

FROZEN WINTER

Written by

BAH

EXT. BIRCH UNIVERSITY PRACTICE FIELD - AFTERNOON

COACH Q, 50s, begins the workout with four high school recruits. All of them sit on a sideline bench.

COACH Q
You all had your tour. Now the real fun begins.

Coach Q checks his clipboard.

COACH Q
B.J.

B.J.
Right here.

COACH Q
You're first up. Step forward.

B.J. approaches, timid. Coach Q hands him the football.

COACH Q (CONT'D)
Ten targets. Let's see what you got kid.

Coach Q blows his whistle.

B.J. hits seven of ten targets. He turns to Coach Q for approval. The coach, unmoved, notes on his clipboard.

B.J. returns to his seat.

COACH Q
Next up. Ms. Winter.

ALIAH WINTER, 17, toned and long 4B hair, jumps out of her seat. She's a humble football prodigy. Her broad shoulders bear the world's expectations.

Aliah grabs the ball from Coach Q's hand and struts to the starting line.

B.J.
(under his breath)
Bet she won't do any better.

JACKSON
You got a five?

B.J.
Pardon?

JACKSON
(stands up)
You said bet. So...put your money
where your mouth is.

B.J. checks his bag and pulls out his wallet.

B.J.
I only have twenties.

JACKSON
Perfect. We got a deal then?

B.J.
Sure.

Jackson grins.

Coach Q blows his whistle again.

Aliah nails one target after another, seemingly with no hesitation. On her last attempt, the most challenging target, she stares down the others and completes a no-look forty-yard pass.

Jackson holds out his hand for the cash.

Aliah glides to the bench. Her hand trembles; she hides it in her pocket.

ALIAH
Jackson, if you're gonna keep
hustling these guys, the least u
could do is give me a cut.

Jackson grabs the football.

JACKSON
And where's the fun in that Winter?

EXT. BIRCH UNIVERSITY CAMPUS- EVENING

After the tryout, Aliah and Jackson stroll to the parking lot.

JACKSON
Undefeated?

ALIAH
A perfect season! What? You don't
think we can do it?

JACKSON

I mean make playoffs, you better. Win States, maybe. But a perfect season, hell nah. For one, you ain't winning our rivalry game this year.

ALIAH

Coming from the guy who hasn't won once.

JACKSON

Hey, hey. You've had a historically great team these past years.

ALIAH

(side-eyes Jackson)

And whose been leading those teams?

JACKSON

I know. The great Aliah Winter. Yeah, yeah. I'm just saying, you lost a lot of core guys. This year our teams are even.

ALIAH

Mhmm. Well hopefully, the scout comes that game. I can impress him, complete our 10-0 regular season, and hand you an L, all in the same evening.

JACKSON

Keep dreaming Aliah.

Jackson leaves.

Aliah's smile fades. She exhales deeply.

DENISE WINTER, 45, pulls up in her blue hatchback, wearing scrubs. Her eyes are baggy, worn down from years of double shifts.

INT. DENISE'S CAR - EVENING

Aliah and Denise drive home.

DENISE

So? Tell me. You killed it didn't you?

Denise turns to Alia, who's smirking.

DENISE (CONT'D)
 Oh, I knew it. My baby. My alma
 mater's star QB. I can see it
 already. Your name--

ALIAH
 Ma, slowdown...please. I don't even
 have an offer yet and who knows if
 I can even get in.

DENISE
 Hush. Enough doubts. I don't even
 wanna hear it. Birch would be lucky
 to have you.

beat.

DENISE (CONT'D)
 What's your second choice then,
 Fulham?

ALIAH
 Try last choice. Their coach spent
 more time talking about his
 personal life than evaluating my
 game.

DENISE
 And that's a bad thing?

ALIAH
 I need a coach Ma, someone who can
 take my game to the next level, not
 a bestie.

Aliah and Denise leave the affluent suburb of Birch and
 enter their run-down town.

They arrive at Aliah's house. It's white shingles are
 stained and wooden porch rotted.

INT. ALIAH'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Aliah enters her room. Years of trophies, medals, and a news
 article that's titled "Winter: The Next Mahomes" overshadow
 the walls.

She seems tiny in comparison.

The only item unrelated to football is a picture of five-
 year old Aliah and her father that rests on the nightstand.

Aliah plops on her bed and grabs the photo. She looks up at
 her father's framed NFL jersey, hanging over the headboard.

ALIAH
We're almost there, Dad.

INT. CLAREMONT SENIOR LOUNGE - AFTERNOON

The senior lounge is a carpeted room, decorated with leather couches and chairs.

DAVIS, 17, Aliah's best friend, wears a plaid skirt and has painted nails. He eats lunch with Claremont receiver, HENRY. They're both wearing school polos.

Aliah approaches with her bagged lunch.

DAVIS
Ten finals trips and the all-time leading scorer. It isn't close.

HENRY
So six rings and two threepeats mean nothing?

ALIAH
Not again. Don't y'all ever get tired of this?

HENRY
Aliah settle the debate.

DAVIS
You know she's a Jordan stan.

ALIAH
Hard to compete with 6-0 in the finals.

HENRY
One game, you need a win, you want Jordan or LeBrick?

DAVIS
I'd rather have the guy that doesn't punch his teammates. That uplifts the locker room and makes his guys better. Jordan might win the game. But in a series, I trust the team with better chemistry. The team with Bron.

Aliah rolls her eyes.

EXT. CLAREMONT FOOTBALL FIELD - AFTERNOON

A whistle pierces the ears.

COACH GREEN, 40s, bald, grey beard, and a commanding voice addresses the team, gathered on the turf.

Coach G stands next to LUKAS, 16, who's tall and lean. He always wears a ladybug necklace.

COACH GREEN
Welcome to hell!

EVERYONE
To hell!

COACH GREEN
Before we start, I wanted to introduce your new teammate, Lukas Shell. Anything you'd like to say?

LUKAS
First, thank you guys for having me. I've heard a lot of great things and I'm excited to be a part of something special...let's have some fun.

Everyone claps. Lukas sits next to Aliah.

COACH GREEN
Since Henry decided last season he didn't like catching open passes. Lukas you're my new receiver two.

HENRY
But coach.

COACH GREEN
No don't but coach me. We don't have time for your pathetic whining. And you shit the bed again this season, you're off my team, you hear? Now, fix your face!

Everyone is unfazed by the coach's temper, except Lukas.

Coach Green continues addressing the team.

LUKAS
(whispering)
Is he always like this?

ALIAH
To be fair Henry dropped like three gimmes in the State finals. But he's chill unless you piss him off.

LUKAS
And how often is he pissed off?

ALIAH
Always.

Aliah extends her fist.

ALIAH (CONT'D)
Welcome to hell, Lukas.

EXT. CLAREMONT FOOTBALL FIELD - LATER

In the background, Coach Green scolds a player for messing up a play. Lukas approaches Aliah, who's rehydrating on the sideline.

LUKAS
So, why do you put up with it then?

ALIAH
Excuse me?

LUKAS
Coach Green.

ALIAH
He gets results. He's won more--

LUKAS
Yeah, more than anyone. I know. But is it worth it?

ALIAH
Say we bring in someone who coddles us after every mistake; who doesn't push us the way Coach G does. What then?

beat. Aliah eyes Lukas.

ALIAH (CONT'D)
Losing is not an option. Not for my family, not for this school, Coach G, or my sister. The only thing that matters is at the end of the season I'm putting another trophy in Claremont's case.

COACH GREEN
(yelling from across the field)
Lukas, if you want to chitchat take my quarterback on a date.

(MORE)

COACH GREEN (CONT'D)
 Now, get your ass back on this
 field. You too Winter, up, up!

EXT. CLAREMONT FOOTBALL FIELD - EVENING

Practice has ended.

Lukas shows his teammates how effortlessly he can catch one-handed passes; they're amazed. They try to imitate him but can't, yet they're giggly. His positive energy is infectious.

Aliah is reviewing her playbook; there are papers everywhere. She glances at them often.

LUKAS
 Hey Aliah!

Lukas runs over to her.

LUKAS (CONT'D)
 Hey...come run routes with me?

ALIAH
 I gotta review the playbook for the
 game Saturday. They run a really
 complex defense.

LUKAS
 (softly)
 Aliah...just one pass.

EXT. CLAREMONT FOOTBALL FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Aliah and Lukas are huddled up. One cornerback, NIKO, bigger than Lukas, is lined up behind the thirty-yard line.

ALIAH
 What we running?

LUKAS
 Nah, no play.

ALIAH
 Wait what?

LUKAS
 (jogging away from her)
 Once I get open, dot me up.

Aliah nods. Lukas settles on the thirty. They lock eyes. The anticipation grows, then...

ALIAH

GO!

Lukas takes a few steps forward. He stutter steps, jabs to his left, then cuts hard right. Lukas runs it well, but gets little separation.

They approach the goal line and stop, preparing for the jump ball. Aliah smiles.

Niko moves in front of Lukas; they both reach out for the ball; Lukas snags it with one hand, between Niko's arms.

EXT. CLAREMONT FOOTBALL FIELD - EVENING

Lukas catches a pass like the one yesterday.

A card: Season Opener Spartans vs. Hawks

The energy is frenetic, like every Claremont Spartans game. Fans of all ages, even those with zero connection to the team, pack the stadium full. The news spectates from the corner.

COLOR COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

How about that catch by Lukas Shell?

DAVIS (V.O.)

Like my broke sister in college, Shell's been working that corner all night long. We are so lucky to have him.

COLOR COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

Time out Spartans.

Scoreboard: 4th Quarter, 4 minutes left, 17-14 Spartans.

EXT. CLAREMONT FOOTBALL FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The offense returns to the sideline. Unlike the crowd, they are displeased by their performance.

COACH GREEN

You shitheads got lucky. Ya hear. But unless you want to lose to the Flamingos, get your act together.

EVERYONE

Yes Coach!

The offense trudges back on field to the 30 yard line.

COACH GREEN
Winter, take us home.

EXT. CLAREMONT FOOTBALL FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

#0 (Aliah) adjusts for the snap. Coach G's arms are crossed.

Hut, Hut! Aliah scans the field. Man coverage. Her receivers are boxed, *fuck*. She escapes the pocket and throws it away.

Aliah's body quivers. She shakes it off and resets her team.

2nd Down.

Hut, Hut! Winter hands it off to the RUNNING BACK, who manages three yards.

Aliah gazes at the stands.

LUKAS
(in the background)
Aliah...Aliah.

She's unmoved.

LUKAS
Winter! You good? C'mon. Focus up.

EXT. CLAREMONT FOOTBALL FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

COLOR COMMENTATOR (V.O)
Crucial third down here.

The Hawks press. Aliah nods to Lukas for the go-route.

Hut, Hut! Lukas easily rushes past the Hawks cornerback. The anticipation of an easy touchdown fills the stadium.

Aliah prepares to throw...her heart races; her breath shortens; she stiffens. *What is happening to me?*

Aliah spaces out, then returns to the moment. But it's too late, her throwing window disappeared.

Winter chucks it. It's slightly under-thrown, but that's all it takes. Interception!

The corner sprints downfield. He has an easy pick six, except someone trails behind.

It's Winter. She catches up and saves the play.

The crowd sighs. Aliah sits on the field, disappointed.