

ARIZONA SUNRISE

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. COCHISE COUNTY, ARIZONA - MORNING

The summer sun pounds majestic ranges, a natural spotlight on the--

HUACHUCA MOUNTAINS

Upon closer inspection--

--brushfires dot its slopes.

IN SKY

A Lockheed C130 Hercules forestry plane skims the flames with red fire retardant.

In the distance below on the valley floor--

EXT. HEREFORD - RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - MORNING

--a small town's main drag--a narrow country road, cratered with an occasional pot hole.

In the far distance, church BELLS RING.

Standing undisturbed, the shells of former businesses-- now selling only decay and economic depression. Nearby...

...walking down this excuse for a main street, a teenage boy sports a Golden State Warriors T-shirt, enveloped in an aura of decency. He is BRANDON SWENSON, 13.

He measures the distance of the far away fires. Sniffs at the hint of burnt wood in the air.

Brandon notes two teenagers his age riding by on mountain bicycles: a smiling AMY DABALO, 13, of India(n) descent, and Chinese-American ZACK CHAN, 13, surprisingly muscular for his age.

They exchange waves.

Brandon peers into a deserted store. The pane glass from the front window reflects the teenager's sandy blonde hair and blue eyes, offering two distinct faces. Two Brandons.

On the street, a one-story building features the sign--
 "OLE DOC MILLER'S CHIROPRACTIC CLINIC."

Near it, up ahead, the words "HOT DIGGETY DOG" on a storefront window.

INT. "HOT DIGGETY DOG" RESTAURANT - MORNING

Brandon eases himself through the door. He looks around, greeted only by empty tables and chairs missing chunks of foam padding.

A large banner hangs prominently and proudly on a wall:

Mule Mountain School - 1978 County Basketball Champions

In a corner, wearing a white smock, a wrinkled man soaked in wisdom nibbles on a meal with arthritic hands. He is DOC MILLER, 80.

A blackboard rests on an easel. Lists in chalk the limited menu: Hot Dog, Chili Dog, Chili, Bar-b-q Fries.

The proprietor, a tired-looking CLYDE MURPHY (60), slaves behind a Formica counter, his only badge of honor a stained kitchen apron.

On edge, Clyde tilts an ear to the STATIC-LACED RADIO NEWS ON LOW VOLUME.

CLYDE

We could be seeing dry lightning--
 where's the monsoon when you need
 it?--At least there's no wind--for
 now--then again--

BRANDON

--Clyde? Are you--

CLYDE

--Still not hiring, Brandon.

Brandon gathers himself, a little frustrated.

CLYDE

You're looking for work? At thirteen?

BRANDON

My dad.

EXT. RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - DAY

Brandon hikes down the street. He surveys a nearby residential area.

At one house, a WOMAN, 90, fails clearing refuse in her junk-laden front yard.

Surrounded by the mess, anchored in her garden, looking much like a baptismal font is an Augustine Wall Fountain, six feet high by four feet wide.

It BUBBLES FORTH WATER.

BRANDON

Hello, Mrs. Patterson.

The nonagenarian, LYDIA PATTERSON, greets Brandon. On creaky knees she approaches him, her delicate cross necklace glinting in the sunlight.

LYDIA

Ready for the new school year?

Brandon gazes at the far-off fires.

BRANDON

If it's not postponed. I'm trying to find a weekend job.

The senior citizen gestures to her yard.

LYDIA

I'll put you to work. Pay you good money. How about this Saturday?

Brandon lights up.

LYDIA

Grant was helping me with all the clutter. It's amazing how much junk we can collect over time. Now it's time to say good-bye. Or hello. You knew Grant?

In a snap, melancholia drenches Brandon's face.

LYDIA

You'll help me now.

Brandon's look says he wish he didn't have to.

EXT. MANUFACTURED HOME - DAY

Plopped on an acre of rural land, the double-wide's dirt driveway leads to a rickety carport and its parked cars:

A polished red 2001 Dodge Dakota pick-up, and, a dull blue '94 Ford Aerostar Sport minivan, covered with its share of primer spots.

A SQUEAKY-RAILED WOODEN STAIRCASE gives under Brandon's weight all the way up to the front door.

INT. SWENSON HOME - DAY

Sparse, patchwork furnishings low-light the double-wide. No matching color scheme. A simple analogue clock in the kitchen reads: 3:00.

THROUGH HOUSE

Brandon tiptoes all the way down a narrow hallway. A final closed door before him.

On the door's other side:

MUFFLED SNORES. Brandon nudges the door open. He peeks in. Sees...

Lying on a bed, wearing a loose T-shirt with armpit stains, dead asleep--a MAN, (40), an empty bottle of beer resting on the bed near his hand.

Next to him lies a blonde-haired WOMAN, also 40, her face turned away from the man and his SNORING.

Brandon eases over to his parents, JERRY and EDWINA SWENSON. He gently removes the beer bottle.

KITCHEN

Brandon hovers over the garbage can. He glances in.

Another five empty beer bottles.

He sets the sixth bottle next to the others, making a GLASS-ON-GLASS CLINKING SOUND.

Another BEDROOM DOOR OPENS.

An older TEENAGER, 16, more beef than brawn, walks into the kitchen like he owns the place. Wearing a Yankees ball cap, Brandon's brother, DAKOTA, knows without a doubt he's the alpha male.

Brandon motions with a finger to his lips: "Shhsss."

Dakota ignores Brandon. Heads for the fridge. Opens its door. Peers in. A quasi-sparse amount of food and drink.

Dakota snatches a can of pop.

He darts into his room.

SHUTS his BEDROOM DOOR.

Brandon hears the faint THUMP THUMP THUMP of a basketball bouncing just outside his home.

EXT. SWENSON HOME - DIRT DRIVEWAY

Near the end of the driveway, a free-standing portable basketball hoop shows off a rust-covered rim accompanied by a chipped, dilapidated backboard.

Brandon plays one-on-one basketball against Zack. During the back-and-forth game--

BRANDON

Afraid to go back to school?

ZACK

You mean 'cause what Travis and Wade did? Nah. Dad tells me the wicked fall from their own wickedness.

BRANDON

How long will they be in jail?

ZACK

Floyd'd say not long enough.

BRANDON

Living in a brand new shiny wheelchair wouldn't make someone feel too many warm fuzzies.

An afterthought dawns on Zack's face.

ZACK

You think of Grant?

Brandon takes a moment--maybe too long to answer.

BRANDON

All the time.

Jump shots back and forth from the two players.

Brandon's face changes, deep in thought. His concentration lapses. He misses over and over.

Zack throws up his jump shot.

SWISH.

ZACK

Game. I gotta go.

BRANDON

Coming to Open House tonight?

ZACK
I'll be there. Ball.

Brandon snaps the ball to Zack, who snags it.

Zack moves toward his nifty-looking mountain bike, mounting it. Brandon takes note.

BRANDON
Nice bike.

ZACK
I know. Later.

Zack streaks off on his bike. Brandon just doesn't look at Zack's wheels--he wants some of it.

EXT. SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Dry lightning flashes across the sky. It temporarily illuminates the marquee:

MULE MOUNTAIN MIDDLE SCHOOL

And below it, a hanging student-made painted sign:

WELCOME! OPEN HOUSE!

INT. MULE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Far too many students and parents jam the corridor, making movement almost impossible. The crowd meanders down, filing into individual classrooms.

Only Edwina, Dakota, and Brandon--Jerry nowhere to be found--stick together.

The crowd's collective push separates Brandon from his mom and brother. He veers off, unaware to Edwina and Dakota.

Brandon funnels into the-

CAFETERIA

Brandon steps in. High and above on the wall...

...in crimson and gray, a cougar's head--the school mascot.

Brandon scans the cafeteria three-hundred and sixty degrees. He then locks in, at eye-level, on an area on his end...

...a portion of the wall.

Brandon notices something, the look on his face evident:
 "What on earth is that?"

Drawn in, he eases his way over.

Brandon approaches the wall, closer and closer, until stretching a single finger to touch it.

In the wall, underneath his fingertip, a small hole. He peers in. Notices something embedded.

He burrows at the hole with his fingernails, gnawing at the outer edges. After a little effort, he removes...

...a .00 buckshot pellet.

He holds it in his hand. Studies it. Deep in thought.

"Waking up," he notices...

...at the cafeteria doors, Zack, and a spindly African-American, wearing a tie-dye tank top: MARCUS STONE, 13.

Next to Marcus, a third teenager stands six inches taller. He is Navajo Native-American, PHILLIP DESHCHEENIE, 13, whose skin is the color of amber.

None of them a happy camper.

ZACK

You hear? Mr. Clark isn't coming back. No coach.

Glancing at the pellet, Brandon isn't sure what's making him angrier. He flings the pellet into a garbage can.

An upset Brandon storms past his friends and out of the school's cafeteria.

INT. SWENSON HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT - HOURS LATER

Brandon fidgets in his bed. Just can't get comfortable.

He thumbs through last year's school yearbook, titled on its hard cover, "COUGAR."

INSERT - FULL YEARBOOK PAGE

WORDS: "IN MEMORIAM"

Below it, a smiling student's school portrait, his name next to the picture:

GRANT MCKEEN.

BACK TO SCENE

An obviously-shaken Brandon.

He flips through the pages, and settles on another portrait, this one in color.

INSERT - HALL OF FAME PAGE

A photograph of the teenage girl Brandon saw on the bike, and, who waved to him. Her face features warm brown skin, electrifying true-gray eyes, and an effervescent smile.

Next to the picture, the name: "AMY DABOLA." Next to the name, the words, "Most Kind."

Brandon carries on an imaginary conversation.

BRANDON
Hi, Amy. How's it going? Been better. A lot better. How 'bout you? Oh, that's good. See you later. Bye.

BACK TO SCENE

Brandon closes the yearbook. He turns off his bedroom light. All black.

INT. SWENSON HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

The kitchen counter displays decades-old appliances that have seen better days.

Edwina looks worn down and blousy, a woman whose appearance announces her day never ends. She stations herself in front of the stove. Tends to eggs as they SIZZLE IN A PAN.

Brandon, who wears his Warriors jersey, and Dakota, chow down cereal at the table, a box of "Wheaties" next to them.

They stop when--

HALLWAY

--Their parents' BEDROOM DOOR SLOWLY CREAKS OPEN.

A shadowy figure lurches from just inside the room.

A lone claw-like hand stretches out.

Grabs the door frame for dear life.

Jerry, Frankenstein awakened, sports his Medusa "bed-head."

He staggers out. Moans all the way to the kitchen table, holding on to his head the entire time.

Jerry eases himself into a chair, not acknowledging anyone, because he can't.

He showcases the disheveled look of a man who just doesn't give a rip anymore. He emerges from a hangover.

Brandon and Dakota notice their father's condition. They glance at each other, disgusted.

JERRY

Coffee.

Without missing a beat, Edwina brings his eggs along with a pot of java. Ever the dutiful wife, she pours it in his waiting cup.

A brief sip.

JERRY

Stale.

Edwina removes the cup in front of him.

She pours the percolator contents down the kitchen sink. Prepares a new batch. Without missing a beat--

EDWINA

Have a great first day of school.

Brandon and Dakota ease themselves out of their chairs. Slide out of the kitchen.

JERRY

Don't get any F's today. And no
free school lunch. Swensons
don't freeload.

The boys make sure the front door behind them shuts...

...without a sound.

Edwina burdened. She turns on a cheap black-and-white TV, complete with rabbit ears.

INSERT - ON TV

The same C130 plane Brandon saw earlier, along the Huachucas, putting out fires with retardant.

NEWS ANCHOR

Given drought conditions and dry lightning, Cochise County could see intermittent fires for several months.

In business, Arizona unemployment rose one percent last month--

BACK TO SCENE

JERRY

--Everyone's out of work.

EDWINA

Maybe you gotta start looking?

JERRY

What company's going to hire a forty-year-old with a bad back?

EDWINA

You gotta try.

A long glare from Jerry. Stews on it.

JERRY

Why aren't you working?

EDWINA

I cook, I clean. That's a job.

JERRY

Here's a job for you. Get me another beer.

Edwina not at all happy--stares at the looming fridge.

EXT. RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - MORNING - TEN MINUTES LATER

Brandon and Dakota meander together along the side of the road, each preoccupied with their deep thoughts.

Brandon travels with burdened steps.

BRANDON

Will Dad ever work again?

DAKOTA

How do I know? You're asking me about a man who named me after a truck.

BRANDON

Something's gotta change, or--

DAKOTA

--We'll be thrown out of our
double-wide? Yeah. Ready to
live in a Ford Aerostar?

Brandon clams up on the conversation: "Oh, no."

EXT. RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - BUS STOP - MORNING

A yellow school bus approaches. It pulls over. BRAKES
SQUEAK to a stop. The door folds open. Dakota and
Brandon jump onboard.

INT. PARKED SCHOOL BUS - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Brandon walks all the way down the center aisle. He plops
down next to an already sitting Zack, Marcus, and Phillip.

Brandon takes in a view of the bus that's before him. By
the look on his face, something's not right. From all the
students--morgue quiet.

Eerie.

Some students turn around, staring in Brandon's direction.

BRANDON

What's wrong?

Directly in front of Brandon and his friends, empty bench
seats on both sides of the bus's center aisle.

ZACK

Grant and Floyd sat there.

Now it hits Brandon like a ton of bricks.

The bus CHUGS off.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

The first day of school.

No excitement from the students as they walk by each other
in nearly a zombie state.

Continued solemnity.

From the looks on their faces, the ghost still haunts from
that fateful day.

Zack, Marcus, Phillip, and Brandon march down the hallway,
when, coming from the other end, slicing through all the
walking students--

--a wheelchair and its passenger weave its way, headed right toward the four boys.

The boy who sits in the wheelchair--

BOYS

--Floyd!

The boys greet their friend with warm handshakes.

Upon closer inspection, FLOYD ELSON, 13, showcases jet-black curly hair and Howdy-Doody freckles. Something lacks on Floyd's face--eyes dull as mud. The burden remains deep in him.

INT. 7TH GRADE HISTORY CLASSROOM - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Students fill the class. Amy Dabola sits closest to Zack, which Brandon can't help but notice, even with Phillip, Floyd, and Marcus sitting around him.

A MAN of Hispanic origin, 33, steps into the class with a mysterious cachet. Neatly tailored with a royal purple tie, he sports a trimmed beard.

TEACHER

Mr. Clark has moved to Las Vegas.
I'm your new history teacher, Mr.
Jesus Alvarez.

Alvarez scans the room's faces, one at a time.

He stops on Brandon's eyes, sadder than all but Floyd's.

ALVAREZ

I'm also your new b-ball coach.
We'll be having a meeting after
school to discuss this coming season.
You need to be there.

The boys' disappointment turns to big relief.

ALVAREZ

The most important thing I can
share with all of you, on behalf
of Grant, is, "What are your
plans for the rest of the day?"

Alvarez lifts from his desk an 8½-by-11 color photograph. A smiling portrait of...Grant McKeen.

Picture in hand, Alvarez makes his way to a decorated bulletin board.

It reads:

"FOREVER WITH US"

Alvarez pins the photograph below the words.

ALVAREZ

It's good to remember a friend.

Alvarez and his class--especially Brandon, get misty-eyed. A burden that remains.

INT. ALVAREZ'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Brandon, Zack, Marcus, and Phillip together among a larger group of seventh-grade boys who sit at desks, their attention locked in on Alvarez.

ALVAREZ

I heard there's unfinished business. Something that hasn't happened here in forty years. News flash: This is our year. It's our time.

The team's all determination.

ALVAREZ

Someone once said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, and you say to a mountain, 'Move,' it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." This year, it's going to move. We're going to reach the summit.

Belief in all the players' eyes.

ALVAREZ

Our first game's in a week. Get yourselves in shape, 'cause we're going to run the other teams out of the gym.

The boys are all business.

ALVAREZ

Mule Mountain, are we all in?

TEAM

Yes!

Alvarez motions to a large work desk in the rear of the classroom. On it: A large cardboard box, entitled: JERUSALEM'S TEMPLE.

Alvarez dumps out the three-dimensional puzzle pieces. They scatter across the table. Alvarez passes one puzzle piece to each player, as if it were communion.

Alvarez lays his piece on the table. Motions for the other players to do the same.

One-by-one, they fit their single pieces together. It makes up the temple's floor foundation.

The coach motions for the team to get in a tight huddle.

ALVAREZ
We begin building our team's
foundation today with our first
practice tomorrow.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - OUTSIDE ALVAREZ'S CLASSROOM

Alone in his wheelchair, Floyd listens in, but not a part of the team. Distant.

ALVAREZ (O.S.)
So, what are your plans for the
rest of the day? Championship,
on three. One-two-three-

TEAM (O.S.)
Championship!

A washed-out look on Floyd offers nothing but defeat. Unbeknownst to the team, he wheels himself away.

INT. SCHOOL - GYM - BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

During P.E., Brandon, Zack, Marcus, and Phillip play a game of two-on-two basketball.

A short distance away on the sidelines, in his wheelchair, Floyd Elson offers encouragement. Next to him, Amy.

On the court, Alvarez studies his basketball talent.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Brandon puts on a shooting clinic. Play-after-play, pass-after-pass from Marcus, Brandon SWISHES HIS SHOTS.

Marcus makes a nifty pass to Brandon, who--drains another shot into the basket.

Nothing but net.

Brandon and Marcus win the game. Quiet confidence. Pleased as can be. Alvarez likes what he sees.

Floyd aches to play. Amy picks up on her friend's desire. She places a supportive hand on his shoulder.

EXT. SWENSON HOME - DIRT DRIVEWAY - AFTERNOON

Brandon and Dakota play catch, using their baseball mitts, back and forth with easy lobs.

And then, from the house--ELEVATED ANGRY VOICES, then--

--Edwina's MUFFLED SOBS.

The boys pause. They hear their mother's heartache. Brandon and Dakota continue to play catch, trying to ignore the CONTINUED SOBS from their mother.

Dakota's reticence gives way to an undercurrent of emotion--he fires the ball at Brandon. POPS HIS MITT.

A likewise angry Brandon takes the ball, and zings the orb right back at Dakota. POPS DAKOTA'S MITT.

Back and forth they throw, harder and harder--DUELING POPPING MITS--channeling their misdirected anger.

Jerry storms out of the house, right past the boys, not bothering to acknowledge them.

The father jumps into his Dodge Dakota. SLAMS HIS DRIVER'S SIDE DOOR. Jerry TURNS ON THE MOTOR.

He and the Dodge PEEL OUT of the dirt driveway. Flies off the property.

The boys drop their mitts. Sprint into the house.

INT. SWENSON HOME - KITCHEN - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Dakota and Brandon snuggle next to their saddened mom.

EDWINA

Your father has a problem. The good thing is he knows it. The bad thing is he may not do anything about it.

A disgusted Edwina wanders back to her bedroom.

Brandon and Dakota collapse in their chairs, totally spent: "What now?"

INT. BRANDON'S HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

Brandon slowly wakes up from his slumber.

He glances at a clock in his room--

--7:45

Way late!

Brandon scrambles out of bed, the rest of the house still deep asleep.

EXT. RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - MORNING - TEN MINUTES LATER

Deep concern on his face, Brandon jogs down the street. Before him, he sees no other students, no bus. Then, off the side of the road, all by its lonesome...

...an abandoned mountain bike.

Brandon makes a beeline to it. He buffs off the dust, especially the seat.

He gets on the bike, takes off, and heads down the--wait!

Brandon realizes the bike's wheels are warped, the BICYCLE'S CHAIN CLAKETING with stress.

GRINDS to a halt after only a few yards.

Brandon straddles off the bike. Disgusted, he pushes it into the desert grave where it once rested.

More frustrated than ever, Brandon doubles-up on his jog to a near sprint, chugging straight for Mule Mountain School, seen in the far distance.

EXT. SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - MORNING

Mr. Alvarez greets student as they walk into the school for the new school day, bumping into Zack, Marcus, and Phillip, and Floyd.

MR. ALVAREZ

Where's Brandon?

MARCUS

If he misses the bus, he's got to walk to school.

PHILLIP

Or run.

ZACK

He doesn't have a bike, Mr. Alvarez.

MR. ALVAREZ

No bike, huh?

Alvarez looks into the distance down Ramsey Canyon Road.

MR. ALVAREZ

At least he's getting in shape for
basketball season.

Way in the distance, a blip on the radar, a sprinting
Brandon tries to get to school on time.

INT. SWENSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Edwina sits in a lone chair, withdrawn. Still in a funk,
she stares across at a heart-shaped love seat. Nothing
there. The look on her face: "Memories."

Brandon ambles over to his mother.

BRANDON

Mom, what's for dinner?

EDWINA

You boys figure it out tonight.
Whatever you want.

BRANDON

Cheesy curls?

EDWINA

Sure.

Brandon takes off for the kitchen.

KITCHEN

Brandon heads for the cupboards. Not at all full. Sifts
past a few food cans. Nothing of interest.

Dakota already stakes his claim at the kitchen table.

BRANDON

Where's the cheesy curls?

Dakota reveals, then wiggles, his orange-stained
fingertips. Brandon notices an empty Cheesy Curls bag in
the garbage.

He stops looking, a battle lost.

Dakota offers an opened plastic container, featuring
chalky chocolate chips.

DAKOTA

Have some cookies. You'll like
them. They're really old.

Enough of it, Brandon storms to--

BRANDON'S BEDROOM

Brandon SLAMS the door. Flops on his bed, frustrated:
 "Life just isn't fair."

INT. BRANDON'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Brandon tosses and turns in bed, wide awake. Troubled and restless, he gets up.

Clock reads: 1:45.

He opens his bedroom window without a sound, and...

EXT. BRANDON'S HOME - OUTSIDE WINDOW - NIGHT

...Fully clothed, Brandon squirms out.

On his feet, he views the countless bright stars above, hazy smoke from the fires drifting past.

He exhales a stress-breaking breath.

Out in the distance along the horizon--sheets of dry lightning blanket the sky.

Small glowing red fires punctuate the slopes of the Huachuca Mountains.

Brandon goes for a stroll.

EXT. NATURE TRAIL - NIGHT

Nature's strobe-light show continues. The dry lightning silhouettes Brandon off-and-on in chiaroscuro extremes.

He moves across the background of the sky's horizon as he crosses the trail.

The sky RUMBLES with DISTANT THUNDER.

Brandon picks up the pace. Losing the sense of time, he jogs--jogs some more, then...stops. The trail ends.

Brandon finds himself right in front of--

EXTREME CLOSEUP - SIDE OF DOMICILE

--a door.

Brandon's hand reaches out. He wraps his hand around the knob. JIGGLES it. Works it until it UNLOCKS.

The DOOR LATCH POPS OPEN.

One final look around by Brandon. He makes sure no one sees him enter the abode, quiet as a mouse.

INT. HOME - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Brandon eases himself in, not wanting to wake anyone.

Passing through, Brandon notices it opens up into a--

LARGE KITCHEN GALLEY

On a long counter, Brandon studies brand new appliances: toaster, coffee maker, microwave oven, blender, juicer.

He gauges their heaviness. He places the appliances back down.

Brandon enters into another connecting--

HALLWAY

In total darkness, Brandon's figure wanders down toward a closed door, which he opens to a...

GREAT ROOM

The low light makes it near impossible to discern any kind of furnishings.

Dark surroundings shroud Brandon as he glides through. He pivots around. Sits in a chair not seen.

His face becomes oh so slightly illuminated, because, now, for the first time, what is seen before Brandon, lit with dim foot lights...

...a tall wooden cross.

Brandon hasn't burglarized a home. He's graced a church, his own one-person congregation.

He sits not in a chair, but at the end of a pew.

Brandon fixates on the Christian symbol, drawn into it. A moment of contemplation.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT - LATER

Outside, Brandon quietly exits where he entered. Nothing has been stolen.

He closes the door, making sure it's locked and secured.

Not far away, a lit sign which reads:

CROSSROADS BIBLE CHURCH

Brandon checks his surroundings—a nearby small cemetery on the church property, the headstones illuminated by the flashes of dry lightning.

He runs off. Disappears into the darkness.

INT. SWENSON HOME - KITCHEN - MORNING

An exhausted Brandon pours into his bowl, a near-empty box of "Generic Cereal." Just barely enough.

Brandon opens a milk container. Pours--or tries to pour. A weak stream of milk trickles out, then nada. He pauses: "What to do?"

He takes his bowl over to the kitchen sink. Fights it a moment, then turns on the faucet.

Brandon fills his cereal bowl with tap water: "Ughh."

KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Brandon fights to down his cereal. Drinks a thimble amount of orange juice from a Golden State Warriors drinking glass.

INSERT - WALL CLOCK

Reads: 7:15.

BACK TO SCENE

Brandon studies Dakota's closed bedroom door. Hesitates, then forces himself to go over. Knocks.

BRANDON

Coming to school?

DAKOTA (O.S.)

Mom needs me here. For now.

A longer pause on Brandon's end.

Dakota swings open the door. Big Brother looks down at his much shorter brother.

DAKOTA

Understand? Family comes first.
Mom comes first.

Dakota closes his door.

Brandon mopes over to Edwina's closed bedroom door.

He knocks--first quietly, then louder.

BRANDON
Mom, what do I do for lunch?

A moment of silence--a five-dollar bill slides under the door crack.

EDWINA (O.S.)
Make it last.

Brandon shoves the bill into his pocket.

INT. HOT DIGGETY DOG RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Brandon plops in.

Doc Miller lounges at his table, munching on dinner.

Clyde's stationed at his store's front window, looking out to the Huachuca Mountains.

ON SKY - THROUGH WINDOW

Far away, a C130 plane dumps red retardant on the fires.

BACK TO SCENE

CLYDE
Those fires are being rude house guests.

Brandon helps himself to an empty table.

CLYDE
Brandon, I'm still not--

BRANDON
--I'm hungry, Clyde.

HOT DIGGETY DOG - LATER

Brandon inhales his chili dog and fries. He slurps from a tall glass of Cherry Coke. Between chews--

--He focuses on the 1978 Mule Mountain School championship banner on the wall.

Clyde notices Brandon gazing at the banner.

CLYDE
Grant said I'd have to make room for your team's championship banner. I'm still waiting. Not that it's his fault. We can thank Wade and Travis for that.

With the mention of the two perpetrators, Brandon's eyes burn with anger. He takes out his five-dollar bill and slaps it on the table.

One last look at the banner before Brandon stalks out.

INT. SCHOOL - GYM - ON COURT - DAY

Team practice with players in their P.E. jerseys and shorts. Twelve players spread out about the floor, engaged in quarter-court scrimmages.

Brandon, Zack, Marcus, and Phillip play two-on-two basketball. Brandon and Marcus on one side, Zack and Phillip on the other.

An intense game--Brandon more intense than anyone.

Everyone puts on a show, hitting jumpers and making acrobatic layups. Brandon in a zone, and knows it. Marcus keeps feeding him the ball.

Floyd wheels himself into the gym. He watches the game. More longing on his face.

Brandon spots Floyd. Like a shot--

BRANDON

--Time out!

Brandon leaves the court. Surprised by Brandon's action, the other players follow suit and swing over to greet Floyd, who appreciates the attention.

FLOYD

How's the team doing?

BRANDON

You should know. You're still on it.

Floyd's face says otherwise: "No, I'm not."

Phillip scoots over to the free throw line with the ball. He motions to Floyd to come join him.

Floyd takes in the polished court floor. He hesitates.

ZACK

We won't tell.

Floyd changes his mind. He wheels out to the free throw line. Phillip offers him the ball.

Floyd takes it. He locks in on the basket.

Floyd shoots the ball. A brick.

The ball bounces over to Brandon. He snaps the ball right back at Floyd, who catches it cleanly.

He fires again.

The ball bounces around the rim--pauses--before it drops into the basket.

FLOYD
Thanks, guys, for the love. But
making a shot isn't going to change
anything, will it?

The boys remain reticent. Don't know how to respond.

FOOTSTEPS ECHO in the gym from...Mr. Alvarez, who grapples with a bunch of three-ring binders buried in his arms.

ALVAREZ
Team, gather around!

The players run up and surround Alvarez.

Alvarez passes out playbooks to each player--except Floyd, who recognizes the slight. He looks at Brandon: "See, I told you."

Alvarez keeps one playbook for himself.

ALVAREZ
More homework, gentlemen. You need
to know these plays in a week.

Players thumb through the pages of drawn plays.

Floyd jumps in.

FLOYD
Mr. Alvarez, could I be team manager?

ALVAREZ
Sorry, Floyd, I've already got someone.

Floyd's disappointment is palpable.

ALVAREZ
But would you like to be my
assistant coach?

Floyd can't believe his ears.

The countenance on his face changes 180 degrees.

Alvarez accepts Floyd's non-verbal response.

He plops his playbook in Floyd's lap. Places a whistle and string around his neck.

ALVAREZ

Line up for sprints!

Before breaking up, Brandon and the team encircle Floyd. Pats on his back.

BRANDON

Hey, Coach, how's it going?

Speechless, all Floyd can do is take in his shiny new basketball playbook.

INT. SCHOOL - ALVAREZ'S CLASSROOM - DAY

History Class.

On the walls, chronological maps outline the passage of World War II with major historical figures.

And nearby--Grant McKeen's picture.

The class takes a test.

Not a whisper, the only sound heard PENCIL LEAD SCRIBBLING ON PAPER. The confident look on all the students' faces offer everything's under control. Everyone's face...

...except for Brandon's. He sits in his seat, drenched in nervous sweat. DROPS OF PERSPIRATION PLOP onto his test paper: "When will this be over?"

The school BELL RINGS. Class over. Students line up, including Zack, Amy, Marcus, Phillip, and Floyd. They each hand Alvarez their test, then exit.

In the back, a guilty-looking Brandon waits until the class files out, hiding his test sheet. He approaches Alvarez with trepidation--the two alone.

Alvarez receives Brandon's test paper. He quickly scans and grades it.

ALVAREZ

Remember one thing about history.
Nation will rise against nation.
Kingdom against kingdom. Always.
Then who's left?

Brandon ponders the question.

BRANDON
Mom and Dad broke up.

A long, respectful pause from Alvarez.

ALVAREZ
You like eating out?

BRANDON
Sure. Dad would take us out on Fridays.

ALVAREZ
Today's Friday. Given your situation,
where would he be eating--tonight?

Alvarez hands Brandon his test. Way too much red ink.

INSERT - TEST SHEET

A 59. A circled "F."

BACK TO SCENE

ALVAREZ
No improvement, no basketball.

Brandon accepts the paper, but not happy with it.

ALVAREZ
All things can be made new again.
Marriages. Grades. Get ready for
Monday's game.

INT. HEREFORD SOUP KITCHEN - NIGHT

Restaurant-sized with two separate wings.

Lydia Patterson, her cross necklace shimmering, serves food to the homeless who stand in line. She notices Brandon, Dakota and Edwina. Waves.

Brandon waves back. Edwina sits at a cafeteria table, Brandon and Dakota sandwiching her. Embarrassed, she tries to hide from any potential gazes.

DAKOTA
Mom, why did you marry Dad?

EDWINA
I thought we'd get along. Have
a few laughs. Now I realize there's
got to be more than that.

Lydia waddles over to the family.

LYDIA

Hello, Brandon. I'm ready for you.
Tomorrow at nine?

Lydia pulls out a \$100 bill from her pocketbook. Presents it to Brandon. The look on Brandon's face: "Thank you!"

Lydia limps away. Then stops. She addresses Brandon.

LYDIA

Why is your father sitting on the
other side?

Lydia goes back to serving. Brandon checks with his mom, waiting for a decision. Edwina considers it, but doesn't want to.

EDWINA

Oh, go ahead, let's get this over with.

SOUP KITCHEN - OTHER WING

Back turned on everyone, Jerry eats by himself, shoveling food in his mouth...when he looks up.

Brandon stares down at him.

BRANDON

Hi, Dad. Mom and Dakota are on the
other side. Come sit with us?

Jerry hesitates. Then, a change of heart: "What the heck?" He follows Brandon.

SOUP KITCHEN - OTHER ANGLE

Dakota notices Brandon with...Jerry. He nudges Edwina, who lasers in on her husband.

A pound of disappointment in her eyes. Jerry picks up on his wife's vibe.

JERRY

Son, are you sure about this?

BRANDON

I thought so.

Jerry and Brandon inch their way over with hesitant steps, right until they get to the table.

She locks eyes with Jerry--hers as hurt as his are
repentant.

Not a blink.

EDWINA

Thought you said Swensons don't freeload?

Touche. Jerry humbled.

JERRY

Mind if I sit down?

EDWINA

Promise not to storm out?

Touche again. Jerry takes the zinger pretty well: "Okay, I promise."

Edwina motions to a chair.

Jerry settles in. Then Brandon. A long awkward pause.

SOUP KITCHEN - CAFETERIA TABLE - LATER

Edwina still stares at Jerry, who has a hard time returning her gaze, not proud in the least. For all his size, he looks intimidated.

JERRY

I'm going to rehab. Monday.

EDWINA

Guess I won't have to call 9-1-1 now for a missing person. Have fun.

Desperation etched on Jerry's face.

JERRY

Please wait for me. Please.

EDWINA

Let me think about it...a lot.
Okay, Jerry. You can go now.

Jerry limps away, his tail between his legs. Edwina and the boys sit there, not saying a word.

EXT. LYDIA PATTERSON'S HOME - FRONT YARD - MORNING

Lydia's tsunami mess of a yard almost drowns Brandon:

old torn-up furniture, rusty metal, boxes, twisted lawn chairs, even a plastic baby pool with a whale spouting water imprinted on the side.

Nearby, a large dumpster. In the distance, smoky haze.

A flimsy screen door opens. Out limps Lydia.

LYDIA
 Praise the Lord, you're here!
 Hello, Brandon!

Lydia drags a sledgehammer behind her.

LYDIA
 I'll have a snack for you once
 you're done.

She leaves the sledgehammer with Brandon, and gimps back to her home.

Brandon feels the weight of the sledgehammer. He studies the refuse all around. Overwhelming.

Struggling with the sledgehammer, he takes a mighty practice swing John Henry would be proud of.

Brandon targets some junk, and with all the pent-up anger raging inside of him--WHACK!

INT. LYDIA PATTERSON'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY - LATER

Immaculate and orderly.

The antithesis of her messy yard. No hoarder here.

Lydia hobbles in. Carries a tray with a heaping plate of oatmeal raisin cookies and a tall glass of cold milk.

Brandon on it in a heartbeat. He swallows the cookies. Tosses down the milk.

Brandon soaks in all the surroundings. There's a lot.

From decorations to knickknacks to framed paintings, Lydia's home is a museum to the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Lydia settles over to an organ. She sits in front of the keys. Warm rubs her arthritic hands.

Starts hitting sour notes to Luther's "A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD." Her playing isn't what it used to be.

LYDIA
 Have you heard of Martin Luther?

BRANDON
 No. Do you know him?

LYDIA
 No, dear, he died about five hundred years ago--I just missed meeting him.

Brandon gets the joke. He glances at the reproduced paintings on her walls. As she continues to try to play, he studies:

The Adoration of the Magi by Albrecht Durer, c. 1504.

Baptism of Christ by Pietro Perugino, c. 1480.

Jesus Healing the Blind of Jerico by Nicolas Poussin, 1650.

Christ the Consoler by Carl Heinrich Bloch, c. 1884.

The Crucifixion by Andrea Mantegna, c. 1459.

The Descent from the Cross by Rosso Fiorentino, 1521.

The Resurrection of Christ by Matthias Grunewald, c. 1515.

The Incredulity of Saint Thomas by Caravaggio, 1602.

And...gives a second look to--The Ascension by John Singleton Copley, 1775. Christ floating in the air.

INT. SCHOOL - GYM - ON BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

Both school teams on the court, in the middle of action. Brandon, floating in the air, snags a rebound.

A VOCAL home crowd packs the stands. Amy leads the cheerleading squad.

An electronic scoreboard displays:

MULE MOUNTAIN: 68 PALOMINAS: 51 QUARTER: 4 CLOCK: 0:29

A Palominas player shoots and misses.

Phillip skies for the rebound. He outlet passes the ball down the court to--

--Marcus, who streaks down the middle of the court, passing the mid-court line.

Zack a step behind in the right lane. In the left lane--Brandon, a step behind Zack.

The three fly down the court.

Both keep up with Marcus, who pressures a sole defender between them and the basket.

The defender commits to defending Marcus, who makes a no-look pass to Zack.

Zack plays hot-potato--a nifty touch pass to Brandon. He lays the ball in the basket. An easy two.

Amy and the cheerleaders erupt with joy.

IN STANDS

Edwina excited for her son. She looks up to Heaven:
"Thank you."

Dakota, next to his mother, not impressed at all: "No big deal, it's only a layup."

Brandon glances up to the stands where Edwina and Dakota sit. An empty space next to Edwina--no Jerry.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Alvarez, Floyd, and the entire team celebrate, CLAPPING IN UNISON, except for...Brandon.

ALVAREZ
Great game! Great start!

Amid the celebration, a melancholy Brandon quietly removes himself from the team. Alvarez picks up on it.

INT. PUBLIC BUILDING - NIGHT

In the cavernous lobby, a sign: COCHISE COUNTY REHABILITATION CENTER.

Jerry appears from out of the night's darkness. He hobbles over to the front-desk receptionist.

JERRY
I got issues with the bottle.
Please help me.

REHABILITATION CENTER - CAFETERIA - LATER

The facility looks more like prison, minus the bars. A nurse shows Jerry the cafeteria. Not warm and cozy.

REHABILITATION CENTER - COMMUNAL BATHROOM - LATER

The bathroom includes a communal shower. No privacy.

REHABILITATION CENTER - SLEEPING QUARTERS - LATER

Jerry's jail cell...er...sleeping quarters has two sets of metallic bunk beds. Cold and sterile.

A frustrated Jerry: "How did I get here?"

EXT. EDWINA'S HOME - CARPORT - DAY

Edwina checks the oil dipstick in the Aerostar, motor oil all over her hands: "What a mess."

OUTSIDE HOME FRONT DOOR

Edwina about to go inside, when she hears...

...hanging tubular angel chimes sway gently, nudged by the wind, SOFTLY RINGING. Drawn to the sound, Edwina pauses, allowing herself the briefest of respites.

INT. SWENSON HOME - EDWINA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Edwina makes her now-solitary bed. She scans the room. Dust everywhere. She studies two framed photographs on her bureau.

INSERT - FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS

Her wedding picture. Edwina with Jerry, a cross in the center of them.

The family at Disneyland. A happier time.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - LATER

Edwina eases herself into the living room.

She turns on the TV, then, out of the corner of her eye, notices again the heart-shaped love seat.

She approaches it. About to sit on it--when she stops herself. Hesitates. She reaches out to the love seat. Wants to caress it. Pulls back at the last moment:

"No, I can't. I won't."

Edwina walks across the room. Sits in her single chair across from the love seat. She tries to relax.

INSERT - TELEVISION SET

A local fast-food commercial.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

"Burger Paradise" is now hiring.
Call now the number on your screen.

Edwina tries to focus on the television, but her attention is drawn into--

--the heart-shaped love seat, which, from her angle, glares back at her, a battle still being fought.

INT. HOT DIGGETY DOG RESTAURANT - DAY

Brandon hands Clyde his \$100 bill. A surprised Clyde barely makes change. Hands it to Brandon.

Already sitting at his "reserved" table--Doc Miller.

Clyde moves over to his restaurant window. Through it he sees forest fire smoke.

CLYDE

More dry lightning last night.

Brandon enjoys every bite of his giant chili dog and barbeque fries, washing it down with an extra-large cherry Coke. Nothing like it.

Brandon absorbs the 1978 Mule Mountain School Championship banner hanging on the wall.

Settling in, Brandon cracks open his history book. Reads to himself, when--

--Amy Dabola pops in.

Brandon perks up, then notices who walks in with her--

--Zack Chan.

A sinking feeling on Brandon's face. Tries to hide it.

Amy gazes at Zack with stars in her eyes. It's hard for Brandon to look.

ZACK

Hey, Brandon!

Zack buys a tall glass of coke from Clyde--with two straws. The couple sucks the drink all the way down to its last SLURPING drop.

They have the time of their lives, unknowingly at Brandon's expense. Zack and Amy saunter off--then Amy turns around.

AMY

Hi, Brandon.

She waves before Zack yanks her out of the restaurant.

Brandon fakes a smile only until the two can no longer see him, then--

--crash and burn.

BRANDON

Bye, Amy.

Clyde picks up on Brandon's disappointment. Brings over a pitcher of Coke. Fills Brandon's glass to the brim.

CLYDE

That first special someone we all
fall in love with. And they don't
know it.

BRANDON

What happened to her, Clyde?

Clyde shows off his gold wedding band.

BRANDON

Your championship ring.

CLYDE

Hang in there, Brandon. Good things
are coming. In time. Right, Doc?

Speechless, Doc Miller agrees. Brandon appreciates the support: "Maybe there's hope."

INT. SCHOOL GYM - ON COURT - DAY

Team basketball practice. Half-court scrimmage. Alvarez studies the two-on-two games.

On the sidelines, Floyd and Amy lock into the action.

Marcus and Brandon play against Zack and Phillip.

Brandon sneaks peeks at Amy during the game. Because of it, his play lacks concentration.

MONTAGE

Brandon misses a shot. Then he--

--dribbles off his foot.

Throws a lousy pass.

Blows an easy layup.

Marcus's great play props up Brandon.

Zack and Phillip drain jumpers from all over the court. Play hearty defense. Not one mistake.

Brandon's poor play gets on Marcus's nerves.

Zack and Phillip victimize Marcus and Brandon, over and over, with back-door plays.

Getting the ball, Marcus makes a nifty pass between Zack's legs, right to Brandon, who fires a shot that looks straight and true.

Brandon's confident look says the shot's perfect, but--
--becomes an air ball. Ouch.

The ball falls right into Phillip's hands.

Phillip lays the sphere in the basket for an easy two.

Victory for Zack and Phillip.

Alvarez weighs Brandon's play. Not pleased at all. He BLOWS his WHISTLE.

ALVAREZ

Water break!

MARCUS

Brandon, what happened?

Brandon glances Amy's way.

She offers Zack his water bottle, then straightens his hair a bit. Brandon wants to say something--but doesn't say a word. Double despair.

Marcus can't figure Brandon out.

Then--

--Brandon glances up to the gym's end wall, just below the gym's electronic score board:

Grant's jersey displayed prominently in a glass frame.

INSERT - MCKEEN and number 11.

Brandon, glances back and forth between Amy, and, Grant's retired jersey.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - MORNING

Still blue, Brandon scans an awards display case.

He takes in all the plaques, trophies, and team basketball pictures from bygone years.

Brandon comes across another team picture.

INSERT - TEAM PHOTO

Zack, Marcus, Phillip, and Brandon next to each other.

As Brandon continues to scan across, standing tall and proud...Floyd.

And immediately next to him--

--Grant McKeen, wearing that same number 11 jersey, with a capital "C" (for Captain) on the front. A confident, mile-wide smile.

Other pictures of Grant scoring.

Sandwiched in between all the photos, almost forgotten, glazed with dust, a small awards plaque, inscribed:

Mule Mountain School 6th Grade 3rd Place

One last glance from Brandon at Grant's picture.

EXT. SCHOOL - PLAYGROUND - COVERED LUNCH AREA - DAY

Brandon sits alone at a picnic table, kept company only by his distant thoughts.

Students sit together at other tables. Chow down their lunch. No food for Brandon, who quickly becomes aware of that fact.

He notices, in the distance, a fire-fighting plane swooshing down on brushfires imbedded in the mountains.

Reddish fire retardant pours out from the plane's belly.

Brandon zeroes in on, in the thick of the fires, nestled in the Huachucas, the Hereford Veterans' Shrine, a...

...steel, 75-foot-high cross.

Brandon takes it in. Ponders it deeply, until--

--The SCHOOL BELL'S JARRING RING "wakes up" Brandon.

Alerted students end their lunch. They bolt up. Leave the eating area.

Last to go, Brandon tags along.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Brandon walks with a heavy heart past Grant's photos in the awards' display case, and down the crowded hallway stuffed with students. By his look, something lingers.

Brandon pivots, and, like a stuck salmon trying to swim upstream, stops dead in the middle of all that foot traffic, impeding the students' flow.

His gas tank on empty, Brandon extends his arms high above himself, in prayer, tears streaming down his face.

Other students stare with perplexity, doing double-takes as they walk by. Brandon doesn't care.

Not far away, Alvarez stands in his 7th grade classroom doorway, monitoring the hallway and Brandon, a witness to it all. Concern on Alvarez's face: "What to do?"

EXT. RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - AFTERNOON

Brandon trudges home. The sun beats down on him when--

--WHIZ! WHIZ!

Marcus and Phillip streak right by Brandon on their mountain bikes. Marcus hangs on to his basketball with one hand, while steering his bike with the other.

MARCUS

Meet you at your house!

Brandon focuses on their bikes: "If only."

INT. SWENSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Brandon with Marcus and Phillip, who sit on the heart-shaped love seat.

MARCUS

Where's your mom?

BRANDON

Working part-time at "Burger Paradise."

MARCUS

Don't worry about what happened yesterday. We know what you bring.

PHILLIP

Grant was better one-on-one. You're a better team player.

MARCUS

You pass the ball, set picks, fill lanes, do all the dirty work.

BRANDON

My best may not be good enough.

MARCUS

That's not what Grant told me.

In spite of Marcus and Phillip's best efforts, Brandon still looks vanquished.

INT. SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

The SCHOOL BELL RINGS. HALL CLOCK: 12:00

Brandon mills around the hallway with other students, wearing his Golden State Warriors basketball jersey, holding a small lunch bag.

INT. CAFETERIA - MOMENTS LATER

Students gather at tables, eating their lunches.

Brandon sits alone with his sack lunch.

Inside, not much of anything:

A half-of-a-half of a sandwich. One Fig Newton. A small box of Sunmaid raisins.

Brandon's face drifts to a distant place.

He eats his lunch, when--seamlessly, out of the blue...

FLASHBACK - CAFETERIA

Present and past time blend into one.

...GRANT MCKEEN, alive in the flesh, and, a walking Floyd, come up to Brandon and sit at his table, holding their lunch trays.

Grant wears a matching Warriors basketball jersey, with the number "11" printed on it.

BRANDON

You guys want to play ball after school?

GRANT

I can't. I've got to help Mrs. Patterson with her yard.

FLOYD

I'll play, Brandon. Even if Grant and you are wearing Warriors jerseys.

BRANDON

We just want to be Warriors good.

GRANT

We'll be better than good next season.
None of this third-place stuff.
We're going to win the championship.
We'll get our rings.

FLOYD

Grant, you don't get championship
rings in 7th grade.

GRANT

I'll buy one on E-Bay!

Grant waves his hand at Brandon and Floyd. He points to his ring finger. Brandon enjoys Grant's antics, then--

BRANDON

--I've got to talk to Mr. Clark
about my history test. He's waiting.

Brandon scoots out of the cafeteria's front doors.

GRANT

Go Warriors!

BRANDON

Warriors!

A flabbergasted Floyd doesn't want to hear it.

HALLWAY

Brandon, in a hurry, makes a bees line for his meeting.
In a snap, he's in the foreground.

He turns and darts into Mr. Clark's old classroom (now Mr. Alvarez's room).

Seconds later, way in the background, quickly entering the
cafeteria's front doors from a different hallway...

Travis and Wade, holding...

...shotguns.

END FLASHBACK.

CAFETERIA

Brandon "wakes up" from his flashback.

At the same dining table, once again sitting alone.

Not for long.

Zack, Marcus, Phillip, Amy, and Floyd—now back in his wheelchair—come by with their lunch trays. The group sits next to a preoccupied Brandon.

ZACK

Where've you been today?

BRANDON

With a friend we knew.

The five read into Brandon's subtext. They know who.

INT. SCHOOL - ALVAREZ'S CLASSROOM - DAY

The SCHOOL BELL RINGS. A different class filters out. Alvarez motions good-bye and then heads to the work station with the Jerusalem Temple 3-D puzzle.

The last students leave the room. Brandon steps in.

Alvarez concentrates on the puzzle, when--

ALVAREZ

--Want to talk? About your dad?

Brandon joins Alvarez at the work station.

The two complete half of the Jerusalem Temple puzzle.

BRANDON

Dad'll be okay. Sooner or later.
I miss Grant. A lot.

Alvarez weighs Brandon's comment, not rushing in.

ALVAREZ

There's a time to laugh and a time
to cry. Even in a school hallway.

Brandon realizes Alvarez saw him.

BRANDON

Wade Wyatt and Travis Burger--

ALVAREZ

Right now, you're just as much in
jail as Wade and Travis. How's Grant
honored in that?

Brandon glances at the displayed picture of Grant on the bulletin board.

Brandon takes in Alvarez's words:

"I'll try."

INT. CIRCLE K CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Through the store windows, flashes of dry lightning.

Jerry limps down a grocery aisle. He holds a plastic bin to collect goods. Down one aisle, he picks up some beef jerky. Down another aisle, some nacho chips. In another, sunflower seeds.

In the refrigeration section, he debates his choices: juices, milk, canned pop, ending with...

...bottled and canned beer.

Mesmerized, Jerry pauses a little too long before the alcohol section: "Fighting it."

CASH REGISTER COUNTER - LATER

Jerry places his goods, unseen, on the counter for the cashier, who only rings up...

...two aluminum six-packs of beer.

Digital display on the cash register.

Jerry hands what cash he has to the cashier. Gets his change. But with it...

...Shame on Jerry's face.

EXT. SCHOOL - PLAYGROUND - DAY

Brandon walks past the outdoor basketball court, behind the chain-link fence that surrounds it.

On the other side of the fence, untouchable-

--Amy, who practices her cheerleading routine by herself, using her crimson and gray pom-poms.

Brandon stops. Locks in on Amy.

He appears imprisoned looking at her through the chain links, almost trapped.

AMY

Go Cougars! Fight Cougars! Win
Cougars! Victory!

Brandon applauds, catching Amy's attention.

AMY

Hey, Brandon!

BRANDON

Hi, Amy.

Amy makes her way to the other side of the fence. As close as she is, Brandon realizes she's still kept apart from him.

Those gray eyes of hers look a little burdened.

AMY

Brandon, have you talked to Floyd?

BRANDON

Sure.

AMY

I mean have you listened to him?

Concern in Amy's eyes.

Brandon ponders the question.

INT. HOT DIGGETY DOG RESTAURANT - DUSK

Through the window, the crimson sun falls. Dying behind smoky haze.

Brandon hands Clyde more of Lydia's chore money. He gets back change.

LATER

Brandon and Floyd partake of their hot dog meals.

They enjoy the meal, as does Doc Miller, who lounges alone at his "reserved" table.

Between bites--

BRANDON

What do you think about?

A long pause from Floyd. Struggles to hide a secret behind his eyes.

FLOYD

How perfect life is. That there's only good in the world. That I never think of Grant. How I'm never afraid of anything.

Brandon gets it, then--

BRANDON

Jail's a good place for Wade and Travis.

FLOYD

Their day's as bad as mine. The only difference is they walk to their problems. Hating them won't change my life. Forgive those who trespass against us.

Brandon considers Floyd's comments for a moment--he doesn't want to.

FLOYD

What do I think about? That you have to have faith in something more powerful than yourself. Oh, and wanting to play basketball with Marcus and Zack and Phillip and you.

Floyd soaks in the 1978 championship banner on the wall.

BRANDON

You'll be on the court with me tomorrow.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - ON BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

Mule Mountain plays Douglas Middle School, with Brandon, Zack, Marcus, and Phillip on the court.

SCOREBOARD:

MULE MOUNTAIN: 80 DOUGLAS: 60 QUARTER: 4 TIME: 0:51

Zack shoots a jumper. Misses. A man among boys, Brandon scrambles for the rebound right under the basket, fighting off two other Douglas players.

Brandon wrestles the ball away from the other players. Pump-fakes, causing the two other players to jump in the air, fooled.

Brandon jumps up, drawing a foul from one of the Douglas players. He releases the ball, scoring the basket.

A referee BLOWS HIS WHISTLE. He counts the basket plus one free throw.

Brandon glances over to Floyd, who's in his wheelchair near the players' bench. Their eyes meet.

Brandon's look:

"This one's for you, Floyd."

Floyd appreciates it.

EXT. LYDIA PATTERSON'S HOME - FRONT YARD - DAY

Brandon cleans up the last of Lydia's front yard junk. He slam dunks the last of the refuse into the dumpster.

INT. LYDIA PATTERSON'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Brandon munches on more cookies. He kicks back, relaxing in front of Lydia.

LYDIA

I'm glad you had a good game.
Sports can teach us how to fight
the good fight. I wish I could
say I've always done that. But
I haven't.

Brandon continues munching, weighing Lydia's words.

LYDIA

I want to show you something.

HALLWAY - LATER

Lydia and Brandon survey the narrow hallway, dozens of framed family portraits on each side.

A grandfather clock TICK-TOCKS at the end of the hallway, its pendulum swings back and forth--a Patterson family witness to the passage of time, observed in the--

INSERT - FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS OF LYDIA'S FAMILY

Present relatives and past ancestors, some dating back a hundred and fifty years ago by their clothing.

BACK TO SCENE

LYDIA

Great-grandparents, and great-grandchildren. All saved by God's Son. Whatever's been lost can be found again. Through the Carpenter's nails.

Brandon perks up.

BRANDON

My dad was a carpenter.

LYDIA

I know.

Brandon perplexed: "How would Lydia know that?"

Lydia hobbles along, followed by Brandon to the--

BEDROOM

Lydia guides Brandon into her chamber. Immaculate as the rest of her house.

An antique bed covered by a plush spread, with long carved posts at each corner. A night table next to it, and on it...an opened Bible.

In another corner, a little night stand with a candle burning bright, and next to it, a photograph of... Grant McKeen.

LYDIA

I've lost lots of games lately.
I've been on a very long losing
streak. Since that day last May.

BRANDON

I understand, Mrs. Patterson.

LYDIA

Brandon, could you tell Wade and
Travis that God loves them? And
will forgive them for what they've done?

Taken back, Brandon doesn't know how to respond. Then--

BRANDON

Sure.

Brandon doesn't sound like he means it.

Lydia reaches out and squeezes Brandon's hand, trying to get his attention as if their lives depend on it.

LYDIA

And pray for me that I'll forgive
those boys. I'm having a real
hard time with that.

The real Brandon breaks out.

BRANDON

So am I.

LYDIA

Then we can pray for each other.

Lydia gives Brandon a tender hug. Kisses his forehead.

A needy Brandon melts into her arms.

INT. SCHOOL - ALVAREZ'S CLASSROOM - DAY

All's quiet in the room. The class takes an exam.

On the front dry erase board, the words, "WORLD WAR II."

The BELL RINGS. Students get up, the test over.

Zack, Amy, Marcus, Phillip, and Floyd place their tests in a wire basket on Alvarez's desk.

Last but not least--Brandon.

Brandon passes his test paper to Alvarez, a light tremor in his hand. Alvarez picks up on his student's nerves.

Alvarez flies through both sides of the test sheet.

Red checkmarks but more X's. Alvarez places a number on the test sheet:

INSERT - PAPER SHEET

A 63. Circles a capital letter D-.

BACK TO SCENE

Alvarez hands the sheet back to Brandon.

The teacher makes his way to the incomplete Jerusalem Temple 3-D puzzle.

He puts together more pieces, completing about three-quarters of it.

ALVAREZ

You've got to maintain a C. Unless you prefer watching from the stands?

BRANDON

I'll do better. I promise.

Alvarez's look: "Good."

ALVAREZ

How's your dad?

INT. REHABILITATION CENTER - SLEEPING QUARTERS - NIGHT

Through his quarters' window, flashes of dry lightning flicker on Jerry's face.

He struggles to sleep. He can't. Tosses. Turns. Breaks into a cold sweat.

Jerry turns a wrong way. He grabs his back in pain. Starts getting the shakes. More than he can bear.

Jerry goes to his billfold on a nearby stand. Pulls out two wallet-sized pictures, lit by the dry lightning.

INSERT: PICTURES

Jerry, Edwina, Dakota, and Brandon together, sitting and around their heart-shaped love seat.

The other is a prayer card with the face of Jesus Christ on one side.

BACK TO SCENE

Jerry looks at it twice. Clasps the family picture and prayer card together, hard, close to his heart: "Will I ever get out of here?"

EXT. RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - DAY

Brandon jogs down along the side of the street in his crimson and gray P.T. clothes. He jogs by...

...Hot Diggety Dog and Doc Miller's Chiropractic Clinic.

Out in the far distance along the mountain peaks, Brandon sees hazy smoke from the brushfires.

Up in the sky, Brandon hears the HUM FROM THE ENGINE OF A C130 PLANE as it drops red slurries on the fires.

Brandon finds a rhythm. Endorphins kick in. A rapturous look on his perspiring face as he enjoys the flora that surrounds him:

Staghorn brush, an ocotillo, Organ Pipe, Barrel, and armed Saguaro cacti all welcome him as he runs by.

And then, in a blur--

--an unknown rider flies by on a mountain bike, the wind created ruffling Brandon's hair. The bike travels down the road, streaking away from him.

The bike gets smaller and smaller from his view. Brandon reaches out. He wants to touch it. He notices the bike goes right past--

--a red pickup truck.

Recognition on Brandon's face. He picks up his speed. Runs faster and faster with urgency in his strides. Brandon gets closer. He slows down.

Brandon stops. A Dodge Dakota pick-up before him.

Brandon absorbs the scene. Not far from the truck, eight aluminum beer cans in a pile on the ground.

From the look on his face, Brandon fears what he's about to see. He peers in the driver's side window.

Passed out along the seat...his father, Jerry. Heartbroken, Brandon taps on the rolled-up window.

Below, littered on the truck floor, four more empty beer cans keeping each other company.

BRANDON

Dad! Wake up!

Jerry struggles. He shakes the cobwebs loose. Fights to get the fuzz out of his mouth. Rolls down his driver's side window.

Brandon locks in on his father, the hurt evident all over Jerry's face.

BRANDON

Dad, what are you doing?

JERRY

It's called alcoholism. It's a bad thing. Someone once told me wine is a mocker. Whoever is led astray by it is not wise. And they were right. Promise me you'll never drink.

BRANDON

I promise. How's your back?

JERRY

It's there. I know that because it's killing me every second.

Weighing the situation, Brandon pulls something out of his sock--twenty dollars of chore money bills.

The son offers it to his father, who takes it a little too quickly. Jerry counts it without much deliberation.

BRANDON

Hot Diggety Dog has a pretty good chili dog and barbeque fries. Check it out.

JERRY

And a good cherry Coke, too.

BRANDON

I've got a game tomorrow. Will you come?

JERRY

I'll be there.

Jerry's eyes say thank you. He turns on the ignition. The truck ENGINE STARTS. The DAKOTA PEELS OUT.

Brandon locks in on the truck. Jerry drives off down the street, leaving his son behind.

A dirt cloud swirls around Brandon for a few seconds before it settles.

Deep disappointment in Brandon's dust-covered eyes.

INT. MULE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL - GYM - NIGHT

The student body and parents jam the stands, being led in cheers by--

--Amy and the cheerleading team.

SCOREBOARD:	MULE MOUNTAIN: 26	BISBEE: 31
	QUARTER: 3	TIME: 2:03

On the court, players from the two schools wage battle.

MONTAGE:

Mule Mountain's players, including Zack, Marcus, and Phillip on the court, but Brandon outhustles everyone.

Basket after basket, scored by--

a Marcus three-point jumper, from a pick by Brandon.

A Phillip three-point jumper, from a pick by Brandon.

A Zack three-point jumper, from a pick by Brandon.

LATER

Brandon at the free throw line, ready to shoot a free throw. Pauses. Aims. Shoots the ball. The ball arcs through the air, SWISHING through the hoop. Perfect.

LATER

On the gymnasium wall high up...

SCOREBOARD:	MULE MOUNTAIN: 59	BISBEE: 50
	QUARTER: 4	TIME: :17

Alvarez calls a timeout. Waves Brandon off the court, pulling him out of the game for a job well-done.

A substitute Mule Mountain player comes on the court, taking his place. High-five between the two.

In the stands, Edwina, Dakota, and the rest of the crowd give Brandon respectful applause for his efforts.

Brandon walks off the court, exhausted. Handshakes from Alvarez, and next, to him, from Floyd.

Brandon's teammates all congratulate him, as he sits on the bench. Satisfied, he catches his breath. Looks over at Amy and the cheerleaders. The squad applauds.

Brandon gazes at Grant's number "11" MCKEEN jersey displayed in a glass frame, just below the scoreboard.

Not far, up in the stands, Brandon spots Edwina going nuts, while Dakota unenthusiastically applauds for him.

Brandon focuses on an empty spot right next to the left of Edwina in the stands. No Jerry.

Brandon's eyes rove the stands everywhere. He looks doubly-close. Still no Jerry. Brandon a bump on a log, disappointed from his father's broken promise.

INT. SCHOOL - TEAM LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

The players gather around Alvarez.

ALVAREZ

Nice comeback. You never stopped hustling. Remember. Humility before honor.

Alvarez holds his hand out. The players join him.

ALVAREZ

Championship. On three--one--two--three--

ALL

--Championship!

The team applauds--minus Brandon--

--who slumps in front of his locker, still bummed out.

INT. SCHOOL - ALVAREZ'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Brandon bides his time while Alvarez grades his test.

The student paces the room. Edgy. A look of concern etched on his face.

The teacher hands the exam to Brandon. The student studies his test sheet.

ALVAREZ

A 71 is a C-. Better.

BRANDON

What about our next game? Am I playing?

A long pause. Too long for Brandon.

ALVAREZ

I'm benching you, Brandon. Your grade isn't high enough. You're still expected to practice, but you're not suiting up. Got it?

Brandon sloughs out of the room, all the wind taken out of his sail.

EXT. RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - DAY

Brandon drags himself along the road, not pleased.

Gliding up to him--on mountain bikes--Zack and Amy.

ZACK

Slam dunk, Brandon. Coronado will be sorry for playing us.

Brandon now twice as depressed. Zack and Amy--still an item. He struggles to suppress his building frustration...and shame.

BRANDON

Yeah, thanks, Zack.

Amy circles back around to Brandon.

AMY

I'll be rooting you on.

Too embarrassed to admit defeat.

BRANDON

Yeah, thanks, Amy.

Zack and Amy ride off, together, leaving Brandon far behind and all alone.

Brandon gazes at an increasingly distant Amy, enjoying Zack's company.

Brandon doesn't like it. A triple-reason to be upset. No Amy. No bike. No game to play.

INT. SCHOOL - ALVAREZ'S CLASSROOM - DAY

A recommitted Brandon as Alvarez teaches his students, highlighting iconic photos tacked to the board: the Iwo Jima flag-raising, Churchill's "V" for victory, V-J Day.

ALVAREZ

American troops who entered the war after Pearl Harbor are now 90 years old. Time goes quickly. In the twinkle of an eye.

On the board--two pictures--one of Doolittle's Raiders--right before their 1942 mission--and another of the remaining heroes, old in years, some holding canes.

ALVAREZ

The school year will soon be over. And you won't be able to come back to 7th grade. So, ask yourself...

The class "reads" Alvarez, beating him to the punch.

CLASS

"...What are your plans for the rest of the day?"

Alvarez's expression: "It's true." Brandon and Floyd glance at each other, weighing their teacher's words.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - ON BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

Mule Mountain battles Coronado.

In uniform, Marcus, Phillip, and Zack, but...

...no Brandon, who's on the bench, with the rest of his non-starter teammates, in his street clothes, a fish out of water.

Coronado scores an easy basket off a defensive breakdown. A frustrated Zack glances over to Brandon. Not happy.

Brandon glances around, almost fearful to look anyone in the face.

Amy with the other cheerleaders. No pep. Amy glances over at Brandon, perplexed. Offers a weak smile: "It'll be okay."

Brandon can't respond.

Amy focuses back on the game. Cheers without passion. Brandon's face soaked in embarrassment, even before glancing at the electronic scoreboard above:

MULE MOUNTAIN: 53 CORONADO: 68 QUARTER: 4 TIME: 1:19

A frustrated Alvarez and Floyd on the bench.

A disappointed Edwina and Dakota in the stands. Once again, an empty space next to Edwina. No Jerry.

Brandon glances across the court. On the other side, a figure who stands alone...

...Jerry, next to the bleachers! He takes in Brandon in his street clothes. Their eyes meet.

Brandon can't believe it: "Now he comes."

Disappointed, Jerry hobbles out of the gym.

INT. SWENSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Through a window, dry lightning flashes. Brandon rests on the heart-shaped love seat. Struggles to pour over the pages in his history book.

A clock nearby: 12:10.

Brandon nods off with his book still in his hands.

INT. SCHOOL - MR. ALVAREZ'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Total quiet.

Another test for the class. Zack, Amy, Marcus, Phillip, Floyd, and the rest of the students plug away.

Tense, Brandon racks his brains. Deep breaths between his scribbling words down in spurts.

CLASSROOM - LATER

Alvarez grades Brandon's test. Done, the teacher turns to the front page.

Writes...

INSERT - TEST PAPER

The front page reads: 82 B-

Alvarez hands the sheet to Brandon: "Good."

Pride in Brandon's eyes.

ALVAREZ

There's someone who can help your father. Doc Miller.

BRANDON

I don't think chiropractors can help Dad, but I'll let him know. When I see him.

Brandon heads out of the room before—

ALVAREZ

--Brandon? Lydia Patterson died last night. Her funeral's this Saturday.

BRANDON

What happened?

ALVAREZ

She died in her sleep. It was her time.

Brandon still takes the news hard: "What now?"

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

A sign on the church grounds:

CROSSROADS BIBLE CHURCH

The same church Brandon visited late at night.

INT. CROSSROADS BIBLE CHURCH - SANCTUARY - DAY

Congregants cram the pews.

Several rows back, sandwiched between strangers, sits an uncomfortable Brandon.

Up front in the first pew, Brandon recognizes some of Lydia's family featured in her hallway family portraits.

The cross, up front on the rostrum, keeps company with a botanical garden of bouquets and white standing sprays.

This time, a church organist plays Luther's "A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD" to perfection.

DISSOLVE TO:

SANCTUARY - LATER

A man wears a respectful black suit and tie, possessing the decorum of an elder statesman.

He makes his way to a microphone attached to the pulpit's wooden lectern.

PASTOR BILL RICHLAND addresses his congregation.

PASTOR BILL
Would anyone care to share?

Brandon stays out of it, intimidated by the large crowd which surrounds him.

A WOMAN stands wearing a long-black dress.

She walks up to the front, shrouded in sadness. Practically whispers into the microphone.

WOMAN
I'm Stacy McKeen, Grant's mom.

Her sadness becomes Brandon's sadness.

STACY
Thank you, Mrs. Patterson, for being generous to my son. I'm sorry he couldn't finish your job. He wanted to. Please give my Grant a hug and kiss for me.

Stacy eases her way back to her seat.

The pastor motions for anyone else. By his reaction, a person from a rear pew comes forward.

Brandon surprised to see--

--his dad, Jerry.

His gait labored, Jerry struggles to the lectern. Speaks into the microphone.

JERRY
My name is Jerry Swenson, and I'm an alcoholic.

Brandon weighs his father's words: "Oh no."

JERRY
This is no A-A meeting, but Mrs. Patterson did everything she could to get me sober. She told me wine was a mocker. Didn't want to listen.

Jerry holds up high the Jesus prayer card he held onto in Rehabilitation. Jerry points to it.

JERRY

I want to thank her for caring.
And sharing the Good News with me.

Brandon looks bowled over: "That's how Lydia knew."
Jerry passes the microphone back to Pastor Bill. He limps
back to his seat.

No one else comes forward. Pastor Bill and the
pallbearers roll Lydia's casket all the way to right in
front of the rostrum.

The pastor opens the upper hinged lid, unveiling the
joyful face of the sleeping saint.

The congregants get in a line which zigzags through the
church. Friends and family crawl along, passing Lydia's
casket, one after another.

Brandon's turn. He glimpses Lydia's radiant face.
Viewing it, he's a little less sad.

INT. CHURCH - PANTRY - DAY - THIRTY MINUTES LATER

A few congregants gather for a luncheon.

Brandon sits by himself. A paper plate in his lap, he
wolfs down a sandwich, until a familiar figure approaches.

Jerry limps toward Brandon. Eases himself as he sits next
to his son. A long awkward pause.

Finally...

JERRY

How come your coach benched you?

BRANDON

Remember when you said for me not
to get any F's?

JERRY

It happens.

BRANDON

Mr. Alvarez--he told me for you to
go see Doc Miller.

JERRY

Chiropractors can't help my condition.

BRANDON

Try?

A frustrated Brandon, his father unconvinced.

Jerry fixes his gaze on an old wooden cross on the wall.

JERRY

Okay. I'll do it. I don't know
how much this guy charg--

Before he can get the rest of his sentence out--

--Brandon offers his father the remainder of Lydia's
leftover chore money--fifty dollars. Nothing left in
Brandon's hand.

Jerry accepts it--but this time doesn't want to.

He struggles to stand. Hobbles away when...

BRANDON

Dad, please don't spend it on booze.

Jerry pauses. He notices congregants looking on.

JERRY

I won't. Hey, get an A on your
next test.

Brandon inspects his father as he walks off, pain in every
one of his guarded steps.

Brandon's attention gravitates to those congregants
staring at him. A few worshippers from the party part like
the Red Sea, revealing...

...Grant's mom, Stacy McKeen, still draped in sadness.

Brandon and Stacy's eyes meet for a moment. He takes in
her heavy heart.

Brandon's melancholy rises into a quiet anger.

CHURCH SANCTUARY

Unnoticed in the back, his body turned in such a way so
his face is shielded--

--Mr. Alvarez, deep in meditative prayer.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CEMETERY GRAVEYARD - DAY

Brandon stands alone before Lydia Patterson's headstone of
white Vermont marble.

The still-fresh soil blankets her just-dug grave.

The headstone features a cross engraved on it. Reads:

LYDIA PATTERSON BORN: July 11, 1927
 DIED: October 5, 2017

Below it the Bible verse, "JOHN 3:16."

Brandon places a supportive hand on the headstone.

 BRANDON
 I haven't forgotten.

Brandon marches off, determination in his steps.

EXT. RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - DOC MILLER'S CLINIC - DAY

From the building's angle, in the distance, smoke haze.

Jerry's red Dodge Dakota pick-up parked right outside the chiropractic clinic's sign.

Still in the truck, Jerry locks in on a C130 plane as it extinguishes a brushfire.

Jerry glances at the nearby building's sign:

INSERT - OLE DOC MILLER'S CHIROPRACTIC CLINIC

BACK TO SCENE

A pang of discomfort from Jerry's back. He pauses: "Do I want to do this?" He hesitates. Opens his door. Freezes. Struggles to fight his way out of his driver's seat. Finally worms out.

Jerry pulls out of his pocket Brandon's chore money. Studies it. He drags himself right up to the door of the clinic. Another pause. Apprehension. Then...

...he opens the door. Limpes in.

INT. SCHOOL - GYM - ON COURT - DAY

Team practice goes like clock-work.

Player after player perform non-basketball exercises with great enthusiasm:

The team runs, jumps, and even carries hand weights as they hold their arms over their heads in a defensive position. Taxing.

LATER

With the basketball, players run intricate patterns.

Floyd BLOWS his WHISTLE.

FLOYD
Run four-corners.

Marcus, Zack, Brandon and another player station themselves each in the far four corners of the front court. Ready to go.

Phillip at the top of the key. Players shift their positions one at a time in a circular wave.

Floyd BLOWS his WHISTLE again.

FLOYD
Good. Run Warrior.

This time, the players weave by Phillip at the top of the key, passing the ball back in forth in a "hot-potato" fashion. Perfect.

Floyd BLOWS his WHISTLE, stopping play.

FLOYD
Outstanding. We'll be eating
Tombstone for lunch.

A proud Alvarez admires Floyd from afar.

Brandon pauses, holding his stomach. Looks a little faint, because--

INT. SWENSON HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

--Brandon searches through several near-empty cupboards, which hold nothing except a box of instant rice and two cans of stewed tomatoes.

Food more scarce than ever before. A look of quiet desperation on Brandon's face.

Brandon rushes over to the fridge. Opens the door--

--a Spartan portion of food: a slice of mould-infested pizza. A single hot dog. A jar of mustard.

Looks in the freezer. Nothing but built-up ice.

Desperation turns to panic on Brandon's face.

He double-checks his wallet. Empty.

Brandon wanders, then pulls out his history book from his backpack. Opens it. He tries to study a chapter. Tries.

KITCHEN - LATER

Edwina, still dressed in her "Burger Paradise" fast-food uniform, pulls a single hot dog out of a boiling pan. She cuts it into slim thirds to make three separate servings.

EDWINA

I'll be getting paid later in the week. We just have to hang in there.

She places each piece of hot dog on a separate slice of old bread, scraping the mould off of each.

Coats the slices with mustard. Edwina wraps the bread around the hot dog piece. Does it three times.

Each on a paper plate, Edwina brings the thin hot dog slices over to the kitchen table, where a hungry Brandon and Dakota wait. She places it in front of them.

Edwina trots back to the kitchen stove.

She takes several fast-food ketchup packs. Opens the tops. Squirts the contents into the pan of boiling water, pack after pack. Stirs the contents and water.

DAKOTA

What's for dinner tomorrow?

EDWINA

Tomato soup.

BRANDON

Campbell's?

Dakota gets it before Brandon.

DAKOTA

No. McDonald's.

The look on Brandon's face emits one word: "Yuck."

INT. CIRCLE K CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Jerry eases himself into the store, the scene of his previous "crime." He walks down an aisle:

Grabs a simple can of baked beans. A bag of white rice. And a single beef jerky.

Jerry wanders around, not fully focused. Until he looks up, and finds himself in front of--

--the refrigeration section of the store.

Through the glass door partially obscured by condensation--beer, wine, and other alcoholic beverages.

Jerry tries to stare down his old nemesis, frozen.

CASH REGISTER COUNTER - LATER

At the checkout counter, the same cashier greets Jerry. Jerry hands over the beans, rice, beef jerky, and the--

--wait. This time, no beer. No alcohol.

The cashier rings up the goods, not noticing either way.

Digital display reads: \$6.94.

Jerry hands the cashier one of Brandon's \$10 bills. He receives his few coins of change.

The temptation fades in his eyes. A sigh of relief.

Jerry steps out with goods in his arms, his moral victory intact, with nary the least hint of a limp in his stride.

INT. SCHOOL - GYM - ON COURT - DAY

Basketball practice.

Under the watchful eyes of Alvarez and Floyd.

The school team splits up into two sides. Zack, Marcus, Phillip, and Brandon take on the second team.

MONTAGE - SCRIMMAGE

A ragged one. Both teams play flat.

Shoot first--pass second.

Poor passing when attempted.

Poor shooting.

No hustle.

Alvarez notices the sloppy play. Glances at Floyd, who BLOWS HIS WHISTLE.

What masquerades as play stops.

FLOYD

Listen up!

In a hurry, Floyd wheels his chair onto the court. In doing so--

--falls out of his chair.

The team rushes up to help him.

Floyd picks up on their compassion, but holds them off.

FLOYD

No!

Floyd drags himself up his mountain of a wheelchair. With great exertion, he seats himself. He catches his breath. Composes himself.

FLOYD

There's not much time to get championship good. Someone once told Brandon and me this was our year to win it all.

The players glance at Grant's displayed jersey high on the gymnasium wall.

FLOYD

There won't be a championship if we play like this. Tombstone will be eating us for lunch.

ALVAREZ

Your coach is right. Floyd sees no sacrifice out there. Neither do I. I only see selfishness.

FLOYD

Lines!

Disappointed, the players line up. Floyd BLOWS his WHISTLE. The team sprints up and down the court.

Back and forth--back and forth they go. No letting up.

FLOYD

How bad do you want it! What I would give if I could run just one more time! Stand up one more time!

Alvarez takes in all that Floyd offers. He weighs his words. Moved by them.

The players sum up all their energy. Run faster.

FLOYD

Don't you dare insult Grant!

The players run even faster. Desperation and fatigue on Brandon's face.

FLOYD
 It's more than just a championship!
 It's personal with us!

Alvarez BLOWS HIS WHISTLE, stopping the team's sprint.

Gasping for air, the team collectively HUFFS and PUFFS.
 Even Floyd's out of breath.

INT. SCHOOL - ALVAREZ'S CLASSROOM - DAY

On the walls, the flags of World War II's allies: The United States, Great Britain, Australia, and Canada.

Brandon, the last in the room, wraps up his test.

Finished, Brandon inches his way over to Alvarez. He offers his test sheet, which the teacher accepts.

BRANDON
 Am I suiting up tonight?

ALVAREZ
 We'll find out...tonight.

Brandon trudges out of the classroom without an answer.

Alvarez turns to the test sheet. He grades it in red ink, the motion from his pen indicating a checkmark here, an X there. He reacts to every correct and incorrect answer.

INT. SCHOOL - BOY'S LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Marcus, Phillip, and Zack in their team uniform. Stretch their limbs.

In a corner, Brandon by his lonesome--still dressed in street clothes.

Alvarez and Floyd enter, a dry erase board behind them.

ALVAREZ
 Gather around. Let's talk about
 Tombstone's starters.

The team gathers around.

Alvarez spots a dejected Brandon, still a distance away from the team.

ALVAREZ
 Brandon?

Alvarez offers Brandon's test sheet.

Brandon walks over, expecting the worst. He glances at his test sheet.

INSERT - TEST SHEET

An 89. A B+ circled in red.

A relieved Brandon takes his eyes off his test. Floyd flings Brandon's number "30" jersey at him, draping his entire face.

ALVAREZ
Suit up. You're starting.

Wow! Double-relief from Brandon. Cheers and hugs from the team. A thoroughly-pleased Alvarez.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - ON BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

Mule Mountain battles Tombstone.

MONTAGE:

An inspired Brandon--hauls down rebound after rebound.

--Brandon makes assist after assist to Zack, Marcus, and Phillip, who make easy basket after easy basket.

--On defense, Brandon blocks several shots.

--Brandon scrambles after loose balls on the floor, securing each one.

Marcus passes Brandon the ball, who stands a foot outside the three-point line. Making sure his feet are behind the line, he aims.

The ball arches its way to the basket. It goes right through the hoop, TOUCHING NOTHING BUT NET.

The crowd, including Edwina and Dakota, cheer.

The END OF GAME BUZZER SOUNDS. On the scoreboard:

MULE MOUNTAIN: 71 TOMBSTONE: 55 QUARTER: 4 TIME: 0:00

On the court, Amy and the cheerleaders approach the team. Pats on the backs for all the players.

AMY
Great game, Brandon!

BRANDON
Thanks, Amy.

Brandon notices a reticent Zack skirts right past Amy. Not a word between them. A poor vibe: "Hmmm."

INT. SWENSON HOME - BRANDON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Brandon rests in bed. He studies his history book. Jots down copious notes. A knock on his door.

Edwina walks in, Brandon's test grade in her hand.

EDWINA

As proud as I am from the way you played tonight--

Edwina holds up today's test grade.

EDWINA

--This means a lot more to me. Way to go, son.

Quietly pleased, Brandon's happy that his mom's happy. As soon as Edwina leaves, Dakota appears.

DAKOTA

Hey, superstar?

From behind his back, Dakota tosses Brandon a jumbo bag of cheesy curls. Brandon snags it in the air.

DAKOTA

Enjoy it before I change my mind.

Dakota wiggles his fingers again, pretending they're orange-stained.

It doesn't take Brandon long to tear the bag open. Like a wine connoisseur, he sniffs the cheese aroma. Heaven. Brandon munches long and hard. Savors every bite.

LATER

Brandon soaks up his history book.

INSERT - HISTORICAL PHOTOS of World War II.

Tyrannical leaders: Hitler and Stalin.

BACK TO SCENE

Brandon sets the history book down.

He picks up last year's school yearbook, and flips through the pages. He stops on one.

He sees--

INSERT - SCHOOL PORTRAIT

A smiling student. Below the photograph, the name--
--TRAVIS BURGER. A face filled with joy and innocence.

Brandon flips through a few more pages. Rests on--another smiling student.

Below the photograph, the name, WADE WYATT.

No different. A picture of American normalcy.

BACK TO SCENE

Both Brandon's history book and school yearbook are opened, side-by-side.

INSERT - HISTORICAL PHOTOS ON PAGES

Brandon glances back at the pictures of Hitler and Stalin. He studies their faces. Compares the two tyrants' faces to the faces of Travis and Wade.

Travis and Wade--Hitler and Stalin--Wade and Hitler--Travis and Stalin. Back and forth, back and forth.

BACK TO SCENE

The curious look on Brandon's face gives way to only one word: "Why?"

EXT. PUBLIC BUILDING - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Dry lightning flashes, illuminating a redbrick fortress with large generic words mounted on its face:

COCHISE COUNTY JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER

Overhead lights dot the adjoining parking lot.

One of the vehicles parked--an Aerostar minivan.

INT. AEROSTAR MINIVAN - NIGHT

Edwina sits behind the wheel. Brandon sits next to her, focused on the center's sign.

EDWINA

Mrs. Patterson said things that didn't always make sense. She was ninety years old.

BRANDON

What are you saying, Mom?

EDWINA
Sure you want to do this?

BRANDON
I made a promise.

Edwina's look says she understands.

INT. JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER - NIGHT

Several heavy-bolt metal sliding doors BUZZ open for Brandon, as if wanting to swallow him whole.

He walks in.

Behind him the DOORS CLANG SHUT. Jonah in the whale.

Unsettling.

INT. VISITING ROOM - NIGHT

A thick, Plexiglas window with dual phones on both sides of the pane separate the prisoner from the visitor. Brandon plops himself down in a chair.

Waits.

A custody officer leads WADE WYATT, sixteen, into the room. He orders him to sit: "No goofing around."

Wade measures up Brandon. He doesn't recognize him. Brandon measures Wade: washed-out eyes, void of any life--much like Floyd's.

They both pick up their phones.

BRANDON
Where's Travis?

WADE
He got in trouble. Again. Lost his privileges. Like this is a privilege. What do you want?

BRANDON
I'm Brandon Swenson. Dakota's little brother.

WADE
Okay. We got that out of the way. What do you want?

BRANDON
I want to know why you killed Grant, and put Floyd Elson in a wheelchair?

WADE

Haven't you heard the news by now?
We stole two shotguns, got to drinking,
and got crazy. What else do you want
to know?

BRANDON

I want to know if I was there...?

WADE

...I would've shot ya'?

Brandon's eyes: "Yes." Wade gathers himself. Glances at
Brandon, like he's the dumbest person on earth.

WADE

I don't know. Probably. But we
were aiming at everybody. It wasn't
personal. We were just...having fun.

BRANDON

Fun? Grant is dead and Floyd
paralyzed because of your fun?

WADE

Look, I'm just like you except when
I get to drinking. Kind of like your
dad—he's the town drunk, right?

Brandon takes it in. Holds it. Now he gathers himself:
"Yes, he's my father."

WADE

There you go. I love my mom, my baby
brother. What does that tell you?

Brandon can't answer.

WADE

Do I scare you? I shouldn't, 'cause
if you look real close into my eyes,
you might see yourself.

Brandon's boiling under the surface.

BRANDON

Mrs. Patterson wanted me to tell
you that there's forgiveness from
God, if you want to be forgiven.

Now Wade takes it in. Sincere. A beat: "Okay."

WADE

...Say hi to Dakota for me.

Wade bolts from the room. He doesn't bother putting the phone receiver back on its hook.

It dangles in front of Brandon's face through the glass, another pendulum moving back and forth, this time keeping track of Wade's imprisoned life.

Brandon looks like he's been through the ringer.

INT. AEROSTAR VAN - IN DETENTION PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Brandon gets in, an anxious Edwina waiting for him.

BRANDON

I kept my promise to Mrs. Patterson.
You know something? I'm more angry
at Travis and Wade than ever.

Edwina takes in her son's words. Saddened to hear it.

BRANDON

Because Grant isn't coming back.
And Floyd isn't getting out of
his wheelchair either, is he?

Eyes moist with coming tears, Edwina's face says, "No."

INT. SWENSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Edwina and Dakota watch TV. She in a single chair, the heart-shaped love seat still unoccupied.

Brandon studies his history book. Looks a little blue.

The PHONE RINGS.

Edwina answers.

EDWINA

Hello...yes...Brandon's my son.

Brandon perks up.

EDWINA

(several beats)

Give him a few minutes to get there.
He doesn't have a bike.

INT. LYDIA PATTERSON'S HOME - DAY

Moving company workers remove furniture from the home, struggling past a waiting Brandon.

BRANDON

Excuse me, I'm Brandon Swenson.

A manager motions for Brandon to sign his name on a sheet of paper attached to a clipboard, which he does.

The manager grabs a covered, rectangular shaped object two feet by three feet, fully wrapped in butcher paper.

He presents it to Brandon.

With the wrapped gift under his arm, Brandon walks through the house. Soaks in what's left.

HALLWAY

Lydia's family portraits no longer on the walls. Only "dirt" shadows show there once was something displayed.

Brandon takes in one final glance around Lydia's home before leaving his friend's abode. The spirit gone, an empty shell of a house only remains.

INT. SWENSON HOME - BRANDON'S BEDROOM - DAY

Brandon rips off the butcher paper. He lays his eyes on Lydia's gift--only seen by him.

MOMENTS LATER

Brandon gazes at his Golden State Warriors poster, displayed prominently in his room.

Brandon stands on a chair. Removes the poster from its lofty height. Tacks it on his nearby closet door.

MOMENTS LATER

Brandon hammers a nail high up on his wall, right where his Warriors poster rested.

He hangs the picture frame up, obscured from the glare that bounces off the glass face.

From a different angle, directly across from him, in his bedroom's place of honor, Brandon takes in, in all its wondrous glory...

...The Ascension by John Singleton Copley, the reproduction first viewed in Lydia's home. Brandon focuses on Christ, who ascends into Heaven.

EXT. AMY DABOLA'S HOME - NIGHT

Almost a mansion. A breath-taking, two-story home.

A lit Jack-o'-lantern sits on a window sill, brightened by dry lightning across the midnight sky.

Brandon approaches the front door, impersonating Babe Ruth. Besides his New York Yankees ball cap, stuffed inside his Yankees jersey to feign weight--a pillow.

NOISY FESTIVITIES heard on the other side of the door.

INT. AMY'S HOME - FOYER

Brandon opens the front door. He pops his head inside.

Quite a foyer--something out of Gone with the Wind.

A middle-school party in full swing.

Costumed Zack, Marcus, Phillip, among others, run around, while Floyd, in his wheel chair, strains to catch up.

All the commotion, then, as if on cue, at the top of the spiral staircase, a teenage girl harkens...

VOICE (O.S.)

Hi, Brandon.

It's Amy Dabola, dressed as a Botticelli angel in a respectful, age-appropriate costume, layered in sequins, complete with feathered wings. She stands there, an innocent vision to behold.

Amy floats down the spiral staircase.

Light shimmers off her sequins time and time again, popping like flashbulbs.

Glittering, Amy saunters up before a hypnotized Brandon, who can only smile at those true-gray eyes.

AMY

Did you hear? Zack and I broke up.

Amy waits for a surprised Brandon to say...anything.

BRANDON

Wow--that's--I'm sorry.

AMY

Oh, no. It's okay. Zack and I are still friends.

BRANDON

I like Zack. He's a good guy. I'm glad we're friends, Amy.

AMY

Friendships can grow, Brandon. Well, "Trick or Treat."

Amy floats off, wings flapping behind her.

Brandon's enraptured by Amy, in the midst of his own private reverie:

"There is hope."

INT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

Basketball practice features Zack, Marcus, Phillip, and Brandon, along with other teammates. From the sideline, all studied under Floyd's watchful eye.

BASKETBALL COURT - MONTAGE

Drills galore:

Passes zip around. Feet shuffle rat-a-tat-tat. Sliding left-to-right, then right-to-left. Jumping to net touch. Players dribble around cones.

ALVAREZ

What do you want to call, Coach?

Floyd does his best General Patton impersonation.

FLOYD

Run Warrior!

Brandon, Marcus, Phillip, and Zack weave around each other. The ball zips around in "hot potato" fashion, barely resting on each player's hands-POP-POP-POP.

It's a choreographed now-I-have-it-now-I-don't. The play ends with Marcus's easy lay-up.

A well-oiled machine. Pleased with everyone, Alvarez BLOWS HIS SHARP WHISTLE.

ALVAREZ

Gather around!

The team approaches Alvarez.

On his way over, Brandon notices up above, in the second-story loft...the cheerleading squad, led by Amy. Brandon's face offers one thought: "My angel."

Zack notices Brandon noticing Amy. Then Brandon notices Zack noticing him looking at Amy.

Awkward.

Breaking the tension, Zack chuckles to himself. Not bothered in the least.

Brandon realizes it really is over between Amy and Zack.

ALVAREZ

Mr. Clark's coming back to teach
history after Christmas Break.
He misses Mule Mountain too much.

Surprise from the boys.

MARCUS

What will you be teaching?

ALVAREZ

History...in Las Vegas. The
school districts agreed Mr.
Clark and I can switch places.

ZACK

Who's coaching us next year?

ALVAREZ

You should be asking who's your head
coach for the rest of this year.

Alvarez motions to Floyd. The boys surround Floyd:
"Whoa!" Congratulatory handshakes all around. Floyd
can't believe it.

The boys, realizing Alvarez's eventual departure, become
reticent. Brandon takes it the hardest.

BRANDON

I wish I could go with you, Mr. Alvarez.

ALVAREZ

Everything will be fine, Brandon.
Where I'm going you can't follow.
Besides, your parents are here.
Dakota...Amy.

Brandon gives a perplexed look: "Wait, how did Mr.
Alvarez know about Amy?" Zack winks at Brandon.

ALVAREZ

Everybody. One-two-three--

TEAM

--Championship!

The team gathers around Alvarez. A warm, group hug.

INT. SCHOOL - ALVAREZ'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Posters of Hitler, Stalin, FDR, and Churchill.

The class departs, leaving Brandon alone with Alvarez.

Brandon walks up to the teacher's desk. He hands Alvarez his test. The teacher motions for Brandon to head over to the work station.

Brandon works on the uncompleted Temple 3-D puzzle.

The teacher grades the test. Done, he saunters over to the work station, next to Brandon.

The two focus on the puzzle, piece by piece. Now only one piece of the puzzle left. Alvarez hands the last piece to Brandon, who completes the 3-D puzzle. The Jerusalem Temple in one piece. Whole.

--Alvarez's stare penetrates into Brandon's soul.

ALVAREZ

All things can be made new again.

Alvarez hands the test sheet to Brandon.

INSERT - TEST SHEET

A 91. A-.

Total relief from Brandon. A proud look from Alvarez: "Job well done."

INT. SCHOOL - GYM - ON BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

SERIES OF SHOTS:

Mule Mountain plays "one game" edited against several schools all wearing different-colored jerseys, the only constant being Mule Mountain's home white uniform.

Marcus, Zack, Phillip, and Brandon put on a basketball clinic against different schools. They out-shoot, out-hustle, out-rebound, out-pick, and out-run their beleaguered opponents.

On the bench, seating positions swapped by Alvarez and Floyd, who now is in the head coach's "driver's seat."

Alvarez takes a "back-seat" to Floyd.

A rapid-fire succession of SCOREBOARD blowout scores offer the names of vanquished schools:

Garden Valley	65-29	Huachuca City	74-54
St. David	58-40	Naco	71-55
Smith	61-39	Benson	64-49

OVERLAPPING OF FINAL SCORE BUZZERS with several different Mule Mountain celebrations, one after another. An applauding Edwina and Dakota in the stands.

Amy and the cheerleaders congratulate the players. Amy offers Brandon a hug. She now straightens his hair. A happy Brandon offers no resistance.

INT. SCHOOL - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

A post-game celebration. The team ecstatic. CHANTING AND CLAPPING in unison. Alvarez defers to Coach Floyd.

FLOYD

We're in the championship game. Playing the only team that's beaten us this year. We know we weren't at full strength.

Brandon knows it was his fault.

FLOYD

Since our season record is better than Coronado's, we get to play them here—in our house!

The team EXPLODES with emotion.

INT. SWENSON HOME - BRANDON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Brandon glances at Copley's The Ascension between studying his history book.

Out of nowhere—a loud knock from the front door. A surprised Brandon: "Who could that be?"

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

A dimly-lit room.

A self-assured Jerry sits across from Edwina at their kitchen table. Guarded, Edwina looks as tough as nails. Brandon sits next to Dakota, who's half-asleep.

JERRY

Brandon told me about Doc Miller.

Brandon's face lights up. Mouths: "Mr. Alvarez."

JERRY

After several treatments, bone snapped right into place. I don't need drink anymore. I don't even need baby aspirin.

EDWINA

When did a carpenter become a
con artist?

JERRY

It's true. Please, let me come home.
Edwina, I'm back from the dead.

Another long pause. The wife and mother stands,
and...circles the table.

Jerry, Dakota, and Brandon concentrate on her every step:
"Where is she going?" Edwina opens the fridge door, its
light illuminating the darkened kitchen.

She motions to Jerry, who eases himself over to her.

Edwina reaches into the fridge, and from the back, pulls
out a pristine bottle of beer.

She presents it to Jerry, who takes it into his hand. He
gazes at it. Reacquaints himself with an old friend.

EDWINA

Look at the label. It's your
favorite brand. Nice and cold, too.

Jerry ponders it all. Dakota and Brandon lock in on their
father: "What is he going to do?"

Jerry grabs a bottle-cap opener. He pops off the cap.
Peers into the neck of the bottle.

He spins around. Pours the beer right down the drain.
Even shakes out the suds.

Jerry lobs the bottle into the garbage can. The beer
bottle SHATTERS—the spell broken.

Edwina measures Jerry up and down. Not sure. Then--

EDWINA

--Make yourself at home. I'm
going back to my nice big bed.

Jerry accepts Edwina's terms. Brandon and Dakota collapse
in their chairs with a big sigh of relief.

INT. SWENSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Jerry stands before the heart-shaped love seat. He eases
himself into it, curling up into a ball. Uncomfortable...

...but it's home.

EXT. RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - DAY

Brandon jogs along the road, all by himself. An occasional bicyclist WHIZZES by, but his concentration's not detoured.

He runs straight toward the Huachuca Mountains.

EXT. BASE OF HUACHUCA MOUNTAINS - DAY

Brandon runs up the side of the steep ledge, dodging small brushfires along the way. He sees in the short distance before him--

--the 75-foot-high metal cross as part of the Hereford Veterans' Shrine.

LATER

Brandon scales up the stone blocks, which give way to a series of stone steps. He stops. Standing before and towering above him--

--the same 75-foot-high cross.

Brandon approaches the Christian symbol. Pauses. He takes in the cross. Visual communion. Touches the cross's base, while viewing the valley below him.

BRANDON

Grant!

Brandon fights his next thought. He gives it up, coming out as a plea, not a condemnation.

BRANDON

Wade! Travis!

Brandon accepts his own words, a burden lifted. Done, he darts back down the mountain.

INT. SWENSON HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Thanksgiving.

The SOUND OF A FOOTBALL GAME over the TV set seeps into the room. Edwina works at the stove. She notices--

--Jerry places a small, wooden cross on the wall.

Edwina almost does a double-take.

EDWINA

Jerry, is there anything you want to share?

Jerry can't find the words, only peace on his face.

KITCHEN - LATER

Thanksgiving dinner. Jerry, Edwina, Dakota and Brandon circle the dining table.

Barely any food on the table, canned turkey, a dollop of mashed potatoes—with no gravy, and a tablespoon of cranberry sauce.

JERRY

Guys, we're a little behind on our bills. There's not going to be any Christmas gifts this year. My fault. I'll make it up to you next year.

Regret quickly fades on Dakota and Brandon's faces.

Jerry extends a hand to Edwina, who returns the gesture. Two hands, now clasped together as one. Father and Mother extend their remaining hands to--

--Brandon and Dakota, who take them. Brandon offers his hand to Dakota, who first fights it, then comes around.

Not four people. One family. Heads bowed in prayer.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Dakota and Brandon lounge in front of their TV, another football game on.

On their heart-shaped love seat...Jerry and Edwina sit together once again, their arms around one another.

JERRY

I got a construction job. Full-time. Start Monday.

EDWINA

Congrats.

Jerry and Edwina kiss each other tenderly.

Edwina's look says she's fully forgiven him. All is right again. Brandon and Dakota happy to witness it.

EXT. SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - DAY

Marcus, Zack, Phillip, and Brandon exit the school. Wearing their P.E. shorts and tank tops, they jog out—with military precision.

The four CLAP in UNISON.

TEAM
Let's go Cougars!

EXT. RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - DAY

Other than the smoke haze along the Huachuca Mountains, a perfect, cloudless day. The sun pulsates light on the four joggers.

Brandon hears something not far off the road. In the desert, a BAA.

It comes from--

--a Bighorn lamb, spotless and bright against the gray-brown of the desert, struggles to free itself from a prickly pear cactus. Brandon rushes to the lamb.

Frightened, the lamb tries to get away from Brandon, but can't, the thorns too imbedded in its body. Streaks of blood stain its wool coat.

Brandon extricates the lamb from the cactus. It takes off like a shot, into the desert, giving Brandon one last BAA.

Down the road, Zack, Marcus, and Phillip create greater distance between themselves and Brandon.

Brandon sprints toward his friends, yet with each stride, he lags farther behind. Zack, Marcus, and Phillip recede into the distance.

ON SUN IN SKY

Beats down, strong and powerful until Brandon notices a change in the intensity of the light.

Out of the blue, dark clouds move in and cluster.

Brandon slows down to a stop. Takes in the changing cloud cover above. He pivots, and reverses course, when he stops dead in his tracks, because--

--all the sky directly above and in front of him--conjures itself into thick, black-as-night cumulonimbus clouds--a swirling brew, almost demonic in nature.

BRANDON
Storm!

No response from Zack, Marcus, and Phillip. Too far away to hear.

Panicked, Brandon rockets right off into the desert.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Desperation kicks in. Brandon sprints--his life depends on it. He gasps for air.

In the far distance, he sees his manufactured home.

ON HORIZON

The sky EXPLODES. A lightning bolt zigzags across the welkin. MURDEROUS THUNDER.

Zack, Marcus, and Phillip freeze. Look to the sky. Brandon sees the three sprinting together in the same direction--deeper into the desert.

ON SKY

The clouds keep rolling in, a horizontal tornado that drops closer from the sky.

IN DESERT

Brandon dodges rolling tumbleweeds. He runs too close past a prickly-pear cactus--a thorn slashes his thigh.

And then, on the ground, a single drop of rain splashes down on the dry desert floor.

Soon after, drops of rain, first slow and polite, then steady and rude. Nature's incoming. Brandon approaches--

DESERT WASH

Wide and bone dry--eight feet deep--a sand pathway. Brandon jumps into it.

He takes off sprinting.

Brandon quickly approaches a narrow, rocky bottleneck.

He makes a dash for it.

In the distance, behind Brandon...a RUMBLING SOUND.

Not thunder.

Brandon notices sand in the wash shaking loose, sifting downward. Something VIBRATES the ground.

Down a ways--

--STORM WATER RUSHES straight toward Brandon.

It gets closer and LOUDER, closer and LOUDER.

A rattle snake floats by, carried along by the rush of the water. Brandon dodges the rattler as it snaps at him. He scrambles to the other side of the wash.

Brandon climbs out. He gets on higher ground, just as water CASCADES by in an awful fury around a crooked hairpin bend.

WASH

Farther out in the distance, the narrow bottleneck widens in width.

The geographic feature traps the boys from climbing out.

A ferocious wall of rushing water smashes into the three. It carries them down the wash, the boys helpless.

Brandon struggles to catch up to his teammates along the wash. Futile.

Farther down the wash--Phillip clings to a tree root that sticks out of the wash's dirt wall.

The LOUD TORRENT of RUSHING WATER makes it impossible to hear anyone.

Brandon struggles up to Phillip, who strains to reach out to Brandon. Brandon reaches out for Phillip. He grabs Phillip's wet arm--his hand slips off.

The root starts to give way. Brandon hangs on to it for dear life.

As if it were a fulcrum lever, Brandon places all of his weight on the partially uprooted tree limb, which rotates ever so slightly.

It carries Phillip's upper body a few needed inches...

...just far enough to edge him over the top of the bank.

Brandon pulls the rest of Phillip onto the desert floor, safe from harm. Until--

--Lightning bolts strike all around. THUNDER CRACKLES.

Brandon and Phillip run along the bank of the wash. Peer down. Search for Zack and Marcus.

No luck.

Farther down--up against a sloped part of the bank, Zack--face down and motionless.

Soil around Zack starts to give way from the strong current. Rapid erosion.

Brandon, without hesitation, jumps off his side of the bank and onto the slope five feet away.

Brandon reaches Zack, rapid water only a foot away. He turns him over, his friend barely conscious.

He props Zack against the bank. Struggles to drag him up from his legs. Phillip yanks him up from his arms.

Inch-by-inch, Zack's body moves to the top of the bank, out of the wash.

An exhausted Brandon crawls out of the wash, his legs red from the force of the current—just as the dirt slope washes away into the rushing water.

Brandon and Phillip help a weak Zack come to.

Phillip and Zack stagger off for Brandon's home, now in the near distance.

Brandon scurries alongside the wash, back-and-forth, back-and-forth, frantic, looking for--

BRANDON

Marcus!

Out of sheer exhaustion, Brandon gives up the search. Overcome with emotion, he drops to his knees.

VOICE (O.S.)

What's wrong, Brandon?

Above Brandon stands a joyful Marcus. The fear on Brandon's face breaks.

He embraces Marcus.

Marcus and Brandon sprint through the rain, through the wind, between LIGHTNING STRIKES that CRASH around them.

INT. SWENSON HOME - KITCHEN

Marcus and Brandon spill in from the front door.

In the back, barely noticing Brandon and Marcus--Edwina at the stove, warming milk in a saucepan.

In front of them, who sit as relaxed as can be at the kitchen table...

...Zack and Phillip.

Blankets wrap around their shivering bodies, giving them the look of mummies. They sip hot chocolate.

EDWINA

It'd be terrible if you guys caught a cold right before the championship game.

The boys look at each other: "If only."

Zack toasts Brandon with his friend's own Warriors mug: "Thank you." Brandon gazes upon the cross Jerry placed on the kitchen wall: "Thank you."

EXT. SWENSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Jerry, Edwina, Dakota and Brandon put up Christmas decorations on their tree.

Brandon takes in the tree's ornaments--but nothing rests at its base. Bare of wrapped presents.

EXT. SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Jammed with cars.

Dry lightning illuminates the marquee:

LEAGUE CHAMPIONSHIP: MULE MOUNTAIN VS. CORONADO

INT. SCHOOL - BASKETBALL GYM - NIGHT

A pumped, capacity crowd pogo up and down. SHAKE THE PACKED BLEACHERS.

Mule Mountain students and parents yell support as Amy, and the cheerleading squad, perform at half-court.

Jerry, Edwina, Dakota, Clyde Murphy, Doc Miller, Pastor Bill, and Stacey McKeen sit in the stands together, half-way up, surrounded by other supporters.

Brandon takes another look at Grant's number 11 jersey, with his embroidered name, MCKEEN, above his number, enclosed in a framed glass case, displayed on the wall.

ON COURT

GAME IN PROCESS:

A Coronado player swishes a 12-foot jumper. A MASSIVE GROAN from the home crowd. Marcus calls time out.

ELECTRONIC SCOREBOARD: MULE MOUNTAIN: 75 CORONADO: 76
 QUARTER: 4 TIME: 0:09

In the huddle, the team focuses on Coach Floyd.

FLOYD
There's only one play to run.

Floyd waits for a response from someone, until...

BRANDON
...Warrior.

Zack, Marcus, and Phillip agree. Floyd joins in.

FLOYD
Run Warrior. For Grant.

The team joins hands.

FLOYD
One, two, three--

TEAM
For Grant!

Back on the court, the teams jockey for position.

The referee BLOWS HIS WHISTLE, starting play.

On the floor, Brandon makes the inbound pass from half-court to Zack, who waits for Marcus and Phillip to weave their way around the ball in a "hot potato" fashion.

The SCOREBOARD ticks down: Eight seconds...seven...

Brandon sets a pick Steph Curry would be proud of.

Allows Zack to get free.

SCOREBOARD: Six seconds...five seconds...

Phillip passes the ball to Marcus...

SCOREBOARD: Four seconds...three seconds...

The score and ticking time squeezes life-sustaining oxygen from the crowd's lungs.

Marcus passes the ball to Brandon, who has a clear lane in front of him.

Brandon will be the hero--

SCOREBOARD: Two seconds...one second...

--at the last moment, a behind-the-back pass to Zack, who is free underneath the basket.

No one guarding him, Zack puts the ball up. It hangs on the rim for an agonizing moment, teetering--will it go in--will it fall out, before--

--it drops in the basket for two points, right before...
...the BUZZER SOUNDS.

SCOREBOARD:	MULE MOUNTAIN: 77	CORONADO: 76
	QUARTER: 4	TIME: 0:00

The HOME CROWD EXPLODES. Victory. A tide of crimson and gray cascades down from the stands.

Students, parents, and players storm the court--pandemonium. A championship celebration.

A warm embrace between Alvarez and Floyd.

League officials bring over a tall trophy. They hand it to Alvarez, who hands it off to Floyd, who thrusts it high above his head. DEAFENING CHEERS from the crowd.

Floyd passes the trophy off to students, who go nuts, running around the gym with it. Teammates hoist Marcus in the air. He cuts down a net on one end of the court.

Teammates hoist Phillip, who cuts down the other net.

Enthusiastic pats on Brandon's back from supporters.

In the stands, Jerry, Dakota, Clyde, Doc Miller and Pastor Bill congratulate each other. A supportive hug from Edwina to Stacey McKeen.

CLYDE

Got some rearranging to do in
my restaurant.

The group can only beam back.

Nothing could be finer, when, back down on the court, Brandon notices Amy...

...with Zack Chan.

Amy gives Zack a big hug. Heartfelt words whispered between them. Another hug, the flame rekindled.

Joy washes from Brandon's face.

Zack and Amy approach Brandon...hand-in-hand.

BRANDON

It's okay. You don't have to
say anything.

Amy breaks away from Zack. Gets up close to Brandon.

AMY

Thanks for saving Zack's life.

Amy embraces Brandon. A warm, long, agape hug. Amy cares for him. And Brandon knows it.

AMY

Merry Christmas, Brandon.

BRANDON

Merry Christmas, Amy.

Amy rejoins Zack. Zack shakes Brandon's hand, then a heartfelt bro' hug.

The reunited couple gets swallowed up in the throng of celebrating fans and classmates.

Brandon sees Zack and Amy together, happy. By the look on his face, it's finally all right with him: "You can't win them all."

SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - LATER

The championship celebration and ceremony continues.

The SCHOOL SONG PLAYS on a loud speaker. The packed stands full of the student body, cheerleaders, and parents SING along.

Phillip, Marcus, Zack, Brandon, Alvarez, Floyd and the rest of the team, in a straight line along midcourt, arms intertwined with one another. They lock in on...

...their championship banner, in bold, gold lettering:

MULE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL - COCHISE COUNTY BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS

Floyd wants to stand up. Tries. He teeters, swaying. Brandon and Alvarez notice.

They place supportive arms around Floyd's waist. Floyd stands straight, anchored. The look on Brandon's face: "I'll always be here to help you, my friend."

The hoisted banner rises sl...ow...ly, higher and higher, the town savoring every single second.

A look of disbelief on the players' faces, their smiles a mile-wide.

This time, tears of joy stream down Brandon's face: "Can this really be happening? Yes!"

It finally rests high in the rafters, right next to another banner:

MULE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL - 1978 COCHISE COUNTY BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS.

The SCHOOL SONG REACHES ITS CRESCENDO.

ON COURT

Brandon looks at the banner, then glances down at Grant's framed number 11 jersey.

One look on Brandon's face: "Mission accomplished."

INT. CROSSROADS BIBLE CHURCH - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

A baptismal gown made of white linen drapes Jerry. Along with Pastor Bill, they stand in the middle of a...

...baptism immersion tank, near the rostrum. Pastor Bill holds Jerry and...dunks him whole.

PASTOR BILL

I baptize you, Gerald Swenson, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Polite APPLAUSE from the congregation. Edwina, Dakota, and Brandon sit in the front pew, washed in surprise.

The new Jerry rises from the water, soaking wet, embracing Pastor Bill. He notices his family, who all look at him with pleasant surprise.

EDWINA

What's your New Year's resolution?

BRANDON

To love Jesus more.

EDWINA

That's a good thing.

BRANDON

I want to be baptized, too. Like Dad.

DAKOTA

I think you have to be eighteen.

Edwina locks in on Dakota: "What are you talking about?"

EDWINA

Oh...we're going to church.

EXT. CROSSROADS BIBLE CHURCH - CEMETERY - NIGHT - LATER

Brandon stands before Grant's simple grave, not far from Lydia's headstone. Jerry, Edwina, and Dakota stand behind their son and brother.

Brandon offers a solemn prayer to God, eyes moist from holding back tears.

BRANDON

Lord, please tell Grant we won the championship. Just like he said we would. And I've forgiven Travis and Wade. I want to make good use of the time I have here on earth. I have plans for the rest of the day. I thought Grant would like to know that. If You could let him know, Lord, I'd appreciate it.

A final gentle touch of Grant's tombstone and the cross that's chiseled on it. No more mourning from Brandon. On his face, a look of certainty that this sad chapter is over, once and for all.

Brandon joins his family, his life intact.

And then...

...a snow flake flutters past Brandon's face.

Then another. And another...and another.

All at once, white snow comes down in bushels, swirling around, out of the black sky.

Having fun in the moment, Jerry, Edwina, Dakota, and Brandon try to catch snowflakes on their tongues.

Brandon glances at the Huachuca Mountains, far out in the distance, jutting into the night sky.

BRANDON

Look at the mountains!

ON MOUNTAIN

The snow extinguishes the red pockets of fire. Dying flame, one...after another...after another.

Lights out on the Huachuca Mountains, a gift from above.

EXT. SWENSON HOME - MORNING

In the sky above the home, thick cloud cover.

INT. SWENSON HOME - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Brandon flops on the love seat. He looks at the Christmas tree. Notices it is still without presents. No change.

He takes in the love seat, hanging on to it for dear life. What it now represents is his present.

An arm-in-arm Jerry and Edwina enter, a still-tired Dakota right behind them.

JERRY
(to Edwina)
Merry Christmas.

EDWINA
Merry Christmas.

A tender kiss between the married couple.

JERRY
Merry Christmas, Brandon.

BRANDON
Merry Christmas, Dad.

Brandon tries to conceal his disappointment, but Jerry picks up on it.

JERRY
There's something outside.

Brandon perks up. He follows his dad out the door.

EXT. SWENSON HOME - MORNING

Jerry and Brandon walk around the house, and near the garage, around a corner, wrapped with a big bow ribbon--
--a hot-looking mountain bike.

Brandon stares in disbelief: "Oh, yeah."

Jerry hands Brandon an envelope, with the name, "BRANDON SWENSON" scribbled on it.

His son opens it. Pulls out a Christmas card.

INSERT - CHRISTMAS CARD

A handwritten note inside:

BRANDON, REMEMBER THAT WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE.
MERRY CHRISTMAS, MR. ALVAREZ

Brandon strokes his new bike.

BRANDON
Thanks, Mr. Alvarez.

Brandon goes over and removes the large ribbon and bow. He puts on an attached safety helmet. Mounts his bike.

He putters down the dirt driveway, getting a feel for Alvarez's gift.

EXT. SIDE STREET - MORNING

Brandon slowly picks up the speed to his bike, leading him to head down--

EXT. RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - MORNING

Brandon's old walking grounds. As he coasts by...

he notices, one-by-one--

--the old broken-down mountain bike, still resting in its desert grave.

--his school bus stop: "No more missing the bus."

--the spot where Jerry's Dodge Dakota pick-up was parked-- the empty beer bottles still in a pile off the road.

--the desert wash where Brandon saved Zack's life.

Brandon labyrinths his way down, dodging potholes, totally uninhibited, a caged bird no longer.

He looks all around. No cars coming in any direction. Brandon picks up the speed to his bike, and...

...takes it into the middle of the road.

He then looks above to the--

SKY

The sun bursts through thick clouds, making its first appearance of the day, washing Brandon clean in light. No more smoky haze. Only the rising Arizona sun.

ON RAMSEY CANYON ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Brandon rides as free as can be, picking up more speed.

With his bike under control, he fearlessly removes his hands from the handlebar grips.

Still under control, Brandon joyfully lifts his arms to Heaven in praise, his silent prayer of thanksgiving offered to the one true God above.

FADE OUT.