

AGAINST THE GRAIN

By David R. Remschel

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SYNOPSIS: When an email accuses their beloved coach of unthinkable acts, three high school athletes are thrust into a storm of doubt, fear, and loyalty. In the locker room where brotherhood was forged, they must decide whether to protect the man who shaped them—or stand up for what’s right. *Against the Grain* is a raw, heartbreaking story about trust, truth, and finding the courage to break the silence.

DURATION: 70 minutes.

TIME: Present.

SETTING: High School locker room.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 males)

PAYNE (m) Captain of the Buccaneers. (211 lines)

STOCKARD (m) Center of the Buccaneers. (198 lines)

WILLIS (m) Wide Receiver of the Buccaneers.
(131 lines)

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

Against The Grain had its world premiere that ran at The Hill Country Arts Foundation's Point Theater on Friday, May 12-13, 2023, with the following company:

PAYNE Diego Martinez
STOCKARD..... Dom Mason
WILLIS..... Aidan Spraggins

DIRECTOR David R. Remschel
FIGHT SONG/ALMA MATER..... Chris Huber
STAGE MANAGER Jorja Simpson
SET DESIGNER Jeff Cunningham
SOUND DESIGNER..... Chris Huber

ACT ONE

We hear:

A cell phone dings, signaling a received email. There is a silence and then:

Another ding.

Then another.

And then three more.

Five more.

Twenty more.

A hundred all together in a strange, eerie cacophony of sound.

Then:

There is a final, single ding and:

Somebody opens their device and:

MALE VOICE: *(Voice over.)* This is for all of you Coach Allen fans.

Some of you—some of you might recognize the tune. Well. Enjoy.

“Buccaneer Boys, listen to me

Buccaneer Boys, mind what I say

He’s your coach and he gets to see

Whatever he wants, it’s a price you pay.

He’ll give you a squeeze,

He’ll give you a pat

Without fail, he’ll give you a chill.

He’s your coach—don’t you see that

There are just some things you have to fulfill.

S-O-S put a stop to this now

S-O-S put a stop to this now

I know I’m not the only one

We victims know, it was never for fun.”

AT RISE: *A high school locker room held in darkness. A door opens, loudly, from somewhere else in the building. The loud clanging of it shutting follows and then the sounds of footsteps approaching can be heard. We see the silhouette of a figure, PAYNE, against the door and then the door opens and in comes the figure and the door shuts. We hear more footsteps from inside the room then:*

A loud clack and then:

The lights come on, finally illuminating the locker room. There was a time, perhaps not that long ago, that this had been a place of great revelry and celebration. There are streamers sagging from one locker to the next and balloons resting, sadly, on the ground or on the benches lining the place.

In the middle of the room stands the figure, who we now see is a young man—no more than seventeen. Clad in soiled work-out attire and sweaty from what was clearly a lengthy and very grueling exercise regimen.

He looks the place over, breathing heavily.

He pulls himself away from his inspection to one of the benches drops his sports bag upon it. He opens the bag and produces a fine, silver flask from which he takes a long drink. He gags upon the drink and sputters but manages to take it down. He thinks to take another drink but forgoes the concept, puts the flask back into his bag then takes off his shirt. He throws the shirt onto his bag and makes his way into the shower area.

The door from off opens, yet again, and in comes another young man, STOCKARD, of the previous' age but of rather hefty build. This individual, likewise, finds himself in the middle of the locker room. He zeroes in on a lone balloon, approaches it, and places his foot upon it when: The sounds of the shower starting can finally be heard.

STOCKARD: Who's that?!

PAYNE: (Off.) Someone there?

STOCKARD: That you Payne?

PAYNE: (Off.) Yeah. Stockard?

STOCKARD: That's right.

PAYNE: (Off.) Gimme a moment, would ya? I'm just rinsing off.

STOCKARD finds his way to the right-most locker. His. He fiddles with the knob, it clicks, he opens it and withdraws a worn uniform. Caked in mud and blood. He clutches at it. Pulls it in close.

STOCKARD: Hey, Payne? (No response.) Payne!?

PAYNE: (Off.) Yeah, what's up?

STOCKARD: You have that silver flask of yours on you?

PAYNE: (Off.) Yeah. Left pocket of my bag. Get yourself some.

STOCKARD, still holding onto the uniform, scoots over to the other side of the bench—the side that houses PAYNE'S athletic bag—and he opens the pocket and produces the flask. He looks it over. There is a definite hint of jealousy that marks his face. He shakes this thought away, uncaps the flask and takes a drink. A long drink. His is not as pained in pay off as PAYNE'S was. He takes another drink then wipes the liquid from his lips and puts it back into the bag. He looks back down to the clutched uniform in his hands. Then:

With tender love and care, he puts his uniform back onto its hangar and hangs it back up in his locker.

PAYNE comes out of the shower area. They nod to each other. A silent greeting amongst "men".

PAYNE: Hey, man. Didn't expect to see you here.

STOCKARD: Yeah, well. Didn't have any place else to go. At least. No place I wanted to go.

PAYNE: I hear you. I hear you.

PAYNE goes to his gym bag and begins the process of getting changed.

STOCKARD: You okay—?

PAYNE: Heh?

STOCKARD: If I'm here? That be alright?

PAYNE: Oh. Eh. Sure.

STOCKARD: You sure?

PAYNE: Yeah. Well. I am kinda expecting someone in the next—
eh—

STOCKARD: Someone—

PAYNE: In the next couple'a minutes but—

STOCKARD: Oh.

PAYNE: I mean if you wanted to hang for a little bit—

STOCKARD: No. No, I can bounce.

PAYNE: No, man. Hey, I'd appreciate the extra company.

STOCKARD: For just a little while though, right?

PAYNE: ...

The air that hangs about the place is quite awkward.

Especially for STOCKARD who sits and tries to avoid looking over to PAYNE while he changes.

STOCKARD: So, you—?

PAYNE: Sorry?

STOCKARD: What? Eh, how'd you do this morning, heh?

PAYNE: Yeah. Alright, I guess. Did a suicide. Couple'a air raids.

STOCKARD: And you do all of it for fun. I never could understand that.
Every morning, I mean.

PAYNE: It helps me focus. You know. Clears my head. Besides you
do it enough times, you get used to it.

STOCKARD: Could you imagine my fat ass runnin' a suicide just for
fun?

PAYNE: *(Laughing.)* I see you runnin' a hundred every day and that's
a riot in itself.

STOCKARD: *(Laughing.)* Hey, alla that runnin'd burn off my love meat.
I gotta keep it packed on to block your pencil thin ass.

*Their laughter which, until now, has grown—gradually dies down. A
silence follows after.*

STOCKARD: Haven't seen any of the fellas since the game.

PAYNE: Yeah, me neither.

STOCKARD: (*Long pause.*) I haven't seen The Coach either. (*No response.*) Have you?

PAYNE: What?

STOCKARD: You know—seen The Coach?

PAYNE: No. (*Beat.*) Well—

STOCKARD: Well?

PAYNE: I mean. I went by yesterday to try and check up on him.

STOCKARD: Did you see him?

PAYNE: Not really.

STOCKARD: (*Relieved in a strange way.*) Oh, good. Eh, I mean—

PAYNE: I mean, I got to the door and, you know how you can kinda see into his house through that grating on the door and all?

STOCKARD: Sure. Sure. I got you.

PAYNE: Well, I see him get up and start coming to the door but, just before he gets to the door, he turns and walks into the hallway. (*Beat.*) And that was that.

STOCKARD: He didn't say anything?

PAYNE: Not a thing.

STOCKARD: Not even to you. (*Pause.*) That's something, isn't it? I mean. Him not wanting to talk to the captain and all.

PAYNE: He's upset, I guess over, what happened. That night. With. You know. The email and all.

STOCKARD: Yeah. (*Pause.*) Man, everything was going so—

PAYNE: I know.

STOCKARD: I mean it wasn't before. Going well. It was all going to the shitter. But then you ran that beautiful sonofabitch into the end-zone and everything after was just so—so perfect. The crowd came pouring out onto the field. The look of those assholes from Wesley. I never felt so good before in my life, you know. Have you? I mean. I'm sure you have loads of times. Being starter for two whole years and all. But for me that was a first.

PAYNE: It felt real damn good. Sure.

STOCKARD: Real, real damned good. (*Long pause.*) Man, why'd some asshole have to go and foul it all up with that mother lovin' email?

PAYNE: Yeah, man. I mean. I dunno.

STOCKARD: You think it was someone from Wesley? Pissed after the big upset?

PAYNE: I don't think it would occur to someone to send an email like that just because of a loss.

STOCKARD: I dunno. You never can tell with them at Wesley. *(Beat.)* It couldn't be somebody from Philmann. I mean. I mean. Everybody here loves The Coach, right?

PAYNE: ...

STOCKARD: Right?

The door from off opens and closes with its customary loud clang. PAYNE and STOCKARD both, quickly, stand up.

STOCKARD: Who do you think it could be?

PAYNE: I dunno.

STOCKARD: Maybe that guy you were waiting for?

PAYNE: Maybe. *(Pause.)* Could be The Coach.

STOCKARD: *(Almost scared.)* You think?

PAYNE: I dunno. Could be. Yeah.

They both wait.

Footsteps can be heard. Loud and ominous. Approaching the locker room. The door opens and then:

WILLIS enters. He is of the same age as the others. A good looking, tall and muscled young man.

STOCKARD is confounded to see WILLIS. PAYNE is relieved.

WILLIS: Hey, fellas. Payne. Hey, Stocky. Didn't know you were going to be here.

STOCKARD: For cryin' out—we thought you was somebody important, Willis.

WILLIS: Well, thank you, Stockard. That means a lot. Coming from somebody like you.

STOCKARD: What in the hell are you doin' here anyway, New Meat?

PAYNE: Well, Willis here, called a meeting of sorts.

STOCKARD: A meeting—

WILLIS: A private meeting.

STOCKARD: (*Simmering.*) Oh. It makes sense now. The other fella you were waitin' for.

WILLIS: Is that a problem, Stocky?

STOCKARD: Why should it be a problem? I mean, if you have a meeting special with the captain what the hell problem is there, you know?

PAYNE: Look Stock. Forget about it, alright.

STOCKARD: Forget about it? I'm not even invited to this little soirée and you say forget about it.

WILLIS: Hey, if it's going to be a problem, Payne. Me being here and all. I can walk. Really. I don't mind.

PAYNE: No. I want you here, Willy. Hey, I want you both here. You know. Now it's the Varsity Boys. Back in action. The guys who knew The Coach better than anyone.

STOCKARD: Yeah, well, some of us knew him a whole lot better than others.

WILLIS: And some of us are very glad about that little fact.

STOCKARD: (*Approaching WILLIS.*) Just what are you saying, Willy?

WILLIS: You tell me, Stockard. You seem to know everything about every little thing. Just what do you think I mean?

PAYNE: Why don't we all three just take a chill, heh? Before this all gets outta hand. (*Beat.*) Can we do that, do you boys think?

WILLIS: I can do that.

PAYNE: Stocky?

STOCKARD: I can—if he can.

PAYNE: There we go! (*Beat.*) So, Willis says there's been this committee meeting called for tomorrow. To investigate the email.

WILLIS: And The Coach. Let's not forget about The Coach.

STOCKARD: And The Coach? But why him? He didn't do anything.

WILLIS: That's what they hope to find out.

PAYNE: (*Awkward pause.*) Eh, anyway. I was thinking. You know. Maybe it would do some good. Me going to the committee and speaking about The Coach's character and all.

STOCKARD: Heh. They got any room for somebody else to speak about The Coach and his character? I think I might have some things to say. (*Beat.*) Important things.

WILLIS: Sorry. This is more of a “by invitation only” kind of meeting.

STOCKARD: *(Beat.)* Oh.

PAYNE: Willis called me here because he wants to help me through how the meeting is going to go. What they’re going to ask and stuff like that. Isn’t that right, Willis?

WILLIS: *(Beat.)* Something like that. Sure.

STOCKARD: And how would Willis know what they were going to ask?

PAYNE: Well, you see, his—

WILLIS: My father is on the committee.

STOCKARD: Is that right?

WILLIS: Yep. Asked to be on it by the superintendent himself.

STOCKARD: *(Long pause.)* How about that. My daddy wasn’t asked to be on no committee. Been a loyal Buccaneer goin’ on twenty years and still—but he isn’t some big shot like your old man, Willy, so I guess that’s probably why he wasn’t asked.

PAYNE: *(Pause.)* You good, man?

STOCKARD: Heh? Yeah. Course I am. Hey, Willy. Forget I said anything. I’m just—I dunno—blowin’ off some steam. You don’t mind if I hang around, do you, Payne? I promise I won’t be a bother.

PAYNE: Well—

WILLIS: It might be better if it were just the two of us. Me and Payne, I mean.

STOCKARD: I wasn’t askin’ you, New Meat, was I?! *(Beat.)* Well, Payne?

PAYNE: *(Rather exasperated.)* Sure. I guess.

A silence.

WILLIS, more than a little perturbed, takes a lap around the room. Kicking at the balloons. Pulling at the streamers. Then, when he has had ample time to cool down:

WILLIS: Doesn’t feel real, does it?

PAYNE: What you talkin’ about?

WILLIS: I mean this. The locker room. Still has balloons and streamers and junk all over the place. You know. Usually old what’s his name—the janitor—

STOCKARD: *(Lowly.)* Grady.

WILLIS: Yeah—usually he comes in and has everything cleaned before Monday morning practice. It's just kind of surreal, you know? Everything all still being out. Like we're in this weird kinda calm after a storm. *(Beat.)* Except it doesn't feel too calm right now, does it?

STOCKARD: Big Money doesn't like a messy locker room.

WILLIS: I didn't mean anything by it.

STOCKARD: Grady doesn't get here 'til five in the morning on Mondays. There's nothing weird about it. He just hasn't made it out yet.

WILLIS: I know. I'm just sayin' it's kinda funny feeling.

STOCKARD: To you maybe.

WILLIS: Maybe. Yeah.

STOCKARD: *(Pause.)* Hey. Did they ever find out—you know—who sent the email?

PAYNE: Not yet. But I talked to some of the fellas. Bixby's dad is one of those super computer geeks. He said he might be able to hack into the school's main email system or something and decode who sent it out.

WILLIS: Wow. Is that legal?

STOCKARD: *(Suddenly.)* Who gives a shit. This is The Coach we're talking about. And when I find out whoever did it—they'll have signed their own death warrant. *(Beat.)* Yeah, that's for sure.

WILLIS: *(Beat.)* Even if it isn't a lie.

STOCKARD: What the hell's that supposed to mean?

WILLIS: I'm just saying. Somebody went through a whole lot of trouble doctoring that email up. Supposin' it wasn't just because they had a bunch of time on their hands. Or were disgruntled at the outcome of a game. Supposin' it had some actual merit behind it. Sure, it could have been done with a little more tact but—I mean. You gotta consider the possibilities.

STOCKARD: There are no possibilities. What, are you saying he did all that because of some email? That's what's got you convinced? Boy, that is so messed up.

WILLIS: You know that he didn't do anything? Actually, really know it?

STOCKARD: *(Pause.)* Of course I know it.

WILLIS: How?

STOCKARD: Heh?

WILLIS: How do you know it, actually? Really?

STOCKARD: ...!

WILLIS: I mean, what if somebody came forward? With stories about what Coach Allen had done to him? Would you still say it wasn't true?

STOCKARD: Who is he? This mystery man?

WILLIS: *(Beat.)* He's hypothetical.

STOCKARD: Then if he's hypothetical he's bullshit and I don't know why we're meeting here to begin with.

WILLIS: You're not supposed to even be here.

PAYNE: Willy.

WILLIS: Sorry.

STOCKARD: You wanna talk about hypothetical stories, *heh*? I've heard some. About you, you know. Wanna know what they were all about?

WILLIS: Be careful, Stocky.

PAYNE: Stock, come on now. Ease up. Don't say something you're gonna regret.

STOCKARD: Those hypothetical late nights behind the stadium tradin' backseat hypothetical favors with some fairy from Beaumont. Wanna tell us that story, *heh* Willy the Philly?

WILLIS: *(Advancing on STOCKARD.)* You go too far!

STOCKARD: Come at me, boy. Daddy isn't here to protect you now.

PAYNE: *(Getting in between them.)* Hey, look. Listen. We aren't gonna get anywhere shit-talking each other like this and all. We gotta be unified. The three of us. Together. You know. A team. Know what I'm saying?

WILLIS: *(Beat.)* Yeah, well, I expect an apology!

STOCKARD: *(Snigger.)* You expect a what now?

WILLIS: You heard me, Stocky. You apologize for all that you just said about me. Right. Now.

PAYNE: Come on, man. It was kinda out of line. Just apologize.

STOCKARD: Well, maybe I don't feel like it.

WILLIS: Then I'm walking, Payne, and you can continue on with our present company. I'm sure you'd get real far with old Stocky here.

STOCKARD: Maybe he'd do just fine.

PAYNE: Don't be a dick, Stocky. Remember. He knows what they're going to ask. This could be—you know—helpful.

WILLIS: *(Pause.)* Well?

STOCKARD: *(Pause.)* Whatever. *(Beat.)* Okay. Fine. I'm sorry. *(Beat.)* Happy?

WILLIS: ...

PAYNE: Now, shake on it. *(Beat.)* Go on.

STOCKARD reaches out. WILLIS considers.

WILLIS: *(To STOCKARD.)* Someday you're going to get messed up for sayin' trash like that.

PAYNE: But that's not going to happen today. Today we gotta be united. For The Coach.

STOCKARD: For The Coach! Hell yeah!

WILLIS: *(Pause.)* For you Payne. Only for you.

WILLIS takes STOCKARD'S hand. They shake. Pat each other on the back and etcetera.

PAYNE: Good. Now, what do I need to know about tomorrow, Willis?

WILLIS: Well. Eh. First thing they're going to do is ask about your relationship with The Coach. You know. Was it healthy or unhealthy?

STOCKARD: *(Snort.)* Is that all?

WILLIS: They'll only be asking Payne this so—

STOCKARD: Alright. Go 'head, Payne. You tell him. Go 'head.

PAYNE: The Coach was—eh—he was pretty harsh in his coaching style.

STOCKARD: Payne—!

WILLIS: Harsh how, exactly?

PAYNE: Well, I mean. Come on, man, you know how.

WILLIS: Yes. I know. But I'm not going to be the one asking these tomorrow.

PAYNE: *(Sigh.)* He'd chew your a(ss)—eh—your butt out if you fumbled or missed an assignment. Things like that.

STOCKARD: But we had it coming. I mean. If that ever happened.

WILLIS: Is that true, Payne? Did we deserve that kind of treatment?

PAYNE: Well, I mean. At the moment you'd wonder if it was—you know kind of excessive but when you think about it later on—yeah. You had it coming. He was fair. Didn't matter who you were. He was always fair.

STOCKARD: That's right! Fair! Tell it like it is!

WILLIS: Heh. (*Beat.*) But I'm more interested in your relationship with The Coach—eh—Coach Allen outside of practice. Could you tell me about that, please?

PAYNE: My relationship with The Coach—outside of practice—?

WILLIS: Would you call it healthy? Natural?

PAYNE: I—

STOCKARD: The Coach was there for Payne during a real damn rotten time in his life.

PAYNE: Hey, Stock—

STOCKARD: He took care of him. Was it real natural? Like any other coach and player? No. Not really. But that wasn't a natural time, was it, Payne?

PAYNE: (*Beat.*) No. No, it wasn't.

STOCKARD: And The Coach was there for you through it all, wasn't he?

PAYNE: Yeah. I guess he was.

STOCKARD: So there's your answer Mr. Big Man of the committee. You got any further questions you wish to trouble my main man here with?

WILLIS: (*Pause.*) This is really not ideal, Payne.

STOCKARD: What's that supposed to mean, heh?

WILLIS: You know what it means, Stocky.

STOCKARD: No. No, I wanna hear you say it.

WILLIS: It's not good for Payne—you being here.

STOCKARD: Oh and why's that?

WILLIS: Because it needs to be him that takes the stand. What, you think he's going to have you standing over his shoulder tomorrow? Feeding him the answers? I'm sorry, Stocky, but they aren't interested in what you have to say. So, I think it would do us—

STOCKARD: Us—

WILLIS: Payne a lot of good if you were to—you know—

STOCKARD: What, get lost?

WILLIS: Well, not in those exact words but—

STOCKARD: *(Pause.)* What do you think, Payne?

PAYNE: I think—look, I'm sorry, man—but, I think Willis is right, you know?

STOCKARD: Say it then. Say, get lost Stockard.

PAYNE: Why don't you walk around the track a time or two? That'd probably give us enough time to hash things out. You can come back in—after.

STOCKARD doesn't move, then:

He goes to PAYNE'S bag, takes out the flask and downs a hearty swig.

PAYNE: Jesus, Stock!

STOCKARD: Hey, I'm just getting a little drink, you know. *(Taking another long drink.)*

PAYNE: Come on, man. Don't do this. Don't go overboard.

STOCKARD: Hey. You don't need to worry about me. *(Pause.)* I'd do anything for The Coach.

PAYNE: I know you would.

STOCKARD: Bust in there and mess them up. That's something I would do. I don't even care who they are. I don't care if he is your daddy. I would mess him right the hell up. Because. Because I'm loyal, you know? To my Coach. To my Captain. To my team. To my-my Coach.

WILLIS: You've said that already.

STOCKARD: Then I'll say it again! *(Taking one final drink. Pause.)* I always liked this flask.

PAYNE: Yeah.

STOCKARD: The Coach gave it to you, right?

PAYNE: *(Not this again!)* Yeah. Right. The Coach.

STOCKARD: That's real—real nice. *(Beat.)* What for, again? I forget.

PAYNE: He gave it to me after—after my old man died. You know this, man.

STOCKARD: Yeah. I know it. I just—I dunno—forgot, I guess.

PAYNE: Come on. Give it back, heh. That's enough. Come on, dog.

STOCKARD: There. You can have the damned thing back. *(Beat.)* You know. That isn't real silver right. I seen somethin' like that at the Walmart. Oh, shit. I'm sorry. That wasn't. That wasn't cool of me to say. Sorry. Oh, there I go apologizing again. Just like the old man. Always apologizing. Hey, Willy. I bet your old man never had to apologize for a damn thing in his life, you think? Not like mine. Always apologizing. *(Beat.)* Maybe—maybe a lap or two would be good for me. Sorry.

STOCKARD stumbles to the door. WILLIS moves to help him.

STOCKARD: I don't need any damn help, alright!

WILLIS: Sorry, man. I was just—

STOCKARD: Just nothin'. *(Pause.)* I'll see you fellas in a little minute.

He exits.

There is a silence. Awkward and prolonged.

PAYNE: Sorry about him. He's not normally so—

WILLIS: Hey, no worries. I'm used to it.

PAYNE: Used to it—?

WILLIS: I'm a little different. Goes without saying, heh. And no matter where I go, there will always be people like Stockard that give people like me a hard time for being what I am. Who I am. Even The Coach. Sometimes he can be the worst. You know, I don't think I would have even stood a chance to bench this season if it hadn't been for you.

PAYNE: I just saw your real potential is all.

WILLIS: I appreciate that. I do love the game a whole, whole lot. But my point is, you have my back. I look up to you, Payne, and I know a whole lot of the other guys that do too.

PAYNE: *(Uncomfortable.)* I'm just The Captain.

WILLIS: Right. Just The Captain. *(Beat.)* Look, Payne. I'm gonna be up front with you on this thing. There was an accusation made against Coach Allen.

PAYNE: *(Beat.)* Do what now?

WILLIS: That's right. After the email was sent. It was a player, Payne.

PAYNE: (*Beat.*) Yeah right.

WILLIS: I'm being dead serious here.

PAYNE: I thought you said he was hypothetical.

WILLIS: I told that to Stockard, yes, 'cause how well do you think he would handle a piece of news like this. Now. Now, I am telling you that both the account and the person who gave it to me—they are both very, very real.

PAYNE: Who?

WILLIS: Heh?

PAYNE: Who is he? What is his name? Tell me.

WILLIS: (*Pause.*) Alright. It was James Dooley, Payne.

PAYNE: What, Dooley?! Dooley is the one that came to you with this crock of—?! Oh, that's rich! That's a riot!

WILLIS: I'm surprised you think this is funny.

PAYNE: If you knew Dooley like I do, oh, you'd blow a gasket. (*No response.*) Willy, Dooley is always getting in trouble on the field. Cracking up the players. Getting on The Coach's every last nerve. That's probably why he did this. The Coach ran his butt a little too hard and this was his way of getting back at him.

WILLIS: Payne, I know James has built himself up a bit of a reputation as a dingus here but when he came to me he was genuinely terrified about what had happened. And what might happen if he comes out with this information. You know. What other people, people like Stockard, might do to him to keep him quiet.

PAYNE: If he was telling the truth, he wouldn't need to worry about it.

WILLIS: I believe he came to me in earnest.

PAYNE: Well then if he was telling the truth. Why did he come to you? Some—no offense—some new meat? And not his captain?

WILLIS: Maybe because he felt like you might pass on what he had told you to someone else. The other players. Coach Allen, himself, even.

PAYNE: Hey, I wouldn't do that!

WILLIS: I know you wouldn't. You know how I know that? Cause you're a good leader. A good captain. He needs his captain. Now. More than ever.

PAYNE: Man, this is so—I love The Coach!

WILLIS: I know you do.

PAYNE: (*Almost a grumble.*) Dooley thinks he can send some bogus email and—

WILLIS: He didn't send any email.

PAYNE: He didn't—?

WILLIS: That's right. He didn't send the email.

PAYNE: So, what are you saying, there's somebody else?

WILLIS: I dunno. Maybe.

PAYNE: God, this could kill The Coach, you know.

WILLIS: I do know. But the captain's job is to consider all the possibilities of a situation. Even if they aren't all that popular.

PAYNE: I don't have to consider a thing because I don't friggin' believe any of this. I don't believe you.

WILLIS: (*Beat.*) Heh. Well, that's disappointing.

PAYNE: What, are you leaving?

WILLIS: Yeah, Payne. I think so.

PAYNE: But—what about—you know—the committee meeting?

WILLIS: What about it?

PAYNE: Well, I thought you were going to help me through it.

WILLIS: It's funny you still think that's why I called you here. No. Tomorrow, you'll go up to that committee and speak about Coach Allen's glorious character and all and then you'll leave and go home. Coach Allen goes free. Everybody's happy. Well. Almost everybody. (*Starts to exit.*)

PAYNE watches him a moment then produces his cell phone and opens something up on it. Whatever it is seems to trouble him greatly.

WILLIS: (*Turning back in to the room. Quite angry.*) Hey, Payne, you know what—?! (*No response.*) Hey, Payne? You okay?

PAYNE: Heh?

WILLIS: You seem—

PAYNE: What? Oh, no. I was just-just reading the email. Again. I figured that'd probably come up tomorrow. In the meeting. Figured I might as well be prepared, you know. In case they read it or—God—or have me read it. Can you imagine?

WILLIS: (*Crossing back to him.*) No. No, that's a good idea. Why don't you?

PAYNE: Why don't I what?

WILLIS: Why don't you read it? Right now?

PAYNE: What, to you?

WILLIS: Why not? I have nowhere else to be. *(Beat.)* Go ahead.

PAYNE: But—

WILLIS: Hey, I wanna help. Really. Come on. What's the worst thing that could happen? It changes your mind about The Coach?

PAYNE: No chance of that happening.

WILLIS: Well then—what's the problem?

PAYNE: *(Beat.)* Alright. No. I guess that's a-a good idea. *(Scrolling.)* Lemme just—okay. Here it is. Okay. *(Pause. Saying it with some great trouble.)*

"Buccaneer Boys, listen to me
Buccaneer Boys, mind what I say
He's your coach and he get to see
Whatever he wants, it's a price you pay.
He'll give you a squeeze,
He'll give you a pat
Without fail, he'll give you a chill.
He's your coach—don't you see that
There are just some things you have to fulfill.
S-O-S please put a stop to this now
S-O-S please put a stop to this now
I know I'm not the only one
His victims know, it was never for—."

STOCKARD, who has since drunkenly re-entered, listens. Just before PAYNE has reached the end, STOCKARD goes to the nearest set of lockers and, after another silent moment, slams his fist into it.

WILLIS starts in shock.

PAYNE doesn't flinch a muscle.

PAYNE: You okay, Stocky?

STOCKARD: No. No, I'm not okay. Actually, I'm pretty friggin' far from okay.

PAYNE: *(Directed at WILLIS.)* I can understand that.

STOCKARD: *(Pause.)* You know. I never even read it. The text from the recording. I tried. Hundreds of times but I could never get past the first couple'a words. *(Beat.)* I ended up getting so mad, the last time I tried to read it, that I—

PAYNE: What?

STOCKARD: I ended up chucking my phone across my room. Smashed it into like a hundred thousand pieces or something.

WILLIS: ...!

STOCKARD: Anyway. I'm glad it was you, Payne, that I actually heard it from. *(Pause.)* So, you—eh—you been getting some good work done in here?

PAYNE: Eh—well—

WILLIS: We've actually had a stimulating conversation on loyalty. I'm kinda sad you missed it, Stock.

STOCKARD: Yeah?

PAYNE: He's being sarcastic, Stocky.

STOCKARD: *(Beat.)* Oh.

STOCKARD sits down in front of his locker.

WILLIS: I guess I'll be seeing you later, Payne.

PAYNE: Yeah. See you at practice.

WILLIS: Yeah. We'll see.

There is a silence and a moment where nobody moves. Then:

STOCKARD: You know. I just had a thought.

PAYNE: What's that?

STOCKARD: All of the badness. All of the craziness come from that night and you wanna know what I'm going to hold onto? I mean more than anything else?

PAYNE: What?

STOCKARD: The crowd starting the alma mater up. Remember? After the big win? So slow. You know. At first and then—it just built up. And up and up. Until that was the only thing you could hear.

PAYNE: That was something.

STOCKARD: Oh yeah. (*Pause.*) We have pride and loyalty to show
To our blue and gold Buccaneers who know
That Brotherhood is the strongest bond.
Oh, to Philmann we will always be fond
Stand forever proud, stay forever true.
Remember all you learned from the gold and blue.
Memories shall remain, lessons learned run deep
Philmann High, in my heart, I will always keep.

PAYNE: (*Joining STOCKARD.*)

Oh, to Philmann we will always be fond
Stand forever proud, stay forever true.
Remember all you learned from the gold and blue.
Memories shall remain, lessons learned run deep
Philmann High, in my heart, I will always keep.

They finish in the middle of the locker room. Big finish. Proud. Happy.

WILLIS remains where he was. Unmoving. Unspeaking. Very angry.

STOCKARD: Hey, that wasn't half bad, heh?

PAYNE: Not bad. Yeah. Pretty good. Yeah.

STOCKARD: Hey, maybe we fellas ought to join up with the choir, heh,
we were so friggin' good. What do you think?

PAYNE: I think, let's not get too much ahead of ourselves.

STOCKARD: (*A laugh.*) Okay, asshole. Then how about—?

"Buccaneer Boys, bring us a win

Buccaneer Boys, fight tonight

Rah-rah, we won't give in

Buccaneer Boys, fight—(*Beat.*) fight—(*Pause.*)

What—Payne, what's the matter? Why ain't you singing?

PAYNE: I dunno. It's just different. I never thought it would be but—

STOCKARD: What the hell are you talking about, different? This is the
fight song we're talking about.

PAYNE: Yeah but—

WILLIS: (*Finally turning back around.*) What Payne is trying to say is
that it's just not what it used to be. Not anymore.

PAYNE: Well—

WILLIS: Am I wrong?

STOCKARD: Is that what you're saying, Payne?

PAYNE: Well, I mean, at the moment—you gotta admit it does feel a little—

STOCKARD: What? A little what?

PAYNE: I dunno. A little—tainted, I guess.

STOCKARD: What, because of the email? Some-some stupid email has done the fight song in for you fellas, is that it?

WILLIS: It has for me, yeah.

STOCKARD: Payne—? *(Beat.)* Man, the fight song is an institution. People have been singing it for decades. Generations even—and you both wanna let it be up and tarnished by some dopey friggin' little email. Well, I'll tell you what. You don't have to sing anything. Not a damned note of it. I'll just sing for all of us. The whole team if I need to. How the hell about that?

Show them our strength,

Show them our grit

Philmann needs you to slaughter them—

WILLIS: I don't have time for this!

STOCKARD: Rah-rah, we'll never quit—*(Continuing underneath the next few lines.)*

Buccaneer Boys bring us a win—

PAYNE: Willis, wait! Stockard, hey, Stockard!

STOCKARD: Yeah, what?

PAYNE: Could you give it a rest for half a friggin' minute, do you think?

STOCKARD: *(Beat.)* Sorry.

PAYNE: *(Back to WILLIS.)* Look, I'm real sorry about before. But can't you see where I'm coming from? I mean—can't you see why it'd be a little hard for me to believe—somebody—somebody like him—with something as crazy as this?

STOCKARD: What are you talking about, boys?

WILLIS: I can understand, yes. That it would be difficult for you, someone that knows The Coach the way you do, to accept this as fact.

STOCKARD: Hey, Payne? What's all this about The Coach, heh?

WILLIS: But that's exactly what it is. Cold, hard fact. Whether you like it or not.

PAYNE: So you say.

WILLIS: So I believe.

STOCKARD: What is fact? What in the hell are you talking about?

PAYNE: Oh, for cryin' out! There was a player that came out with an accusation against The Coach!

WILLIS: Payne!

PAYNE: What?

STOCKARD: (*Pause.*) What kind of accusation?

PAYNE: I dunno—eh, Willis? (*No response.*) Eh, a sexual kind, I guess.

WILLIS: I really cannot believe you would—!

STOCKARD: (*Quite anxious. Pause.*) Who was it?

PAYNE: Eh, Willis—

STOCKARD: Willis—?!

PAYNE: Eh, Willis—wouldn't say who it was.

STOCKARD: Well, he's standing right there, you know. Why don't we just ask him?

WILLIS: (*Drawing close to PAYNE.*) Payne, please. Think about what Stockard would do if he knew who it was.

STOCKARD: Well?

PAYNE: Hey, I already asked him. He said nothing.

STOCKARD: Well, maybe you didn't ask hard enough, heh? Whadya say, Willy?

WILLIS: Not a thing to you, Stocky.

STOCKARD: Hey! Just how come you won't say anything, exactly, heh?

WILLIS: Because you are blinded by your so called loyalties to Coach Allen. What, don't believe me? Watch this. Hey, Stocky. The Coach raped a player!

STOCKARD: That's bullshit!

WILLIS: I rest my case. (*Beat.*) I'll see you later, Payne. It's no good for me to be here. I can see that now only too clearly. (*Starts to exit.*)

PAYNE: Willis, wait—!

STOCKARD: Ah, let him go, Payne! That queer has just been spreadin' lie after lie! Best to just cut him loose before he does some serious harm to the you. Or the team. Or The Coach. (*Beat.*) Hey, where'd that damn flask go! Let's bust that thing out and get to celebratin', heh?

WILLIS: (*At the door.*) I have to ask. What's the occasion?

STOCKARD: *(Looking for the flask.)* Well, I'll tell you, Willy. After tomorrow. All of this shit. The email. The piddly little accusation of yours. It's all gonna just disappear. Like a little puff of smoke. And we are gonna go about our lives as if nothing ever happened. That's worth celebrating I think. Ah, here it is! *(Going back to PAYNE.)* Hey, you don't mind if I take the first drink, do you, Captain?

PAYNE: I don't care.

STOCKARD: *(Raising the flask high above his head.)* For! The Coach!

He downs a hearty swig. Then hands it off to PAYNE.

PAYNE: *(Long pause.)* For—

WILLIS: Well?

PAYNE: *(Pause.)* For—*(Long pause.)*

STOCKARD: Payne?

PAYNE looks from STOCKARD to WILLIS then, without answering, he takes a drink and does not stop drinking.

WILLIS shakes his head and completes his exit.

STOCKARD cheers PAYNE on. Claps him on the back and carries on.

PAYNE, finally, gives up. Sputtering. Hacking.

END OF ACT ONE

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