

BRUNO SAMMARTINO
The People's Champion

Original Screenplay by
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Based on a true story

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Under the OPENING TITLES, black and white images circa 1940's-1960's tumble onto the screen, suggesting fragmented dreams from someone's fitful slumber, or memories that never go away:

An 8 year-old Italian boy rides a beautiful white horse as a man holds the reins and walks the horse toward a cornfield;

The same boy walks slowly on a dirt path, a bushel of wheat on his back, his sister, brother, and mother nearby, all carrying much more than him as he struggles with his load;

The boy, now gaunt and sickly, sits in front of a meager fire at a mountain encampment with his family, shivering from the cold, misery all around him;

The boy, now 15 and frail, hangs off of the side railing of a large steamship, staring at the Statue of Liberty, his mother close to his side;

The boy, now a muscular young man of 20 with a strong jaw, lifts weights in a gym, a confident smile on his face;

Now a wrestler, the young man, 27, lifts another wrestler over his shoulder, the opponent with a terrified, puzzled look on his face;

Images flood in at a very fast pace then finally we see the very first image, now in slow motion, of the young boy on the white horse in the Italian countryside as a loud, blaring car horn fractures the images and brings us to:

INT. FIAT - ITALIAN COUNTRYSIDE - DECEMBER, 2000 - DAY

BRUNO SAMMARTINO, 64, wakes up with a start, his reverie broken by the sound of the horn as the car bounces over a rutted country road, opera music blaring from the radio. Bruno, although scarred by gnarled ears and remnants of multiple broken noses due to his years in the ring, is surprisingly fit and muscular for a man his age. He sits in the backseat of the car with his wife, CAROL SAMMARTINO, 60, a lovely dark-haired woman with an intense gaze and a warm heart. As the driver takes them on a wild ride, Bruno leans forward, nods to the driver.

BRUNO

Paisano, please...slow down...

But the driver is oblivious.

BRUNO (CONT'D)
 (to Carol, exasperated)
 They'll be honoring me in a casket
 if he keeps this up...

Carol gently puts her hand over Bruno's enormous hand, which calms him. They smile at each other, nodding at the driver, shaking their heads, sharing a private joke as they hang on for dear life.

EXT. FIAT - ENTERING THE TOWN OF PIZZOFERRATO, ITALY - DAY

The car drives into Pizzoferrato, a small Italian village in the Abruzzi Appenine Mountains. The car stops abruptly near La Piazza in the center of town. Bruno gets out, stretches his back then helps Carol out of the car. From across the piazza a man wearing a red, white and green sash over his coat breaks away from a group of people and walks quickly toward them. This is MAYOR PALMERINO FAGNILLI, 35, who vigorously shakes Bruno's hand.

MAYOR PALMERINO FAGNILLI
 Mr. Sammartino, this is such an
 honor...

Bruno begins to speak but stops when Fagnilli turns his attention to Carol, hugs her, kisses her on both cheeks.

MAYOR PALMERINO FAGNILLI (CONT'D)
 I trust my driver treated you
 well...

BRUNO
 I think we're still in one piece...

CAROL
 The ride was perfectly fine, Mayor
 Fagnilli. Thank you for your
 hospitality.

MAYOR PALMERINO FAGNILLI
 We have such a wonderful day
 planned for you. I can't wait to
 tell you...

CAROL
 We've been looking forward to this
 ever since we got the invitation.

Off of Bruno's look Carol walks away with Mayor Fagnilli, continuing the conversation. Bruno watches them then turns and looks up at the large mountain, La Torre, with a church on top of it that rises as a backdrop to Pizzoferrato.

Bruno is transfixed, continues his gaze past the mountain toward Valla Rocca, the mountain chain behind La Torre. Carol and Mayor Fagnilli continue talking in the background as others gather around them. The sound fades as Bruno continues to stare at Valla Rocca. We begin to hear the sounds of a different era, and Italy is at war...

WWII NEWSREEL FOOTAGE:

German infantry in the Italian countryside; Italian Partisans in Rome; Mussolini being arrested; The Allies storming Sicily and Anzio; The Italian Army surrendering and joining the Allies.

EXT. FIELD NEAR PIZZOFERRATO, ITALY - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE TITLE: SEPTEMBER, 1943

A group of chickens hop around in circles and squawk frantically. A stone connects with one unfortunate bird who is launched into the air but mercifully isn't terribly hurt. Children's laughter can be heard and we pull back to reveal a small group of 8-9 year-old boys throwing stones at the chickens, an afternoon's entertainment in this small mountain village. One of them, ALFIO CICCARELLI, 9 years-old, the instigator of the group, winds up and connects again with an unsuspecting bird. He turns and whistles toward another young boy standing under a nearby apple tree.

ALFIO

Hey! Sinibaldo! I'm two for two!

(THE DIALOGUE IN THE SCENES IN ITALY IS IN ITALIAN WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES)

SINIBALDO SAMMARTINO, 10 years-old and mature for his age, paces under an apple tree, nervously standing guard. He waves to Alfio, then looks up into the tree.

SINIBALDO

Bruno! Bruno! Hurry up!

Up in the tree, legs wrapped around a heavy branch, reaching for a bright red apple is BRUNO SAMMARTINO, a good-looking 8 year-old boy of average size with a strong jaw and eyes that sparkle with mischief. Bruno reaches again for the apple, grabs it, twists it off and drops it to Sinibaldo, below, who catches it and tries to find a place for it since his pockets are already filled with apples and he's starting to get weighted down.

SINIBALDO (CONT'D)

Bruno! That's enough! Let's go!

Bruno reaches for one more, a particularly large specimen.

BRUNO
Relax, Sinibaldo. We won't get
caught. I promise.

An anxious Sinibaldo continues to look around, worried, as another apple falls from the tree, hitting him on the head.

EXT. MAIN STREET OF PIZZO FERRATO - CONTINUOUS

Bruno, Sinibaldo and Alfio walk down the main street of their town toward La Piazza, the town square. There are horse-drawn carts, merchants, and townspeople finishing up for the day. There are no cars, not even any bicycles, and there are no young and middle-aged men as they are fighting in the war.

The kids walk past a donkey laden with supplies. It's owner, an elderly woman dressed in black, pushes the animal along.

SINIBALDO
He looks tired.

ALFIO
Stupid good for nothing jackass...

Alfio takes a step toward the donkey, making the animal rear up, shifting his load. Bruno grabs Alfio's arm.

BRUNO
Don't bother him. He's just doing
his job.

ALFIO
Well, when I grow up, you won't see
ME doing a job like that. No way.

They continue down the street.

EXT. VIA ROMA - DAY

Bruno, Sinibaldo and Alfio walk down the street, where one group of kids plays soccer with a ball made up of rolled up newspapers, and another group of kids are playing an Italian version of stickball using a 4-foot stick as a bat and a smaller, sharpened stick as a ball. The kids wave to Bruno and his friends and Alfio starts toward them, motioning to Bruno to come with him. Bruno shakes his head, "no".

BRUNO
My mom wants me home.

Alfio runs off to join the other boys.

EXT. VIA ROMA - IN FRONT OF BRUNO'S HOME - DAY

Bruno's three-story family house sits at the corner. The local priest comes out of the front door, closes it, and heads up the street, away from Bruno and Sinibaldo. The kids share a quizzical look then shrug, as Sinibaldo walks in one direction and Bruno walks toward his home.

EXT. SIDE OF BRUNO'S HOUSE - DAY

Alongside the house Bruno's older brother, PAUL SAMMARTINO, 13, chops wood, sweat staining his shirt. Paul is taller than Bruno, a studious, serious boy. Across from their house Bruno's sister, MARY SAMMARTINO, 15, holds a basket and talks to her friend LILIANA, also 15, in front of her home.

PAUL

You finally back to help me?

BRUNO

You need to build up your muscles
like me!

Bruno laughs, makes a fist and holds his arm out to show off his physique, which isn't much to look at.

PAUL

You're useless...

MARY (O.S.)

Bruno! Hey, Bruno!

Mary waves goodbye to Liliana, who goes back into her house as Mary walks toward Bruno.

MARY (CONT'D)

I think you're in trouble again...

BRUNO

Really? For what?

Mary shrugs.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

Not even a hint?

MARY

I'm sure mom will tell you!

Mary walks away, and Bruno looks up at the heavens, shakes his head and slowly walks into the house.

INT. MAIN ROOM OF BRUNO'S HOUSE - EVENING

It's dinnertime. Mary holds a large serving dish and stands next to EMILIA SAMMARTINO, a sturdy 43 year-old woman, who spoons polenta from a large pan on the stove into the dish. Bruno and Paul sit at a small table to the right of the front door. Paul shares a book he's reading with Bruno.

PAUL

Bruno, it's Tom Sawyer and
Huckleberry Finn...

Bruno pages through the book quickly then sighs, indifferent, and sits back in his chair.

Mary dutifully brings the bowl over to the table next to a basket of homemade bread then sits, as Emilia wipes her hands on her apron then comes over to the table, sits, and begins spooning out the food to her children.

EMILIA

Bruno, pay attention to your
brother...

BRUNO

But mom, there's no school so why
does it matter?

MARY

You think it's always going to be
like this?

EMILIA

You have to apply yourself, Bruno.
You'll have to go to school after
the war and you can't be left
behind.

PAUL

I'll help him, mom. Don't worry.

Emilia smiles at Paul, but Bruno pays more attention to his food than the conversation.

MARY

Mom, is it okay to see Liliana
after dinner?

EMILIA

Yes, after you help me clean up.

Bruno mimics the two girls talking to each other like hens. Paul laughs.

EMILIA (CONT'D)
Stop it, Bruno. You know better.

Mary grins at Bruno, who gives her a look then goes back to his food.

EMILIA (CONT'D)
A letter came from your father today.

All three kids sit up, excited. Bruno, especially.

BRUNO
Mom, what did he say? What did he say?

Emilia takes the letter out of her apron pocket, opens it and begins to read.

EMILIA
(reading the letter)
Dearest Emilia...I hope this letter finds you and the children safe. I know that Camillo is looking after you. Life here in Pittsburgh...

Emilia's voice trails off and we now hear the voice of her husband, ALFONSO SAMMARTINO, reading the letter.

ALFONSO (V.O.)
...is difficult without you, but there's work at the steel mill.

Bruno listens with rapt attention, and through his eyes we see images of a strong man, whose face we don't see, working in a steel mill. The strong man is in charge, as the others pay attention to his orders and look up to him.

ALFONSO (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I'm saving enough money for a new home in Italy. As soon as this war is over I'll come home...seven years is too long...please kiss the children for me...

Bruno looks at Emilia as she stops reading the letter, tears welling in her eyes. He goes to her and hugs her, as Paul and Mary do the same.

INT. THE SAMMARTINO LIVING ROOM - LATER

It's after dinner. Mary helps Emilia put away all of the dishes, Paul stacks firewood next to the stove as Bruno helps his brother. Finished with their chores, Paul and Mary head upstairs to bed. Bruno lags behind.

EMILIA
Goodnight, children.

ALL THREE KIDS
Goodnight...

EMILIA
Bruno...come here.

Bruno stops, walks slowly toward his mom.

EMILIA (CONT'D)
Father Antonio came by today.

BRUNO
How's he doing?

EMILIA
(shaking her head)
He told me about what you did.

BRUNO
What?

EMILIA
You think you're some kind of delinquent? You know it wasn't right to steal those apples...

BRUNO
I...

EMILIA
Your father would be very upset if he knew you stole anything. We didn't teach you that way...you should never, ever steal anything from anyone. Do you understand?

BRUNO
(ashamed)
Yes, mom. I'm sorry. I'm really sorry.

EMILIA
Father Antonio wants to see you first thing tomorrow.

BRUNO
 (under his breath)
 Oh, no...

EMILIA
 (softening)
 Your father and I love you, Bruno.
 Make us proud, okay?

Bruno nods, heads up to bed.

INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - SAMMARTINO HOME - NIGHT

Bruno walks into the second floor bedroom that they all share. Mary is in one bed, her back to Bruno, Paul in another, reading, ignoring Bruno.

MARY
 I told you...

BRUNO
 Go to sleep...

PAUL
 Leave her alone...

Bruno jumps on Paul, who drops his book and begins wrestling with Bruno. Mary gets up, joins in, and the three of them roll around, laughing, having a moment of fun together.

CLOSE ON BRUNO'S FACE - MORNING

Bruno grimaces in pain. We pull back to discover that he is kneeling on hard kernels of corn outside of the church rectory, with Father Antonio standing above him, holding a pocketwatch, timing the punishment.

EXT. LA PIAZZA OF PIZZOFRERATO - LATE MORNING

Bruno walks toward La Piazza, hobbling slightly. From his POV we see a group of older men standing around, talking. One man, Bruno's UNCLE CAMILLO, 48, notices Bruno and breaks away from the men and walks toward Bruno. He smiles and waves at Bruno.

CAMILLO
 Bruno, Bruno...how are you?

BRUNO
 Fine, Uncle Camillo. My knees are a little sore...

CAMILLO

I heard about your little
escapade...

Uncle Camillo gives Bruno an affectionate hug.

CAMILLO (CONT'D)

Try not to give your mother a hard
time, okay?

BRUNO

I know...

CAMILLO

I promised your father I'd look
after you...you don't make it easy!

Bruno's mood darkens.

BRUNO

The last time I saw him I was three
months old. I don't remember him
at all.

CAMILLO

He'd do anything to be back here
with you. You know that, right?

Bruno nods as Camillo puts his arm around Bruno's shoulder.
They walk up to a nearby fruit vendor.

CAMILLO (CONT'D)

Well, if it's fruit you
want...today you're in for a treat!

Uncle Camillo motions to the fruit vendor, whose horse-drawn
cart is filled with all kinds of fruit, including figs, pears
and cherries on a stick. Bruno asks for the cherries and
Uncle Camillo pays, and the vendor hands Bruno the stick
filled with cherries. They begin walking as Bruno eats,
Camillo's arm around his nephew.

INT. BRUNO'S HOME - NIGHT

Sitting in front of the fire are Emilia, Uncle Camillo and
AUNT AGNESI, 43, Camillo's wife and Emilia's sister, and
Emilia's mother-in-law, ANITA SAMMARTINO, 65. Emilia serves
them coffee. Camillo smiles graciously but Anita gives
Emilia a disapproving look. Agnesi notices and shakes her
head, but Emilia pretends not to notice.

CAMILLO

(breaking the silence)

Listen, everyone...I have some news from the Partisans. Rumor has it that German SS troops may be on their way.

EMILIA

To Pizzoferrato?

CAMILLO

(nodding)

The Allies are in Anzio so the Germans are pushing to higher ground. It's only a matter of time...

AGNESI

I hear San Angelo is safe.

CAMILLO

(lowers his voice)

The SS rounded up all of the women near there, had their way with them, locked them in a house and burned it down. All of them died. I'm not sure what's safe.

We now see Bruno listening from the top of the stairs. This news makes him squirm.

AGNESI

Can't the Partisans help?

CAMILLO

Yes, but...I think it's going to get worse before it gets better.

EMILIA

Worse? I've already lost two children to the war. I'm not about to lose anyone else.

Anita glares at Emilia, shakes her head.

Bruno, at the top of the steps, takes all of this in.

INT. SAMMARTINO BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bruno is now in a bed with Paul, as Emilia, after washing, gets into another bed with Mary. It's quiet.

BRUNO

Mom...

EMILIA

Yes, Bruno?

BRUNO

Are Anita and Sandrino in heaven?

EMILIA

Bruno...

BRUNO

Are they okay?

EMILIA

They're fine, Bruno. They're at peace. (beat) Now go to sleep, my son. Please go to sleep.

Bruno nods and turns over, content. Emilia stares at the ceiling, tears in her eyes.

INT. BRUNO'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

The monstrous sounds of armored trucks, tanks and other heavy mechanized artillery fill the air. Bruno awakens with a violent start, grabbing Paul's arm. Emilia is already putting on her clothes, as there's a loud knocking at the front door. Mary, frantic, reaches for Emilia.

MARY

Mom!! Don't go...

EMILIA

Children, get dressed! Get dressed now! Hurry!

The kids jump out of bed as Emilia runs downstairs as someone continues to pound on the door.

INT. BRUNO'S LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

CAMILLO (O.S.)

Emilia! Emilia!

Emilia runs to the front door, opens it to let in Uncle Camillo.

CAMILLO (CONT'D)

The SS!! They're coming! Get the kids!! Get them out of her, now!!

INT. BRUNO'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Paul helps Bruno get into his clothes as he clutches a bag for both of them. Mary tries to carry too much and Paul takes some things and throws them on the floor.

PAUL

Mary, there isn't any time. We have to go!

INT. BRUNO'S LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

By now the kids are downstairs, frantic, as Emilia rushes out of the kitchen with a bag filled with some food, and pushes her children out the front door, Uncle Camillo following them.

EXT. BRUNO'S HOME - EARLY MORNING

Aunt Agnesi is outside the front door, as Bruno, Mary and Paul run outside. It's chaos. People are running all over the place, the noise is deafening as there are planes overhead and the rumbling sounds of armored trucks and other vehicles.

EMILIA

Kids!! Stay together!!

Bruno and his siblings are petrified, running every which way, as Uncle Camillo tries to wrangle them and keep them together, doing his best to keep everyone together. He finally gets them all in a group, looks at Emilia.

CAMILLO

Head for the house in the fields...you know where to go!

Emilia nods, and grabs her kids' hands and starts running with them. Camillo grabs Agnesi's shoulders.

CAMILLO (CONT'D)

Help your sister, my love. I will see you soon, I promise.

Uncle Camillo kisses her then runs off to help others as the town of Pizzoferrato, in the flash of a moment, is changed forever.

EXT. SHACK IN THE HAYFIELDS - EARLY MORNING

Bruno and his family arrive at the shack, all exhausted, tearful, in shock. Emilia pushes them into the shack and closes the door.

INT. SHACK - LATER IN THE MORNING

Inside Bruno, Paul and Mary sleep, exhausted. Emilia is with Agnesi, and they are awake, talking quietly. Bruno wakes up, sleeping fitfully, and Emilia goes to comfort him, holding him while Paul and Mary sleep. The sounds of artillery shelling is constant, like fireworks that never stop.

EMILIA

(to Agnesi)

This place isn't safe...

AGNESI

You don't think we're far enough from town?

EMILIA

No, Agnesi, I don't. They'll find us. We have to leave. Soon.

Bruno hangs on for dear life as Emilia thinks.

AGNESI

Camillo mentioned something about Valla Rocca...

EMILIA

(nods)

Yes...it would be hard for the Germans to find us there...they don't know those mountains.

Agnesi nods, sobs slightly. Emilia clasps her hand, squeezes it.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Be strong, Agnesi. We all have to be strong.

Emilia lets go of Bruno, looks the tearful boy in the eye.

EMILIA (CONT'D)

Now you're a man, Bruno. No time for tears. Wake your brother and sister and let's get going.

Bruno nods, goes over to his brother and sister.

EXT. PATH TO VALLA ROCCA - DAY

Bruno and his family take a winding path through the mountains on the way to Valla Rocca, a mountain range outside of Pizzoferrato. The dirt path, when there is a path, is treacherous and steep, and everyone is exhausted but they have no choice but to keep going up the mountain.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP OF VALLA ROCCA - DAY

Finally Bruno and his family arrive at an encampment. There are approximately fifty people there: older men, women and children with only a couple of younger men, Partisans, helping set up large makeshift tents held up by wood timbers, resembling teepees with a hole in the middle for the timbers and for smoke from a fire to come through. Bruno, Paul and Mary drop their possessions and collapse, exhausted, as Emilia and Agnesi survey the scene.

We see devastated mothers, trying to find places for their families, negotiating space in the tents. Older people are laid out on blankets, motionless. Children sit around, frightened, bored, not knowing what to do. The sound of aerial bombing, artillery fire and machine gun fire is pervasive.

EXT. TENT - DAY

Agnesi stays with Paul and Mary as Emilia walks over to a tent with Bruno, goes inside.

INT. TENT - DAY

Inside, families create space for themselves, trying to have as much privacy as possible, which isn't much. Emilia catches the eye of a woman tending to her family. The woman looks at Bruno and Emilia, then points to a corner of the tent that is available, goes back to tending to her family. Emilia looks at the corner, grabs Bruno's hand.

EMILIA

Our new home, son. Let's make the best of it.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT AT VALLA ROCCA - DAY

Emilia and Mary carry baskets with meager pickings of dandelions. They pass by families in rags, everyone averting each other's gaze, minding their own business, which is surviving.

Two families are fighting over rations, and someone tries to break it up. Mary catches the eye of Lilitiana, her neighbor, and begins to say something then stops when she realizes that her family is covering the body of an elderly man, most likely Lilitiana's grandfather. Mary and Lilitiana lock eyes, then Mary looks away as Emilia tries to shield her from this scene.

INT. BRUNO'S TENT - DAY

Bruno and Paul cook potatoes over the fire. Bruno rotates the potato on a stick, as Paul does the same. Bruno is very thin, coughing periodically. They are both wrapped in thin burlap, hardly able to keep out the cold weather. Bruno tests the potato with his finger.

BRUNO
They're like rocks.

PAUL
It's better than nothing.

Emilia and Mary enter the tent with the dandelions, come over to the fire. Mary puts the greens in a pot that's filled with water, and places it on the fire. Emilia puts her hand on Bruno's forehead to check his temperature, shaking her head. Aunt Agnesi walks into the tent.

BRUNO
Mom, these are the last of the potatoes...

AGNESI
(to Emilia)
We have to learn how to ration better...

EMILIA
I have three children, Agnesi.
It's not so easy...

BRUNO
I'm hungry, mom.

Emilia sighs, looks at her desperate children, then steels herself, a look of determination on her face.

INT. BRUNO'S TENT - NIGHT

Bruno sleeps, lying on thin burlap and wrapped by a very threadbare blanket. Mary, Paul and Aunt Agnesi lie next to him.

He awakens from the sound of artillery fire and anti-aircraft guns going off in the night. He sits up, looks around.

BRUNO

Mom?

Frantic, he bolts out of the tent.

EXT. BRUNO'S TENT - NIGHT

Bruno looks around, sees the other four tents and a few people around, but mostly everyone is asleep.

BRUNO

Mom! Mom!

VOICE (O.S.)

Hey! Keep it down!

Bruno begins running to the edge of the encampment, continues toward the mountain path, stumbling, cutting himself but paying no attention to anything but finding his mother. Desperate, tears flowing, he looks everywhere, but can't find her. Finally he sits down at the top of the path, a frightened little boy, sobbing, hugging himself for warmth, not knowing what to do.

EXT. MOUNTAINS OF VALLA ROCCA - EARLY MORNING

Emilia walks along a treacherous path, carrying an empty sack. It is hard going, but she is determined and despite slipping and falling she continues on.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF PIZZO Ferrato - EARLY MORNING

Emilia enters Pizzoferrato on a side street, narrowly avoiding an SS patrol coming toward her. Once they pass, she moves on, taking a route to avoid contact with anyone.

EXT. BRUNO'S HOME - EARLY MORNING

Emilia treads cautiously near her home. She looks up, noticing a light on somewhere on the second floor, but everything is quiet. She walks closer to the back of her house, hearing stirring and some movement from inside. She takes a deep breath, and after what feels like a lifetime opens a latch on the side of the house, which opens into a cellar. She steps in.

INT. BRUNO'S HOME - CELLAR - EARLY MORNING

Emilia walks quietly into the cellar, through two rooms and up to a wall with a latch on it. She opens it slowly, and steps through a round hole in the wall and into a storage room, filled with potatoes, flour, corn and other supplies. She begins to fill her sack, then hears a creaking from above, holds her breath, doesn't move, as she hears voices above, speaking German, faintly.

EXT. MOUNTAINTOP OF VALLA ROCCA - LATER

Bruno, Mary and Paul all sit patiently, trying to stay strong but not doing a great job of it. Finally, after what seems to be an eternity, Emilia comes walking over the hill, carrying her sack filled with as much food as she could carry. The kids are delirious with joy, and run to her, hugging her.

BRUNO

Mom! Mom!

EMILIA

My children, I will always take care of you. No matter what...

BRUNO

I promise to eat less from now on...I promise...

EMILIA

Don't worry, Bruno. It's okay. I'm here. I'm here.

Bruno hugs his mother tightly, closing his eyes, never wanting to let go.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT AT VALLA ROCCA - DAY

It's now winter, and snow covers the ground. Bruno and Paul are out collecting snow, eating some while they do, but putting as much as they can carry in buckets. As they work, Uncle Camillo and another man, both with rifles over their shoulders, appear on the nearby trail. Paul and Bruno run to them. Uncle Camillo carries a sack, loaded with provisions.

INT. BRUNO'S TENT - DAY

Uncle Camillo warms himself by an fire inside the tent as Aunt Agnesi removes the potatoes from his sack.

Emilia has placed what resembles uncooked bread onto the fire, Mary helps her. Distant sounds of warfare fill the air.

BRUNO

(to Paul)

At least we won't have to eat snow for awhile...

There's a loud explosion from a bombing raid. Everyone hears it.

CAMILLO

It's okay, boys. The Allies have been attacking with our help. There's been a lot of fighting, and the Germans are low on reinforcements. They can't stay here forever.

As they all take in this information, nearby two men with shovels walk to the edge of the encampment. Another man follows them, a body wrapped in burlap in his arms. Emilia sees this, and goes to Bruno, shielding him as much as possible from seeing this gruesome scene.

INT. BRUNO'S TENT - A FEW MONTHS LATER - MORNING

Bruno is very gaunt, and coughs constantly. He eats some thin soup that Mary hands to him, but is nervous and distracted. Paul stands just outside the tent. He notices something, runs away from the tent. Bruno tries to stand, coughing, as Mary hold him up. Just then Emilia comes into the tent, propped up by Agnesi and Paul. She is bleeding from cuts on her face and arms, and there is blood on her shoulder. They bring her into the tent and lay her down. Bruno goes to her and hugs her, eyes shut tightly.

BRUNO

Mama...

Emilia hugs him then takes a deep breath and closes her eyes as Agnesi attends to her. Bruno, tears in his eyes, continues to hold onto Emilia's leg as Agnesi attends to her wounds.

AGNESI

Emilia...what happened?

EMILIA

(eyes closed)

I was a little careless...I think I was tired...

We are close on Bruno, as we see Emilia's story from his POV:

FLASHBACK: INT. BRUNO'S HOME - BASEMENT - EARLY MORNING

Emilia comes out of the storeroom, her sack loaded with provisions. She catches her foot on something, stumbles, banging into a table and making noise. She holds her breath, then heads outside.

EXT. BRUNO'S HOME - EARLY MORNING

Emilia walks slowly outside, but as soon as she walks away from the house an SS soldier stops her, and aims his rifle at her. She stops, and lowers her head as the soldier advances toward her.

INT. BACK OF OPEN TRUCK - EARLY MORNING

Emilia rides in the back of an open truck, other people like her ride with her, all rounded up. They are subdued, silent, awaiting their fate.

EMILIA (V.O.)

They said they were taking us on a work detail, but I wasn't going to take a chance...

Emilia surveys the situation, doesn't like what she sees. She looks out at the road, back at the people, stands up while the truck is moving and pushes herself painfully through the barbed wire attached to the tailgate, ripping her clothes, her arms and legs to shreds and dives out of the truck and falls to the side. As the truck slams on its brakes, Emilia manages to get to her feet and without thinking begins running up the hill and away from the truck. A German SS soldier comes out of the passenger side of the truck and begins shooting at her with his machine gun, and hits her in the shoulder but she keeps running. The driver yells to him, and the soldier stops, shakes his head then gets back in the truck which drives off.

END FLASHBACK: INT. BRUNO'S TENT - MORNING

BRUNO

Mom...please don't ever go again.
Please...

With great will, Emilia crouches over Bruno, wincing from the pain but trying to forget it.

EMILIA

Okay, Bruno. Okay. It's okay, I'm here now...

Emilia grits her teeth through the pain.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT AT VALLA ROCCA - A FEW MONTHS LATER

Bruno and Paul collect firewood. Machine gun fire cuts through the air, startling them. They look up to see two German soldiers coming into the encampment, surprising everyone. One shoots his machine gun into the air, barking orders at everyone. The other sets up a large-caliber machine gun on a three-legged tripod. The first soldier starts rounding everyone up, as they're too weak to disobey with a rifle trained on them. Bruno and Paul run toward their tent.

INT. BRUNO'S TENT AT VALLA ROCCA

Bruno and Paul run into the tent, grab Emilia.

BRUNO

Mom...mom...

PAUL

German soldiers...

Emilia shares a look with her family, looks outside. She turns back toward her family, crosses herself.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT AT VALLA ROCCA - DAY

Bruno's family falls in line with the others, about 40 in all, who line up near the machine gun. The German SS soldier with the small-caliber machine gun motions to everyone to come together, and surprisingly, everyone does. They are too exhausted to do anything but surrender. Once in line in front of the large-caliber machine gun, Emilia takes Bruno under one arm, Mary and Paul under the other. She hugs them tightly.

EMILIA

(whispering to Bruno)

Don't be afraid...soon there will be no more cold and you won't be hungry...we'll be in a big palace and you won't have to worry...

Bruno holds onto his mom and shuts his eyes. He feels very calm.

Out of nowhere TWO ITALIAN PARTISANS come up the hill from behind the German SS soldiers, having tracked them, and quickly pounce on them and slit their throats. The people lined up are too stunned to react, as Bruno hugs his mother tighter as Emilia falls to her knees.

INT. BRUNO'S TENT - MONTH 14 - DAY

Bruno is now deathly sick with rheumatic fever. Emilia wipes his forehead with a damp cloth, as he coughs incessantly. Mary, Paul and Agnesi sit nearby, helpless. Emilia wrings out the cloth and soaks it with water from a small bucket.

EMILIA

(to Agnesi)

I lost Anita and Sandrino this way
and I never forgave myself. I
won't let it happen again...

There's a commotion outside and fearing the worst, Agnesi and Paul go outside to see what's going on.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT AT VALLA ROCCA - DAY

Uncle Camillo and two other Partisans stand in the encampment, talking to a group of people, who appear to be sobbing for joy, shaking their heads in disbelief, hugging each other. As Uncle Camillo talks he locks eyes with Aunt Agnesi, smiles at her and nods. Emilia joins Agnesi, hugging her, in shock that their ordeal may finally be over.

NEWSREEL FOOTAGE: MUSSOLINI'S DEATH AND HANGING, FASCISTS BEING BROUGHT TO TRIAL, MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF RUBBLE BEING CLEARED AWAY, MINESWEEPERS WALKING OVER THE CORNFIELDS, THE ALLIES TAKING OVER; IT'S THE END OF THE WAR IN EUROPE.

INT. BRUNO'S LIVING ROOM - A FEW MONTHS LATER

Bruno lies on a palette in the living room next to the stove, sweating feverishly, his weight under 100 pounds. Emilia has placed leeches on him to suck out the bad blood. Bruno, in pain, screams as Mary tries to calm him, Mary at his side, wiping the blood off from around the leeches as they remove them one by one from his body.

EXT. BRUNO'S HOME - DAY

Paul is outside doing some work on the house with Uncle Camillo, as are others in the neighborhood.

A small group of Polish soldiers walk march down the street, carrying mine sweepers. One of the soldiers, CORPORAL OZDOBA, around 19, waves to Paul, who waves back.

OZDOBA

(to Paul)

I brought something for him.

Corporal Ozdoba starts to hand Paul a chocolate bar.

PAUL

I think he could use the company.

(he nods to the house) Go ahead.

Corporal Ozdoba says something to his platoon, then heads toward Bruno's front door.

INT. BRUNO'S BEDROOM

Corporal Ozdoba walks into the bedroom, waves at Bruno, who looks over, smiles weakly. Corporal Ozdoba walks over and sits on Bruno's bed. He takes out the chocolate bar, unwraps it, and holds Bruno's head up so that he can take a bite.

OZDOBA

You need to eat, boy...you need to get stronger...

Bruno gags on the chocolate bar, and the Corporal Ozdoba quickly takes it away. He then reaches into his pack and pulls out a can of condensed milk, opens it, and lifts Bruno onto his lap to help him drink. Bruno takes a drink of the milk, his eyes closed.

OZDOBA (CONT'D)

I have to leave, but promise me
I'll see you again, running around,
getting in trouble...

Bruno smiles weakly, nods. Emilia walks into the room but stops at the doorway and watches as Corporal Ozdoba takes money out of his pocket, presses it into Bruno's hand, gets up to leave. He sees Emilia, who smiles at him.

OZDOBA (CONT'D)

He's a brave boy.

EMILIA

I've already lost two children and
I will not lose a third.

Corporal Ozdoba nods, then leaves. Emilia removes the money from Bruno's hand then squeezes it with all of her might.

Bruno gestures weakly to his mom to pick him up. Surprised at his sudden burst of energy, she does as he wishes.

EXT. BRUNO'S HOME - DAY

Emilia holds Bruno on their front steps as Corporal Ozdoba and his platoon march away. Emilia must hold Bruno's hand to help him wave, as Corporal Ozdoba looks back, smiles and waves. Emilia continues to help Bruno wave as Corporal Ozdoba marches further away, but continues to turn back until he is finally out of sight.

INT. BRUNO'S LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

It is months later, and Bruno sits in front of the fire. There is a little more life in him, but he is down to 85 pounds and is still very weak, but laughs when Paul says something to him with Mary sitting nearby. Emilia comes in from outdoors, closes the door behind her. She has an opened box with her, and pulls out shoes for everyone, distributes them.

EMILIA

These are from your father...

MARY

Is he coming home soon?

EMILIA

Children, I need to tell you something. Your father and I have been discussing this and we've made a decision. Your father is going to bring us to America...

MARY

(panicking)
But my friends...

EMILIA

There's nothing here for us anymore, Mary. You see what it's like. Our place is with your father in Pittsburgh.

BRUNO

Mom? Will dad know who I am?

Emilia seems lost for words. Finally she speaks.

EMILIA

It will be okay, my children.
We'll be a family again.

Emilia begins to go about her chores.

BRUNO

Mom? Is it true that the streets
are paved with gold in America?

Emilia, her back to Bruno, begins to say something then stops. Paul and Mary share a look with each other.

PAUL

Where did you hear that?

BRUNO

Alfio told me...

They all laugh, breaking the tension.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

What? What?

EXT. ELLIS ISLAND - 1950 - DAY

Bruno and his family stand under a big sign, "S", denoting families with the last name starting with "S" just outside of the processing center at Ellis Island. They are all dressed in their nicest clothes, and have suitcases in front of them. Bruno searches for his father, and when a big, strong man in his thirties heads toward them Bruno smiles, takes a step toward him but the man just keeps on walking. Bruno is deflated, and misses a stocky man of 58 walking up to them wearing glasses, balding, hat in his hand. The man walks up to Emilia, who notices him immediately. It is ALFONSO SAMMARTINO, Bruno's father.

EMILIA

Alfonso...My God, Alfonso...

Emilia goes to Alfonso and they hug. The kids stand to the side, watching this tearful reunion of their parents who haven't seen each other in 14 years. Bruno is especially awkward as it's clear that he didn't recognize his father. Alfonso breaks away from the hug and looks at his children, having not seen them in so long, smiles and goes to hug them. Paul and Mary go to him, but Bruno, very shy, very tentative, hangs back.

EXT. CATO STREET - PITTSBURGH - DAY

From atop a hill we see a steel mill going full blast, smokestacks belching thick smoke, the air choked by soot. We pull back to discover Bruno and his family getting out of a taxicab in a neighborhood of row houses that overlook the steel mill. Alfonso escorts Emilia out of the cab as Paul and Bruno take the luggage to the curb. Mary looks around, noticing neighbors on their porches, kids in the street.

Bruno struggles with a suitcase, stops when he sees Alfonso lead Emilia up the steps to a home at the corner then up onto the porch.

BRUNO

Wait until I tell Alfio...

PAUL

Tell him what?

BRUNO

I don't think there's any gold in Pittsburgh...

PAUL

You're crazy...c'mon, let's get going.

Paul drags a suitcase up the steps and Bruno follows him, struggling with his heavy load.

EXT. SCHENLEY HS - DAY - TWO YEARS LATER (1952)

Bruno, now 17 and still as skinny as a rail, is on the ground and getting the tar kicked out of him by two boys. All of a sudden one of the boys goes flying and we see that Paul has arrived. He grabs the other boy away from Bruno as well, and as the kids run away one of them kicks Paul's books, which were on the ground, and they go flying all over the place. Bruno just looks on, helpless, as Paul shoots the kids the Italian salute.

EXT. PITTSBURGH STREET - DAY

Bruno, limping, and with a rag to his face, walks with Paul beside him.

PAUL

Jesus, Bruno...you're a mess.

BRUNO
 (broken English)
 What am I supposed to do?

PAUL
 I don't know, but I won't be around
 forever to protect you!

BRUNO
 (in Italian)
 What do you mean?

PAUL
 Speak English. You have to
 practice your English!

Bruno nods, self-conscious. Paul looks at him, shakes his head.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 We'll think of something...

They round a corner, walk toward a corner grocery store and go inside.

INT. NEIGHBORHOOD GROCERY STORE - DAY

Inside the store the owner, a Hungarian man, MR. HUTNIK, around 40 years old, throws an icepack at Bruno, who puts it on his head, a ritual that has clearly been repeated many times.

HUTNIK
 Get 'em next time, kiddo!

Bruno, very shy, nods as Paul opens a cold case to take out a couple of sodas. A bell jingles at the front door and in comes MAURICE STEIN, 18. He nods at Paul then sees Bruno, comes over to him.

MAURICE
 Hey, the human punching bag!
 What's new?

BRUNO
 That's not funny, Maurice...

MAURICE
 Tired of getting beaten to a pulp,
 huh, boychik?

PAUL
 We need to do something...

Maurice walks over to the magazine rack, takes one and tosses it at Bruno. Bruno looks at the cover and sees a weightlifter with an incredible build. He laughs.

BRUNO
This isn't real...

MAURICE
Of course it is!

Paul walks over, looks at the magazine.

BRUNO
I don't believe it...

MAURICE
Want me to show you?

Bruno and Paul share a look, Bruno intrigued.

EXT. PITTSBURGH YMHA - DAY

Bruno, Paul and Maurice walk up to the front door. Maurice leads the way, Paul next. Bruno, his usual shy self, hesitates, then goes in.

INT. YMHA WEIGHT ROOM - DAY

Maurice, Bruno and Paul walk into the room. There are numerous men and boys working out - powerlifting, with dumbbells, benchpressing - a world Bruno has never seen. Bruno is mesmerized; a scrawny kid amongst the behemoths, taking everything in as if he's met a long lost friend. Maurice slaps Bruno on the shoulder but he barely feels it, transfixed by everything around him. Paul notices, studying Bruno, as if seeing his brother in a new light.

INT. BASEMENT OF BRUNO'S HOME - DAY

CLOSE on a boy's hands grabbing onto a broomstick which has been cemented into a one-gallon round oilcan. The hands struggle to lift the can. It's Bruno, who's created a homemade barbell by having cemented a broomstick into two oilcans filled with cement. Paul is with him, helping.

BRUNO
It's dry. Let's try it.

Bruno struggles with the barbell, barely weighing 25 pounds, without much luck. Paul laughs, tries to grab the barbell away from Bruno.

PAUL

You're going to hurt yourself...

Bruno won't let Paul take it and tries to lift it over his head, barely getting it to his chest.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I told you!

They begin to fight. Alfonso and Emilia come down the steps, see Bruno and Paul fighting over the homemade barbell.

ALFONSO

Boys! What's going on!
What's with this nonsense?

BRUNO

Dad, I want to join the gym, but
it's twelve dollars and I don't
have that kind of money.

ALFONSO

A gym? For what?

PAUL

To get strong, dad. So he doesn't
get picked on anymore.

ALFONSO

I don't understand...

EMILIA

Alfonso...

Alfonso waves her off, walks upstairs.

ALFONSO (O.S.)

Silliness...

Emilia goes after Alfonso, then stops, turns to Bruno and Paul.

EMILIA

You really want this?

BRUNO

Yes, mom. Very much.

EMILIA

Okay. I'll call Angelo
Pasquerelli. He runs a landscaping
business, I'll make sure he hires
you. He owes me a favor...

Bruno smiles, gives Emilia a big kiss. She smiles at him then walks up the steps. Bruno goes back over to the barbell and tries to lift it again, still barely getting it up to his chest, as Paul laughs.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. YMHA WEIGHT ROOM - DAY

Everyone is training with free weights, lifting, curling, doing squats. We are CLOSE on a particularly strong young man who is curling a lot of weight, his physique chiseled, his body glistening from the workout. He turns and we discover that this is Bruno, and it is four years later, and he's 21, and built like a powerhouse. He finishes his reps, hands the barbell to his workout partner, ALEX PHILIN, 25. This is not the scrawny kid we've seen before!

INT. BRUNO'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Bruno sits at the kitchen table, eating a gigantic portion of pasta as Emilia bustles around the kitchen. Bruno drains a quart of milk, starts on another. He leans forward to speak, then stops, nervous.

BRUNO

Mom?

Emilia stops her work, comes over and sits down.

EMILIA

What is it, Bruno?

BRUNO

You know I've been wrestling at Pitt after school...

EMILIA

Yes...

BRUNO

They asked me if I wanted to go there for real after high school.

EMILIA

College?

BRUNO

Yes, mom, but I don't know...the guys I wrestle with talk about staying up until four, five in the morning studying...that scares me to death.

EMILIA

Bruno...

BRUNO

I know Paul plans on going to college when he's back from the army, but I just don't know if it's for me...

Alfonso comes into the room, an Italian newspaper in his hand, shaking his head, pointing at Bruno.

ALFONSO

College? Paul got straight A's. You...you go to that place and pick up those big things! You think that means anything?

EMILIA

Alfonso...

ALFONSO

It's time for you get a job. Forget all this foolishness...

BRUNO

Dad...

ALFONSO

(waving him off)

I've already taken care of it. I talked to Carmen Tropea and he can get you into the union as an apprentice carpenter.

BRUNO

Dad...

ALFONSO

It's settled. No more discussion. You're going to learn a trade.

Alfonso notices what Bruno is eating, shakes his head.

ALFONSO (CONT'D)

That's why you need a job! You're eating us out of house and home!

Alfonso leaves the kitchen. Bruno lowers his head.

BRUNO

Mom, I really love to train...it's
the first thing I've really
enjoyed. I know something good
will come of it. I just know it.

Emilia grasps Bruno's hand, squeezes it, smiles at him.

INT. BRUNO'S '52 CHEVY - NIGHT

Bruno drives, with Alex Philin in the passenger seat, who has his feet up on the dashboard.

ALEX

Thanks, buddy. I owe you one. Of
course, you owe me big time for
training you, right?

Alex laughs as Bruno gives him a look. Alex motions ahead as Bruno pulls into a parking spot, turns off the car.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Remember, her parents don't know
we're gonna' elope...

They get out of the car and head up the steps of a brick rowhouse.

INT. ROWHOUSE - NIGHT

Bruno follows Alex into the house. Alex is greeted by LOLO, 18, his girlfriend.

ALEX

Hey, gorgeous!

Lolo gives Alex a big kiss, while Bruno stands in the foyer, awkward, shy, averting his gaze. When he looks up, he sees CAROL TEYSSIER, 16, walking into the foyer.

CAROL

Lolo...Lolo...you father is
coming...

When Lolo doesn't break the clinch with Alex, Carol looks back toward the kitchen, on the lookout for Lolo's father. When Carol turns around, she notices that Bruno is staring at her. She smiles at him, and he at her, and even with Alex and Lolo in a mushy liplock Bruno and Carol are in their own world, and can't take their eyes off of each other.

INT. LOCKER ROOM AT YMHA - A FEW NIGHTS LATER

Bruno sits in front of a locker, towelling his hair. Alex, wrapped in a towel, sits next to him. Bruno looks at Alex, then down then back at Alex, who's getting dressed.

ALEX

What, Bruno?

BRUNO

(nervously)

Did you ask Lolo to talk to her?

Alex shakes his head, laughs.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

What?

ALEX

You can't do it yourself?

BRUNO

I...

ALEX

Bruno, how many girls have you dated?

BRUNO

Well...uh...you know...none.

ALEX

You're almost 20, Bruno.

Bruno looks away in agony.

BRUNO

Please, Alex...I don't think I can talk to her...

ALEX

Bruno Sammartino, you can do 38 reps of 330 pounds on the bench, but you can't pick up the telephone and call a girl...

Bruno gets up to leave.

ALEX (CONT'D)

Look, I'll get you her number. I'm sure she doesn't bite.

Bruno nods, takes a deep breath.

EXT. THE PORCH OF CAROL'S HOME - NIGHT

It is a few nights later. Bruno sits on the porch of Carol's home, Carol sitting next to him. They are both quiet, Bruno not knowing quite what to say, Carol waiting to take his lead. Carol's grandmother, BIG MOM, comes out with a tray of cookies. Bruno goes to take one then stops, and motions to Carol.

BRUNO
Would you like one?

CAROL
Thank you, Bruno, but I'm fine.

Bruno hesitates.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Go ahead. It's okay.

Bruno gratefully takes one, happy to have something to occupy him. He smiles at Big Mom.

BRUNO
Thank you, ma'am.

Big Mom smiles, then as she walks by Carol she winks at her and goes back into the house. Bruno and Carol sit for a few moments.

CAROL
So where do you live?

BRUNO
Uh...Cato Street. Not far.

CAROL
How long have you been there?

BRUNO
Almost five years. We came from Italy.

Carol nods, smiles.

BRUNO (CONT'D)
That's why my English isn't so good...

CAROL
It's fine. You talk just fine.

Bruno smiles, more relaxed than before.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Where do you work?

BRUNO
Construction. For Carmen Tropea.
I just graduated from high school.

CAROL
What about weightlifting?

BRUNO
I work out every night. There's
nothing I like more.

Carol smiles. Bruno, more relaxed, smiles back.

BRUNO (CONT'D)
You want to get some ice cream? At
the corner? Is that okay?

CAROL
Sure. I just need to tell my mom.

Carol gets up and goes inside, Bruno gets up, wipes the sweat
off of his face, and waits for Carol, smiling to himself.

BRUNO
(to himself)
Well, you didn't blow it yet...

INT. BRUNO'S CAR - A FEW NIGHTS LATER

Bruno drives with Carol in the front seat, Alex and Lolo in
the backseat. Bruno and Carol share a look and smile when
they see Alex and Lolo kissing in the backseat. Bruno looks
in the rearview mirror.

BRUNO
Isn't this the address?

Alex looks up, nods.

ALEX
Yep...maybe our first home, baby.

Bruno pulls over. Lolo turns to Carol.

LOLO
We'll just be a few minutes, okay?

Carol smiles, nods. Alex and Lolo get out of the car, run to
the front steps of the apartment. Carol fans herself, as
it's summer and it's hot. Bruno takes a deep breath.

BRUNO

Carol, would you roll the window
up, please?

Carol looks at him, surprised, hesitates then rolls up her
window. Bruno does the same, puts his hand on Carol's.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

I haven't gone out with many
girls...between my job, wrestling
at Pitt, training at night...

CAROL

It's okay. I understand if you
don't have the time..

BRUNO

No, no...I mean...I really like
you...and I'd really like to go
steady with you. By steady I mean
that when we can, we should get
married.

Carol studies Bruno, then smiles.

CAROL

Okay...sure.

Bruno sighs deeply, clasps his hand in hers.

CAROL (CONT'D)

You know I'm only sixteen...

BRUNO

I know, I know.

CAROL

I don't think I should tell my
parents yet...

BRUNO

That's okay. We can keep it a
secret for now.

EXT. BRUNO'S CAR - NIGHT

Outside the car, we pull back as they continue talking in the
car, happy, waiting for Alex and Lolo to come out of the
apartment.

EXT. YMHA - NIGHT

People mill about in front of the YMHA, waiting to go in.

INT. YMHA WEIGHT ROOM - NIGHT

The room is set up for an Olympic lifting meet, with bleachers set up and thirty weight lifters warming up on a platform with different sets of weights, barbells, etc.

Close on Bruno as he warms up, confident, sharing a camaraderie with the other guys. He looks out into the audience now and then, finally focusing on something, waves.

Emilia waves to Bruno, Alfonso next to her as they walk toward the bleachers, finds a seat, sit down. Alfonso is clearly uncomfortable.

INT. YMHA WEIGHT ROOM - OLYMPIC COMPETITION - LATER

A weightlifter finishes a clean and jerk, floor to shoulders in one motion, drops the weights, then walks off of the platform.

Another weightlifter does a two-hand snatch, where in one motion he raises the barbell, does a split, then raises the weights over his head. Everyone cheers as the man drops the weights to the ground.

INT. YMHA WEIGHROOM - LATER IN THE COMPETITION

An ORGANIZER is on the platform.

ANNOUNCER

Now for the military press, our
first competitor, our own Bruno
Sammartino!

People clap politely. Emilia claps, but Alfonso looks around at everyone, shakes his head.

Bruno steps onto the platform, his 200 pound-plus physique standing out amongst the other weight lifters, an air of confidence surrounding him, much different than the Bruno we've seen before. Bruno grips the barbell, a judge stands near him. Bruno raises the barbell to his chest, holds it there, veins popping in his neck. Alfonso watches, shakes his head, disgusted. The the judge claps, and Bruno raises the barbell above his head successfully, the veins bulging in his neck.

The judge claps again, and Bruno drops the weight, breathing deeply, as the audience claps and cheers. Bruno looks out into the audience, searching for his parents.

We see Emilia watching and waving to Bruno, but the seat next to her is empty. Alfonso is nowhere to be found.

INT. SECOND FLOOR OF BRUNO'S HOME - NIGHT

Bruno is in the hallway, holding his trophy. He sees his father in his bedroom, taking off his shoes. He goes to him.

BRUNO
Pop, what happened?

Alfonso continues unlacing his shoes, his face red and angry.

BRUNO (CONT'D)
Pop...

ALFONSO
(angry)
In the old country, whenever we had heavy stuff to lift, we had the jackass...now I bring my family here to raise my own jackass!

Alfonso walks past Bruno into the hallway, almost knocking the trophy out of his hands.. Emilia comes up the steps.

ALFONSO (CONT'D)
(to Emilia)
That's what I'm raising, a jackass!

EMILIA
Alfonso, look at him! Look what he was when he came here!

ALFONSO
That's because he eats like a horse!

Alfonso walks into the bathroom, slams the door. Emilia throws up her hands as Bruno shakes his head.

EXT. BUCCI'S JEWELRY STORY - PITTSBURGH - ESTABLISHING - DAY

It is one year later.

INT. ALFIO BUCCI'S JEWELRY STORE - DAY

Bruno and Carol walk into the jewelry store.

BRUNO

Now honey, this is a big deal with my family. In the old country, when people get engaged, they get married.

CAROL

We ARE going to get married...

BRUNO

I mean right away!

CAROL

That's silly...

BRUNO

Silly? YOU wanted to get engaged. Now you want to slow things down?

CAROL

I think twenty-one is a good age to get married...

BRUNO

That's four years! You don't understand...we're going to have to keep this a secret, you know...you won't be able to wear this in front of our families...

Carol takes Bruno's hand in hers.

CAROL

That's okay. I don't mind, if that's what we have to do.

Bruno and Carol stand next to a jewelry case, Carol admires a ring on her finger. Bruno gulps as ALFIO BUCCI, 40, dressed impeccably, notices Bruno's discomfort, nods to Bruno to take a walk with him. Carol stays back at the case admiring the ring.

BRUNO

My God, it's seven hundred dollars. I...

ALFIO BUCCI

(in Italian)

Don't worry, Bruno. If she wants it, get it.

BRUNO

But Mr. Bucci, I don't have that kind of money!

The affable jeweler puts his arm around Bruno.

ALFIO BUCCI

I'll make it easy for you, don't worry...

Bruno looks up at Carol, who catches his eyes, her face beaming as she shows off the ring. Bruno looks at Alfio, and helpless, nods, "okay".

CLOSE ON TELEVISION SCREEN:

Bruno is being interviewed on the Bob Prince Show, a Pittsburgh television show at KDKA-TV that deals with local sports stories and personalities.

BOB PRINCE

So Bruno, you just got back from Oklahoma and the North America Weightlifting Championship, and you won the State powerlifting championship where you benchpressed 560 pounds...and you got an offer from Art Rooney to try out for the Steelers! Pretty impressive.

We see a clip of Bruno benchpressing in a competition.

BRUNO

(soft-spoken)

Thank you, Mr. Prince.

BOB PRINCE

Who are your heroes?

BRUNO

Well, Mr. Prince, I always wanted to meet Primo Carnera...

We pull back to reveal someone watching the show on the television. This is RUDY MILLER, 55, a wiry-haired wrestling promoter, watching television at home.

RUDY MILLER

(to himself, German accent)

My God...

He reaches for the phone next to him, never keeping his eyes off of the television screen.

EXT. HILTON HOTEL CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Bruno works as an apprentice carpenter, but really doing a lot of grunt work. He works with a partner, JOHN MILLER, stripping down a beam that had just received a concrete pour. Bruno is below the beam, prying loose concrete off of the beam, John is on top of the beam, hitting it with a sledgehammer. Suddenly the beam comes loose, hitting Bruno and knocking him down and into an elevator shaft. Miller and a couple of other guys notice and instantly run to the shaft, look down to see Bruno, many feet below, sprawled out on some planking that has miraculously broken his fall. He's at the bottom, shaking the cobwebs out of his head, but alive.

EXT. BRUNO'S HOME - EVENING

Bruno walks down the street toward his family's home. He's limping and rubs his neck, but is okay. A man, JOHN KARTSONIS, 20, is sitting on the steps of his house. When Bruno heads for the porch, Kartsonis meets him on the street, talks to him.

INT. SECOND FLOOR OF BRUNO'S HOUSE - EVENING

Bruno walks up the steps to the second floor, which is a converted apartment in his family's home, Emilia and Alfonso living downstairs. He comes into the kitchen where Carol is there, cooking. She smiles and gives Bruno a kiss.

CAROL

Hi, honey. You have a good day today?

BRUNO

(hesitates)

Uh, yeah, it was okay.

CAROL

The office was busy today. I typed so much my hands are sore.

Bruno takes her hands in his large hands, rubs them.

BRUNO

Hon, I just saw Mike...a man saw my interview with Bob Prince and told him he wants to meet me.

CAROL

Why?

BRUNO
I'm not sure, but I think he's a
wrestling promoter.

CAROL
Wrestling?

BRUNO
I think I should go talk to him.

CAROL
But you have a job!

BRUNO
I know, I know...

CAROL
I don't understand.

BRUNO
I...just want to see what they say,
okay?

CAROL
(nervous)
I like everything the way it is...

Bruno starts to say something, thinks better of it and stops.

EXT. CHANNEL 11 TV STATION IN PITTSBURGH - DAY

INT CHANNEL 11 STUDIO WRESTLING SET - DAY

Bruno walks into a door marked, "Studio Wrestling". The studio is half-lit with a ring in the middle, chairs scattered around, a light grid above him. A few workers are there. Bruno spots John Kartsonis, standing next to his brother, BILL KARTSONIS, who is talking to someone who's back is to Bruno.

JOHN KARTSONIS
Hey, Bruno...

The man turns around and it is Rudy Miller, the promoter who was watching Bruno on television before.

BILL KARTSONIS
Bruno, please meet Mr. Rudy Miller,
of State Wrestling.

JOHN KARTSONIS
He's their promoter here in
Pittsburgh.

BRUNO
I'm pleased to meet you, Mr.
Miller.

Bruno shakes hands with Rudy Miller.

RUDY MILLER
(German accent)
The pleasure is mine, Bruno.

Rudy looks at the Kartsonis brothers, who go about their
business. Rudy motions to Bruno to walk with him.

RUDY MILLER (CONT'D)
How much wrestling have you done?

BRUNO
I wrestle every day after work at
Pitt...and I do weight training
every night at the YMHA.

RUDY MILLER
You mind taking off your jacket and
shirt?

Bruno obliges, showing off his physique. Miller is
impressed, tosses Bruno's clothes back to him as they walk
toward the ring.

RUDY MILLER (CONT'D)
Sammartino...you're Italian, right?

BRUNO
Right.

RUDY MILLER
You speak Italian?

BRUNO
Of course, I was born and raised
there!

RUDY MILLE
Listen, I want to send you to
Washington, D.C. to meet my
partners. Can you do that?

BRUNO
Oh, boy, Mr. Miller, I don't
know...

RUDY MILLER

If it's money, don't worry about that stuff.

BRUNO

I'll have to ask my wife...and get the time off at work.

RUDY MILLER

Do that and get back to me. My boy, this is a very important step in your life. You understand?

BRUNO

Mr. Miller, is this something I can make some money at? I mean, I was offered six thousand dollars to play with the Steelers...

RUDY MILLER

You can do thirty, thirty-five thousand a year easy...

Bruno nods, thinking about this as they walk around the studio, talking.

INT. STATE ARENA IN WASH., D.C., - DAY

Bruno is in the ring with another wrestler. Standing just outside the ring, watching are CARL MCCANN, 45, well-groomed and wearing a suit, AND JOSEPH "TOOTS" MONDT, 70, an ex-wrestler and a stocky man with glasses, partners in State Wrestling.

Bruno starts in his best amateur stance, tries to go behind the wrestler, who blocks his move. Bruno tries it again, the wrestler blocks the move easily. McCann and Mondt share a concerned look. Then Bruno fakes the move behind, goes for the man's leg and takes him down, riding him onto the mat. McCann nods approvingly, looks at Mondt.

MCCANN

If this kid's really from Italy, he can be a tremendous draw.

MONDT

I'll find out, Carl.

Bruno continues to counter the professional wrestler's moves as McCann continues to watch, impressed.

INT. STATE ARENA LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Bruno finishes towelling off his hair, his street clothes back on. McCann and Mondt come into the locker room, another MAN with them. Mondt nods to the man.

MAN
(to Bruno)
Bonjourno...

BRUNO
Bonjourno...

The man continues to talk to Bruno in Italian, who answers all of the questions fluently in Italian. After a few moments the Man shakes his hand, nods to Mondt and walks off.

MONDT
That was very impressive, my boy.

BRUNO
Thank you, Mr. Mondt.

MCCANN
Bruno, can you stay in Washington and train?

MONDT
It would be for a month...

BRUNO
Gee, I don't know...I have to go back to Pittsburgh because I told my boss and my wife I'd only be gone two days...

Bruno looks at McCann and Mondt, letting this all sink in.

BRUNO (CONT'D)
Does this mean you think I'm good enough to compete professionally?

MCCANN
Yes, Bruno. Go back to Pittsburgh and tell them you're going to quit your job. You're going to be a professional wrestler.

MONDT
We'll have the contract waiting for you when you get back.

BRUNO
How much will I make?

MONDT

Well, my boy, \$250 a week salary
and 2% of the boxoffice.

MCCANN

You cover your own expenses, but
you'll travel by car and there'll
always be someone else with you to
help cover expenses.

MONDT

You'll be wrestling mainly in New
York, Jersey, Connecticut and
Pennsylvania.

BRUNO

Mr. McCann, I'm not so sure \$250 is
going to be enough to live on and
send money home to my wife.

MCCANN

Don't worry, Bruno. The \$250 is
only for expenses. That's your
guarantee. The bulk of your money
will come from the 2% split.

BRUNO

(nods)

Okay...that makes sense. Thank you
both for this opportunity. I won't
let you down.

They all shake hands, walk out of the locker room together.

EXT. BRUNO'S HOME - DAY

Bruno parks his car, then walks up the steps to his home,
suitcase in hand. Carol is on the porch, sitting and talking
to Emilia and her parents. Bruno says something to Carol,
and she gets up and runs inside the house. Alice Teyssier
goes in after her as Emilia shares a look with Bruno,
concerned for her son.

INT. SECOND FLOOR OF BRUNO'S HOUSE - DAY

Bruno passes his mother-in-law, bounds up the steps two at a
time, walks down the hall and sees Carol in their bedroom,
folding clothes, trying to stay occupied. Bruno walks into
the bedroom.

CAROL

I don't understand why you can't
you get wrestling out of your head!
Why can't you just forget it?

BRUNO

Honey...

CAROL

You're going to be a carpenter!
With me working for Travellers
we'll have enough! I don't
understand!

BRUNO

I quit my job.

CAROL

Oh my God!

In complete frustration Carol starts throwing the clothes she's folding at Bruno. He catches the clothes, goes to Carol, who doesn't want him to touch her.

BRUNO

Honey, I can't go through my life
without giving my dream a shot. I
have to try.

Carol backs away from him, shaking her head.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

I've wanted to do this for a very
long time. It's important to me.

CAROL

I know it is. I know how much it
means to you...but what happens if
you get hurt? I don't know if I
can live like that, waiting for
something to happen to you. It
just doesn't make sense.

BRUNO

I'll be able to take care of
myself. I made it to now, didn't
I?

CAROL

This is different. Men get hurt
and you're not Superman, no matter
what you think.

They look at each other. Carol is scared and Bruno is standing his ground. Very little room for compromise.

BRUNO

I'll try it for a little while,
okay? Then we'll see what happens.

Carol nods then begins to pick up the clothes that have fallen on the floor as Bruno goes to help her, not knowing quite what to say.

EXT. BRUNO'S BACKYARD - DAY

Bruno is helping Emilia, who is plowing under her vegetable garden as Alfonso works with his winemaking equipment at the back of the house. Bruno and Emilia are mid-conversation.

EMILIA

You could get hurt. Badly.

BRUNO

I can handle myself, mom.

EMILIA

I don't want to see you like that,
son. We've had enough of that in
our lives.

ALFONSO

You're a married man now. It's not
a respectable business! We didn't
raise you for that!

Bruno is too polite to say anything to his father.

EMILIA

(quietly to Bruno)
What about Carol?

BRUNO

I don't know, mom. It's gonna'
take a while...

EMILIA

I know her parents will take care
of her, but you're going to be away
a lot...

BRUNO

I know...

EMILIA
Take care of her, son. She's a
wonderful girl.

Bruno nods, knowing he's responsible for rearranging
everyone's lives.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. PITTSBURGH CIVIC ARENA - NIGHT

It is December 17 1959, and Bruno is wrestling Dimitri
Grabowski. It is the beginning of the bout, and Bruno goes
after Grabowski ferociously, pins the man in 18 seconds! The
crowd gasps, then begins cheering as Bruno stands up in the
ring, waving to everyone.

INT. CHANNEL 11 STUDIO WRESTLING RING - PITTSBURGH - NIGHT

One week later Bruno wrestles a man, Jose Torres, and wins
under the television lights, the match going out to a
national audience.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Bruno is in a phonebooth in a hotel lobby, talking on the
phone to Carol.

BRUNO
I'm going to be a father? Oh, my
God, that's great news! Can you go
downstairs and get my mom so I can
tell her?

INT. CAROL'S PARENTS LIVING ROOM - DAY

Carol is at her parents' home, talking on the phone. Her
parents are behind her, in the kitchen, listening.

CAROL
I can't. I'm at my parents.

BRUNO (O.S.)
Your parents? Why?

CAROL
It's hard staying at your house
alone. It's too...when are you
coming home?

BRUNO (O.S.)
 Uh, I don't know...I have at least
 two more weeks on the road...

Carol shuts her eyes and takes a deep breath, holding back
 her feelings, anxiously pulling on the phone cord.

BRUNO (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 These are commitments, honey. I
 can't let everyone down. You know
 that.

CAROL
 I know. I...I'm going to stay with
 my parents until you come home,
 okay? I don't want you to worry.

BRUNO (O.S.)
 Okay, honey. I love you.

CAROL
 I love you too.

Carol hangs up. She picks up a pillow on the sofa and holds
 it to her then throws it across the room. Her mother walks
 over to comfort her.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Bruno hangs up, pauses, a worried expression on his face.
 There is a knock on the phonebooth door, and it is two
 wrestlers making goofy faces at him. Bruno steps out of the
 phonebooth, does his best to mask his anxiety over the call.

BRUNO
 Guys...I'm going to have a baby!

WRESTLER #1
 Congratulations!

WRESTLER #2
 (shaking his head)
 That's terrible...

BRUNO
 What do you mean?

Wrestler #2 grabs Bruno's hands in his.

WRESTLER #2
 With these meathooks you better let
 your wife do all the diapering!

WRESTLER #1

(joining in)

He's right, Bruno. You're liable to cut her to pieces with those safety pins!

BRUNO

I'm gonna' kill you guys...

Bruno grabs Wrestler #2 in a headlock, then Wrestler #1 joins in as they roll around the lobby, laughing, as others look on.

EXT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - JANUARY 2, 1960-ESTABLISHING

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

It is Bruno's first time wrestling in Madison Square Garden. Bruno paces in the locker room in his tights and boots. Rudy Miller sits nearby.

RUDY MILLER

Bruno, my boy, don't be nervous. You'll be just fine...

BRUNO

Mr. Miller, it's Madison Square Garden. The Garden...

RUDY MILLER

You'll be just fine...there are lots of Italians here to help you through...

Bruno nods, walks in place, trying to stay calm but doing a bad job of it.

INT. RING AT MADISION SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

Bruno walks into the ring as the place is packed. He steps up under the ropes, and stands in the ring, and looks around, takes in the crowd for the first time. It's daunting. But it's thrilling, and he feeds off of it, waving, ready.

INT. RING AT MADISION SQUARE GARDEN - A FEW MINUTES LATER

An announcer is in the middle of the ring, finishing his introduction of Bruno's opponent.

MSG ANNOUNCER #1
 ...from Pensacola, Florida, Bull
 Curry!

The audience cheers as Curry raises his hand.

MSG ANNOUNCER #1 (CONT'D)
 And in this corner, in his first
 appearance at Madison Square
 Garden, the Abruzzi Strongman,
 Bruno Sammartino!

Bruno waves, and smiles politely to the crowd.

INT. RING AT MADISION SQUARE GARDEN - LATER

We pick up the action as Bruno picks Curry up and bends him over his shoulder, his back to Bruno. We see the reaction of the crowd, as they've never quite seen something like this before. Curry signals he's done, and Bruno drops him, as the referee raises Bruno's hand.

ANNOUNCER #1
 The winner, in 34 seconds, Bruno
 Sammartino!

The crowd cheers, and we hear snippets of Italian being yelled out and the faces of the crowd cheering. Bruno takes this all in, then takes the microphone from the announcer.

BRUNO
 (in Italian)
 I'd like to thank all of you for
 coming tonight...

The crowd goes mad. At ringside Rudy Miller looks around, shakes his head, realizing he's discovered a star.

WRESTLING MONTAGE:

We see Bruno wrestling at various small-town arenas around the Northeast, driving late at night, bleary-eyed with someone sitting next to him, asleep; in a phone booth talking with Carol, who is pregnant; Bruno eating a giant meal at a diner, checking his money to make sure he has enough, shaking his head. Finally we see Carol at home, opening a letter from Bruno, taking out a few meager bills. There's a worried look on her face.

INT. DINGY HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Bruno sits on the bed, on the phone.

BRUNO

I respect everything you've done for me, Mr. Miller, but when am I going to make some decent money?

RUDY MILLER (O.S.)

My boy, you're new to this business. It's gonna' take a while for you to get established.

BRUNO

The money's just enough to pay bills! Rudy, I stay at the cheapest hotels I can find but sometimes there's not enough money for food!

RUDY MILLER (O.S.)

Bruno, I might have a solution. (beat) You know McCann and Kwariani split up territories...

BRUNO

Yeah, I know. I like Kwariani. I think he's an honorable man.

RUDY MILLER

I think you should sign with him.

BRUNO

You backing him?

RUDY MILLER

Yes, Bruno. So is Toots.

BRUNO

Okay, then, I'll do it. I have to do something. I don't want to be a curtain-opener all my life.

INT. CARL MCCANN'S OFFICE IN WASH., D.C. - DAY

McCann's sits at his desk, talks on the phone.

MCCANN

(irate)

He signed with Kwariani? I'll show that dago bastard who's boss.

McCann slams down the phone.

INT. HOSPITAL IN PITTSBURGH - DAY

Bruno stands in the hallway, talking to a YOUNG DOCTOR. The doctor is reassuring, but walks away. Bruno walks into the waiting room, where we see Emilia, Alfonso, and Carol's parents.

EMILIA

What did he say, son?

BRUNO

She has toxaemia...they're monitoring her very closely. They're going to give her a few more hours then do some tests.

ELMER TEYSSIER

She's been over twenty hours in labor!

BRUNO

Look, I know we're all tired, but please, go home, and get some rest. I'll call everyone soon.

The two sets of parents hesitate.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

Please, it's okay. Honest.

INT. WAITING ROOM - LATER

It's now eight hours later. Bruno dozes off in an uncomfortable position in a chair, wakes up, rearranges himself, tries to find a comfortable position but can't.

The young doctor comes into the waiting room.

YOUNG DOCTOR

Mr. Sammartino...

Bruno bolts up off of the couch.

BRUNO

What's wrong?

YOUNG DOCTOR

The umbilical cord is wrapped around the baby's neck.

(MORE)

YOUNG DOCTOR (CONT'D)

We have to start a procedure immediately. I'll let you know as soon as I can.

Bruno paces, not knowing what to do with himself.

INT. WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Bruno paces in the waiting room. The young doctor comes back in, smiling. He motions to Bruno to follow him.

INT. CAROL'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Bruno walks into the room to see Carol in bed, holding their son, David. He goes to them, a little unsure, but sits on the bed as Carol shows the baby to Bruno.

INT. CAROL'S HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Carol is in bed as Bruno sits in a chair next to the bed.

CAROL

The doctors aren't sure about me having kids again. It's going to be awhile before we know.

BRUNO

What can I do?

CAROL

There isn't much you can do. Just be the best father you can be, hon. I'll do the rest.

The phone rings, Bruno picks it up.

BRUNO

Uh, huh, okay...okay Mr. Miller, you know I'll be there. Don't worry.

Bruno hangs up, looks sheepishly at Carol. She smiles.

CAROL

I know, I know. You can't miss a match. At least you made it!

They both laugh. Bruno kisses her gently. Despite everything, they're connection is still strong.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

Bruno is in the ring against a behemoth of a man, HAYSTACKS CALHOUN, 28, barefoot, wearing overalls, weighing 625 pounds. They go at each other, and the crowd cheers with every move. Finally Calhoun gets Bruno in a side headlock, squeezing him. Bruno reaches down and wraps his arms around Calhoun's thigh, bends his knees and lifts him into the air! The crowd erupts as Bruno holds Calhoun over his head.

INT. RUDY MILLER'S OFFICE - DAY

Bruno sits in a chair, Rudy behind his desk, on the phone.

RUDY MILLER

...yes, Koala, I'll tell him. I know you're sorry. Okay, goodbye.

Rudy hangs up the phone, looks up at Bruno.

BRUNO

So that's it? Kwariani's dropping me?

RUDY MILLER

There's no choice, Bruno. Carl's got the Athletic Commission in his pocket and he's squeezing Koala dry.

BRUNO

Man, who is this guy?

RUDY MILLER

Carl's used to getting his way.

Bruno gets up to leave.

BRUNO

What should I do, Rudy? I have a family to take care of.

RUDY MILLER

Look, I'll talk to him about taking you back, but I'll look around for another angle, okay?

BRUNO

Thanks. I appreciate it.

Bruno leaves, and Rudy dials the phone.

RUDY MILLER

Carl, it's Rudy. Listen, the kid's sorry. He wants to come back.

MCCANN (O.S.)

Yeah? I'll think about that, Rudy. Who does that guinea bastard think he is?

RUDY MILLER

Carl, he's a good kid...

MCCANN (O.S.)

I'm gonna' teach him a lesson once and for all...

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO COW PALACE - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

INT. COW PALACE LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Bruno, in his tights, laces up his boots. JOHNNY DOYLE, 45, a promoter in San Francisco, stands next to him.

BRUNO

It was really nice of you to help me, Mr. Doyle.

JOHNNY DOYLE

It's okay, Bruno. Carl and I ain't exactly the best of friends...

BRUNO

I appreciate the opportunity...

JOHNNY DOYLE

There's a big Italian community out here. You'll do okay...

Two men wearing coats and hats walk into the dressing room, make a beeline for Bruno.

ATHELTIC COMMISSION REP #1

You Bruno Sammartino?

BRUNO

Yes, what can I do for you?

ATHLETIC COMMISSION REP #2

You can't wrestle tonight. You're suspended.

BRUNO
Suspended? What are you talking
about?

ATHLETIC COMMISSION REP #1
(smirking)
In plain English you can't wrestle.
Suspended.

BRUNO
What have I done?

ATHLETIC COMMISSION REP #2
You really don't know?

BRUNO
I have no idea.

ATHLETIC COMMISSION REP #1
That's too bad...just don't try
crawling through the ropes tonight
or any night. You're through.

The two Athletic Commission reps leave the locker room.

BRUNO
Mr. Doyle...

JOHNNY DOYLE
Well, kid, I don't know what you
did. I'll see if I can find out.

BRUNO
I need to work, Mr. Doyle. I can't
keep going through this.

JOHNNY DOYLE
I'll call Jim Barnett in
Indianapolis. We'll figure
something out.

EXT. WILLIAMS HOTEL IN INDIANAPOLIS - DAY

The Williams is a dingy, cheap hotel where the undercard
wrestlers stay.

INT. LOBBY OF THE WILLIAMS HOTEL

Bruno is in a phone booth in the back of the lobby, talking
on the phone.

BRUNO

Mr. Barnett's not in? I've been calling him every day for two weeks! Sure, sure...thanks.

Bruno slams down the phone, disgusted. He picks it up again, puts some coins in and dials.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

Hi, honey, it's me. I'm fine. How's the baby? Good. Listen... I'll get you some money next week...

INT. BRUNO AND CAROL'S KITCHEN ON WHITLEY DRIVE - DAY

Carol feeds David as she talks on the phone.

CAROL

The house payment is due. I thought you were doing okay?

INT. WILLIAMS HOTEL IN INDIANAPOLIS - LOBBY

BRUNO

I am, honey, but the hotel's a little more than I expected...I know, it's been three weeks...it'll be better next week, don't worry.

CAROL (O.S.)

I'll hold down the fort. Just do your best, okay?

BRUNO

I will. I promise. I love you.

CAROL (O.S.)

I love you, too. Always have, always will.

Bruno hangs up, picks up his suitcase and a shopping bag and walks into the lobby, looks around, sits in a chair facing a window away from the front desk. He sits, making sure he can't be seen from the front desk, and pulls out a loaf of bread and some cold cuts from the bag and begins to put together a meal. Unbeknownst to Bruno, the ELDERLY NIGHT CLERK watches him.

INT. WILLIAMS HOTEL IN INDIANAPOLIS - LOBBY - LATER

Bruno sleeps in the same chair in the lobby. There's a tap on his shoulder, and the elderly night clerk awakens him.

BRUNO

I'm so sorry, I'll leave...

Bruno begins gathering his things.

NIGHT CLERK

I've seen you here before...you a troublemaker?

BRUNO

No, I'm not, I...

NIGHT CLERK

Then come with me. Can't stand to see a grown man suffer...

INT. FURNACE ROOM OF THE WILLIAMS HOTEL - NIGHT

The night clerk shows Bruno a cot next to the furnace.

NIGHT CLERK

I sleep her sometimes when I pull a double shift.

BRUNO

Thank you. I don't know how to repay you...

NIGHT CLERK

You don't have to. You're down on your luck. It's not a crime.

The night clerk tosses Bruno a blanket resting on a chair, turns and leaves. Bruno stretches back, exhausted, and closes his eyes.

INT. FURNACE ROOM OF THE WILLIAMS HOTEL - VERY EARLY MORNING

Bruno is sound asleep. A hand reaches down and shakes his shoulder, and he stirs. The night clerk says something to Bruno, who nods, sits up, puts his head in his hands.

EXT. FUNERAL HOME IN PITTSBURGH - ESTABLISHING - DAY

INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Exhausted, Bruno walks into a funeral home. His parents are there, as are Mary, her husband and young daughter, Carol, who's sitting with Bruno's parents as Emilia holds David. Bruno kisses Carol on the head then walks to the front of the funeral parlor to see his brother, Paul, leaning over a casket. As we get closer we see a woman and baby in the casket, dead. Paul is slumped forward. Bruno touches his shoulder and Paul turns, embraces Bruno, sobbing. Bruno holds his brother, tears in his eyes as well.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION JOBSITE IN PITTSBURGH - DAY

Bruno works as a laborer, just like before.

INT. BRUNO AND CAROL'S KITCHEN ON WHITLEY DRIVE - DAY

Bruno, home from the construction site, puts his lunchbucket on the table. He sees a bag of groceries, and looks inside. He takes out a ripe, juicy tomato as Carol walks in.

CAROL

He's asleep...

BRUNO

What's this?

CAROL

Are you being funny?

BRUNO

No, I'm not. We don't have money for this! I don't even have the money for the house payment!

CAROL

My parents will help. Besides, if we had to we could always move back to your parents.

BRUNO

I need to be able to take care of us...

CAROL

(trying to be light)

Well, we have to eat, hon. You, especially!

Carol puts the remainder of the groceries away.

EXT. PITTSBURGH STREET - DAY

Bruno talks to Toots Mondt on the street.

BRUNO

So what have you heard? Anything?

MONDT

Look, I know this suspension has been rough on you...but things can be worked out.

BRUNO

What do you mean?

MONDT

I spoke to Carl and we can get the suspension taken care of. You can start wrestling again.

BRUNO

Does that mean you know what happened?

MONDT

(measured)

It was in Baltimore. You were scheduled for a match and didn't show up.

BRUNO

That's impossible. I've always made all of my bookings, no matter what.

MONDT

Don't question it. The main thing is to get it cleared up.

BRUNO

You know, I was never formally charged, I never had a hearing.

MONDT

Just meet with him, Bruno.

They walk for a few moments, then Bruno stops suddenly.

BRUNO

He doublebooked me, knowing I couldn't show up to two matches at once. Toots?

MONDT

It's not important. Just go clear
it up. He'll will meet you in
Baltimore in two days.

EXT. FORBES FIELD - DAY

Bruno walks down the street. He's stopped by a burly, 6'8"
blond wrestler, YUKON ERIC, 30, dressed in a plaid work shirt
and jeans in the tunnel outside the dressing rooms.

YUKON ERIC

Good to see you, buddy. Heard
about working construction. Tough
one.

BRUNO

I'd like to wring McCann's neck...

YUKON ERIC

There's something you can do about
it. Canada.

BRUNO

Really?

YUKON ERIC

I'm good friends with Frank Tunney,
a promoter in Toronto. McCann has
no jurisdiction up there...you want
me to talk to him?

BRUNO

Sure, why not. I can't support my
family like this. Thanks, Yuke.

INT. BRUNO AND CAROL'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

David is in a highchair and is being fed by Carol as she sits
at the dinner table with Bruno. Carol does not look happy.

CAROL

Canada? Bruno, you have a job
here!

BRUNO

I'm not good at it, Carol. I can't
go to that site one more day. I
have a shot up there...

Carol isn't paying attention and misses seeing David put his
hands in the food in front of him, smear it all over.

CAROL
(angry)
David!!

David is startled as Carol grabs the bowl, which falls to the floor. David begins crying as Carol gets up and goes to the sink to get a cloth. Bruno tries to help clean up the mess but he makes it worse. Carol throws Bruno a cloth, stands at the sink.

CAROL (CONT'D)
I thought you were done with
wrestling? For good?

BRUNO
It's what I'm best at...I know
it...

CAROL
In that case...I want a divorce!

BRUNO
What?

CAROL
You heard me.

BRUNO
Honey...

CAROL
I can't do this anymore...

BRUNO
Then call your lawyer!

Carol looks stricken. She sits down at the kitchen table, dazed, hold her head in her hands.

CAROL
I don't really want a divorce.
It's just that when you're on the
road I feel so overwhelmed...I end
up being the mother, the father,
everything...it's not easy. I
don't want to let you down. I know
you're doing everything you can to
take care of us.

Bruno goes to Carol, sits next to her.

BRUNO
What can I do to help?

CAROL

(shakes her head)

I don't know. I just have to get used to not getting what I want, I guess.

Bruno holds her face in his hands.

BRUNO

Honey, I love you so much and I know how hard this is, but I need to try again. You know that. Please...

Carol looks at Bruno then hugs him, as David watches.

INT. WRESTLING RING IN CALGARY - NIGHT

Close on Bruno's face as his eyes bulge and he is bright red from exertion. A very heavy opponent is on his back, and we reveal that Bruno is wrestling "Terribly Ted", who's a giant black bear! Bruno gropes for the ropes as Ted sits on his back, the crowd cheering on Ted, Bruno gasping for breath.

INT. YUKON ERIC'S CAR - DAY

Bruno sits in the passenger seat as Yukon Eric drives fast, laughing hysterically.

YUKON ERIC

...a goddamn bear!

BRUNO

I thought I was a goner...

Yukon Eric laughs again.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

You know, I've been thinking about a couple of things...

YUKON ERIC

Yeah? Making Terrible Ted a tagteam partner?

BRUNO

There are a lot of Italians up here...if I could just get to them, I know I could build a fan base.

YUKON ERIC

Now you're talking, buddy. If you don't do it, no one else will.

Yukon Eric looks past Bruno and sees a lake off the side of the road. He slams on the brakes and swerves to the shoulder. With the car running he leaps out, begins disrobing as he runs toward the lake.

BRUNO

Yuke! It's freezing out!

YUKON ERIC

C'mon in, Bruno. I don't think there are any bears in the lake!

Yukon Eric starts laughing again as he leaps, buck naked, into the lake, swimming and splashing. Bruno watches, shakes his head, laughing.

MONTAGE - BRUNO IN CANADA:

In a Toronto gym, Bruno finishes benchpressing 570 pounds, sits up as photographers flash pictures and writers from "Il Progresso", an Italian newspaper, scribble in their notebooks.

In a Toronto radio station, Bruno sits at a console and speaks into a microphone in English and Italian with an interviewer next to him. The questions board lights up and they can barely handle the calls.

A family listens to the broadcast, young and old, and they motion to others to come listen.

Newspaper headlines (in Italian) flash by: "The Italian Superman!" "The Abruzzi Strongman!" Pictures of Bruno in the ring and in the gym are below the headlines, with the copy in Italian.

Close on a newspaper headline, "The Italian Sampson!" The paper is crumpled to reveal Carl McCann, sitting at his desk, his face beet red.

INT. MAPLE LEAF GARDENS - NIGHT

Bruno whips his opponent. As the ring announcer raises his hand, the place goes wild, and we see the faces of people as Bruno takes the microphone, speaks Italian to the crowd, who eats it up and cheers him on. Old people and young people all begin to chant, "Bruno! Bruno! Bruno!" It is the beginning of a phenomenon.

At the side of the ring a reporter is talking to FRANK TUNNEY, 49, the promoter, who smokes a cigar, smiling.

REPORTER

This is unbelievable. They love him!

TUNNEY

(nodding)

He's the real deal...thank God I didn't listen to anyone!

INT. BRUNO'S HOME - CHRISTMAS TIME - DAY

Bruno lies on the couch as David plays near the Christmas tree. Emilia, Alfonso and Carol's parents are there. Carol is preparing a meal as her mother and Emilia help her. The phone rings, Bruno picks it up in the living room, answers it.

BRUNO

Hello...Hey, Ace...uh huh...Ace, Ace...listen. This is the third week in a row you've called me on a Sunday. I'm home with my family. If Carl really has something to say to me, tell him to call me directly, okay? He knows where I am. Oh...merry Christmas.

Bruno hangs up, bends down to play with David. They wrestle near the Christmas tree, Bruno pretending that David is beating him. Carol walks into the room, smiles as she watches her husband and son together. The phone rings. Carol picks it up as Bruno continues to wrestle with David with one arm.

CAROL

Hello...uh...just one second.

Carol cups the phone with her hand.

CAROL (CONT'D)

It's Carl...

Bruno smiles to himself, takes the phone from Carol.

BRUNO

Hello...hi, Carl...yes, Canada is treating me well...

Bruno, holding David high with one arm, hands him to Carol.

CARL (O.S.)

Bruno, you belong in New York. You know that...

BRUNO

I hear New York's down right now...

CARL (O.S.)

Let's forget about the past. We have to bury the hatchet.

BRUNO

Listen, Carl. I have offers from St. Louis, California...even Japan. (beat) There's only one way I would ever consider coming back. I want a match with Buddy Rogers. In Madison Square Garden.

CARL (O.S.)

I don't think that would fly. But I'll tell you what, I'll put you on a \$500 a week guarantee. I've never done that with anyone.

BRUNO

I'm doing \$700 a week in Canada, Carl. Listen, I want to make myself clear. I'll come back if you put me in the ring with Rogers. For the title.

CARL (O.S.)

Rogers won't wrestle you.

BRUNO

Figure out a way, Carl. Tell him I'll agree to lose...tell him anything, Carl, but get him in the ring. I'll take care of the rest.

Bruno hangs up then picks up Carol and David, swings them around. Then he picks up Emilia, plants a big kiss on her cheek.

EXT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN MARQUIS - NIGHT

The marquis is lit up: "Tonight-Wrestling; Rogers-Sammartino". It is May 17, 1963. People are pouring into the Garden on 38th Street.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - WRESTLING ARENA - NIGHT

A preliminary bout is underway. The place is jammed.

INT. HALLWAY UNDER THE GARDEN - NEAR DRESSING ROOMS

BUDDY ROGERS, 34, dressed to the nines and smoking a cigar, walks down the hallway with an entourage behind him. Toots Mondt spots him, comes over.

MONDT

Everything okay, Buddy?

ROGERS

Yeah, everything's okay. Sammartino hasn't forgotten the plan, right?

MONDT

No, Buddy, I don't think so. He'll do his part.

ROGERS

Good, because I can't stand the sight of that whop and the less time in the ring with him the better!

Rogers walks into the dressing room leaving Mondt in the hallway.

INT. BRUNO'S DRESSING ROOM IN THE GARDEN - NIGHT

Bruno sits on a bench in his tights, lacing up his boots. He is deliberate, quiet, his energy building with every second that goes by. He takes a few deep breaths then does a series of stretches and moves to warm himself up. As he does, the intensity gathers inside him. He hears the muffled sound of the crowd outside in the arena, but he continues his routine as we get closer and closer and we go all the way into his eyes, intense, focused, clear. This is a man who knows why he's here.

There's a knock at the door. A TRAINER walks in.

TRAINER

Okay, Bruno. It's time.

Bruno nods, jogs in place, intense, worked up, ready. He follows the trainer out of the dressing room.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - WRESTLING ARENA - NIGHT

The crowd is cheering wildly, anticipating the main event. Rogers comes into the arena and there's applause as he cockily waves and heads up the aisle. A chant starts: "Bruno! Bruno!" It takes a few moments then Bruno jogs down the aisle, and the crowd explodes. We see individual faces now - people yelling "Bruno" in slow motion, people who are in awe of him, Italians, Puerto Ricans, Black and White...everyone.

INT. EMILIA'S HOME - NIGHT

Emilia, Alfonso, Paul, Mary and her husband are in the living room. They're all excited and nervous.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - WRESTLING ARENA - NIGHT

Sportswriters are ringside, ready with anticipation. A RING ANNOUNCER walks up into the ring, grabs the microphone above him and pulls it down.

RING ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the main event of the evening, and for the heavyweight wrestling championship of the world!

We see Rogers in his corner, relaxed, smiling. We see Bruno, his gaze intense, his body in motion, already sweating, staying inside himself, ready. The ring announcer points to Rogers.

RING ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

In this corner, the heavyweight wrestling champion of the world, from New Jersey, Buddy Rogers!

The crowd cheers. The ring announcer points to Bruno.

RING ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

And in this corner, the Italian Sampson, from Italy, Bruno Sammartino!

People get to their feet, cheering wildly. We see the faces of older Italians, who are on their feet, wanting to see this man.

Bruno waves. The announcer walks out of the ring and the referee enters as others clear out.

We stay with Bruno, who stares Rogers down as they both walk into the center of the ring. The referee talks to both of them, and they nod. Rogers begins to turn to walk back to his corner.

BRUNO
Buddy...Buddy...

Rogers, looking confident, turns around.

BRUNO (CONT'D)
Give me your best shot, Buddy.

Rogers looks confused, starts to look around the ring. We see McCann and Mondt watching from the crowd, looking at each other, shrugging.

BACK TO THE RING

Bruno's gaze bores a hole through Rogers, who now has a bewildered look on his face as he walks back to his corner. Bruno moves back to his corner, cagey, ready.

The referee signals the timekeeper to ring the bell. The bell goes off. Rogers moves slowly into the ring but not Bruno, who comes at Rogers full force, coming in low and like a tank. Rogers is frozen in place. Bruno dives straight at Rogers, wraps him in a bear hug. With every ounce of strength in his body, Bruno throws Rogers onto his shoulder, rolls him over on his back. The crowd is deafening. Bruno holds Rogers backwards over his shoulder.

BRUNO (CONT'D)
(screaming at Rogers)
Give up or I'll break your back!

Rogers waves his hand, submitting. The referee motions to the timekeeper to ring the bell, and he does. Bruno drops Rogers, raises his arms in triumph.

At ringside, there's pandemonium. Writers pound away at their typewriters, the crowd noise is deafening. A ringside announcer grabs his microphone.

RINGSIDE ANNOUNCER
...and it's all over! Sammartino wins in 55 seconds! A stunning defeat for Buddy Rogers and Bruno Sammartino is the new world champion of wrestling!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - WRESTLING ARENA

The crowd is going crazy, continuing with "Bruno! Bruno! as Sammartino walks around the ring, waving, the look on his face saying it was all worth it, every last bit.

Carl McCann and Toots Mondt look around them, shaking their heads.

MCCANN

This kid's a goldmine...

Bruno is given the championship belt, which he puts around his waist, raises his arms.

Fans rush into the ring, screaming and yelling in Italian, and raise Bruno on their shoulders, parading him around the ring.

EXT. 42ND STREET - NIGHT

Bruno walks along 42nd Street, the crowds brushing past him, not noticing him. He looks up, realizing something, sees a phone booth nearby and goes into it, drops in coins and begins dialing.

INT. PHONE BOOTH ON 42ND STREET - NIGHT

Bruno holds the receiver to his ear.

BRUNO

Carol...it's me...I'm the new world champion! I beat Rogers!

CAROL (O.S.)

What does that mean?

BRUNO

We're going to be okay!!

CAROL (O.S.)

Honey, I'm really happy for you but does this mean you're going to be home more?

BRUNO

I...I don't know, but don't worry...everything's gonna' be okay!

CAROL (O.S.)

You sound funny...

BRUNO
I love you, honey. Listen, I'm
going to call my parents, okay?

Bruno hangs up, drops in some more coins, dials.

BRUNO (CONT'D)
Mary...

MARY (O.S.)
Bruno! Oh my God!

BRUNO
What? What's wrong? Are mom and
dad okay?

MARY (O.S.)
We just saw it on the news! You
won the title!

BRUNO
It was on tv?

MARY (O.S.)
Yes!! Just a second...

Bruno waits, then hears the voice of his father.

ALFONSO (O.S.)
Son, we're all so proud of you!

BRUNO
(tearing up)
Dad...

ALFONSO (O.S.)
We're toasting you right now!

Bruno has tears in his eyes and can't speak.

EMILIA (O.S.)
Bruno, si fatemale? You okay?

This breaks the moment between Bruno and his father.

BRUNO
(laughing)
No, mom. I didn't get hurt.

EMILIA (O.S.)
Nothing hurts?

BRUNO
No, mom. Nothing hurts.

EMILIA (O.S.)
Thank God, thank God...

EXT. PHONE BOOTH ON 42ND STREET - NIGHT

As Bruno talks to his mom, people begin to notice that it's him, and gesture to each other, start to crowd around the phonebooth, chanting, "Bruno! Bruno! Hey, Champ!" as Bruno is caught by surprise and doesn't quite know how to react.

INT. THE LAMONT SUPPER CLUB - PITTSBURGH - NIGHT

Bruno, Carol, Emilia, Alfonso, Paul and his wife VICTORIA, Mary and her husband, AMERICO all share a table together at this exclusive restaurant. They are enjoying themselves, Emilia is beaming, Alfonso as well. Bruno is relaxed with his arm around Carol. Emilia catches his eye and they nod to each other, Bruno grinning ear to ear.

INT. CAROL AND BRUNO'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Bruno lies on the bed, his shoes off but his suit jacket still on, tie off. His eyes are closed. Carol comes in from the bathroom, wearing a nightgown and robe.

CAROL
Honey...

Bruno is asleep. Carol takes a deep breath.

CAROL (CONT'D)
(louder)
Honey...

Carol sits on the bed, Bruno stirs, puts his arm around her. Carol rests her head against Bruno's shoulder, then pulls back.

CAROL (CONT'D)
You know I love you very much, but
I just never expected any of this,
you know?

BRUNO
What do you mean?

CAROL
I just planned on a nice, simple
life. Now...

BRUNO

Honey...

CAROL

I mean, how are we going to make everything work? You're gone so much...I don't want David to grow up without you...

BRUNO

You know what I do. You know what it took to get here. It's for both of us...

CAROL

Look, I know how hard you sacrificed. And I'm happy that everything is finally happening for you. And I'm strong, I really am...but just make sure you're there for David, okay?

BRUNO

I promise, honey. It won't be like that forever. I mean it.

Bruno hugs Carol, strokes her hair.

INT. WRESTLING FAN'S HOME - DAY

A young boy, 10 years-old, charges down the hallway of his modest home. In the distance we hear the sounds of a wrestling match on the television.

YOUNG BOY

Bruno! Bruno!

The young boy runs around the corner, sliding, then drops onto the floor in the family room.

YOUNG BOY (CONT'D)

What did I miss?

GRANDFATHER

(Italian)

Quiet...

There are others in the room of mixed ages, all watching with rapt attention, cheering on Bruno who we see on a black and white television screen, in the ring, having just beaten Killer Kowalski, talking to the audience in Italian. RAY MORGAN, the announcer for Studio Wrestling in Wash., D.C., takes the microphone from Bruno.

RAY MORGAN

Bruno, you've been champion for a year...how do you feel?

BRUNO

Mr. Morgan, this is really a dream come true. I want to make sure I do honor to the belt and stay a true champion.

RAY MORGAN

You haven't disappointed anyone yet. Your fan base seems to increase every day!

BRUNO

Well, Mr. Morgan, I just want everyone to know how much I appreciate their support...it means a great deal to me...

The Grandfather, watching the television stands up, looks the Young Boy straight in the eye.

GRANDFATHER

Someday you be like him...make us all proud.

INT. TOKYO ARENA - DAY

Bruno wrestles Shohai "Giant" Baba, who is 7'2", and a hero in Japan.

EXT. TOKYO ARENA - LATER

Bruno bows to Baba, who walks across the street and comically squeezes himself into a ridiculously small car, barely able to fit inside. Dom DeNucci, a wrestler accompanying Bruno laughs at the spectacle, but Bruno shakes his head, concerned that Baba might hurt himself.

EXT. FRONT LAWN OF NEW HOME IN PITTSBURGH - DAY

Bruno proudly carries Carol up the steps to their new stone home. Emilia and Alfonso are there with David, enjoying the fruits of Bruno's labor.

EXT. BRUNO'S BACKYARD - DAY

Bruno is at the grill, cooking, a big backyard barbeque in full swing. People are in the pool, sitting at picnic tables. Mary is with her children, Paul and Victoria, Alfonso and Emilia and Carol's parents are there as well. David stands next to Bruno, helping him, enjoying having his father around. Bruno is relaxed and happy.

Carol comes out of the house and brings hamburger buns to one of the picnic tables where her parents are sitting.

ALICE TEYSSIER

It's nice to see him with David...

ELMER TEYSSIER

The boy really needs him...

CAROL

I know. I just wish it could last longer, you know?

ALICE TEYSSIER

You shouldn't think about that, honey. He's taking care of his family the best way he knows how.

ELMER TEYSSIER

You ever stop to think that maybe he gets lonely, too? All those hotels? Travel? He's alone all the time.

Carol watches Bruno and David horse around together, smiles.

ALICE TEYSSIER (CONT'D)

It's his dream, honey. You need to support him.

ON BRUNO AND DAVID

Bruno is grilling with his arm around Emilia. David grabs Bruno's leg in a wrestling hold. Bruno drops the barbeque tongs, lifts David up over his head to David's delight, then puts him down.

DAVID

Dad, can I be a wrestler someday?

Bruno lets this sink in, goes back to his grilling.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Dad?

Bruno suddenly turns on David, makes a funny face and scoops him up over his shoulder as Emilia laughs.

INT. BRUNO AND CAROL'S KITCHEN- NIGHT

Bruno and Carol clean up the house from the barbeque. Bruno brings plates in from the outside as Carol does the dishes. Bruno sits at the kitchen table, looks at Carol then looks away. Carol looks at him.

CAROL
Hon, are you okay?

BRUNO
Yeah...

CAROL
What?

BRUNO
Oh, I told Carl that I wanted to cut down on my tv matches...just work the arenas...

CAROL
What's really on your mind?

BRUNO
David...he said something about wanting to be a wrestler. I mean, I want him to be happy, but I really don't want that for him, you know? I want him to go to college, do something...I don't want him to go through all of this...

CAROL
He wants to be like his dad...

BRUNO
I know...but I barely got of high school. I don't want that for him...

Carol goes over to Bruno and sits down at the kitchen table.

CAROL
You're a good man, you know that?

BRUNO
I don't want David to go through what I did. I wouldn't wish that on anyone.

CAROL
He'll find his way...I promise.

BRUNO
I don't want anything bad to happen
to any of you...

CAROL
(kisses Bruno)
And I love you for that...always
have...always will.

Carol takes Bruno's hand, squeezes it then goes back to the
sink. Bruno watches her and smiles.

INT. DRESSING ROOM AT MADISION SQUARE GARDEN - NIGHT

Bruno comes into the dressing room from a match, sweaty,
limping slightly. He's followed by ARNOLD SKOLAND, his
manager. Bruno sits down, rubs his shoulder.

SKOLAND
You okay?

BRUNO
Arnold, you have to talk to Carl.
I need some time off. I can't keep
up like this...

SKOLAND
I'll try, Bruno, but you know how
he is...

BRUNO
I don't have enough time to heal
and my back is starting to act
up...

SKOLAND
You taking anything?

BRUNO
Nah...never. I couldn't.

Bruno gets up, limping, to go toward the shower. Skoland
notices the limp.

SKOLAND
You should have that checked.

BRUNO
Yeah, another medical bill, just
what I need.

(MORE)

BRUNO (CONT'D)

It's not like they take care of anything...come to think of it, why don't they? We all get so banged up and not one nickel from Carl.

SKOLAND

It'll never happen.

BRUNO

Maybe it's time someone asks. I'm on top...you never know, he might listen. Heck, maybe I'll even start a union!

SKOLAND

You've already helped get the undercard guys a better payday. I don't think Carl would take too kindly to a union.

BRUNO

It's time, Arnold. These guys get so banged up and there's no one there to help. It's not fair.

Arnold shakes his head. As Bruno walks toward the showers a policeman comes into the dressing room, looks at Bruno.

POLICEMAN

Bruno Sammartino?

BRUNO

Yes?

POLICEMAN

I've been told to deliver you a message from Mr. Rizzo.

BRUNO

Who?

POLICEMAN

He wants to meet you...

Bruno, towel around his waist, gives Arnold a quizzical look.

EXT. JILLY'S SUPPER CLUB - 52ND STREET - NIGHT

Bruno looks up at the sign, walks into the club.

INT. JILLY'S SUPPER CLUB - 52ND STREET - NIGHT

Bruno walks in, looks around, self-conscious. A fireplug of a man, JILLY RIZZO, 45, notices Bruno, walks over to him.

JILLY RIZZO
 (distinctive raspy voice)
 Bruno...I'm very happy you could
 come. It's an honor...(extends his
 hand) Jilly Rizzo. This is my
 place.

BRUNO
 Nice to meet you, Mr. Rizzo.

JILLY RIZZO
 You're a model for us Italians, my
 boy. I wanted to meet you in the
 flesh.

BRUNO
 Well here I am...

They both laugh as Jilly escorts Bruno through the club. They stop at a table where an older man sits with an attractive young woman. Jilly puts his hand on Bruno's shoulder.

JILLY RIZZO
 Bruno, I want you to meet some good
 friends of mine. Sam Giancana and
 Dorothy McGuire.

Bruno shakes Giancana's hand, and takes Dorothy McGuire's hand and kisses it, nearly falling all over himself.

DOROTHY MCGUIRE
 A gentleman...very nice to meet
 you.

BRUNO
 (stammers)
 I...likewise, Ms. McGuire.

Jilly laughs, ushers Bruno forward, who shakes his head, embarrassed.

A PRIVATE PART OF THE CLUB

Jilly ushers Bruno into an enclave away from the main room. There's a table with three men sitting there, all drinking scotch, having a great time.

Bruno walks in with Jilly, and they all turn, and we see
FRANK SINATRA, SAMMY DAVIS, JR., AND DEAN MARTIN.

FRANK SINATRA

Hey, Champ!

Bruno is dumbfounded. He just stands there, looking at the
Rat Pack, looking at Jilly, shaking his head.

INT. BRUNO'S HOTEL ROOM IN NEW YORK - MORNING

Bruno drinks a glass of orange juice, talks on the phone.

BRUNO

Honey, you're not going to believe
who I met last night! Frank
Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr. and Dean
Martin!

CAROL (O.S.)

Hon...

BRUNO

Man, those guys can drink!

CAROL (O.S.)

Hon...

BRUNO

I don't know how they do it!

CAROL

Bruno...I'm pregnant.

BRUNO

My God, that's wonderful!

CAROL

We weren't sure I ever would be
again...nice surprise, huh?

BRUNO

I knew we could do it. I knew it!

CAROL

I love you. Always have, always
will.

INT. HOSPITAL IN PITTSBURGH - 9 MONTHS LATER - DAY

Bruno is in the waiting room with David, his parents and
Carol's parents.

A doctor comes into the waiting room and speaks to him, and he shakes his head, then sits down slowly, stunned.

INT. CAROL'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Bruno steps into the room to discover Carol in bed, holding two newborn boys, one in each arm. A nurse attends to Carol and the equipment around her. Carol's eyes are glassy from being doped up, but she smiles when she sees Bruno.

BRUNO

My God, I can't believe it...

NURSE

You have two beautiful boys, Mr. Sammartino...

CAROL

(delirious)

I know...I heard it on the news...

The nurse laughs along with Bruno.

CAROL (CONT'D)

You better tell my mother to get a second set of everything...and I mean right away!

Bruno sits on the bed. Emilia, Alfonso and David come to the door, peek in. Bruno motions for David to come in. He takes a step into the room, staring in awe at the twins, then bolts out the door, Emilia and Alfonso chasing after him. Bruno looks concerned as Carol hugs the twins closer to her.

EXT. WILLIAM PENN HOTEL - PITTSBURGH - NIGHT

A Rolls Royce pulls up to the curb in front of the hotel, the lights of downtown Pittsburgh behind them.

Bruno, in black tie, gets out of the driver's side, Carol, in a gown, out of the passenger's side, helped by a valet. Bruno opens the back door and escorts Emilia out of the car as Alfonso exits on the curb side.

INT. WILLIAM PENN HOTEL BANQUET ROOM - PITTSBURGH - NIGHT

Carol is sitting at a table with her parents and Alfonso, who taps his fingers on the table to the music, taking everything in, enjoying himself. Bruno dances with Emilia as an Italian band plays nearby. The room is filled with close to 250 people.

EMILIA

Bruno, you didn't have to do this.
It must be so expensive!

BRUNO

Mom, please. That's not important.

EMILIA

But you have a big family now.

BRUNO

It's fine, mom, really. It's your
50th wedding anniversary! Stop
worrying about everything and just
enjoy yourself, okay?

As they dance, Emilia notices people staring at them, other people nodding to Bruno, some coming up to him and patting him on the back. Emilia notices, smiling. Bruno spins her, and as he does, we can see the scar on the back of her shoulder where the bullet entered her years before.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

Long way from the mountain, huh,
mom?

EMILIA

We don't have to talk about that
anymore. I try not to think about
those devils from hell anymore...

BRUNO

I'm sorry...

EMILIA

Don't worry...let's enjoy what we
have...and this...(waves her hands)
this is the wedding we never had.
Thank you, son.

Emilia takes Bruno's face in her hands, kisses him on the cheek. For Bruno, this is the greatest day of his life.

INT. WILLIAM PENN HOTEL BANQUET ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Bruno stands alone in front of a large glass window, looking out at the lights of downtown Pittsburgh. Carol comes up to him, kisses him on the cheek, stands beside him. They stay like that for a few moments, Bruno continues to stare at the cityscape.

BRUNO

My Aunt Agnesi told me that when Uncle Camillo died a few years ago, his last words were about his nephew in America...that I was the biggest, the strongest, a champion...

Bruno pauses, tears forming in his eyes.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

No matter what anyone says...there will always be one person bigger and stronger, a champion greater than I could ever be.

Carol puts her hand on Bruno's. They turn around to see Emilia dancing with Alfonso, enjoying herself. Bruno and Carol watch his parents dance.

CAROL

Well...maybe not the biggest!

They laugh together, Bruno wiping his eyes, enjoying seeing his parents having the time of their lives.

WRESTLING MONTAGE:

Bruno in a brutal match with Baron Scicluna, who grimaces in pain when Scicluna breaks Bruno's thumb. Bruno is taking a lot of punishment, especially to his back and is sweating profusely.

Bruno, in a locker room in some arena taking a shower, massaging his back, in obvious pain. He limps slowly out of the shower.

Bruno lies on the couch at home, asleep as the twins are chased by David. Bruno wakes up with a start when Darryl starts crying because David is roughhousing too much. Bruno is so tired he's moving in slow motion. Carol runs into the room, gives Bruno a look, then attends to Darryl, motioning to Bruno to reprimand David. Bruno looks on, dazed, exhausted. He takes in the noise and activity in his own home, with a look on his face that tells us that he knows he has to do something, but he's not quite sure what that is.

INT. STATE ARENA - NIGHT

We're close on a black and white television image of Bruno being interviewed ringside by Ray Morgan.

RAY MORGAN

You've been champion now for seven years, Bruno. How does it feel?

BRUNO

Well, Ray, I'm very proud of my accomplishments and don't ever want to let my fans down.

We pull back to see that Bruno is standing ringside with Ray Morgan, the arena empty except for large cameras and lights and a crew taping the interview.

RAY MORGAN

So how are you holding up?

BRUNO

I eat right, get my sleep, and keep up my training. I never stop training.

RAY MORGAN

You're an inspiration to kids everywhere, Bruno. In fact, I know there's someone you want to say hi to, right?

BRUNO

As a matter of fact, yes, Ray.

Bruno looks right at the camera.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

I just want to say hello to a young man in Roosevelt Hospital who's a friend of mine.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM AT ROOSEVELT HOSPITAL - NIGHT

JOHNNY, 14, is watching the interview on television, sitting up, smiling.

BRUNO (O.S.)

I want you to know that I'm thinking about you. I want you to take care of yourself and I'll see you real soon.

Johnny watches Bruno an autographed picture clutched in his hands.

INT. STATE ARENA - LATER

Bruno is finished with the interview. Carl McCann comes over to him, claps him on the back.

MCCANN

Good job, Bruno. Should be a good match in Baltimore tomorrow, huh?

BRUNO

We have to talk. (beat) I don't think I can keep this up.

MCCANN

You're not serious.

BRUNO

I'm banged up, Carl. You have me on so many consecutive dates I don't have any time to heal.

MCCANN

Hey, if you need a referral on a chiropractor...

BRUNO

I'm already doing that. It's just too much, Carl. I need a break.

MCCANN

What are you saying?

BRUNO

Look, Carl, I'm grateful for everything you've done, but...you know what I'm saying.

MCCANN

I can't talk you out of it?

BRUNO

Not this time, Carl.

McCann thinks for a moment, then puts his arm around Bruno's shoulder, starts walking with him.

MCCANN

Okay, Bruno. I'll take care of it.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - JANUARY 18, 1971 - NIGHT

Bruno is wrestling the Russian Bear, Ivan Koloff. They are really going at it, giving the standing-room-only crowd their money's worth.

LATER IN THE MATCH

Bruno comes off of the ropes, and as he does, Koloff fools him and catches him on the side of the head, cutting him and leaving him dazed. Koloff then rushes at Bruno, picks him up and body slams him, then does a knee drop across Bruno's throat. Bruno, still dazed, struggles to move as Koloff gets up onto the top rope and leaps down on Bruno, driving his knee into Bruno's chest, then in a flash, covers Bruno as the referee slams his palm into the mat three times, counting Bruno out. Koloff leaps off of Bruno, raising his arms, the new champion, as Bruno pulls himself up off of the mat. The entire crowd is silent. Dead silent - 21,000 people. Bruno scans the crowd to see shocked faces, people beginning to cry, shaking their heads in disbelief. In slow motion Bruno takes all of this in as Arnold Skoland comes into the ring to make sure Bruno is okay.

VOICE FROM THE CROWD

Bruno, you're still the best! We
love you, Bruno!

Bruno nods, acknowledging the comment, but still dazed begins to exit the ring with Skoland.

RINGSIDE

A path clears as Bruno begins to walk up the aisle toward the dressing room. People reach out to touch him, pat him on the back.

VOICE 2 FROM THE CROWD

You'll be back, Bruno! We love
you!

As Bruno walks the long walk, he is mobbed with affection and he thanks people, shaking their hands, acknowledging their love.

INT. BRUNO'S LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

People mill about in the locker room - promoters, other wrestlers, the media, all giving encouragement and support to Bruno. Arnold Skoland is there.

Bruno motions to Arnold who then ushers the last of the well-wishers out, closes the door, leaving Bruno alone with his thoughts. Bruno sits back and looks around, and we hear snippets of his successes - his title fight with Buddy Rogers, other great matches that he's won. He takes this all in, and even though there's a trace of sadness in his eyes there's also relief, as he's ready for the next phase of his life.

EXT. BRUNO'S HOME - DAY

Bruno pays the cab driver then walks up the stone path to his front door, suitcase in hand.

INT. BRUNO'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Carol, David, Darryl and Danny are near the front door in anticipation of Bruno's arrival.

CAROL

Kids, please don't get him riled up. I don't think he's happy about losing the title.

The door opens. Bruno is there, a scowl on his face. Carol is silent, so are the kids, trying to gauge Bruno's mood. Suddenly his scowl turns to a maniacal grin as he drops his suitcase and begins chasing the kids around the house, enjoying himself, the kids squealing with joy. Carol watches, elated, as her husband's come home and all is right with the world.

EXT. BRUNO'S BACKYARD - DAY

Bruno has one of his big family barbeques. The backyard is filled with people, including Mary and Paul's families, other friends. Bruno sits with Alfonso, Elmer and Dom DeNucci in lawn chairs, talking, drinking wine, relaxing. All of the kids are splashing in the pool having a good time. Paul is being admonished about something by Victoria, who then walks away from him, angry. Bruno notices this as Paul catches his eye, shrugs, turns away, embarrassed. Carol sits with her mom, Alice, Emilia and Mary, near the pool. Mary watches her husband, AMERICO, drink a beer, off to the side.

MARY

You know, I never thanked you and Bruno properly for the car. It was a big help with Americo out of work again.

CAROL
Don't worry about it. He'll get
back on his feet.

Bruno walks over, puts his arm around Emilia, hugs her.

BRUNO
I'm going to start the grill.
Everyone okay?

EMILIA
We're fine. Everything's fine.

Bruno leaves. Alice Teyssier turns to Carol.

ALICE TEYSSIER
It's good to see him around...I'm
sure it'll have a good effect on
David...

CAROL
(nodding)
I know...I just hope it lasts.

Emilia smiles, takes Carol's face in her hands, kisses her.

EMILIA
Everything will be fine...

INT. BRUNO AND CAROL'S KITCHEN

Two women are in the kitchen. One is spooning potato salad
from a container onto a platter, the other is smoking.

WOMAN #2
I don't know how she does it. He's
never home.

Carol walks out of the bathroom, stops in the hallway when
she hears the two women talking.

WOMAN #3
I couldn't do it...

WOMAN #2
I feel sorry for her. I'm sure he
stays busy, if you know what I
mean!

Both women laugh as Carol turns the corner, comes into the
kitchen.

CAROL

Ladies, I don't know about you, but no matter how much he's away, no matter how far, I always know what my husband is doing.

WOMAN #2

Carol, I...

CAROL

If I were you, I'd concentrate on your marriage. And keep your nose out of mine.

Carol leaves the kitchen leaving the two women alone.

INT. BRUNO'S LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT SAME DAY

Everyone is crowded into the living room. Bruno is standing in front of a tape recorder. Mary leans over to Carol.

MARY

This is quite a surprise...

CAROL

He's been practicing. It's the aria, Che Gelida Manina from La Boheme.

Bruno switches on the tape recorder, turns around to face everyone. He's sweating, looks at Carol, who nods encouragingly. The music starts. Bruno is singing an aria. There is no easy way to say it - he's terrible. It's excruciating. People don't quite know what to say, trying to be polite. Dom DeNucci begins to laugh, someone hits him. Bruno sweats even more, turns off the tape recorder, looks at Carol.

BRUNO

Did the kids do something to the tape recorder? I think it's broken.

Carol hesitates, while everyone is waiting for her to talk.

CAROL

Honey...I don't think it's broken.

BRUNO

Well then...I think I just retired from the opera!

Dom bursts out laughing, which is contagious. Finally, even Bruno joins in, making fun of himself.

INT. ALLEGHENY GENERAL HOSPITAL - DAY

Bruno walks down the hallway, enters a room.

INT. FRANKIE'S ROOM - DAY

Bruno walks in to see FRANKIE, 10, in bed, eyes closed, his MOTHER sitting by his bedside, his FATHER standing by the window. Bruno goes to the bed, sits in a chair next to the mother. There are tubes coming out of Frankie from every direction, his head is shaved.

FRANKIE'S MOM

(tearful)

Just talk to him, please. He adores you and he can hear everything we say.

BRUNO

(nodding)

I hear you're a big wrestling fan, Frankie. I'm very happy to meet you and I want you to get better so you can be my guest next time I wrestle at the Civic Arena, okay?

Frankie smiles weakly, grabs Bruno's hand. Bruno squeezes it gently. Frankie's mother and father both well up with tears, as does Bruno.

INT. BRUNO'S HOME - DAY

Bruno walks in the front door, home from the hospital. Carol is coming out of the kitchen. Bruno still looks shaken from visiting Frankie in the hospital.

CAROL

Are you okay?

BRUNO

Yeah...just this kid in the hospital has leukemia...I feel so helpless, you know?

CAROL

I'm sure you made him feel better...

BRUNO

It makes me feel that I've let David down, you know? I just haven't been around enough...

CAROL

You can make up for it now...

BRUNO

I hope so. And I definitely don't want that to happen with the twins. I swear to you that I won't let that happen with the twins.

INT. WAITING ROOM AT PITTSBURGH AIRPORT - DAY

Bruno walks into a private waiting room, sees Carl McCann sitting with a piece of luggage. Bruno comes over to him, sits down.

BRUNO

What's so important, Carl? I'm on my way to Japan.

MCCANN

I'll make it quick. Morales is a good champion, but attendance is down. I need you to wrestle Stasiak in the Garden.

BRUNO

Carl...

MCCANN

Just for a year. I promise.

BRUNO

I like everything the way it is...

MCCANN

Just two shows a week, big arenas only. The Garden Nassau, the Civic Arena, Boston Garden...I need you back, Bruno. The spic ain't cuttin' it.

Bruno looks at McCann, shakes his head.

BRUNO

You have to promise it won't stretch past a year. If it does, I'm gone. Understood?

MCCANN

I give you my word.

Bruno sighs, picks up his bags, turns around and walks away.

INT. TOKYO ARENA - NIGHT

Bruno is locked in a strenuous match with Shohai "Giant" Baba, as the crowd cheers for both. The match ends, and the referee raises Bruno's hand, then the two wrestlers bow to each other, respectfully.

EXT. TOKYO ARENA - NIGHT

Bruno walks with Baba outside the arena. Baba stops at a 1972 Fleetwood Cadillac, out of place among all of the smaller Japanese cars on the street.

BRUNO

I see you've been keeping the car
in good shape.

SHOHAI BABA

(bowing)
Sending me this car was very
generous. You humbled me. I've not
repaid you...

BRUNO

It's what anyone would do...

SHOHAI BABA

Not just anyone. I will never
forget this. Ever.

Baba bows again, walks toward the Cadillac, then turns back.

SHOHAI BABA (CONT'D)

And my legs thank you, too!

Bruno laughs as Baba waves to him, gets in the car, smiling.

INT. LOBBY OF TOKYO HOTEL - NIGHT

Bruno walks into the lobby with Dom DeNucci. A DESK CLERK motions for them to come over. Bruno walks up to the front desk.

DESK CLERK

Mr. Sammartino, there's a message
for you.

The desk clerk hands a folded piece of paper to Bruno, who takes it, turns around, begins to read. He crumples up the piece of paper.

DOM DENUCCI

What is it, Bruno?

BRUNO

Stasiak beat Morales in Philly.

DOM DENUCCI

So?

BRUNO

That means my match with Stasiak is a title match. (to himself) Carl conned me again...

DOM DENUCCI

Bruno, I don't get it. Isn't that good?

BRUNO

Well, I can tell you this. I know one person who won't be happy.

INT. BRUNO'S DEN - DECEMBER 10, 1973 - NIGHT

We're close on a television set as we see the match between Bruno and Stan Stasiak in progress at Madison Square Garden. We pull back to see that we are in Carol's den as she's watching the match with David and the twins nearby. Bruno wins the match, pinning Stasiak. As Bruno stands in the middle of the ring, triumphant, chant of "Bruno! Bruno! loud and clear, the twins jump up and down, excited as someone puts the belt around Bruno's waist beginning his second reign as champion.

CAROL

Here we go again!

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - APRIL 25, 1976

Bruno wrestles Stan Hansen, who has Freddie Blassie in his corner as manager. Although Hansen is younger than Bruno, even at 15 minutes into the match he doesn't have the stamina of the older wrestler. As Bruno comes off the ropes to go in for a tackle, Hansen picks him up for a body slam. He gets Bruno in the air but too tired to execute properly, drops Bruno on his head, breaking his neck. Bruno is in excruciating pain, on the verge of blacking out, although the match continues.

Hansen goes in for a bodyslam, by attempting an illegal hold. The referee disqualifies him and the match is halted. As the referee goes to raise Bruno's arm Bruno drops to the canvas, out cold. The audience, now noticing, gets quiet, wondering if Bruno is okay.

INT. EMERGENCY WARD/NEW YORK PRESBYTERIAN HOSPITAL-NIGHT

Bruno is wheeled into the emergency ward, a group of doctors and nurses hovering around him. As they all disperse, Bruno grabs the arm of BERNIE SPIEGLE, 50, his friend and attorney.

BRUNO

(hazy)

Bernie, you can't let my parents know. Promise me. They'll both have a heart attack at their age...

BERNIE

Don't worry, Bruno. I'll take care of it.

Bernie picks up a phone on a table next to the bed, begins dialing.

BRUNO

I know they won't want me to leave, but I have to get back home.

BERNIE

What?

BRUNO

They have to get a release from my doctor in Pittsburgh. Promise me.

Bernie nods to Bruno as he holds the phone.

BERNIE

Carol, it's Bernie. Listen, Bruno's hurt...in a match. He's okay...

Bruno grabs the phone from Bernie.

BRUNO

Honey, it's okay, don't worry...yes, in my match tonight, but as soon as I can get a release I'll be home. I need you to contact Dr. Civitarese, and have him send a consent release...

EXT./INT. DIVINE PROVIDENCE HOSPITAL - PITTSBURGH - DAY

Bruno is wheeled out of an ambulance and into the emergency ward and a curtained area. He is met by DR. CIVITARESE, 52, who looks at Bruno, shakes his head.

DR. CIVITARESE

Do you understand how badly you're hurt? You flew from New York to Pittsburgh? The slightest bump or movement and the broken bone in your neck could cut into your spinal cord!

As Dr. Civitarese begins to bark orders, attending to Bruno, Carol comes in the room. She stops short when she sees her husband in a neck brace.

Bruno reaches out his hand. Carol takes it, comes up close to Bruno, brushes the hair out of his eyes.

BRUNO

The kids know?

CAROL

They're a little scared, but okay.

Bruno squeezes her hand.

CAROL (CONT'D)

You know, this isn't what I had in mind when I wanted you to stop wrestling...

BRUNO

I'm sorry.

CAROL

I just wouldn't want to do any of this without you...

BRUNO

You won't have to, honey. I promise. I'm not going anywhere.

CAROL

(hugs Bruno)

I hope not. Losing you is not the plan...and I hope Carl knows that, too.

INT. BRUNO'S HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Bruno rests in bed, his eyes closed, brace on his neck. Carol sits in a chair next to him, David, Darryl and Danny by her side. Emilia and Alfonso walk into the room escorted by Mary. They both stop dead in their tracks when they see Bruno in bed, head in a brace, eyes closed. Emilia goes limp and Mary has to hold her up, while Alfonso grabs onto a nearby chair to steady himself, then walks over to Bruno and touches his arm. Bruno opens his eyes.

BRUNO

Hey, Pop. I'll be fine. Don't worry.

ALFONSO

Does it hurt?

BRUNO

(smiling)

Not so bad...I don't want you to worry...it's really not that serious.

Emilia comes over, supported by Mary, and with tears in her eyes takes Bruno's face in her hands kisses both cheeks.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

I'm okay, mom. Don't worry...nothing's gonna' happen to me...

Darryl and Danny, now 9, come over to Bruno and hug him, not letting go. Bruno and Carol's eyes lock.

INT. BRUNO'S HOSPITAL ROOM - A FEW DAYS LATER

Bruno rests in bed, equipment all around him, his head immobilized, a nurse attending to him. The phone rings next to the bed. He motions to the nurse who answers it, puts it up to his ear.

BRUNO

Hello?

MCCANN (O.S.)

Bruno...how you feeling?

BRUNO

Not so good, Carl. What's up?

MCCANN (O.S.)

Listen, I'll get straight to the point. You know I've been putting together this fight with Muhammed Ali and Inoki. Closed circuit. It's not drawing flies, Bruno. I need you to bail me out.

BRUNO

You joking?

MCCANN (O.S.)

I'm dead serious. Let me set up a return match with you and Hansen. We'll do it at Shea Stadium and put it on closed circuit along with the Ali match.

BRUNO

Carl...I don't know. I can hardly talk, let alone wrestle. I don't know how long it will be...

Dr. Civitarese comes into the room, sees Bruno on the phone. He grabs it from him.

DR. CIVITARESE

Is this McCann? Listen, I'm Bruno's doctor and I want to make something clear. Bruno has a broken neck. He's lucky to be alive, and within a millimeter from being paralyzed. As for wrestling...don't ever call Bruno again!

Dr. Civitarese slams the phone down. Bruno tries to laugh, but it hurts too much.

INT. BRUNO'S HOSPITAL ROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Bruno is in bed, a nurse holds the phone up to his ear.

BRUNO

I told you, Carl...

MCCANN (O.S.)

I'm in deep trouble, Bruno. I need you to bail me out...us out.

BRUNO

Ten percent of the gate and a piece of the closed circuit, right?

MCCANN

Right, Bruno. This match will save the organization.

Bruno takes a deep breath, closes his eyes.

BRUNO

Okay, Carl. Go ahead and make the announcement. But it will happen when I'm ready.

Carol walks into the room during the tail end of the call. Bruno tells the nurse to hang up as Carol walks toward the bed. She gives the nurse a look.

CAROL

I need a few moments of privacy, please.

The nurse nods, leaves the room. Carol looks at Bruno.

BRUNO

Honey...

CAROL

We've been married seventeen years. It's not exactly what I expected, but with everything...all your time away, I have never, ever stopped loving you as much as I did when I first met you.

BRUNO

I know, hon. I understand...

CAROL

Do you? You want to wrestle with a broken neck, risk getting paralyzed and leaving me with a husband in a wheelchair while I raise three kids? Do you think Carl cares about that? He's not family. Everything he does is for himself, and now you're going to say "yes", again? For what?

BRUNO

This is how I make my living. You know that. You know how I feel. I can't let the fans down. And I can't let this be the reason I'm out of wrestling. I just can't!

CAROL

You'd rather risk your life than protect your family? Is that it?

BRUNO

No, honey. You and the boys mean everything to me. I won't do this until I'm healed, I promise you. I won't take unnecessary chances, but I have to do this.

Carol looks at her husband in a neck brace, then strokes his head, brushing hair off his forehead.

CAROL

Always your way...no matter what.

Bruno squeezes her hand as she rests her head on his chest.

INT. BRUNO'S CAR - NEAR NORTH HILLS HS - ONE YEAR LATER

Bruno drives his Rolls Royce. He pulls up to North Hills High School, waits. It's around 5:30, and there's not much activity. He sees David, who's now 17, come out of the gym and he honks the horn. David, surprised, heads over to the car, looks in.

DAVID

I can walk...

BRUNO

Get in. C'mon.

David hops in and they pull away from the curb.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

How was wrestling practice?

DAVID

Good. Working on losing a little water weight...

BRUNO

You've gotta' be careful with that. Don't get dehydrated.

DAVID

I know, I know...

BRUNO

Is everything okay at school?

DAVID

Yeah, it's fine. Not as stuck up as Kiski.

BRUNO

Kiski was a good school, David.

DAVID

Yeah, but I just couldn't cut it so they threw me out, is that what you mean?

BRUNO

David...

DAVID

Look, dad, we've talked about this before. I like wrestling. I'm not good with the books. What's the problem? You weren't either! I mean...you wrestled with a broken neck!

BRUNO

That's why I want something else for you. College. Not wrestling. This isn't a great life, David. At least not starting out, and you should have a better foundation. If you go to college THEN want to wrestle, fine. But I'm not going to help you unless you go to college first. Your mother and I are serious about that.

DAVID

What about what I want? Have you thought about that? I WANT to be a wrestler. I don't WANT to go to college. Do you understand? How could you not understand? You, of all people?

Bruno begins to speak then stops, not really knowing what to say to his son.

INT. BALTIMORE CIVIC CENTER - APRIL 30, 1977 - NIGHT

Bruno wrestles Super Star Billy Graham. At the end of the match, Graham uses the steel post in the corner for support and pins Bruno, the referee oblivious. The crowd jeers but to no avail as Graham becomes the new champion, Bruno handing over the belt.

INT. BRUNO'S LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Bruno dresses into his street clothes. People mill around, pat him on the back, offer their support. He doesn't pay much attention to anyone. Carl McCann walks into the dressing room, comes over to Bruno.

MCCANN

Bruno, it will be fine. We'll get you lots of bookings, don't worry.

BRUNO

I'm not worried about that, Carl. I just don't know how much longer I want to do this. At all.

MCCANN

You kidding? Jeez, you're still young...you've got a few more years.

BRUNO

Well, I don't feel the same, Carl.

MCCANN

Just a couple more years?

BRUNO

Really? So you can take advantage of me for a little while longer?

MCCANN

What do you mean?

BRUNO

Carl, I came back with a broken neck to bail you out and I never got a nickel from the closed circuit.

MCCANN

You know it was out of my hands.

BRUNO

Really? My God, Carl, I paid my own medical bills!

Bruno gets up, walks away. At the door he turns back.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

It's always someone else's fault, Carl. I'm just not interested in the excuses anymore.

Bruno leaves the dressing room, leaving McCann alone.

EXT. MEADOWLANDS ARENA, NJ - ESTABLISHING - NIGHT

Signs say: FINAL WRESTLING MATCH OF THE LIVING LEGEND, BRUNO SAMMARTINO - OCTOBER 4, 1981

INT. MEADOWLANDS ARENA, NJ - NIGHT

The arena is packed as Bruno wrestles George Steele. Steele is quite a character, his eyes rolling in his head, hair all over his body. But tonight Bruno is in command, and easily wins in fifteen minutes.

INT. MEADOWLANDS ARENA, NJ - LATER

Bruno is in the center of the ring as people stay in the arena. He takes the microphone from the announcer, who backs off. The entire arena is quiet.

BRUNO

I wanted to thank all of you for coming tonight. It's a very special night for me. I've had a long career and I appreciate the support I've received from you these many years. It means a lot to me. I'm not going to miss wrestling so much since my body is battered and I need to rest. But what I will miss is all of you...the fans. That's the saddest part of all (Bruno gets choked up). It is very difficult to say goodbye, but tonight, I say goodbye to all of you.

Bruno hands the microphone back to the announcer and listens as the place gives him a long standing ovation. Tears are in his eyes as he acknowledges everyone as best he can.

EXT. BRUNO'S HOME - DAY

Bruno steps out on onto his front porch, dressed in jogging clothes. He stretches, then takes a step to run when Carol comes to the door.

CAROL

Honey...it's Carl, Jr. On the phone.

BRUNO

Not now...

CAROL

He says it's important...

Bruno sighs, heads back into the house.

INT. BRUNO'S LIVING ROOM

Bruno, perturbed, goes to the phone, picks it up.

BRUNO

Carl, what's up? (beat) I'm sorry to hear that...your dad was a good man, Carl. I'm sorry for your loss.

MCCANN, JR. (O.S.)

Listen, Bruno. When all this settles I want you to talk to you about coming back.

BRUNO

Carl, I don't know...

MCCANN, JR.

My dad wanted this, Bruno.

BRUNO

I'm too old, Carl...

MCCANN, JR. (O.S.)

Not to wrestle...as a commentator. It would be good for business. And to keep things in the old tradition.

BRUNO

I don't know, Carl. I'm pretty happy with things right now.

MCCANN (O.S.)

It would only be once every three weeks, Bruno. Easy.

Bruno is silent, thinking. Carol watches him.

MCCANN, JR. (O.S.)

If you come back, we can bring David in here and give him an opportunity.

Bruno shakes his head.

BRUNO
Sure, Carl. Now I get it.

MCCANN, JR. (O.S.)
What will it be?

BRUNO
I'll let you know.

Bruno hangs up, steaming.

CAROL
Honey...

BRUNO
I'm going on my run...

Bruno bursts out the front door leaving Carol behind.

EXT. EMILIA'S PORCH - MORNING

Bruno runs hard down the street, then slows down, begins walking as he approaches Emilia's house. The front porch is empty, then Emilia appears in the doorway holding a sweater and escorting Alfonso outside, holding his arm as he has a walker in front of him. He is very unsteady and not able to move on his own. Bruno walks up the steps and gently takes Alfonso's arm from Emilia, helps him walk toward a chair on the porch. Alfonso stops, winded.

BRUNO
C'mon, Pop. We have to walk. Just a few more steps.

Alfonso gives Bruno a confused look. Undaunted, Bruno coaxes Alfonso to a chair, gets him into it, then sits next to him, his hand on his father's arm.

BRUNO (CONT'D)
Pop, you cold?

Bruno takes the sweater from Emilia, begins putting it on Alfonso. Alfonso stops him.

ALFONSO
Only my wife dresses me...

Bruno hands the sweater to Emilia, who puts it on Alfonso, making sure his shoulders are covered. They sit quietly as Bruno is in the middle with his parents on either side of him.

EMILIA

He was always such a strong man...worked hard his entire life and never complained...

BRUNO

Except at me!

Emilia and Bruno share a laugh.

EMILIA

He loved you, Bruno. He just...he just didn't know you that well. He didn't go through what we went through. It's impossible for anyone else to understand. Even your father.

Bruno nods, turns away, tears in his eyes, as Alfonso stares blankly ahead. Emilia takes Bruno's hand and squeezes. As we move into Bruno and Emilia's hands intertwined we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GRAVESITE - DAY

We're close on Emilia and Bruno's hands intertwined and pull back to reveal that we are at Alfonso's gravesite, with family and friends around, Emilia dressed in black with Bruno in a suit and Carol, David, Danny and Darryl sitting next to him.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA - NIGHT

Bruno sits ringside next to CARL MCCANN, JR., 35. They are both working as commentators, and it is before the matches. The arena is filled, and parading around the ring are what look like a series of circus acts to Bruno - a wrestler with warpaint, a woman in a thong, a wrestler, cut, his face flushed with the look only enhancements can bring, screaming into the microphone - Bruno watches this spectacle and can only shake his head. McCann notices.

MCCANN, JR.

A little different than your day?

BRUNO

This is a joke, Carl. This isn't wrestling. It's a sideshow.

MCCANN, JR.

Well, then I'm the lead
barker...and the place is filled.

BRUNO

Carl, some of these guys are dying
from the juice...you taking care of
that as well?

MCCANN, JR.

I don't believe it, Bruno. You
don't know that.

Bruno shakes his head as the spectacle continues in the ring.

MCCANN, JR. (CONT'D)

You know, Bruno, I could use you
back. For real. Boston needs a
lift. Hogan can't hold an
audience.

BRUNO

You're not serious.

MCCANN, JR.

I am.

BRUNO

I'm 50, Carl. You're crazy.

MCCANN, JR.

Think about it. Really think about
it.

Bruno looks at the lunatics parading around in the ring, then
at McCann. It's clear he thinks they're ALL nuts.

INT. WRESTLING ARENA LOCKER ROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT

It's after a pay-per-view match. Bruno, dressed in the
jacket he wears as a commentator, walks through the locker
room. Wrestlers are cleaning up, laughing and joking. He
sees three wrestler, off to the side, doing a line of coke.
One of the guys looks up, looks at Bruno, laughs, goes back
to what he's doing. As Bruno heads out of the locker room,
he hears, "Sure you don't want a hit, oldtimer? Need help
walking?" Bruno stops at the door, then brushes off the
comments and walks out the door.

EXT. ARENA - NIGHT

Bruno walks out of the arena, heads toward the parking lot.

DAVID (O.S.)

Hey dad!

Bruno turns around, and David is there. David has really beefed up, and is now 24 years old. Bruno turns around.

BRUNO

This is a surprise.

DAVID

I know...been three years now, right?

BRUNO

About that. What's up?

DAVID

Well...I need a favor.

BRUNO

Sure...

DAVID

I need you to put the tights back on, dad.

Bruno deflates.

BRUNO

Carl must have talked to you...

DAVID

Does it matter? It's the only way for me to catch a break. You know that. I need you to do this for me.

BRUNO

David, I'm 48 years old!

DAVID

Whatta' ya' mean? You're in great shape, you're still running. You're not flabby, you're fine. I don't get it!

BRUNO

You don't understand...

DAVID

Really? Are you sure? I mean, you helped Zybsko, brought him along, but not your own son?

BRUNO

Look, David. I'd like to help, but it won't turn into anything good, I know it.

DAVID

What I know is that you won't put on the tights. I get it. You don't have to say anymore.

David begins to walk away. Bruno watches his son walk away.

BRUNO

David! David!

David turns around.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

Look, I'll put on the tights. Only to help get you in with Carl. I don't want this open ended.

David nods, starts walking back towards his dad.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

But remember, and remember good. This is your opportunity, and it may be your last. Don't mess it up.

DAVID

(nodding)
I won't.

INT. PHILADELPHIA ARENA - NIGHT

Bruno and David wrestle in Philadelphia. It is a tag team match, and they're partners. They do well together, but the match is difficult for Bruno, and he tries to hide but he's winded not enjoying it very much and having a hard time.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Bruno, on the phone, sits in a chair in his hotel room, the television on.

BRUNO

It was fine, honey. I know, I know...not much longer. I'll be on a plane tomorrow, I won't miss date night, don't worry!

There's a knock at the door.

BRUNO (CONT'D)
Someone's here. I'll see you
tomorrow, okay?

Bruno hangs up, walks to the door, opens it. It's Carl
McCann, Jr.

BRUNO (CONT'D)
It's late, Carl. I have to catch
an early plane home...

MCCANN, JR.
We have to talk. It's David.

Bruno lets him in, closes the door.

MCCANN, JR. (CONT'D)
He missed another date, Bruno.
It's his third in a row. I can't
have that, you know it.

BRUNO
What do you expect? When you don't
have him wrestling with me, you
drop him back to prelim bouts. He
doesn't like it. Who would?

MCCANN, JR.
It's not up to him. I make the
rules.

BRUNO
Yeah, Carl, you make the rules, but
you're taking advantage of him to
get me in the ring. Face it, I'm
on to you.

MCCANN, JR.
Regardless, he's missing the dates
and screwing up my business. I
need you to replace him.

BRUNO
Of course, Carl. I knew you were
headed there. Nothing ever
changes.

MCCANN, JR.
What do you mean?

BRUNO

Forget it, okay? What's the deal?
What do I have to do?

MCCANN, JR.

His next tour is through the
Southwest. I need you to fly to
Phoenix right away and meet up with
the other guys. You know the
drill, all of you ride together...

BRUNO

Forget it. I'm not riding in a car
with a bunch of druggies.

MCCANN, JR.

They're not druggies...

BRUNO

Yes, they are, Carl, and I'm not
going to involve myself with that.
If a cop stops us, finds drugs, my
reputation's shot. I'm not doing
it, so figure something else out,
okay?

MCCANN, JR.

Okay, Bruno, okay. I'll take care
of it.

McCann heads for the door, opens it, looks back at Bruno.

MCCANN, JR. (CONT'D)

You know, most of the young guys
think you're a dinosaur. I defend
you, because of my dad, but all
your accusations about drugs makes
everyone uncomfortable, you know?

BRUNO

They're not accusations, Carl.
It's the truth, and if you or
anyone else doesn't like it, I
don't care.

Bruno ushers McCann, Jr. out the door, slamming it behind
him.

EXT. SEEDY MOTEL IN AMARILLO, TEXAS - DAY

Bruno drives up to the motel in a rental car, gets out,
surveys the surroundings, shakes his head. He heads for a
room across from the pool on the first floor.

EXT. SEEDY MOTEL IN AMARILLO, TEXAS - ROOM 102

Bruno knocks on the door. David answers, looking dishevelled, no shirt on, a mess. Bruno looks at him then walks into the room.

INT. DAVID'S SEEDY MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Bruno walks in, surveys the surroundings. The place is a mess, clothes everywhere. There is an opened loaf of bread and a package of ham on a coffee table, empty cartons of milk and orange juice as well. Bruno clears a space for himself on a ratty couch, sits. David paces, clearly upset.

BRUNO

You keep missing dates, David, it's going to be...

DAVID

Dad...forget about that. It's my heart.

BRUNO

What do you mean?

DAVID

I have an irregular heartbeat, and my blood pressure is through the roof.

David sits on the bed, his head in his hands.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I don't know what to do.

BRUNO

You can start by getting off the juice.

David gives him a look.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

Don't look at me like that. I'm not a fool. I know you get the stuff from Graham.

DAVID

Dad...

BRUNO

David, I've been training for a lot of years. You can't fool me, so knock it off, okay?

(MORE)

BRUNO (CONT'D)

I mean, I'm your father. Don't you think I care more than anyone else? All you're doing is listening to a bunch of losers.

DAVID

You know it's my only way to get a chance. Look at the guys, dad. They're all doing it, so wise up!

BRUNO

It's not me who needs to wise up.

DAVID

You're going to blow it for me, you know that?

BRUNO

Me? All I've done is go out on a limb for you. I take your dates when you don't show up! You have any idea what this is doing to me?

DAVID

Sure, dad. Of course. It's about you. This whole thing is about you! They don't want me, anyway. They just want YOU back in the ring. They don't care if I'm a prelim boy for the rest of my life.

BRUNO

You will be if you keep this up!

David is in agony. Bruno takes a deep breath.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

David, you have to play ball with Carl. That's the way it works if you want to get ahead.

DAVID

Forget it, dad. I thought you could help.

Bruno stands up.

BRUNO

You know, David, I've done everything I could. Really.

(MORE)

BRUNO (CONT'D)

I know I wasn't around a lot when you were growing up, and I'm sorry for that, but you've had opportunity after opportunity and you can't seem to handle it, and you don't seem to give a damn what you're doing to me, either. I'm old, David. I'm crippled up, in pain. I'm done.

Bruno goes to the door, turns back to David.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

Now you have to do it on your own.

Bruno leaves. David heaves a glass at the wall, shattering it, then falls back on the bed, in agony.

EXT. BRUNO'S BACKYARD - ONE MONTH LATER

Bruno and Carol are in the backyard, a bottle of wine and two glasses in front of them, enjoying the evening and each other. Danny, now 20, comes out of the house.

DANNY

Dad, the phone's for you.

BRUNO

Who is it?

DANNY

Debbie McCann.

CAROL

Can you take a message.

BRUNO

Honey, I've been trying to get Carl on the line for a week. I'll take it.

Bruno gets up, goes into the house.

INT. BRUNO'S LIVING ROOM

Bruno picks up the phone.

BRUNO

Hello, Debbie. Yeah, you're right, I've been calling Carl and he hasn't called back.

DEBBIE MCCANN (O.S.)
So why are you calling?

BRUNO
I have an offer outside of the company that I want to pursue, so I'm done. Pure and simple.

DEBBIE MCCANN (O.S.)
You know, we own the rights to your name so you better watch your step.

BRUNO
Really? Are you kidding?

DEBBIE MCCANN (O.S.)
After all we've done for you, you're turning your back on us? Is that how it works?

BRUNO
Let me tell you how it works. I'll give you a little history lesson, Debbie. How do you think your organization GOT so successful? On my back, that's how. Before I got involved it wasn't much of anything, and under your father-in-law it almost folded many times. After I took the title you started making money, because I drew the crowds and put you on the map.

DEBBIE MCCANN (O.S.)
Listen, Bruno...

BRUNO
Even after I lost the title in 1971 Carl, Sr. begged me to come back and bail him out. Your husband knows, because he was there, following me like a puppy trying to get me to return.

DEBBIE MCCANN (O.S.)
The only reason you can GET jobs is because of what we did for you!

Bruno is silent. Nothing.

BRUNO
Goodbye, Debbie. Same goes for Carl.

Bruno hangs up. By now, Carol has come into the living room.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

Can you believe it? After all that? Almost thirty years, Carol. Thirty years, and that's all these people can say to me?

CAROL

You did everything you could. You know that.

BRUNO

Did they ever care? For a minute? I gave them my heart and soul, everything I had. I was loyal, never missed a date, treated them with respect. (he stands up) I came over here and made something of myself. I worked hard. I took care of my family. And this is how it ends? Like this?

CAROL

Just get out, Bruno. Walk away. They don't deserve you. They never did.

BRUNO

All those years...I did what I believed was right, but no one cares. No one cares!

Carol goes to Bruno, hugs him.

CAROL

Just forget them, Bruno. It's over. It's just about family, now. It's all that matters.

EXT. CEMETERY IN PITTSBURGH - 1995 - DAY

Bruno stands graveside at Emilia's funeral, as her casket is being lowered into the ground. He is a mess - tears streaking his face. Almost inconsolable. Carol is next to him but it's Danny and Darryl who hold him up. If they weren't there, he'd collapse he's so filled with grief.

INT. BRUNO'S LIMO

Bruno is in the backseat, crying, Carol next to him, the twins there as well. Darryl and Danny do their best to console him but nothing works, and they are unsure of what to do as they've never seen their father like this before. Bruno turns around as the limo leaves the cemetery, and through the window in the back waves to his mom one last time, the look on his face is one of a lost little boy, not a 59 year-old man. It's heartbreaking.

INT. BRUNO'S BASEMENT - 2000 - MORNING

Bruno is in his basement, working out with weights, a ritual he's performed almost every day for the past 48 years. He's 64, but with his shirt off and benchpressing weight we can see that he is still in tremendous shape. He goes through his routine quietly, staying within himself, in a rhythm, a rhythm he's stuck to his entire adult life. Carol opens the door at the top of the steps, pokes her head in.

CAROL

Honey, that was Marty...he wanted me to tell you he'd be by in two hours.

BRUNO

Alright.

Bruno goes back to his workout.

INT. BRUNO'S TROPHY DEN - MORNING

We're close on a television screen with Bruno on the Larry King Show, going up against Carl McCann, Jr.. It's a show about steroid use in wrestling. There's a click, and we now see Bruno, remote in his hand, clicking onto a similar interview on the Phil Donahue Show, Nancy Grace and Geraldo Rivera. All of the shows are about steroid use in wrestling, with McCann, Jr. vigorously denying sanctioned steroid use, Bruno taking the other side. As Bruno clicks back to the Larry King Show, a horn honks outside. As Bruno stands up, we're closer to the screen, where we see an arrogant McCann belittling Bruno.

MCCANN, JR.

You've seen this stuff happening?

BRUNO

Yes, I have. I was there.

MCCANN, JR.
 (snide)
 Yeah, Bruno, you were there...

EXT. BRUNO'S PORCH - LATE MORNING

Bruno kisses Carol at the door. A Bentley waits for him in the driveway.

BRUNO
 Don't worry, I'll be home soon.

CAROL
 Be nice to him, Bruno.

They laugh together, Bruno walks toward the car. He looks back.

BRUNO
 Hey, don't forget, tonight is date night!

Carol waves as Bruno gets in the passenger side of the Bentley.

INT. BENTLEY - LATE MORNING

Bruno gets in. His friend, MARTY LAZZARO, 40, a big guy with a heart of gold, begins backing out of the driveway.

MARTY
 I've got it all set up, Bruno.
 I've been talking to McCann's lawyer, Paul Wilson, and I think you're going to like what you hear.

BRUNO
 (chuckling)
 Okay, Marty. Whatever you say.

MARTY
 No, I mean it! Look, you deserve it after all of these years. These assholes have robbed you blind. You're due...the Hall of Fame, the endorsements? Why not? Take the devil's money, for chrissakes. They never did you any favors!!

BRUNO
 I'm listening...

MARTY

What do you have to lose?

Bruno nods, looks straight ahead, betraying nothing.

EXT. PITTSBURGH CIVIC ARENA - DAY

Marty pulls up to the arena, parks. He and Bruno get out, head into the arena.

INT. PITTSBURGH CIVIC ARENA

Bruno and Marty walk onto the main floor, where a wrestling ring is being set up for an event that night.

MARTY

Don't forget, the tv station is doing the interview after we meet.

Bruno nods. Someone spots them, comes over, and they follow the person.

INT. PITTSBURGH CIVIC ARENA - TUNNEL UNDER THE ARENA

Bruno and Marty walk in the tunnel, a place that Bruno knows well, having loosened up in her many times. They come to a door, and are ushered into the room.

INT. ROOM UNDER THE CIVIC ARENA

Inside the room are Carl McCann, Jr., along with his attorney, PAUL WILSON. Wilson comes over to Bruno and Marty.

WILSON

Bruno, it's great to see you.
Marty, thanks for bringing him.

MARTY

You think we can get something accomplished here?

WILSON

I believe so. Yes, I do.

McCann shakes Bruno's hand.

MCCANN, JR.

Good to see you again. It's been a couple of years, no?

Bruno nods.

WILSON

We have so much on the drawing board right now. New dvd's, a book...it's time to really show how all of this started.

MCCANN, JR.

I want to honor the legacy of my father, Bruno. Starting with you.

BRUNO

Okay...

WILSON

Carl has always had great respect for the old-timers...

BRUNO

What?

MARTY

Uh, Bruno...

BRUNO

You've only showed disrespect for the old-timers, Carl. You pay Mike Tyson three million dollars to referee a match and not even get in the ring! Pete Rose four hundred thousand and look at what he did! Every time you bring out an old-timer they get 1500 or 2000, maybe.

Marty is trying to interject, but can't find a place to jump in.

MCCANN, JR.

Wait, Bruno...

BRUNO

Forget it, Carl. The old-timers gave so much, barely made a living, got busted up and you say you have respect? You show no respect and I'm not going to stand for it. If you have anything else to say, talk to Marty, because I'm done.

Bruno leaves the room. Everyone is speechless. Marty is sweating.

MARTY

I'm sorry, guys. I thought he'd be ready for your offer...I really did.

Marty leaves. McCann looks at Wilson.

MCCANN, JR.

He'll never change...

WILSON

His loss...

INT. TUNNEL UNDER THE CIVIC ARENA - DAY

Bruno moves at a good clip down the hall. As he does, the image morphs into Bruno in his prime, in his tights, jogging in the same tunnel, getting loose before a match. We hear the sound of the crowd above him, chanting "Bruno! Bruno!" As he jogs toward the opening of the arena. As the noise gets louder we are now back in present day, with Bruno hearing the sounds of the crowd, walking toward the ring. Marty is in the background trying to catch up to him. We are tight on Bruno's face, as he smiles, clear and strong, ready to take on anyone, ready to stand up for what he believes. He is at peace, and happy.

EXT. CENTER OF PIZZOFEERRATO - 2000 - DAY

We are now back in present day. A hand touches Bruno's shoulder, breaking his reverie of staring at Valla Rocca. He turns to see his cousin, SINIBALDO SAMMARTINO, 65, smiling at him.

BRUNO

Sinibaldo!

Sinibaldo hugs him. As he does Bruno sees Carol walking toward him with Mayor Fagnilli, and discovers about 2000 people there, including a brass band, to honor him that day. He puts his arm around Sinibaldo and they begin walking down the street, reminiscing about the old days.

EXT. SIDE STREET OF PIZZOFEERRATO - DAY

Bruno stands next to an object about fifteen feet tall covered by a blue plastic tarp. Mayor Fagnilli pulls the tarp off, revealing a magnificent sculpture representing Bruno and his achievements. Bruno is touched, Carol by his side, as he shakes hands with the sculptor.

EXT. NEAR SCULPTURE - A LITTLE LATER

Bruno is wrapping up his speech as the crowd listens.

BRUNO

...and it was Pizzoferrato that made me strong. I realize that I am a champion in the hearts of my fellow Pizzoferratesi.

Everyone claps, Carol takes his hand, squeezes it.

EXT. VIA ROMA - DAY

Bruno walks ahead of the procession, up his street where he grew up. He is wide-eyed, taking everything in. A man comes up to him, claps him on the back.

BRUNO

My God, Alfio! Alfio Ciccarelli!

He sees a woman, FILACETTA, Alfio's wife, next to him. Bruno smiles at them both.

BRUNO (CONT'D)

Alfio, you're a very lucky man. My cousin is as beautiful as I remember her...

They walk around the corner, now stopping in front of the home that Bruno grew up in. Bruno sighs deeply, Carol at his side, as he sees on the side of the house a small blue tarp covering up something. He turns to Mayor Fagnilli and Sinibaldo for an explanation.

MAYOR PALMERINO FAGNILLI

For you, Bruno. We have never forgotten.

A hand pulls off the blue tarp, revealing a plaque made of plaster, which reads, "Qui Nacque Sammartino" (the birthplace of Bruno Sammartino). Bruno stares at the plaque, blinking back tears, then at Carol.

BRUNO

Did you know about this?

CAROL

Of course...we wanted to surprise you...

Bruno hugs her and begins sobbing quietly.

BRUNO

I love you so much...I could have
never done any of this without
you...

CAROL

I love you, too, honey. Always
have, always will.

Bruno takes in the surroundings, the people here to honor him, then back at the plaque. Tears well in his eyes, as everything in his life flashes before him, knowing that this is where he began, where he was formed. He begins to cry openly, Carol at his side, holding him up, kissing him, knowing, as Bruno knows, that he has finally come home, and everything is going to be okay.

THIS FILM IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF EMILIA SAMMARTINO,
THE GREATEST HERO OF THEM ALL