LIFE VEST

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FADE IN:

INT. SAM'S HOUSE- BEDROOM - DAY - 1982

SAM, 11, smart, pudgy, lacks confidence, sits on the floor flipping through football cards. He admires a few San Diego Chargers' players; Dan Fouts, Charlie Joiner, John Jefferson, then gently puts the cards away in a cabinet.

Inside the cabinet is a stack of Beatles' cassettes and comics. He grabs a Dracula comic, lays down on his bed and reads. Fascinated by the artwork, he examines it, as if looking for a hidden meaning.

Muffled SHOUTING between two PEOPLE permeates his bedroom wall.

Sam, pained, glares at the wall, then places the comic on his head, covering his face. Unable to tolerate the sound, he pops up, leaves his room and escapes into the backyard.

EXT. SAM'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Sam grabs a worn basketball, tries to twirl it on his finger. He is supremely uncoordinated.

SHOUTING can still be heard through open windows.

Sam BOUNCES the ball on the driveway, harder and harder until he can no longer hear anything but the ball SMACKING the concrete.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

The bell RINGS. KIDS empty into the hallway and walk to their next class.

Sam makes his way through the human obstacle course with his head down. TYLER, 11, tall, thin, cocky, sneaks up behind him and SLAPS Sam's books, notebooks to the ground.

Sam stops in his tracks, stunned. Tyler LAUGHS and SMACKS Sam's head as he briskly walks past. Sam grimaces, turns red.

SAM
You Goddamn, mother fucking, shit, asshole!

Everyone in the hall around Sam freezes. Tyler scans the hall for an adult, spies one, then points a finger at Sam.

TYLER
He did it.

TEACHERS converge on Sam while Tyler roars with LAUGHTER.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Sam's mother, CAROL, late 30's, a bit worse for the wear, frowns. She sits next to Sam while PRINCIPAL CONNER, 40s, nonplussed, sits behind his desk.

CAROL
He knocked the books outta Sam's hand and then smacked him in the head.

PRINCIPAL CONNER
Well, nobody saw that. They did however, hear Sam's colorful reaction.

CAROL
You know what, I'm glad he said it. That kid is a shit and has been bullying my son for years.

Principal Conner shifts uneasily in his seat.

PRINCIPAL CONNER
We have done our best to address this --

CAROL
Really?! Well, your best is not good enough for my son. Not even close.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sam's brother DAVE, 15, lanky, overflowing with teenage angst, sits in the living room, smoking. A radio on an end table next to him is cranked up, blasting ROCK MUSIC.

Sam strides through the living room, waves his hands, clearing a path through the smoke.

DAVE
Hey, shithead!

Sam ignores Dave, continues on his path.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Shithead!

Sam bristles, stops, shakes his head.

Dave picks up an ashtray overflowing with cigarette butts and ash. He motions for Sam to fetch it.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Empty this for me.

SAM
Mom doesn't like it when you smoke inside.

DAVE
Mom's not here. Shut up and do it or I'll make you eat a few.

SAM
(under his breath)
You suck.

DAVE
What?!

SAM
Nothin'.

Sam grabs the ashtray, walks to the kitchen, puts it on the counter and slips out the back door.

DAVE (O.S.)
Hey, bring it back!

EXT. SAM'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Sam, aggravated, dribbles and shoots baskets. He's terrible.

ROCK MUSIC pours out the back, screen door.

SAM
(to himself)
Asshole.

He squares up with determination, shoots and misses.

MARIANA, 30s, vibrant, with jet black hair, and her son PAUL, 11, athletic, same jet black hair, march up the driveway into the backyard accompanied by Carol.

SAM (CONT'D)
Shit!

Carol cringes.

CAROL
(to Mariana, then Sam)
Sorry ‘bout that. Sam!

Sam shoots, misses again, turns.

SAM
Yeah.

Carol waves Sam over.

CAROL
This is Paul and his Mom, Mariana. They moved in down the street a few weeks ago.

Sam nods.

CAROL (CONT’D)
Turns out, you two are the same age.

SAM
OK.

CAROL
Well, say hello.

SAM
(sheepishly)
Hello.

Paul nods.

Carol becomes distracted by the MUSIC blasting from inside the house.

CAROL
(to Mariana)
I need to go take care of this. I’m sorry. I’ll call you later.

Carol, annoyed, braces herself, then goes inside.

Mariana speaks with a thick Spanish accent.

MARIANA
(smiles)
Very nice to meet you, Sam.

SAM
(intrigued)
Nice to meet you.

MARIANA
Paul, don't outstay your welcome.

Mariana disappears down the driveway as SHOUTING from inside the house pierces the screen door.

Sam breaks an awkward silence.

SAM
If we're the same age, how come I haven't seen you at school?

PAUL
I go to the Catholic school.

SAM
That's cool. Wish I went there.

PAUL
It's alright, but some of the nuns are super angry.

SAM
Maybe they were possessed by the devil, like in The Exorcist. It's probably a job related hazard.

PAUL
(smiles)
That might explain the horns.

SAM
Well, they probably wouldn't accept any Jewish kids anyway.

A beat.

PAUL
So, you good at basketball?

SAM
Nah, I just like being out here. You?

PAUL
I play soccer and take karate.

SAM
I'm crappy at soccer. Never scored... unless you count scoring on your own goal.

PAUL
(laughs)
Come on. No way.

SAM
Yeah, I was near the goal, some guy kicked the ball right at me. I missed and it ricocheted off the inside of my leg, changed direction, and went right in.

PAUL
Bet the coach was pissed.

SAM
Actually, he seemed OK, but the goalie was *really* pissed. Like it mattered. We were already four goals down.

PAUL
That guy sounds like an idiot.

SHOUTING from inside the house gets louder. Sam, embarrassed, glances at the screen door, then back at Paul.

SAM
Any chance you can teach me some karate? There's this jerk, Tyler that I'd like to punch or chop or whatever.

PAUL
Maybe.

SAM
(anxiously)
Can we go over to your place?

PAUL
Sure.
(turns to the house)
Who's in there?

SAM
My idiot brother, total asshole.

PAUL
I bet he won't be like that when your dad gets home.

SAM
(hesitates)
I don't really have a dad. Mom says he left when I was two, but I don't remember.

PAUL
That sucks.

They make their way down the driveway.

SAM (O.S.)
Hey, you like the Beatles?

PAUL (O.S.)
Nah, you like Elvis?

SAM (O.S.)
Nah, but the Beatles are really good.

PAUL (O.S.)
You've lost your mind. Elvis is the king.

SAM (O.S.)
King of overrated songs.

PAUL (O.S.)
(laughs)
Shut up.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mariana ushers Sam and Paul into the living room.

A three year-old mutt, PUPPY, runs up, jumps and almost knocks Sam over. Sam, initially shocked, LAUGHS. Paul shakes his head in disgust.

MARIANA
(to Puppy, then Sam)
Puppy. Puppy! Down! Come here. I'm sorry about.

SAM
It's OK.

Puppy watches Mariana as she walks away, then slowly trots behind her, glances over his shoulder at Sam, PANTING.

SAM (CONT'D)
(confused)
What's the dog's name?

PAUL
Puppy.

SAM
Puppy? That's different.

PAUL
My Mom calls it Puppy, so, it's Puppy. He's so stupid.

Paul crashes on a couch.

SAM
Seems super friendly.

PAUL
Don't think you're special. He does that with everyone.
(beat)
Idiot eats its own poop.

SAM
Ahhh, groooooooss! What are you feeding him?
(beat)
My Mom says, we can't have pets because we can't afford another mouth to feed, but I wish I had one.

PAUL
Well, if it were up to me, I'd say take him.

Paul's father, JAMES, 30s, strides out of the bedroom smoking a cigarette, wearing jean shorts, no shirt, and reflective sunglasses. He looks like a cooler version of the Marlboro Man. Sam is in awe.

He greets the boys, stone-faced.

JAMES
(points to Sam)
What... do we... have... here?

Sam extends his hand. James just stares.

SAM
I'm Sam.

JAMES
Is that so?

SAM
Ummm, yeah.

Sam looks at Paul who shrugs.

Mariana rejoins them, Puppy in tow.

JAMES
You have any identification?

SAM
I don't think so... I'm not old enough--

JAMES
That's convenient.

James bends down, removes his sunglasses and stares at Sam cross-eyed. Sam stifles a giggle.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Hmmm, ain't got no papers... well then, how do I know who you are and where you're from?

SAM
I'm from down the street.

MARIANA
OK, James, enough. Stop being weird.

James relaxes his eyes back to normal, smiles, grabs Sam's shoulder. Sam smiles.

JAMES
Well, Sam, if that's your real name, welcome, but don't try any funny business. I'll know.

PAUL
Dad, can we go now?

James waves them on.

JAMES
(to Mariana)
I'm headin' out back to catch some rays. Grab a beer and join me.

Sam turns back towards James.

SAM
Hey, there's a pool a few blocks away. We go there.

JAMES
Hmmm, thanks for the tip, hombre.

Sam and Paul retreat to the DEN...

Paul snags a remote from an end table, turns on the huge TV nestled in a wooden cabinet that takes up almost the entire length of the wall.

Sam spots the TV and freezes.

SAM
Holy shit, is that real?

Paul plops down on a recliner.

PAUL
What, the TV?

Sam nods, then settles into a love seat.

SAM
Yeah.

PAUL
I guess so.

Sam regains his composure.

SAM
Your dad's funny. Is he always cool like that?

PAUL
Sometimes, if he's not pissed at me.

Paul clicks the remote. Sam bathes in the light from the TV.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sam and his mother sit at the kitchen table finishing plates of spaghetti.

CAROL
So, you and Paul have fun? You were over there long enough.

SAM
Yep.

CAROL
That's all I get? You know I hate that.

SAM
(exhales; rolls his eyes)
They have an awesome TV. Crazy dog named Puppy. His father's pretty cool.

CAROL
Was that so hard?
(beat)
Well, that's good. Maybe you can invite him over some time.

Dave hip checks Sam as he walks past.

DAVE
Hey, moron, where'd you stash my comics?

Sam SLAMS his fork down.

SAM
You said--

Dave strolls into Sam's bedroom.

DAVE (O.S.)
No worries, dummy. I'll find 'em.

SAM
Mom!

Carol shakes her head, steadies herself.

CAROL
Sam, it's...

Sam gets up, rushes out of the kitchen and through the back door.

The sound of drawers OPENING, cabinet doors SLAMMING in b.g.

CAROL (CONT'D)
(puts her head in her hands)
Damnit, Dave. Must you--

DAVE (O.S.)
I need them for something.

CAROL
Can you stop being a jerk for like a minute?

Dave pops out of Sam's bedroom clutching a stack of comics, turns, walks off.

DAVE
(over his shoulder)
As soon as you stop being a failure of a mother.

Carol rubs her forehead in distress.

MONTAGE

A)Sam and Paul toss a football in Paul's backyard. Sam's throws and catches are a bit awkward compared to Paul.

Paul runs a hook pattern and Sam's pass is on target. Paul runs, spikes the ball. Sam bobs his head, assumes a cocky demeanor. Paul throws a nice spiral to Sam. Sam slaps at the ball, misses. The ball bangs off his shoulder.

SAM
Damnit!

B)Sam and Paul hunker down on the floor in the living room, frantically manipulating joy sticks, connected to an ATARI 2600. The competition plays out on a small TV.

Sam's reaction time and reflexes are off just enough to allow Paul to dominate.

PAUL
Ohhhh...you're going down.

Puppy sidles up to Sam and licks his ear. Startled, Sam whips his head around, then back to the game.

SAM
Snot bubble stew!

Paul wins the game, smiles triumphantly.

PAUL
Good dog.

C)A large piece of cardboard lays in the middle of Paul’s backyard. Next to it on the grass, a boombox plays HIP HOP music.

Paul, wearing coveralls, does his best B-Boy moves, then moonwalks to the center of the cardboard. He crouches down, then effortlessly spins on his back. When he stops, he points to Sam and hops up.

Sam jumps onto the cardboard and does a series of silly dance moves that resemble a mild seizure more than a pop and lock session. He gets down on the cardboard, tries to spin, completes a quarter rotation, then falls over. Paul LAUGHS hysterically.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DEN - DAY - MONTHS LATER

Paul lounges in the recliner, flips through channels. Sam impatiently watches from the love seat.

SAM
There’s gotta be somethin’ on. You have like allllll the channels.

Paul tosses the remote at Sam.

PAUL
Fine. You try.

Sam examines the remote, glances up.

SAM
This is the greatest TV I have ever seen. Ours is like a third of that.

PAUL
I hate fractions.

SAM
I can probably help ya with that.

Sam flips through some channels, passes over a scrambled channel.

PAUL
Hold on. Wait. Go back.

Sam flips back until he lands on the scrambled channel.

SAM
Why in the hell do you want to watch this? It’s all messed up lookin’.

PAUL
(intensely focused)
Hold on... hold on. There! You see that?

SAM
What?

PAUL
I swear I saw a naked chick. Boobs, butt... all the good stuff.

SAM
Come on. No, you didn’t.

The channel scrambles, unscrambles for a moment and reveals a breast.

PAUL
See?!

SAM
(shocked)
Holy shit! What is this?

Sam hops off the love seat, gets on his hands and knees, crawls up to the TV until his face almost touches the screen.

PAUL
I think it’s the Playboy channel, but we aren’t paying for it, so it does this crap.

SAM
They have their own channel?!

PAUL
Yeah.

Sam tosses the remote back to Paul.

SAM
We *have* to get this to work.

Sam hops up, grabs a metal TV tray and tries to uses it like a satellite dish, frantically positions it all around the TV.

PAUL
Wait a sec... that might have worked.

SAM
(pleading)
Come on. Come on.

Sam holds his position, eyes wide.

PAUL
Yeah, right there!

SAM
(glances at the TV)
Is that a boob or an elbow?

PAUL
(sarcastically)
Oh, I don't know. Do elbows have nipples?!

The signal scrambles, the image is lost.

SAM
No, no, noooooo.

PAUL
You had it. Shit.

Sam desperately repositions the TV tray around the TV cabinet.

SAM
Damnit, it's not holding steady.

Mariana jumps into the room.

MARIANA
Ah, ha!

Sam, startled, drops the TV tray. It CRASHES to the floor. Paul fumbles with the remote, changes the channel as quickly as he can.

Mariana wags her finger at the boys and triumphantly backs out of the room with a sly grin.

The boys look at each other stunned, then smile.

SAM
Your mom is like a ninja.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - PLAYGROUND - DAY

A banner hangs over the entrance to the playground: “END OF YEAR CELEBRATION THIS FRIDAY”

Sam, off by himself, kicks dirt around the playground. Every so often he wistfully glances over at several GIRLS chatting, focuses on MONICA, cute, mature for her age.

Tyler and a GROUP OF STUDENTS play nearby, tossing a ball. Tyler eyeballs the TEACHERS and, when they aren’t paying attention, motions for the ball.

A student tosses Tyler the ball. He snags it out of the air and charges towards Sam.

TYLER
Hey, ass-wipe!

Sam turns to face Tyler.

TYLER (CONT’D)
Made ya look.

Tyler throws the ball as hard as he can into Sam’s belly, knocking the breath out of him. Two of the Girls GIGGLE, while Monica looks on, disgusted.

The Group of Students point and LAUGH, while Tyler trots around, hands raised like a champ.

Sam stands alone, head down, humiliated.

EXT. PAUL’S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Bright, hot summer day. Sam lugs a basket filled with water balloons into the backyard.

Paul points to the middle of the yard. Sam struggles to hold the basket.

PAUL
Put ‘em over there.

Sam, tired and pained, takes a few steps, then dramatically drops the basket, collapses to the ground, and acts like he is barely alive.

SAM
Water is heavy.

PAUL
(ignores Sam)
So, we grab as many as we can and then run around nailing each other.

Sam puts on a show struggling to sit up.

SAM
Run? I don't know if I'm gonna make it.

PAUL
Come on.
(beat)
Then when you need more, you run... Or crawl or whatever to get some more.

SAM
We could just go to the pool and be submerged *in* water.

PAUL
Ready, set... Go!

Paul rushes over, grabs several balloons as Sam springs into action. Sam grabs a few, then backs away from Paul.

Paul charges and throws a balloon. It bounces off Sam's head and doesn't break. Sam shakes his head, picks it up and throws it at Paul as he flies past. The balloon breaks at Paul's feet.

Sam runs from Paul who is now in pursuit. He tosses another balloon, it explodes on Sam's back.

James saunters into the back yard, shirt off, beer in hand, and lit cigarette dangling from his mouth. He settles into a lawn chair.

JAMES
Hey! You guys better steer clear of me.

Sam stops as Paul sprints past, smashes another balloon on Sam's back.

Sam clutches a balloon, points at James, and smiles.

Paul stops running and watches.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Boy, don't mess with me.

Sam smiles even wider.

JAMES (CONT'D)
This is not a game. I am bigger than you, stronger than you, and faster than you.

Sam runs at James and nails him in the chest. Water explodes everywhere as Sam LAUGHS and scurries away.

PAUL
Oh, no. Run, fool!

James jumps out of the chair and runs after Sam as Paul LAUGHS hysterically.

JAMES
You messed with the wrong dude, hombre.

James catches Sam, gently knocks him to the ground and stands over him. Sam SNORT-LAUGHS.

JAMES (CONT'D)
This will hurt, but won't leave a mark.

James poses like a Kung Fu warrior. He opens his eyes wide, inhales, and stares down at Sam.

He freezes, then dramatically thrusts his hand into Sam's belly, grabs some fat, pulls and squeezes.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Ahhhhhhhhhh!

PAUL
You messed up now.

Paul LAUGHS as Sam GIGGLES, SQUEALS through the pain.

SAM
(almost out of breath)
Heeelp!

Paul hesitates, then rushes over, arm cocked with a balloon at the ready. James whips his head around, eyes wide.

Paul releases the balloon with glee as Sam LAUGHS and rolls away from James. It explodes on James' shoulder.

James pulls a now wet cigarette from his mouth.

JAMES
Oh, it’s go time!

He sprints to the bucket of balloons. Sam and Paul scatter with frenzied excitement, almost knocking each other down.

EXT. SAM'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Carol sweats as she flips burgers on the grill. Sam attempts foul shots. One shot CLANGS off the rim, he then makes a couple.

CAROL
Sam, did you finish your homework?

SAM
Yes, ma’am.

Carol, bewildered, snaps her head around and looks at Sam.

CAROL
What?

SAM
Ummm... yes, ma’am.

CAROL
Are you on drugs?

SAM
I don’t think so.

CAROL
Is that how Paul speaks to his parents?

SAM
Not really.

CAROL
You’ve been spending a lot... a lot of time over there and don’t get me wrong, I’m glad you have somewhere to go so you don’t have to deal with me and your brother.

Sam nods, puts the ball down, then does some awkward karate moves.

SAM
(to himself)
Hey Tyler, suck on *this*. Chop, choppity, chop.

Carol takes this in, gently shakes her head. Flips a burger.

CAROL
But, if you spend any more time over there, I don't know if I will be able to claim you as a dependent.

Sam pauses.

SAM
A what?

CAROL
I'm going to have a chat with Mariana to make sure you haven't overextended your welcome.

Sam picks up the basketball, spins it on his finger.

SAM
Everything's fine. I promise.

The ball makes two full rotations before falling to the ground and bouncing down the driveway with Sam smiling triumphantly in pursuit.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - DAVE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Dave sits in his dimly lit room hunched over a cluttered desk, sketching on a pad, then looks back at an open comic next to the pad.

CU on the sketch pad reveals numerous, nearly perfect sketches of the comic book characters. Below these are several sketches utilizing some of the character traits, where Dave has morphed them into something new.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - DAVE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Carol holds a laundry basket by her side, as she steels herself outside of Dave's room.

She KNOCKS, listens intently, then opens the door with authority. She steps in, cringes, COUGHS, surveys the room.

CAROL
I raised a pig.

Carol spies rumpled clothes strewn about. She grabs an article of clothing, stuffs it in the basket.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Disgusting.

Grabs another, holds it gingerly, exhales.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Foul.

Grabs another.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Prelude to a vomit.

She examines the area around Dave's desk, then locks in on the sketch pad.

She side winds across the cluttered floor, opens the sketch pad, flips through.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Hmmph. I'll be...

She grows wide-eyed with amazement as she flips some more.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Talented little shit.

She stops on a page. Her mouth opens, a scowl forms.

CU of the sketch pad reveals a sketch of a comic book cover. There is a muscular, handsome man patting the head of a boy who looks remarkably like Dave. The title is "My Dad is a Superhero".

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DEN

Sam and Paul watch a poorly dubbed Kung-Fu movie. The main character spits toothpicks at an attacker, pinning his eyes shut. The attacker crumbles to the floor in agony.

On screen, the main character looks around the room filled with scattered, broken furniture and twelve attackers strewn about unconscious.

MARTIAL ARTIST
(breaks the fourth wall)
Shaolin warriors fight only in self-defense.

The movie goes to commercial.

SAM
He just self-defensed the shit outta like a dozen dudes.

Paul CRACKS UP.

PAUL
Don’t mess with Shaolin.

SAM
Would you please teach me some karate? I’m drowning in assholes.

PAUL
Bet that smells awful.

SAM
My brother sucks and... school sucks. That asshole Tyler is always messin’ with me.

PAUL
Well, forget about that self-defense crap. Sometimes you have to go on the offensive to throw them off balance; surprise ‘em.

SAM
Yeah, but I don’t have a clue--

PAUL
Just get them before they get you.

SAM
Is there a stone I need to grab from your hand?

PAUL
No, grasshopper, but you can fetch me a Pepsi.

QUICK SHOTS

Sam fetches two 16oz glass bottles of Pepsi from the fridge.

Sam fumbles with a bottle opener, pops open the sodas as Paul supervises from the kitchen table.

Sam shows one bottle to Paul as if it’s a bottle of wine. Paul smells the cap in Sam’s hand, nods.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Paul and Sam sit at a table eating chips and guzzling Pepsi.

SAM
I think Coke's better. This stuff is too sweet.

Paul chugs some Pepsi, BELCHES and speaks at the same time.

PAUL
Wroooong!

Sam crinkles his face, chugs then speak-BELCHES as Paul takes another gulp.

SAM
Gargle baaaaaaaaaalls!

Paul CHOKE-LAUGHS as Pepsi shoots out his nose, spewing all over the table with some splashing on Sam's arm. Grossed out, Sam quickly jerks his arm back.

SAM (CONT'D)
Jesus, man. You're gross.

Paul LAUGHS, barely able to breathe, then feels his nose.

PAUL
Ah, shit! That burns!

Mariana enters the room, looks disgusted. Paul blows his nose without a tissue.

MARIANA
Paul! What is -- he's right, you are gross. Clean... this... up.

PAUL
Yeah, will do. Hey, can Sam spend the night?

MARIANA
We'll have to check with his mother.

SAM
Ummm, she might not let me.

MARIANA
(winks at Sam)
I'll take care of it.

James strides in, stops, eyeballs the table. Paul immediately hops up, grabs a paper towel and begins cleaning.

Puppy trots in, searches the floor for droplets of soda.

JAMES
What in the giggle snortin' hell is goin' on in here?

James squints, points at his eyes, then at Sam.

Sam squints back and shakes his head. James nods.

James turns, grabs a couple beers from the fridge.

MARIANA
Sam is going to spend the night.

JAMES
Boy, when are you gonna start payin' rent?

SAM
I don't have any money. Child labor laws?

JAMES
You are smarter than you look, hombre. How are you doin' in school?

SAM
Mostly A's... a C minus in gym.

PAUL
A C minus?! What are you doing?

SAM
Mostly tripping and spraining things.

JAMES
(to Sam, then points at Paul)
Hmmm, we need to work on you a bit, but congrats on the good grades. Paul you might wanna follow his example.

Sam swells with pride.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(points a beer at Mariana)
Mariana, you wanna to join me?

MARIANA
My stomach is a bit upset. Maybe later, but we can sit outside for a bit.

JAMES
Two for me, none for you. Got it.
(to Sam)
Stay cool, hombre.

James, Mariana, and Puppy head out to the back yard.

PAUL
Cool. We can watch Cinemax tonight.

SAM
What's-a-max?

PAUL
It's got the good stuff. You'll see.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul's room is illuminated by a TV atop a dresser, a couple feet from the foot of a queen-sized bed. Paul and Sam lay on their stomachs, elbows propping them up with their heads as close to the TV a possible.

Paul glances at a clock on the dresser, then the closed bedroom door. He CLICKS a remote, changes the channel.

SAM
Aw, come on, the show was almost over.

The Cinemax logo covers the screen with "Friday After Dark" below it, then dissolves into "Next on Cinemax - Lady Chatterley's Lover."

PAUL
Thank me later.

Sam eyes the TV with confused curiosity.

SAM
What the hell is this?

PAUL
Just shut up and watch.

The movie starts. Both boys lock in on the screen. They don't notice the bedroom doorknob twisting. Mariana busts in.

MARIANA
Ah, ha!

Sam, startled, YELPS. Paul tries to change the channel, but the remote shoots out of his hand, hits the dresser, then the floor.

Mariana slowly backs out of the room, finger wagging. Puppy slips past her and jumps on the bed. Sam buries his head in shame. Paul catches his breath.

SAM
(still face down)
Jesus Christ. She’s freakin’ Shaolin.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - HOURS LATER

The boys are asleep. Puppy is spread out, taking up more than his fair share of the bed. Sam’s body clings to the edge of the bed. Puppy repositions, pushes against Sam’s body. Sam’s tired body slowly slides off the bed -- Hits the floor.

SAM
(groggy)
Damnit.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sam sits at the kitchen table with Paul. They hover over a math book with some scratch paper to the side almost entirely filled with solved math equations.

SAM
Yeah, and if you’re dividing by two thirds, you flip it and then multiply across.

Paul scribbles on the scratch paper.

PAUL
Huh, flip it...done.

SAM
Yep, and if you are adding two fractions and the denominator--

PAUL
I don’t wanna hear about no denominator.

SAM
Ok...the bottom of the fraction...just add the tops and if the bottoms are the same just keep the bottom.

PAUL
Ya know, they should just call it tops and bottoms.

James wanders into the kitchen, heads toward the fridge, then stops in his tracks. Confused, he looks the boys up and down, then scans the room for anything suspicious.

JAMES
What are you two doing?

SAM
Doing math, sir.

JAMES
(squints)
What in the--

James yells over his shoulder.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Mariana, there's somethin' wrong with the boys!

The boys glance at each other. Sam shrugs.

MARIANA (O.C.)
What? What's wrong?

Mariana pops into the kitchen. Scopes out the situation.

MARIANA (CONT'D)
What's going on? Are you boys OK?

JAMES
(sighs)
I don't know how to break this to you,... but they're doing math.

MARIANA
What?

James rubs his forehead, then puts his hands in a praying position. Acts very serious.

JAMES
They're doing math.

Mariana smacks James' arm.

MARIANA
You are so stupid. Don't scare me like that.

JAMES
(feigns being stunned)
Math Mariana. Math.

The boys LAUGH.

MARIANA
I'm walking away now.

As Mariana turns to leave, James gives her a quick, playful smack on her behind, then completes his journey to the fridge and grabs a beer.

JAMES
Wonder whose idea this was.
(beat)
Carry on, hermanos.

James winks at Sam, then exits.

EXT. PAUL'S BACKYARD - DAY - MONTHS LATER

Paul draws a target on a medium-sized, cardboard box about fifteen yards from where Sam clutches a bow and arrow.

PAUL
That Tyler clown still messin' with ya?

SAM
He was out sick most of the week.

PAUL
Hope he had a gnarly case of explosive diarrhea and shit himself a few times.

Sam smiles, then awkwardly tries to get the nock end of the arrow to fit securely on the bow string while simultaneously getting the arrow shaft to rest on the arrow rest. It's a losing battle.

SAM
Fucking crud balls!

Paul trots over to Sam, tries to assist.

PAUL
You can go first.
(beat)
Hold on. Stop fighting it.

Paul gets the arrow to fit securely on the bow.

PAUL (CONT'D)
There ya go.

SAM
OK, but I don't think I'm going to be good at this.

PAUL
Maybe you'll be a natural.

Paul moves safely out of the way as Sam attempts to pull the string back. Sam miscalculates and the arrow travels about a foot.

SAM
Crap! I'm a natural at not being a natural.

PAUL
Just slow down when you pull it back.

Sam reloads, slowly pulls the string as a gust of wind blows the box across the yard. Sam keeps the box in his sights, ready to fire. The box stops in front of the house.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You might wanna --

Sam releases the arrow as another gust of wind hits. The arrow heads towards its intended target, but the wind causes it to sail over and -- it HITS the house right below a window, piercing the tin siding and sticks.

James opens the curtains, looks down. He spots the arrow. His eyes widen as he closes the curtain.

Sam freezes.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Oh, shit.

SAM
Oh, shit, oh, shit... What do I do?

PAUL
Convince your Mom to move.

James rounds the corner of the house, walks towards the boys, jaw clenched.

SAM
I ummm --

JAMES
Why are you trying to destroy my house?

Paul LAUGHS. James looks at him with daggers in his eyes. Paul shuts up.

SAM
I don't --

JAMES
Do you know how to mow?

SAM
Umm, no, not really.

JAMES
Good, this will be a learning experience for you. Tomorrow you mow the back yard.

SAM
Yes, sir.

JAMES
Today's fun is done. Head on home.
(beat)
(to Paul)
What have I told you about being careful!

PAUL
But --

JAMES
Get inside.

James walks to the house, pulls the arrow out, looks back at Sam. Sam gives a half-hearted wave goodbye, then starts his journey home.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

The classroom is empty. The bell RINGS. Tyler bursts in with a hand full of notes. He quickly places them on select desks then scurries to his own, and sits as the rest of the class enters with their TEACHER, 40s, right behind them.

The students, including Sam, have a seat. The boys settle in as the girls all open their notes and read...

CU of note: “I have a small weiner. Love, Sam”

Some of the girls GIGGLE, whisper to each other, as the teacher thumbs through the day’s lesson plan.

TEACHER
(while looking down at the lesson plan)
Alright, settle down.

Tyler beams triumphantly as a few of the girls gawk and LAUGH at a confused Sam. Monica reads her note, balls it up and throws it at Tyler’s head. It bounces off his face, wiping away his grin.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sam, out of breath, places the last bag of groceries on a countertop with the other bags.

SAM
OK, I’m gonna go to Paul’s.

Carol fills a bin in the fridge with produce.

CAROL
No, you can give them a break and have dinner here tonight.

SAM
But --

Carol stands upright, stares at Sam.

CAROL
(firmly)
But, nothing. Here, tonight.

SAM
Crud.

Deflated, Sam opens a drawer, fishes out some silverware, places it on the table as Dave strides past.

CAROL
Dave... Dave!

Aggravated, Dave stops.

DAVE
What? Jesus.

CAROL
I was picking your clothes off the floor of your room the other day and ummm...saw some of the drawings you are working on--

DAVE
Stop going through my stuff.

CAROL
And--they're really good. I mean it.

DAVE
(sheepishly)
Whatever.

CAROL
There was one that kinda looked like you and your--

Dave walks towards his room.

DAVE
Not interested.

EXT. PAUL'S BACKYARD - DAY

James tosses a football to Sam as he runs a hook pattern.

The ball bounces off his hands.

SAM
Sun got in my eyes.

JAMES
Sun in your eyes, earth spinnin' too quickly... you have a bunch of excuses. Let's do it again.

PAUL
Come on, Dad. Let me have a turn.

JAMES
In a sec, he's gonna get this one.

Sam flips the ball back to James and runs another hook pattern.

PAUL
He’s not gonna catch it.

James throws a strike into Sam’s guts. The ball knocks Sam down, but he holds on to it.

JAMES
There it is.

Sam smiles. James trots over and pats Sam on the head, helps him up.

JAMES (CONT’D)
Nice.
(to Paul)
Want your buddy Lynn Swan over here to join us for a little dinner and movie action?

Paul nonchalantly shrugs his shoulders.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DEN - DAY

The giant TV plays John Ford’s “The Quiet Man” as James watches intently.

Paul and Sam shuffle in, plop down on the love seat and wince when John Wayne and Maureen O’Hara kiss. The screen fades to black and transitions to a commercial.

JAMES
The Duke. Classic.

SAM
How old’s that guy? Was that his daughter?

JAMES
What? No. That’s the man right there. How ‘bout you? How’s you’re old lady?

SAM
My Mom?

JAMES
No, your main squeeze, your lady, your girlfriend...

SAM
Oh, I don’t have one.

JAMES
So you have *more* than one. That's a dangerous game, young blood.

SAM
No, I mean I have none.

JAMES
Humph, that doesn't add up.

PAUL
I think it adds up perfectly.

JAMES
(to Paul)
Ohhh, and you?

PAUL
Umm, sure, I've got a bunch.

JAMES
Is that right? How come your mother and I have never met them?

PAUL
They're not the meetin' type.

SAM
(giggles)
You're stupid.

JAMES
Heck, they must not be the callin' type either because the only calls you get are from Sam --

PAUL
Sam's got a crush on this chick at his school.

SAM
No, no, no, I'm definitely not--

JAMES
Ya got a good heart, you're smart, you ain't ugly...you'll be fine. Just give the rest of the world a little longer to figure that out.

Paul scowls with jealousy while Sam and James smile. Mariana enters. Looks them up and down.

MARIANA
Jimmy leave the boys alone and come help me in the kitchen.

James slowly rises.

JAMES
Interrogate ya later, hombre.

MARIANA
You will not.

Mariana pretends to pull James out of the room by his ear. He plays along but stays locked in on Sam, eyes wide. He fake winces, points at a smiling Sam as he backs out of the room.

Sam tries to be serious and points back. Paul rolls his eyes.

As soon as they are out of sight...

PAUL
You know he’s not your dad, right?

Paul hops up, exits the room leaving Sam all alone. Sam’s smile fades as melancholy spreads across his face. He stands, exhales, then slowly follows.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER THAT EVENING

Sam and Paul stare out a kitchen window with the curtains pushed to one side, watching Paul’s parents’ car pull out of the driveway.

As soon as they are out of sight, Paul jumps into action, opens a cabinet and pulls out a bottle of red wine that has previously been opened.

SAM
Hey, is your Mom alright?

Paul places the bottle on the kitchen table.

PAUL
Sure. Why?

SAM
She just seems like more tired.

PAUL
Nah, she’s good.

SAM
Ummm, OK.

Paul struggles with the cork, then pops it out of the bottle.

PAUL
They say this is the good stuff.
Grab a couple glasses.

Sam fetches two Disney themed glasses from a cabinet. Paul shows Sam the label, raises his eyebrows, then pours.

They nod to each other, raise their glasses, and take big GULPS at the same time. Both their faces look pained as they swallow.

SAM
What the hell? Good stuff, my ass.
Is this spoiled or somethin'?

PAUL
Maybe you have to get used to it.
Let's give it another try.

They each take a sip and look equally disgusted.

Sam, acting dramatically, drops to his knees, raises his arms, looks up at the ceiling.

SAM
Why God?! Whhhhhhhhhhhhhhy?!

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Paul and Sam sit at the table chugging Pepsis.

SAM
Oh, thank God. I was afraid my
sense of taste was destroyed.

PAUL
Fuck that stuff. Now, this is where
it's at.

They chug down the last of it, then try to out BELCH each other.

Paul's face lights up with a sudden realization.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Oh, shit, I gotta show you
something.

Paul races to his parents' bedroom. Sam looks around then trots to the...

Bedroom where Paul has opened a side-table drawer. He pulls out a hand full of condoms.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You know what these are?

SAM
Ummm, not really. Whatever it is they sure have a lot of them.

PAUL
Condoms, dummy.

Sam, embarrassed, quickly changes the subject.

SAM
I'm pretty sure my mom would kill me if we were going through her stuff.

PAUL
Stop worrying. They won't find out.

Paul shoves the condoms back in the drawer.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I know they hide my Christmas gifts in their bedroom.

SAM
Your parents got you condoms for Christmas?

PAUL
Nooo, look, I was searching around and...

Paul opens a cabinet under the drawer. A box rests on a stack of magazines. He pulls the box out and cautiously places it on the floor, then proudly crouches down, looks up at Sam.

SAM
Lemme guess, coupons for more condoms?

PAUL
No, man, check this out.

Paul gently opens the box and motions for Sam to sit on the floor. Sam does, peeks into the box, jerks his head up suddenly and looks at Paul.

SAM
What the fuck?

CU of the box reveals a gun with a metal canister next to it.

PAUL
Yeah, that's right. The Crossman thirteen-seventy-seven.

SAM
(beat)
I-I-I don't know. We should--

PAUL
It's just a pellet gun. Chill!

SAM
Yeah, I knew...I knew that.

Paul shakes his head.

PAUL
(excitedly)
My dad said he'd finally show me how to use it on my birthday.

SAM
Can I hold it?

Paul puts the box lid back on.

PAUL
Hell no, he's so serious about this thing, I'm afraid he'll dust for prints.
(beat)
But wait, there's more.

Paul reaches inside the cabinet and pulls out a Hustler magazine. He shows it to Sam like it's the Holy Grail.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You gotta see this.

Paul flips through the pages and proudly displays various nude pictures for Sam. Sam, mouth slightly agape, tries to process the images.

SAM
Hmmm, bazooms.

PAUL
Bazooms? Are you trying to ruin this?

QUICK SHOTS - In Sam's mind.

Mariana wags her finger back and forth.

James stares wide-eyed.

JAMES
No funny business. I see all.

BACK TO SCENE

Sam hops up, nervously paces around the room.

SAM
We don't know when your folks are coming back. What if your father dusts that for prints?

PAUL
Come on wussy, check this out.

Sam glances over at the picture of a fully naked woman.

SAM
(nervously)
OK, well that's something.

Paul resumes flipping through the pages.

PAUL
How 'bout this, you be the lookout and, if they come back, just yell from the kitchen.

SAM
OK.

Sam sprints back to the kitchen...

Where he positions himself in front of the window over the sink. He shoves the curtains to one side, peers out, eyes shifting back and forth.

The driveway is empty. He moves the curtains back, then exhales.

SAM (CONT'D)
You almost done?!

PAUL (O.S.)
What?!

The sound of a car pulling into the driveway freezes Sam.

SAM
Damnit!

Sam pushes the curtains back, spots Paul's parents pulling up.

He freaks out and runs towards the bedroom.

SAM (CONT'D)
Abort, abort!

PAUL (O.S.)
Shit. They weren't gone long.

Sam dashes back to the kitchen. As he hastily pushes the curtains back into place, he accidentally knocks a beautiful vase off the window sill. It tumbles, SHATTERS in the sink.

SAM
(horrified)
Oh, shit.

Paul hurries into the kitchen.

PAUL
What the heck was that?

SAM
Shit, shit, shit. The vase broke.

The side door opens and Paul's parents enter. Sam and Paul collect themselves and try to act *normal*. Mariana looks a tad pale.

James senses something is off. He scowls.

JAMES
What's going on?

After a protracted pause, James scans the room, spots the shattered vase in the sink, steps to the boys.

JAMES (CONT'D)
So?

SAM
So, ummm--

Mariana spots the shattered vase.

MARIANA
Oh, no. My mother gave us that for our wedding.

Sam's heart drops even further, hangs his head.

PAUL
Yeah, he opened the curtains--it was an accident.

JAMES
Why... would you... be looking... out... the window?

Sam steals a quick glance at Paul.

SAM
Well, we thought we heard something, so I... I just went to look.

JAMES
Is that right?

PAUL
Yes, sir.

MARIANA
This is a bit fishy.

Mariana COUGHS.

JAMES
(to Mariana)
Why don't you go lay down.

Mariana makes her way to the bedroom.

SAM
Is Ms. Ferguson OK?

JAMES
Yeah...she's fine. Just a little car sick.

SAM
I'm really sorry about the vase.

JAMES
Ever washed a car before?

SAM
Umm, no, not really.

JAMES
Good, this will be another learning experience for you.

Paul CHUCKLES. James shoots a cold look at Paul.

JAMES (CONT'D)
Don't worry, you're gonna work right along side him.
(beat)
Sam, head on home.
(to Paul)
And what have I told you about being careful?!

PAUL
But --

JAMES
Just go to your room.

Sam looks at Paul who appears frightened.

SAM
(pleads)
It really was all my fault.

JAMES
Doesn't matter. Paul is responsible for his friends.
(beat)
Sam, go home.

SAM
But --

JAMES
(sternly)
Go home.

SAM
Yes, sir.

Sam walks past James to the front door.

JAMES
And Sam... we'll see you for dinner tomorrow.

Sam smiles to himself as he exits.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Early morning sun streams through a kitchen window. The phone on the kitchen wall RINGS. It RINGS again...by the third RING -- a sleepy-eyed, cranky Sam throws his bedroom door open.

SAM
(mumbles to himself)
Don’t worry. I’ll get it.

Sam shuffles over to the phone, picks up the receiver and presses it to his sleepy head.

SAM (CONT’D)
Hello.

MARIANA (V.O.)
(distraught)
Jimmy’s dead.

Mariana hangs up. Sam stands in total shock. As what he heard sinks in--he bolts to and out the front door.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAWN

Sam sprints down the street moving faster than he ever has, his bare feet SMACKING the road.

He spots Paul’s house. A couple of cars are parked out front.

Sam runs across the yard to the front door. The door is ajar. He enters without knocking.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - MULTIPLE ROOMS - DAY

Sam pops his head into Paul’s parents’ bedroom. Empty.

Sam glances into the kitchen. Empty. Dining room. Empty.

VOICES can be heard in the next room. Sam, out of breath, sweating, moves to the living room where Mariana is consoled by a couple NEIGHBORS, Puppy at her feet. She sees Sam, points in the direction of Paul's room.

Sam collects himself, rounds the corner and sees Paul’s bedroom door partially open. Sam quietly approaches and gives a gentle KNOCK. No reply. He pushes the door open, revealing Paul sitting listless on the edge of his bed.

SAM (V.O.)
I don’t understand what happened.

CAROL (V.O.)
What did Paul tell you?

SAM (V.O.)
He didn’t say much.

Sam cautiously approaches the bed, stands before Paul who looks right through him. Sam swallows, goes to speak, but thinks better of it.

CAROL (V.O.)
Well, James was in a long line of men in his family with heart... problems. His doctor advised him to take better care of himself; stop drinking, smoking, cut down on stress... It's not something they worried Paul with.

SAM (V.O.)
I don't... I mean, I'm not sure that he stopped doing those things.

CAROL (V.O.)
No, he didn't. There was another problem...

Sam settles in next to Paul, both stare at the wall.

FLASHBACK INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - PARENTS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mariana, distraught, is on her knees next to an unconscious James on the bedroom floor.

CAROL (V.O.)
(her voice cracks)
And, this is hard, and something they struggled with. They were trying to think of a way to tell Paul...

Mariana SOBS, pounds James' chest not knowing CPR.

SAM (V.O.)
Mom?

CAROL (V.O.)
You see...Mariana was recently diagnosed with cancer. She has three to six months--

SAM (V.O.)
What?

MARIANA
No, no, Jimmy. Wake up! Paul! Paul!

Paul rushes in, stops in his tracks, stunned.

BACK TO SCENE

Sam puts his arm around Paul.

CAROL (V.O.)
I think the stress of that and everything else...(sighs)

SMASH TO BLACK

FADE IN:

MONTAGE

A)James' wake is well attended. A row of FRIENDS and FAMILY line up waiting to pay their respects to Mariana, who sits with Paul and Sam at the end of the room.

Carol gestures, gets Mariana's attention. Pantomimes to see if she wants Sam sitting with them. Mariana smiles, gives Sam a side hug.

B)Sam sits next to Paul and Mariana at James' funeral mass. Carol is a couple rows behind. A PRIEST stands next to a picture of James on a easel. The Priest RECITES from a Bible on the lectern.

THE CONGREGATION on Sam's row, stand, go to the front of the church and receive the Eucharist wafer and wine. Sam anxiously watches. Paul nudges Sam to go next. Sam approaches the Priest who looks Sam up and down, trying to place him.

PRIEST
Haven't seen you before. Are you Catholic?

SAM
No, not really.

The Priest motions for an embarrassed Sam to keep walking.

SAM (CONT'D)
Is it Ok if I have one of those crackers?

The Priest shakes his head. Sam returns to his seat, defeated.

C)FAMILY and FRIENDS are gathered at a fresh gravesite wearing funeral attire.

TAPS plays.

There is a gun salute. Each SHOT causes Sam to flinch.

A SOLDIER hands a tearful Mariana a folded flag.

Sam and Paul walk away from the gravesite. Carol and Mariana hug.

SAM (CONT'D)
I didn't know your dad was in the military.

PAUL
He didn't talk about it much...but, Yeah, Air Force. He was stationed in Spain. That's how he met my mom.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sam expressionless, slumps at the kitchen table, still wearing his funeral attire. He tugs at his tie, loosens it. Carol peers into the fridge, then lifts her head up.

CAROL
You want something?

Sam shakes his head.

Dave passes through from the back of the house. Tosses a comment as he passes by.

DAVE
Sorry your fake dad died.

Carol, stunned, eyes wide, jaw clenched, shuts the fridge. She glances at Sam who is red-faced with anger. Sam opens his mouth, then tears up, says nothing.

CAROL
That's it! You stay here.

She moves swiftly in pursuit of Dave and catches up as he enters his bedroom...

He attempts to close the door in her face. She holds the door open with her foot, then pushes it open.

DAVE
What? I meant it. I am sorry he gets to feel what I felt when Dad left, except this time it wasn't your fault.

CAROL
Listen you little shit.
(throws her arms up)
(MORE)

CAROL (CONT'D)
He left because he didn't want any of this.

DAVE
Bullshit.

CAROL
No, if anything, I'm guilty of pushing him to stay which was a mistake. We had you...very young. I wanted you. I did! He...wasn't ready. And then we had Sam... He tried. He really did--

DAVE
Maybe, I should leave!

CAROL
Fine, be my guest. Let me go grab a couple of trash bags, so you'll have some matching luggage.

DAVE
I don't believe you. My dad wouldn't leave me. Maybe you and Sam--

CAROL
He left *all* of us! I know you need to blame someone, so you won't blame yourself, and you shouldn't. I've been OK with that. I've been your punching bag because I'm the one that's here...and I've let that happen. But I can't anymore. It's just not good for any of us. You want to leave...but if you stay, I'll keep on being here for you. I've wanted you since the moment I knew I was pregnant. But, I'm not taking this shit anymore.

After having the wind knocked out of his obnoxious sails, Dave stands silently deflated.

Carol closes the bedroom door, walks to Sam's bedroom...

Sam's door is closed. She lightly KNOCKS.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Sam?...Sam, may I come in?

SAM (O.C.)
(weakly)
OK.

Carol opens the door, walks in, closes the door behind her. Sam lays on his bed, his face streaked with dry tears. Carol eases down onto the bed, sits next to Sam.

CAROL
Sam, I'm sorry. He didn't mean it. Your brother can be a complete asshole, but... he's just hurting. He was really close with your father and always thought they had a special bond...he might have been a bit jealous...

She brushes Sam's hair neatly into place with her hand, admires her work, smiles. Sam reaches up and messes up his hair. Carol grins, resumes fixing Sam's hair. Sam smiles.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DEN - DAY

MTV plays on the giant TV. VJ Mark Goodman is on screen.

Paul, oblivious to the world around him, mournfully looks at a picture of his parents on a wall. Sam notices, wishes he could distract Paul.

MARK GOODMAN
Next up, we have KISS with Lick It Up. This debuted on MTV last fall and is the first video where the boys stripped off their iconic make-up. Check it out.

The video starts. Sam's eyes dart back and forth between the video and Paul. He tries to entice Paul.

SAM
Oh man, you gotta watch this.

Paul breaks free from his reminiscing, pivots to the TV.

PAUL
What?

SAM
It's Kiss without make-up.

PAUL
I thought the make-up was the only cool part.

The video initially shows the band from the waist down, walking. One band member has something tied around his leg and crotch.

SAM
Oh shit, he's got his balls strapped to his leg. Sack strap.

Paul manages his first smile of the day.

PAUL
Just think how good the Beatles would've been if they had done that.

Sam smiles, doesn't protest the dig at his favorite band.

The video pans up to reveal the band with no make-up.

SAM
What the fuck?! Ahhhhh. No, no, no.

The camera pushes in tight on Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley.

Sam winces in horror.

SAM (CONT'D)
Oh no, that's worse. Pull back!

PAUL
Ugh.

SAM
Put the make-up back... on!

Paul soon loses interest, resumes examining photos of his parents on the surrounding walls. Sam notices, frowns, grabs the remote and turns the volume down.

SAM (CONT'D)
Hey, ummm, maybe we should go outside...do something.

PAUL
Like what?

SAM
I don't know, we could ride our bikes around. Maybe swing by the pool.
(beat)
Look, I'll run home, change, grab my bike, and meet ya back here.

PAUL
(solemnly)
Sure, OK.

Sam jumps up, dashes out of the den.

SAM (O.C.)
Cool.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

Sam, towel around his neck, pulls into the driveway riding a Schwinn that has seen better days. Paul straddles a mini ten-speed, uncomfortably wearing a protective helmet.

Sam stops, straddles his bike, squints in confusion, focuses on the helmet.

SAM
Ummm, what's with the helmet?

PAUL
My Mom's been all about safety and shit...I hate it.

SAM
We're just going--

PAUL
I know.

The boys mount their bikes and peddle down the road.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - DAVE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Dave sits at his desk, flips through a sketch pad filled with his comic book art. He stops, closely examines...

CU of a page with the super hero dad consoling the boy that looks like Dave. The hero's dialogue balloon reads: "I'm sorry son, but I have to leave so I can keep the world safe." The son's balloon reads: "I know dad. I understand."

Dave blankly stares at the page, then carefully tears it out of the sketch pad along with several other pages.

He carefully slides the pages, along with a letter, into a folder, than a large, manila mailer. He seals it, holds it gently, exhales.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Carol relaxes in the living room reading a book and listening to classical music. Dave marches in clutching the manila mailer.

DAVE
Stamps.

Carol doesn't look up from her book.

CAROL
Is that a question or are you just going around saying random nouns out loud?

Dave stomps out. Carol continues to read.

CAROL (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Good talk. Thanks for dropping by.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - DAY

The boys peddle through the neighborhood side-by-side with the COMMUNITY POOL a few hundred yards in the distance.

Paul tries to shove his fingers under the helmet in an effort to scratch an itch.

PAUL
Damnit, this thing's hot.

SAM
Let me just warn you, that jerk Tyler might be there.

PAUL
So what?

SAM
(smiles to himself)
Yeah, well...I'm just glad you're coming with me.

Paul is uncomfortable with this type of bonding.

PAUL
Stop being a pussy.

SAM
Me? You're the one wearing a helmet.

PAUL
(ignores Sam's retort)
Race ya the rest of the way.

SAM
Hell no, you've got ten speeds.
I've got maybe like a half a speed.

Paul increases his peddling, slowly leaves Sam behind.

PAUL
Come on.

Sam struggles to keep up, breathes heavily.

SAM
Nah man, you come on!

Paul stops, grins, waits for Sam. They peddle off together.

INT. COMMUNITY POOL - DAY

The pool is hopping with fun in the sun energy. People of all ages are in or around the pool lounging, goofing off.

Sam and Paul are off to themselves sunbathing with their towels over their heads blocking the hot sun.

SAM
(muffled under his towel)
See, this is cool right?

PAUL
(muffled)
What?

SAM
(muffled)
I said --

PAUL
(chuckles)
Yeah, it's alright.

A KID from the other side of the pool breaks off from a GROUP OF KIDS including Tyler and traipses over to Sam and Paul.

KID
Hey, you guys wanna play shark?

The boys remove their towels.

SAM
Who’s playing?

The Kid points over to the group of Kids on the other side of the pool. Sam notices Tyler, frowns.

SAM (CONT’D)
I don’t know man.

PAUL
Yeah, he’ll be over in a sec.

The Kid trots around the pool. A LIFEGUARD blows his WHISTLE.

LIFEGUARD
No running!

The Kid turns his trot into speed-walking.

KID
Ok.

LIFEGUARD
Slow down!

KID
Geez, ya freakin’ tyrant.

The Kid mockingly walks in slow-motion, turns his head slowly to stare at the Lifeguard. As soon as the Lifeguard averts his gaze to survey the rest of the pool, the Kid flips him off and resumes speed-walking.

Sam turns to Paul.

SAM
Maybe we should just go home.

Paul shakes his head.

PAUL
Nah.

He shoos Sam along.

As Sam wanders towards the group of Kids, Tyler notices Sam approaching. He stands and yells at the Kids.

TYLER
Last one across is it!

Sam knows there is no way for him to get there in time.

SAM
(to himself)
Still an asshole.

The kids scramble to their feet, rush over to the side of the pool, dive in and swim as fast as they can to the other side.

Sam looks back at Paul, points at the kids racing across. Paul motions him on. Sam resumes walking, head down, MUMBLING to himself.

The kids all crawl out of the pool, before Sam reaches the other side.

TYLER
(points at Sam)
Shammo is it.

Sam shakes his head, dives gracefully into the pool, glides like a fish to the center of the pool.

Paul looks on, surprised, as he quickly ponders every uncoordinated thing he's witnessed Sam do.

PAUL
Huh.

The kids line up at the edge of the pool while Sam effortlessly treads water, then slowly advances.

MONTAGE

A)Three kids dive in. Sam sizes them up, slices through the water and tags two of them before they make it to the other side. Paul stares wide-eyed.

B)A small kid dives in, Sam head fakes like he's going to pursue the kid causing a larger more athletic kid to take the bait and dive in.

Sam speeds to the bigger kid, tags him, then immediately turns, catches up to the other kid and tags him right before they reach the other side of the pool.

Paul watches with stunned admiration. He stands.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Damn.
(beat)
Yeah, Sam!

C)Sam strategically advances. Tyler gets behind one of two kids left and shoves him into the pool, almost hitting Sam. Tyler dives in. The race is on.

Tyler is quick, but not fast enough for a determined Sam. Sam closes in, grabs Tyler’s leg, jerks him under water right before Tyler’s hand touches the wall.

Tyler's head breaks the surface. He does not take well to the embarrassment. He frowns and SLAPS the water in frustration.

PAUL (CONT’D)
(laughs, claps)
Ha, ha, ya dick!

KID
Shammo whipped your ass, Tyler!

LIFEGUARD
(blows his whistle)
Language.

The Lifeguard resumes scanning the pool for trouble. The Kid deepens his voice, shakes a fist at the lifeguard stand.

KID
Why, I oughtta.

BACK TO SCENE

Sam walks over to a grinning Paul. Sam lays down, resumes sunbathing as if nothing has happened.

PAUL
What in the fuck, man?

SAM
What?

PAUL
Shut up. You know what.

Paul slaps Sam on the shoulder. Sam breaks out in a big grin.

PAUL (CONT’D)
Fuck soccer, fuck basketball, you should join the swim team.

SAM
Tyler’s on--

PAUL
And fuck that guy. You just wasted him. No way he messes with Dolphin Boy in a pool.

SAM
I don’t know.

PAUL
Well, I do. It’s a done deal.
(beat)
How, when...

SAM
Oh, my mom taught me how to swim when I was two and a half. She swam in college.

PAUL
Seriously? No shit.

SAM
Yeah, I mean, I kinda feel more comfortable in the water than on land.

PAUL
We are signing you up before we leave.

Sam shrugs his shoulders, smiles, closes his eyes.

Paul takes a look around the pool. His gaze stops on a father and son playing.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - DAY

The boys, damp from swimming, straddle their bikes atop a steep downward grade. Paul, annoyingly adjusts his helmet.

SAM
I’m not like an athlete or anything.

PAUL
Like those assholes are?
(beat)
Race ya to the bottom.

SAM
I--

Paul shoots down the hill. Sam shakes his head, takes off in pursuit.

Paul maintains his lead as Sam frantically peddles behind.

At the bottom of the hill, Paul’s front tire runs over a broken bottle, slashing it. He loses control of the bike, SLAMS into the curb, causing his body to hurdle over the handle bars. He lands on his head, tumbles forward.

Sam flies up to the scene, hops off his bike.

SAM (CONT'D)
Oh, shit. Paul are you OK?

Paul gives a thumbs up.

PAUL
Yeah.

SAM
Damn, that helmet --

PAUL
Don't you say a word to my Mom.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

The boys ride their bikes to the back of the house, park, wrap their wet towels on the bikes to bake in the sun, then enter the house through the side door.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The boys lumber into the kitchen.

PAUL
Grab some chips outta the pantry.

SAM
With pleasure.

Paul swings the fridge door open, rummages, pulls out a pack of hotdogs while Sam grabs two bags of chips and holds them up for approval.

PAUL
(nods)
Both.

Sam grins, glances at the hotdog package in Paul's hand.

SAM
Oh, are we having hot dogs?

PAUL
Yeah, man.

Paul walks towards his bedroom with a confused Sam behind him.

SAM
But don’t we need to cook them?

PAUL
Nah.

SAM
I don’t wanna get worms --

PAUL
You’ll be fine.
(beat)
Shit, run back and grab a couple plates.

Paul wanders into his room as Sam trots back to the kitchen...

Sam whips open a cabinet, grabs two plates and trots out of the kitchen into...the living room. A muffled SOB is heard from Paul’s parents' room.

Sam changes course and slowly approaches the cracked open, bedroom door. The SOB is clear now, as Sam peeks through the door into the bedroom. Mariana sits on the bed, sobbing. Puppy is nearby.

Sam stares, helpless. He backtracks into the...kitchen, eyes the phone on the wall. Decision made, he grabs the phone and dials.

CAROL (V.O.)
Hello.

SAM
Mom...umm, Mariana is crying. I don’t know what to do.

CAROL (V.O.)
I’m heading over there now.

Sam hangs up and makes his way to...Paul’s bedroom. Sam enters. Paul has already cracked open the chips, chews on a cold hot dog.

PAUL
Good Lord, that took like forever.

Sam shrugs, hands a plate to Paul.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - PARENTS' BEDROOM - DAY

Carol sits next to Mariana on her bed. She releases her from a long hug. Mariana's eyes are red. Carol grabs tissues for her.

MARIANA
It's too much...I can't do this without Jimmy.

CAROL
We are absolutely here for you. I will be here as much as you will allow. I will not let you be alone in this.

Mariana believes her, relief spreads across her face.

MARIANA
Just keep reminding me.

EXT. SAM'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY - MONTHS LATER

Sam, wears the bike helmet like a football helmet, jogs across the yard. Paul throws a football to him. Sam GROANS in pain as he tries to raise his left arm to catch it. The ball ricochets off his chest.

Paul shakes his head as Sam scampers off to retrieve it, massaging the left side of his rib cage.

PAUL
You did what now?

SAM
I sorta tried to do that, "keep 'em off balance", surprise thing.

FLASHBACK INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL SCHOOL - LUNCHROOM

Sam sits alone at a table next to a table filled with CLASSMATES cutting up, including Tyler.

Tyler notices Sam at the table, takes a gulp of soda, leans back in his chair, spits all over Sam, CACKLES and seeks adulation from the other kids at the table.

PAUL (V.O.)
Damn, that guy *is* an asshole.

Sam jumps up from his chair, faces Tyler.

SAM
I'll fucking kill you.

PAUL (V.O.)
(through laughter)
You said that?

Tyler confidently stands to face Sam. Before Tyler completes a smirk -- Sam SLAMS into Tyler with all his might causing Tyler to fall into the table knocking trays of food onto the other kids and cafeteria floor.

SAM (V.O.)
I thought that was it.

PAUL (V.O.)
Yeah, no.

Tyler, stunned, gathers himself, ambles toward Sam. Sam slowly backs up.

The lunchroom crowd is now fixed on the conflict, MURMURING.

Tyler throws a wild right hook at Sam who calmly backs up causing the blow to land nowhere. Tyler repeats this move as does Sam. Punch adverted.

PAUL (V.O.)
Oh, my God. Hit that fool!

SAM (V.O.)
I didn't know what to do! Not like
I had some magical toothpicks to
spit at him.

Tyler lunges forward in frustration. Now chest to chest, the boys grapple with each other.

PAUL (V.O.)
Come on, he's all up on you!

Tyler punches Sam in the ribs repeatedly. Sam fills with adrenaline and rage.

PAUL (V.O.)
Man, ya gotta hit that sucker.
Stick and move. Stop slow dancing.

SAM (V.O.)
Well...

Sam grits his teeth, GROWLS, balls his fist, and thrusts it as hard as he can into Tyler's ribs, rapid fire, over and over until a TEACHER breaks them up.

The Teacher stands between the two, with one arm holding Tyler back.

Sam bucks up and bitch slaps Tyler on the chin. Tyler winces, recoils.

SAM
Let him go so I can hit him again!

PAUL (V.O.) (CHOKING ON LAUGHTER)
Ahhhhhh man, that's hilarious. He should never have messed with the son of Shaolin.

The Teacher motions for Sam to back up.

SAM (V.O.)
Well, the Dean wasn't too happy.

BACK TO SCENE

SAM
But I told him, if Tyler spits on me again, I'd do it all over.

PAUL
Good. I bet that asshole crossed you off his list of people to fuck with.

SAM
My Mom wasn't even all that upset.

Sam smiles, confidently tosses the ball back to Paul.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Sam shuffles down the hallway, backpack slung over his shoulder. Two STUDENTS pass him and WHISPER to each other.

Sam, confused, pauses as another STUDENT walks past, smiles and points at Sam.

STUDENT
Stay cool this summer.

Sam crinkles his face, looks around. A CLASSMATE comes over, shadow boxes at Sam.

CLASSMATE
What's up, Larry Holmes?

The classmate smiles, SNAPS his fingers and points at Sam.

Sam's face relaxes. He starts walking with a new found pride and bounce in his step. An arm reaches out and grabs his shoulder from behind -- it's Tyler.

Sam stops, his jaw clenches, prepares for what may be round two.

TYLER
Aww man, you really got me in the ribs man. I'm sore. Are you?

SAM
(smirks)
Nah.

Sam turns, moseys down the hall as Tyler watches. Another CLASSMATE passes Tyler and GIGGLES.

ENT. COMMUNITY POOL - DAY - MONTHS LATER

Mariana and Carol chat, sit poolside, wearing bathing suits. They fan themselves hopelessly in the heat. Carol wears a wide brim sun hat.

CAROL
Just let me know when the next treatment is and I'll take you.

MARIANA
That's very nice of you, but you really don't have to--

CAROL
I do, and I am.

MARIANA
(smiling)
Do I have a choice?

CAROL
No, you do not.

Mariana nods, thankful for their friendship.

MARIANA
What about Dave? How is he doing?

CAROL
Grumpy and stinky, so status quo...but he is working really hard on his comic book artwork.

MARIANA
Oh, what's it like?

CAROL
Mostly superhero stuff. He's actually really good at it, but I think he wishes that this would make him famous and his father would seek him out, reconnect, and then they'd live happily ever after.

MARIANA
If that ever happened, do you think his father would reach out?

CAROL
Maybe, but it would be for all the wrong reasons.

Paul and Sam are sunning nearby with a group of KIDS. Hitting puberty has been good to Sam as he is taller, thinner, and swimmer fit. Paul sports a pre-mustache and a hint of acne.

Sam deliberately adjusts himself so he can flex for the GIRLS in the immediate area including Monica. Paul's eyes almost roll out of his head.

Mariana motions to Carol that she is going to go for a dip in the pool to cool off. She drops herself into the pool, wades deeper into the water.

Mariana wipes sweat from her brow, then dips under water. Paul shoots a nervous glance at her. His eyes widen.

Mariana's hair stays on the surface. She pops up out of the water, her wig floating behind her. She wipes water from her eyes. Her scalp is white with a few scraggly hairs that chemo hasn't robbed her of.

Carol looks over at Mariana, quickly processes the situation and jumps in the pool.

Paul glances around, sees people staring, pointing. His embarrassment and pain segues into anger, as he hides his head beneath his towel. Sam is oblivious, sneaks a quick glance at Monica.

As soon as Carol is within reach of Mariana, she removes her hat and places it on Mariana's head. She snatches the wig out of the water.

Mariana, initially confused, bursts into tears as the realization hits her. Carol puts the wig on her own head, so she can free her hands to hug Mariana.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Sweetie, it's OK.

MARIANA
(sobs)
Oh, my God. I just can't...

Mariana notices the wig atop Carol's head and GIGGLES.

CAROL
(points to her head)
Oh, you like this?

Mariana nods, smiles.

MARIANA
(sighs)
I forgot...the adhesive irritates my scalp. I didn't --

CAROL
It doesn't matter.

Carol notices people staring at them. She takes the wig and shoves it into the top of her bathing suit making it appear as though she has a big tuft of chest hair poking out.

Mariana SNORTS at Carol's silliness, then LAUGHS. Sam finally notices what is happening.

CAROL (CONT'D)
(to those watching)
What?! You've never seen a woman go through rapid-onset menopause.

Mariana hugs Carol again.

MARIANA
Oh boy, that's scratchy.

CAROL
Sorry, my hormones are all outta whack.

Sam grimaces as Paul looks on in horror, hyper aware that some of the GIRLS are already gossiping about the chest hair incident. Paul buries his head in his towel.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Paul, Sam, and Puppy are all hunkered down in bed watching HBO. Puppy flops a paw on Paul's leg. Paul pushes it off.

PAUL
Move ya stupid mutt.

Puppy takes the hint and readjusts, placing his head on Sam's foot.

SAM
(nervously)
Today was...something.

Paul ignores Sam. Turns the volume up a bit.

Movie title on TV screen: "Porky's 2"

PAUL
Ohhh, I've heard good things about this one.

Sam grins, glances at the closed bedroom door. He waits, but she never comes. His grin fades.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Carol sits at the kitchen table working on a crossword puzzle from the daily newspaper.

Dave approaches the table, holding some papers. He tosses them on the table.

DAVE
Sign.

Carol continues to work the puzzle.

CAROL
Four letter word for inconsiderate.

DAVE
Rude. Sign, *please*.

Carol looks up quizzically, stares at Dave. He rolls his eyes, then relents.

DAVE (CONT'D)
OK, I just need you to sign this so I can...go to the art school.

CAROL
(genuinely interested)
What now?

DAVE
God...I got into the School of the Arts and I can stay in the dorms, but I need you to sign a bunch of stuff.

CAROL
When did you...Dave this is terrific, I mean it, but we can't afford--

DAVE
I know. I got some scholarship money and they said I could work on campus--

Carol hops up, smiles, hugs Dave. Dave's arms hang limp by his sides. He tries to wiggle free. Carol employs a bear hug.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Geez, I can hardly breathe.

Carol relaxes her hold just a bit. After a long pause, Dave hugs her back.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mariana, wearing a robe and slippers, wig tilted, slowly makes her way across the living room to a table with a framed picture of James situated next to a plate, with a white candle in the middle of it.

She gingerly gets on her knees, gazes upon the photo, misty eyed. Puppy strolls in and sits next to her.

MONTAGE

A)Mariana sits in James' lap, arms around his neck, head on his shoulder. She is completely at peace.

B)Mariana and James stroll hand in hand. James wears his military uniform. Mariana stops, dips James, gives him a quick kiss before they tumble to the ground, laughing.

C)Mariana opens a birthday gift. The box is empty. She looks at James confused. He pulls a box from behind his back, gives it to Mariana. She opens it -- reveals three plane tickets to the United States.

BACK TO SCENE

MARIANA
Happy birthday, Mi Amor.

She searches a robe pocket, pulls out a box of matches, then strikes a match and lights the candle.

She sees her reflection in the picture frame, notices her wig is askew. Her heart sinks further, as she adjusts the wig with a wistful smile.

MARIANA (CONT'D)
I wish you were here...so you could lie to me and tell me I'm still pretty...and that everything will be alright.
(beat)
I don't know how to do this without you.

She kisses two of her fingers, then presses them to the glass in the picture frame.

Mariana gathers herself, struggles to get up. Once on her feet, she walks into the den...

Where she slides down into James' recliner, closes her eyes, puppy at her feet. She drifts off.

EXT. PAUL'S BACKYARD - DAY

Paul and Sam stand next to a pile of rocks, ten yards from a tree. Sam spits on a rock in his hand.

PAUL
What the hell?

SAM
Spitball.

Sam winds up like a pitcher, throws as hard as he can only to watch the rock sail past the tree.

PAUL
More like shitball.

SAM
I got it. I got it.

Sam picks up another rock, winds up, throws and watches the rock bounce in front of the tree.

SAM (CONT'D)
Damnit!

Paul grabs a rock, tosses it in his hand.

PAUL
Look and learn.

Paul winds up, hurls the rock. It SMACKS the tree. Sam runs over to examine the damage.

SAM
Dang, that was a good one.

Paul pats himself on the back. Just as boredom creeps up on him, an idea strikes.

PAUL
Hey, I'll be right back.

Paul trots across the yard to his house.

SAM
You don't want me to --

PAUL
Nope. Stay there.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Paul enters the living room, stops in his tracks. He stares at his father's picture illuminated by the candle. He averts his eyes, then looks around and notices his mother, asleep in the den.

He quietly approaches her, listens intently to a gentle SNORE, then turns and makes his way toward his parents' bedroom.

EXT. PAUL'S BACKYARD - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Sam sits in the yard, clocking clouds as Paul approaches, one hand behind his back.

PAUL
Check this out.

Paul whips his arm around, hand clutching the pellet gun. He points it at Sam's head just as Sam's eyes drop from the sky to Paul. Sam, startled by the gun, YELPS, and spastically jerks his body to one side.

SAM
Ahhhhh, what the fuck, man?!

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DEN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The sound outside the den window, stirs Mariana. She slowly sits up, then turns to peer out the window. Dismayed, she sees Paul waving the pellet gun around.

MARIANA
(to herself)
Paul.

Adrenaline forces her to her feet.

EXT. PAUL'S BACKYARD - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Sam pulls himself together.

PAUL
Jesus, ya baby. It’s not loaded.

SAM
I didn’t know that.

PAUL
(disgusted)
You think I’d point a loaded --
whatever.

Paul fishes the pellet container out of his pants’ pocket. He shakes the can and points it at Sam.

PAUL (CONT’D)
Just gotta figure out how to load--

Mariana strides into the backyard.

MARIANA
Paul!

Startled, Paul and Sam turn to face Mariana.

MARIANA (CONT’D)
Bring that back inside! You’re not--

PAUL
But, he promised!

Mariana nods. Sam is frozen in place, unsure of what to do.

MARIANA
I know. But Paul, he's not...here.

Paul's face turns red.

PAUL
You don't think I know that!?

Paul, unable to stifle his emotions, turns away from Mariana, then hurls the gun and pellet canister over their backyard fence as hard as he can. He turns back, storms off to the house.

Spent, Mariana's head drops. Sam hasn't moved a muscle.

SAM
Umm...I can get that if you want.

Mariana forces a smile.

MARIANA
That's OK. Maybe later. If you don't mind, go check on Paul.

SAM
Yes, ma'am.

Sam slinks off towards the house.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - DAY

The bedroom door is partially open. Sam pokes his head inside, sees Paul on his bed next to a empty dresser drawer which has been dumped onto the bed. Sports cards, trinkets galore are scattered about.

Paul grabs a switchblade from the treasures.

SAM
Hey, ummm, can I--

PAUL
Whatever.

Sam cautiously enters. Paul points the switchblade at Sam stopping him in his tracks. He hits the release button -- it's a switchblade comb.

Sam relaxes. Paul digs a piece of Bazooka gum out of the pile, unwraps and pops it in his mouth.

SAM
That's cool.

PAUL
You probably thought I'd point a real switchblade at you.

Sam shrugs, sits on the bed, combs through the treasures.

Sam closely examines the front and back of a Johnny Unitas 1973 Topps football card.

SAM
I didn't know Johnny Unitas played for the Chargers.

Paul is still brooding and in a foul mood.

PAUL
Yeah. End of his career. Aren't the Chargers one of your loser teams?

SAM
(defensive)
Yeah, but I wasn't following them in nineteen seventy-three, jerk wad.

PAUL
Now, the Cowboys, that's a team.

SAM
Really? That's kinda lame. Everybody likes them.

Paul puffs his chest.

PAUL
Let me be more specific, the Cowboys' cheerleaders.

SAM
Oh, OK.

They resume sitting in silence, awkwardly making sure not to look at each other.

SAM (CONT'D)
Maybe we can have someone show us how to use the pellet gun.

PAUL
Who, *your* dad? Just forget about it.

Sam can no longer pretend that everything is OK.

SAM
Listen, I really miss him too.

Paul angrily looks up, stares at Sam.

PAUL
What?! You hardly knew him.

SAM
Well, I can still miss him. He was...really nice to me.

PAUL
Probably just felt sorry for you.

SAM
(hurt)
Hey, come on Paul.

Paul pulls the sticky, saliva covered gum out of his mouth and smashes it into Sam’s hair.

Stunned, Sam tries to gently extract the gum from his hair.

SAM (CONT’D)
(furious)
What the hell, man? Why’d you--
Don’t do that!

PAUL
Or what?

Sam springs into action and tackles a surprised Paul. Puppy busts into the room and BARKS at them.

Sam has the upper hand for a moment, but Paul quickly takes control and wrestles Sam to the edge of the bed. Sam shifts his weight, angles himself and pushes as hard as he can on Paul’s shoulders until they both tumble to the floor.

Puppy BARKS. Sam pops up. A surprised Paul rises and grabs Sam. They push, pull, and twist their way to the bedroom window -- Sam’s butt smashes through the glass. They freeze.

INT. PAUL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Mariana, Carol, Puppy, and the boys stand in the room focused on a piece of cardboard covering the smashed window. A tuft of Sam’s hair has been cut out to remove the gum.

CAROL
(to Mariana)
I am so sorry about this.
(MORE)

CAROL (CONT'D)
(looks back at the window)
We are definitely paying to get that fixed.

MARIANA
You really don't have to. It was just a little rough housing--

CAROL
No, I insist.
(to Sam)
You are gonna work your ass off and pay me back.

SAM
But Mom, I...
(glances at a dejected Paul)
My ass just went through a window. It needs a break.

Everyone cracks a grin. The room is lighter.

CAROL
It'll be fine.
(beat)
Now, how 'bout we all come back to *our* house for dinner.

MARIANA
I'm really tired.

CAROL
OK. Even better, you take some time to yourself and I'll handle the knucklehead twins and bring you a plate later.

Mariana nods and mouths "thank you."

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Sam and Paul finish their spaghetti and meatball dinner in silence as Carol scoops leftover spaghetti into a Tupperware container for Mariana.

CAROL
That was the quietest the two of you have ever been.

Sam gets up, takes his plate to rinse in the sink.

CAROL (CONT'D)
Ya know, there's only so many good friends you'll have a chance to meet in a lifetime.

Sam walks back to the table, snatches Paul's plate right as Paul devours one last fork-full.

PAUL
Hey.

Sam takes the plate to the sink and rinses.

CAROL
None of this is easy, but I'm gonna need both of you to cut this shit out. Mariana doesn't need to worry about you two.

Sam settles back in at the table.

CAROL (CONT'D)
So, get over yourselves and kiss and make up.

SAM
Ewwww.

PAUL
Gross.

Carol stares each of them down until they avert their eyes in defeat.

PAUL (CONT'D)
(quietly)
I'm...sorry.

SAM
Yeah, me too.
(beat)
Your window never had a chance with my butt blast.

Paul grins, looks at Sam.

PAUL
Windows better recognize the Shaolin buns of steel.

Sam smiles. Paul glances at Sam's missing tuft of hair.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You can borrow one of my baseball caps if that helps.

SAM
Or, I could cut your hair--

CAROL
Nope.

SAM
Fine, I want the Yankee's cap.

PAUL
Done.

Paul and Sam smile at each other. Carol beams.

CAROL
I love you two.

EXT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY - MONTHS LATER

Carol's car is in the driveway. She assists a physically and emotionally drained Mariana from the passenger side, then walks her gently to the house.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - PARENTS' BEDROOM - DAY

Carol helps Mariana into bed. Mariana settles in, looks up at Carol, tears welling in her eyes.

MARIANA
I'm not ready.

Carol sits on the edge of the bed and holds Mariana's hand.

CAROL
It's OK.
(beat)
You...have more strength than anyone I know.

Mariana shuts her eyes for a moment in thought, slowly opens, gently nods her head as tears slide down her cheeks.

EXT. COMMUNITY POOL - DAY

Paul stands behind a row of GIRLS in their late teens sunbathing near the edge of the pool, eyes closed, glistening with oil and sweat. Paul is laser focused, ogling every last inch. He blinks every so often as if his eyes are a camera.

Sam watches as he climbs up onto the diving board nearby.

Paul leans in for a closer view.

Sam sprints down the diving board, jumps, springs, forms a jackknife with perfect maximum splash capacity -- SMACKS the water, splashing an impressive amount of water at the Teens.

The Teens bolt upright, annoyed.

TEEN GIRLS
(all together)
Come on! What the hell?

Paul jerks his head back. Scampers left then right as Sam's head breaks the surface of the water.

TEEN GIRL
(frowning; to Sam)
You, twerp!

Sam looks around, acts confused, then points to himself "what me?"

Another teen notices Paul rushing away from the scene.

ANOTHER TEEN GIRL
(at Paul's back)
Hey!

The Lifeguard sees Paul making a beeline. Sam swims away.

The Kid treads water nearby enjoying the action.

LIFEGUARD
(blows his whistle)
Hey! Slow down.

The Kid whips his head around, stares up at the lifeguard.

KID
(to the lifeguard)
Hey!

EXT. COMMUNITY POOL - DAY - LATER

Paul and Sam saunter over to the snack machines.

PAUL
If you had splashed that chick with the white bikini -- I bet that shit would've been see through.

SAM
(grinning)
I'll work on my form.

Paul and Sam stop at a candy bar machine, stare at the choices. All rows show what candy is for sale except one labeled "pot luck."

PAUL
So, what's up with you and Monica?

SAM
What? Who?

PAUL
Don't give me that shit. You've been eyeballin' her all day, and she doesn't seem to mind.

Paul feeds coins into the machine, then pulls a knob releasing a Milky Way that he grabs, opens, takes a bite. Sam surveys his candy options.

SAM
I don't know...after that last swim meet, she actually came over to me. We talked for a bit --

PAUL
Ohhh, that's where you were. The itty bitty titty committee. Hmmm, maybe your luck is changing. Go for that pot luck thing and let's see how lucky you are.

SAM
I don't know. I was thinkin' Baby Ruth --

PAUL
Come on, those suck.

Sam puts his money in the machine. Paul swiftly pulls the knob corresponding to "pot luck." A Zero bar is dispensed. Sam frowns. Paul LAUGHS.

PAUL (CONT'D)
The albino turd of candy bars. I wouldn't put that in my mouth.

SAM
Damnit.

A phone RINGS in the lifeguard station next to the concession area.

LIFEGUARD (O.S.)
Yo, Paul. It's your mom.

An arm extends out the station window with a white phone receiver.

Paul deflates, walks to...

the LIFE GUARD STATION, grabs the phone, listens.

Sam looks across the pool at Monica, sheepishly waves. She smiles, waves back. Paul hangs up, notices Sam staring at her.

PAUL
Hey, Sam!

Sam whips his head back towards Paul.

SAM
Yeah, what's up?

PAUL
Look, my mom...I need to go.

SAM
Umm, do you want me to go with you?

PAUL
Nah, go share your Elmer's Glue shit bar with that chick.

Paul turns, leaves. Sam watches, then glances back at Monica.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
I regret not going with him. Nothing was ever the same.

INT. PAUL'S HOUSE - DAY

There's a KNOCK at the front door. Carol approaches.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
Things happened pretty quickly after that.

Carol opens the door, stands face to face with a hospice NURSE. She welcomes her in.

MONTAGE

A)Shows the Nurse where the kitchen is.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
My Mom explained what hospice is.

B)Carol introduces the Nurse to Mariana who is in bed with Puppy by her feet. She is no longer wearing her wig.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
I wasn't allowed to be over there much. My Mom said Mariana wanted to preserve her dignity and didn't want to be remembered this way.

C) Sam, Paul and Carol stand around Mariana's bed. The room is dimly it. All horizontal surfaces are cluttered with family pictures enveloping the room in warmth. Mariana wears her wig one last time.

MARIANA
(weakly but with a loving smile)
I'm so glad you and Paul became friends.

Mariana looks around at the photos, locks in on one.

CU of at photo of Sam, Paul, and Mariana at the pool.

Mariana motions Sam to come closer and bend down to hear her.

MARIANA (CONT'D)
(whispers)
I never thought I'd have two boys.

Sam chokes up.

C)Carol sits in the living room speaking with the Nurse.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
The next time I saw her was at the funeral.

D) Sam and Carol sit next to Paul at Mariana's funeral.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
They said she had three to six months, but she showed them and lived for a year and a half battling all the way.

SMASH TO BLACK

FADE IN:

INT. SAM'S HOUSE- BEDROOM - DAY - MONTHS LATER

Sam sits on the floor. A new shelf adorned with swim trophies and ribbons is mounted on the wall above him. Nestled to one side is a picture of Sam and Monica.

Sam flips through some football cards, stops, admires a familiar 1973 Topps football card of Johnny Unitas with the Chargers.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
Paul handed me the card before he left. He smiled and said he didn't have any room for it. He received a worn out basketball in return. We talked about keeping in touch, getting together...We didn't know that this would be goodbye, but even if we did, I'm not sure either of us knew how to say it.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Carol rests on the couch shuffling through a pile of mail in her lap.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
My Mom said that she offered to have Paul stay with us especially since Dave was spending so much time away from home, but Mariana wanted Paul to continue going to the Catholic school with all of his friends and soccer teammates.

CAROL
(to herself)
Crap. More crap...

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
Mariana made arrangements with a family of one of Paul’s soccer buddies. My Mom said that Paul’s parents’ life insurance policies should take care of him through college.

Carol unearths a large manila envelope. No return address, but she recognizes the handwriting...

She tears it open and slowly pulls out a comic book.

CAROL
What in the world?

She takes it in.

CU of the comic cover reveals a female super hero that resembles Carol just enough to make the point. The title is “The Hero that Stayed Home.”

CAROL (CONT’D)
That little shit.

Her face breaks into a wide, happy smile as she holds the comic lovingly.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sam sits at the kitchen table doing homework. He doesn’t notice Dave as he strides towards him from behind.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
Dave and I...

As Dave passes, he smacks the table startling Sam.

DAVE
What up loser?!

SAM
Fuck off!

Dave stops in his tracks, his back to Sam.

DAVE
Hmmm.

Dave glances over his shoulder admiringly at Sam.

DAVE (CONT’D)
Good one.

Dave continues his journey.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
I guess it got a little better.

INT. SAM'S HOUSE- BEDROOM - RETURN TO PRESENT DAY

Sam puts the cards away.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
We were able to --

Puppy busts into the room, full speed, rams into Sam and welcomes him with a few licks.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
...feed one more mouth after all. Turns out Puppy did not like the cats that came with the family taking care of Paul.

Sam retreats to his bed. Puppy joins him.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
As our lives drifted apart, I wondered if it was maybe easier not having me as a reminder of all that happened.

Sam props his head up with one arm and squeezes Puppy with the other.

OLDER SAM (V.O.)
When Paul and I met, I felt like I was drowning. His family threw me a life vest and kept me afloat until I learned how to swim on my own. I don’t know how to pay that back. My mom said that’s just not how life works and true friends don’t keep score.

THE END