

THE UNBREAKABLE BOY

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Based on the book THE UNBREAKABLE BOY
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OVER BLACK - A VOICE. 13 years old. Super enthusiastic.

*AUSTIN (V.O.)
Here's a true fact. Things break.*

CLOSE ON a beer bottle, SHATTERING ON THE FLOOR.

*AUSTIN (V.O.)
See?*

Leather shoes stumble, drunk, over the broken shards.

*AUSTIN (V.O.)
Sometimes it's bad when they break,
sometimes it's good. You don't
always know which it's gonna be.
Dad says that's a metaphor. Mom
says Dad doesn't know what a
metaphor is.*

*
*
*

And now we TILT UP to reveal --

INT. IOWA COUNTRY CLUB - INDOOR PATIO - NIGHT

SCOTT, 42. The drunk guy who broke the bottle. He eyes a crowd of well-dressed country-clubbers. Staring back at him, uncomfortable. A banner reads: *HAPPY NEW YEAR!*

*AUSTIN (V.O.)
In my life, lots of things have
broken. Toys, dishes, shoelaces,
bones. I'll tell you about all of
them, don't worry. But I'm starting
with this one, cause it's important.*

Scott pushes through guests to the bathroom, trying **REAL HARD** to look sober. Guess what, he's failing.

*AUSTIN (V.O.)
See that guy? That's my Dad. He's
the BEST.*

INT. COUNTRY CLUB - MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Scott stands at the bathroom mirror, squaring off with himself. His speech is slurred.

SCOTT
You are lost, my friend. Your moral
compass is broken. You're failing
as a husband and a father.

He leans closer. There's shame behind his eyes. It's sad. Then he darkens.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Yeah? Who are you to judge me?!

Before he can answer himself, the door opens and an **ELDERLY MAN** steps in. Scott straightens.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Hey man, what's up. Sweet tie.

The old man glances at his tie. *Is it sweet?* He closes the stall to do his business and Scott turns back to himself.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Just cool it. You're fine, you're still in control. Now walk back out there, sober up and go home. Okay? Okay...

He fumbles with the keys, drops them in the sink. *Dang it.*

SCOTT (CONT'D)
I'll drive.

INT. IOWA COUNTRY CLUB - INDOOR PATIO - NIGHT

Scott rejoins the party, searching the crowd. He catches a glimpse of a **COLORFUL JESTER'S HAT**, floating between people.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*Look at me, I am rocking that hat.
I'm Austin. Richard Austin LeRette.
But you can call me Auz. Or Auz Man.*

We finally get a good look at **AUSTIN**. He's 13, but seems younger. His face glows with innocence and enthusiasm. He wanders the party, snatching finger food off every passing tray. His little brother **LOGAN**, 11 right beside him.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
When I meet new people, I tell them everything. Ready? I love sneakers, pancakes, Batman, SpongeBob, Back to The Future, chicken nuggets and ranch dressing. Ranch dressing is the bomb! I'm really good at video games, especially Call of Duty, and I have a killer DVD collection, and also a shoelace collection and a hat collection. Wearing just the right hat makes my day.

We notice Austin walks with a bit of a limp.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

I have a condition called Osteogenesis Imperfecta. Those are big words, but it basically means my bones break easy. I've broken my arms, my nose, my ribs, my head, my legs, my feet, pretty much everything. It kinda stinks, but you get used to it. I also have autism. Some autistic kids can't talk, but I sure can! I have a pet lizard named Marty, and I love 80s rock music and I might have told you also ranch dressing. But hold on, I don't want to lose my train of thought...

(beat)

"Thought." Thought.... Thought.... Thought, thought, thought, thought, thought, THOUGHT.

(deep breath, then)

THOUGHT! Okay.

Scott finds his boys in the crowd, grabs them by the hand --

SCOTT

Come on, time to go home.

OUTSIDE, he leads them to the car. Austin mimics his dad's drunken walk, thinks it's hilarious.

CLOSE ON AUSTIN. He fixates on his hat's colorful pom poms, bouncing with every step. Then Scott trips, falls to the ground. He lays there in the gravel, LAUGHING kind of crazy. Austin LAUGHS, too. But Logan is worried.

LOGAN

Dad? Are you okay? Dad?!

A PASSING MAN helps Scott to his feet, hands him the keys. *Careful, there.* Scott throws him a friendly salute, and Austin smiles.

AUSTIN

Happy New Year! Please, thank you, you're welcome, I love you!

AT THE CAR, Scott loads the kids in the back and climbs behind the wheel. Logan is scared, but poor little Austin has no idea the danger he's in.

Scott FIRES UP THE ENGINE and peels out onto the winding road, already swerving. As his car disappears into the night, we hear the countdown to midnight - "5, 4, 3, 2...!!"

AND WE CUT TO BLACK.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
That was the night when everything broke.

Then:

AUSTIN (V.O.)
Oh wait, first I need to tell you about the green khaki pants! Without the green khaki pants I wouldn't even be here.

TITLE: 13 YEARS, 9 MONTHS AND 3 WEEKS EARLIER

INT. "STRUCTURE" CLOTHING STORE - DAY

A **YOUNGER SCOTT (29)** flips through a rack of pleated khakis. But his eyes are on the sales girl.

Scott turns to his best friend **JOE, 30**. Big, bearded guy. Think Seth Rogen or Zack Galifianakis.

SCOTT
 Do you see that girl's eyes?
 Seriously, Joe, look, they're the craziest blue I've ever seen.

JOE
 So talk to her. Buy something.

SCOTT
 Buy what?

JOE
 Buy pants.

Great idea. Scott waves to the girl. She walks over. This is **TERESA, 27**. Mellow, cool, a little enigmatic. Her eyes really are crystal blue. Even the whites seem blue. It's incredible.

SCOTT
 Excuse me. Hi. I'm interested in these green pants.

TERESA
 Good choice.

SCOTT

Yeah. I'm Scott. I travel a lot for work, so...

Teresa realizes. *Oh, he's flirting.* She sizes him up. He's kind of goofy, but also kind of sweet.

TERESA

Yeah? What kind of work is that?

SCOTT

Medical rep. For now. But I have bigger plans.

TERESA

And are these plans pants related?

SCOTT

Could be. The pants could be part of it. So you should definitely sell me some.

TERESA

Anything I can do to help.

SCOTT

And hey, you work on commission, right?

TERESA

I do.

SCOTT

Then I'll buy four pair...
(he grins)
...if you'll have dinner with me.

TERESA

Well, they're already two for one, so...

SCOTT

Okay. Then I'll buy eight.

Teresa raises a playful eyebrow, contemplating.

TERESA

Eight pair of green pants, really?
How about this?...
(scribbles her name and
number on a receipt)
You buy no pants, and I'll have
coffee with you.

SCOTT

Uhh... (reading her name) Teresa? I don't think you get how negotiating works.

TERESA

And you definitely don't get how asking a girl out works. Here's a tip, don't use the word "negotiating".

SCOTT

(fumbling)

Oh, I didn't mean, this wasn't like, I wasn't offering you money to...

Joe shakes his head from where he's eavesdropping. But Teresa just laughs. *All good.* Scott quickly folds the receipt.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Ok, I'm just gonna take this and walk away before I talk you out of it.

TERESA

Now who's the bad negotiator?

He nods. *Touche'.*

SCOTT

Okay, I'll call you. And... I actually do really want the pants, but, yeah, I'll come back another time for those.

As Scott walks out, Teresa grins. He's cute. AUSTIN'S VO:

AUSTIN (V.O.)

After that, Mom and Dad went on three dates in three weeks.

INT. SUPER FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A Maitre d' seats Scott and Teresa at a candlelit table.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

DATE #1.

Scott wears his green khakis and a tie. Teresa is under-dressed. Jeans and a sweatshirt. She whispers, self conscious.

TERESA

I said coffee, like a *coffee shop*.

SCOTT
Oh, don't worry, they serve coffee
here. I checked.

LATER, they talk over dinner, hitting it off. Scott lines up the salt and pepper shakers perfectly with the votives. Teresa notices, moves one an inch. He pretends it doesn't bother him. Then moves it back. She nods. *Control freak.* Noted.

INT. VIDEO ARCADE - NIGHT

AUSTIN (V.O.)
DATE #2, video games. Mom
dominated.

Scott and Teresa sit side by side, playing a shooting game. Teresa kicks ass. Scott is frustrated.

SCOTT
I was in the military, how are you
a better shot than me??

She turns to him and fires her last two rounds without even looking at the screen. Nails it.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Okay, let's go find something I can
win.

IN THE PHOTO BOOTH. They take a series of pics. The last one Teresa rests her head on Scott's shoulder. It's sweet.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD SIDEWALK - NIGHT

A late night walk through suburban Iowa.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
DATE #3. Mostly talking...

Scott wears the khakis again. As he walks, he makes sure to take exactly two steps in each sidewalk square. She notices.

TERESA
So why leave the Navy?

SCOTT
Did my time. It was a great
experience, I was proud to serve.
But -- I like change. Adventure.
I want to go everywhere. Do
everything.

TERESA

So what's the next adventure?

SCOTT

Advertising. That's my real dream.
I'm quitting the day job and
starting school in the fall.

*

TERESA

Isn't advertising just making
people feel unsatisfied with what
they have?

*

SCOTT

What?? No, it's helping people
dream of something better. A good
ad campaign is romantic, it's
emotional, it's.... ART.

TERESA

Art. Wow. Okay then, I'm sold.

SCOTT

See? Did my job. Five years from
now I'll be in Manhattan, working
for a big agency, driving a green
Volvo.

*

TERESA

Well, I admire your ambition. And
your stylish yet responsible taste
in cars.

Scott grins. He stops walking and turns to her.

SCOTT

And I admire your incredible blue
eyes. Been admiring them all night
actually. Seriously, I've never
seen anything like them.

Teresa glances away, a little self conscious.

TERESA

Yeah. Funny thing about them. It's
actually a genetic defect. My
collagen doesn't work right, so the
whites are really thin and the blue
arteries show through.

SCOTT

Well the defect is working for you.

She meets his gaze. A moment. There's definitely chemistry here. Scott steps closer. Are they gonna kiss?

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Okay, your turn. Five year plan.

TERESA

Oh. I'm a one-day-at-a-time gal.

SCOTT

But.... Married? Kids?

*

TERESA

We'll see. I'm in no hurry.

Scott eyes her, there's more there. But Teresa turns the attention back on him.

TERESA (CONT'D)

Know what else I admire about you?
Your pleated pants.

Scott LAUGHS. She likes that she makes him laugh.

SCOTT

Right?? I tried buying them from
this beautiful sales girl with the
most amazing defective eyes, but
she was too principled to take my
money.

TERESA

My kind of girl.

SCOTT

Mine, too.

And now they kiss. It's good. Really good.

TERESA

Want to get out of here?

He does. They kiss more. But before it gets too heavy:

AUSTIN (V.O.)

*They never had a fourth date, cause
then this happened...*

INT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Scott sprawls out on his lazy boy, drinking beer, watching TV. Joe's on the couch. The phone RINGS.

*

JOE
Bet it's your girlfriend.

SCOTT
Girlfriend? Gimme a break, I don't
even know her last name.

Joe grabs the cordless, checks caller ID. *Toldja*. He tosses
Scott the phone. Scott answers, playful.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Well, hey there. If you're calling
to ask me out again, I'm gonna need
to know your last name.

TERESA (O.S.)
Scott? Hey, listen....

Her voice sounds off. Scott sits up in the chair.

SCOTT
Everything alright?

TERESA
Yeah. Well, no. Can you.... Can you
come to the hospital and get a
blood test?

SCOTT
A what?

TERESA
A blood test.

SCOTT
Why would I.... (face falls) Is
this an STD thing?

TERESA
What?? No.

SCOTT
Right, no, of course, thank God.
Wait, did you commit a crime? Did I??

TERESA
Scott. Just listen.

SCOTT
Okay. Yeah. I'm listening.

He props himself on his elbow. Waits.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
You're not saying anything.

TERESA
(finally)
I'm pregnant.

Scott jolts like he's been tasered. He falls out of his chair, hits his head on the desk. Spills beer everywhere.

SCOTT
Hold on. Wait... dang it! Ow. Hold on.

TERESA
It's okay.

SCOTT
Give me a second. I'm just, I'm thinking...

TERESA
You fell, I heard you. It's okay.

SCOTT
You're saying this is... mine??
This is ME you're pregnant with? I mean, FROM.

TERESA
Scott. I don't need anything from you.

SCOTT
Except my blood.

TERESA
Forget it.

SCOTT
No. Wait. I'm sorry. Wait....
(takes a breath)
Pregnant.

It really hits. He lowers the phone. To himself:

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Crap.

EXT. SCOTT'S APARTMENT - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Scott and Joe sit on patio chairs by a pit fire. Joe drinks Bud Light from a bottle. Scott taps his feet. Three on the left, three on the right. They both wear green khakis. *

JOE

You like her though, right?

SCOTT

I mean... Yeah. She's attractive, obviously, and smart - not just smart, clever. She seems a little insecure, maybe, I'm not sure. But it's actually kind of nice. She's.... *real*.

JOE

Real is good. And you want kids.

SCOTT

Some day. After I've done a million other things. I was about to quit my job, get my degree. This is the worst possible time. And a baby, I mean... that's FOREVER.

JOE

Yeah, they do tend to last.

Scott rubs his temples. Joe can't think of what to say, so --

JOE (CONT'D)

Beer?

Scott shakes his head. Joe shrugs, grabs himself a fresh one and pops the cap. It overflows - spraying all over his shirt.

JOE (CONT'D)

Aw, dang it!

As Joe recoils from the spill, Austin's VO interrupts.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

Oh yeah, I forgot to tell you the thing about Joe. It's pretty important.

(beat)

He's not real. He's made up. He's my dad's imaginary friend.

BACK TO SCENE. Now it's Scott who recoils from the beer.

SCOTT
Aw, dang it!

CUT WIDE to reveal it's true, THERE IS NO JOE. Just Scott sitting alone, talking to himself, beer all over his shirt.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
Dad invented him as a kid. It's how he talks through things. Like Tyler Durden in Fight Club. I flippin' love that movie!

And now Scott sits alone by the fire. Talks to himself.

SCOTT
This is bad, Joe. This is really, really bad.

We pan over, and Joe is back. And he has a thought.

JOE
Hey. You know what else was bad?
When you broke your collarbone freshman year.

Scott looks at him. Perking up. He nods, *you're right*.

INT. "STRUCTURE" CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Teresa at work. Scott follows her as she folds and straightens clothes. He's trying to make a point.

SCOTT
I was playing football. It hurt like hell, and I was laid out for months, and that's the only reason I took up guitar.

TERESA
So what, you play in a band or something?

SCOTT
No, how cool would *that* be? But I love playing, and I'm good at it. Point is, sometimes good things come from bad things. Okay, forget the guitar. How about.... cheese. You love cheese.

TERESA
Everyone loves cheese.

SCOTT

Well, cheese is just milk that's gone bad, right? Like raisins are just bad grapes.

TERESA

Raisins are the worst, I hate raisins.

SCOTT

Fine. Who's that scientist that accidentally discovered ibuprofen. Figment....or Fletcher --

TERESA

Fleming.

SCOTT

Exactly.

TERESA

It was penicillin.

SCOTT

Exactly! Yes! A mistake in the lab and it leads to one of the greatest breakthroughs in medical history. Good from bad, right?
(point made)
Maybe that's what this is.

Teresa stops folding. Sighs.

TERESA

We don't even know each other, Scott.

SCOTT

That's the bad part. The good part is -- a new person. A person we made! You and me.

TERESA

I get what you're doing, and it's nice. But I don't need you sticking around out of obligation.

SCOTT

Why not? I *do* have an obligation. And I want to be a father. A GREAT father. Like *my* father. I want to be the cool Dad, the Dad who gets it. Who has all the answers, who knows how to show affection. Who's there.

(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)

And no, I didn't think it would happen this soon, or like this. But it's happening. That --

(points to her belly)

-- makes me a father. And my kid is NOT gonna grow up without a father. I'm gonna be there. And I'm gonna be SO cool.

Teresa smiles, she can't help it.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Look at your face, I'm winning you over! All I'm saying -- what I'm proposing -- is let's give this a try. Together. Could be good. Right?

He's totally sincere, and kind of adorable, and from the look on her face, this is actually what she was hoping he'd say.

EXT. SCOTT'S PARENTS' HOUSE - DAY

Scott parks his '92 Buick Century before a white two story house, framed by Iowa cornfields. Joe in the passenger seat.

JOE

Oh man, your Mom is gonna destroy you!

SCOTT

Yeah, well if I go, you go with me.

And then - CRASH!!

INT. SCOTT'S PARENTS' HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

SCOTT'S MOM (50s) SMASHES a dish on the kitchen floor.

SCOTT'S MOM

What's the matter with you?? Are you STUPID?! You should be married by now, not getting some girl pregnant! This is not how I raised you!

Mom is short and tough. Her home is adorned with strong Catholic influences, which only reinforces the problem.

Scott sits at the kitchen table, sheepish, across from his **DAD**, a quiet, kind, blue collar man.

They avoid eye contact as Mom storms out of the room, BREAKS something else. Dad shrugs.

SCOTT'S DAD

Give her a minute. You know the Warden, she processes through destruction.

(leans closer)

But hey. I'm proud of you.

SCOTT

You are?

SCOTT'S DAD

You're stepping up. Facing consequences. That's what a man does. What a *Dad* does.

Scott nods. Okay.

SCOTT

But I don't know if I'm ready to be a Dad.

SCOTT'S DAD

Oh, I'm not either. Parents have no idea what's going on. None of us.

SCOTT

Thanks. Gotta say, I did not think this would go so well.

*

Another CRASH.

EXT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S APARTMENT - DAY

A charming little apartment complex in small town Iowa. MOVING TRUCK parked outside. Scott and Teresa (now 4 months pregnant) climb out. Stand and look at the apartment together.

TERESA

So we're doing this?

SCOTT

I think we're doing this.

LATER, Teresa sorts boxes. Scott and Joe wrestle a mattress through the front entrance.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Lower the left side, lower the left side. The LEFT SIDE!

Teresa watches him, amused, as he hefts the mattress alone, yelling at himself. *What a weirdo.*

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The place is half-unpacked. Some boxes against the walls.
Fast food wrappers on the coffee table.

Teresa sits on Scott's lazy boy, playing PLAYSTATION 2. Scott *
strums his guitar on the couch. He looks around.

SCOTT

It's not bad, right? Small.

TERESA

Not too small. I like it.

SCOTT

We'll get a house soon.

(plays a riff)

Once my band goes platinum.

TERESA

It's the album that goes platinum,
dummy, not the band.

SCOTT

You want the house or not?

TERESA

Hey, what happened to your
advertising degree? Weren't you
supposed to start in the fall?

*
*

SCOTT

Yeah. Something came up.

(pokes her belly)

I knocked up this girl and have to
help raise the baby for a while.
Just long enough to look like a
good guy. Then, back to my dreams!

She laughs, but seems sad to hear that. She pauses the game --

TERESA

So, hey.... there's something I
haven't told you yet.

SCOTT

Scary way to start our first night
together.

Teresa gets up, busies herself clearing the dinner wrappers.

TERESA

It's just. One of the side effects
of my "amazing" blue eyes....

(MORE)

TERESA (CONT'D)

(deep breath)

I have a condition called
Osteogenesis Imperfecta. "O.I."

Scott follows her into the kitchen. Concerned.

SCOTT

Which means?

TERESA

It means my bones are very brittle.
They break easily.

Scott doesn't respond. But she can see it right away. *He thinks I'm defective.* Teresa tucks her thumbs under her fingers, making a fist, then squeezes. A nervous habit.

*

*

TERESA (CONT'D)

I would have told you sooner, but
it's not exactly the kind of thing
you share on a first date. Or a
third. And then...

She looks to her belly. Scott can see she feels vulnerable.

SCOTT

Well, you seem fine to me.

She wishes he used a better word than "fine".

TERESA

I am. I'm fine. Broke a lot of bones
growing up, but I've learned how to
live with it. There's just certain
things I can't do. Sports, skydiving...

SCOTT

(shrugs)

Ok. No skydiving. I can live with
that.

TERESA

Anyway, I thought you should know,
because.... it's genetic, so...

Scott moves to her.

SCOTT

T. Our baby is gonna be perfect.
And if we're *lucky* -- his eyes will
be *half* as defective as yours.

She laughs, grateful. Scott wraps his arms around her. But as
we PUSH IN, we see his gaze go far off. FROM THIS --

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Teresa SCREAMS, mid-delivery. Scott by her side. Joe is there for moral support.

SCOTT
You're doing great, T. You're a champ.

TERESA
You don't know that, you don't even KNOW me!!

A NURSE frowns at Scott. He waves it off.

SCOTT
Not true, I know her, it's just new.

Then T's sister **LORI** (34) runs in, disheveled even in scrubs. *

LORI *
I'm here, I'm here! Stupid boss *
made me settler the register and my *
dang truck wouldn't start again. *

She rushes to Teresa's other side. Takes her hand. *

TERESA *
Finally! Scott, this is my sister *
Lori. Lori, Scott.... AAABWWHHHHH!!! *

Scott and Lori shake awkwardly over Teresa's belly. The nurse *
eyes Scott again. *

SCOTT *
I said it was new! *

DOCTOR
Okay, here's the head...

Scott peeks, curious, then goes pale. Turns to Joe.

SCOTT
Don't look. There's blood.

Joe looks, and instantly faints. Hits the floor with a THUD.

DOCTOR
(calling out)
Cord is wrapped around the neck.
Get me forceps.

Everyone SCRAMBLES. The nurse hands him the cold metal instrument. Scott gapes.

SCOTT
Everything okay?

DOCTOR
It's fine, your baby will be fine.

SCOTT
(sweating)
I'm feeling light headed, can I get
some ice chips?

NURSE
Ice is for the mother.

SCOTT
All of it?

TERESA
Scott, you're freaking me out. Look
at me. Just breathe.

Scott locks eyes with Teresa. He nods.

SCOTT
Right. You, too. Breathe. We'll
both breathe.

And as she SCREAMS again, Austin's VO comes back --

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*Okay, pay attention. Here's the
part where I come in.*

TERESA'S SCREAM echos over to:

BABY AUSTIN. Swaddled in Scott's arms. Eyes blue as the
ocean. Just like his mother's.

PUSH IN ON SCOTT. Filled with wonder. He stares into the face
of his son, utterly in love. His world changed.

Lori strokes Teresa's head, whispers to her. The two of them *
seem close, as if they've endured hard times together. *

Scott's Mom and Dad dote over the baby.

SCOTT
Mom, Dad. Meet Richard Austin
LeRette.

SCOTT'S MOM
He's a miracle.
(beat)
Despite your bad choices.

FROM THE BED, Teresa watches Scott. Tears running down his face. She smiles. Scott carries Austin to her.

SCOTT

Check it out, T. We made a boy.
Look at him, he's perfect.

She gazes at her son. He is perfect. Then he starts CRYING.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

*I cried a lot. Right away. Partly
cause I was a baby. And partly
cause those metal things broke my
ribs. But no one even knew.*

Close on BABY AUSTIN'S SCREAMING FACE.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

That was break #1.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S APARTMENT - MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

ANGLE ON Scott and Teresa, utterly exhausted, staring down into Austin's crib. He's still SCREAMING.

SCOTT

When does he sleep? When do WE
sleep?

TERESA

(shell shocked)
What have we done?

Scott turns to Joe for help. He's just as exhausted.

JOE

Looks like you got this, I'm going
to bed.

And he bails.

QUICK MONTAGE - AS BABY AUSTIN GROWS

- SCOTT SLEEPS. Teresa feeds Austin. He pukes, then CRIES.
- TERESA SLEEPS. Scott feeds Austin. He pukes, then CRIES.
- THEY BOTH SLEEP. From the crib, we hear Austin puke. Then CRY. Teresa shakes Scott.

TERESA

I'll pay you *ten thousand dollars*
to clean that up.

- **IN THE DEN**, Teresa plays *VAMPIRE NIGHT* on PS2, Austin napping on her belly. She sings 'You Are My Sunshine' softly as she plays. Scott smiles. *

SCOTT

You know what I admire about you?
You can soothe a baby and kill
vampires at the same time. *

- **ON THE COUCH**, Scott watches TV, spent. Baby bottle in one hand, beer bottle in the other. Almost feeds Austin the beer.

- **IN THE BEDROOM**, Scott stares into his son's eyes. Despite everything, so in love. Austin starts CRYING. Scott SIGHS.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Come on, little dude. What are you
trying to tell me here? What am I
doing wrong? *

But the SCREAMING gets louder. It's unbearable. Scott covers his ears with two throw pillows. Trying not to lose his mind.

AT THE FRONT DOOR - Teresa holds a crying SIX MONTH OLD AUSTIN. Scott kisses his head, suitcase in hand.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Daddy's gotta work. Back in a few
days. *

Teresa is not stoked. Scott closes the door behind him. Austin still CRYING inside. Scott take a breathe. *Relief.*

THE SEQUENCE ENDS WITH -- AUSTIN (now 14 months) IN THE FRONT YARD. Taking his first steps. Scott and Teresa CHEER HIM ON.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Scott sits at his desk, busy on his laptop. Austin toddles around, carrying a Curious George book, making monkey noises.

TERESA

Headed to the store. You got him?

SCOTT

I got him.

TERESA

I shut the garage door and the
bathroom but he's moving fast today.

*

SCOTT

T. I got him. The gate is up. We're
good.

She leaves and Scott gets back to work. Behind him, Austin
grabs the arm of the rolling chair, pulls himself up.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Hey, no climbing on the chair,
little monkey. No!

Scott pushes back and Austin loses his grip, falling
backwards hard. Scott hears an awful SNAP. He looks down to
find Austin on the floor. His leg bent at a 90 degree angle.

Austin WAILS. Scott's face goes white.

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - DAY

Scott rushes into the hospital, carrying Austin. The Curious
George book duct taped around his leg as a makeshift splint.

INT. HOSPITAL BAY - DAY

Scott holds Austin's hand as they wrap his leg in a cast.
Teresa runs in, goes right to Austin. She glares at Scott.

TERESA

What did you do??

SCOTT

Nothing, he tripped. Barely. Fell
against my chair, I don't get it.

Which gives Teresa a sick feeling in her stomach.

LATER, they sit with the DOCTOR, Austin has a cast on his
leg. He plays with toys, happy as can be.

DOCTOR

His leg will heal fine. But I took a
body scan and noticed two of his ribs
had been broken and healed over.

SCOTT

What?? How?

DOCTOR
Most likely from childbirth.

TERESA
(horrificed)
That's why he cried so much! Oh my
God, Scott....

Her eyes fill with tears, heart breaking to think of it. Then the doctor looks to Teresa, hesitates.

DOCTOR
Also... we ran the tests. And you're
right, he does have OI. I'm sorry.

Teresa's face falls, worst fears confirmed. She turns on Scott.

TERESA
Why did you let him fall?!

SCOTT
I'm sorry, T. I'm really sorry.

She collapses into him. As Scott comforts her, Austin stares at the Curious George book on the floor, in his own world.

We end on Teresa, looking at AUSTIN'S LITTLE CAST.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
That was break #2.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The furniture is now wrapped with padding. Austin zips through the apartment, cast free, Teresa chasing after.

TERESA
Austin, no running!

LATER. More running. More chasing. Austin GIGGLES. This kid loves to run.

TERESA (CONT'D)
Watch him!

SCOTT
I've got him.

Austin trips. SCREAMS.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Dammit!

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Arm in a sling, Austin plays with the nurses, making them laugh. Teresa glares at Scott again.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

Break #3.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Scott and Teresa commiserate as they get ready for bed.

TERESA

....At lunch he pulled all the napkins from the dispenser, one by one. I told him to stop, but he wouldn't, what am I gonna do? Can't spank him, he might break.

SCOTT

The kid's got all the power.

TERESA

It's impossible, Scott, I'm panicked all the time.

SCOTT

I know, me too! We're being held hostage by a toddler!

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S APARTMENT - SCOTT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Scott digs through boxes. Tax stuff. Joe pours them both wine. Scott gulps his down. Stares at some paperwork, confused.

SCOTT

This is weird.

JOE

What's weird?

SCOTT

Teresa's last name is Houser.

JOE

That's not *that* weird.

Scott holds up a legal document.

SCOTT

So why does this say Teresa Morrison??

CLOSE ON PAPER. The words 'Teresa Morrison'. Further down, the word 'DIVORCE'. Scott and Joe look at each other. *WTF?*

TERESA (PRELAP)
Yes. I was married...

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S APARTMENT - DEN - NIGHT

Scott paces, a little drunk. Teresa looks ashamed. Tucking her thumbs under her fingers again.

TERESA
Twice.

SCOTT
Twice??

TERESA
Yes. Jim for a few months, then Rudy for a few years.

Scott tries to process this.

TERESA (CONT'D)
I was 18 the first time. Just needed to get out of my house.
(with difficulty)
My father was an alcoholic and my mom, she tried, really tried, to hold everything together. They're not bad people, they just... it was a mess.... and I thought getting married was my way out. When that didn't work, I tried again.

SCOTT
Anything else you want to share while we're getting to know each other?

TERESA
No. That's it.

Scott paces more. Teresa goes quiet. Bracing for the worst.

TERESA (CONT'D)
Are you mad?

SCOTT
Yeah, I'm mad!
(beat)
I guess. I don't know. I feel a little duped, Teresa.

TERESA

I wasn't trying to hide anything, I
just... I was afraid you'd be done
with me. I wouldn't blame you...

Her eyes fill with tears, turning the whites even more blue.

TERESA (CONT'D)

I have two failed marriages, bones
made of chalk. I'm damaged goods.
My father used to call me "an
accident waiting to happen."

Just saying those words seems to send her back. She turns
away from Scott, closing off.

TERESA (CONT'D)

I would dream I was in a fairy tale,
but I never knew if I was the
princess or the ugly stepsister.
(more tears)
I always felt cursed. And now our
son is cursed...

*

She wipes her face, trying to be strong. But she looks
ashamed, broken. It breaks Scott's heart. He goes to her.

SCOTT

Hey. Our son is not cursed. You are
not cursed.
(takes her hand)
There's a lot we don't know about
each other. I'm not perfect either.
For instance, I use humor to
deflect, it's not healthy.

TERESA

True. And you're not even that
funny.

SCOTT

Let's just.... from now on no more
secrets, okay?

TERESA

Deal.

EXT. BIKE PATH - MORNING

Scott rides a trail on his mountain bike. Joe pedals beside
him. His bike is identical to Scott's. After a beat --

JOE
Twice.

SCOTT
It's fine.

JOE
Married two times. That's a lot.

SCOTT
It's fine.

Scott pedals off, leaving Joe behind. *Okay.*

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Scott and Teresa lie on the bed. Austin between them. He starts fussing. Scott SHUSHES. Puts a pacifier in his mouth.

WE SEE AUSTIN'S POV of Scott, wide angle. His SHUSHING is more like a BUZZING. Loud, assaulting. Austin spits out the pacifier, cries louder. So Scott SHUSHES louder.

Then Teresa rests a hand on Austin's belly. Gently sings.

TERESA
*You are my sunshine, my only
sunshine. You make me happy when
skies are grey...*

Austin immediately calms, stops crying. His eyes close.

WE PUSH IN ON SCOTT, as he watches Teresa. Her voice calms him, too. He smiles. A nostalgic smile, like he just imagined a whole life with this woman, and it's a good life.

Teresa gets up from the bed, gently places sleeping Austin in the crib, then gathers some clothes, a dirty diaper, and carries them from the room. Scott follows.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Teresa adds the dirty diaper to the pale, then pulls out the gross full bag. Finally Scott says what's on his mind.

SCOTT
Hey.... I think we should get
married.

Teresa stops. She shakes her head.

TERESA
No. Not right now.

SCOTT
Why not?

TERESA
It's too soon.

SCOTT
But. I think... I might love you.

Teresa practically rolls her eyes.

TERESA
You're telling me you might love
me, as you propose. Right now?
(lifts the used diaper bag)
Like this?

SCOTT
Come on, T, I'm being honest. This
is where we are. What do you want
me to say?

TERESA
Not that.

She carries the diaper bag out to the hallway. He follows.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Teresa jams the bag into the trash chute. It gets stuck.

SCOTT
Well... do you love ME?

TERESA
No.

SCOTT
Come on, don't do that. We agreed,
we should get married.

TERESA
Don't want to.

She jams the bag harder. Scott steps in, pushing until it
falls to the dumpster below.

SCOTT
You don't want to marry me?

TERESA
Not now I don't.

She struts back into the apartment. Scott looks to Joe.

JOE
To be fair, it wasn't the MOST
romantic proposal.
(pointing)
There's poop on your arm.

Scott looks. *Dang it.*

JOE (CONT'D)
Don't sweat it. She'll come around.

AND WE CUT TO --

SCOTT, in his best suit. Teresa in a wedding dress. We circle around them to reveal --

INT. CITY HALL - DAY

A LARGE TATTOOED WOMAN stands beside her SCARED HUSBAND.
We're in CITY HALL. Before a **JUSTICE OF THE PEACE.**

JUSTICE
Lay your hands on him again, ma'am,
I'm locking you up. Understood?
(to the husband)
Restraining order granted.

Scott and Teresa share a look, try not to laugh. He whispers.

SCOTT
Is this everything you dreamed?

The scared husband eyes Scott as he walks out. *Good luck.*

The JUSTICE looks to Scott and Teresa, to their family and friends in the plastic chairs behind them, all dressed nice.

JUSTICE
How about we do this outside?

EXT. CITY HALL GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

A secret garden behind City Hall. Surprisingly beautiful.
SCOTT'S PARENTS hold Austin. Teresa's sister Lori beside
them, along with a few other friends. And Joe, of course.

Scott faces Teresa, takes her hands in his. For the vows.

*

SCOTT

You know what I admire about you?

She smiles.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

You make me feel calm. Even when I know you're scared or overwhelmed, somehow you're the one who comforts me. You think you're weak, but you're actually so strong. Austin is lucky to have you for his mom. And I'm lucky to have you for my wife.

Teresa's eyes glisten. She takes a breath.

TERESA

Know what I admire about you? You're not afraid to say sappy sentimental stuff like that.

(everyone laughs)

No, I mean it. I've never had that with a man. With anyone. It's nice. Oh, and by the way. I lied before. I think I might love you, too.

SCOTT

I *knew* it.

JUSTICE

Alright then. Husband and wife. Go ahead and kiss your bride.

Scott and Teresa kiss. Friends and family CHEER.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Teresa is asleep in bed. Scott sits in the dark, Austin resting in his arms. Scott looks to Joe, end of a long day.

SCOTT

I'm a husband. A dad and a husband.

Joe nods.

JOE

Yeah. Heavy.

(beat)

Want a beer? I'll get you a beer.

From this: TERESA'S PREGNANT BELLY.

EXT. SCOTT AND TERESA HOUSE - DAY

She stands before a large two story house with a big yard. In the driveway, a shiny red Mustang and a white Ford Taurus.

Lori helps unload boxes. She eyes the house and cars.

LORI

T, look at all this. How much does he make selling medical supplies?

TERESA

Enough.

LORI

I mean it, can you pull this off?

TERESA

Relax, Lori, I'm fine. He got another promotion, he's a good salesman. It's not exactly his dream job, but... it gets us this.

LORI

Well dang, can I be a medical rep? Never gonna get me a house like this with Cracker Barrel money.

Once again, Scott and Joe wrestle with a mattress, while Austin runs around, excited. A cast on his right wrist.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

Blue cast. Break #12.

Teresa looks to Austin.

TERESA

What do you think, Auz Man? Like the new digs?

AUSTIN

What's "digs"?

TERESA

The house. You like it?

AUSTIN

Yes! I love digs!

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Austin chases Scott through the house (now fully furnished and moved in) as Scott throws toys and snacks in a bag.

SCOTT

Come on, your baby brother is here!
Wait till you see him, he's like a
little pink tomato!

Excited, Austin turns a corner and runs face first into a dresser. He WAILS.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

No, no, no! Dude, is it your nose,
please tell me it's not broken....
(he looks. It is)
Dang it.

*

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Teresa holds her new baby in her arms. Glowing. Until Scott slinks in with Austin. Black eye. Tape across the nose.

SCOTT

He ran into the dresser. I tried
to... I didn't... I. I'm sorry.

A CONCERNED NURSE eyes Austin, whispers to another nurse. Something about "...third time this year..." The two women look to Teresa. But she waves them off, used to this.

TERESA

Don't worry, he's not abusive. Our
son has a brittle bone disease,
you'll see it in his charts.
(nods at Scott)
Trust me, if anyone's getting hit
tonight it's him.

SCOTT

Hey!

LATER, Austin eyes little **LOGAN**, swaddled in a blanket in Teresa's arms.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Auz Man, what do you think of your
baby brother?

Austin stares at Logan for a long beat, really studying him.

AUSTIN

Four red. Five blue.

Scott frowns. What? Then Teresa realizes.

TERESA
Stripes. The blanket.

It's true. The hospital blanket has stripes. Four red, five blue. Scott and Teresa exchange a look. *Huh.*

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

First night home. Logan sleeps peacefully in his crib.

Scott and Teresa stare down at him, amazed. They give each other a silent high five.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*Logan was lucky. His bones didn't
break and he didn't cry and he
didn't have autism or anything.*

INT. LOGAN'S ROOM - MORNING

ONE-YEAR-OLD LOGAN climbs from his crib. Runs to Austin (now 3) and they play together. Logan seems like a normal kid.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*That's when Mom and Dad started to
realize I was different.*

INT. AUSTIN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Austin's walls are lined with DVD and hat collections, all color-coded. IN EXTREME CLOSE UP, we see him organize action figures in perfect rows. Counting as he goes. In the zone.

AUSTIN
Twenty-five, twenty-six... twenty-
seven...

Then Scott pops in, interrupting.

SCOTT
Come on, Auz-Man, shoes on, I'm
late for work.

Austin pauses, then sweeps all the toys onto the floor and starts lining them up again.

AUSTIN
One... two... three... four...

SCOTT
Austin, now! We need to go.

Austin takes a breath. Sweeps them off again.

AUSTIN
(louder, upset)
ONE! TWO! THREE!...

SCOTT
Austin!! What is wrong with you?

Austin pauses again. Doesn't look up. Just STARES AT THE TOYS. Teresa step in, intervening.

TERESA
Just let him finish, Scott.

Scott takes a breath. Looks at the large pile of toys, looks at his watch. Sits down, frustrated. As Austin continues.

AUSTIN
Four... Five... Six...

IN MACRO-FOCUS, we watch as Austin lifts a little airplane, as it moves through space, landing perfectly on the shelf. An inch to the right or left would be wrong. Scott SIGHS.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*Sometimes I feel like my Dad is close
and far away at the same time...*

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Scott and Austin lie on a blanket by the lake, looking up at the giant IOWA SKY. They eat Cheetos and point out clouds.

AUSTIN
I like this day, Daddy.

SCOTT
I like it too, little dude.

*

LATER, they run together, flying a paper kite.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*Like even though I'm right there,
he doesn't really see me.*

AUSTIN
It's a dragon, Daddy. It's a dragon!

SCOTT
Yeah. I see it.

AUSTIN'S POV, the kite comes to life as a CARTOON DRAGON. He swoops down, breathing paper fire. As he flies by, HE SCOFFS -

CARTOON DRAGON
He's lying. He doesn't see me.

Auz stops running, getting upset. Scott has no idea why.

AUSTIN
You don't really see him, you're just saying that. Why can't you see it?? Daddy, WHY??

Scott tries comforting him, but Austin is inconsolable.

SCOTT
Austin, hey, relax, I don't know what you want me to say, I don't see what you see, I'm sorry.

Austin pushes him away. The moment is ruined. Behind them, the kite falls to the ground. OVER THIS:

SCOTT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'm worried about him.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Scott and Teresa get ready for bed.

SCOTT
He won't stop counting. He talks constantly....

Teresa eyes him tapping his feet.

TERESA
Can't imagine where he gets it from.

SCOTT
That's different.

TERESA
You talk to yourself every day, Scott. Or to "Joe" anyway.

Joe jumps in.

JOE
Hey, why the "air quotes"? Was that a dig, that felt like a dig!

Scott turns on Teresa.

SCOTT

Yeah, well our son certainly
inherited more than enough from
you.

TERESA

(stung)

Yes. Thanks for that. It's what
makes him *our son*. Stop treating
him like he's broken.

Scott feels bad. He softens.

SCOTT

I don't mean to. This just... isn't
what I thought it would be like.
I feel like I'm failing. Every day.
And the harder I try, the worse I
do. I just... can't figure him out.

*

TERESA

Maybe you're not supposed to.

SCOTT

Come on, T. Something isn't right.
Tell me you're not worried.

She doesn't have an answer. From this --

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S HOME - DEN - NIGHT

A ZOMBIE'S HEAD EXPLODES. Teresa and Scott play PS2. Blasting *
an undead army. Teresa dominates, as always.

ON THE FLOOR, Austin and Logan watch the Jim Carrey movie *The Mask* on a DVD player. Austin rubs his eyebrow as he watches.

ON SCREEN, Jim Carrey says: "*It's party time! P-A-R-T-Y.*"
Austin repeats it.

AUSTIN

It's PARTY time! (then...)
It's PARTY time!.... It's PARTY
time!.... It's PARTY time!!

SCOTT

Okay Auz, that's enough.

AUSTIN

It's PARTY TIME! Party time, party
time PARTY TIME!!!

SCOTT

AUZ!

Austin rubs his face more. Right palm over left eyebrow. It hurts but he can't stop. Over and over, more and more manic.

AUSTIN

Party time, party time, party time,
party time, PARTY TIME!!

He claws at his face. Scott and Teresa run to him.

SCOTT

Hey, hey, hey. What's going on? Can
I help you, Auz? What can I do?

AUSTIN

(crying)
Make it stop! Daddy, make it
stop!!! I want it out of my head!
(hitting himself)
PARTY, PARTY, PARTY, PARTY.....!!

Scott tries holding Austin but he slaps him away.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

...PARTY, PARTY, PAAAAAAAAAAAAARTY!!

They watch, helpless. Finally Austin stops, face red and bleeding. He lets out a breath, his whole body relaxes.

Dad hugs him carefully. Looks to Teresa.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Scott and Teresa watch through a window, worried, as a doctor administers tests on Austin. Various puzzles and patterns.

Austin is laser focused. Moving pieces around, pointing at objects, etc. OFF THIS:

SCOTT

Autistic? But... How is that
possible? We would have known.

He turns to a **DOCTOR** watching beside them.

DOCTOR

There are all kinds of autism. It's
a spectrum. Some are more verbal
than others, some don't show the
signs as early.

SCOTT

So what do we do? Does he grow out of it, is there medication?

DOCTOR

(checking the chart)

It looks like he's already on SSRIs for OCD... various other things. We can experiment with additional medication now that we know more, but... No, don't expect him to "grow out of it", Mr. LeRette. This is who Austin is. The more you learn about it and embrace it, the better.

ON SCOTT AND TERESA, as they take this in.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Teresa sits at the table, head in her hands. Scott paces.

TERESA

Is this punishment? For the way we had Austin?

SCOTT

If you're talking about God, I wouldn't know how to answer that. But I'm sure lots of people have done worse things than what we did, and most of them didn't end up with an autistic kid. So no. I think it's just life. It's just how it is.

He gets up.

TERESA

Where are you going?

SCOTT

I need some air.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Scott and Joe sit side by side. Drinking whiskey. Scott is good and drunk. He mumbles, dark...

SCOTT

All those times... I'd yell at him, get so frustrated... make him feel stupid.... for just being who he is.

He's crushed by that thought. Joe pats him on the shoulder.

JOE
You didn't know. Now you do.
He has autism. You have an autistic
kid. That's what it is. Better
accept it, cause it's real.

Scott nods, lets out a long, bitter breath. Downs his whiskey.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Teresa is getting everyone out the door. Scott is hung over.

TERESA
Let's go, let's go, we're gonna be
late for church. Austin, eat your
toast, I told you a hundred times.

AUSTIN
No, you told me four times...

TERESA
Scott?

SCOTT
What? I have golf.

TERESA
No, you're coming. We're a family,
we need to do family things...
Especially now.

SCOTT
But. I don't even know anyone there.

TERESA
Exactly, and it's weird no one
knows my husband. Come. On.

Scott relents. Totally bummed.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

Congregants file in. Scott holds Austin's hand, Teresa carries Logan.

AUSTIN
I gotta poop!

Teresa checks Logan's pants.

TERESA
And his diaper's full.

Scott SIGHS. *I got it.*

INT. CHURCH - BATHROOM - MORNING

Scott has Logan laid out on the bathroom floor, changing his diaper. IN A STALL, Austin FLUSHES.

AUSTIN
I did it, Dadio. All good, no
worries, no more poop, Auz Man
wins!

He bursts from the stall without pants on. Just a pull-up
diaper, half hanging off. He goes for the door.

SCOTT
Auz, no! Wait here with me. And put
your pants on.

But Austin just runs in circles, chanting --

AUSTIN
No more poop, Auz Man wins!

A **MAN** STEPS from another stall. Finds Austin half-naked
running in crazy circles, Scott and Logan on the floor.

MAN
Need some help here?

SCOTT
Nah. Sorry, we're... new. I was
kinda forced here against my will.

MAN
(friendly grin)
I've often felt the same.

He walks out, shuts the door behind him. Auz reaches for the
knob. Scott eyes him.

SCOTT
Don't.

But Auz just grins, twists the knob and bolts out.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
NO!!

Scott panics. *What do I do??* He grabs Logan, covers his naked butt with a paper towel, runs after Austin.

INT. CHURCH - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Scott runs into the hall, naked Logan in hand. He spots Auz about to turn a corner to the foyer, where EVERYONE CHATTERS.

Scott glares at Austin. *Don't you dare.* Auz looks right back at him. Eyes bright, blue and full of life and joy. In this moment, time seems to stand still, and they connect.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

See that? He saw me. For just a second. That was the first time.

Then Auz flashes a mischievous smile, and bolts. Scott chases.

IN THE FOYER, Scott runs around the corner....

SCOTT

Damn it, Austin! Get back here!

He skids to a stop, sweating, naked baby in his hands. Austin stands before a group of parishioners, no pants, diaper on backwards. Everyone stares. Teresa's sister Lori CRACKS UP. *

LORI

Well hello there, peanut! *

Scott's face goes red. WE HOLD ON THIS.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

Dad says sometimes he thinks God is laughing at him. I think he's laughing WITH him.

In the crowd, Teresa turns, sees her boys. She shakes her head. Steps to Austin, takes his hand. Then introduces Scott to the man she's talking to. *It's the man from the bathroom.*

TERESA

Scott, this is Preacher Rick.

SCOTT

(nods, great)
Of course it is.

Rick just laughs, pats him on the arm.

PREACHER RICK

Nice to meet you, Scott.... And hey, well handled.

Scott narrows his eyes at Austin. *You won this time.* Auz just grins back, innocent. OVER THIS: *"Haaappy birthday to you..."*

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Austin sits before a cake with a giant SpongeBob candle in the shape of a 5. Scott, Teresa and Logan (3) SING TO HIM.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*One, two, three, four, five. Five
years of Austin. Five year plan.*

WE PUSH IN on the '5' candle.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*Dad never got to go to Manhattan or
be in a rock band or work for an ad
agency or drive a green Volvo.*

*
*
*

CLOSE ON SCOTT, singing. He looks generally happy. But with that slight malaise of young parenthood.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*He said plans change. And it was
fine. Fine means good. Good means
happy.*

Austin blows out the candle. From this --

WE PAN ACROSS A SERIES OF CASTS AND BRACES, lined up in Austin's room like trophies.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*After that, more birthdays, more
years, more broken bones. Break #19
I fell off my bike, break #22 was
the sled. I think 27 was the closet
door, I'm not sure. After a while
you kinda get used to it.*

12-YEAR OLD AUSTIN yells to his parents in the kitchen.

AUSTIN (O.S.)
Dad! I broke my finger!

Dad eats a sandwich. Looks to Teresa.

TERESA
Your turn. I'm going shopping.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*One time it even happened to Dad
and me and Mom, all in the same
week. Dad called that the trifecta.*

THE THREE OF THEM EXIT THE HOSPITAL TOGETHER IN SLO MO. Auz
in a wheelchair, Dad in a sling, Mom with crutches.

We push in on **AUSTIN, NOW 13**, same age as the opening scene.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Hectic morning. Austin scurries around the kitchen, opening
cabinets. LOGAN is 11, athletic, but small for his age.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*Now I'm 13. I flipping love 13.
Friday the 13th, Ocean's 13. Apollo
13, you kiddin' me, best Tom Hanks
movie ever! Also, this is when I
started eighth grade. I had
flapjacks for breakfast. And I
almost killed Mom.*

Teresa hurries into the kitchen.

TERESA
Come on guys, you really want to be
late on your first day?

She stops. All the kitchen cabinets are open. Dozens of cups
and mugs and glasses scattered all over the counters.

TERESA (CONT'D)
Austin, what is this??

Austin wears new school clothes. Bright green pants, red
striped shirt. A tie. All very over-the-top. Perfect.

AUSTIN
The pancake box say two cups of
mix. But it doesn't say which cups.

TERESA
You're killing me, Auz.

Austin freezes. His face goes white and he runs to his room.

INT. AUSTIN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Scott pops his head in. Finds Austin sitting on the bed,
sobbing. Inconsolable. Clutching his pet lizard, MARTY.

SCOTT
Hey, hey. What's up? We gotta go.

AUSTIN
(through wracked tears)
I can't go to school... Mom's dying!

SCOTT
She's what?

AUSTIN
She's DYING. And it's my fault. I'm
killing her!

Scott realizes, tries not to laugh. Takes Austin in his arms.

SCOTT
No. No, Auz. Mom is fine. I
promise, she's not gonna die. You
believe me?

Austin catches his breath. Wipes his nose over and over.
Nods. Scott takes the lizard, places him in his terrarium.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Ok. Now let's put Marty back. Wanna
choose a hat?

Austin perks up, looks to his wall of hats. CUT TO:

INT. SCOTT'S CAR - MORNING

Austin in the passenger seat, Jester hat flapping in the window. Dad drives, Logan in the back. Austin is pumped.

AUSTIN
You're gonna love middle school,
Logan, just wait! The hallways are
SO big, the teachers are the bomb
and all the food is ala cart!

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MORNING

School BUZZES with first day energy. Scott pulls up and Austin bounds from the car. Scott eyes his hat, concerned.

SCOTT
Maybe no hat on your first day.

AUSTIN

Don't be a goober, Dadio. Jester is
the best one. It's the Mountain Dew
Code Red of hats.

Scott looks to Logan.

LOGAN

He'll be fine. Let's go, big
brother. Show me everything.

As Logan takes Austin by the hand, UPBEAT MUSIC KICKS IN --

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Austin rushes through the hallway in his big colorful hat,
greeting and hugging everyone. Some kids give him looks and
avoid him, but most of them light up. "*Auz Man!!!*" "*How was
your summer? Missed you, pal!*" When the bell rings he's
hugging the last remaining kid in the hallway.

*
*
*
*

AUSTIN

School is hard but it's WORTH IT.
You're gonna do great!

*
*
***INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY**

AT LUNCH, Austin selects his food, a la carte. *The best!* He
goes on and on about it to everyone around him.

AUSTIN

You can pick whatever you want. Ala
carte flippin' rocks.

But the kid in front of him is not charmed. This is **TYLER,**
14. Big for middle school. Tall and athletic. A bully.

FROM ACROSS THE CAFETERIA, Logan watches, concerned. As
Austin tags along Tyler and his buddies. They're clearly
laughing at him, flicking his hat. Logan steps over.

LOGAN

Everything okay, Auz?

AUSTIN

Logan! This is Tyler. He said we
can be best friends, all I have to
do is shut up!

Logan steps to Tyler.

LOGAN

Hey man, that's my brother. He's autistic.

AUSTIN

I'm autistic. True fact!

Tyler nods to his buddies.

TYLER

Told you he's one of those.

(to Logan)

And what's your excuse? Still waiting on puberty?

His friends crack up. Logan wants to punch this kid, but Tyler is twice his size. So he takes Austin's hand.

LOGAN

Come on, Auz Man.

AUSTIN

Wait!

Austin doubles back and bearhugs Tyler.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

See you in class, Tyler, glad we're best friends! Please, thank you, you're welcome, I love you!

Logan and Austin walk off, hand in hand. The poor bully doesn't know what to do.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

EXTREME CLOSE ON A ZIPPER. Zipping. Unzipping. Austin stares. Each tooth CLICKING. The sound, the texture. ZIP, ZIPP, ZIPPP

WIDER, we see Austin at his desk. A girl in front of him fiddles with her jacket zipper. The teacher drones on, Austin hears none of it. All he sees and hears is: ZIP, ZIPP, ZIPPP.

TEACHER (O.S.)

Austin. Austin?

The ZIPPING finally stops.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Earth to Austin. Are you with us?

Austin snaps out of it. Looks up. Everyone stares at him, including TYLER, who snickers.

TYLER

I think his brain's on another planet.

AUSTIN

No. My brain is right here in my head. On Earth.

The class LAUGHS. Good joke. Austin laughs too, but doesn't understand why. Then he looks right back to the ZIPPER.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - END OF DAY

Scott picks them up outside school. Austin seems happy, which is a relief. Scott looks to Logan, checking in.

SCOTT

How was it?

LOGAN

It was good.

AUSTIN

No, it was GREAT. I made a new best friend, Dad! His name is Tyler.

Logan gives Dad a reassuring nod.

LOGAN

It was fine.

SCOTT

Well, good. Fine is good.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Scott and Teresa prep dinner together. An old *Huey Lewis and the News* song plays on the radio.

*
*

SCOTT

No meltdowns. No calls from teachers. So... success.

They high five. Teresa grooves to the music, enjoying a moment of peace. Then Austin enters like a whirlwind.

AUSTIN

When is dinner? Is that what's for dinner? Is that meat? Is that pot roast or poop with white sprinkles? Hey, are werewolves real? What if we had one in Iowa?

(MORE)

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I just know they are real. Dad, I think I have a migraine. Do you have a migraine? Why do we get migraines? It's probably because I talk too much and my cortex can't keep up. I am such a dork, aren't I? Do you love me, Dad? Please tell me you love me.

(doesn't wait for an answer)
Werewolves must be so cool. I bet they have one at the zoo. If they don't you have to get them one. I would love to meet a werewolf and invite him to lunch.

He paces, rattling on. It's exhausting. JOE HIDES IN THE CORNER, wearing giant noise reduction headphones.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Is Bruce Lee Chinese? Oh, I know he is. If he were alive would he still be Chinese? Or is he Japanese? Either way.... he could come to lunch.

As he talks, Scott and Teresa look to each other. They're gonna lose their minds. Teresa mumbles...

TERESA

Someone has to do something, right?

They quickly do Rock-Paper-Scissors. Scott loses. *Damn.*

SCOTT

Hey, Auz Man. Austin, Dude. Listen to me. I have an idea. Look at me.

*
*

Finally Austin stops, intrigued. Dad raises an eyebrow.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

You wanna fly?

Austin's eyes light up. FROM THIS:

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY

Austin is FLYING. He sails through the air like a super hero, backlit by the orange afternoon sun. Jester hat fluttering.

Then Scott flies beside him. No wires, no tricks, these guys are flying! And to make it even cooler, A SUPER HERO THEME PLAYS. It's magical, and AUSTIN'S FACE BEAMS with pure joy.

AUSTIN

Flying is so easy, Dad! I'm
surprised more kids don't do it.

Just as we're wondering what the heck is going on here,
WE CUT TO REALITY. Which is --

EXT. PARK SWING SET - SUNSET

They're on swings. Logan pushes Austin and Scott, one at a time. Higher and higher. Austin is LOVING IT.

Then Logan pushes Scott really hard and runs under his swing. He doubles back and does it again.

SCOTT

Logan, you're getting strong! Look
how high we're going!

*

AUSTIN

Higher! Go higher!

BACK TO FLYING FANTASY. Scott soars through the air again. He looks over to Austin. But it's Logan flying beside him now. Scott grins, then hesitates. Something isn't right.

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

Higher!

As Scott realizes, the fantasy crumbles.

BACK TO REALITY. Austin pushes Scott now. As Scott's swing goes high, Austin tries to run under him like Logan did. But--

SCOTT

AUZ, NO!!!

Austin isn't fast enough, and Scott swings back down, SMASHING into Austin's little body like a freight train.

There's a THUD, then a horrible CRACK. Scott lands on top of Austin with his full weight.

Austin is already BAWLING, his mouth wide open but no sound coming out. Scott looks down with horror at Austin's twisted body. Austin stares back at him, in shock.

AUSTIN

Daddy, I can't move. Why did you do
that to me? I hurt really bad. Why
did you hurt me???

Logan stands frozen. He knows it's bad. Scott yells to him.

SCOTT

Logan, go get my phone, fast as you can. Tell Mom Austin is hurt. Go!

Logan snaps out of it. Sprints off. Scott cradles Austin in his arms. The Jester hat now crushed beneath his little body.

AUSTIN

I'm sorry, Daddy. I just wanted to be strong.... Like Logan.

SCOTT

It's alright, Auz Man. You're so strong. You're gonna be alright, ok?

But his eyes betray him. He's terrified.

IN A FEW HORRIBLE FLASHES, we see AUSTIN'S POV, DREAMLIKE:

- PARAMEDICS LEAN OVER HIM, loading him onto a stretcher.
- IN AN AMBULANCE, Scott covers his face, stifling sobs.
- ROLLING THROUGH A HOSPITAL. Teresa and Scott run alongside. Teresa's eyes wild with fear. She yells at Scott.

TERESA

What happened? What did you do???

- As the stretcher pushes through double doors to the ER, Scott collapses to the hallway floor in tears.

INT. HOSPITAL - CHAPEL - NIGHT

Teresa kneels alone in the chapel. Praying desperately.

TERESA

Please, please God.... PLEASE....
let him walk. Please...

Scott steps in, his face all shame. He sits beside her. Doesn't know what to do or say. Teresa feels his presence.

SCOTT

I was trying to do something fun. I didn't... I just didn't see him.
(no answer)
It happens, T. It could have happened on your watch, too...

She turns on him.

TERESA

But it didn't, and it doesn't. Ever
notice that?! It's always you.

She storms out. Leaving Joe alone. Well, alone with Joe, who
now sits beside him. After a long, awkward silence.

JOE

You are not a terrible father.

Scott nods, wanting to believe that.

JOE (CONT'D)

You are not the worst person ever.
You are not selfish. And reckless.
And foolish. And irresponsible...

SCOTT

Okay, Joe. Thank you.

A beat.

JOE

You think he's gonna be okay?

OFF THIS -

AUSTIN (O.S.)

I'm BATMAAAAN!!

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Austin runs into the waiting room in a custom-made carbon
fiber sleeveless upper body cast. Like a bullet-proof vest.
It's pretty cool. Teresa rushes to him, relieved.

DOCTOR

He spent the whole day cheering up
the nurses, reassuring them he's
fine. He'll need to wear the cast
for a few months while the
vertebrae heal. But as you can see,
he doesn't seem to mind too much.

Austin's cast is already signed by all the hospital staff.
And there's a giant Batman symbol drawn on the chest.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

You're a remarkable kid, Austin.

AUSTIN

Oh, I'm not Austin.

SCOTT
If you're not Austin, then -- "What
are you?"

Austin pulls him by the collar. Face to face.

AUSTIN
"I'm Batman!"

Scott and the nurses LAUGH. But Teresa is still reeling.

EXT. SCOTT AND TERESA HOME - EARLY MORNING

Scott zips up his suitcase, grabs his jacket. Teresa follows him to the front door.

TERESA
They really need you? In Topeka?

SCOTT
It's my job, T, I have to go.

TERESA
No, you GET to go. And you get to
bike and golf and fish, and I'm
always stuck here. With the kids.

He stops, looks at her. *Seriously?*

SCOTT
You could do other things.

TERESA
I broke my ankle last time we took
a walk, Scott.

SCOTT
I don't know what you want me to
say. I'm late for the airport.

TERESA
Just go. It's ok, I'm sorry, I'm
just... I love you. Go.

SCOTT
Ok. Love you, too.

But it doesn't feel that way.

INT. PLANE - MORNING

CLOSE ON SCOTT'S FEET, tapping. His work colleague **MILES** plops in the seat beside him. Coffee in hand. Scott is already buzzed, working on three mini vodkas.

MILES
Morning, Scott.

SCOTT
Miles.
(slurring a little)
Huh.... Your name is Miles. I just realized that.

MILES
Realized what?

SCOTT
We're on a plane. There's a joke there somewhere, right?

Miles helps him out.

MILES
Frequent flier Miles.

SCOTT
That's it!

He offers Miles a vodka. Miles holds up his coffee. Scott shrugs, downs it himself. Miles eyes him, a bit concerned.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S HOME - DAY

Teresa walks the house, picking up laundry. Clearing messy counter tops, toys, dishes. It's unending.

IN HER ROOM, she straightens a large collection of Beanie Babies. Opens UPS packages: new clothes, makeup, Air Jordans.

TERESA
Auz, new sneakers!

Austin runs in, stoked. Grabs them, runs out. Mom just shrugs.

TERESA (CONT'D)
"Thanks, Mom!" "Oh, you're welcome."
"Love you!" "Love you, too."

*
*

IN THE DEN, she sorts mail. Opens a drawer, adds bills to a large stack. Some OVERDUE. She closes the drawer. Sits alone for a long beat. Exhales. Depressed.

Finally she gets up. Clicks on the stereo. Finds a hard rock station. Aerosmith. YES! She CRANKS IT UP. Starts dancing alone. Like a teenager at a club. Blowing off steam. *

Austin runs in, wearing his new sneakers. And his hat. He joins her, excited. He's not letting his body cast slow him down a bit. They dance together. Crazy, silly dancing. It's cathartic. Then Logan storms in, annoyed.

LOGAN

Mom. MOM!!!

(turns the music off)

I'm trying to study!

They freeze, busted. Logan leaves. Then Teresa starts dancing again, without the music. Austin is right there with her.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA BEDROOM - NIGHT

Teresa sits up in bed, on her laptop. Online shopping. She clicks BUY on a \$100 Beanie Baby. SIGHS. Closes the laptop. Opens it. Adds another one to the cart. Closes it again. SIGHS again. Then clicks off the light and goes to sleep.

INT. TOPEKA BAR - NIGHT

Scott and Miles hang at a hotel bar. Miles finishes a beer.

SCOTT

Another round.

MILES

Dude, we have like six hours until the meeting. Don't know how you do it. I'm out.

He pats Scott on the shoulder and heads to the elevator.

JOE (O.S.)

I'm in.

Scott turns to find JOE STANDING BESIDE HIM. Scott grins.

SCOTT

Bartender!

AT THE ELEVATOR, Miles gives one more look back at Scott. Clearly worried. WE PUSH IN ON SCOTT. His eyes blurry, his face slack. He takes another drink. Over this: *

TERESA (PRE-LAP)

Without any notice?

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Scott pours himself WINE. He's home now. Teresa paces, upset.

SCOTT

They said the company "needs
someone more available for travel"
or whatever. Apparently I've had
too many distractions lately.
Austin, everything...

TERESA

Is that all they said? Nothing
about missing meetings, being late?

She eyes his glass of wine. Scott rises, annoyed.

SCOTT

They don't want a family man, T.
They want some young kid who can
commit his whole life to this
stupid job. That's not me anymore.

TERESA

So what now?

SCOTT

I get three months severance. We'll
make do. Cut back while I find
something else.

He walks out. Taking his wine with him. Then, Austin's VO:

AUSTIN (V.O.)

*You're lucky if you have a dad
without a job. Know why? He's home
ALL THE TIME...*

EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY

Scott mows the lawn. Austin tracks with him -- TALKING.

AUSTIN

Dad, know what I was thinking?
Thinking is weird. Thoughts happen
in your brain but you can't see
them. When I think things sometimes
I look up and think I'll see the
things I'm thinking but there's
nothing there. The things I think
are invisible. Isn't that so weird?

Scott just stares forward, tuning him out.

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA HOME - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Teresa unpacks large boxes of makeup products onto basement shelves. Austin stacks them all perfectly. One by one.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

*Then Mom started her own business
selling her favorite make-up
products to other people. And she
worked from home, so she was around
all the time, too!*

So Austin talks her ear off, too.

AUSTIN

Mom, do you know that no one owns
ducks? So we could just pick up a
duck and bring it home and it would
be our duck....

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

HALLOWEEN. Scott and family trick or treat. Austin is dressed as the IRON GIANT, his body cast painted silver. Logan is a BASKETBALL STAR, Teresa is LARA CROFT.

As they knock on doors, Scott sits on a curb in a UNICORN ONESIE. Joe beside him, as Tyler Durden from *Fight Club*.

JOE

Hey, man, why the long face?

SCOTT

Whadya mean? I'm fine. I think I'm
fine, how would I know?

He pulls out a flask from his unicorn pocket. Takes a swig. Joe points to the kids, collecting candy, having a blast.

JOE

Look. Look at them. Adorable. Go
engage.

SCOTT

What is it with you, always in my
business?

JOE

I'm just saying, you have a
tendency to retreat.

SCOTT

Maybe I think they'll have more fun
without me.

He takes another swig. Joe eyes the flask.

JOE

Careful, you're gonna get busted.

SCOTT

(scoffs)

Please. I'm a grown ass man.

Joe flicks his unicorn horn.

JOE

Yes. Yes, you are.

Austin runs over, GIDDY, his candy bag stuffed. Scott quickly
stashes his flask and smiles. From this, A BULLHORN BLAST:

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

Middle School basketball game. Scattered crowd. HALFTIME
MUSIC PLAYS. Logan sits with his teammates, including TYLER. *

BY THE BLEACHERS, Austin wears the mascot TIGER COSTUME. Dad
holds the head for him as Austin fiddles with the velcro in
the back. Nervous.

SCOTT

You sure about this? That's a lot
of people out there.

AUSTIN

Don't be a goober, Dad. Team Mascot
is the greatest honor there is.

SCOTT

Okay, just... stop with the velcro.

He helps put the head on, and Austin runs out.

ON THE COURT - Austin dances for the crowd. Having a blast.

But he can't stop fiddling with the velcro, and it looks like
he's doing some weird butt dance. The crowd CRACKS UP. But
he's not trying to be funny. On the bleachers, Tyler and his
buddies chuckle. Logan sees, but looks away, embarrassed. *

AUSTIN POV, INSIDE THE HEAD -- People laughing. Pointing.
CHEERING. It's SO LOUD. They look distorted. Scary, even.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

*Here's a true fact about me. Some
times a happy moment feels sad and
sometimes a sad moment feels happy.*

Auz suddenly stops, mid-dance. Then walks to the bench and sits, head down. Music still plays, but the court is empty.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

*I don't always know why, I don't
always understand. That's just what
it's like to be Austin.*

People CHEER for him anyway, but when Austin takes the head off, we see tears in his eyes. No one else notices. But Scott does. He pushes through the crowd and sits beside Austin.

SCOTT

Hey, dude. You did great. And look.
All that...

*

(points to LAUGHING fans)
...that means they loved it.
They're laughing because you made
them happy. They're laughing WITH
you, not at you.

Austin looks around more. Processing that.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

So go on. Finish your dance.

AUSTIN

I can't.

SCOTT

Yeah you can. Watch.

Scott gets up, puts the head on and prances out. Doing Austin's silly dance. People start to clap. Scott grins at Austin. *Come on!* And Austin finally runs out to join him.

And they dance together. Scott wearing the head, Austin wearing the body. THE MUSIC ENDS and Scott beams at Austin.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Nailed it! Love you, Auz Man.

*

He opens his arms for a hug, but Austin just squints back at him, curious. Then -

AUSTIN

You have something in your teeth.

And he bounds off. Scott shakes his head. Disappointed. Not the moment he was hoping for.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - NIGHT

Austin and Logan wait for Scott to pull up the car. Logan pulls Austin along on his skateboard, teaching him to balance. Suddenly Austin stops, looks at Logan.

AUSTIN
Is it hard being my brother?

Logan pauses, surprised by the question. He thinks.

LOGAN
No. It's an honor being your brother.
And sometimes annoying. But mostly
it's an honor.

Tyler approaches, grinning sarcastically.

TYLER
Sure that's a good idea, Auz Man?
Don't want to break anything. Or
everything.

AUSTIN
Tyler! Hi. Wanna ride??

But Logan pulls Tyler aside.

LOGAN
Leave him alone. He doesn't
understand. About you.

TYLER
Oh yeah? Understand what?

LOGAN
Even though you look big, you're
actually really small.

Tyler steps close, gets in Logan's face. Logan doesn't back down. But A CAR HORN breaks the moment.

SCOTT (O.S.)
Everything okay over there?

LOGAN
Hey, Dad. Fine.

Tyler SCOFFS, walks away. As Logan and Auz climb in the car, Dad eyes Logan, aware.

SCOTT
That's Tyler?

LOGAN
That's Tyler.

EXT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Scott parks in the driveway. He jams burger wrappers into a fast food bag as Logan and Austin file out --

SCOTT
Not a word to Mom, remember? Boys?

AUSTIN
Not what word?

LOGAN
He means don't mention the burgers.

As they enter the house, Scott looks to the curb. Frowns.

SCOTT (PRE-LAP)
Where are the bins?

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Scott quickly stuffs the wrappers in the kitchen trash. Turns to Teresa, hoping he's not busted.

SCOTT
The trash bins. They're not out there.

Teresa hesitates. She's the one who looks busted.

TERESA
They're uhhh.... they took them.

SCOTT
Who took them?

TERESA
The company, the trash company.
They came today, they took them.

Off Scott's VERY confused face, WE CUT TO:

A PILE OF UNPAID BILLS drops on the table. Scott pours himself a full glass of wine, angry.

SCOTT

So you just *didn't* pay them? Any of them?

TERESA

I've been trying to keep up, but... all the surgeries and medications and therapists, I had to start putting it on cards, then the cards raised the rates, and it just... got out of hand.

SCOTT

They took our TRASH CANS, Teresa! I've never even heard of that! And you're off buying Austin twenty different pairs of shoes and Star Wars crap and DVDs and... a million "bean bag babies!"

TERESA

Beanie Babies. They're an investment! And it's not just me, you know, all your hobbies and gadgets and country club memberships, how did you think we were paying for everything?

SCOTT

I didn't KNOW, Teresa!

TERESA

You didn't WANT to know!

AUSTIN WATCHES THEM from the other room, curious.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

Sometimes Mom and Dad yell when they talk. Mom says Dad doesn't hear a word she says, which is impossible, because she says the words so loud.

Scott gulps down his wine, refills the glass.

TERESA

I've been all alone here, you know? And maybe everyone else has it all figured out -- life, money, raising kids -- but I don't, I have no clue. It's just too much!

SCOTT

Too much??
(grabs the bills)
(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)
SEVENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS, Teresa!
How the hell are we gonna pay this??

TERESA
Stop yelling! You look like my Dad
when you yell!

SCOTT
We could lose our home!!

TERESA
STOP YELLING!

Scott suddenly throws his wine glass against the kitchen wall. It EXPLODES, spraying red wine and glass everywhere. Teresa SCREAMS.

ANGLE ON AUSTIN, standing in the doorway.

TERESA (CONT'D)
Don't come in here, there's glass!

She runs to Austin. Studies his face, worried that he's scared. He has an odd look, like he wants to say something.

TERESA (CONT'D)
You okay, Auz?

Finally --

AUSTIN
We had Burger Star for dinner.

TERESA
Oh. Oh, that's fine, honey.

Austin shuffles from the room. Scott looks from the broken glass to the bills. Lowers his voice.

SCOTT
We can't pay all this.

TERESA
What choice do we have?

SCOTT
We'll negotiate. There are firms
that do that. We need to talk to
someone.

Teresa nods, starts cleaning up the mess. Scott sighs, feeling bad. He joins her.

*
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AUSTIN (V.O.)

*Here's another true fact. Sometimes
if you spend too much money, you have
to spend more money for someone to
help you spend less money on the
money you already spent.*

*
*
*
*
*
*

INT. SCOTT AND TERESA'S HOUSE - OFFICE - DAY

*

Scott sits at his desk, a stack of paperwork in front of him.
Phone to his ear. He waits, annoyed, as it RINGS and RINGS.

TERESA

Give him a little more time, maybe
he's still working on it.

SCOTT

He's not working on anything, he
took my 5 grand and stopped
answering my calls. He's not gonna
save us "forty thousand dollars",
he's not gonna save us a dime, he
scammed us!

Scott rubs his temples, thinking. Then he hangs up the phone
and grabs his keys, determined.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Come on.

EXT. STRIP MALL - CONTINUOUS

SCOTT'S CAR pulls into a spot at a strip mall. He turns to
the kids in the back.

SCOTT

Stay here. We'll be right back.

Scott and Teresa jump from the car. They climb stairs, find
an office marked "*Fast and Friendly Mortgage/Debt Relief*".

Scott tries the door. Locked. Blinds are closed, but still
swinging, like they were JUST closed.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Lyle! Open up. I know you're in
there!

Teresa points.

TERESA

Scott!

A guy in a cheap suit sneaks down a set of back stairs.

TERESA (CONT'D)
Go, go, go!

They run after him. The guy climbs into a brown Lincoln Town Car and takes off.

INT. SCOTT'S CAR - MOMENT'S LATER

Scott and Teresa jump back in. Scott guns it.

AS HE RACES AFTER LYLE'S CAR, WE STAY ON AUSTIN'S FACE IN THE BACK SEAT. The wind whips his hair, his eyes take in the cars blurring by, FASTER AND FASTER. Over this shot, we hear:

SCOTT (O.S.)
Hey!!! Lyle!! Pull over!!!

LOGAN (O.S.)
Dad, what are we doing?

SCOTT (O.S.)
Where is he, where'd he go??

TERESA (O.S.)
There, behind the truck! He's exiting! You lost him!

SCOTT
Damn it!!

Finally the car slows. We pan to Dad, who looks back.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
You guys okay?

Logan looks rattled. But Austin is GRINNING ear to ear.

AUSTIN
That was totally wicked! Go faster,
Dadio! 88 MILES PER HOUUUUUR!!

A beat. And Teresa starts LAUGHING. Then Scott. The whole thing is ridiculous. CLOSE ON AUSTIN, happy as can be.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*That was a great day. Top five
family moments ever.*

EXT. SCOTT AND TERESA HOME - DAY

A FORECLOSURE SIGN in the lawn. A YARD SALE underway. Scott and Teresa sit in folding chairs as strangers pick through their belongings.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*But we never caught that man in the
 car. So other people got to have our
 house. And a bunch of our stuff.*

Scott sips a beer, bitter, as someone eyes his mountain bike.

SCOTT
 No. Not for sale!

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE - DAY

A much smaller house in a much less desirable neighborhood. A FOR RENT SIGN still pokes out from unraked leaves.

Teresa and the kids unload boxes from the cars. Scott carries a mattress alone. Joe tries to help.

SCOTT
 (annoyed)
 I got it, I got it.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - NIGHT

THANKSGIVING. Scott's parents arrive, and Austin throws his arms around them, no longer in his body cast.

SCOTT'S MOM
 Look at you. No cast!

AUSTIN
 I'm a free man!!

Scott's father glances around. The living room is tiny. With old carpeting. Boxes still stacked against wall.

AT THE TABLE, they all sit together. Ready to eat. Sharing what they're thankful for.

SCOTT'S DAD
 That my grand-rascals live right
 around the corner now, so I can
 visit whenever I want.

AUSTIN

I'm thankful for food. All of it,
YUM! And no more cast. And also
SpongeBob.

TERESA

Well. I'm thankful for our new
home.

She looks to Scott, trying to have a moment. But he's already
halfway through a glass of wine. Not feeling it. He raises *
his glass.

SCOTT

Agreed. On all fronts. Let's eat.

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE - NIGHT

In the driveway, Logan shows off skateboard tricks for Austin.
Scott sits with his Dad on the front steps, drinking a beer.

SCOTT

I don't know, maybe I'm cursed.
It's always something. Another
injury, another setback, another
catastrophe. It's just, it's a lot.

DAD

There's a word for all that, you
know?..... Life.

Scott scoffs. *Please.*

DAD (CONT'D)

Now all you gotta do is learn to
enjoy it.

Dad pats him on the shoulder, gets up to leave. He stops in
the doorway. Nods to Austin and Logan, LAUGHING in the yard.

DAD (CONT'D)

And you're right, son. It IS a lot.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Teresa cleans up the kitchen by herself. Austin comes
through, looking in cabinets, under the table.

AUSTIN (O.S.)

DAD?? DADIO! Come on, you
snickerdoodle. I know you're
hiding. Where ARE YOU??

Teresa mutters under her breath.

TERESA
Bet I know where he is.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - SCOTT'S CLOSET - SAME MOMENT

In the closet, only half-unpacked. Scott sits alone, hiding.
Drinking. Eyes far off.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Teresa brushes her teeth. Scott stumbles in, drunk. Collapses
on the bed. Out cold. Teresa shakes her head with disgust.

TERESA
Happy Thanksgiving.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Scott steps into the kitchen. Still blurry. Teresa stands at
the sink. Doesn't turn around. Tucks her thumbs into her
fists, fidgeting. *

SCOTT
Where are the kids?

TERESA
At a friend's. No school, remember?

Then he notices a bunch of booze bottles on the counter.
Teresa's pouring them all out.

SCOTT
What's this?

She stops, flexes her hands. Turns to face him, with resolve. *

TERESA
No more drinking.

Scott takes a moment with that. Looks at her, at the bottles.

SCOTT
I didn't know it was such a big
deal to you. You never said
anything.

TERESA
There's a lot I haven't said.

SCOTT
Oh yeah? And why is that?

TERESA
I don't know.

SCOTT
You don't know?

She sets a bottle down. Okay.

TERESA
Maybe because I haven't had the
guts. Maybe because I've been
divorced twice already and I have
two kids and I'm afraid I don't
have options. That I don't deserve
options. But you know what, I'm
tired of living with a man who
doesn't respect me. Doesn't respect
himself. I won't do it any more.

She sweeps all the bottles into a trash bag.

TERESA (CONT'D)
You stop this nonsense now, Scott. Or
I'm done. DONE. Now take this out.

And she walks from the room. Scott just stands there holding
a bag of his empty booze bottles in his hand.

JOE (PRE-LAP)
She's not wrong. You do drink a lot.

EXT. GOLF COURSE - DAY

Scott and Joe putt the 8th hole. Lush, rolling hills all
around. It's cold, but they don't care.

SCOTT
I drink exactly the amount you do.
And it's usually your idea.

JOE
Yeah, well my ideas are your ideas.

Scott putts. Misses.

SCOTT
People drink. Hell, she drinks, I
never say a word. And she shops,
and she plays her damn video games.
Now THAT'S an addiction.

JOE
Who said anything about addiction?

SCOTT
What? I don't know.

JOE
So why bring it up?

SCOTT
I didn't. You did.

Scott putts again. Misses again. *Dang it.*

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - SCOTT AND TERESA BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's late. Scott comes in quietly. Teresa is already in bed, turned toward the wall. Asleep?

He watches her for a moment. Like he hasn't seen her in a while. He gently eases into bed, not wanting to disturb her. Lays on his side, breathing with her. After a moment, she reaches her hand back. Puts it on his. He takes it, and they lay like that. Together but apart.

OVER THIS - *Jingle Bell Rock.*

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - HALLWAYS - DAY

Christmas season has begun. Lockers are decorated. Austin runs through the halls, wearing the tiger mascot costume. Hugs and high fives, everyone smiles, happy to see him.

AUSTIN
Welcome back! How was your
Thanksgiving, mine was AH-MAZING.
Christmas is next, are you ready??
Auz Man loves you!

*
*
*
*
*
*
*

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Austin bounds into class. He spots Tyler and sits beside him.

AUSTIN
Tyler! What's up, my man! Did you
get my facebook messages? You
didn't write back, just wondered if
you got them.

Tyler ignores him. But Austin doesn't get the hint.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Do you want to come to my house
after school and watch Yu-Gi-Oh?
Are we still friends?

TYLER
(super sarcastic)
Yeah, Austin. BEST friends.

As the teacher starts in with class, Tyler looks to his buddy
and mouths "watch this".

TYLER (CONT'D)
Hey, Austin. You want answers?

Austin looks at him, doesn't understand. Tyler leans close.

TYLER (CONT'D)
"I want the truth!"

AUSTIN
(gets it, lighting up)
"You can't handle the truth!"

-- and launches right into Jack Nicholson's speech.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
"Son, we live in a world that has
walls, and those walls have to be
guarded by men with guns...."

TEACHER
Alright, Austin. Let's settle in.

But Austin can't stop himself, and Tyler knows it.

AUSTIN
"Who's gonna do it? You? You,
Lieutenant Weinberg?"

TEACHER
Thank you for the performance,
Austin, that's enough.

But Austin keeps rattling it off. Tyler and his buddy stifle
LAUGHTER. But the other kids feel bad for him.

*

AUSTIN
"I have a greater responsibility
than you can possibly fathom. You
weep for Santiago, and you curse the
Marines. You have that luxury..."

The teacher shakes Austin's shoulder, and he JOLTS, rubs his eyebrow, talking faster. He has to finish.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

"You don't want the truth because deep down in places you don't talk about at parties, you want me on that wall -- YOU NEED ME ON THAT WALL.....!"

TEACHER

Ok, I think you need a break. Would someone walk him down to the office?

*

A NICE GIRL volunteers. Calmly helps Austin to the door. Shooting Tyler a look. Austin claws at his face as he goes, in full meltdown mode. It's really sad. Even Tyler looks like he feels bad. Classmates call out to Auz as he goes. "You're okay, Auz man." "We love you, dude." FROM THIS:

*

*

TERESA (PRE-LAP)

She called it a resource class.
It's for special needs kids!

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - NIGHT

Teresa paces the house. Whispers into the phone, distraught.

TERESA

She said they think it's time, that it's only gonna get harder, it's not fair to him or the other kids.

She peeks in on Austin, who sits on his bed, obsessively re-sorting his shoelace collection.

TERESA (CONT'D)

Apparently they have classrooms right there on campus. She said they can enroll him right away, like they're doing us a favor.

SCOTT (V.O.)

Maybe we just need to adjust his meds again. What did you say?

TERESA

I didn't know what to say! I agreed. Honestly, it didn't sound like we really have a choice.

(upset)

Scott.... I think I just made the worst decision of my life.

SCOTT (V.O.)
No, T, relax, you always know
what's best for him.

TERESA
Where are you?

SCOTT (V.O.)
Just doing some Christmas shopping.
I'll be home soon. I love you.

TERESA
Yeah, you too.

She hangs up, and we CUT TO SCOTT. He's in:

INT. BAR - AFTERNOON

A local dive bar, glass of Scotch in hand. Alone, this time.
No sign of Joe. He hangs up his cell, looking guilty.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL CAMPUS - MORNING

Scott, Teresa and Austin follow an UNINSPIRED TEACHER to a
pre-fab trailer in the back of school property. They enter
the trailer, skeptical, to find --

INT. SPECIAL NEEDS CLASSROOM - DAY

A HECTIC, CHAOTIC classroom, filled with a mix of kids, some
with obvious disabilities, others with behavior and
discipline problems. The vibe is very bad.

Austin looks to his mom. Fidgeting.

AUSTIN
But none of my friends are here.

Teresa doesn't know what to say. On the verge of tears. Scott
tries to be encouraging.

SCOTT
You'll make new friends, Auz. You
always make friends. Right?

It breaks their heart, but they hug Austin and walk out.
Austin stands alone, scared.

LATER. A fight breaks out between two kids. The teacher tries
to break it up, gets pushed backwards against a desk. Austin
cowers in the corner, clawing at his face, whimpering.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - NIGHT

Dinner. Austin sits at the table, dark. Mom scoops potatoes on everyone's plates. Austin pushes the spoon away.

AUSTIN
I don't want them.

TERESA
What do you mean, you love mashed potatoes.

AUSTIN
Well, now I hate them. They're retarded.

TERESA
Hey, don't say that word.

AUSTIN
Retarded. Retarded, retarded, retarded, retarded.

SCOTT
Austin, stop it.

AUSTIN
You stop it, asshole!

Logan spits his milk. Scott and Teresa are shocked.

SCOTT
What is with you?! You want to go to bed early?

AUSTIN
No. I don't want to go to bed, I don't want to go to school, I don't want to go ANYWHERE!!

TERESA
Hey hey hey. Calm down. Come here.

AUSTIN
No. Don't touch me, don't come near me!

Teresa steps toward him and Austin WHIPS HIS GLASS AT HER, hitting her square in the forehead with an awful THUNK.

Teresa stumbles back, stunned. Blood already flowing.

Scott jumps up, shocked, and runs to Austin, who pushes his chair back, kicking and punching, going berserk.

Logan tries to help, but Austin grips his brother by the throat and starts choking him. Logan struggles, fighting to free himself, his face turning beet red.

SCOTT

Austin!! Stop it. Let him go. AUSTIN!!

Scott tries to pry his hands off, but Austin flails and SCREECHES, his eyes going black like he's possessed.

Teresa rushes over. It takes both of them, but Austin finally releases his grip and Logan GASPS for air. Austin goes limp, panting and crying. He whimpers to himself.

AUSTIN

Please don't make me go back to
that room. They scare me, please
don't make me go back...

Teresa wipes the blood from her head. They all look to each other, reeling. What just happened?? From this, the BUZZING OF AN ELEVATOR --

INT. HOSPITAL - PSYCHIATRIC WARD - NIGHT

Revealing the sterile lobby of a psychiatric ward. Armed guards stand before a large vault-like door.

Scott and Teresa escort Austin in. Still in shock.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

*The doctor said I was taking the
wrong medication and I was "under a
lot of stress", which means it was
actually the medication that choked
Logan, not me. Stupid medication.*

Scott fills out paperwork as Teresa tries to soothe Austin. He's still agitated, so two nurses hold him down and give him a shot. Finally his body goes slack and his eyes stare off.

A KIND-FACED DOCTOR emerges and speaks to Scott and Teresa. They listen, through a fog.

Then a HORRIBLE GRINDING NOISE as the vault door slides open. Two orderlies take Austin by either arm and lead him away. Teresa and Scott try to follow, but the guard stops them.

They watch, helpless, as Austin looks back, confused. *Why aren't you coming with me?*

TERESA

It's just a few days, Baby! The
doctors need to make sure you're ok,
but we'll be back in just a few days!

Austin's face crumples up into abject terror, and he BURSTS INTO TEARS. Then the door slowly swings shut, sealing them off from their boy.

Teresa collapses to the floor. She SOBS, her back pressed against the vault door, as close to Austin as she can get.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - NIGHT

In a daze, Teresa, Scott and Logan decorate the house for Christmas. They hang ornaments on a little tree.

LOGAN

He'll love it. When he gets back,
he'll be so happy.

CLOSE ON TERESA. Her eyes empty.

INT. HOSPITAL - PSYCHIATRIC WARD - NIGHT

Austin lies in a cot. Curled up, scared.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

*Sometimes we feel alone, even when
we're not.*

EXT. GROCERY STORE - SAME MOMENT

Teresa climbs into her Mustang with a small bag of groceries. She sits, trying to breathe, trying to hold it together. Then she starts the car and pulls away.

INT. HOSPITAL - PSYCHIATRIC WARD - NIGHT

Lying in the dark, Austin starts singing to himself, soft and quiet. Like Mom would do.

AUSTIN

*You are my sunshine, my only
sunshine....*

EXT. DARK ROADS - NIGHT

Teresa speeds along dark, winding roads, eyes blurred with tears. OVER THIS, Austin's voice continues:

AUSTIN (O.S.)
*You make me happy when skies are
 grey...*

Teresa drives faster and faster. She POUNDS the steering wheel, unleashing bottled up rage. Then, in total desperation, SHE CLOSSES HER EYES AND LETS GO OF THE WHEEL.

Time slows down. All sound fades away, except Austin singing.

AUSTIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*...You'll never know dear, how
 much I love you. Please don't take
 my sunshine away...*

OUT THE WINDOW - The night blurs by.

CLOSE ON TERESA'S FACE. Wet with tears. Eyes clenched shut.

FROM THIS, WE SEE FLASHES. MEMORIES:

BABY AUSTIN in Teresa's arms. Teresa doing dishes, 2 YEAR-OLD AUSTIN plays on the floor. AUSTIN AT 5, Teresa sings to him at bedtime. Her voice blending with his in a haunting duet.

AUSTIN AND TERESA (O.S.)
*The other night, dear. As I lay
 sleeping, I dreamt I held you in
 my arms....*

MORE FLASHES. Playing, crying, laughing. Scott with his guitar, adding to the song. Connecting them all.

BACK TO TERESA'S FACE. Eyes still closed.

THEN TO THE ROAD. The car races for a drop off.

AUSTIN AND TERESA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*And now that you're here, my dreams
 are waking...*

A FINAL FLASH. 5-year old Austin. Giggling.

AUSTIN AND TERESA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...and I will keep you from all harm.

The tires hit the grooved edge of the pavement -
 BBBBRRRRZZZZT! - and snaps Teresa back to reality.

THE MUSIC CUTS OUT, replaced by SQUEELING, as Teresa slams on the brakes and cranks the wheel.

The Mustang spins 360°, leaving a trail of black rubber. It finally skids to a stop, inches from the edge.

INSIDE THE CAR, Teresa sits in silent shock. *What did I just do?* Then she puts her head in her hands and cries. Over this:

PREACHER RICK (PRE-LAP)
I know this must be really
difficult right now, I can only
imagine...

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - DAY

TERESA'S CHURCH FRIENDS, LORI and PREACHER RICK gather around Teresa in the living room. Lori squeezes Teresa's hand.

*
*

PREACHER RICK
...but we're here for you, and with
you.

Teresa nods, grateful. But still overwhelmed. She bows her head....

TERESA
I know you're with him, God, I know
he's not alone. Thank you....

Scott and Joe watch from the doorway, super skeptical.

JOE
Did she seriously just say *Thank*
You to God right now?

AFTERWARD, Rick spots Scott on his way out.

PREACHER RICK
Scott. Nice to see you. Hope you're
holding up okay.
(a beat)
And hey, if you need anything. I'm
always around.

SCOTT
Cool, yeah. Actually, one thing you
could do for me. Tell God if he
really feels the need to punish
someone right now, how about punish
me? I can handle it. Hell, I deserve
it.

(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)

(dark)

But leave my wife and kid alone.

Rick nods, unfazed.

PREACHER RICK

I'll tell Him.

With that, Scott struts away. Joe chases after him.

JOE

Oh snap! That was dope. You just told that preacher what's WHAT!

INT. HOSPITAL - PSYCHIATRIC WARD - NIGHT

The vault door BUZZES open and the DOCTOR leads Scott and Teresa into a community room.

KIND-FACED DOCTOR

He's been great. We'd kind of like to hire him, to be honest. I think everyone here will be sad to see him go...

THEY SEE -- Austin at a table, putting on a puppet show for a collection of patients. All of them smiling. Austin sees his parents and runs to them. Huge hugs.

AUSTIN

Mom! Dad!

His eyes are clear, he looks bright and happy.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

(whispers, excited)

There are some really, really messed up people in here. Want to meet them??

And before they can answer, Austin starts introducing them to his new friends. Mom and Dad just smile, baffled as always.

INT. BURGER STAR - DAY

Scott, Teresa and Austin wait in line to order. Special treat on the way home. Austin taps the man in front of him.

AUSTIN

Hi, my name is Austin, Richard Austin LeRette. What are you going to have?

(MORE)

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I'm having the number eleven.
That's the ten-piece nugget meal
with fries and a drink. I plan on
getting a strawberry milkshake for
my drink, because there's just
something about a milkshake with
nuggets that's absolute perfection.
For the fries I will get salt and
pepper and ketchup. For the nuggets
I will have ranch, honey mustard,
buffalo, sweet and sour, barbecue,
and more ranch, of course. Oh, I'll
get a lot of napkins, too. Please,
thank you, and you're welcome.

The man takes all that in. Scott just shrugs. *That's my son.*

AT THE TABLE, Scott and Teresa watch as Auz digs in, MOANING
with delight at everything he eats. Fully in the moment.
Then, without warning, he looks up at them. Matter of fact.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I'm not going back there again. Can
I have more ranch dressing, please?

And that's that.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - CHRISTMAS MORNING

They all open presents. Happy to be back together. Austin
holds his lizard MARTY, who wears a tiny Santa hat.

The tree is small, and the gifts are, too. Logan opens one.
It's a NEW SKATEBOARD. He lights up.

SCOTT

This one is lighter and more narrow,
better for doing tricks...

LOGAN

Awesome! Thanks, guys.

Austin rips open a present. A neon green bowtie.

TERESA

It's a bit of a small Christmas
this year, but we thought you might
want to add one to the collection.

AUSTIN

You kidding, it's the greatest gift
I ever got!

And he means it.

THAT NIGHT, Scott settles onto the couch beside Teresa. A moment alone. He hands her an eggnog. CLINKS her glass.

SCOTT

Don't worry, no alcohol. So it's not like it tastes good or anything.

A long beat.

TERESA

There's no way we're sending him back to that classroom.

SCOTT

I know.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

A FLYER slams down on the table. CHURCH CAMPING TRIP.

AUSTIN

Dad, look!! Father/Son camping trip in March. It's annual, that means every year. We HAVE to go!!

Scott eyes the FLYER, skeptical.

SCOTT

I don't know, Auz. Don't think it's a good idea. You'd have to sleep in a tent, there are bugs, lots of kids doing things you might not be able to do.

AUSTIN

But I CAN do it, Dad. PLEASE. I just want to do something normal. With normal kids. I don't want to be "special", I want to be like every other dude.

(emotional)

I want to go camping with my Daddy.

Scott hesitates. Austin can tell he's got him on the hook.

AUSTIN (V.O.)

Here's a trick I know. If you really, really want something, just talk and talk and talk about it and whatever you do don't stop talking and then you get it.

Austin leans in harder now. Super earnest. Closing the deal.

AUSTIN

It could be like an extra Christmas present, since this was a smaller Christmas because of money, and I've been so good, and I did have to spend four days in a mental institution, and I just really, really want to go camping with you. Please, please, PLEASE, Dad!

Scott SIGHS. Looks to Teresa. She shrugs.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

YESSS!!

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - SCOTT AND TERESA BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

5am. Scott and Teresa wake up to Austin jumping on the bed.

AUSTIN

Dad! Guess how many days until the camping trip? 19 and a half.

Scott exhales, bleary. *Are you kidding me right now?*

SCOTT

No, Auz. The trip is in March. That's like three months away.

AUSTIN

Uh uh, because tonight is New Year's Eve, and there's a party, so we won't even be thinking about camping, so tonight doesn't count. And there's eight weekends until the trip, and weekends don't count because weekends are fun. And I'll be sleeping nine hours of every day, so I won't even feel those. And I have three friends' birthday parties and then *Batman vs. Superman* comes out March 25, and it's two hours and 32 minutes long, but with popcorn and trailers, that's a solid three hours we won't be thinking about ANYTHING else, and so none of that counts. Which leaves 19 and a half days until Father/Son Camping Weekend!!

And he runs out of the room. Scott looks to Teresa.

SCOTT
I really hate camping.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Scott and the kids are dressed up and ready for New Years. Austin grabs his Jester hat. Mom lies on the couch in sweats, not happy. She whispers to Scott.

TERESA
You can't just stay home?

SCOTT
The kids want to see the fireworks,
T, they want to have a fun night.

TERESA
YOU want to have a fun night.

SCOTT
We all do. You'll just be resting
anyway.

She shakes her head. *Whatever*. Then she smiles for the kids.

LOGAN
You sure, Mom?

TERESA
I took some Tylenol, I'll be okay.
Have fun, just be home by 11 so we
can watch the ball drop together.

Austin gives her a quick kiss, bounds out the door.

AUSTIN
Love you, Mama bear! Feel better.

Scott avoids her gaze. Shuts the door, annoyed.

EXT. IOWA COUNTRY CLUB PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Scott pulls his white Taurus into the Country Club valet.

They walk under a fancy archway to find a patio party in full swing. A banner reads: *HAPPY NEW YEAR!*

Austin goes right for the food trays. Scott goes right for the bar. WE'VE NOW REACHED THE OPENING SCENE.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*Here it is. This is the night I was
 telling you about, remember??*

LATER, Scott makes small talk with some friends. Already sloppy, talking too close. His parents are there. They say goodnight early, and his Dad leans close.

SCOTT'S DAD
 Happy New Year, son. Take it easy
 with that.

He takes the drink from Scott's hand as they leave. Scott immediately grabs another one from a passing tray.

FIREWORKS EXPLODE IN THE SKY. Everyone OOH and AWWs. Austin stares, transfixed.

Scott's PHONE BUZZES. A text from Teresa. "It's 11, you on your way?" But he's too far gone. He pops open a custom beer bottle with a rubber stopper. *Fancy.*

Then he joins his kids on the dance floor. Stumbling in sloppy circles, flailing his arms. Beer in hand. It's not charming. It's embarrassing. Logan looks concerned, Austin thinks it's funny. He dances just as silly.

Then Scott gets dizzy and drops the bottle. It SHATTERS on the floor. Oops.

INT. IOWA COUNTRY CLUB - MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Scott stumbles in - propped up by Joe. Joe pushes him against the sinks. Scott slaps him away, slurring.

SCOTT
 Off! Hands off, I'm fine.

And they have the fight we first saw as Scott talking to himself.

JOE
 You are lost, my friend, your moral
 compass is broken. You're failing
 as husband and a father.

Scott glares back, defiant. But there's shame behind his eyes.

SCOTT
 Yeah? Who are you to judge me?!

Before Joe can answer, the door opens and an ELDERLY MAN steps in. Scott straightens.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Hey man, what's up. Sweet tie.

The old man frowns, goes into a stall. Scott turns back.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
I'm going home.

He takes out his keys, but Joe grabs them. No way. They struggle over the keys.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Give em back.

JOE
No!

SCOTT
Give em back!

JOE
NO! Just cool it.

SCOTT
I'm fine, I'm still in control.

JOE
Great. Then let's just walk back out there, sober up and go home. Ok?

SCOTT
Ok.
(reaches for the keys)
I'll drive.

JOE
No, I'm not letting you behind the wheel.

SCOTT
And I'm not asking your permission.

He reaches for the keys, but Joe pulls them away again. Scott throws him against the wall. Angry.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
This is none of your business, Joe!
It never is!

He grabs the keys and heads for the door. Turns around.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
Don't follow me. I mean it. I'm done with you.

And he storms out. Joe stands there, like he really wants to follow, but physically can't.

Then the toilet FLUSHES. The old man peeks from stall door.

ELDERLY MAN
I'm coming out now.

INT. IOWA COUNTRY CLUB - PATIO - NIGHT

Scott grabs the kids and heads for the parking lot, Austin's Jester hat bouncing as they go.

Joe stands in the crowd, WATCHING THROUGH THE WINDOW, sad, as Scott leads his children to the car.

WE SEE IT PLAY OUT FROM JOE'S POV. And this time it's not funny at all. As Scott falls to the ground, so drunk he can't stand up. As the other man hands him his keys. As Austin giggles, clueless, and Logan cries. Scared to death.

AS THE CAR DRIVES OFF, the crowd counts down to midnight.
"Five, four, three, two, one...."

WE CUT TO BLACK:

CROWD (O.S.)
Happy New Year!!!

SILENCE. For a long beat.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*Like I said. Sometimes it's bad
when things break, sometimes it's
good. You don't always know which
it's gonna be.*

THEN, from the darkness -- BRIGHT WHITE LIGHT. And WATER.
Cascading down in SUPER SLO MOTION.

It's beautiful. Cleansing. Serene. And we SMASH CUT INTO:

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - SCOTT AND TERESA BEDROOM - MORNING

A pitcher of cold water dumps on Scott.

He bolts up in bed, GASPING. Soaking wet. Still in last night's clothes. He looks up through swollen eyes and sees:

TERESA, standing over him. Furious.

TERESA

I want you out of this house. NOW!

Scott is bleary, confused. No idea what's happening. He squints, trying to put it together. Suddenly he jumps up -

SCOTT

The kids!

He rushes to the window -- THE CAR IS ON THE LAWN. Crashed through their fence. His brain spins. *What did I do??*

TERESA

The kids are fine, they're in their room. And they're staying there until you're gone. I don't want you near them. Or me. Now get out.

SCOTT

Teresa....

TERESA

GET! OUT!!

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE - MORNING

Scott stumbles from the house, past his wrecked car. He pauses to try to straighten a splintered fence post. Then gives up and walks off down the street, alone.

EXT. SCOTT'S PARENTS' HOUSE - DAY

Scott's Mom and Dad stand at the front door as Scott climbs the porch, ashamed.

SCOTT (PRE-LAP)

I don't know what to do, I don't know where to go...

INT. SCOTT'S PARENTS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Scott sits across from them. Head down.

SCOTT'S DAD

You stay here with us.

Scott finally glances at his mother. Knows she's angry.

SCOTT

I'm sorry, Mom.

Mom picks up a plate. *Here we go.* But instead of smashing it, she hands it to Scott.

SCOTT'S MOM
You break it.

He hesitates, but she's not messing around. He shrugs, throws the plate to the floor. It BREAKS into pieces. She points.

SCOTT'S MOM (CONT'D)
Is that you right now?

Scott nods, eyes filling. Then Mom wraps her arms around him.

SCOTT'S MOM (CONT'D)
Moments like this are what grace is meant for, Scott.
(takes his face in her hands)
It's not your mistakes that define you, it's how you heal. How you put the pieces back together.
So get to work.

She slaps his face hard. Scott flinches, *Hey!* Looks to Dad.

SCOTT'S DAD
What she said.

INT. ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS MEETING - DAY

Scott sits in the back of an AA meeting, head low, just listening, as they all read together.

EVERYONE TOGETHER
"An honest regret for harms done, a genuine gratitude for blessings received, and a willingness to try for better things tomorrow..."

EXT. FIELD - SUNSET

Scott walks beside a long, frosted field. Alone.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Scott plays at the park with Austin and Logan.

AUSTIN
When are you coming home?

SCOTT

Not sure yet, Auz Man. I need some
time to get better.

Austin doesn't understand. But Logan does. And Scott can
barely make eye contact with him.

AUSTIN

Hey, maybe you should go to the
crazy hospital like I did.

SCOTT

Maybe I should.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - DINING ROOM - MORNING

Teresa sits with Austin at the table. Home schooling him.

TERESA

Come on, Auz, stay focused. I'm not
just gonna give you the answers.

Austin SIGHS, turns back to his book. OFF THIS, we hear
MACHINE GUN FIRE.

TERESA (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)

No way. Not ready, not even close.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Teresa and Lori play CALL OF DUTY on Xbox. Both of them
BLASTING ENEMY SOLDIERS as they chat.

*

TERESA

I just keep thinking of him....
choosing to drink, after everything
we talked about. Choosing to get in
that car. With our kids. You know
what could have happened to them, I
can't even....

(she shudders)

So no. God can forgive him if he
wants to. Not me. Not now.

LORI

I hear that. I do. I'll just say
this, though...

TERESA

No, don't try to talk me down, you kidding me, after everything we went through? Growing up with this. I'm not doing it again....

LORI

That's not what I'm saying, let me finish.

Lori lowers her controller.

TERESA

Go ahead.

LORI

All I'm saying is -- You're not Mom, T. And Scott's not Dad. Yeah, he messed up, but he's HERE. He loves you, he loves those kids. And you know what, I'll bet he's struggling with a lot right now. But you've had your share of struggles, too, be honest.

TERESA

So?

She fires a ROCKET LAUNCHER, blows up a building. YES.

LORI

So are you gonna struggle together, or struggle apart?

TERESA

Apart. Definitely. I can't even look at him, I'd tear his face off, I'm serious.

Lori LAUGHS.

LORI

Alright then. Fair enough.

EXT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - MORNING

Logan rolls up to school on his new SKATEBOARD. As he kicks up the board, it's snatched away from behind. He turns.

TYLER

Happy New Year, Tiny Tim, check out my sweet new board.

LOGAN

Why are you such a jerk, man? Give it back.

TYLER

Nah. But you can borrow it sometime.

He starts to walk away. Logan grabs the board. Tyler spins around, pushes Logan hard.

Logan stumbles back, then charges Tyler, pissed.

But Tyler is too big for him. He absorbs the momentum, then punches Logan square in the face. Knocks him to the ground.

Logan isn't done. He charges Tyler, tackling him. Then unleashes, swinging wildly. His punches barely connect, but it's enough to freak Tyler out. He pushes Logan off.

LOGAN

What is it with you?? You mess with my brother, you mess with me, WHY?? Do you even see yourself? You're a cliché, you're a bully, you're nothing!

By now students have gathered. A TEACHER rushes over. She looks to Logan, surprised.

TEACHER

Logan? What is this?

LOGAN

Nothing. He took my skateboard.

The teacher turns to Tyler. He shrugs, hands the board over.

TYLER

Learn to take a joke, man.

He walks off, trying to be play it cool. But he's rattled.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Teresa puts ice on Logan's swollen eye. Austin is upset.

AUSTIN

LOGAN! Why did you hit Tyler??

LOGAN

He hit ME! Austin, the guy is a total jerk, why do you want to be friends with him so much?

AUSTIN
Because..... He's sad.

LOGAN
He's WHAT?

AUSTIN
He's sad. His Dad's been in jail
for a long, long time, and also his
Mom is sick, like really sick with
cancer, and I heard they don't even
get to do Christmas. So I think
he's sad. I can see it when I look
at him. And that makes me sad.

Logan frowns, struck. Then the front door opens and Scott
rushes in, already worked up. Sees Logan's black eye.

SCOTT
This was Tyler again?

LOGAN
It's fine, Dad. I'm okay.

SCOTT
I'm going to school tomorrow. I'm
gonna straighten this kid out.

Logan stops him.

LOGAN
No. Dad. Let me deal with it.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - MORNING

Logan sits across from Teresa and the Principal, **ILENE**.

ILENE
You sure you want to do this?

Logan nods, and ILENE opens the door. The TEACHER who broke
up the fight leads Tyler in. He sees Logan and stops.

Logan holds out a large gift, wrapped in Christmas paper.

TYLER
What is this?

LOGAN
It's for you. A late Christmas
present.

Tyler eyes him and all these adults, wary.

TYLER
I don't get it.

ILENE
It's okay. Open it.

Tyler hesitates, then carefully opens the gift. It's Logan's new skateboard. Tyler looks to him. WTF??

LOGAN
I want you to have it.

TYLER
Why?!

LOGAN
I thought... maybe you didn't have a great Christmas, so...

TYLER
You what?

Tyler stares at him, his face unreadable. Logan fumbles.

LOGAN
I don't know, I just wanted you to have that. And I know that's kind of weird, but -- I guess I'm kind of weird. Anyway...
(totally sincere)
I don't want to fight with you, I'd rather be friends. Is that okay?

Tyler's face goes red. Looks like he's going to be angry, but instead tears well in his eyes. Tyler lowers his head. After a beat, he nods. And tears fall. From Logan, too. AND FROM TERESA, who couldn't be more proud of her boy.

INT. ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS MEETING - DAY

Another day, another meeting. Partway through, Scott looks up and recognizes someone in the group. *It's Preacher Rick.*

AFTERWARD, Scott approaches him.

SCOTT
Rick. What are you doing here?

PREACHER RICK
(matter of fact)
I'm an alcoholic. You?

SCOTT
Yeah... uh. Same.

First time he's actually said it. Rick pats his back.

PREACHER RICK
See you next time.

INT. RENTAL HOUSE - MORNING

Logan grabs his backpack, ready for school. He looks to Austin, sitting at the dining room table, ready for home schooling. His lizard Marty is his only classmate. It's sad.

Mom sees Logans's face.

TERESA
We'll figure something out. We'll
find him a good school, don't worry.

*
*

He nods, thinking. Then gives her a quick kiss and heads out.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY

*

Logan carries his tray. He spots a group of kids huddled, whispering and giggling. Hears the word "Austin", then one of the kids sees him and they all go quiet. Logan struts over.

*
*
*

LOGAN
Hey, are you talking about my
brother? Do NOT make fun of him.

*
*
*

They all turn, revealing TYLER. Logan eyes him.

*

TYLER
No man, we weren't. For real.

*
*

But they're hiding something. Tyler gives Logan a reassuring look. *It's cool, promise.* Then waves the other kids off. He nods for Logan to join him, offers his brownie as a peace offering. Wary, Logan accepts. Then sits with Tyler for lunch.

*
*
*
*

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Scott and Teresa meet in the school's front entrance.

SCOTT
Do you know what this is about?

Teresa shakes her head. No idea. As they walk down the hall --

PRINCIPAL (PRE-LAP)
Thank you for coming in.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

The principal ILENE sits across from them. They're both wary.

PRINCIPAL
I want to talk about Austin. I know
you've withdrawn him from the
resource class.

TERESA
We're homeschooling for now. Until
we find something else.

Ilene nods.

SCOTT
Look, we know he's different,
Ilene, we're not delusional. But
the thing that makes Austin
different is what makes him
"special." And we refuse to hide
that away. Or apologize for it.
(firm)
So we'll find him another school.
He does better when he's around
more "typical" kids. They're his
friends. He learns from them. And I
think they learn just as much from
him.

*

After a beat.

ILENE
I agree.
(she opens a file)
And you're right about the other
kids. They all love him.

She slides a stack of loose leaf paper across the desk. Pages
and pages of signatures.

ILENE (CONT'D)
It's a petition. Signed by just
about every student in school.

Scott and Teresa flip through the pages, in shock.

ILENE (CONT'D)
Austin inspires something in
people.

(MORE)

ILENE (CONT'D)
I think we can all learn from him.
I know I can.
(she smiles)
He's welcome back any time.

From this -- CHEERING.

INT. MIDDLE SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - DAY

A school rally. Ilene stands before the whole student body.

ILENE
I have a special announcement. Back
by popular demand.... Please give a
big, rowdy welcome to the man
behind the tiger. Everyone's
favorite mascot, Auz Man!

Austin runs out in the tiger costume and everyone FREAKS OUT.
MUSIC PLAYS and Austin does his famous Tiger dance.

Tyler and Logan run up to join him. Logan wears the Jester
hat. He yells to Tyler over the APPLAUSE.

LOGAN
Hey. Thanks, man. For doing this.

Tyler grins.

TYLER
Don't know what you mean.

He snatches the Jester hat and puts it on.

FROM BESIDE THE BLEACHERS, Scott and Teresa take it all in.
Scott watches AUSTIN, dancing, laughing, happy as can be.

PUSH IN ON SCOTT'S FACE. He smiles, but something in him is
unsettled. The rhythm of the drums is slowly replaced by a
pensive CLICK, CLICK, CLICK....

SCOTT (PRE-LAP)
I wish I could enjoy *anything* as
much as my son enjoys *everything*.

INT. ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS MEETING - DAY

Scott speaks. He grips a pen, CLICKING it over and over.

SCOTT
I've always held on so tight to
things. I don't even know why.
(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)
I just need everything to be a
certain way...

Scott looks at his shoes as he talks. He taps his feet to the
CLICKS. Twice with the right, twice with the left.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
We talk about "an attitude of
gratitude".... That's never been
me. I'm never content, never have
been. I used to think that made me
ambitious, but really I'm just....
(he turns inward)
Ungrateful. I hate that about
myself. I push everything away --
everything and everyone I care
about.

Scott looks up for the first time. Into the crowd of faces.
Rick is there. And then we see -- JOE.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
I don't want to do that anymore.

Joe nods. Like he's accepting an apology. From himself.

SCOTT (CONT'D)
I want to be more like my son.

He pauses. Taps twice with his left foot. Just once with the
right. Stops himself. Waits. Nothing. *Huh.*

EXT. SCOTT'S PARENTS' HOUSE - DAY

Scott returns to the house to find Teresa waiting on the
front steps. He stops, surprised. Then he waves.

INT. SCOTT'S PARENTS' HOUSE - DAY

Scott pours coffee. Hands a mug to Teresa. They're both a
little awkward.

TERESA
So. I wanted to talk about.... the
uh -- the camping trip. Is this
weekend.

SCOTT
Right. I figured that was off. That
I.... shouldn't go.

TERESA

I think you should. Austin is so excited about it.

Scott shifts in place, like a child. Working up the nerve.

SCOTT

T. I'm so sorry. About what I did.
And what I didn't do. About
everything. There's so much I want
to say...

He chokes, can't quite look at her. Still filled with shame.
Before he can say any more, Teresa takes a step toward him.

TERESA

You know what I admire about you?

Tears immediately well in Scott's eyes. He shakes his head
and turns away. He can't accept it. But Teresa stands right
in front of him, takes his hand.

TERESA (CONT'D)

You're broken. And lost, and
scared, and getting things
wrong.... But you keep trying.

Scott nods, barely holding it together.

TERESA (CONT'D)

You know how I used to wonder if I
was the princess or the ugly
stepsister? Turns out I'm not
either, I'm just a regular mess.
And I don't expect you to be a
perfect prince, that would be
boring. And it would make me feel
super insecure.

(she looks him in the eye)

You're a good man, Scott, with a
good heart. I knew it the moment I
met you. You've given up a lot for
this family, and you've never
stopped fighting for us. Even now.

Scott cries openly, unable to contain it anymore.

TERESA (CONT'D)

Two month sober. I'm so proud of
you.

SCOTT

74 days actually. But to be fair,
it only seems like 19 and a half.

Teresa LAUGHS out loud.

TERESA

So yeah, damn right I admire you.
And by the way, I've been giving
this some thought since our
wedding. And -- I *definitely* do
love you. So how about we struggle
together?

He looks at her, relieved. *You sure?*

TERESA (CONT'D)

I figure if Logan can forgive the
school bully, I oughta be able to
forgive you.

SCOTT

(then, realizing)
Awww man.

He goes to a desk in the dining room. Pulls out an 11x7
ADVERTISEMENT.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

So I did all this work for nothing?

CLOSE ON THE AD: IT'S THE PHOTO BOOTH PICTURE from Scott and
Teresa's first date at the arcade. Teresa's head on his
shoulder. Cheery text reads:

***FORGIVENESS! Half the price of bitterness,
with none of the calories!***

Teresa cracks up, genuinely impressed.

TERESA

You made this??

SCOTT

I thought I was gonna have to sell
you on it.

TERESA

This is really good, Scott! Wait,
we don't have to move to New York
now, do we?

SCOTT

Nah, I'm happy here.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - DAY

Scott pulls his car into a campground parking lot BUZZING with excited kids. As he and Austin unload -

SCOTT

Looks like we have to hike a mile or so to the campsite. And the bags are heavy, so if you start to get tired, or your ankles hurt....

But Austin is already out of the car, bags on his shoulders, huffing it right along with the other kids. *Okay then.*

Over this - THUNDER CRACKS.

INT. SCOTT'S TENT - NIGHT

Scott and Rick share a tent. Lightning FLASHES outside. Rain pelts down. Water already leaks onto Scott. He's miserable.

SCOTT

I better get Austin. He doesn't do well with sleepovers, even normal ones. With all this, he's gonna have a meltdown any second.

PREACHER RICK

So he melts down. It's alright.

Scott hesitates, then lies back down. *Okay, I warned you.* He pokes the tent. More water dumps on him. *Great.*

EXT. CAMPGROUND - MORNING

The sky is clear. BRIGHT MORNING SUN rises behind the tents.

INT. SCOTT'S TENT - MORNING

Scott bolts awake to Austin. Fired up and ready to go.

AUSTIN

Dad! What's up? What an awesome night. How'd you sleep? Are you ready to rock? What'd you do all night? Do you love these tents? We had a blast. This is going to be great. Are you hungry? I am. Let's do it, man! By the way, Dad, was that storm cool or what? That was so awesome!

And he's out. Scott and Rick share a look. *Morning.*

SERIES OF EVENTS. Austin and Scott compete with the others:

- **A RELAY RACE**, as dads carry kids on hand-made stretchers.
- **A SAWING CONTEST**, where Scott and Austin race to saw through a foot-thick log with a large two-handled saw.

Then... SWISH!

- **AN ARROW STICKS INTO A TARGET.** Just outside the bullseye.

WHIP PAN over as the shooter steps aside, making room for his competitor.... AUSTIN. Up next.

Austin nocks his arrow, focused. CLOSE ON HIS EYES, he's in the zone. We see his POV -- *The feather, the bow string, the target.* Austin breathes, and lets it fly.

BULLSEYE!

Scott blinks. *What??* He can't believe it. Everyone FREAKS OUT. CHEERING. But Austin is already over it. No big deal.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Let's go, Dad. Time to move on!

EXT. LAKE - SUNSET

Scott and Austin glide across the lake in a canoe. The sun sets over the water. It's beautiful.

Austin is exhausted from the day. So Scott paddles. Austin watches him. Then, out of nowhere.

AUSTIN
Dad. I wish I was more like you.

This stops Scott. He looks at Austin. As hard as it is for him to accept that right now, Austin is completely sincere.

SCOTT
You do?

AUSTIN
Course I do, silly goose. You're the best.

AUSTIN GRINS. And his eyes twinkle in that knowing way. As Scott meets his bright blue gaze...

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*Most of the time, Dad can't see
 what I see. But that day floating
 on the lake, he did.*

And now WE SEE QUICK FLASHES -- MOMENTS FROM AUSTIN'S LIFE.
 Some big, some small.

Scott holding baby Austin as he cries. Running him heroically
 into a hospital, time after time. Hiding in the closet - "I
 found you!", Scott holding him at the swing set. Speeding
 after the finance guy, wind whipping his hair. Playing games
 together, watching movies, laughing, crying....

Most of them are moments Scott considered failures, or
 forgettable. But through Austin's eyes - they're perfect.

AUSTIN (V.O.)
That day he saw exactly what I see.
 (beat)
A great dad.

BACK TO CANOE. Scott is struck. He smiles at his son through
 happy tears.

FROM THIS, WE PULL OUT to reveal they're no longer floating
 on water, but in a sea of radiant, magical clouds. In
 Austin's imagination.

AUSTIN
 You see it, Dad?

SCOTT
 Yeah, Auz Man. I sure do.

And this time, he really does.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - NIGHT

Everyone gathers around a CRACKLING FIRE. Chatting, singing,
 making s'mores. The lake reflects a million stars.

Scott strums his guitar. Beside him, Austin lays his head
 down, immediately asleep. Rick sits down, joining Scott.

They stare into the fire for a beat.

SCOTT
 You know, I didn't want to come on
 this trip, I wanted to stay home.
 (beat)
 I almost missed all this.

PREACHER RICK
You made a good choice.

SCOTT
Guess I owe you one. Or God. Could
you tell Him for me?

PREACHER RICK
Tell him yourself. It's not that
hard.

EXT. LAKE - DAWN

The sky glows blue. Everyone is asleep in their tents. Scott
sits on a rock with Joe, watching the mist over the lake.

SCOTT
So.... I have a question.

JOE
Yeah?

SCOTT
I've been talking to you almost all
my life. And it just occurred to me.
(hesitant)
Are you... God?

Joe nods thoughtfully, like he's been expecting this question.

JOE
Scott. Look at me. Look at my face,
son.

Scott does, a little wary. And Joe's face STARTS GLOWING.
Scott stares, eyes wide. The white light seems to overtake
Joe's face until..... IT SNAPS BACK TO NORMAL.

JOE (CONT'D)
No, I'm not God, dimwit.

Scott shakes his head.

JOE (CONT'D)
Seriously. What did you think was
gonna happen there?

EXT. CAMPGROUND - MORNING

The kids and dads all walk back to their cars, loaded up with
gear. The kids cluster together, chatting. Dads do the same.

Then Austin runs up alongside Scott and takes his hand. They walk together in silence for a moment. Then Austin asks -

AUSTIN
Whatcha thinkin', Dadio?

Scott shrugs.

SCOTT
Nothing, really.

And as they continue together, hand in hand...

AUSTIN (V.O.)
*But that wasn't true. Dad told me
later he was thinking, "what
teenage boy wants to hold his
father's hand?" And you wanna know
what he was feeling?*
(beat)
Grateful.

AT THE CAR, Scott loads Austin, then shuts the door. Looks out over the horizon. Takes a breath. Then -

SCOTT
Thank you. For everything.

Then, from inside the car.

AUSTIN (O.S.)
Welcome!

INT. BURGER STAR - DAY

Scott, Teresa, Austin and Logan all sit together. Burgers and fries for everyone. And for Austin, a LARGE STRAWBERRY MILKSHAKE.

AUSTIN
You guys, wait. Stop. Look at me!

They all look. Except Scott, who is trying to sneak a bite.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Dad. Look at me, please, thank you and
you're welcome, this is important!

Scott can't help but laugh. But he really wants this burger.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
Put it down and -- stop what you're
doing and look at me, Dad. You're
not looking!

SCOTT
Okay, I'm looking, I'm looking.
What is so important?

Austin takes another big sip of his shake, then, blissfully:

AUSTIN
This shake, oh my gosh, this is the
best strawberry shake I've ever
had! You have to believe me.

They all smile, but Austin isn't done.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
The texture, the smoothness, it is
so creamy and, oh man, it's just
like heaven. I know milkshakes are
great, but this one is perfection.
Do you get it?! The shake makes the
deal. It makes everything better,
everything!

Then he screams it out.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)
This is the best day of my life!

The whole restaurant turns. But Austin is done now. Back to
his shake. Scott and family just smile.

As Scott finally takes his bite, we PUSH IN ON HIM, and now
IT'S HIS VOICE THAT COMES IN.

SCOTT (V.O.)
*I believe Austin, that it really
was the best milkshake ever.
Because to Austin, every milkshake
can be the best milkshake. Every
day can be the best day. Every
moment, the best moment. You just
have to be able to see it.*

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Scott drives his family home. He looks to the back seat,
where Austin sits with his face out the window, Jester hat
flapping in the wind, sun on his face. Happy as can be.

SCOTT (V.O.)

Until that day, I spent most of my son's life trying to figure him out. So I could fix him. But it turns out he wasn't broken at all. He didn't need me to fix him. I needed him to fix me. That's a true fact.

Scott adjusts the rearview, SO HE CAN SEE HIS WHOLE FAMILY AS HE DRIVES. Teresa in the passenger seat. Austin and Logan in the back. And between them, Joe. Scott smiles.

SCOTT (V.O.)

*Look. See this moment. Right here?
(beat)
Best moment of my life.*

AND WE CUT TO BLACK