

Rage

“... and the Bengals led 35 to 10 against the Saints. Now onto tonight's game we have the Angels vs the Bulls, which is going down as the rematch of the century. Probably one of the most even match ups as far as technique, strategy, and overall raw power goes. How are we feeling about these rosters, Michael?”

Two groomed men sat at a long desk, lights shimmering off of its glassy, polished screens. Behind these men stood a bright blue background with markers running across it in specified angles, all leading back to the two men. Numbers accompanied each marker, and above and below the screen cycles through images of cleats scraping against grass and large spot lights lighting stadiums. Two large monitors lit up the area in the center, one behind each man. In front of them was an abyss which emitted no noise. Faces were lit up by screens, scattered around the shadows of the room. Large cameras stood, circling the desk as the two men continued their pregame banter.

“The rosters have never looked better, Jacob. The Angels have returning quarterback Neil Gazza, and previous rookie of the year, number 30, Anthony Stoss, who, I gotta tell you, Jacob, is an absolute killer as an offensive lineman. There is no getting around that man. Truly a brick wall,” the grey haired man on the left exclaimed. He looked over at the young man to his right, who was straightening out papers vacant of any scripture.

Jacob looked up and smiled, a fixed expression forming that he had been using for a majority of the conversation. “No kidding. Although, that’s not to say that today won’t be the day he gets taken down. Because the Bulls have their returning defensive lineman Cameron Roaz, returning after his one year suspension. He is by far one of their best players, and a monster on the field. They use to call him the ‘Goliath’ of the league, because no man could stand up to

him. The Bulls are lucky to get him back just in time for this game, they are going to need all the help they can get after last years display.”

“Well hopefully this playoff will be enough to get Roaz back into his old flow. For now let’s send this to our analyst’s desk,” Michael replied. The smile on his face flickered at the utterance of the name ‘Roaz’.

The lights flickered and shifted. The sound of shuffling could be heard from behind the cameras, and brief glimpses of arms and legs could be seen from the illumination of the scaffolding lights above the set. Michael and Jacob’s faces hardened, Jacob pulling out a pack of Camels from the inside of his suit jacket. Michael dug his fingers into eyes, pulling his face down as he slid his hand down its rough exterior. Clearly defined bags and dark blotches were visible on his face as his skin slowly shifter back to it’s former position. He looked over to Jacob, who was pulling out a lighter for the cigarette sticking out of his mouth.

“I wish I was out there today. I’d gut Roaz like a fucking fish,” Michael spat, leaning back into his chair.

Jacob smiled and laughed, clouds of smoke releasing from his mouth with every chuckle. “Your current state you’d keel over, oldtimer. And don’t worry, I’m sure my boys will give it to him hard enough. Either that or the fans will. Almost feel sorry for that sack of shit.”

“I don’t!” Michael replied, lurching back forward, one eye shut, the other one bulging out of its socket, red veins encircling the whites. “How does a man like that come back? How does a man like that get to walk back into this place like all the dirt’s gone. Like he’s cleaned of what he did? How does he come back to a countrywide spectacle, a respected sport like this, and get to tramps around like he deserves his spot, you tell me?”

“Mmmmm dunno pops. At the least he’s trying. Time will tell whether or not he comes back from this,” Jacob stated coolly, closing his eyes and leaning back in his own chair.

Michael sat back, shaking his head, mumbling profanity to himself.

“Some things you don’t get to come back from.”

....

A dim light filtered the lockers with a stagnant, pale glow. Every so often a strip bulb would flicker, causing shadows to briefly dance across the walls, disappearing as soon as they sprung up. The lockers were a gray mass that stretched across the room. Some were dented, others slightly agape with clothes laid about the cold cement floor.

There was a rumble overhead. Stomping and roaring was muffled by thick stone barriers as masses flooded the stands above. Below them a team donning orange jerseys with blue curve embellishments running across gathered in a circle and began their ritual. Large men, with defined muscles pulsing underneath their tight leggings and jerseys, donned their armor, bumping each other, snarling like beasts getting ready for a hunt. They crowded and pushed each other towards a center, where an old man wearing sweats and grasping a clip board stood. He was considerably small compared to the golems that surrounded him. He bellowed for silence, raising his hands above the giants. The hunting party quickly fell silent and kneeled before their keeper. He looked around, a slight grin on his face.

“Gotta appreciate the enthusiasm. Havn’t seen you all this pumped for a game in quite some time. Does that mean that we’re planning on pulling a win out of our sorry asses for once!?” the old man question, his grin fading at the end. His face contorted into a sneer, and he looked down upon his flock.

A flurry of disjointed hollars washed over the crowd while a few lowered their heads.

“I knew you had this spirit in you. I knew it despite what every single person out their would try to have me believe. I never gave up on any of you. And I don’t plan to anytime soon. Cause you got what all those other teams wished they had! You got raw power! You got fighting

spirits! Your hearts burn with it the moment you touch that field!” the small old man clenched his fist in front of him, bringing it down to punctuate his words, nearly slamming down on the heads of those closest to him.

An “Amen!” rang out. More chanting started up.

“But what I think doesn’t matter. It matters about as much as what everyone else out there thinks. Which isn’t jack shit,” the coach solemnly said. The room was quiet once more, as if a conductor had just lowered his hands. “No. Not jack shit. What matters... What needs to happen, is that every one of you believes in yourselves. You all need to feel it! Believe in yourselves!”

A “Hurrah” sounded off in response.

“Believe in each other!”

“Hurrah!”

“Believe in your spirit”

“Hurrah!”

“Now sound off!”

All together the circle of players erupted upwards, shifting from side to side in rhythm with one player’s calls.

“Who are we!?”

“Bulls!”

“What are we!?”

“Bull!”

“When are we!?”

“Now!”

“WHAT - WILL - WE - DO!”

“CHARGE - CHARGE - CHARGE - CHARGE - CHARGE!!!”

The wave of screaming animals pushed and stampeded out the door, roaring their horns of war out. Their screaming slowly drifted away, echoing as they ran further and further from their temple. Eventually the roaring ceased, and the coach was alone, standing amongst discarded towels and puddles of spilt water. The lights began to flicker. He dropped his head low, and walked around the lockers, peering down the adjacent aisle. There, one last man stood, a woman in front of him. His head was low and hung into himself. The woman had her hands on both side of his face, whispering quietly to him. As the coach cleared his throat, the two looked up.

“Time to go son. Now,” the coach said solemnly, turning away and walking towards the exit where a mass of orange had once been. “Or never...”

The last man was motionless. He stood, straight and stiff. The woman in front of him ran fingers over his short buzz cut. His head shook a bit and he slowly rose to meet her eyes. They were blue, and endless. She had a smile on her face. His face twinged at the sight of her calm.

“Give it everything you got babe,” the woman said. “Nothing more, nothing less.”

“Rosy... I,” the man started, but stopped at the presence of her finger to his lips.

“You owe them nothing, Cameron,” Rosy said, her expression stern. “Nothing at all. You do this for you.”

Cameron shook his head rhythmically in response, looking at her face once more, trying to find an answer to a question he didn't ask. He turned from her and walked slowly around the lockers, putting his helmet over his head.

Rosy stood for a moment, raising her hands over her mouth and breathing in slowly.

....

Cameron stopped at the mouth of the tunnel. He looked out at the field, the sudden rays of the sun illuminating the scene to an almost unbearable degree. He saw his team filtering along the side, through masses of black and orange workers. Some had cameras, other had yard markers, others water and towels. Everyone was doing something. The last man stood still at the mouth of the tunnel. The whistle blew. Kickoff. Cameron tapped on his chest twice with two fingers, kissed them, and raised them up. He slowly emerged from the darkness, his large imprinted number "1" radiant in contact with the sun.

He felt immediately exposed. Suddenly the hundreds of onlookers in the stands and workers on the field were looking at him. They were disgusted with him. He marched on. There were no eyes on him. He felt the heads turn. No one even noticed.

The coin toss unfolded. The Angels would be receiving. Cameron was up.

....

The Angels were pushed all the way to their endzone. It was up to the Bulls defense to keep them there. Cameron lined up with his peers. He looked down at the grass, started counting the blades. His mind flurried about him. His gut sank to the ground. The sound of the opposition's quarterback was muffled in his ear. Two huts and a hike later, Cameron was on the ground, the lights of the stadium spinning around above him. He shook his head, the grasp of hands helping him up. He looked around, his brothers in arms nodding to him. He received a bombardment of pats and grips as he was lifted off of the rugged ground.

The war had begun.

....

The Angels had traversed 50 yards. First down.

Cameron was floored three times since the first lineup. He stood in his huddle, but he couldn't hear a word that was being said. He looked around, breathing heavily. The stands were

a faceless mass of oranges and whites. Cameron squinted his eyes, sifting through the rows. He looked back to see his team getting into position. He shook his head and ran quickly to his spot. He looked ahead. There was a shadowy face underneath the white helmet ahead of him. A gold number shimmered on his chest. This was his target. Get through this man, and onto the one holding the ball. Cameron tensed up. His breathing quickened and he began to stumble forward. A whistle rang out, and a flag was thrown towards him.

False start. Five yards.

Cameron shook his head. The stands roared with cheering and screams of anger. Cameron felt the weight of his number.

....

Second quarter came around. Angels up seven to three. Stalemate with Bull's offense inches from the end zone. Bull's quarterback trots backwards, surveying the landscape. All receivers are covered. An Angel breaks through the lineup and bolts for the Quarterback.

Panic.

Cameron, stretching out his legs on the sideline, looks up to see the ball flying into the end zone. Gold gloves rise above the sea of orange and white and catch the ball. Cameron's face turns pale. He lowers his head. Interception.

The Angel that caught the ball sprinted, breaking through the sea and bolting down the field. He covered 30 yards before he was put down.

Cameron had to go back out. He tapped on his chest, kissed his fingers, and pointed them up.

He stood up, and began to walk slowly out to the field. The coach stopped him, placing his clipboard against Cameron's chest.

“You’re playing like shit, kid. I’m about ready to bench you, honestly,” Coach said, shaking his head slowly.

“Nah coach, come on. I just need to get my head screwed on right. It’s been a while, I-,” Cameron was cut off.

“You listen hear, you fuck! I didn’t agree for you to come out here to hear every excuse you can muster up in that dense fucking head of yours. What exactly is it you want? Sympathy? Pity? You don’t get to be the one grovelling for that shit! You’re the one who FUCKED up, remember?,” the coach raged on, pulling Cameron down to his height.

“I... I’m sorry, sir. I don’t want any of that. I-I-I just want to play sir. I want this back,” Cameron spat, sinking into himself. “I want to earn this.”

“It doesn’t look like you’ve even earned your right to breathe my air, Roaz,” the coach yelled, pounding on Cameron’s chest with his hand. “I swear if I was half my age I’d kick your ass. Maybe then you get some sense. What is it you want me to tell you Roaz? What do you need?”

“I,” Cameron stopped. He looked up, and then back towards the stands, scanning each person’s face. “I need to feel right again. I feel like everyone’s watching me.”

The coach looked up at Cameron. He put his head in his right hand and began rubbing his eyes, his wrinkles disappearing and reappearing. He sighed.

“No, son,” he said, placing a hand behind Cameron’s neck. “The problem isn’t that everyone’s watching. I think the problem is that no one is, and maybe that’s even harder for you to take right now. Now what’d I tell everyone in that room? It’s about how we see ourselves. These people don’t matter. Now you get out there and show me your old self.”

Cameron looked back behind him. The coach grabbed his face and pulled it forward, smacking him lightly on the cheek.

Cameron tapped his chest, kissed his finger, and pointed towards the sky.

....

Cameron lined up. The sun beat down on him. Beads of sweat pooled underneath his helmet. He looked ahead into the blazing whites and gold of Angels as they beat down on his peers. Cameron pushed forward, his body leaning forward as he slipped through the whites and oranges and around back. He saw the man with the ball, winding up. Cameron ran forwards, arms rushing past his sides. His feet propelled him towards his target, grass and dirt flying out with each step. He leapt forward and crashed into the man with the ball. They hung suspended in midair, until finally gravity pulled them towards the earth, leaving them a heap on the ground.

Cameron got his first sack.

....

A minute till halftime. Cameron steps up next to his team mates. The man to his right looks over at him and shakes his head.

“Hurrah, brother,” the man says. Cameron nods in reply.

Cameron looks down at the grass. His head clear, he looks up to see a golden number 30 in front of him. Cameron looks into the gold, getting lost in its glimmering shades for a moment. Two huts. Cameron snaps back, breathing out, growling under his mask.

A hike.

Cameron collides with the man in front of him. They bend and shake underneath the others wake. They grind their feet on the ground, their shoulders digging into each others heads. They loosen back simultaneously for a moment before plummeting into one another once more. Cameron dug his feet into the ground. He could feel his body starting to give. He could feel the Angel's hands gripping the sides of his arms. The Angel leaned back, and slammed his helmet into Cameron's. Cameron lurched back in shock, stumbling about before

falling backwards. Whistle blows, the ringing echoing in Cameron's ears. Play was over. The clanging of helmets and pads was still washing over Cameron and his eyes realigned with reality. He looked up, A shadowy face above him. The Angel looked down upon him.

"Ey Roaz? You good?," the Angel 30 asked, beginning to chuckle. He back away slowly. "Ey, what's wrong Roaz? Not so tough unless it's your bitch?"

The Angel's laughter was deafening.

Cameron's face burnt. His skin was ablaze, and his world went white. His helmet came off and was thrown aside. His body moved forward without any input from Cameron. His feet launched him at Angel 30, who had turned back around to meet him head on. Yelling started up from the surrounding soldiers, as they started towards Cameron and Angel 30, and towards each other. The group began tugging and shoving, arms flying wild. Whistles sounded off through the white haze of Cameron's eyes. He latched onto the Angel's face.

Cameron screamed.

....

Rosy walked across the room of their small apartment, picking up papers off of the coffee table and bringing them over to a satchel, which she popped open and placed the papers into. She looked to the side at the couch and saw a large jacket. Rosy sighed.

"Not again," she remarked.

....

Cameron was pulled away from Angel 30. 30's face was bright red, his ginger hair a mess from the fight, sweat sprinkling from his face as he spat words to Cameron.

Cameron couldn't hear him.

....

Rosy walked over to the kitchen, opening a box of pizza. A third was missing, and the grease had time to settle and had puddled around what was left.

He knows it's best when it arrives.

She closed the box and sat at the table. She pulled out her phone quickly, looking into the screen. She sighed and placed it on the table, placing a hand under her chin.

....

Cameron was pushed through the crowds of people on the sideline, as his coach looked over to him with fear on his face. He began talking to Cameron quickly, motioning around with his hands, pointing back at the field.

Cameron couldn't hear him.

....

Rosy stood up when the door opened. She walked around the corner. Cameron stood at the door, stumbling in, his weight shifting from the left to the right. He dropped an empty bottle onto the table. The thud made Rosy jump. She looked down at the bottle, then back to Cameron.

"Seriously? Again? You said you were hitting the gym with Gabriel," Rosy said, walking around the couch to stand next to Cameron, who had collapsed onto it, groaning.

"An' I did. We hit up Lucille's after to wind down. I was stressed out," Cameron muttered. He looked up at Rosy, who glared at him, a hand on her hip. "The fuck is your problem?"

Rosy picked the bottle and shook it at Cameron. "This is my fucking problem. This is the third night this week. It's one thing to wind down, but you get so plowed you can hardly move."

"Probably cause that's the point, you fuckwit," Cameron said. Rosy eyes widen, her hands moving to her elbows.

"You missed dinner again, you know. Pizza's gone to shit about now," Rosy said.

Cameron sat up and looked over at her. He opened his mouth to reply, but paused. His eyes dropped down to the burly jacket on the couch, lying next to him.

“The fuck is this?”

....

Cameron slowly walked down the tunnel, hands on his back as his teammates ran up behind him, trying to console him while cursing out the other team.

Cameron couldn't hear them.

....

“I told you this morning that Steven was coming over so we could finish our work. I told you this,” Rosy pleaded, backing up as Cameron raised from the couch, still eyeing the jacket.

“The fuck you did. I've told you about how I don't want that bitch in my house. I told you this, and you still don't fucking listen,” Cameron yelled at Rosy, pointing at her, throwing his hand forward.

“You're the one that won't listen! You only talk about him like this when you're drunk. I can't keep explaining this to you!” Rosy said, stumbling back as she walked around the couch.

Cameron circled around, grabbing the bottle as he passed the table. “This?” he said, holding the bottle up to his face, “isn't the fucking problem.” He bounded toward her.

“You are!” Cameron screamed, throwing the weight of his hand forward, the bottle colliding with Rosy's head. She whimpered and threw her hands over her head. A welt already began to form underneath her small hands. She was shaking as she leaned against a stand by the door.

“Cameron, I didn't do anything, please. I'm sorry!” Rosy began to cry. Cameron sneered.

“You fuck him? Why are you crying!? Is it cause you fucked him?” Cameron grabbed her wrists and squeezed them in his hands, veins bulging from his forearms. She yelled out under the force of his grip.

“No I didn’t do anything. We had work, that’s all!” Rosy replied, tears rolling down her flustered cheeks.

“Nah. NAH NAH. Not this time. You wouldn’t be sorry if you didn’t do something!” Cameron screamed. He got close to her face. “What did you do!”

“What did you do!?” Rosy screamed back. Her breathing was quick and disjointed. “You fucking can’t keep yourself together, but what, booze is gonna help? It’s not my fault that you can’t deal with your own self pity!” Rosy pushed on him, his dizziness sending him back against the couch. He growled, looking back to her, his face dark. Rosy stood tall, blood trickling down from the welt. Her hands were balled into fists.

....

Cameron walked into the locker room. He slowly moved forward, but he felt eyes on him. He felt ,fury in front of him. He slowly looked up and saw Rosy standing in front of him, arms crossed, eyes burning. His teammates walked around him towards her. She motioned them away, gritting her teeth and point out behind Cameron. The teammates looked solemnly over at Cameron, then turned away, walking out towards the tunnel, patting him on the back as they went.

Cameron couldn’t hear them.

....

Cameron stood up, walked slowly up to Rosy, who met him eye to eye. Cameron ground his teeth against themselves. The world was a white blaze around him. He looked into Rosy’s blue eyes, looked into her face. She was still soft. She was still calm.

Cameron lifted his right arm across his body and swung it across her face.

Rosy stumbled to the floor. She looked up, fear in her eyes. Her face strained as she kicked her legs towards his advancing body. He grabbed her face in one hand and dragged her, heaving her into the wall. She crumpled up, grasping her head. She pleaded, still trying to kick him away. He struggled with her for a moment before grabbing onto her feet. He pulled, yanking her across the floor as she struggled to break free. He swung her side to side, before slamming her ribs into the corner wall. He pulled her into the kitchen, leaving her curled up in the corner. Rosy breathed heavily, looking up at him. She sniffed in loudly, an adamant look on her face.

“Are you happy with this, Rosy!?” Cameron screamed, picking up a chair and slamming it into the counter, splintered wood littering the kitchen. Cameron looked down at her. “Are you happy with this?!”

Rosy looked around at the kitchen. At the fallen stand by the door, the scratches on the floor, and the clutter of collaterals sprawled about the living room. She looked back up to Cameron. She breathed in slowly, and then released.

“Are you?” Rosy asked.

Cameron’s mouth opened slightly, before his teeth gritted shut. He towered over her before dropping to his knees. He brought his fists down, and then again. And again. And again. Again. Again. Again.

Rosy screamed through his fury.

Cameron couldn’t hear her.

....

“Cameron!” Rosy yelled, snapping her fingers in front of his face.

Cameron shook his head. He looked around. He was standing in the pale locker room, nothing but the hum of lights being audible. Cameron looked into Rosy’s eyes. He examined

every little detail on her face. He saw the curve of her cheeks, the perk of her upper lip, the blue of her eyes. And the scar on her forehead.

Cameron began shaking violently. He lowered his head, muttering to himself.

"I-I-I-I'm so sorry Rosy. I got mad out there. I couldn't think straight. I couldn't stop myself. It was never the alcohol. This is just me. This is just me!" Cameron exclaimed, sobbing and gasping for air. Rosy looked sternly at him.

"No, it's not. That's man was a pussy and took a cheap shot. I'd have slugged him myself," Rosy said.

"I'm no good, I'm just no fucking good Rosy," Cameron yelled, still shaking his head. Rosy lifted his head and stared into his eyes.

"What is it you want, Cameron?" Rosy questioned.

"I...I'm just so sorry," Cameron replied.

"What? Forgiveness or some shit? I'm still fucking here right? Must've forgiven you somewhere down the line," Rosy said, still holding onto his face. "So, what do you want?"

"I'm no good. Why was I even let back. Why I am I still here. Why'd you even stay!?" Cameron yelled, his eyes closing. Rosy's nostrils flared. She let his face go.

"You see this? Self pity? You don't get to do this. You don't get to wallow. You need to own up to the shit show you were, and maybe still are. I mean, what the fuck do you want? You want me to hate you? You want me to curse your name? You want me to scream and yell until the day you die, you sorry fuck!?" Rosy yelled. Cameron kept eyes closed, still shaking. Rosy lifted a hand and slapped him across the face. Cameron's eyes opened in shock, his mouth open.

“There, is that fucking better?” Rosy said, tears welling up in her eyes. She lifted her other hand, and slapped Cameron. “Is everything right in the world now? Everything fixed for you?”

They stood for a moment, silent. They stared into each other's eyes.

Rosy grabbed his head and pressed it against her own. “That’s not the way it works, babe. That’s just not it. Because I never hated you. Not for a moment. No matter how hard you hit me I wouldn’t have hated you. Because you fucked up. And because you were going to hate yourself enough for the whole world. And I’m not gonna try and paint a nice picture out of the shit you’ve done. But it’s yours. So own it. Because everyone else is trying to give you another shot. But that doesn’t mean you get to come back. The only way you come back, is if you think you’re worth coming back. The world doesn’t end because you want it to. It’s not gonna turn it’s back from you just because you think it should.”

Cameron looked into her eyes. He breathed slowly, holding onto her hands. He closed his eyes. His world was dark, but he could still feel her standing with him. Rosy whispered softly.

“So, one more time,” She said. “What do you want?”

....

Fourth quarter. Last 2 minutes. Bull’s up 10 to 7. Whole match was back and forth. Angel’s are 20 yards from the end zone.

Cameron straightens out in his position. He looks around at the stands. He peers into the individual faces in the seas of orange, blue, white, and gold. He can see the smiles, the jeers, and laughter, and rage. He looks to his left and right, at his teammates, preparing for the last push. The final charge. The last man stood and looked to the sky.

He tapped his chest, kissed his fingers, and pointed up to the sky.

Cameron bent low and readied himself. Ahead of him was an army of Angels. 30 stood right in front of him, peering at him through the shadows of his helmet. Cameron stared into the darkness. Breathed in slowly.

Two huts.

Cameron let loose his breath, looking onward. He smiled.

A hike.

Cameron sprinted forward and braced himself. He collided with the ball of light in front of him. Cameron held onto the mass in front of him, grunting under the weight. His feet slid against the grass. He shifted his own weight from side to side. The Angel thrashed against him, pushing forward. Cameron swung again, pushing his head into the Angel's body, the pressure of his helmet excruciating. He yelled and swung the other direction. He finally grabbed at the sides of the Angel, latching on tightly. He grunted and began to lift. The Angel was heavy, heavier than anything Cameron had ever carried. Cameron began to step forward, the Angel being dragged with him. Cameron marched slowly towards the Angel holding the ball, who looked frantically for an open receiver. Cameron began to pick up speed, the Angel in his hands thrashing violently. The Angel crashed into Cameron, who screamed as he leapt towards the ball bearer. The three players crumpled to the ground in a heap, and ball rolled away.

Another Bull broke from the lineup and snatched the fumbled ball, beginning to sprint down the open field. He kept running till he made it to the end zone. Cheers erupted from the stands. People began flooding the field. The whole stadium was filled with the delighted screams of fans watching their gladiators battle.

Cameron rolled onto his back, slowing his breathing down. He looked up to the sky. The sun shined down upon him, blinding him with yellow light. Cameron closed his eyes.

He raised two fingers, and pointed them to the sky.