

STUD

Written by

Casiano R. Hamer

INT. BASKETBALL GYM-NIGHT

OVER BLACK:

COACH HILL

Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five,
four, three, two, one..

COACH HILL (56), clears his raspy throat and adjusts his compression shirt over his beer belly.

AARON's(16) veiny hands are propping his body into a flat plank. His forearms stretch against his throbbing muscles as his lean structure reaches its limit. His teeth lock against his gold crucifix medallion that extends from a gold chain around his neck. His face is contorted to a tight grimace and his eyes are red from sweat slipping through the corner of his eyelids. Aaron looks around to his teammates. Like him they are all wearing mesh navy shorts and grey cotton t-shirts that read, "Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard", on their backs. Each of them are grimacing just as much. Some breathe through their teeth as they try to release the pain.

Aaron's teeth tighten as he lifts one of his forearms from the floor. He can see his skin become red and raw with deep imprints of the hardwood floor.

COACH HILL

One and three-quarta's.

The whole room grunts in unison.

COACH HILL

One and a half.

Coach Hill spots a slacking teammate in the far corner of the court. His hips are slightly elevated, taking the pressure off his core.

COACH HILL

Keep ya' ass down Danny! One and one-
fourth...

Coach Hill finally blows his whistle and all the teammates drop to the floor.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL TRACK-MORNING

Aaron is pacing himself around a bend and bracing himself for the 100 meter straight away. His cadence quickens and his

arms begin to pump harder. His FATHER (43) follows him with his eyes while holding up his stop watch.

FATHER

High knees! High knees! Let's get it!

Aaron's cheeks inflate and deflate as he searches for more oxygen. He finally lifts his knees higher and plows through the finish line. The father clicks his stop watch and begins to clap.

FATHER

That's what I'm talkin' about! Finish strong! Let's fuckin' go!

He pumps his chest and walks over to him. He notices that he is resting his hands on his knees.

FATHER

Hey! Head up, head up!

Aaron quickly fixes his posture. His father approaches him and rubs in his wool hat.

FATHER

You think your hot shit, huh?

He begins to giggle a bit and Aaron begins to giggle as well.

INT. BASKETBALL GYM-NIGHT

Aaron is side by side with a tall, slim DERON (16) running from baseline to baseline. The other teammates along with Coach Hill watch from the sideline. They chant in an ominous roar. As they approach each baseline they nearly nudge each other over to touch it. Deron begins to dig in deeper for their last baseline touch.

DERON

You ain't got me! You ain't me!

Aaron pumps his arms harder and narrows the gap.

DERON

Come get me bitch!

Deron elongates his stride and lifts his knees higher. He bows his head as he crosses the base line first and slams into the padded wall. Aaron slams into the padded wall behind him.

DERON

(Short of breath)

What! What! What I say?

Deron presses his chest against Aaron's and stares him down until he breaks into a wide smile. They bump fists and he jogs past him towards the other teammates that are headed to the locker room. Aaron bends over to rest his hands on his knees and Coach Hill walks up from behind him and taps his bottom. He continues to the locker room without looking at him.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD-DAY

Aaron's father tosses him baseballs over home plate. Aaron responds to each ball, bashing the barrel of his bat against them and sending them flying into the outfield. His swings are firm and are followed by grunts. Each hit leaves a sharp ring from the aluminum bat.

FATHER

Too much top spin. Stop gettin' under
the ball. Swing through the ball!
Swing through it, damnit!

The trajectory of each ball begin to flatten and each ball travels a bit further than the last as they roll softly in the thick grass.

FATHER

There we go pop 'dem hips!

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD-AFTERNOON

Aaron is in line for outfield drills. He watches Coach Hill from a far toss a ball to himself and stroke soaring line drives with a long wood bat. Aaron is up, he widens his stance and pops his glove with his fist. Coach Hill strokes a shallow pop fly and Aaron digs his feet into the ground and charges after it like a loose hound. He makes a savory shoelace catch and smiles as he tosses the ball back to him. His teammates hoot and holler.

COACH HILL

Again!

Aaron lines up, widens his stance, and pops his glove again. Coach Hill strokes an even softer pop fly and Aaron charges in even harder. He dives flat out forward, his hat flies off, and the ball just grazes the tip of his glove.

COACH HILL
That's what I thought.

He tosses another ball and strokes a liner to the next teammate in line.

INT. HATCHBACK- DRIVEWAY DAY

Aaron stuffs his bat bag and a box of Gatorade in the back row of the hatchback. He joins his father, wearing a hoodie that reads, "Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard," in the passenger seat and notices him staring at him.

FATHER
You ready? Game day baby let's get it!
Woooo!

Aaron begins to smile as his father rips the car into drive and peels out into the street.

INT. HATCHBACK-HIGHWAY

Aaron's father inserts a CD with a scribbled marker inscription. A rampage of hardcore hip hop buzzes through the jittering speakers. As he approaches the freeway ramp he rolls his window down a crack and slides a brown stick clipped by a stained plastic mouth piece in between his furry lips.

Aaron watches his father light it with one hand while steering with the other. He follows the ashes tumble down his knuckles and into the open creases of his shiny platinum state championship rings.

As the father reaches the peak of the on ramp he peels into the left lane and begins to bob his head to the hazy bass heavy music. He blows a cumulus cloud and watches the Trinidadian flag that dangles from the rear view mirror disappear in smoke. He sees Aaron's reflection and looks over only to see him rub his arms and quietly watch the colossal skyline slowly pan by his window. He turns down the blasting music.

FATHER
You look 'bout ready to shit ya'
pants.

He gets Aaron's attention. He blows another cloud out of the window crack.

FATHER

You the fastest, ain't you?

Aaron nods.

FATHER

The strongest, ain't you?

Aaron nods.

FATHER

The smartest, ain't you?

Aaron nods again.

FATHER

Then show 'em.

He bounces his palm against his chest while balancing the cigarillo in between his fingers.

Show 'em that stud. Let 'em know what happens when they play Deron over you...Out here gettin' punked by a Sophomore!

He looks at Aaron and watches his head lean against the window. He sneaks his hand towards the volume knob, spins it and let's the bass roar louder. He begins to bob his head more aggressively as he continuously shoves Aaron, moving him to the music. A smile consumes Aaron's face.

INT. HATCHBACK-BASEBALL COMPLEX PARKING LOT

Aaron's father pulls the e-brake and turns off the radio. He reaches towards Aaron and pulls out a grocery bag with two bottles of Gatorade and a banana from behind his seat and hands them to Aaron.

FATHER

Eat the banana now and get you some Trini strength.

He chuckles softly as Aaron shakes his head and begins to peel the banana.

FATHER

Leave one of those for after the game.
OK?

Aaron nods and takes a bite and chews as it rolls in his

cheek. He looks at his father and finds him staring at him with a slight smile. He stops chewing and looks at his father.

FATHER

Go on. You gon' need the potassium for 'dem little guns in there.

He nudges one of Aaron's biceps. They share a brief moment of laughter. Aaron finishes the banana and his father places his hand on his back.

FATHER

Alright, don't worry about the peel, leave it in the bag.

He waits for him to put the peel in the bag and he pulls Aaron even closer and their heads reach over the middle compartment that separates the two front seats. They remove their hats and press their foreheads together. Aaron's father places his had on the back of Aaron's neck.

FATHER

Father God we pray that you protect Aaron out there on the diamond. That you keep him healthy and strong. We pray you bless him with a good performance, that he leaves everything out there on the field and puts his heart and his faith in you Lord. In Jesus name we pray...

He pauses; waiting for a response.

AARON

Amen.

Aaron's father separates with energy. He reveals a big smile on his face as he slides his cap tightly on his head.

FATHER

Let's fuckin' go baby!

He claps his hands as he exits the car.

EXT. BASEBALL COMPLEX-NIGHT

Deron and Aaron warm up in the lawn along the parking lot. Each of them throw the ball harder than the last until Deron fires a stinger that lands right into the unpadded palm of

Aaron's mit. Aaron winces in pain and throws his mit at Deron. Deron dodges the glove and laughs.

INT. PUBLIC BATHROOM

Aaron looks into the mirror in between illegible graffiti and carefully applies a stripe of eye black under each eye lid. He looks into the mirror again for several minutes.

MONTAGE OF FLASHBACKS (OVER CLASSICAL MUSIC)

Aaron is alone in the dugout stuffing his practice equipment into his baseball bag as his teammates begin to leave practice. When he is finished he looks across the field and is interrupted by the sight of Deron flirting with a girl.

CUT TO:

Aaron is struggling to lift a waited barbell. His face tightens and his clenching teeth show as the bar begins to slowly ascend.

CUT TO:

Aaron watches from the dugout; attentive to her smile and her finger constantly twirling the end of her hair. He notices how Deron continuously inflates his bicep as his hand clutches the shoulder strap of his bag. He notices his minimal smirk and the way his eyes roll as he looks her up and down.

CUT TO:

The barbell continues to slowly rise from his chest. Veins are visible on Aaron's forehead.

CUT TO:

BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN AARON'S FATHER AND AARON'S FACE

Aaron's father stands in front of him and yells at him from the middle of the infield. He pumps his chest with his fist and points to his head as he continues to yell. Aaron notices the shine on his state championship ring and an empty space on his left ring finger. Aaron is attentive to his father's intense chomping mouth as he continues to yell.

CUT TO:

Aaron's hands begin to shake as the barbell approaches the stand.

CUT TO:

At dusk Aaron is standing over home plate. He rests his arms over a bat that is flat against his shoulders like a scarecrow posted on a pole. He looks across the baseball diamond.

CUT TO:

INT. PUBLIC BATHROOM

Aaron is back in the bathroom staring at himself in the mirror. He then suddenly leans forward to gag. He releases a stream of bile into the porcelain sink and immediately begins coughing.

He rips a sheet of paper towel, wipes his mouth clean and clears his throat. He stands tall to allow his stomach to recover.

After a few moments, Aaron walks into a stall and locks himself in. He takes out his gold crucifix from under his jersey and presses it against his lips. He dips his head, closes his eyes and begins to mouth words to himself. He then pops his head back up, traces a cross along his torso with his right hand, kisses the side of his fist and points to the ceiling.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD-NIGHT

Bright specs of gnats and mosquitoes hover around the field lights. Aaron's team, in navy and white pants, are packed against the dugout fence. Banging their palms and screaming against the steel fence links. The opposing team, maroon with grey pants, return the energy. They are banging bats against ball buckets and chanting in a choral roar.

A teammate of Aaron's looks over to the score board. The light bulbs flicker, "Home: 2. Away: 2. BOT: 7". He blows a large bubble with his chunk of Double Bubble. He takes the pink inflated ball from his mouth and plants it firmly on the bill of his cap.

Aaron pats down his helmet and rolls his neck as he grabs a bat. He points it forward from his waist and tightens his grip like he is holding a katano. He walks slowly to the plate planting each foot carefully into the batter's box while staring down the lanky pitcher.

Aaron's father stands tall and silent among large rowdy families gathered in fold out chairs and beer coolers. He claps and lowers the brim of his fitted hat.

Coach Hill leans against the doorway of the dugout. His white bearded jaw rolls as he grinds a handful of sunflower seeds. He looks over to second base and watches Deron crouch down and side step for a careful lead off the bag. Coach Hill looks back at Aaron who is at the plate and spits out a flying flock of sunflower shells.

COACH HILL

Bring him home and let's get the hell outta of here!

Aaron slowly crouches in his stance. The catcher flicks his fingers below his mit until the pitcher eventually nods. The pitcher coils in his wind up and unleashes a small white missile down the middle. Aaron swings and misses.

UMPIRE

Strike!

CATCHER

Bro, yer' done!

Aaron steps out of the batter's box and smacks chunks of damp clay off the bottom of his cleats with the barrel of his bat. He lifts his helmet and grazes his blemished and creased forehead with his navy arm band. Smoke floats from his scalp and sweat glimmers in his follicles. His father readjusts his hat.

FATHER

Let's go! Swing through!

Aaron returns to his stance, the catcher flicks his fingers, Deron takes another lead, and the pitcher coils back into his wind up. He sends the ball curving towards the outside of the plate. Aaron makes solid contact and watches a pop fly fall outside of the foul pole.

Aaron's father claps.

FATHER

That's right, you on him now!

Aaron returns to his stance and tightens the grips on his bat until his knuckles fade into a pale white. His eyes are sharpened on the pitcher. Deron takes another lead, Aaron's

father claps again, the catcher flicks his fingers, and the pitcher coils back into his wind up. The pitcher sends another missile inside. Aaron turns quick on it and watches a line drive tail outside the foul pole.

Deron claps.

DERON

Let's go kid! Send me home!

Aaron gets back into his stance. His feet dig deep into the batter's box and the clay is almost at his ankles. Deron gains a bigger lead, the catcher flicks his fingers, and the pitcher remains still. The catcher flicks his fingers again and the pitcher nods. He coils into his wind up and sends a ball sliding a bit outside the plate. Aaron keeps the bat on his shoulders and watches it.

UMPIRE

Strike three!

Aaron's father clenches his hat and slaps it against the ground.

FATHER

The hell are you waitin' for?

Aaron looks back at his father and then at the opposing team gallop off the field and into the dugout. He waits with the bat still on his shoulders for a moment. He turns his whole body towards the umpire, looks him dead in the eyes and clenches the bat tighter.

AARON

Are you blind?

UMPIRE

Excuse me?

AARON

Are you fuckin' blind!

UMPIRE

Kid I suggest you-

AARON

It was way outside!

UMPIRE

In the dugout, kid.

The umpire begins to turn around.

AARON
Outside, dumbass!

The umpire turns back around. He points his finger in the air and swings it across his body.

UMPIRE
Yer' outta here!

Aaron turns around immediately and storms into the dugout. Coach Hill let's him slip right by him without saying a word.

Aaron hurls his helmet against the dugout wall. His teammates clear a path for him as he takes his bat and smashes it over and over against the fence. He quickly grabs his hat, his glove, and his bat bag and storms out.

He meets his father in the walkway and he tries to veer around him. His father flicks another brown stick, grabs his shoulders and tries to wrangle him in closer. Aaron continues to struggle until his father tucks him in a tight hug. Aaron drops all of his belongings and begins to bawl into his father's chest. His father tucks his head down and rubs his back.

THE END