

RUST and BONE

Characters- (TF)Fighter(plays Harris), (F)Father(plays Sam),
(OD)Ollie's Dad(plays Neighbour, Nipper)

The three actors play the supporting characters as well. The play demands fluidity. All three actors actually clap wherever there's written "**Clap**".

Prologue

F Twenty-seven bones make up the human hand - each of them flush fitted, bound together underneath the skin. Some animals got more - Gorilla's got thirty-two. Five in each thumb. Us? We got only twenty seven.

If you break an arm or leg, calcium gathers around the bone and joins it together. In the end, it's stronger than before. If you break a bone in your hand, it's never gonna fully heal.

TF You'll think about it before every fight. You'll pay attention. And even if you pay attention, the pain will come back. Just as strong as before.. Just as strong as every time. Like needles...like broken glass.

OD You'll see men cry breaking their hand in a fight. Slumped on a stool. Tears squirting out of their eyes. It's not the pain, they're crying because it's a weakness they can't do anything about. They're stuck to the second tier.

Act

(Room's the size of a gas chamber. Wooden chair, sink, small mirror hung on the wall. Bags packed with liniment and Vaseline, foul protector, mouth guard.)

TF I had strong hands once. Hammers, my father used to call them. Now they've been broken so many times the bones are like those brown clay teacups in a sack. Bones like teacups (laughs). You got one hit before they –

TF Got a hot water bottle? Can't get loose.

(TF finishes wrapping his hands. And acts out what he says in the following dialogue)

TF Don't remember if I was wrapping my hands or bandaging them. Look at my palms and the sweat on it. On my toes, bobbing a little. Half-circle to the left, feint low and fire a right cross, arm cocked at ninety-degree to generate maximum force. Torque the hips, and three stiff jabs.

(Father Enters)

A lot of people don't like a jabby fighter, but a smart boxer knows everything flows of the jabs. Keeps your opponent at a distance while muffling his offense. And hey, if the guy's glass jawed or thin skulled? One good jab and he's

Clap#1

F And that's why, you always jab. First rule of fighting: You always protect your hands, I tell him. We used to practice together all the time. Every day in good weather, we'd be out in the yard practicing until the sun passed behind the house. Before he could quit he had to get hit fifteen times in a row. One night after getting a little tanked, I dragged him out of bed in the middle of the night and threw him the glows.

Every minute you're not practicing, someone else is. Now punch that bag! You got to work, son. Hard and every day!

TF The neighbor comes in

N You two mind calling it a night?

F Mind your business, man.

N Trying to sleep is my business. Teaching your kid to fight in the middle of the night//is my business.

F //Telling me how to raise my kid, moron? why don't you come and call me a lunatic to my face, you fat fuck.

I was surprised when he actually came. I tumbled around with him, crashing into railings, All the while, screaming, "60 push-ups! don't forget, son! 60 push-ups before you start skip rope."

TF Sweats coming now. Twist the tap, splash some cold water on my face. A sheet of paper's taped to the wall: Fight #3 - Eddie Vs Ahmed.

Crack splits the mirror. Look at myself. Nose broken, Forehead marbled with scar tissue, deep shadows under my eyes. 37 years old. Not too old.

OD Ollie always played with blocks when he was a kid. Stacking them up as high as he could, just so he could watch them tumbling down. Give blocks to a girl and she'll probably set a tea party but give it to a boy, and you've got a growing tower. Some morons might think it's some psychological shit related to dicks -

Moron(F) The primal act of erection

OD But that's not it. The kid knows construction's just the start. The real deal is demolition. It's all about breaking it all down. The blocks pile up as high as they can be and then -

Clap#2

F I grew up in the hottest place on earth. At least, it felt like it. The town hosted the country's largest steel plant. People would work their ass off in blast furnaces and coke ovens, partially evaporating, and then head straight for their bottles, to condense back to sanity. Not much else to do.

Every October, almost like a festival, "Roy Bell's Boxing Tent" would be set up. For the next few nights, people got the chance to forget their miseries and step inside for a few swings with Lightning Jimmy Jones or Cowboy Taylor. Hey, you might get beat up but so what? you stood tall in front of your wife, your kids, heck, the whole goddamn town.

TF I saw Dad fight once, back then. I watched him go three rounds with The Cowboy. He lost but that didn't matter. The crowd roared; and Dad stood there grinning like a kid.

F How's your ma doing?

TF Fine, she's fine.

F Eddie's mother and I are experiencing marital difficulties. The crux of the problem seems to lie in the admission I may have married her with an eye towards certain features - Her articulate fingers, her slender legs, yet strong calves - that, united with my own physical makeup, laid the genetic groundwork for a truly spectacular boxer. She claims our entire relationship is built on "false foundations", that I ought to be ashamed for aspiring to create some "Franken-son" with little or no regard for her "Feelings". I don't know what the bloody hell she's talking about! I'm just helping Eddie fulfill his destiny!

OD Managing fighters is a lot like being a dog breeder. I did that in my past life. It often comes down to the breed. Argentinos are tough, they were bred to hunt jaguars. But kilo for kilo nothing beats the pitbull. Pitbulls are bred to *fight*. That's the only thing they know. They don't care about the damage they take. They don't care about looking ugly after a fight. Eddie is a pitbull. Strong. Fierce. Relentless.

TF As soon as I was 13, Dad made me join the boxing gym in the town. The place was an old dance hall: ring in the centre, punching bag over by the wall. I was picking a lot of fights in schools and Dad was really proud. And hey, back then, any time not spent with dad was a time well spent.

F Mr. Harris? I was wondering - if you've decided yet. About uh, the Management position. You see, I've been here eight years now.

Harris John-

F James

Harris *(Nods)* The role requires a natural leader. You have to be strong. Forceful, able to inspire others. *You* are a terrific shop floor engineer.

(Harris approaches and pats F on the shoulder and exits.)

OD I had a place outside town. No TV. I preferred books. I had more books than all 6 of my neighbors and probably rest of the town combined. Had to sell them all.

TF Everything's damp. Pipes overhead, leaking. The cement walls look like they've been sweating. Look at the paper again. Fight #3. 3 is good. It means audience is experienced, but not tired. Neither of the extremes is good. Try to get loose. Roll my neck. The wait is difficult.

OD I remember waiting for him at the train station. He was on time, as always *(Doesn't say that lovingly. Just plainly.)* It was me, my wife and my son -
...*(Whispers)* Ollie.

F After Harris blew me off ever-so-gently *(says sarcastically)* I figure I'll take the day off. No one's got the balls to stop me. I didn't work here eight years for nothing. With the free time in my hand I decided I'll give my boy a visit at the boxing gym, after quenching my thirst, of course. He will be happy to see me. He will be happy to see me.

TF Halfway through high school I get my first real fight. Didn't tell Dad about it. Kinda liked my alone time. It was going to happen in the gym itself. No one cares to check during office hours. All sorts of illegal activity took place in daylight in this town, because everyone was locked up in the plant. People would host fights with betting, set up shops selling weed, and no one would mind. No one was there to mind. **(Fight Compilation Music Starts)**

F Reach the gym and I see there's a crowd gathered. Shuffle through the people, come out in front of a boxing ring, there's a bell ringing, and My boy enters.

TF I enter the ring. My opponent was this Asian dude who looked pretty thin but I could see it was all muscle. They called him Nipper.

F The Asian was barefoot, wore black shorts. I watched him throw a cigarette butt in the crowd. Hah! A smoker!

TF Nipper warms up by bobbing a bit and throwing a few punches. He coughs.

F I hope my son goes easy on him!

TF I had twenty years to think about that fight because it was my first *real* loss. Twenty years to realize and learn that I might have lasted a few rounds, maybe even bruised you a bit, but I could never, in any possible universe, have beaten you. I couldn't even hit you - you were quicksilver.

(TF and OD go into a fighting stance, circling each other, and F watches; intent.)

F *(In passionate and borderline orgasmic voice.)* And there's the stance. The circling. Oh, a match. After so long. They trace a circle. And it begins.

(Dramatic Light Sequence)

TF I took a hellish beating. You knew things about momentum and leverage I'd never learned. You had something waiting for you, worth fighting for. I lost because I had nothing worth fighting for.

(A few punches exchanged between Nipper and Fighter)

F My son was taking a few punches but it's okay. He's indestructible. He stands up. There you go, He stood up! Give him hell, son! He dodges a punch and it barely misses his face, grazing his pony. Long black hair tied with a blue rubber band. Apart from giving you the look of a pansy it can get in your eyes during a fight, can be the difference between victory and defeat.

The boy refuses to cut it so one night I chased him around the night with a pair of scissors screaming, "I swear to God I'm gonna cut that fucking hair off!" Eh, you tend to go a little overboard when you're tanked. He locked himself in the bathroom. I said I'll cut it in his sleep. He slept on the floor. His pansy hair over pissy tiles.

TF You hammered my organs, seeking out kidneys and liver. I pissed red for days.

(Fight Compilation Music Ends)

(Lights dim and brighten)

Clap#3

F After that fight I wanted to smack the life out of Eddie's trainer. My boy wasn't taught anything right! I mean, hey, even if you are born with wings of an eagle, you're never gonna fly for real if a moron keeps telling you the ground is the sky! I knew then and there that this town is destroying my boy's career. I took Eddie's victory money to head back to the office.

TF After the walloping I took from Nipper, Dad decided to send me away to some Training Camp. According to him, I already had everything I needed to become a "spectacular boxer". I just needed the right track.

F I have made my decision. (hands a paper to him)

TF What's this?

F Your ticket. Train for Lahan leaves in 3 hours. You should start packing.

TF Sam Hutch, an ex-Olympic boxing coach and legend, ran a training camp in Lahan over the summer, to prepare boxers for the National Qualifiers. He used a combination of roadwork and weights to put his fighters through the mincer. The ones that could hack it came out hard as nails. Dad had everything figured out.

F I have a cousin in Lahan. Breeds dogs for a living or something. Says he doesn't mind you living with him as long as you take care of his boy, Ollie.

OD I was surprised when he called me. Took a while to figure out who he was. Had only met my cousins occasionally. I couldn't leave my dogs. His son was coming here for Sam's Camp. Asked me if he could stay at my place.(*very slight pause*) I agreed.

As I open the door I hear puppies in the nursery. Pass down the hall hung with photos of dogs that went on to be champions. Brutus. Chained to a rod, teeth bared, a Tibetan Mastiff. Cerberus. Cock like a javelin. Matilda. She was Ollie's favorite. Both were kids of their own species, playing with each other for hours on end.

TF I arrived in Nepal in a bus. The trees, the sky, everything was different. Especially the ice. So much white. I had never seen anything like it in my life. left the bus, they were waiting on the tarmac. Uncle, Aunt...and Ollie.

Clap#4

F Still remember the day he left. He walks down the street, hitching a duffel bag up his shoulder, two airbags in hands. Charting his departure, it's as though I'm seeing him through the ass end of a telescope: this tiny figure distorted by an unseen convex, turning the corner now, gone. And it dawns on me I've nothing to do, nowhere to be, the day stretching out bright and interminable with no clear goal or closure in sight. Head to the liquor store, to buy myself some Old Monk, and I realize, I've hit a new low.

TF They had a place outside town. Uncle gave me a tour. No TV, but they had a fireplace and books everywhere. I never saw so many books. And puppies and dogs. Some actually quite scary. We entered the place and Ollie ran into his room as fast as he could. He was shy. I go in, Its filled with

toys and blocks. When his Blocks had reached the highest he could pile them, he handed one to me, "Take it higher".

(Night Crickets sound starts)

TF On my first night there, we sat out back with a carton of some local brew, a few of his favourite dogs loitered around..... And who's this?

OD That's Matilda. She is Ollie's favourite.
And I know I'm not supposed to have one, but she is my favourite too.
How're you doing, girl?
Few weeks time, and Matilda here is going to be a Mom.

TF Ollie was telling me how Matilda is going to have little babies. I figured he was talking about a neighbour.

OD Lets hope it all goes well.

TF The yard was littered with cans.

OD Talked to Sam. Your training starts Monday.
He really tests his fighters. So you'd better slow down on the beer.

TF Uncle was the smartest guy I'd ever met. Rather kept to himself. He knew everything and then some.

(Night Crickets sound ends)

OD I went to some of his training sessions. The way Sam trained his boxers. It wasn't very different from the way I trained my dogs. It's all Biology. Taking one's body to the maximum of its genetic capacity.

Sam You hit. But don't move. At all.

TF Sorry, Sam.

OD You know how boxing started? In Greece. They'd sit fighters opposite...

Sam Gladiators

OD Yeah, wearing gloves made of lead. And they'd just sit there. Swinging away.

Sam *(to the fighter)* YOU would have loved it.

Clap#5

TF Both Uncle Joe and Aunt Gail worked. Babysitting duties fell to me. It somehow added value to my stay in Lahan. When I returned from gym, Ollie would scream at the top of his voice, "Eddie!".

OD He lived a pretty rough life. Woke up at five each morning, ate breakfast before running a ten mile circuit around the lake. He trained till five – roadwork, sparring, then weights – before dragging himself home looking like someone who just got run over by a dozen trucks. All he did after that is play with Ollie, have Dinner and sleep. Ollie was quite happy with this.

OD My days went in caring for Matilda. I needed the pups healthy and strong, which meant I needed to keep track of her diet and make her exercise regularly. Gail said I was getting nervous.

OD Bathroom walls papered in outdated concert flyers and old cigarette butts. A fan of dried puke splashed round the lone commode. I cannot say with utter certainty that I am not the culprit: The sequence of this morning's events seem a bit hazy. He is gone and I feel nervous. I feel sick. Doctor says its the bottle. Eddie, I swear its this town. Nothing but these chemicals. Go off now. Eddie, you're better off.

Sweat beads fall off my temple, taking the last of my strength with them.

TF Dad?

(F stares at TF, and then starts laughing)

Clap#6

OD Matilda? Girl? Wrap a blanket around her.
Six newborn pitbulls. Five healthy puppies and a blind runt.
Slump down against the enclosure wall. A dog breeder should not get into the business of moral decision making.

TF It's night. Everyone's asleep.
Ollie?
Kid comes in his pajamas
Why are you up so late, kiddo?... Wanna play with blocks?... Sit down here.

Clap#7

(Back to reality)

OD Edward?

TF ... what?

OD Where are you.

TF Nepal..

OD Get a grip.

TF It's not just the body that's getting older, getting hit. It's the mind as well. It plays tricks on you. Especially before a fight, when everything is calm outside, it's mayhem inside.

Clap#8

TF My days in Lahan were drawing to an end. The National Qualifiers were coming up. I was sitting out back with two empty cans at my feet.

OD When do you leave?

TF Next weekend.

OD Ollie's gonna miss you.

TF *(Presses a box into his hands)* These are for Ollie.

OD Cute. Why are you giving it to me?

TF I thought it might be/ better if

OD /Edward - I know you don't want to hurt him

TF I'm no good at goodbyes

OD He's a big boy *(Joe presses the gift back into his hands)*
And so are you. Take him out for a walk, you can tell him you're leaving, there.

TF How is Matilda doing?

OD Tired.

TF Yeah? What's going to happen to the blind one?

Clap#9

(Open the Mind music starts)

F Standing there in the piss and puke and dim unmoving puppet show thrown by the bugtarred bulb, a sense of grim desolation draws over me - a sensation of psychological dread. Reel from the stall and in the crack-starred mirror glimpse my eyes punched out and dangling on their optic nerves and there deep in the cratered sockets spy another pair of eyes, red and raw and slitted lengthwise like a cat's, peering back without pity or remorse.

TF Uncle's asked me to take Ollie for a walk so that I can tell Ollie that I'm leaving. I knew it was because he had some business with the pups, that he did not want Ollie to see.

OD Look out the window. The evening sky is an orange haze with streaks of white clouds. It's time. Brighten the lights. Get out the bags.

TF /Ollie and I went to the lake, which was completely frozen. It was just the two of us. Ollie walked beside me, wearing the gift I'd got him. A pair of junior boxing gloves. Smallest size they got. Kid looked ridiculous, but once he tried them on he wouldn't take them off.

F I'll wait here for a letter from Lahan. Eddie's National Qualifiers are coming up. I've gotta be there to support him. *(looks into infinity and smiles)* Take a swig from my flask and I catch myself drifting. Stare at the shallow flickering lights and I see them shift.

(Open the Mind Music ends)

TF I remember the ice sparkling under the sun. Ollie quiet, fingering the laces on his gloves.
Lost in the world.

Behind us on the shore, I see a girl in a wheelchair at the edge of the lake. Wave and she stares right through me. Hairs prickle on the back of my neck.

Look at Ollie. He looks up at me with those big eyes of his. See his lips move and a single word escapes.

Stay.

I cant stay, Ollie.... Ollie listen, you're my best little/ friend.

/Ollie-wait!

F I am standing in a stadium. All around me, I see a hoard of faceless people. They don't have eyes but I feel them staring at me. Through me. See a ring at the center of the stadium.

TF Watch Ollie head out farther into the lake. Sliding, falling, getting up, running faster.
Hey slow down buddy!

F Shove through the mob with an air of drunk entitlement. It's my son they are all here to stare at, isn't it?

OD Enter the nursery and I'm met with silence. No barking. Through their cages, /Cerberus,

TF /I had only ever seen ice lakes on TV.
Ollie doesn't stop running.

F Come out to the front of the crowd. See my son in his unmistakable stance. The fight has already started. His opponent was also faceless, just like the crowd. No nose to break. No eyes to gouge. But hands to inflict as much damage as he can to my son.

OD Make my way towards the last enclosure. That's where Matilda gave birth. As I approach, I hear the litter. The six of them. Five healthy puppies and a blind runt.

TF The air shimmers and I look down. For a second.
I can't remember the sound the ice made when it broke.

(Slight Pause)

Clap#10/

F /A cement fist slams into my son's temple.

TF I look up. See cracks like snakes slither with lightning speed. Ollie lurches sideways, arms flung out. The ice splits (**Clap**) in two and Ollie sinks into the lake, vanishing in an instant.
OLLIE!

OD Watch Matilda sleeping. Taking tired, deep breaths. Her chest rises and falls with ease and fluidity, content. She's done well. It was a taxing delivery. Her puppies play around her. All six of them.

Spot the blind one. She moves around happily, bumping into things and panting, blissfully ignorant of the fact that she can't see. Ignorant of the concept of sight and a life without pain.

TF I laughed. Maybe Ollie looked funny going down, mouth wide, gloves in the air.

Hold On!

My boots skid out under me and I'm down.

Ollie's churning foam, red gloves pumping water. It all seems okay till I see the fear in his eyes.

Ollie, I'm coming! /

F /My son takes a hit. Take a long swig of my drink and for a long moment I could feel nothing but seething, relentless hatred for my son. A fury reserved for your own blood. He was not trying hard enough to reach the goal he's destined for. Everyone was stopping him from becoming great, and he couldn't see it. He didn't believe that he's destined for greatness. He couldn't see it. /

TF /See him trying to get a grip on the ice, except the gloves
-he can't get hold of the edge
The fucking gloves!

OD Make no sound as I approach Matilda's enclosure. Hear the other dogs beginning to wake from their slumber...Hear Cerberus howl...Hear Brutus rattle his chains.

F And then it happens. My son stab steps his faceless oppressor, moves swiftly underneath him and connects his closed fist to the guy's chin. The sound so clean. Bone hitting bone. That sound-Oh God, almost sexual.

TF Ollie stops struggling, just hangs there, water trickling into his mouth, reaching the edge and-
(he stretches out his hand, hopeful)

F The faceless man my son's fighting looks frazzled. He gains composure, keeping left, outside my son's range. He stabs forward trying to get back in the fight but-

TF NOOOOOOOO!

F But my son is in some kind of a zone now. I look at the spectators. All those blurry faces cheering for my son. There are hundreds of them, all dressed in the same dull steel plant uniform. The blinking lights of the stadium brighten the crowd in a ghostly yellow: a wave of faceless crazies waving currency notes.

TF I plunge my arm in the water, but he's not there anymore.
Ollie!

OD Enter Matilda's enclosure.

TF Look around, and I can't see him. I CAN'T SEE HIM.

OD Touch Matilda's square head to let her know it's me. trace my fingers through her fur. She blinks twice to acknowledge me.
I know you're tired girl. Go to sleep.

TF I look around wildly. Then I hear it. This thump.
I can't tell where it-
There! A dark form is pressed against the sheet of ice. Ollie.
(TF drops to the ground and crawls.)

I'm coming Ollie! (*Voice cracks with fear and dread*)

I'm coming.

OD Puppies paw at my legs in clumsy, exploratory fashion.

TF I see his face. Lips and nostrils blue. Cheek flattened to the ice and his eyes-seeing me, begging me for-

F Scan the crowd for someone familiar and every face in the stadium turns into fucking **Mr.** Harris.

TF I form a fist and bring it back.

F Fill up with rage and-

TF (*In calmer tones of acceptance, arm outstretched, ready to punch*) I'm coming.

F Hear myself screaming- See that, asshole? That's my son! MY genes MADE that! What did your genes ever make, Harris? Oh that's right-a few stains on the bed sheet and a pussy tax consultant. I made a fighter.

TF My lead hand, right hammer, drawn back and then/

/Clap#11

TF My hand shatte4rs on impact.

The Ice holds.

I bring it back up, and I slam it down

(Clap)

Feel it smash like a china plate...The Ice buckles, but holds

OD Bend down and scuffle through the pups

TF I look at Ollie. He stops clawing, stops thumping. His eyes roll to white.

OD Pick up the blind one gently by the scruff of her neck.

TF No, wait!

F The crowd is getting restless now. Look at Eddie's face. His expression never changing as he angles a hook so that it grazes his opponent's abdomen, leaving slashes of glove burned flesh.

TF Hammer down harder
Ignore the pain. Concentrate. Attack the ice.

F Watch his gloved fists move in an amber glow.

OD Bring out the injection filled with Telazol for anesthesia. gently pierce the needle into her abdomen, into a vein.

TF Pulverizing muscle and bone-then/

/Clap#12

F He gives the guy one, solid uppercut. The opponents skull snaps back and he falls backwards on the ground with a/

/Clap#13

TF The ice breaks, and I'm through. My hand feels the water and Ollie.

OD The puppy stops moving. She's fast asleep now, can't feel a thing.

TF My hands now unusable sacks, I widen the hole by hitting the ice with my broken forearms and cracked elbow.

F My ears are ringing; there's a roaring in my head as I watch my son kitchen sinking the bastard.

TF Finally the hole is big enough for me to pull him through. Reach my hands in, take him back from the Lake.

(Slight Pause)

OD I bring out the second injection filled with barbiturates. It'll shut down her brain functions and cause a cardiac arrest in under a minute.

TF Ollie?
Look at him. Nose broken- and me who's done it.
Oh Ollie I'm sorry

Oh fuck I'm so sorry.
Gather him in my arms and stumble back to the road.
HELP! SOMEBODY!

F Watching that punch, the unstudied perfection of it, I think back to all the time we spent practicing together.

TF See a house nearby. No one's fucking home!
Through the window see the phone inside
(Clap)
Track broken glass and blood across the floor.
I can't operate the phone. Fingers won't dial.
HELP!

OD Wait for the anesthesia to take full effect.

TF HELP!!

F When he was young I made him punch small dummies of plywood padded with leather to practice punching. My son was born to be a legend. He was untouchable. He knew how to hurt those bastards. I beamed with pride as the ref counted to ten.

TF I don't think he's breathing. I only know how to hurt people, what do I - How do I -
(to the audience) SOMEBODY HELP!

OD The second one's also an intravenous injection. Search for a new vein.

TF Jogger by the lake! *(Relief then concern)*

OD Find another vein.
Pierce her the second time.

TF She takes one look at Ollie and goes to work. Unbroken hands pump water from his lungs.
pump life back into him...

OD I wait there, in the enclosure

TF ...while I hover around uselessly

OD Until she stops breathing.

TF Until he starts breathing.

(Lights dim)

Act

TF Hospital. Ollie lies in bed, hooked to a machine. *(TF is still crying)*

Will he be alright?

No one looks at me. Touch my cheek where Gail's nails drew blood. The way she looked at me. They had to get me out of the room. Hear her retching in the bathroom.

..is he- will he wake up soon?

Unknown faces lead me to a seperate room. Stare as the doctor drills screws into the writhing sinews of my hands. **I broke 44 bones out of 54.**

OD I sit beside him. Holding his hands. I'm always amazed by how tiny they are. How they looked when he held UNO cards. The machine that helps him breathe keeps steadily beeping. I talk to the doctor-
What's happening to my son?

How bad is it?

When will he wake up? Will he ever wake up?

(TF and OD are not conversing)

TF Ollie's twenty four now. Comatose 19 years.

OD For 19 years, he has visited, sat by the bed-/

TF /sat by the bed-, but I don't hold his hand..
Every cent I make goes to him. I know Uncle could use it.

OD He still fights with what he's left with. Gambling with his own hands.

TF There are other ways. I know that. *(to the audience)* You think I don't know that?
This is the only way that feels right.

OD I take his money because Ollie needs it, and I know he needs to give it.

F Don't know what day it is. Mind keeps wandering. Hands keep shaking.
The lights shift again. It's all dark now.

Epilogue

OD Read this book once. Sloppy narration, weak plot, but it kept stressing one thing. Cause and effect.

I think a lot about this.

Every night I close my eyes and its summer. I'm in my car. Outside a ...college? I've got that book in my lap. Look at my watch. The gates open and a swarm of youngsters start coming out. Search for him, and there he is, in a blue shirt, matching his eyes, Ollie. He spots me and smiles. He's taller than me, more handsome than his old man. Took after Gail. He walks up to my car and (*slight pause*) opens the back door, and says:

"How're you doing, girl?"

The Pitbull in the back, full grown and muscular, is already wagging her tail, having smelt him long ago. She starts to jump in his arms but trips and falls. She can't see.

Ollie laughs, pats her on the head and closes the door. Comes sits in the shotgun. Turns to me.

The car sinks in freezing water and I wake up.

F Think about my son's ruined, shattered hands, his splintered bones pulsing. And something explodes inside my skull, a combusive fireworks: starbursts and fractured lights pinwheeling as one pure thought loops around my fritzing, blown apart brain-

OD So this is fatherhood.

TF I had only ever known fighting. It is all I have. Night after night reliving those moments, the pain, the desperation, my utter failure. Day after day in rooms like gas-chambers waiting for the next fight. Every fight, a gamble; no punch, the same.

Always wondered what would have happened, if in those moments.....

A pair of young eyes opening. A hand pushing up from black water, fist smashed through the ice and a body drags itself to the surface. A boy. Lungs drawing clean winter air. I see a man waiting. He offers his hand – an arthritic claw. The boy's face smooth and unlined.

For a moment he doesn't move. Then he reaches up, takes my hand. The boy gasps at the fierceness of his grip. I see them walk towards a house: blankets a fire, hot chocolate. The man leans down and

the boy laughs – a beautiful snorting laugh – fine droplets of water spraying from his nose. I see this. I still hold belief in this possibility.

(Knocking is heard at the door)

TF Its time now. Eddie v/s Ahmed. *(Mocking Laughter)* Before every fight. I patch myself together - Close my eyes and whisper,

OD/TF/F “I’m sorry”

(Fighter Bobs a little, exits through door)

End