

YOUR DREAMS SUCK

by

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INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S ROOM - NIGHT

CORY SMALLS sits at his desk in his typical suburban bedroom, bathed in the blue glow of a computer screen. At sixteen, he's a good kid but vulnerable and insecure despite being kind of cute.

He's watching a PODCAST, Episode 12 in a series of online self-help videos: Dr. Lodge's Mental Wealth.

PODCAST:

DR. ROBERT LODGE a sharp, charismatic, handsome psychologist in his mid-forties. His voice and demeanor are irresistible and he speaks directly into the camera.

DR. LODGE

(on computer screen)

Your assignment for tomorrow is: Break character. Call up that estranged family member. Make a pass at that attractive person you've had your eye on. Or just get up on the table at lunch and dance.

He chuckles.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

Whatever you want, as long as it's relevant to you.

Dr. Lodge sits on the edge of his desk and puts his hand in the pocket of his sharkskin blazer.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

Remember, with every passing day we become richer human beings. And that...is Mental Wealth.

He withdraws his hand and casts a handful of GOLD CONFETTI at the camera.

END PODCAST.

Cory sits back, inspired. He looks to his left. On the wall is a poster of Dr. Lodge in front of a gold background.

CLOSE ON: A calendar with JULY 4TH circled in gold marker and a dollar amount written in black: \$695. On a small bookshelf under the calendar is a glass jar half-filled with bills and loose change.

Cory crouches down and pulls a dusty boom box out from under his bed.

He looks back over his shoulder and sees FEAR - a tall, thin, all-black figure whose face is either covered or nonexistent.

FEAR is holding up a white sign with black letters.

FEAR
(on sign)
DON'T DO IT

Cory blinks.

FEAR switches the sign with one behind it.

FEAR (CONT'D)
(on sign)
IT'LL END BADLY

Cory turns back to his boom box and blows dust from the speakers.

CUT TO:

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

The cafeteria is full of hundreds of busy, chattering kids.

SUPERIMPOSE: THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL.

Cory emerges from the crowd unnoticed, carrying his boom box. He climbs onto a table in the center of the room. His eyes pause on IMOGENE MA, 16. She's NATURALLY BEAUTIFUL, the kind of girl who doesn't even have to try, and her hair is up in a ponytail. She's sitting with HUNTER KEIGHTLY, 16, dirty blond hair, handsome, athletic, all-American.

Cory squeezes his eyes shut in anticipation and with a shaking hand, presses PLAY.

MUSIC: RUN-D.M.C. - "TRICKY"

He begins his "Mental Wealth" assignment: dancing on the table at lunch.

While busting moves, Cory is clearly petrified and cold sweat is beading on his face. Despite his dread, he's a pretty good dancer. Everyone in the room stares blankly at him.

"It's tricky to rock a rhyme to rock a rhyme that's right on time / it's tricky"

The kids in the cafeteria look at each other as if trying to form a consensus.

Imogene turns to Hunter.

IMOGENE

Do you know him?

HUNTER

You mean the kid with no friends? Yeah,
I know him.

"TRICKY tricky TRICKY tricky / HUNH!"

Cory throws up his arms in fright as assorted food HURLS toward him and we FREEZE FRAME the moment before impact.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL - GUIDANCE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - LATER

MR. GANGEMI, the school guidance counselor, late 40s, pasty, has just closed Cory's student file.

MR. GANGEMI

I've been observing you, Mr. Smalls.

Cory sits opposite him, covered head-to-toe in cafeteria food but somehow nonchalant.

CORY

Why?

MR. GANGEMI

Your grades are fine, but you're quiet, you eat alone, you don't participate in extracurriculars...you don't seem to have many friends here at school. Any friends. Do you realize you're fitting a certain profile, Cory?

(switching gears)

What kind of music are you listening to these days?

CORY

Uh...a lot of James Brow--

MR. GANGEMI

(interrupting)

Slipknot?

CORY
Um, no, James Brown. And, I don't
know...The Killers?

MR. GANGEMI
The KILLERS. I see.

He leans forward.

MR. GANGEMI (CONT'D)
Are you a killer, Cory?

Cory's eyes widen.

CORY
(blindsided)
What?

MR. GANGEMI
Do you hate me? Do you want to kill me?

CORY
(appalled)
No!

Beat. Mr. Gangemi leans back.

MR. GANGEMI
(suspicious)
Have a nice summer.

EXT. SCHOOL - LATER

School's out for summer! Kids hang out on the front lawn
and stream out of the double doors.

Imogene Ma waits by the curb. A spotless teal Bentley
Azure convertible with the top down pulls up, driven by
OLIVER ZAUN, 16, fine-boned, ridiculously handsome, with
olive skin and straight black hair to his shoulders in a
blue private school blazer with a crest.

Imogene throws her knapsack in the back and gets in.

OLIVER
So are we going to the French Rivera or
Orange Julius?

IMOGENE
What do you think?

OLIVER
To the mall!

They roar off.

Kids flow around Cory as he exits the school, covered in food.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE SUBURBS - DAY

Cory walks home from school, still covered in food.

He passes a HOMELESS GUY on a corner.

HOMELESS GUY

Hey man, I haven't eaten in two days.
You have any change on you?

Beat. Cory peels a doughnut off his chest and gives it to him. The man takes a bite and waves as Cory walks on.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BATHROOM - DAY

Cory showers. As the water runs, rainbow sprinkles spiral down the drain.

He wipes steam off the shower door revealing FEAR, holding another sign.

FEAR

(on sign)
I TOLD YOU SO

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

INSERT ON COMPUTER SCREEN: A VIRTUAL BATTLE.

A warrior-elf and his dwarf partner fight a one-eyed giant in WORLDS OF WARCRAFT, a massively multiplayer online role playing game. It's complicated and nerdy.

Cory types furiously in between alternating bites of potato chips.

DWARF

(instant message)
FINISH HIM OFF!

Cory inputs a special macro command. Onscreen, his warrior-elf executes a high-flying spin kick.

DWARF (CONT'D)
(instant message)

NICE!

Cory smiles. Onscreen, his paladin levels up. Ding!

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Cory's alarm goes off and he sits straight up in bed.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Cory buttons the top button of a light blue collar shirt and pulls on a dark blue vest with a name tag.

EXT. COMMEMORATIVE SPOON FACTORY - MORNING

The JACOB ORSON COMMEMORATIVE SPOON FACTORY is a long, two story grey building downtown. This is where Cory works.

INT. COMMEMORATIVE SPOON FACTORY - MORNING

Cory stands at a conveyer belt on an assembly line, in front of a mountain of clear plastic boxes.

Small silver spoons inset with the state seal of California come down the belt and Cory puts them in the boxes, one by one.

INT. COMMEMORATIVE SPOON FACTORY - LATER

The mountain of plastic boxes is significantly smaller. A big guy with a spoon dangling from his nose comes by with a huge wheelbarrow overloaded with plastic boxes and dumps a new mountain of them behind Cory.

Cory sighs.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAY

Cory walks down the street on his lunch break, passing JILLY'S ARCADE. He glances in the window. A kid his age is going crazy on a DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION machine, drawing a small crowd. FEAR is there, holding up a sign:

FEAR
(on sign)
TOO CROWDED

Cory walks away. He reaches ANDREA'S PET STORE, a bright pink building. He pauses to press his hand to the shop window and a kennel full of puppies yelp joyfully.

INT. BLIMPIE'S SUB SHOP - DAY

Cory sits and eats a meatball sub while 50 Cent's "In Da Club" plays. Cory nods his head to the beat as he chews.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAY

Cory walks back the way he came, singing to himself.

CORY
(singing)
You can find me in da club, I just ate a
sub, mama, I got what you need, unless
you need a sub...

CUT TO:

INT. COMMEMORATIVE SPOON FACTORY - LATER

Cory is back at the conveyer belt, absentmindedly humming "In Da Club" to himself. He looks around.

CORY'S POV: The spoon making machine presses out spoons from sheet metal at an even pace, emitting small PUFFS of steam.

Far to Cory's left, a woman in a smock with a clear plastic box over each ear stacks the packaged spoons into a big cardboard shipping box with RHYTHMIC SLAPS.

Cory, still humming, bobs his head in time. The music RISES UP and surrounds him.

SONG: 50 CENT - "IN DA CLUB"

"Go/go/go/go"

ANGLE ON: The conveyer belt. Two spoons STAND STRAIGHT UP and start swaying back and forth like metronomes.

"Go shawty"

CUT TO:

Cory, amazed.

"It's your birthday / we gon' party like it's yo birthday"

On the conveyer belt, the spoons have TRANSFORMED into two men in big shiny foam spoon costumes. They HOP off the belt onto the floor, which lights up like a disco when they hit it.

They start doing body rolls, their silver costumes glittering in the light.

"We gon' sip Bacardi / like it's yo birthday"

They simultaneously SPIN closer and gesture for Cory to join them.

*"And you know we don't give a F*** it's not yo birthday"*

CUT TO:

Cory, who looks like he's just been asked to the prom. He points to himself.

CORY
(whispers)

Me?

The spoons nod and hold out their hands. Cory WHIPS off his vest and attempts to LEAP over the conveyer belt, but FALLS over it instead.

He quickly pulls himself up and joins the giant spoons, Crip-walking and body rolling like a man with pants on fire.

Bubbles POUR out of the spoon making machine and a pink fog rolls across the floor. Cory and the spoons dance crazily in the now dreamlike factory.

CUT TO:

A huge pile of un-packaged spoons is GROWING at the end of Cory's conveyer belt. He has his eyes closed and a faraway look on his face. A red light is flashing above his section.

His BOSS, a fortyish man with an award-winning moustache, jogs over.

CORY'S BOSS

Smalls! What is this?

Cory snaps out of it and looks at the pile of spoons.

CORY
(frightened)
...a spoon factory?

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Cory enters. His mom, LOIS SMALLS, mid-40s, is a pretty, over-worked woman in a maroon real estate blazer with big shoulder pads. She's as pale as her son.

His dad, FRANKLIN SMALLS, late 40s, is black, handsome, and thoughtful-looking. Even though they're different colors, you can see that Cory is clearly his biological son. They're eating dinner.

Cory sits down.

CORY
I got fired from the spoon factory.

LOIS
Aww, honey.

FRANKLIN
Fired from the spoon factory, huh?

Cory scratches his cheek.

CORY
Yeah.

His dad motions to a dish.

FRANKLIN
Have some potatoes.

Cory scoops some mashed potatoes onto his plate. They dine in silence for a few moments.

LOIS
What can you eat with those little spoons, anyway?

Cory shrugs.

FRANKLIN

The bottom line is, working in a spoon factory is no job for a proud young black man like yourself. You should be doing something you're passionate about.

CORY

(truthfully)

I'm not really that passionate about anything.

FRANKLIN

That can't be. Look, why don't you come and work in my laboratory again this summer? You liked the mice, didn't you?

Cory flinches as if remembering something unpleasant.

CORY

NO. (beat) Even if I were passionate about something, I probably wouldn't be any good at it.

FRANKLIN

Well, you can be passionate about something and not be good at it and then go on to a second, more realistic passion.

CORY

What?

FRANKLIN

Take me for example. I was passionate about dancing, but - do you remember our wedding, honey?

LOIS

It's hard not to, sweetheart.

FLASHBACK TO: 1985

INT. CHEESY WEDDING HALL - NIGHT

It's Lois and Franklin's wedding video, shot camcorder-style. They're dancing in the center of the room and everything seems okay until Franklin gets funky.

He starts dancing around his new bride in a circle and executes a poorly-timed SPIN that sends him CAREENING into another dancer. He tries to hip-thrust his way out of danger, but TRIPS over Lois' train.

He jumps up from the floor, but he's got too much backwards momentum and CRASHES into the giant speakers behind him, which TOPPLE OVER. If it wasn't for his Afro, he might have been seriously hurt.

The guy holding the camcorder CRACKS UP.

END FLASHBACK.

Franklin sighs.

FRANKLIN

And that's how I became a biochemist.

CORY

I'm not sure how this advice relates to my situation.

LOIS

(taking control)

Cory, don't worry so much, okay? You're sixteen. You should be working hard in school, which we know you are, and having fun. With kids your own age.

Franklin points a full-size spoon at him.

FRANKLIN

Listen to your mother.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cory's standing in front of his calendar/bookshelf/money jar setup. He takes his final spoon factory wages from a white envelope, all of the money from the jar, and counts it.

CORY

(under his breath)

Three hundred...twenty-six.

He looks up at the circled date on his calender - July 4th, \$695.

He stuffs all the money back into the jar.

CUT TO:

DR. LODGE'S INFOMERCIAL:

EXT. SPRAWLING RANCH STYLE HOUSE - DAY

CAMERA SWOOPS DOWN onto a lush green lawn where Dr. Lodge stands with his beautiful half-Indian wife, RAYA, mid-30s, earthy. She passes their new baby daughter, HOPE, to her husband. Hope giggles and Dr. Lodge kisses her head. Their five-year-old boy COLE runs gleefully around a nearby lawn sprinkler.

DR. LODGE

Hi there, I'm Dr. Robert Lodge. Some call me a motivational speaker, but I prefer to think of myself as a guide. I've made it my mission to show people the way to a happier, fuller life using a philosophy I call...Mental Wealth.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST PATH - DAY

Dr. Lodge is strolling down a sunlit path.

DR. LODGE

Many of the people who come to me feel damaged, or incomplete. Maybe you feel that way - we all do sometimes. The foundation of Mental Wealth is a set of powerful techniques that will change your discontent into a lasting experience of being whole.

EXT. SET OF *IRON MAN 2* - DAY

ROBERT DOWNEY JR. sits in his cast chair and addresses the camera.

ROBERT DOWNEY JR.

He changed my life. Let me put it this way: ten years ago I was the love interest on *Ally McBeal*.

He cocks an eyebrow.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Lodge is sitting behind a desk in a comfortable, well-appointed office.

DR. LODGE

I want you to join me July 4th at the Wynn Hotel in Las Vegas for my two-day transformational Mental Wealth seminar. It's the culmination of all my years of experience as a Professor of Healing, helping countless people to overcome unhappiness and unlock the secrets of the mind.

He locks his eyes on the camera.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

It's about you, in this moment, changing your life forever. Come with me, and let this July 4th be your personal Independence Day.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALLS' HOUSE - DAY

Cory sits on the curb, waiting. A few kids ride by on their bikes. Someone has the sprinklers on.

A rickety U-Haul that's been painted white and spray-painted freehand with the words "MIKE'S GROCERY TRUCK" pulls up next to Cory.

MIKE, mid-30s, a tall and wiry Armenian guy with an accent, pokes his head out the window.

MIKE

Hey there Charlie Brown, you little depressed little man, you!

Cory smiles and gets up.

CORY

Hey, Mike.

MIKE

What can I get you?

CORY

Uhhh...a Snickers.

Mike lights a cigarette.

MIKE

Those are bad for you.

CORY
Not as bad as cigarettes.

MIKE
You want cigarettes?

CORY
No, just a Snickers.

MIKE
It's your funeral. Hold this.

He passes Cory his lit cigarette and disappears over the back of his seat. The truck rocks back and forth as Mike rummages around inside.

The back doors of the truck swing open. Cory walks over. The inside of the truck is packed full of grocery and convenience items. Nets full of various kinds of fruit hang from the ceiling.

Mike hands Cory a Snickers and takes back his cigarette.

MIKE (CONT'D)
How's your woman situation lately?

CORY
There is this one girl at school, but I've never talked to her.

MIKE
Is she aware of your existence?

CORY
I hope not.

Mike pulls a beat-up, dog-eared paperback book out from under a cantaloupe and holds it up: it's Dr. Lodge's manifesto, Mental Wealth.

MIKE
Did you read it? Because I am hearing, let me see--

He flips through the book.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Page 93, "preemptive failure rhetoric."

Cory shrugs, playing down his devotion.

CORY

No, I did read it. I'm watching the podcasts and doing the assignments and stuff.

MIKE

Listen, you gotta stick with it. It worked for me!

Cory takes a critical look at Mike: he's weird and lives out of a grocery truck, but he is happy.

CORY

Yeah, I'm going to keep going.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Cory sits in front of the computer holding a notebook, intently watching another Mental Wealth podcast.

Dr. Lodge is once again sitting on the edge of his desk, speaking directly into the camera.

DR. LODGE

Let's go over your previous challenge. I told you to overextend yourself. How did you do? If you completed this assignment, you're probably feeling pretty satisfied right now. On a scale of one to ten, I want you to rate your level of fulfillment in your progress notebook.

Under the heading "Challenge #7," Cory jots down a number: 2. Beat. He adds .13, making the final number 2.13.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

Now think back over the past couple of days. Did you let fear or uncertainty prevent you from doing something you know would be good for you personally or professionally? This is your second chance. I want you to go back and give it another try. Consider this your next assignment.

There's a knock on the door.

CORY

Come in!

Franklin enters.

FRANKLIN
Are my glasses in here?

Franklin squints at Cory's screen. Cory quickly turns the screen OFF.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
You're not still doing that self-help nonsense, are you?

CORY
No.
(changing the subject)
Look, Dad, I have to go do something.

Franklin holds up his hands.

FRANKLIN
Go on, do your thing, don't let your old man slow you down.

EXT. JILLY'S ARCADE - DAY

Cory pulls up in front of Jilly's Arcade in his piece-of-crap old Hyundai. With determination, he gets out and marches inside.

CUT TO:

INT. JILLY'S ARCADE - CONTINUOUS

Jilly's is a dimly-lit cavern of adolescent fun, full of sounds and brightly colored lights from the arcade games' attract modes. Teenagers blast away at gun games, giggling girls cluster around photo booths and older kids mob the free-throw basketball games. The place is packed.

A girl steps off the Dance Dance Revolution machine in the center of the room. FEAR is leaning against it, arms crossed.

Cory goes over and slips four tokens into the DDR machine's change slot. The machine lights up like a crazy neon fire.

DDR MAX 4
WELCOME TO DDR MAX 4!

The start button on the console flashes. Cory hammers it.

DDR MAX 4 (CONT'D)

LET'S MAX!

A song selection screen comes up. Throwing caution to the wind, Cory picks "RANDOM SONG." It stops on "Candy Heart" by Luv Unlimited.

His eyes narrow.

The song starts up, and right away intense arrow combinations fall from the top of the screen. Cory's feet flash on the dance pad. He's sweating a little bit.

Familiar with the difficulty level of the song, a group of kids crowd around. Cory takes a breath and proceeds to nail every move and combo.

The kids in the crowd go nuts cheering. Cory seems completely elated.

CUT TO:

EXT. JILLY'S ARCADE - MINUTES LATER

The sidewalk is full of happy, smiling people. They flow around Fear and Cory, who is bent over a municipal trash can, VOMITING. Loudly.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lois sits at the kitchen table going through the mail as Cory walks in, sweaty.

LOIS

Why are you sweating?

CORY

I was out dancing and throwing up.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cory's at his desk, playing Worlds of Warcraft. Onscreen, Cory's warrior-elf and his dwarf partner are fighting HAKKAR THE SOULFLAYER.

While the dwarf tries to avoid getting flayed, Cory runs around Hakkar's flank. A chat window pops up.

DWARF
(instant message)
D00d, I hate Hakkar the frickin'
Soulflayer.

CORY
(aloud)
Me too.

Cory's elf-warrior starts hurling fireballs.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Cory eats breakfast with his parents. His dad is dressed for work in a suit and tie and is reading The Atlantic as he eats.

LOIS
Franklin, it turns out that crazy open house I have is this Sunday, so tell Neal I won't be able to make it.

FRANKLIN
You think you'll be able to sell the house?

LOIS
I don't know, honestly. It's been passed around the whole office - no one can close on it - I think Leilani dumped it on me because I'm the low woman on the totem pole, you know? I mean I don't know why she didn't give it to Cheryl, Cheryl's only been here eight months and anyone can sell condos to sitcom writers.

FRANKLIN
Need any help?

LOIS
No, I'll take Cory to help me set up.

Cory looks up from his eggs.

CORY
What?

LOIS
You're not doing anything, are you?

CORY
I'm--

LOIS
Great.
(venting)
No one's going to buy this house!

Cory looks at his cell phone.

CORY
I gotta go, I have a job interview.

LOIS
Oh really, where?

CUT TO:

INT. SANRIO STORE BACK ROOM - DAY

Cory sits in a Hello Kitty beanbag in front of the desk of a PERKY BLONDE GIRL in her mid-20s.

PERKY BLONDE GIRL
What would you say makes you Hello Kitty material?

CORY
I like animals?

PERKY BLONDE GIRL
For instance: I have a degree in Asian-American Studies from UC Santa Barbara.

CORY
Wow.

PERKY BLONDE GIRL
I know!

She points a French-manicured finger at him.

PERKY BLONDE GIRL (CONT'D)
No swearing, no bringing your "skater friends" around, and you have to wear this:

She hold out a pink Hello Kitty apron.

PERKY BLONDE GIRL (CONT'D)
 Since there are no other applicants,
 you're hired. *Irashaimase!*

INT. SANRIO STORE - LATER

Cory, wearing his apron, stands behind the register.

PERKY BLONDE GIRL crosses in front of him.

PERKY BLONDE GIRL
 I'm going to lunch. Call the cell if
 there's an emergency.

Beat.

CORY
 What could go wrong?

She gives him a stern look. Cory looks side to side,
 warily. She leaves.

A cute NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL enters the store. The girl
 zeros in on a display of Hello Kitty walkie-talkies and
 grabs a pair. She runs up to the counter.

CORY (CONT'D)
 Can I help you?

NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL
 HeretakethisIwannatryitout!

She thrusts one of the walkie-talkies into his hands and
 runs out of the store and around the corner. Cory stands
 there helplessly.

His walkie-talkie crackles. He pushes the 'TALK' button
 with his thumb.

CORY
 ...Hello?

NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL
 (over the walkie-talkie)
 Hi! How are you?

CORY
 I'm okay.

NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL
 What's your name?

CORY

Cory Smalls.

NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL

You're not small! Ha ha ha ha.

Cory rolls his eyes.

NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL

(CONT'D)

What's your favorite sport?

CORY

Worlds Of Warcraft.

NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL

What's that?

CORY

It's a video game.

NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL

Video games aren't sports, goober! You just sit there!

CORY

Yeah, but--

NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL

Don't you play soccer? I play soccer.

CORY

No.

NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL

What about baseball? I play baseball.

CORY

I tried once, but I got stung by a bee.

NINE-YEAR-OLD GIRL

You're never gonna have a girlfriend if you don't play sports. Girls don't like boys who are goobers.

Beat.

CORY

You're probably right.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Lois is Saran-wrapping a tray of cookies. Cory comes down the stairs, sleepy-eyed.

LOIS
Oh good - take these to the car and I'll
be out in a second.

Cory yawns.

CUT TO:

INT. LOIS' 1993 VOLVO STATION WAGON - MOMENTS LATER

Cory sits with the tray of cookies in his lap. He pulls up a corner of the Saran Wrap. Lois gets in the car.

CORY
Did you make these?

LOIS
(proudly)
Yes I did!

Beat. Cory folds the Saran wrap back down. Lois starts the car.

INT. LOIS' 1993 VOLVO STATION WAGON - TEN MINUTES LATER

The car is in motion. Lois is in the middle of a long-winded real estate jag.

LOIS
- and then I said, it's not a Craftsman,
for Christ's sake, it's a modified neo-
Victorian! It's got a tin ceiling! I
don't know how Bill wound up in this
business. I think he used to be a raw
food chef. Oh! And did I tell you how
Leilani Purells herself constantly?
Constantly disinfecting! It's like,
Leilani, what's the problem? But you
know, I like Leilani - she's...

Cory is trying to listen but just can't. All his attention is focused on the hula-girl ornament swaying to and fro on the dashboard. Relaxing HULA MUSIC rises and drowns out Lois' voice.

After a minute, the car JOLTS to a stop.

LOIS (CONT'D)

Here we are!

EXT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Cory stands on the sidewalk with the tray of cookies gaping at the craziest house he's ever seen. It's an architectural patchwork quilt - all ramshackle and asymmetrical, huge, but built without any structural logic.

The eye immediately is drawn to a one-and-a-half story high ARCHWAY cut out of the front of the house, with a gold door.

He points to the door.

CORY

What is that?

LOIS

The garage.

CORY

Yikes, in the center of the house?

LOIS

Believe me, I know.

She take a real estate sign with her face and phone number on it and plants it in the grass on the edge of the lawn.

INT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The kitchen walls are painted with murals of tropical rain forest scenes. The counter and appliances are all green, and the floors are green marble. The ceiling is blue and painted with clouds. Clearly, the inside of this house is just as crazy as the outside.

Lois puts the tray of cookies on the counter. She bustles around, opening cabinets, checking light switches, brushing dust off of the countertops.

LOIS

Would you go check and make sure the upstairs windows are closed?

CORY

Should I leave a trail of breadcrumbs?

INT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Cory peeks into a large, empty bedroom and walks over to the window. It's closed.

INT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - AJJOINING BATHROOM -
CONTINUOUS

Cory leans over the whirlpool tub and carefully closes the window with his fingertips. He's about to leave, but instead pauses in front of the medicine cabinet. Out of curiosity, he opens it.

HUNDREDS OF GLASS MARBLES POUR OUT into the sink with deafening CLACKS. Cory jumps back, shocked. Taped to the back of the cabinet is a note: "Stop snooping around!"

Cory's eyes widen and he shuts it with a BANG.

CUT TO:

EXT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - CONTINUOUS

A green Ford Explorer pulls up to the curb. ALBERT and ELLEN MA, a mid-40ish well put together Chinese-American couple get out and close their doors.

Ellen Ma takes in this monstrosity of a house.

ELLEN MA
Get back in the car.

ALBERT MA
No, I want to see it. I've driven past this place a hundred times and I've always wondered what the inside looks like. Imogene, let's go!

A muffled reply comes from the backseat.

IMOGENE
(O.S.)
I'm coming, hold on.

Albert and Ellen start up the walk.

The rear door opens, and a pair of legs dangle and then hop down.

These legs belong to IMOGENE MA, the girl from school Cory likes. We follow her sneakered feet, which LIGHT UP as she walks into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Cory opens a door to an empty bedroom and goes inside.

INT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - EMPTY BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The only objects in the room are a short, paint-speckled ladder with an old, similarly paint-speckled radio sitting on it.

Cory looks at the radio, hesitates, and turns it ON. Smooth jazz comes on. He plays with the tuning dial until he finds a hip-hop station.

SONG: SEAN PAUL - "TEMPERATURE"

Cory is totally unable to resist the beat and starts shaking it, quickly busting out a little footwork.

CUT TO:

INT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - BREAKFAST NOOK - CONTINUOUS

Lois is showing Ma and Pa Ma around the kitchen.

LOIS

And this is just the coziest nook you'll ever find.

ALBERT MA

I like cozy nooks.

His wife elbows him pretty hard.

As the parents chat, Imogene's light-up sneakers climb the stairs in the background.

CUT TO:

INT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - EMPTY BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cory is shaking his ass and tomahawk-chopping.

CUT TO:

INT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

From behind, we see Imogene wandering down a Gothic hallway toward the source of the music. Her ponytail starts bobbing in time.

INT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - EMPTY BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cory gets experimental.

Imogene peeks around the half-open door to see what's going on, and we finally see her face, watching Cory from behind.

Cory, facing the window, is unaware that he's being watched.

CLOSE ON: Imogene's eyes as she follows Cory's rhythm.

A cloud passes in front of the sun, and the room DARKENS.

Imogene falls into step with Cory, who's still totally zoned out. She dances closer to him. The blue, green, and white lights in her sneakers blur, multiply, and FLOAT UPWARDS LIKE FIREFLIES.

Imogene dances confidently around Cory in a semi-circle as he stays more or less in place. The lights FLOAT AROUND, encircling them, PULSING to the slower underbeat of the music.

Cory executes a whip-spin and comes nose-to-nose with his previously unseen dance partner. Instantaneously, the room BRIGHTENS and the magical lights BLINK OUT. Cory flails, realizing he wasn't alone.

CORY

Aaaahh!

IMOGENE

Aaaahh!

CORY

(realizing who she is)

AAAAHH!

Cory LUNGES at the radio and falls all over it trying to turn it off. FEAR files his nails in the background.

CORY (CONT'D)

Uh...oh my god.

IMOGENE

Hi?

Cory stands up, trying to form a response.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)

I was just looking around. My parents are checking out the house.

CORY

Oh. My mom is probably trying to sell it to them.

IMOGENE

So hey, I've seen you around at school. What's your name?

CORY

Cory.

IMOGENE

I'm Imogene.

Beat. Cory tries to come up with a new, different sentence.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)

So you like to dance?

CORY

No. Never. I don't dance.

IMOGENE

Yeah you do.

CORY

No I don't.

IMOGENE

Cory. I saw you dancing in the cafeteria on the last day of school.

She mimes his 'don't-throw-food-at-me' stance.

In the background, Fear holds up a sign.

FEAR
(on sign)
LOL

Cory goes totally pale.

CORY
You DID?

IMOGENE
(playful)
I did, and you can dance. Also, just now
I was dancing with you for half that
song. So you totally do dance, you liar.

CORY
I don't *dance*...

Beat.

CORY (CONT'D)
I Dance Dance. Sometimes.

IMOGENE
You do? I Dance Dance!

CORY
Are you serious?

IMOGENE
Yeah, my friends and I have a team. We
all got into it after that Dance Dance
Revolution movie.

CORY
Oh, I didn't see that.

IMOGENE
It sucked. But the game is fun.

CORY
I just play at the arcade. I didn't know
there were teams.

IMOGENE
Oh yeah - ours is called Green Arrows.

CORY
Wow. That sounds kind of awesome.

Imogene gives Cory a little smile.

ELLEN MA (O.S.)
Imogene! We're going!

Imogene gets out her iPhone.

IMOGENE

Listen, we need a fourth person. Why don't you come by our next practice and see if you can keep up? Gimme your number.

Beat.

CORY

Um - I just forgot it. Oh wait - 818-557-8927.

Imogene taps in his number.

IMOGENE

Well, nice meeting you, Cory. Hope your mom sells the house.

CORY

Yeah, I don't think your parents are going for it.

IMOGENE

Yeah, no.

CUT TO:

INT. SANRIO STORE - DAY

Cory in a foam Hello Kitty sombrero does an exuberant HAPPY DANCE.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOP OF HILL - NIGHT

Ominous music. It's raining. Thunder ERUPTS. A mysterious CLOAKED FIGURE stands atop the hill with his back to us, holding a long wooden staff. In the distance, LIGHTENING STRIKES.

The cloaked figure WHIRLS AROUND, pulls off his hood, and GLARES STRAIGHT INTO CAMERA. Another flash of lightning illuminates his face. This is FRITZ BRÄUHLICH, 17, German, 0% body fat.

His cell phone rings: the "*I Dream of Jeannie*" theme. He digs around in his cloak and pulls out a bubblegum pink RAZR. He flips it open aggressively.

FRITZ

Was ist es?

We hear a faint reply from the other end.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

(heavy German accent)

No this is not a good time, I am trying to center myself!

Beat.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

CENTER MYSELF!

Beat.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

You sicken me!

He snaps the phone closed, flips up his hood, and turns away.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

Cory and Lois come through the front door, arms loaded with grocery bags.

FRANKLIN

(O.S., on phone)

In DNA, adenines form two hydrogen bonds with thymine, and guanine forms three hydrogen bonds with cytosine.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Lois and Cory enter and put the bags on the counter.

FRANKLIN

In RNA the base-pairing is the same, except thymine is replaced by uracil, see? Oh hang on, he just walked in.

Cory SNAPS to attention.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

Really nice talking to you.

Franklin takes the phone away from his ear and covers the receiver with his hand.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)
(whispers, to Cory)
It's a *girl*!

Cory GRABS the phone from his dad and crouches on the floor behind the counter for privacy.

He takes a deep breath. This phone call is all he's been thinking about.

CORY
...Hello?

CUT TO:

INT. IMOGENE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Imogene's room is has light green walls and is furnished with white and oak IKEA furniture. A plexiglass case above her dresser is filled with sparkly mineral samples - pyrite, amethyst, fluorite, etc. - and Imogene is at her desk, scribbling a note.

IMOGENE
Cory, your dad completely just got me an
A in bio next year.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Cory's parents are huddled across the kitchen, talking in excited whispers.

FRANKLIN
And she likes *science*!

Cory covers the phone and waves them away.

CORY
(to parents)
SHHHH!!!
(to Imogene - scrambling)
So, A is the best grade, right?

CUT TO:

INT. IMOGENE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Imogene raises an eyebrow.

IMOGENE

Yeah...so...listen, I just called to give you directions to my house, because we're practicing there tomorrow. I mean, if you're free.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Cory covers half his face with his hand, trying to think of something cool to say.

CORY

Well, I might have to move one or two things around, but, ah - what time is the thing tomorrow?

CUT TO:

INT. IMOGENE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

IMOGENE

Three.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

CORY

Yeah, I might move one or two things around, but yeah, three should be fine.

CUT TO:

INT. IMOGENE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

IMOGENE

Okay, do you have a pen?

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Cory PULLS a drawer out of the counter and turns it over, shaking its contents onto the kitchen floor.

He grabs a permanent marker, uncaps it with his teeth and starts writing on his arm.

CUT TO:

INT. BOB'S BIG BOY - NIGHT

Lois and Franklin sit in silence, facing Cory in a booth. Cory's flicking a sugar packet with his nail, wired. His parents steal a glance at each other, trying to figure out what to say.

CORY

I see you looking at each other, and I don't want to talk about it. There's nothing to talk about.

FRANKLIN

You know, I spoke to her for a little while, and she's a charming young lady. Also, I can't help but notice that you have directions written on your arm there. Are they directions to her house?

Cory pulls his arm through his sleeve into his t-shirt, hiding it as he talks.

CORY

Dad, Dad, I don't want to talk about it and there's nothing to talk about because we're just friends.

FRANKLIN

Listen, Cory, let me tell you something about friends.

Cory puts his head in his hand.

LOIS

Franklin, maybe this isn't the right time--

FRANKLIN

(cutting her off)

Men and women are DIFFERENT. Women have TWO LADDERS.

Franklin PLUCKS the straws from his and Lois' drinks to illustrate this point.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

One ladder is for FRIENDS and the other is for LOVERS. Depending on YOUR ACTIONS, you will end up on THIS LADDER--

Every time he shakes one of the straws, a drop of water hits Lois in the face.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

Or THIS LADDER. Or, if you really screw it up, NEITHER ladder.

LOIS

He wouldn't screw it up!

FRANKLIN

Please. Now, these two ladders NEVER CROSS. You cannot go from the friend ladder to the love ladder. BUT - you can CLIMB these ladders. So, if you're on this girl's love ladder, right now you might be at the bottom, but if you use your head, in a couple months you might be right near the top.

LOIS

What are you talking about? I've never heard this from you before.

FRANKLIN

I'm telling our son the TRUTH. Now, men only have ONE LADDER. Friends, girlfriends, cousins, it's all the same. It just depends WHERE YOU ARE on the rungs. For example, when I met your mother, she was pretty cute, so she was already midway up my ladder. And I could tell that I was on her love ladder, but maybe just a few rungs up.

LOIS

What are you talking about? We started out as friends! We're still friends! You're my BEST friend!

FRANKLIN

That is BULLSHIT. Now I love you, but these ladders do not cross. You remember that time when we were smoking weed on the roof of your dorm--

LOIS

FRANKLIN! Don't tell him that!

Franklin waves his hand dismissively.

FRANKLIN

Anyway, remember we were on the roof and you were saying how great I was, and what a good friend I was, and how comfortable you were talking to me?

LOIS

Yeah?

FRANKLIN

That's the first time we kissed, right?

LOIS

Yeah?

FRANKLIN

PREMEDITATED! And, had I just been a friend up to that point in your mind, you would have run down the fire escape and never spoken to me again.

LOIS

Well, no...

FRANKLIN

Don't lie to me. I was on your love ladder, and look at us now.

Franklin puts his arm around her.

LOIS

I cannot believe you don't think of me as your friend.

FRANKLIN

Lois, friends pick you up at the airport. You're with me on the plane.

LOIS

That is a line, that is such a line!

Their waitress glides up to the table.

WAITRESS

(brightly)

You folks want any dessert?

CORY

LOIS

NO!

NO!

FRANKLIN
Do you have any creme brulée?

CUT TO:

EXT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - DAY

Cory's Hyundai pulls up to Imogene's house, which is a pleasant two-story Craftsman.

Cory checks the address written on his arm against the number on the house. It matches.

Cory glances in his rearview mirror. FEAR is sitting in the backseat holding a sign.

FEAR
(on sign)
THEY'RE NOT GOING TO LIKE YOU

FEAR replaces the sign with one behind it.

FEAR (CONT'D)
(on sign)
YOU DON'T BELONG HERE

Cory tenses up, takes a deep breath and gets out of the car.

EXT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Cory rings the doorbell.

Ellen Ma answers the door.

ELLEN MA
Yes?

CORY
Uh hi, I'm Cory. Is Imogene here?

Just then, Imogene appears. She grabs Cory's wrist and pulls him inside.

IMOGENE
Hey Cory, this is my mom - Mom, this is Cory.

CORY
Hi.

ELLEN MA

Nice to meet you.

CUT TO:

INT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM

Imogene brings Cory into the family room. A pair of metal Dance Dance pads are hooked up to a big TV. Two teenage boys are chilling on the couch.

IMOGENE

Cory, this is Hunter and this is Oliver.

Hunter's wearing track pants and an old Air Force sweatshirt with the sleeves cut off. He extends his hand. Cory shakes.

HUNTER

(friendly)

Hey guy. Saw you covered in food, nice to formally meet you.

Oliver, the kid with the Bentley, is wearing a fitted tracksuit and has his hair in a ponytail. He looks Cory up and down.

OLIVER

Welcome.

Imogene unzips her hoodie.

IMOGENE

Let's start!

Hunter turns on the PlayStation while Imogene motions for Cory to stand next to her.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)

So, don't worry about anything, we're all just going to take turns with you one on one.

Cory looks nervous.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)

Let me rephrase that. We just want to see what your strengths and weaknesses are. You've never danced doubles before, right?

CORY

Right.

IMOGENE

Just watch us for a little bit then.

BEGIN MONTAGE

MUSIC: MICHAEL DES BARRES AND HOLLY KNIGHT - "OBSESSION"

Cory watches Imogene and Oliver dance doubles together. They're amazing, switching pads effortlessly mid-song and perfectly timed, not looking at the screen once.

BREAK:

CORY

Wait wait wait wait. You guys aren't looking at the screen! How do you do that?

IMOGENE

We memorize everything backwards.

Beat.

CORY

You're kidding.

Imogene and Oliver shrug. Cory sinks into the couch.

RESUME MONTAGE:

Imogene dances doubles with Hunter. They're good but not as in tune with each other as she was with Oliver.

Now it's Cory's turn to try it with Hunter. Hunter takes him through it slowly before they go full speed. They face the screen and Cory warms up to the moves.

Partway into the song Imogene comes up behind Cory to tweak his form and lifts his left leg to straighten him out. He FALLS OVER.

Cory and Oliver dance. Cory tries switching pads and SLIPS, FALLING OVER again. Oliver nimbly dodges Cory on his way down.

Imogene and Cory now. They get into a gentle groove reminiscent of how they danced together when they met. Cory is far more tuned in and graceful with her than with either of the guys.

END SONG, END MONTAGE

CUT TO:

INT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM

The kids are tired and hot.

HUNTER

Let's go put our heads in the freezer.

INT. IMOGENE'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

The freezer door of a black refrigerator is open, and Imogene has her head stuck inside. She leans back, holding two Popsicles, and hands one to Cory.

Hunter, who has been rearranging the multicolored alphabet magnets on the door, straightens the last 'P' in the word 'POOP.' Cory takes a bite of his Popsicle.

CORY

Thank you.

IMOGENE

Let's watch the tapes.

INT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Imogene, Oliver and Cory sit Indian-style on the floor. Hunter presses 'play' on the DVD player and sits back.

CORY

So what is this now?

OLIVER

Our competition.

Imogene, silent, points at the screen.

ONSCREEN:

Darkness. FADE UP just enough to reveal three of the four members of one of the world's greatest Dance Dance Revolution teams: SPANGLEFERKEN. They are KLAUS, KARL, and JOHANN, all 17, all wearing black satin Dior Homme suits, white shirts and skinny yellow ties.

They stand immaculate in the dark until suddenly a BRIGHT LIGHT approaches and they simultaneously slide on matching sunglasses.

ANGLE ON: FRITZ, the mysterious cloaked figure from the mountaintop and the leader of Spangleferken, striding in slow motion towards his teammates in an identically cut GLOWING WHITE suit.

Fritz walks to the center of the group and speaks into the camera.

FRITZ
Wir sind Spangleferken.

The other three members lean forward.

OTHER MEMBERS
(whispering)
Spangleferken.

The other kids have seen this before, but Cory is bug-eyed.

ONSCREEN:

A booming German voiceover takes us through clips of Spangleferken winning various Dance Dance tournaments. Their moves are unparalleled: Fritz, wearing an asbestos dinner jacket SETS HIMSELF ON FIRE while his teammates light sparklers off of him and throw them in the air; feet flashing like hummingbirds they effortlessly conquer the impossible Pandemonium stage; wearing German flag unitards they LEAPFROG over each other and land on flashing squares; finally, Fritz does a BACKFLIP and completes a routine on his hands.

CORY
It's like Cirque De Soliel. How are we going to beat them, with our pure souls?

IMOGENE
We've never beaten them. We always come in second.

OLIVER
I'm thinking of having them assassinated.

HUNTER
Yeah, maybe we should poison their lip gloss.

INT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - FRONT HALL - LATER

Imogene is leaning on the open door. Oliver jingles his keys.

OLIVER
We have to take off; I'm driving Hunter back.

Hunter pats Cory's shoulder.

HUNTER

Good job, dude. Welcome to the team.

CORY

(happy)

Thanks.

Oliver and Hunter leave, and Cory hovers by the door unsure of what to do. Beat.

IMOGENE

Do you want to see my geodes?

Cory pales.

CORY

ALREADY?

INT. IMOGENE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Imogene stands next to Cory at her desk, on which a few minerals are arrayed.

IMOGENE

That one's your basic amethyst, pretty boring--

CORY

No, I like it.

IMOGENE

Once you get into geology you get over amethysts pretty quickly.

She picks up a glittering gold-orange rock, half of which is covered in spiky stalactitic arms.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)

Aragonite. See how this particular one has these branching pointy things?

CORY

Yeah?

IMOGENE

Those are called flos-ferri, which means "flowers of iron."

CORY

Huh. What's that one?

He points to a gleaming white phosphorescent stick that looks like it came from the Fortress of Solitude.

Imogene holds it up to her desk lamp, revealing a tiny bubble of water encased inside.

IMOGENE

This is one of my favorites. It's a bar of selenite, but this one is special because it has water trapped inside. Look, do you see the air bubble? That water could be a million years old.

Cory leans in close. Their heads almost touch as they look at this glowing, beautiful rock.

CORY

That's amazing.

Beat.

CORY (CONT'D)

So which one's your favorite?

Imogene straightens up.

IMOGENE

Well, I love all of these but my favorite is really rare and I can't afford it.

CORY

What is it?

IMOGENE

Diopase. A good sized specimen is like a thousand dollars.

CORY

Whoa.

EXT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Cory and Imogene stand on her front step.

CORY

(awkward)

Thanks for inviting me. I had a really good time and I'm not, like, usually a, um, team player or whatever.

Imogene touches his shoulder.

IMOGENE

No, you did a good job.

Off her touch, Cory looks in her eyes and leans in to kiss her.

Imogene DUCKS and deftly HOOKS HER LEG AROUND CORY'S ANKLES. He instantly FALLS OVER.

CORY
(on his back)
Ow...

Imogene crouches down next to him.

IMOGENE
I'm sorry, Cory, I'm off the market.

Cory groans.

CORY
My bad.

She gives him a hand and helps him to his feet. He brushes himself off.

CORY (CONT'D)
Do you hate me?

IMOGENE
No, you're just like every other boy I've ever met in my entire life.

Cory looks aghast.

CUT TO:

INT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Imogene sits at the dinner table with her parents. Her mom turns their Lazy Susan.

ELLEN MA
Cory seems nice.

IMOGENE
(sincerely)
He is nice.

Beat.

ELLEN MA
Whatever happened with Oliver?

IMOGENE
MOM. Nothing.

ELLEN MA

I like him for you. He's a handsome boy,
and his family is so wealthy.

IMOGENE

Jesus, mom.

ELLEN MA

Imogene, it'd be so easy for you; you're
so beautiful. Just take your hair out of
that damn ponytail and the boys will go
crazy. It's good to date and get to know
lots of different kinds of people.

IMOGENE

I already know different kinds of people.
We've been through this a thousand times:
I just want to focus on what I'm doing, I
don't want to deal with boys right now.
Not at all.

ALBERT MA

Good. I admire your resolve.

ELLEN MA

(turns to her husband)

Don't you want your daughter to be happy?

ALBERT MA

Of course, but she doesn't need to date
to be happy. It's more than enough to
have good friends.

ELLEN MA

Good friends don't necessarily make good
husbands. You want someone stable,
financially secure, no obesity gene -
thank god your sister found someone to
marry her who's not a drug addict like
all her other boyfriends.

She points to Imogene with her chopsticks.

ELLEN MA (CONT'D)

You're next!

Albert puts down his fork.

ALBERT MA

Ellen, do you think you could let her
graduate from high school before you try
to marry her off?

ELLEN MA
WE met in high school, Albert!

Her parents start arguing in Chinese. Imogene covers her face with her hands and starts crying. Ellen turns to her daughter.

ELLEN MA (CONT'D)
(in Chinese, subtitled)
You're so dramatic! I'm trying to help you.

IMOGENE
Just leave me alone!

Imogene, still crying, picks up her plate of food and leaves.

Her parents continue arguing in Mandarin and offscreen we hear a door SLAM.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALLS' HOUSE - DAY

Cory's sitting on the curb. He kicks a rock into the street.

Mike's Grocery Truck pulls up and Mike slides out of the passenger-side window, Dukes-Of-Hazzard-style.

MIKE
Time for groceries! Buy something and tell me your problems because I don't have all day.

CORY
I'm not hungry and I don't always have problems.

MIKE
Well I have a problem! A very special rerun of Oprah Winfrey in which a family is devastated by cancer has caused me to stop smoking and now my lungs cry out for nicotine, sweet beautiful nicotine!

CORY
Is there anything I can do?

MIKE
Buy something.

Mike takes out a hard pack of Marlboro Reds and flips up the top.

CORY
You just said you quit!

Mike tilts the pack toward Cory to reveal that it's filled with bright orange carrot sticks.

CORY (CONT'D)
Oh, okay.

Mike takes one out and holds it between his fingers like a cigarette.

MIKE
I am not yet weened off the oral fixation component of the addiction.

CORY
You want some ranch dip?

MIKE
I have some in the truck, but thanks.

CORY
I don't have any money, but can I bum a carrot stick?

MIKE
Sure.

Mike gives him a carrot stick.

Mike and Cory lean against the grocery truck, contemplatively holding their carrot sticks between their fingers.

CORY
I met a girl--

Mike throws open his arms.

MIKE
Hey, mazel tov!

CORY
But she's not interested.

MIKE
How do you know?

CORY
She used judo on me.

MIKE

Ah, violence. The language of love.

He points to Cory's carrot.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Orange vegetables whiten your teeth. And white teeth attract women. And women are the earth's treasure. And you must build a house for this treasure, or in my country, a yurt, which is a dome-shaped structure made of bamboo and leaves.

Cory looks nervous.

CORY

I don't know how to build a yurt. I don't have the confidence to build a yurt. Also, I don't know what yurts have to do with anything.

MIKE

Anyone can build a yurt. But not just anyone can build a two-story yurt.

CORY

How in the world do you build a two-story yurt?

CUT TO:

EXT. ARMENIAN VILLAGE - DAY

Mike stands next to his two-story yurt, and gives the thumbs-up.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

MIKE

CUNNING! Trust me, when you gotta make something work, you find a way even if it takes a long time and results in the death of two of your field hands. All projects worth doing are difficult.

Cory nods.

CORY

That's good advice, Mike.

Beat.

MIKE
I've got the shakes so bad.

CUT TO:

INT. SANRIO STORE - DAY

Cory is behind the counter. Business is slow.

Cory's cell phone rings. He looks at the caller ID:
it's Imogene!

He puts the phone down on the counter and frantically
fixes his hair before he remembers she won't be able to
see him.

He presses TALK.

CORY
Hello?

IMOGENE
(O.S.)
Hey, it's Imogene.

CORY
(trying to act smooth)
Oh, hey.

IMOGENE
So, listen--

CUT TO:

INT. FRED'S LAPIDARY - CONTINUOUS

Imogene is looking in a glass case of the rarest mineral
specimens in the store including her dream rock, a medium-
sized sample of DIOPHASE.

IMOGENE
--it turns out there's a state Dance
Dance qualifier tournament on Sunday in
Huerta.

CUT TO:

INT. SANRIO STORE - CONTINUOUS

Cory's squeezing the life out of a Keroppi stress ball.

CORY

Sunday? Like Sunday in five days,
Sunday?

CUT TO:

INT. FRED'S LAPIDARY - CONTINUOUS

Imogene's turning over a small blue chunk of iolite.

IMOGENE

I know it's kind of soon, but we'd be
doing the routine we practiced. And I
thought you could be my partner this
time.

A *kssssh* sound is heard over the phone. Imogene furrows
her brow.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)

What was that?

CUT TO:

INT. SANRIO STORE - CONTINUOUS

The stress ball has exploded in Cory's hand, and the sand
inside is POURING OUT onto the counter and the floor.

CORY

Uh, nothing! It's just - I don't think
I'm ready to compete yet.

CUT TO:

INT. FRED'S LAPIDARY - CONTINUOUS

IMOGENE

Don't worry, just practice by yourself a
little, and then we can have a one-on-one
on Friday or Saturday. If you keep your
lips to yourself.

CUT TO:

INT. SANRIO STORE - CONTINUOUS

CORY
(kicked in the balls)
Uh - okay!

IMOGENE
(O.S.)
Great, then I'll talk to you later.

CORY
Bye.

IMOGENE
(O.S.)
Bye.

Cory hangs up as Perky Blonde Girl comes out of the back room holding a Hello Kitty mini-broom and dustpan.

PERKY BLONDE GIRL
What happened?

CORY
Oh, I was testing one of the stress balls
and it broke.

She hands him the dustpan and broom.

PERKY BLONDE GIRL
That's \$3.95 out of your next paycheck,
mister.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Cory sits in front of his computer watching a Dr. Lodge podcast, wired and freaked out, massaging his temples.

Onscreen, the camera is tight on Dr. Lodge's face. He's sitting in a dark room, face illuminated with gold light.

DR. LODGE
(on screen)
Welcome to your Total Recharge. You
should watch this video any time you need
to access the power within yourself to
achieve your chosen goals. Now lock eyes
with me and let's begin.

Cory is already starting to space out.

CORY

Okay.

A meditation bell is struck.

DR. LODGE

(O.S.)

Repeat after me: *Focus.*

CORY

(spaced)

Focus.

DR. LODGE

(O.S.)

Intensity.

CORY

In-tensity.

DR. LODGE

(O.S.)

Concentration.

CORY

Concentration.

DR. LODGE

(O.S.)

Peace. Calm.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BEDROOM - LATER

MUSIC POUNDS as Cory practices his Dance Dance routine with his partner...FEAR. They switch pads, gliding past each other like pros. They continue through the song, their feet totally in sync. The music RISES and we go into a

MONTAGE

INT. IMOGENE'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

FEAR's feet fade out and become Imogene's feet.

PAN UP: We're now at Imogene's house and she and Cory are practicing alone. They're adorable as they work together to refine their routine.

EXT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - DAY

Music continues as Cory and Imogene play hopscotch in her driveway as a break, but still working their feet.

INT. IMOGENE'S FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Cory and Imogene make the final pad switch and bring their routine to an impeccable end.

END MONTAGE.

INT. IMOGENE'S FAMILY ROOM - DUSK

Imogene tosses Cory a towel. He wipes his face.

IMOGENE

If we can do it like we just did the last three times we'll be Godzilla and the tournament will be Tokyo.

Imogene goose-steps, crushing imaginary office buildings.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)

Rawrrrr!

Cory laughs.

CUT TO:

EXT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Imogene waves from her door and closes it. Cory goes the long way to his car so he can skip across the hopscotch board.

CUT TO:

INT. OLIVER'S MANSION - GAME ROOM - NIGHT

Oliver and Hunter have just finished practicing their own routine on Oliver's real, full-size Dance Dance machines. Oliver's game room is immense and contains everything a sophisticated teenager with an unlimited budget could think of. A large carved Belgian coat of arms is hanging up at the far end of the room.

They hop off the machines.

OLIVER
Good work. Want a drink?

Hunter leans against a pool table.

HUNTER
Uh...root beer.

Oliver goes over to his Coke machine and presses buttons.
He tosses Hunter a root beer.

OLIVER
I don't know how you can drink that
filth. It tastes like medicine.

HUNTER
What kind of medicine?

OLIVER
Belgian medicine.

Hunter takes a big swig.

HUNTER
Mmm, delicious roots.

Oliver shakes his head and sips his bottled water.

HUNTER (CONT'D)
So - I bet you wish you were dancing with
Imogene instead of me.

OLIVER
You're very pretty, Hunter, but yes, I do
wish I was dancing with Imogene instead
of you.

Hunter tries to gather his hair back into a ponytail,
like Imogene's.

HUNTER
Better?

Oliver rolls his eyes and pulls the arm of a slot
machine.

HUNTER (CONT'D)
I think Cory's looking to eat your lunch,
dudebro.

OLIVER
"Eat my lunch?"

HUNTER

You know - jumpshot your game. Steal your donuts.

OLIVER

What? Cory? He's a nice kid, but come on. Not qualified. Imogene and I are inevitable.

HUNTER

Does she know that?

OLIVER

She knows.

CUT TO:

EXT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - PARKING LOT - DAY

Cory's battered Hyundai pulls into a parking space at Huerta Piers, a massive sports complex built on a long, wide dock that juts into the ocean.

INT. CORY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

It's clearly been a long night for Cory, who looks white and clammy.

He shifts his weight and takes out his wallet. He opens it and pulls something from the billfold: a picture of Dr. Lodge, about the size of a baseball card, with a gold foil border.

He flips it over. On the back is printed "Fear Is The Enemy of Your Dreams."

Cory looks over his shoulder. FEAR is in the back seat again, holding up one of his signs.

FEAR

(on sign)

YOUR DREAMS SUCK

Cory puts his head in his hands.

EXT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - PARKING LOT - MINUTES LATER

A black and red Bugatti Veyron pulls up to the valet parking station. Oliver gets out and gives his key to the attendant.

Oliver walks over to Imogene and Hunter, arriving just as Cory walks over from the other direction. Oliver and Hunter are wearing matching red track suits.

OLIVER

Hey Cory.

CORY

(still nervous)

Hi Oliver.

IMOGENE

(pumped)

Are you guys ready?

Cory gives a thumbs-up, but his hand is shaking.

CUT TO:

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - LATER

The kids come through the doors. Imogene, Hunter, and Oliver grin at each other in this familiar territory. But HOLD on Cory as he looks around, wide-eyed, taking it all in.

CORY'S POV: Flashing multicolored lights from the ceiling speckle the arena. Beneath them onlookers are clustered around the stages - some cheer, some heckle, some wear flashing LED jewelry - hundreds of people in all. Competing music from a variety of sources makes it hellaciously loud and chaotic.

Cory reels.

CORY

Oh my god.

Hunter and Oliver simultaneously unzip their matching track jackets, revealing identical tuxedo-print t-shirts.

HUNTER

What?

OLIVER

What?

Cory leans against a steel column. One second later, Imogene's arm comes into view and SLAPS his competition number onto his chest. WHACK! He pitches forward.

CUT TO:

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - LOCKER ROOM

The music from outside is somewhat muted here. There's a SCREAM, and a bunch of scared-looking kids STAMPEDE around a corner and out of the locker room. Three sputtering blue and white sparklers are HURLED after them, almost singeing the backs of a few heads.

We move towards the source of the disturbance and see FRITZ, team leader of the mighty Spangleferken, surrounded by his lieutenants, standing on a bench, TEARING OFF HIS WIFEBEATER.

FRITZ
SPANGLEFERKEN!

His muscles ripple. Johann and Klaus high-five.

FRITZ (CONT'D)
Fuel!

He tilts his head back and opens his mouth. Hurriedly his teammates whip out bunches of blue Pixi Stix, tear them open, and POUR THEM DOWN HIS THROAT.

When he looks up, his lips are blue and his eyes are full of fire.

FRITZ (CONT'D)
Victory is assured!

CUT TO:

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - LATER

Cory and Imogene are standing towards the front of the crowd gathered around the main stage for the doubles competition. While the rest of the crowd is moving to the background rave beat, Cory is standing perfectly still, breathing deeply. Imogene notices.

IMOGENE
Are you okay?

CORY
Imogene - I think I'm actually going to die if I have to go up there.

She takes his hand and squeezes it.

IMOGENE
I promise it'll be okay.

Beat.

CORY
(not okay)
Okay, great.

Imogene excitedly points up at the stage.

IMOGENE
Look!

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - MAIN STAGE -
CONTINUOUS

Hunter and Oliver have taken center stage and stand on the twin machines with their heads lowered. The background noise fades out and the lights go down.

MUSIC: THE GOSSIP - "STANDING IN THE WAY OF CONTROL
(SOULWAX REMIX)"

The music begins to THROB and Hunter and Oliver launch full speed into what can only be described as a BIG GAY DANCE.

To open, they JUMP IN PLACE to the rapid fire beat, matching the neon arrows precisely. As the vocals kick in, they WHIP off their track jackets and WHIRL THEM OVER THEIR HEADS LIKE LASSOS.

The crowd responds with whoops and cheers.

They continue dancing, throwing in a few hip thrusts and fake playful slaps to the face.

They SWITCH PADS and as the beat slows down at the bridge, Oliver exaggeratedly puts his hands around his mouth and BLOWS A GUST OF WIND at Hunter, who pantomimes being BLOWN BACKWARDS as if he were made of paper.

The beats intensify as the song nears its end and the boys go through a series of whip-fast "pattycake"-style hand claps.

The song ENDS. Hunter and Oliver produce what look like mini Nerf guns from their deep pockets and SHOOT THEM into the air. RED ROSE PETALS RAIN DOWN ON THE AUDIENCE, WHICH GOES NUTS.

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS
LATER

Hunter and Oliver HOP down from the stage. They pass Fritz and the other members of Spangleferken, who are limbering up in cobalt blue metallic unitards with a sequined silver lightening bolt starting at the neck and ending at the crotch.

FRITZ

Nice big gay dance, big gay fags.

They glare at him.

OLIVER

(mutters in Flemish)

Laat u door nen olifant pakken, eikel.

Fritz applies CLEAR LIP GLOSS and goes back to his teammates.

CUT TO:

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - BACKSTAGE

Cory is sitting on the floor between Imogene and FEAR, holding his knees to his chest. FEAR is decked out in black sequins. Imogene has her pink iPod out and they're sharing the earbuds.

A guy with a clipboard approaches them. He looks at the numbers on their chest, then down at his clipboard.

CLIPBOARD GUY

Cory and Imogene?

IMOGENE

That's us.

CLIPBOARD GUY

You're up.

CUT TO:

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - MAIN STAGE - MOMENTS
LATER

Cory and Imogene stand in position on the machine. Cory wipes some anticipation sweat from his brow and looks to Imogene. She winks at him. The music begins.

MUSIC: KENNA - "OUT OF CONTROL"

The song opens with a sweeping, upbeat synth line. Cory and Imogene STOMP in place and let their arms SWAY over their heads. They look upwards joyfully and give in to the happy vibe of the song.

Suddenly, the song BREAKS DOWN into a hip-hop beat and they POP AND LOCK like robots, balancing on their heels and bouncing, seemingly weightless.

While their routine is less flashy than Oliver and Hunter's, there is a harmony between them that transcends props. They SPIN IN PLACE, landing perfectly on the correct arrow tiles.

The crowd cheers.

They each put their legs together and JUMP using both feet, from side to side and back to front. As the chorus begins, they JOIN HANDS across both pads and do the moves SIDEWAYS! The crowd goes "WHOA!" Cory DUCKS down and Imogene LEAPFROGS OVER HIS BACK, landing perfectly timed on newly lit arrows.

The song breaks down once more, and they SWITCH PADS again. As the song gets into the homestretch, they do the LIQUID WAVE in perfect sync.

The song ends with a BANG and the crowd CHEERS LOUDLY.

PUSH IN on Cory, lit up with neon flashes, amazed at what he just did. A smile spreads across his face.

Imogene drapes her arm around his shoulders. In the audience, Hunter TAKES A PICTURE OF THEM with his phone.

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - MAIN STAGE

Now is the time for Spangleferken. Fritz and Johann are in place, and the crowd VIBRATES with excitement. The boys are completely still until:

MUSIC: METALLICA - "RIDE THE LIGHTNING"

The only word that comes to mind when watching Fritz and Johann dance is: RUTHLESS. There is no question that Spangleferken is unbeatable. Their moves are so sharp that you get paper cuts on your eyes just from watching them.

They SWITCH PADS with every second beat, showing no mercy or exertion.

They RUN IN PLACE, POUND the platform with their fists, and take turns doing KILLER ROUNDHOUSE kicks over the other's head, their eyes PULSING with HATRED AND EXCELLENCE!

When James Hetfield sings "*There's someone else controlling me*" Fritz JUMPS UP ONTO THE METAL DANCE BAR and mimes PUPPETEERING Johann, who MOVES JERKILY like a MARIONETTE.

CUT TO:

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - ELECTRICAL CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Klaus, clad in a leopard print leotard waits for his cue. As soon as he hears the lyric

"Wait for the sign / to flip the switch of death"

He THROWS two huge switches, one for the HOUSE LIGHTS and another for:

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - MAIN STAGE - CONTINUOUS

THE BLACKLIGHTS! The arena is THROWN INTO DARKNESS and the main stage goes PURPLE, illuminating Fritz and Johann's SECRET COSTUMES: BLACKLIGHT SKELETONS. Their faces are terrifying skulls and their bodies are glowing bones. The crowd GASPS. Ultra-luminescent, they continue dancing eerily.

After another minute, the lights turn back ON. Now is the moment in the song where it goes INSANE, segueing into RELENTLESS SPEED METAL GUITAR THRASH. This is one of the most DIFFICULT SONGS in the ENTIRE Dance Dance pantheon.

SPLIT SCREEN:

On the LEFT is the Dance Dance game monitor, where a HAIL of SIXTEEN ARROWS A SECOND fall continuously. Combinations flash by and every single one is outlined in GREEN; ALL PERFECT.

On the RIGHT, Fritz's FEET. They are MOVING SO FAST that they're almost a blur.

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - AUDIENCE - CONTINUOUS

Cory, Imogene, Oliver and Hunter stand in the crowd, AGAPE. Nobody can believe what they're seeing.

OLIVER

Damn.

CUT TO:

INT. HUERTA PIERS SPORTS COMPLEX - MAIN STAGE - LATER

Cory and his team are back onstage, alongside all the other competitors in their division. They're still shell-shocked from Spangleferken's performance. Fritz and his teammates look bored.

The three JUDGES emerge from backstage, each holding a trophy.

JUDGE #1

Now the moment you've been waiting for!

The crowd cheers.

JUDGE #1 (CONT'D)

We've seen a lot of amazing routines here today, and now it's time to name the winners. Despite creating a fire hazard, first place goes to: SPANGLEFERKEN!

The crowd is PUMPED! They wave their glowsticks in the air and cheer and whistle.

Judge #1 presents Fritz with an impressive five-foot-tall trophy.

FRITZ

(to crowd)

Danke schein, bitches!

Oliver chin-flicks Fritz. Fritz makes a kissy-face at him and starts walking away. As he passes Cory, he gives him a HARD STARE. Cory flinches.

JUDGE #2

Second place goes to...Green Arrows!

Imogene, Cory, Hunter and Oliver jump up and down excitedly. Imogene gives Cory a quick hug and runs to collect the trophy. Cory is dazzled.

CORY
(to Hunter)
We got second place!

HUNTER
I know, right?

CORY
Wow!

CUT TO:

INT. GOOMBA'S PIZZA - NIGHT

Cory and the kids share a celebratory pizza, their huge trophy sitting on the table for all to see.

IMOGENE
(raising her glass)
To Cory's first tournament!

They clink their plastic glasses and Hunter ruffles Cory's hair.

Imogene pulls the trophy to her face and pretends to make out with it.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)
I love you. I love you, second place.

Cory dies a little.

A group of four teenage hipsters with asymmetrical haircuts, mesh shirts, and bandanas step in front of the table. Their wrists are wrapped in neon green sports tape. Their leader is wearing a GUITAR HERO t-shirt.

GUITAR HERO #1
Hey tards.

HUNTER
Uh...I think you got the wrong table.

GUITAR HERO #1
That's a Dance Dance trophy, isn't it?

IMOGENE
So?

GUITAR HERO #1
(points to his t-shirt)
The future is Guitar Hero! Dance Dance
is OVER!

HUNTER

Your face is over, and my fist is the
future - of your face!

All four Guitar Heroes step forward.

GUITAR HERO #1

(shaking his bandaged fist)
Man, if it wasn't for my carpal tunnel,
I'd kick all your candy asses right now!

They spin on their heels and retreat.

CORY

What the hell was that?

HUNTER

Guitar Hero players, homeboy. All talk,
no rock.

Oliver leans back in his chair.

OLIVER

So let's do it.

He and Hunter and Imogene each grab hold of one of the
four gold DDR statuettes attached to the trophy. Oliver
puts Cory's hand on the fourth one.

CORY

What are you guys--

They simultaneously SNAP OFF the statuettes. Cory
hesitates.

IMOGENE

Go for it.

He breaks off the last dancer.

CUT TO:

EXT. GOOMBA'S PIZZA - PARKING LOT - LATER

Imogene and Hunter hoist their gold statues in the air
and wave before getting into Hunter's muddy pickup truck.
Cory and Oliver wave back and head to their cars, which
are parked next to each other.

Oliver gets his keys out and nudges Cory.

OLIVER
I noticed you seemed quite anxious before
the tournament.

Cory tries to deflect the question.

CORY
Yeah, well...I mean it was my first big
thing, so...I just...was nervous.

Oliver studies him.

OLIVER
Listen, Cory, you might not believe it,
but I have the same problem you do.

Cory sees FEAR standing behind Oliver, holding up a sign.

FEAR
(on sign)
WHAT?!

CORY
(to Oliver)
I don't think you do.

OLIVER
Be that as it may, I have a way of
dealing with my moments of unsteadiness.

Oliver reaches inside his jacket and pulls out a glass
vial with a silver cap. It's full of small orange
tablets. He unscrews the cap, taps one into the palm of
his hand and offers it to Cory.

Cory takes it.

CORY
What is this?

OLIVER
Xanax. It makes you feel better.

Beat. Cory stares at the orange tablet in his hand.

OLIVER (CONT'D)
Save it for the next time. I can get as
many as you need.

CORY
(uncertain)
Thanks.

Oliver opens his car door and gets in.

OLIVER

No problem.

Oliver's Bugatti screeches off. Cory looks down at the pill.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Franklin is flopped in front of the TV, eyes riveted on the screen, watching his and Lois's wedding video.

Cory enters. Seeing his father, he quickly shoves his part of the trophy in his jacket.

CORY

Hey Dad, what are you doing up so late?

FRANKLIN

What are you doing home so late?

CORY

(changing the subject)

Is that you and Mom?

Franklin sighs.

FRANKLIN

It is indeed.

ONSCREEN: Franklin takes a tumble into the giant speakers.

CORY

Uh-oh.

FRANKLIN

Your poor mother. Look at that.

ONSCREEN: Lois is straining to help Franklin up.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

She deserved a real wedding dance. I knew I didn't have moves, but I thought I could fake my way through it.

Cory picks up the remote and rewinds back to the fall.

CORY

(pointing)

You crossed your feet.

FRANKLIN

Where?

CORY

I'll show you.

Franklin gets up. Cory reenacts Franklin's dance steps up until he went wrong, and then pauses. Cory crosses his left foot behind his right.

CORY (CONT'D)

You did this--

He shifts his weight to the inside of his front foot, making him stumble back.

CORY (CONT'D)

When you should have done this.

He puts the weight on the ball of his back foot and does a quick spin in place.

CORY (CONT'D)

Plus you were wearing pointy '70s boots.

FRANKLIN

Let me try that.

He crosses his feet and leans on his back foot.

CORY

Now spin on your back foot.

Franklin's spin is a little wobbly, but he pulls it off.

FRANKLIN

(proudly)

I'm going to practice this tomorrow in my office with the door closed.

CORY

I can give you more pointers later, if you want.

Franklin smiles, then becomes serious.

FRANKLIN

What time is it?

Cory checks his watch.

CORY

Two.

FRANKLIN

Go to bed.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Cory lies under the covers, staring at his bedside table. On it: his hard-won piece of trophy and the little orange Xanax.

Cory sighs and looks over at his calender. All the days have been crossed out up until the big day: July 4th. Ten days remain until Dr. Lodge's seminar in Vegas.

TIME LAPSE: Sun, moon, sun, moon. One by one, each of the days up until July 3rd are crossed out on the calendar.

FADE OUT.

INT. SANRIO STORE - DAY

Cory is sitting behind the counter, chin on fist, bored. The store is empty.

A pair of pink sparkly Hello Kitty fairy wings gently float into frame, flapping like a butterfly.

MUSIC: THE LEFT BANKE - "PRETTY BALLERINA"

"I had a date with a pretty ballerina / her hair so brilliant that it hurt my eyes"

Cory perks up. He goes around the counter, grabs the fluttering wings out of the air and puts them on.

"I asked her for this dance / and then she obliged me"

CLOSE ON: Cory's feet - lifting upwards until only his toes scrape the carpet as he floats forward.

"Was I surprised, yeah / Was I surprised? No not at all"

A color-changing fairy wand with a star on the end falls from the ceiling and Cory CATCHES it in his right hand.

A Hello Kitty toaster floats toward him. It turns in midair and waves its cord, as if beckoning him. Enchanted, he points his wand at it.

CUT TO:

INT. SANRIO STORE - LATER

Cory's boss, Perky Blonde Girl, towers over us.

PERKY BLONDE GIRL

I. Don't. Think. You. Take. This.
Job. Seriously enough!

Cory cowers. His Hello Kitty apron is wrapped around his head like a turban and he's wearing the pink fairy wings, a tutu, and holding the color-changing wand. In his other hand is a piece of Hello Kitty toast, and a Hello Kitty guitar is strapped across his chest.

CORY

(mouth full of toast)

I take it VERY seriously!

PERKY BLONDE GIRL

I don't think you do. I don't think you
even know my name!

Beat.

CORY

Hello...Bossy?

PERKY BLONDE GIRL

You're fired.

CUT TO:

INT. MALL - OUTSIDE SANRIO STORE - MINUTES LATER

Cory holds up his keychain, from which dangles a silver USB key and a plastic Hello Kitty charm.

CORY

(to Hello Kitty)

I'm sorry.

CORY'S POV: He lowers the keychain, revealing Imogene, who is sitting on a nearby bench sipping an Orange Julius. She waves.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROOF OF PARKING STRUCTURE - LATER

Imogene's silver Honda is the only car parked on the top level. She's sitting on the hood.

IMOGENE

So how long did you work there?

CORY
Three and a half weeks.

IMOGENE
Wow, that's pretty fast to get fired.

CORY
Actually, that's the longest I've ever
worked anywhere. (fake suave) I don't
like to stay in one place too long.

She laughs.

IMOGENE
Where'd you work before that?

CORY
A spoon factory downtown.

IMOGENE
Is that next to the knife and fork
factories?

Cory laughs.

CORY
(looking around)
Why are you parked up here?

IMOGENE
I always park on the roof.

She walks towards the low wall at the edge of the roof,
and Cory follows. The view is of mountains in the
distance.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)
See? Look how pretty.

CORY
(looking at Imogene, ignoring
the view)
Uh huh.

Beat.

IMOGENE
So, what are you going to do now? Are
you looking for other jobs?

CORY
No, I think I'm going to Vegas.

IMOGENE

Vegas? Why?

CORY

I've just got something I have to do there.

IMOGENE

Slots and prostitutes?

CORY

No! No, no...nothing like that. What do you have lined up?

IMOGENE

Well, I'm going to start studying for my AP classes next year, and I mean...my sister's getting married in a couple weeks so I have all these fittings and stuff, and tomorrow Oliver wants me to go with him to Ojai for 4th of July.

CORY

Oh. Oliver does?

IMOGENE

Yeah.

CORY

Is Hunter going?

IMOGENE

No, just me and Oliver. It's a little weird because we used to go out.

CORY

(dying inside)

Oh, really?

IMOGENE

Yeah, last year.

CORY

Why did you break up?

Beat.

IMOGENE

(thoughtfully)

Well, we never really *broke up* exactly.

Cory is looking a little sick.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK

CORY'S POV: Imogene looks down at him.

IMOGENE

I'm sorry, Cory, I'm off the market.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. ROOF OF PARKING STRUCTURE - RESUME

Cory tries to keep it together.

CORY

Oh. Well, have fun I guess.

IMOGENE

Yeah, I think it'll be a lot of fun actually. Ojai is really really nice.

She looks at her cell phone.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)

Oh, I have to go! It was really good bumping into you. Call me when you get back from Vegas, partner.

Still holding her Orange Julius cup, she gives him a half-hug. He takes it, looking wrecked. She gets in her car and drives off. Cory looks mournfully after her.

After a second, he turns and VOMITS over the side of the wall.

CORY

(vomiting)

HHHHHRRRRUUUUUUUUUUURRRRGGGGGHHH!

CUT TO:

EXT. PICK 'N' PAY CHECK CASHING - DUSK

Cory stands in line at a yellow, sketchy-ass check cashing joint. The vagrant in front of him shuffles off, and it's Cory's turn to speak to the old woman behind bullet-proof glass.

He slides her his driver's licence and a pink Hello Kitty paycheck.

OLD WOMAN
(into microphone)
You understand we deduct one percent of
the total.

CORY
Great.

She feeds the check through a TeleCheck verification machine and then slides Cory a stack of twenties, which he stuffs into his pocket.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lois is reading *Life & Style* at the kitchen table. Cory enters, looking somewhat out of sorts.

LOIS
Hi honey. What's--

CORY
Got fired. I'll be in my room.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

Cory dumps the contents of his money jar in the middle of the floor. He spreads out the bills with both hands before making piles.

ANGLE ON: The calender. The amount he needs is circled...\$695.

Twenties, tens, fives, ones. He makes the final tally on his yellow legal pad: \$703.

CORY
NICE!

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALLS' HOUSE - NOON

Cory sneaks across his lawn, carrying a duffel bag. He unlocks his car, throws the duffel in the backseat, and gets in.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Cory's stopped at a stop sign. Mike's Grocery Truck rolls up next to him, going in the other direction.

Mike leans out the window.

MIKE

Hey, where you going, little man?

CORY

(happily)

Out!

Mike pumps his fist.

MIKE

Woo!

They both drive on.

CUT TO:

INT. CORY'S CAR - DAY

Cory's driving on Highway 15, on the way to Las Vegas. He takes the card with Dr. Lodge's face on it and sticks it on his dashboard.

Cory passes a huge sign on the side of the road: WORLD'S LARGEST TRASH CAN - 5mi.

Something occurs to him.

CUT TO:

EXT. WORLD'S LARGEST TRASH CAN - MINUTES LATER

It's an off day for the World's Largest Trash Can; only three or four tourists linger on the grass, taking pictures.

Cory climbs the metal stairs that lead to the lip of the gargantuan trash can. He digs in his pocket and pulls out a tiny plastic Ziploc, which holds the orange Xanax given to him by Oliver.

He takes out the pill and looks at it for a second, then FLINGS IT INTO THE ABYSS. It disappears.

EXT. LAS VEGAS HIGHWAY - DAY

Cory's car speeds past a LAS VEGAS - 75mi sign.

CUT TO:

EXT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - DAY

Oliver is in Imogene's driveway, looking all handsome, leaning against his Bentley convertible.

Imogene runs down the front steps and tosses her backpack at him. He catches it and throws it in the backseat. He gives her Euro kisses on both cheeks.

CUT TO:

INT. CORY'S CAR - DAY

Cory takes out his cell phone and speed dials his mom.

CORY

Hi Mom.

CUT TO:

INT. LOIS AND FRANKLIN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lois is putting on red, white and blue earrings.

LOIS

Hey, where are you?

CUT TO:

INT. CORY'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

CORY

(awkward lie)

I forgot to tell you, I'm sleeping over at my friend Hunter's house.

LOIS

(on phone)

Oh, so you're not coming with us to Leilani's party? That's for the best, anyway. She's kind of a drunk. (beat) It's so nice that you have friends now.

CORY

Okay, well, I just wanted to let you know
where I am.

Roadside: a huge billboard for a Vegas strip club with a
half-naked showgirl on it. Cory averts his eyes.

LOIS

(on phone)

No problem, honey. Have fun, I love you!

CORY

I love you too.

He hangs up, looking guilty, and puts the phone back in
his pocket.

In the rearview mirror he sees FEAR, who's holding up a
sign.

FEAR

(on sign)

I WONDER WHAT IMOGENE AND OLIVER ARE
DOING RIGHT NOW?

CUT TO:

EXT. TROPICAL PARADISE DREAM SEQUENCE - DAY

Oliver is lying out on a deck chair, wearing a white
Gucci three-piece suit with mirrored aviators and white
patent leather shoes.

Imogene climbs out of the pool, wearing a bikini made of
sparkling diamonds. An oiled manservant appears at her
side and places a BRIDAL VEIL on top of her head.

Oliver sits up.

OLIVER

I'm so glad you agreed to marry me in
five and a half years when we're done
with college. Why don't you come over
here and kiss me.

Imogene flips back the veil. She radiates happiness.

IMOGENE

Oh Oliver! You're so handsome and rich
and stuff! I never stopped loving you,
and I never felt anything for Cory
Smalls.

She runs into his arms. He removes his sunglasses and starts LICKING HER FACE.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)
You're sooooo good at kissing!

OLIVER
It's because I'm European, baby.

CUT TO:

INT. CORY'S CAR - DAY

CORY
Ahhh!

CUT TO:

EXT. OJAI - REALITY - SAME TIME

Imogene and Oliver are sitting on a bench by Lake Casitas, feeding ducks. In contrast to Cory's fantasy, Imogene is wearing cargo shorts, a polo shirt, and her hair is pulled back in a ponytail like always.

OLIVER
Do you want to play a game of badminton before dinner?

Imogene brightens.

IMOGENE
Oo, okay!

They throw the rest of their bread in the water.

EXT. LAS VEGAS - DUSK

From above, Vegas is a glittering neon treasure chest.

At a traffic light, Cory peeks out of his car window. He's surrounded on both sides by stretch Hummer limos. He rolls his window up.

An Elvis impersonator on stilts, fat tourists in billowing Hawaiian shirts, a cop on a horse and a homeless busker with a guitar strapped across his chest cross the street in front of Cory's car. FEAR has moved up to the front seat, and Cory looks overwhelmed by the spectacle.

EXT. WYNN HOTEL - DUSK

Cory stands in front of the Wynn Hotel, a colossal gold palace. Hanging down the front is a HUGE vertical banner with Dr. Lodge's face on it. Cory takes a deep breath: destiny time!

INT. WYNN HOTEL - MINUTES LATER

Cory enters the lobby. It's crimson and gold, with intricate moldings and huge fabric lanterns. People are everywhere.

He sees a sign for the Mental Wealth seminar and starts walking in that direction.

INT. WYNN HOTEL THEATER - ENTRANCE - MINUTES LATER

Cory stands in line for registration. He's underdressed and at least fifteen years younger than anyone else there.

He finally reaches the front of the line and steps up to the desk. The gold vested registration guy types something into his computer.

REGISTRATION GUY

Your name?

CORY

Cory Watende Smalls.

Beat.

REGISTRATION GUY

Um--

CORY

W-A-T-E-N-D-E.

REGISTRATION GUY

Thank you.

The registration guy types in Cory's name.

REGISTRATION GUY (CONT'D)

That'll be \$695. Credit or debit?

Cory pulls out his huge wad of bills and SLAMS it down on the counter.

CORY

Cash.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE DR. LODGE'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Dr. Lodge is sitting in a leather chair with his eyes closed, listening to Bach and taking long, even breaths. A gold tie hangs undone around his neck.

PAN around him. His MANAGER, a smooth-looking New York type in his mid 30s is silently texting on his BlackBerry.

INT. WYNN HOTEL THEATER - MOMENTS LATER

The house lights are dim. Cory takes his seat in the audience next to a man in a tweed jacket and a woman in a storybook sweater from QVC.

Cory turns to the woman. Brimming with excitement, he does something slightly out of character and leans toward her.

CORY

Hi, I'm Cory!

She beams him a smile.

WOMAN

Hi Cory, I'm Peg.

Hearing them talk, the guy on the other side of Cory joins the conversation.

GUY

Hello, I'm Matthew.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE - DR. LODGE'S DRESSING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dr. Lodge is standing, looking in the dressing room mirror, adjusting his tie's Windsor knot. He looks supremely powerful and confident.

INT. WYNN HOTEL THEATER - MOMENTS LATER

The house lights go down and the stage lights go up. GOLD METALLIC CONFETTI RAINS DOWN FROM THE CEILING. Cory GASPS. A silhouette appears behind two opera screens and walks from stage left to center.

The screens separate, revealing DR. LODGE, dressed in a two-piece suit cut from gold leather. He's holding a microphone in his left hand.

The crowd is on its feet CHEERING, Cory the loudest.

Dr. Lodge bows and calmly accepts the crowd's adulation.

DR. LODGE

Namaste, and thank you. Welcome to your personal independence day.

Cory is so excited that he is squeezing the arm of his chair. His eyes are completely, unblinkingly locked on his idol.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

Today I want to talk to you about fear and courage. The symbol of courage is a lion, but courage is not a lion.

He pauses.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

Let me tell you a story from my life. When I was a child, I was attacked by a sand shark. I must have frightened it, because they don't usually bite - it took a chunk out of my calf. My father pulled the shark out of the water and ripped it in half. Blood was everywhere. I developed a terrible phobia of sharks. I would not go back in the ocean, or even to the beach.

The audience is rapt.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

You'd think it wouldn't matter; so I didn't go to the ocean. But fear is like a poison. It gets in your system and corrodes your spirit.

The stage lights go blue and the shadow of a shark is projected on the giant flat background behind him, swimming menacingly.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

In my twenties, after I trained with the monks of the Wat Phra Kaew temple in Thailand, I held a strong belief that what I had to do next was face my deepest, innermost fear in order to transcend my past. I went to South Africa, to the Indian Ocean, where I had divers put me in a cage and lower me into the water.

He stops and stares out into the back of the silent theater.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

I had not adequately prepared myself for the reality of the situation.

The audience laughs nervously.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

I was utterly terrified. As the cage sunk down into the depths, it felt as if my eyes were there, watching, but my soul had stayed on the surface.

He switches the microphone to his right hand.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

After some time, I saw a tiny black shadow in the murky distance which grew larger and larger as it came toward me. All I could hear was the sound of my own breathing. I crouched down and tried to make myself as small as possible. And then there it was, right in front of me: a great white shark, the most ferocious of its kind. It was the size of a Greyhound bus, and all teeth. At that moment, I thought: man, why was I so freaked out by that little sand shark?

The audience laughs.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

It hovered in front of my cage, and I looked directly at it. It felt like all of the fear I had ever experienced was compressed into that one moment. I was frozen.

Beat.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

A bubble escaped from the shark's mouth. Then it turned and swam away. I pulled the signal cord and they raised me to the surface.

He walks to the edge of the stage.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)

Courage is not a lion. Fear is not a shark. I expected that once I faced my greatest fear, I would be free of all fear for the rest of my life. But I wasn't. And what I realized was that I had misdirected my efforts. The shark didn't care about me. It wasn't a symbol. It was a living entity, separate from me, and I was below its level of interest. My fear came from inside myself, was woven into the fabric of my being. That was what I had to overcome: what was inside. After that point, what I reached for was personal independence. And that is the theme of our seminar to come. Thank you for being here.

The crowd ERUPTS in applause and cheers and Cory stands up and quickly climbs out of his row.

INT. WYNN HOTEL THEATER - BACKSTAGE - MINUTES LATER

Cory peeks around the darkened backstage corridor. A few technicians mill around speakers and a burly SECURITY GUARD with a headset stands in front of Dr. Lodge's dressing room. Cory RUNS up to him, seemingly in distress.

SECURITY GUARD

Kid, you can't be back here.

CORY

I know, I'm sorry, it's just that I saw this sketchy guy and I think he's going to hurt somebody.

The security guard holds up his hand.

SECURITY GUARD

Hold on, hold on. What exactly did you see?

CORY

I was leaving the theater and I felt someone bump into me and I thought it was an elbow but I looked and I think this guy had a gun in his jacket.

SECURITY GUARD

You think or you know?

CORY

No, I mean...I saw it.

SECURITY GUARD

What did he look like and where was he going?

CORY

He was white, a little taller than me, brown hair, brown jacket, and I think he was going to the buffet with everyone else.

The security guard touches a button on his headset.

SECURITY GUARD

All right. You did the right thing, kid.

Cory watches the guard run to the exit. He puts his face in his hands.

CORY

(muffled)

I'm sorry security guy!

He collects himself and OPENS DR. LODGE'S DOOR.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. LODGE'S DRESSING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dr. Lodge kneels in front of a beautiful, naked showgirl who's lying face down on a chaise lounge. He measures out a generous LINE OF COCAINE onto her ass with a JACOB ORSON COMMEMORATIVE SPOON.

As he snorts it he hears a strange SQUEAKING noise. He turns.

Cory is in the doorway, eyes bugged out, looking like he just saw the Pope shoot a kitten. His throat emits another terrified SQUEAK.

Dr. Lodge swivels towards Cory.

DR. LODGE

Hey, kid.

Beat.

CORY

Um...what you said was so amazing, I had to meet you.

Dr. Lodge stands up and extends his hand.

DR. LODGE

(amused)

Hi, I'm Dr. Robert Lodge.

Cory stares at Dr. Lodge's hand, and then at his face. A smidge of white powder is stuck on his nostril.

CORY

WHAT THE FUCK?!

Dr. Lodge chuckles and heads back to the showgirl.

CORY (CONT'D)

No, wait! But...you're my hero! I subscribed to your podcast on iTunes, I did the Mental Wealth assignments...I even used your Total Power Recharge! I worked all summer to save money to come here and I even lied to my mom about where I was going! Do you have any idea what you've just done to me?

Dr. Lodge turns back.

DR. LODGE

What's your name?

CORY

Cory.

DR. LODGE

Listen, Cory. First of all, you're way too young to be here. Your problems consist of which acne cream to buy and what color hoodie to wear tomorrow. This is a program for adults. You're not an adult.

CORY

But I have problems, and my problems are real. I thought your podcasts were helping me.

DR. LODGE
I've helped a lot of people.

CORY
But...you're a liar! All that enlightenment comes from within and family is the building block of Mental Wealth stuff and here you are doing drugs with some naked lady!

The showgirl turns her head.

SHOWGIRL
I'm Jennifer.

CORY
With Jennifer! I thought you had a wife and kids and stuff!

DR. LODGE
What I do in my private life is none of anyone's business. I didn't invite you in here and I'd like you to leave.

Beat.

CORY
I just can't believe it. You're a liar, a hypocrite and a fraud.

Beat. Dr. Lodge clenches his teeth and PUNCHES CORY IN THE FACE. Cory drops to the ground. Jennifer SCREAMS.

DR. LODGE
You want truth?

Dr. Lodge reaches in his jacket pocket and THROWS a handful of his token GOLD CONFETTI onto Cory's prone body.

DR. LODGE (CONT'D)
Life is suffering.

CUT TO:

EXT. OJAI - NIGHT

A firework EXPLODES in the sky.

Imogene is sitting on a picnic blanket, looking at the picture of her and Cory that Hunter took at the tournament in Huerta on her phone.

Oliver comes walking toward her and she slips her phone into her pocket. He sits down next to her, pretty close.

OLIVER

I'm so glad you're here, Immi.

Imogene smiles, still looking at the sky.

IMOGENE

Me too.

OLIVER

It could be like this all the time.

Imogene looks at him.

IMOGENE

Oliver. We tried that, remember? It's much better this way.

OLIVER

For who?

IMOGENE

Both of us.

OLIVER

I don't think so. I think you're lonely without me.

IMOGENE

Oh my god. Oliver. I'm not lonely at all. I'm totally fulfilled, just me and my minerals.

He takes her hand.

OLIVER

You're the only thing in the world I want that I can't have.

Beat. Imogene looks down.

Oliver withdraws his hand.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

Is there someone else?

IMOGENE

No. I just want to be friends with you.

OLIVER

Friends don't break hearts.

IMOGENE
Your heart's fine.

Oliver lies back on his elbows and looks thoughtfully at her.

OLIVER
There's really no one else?

Imogene opens her mouth to say no and then stops. She looks at her light-up sneakers, which BLINK. A small realization comes over her.

IMOGENE
Actually...maybe there is.

Oliver sits up.

Who? OLIVER

IMOGENE
...Cory.

CORY? Cory Smalls OLIVER

IMOGENE

Yeah.

Oliver GETS UP.

OLIVER
Jesus Christ.

He starts WALKING AWAY.

IMOGENE
Where are you going?

OLIVER
(over his shoulder)
I'm going to get some food.

He leaves.

Imogene looks back up at the sky and slowly TAKES HER
HAIR OUT OF THE PONYTAIL. It falls around her shoulders.

A blue firework EXPLODES in the atmosphere and is reflected in her eye as it fades.

EXT. WYNN HOTEL - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Cory DRAGS himself to his car, fireworks exploding behind him. He leans heavily on his car, gets out his keys, laboriously unlocks the door and slumps down behind the wheel.

CUT TO:

INT. CORY'S CAR - NIGHT

Cory drives home from Vegas. His eye is so swollen that he can't open it and the flesh around it is purple and red with burst blood vessels. Fear is sitting next to him in the passenger seat. An upbeat song is playing on his stereo. Fear shuts it OFF.

CUT TO:

INT. MIKE'S GROCERY TRUCK - NIGHT

Mike reclines on a potato sack, playing solitaire and watching a portable television mounted in the corner of the truck.

The California Lottery drawing comes on and Mike absentmindedly takes a lottery ticket out of his shirt pocket. He holds it in his mouth and puts a jack onto a queen.

LOTTERY ANNOUNCER

And the first number is...17!

Mike takes the ticket out of his mouth and looks at it. He looks back at the screen.

LOTTERY ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

4!

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

Mike's grocery truck is parked in front of a vacant lot.

Silence.

Suddenly, Mike's wild ecstatic SCREAMS emit from within and the truck SHAKES and BOUNCES.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALLS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Cory rolls to a stop in front of his house. The lights are on in the kitchen and he can see Lois and Franklin through the window. They're eating leftovers and talking.

Cory pauses, checking his eye in the visor mirror. He looks back to his parents. There's no way he can go in there and face them.

He drives off.

EXT. CORY'S NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

Cory pulls up outside a playground and shuts the engine off.

He reclines his seat, wraps his hoodie around him tightly and closes his eyes.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - CORY'S NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

Cory's sleeping, curled up with his arm across his face.

He MOANS and tries to sit up. Remembering where he is, he puts his seat back upright and looks around. His eye looks worse, having darkened overnight.

After a moment, he takes his wallet out of his jeans and removes the gold-bordered image of Dr. Lodge. He RIPS it up into tiny pieces.

EXT. ANDREA'S PET STORE - MORNING

The same bright pink building he used to pass on his way to the spoon factory. He goes inside.

CUT TO:

INT. ANDREA'S PET STORE - MINUTES LATER

Cory is sitting on the floor of a small white room, covered in kittens, WEEPING.

FRITZ BRÄUHLICH, leader of Spangleferken, stops in the doorway of the kitten room. He is holding a large floppy-eared bunny in his arms.

Fritz stares at Cory. Cory stops wailing and stares at Fritz.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANDREA'S PET STORE - MORNING

Cory and Fritz sit on opposite ends of a bench. Fritz's scooter rests on the pavement.

A long, awkward silence passes between them.

FRITZ

What happened to your eye?

Cory raises his head.

CORY

I got punched in it.

FRITZ

By who?

CORY

Someone I never thought would punch me in the eye in a million years.

FRITZ

Ah.

Beat.

FRITZ (CONT'D)

Have you put ice on it?

CORY

No.

FRITZ

Go to your house and do so.

CORY

I can't go home looking like this. My parents would freak out.

Cory looks at his shoes. There's a little piece of gold confetti in the laces. He flicks it off.

CORY (CONT'D)

I just have to figure out what to do until it goes away.

FRITZ

Perhaps you should go to Cabo for the next two weeks.

CORY

Oh god. What am I supposed to do?

Beat. Fritz looks uncomfortable.

FRITZ

Well...why don't you come and have brunch with me and my aunt. We have ice at the house and also small pastries.

Cory looks at Fritz.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANDREA'S PET STORE - MINUTES LATER

Fritz folds up his scooter and puts it in the trunk of Cory's Hyundai. Cory closes the trunk.

INT. CORY'S CAR - MINUTES LATER

Cory and Fritz are driving down a residential street. No one is talking. After a minute, Fritz glances at Cory.

FRITZ

Do you have any music?

Cory pushes a button on the radio. The deep baseline intro to Ginuwine's "Pony" comes on.

BWOMP. BWOMP BWOMP BWOMP.

Cory immediately starts singing along softly. This is his jam.

CORY

(singing)

I'm just a bach-e-lor / Lookin' for a partner

Fritz gives Cory a "I can't believe what I'm hearing" look.

CORY (CONT'D)
*Someone who knows to ride / without even
 fallin' off*

Cory starts to lose himself and sings louder. Fritz
 stares at him.

CORY (CONT'D)
*Gotta be compatible / Takes me to my
 limits / Girl when I break you off / I
 promise that you won't wanna get off*

Suddenly, Fritz JOINS IN.

CORY (CONT'D)
 (singing loudly)
*If you're horny, let's do
 it / Ride it / My pony / My
 saddle's waitin' / Come and
 JUMP ON IT*

FRITZ
 (singing loudly)
*Eef you're hornay, let's
 doo eet / Vride eet / My
 pony / My saddle's waiteeng
 / Come und JUMP ON EET*

CUT TO:

EXT. FRITZ' HOUSE - DAY

Fritz' house is a lovely, large California ranch-style
 with a flowering front lawn.

Fritz opens the front door.

INT. FRITZ' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Cory follows Fritz inside.

FRITZ
 (yelling)
 Greta, I'm home! We have a visitor!

GRETA
 (O.S., German accent)
 Okay!

GRETA, Fritz's aunt, enters fresh from the garden. She's
 wearing overalls smudged with dirt and her blonde hair is
 messy. She's wearing no makeup but is quite pretty.

She pulls off a thick gardening glove and extends her
 hand to shake with Cory, but immediately zones in on his
 bruise.

GRETA (CONT'D)
 Oh no! What happened to your eye?

CORY
I got punched in i--

GRETA
(waving her hands)
FRITZ, get me some ice!

CUT TO:

INT. FRITZ' HOUSE - KITCHEN

Cory sits with Fritz and Greta at the table in their sun-filled kitchen, holding a big bag of ice to his face.

Greta holds out a bird-shaped mini-Danish.

GRETA
More Leipziger lerchen, sweetheart?

CORY
Oka--

She gently shoves the pastry bird into his mouth.

CORY (CONT'D)
Mmm.

Fritz looks bored. Greta sighs.

GRETA
(sighing)
I wish I wore makeup so I could fix your face.

Fritz rolls his eyes.

FRITZ
(getting up)
I'll get mine.

He EXITS.

Beat.

CORY
Greta, can I ask you something?

GRETA
Of course.

CORY

Okay, well, I'm in love with this girl, Imogene, and I don't think she's interested in me. In fact, she might be camping out in this handsome rich guy's pants right now. What should I do? Should I just try to be cool and then never talk to her about it--

Greta POUNDS the table.

GRETA

NO! Cory, you must tell her how you're feeling! Show her how you love her! Buy her something nice.

CORY

But I spent all my money!

She takes his hand.

GRETA

Cory, don't be timid. If you don't at least tell her how you feel, you will never know how she feels and you will always regret missing the opportunity.

FRITZ

(O.S.)

Cory, are you a winter or a summer?

CORY

(yelling back)

What?

FRITZ

(O.S.)

Do you have pink or yellow undertones?

CUT TO:

INT. FRITZ' ROOM - DAY

A shrine to Fritz' Dance Dance dominance. His lightning bolt unitard is hanging up over the back of his bathroom door. The entire back wall holds a portion of Spangleferken's first-place Dance Dance trophies.

Cory sits on a chair and Fritz artfully applies concealer to his eye.

CORY

Greta's awesome.

FRITZ
Yes, she is wonderful.

Cory spots a framed picture of a young Fritz and his blonde, attractive parents.

CORY
So, where are your parents? Are they in Germany?

FRITZ
They are not alive anymore.

CORY
Oh my god. I'm so sorry.

Fritz shrugs.

FRITZ
It was some time ago now. Greta took me to America for starting over. Enough about this. Behold!

He hands Cory a mirror. Cory looks: his black eye is virtually invisible.

CORY
WOW.

FRITZ
I know.

CORY
Thank you.

FRITZ
Here, take these for touch ups.

He hands Cory a pot of concealer and a brush.

FRITZ (CONT'D)
You can give them back when it heals.

CORY
I will.

He looks around the room and sees a stack of Spangleferken DVDs.

CORY (CONT'D)
Your DDR team is really amazing, by the way.

FRITZ
(matter-of-factly)
Yes, I know. We are the best.

CORY
I was really happy when Green Arrows came
in second. I just joined the team and I
hadn't even been playing that long.

FRITZ
What else could you possibly have been
doing?

CORY
I don't know...I also play Worlds of
Warcraft.

FRITZ
Pfft! VIRGIN.

CORY
(defensively)
It's fun! I'll show you.

CUT TO:

INT. FRITZ' HOUSE - FRITZ'S ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Cory plugs the USB stick from his Hello Kitty key chain
into Fritz' computer.

Fritz peers over Cory's shoulder as Cory logs into his
Worlds of Warcraft account. His character screen appears
with a visual representation of his inventory and
equipment.

Fritz narrows his eyes.

FRITZ
Look at all this shit that you have.

CORY
(proud)
I'm a level 70 paladin!

The inventory screen vanishes and Cory's paladin starts
running around a virtual wasteland.

FRITZ
I just read an article about some nerds
who sold - an...account? for like 1500
euros.

Cory looks at the screen.

CORY
Huh.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRITZ' HOUSE - DAY

Fritz takes his scooter from Cory's trunk.

CORY
Thanks for everything.

FRITZ
Stop by whenever.

CORY
Okay, cool.

He gets in his car.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALLS' HOUSE - DAY

Cory unlocks his house and goes inside.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lois and Franklin are chilling on the sofa watching tennis - Wimbledon. They look up.

LOIS
Hi hon. Did you have fun at your sleepover?

CORY
My what?

LOIS
At Hunter's house?

CORY
Oh yeah. It sucked. Well--

He considers.

CORY (CONT'D)

It wasn't that bad. It was okay.
Actually, there were a lot of good things
about it. I think I learned a lot.

Lois and Franklin exchange glances and decide to let it go.

LOIS

There's leftover jelly rolls in the
fridge if you want some.

CORY

Thanks.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Cory flips open his cell phone. He navigates to a folder of pictures and opens the one Hunter took of him and Imogene at Huerta Piers after their second place finish. She has her arm around him, and they both look really happy.

He looks at it for a moment, then flips it closed.

EBAY MONTAGE:

Cory wakes his computer from sleep and loads Worlds of Warcraft. He takes several screen captures of his character and his inventory and closes the application.

On eBay, Cory writes a description of his character - Level 70 Paladin - and uploads the screenshots. He submits the listing as a Buy It Now item.

He starts to get up when suddenly his email DINGS. Message from eBay: "YOUR ITEM HAS BEEN SOLD." Cory is flabbergasted - nervously, he logs in to PayPal and checks his balance.

It's \$1876.

Cory falls off his chair.

END MONTAGE.

CUT TO:

INT. WASHINGTON MUTUAL BANK - DAY

Cory, dazed, walks up to a TELLER.

CORY
I'd like to make a withdrawal.

TELLER
Certainly.

Cory slides over a withdrawal slip and his ATM card. The teller picks up the slip.

TELLER (CONT'D)
That's a lot of money, young man.

CORY
It's for something special.

CUT TO:

INT. CORY'S CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

A gift box wrapped in simple white paper rests on the passenger seat. FEAR is in the back seat.

FEAR
(on sign)
SHE DOESN'T LIKE YOU

Cory ignores him. FEAR switches signs.

FEAR (CONT'D)
(on sign)
YOU'RE WASTING YOUR MONEY

Cory keeps driving.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - CORY'S BATHROOM - LATER

Cory is shirtless. He sprays cologne onto his wrists and rubs them together. He leans towards his mirror, picks up the pot of concealer he borrowed from Fritz and touches up his eye with the makeup brush. He looks really nice.

Satisfied, he slips on a white dress shirt and starts buttoning it up. Out of the corner of his eye, he spies something through the window.

ANGLE ON: FEAR, standing on the lawn, holding up a GIANT SIGN.

FEAR
(on giant sign)
YOU'LL NEVER BE GOOD LOOKING

Cory stops buttoning up his shirt for a second and looks in the mirror. There is something slightly different about him: a new element of maturity.

He looks back at FEAR, who holds up a new sign.

FEAR (CONT'D)
(on giant sign)
YOU HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER

Cory buttons up the last button on his shirt and EXITS.

EXT. SMALLS' HOUSE - DUSK

Cory opens the front door and steps out onto the lawn. FEAR is still there, holding a normal sized sign.

FEAR
(on sign)
GIVE UP.

That. Is. It.

Cory LUNGES AT FEAR!

FEAR DROPS his signs and RUNS. Cory BOLTS after him.

EXT. CORY'S NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

FEAR rounds a white picket fence, with Cory at his heels.

FEAR HOPS over a hedge, which Cory RUNS straight through.

Cory chases FEAR through several consecutive back yards, the last of which has a family of six eating barbecue at a wooden picnic table. They stare after Cory.

FEAR SPRINTS down a long sidewalk, with Cory in close pursuit.

There's a staccato HISS and the sidewalk sprinklers go on, DOUSING them both. They keep on running.

EXT. DEAD END - CONTINUOUS

Cory and FEAR finally reach a GATED DEAD END.

Cornered, FEAR tries to fake Cory out by feinting left, and then right. Cory follows FEAR's moves, unfazed.

FEAR JOLTS forward, hands up like a boxer. Cory SLIDES back and SNAPS into an upright stance like a bullfighter, hand on hip. He looks FEAR in the face.

MUSIC: FOREIGNER - "HEAD GAMES"

Cory and FEAR circle each other. Every move FEAR makes, Cory mirrors.

"Head games / it's you and me baby / Head games / I can't take it anymore"

As the song continues, their moves become increasingly AGGRESSIVE, with FEAR reaching out to grab but never actually touching Cory.

Their moves escalate into an intricate and intense FIGHT DANCE, the ultimate PASO DOBLE.

"It's high time to draw the line / Put an end to this game before it's too late"

Cory and FEAR continue mirroring each other's moves, getting into a feverish sync.

"Head games / It's you and me baby / Head games, and I can't take it anymore"

Cory MOONWALKS backwards toward FEAR and does a quick spin, ending up facing him - with POWER IN HIS EYES. Except...FEAR IS GONE. The music slows to an eerie stop.

Cory looks around. Suddenly he's standing on a cold desert of GREY DUST.

EXT. SURFACE OF THE MOON - CONTINUOUS

DEATHLY QUIET. Cory searches the horizon and starts walking toward a crater in the distance.

As he gets closer, FEAR LEAPS OUT OF THE CRATER, WITH AN AMAZING LOW-GRAVITY JUMP and lands, SPIDER-LIKE, within fighting distance of Cory, sending up a CLOUD OF GREY DUST.

MUSIC: MICHAEL JACKSON - "BEAT IT"

Cory takes the lead and launches a KARATE KICK inches from Fear's head.

"They told him don't you ever come around here / Don't wanna see your face, you better disappear"

Fear does an aerial somersault over Cory's head and lands behind him on his feet.

"You better run, you better do what you can / Don't wanna see no blood, don't be a macho man"

Cory turns just in time to read Fear's latest sign:

FEAR
(on sign)
YOU WON'T EXPECT THIS

BONK! Fear hits Cory in the face with the sign.

"Beat it / No one wants to be defeated"

Cory falls down, raising a dust cloud, and LEAPS straight up into the air, landing in a wobbly crouch.

Fear wastes no time, advancing on Cory like a panther stalking prey.

CORY'S POV: Dust clouds his vision. The outline of Fear's body is just barely visible against the black night sky.

Cory gets on his feet, but too late - Fear HITS HIM WITH ANOTHER SIGN and Cory goes flying and lands far away. Dust billows around him. He COUGHS.

"Just beat it, beat it / beat it / beat it / No one wants to be defeated"

Cory struggles to his feet. Fear is in the distance, standing strong.

Cory wipes the dust from his eyes and clenches a fist. Before he can think, he is RUNNING TOWARDS FEAR AT FULL SPEED.

Fear GETS IT. He RUNS TOWARDS CORY, matching him STRIDE FOR STRIDE.

SPLIT SCREEN: Simultaneously, Fear and Cory LEAP INTO THE AIR, STEELING THEMSELVES FOR A COLLISION. There's barely a millisecond to catch Cory's SMILE.

They SMASH INTO EACH OTHER in mid-air and FEAR EXPLODES in a shower of tiny WHITE SIGNS.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEAD END - CONTINUOUS

Cory is COATED from HEAD TO TOE in thousands of TINY WHITE SIGNS. He shakes himself off and they flutter to the ground.

CORY'S POV: Two of the tiny white signs remain on his sleeve, face down.

He turns them over. The first one says:

"YOU"

The second one says:

"WIN"

Cory smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. IMOGENE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Cory, still wet from the sprinklers, rings Imogene's doorbell.

Imogene opens the door. Her hair is down around her shoulders.

IMOGENE

Cory!

He takes a deep breath.

CORY

(resigned)

Imogene, I just came to tell you something: I think you're amazing. You're the smartest girl I've ever met, and you're really nice, and you're really really foxy and you don't care. And I know I'm not on your love ladder, but--

IMOGENE

I changed my mind about you, Cory.

CORY

You did?

IMOGENE

You're not like every other guy I've ever met. You respected my boundaries when I asked you to and tried to be my friend.

(MORE)

IMOGENE (CONT'D)

Most guys would have been long gone. And when I was in Ojai with Oliver I realized I had way more fun playing hopscotch with you than I ever did with him on his yacht or whatever.

CORY

Really?

IMOGENE

YES.

He offers her the plain white gift box.

CORY

This is for you.

She takes the box and puts it down on her front step.

IMOGENE

This is for you.

She takes both his hands and KISSES HIM!

She leans back, still holding his hands. Cory is DAZZLED.

IMOGENE (CONT'D)

I need a date to my sister's wedding or I'm going to get auctioned off to some random fourth cousin. Go with me.

CORY

I WILL go with you!

She grins.

IMOGENE

So what's in the box, anyway?

CORY

Oh - oh, open it!

She picks up the box, tears off the wrapping, and opens the lid. She takes out the contents:

A baseball-sized, \$1876 chunk of DIOPTASE, her DREAM MINERAL.

She SCREAMS with joy and TACKLES CORY. They fall out of frame, and all we hear are enthusiastic kissing noises.

IMOGENE
(O.S)
What's a love ladder?

FADE TO WHITE.

FADE IN:

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Franklin is making lemonade. Cory and Imogene enter from upstairs.

CORY
Hey, we're going to go see Mike. Want
anything?

FRANKLIN
Mom said we need oranges, so get a bag of
them.

Okay. CORY

EXT. SMALLS' HOUSE - DAY - MINUTES LATER

Cory and Imogene sit on the curb waiting for Mike.

Imogene playfully kicks Cory's sneaker. He takes her wrist and looks at her watch.

CORY
That's weird, where's Mike?

CUT TO:

EXT. 517 SOUTH ROBERTS' ROAD - DAY

The gold doors of the giant archway are open, and Mike BACKS HIS GROCERY TRUCK INTO THE LIVING ROOM/GARAGE. It fits perfectly! Mike leans out the driver side window and gives Lois the thumbs-up.

MIKE
I'LL TAKE IT!

Lois SQUEALS and does a happy dance.

INT. SMALLS' HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Franklin and Cory are looking classy in black tuxedos and Lois is looking lovely in a dark blue dress. Franklin tugs at his French cuffs.

FRANKLIN
Everybody ready to go?

CUT TO:

INT. WEDDING HALL - DAY

MUSIC: BILLY IDOL - "DANCING WITH MYSELF"

The ceremony is almost over. Cory sits with his parents in a pew. Imogene, looking gorgeous in her lilac bridesmaid's dress, stands to the right of her sister, MEI, and smiles at Cory. Cory smiles back.

MINISTER
I now pronounce you Mr. and Mrs. Lau.
You may kiss the bride!

Mei and her new husband KISS, and the hall is filled with cheers.

SONG CONTINUES OVER:

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

The sun is shining and everyone is dancing. Mei has kicked off her shoes and is being dipped by Albert. Her new husband is dancing with Ellen, who is also barefoot and laughing.

Hunter and Oliver are being SWARMED by Imogene's hot cousins and exchange a "hell yeah" look.

Franklin TWIRLS Lois expertly and SPINS on his heel exactly the way Cory showed him how. Lois GRABS him and kisses him all over his face. Franklin looks proud.

Greta, in a blue and white peasant dress, dances with Mike, who's wearing a stingray leather suit and gold chains. They're looking deeply into each other's eyes.

Fritz stands with his Spangleferken teammates, Johann, Klaus and Karl, suavely pouring a Pixi Stick into his mouth. A few cute girls walk by and the team simultaneously SPINS and POSES. The girls SWOON.

Cory and Imogene, oblivious to everyone around them, slow dance together. Cory gives her a sweet kiss on the lips. The blue, green and white lights that appeared when they first met RISE UP and SURROUND THEM now. They are happy and in love.

FADE OUT.

