

PROTECT YOURSELF AT ALL TIMES, by Mark Whicker
CAST

CURTIS JEROME: 30-year-old super-middleweight boxer.

NATHAN JOHNSON: boxing trainer.

EDDIE SANTILLAN: boxing promoter.

MAX BELDORF: boxing manager

GROVER NEWSOME: referee

ANGELA WINSTON : Curtis' girlfriend

KIKI ORTEGA: boxer

CHRISTINA ORTEGA: boxer's wife

RAMON AGUILAR, Christian's brother

RICKY SERRANO: promoter

DIETER STEIN: boxer

CARLOS MENDOZA: boxer

MYRON BERMAN, promoter

DEMPSEY LONDON, boxer

JIM HARRISON, broadcaster

OMAR SAENZ, broadcaster

LIZ PIRELLI, broadcaster

KELLIE MONAHAN, reporter

RAMON CRUZ, Christina's brother.

GEORGE STEINBERG, Berman's matchmaker and adviser.

CALEB JEROME, Curtis' son

GRADY JEROME, Curtis' brother

SANDRA YOUNG, therapist

SYNOPSIS

Curtis "The Hammer" Jerome is an aging boxer who is finally nearing a championship. He defeats Kiki Ortega, and Ortega dies in the aftermath of the fight. Confused by his remorse and his emotions, he struggles to keep together his relationship with girlfriend Angela, and is angered when his promoter Eddie tries to cast him as a killer to prop up his fame. He also struggles with his feelings for Christina, Kiki's widow. He tests the loyalty of trainer Nathan and manager Max, and he is dogged by a life that he left behind him in tatters, in Fresno. In the end he tries to reverse his plummeting career, and to learn to function with guilt and the self-absorption within.

OUTLINE

ACT I

Scene 1: Curtis goes to the hospital after the fight and learns that Kiki is in grave condition.

Scene 2: Curtis copes with the news that Kiki is dead.

Scene 3: (Monologue) Nathan explains his relationship with Curtis

Scene 4: Angela tries to comfort Curtis

Scene 5: Curtis visits Christina.

Scene 6: (Monologue) TV broadcaster Jim Harrison gives a brief history of death in the ring.

Scene 7: Curtis and Angela have a nice vacation in Vancouver, but there is a foreboding episode.
Scene 8: Nathan is frustrated with the way Curtis is training for his championship fight.
Scene 9: Curtis and Ricky visit a sports book, and Curtis learns what the public is thinking.
Scene 10: Angela becomes more exasperated with Curtis
Scene 11: Curtis does an interview, then gets anxious when he hears of Eddie's plans.
Scene 12: Curtis commits to helping Christina financially as his feelings for her grow.
Scene 13: Eddie lets Curtis know what he expects in the pre-fight promotion.
Scene 14: Curtis goes home to Fresno but can't connect with his son.
Scene 15: Angela reminds Curtis he doesn't have to feel so much guilt.
Scene 16: Curtis follows Eddie's orders at the press conference, but begins to hatch his own plan.

ACT 2

Scene 1: Myron and George discuss a chance to take over Curtis' career.
Scene 2: Curtis loses the fight and Ricky lets him know he's not happy.
Scene 3: Curtis comes to grips with Angela leaving him.
Scene 4: Nathan, Max and Curtis patch things up and see another opportunity.
Scene 5: Back in the gym, Curtis prepares for the fight and gets a visit from Angela.
Scene 6: Leading up to the next fight, Eddie pulls a fast one on Curtis.
Scene 7: Myron and George see through Eddie's treachery and still have eyes on Curtis.
Scene 8: Curtis meets briefly with Caleb in Fresno, but Caleb is standoffish.
Scene 9: Curtis gets ready to fight Dempsey, the best young fighter in Myron's stable.
Scene 10: Curtis is upbraided by a therapist.
Scene 11: Curtis digs deep to get a comeback victory and a new deal.
Scene 12: A rematch two years later doesn't go so well, but Curtis finds he can retire in peace.

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Scene 1

(broadcast voiceover)

JIM HARRISON: "If we had to bet, Ortega is trailing but is still in striking distance. He's fought very well tonight. But Jerome catches him with an uppercut...and Ortega is hurt! Jerome is very good in these situations....there's a right hand to the side of the head and -- oh! -- hard, hard left to the top of the head. Ortega slumps against the ropes. He is offering little resistance...Grover Newsome might want to think about stopping this. Jerome hesitates and looks at

him, gestures...then throws another hard right! Here comes the towel from Ortega's corner. It's over! Jerome has won it. The fight was stopped at 2:07 of Round 9....Some will say, far too late!

(Curtis "The Hammer" Jerome and manager Max Beldorf are walking into a North Las Vegas hospital where Kiki Ortega is hospitalized. Ortega was knocked out by Jerome in their fight earlier that night. They go into a waiting room to meet Ricky Serrano, Ortega's promoter, and Ortega's wife Christina, along with other family members)

CURTIS

Let's get in and get out, OK? Ask how he's doing, talk to the wife. They might have released him by now anyway. Eddie wants us at the Hard Rock for the after-party. Lots of scenery, if you know what I mean..

: MAX

I don't know, Curtis. I know he was talking in the ring, but he looked different. I got a bad feeling. I had this happen before, with Buddy Simpson, remember him? He knocked out Jose Solano and everything was fine, and Solano was in the hospital for a month, coma and everything.

CURTIS:

You saw me, Max. I stood back. I looked at Grover. He wouldn't look at me. He stood there with his head up his ass. I had to keep hitting him. I wish I'd hit him in the body. He would have gone down for good. Damn. Now you got me worried.

MAX:

MAX: Sorry. I've just seen this before.

(walks into waiting room)

RICKY:

Max! (hugs him) You didn't have to come out here.

MAX

Ah, we got lost looking for the IHOP. All of a sudden, here we are. Who have we got here?

RICKY

Christina. That's Kiki's brother Ramon, hugging her. That's Ramon's wife and their daughter..

CURTIS

I'm Curtis.

RICKY:

Yeah, sure, I know you. Great fight. I thought we had you in trouble there in the sixth.

CURTIS

(laughs): I think I WAS in trouble. He fought his heart out, man. I couldn't get out of the way of that jab. I think I took him lightly, to be honest with you.

MAX

How bad is it, Ricky?

RICKY

(voice cracks) He passed out on the way here. He's been in surgery for a couple of hours.

CURTIS

Surgery? For....

RICKY

His brain, Curtis. One of the doctors came out and talked to Christina already. He was white as a ghost.

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MAX:

What did he say?

RICKY

I couldn't make any sense of it. It wasn't what he said, it's how he looked.

CURTIS

(disbelieving)

His brain.

RICKY

Yeah. (looks back, gestures at Ramon.) Ramon's a firefighter. He might know something.

\ (Ramon joins them)

MAX

Max Beldorf, I'm Curtis' manager. (shakes hands)

RAMON

Pleased to meet you. You, too, Curtis. You were good tonight.

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CURTIS

I wish I wasn't. Do you know what's going on?

RAMON

The doctor says it is a subdural hematoma. Blood on the brain. He said it's the worst thing that could happen. He didn't bullshit us. I guess that's good.

CURTIS

So....

RAMON

If he makes it, there's no guarantees.

CURTIS

:

If he makes....what?

MAX

If he lives, Curtis. He's in trouble.

(Curtis sits down, puts his head in his hands)

CURTIS

Did he say how long the surgery would last?

RICKY

He didn't.

RAMON

Hours, I think.

(Christina comes over)

CHRISTINA

Puedo tomar agua.

RAMON

Sure, it's around the corner, I'll be right back..

MAX

Christina, I'm so sorry. I'm Max. I'm Curtis' manager.

CHRISTINA

Hello. Thank you.

(Christina comes over meets Curtis)

CURTIS:

I don't know what to say. I didn't want this. I didn't want to do this...

CHRISTINA

Te entiendo....Dios te bendiga.

SCENE 2

(The next day. Trainer NATHAN Johnson, CURTIS and MAX are in Nathan's gym. They are waiting on word from the hospital.)

CURTIS:

I see you still got the fight poster up on the wall, with me and Kiki.

NATHAN

Yep.

CURTIS

When you gonna take it down?

NATHAN:

When I get a chance.

CURTIS

Well, I got a chance right now. (gets up, takes down the poster, starts tearing it in half)

NATHAN:

Shit, Curtis, take it easy..

MAX:

You talk to Angela yet?

CURTIS

I called her. She's in New York. I told her I won. She said, I sure as hell hope so. I didn't tell her about Kiki. Too much too soon.

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NATHAN:

Women are funny.

MAX

Wanda Sykes is funny. I wouldn't say women are funny. Not in my 28 years of marriage,

CURTIS:

Wow, really? That's a long time with one woman.

.MAX

It would be. That's why you split it up. For me it was ten, eleven and seven.

(Curtis doubles up laughing)

NATHAN

So it's like a relay race.

MAX

Right. And I was 0-for-3 on alimony and child support. Fortunately, we got Curtis here, and he's going to make us all rich.

NATHAN

Right. As if you don't own half the Strip already.

CURTIS

This ain't about money today.

NATHAN

Heard anything from Kiki?

CURTIS

I called this morning. Nothing new.

MAX:

Nathan, you think you'll ever get married again?

NATHAN

Should I? I definitely think Curtis should.

CURTIS

Now, why you want to put me through that?

MAX

You? Look at what the woman goes through. Like she wants a man who gets busted up in the ring, spends all morning running and then all afternoon sparring, and then eats baked chicken every night because he's holding his weight. On top of that, when he gets into training he can't have sex for eight weeks. He ain't Prince Charming on his good days. And when it's all over, if she sticks with him long enough, she gets to feed him with a straw and push him around in a walker all day while he calls everybody 'George' and starts asking if anybody has seen the dog that he never had. Sure, that's every woman's dream come true.

CURTIS

But they keep coming, Max. Out of the woodwork. They must see something they like.

MAX

That's why you need three things to be a success....and I'm not talking about Ali here, but three things: If you get out with some money and your good sense and a woman that really loves you enough to put up with everything, you've beaten the game. It was worth it for you to do this. And you've got a chance at all three.

NATHAN:

Yeah, and you also need a trainer. He's the brains of the operation. When we get old, we don't lose our natural functions.

CURTIS:

Unless you boxed.

NATHAN:

Well, that was the good thing about starting out with two wins and five losses. I knew what I was doing wrong.

CURTIS:

Yeah. The wrong thing you were doing was boxing. But you kept your taxi license, just in case.

(NATHAN laughs. MAX's phone rings)

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MAX

Hello....Hi, Ricky. Yeah, we're all here in the gym. Yeah. (pauses). Okay. When? Okay. I'll tell him. Ricky, I can't tell you how sorry....Okay. I know. I'll be in touch.t

CURTIS

(staring at Max)

He's dead.

MAX:

About 45 minutes ago.

CURTIS:

I just killed a man in the ring.

NATHAN:

(puts his around Curtis' shoulder): I wish I could say something. You didn't mean it. You were doing your job. Look, what can we do for you?

CURTIS:

I just want to go home.

NATHAN

I'll drive you.

CURTIS:

No, no. (Stands up, then sits back down and puts his hands over his eyes.) Okay, drive me home.

NATHAN:

You want me to stay with you?

CURTIS:

We'll see. I don't think so. I don't know.

NATHAN:

Okay. (Curtis and Nathan walk out) See you, Max.

MAX:

I'll put out a statement. Call me if you need me, Curtis.

Scene 3:

Monologue: NATHAN explains Curtis to the audience.

NATHAN

I heard about Curtis six years ago. An old promoter from Sacramento saw him fight in a hotel ballroom in Fresno, where he's from. Curtis wasn't getting much training, and he was getting hit too much, but he was knocking guys out, and the man told me, "You can look in his face and tell how much he wants it."

And that's true. Curtis does a lot of things wrong in the ring. He has bad habits, like keeping his hands down. You can tell when he's going to throw his right. I start yelling, 'Western Union' when I see him doing it, because he's telegraphing it to the opponent. He laughs and then he does it all over again. But he makes up for it because he's strong and he's pretty quick, and sometimes he just wins because the other guy says, 'Screw it, this is going to be too hard.' Curtis always comes to fight.

I spent a lot of time with him but I can't say I know him that well.. He gets in these moods sometimes. He'll have a bad night with his girlfriend and you can tell the next morning, because he won't say nothing. He don't want to hear the music in the gym. Sometimes I kick him out because he's not accomplishing anything and wasting everybody's time. But it only lasts a day, and he's back with us. He likes his sparring partners, doesn't beat them up too much. And he's not one of these guys who just wants to do it his way. He will listen.

He's still fighting at 168 pounds even though he's getting stronger. He doesn't blow up between fights. He's not in the casinos and he doesn't chase women. Matter of fact, they're usually

chasing him. I don't worry about that too much. He's pretty suspicious until he decides he can trust you.\

Curtis was in the Army for four years and that's where he started boxing. He's got an ex-wife and son in Fresno that I never ask about. I don't think he ever sees them. But the Army was good because he learned how to do stuff. He can landscape, he can put in a sprinkler system. He did some of the wiring for the gym. I know he's got his union card, which is a big deal in Vegas, and the workmen come out to his fights. For a guy who hasn't won a belt yet, he has a pretty good following. They call him "The Hammer" and they find these foam hammers and bring them to the fights.

He also goes to the Boys and Girls Club and gives out boxing equipment. A lot of boxers do that, but you only hear about the ones who get in trouble or run around acting like drug dealers. And he loves jazz, too. He doesn't want to hear hip-hop when he's training. We both love that album Les McCann and Eddie Harris put out 50 years ago, Swiss Movement, and he plays that when he's sparring. There's a song called Compared To What?, and we say that to each other all the time. Anything I can do to get him to laugh, I do. Sometimes I think he's a little too serious, but then I realize, it's not a bad thing for a boxer.

SCENE 4

After he learned that Kiki died, Curtis returned to the house he shares with Angela. It's late at night and he sits in the corner of the living room, sipping wine. A Jason Bourne movie is playing on Netflix. He isn't watching.

(Angela comes through the door, unexpectedly.)

ANGELA

Baby! (puts down her bags and rushes over to hug Curtis.) You didn't tell me what happened! Oh, baby, I'm so, so sorry!

CURTIS

(sniffing) Ohhhh....I swear to God I never wanted that to happen. I didn't want to talk about it on the phone. How was your trip?

ANGELA:

Fine, but you? Have you slept? Have you eaten? My God, you look tired.

(they sit on sofa together)

CURTIS;

You didn't have to come home early.

ANGELA

It's no problem, really. When did you find out?

CURTIS:

About 2 o'clock.

ANGELA

One of my guys at Saks is a fight fan. He saw it on his phone. He didn't even know I was with you. He said, hey, this could get me interested in boxing again. I nearly slapped him. I should have. He's a little shit. Might have put him in the hospital. Anyway, I went right to JFK. .

CURTIS

(shakes his head): Max and me, we went to the hospital last night. Kiki was on a ventilator. We met his wife and her brother.

ANGELA:

What? Why?

CURTIS:

We were just checking on him. I didn't think he was that bad. Max was more worried than I was. But she was great. Looked so fragile, but she was strong. She was holding it together, praying. There was still some hope then. I don't know. I started thinking, should we think about going to church? I never saw much to it. But those people seem so calm. Max goes to the temple all the time. He's had a rough life, too. But he's happy.

ANGELA (flustered)

I don't know. God never did shit for me. Don't get weak on me, Curtis. Just get some rest. How often does this happen?

CURTIS:

What?

ANGELA:

You know....death. Somebody's death.

CURTIS:

Say it. Somebody killing somebody..... Probably 12 times a year, around the world.

ANGELA

I thought there would be more.

CURTIS:

There's doctors, there's trainers, there's an ambulance, paramedics...but this time the referee went to sleep at the wheel. He let it happen.

ANGELA:

What happens to him?

CURTIS

I don't know.

ANGELA

But you won, right? So the next fight is the big one.

CURTIS

I guess.

ANGELA:

And the money goes way up, right?

CURTIS

The what? The money? You're talking about the fuckin' money?

ANGELA

Don't get pissed.

CURTIS

Are you serious? A man is dead right now because I hit him. A husband. Thank God they didn't have kids. Is any of this sinking in?

ANGELA

Sure, sweetheart, but I don't want you to forget where you're going. I want to get there with you. So take a couple of days off, sleep, eat.....

CURTIS:

Let's go somewhere. Can you get time off?

ANGELA:

Sure. Sure. Where? I'm a little burned out on New York.

CURTIS:

Naw, someplace quiet. Montana? I ain't never been there.

ANGELA:

Bugs. Snakes. Bears....How about Vancouver?.

CURTIS:

Vancouver. Canada? They speak English there?

ANGELA

(laughs) Better than we do, babe. It's beautiful.

CURTIS:

You've been there?

ANGELA:

Just once on business. I promised myself I'd go back there someday. Let's get a hotel on the water with a kitchenette. Maybe we'll think of some other things to do in there (points at bedroom). Who knows, I might even cook.

CURTIS

(rolls eyes): Holy Jesus, don't make it worse.

ANGELA (laughs):

I said 'might.'

(they hold each other tightly)

SCENE 5

(A week later)

) CURTIS and RICKY visit CHRISTINA's jewelry shop on the outskirts of North Las Vegas. Kiki's funeral was four days ago.

CURTIS

Go in there and ask her first.

RICKY

She knows you're coming. She's fine with it. But, yeah, just hang out here for a minute

.(Eddie goes in, comes back, waves CURTIS in)

CHRISTINA

Hello.

CURTIS

(puts his hand on her shoulder): Hello. Again, I'm so sorry.

CHRISTINA:

I know. (gestures at shop) I'm sorry. (looks at Ricky) No he tenido la oportunidad de limpiarlo

CURTIS:

It looks great. How long have you had it?

CHRISTINA:

Two years.

RICKY::

A lot of people have come by, over the last week, and bought stuff. But the store is doing very well. Most people didn't know she was Kiki's husband. She did this herself. It was making a profit even without his money. She's smart. Look. She doesn't overstock, the stuff is pretty well-priced.

CURTIS

(picks up brooch, with an emerald in the middle): And it's beautiful.

(to Christina) Can I buy this one?

CHRISTINA:

Yes. For your wife?

CURTIS:

(laughs, shakes head): No wife. But it might keep the peace at home.

CHRISTINA

(points at picture frame): Esta foto es cuando Kiki estaba en la secundaria.

EDDIE:

In high school

CURTIS
(picks up the picture frame):

Guapo.

CHRISTINA (smiles)

Yes. I was 17, he was 18.

RICKY

:

Here's their wedding picture.

CURTIS:

So young. A couple of kids.

CHRISTINA:

Fue a la universidad por un semestre, pero al boxeo era su amor. A veces era el numero uno, a veces boxeo.

EDDIE:

Boxing was his love. Sometimes she was No. 1, sometimes boxing.

CURTIS:

You should be proud of him. He was very, very good.

CHRISTINA

(softly) I am.

(CURTIS looks at a boxing poster that says "Kiki (KO) Ortega.").

CURTIS:

KO. Perfect. You come up with that?

RICKY:

I wish. I called him the Matador.

CHRISTINA:

Siempre me dijo que podria lastimarse en el boxeo. Tuvo una conmocion cerebral el ano pasado.

RICKY

He always warned her he could get hurt. He had a concussion last year, it turned out.

CURTIS:

Jesus. And he kept fighting?

RICKY:

I didn't know it until the doctor told us last night. I don't even know if he knew.

CURTIS:

Can I get you anything?

CHRISTINA: (shakes her head).

Thank you. Very nice.

CURTIS

: I'm sorry I didn't go to the funeral. I really don't think I belonged there. People would have made it a big deal..

CHRISTINA:

No, no te sientas mal. Habia tanta gente, no se quien estaba alli, quien no.

RICKY:

It was packed. She wouldn't have noticed. We understand.
(bell rings over the door, two well-dressed Latino customers come in)

CURTIS:

We should go. It's so good to see you.

CHRISTINA:\

(hugs Curtis for a long time

Thank you for coming.

CURTIS:

You know I didn't want this to happen.

CHRISTINA:

Entiendo. No te culpes.

CURTIS:

I know. We will be back.

(Christina waves, dabs her eyes. Curtis and Eddie leave, stop in parking lot)

CURTIS:

She's strong.

RICKY:

She's been crying for a week. This might be the first time I've seen her smile. We basically had to walk her out of the church at the end.

CURTIS:

\

Wait ! I was going to get that pin. Just a second

(CURTIS goes in for a few minutes, comes out with a bag.)

CURTIS:

(shakes her head) She wanted to just give it to me. I didn't let her.

RICKY

: She likes you.

CURTIS:

She's sweet. No wonder Kiki was so happy.

RICKY (laughs):

Kiki was a little too happy. Let's just say he didn't stay in his own corner all the time.

CURTIS:

Yeah?

RICKY:

She kicked him out a couple of times. And when that happened, he was on his own, and he found out that nobody in this town gives a damn about a Mexican who can't take a punch. So he came crawling back.

CURTIS:

Well...just let me know how much the funeral cost, and the hospital bills. I want to do something .

RICKY:

We'll talk about it. Right now, just take care of yourself.

(They hug)

CURTIS:

Okay. And if she wants to talk about anything, call me.

RICKY

(smiles): I will. And she will.

Scene 5

Monologue, spotlight on the speaker. JIM HARRISON explains the true price of boxing.

JIM HARRISON:

On average, thirteen boxers a year are killed in the ring.

Jean-Claude Vinci's last fight was in 1987. It was his third professional fight. It was a six-rounder against Lionel Jean, and he lost a decision but was not knocked down. He died 30 minutes later.

Minoru Katsumata's last fight was in 1991. It was his first professional fight. He was knocked out in the 10th round of a 10-rounder against Takashi Murata. He died the following day.

Scott Westgarth's last fight was in 2018. It was a fight that he won. He was knocked down in the 10th round of a 10-round fight by Dec Spelman in Doncaster, England. He earned a unanimous decision, then said he didn't feel well in the locker room. He died the next day.

Hugo Santillan's last fight was in 2018. He was 23. He fought Eduardo Javier Abreu to a 10-round draw in his native Argentina and raised his arms at the end because he thought he won. He became dizzy and died five days later, after three heart attacks. He had lost badly, on June 15, to Artem Haretyunyan in Hamburg, Germany and the German commission jhad barred him from fighting until July 30. That was 10 days after he fought Abreu.

Archie Kemp's last fight was in 1949. He was fighting Jack Hassen for the Australian lightweight title. Hassen knocked him out in the 11th round and Kemp was carried from the ring, dying of a cerebral hemorrhage. Hassen asked referee Joe Wallis to stop the fight, but Wallis refused. It was revealed that Kemp had suffered a blackout after his previous fight. Hassen died in 2002. According to his family, he cried whenever Kemp's name came up.

Davey Moore's last fight was in 1963. He fought Sugar Ramos in Dodger Stadium for two featherweight titles. Ramos knocked down Moore in the 10th round and Moore's head whiplashed against the bottom rope, damaging his brain stem. Another knockdown ended the fight. Moore asked for a rematch, then suffered headaches and died four days later. Ropes were padded, and another rope was added, in the aftermath. Bob Dylan wrote a song called "Who Killed Davey Moore?" that included the chorus, "It wasn't me that made him fall. No, you can't blame me at all."

Angelo Jacopucci's last fight was in 1978. He was knocked out by Alan Minter in Bellaria, Italy. After the fight Jacopucci and Minter met at a party and had drinks together. Minter later saw Jacopucci grow nauseous but assumed he'd had too much to drink. Jacopucci died the next day. Ring doctor Ezio Pimpinelli was convicted of second-degree manslaughter for failing to attend to Jacopucci.

Jimmy Garcia's last fight was in 1995. He had lost 32 pounds in two months to get to the super-featherweight limit, so he could fight Gabriel Ruelas in Las Vegas. The fight was stopped in the 11th round. Ruelas was 41-2 at the time, then lost five of his last 13 fights and never felt the same about the sport. After Garcia died, his mother Carmen told Ruelas, "Every time you fight, I will see my son in you."

Duk Koo Kim's last fight was in 1992. He fought lightweight champion Ray Mancini in Las Vegas. He said, "Either he dies or I die' before the fight. Kim pushed Mancini hard, but in the 14th round, Mancini unleashed a right hand, and Kim's head bounced off the canvas. He went into a coma shortly afterward and died four days later. Championship fights were reduced from 15 to 12 rounds. Kim's mother flew from South Korea and was by his side at the time of death. Later she drank a bottle of pesticide. The next year, referee Richard Green committed suicide, too.

Scene 6

(CURTIS and ANGELA are taking a short vacation in Vancouver. They are in CityLux boutique, a women's clothing store. Earlier they ran together in Stanley Park. They are about eight blocks from their waterfront hotel)

ANGELA

(looking through sweaters and tops): Lots of greys and beiges.

CURTIS:

Lots of grey days, too. But this is good, you got a birthday coming up. Let me know what you like...(looks at the price of a skirt)...my goodness.

ANGELA:

Canadian money. The real price isn't that bad.

CURTIS

Oh. Good. See, I learn something new every day with you.

ANGELA

Damn right. Now look. This is what I'm talking about. (Holds up an orange, long-sleeved top.) When I start designing, it's going to look like Fruit of the Loom. Bright. Love this color. They'll know you're in the room.

CURTIS:

Might have to wear sunglasses.

ANGELA:

They call this color-blocking. Put the bright ones right to each other. But, see, this is confidence, too. This is what black women need. It's not just limited to black women, but I want a simple design, maybe a three-quarter sleeve, and have the neckline just under the collarbone, and then purple, pink, yellow....

CURTIS:

Mustard yellow?

ANGELA:

Bright yellow.

CURTIS:

But just plain?.

ANGELA:

I think so. I go back and forth. Maybe a diagonal black line...maybe just a few embossed flowers....but not much. I want it pure.

CURTIS

Athe same thing for the pants?

ANGELA

Well, I've got something in mind. Maybe a bright yellow top and lime green pants. Or black with lime stripes, running real close together, you know, like palazzo pants.

CURTIS

Right, palazzo pants (smiles)

ANGELA:

You've seen 'em. If it was a skirt, I'd probably go with something black and pleated with the yellow top. Maybe black with the purple top, too. But with the pink, I don't know. A bright blue skirt? Maybe blue and white striped pants?

CURTIS:

I can see it, yeah.

ANGELA

\But the color has to be exactly right. There are so many different shades. I want something that won't be mistaken. Come on, let's go look at the raincoats.

CURTIS

Sure.

ANGELA

Now, these are pretty much all the same, right? I like the fashion sense, but there's no imagination here. I'm thinking maybe go back to the 80s with the shoulder pads and maybe big gold-plated buttons. I want the buttons to be big. I could even see the coat being black except for the collar, which could be blue or pink or maybe some print. Can you see that?

CURTIS

Wow. I'm sorry, I wish I'd been paying more attention to all this. This is impressive.

ANGELA:

Well, thank you. I think this is what you call parallel lives. Does that make sense? I'm glad you get to see what I do all day.

CURTIS
(moves closer to her)

Yeah, but you see...the way you light up when you talk about this stuff, it kinda makes me a little hongry...

ANGELA

(smiles) Yeah? You, too? You want to go back to the hotel?

CURTIS

:

Naw, that's too far away...I was thinking about one of these dressing rooms.

ANGELA

You think I can be quiet in a little room like that? Man, we'll have the police and the Mounties and everybody else on our ass. Come on, let's go back to the hotel.. We can come back here later..

CURTIS

(puts arm around her waist, and they kiss deeply): All right, let's get outta here

(CURTIS and ANGELA walk out of the store. A stranger comes up and takes their picture on his phone, yells out "Curits The Hammer!" Then two teen-age kids come up).

KID

You're Curtis Jerome. Curtis The Hammer Jerome! Can you sign this?

CURTIS

Sure. (looks at Angela, shrugs). You know me up here?

KID

Sure. After that last fight, that's all we've been talking about. I mean, I'm sorry about the other guy, but that was great.

CURTIS:

(shakes his head, walks away). Whatever. Have a good one.

ANGELA:

Wait up a second.

CURTIS:

Can you believe that? He thought what I did to Kiki was cool. I'm not into that, man.

ANGELA

: Hey. He's just another set of eyeballs. That's good. Just sign and smile. You don't have to explain nothing.

(They get back to the hotel lobby, where two college-age kids come up and ask him to sign. They get on the elevator and go to the room, and get out the Do Not Disturb sign).

(An hour later, still in bed).

CURTIS

Thanks for lunch.

ANGELA:

(laughs loudly): Anytime. And it was gluten-free!

CURTIS

(laughs, looks out the window) Damn! That's a bald eagle. Wow. Just sitting by the window looking at us. I like this town. It's cool.

ANGELA

Sure is....Say, I wanted to ask you. Why do they say you can't make love when you're in training?.

CURTIS

(gets up, puts on pants): Well, it's not hard and fast...

ANGELA

So to speak

CURTIS

(laughs): Damn, the mouth on you....No, they always talked about how it took a lot out of you physically. But it never seemed like it hurt Ali. When he fought Frazier in the Phillippines, he was taking up with that photographer, Veronica. Myron Berman was his promoter. He was flying over with Belinda.

ANGELA:

Who's Belinda?

CURTIS

Sorry, Belinda was Ali's wife. They got on the plane and they were reading some magazine, and there were these pictures of Muhammad and Veronica, and Myron says, oh, shit, and tries to cover them up from Belinda, who was sitting right next to him...and she says, 'What the hell is this? Give me that' and she saw them and started f-bombing Ali and Myron all the way across the Pacific, and then she charged off that plane...Myron told somebody it was the longest 14 hours of his life.

ANGELA

So Ali really was the greatest.

CURTIS:

Yeah. He made his own rules. For me, I think it's a good idea to give it up because you're getting ready to fight. And you don't want to be too happy. You can't be happy. Right now, for instance? I don't feel like fighting. Especially with you. 'Cause I'm happy.

ANGELA

(rises, puts on a robe): Do you think we can be happy?

CURTIS:

The question is whether I can go back to boxing and be happy. And there's only one way to find out.

ANGELA

touches his shoulder): I think we can both be champions, Curtis. That's gonna make me happy.
(they hold each other and kiss)

Scene 7

After a workout in Nathan's gym in Las Vegas. It has not gone well. Curtis has not been aggressive with his partners and ended the session after only six rounds. Curtis and Nathan sit across from each other at a card table, in Nathan's office.

NATHAN:

You OK?

CURTIS

: Compared to what?

NATHAN

Compared to the dude that used to come in here, bustin' heads, all business..

CURTIS

(smiles): He'll be back.

NATHAN

(warily): I don't know. What I saw just now, I'd say no. This guy's head today was hanging out there like a stop light and his hands were down and he was begging to get hit. You never let your hands go.

CURTIS:

He's a kid, Nate.

NATHAN:

He's 26 and he wants to be good, and you let him get away with bad habits. Now he's walking around town bragging. The Hammer couldn't touch him.

CURTIS

You training him or me?

NATHAN

: I'm training everybody -- especially the guys that want it. You think this is a fuckin' hobby all of a sudden? You're turning into the guys you spent the last five years beating just to get here. They walked into the ring and started looking for the back door. You've got to be at home in there. It's your living room. Guy you're fighting, he just broke into your living room. You got to --

CURTIS

Kill him?

NATHAN

You know goddamn well that's not what I meant. Look, we know what happened. We know what Grover did.

CURTIS

Didn't do.

NATHAN

Didn't do. I never trusted him. He never wanted to run a fight. He's just in there for the money.

CURTIS

I know. But he didn't kill the guy

NATHAN

Curt. Leave that shit at home. It's done. The family don't blame you. Who knows what happened? They ain't done the report yet. Kiki might have had all kinds of shit wrong with him....

CURTIS

You got a lot of psychological expertise all of a sudden.

NATHAN

: Naw. You need a shrink, but I'm not it. How's Angela doing with this?

CURTIS

Day to day. She tries to understand, sometimes. Other times she's pushing too much. . She wants that check, man. But I shouldn't say that. She's been sweet. We were great in Vancouver. Just something about this town, makes us both crazy.

NATHAN

I had a fine woman in Paris one time.

CURTIS

Oh, I believe that. The 'one time' part, anyway.

NATHAN

I'll tell you about it sometime after you get your head out of your ass.

(gets up, puts on jacket)

So I'll see you here tomorrow.

CURTIS:

Thursday. I'm just gonna run tomorrow.

NATHAN:

Thursday. And this time, bring Curtis with you.

CURTIS

(getting up): I'll see if I can find him. Later, Nate.

Scene 9

CURTIS and RICKY, the professional gambler and fight promoter, are at the Sports Book at the M Hotel, which is in Henderson, southwest of Vegas.

RICKY:

So you bet sports a lot?

CURTIS (laughs):

Naw, man. If I bet sports a lot I'd be lining up for lunch at the shelter. I can't even bet on boxing. I took Pacquiao over Mayweather. I took De La Hoya over Pacquiao. I did have Ward knocking out Kovalev in the second fight but I bet on Round 7 and it happened in Round 6. That was it. I dropped \$100 that night.

RICKY:

I don't bet on boxing much. They got judges. They act funny sometimes.

CURTIS:

I'd hate to think about somebody betting on me. I got enough shit to think about....What do you like to bet on?

RICKY

(laughs) Everything else. I'm not much of a horseplayer. NBA is pretty easy. Baseball is tough. Pro football is just a couple of days a week. College basketball season is when I get all excited. And it's where I get rich. So many games, so much action, so much info.

CURTIS

Info?

RICKY

Yeah, you got 300-some teams and some of them are so obscure that the lines are screwed up. Sometimes they get Cal State Bakersfield mixed up with Cal Poly SLO. And if you get the right info....(winks)

CURTIS

I don't want to know.

RICKY

Well, it's a fulltime job along with promoting fighters. But I had a good year last year.

CURTIS

Yeah, I could tell. You didn't have that Lexus last year.

RICKY

Well, some of that was from Kiki, but yeah....OK, you see the big board.

CURTIS

What do you like? I see UCLA is getting 4 points at home against Arizona State.

RICKY

Yeah, that don't make sense. I'm leaving that alone, but I like that one right there: Oklahoma giving Kansas one, at home.

CURTIS

Kansas? Aren't they in the top five?

RICKY

Their best guard rolled his ankle in the last game. He didn't practice yesterday.

CURTIS

: Didn't practice? How the hell do you know that?

RICKY

: And their best forward was supposed to go to Oklahoma, except he knocked up some girl when he took his recruiting visit and "suddenly" decided he always wanted to be a Jayhawk. He's played at Oklahoma twice and scored 12 points, total. Girl's daddy still lives there and threatens him every time he comes to town. He gets tight there, doesn't play well. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if he developed flu symptoms overnight and begs off the whole thing..

CURTIS

And all this stuff is in the papers?

RICKY

(laughs) Not really.

CURTIS

: Woo-oo. So you're going to play that one?

RICKY

Sure. You want some, too?

CURTIS:

(reaches in, peels off a \$100 bill)

OK, I trust you.

RICKY

Good. Which reminds me, I wanted to talk to you about something else....OK, you see that? That's the early line on the Masters.

CURTIS:

Golf? Where's Tiger?

RICKY

He's hurt. Might not play. But you do see right there at 30 to 1, Patrick Reed.

CURTIS

Who's that?

RICKY

He putts like a fiend, he hits the ball straight, and he ain't scared. If he gets off to a good start he won't disappear. I like that play.

CURTIS

Like it how much?

RICKY

A grand.

CURTIS

Damn. That could be a lot of iron, Rick.

RICKY

That's right. In football season you got the looky-loos coming in, the guys who put \$2 down on their favorite team and then they brag about it all week. They pack the place and they're drunk and they make a lot of noise, especially on the Strip. That's why you see me in places like this. I could do it from home, but I love the big board. It just brings it home for me.

(bystander stops)

BYSTANDER

Curtis! Curtis the Hammer!

CURTIS

What's up?

BYSTANDER

Can I get a picture?

CURTIS

Sure. Give the phone to my brother here.

(Eddie takes a picture of them both)

BYSTANDER

Man, I loved your last fight! You finished that ragpicker off, man!

RICKY:

(slams bystander's phone to the floor, where it shatters):

Oh, shit! Sorry, man. It just jumped out of my hand and onto the floor! You know us ragpickers. We've got the bad hands.

BYSTANDER

You son of a bitch! What do I do now? What are you going to do, Curtis?

CURTIS

I'm going to tell you there's a Verizon store right down St. Rose Boulevard here, and I'm going to advise you to get your fuckin' ass down there in a hurry, beginning now.

(bystander leaves)

RICKY

Can you believe that?

CURTIS

It's been happening lately. It happened to me in Vancouver, right in the middle of the street. People think it's a great thing that I killed Kiki. I can't handle it, man.

RICKY:

Price of fame.

CURTIS

Yeah, I used to wonder when anybody was going to notice me, when I was coming up and knocking those guys out. .

RICKY

Relax. It's just a couple of guys.

(another bystander)

BYSTANDER

: Mr. Jerome? I'm a big fan. Can you sign this for me? And maybe take a picture?

CURTIS:

I would, but maybe you should get somebody besides Ricky.. He breaks phones.

RICKY:

(laughs): Don't pay any attention to him. All right. Smile.

(Curtis and bystander pose)

BYSTANDER

Wow, this is great. You were so good in that last fight. Then when we found out what happened...

RICKY

(pretends to throw phone): I would stop it right there if I were you.

BYSTANDER:

Oh. Okay. Sorry. Good luck.

(leaves)

CURTIS

Man, you keep busting phones, you can work for Verizon yourself.

RICKY

Let's get outta here. I see what you mean. This is messed up. I'll call you tomorrow.
(they walk out)

Scene 10

Curtis is in his living room, watching a recording of the fight on his wall-mounted TV.

(BROADCAST)

JIM HARRISON

They stopped it at 2:07 of the ninth round, certainly a valiant effort by Kiki Ortega, but he was no match for the power and skill of Curtis "The Hammer" Jerome, who has now earned an IBF title shot against Dieter Stein in a few months....Ortega has now gotten to his chair and the doctors are looking at him closely. He does seem to be responding, which is a good sign....

OMAR SAENZ

To me they let this fight go too long, Jim. Kiki Ortega was defenseless but the referee, he just froze,,.You could see Curtis, asking him to stop it. Kiki took about 10 hard shots in a row. I've been in the situation Curtis was in, Jim, and you can't let up, but it just puts him in a bad situation.

JIM

Let's go to the ring, where Liz Pirelli has the winner.

LIZ

Curtis, congratulations on a tough win. What happened there in the ninth?

CURTIS

Thanks, I just want to thank Nathan Johnson, my trainer, and Max Beldorf and Eddie Santillan and the whole team...Yeah, Kiki was tough like I knew he would be, but he just made some mistakes and I hope he's all right.

LIZ

You seemed a little concerned...

CURTIS

Hell, yes. I got no idea what Grover was doing. It's a damn shame his corner had to throw in the towel or who knows what would have happened. The one thing the ref says is 'Protect yourself at

all times' but you can't always do that. ...But I think Kiki's all right, I talked to him afterward. It shouldn't have been like that..."

(Curtis turns off the TV)

ANGELA

I guess I'm not part of the whole team, huh?

CURTIS:

Wow. Touchy-touchy. I guess I might have mentioned you if you'd showed up.

ANGELA

Look, I was kidding. All right? I'm sorry if I've gotten past the grief stage here. It's been 3 weeks and you watch that thing every damn night and it's like you're sticking pins in your eyes. I don't like seeing you like this, believe it or not. I don't like fighting. I'm a lover, not a fighter. Shall I refresh your memory on that?

CURTIS

I keep trying to see which punch did it.

ANGELA

: Figured it out yet?

CURTIS

No. I just know that chickenshit Grover could have stopped it, and he'd be fine and I'd be fine and I wouldn't be wondering what I'm gonna do next.

ANGELA

You shouldn't be wondering now. You're fighting Dieter what's-his-name.

CURTIS

Maybe.

ANGELA

No fuckin' maybe. And you are not disappointing Nathan and me and Max and everybody who pays to see you and wears your T-shirts and buys those foam hammers and sparred with you... You're going to do this, because (voice rising) this is what you do.

CURTIS

And I can't do anything else.

ANGELA:

I didn't say that.

CURTIS

Doesn't matter. Just put yourself in my place for one second, for God's sake.

ANGELA

I will, but you act like you're the first guy this ever happened to.

CURTIS

No. I was at the fight when Gabriel Ruelas did it to Jimmy Garcia. Gabe didn't get over it either. Remember the asshole in Vancouver who took my picture outside the store? This is happening to me every time I walk down the street.

ANGELA

High profile. That is not all bad.

CURTIS:

What am I supposed to tell Kiki's wife and her brother and her promoter? Me and Ricky were out the other day. It happened twice.

ANGELA:

Curtis, please. I told you before. I got no time for victims. This is bullshit. Quit watching the fight every day. By now I can do the play-by-play by heart. You act like the crazy woman in that movie, Buffalo 66, right? She watched the same Super Bowl every day and she kept getting pissed off because the same man kept missing the same kick. You're that woman.

CURTIS

Anjelica Huston. Thanks, baby. I'm glad you could see the resemblance. See? I told Nathan you weren't just a pretty ass. I mean, face.

ANGELA (shakes her head)

Come on, let's go to bed. I promise I won't throw in the towel.

Scene 11

Nathan's gym. NATHAN and MAX are playing gin on a nearby card table. KELLY, a reporter from the Las Vegas Review-Journal, is interviewing CURTIS

KELLY:

When did you first realize that this was going to be more than just a knockout, that Kiki was in serious trouble?

CURTIS

I don't know the exact second. I do know that Kiki had been so tough, all fight long. He kept moving and countering. When I hit him with that right hand on the temple, I saw him lose

something. You're right there looking in a man's face, you can tell. He was just covering up. He was like an animal getting attacked, just using instinct. He didn't know where he was. I knew I was hurt, but....I kept waiting for the referee to do something. He did nothing.

KELLY

Do you wish you had backed off?

\CURTIS\

Sure. I do now. But you back off in the ring and let a guy off the hook and you can lose the fight. The only fight I ever lost, I had the guy in trouble in the third round and I didn't finish him. That's why there is a referee in there. It's not my responsibility.. Look, I feel worse than I ever felt in my life. I saw Kiki's family that night. I'd give anything to change it but I'm not in charge of the fight. Grover was. Why he did nothing, I'll never understand. He should never be in the ring again.

KELLY

Would you change anything about it, from the time you first hurt him?

CURTIS

I told Max, my manager, that night. I wish I'd hit him in the ribs, or maybe a liver shot.

KELLY

Liver shot?

CURTIS

There's a place on his side, right around the ribs, and if you hit it right he just gets paralyzed. You've seen a fighter kinda go down in a delayed reaction? That's the liver shot. He's frozen, and then he falls. If I'd done that Kiki would have still gone to the hospital but he would be alive today.

(from the other table)

MAX

Beefeater!

NATHAN

Damn. I just needed one card. One card away.

CURTIS

What the hell is Beefeater?

MAX

I beat him so much, Curtis, I get tired of yelling 'Gin!' all the time. I gotta mix it up. I gotta go with a specific gin.

NATHAN

You realize this is not skill, right, Max? This is just luck.

CURTIS

(laughing, turns back to Kelly): What were you asking me? Sorry, I had to deal with these two clowns.

KELLY

No, that's no problem. I just wondered how you feel about boxing after this happened. I know you have the fight with Dieter Stein but can you see yourself leaving boxing?

NATHAN

Naw, it's too late for med school. It's closed! Not taking applications.
(to Max): Deal, you lucky prick.

CURTIS

No, to answer your question, I love boxing. I'd be a handyman if it wasn't for boxing. There's nothing else like it. You're in there for three minutes with a guy who wants to take your head off, but you have to be smart about it. That's the difference between this and the UFC. In UFC you knock a guy down and you jump on him, or you kick him, and it's two minutes a round, and it's just street fighting. Here, I got to read his mind, remember what he does, and keep thinking even though I'm getting hit. There's no coach, no teammates, nobody says "Thirty-love," the manager doesn't bring in a relief pitcher. It's you and everything that's inside you....But the thing about Kiki....I didn't even know him that well. But when you're in the ring with somebody, you know them better than anybody else. You see us hug each other after the fight's over. That's not fake. That's real. After 12 rounds of putting it all on the table, you're brothers. Nobody else in the world knows how that feels. It's not boxing or the boxers that are the problem. It's all the people around them. (gesturing.) Especially these two..

NATHAN (to Max)

I see indecision in your face. I see panic.

KELLY

Well, listen, Curtis, thanks for all the time and for opening up about all this. I hope it all fades away. Good luck in your next fight.

CURTIS

Thanks, Kelly, anytime. Let me know when it comes out. Talk to you later.

(KELLY leaves).

MAX

Gordon's!

NATHAN

(throws down cards): Oh, for God's sake.

CURTIS

Let him up, Max. Hey, let me stop the fight. (grabs Nathan, waves his hand.) It's over. It's all over! No more cards! Call in the ring doctor!

MAX:

Hey, Curtis, I talked to Eddie. He's coming over here tomorrow about 3.

CURTIS

(winces): Oh, good. How is Senor Bullshit anyway? I wanted to talk to him about that, about the money. I was hoping I could pay for their funeral and the hospital bills. Christina owns a jewelry store but they don't really have anything. Kiki never fought for big money.

MAX

Don't count on Eddie. Kiki wasn't his fighter.

CURTIS

Well, can we do that?

MAX

Do you really want to? Have you run it past Angela?

NATHAN:

(laughing): I want to have a front-row seat at that conversation. That might be a better fight than the fight.

CURTIS

Well, it's none of her damn business. You know all these people popping up all over the place, telling me I'm their hero now because Kiki died? Angela thinks it's a (makes air quotes) marketing opportunity.

MAX

Well, the Internet seems to think so
CURTIS

That's not good.

MAX:

You're right, but it's a sick world, and we live in the sickness capital. Some people are going to look at you different. People want superpowers now.. You don't really think they looked at you like a human being anyway, do you?

CURTIS

I don't know. I never felt like it was my job to think about it. Fighting's hard enough.

MAX

It still is. All of this is bullshit compared to what you do in the ring. Hopefully Eddie will have a date and a site and some money numbers, and if he wants to do his little song-and-dance, let him. He's good at his job. He's been good to you.

CURTIS

He hasn't got hit once. I've been damn good to him.

MAX

Granted. But here's one place I agree with him. Leave Grover alone. Quit ripping him to everybody you see.

CURTIS

I just wanted Grover to pay for what he did or didn't do. Kiki's family is ruined. I can't sleep at night. He just puts on his little bow tie and goes out there and fucks up more fights.

MAX

No, Curtis, the Nevada commission suspended his ass for six months and California went along. But you can't just piss on people indefinitely. They remember. That writer who was just here? Her headline is going to be: The Hammer Nails Grover Newsome Again. Or something like that. Bet you \$100.

NATHAN

Double-or-nothing tomorrow, by the way.

CURTIS

What time is Eddie coming?

MAX

Three o'clock.

CURTIS

Max, you better be here, too. I don't want to be alone with him. You hear me?

MAX

I will, Curtis.

Scene 11

CURTIS, CHRISTINA and her brother RAMON are in a small coffee shop/bakery in North Las Vegas. RAMON and CHRISTINA are on one side of the booth, CURTIS the other. She's drinking hot tea, Curtis is having coffee and water, Ramon is eating a burrito.

CURTIS:

Damn, man. They almost needed two people to bring that thing out.

RAMON:

It's the Mexcali. Carne asada, avocado, tomato, onion, red peppers, sour cream. Maybe an old hubcap from an '81 Chevrolet.

CURTIS

(laughs): If I ate that I'd blow six weeks of training.

RAMON

\
How is training?

CURTIS

(shrugs) Ok, I guess. Not really too fired up about it. It's hard when they haven't made the fight yet. You need a date, something to shoot at, and after last time....

(RAMON frowns, CHRISTINA puts her head down)

CURTIS

(quietly): I'm sorry. That was stupid. I'm lucky to be still doing this.

CHRISTINA

: It's OK.

CURTIS

How's the store? Are you taking care of yourself?

CHRISTINA:

La tienda esta bien. No me gusta estar solo en casa. Sigo pensando que viene por esa puerta.

RAMON

She still thinks he's coming through the door....It's tough. She doesn't like being home. isn't ready to go through his clothes, go through the trophies and all that. She still wears the rings.

CURTIS

Of course. I understand. Well, I can't imagine it, really.

RAMON

He has so many gloves and shoes in their garage.

CURTIS

\ I can take care of that, anytime she wants. I can take them to the Boys and Girls Club, no problem at all.

CHRISTINA

Eso estaria bien. No quiero las cosas del boxeo. Puedes tomarios.

RAMON

I'll bring them by the gym. Except for the trunks he wore in the last fight before they got married. He had 'Christina' on the front waistband.

CHRISTINA

(smiles): No los olvio a usar. Pregunte por que. Dijo que no le gusto cuando mi nombre fue golaeado.

RAMON

He only wore them once. They would hit her name on the waistband. It made him mad.

CURTIS

(laughs): I wish I'd known him a little better. He was a character.

CHRISTINA

(points at Curtis: Te tenea mucho respeto.

RAMON

: He did respect you, Curtis. But he was just so alive. He would get mad in big ways. He would be happy in big ways. He would have some tequila shots and start singing in the bars. He would get in brawls. He was alive. That is what he would want for all of us. I would be down or she would be down and he would say, 'Dame la buena cara!' Give me the good face!

CHRISTINA

(smiles): Always, he said that.

RAMON

: We're trying to get a foundation organized, too. Eddie is getting some people together in Ensenada and also here.

CURTIS

Listen. Say the word. I'll get Max on it. He can do anything. Eddie, too. You want a golf tournament? We'll get every boxer Eddie has. Count on it.

RAMON

That's great. But you have to play!

CURTIS

(laughs) Then the deal's off!

(They get up. Ramon asks for a box for the rest of the burrito. Curtis hugs Christina).

CURTIS

Any time you need to call, anything you want....you've got my number.

CHRISTINA

Thank you, very nice.

RAMON

: Good luck. Tell me when the fight is on.

CHRISTINA

(touches Curtis' shoulder): Pero ten cuidado.

RAMON:

He will. He'll be careful.

Scene 13

CURTIS and NATHAN are sitting in Nathan's office at his gym, watching video of Jerome's next opponent, DIETER STEIN. MAX is on his way, as is EDDIE, the promoter.

CURTIS

He moved his head pretty good there.

NATHAN

Yeah. It looks like you can hit him but nobody really does..

CURTIS

(laughs): That's what happens when you don't fight nobody.

NATHAN

This guy he's fighting wasn't bad, Curtis.

CURTIS

Compared to what?

NATHAN

Compared to the guys he beat to get to the Olympics. Beat a tough Russian guy.

CURTIS

: Ooooh, good jab there. .

NATHAN

Yeah, and Dieter's got good posture. Good feet for a big guy.

CURTIS

How many times has he been down?

NATHAN:

Four.

CURTIS

: Four? Against the guys he's fought? He's been fighting Hogan's Heroes.

NATHAN

: There. See? Right there, Dieter cracks him with that double left. Down and then up. Dazed him.

CURTIS

: Yeah, here it comes. Right hand on the button. Well, maybe you're right, Coach, he's a little better than he looks.

NATHAN

Technical. Judges love him. We just don't know about his chin.

CURTIS:

We do know one thing.

NATHAN

What?

CURTIS

He can't break an egg. I've beat a dozen guys better than this. Kiki Ortega included.

NATHAN

: Curtis, the only problem is whether you're ready. This is a title fight. Most guys only get one. Really, most guys only get NONE. Once this train leaves the station, who knows?.

CURTIS

What time is it?

NATHAN

Hammer Time.

CURTIS

(laughs). No, dumbass! I mean, what time of day is it?

NATHAN

: Ten to three.
(MAX comes in)

NATHAN

Where are the showgirls?

MAX

At the show. What's going on here at the nerve center of boxing?

CURTIS

We were watching Dieter Stein do his thing. He won't be doing it long. I'm just going to pretend I'm punching Eddie's face. That should take care of it.

MAX

\Yeah he'll be here any minute....You know you're trending on the Internet, right? They've got memes of you like you're Spartacus, like you're Chuck Norris.

NATHAN

: Memes?

MAX (dismissively)

Pictures on the web....Anyway, Eddie says this is going to make Curtis high-profile, and that's more money, bigger fights, commercials....

CURTIS

(rolls eyes) I can't believe any of this.

NATHAN

: I got to go to work with some guys. Let me know if you gotta call 9-1-1.

(EDDIE walks in, wearing designer sweatsuit with ESP logo, for Eddie Santillan Promotions)

EDDIE:

Ei Martillo! Come here, brother!

(Eddie and Curtis exchange a bro-hug)

EDDIE

How are you holding up?

CURTIS

: I don't know, Eddie. Sleep a couple of hours, watch the fight again, sleep a couple of hours, have a glass of wine....

EDDIE

Watch the fight? Watch the Kiki fight?

CURTIS:

Yeah.

EDDIE

You know what I remember about that fight? You won. You went to 30-1-1.

CURTIS

Yeah, I know that's how you think.

EDDIE

But, hey, forget that stuff. We've got the date all but wrapped up. Looks like it won't be until April 28. And we have a pretty good idea what the money is.

MAX

Tell him what you told me yesterday.

EDDIE

First of all, MGM Grand wants it and that's probably where we're going. But Madison Square Garden does, too. You never fought there before, right? New Orleans is talking about the Superdome. We could go to Germany and fill up the Olympic Stadium. He's big there, biggest thing since Max Schmeling. It's a main event, no matter what. It's prime time on the network. And the last couple of days, they're throwing out money I never thought you'd see.

CURTIS

Big money?

EDDIE

About 800 grand for you, a million two for him.

CURTIS:

Sweet Jesus. (smiles)..

EDDIE

: That's a long way from that party deck in Laughlin where I saw you the first time, am I right?

CURTIS

Yeah. This way I can help the Ortegas with the hospital bills and the funeral and all that.

EDDIE

Hey. whatever gets you a merit badge.

CURTIS

And they're trying to start a foundation for younger fighters. I thought maybe we can organize a golf tournament. Get some of the other fighters, maybe some old golf pros, some Golden Knights.

EDDIE

Done. Whatever you need.

CURTIS

Damn, you're downright human today, Eddie.

EDDIE

Well, times have changed, Martillo. You're not just a boxer anymore. You are moving into The Rock territory. You're moving into Arnold territory. You've got the looks and the smarts and all of that. So when we do this fight, just play the game. It's win-win. As long as you win, and of course you'll do that.

CURTIS

(sarcastic): But, no, you're not asking me to act the fool after I killed somebody.

EDDIE

Put it however you want. You're a smart guy. Turn a negative into a positive. Everybody knows it was an accident. It's boxing. Every time you walk into the ring....

CURTIS

No shit. I know that.

EDDIE

: Okay. So let me handle all this. This is called promotion. Bernard Hopkins was the Executioner. He wore a hood.

CURTIS

I ain't Bernard Hopkins.

EDDIE

: What the fuck is wrong with being Bernard Hopkins? Tell him, Max. This is showbiz. This is entertainment.

MAX

This is a real human being, too.

EDDIE

I'm not asking you to be an asshole. I'm asking you to ACT like an asshole. Everybody close to you is going to see through it. You can have fun with this.

CURTIS

Christina and Ramon, what about them? They can't see through anything right now.

EDDIE

We just said we're going to take care of them. We can turn this into good press.

CURTIS

They don't need good press. They don't need to get their noses rubbed in it. They've been great to me. They could have run me out of the waiting room that night when we went to see Kiki. They know we're all dealing with this, and it's hard, Eddie, you got no idea..

EDDIE

Okay. Fine. This is all down the road. The important thing is to fight the best fight you ever fought, win the title, become the 12th man in the glorious ESP stable to become a champion. I don't tell you how to box. Don't tell me how to do business. All right, Martillo? And, Max, it is always a pleasure.

MAX

Yeah. It's business, too.

EDDIE

Now you're talking. See you, Curtis.

(leaves)

(Nathan walks in)

NATHAN:

No blood on the floor. That's a relief.

CURTIS

: Not yet.

MAX

: I don't know what to tell you, son. I negotiate deals every day of the week with much bigger assholes than Eddie Santillan. Maybe we can meet him halfway. Blame it on Ali. Before him, it was Floyd Patterson saying nothing except he respected his opponent.

CURTIS

Nobody knows who Floyd Patterson was.

MAX:

Exactly. Face it, Curtis. The only difference between wrestling and boxing is that our bullshit stops when the bell rings.

CURTIS

Well, let the bullshit begin. And we might as well crank up the boxing. What time you want me here tomorrow, Nathan?

NATHAN

I don't know. Eleven?

CURTIS

Okay. I need to go see Christina at ten. Then I'm going to Fresno.

NATHAN

Yeah?.

CURTIS

(quietly). Yeah.

Scene 14

CURTIS is visiting his brother GRADY's house in Fresno, hoping to see his son CALEB

GRADY

How long did it take you?

CURTIS

Four and a half. I did stop in Tehachapi. Really nice.

GRADY

Janice and Caleb and me, we like to go hiking there.

CURTIS

So Caleb should be here when school's out?

GRADY

I'm sorry, Curtis.

CURTIS

What did he say?

GRADY

We talked about it three times. He said he wasn't coming home at all if you were here. He said he wasn't going to the school assembly tomorrow to listen to you. And he said he didn't want any of your money or anything else. I didn't tell you because I was hoping he'd change his mind. We had a big blow-up this morning before school. I wish I could tell you he was wrong.

CURTIS

They don't talk about forgiveness in that big-ass church you go to, guess.

GRADY

They talk about repenting. You can send him all the basketballs and laptops and sweaters for Christmas that you want. None of that means anything if you ain't here.

CURTIS

Did he even get 'em?

GRADY

Yes, but we had to tell him we gave them to him, and then he got mad because he knows we ain't got the money. .

CURTIS

So I guess you don't remember when I told you I'd send you whatever you need.

GRADY

It's not about that, Curtis.

CURTIS

What did people say about Kiki Ortega?

GRADY

You know what? I didn't hear much about it. I don't think a lot of people connect me with you, or connect you with Fresno. The guy they love is Jose Vazquez. He's undefeated, he fights here all the time, sells out the joint. He was a picker. He's like God in the valley. He speaks up for the pickers, talks to the lawmakers....

CURTIS

Yeah, yeah, I know him. I'm sorry I got disconnected. But you know I had to leave. As soon as I knew you would take care of Caleb I had to get out.

GRADY

Because of Belinda.

CURTIS

You know how messed up she was. She wouldn't even think about rehab. But then she took up with Rudy, and I heard him about his drinking on top of everything else, and him beating her....You know that's why I left. Because I would have killed him. No doubt about it. I would have killed him and then where are we? Where's Caleb?

GRADY

I know. No good options. And then there was your career.

CURTIS

Well, yeah, it sounds shitty, but yeah. It's seven days a week and when I'm fighting I can't think about nothing else. I'm going into camp right now. But in a couple of years Caleb can come live with me. We can make that work. We got schools in Vegas, too..

GRADY

(quietly) Fortunately it will never come to that, because he'll never do it, but if he did we would have some problems. He's been our whole life. And thank God for it. But no. If you want to be part of Caleb's life, you'll have to get your ass over here a lot more often. Because that's where it is. You ain't parachuting in here like some fucking war hero. You got some dues to pay.

CURTIS

(sighs) Okay. I know. Thank you again. Tell him I was here. Tell him to come to the Assembly. I won't embarrass him. Tell him that.

GRADY

All right, brother. Just remember. He doesn't need The Hammer. He needs you.

CURTIS

(smiles) Let me figure out where one ends and the other begins. And I'll get back to you. Love you. (leaves)

Scene 15

Curtis and Angela, in the house they share. Angela is wearing a bright yellow blouse with ruffles, and purple and white Palazzo pants.

CURTIS

Wow, look at you Angela in living color.

ANGELA

(laughs). You were my inspiration, baby. I designed this myself.

CURTIS

You're going to hit it big. And maybe you can finance my retirement.

ANGELA

Give me five years and I just might . (embraces him)

CURTIS

Five months is more like it. I'm trying to get back into training but it ain't happening right now. I told you I was going to help with Kiki's funeral and the hospital bills, right?

ANGELA

You said you were thinking about it.

CURTIS

And they're having a charity golf tournament for Kiki's foundation next week, so they'll raise some money that way.

ANGELA

(shakes head) You're taking your eye off the ball, baby. You and me are going into this two-month booty moratorium for the fight, and you're getting ready to kick somebody's ass, but you're still trying to be Mr. Wonderful to everybody else..

CURTIS

Not really. I guess I'm going to be Mr. Asshole. Eddie wants to turn me into this wrestling villain. I'm going to act like I'm a real killer. Get up in the press conference and yell and talk about putting Dieter in the grave instead of just boxing. I don't know how I'm supposed to explain that to Christina.

ANGELA

If you fuck around and lose this fight, I don't know how you're supposed to explain it to Angela...What's with Christina? She's got family, right? She's a grown woman. This is just really strange, Curtis. You don't have to adopt the whole family. Really.

CURTIS

They don't have insurance. None of us do. This is a tough business.

ANGELA

You've told me that 100 times. Tough business. I got a tough business. You know how to handle a tough business? Be tough.

CURTIS

So if I have to play the part for Eddie, who is a bloodsucking son of a bitch as we all know....That's OK with you?

ANGELA

(rolls eyes) I'm tired of talking about this, I'm tired of you bitching about Eddie. I'm tired of you begging for my approval, I'm just tired. I got a cocktail party for all the buyers and the muckety-mucks to go to. Quit worrying about your fucking image, Have fun with it. You might get an acting career out of it..

CURTIS

Yeah, Eddie was talking about The Rock.

ANGELA

Ain't nothing wrong with the Rock, baby. Ain't nothing wrong with billboards and penthouses. Make the Rock's kind of money, you can save every widow in America. But not even the Rock can bring somebody back to life. Only one man ever did that.

CURTIS

Yeah? I didn't think you believed in Jesus.

ANGELA

I was talking about David Copperfield. See you tonight.

, SCENE 15

The press conference for Dieter Stein's title defense against Curtis Jerome is coming up at the MGM Grand ballroom. EDDIE, CURTIS, DIETER, MAX are on the dais. Curtis is wearing shades and a hood.

EDDIE (loudly, into microphone)

There comes a time in this business where there is resolution. Dieter Stein, you won in Stuttgart and in Munich and in Paris and where all the white fighters fight. We respect you. But we know that resolution is waiting for you in the ring Saturday night, MGM Grand Garden Arena, on Showtime. We know you're a student of European history. So you should know this is where Napoleon met his Rubicon....

CURTIS

(whispering to Max)

That ain't right, is it?

MAX

No.

EDDIE

...And where the entire German nation collapsed at the sight of General Patton, blowing up every tank in sight.. You remember what General Patton said. It's not about giving up your life for your country.. It's about getting that other son of a bitch to give up his life for his country! We respect you, Max, for coming across the pond. But you are in the deep water now, my friend. Nevertheless, you are the champion and you deserve to have your say. So now, here's the super-middleweight champion of the world, and one of the last times you're ever going to hear him speak, Dieter Stein!

DIETER (stands at microphone)

Thank you Eddie. Thank all of you for coming. This will be the biggest event in the history of the 168-pound division. All my life I have known I am destined to do great things. I dreamed of becoming the greatest boxer in my country, even though there were no boxing heroes to look up to. I have done that. Now I am a world champion and it's time that I travel the world to prove that. Curtis, you are a great fighter but you are going to see a combination of technique and skill that you are not prepared for. I was a schoolteacher when I got out of university and on Saturday night, I will deliver a boxing lesson, and the joke will be on you. We will see you Saturday night!

CURTIS (to Max)

Okay, here I go to the dark side. God help me.

EDDIE

Thank you Dieter. And after this fight Germany will again have no one to look up to. This is where you get off, my friend. The man you are going to fight on Saturday night has a proven record of destruction. In his last fight you saw him unleash his deadly power. He is just now learning how to go for the jugular, to take it to the limit. Make sure the ambulance is waiting for you, Dieter, because here he is, the next super-middleweight champion...Curtis "Black Death" Jerome!

CURTIS (at microphone)

Okay, Eddie. I want to thank my manager Max and my trainer Nathan for putting me in this position. A lot of people want me to feel bad about what happened in my last fight and, yeah, I do feel bad for his family. But if you climb through those ropes and get into the ring with me, you have no excuses. You have been warned. Today I got to hear about how I'm going to have to learn a lesson. Listen here, asshole. You ain't going to be teaching anybody anything except how to lay down. And you can take that rematch clause and stick it because after Saturday, you won't be fighting nobody, and I mean for a long, long time. You walk into that ring, I'm not responsible for you. So come in if you want. But make sure you make the weight, bitch. And don't forget to bring the belt with you.

(Crowd cheers loudly. Curtis and Dieter move in front of the dais for the traditional staredown. Curtis, two inches shorter, stares up into Dieter's eyes)

CURTIS (whispering)

Hey, man. I was just bullshitting. They're making me play this role. You know that, right? Let's just have a good fight.

DIETER

Don't worry. This is business. This is American business. I understand.

CURTIS

All right. (then turns to audience and yells) Don't wait around for his autograph! He'll be stretched out!

DIETER (laughs)

You're good at it, though. You sure you don't like this?

CURTIS

Yeah. I'm sure.

(they pull apart and leave the ballroom)

EDDIE

Curtis! Fantastic! We're already sold out! Twitter is going crazy. I told you you could do this. (runs off).

MAX (to Curtis)

You pulled that off pretty well, young man.

CURTIS (smiles)

Yeah. I know. Wait till Saturday.

(walks away, pulls out phone)

Ricky. It's Curtis. Want to hit a big one on Saturday? Take Dieter. That's right. Go big on Dieter. In a decision.

(END OF ACT 1)

ACT 2

Scene 1

(the office of promoter
MYRON BERMAN, as he
talks with
assistant/matchmaker
George Steinberg)

MYRON

You going to MGM tomorrow night?

GEORGE

Yeah, there's a kid on the undercard. He's from Venezuela. Saw him in the Olympics. Featherweight. Saw him in the Olympics.

MYRON

What about the main event?

GEORGE

Jerome should take him out. Stein is just a robot with red hair.

MYRON

How long is his deal with Santilan?

GEORGE

One more fight, I think. Don't get any ideas, Chief. Do we really want him? He's 30. He's pretty good but he's not gonna get any better, plus he killed that kid last fight. You don't know how he's going to react to that..

MYRON

That's why I want you to check him out. And think about it. We got Sharpe and Escobedo. They're not going to be at 160 forever. And we got the London kid who's already at 168. Jerome could be a good fight for all of them. He's popular. He's gotten more popular since the Ortega fight.

GEORGE

Yeah. Did you see him trying to be a jerk at the press conference?

MYRON

(waves hand dismissively) That's coming from that schmuck Santillan. I can't believe Jerome would have done that by himself. That's not him.

GEORGE

Something's going on there. I know a guy who went to that charity golf tournament. He said Jerome was hanging around with Ortega's wife. He thought they were acting a little too chummy, all things considered.

MYRON

I thought he was living with that tall broad from Nordstrom.

GEORGE

(laughs) What, you're spying now?

MYRON

Just watch Jerome and tell me what you think. Jerome's one of those community guys. You like to have them around. Works with kids and all that. We've got enough assholes, right?

GEORGE

You got it, Chief. (leaves)

SCENE 2

(voiceover from broadcast)

JIM HARRISON

And the judges have spoken...Dieter Stein has retained his super-middleweight championship by scores of 116-112, 115-113, 115-113....He did what he had to do, Omar, but I have to be honest here, this was not the fight I expected to see.

OMAR SAENZ

No question, Jim, and you heard the fans boo in the last few rounds, and those boos were in the direction of Curtis Jerome, who showed none of the aggressiveness we've seen from him...Very strange, considering this was his title shot. He had Stein in trouble in the second round but let him off the hook, and Stein really dictated the fight from then on....Liz Pirelli, our ring reporter, is saying that Jerome was complaining of some sort of thumb injury, but his promoter, Eddie Santillan, would not comment and seemed very upset. Hopefully he's not upset at the decision because I thought it was pretty fair, Jim.

(The next morning, CURTIS meets RICKY in a parking lot)

CURTIS

Well, did you cash in on Dieter last night?

RICKY

(quietly) No. I didn't bet. I told Ramon. He put 20 bucks on him, so he's happy. Happier than me. .

CURTIS

I'm sorry I put you in a bad position. But it was a no-win situation for everybody, except Dieter and you. Besides, I thought you could use the money.

RICKY

We're OK on the money. Come on, Curtis. What were you doing? It wasn't even subtle. What did you gain from this?

CURTIS

I just couldn't let Eddie get away with it.

RICKY

Get away with what? You think losing this fight hurts him? He's got a hundred guys. He's moving on.

CURTIS

Moving on without me. He already told us he's tearing up the contract. It was just one more fight anyway. That's fine.

RICKY

How mad was he?

CURTIS

I didn't talk to him. He talked to Max. I know Max is mad.. At me. But nothing compared to Nathan. He barely would look at me when he was taking off the gloves. How about you? Are you mad?

RICKY

Do they know you threw the fight?

CURTIS

Threw the fight? I wouldn't say that, Rick. I just went half-speed.

RICKY

Threw the fight. It doesn't really matter what you meant to do. You looked like shit and that tears up everything that happened in the last 10 fights, 20 fights. Now people think you got a big mouth and you can't back it up. I hope your fucking thumb is OK. Where's your splint?.

CURTIS

(agitated) What were my options, Rick?

RICKY

Win the fight. Win the next one. Get out of your contract. Tell Eddie to fuck off. Sign somewhere else. Pretty simple, Curtis. Did you know George Steinberg was there? He was asking me a lot of questions about you before the fight. After the fight he bolted.

CURTIS

He did? Shit.

RICKY

The one reputation you had was that you were an honest fighter. Rain or shine, Curtis is going to give you what he's got. Why didn't we talk about this? Why didn't you talk to Max at least?

CURTIS

I don't know. How's Christina?

RICKY

Confused. She wasn't interested in the fight. I mentioned you a couple of times and she just changed the subject.

CURTIS

Maybe I should talk to her.

RICKY

Later, maybe. Ask me or Ramon first.

CURTIS

OK. But you know why I wanted to see you today? I came out here to ask if you wanted to promote me.

RICKY

You did?

CURTIS

Sure. Back to square one. Back to basics. We could move up together. Young promoter makes a breakthrough, fighter makes a comeback. And I'm a free agent right now. A cheap date.

RICKY

(slowly)

Yeah. That has crossed my mind, for sure. But we'd need to do some damage control.

CURTIS

Yeah. I wouldn't be fighting any Santillan fighters, that's for sure. Not unless he has no choice. Do you have anybody at 168?

RICKY

I got one guy. From Iceland (starts laughing).

CURTIS

(laughs along with him). Iceland! Where the hell is Iceland? Does he fix refrigerators?

RICKY

He might be better off fixing refrigerators. He's about 33 and he's won 22 and lost 6 or something like that.. Magnus Allanson. He was on the Olympic team.

CURTIS

(laughs) Olympic team. Yeah. I can see him walking into the stadium, carrying the flag by himself. You think we got tape on him?

RICKY

(out of control laughing) No, but there's probably a picture on the refrigerator!

CURTIS

Oh, man. I hope I can stop from laughing at the weigh-in. The Hammer and the Iceman.

RICKY

Leave the promotion to me, Curtis.

CURTIS

(phone beeps) What's this? Max is texting. He says, "Go home. Now." What the hell does that mean?

RICKY

Sounds like you better take care of it. I'll call you.

CURTIS

See you later. Say hello to the Iceman (starts laughing again)

Scene 3

(at the apartment Curtis shares with Angela. Max arrives. Curtis is already there)

MAX

Where did she go?

CURTIS

(quietly) Not sure. I did Find Friends on the phone. She was at the airport.

MAX

Was she supposed to be on the road?

CURTIS

I don't think so. Go look in her closet. Everything's gone.

MAX

You have any idea what happened?

CURTIS

(laughs bitterly). Yeah. Look.

MAX

(opens envelope, takes out photos) Jesus. When did this happen?

CURTIS

At the golf tournament. Christina and I were walking around, talking, and all of a sudden we get to the car, and then we're in the back seat....

MAX

In the middle of the afternoon?

CURTIS

(holds up hands) It's a blur, Max. Everything is a blur.

MAX

So how did Angela get the pictures?

CURTIS

I give you one guess, Max. Rhymes with Santillan..

MAX

Right. That was a dumb question. OK. First thing you do is this: You do not get into your car until you go through the trunk and glove compartment.

CURTIS

Gotcha.

MAX

I take it you don't want to go to court with Santillan.

CURTIS

No way. Put him behind us. You know Ricky Serrano, you met him at the hospital? He's going to promote me.

MAX

He is? You already made a deal with him?

CURTIS

I didn't sign anything but that's what I'm doing. He's street-smart and he's got money, and he's got a few fighters. I'll teach him about boxing.

MAX

I'll take care of Santillan if he messes with you. Remember, we might have to deal with him again. He's got other guys at 168. But after that shit last night I don't know if we'll have that option. And you might need a new trainer. Nathan was so mad he was crying. What in the hell were you thinking?

CURTIS

I don't know anymore.

MAX

OK. Let's just sit down. Angela still has a lot of stuff here. She's probably going to come back. Let me talk with Ricky. But I can't help you with Nathan. And Kiki's wife?

CURTIS

Christina. Her head is spinning, too.

MAX

Women walk out. That happens. Trust me. What you need is two weeks off. Go....somewhere. You don't need to box. You can be a contractor. You can go back to school. I'll help you every way I can. And I'll talk to Ricky if you need me, because there's a whole world out there he knows nothing about. But I'm not going to sugarcoat it. You know how they say you're as good as your last fight? That's not it. You're as good as your worst fight. That's the world we live in.

CURTIS

(gets up) When should I go see Nathan? And should I wear headgear?

MAX

Not just yet. But, yeah. And some Kevlar wouldn't hurt.

Scene 4

(Two days after Curtis beats Magnus Allanson in a 3-round knockout. He, MAX and NATHAN are in a bar)

NATHAN

Did you miss me?

CURTIS

Man, I never knew it was so tough to be a trainer. Especially when you're boxing at the same time.

NATHAN

(laughs) I watched it. I liked it when Ricky spilled the water all over your head. And Ramon got the Vaseline in your eyes.

CURTIS

Yeah, Using them was pretty dumb, when I think about it. God knows what happens if I get cut. They'd probably run off to the CVS for band-aids.

MAX

In other words, yes, Nathan. We missed you.

NATHAN

I needed some time off anyway. You talk about training and boxing. I've been a psychologist, baby-sitter and trainer the last nine months.

CURTIS

I know I've been a mess. Thanks, really.. But did you miss us?

NATHAN

Sure (laughs). Three nights, stuck with my brother and his family, I missed everybody!

CURTIS

How'd I look?

NATHAN

Focused. That was a sweet right hand to the side of the head. And you didn't let him get any confidence. Your feet were sloppy, though. That's what we got to work on.

CURTIS

Oh? So we're together again?

NATHAN

I guess so. I got a savior complex..

MAX

Ricky will be glad to hear that. He was hyperventilating. He didn't realize what it looks like, from the corner.

NATHAN

So, Curtis. Where's Angela at?

CURTIS

Miami, I think.

NATHAN

You think?

CURTIS

She's got her own product line coming out. I think she might have hooked up with some businessman. I boxed her stuff up and sent it to her, after she sent me a card with some dude's address. She could have texted me. That was her way of getting under my skin.

NATHAN

I heard how she found out. That's cold.

CURTIS

That's part of why she left but, really, she couldn't handle me losing, especially like that. I know I was wrong.

NATHAN

Wrong with Christina? That's not really wrong. That's just two fucked-up people with nowhere else to turn.

CURTIS

Wrong, the way I handled the fight. I felt like I was in a trap. I had to lash out at somebody. Wound up knocking myself out instead.

NATHAN

I know. I'm sorry I got pissed off.

CURTIS

How pissed were you?

NATHAN

(laughs) Whoo-ee, you don't want to know. I wasn't letting you back in the gym.

MAX

That's why I told you not to come in.

NATHAN

Hey, man. We all screw up. I never told you about me screwing up.

CURTIS

When was that?

NATHAN:

Nineteen ninety-two. Gloria was her name. She thought I was going to be special. Took about three losses in the ring for her to realize I wasn't. And I

couldn't do nothing else except drive a taxi. And she said she didn't sign up for that. So it was World War 3 every night. I'd put the key in the door and I'd take a deep breath. I'd pray she was asleep....

CURTIS

But she hardly ever was.

NATHAN

Yeah. One night it all came out. She started yelling about how she was going to go back to San Diego, and she just found out her old boyfriend had gotten divorced, and he owned a restaurant and was all this and that....and I said, well, let me pack your shit for you...and she threw something at me and I...I just smacked her. Smacked her hard.

CURTIS

How hard?

NATHAN:

(choking up) Broke her jaw.

CURTIS

: So that was the end of that.

NATHAN

: Not really, Curtis. You see this tattoo on my arm here?

CURTIS

Yeah, I noticed it.

NATHAN:

Got it in Folsom. I was there for nine months.

CURTIS

: (quietly) I didn't know that, man.

NATHAN

: Yeah. Those were the best fights I ever had. I was 2 and 5 as a pro and I was about 15 and 1 in the joint. But then I was motivated, too.

CURTIS

: I never knew a thing about that, man.

NATHAN

Not many people do. I did what I had to do. I wrote letters to somebody every day. I talked to the psychologist and he gave me some anti-depressants -- that's why I keep saying you ought to see somebody, Curtis. This is the sport where you get hit in the head, but nobody wants to go to the head doctor. But I came out OK. At least I came out. Some people don't.

CURTIS

Where's Gloria?

NATHAN

(laughs) Went back to San Diego and married that guy. Then he went to jail for embezzling. She's put more dudes in jail than the FBI.

CURTIS

But she was a fine woman, huh?.

NATHAN

Oh, yeah. Too fine for me.

(Max's phone beeps)

MAX

Lordy, lordy, will you look at that? Dieter Stein didn't make weight for the Mendoza fight.

NATHAN

Which means they'll fight, but he won't keep his belt.

MAX

Which means Mendoza is the new champ, and guess who the mandatory challenger is?

CURTIS

(smiling) A guy named The Hammer?.

NATHAN

And Mendoza belongs to Eddie Santillan. Unless they try to buy you out..

MAX

What goes around comes around. Just like Magellan said.

CURTIS

(to Nathan) Wow. Crazy. That changes everything. See you at 9 o'clock, trainer. We got some work to do.

NATHAN

Compared to what?

CURTIS

Now that's what I'm talking about. Later.

Scene 5

(A pre-fight rules meeting at a ballroom at the MGM Grand. JIM FAGAN, chairman of the Nevada State Athletic Commission, presiding).

JIM

Okay, most of this should be standard. Gloves will be 10 ounces. I believe Mr. Mendoza will be using Reeboks?

EDDIE

Yes, Jim.

MAX

We're using Everlasts, as you know.

JIM

OK. Judges for the fight are Glenn Feldman, Julie Lederman and Max DeLuca, I'm sure you're familiar with all three. Any objections? No? Good. And the referee for this fight will be Grover Newsome.

CURTIS

(To Max) What? What the fuck?

MAX

Jim, we'd like to record an objection here.

JIM

On what grounds?

MAX

I believe the commission knows perfectly well on what grounds. His negligence allowed a young man to get killed last year, and in fact the commission suspended him on those grounds.

JIM

Max, we disagree. Mr. Newsome has refereed 15 championship fights in the state of Nevada all alone. He has no prior history of misconduct or negligence and he has also worked two other fights that Mr. Jerome has won. He has paid a price and we are convinced of his objectivity. If there's nothing else, we're adjourned.

EDDIE

(walking past Curtis and winking)

Always good to see a man get a second chance, eh, muchacho?

CURTIS

What a piece of shit you are.

MAX

(grabs Curtis) Let's get out of here. Next time I tell you not to come to a rules meeting, listen to me.

Scene 6

CURTIS, MAX, RICKY and NATHAN are at the gym. CURTIS is on the scale

NATHAN

One sixty-six.

MAX

Perfect. Let's hold it right there. You don't know if Eddie will start fucking with the scale. That's probably what happened to Stein.

CURTIS

One sixty-six. When I quit boxing, I won't eat another baked chicken again.

NATHAN

..

(wrapping Curtis' hands)

All right. Today it's all about balance. Mendoza's got the big right hand and he's fast. He wants to hit you coming in when you're lunging. He gets lots of knockdowns and lots of 10-8 rounds and it's not because he's a big puncher. Stay balanced and you can get the uppercuts. They're open all day.

CURTIS

Got it.

RICKY

I George Steinberg called yesterday, asking about you.

CURTIS

Really? What'd he say?

RICKY

Said we could beat Mendoza.

CURTIS

Say anything about the Stein fight? What did you tell him?

RICKY

I didn't tell him anything. He wanted to know if he should take Notre Dame on Saturday.

MAX

Which you can't tell him anything about. Not if there's a ghost of a chance of us working with him.

RICKY

I don't talk about that stuff, Max. Come on. I had Purdue plus 10, all to myself. It worked out pretty good.

CURTIS

And the Stein fight?

RICKY

He said one bad fight isn't a problem. Why would he call if Berman wasn't interested?

CURTIS

Look, if you're worried about them swooping me up, don't be. You're my promoter.

MAX

(to Curtis) And the only thing you're supposed to be worried about is Mendoza.

(ANGELA walks in)

MAX

(to himself)

So much for that.

ANGELA

Am I permitted?

CURTIS

(smiles)

I don't know. Max, did she make an appointment?

ANGELA

I went by the house. You clean up real nice.

CURTIS

Mercedes does. She was there this morning.

ANGELA

Nathan, can we talk somewhere? I won't be long.

NATHAN

Sure, sweetie. Go back in my office. Even though the cleaning lady hasn't gotten there yet. I got her scheduled for 2022..

(Angela and Curtis go back)

ANGELA:

You look good. Even look younger. Thriving without me, huh?.

CURTIS

I'm hanging in. That blouse...is that aquamarine?

ANGELA

(laughs) Yes it is. Very good. I'm here for a convention. Well, for connections. I can't get my clothing line off the ground. So I'm kind of struggling.

CURTIS

You get those boxes I sent you?

ANGELA

Yes, thanks, that was a big job.

CURTIS

I got a championship fight Saturday.

ANGELA

Really? So you're making a comeback. How's Eddie?

CURTIS

We split. I'm fighting one of his guys. And guess who the referee is? Grover. Eddie arranged it, I'm pretty sure. I'll be fighting two guys in the same ring. But that's the way it is.

ANGELA

What about the woman in the photo? That was Christina, right?

CURTIS

(quietly) It was.

ANGELA

Did you fuck her?

CURTIS

No, Angela, I did not, although that's where we were headed. It's so crazy. She's moving back to Ensenada. I haven't talked to her. She was scared, I was scared....I didn't expect you to understand because I didn't. I'm sorry I hurt you. I know I did.

ANGELA

I'm sorry we didn't talk about it. I couldn't. The biggest reason it worked, this thing with you and me, is that I trusted you. I've been stripped to the bone by men I couldn't trust and for the first time I didn't even worry about it with you. And then you made me into a fool. Nobody does that.

CURTIS

I made a lot of people mad and the one thing I never wanted to do in my life was to make people mad. Explain that.

ANGELA

The people pleaser.

CURTIS

Kinda stupid, huh?

ANGELA

(laughs) Sure is.

CURTIS

What's with you? Still with the fashion mogul?

ANGELA

No. He fulfilled all my expectations of the male brand. I didn't even blink an eye. He was just fun in bed and he had a lot of money.

CURTIS

Two out of three ain't bad.

ANGELA

Yeah. Meat Loaf. That's actually a good name for him..

CURTIS

So where you staying?

ANGELA

At the Mirage. Don't worry, I know you're in the No Fuck zone right now. I just wanted to see you. I'm leaving Saturday but I promise I'll keep up with the fight. And I'll be back. For some reason I missed your humanity, Curtis. Am I getting soft?

CURTIS

Somebody told me that a love-hate relationship is actually good for a boxer.

ANGELA

Who?

CURTIS

Nathan. But he wasn't much of a boxer.

ANGELA

(laughs) It's a fine line, baby. Win this one. (kisses him goodbye)

Scene 7

(voiceover boxing broadcast)

JIM HARRISON

Jerome keeps pushing. There's a hard jaw to the jaw of Carlos Mendoza....Now Jerome goes downstairs....Mendoza barely misses the right counter....Already there's some swelling underneath the champ's eye....If Jerome had fought this way against Stein he might be the champ tonight....Wow! Chopping right hand out of nowhere by Mendoza and Jerome is down! He pops right back up though, smiling...Just a flash knockdown...But, oh, no! Newsome has stopped the fight! He looked in Jerome's eyes for a minute and he's waving his hands! It's over and Mendoza is still the champ! Nathan Johnson is livid, his other cornermen are holding him back from Newsome....Once again, there's controversy with Curtis Jerome and Grover Newsome!.

(Myron Berman's office, with George Steinberg and their public relations man, Howard Roth)

MYRON

What did you think?

GEORGE

Outrageous. Just so blatant. If they wanted to screw Jerome they could have done it with the decision. But Jerome had him in trouble early so maybe they couldn't wait that long.

MYRON

I talked to Fagan. They have to order a rematch to save any kind of face. But Fagan's so deep into Santillan's pocket. I'm with you. Mendoza doesn't want any part of Jerome. I must say, Jerome handled it right. He just shook his head and walked out of the ring and didn't say shit to anybody.

GEORGE

He saw it coming, I'm pretty sure. Of course, he ran his mouth too much about Newsome beforehand. That didn't help him.

MYRON

So what about Jerome? Should we get involved? Does he have a contract with that gambler?

GEORGE

He doesn't. But I like Ricky. He's a bit of a showman and he knows fighters a little bit. Knows enough not to bet on 'em. I'll have lunch with him this week. What are you thinking?

MYRON

We got the Vazquez card in December. Let's see if we can slot Jerome in there.

HOWARD

It's almost sold out already. And I talked to Joel Diaz the other day. He says Rodriguez is ready to go. He wants to move up from 160.

MYRON

Nah, nah. I want London in there with Jerome..

GEORGE

London? Is he ready for Jerome? That's a risk.

MYRON

If he's as fucking good as you say he is, he can handle the risk. He's 22. Jerome is 31. London's got bombs in both hands. Jerome gets hit. This will be a big win over a big name, like when Canelo beat Austin Trout. Remember how we managed De La Hoya? Got him with guys who were just past their peak. Networks will love it. Jerome's still a good story. And London comes out of this thing a big star.

GEORGE

What if he doesn't?

MYRON

Then we get an option on Jerome and we've still got London..

HOWARD

And the fight is in Fresno.

MYRON

Of course, with Vazquez. Full house, guaranteed.

GEORGE

Fresno. (squinting). I seem to recall Fresno is a problem for some reason.

Scene 8

(Curtis walks into his brother GRADY's house in Fresno. CALEB, 14, is in the living room)

CURTIS

Hey.

CALEB

(quietly) Hello, Dad.

CURTIS

Should I tell you how fast you're growing? Or is that too much of a Dad thing?

CALEB

Probably.

CURTIS

Got a girlfriend yet?

CALEB

Kinda. (shrugs) I mean, do you really want to know?

GRADY

Caleb's got four As and a B. He's in AP Math.

CURTIS

Them brains must have skipped a generation. Daddy was smart.

GRADY

Oh, you were smart, too.

CURTIS

Not with the books. You're looking at colleges?.

CALEB

I'm in the 8th grade, Dad..

CURTIS

Ever see Mom?

CALEB

Nope. I talk to you more often than her.

CURTIS

I'm sorry. I guess it was tough on you when the news came out, about me and Kiki

Ortega.

CALEB

People were talking about it. They asked me if I was related to you. I said no.

CURTIS

(looks down) I guess that was smart.

CALEB

(to Grady) Can I go now? (to Curtis) Bye, dad. Good luck in the fight.

CURTIS

You can come if you want....it's OK if you don't. Keep up the good work. Love you.

(Caleb leaves)

CURTIS

Well, that was....close to unbearable.

GRADY

He's doing fine. He studies his ass off. He might play lacrosse.

CURTIS

Lacrosse? The stick with the net on the end? (laughs) He's got some wide shoulders on him. Might be a pretty good light-heavyweight.

GRADY

But he's intense. He hates it when I talk about his grades because of that B. He'll be up reading until 2 in the morning. It's different now. These kids don't have fun like you and me did.

CURTIS

Had fun that one night. Nine months before he came along....So Belinda is bad off?

GRADY

That's what I hear. Still with Rudy. She tries to run away. She's either in a halfway house or a crack house. Caleb saw him in an alley with a guy one day. Saw something that really upset him. Another time he ran into her and she didn't know who he was. Rudy doesn't give a damn.

CURTIS

I gotta thank you for stepping in. You're doing what I should be doing. I keep thinking I should bring him over to Vegas for a weekend. But things keep coming up.

GRADY

(sternly) He won't do that. But you could drive over here and see him more often. Once a month? Is that too much? I'm doing what I can but I'm his uncle. They don't have Uncle's Day. They have Father's Day.. You want Caleb in your life, it's gonna take some work.

CURTIS

(blinks back tears) Great. Six days before the fight and I'm a mess. Like I am every time I come here. You need money?

GRADY

No, we don't need your money. We're good..

CURTIS

Right. Doesn't buy much in the end, does it?

GRADY

No. But if you want some help, Janice knows a woman named Sandra here in town. She's not a psychiatrist, she's a therapist. She goes to our church. If you want to talk, she'll listen. But she doesn't do any hand-holding. She'll cut right through it. She might be what you need.

CURTIS

She's different?

GRADY

(laughs) Oh, yeah. People either leave after one session and never leave at all. She's kinda like the Marines.

CURTIS

Hey, talk to her. Nothing from nothing leaves nothing, right? And if you want to come to the fight, I'll leave you some tickets. Take Janice. She can cover her eyes.

GRADY

(laughs) She can hold my beers. See you then. Love you. Good luck.

Scene 9

(in a hotel suite in Fresno)

CURTIS

Wow, look at this. This is uptown. Nathan, we'll roll out the sofa for you.

NATHAN

No need, brother. I got my own room down the hall.

MAX

And look at this. Howard gave us our whole schedule for the week. Public workout tomorrow, then we go to the TV station. Press conference the next day. Go to the fields with Vazquez and talk to the farm workers. Weigh-in the next day and then we meet with the network guys....Organized. And they got a chef in a suite on the 5th floor. They can cook you whatever you ask for.

CURTIS

I hope they can bake a chicken.

NATHAN

So this is the big leagues.

CURTIS

Compared to what?

NATHAN

Compared to what Santillan does.

CURTIS

(laughs) Right. Santillan would give us a voucher for a KFC box.

NATHAN

All right, let's see how we can beat this young stud.

(turns on tape)

CURTIS

Look at him. Damn. Every time I see him I think he should be a body-builder. I remember the Olympics when he took apart that Russian.

NATHAN

That's when they made him the mayor of Jamaica.

MAX

That's a country, Nathan.

NATHAN

(Ignores him) So I'm thinking that he's thinking you're gonna run. But you see the way he cuts off the ring. That's 30-year-old stuff, man.

CURTIS

Oh, yeah. He's tough. I can't see running. I can't win that way. Maybe if I can slip in there and get me some of those ribs. I haven't seen anybody give him body shots.

NATHAN

No, because when you get in there, you pay. Fifteen fights, 14 knockouts, all before the sixth round.

CURTIS

Maybe be careful early, jab him, box him, and then go after that big bitch when he gets tired.

NATHAN

Maybe.

CURTIS

Maybe he'll miss the weight.

MAX

(laughs) Not likely. Myron has probably plotted out his menu for the last two months. He probably has a food taster, too. London is their next meal ticket. They don't miss a thing.

CURTIS

And I'm the next meal. (laughs). We'll see about that.

MAX

(looks at phone) Breaking news, fellas. A guy we both know has been indicted back in Las Vegas for federal tax evasion.

CURTIS

Who?

NATHAN

Eddie Santillan.

MAX

You got it..

CURTIS

Man. He finally screwed up. Hey, Max, why don't you seem surprised?.

MAX

Oh, I am surprised. They weren't supposed to do that until Friday. (smiles)

CURTIS

(laughs) You're good, Max.

Scene 10

(in Fresno, at the office of Dr. Sandra Young, a petite woman in her late 30s, in a no-frills business suit. Curtis is in a chair facing Sandra, who is sitting on the edge of a couch. There is a terrarium nearby with a king snake inside.)

SANDRA

So Janice said you were a boxer.

CURTIS

Yeah.

SANDRA

Do you know Jose Vazquez? He's the man around here.

CURTIS

Yeah, I'm fighting on his undercard in a couple of nights.

SANDRA

Undercard?

CURTIS

He's the main event, I'm in a preliminary fight.

SANDRA

I see. Do you expect to win?

CURTIS

I'm fighting a really talented young kid, Dempsey London. But we've got a good plan. I'm the underdog, for one of the few times. So I'm relaxed about that.

SANDRA

(smiles) Underdog on an undercard. Have you been suffering anxiety?

CURTIS

I don't know if you'd call it anxiety. I've had some rough stuff happen. I had a fight last year when the guy I was fighting went to the hospital and died.

SANDRA

Do you blame yourself?

CURTIS

No, the referee didn't stop the fight quick enough....I'm tired of blaming him, though. The problem was my promoter. Instead of letting me deal with it, he wanted to play up the fact that this happened, and turn me into some villain.

SANDRA

And you let him?

CURTIS

(taken aback) Well, he was running the promotion on my next fight...I didn't have much of a choice.

SANDRA

(shakes her head) Did you have anyone to support you?

CURTIS

I had a girlfriend, Angela. She bolted, though. I was trying to get back at the promoter, so I really didn't fight very hard in my next fight and I lost. I thought it would hurt him. Wound up hurting me.

SANDRA

That sounds like a very strange decision..

CURTIS

Yeah, and my trainer almost fired me.

SANDRA

I can understand that.

CURTIS

(pointing at terrarium) Excuse me, what kind of snake is that?

SANDRA

It's a king snake.

CURTIS

The other psychologist I went to, she had a little furry dog.

SANDRA

I'm not a psychologist. I'm not interested in entertaining or comforting.

CURTIS

And those are what...gerbils?

SANDRA

In the cage, yes. The king snake likes them for lunch. Would you like to see...?

CURTIS

Ah, no, thanks... So you just call him the king snake? Does he have a name?

SANDRA

He's not a pet, Curtis. And we only have a half-hour....So you said you didn't fight hard, and lost, but it didn't hurt the promoter like you thought.

CURTIS

Yeah. We parted ways, and then I fought one of his guys for a championship, but he arranged it so I'd have the same referee that didn't stop that other fight. I'd been vocal about it. So the first time I got in trouble, the referee stopped the fight. Everybody raised hell but it didn't make any difference.

SANDRA

Any other reason the girlfriend left?

CURTIS

Well, I was helping Kiki's wife -- that's the guy who died -- and trying to raise money, and for some reason we started getting close, and my girlfriend got hold of some pictures of me and Christina messing around, that's the widow.

SANDRA

I can understand that, too. Are you in Fresno very often?

CURTIS

Well, Grady and Janice are here, and my son is here. Grady raises him. That's another thing. The boy doesn't want to have much to do with me. I guess that's natural.

SANDRA

How often are you in touch?

CURTIS

Twice, maybe three times a year.

SANDRA

And, he's how old?

CURTIS

Fourteen.

SANDRA

(takes off glasses) So you expect your son to jump into your arms and yell, "Daddy!" when you haven't seen him since Christmas? Teenagers don't work that way.

CURTIS

I know....but he's a brick wall.

SANDRA

To him, you're just some dude who ran off. Your reasons aren't good reasons to him. This is not unique, Curtis. From what you told me, people are reacting to you in very understandable ways. Human ways.This is the major part of my business. I guess I should thank you for the business, but this idea that you're tortured, or you're being knocked around by life, is just horseshit.

CURTIS

But it all started when that ref didn't do his job.

SANDRA

Curtis, when you're boxing, how often do you face your opponent?

CURTIS

Face?

SANDRA

Yeah. Do you ever turn your back to him and try to fight that way? You know what I'm asking? I'm sorry that kid died and I know it was traumatic. It also sounds like it was beyond your control. Guilt, blame....they fuck up the world. If you did something really wrong, fix it. If you didn't, put it in the trash like everything else that's in the past. But face it. Either live with the reality that you abandoned your son and deal with it the best you can, which not many people can do, or change the reality. The drive-by dad. There's a million of you. For some reason you want to have it both ways.

CURTIS

(nods) That's true.

SANDRA

I really don't want to be nasty. You're a nice guy. But it's not a nice world. You don't keep sour milk in the refrigerator, you don't let rats run around in your house.

CURTIS

You give 'em to the king snake.

SANDRA

(laughs) Right. You send them to their just reward....The worst stereotype in the world is the woman who's the drama queen. In my experience men are just as bad if not worse. You get involved with that boy's family because it makes you feel better. You think you're going to screw over the promoter because your feelings got hurt and you've got to even the score, like that makes any sense. You're hung up on how your son is making YOU feel, which is just fucking ridiculous.

CURTIS

(quietly) I can't argue with any of that.

SANDRA

Curtis, I'm going to give you three words that would turn this whole planet into paradise, if everybody took them to heart. Get. Over. Yourself. Get over yourself. Or get your head out, if you prefer. Look outward, take care of business. Quit keeping score.

CURTIS

(smiles) Is it that simple?

SANDRA

The advice is. The execution isn't. But 90 percent of what we all deal with is garbage. It doesn't mean a thing. Take out the garbage. Don't worry, other garbage will replace it soon enough. But if you sit around and look at it and analyze it, or if you pretend it's not there, your mind is going to be stinking with garbage. You're going to hear people say you should control what you can control. Which is true. What they're missing is, you control more than you think.

CURTIS

Okay. I'll think on it.

SANDRA

And we're done. Sorry it was a little rough.

CURTIS

You told me the truth. So that's worth every penny.

SANDRA

You know, Janice had mentioned that fight, and I was kinda interested because the whole town has a crush on Jose Vazquez. I put her off, but maybe I should call her.

CURTIS

Sure. Come on out. Let me know if I can help. I'll try not to get beat up too bad (laughs, heads toward the door).

SANDRA

Underdog on an undercard. We're all "under" something. Most of us, under construction.

CURTIS

That's true, too. Maybe I'll check in with you again. You and the snake, take care.

SANDRA

I will, but he won't take care, because he's a snake. Have a good one.

SCENE 11

(voiceover broadcast)

JIM HARRISON

Round 7 is here, Omar, and London is coming off two good rounds...He rocked Jerome with a combination late in Round 6...Now he's using his reach to get his jab in...Jerome

isn't quite as quick as he was earlier...But now Jerome is closing in....Better be careful...London can be dangerous off the ropes...Now a right lead from Jerome...and, holy Toledo, there's a big left hook to the body, Omar! London sags against the ropes and Jerome pounds him with another left in the same place...

OMAR SAENZ

That's the liver shot, Jim! I've been hit with those. Cancel Christmas. He's not getting up!

JIM HARRISON

Eight...nine...10....And it's over! Curtis Jerome is back in the super-middleweight picture. And what a comeback after two losses in his past three fights. He has paid his dues. He's in the ring with Liz Pirelli.

LIZ

What a shocker, Curtis! It's the boxing upset of the year.

CURTIS

It's all because of the people around me...Nathan Johnson, Max Belfdorf...my promoter, Ricky Serrano...it goes to show you that if you keep doing the right thing, good things will happen. And the Hammer is back!

(in the locker room afterward)

CURTIS

Where's you get the champagne, Max?

MAX

I don't go anywhere without it.

NATHAN

Well, this one bottle ain't enough for me!

CURTIS

Man, I was so worried about this kid. Tell you what, Ricky, if they say anything about a rematch, tell 'em to go to hell. That kid hits too hard. Going to the bathroom is going to be an adventure tonight.

(Myron and George walk in. Curtis stands up)

CURTIS

Mr. Berman, I'm sorry. Dempsey is going to have a lot of belts before he's done.

MYRON

Sorry for what? Fuck that. You beat him fair and square. I knew you were dangerous. Even though some of my geniuses disagreed with me....

GEORGE

(rolls eyes) Congratulations, Curtis. And you, too, Nathan. Great game plan. And Ricky, good job, too..

CURTIS

Only thing is, Mr. Berman, I don't want any more of that kid right now.

MYRON

We'll worry about that later. Let's get you a couple of belts, and get him a couple of belts, and maybe we'll do that down the road.

CURTIS

Does that mean we're doing some more business?

MYRON

Let's meet next week. How does a five-fight contract sound? Now that Santillan is out of the picture, maybe we could match you up with Mendoza.

CURTIS

You know I would love that....but what about Ricky? He's the guy who got me out of the garbage can.

MYRON

Don't worry. We could use a guy like Ricky, too. We could teach him the ropes. After all, when you're 81 like I am....

GEORGE

(whispers) Eighty-two, Chief..

MYRON

Go fuck yourself, George...Anyway, call me next week and you and Ricky can come by.

CURTIS

Thank you, Mr. Berman. Thank you so much.

MYRON

(to George) Hear that? It's "Mr. Berman." That's the kind of respect I deserve at my age. Good night, guys.

Scene 12

(Two years later)

JIM HARRISON

So the judges have spoken here at T-Mobile Arena,, and there won't be any arguments here...Dempsey London has unified the super-middleweight division with a unanimous decision over Curtis Jerome in their rematch...It's the largest live gate for any 168-pound fight in history....No knockdowns, but it was a great young fighter in his prime against a proven champ who's a little bit older. Curtis is with Liz Pirelli right now.

LIZ

Curtis, a tough fight for you in your fourth title defense.. How are you doing?

CURTIS

Well, Liz, he beat me up pretty good and I couldn't get inside on him...I feel bad for my fans and I'm going to stop by the hospital just to check everything out. But I have no regrets. My manager Max, he told me a long time ago about the three things. If I got out of this game with some money, some brains, and a good woman, the belts don't mean a thing. And that's where I'm at, thank God..

LIZ

So what's next? Are you going to move up to 175?

CURTIS

No, Liz, this is it. I'm done with boxing. I'm going to get out of the game while the getting is good, while I can enjoy the people around me,...Maybe I'll even pick up a microphone

and put Jim and Omar out of a job....I just got married and I want to relax and see how everybody else lives...And maybe work with some boxers and tell them not to make the mistakes I did....But I'll tell 'em to wait until this young buck Dempsey gets out of the game, because nobody's going to beat him for a long time...Thanks...Love you, Sandra!

OMAR SAENZ

Well, I can't say I'm surprised, Jim. Curtis has had a fine career and he has made some good decisions. You heard him mention Sandra, who's a psychiatrist from Fresno that he married two months ago before he started training. He has a son there, so that's where he'll be living. And he's still raising money for the Kiki Ortega Brain Trauma Center at UNLV, which is certainly close to his heart....Meanwhile, his trainer Nathan Johnson is expanding his gym....and his manager Max Beldorf is getting married, too, to international fashion designer Angela Winston. That's happening sometime later this year in Portugal, I believe. Curtis will be the best man for that....

JIM HARRISON

Yeah, I think it's going to be on Max's 65th birthday. Talk about marrying up. He calls it "his biggest challenge."

OMAR SAENZ

(laughs) Yeah, he better see the cardiologist first. Small world, ain't it, Jim? We'll see you next week

(lights fade, to the tune of "Compared to What")

END

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