# Goal-to-go

By Hank Perritt

Time and place

Atlanta 2012

This is a fictional work. Any resemblance between the characters and actual persons is purely coincidental.

Character list

Spencer Wilson: 23-year old gay quarterback

Nancy Mulligan: 24-year old girlfriend

Prentice: 23-year old boyfriend

Druid Fallon: 24-year old straight split end

Coach Stevens: 40

Franklin: 25-year old guard

Father McQueen: Roman Catholic priest

Waiter: 20-year old

Sportscaster: (voiceover)

Reporters:

List of scenes

Contents

[Goal-to-go 1](#_Toc337652949)

[Notes on staging 3](#_Toc337652950)

[Act I 4](#_Toc337652951)

[Scene 1 (locker room; praise and reservations) 5](#_Toc337652952)

[Scene 2 (with Nancy in restaurant) 11](#_Toc337652953)

[Scene 3 (Spencer, Druid & Prentice in condo) 17](#_Toc337652954)

[Scene 4 - locker room (Franklin in the locker room) 44](#_Toc337652955)

[Act II 56](#_Toc337652956)

[Scene 1 (call to the Coach) 57](#_Toc337652957)

[Scene 2 (Input for the Coach) 79](#_Toc337652958)

[Scene 3 (not nobly done) 84](#_Toc337652959)

[Scene 4 (press conference) 88](#_Toc337652960)

# Notes on staging

The locker room has two areas: a lounge area, and three lockers arranged in a row. To the extent feasible multiple areas should be set up on stage: the restaurant, the locker room, the couch in Spencer’s condo, the press-conference podium. When appropriate for the context, the characters walk from one area to the next without lights out.

# Act I

## Scene 1 (locker room; praise and reservations)

The lounge area of the Atlanta Falcons locker room. A couch faces downstage. A big screen TV faces the couch, so that the audience cannot see what’s on the screen.

Spencer enters, fresh from showering. He’s wearing only gymshorts. He’s limping so badly on his right leg that it threatens to give way with every step. He grimaces as he grabs the backs of chairs and tabletops to support him. He moves to the couch and flops down. He flexes and extends his leg, cupping his knee in his right hand, ending up with his bare foot on the table in front of him. He presses the tips of his fingers into the ligaments on the lateral and medial sides and then manipulates the knee some more trying to figure out where the injury is.

He reaches out for the TV remote control and clicks it.

 [**cheering roaring audio clip]**

announcer (recorded)

Spencer Wilson, the Falcon’s quarterback played an amazing game. He completed 24 out of 37 passes for a total of 422 yards. He ran with the ball 7 times for a total yardage of 55. That’s an average of 7.9 yards per run! And he scored a touchdown. He’s shaping up to be better than Cam Newton. If he keeps this up he’ll get the MVP award, for sure.

A noise startles him.

Franklin enters, also fresh from a shower and dressed like Spencer.

Franklin sits down and puts his feet up on the table in front of the couch. Spencer, hoping a change of position will ease the pain in his knee, carefully adds his bare feet beside Franklin’s.

Franklin notices the care with which Spencer makes the movement.

Franklin nudges Spencer’s foot with his own. Spencer almost cries out.

franklin

Shit! I’m sorry. What’s the matter? Did you hurt yourself?

Spencer

(suppressing a desire to put his hands on his knee, and careful to remain absolutely still)

No. I’m fine.

franklin

If you hurt yourself, we need to get the trainer to look at it. Want me to get him in here? Don’t fool around.

Spencer

(more forcefully)

No. I’m fine.

franklin

Whatcha watching? Friday Night Lights?

Spencer

Clips of this afternoon’s game.

franklin

You played a hell of a game, buddy. You’re something else for a second-year guy. You made me look good. Even when I let guys through, you made it look like the pocket was good enough.

Spencer meets Franklin’s eyes for a moment, blushes, and looks back at the screen.

Coach Stevens, dressed in cotton khaki slacks and a knit shirt, and loafers without socks, enters from upstage, behind Spencer. Spencer glances around, sees who it is and quickly lowers his foot to the floor, wincing. The coach already saw him rubbing it.

Coach Stevens circles around the couch and sits in a chair.

franklin

How’re they hanging, Coach?

(looking back at the screen)

Look at that! Great job, man!

Coach

He’s pointing out all the blocks you missed?

Franklin

I can't believe I let that one limp-wristed pansy dance around me. He should be doing ballet instead of playing pro football. Disgusting faggot.

Coach

You did miss a few.

Franklin

(cheerfully, but with a slight edge, as Spencer doesn’t respond)

Spencer hasn’t called me on it, yet. So far he’s just looking at pictures of himself.

He looks at Spencer, willing him to make eye contact to participate in the teasing. Spencer keeps his eyes on the screen.

franklin (cont’d)

I gotta go. My girlfriend and I deserve a night on the town.

Franklin stands up, high fives the coach, looks at Spencer, decides not to bother, and exits.

coach

You played a hell of a game, son.

Spencer

(careful not to move his right leg as he looks at the Coach)

Thanks, coach. I made some mistakes.

Coach

Of course you did, but that’s why . . . Actually, there is something I wanted to talk to you about.

Spencer

Uh-oh. I thought it was too good to be true that you would slum in the locker room just to tell me I played well.

Coach

You did play well-phenomenally well, but that’s not the only mark of a good quarterback. You’ve got the physicality to be MVP, but you’ve gotta do some other stuff too—now that you’re starting regularly.

Spencer

(growing defensive)

Like what?

Coach

Show some leadership. Make some friends on the team.

Spencer

What do you mean? Franklin is a friend.

Coach

You didn’t act like it.

Spencer

What did you want me to do?

Coach

Start by acting like you give a shit when he compliments you.

Spencer

I do that.

Coach

Rarely. It’s like you hold yourself away, keep a distance;

You’ve got a wall. Like with your knee. You obviously screwed it up. I’m not going to cut you because you hurt your knee. I want to help you fix it. But you didn’t tell anyone about it.

Spencer

Okay. I guess I did twist it a bit. You can have the trainer look at it.

coach

You gotta trust folks that are on your side.

Spencer is obviously uncomfortable. The coach struggles to find another way to connect.

Coach (cont’d)

Sometimes we construct horrors; we hunker down. They grow fantastic in their dimensions, like a billowing cumulonimbus cloud on the horizon, moving closer, developing into a summer thunderstorm. We put most of our energy into building a shelter to keep the storm at bay. Sometimes you gotta go outside, risk getting rained on, to see if the cloud is really there at all.

Spencer grows even more uncomfortable, wishing the Coach would go away

Coach (cont’d)

You have a girlfriend, right?

Spencer

Nancy. She and I are supposed to get together later.

Coach

Friends?

Spencer

Of course.

Coach

See if you can figure out what makes you connect with them.

## Scene 2 (with Nancy in restaurant)

Nancy is sitting at a table in an upscale sportsbar restaurant, periodically looking at her watch.

Spencer enters, in a hurry, trying to cover his limp.

Spencer

Sorry, Babe. Have you been waiting long?

Nancy

A few minutes. I went ahead and ordered a drink. Hope you don’t mind.

Spencer

Of course, I don’t mind. You’re looking as stunning as always.

HE leans over to kiss her on the lips.

nancy

Thank you, sweetheart. What’s the matter? You were limping.

Spencer

Nothing. When they sacked me in the third quarter, I twisted my knee a little.

Nancy

Did you have them look at it? What did they say?

Spencer

It’s fine. I didn’t even want to tell the Coach about it, but he saw me limping. We have the playoffs coming up. What did you think of the game today?

Nancy

You played well. The crowd loved you.

Spencer

The Coach gave me a bunch of shit.

Nancy

(surprised)

About what?

Spencer

He said . . . well, he wants . . . He says I’m not a leader. Don’t let myself get close to my teammates.

Nancy

You're close to some of them, aren’t you?

Spencer

The coach didn’t think so—not really. Says . . .

(looks around for a waiter)

That . . . uh . . . I hold everyone at arm’s length, build walls.

WAITER approaches eagerly. SPENCER is relieved by the interruption

Waiter

Are you ready for your martini, now, ma’am? What would you like sir?

Spencer

(to Nancy)

What’re you having?

Nancy

A martini.

Spencer

Let me have the same—beefeater, up, with an olive.

Waiter

Certainly sir.

The WAITER turns away and then turns back, hesitating.

Waiter (cont’d)

I just wanted to tell you . . . uh . . . sir. That was a wonderful game you played. Atlanta is lucky to have you here. Could I get . . . an—

Spencer

Sure. What do you want me to sign?

The waiter panics, fumbles around and finally produces the back of a blank restaurant check.

SPENCER signs it with a flourish.

Waiter

Thank you so much, sir!

Nancy

(trying to build on the thrill of the autograph request)

I thought that’s what you would have. I’m glad I guessed right. I wanted us to have the same thing.

Spencer

(laughs, welcoming the frivolous subject)

I thought you liked more dainty drinks—a cosmo, some shit like that.

Nancy

Sometimes, but tonight, I wanted us to have the same thing.

Their drinks arrive. Spencer looks at her and raises his glass.

nancy

Wait

spencer

Oh, right.

They bow their heads, and cross themselves

Nancy and spencer (together)

Bless us, oh Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ, our Lord, amen.

Spencer crosses himself again and laughs.

Spencer

I’m not sure you’re supposed to do it over martinis.

Nancy

I don’t have much experience with martinis.

Nancy raises her glass.

Nancy

I love you.

Spencer

I love you, too.

They drink.

Nancy

This wall stuff . . .

Spencer

What? Oh.

(laughs, hoping to make light of it)

It’s ridiculous. He even told me to get some hints from.

Nancy

Hints?

Spencer

Yeah, advice on how to connect with my teammates. At least, I guess that’s what he meant.

Nancy stares at him for a moment.

Nancy

That’s a strange thing for him to suggest.

(hesitates)

Sometimes I wish our connection was more intense.

Spencer

We have a covenant.

Nancy

I know. I honor that, but . . .

Spencer

What?

Nancy

Sometimes I feel a little distance, too.

Prentice enters the restaurant, sees Spencer and stops. Spencer notices him and freezes.

Nancy detects the reaction, looks in the direction she sees Spencer looking and finds Prentice.

nancy

You know him? He’s looking at you kind of strangely.

spencer

What? No. Not really. He’s just . . .

Prentice backs part way out of the restaurant and then turns and hurries through the door.

Nancy

I guess he wants your autograph too, but is too shy to ask.

Spencer

Yeah, that must be it.

Spencer moves his chair closer to Nancy and makes a point of stroking her arm and engaging in other public displays of affection. She responds enthusiastically. NANCY is passionate and unrestrained. SPENCER is mechanical. They kiss repeatedly. Each time Spencer is the one who breaks it off.

The waiter reappears

waiter

Would you like another? Or are you ready to order?

spencer

If she doesn't mind, I like for the young lady to decide for both of us.

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## Scene 3 (Spencer, Druid & Prentice in condo)

Spencer is in his condo, barefooted and wearing shorts and a tee shirt. He’s drinking beer and listening to Vampire Weekend on his audio system. Oxford Comma is playing.

**[Oxford Comma audio clip]**

The door buzzer sounds. Spencer stands and limps over to activate the intercom

druid

(voice heard over the intercom)

It’s Druid. May I come up?

spencer

(into the intercom)

Of course.

HE presses the door-release button and opens the door

Druid enters, dressed in shorts, a tee shirts and flip flops.

druid

I hope you don’t mind my dropping in unannounced like this.

Spencer

Of course not, Dru. Come in and have a beer.

He crosses and turns down the volume on the audio.

Druid sits down. A little awkward, he watches SPENCER cross to the kitchen area, retrieve a beer and then takes it from him.

Spencer (cont’d)

(genuinely glad to see Druid)

It’s great to have you in Atlanta! What’s up?

Druid

Nothing much. I just wanted to come by and see how your knee is doing.

Spencer

It’ll be all right. The coach had the trainer look at it.

Druid

So he pried it out of you.

Spencer

(laughs, a bit forced)

Yeah. I wasn’t going to tell him about it.

Druid

You shouldn’t fool around with stuff like that. What if you tore something?

HE inspects Spencer’s leg and foot.

druid (cont’d)

The color in your foot looks okay. It seems to have good blood flow.

SPENCER

Of course it has good blood flow. Why wouldn’t it? It’s my knee that’s hurt, not my foot.

druid

Didn’t you hear about the high school football player in Virginia? They all thought he had just sprained his knee in a game, treated him and sent him home. It turned out that the knee injury had blocked the blood flow to his lower leg. By the time they discovered it, he had to have his leg amputated above the knee.

Spencer

Oh, for Christ’s sake! It’s all right.

druid

I hope so. You’ve always been too . . . uh . . . stoic. I’m glad you told him about it. We need you on Sunday.

I’m looking forward to catching lots more of your passes.

Spencer

You’ve always been good at that—that’s for sure. If you don’t get any protection you just outrun them.

Druid

What were you listening to?

Spencer

Vampire Weekend. Oxford Comma.

Druid

They’re great. Turn it up. Did you ever see that clip where they were out on a sailboat, playing this song? It’s on YouTube.

Spencer gets up, limps to turn up the volume slightly.

Spencer

No. Send me the link. Another beer?

HE crosses to get two more beers, sits down, and they listen to the rest of the song.

Spencer

(hesitantly)

The coach gave me a bunch of shit. Said I was rude to Franklin.

Druid

He deserved it! Ridiculous how little protection he gave you.

Spencer

Yeah. He says I am too reserved when it comes to my teammates.

Druid

You’re just being you.

Spencer

(impulsively)

Do you think I’ve built a wall around myself?

Druid

A wall? I wouldn’t say that. Just . . . like I said . . . stoic, kind of withdrawn.

(hesitates)

Sometimes I do wish you were a little less reserved. We’ve known each other a long time—sometimes, though, I feel like I don’t really . . . you know what I mean?

They drain their beers. Spencer gets two more.

Druid

Did know one of the members of Vampire Weekend is gay?

Spencer stiffens

spencer

What?

druid

Yeah. He’s pretty open about it. Happily, he hasn’t taken any shit about it.

Sound of a key in the door lock.

Spencer freezes.

Prentice enters, not immediately noticing Druid. He’s dressed like the others.

prentice

Hey, my stud! Helluva game!

(suddenly noticing Druid)

Oh! Sorry.

Druid stands up.

druid

I’m not sure we’ve met, although I’ve seen you around. I’m Dru--Druid.

Prentice glances at Spencer, uncertain, but comes in and shakes hands with Druid

Prentice

Good to see you. I’m—Oh! Dru! I've heard a lot about you. Spencer thinks you hung the moon. He was happier than a pig in shit when they traded you to the Falcons.

Druid

Don’t believe everything you hear.

Prentice

I’m Tiss--Prentice.

Spencer

(trying to be casual)

We were having a beer. Want one?

He crosses, still limping badly, to get Prentice a beer.

Spencer (cont’d)

(over his shoulder)

Dru came over to commiserate about my knee.

Prentice

Is it all right? You can hardly walk.

Spencer

It’ll be fine.

Spencer returns with Prentice’s beer. An awkward silence ensues.

Druid

Well, I need to be going. I just wanted to stop by, make sure you’re all right.

He drains his beer and stands.

Druid (cont’d)

Nice to meet you, Prentice. I’m sure we’ll see each other around.

Spencer

(standing)

I really appreciate it. Thanks, man. I’m glad the Bears traded you to the Falcons. It’s good to have you here. We’re going to make a helluva team.

He extends his hand and awkwardly puts his left hand on Druid’s shoulder as they shake.

Druid puts his other hand over Spencer’s, holds it there for a moment, then exits, inadvertently leaving the door unlatched.

Prentice

I’m sorry. That was a little awkward.

Spencer

He’s a really good guy. We played together at Alabama, and then he got drafted by the Bears—fifth round.

Prentice

Not bad on the eyes, either.

Spencer

(laughs)

That’s for sure.

Prentice

So how *is* your knee? I thought you weren’t going to make it to the refrigerator when you got my beer. Want to have my dad take a look at it?

Spencer

The trainer said it isn’t anything serious. Just some kind of light sprain.

Prentice

(concerned)

You took quite a beating in the game

Spencer

Tell me about it. I’m still sore all over.

Prentice

Spencer’s cellphone rings. He picks it up and looks at the caller ID with an expression of distaste.

Spencer

It’s Nancy.

Prentice

(steeling himself)

Want to take it? I can excuse myself.

Spencer

(hesitating)

No.

He silences the ringing and puts the phone back down.

Prentice

Wait a minute.

He exits and returns with an icepack and a towel. He obviously knows where everything is.

Prentice

Put your foot up.

Spencer tries, biting his lip.

Prentice takes Spencer’s lower leg and gently sets his foot on the table. He wraps the towel and positions the icepack on Spencer’s knee

Spencer leans back on the couch and adjusts the icepack slightly.

Prentice watches him, letting his eyes linger as they roam his body.

Prentice (cont’d)

I’ll get you some Ibuprofen.

Spencer

Another beer would be better.

Prentice exits and returns with two Ibuprofen tablets, a glass of water and two beers.

Spencer reaches for the beer. Prentice pulls it out of his reach and holds out the Ibuprofen tablets.

Spencer reluctantly takes the tablets with a swig of beer.

Prentice watches Spencer with concern. Spencer closes his eyes and leans his head back.

Prentice

Here. Let’s reposition you. Turn over and lie down. I’ll help you.

Spencer

What? I don’t need . . . I mean.

Prentice

Just lie down.

Spencer reluctantly and awkwardly shifts his position so that he is lying prone on the couch. Prentice assists him with his leg.

Once Spencer is in position, Prentice withdraws a tube of ointment from his pocket, twists the cap off the tube, examines Spencer’s position, and hikes up his shirt to expose most of his back.

He squirts something from the tube onto his hand, kneels down, and begins messaging Spencer’s back.

Spencer jumps at the first contact, but then relaxes.

Prentice digs his fingers into the muscles of Spencer’s back, works his way up to the shoulders, and then back down, spending some time on his butt, and then proceeds down to his legs, working around the ice-pack on the back of his knee.

Spencer is in bliss, making a kind of purring noise.

Prentice

You like that.

Spencer

I love it. Don’t stop.

Prentice

(continuing to work on Spencer’s body)

It must be good to have Drew down here. I think you've been feeling a bit isolated from these good old boys who make up the fan club in Atlanta.

Spencer’s cellphone rings.

Spencer

Do you mind? See who it is.

Prentice picks up the phone and looks at the caller ID.

Prentice

(grimaces)

It’s Nancy.

HE holds the phone out to Spencer

Spencer

(ignoring the proffered phone and mutters)

Jesus! Let me the fuck alone!

Prentice resumes massaging Spencer’s back.

PRENTICE

I can’t believe how massive your trapezius is—and that grove it makes with the lats on both sides is hot.

SPENCER

I work at it. You’re showing off the anatomy jargon your old man taught you.

Prentice continues.

Spencer

I’m scared, Tiss.

Prentice

I know, honey.

Spencer

What am I going to do? I want to play football. I want to live our lives together.

Prentice

That’s what I want, too—both of those.

Spencer

It’s not fair to you to hide.

Prentice

It’s a price I’m willing to pay, if that’s what it takes. We support each other.

Spencer

No one will drive a wedge between us.

Prentice

As long as that’s what we believe, there’s nothing we can’t deal with.

Spencer

I love you so much, Tiss. I love you desperately.

Prentice

Me too, Spin.

HE twists Spencer’s neck around so he can kiss him.

Prentice

Is your knee feeling any better?

Spencer

Lots better. I don’t know whether it’s what you’re doing, the ice, or the Ibuprofen.

He twists his head around again to smile at Prentice.

Spencer (cont’d)

Probably the beer. Let me have another one.

Prentice

You’re really snarfing down the beer this evening.

Spencer

I’m in the doghouse with the coach.

Prentice

Why? After the way you played?

Spencer

He says I’m too “remote;” not willing to let people close to me.

Prentice

(continuing to massage Spencer’s back, occasionally moving his hands down to a leg or foot, adjusting the icepack when it threatens to slide off the back of Spencer’s knee.)

At some point, he removes his own shirt and kicks off his flipflops

That’s interesting.

HE continues the massage, both of them now nearly oblivious to what he’s doing, but both enjoying it. The massage is gradually is morphing into more generalized foreplay.

prentice (cont’d)

(laughing)

Just tell him you’re mildly autistic. There’s actual a lot of similarity between being autistic and being closeted.

Spencer

No shit.

Prentice (cont’d)

You have to be careful. I know it’s hard when you have to compartmentalize your life.

Spencer

Tell me about it.

Prentice

(thoughtfully)

You’re doing what you have to do to play football. Sometimes I admit, I feel a little excluded from the football compartment. I’ve never met any of your teammates—except Druid, just now.

Spencer

It’s dangerous to let down my guard.

Sound of a knock on the door, which is slightly ajar. Spencer and Prentice don’t hear it. Druid enters.

He sees Spencer and Prentice and freezes, realizing that Prentice has noticed him.

Druid

Shit! I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have . . . the gate was open, and then the door . . .

Spencer lifts himself up to see who it is

Spencer

(horrified)

Dru?

Druid

I’m sorry, man. I’ll leave.

Spencer

No! Uh . . .

Prentice

Come on in.

Spencer

I can explain. Tiss—Prentice—was just . . .

Druid makes some kind of decision, and comes further inside, reaches for a chair and sits down, facing them.

Spencer (cont’d)

Prentice was just—

Prentice

His knee . . .

Druid

Be quiet. You don’t owe me any explanation. I’m cool with it. That’s what I came back to tell you. I went out for a few more drinks, and couldn’t get our conversation out of my head—meeting Tiss and all. I guess that’s what made me think—maybe you keep your distance because you think you have something to hide.

Spencer

It’s not . . .

Druid

I came back to tell you, you certainly don’t have to hide it from me. I’m cool with it. I don’t give a shit about your personal life—That’s not what . . . I *do* give a a shit about it. I want you to be happy. *Who* makes you happy doesn’t matter to me.

He looks at Spencer and Prentice, who have pulled apart, but their nearly naked bodies are still dangerously close.

Druid (cont’d)

Hell, I’m glad for you—for both of you.

Spencer

But . . .

Druid

And I’ll keep it entirely to myself, so you don’t need to worry about that. Okay?

HE searches Spencer’s eyes until he is satisfied that his words have penetrated.

Druid

Let’s have dinner tomorrow—the three of us. I already know Spin like a brother. I’d like to know you, too, Tiss.

HE stands, pauses for a moment to show that he’s not in a hurry, and exits.

Spencer

Shit.

Prentice

What do you think he’ll do?

Spencer

I don’t know. I hope he meant what he said. I can’t fucking believe this . . .

He can’t find the right words.

Spencer (cont’d)

We can think about this in the morning. I’m going to get shitfaced. Break out some of the harder stuff.

Lights grey. Spencer and Prentice drink for a while, becoming increasingly affectionate and physical, hugging and stroking each other. THEY undress the rest of the way and are tender with each other.

spencer

Now, I’m *really* scared, Tiss.

prentice

I know, Spin.

HE kisses him and holds him tight.

Prentice (cont’d)

You’re so strong.

Spencer

I don’t feel strong, right now.

Prentice

But you are. You always underestimate yourself. Somehow imagine that everything is going to come crashing down.

Spencer

That may be about to happen.

Prentice

You have a beautiful face and a sculpted body. You’re gentle and there’s not an ounce of arrogance in you. You’re smart, well educated, and you make a grotesque amount of money, most of which we’ve saved.

Spencer

Thanks to you. You’re always the sensible one, unflappable, no matter what happens.

Prentice

We’ve shared a lot in five years.

Spencer

God knows!

Prentice (cont’d)

We toughed our way through our initial arguments about my being more out than you.

Spencer

You held my hand when we sweated through the draft, and constantly pointed out that I would not be a worthless human being even if I didn't get drafted.

Prentice

You were brave when you came to meet my parents--who, of course, loved you and wouldn't dream of outing you. But you had no way to know that, for sure.

Spencer

(laughs)

I sure didn't, but I went anyway.

Prentice

You did.

Spencer

My fucking heart was in my throat.

(a beat)

You take care of me when I come limping home--like right now.

Prentice

I worry about you, about what you do to your body, but I know how much football means to you, and I celebrate your courage and your prowess on the field.

Spencer

You also celebrate me when I screw up.

Prentice

That doesn't happen very often. I screw up more often, and you're always ready with a joke, with some sarcastic remark that gives me perspective.

Spencer

We’re going to spend the rest of our lives together, Tiss.

Prentice

We will, Spin. We will.

They drift off to sleep.

Lights down and up

Spencer and prentice are asleep on the couch, bodies intertwined

Prentice awakens and looks at Spencer who opens his eyes

spencer

Jesus Christ! the way I feel, I wanna die. We didn’t even make it to the bedroom.

prentice

You’re too young to die. Get up and tough it out. You were the one who wanted to kill the fifth—after all that beer.

spencer

Yeah. Well. It seemed like a good idea at the time—after Dru.

prentice

Maybe we should invite him over for breakfast.

Spencer

You think he’d come?

Prentice

He said he wanted to have dinner with us.

Spencer

Shit. Well you said you wanted to know someone on the team. I guess your wish is coming true.

Spencer picks up his iPhone, like it was hot to the touch.

Spencer (cont’d)

Do you really think I should call him? . . . Maybe I should just text him. Or . . .

Prentice

Nevermind, my brave, macho quarterback. I’ll call him.

(taking Spencer’s cellphone from him)

Is he in your contacts?

Spencer nods and Prentice scrolls the phone and taps on it.

Prentice

(into the phone)

Hey—no it’s not Spin; it’s Prentice . . . Prentice. We met last night . . . right.

(laughs)

Well, Spin and I wanted to invite you over for breakfast. Are you free?

(listens)

Whenever you can get here. We’re both a little hung over and moving slowly.

(listens, laughs)

See you then.

HE hands the phone back to Spencer.

spencer

(finally coming fully awake)

Fuck. What’re we going to say to him?

prentice

He’s your teammate. You’ll figure something out, sweetie.

HE kisses Spencer. Spencer responds desperately and then breaks away.

spencer

Thanks, Tiss. You really are great. Blocking for me so ferociously.

HE twists Prentice’s arm behind his back.

Spencer (cont’d)

Slinking off to the sidelines is more like it.

Prentice

Ow! Let me go. God knows, I’ll have to fix the food. You’d poison all of us.

(pulls at his arm)

I can’t do it with a dislocated shoulder.

Spencer releases him. Prentice pulls on a pair of shorts and pads barefoot into the kitchen. Spencer goes offstage to take a shower.

Sounds of a shower and of pans banging and bacon sizzling.

Spencer reenters from the shower, wearing a towel.

The door buzzer sounds.

Spencer

Shit! He must have been sleeping out in the hall.

He scrambles to replace the towel with a pair of shorts, and then rushes over to press the door release button.

Druid enters. He’s dressed as the evening before.

Druid

You guys had a party night, too, I guess.

Spencer

Don’t talk about it. I may puke on you. Tiss probably didn’t tell you that when he invited you.

Prentice

(from off-stage)

Shit! We don’t have any eggs.

(pauses)

Double shit! Fuck! We don’t have any bread, either. I’ll be right back. Fix him some coffee, Spin. Pretend you know how to be a host. He’ll neglect you, Dru, probably go back to sleep or something. But I *will* be right back.

Prentice exits.

Druid

He’s a riot. I guess he keeps you in your place.

Spencer

(still nervous about the subject)

He’s the quarterback here. Sit down! Let me get you some coffee.

He goes off-stage to the kitchen and returns.

Spencer (cont’d)

Sorry. It’s still brewing.

He sits down, hesitates.

I’m glad you could come over.

Druid

I’m glad you invited me.

Spencer doesn’t know what to say.

Druid (cont’d)

A little awkward, huh?

Spencer

(rubbing his hands on his thighs)

You got that right.

Druid

How’s your knee—oh fuck it. So you’re gay?

Spencer

Yeah.

He pauses and rubs his thighs again.

Listen. No one else knows about this.

Druid

Knows about what?"

Spencer

Prentice.

Druid

Oh. Why?"

Spencer

Oh, come on. You know why.

druid

They can’t cut you because you are gay--under the 2011 NFL collective bargaining agreement. Article 49, section 1, prohibits "discrimination in any form" against a player by any team, the union or the NFL based on "sexual orientation."

Spencer

I can just imagine going to the coach and quoting that to him.

Druid

I’d go with you if anyone tries to give you any shit about it.

Spencer

No one’s going to give me any shit if they don’t’ know about it.

Druid

Yeah. But you pay a price for that.

Spencer

It’s a price I’ve been paying all my life. I want to be an NFL football player. I’m not going to derail up my chance--anything that will screw up the playoffs. We really have a good chance this year.

druid

We do—as long as you are our quarterback. You *are* an NFL pro football player—a very good one. And you happen to be gay.

Spencer

I don’t have to tell the world that. It’s none of their business.

druid

You don’t have to keep it from the team. What’re they going to say? “Emergency! One of us is queer! We’re afraid he will overpower us weaklings and rape us in the shower?”

Spencer

(he can’t resist a slight smile)

Well, not exactly that . . .

druid

“We don’t care that he can tell the Marines that he’s gay and become a marine officer, or that he can go to New York and marry Prentice?”

You can’t be the only gay guy in professional football. This is the twenty-first century. Everyone knows that, and no one cares.

druid (cont’d)

I think you pay a higher price for keeping it under wraps—I guess “in the closet” is the phrase—than any price you would pay if you relaxed about it.

Spencer

I don’t know how to be “relaxed” about it.

Druid

Listen, Spin. I figured out long ago that it might be something like this going on with you, but I didn't pull away, I just waited for you to tell me. Now you’ve told me. I’m not freaking out. It makes me feel close to you, like the final glue in our bond is finally there. No one else is going to go berserk either. Everyone has some gay friends.

He holds Spencer’s eyes.

You are who you are, and everyone already respects the hell out of the part of you they already know.

Spencer

It’s makes me cringe to think of it. I can imagine the stories the next day—hell within minutes on CNN, ESPN, the blogs, and YouTube.

druid

If they found out. But even if they did, it’s an opportunity.

Spencer

An opportunity to commit professional suicide. Even if the team was okay with it, the reporters would go berserk. Every time anyone has a press conference, anytime they talk to a player, all of the questions would be about their queer teammate.

Druid

It’s an opportunity to make a difference in the world. It would give us a chance to be noble

(in the tones of a TV sportscaster, looking at Spencer and Prentice, while maintaining the formality he uses in talking to the camera)

Breaking news! In a late-afternoon press conference today, NFL quarterback Spencer Wilson showed the courage he regularly displays on the football field every Sunday afternoon. He came out of the closet, and acknowledged that he is gay.

Wilson, widely expected to lead his team to the Superbowl this year, and an odds-on candidate to receive the MVP award at the end of the season, is admired for his ferocious athleticism, for his mystical ability to drill the football through the upraised arms of multiple defenders into the hands of a downfield receiver—even one as clumsy and slow as Dru--his on-the-spot adaptability and his speed and footwork when he decides to run the ball himself.

But that’s not all he is admired for. Wilson is known as a decent guy in an often brutal sport, populated with big egos, cruelty, greed, and indifference to the larger world. Everyone who has seen him or heard of him uses him as a role model.

This latest development in his awe-inspiring career should only deepen the admiration. Now he has let us see the rest of him.

Druid stops. Spencer looks at him in amazement.

Druid (cont’d)

That’s what they should say. It’s the truth.

Spencer

Thank you.

He clears his throat, and tries to continue, but he can’t.

druid

It’s the truth.

You’ve got a chance to do something really big, here—really great. Every little kid out there who’s cringing in his closet, terrified, will hear about this, and gain some courage. Every bigoted bully who amuses himself by beating up on gay—or suspected—gay kids will hear about this and realize that he is an asshole.

Spencer

I just . . . I understand what you are saying . . . but what would I . . .

Druid

Just relax. Don’t censor every movement, everything you say. Everyone already likes you. They would be honored that you opened up to, that they now know *all* of Spin. It would bring all of us closer, make you a real leader. Everyone wants leadership and respects it.

Spencer

I don't understand what you're pushing this so hard. Are you gay yourself? That would be something!

Druid

(laughs)

No. Not at all. I care about you. We’ve known each other for a long time. There was a time, back in college, when you shined a light into my soul and made me look. I will never forget that.

We have an unbreakable bond. But it’s always like there was a piece missing. I never could understand it. It's the Stoicism – the remoteness – that we talked about last night.

Now I understand what the missing piece is. Over the last year so it occurred to me that that might be it. You’ve always had to hide something—something important.

Spencer

I’ve got pretty good at it.

Druid

Like I told you last night. You don’t have to hide it from me.

(hesitates)

You’re painting yourself into quite a quarter here, and I see disaster looming. I want to help you work through it. That's all.

Spencer

Even if I tried to take your advice, I don’t know how to do it.

Druid

Do what?

Spencer

Have a relaxed, casual conversation about my sexuality with a bunch of straight guys. I’ve never done it—not ever.

Or for that matter, have a relaxed casual conversation about *anything* with straight guys who know I’m gay.

It would be like a six-year-old interacting with adults for the first time, without his parents ever having coached him.

Druid

(laughs)

It’s not that hard. I’ll be happy to give you instruction. I’ll coach you.

Spencer

Well you better coach me on how to talk about it with *you.* I don’t know how to do that.

Druid

You’re doing fine.

Spencer

And wouldn’t there be risks?

Druid

We’ve already talked about the risks.

Spencer

No. I mean . . . What if I fall in love with someone? If it’s a permissible subject, everyone will want to talk about it; pretend to flirt with me. Am I supposed to flirt back? What if something clicks with one of the others? What about Tiss? It’s easier to prevent that if I build a wall; if it’s not out in the open.

Or do we just make a formal announcement but keep the subject in the closet? Spin is now your closest buddy—your brave no-longer-closeted quarterback leader. Your leader about whom you now know a lot more than you ever wanted. But be careful. Neither of you can talk about dating, about your love life?”

Druid

I can’t predict all the details. But I do know this: if my job involved working with a bunch of gorgeous women, I’d be a hell of a lot more likely to yield to temptation if I had to pretend to all of them that my girlfriend doesn’t exist, and to my girlfriend that they barely exist.

On the other hand, if my co-workers knew her, respected her, and our relationship, they wouldn’t be trying to get me in bed. And I wouldn’t be tempted.

Spencer

This makes my head spin—

Druid

So to speak.

spencer

(laughs, and gives Druid the finger)

Just thinking about this makes me feel completely exposed--naked.

Druid

Everyone is naked in the locker room.

Spencer

(gives him the finger again)

That’s not what I mean, ass. I’ve spent a lifetime perfecting these strategies, and you suggest that I just strip them away?

Druid

What I’m saying is that you would have a whole lot better life, if you did. That’s exactly what I’m saying.

And like I told you: I’ll coach you through it.

Prentice enters, with a full shopping bag from the convenience store.

Druid

Hey, Tiss. Wanna come to the Falcon’s “significant other party” next Friday?

Prentice almost drops the bag, but regains control of it.

prentice

Jesus Christ! What about Nancy?

Druid

Who’s Nancy?

## Scene 4 - locker room (Franklin in the locker room)

Spencer, Druid, and Franklin are standing in their lockers, changing into street clothes after a practice. Spencer’s locker is in the middle.

Franklin

Hey, Mr. Quarterback stud, team leader, sir. Who you bringing to the party on Friday. Nancy?

Spencer

Uh . . . I’m not sure.

Franklin

I knew it couldn’t last long. Your dick isn’t big enough for someone that stunning.

Druid stops dressing and stands still, listening.

Spencer

Fuck you. If that’s what mattered, you’d never get any. It’s amazing when you think about it—a fucking hippo like you with such a teeny apparatus.

Franklin

I’ve seen you checking me out. It’s about the size of the mouth in your pretty little face.

Druid

Everyone has a small mouth, compared to yours.

Franklin

You better watch it, midget. I do your blocking for you.

Druid

Sometimes. Only sometimes. Usually I just have to outrun them.

Franklin

Come on. Who you bringing, if not Nancy? Whoever she is, you better keep her away from me. If she sees me, she’ll come with me, not you.

Spencer looks at Druid, helplessly. Druid makes gesture indicating “go ahead”

Druid

(half whispering, half mouthing the words)

Go ahead! Go ahead. Now’s your chance.

Spencer looks at him and shakes his head. Go ahead, go ahead, Druid gestures.

Spencer

I may just bring a friend.

Franklin

A “friend?” What kind of friend?

Spencer takes a deep breath and looks back at Druid

Spencer

His name is Prentice.

Frankin

“Prentice?” That’s a weird name for a g---Wait. You said “his.”

Spencer

Yeah. He’s just someone I’ve . . .

Franklin

Holy shit! Is he that fag I’ve seen you hanging out with sometimes? What’d you, promise him you’d introduce him to some honest-to-goodness het-er-o-sex-u-al men. I can understand that. He’s probably never met any before.

Hah! Better get one of those little suitcase locks for your zipper. Time he’s done with it there’ll be even less for Nancy.

Franklin finishes dressing, and exits, making a loud kissing noise at Druid as he passes him.

Druid gives him the finger.

Spencer watches to make sure Franklin is gone.

spencer

That went well.

druid

It was okay. You know him. He always plays an over-the-top asshole.

Spencer looks at Druid forlornly.

Spencer

This is hard, Dru, really hard.

His eyes begin to well.

Druid

I know, buddy, I know. But it will be worth it.

He approaches and hugs Spencer, and holds him. Spencer puts his cheek down on Druid’s shoulder.

Spencer and Druid finish dressing and are on their way out, when the Coach enters.

Coach

Hey, Spin. Got a minute?

Spencer

Sure.

Druid hesitates, wondering if he can stay. Coach indicates he should not, so Druid exits

Coach

I think you’re over-reacting a bit to our conversation the other day.

Spencer

What do you mean?

Coach

I’m glad you’re opening up to some of your teammates, but you don’t have to be so dramatic about it.

Spencer

(freezing)

What?

Coach

Announcing that you’re going to bring your boyfriend to the party.

Spencer

What?

Coach

Yeah. I’m really glad, that you are beginning to trust some of us to let us know you—all of you. I don’t give a shit if you’re gay. I’d like to meet your boyfriend.

He catches and holds Spencer’s eyes, and puts his hand on his arm.

Coach (cont’d)

I mean it. But it’s one thing to open up to us, one-at-a-time. Making some big symbolic statement ensures adverse reactions. It invites people to close ranks against what they see as a defiant poke in the eye.

Spencer

I’m sorry. I really don’t understand what you’re talking about.

Coach

Are you denying that you are gay? I’m sorry to put it that way . . . I don’t mean to cross examine you about it. You don’t have to tell me.

Spencer

(hesitating)

No, I guess not.

Coach

Good. Hey, I know it’s not easy. I thought it might be something like that, and I didn’t want to be too . . . well, you know . . . too specific about it in our earlier conversation. I’m glad it’s out in the open, now.

Spencer

I was going to come to see you.

Coach

I know you were, but the news beat you to it. One of your teammates came to see me.

Spencer

(angry)

Druid?

Coach

No, no. Another one.

Spencer

Fuck.

Coach’s cellphone rings. He looks at it, comes to a position of attention, and answers.

Coach

Yes, sir?

(listens)

I don’t see why that’s a problem. I think the team is okay with it.

(listens)

Oh.

(listens, face reddening)

No, no! I’m not going to do that. He’s our ticket to the Super Bowl.

(listens)

I’m telling you: I’m not going to do that. You can find someone else, if you insist on that.

(listens)

Well, all right. That seems kind of bizarre, but I’ll check into it.

Turns to Spencer.

Coach (cont’d)

What’s your girlfriend’s name?

Spencer

(mystified)

Nancy Mulligan.

Coach turns back to the phone.

Coach

Nancy Mulligan.

(listens)

All right. We’ll wait for it.

He terminates the call and turns back to Spencer.

Coach

This thing is spinning out of control, I’m sorry to say. That was Mr. O’Reilly.

Spencer

(terrified)

I figured as much.

Coach

He told me to cut you or trade you immediately. I refused.

Spencer

I heard. Thank you. You don’t need to put your job on the line.

Coach

He was out of control, ranting and raving that he’s not going to have any fucking queers on his team. “The fans imagine that he’s humping the center every time they line up,” he said—I’m sorry, but I need to give it to you straight. He’s completely out of control about this. “Football has an image. The fans will do the rats-off-a-sinking ship thing—or whatever it is. This is Atlanta, Georgia; not San Francisco,” he said.

Coach

He’s had the front office folks draft a statement that he’s sending down. He told me to wait for it. He’s going to release it after I review it.

Spencer

OK

Coach’s cellphone pings. He looks at it and fiddles with it for a moment.

Coach

That was quick. They must have already written it when he called. It’s the document. I’ll read it to you as soon as it loads.

(waiting)

Fuck.

Spencer

What now?

Coach

The first part of it is a “breaking news” story from Fox:

(reading aloud)

“NFL quarterback plans coming out party. Spencer Wilson, promising young quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons, has announced that he is bringing his boyfriend to a team party. Players in an uproar. Stay tuned”

Spencer

(wishing he could hide)

Shit.

Coach

Then there’s the document that they drafted for release.

“The Atlanta Falcons deny the vicious and unsubstantiated rumor that one of their players is a homosexual. The team would never allow such perversion to poison its roster. In fact, Spencer Wilson, the player who has been slandered, has announced his engagement to Nancy Mulligan. The loving couple plans their marriage ceremony for next June in Atlanta. The Falcons congratulate both of them.”

Spencer

(anger replacing terror)

Full service club, the Atlanta Falcons. Recruiting, coaching, and marriage arranging.

This is none of his fucking business.

Coach

So how shall I respond?

Spencer

I’m not letting them issue that statement. If they issue it, I will repudiate it. Say it’s false. This is absurd. Announce that I’m getting married. I’ve never heard of such a thing.

Coach

A confrontation over this may end badly.

Spencer

Let it end badly. I don’t give a shit. I gotta tell youthat Mr. O’Reilly is *not* deciding whom I’m going to marry.

Coach

Do you have any other suggestions?

Spencer

Maybe I should beat up Nancy, or sponsor a dog fight to distract them—or get busted for snorting coke or shooting up some performance-enhancing drugs. Mr. O’Reilly probably has some stashed away. Shit, that’s probably how he made enough money to buy the team—running heroin. Have him send some down. I can announce that he gave them to me.

Coach

You need to take this seriously.

Spencer

I *am* serious. Hoking up a drug bust is as reasonable as this ridiculous press release.

coach

I’m afraid he will order me not to play you.

Spencer

What! I have a contract. He’s—you—are stuck with me.

Coach

I’m not “stuck” with you. I value you. But he’s going to remind me that I don’t have to play you. Both of need to think about this hard, Spin. You are on the fast track to real greatness. You have the MVP locked up. Until this happened.

(hesitates)

I’m sorry, buddy.

He grabs Spencer’s arm again and exits.

Druid enters immediately. He has a big bag of beer and chips, which he plops down on the table.

druid

What was that all about? I could hear you screaming at each other.

spencer

Fucking Franklin works fast. He went to the coach and then, apparently, to the owner and said I am bringing my boyfriend to the party.

druid

Jesus Christ!

Spencer’s cellphone rings. He looks at the caller ID, annoyed with the interruption

Spencer

Hello, Nancy.

Nancy is not on stage. Only her voice is heard.

Nancy

Did you hear about this horrible story on Fox Sports?

Spencer

Yeah. I’m meeting with the coach now. Things are kind of hectic.

Nancy

They’re saying these terrible things about you. I want to be with you.

Spencer

I know. I wish you were.

Nancy

I can come over now.

Spencer

I’m not at home. Uh . . . listen. Let me get back to you.

Nancy

Okay, sweetheart. Call me as soon as you can. I love you. I’m praying for you.

Spencer

I love you, too.

He breaks the connection, and looks at Druid. Druid hands him a beer.

Druid

Or would you prefer scotch? I got some of that, too. I ran out for supplies after the Coach shooed me off. I figured something bad was about to go down.

He reaches in the bag.

Spencer

Fuck. I don’t know. It doesn’t matter. I’ll drink the beer.

His cellphone rings again. He looks at the caller ID and answers

Spencer

Hey, Tiss.

Prentice is not on stage. Only his voice is heard.

Prentice

What’s going on?

Spencer

The fucking owner—O’Reilly—wants me to sign off on a press release saying that Nancy and I just got engaged and are getting married this summer.

prentice

What? You’re not going to agree to it, are you?

Spencer

No! Druid is here now, and we’re figuring out what to do.

Spencer looks at Druid and starts to lose control. He drains the beer, and Druid hands him another.

Prentice

Where are you? I’m coming right now.

Spencer

(clearing his throat)

No. Meet me at the condo. I’ll bring Dru.

He breaks the connection and starts to cry. Druid moves to the couch and holds him.

Spencer (cont’d)

I really want to play football.

Druid

You *are* playing football.

Spencer

Not if the coach does what the owner wants.

Druid

He won’t do that. He’ll lose every game without you.

Spencer’s cellphone rings again. It’s Nancy

Spencer

Hello, honey. Sorry it’s taking me so long. Yeah, okay. That would be good.

# Act II

## Scene 1 (call to the Coach)

Spencer’s condo.

Spencer enters. He’s been out for a run. His shirt is soaked through with sweat. He strips off his shirt, pulls a big brace off his knee, removes his running shoes and socks, and drinks about half of a large bottle of Gatoraide that he takes from the refrigerator.

Then, moving slowly, he sits down in a chair by his kitchen table and fiddles with his cellphone, trying to make a decision.

He starts to punch in a number, and then hesitates, browsing his email to buy some more time.

Finally, he takes a deep breath and punches in the number.

Spencer

Coach? It’s Spencer Wilson. I’ve decided the team can issue the statement.

(listens)

I know.

(listens)

There’s no reason for you to lose your job over me.

(listens)

What? My folks?

(listens)

I guess so. Okay. I’ll do it right now.

He breaks the connection and taps another entry on the directory

Spencer

(listlessly)

Hello, Mom?

(listens)

I’ve got some news. Nancy and I have decided to get engaged. The team . . .

(listens)

Oh, right. It *is* exciting. We’d been thinking about this for some time and . . . uh . . .

(listens)

Probably June. The team thinks . . .

(listens)

Yeah. Well, we can talk about all that some more. I just wanted you to hear before you see it on the news. You’ll tell Dad?

(listens)

Right. Thanks.

He puts his head between his knees.

Prentice enters. Spencer looks up

Spencer

I just got off the phone to the coach.

Prentice

You did? What did he say?

Spencer

He said I am starting on Sunday.

Prentice

That’s great! I knew he would come around.

Spencer

He didn’t.

Prentice

Didn’t what?

Spencer

He didn’t “come around.”

Prentice

But . . .

Spencer

I did.

Prentice

What? What do you mean?

Spencer

(he looks away, unable to make eye contact)

I told him they could issue the statement.

Prentice

Oh, Jesus, Spin!

Spencer

I’m sorry, Tiss. I know I should be braver. But I‘m not. I can’t stand this. I just want to play football.

PRENTICE is shocked. He tries for a beat to put a brave face on it, but he can’t. He struggles with the disclosure, tries to find the words to respond, and then tears well up in his eyes and overflow down his cheeks.

Prentice

And you can’t play football if you’re gay? You’ve *been* gay, and you’re playing football very well.

Spencer

I can’t play unless I deny it. That’s what the owner says. It was a “major compromise” on his part, he says. He really wants the coach to get rid of me.

Prentice

Jesus Christ! Then deny it. You don’t have to rush off to get married to a woman.

Spencer

That wasn’t my idea.

Prentice

Call his bluff.

Spencer

It’s not only that. The other guys on the team . . . they’re my . . . I care for them. Especially Druid. Why should he ruin his career over this? And the coach. I should ask him to fall on his sword?

Druid enters.

Prentice

He told the coach he’s signed off on the statement.

Druid

No you didn’t.

Spencer

I did. Just now. I can’t throw a turd like this into the middle of the season. It’s not fair, just when we need to keep our minds on the season. We don’t need distractions. It’s not fair.

prentice

(half to himself)

You don’t mind throwing a turd into our relationship

druid

I’ve talked to the other guys. They’re behind you 100 . . .

Spencer

You told them?

Druid

No. I wouldn’t do that. I promised you. But they’ve read the news. They don’t give a shit. They want you as their leader.

Spencer

Not all of them.

Druid

Franklin is not going to have much of a further career with the Falcons. The other guys are cooler with you than you realize. You’ve started with me. Number 2, 3 and so on will be easier.

Spencer

I’m not going to drag the whole team down with me. I’ve already put you and the coach in a horrible position. You, particularly, don’t deserve it.

Druid

Don’t talk nonsense. It’s an honor to support you. I put *you* in this position.

Prentice is feeling excluded.

Prentice

(breaking in)

And so I’m just going to be thrown out with the trash.

Spencer

No, no!

Prentice

You’re choosing Nancy.

Spencer

That doesn’t mean—

Prentice

Yes it does. OK. Well . . .”

druid

Do you guys want . . .

He stands up.

Spencer

No! Stay. I need you. Please?

Spencer and Prentice glare at each other.

Prentice

How many times have you fucked Nancy?

Spencer

What? Oh, come on!

Prentice

And don’t give me any of the PR shit about “saving it for after you get married.” You sure as hell haven’t saved it for me until we get married. How does that fit in with Catholic celibacy before marriage?

Spencer

We weren’t going—“

Prentice

Oh, right. I forgot. We can’t get married—unless we go to one of the Yankee states.

Spencer

That would be . . .

Prentice

How many times have you fucked me, and I you?

Spencer

Don’t be gross.

Prentice

So now what we did was “gross?” Thanks. I had a different impression.

Spencer

I don’t see why you want to make things even harder for me.

Prentice

Harder for you? What about me? I’m entirely outside your consciousness?

Spencer

No, no. You know that’s not right. I love you.

Prentice

Oh, right. If you love me, why are you marrying Nancy?

Spencer

I want to play football.

Prentice

You fucking toad! You’re *playing* football! You’ve been playing football for more than a year. While we were together, promising each other that we wanted to merge our lifetimes.

You fucking liar! You fucking fraud. You knew what I wanted, and you just tricked me into letting you fuck me.

Spencer starts to stand up. Prentice advances on Spencer and shoves him in the chest.

Spencer

Calm down. I don’t want to fight you. We can talk about this later

Prentice

There's not going to be any later. You already told the coach. There *is* no later.

You must have been smirking to yourself. Tiss is so devoted, cares so much about me. Nurses me when I come home all battered from the fucking game of football. Well, it’s worth pretending that I care about him. Otherwise he might not fix me dinner, reassure me, rub out my sore muscles.

You fucking snake!

HE backhands Spencer in the face.

druid

(uncomfortable)

Come on, guys.

Prentice

(wheels on Druid)

You can fucking have him. Worthless coward that he is.

Prentice jumps up and surveys the room. He spies a favorite picture of him and Spencer, dressed up, together at a banquet table. He takes a couple of bounding steps, grabs it off the wall, and hurls it to the floor, smashing it.

He stalks off the stage

Spencer looks at the door Prentice slammed, looks at Druid, and then looks down.

Spencer (cont’d)

I think I’m just going to quit.

druid

(astonished)

Quit?

Spencer

Resign from the team.

Druid

You don’t have to do that—even if you come out.

Spencer

I’m not going to come out.

Druid

So why would you quit the team?

Spencer

I’ve always thought about going to law school.

Druid

You say you want to play football, that’s it’s your dream.

Spencer

Well, I have played professional football, now. It’s time to move on to something else.

Druid

And Nancy?

Spencer

The wedding is scheduled for June. I might as well go ahead with it. Tiss is gone.

Druid

Tiss is *not* gone. He wants to stand by you, but he’s confused . . . and hurt. He’s hurt.

Spencer

Yeah. That seems to be going around a lot. I cut a wide swath when I get started. I love Nancy.

Druid

Do you?

Spencer

She’s beautiful and smart. She is so nice and so devoted to me. I try to be nice to her. I want to make her happy. I want to have a family.

Druid

That’s not what I asked.

Spencer

The other thing?

Druid

Some people think it’s the main thing.

Spencer

There’s nothing. I want to. I’ve tried. God knows, she’s not the first I’ve tried with. But there’s just not that kind of attraction.

I've tried. I’ve wished. I’ve prayed. I’ve researched. I’ve hoped for some kind of pill – some kind of shot.

Druid

Those efforts, wishes, and hopes have been going on for a long time.

Spencer

Since I was about eleven and you and everybody else started talking about girls.

Druid

That’s a long time. Why would you get married to a woman you don’t love—can’t love--if you are going to resign from the team?

Spencer

I want to play on Sunday. I want to start in a second season.

Druid struggles to formulate a reaction.

Druid

I think you’ve lost your mind. You agreed to the engagement announcement so you could keep playing football.

Spencer

So I could start the season after my rookie year.

Druid

And now you’re going to quit? We're only two games into the season.

Any you’re still going through with the engagement. It doesn’t make any sense. I want to support you but I absolutely cannot wrap my head around this.

Spencer

It’s what I’m going to do.

Druid

There’s no logic in this at all. It makes no sense at all.

Spencer

Everyone is out to screw me. Fuck ‘em!

Druid

I’m not out to screw you, Spin.

The irony of what he just said, tempts Druid to risk trying to lighten things up a bit

druid (cont’d)

Tiss is. I’m not. It’s not my thing.

Spencer

(lashing out, mindlessly)

That wide receiver for North Carolina was hot. I’d like to have been in *his* locker room.

Druid

(astonished)

What?!

Spencer

You’re uptight about it, even now. *You.* And you claim the others won’t be?

Druid

No, I’m not.

Spencer

Suppose I told you that I’ve found you extremely attractive ever since we were the ninth grade.?

Druid

I take it as a compliment.

Spencer

What if I told you I've always wanted to get you in bed, always. Strip. We can do it on the couch or go into the bedroom, you hot stud--pretty-boy stud.

Druid

You’re determined to make me uncomfortable, aren’t you? You’re getting close. But I guess I’d tell you that I'm flattered but I'm not interested. If a woman said something like that to me when I don't want to go to bed with her, I’d worry about hurting her feelings. I know you're just busting my chops.

Spencer

(risks a smile)

Well, actually . . .

Druid

I mean that you knew that I would say no.

Spencer smiles weakly and then buries his face in Druid’s chest and breaks down into sobs. Druid remains silent, stroking his hair.

Spencer

You know that waiter I told you about?

Druid

The one that asked you for your autograph?

Spencer

Yeah. Nancy and I went back to the same restaurant, and I made a point of greeting him. He acted like he didn’t know me, and just asked for our order. That kid was about to wet himself to get my autograph a week ago. Now he pretends he’s never seen me before—doesn’t even know who I am.

Spencer starts to tear up thinking about Prentice. He clears his throat.

Druid looks at him sympathetically and waits.

Spencer (con’d)

You think I’m a chicken-shit.

Druid

I’m not sure I would put it that way, but it is a little hard to wrap your head around. You want to stay in the closet because you think that’s the only way to keep playing football.

Spencer nods

Druid

But you’re going to quit football.

You love Tiss—so much so that you tear up whenever I mention him.

Spencer nods.

druid

But you’re going to marry Nancy, from whom you are so distant you have barely bothered to tell her that you’re going to quit . . . or have you even told her?

Spencer

Uh…

Druid

Oh, just great! You’re really handling this well. Don’t you think she’s entitled to know that she’s going to be marrying an *ex-*quarterback—one who quit? Or have you even told her that you’re marrying her?

Well, I guess you might just let the front office pass the word to her.

Spencer shakes his head.

druid (cont’d)

So you keep on living a lie with Nancy, and your parents, and the coach, and the press, and the world.

Spencer

I guess, but I’m going to be a law student. They won’t care.

Druid

Won’t care about what? You’re going to be in the closet, married to Nancy.

That’s going to be a hell of a marriage. I guess you’ll *have* to fuck her then. When you’re not over at Tiss’s, that is. Or did you plan on inviting him to live with the two of you. That would be more convenient. He could be your “trainer,” I guess—except that you wouldn’t need a trainer anymore because you’re not playing football.

Spencer

(beginning to get angry)

I’ll fantasize about Tiss when we’re making babies.

Druid

Right. Fantasize. Because you threw him out with the trash.

Spencer

Or – I know! I can fantasize about you. Then you can be a bit more than a mere godfather to the babies

druid

Thanks.

Are you going to tell her it’s a sham, or just carry on so that she is certain that you are cheating on her but hopefully too afraid to confront you with it? You must really care about her.

Spencer

The priest surprised me.

Druid

He did? What did he say?

Spencer

I was dreading going to confession.

Druid

Why didn’t you just go through the motions? Or, better yet, stop with that foolishness. You didn’t have to tell him what’s going on.

Spencer

If I don’t open my soul, I can’t get God’s forgiveness.

Druid works, not completely successfully, to mask his antagonism for religious ritual.

Druid

Okay.

Confessional booth, on the margin of the stage, is gradually lit. Father McQueen is sitting in it.

Spencer

So I have him a pretty full account. If I knew how he would respond, I’d wouldn’t have been such a wreck.

Druid

What did he say?

Spencer moves to the confessional, or, if the booth is close enough to make it believable, he merely turns toward the priest.

father mcqueen

May I open the screen Spin?

Spencer

Yes, Father McQueen. That would be better.

Father mcqueen

Listen to me, Spencer. God made you the way you are. Do you understand that?”

Spencer

I guess so.

Father McQueen

The Church teaches that homosexuality is a sin, and too many Church authorities have been guilty of a far worse sin—opposing all kinds of initiatives to protect gay people from violence and to assure that they have equal rights. That’s simply wrong and un-Christian. I don’t care what the Vatican says about this. The Vatican has been grievously wrong before. Think about the Inquisition. Think about the snuggling up to Hitler. It’s wrong this time, too.

Only one thing matters, Spencer. Do you know what that is?

Spencer

I’m not sure.

Father McQueen

The only thing that matters is whether you have God in your heart and whether you understand and follow Jesus’s teaching. That’s not always easy. It’s not going to be easy for you. But If God is in your heart and you do what your heart says you'll do the right thing. The Christian thing.

You have to do what you know is right, in your heart. Whether marrying Nancy is the right thing or whether you should make a real commitment to Prentice is something only you can decide. God loves you, regardless.

Lights down on Father McQueen.

Druid

Wow! Smart guy.

Spencer

It moved me more than I can express.

They look at each other for a long beat.

druid

You ought to think about what he said, Spin. Wise advice.

spencer

Tiss wants me to be like him.

Druid

An actor? So why are you going to law school?

Spencer

No. A gay.

Druid

What do you mean. He *is* gay. So are you.

Spencer

I don't want to be defined mainly as gay, even if people accept that. The gay NFL quarterback—the quarterback who came out. I want to be the MVP.

Druid

The would-have-been MVP who quit after his rookie year.

Spencer

Have you looked at the marriage pages in the *New York Times?*

druid

Not very closely.

Spencer

They always have some male couples. There’s a particular look—most of them have a kind of worn . . . I don’t know how to describe it . . . I just know it when I see it. Those are the older faces you see at gay bars and gay parties: not middle-aged, but mid to late thirties, trying to look like they’re still in their twenties. Buff bodies from lots of time in the gym, faces smoothed by cosmetic surgeons.

Druid

I don’t see how you get that from the pictures in the Times.

spencer

It’s the type. The pictures evoke a type. They don't have straight friends; they don't take part in mainstream life; they've built their own ghetto, centered in the gay bars and restaurants. They are defensive about their identity, never casual.

Druid

That’s not you.

Spencer

I don't want to be part of that ghetto, even if the mainstream world tolerates my identity

I like being part of the mainstream world

Druid

So if you come out, that’s the end of your connection with the straight world? You'll shut me out--or in--or whatever the metaphor is?

Spencer

No! You’re my lifevest.

Druid

I don't think Tiss lives in a ghetto.

Spencer

Yes, he does. The theatre is part of the ghetto, because so many are gay that they all intermingle. That's unique. I’m talking about the NFL and about mainstream life—going to clubs with ordinary couples. I would miss that.

Druid

Seems to me that’s up to you. Your friends—and mostof your admirers—will still embrace you because of who you are. They will also embrace your disclosure of a new dimension of who you are.

Hiding from them with your gay friends is on you, not on your friends.

Spencer

Guys in the straight world are expected to have female dates or wives. When they don't even--if they're just single--it makes everything awkward. I can only imagine how awkward it would have been I brought Tiss to a cocktail party.

I don't want to be uptight at every party I go to, having to steel myself against adverse reactions and smirks--pretending to be upbeat and proud through it all.

Druid

No. You've always been the popular jock, one whom all the guys envy, girls hanging off of you.

Spencer

Now I’ll be a freak.

Druid

Whether you are a freak is entirely in your head, Spin.

That’s my whole point. Of course it will be awkward, at first—for both you and the team. But you, *you*, can break down these ghetto walls—learn to relax with your straight teammates who know you are gay. Help *them* relax when all of you joke about your sexual exploits, gay or straight. I’ll help you—coach you.

You can start building a better world, right here in the Falcons locker room and in Georgia Dome.

The party’s not ‘til Friday. You can still do it.

Spencer

No I can’t. He wouldn’t come, even if I wanted to bring him.

druid

Tiss is a human being, Spin. You think you can arrange whatever deception suits your plans, and he’ll just go along? He’s entitled to some dignity too.

spencer

This is what I have to do.

Druid

(deciding to try a different line of argument)

You’re betraying your faith—which you talk about entirely too much.

Spencer

I don’t pretend to be perfect. Who knows how many times I've fallen short. We all fall short. That's the amazing thing about the grace of God ...

Druid

You’re not going to earn the “grace of God” by slinking away from this. There’s nothing graceful about it. Your “faith” is phony when you run and hide. You put no faith in your teammates.

Spencer

You know nothing about it. You’re godless.

Long beat.

Then something catches Druid’s attention. He gestures toward the TV screens that has been broadcasting game highlights and now is presenting the evening news.

Announcer

The Archbishop of Atlanta, the Very Reverend Michael Blatchford, issued a statement today denouncing homosexuality, and decrying the moral weakness that has led more and more young Americans to accept it.

Spencer

Fuck.

That’s proof of why I have to quit.

Druid

Why?

Spencer

I’m wrecking everyone’s lives. Mine, yours, the coach’s, and now I’m going to get Father McQueen defrocked.

Druid

You’re not wrecking my life, Spin. You have enriched it. And the only way you will wreck yours is if you quit the team and marry Nancy.

Spencer

I don’t know what the fuck to do.

Druid

Give him a couple of hours and then call Tiss. Tell him you love him and that you are going to tell Nancy what’s going on—what’s really going on.

He stands up and exits.

Spencer picks up his cellphone, flips through his quick-call list and hesitates. He taps a number.

Spencer

Hello, Honey.

(listens)

Oh! Glad you’re here. Come on up. My roommate is out.

HE buzzes her up and opens the door. Nancy greets him. He kisses her and hugs her desperately.

Spencer (cont’d)

(nervously)

The team is going to be making an announcement that I hope you will be pleased with.

Nancy

What?

Spencer

We’re getting engaged.

Nancy

Oh, Spin! That’s wonderful. I’ve been hoping . . .

And, after all these terrible things they’ve been saying about you . . .

Spencer tenses.

Nancy

It makes my skin crawl just to think about it. I know it’s all completely false.

Spencer

I want us to be happy together.

Something about Spencer’s reaction makes Nancy anxious.

Nancy

None of it’s true, I know. Of course they aren’t. I’m sorry I even . . . I shouldn’t have. That was disrespectful.

Spencer

I just want us to be happy.

Nancy

If there was anything . . . I mean . . . if there was something you wanted to talk to me about.

Spencer

No, no. Let’s tell your mother and celebrate.

## Scene 2 (Input for the Coach)

Coach’s office. The Coach is behind his desk

Franklin enters, knocking on the door.

franklin

Got a minute. Coach?

coach

I guess so—a couple.

He does not invite Franklin to sit down

franklin

You’re going to cut him, aren’t you?

coach

Who?

franklin

Who do you think? Spencer.

Coach

Why would I cut him? His performance is stunning.

Franklin

Because he’s a fucking fag, that’s why. I’m not going to play with a fag.

Coach

So what if he were? He’s a good football player—better than you, that’s for sure.

Franklin

So what if he is? You gotta be kidding. The other guys and I are not to be in the showers and the locker room with a fucking queer getting a hard on every time we change clothes?

Coach

You ever seen that happen?

Franklin

Yeah, I think so, now that I think about it. The other guys have noticed it, too.

Coach

Don’t be ridiculous. This is the 21st century. Do your fucking job.

Franklin exits, angrily.

Druid knocks on the open door. The Coach looks up.

Druid

Spencer is setting up a press conference for on Monday

Coach

What! He just had a press conference, announcing his engagement. And, anyway, we have people to arrange press conferences for our players.

Druid

He's going to announce his resignation from the team.

Coach

(mood darkening)

You must be high on something. He's not going to do that. We worked it all out.

Druid

You didn't work it all out.

The Coach stares at Druid, speechless.

Coach

This is crazy. Why would he quit? If he quits now, after all these rumors swirling around . . . Everyone will think we fired him. It will ruin his life.

Druid

It won't ruin his life. It will rescue it.

Since when have the professional sports teams of America arranged marriages?

Coach

It was the only way to save him. Otherwise O’Reilly insisted that I cut him. I would quit before I would do that. Of course, if I did, I’d be lucky to get a junior high school teaching job

Druid

So all this is about saving your job.

Coach

No it isn't! You know that. You know what the culture is like.

Druid

Well I think it’s a shitty culture. Let me ask you this:

Suppose the Falcons changed ownership. Tom Fletcher is the founder of Cyberdreams, the phenomenally successful new Internet startup. He recently bought a controlling interest in the *New Republic* and took over as publisher and editor in chief. He’s got $700 million from the sale of his Cyberdreams stock. He was head of online organizing for President Obama's 2008 campaign. He just married his male partner, Trey Lambsdorf, an investor and political activist who helped lead the fight for gay marriage in New York state.

Coach

So? That’s New York. This is Georgia.

Druid

Between them, they have way more money than they know what to do with. Suppose they have bought the Atlanta Falcons. The main reason they buy the team is their conviction that the Falcons should take a long overdue step to bring professional football into the twenty-first century. They envision a dramatic first step: the coach—you--should get married to a man. They would have the coach go up to New York, where gay marriage is now legal, and get married, officially, to one of his assistant coaches or players.

Coach

That’s the most ridiculous thing I ever heard.

Druid

I didn’t figure you would be too keen on it. But the new owners wouldn’t care. They just want a symbolic gesture and they make it clear that you’ll be out of a job if you don’t do it.

Coach

You’ve lost your fucking mind.

druid

Maybe, but just imagine. Suppose something like that happened—straight coach, arranged gay marriage. What kind of life would you have? Presumably not much of one with your arranged husband, because you wouldn't have any romantic feelings for him. What kind of impact do you think the grand gesture would have on your relationship with your wife or with other women you are interested in?

(pauses for a long beat)

That’s exactly what you’re doing to Spencer.

Coach

They’ll demand a separate dressing room and require him to shower by himself.

Druid

I won’t. You ought to talk to the team about this.

Coach

I’ve already talked to them—some of them anyway. They’re demanding that I cut him.

Druid

How many did you talk to? Who, besides that asshole Franklin?

Coach looks away, evasively.

druid

Listen. All this shit on Fox. There's already some pushback building in the responsible and progressive part of the press and media. You better tell Mr. O'Reilly this is going to be a firestorm unless he backs off. We all have friends in the press. Not only Franklin.

Coach

Jesus! Why would he quit? He's our best draft pick in years. Phenomenal rookie year. He could have led us to the Super Bowl

Druid

He still can, coach. You can put an end to this savagery. Think about your legacy of leadership when you're ready to retire.

Talk to the team.

Druid exits.

Coach

Shit.

HE puts his head down on his desk in frustration. He stays that way for a long moment, and then picks up his phone.

Coach

Get all the players in here, ASAP.

## Scene 3 (not nobly done)

Spencer and Nancy are in his condo. She has just shown him the wedding dress—without putting it on--and is now putting it away.

Spencer

That’s really beautiful. *You’re* so beautiful.

Nancy folds the wedding dress and carefully puts it back in the box.

Nancy

I hope I get to wear it, someday.

Spencer

It’s just amazing how everyone is so excited about this . . .

What she said suddenly registers.

Spencer (cont’d)

What do you mean?

Nancy

We’re about to ruin our lives.

Spencer

Ruin our lives? How?

Nancy

By trying to do something that’s not in our genes.

Spencer

(alarmed and confused)

Whatever are you talking about?

Nancy

We have to abort this. It’s going to be awkward and embarrassing, but it will only get worse if we wait.

Spencer

Abort it? Jesus! Are you pregnant? Why didn’t you tell me. That’s not what . . .

HE stares at her with sudden realization.

Spencer (cont’d)

How could you be pregnant?

Spencer (cont’d)

Who?

Nancy

I’m not pregnant. It couldn’t be yours, that’s for sure.

Spencer

I don’t have a clue what you are talking about.

Nancy

What’s the scenario, Spencer? We get married and then live like monks?

Spencer

I told you . . .

Nancy

Oh, I know. Saving our virginity for the wedding night, and all that.

Spencer

That’s right! What’s wrong with that?

Nancy

Nothing would be wrong with that. It’s trying to be someone you’re not—someone you’re incapable of being.

I love you Spencer, and my dream was to live my life with you.

Spencer

That’s my dream, too.

Nancy

I’ve been thinking about this for a while, and then I talked to Father McQueen.

Spencer freezes. He can’t look at Nancy.

Spencer

(trying to keep his voice even)

What did he say?

Nancy

He actually didn’t say much at all. He just asked some questions about our engagement, how I felt about marriage. What I expected from it.

She pauses.

nancy (cont’d)

More important: he asked me how you felt about it.

Spencer wants desperately to change the subject, but he can’t figure out how.

Spencer

And?

Nancy

He told me something that Oliver Wendell Holmes once said. It made an impact on me. I wrote it down.

SHE looks down at a scrap of paper

Nancy (cont’d)

“Alas, gentlemen, we cannot live our dreams. We are lucky enough if we can give a sample of our best, and if in our hearts we can feel that it has been nobly done.”

Spencer

This is the strangest thing I have ever . . .

Nancy

Your best is not with me, Spencer. And if we press on with this pretense neither one of us will feel in our hearts that it was “nobly done.”

Spencer

(descending into raw panic)

But . . .

Nancy moves to him, kisses him lightly on the lips and hugs him.

nancy

It’s not fair to Prentice.

spencer

(panic growing)

Prentice! What do you . . .

nancy

He loves you, Spin. I do too. I always will. But I love *you*—not some character you think you can play. I love you the way God created you. God doesn’t make mistakes.

spencer

I don’t understand this.

Nancy

You don’t need to take it on yourself to cover up what you think was God’s mistake. God doesn’t make mistakes.

It’s time, Spencer.

## Scene 4 (press conference)

Press conference. The audience is in the position of the press. The coach, Spencer, Nancy, Prentice and Druid are seated behind the podium.

The Coach steps closer to the podium. The room falls silent.

coach

One of our players has something to say.

He yields the podium to Druid.

druid

Spencer Wilson originally was going to organize this press conference—on his own. He thought it would be better if it was independent of the Falcons.

More crowd murmuring.

Druid waits patiently for their attention.

Druid (cont’d)

The purpose, he told me, was for him to announce his resignation from the team and his plans to go to law school.

He steps back and turns to Spencer.

Renewed crowd noise.

Spencer slowly stands, looks at Prentice, Nancy, and the Coach, and approaches the podium.

Spencer

This is one of the hardest things I have ever done in my life. My proudest achievement was earning a place on the Atlanta Falcons starting roster.

I’ve done my best to be a credit to the team, to my teammates, to myself, to the people closest to me . . .

(he glances over his shoulder at Nancy, Prentice, and Druid)

and to God.

I’ve concluded that those obligations—which I hold close to me heart—require a change. It’s time to move on, to a deeper sense of duty.

I’ve been engaging in a course of conduct that is unworthy of me, unworthy of my teammates, and unworthy of the Atlanta Falcons. It’s being going on for a long time but I kept it hidden.

I let football lead me into a lie. I’ve been lying to you—and to almost everyone else.

I knew it was a lie, but I was afraid.

I knew it was a lie, but I thought I could tell it without getting caught.

I was afraid of the reaction if the truth came out about what I was doing. I didn’t trust anyone, not my teammates, not the coach, not my fiancé. Not even myself.

I was afraid that my career would be over if people knew who I was.

I was afraid that my parents and my friends preferred the lie.

I was afraid that my fiancé, the wonderful Nancy, who now stands behind me, couldn’t live with the truth.

She, in fact, was the one who gave me the courage to talk to you today—to tell you the truth. She, and lots of others.

He steps back to clasp Druid’s hand.

Spencer (cont’d)

The truth is: I am gay.

Sounds of pandemonium, so many shouted question fragments that none of them is intelligible.

Spencer stands patiently, waiting for things to calm down.

Reporter

(from the audience)

Why are you doing this? You could easily keep it a secret. There are probably lots of players who are keeping this—and lots of other things—secret. Isn’t this going to be a huge distraction.

Spencer

Living a lie was a prison. I thought I could play football, but planned to do it on my own terms; within this false framework—this prison--I had constructed for my life. I had lived in it for a long time, helping the warden—myself—shore up the walls and the barbed wire.

In 1973 Andrew Tobias, writing under the pseudonym John Reid, wrote a book called "The Best Little Boy in the World." It was a journal of *his* prison life--forty years ago. He thought he could win love only if he concealed his gayness and made sure that he was perfect otherwise: cracking the best jokes, taking an interest in those around him, getting straight-A’s, being able to do the most pushups or chin-ups, running the best 100-yard dash time, scoring the most touchdowns, going to be best university, becoming class president and president of his fraternity, proving that he deserved the fastest track in his career, being admired as a renaissance man. It didn’t work.

He described what I have been going through--what 6-10% of America goes through. It’s excruciatingly painful to have to watch everything you say, every gesture, to worry constantly what someone might suspect. Never being truthful, even to your closest friends, about what you feel and care about the most. It is exhausting.

I’m breaking out of that prison today.

same Reporter

(from the audience)

I think this will be pretty painful, too—giving up your career after such a promising start.

Spencer starts to answer, but the Coach stands, and gestures that he would like to take the question. Spencer nods and moves aside slightly to make room for him.

Coach

He’s not giving up his career. He’s the starting quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons.

My heart goes out to the brave young people sharing the stage with me. They have been through painful turmoil and excruciating decisions that they should not have had to make alone. I regret to say that I have been slow to recognize my duty here.

After this firestorm developed a couple of weeks ago—actually after *you* guys fueled this firestorm—I initially reacted in the wrong way. But then a delegation of players came to see me, followed by a meeting with the whole team. They told me that if I benched Spencer—or traded him, or let him quit—because of this, almost all of them—almost *all* them--would sit out the season. There was only one dissenter. He asked me to trade him, and I gladly agreed.

When they got word that Spencer was thinking about quitting the team, . . . Well, I’m not sure what they said to him, but I’m glad they brought him around.

These young men helped me realize what is right. I owe them—big time.

Spencer

So do I. My teammates beat some courage back into me.

Look. I’ve thought a lot about this move—as you might imagine. No one who is gay has not spent huge amounts of energy wishing he were straight—trying to be straight, and when that fails, pretending to be straight. I make $5 million per year, guaranteed. I’ve got people who love me and accept who I am. I’ve got a college degree in engineering. I’m a celebrity . . .

(he smiles ruefully)

If I wasn’t before, I am now.

There is much laughter in the room.

anonymous reporter

(from the audience)

And you’re a hunk.

Everyone, including Spencer, laughs harder.

Spencer (cont’d)

Thank you. I’m in a whole lot better position to deal with this than the high-school kid who comes out to his friends, to the Marine officer who came out even when Don’t Ask Don’t Tell was in effect, to the thousands of gay men and their wives who decide to end their suffering in sexless, and in many cases, loveless, marriages.

If they are brave enough to do it, why can’t I be?

Reporter

(from the audience)

Do you think this will result in other players coming out?

Spencer

I hope so. There are about 1700 players in the NFL. If the incidence of same-sex orientation is the same as in the general population—there is no reason to believe it isn’t--somewhere between 102 and 170 of them are gay and hiding.

I hope what I am doing will give some of them the courage to be true to who they are.

(he pauses and thinks of something else)

And if that happens, it will shine a light into some miserable and painful lives – the teenager who has to hide from his classmates so they don't beat him up--and too often from his own parents so they don't turn him out of their house.

I can't do anything from here to help him fight back with his fists, but I, and others like me--I hope--can help him stand tall and replace some of his misery with pride in himself as an example of God's work

dissenting reporter

(from the audience)

Fucking Falcon’s fag party.

Franklin

(from the audience)

You got that right.

Coach

Spencer is doing the right thing. I look forward to seeing him on the field next Sunday. I expect that he will lead us to the conference championship.

Spencer is a superb football player. It’s an honor to have him as a member of the Atlanta Falcons. It’s an honor to coach him.

Moreso now than ever.

Spencer

The most courageous guy in the room is Coach Stevens.

Soundtrack of a broadcast.

Announcer

(off-stage, recorded)

The Falcons are on their way to the Superbowl, thanks to a breathtaking 47-yard pass from Spencer Wilson to wide receiver Druid Fallon in the last seconds of the fourth quarter.

Crowd noise (recorded)

“Spin-Sir! Spin-Sir! Spin-Sir!”