

RAGE & FURY

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SHADOW OF THE DRAGON

OVER BLACK comes the voice of BRUCE LEE. His tone is poised and thoughtful.

BRUCE (V.O.)

All types of knowledge ultimately mean self-knowledge.

FADE IN:

BLACK AND WHITE FOOTAGE

BRUCE LEE faces us, shirtless, bloodied, exhausted. An overwhelming force of COMBATANTS closes in on him, armed with clubs, spears, and chains.

BRUCE (V.O.)

So therefore they're coming in to learn, not so much how to defend themselves, or to learn how to do someone in, but to learn to express themselves.

A few hooligans rush him and he launches into a kinetic ballet. Drops assailants left and right.

BRUCE (V.O.)

It is easy for me to put on a show... I can show you some really fancy moves.

More attackers spring forward and Bruce spins in SLOW-MOTION, dispatching the lot of them with one sweeping kick. He turns to face us with a stoic expression. We FREEZE FRAME.

BRUCE (V.O.)

But to express oneself honestly, not lying to oneself... That, my friend, is very hard to do.

GO TO BLACK.

BRUCE (V.O.)

And you have to train...

There comes the drone of adolescent chatter and the thumping bass of Modest Mouse, and we are...

INT. HOUSE PARTY - BATHROOM - NIGHT

ETHAN GUNNER, 15, regards his black eye in the mirror. He is scrawny with high cheek bones. Winning features when he isn't brooding.

He opens the door to the upstairs hallway. A long line of TEENS wait for the use of the bathroom. He edges past them and ventures into...

INT. HOUSE PARTY - BEDROOM - NIGHT

...where a COUPLE makes out on top of a pile of coats on the bed. Ethan leans over them and yanks his wind jacket free.

INT. HOUSE PARTY - DEN - NIGHT

A sweaty CROWD bathed in red light loiters in the den. Ethan wades through the sea of bodies. Stops when he hears his name.

BARRY (O.S.)

Ethan!

In the kitchen, juniors BARRY HILL and MATT HELBIG beckon to him. Ethan shoves his hands into his pockets and grudgingly heeds the call.

BARRY

This... is the great Ethan Gunner.
Ethan's going to be a freshman.

Barry squeezes Ethan's shoulder like a doting older brother. His voice has the distinct twang of a Virginia native.

BARRY

Get me a soda, will ya, freshman?

Beat. Ethan opens the refrigerator door. Fishes inside and hands a can of soda to Barry.

Barry doesn't take it. He regards Ethan's black eye with amusement and takes a long drag on his cigarette.

BARRY

Open it.

Ethan cracks open the can. Barry smacks it from his hand. They both watch the can spiral and spurt foam across the linoleum tile.

Barry gestures impatiently at the mess.

Ethan stoops down to mop up the foam with a wad of paper towels. Overhead, the two bullies casually converse.

BARRY

So my Dad gave in. It's a BMW Z3.

MATT

All I want to know is when do I get to drive it?

BARRY

Yeah, like that's going to happen. It's outside if you want to touch it though.

Ethan hears Barry crack open a new soda can.

The first trickle of soda hits Ethan on the back of the neck. Barry empties the rest of the beverage over his head.

Ethan runs his hand through his sticky hair and rises. Barry gets an oafish grin. Gestures to Ethan's shiner.

BARRY

Sorry about the eye, man. When I heard you were moving to New Jersey, I couldn't let you go without saying goodbye.

There's no anger in Ethan's face. Just the calm, tormented expression we saw in the mirror. Barry squeezes his shoulder again, harder now, and Ethan winces.

BARRY

You better go before I get the urge to kick your ass again.

Ethan nods and pushes back into the crowd. Matt and Barry watch him go. They snicker.

BARRY

You think he'll remember me?

MATT

Yeah, dude. But it's nothin' a few years in therapy won't cure.

They cock their heads at the sudden blare of a car alarm.

EXT. HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Ethan stands on the battered hood of Barry's dark blue BMW. He winds up and slams a metal bat into the windshield. The window explodes inward at us.

He twirls the bat in his hand and slices off a side mirror.

Barry and Matt barrel out of the house. Ethan climbs down from the hood and tosses the bat away with a smirk of resignation.

ETHAN

I couldn't leave without saying
goodbye to you either.

Barry cracks him across the jaw. The blow spins Ethan around and he...

...lands face-down on the hood. Matt flips him over and holds him down.

ETHAN'S POV

as Barry cocks his fist and punches us in the face, we...

GO TO BLACK.

A fluorescent light hums to life as we...

BEGIN TITLE SEQUENCE

INT. GUNNER HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

Ethan now has two black eyes. He admires them in the mirror.

MR. GUNNER (O.S.)

Ethan, we're done loading up the
car. Are you ready to go?

He slides on a pair of sunglasses.

EXT. TOYOTA - MOVING - DAY

The Gunner family car tows a U-Haul down the highway.

INT. TOYOTA - MOVING - DAY

MRS. GUNNER pours over street maps, obstructing MR. GUNNER'S view of the road.

MRS. GUNNER

What's with the shades, Ethan?

ETHAN

I'm just a bad ass, Mom, what can I
say?

She shrugs helplessly at her husband. Mr. Gunner adjusts the rearview mirror so he can see his son.

MR. GUNNER
Say goodbye to your friends?

ETHAN
Yep. I think they're really going
to miss me.

MR. GUNNER
You'll make new friends.

ETHAN
Indubitably.

He stares out the window as Virginia is left behind.

EXT. GUNNER HOME - NIGHT

The headlights of the Toyota swing into view on a quiet suburban street. Mr. Gunner cuts the engine. Ethan clambers out and stretches.

MR. GUNNER
I'm exhausted. Let's unload the U-Haul in the morning.

MRS. GUNNER
You think that's safe?

MR. GUNNER
Sweetheart, this isn't Richmond.
This is Seaside Heights. It's the suburbs, for God's sake.

The parents go inside. Ethan leans over the roof of the car and takes a moment to consider his surroundings.

He slaps his bare neck. His hand comes away with a ruptured mosquito stuck to his palm.

Ethan shakes his head.

ETHAN
Welcome to the sticks.

He turns and follows his parents into the house.

END CREDIT SEQUENCE.

In pre-lap comes the BEEPING of an alarm clock.

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S ROOM - DAY

Ethan slaps at the alarm and lets out a long moan.

EXT. GUNNER HOME - DAY

He emerges from the house, backpack slung low over his shoulders.

The school bus appears at the lip of the hill. It seems to take forever to reach him. Ethan nervously scuffs at the dirt with his shoes.

The school bus pulls to a stop in front of Ethan and the doors open with the WHOOSH of hydraulics.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - MOVING - DAY

Ethan grabs a seat beside a CUTE GIRL WITH GLASSES.

Across the aisle, a BLONDE BOMBSHELL looks over and smiles warmly at him. He smiles back. The cute girl with glasses taps him on the shoulder.

CUTE GIRL WITH GLASSES

Hey, do you mind if we switch? My friend and I want to like swap summer stories. No offense.

ETHAN

Yeah. No problem.

The two teenagers slide past each other.

He glances over once at the two girls. They sit with their legs out into the aisle and whisper conspiratorially.

He sighs and looks back out the window.

EXT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Ethan follows the rest of the kids out the doors of the bus and onto the curb.

An old convertible Mazda Miata rockets into the parking lot and almost clips the back of the bus. Ethan scuttles out of the way. POLLY WATKINS, 16, waves apologetically from behind the wheel and puts the car in reverse.

Ethan watches the car jerk back several times and stall. He considers the beautiful, scatter-brained brunette fumbling with the ignition.

He heads for the main building. A group of older boys loiter in front of the steps to the entrance.

Ahead of Ethan, a PALE-FACED FRESHMAN walks past the older boys. A gangly kid grabs him by his backpack and yanks him off the steps.

The gangly kid's wearing a tank top and a GENERATION TERRORIST baseball cap. Everyone calls him CANINE.

CANINE

You gotta go around. You're not allowed to walk on the seal.

The pale-faced freshman follows his gaze to the engraved school seal on the ground. The posse closes around him.

ETHAN (O.S.)

What is that, like some dumb upperclassman rule?

The older boys turn around, surprised by the back talk. The pale-faced freshman takes the opportunity to slink away.

CANINE

Hey, I guess you're right. Why don't you walk across it and see what happens.

Ethan considers the dare for a beat... but in the end bites his lip and walks away.

Polly watches from her Miata, but turns her head as RAFE NIELSON, 17, pulls into the space beside her in a JEEP WRANGLER. His rough, unshaven face, partially obscured by cigarette smoke, makes him look perpetually pissed off.

RAFE

Hey, Polly Watkins.

Polly quickly averts her eyes and hustles inside. Rafe gets a smug look from successfully catching her attention.

He clambers out of his Jeep and flicks his cigarette off the backpack of a passing student. Approaches the school seal.

Canine and the other boys part to let him cross it. They turn and follow Rafe into the building.

INT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - DAY

A chaotic mass of students. Rows of tables display placards and sign-up forms for clubs. A flashbulb goes off in Ethan's face. Polly smiles at him from the photography club table.

She snags the photo from her Polaroid camera and shakes it vigorously.

POLLY

Want to join the photography club?

ETHAN

You kind of ambushed me.

POLLY

We do we what we gotta do.
Photography doesn't exactly sell
cool all on its own.

She examines his picture. Clicks her tongue in her mouth.

ETHAN

I feel like I'm being judged.

POLLY

You're a freshman.

ETHAN

How'd you know?

POLLY

The freshmen are the ones who
aren't smiling.

Ethan reaches across the table for the photo. Polly pulls it back out of reach. She crumples the photo in her hand.

POLLY

I'll take another one later when
you actually have something to
smile about.

ETHAN

You're a little weird, you know
that?

POLLY

I should hope so. In my book
everybody's either weird or a
schmuck. Which one are you?

ETHAN

I'm probably the schmuck.

(beat; seeing her name
tag)

Well... Nice to meet you... Polly.

He moves on to the next table.

POLLY

Nice to meet you... you.

She snaps a picture of another passerby.

INT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - PHYSICS CLASS - DAY

A TEACHER scribbles on the board and mindlessly goes through the lesson. The first row of students jot down notes diligently.

We DRIFT to the back of the classroom, past increasingly disinterested faces. Ethan slips on his shades, leans his chair back against the wall. Closes his eyes.

EXT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Ethan emerges from the main building, dutifully side-stepping the school seal like the rest of the freshmen.

He frowns at the sight of his bus already pulling away.

EXT. SEASIDE HEIGHTS - DAY

He dodges YUPPIES shopping along the thoroughfare. Arrives at an intersection and stops. He looks across the street.

Kitty corner to him stands the COVE, a bowling alley and billiard hall.

The honk of a car horn sends him leaping back onto the sidewalk. Polly struggles to keep her Miata from careening into him. She backs off the sidewalk in staggered jerks.

ETHAN

You're a menace.

POLLY

How do you know I wasn't trying to hit you on purpose?

He's not completely sure whether she's kidding or not, so he opts to say nothing. This seems to amuse her.

POLLY

I never got your name.

ETHAN

Ethan. Ethan Gunner.

POLLY

Well, Ethan, Ethan Gunner, what are you doing loitering on the corner?

ETHAN

Just checking out your little town.

She takes a moment to scan main street and gives an impartial shrug. Her eyes settle back on Ethan, sizing him up.

POLLY

You know, that was pretty cool what you did this morning. Standing up to Canine and his friends, I mean.

ETHAN

I'm sure I scared the bejesus out of them.

POLLY

Actually, you really should steer clear of those guys.

ETHAN

I think I'm safe in public areas.

POLLY

Yeah, but if I were you, I'd avoid dances, sporting events, parties, bar mitzvahs...

ETHAN

Gee, thanks. As if I wasn't already living in fear.

POLLY

Yeah, well, welcome to high school.

Ethan nods. Looks over her head to the bowling center and billiard hall across the street.

ETHAN

Am I safe in the bowling alley?

POLLY

(in an exaggerated voice)
In the lion's den? Are you mad?

ETHAN

You could come along and protect me.

POLLY

I'm a very expensive bodyguard. You couldn't afford me.

ETHAN

How 'bout I buy you something at the snack bar?

POLLY

Done and done. Just give me ten minutes to parallel park.

INT. COVE BILLIARDS AND BOWLING - DAY

Ethan tosses a bowling ball down his lane. It rockets right into the gutter. Polly winces with sympathy.

POLLY

Ethan, are you by any chance letting me win?

ETHAN

I like that theory.

BY THE BILLIARD TABLES

Rafe and his friends smoke in the amber glow of the suspended Tiffany lamps. He looks over from his pool game and watches Ethan and Polly cavorting on the bowling lane.

He takes a long drag on his cigarette and accepts the cue from one of his friends.

RAFE

Who's the punk Polly is talking to?

CANINE

I dunno. But he mouthed off to me this morning.

Rafe watches Ethan cross the arcade and head into the boys room.

INT. COVE BILLIARDS AND BOWLING - BOYS ROOM - DAY

Ethan whistles at the urinal. One of Rafe's boys, we'll call him LEOPARD HEAD for his outrageous hair color, walks in and rinses his hands at a sink.

Another boy with a PIERCED LIP strolls in. He ambles past the stalls, tapping the doors open to check for occupants.

The door opens yet again. Two more boys, a HEAVYWEIGHT WRESTLER and a TATTOO FREAK walk in and take stances directly behind Ethan.

ETHAN

Uh, is this like your favorite
urinal or something?

Canine enters. Ethan makes to squeeze past him. Canine holds
up his hand.

CANINE

Aren't you going to wash your
hands?

Rafe enters and the other boys file out. He and Ethan face
off alone from opposite ends of the boys room.

RAFE

Time for a talk.

ETHAN

Isn't talking in the restroom kind
of a girl thing?

RAFE

You're funny. What's your name?

ETHAN

Ethan.

RAFE

I can tell you're a freshman,
Ethan, because you don't know the
deal here. That's okay though.
There's a grace period.

ETHAN

Uh... okay. So what's the deal
here?

RAFE

I don't want you to hang out with
Polly Watkins.

ETHAN

Are you like her ex-boyfriend?

RAFE

Just don't do it. Are we clear?

Ethan considers and finally nods. But he's biting his tongue.
Rafe nods back and turns to go. Ethan can't hold back.

ETHAN

You know, I've been beaten up by
better than you.

Rafe stops and turns around slowly. He locks eyes with the freshman. Ethan prepares himself for his first New Jersey beat down. But instead--

Rafe spins and launches a succession of roundhouse kicks into each stall door.

A series of THUDS as each door gets blasted off its hinges and splinters in half.

Rafe catapults in the same fluid motion across the bathroom floor and punches the soap dispenser off the wall, splattering the mirror with pink goo.

He rushes forward and drop kicks the top of a sink basin. The porcelain slab breaks in half and shatters on the floor. Water spurts from the exposed plumbing.

He glides forward, leaps up right in front of Ethan, and high kicks the ceiling light. Pieces of broken glass shower down. Rafe lands gracefully into a kneel.

He rises to square off nose-to-nose. The hanging wire sparks and throws shadows across their faces.

A beat passes between them, and then...

Rafe suddenly pivots in place. His fist shoots out and pulverizes the mirror that provides our vantage.

His reflection collapses into a pile of jagged shards.

Stillness. Rafe stares into Ethan's eyes with an intimidating calm.

RAFE

You telling me you've been beaten
up by better than that?

Ethan looks around. We PAN over the devastation.

Doors busted off their hinges. Broken glass and porcelain underfoot, splattered with pink soap. The swinging remnants of the overhead light. And then back to Rafe.

Ethan shakes his head in the negative.

Rafe takes his time lighting a cigarette. Gives Ethan a nod and leaves without another word.

STAY with Ethan and his stunned expression as he stands in the middle of the demolished boys room.

INT. COVE BILLIARDS AND BOWLING - DAY

Polly reprograms the lane for another game. She spots Ethan emerging from the boys room. He's headed for the exit.

POLLY

Ethan?

But he leaves without even making eye contact.

INT. GUNNER HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Gunner family gathers around the dinner table. Stacks of unpacked boxes still clutter the living room and hallways.

ETHAN

Dad, when you were in the military,
did they teach you how to kill a
guy with your bare hands?

MR. GUNNER

I'm still in the military.

ETHAN

Yeah, but you're in public
relations now.

MR. GUNNER

Is someone bothering you at school?

ETHAN

No. I was just curious. Nevermind.

MR. GUNNER

If you ignore them, they'll get
bored and leave you alone.

ETHAN

That was stupid advice in grade
school, Dad, and it's twice as
stupid now.

MRS. GUNNER

Eat your dinner, Ethan.

He pushes his plate away in protest. Gets up and walks out.

He storms up the stairs to his room.

Mrs. Gunner flinches at the sound of his bedroom door
slamming shut.

ETHAN (V.O.)

Jeet Kune Do is the only non-classical style of Chinese kung fu in existence today.

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ethan lays on his bed, surrounded by various books on martial arts. A tower of Bruce Lee DVDs stands precariously on his bed stand. Posters of ENTER THE DRAGON and Bruce Lee's other films cover the walls.

He reads from the large manual in his hands. It is the TAO OF JEET KUNE DO, the collection of Bruce Lee's ruminations on his unique martial arts philosophy.

ETHAN (V.O.)

Jeet means "to stop, to stem, to intercept," while Kune means "fist" or "style," and Do means "the way" or "the ultimate reality." In other words... "The Way of the Intercepting Fist."

He flips to the next page. Pulls himself into a cross-legged position.

As Ethan reads, the GHOST OF BRUCE LEE materializes behind him, watching the boy. Oblivious to the otherworldly presence, Ethan reads on.

ETHAN (V.O.)

Jeet Kune Do favors formlessness so that it can assume all forms and since Jeet Kune Do has no style, it can fit in with all styles.

Bruce Lee's apparition continues to watch the boy.

ETHAN (V.O.)

Approach Jeet Kune Do with the idea of mastering the will. Forget about winning and losing; forget about pride and pain. Let an opponent graze your skin and you smash into his flesh; let an opponent smash into your flesh and you fracture his bone; let an opponent fracture your bone and you take his life!

ETHAN

(out loud; to himself)
Sweet...

Bruce Lee smiles at the boy's misplaced zeal. The master knows the boy has much to learn, but clearly sees potential.

He lowers his head and fades away. Ethan, sensing something, lifts his head and regards the empty space where the legendary fighter stood.

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ethan tosses and turns in bed. He hears voices. Bruce Lee speaking with a SHIFU, or kung fu mentor.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

I have no opponent.

SHIFU (V.O.)

Why is that?

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Because the word "I" does not exist.

Ethan's eyes snap open. He scans his room with some concern. He can hear the sound of men shouting KEE-YAH over and over.

He climbs from bed and inches out into the corridor. The moonlight shines through the downstairs window. In the dim light - myriad shadows of men practicing punches.

EXT. GUNNER HOME - NIGHT

Ethan steps out of the house. He's still in his pajamas.

His lawn is filled with CHINESE WARRIORS in white uniforms. They stand in rows practicing synchronous kung fu exercises.

PULL BACK to reveal the neighboring lawns are also filled with warriors practicing as far as the eye can see. Their KEE-YAHS fill the night.

Ethan wanders through the rows of men. They all face Bruce Lee.

Bruce looks straight at Ethan. Bows with his palms pressed together in front of him. His voice resonates in Ethan's head.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

I'd rather die a broken piece of jade than live a life of clay.

Ethan's jaw drops with recognition.

INT. GUNNER HOME - PARENTS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mr. and Mrs. Gunner awaken to find Ethan standing in their doorway.

MRS. GUNNER
Are we being robbed?

ETHAN
I had a really weird dream about
Bruce Lee.

MR. GUNNER
Uh, well, is everything okay?

ETHAN
I think so.

MR. GUNNER
Then can we talk about it tomorrow?
I have to be at the base really
early in the morning.

ETHAN
Okay.

He steps out and closes the door behind him. Mrs. Gunner's eyes fall to the floor. She sees the muddy footprints Ethan tracked in.

MRS. GUNNER
You think Ethan is sleepwalking?

MR. GUNNER
I'll take sleepwalking over bed-
wetting. Turn out the light.

She pulls the cord on the lamp and plunges us into darkness.

EXT. SEASIDE HEIGHTS - DAY

Ethan's walking to school. Polly pulls up in her Miata and rolls slowly alongside. He tries not to acknowledge her.

POLLY
You left without saying goodbye
yesterday. I have to assume you
were home sick the day in
kindergarten when they taught the
fundamental rules of etiquette.

ETHAN
I'm sorry, I can't talk to you.

POLLY

You should probably stop walking, because eventually I am going to have a head-on collision and my quadriplegia will be on your conscience.

Ethan halts with a sigh and turns to the girl in the idling vehicle.

POLLY

I'm going to the amusement park after school today. Wanna come?

ETHAN

I'm sorry, Polly. I really want to, but I can't.

POLLY

Okay, I give. What was my, like, big faux pas?

ETHAN

You didn't do anything.

POLLY

Well, then tell me. I'm not a mind reader, ya know.

ETHAN

Someone bigger than me said to back off, and seeing as I have no spine, that's what I'm doing.

Polly adopts a look of sudden comprehension.

POLLY

Rafe...

ETHAN

See, you are a mind reader.

POLLY

I'm sorry, Ethan. It's got nothing to do with you. Rafe and I have... history.

ETHAN

So I'm just the monkey in the middle. That makes me feel tons better.

Polly shakes her head in bemused resignation.

POLLY

You're probably right. I guess I'll see you in school. Or not.

She swerves back into traffic.

INT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY

Ethan grimaces as he steps up to the steaming array of possible entrees. Six variations on earth-toned vomit.

He flops a dripping Sloppy Joe onto a plate and faces the cafeteria. Spots Polly at a table with a gaggle of other girls.

He takes a few steps towards her. Stops when he sees Rafe and some of his friends slide into empty chairs at her table.

Ethan takes a seat at a table nearby. Glances over at them from time to time and dabs at his food.

AT RAFE AND POLLY'S TABLE

She watches Rafe smother his fries in ketchup. He finally acknowledges her.

RAFE

Something on your mind, Polly?

POLLY

You can't choose my friends for me.

RAFE

Oh, that shrimp was a friend?

POLLY

Trying to control my life isn't going to change what happened.

RAFE

I'm not trying to change anything. I'm trying to keep things exactly the way they are.

POLLY

You're such a bully. I can't believe I ever felt sorry for you.

Rafe shrugs and leans back in his chair. Swings his legs up and drops his riding boots with a PLOP into Polly's lunch.

She flips him the middle finger and storms off. Two tables away, Ethan observes with confusion.

EXT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The students board the buses. Ethan watches Polly make her way to her car in the parking lot.

His eyes go from Polly to Rafe and a handful of his friends perched on nearby car hoods. They stare at Ethan, as if daring him not to heed the warning.

And that's when Ethan hears Bruce's words from the night before.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

I'd rather die a broken piece of
jade than live a life of clay.

Ethan leaps over the school seal and jogs across the parking lot. Rafe, Canine, and the other boys watch him approach Polly's car.

ETHAN

Polly! Polly!

He bounds past cars and waves her down. She struggles to crank the ignition.

POLLY

What's up?

ETHAN

Are you still going to the
amusement park?

She glances nervously in Rafe's direction.

POLLY

Ethan, I dunno... You made a very
compelling argument this morning.

ETHAN

You should never listen to me in
the morning. I'm not a morning
person.

He clambers into the passenger seat without waiting for permission. She nods with a smile and the Miata roars out of the parking lot. Rafe watches them go with a scowl.

EXT. AMUSEMENT PARK - DAY

The roller coaster clicks steadily. It winches up to the apex of the track. Ethan and Polly sit in the first car. It crests the top and suddenly they're yanked forward at awesome speed.

ETHAN

Oh this is gonna suuuuuuuuck!

The roller coaster hums past. It rattles the metal track and bears screaming children in loops over the vast park.

Polly lifts her Polaroid camera in front of them and snaps a picture. The photo emerges and the wind catches it.

EXT. AMUSEMENT PARK - LATER

The roller coaster click clacks to a stop.

The two kids climb out. Ethan wobbles and Polly grabs his shoulder with genuine concern.

POLLY

Hey, you okay?

ETHAN

I'm cool. I'll just wait to puke when I get home.

POLLY

I feel a guilt trip coming on. You had a little fun, right? C'mon...

She busts into a sexy Britney Spears imitation, imaginary microphone in her hand.

POLLY

...Gimme a sign!

ETHAN

How's this?

He holds up the rescued photograph.

POLLY

Wow, nice reflexes.

Polly takes it from him.

ON THE PHOTO

and their ecstatic expressions. She hands it back.

ETHAN

You can have it if you promise you won't tell anyone I smiled. I have a reputation to uphold.

POLLY

You keep it. Your secret's safe
with me.

EXT. AMUSEMENT PARK - PARKING LOT - DAY

Polly settles into the driver's seat of her Miata and Ethan
leans against the door.

POLLY

Want a ride home?

ETHAN

I would, but there's only so many
times today I can cheat death.

POLLY

I'm not that bad of a driver.

ETHAN

Maybe if you're like comparing
yourself to the guy at the monster
truck rally.

POLLY

That's it, you're walking. Good
night, wise ass.

ETHAN

See ya later, Evel Knievel.

They exchange a smile and she burns rubber.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - NIGHT

A swing set and playground pitted against a dusky sky. Ethan
saunters past the merry-go-round. He doesn't see the boys
perched like gargoyles atop the jungle gym. They climb down
and follow him.

Ethan gives pause and squints. A few feet ahead of him, the
lit cherry of a cigarette glows in the shadows.

Rafe steps into the light and exhales a plume of smoke.

RAFE

Did you have fun?

ETHAN

A blast.

RAFE

Hope it was worth it.

ETHAN

Is there still a chance you'll let me off with a warning?

RAFE

No. But I'll give you a ten second head start. No one will blame you for running.

Ethan glances behind him. Canine, Leopard Head, Pierced Lip, Heavyweight Wrestler and Tattoo Freak are all there.

Rafe tosses his butt and taps his finger against his temple.

RAFE

I'm counting in my head.

Ethan tries to make an escape. Pierced Lip juts out his leg and trips Ethan up. The freshman lands on his face and the boys chuckle.

Rafe turns to the tire swing. He leaps a few feet into the air and karate chops the chain in two.

As he lands he wraps the chain around his hand and starts to swing the makeshift mace in circles above his head.

Ethan sees Rafe's weapon and clambers to his feet. He runs.

The boys shout with gleeful anticipation. The HUM of the spinning tire swing grows louder with velocity.

RAFE

Times up.

He releases his mace and the tire swing hits the retreating freshman square in the back. Lifting him...

...off the ground. Ethan lands on the merry-go-round. He lets out a groan. He tries to stand, but his legs buckle.

Rafe grabs hold of one of the bars and rotates the merry-go-round at a dizzying speed.

Ethan climbs to his feet on the spinning platform. The boys surround the merry-go-round. Ethan tries to dismount the ride. Canine delivers a side kick that sends him back on.

One by one, the boys tighten the circle. In order for Ethan to get off the merry-go-round, he has to go through them.

They begin delivering kicks and punches that send Ethan bouncing from one boy to the next like a rag doll.

Ethan staggers into Tattoo Freak, and the bully gives an uppercut that sends Ethan into Leopard Head, who knees him in the stomach, and on and on until...

...the merry-go-round slows to a stop. Ethan looks up to find the boys are gone.

He looks down at his shirt. Sees that he's puked on himself.

Bruised and bloodied, he gets to his feet and begins hobbling as fast as he can from the playground.

Rafe and the other boys watch from the shadows.

CANINE

You're letting him go?

RAFE

Relax. This is just half time.

EXT. SEASIDE HEIGHTS - NIGHT

Ethan's shoes THUMP the pavement. He's running for his life. He doesn't see....

...Rafe bounding from one roof to the next right alongside him. Impossible jumps that defy the laws of physics.

Ethan reaches an intersection and changes course. Rafe's sneakers hit a rooftop and he hurls himself across the street to someone's front yard.

A leashed GERMAN SHEPHERD snaps at his heels as he leaps to the home's shingle roof.

EXT. LIGHTHOUSE - NIGHT

Ethan approaches the shore at full tilt. Just ahead, an automated lighthouse rotates its spotlight onto the dark surface of the ocean.

He reaches the water's edge and looks down a steep and rocky cliff to the beach below. He pants, both hands on his knees. As he turns around to look back...

...his face meets Rafe's fist. Ethan spins and falls against the side of the lighthouse.

Rafe dances in and throws a punch, just barely missing Ethan's head, and striking the stone.

The impact of Rafe's punch leaves several cracks in the lighthouse's facade.

Ethan tries to break free from the close quarters combat, but Rafe hammers him in the gut with both fists like a piston.

Ethan lands in the gravel lot of the lighthouse. He gasps in a desperate attempt to fill his lungs, and slowly, painfully rises to his feet. Picks up a piece of driftwood.

RAFE

What happened to the smart mouth?

Rafe begins circling like an eager jungle cat. He whips around and spin kicks Ethan in the face.

Ethan stumbles backward and the driftwood escapes from his hands. Rafe spin kicks him again and again, his feet never touching the ground. The last kick drops Ethan to earth.

Rafe cocks his fist to strike. It's the killing blow.

A siren and flashing lights herald the arrival of a police cruiser. Rafe backs off.

Two uniform COPS close in, hands on their nightsticks.

COP

You know the drill, Rafe! I wanna see your hands on your head, now!

ETHAN'S POV

of Rafe and the cops standing over him. Rafe's face twitches in rage as they cuff his hands behind his back.

RAFE

Next time you see me, you're a dead man.

Rafe lifts his leg and brings his foot down in our face, and we...

GO TO BLACK.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON ETHAN'S EYES

bruised to a deep purple. They open.

A stuffy hospital room. Dawn peeks through the blinds. His mother leans over him. Strokes his cheek. His father sprawls in a sofa chair. He's asleep.

MRS. GUNNER
How do you feel, kiddo?

ETHAN
Like I deserve a day off from
school.

MRS. GUNNER
Take as many as you want.

ETHAN
Really?

She nods. Mr. Gunner stretches and joins the bedside.

MR. GUNNER
I'm sorry, Ethan. If I had known
things were so serious-

ETHAN
You would have suggested I do what?
Other than ignoring them. What
would have been your plan, Dad?

MR. GUNNER
I don't know. Called this boy's
parents, I guess.

ETHAN
Yeah, that would've been brilliant.
That would have totally saved the
day.

Mr. Gunner's at a loss. He looks to his wife for a rescue.

ETHAN
What happened to him?

MR. GUNNER
They're holding him in a juvenile
detention center until the fact
finding hearing.

MRS. GUNNER
There's plenty of time for us to
talk about that. We're going to
step out and speak with the doctor.

MR. GUNNER
And you can have a chance to talk
to your friend.

They push through the door into the hallway. Ethan cocks his head quizzically.

ETHAN

My friend?

Polly appears in the doorway. She strikes a pose.

POLLY

Did someone call for a candy
striper?

Ethan breaks into a grin. She approaches his bedside.

POLLY

You look rough.

ETHAN

You should see the other guy. He's
never going to be able to get my
blood stains out of his shirt.

Polly nods glumly. And then... she starts to cry.

ETHAN

Hey, it's not your fault. I knew
you were his ex, and I still made
the decision to hang out with you.

POLLY

I never dated Rafe.

ETHAN

Then why...?

POLLY

I dated his younger brother. Caleb.
Until two years ago.

(beat)

When he died.

Ethan balks at the revelation. Unsure of what to say.

POLLY

He was my first boyfriend, I
guess. And he's the only person I
ever knew who died. I went to his
wake, but I didn't know that his
like actual body would be there. I
was so shocked I didn't even cry.
Neither did Rafe. And after that,
he became someone else.

A long pause as Polly is lost in a very sad memory. She comes to and gives Ethan a rueful look.

POLLY

I should have told you all this.

ETHAN

Maybe, but I don't know if I would have done anything different. There's part of me that feels bad for him. But then a part of me thinks that what happened to Rafe doesn't give him the right to break my nose. You know what I mean?

Polly nods.

POLLY

Is there anything I can do for you?

ETHAN

Well, now that you mention it...

POLLY

Oh, great, here it comes.

ETHAN

You could come to the Homecoming dance with me.

(off Polly's blank expression)

Not a date or anything.

POLLY

So like... a platonic outing?

ETHAN

Exactly.

POLLY

Very well. I accept.

She musses his hair and heads for the door.

ETHAN

Out of curiosity. If I had gone for the date...

Polly gives a coy shrug and disappears into the hall.

INT. GUNNER HOME - DAY

Ethan lounges on the couch, an ice pack pressed against his face. A bottle of pain killers rests on the side table.

Mrs. Gunner sets a glass of orange juice, complete with crazy straw, on a coaster beside him.

MRS. GUNNER

Will the patient be requiring
anything else this evening?

ETHAN

Remote control?

She slides the remote, already within reach, about six inches closer to him. He gives a painful nod of appreciation and hits the remote. The TV comes to life with GAME OF DEATH.

INT. GUNNER HOME - LATER

Ethan is bathed in the television's pale glow. There is the sound of Bruce Lee's battle cries from the screen.

INT. GUNNER HOME - LATER

Ethan flips through a kung fu manual.

There's a Bruce Lee biography playing on the TV. The narrator tells of Bruce's history of growing up having to fight on the streets.

INT. GUNNER HOME - LATER

Ethan has passed out on the couch. Static hisses on the TV.

There is the creak of feet on floorboards and Ethan snaps to attention.

He looks around the house. Night has fallen and his parents have long since retired to bed.

ETHAN

Hello?

EXT. GUNNER HOME - NIGHT

Ethan emerges from the house in his pajamas.

He stares across the park and catches the figure of Bruce Lee receding into the mist.

ETHAN

Is there someone out there?

He wanders across the street and into the fog.

ETHAN

Hel-looo?

EXT. LIGHTHOUSE - NIGHT

Ethan finds himself standing under the lighthouse. He looks around at the familiar spot where Rafe beat him to a bloody pulp.

ETHAN

It's cold as balls out here. I gotta be out of my freaking mind.

That's when he senses another presence. Slowly turns and...

The apparition of Bruce Lee emerges from the finger-like tendrils of the fog.

The boy stares in wonder. Breath condensing in the cold night air.

ETHAN

You're... you're Bruce Lee. Or like, the ghost of Bruce Lee.

Bruce adopts a pleased expression and bows.

ETHAN

You're here to teach me how to defend myself.

As Bruce Lee paces about, Ethan can hear his voice in his mind.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

It's in your nature to do more than just defend yourself.

ETHAN

It's in my nature to tuck tail and run, so maybe we could start with the basics. Can you teach me?

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

I don't believe in systems, nor in method. And without systems... Without method... what's to teach?

ETHAN

Teach me to punch like you. Kick like you. Teach me your style. What's it called again?

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

My style? You could call it the art of fighting without fighting.

ETHAN

C'mon, you know what I mean.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Jeet Kune Do. The way of the intercepting fist.

ETHAN

Right. Now teach me how to punch.

Bruce Lee obliges by demonstrating a Wing Chun punch.

Ethan tries to mimic the move. Bruce holds up his clenched fist.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Get all your energy in there and make this into a weapon.

ETHAN

Like this?

Ethan repeats the move. The ghost shakes his head. Gestures to the lighthouse.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

You have to put the whole hip into it. And snap it.

ETHAN

You want me to punch a lighthouse?

Bruce nods and gestures again. Ethan runs his fingers down the surface of the stone.

ETHAN

But I'll break every bone in my hand.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

When you ease the burden of your mind, you just do it.

Ethan takes a deep breath. He cocks his fist.

ETHAN

Ease the burden of your mind. Ease
the burden of your mind.

As he punches he yells a mighty KEE-YAH. His fist strikes the
stone and he screams in agony.

ETHAN

For the love of God!

Ethan looks at his knuckles. They are scraped and bleeding.
Bruce gives a slight simper.

ETHAN

You think that's funny? I almost
broke my hand. What kind of kung fu
instructor are you?

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

I cannot teach you, only help you
to explore yourself.

A beat as ghost and boy regard each other in the mist.

ETHAN

Fine. I'll do whatever it takes.

Bruce nods, clasps his hands together, and bows.

Ethan bows with him.

ETHAN

Will you show me more?

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Later.

Behind him, the early morning's aurora reflects off the
surface of the ocean.

Bruce Lee backs away and dissipates into the glare.

ON ETHAN

and his mystified expression. It gives way to one of willful
determination.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. GUNNER HOME - DAY

A morning cartoon on the TV wakes Ethan from his slumber. He's still on the couch. He can hear his mother fixing breakfast in the kitchen.

MRS. GUNNER

Hon? You awake?

ETHAN

I think so?

MRS. GUNNER

You feeling well enough to go to school?

ETHAN

Not really.

MRS. GUNNER

That's a shame. The dance is tonight and that Polly girl called for you.

Beat.

ETHAN

I might feel better by then.

MRS. GUNNER

I thought you might.

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Gunner aids his son in getting ready for the dance. The boy is on the verge of surrendering to his tie.

MR. GUNNER

Let me help you with that.

His father turns him around by the shoulders and takes over.

MR. GUNNER

Are you going with a girl?

Ethan's not quite sure what to make of the inquiry.

MR. GUNNER

Okay, strike one. Are those boys going to be there?

Ethan sighs and removes the half-finished tie. Throws it onto the bed.

ETHAN

The tie is not worth the third degree.

MR. GUNNER

Look, it's my job to ask.

ETHAN

Well I'd rather you'd just stay out of it. Not that my opinion matters around here.

MR. GUNNER

Of course it matters.

ETHAN

Dad, out of all the times we ever had to move somewhere, did you ever ask me if I wanted to go?

MR. GUNNER

I never had much choice about it. Was there a particular place you wanted to stay?

ETHAN

No, there wasn't. Can you imagine how much that sucks?

He storms past his father. Mr. Gunner plops down on the edge of Ethan's bed.

He glances curiously around his son's room. It's a world he seems totally unfamiliar with.

INT. GUNNER HOME - NIGHT

Ethan's in a sports coat, waiting for Polly's arrival. He anxiously flips through a kung fu book.

He stands up and starts practicing moves in the living room. Blocking and delivering counter punches to imagined opponents all around him.

EXT. GUNNER HOME - NIGHT

Polly pulls into the cul-de-sac in her Miata. She cuts the engine and observes with amusement.

She can see Ethan through the living room window going through the motions of his basic Long Fist Form.

INT. GUNNER HOME - NIGHT

MRS. GUNNER (O.S.)

Ethan! There's a young lady here
for you!

Her words cause Ethan to lose his concentration and he
accidentally side kicks a lamp off an end table. It lands with
a CRASH.

MRS. GUNNER (O.S.)

Was that my lamp?

Ethan hastily rights the lamp and heads into the...

FOYER

where his parents have accosted his "not a date."

POLLY

Ethan, Ethan Gunner.

ETHAN

Hello, Polly.

Beat. Polly looks from Ethan to the parents.

POLLY

Hi. I'm Polly.

MRS. GUNNER

So nice to meet you, I'm Ethan's
mother. That's a lovely dress
you're wearing.

POLLY

Thanks. It's a Nicole Miller.

MR. GUNNER

And I'm Ethan's father.

They all shake. Another long awkward beat. Then Mr. Gunner
puts his arm around his wife and gives her a squeeze.

MR. GUNNER

We just made a pact in the kitchen
not to embarrass Ethan.

ETHAN

Too late.

Polly can't suppress a giggle. Mr. Gunner shrugs.

MRS. GUNNER

I thought we were doing a pretty good job. We didn't even give him a curfew.

(off her husband's look)

Oh, just kidding. Curfew it is.

ETHAN

Okaaaaay. Well, we better bail.

Ethan hustles Polly down the slate path.

MR. GUNNER

Midnight, Ethan. Imagine how mortified you'll be when I show up looking for you. In my pajamas.

Ethan gives a dismissive wave over his shoulder. His parents watch the Miata pull away and linger in the doorway.

MRS. GUNNER

You were quite the disciplinarian, hon. Well done.

MR. GUNNER

Yeah right. That kid's been calling my bluff for fifteen years.

INT. MIATA - MOVING - NIGHT

ETHAN

Sorry 'bout that.

POLLY

Don't be silly. They're no worse than anyone else's parents.

ETHAN

I guess. So you go to a lot of these things?

POLLY

What, dances? Sometimes. I'm not like a social butterfly or anything, if that's what you're asking.

ETHAN

But you like being in high school.

POLLY

Yeah, I mean, you know. It has it's ups and downs, but I figure one day we'll look back and laugh.

ETHAN

I think it sucks. I'd even go so far as to use the word "hate."

POLLY

What's to hate?

ETHAN

I hate the way, when I'm walking down the hall and someone bigger is headed right for me, I always have to step to the side. Just because I'm small. One of these days I'm not going to move and just let the head-on collision happen.

Polly nods but says nothing.

ETHAN

What?

POLLY

What, what? Did you hear me say something?

ETHAN

You think I'm disturbed or something.

POLLY

Not at all.

Beat.

POLLY

(under her breath)

Psycho.

She eyes him with a smile and they both crack up.

EXT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Miata pulls into the lot. Crowds of students make their way into the school. Boys arm and arm with pretty girls.

Ethan gets out and offers his arm to Polly. She takes it casually and they head for the entrance.

ETHAN

Crap.

POLLY

What?

He gestures to the entrance where Canine and his four associates loiter on the school seal.

Polly grips his arm.

POLLY

It'll be okay.

A long, tense approach to the entrance of the school. Canine and the other boys hold them in an intimidating gaze.

Ethan and Polly reach them and stop. The freshman looks to Canine with uncertainty. Canine drops his half-finished smoke on the seal and grinds it out with his toe.

CANINE

Polly, I'm gonna need to borrow him for a minute.

POLLY

No problem. As long as you don't mind me giving you a face full of mace.

She begins reaching into her purse.

CANINE

I'm not going to start anything. I just want to talk.

ETHAN

It's okay, Polly. I'll meet you inside.

A beat as she considers whether she's being dismissed. She heads inside. Canine puts his arm over Ethan's shoulder and walks hide away from the huddle of boys.

CANINE

You heard what happened to Rafe?

ETHAN

Yeah. I heard.

CANINE

Look, we kinda talked it over and decided we probably got a little carried away. Nobody's perfect, you know. So anyway, to err is human, to forgive divine, right? I mean, you don't want Rafe to have to serve time in juvie, do you?

Ethan opts to say nothing.

CANINE

Right. And the best part is, it's totally in your power to make sure he doesn't. All you have to do is drop the charges before the hearing. You do that and Rafe gets released. And if that happens, I don't think you have anything to sweat as far as we're concerned.

Ethan stops and faces Canine.

ETHAN

I agree to drop the charges before the hearing and you leave me alone?

CANINE

Totally.

ETHAN

And if I don't?

Canine pulls a butterfly knife and flips it around until the blade is quivering under Ethan's nose.

Ethan gives the knife due consideration.

CANINE

We have an understanding?

A beat. Ethan locks onto Canine's eyes and sees the sociopath within.

ETHAN

Yeah. We have an understanding.

Canine nods and in a series of flips, the blade is gone. He puts his arm across Ethan's shoulder and leads him back to the entrance.

CANINE

Sweet. Now go tear up that dance floor, you maniac.

Ethan goes inside.

In pre-lap we hear the booming of the Black Eyed Peas.

INT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

The gymnasium is packed with sweaty teens bobbing to the hip-hop. Movement made jerky by the strobe.

Polly and Ethan have carved out a space on the dance floor. He's clearly preoccupied. Polly senses this and shouts over the music.

POLLY

You know this is a dance, right?

ETHAN

I'm dancing. .

POLLY

You're just like rotating your hips like you've got some invisible hula hoop or something.

The hip-hop song ends and the music segues rather abruptly into a slow song.

Ethan waivers on the dance floor with uncertainty. Polly puts her arms on his shoulders and they dance close.

She whispers in his ear.

POLLY

What did he say to you, Ethan?

ETHAN

Whatever. I don't wanna talk about it.

They dance for a while. Not speaking. He breathes in the scent of her hair.

ETHAN

I think I just stepped on your foot.

POLLY

Yeah. You dance like I drive.

ETHAN
Gee, thanks.

EXT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The dance has ended and the students are piling into cars, blasting music, revving themselves up for after-parties. Ethan and Polly watch the circus with amusement.

ETHAN
I'm not really up for a party.

POLLY
Do you wanna go home?

ETHAN
I dunno. I have like another hour before my parents lock me in the dungeon.

POLLY
How 'bout we go for a walk?

ETHAN
Cool with me.

EXT. SEASHORE - NIGHT

LONG SHOT

In the moonlight Ethan and Polly make there way along the sandy beach below the boardwalk. Polly holds up her dress like a princess braving the forest.

ETHAN
This place is kinda cool. I haven't been down here.

Polly takes a seat on a gnarled, fallen tree. She pats the spot next to her and he joins her side.

A pensive beat as Ethan stares across the bay to where the lighthouse's lamp sweeps the waters.

ETHAN
You know who Bruce Lee is?

POLLY
Sure.

ETHAN

You know... he died really young.
Just went to sleep one night and
never woke up.

POLLY

Wow. Bummer.

ETHAN

Yeah.

A beat as he struggles with the decision to tell her.

ETHAN

I think his ghost is haunting me.

Polly nods, but says nothing. Then-

POLLY

Huh.

ETHAN

That's it? Huh. That's the verdict?

POLLY

Well, I dunno. I mean, it's New
Jersey, right? Stranger things have
happened.

ETHAN

Not to me they haven't.

POLLY

Why's he haunting you of all
people?

Beat.

ETHAN

I think he came to teach me how to
defend myself. Or something.

Ethan looks to her and she shrugs. If she's making a
judgement, she's keeping it to herself.

POLLY

So do you think you can learn stuff
from him?

ETHAN

Maybe. I mean, I know there are
some things he could do that I
could never do in a million years.

POLLY
Like what?

ETHAN
Well, there's this one move he was famous for. It was called the One Inch Punch. Basically, it's just like it sounds...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE - DAY

The image is in black and white, and grainy. Actual stock footage of Bruce Lee's famed demonstration.

Bruce Lee paces the gymnasium floor. The crowd in the bleachers seethes with anticipation.

ETHAN (V.O.)
He could deliver this like totally powerful punch without hardly moving his arm at all.

He takes a stance in front of his ASSISTANT. Extends his arm and places his fist against the man's chest.

We dial down to SLOW-MOTION as he pulls his fist back an almost imperceptible distance...

...and shoots his fist forward. There is an audible POP and the assistant gets knocked off his feet. He pitches backward and crashes into a fold-out metal chair, bowling it over.

POLLY (V.O.)
That sounds kind of impossible. For anyone, I mean.

BACK TO:

INT. SEASHORE - NIGHT

ETHAN
Hey, no discouraging words allowed.
(re: his bruised hand)
I can't even figure out how to punch the regular way.

She rubs her hand over his black and blue knuckles. Ethan blushes and instinctively turns his head away.

POLLY

You know what you need, mister?
Your own private pep rally.
Ready...?

(deadpan)

Ra ra, siiss boom ba. Gooo Ethan.

She breaks into a warm smile and Ethan smiles back.

It's a ripe moment for kiss. But they both become self-conscious and look away. She points to the lighthouse on the far side of the bay.

POLLY

How far do you think that is?

ETHAN

Dunno. Pretty far.

POLLY

Let's swim it. I'll race you.

ETHAN

I don't think we can swim that far.

Polly pretends to slide off a glove and smack Ethan with it.

POLLY

C'mon! The gauntlet is thrown!

ETHAN

Are you like peer pressuring me?

She sighs and jumps to her feet. She pulls off her dress and strips down to her underwear and bra. Ethan becomes extremely flustered.

ETHAN

Uh, what are you doing?

POLLY

What? Like I'm really going to swim
across a bay in a Nicole Miller
dress.

ETHAN

Uh-huh.

She runs up a winding path that takes her to the top of a steep embankment.

Ethan watches her leap off the embankment and holler for joy. She plummets into the dark water.

He slumps his shoulders and sighs in resignation. Pulls off his sports coat and tie. She cheers him on from the water.

ETHAN

Yeah. I'm just gonna... wade in.

POLLY

C'mon, get pumped!

Ethan pumps his arms in mock exuberance. She giggles. He wades in a few feet.

ETHAN

Christ, it's cold!

POLLY

(teeth chattering)

Don't be a wuss. I'm the one not wearing any clothes.

ETHAN

Alright already.

Ethan dives under. He pops up a few moments later beside Polly. He shakes the mop of hair from his eyes. She splashes him playfully.

POLLY

C'mon...

They both launch into a crawl.

The rotating beam of the lighthouse passes over the bay. Ethan is nearly half way across when-

-he halts suddenly. Treads water and whips his head around for signs of Polly.

ETHAN

Polly?

He hears a faint sound and turns back. He glides like a torpedo through the water.

The lighthouse sets the water aglow again, and he spots Polly struggling to keep her head above the surface. He swims to her.

POLLY

(sputtering)

My leg. It cramped up...

ETHAN

Put your arms around my neck.

He hauls her through the water.

EXT. LIGHTHOUSE - NIGHT

The two kids wade from the water and flop onto the sand. They lay there, chests heaving from the exertion.

POLLY

I almost died.

ETHAN

Uh, excuse me, but I'm the one who did all the work. Don't worry, everybody, Ethan's fine.

POLLY

Oh, are you okay?

ETHAN

I think I need 40 cc's of... something. STAT!

Polly pretends to hold electric paddles to his chest.

POLLY

Clear!

Ethan jolts, his arms and legs thrashing. Polly continues to try to revive him.

Her laughter dies and there is a beat of stillness as they stare into each others' eyes. From the ground, Polly's face appears to be upside-down.

Polly finally interrupts the intimate silence.

POLLY

You should be a lifeguard. Or at least play one on TV.

Ethan rolls his eyes and staggers to his feet. His eyes crinkle in confusion, and that's when he realizes...

ETHAN

Holy crap. I actually dragged you all the way.

Polly gazes around, equally surprised he was able to close the distance with her on his back.

POLLY

Holy crap indeed. I guess when you put your mind to something, anything is possible.

ETHAN

I'll tell you one thing, there's no way I'm swimming all the way back.

POLLY

Me neither. But for some strange reason, I am suddenly feeling self-conscious in my underwear. Go figure.

A pair of headlights appear on the gravel road.

Polly's GIRLFRIENDS hoot from the Jeep.

GIRLFRIEND

What the heck are you doing out here, Polly?

POLLY

What's it look like, bee-yatch? I swam across the bay!

GIRLFRIEND

Right on. You need a ride?

Polly nods and climbs into the Jeep.

POLLY

Ethan? You coming or what?

ETHAN

I think I'm gonna walk. I live just down the street.

POLLY

Okay, dude. Whaaa-tever.

They wave goodbye and Polly settles into the back of the Jeep.

Her girlfriend throws the Jeep into gear. Ethan watches the girls take off into the night, music reverberating across the waters.

ETHAN

(in a weird voice)

You should have kissed her, Gunner.

(MORE)

ETHAN (cont'd)

(normal voice)

Really? Thanks, Captain Obvious.

Ethan stoops beside the base of the lighthouse and picks something up from the muck.

It's the picture of him and Polly on the roller coaster. Wrinkled and spotted with mud.

He regards the lighthouse and runs his fingers down the rough hewn surface.

He bites his lip and his fingers curl into a fist. Readies himself in front of the towering structure.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

When you ease the burden of your mind, you just do it.

Ethan throws his whole body behind the punch, driving his fist into the side of the lighthouse and...

...the impact of his fist makes a great BOOM like nearby thunder.

At first nothing happens. He takes a few steps backwards. Then...

...the whole lighthouse crumbles in a thunderous avalanche down the cliff and into the ocean. He watches the rotating spotlight hurtle into the darkness and disappear.

Ethan backs away from the cliff. He looks this way and that to see if anyone just saw what he did.

Gets a boyish grin.

He closes his eyes and Bruce Lee materializes from the forest behind him.

Ethan senses his presence and turns to face him.

ETHAN

What now?

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

C'mon, touch me. Anywhere you can.

Ethan pivots and rises into a high kick.

Bruce crouches low and extends his foot within striking distance of Ethan's unprotected kneecap.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

You see, to reach me, you must move to me. Your attack offers me the opportunity to intercept you. In this case I am using my longest weapon, my side kick, against the nearest target, your kneecap. This can be compared to your left jab in boxing, except it's much more damaging.

Ethan bobs and weaves, anticipating the next attack. Bruce materializes and Ethan snaps a punch. Bruce dodges it with ease.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Ahhhh, this time I intercept your emotional tenseness. You see, from your thought to your fist, how much time was lost?

LONG SHOT OF THE TWO OF THEM IN THE FOREST

as Ethan launches into an dizzying attack combination.

Strikes with his arms and legs everywhere that Bruce appears. The martial arts legend dodges and parries each blow.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

No, no, no! Don't just move for the sake of moving. Relate to me. Relationship! Relationship!

Ethan stops and leans over, hands on his knees as he struggles to catch his breath.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Kick me.

The boy turns and snaps his leg at Bruce's face. Bruce pulls back and Ethan's foot wavers within inches of it.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

What was that? An exhibition? Show me emotional content. Now try again!

CUT TO:

INT. GUNNER HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mr. Gunner pours himself a glass of Brita water. Considers a piece of pie in the refrigerator. Thinks better of it.

He heads back upstairs. Stops at the top of the stairwell when he sees the door to Ethan's bedroom is ajar.

BACK TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Ethan is now blindfolded with his tie. Bruce paces behind him, hands clasped behind his back.

The ghost observes a THRUSH moving through the underbrush.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
Can you hear the bird?

Ethan cocks his head.

ETHAN
No.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
If you can not hear the bird, how
can you hear me?

Ethan concentrates. Bruce moves to strike and the thrush takes flight in alarm.

Ethan blocks the punch and counters with a roundhouse kick. His foot holds in the air just inches from the ghost.

The boy removes his blindfold and grins in self-satisfaction.

ETHAN
What's next?

The ghost pauses in consideration.

ETHAN
How 'bout we break a few boards?

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
Boards don't fight back.

Bruce Lee points and Ethan's gaze follows the ghost's outstretched finger to...

...the golf course beyond the trees.

ETHAN
What's out there?

But Ethan suddenly realizes the ghost is gone. He lets out a sigh and trudges toward the green.

CUT TO:

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Gunner hits the light and sits down on Ethan's bed.

A stack of library books on the bedside table catches his attention.

BRUCE LEE'S FIGHTING METHOD, THE SWORD POLISHER'S RECORD, THE TAO OF POOH... The list goes on and on.

He opens a book about Chinese art. Pictures of Buddhist monks creating intricate MANDALA SAND PAINTINGS.

BACK TO:

EXT. GOLF COURSE - NIGHT

Ethan walks past sand traps and small ponds. Stops on the greens and taps his foot against the flag. Glances around.

ETHAN

What am I doing out here?

But the only answer he gets is a crack of lightning that splits the sky and the roll of approaching thunder.

Then it starts to pour.

ETHAN

Fantastic.

CUT TO:

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Gunner flips from the images of sand paintings to the next page.

Photographs of the Army of the Terracotta Warriors. Statues of javelin throwers, swordsmen, spearmen, shield-bearers.

The last picture features a fearsome CHARIOTEER.

BACK TO:

EXT. GOLF COURSE - NIGHT

The downpour intensifies. Ethan is drenched and shivering.

A terrifying rattle of wheels and the neigh of horses turns his head.

From out of the impenetrable darkness emerges a CHARIOTEER. Three black mares' stone hooves slosh in the mud as the charioteer circles a sand trap to face Ethan.

ETHAN

Bruce...

The charioteer brandishes his scimitar with a flourish and jerks the reins, urging the three horses into a light canter. The warrior's face strangely resembles Rafe's, but with sunken eyes.

ETHAN

I can't do this!

The charioteer explodes into a full gallop and bears down on Ethan. The boy squints in the face of the driving rain.

Bruce materializes behind him and Ethan can hear his words in his mind.

BRUCE (V.O.)

You ask yourself, am I really afraid of this man? And if I do have such doubts, such feelings, then I take it very lightly. Just as today the rain is going on strong... but tomorrow maybe the sun is going to come out again.

Bruce's self-assured voice seems to bring Ethan composure. He digs his heels into the muddy ground.

The charioteer is almost upon him, and for a moment he can see his opponent so clearly...

The blast of air from the animals' nostrils.

The black eyes of the charioteer.

The gleam of the blade as it arcs downward.

Ethan leaps high... rising above the shrieking horses... and meets the warrior in mid-air.

Drives his foot into the charioteer's chest.

The rider tumbles from the chariot. When he hits the ground, he crumbles into pieces like a shattered statue.

Ethan lands in a crouch, caked in grime. He eyes the pile of rubble that was once the object of so much fear.

He picks up the charioteer's head. It's nothing more than a piece of clay that falls apart in his hands.

Ethan speaks under his breath to himself in comprehension.

ETHAN

I'd rather die a broken piece of
jade than live a life of clay.

INT. GUNNER HOME - PARENTS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mr. Gunner watches through the window as his son wanders into the house. He listens to the front door open and the creak of footsteps on the stairs.

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ethan struggles to remove the wet clothes hugging his body. There's a tap on the door and his father enters.

MR. GUNNER

You have any idea what time it is?

ETHAN

Dad, get a life. I wasn't drinking,
I wasn't doing drugs, I wasn't
having unprotected sex...

MR. GUNNER

Yes, and that's a relief, but next
time you intend to extend your
curfew, I'd appreciate a phone
call.

ETHAN

Fine. Now buenos noches.

Mr. Gunner nods and turns to go. Pauses in the doorway.

MR. GUNNER

Wait. What happened to your sports
coat?

ETHAN

I had to ditch it so I could swim
across the bay.

MR. GUNNER

Right. Gotcha. See you in the morning.

ETHAN

Dad?

MR. GUNNER

Yeah?

ETHAN

Thanks for not being a total tyrant.

His father is touched.

MR. GUNNER

You're welcome. Get some sleep.

INT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Ethan closes his locker. Tucks next period's books under his arm.

He glances down the hall to where Canine walks right into the pale-faced freshman. Canine reacts with false indignation.

CANINE

What are you copping a feel or something? Freak.

PALE-FACED FRESHMAN

What? No, you-

CANINE

Are you like checking me out?

Canine punches the kid in the groin, bowling him over. He catches sight of Ethan watching.

Ethan narrows his eyes in contempt. Canine saunters toward him, flanked by his friends. Ethan stands his ground. Prepares himself for the worst.

Canine stops when he gets to Ethan. Leans in to whisper.

CANINE

Don't hate me too much, Gunner.
You'd be one of us if you could.

Canine lingers there a beat to let the theory sink in.

He motions to his friends and they cackle to themselves as they continue down the hall.

Ethan punches a locker and heads to class.

EXT. SEASIDE HEIGHTS - DAY

POLLY

I don't see why you're so upset.

Polly and Ethan emerge from a Ben and Jerry's. They amble along the sidewalk passing the pint of cookie dough iced-cream back and forth.

ETHAN

I dunno. It could have just as easily been me. I mean, he looked at me, and I knew what he was thinking.

POLLY

He was hoping you'd come to his rescue.

ETHAN

Right. But nobody does that. It's like that crazy video that was on the news last year. Remember the one from the security camera on a school bus? You could see these kids practically beating this smaller kid to death. And all the other kids were just sitting there and staring. Even the freaking bus driver didn't do anything.

POLLY

Well, that's scary about the bus driver, 'cause he's an adult. But for the rest of us... I mean, I'd just be praying the psychos didn't notice me.

ETHAN

It's different for guys. You're either a wimp or a bully. And if I had the choice, I'd be liar if I said I wouldn't be a bully too.

POLLY

But bullies always get their comeuppance.

ETHAN

Their what?

POLLY

You know, like all the bad karma they've been building up all their lives. Canine's got enough to have like ten pianos fall on him before he even makes it to his five year reunion.

ETHAN

Yeah, well, I don't think I have the patience to wait that long.

They reach Polly's car and Ethan forfeits what remains of the pint. A beat of silence. She feels for him.

POLLY

(imitating Yoda)

Yes, yes, I sense much anger in you. Hate leads to the Dark Side...

ETHAN

You do that a little too well. See you tomorrow.

She giggles and gets into the car. We FOLLOW Ethan as he reaches the crosswalk.

He glares at the bowling alley and pool hall across the street. His ire reaches the boiling point.

INT. COVE BILLIARDS AND BOWLING - DAY

Dust particles play in the shafts of light. The door gets kicked in and Ethan scans the room.

The regular teen hang-out is empty. Ethan's chest heaves from the adrenaline rush.

ETHAN

(confused)

There's no one here.

The lamp above the nearest billiard table suddenly flickers to life. Then the next and the next, until the farthest, darkest corner of the pool hall illuminates and reveals...

...The spectre of Bruce Lee. He strides towards Ethan.

ETHAN

I almost did something really stupid. I guess I should be thankful Canine and his friends are probably at someone's house right now, huffing Elmer's Glue or something.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

A good martial artist does not become tense, but ready. Not thinking, yet not dreaming. Ready for whatever may come.

ETHAN

Yeah, I get it. I'm still not...

He senses movement behind him and turns around.

Three GHOSTLY CHINESE WARRIORS stand before him. Terrifyingly real and armed to the teeth. They bear the countenances of Canine and the other bullies.

ETHAN

...ready?

The first combatant wields a PU DAO - a long wooden staff with a magnificent blade attached at the end.

The second brandishes two small NINE TEETH HOOKS - short swords with hooks that sport gleaming metal teeth.

The third twirls a pair of NUNCHUKU - a metal chain connecting two wooden handles.

Ethan regards them with awe. Backs up to place a billiard table between him and his three formidable opponents.

ETHAN

Okay, I think we might have skipped a few lessons here. Maybe we could-

The first warrior swings the mighty pu dao down like an ax on the billiard table. The table splits in two and streams of billiard balls erupt from the table's innards.

Ethan stumbles back, and the warriors press forward. The pu dao comes flying at his neck in a horizontal sweep.

He rocks back on his heels like a limbo dancer. The blade whistles over his head.

He rolls under the next billiard table. The point of the pu dao stabs through the belly of the table and sinks into the carpet next to Ethan's head.

There comes an awful grown of splintering wood as the warrior uses the weapon as a fulcrum to tear the table asunder. The freshman underneath finds himself suddenly very exposed.

Ethan leaps up and grabs the overhanging lamp. Swings like a chimp to the next lamp, but instead crashes through it.

He lands with a groan on the table. Pulls himself into the fetal position as shards of glass cascade over him.

He rises like a break dancer on the table top, spinning out of reach before he retreats to the next table.

The three warriors give chase and a deadly ballet ensues. Ethan bounces off walls, bounds from table to table, and somersaults between slashing weapons.

Here and there a weapon catches him and tears at his clothes.

His back finds a wall. The three warriors approach the cornered boy with triumphant smirks.

He snatches a pool cue from the rack on the wall behind him. Grasps it with a distinct lack of confidence and shoots Bruce Lee a plaintive look.

ETHAN

Hel-looo? Some help would be nice.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Empty your mind, be formless,
shapeless - like water.

Bruce Lee wanders through the fray, ignored by the warriors intent on doing Ethan harm.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Now you put water into a cup, it
becomes the cup. You put water into
a bottle, it becomes the bottle.
You put it in a teapot, it becomes
the teapot. Now water can flow or
creep or drip or crash!

The first warrior winds up for a powerful swing with his pu dao. Ethan tenses.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Be water, my friend.

Ethan nods. Blinks the sweat from his eyes.

The pu dao arcs downward, straight for Ethan's skull. Ethan rolls underneath and slashes at his torso with the cue. Slams home and knocks the warrior back a few steps.

There comes the flash of the blade again and the top half of Ethan's cue stick spirals off like a broken toothpick.

He sidesteps the next slice of the pu dao and drops low again. His arm shoots out and the broken handle of the cue stick rams into the warrior's solar plexus.

The warrior's wraith-like form wobbles and shudders like a wind-up toy, and then... blasts apart in a torrent of water.

A heavy mist settles over Ethan. He regards the remaining two foes with newfound aplomb.

ETHAN

Who's next?

He flows elegantly to his second opponent. A blur of steel as he contorts his body to dodge those scary nine tooth hooks.

One set of spikes narrowly misses Ethan's bobbing head and plants itself into the side of a billiard table. The warrior scowls and rakes at Ethan with his other nine tooth hook.

Ethan ducks the blow and finds himself level with a pool triangle hanging from the under section of the table.

He rises with the triangle in his hands. Slides it over the warrior's wrist and uses it to yank the ghost's arm wide.

The warrior releases the weapon stuck in the table and struggles with Ethan for control of its other arm. Their wrestling match brings the ghost and boy nose to nose.

Ethan kicks the side of the table. Shatters the wood paneling and sends the freed nine tooth hook sailing overhead.

He propels himself off the ghostly warrior and grabs hold of the airborne weapon, helping it along its natural course...

...Into the warrior's neck. His opponent vanishes in a swirl of watery vapor.

The third warrior disarms Ethan with a snap of his nunchuku. He inches backward, out-matched without a weapon.

Bruce Lee steps in between them and faces the warrior with his own set of nunchuku.

The martial arts master dances on the tips of his toes with a self-assured smile. He's toying with his opponent.

The warrior charges at Bruce and...

...Bruce Lee surprisingly bows, offering no defense.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Not thinking, yet not dreaming.

Ready for whatever may come.

The warrior passes right through the spectre and swings his nunchuku at Ethan's head.

Ethan parries and rolls away. Rises and slams painfully into the side of the last unmolested billiard table. The two fighters circle. Searching for an opening.

The warrior, bearing Canine's visage, shoots his defenseless foe a malicious grin. His nunchuku whirl around his body in a dazzling display of prowess as he closes the distance.

Ethan gets an impatient look and snatches an eight ball off the table. Winds up like a pitcher and lets it fly.

The familiar face of the warrior gasps in surprise just before the projectile passes effortlessly through its insubstantial body and... it ruptures like a water balloon.

The billiard ball ricochets around the room and Bruce Lee snatches it out of the air. He looks Ethan up and down with an appraising look, reserving judgment.

ETHAN

Hey, Jeet Kune Do is all about improvisation, right?

Bruce Lee hesitates before finally giving a reluctant shrug of agreement.

Ethan takes a moment to consider the demolished pool hall.

Various weapons impale broken pool tables. Billiard balls lay scattered about the room. Shards of glass cover the floor.

ETHAN

You know, I'm not half bad at this.

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ethan lays on his stomach, face propped up by his hands. FISTS OF FURY plays on the TV.

ON SCREEN

A thug strikes Bruce Lee in the face. The kung fu master dabs at his mouth with his fingers. Tastes the blood on his hands.

Rage overtakes Bruce's face and he springs into action. His assault sends limp bodies flying in every direction.

The door to Ethan's room creaks open and Mr. Gunner pokes his head into the room. His eyes go to the screen.

MR. GUNNER

Could you pause that for a second?

ETHAN

What's up, Dad?

MR. GUNNER

Not much. You know, we're planning on going to church next Sunday.

ETHAN

Ugh.

MR. GUNNER

That's very articulate. Mom doesn't really know anybody here, and she thinks church is a good place to meet people.

ETHAN

Mom is having trouble making friends?

MR. GUNNER

I guess.

ETHAN

Dad, is this some kind of half-ass intervention?

MR. GUNNER

Uh, no. But I did think it might be something we could do together. Bad idea?

ETHAN

If you want to hang out, I'll let you watch The Chinese Connection with me.

His father purses his lips. It's the closest he's going to get to an invitation.

MR. GUNNER
Double feature, huh?

ETHAN
Only way to watch kung fu movies.

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - LATER

ON SCREEN

A score of kung fu artists in white uniforms surround Bruce Lee on the floor of a dojo.

He removes his tunic and casts it aside. The attackers rush in. He launches into a spin kick, and they fall like dominos.

MRS. GUNNER (O.S.)
Boys, this isn't a bed and
breakfast!

MR. GUNNER
Okay, we're coming down!
(to Ethan)
Let's watch the rest after dinner.

Ethan presses PAUSE on the remote. His father hesitates.

MR. GUNNER
I do like him though.

ETHAN
You don't have to pretend to like
Bruce Lee just because I do.

MR. GUNNER
But I do.

ETHAN
Oh, yeah? What do you like about
him.

MR. GUNNER
He defends the people who can't
defend themselves. You know, kind
of like a super hero.

ETHAN
Yeah. Like... it's in his nature to
do more than just defend himself.

Ethan has an introspective moment. Mr. Gunner gets a little smile observing it.

MR. GUNNER
C'mon, let's go down to the table
before your mother disowns the both
of us.

Ethan snaps out of it and they head downstairs.

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

The alarm clock goes off. Ethan slaps it off and groans.

MRS. GUNNER (O.S.)
I heard that alarm! Ethan!

ETHAN
Alright already!

He hauls himself out of bed.

INT. GUNNER HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

He's ready for school and considering himself in the mirror.

ETHAN
A good martial artist becomes not
tense, but ready.
(beat)
I'm ready.

EXT. GUNNER HOME - DAY

Ethan patiently waits at the end of the drive. The bus makes
its slow descent down the hill.

It SQUEAKS to a prolonged stop and Ethan climbs aboard.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - MOVING - DAY

He gazes out the window. There's an air of inner peace about
him now.

ETHAN (V.O.)
Hey, I have a question that I'm
probably going to regret asking.

INT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY

POLLY
Shoot.

Polly daintily removes dead lettuce from her cold cut
sandwich. Ethan watches her with apprehension.

ETHAN

Are we like hanging or chilling or dating? I'm not sure where the lines are drawn here.

POLLY

Well, we haven't actually been on a date before.

ETHAN

Oh...

POLLY

But I'm giving you the green light to ask me out, if that's what you're waiting for, slick.

ETHAN

You mean, like for an official date?

POLLY

Yes, an official date. Let me get my stamp out...

(pretends to remove an
imaginary stamp)

Okay, go ahead and ask me.

But he's looking past her now.

POLLY

Ethan?

She follows his line of vision over her shoulder.

The same pale-faced freshman from the day before tries to make his way past Canine's table with a tray of food.

Like clockwork, it gets slapped from his hands and clatters to the floor. The cafeteria erupts with an applause of schadenfreude.

Polly looks back to Ethan.

ETHAN

Excuse me for just a sec.

CANINE'S TABLE

The pale-faced freshman gathers up the food, head hung low with humiliation.

Ethan arrives. Canine and his posse give him blank, questioning stares.

ETHAN
(to the pale-faced
freshman)
Dude, it's okay. Canine's going to
clean this up.

The pale-faced freshman's eyes go from Canine to Ethan and back again with uncertainty.

ETHAN
Seriously. I got you covered.

The freshman steps aside. Canine, Leopard Head, Pierced Lip, Heavyweight Wrestler, and Tattoo Freak rise out of their chairs.

CANINE
What do you think you're doing?

ETHAN
I think this is your mess. And I
think you should clean it up.

Canine gets a irritated pout and leans in. He whispers intimately.

CANINE
You know if you do this, it's open
season on your ass.

Canine leans away again. The whole cafeteria has quieted for the confrontation.

ETHAN
I don't see you cleaning.

Canine's eyes widen with some surprise. He shrugs and gives a little chuckle.

The apparition of Bruce Lee flits in and out of view among the cafeteria tables, circling like a watchful coach.

Ethan closes his eyes.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
Can you hear the bird?

ETHAN (V.O.)
No.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

If you cannot hear the bird, how
can you hear me?

Canine pivots and swings right for the bridge of Ethan's nose. Ethan hears Canine's fist cutting through the air and...

...he catches it with his hand. Plants his foot into Canine's ribs and sends him flying into the cafeteria's sneeze guard.

Bruce Lee flickers into existence beside Ethan and launches into his own series of kicks and punches.

Ethan mimics them as he enters the melee. With his mentor's guidance, Ethan's movements become more controlled, more fluid.

Tattoo Freak snatches up one of the plastic mold chairs and brings it down over his head. There comes a painful THUD and Ethan's body hits the floor.

He shakes it off and sweeps Tattoo Freak off his feet with a kick to his shins.

Ethan leaps and floats through the air. He comes to rest atop one of the tables. Pierced Lip and Leopard Head spring onto the table on either side of him.

They attack with rapid punch combinations but they're not fast enough to get through Ethan's defenses.

They both punch high and Ethan's body snaps his head out of the firing line. The fists of Pierced Lip and Leopard Head collide and there is the CRUNCH of bone against bone.

Ethan side kicks Pierced Lip and sends him soaring.

In the same fluid motion he backhands Leopard Head. Sends him spiraling.

A beat of stillness. Bruce is standing behind Ethan now.

ETHAN

Am I supposed to be having this
much fun?

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

A fight should be like a small
play, but played seriously.

Canine snatches up a palette knife from the serving counter. He leaps into the air, knife pointing the way.

Ethan dodges the blade. A long tear opens across his T-shirt.

He jumps backwards and the two of them duel, bounding from table to table.

Tattoo Freak has recovered. He snatches up a glass full of water and hurls it Ethan's way.

ON THE GLASS

as we catch every droplet of water passing through the air.

Ethan leaps and kicks the glass, sending shards everywhere.

He grabs Canine by the wrist and uses the palette knife to deflect the next six glasses thrown by Tattoo Freak and Heavyweight Wrestler.

The last glass gets through and smashes against his head. He stumbles backward, arms flailing as he teeters on the edge of the table. His hand still grasps Canine's wrist.

The cafeteria full of teenagers erupts with excitement. Milk cartons and potato salad fill the air and as the food fight blooms...

...we dial down to SLOW MOTION. Canine frees himself from Ethan's hold and pursues him from one table to the next. Ethan spirals through the air and dodges all manner of edible projectiles.

He lands and Canine squares off with him. They adopt fighting stances. A rivulet of blood runs down the side of Ethan's face, from where the glass struck his temple.

Ethan senses the Heavyweight Wrestler and Tattoo Freak moving in behind him. He catches Bruce's motions from the corner of his eye.

ETHAN

I think I can do this.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Don't think; feel! It's like a finger pointing away to the moon. Don't concentrate on the finger, or you will miss all the heavenly glory.

The three boys rush in. Ethan kicks a chair into the air. It hits Heavyweight Wrestler so hard he's sent CRASHING through the plate glass window.

Canine reaches him first. Ethan dodges a thrust of the palette knife. Counters with a succession of punches.

Tattoo Freak quickly closes the distance between them.

Ethan stomps the surface of the table with such force, one of the trays gets lifted into the air. He jumps up and side kicks the tray into Tattoo Freak's chest.

The attack drops him.

Canine charges down the long table. Ethan back flips onto the floor and plants a powerful kick to the underside of the table.

The table flips up and launches everybody's lunch - and Canine - into the air.

Canine soars overhead and his body shatters the soda machine. He lands in a pile on the floor. Gets buried in an avalanche of ruptured soda cans.

With no opponents left, Ethan turns and finds the blank, astonished faces of the other kids.

The blonde bombshell from his first bus ride holds up a napkin and gestures to the wound on his head. Ethan gives his newest fan an appreciative smile and dabs at the blood.

He casually walks through the littered room back to Polly. She flips through an issue of Elle, pretending to have missed the whole spectacle.

ETHAN

So you gonna go out with me or what?

She tries to hide her smile and continues flipping through the magazine.

INT. GUNNER HOME - BATHROOM - NIGHT

ETHAN

Is this really necessary?

Ethan has applied a generous amount of shaving cream to his face. He's side by side with his father.

MR. GUNNER

My father never showed me how to shave. I'm trying to spare you the needless suffering I went through.

ETHAN
Do I even really need to?

MR. GUNNER
You don't want her questioning your
commitment to hygiene, do you?

Beat as Ethan considers.

ETHAN
Is this enough shaving cream?

MR. GUNNER
I'll be surprised if you can find
your face under that. The key is
shaving against the grain.
Gently...

He winces as Ethan swipes carelessly at his own jugular.

ETHAN
Ow.

MR. GUNNER
Okay, you're bleeding a little
there.

ETHAN
I need a transfusion.

MR. GUNNER
No, you need this.

He unveils something that looks like a piece of chalk.

ETHAN
Uh, what is that?

MR. GUNNER
It's salt. It'll stop the bleeding.

ETHAN
You want to rub salt in my wound.

MR. GUNNER
Don't be a baby.

Ethan braces himself as his father leans in.

INT. GUNNER HOME - NIGHT

His scream of pain resounds throughout the house, and laps
over to...

INT. SHOPPING MALL - NIGHT

Establishing. Bevvies of HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS gabbing on cell phones and toting shopping bags.

A handful of TOWNIES skateboarding around the rotunda and drawing protests from MALL SECURITY.

MIDDLE SCHOOL KIDS running up the wrong escalator.

A SERIES OF JUMPS as we PULL BACK again and again to take in this teenage mecca. And finally, we find...

...Ethan hands stuffed self-consciously into the pockets of his cargo pants. He searches the crowd for Polly.

There's no sign of her.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - LATER

Ethan peers through the plate glass display of a NEWBURY COMICS store. His eyes scan the titles. IRON FIST, DAREDEVIL, X-MEN.

He turns around and leans against the railing. Takes in the sights of the mall.

From the railing, the drop is three stories to a rotunda spotted with benches, potted plants, and various kiosks. Dozens of CHILDREN chase each other through one of the main exhibits on the first floor: a LEGO CASTLE filled with a maze of corridors.

Polly suddenly appears next to him at the railing.

ETHAN

I couldn't find you downstairs.

POLLY

Sorry, we must have just missed each other.

(beat)

You didn't think I was going to stand you up, did you?

ETHAN

It crossed my mind. So what do you want to do?

Polly glances back into the window of Newbury Comics.

POLLY

Did you want to go in there?

ETHAN

No, no, no.

POLLY

I can totally tell you want to go in there.

ETHAN

I'm a little old for comics.

POLLY

You know what I think?

ETHAN

I'm afraid to ask.

POLLY

I think he doth protest too much.

She sticks her nose into the air in a histrionic display and marches into the comic book store. Ethan hangs his head and follows after her.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - NEWBURY COMICS - NIGHT

POLLY

Explain something to me.

They flip through comic books at the counter.

ETHAN

Yup.

POLLY

Is it just me or do these people with powers...

ETHAN

Some are born with them and some get them in freak accidents.

POLLY

Okay. But how come their powers are always so useful for fighting the bad guys? Shouldn't there be guys who are born with hideous ingrown toenails or who are hit by lightning and get like terrible halitosis?

ETHAN

What's halitosis?

POLLY

Bad breath.

ETHAN

Oh. Well, I guess it's because they figure the boys that read the stories don't fantasize about a having ingrown toenails or hali- whatever.

POLLY

Ah-HAH! So you're saying you guys do fantasize about being able to fly and shoot laser beams out of your eyes!

Beat.

ETHAN

Well... yeah. I mean, why, what do girls fantasize about?

POLLY

Oh, right. Like I'm really going to betray the sisterhood and tell you.

ETHAN

Whatever.

Polly places the comics back on the rack.

POLLY

Okay, time to do something I like.

ETHAN

Sure, what do you want to do?

INT. SHOPPING MALL - BLOOMINGDALES - NIGHT

Ethan slumps in a chair. He's got the air of a husband who's watched his wife try one too many outfits.

Polly has a pile of eliminated clothing beside her. She holds up a pair of jeans.

POLLY

So these ones are a little more expensive because they come with holes in them. But each hole tells a story. At least, according to this card.

ETHAN

It costs more if it has holes in it?

POLLY

But of course, mon cheri.

ETHAN

Then I have got a gold mine in my closet.

POLLY

Okay, forget the jeans. Help me pick out some shoes.

Ethan rolls his eyes and oozes out of the chair.

POLLY

Don't roll your eyes at me!

She throws a shoe at him and he ducks. He lobs a stack of jeans back at her.

They playfully face off with loads of clothes in their hands.

An evil eye from the SALESWOMAN sends them retreating out of the store and into...

EXT. SHOPPING MALL - MOMENTS LATER

They stagger out onto the promenade, laughing and shoving.

POLLY

I think her head was about to explode.

ETHAN

Whatever. We were the highlight of her day. So you want to see a movie or what?

CANINE (O.S.)

Ethan Gunner!

Ethan and Polly spin. RACK FOCUS to Canine standing below in the rotunda. He's flanked by Neck Tattoo and Pierced Lip.

Polly turns to Ethan pleadingly.

POLLY

No, no. See, this is a mall. That makes it, like, a house of God.

(MORE)

POLLY (cont'd)
And you can't shed blood in the
house of God.

ETHAN
(with fake astonishment)
Polly... you are so deep.
(with a smile)
C'mon.

He takes her arm and they turn their backs to Canine.

They halt when Heavyweight Wrestler and Leopard Head block
the other side of the bridge. Canine calls up to him.

CANINE
You gonna come down here or you
gonna behind the slut?

POLLY
(to Ethan)
Okay, rewind. I now give you full
permission to kick their asses.

ETHAN
Thank you.

Ethan leaps over the railing.

MOTION SLOWS almost completely to a standstill, with Ethan
suspended, legs tucked underneath him, arms out to his sides.
He looks like a hawk swooping in for the kill.

He lands in a crouch at Canine's feet. The marble floor
cracks as if struck by a meteorite.

Ethan rises. Canine has a full three inches on him.

ETHAN
You should have brought more guys.

The sound of many footsteps. Like rolling THUNDER.

A flood of TEENAGERS surrounds him, pouring in from every
direction. Ethan eyes lift to the floors above as the boys
flock to the railings.

ETHAN
Oh...

Canine lifts an eyebrow.

CANINE
You were saying?

Ethan sinks into a defensive stance and the boys rush him.

He performs a flying kick that connects with the first attacker's face. Uses the boy's chin to propel himself into the next assailant.

Does a split in mid-air and kicks two combatants at once as they attempt to flank him.

Goes low and sweeps an attacker's feet out from under him. Sends the boy into a airborne barrel roll.

Ethan kicks him while he is still in the air and sends him through the display window of a FUDGE SHOP.

He spin kicks and connects with a opponent's gut, propelling him into two more onrushers.

Drives his palm into yet another teen, whose body proceeds to knock a handful of attackers into the fountain like bowling pins.

We SPIN around Ethan as he pivots in place to take in the tightening circle of the horde.

They all move in at once, and while he manages to fend of the first barrage, they soon swarm him like an army of ants and he is overwhelmed.

They pig pile Ethan. He struggles. Catches sight of...

....Bruce pacing around the outskirts of the battle.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

Your mind and body are still not one.

Ethan closes his eyes. The SHOUTS of the boys gradually gets drowned out by a deep voiced CHORUS OF MONKS.

He gets into his zone and the pile of boys erupts. Bodies flying everywhere.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

When the opponent expands, I contract.

Ethan punches a boy in the chest and sends him crashing into the Lego castle.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

When he contracts, I expand.

Ethan spin kicks two more boys into a cart of sunglasses.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
And when there is an opportunity, I
do not hit...

Uppercuts another boy and he gets catapulted upward.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
It hits all by itself.

ON A MALL DIRECTORY

and the star that indicates YOU ARE HERE. The boy's trajectory takes him crashing through the directory in a blast of glass and sparks.

Ethan bounds from the mass of combatants and runs up the railing of the escalator.

He reaches the second floor and drop kicks five boys with both feet.

The boys are sent crashing through the plate glass window of a SPORTING GOODS STORE.

He follows them inside. The attackers snatch up make-shift weapons from the racks. Hockey and lacrosse sticks, tennis rackets, baseball bats.

They move in. A hockey stick breaks in two over Ethan's back and he lands on his stomach. Rolls to one side just as a Louisville Slugger fractures the tile beside his head.

His foot breaks through the mesh of a tennis racket. He tries to swivel away, his leg snagged in the racket, and his face meets an incoming lacrosse stick.

The blow snaps off the lacrosse cradle and frees Ethan from the racket. He whirls around to face his attackers, and they renew their assault.

His body becomes horizontal with the ground as weapons pass above and below him. Each limb seems independently aware of the deadly blows approaching from every angle.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
Ahh... you see that? Man, I see
some fire in you there.

Ethan snatches up a golf bag and hurls it. The clubs shoot from their sheath.

ON THE VOLLEY OF GOLF CLUBS

soaring through space. Ethan vaults and plucks two of them out of the air. Uses them to deflect the weapons of his opponents.

He runs up a wall and uses the surface to push off. Becomes a human rocket, propelling two boys through the wall and into...

DEPARTMENT STORE

Ethan goes rolling away across the floor and springs to his feet.

As in the cafeteria, Bruce Lee's image breaks into its own attacks, and Ethan does his best to follow suit.

A dozen more dojo members move in from every direction. He separates one from his hockey stick and uses it to clobber other enemies upside the head.

The last blow splinters the paddle at the end of the staff. The melée moves through the department store and back onto the promenade.

Ethan leaps onto the railing, cartwheels along it's length and dispatches several of his attackers with his staff as they attempt to knock him from his perch.

His staff gets kicked in half. He abandons in and snaps a flag-like banner off the wall. It makes a pretty good spear.

Ethan bounds from the railing to the tip of the Christmas tree. The tree bends with his weight and he rides it all the way to the rotunda.

There's only a half dozen opponents left. They take positions all around him. Ethan brandishes the spear, the banner swirling around him with exaggerated grace.

Bruce wanders through the attackers.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

I know I have no fear of opponent
in front of me.

Canine signals and the boys move in. Ethan moves among them, smacking their bodies aside.

One of them collides with the giant GUM BALL MACHINE. The glass sphere cracks and a multi-colored torrent bounces all around them.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
That I am very self-sufficient.
That they do not bother me.

Ethan sweeps a wave of them off their feet with one swing.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
And that should I fight....

Ethan's back is turned to Canine now, and the sociopath uses the opportunity to hurl a broken lacrosse shaft like a javelin.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
Should I do anything...

Ethan whirls and thrusts out the spear. Splinters Canine's javelin down its length.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
I've made up my mind and that's it
baby, you better kill me.

Ethan closes his eyes and holds his final pose. Spear extended. The clinging banner sailing back to earth.

The ghost of Bruce Lee steps tentatively through the battlefield. The mall is littered with moaning dojo members, and only Canine remains.

Canine stares in wonder at the meditative teenage martial artist still frozen in his stance.

Ethan's eyes snap open.

ETHAN
You don't get to pick on anyone
anymore. Do we have an
understanding?

Canine can only nod. Ethan tosses his weapon. He leaves Canine standing among his fallen comrades.

CANINE
(under his breath)
But you're still a total fairy.

Ethan pivots, grinding his teeth in rage. His foot meets Canine's chest and the boy's limp body takes flight into...

THE ELEVATOR

The metal doors fold inward like tissue paper and Canine rolls to a stop inside the elevator. Pulls himself to his feet and presses the button for the FOURTH FLOOR.

Ethan closes the gap with graceful strides. Watches the rising elevator, times his leap just right, and...

...Crashes through the glass elevator shaft and into the busted doors of the elevator car.

CANINE

I take it back. Seriously.

ETHAN

Too little...

He cracks Canine across the jaw. Grabs the falling bully by the hair and backhands him in the other direction.

ETHAN

...Too late.

He bounces Canine's head off the wall and knocks him unconscious. The lift reaches the top floor with a DING.

Ethan gazes out the glass elevator shaft. His eyes find his mentor amidst the defeated teenagers on the rotunda.

Bruce Lee looks away, disappointment etched in his face.

EXT. SEASHORE - NIGHT

Ethan and Polly amble along the boardwalk.

ETHAN

I guess that wasn't exactly the date to end all dates.

POLLY

Well, it was definitely the most interesting date I have ever had.

ETHAN

Really?

POLLY

Actually, it's the first date I've ever had. And you haven't been trying nearly hard enough.

ETHAN

Trying to do what?

POLLY

Kiss me.

Ethan stops dead and she marches confidently onward.

ETHAN

I'm supposed to be trying to kiss you?

POLLY

These things don't just fall into your lap, you know.

He walks hesitantly to the edge of the steep embankment from which Polly once leapt with glee.

ETHAN

I'd jump off the cliff to prove myself, but I think we've moved beyond peer pressure, haven't we?

POLLY

Actually, jumping sounds about right. That would get you a kiss.

Ethan peers over the edge.

ETHAN

It's not that high...

POLLY

Would it help if I pushed you?

ETHAN

No, I just need some moral support...

He grabs her hand and drags her over the edge with him.

POLLY

Ethan, no!

They plummet hand-in-hand into the bay.

Their heads crown the surface of the moonlit water. Polly sputters, pushing her hair from her face.

POLLY

Oh, you're hilarious.

EXT. SEASHORE - LATER

Ethan and Polly wade from the ocean and back up the embankment to the boardwalk.

ETHAN

Hey... I think I'm owed something.

POLLY

Well, you cheated, so technically that didn't earn you anything.

Ethan's face drops, but then suddenly Polly is there, pressed up against him, and they are kissing. He wraps his arms around her in an embrace.

Finally, she pulls away with a sweet smile.

POLLY

So don't think you deserved that.

Ethan smiles and they walk back toward town hand in hand.

POLLY

Tomorrow is Rafe's hearing.

ETHAN

Yeah.

POLLY

Are you worried?

ETHAN

No. I already know he's getting out.

POLLY

How do you know?

ETHAN

I had the charges dropped.

POLLY

I'm sorry? What have you been smoking?

ETHAN

Did you see me tonight? I've got Bruce Lee on my side. Trust me, I can take Rafe.

POLLY

Wow.

ETHAN

Wow what, Polly?

POLLY

You just surprised me. Like, in a oh-he's-one-of-those kinda way.

ETHAN

What can I say? I'm not a little puppy anymore. Maybe it's time for you to adopt some other terrified freshman.

POLLY

Yeah, that's it, Ethan. Time to say good night.

She releases his hand and marches, putting distance between them as quickly as possible.

ETHAN

Polly... I...

Ethan hangs his head. He watches her go for a moment longer before turning around and making his way home.

Bruce is waiting further down the boardwalk. The ghost turns and walks toward the beach. Ethan follows.

ETHAN

Where are you going? We need to talk.

We can see now the sand is composed of vibrant colors. The surf laps at his feet and fades away the strange hues.

He strolls past several BUDDHIST MONKS on their hands and knees, clad in brown and yellow robes. They draw intricate designs in the sand with small brushes.

His eyes follow a SHOOTING STAR as it arcs across the dark expanse and...

...joins a celestial phenomenon above the horizon that swirls like Van Gogh's STARRY NIGHT somehow put into motion.

Ethan stands in the middle of a sprawling MANDALA SAND PAINTING. The colorful mosaic stretches on forever and displays the image of the Buddha sitting on lotus.

ETHAN

What are we doing here?

Bruce Lee returns his gaze with a look of deep sadness.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
May it be well with you.

ETHAN
You're leaving? What did I do
wrong? I never said I was perfect.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
But I learned the source of my
ignorance.

ETHAN
Then what's mine?

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
Like everyone else, you want to
learn the way to win. But never to
accept the way to lose. To accept
defeat, to learn to die, is to be
liberated from it.
(beat)
So when tomorrow comes, you must
free your ambitious mind and learn
the art of dying.

ETHAN
I don't understand any of this. I'm
just a kid. What did you expect?

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)
Gong fu is gong fu. It's not
child's play.

A gust of wind sweeps away the sand painting beneath Ethan's
feet. The otherworldly landscape lifts in a cloud and both
mentor and pupil are momentarily obfuscated.

ETHAN
Bruce? I can't do this without you!

When the sand settles, Ethan stands alone on the New Jersey
beach. Off in the distance, he can see the glittering
amusement park extending into the waters on a long pier.

It starts to snow, and we...

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ethan wakes. He pulls the curtains open to reveal a new world in the wake of the overnight snowstorm.

EXT. FOREST - SNOWING - DAY

He trudges through the winter wonderland. Breaks the tree line and traverses the golf course.

He stops at the foot of a hill on the last hole. A figure of a man backlit by the morning sun crests the top of the slope.

It is the distinct silhouette of Bruce Lee. Ethan brightens.

ETHAN

Bruce?

But it is Mr. Gunner who tops the hill, bundled up in a puffy winter jacket. He nears his son.

ETHAN

Dad? What are you doing out here?

MR. GUNNER

Just out for a walk. Thought maybe you'd want to partake of some hot chocolate.

He hands his son a Styrofoam cup. They stand their sipping and watching the snow fall.

ETHAN

Well, I think I'm gonna head back.

MR. GUNNER

You want me to follow from like ten paces behind?

ETHAN

Dad, try not to be lame for once in your life.

MR. GUNNER

Okay.

They walk in silence for a moment. The only sound is their boots crunching through the crusty top layer of snow.

MR. GUNNER

I'm confused and honestly a little worried.

(MORE)

MR. GUNNER (cont'd)

I don't understand why you wanted to drop the charges against that boy.

ETHAN

You wouldn't get it.

MR. GUNNER

Is it because someone threatened you?

ETHAN

No.

MR. GUNNER

What then?

ETHAN

If I tell you, you're going to try and interfere.

MR. GUNNER

I promise I won't. I just think we should be able to talk about things again. I want to know what's going on in your life.

They stop walking and Ethan mulls over his father's request.

ETHAN

I wanted him to get out so that I could fight him.

Mr. Gunner takes this in.

MR. GUNNER

Why do you think this boy picked on you in the first place?

ETHAN

It doesn't matter.

MR. GUNNER

Well, I think you should put some thought into it.

(beat)

When you know yourself and your opponent, you will win every time. If you know yourself, but not your opponent, you will win one and lose one. However, when you do not know yourself or your opponent, you will be imperiled every time.

ETHAN

What's that from?

MR. GUNNER

I thought you'd recognize that.
It's from The Art of War.

ETHAN

I didn't know you were into that
kind of stuff.

MR. GUNNER

Yeah, well, I stole it off your
dresser and hoped you wouldn't
notice.

Ethan nods. There is a contemplative moment between them.

ETHAN

His brother died. Rafe's, I mean.

MR. GUNNER

I know.

Ethan gets a surprised look. Mr. Gunner shrugs it off.

MR. GUNNER

It's a small town. Parents talk.

ETHAN

I don't know how he-

MR. GUNNER

He drowned.

CUT TO:

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - FLASHBACK - DAY

Rafe, Polly, and Rafe's younger brother CALEB, 14, laugh as
they get running starts and go sliding across the frozen lake
on their boots.

The whole scene plays out MOS as Caleb glides to a stop.

The ice underneath him gives way and he plunges into the
freezing depths.

LONG SHOT OF THE LAKE

As Rafe sprints full force across the ice. Slipping and
sliding uncontrollably.

ON POLLY

paralyzed with dread.

UNDERWATER

Caleb gets sucked past the opening and under the ice shelf. Above him there is frantic movement, as...

...Rafe cocks back his fist. Strikes at the frozen barrier in vain. Tears streaming down his face.

He continues punching at the ice again and again, but he isn't strong enough.

He pauses in mid-swing. His brother floats just below the translucent surface, his glassy eyes staring back at Rafe.

Polly watches. Unable to move or speak.

CLOSE ON RAFE

and his helpless expression. His battered knuckles covered with blood.

BACK TO:

EXT. GOLF COURSE - SNOWING - DAY

MR. GUNNER

I suppose it goes without saying
that it's easier to break someone's
nose than to break through six feet
of ice.

Beat. Mr. Gunner watches Ethan considering the implications of what he's heard.

ETHAN

Yeah, maybe. But he's still a jerk.

His father doesn't offer any dissent. They pause at the edge of the snow-covered playground. Across the street, smoke whistles from the chimney of their home.

MR. GUNNER

I want to get your opinion on
something.

ETHAN

Okay.

MR. GUNNER

What do you think of this town? Do you want to stay here?

Ethan looks out over the landscape. The sleepy planned community of Seaside Heights and the Atlantic ocean beyond.

ETHAN

Yeah, this place is pretty cool. I actually kinda dig it.

MR. GUNNER

Me too.

Father and son continue their trek through the snow.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The choir music swells and fills the austere space. Ethan's parents sandwich him in the front pew, all of them garbed in their Sunday best.

He wiggles around and glances into the gallery. Rafe slouches in his suit, nestled between his own parents near the back of the room.

Ethan and Rafe share a long look, neither boy willing to avert his eyes first.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The pastoral image of the stone church atop a grassy hill. Beside it, an old weather vane and a cluster of weeping willow trees bowed down by heavy powder.

The congregation slowly makes its way down the dirt road to their cars. Women's dresses billow in the chill wind.

Ethan tightrope walks like a child on the wood fence that follows the road. Comes to a stop where Rafe leans against the fence, far from the flock of adult parishioners.

Rafe sucks hard on his cigarette. Doesn't acknowledge Ethan.

ETHAN

I like this church a lot better than the one we went to in Virginia. They actually give us wine here.

RAFE

What did they have at the old one?

ETHAN
Grape juice.

RAFE
Prudes.

ETHAN
Seriously.

There is a long pause. Ethan bites his lip nervously.

ETHAN
You still want to fight me?

RAFE
It's all I've thought about for the past month.

ETHAN
You know I've been training?

RAFE
I heard. It won't make a difference.

ETHAN
I don't want to fight you, Rafe.

RAFE
I wouldn't if I were you either, but you don't have a choice.

ETHAN
Look, think about this. It doesn't make any sense. I didn't do anything to you. Let's just call this off.

RAFE
You could have done that along time ago. When I told you to stay away from Polly.

ETHAN
You can't like put her away in a wax museum for your dead brother, you know.

Rafe's face changes. For a moment it looks like he's going to cry, but as usual it hardens into barely contained anger.

RAFE

That's what you don't get. I can do whatever I want. And tomorrow I want to fight you. At the amusement park. It's closed for the winter, so no one will bother us.

ETHAN

Don't expect me to show.

Ethan turns his back on him.

RAFE

You'll show. Everyday I don't get to pound you, I'm going to pound someone else.

Ethan stops. Turns around to face him again.

RAFE

They can expel me. They can lock me up. But sooner or later you and I are gonna go at it. If it means I gotta slap around every other freshman 'til you do... So be it.

Ethan checks the proximity of the parents. Turns back and gives Rafe a surprisingly adamant look.

ETHAN

See you tomorrow.

Rafe nods. Ethan turns and heads back up the hill.

INT. GUNNER HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Ethan feels his father's concerned eyes on him as he eats. Mrs. Gunner sifts through a stack of vacation brochures.

MRS. GUNNER

I am thinking somewhere in Florida for next winter. I could use a break from the cold.

MR. GUNNER

Hon, we moved to New Jersey. You should have seen this coming.

ETHAN

Can we not make any long-term plans? At least not tonight.

MRS. GUNNER
What's up, my buttercup?

MR. GUNNER
The trials and tribulations of
adolescence.

MRS. GUNNER
Yeah? Try being a 15 year old girl
with no boobs and a face full of
headgear.

Mr. Gunner gives his son a knowing wink. But Ethan is beyond
cheering up.

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ethan lays below us on the bed. He casts the sheets aside.

EXT. FOREST - SNOWING - NIGHT

Ethan crouches low in the undergrowth. Contemplates his
natural obstacle course with a predatory leer.

He whirls through the powder like a dervish. Thin tree trunks
splinter with each glancing blow. Wood chips fly.

KEE-YAH! He karate chops a giant oak tree, and the fissure
ripples from the roots to the tree boughs. It splits in half
and both sides crash through nearby limbs in free fall.

He bolts right up the side of another tree and breaks into
the open air above...

THE FOREST CANOPY

Ethan glides over the tops of trees, buoyant against the
backdrop of a rosy dawn.

Straightens into a dive. Plunges back through the canopy...

...tucks into a somersault as he falls through the air...

...and torpedoes into a snowbank. The whole forest trembles.

The impact tremor blasts snow in all directions. Sweeps the
earth clear of powder. Strips trees of branches and bark.

When the vibrations cease, Ethan rises to a stance and
surveys the devastation he has wrought.

RAFE (O.S.)
KEE-YAH!

Ethan hears the shouts of boys deeper in the woods. He goes to investigate.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - SNOWING - NIGHT

Ethan reaches the edge of the clearing. He spies on Rafe preparing for the fight.

The boy is dressed in a black dojo uniform. He's surrounded by Canine and the other boys, who circle Rafe and brandish their nunchuku, bo staffs, and swords.

Ethan watches awestruck.

Rafe removes his black tunic, just as we saw Bruce do in the movie. Casts it aside and beckons his friends forward.

His rippling muscles dwarf Ethan's slender physique.

RAFE

Attack!

The boys rush Rafe, but each assailant -- just a fraction of a second ahead of the next -- provides Rafe with all the time he needs.

RAFE

The monkey's spear.

Rafe shoots his hand out, closed save for his forefinger. Stabs his extended finger into Tatoo Freak's chest and...

...Propels Tatoo Freak into a tree. The tree splits and Tatoo Freak collapses in the snow.

RAFE

The tumbling cloud hands.

Rafe's limp hands buffet Pierced Lip's body in rapid-fire. The concussions make the sound of pelting rain and...

...Pierced Lip spirals off and crashes into the forest.

RAFE

The dragon whips his tail.

Rafe leaps up and levitates for a moment in the lotus position. Then he spins, legs extended in a perfect split...

...and the Heavyweight Wrestler and Leopard Head rocket in opposite directions.

Rafe drops to his knees without a sound.

Canine rises into view over Rafe's shoulder and brings a gleaming broadsword down on his friend's head.

In the last moment before execution, Rafe shoots his hands into the air and...

...catches the falling blade between his palms.

RAFE

Buddha in repose.

Canine releases the handle and stumbles back in fear. Rafe tosses the sword aside.

We find Ethan watching all this from the shadows of the trees.

ETHAN

(under his breath)

I'm a dead man.

He turns and sneaks back from whence he came.

EXT. SEASIDE HEIGHTS - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The sun breaks the ocean horizon.

INT. GUNNER HOME - ETHAN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Ethan opens his eyes. QUICK CUTS. Getting dressed. Making the bed.

INT. GUNNER HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

Ethan regards his appearance in the mirror.

EXT. SEASIDE HEIGHTS - SNOWING - DAY

Ethan makes his way toward us down the residential street. He wears a wool hat and a winter jacket over his sweats.

A set of headlights cut through the snow storm behind him.

Polly pulls up alongside him in her Miata. He stops walking.

POLLY

Need a ride?

ETHAN

You know where I'm headed?

POLLY

I think everyone in school knows
where you're headed.

Ethan nods. He climbs in.

INT. MIATA - MOVING - SNOWING - DAY

The windshield wipers fight the storm. They sit in silence
for a beat. Ethan glances her way.

ETHAN

Does this mean we're not fighting?
I mean, you and me?

POLLY

I knew what you meant, numb nut.
No, I'm not mad. My mom says that
if women don't learn to tolerate
men's stupidity, the species is
doomed.

ETHAN

Aren't your parents divorced?

POLLY

Yeah, well, some men are really
stupid.

ETHAN

So we're friends. Just friends.

POLLY

Is that all you want to be?

ETHAN

No!

(beat)

Uh, what I meant was a slightly
less desperate... no.

POLLY

Maybe we should wait until after
the fight to discuss this stuff.

ETHAN

I'd like to know now. It would give
me something to live for. I mean,
depending.

Polly turns her head to hide an impish grin. She's clearly
getting a kick out of his anxiety.

POLLY

I... could tolerate a second date.

ETHAN

That's good enough for me.

They reach the parking lot of the amusement park and she stops the car. The engine's still running.

POLLY

I'm not going to watch. No offense, but I don't want to see you get hurt. And as crazy as it sounds, I don't want to see Rafe get hurt either.

ETHAN

Watch. I might surprise you.

Polly furrows her brow in confusion. Ethan smiles. Leans across the seat and kisses her on the cheek.

He opens his door and the car CHIMES. Polly takes a moment to watch him go before turning off the ignition.

EXT. AMUSEMENT PARK - SNOWING - DAY

A derelict fair grounds in the dead of winter. The snow makes for poor visibility.

We FOLLOW Ethan as he heads through the snow to the spot where a crowd of HIGH SCHOOL SPECTATORS has formed.

They part for him and he finds Rafe waiting in their midst.

RAFE

You're late.

ETHAN

My parents were on my ass. I had to sneak away.

Rafe nods. Calm and unperturbed. Ethan chomps on a piece of chewing gum. Not sure what's supposed to happen next.

RAFE

You might want to get rid of that.

ETHAN

Thanks.

Ethan removes the gum from his mouth and deposits it in a trash bin.

Rafe takes the opportunity to bend down and tie the laces on his shoes.

Ethan returns to the circle and Rafe straightens. There is a beat of apprehension between them.

RAFE

So are we gonna do this or what, freshman?

ETHAN

I don't want to. It isn't going to solve a thing.

RAFE

For you it won't. For me, I get a solid ten minutes of entertainment.

ETHAN

Get a punching bag then, why don't you.

RAFE

A punching bag doesn't fight back.

ETHAN

Maybe I won't either.

RAFE

Suit yourself.

Rafe adopts a fighting stance. Ethan sinks into his as well.

Stillness. An idyllic TABLEAU. The two boys facing off with the inert Ferris Wheel and roller coaster looming in the snowy backdrop.

And then they rush each other.

A wild flurry of kicks and punches. The boys deflect each other's blows.

Ethan drives his palm into Rafe's chest. But as the force of the attack sends Rafe backwards, the boy manages to go into a graceful back flip that lands him right on his feet.

He returns with a series of punches that come so fast, they sound like someone working a speed bag.

Ethan does his best to block the attacks, but ultimately decides to free himself from the close quarters.

He bounds backwards out of the circle of spectators.

Rafe leaps after him, and the two boys float over the other kids' heads. Exchanging punches. An air-born battle.

They land among the...

PRIZE BOOTHS

Ethan delivers a side kick to Rafe's chest. Rafe catches the foot with both hands and twists Ethan's leg.

Ethan goes into a barrel roll three feet off the ground. Rafe roundhouses Ethan's spinning body and sends him flying.

Ethan CRASHES through the glass of the CLAW MACHINE and lands in a pile of stuffed animals.

Rafe takes his time closing the distance.

RAFE

Your technique isn't bad, but you don't want it enough.

Ethan climbs to his feet.

ETHAN

Your technique isn't bad either, but you want it too badly.

RAFE

I didn't study kung fu so I could get my ass kicked.

ETHAN

Why did you study it?

Rafe considers, but the answer is too painful and he pushes it from his mind.

He rushes forward. Ethan counters the kicks. They block and dodge until they're all tangled up like a pair of kids playing twister.

Rafe pulls into a spin that undoes the knot and drives both his palms into Ethan's abdomen.

Ethan flies backward, demolishing a pyramid of stacked bottles. He leaps from the booth and scans for Rafe.

A dart HISSES past Ethan's ear and imbeds itself in the wood next to him. Rafe has snatched up a handful from a prize booth and lets them fly.

Ethan moves to a bin of items meant for juggling; fire sticks, swords, bowling pins.

He snatches up one of the swords and deflects each of the darts.

ON THE LAST THE DART

WHISTLING as it pierces the air. It's headed straight for Ethan's eye.

Ethan drops into a stance and stretches out his hand in what appears to be the PEACE SIGN. He catches the dart between his two fingers.

Rafe blinks in astonishment.

He springs forward, grabs up a sword for himself. Leaps into the air, and stays there long enough to deliver three kicks.

Ethan blocks them one after the other.

There is the CLANG of steel on steel as they engage with the swords.

Ethan uppercuts Rafe so hard the bully gets knocked right through a REFRESHMENT BUILDING.

Stillness.

Ethan follows to investigate.

He climbs through the building, following the SWATH OF DESTRUCTION, and comes out on the other side only to find himself standing on the floor of...

...THE TEA CUPS RIDE.

ETHAN

Rafe?

MUSIC starts up like an old record player. The floor begins to move under Ethan's feet and the tea cups start spinning.

He gets knocked over and falls into one of the cups.

Rafe pounces from his hiding place and roundhouses Ethan as he climbs from the tea cup.

The boys leap from the rim of one tea cup to another, struggling to maintain their balance.

As they pass each other they engage with the swords. Ethan does a series of cartwheels that land him by the...

CAROUSEL

Amongst rows of horses and other inanimate animals. Rafe follows him on and as they deliver kicks and slice with the swords we dial down to...

...SLOW MOTION, so that every time they shatter one of the porcelain horses, we catch every piece of rubble that gets sprayed toward us. Their swords shatter.

Ethan jumps backwards again and Rafe pursues him. They hold their fighting poses as they pass through the air and onto...

...the TRAMPOLINE ROOM. An inflated rubber structure that makes the two boys bounce in every direction.

Each time they pass each other in the air they engage.

Rafe runs up the rubber wall and does a back flip that lands him behind Ethan. He side kicks Ethan in the back, and the boy bursts clear through the rubber wall and goes sliding across the frozen pool at the bottom of a towering...

...WATER SLIDE. Rafe leaps from the deflating trampoline room and comes crashing down onto the ice. The impact of his feet send cracks in all directions.

Ethan gets on his feet and they duel on the ice. Behind them, water still flows from the base of the slide, and it has created a hole in the surface of the frozen pool.

The boys pause briefly to catch their breath.

RAFE

C'mon, you can do better than this.

ETHAN

Kung fu is kung fu. It isn't child's play.

RAFE

You should have spent more time learning to defend yourself and less time on the philosophy.

ETHAN

I don't see the difference. To me they're the same thing.

RAFE

Hold still, I'll show you the difference.

Rafe moves in. Ethan turns around and impossibly...

...runs up the waterfall onto the chute above.

Ethan smiles down at his opponent. Rafe purses his lips in annoyance. Gets a running start and pursues Ethan up the flow of water onto the slide.

As they do battle, chunks of ice spray all around them. They reach a level place where the slide rounds a bend.

They pause to catch their breath.

ETHAN

I'm not going to beat you. Even though, for all your blabbing, that's what you really want.

RAFE

Why would I want to get beaten?

ETHAN

You think you deserve it.

Rafe fumes. He closes the distance between them.

RAFE

You don't know anything about me!

Rafe attacks and Ethan blocks every blow. But he's stopped countering. He just keeps blocking and letting Rafe tire himself out.

RAFE

Fight back!

One of Rafe's punches finally gets through. Ethan gets decked in the face, but he appears to be unfazed.

RAFE

Fight back!

ETHAN

I won't.

Rafe glares in frustration.

RAFE

You'll fight. Or maybe you think I'd get more out of slapping Polly around?

It's the only button Ethan has left. The fury bubbles toward the surface.

Rafe punches him in the face just to be sure.

Ethan staggers back. Lifts his hand to his face and it comes back bloody. Like Bruce in the movies, he brings his stained fingertips to his lips and tastes his own blood.

His face contorts into a profound new level of rage. He uppercuts Rafe and sends him flipping through the air.

Rafe lands atop one of the cars of the FERRIS WHEEL.

Ethan leaps. It's the most spectacular jump yet. He hurtles over the heads of the spectators, legs bicycling wildly.

ON THE FACES OF THE KIDS BELOW

mouths open. Expressions of awe and wonder absolute.

ABOVE THEM

Ethan traverses the distance. He lands atop the car and sends it into a barrel roll. He pursues Rafe from one rolling Ferris wheel car to the next like a pair of loggers.

Their kicks and punches send spokes and other pieces of the Ferris wheel into the snowy air.

The force of their leaps begin to put the Ferris Wheel into motion. As they begin to descend back to earth, Rafe does a back flip that lands him...

...on the ROLLER COASTER TRACK. Ethan follows him and they launch into an aerial duel, bounding from one crest of the roller coaster track to the next.

They pause atop the peak of the ride.

ETHAN

Are you happy now, you freak?

Rafe tries to attack, but Ethan socks him in the nose. Rafe waivers. Stunned.

ETHAN

I'll tear you apart if that's what you want!

Ethan unleashes a feral snarl and his fist shoots out at Rafe's face.

There comes the sickening pop of cartilage under knuckles.

They engage each other. Blocking and dodging blows. The rate of Ethan's attacks increases.

Rafe exertion begins to show in his expression. He can't keep up.

Ethan delivers a sidekick that throws Rafe from the track.

Rafe plummets. An uncontrolled free fall.

Goes CRASHING through the roof of the FUN HOUSE. Lands and tucks himself into the fetal position. He gets covered in plaster and debris.

Ethan considers the distance from the roller coaster track.

He jumps and drops through the fun house ceiling, only to find himself in a maze of MIRRORS that distort his reflection.

Rafe and Ethan stalk each other through the hall of mirrors.

Ethan is surrounded by warped images of Rafe. A sudden calm comes over him.

ON ETHAN'S EYES

as they close.

Rafe turns in a full circle, considering the images of Ethan around him. He comes to a stop in front of his real foe.

Ethan fist extends to within a hair's breadth of Rafe's chest. Rafe's eyes widen in shocked comprehension.

We dial down to SLOW-MOTION. And as Ethan cocks back his fist...a mere inch...we can almost see the potential energy materializing, desperate to become kinetic energy.

The hall of mirrors quakes. The mirrors warp and bend. Glass and debris get swept up as if caught in a whirling maelstrom.

Ethan's fist rockets forward. The force SHATTERS the mirrors and sends Rafe backwards.

OUTSIDE

The kids duck for cover as the wall of the fun house explodes and Rafe flies from the building in a shower of glass and rubble.

Rafe is splayed out in the snow. He pulls himself into a kneeling position. Glances over his shoulder as Ethan emerges from the fun house.

LONG SHOT of the winter wonderland as Ethan closes the distance between him and his kneeling opponent.

RAFE

You've learned the One Inch Punch.

ETHAN

Yeah.

Ethan considers Rafe, kneeling before him, a picture of defeat.

RAFE

Go on then. It's what you want.

He cocks his fist and the air. It's the final blow.

Ethan gives pause. He can see the fear in Rafe's eyes just before the bully lowers his head in resignation. It's a look Ethan knows all too well.

He lowers his fist.

Rafe lifts his eyes and looks to Ethan with some confusion.

ETHAN

No. If I have to choose between
losing and becoming a bully,
then... I give up.

Ethan turns his back on Rafe.

He stares skyward. An enlightened expression. Rafe regards him. Still kneeling. Still pensive and confused.

BY THE FERRIS WHEEL

Canine and the other boys see Ethan standing in snow.

TATTOO FREAK

Should we jump him?

But Canine doesn't have the courage. He looks and spots the lever that activates the Ferris wheel.

He gets a devious grin and pulls the lever.

The Ferris wheel begins to rotate. It groans as the few remaining support beams collapse under the weight of the ride.

The wheel begins to fall sideways.

UNDER THE FERRIS WHEEL

Ethan sees the shadow in the snow. Bruce's parting words echo in his mind.

BRUCE LEE (V.O.)

To accept defeat, to learn to die,
is to be liberated from it.

(beat)

You must free your ambitious mind
and learn the art of dying.

Ethan closes his eyes. He stretches out his arms. Ready for whatever may come.

He is oblivious to the presence of Rafe behind him. Rafe cocks his fist and white powder lifts off the ground to swirl around it. He readies his killing blow.

Rafe suddenly pivots from Ethan and gazes up at the falling Ferris wheel. His punch...

...SPLINTERS the Ferris wheel above them.

AERIAL VIEW

of the event. From the spot where Ethan and Rafe stand, waves of snow extend in concentric circles like the site of a space shuttle launch.

ON THE FACES OF CANINE AND THE OTHER BOYS

Marveling. Slack-jawed.

Rafe falters from the incredible exertion, and Ethan catches him by the shoulders. The two boys regard one another.

RAFE

I'm tired of being angry.

Ethan gives a concurring nod.

ETHAN

Yeah.

(beat)

Me too.

LONG SHOT

of the boys facing each other among what's left of the amusement park's structures. A gust of wind surges, and the blizzard leaves us with...

WHITE OUT.

As the beat of The New Pornographers SWELLS we are...

INT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Where we find the winter dance in full swing. Ethan and Polly grind close on the crowded dance floor. He whispers something in her ear.

POLLY

What? You gotta talk louder.

ETHAN

I said, I wanna show you something that will totally blow your mind.

POLLY

Uh, okay.

He steps back and clears some room. Clasps his belt buckle with both hands and breaks into a rather cheesy hoe-down.

POLLY

What in God's name is that?

ETHAN

It's called the boot scootin' boogie. Did it sufficiently blow your mind?

POLLY

Nah, it just sorta blew.

She laughs and pulls him close. He rests his chin on her shoulder, and his eyes fix on the disco ball above them.

Reflected in the shimmering sphere, he sees a familiar figure float through the crowd behind him. He pulls away from Polly.

POLLY

Where you going? Stairway to Heaven is in like T minus two minutes.

ETHAN

I'll be right back.

POLLY

I am dancing with someone for the last dance.

ETHAN

I'll make it in time. Don't settle.

Ethan worms his way past convulsing teens to...

EXT. GROVER CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

Ethan's eyes scan the parking lot.

Rafe sits atop a car hood with several other kids. The two former rivals glance at one another, give a slight nod of mutual respect. Rafe turns back to his friends.

Ethan fixes his gaze on the baseball diamond beyond the parking lot, where Bruce stands under the floodlights. Mentor and pupil regard each other without a word.

Bruce Lee's somber gaze dissolves into a smile, and he flashes a thumbs up. Ethan smiles and gives a thumbs up back.

And as Ethan walks back to the dance, the floodlights dim.

ETHAN (V.O.)

It is easy for me to put on a show...

BLACK AND WHITE FOOTAGE

Bruce Lee faces us in a dojo. Performs the slow, tranquil movements of Tai Chi Chuan.

ETHAN (V.O.)

I can show you some really fancy moves.

The martial artist's movements quicken. We SPIN AROUND him as he punches and kicks in the frenetic style of Ba Ji Chuan.

ETHAN (V.O.)

But I remember the words Bruce Lee spoke when he was still alive. He said, "Remember that Jeet Kune Do is merely a name used, a mirror in which to see ourselves."

Bruce whirls and cartwheels within the confines of a YIN YANG SYMBOL drawn on the floor in black and white chalk.

ETHAN (V.O.)

Martial arts is as much about knowing yourself as it is about knowing your opponent. You have to see him clearly. You have to see his fear... And recognize it as your own.

He completes his attack combination with his fist extended towards us. Lowers his fist and gives a slight smile.

We FREEZE FRAME.

ETHAN (V.O.)

For only then can you learn the art
of fighting without fighting.

FADE OUT.