

TOUCH THE FIRE

An excerpt

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FADE IN:

INT. DARTMOUTH - UPSILON BETA ALPHA (UBA) - POOL ROOM - NIGHT

Track past a large pool table covered in playing cards, broken champagne bottles, plastic cups, beer cans, beer bottles, absinthe, and ties.

We hear a MALE VOICE.

ALLANSON (V.O.)
Depending on who you ask, the Ivy League is about power. Or money. Or sex.

A fireplace is behind the table, in which something is on fire -- an empty bottle of Jack Daniels is on the mantle -- above we see framed black-and-white pictures of men in ties seated in rows -- reveal thick, green curtains drawn over bay windows -- a recessed wood-paneled ceiling -- a shiny wooden floor --

ALLANSON (V.O.)
But if you ask me, all of those things are about one thing, and one thing only. Insulting the shit out of other people. The Ivy League is what helps you get away with it.

We hear a CHANT coming from below -- the floor begins to SHAKE.

EXT. DARTMOUTH CAMPUS - DAY

With "Crazy" by Gnarlz Barkley playing on the soundtrack, we see a series of shots showing Dartmouth Hall, Rauner Library, Baker Library, and preppy-looking DARTMOUTH STUDENTS walking around a campus decked with fall foliage.

The chorus of "Crazy" moves seamlessly into the same chorus being sung by a coed Dartmouth A CAPPELLA GROUP in

SPAULDING AUDITORIUM

Facing a large audience of DARTMOUTH FRESHMEN.

Pull back from the a cappella group to reveal JEFF ALLANSON, 18, who looks pretty young for his age, seated next to MISHENSKI, who is tall with crazy hair. Both of them are wearing mildly preppy clothing.

A CAPPELLA GROUP

(singing)

*But maybe I'm crazy
 Maybe you're crazy
 Maybe we're crazy
 Probably*

Allanson and Mishenski APPLAUD along with the rest of the audience.

PROFESSOR ALAN SHORTRIDGE gets up on stage.

They quiet down with the rest of the audience as Professor Shortridge stands behind a podium -- he has an Australian accent.

PROFESSOR SHORTRIDGE

Dartmouth is an idea. Dartmouth is a recurring motif. Dartmouth is discourse. It is dissent. And it is descent. Into the inner workings of the mind. And sometimes into the inner workings of a fraternity basement.

POLITE LAUGHTER from the audience.

PROFESSOR SHORTRIDGE (CONT'D)

But what is it that we want from you? Besides working more intensively than you ever have before? Dartmouth men and women, we want you to think for yourselves. The unpacked essence of that word. Your. Selves. Not for the trappings of ego that people call position, or prestige, or membership. But for yourselves. So, if you haven't done so already, buy my book. Buy it twice. Line my pockets.

POLITE LAUGHTER from the audience.

PROFESSOR SHORTRIDGE (CONT'D)

Thank you, and welcome to Dartmouth.

APPLAUSE -- Professor Shortridge leaves the podium -- RABBI BILL HERTZMAN, an older-looking man with a significant beard and wearing a yarmulke, gets behind the podium -- he quiets the students authoritatively, with both arms outstretched.

RABBI HERTZMAN

I just want you all to remember,
when you're out there, boozin' it
up, enjoying the singing, the
dancing, and the sex, to use
protection. Because even God can't
take back herpes.

HESITANT LAUGHTER -- then CONFUSED, AMUSED APPLAUSE forming
into RAUCOUS APPLAUSE from many of the Students -- Professor
Shortridge is not amused.

Allanson is clapping tepidly -- Mishenski is clapping wildly.

ALLANSON

(to Mishenski, amid
clapping)
He's the College rabbi?

MISHENSKI

(amid clapping)
He needs to run for fuckin'
president.

INT. DARTMOUTH - COLLIS - DAY

It's an activities fair -- scores of DARTMOUTH STUDENTS walk
next to booths with the names of various clubs on them.
Allanson and Mishenski are walking together -- Mishenski has
a lobster roll in one hand.

ALLANSON

Where did you get lobster?

MISHENSKI

At the free-lobster event, that you
somehow missed.

ALLANSON

I was finishing my essay on our
summer reading.

MISHENSKI

An optional essay on our optional
summer reading. About some ass
composer named Sukovich.

ALLANSON

Shostakovich.

MISHENSKI

(munching the lobster roll)
More like Shosta-cock-bitch.

ALLANSON

How did you get into Dartmouth again?

MISHENSKI

Twenty-three --

ALLANSON

Eighty on the SAT, yeah, I find it strange I have to keep asking you.

MISHENSKI

(finishing the lobster roll)

Don't be a bitch, man.

Mishenski grabs some paper brochures from a stand -- wipes his mouth, then his hands with the brochures as they keep walking -- throws the brochures in a trash can.

MISHENSKI (CONT'D)

I think I'm going to try a cappella. Good way to meet girls.

ALLANSON

Yeah.

MISHENSKI

Have you ever talked to a girl?

ALLANSON

What kind of a question is that? I've known you for like a week.

MISHENSKI

I've never witnessed you talking to a girl.

ALLANSON

I had a girlfriend in high school. Whom I had sexual intercourse with.

MISHENSKI

Yeah. In Ohio.

Allanson picks up some flyers from a booth -- looks through them as he and Mishenski keep walking.

MISHENSKI (CONT'D)

Is she the only girl you've fucked?

ALLANSON

Yes.

MISHENSKI

So, you're walking around as an Ivy-League man, with a partially punched V card. Your V card is like a Florida ballot with a big ol' hanging chad.

ALLANSON

What, because you banged some floozie in Jersey before coming here, that makes it a fully punched V card?

Mishenski picks up some flyers from another booth.

MISHENSKI

I'm not all sentimental as shit about it. That's what makes it a fully punched V card.

ALLANSON

Dick.

MISHENSKI

I'm just saying, you need to show you care about this place being coed. Think what our Dartmouth forbears in the Fifties would have done to have all of this.

He makes Allanson look around them -- we see several groups of cute GIRLS talking to each other at several booths.

ALLANSON

Forbears? Jesus.

They come to a booth draped in a banner that has an image of a pine tree and THE DARTMOUTH REVIEW underneath, all in green. SEVERAL EDITORS are staffing it, with ROB SMITH -- a tall guy with effortless Brooks-Brothers style -- in the center, talking to a FRESHMAN, who thanks him before walking away.

MISHENSKI

Oh, this is what you've been looking for.

ALLANSON

Yeah.

MISHENSKI

You know the masthead is loaded with UBA brothers.

ALLANSON

Dude, I'm not interested in the *Review* so I can position myself for rush. I love writing.

Mishenski spots a booth some distance away with a large group of cute, preppy GIRLS standing around it.

MISHENSKI

Yeah, and I'm going to check out Dartmouth Women in Business because I love business. Catch you later.

Allanson excitedly walks up to Smith.

ALLANSON

Hey man. Jeff Allanson.

Handshake.

SMITH

Hey... man. Rob Smith.

ALLANSON

I'm a big fan of this publication. I'm very impressed that you've got William F. Buckley as an honorary member of the masthead.

SMITH

Yeah. You've got a high opinion of him.

ALLANSON

Very high opinion of him.

SMITH

Was that post coitus?

Allanson is confused.

SMITH (CONT'D)

(patting Allanson on a shoulder)

I'm just playing with you, man!

Allanson lightens up.

SMITH (CONT'D)

You're not trying to fuck me, are you?

Allanson is confused again.

SMITH (CONT'D)
 (patting Allanson on both
 shoulders)
 Come on, take it easy! So, what,
 you want to get involved?

ALLANSON
 That would be awesome.

SMITH
 Well, you'll need to meet our
 editor-in-chief tonight, nine PM.
 You know where the office is?

ALLANSON
 No.

Smith hands him a recent copy of the newspaper.

SMITH
 Under the masthead.

Allanson looks at Page 2.

ALLANSON
 Do I need to bring anything?

SMITH
 Writers always bring their pens,
 right?

EXT. DARTMOUTH - THE GREEN - NIGHT

Allanson walks on a gravel path -- on either side are
 STUDENTS playing bocce ball, walking, or just sitting and
 talking.

INT. DARTMOUTH - OFFICES OF THE DARTMOUTH REVIEW - NIGHT

Allanson walks down a polished-wood hallway, past some old
 pictures of Dartmouth -- finds a door marked EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
 ALEX WALLINS and goes

INSIDE

An elegant room -- no windows -- a desk in the center -- two
 chairs on either side -- Allanson takes off his bookbag --
 sits down in a chair -- waits.

Suddenly, another door BANGS open, and in comes ALEX WALLINS -
 - he's got closely cropped hair and is wearing an expensive
 collared shirt tucked into khaki pants, sleeves rolled up,
 boat shoes without socks. He's got a folder in hand and puts
 that down on the desk as he sits in a chair. Allanson
 proffers a hand.

ALLANSON

Jeff Allanson.

Wallins tentatively shakes it -- then opens the folder in
 front of him.

WALLINS

(not looking up)

Why do you want to join the *Review*?

ALLANSON

I just feel as a writer, it can
 give a wide berth to my creativity,
 and being around so many
 intelligent people --

Wallins cuts Allanson off with a raised hand.

WALLINS

Who are your influences?

ALLANSON

William Blake. Thomas Paine.

WALLINS

Modern influences.

ALLANSON

Writers don't have to be
 contemporary to be modern.

WALLINS

What do you want to do?

ALLANSON

(exhales)

That's a vague question.

WALLINS

Not really. You want to make money,
 don't you? That's why you're here.
 You know the *Review* dresses up a
 job application that gets accepted
 by a bulge-bracket bank.

ALLANSON

I was just --

WALLINS

Look, those of us on the *Review* are the gatekeepers of Dartmouth's image, do you understand? We also have a path to one of the best fraternities on campus. But we don't provide column space for literary dilettantes. You get me?

ALLANSON

I believe in what you're doing.

WALLINS

No, you don't. Ok? You believe in your own high opinion. You want to be a voice of the establishment at this college? Learn to call something by its correct name.

Wallins throws down a stack of word-processed papers in front of Allanson.

WALLINS (CONT'D)

You have twenty minutes to edit these articles for syntax, pace, and clarity of argument. Do not editorialize. Do not editorialize. If you can't obey that order, you shouldn't be on the *Review*.

Allanson gets ready to begin. But Wallins stands up -- goes to a cabinet -- opens it -- brings over a bottle of whiskey that is a quarter full -- puts it in front of Allanson.

WALLINS (CONT'D)

When that disappears, the clock starts.

ALLANSON

Seriously? I've never had anything harder than beer before.

WALLINS

Cool. Do you think never having anything harder than a credit-card bill to manage deters a new investment banker from running a leveraged buyout? Either drink, or leave. But don't try to make it my problem.

Allanson hesitates, staring at the bottle -- he tips it up and drains it, grimacing, spewing out some of the whiskey, but finishing it.

WALLINS (CONT'D)
(looking at his watch)
Go.

Allanson drunkenly puts pen to paper as he begins editing.

INT. DARTMOUTH - OFFICES OF THE DARTMOUTH REVIEW - EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S OFFICE - NIGHT - MONTAGE

- Allanson editing the articles -- they're convoluted but with very complex words and sentence structures.
- Wallins looking impatiently at his watch.
- The watch itself, which shows 9:40.
- Allanson furiously writing -- shuffling pages -- finding something he missed.

END OF MONTAGE

CUT TO:

WALLINS
Time.

Wallins quickly grabs the pages from Allanson and gathers them up.

WALLINS (CONT'D)
Stay in here.

Wallins leaves.

THE HALLWAY

Wallins walks across to

ANOTHER OFFICE

Wallins enters a similar room to the one he just left -- Smith is seated at a desk. Wallins hands him the edited articles.

WALLINS
If he didn't cut the fourth sentence in the second paragraph of Article Five, he's out.

Smith shuffles to the relevant page -- looks up at Wallins.