

INT. WOMB - DAY

Twin fetuses.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
Bullying: it starts before you're
born...

One of the fetuses gives the other a "wedgie" with the umbilical cord.

FREEZE FRAME: Intrauterine wedgie.

INT. OB-GYN OFFICE - DAY

We see the freeze frame is a sonogram in the hands of a baffled DOCTOR (65, Santa-like) in scrubs.

DOCTOR
Is that what I think it is?

RESIDENT (30, neat) nods gravely.

RESIDENT
It's an atomic wedgie.

The fetus with the wedgie's mouth is open. We fly into it.

INT. PRESCHOOL - DAY

...And come out the chimney of a chalet of Lincoln Logs, which Michael (4, cherubic) puts the finishing touches on.

From over his shoulder, we see a MUCH LARGER BULLY approach. He puts his foot through the roof, Godzilla-like.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
... And carries on as you grow,
ESPECIALLY if you grow slowly--

Michael's mouth gapes in astonishment. He stands to confront the Bully, only to be knocked to the ground.

FREEZE FRAME: Michael's mouth open in outraged dignity. We fly into it.

INT. BINGO PARLOR - DAY

... And comes out the open mouth of an OLD NEBBISH (75, short and scrawny) hollering:

OLD NEBBISH

Bingo!

A GRUMPY OLD BULLY (80, beefy) gives the Old Nebbish a "Depends" wedgie. The Old Nebbish grimaces.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

...And if you're not careful, it'll last until the day you die.

FREEZE FRAME: Grimacing Old Nebbish.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

That is, unless you do something about it.

EXT. PRAGUE AIRPORT - DAY

MICHAEL (14, shrimpy) stands with a duffel bag at the security gate next to his dad, RUSSELL, (40, intellectual).

RUSSELL

Did you forget your chess set?

Michael shakes his head no, gestures at his bag.

RUSSELL (CONT'D)

Toilet paper?

MICHAEL

Dad!

RUSSELL

Just checking.

MICHAEL

St. Andrews is a boarding school, not a logging camp.

RUSSELL

You might need to trade it for cigarettes or chocolate bars.

MICHAEL

I'm sure it's not that bad.

They embrace, Michael turns to catch his flight.

FREEZE FRAME: Michael's face. He misses his Dad already.

INT. PLANE - NIGHT

Michael is crammed in the middle seat between two snoring OBESE TOURISTS. He can't get comfortable.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
My Dad is a lifer at Radio Free Europe in Prague. Thanks to him, I grew up in a place where chess is cool...

INT. CHESS MATCH - NIGHT

KASPAROV flanked by two BEAUTIES takes his seat on the opposite side of a board.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
And the champions are rock stars...

He DISSOLVES into a drooling NERD.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
...Not jerk off in a sock stars.

FREEZE FRAME: Closeup of nerd's crusty sock.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
But I'm getting ahead of myself.

INT. PLANE - NIGHT

One Obese Tourist eats duty free candy. He turns to Michael.

OBESE TOURIST
(mouth full)
Were you in Prague for vacay?

MICHAEL
No, I live there.

OBESE TOURIST
I didn't know people lived there. I mean, people who aren't Czech people. Are you a Czech person?

MICHAEL
I grew up there.

OBESE TOURIST
I guess that sort of counts.

The Obese Tourist eats more candy.

OBESE TOURIST (CONT'D)
 Wait a minute, if you live there,
 why are you going to America?

MICHAEL
 Boys' boarding school.

OBESE TOURIST
 Didn't they ban those?

MICHAEL
 No, I don't think so.

OBESE TOURIST
 What do you know. Well, good luck,
 kiddo. Something tells me you're
 gonna need it.

He proffers the open bag of candy.

MICHAEL
 No, thanks.

OBESE TOURIST
 Think of it as a last meal.

Michael considers this, then takes one.

INT. TAXI - MORNING

Michael awe-struck at the grand sights of Washington D.C.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
 This is obviously a place that
 takes itself seriously.

EXT. ST. ANDREWS CLOSE - DAY

Michael gets out of the taxi, pays the fare, glances around
 at a grandiose campus more suited to an Ivy League college.

MICHAEL (V.O.)
 Very seriously.

The TAXI DRIVER leaves his bag on the curb and takes off,
 leaving Michael in a cloud of exhaust. He COUGHS.

A BACKFIRE startles him. He looks up to see LIONEL POMEROY
 (14, portly English shrimp) get off of an ancient moped
 driven by his sister, KATE (17, lovely).

Lionel lifts the visor of his helmet, marvels at the school.

LIONEL
 (under his breath)
 A madrassa for rich Yankee wankers.

Lionel struggles to drag a portmanteau off the back of the moped. He turns to Michael for assistance.

LIONEL (CONT'D)
 Gissa hand?

Michael helps. They barely have it when the moped takes off.

LIONEL (CONT'D)
 (at departing moped)
 Daft cow!

MICHAEL
 Are you a freshman, too?

LIONEL
 Do you mean a third former?

MICHAEL
 What's a third former?

LIONEL
 Bloody hell.

INT. ST. ANDREWS REGISTRATION - MOMENTS LATER

Michael and Lionel are homunculi among the new NINTH GRADERS milling around the registration tables.

There's a giant poster that shows the silhouette of a Roman fighting a barbarian. Underneath it...

INSERT TITLE: "NINTH GRADE WELCOME PICNIC at 2 p.m."

MICHAEL
 Are those gladiators?

LIONEL
 I hope so. I've always wanted to see actual blood spilled for my entertainment.

Michael's surprised and slightly disapproving.

EXT. COLOSSEUM - ROME - DAY - MICHAEL'S DAYDREAM

Michael and Lionel dressed as Christian martyrs, pursued by wild beasts including elephants.

LIONEL (O.S.)
 As long as no elephants are hurt,
 of course.

The elephants vanish. A tiger jumps for Michael's throat.

INT. ST. ANDREWS REGISTRATION - DAY

The REVEREND MULLIGAN (53, silver fox) steeples his fingers.

REVEREND MULLIGAN
 I'm sorry, boys, but Seventh
 Graders don't register until 5 p.m.

MICHAEL
 We're Ninth Graders, sir.

If Mulligan is embarrassed, he doesn't show it. Lionel
 gestures at the Roman silhouette on the poster.

LIONEL
 Will grown men fight to the death
 for our viewing pleasure?

Reverend Mulligan smiles cryptically.

REVEREND MULLIGAN
 No. That's a game the new boys play
 for the football coaches.

MICHAEL
 I have no gladiatorial training.

LIONEL
 What is this, "Strength Through
 Joy?"

REVEREND MULLIGAN
 Think of it as flag football, but
 with Styrofoam weapons.

LIONEL
 What's wrong with cold steel?

The Reverend frowns. Michael grabs Lionel and pulls him to
 the back of the registration line, where they meet BART (13,
 tiny), who looks around warily.

MICHAEL
 Are you new here, too?

Bart nods.

MOLLERMAN (14, giant) elbows past them.

LIONEL
Oi! Mind the queue.

Mollerman towers over him.

MOLLERMAN
I don't take orders from Thomas's
English muffin.

LIONEL
Hasn't anyone told you that twats
should be seen, not heard?

Mollerman grabs Lionel's collar.

MOLLERMAN
Who's the twat now, Thomas?

LIONEL
I am what I eat.

Michael valiantly tries to pull Mollerman's hand off his new
pal. Bart grabs Mollerman's other hand. Mollerman rips his
hands free of theirs.

MOLLERMAN
I'm gonna hafta throw a blanket
party for you midgets to teach you
some manners!

MASTER STONE (38, balding) stands from behind the table.

MASTER STONE
(to Mollerman)
Get in the back of the line,
Mollerman. I saw you cut.

Mollerman obeys reluctantly.

LIONEL
(under his breath)
What's a blanket party?

BART
It's a type of gang initiation.
They pull a blanket over your head
and beat the crap out of you.

MICHAEL
I didn't know the Crips had an
Episcopalian branch?

LIONEL

This is a bizarro imitation of an English boarding school. You know the difference between America and a pot of yogurt?

Michael and Bart shake their heads.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

After two hundred years at least a pot of yogurt develops a culture of its own.

JOFF (15, giant) leads a group of JUNIOR VARSITY LETTERMEN by like they own the place, which they pretty much do. They're with PRETTY GIRLS.

MICHAEL

Who the hell are they?

BART

Lettermen.

The J.V. Lettermen DISSOLVE TO:

A TROUPE OF KNIGHTS in shining armor accompanied by maidens.

LIONEL (O.S.)

You mean wankermen.

BART (O.S.)

If you wear one of those jackets, the girls will do your wanking for you.

LIONEL (O.S.)

Blimey.

The Knights DISSOLVE back into Lettermen, who jostle the three amigos as they walk past.

FREEZE FRAME: Junior varsity letter jacket.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

That's when the dream was born. All I had to do was be really good at Romans and Barbarians.

EXT. ST. ANDREWS PLAYING FIELDS - DAY

Michael dressed like a ROMAN SOLDIER carrying a football, pursued by Joff, dressed like a barbarian holding a Styrofoam sword. Just as Joff brings the sword down on Michael's head...

FREEZE FRAME: Michael half-way to the ground, ball loose.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Which was easier said than done.

Michael resumes his crash into a mud puddle, the ball bounces loose, Joff recovers it and runs for a touchdown. WHISTLE.

WEALTHY, ATTRACTIVE PARENTS on the sidelines CHEER.

Bart, also a Roman, helps Michael up.

BART

You all right?

Michael spits blood, works his tongue around his mouth.

MICHAEL

Does that look like a molar to you?

Lionel comes up panting.

LIONEL

Oi, aren't you supposed to keep hold of the bloody ball?

Bart and Lionel help Michael limp back to the rabble of dispirited Romans, his arms outstretched Christ-like over his friends' shoulders.

The Romans, who are noticeably shorter, muddier, and more battered than the "Barbarians," join in a ragged huddle.

INT. ROMAN HUDDLE - CONTINUOUS

Michael tries to catch his breath. CRISPIN (14, short) shakes his head in disgust.

CRISPIN

(to Michael)

Now what, genius?

SHORT KID (14) nods at the COACHES making notes on the sideline. One of them gives the "thumbs-up" to Joff.

SHORT KID

None of us are going to make the
J.V. football team now.

LIONEL

I'm sure you could be their fluffer
if you invested in a pair of
kneepads.

The short kid lunges at Lionel. Michael stops him.

A FAT KID (14, bowling ball-shaped) steps up.

FAT KID

(to Michael)

Who appointed you Caesar?

SHORT KID

Yeah, aren't you the kid on a chess
scholarship?

Michael spits blood on the ground, which silences them.

MICHAEL

We're never going to do it with
brute force.

LIONEL

What? It's Lord of the Bloody Flies
out here!

Through the huddle, Michael watches SOPHIA MILKFORD (tall 14,
stunning) and a group of GIRLS on the sidelines standing with
the Junior Varsity Lettermen.

MICHAEL

We're going to take a page from the
Romans' playbook.

FAT KID

We ARE the Romans.

MICHAEL

I meant the real ones.

He leans forward and WHISPERS to his teammates.

EXT. HUDDLE - MOMENTS LATER

MR. ADARE (44, African-American) in a striped ref's jersey,
WHISTLES. The Romans leave their huddle. They form a square
around Bart, who appears to have the ball tucked away.

When Adare WHISTLES again, the Barbarians race SCREAMING towards them. The Romans are visibly nervous. Michael is part of the square around Bart.

MICHAEL

Hold it... hold it...

Just as the Barbarians arrive to annihilate them,

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Now!

The Romans interlock shields in a "Turtle" formation protecting Bart. Instead of a group of stragglers, they are finally fighting as a unit. The Barbarians CRASH into them, but the formation holds. Bart is protected.

There is fearsome, vicious combat, but the Roman "turtle" moves slowly down field towards the Barbarian goal line.

Until JOFF SMASHES the FAT KID in the face with the pommel of his Styrofoam sword. The Fat Kid bends over in agony. The "turtle" slowly disintegrates.

Michael throws his shield aside, revealing that he is actually the one with the ball. He sprints towards the endzone.

JOFF BASHES BART until he realizes the "ball" is a bundled sweatshirt. Realizing he's been had, Joff turns to see Michael running away.

TIME LAPSE

Michael pursued by a feral pack of BARBARIANS. They're gaining, but he has a clear field to the goal line.

Then he turns to smile at Sophia, who squints, confused.

FREEZE FRAME: Michael smiling in triumph.

Michael slips in a mud puddle and goes sliding to the ground short of the goal line. Joff and his cohort POUNCE. They bash him into the ground.

INSERT: The scoreboard: 49-0.

WHISTLE.

INT. SHOWERS - DAY

Michael, Lionel and Bart wear Speedos. They're surrounded by naked, much larger, pubescent classmates. Michael's dejected.

BART
At least you gave it a shot.

LIONEL
Why'd you have to look at that
bleeding girl?

MICHAEL
I don't know. She was hot?

MR. VERKSTEDT (40, creepy) leans his head in the showers.

MR. VERKSTEDT
You're not allowed to wear swimming
trunks in the showers.

LIONEL
Why? Are you filming?

MR. VERKSTEDT
Take them off now.

MICHAEL
Can we at least have dinner and a
glass of wine first?

MR. VERKSTEDT
I want you two to report to Dean
Vache's office.

BART
With bathing suits or without?

MR. VERKSTEDT
Make that all three of you.

There is a Mexican standoff before the three strip their
swimsuits off. Mr. Verkstedt lingers creepily, leaves.

Michael, Bart and Lionel are very self-conscious about their
underdevelopment. The others gawk: these are just kids.

MICHAEL
Perv.

LIONEL
I didn't know Caligula taught here.

BART
I hate this god damn place already.

Joff strolls by, looks below their waists mockingly.

JOFF

The ladies room is over at the
girl's school.

FREEZE FRAME: Michael mortified.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

So that was it. The real divide in
our class wasn't based on class, or
looks, or even coolness. It was
based on puberty. And we were on
the wrong side of the line.

Joff shakes his head, amused.

LIONEL

Bugger off.

JOFF

What did you say?

MICHAEL

He said, "bugger off."

BART

(under his breath)

You might not want to say that
while we're in the shower.

Joff points at the two of them: I've got your numbers.

EXT. DEAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Michael, Lionel and Bart. On the hallway wall is a sign
advertizing the "9th Grade Welcome Dance".

BART

How are we supposed to go to a
dance if we don't know any girls?

LIONEL

You could always invite that
pedophile from the showers.

MICHAEL

What we need are junior varsity
letter jackets. They were catnip to
those girls at the picnic.

LIONEL

Sorry to break it to you, sport,
but they don't give those to the
chess team.

DEAN VACHE (45, short, Van Dyk beard) steps out of his office with a riding crop and elevator shoes. He looks surprised.

DEAN VACHE

Already?

The three new friends look between themselves, nod.

INT. DEAN VACHE'S MILITARISTIC OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The office is plastered with pictures of Vache in desert fatigues with a bandolier and tough-looking comrades. A miniature flag on his desk: the French Foreign Legion. There's a TV mounted on the wall.

DEAN VACHE

Names?

MICHAEL

Michael Banks.

LIONEL

Lionel Pomeroy

BART

Bart Stoverman.

Vache rifles through a filing cabinet.

DEAN VACHE

(sarcastic)

I want to congratulate you for setting a disciplinary record. Why were you told to report here?

MICHAEL

We were wearing swimsuits in the showers.

LIONEL

We didn't realize we were starring in a peep show.

Vache opens Lionel's folder and studies his records.

DEAN VACHE

Mr. Pomeroy, how many boarding schools have you been thrown out of?

Michael and Bart look at him, surprised.

LIONEL
Counting this one?

He picks up Michael's folder.

DEAN VACHE
A chess scholarship? That's a
first.

MICHAEL
You haven't awarded one before?

DEAN VACHE
No, we've never had to discipline a
chess player.

Dean Vache studies Bart's folder.

DEAN VACHE (CONT'D)
Why is a 12 year-old in Ninth
Grade, Mr. Stoverman?

Bart, embarrassed. Michael and Bart look at him, surprised.

BART
Is that a trick question?

DEAN VACHE
It's nice to get acquainted with
the boys who have volunteered to
serve on Saturday morning gardening
duty.

MICHAEL
But we haven't volunteered.

DEAN VACHE
Yes, you have.

DEAN VACHE (CONT'D)
We have a zero-tolerance policy for
delinquency at St. Andrews. You may
leave.

Michael, Bart and Lionel leave the office.

INT. REFECTORY - NIGHT

Michael, Bart and Lionel in white gloves deliver food to
baying tables of UPPER CLASSMEN at trestle tables laid with
china. They collect fresh platters at the kitchen door.

MICHAEL
There has to be a way out of this.

LIONEL
We're worse than indentured bloody
servants!

BART
Will we ever get to eat? I'm tired
of smelling everyone else's food.

Michael sets off on his next delivery when he hears...

JOFF
Hey, Twinkle Toes!

As he looks at Joff, someone tries to trip him. He dodges the
foot in the nick of time. Grins mockingly. Someone else trips
him. Face plant.

LAUGHTER

There's a CRACKLE of MICROPHONE STATIC.

REVEREND MULLIGAN
(through mic)
Let us say the blessing.

Michael climbs to his knees, soaked with gravy. He makes eye
contact with Bart, brushes bits of mystery meat off.

REVEREND MULLIGAN (CONT'D)
Lord, we thank thee for guiding,
blessing and protecting us. Bless
this food to its intended use.
Amen.

SNIGGERS near Michael, who flees to the kitchen amidst a
sudden CLATTER of forks and knives on plates.

INT. REFECTORY - CONTINUOUS

Michael and Lionel, both food-stained, file out in a MASS OF
BOYS. Mollerman catches their eyes, mimes a beating.

LIONEL
Oh, crumbs.

MICHAEL
He wouldn't dare lay a finger on us
the first day of school.

LIONEL

Really?

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

BOYS SING "ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL." Michael, Bart and Lionel appear like elementary school children next to their TALL PUBESCENT CLASSMATES.

Communion begins. Michael watches, surprised, as Lionel files past him.

LIONEL

Free wine, innit?

Michael follows him dumbly. Bart behind him. JOFF assists the Reverend. When it's Michael's turn, Joff intentionally bumps the sacramental cup so that wine spills down his shirt.

JOFF

(under his breath)

Nice work, midget. That's Christ's blood you just spilled.

Michael, furiously embarrassed. Michael watches Joff, smug as hell, pass down the line.

INT. MICHAEL'S PRISON-LIKE DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Michael reads Gulliver's Travels with a flashlight. A FAINT TAP on his door. He gets up, puts his ear to it.

MICHAEL

(softly through door)

Who is it?

LIONEL (O.S.)

(groaning)

Father bleeding Christmas.

Michael opens the door. Lionel hobbles in, WINCING.

LIONEL (CONT'D)

What was it you said about the first day of school?

Michael carefully closes, locks the door.

MICHAEL

Jesus, Mollerman threw you a blanket party?

LIONEL
They used my Snuggie, actually.

MICHAEL
I'm sorry, Lionel.

LIONEL
Pish posh, I've always fancied a
limp. Dashing, don't you know. Lord
Byron and all that.

Michael helps Lionel sit on his bed, GROANING.

MICHAEL
Did the bastards get Bart, too?

LIONEL
I was too busy hemorrhaging to ask.

There's another light TAP. Michael opens the door to find
Bart doubled over in pain.

BART
Do you have any Advil?

Michael lets him in, closes and locks the door, grabs his
flashlight. Bart hobbles over to take a seat by Lionel.

FOOTSTEPS pause outside Michael's door.

MICHAEL
It must be the Master. Quick, under
the blanket!

Lionel and Bart dive under the blanket at the foot of the
bed. A LOUD KNOCK.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
(under his breath)
Quit squirming!

Michael grabs Visine from his table, squirts it in his eyes.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
(through door)
Yes?

MASTER STONE (O.S.)
(through door)
Open up.

Michael complies. Master Stone looks in, snaps on the light.

MASTER STONE (CONT'D)

What was that noise I--
(notices Michael's
"tears")

Are you all right, Mr. Banks?

MICHAEL

I'm fine. Really.

Master Stone takes a seat at the foot of the bed, narrowly missing Lionel and Bart.

MASTER STONE

First time away from mom?

MICHAEL

She went to a better place when I was young.

MASTER STONE

I'm sorry. When did she pass?

Michael wipes away his "tears."

MICHAEL

She lives in Jacksonville. My parents are divorced.

MASTER STONE

(angry at being had)

I see.

Master Stone shifts his weight, causing Lionel to YELP. Michael NOISILY CLEARS HIS THROAT to cover the sound.

Master Stone points at Michael's alarm clock. 10:52 p.m.

MASTER STONE (CONT'D)

Lights out was over an hour ago.
The next time I catch you breaking house rules, you'll have to report to the Dean.

Stone leaves.

MICHAEL

(under his breath)
He's gone.

Suddenly the blanket is torn off and Bart GASPS for air.

BART

Damn it, Lionel!

LIONEL

I'm sorry. The Snuggie party
must've damaged my intestines.

MICHAEL

Listen: I grew up in the most
bullied country in Europe.

INSERT: Map of Europe. A star marks Prague. First, a red-green ocean from Austria-Hungary spills over the Czech Republic. Then, black swastikas spread from Germany and engulf nearly all of Europe, including Prague. Finally, red hammer and sickles from Russia flood over Eastern Europe.

MICHAEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)

If the twentieth century teaches
anything, it's that there's only
one way a small country can survive
bullying.

Michael grabs, brandishes Gulliver's Travels.

BART

By giving them homework?

MICHAEL

By banding together. Even little
people can beat giants if they help
one another.

BART

Who you calling little?

Michael rolls his eyes.

LIONEL

"Lilliputians" has far too many
syllables for Neanderthals like
Mollerman.

BART

Musketeers?

MICHAEL

Too close to "Mouseketeers."

LIONEL

Not exactly original, either.

MICHAEL

How about "the Midgets?"

LIONEL

That'll put the fear of God in
them.

BART

Midget Freedom Fighters?

MICHAEL

We're not going to car bomb anyone.

LIONEL

Isn't "militant" a polite way of
saying "terrorist?"

MICHAEL

Militant Midgets!

The three clasp hands. A done deal.