

PUMPING BLACK

Written by

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I am in blood
Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.

-Macbeth, III.IV

EXT. SUNSHINE CANYON - BOULDER, CO - AFTERNOON

SUPER WIDE on an ALPINE LAKE, flanked by snowcapped mountains. A harsh blue sky punctured by a sharp sun.

A thin ribbon of road before the lake. Breathless stillness.

THEN --

The silence SHATTERS as a team of PRO CYCLISTS rips across the frame --

QUICK INSERTS --

- Mouths suck air
- Veins BULGE in legs that look carved from marble
- Pedals MASH, chains SCREAM around drive trains
- Jerseys sweat-soaked and white-cruised with salt
- Wheels WHIRR inches from the rider in front of them, spinning faster than seems possible
- Jaws clenched tight enough to grind enamel

EXT. MOUNTAINS ABOVE BOULDER - SUNSET

Later -- the sky BLOOD RED as our riders climb, silhouetted by the falling sun.

ONE RIDER AT THE BACK PUSHES HIMSELF HARDER THAN ALL THE REST. Sweat burns his eyes. Breath hard and rapid. This is **TAYLOR MACE**, 35.

He struggles to keep up. Face lit RED by the dying sun.

Across his leg -- a fresh, ragged GASH, speckled with gravel and asphalt-dark stripes of ROAD RASH. It BLEEDS, the wound gumming BLACK as it clots.

HOLD ON: BLOOD DRIPPING INTO THE GEARS OF A CHAIN RING.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - TEAM INVERNESS HQ - BOULDER - EVENING

The sterile gleam of a locker room. Taylor sits on a bench while a male SOIGNEUR -- team assistant -- examines his leg.

Around them are posters and decals for TEAM INVERNESS -- Taylor's team, sponsored by an American bank.

Taylor's body is covered in nasty scrapes from the crash. He doesn't react as the Soigneur dabs them with alcohol.

SOIGNEUR

You're pushing yourself too hard.

Taylor smiles -- his hollowed cheeks and rangy frame shed some of their hardness. There's an impish charm to him when he grins.

TAYLOR

Not hard enough, you ask Coach.
Gotta get those times back up.

The Soigneur smiles sympathetically -- something about it says he doesn't think getting those times back up is likely.

Soigneur withdraws a syringe of ANESTHETIC. Injects the leg -- Taylor doesn't react. Accustomed, and indifferent, to pain.

Across the locker room -- several of Taylor's TEAMMATES stride out, hair damp and cheeks pink after showering.

One stands a head higher than the rest -- quads like Hercules with a jawline to match. GREG DUNCAN, 30s.

Taylor watches him for a beat -- more than a little hero worship in his gaze. And, perhaps, a touch of ENVY.

Duncan catches Taylor's eye --

DUNCAN

Good ride today, Mace.

TAYLOR

(amiably, re: scrapes)
Greg Duncan, king of sarcasm.

DUNCAN

I mean it. You've been great about covering that left flank. We just gotta get your speedwork back up.
(grins)
And maybe check your handlebars.

TAYLOR

(grins)
Fuck you.

A FEMALE SOIGNEUR approaches Duncan -- he smiles and drapes a casual arm around her. Taylor bounces his eyebrows -- Duncan flips him off and exits with the Female Soigneur.

Taylor turns back to the Soigneur, his cheerful facade wavering just for an instant. Almost defensively --

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
I'll get them back up. I'm doing
everything perfectly.

The Soigneur nods, smiles encouragingly, and begins stitching Taylor up. Needle slides through skin.

EXT. TEAM INVERNESS HQ - AFTERNOON

Taylor exits. Beat. He shakes off the day, strides over to his COMMUTER BIKE, which is locked in the rack outside.

He checks the tires, carefully spins the chain a few times. Treating each part of the bike with respect and love. Then hops on and begins to ride.

EXT. STREETS OF BOULDER, CO - CONTINUOUS

Taylor rounds a corner onto a long, tree-lined, empty street.

He looks to his left. He looks to his right -- no one around.

And Taylor TAKES OFF.

It's a whole different experience from training -- now alone, Taylor's having FUN.

His legs churn as he SPRINTS for the sheer joy of it. Wind tousling his hair, whipping his clothes. Cheeks flushed. Everything gold in the afternoon light. A sense of FREEDOM and LIMITLESSNESS.

Taylor beams. This is a man who loves to ride.

EXT. BEEF PROCESSING PLANT LATER

Taylor pulls up outside a SLAUGHTERHOUSE -- "MACE FAMILY MEATS" arcs across the wall in huge white block lettering.

INT. BEEF PROCESSING PLANT - EVENING

Taylor watches as a line of CATTLE are driven toward a door at the end of the hall. Every now and then -- there is a ZAP followed by a dull THUD.

A man in his 60s -- body of a former football player going to seed -- approaches. DONALD MACE, Taylor's father.

DONALD
Taylor!

TAYLOR
(smiles)
Hey, Dad.

Father and son embrace in a warm hug.

DONALD
Got you something. In my office.

They begin walking through the slaughterhouse. Passing by the line of cattle. One or two moo mildly.

TAYLOR
Always amazes me.

DONALD
Hm?

TAYLOR
They just keep walking forward like the cow in front of them.

ZAP. THUD.

DONALD
Cows, famously not too bright.

Taylor and Donald walk past the line of cattle, entering the next holding room. A single WORKER herds the cows forward.

TAYLOR
Understaffed today?

DONALD
Understaffed most days.
(beat)
You still seeing -- what was it -- Angie?

TAYLOR
(grimaces, awkward)
Ahh. No. She, uh. Said I was too competitive.

DONALD
(*What did she expect?*)
You're a professional cyclist.

Taylor shrugs. Donald senses his discomfort, pivots.

DONALD (CONT'D)
Well, it's for the best, then. We
gotta find you someone who can keep
up with you.
(beat)
Randall's daughter just got
divorced. Played tennis in
college....

Taylor cracks his neck, fidgeting, uncomfortable with this
line of conversation.

TAYLOR
I'm focusing on the Tour this year.

DONALD
(gentle sarcasm)
Oh, you're focusing on the Tour
this year.

They pass into the STUNNING CHAMBER -- a worker mashes a STUN
GUN against a cow's skull. ZAP. The cow drops -- THUD.

DONALD (CONT'D)
I'm just saying -- plenty of
athletes your age have retired
already, settled down...

A worker attaches shackles to the dead cow's ankles. The
carcasses are hoisted into the air and conveyed on tracks
into the next room.

TAYLOR
I know you had to leave football
when you did, but cycling's easier
on the body.

DONALD
(eyes Taylor's leg wound)
That so?
(and)
Hard work only gets you so far --
at some point, you gotta have the
grace to know the limits of your
god-given talent and make your
peace with it.

His tone is kind, but Taylor doesn't respond. This hurts to
hear.

They pass into the next room -- a white-walled BLEEDING
CHAMBER. Workers slice the upside-down cows' throats,
bleeding them out. The floor is a LAKE OF BLOOD.

TAYLOR
I really think this is the year.

DONALD
You've said that for eight years,
Taylor. And every year, these
injuries get worse.

TAYLOR
I'm doing everything right -- it'll
be a good Tour --

DONALD
I want you to have a good life.
Find a good woman --

TAYLOR
(changing the topic)
What did you want to show me?

DONALD
(clocks Taylor's
discomfort. Beat)
This way.

They pass into the next chamber -- workers knife open cows'
bellies -- remove viscera -- strip hides from flesh.

Donald leads Taylor up the metal-grate stairs to his office --
"DONALD MACE, CEO" emblazons the door.

Donald unlocks the door and Taylor enters to see --

INT. DONALD'S OFFICE - BEEF PROCESSING PLANT - CONTINUOUS

-- a massive CAKE in the shape of a side of beef, sitting
proudly on Donald's desk.

Taylor stares at it. It's a confectionary monstrosity.

DONALD
I wanted to formally ask you...
We're hurting in this recession,
and I could use all the help we can
get. You start now, we can fast-
track you to management.

Taylor eyes the cake warily.

DONALD (CONT'D)
You could have a good life, Taylor.
A quiet life, maybe --
(eyes the gash in his leg)
(MORE)

DONALD (CONT'D)
-- But a good one.
(and, almost ashamed)
You need to be realistic.

Realistic?

Taylor looks around the office -- framed NEWSPAPER ARTICLES showing Donald as a high school football star, FOOTBALL TROPHIES, a framed degree from CU Boulder.

TAYLOR
Are you happy, Dad? I mean, really.
Happy.

DONALD
I have a comfortable life.

ZAP. THUD.

Beat.

TAYLOR
One more year.

Donald doesn't say anything.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
One more. If I'm wrong, I'll come
back, work the plant. But I need
this year. I have to try.

Beat. Finally, Donald nods, covering his disappointment.

DONALD
It's your life, son. I trust
whatever choices you see it fit to
make.
(re: plant)
But I think this'd be a good one.

EXT. BEEF PROCESSING PLANT - LATER

Taylor and Donald walk to their respective cars. Donald hugs Taylor tight, then hands Taylor the boxed-up CAKE. Taylor attempts to refuse --

TAYLOR
You keep it. Every calorie --

But Donald presses the cake into his hands.

DONALD
Be a human being. Live a little.

INT. TAYLOR'S HOME - NIGHT

Taylor enters his cramped one-bedroom home. Passes through --
THE KITCHEN

-- Where he eyes the cake box for a beat, briefly tempted --
then shakes off the craving and dumps the box in the bin.

He passes a sideboard with a PICTURE of Donald teaching
Taylor, perhaps 5 at the time, to ride a bike.

INT. TAYLOR'S HOME - STUDY - NIGHT

A cramped study converted to fitness room. Windowless, grey.

Taylor SPRINTS on a stationary bike. Breathing hard.

Before him is a MASSIVE POSTER of the TOUR DE FRANCE FINISH
LINE. He sprints toward it, harder, harder, RPMs accelerating
-- charging endlessly toward a line that never gets closer.

A lake of sweat on the floor grows bigger, drip by drip.

Taylor pushes harder...harder...the flywheel of the
stationary WHIRS VIOLENTLY -- then --

SNAP!

A pedal BREAKS and Taylor falters -- the momentum makes him
JAM his leg.

TAYLOR

Fuck!

He catches his breath. The pool of sweat has turned the floor
into a mirror.

Taylor picks up the broken pedal and stares at it, annoyed.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Taylor checks his heel -- an ugly purple BRUISE blooms where
he jammed his foot into the floor.

He shakes out a couple aspirin. Takes them. Thinks. Then
takes one more.

INT. TAYLOR'S HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

Taylor wakes. Cheeks hollow, eyes wreathed in bruise-like circles. He's exhausted. Hauls himself out of bed with the stiff movements of an old man.

He checks his heel, testing his weight. Furrows his brow -- definitely sore.

INT. TAYLOR'S HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

He measures exactly half a cup of oatmeal. Precisely weighs fruit, walnuts, chia seeds, and protein supplements.

Chugs a HUGE thermos of coffee. Then a second.

INT. BIKE SHOP - MORNING

Taylor limps into a bike shop. Large TEAM INVERNESS banners paper the walls. He approaches the counter, where a store associate -- a pimpled college kid with an attitude -- listlessly reads a magazine.

TAYLOR

I need to return this.

He plops the broken pedal on the counter. The kid looks up, bored, picks up the pedal.

BIKE SHOP KID

It's broken.

Give me strength. Taylor manufactures a patient smile.

TAYLOR

Yes, I know it's broken. There's the receipt. I've got this gnarly bruise because it broke.

The kid types into the computer --

BIKE SHOP KID

Your warranty expired 6 months ago.

TAYLOR

Man, I paid a mint for them. Isn't there something you can do?

The kid blows a bubble with his gum. Taylor tries another tack, pointing to one of the Inverness posters on the wall.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

I ride for that team. Inverness. We took fifth in the Tour de France last year.

BIKE SHOP KID

I don't really follow cycling.

TAYLOR

You don't --?

He gestures to the bike shop around them. The kid shrugs.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Well, okay. You like baseball?

(kid shakes his head)

Football? Work with me, kid.

(the kid shrugs)

Okay. Well, the Tour is bigger than the Superbowl and the World Series combined. I've been working my whole life to be on a winning Tour team. I cannot lose my slot. I can't. So please -- can you just get me some working pedals?

BIKE SHOP KID

So shouldn't you be like a millionaire?

(Taylor blinks)

If this race is so big. Shouldn't you be like on some Joe Montana shit?

Taylor takes a breath.

TAYLOR

Top riders get sponsorships. The rest of us get paid in love and glory.

BIKE SHOP KID

We don't accept love and glory. Just cash or credit.

Taylor knows he's lost this fight. He leaves the broken pedal on the counter --

TAYLOR

You can keep that.

-- And leaves. The kid takes the pedal dumbly, blowing another bubble with his gum.

As he exits, Taylor passes the PEDAL DISPLAY. Looks back at the kid -- he's distracted by the computer.

Taylor swipes a pair of NEW PEDALS and slips out.

EXT. MOUNTAINS OF BOULDER - DAY

Another vicious ride. Taylor throttles himself. Sweats.

Up ahead is DUNCAN in a blue jersey -- an absolute monster on the pedals. Taylor gives it all he's got, catches up --

Duncan throws Taylor a grin -- they're neck and neck.

DUNCAN
Lookin' good, Mace.

TAYLOR
Lookin' good, Dunk.

It's a familiar call and response, a go-to greeting for them.

DUNCAN
How're the legs today?

TAYLOR
(cheerful)
Can't feel a goddamn thing!

DUNCAN
Well, let's change that.

Duncan easily accelerates. Taylor, with effort, matches him -- but only hangs on for a few seconds before he's gasping.

Duncan glances back and his smile wavers --

DUNCAN (CONT'D)
You got it, man --

But Taylor's gassed. He can't keep up. A flash of SHAME and ANNOYANCE crosses his face -- he pushes harder, but it's no use.

Duncan's smile falls -- he turns ahead and keeps riding.

Taylor falls to the back of the pack. But his ears catch a snatch of conversation, blown back by the wind --

RIDER (O.S.)
He's gonna get cut.

Taylor sees Duncan turn sharply to the speaker --

DUNCAN
Shut the fuck up, Lennox.

Taylor channels a burning internal ROAR into the mashing of his pedals. The HEARTBEAT in his ears, the THROB of lactic acid, the GRINDING of the gears BUILD TO A SCREAM --

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. INVERNESS TEAM HQ - MEETING ROOM - DAY

The DEAD QUIET of a meeting room. Everyone pink post-shower, exhausted, refueling on protein bars and energy drinks.

Beside Taylor is a flush-cheeked, cheerful young man in his late 20s -- EVAN DUFFY.

Taylor's gaze finds DUNCAN across the room. He looks like a Michelangelo sculpture. Duffy follows Taylor's gaze --

DUFFY
So pretty. But you couldn't pay me
to swap lives with him.
(off Taylor's look)
I bet he goes home and hops right
on the stationary. Weighs his
macros. All that.

TAYLOR
You gotta do everything, to be that
good.

Duffy blows a raspberry.

DUFFY
Yeah, maybe. But I like to have a
beer now and then.

Taylor's spared responding as the HEAD COACH strides in. 50s, a former cyclist himself with the typical ex-athlete paunch.

COACH
Off season's over, people. Tour's
coming. This year we're doing
things differently.

Behind Coach, a WOMAN has slipped in. Taylor's immediately drawn to her. She's sharp-eyed and built like a knife.

Her eyes snap to Taylor's -- he looks away, uncomfortable. But she keeps staring at him. Sizing him up.

COACH (CONT'D)

Fifth last year was good. Good -- not great. Frankly, we had too much dead weight. Management is pushing to streamline things.

DUNCAN

Meaning?

COACH

Cuts.

Taylor pales. The team shifts uneasily -- the air is electric with nerves.

COACH (CONT'D)

This is Dr. Andrea Lathe. She's replacing Dr. Gregorovic. I'm taking her recommendations very seriously -- her last assignment was supervising the US Olympic team in Barcelona. Dr. Lathe is a goldsmith.

(off their blank looks)
37 medals, people.

Taylor eyes Lathe, now doubly interested.

The Coach gestures to her -- *you're up*.

ANDREA LATHE, 40s, takes a beat, then steps forward. Her gaze scrapes over the riders, as if cutting them open and dissecting them. She commands the room.

LATHE

(abrupt, to Duffy)
What did you eat for breakfast?

She stares at him, unblinking, her gaze intense.

DUFFY

Uhh...cereal? Orange juice?

LATHE

How many calories?

She has a pointed way of speaking, each syllable a jab.

DUFFY

Uh...

LATHE

What was the glycemic index of the orange juice?

(MORE)

LATHE (CONT'D)
 (Doesn't wait for his
 answer. To Duncan)
 What's your hemoglobin?

Duncan's at a loss. She turns to Taylor --

LATHE (CONT'D)
 Your V02 max? Body fat percentage?
 Your weight?

Taylor knows this one -- but she's already moved on.

LATHE (CONT'D)
 Imprecision. Guesswork. That's not
 how we do things anymore.
 (beat)
 Hematocrit -- does anyone know what
 this means?
 (crickets)
 Red blood cell density. Over the
 course of a stage race, hematocrit
 drops by two percentage points a
 week. That's six points over the
 course of a three week race. In a
 race where a tenth of a point wins
 and loses races, every decimal
 counts.

She surveys her audience -- most look confused, but Taylor
 clings to every word.

LATHE (CONT'D)
 V02 max. Your blood's capacity to
 carry oxygen. The slightest
 difference determines whether you
 finish a climb first... or if you
 don't finish at all.

She looks over them as though they're bugs.

LATHE (CONT'D)
 Dr. Greogorovic was a disciple of
 "train hard, eat right." This is
 Dark Age thinking. This is
prehistoric. This is thinking that
loses races. I am here from the
 future.
 (beat)
 Winning the Tour isn't luck. It's
 mathematics.

Taylor steals a glance at Duffy -- he's staring at Lathe with
 googoo eyes. Taylor looks back to Lathe, magnetically drawn
 to her -- this woman has sparked something in him.

Lathe claps her hands together --

LATHE (CONT'D)
Let's see what I'm working with.

INT. TRAINING LAB - DAY

A cold white room filled with a neat row of stationary bikes, a cyclist astride each.

Taylor pedals hard. He's hooked to electrodes threaded to machinery, a heart rate monitor. Rubber straps press a breathing apparatus over his nose and mouth.

He watches Lathe walk down the row -- she can see the machines' stats, the riders can't.

She pauses in front of Duncan. Eyes his stats, jots a note on her clipboard. Makes sure everyone hears her say --

LATHE
Very good.

Taylor clocks this -- she's holding up Duncan as a pillar of comparison.

As Lathe approaches him, Taylor ramps it up.

Lathe notices. And deliberately takes her time to get to him.

Taylor sweats. Heart rate spiking. Just as his RPMs start to dip -- Lathe approaches.

In her eyes: A DARE. She crosses her arms, waiting to see how long he lasts.

Taylor stares her down as he pedals. Gasping into the breathing apparatus -- pedals spinning harder...harder... Lathe's eyes impassive...

Taylor burns out. His pace drops, the beeping slows. He rips the breathing apparatus off his face, sucks air.

Lathe, expression unchanged, jots single note and moves on.

Taylor gasps for air, mentally thrashing himself.

INT. MEDICAL OFFICE - DAY

The team stands SHIRTLESS in a row in a cold, clinical office. Each has the classic cyclist body -- skinny arms and chests, monster quads, compact asses made of steel.

Gooseflesh prickles Taylor's flesh. The room's FREEZING.

Lathe, wearing a cocoon coat like armor, marches down the line, performing a CALIPER TEST. She tests Duncan -- he WINCES as the sharp device roughly grips his stomach flesh.

DUNCAN

Ow.

LATHE

If a little pinch like this bothers you, the French alps are going to fuck you bloody.

Taylor makes note of this.

LATHE (CONT'D)

(re: Duncan's numbers)

But, once again, excellent.

Taylor is next. Lathe turns caliper's fangs on him, grabbing the limited fat of his torso HARD. Taylor doesn't react.

She readjusts the calipers and grips another wad of flesh, even harder, watching his reaction. Taylor gives her nothing.

Lathe makes an unimpressed noise. Jots a note.

INT. LAB - DAY

Taylor enters a cold white room. An odd-looking MACHINE and a hospital bed the only furnishings.

LATHE

Strip down.

Taylor obeys, removing everything but his boxers.

LATHE (CONT'D)

Those, too.

Beat. Taylor obeys. Now completely naked, he looks skinny and vulnerable. Goosebumps. He shivers.

LATHE (CONT'D)

Lie down.

TAYLOR

Which test is this?

LATHE

Lie down.

Beat. Taylor obeys.

Lathe straps down Taylor's ankles and wrists. He's spread-eagled on the bed.

Lathe begins attaching ELECTRODES to Taylor's body -- his biceps, quads, neck, calves. Finally, two on his temples.

LATHE (CONT'D)
You will feel a shock.

TAYLOR
Okay. Wh--

Lathe THROWS A SWITCH -- Taylor's body SEIZES in a rictus as ELECTRICITY rips through him. He can't even scream.

It's BRUTAL.

His body CONVULSES. Face contorted in agony -- he holds on, clinging to sanity, riding the waves of UNIMAGINABLE PAIN that course through him --

LATHE
Do you want me to stop?
(beat)
Nod if you want me to stop.

Taylor looks at Lathe, whole body taut with agony, veins in his head bulging -- but he does not nod. Endures.

Blood vessels SHATTER in his eyes. He froths at the mouth, drool and tears and snot mixing on his face.

Lathe watches. Glances at her stopwatch. Seconds tick past...

A GLEAM begins to form in Lathe's eye.

Taylor holds back something immense as the electric SIZZLE of the machine HUMS MENACINGLY, louder and LOUDER --

Finally -- he SCREAMS.

TAYLOR
Stop!! STOP!!!!

Lathe powers down the machine. Notes the time on her watch as Taylor catches his breath, cheeks wet with tears.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Fuck --
(all he can manage)
Why?

LATHE

Baselines. Your muscle's maximum ability to contract is higher when the mind is not involved.

TAYLOR

...How'd I do?

She regards him, reading something in his face.

LATHE

It is a difficult test.

Taylor takes this to mean the worst -- he did poorly.

TAYLOR

Let me go again.

She pauses in unhooking him. Her gaze bores into his, reading him, unpeeling him.

LATHE

You would submit yourself again to this? Willingly?

TAYLOR

I can do better.

LATHE

The pain will break you.

TAYLOR

I don't care about pain. I care about winning.

This sentence triggers something in Lathe -- for the barest beat, she almost looks like she might SMILE. But --

LATHE

There are no do-overs in the Tour. Why would I give you one here?

But her eyes gleam as she says it -- in the last few minutes, Taylor has become very intriguing to her.

Off Taylor, devastated -- feeling, again, like a failure.

EXT. MEDICAL OFFICE - DAY - LATER

Taylor waits on a bench outside the facility. He looks absolutely thrashed -- his expression full of self-loathing and disappointment.

Duncan and LENNOX -- 30s and ice-blond -- exit, each looking just as beat.

Taylor nods as they pass. Lennox does a double take when he sees the broken blood vessels in Taylor's eyes --

LENNOX
Electroshock. No fucking joke, eh?

Taylor musters a head shake.

LENNOX (CONT'D)
How long you last, Mace?

TAYLOR
Two minutes.

LENNOX
Two -- !? You lying little weasel.

TAYLOR
Why, what'd you get?

LENNOX
Didn't last three seconds. Ripped those wires right the fuck off.

Taylor looks at Duncan --

DUNCAN
I tapped out at fifteen.

TAYLOR
Minutes?

DUNCAN
(an odd look)
Seconds.

Duncan and Lennox exit. Taylor's brow furrows. *Lathe was manipulating him.*

INT. HALLWAY - MEDICAL FACILITY - DAY

Taylor paces down the hallway toward Lathe's office -- pauses at the door.

Through the window, he sees LATHE and the HEAD COACH -- in a heated argument. Coach shakes his head. Lathe seems insistent -- whatever it is, she's not backing down.

A few moments later --

They exit. Taylor approaches --

TAYLOR
Dr. Lathe, I wanted to ask about my
results --

COACH
Don't worry about it, Mace. We'll
release the roster soon enough.

TAYLOR
If there's anything I can do to
prepare for the next round of --

COACH
(gently)
You've had a good career, Mace.

The air goes out of Taylor's chest. Lathe watches him react.

COACH (CONT'D)
A solid career. Not everyone gets
on the podium, and that's okay.

Beat. Taylor meets Coach's gaze.

TAYLOR
The roster isn't final yet, is it?

COACH
...No, no it isn't.

But something about his tone suggests it is, indeed, final.

Whatever's welling inside Taylor is clamped down. He covers
his desperation with nonchalance -- smiles --

TAYLOR
Then I'll be sure to ramp it up the
rest of the week.

Everyone present knows that won't be good enough. But Coach
summons a smile of his own --

COACH
Head down, ride hard, huh?

TAYLOR
Head down, ride hard.

Lathe watches Taylor closely. Observing his every minor
facial expression, the subdued twitch of his jaw...

Taylor nods and goes, walking with tight, controlled steps. Coach has all but confirmed it -- he's getting cut.

Coach throws a look at Lathe, shakes his head, and departs. But Lathe watches Taylor go, her gears turning.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - LATER

Taylor sits in the dimly-lit kitchen. His dad's massive cake HALF-EATEN before him. It's been pulled from the trash -- the icing is battered, but intact.

Taylor mechanically consumes the wrecked cake, no pleasure in his eyes as he shovels in bite after heaping bite. He lifts another gloppy chocolate forkful -- it looks like SHIT --

Something snaps. Mouth still full, he screams into the empty house --

TAYLOR
Fuck! Fuck!!!

DING DONG.

The doorbell. Taylor pauses. Beat.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

He wipes icing from his mouth -- goes to the door, opens it --

LATHE stands in the doorway, her sharp silhouette like a blade in the dark.

INT. TAYLOR'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lathe and Taylor sit across from each other, the cake between them. The dim overhead lighting draws sharp shadows. Beat.

TAYLOR
Want a slice?

LATHE
No.
(and)
You shouldn't, either. Your caliper test was... disappointing.

TAYLOR
(prickly)
What can I do for you, Doctor?

LATHE

You can win me the Tour.

Taylor snorts bleakly.

TAYLOR

Okay. I guess I haven't been trying hard enough. I'll get on that.

Lathe's mouth curls in an amused smile.

LATHE

In every test this week, you finished last or close to it. Duncan, in particular, crushed you. Pulverized you. V02 max, caliper test, hematocrit... He's an exceptional specimen. His numbers decimated yours in every test --

TAYLOR

Is this supposed to be motivating?

LATHE

-- Every test but one.

TAYLOR

Too bad for me getting electrocuted isn't a stage of the Tour.

(and)

You heard Coach, he's chosen the roster.

LATHE

He chose prematurely. And he chose wrong.

(and)

I convinced him to hold off on sending the lineup until the deadline in June.

TAYLOR

Why?

LATHE

Because he wants to cut you --

TAYLOR

You're really doing wonders for my self-esteem, here.

LATHE

-- Which is a mistake.

Taylor pauses.

LATHE (CONT'D)

And he thinks Duncan is going to be the team leader. Which is also a mistake. Because this year, the team leader is going to be you.

Beat. The air freezes. Taylor eyes her warily.

TAYLOR

You're fucking with me. Just like with the electroshock test...

LATHE

All you needed was proper motivation.

(and)

Duncan tested higher in every other test, it's true. But all his numbers can be achieved. They can be manufactured. Your test...Duncan will never be able to replicate what you did.

(and)

You passed the pain test.

TAYLOR

(gets it, disturbed)

All that talk about "baselines"...

LATHE

The more agony a rider can endure, the higher the ceiling on his potential. You, Taylor... I could build a cathedral from your pain.

TAYLOR

If pain were all it took, I would have won a Tour by now.

LATHE

You've lacked the missing element -- me. If you trust me, and do *exactly* as I tell you...I will give you the keys to winning the Tour.

Taylor struggles to digest this. It seems like too much. Too big a promise. She's holding his dreams on a platter.

TAYLOR

What would I have to do?

Lathe places something on the table. Withdraws her hand.

A LITTLE CRIMSON PILL.

It sits ominously on the table beside the cake.

Long, deadly beat.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Get that poison off my table. I
don't need that shit.

LATHE
My data disagrees.

TAYLOR
Fuck your data --

LATHE
If you do not do this, you will be
cut. You will not ride again.

Taylor wrestles with this. Swallows his anger. Lathe can tell she's struck a nerve, leans into it --

LATHE (CONT'D)
You will vanish into obscurity,
cutting logs or breeding sheep or
toiling at whatever mind-numbing
drudgery whiles away the hours
until your death.

Taylor stands, paces, eyeing the pill like it's a scorpion.

TAYLOR
People have died --

LATHE
People die every day. The only
difference is whether die with
glory clutched in their fist, or
slink into a nameless grave.

Taylor doesn't take his eyes from the pill. Lathe watches him closely, reading him, choosing her words precisely.

LATHE (CONT'D)
The Tour is the race of the Gods,
Taylor. And this year's route is
the crown jewel of our lifetime --
the hardest climbs of the race,
Frankensteined together into one
savage event. Galibier, Tourmalet,
Mont Ventoux, and the bloody
gauntlet -- the 21 switchbacks of
the Alpe d'Huez.
(MORE)

LATHE (CONT'D)

This year's champion may well go
down as the greatest cyclist of all
time.

There's reverence in her voice. A moment of understanding
between them. Taylor knows exactly what she's saying.

He could be that winner.

But --

TAYLOR

I'll get caught.

Lathe holds up the pill --

LATHE

Don't you want to taste victory?
It's like candy, Taylor -- it melts
on your tongue like sugar.

Taylor stares at the pill. Behind Lathe, on the sideboard, is
the picture of Donald teaching Taylor how to ride a bike.

Taylor looks from the picture, to the pill, to Lathe.

TAYLOR

You should go.

Beat.

Lathe places the pill on the table. Stands.

Walks to the door.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

(re: pill)

Take that with you --

Click. The door closes. Lathe is gone.

The pill still sits on the table. Taylor stares at it. After
a long moment, he turns off the lights.

EXT. MOUNTAINS ABOVE BOULDER - DAY

Taylor and Team Inverness jostle at the starting line of a
LOCAL ONE-DAY RACE. A couple other American teams -- the
cycling equivalent of a friendly practice match.

Taylor adjusts his jersey, fidgeting. He catches sight of
LATHE standing beside the Coach. He avoids her eye. Duffy
clocks his nerves --

DUFFY

Easy, bud. It's only a scrimmage.

For you, maybe.

Taylor catches sight of ANOTHER RIDER several yards ahead.

TAYLOR

Oy! Guards!

The rider -- a beefcake approaching 40 -- turns. DEREK GUARDS, American rider for Team MultiCom.

GUARDS

That you, Mace? Fuck me, I bet Voss you'd retire this year.

TAYLOR

(throws it right back)

I bet the same of you. Didn't you DNF last year?

Guards beams. Their ribbing is light, but has an edge to it.

GUARDS

Got a new training program, don't I?

Taylor sizes the older rider up. He's starting to go grey -- but his muscles look as strong as the 23-year-old beside him.

The RACE OFFICIANT ascends the stairs above the starting line -- the riders turn, tense, crouch on the bikes.

THREE... TWO... ONE...

BANG! Starting gun. They're off.

Taylor manages to hang with the PELOTON -- the main pack of riders. He catches a glimpse of the back of Guards' jersey as Guards immediately shoots ahead to a massive lead.

Taylor marvels -- Guards is soaring. It's not even close.

TAYLOR

(to Duffy, between breaths)

How -- the fuck -- is he --

Duffy, equally winded, just shakes his head.

Taylor's never seen anyone so fast. It's unreal.

COACH (O.S.)
 (in their earpieces)
 Reel him in! Duncan, Duffy --
attack, don't let him decimate us
 like this -- fucking embarrassing --

Duncan and Duffy RAMP UP THE PACE -- Taylor clings on,
 GASPING -- but it's no use.

Guards throws a smug glance back, accelerates --

It's a short, fast, nasty race -- Taylor sees the SPECK that
 is Guards blast across the finish line --

DUNCAN
Fuck --

LATER

Taylor crosses the finish line with the stragglers. The rest
 of the team has already finished. Coach flicks Taylor a
 cursory glance, then looks away -- embarrassed for Taylor.

Taylor pretends not to notice, and instead scans for Guards --
 he has questions. Guards is already up on the podium,
 accepting his WINNER'S JERSEY.

Taylor sidles up next to Duncan, who's watching Guards with a
 look of disdain on his face. Off Taylor's quizzical look --

DUNCAN (CONT'D)
 (with disgust)
 Fucking dooper, put money on it. You
 saw how fast he crossed that line.

Taylor definitely saw it.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)
 And I'll bet he's not the only one.
 They're cheating us, Mace.
 Everybody's fucking cheating us.

Duncan heads off, shaking his head --

But Taylor stays, watching the award ceremony. Guards is
 grinning, surrounded by congratulatory fans and teammates --
 he looks like the picture of joy, happiness, success.

Taylor looks to the scoreboard, where Guards' name is firmly
 in first. Ahead of everyone else's by a mile.

Off Taylor -- a decision gelling into place.

INT. TAYLOR'S HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Taylor staggers into the kitchen. Looks pale and shaky -- absolutely decimated by that race.

The testosterone sits where he left it on the table.

Taylor tosses the pill in his mouth and swallows it dry.

PRELAP -- THE SOUNDS OF PRE-FLIGHT ANNOUNCEMENTS --

INT. PLANE - DAY

Taylor awkwardly sidles down the aisle with his bags, passing his teammates. A long-haul flight to Europe.

He finds his seat beside Lathe. Sits.

They share a brief moment of eye contact. Something passes between them -- she understands. Her eyes gleam.

Off Taylor, still nervous, a bit guilty -- but also EXCITED.

EXT. GIRONA AIRPORT - DAY

The team's plane touches down.

INT. SPRINTER VAN - GIRONA, SPAIN - DAY

Taylor and several of his teammates sit in a SPRINTER VAN as they wind through GIRONA -- their training grounds for the next several months.

It's a tight city -- high walls, stacked apartments. Everything feels closed-in and constricting. The fiery reds and venomous yellows of a Spanish city.

INT. GIRONA HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

The jet-lagged team hauls their luggage through the archways and white stucco of a Spanish hotel lobby.

Taylor passes a small MAN in an armchair with a binder in his lap and a sandwich in his fist.

Taylor DOUBLE TAKES when he sees HIS OWN PHOTO in the binder.

The MAN turns, catches Taylor looking -- a moment between them. The man points at the photo with an awkward little smile -- *that's you, isn't it?*

There's something both unnerving and cheerful about him. Like a dog wagging its tail that could, any moment, turn and bite.

Taylor, spooked, catches up with the team as they wait for their room keys to be distributed. He nudges Lennox --

TAYLOR

I don't wanna sound like a nutcase,
but that guy's got a binder full of
our pictures.

Lennox follows Taylor's gaze, snorts derisively.

LENNOX

Fucking vampire.
(clarifies)
UCI, anti-doping. Alain Banks.

Taylor looks back at **ALAIN BANKS**, 40s, just in time to see him spill a LARGE BLOB OF KETCHUP on his documents.

LENNOX (CONT'D)

Took down the entire German swim
team last year.

TAYLOR

Really? That guy?

Taylor and Lennox watch Banks lick his thumb and try to wipe the ketchup away -- he makes the smear worse, and, in the process, drops his sandwich. Banks sighs sadly.

LENNOX

Dunno why they bother...

DUNCAN

(overhearing)
Because the integrity of the sport
still means something to some
people.
(and)
I'm glad he's here. Because you
know what vampires do?

TAYLOR

Seduce virgins. Watch out, Lennox --

DUNCAN

Root out weak blood. If you're a
coward who takes PEDs, you deserve
to be eaten.

Duncan takes his key and strides off.

Taylor swallows. Takes his key, gives Banks one last look...

INT. GIRONA HOTEL BATHROOM - DAY

Taylor dumps a bottle of ASPIRIN PILLS into the toilet.

He tips a little baggie of RED TESTOSTERONE PILLS into the now-empty aspirin bottle. Beat.

He flushes the toilet and walks out into --

INT. GIRONA HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

His and Duffy's room -- a riot of brightly-colored tiles everywhere. The adjacent ONYAR RIVER throws ribbons of dancing light across the walls.

Taylor tucks the pill bottle into his dresser.

LATER: Taylor sets up an odd-looking TENT over his bed.

DUFFY
Fuck is that?

TAYLOR
Oxygen deprivation tent.

DUFFY
You lug that monstrosity all the way from the states?

TAYLOR
Jealousy's an ugly look, Duff.

Taylor finishes assembling the tent, goes inside.

DUFFY
You look like the fucking Bubble Boy.

TAYLOR
(grins)
It's my year, man.

DUFFY
Oh my god, I hope you get cut. Just to spare me the secondhand humiliation.

Taylor lobs a pillow at him, grinning.

EXT. GIRONA STREETS - DAY

The first team training ride -- over BRUTAL COBBLESTONES. The Coach paces them on a VESPA --

COACH

Get used to it, the route this
year's frosted with these fuckers.

Taylor's falling behind -- Duncan throws a glance back --

DUNCAN

Caboose! Pick it up, you're
dragging us!

It's good-natured and meant to encourage, but it no longer lands playfully -- it rankles Taylor. He grits his teeth, bears down.

LATER -- Taylor and the rest of the team stagger off their bikes. A soigneur hands Taylor a bottle of water -- he CHUGS the whole thing. So tired he can barely stand.

Duncan, though sweaty and winded, still looks like he could go another 50 miles. He passes Taylor --

DUNCAN (CONT'D)

Lookin' good, Mace.

TAYLOR

Lookin' good, Dunk.

DUNCAN

Duffy says you got one of those
oxygen tents. Seems like it's
helping.

Beat. Taylor can't tell if it's sarcasm.

Duncan senses something's changed in Taylor -- he cocks his head, can't put his finger on it.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)

Just keep putting in the work, man.
No gimmicks to the top.

Taylor watches him go, eyes exhausted but flinty with determination.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - GIRONA - NIGHT

Taylor lies awake, staring out at the Onyar river. Blue and silver light ripples across the room.

Carefully, silently, he peeks at Duffy. Fast asleep. *Good.*

Moving slowly to avoid making noise, he stands and moves stiffly over to his DRESSER -- sore from today's ride.

He opens the drawer and withdraws the DECOY ASPIRIN BOTTLE.

He shakes out a little red pill, pops it. Hobbles into bed.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - GIRONA - MORNING

ALARM BLARES.

Taylor SMACKS the off button, FLINGS off the sheets, SPRINGS out of bed. He fires off a few quick pushups, check out his pump in the mirror -- he feels great.

Cheeks rosy, skin glowing.

Duffy glares groggily, pulls his sheets back over his head.

Taylor grins. He feels strong.

INT. LATHE'S OFFICE - GIRONA, SPAIN - DAY

Taylor enters a sparse MEDICAL OFFICE to see Lathe kneeling before an almost-naked Duncan -- her hands on his thigh, checking his inner knee.

It looks more intimate than strictly professional.

TAYLOR

Sorry, I --

DUNCAN

(awkwardly, laughs)

Anyone teach you to knock, Mace?

Lathe stands, removing her gloves, all business.

LATHE

We're finished.

(to Duncan)

It's myofascial tension, not the ligaments. Ice it and get a massage, you can ride tomorrow.

Taylor eyes Duncan's undressed form -- he's built like Neptune. A perfect specimen of male athleticism.

Duncan throws on his shirt, smiles extra brightly at Taylor as he goes. Taylor watches him leave -- something about Duncan's cheerfulness seems forced. But he shakes it off --

Lathe and Taylor are now alone.

She locks the door.

Then crosses to her chair, sits, and says nothing. Just eyes him. The silence gnaws at Taylor -- she lets him simmer. Waiting for him to speak first.

TAYLOR

Um. I'm here to --

He glances around, nervous. Not sure how much to say. Not sure who might overhear. Lathe enjoys watching him squirm for a beat, then takes pity on him --

LATHE

Anything within these walls is our secret. Don't be afraid.

Lathe gestures to the steel examination table -- he sits.

LATHE (CONT'D)

Clothes.

He removes his shirt and pants. She touches him with her BARE HANDS -- no gloves -- poking, prodding, twisting. Starts with his arms and back and works her way down.

LATHE (CONT'D)

The new program is treating you well.

TAYLOR

It's... effective. My recovery times are improving.

LATHE

Lie back.

Taylor, ill at ease, obeys. Her hands check his leg muscles -- her skin is cold. He suppresses a shiver.

She pulls his legs apart, working up his thighs. It's invasive -- he tenses up, vulnerable and defenseless.

Abruptly, just as Taylor's discomfort is peaking, Lathe pulls back.

LATHE (CONT'D)

Disappointing.

Taylor opens his mouth to protest, but --

Lathe goes to her desk, shifts aside stacks of books and equipment to reveal a SAFE. She opens it -- inside is a small, hidden fridge, containing rows of VIALS.

Lathe removes one. Produces a SYRINGE and drives the needle into the vial, filling it with the clear viscous liquid.

LATHE (CONT'D)

Your arm.

TAYLOR

(balks, recoils)

What is that? I thought --

LATHE

EPO. For your endurance.

TAYLOR

No. The pills are enough. I don't want this...

LATHE

Duncan told me you're no threat to him. He is correct.

Taylor eyes the syringe. It drips like a viper's fang.

TAYLOR

I'm worried enough about the UCI as it is.

Lathe lowers the needle, her face suddenly grave.

LATHE

Ahh. The UCI.

Genuine worry creases her face.

LATHE (CONT'D)

What was I thinking? You're right. A single prick of the finger, and they take everything. If they catch you with even a drop of EPO in your blood, you're ruined. Lifetime ban. Disgrace. Forgive me, I got carried away...

Lathe lowers the syringe. Taylor relaxes, relieved.

TAYLOR

Like I said, the pills are working great, so...

LIGHTNING FAST, Lathe JAMS the needle into his arm and PLUNGES the EPO into his veins.

Taylor RIPS his arm away -- blood SPEWS from the puncture --

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
WHAT THE FUCK?!?!?!?

He staggers off the table, knocking a tray of instruments onto the floor.

His eyes hot with rage, resentment -- and fear.

Lathe, however, is cool and calm. She retracts the needle into its safety slip and disposes of it.

LATHE
It is not enough to want. Wanting is for mewling babes and impotent insurance salesman who dream of fucking their secretaries, but go home to mash their tiny cocks into fat, nagging wives. Most people want -- they ache, they lust, they whine like dogs after a distant moon, incapable of planting a flag on their desire and saying, "This is mine." Most people die strangled in the mire of their useless wanting.

She eyes him -- he still clutches his violated arm.

LATHE (CONT'D)
You say, "I don't want this." But you do, Taylor. To win, you have to want this. If you don't do it, someone else will. Someone else already is.

Taylor still roils with fury. She smiles, amused, as one might at a pissed-off toddler.

TAYLOR
You can't pump me full of drugs like a fucking lab rat.

LATHE
(lightly)
It's not like I can take them out now.

TAYLOR
If anyone finds out... I can't be
known as a dooper.

LATHE
You'll be known as a winner. A
hero.

TAYLOR
Heroes don't cheat.

LATHE
Heroes don't get caught.

Her speech carries over into the next scene --

INT. TAYLOR'S ROOM - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Taylor shuts the bathroom door behind him. Runs his fingers
along the bathroom tiles.

LATHE (V.O.)
I've taken the liberty of preparing
a few defense mechanisms.

Taylor finds a loose tile. Removes it.

TAYLOR (V.O.)
You broke into my room?

LATHE (V.O.)
(ignores him)
Inside you'll find a black bag.

Sure enough, Taylor finds it. Pulls it from the wall. He
withdraws several small bags of CLEAR FLUID, along with
needles and IV supplies --

LATHE (V.O.)
Speed bags -- saline. Dilute the
blood quickly. If you can't get to
those in time...

Taylor finds a small jar of GREY POWDER.

LATHE (V.O.)
Polvo. For urine tests. Place it
beneath your fingernail, then slip
that nail in the stream. It'll
cover testosterone, EPO... anything
else you're taking.

TAYLOR (V.O.)
"Anything else"?

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY

Taylor exits his room -- just as Lathe is passing. She gives him a coy look.

LATHE (V.O.)
You have to start trusting me,
Taylor.

EXT. STREETS OF GIRONA - DAY

Another ride. This one an ENDURANCE ride -- Taylor glances down at his wristwatch -- the timer just under SEVEN HOURS.

The whole team looks absolutely battered -- asses aching from the cobblestones, necks and shoulders tense from hunching over the handlebars all day.

Taylor, however, looks good. Tired, sure. But nowhere near as busted as the rest of the team.

COACH
(on Vespa)
That's seven. Hour to go, people.

DUFFY
(miserable)
Fucking hell.

Just because he can, Taylor puts on a little burst of speed and rides up next to Duffy.

DUFFY (CONT'D)
How the fuck do you look so fresh,
you spring fucking daisy?

Taylor opens his mouth to reply --

DUFFY (CONT'D)
You say "oxygen tent" and I'll slap
the silly out of you.

Taylor manages a grin. He feels good -- the EPO is working.

Up ahead, Duncan -- comfortably in the lead -- glances back. Watches Taylor, his eyes unreadable under his shades. Something dark brewing behind them.

INT. HOTEL - GIRONA - DAY - LATER

Taylor and Duffy arrive back at their room, both hobbling.
Lennox passes, looking annoyed --

LENNOX
Just what I need. Eight hours on
the bike, fucking starving and the
vampire chooses now to bite us.

TAYLOR
(*oh, fuck*)
UCI is here?

LENNOX
That doughy little man -- Banks.
Built like a ravioli noodle. Nearly
fucking ate him.

Lennox shakes his head and heads off in search of food.
Taylor unlocks the room, beelines for the bathroom --

INT. BATHROOM - TAYLOR'S ROOM - SAME

-- and shuts the door.

TAYLOR
Duff, I'm about to shit my stomach
lining out --

DUFFY (O.S.)
...Gross --

TAYLOR
-- tell UCI I'll be out as soon as
I return last night's shrimp to the
sea from whence they came.

DUFFY (O.S.)
Godspeed, brother.

Taylor turns on the faucet to cover up the noise.

He removes a TILE and pulls out the BLACK BAG Lathe gave him.
Removes the SALINE SPEED BAG. Hooks up a TUBE, screws on a
NEEDLE -- hesitates --

TAYLOR
(*squicked out*)
...shit.

He bites the bullet and awkwardly jams the needle into his
arm. He misses the vein -- the bag doesn't drain. *Fuck* --

He winces and tries again -- *got it*. He loops the bag over the shower rod -- the saline drains into his veins.

He unscrews the tiny jar of GREY POWDER. Dips his thumbnail in, scraping powder beneath the nail.

Squeezes the speed bag to empty the last few drops of saline. His muscles are tense with nerves -- veins thread his arms.

He unhooks the bag, stashes everything back in the wall, and carefully replaces the tile.

Is about to leave, notices a few droplets of BLOOD on the ground. Rubs them out with his shoe, exits --

INT. HOTEL ROOM - GIRONA - CONTINUOUS

DUFFY sits placidly on the bed as BANKS draws his blood.

Banks' eyes are momentarily obscured by the light that flashes off his glasses. He looks up --

BANKS

Mr. Mace.

He finishes drawing Duffy's blood, caps the sample. Extends a hand to Taylor --

BANKS (CONT'D)

Please excuse my intrusion. I am Alain Banks, with the UCI's anti-doping division. I have the pleasure to be in charge of your fluids.

Banks is geeky, amiable, a bit awkward. Speaks with a SWISS-GERMAN ACCENT -- slightly singsongy with crisp pronunciation.

Banks withdraws a fresh blood sample kit -- cheerfully --

BANKS (CONT'D)

I will take your blood now, please.

Beat.

TAYLOR

Of course.

He sits. Is about to extend his arm -- then remembers it has a fresh track mark on it.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Wait. This one.

(off Banks' look)

My non-dominant.

Beat. If Banks is suspicious, he give no sign of it -- he inserts the needle. Blood drips into the vial --

BANKS

Hm.

TAYLOR

...not good?

BANKS

It is very dark.

He turns the sample toward the light, holds up Duffy's for comparison. Taylor's is a MUCH darker crimson.

The EPO is definitely working.

Taylor covers his anxiety by playing dumb --

TAYLOR

(worried tone)

Is dark bad?

Banks eyes Taylor for a beat. Then shrugs.

BANKS

It means you have more red blood cells. Which can be the result of... any number of things.

Taylor swallows. He can't get a clear read on Banks.

DUFFY

Bloody fucking oxygen tent...

Duffy shakes his head -- Taylor shrugs at Banks -- *guess that must be it.*

BANKS

Can be altitude, genetics... drugs. Usually, super great for athletes. Dangerous if overdone.

TAYLOR

High blood oxygen is good, isn't it? The more the better.

BANKS

To a point. Once the hemoglobin hits 50, the blood thickens to sludge. It is like, what is the word? The black syrup --

DUFFY

Molasses.

BANKS

Precisely. There are stories of dopers setting alarms for 4 in the AM to do calisthenics so their blood does not slow to a stop and kill them in their sleep.

Banks finishes drawing Taylor's blood, caps the sample. Taylor watches him closely, still unsure if he's a threat.

Banks withdraws a pair of URINE SAMPLE CUPS -- with a smile --

BANKS (CONT'D)

And now, the urine. Who is first?

INT. BATHROOM - TAYLOR'S ROOM - DAY

Taylor stands before the toilet, sample cup poised. Banks stands behind him, watching intently.

TAYLOR

Buy a guy a drink first, huh?

BANKS

(misses the humor)

I am sorry, do you need a drink of water?

Taylor concentrates -- starts pissing. Discretely, he slides his THUMBNAIL -- the one with the *polvo* -- into the stream. The tiny grey crystals dissolve into the piss.

Taylor finishes, goes to hand it to Banks --

TAYLOR

(fakes tripping/spilling)

Whoops!

(grins)

Kidding.

Banks laughs -- a little bit too hard. He takes the cup and carefully screws the cap on tight. Wags a finger --

BANKS

You must always double check these.
Last week, three burst in my bag.
(amiably)
My poor colleagues. I walked around
smelling like athlete peepee the
rest of the day.

Duffy and Taylor don't know how to respond to this.

BANKS (CONT'D)

Okay. Well, now that I have your
liquids, goodbye.

Banks goes. Taylor calls after him --

TAYLOR

Enjoy!

Banks giggles again. But when the door closes, Taylor's eyes
flash with nervousness. *Did the polvo and speed bag work?*

He's surprised to turn and see DUFFY is sweating bullets --

DUFFY

Fuck! Fucking shit, I hope they
don't test for reefer... if last
weekend's jaunt to Amsterdam gets
me kicked off the team I'm fucked
six ways to Sunday.

TAYLOR

Come on, you saw that guy. Nothing
to worry about.

Off Taylor, unsure if he believes his own words.

EXT. STREETS OF GIRONA

Another training ride. Taylor's right up with the leaders --
he feels good.

He zips effortlessly up to Duncan -- who eyes him. Definitely
sniffing something amiss about Taylor's new ease on the bike.

TAYLOR

Lookin' good, Dunk.

DUNCAN

Lookin' good, Mace.

But there's the slightest chill to Duncan's tone, their previous playfulness gone. Something's changed -- Duncan doesn't like it. He accelerates.

Taylor pushes harder, grinning.

Duncan accelerates again. Testing him.

Taylor grits his teeth, grin becoming a grimace. He gives it all he's got -- but Duncan's still got more. Always manages to stay one step ahead.

Taylor watches the back of Duncan's jersey. Jaw gritted, eyes stony with dark resolve.

INT. LATHE'S OFFICE - DAY

SUPER CLOSE ON: a needle presses against a throbbing vein. The hollow tip penetrates the skin, the lips of the wound wrapping tight around the metal shaft.

Taylor sits on the cold steel of Lathe's table as she injects his latest round of EPO. He accepts her needle willingly now -- it's intimate, almost tender.

LATHE

From the lack of theatrics, I take
it you're pleased with my results.

Taylor doesn't answer -- but his silence is an affirmation.

A few drops of blood fall and starburst on the floor.

She withdraws the needle and turns to discard it. Taylor's jaw works -- he's building up to something.

Lathe turns back and sees he hasn't moved --

LATHE (CONT'D)

Was there something else, Taylor?

TAYLOR

(beat)

Duncan's still better than me.

She cocks her head. Doesn't disagree. Just gives him a sympathetic look. Taylor fidgets --

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

The roster deadline is coming.
There must be something more you --
something else.

LATHE

I think your position on the team
is safe.

TAYLOR

(shakes his head)
I'm still not fast enough.

Beat. Lathe sizes him up.

LATHE

So you want to do more? Are you
ready to do everything?

Taylor nods. She takes in the desperation in his eyes -- a
flicker of pleasure at seeing him grovel.

LATHE (CONT'D)

Good. There is something.
(toying with him)
But after you resisted the EPO, I
assumed you didn't have the stomach
for it.

TAYLOR

(resolved)
I'll do anything you tell me.

Correct answer.

She jots down something on a piece of paper. Hands it to him
-- it's an address.

LATHE

Tomorrow. 5am.

Taylor's expression wavers -- She had that ready fast. Did
she already have this planned?

EXT. GIRONA ALLEY - EARLY MORNING

The first rays of dawn just beginning to brush the Spanish
cobblestones. Mist creeps at the feet of streetlamps.

Taylor slouches down a back alley, hoodie drawn tight around
his face.

Unseen by Taylor -- SOMEONE IS FOLLOWING HIM. A dark shadow,
grim and menacing.

Taylor checks the address on Lathe's paper. Ducks into a
small brick facade.

The SHADOW follows him inside.

INT. SEEDY GIRONA MEDICAL OFFICE - SAME

He walks down a dark, mildewed hallway toward the farthest doorway -- it's ajar, and a hard cone of fluorescent light slices the dark hallway.

Taylor trudges toward it and enters an --

EXAMINATION ROOM

-- Where LATHE waits.

Behind them, unseen, the FRONT DOOR CREAKS OPEN --

Taylor's whole body goes rigid.

LATHE
(whispers, eyes wide)
You were followed.

Footsteps in the hall. A SHADOW looms in the doorway --

Taylor simmers in fear. Lathe glances at him, amused --

And a tall MOTORCYCLIST -- head to toe in BLACK LEATHER -- enters. He wears a BLACK MIRRORED HELMET.

Taylor doesn't move.

LATHE (CONT'D)
(to Motorcyclist)
You're early.

Taylor exhales -- she knows him. Thank fuck.

Taylor eyes the Motorcyclist, trying to make out features through the visor -- but he can only see his own reflection.
We will never see the Motorcyclist's face.

TAYLOR
(wary)
Who's this?

LATHE
No one for you to worry about. An apparition.
(gestures)
Sit.

Taylor keeps his eyes on the Motorcyclist as he lowers himself into the rickety steel medical chair.

Lathe approaches and slips a hollow NEEDLE into his vein.

TAYLOR
(forced levity)
What are we putting in today?

LATHE
Not putting in.

Taylor frowns. Lathe attaches a TUBE and EMPTY BAG to the needle. Taylor's blood -- slow and thick and dark -- starts crawling down the tube, filling the bag. Lathe marvels at it.

LATHE (CONT'D)
So much power in a single pint of
fluid. The Human Spark. Look at it,
Taylor -- that's God.

Taylor watches his dark red blood stream thickly into the plastic bladder -- his eyes curious. And a little disturbed.

TAYLOR
What is this?

LATHE
The final element of your training.

The blood finishes draining. Lathe unhooks the bag, hands it to the Motorcyclist. He bags it and exits without a word.

LATHE (CONT'D)
(off Taylor's look)
Don't worry. You'll get it back.

EXT. MOUNTAINS OF GIRONA - MORNING

Team Inverness pedals out slowly, shaking off the cobwebs -- preparing to ramp up into today's training.

Taylor looks pale. A little shaky on the bike -- lightheaded.

He downs water, blinks. Tries to stay focused.

Duffy clocks Taylor's shakiness --

DUFFY
You okay, Mace?

TAYLOR
(manages a nod)
Just gotta get through it today.

COACH zips up on the Vespa --

COACH
Mace! Congratulations, you're promoted.

Taylor blinks.

COACH (CONT'D)
Lennox is out today -- saddle sores. You're riding the number two slot -- pull for Duncan.

Taylor's eyes light up -- then, as soon as the Coach zips away, his expression darkens.

He looks down at his hands -- they're TREMBLING and pale with blood loss. *Shit. Of all the days...*

LATER

Taylor rides toward the front, DRAFTING off the riders in front of him. Jaw working -- dreading being called to attack.

The first hill rises before them --

COACH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(on radio)
Alright. Aaaaand... Go, Taylor.
Pull, pull, pull --

Taylor grits his jaw, hammers down -- hauls himself to the front of the pack, directly in front of Duncan. He's PULLING DUNCAN -- breaking the headwind and allowing Duncan to DRAFT off of him and conserve energy. A classic racing tactic.

But barely ten seconds and Taylor's drained. He SLOWS --

Duncan WOBLES, JERKS his handlebars to avoid crashing into Taylor's rear wheel --

DUNCAN
The fuck, Mace?

He shoots him an alarmed look, pulls around him, starts pulling the team himself --

DUNCAN (CONT'D)
Duffy! Come up here and haul.

Duffy obediently zips forward -- passing Taylor with an apologetic look -- and starts pulling for Duncan.

Taylor, frustrated, pedals harder -- it's no use. He drops to the back of the pack.

Duncan glances back, shakes his head. To himself --

DUNCAN (CONT'D)
Maybe nothing to worry about after
all.

DUFFY
(didn't hear)
What?

Duncan shakes his head. Throws one last look back at Taylor and keeps riding.

Meanwhile -- Taylor falls farther and farther back. The team crests a hill and stretches out of sight -- he's been DROPPED. The most humiliating thing to happen to a rider.

He hits his wall. Can't even turn the pedals.

He stops. Throws his bike down. SCREAMS in frustration.

Beat.

Goes to pick up his bike -- catches sight of the two hiking TOURISTS, staring at him. Taylor, wound salted, ears burning with embarrassment, rights his bike.

Starts riding back, alone.

PRELAP -- AGGRESSIVE KNOCKING --

INT. HOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Taylor KNOCKS furiously at Lathe's door. It's late -- the Onyar river nearly BLACK in the darkness, dotted with the reflections of streetlights and stars.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK --

Lathe opens the door, annoyed --

TAYLOR
You snake, what kind of fucking
game --

Lathe drags him inside --

INT. LATHE'S ROOM - HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

-- and snaps the door SHUT.

LATHE

Have you lost your mind? If anyone
hears --

TAYLOR

You sucked my strength out and put
it in a bag, you fucking succubus --

He's shaking -- angry, but also SPOOKED. Lathe assesses his
shaking hands, the worry in his eyes -- sees how scared he
is. In a blink, she switches seamlessly into comforting him --

LATHE

Shh, shh. It's alright...

She guides him over to the bed, sits him down. A comforting
hand on his forearm.

LATHE (CONT'D)

It must be so frightening... to
realize how little of your own
strength actually belongs to you.
To see it liquified and siphoned
into a plastic bladder...

She's sitting very close to him. Despite his anger, Taylor's
eyes flick over her frame -- she's in a strappy satin
nightgown, silvery white and sheer. Gooseflesh prickles her
arms despite the warmth of the summer night.

He shakes himself.

LATHE (CONT'D)

You have to trust me. I chose you
for your ability to suffer, Taylor.
Has your strength made you soft?

He doesn't answer -- but Lathe sees his wall eroding.

LATHE (CONT'D)

Your body is rebuilding itself.
Suffer through weakness for a few
days. It will be worth it. It'll be
your name on that roster -- I
promise.

She strokes his back, tenderly. A touch that could be either
maternal or seductive.

Taylor's disarmed -- Lathe's backed him off the edge.

For now.

INT. TAYLOR'S ROOM - GIRONA - NIGHT

TWO WEEKS LATER.

Blackest midnight. Taylor rolls over in bed -- hears the telltale WHISTLING of Duffy's snores.

He silently extricates himself from the covers.

DUFFY
(half-asleep)
Mace?

Fuck. Taylor covers --

TAYLOR
Vending machine... want anything?

DUFFY
(so groggy, annoyed)
At 2am? Man, the roster trial is
tomorrow and you have to wake me up
for Cheetos?

TAYLOR
Sorry, Duff. Go back to sleep...

Duffy rolls over. The whistling restarts. Beat. Taylor exits.

EXT. STREETS OF GIRONA - DEAD OF NIGHT

Taylor slinks down the pitch-black streets of Girona. Alternately appearing in the pools of light between the street lamps, and disappearing in the darkness between them.

He doesn't see THE MOTORCYCLIST stalking behind him. An invisible shadow.

INT. SEEDY HOSTEL - NIGHT

Taylor waits at the front desk of a rinky-dink hostel. The ancient CONCIERGE hands him a key.

Taylor ascends the rickety STAIRS --

Enters --

INT. SEEDY HOSTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Lathe waits for him.

Taylor enters, fidgeting.

Beat. Taylor's unsure of whether or not to speak. Lathe lets him dangle.

Somewhere, a CLOCK TICKS.

The room looks like a rent-by-the-hour joint -- mirror on the ceiling, dim RED LANTERN.

A KNOCK. Taylor jumps.

Lathe opens the door -- it's the Motorcyclist. He enters.

The three of them stand before one another. No one speaks.

Then, Lathe nods.

The Motorcyclist unslings his backpack. Withdraws Taylor's BANKED BLOOD. Passes it to Lathe.

LATHE
(to Taylor)
Sit.

Taylor, deeply weirded out by all of this -- between the blood and the red lighting, it's like some Satanic ritual. He eyes his bag of blood. Sits.

Lathe drags over a coat rack. Inserts a NEEDLE in Taylor's arm, hooks up the tubing, connects the BLOOD BAG. Slings the whole apparatus over the coat rack -- a makeshift IV.

Thick, dark blood -- nearly BLACK -- creeps down the plastic tubing, emptying back into Taylor's veins.

LATHE (CONT'D)
Everything we've done so far,
Taylor... this will double it.

Crimson light glints off her eyes. Hard to read her face in the red shadows, but she might be smiling.

Off TAYLOR'S REFLECTION as he stares at himself, distorted by the WARPED MIRROR of Motorcyclist's helmet...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. TAYLOR'S ROOM - HOTEL - MORNING

Taylor WAKES with a GASP --

As if from a nightmare. He blinks against the sharp daylight.

INT. TAYLOR'S BATHROOM - MORNING

Taylor PISSES. Groggy as hell -- he rubs sleep from his eyes.

Looks down --

Frowns.

The urine in the toilet bowl is REDDISH ORANGE. A disturbing color -- doesn't look healthy.

He checks himself in the mirror -- he looks okay. Great, actually. Cheeks flushed and rosy, skin glowing. He flexes.

Drops to the floor and blasts out a few quick pushups. He keeps going -- he can do more now. A lot more.

Springs back up. Checks himself one last time in the mirror. All systems go.

With one last wary look in the toilet bowl, he flushes.

EXT. STREETS OF GIRONA - DAY

The day of the test. Taylor and his teammates hang at the unofficial starting line, surrounded by the close-packed apartments of Girona.

Lathe steps into the back of a black PACE CAR. Taylor avoids looking at her -- nothing to attract suspicion.

Duncan scoots his bike up to the front. Glances at Taylor --

DUNCAN
How the legs today?

TAYLOR
Better.

DUNCAN
(eyes him, beat)
Can't have you getting hurt.

Is that a threat?

But no -- after seeing Taylor get dropped the other day, Duncan's concern is genuine. Gently --

DUNCAN (CONT'D)
Look, riders have good years and bad years. And you're not getting any younger. I'm worried you're doing too much.

TAYLOR
(clipped)
I'm okay, thanks.

Duncan gives him an odd look. This is a sharper Taylor than we've seen. Something edged about him. Duncan's unnerved.

The coach zips up on his Vespa --

COACH
Alright, people. Last chance to
solidify your slots.

The riders crouch, clip into their pedals --

COACH (CONT'D)
Mark. Set -- GO.

The team TAKES OFF, RIPPING through the streets. Sharp turns, narrow streets. Those fucking cobblestones.

Taylor holds strong at the front of the pack, hanging right alongside Duffy and Duncan.

Duncan shoots a look back -- but can't shake Taylor. His suspicious frown returns.

They WHIP around another corner --

SHIT -- one of the riders takes the turn too hard, CRASHES. Blood smears the cobblestones.

COACH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(on radio)
Fuck -- Fleece is down --

DUNCAN (O.S.)
(on radio)
Want us to stop?

COACH (O.S.)
(on radio)
Keep going -- I'll catch you --

The Coach pulls away from the peloton, goes back to help the fallen rider. The remaining cyclists ride on.

Lathe follows in her car, her eyes glued on Taylor.

They round another corner -- the final stretch. A short but nasty climb rears up before them.

They're going impossibly fast -- and Taylor's neck and neck with Duncan for the lead. He looks over at his rival --

And Duncan, for once, is struggling. He's breathing open-mouthed. Face contorted with effort. We hear his HEARTBEAT -- pumping hard, worryingly fast. He doesn't have anything left.

DUNCAN
(barely manages)
Jesus -- Fucking Christ -- Mace --

On Taylor -- we hear HIS HEARTBEAT now. It's STEADY. Calm.

He flicks a look at Duncan -- *I'm going*. Duncan, out of gas, shakes his head --

AND TAYLOR CHARGES.

He BLASTS up the hill -- he's out of the saddle, legs hammering. An epic breakaway that leaves Duncan in his dust.

And for a moment -- it's like he's back in Boulder, sprinting alone down the street for the sheer childlike joy of it.

Wind tousling his hair, whipping his jersey. Cheeks flushed. Everything gold in the afternoon light.

That magical sense of FREEDOM and LIMITLESSNESS.

Taylor beams. Finally, he has it all -- not just the love of the bike, but speed unlike he's ever had before.

That blood bag was rocket fuel.

EXT. FINISH LINE - MOMENTS LATER

Taylor crosses the line. Catches his breath, a wild grin on his face. He fucking did it. Sucks down a bottle of water.

Duncan, pale and shaky and totally drained, crests the hill. He throws down his bike, staggers up to Taylor.

They're alone at the finish line.

DUNCAN
(beyond furious)
What the fuck are you doing?

TAYLOR
(still riding high)
Sorry, got carried away.

DUNCAN
I don't mean today. I mean what.
Are. You doing.

The implication hangs between them. For a moment, everything is clear. Duncan sees Taylor. Deadly beat. Then --

Taylor, grin fading, shakes his head.

TAYLOR

I don't know what you mean, man.

DUNCAN

Whatever it is, you bet your
cheating ass I'm gonna find out.

This rankles Taylor -- suddenly, Duncan is threatening to take it all away. Taylor keeps his voice controlled --

TAYLOR

Maybe Lathe's program just works
better for me than it does for you.

The rest of the riders begin to crest the hill, panting.

Duncan speaks low and dangerously. His amiable nature is gone -- he takes cheating very fucking seriously.

DUNCAN

My team races clean. Anyone who
isn't doesn't belong here.

Taylor holds his gaze as the rest of the team begins trickling across the finish line. Duncan turns and goes.

But for all his bravado, a flash of worry creeps into Taylor's eyes as Duncan leaves.

INT. LATHE'S ROOM - DAY

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

Lathe opens the door of her room and Taylor strides in, begins pacing.

TAYLOR

Duncan's onto me.

Lathe eyes him.

LATHE

Mere insecurity over your new
success.

TAYLOR

He knows.

LATHE

He suspects. Do not underestimate
the power of relentless denial.

TAYLOR

We have to do something.

LATHE

Taylor. Look at me.
(he's still pacing)
Look at me.

She strides forward and takes his face in her hands. He
stops. Her eyes pierce his.

LATHE (CONT'D)

Everything is under my control.

Her tone is soothing -- like melting butter. But the
agitation still churns in Taylor's eyes.

TAYLOR

We have to keep him quiet. We could
do something --

LATHE

(sharply)
Absolutely not.

TAYLOR

He's going to tell.

Taylor is panicking, and Lathe's not listening.

LATHE

(soothing)
This will blow over. Trust me, and
everything will work out.
(pats his cheek)
Now, go make nice.

Off Taylor, panic nowhere close to quelled.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY

Taylor, still agitated, crosses through the lobby, heading to
the elevator -- but something catches his eye. He stops.

BANKS sits in the lounge, doing a newspaper crossword.

Beat. Taylor eyes him, thinking.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - HOTEL - LATER

Taylor waits in the conference room alone, holding a pair of water bottles filled with recovery mix. He fidgets, antsy.

The team starts trickling in.

Taylor sips from one bottle, clutching the second tight in his other hand.

Duncan arrives. Taylor swoops up to him --

TAYLOR
Hey. Got a sec?

Duncan eyes him, but allows himself to be pulled aside. Taylor lowers his voice, assumes an apologetic tone --

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Olive branch.

He hands Duncan the SECOND BOTTLE.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
We're on the same team, right? We want the same thing -- what's best for Inverness. My behavior was unacceptable.
(and)
Consider this my apology.

Duncan accepts the bottle warily. Shakes his head.

DUNCAN
"What's best for Inverness"...
Listen, Mace. It might work on Coach, on Lathe, on everyone else.
But I see you.

Duncan pushes past Taylor, sits, still holding the bottle -- but doesn't drink. Taylor watches him intently --

The Coach and Lathe arrive, stride to the front.

COACH
Helluva ride today, people. We're strong this year.
(he nods at Lathe)
But we can't keep everyone. You'll notice Fleece, Dexter, and Catallan are no longer with us. Which means everyone here -- congratulations, you're riding the Tour.

Duncan still holds the water bottle in his hands. Toys with the lid... Taylor licks his lips, watches obsessively.

COACH (CONT'D)

But the question of the hour --
who's leading us? You've all busted
your asses this season. Some of you
have blown me out of the water, to
be honest.

(eyes Taylor)

But you don't mess with perfection.
Our team leader this year... is
Duncan.

Lathe's face remains controlled. Her eyes flick to Taylor --

But Taylor, engrossed in Duncan's bottle, barely registers the announcement. Lathe frowns. Watches him watching Duncan.

Duffy leans in to Taylor --

DUFFY

Shoulda been you.

TAYLOR

(distracted)

It is what it is.

DUFFY

Least you didn't get cut, huh?

Taylor shrugs, eyes still glued on Duncan...

...who pops the top of his water bottle... and finally takes a long draught.

Taylor watches him down it, his eyes intense.

EXT. HOTEL - EARLY MORNING

The team leaves the hotel, still puffy-eyed with sleep and waiting for the coffee to kick in. An idling CHARTER BUS waits for them in the hotel parking lot --

COACH

Mountains today -- bikes'll be in
the sprinter behind us --

He's cut off by a WHOOP of sirens and flashing blue-red-white light as several INTERPOL CARS swoop into the lot, blocking the team's path to the bus. OFFICERS emerge and approach.

A very plain, minuscule brown FIAT pulls up. BANKS gets out.

COACH (CONT'D)

Help you, gentlemen? We're on our way out to train--

BANKS

I am sorry to inform you that last night one of your riders tested positive for illegal amounts of testosterone.

Duncan and Taylors' eyes meet. Duncan's gaze is grave -- not gloating, but heavy with a sense of justice being served. Taylor keeps his face expressionless.

COACH

There's been a mistake.

BANKS

I apologize, but the levels were beyond mistaking. We have to take the rider into custody. A lifetime ban will go into immediate effect for all future UCI events. And you will, I regret to say, be short a rider for the Tour.

The Coach's face falls. He turns toward his team, looks them over -- *Which of them...?* Taylor stares brazenly back when their eyes meet.

COACH

You have the results with you?

Banks rummages in his briefcase -- spilling papers -- and hands the Coach a stack of TEST RESULTS. The Coach flips through, looking more devastated by the second.

Several INTERPOL OFFICERS stride forward, backing up Banks. He doesn't look so powerless now.

COACH (CONT'D)

There's been a mistake...

Taylor watches every move closely.

BANKS

I am afraid not. So. If you would please come with us, Mr. Duncan.

Hushed beat. Duncan blinks, sure he misheard.

DUNCAN

...sorry?

The OFFICERS advance. Cuffs ready.

BANKS
If you would, please.

DUNCAN
No. I'm clean.
(re: Taylor)
It's him -- you mixed up our
results -- he's cheating -- you
made a mistake --

BANKS
There has been no mistake.

But Banks' eyes flick to Taylor even as he says this,
considering Duncan's words.

The officers attempt to cuff Duncan -- he resists --

DUNCAN
No -- I swear to god, I'd never --
I race clean, I love this sport --

BANKS
Mr. Duncan. If you please.

He gestures to the officers. They take Duncan down, slap the
cuffs on him. Duncan is screaming now --

DUNCAN
(to team, Coach)
Tell him --

But Coach won't look at him -- eyes hard, still laser-focused
on the results. Humiliated. His own reputation on the line.

DUNCAN (CONT'D)
(screams)
It isn't me --

He's dragged away --

BANKS
You are lucky everyone else tested
clean, Coach. I am very glad that I
do not have to arrest you, too.

It's the world's politest threat.

Duncan's still screaming. The team stands, dumbstruck.

Taylor looks over at the soigneurs -- one of the FEMALE
SOIGNEURS has tears of shock streaking her cheeks.

DUFFY
(sotto, to Taylor)
Sometimes you see the way they ride
and wonder if it's worth it...

He looks back to Duncan, whose face is like a rasher of bacon
where it was slammed against the asphalt.

DUFFY (CONT'D)
But then you look at that -- no.
Nothing's worth that.

Taylor doesn't reply.

The SLAM of a cruiser door stifles Duncan's protests.

The cruisers depart.

Taylor keeps his face perfectly smooth. Duncan's gone -- but
the cost of doping just played out before his eyes.

Lathe studies Taylor's face intently. Looking for something.

INT. ANOTHER SEEDY MEDICAL OFFICE - NIGHT

We could be anywhere. Somewhere else in Spain, but it doesn't
matter. It only matters that, wherever we are, there are no
windows and no cameras.

Taylor's got his arm hooked up to another IV -- donating his
next round of blood. The Motorcyclist watches, silent.

The blood bag fills.

TAYLOR
We really need three for the Tour?
One bag was fine for training...

LATHE
Three. One after Valensole. One
after Mt. Ventoux, to keep you
fresh for the alps. And one right
before the end, so you can sail up
to the Champs-Elysee like a god. I
have it planned to the minute.

TAYLOR
Seems like overkill. Risky.

LATHE
Hell is not a pit of fire -- it's a
mountaintop. The bodies of men are
fodder for the alps.
(MORE)

LATHE (CONT'D)

If you don't do everything, the
mountains will eat you alive.

She unhooks the bag and hands it to the Motorcyclist. He
takes it and disappears.

Lathe and Banks are alone. The air is charged.

Beat.

Lathe approaches him. Maternally, with quiet concern--

LATHE (CONT'D)

Something's bothering me. About
Duncan.

Taylor says nothing.

LATHE (CONT'D)

I've been checking his blood since
the beginning. The man rode clean.

TAYLOR

Yeah, well. Liars are everywhere.

LATHE

You'd know.

TAYLOR

(sharp, defensive)
You would, too.

She studies him hard. He squirms.

LATHE

(suddenly soft again)
There can be no lies between us,
Taylor. I've seen inside you. Tell
me the truth.

Her gaze is tender, encouraging. Taylor says nothing. But a
flicker of PRIDE, almost imperceptible, curves his lips --

SLAP.

Lathe SMACKS him, HARD.

Taylor staggers back, clutching his cheek. Nearly goes down.
She's surprisingly strong -- her palm hit like marble.

LATHE (CONT'D)

You drugged him.

She GRABS him by the jaw, DIGS her fingers hard into the flesh of his face -- her sharp fingernails cut tiny red crescents into his skin.

LATHE (CONT'D)

You want to win? You do what I say.
You follow my script.

She releases him, roughly. He's shaken, but defiant.

TAYLOR

I'm not your fucking puppet.

Lathe eyes him with amused pity.

LATHE

Do you know why you're so good at suffering? Because you like it. You broken, pathetic -- yes -- puppet.
(deadly)

I can make your broken pieces dance, puppet. I can twitch my strings and waltz you across the finish line to victory. If you want that, let me do my work. If you don't, I'll leave your broken pieces where I found them.

Lathe leaves abruptly, leaving Taylor to simmer.

PRELAP -- SOUNDS OF A LANDING PLANE --

EXT. PARIS CHARLES DEGALLE AIRPORT - DAY

The team plane -- INVERNESS emblazoned on the side -- touches down in Paris.

INT. TEMPORARY TEAM HQ - NICE - DAY

Another team meeting. Long faces. Everyone still grim following the loss of Duncan.

DUFFY

He's gotta pick a new leader today.

TAYLOR

(evenly)
Suppose he does.

LENNOX

No matter who he picks, we're a man short. We've got no shot with seven riders.

The Coach strides in, followed by Lathe.

COACH

Fat mouth gets fatter ever day, huh, Lennox? "No shot with seven riders." Well, you're welcome, goody for me, after calling in a spectacular number of favors and spending a fucking offensive amount of money -- I've solved that particular problem.

LENNOX

Bringing back someone you cut?

COACH

Better.

A YOUNG RIDER enters. Super young -- 19 years old if he's a day. Rangy, sharp-angled.

DUFFY

(sotto, to Taylor)

That's fucking Blain Malcolm --

COACH

Very good, Duffy. I'll have one of the soigneurs give you a little treat later. Yes, this is Malcolm. You might be familiar with him because he's the fucking wunderkind who set the course record for the Tour De Suisse this year. He rides for us now.

MALCOLM

Honored to be here, Coach.

(to team)

Howdy.

Hint of Texas accent. Something very wholesome and heartland about him -- speaks like he's got corn kernels in his teeth.

LENNOX

He's leading, then?

Taylor considers this, sizing the kid up.

COACH

He is really fucking good.

He lets this dangle -- then turns to Malcolm.

COACH (CONT'D)

...But no. Malcolm will be riding
domestique with Duffy. For our
leader -- Taylor Mace.

All eyes go to Taylor.

Taylor blinks. Then a smile spreads -- relief, pride.

Lathe catches his eye -- inclines her head just slightly, a
scimitar of a smile curling her lips.

As he accepts the handshakes and backslapping from his
teammates, Taylor's eyes pass over Malcolm.

He's skinny and definitely looks strong. But nothing to worry
about. Just a kid.

Harmless.

INT. TAYLOR'S ROOM - NICE - NIGHT

THE FINAL NIGHT BEFORE THE TOUR.

Lathe and Taylor sit on his bed. Taylor's got his own room in
the team hotel this time.

Lathe prepares Taylor's final round of EPO.

In the street, a busker sings a French ballad -- but it's in
a minor key. Rather than romantic, it sounds ominous.

Taylor watches Lathe prepare the drugs. She's in a slinky
black dress, and her hair's slipped free of its chignon.

The phone RINGS, breaking the moment. Taylor answers.

TAYLOR

Hello?

DONALD (O.S.)

Hey, kiddo.

INT. DONALD'S HOUSE - COLORADO - DAY - SAME

Donald's sitting in front of the TV, watching pre-Tour coverage. Lines of worry crease Donald's brow as coverage of DUNCAN'S ARREST AND TRIAL plays.

DONALD

Got the news on over here. Duncan's not team leader?

TAYLOR (O.S.)

We lost him.

DONALD

Shame. He was good. You feel okay?

INT. TAYLOR'S ROOM - NICE - NIGHT - SAME

Taylor smiles --

TAYLOR

Great, actually. Dad --
(beat, emotional)
I'm leading the team.

Beat.

DON (O.S.)

That's great, kiddo.

On Taylor -- Donald's response is more subdued than he expected. He pretends not to notice, forces nonchalance.

TAYLOR

Yeah. Yeah, it's gonna be good.

INT. DONALD'S HOUSE - COLORADO - DAY - SAME

Donald's working up to something. On his TV -- footage of DUNCAN IN HANDCUFFS.

DONALD

You're not -- you're being careful over there, right?

INT. TAYLOR'S ROOM - NICE - NIGHT - SAME

Taylor eyes Lathe -- she gestures to the needle. A question in her eyes -- he gestures -- *wait a sec.*

TAYLOR
Careful as I've ever been.

Not the answer Donald wanted. Silence on the end of the line.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Listen, it's late here...

DONALD
Taylor -- Winning isn't everything.

Taylor eyes Lathe, approaching with the dripping needle.

TAYLOR
I'll keep that in mind.

DONALD (O.S.)
(really means it)
I love you, son.

TAYLOR
Yeah, you too.

He hangs up.

LATHE
Your father?
(Taylor nods)
He's supportive, I take it.

TAYLOR
Not of... not of this, no. He
wouldn't be. He lost his spot on
his college football team to a guy
they later found out was doing
PEDs. Missed out on going pro
because of it.

LATHE
And your mother?

TAYLOR
If he had, maybe she'd've stuck
around.

LATHE
If he'd wanted that spot badly
enough, he would have gotten it.

Beat. Taylor presents his arm -- Lathe injects the EPO.
Withdraws her needle -- presses the wound gently to stop the
bleeding. Their eyes meet. She squeezes his arm.

LATHE (CONT'D)

Don't get comfortable. There are
snakes in the grass. Ride hard. Win
for me.

Her voice is thick with desire. Taylor's heart catches in his throat. He wants it, too.

They looks down on the promenade below -- the STARTING LINE being set up as they watch...

EXT. NICE - PROMENADE DES ANGLAIS - MORNING

DAY ONE OF THE TOUR.

A huge banner arcs over the starting line, swathed in a riotous froth of HELIUM BALLOONS -- LE GRAND DEPART.

The aquamarine waters of the Baie des Anges flash white in the morning light, lapping at the pebbled shore. The terracotta roofs of Nice bake in the morning sun.

Throngs line the Promenade, grouped by nationality, clusters of team colors forming along the route.

The riders jostle. The RACE STARTER ascends the stairs... raises the STARTING GUN...

In the final seconds before the gun, TIME SLOWS for Taylor. His heart HUMMINGBIRDS.

His eyes scan the crowd for Lathe -- he finds in her in the stands, dressed in black despite the heat of the midsummer morning. Eyes shielded by dark glasses.

THE WHOLE WORLD SEEMS TO PULSE LIKE A HEARTBEAT...

THREE...TWO...ONE...

The flag DROPS and the GUN FIRES --

-- AND THEY'RE OFF. The Tour de France has begun.

The peloton rockets along the Promenade -- a thousand bullets from the mouth of a gun.

Mere inches separate the riders as they zoom down the route at speeds touching 40mph.

At the front of the pack -- Taylor hangs with the leaders, keeping pace. Biding his time.

He glances over to see Malcolm -- hanging up front just as easily. Taylor eyes him -- *impressive*.

The peloton carves through Nice, past waters that shift azure to cerulean to lapis. A fast, flat stage.

INT. MEDIA BOX - SAME

A BRITISH COMMENTATOR speaks into a mic --

BRITISH COMMENTATOR
 ...And Taylor Mace, an early favorite, has taken the lead -- Team Swiss close at the flank, followed by Telecom -- nothing will be decided today, but this prologue stage will give each team a critical sense of what they're up against for the next twenty days.

BACK ON THE COURSE --

The riders swerve into a long straightaway.

COACH (O.S.)
 (on radio)
 Eyes on Team Swiss -- leader's angling for a breakaway -- he's hungry for that Yellow Jersey.

And sure enough, Taylor looks up to see the SWISS LEADER stand up on the pedals and begin to charge --

TAYLOR
 (into radio)
 Too bad for him.

The Swiss team leader attempts his breakaway -- Taylor gestures to Duffy and Malcolm --

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
 Reel him in.

Together, the three riders push the peloton's pace and reel the Swiss rider back in. Inverness is a well-oiled machine.

And Malcolm seems to have dropped into the team dynamic as easily as breathing.

LATER

The final stretch --

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
(into radio)
Gearing up. Block for me --

Roger. DUFFY Copy that. MALCOLM

They round the final corner -- the last straightaway stretches before them, the finish line in sight.

Taylor STANDS, and he's OFF -- legs like pistons on the pedals. DROPPING the pack.

A few other leaders break away, too -- Duffy blocks them. But Malcolm, Taylor notices, STAGES A BREAKAWAY OF HIS OWN.

Taylor crosses the line -- the crowd ROARS. A FRENCH ANNOUNCER is jabbering wildly over the PA system. Taylor blinks as it sets in -- his first stage win of the Tour.

BRITISH COMMENTATOR (O.S.)
And Taylor Mace snatches the Yellow
Jersey from a competitive field --
let's see if he can hang onto it --

Taylor takes in the roaring of the crowd. Looks up to his own name, flashing in huge letters on the jumbotron. The instant replay footage of him triumphantly crossing the line.

Taylor beams, eyes misty -- this is everything he dreamed.

Malcolm crosses the line next. Taylor eyes him -- his smile wavers for just an instant.

MALCOLM
Hot dog! Inverness!

Malcolm grins at Taylor -- genuinely stoked. Taylor allows himself to grin back, calmed by the kid's wide-eyed, uncalculated excitement.

LATER

The podium. Taylor in first, Malcolm in second, a DUTCH RIDER in third. Two PODIUM GIRLS zip Taylor into the legendary YELLOW JERSEY -- the jersey reserved for the overall leader.

Taylor blinks, cementing over his welling emotion with a Captain America grin for the cameras.

We hear Taylor's HEARTBEAT -- pumping strong and even. He practically glows -- *the drugs were worth it.*

IN THE CROWD

Lathe watches, a tight smile curving her lips. Nearby, BANKS is watching the ceremony, too -- Lathe eyes him like a lioness and sidles up beside him.

LATHE

And are you enjoying sticking your
little needles in my rider?

The small man looks up at her striking, willowy frame. He smiles, one of the few men that's not intimidated by her -- despite how much more physically imposing she is.

BANKS

Dr. Lathe -- a pleasure. Yes, I
have tested him, as is my duty --

LATHE

And?

BANKS

If he had tested anything but clean
you know we would have made you
aware.

LATHE

(smiling)

In a painfully public and
humiliating fashion, knowing you.

BANKS

(smiles back)

We are duty-bound to our bloody
work.

LATHE

Of course, Mr. Banks. What would
the sport be if you were not? It'd
just be a bunch of beasts devouring
one another...

EXT. TEAM TENT - DAY

The riders mill about in the team tent, recovering, eating,
getting massages from the soigneurs.

Lathe and Taylor cross paths --

LATHE

(performing)

Congratulations, Mr. Mace. You rode
well today.

She smiles tightly, her eyes glittering with amusement. She leans in and whispers...

LATHE (CONT'D)
Only the beginning.

...and walks on.

Taylor turns -- catches the eye of Malcolm, who hastily throws him a thumbs up. *Was he watching me...?* Taylor blinks, shakes off the paranoia.

But he keeps his eyes on Malcolm when the kid turns away. Something chewing at him about the kid.

EXT. FLAT STAGE - DAY

Another stage's starting line. Taylor's champing at the bit, muscles tensed, a beast in a cage. BANG -- they're off.

LATER -- The peloton, a flurried rainbow of jerseys and flashes of chrome, blazes past a field of sunflowers.

LATER -- The endless lavender fields of Valensole, glowing lilac in the dewy morning sun.

LATER -- Rolling green hills, dotted with sheep that have been crudely hand-painted with farmers' favorite team colors.

It's a stark contrast -- idyllic, pastoral scenes, sliced by the ravaging knife of athletic brutality.

And the fans, seen in SLOW MOTION, their faces contorted into the grotesque shapes of GARGOYLES as they SCREAM AND CHEER, SPITTLE FROTHING from their lips, racing alongside their riders, FISTS CLENCHED white-knuckled around cowbells as they ring them, violently, as if their lives depend on it. FEVERED SUPPLICANTS WRITHING AT THE FEET OF THEIR GODS -- roaring full-chested prayers from deep in their lungs --

These riders are worshipped.

Taylor crosses the finish line first again --

...And again, Malcolm finishes just a hair behind him.

Taylor catches his breath at the finish -- catches Malcolm. High fives him, cozying up.

TAYLOR
Coach said you were good, but damn,
kid, where's this shit come from?

MALCOLM

(shrugs)

My mom likes to say genetics, but
she's two hundred pounds and has
scoliosis, so...

The kid has a self-effacing nature that's charming as hell.

Taylor laughs amiably. Sucking up to him. Then leans in --

TAYLOR

For real, though.

("what's your secret?")

Rider to rider.

MALCOLM

(shrugs)

I just follow the program.

Taylor accepts that this is all he's gonna get out of the kid today. Wallpapers over his annoyance with a grin.

TAYLOR

(re: podium)

We've got some stairs to climb.

The kid smiles. Just happy to be here.

But when Malcolm looks away, Taylor's grin freezes over.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE - NIGHT

Another hotel room.

Taylor's hooked up to BLOOD BAG NO. 1. Lathe supervises. The Motorcyclist watches from the corner. Breaking the silence --

TAYLOR

The kid is good. We're lucky to
have him.

Lathe glances at Taylor. Reading his expression. Beat.

LATHE

We are lucky to have him, aren't
we?

Taylor doesn't miss the evasion. He frowns, paranoia growing.

Lathe starts unhooking the bag.

LATHE (CONT'D)
He's on your ass, though. You'd better stay ahead of him.

TAYLOR
You promised me --

LATHE
Now, Taylor. I can't be held accountable for the cheating anyone else is doing. I can't be blamed for acts of God. I've all but placed the crown in your hands. It's up to you not to let some child snatch it away.

Taylor rankles. Lathe pats his shoulder, either comfortingly or patronizingly --

LATHE (CONT'D)
Don't let him get under your skin.

But the way that she says it make it sound like that's exactly what she wants.

EXT. HILLY STAGE - DAY

Rolling hills, shingled with farms and ancient churches.

BRITISH COMMENTATOR (O.S.)
A beautiful morning here in Stage 8 -- fatigue sets in and the true test begins. We'll see racers drop off, see which leads are genuine --

Taylor's cheeks are rosy -- he glows with the fresh transfusion. Everything's going according to plan.

A hill rises before the peloton. Nothing like the monstrous alps that loom in the distance... but a substantial climb.

COACH (O.S.)
(on radio)
Duffy, Swiss is riding strong but their leader's toasted from yesterday's breakaway. They won't be able to hang if we drop them on these rollers.
(and)
Attack at the base.

The hill is roaring toward them. Duffy, winded, looks at Taylor and shakes his head --

DUFFY
Jesus, man -- I don't know --

He's not nearly as fresh as Taylor.

TAYLOR
I'll go for you if --

MALCOLM
(swooping in)
No worries, I got it.

Before Taylor can protest, the kid is OFF.

He pushes the pace, pulling Taylor up the hill in his draft.

And sure enough, Team Swiss's leader falls to the back.

Taylor allows himself to be pulled, but his eyes burn a hole in the back of Malcolm's jersey. Face clouded with suspicion.

EXT. ANOTHER CLIMB - DAY

Another stage. Another climb.

A SPANISH RIDER breaks free of the peloton, starts HAULING ASS up the SHORT BUT BRUTAL CLIMB --

The Coach is on the radio, screaming --

COACH (O.S.)
(on radio)
Attack!! Attack now!! Fuck --

Taylor ramps up -- but just as he does, MALCOLM rockets past him. Chasing the Spaniard like a pit bull after a mailman.

Taylor has to give it everything he's got just to stay on Malcolm's tail. This kid is a beast.

No one's supposed to be able to keep up with Taylor. Not if they're clean.

EXT. SOIGNEUR TENT - POST-RACE - LATER

Taylor loads a plate with recovery food -- bananas, bagels.

MALCOLM sidles up beside him, filling a plate of his own.

MALCOLM
Heck of a ride today, huh?

Taylor musters a nod and grunt of acknowledgment.

MALCOLM (CONT'D)
I don't wanna count our chickens,
but, uh...

The kid grins -- *we're gonna win.*

Taylor eyes Malcolm as he dishes fruit onto a plate.

TAYLOR
Did you want it?
(off his look)
The team leader spot. When you
signed onto Inverness.

MALCOLM
(beat)
I thought about it, sure. Who
wouldn't? But nah, man, I'm happy
where I am.
(and)
I don't envy you, to be honest.

TAYLOR
I feel like I should take offense
to that.

MALCOLM
(course-corrects)
I just mean -- I hear it fucks with
you, is all. Leading. My last coach
called it Yellow Jersey syndrome.
He said when you're in the lead,
it's like you're prey. Everyone
behind you is waiting to pounce.
You can't see them. But you know
they're there. Feel them breathing
down your neck. Coming for you...

Malcolm catches himself --

MALCOLM (CONT'D)
But I'm glad to hear that's not the
case for you. We need you sharp!

Malcolm beams. Taylor side-eyes the kid again -- *is he
playing head games?*

THUD -- someone SLAPS Taylor on the back. Taylor jumps, turns
to see --

DUFFY

(huge grin)

I swear to fuck, when we get back to the States, I'm not only gonna get three of those dumbass tents, I'm gonna buy stock.

Something across the tent catches his eye. LATHE, eyeballing Malcolm. The kid sees her watching, smiles -- raises a cup to her. She nods at him approvingly.

Taylor's smile flickers.

TAYLOR

'scuse me a sec.

Taylor leaves Duffy and Malcolm and stalks Lathe between the aisles of various TEAM TENTS.

It's almost like a festival, loud and riotous, full of reporters conducting interviews, teams eating, drinking, talking. Banners and ribbons, food kiosks.

He grabs Lathe's arm and pulls her into a shadowy corner --

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Alright. Come on.

(she says nothing)

The kid.

Lathe raises her eyebrows, makes a gesture of bafflement.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

You're helping him.

LATHE

What would I possibly have to gain from that?

TAYLOR

Doubling your chances of a win.

A pair of rival team's soigneurs pass. Taylor goes silent, nods, waits for them to pass. Then turns back to Lathe --

LATHE

Taylor. I invested in you. I poured my heart and soul into you. Only you.

She softens her tone, cooing, pacifying, maternal --

LATHE (CONT'D)
He's good. But he'll drop off in
the alps. They always do.

But Taylor's unconvinced.

TAYLOR
I want to do the next one now.

LATHE
No. There's a rest and travel day
tomorrow, it makes no sense to --

TAYLOR
The big climbs are coming.
Everyone's thrashed from the past
few days. That's the way to do it.
We put as much distance between me
and everyone else from the second
the climbs begin.

LATHE
That isn't the plan.

TAYLOR
Tonight. Give it to me tonight --

LATHE
(soothing)
Taylor, my love....

TAYLOR
-- Or I maybe I let slip to someone
what you've been doing. What you
tricked me into.

Ugly beat. Taylor's crossed a line. Lathe's expression shifts
from honey to poison. Her voice deadly.

LATHE
You have much more to lose than I
do. A lifetime ban, prison. And
what would that sad-sack father of
yours think? You saw what happened
to Duncan.
(and, venomous)
I made you. It's my plan or
nothing.

She leaves him alone in the shadows, tossing a last barb over
her shoulder --

LATHE (CONT'D)
Get some rest, puppet. The flight
leaves at 8am.

INT. TAYLOR'S ROOM - ANOTHER HOTEL - NIGHT

Taylor sits on the bed, hotel phone pressed to his ear.
Stares at the CLOCK -- just before midnight. Leg jiggling.
Mid-conversation --

TAYLOR
-- well, it's not her fucking
blood, is it?
(listens)
Name your price.
(listens)
How soon can you get here?

CUT TO:

LATER

The clock now reads 5:38am.

Taylor paces, sleepless and agitated.

KNOCK KNOCK.

Taylor sprints over, takes a breath and opens the door. The
MOTORCYCLIST stands in the hallway, holding a BLACK BAG.
Taylor hands him a thick wad of hundreds.

The mirrored helmet distorts Taylor's own face back at him.

The Motorcyclist departs. Taylor closes the door.

Unzips the bag -- the blood bag, needles, tubing.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Okay. Piece of cake.

He assembles the apparatus, like he's seen Lathe do. Takes
several quick breaths, then JAMS the needle into his arm. It
doesn't drain at first -- he holds it up over his head,
squeezing the bag to empty it faster --

KNOCK KNOCK...

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
What?!

MALCOLM (O.S.)
Hey, Mace, the bus is leaving...

Shit.

Taylor, still holding the blood bag aloft, moves over to the door, cracks it just a sliver -- eyes Malcolm in the hall --

TAYLOR
Listen, kid, this is awkward --
don't tell anyone but... I have a
girl over --

Malcolm looks at his shoes, vaguely embarrassed.

MALCOLM
Oh... Heck -- Uh -- is that allowed
-- ?

TAYLOR
Sure it is. Just... frowned upon.

Inside, unseen by Malcolm, blood trickles down Taylor's arm. Creeping toward his WHITE SHIRTSLEEVE....

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
So, I'm gonna say my goodbyes,
yeah? If you know what I mean...

MALCOLM
What should I tell Coach?

The blood has reached Taylor's sleeve. Slowly seeping into the fabric. Spreading...

TAYLOR
Tell him I'll catch a cab.

Malcolm waffles, torn.

MALCOLM
I dunno... He told me...

TAYLOR
(snaps, harsh)
Are you a fucking *domestique*?

Beat. Malcolm, shocked, nods.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
If you want to be on a winning
team, you do what your leader
fucking tells you.

Beat. Malcolm eyes Taylor, a hardness beneath the shock at Taylor's outburst. Then he nods, all midwestern humility.

MALCOLM
I'll let him know.

Malcolm goes. Tense beat as Taylor watches, then shuts the door. Eyes his clothes and gear, still not packed --

TAYLOR
Shit.

Still holding the draining blood bag, he frantically packs --

The clock on the dresser beams an evil green, reminding him how very late he is --

The final drops of blood empty into his arm. He RIPS out the needle, holding pressure on the wound. Runs to the bathroom --

Takes SCISSORS and frenetically cuts up the empty blood bag and flushes it, piece by piece, into the toilet.

EXT. HOTEL - STREETS OF FRENCH CITY - EARLY MORNING

Taylor races down the cobblestone alleyway, dragging his suitcase to the main drag to catch a cab.

SMALL CHILD
Monsieur, monsieur --

Taylor looks down -- the child is gesturing and speaking urgently in French, trying to get his attention.

Taylor looks down at the arm dragging the suitcase - it's dripping BLOOD.

Fuck.

He presses his hand against the wound. Hails a cab.

INT. CAB - MOMENTS LATER

Taylor leaps into the back of a cab --

TAYLOR
Aéroport, s'il vous plaît.

The cab lurches forward.

Taylor rummages in his bag, searches for something to press to the wound. *How is he bleeding this much?*

He finds a SHIRT and awkwardly wraps his arm --

Fuck -- no time --

EXT. AIRPORT - LATER

The cab screeches to a halt in front of the airport -- Taylor throws money at the driver, races out.

INT. AIRPORT BATHROOM - DAY - LATER

Taylor stands at the running faucet, scrubbing ferociously at the BLOOD that stains his forearm and hands.

There's so much of it...

He catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror -- he looks pale, skinny, agitated, eyes hollow. But strong.

He looks back down -- BLOOD IS POURING FROM THE FAUCET.

Taylor jerks back, blinks. It's just water. Tentatively, he finishes washing his hands.

Blood mixes with water and spirals down the drain.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - MORNING

Taylor finds his gate. Spots his team, beelines toward them.

COACH

Nice of you to join us, Mace.

TAYLOR

Won't happen again.

LENNOX

(knowingly)

You win the Tour, you can bet it'll happen plenty more times.

Taylor frowns -- *what --?* But then catches Malcolm's eye, who shrugs guilty. He spilled the beans about Taylor's "girl." *A mistake? Or an attempt to undercut Taylor?*

Taylor frowns. Then sits down across from Lathe.

TAYLOR

(as if nothing's wrong)

Good morning, Doctor.

LATHE

Mace.

She side-eyes him -- catches sight of a speck of BLOOD on his sleeve. Her mouth twitches.

But can't say anything, not here, not in front of everyone. And Taylor knows it. For once, he gets to watch her squirm. And he enjoys it.

But then he looks up and across the terminal and locks eyes with -- BANKS, who's watching him.

Banks doesn't react when Taylor meets his eye. Long beat. Then he goes back to his Reader's Digest.

Lathe follows his gaze to Banks. A warning --

LATHE (CONT'D)

Vampires are everywhere these days.

TAYLOR

(lightly)

Well, I'm packing stakes.

But Taylor's spooked -- this guy is everywhere.

EXT. MONT VENTOUX - MOUNTAIN STAGE - DAY

Taylor leads the pack up Mt. Ventoux --

A bleached, alien landscape -- white clouds soar over the white mountain, a harsh gash of blue sky the only reprieve from a punishing landscape otherwise drained of color.

It's like riding on a lunar surface.

BRITISH COMMENTATOR (O.S.)

Stage 14 -- with still another week of racing ahead of them, the riders face the first of a series of brutal climbs -- Blain Malcolm cemented his Tour de Suisse win in the mountains this year, and Mace has yet to be tested in the alps -- can Mace hold his lead?

Taylor leads the peloton up towards the meteorological station that looms like a lighthouse at the peak.

The blood bag is working -- Taylor's HAMMERING, jamming up the climb in a big gear.

Taylor looks back -- and sure enough, Malcolm is far behind him today. Looks winded. Isn't up with the leaders.

TAYLOR
(to Duffy)
Kid's can't hang today?

DUFFY
Rookies, man. Always gas themselves on the flats. Don't save anything for the real shit...

TAYLOR
Tough break.

But Taylor can't keep the smirk off his face.

EXT. MONT VENTOUX FINISH - MOUNTAIN STAGE - LATER

Taylor crosses the finish line first again with a comfortable lead -- he barely looks sweaty when he hops off the bike.

He towels off, finds Lathe in the crowd -- raises a smug eyebrow at her. *Told you so.*

Her mouth twists -- *We'll see.* She looks away, eyes shielded by dark glasses -- but looks like she's suppressing fury.

EXT. COL DU GALIBIER - ANOTHER MOUNTAIN STAGE - DAY

Another climb, classically French alpine -- silver lakes; icy streams tumble through meadows; lupin bejewels the valley.

Taylor's still climbing strong. He gasses up, puts on speed just because he can --

COACH (O.S.)
(on radio)
Jesus, Mace, planning on saving anything for the rest of the Tour?

TAYLOR
Pinky swear, Coach, I'm not doing anything reckless.

He grins and looks back again. Malcolm is still fixed squarely in the center of the peloton. *Good.*

EXT. COL DU TOURMALET - ANOTHER MOUNTAIN STAGE - DAY

Another iconic Tour climb. A high-altitude stage -- through chalet towns, past green peaks marbled with veins of snow. Ski lifts crisscross above the course.

Taylor's still leading -- but the last blood bag has lost some oomph. His breathing harder than the last two climbs, muscles burning a bit more.

Something OMINOUS about the glacier that looms darkly in the distance... a dark feeling suddenly strikes Taylor.

And when he looks back -- there he is -- MALCOLM. Right on his tail. A CHILL shoots up Taylor's spine.

He and Malcolm lock eyes -- and Malcolm smiles. Easily, like this is nothing.

A moment between them -- the final pitch of the climb. Malcolm raises his eyebrows -- beat --

BAM. They're off in the exact same instant, rocketing up the steepest part of the climb -- legs CHURNING --

They DROP the peloton -- Duffy clings on for a few hot seconds but then he drops off, too -- they're too fast.

Taylor races with all his might. But Malcolm doesn't give him an inch.

They CREST THE SUMMIT --

THERE'S THE FINISH LINE --

BANG! The finishing gun fires. They cross at what seems, to the naked eye, like the exact same time...

Malcolm sucks in air, grinning hugely -- *that was fun, huh?*

Taylor's eyes go to the electronic results display.

The kid edged him out by a tenth of a second.

He looks back to a still-grinning Malcolm.

MALCOLM

Nice break.

TAYLOR

(beat, swallows pride)

You too.

They shake hands. But then Taylor's eyes go to Malcolm's arm, where he clocks unmistakable TRACK MARKS --

FRESH INJECTION SITES.

Taylor's smile freezes into a rictus. The whole world tilts.

He looks up in to the stands -- there's Lathe, looking down on both of them, eyes still unreadable behind her shades.

And nearby... Taylor also spots BANKS, who's copying down his and Malcolm's times into his binder.

Taylor's mind SPINS...

INT. ALPINE HOTEL - EVENING

An alpine chalet -- pinewood, gabled ceilings, stone fireplaces. Vast glass windows overlook the ragged moonlit peaks that surround the valley like broken teeth.

Taylor loiters in the lobby, nursing a hot cocoa. His leg judders -- he's antsy.

He glances up when Malcolm, Duffy, Lennox, and a few other riders amble downstairs --

DUFFY

Yo, Mace, you wanna come?

LENNOX

We're grabbing dinner next door --
one more bite of team food and I'll
yak on the bike.

DUFFY

(slaps Malcolm's back)
Besides, we're celebrating!
(catches himself)
The team being in the lead, of
course. And, come on, Mr. Yellow
Jersey, you can celebrate... still
leading overall.

Taylor forces a smile --

TAYLOR

I'm gonna grab room service and
call it a night... maybe catch some
French soap operas. I hear they
allow nudity on TV here...

MALCOLM
(in earnest)
Oh, cool...

DUFFY
Suit yourself.

The rest of the riders depart.

Taylor waits for a beat, then beelines to the MAID KIOSK.

A single French maid -- not the type they sell kinky Halloween costumes for, but a fat little old woman with a goiter -- sits in the kiosk, folding towels.

TAYLOR
'Scuse me. You have a master key
for all the rooms, right?

MAID
(barely understood)
Oh -- *Je suis désolé, monsieur* -- I
am sorry, is not possible --

Taylor pulls out a thick stack of FRANCS.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Taylor holds the master key outside MALCOLM'S ROOM. He looks over his shoulder -- he's alone. Then turns the key --

INT. MALCOLM'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Taylor enters the dark room. Doesn't dare turn on the light.

In the dim light that slants through the windows, Taylor roots through Malcolm's things. Silently, carefully, taking pains to replace everything exactly as it was.

Checks all the drawers -- nothing.

Slides a hand beneath the mattress -- zilch.

Nightstand -- nope.

He opens the mini-fridge, inspects every item -- no hidden compartments, no coke bottles full of EPO vials. All normal.

He enters the

BATHROOM

And checks the toilet tank. Below the sink. Every drawer. Becoming more desperate, scrambling -- he checks the tiles to see if any are loose. But no -- nothing.

But then --

The CLICK of a key in the lock --

Malcolm's back.

Taylor FLATTENS himself down in the tub.

We stay with him as the LIGHT goes on in the bedroom. Sounds of Malcolm rooting around...

MALCOLM (O.S.)
Motherfucker, where are you...

Oh, shit.

The LIGHT goes on in the bathroom. Taylor can't breathe.

Malcolm sees his WALLET, forgotten on the counter --

MALCOLM (CONT'D)
Oh, thank fuck.

He pockets it. Checks his teeth in the mirror --

Taylor holds his breath and freezes every muscle. Long, tense beat. Then...

DUFFY (O.S.)
(from hallway)
Hurry up, kid, I'm gonna eat the
fucking crown moulding if you don't
move your ass.

Malcolm takes one last look in the mirror -- then flicks off the light and EXITS, locking the door behind him.

Taylor exhales in a gasping torrent. *Holy fucking shit.* The paranoia is becoming fucking all-consuming.

He rises from the tub. Finishes rummaging -- in the very last drawer... his eyes light up. PAYDIRT.

Taylor withdraws a small glass vial. It looks just like Lathe's EPO vials.

His eyes sparkle. He knew it, he fucking knew it...

He twists the vial -- it's labeled INSULIN. But Taylor rolls his eyes as he pockets it --

TAYLOR
Oldest trick in the fucking book.

INT. HOTEL - CONCIERGE DESK - NIGHT

Taylor approaches the concierge, a little old man in his 70s.

TAYLOR
Excuse me. English?
(the man nods)
Can you tell me which room is Mr.
Alain Banks', please?

INT. HALLWAY - OUTSIDE BANKS' ROOM - LATER

Taylor finishes scribbling a NOTE. Slips the note, along with Malcolm's vial, into an envelope.

Slides it under Banks' door.

EXT. ALPINE HOTEL - NIGHT

Lathe, alone, smokes a cigarette next to the alpine river behind the hotel -- the red-tipped glow and the moonlight off the water breaking the dark.

Each time she smokes, her eyes glow RED -- they gleam like the Devil's. She's lost in thought.

One last drag. She jettisons the cigarette.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Lathe strides into the hotel -- at the exact same time Taylor is returning from his escapades and heading back to his room.

LATHE
I need you. Come.

Taylor, confused, falls into step, follows her.

INT. LATHE'S ROOM - NIGHT

They stand before one another. Lathe has a nicer suite than Taylor's -- her massive windows overlook the black river below. Moonlight drapes eerie light over the room.

Lathe lights another cigarette.

LATHE
The last bag is bad.

Taylor blinks. Beat.

TAYLOR
By "bad" you mean...

LATHE
I mean you can't do it. It was delivered today. One look and I knew it -- black. Wrong. I called, and it turns out the refrigeration facility lost their power last week. The bag overheated.

TAYLOR
So -- so what, we cool it down again, we --

LATHE
You cannot do this bag. It's poison. Dead blood -- the essence of a corpse.

Taylor strides toward her, hot with betrayal --

TAYLOR
You're lying.

LATHE
I'm not.

TAYLOR
You're punishing me. Because I did the other one early. Because I didn't follow your precious script.

Beat. Lathe gives him nothing.

He begins upturning her room, methodically at first, then more frantically -- he yanks drawers from the wardrobe, roots through her trash, tears through her closet in a frenzy.

Lathe watches with indifferent eyes.

Taylor's search turns up nothing --

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Where is it?!

LATHE
(coolly)
I told you. I threw it away.

Beat.

Taylor throws a FIST through the drywall.

Lathe doesn't even blink --

LATHE (CONT'D)
Finished?

Taylor storms out, knuckles bleeding.

Lathe watches him go, eyes cold.

EXT. BEHIND THE HOTEL - NIGHT

A DUMPSTER lurks in the shadows behind the hotel. The stream
BABBLER -- the sounds of trash shifting within the dumpster --

Taylor roots through the garbage, sifting through fistfuls of
glass and cardboard. It's hard to see in the moonlight -- he
CUTS his hand on a broken bottle.

TAYLOR
Fuck!

Blood sluices down his arm.

But -- THERE --

He nearly cries, he's so relieved.

He pulls his DISCARDED BLOOD BAG free from the trash.

INT. ALPINE HOTEL - TAYLOR'S ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Back in his room, Taylor places the blood bag on his rickety
little dining table. Stares at it.

It is darker than usual. Foreboding and BLACK.

He stares at it for a long beat, weighing his chances. Then --

Snatches it. Deftly hooks up the IV, the tubing -- jams the
needle into his arm and infuses the tainted bag anyway.

He sighs like a junkie as the blood flows into him. Looks out
over the black river that gleams darkly beneath the sick
yellow moon.

INT. ALPINE HOTEL - TAYLOR'S ROOM - MORNING

ALARM -- harsh, grating, urgent.

Eyes open. Taylor wakes.

He looks pale. Sick. Eyes wreathed in shadows.

He stands, shakily -- immediately lightheaded. He staggers into the bathroom, holding the wall for support.

Groggily, he reaches the toilet. Unzips. Pisses.

He looks down into the bowl and staggers back, nearly YELLS --

He's peeing BLACK.

Lathe wasn't bluffing -- that was a BAD BAG. He's peeing out liters of DEAD BLOOD.

He feels sick.

He pulls in the ROOM SERVICE BREAKFAST from outside his door.

Forces it down.

VOMITS into the trash.

Returns to the breakfast, sits, finishes. Manages to keep down what remains.

He looks half-dead. Sickly sweat prickling his forehead, eyes barely able to focus.

But he begins suiting up for today's stage.

EXT. L'ALPE D'HUEZ - DAY

PISSING RAIN. The riders are in all place. Taylor looks pale and nauseous -- a vein throbs in his neck.

BRITISH COMMENTATOR (O.S.)

Miserable weather here in the 20th and penultimate stage of the Tour de France, heading into the Alpes D'Huez -- 21 brutal switchbacks. The most ravenous fans of the race, the nastiest of the climbs. Sure to be a dramatic day as the riders tackle a stage that has quite literally sent men to their deaths.

The RACE STARTER ascends the stairs, raises the GUN -- BANG!
The climb begins.

Taylor falters from the beginning -- it's an effort just to turn the pedals. The rain spits down.

The climb pitches UP -- hitting a monstrous 10% grade almost immediately.

Taylor's pale, shaky, weak. His tongue lolls from his open mouth -- he blinks hard, fighting to stay conscious.

Duffy eyes him with concern --

DUFFY
Mace? Okay, bud?

Taylor can't even answer. He starts to fall behind --

COACH (O.S.)
(on radio)
Pull him! Pull Mace, do not let him
get dropped!!

Duffy and Mace place themselves before Taylor, start hauling... it's no use. Taylor's holding the whole team back.

MALCOLM
...I'm gonna go.

TAYLOR
(just barely manages)
No...

But Duffy looks from Malcolm to Taylor, eyes hard -- then nods at Malcolm.

DUFFY
We can't lose the overall. Do it.

And Malcolm jets off. Easily rejoins the leaders at the front of the peloton.

Meanwhile, Taylor drops further and further back... the faces of the fans distorting, aggressive, terrifying to him.

The climb becomes UNFATHOMABLY STEEP.

DUFFY (CONT'D)
Taylor, man -- come on, give me
something --

But Taylor can't respond.

Duffy shakes his head, cuts his losses -- and abandons Taylor, shooting off to catch Malcolm.

Taylor VOMITS, spewing green bile and the remnants of his breakfast down the front of his kit.

He glances at the rider beside him -- Taylor jolts. It's DUNCAN. Duncan grins nastily, reaches out as if to YANK Taylor from the bike --

Taylor accelerates, spooked. Looks back -- no Duncan. Just a rider from Team Swiss, giving Taylor an odd look.

Taylor looks back ahead, sees Malcolm in the distance -- Taylor stands, tries to ATTACK -- wobbles and CRASHES.

He goes down HARD -- a nasty, sickening crash. GASHES open in his forearms and legs.

Several riders go down behind him -- a horrifying pile-up.

But Taylor waves off the help of fans, of soigneurs on vespas -- gets back on his bike and keeps riding.

The Yellow Jersey covered in blood and bile. Taylor's eyes the eyes of a madman as he thrashes his body up the climb --

Agony building, veins threading across his neck, he channels his rage into a SCREAM that melts into --

PRE-LAP -- CHEERING --

EXT. L'ALPE D'HUEZ FINISH LINE - LATER

The fans go WILD as Malcolm crosses the finish line.

LATER:

Taylor finally finishes to weak cheers from spectators who've long since seen the leaders come through.

Several SOIGNEURS rush forward, take Taylor's bike -- he nearly collapses into their arms.

He looks up at the leaderboard -- his face falls.

He's fallen in the overall category to SECOND PLACE.

Right behind Malcolm.

In the crowd --

Banks watches Taylor closely. He finds himself beside Lathe once again, and glances between her and Taylor.

BANKS
(re: Taylor's condition)
Something the team doctor should be
worried about?

Lathe glances down at Banks --

LATHE
I'll check him later this evening.
I have other riders to attend to.

She's not bantering with him -- seems distracted, cagey.
Banks notices. Tentatively probes --

BANKS
But this one is your star, no?
Seems he should get priority...

LATHE
I know how to do my job, Mr. Banks.

She turns to go. Banks' cogs whirr -- something's off.
Emboldened by how out of her element she seems, he calls --

BANKS
I would be amazed if you let this
win slip through your fingers...

Lathe turns around, plasters a gorgeous smile on her face --

LATHE
Through my fingers? It's not my
race, Mr. Banks. I'm just the
doctor.
(re: Taylor)
It's his race.

But as she goes, she takes one last glance back at Taylor.
Her jaw twitches.

Banks watches her go, then looks back at Taylor. Off his
look...

INT. TAYLOR'S ROOM - ANOTHER HOTEL - NIGHT

Taylor lies in his hotel bed, flanked by the Coach and
several soigneurs. The soigneurs finish serving Taylor a meal
-- one of them unhooks a blood pressure monitor from his arm.

The Coach is shaking his head --

COACH

Of all the fucking luck -- food poisoning. On the second-to-last day of the Tour.

TAYLOR

I shoulda been more careful -- shouldn't've trusted seabass at an alpine hotel....

COACH

Long as you're okay for tomorrow.

TAYLOR

I'd die before losing this Tour.

COACH

Good thing we've got that kid, huh?

TAYLOR

(beat)

Yeah. Good thing.

Suddenly -- and OUTBURST from the hall -- a woman sobbing, hysterical. Through the ajar door, we see a FEMALE SOIGNEUR, in tears, throw herself into another soigneur's arms --

FEMALE SOIGNEUR

(muffled)

There were bedsheets in his cell --

TAYLOR

(to Coach)

What -- ?

The Coach doesn't answer -- seems unsurprised, but grim -- doesn't answer. Waves for the other soigneurs to exit.

Coach turns back to Taylor before he leaves, studies him for a beat --

COACH

Head down, ride hard.

TAYLOR

Head down, ride hard.

Coach exits.

Beat. Taylor, confused, turns on the television. Flicks through channels -- finds one --

NEWS ANNOUNCER

-- the suicide of Greg Duncan,
after being found dead in his cell.
Duncan recently tested positive for
testosterone. Widely expected to
win this year's Tour, Duncan...

The sound fades out -- on Taylor as he watches, processing
Duncan's suicide. He's pale, haunted-looking.

Taylor catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror -- he looks
awful. He lifts a hand -- it QUIVERS.

Taylor flings off the covers.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Taylor KNOCKS on Lathe's door.

She opens it, face stony. Glances around to make sure no one
else is in the hallway, then --

LATHE

I'm through helping you.

TAYLOR

Please --

LATHE

You ignored my warnings --

TAYLOR

I'm begging you. The finish is
tomorrow -- I can't lose everything
--

LATHE

(venomous)

Too fucking bad.

She goes to close the door. He puts his foot in the jamb --

TAYLOR

Please. Something.

LATHE

It's too risky. The UCI is sniffing
around, that little bat has been
watching you -- and after today,
they know something's wrong.

TAYLOR
They bought the food poisoning
story --

LATHE
The press might have, but Banks has
seen this before. He has your
scent. You will be tested tomorrow.

TAYLOR
I have to win.

LATHE
This moment has been in the making
since you decided to take this race
into your own hands, you arrogant
child -- it's over. You lost.

Taylor SNAPS -- he rushes her, shoving her into her room and
SLAMMING the door behind him.

He throws a forearm against her neck, PINS her to the wall.

TAYLOR
I know you have something, you
bitch. Give me SOMETHING --

Lathe GASPS for breath -- SCRATCHES his arms, drawing long
stripes of BLOOD. But Taylor holds her tight --

LATHE
(gasping)
There's nothing left --

TAYLOR
(pressing harder)
LIAR --

Lathe KNEES him in the groin. He goes down briefly -- she
scrambles away -- but he GRABS her ankles, drags her back.

She KICKS him in the face, briefly struggles free -- but no --
he's on top of her --

He straddles her, holding her down. One hand over her mouth,
the other pinning her wrists.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Give it to me, you cunt, you snake--

Lathe starts laughing, madly, muffled through Taylor's
fingers -- infuriating Taylor even more.

He SQUEEZES her jaw harder -- she BITES his hand, drawing a hard crescent of blood -- then SPITS in his face, a thick gob of hot, bloody saliva.

Still pinned, she looks up at him with taunting eyes --

LATHE

Stupid little puppet. You're
nothing without me. Nothing. If
you'd only listened... I offered
you the world...

He stands, DRAGS her up -- fist around her throat.

And for a moment, Lathe's eyes flash with genuine FEAR --
like she's looking her own death in the face --

And Taylor KISSES her.

Not a kiss of passion. A kiss of violation. A kiss that
mirrors the moment Lathe stuck her needle in his arm without
his consent.

An unnerving, long, violent kiss -- his tongue down her
throat like a live python.

He throws her aside.

Then grabs her MEDICAL BAG.

TAYLOR

It's you who's nothing. Everything
we did was thanks to me.
(and)
If I see you after tomorrow, it's
you who'll be in a nameless grave.

He exits. Lathe watches him go, recovering, the fear in her
eyes icing over into impassivity once again.

She picks herself up. Wipes a smudge of blood from her mouth.

INT. TAYLOR'S ROOM - NIGHT

He opens Lathe's medical bag. Roots through it - finds
TESTOSTERONE, slams a fistful.

Sifts through the bottles of pills, shoveling down various
drugs indiscriminately. He's manic.

Catches his breath. Stashes the bag under his bed.

INT. TAYLOR'S ROOM - MORNING

Taylor wakes. Eyes bloodshot.

He stands. Checks his mirror. Movements jittery -- he looks energetic, but the way a JUNKIE looks energetic.

THE WRONG KIND OF ADRENALINE.

He begins dressing --

KNOCK KNOCK.

He freezes.

Beat.

KNOCK KNOCK.

BANKS (O.S.)
Mr. Mace. UCI.

The air around him seems to freeze. Taylor goes to the mirror. Smooths his hair, arranges his face into a nonchalant expression.

He answers the door.

Banks stands outside his door, holding his clipboard and sample kit. He smiles placidly and holds out a sample cup.

BANKS (CONT'D)
You are, at this point, familiar
with our nice little drill.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Taylor unzips.

BANKS
I was sorry to see your
disappointing finish yesterday. You
are feeling better?

Taylor musters a nod.

BANKS (CONT'D)
Have the French offered you their
folk cures yet? My wife's favorite
one involves shots of absinthe --
perhaps save that for after today's
stage, though.

The sound of Taylor's PISS hitting the sample cup.

On Taylor -- Banks' voice just washes over him. He didn't even bother with the grey powder this time -- no time.

He finishes. Hesitates -- takes his time screwing the cap on.

BANKS (CONT'D)

(gently urging)

I apologize again for these indignities. But I appreciate the cooperation. Your whole team, actually. The cooperation has been remarkable.

TAYLOR

How do you mean?

Banks watches Taylor closely as he speaks --

BANKS

One of your teammates slipped me an anonymous tip that one of your other riders was doing PEDs.

TAYLOR

(ears perk up)

Really, now?

(can't resist)

And... is it true?

BANKS

It was the strangest thing. A little vial of insulin. But dopers, they always relabel their drugs, so I tested it. Do you know what it turned out to be?

TAYLOR

(can barely contain himself)

What?

BANKS

Insulin.

Taylor's guts sink.

BANKS (CONT'D)

Well-intentioned, or perhaps a prank, but ultimately a waste of time.

Beat. Taylor holds the cup of urine like it weighs a thousand pounds. Banks clears his throat -- Taylor hands it over.

BANKS (CONT'D)

Again, I must thank you for making
this painless.

(and, kindly)

I hope today you -- what is your
American expression? -- "break your
leg."

Beat. Then Banks tips his cap and goes.

Taylor watches him walk, as if in slow motion, to the door -- the urine cup, full of Taylor's impending condemnation, sloshes in his fist.

Banks doesn't see Taylor reach for the SCISSORS on the desk...

A terrible beat. Then --

Taylor STABS Banks in the back. BLOOD SPURTS and immediately soaks his shirt.

Taylor stabs him AGAIN. And AGAIN.

BANKS SCREAMS A TERRIBLE SCREAM --

Taylor stabs him in the throat, silencing him. The scream is squashed into a sickly gurgle -- the open flap in Banks' throat sprays blood with each failed breath.

Taylor stabs over and over until the man is dead. A low, foamy red burble, and Banks is no more.

Beat.

Taylor catches his breath.

His whole body is soaked a gleaming RED.

Gently, his hands covered in blood, he reaches out and plucks the sample cup of his urine from the corpse's fingers.

Calmly walks over to the sink and pours it down the drain.

Gets in the shower, rinses off the blood.

Goes back, looks at the body -- *What to do?*

He pulls the sheets off the bed. Wraps the corpse in it. Shoves the corpse into the closet as best he can -- along with his own bloody clothes and the scissors.

EXT. STARTING LINE - FINAL STAGE - OUTSKIRTS OF PARIS - DAY

A festival atmosphere -- the teams huddled at the starting line. As is tradition, bottles of CHAMPAGNE are passed between the leaders.

Team Inverness is raucous, celebratory. A stark contrast to Taylor, who's twitchy and moves as though under a dark cloud.

Duffy pops another bottle, sprays Malcolm and Taylor --

DUFFY

A French baptism for our leaders --
you lucky fucking bastards, I'm so
jealous I don't know whether to
kiss you or kill you --

Malcolm laughs, grabs the bottle and takes a vigorous glug --

MALCOLM

(playful)

Watch out, Taylor, maybe this is my
Popeye spinach --

He grins at Taylor -- but Taylor returns it with a hollow, dark look. The grin falters on Malcolm's face -- he sees something that spooks him. Disturbed, Malcolm backs off.

DUFFY

(to Taylor excited)

You ready, man? This is it. Last
stage.

Taylor's distracted by a pair of POLICE moving through the crowd nearby -- black mirrored shades obscuring their eyes. Taylor turns toward Duffy with grim, hollow eyes --

TAYLOR

There's no tomorrow.

Duffy gives him an odd look. Worried. Something's wrong.

The starter climbs the stairs, gun in hand. Announcers boom over the PA in French --

On Taylor -- everything seems to move in a MUFFLED BLUR. Sounds are stifled -- he has trouble focusing. Like drowning in a dream...

Taylor shakes his head, trying to focus -- trying to wave the intrusive thoughts away...

His HEARTBEAT throbs in his ears -- THRUM, THRUM... THRUM, THRUM... a slow hammer, loud enough to drive him MAD.

He finds Lathe in the crowd. She stares at him with disdain, a disappointed God looking down from Olympus.

THRUM... THRUM... THRUM... BANG!

The starting gun.

Everything NARROWS and SHARPENS INTO FOCUS.

And Taylor's programming kicks in and he does what he does best -- he rides.

The peloton rides harder than seems possible -- finally the end is in sight. No tomorrow.

The Eiffel Tour perched like a cake decoration in the distance...

Fans line the girders -- cheering, roaring, ringing cowbells.

The riders PICK UP SPEED.

They round a corner -- now in Paris proper. Taylor's jaw gritted like marble -- his legs churn, riding the crest of the peloton like a surfer riding a wave.

And Malcolm's right on his tail.

They race through the streets of Paris, flashing past landmarks, each swarming with fans --

- The Eiffel Tour
- The Louvre
- The Jardins de Tuileries

The wheels of the bikes FLASH in the sun --

Taylor's mind FLASHES to the chrome gleam of the SCISSORS stabbing the yielding flesh of Banks' throat.

He shakes his head -- pedals harder --

Taylor's pedals scream, his gears gnash at each others' teeth, his chain shrieks as it whizzes around the drive train. The peloton is viper-fast, bullet-fast -- deadly fast.

They whip around another corner -- driving deeper and deeper into the heart of Paris.

Fans are packed even more densely here -- they SCREAM, INCHES FROM TAYLOR'S FACE --

Another FLASH: the SCREAMING, contorted face of Banks.

Taylor shakes the image away, keeps riding.

Fans wave COWBELLS and FLAGS -- a young woman screams his name, waving a TEAM INVERNESS FLAG in his face --

Another FLASH: Taylor sees her as holding a pair of BLOODY SCISSORS.

He SWERVES to avoid her, wobbling on the bike -- the rider next to him CRASHES, taking ten other riders down with him in a BLOODY PILE-UP.

Taylor escapes unscathed -- keeps riding, shaken.

Fans run alongside him -- one passes him a water bottle -- he takes it, gratefully, takes a swig -- then IMMEDIATELY SPITS OUT RED FLUID. He looks at the bottle -- it's full of blood.

Fans DOUSE HIM WITH WATER BOTTLES TO COOL HIM DOWN -- but in Taylor's eye, they're all filled with BLOOD, too.

It happens again -- more fans drenching him in thick, hot BLOOD until the YELLOW JERSEY IS SOAKED RED.

For all this, though -- he's still in the front of the pack.

The peloton rounds the final corner.

They SCREAM along the Champs Elysee, racing toward the Arc de Triomphe.

Taylor and Malcolm are neck and neck. Taylor looks over at Malcolm -- Malcolm meets his gaze with concern -- Taylor's eyes look feral.

MALCOLM

Mace? Alright?

Taylor's voice sounds barely human --

TAYLOR

Fuck you -- cheater. It's my race.
It's my fucking race --

He's cracking. His face twisted in pain and suffering -- demonic, inhuman.

Malcolm recoils. His eyes flash with something like FEAR --

Taylor grins, madly. *Good.*

But then Malcolm's eyes change. He throws another glance over at Taylor as he rides. Looks at the Arc. Consideration -- then -- decision.

Taylor realizes what he's about to do a second before he does it --

MALCOLM BREAKS AWAY.

Taylor ROARS -- and gives chase.

Two sprinters -- they could be connected by a string, it's that close. THE TWO TITANS OF THE RACE, DUKING IT OUT.

They're each in a hard tuck over the handlebars, riding faster and more furiously than we've seen all race -- emptying the tanks. NO TOMORROW.

The fans are screaming their throats raw -- the kind of thrilling finish they never could have predicted.

From the RADIOS that line the course, we flash past the sounds of commentators of all languages -- French, English, Spanish, Dutch, Catalan -- all jabbering excitedly. The only words we make out over and over -- Mace. Malcolm. Mace.

IN THE STANDS

LATHE stares at the jumbotron, watching Malcolm and Mace intently, her whole attention on this moment -- her lips moving as if in silent prayer.

Like a ghost materializing, the Motorcyclist is suddenly beside her. He passes, bending to her ear and whispering something. Her face goes stony. The Motorcyclist melts back into the crowd.

IN THE CROWD

A group of French spectators around a radio -- the ANNOUNCER's voice shifts from excited, to confused, to grave -- we make out the words ALAIN BANKS and MORT and MACE.

BRITISH COMMENTATOR (O.S.)
...The body of Alain Banks, found
in Taylor Mace's room...

News of Banks' murder ripples through the crowd -- we see it pass like a wave of energy through the spectators -- the mood SHIFTS --

And still the racers ride on.

BACK ON THE COURSE

Taylor and Malcolm have rounded the corner into the final straightaway. Only Taylor and Malcolm -- the rest of the pack has fallen away.

On Taylor -- EVERYTHING GOES DEAD QUIET.

He can't even hear his own heartbeat. All he sees is the finish line... just like the poster in his room back home.

The meters whizzing by as they hurtle toward it...

Lathe watches -- doesn't breathe --

And...

Malcolm throws one last look at Taylor... AND PUTS ON ONE FINAL BURST OF SPEED.

He has one last effort to give.

But Taylor doesn't.

Taylor pushes with all his might -- but nothing. No. He's hit his wall.

As Malcolm pulls forward, Taylor reaches out -- GRABS THE YELLOW JERSEY IN HIS FIST, tries to YANK MALCOLM DOWN --

But the Yellow Jersey slips through his fingers.

Malcolm pulls away.

And all Taylor can do is watch as...

MALCOLM CROSSES THE LINE FIRST.

BOOM -- The SOUND explodes back into Taylor's ears with a DEAFENING ROAR -- THE CROWD IS AN EARTHQUAKE, A JET ENGINE, LOUDER THAN TEN MILLION MOTORCYCLES.

It's over.

Malcolm won.

Taylor glides over the finish line. Not even pedaling anymore. Frozen beat.

Through the crowd and the chaos -- the glittering CONFETTI that falls like torrential rain, the CHAMPAGNE that arcs through the air -- Taylor sees SEVERAL INTERPOL OFFICERS.

Blue and white lights flashing ominously behind them.

One catches sight of him and begins striding toward him, taking the cuffs off her belt.

Lathe watches him.

Through the crowd, DONALD pushes his way to the barrier -- tears in his eyes -- voice breaking in agony --

DONALD

What did you do? Taylor -- What did you do!?

But Taylor can't answer, barely registers his dad at all --

The rest of the peloton catches up and comes screaming across the finish line around him. Taylor stays frozen still as they shoot past him like a volley of arrows.

The INTERPOL OFFICERS have reached Taylor now.

INTERPOL OFFICER

Mr. Mace. You are under arrest for the murder of...

The sound fades out as Taylor goes numb.

His eyes drift from the officers to the crowd -- where the Motorcyclist watches from behind that mirrored helmet, hulking like Death itself.

On the podium, Malcolm is swaddled in the Yellow Jersey. He's handed the TROPHY and kissed on each cheek by podium girls. He frowns as he sees Taylor, down below, being arrested. But plasters a smile back on for the cameras...

Malcolm's eyes meet Lathe's. Long beat as she holds his gaze, looking at him the way a cat might look at a cockroach. Her mouth twitches.

ON TAYLOR: He's dragged away.

His eyes never leave the BROKEN FINISH LINE.

TAYLOR'S POV as he's hauled to the waiting Interpol cruiser -- the finish line being pulled farther and farther out of reach as we --

SMASH TO BLACK.