

JACK

A Screenplay

by

James DeMonaco and Gary Nadeau

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BLACK SCREEN

A violent chorus of urgent SOUNDS hover in the black. An overlapping cacophony of distress. A woman MOANS. Pain, not passion. A man HOLLERS. His voice, too, laced with real fear. "Hold on, honey. Hold on. We're almost there!" Tires SCREECH to a hard stop. SCREECH! DOORS OPEN. SLAM! SLAM! Her MOANS thicken. AHHHHH! His VOICE rises to a crescendo. "HOLD ON, HONEY! WE'RE HERE! WE'RE HERE!" Through her moans, words muffled -- "What's happening? What's HAPPENING?"

THE BLACK RECEDES

SWINGING DOORS OPEN in a frenzied rush:

INT. HOSPITAL -- NIGHT

A surge. BRIAN POWELL carries his wife through the halls of ST. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL. Purpose and haste in his strides. His eyes, flat with fear, search. Taking quick inventory of the scene around him.

His wife, KAREN, slumps in his arms, curled in feral contortion. Her hands hold her swollen, obviously pregnant belly. The size of her stomach tells us she can't be less than eight months. A lather of sweat thickens on her brow. Through her moans we HEAR desperation:

KAREN

Brian, the baby, what's happening to the baby?

No response. He proceeds through the sterile, white hallway. He calls out urgently now:

BRIAN

Help! Would someone help here? I think my wife's going into labor.

He moves on. Adrenaline rush carries him. Curious eyes of PATIENTS follow him. A NURSE finally approaches with a wheelchair.

NURSE

When did the contractions start?

Karen attempts to answer:

KAREN

Twen...

He finishes:

BRIAN
Twenty minutes ago...

NURSE
When are you due, ma'am?

A beat. Karen rubs her belly unconsciously. Trades a quick look of dread with her husband. Their eyes lock and...burn. He answers.

BRIAN
Not for another seven months.

She's never heard that one before. -- The nurse's expression falls perceptibly quizzical.

INT. LABOR UNIT, OPERATING ROOM -- LATER

Chaos. A sense of urgency seizes the room. NURSES move quickly. Efficiently. Checking monitors. Setting equipment. Their faces veiled by blue masks. Only their eyes visible. Yet their eyes tell it all. What the hell is going on?

A NURSE adjusts the overhead fluorescents. Directs them downward toward:

KAREN. Strapped to a table. Shrouded in a halo of light from above. Tears build. Her husband clutches her hand. Their fingers touch, caress. Soothing each other. Holding on. Their eyes lock. A frozen beat. Hers say -- WHY? His try to say -- IT'LL BE O.K.!

She's panting now. Controlled panting. As contractions lessen. HEAD NURSE approaches:

NURSE
Have you had Lamaze?

KAREN
I haven't even signed up for the course yet. I told you, I'm only two months...

Doctor JOHN GRIMALDI enters. Hands high. Palms out. NURSE approaches. Throws rubber gloves over those sturdy hands. He's older, distinguished. Thick white hair under a blue cap. Wrinkled eyes visible under mask reveal a keen sensibility. And, unlike the others in the room, he's unusually calm.

GRIMALDI
Karen, Brian, the Nurse tells me you're only two and a half months pregnant.

BRIAN
Yes, doctor. But...

GRIMALDI

I want you both to be calm. If you're only two months, it's definitely not contractions. Something else is bringing this on...

He walks forward. Nurse's eyes watch him. Obviously, he hasn't yet seen KAREN'S stomach. The NURSES, KAREN, and BRIAN watch curiously as Grimaldi makes his approach.

He finds her stomach, her lower torso. He pauses. Eyebrows furrow in disbelief. His eyes reveal all. A momentary lapse. He refocuses. Eyes set like stone on her fully-formed belly. We barely hear:

GRIMALDI

Christ.

The nurses exchange a quick glance. Brian squeezes his wife's hand in a gesture of shared fright.

GRIMALDI

Two months. This doesn't make any sense at all.

BRIAN

She began growing two weeks ago, doc. Our Doctor thought it was just water on her stomach. He wasn't that worried. She's only two months.

And then:

KAREN

AHHH!

A violent jerking of her entire frame. Karen releases a barbaric YAWP from the depths. Her upper body writhes in a demented paroxysm of movement. Brian squeezes her hand. The doctor breaks his puzzled fugue and kicks it into gear. He wheels to the:

NURSE

Standing at a monitor displaying a black and white grainy photo of Karen's womb:

GRIMALDI

Sonogram?

NURSE

Reading fine, doctor. --- For full-term pregnancy...

Karen MOANS again. Louder this time. Brian's eyes widen.

GRIMALDI

She's in full labor. Let's do this.

No time to re-evaluate the peculiar situation. It's a go. It's time. Grimaldi reaches down, beneath the sheets. Between Karen's spread legs. He's done this many times before. Clearly a seasoned veteran but this is different. And his eyes reveal that -- doubtful, worried, confused.

Karen's lungs rise and fall like a bellows. Her MOANS reach an unheralded zenith. Louder. Harder. Her husband watches with utter dread on his face. His hands shudder, trembling like those of a frightened child.

Nurses watch with curiosity. HEAD NURSE hovers over Karen, working her through this. All trying to forget how strange this is. PUSH. PUSH. BREATH. It all seems normal but...

Another monstrous MOAN. The moment intensifies.

GRIMALDI

Don't fight me, Karen. I need you to help me.

KAREN

It's too soon!

She gasps. The doctor's eyes fall. A "holy shit" expression. He's seen something. Something's emerging. He tries not to flinch, nor let his expression reveal anything. But he actually scratches his head in stunned disbelief. His hands continue to work through the tense moment. He blurts out:

GRIMALDI

Here he comes.

Karen and Brian exchange a glance.

The doctor's eyes widen even more. This is quite unusual, folks. His hands fumble. He casts his eyes upon Karen and Brian as he guides the baby, or whatever the hell it is, out of her.

THE PARENTS

Anxious eyes. Apprehensive. Uneasy. Their hands clutching in a vise-like grip. Not letting go. They must face this together. Expecting the worst. A monstrosity. Something from a horror movie. Remember, only two months gestation. Brian's eyes fill with tears. This is too much. Simply too much.

Doctor Grimaldi holds something. Guides something out of Karen. When, suddenly, he guffaws with the wild abandon of a school kid, not a distinguished doctor. Unable to control his emotion and shock any longer.

DOCTOR

Holy shit!

A Nurse giggles as if amused by the rather distasteful language so rarely heard between these walls. But she's actually smiling at:

THE DOCTOR'S HANDS

As he reveals:

A BABY

Yes, a baby. A sparkling, crying, baby boy. Not a monstrosity. Not the child from IT'S ALIVE PART 7. This is a blue-eyed baby boy. Full nine months grown. No problem signs at all. He cries and cries and cries with high-pitched intensity, just like any other newborn.

And all remains quiet. All rendered utterly speechless. Just the baby's cries invade the thick, pensive silence. All locked in a strange tableau of pure bafflement. No one knows how to react.

Karen and Brian exchange a curious glance. Both sets of eyes full of tears. Brian somehow manages a smile. Momentary satisfaction in his eyes. But Karen doesn't return that smile. The wear and worry of the day still evident. This is far from over and she knows that. Brian shrugs. Embarrassed for showing early signs of relief.

They both then turn back toward the presumably healthy baby boy. Doctor Grimaldi holds him, shaking his head uncontrollably in disbelief. On the crying child as we:

FADE TO BLACK:

THE DRONE OF A MOTOR hovers in the dark as we:

CUT TO:

THE BABY

Naked. Giggling. On a sterile, cold piece of mobile equipment. The table moves forward, bringing the baby into a claustrophobic conduit, whirring like a welder's tool. The baby is shrouded in red light as he enters the tunnel of the CAT SCAN machine, still giggling, a playful exercise.

CUT TO:

CLUNK! The hard SOUND of an X-RAY photo SNAPPED. The child lies on a stainless steel table. Red beams of light spew from the X-RAY machine above, forming an intricate crucifix on the child's forehead, which travels down the child's body, scanning. Searching.

It seems like an intimidating process yet the baby lies undaunted, staring up at the red light.

FADE TO BLACK:

These voices hover in the darkness:

GRIMALDI (O.S.)
I'm sorry this has taken so long. Like you, we've been equally puzzled by your son's premature birth.

INT. GRIMALDI'S OFFICE -- DAY

Karen and Brian face Doctor Grimaldi. The worry of the past few weeks weigh heavy on both parent's faces.

GRIMALDI
In fact, there's been a great deal of curiosity throughout the hospital about your son's case. -- I'd like you to meet Dr. Prager. He's an infant disorder specialist from Cornell University.

Meet DOCTOR PRAGER, young, long wavy hair and a distant brooding countenance. He gives the Powells a comforting smile, but nothing can penetrate their deep concern.

GRIMALDI
The hospital brought Dr. Prager in, in hopes of finding some answers. We've come up with what we think is an explanation, but only time will tell. I must warn you -- it is rather unusual.

Grimaldi takes a deep breath. Pauses. Eyes hold on Prager. Prager takes a moment. Unsure of how to say this.

KAREN
What is it?

Then, as laconic as possible:

PRAGER
We think there's a chance your son is aging at an accelerated rate.

A moment. They take this in.

KAREN
What do you mean? Accelerated rate.

PRAGER

Our tests have indicated that your son's cells are developing at what seems to be four times the normal rate. -- That's why he was born at two and half months instead of nine. He may be two and half months old but physically, he's nine months and was ready to leave your womb.

There. He said it. They absorb that. Brian's face goes pallid, as if he just saw the face of God. Karen's mind races. Searching. Needing answers. Grimaldi sees their baffled expressions:

GRIMALDI

Nature has given us all an internal clock, Mr. and Mrs. Powell. It meters our life span. Controls our growth. Your son's internal clock seems to be ticking faster than usual.

KAREN

I'm sorry. I still don't understand what you're saying.

PRAGER

This is still only speculation, but we believe at age one your son may, in fact, physically appear to be around age four, and this will continue throughout his life. So by age five he could...

(a beat)

...appear to be an ordinary, full grown twenty year old man.

Karen lowers her head. Overwhelmed. Brian's confused, upset, not fully understanding. Looking for rationale.

BRIAN

You can't be serious. -- I mean, we knew something was wrong but...

(a beat, stumbling)

I've never heard of anything like this.

PRAGER

Neither have we. There are other aging syndromes, but this is quite different. That's why we were so baffled. Unlike those other diseases, there is nothing debilitating about your son's condition. He's healthy. There are no signs of cell deterioration. This is the first time we've ever seen anything like this.

GRIMALDI

We'll continue watching him. Continue tests. This is as new to us as it is to you. -- One thing we do expect is that his mental growth will be ordinary. No different then yours or mine. But only time will tell us what is really happening.

Karen takes this all in, trying to make sense of all that she has heard. Then, quite somberly:

KAREN

Tell me why this happened. Is this our fault?

GRIMALDI

It's nobody's fault, Mr. and Mrs. Powell. It's natures tampering.

BRIAN

Isn't there something you can do about this?

PRAGER

This isn't a disease, Mr Powell. This is a condition. All we can do is wait and see.

Karen's mind racing, absorbing everything she's heard. And suddenly, a wealth of emotion builds. She fights tears, as she concludes:

KAREN

So if this is what you say it is, when our son's twenty years old he'll physically look eighty. -- I don't understand that. That's not a full life.

And this hits her like a ton of bricks. On her growing look of turmoil as we:

CUT TO:

THE BABY -- MATERNITY WARD

Sleeping, peaceful. A beautiful child. The baby rolls over in his crib, completely unaware of the predicament he's in.

INT. MATERNITY WARD ROOM -- DAY

Karen and Brian peer over their son. Tears cloud their vision. The baby smiles up at them. His blue eyes radiate, innocent, untouched.

KAREN

Jack, we'll call him Jack.

BRIAN

I like Jack. -- Hi Jackie, do you know you'll be the first boy shaving before you start kindergarten?

Jokes to hide his pain. The only way Brian can cope. Karen smiles for his sake. There are heavy tears in her eyes now. Karen closes her hand over Brian's.

Karen hears something. Looks up and sees through the glass window of the maternity room:

A NURSE

Dragging a MAN wearing a drab suit with her. Their voices, muted whispers, barely audible:

NURSE

Right there, born at just two months.
Only two months and fully developed.
Strangest thing I've ever seen.

Karen turns, her expression venomous. Full of obvious consternation. She throws a noxious look at both the Nurse and the Drab Suit that admonishes -- get outta here! Here, Karen displays the intensity only a protective mother can reveal in a single look. The nurse and the man duck away.

Brian's grip on his wife's hand tightens. Calm down, it says. Don't let that get to you. They turn back to their son. She caresses his cheek. Her voice comes softly:

KAREN

It's time to bring him home.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY -- DAY

The Powell trio -- Karen holds her son as Brian leads them down the hallway. Solemn. Deliberate. Time to go home. No words. Rapt in thought. Only Jack's shrill giggles betray the silence. When:

They turn in to the waiting room. Approaching the exit. And there, they see -- a familiar FACE among many. The DRAB SUIT standing with a crowd of other DRAB SUITS. Reporters. A half dozen or so. Sighting the POWELLS. The reporters rush forward. The spectacle has begun.

KAREN stops dead in her tracks. Stunned. What the hell is this? Brian takes the lead. Guarding. A protector of his family. They're quickly bombarded by the reporters. QUESTIONS. CAMERAS. FLASHING! SNAP! CRACK!

JACK

Begins to cry. A high-pitched wail. Karen covers him, shielding him from this as best she can.

BRIAN

Fights his way through. Grabs Karen by the hand. Undaunted. Pushing now. HE HEARS:

REPORTERS

Can we talk to you about your son?

BRIAN

It's none of your business.

They reach the exit. Jack's still crying. Karen's confused. Losing semblance. Brian pushes open the door, escorts his family through, into the parking lot. Reporters follow. Shouting questions. Brian pays them no heed. Continues on. To their car. They enter. Pulling quickly away. Leaving a plume of reporters and many unanswered questions in their wake.

INT. CAR

Quiet. Heavy, scared breaths. Jack's crying subsided. On the parents's faces. Their looks of concern, as we go to:

INT. POWELL HOME - LATER THAT NIGHT

Karen sits over the crib in her son's room. Expression strained. Still dismayed by the day's earlier events. She watches her sleeping baby. She HEARS:

RING. RING.

The phone. Ringing incessantly. Brian enters:

KAREN

Why won't they leave us alone?

BRIAN

I'm not answering it. The phone company said we'll get a new number tomorrow.

Karen nods. Takes that in. Looks down at her son. Sleeping. Peaceful. She's thinking. Coming to conclusions. A wealth of emotion carrying her now. With conviction:

KAREN

We have to protect him from all this. It's only going to get worse as he gets older. It's up to us to give him a normal life... No matter what it takes.

She means that. She squeezes both her husband's and son's hands even tighter.

Brian nods in agreement. No words to express his feelings. They peer back down at their son. A seemingly normal child. Awake now. Grinning up at his parents. On Jack's bright face as we:

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

CREDITS BEGIN -- OVER PHOTOS

PHOTO -- What appears to be a four year old. Face lit orange from a candle on a birthday cake. One candle, folks. Birthday hat low. Smile wide. Eyes bright. -- The bottom of the photo reads -- JACK'S FIRST BIRTHDAY.

A BOY, apparently EIGHT, reveals an open mouth of teasing ugliness. His two front teeth missing. PHOTO READS -- JACK LOSES FRONT TEETH -- AGE TWO.

A PHOTO of a TWELVE year old boy, wearing diapers, sitting at kitchen table with food covering his face. Karen wipes the child's chin.

PHOTO OF a 16 YEAR old with innocent eyes and seraphic features, covering his face in SHAVING CREAM. BRIAN POWELL STANDS behind the boy, guiding a RAZOR over the boy's face. The PHOTO reads -- JACK'S FIRST SHAVE -- AGE FOUR.

PHOTO of a 20 year old, wearing "feetie" pajamas, playing with his new TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLE ACTION figures under the CHRISTMAS TREE on CHRISTMAS MORNING. WRAPPING PAPER heaped in mounds around him.

PHOTO of a MAN. A 24 year old. He bends in the Powell's garden, holding a colored EASTER Egg, retrieved there, in his yearly Easter Egg Hunt. He smiles joyously.

CREDITS END

EXT. POWELL HOME -- DAY

The sun hangs at mid heaven, providing dappled light for the land below. Under that light, the Powell home sits on a quiet suburban street in the heart of America. A fair-sized home with a well-kept lawn and blooming willow trees. CHILDREN play on the street in front. It is fall here.

Four messy, fresh-faced ten year old BOYS, holding notebooks, step in front of the Powell residence, on their way home from school.

JOHN JOHN, taller than the rest, cool and confident. EDWARD, frazzled hair, chews the wad of gum in his mouth with staccato rapidity. GEORGE. A squinty-eyed lad with a serious demeanor.

And LOUIS DURANTE. Small, black hair. Doe eyes reveal a kind heart. All eyes hold on the Powell home, a sense of awe within each set. John John addresses his gang. His tone serious, laced with high dramatic emphasis.

JOHN JOHN

I'm telling you, that's where he lives.
Right down the street my whole life and
I didn't even know about it.

GEORGE

There's no such thing as giants. Only in
olden times did they have giants.

JOHN JOHN

He's our age but he looks forty. He's a
giant boy. He shaves and stuff.

GEORGE

Well, why haven't we ever seen him then?

EDWARD

'Cause he's a monstrosity, that's why,
George. They hide him.

JOHN JOHN

No, no, no. I've seen him. I've seen him
in the store with his mom. I thought it
was her husband. But it wasn't. It was
him.

GEORGE

If he's our age, why ain't he in school?

JOHN JOHN

A teacher comes to him. I heard he's got
all kinds of toys, too. His parents buy
him everything. -- And the scariest part
of it all is he's dangerous. He's so big
that he hurts other children. That's why
they really keep him away from other
kids.

Fear with that. They all gingerly step back a bit. Except
Louis.

LOUIS

I'd like to meet him. I don't believe
any of it.

JOHN JOHN

It's true, Louis.

GEORGE

Is he like twenty feet tall?

JOHN JOHN

No, ya idiot. He's like a man. Like six feet tall. He just grows faster than we do. Like when he was two, he looked like we do now but he couldn't say anything and he wore diapers.

And Louis steps forward, eyes widening as if he's seen something. He raises his hand. Slowly, indicating something ahead. His voice comes softly, quietly:

LOUIS

There he is.

Everyone looks up. And sees what Louis sees. Faces fall -- taut masks of fear now. Imaginations run amuck. An upwelling ripple of fear runs through each small body. Except Louis. As the others back away, he walks forward, amazed, high levels of empathy within those big eyes. They see:

THE POWELL HOME

A second story window. The curtains parting slightly. Half a face visible. Someone is, in fact, peering out at them.

THE BOYS

Faces sag in stunned disbelief. John John hollers:

JOHN JOHN

It's the GIANT!

They all scream in virtual hysterics! Break into mad dashes down the street, away from the giant's lair.

Yet Louis remains. Undaunted by the giant and his myth.

EDWARD (O.S.)

Come on, Louis. He's gonna get ya.

And, slowly, Louis breaks his hold on the giant's home. He drags himself away. Jogging down the street. Peering back over his shoulder as he runs farther and farther away.

INT. POWELL HOME, JACK'S ROOM -- SAME TIME

A young boy's room. Sports POSTERS on the wall. Action FIGURES on the floor alongside Match Box cars. NFL BED SHEETS and the BAT PLANE hanging from the ceiling. A man's voice pervades:

WOODRUFF (O.S.)

It's always easier if you remember to cross out and carry over the one.

MR. LAWRENCE WOODRUFF, tutor, age fifty or so, holds a book open in his lap. He's a stubborn man yet not unkind. He lifts his head from his book, pauses. Addresses his student:

WOODRUFF

Jack, are you paying attention?

JACK (O.S.)

Yes, Mr. Woodruff.

And we see:

A NOTEBOOK

Math problems scribbled -- $10 \times 7 =$, $11 \times 7 =$, etc...

A HAND

Rested beneath that page. A man's hand. Subtle age spots loom dark, hair apparent. Clutching a BATMAN pencil. Teeth marks evident. And:

JACK

Jack Powell. Older here. He's ten years old now. Physically about forty. His expression is that of boy, a child. The countenance of someone who hasn't seen much. Innocent, untainted, still pure.

His stature -- loose, flexible. He holds himself like a child, without the reserve or self awareness that comes with years. His hair -- a mess. His eyes -- soft, sullen, vulnerable. Revealing purity. But there's a distant look in those eyes -- the look of a young boy who lost his dog. This is Jack Powell. He may look like he's a weathered and seasoned man of the world. But he's only had ten years. Ten years alone, without companions his own age. And we clearly see this in those eyes, those sunken eyes.

He stares out the window at his peers as they run down the street. He seems caught in a distant stare, his rapt attention focused completely on their images as they whittle away with each running step.

WOODRUFF (O.S.)

Can we continue?

He closes the curtain. Returns, melancholy:

JACK

Yes. Sorry, Mr. Woodruff.

WOODRUFF

It's O.K., Jack. Turn to page five.
Remember, anything multiplied by zero is
zero. You keep getting that wrong on
your exams...

But Jack's mind is elsewhere. He stares out the window
again, distracted. Searching. Looking for youth. Looking for
someone his own age.

WOODRUFF

Is anything wrong, Jack? We could stop
for the day.

JACK

No. I'm O.K.

Woodruff's eyes hold on the young boy, studying him, seeing
through the facade. He suddenly closes his book, and says
with some enthusiasm:

WOODRUFF

No. That's enough for the day. I think
it's game time!

And Jack raises his head. A smile flits across his once
sullen face. This is clearly a statement he's heard before.
And with it, the child emerges, the boy under the wistful,
sullen countenance. Jack watches Woodruff push aside the
school work, and cross the room to the closet where he
begins rummaging through piles of board games with great
zeal.

WOODRUFF

It's game time, Kiddo. What'll it be
today?

Woodruff's excitement clearly contagious. Jack's solemn
demeanor replaced with a revitalized smile.

Yet after a beat, we see Jack's feverish pitch lessen, and
notice a subtle yet discernable sag of his expression. He
turns, ever so slightly, looking toward the window once
again. His eyes searching, gazing out, looking, longing for
children his own age.

EXT. JACK'S BACKYARD -- DAY

A playing field for a child. Strewn with toys, swings, and a
small swimming pool. Jack Powell's own private playground.
The best Brian and Karen could do for their son. We HEAR
Jack's quiet yet enthusiastic VOICE as we PAN the yard:

JACK (O.S.)

These men here are Green Berets. I send
them in first...

We move along. BIRTHDAY DECORATIONS line the yard. A BANNER sways gently in the breeze -- HAPPY BIRTHDAY JACK! There's a picnic table set up. Dishes, candy. We move along the table coming upon an ARMY of TOY SOLDIERS set up meticulously in fighting positions. Two armies actually. Facing off, equipped with toy tanks, grenade launchers, and mortars. We finally come upon Jack Powell conversing with his grandfather, POPPY, with quiet enthusiasm. Poppy listens on, seemingly absorbed by his grandson, and never condescending.

JACK

... 'Cause the Green Berets are specially trained for the most dangerous situations. I send the Green Berets around the side...

POPPY

Flanking. That's how we did it in World War II.

JACK

Right, flanking. They come around flanking. Surprising the enemy.

(he raises a TANK, expertly crafted)
... Mr. Woodruff just gave this to me today. It's got detachable soldiers and shoots rockets. Rockets or missiles, I don't know which...

BRIAN POWELL

Brian's older now, weathered. These last ten years have obviously taken a toll on him. He hangs a PINYATA off a tree branch in his yard.

BRIAN

Jack, come here. I want you to break the Pinyata.

Jack stands. Runs to his dad.

BRIAN

Hey, Pop, why don't you get this on video?

POPPY

(to Jack)

Ohh, like this is going to last, huh Jack?

Jack exchanges a conspiratorial smile with Poppy. Brian hands Jack a baseball bat.

BRIAN

Go ahead, Jackie.

JACK

Everybody move back, I'm gonna give it a whack.

Jack looks exactly his father's age now. They could easily pass for brothers. Poppy approaches with the Camcorder, capturing the event on video. Jack, enthusiastic, a smile prevalent, takes the bat and in one forceful, unreserved swing, which sends him into a vicious spin, tears into the Pinyata. And WHAM, it splits open, candy spilling over the ground. Poppy and Brian CHEER enthusiastically.

POPPY

(throws a wink to Jack)

That's my boy.

Jack smiles, picks up a piece of candy, and kindly offers it to his father.

And this may seem unusual for us, but for the Powells, it's not strange at all. It's actually sweet, peculiar only in its incongruity. And something they've adapted to over the last ten years.

INT. POWELL HOME

Mrs. Karen Powell places TEN CANDLES on a delicious chocolate birthday cake. She's about thirty eight now but her facial mileage appears well beyond that. She begins lighting the candles as Mr. Woodruff, Jack's tutor, stands behind her.

KAREN

I don't think this is the time to talk about this. It's his tenth birthday. It's a special occasion.

WOODRUFF

I just wanted to let you know that I've noticed a change in his behavior. He's acting different. Quieter. As if he has something on his mind.

KAREN

He's fine. He's just been looking forward to his birthday like any child. That's all. That's all it's been. I tell you, he's fine.

Finished with the cake, she picks it up.

KAREN

Mr. Woodruff, can you bring down the milk? I'll meet you downstairs.

She doesn't want to talk about it. He gets the hint. Karen exits. He follows behind her with a carton of milk.

CUT TO:

JACK

Ecstatic. Like any child on his birthday. He stares at the cake, eyes glowing from the candles. Sucks in deep wind:

FAMILY (O.S.)

Happy Birthday dear Jackie. HAPPY
BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

And BLOWS out the candles. WHOOSH! Cheeks explode, eyes pop. He tries desperately to extinguish each one. Family CLAPS. YAAAAAY! He smiles. Triumphant. But something's missing from this picture. An absence of something. There are no other children present.

The family approaches. Each giving him a big hug.

KAREN

Happy Birthday, Jackie.

She embraces him. He returns it.

KAREN

Ohh, not so hard, Jack. You'll crush me.

POPPY

Big ten years now, Jackie. Happy
birthday, pal.

HIS FATHER rolls out a BIKE from the side of the house. A BMX Red Bandit, adult size. Built for speed. A horn. A front light. Brian gestures grandly to the sparkling chrome bike:

BRIAN

Happy birthday, son.

Jack's eyes light up. He runs forward. Captivated by his gift.

BRIAN

We'll test it out in the park.

JACK

Cool! Mr. Woodruff, check out my new
bike!

Woodruff moves to join his young friend. Karen gives him a reassuring smile, as if to say -- See, he's fine. Woodruff smiles back before joining Jack and Brian as they revel over the boy's new gift.

EXT. POWELL HOME -- NIGHT

A lingering light flickers within the Powell home, casting an amber window of warmth on the ground below. From the second story window shines such a light.

KAREN (O.S.)

...The garden, which covered the whole of the top of the hill, was large and desolate, and the only tree in the entire place was an ancient peach tree that never gave any peaches...

INT. JACK'S ROOM -- NIGHT

The Big Child wears COWBOY and INDIAN pajamas as he lies comfortably in his bed, staring up at his mom, engrossed in the story. Karen sits at the edge of the bed, reading the children's book -- JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH.

KAREN

...There was no swing, no seesaw, no sand pit and no other children were ever invited to come up the hill to play with poor James.

She stops reading. Considers those words. She sees her son's fallen expression, the moonlight streams highlighting his face. She re-evaluates.

KAREN

Let's read something else, Jack.

Jack protests:

JACK

No, ma. Read more. I wanna see what happens. I'm not tired yet.

KAREN

No, we should stop. It's getting late. Say your prayers. We had a long day today. -- And, hey, listen, I want this room clean tomorrow, no excuses either. It's a pig sty. O.K.?

She kisses him on the forehead. Then pauses. A beat. She stares down at him, smoothing his hair. Something on her mind. She has the need to say something. Unsure of it, then.

KAREN

You O.K., Jackie? Mr. Woodruff says you've been real quiet lately. If something's wrong you can tell me.

A moment, then:

JACK

Ma. Am I a giant?

This stops her cold.

KAREN

No, of course not. Where did you hear that? You know that you're just special. You know that.

Jack takes that in. A moment:

JACK

Is that why I'm not allowed to be in school with other kids?

KAREN

Well, it's a lot of things, Jackie. Why are you thinking about school?

JACK

I don't know. Thought it might be fun.
(exaggerated sincerity)
Thanks for the bike. I really liked it.
Goodnight, ma.

And he turns over. But she saw it -- beneath his casual face she saw the crumbling facade of pure longing. But Jack doesn't want to talk about this anymore. And Karen doesn't want to face this obstacle just yet.

INT. JACK'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Mr. Woodruff goes over those multiplication tables once again. But Jack's mind is obviously elsewhere. His eyes wander. To the window again. Where children's VOICES float in. Taunting him. Pulling him. He peers out wistfully:

CHILDREN

Caught up in a championship whiffle ball game. But Jack sits alone, imagining what that would be like. Another group of children pass the Powell house on BMX Bandits. We recognize them as that GANG of BOYS once again. Now rushing by the giant's house. But little Louis Durante trails behind. Peering up at Jack's window. Not afraid. Eyes scrunched in curiosity:

EDWARD (O.S.)

I wonder what the giant's doing in there.

Mr. Woodruff sees Jack's face. The sullen look of longing apparent once again. A beat. Jack stands. And in a bold move, he approaches the window. For a closer look. He stares out. Quiet. Rapt. As if Woodruff were no longer there. Woodruff takes a moment. Closes the math book. Then:

WOODRUFF

Jack, what do you see out there?

JACK

Kids on their bikes. Playing together.

WOODRUFF

Do you want to play with them, Jack?

Jack turns back to him, nods his head sadly. There's desperation on that face now. Woodruff takes this in, understanding Jack's plight completely.

EXT. POWELL'S BACKYARD -- DAY

The playground. A voice, a single man's voice GRUNTS and SHOUTS with great enthusiasm. A hand guides plastic army figures in a kamikaze attack on a plastic tank brigade set up on the edge of the lawn. They seem like menacing green soldiers here, hiding behind thick blades of grass and dandelions. That voice provides color commentary:

JACK'S VOICE (O.S.)

Here come the Green Berets, flanking
around the side... WHAM!

A figure knocked down with a vicious arm sweep. We PULL BACK and see Jack Powell, 40, on his belly, setting those figures up in man to man combat battalions, in trenches, in flanking positions, in a two by two cover formation.

KAREN (O.S.)

I think what you're proposing is
extremely cruel.

INT. POWELL KITCHEN -- DAY

Karen, her countenance solemn, stands at the window, watching her big son below. Coffee brews on the stove behind her. We can almost smell it. Brian Powell pours coffee in a cup for Mr. Woodruff, who sits at the kitchen table. He's direct and to the point, his eyes serious:

WOODRUFF

I spend five days a week with Jack. I
think I know him pretty well.

KAREN

I think I know my own son pretty well,
too.

BRIAN

Karen, I don't think Mr. Woodruff is saying you don't.

WOODRUFF

It's wonderful what you've set up here. I'm not trying to take away from that.

KAREN

But you are. -- And to say that he should start attending public school is...ridiculous. --- This is something we've considered. It's just not possible.

WOODRUFF

Just because he's different doesn't mean he has to be an outcast. We can speak to the school, they can prepare the students. The Board of Education can't deny a child an education.

KAREN

Listen to yourself. He looks like a forty year old man, Mr. Woodruff. I don't think he can fit in. How would the other parents and children accept this? And I don't want my son singled out and made a spectacle of. That's why we hired you.

WOODRUFF

I'm not saying it would be easy. But he'll acquire defense mechanisms just like any child with a shortcoming does.

KAREN

I appreciate what you're trying to do. But I don't think you're considering everything here. Brian and I have been through this before.

JACK -- BELOW

His attention span short. He's focused on some WORM now, not the army set any longer. He pushes the night crawler with a stick. Examining its texture. The world's only ten years old for him; things are still new. Places need to be explored.

WOODRUFF (O.S.)

...He has child's eyes. They say it all. That's all I need to see. Just watch his eyes when he sees other children. He wants to play with them, to run with them, to ride bikes with them. He wants to lead a full life...

INT. KITCHEN

WOODRUFF

Pensive now. His tone sincere.

WOODRUFF (cont'd)

...And right now, he's not. I'm his only companion and there's only so much I can teach him...

Karen takes those words in. Those heartfelt words. She watches her son frolicking on the lawn. Her eyes set like stones on him. Jack now rolls in the grass, his knees stained green from the lawn. Facial stubble announces his years. But his manner is that of a child's. Free formed movement, lithe and agile. He's unaware of his scraped knees, unaware of his messy hair. His dirty clothes. Carefree.

On Karen Powell, looking down at her big son. Smiling, perhaps relenting slightly as we go to:

INT. POWELL HOME -- NIGHT

The quiet hours. Karen and Brian lie in bed. They're both awake. Pensive. Struggling with Woodruff's words. Karen turns to her husband.

KAREN

I don't know. -- We both know this is not as easy as Woodruff makes it sound.

BRIAN

Jack's older now, its different. We can't protect him forever. -- It can't hurt to give it try.

KAREN

Yes it can.

A beat. Brian takes a breath:

BRIAN

He's my son. I don't want to let go either. But maybe it's time for Jack to grow up. Maybe it's time for him to see what's out there.

She digests that. Wrestling with this big decision as we go to:

EXT. POWELL HOME -- MORNING

A stark red horizon. A balmy, motionless fall morning. A radio announcer escorts in the day:

ANNOUNCER (v.o.)
It's seven o'clock. You school kids
better get out of bed or you're gonna
miss that school bus 'cause it's leaving
right now. Wake up! Wake up! Wake up!
You're gonna be late!!!!!!

WHAM! The yellow school bus whips past the Powell home.
CHILDREN'S faces pressed up against windows. We HEAR:

INT. POWELL HOME -- MORNING

Chaos afoot. A radio BLARES. Mr. Powell throws on a suit and tie. Moves through the hallway with haste in his strides. He calls out:

BRIAN
Come on, Jack. You'll be late. Hurry!

KAREN

Preparing Jack's lunch. Clearly, she's giving Woodruff's idea a shot. But she's not overwhelmed. She seems worried. Motherly protection evident. This is much different than any other child's first day of school. She knows that. She throws an apple in Jack's lunch box when:

BRIAN

Enters. Sees her troubled look:

BRIAN
He's going to be just fine. Don't worry.

She forces a smile.

INT. BATHROOM

A razor slides gently across a cheek.

A real pro at this shaving thing now, Jack Powell shaves that last bit of stubble above his lip. He throws water on his face. Nice and clean. No cuts.

Jack steps back. Eyes himself in the mirror. Raises a comb. Parts his hair to the side. Smooths it out. It's perfect. Buttons up his shirt. He's anxious. He's scared. After a moment, he takes a deep breath and quickly exits.

EXT. BATHROOM

As Jack bursts out. He crosses into the kitchen. Snatches up his:

POWER RANGER LUNCH BOX

And makes his way down the stairs. Skipping every other step on the way down.

EXT. STREET

Karen and Brian sit in their car waiting for their son. They trade worried glances as;

Jack exits their home in a burst of movement as if suddenly unchained. He runs to the car. Full speed ahead. Jumps in the back seat. Hauling a notebook, his lunch box, and a lot of hope.

BRIAN

Ready for the first day of school, Jack?

JACK

Let's go!

And they're off. The car takes off down the street. Jack sticks his head out the window, the wind whipping back his slicked hair, exposing his bright, anxious, clean-shaven face.

INT. MS. WARGO'S FOURTH GRADE CLASS, P.S.3 -- DAY

MS. ELIZABETH WARGO. Every school boy's dream teacher. A natural beauty radiating poise and intellect. She's thirty five, with auburn hair and pearl eyes. She stands in front of a class of ten year olds. Her voice is soft yet authoritative. The class remains quiet as she speaks. Some children fidget restlessly in their chairs.

WARGO

Children, the new student I told you all about is arriving today.

Attention getter. Eyes wide and curious. A low murmur kicks up. A buzz in the air. They all exchange curious glances. Wargo quiets the youngsters down with a subtle hand gesture, placing her forefinger over her lips. SHUSH! They stifle quickly.

WARGO

As I told each of you yesterday, the new student is a special child. He may look quite older than all of you, but actually he's just your age...

(cont'd)

WARGO (cont'd)

...I want you to treat him with respect and care just like you treat each other and I hope you'll all be friends with him very soon.

As Ms. Wargo prepares the students, through the window, we see the Powell's car arrive and park in front of the school. Jack, Karen, and Brian step out.

JOHN JOHN

We recognize him from the Gang. His eyes track the approach of the Powells. Wide eyes revealing intense curiosity. He quickly alerts his friends with unheralded excitement:

JOHN JOHN

(whispers)

It's the giant. He's here! Can you believe it? We're finally gonna get to see him up close!

Louis turns, casually yet curiously toward the window, trying to get his first peek at the legendary child.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

PRINCIPAL MCGEE, a short man, with a fragile frame and glassy eyes, shakes Brian's hand firmly, then Karen's, and finally Jack's. Jack looks down at McGee. Smiles politely. McGee gazes up at Jack, who has at least four inches on him. A subtle yet clearly discernable grin rises on little McGee's face. He suppresses a great need to laugh at the absurdity of this:

MCGEE

So, you must be Jack. I heard a lot about you, son.-- Welcome to our school. What do you think of it so far?

JACK

It's big.

MCGEE

Yes, it is.

(to Karen and Brian)

We've made all the preparations. The paper work is done. We're all ready.

(to Jack)

It's time to show you to your classroom.

INT. HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Teachers FACES, staring out of their classrooms, as the entourage of McGee, Brian, Karen and Jack, makes its way down the hallway. Much anticipation here.

Curious eyes hold on Jack, as McGee leads the Powells to Jack's classroom.

Karen sees the stares. The concern on her face grows with each step. She stands next to her son. Protecting him, guiding him along now.

They walk quietly. Jack picking up the rear. Brian walks next to his son, lending support for the young man. Jack's eyes take quiet yet thorough inventory of the hallway. The classrooms. Trophy cases. Lockers. The children's FINGER PAINTINGS displayed on the walls.

Though all seems relatively small next to Jack, his eyes tell us that this is a foreign world, a very big world, a world of possibilities. And Jack's face reflects the hope of new beginnings.

The Principal stops at Ms. Wargo's closed classroom door. The moment of truth has arrived:

MCGEE

Here we are. Ready, Jack?

Jack nods. He clenches his fists, hiding his trembling hands. Takes a deep breath. Fights sudden nervousness. His mother senses his apprehension:

KAREN

Jack, are you O.K.? Oh, look how much you're sweating.

She withdraws a handkerchief from her pocketbook. Wipes the lather of sweat from his brow.

KAREN

Look at you.

He almost manages to keep the tension out of his voice:

JACK

I'm fine, ma. I'm fine.

KAREN

You sure? 'Cause you don't have to do this.

JACK

I want to. I'll be O.K. Don't worry.

Karen turns to her husband. Concern on her face thickens.

Brian smiles, a reassuring smile, hey, this is what he wants. This is for the best.

MCGEE

Mr. and Mrs. Powell, I think Jack'll be fine. He'll see you guys later.

McGee throws them a look as if to say -- time to leave. Karen pauses. A wealth of emotion rises. Her eyes glaze over. Frozen. Brian takes her hand.

BRIAN

We should go.

She nods. Turns to her son one more time. Fixes his collar. Rebuttons his shirt. Pulls his pants a little higher. She kisses him on the cheek. Then, wipes away the lipstick mark.

JACK

I'll be fine. Don't worry. Come on, you're embarrassing me.

KAREN

Jack, if you need anything, just tell your teacher and someone will call me.

He nods. She quickly turns before she loses it. Brian faces his son.

BRIAN

You go get 'em, champ. You'll have a great time. Make friends. And stay out of trouble. Don't be like your old man.

Jack likes that. He grins. Brian takes a deep breath, takes his wife's hand, and begins walking off. Karen keeps her head low, hiding tears from Jack.

BRIAN

He's going to be just fine.

They walk down the hallway. Brian throws his arm around his wife's shoulder, comforting her. Jack watches them go. Whittling away with each step. Alone now. Without their protection for the first time. Jack draws a breath, trying to muster up enough gumption to face the music.

MCGEE

Are you ready, Jack?

Jack manages a brave nod. McGee knocks on the door.

INT. CLASS -- CONTINUOUS

KNOCK. KNOCK. The Gang trades expectant looks. Other students exchange curious glances. Ms. Wargo approaches the door. Opens it slowly. Her face sports a warm, welcoming smile as McGee enters.

MC GEE

Ms. Wargo, your new student, Jack Powell, has arrived. -- Jack, this is Ms. Wargo, your fifth grade teacher.

McGee turns to escort Jack in, but there's no one. The students exchange dubious glances. Taut masks of expectancy. No delivery. Hey, where's the new kid?

MC GEE

Come on, Jack. Don't be shy.

TWO FEET

Proceed unsteadily into the classroom. Men's feet. Size ten. Maybe eleven. Children's style Air Jordans. Right shoe lace dangling untied. The feet stop under the threshold of the doorway.

THE STUDENTS

Get their first look at the new kid. Eyes go wide. Jaws drop. Cute contortions of pure bafflement. Faces sag -- undeniably perplexed. Edward whispers to his pal John John.

EDWARD

Shit. He's no giant. He's just an adult.

JOHN JOHN

Same thing.

Jack smiles self-consciously. He tries to find a place for his hands. His pockets. Hides them there. Ms. Wargo buries any surprise, her expression betrays nothing except the usual smile. She nods to Mr. McGee, who exits. Jack watches him leave. Then, he turns to the classroom. Catches a quick glimpse of those dumbfounded looks.

THE CLASS

Baffled. Agape. Gawking. He does look forty.

GEORGE

Jeez. He looks like my dad.

No one even laughs. 'Cause George is not joking. Ms. Wargo takes Jack by the hand, leads him to the front of the classroom. He stands there, alone, rigid, without any protection, facing those shocked faces. He takes another deep breath. Moves in sheepishly. Ms. Wargo whispers to him:

WARGO

Welcome to our class. I'm glad you're here.

Jack lightens. He likes this woman already. She offers warmth. Kindness. There is an essence that emanates from her, a glow. Jack senses it.

Wargo faces the troops:

WARGO

Students, this is Jack Powell.

She waits for something. A rehearsed response. But she gets nothing but a sea of baffled expressions. And you could cut this silence with a knife. She tries again, slowly:

WARGO

Students, this is Jack.

Not a peep. Wargo stands behind Jack and mouths the practiced response to her class. "HI JACK". Finally, some students, including Louis, manage:

A HANDFUL OF STUDENTS

Hi, Jack.

But Louis gets dirty looks from the rest of his Gang for joining in. He shrugs.

Jack nods. Not a very favorable reception. Grins meekly.

WARGO

Jack, our class would like to welcome you to P.S.3. And we are very glad to have you as one of our classmates. Aren't we children?

Nothing again. Just those baffled looks. Until, George raises his hand:

WARGO

Yes, George?

GEORGE

(bewildered)

Ms. Wargo. What's going on here? How old is he really? He ain't no kid!

Some giggles with that. Some murmurs of assent. Jack fidgets nervously. Wargo barks:

WARGO

George. That's enough. -- Jack, your seat is in the back. -- Today, we're going over division.

Jack nods. Head way low. Wary. He makes his way to his seat. The trek of a lifetime. All eyes on him now. And he knows he's a spectacle. Keeps that head down.

Doesn't want to meet those stares. Tries not to show his anxiety. Louis and the Gang watch him closely, continuing to trade shocked looks. Jack raises his head momentarily, accidentally locks eyes with LOUIS DURANTE. And they hold on each other for a moment.

LOUIS

Hi.

JACK

Hi.

And Louis' eyes stay firmly on Jack. Intrigued by the new student yet not frightened. Louis turns away -- to John John and George and Edward. Who all look at him as if he were completely insane. Jack continues on, moving quickly to his seat, way in the back.

Ms. Wargo watches him, sensing his uneasiness. She addresses the class, in a quick attempt to draw their attention away from Jack:

WARGO

O.K. Let's begin, everyone take out your math book. Come on.

Jack reaches his desk. Finally. Wipes the lather of sweat from his forehead. Then, he eyes the size of his seat. Small. Way too small actually. He tries to sit. His ass gets stuck. He's actually stuck. Embarrassed. He's making noise. Drawing attention. Some students turn. He's the spectacle again. He smiles awkwardly. There's great patches of sweat spreading around his armpits now. It's uncomfortable. More heads turn. He wiggles his butt. Tries to get unstuck. It's not working. He stands, desk stuck to his adult ass. Rather amusing. He loses balance. Falls over, out of frame, as we go to:

EXT. POWELL HOME -- AFTERNOON

Quiet. No movement on the street.

INT. HOME -- DAY

A PLATE

On the kitchen table. One plate. Alone.

KAREN POWELL

Sits at the table. Lethargic. By herself. A lonely sight here. Eating lunch. It's quiet. Uncomfortably silent. The ticking of the clock, rhythmic, somehow louder here.

The chair, opposite her, is conspicuously vacant.

And that, of course, is Jack's chair. She eyes the chair reverently. A look of yearning in her eye. He is usually sitting there. But today, for the first time in years, he is not.

And this once full time Mom, who somehow lost her job, wears her loneliness like a deep scar now. Her face painted with concern as she wonders if she made the right decision sending her son off to school.

She fidgets uncomfortably. Finishes her sandwich. Stands, places the dish in the sink. There, she pauses. Peers around. Searching for something to fill her time. Yet here, she will find nothing.

She peers up at the clock. Waiting now. Tick. Tick. Fills the flat silence. On her quiet, lost expression.

-EXT. SCHOOLYARD -- LATER

STUDENTS

Frolic about in an unblemished mosaic of school yard life. And the yard is alive. Children laugh. Children sing. A boy performs a magic trick. Boys play kick ball. Girls hopscotch. Kindergartners play PATTY CAKE. The staccato rhythm of POGS being slammed against the concrete raids the air.

TWO FEET

Those large feet again. Balancing along a curb.

JACK

Stands on that curb. On the edge of this foreign land called the schoolyard. He has parked himself away from everyone. A solitary figure, isolated, under a fall amber sun. Like his mom, he is alone. He keeps his head down, focusing his attention on the ol' curb walk.

JACK

(to himself)

They're looking at you, Jack. Don't look at them. Don't let them see that you're scared.

He's right. Students wander to the outskirts of the schoolyard taking notice. Groups huddle ten yards away from him, careful not to get too close. They POINT. And WHISPER. At this object of fascination. Jack keeps his head low, peeking out. Sees the POINTS, hears the WHISPERS. They blend and overlap, but he still makes out: "How old is he?" "He looks old." "He's the giant!"

MS. WARGO

Standing with another TEACHER. Curious eyes hold on the new student.

TEACHER

This is really odd. He's so...old.

WARGO

This is going to be rough for the kid.

TEACHER

It's hard to look at him as just a kid.

WARGO

I talked to each student individually. I don't think it's working. They're still treating him like the eighth wonder of the world.

TEACHER

You gotta look at it from their point of view. It's gotta be very strange. -- You know, I wouldn't believe it if I didn't see it with my own eyes. I've never seen such an innocent looking man in my whole life...

And Wargo looks forward, eyes holding on Jack. And she sees it -- the innocence of a child -- the severity of manhood absent. A beat, until:

TEACHER

You know, he's rather handsome. I'd like to teach him a lesson or two.

WARGO

He's only ten, Elaine. -- That's terrible.

Teacher shrugs.

STUDENTS

All making their way near Jack, to get a closer look. Dawning curiosity obvious. Jack ignores the curious stares. Tries to get a clear view of some activities in the schoolyard. Things he's never seen. Possibilities. He finds that GANG of BOYS sitting across the schoolyard. His gaze holds on them. Studying them, their friendship, their camaraderie. Envious, yearning for that, that companionship.

THE GANG

Sitting near the basketball court, tossing furtive glances the giant's way. They catch Jack gaping at them. Eyes widen.

They refuse to meet his gaze evenly. Their voices strain.
They whisper:

JOHN JOHN

Oh, man, he's looking at us. He's
looking at us. The giant's looking at
us.

EDWARD

He probably recognizes us from the
street. -- He's probably planning on
getting us.

LOUIS

You guys are babies. He's not gonna do
anything.

GEORGE

You're as weird as he is, Louis. He's
the giant. You heard the stories of how
crazy he is. Sometimes, you make me
wonder about you.

But Louis pays no heed to their comments. His eyes quickly
find Jack. A beat. He throws a warm, receptive smile Jack's
way.

But Jack lowers his head, nervously. Doesn't know how to
react when, he sees:

Louis suddenly hit squarely in the chest with a basketball.
The young boy flinches. The ball bounces off, right into the
hand of a large squinty-eyed ruffian, VICTOR. Standing
beside his sidekick, ERIC.

VICTOR

Ready to lose again, butt face.

Victor viciously throws the ball into Louis' chest once
again. Louis catches it. He looks around, defiantly:

LOUIS

Are you talking to me?

VICTOR

Yeah, you're the only butt face I see.

LOUIS

Well you're the only fart knocking
cheese eater, who wears his mother's bra
that I see.

VICTOR

You're a loser, Louis.

LOUIS

No. I'm rubber and you're glue. Anything you say bounces off of me and sticks to you.

VICTOR

That's the trouble with you. You do all your talking off the court. Now are you gonna play or what?

And their eyes lock and... burn. Deep seeded rivalry apparent here. Jack watches, very interested in this banter, this behavior he's never seen before.

LOUIS

Come on, John John. -- We can beat these guys. We're due.

And John John reluctantly follows. Already defeated.

JOHN JOHN

Here we go again.

Louis takes out the ball. Goes to throw it to John John. It's quickly intercepted by Victor, who goes up for a nice lay up and scores. High fives his teammate. He spews a derisive, machine gun like laugh that could spoil any day.

JACK

Watches on. Intrigued. His first glimpse of a school yard bully. Victor's mean spirited laughter ringing through the air, as the game resumes. Jack continues watching, when his view is interrupted by:

Two YOUNG GIRLS, PHOEBE AND JANE, pointing at him with the utmost curiosity. They push themselves forward, closer to him than anyone else has yet ventured, inquiring minds drive them, toward the boy, like kittens eyeing a new ball of yarn. Frightened yet anxious. Trying to muster up the courage to approach, they drift closer.

JACK

(to himself)

Don't come over here. Don't come over here, please.

They come forward. Jack's face drops. Not ready for this:

PHOEBE

Hey, mister? What are you doing here?
How old are you?

JACK

I'm ten.

JANE

(to Phoebe)

He's ten. A whole two years older than us. See!

PHOEBE

(cheerfully sarcastic)

Oh, like that explains it!

That hurts. He lowers his head, dejected as the girls walk away. A beat. He peers down at his dangling shoe laces, goes to tie them, when:

A BALL

The basketball lands at his feet. Bouncing into his size ten Jordans and stopping there. He eyes it quizzically, when;

LOUIS (O.S.)

Hey, how 'bout a little help?

He looks up, sees:

BOYS

The boys from the basketball game peering over at him. Measuring him with awe, curiosity, fear. Louis, John John, Victor, and Eric.

JACK

Caught like a deer in headlights, he pauses, face reddening, more vulnerable now. Some type of interaction with children his own age. Finally, he bends, picks up the ball, holding it gently, like an egg:

LOUIS

Throw it over.

He goes to throw it, when the hard, heinous VOICE of Victor bleeds out:

VICTOR

Wait. I'm not touching that thing. It's been contaminated now that he's touched it!

ERIC

Yeah, I'm not touching it. We might catch what he has! I ain't touching it! No way.

And they laugh. A mean derisive laugh together at the expense of Jack. The Gang doesn't laugh though, sensing the blatant cruelty of this. Louis grimaces, staunchly unamused, watching Jack closely now -- the new boy's eyes

watering from this malicious bite. Jack tries to hide it. Chews his trembling lip. When:

THE BELL RINGS

Announcing the unfortunate yet inevitable end of recess. All the children break into stride, running for the school. Some children kick into the fuel efficient SKIP run.

And Jack remains caught in a frozen tableau, holding that contaminated basketball. Unable to move. He doesn't follow, feeling completely out of place.

And, as the other children run in, Louis Durante holds his point. Eyes hold on Jack, brows furrowed in deep empathy. Then after a moment, he runs off too, leaving Jack Powell behind, a solitary figure in the courtyard, feeling small and altogether alone.

EXT. POWELL HOUSE -- NIGHT

A sea of star life overhead tracks Mr. Powell's car as it pulls in the driveway of his home.

INT. POWELL HOME -- NIGHT

Karen stands outside her son's door, knocking lightly. There's desperation and anger in her eyes. She hides that in her voice:

KAREN

Jack, do you want something to eat, honey?

JACK (O.S.)

No. I'm not hungry.

Brian enters. Karen meets him at the head of the stairs.

KAREN

He won't come out of his room.

BRIAN

What happened?

KAREN

Just what I expected. Children whispering. Pointing. He's not used to that, Brian. I don't know if this was a good idea.

INT. JACK'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Jack sits by the window. His mind racing. Caught in a distant, faraway fair dream of the way things ought to be. He's beyond tears. He's unsettled, sighing with indecision.

Streams of moonlight seep in through the window, lighting his face blue. Highlighting the wrinkles there. He may have crow's feet and acne scars but he still bears the lost look of a child.

His mother's words float into his room:

KAREN (O.S.)

I'm going to call Woodruff -- we'll go back to the way things were. It was easier for him that way. Jack saw the other side. He tried that way and understands why it is the way it is, and why it can't work any other way.

But Jack doesn't like that either. He's confused, scared. Mind races for some type of rationale here. He turns, faces himself in the mirror over his desk.

BRIAN (O.S.)

Karen, I think you're being a little rash here... First day of school is rough for every kid. I'm going to talk him.

He stares at himself wistfully. A beat. His fugue is broken by a KNOCK on his door. And the door opening, revealing his Dad.

BRIAN (cont'd)

Hey, kiddo. I heard you had a rough day. You want to talk about it?

Jack shrugs.

JACK

Not really.

BRIAN

That's O.K.

(a beat)

You know what I was just thinking about? I just saw your new bike on the lawn. Made me remember the first time you learned to ride a bike. Remember that? You were so determined to ride. Kept wiping out. Nearly took out a couple of the neighbors. You had me and your mother worried sick. We thought you were going to kill yourself.

Jack smiles. Thinking back. Remembering...

BRIAN

It took a couple days until you finally got it. But ya got it. And now you're like a pro...

(a beat)

It's kind of like school, isn't it?

Jack nods. Takes in his father's words.

BRIAN

Anyway. I just wanted to see how you were doing. You need anything. Give me a holler.

Brian finally stands. Makes his way toward the door. When, he hears:

JACK (O.S.)

Dad.

Brian stops. Turns back to his son.

JACK

Could we practice some basketball?

And Brian smiles. A hint of pride apparent.

INT. POWELL HOME -- LATER THAT NIGHT

POV of KAREN THROUGH BACK WINDOW

Of Brian and Jack practicing hoops, in their backyard, under spotlights. There's a hint of nostalgia in Brian's voice, as Jack watches on, determined. A wanton lust to learn burns in his eyes as:

BRIAN

It's all in the wrist, Jackie. All in the wrist. Watch. Like this. We used to play one on one in the schoolyard everyday. Just watch...

Brian takes a shot. It sinks. Jack, intent on mimicking his father's shot, takes the ball, sets up just like his father did.

KAREN

Watching. Worry on her face evident. On her tired face as we go to:

EXT. SCHOOLYARD -- MORNING

Sun lingers high and hot. The underside of a few clouds glow red and beneath them:

Yellow school buses line the street in front of P.S.3 The buses release crowds of students. Car DOORS slam as mothers drop off youngsters. And in the midst of those students:

JACK POWELL forges his way to the front doors of the school. Students seem dwarfed around him. They peer up at him, still amazed, curious, and frightened.

CHILDREN alert their PARENTS to this oddity. Parents take note. Exchanging curious glances.

And from here, Jack Powell would appear to be a teacher not a student. Until we see him swinging his Power Ranger lunch box and wearing a backpack. He keeps his head higher today. He responds to the stares by assuming a straight ahead demeanor, trying to appear undaunted, as he enters the school.

INT. CLASS -- LATER

PAN a line of students reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, hands over their hearts in salute to our nation. We pan along, slowly passing John John, Edward (chewing gum), George, Louis, and, finally, PANNING UP at the end of the line, finding Jack, hand over heart, reciting along. Ms. Wargo eyes him endearingly as we go to:

EXT. SCHOOLYARD -- AFTERNOON

Children frolic about in their habitat. And:

JACK stands in his old spot. On that curb again. Balancing there like he's walking the tightrope. A hint of confidence in his eye today. Knows what to expect now. Yes, there's some students staring and pointing. But not as many as yesterday.

TWO YOUNG GIRLS

Phoebe and Jane. From yesterday. On the make. One on each side of Jack. They peer at him curiously, baffled by this puzzle. We catch them in the midst of their inquiry:

JANE

So, you're really ten?

Jack nods.

PHOEBE

But I'm eight. And I don't look nearly as old as you. I mean, come on.

JACK

Give yourself a couple years. This is what you'll have to look forward to.

JANE
(worried)
That's a joke, right?

Jack shrugs.

PHOEBE
No, really. Why do you look like that if
you're just ten, Mister?

JACK
You don't have to call me "Mister". My
name's Jack.

JANE
You're ten. -- But you look like my dad.

JACK
So? I age specially. What's the big
deal?

A light bulb bursts above Phoebe's head. She explodes:

PHOEBE
I got it! February 28th. Leap Year. You
must have been born Leap Year. Every
four years is your birthday. You've only
had ten birthdays because of...

JANE
No, silly. -- If he was born in Leap
Year he would have only...four birthdays
but he would still look...ten. Or
something like that.

Jack stares at them, completely confused. His face tells us
he has no idea what 'leap year' is.

JACK
I was born in October.

PHOEBE
No, it makes sense. If he was born in
leap year, he would have only had ten
birthdays but he would look forty, like
he does...

They walk away, arguing as if he weren't even there. Jack
just shakes his head, inured. He sits on the curb, eyes
surveying the courtyard. He reveals a bag of gummi bears
from his pocket. Eats one, peers around. Goes for another,
finding solace in these small treats. As only a child can.

When, MS. WARGO arrives. Curious onlookers slowly back away
from their respective vantages upon her arrival.

WARGO
How you doing, Jack?

JACK
Hi, Ms. Wargo.

Jack nods sheepishly. But his eyes light up when he looks at Wargo. He likes that lady. Feels comfortable around her. She gestures toward the seat next to him:

WARGO
May I?

Jack nods. Oh sure. Go right ahead. She sits next to him on the curb. A beat. An awkward moment. He raises his small bag of gummi bears, offering her one. She eyes the bag. Then:

WARGO
Could I get a red one? The red one's are my favorite.

He nods. Be my guest. She reaches into the bag, withdraws a red bear. A beat. Then:

WARGO
How do you like it so far?

JACK
It's busy. There's a lotta kids out here.

He pauses. Shrugs. Looks out at all the children. Once again separated from him. The blank innocence of the child inside the man's body so apparent now. She sees his sullen look.

WARGO
It always takes time for them to get used to the new kid, Jack. When I first came here it took the children two weeks to warm up to me.

He nods. Offers her another bear. She withdraws a red one when:

PHOEBE AND JANE (O.S., singing)
Ms. Wargo and Jack sitting in the tree.
K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes love, then comes marriage...

She quickly stands. Jack lowers his head, face reddening with embarrassment. Wargo whispers to Jack before going after the girls:

WARGO
If anyone bothers you, you come tell me.
-- And hey, thanks for lunch.

He likes that. Charmed by her protective nature. He even manages something that resembles a smile. She throws him a warm look. It'll be O.K. She walks away. He follows her as she reprimands Phoebe and Jane.

Jack withdraws another bear, when he catches sight of some action across the way:

LOUIS

Louis, John John, Edward, and George sitting together again as VICTOR and ERIC stand in front of them.

VICTOR

Louis. Come on. Time to lose again.

JACK

Peers over, sees the Victor and Eric taunting Louis to play. Louis stands, walks onto the court alone. Jack looks on, curious.

ERIC

What are you doing, Louis? Ya Louis-er.
Get it, Loser. Ya Louis-er. Pick a
teammate.

Louis nods. Turn to his gang. They collectively shake their heads -- no way we're playing. He looks around. Eyes catch something. He takes a moment. Then, casually raises his hand and non-chalantly points across the school yard:

LOUIS

Well, I got the new kid.

And everything halts.

Time stretches to a nightmarish crawl. Edward, John John, and George stare at their friend as if he'd just sprouted another head. Edward actually stops chewing his gum in mid-chew. A long, painful stillness ensues. Only the wind bansheeing through the yard fills the silence. Louis repeats, with resolution:

LOUIS

I want the new kid.

JOHN JOHN

(flabbergasted)

Whattaya crazy, Louis?

VICTOR

You can't pick him. He can't play with
us.

LOUIS

I can pick whoever I want. He's in my class, so I can pick him. -- Whattaya, afraid to lose?

ERIC

No. Pick whoever you want. -- We never lose.

Everyone stands stuck in a strange tableau of utter bafflement. While:

JACK

Flinches as if physically assaulted. Agape. Peering meekly at Louis. He looks behind him, making sure Louis is indicating him, not someone in back of him. Then, in a bold move, Louis steps forward and addresses Jack directly:

LOUIS

Hey you, new guy. Come here. You wanna play some ball?

Jack stands warily. Even Ms. Wargo watches now as Louis and Jack converge in the center of the schoolyard. Eyes are wide and expectant. As if Louis is making direct contact with an extra-terrestrial.

JACK

You want me?

LOUIS

Yeah you. -- You ever play basketball?

JACK

Yeah, a little.

LOUIS

Good 'cause I always lose to these guys. They're real jerks. I don't want to lose again. -- So just stand by the hoop and I'll get the ball to you. You're a tall guy so just put the ball in the basket. Can you do that?

JACK

I think so.

Louis smiles reassuringly.

LOUIS

Don't think about it. Just do it.

Louis walks forward, escorting his new teammate onto the court. Louis faces the dumbfounded Bullies, who step gingerly back, considering the giant with a measure of

suspicion. Jack nods politely to them as he ventures a hesitant step onto the court and into the domain of young boys. He takes a deep, fortifying breath, preparing himself for his first encounter in this world.

Louis starts the game, finding nothing unusual about his choice:

LOUIS

Let's go. Ten wins. Losers take out. I lost yesterday. I take out.

Jack stands under the net. Nervous.

LOUIS

No, no, Jack. Over here now. We have to take it out first.

Jack obliges. Eric covers Louis. And Victor covers Jack. Jack smiles down at the tiny boy.

VICTOR

Oh, like this is real fair, Louis.

(to Jack)

And please, don't hurt me.

Jack stares quizzically at Victor as:

LOUIS

Brings the ball in bounds with a high toss to Jack. Jack fumbles it momentarily, retrieves it. Smiles triumphantly at that small victory, before quickly getting rid of it, back to Louis, as if it were a hot tomato.

LOUIS

Go to the net. Go to the net. Put your hands up. GO TO THE NET!

Jack manages his way to the net. Eric stands below, in a futile attempt to cover the giant. Jack throws his hands up, following his captain's order, like the Indian in Cuckoo's Nest. Louis tosses one up. High and hard. Jack awkwardly catches it.

LOUIS

Put it in the hole! Put it in the hole!

Jack, six feet tall, reaches up, undefended by the tiny boy below him, and effortlessly places the ball in the hole. Scoring the first basket. Louis hoots triumphantly:

LOUIS

That's my first lead in weeks. HAH! HAH!

And some students laugh along, enjoying Louis' small exhibition here with the giant. John John, Edward, and George standing on the sideline, trade dumbfounded looks, amazed their friend has done this.

JOHN JOHN
He's definitely lost it.

Jack smiles, his teammate's enthusiasm contagious. Louis approaches, introduces Jack to his first high five. George, John John, and Edward watch this strange display in utter disbelief. Victor and Eric stand angrily pouting as Louis raises his hand in front of Jack:

LOUIS
High five.

Jack obliges. Slaps his hand. Louis cringes:

LOUIS
Hey, not so hard. -- Now defense, defense, get on defense. Just stand by the net. Stand by the net.

Here comes the opposition. Jack's eyes dart back and forth as Victor and Eric pass with expert precision, faking out Louis. Victor takes a shot and:

JACK

Blocks it easily before it sinks. Louis hoots:

LOUIS
Big defense!

VICTOR
That's goal tending.

LOUIS
No, no. We take out. Pass it here, Jack. Right here.

Jack passes it back to Louis. They're moving fast now, down the asphalt, with a rhythm all their own. Jack's caught up in the moment. Revitalized. Engrossed in Louis' antics. Almost enjoying this. Louis takes it. Dribbles to the:

LOUIS
To the net. To the net, Jack!

Jack beelines to the net. He stands there. Erect, confident, and hovering impatiently. Louis puts it up, high and hard once again. Jack catches it easily:

LOUIS

Put it in the hole, Mr. Jordan! Put it
in the hole!

And he does just that. Louis hoots wildly once again. Ms. WARGO, watching from afar, smiles. And the thick ice around Jack may be breaking now, as some students watching actually CHEER along with Louis as he exchanges a second high five with Jack. Jack's getting the hang of it. Aware of the crowd's positive response. He slaps Louis' hand with just enough force:

LOUIS

That's better. -- It's four nothing.
Undisputed! All on account of the new
guy.

He sees some students clapping. On Jack's smiling face. Triumphant, unable to disguise his joy, as we go to:

INT. CLASSROOM -- AFTERNOON

Ms. Wargo walks up and down each aisle, addressing the class:

WARGO

Now class, we have a new assignment.
Something I want you to put some serious
thought into. You have all term to
finish the project. I want you to all
write an essay on what you want to be
when you grow up.

JOHN JOHN

I wanna be a gynecologist.

WARGO

(trying not to smile)
If that's so, I want good reasons why. I
want you to really think about this,
John John.

Jack, countenance shining after the basketball incident, (now sitting at a larger desk and chair), writes in his notebook -- HOME WORK -- WHAT DO I WANT TO BE WHEN I GROW UP. He mulls that one over a bit when:

Ms. Wargo walks past his desk, leans down, and whispers to Jack:

WARGO

Nice shooting today, Jack. Way to go.

She pats him on the shoulder. Jack's eyes hold on her. He returns that smile, revealing a grin with a hint of flirtation! Wargo walks on, leaving a victorious, encouraged

Jack alone in the back of the room. On his face, alight with joy:

EXT. SCHOOL -- DAY

Yellow school BUSES and CARS line the street in front of the school. BUS DRIVERS and PARENTS trade gossip in small huddles. A BELL SOUNDS within. School's out. The front doors of the school swing open, releasing hundreds of students. Forging a sinuous path away from the school.

LOUIS

And the rest of his Gang. Trading goodbyes in front. John John, Edward, and George find their buses, leaving Louis alone. He begins to search the area with a serious eye sweep. Something's up. He searches for something, someone. While:

JACK

Exits. Head a wee bit higher now. Some confidence in that step. Students stop and stare, but the novelty is wearing thin. Jack continues on, smile prevalent, ignoring any whispers, when:

Louis spots Jack. Bingo. Just who he was looking for. He runs to him. Tugs on Jack's shirt.

LOUIS

Hey. Nice game today. You did real good.
First time I ever beat those guys.

JACK

Thanks.

LOUIS

Look. You gotta do me another favor.

JACK

What is it?

LOUIS

Follow me.

Jack pauses, follows hesitantly:

EXT. SIDE OF SCHOOL -- DAY

Louis leads Jack to the side of the school. Jack eyes the desolate area with some suspicion.

JACK

What are we doing here?

Louis shakes his head. Peeks around, no one. All clear. He speaks with grave urgency, his words come fast and furious:

LOUIS

Listen. My mother's coming here to meet the principal today. She wants to speak to him. See I kinda been getting in trouble in school lately and my grades aren't what they used to be. It's not that I'm stupid, I'm just really not interested in anything they're teaching...

JACK

Yeah...

LOUIS

Well, you're gonna be the principal.

JACK

I'm gonna be the principal?

LOUIS

Yes. You. The principal. You see, if my Mom talks to Principal McGee, he'll tell her that I've been no good. Then, WHAM! Off with my head. She'll have a hissy fit and ground me and we don't want that.

JACK

You talk fast.

LOUIS

I got a lot to say. -- Not for nothing but Jack, if you didn't know it yet, you could pass for a teacher. You know? So how 'bout it?

But before Jack even has a chance to answer, a CAR pulls up behind them. Louis' eyes fall serious. He sees his MOTHER exit the car.

LOUIS

Here she is. You gotta do it.

JACK

Louis! I can't pretend to be the principal!

But Louis already has Jack by the hand, leading him toward MRS. DOLORES DURANTE. Big hair, tight clothes. Once attractive, yet facial decay evident, she tries to hang on to youth with a veil of make-up that hides loose, sun-baked skin. Thirty five, trying to look twenty.

Before his mother could approach, Louis snatches Jack's book bag and lunch box away.

LOUIS

Hi, ma. This is Principal Powell.
He's new here. He just came a couple
weeks ago. I told him you were coming.

DOLORES

Hi. Mr. Powell. -- My name's Dolores,
friends call me D.D. -- What happened to
Principal McGee? I just spoke to him the
other day.

Jack, frozen, doesn't know how to respond. He exchanges a
look with Louis who blurts out:

LOUIS

I don't know what happened to Mr. McGee.
-- Mr. Powell?

Jack holds silent, on the spot. Louis hits him in the leg,
breaking his frozen state. Jack speaks, deepening his voice,
as any child pretending to be an adult would, yet here, in
this case, it seems somewhat unwarranted.

JACK

Ohh. He got a belly ache.

Dolores eyes him strangely. Sounds like he has a frog in his
throat, this new Principal. Louis throws him the big eye.
Knock it off. A beat, then:

DOLORES

(suspiciously)

A belly ache?

LOUIS

He had to go to the hospital.

His regular voice now:

JACK

Appendicitis.

LOUIS

Yeah. Yeah, appendicitis.

Dolores nods. Hesitant yet finally accepting.

DOLORES

Appendicitis. Mmmm. Hope he feels
better. -- Louis, would you excuse us
for a moment?

LOUIS

No, lemme stay, ma.

DOLORES

Louis. Go on now. This is a private talk between adults.

Louis throws Jack a pleading look before exiting.

DOLORES

See, that's his problem, he doesn't listen. Isn't that the problem with most kids?

JACK

Yeah.

DOLORES

That's what I thought. Actually the problem with most men. Am I right? Your wife probably says that to you.

JACK

No.

DOLORES

Are you married?

JACK

Married. No. Not married.

Dolores' eyes light up with that. Louis stands twenty feet away, listening intently:

LOUIS

How embarrassing. -- If she only knew...

JACK

Face reddening. Dolores continues:

DOLORES

I'm divorced myself. That's why I'm having so much trouble with Louis. His father left a few years ago, and since that time, he's had a chip on his shoulder. -- And he's at that age where he's starting to think about girls. You know, I found some dirty magazines in his room...

Jack is beginning to laugh now. He puts his hand over his mouth, suppressing a great need to guffaw out loud.

JACK
It's a tough age. I know... I mean, I
remember it well.

Jack glances over at Louis.

LOUIS

Nods his head, impressed. Throws the O.K. sign, encouraging
Jack to continue.

LOUIS
Hey, that was a good one.

DOLORES

Continuing:

DOLORES
So, how's he been doing lately?

And blithering on now:

JACK
He's doing real good. Really. He's
really doing fine. Really doing his
homework. Really good stuff.

DOLORES
Really. That's surprising. So much
trouble last term after that painting
incident.

JACK
I heard about that.

LOUIS

Smirking slyly:

LOUIS
(suppressing laughter)
He "heard about that". Convincing. Very
convincing.

JACK

Fidgeting. Searching for "principalic" words:

JACK
Well, he's really cleaned up his act
since that time. He's a really fine
student.

LOUIS

Wincing:

LOUIS
No more "reallys", you're going to blow it.

JACK

Continuing:

JACK
...As a matter of fact, I'd say he's probably the best student in the whole school.

LOUIS

Cringing nervously.

JACK

Winding down. Getting a grip:

JACK
So, you really don't have anything to worry about. -- He's a good boy.

DOLORES
Well, I'm surprised, but that's great to hear. -- Maybe we could have lunch and talk more about this.

LOUIS

Ashamed. Lowers his head.

LOUIS
Oh no. Here she goes. Here she goes.

He's had enough. Louis decides to rejoin Jack and his mother. Runs to them. Stands by his mom's side. Tosses a grateful look at Jack.

DOLORES
I hear you've been quite a good boy.

LOUIS
I told you.

DOLORES
Well, to make sure you continue this good behavior, Mr. Powell's going to report to me on how you're doing. Let me give you my number at work...

She searches for something to write on. Retrieves a book of matches from her purse. Writes her work number on it. Hands the matches to Jack.

DOLORES

You could reach me there if you have anything to tell me about Louis or about anything else.

Jack eyes the matches curiously. Sees the red gaudy script logo -- MEMORIES.

DOLORES

That's just a place I go to. If I'm not at work, I'm usually there. It's a nice place for people our age to get together.

Louis rolls his eyes.

DOLORES

I've taken up enough of your time, Mr. Powell. We'll see each other again I'm sure. I'm looking forward to it. You make sure Louis behaves himself. Bye-bye.

She goes to her car. Jack stands frozen, a bit perplexed at that bizarre encounter. Yet proud of himself. Louis whispers to Jack:

LOUIS

Hey man, I owe you one. Sorry about my mom, Jack. She's looking for love in all the wrong places. Just like the rest of us, I guess.

JACK

Thanks for picking me today. It was fun.

LOUIS

Next time, football.

Jack smiles. Louis nods. Pauses. Has the need to say something. Decides against it.

LOUIS

I gotta go. Maybe I'll see you over the weekend.

As Louis turns to leave, Jack stops him:

JACK

Hey, Louis, you know, I'm not really a giant.

And Louis turns, now awkwardly aware that Jack had seen him standing in front of his home. Feels rotten.

LOUIS

I'm sorry about that. The guys get a little crazy. Don't worry about it. And even if you were a giant, I wouldn't care.

Jack likes that. Nods. HORN BEEPS. Dolores beckoning her son:

LOUIS

I gotta go. Moms, you know. Impatient. I'll see you.

Jack smiles, a genuine connection. He then waves to Dolores as Louis enters his car and slowly pulls away.

EXT. POWELL HOME -- LATE AFTERNOON

WHAM! Jack Powell runs full speed down his street. Sure footed and fast. Face wreathed in a silly grin of joy. The wind blows back his hair, exposing a rosy, electrified face. His back pack swings behind him. He reaches his home. Doesn't slow. Throws open the front door. Steps inside. Whips off his jacket. Kicks off his shoes with child-like swiftness. He's excited, moving quickly, with energy. HOLLERS:

JACK

MAAAA! I'm HOME!

CUT TO:

INT. HOME -- MOMENTS LATER

JACK pacing back and forth in the kitchen. Excited, phone pressed to his ear. Karen watches as Jack tangles himself in phone wire, his voice laced with enthusiasm.

JACK

Dad, I played basketball with these kids. I scored a thousand points. It was great. I met this kid Louis.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE -- SAME TIME

Brian sits at a desk, on the phone with his son. A conservative office. His tie loose. Sleeves rolled up. He shares his son's excitement:

BRIAN

Slow down, champ.

JACK (O.S.)
...I pretended to be the principal. And
I got homework I gotta do. My first
assignment. Can you believe it?

BRIAN
That's great.

Brian smiles, joy evident.

CUT TO:

JACK -- HOUSE

JACK
O.K. I'll see you later. I have to call
Mr. Woodruff. Yeah, me too. O.K. bye,
Dad.

He hangs up.

INT. JACK'S ROOM -- DUSK

Day gives passage to night. Jack Powell at his desk, working
on his homework assignment. He writes on a blank piece of
paper:

WHAT I WANT TO BE WHEN I GROW UP

He pauses. Pensive now, chews on his pencil. Then his nail.
Throws his right arm up, curling it around his head to
scratch his left ear. Chews on that pencil again, then
writes three question marks on that paper. When, he HEARS:

DING DONG

The doorbell. He leans forward. And sees:

A BIKE

A child's style BMX Bandit. Not unlike his birthday present.

LOUIS (O.S.)
Can Jack come out and play?

He sits forward, eyebrows furrowed in disbelief:

INT. POWELL HOME, FRONT DOOR -- CONTINUOUS

Karen Powell faces off with little Louis Durante.

KAREN
And you're?

LOUIS

Louis Durante. Pleased to meet you. --
I'm a friend of Jack's from school. - I
was wondering if Jack wanted to come to
a sleep over some of us guys are having.
I mean, if he's allowed and stuff.

Karen pauses. Unsure. This is a big step. Then, finally:

KAREN

Well, I don't know if that's a good
idea.

JACK -- ROOM

Thinks it's a very good idea. Has made his decision already.
He throws on his sneakers. And bolts out of his room.

EXT. HOUSE -- LATER THAT NIGHT

Karen stands at her screen door. Peering out. With that
motherly conviction in her eyes, she hollers:

KAREN

Don't stay up too late! And be careful.

She watches:

HER SON AND LOUIS

Under a pearlescent white slice of moon, under pools of
street lights, Jack Powell rides his new bike away from
home. He waves goodbye to his mom. Kicks hard on the pedals.
Joins Louis as he pulls down the street. And there, he
rides. Not a solitary figure anymore. But now with a
companion, racing under the moon. A sleeping bag slung over
his shoulder. A baseball cap on his head and a toothbrush in
his back pocket. He pumps hard on those pedals, eyes flick
and flash under shafts of moonbeams that whisk through tree
branches, grim determination apparent.

KAREN

His mom. Watches them go, with a hint of concern.

EXT. STREET -- LATER

As those two ten year olds make their way down a street
lined with gnarled oaks, and slender elms. They weave back
and forth, forging a sinuous path. We watch from behind:

LOUIS (v.o.)

Hey Jack, I know you must hear this a
lot, but how come you look like an adult
even if you're just ten?

JACK (v.o.)
 (his stock answer)
 I'm special.

Louis waits for more than that.

JACK (v.o.)
 I age like four times the rate of what
 you age. I'm ten but I look about forty.

LOUIS (v.o.)
 Sort of like cat years.

JACK (v.o.)
 Yeah sort of. -- When I'm twenty I'll
 look really old.

A beat. They ride on. Then:

LOUIS (v.o.)
 Hey, man, I hear that the first twenty
 are the best ones anyway. My mom says
 it's all downhill after that.

They begin to ride faster, cutting a swath into the night.

EXT. JOHN JOHN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

A quaint white house, with a porch and a pleasant elm tree.
 Jack follows Louis' lead. Parks his bike in front.
 Dismounts. Expression now reveals anxiety, fear. They eye:

A FORT

A magnificent structure located on the side of John John's
 home. Suspended fifteen feet above ground by gnarled OAK
 LIMBS and scavenged TWO BY FOURS. Sturdy walls, a rain-proof
 roof. The sound of BOYS' LAUGHTER bleeds from within. A
 beautiful sound here. Pulling Jack. And Louis:

JACK
 Do they know I'm coming?

LOUIS
 No, but don't worry about it.

JACK
 This'll be O.K.?

LOUIS
 Oh sure.

Louis steps forward, hauling his sleeping bag. Jack takes a
 deep breath, preparing himself, before following his new
 friend.

EXT. FORT -- MOMENTS LATER

Louis ascends the makeshift ladder nailed to the middle elm, leading to the base of the fort. Louis summons Jack with a finger.

Jack ascends. Warily. CREAKS accompany each step. Boys' LAUGHTER from within guides him. Louis stops at the TRAP DOOR. And suddenly reveals a PLAYBOY magazine from his back pack before entering. Jack eyes him rather strangely.

LOUIS

Wait one second here. -- Lemme smooth things over.

JACK

Where'd you get that?

LOUIS

Don't worry about it. Just remember, go along with whatever I say.

Louis opens the trap door at the base of the fort. Disappears inside. Jack remains, suspended there, on that makeshift ladder, nervous. A beat. Then, to his utter dismay, he HEARS:

JOHN JOHN (O.S.)

Whattaya crazy? I can't believe you brought him here.

And Jack's face falls. Tension rises. He hangs there, crestfallen.

INT. FORT -- CONTINUOUS

The boys face Louis, incredulous.

LOUIS

Listen. I'm telling you all the rumors aren't true. He's a nice kid.

JOHN JOHN

Yeah, some kid.

LOUIS

He's cool. Look what he did at the basketball game. First time I beat those guys. Plus, he helped me out today. He pretended to be the principal. It was cool. -- And check this out. Look what he bought on the way over...

Louis, with a great dramatic smile, gestures grandly at the PLAYBOY magazine he reveals from inside his jacket. All eyes light up with that.

JOHN JOHN

He bought that?

LOUIS

That's right. Think of the possibilities. He walked into the deli, I'm telling ya it was the coolest thing ever. He walked in there and he picked up the Playboy like it was nothing. No fear. He even went for some beer but I said John John's mom wouldn't allow it. He paid for it like a real man.

Impressed looks with that.

LOUIS

Come on, guys, give him a chance. If he leaves, the Playboy goes with him.

They don't like that. George, John John, and Edward exchange curious glances. All thinking the same thing. We don't want to lose the Playboy. John John makes the only decision:

JOHN JOHN

O.K. I'm trusting ya. But if he gets weird or if there's any signs of danger, he's out. You hear me?

JACK

Waiting impatiently, when Louis' head pops through the door, upside down, summoning him up with a head gesture and a jaunty smile:

LOUIS

You're in. Come on up.

Jack nods. Hesitates. Then continues to the base of the fort. Pauses. A moment. Preparation. A deep fortifying breath. He continues on. More nervous now. Swallows it. Pops his head through the door and enters the land of young boys:

INT. FORT

Jack emerges. Wary. Sees:

Edward. Louis. John John and George. Staring wide eyed at him. Jack waves hello; they prudently nod back. Jack goes to stand. Hits his head on the roof above. A poster falls off the wall. Nervous now, he goes to fix it. Louis nods, it's O.K. -- I got it. Louis re-hangs the poster. Jack smiles awkwardly. Then:

LOUIS

This is Edward. George. And John John. Twice, not once, John squared. Not just John.

JACK

Hi, guys.

LOUIS

And guys, this is Jack.

A moment, then:

JOHN JOHN

You bought that Playboy?

Louis eyes Jack. Just go along with this.

JACK

Yeah. I did. I buy 'em all the time.

Awed looks with that.

GEORGE

What about Penthouse? You get Penthouse?

JACK

Sure. If you want it.

GEORGE

And they give you no trouble buying one?
I mean, they don't ask for I.D.?

JACK

No, I just don't shave for a day and
then they think I'm like fifty. They
don't ask for I.D. from fifty year olds.

And that brings a blatant guffaw from Edward. Louis joins
in. Tension breaker.

GEORGE

So you really don't hurt kids or
anything?

Jack smiles.

JACK

No. Just adults.

That brings some more laughter.

EDWARD

So, what's up with the way you look? I
mean, Ms. Wargo said you're the same age
as us but you look like my Uncle Freddy.

LOUIS

He ages faster than us. Like four times
as fast. When he was four he looked
sixteen. Is that cool or what?

They nod. That is pretty cool. Jack turns to Louis, thanks him with a subtle nod for that explanation.

George wheels to John John.

GEORGE

See, I told you he was no giant. No such thing as giants, ya jerk.

Louis is smiling now. The boys loosening up.

JOHN JOHN

(to George)

Sorry, Jack. I just heard there was a giant in that house.

GEORGE

Yeah, I'm sorry, too. -- You mind if I look through the Playboy?

JACK

No, go ahead.

Edward approaches Jack. Chewing his gum and eyeing Jack's face suspiciously:

EDWARD

You really shave, Jack?

Jack nods.

EDWARD

'Cause I'm looking forward to shaving. Whattaya think, you see anything there? Any whiskers?

(he sticks his chin out for Jack to view)

Man, if I were you, I'd grow like a Fu Man Chu thing or maybe half a beard. It would be the funniest thing.

GEORGE

Hey Edward, check this out.

EDWARD

Excuse me.

Edward joins John John and George by the Playboy magazine. Jack turns to Louis, smiles gratefully. Couldn't thank him enough.

LOUIS

So, how do you like it?

And Jack finally gets a chance to look around. He sees:

POSTERS on the walls. GIRLS IN BIKINIS. Sports figures -- JORDAN in mid flight dunking. BARRY BONDS in mid swing, connecting for a home run. And several football posters -- JOE MONTANA, LAWRENCE TAYLOR, TROY AIKMAN, EMMET SMITH. Baseball cards line a small table. SEGA GAME GEAR. PEPSI CANS. OREO COOKIES. This is clearly a boys haven, a sanctuary, the men's club. And Jack loves it.

JACK

So, what do you guys do here all night?

LOUIS

Anything we want.

INT. JACK'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Across town, Karen Powell sits on her son's bed. Peering out the window. A light breeze ruffles her hair. She holds her son's book -- JAMES AND GIANT PEACH. She peers down at the novel, then at his empty bed, then out, into the darkness, considering the night, and her son's predicament. When, a figure of a man, silhouetted, appears in the doorway behind her:

KAREN

Jack?

BRIAN

No, it's me.

KAREN

I was thinking about Jackie.

Brian approaches. Peers out the window with his wife. And says simply:

BRIAN

He's a strong kid. He's going to be just fine.

KAREN

It's strange not having him around. I don't know what to do with myself. I can't stop worrying.

BRIAN

It's going to take some getting used to. But this is what he wants. It's for the best.

KAREN

I know.

(a beat)

I hope he's alright.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT -- LATER THAT NIGHT

JACK

Apparently alright. Face grimacing as he holds a coffee can up against his butt. The boys hooting with laughter around him:

EDWARD

I wanna hear a good one. A good manly rip. Show us what you're made of.

And WHAM! Jack rips a vicious fart into the can. The crowd ROARS!

LOUIS

Rip roaring. The earth is rumbling! Seven point five on the Richter scale!

GEORGE

I think you mighta ripped off a hemorrhoid, Jack. Oh man.

EDWARD

Jack Powell, the manly farter. A GIANT FART! Unbelievable farting ability.

JOHN JOHN

Pass it down. Pass it down. George has to smell it -- to see if it was lethal.

Jack covers the can with his hand and moves the cup in front of George's face. George warily takes hold of the can. Puts it to his nose and sniffs. His face goes pallid, he falls back, clutching his heart. Pretending to go unconscious. The other boys break up in vicious laughter.

CUT TO:

THE GANG -- LATER

Each member, excluding Jack, who just watches Louis now, rifles through piles of baseball cards. Jack watches on, perplexed at this ritual. When, suddenly, all stops cold. Edward turns to Louis. His face a mask of dead seriousness:

EDWARD

I'll trade you my Barry Bonds straight up for a Frank Thomas rookie card.

Louis pauses, rethinks the deal. His answer comes quick:

LOUIS
What do you think I am? A novice. No
dice, pal.

They begin rifling again. Except Edward. He's thinking. He negotiates.

EDWARD
Wait a second here!
(all stops again)
I'll throw in a Joe Carter all star card
to close the deal.

Louis' eyes light up with that. He turns to Jack.

LOUIS
What do you think, Jack?

JACK
I like it.

LOUIS
O.K. then. -- I'll do it.

Tough negotiations. All release a breath of tension as we:

CUT TO:

A MAYONNAISE JAR. A KETCHUP JAR. RELISH. TABASCO SAUCE. SARDINES CAN. And a piece of CHOCOLATE CAKE covered with those ingredients. There's a low murmur rising in the fort. As a hand dumps more than a few dashes of Tabasco on that cake. Adding to its grotesque flavor.

JACK (O.S.)
I can't do it. I can't do it. I can't do
it. I can't do it.

THE GANG

Cheering wildly as Louis brings the cake in front of Jack's face. Jack sniffs it, grimaces.

JACK
I can't eat it!

GANG
GO! GO! GO! GO! GO! GO! GO! GO!

Peer pressure. Jack slowly raises a fork, scoops a piece of mayonnaise, ketchup, relish, Tabasco and, sardine-covered cake. Reluctantly brings the fork to his mouth and he EATS IT! An upwelling chorus of approval. HIGH FIVES all around.

CUT TO:

Velvety BLACK:

A single candle provides subtle light to the tree house. Louis' face is set behind the candle. A taut mask of fear. He speaks with great dramatic emphasis as he tells a haunting ghost story:

LOUIS

...And everyday for years he asked her why she wore that red satin ribbon around her neck. But she would never tell him. So one night, one dark night, the darkest night ever, he waited till she fell asleep. It was so dark that he couldn't even see where he was going...

THE GANG

Edward, John John, George and Jack sit agape, ashen. Candle lends soft flickering light to their faces, faces full of tension and mind-numbing fear as they listen to Louis:

LOUIS (cont'd)

...And he walked into the bedroom, slowly his hand reached around her neck finding the red ribbon right where it always was. Slowly he untied the knot from behind her neck and he would now know the true mystery of the ribbon. He pulled the knot, took the ribbon off her neck when...

The Gang leans forward, eyes widen, waiting for the end with utter dread:

LOUIS (cont'd)

...when, suddenly, her HEAD FELL OFFFFF!

AHHHH! They scream, barbaric howls of complete fear. Jack's screaming the loudest, his mouth wide, releasing a death scream from the depths, frightened out of his wits.

EXT. FORT

Those SCREAMS invading the entire neighborhood. Several neighboring houses LIGHTS flick ON, as we:

CUT TO:

INT. FORT

A piece of gum pushed into a mouth.

EDWARD

Ain't nothing like a fresh piece of gum
right before bed.

THE GANG

Crunched like sardines in their respective sleeping bags. Exhausted. The night wears down. Jack squirms in his BATMAN bedroll, an everlasting smile prevalent as he slumbers for the first time in the land of children. Night spills through the window, providing a soft halo of blue light for the fort.

Edward begins to doze. Still chewing gum as his tired eyelids waver. John John sifts through the Playboy.

LOUIS

Hey, guys, I forgot to tell you. I think
Jack has the hots for Ms. Wargo.

A collective "OOOOHHHH." Jack's face falls as if Louis just revealed the fact that Jack was from Mars. He quickly protests:

JACK

I do not. I don't know what you're
talking about?

LOUIS

That's alright. I saw you looking at
her. Giving her the big eye.

JACK

You're crazy. She's just our teacher.

JOHN JOHN

Yeah, but she's hot.

GEORGE

No, she's old.

LOUIS

No. No, she's just...mature. You should
take her to the dance. That's what you
should do.

JACK

I don't even like her. You're all crazy.
I don't know what you're talking about.

(a beat)

What dance?

LOUIS

The fall dance. It's coming up. You
should ask her.

JACK

No way. I don't like her I said. I was just curious.

LOUIS

Yeah, whatever you say.

Louis let's it die.

They all appear ready for sleep. Shifting in their blankets, finding the right position. John John finally closes the Playboy. A beat. All quiet. Then, in the dark:

JOHN JOHN

Hey, you know, Jack, you're all right. -
- You're really not dangerous at all.

Jack smiles. The moonlight encapsulates his delighted face. Louis peers over at his new friend, sees his shining grin. They exchange a smile. A bond being formed here, tonight, and Jack knows that.

LOUIS

Just wait 'til you're sleeping, John
John. That's when he eats children.
Right, Jack?

JACK

That's right.

Jack and Louis trade a conspiratorial smirk. The others smile at that. Except Edward, who shifts uncomfortably, zipping his sleeping bag all the way up. They all turn over in their sleeping bags, trying to get comfortable, ready for a good night of sleep.

On Jack's face, revitalized, a paragon of youth.

MONTAGE BEGINS -- MUSIC OVER

INT. POWELL HOUSE -- DAY

DING DONG -- The bell rings. Mrs. Powell descends the stairs, opens the door, and to her utter surprise, she sees:

THE GANG -- Louis, Edward, John John, and George. Smiling up at her.

LOUIS

Can Jack come out and play?

EXT. SANDLOT FIELD -- DAY

Football frolics. Jack takes a handoff from Louis. Begins running. Full steam ahead. John John goes for the tackle. Dives toward Jack. Grabs onto him, but Jack isn't going

down. He continues toward the end zone, undaunted, carrying John John on his back.

INT. DRUGSTORE -- DAY

Jack seems strangely nervous as he places several items on the counter. Including baseball cards, Pez dispenser, gum... The clerk eyes him suspiciously as Jack finds the adult magazine rack behind the counter...

JACK
(stuttering nervously)
...And I'll take one of those p, p, p,
pl, pl, playboy magazines...

EXT. DRUGSTORE -- DAY

The Gang, excluding newcomer Jack, waits anxiously outside the local store. Jack emerges from the drugstore with a bag in hand. He opens the bag and to everyone's delight reveals A PLAYBOY magazine. John John snatches it up quickly.

INT. SCHOOL -- DAY

The Gang stalks through the hallway. Like mini Reservoir Dogs on a mission. They walk proud with their new member. Jack Powell. The Giant. Leads the way. As they walk, they see Victor and Eric approaching. Tension rises. Angry looks exchanged. As they pass, Jack unexpectedly leans over to the Bullies and ROARS. Terrifying the youngsters. They run down the hall. Triumphant, the gang continues walking.

INT. CLASSROOM -- DAY

Jack watches Ms. Wargo instruct the class in some intricate math problem. He writes in his book -- JACK LVS MS. WARGO.

EXT. POWELL HOME -- DAY

Under a cloudless sky, Jack and the gang play basketball on Jack's backyard court. Brian plays along, too. Caught up in this moment with his son's friends. Coaching the young children. The first time he's ever shared this with Jack. He positions the boys on the court. Shouting orders. Excited. Cheering them on.

Louis passes to Jack. And Jack goes up, over Edward and George, pounding it home with a jam from hell. He and his Dad exchange a heartfelt, psyched up high five.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The children each seem absorbed with a problem in their note books. All heads low, staring down at their books. Eyebrows furrowed in deep, private thought. Ms. Wargo walks around her class, up and down each isle, checking on each student's

progress. She stops at Jack's desk. Peers over his shoulder. Notices that he's done something wrong. She leans down, says something to him. But Jack is distracted by her beauty, her warmth. Never been this close to her. And he can't take it. Her perfume, her smile, the smell of her hair. He moves a little closer, watching her, not the problem she is solving.

EXT. SANDLOT FIELD -- DAY

SLO - MO. Jack is still running toward the end zone with John John on his back. Edward and George advance stealthily to attempt a side tackle. Jack throws a stiff arm sending both boys to the ground. Jack continues with John John on his back, leaving Edward and George eating dust.

INT. CLASSROOM -- DAY

Jack and his fellow students line up for the annual class spelling bee. Jack steps forward, nervously, attempting:

JACK
Pneumonia. P -- N -- E -- W -- M -- O

WARGO
Oh, I'm sorry, Jack. That's incorrect.

Forlorn, Jack goes to his seat.

CUT TO:

FIVE PAIRS OF FEET

Making their way down the street. Four pairs of size six high tops, followed by one pair of size ten leather red boots.

CUT TO:

A DOOR

Bell ringing. A woman opens the door, revealing:

JACK POWELL

Dressed as SUPERMAN. The blue suit. The red cape. The spit curl greased to his forehead. The Super-hero from Krypton. The Gang behind him. Edward -- a football player. John John -- a doctor. George is some type of grotesque monster. Louis -- midget Dracula. Jack's face is suffused with complete excitement as he hollers his first:

JACK
Trick or treat!

She dumps some candy in his bag. He nods thank you and takes off down the street. His cape blows in the wind as he runs to yet another house.

CUT TO:

SNAP! FLASH!

Jack's picture snapped for his school photo:

CUT TO:

ANOTHER PICTURE! A different Jack face. A wide smile. SNAP! FLASH!

THEN:

Jack stands with his fellow students as they take the class picture. He stands in the back row center, Louis, Edward, John John, and George surround him. He smiles wide, hollers:

CLASS

Cheese!

SNAP. The FLASH CRACKLES!

EXT. SIDE OF SCHOOL -- DAY

The Gang watches Jack, as he speaks to LOUIS' MOM, DOLORES, once again. And this time she's forward enough to place her hand on Jack's shoulder in a rather coquettish display. Jack's face goes pallid as the GANG howls with laughter behind him, excluding Louis, who simply lowers his head.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD -- DAY

A BALL

Bouncing up and down awkwardly. We pull back to reveal:

Ms. WARGO

At the foul line, bouncing that basketball. Jack stands next to her. As well as most of her class. Jack coaches her as she goes to make her first foul shot. He holds his wrist up, indicating "it's all in the wrist", just like his father did a month ago. She follows his method, shoots. A wild brick that doesn't even reach the basket. And this brings immense laughter from the students. They break down, belly laughing uproariously. She blushes. Jack's eyes hold on her, his heart pounding, his love growing.

INT. POWELL'S -- DAY

Jack bursts through his front door. Throws off his jacket. Kicks off his sneakers. Withdraws a paper from his book bag.

Runs to the refrigerator. Magnets the paper to the 'frig -- a math test that reads -- 98. A smiley face accompanies that. Jack's ecstatic. His mother sees his grade. Smiles.

Jack wheels to his mom. Throws his arms around her, spins her in a celebration dance.

INT. TREE HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Jack kneels, facing his four friends.

JACK

Guys, I brought a friend. He's sort of like me but older. I told him all about you guys. You mind if he comes up.

The gang, exchanges curious glances. John John makes the final decision. He nods his head. Yeah sure. Jack nods graciously as he bends, summoning someone from below with a finger gesture. A beat. The boys wait anxiously just as they did just a month ago when they first met Jack.

And slowly, a slightly bald head emerges through that door as Mr. LAWRENCE WOODRUFF peeks his head into the fort. He seems nervous as he takes in the new surroundings. Jack nods to him, it's O.K., come on. The boys trade quick looks as Woodruff continues in farther, eventually banging his head on the roof of the fort. This brings laughter to each boy, breaking the awkwardness of the moment.

CUT TO:

GANG (o.s.)

GO! GO! GO! GO !GO

And we see:

A SPOONFUL

Of the most heinous foodstuff we've ever seen making it's way toward Woodruff's mouth. He shakes his head vehemently. No, I can't do it. But the chants grow louder --- GO! GO! GO! And, finally, peer pressure gets the best of him and he swallows the food. His face grimaces as he fights regurgitation. And each boy, Jack, Louis, John John, Edward, and George, exchange high fives as Woodruff's initiation ends.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- DAY

Menacing green soldiers take field position on Jack's lawn. Vantage points -- behind rocks, grass. Huge figures here. JACK'S FACE lies behind one line of soldiers. While LOUIS' FACE appears behind the opposing team. And there, they begin to square off -- in their own private war.

INT. JACK'S ROOM --- NIGHT

Moonbeams shroud Jack in a cascade of night light as he sits at his desk, eyeing that piece of paper that reads -- WHAT I WANT TO BE WHEN I GROW UP. He stares at it, curiously. Then writes -- POLICEMAN. He mulls that over a bit. Crosses it out. Tries FIREMAN. A moment. Then, that too is eliminated. He continues thinking, unable to come up with a definitive answer.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM -- NIGHT

Parents line the seats once again. The Spring Play is unveiled in front of them. Poppy, beaming with pride, sits with the Powells, watching. And here, we see joy on Karen's face. Caught up in her son's childhood, the usual mask of worry replaced here with joy as she watches:

JACK

On stage. Made up as a tree. A giving tree. His arms outstretched, providing shade for the smaller children below. Including the young girls, Phoebe and Jane. Wargo watches from side stage, along with other TEACHERS, enjoying the show.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD -- DAY

SLO-MO. Jack continues toward the end zone still dragging John John, and here comes Louis now, at locomotive speed, beelining for the Big Boy. Jack's ten feet from the end zone as Louis dives on his back, in a spread-eagle propelled tackle move, ala LT. WHAM! He hits Jack. Jack stumbles, yet somehow he manages to keep his feet. Pulling his friends into the end zone with him, where he finally collapses. TOUCHDOWN. The boys dive all over him, congratulating him, high fives all around. Jack stands. Triumphant. Arms high in the air. He luxuriates in this. He's part of the Gang now.

But as the Gang celebrates, Jack Powell slowly moves away from his new friends. He's out of breath. And clutching his chest in obvious pain. The guys, preoccupied with their celebration, don't see Jack, breathing deeply, trying to mask his distress.

Finally, the boys see Jack standing alone, and they swarm him once again in the victory embrace. He joins them now, forgetting his pain, caught up once again in the moment. Throwing his hands in the air, moving his hips, and kicking into a touchdown dance, ala Icky Woods.

And the orange sun above, like an omen in an angry sky, sets in smooth arch, closing out the montage.

MUSIC RECEDES -- MONTAGE ENDS

INT. POWELL HOME -- MORNING

Morning SOUNDS beckon. Songbirds, talk radio, an electric razor.

Ms. Powell straightens up Jack's room. A room cluttered with toys and magazines. Mr. Powell works a tie. And:

INT. BATHROOM

Our friend Jack Powell shaves. An electric razor glides over the under side of his chin. Jack's looking rather dapper this morning. A clean collared shirt. Beige slacks. Not the usual ripped jeans and stained T-shirt. Slightly prim. Something's on his mind, something serious. He finishes shaving. Checks the job. He's done. Not bad.

Studies himself in the mirror. Here, in fact, he looks like a true adult. A man going on an important interview. Until, he lifts his electric BUGS BUNNY toothbrush and foams up his mouth wildly. He finishes. Goes to the hair now.

Parts the hair one way. No good. Then another. Too goofy. Let's try this. No dice. When something catches his eye. He moves closer to the mirror. Curious now. Sees something. Examines his hairline. Higher now, clearly receding. And this distresses him. He looks down in the sink. Yes, he was correct. STRANDS of HAIR line the sink. Doesn't know what to make of this. Eyes hold on that thatched area:

KAREN (O.S.)

Jack, hurry up. You're going to be late for school.

This breaks Jack's brooding. He takes his eyes off his hair. Takes one last look at himself in the mirror. Pleased, he exits.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD --- DAY

JACK POWELL

Approaches LUCY, a tiny young girl with a seraphic face and ponytail. As he approaches, he peaks over his shoulder at Louis. Throws Louis a reassuring smile.

JACK

Hi, Lucy.

LUCY

Hey, Jack. How are you?

JACK

Lucy. Louis likes you.

LUCY

Louis who?

LOUIS

Staring on anxiously. He sees Jack pointing at him, and Lucy casting a quizzical eye upon him.

JACK

He likes you. Whattaya say? You wanna go to the Fall Dance with him tonight?

LUCY

I don't know, Jack. -- Why doesn't he ask me?

JACK

He's shy, you know. But he's a nice guy. You'd like him. He's funny. He's got Sega Genesis at home. He's got a pool. He likes Bay Watch. He's got good trees to climb on at his house. Do you like that stuff? You might have some things in common.

LOUIS

Watching with the utmost curiosity. He sees Jack exchange "goodbye's" with Lucy. Jack then begins walking back to Louis.

LOUIS

What happened? What happened?

JACK

Nothing.

LOUIS

Whattaya mean "nothing"?

JACK

(careful)

No, you know, she said she'd like to get to know you a little bit. Maybe speak to you once or twice, you know. She's shy.

LOUIS

She said "no".

JACK

No. Not "no". Not anything. It's still open for business. You just gotta work it.

LOUIS

She said "no".

JACK

No, hey, don't worry about it, Lou.

LOUIS

I'm not going to have a date for the dance tonight. -- You asking Ms. Wargo today?

JACK

Yeah, at the end of the day.

LOUIS

Hope you have better luck than me.

JACK

Hey, don't talk like that. We'll find somebody for you.

The BELL RINGS.

Louis lags behind, as the rest of the children enter, dejected. Jack stays with his best friend, supporting him. And as they walk forward together, Jack throws his arm around Louis' shoulder, telling him all will be alright.

INT. CLASS -- DAY

JACK'S POV -- Of Ms. Wargo. Writing on the blackboard. Her lithe frame moving lightly across the room. Her pleasant smile captivates Jack in a glow of warmth and comfort. His eyes hold on her, intent, spellbound, dazzled. Now we know why he's dressed for success today, folks. He leans back in his chair, nervous.

WARGO

Today, we're going to begin reading our essays on what we want to be when we grow up. Who would like to go first?

Jack sinks in his seat in the back. He peers at his paper. WHAT I WANT TO BE WHEN I GROW UP? Choices crossed out. No essay. He sinks low, relieved when several hands go up:

CUT TO:

A YOUNG GIRL

Nervously reading her report.

GIRL

When I grow up I want to be President of the United States. But first, when I turn twenty, I want to go to college like my brother and then after that I want to get married, so my husband can be the First Man.

CUT TO:

JOHN JOHN reading his essay, a sly smirk evident:

JOHN JOHN

I want to be a gynecologist because gynecologists help ladies. And they deliver babies. And all women have to go to a gynecologist including Candy Flower, Miss January. And Heather Red, Miss February...

The class laughs. Ms. Wargo rolls her eyes.

CUT TO:

Another young BOY.

BOY

I want to get married when I'm twenty-eight because if you get married before that, statistics say you'll be divorced.

Jack sits low in his seat. Eyes furrowed in deep thought. He writes on a piece of paper. 28 years old. Then -- $28 \times 4 = 112$ yrs. His face sags. He thinks this over. Pensive, confused. The student continues on in front of the classroom... WHEN:

THE BELL RINGS.

Students gather up their books. And head for the door. Yet Jack remains seated, frozen in deep thought. Staring at that number, 112. His face pallid. Everything seems suddenly precarious to him.

LOUIS

Hey, Jack. Hey, what's wrong, buddy?

Jack's sullen state is broken.

JACK

Nothing.

LOUIS

Come on, you better go ask Ms. Wargo before she leaves. You want me to stick around?

JACK

Yeah, meet me downstairs.

LOUIS

Good luck.

GANG

Yeah, good luck, Jack.

Jack nods. Mind still elsewhere until he sees:

Ms. WARGO

A golden halo of light encapsulates her form forever in time. Jack's eyes hold on her as she gathers up the things on her desk. More beautiful than ever.

Jack faces the classroom. Empty now. Quiet. Remembers what he has to do. Steps toward his teacher -- gut scared. She sees him. And softly, like always:

WARGO

Jack. You're still here?

He nods his head. Hands trembling. There's passion in his eyes, love in his heart. He takes a deep breath. She sees his anxiety:

WARGO

Jack, what's wrong? You feel O.K.?

Not the prescribed response. Doesn't want to look sick. Wants to look desirable. Takes another deep breath. Throws out his chest. Manly now. Approaches her. Withdraws something from his pocket. And quietly:

JACK

I know you like 'em, so I saved you all the red gummi bears. It took a long time but I was finally able to fill up a whole bag.

He hands her a full bag of red gummi bears. A red ribbon knotted around the top, securing it, decorating it. She accepts it, her face saying, oh that is the cutest thing I've ever seen.

WARGO

That is so sweet of you, Jack.

A beat. An awkward moment. Jack remains, something on his mind. He pauses, unsure. Then:

JACK

Ms. Wargo, I was thinking that maybe, maybe, you would want to go to the Fall Dance with me tonight. It would be a lotta fun.

A moment. A frozen beat that seems like forever. Then, her face falls in quiet empathy. AHhh! How cute! She raises her hand on his shoulder. Soothing.

WARGO

Ohh. Jackie.

And there's something in the way she said that that makes him melt. He steps forward again. Eyes pleading, face reddening, almost desperate.

JACK

Could you?

She takes a moment. Re-evaluates how to answer. Clearly doesn't want to hurt his feelings. This is rather delicate.

WARGO

Ohh, Jack, you're a young man, I'm much older than you, you know that.

JACK

But we look the same age.

WARGO

Oh, I know, honey, but you're still a young man up here.

(she touches his head rather softly)
You're only ten years old...

JACK

But I can't ask any of the girls my age to go out 'cause I look so much older, so I figured we could maybe go to the dance.

WARGO

Oh, Jack, I'm so sorry, honey. But teachers aren't supposed to go with students.

On his sunken face as we go to:

EXT. HALLWAY -- DAY

The door of Wargo's class opens. Jack steps out. Face ashen. He's sweating now. Fighting tears. High emotion on his face. A wealth of feeling carries him away from that class, that woman. He tries to get away, with some dignity in tact.

Ms. WARGO

Emerges behind him.

WARGO

Jack, are you alright, honey? Come back, let's talk.

JACK

No. I'm O.K.

But he's not O.K. And he's not coming back. He turns a corner, out of her view, and breaks into a futile sprint.

Eyes burn now. His tear-stained face numb. He tries to stifle sobs with deep breaths. His face pallid, cold. Like he's been stabbed. Sobs turn into sporadic whimpers.

He reaches the stairs. Hits them hard with two feet. Pounding staccato rhythm to his run. Tears replaced with heavy breaths now. He hauls ass down those stairs, faster and faster, until he reaches the bottom. And there, he suddenly stops.

Out of breath, panting hard now. A frozen moment. Something obviously wrong. Coughing, a consumptive hacking wheeze that racks his entire frame. His hand goes to his chest. Unable to stand. He loses balance, staggers, barely keeps his feet. He sits quickly, clutching his chest. A child frightened by the inadequacies of his middle-aged frame.

LOUIS

Walks in. Oblivious. Sees Jack's crumpled frame on the floor. Hand pressed to his sternum. He exhales:

JACK

Something's wrong...

Louis springs forward. And runs to him. Virtual hysteria. Heart pounding at triphammer speed. His voice comes with real fear:

LOUIS

Jack, Jack! Someone help us. Someone help us!

His calls for help intensify. On Jack's sallow face as we go to:

BLACK:

SWINGING DOORS OPEN in a frenzied rush:

INT. HOSPITAL -- DAY

A surge of movement. Karen and Brian Powell move through the hallway with purpose and haste in each stride. They consider this hallway, this same hallway they ran through years before, with a complete measure of dread. Fear paints each face, the worst fear in the world. The fear that your child is hurt. They reach the end of the hallway. Stopping a nurse.

CUT TO:

THE DRONE OF A MOTOR hovers in the dark as we:

CUT TO:

JACK

Once again shrouded by the red cross beam of the CAT SCAN machine. Jack enters the tunnel, the red beam scanning every contour of his worn and worried face.

GRIMALDI (O.S.)

I think what has happened is the result of severe strain...

INT. GRIMALDI'S OFFICE -- LATER

We land on the face of Grimaldi. He's aged well, distinguished. His keen sensibility still apparent. He addresses the Powells, a trace of concern in his words. Karen sits quietly. Solemn. Pensive. Taking in Grimaldi's words. Regret and anger building on her face.

BRIAN

So, it wasn't a heart attack?

GRIMALDI

No, not as severe as that. But it is something that should be taken very seriously.

(a beat)

I think we need to understand that the ordinary terms don't apply. Tests have indicated that this is a form arteriosclerosis or angina, but Jack's situation is unique. His forty year old heart is trying desperately to keep up with his ten year old mind... That combined with his rapid growth has caused a great deal of wear and tear on his heart resulting in the shortness of breath and the pain that he suffered.

CUT TO:

INT. EXAMINING ROOM

Jack buttons his shirt after an exam. He seems pensive, deep in thought. A nurse stands with him, straightening up:

NURSE

You can wait for your parents in the reception area. They'll be a few more minutes.

The nurse exits. Jack makes his way to a slightly open door. HEARS DOCTOR GRIMALDI. He pauses there. Listens in.

INT. GRIMALDI'S OFFICE

KAREN

What exactly does this mean?

GRIMALDI

Look, we know what Jack is going through here. We can't assume anything. It would be wrong for me to tell you everything is fine. He's beginning to experience the limitations of mid-life.

BRIAN

He's only ten for chrissakes. That's not something he should have to deal with now.

JACK

Listening intently.

GRIMALDI (O.S.)

There's no real treatment for this. I can only recommend that he take it easy for awhile.

BRIAN

What about school?

GRIMALDI

I think it would be best if he stayed home for awhile. Slow it down. His body needs rest.

BRIAN

That's something we're going to have to discuss. It's going to crush him.

Karen speaks. Resolute, coming to conclusions. Her motherly protection surfacing:

KAREN

I don't think there's much to discuss. We tried to make it work. And it didn't. What else has to happen to him? I don't see what other choices we have.

JACK

Obviously crushed.

GRIMALDI (O.S.)
(with difficulty)

The years ahead are going to be the most difficult. Mr. and Mrs. Powell

GRIMALDI (O.S., cont'd)

...Jack has entered a new stage in his life. The physical signs of aging will begin to appear much quicker. His body is working overtime. Little things that we take for granted will truly affect him. We need to watch him more carefully from now on.

On Jack's fallen expression, that growing look of turmoil. Of fear, of isolation.

INT. POWELL HOME -- NIGHT

Jack sits on his bed, still fully dressed, looking out his window, considering the night, the wind, his life. The sky is dark here. The landscape cold. An ethereal time.

He peers down at his note book. Sees the essay. WHAT I WANT TO BE WHEN I'M GROWN UP. Sees his math -- figuring his age - - 112 years. All too much here. Confusion ways heavy. He HEARS faintly:

KAREN (O.S., on phone)

I'll tell Jack you called. Thanks. O.K.
I'll keep in touch. Bye now.

Karen enters Jack's room. Her tone comforting.

KAREN

How you feeling, Jackie?

JACK

I'm O.K.

KAREN

Ms. Wargo just called. She hopes you feel better. -- Louis called also. I told him you'd give him a call tomorrow. You needed some rest.

Defensively:

JACK

Why do I need rest? I feel O.K.

Karen approaches. Has the need to say something. This is going to be rough. Pauses, unsure, Then:

~~JACK~~ Karen

You gave us a big scare today, honey. We don't want anything like that to happen again. -- We're lucky it wasn't something serious.

KAREN

Daddy and I were talking, Jack. We decided that it might be good if you stayed home from school for awhile.

And before she could even say another word, his face drops. It says, don't lay this on me, too. He turns from her. Avoiding her eyes. She continues, sensing his pain:

KAREN

We just don't want to take any chances. We'll go back to the way things were before you went to school for awhile. It wasn't so bad.

He doesn't like that either. And for the first time, Jack Powell is growing angry. Something we haven't seen before. Beyond sadness now. This is unfair, he's thinking.

JACK

I don't want to go back to the way things were before school.

KAREN

We don't want you to get hurt again. The doctor said you need to slow down a bit and I agree with him. It's better this way.

With resolution:

JACK

No. It's not. Not for me.

KAREN

Jackie...

JACK

(emphatic)

What about my friends?

And Karen's growing uneasy now. Not used to such anger from her young boy:

KAREN

They could come by to visit. There's just certain things you won't be able to do anymore. -- I'm so sorry, honey. I wish it I could make it all go away, but I can't. We just can't take any chances. You mean to much to us.

(a beat)

I don't want you to be mad. You had a long day. You need your rest. We'll get through all this. I promise.

Karen stands. Jack's anger holds firm. Tries to suppress frustration. Karen watches him, disturbed by his fallen look.

She finds a book on his nightstand.

KAREN

Hey, how 'bout I read to you for awhile?

Jack turns away from his mother. Face riddled with desperate anger. Simply yet adamantly shakes his head, "NO."

And that hurts. She fights emotion. A beat. She leans down. Kisses her son on the forehead.

KAREN

Get some rest. I'll see you in the morning. O.K.

Silence. No response from Jack. She waits for something. Receives nothing. Just his angry look. She musters up a smile. Throws it his way before turning toward the exit. Closing the door behind her. She holds there for a moment. Places her head gently against the door frame. Considering her decision and all its consequences. A beat. She walks to the kitchen. Finding Brian standing at the counter. Eyeing her with uncertainty. Throws her a look that says, "this might be a mistake".

KAREN

We didn't have a choice.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

Where Jack turns to the mirror that sits over his desk. Goes eye to eye with himself.

There, he stiffens. Eyes red, cheeks damp. Studying himself appraisingly. An unnerving stare deep into the corridors of his soul. Considers his features, taking sullen inventory of the old eyes, the thin hair, the crows feet. Who am I? Who am I?, his face says quietly.

On his look as we:

CUT TO:

INT. JACK'S ROOM -- LATER THAT NIGHT

JACK'S WINDOW

Being thrust open.

Jack Powell pushes that window. He peers back at his closed door. Listens. Hears nothing. No sign of movement. Takes a

deep breath. Mustering up enough strength to do what he's about to do. Then, in a bold move of desperation, the young boy driven to the farthest edge disappears into the darkness.

INT. GARAGE -- MOMENTS LATER

The garage door lifts ever so gently, as Jack pushes it with all his might. His eyes fall upon his old companion. His bike. It seems smaller now, dwarfed by Jack. Jack grabs the bike by the handles. Mounts up, and takes off into the night.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - LATER THAT EVENING

It is dark, cloud pillows block any night light. Jack arrives. He pulls up close to the school. Eyes searching. When out of the silence the sound of sweet musical notes beckon in the distance, seductively grabbing Jack's attention. Where he finds:

THE SCHOOL

Under a huge dark sky. Colorful lights emanate from the gymnasium. A distant romantic song can be heard echoing within. Silhouettes of young love rock to and fro in the windows.

Jack approaches, seemingly in slow-motion. He stops. His heavy eyes peering in, where through an open window we watch with our friend:

THROUGH THE WINDOW

The school dance unfolds. Edward slow dances with a young GIRL we recognize from class. He offers her a piece of gum.

John John shares punch with a girl twice his size. A glow on his face that would put the moon to shame.

Louis sits alone, nervously biting his lip, fidgeting in his seat. Isolated.

Jack watches his pals in bitter admiration, when his eyes land on:

MS. WARGO

Standing alone. A picture of perfect beauty. His eyes hold on her, boring through her, caught in some faraway fair memory as we go to:

INT. GYMNASIUM -- NIGHT

A HAND taps Ms. Wargo delicately on the back. She turns. Standing before her is Jack. Revitalized

He seems different. Stronger. Clark Gable-like.

JACK
May I have this dance?

She smiles. Her hero has arrived.

MS. WARGO
(melting)
Oh, Jack.

The music SWELLS.

And Jack sweeps Ms. Wargo off her feet. He gallantly offers her his arm, leading her to the center of the dance floor.

There they embrace, towering over the dozens of dancing CHILDREN that surround them.

And they dance, encapsulated in the moment, in time, seemingly alone, a perfect match. Rotating slowly, with quiet ease, gazing into each other's eyes.

When, suddenly, a HAND taps Ms. Wargo delicately on the back.

JACK -- OUTSIDE

Watching. Never having left the window, a child again. His fantasy spiralling to an abrupt end as:

Through the window we watch Ms. Wargo embrace a handsome MAN. The MAN non-chalantly walks toward the dance floor, his hand over his shoulder, casually gesturing for Wargo to take this dance. She takes his hand. He leads her out to the dance floor with cool yet quiet confidence.

Jack steps back, grimaces. Nods grudgingly. He stands alone, a spectator separated by more than just the brick walls of P.S.3.

Jack lowers his head and goes to his old friend:

THE CURB

He balances there momentarily. And then, the rain starts. Hard rain, driving down upon Jack, saturating his hair and clothes. He looks up, considers it for a moment, before raising the hood on his jacket and sitting on the curb.

And there, he sits. Huddled in a ball. Drenched, lost in his pain. From within his jacket pocket, he removes a MATCHBOOK. A hot pink matchbook with white cursive broad stroked gaudy letters. The same matchbook given to him by Louis' mother.

Jack knows what he must do.

CUT TO:

THE BIKE screeching out of the school parking lot. Driving hard through the pouring rain.

EXT. MEMORIES NIGHT CLUB -- NIGHT

A garish neon panoply, missing letters like missing teeth. MEM RI S. Jack, on his bike, comes to a halt, parking behind a Mercedes and a few motorcycles. He draws several curious looks from people passing by as he dismounts his Red Bandit, clothes saturated from the driving rain. He makes his way to the front door of the bar.

INT. MEMORIES NIGHT CLUB

A cacophony of echoing sounds and MUSIC. Seventies Disco. Some Donna Summer tune pollutes the smoky air. A place where the grown-ups go. Middle aged grown ups. Women in outfits that they shouldn't be wearing. Men in bad toupee's that look more like small animals on their heads than hair. Grown ups with one aspiration -- to be twenty years younger.

Jack enters. Timid, unsure. A new world. An intimidating landscape. But here, there are no stares, no whispers. Here, he physically fits. He is not a spectacle. And he likes that.

Two WOMAN with big hair strut their stuff on the dance floor. He eyes them dubiously before taking quick inventory of the grounds. Searching for someone, anyone. He sees:

A dozen MEN lining the bar. Watching a FOOTBALL game on a small T.V. above the bar. Jack sees the game, goes that way. He squeezes into a spot at the bar, drawing several looks.

Jack bumps a rather large, boisterous, ANGRY MAN, accidentally.

ANGRY MAN

Watch it, asshole.

JACK

(timidly)

Excuse me.

He tries to appear undaunted, as the bartender approaches, stopping in front of him, waiting for an order.

Jack sits on his hands, unsure of his next move, nervously biting his lower lip. The BARTENDER, growing impatient, slaps a napkin down in front of Jack.

BARTENDER

Whattaya have?

Startled at this, Jack panics momentarily.

JACK

(clearing his throat)

I'll have a...

(a beat)

...Shirley Temple with extra Marciano cherries..

The bartender stares at Jack for a moment, as if to say "are you serious?"

BARTENDER

Maraschino.

JACK

That's what I said. Maraschino.

And suddenly from beside Jack emerges a single unyielding laugh. Introducing AUGIE, mid-life crisis epitomized. His hair strategically combed over his bald spots. His silk shirt buttons nearly popping. A drink in hand. He slaps Jack heartily on the back. Jack nervously smiles.

AUGIE

(composing himself)

Saving the hard stuff for later.

JACK

(trying to save face)

I like to start slow.

Augie erupts into laughter again, almost spitting his drink all over the bar.

AUGIE

(to the bartender)

Set this guy up with one of these.

(to Jack)

The name's Augie. How's it hanging?

JACK

O.K. I'm Jack.

The drink arrives. Augie grabs his drink, lifts it in the air for a toast. Jack follows suit.

AUGIE

To Jack.

JACK

(hesitates)

Jack brings the drink to his mouth, sips, swallows, and then lets out a god awful GASP. Augie bursts into laughter.

AUGIE

If I didn't know any better, Jack, I'd swear you were a kid.

With that Jack lifts his drink to his mouth, and gulps down the near poison. He slams the drink on the bar.

JACK

I'm no kid.

Augie likes that.

AUGIE

(to the bartender)

Keep 'm coming.

CUT TO:

INT. MEMORIES -- LATER THAT NIGHT.

We move through a crowded bar. A mellow song bleeds from the juke, the crowd twice the size now. We find Jack. His eyes heavy. A bit tipsy. Working on yet another drink. Beside him, Augie talks away.

AUGIE

...So she says, I want to spank you now. Can you believe that? Spank me. I didn't know what to say.

JACK

You must've been a bad boy.

Augie likes that.

AUGIE

I sure was.

JACK

What happened?

AUGIE

This led to that. And I end up going limp.

Jack's confused face.

AUGIE

Yeah, can you believe it? I can't get it going. I'm stuck there, in my birthday suit, limp as a wet noodle...

JACK
It was your birthday?

AUGIE
I wish. -- Humiliated beyond repair.
Ever happen to you?

JACK
Yeah lots.

AUGIE
Christ. That's a shame, man.
(he woofs down his drink)
Hey, what can I tell you?
(a beat)
You married?

JACK
Not yet.

AUGIE
Lucky man. -- She threw me out after she
found out about my escapades. Then she
wanted to take me back. I said no. Just
felt it was time to make a change.

JACK
I hear you.

AUGIE
It's God's cruel trick, my friend.
First, you lose your hair, and then it
appears on your back, and then out of
your nose, and then worst of all, you
find it in your ears. Your eyebrows
start growing all out of whack. You're
walking around like a bald gorilla. I
mean, look at my head -- what the hell
is that? Nobody can understand why the
hell you're so pissed off and before you
know it, you're pushing up daisies at
some depressing cemetery, but no one
comes to visit because you cheated on
your wife, didn't leave the kids a pot
to piss in, because you spent all your
cash on a slick sports car in hopes of
landing some young babe so you can
relive some wild fantasy. It's cruel...

Jack stares blankly at Augie, taking it all in. The alcohol
taking its affect on both of them:

JACK
(surrendering sadly)
I just don't know where I fit in. It all

This hits a serious chord with Augie.

AUGIE

I know what you mean.

Augie swigs the last sip of his drink. Jack follows:

AUGIE

Glad to know ya, glad to know ya, Jack.

Jack nods. When, his eyes fall on the entrance where:

A familiar face is revealed -- Mrs. DOLORES DURANTE, D.D. to her friends, done up for the town tonight. She struts in. Jack watches her, curious.

SLO-MO -- JACK'S POV OF DOLORES

As she makes her way to the bar. Wiggling her rather plump bottom, trying to attract attention. She puffs on a Malboro, leaving red lipstick stains around it.

JACK

Eyes holding on her. Augie catches his stare.

AUGIE

There's a sad story. Husband up and left her and her kid a few years back. They haven't seen him since.

Jack nods, his attention drawn away from Augie now. He's watching Dolores as she lights up yet another cigarette. SINCERELY, a slow, fifties tune, bleeds from the juke. Heightening this moment, intensifying Jack's emotions.

Couples make their way to the dance floor. Jack makes his way to Dolores:

AUGIE

Go for it, Big Jack.

Augie laughs to himself. Orders another round.

JACK

Approaching steadily. He stands behind Dolores now. Unnoticed. He hesitates. Booze fortified backbone. He raises his hand and:

Taps her on the right shoulder. She spins, sees Jack. Her eyes flare with excitement. She embraces him enthusiastically. Plants a kiss on his cheek. Jack steps back, considers his best friend's mom blankly.

DOLORES

Principal Powell! I can't believe you're here.

JACK

It's good to see someone I know.

She nods. Looks out to the dance floor. Her eyes hold on him.

DOLORES

You wanna dance?

Jack nods his head. Walks forward, thrusting his hand over his shoulder, ala Wargo's date at the dance. Cool yet confident, gesturing for Dolores to take it. She obliges. Takes his hand. He leads her to the dance floor.

DANCE FLOOR

Crowded. A haze of smoke hangs above, engulfing the dancing area in a grey cloud. COUPLES settle, begin swaying to and fro. They dance close, in an uninhibited adult style foreign to our hero. Dolores leads Jack to the middle of the dance floor, embracing him there.

And there, in the middle of the dance floor, Jack Powell, in a drunken stupor, dances with Louis' Mom. He follows her lead, slowly, cautiously, still plowing over unconquered ground. His hands sheepishly touch her back. They dance slow, the song guiding them. Jack's eyes wander through this foreign land, finding the COUPLE behind him. Close dancing, a tight embrace between two lovers. The fellow's hands slide up his woman's back. Jack's hands mimic his action, sliding up Dolores' back.

Dolores smiles at that. And we see that like Jack, she too is isolated, longing for something. And she says softly:

DOLORES

I'm happy we ran into each other. -- I bet you don't know it but my son looks up to you so much. He thinks of you almost like a father. -- I'm glad we could be friends, too.

She locks eyes with him. Intense, reverent. The moment builds. Jack nods, an awkward sense rising. Not understanding this. Those child's eyes reappear through his drunken haze. He stares down at Dolores, confused, lost in another world, and she misreads that --- bringing her lips to his. Softly, gently. Jack keeps his mouth closed. His eyes open, wide and confused.

AUGIE

Watching from the bar. Grinning.

AUGIE

What a guy.

JACK

Lips pressed against hers. Dolores pushes harder. A tighter embrace. And this is too much for Jack.

He reflexively SPRINGS backwards. Petrified by the sudden intensity of it all. Breaking the moment. He tries to get a bearing. To gain semblance. At that moment, he seems suddenly sober:

JACK

You're Louis' mom.

DOLORES

That's O.K. What's wrong?

He stares at Dolores as if she were an alien. He peers around, sees those middle-aged faces around him. Disoriented now, his awareness emerges. Those child eyes focus and find nothing familiar. Lost, he backs up even farther away from Dolores, unknowingly knocking into the Angry Man he bumped earlier. The Angry Man spins.irate now. Pushing Jack. Jack staggers, barely keeps his feet:

ANGRY MAN

Watch yourself, buster! That's the second time tonight. Whattaya, some kind of ass?!?

Jack tries to squeeze by the man, not ready for this confrontation. The man raises his arm and holds him back:

ANGRY MAN

Where the hell you think you're going? I want an apology.

JACK

I'm sorry. Excuse me.

The man guffaws derisively.

ANGRY MAN

Ohh, it's that easy huh, pal! -- You know, you're a real son of a...

DOLORES

Why don't you just leave him alone? Come on, Jack.

ANGRY MAN

You're not a real man, huh? Let your old lady take care of your problems.

Jack stops dead. Not a real man huh. He faces the Angry Man. The man grins slyly, proud to have drawn Jack back into confrontation:

JACK

You know, you're a real bully. Ya jerk.

ANGRY

Oh, I'm a bully. Is that the best you can do?

JACK

You, mister, are a fart knocking cheese head, who wears his mother's bra!

All silent, excluding one onlooker who guffaws blatantly at that. Others don't dare laugh, tension mounts.

ANGRY

And you're a real bastard.

JACK

Oh yeah, well, I'm rubber and you're glue, anything you say bounces off of me and sticks to you.

And that draws a long moment of silence from everyone.

ANGRY MAN

What the hell are you talking about?

DOLORES

Did you get that from Louis? I hear Louis say that all the time.

JACK

You know, being around kids at the school, I pick up some things.

The man's angry eyes sag a bit, holding curiously on Jack, as he considers that comment with a hint of perplexity.

ANGRY MAN

You're some kind of lunatic. -- What the hell is he talking about?

JACK

Hah! Hah! See, that means you are. I'm rubber you're glue. Don't you get it? You're the lunatic now. You just called yourself a lunatic!

The man exchanges quizzical looks with his friends seated nearby. He turns back to Jack, who feels slightly triumphant after that verbal exchange. A beat, then, unexpectedly the Angry Man begins to guffaw. A hard, hacking laugh that sounds like an engine sputtering. Breaking the tense moment.

Jack, sensing an ease in the taut atmosphere, joins the man in the laugh. Along with Dolores. Until, the Angry Man stops laughing completely. His face turns stone cold. He says with venom:

ANGRY MAN

I'll give ya rubber and glue!

WHAM! He hauls back his fist and clocks Jack right in the jaw. Jack falls in a crumpled heap. His head spinning while:

AUGIE

Sees what's happening. Pushes his way through the crowd until he reaches the ANGRY MAN. Augie seizes the Angry Man by the shoulder, spinning him forcefully. Then, he raises his fist and POPS him in the jaw. The Angry Man's friends jump in, after Augie, and an all out donnybrook ensues with a ten year old at the bottom of the heap.

CUT TO:

JACK

Facing us, melancholy, and we can tell by the I.D. plate hanging from his neck that this is sadly a mug shot. CLICK! FLASH! PHOTO SNAPPED. On his fallen face as we go to:

INT. CELL BLOCK -- NIGHT

There, in the dingy holding cell, sits the youngest inmate in years. Ten year old Jack Powell sits, eyes weary, terrified and tear stained. He peers around, wondering how he got here.

OFFICER (O.S.)

Jack Powell.

Jack sits up, anxious.

OFFICER

Your bail was posted, pal. Come on.

The Officer opens the cell block. Jack hurriedly runs to that exit as if hot coals were burning his ass on the seat.

INT. POLICE STATION -- CONTINUOUS

Jack gathers his belongings at the front desk.

The WOMAN OFFICER at the desk eyes him suspiciously. He smiles awkwardly, then:

JACK
Who put up the money?

The officer points, indicating:

DOLORES DURANTE

Standing there, a small fragile figure, make-up smeared. Smiling sheepishly at Jack.

INT. DOLORES' CAR -- LATE NIGHT

They drive in silence. Heavy rain hammers the window, beading there and running. Windshield wiper blades work back and forth, back and forth, their staccato rhythm breaking the awkward silence that pervades. Jack Powell hangs his head low, embarrassed. A beat, then:

DOLORES
Are you O.K.?

JACK
I'm O.K.

She smiles. They continue on. She tries some small talk:

DOLORES
Louis told me about the new boy in school. He was pretty upset that something happened to him recently. Have you heard anything about that?

And Jack just stares at her now. Blushing guiltily.

JACK
Yeah.

DOLORES
Is he going to be O.K.?

A moment, then:

JACK
I don't know.

She drives on. In silence. Those WIPERS continue playing back and forth. Their rhythm hypnotic here, intensifying each silent moment. She reaches Jack's block:

JACK
It's right here.

JACK

Thank you.

She stares at him deeply, searching:

JACK

What about that money you put up?

DOLORES

I trust you.

JACK

I'm sorry about all this.

She grins.

DOLORES

It's O.K. -- Could I ask you a question?

Jack nods.

DOLORES

What were you doing there tonight? You seemed lost.

JACK

It was my first time.

DOLORES

I could tell. You should make it your last. You're not missing anything there, believe me.

Jack nods glumly.

DOLORES

You know, you have eyes just like my son. It's the strangest thing.

She comes forward slowly, Jack cringes, fearing yet another adult kiss, when, instead, she gently plants one on his cheek.

DOLORES

Now, go on. It's been a long night. And I hope I see you at school next time, not at that dive.

She smiles, a sad, longing smile that says, I wish I didn't have to go there either. Jack nods. Opens the door. Her eyes hold on him as he exits.

JACK

He watches Dolores pull away, his sight strained by the hard pelts of water. That sadness emerges once again, that feeling of isolation, of failure to assimilate. Peers up at his home. Moves forward, toward his front door. Enters:

INT. HOUSE

As the door opens. Jack steps in:

Karen quickly emerges from the kitchen. Frantic, beyond anger, relieved now, staring at her son confusedly, with obvious worry. She begins removing his saturated jacket. Moving frenetically. Her words come fast:

KAREN

Jack, look at you. Where were you?
Where'd you go? You're father's out
driving. Looking for you. You had us
worried sick.

Jack remains silent. He steps away. Mind racing. Eyes swelling with tears. Needs to say something. Pauses. Unsure. A wealth of emotion builds. Karen senses his pain.

KAREN

What happened, Jackie? What's wrong?

JACK

I'm never going to be a grown up.
(a beat)
And I'm not really a kid. -- I don't
know who I am.

And that hurts. More than anything ever has. She goes to him. Unsure how to soothe him now. She reaches out, he accepts her embrace, yet his young mind is elsewhere. Her motherly comfort not enough now. He stares out, at nothing. A lone figure caught between two worlds:

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. SCHOOL -- DAY

Edward stands in front of the class, chewing gum, and reading his WHAT I WANT TO BE WHEN I GROW UP essay. Ms. Wargo listens intently:

EDWARD

When I grow up I'd like to be a
professional football player.

But Louis sits in the back, peering over at:

JACK'S DESK

Conspicuously vacant.

Louis' eyes hold on it. Longing for his best friend as we go to:

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE -- DAY

Bikes parked in front of the door. Louis Durante and the rest of the gang, holding their book bags. Louis rings the Powell doorbell. Karen answers, her face sagging, strain evident.

KAREN

Boys. How are you?

GANG

Hi, Mrs. Powell.

LOUIS

Is Jack home?

KAREN

He's resting.

LOUIS

Is he coming back to school? It's been days now.

KAREN

He needed some time off after what happened in school. -- Let me go see if he's up for seeing you guys.

She enters her home. Leaving the boys alone. A beat. They exchange curious glances:

INT. HOME

Karen arrives at Jack's room. Knocks on his closed door:

KAREN

Jack. Louis and the guys are here to see you.

A beat. Then from behind the closed door:

JACK (O.S.)

I don't want to play.

She takes that in.

EXT. HOUSE

A CAR

Pulls in front of the Powell residence. Mr. LAWRENCE WOODRUFF steps out. The boys turn to him as he approaches.

GANG

Hey, Larry.

WOODRUFF

Hello, guys. -- How's the old tree house doing?

LOUIS

It's alright. We're waiting to see Jack.

Karen steps back out. Interrupting their conversation. She nods politely to Woodruff. Gestures for him to come in. Then turns to the boys:

KAREN

Jack's a little tired right now, boys. He's sleeping. I'll tell him you came by.

The boys nod. But Louis' eyebrows furrow curiously sensing something odd here. Woodruff enters. Turns to the gang:

WOODRUFF

I'll see you guys later.

GANG

Bye, Larry. Bye, Mrs. Powell.

The gang turns to leave. Louis holds for a beat. Locking eyes with Woodruff. Woodruff sees the concern in Louis' expression. Both now aware that something's up here.

Woodruff then enters with Karen. The door closes behind them. Leaving Louis alone at the front door.

He begins to walk away when his eyes wander to Jack's window. He sees the curtain wavering slightly. He pauses there. Looks up. Holds. Sees nothing. Then moves to his bike.

INT. POWELL HOME -- LATER

Karen Powell leads Mr. Woodruff down the hall to Jack's room.

KAREN

Something's happened. He's changed. He won't leave his room. Maybe you could get through to him. Brian and I can't. - He's very confused. I think he realized how different his life is...

WOODRUFF

Maybe I'm not the answer. Maybe he needs to go back to school.

Adamant:

KAREN

He can't go back to school. That's what started this in the first place. We can't risk his health again.

Woodruff nods. Sees that her decision's been made. They reach Jack's room. Karen knocks on Jack's door. There is no invitation. She opens it anyway. Forces a smile:

KAREN

Jack, Mr. Woodruff is here.

Woodruff enters. His face betrays everything even though he tries to hide it. A hint of shock in his eye as he sees:

JACK'S ROOM

Clean. Spotless in fact. No toys in plain view. No action figures. No comic books. No posters.

JACK POWELL

Sitting by that window again. His spot, like a cat's perch on a window sill. And this, folks, is not the Jack Powell we're used to. The young boy's face is now shrouded in a thick grey and black beard and mustache, unkempt. His eyes sunken and serious, as if he's had no sleep. He peers at Mr. Woodruff. Nods politely yet doesn't smile.

Woodruff pauses, staring at the young boy. Taken aback severely, he tries to hide that when he exchanges a look with Karen, a desperate look that says, please help my son now.

Woodruff can only nod. He sees the conviction on Karen's face. Woodruff steps in, closes the door behind him.

WOODRUFF

I see you're sporting a new look there, champ. I hope it's not something I have to get used to.

EXT. POWELL BACKYARD -- DUSK

Jack's swing set sways gently in the cool breeze. His army figures lie dormant on the lawn. The pool water lies still and untouched. Everything here seems old and lifeless, a child's playground deserted. A barren land of lost innocence. We HEAR, over this:

WOODRUFF (O.S.)

Why don't you want me to teach you anymore?

INT. JACK'S ROOM -- LATER

Jack and Woodruff face off on another lesson. Jack peers down at his book -- $10+60=$, $12+14=$, etc.

JACK

There's no reason for me to learn this stuff if I'm never going to use it.

WOODRUFF

That's not the reason I teach you, Jack. I teach you so you can learn something new, something interesting. That's all.

JACK

I don't care about that anymore...

Jack closes his book with a definitive slam, in a bold move of defiance.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD -- DAY

Louis, sallow, faces off with young Phoebe and Jane:

PHOEBE

Is he sick?

LOUIS

No. I don't think so.

PHOEBE

Then, what's wrong with him?

LOUIS

He's getting older.

JANE

Is he coming back? I'd like him to come back.

LOUIS

So would I.

INT. JACK'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Jack's book, lying closed on his desk.

JACK
I'm not opening it.

WOODRUFF
Then, let's do something else. We'll go on the swings outside. How 'bout that? Just like we used to.

JACK
I'm not a kid. Don't treat me like one.

WOODRUFF
You're only ten years old, Jack.

Woodruff let's that sink in. Then:

WOODRUFF
I think it's game time. How 'bout a game? Whattaya say?

And Jack relents, just for a moment, his face betraying those hidden innermost emotions. But quickly, he settles. A serious demeanor once again. Nonetheless, Woodruff stands, goes to Jack's closet. Removes UNO, a card game, from a stack of games. He places the game in front of Jack.

WOODRUFF
I want to play. Come on. It'll be fun.

And Jack simply shakes his head. No.

INT. POWELL'S KITCHEN -- LATER

Mr. Woodruff faces Karen and Brian.

WOODRUFF
He sees no use for what I teach him. He doesn't think he'll ever need it. He's forgotten he's just a child.

BRIAN
We gave him a childhood and then we took it away.

KAREN
Maybe he's not capable of having a normal childhood. We're just trying to protect him. You heard the doctor. We have to try and make him understand what's best for him.

Her resolute tone silences everyone in the room. There's no way she's budging on this.

INT. CLASS -- DAY

The children gather their books, and throw on their jackets as the day draws to an end. Wargo piles papers together, waving goodbye to her students as they leave. She sees Louis leaving. Approaches:

WARGO

Louis. -- Have you heard from Jack?

With some sadness:

LOUIS

No. I haven't heard from him in awhile.

She senses his melancholy.

WARGO

Hey, don't you worry. He's going to be just fine. When you do see him, tell him I said hello. And we all miss him.

Louis nods before heading out. Wargo watches him go.

EXT. POWELL HOUSE -- DAY

Louis approaches the Powell's, his bike by his side, a folder under his arm. Karen sits alone on the stoop.

LOUIS

I brought Jack all his school work, just in case he wanted to catch up before he came back.

He hands Karen the folder.

KAREN

That's sweet of you, Louis. Thank you.

He lowers his head, dejected. Begins to walk away. Pauses, turns back. They lock eyes.

LOUIS

You know, he's my best friend.

Karen holds, then, a small break. She relents:

KAREN

I'll tell him you came by.

He walks off, peering up at Jack's window, longingly. When the curtains part slightly revealing JACK POWELL, a scruffy

friend. A smile briefly rises. Louis raises his hand to wave, but his wave is answered by the closing of the curtains.

Louis steps back, disheartened, before mounting his bike and riding down the street.

Karen watches him ride off. Strain evident. Brian emerges from the front door behind her. He sits beside her on the porch stairs. They exchange a glance, both caught in the same thoughts. A moment, then, Karen breaks:

KAREN

I don't know what to do, Brian. He's fragile. He's getting older, I want to tell him to go run around with his friends, but I can't 'cause I don't want to lose my little boy. I know he's going to be gone before us, but I'm not ready for that now.

BRIAN

Ten years ago we said we were going to give him a normal life. Is that what we're doing now?

KAREN

We also said we were going to protect him.

BRIAN

Whose benefit is that protection for? Tell me. His? Or yours?

She doesn't have an answer for that. A beat. And there, he sees the wear on her face. He reaches over, and takes her hand, their fingers clenched just like they were years ago when they first found out about Jack's condition.

INT. JACK'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

A math book closing hard. Jack eyes Mr. Woodruff suspiciously as he places that book in his briefcase.

JACK

What are you doing?

WOODRUFF

I'm going home.

JACK

Why?

WOODRUFF

I went to school so I could teach young children, Jack. You know that. You don't want to be taught, you don't even want to play. So I'm not going to waste your parent's money. I'm going home.

JACK

You can't quit.

WOODRUFF

I don't consider it quitting. I consider it losing a student.

Jack just stares at Woodruff curiously.

WOODRUFF

Do you know why I like teaching children, Jack?

(he goes on, not expecting an answer to that)

So I never get too rapt up in being an adult. So I can remember that there are other things that are important in life. Riding bikes, playing sports, building a tree house...

Jack's eyes hold on Woodruff now. Perhaps, a connection:

WOODRUFF

And you, my friend, you were my most special student. Until recently you were everything I ever wanted in a student. You never worried about the future. You lived for the moment. Only worrying about now, like a child should. You were a shooting star amongst ordinary stars.

He goes to the window. Peers out:

WOODRUFF (cont'd)

...Did you ever see a shooting star, Jack? Oh, it's wonderful. It passes quickly, but when it's here, it lights up the whole sky. Most beautiful thing you'd ever see... It's such a beautiful sight that the other stars actually stop and watch it -- so spectacular that people wish upon shooting stars. And they're very rare, quite rare. You almost never see them, but I did, I saw one...

His eyes hold on Jack. Jack's eyes gaze off, into the night. But then, after a beat, Jack turns back, his face sagging:

JACK

I just want to be a regular star.

WOODRUFF

Jack, you're not regular at all, you're spectacular.

Jack looks back out, considering the night, the sky, the stars. Searching for that lone star, with a sparkle in those child eyes.

INT. LOUIS' BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Across town Louis Durante sits at his desk, peering down at his framed CLASS PHOTO. He eyes it with clear reverence. He sees himself standing with his best friend, Jack Powell. Both caught in time, mouths wide, hollering CHEESE. His eyes hold on his best friend. And there, an expression rises, an idea forms within, his sadness dissipates, a glimmer of hope crystallizes and:

Behind him, the night unfolds. The moon, a pearl, beckons, providing light, a harbinger.

EXT. POWELL HOME -- DAY

A cloudless dome hangs above. A ball of tangerine sun hangs at mid-heaven, bathing the house in an orange glow. It is quiet, no movement on the street.

INT. JACK'S ROOM

Jack sits by that window again. Staring blankly at the essay -- WHAT I WANT TO BE WHEN I GROW UP. A list of crossed out choices below. Fireman. Policeman. Football Player, etc. All negated by a line through them. He seems pensive, his mind racing. What is the answer? What is the answer? When:

THE DOORBELL RINGS

Jack raises his head slightly, peers outside.

INT. POWELL HOME -- FRONT DOOR

Karen Powell answers the door. Louis Durante stands there. Unusually jovial.

LOUIS

Can Jack come out to play, Mrs. Powell?

KAREN

Louis, you don't have to come by each day. He'll call you when he's feeling better.

JACK -- BEDROOM

Sees Louis' small shape disappearing around the corner. He goes back to that piece of paper. When:

DING DONG

He raises his head again, curious.

KAREN -- HALLWAY

Stopping in her tracks as she walks away from the front door. She spins, opens the door, revealing Edward. Smiling:

EDWARD

Can Jack come out and play?

JACK -- BEDROOM

Looking outside.

KAREN (O.S.)

No, he can't. I'm sorry.

Jack continues looking. After a moment, he turns back to that paper when:

DING DONG

Door opening O.S. Then:

JOHN JOHN (O.S.)

Can Jack come out and play?

Jack turns completely to that window now. Peering out. Curious. His friends, unrelenting, call him, pulling him:

He sees John John walk away. Waits:

KAREN -- FRONT DOOR

Remains there. Eyes wide as she watches George approach now.

GEORGE

Can Jack come out, Mrs. Powell?

She doesn't say anything. George walks casually away. Karen knows what they're trying to do. Tentative... but she's falling for it. A wealth of emotion building up now. The usual protective mask recedes, replaced by an accepting, sincere smile. As she sees a tiny girl, PHOEBE, from the schoolyard, approaching.

JACK -- BEDROOM

Considering this gesture with wide eyes, a feeling of genuine hope rises. A smile emerges as the child lost within slowly finds his way.

PHOEBE (O.S.)

Can Jack come out and play?

And yet another student we recognize from the class approaches. Jack HEARS;

STUDENT

Can Jack come out?

Jack watches, fighting high emotion. Then, he sees LOUIS, his best friend, appear across the street.

Louis stands, tall and beaming life, staring up at his bearded friend, just as he did months ago, when the myth of the giant was still alive. And they lock eyes, hold. Louis reaches out, smiles warmly, and waves. Jack Powell slowly raises his hand, and waves back to his best friend.

KAREN POWELL -- FRONT DOOR

At the front door. Considering this gesture with the most grateful expression. Breathless, teary eyed, renewed, as yet another student, Victor, approaches.

VICTOR

Can Jack come out and play?

JACK -- BEDROOM

Staring out, at Louis, and the children below. Another child approaching. Eric, Victor's side kick. Faces beaming youth. Invitations to rejoin their world.

ERIC (O.S.)

Can Jack come out and play?

On Jack's face, where the healing has begun.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. POWELL HOME -- MORNING

Quiet. A bird song. A dewy mist hangs heavy in the early air. A PAPER lands on the Powells front step. A PAPERBOY makes his way down the street.

INT. POWELL HOME, JACK'S ROOM -- MORNING

A sea of sunlight spills though Jack's bedroom window.

light. He rolls over. Slowly awakens.

He rises. And somehow here, this morning, Jack Powell seems revitalized.

He looks out, through the window, sees the paper boy riding away on his bike. Something is clearly on Jack's mind. He stands, walks toward his door.

INT. BATHROOM -- LATER

Jack Powell, in his western pajamas, faces off with himself in the mirror. Still groggy eyed, hair tousled, he stares at himself appraisingly, gaping at that strange beard, foreign now to him, and we see that child we once knew under that gruffy facade. He scratches the beard, eyes himself, and smiles.

INT. KITCHEN -- MORNING

Karen and Brian Powell sit across from each other at the breakfast table. Sharing breakfast as well as the morning newspaper.

A beat. A quiet moment. Then:

A figure appears in the doorway. Someone we recognize. An old friend. Jack Powell stands there. Clean shaven. Sparkling. School clothes. Jeans and T-shirt. Backpack slung over his shoulder. Stands timidly. Eyeing his parents. Has the need to say something. Pauses. Unsure. Steps in. They look up. See their son. Different here. Shocked faces.

Jack steps in farther. Serious now. With youthful determination:

JACK
I'm going to school.

There it is. It hangs there. A moment. Frozen in time.

KAREN AND BRIAN

Absorb that. Exchange a glance. And suddenly, Karen stands. Seemingly defiant. Worry evident:

KAREN
Well you better hurry then. You're going to be late.

A beat. Brian grins.

A release. Jack and his mom's eyes lock and hold. She smiles. Letting her son go. Jack's face becomes alight with joy.

INT. Ms. WARGO'S CLASS -- DAY

Wargo faces her students. She gestures to Louis:

WARGO

Louis, are you ready to read your essay?

Louis nods. Stands, reveals the essay from his book bag. He eyes Jack's empty desk in the back as we:

CUT TO:

The front doors of the school swinging open, revealing two size twelve Air Jordans running in at breakneck speed.

CUT TO:

LOUIS -- FRONT OF CLASS

Reading his essay aloud:

LOUIS

When I grow up, I don't really know what I want to be. Perhaps a fireman, or policeman, maybe a football player. But there's one thing I do know -- that's who I want to be just like when I do grow up.

CUT TO:

Those Air Jordans, biting the stairs with great momentum, churning up speed as they reach the top.

CUT TO:

LOUIS -- CONTINUES READING

LOUIS

I want to be just like my best friend when I grow up. I know my best friend is only ten years old. But he looks much older than that. And when I look that grown up, I hope I don't act like the other grown ups I know. I can only hope that I'll be just like him.

CUT TO:

Those Jordans reaching the second floor, pivoting on the left foot, cutting a path now right toward Ms. Wargo's class:

CUT TO:

LOUIS

Continuing his essay:

LOUIS

He's not like anyone else. No child wants to be a child so badly, and no adult ever smiled like him, no adult ever looks at things the way he does, like he's looking at everything for the first time...

And suddenly, George's face drops. He sees something. A smile rises as he alerts Edward, who in turn alerts John John. And word spreads like wildfire as all eyes, happy eyes, go to the door.

TWO FEET

Big feet. Wearing size twelve Air Jordans, stop there.

LOUIS

Oblivious. Goes to continue his essay when he sees:

The entire CLASS peering over at the door, including Ms. Wargo. Curious, he turns, and to his utter surprise:

JACK POWELL

Steps inside. The bearer of those sneakers. Jack nods to his best friend. Louis smiles, revitalized, a wealth of emotion building up.

Jack steps in. Holding a piece of paper in his hand. Ms. Wargo approaches, he smiles at her. No hard feelings.

WARGO

It's good to have you back, Jack. -- We were just in the middle of Louis' essay. Your seat's waiting for you. Go ahead.

Jack hands her that paper. Continues into the class. Amongst his peers now, he smiles at them, they smile back, welcoming him with handshakes and high fives as he makes his way back to his seat.

Ms. WARGO

Looks down at that paper. WHAT I WANT TO BE WHEN I GROW UP. Nothing written there. It is, thus, complete.

She grins.

WARGO

Louis, you may continue.

Louis' eyes hold on Jack before he ventures on with his essay. A beat, then:

LOUIS

And more than anything he knows how to be a good friend. More than most people who look like adults. So, I may not know what I want to be when I grow up. And right now I really don't care, but I do know who I want to be like, I want to be like the giant, the new kid, I want to be like my best friend -- Jack.

A moment. A frozen moment. Quiet ensues. There's an electricity in the air in that small classroom, as Louis and Jack's eyes hold on each other. Louis makes his way back to his seat. His expression joyous, conquering, simple, pure.

Wargo takes center stage.

WARGO

O.K. class, let's begin our lesson today.

Jack and Louis exchange one more glance, holding there, reuniting, smiling, a smile that breaks into laughter. And somehow here, now, in that classroom, Jack Powell seems exactly the same age as the children around him.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. AUDITORIUM - SEVEN YEARS LATER

The sun spills in like ocean waves through windows. A sea of 18 year old students donning purple robes. Graduation caps teeter on their heads. Proud parents watch, cameras in hand, searching for their graduate in the crowd.

DOLORES DURANTE

Unchanged by the years. A camera cocked in hand. She aims it at:

LOUIS

A full-grown teenager. The same sweet eyes, the same messy hair.

DOLORES (O.S.)

Louis, smile.

But Louis' thoughts are elsewhere. His eyes search for something, SOMEONE. He peers around nervously. He gives up. Finding his selected seat among other students.

EXT. AUDITORIUM -- DAY

A car door opens.

A pair of HIGH TOPS emerge from within. As the feet stand the hem of a purple gown falls into place. We follow the feet as they make their way up the stairs of the auditorium, accompanied by VOICES. Familiar voices that hurry us along. "C'MON." "WE BETTER HURRY." "YOU'RE GONNA BE LATE." "DID YOU REMEMBER YOUR GLASSES?"

INT. AUDITORIUM

The doors in the back of the auditorium SWING open.

LOUIS

He looks back.

Silhouetted in the distant doorway is the entire POWELL FAMILY.

LOUIS, a smile of relief.

AND ONE BY ONE the Powell family moves to their seats. Each wishing good luck to JACK. There he stands in cap and gown. His Dad pats him on the back. ALONE now. Silhouetted by the glaring sun. But something is different. It's Jack, now age eighteen. $18 \times 4 = 72$. That's 72 years old in Jack years. He slowly makes his way toward his seat.

He moves into his spot. Just down the row from Louis. And it is here that we see him ever so clearly. His face now wrinkled, his hair entirely white. His body slightly slumped over. Physically, an OLD MAN.

JACK looks to Louis. Makes a FACE, and smiles. Louis returns the smile. Happy his friend Jack could make it. They both look ahead, their profiles side by side.

CUT TO:

THE PODIUM

A distinguished GENTLEMAN stands at the podium. He delivers a speech to the graduating class. We listen intently with the audience.

GENTLEMAN (O.S.)

...So you must forge ahead, with perseverance, hope, and determination in your pocket, no matter what the odds, no matter what the obstacle. You will succeed...

LOUIS listens intently.

EDWARD chews gum. His cap outlandishly decorated.

JOHN JOHN eyes some nearby senior GIRLS.

GEORGE remains squinty eyed and serious.

Ms. WARGO holds her newborn infant. Her husband sits beside her.

GENTLEMAN

(a beat)

98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.

The crowd chuckles.

GENTLEMAN

It is in that spirit that I have the honor of introducing you to our next speaker. Someone who epitomizes every single value that I mentioned.

(he turns to Jack)

Ladies and Gentleman..This year's Valedictorian...Jack Charles Powell.

Jack and Louis exchange a smile. Jack STANDS. Several PARENTS AND RELATIVES whisper as Jack makes his way up the stairs to the microphone.

Jack steps up to the microphone. A slight trace of feedback bleeds from the mike. Nervous now, he steps back. He appears timid. Frightened by the size of the crowd. He removes a pair of bifocals from beneath his gown. Followed by a few index cards. He clears his throat. A STUDENT yells out, breaking the silence.

STUDENT (O.S.)

(loudly)

Go get'm, Jack!

The silence shattered, the tension erased.

JACK

I don't have much time these days so I'll just keep it short.

A delayed laugh, but the crowd gets it. Louis watches proudly. The laughter dissipates.

JACK

As these final days wear down, we think of times forgotten and we pray for new beginnings. And some of us worry about our future. What I am going to do? Where am I going to be in ten years? But I say, let us not worry...

WOODRUFF stands proud of his student.

JACK

...Because in the end none of us have very long on this earth. And if you're ever distressed, cast your eyes to the summer sky, when the stars are strung across the velvety night, when a shooting star streaks through the blackness turning night into day, make a wish and think of me. And make your lives spectacular.

(a beat)

I know I did.

Jack looks over the crowd. He fights the tears. And in the crowd he finds:

KAREN POWELL

Glowing with pride.

JACK

He smiles.

JACK

(proudly)

I made it, mom.

(a beat)

I'm a grown up.

A moment between mother and son. Overcome, Karen's tears flow freely now.

JACK

Thank you.

And with that Jackie Powell removes his glasses, and prepares to leave the stage.

When, suddenly, it happens:

The ENTIRE student body stands in unison. A collective ROAR resounds from the students. Their cheers deafening. A thunderous applause.

THE OLD GANG: whistling wildly.

Ms. WARGO: A smile ear to ear.

WOODRUFF: Laughing with delight.

BRIAN AND KAREN POWELL: Wiping the tears.

AND FINALLY:

LOUIS: Locking eyes with his best friend.

Jack, clearly overcome. He beams with delight. His moment nothing short of SPECTACULAR. The applause slowly fades as we go to:

EXT. POWELL BACKYARD - LATER THAT DAY

The backyard decorated with ribbons and balloons. A CONGRATULATIONS banner hangs from above. A handful of RELATIVES enjoy a variety of dips and assorted finger foods. Jack sits at a picnic table still in his graduation gown, surrounded by a few children, his parents and other relatives. He appears content here. At ease. Not unlike a grandpa watching over his grandchildren. He sits next to Poppy, and here they look more like brothers, rather than Grandfather and Grandson.

Mr. Woodruff enters the backyard. Approaches Jack. Jack stands. Mr. Woodruff extends a hand. Jack takes it. They shake -- hard and long. Two men now, facing each other. Woodruff eyes Jack, a wealth of emotion carrying him.

WOODRUFF

I'm proud of you.

Jack grins. They lock eyes, a frozen beat between teacher and student. A moment, then we HEAR: the SCREECH OF TIRES and the pounding RHYTHM of a RADIO BLARING beckons in the distance. Then, the SOUND of a HORN, calling Jack out:

And with that, Jack's eyes light up, revealing his true age.

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE -- SAME TIME

THE GANG. Four teenagers sitting in Louis' blue Camaro Convertible, waiting for the final member of the Gang to join them. Louis BEEPS again. Edward yells:

THE GANG

Come on, Jackie!

EXT. BACK YARD

Jack, hearing the calls, turns to his Mom, pleadingly:

JACK

Can I, mom?

Karen seems a little disappointed that the recipient of her party is asking to leave, but she conjures up a smile.

KAREN

Not too late.

Jack clenches his fist in victory.

EXT. POWELL'S FRONT YARD

As Jack exits his home. Quickly greeted by HOOTS AND HOLLERS. Walks across the lawn toward a car full of guys. MUSIC blares from within.

KAREN AND BRIAN

Both 47 years old, watch their son, who appears 72, walking toward his friends.

JACK

Catches sight of his parents waiting at the front door. And he stops. Turns, locking eyes. A frozen beat, and beneath his wrinkled face, we see that smile, that child's smile emerge. His parents smile back, proud of their son. Faces full of immense satisfaction.

LOUIS (O.S.)

Come on, Jackie. Let's go!

Their calls breaking the moment. Jack throws one last smile at his parents as he continues on. To the car, quickly greeted by hoots and high fives as he enters.

The car pulls out of the driveway, screeching away, down the street.

FADE OUT:

THE END