

Small Talk

Written by

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INT. DOUG'S BEDROOM - MORNING

WE OPEN ON DOUG BARNES, a scholarly looking, color-by-numbers man as he readies himself for a big day.

He stands in front of the mirror, dressed in a crisp white shirt and khakis, holding TWO NEARLY IDENTICAL SWEATER VESTS up to his chest -- decisions, decisions.

INT. DOUG'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Doug meticulously slices carrots and celery into bite-sized sticks. He then cuts the crust off a PB&J, brown bags it and writes his name and job title: "DOUG BARNES, PRINCIPAL" on the bag with a sharpie.

EXT. DOUG'S HOUSE - LATER

As Doug approaches his KIA OPTIMA (the good Kia), he sees his friend and next door neighbor, FRANK DOBSON, playing catch with his young son, CONNOR (7).

DOUG
Morning, Frankie boy!

FRANK
Morning, buddy.

CONNOR
(to Doug)
You wanna play catch with us?

DOUG
Oh, that's okay, I'm good--

With that Connor pelts the ball right into the side panel of Doug's car. It collides with a THUNK!

CONNOR
Toss it back!

Doug looks at the newly formed dent -- then looks back at Connor in disbelief.

CONNOR (CONT'D)
C'mon, toss it back.

Doug walks the ball over to Connor and places it directly into the child's hand.

FRANK
Sorry about that, pal.

DOUG

It's fine, I'm gonna trade it in,
in like four years anyway.

FRANK

(changing subject)
Soooo... today's the day, huh?
Excited about your big promotion?

DOUG

He didn't actually say the "p"
word. All he said was that he
wanted to meet. It could be about
anything.

FRANK

C'mon man, you're totally getting a
"p word". The guy used to be your
boss. He respects you. And now that
he's retiring, who do you think
he'd rather have filling his shoes?

A smile washes over Doug's face as he realizes that Frank
could just be right.

DOUG

I gotta tell ya' I do feel like
it's time for a change. I mean nine
years of dealing with, you know--

Doug inadvertently points right at Connor.

DOUG (CONT'D)

--kids, can really bust up the
soul.

FRANK

Well, I don't think you have
anything to worry about.

Doug enters his car.

CONNOR

Good luck!

DOUG

Thanks, Connor. I really appreciate
that. You know what, all is
forgiven about the car too. Play
safe.

As Doug pulls his car out, the ball flies in from out of
frame, beaming the side of his car yet again.

INT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - MORNING

Doug pulls his car into a reserved parking space, exits the vehicle and looks towards his school, EDISON MIDDLE, ready to take on the day.

INT. STAFF ROOM - MORNING

SEVERAL UNINSPIRED TEACHERS mill about the staff room before class begins.

Doug enters the room holding his brown bag lunch.

DOUG
Morning all!

The teachers peak up as they exchange pleasantries with Doug.

HIS ACERBIC SECRETARY, PEGGY (40s), pours a cup of coffee into Doug's "#1 Principal" mug and hands it to her boss.

PEGGY
Morning.

DOUG
Morning "Pegs".
(sipping coffee)
Mmmm. Love that Arabica. What do you do to this that makes it taste so good?

PEGGY
Pretty much just heat the water up and mix in that quick dissolve crap. A moron could do it.

DOUG
Nope. Not like this they couldn't. It's fantastic. Keep it up, Pegasus.

BILL BRADLEY, AN AGING, BEARDED SCIENCE TEACHER (58) approaches Doug.

BILL
Hey Doug, got a minute?

DOUG
Sure do.
(jokingly equating science to wizardry)
How can I help you, *Professor Dumbledore*?

BILL

(re: his name)

Just Bill's fine. You know Doug, over the years I've grown pretty use to disappointment. Heck, sometimes my man parts don't work on command. What are you gonna do, right?

DOUG

Probably not share so much... information--

BILL

--It's been a while since our last class trip, just waiting on your "OK". And before you say anything bare in mind, this year, I'm thinking... wait for it...

(elated)

Science Center!

DOUG

You're a science teacher, Bill, that's your suggestion every year.

BILL

(hanging head in shame)

I know. I tried to float it by.

DOUG

Look Bill, we just don't have the funds right now and besides field trips always end the same way: Squished lunches, misplaced children, broken dreams. Believe me, the kids won't even miss it.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

WE ENTER a bustling school hallway packed FULL OF NOISY, PREPUBESCENT MIDDLE SCHOOLERS.

Doug stares down the length of the hallway, though he might as well be watching an episode of "Wild Kingdom". The sights and sounds have become all too familiar to him.

He takes a deep breath to psych himself up before beginning his usual morning round-up.

A SPEEDY YOUNG KID (11) comes bolting down the hall. Doug grabs him by the collar, stopping him dead in his tracks.

DOUG

No running in the hall. I'm gonna
have to tag ya' out, Sporty spice.

Doug pulls out a SMALL NOTE PAD similar to the kind a doctor
would use to write out prescriptions.

DOUG (CONT'D)

See you at 3:30.

He officially writes a time and date on the note, tears it
off and sticks it onto the kid's shoulder before continuing
down the hall.

Doug approaches TWO PUPPY-LOVE STRUCK STUDENTS -- KIM, valley
girl extrodinaire AND JOSH, captain of everything (12).
Together they are the school's resident "Brad and Angelina,"
smiling as they gaze into each other's eyes.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Break it up, this isn't the O.C.
I've seen this kinda... filth
spiral out of control before. Peck
on the cheek, innocent enough, but
then before you know it you move on
to "the anxious Mary", "the crooked
steamboat" and you're thinking --
"this feels right". Trust me, it's
not. Remember, it starts with a mix
tape then leads to a symphony of
bad decisions.

Doug just stares off into space as the couple awkwardly steps
away from one another.

THE MORNING BELL RINGS.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Alright people, you heard the bell.
Let's put the "walkie-talkies" away
and head to class.

Doug spots a young loner, TOMMY (12) playing a video game on
an iPhone. He approaches the boy, all business.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Tommy!

TOMMY

(under his breath)
Now what?

DOUG

Did you not hear the bell?

TOMMY

Oh is that what that was?

DOUG

Rules are rules. Hand 'er over.

TOMMY

Fine, whatever.

Tommy hands over the iPhone to Doug and walks off.

SEVERAL SLUGGISH STUDENTS DRAG THEIR HEELS ON THEIR WAY TO CLASS.

DOUG

Anyone still in the hall in five seconds gets to come in on Saturday, "Breakfast Club"-style... And rest assured it's not gonna be a heart-warming romp where you learn something interesting about the people you thought you knew. It's gonna be long and drawn out like "The Notebook".

The students all pick up the pace, scurrying out of the halls.

Doug HEARS CLAPPING coming from behind him. He turns to see that he is being applauded by a STOCKY, OLDER MAN IN A SUIT. This is SUPERINTENDANT REED (60s).

SUPERINTENDENT REED

Impressive, Douglas.

DOUG

Superintendant Reed! How are you?

SUPERINTENDANT REED

Never better. Walk with me.

The Superintendant and Doug take a walk through the school.

SUPERINTENDENT REED

It's been a while since I walked down these halls as a Principal. Between you and I, the day I was promoted to Superintendant was one of the happiest I can remember. Some nights I would leave this place and all I'd hear were the sounds of the day.

DOUG
Believe me, I've been there.

SUPERINTENDENT REED
You might have heard that I'm
retiring at the end of the year and
we're looking for a replacement.

DOUG
Whhhhhaaaat? That is... some news.

SUPERINTENDANT REED
Promoting you to Principal when I
left this place was one of the best
decisions I ever made. As far as
public schools go, you've done real
well. Managed to keep budget's way
down. That's a huge part of being
an effective superintendant--

DOUG
Thank you for this opportunity--

Doug prematurely sticks his hand out for a congratulatory
handshake.

SUPERINTENDENT REED
--It's not the only part though.

Doug tries to nonchalantly pull his handshake back and slip
his hand into his front pocket.

DOUG
Of course not.

SUPERINTENDENT REED
If it were up to me, well, I think
you know what my decision would be.
Unfortunately, I'm not the only one
who gets to decide on who fills my
spot. The board's also considering
a few other candidates, Cole Pruett
at Hillcrest Charter, for instance.

DOUG
Cole Pruett?

Doug's mind instantly shifts to Cole and his rival school --

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. HILLCREST CHARTER SCHOOL - DAY

WE QUICKLY FLASH TO A PRISTINE CHARTER SCHOOL. The place is immaculate and ultra modern yet somewhat cold and sterile.

It's education in it's most efficient and industrialized form. White walls surround top notch amenities while CLASSICAL MUSIC fills the air.

SEVERAL TWELVE YEAR OLDS IN MATCHING GYM GEAR PRACTICE ARCHERY AND PILATES ON THE FIELD. It's everything you'd expect from a place called Hillcrest (and a lot more).

The beautifully manicured grounds are patrolled by a slick, stylish headmaster in a well-tailored suit, this is COLE PRUETT.

BACK TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - SAME TIME

WE RETURN to Doug and Superintendent Reed's conversation.

Doug stares off for a moment, noticeably shaken by his competition.

SUPERINTENDENT REED

The evaluation will end with a presentation from each of the candidates on how they would improve the school system if made superintendent. Cole Pruett was generous enough to host the event at his school's new auditorium.

DOUG

(under his breath)
Unbelievable.

SUPERINTENDANT REED

He certainly is, Doug. You'll have two weeks to prepare and will be presenting in front of the board and the PTA. They want to see that you're doing what's best for their kids.

DOUG

Well, Sir, for me, it's all about knowing how to effectively relate to the youth. Plus, I've been told I have one of those faces that just -- draws the kids in.

An awkward beat.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Not in a... creepy way, just...
just the regular way.

SUPERINTENDENT REED
(slightly uncomfortable)
Yes, well, we want to make sure
we're choosing the best of the
best, so make this count.

DOUG
I won't let you down.

They shake hands.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE, RECEPTION AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Doug enters the reception area in his office, hardly able to contain his joy. He quickly walks past a STUDENT OFFICE AID, JULIAN (11), an effeminate fifth grader that looks like Tom Ford dressed him.

JULIAN
Lookin' sharp, Sir. Love the vest.

DOUG
It's new, thanks for noticing.

JULIAN
Hard to ignore style like that.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Doug bursts into his empty office, closing the door behind him. He does a happy dance that involves some overly-spirited house moves.

His secretary, Peggy, walks in holding some files --

PEGGY
I got those attendance reports--
(re: Dancing)
--holy crap!

Her eyes go wide as an embarrassed Doug pretends to be stretching and then "casually" takes a seat.

DOUG
What you just saw there--

PEGGY

I didn't see anything, so please,
let's not talk about it.

DOUG

No, we have to. What you just saw
there was an outpouring of joy that
just would not let me contain it.
They told me I'm in line for the
superintendent job. Imagine it Peg,
not having to deal with kids and
their problems day in, day out. I
could rule this place from a far.

PEGGY

You better take me with you or I
will hunt you down -- kidding.

They both share a laugh that Peggy cuts short.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

--But seriously I will.

DOUG

Well, I mean, I didn't get it
yet... Not yet, but I will.
(filled with self doubt)
There are some other's that may
have a tiny shot also -- he
mentioned, psssh, Cole Pruett.

Peggy watches her language due to the fact that Julian is
within earshot.

PEGGY

Cole Pruett? We are so bleepin',
bleeped!

DOUG

Wha? "Bleep" that guy! I have just
as good a shot as Cole Pruett and
his antiseptic learning factory.
There's a lot we're being judged
on, including a big presentation
and what do I always say, Peg?

PEGGY

Um, that you're the best guy at
presentations?

DOUG

Bingo! Please get Gwen on the
phone. I think this news calls for
a little celebration.

INT. RESTAURANT - EVENING

WE ARRIVE at a family-style restaurant that screams Americana. A nervous Doug sits at a booth, as the strikingly beautiful GWEN MILLER walks up to greet him. They share a tight, loving embrace.

DOUG
(greeting)
Hey, hey!

GWEN
Sorry I'm late, got held up at work. We got a whole shipment of diet and exercise books and someone stacked them under Health and well-being instead of Fitness. Needless to say, things got pret-ty crazy, bookstores, right? Listen to me, going on about my day -- Congrats, Mr. Superintendent of all the schools in district 23.

DOUG
It's not official yet, but I did get the festivities started -- ordered some spinach dip.

GWEN
Oh, before I forget, I have a little something for you.

Gwen giggles as she reaches into her purse. She pulls out a LONG, GOLD-PLATED, DESK PLACARD -- IT'S BLANK.

DOUG
Oh man, this is great.

GWEN
It's for your new desk. Sorry, it's blank, it takes three days for them to engrave it. So I'm gonna need it back, so I can --

DOUG
--Oh yeah... for sure.

Doug awkwardly hands the BLANK DESK PLACARD back to Gwen.

GWEN
(re: placard)
Three days.

A WAITER approaches the table.

WAITER

Can I get you folks something to drink?

DOUG

Why yes, a bottle of your finest champagne, please.

The waiter looks around the restaurant.

WAITER

Sir, this is "Chili's".

DOUG

Just a fizzy water then - for the table.

The waiter exits.

Gwen's son, Tommy (the same student that Doug took away the iPhone from earlier in the day) takes a seat at the table, though it's plain as day that he would rather be anywhere else -- anywhere.

GWEN

Did you remember to wash your hands?

He wipes his hands on the table cloth.

DOUG

Hey champ, fancy seeing you again. Look, I know you're a little miffed about this morning when I took away your game phone thingy and I know I said there was no preferential treatment, but... dun da daaaa...

Doug reveals Tommy's confiscated iPhone.

DOUG (CONT'D)

I want you to have this back. No hard feelings. I'm gonna let it slide.

Doug slides the phone back to Tommy.

TOMMY

What do you say we get this show on the road so that we can all go back to our own homes?

DOUG

Well, that's kinda why I asked you both here.

TOMMY

What are you talking about?

DOUG

I don't want to pressure you into anything, but these past few months have been unbelievable. I feel like I can be me around you.

Tommy rolls his eyes.

GWEN

These past few months have been great for us too. Right, Tommy?

TOMMY

You think the chicken fingers are any good here?

DOUG

They're incredible, Tommy -- just like the relationship your mother and I share. And I'm just gonna come out and say it, Gwen, I would love it if you moved in with me.

Tommy's mouth drops open.

GWEN

You mean you'd love it if we moved in with you?

DOUG

Oh yeah, Tommy would be there too. For sure he would... have to.

GWEN

Doug, this is so amazing.

TOMMY

This is what my nightmares are like.

GWEN

(laughing off the tension)
He's joking... he's joking.

TOMMY

No one ever listens to anything I say.

GWEN

Indoor voice, mister!

TOMMY

Order my chicken fingers to go...
I'll be in the car.

GWEN

Tommy, wait.

Tommy gets up from the table and heads for the door. Doug and Gwen follow him out.

DOUG

He'll be okay. I think if we
powered through and just took that
next step, he would really--

GWEN

(to Doug)

--I'm sorry about all this, Doug.
As much as I would love to take
this journey with you. I need for
Tommy to be okay with this... with
us. Maybe he just needs some more
time to get to know you -- like I
do.

She kisses Doug on the cheek.

GWEN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

Gwen and Tommy get into the car and drive off.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Doug stands by a window watching the school kids play at recess, laughing and screaming at the tops of their lungs. The focus of his attention is Tommy and his friends playing a heated game of kickball.

Peggy diligently writes out Doug's agenda on a HUGE, MOUNTED WHITEBOARD WITH THE HEADING "DOUG'S CREATIVE SPACE".

DOUG

Listen to 'em, Peg, it's like it
doesn't even matter how many
chicken fingers you buy 'em, they
still shut you out. Heck, maybe I
just don't know how to deal with
kids anymore.

PEGGY

(staring off)

I know, you used to be so good with them too...

DOUG

Yeah but what they don't tell you when you become principal is that for the better part of a decade you're only gonna be dealing with the problems, the bad apples, the ones that cuss and fight like tiny, little pirates. And every year they get worse, they evolve. There's no escaping it.

PEGGY

Not unless you get that promotion.

DOUG

Boo-ya, Peg. I started thinking last night that a big part of getting this job is showing the parents and the board that I really get their children. And to do that, I need to show those kids that I'm not just their principal, I'm also their friend. Doug Barnes needs to get in the game. Put it on the white board, Peg. Make it real.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - MOMENTS LATER

Doug aggressively walks out of the school, approaching the kickball game.

Tommy is up at the plate while another young boy, SAM (12), readies himself to pitch.

SAM

Look who's coming.

DOUG

Hey guy's, mind if I join?

TOMMY

I'm outta here. See ya.

SAM

"T", you leave and we win.

DOUG

Sam, grab some bench. I got this.

Doug takes the red construction ball from Sam. Tommy resumes the game.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Come on, Tommy boy. I'll go easy on
ya', kiddo.

Tommy settles in as Doug makes his first pitch. Tommy connects but kicks the ball foul.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Get ready for the sweet spin.

TOMMY
You throw like a girl.

All the kids hold their breath waiting for Tommy to be reprimanded -- nothing.

DOUG
(snapping back)
Yeah, well that's not what your mom
says...

Tommy throws up his hands like -- what the hell, dude?

DOUG (CONT'D)
Sh-- Jeez! Sorry. I didn't mean
your mom specifically. Insulting
moms is just what you do in the
heat of battle. I would have said
the same about any of these kid's
moms.

The other kids all stare at one another with blank looks on their faces.

Tommy bears in more determined than ever to put everything he has into this one kick.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Here's the wind up and the pitch--

Doug rolls the bright red construction ball...

Tommy strikes the ball with his leg as though he were David Beckham. It hurtles through space at break-neck speed and collides forcefully with Doug's face -- WHAM!

The shear impact of the ball, knocks Doug off his feet, causing his head to hit the asphalt with a resounding THUD.

THE SCREEN GOES BLACK.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PLAYGROUND - LATER

A CROWD OF CHILDREN gather in a circle around a floored Doug, looking down at his semi-conscious body.

WE ANGLE ON TOMMY pacing around Doug, though he isn't saying A WORD, WE HEAR:

TOMMY (V.O.)

Oh my God, Oh my God, Oh my God...
I killed him. When I said I wish
he'd drop dead I didn't mean by my
hands. Wait, he's getting up. He's
getting up!

(his worry shifts to
anger)

Damn!

Doug's eyes begin to flicker as he regains consciousness.
HE'S GOT A WICKED CIRCULAR WELT where the ball made contact.

Doug looks over at A BRAINY, KNOW-IT-ALL, SARAH (12) -- same thing, though she says nothing Doug can hear every word she's thinking.

SARAH (V.O.)

Minor facial contusions. Looks like
the cerebral cortex is still in
tact, too soon to rule out the
probability of localized brain
damage.

He turns his gaze to Julian, who's mind isn't on the accident at all, instead he looks off into space with a song stuck in his head.

JULIAN (V.O.)

(singing in his head)

*"I whip my hair back and forth, I
whip my hair back and forth--"*

Doug's secretary, Peggy, makes her way through the crowd and rushes to his aid.

PEGGY

Are you okay, sir?

DOUG

Uh... I think so.

PEGGY

I saw you lying on the ground. What happened?

DOUG

I'm not exactly sure.

PEGGY

We should get you to the nurse's office.

Peggy leads Doug into the building, but as she walks away Sam stares at her butt, thinking inappropriate thoughts--

SAM (V.O.)

Man, that butt's so big it probably has it's own landing strip. Some serious "biscuits" right there.

Doug turns around to see who just said that.

DOUG

Guys c'mon! What kinda language is that? Show a little respect, huh?

The kids all have confused looks on their faces. None of them has said a word out loud, but Doug continues to hear things.

PEGGY

Who are you talking to?

DOUG

Did you not just hear that?
(pointing at Peg's butt,
whispering)
Your biscuits?!

PEGGY

Okay, wildly inappropriate.

DOUG

I think I'm having a mild stroke.

PEGGY

Just calm down, everything will be fine. You're probably just in shock.

DOUG

Yeah, that's gotta be it.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Peggy guides a shaken Doug down a PACKED school hallway where he is bombarded with A FRENZIED, WHIRLWIND OF KID'S THOUGHTS.

DOUG
Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Doug plugs his ears as he bursts into the nurses office. Peggy tries to keep pace, scampering behind him.

INT. SCHOOL NURSE'S OFFICE - LATER

Peggy helps Doug onto a bed that is covered in wax paper, just like you see in a hospital.

PEGGY
The nurse will be here soon. Is there anything else you need?

DOUG
I just hafta rest a second.

She exits the room.

DOUG (CONT'D)
(massaging temples)
What a day.

NURSE DOWNS (75), a small, sweet elderly lady enters the room and tends to Doug.

NURSE DOWNS
I heard you had quite the scare.

She aggressively holds open Doug's eye as wide as possible and shines a light in it.

DOUG
How is it in there? Am I "concussed"?

NURSE DOWNS
Who can tell?

DOUG
Well, I was kinda hoping you'd be able to.

NURSE DOWNS
I'm here to deal with nose bleeds and knee scrapes, that's it.

The nurse flashes Doug a soft and pleasant old lady smile.

NURSE DOWNS (CONT'D)
You'll be fine.

DOUG
What are you basing that on?

NURSE DOWNS
(whispering to Doug)
It's just something I have to say.

The nurse exits the room.

Doug exhales deeply, trying to calm himself, but before long HE HEARS the rumblings of a kid's voice coming from the adjacent principal's office.

The kid is none other than resident school bully, JOEY RIGGS, he's twelve but could easily pass for young twenties.

RIGG'S VOICE (O.S.)
This note looks so friggen' real.
Not that it takes much to pull one
over on these idiots.

Doug quickly sits up off the bed and walks to the adjoining office where he sees Riggs handing the note over to Peggy.

She reads the note, diligently, while intermittently looking up at the kid.

JOEY RIGGS (V.O.)
What's taking so long? Is she just
a slow reader or does she know.
I'm not going down for this -- no
way. Crap, she knows my mom doesn't
make her O's round like that--

Peggy hands Joey a sign-out binder.

PEGGY
Alrighty, just sign your name in
the sign out log and off ya' go.
Sorry to hear about your uncle.

JOEY RIGGS
Boom! I don't even have an uncle.

Doug looks around the office in disbelief -- is he the only one that heard all that? Yup.

JOEY RIGGS (CONT'D)
 (faking remorse)
 Thanks for being so kind, Lord
 knows a kid like me needs it now
 more than ever.

Joey pats Peggy on the hand, as he angrily peers at Julian.
 Julian looks away in fear and continues with his office aid
 tasks.

JULIAN (V.O.)
 Why can't they just let this shaved
 ape graduate so he'll leave me
 alone. Dude's gotta be at least
 thirty.

Riggs takes off. Doug approaches.

DOUG
 What the... h?!

PEGGY
 Sorry, did you just say "what the
 h?"

DOUG
 How could you just let him go? He
 was clearly lying.

JULIAN (V.O.)
 So busted. He's finally gonna get
 his.

PEGGY
 That boy had a death in the family.

DOUG
 I know for a FACT that there is NO
 dead uncle AND on top of that his
 mom doesn't make her O's round like
 that. Case closed. BOOM!

Doug slaps his hand on Peggy's desk.

PEGGY
 And how do you know that?

DOUG
 Because I could --

Doug leans in close to Peggy so that Julian can't hear.

DOUG (CONT'D)
 --Because I could... Hear. His.
 Thoughts. There it is. It's all out
 there now. I said it. Can't take
that back.

Doug realizes how crazy he sounds.

DOUG (CONT'D)
 I need to go home... get fetal.
 I'll deal with Riggs another time.

JULIAN (V.O.)
 Ugh, there is no justice in the
 world.

DOUG
 I said I'll deal with him another
 time, alright?!

PEGGY
 Yeah, we heard you.

Doug pats himself down, looking for his car keys.

DOUG
 I have to leave. Where are my car
 keys?

PEGGY
 You are not driving, not in your
 condition.

Doug exhales, defeated as we...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CITY BUS - AFTERNOON

An antsy Doug stands on a packed city bus holding one of the
 metal bars for support.

HE HEARS A SMALL VOICE.

KID ON BUS (V.O.)
 (struggling and grunting)
 Almost... Almost...

He quickly scans the bus to see who's talking, but soon
 realizes that he is hearing the thoughts of a YOUNG BOY (9)
 who stands beside him trying to push out a fart.

Doug looks down at the kid, disgusted.

Suddenly, a look of relief washes over the kid's face.

KID ON BUS (V.O.)
Ah, ghost fart-- the perfect crime.

AN ADULT covers their nose as they give Doug and accusatory stare. Doug points at the Kid as he proclaims...

DOUG
It was him!

KID ON BUS
Nuh uh! It was you, liar!

Doug blurts out a visceral response.

DOUG
You know it was you, don't be such a dick!

Doug covers his mouth with both hands in disbelief of his own outburst.

The entire bus looks at him, appalled.

Doug makes his way to the back of the bus, as he does he locks eyes with a JAPANESE BOY (10). Though Doug can also hear this kids thoughts, he doesn't understand a word of them as they are in the boy's native Japanese.

One thing Doug does decipher from the child's evil glare is that the thoughts are angry and aimed at him. The boy ends his tirade with a bunch of internal chuckles -- "hehehehehe".

Doug rushes to the back of the bus, making his way to the rear doors. He bangs on them hoping they'll open -- not a chance. AN ALARM BELL SOUNDS prompting him to get off the steps.

DOUG (CONT'D)
(Calling out to driver,
panicked)
Let me off, Please!

BUS DRIVER
I can't let you out between stops.
Off the steps, buddy!

Doug pays no mind to the driver's advice. He throws his entire body against the doors causing them to fly open with a burst of hydraulic air.

INT. DOUG'S HOME - DAY

Doug bursts into his home, locks the door tightly and grabs a bag of frozen peas out of the fridge. He places them atop his head and makes his way to his computer, impatiently trying to get online.

QUICK CUTS:

Doug visits a WebMD SITE ON HEAD TRAUMA.

DOUG
(reading the site)
Rest? Relax? Recuperate? What is
this a Canadian website? Useless.

He then tries something more extreme visiting a site who's header reads: "So you think you've been possessed?"

Doug jumps out of his chair with the frozen peas bag on his head and yells up to the heavens.

DOUG (CONT'D)
I CAST THEE OUT!!!

SUDDENLY... A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

Doug ducks behind his couch, frightened.

The KNOCKING continues.

Doug inches closer to the door and answers it with great trepidation.

REVEAL... THE MOST ADORABLE GIRL SCOUT IN THE WORLD (10), HOLDING SEVERAL BOXES OF COOKIES.

She looks a disheveled Doug up and down.

GIRL SCOUT (V.O.)
Ugh, why do I always have to sell
cookies to the crazy looking ones?
I'm getting too old for this.

Doug is taken aback by her comment.

GIRL SCOUT
Hello, sir, I'm selling these Thin
Mints, as part of a program--

DOUG
--Listen, I'm familiar with the
whole thin mint speech, but right
now I--

The girl scout flashes an ear-to-ear, dimple-filled smile, while thinking--

GIRL SCOUT (V.O.)

Here it comes, he's gonna gimme
some lame excuse about how he
doesn't have any cash on him or how
he's allergic to deliciousness.
C'mon help a kid out will ya, you
cheap bas--

DOUG

--I'll take two boxes.

GIRL SCOUT

Thank you so much for your support.

GIRL SCOUT (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The dimples get 'em every time.
Man, I am killin' it on the "crazy
street."

Doug reaches into his pocket, pulls out some crumpled dollar bills and pays the girl for the boxes of thin mints.

DOUG

Here, take your blood money.

He shuts the door.

INT. DOUG'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Doug sits on his sofa, staring into space nervously shoving thin mints into his mouth one after the other.

His gaze falls on a piece of junk mail -- A FLYER FROM THE SPORTS AUTHORITY. He gets an ingenious notion.

INT. THE SPORTS AUTHORITY - DAY

Doug races down an aisle of a sporting goods store, arriving at a display of RED RUBBER CONSTRUCTION BALLS, the same type used in school-yard kick ball games.

He grabs a ball from the shelf and flags down a spacey, Spicolli-esque SPORTS AUTHORITY EMPLOYEE (22).

SPORTS AUTHORITY EMPLOYEE

That's a good ball, bro, it's red,
it's got everything. I can ring you
up at the counter if you want.

Doug leans in, whispering to him.

DOUG

Actually, I just need you to throw it -- at my head. Hard as you can.

The Employee looks around, confused.

SPORTS AUTHORITY EMPLOYEE

Yeeaah, normally I'd be all over that, but the store has a three strikes policy and I'm pretty sure that would count as my third. My buddy Jimmy only has one strike, he'd throw something at you for sure. He's in next Tuesday though.

Doug spots an empty wall located behind the Employee.

DOUG

Thanks, but I just had a thought.

The Employee walks away. Doug approaches the wall standing about five feet away from it, still carrying the red ball.

He looks around the store as though measuring angles.

DOUG (CONT'D)

If I throw this at the wall at a perfect forty-five degree angle, taking into account wind resistance which is fairly negligible. Hmmm-- the acceleration would need to be pretty high, but the recoil should be able to recreate the trauma. Here goes.

Doug psychs himself up. He holds the ball over his head with two hands and whips it at the wall as hard as he can.

He awaits his fate with his eyes closed tightly.

The ball hits the wall with great force but misses Doug's head completely. It flies over his shoulder into a massive tower display containing HUNDREDS OF DIFFERENT SPORTS BALLS.

The tower falls over spilling every type of sports ball imaginable onto the floor. The ground is covered with them.

Doug looks over his shoulder at the nightmare he has just created. He treads lightly to the exit, passing the clerk.

DOUG (CONT'D)
(real casual)
Yeaaaah, I don't think that ball's
gonna work for me.

EXT. FRANK'S HOUSE - EVENING

An out-of-breath Doug rushes up to his neighbor's home.
There are plastic kid's toys sprinkled about the lawn.

Doug frantically KNOCKS on the door. His pal Frank answers.

FRANK
What's up, buddy? Come in.

Doug enters the house.

DOUG
(panting)
Just ran-- several miles. Need help
with my mind and the voices -- THE
VOICES, FRANK!

FRANK
Slow down, man...
(re: red welt on Doug's
face)
Whoa, who did that to your face?

DOUG
Tommy.

FRANK
Ah that makes sense.

DOUG
It was an accident, Frank.

FRANK
Sure it was -- sure it was.

Doug shoots Frank a dirty look.

FRANK (CONT'D)
You know for a guy who's always
talking about wanting to get away
from kids in his off hours. You
sure are driving hard to the hoop
to be with Gwen and her son.

DOUG

That is because Gwen's love makes me feel like I could move mountains -- and rearrange them into more aesthetically pleasing patterns. I would put up with anything for her.

FRANK

(pointing to Doug's face)
Obviously.

DOUG

This is serious, Frank. Ever since the accident weird stuff's been happening.

FRANK

Weird like what?

DOUG

Quick, think of any place in the world. Any place. Don't say, just think.

FRANK

Done.

Doug circles Frank while staring at him intently as though trying to read his mind.

DOUG

Newark!

FRANK

Fiji.

DOUG

Damn it!

(an epiphany)

Wait, I couldn't hear the guy in the sport's store either or the nurse. You see?! Do you see?!

FRANK

I see you having a nervous breakdown.

DOUG

-- Frank, I can hear them.

FRANK

You can hear who?

DOUG

The kids. I can hear what they're thinking. Right after my accident, I heard this one kid on the bus farting in his mind before it happened in real time. And then, there was this girl scout who called me "cheap".

FRANK

Well, you sorta -- she said that to your face?

DOUG

NO, that's just it, she thought it.

FRANK

Doug, you sound like my Nana before we put her in the home.

Frank's son, CONNOR (7) bursts into the room.

CONNOR

Dad, you promised we could play Wii after dinner.

FRANK

I'll be there in a sec, just helping "unkie" Doug with his mid-life crisis.

DOUG

Mid-life crisis? Here, watch this smart guy...

Doug attempts to have a discussion with Connor, however when he talks to the young kid his voice gets really high, very slow and extremely patronizing.

DOUG (CONT'D)

(to Connor)

Heeeey little guuuuy, you wanna see a REALLLLY COOL magic trick?

CONNOR

Yaaaah!

FRANK

Please don't make the child an accessory to your dementia.

DOUG

Al-right, heeeerre we goooo.

Doug grabs a near by note pad. He tears off some sheets of paper, gives Connor a blank page and keeps one for himself.

FRANK

(whispering to Doug)

Why are you talking like that? He's seven, he's not slow.

DOUG

I want you to write down five words. Any five. Don't show them to me. I'm gonna try and guess what they are.

Connor has a question but is too afraid to ask out loud.

CONNOR (V.O.)

I wonder if I can write swears?

DOUG

Sure you can.

FRANK

Sure he can what?

Doug cracks a smile at Frank.

DOUG

Go ahead, Connor, write anything you want.

Connor gets right into it, grinning as he writes his five words. Doug follows suit also getting a little chuckle as he writes the juvenile words on his own sheet of paper.

CONNOR

Done.

FRANK

Alright, let's see them.

Frank looks at his son's list first.

FRANK (CONT'D)

C'mon Connor, really?

CONNOR

He said I could write anything.

DOUG

I did say that.

Doug slides his list over to Frank -- they are both identical, comprised of the words: "Boobies. Butts. LAD. Boobies. Cookies." Yes, "boobies" is on there twice.

Frank's eyes go wide as he compares the two lists.

CONNOR

I wrote "boobies" twice, because there's always two.

DOUG

He's right about that. What's LAD?

CONNOR

It's what people always say my daddy needs to get.

FRANK

Connor, I'm gonna need you to step outside, close the door and cover your ears, 'kay champ?

Connor does as he's told. He shuts the door behind him. The second the door is closed, Frank grabs Doug by the collar.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Holy sh--

DOUG

--I know. I know. It's Twilight Zoney. Make it stop, you're a doctor.

FRANK

Sorry, I'm a gastroenterologist: I mostly deal with "the ass".

Doug paces around the house.

DOUG

What am I gonna do, Frank?

FRANK

Embrace it. You can't just ignore this incredible gift.

DOUG

Gift? It's a curse.

FRANK

Doug, you've been given the opportunity to delve into the minds of our youth.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

Yeah, kid's say the darnedest things, but just imagine what they think.

DOUG

I don't need to imagine... I know.

FRANK

Exactly. You have the chance to understand kids in a way no one else in the history of humanity ever has. Do you realize how you could use this to your advantage? How it could help you with Gwen's kid? How it could make you better at your job? Don't turn your back on this, Dougie.

Doug smiles as he realizes the untapped potential of his new found gift.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - LATER

Music up: "Read My Mind" by The Killers

Doug struts down a busy school hallway with a new found sense of purpose.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Doug enters his office and heads straight for his trusty white board. He addresses Peggy, determined.

DOUG

I need a white board marker-- stat.

Peggy tosses Doug a marker which he catches in one smooth, sweeping motion.

PEGGY

You're looking a lot more... conscious, than yesterday. Coffee?

DOUG

No time, Peg. Hafta map out my future.

PEGGY

This isn't gonna be like one of those "phase" things is--

DOUG
--Phase 1.

PEGGY
--Okay, it is.

Doug writes his "phases to success" on the white board.

DOUG
Phase 1: Get the kids on lock
down...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - LATER

Doug strolls through the aisles of a library that has seen better days.

He walks over to a quiet study area where HE SEES A NOTE being passed to Kim. She reads it with delight, but quickly hides the paper from view as Doug approaches.

Doug gets in her face and speaks to Kim as though he knows exactly what the note says. Her smile slowly dissipates.

DOUG
I understand you have a huge test tomorrow, shouldn't you be busy learning?

KIM
Uh... I am learning--

KIM (V.O.) (CONT'D)
--about my future with Josh.

DOUG
Lemme break it down for you.
You will not be marrying Josh Powell, you will not have three kids and you certainly will not live in a mansion -- If you don't focus on your studies. Hand it over.

She hands over the piece of paper. Doug sees that instead of quietly studying, Kim has been playing M.A.S.H. (mansion, apartment, shack, house) -- a school yard game that young girls use to try and predict their futures.

WE SEE that Doug has nailed all the predictions on the note to a tee.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Think about it... Josh Powell is super dreamy, if you were him who would you rather be with -- a smart, independent lady or a burden on the state? The choice is yours.

BACK TO:

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Doug continues to outline his plan to Peggy.

DOUG

Phase 2: Make sure the staff realizes what an invaluable leader I am.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. GUIDANCE COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Doug walks into the Guidance Counselor's office to demonstrate the sheer awesomeness of his newly begotten powers.

A CHUBBY YOUNG KID (12) sits beside Sarah. They are both waiting to be seen by PHIL HENDERSON, the school's overworked GUIDANCE COUNSELOR.

DOUG

Hey Doctor Phil!

GUIDANCE COUNSELOR PHIL

Good one, Doug, never gets old.

DOUG

Ah, I'm just yanking your chimes, I know you're not a doctor. Busy in here today, huh?

GUIDANCE COUNSELOR PHIL

Yeah, it's been hectic. Pretty backed up. None of the kid's seem to want to open up.

DOUG

Hmmm, lemme give it a crack--
(leans in, whispering)
(MORE)

DOUG (CONT'D)

That portly child over there has been stealing kid's lunches all week, his conscience brought him in, but he's too afraid to admit it. We should probably raid his locker for empty thermoses and discarded Lunchables before making any formal claims. Sarah, feels like she could have done better on her midterms and is trying to think of a way to hold the board accountable for the level of education she's receiving -- like to see that hold up in court.

Mr. Henderson's jaw is dropped to the ground.

GUIDANCE COUNSELOR PHIL

How did you--

DOUG

--When you're in tune with the kids like I am... you just kinda know. Ya know?

BACK TO:

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Doug lets Peggy in on the final phase of his plan.

DOUG

Phase 3 is where it all comes together: Parent-teacher night. That's where my success lies.

PEGGY

Parent-teacher night?

DOUG

Once the school is running like a well-oiled machine, I'm gonna invite the entire board and the superintendant to see what a great job I've done. And while Cole is busy working on his presentation, I'm gonna be wowing them on my home turf. It's all right there, Peg -- my road map to maximum greatness.

WE REVEAL DOUG'S WHITE BOARD. It's actually covered with about 54 phases taking him all the way to retirement. One of the middle phases is "have *relations* on or near a boat".

INT. DOUG'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Doug walks into the house wearing a baggy track suit and carrying a STACK OF MAIL. He dumps it on the counter and casually rifles through it.

Much to his surprise, Doug lands on a PAMPHLET THAT SOLICITS SUPPORT FOR COLE PRUETT'S BID FOR SUPERINTENDANT. IT FEATURES COLE'S FACE AND THE TAG LINE: *COLE PRUETT FOR SUPERINTENDANT--C'MON, WHO ELSE IS THERE?*

DOUG

Oh brother. Have some dignity will ya'?

Doug sheepishly looks around to make sure no one is watching--even though he's alone. He dangles the pamphlet over a PAPER SHREDDER before feeding it in.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Ooops.

Doug savors the act by constantly pressing the shredder's "forward" and "reverse" buttons. It's all very rhythmic and sounds like a DJ scratching a record.

THE DOOR BELL RINGS bringing Doug's playtime to a screeching halt. He rushes to answer it.

It's Gwen and Tommy.

GWEN

Hey you.

DOUG

Heeeey guys! Isn't this a pleasant surprise.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Why do I have to be here?

DOUG

Come in. Forgive the mess. I had the weirdest craving for girl scout cookies. Also I find chocolate helps calm the nerves.

They enter the house. Tommy eyes Doug's sweat suit and then the discarded girl scout cookie boxes.

TOMMY (V.O.)

What is he on his period?

DOUG
(laughing it off)
Psssh... noooo.

GWEN
No, what?

DOUG
I was just saying "oh nooooo" I forgot to call my grandmother for her birthday, then I remembered she died like four years ago. Sucks.

GWEN
That does suck.

DOUG
She was crazy old.

GWEN
I'm so sorry. Anyway, I just wanted to bring Tommy by to apologize. He really shouldn't have burst out of the restaurant like that. Isn't that right, Tommy?

TOMMY
I guess not.

TOMMY (V.O.)(CONT'D)
I'd do it again if I could.

DOUG
It's... it's fine. Apology accepted. Tommy.

TOMMY (V.O.)
I never apologized.

DOUG
(under his breath)
I still accept.

GWEN
How's everything going?

DOUG
Amazing. What can I say? I'm in a good place: Making mid-five figs, dental plan, got a girl who's well read and bottles her own tomato sauce. Woot! Woot!

TOMMY (V.O.)

What does she see in him? Why can't it just be us two like it used to?

DOUG

Tommy, I know you don't want to share your mom with anyone, but I can love her in a whole new way; a way that you simply can not.

GWEN

Woah, okay, we went there. That was fairly detailed --

(changing the subject)

Is it hot in here?

DOUG

Yeah, AC's busted, so--

GWEN

Look Doug, I wanted to tell you that I'm really glad you said what you said the other day. It made me feel, well, special. I want us to work.

DOUG

Me too. I don't want anything to come between us.

TOMMY (V.O.)

I'm gonna be the one who ends this.

DOUG

(peering at Tommy)

Nothing at all.

TOMMY

Can we go now?

GWEN

Why don't we get out of your hair, Tommy and I were just gonna get him some new school clothes.

DOUG

Hey, I need some new clothes too.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Whoa. Hold it right there, buddy. Please don't ask to come with us.

DOUG

Maybe I could take Tommy.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Even worse.

GWEN

Umm... that might actually work out, we're reorganizing the bookstore tomorrow to make way for a new kid's reading room. It's gonna be pretty "Rowling". That's book nerd talk for awe-some. Plus, it'll give you a chance to get to know one another a little better.

Tommy sulks.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Wow, how can this lady turn on her flesh and blood so quickly? There goes any chance of me getting the new "Halo" game.

Doug sees a window of opportunity and seizes it.

DOUG

Oh, you know what, I almost forgot, the new Halo game came out today. I need to pick one up.

TOMMY

You don't even have an Xbox?

DOUG

Oh yeah, I guess I'll have to pick up one of those too, to go with the "Halo". Make everything simpatico. So do you mind if we swing by the local, uh, game... emporium first?

Gwen sees how hard Doug is trying and smiles.

INT. MALL ARCADE - DAY

A busy shopping mall arcade packed with kids.

Doug inserts a twenty dollar bill into a change machine. He places a plastic cup under the change feeder and waits for quarters to rain down -- nothing. That is until he moves the cup for the briefest of moments. Suddenly, coins shoot out onto the floor in every possible direction.

Doug falls to his knees to pick up the loose coins as the kids around him stare.

ARCADE KID 2 (V.O.)
 Man, what loser brought his dad to
 the arcade?

DOUG
 (calling out through the
 arcade)
 Not his dad! Not his dad! Just an
 arcade lover like the rest of you.

Doug makes his way to his feet, trying to recover from the sting of the comment. He quickly walks over to Tommy who is killing a round of "Dance, Dance Revolution".

Beside Tommy sits a MYRIAD OF SHOPPING BAGS filled with bribe gifts.

DOUG (CONT'D)
 Hey now, gotcha some more quarters
 "Jason Beaver".

TOMMY (V.O.)
 Maybe I can use those for therapy
 when this whole thing's over.

DOUG
 Well, I for one thought today was
 pretty fudgin' cool. We got you
 some new shoes, some new games. I
 even bought you these excessively
 loud "bang snaps" which goes
 against every fiber of my being as
 a principal.

Doug holds up a handful of SMALL, MARBLE-SIZED NOVELTY FIREWORKS, that are meant to MAKE A LOUD BANG and SPARK when thrown against the ground.

Tommy rolls his eyes, as he continues playing.

TOMMY (V.O.)
 So that's your angle? You think you
 can just buy me off, huh? Well, I
 got news for you: I am gonna make
 sure you get me everything I want
 and you're still never gonna be
 with my mom.

DOUG
 I don't wanna toot my own horn but
 I think things are going pretty
 well between your mom and I.

TOMMY

Meh, it feels just like all the others -- pretty temporary.

TOMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

If only that were true.

A smile washes over Doug's face, just as one of the kids in the arcade shoves his way past Doug.

ARCADE KID 2 (V.O.)

Move it, gray nuts.

Doug mouths the words "gray nuts" in disbelief as the kid challenges Tommy to a game of "Dance, Dance."

Tommy breaks out his best moves, impressing Doug who CHEERS him on with an ARSENIO HALL FIST PUMP AND DOG POUND BARK.

Try as he might, Tommy comes up short, losing to the arcade tyrant in grand fashion.

ARCADE KID 2

Losers walk. Biatch.

Tommy hops off the machine and slinks away, dejected.

DOUG

We don't have to leave. You can play him again. There's room for two.

TOMMY

I wanna go.

TOMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He's right, I'm just a loser.

DOUG

Man, that was awesome. You had some killer moves out there.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Yeah, right, what do you know?

DOUG

(calling out to the kid)
I got next!

Doug rolls up his sleeves and approaches the game.

TOMMY

What are you doing?

DOUG
 Spirit squad captain. 1990 - 92.
 I got skills and a lotta soul.

The Arcade kid stares Doug up and down.

ARCADE KID 2 (V.O.)
 Gonna take this old man to school.

DOUG
 (responding to the kid's
 thoughts)
 Class is in session, suckaaaa.

Doug methodically pops in some quarters... it's intense.

MUSIC UP: "Teach me how to Dougie" by Cali Swag District.

Doug slowly settles into the game, but picks it up seamlessly. The kid puts up a fight, but it's no match for Doug's uninhibited, often times, inappropriate dance arsenal.

SLOW MOTION SHOTS OF DOUG AS HE BUSTS OUT MOVES FROM ALL SEVEN CONTINENTS, WITH A SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON TRIBAL AFRICAN DANCE.

WE ANGLE ON Tommy who covers his face, mortified, despite the fact that Doug is owning the game.

Doug vanquishes the arcade kid as he steps off the game in shame.

DOUG (CONT'D)
 Looks like ol' gray nuts still has
 game.

A proud and boastful Doug, approaches Tommy.

DOUG (CONT'D)
 Did you see that?! Tell me I didn't
 just earn some serious street
credibility.

TOMMY (V.O.)
 Please strike me down, now.

Just then, Tommy's spots his ultimate crush, Kim, walking by with TWO OF HER PLASTIC VALLEY GIRL FRIENDS. As usual the girls are dressed way too grown up for their age.

TOMMY (V.O.)
 Jeez, it's Kim, if she sees me with
 "dorkenstein" over here I'm--

-- Too late.

KIM

--Hey Tommy. I didn't know you,
like, hung out at the mall.

TOMMY (V.O.)

She knows my name - score.

TOMMY

Uh, hey, Kim -- and friends. Yeah,
totes. It's the place to be.

TOMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

"Kim and friends?", "The place to
be?", one afternoon around this guy
and I'm starting to talk like him.

DOUG

Hey girls!

TOMMY

(re: Doug)

We're not together. He was already
creeping around the arcade when I
got here.

DOUG

Yupper, I was just out buying
Principal stuff, pencils, a paper
weight, the whole shabangabang. I
ran into Tommy. Thought I'd say
"sup?". So what brings you to the
mall?

KIM

Um, buyin' school stuff. Thought I
should, like, hit the books.

DOUG

Glad to see you're taking my
advice.

KIM (V.O.)

You wish. I just need a new push-up
bra to, like, keep Josh away from
that honey badger, Wendy Peters.
I'm so tired of stuffing, when are
my real boobs gonna come in?

DOUG

(changing the subject)

Ahhhhhhh--and how about you girls?
What are you up to?

Kim's posse aggressively chews gum in tandem while staring blankly like a couple of dairy cows -- NEITHER OF THEM HAVE A SINGLE THOUGHT IN THEIR HEADS. DOUG PEERS DEEPLY TRYING TO GET A READ. EMPTINESS.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Wow, nothing at all, huh?

KIM

Well, this was kinda weird. I'll, like, see ya at school or whatever.

DOUG

Yes ma'am, we will see you there... not together, separately. I might see you at one time, then at a totally different time Tommy might see you.

KIM (V.O.)

I'm, like, totally gonna end up seeing this dude on the news one day.

KIM

Later.

TOMMY

Uh... bye.

TOMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Whew, that was close.

DOUG

Soooooo--

TOMMY (V.O.)

If he noticed me crushing on Kim, I'm gonna die.

DOUG

I know it'll take time, but I mean, at least we've started the bonding process. You know, I wish I could bond like this with all my students.

TOMMY

So you wanna date everyone's mom now?

DOUG

Noooooo... just yours, kiddo...

Tommy storms off.

DOUG (CONT'D)
(oblivious)
-- Just yours!

INT. FRANK'S HOUSE - EVENING

Doug and Frank shoot a game of darts. Doug holds a dart in hand, aiming carefully.

DOUG
Thanks for letting me use your dart board.

FRANK
No worries.

As Doug fires the dart WE SEE that Cole's Pamphlet Photo has been taped back together, only to be pinned up dead center on the board.

DOUG
I just don't know, Frank. I was trying everything with Tommy. I bought him stuff. I dusted off some of the old dance moves and was killin' at this game he likes. You shoulda seen me! It was amazing! And still Tommy didn't want to have anything to do with me.

FRANK
Welcome to fatherhood, my man.

DOUG
What are you saying?

FRANK
Well, how did you used to feel when your dad would try to hang out and relate to you.

DOUG
My dad was a government official -- a national treasure, but he was not nearly as cool as I was.

FRANK
Spare me. This kid knows the score. I bet he's already thinking of ways to tap into your pension.

DOUG

That's what he thinks. I'm gonna get him wrapped around my little finger and then BAM!

Doug smacks his hands together.

FRANK

Dougie, are you planning on striking the child? Cuz, I--

DOUG

What? Wait. No. I'm not gonna "strike the child," Frank. I'm talkin' end game here. Marry his mom. Then there are tons of over seas schooling options that can be explored.

FRANK

Just know what you're getting yourself into man. Being involved with a single parent is tough business. It's been hard finding someone who's good for both me and Connor. It's not all about you and her, so tread carefully, buddy.

Doug sees Connor in the distance reading one of Frank's ANATOMY BOOKS. He tunes in.

CONNOR (V.O.)

(awe-struck)

Holy cow, you can totally see this lady's "Virginia".

DOUG

What is he reading?

FRANK

He likes anatomy books. He's gonna be a doctor like me.

CONNOR (V.O.)

When I grow up I'm not gonna work. I'm just gonna look at "Virginias" all day.

DOUG

Okay he needs a female role model in his life. Fast. Or he's probably gonna end up being a sex pervert.

FRANK

Don't you have more important things to focus on-- like your presentation? It's right around the corner.

DOUG

(pointing to his brain)
Already got it mapped out, up here, in my bean. All I need now is some bristol board and some glitter to round it all out artistically.

FRANK

And what about Cole Pruett?

Doug tries to play off Cole, but as he thinks on it a little he realizes what a deep threat his nemesis actually is.

DOUG

What about him? He's just a man... with four limbs and a heart. Nice skin, I guess. Yeah, maybe he's trumped me at a few things before. Grades for example, he had better grades in college. Big. Woop. Okay, so he's got an angelic singing voice that landed him lead spot in the high school chorus. Think that phases me?

FRANK

(sarcastic)
Hmmm. You don't sound phased.

DOUG

Junior high. Halloween. He had a better Mr. T costume than I did--

INSERT QUICK SHOT OF A YOUNG DOUG AND COLE (11), BOTH WEARING MR. T COSTUMES. DOUG'S SPINDLY ARMS, DENIM VEST AND FEATHER EARRING DOES NOT DO THE A-TEAM JUSTICE. WE PITY THE FOOL.

DOUG (CONT'D)

(staring off, still referencing costume)
It was a film-grade costume, nothing my mom coulda sewed could compete with that.

FRANK

Forget all that, the only thing this means is that statistically, you're due for a win. You know... after losing so damn much.

DOUG

Yeah, I got it.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Doug bursts into the principal's office. Peggy approaches.

DOUG

This just got personal, Peg. I am tired of coming in second all the time to Cole Pruett.

Doug's nemesis, Cole Pruett, spins around in Doug's chair revealing himself. Standing beside Cole is his minion, A YOUNG CAMBODIAN BOY -- DANH with an "H" (11).

COLE PRUETT

Hello, *italics*, old friend.

PEGGY

Cole Pruett from Hillcrest Charter is here to see you.

DOUG

Thank you, Peggy... for that... astoundingly late announcement.

Peggy exits the room, leaving Doug and Cole alone.

DOUG (CONT'D)

What are you doin' here?

COLE PRUETT

Dropping off some forms you need to fill out before our presentation.

DOUG

Why didn't Superintendant Reed drop these off?

COLE PRUETT

Oh, I saw "Reedsy" yesterday out on the old links, told him I'd love to deliver these, plus it gives me a chance to show Danh, our new Cambodian exchange student, some of the other schools in the district.

DANH (V.O.)

This must be where learning comes
to die.

Doug stares at Danh with his jaw dropped open in disbelief.

DOUG

The educational system is far from
perfect, but we do our best. Nice
to meet you, Danh.

DANH

Uh... it's Danh with an "H". It's
okay everyone has trouble with it.

Doug looks at the kid confused as his name sounds exactly
like the English version of "Dan".

COLE PRUETT

Well we should probably get going.
I think Danh and I have "roughed
it" for long enough. Care to walk
us out?

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Doug walks Cole and Danh toward the exit. Along the way, Doug
gets a sobering glimpse of his school's underlying problems.

Doug and Cole pass by a LETHARGIC STUDENT, KEVIN (12).

KEVIN (V.O.)

Soooo hungry. Never anything to eat
at home.

COLE

That boy looks a bit out of sorts.

DOUG

I'm sure he's fine. Some of us just
aren't morning people.

WE PASS BY Sarah who diligently flips through a ratty, worn
out text book as she walks.

SARAH (V.O.)

(deep in thought)

So X is equal to Y but only if...
this can't be right. This math book
is full of typos and they're
constantly spelling *Pi* with an "e"
on the end.

DOUG

Hey Sarah, we have a brand new atlas in the library. It's pretty fly. Be sure to check it out.

She doesn't even respond.

SARAH (V.O.)

Awesome, I'm sure that'll keep me out of community college.

Danh runs up to a classroom window. It's painfully obvious that there are WAY TOO MANY STUDENTS for one class.

DANH (V.O.)

Sooooo many kids in here.

DOUG

It looks a little crowded right now, but rest assured we are well under the 36 to 1 student-teacher ratio.

DANH (V.O.)

(counting)
32... 33... 34 --

DOUG

-- It's public school, okay, Pax?! I'm working with what I got--

COLE PRUETT

Well, this was certainly eye opening. Thanks for the tour.

DANH (V.O.)

Mr. Cole was right. This place is pathetic. Good thing he's gonna close all these public schools down soon and make them all like his.

DOUG

So, uh, I bet you got all kinds of plans in mind if you get that promotion huh?

COLE PRUETT

Well, lets just say I hope to make the entire school system a little more harmonious... Jai Ho, Douglas.

Cole flashes a most insincere grin.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Cole and Dahn exit the building and head for Cole's Porsche drop top as they scheme.

DANH

You think he'd carry more shame with him, but it's like nothing phases that man.

COLE PRUETT

Exactly, Danh. It's sad really, but I didn't get to where I am by underestimating my competition. You know how you beat the other guy, Danh? By watching him, waiting for him to slip up and then pouncing when he's weak. That's what you're gonna do for me.

DANH

(whispering)

I will be your eyes, your ears and your heart--

COLE PRUETT

But mostly just my eyes and ears. This is war Danh, leave emotion at the door.

INT. GWEN'S BOOKSTORE - EARLY EVENING

Doug inconspicuously enters Gwen's bookstore and heads for the new children's reading section. He admires Gwen from a far as she reads Dr. Seuss to a SMALL GROUP OF YOUNG CHILDREN who hang on her every word.

GWEN

(reading)

"But I've bought a big bat. I'm all ready you see. Now my troubles are going to have troubles with me!"

(closing the book)

Guys don't read into that too literally, he's not gonna take a bat to his troubles, really that's no way to solve anything. It's kind of a Tony Soprano mentality.

YOUNG KID I (V.O.)

Awww man, done already?

YOUNG KID II (V.O.)
I could listen to her read all day.

YOUNG KID III (V.O.)
Hmmm. I wonder if "Chloe and Lamar"
is ever gonna come back on TV?

A puzzled look washes over Doug's face regarding the last kid's comment.

Doug reveals himself. Gwen looks up at him, smiling.

GWEN
That's all for today, but remember
I'm droppin' mad Seuss every
Wednesday. Get some.

The kids wave goodbye and clear out of the reading area.

DOUG
Like the layout. Pretty "Rowling".

GWEN
There ya' go! Got the vernacular
down. You can officially be my
helper. Can you hand me some of
those books? We're still
organizing.

Doug hands Gwen a few books, that she packs on the shelves.

DOUG
Hey what does it feel like... to
have kids like you so much?

GWEN
What are you asking me that for?
You're liked.

DOUG
I thought I was liked. I thought I
was respected, I'm not either of
those things. This job, this
promotion. It's all kinda fleeting.

GWEN
Are you kidding me? I just spent
\$29.95 on this...

Gwen pulls out Doug's shiny new desk placard. It's now been engraved to read: *Doug Barnes, Superintendent.*

GWEN (CONT'D)

It's been engraved -- they won't take it back now, so I guess you're just gonna have to stop doubting yourself and get that job.

Doug holds up the placard, looking at it with pride.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

Doug frantically gets to work on his presentation.

He lays down a massive piece of bristol board, scours the web for photos of "ideal" school life, prints them out and proceeds to make a collage.

Peggy enters.

PEGGY

Wow, somebody's hard at work.

DOUG

I need this job, Peg. Bad.

PEGGY

I know, it's the job, all the benefits in the world, great pay -- I mean we're talkin' Camry money.

Doug puts down his glue stick and gets serious.

DOUG

Forget all that. If Cole wins he's gonna shut down a bunch of public schools, including ours, and replace us with one of his private "gladiator academies".

PEGGY

What about the kids that can't afford private school? What are they gonna do?

DOUG

Aren't you even listening? If I don't get that superintendant gig, I'm out of a job next year.

PEGGY

That means I'll lose my job too.

DOUG

You're pretty much done for.

Peggy grabs Doug by the collar.

PEGGY

You were supposed to take me with you. What are you sitting around for? Our lively hoods are at stake. Show me what you have so far?

Doug holds up a large sheet of bristol board covered in generic pictures of STATE-OF-THE-ART BUILDINGS AND SMILING KIDS HOLDING HANDS.

The enthusiasm gets sucked right off of Peggy's face.

DOUG

What's wrong?
(whispering)
Does it need more ethnic kids?

PEGGY

--It sucks. That came out wrong.

DOUG

What are you talking about? It's visually striking and projects an idea of togetherness.

PEGGY

That's just it, you said it yourself: These things aren't about ideas. They're about politics.

She points to Doug's white board, filled with his "phases for success".

DOUG

(mounting optimism)
Phase 3: Parent-teacher night.
You're right. There's still hope.

PEGGY

I've got the entire PTA, members of the board and the superintendant coming just like you wanted.

DOUG

Tomorrow is gonna be the most important night of our lives. I just need these kids to play ball for a night and I'm home free.

Doug eyes Julian performing office aid duties in the reception area. He is noticeably less chipper than normal.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Julian! My favorite office aid!

JULIAN (V.O.)
Please, I'm not in the mood to
pretend to like your sweater vest.

DOUG
What do I have to do to impress
you?!

JULIAN
Pardon?

DOUG
Sorry. Stressed. In a bit of a
bind. Tomorrow's parent-teacher
night and I need the school to look
"fierce". That's the word you use
right? "Fierce?"

JULIAN
Uhhhh... yeah. That's what we say.

DOUG
I was looking to spruce up the gym
and figured with your eye for color
we could--

Doug looks at Julian's eye. He's got a small "shiner" that is
hidden under a thick layer of concealer.

DOUG (CONT'D)
What happened to your eye?

JULIAN
Sewing mishap.

DOUG
Really? Sewing mishap? That's the
best you got?

JULIAN
I mean, I fell--

JULIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
--Right onto Joey Riggs' fist.

A concerned look washes over Doug's face.

DOUG
If there's a problem I'll deal with
it.

JULIAN (V.O.)
I'm sick and tired of this place
and the way people treat me.

JULIAN
Everything's fine. Same as it
always is. I gotta get to class.

A feeling of helplessness washes over Doug.

EXT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - NEXT MORNING

It's the day of parent-teacher night.

School bully Joey Riggs gives a "purple nurple" nipple twist to BRANDON (11), a skinny nerd with helmet braces.

BRANDON
All I have is three bucks.

JOEY RIGGS
What kinda bully do you take me
for? I don't do this for the money.

Just then Doug's shadow comes into frame.

DOUG
I think that Brandon's "nurples"
are purple enough. Let him go.

Riggs releases Brandon from his Kung-fu grip.

BRANDON (V.O.)
Not sure who you are, but you got
here just in time.

DOUG
I'm your Princip-- nevermind.

Brandon exits. Riggs tries to slink out unnoticed as well.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Not so fast, Mr. Riggs. Do you mind
explaining what you were doing just
now?

JOEY RIGGS
We were just having fun. No one got
hurt.

JOEY RIGGS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Except for that other kid.

DOUG

You know, Riggs, over the years I've seen students like you come in and out of my office. I've developed a certain amount of resentment towards your type. You're the ones that broke my spirit, turned me into something I never wanted to be.

JOEY RIGGS (V.O.)

Woah, I helped push this dude over the edge. Awesome.

DOUG

You took something from me. Now you're gonna help me get that back.

JOEY RIGGS

So what do you got another detention?

JOEY RIGGS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Put it on my tab. I can do one of those standing on my head.

DOUG

Detentions just aren't gonna cut it this time. You've made this school ugly for so many kids, now you're gonna do something to undo some of that ugliness.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - LATER

Doug and Joey Riggs stand before an OLD PICK-UP TRUCK LOADED TO THE HILT WITH POTTED PLANTS and a ragged field that could use more than a little sprucing up.

DOUG

We haven't had a grounds keeper in ages.

JOEY RIGGS

This blows, you want me to plant all of these?

DOUG

Anywhere you like, be creative. You have until the end of the day, plenty of time to make a mends.

JOEY RIGGS (V.O.)
Yeah right, the second he leaves,
I'm gonna bounce.

DOUG
And if this is not done, you'll be
suspended -- "indef". "Indef".

Doug hands Joey a small spade and a hoe.

Joey plods off and digs a small hole in the dirt, then places
a potted plant into the earth.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - LATER

Doug enters the school gym pushing a dolly filled with
decorations, a helium tank and snacks for parent-teacher
night.

A class is in session. Kids shoot hoops with basketballs that
have no bounce whatsoever.

Josh, the school jock, attempts to pass a basketball to Tommy
who watches dejected, as the ball deflates into a thin,
leather disc in between them.

JOSH (V.O.)
Man, what's with these tired balls?
This school sucks.

The coach BLOWS THE WHISTLE signifying the end of class.

COACH SIMPSON
Alright, "ladies" hit the showers.

DOUG
Good job, coach. Keep it up.
(addressing class)
If anyone wants to help me decorate
the gym, for Parent-teacher night,
there's extra credit in it for you.

The students pay no attention to Doug and walk past him
toward the locker room. Tommy is one of the last to do so.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Tommo! How bout you? You down?

TOMMY (V.O.)
You must be joking.

TOMMY
Nah, I'm gonna pass on this one.

DOUG
Rock. Paper. Scissors?

TOMMY
What?

DOUG
I win, you help me decorate. You win, I'll make it so you never have to do homework again in your life.

TOMMY (V.O.)
Yeah, right. No homework ever.

DOUG
I'm dead serious. Best of seven?

Tommy takes the bait, he bares in -- Rock. Paper. Scissors. Shoot. Tommy loses four games in quick fashion, almost as if Doug knew exactly what he was thinking - oh wait, he does.

TOMMY (V.O.)
This dude is the devil.

DOUG
(analyzing Tommy's choices)
Paper after rock? I gotta give it to you, paper after rock took some serious stones. Nice.
(pointing to decorations)
Don't be shy with the streamers.

MUSIC UP: "Disco Club" by the Black Eyed Peas

WE SEE QUICK CUTS OF DOUG AND TOMMY PREPARING THE GYM FOR A BLOW-OUT SHINDIG.

BOOM. A BAG OF TOSTITOS IS BUSTED OPEN AND DUMPED OUT INTO AN ALUMINUM TRAY. A DISCO BALL IS HUNG UP IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM. BALLOONS ARE FILLED WITH HELIUM. MORE TOSTITOS -- PERFECTION.

Doug puts a bunch of streamers in his hair, mimicking dreadlocks. He puts on a BAD JAMAICAN ACCENT for Tommy's amusement.

DOUG (CONT'D)
(Bad Jamaican Accent)
Yes mon, you "Ja-makin" this place look real "irie".

TOMMY (V.O.)
That's incredibly racist.

Doug scrambles to quickly remove the makeshift dreads from his head, but sees another opportunity to win Tommy over.

DOUG

What's that? You wanna hear me do a chipmunk impression? You asked for it.

TOMMY

No, I didn't.

DOUG

Here goes.

Doug walks over to the helium tank, puts his mouth on the nozzle and turns the valve way up. His face fills up quicker than expected causing him to cough and hack uncontrollably.

It sounds like a small rodent coughing up a lung.

Tommy bursts out laughing at Doug's mishap. Doug joins in. His laugh comes out like a high chipmunk.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - AFTERNOON

THE END-OF-THE-DAY BELL RINGS.

Doug exits the school to see a GROUP OF KID'S standing around Joey Riggs as he plants the last of the flowers in the school yard.

It's awe-inspiring landscaping. The grounds look amazingly vibrant, better than they have in years.

DOUG

Joey, I don't know what to say -- I'm speechless.

JOEY RIGGS

I didn't really care much. I just threw 'em wherever.

DOUG

Well, it looks like you put a ton of thought and effort into this.

JOEY RIGGS (V.O.)

I think I found something I'm actually good at.

Julian walks up to Riggs.

JULIAN

Love your color choices. Nice combos.

JOEY RIGGS

Yeah, you, uh, really think so? That's kinda decent.

JULIAN

You think I'm kinda decent?

JOEY RIGGS

Not what I said.

JULIAN

Baby steps.

DOUG

Wow. All these years and I can still be surprised.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

Parent-teacher night is in full swing.

Parents circulate, discussing academics with their kids in tow.

Doug works the room, smiling and shaking hands like a politician on the campaign trail.

Peggy stands beside him holding a clipboard with bullet notes on all the important guests.

She points out Kim and her FATHER, a member of the board.

PEGGY

That's Ronald Taylor. Major player on the board.

DOUG

Mr. Taylor! How are you tonight?

They shake hands.

KIM'S DAD

Doing quite well, thank you. By the way, kudos on being one of the front runners for superintendant.

DOUG

Oh that-- psssh. I mean it would be an honour, but really I'm a servant to these wonderful kids. And how is the lovely Kim tonight?

KIM (V.O.)

I can't believe I'm, like, totally missing acting class for this. I bet the Kardashians don't have to deal with this junk.

DOUG

Kim, I've been meaning to ask you: Do you act by any chance?

KIM'S DAD

Actually she just booked a commercial for a new line of yoghurt that helps people with their bowels.

DOUG

Ah the fine arts. You know if I were superintendant I would definitely expand our dramatic arts programs since it's so monumental in our children's expression of themselves.

KIM'S DAD

Well put, Doug, well put. Now If you'll excuse me, I think I saw some Tostitos when I came in.

Kim's dad heads for the snacks.

Kim eyes her old boyfriend, Josh, laughing with ANOTHER GIRL.

KIM (V.O.)

I can't stand seeing Josh happy. He should be with me.

Doug whispers to Kim.

DOUG

Plenty of fish out there. Keep your options open.

Doug innocently winks, but it is quickly misinterpreted.

KIM (V.O.)

EWWW. LIKE, NOT ON YOUR LIFE, DUDE.

Kim walks away.

DOUG
(shocked)
No. No. No. Not me. Not--

Peggy walks over to Doug directing his attention to Superintendent Reed who is engaged in a conversation with the brainy Sarah and her AUSTERE MOTHER.

The entire group stands in front of a few posted EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITY SIGN-UP SHEETS.

Doug walks over to join.

SARAH'S MOTHER
If it were up to me, I'd do away with the arts and whatever other extra curricular activities are taking the emphasis away from our kid's education. I don't let Sarah join any program that doesn't have some sort of academic bearing and she's totally fine with that.

SARAH
Yeah, mom those programs are for the slackers.

Sarah stares at a wall of messy oil paintings that surrounds the ART CLUB SIGN UP SHEET.

SARAH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I bet they're pretty fun though.

SUPERINTENDANT REED
I've been saying it for years, we need to push our children into the fields that matter: Math and science. We're here to churn out professionals not hippy rock stars and out-of-work actors.

Doug totally flip flops on his issues from parent to parent.

DOUG
Amen to that, right? I mean let's face it, these programs aren't gonna make a lick of difference in a kid's life. If anything they're just gonna pull them away from why they are in school in the first place -- to learn.

SARAH (V.O.)

Just one afternoon, to squish clay
between my fingers, get paint in my
hair. Man, my mom would be sooooo
perturbed.

Doug looks around at Sarah who doesn't even realize that
she's smiling from ear to ear at the thought.

DOUG

On the flip side there are some
that think that the arts make
school a better place and if we
start cutting one of the things
that enriches our kid's lives,
where does it stop--

Doug gets a bunch of blank stares from Sarah, her mother and
the Superintendent.

DOUG (CONT'D)

--Damn hippies.

They all share a chuckle.

SUPERINTENDENT REED

Now here's a man with his head on
straight. I'm real proud of you,
Doug, know that. You've always been
like a son to me and it would give
me no greater honor than to see you
fill my shoes one more time. I get
the sense that you're ready to make
that jump, move beyond these walls.

DOUG

I am, Sir. I really am.

SUPERINTENDENT REED

Your time's coming.

Doug spots Tommy and Gwen as they enter the gym.

DOUG

Sir, please excuse me for a minute?

Doug dismisses Peg.

DOUG (CONT'D)

I can take it from here, Peg.
Thanks for your help.

PEGGY

Sure thing, Captain.

Doug smiles weakly, disgusted with himself at the charade he just put on. He walks over to Gwen and Tommy.

DOUG

Hey guys!

GWEN

Hey you. Nice set up.

DOUG

Tommy helped a bunch.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Not by choice. He's unnaturally good at Rock, Paper, Scissors.

GWEN

Really? That's great! Tommy, doesn't tell me anything. By the way thanks again for taking him to the mall. Glad you guys got a chance to hang out.

TOMMY (V.O.)

What about thanking me? Do you know how hard it is for me to be seen in public with him.

DOUG

Nah, we had a blast. It was *cool beans...* and I want to take that phrase back immediately if I may.

GWEN

So on a professional note. How's my son doing? I'm sure he's been a perfect angel -- right Tommy?

DOUG

Let's see, shall we?

Doug gives Tommy an intense stare as he methodically rifles through pages on the clipboard looking for Tommy's records.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Damn. This is his chance to take me down. My mom's gonna make me do summer school for sure. Hurry up, just spike the ball already.

DOUG

Perfect attendance. Participates well in class.

(MORE)

DOUG (CONT'D)

Teachers can't say enough about him. What mother wouldn't want to hear that, huh?

TOMMY (V.O.)

Woah. Did he just do me a solid?

Tommy's jaw drops.

GWEN

Wow kiddo, I don't know what to say. I have a ton of faith in you, but I'm a little stunned.

TOMMY

See, I told you, I'm awesome.

GWEN

I told Tommy, I'd take him out to celebrate if he improved from last term, boy did he ever.

DOUG

Well, you two have fun. He did great. Tell him to keep it up.

Doug and Gwen are about to hug, but realize that it would be the wrong venue for this public display of affection.

GWEN

I'll call ya' tomorrow.

Doug watches as Tommy and Gwen walk away. Tommy turns and heads back to Doug.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Thanks for not being you just now.

TOMMY

We're goin' to the Pier. Wanna roll with?

DOUG

(shocked)

I would -- I would love to "roll with", but I should probably pass. You might have been right about me: Maybe I'm not such a good guy after all.

TOMMY

Well, I watch a lot of T.V. and the thing about being a good guy is that you can start anytime.

Doug cracks a smile.

EXT. SANTA MONICA PIER - NIGHT

Doug, Gwen and Tommy take a casual stroll down the Santa Monica Pier. The entire fairground is lit up -- postcard perfect.

Doug holds a paper container full of nachos for them to share.

GWEN

Is it wrong that I love nacho
cheese like I do?

DOUG

I'll give you a pass, 'cuz you're a
nice lady.

GWEN

I'm bein' dead serious it's like
the perfect mystery food. It's
neither solid nor liquid. It's got
a neon-orange color unlike anything
else found on earth and it can hold
temperatures up to seven hundred
degrees. It shouldn't work, but it
so does.

DOUG

I love it when you talk Velveta.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Alright, this is getting weird.

TOMMY

Mom, can I go on some rides?

GWEN

Sure, lemme see if I have any cash.

Gwen searches through her purse, but she's tapped.

GWEN (CONT'D)

All out. Is there an ATM around?

TOMMY

I sure hope so because the rides
aren't free, ya know.

DOUG

This is on me.

GWEN
Absolutely not. I can't let you--

DOUG
--It's done. Please. It'll save a
bunch of time. Plus, I got change.

Doug accidentally pulls out a fifty. Tommy quickly grabs it.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Oops, that's way too muc--

TOMMY (V.O.)
--That'll do nicely. Yoink.

GWEN
Tommy, that's too much.

TOMMY
I'll make change...

TOMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Then i'll use that change to go on
more rides.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
See ya!

Tommy bolts into the midway, leaving Gwen and Doug alone.
There's a listlessness to Doug's demeanor.

GWEN
You alright?

DOUG
Yeah, why wouldn't I be? Everything
is going according to plan.

GWEN
I actually wanted to talk to you
about that. I've been thinking that
if things keep going this way, I
want to take you up on your offer.
That is if it hasn't expired.

DOUG
Not at all. My love is like nacho
cheese: It has no expiration date.

Gwen chuckles.

GWEN
Tommy seems like he's really
warming up to you.

DOUG

Yeah, I feel like we're starting to get each other.

GWEN

I probably don't have to tell you this, but they're not that hard ya' know -- kids.

DOUG

You know I think the better I tried to do my job, the worse I became at it. I've spent my entire life as a principal telling kids what they should do, what they should want, but I haven't spent a single day just listening to what they need. Does that make me a bad guy?

GWEN

Nah, it just makes you a guy who knows what he needs to do...

A FAINT CRY FILLS THE AIR.

DOUG

Do you hear that, crying?

GWEN

No, I can't really--

Doug and Gwen make their way to a clearing where they see a LITTLE GIRL (10) sitting alone on a bench, crying.

LITTLE GIRL ON BENCH (V.O.)

Stupid family... if they want to forget my birthday, then I'll just run away. Then they'll see that they should have cared more.

GWEN

Poor thing. I wonder what's bothering her?

DOUG

They forgot her birthday.

Gwen gives Doug an odd look.

DOUG (CONT'D)

I mean... that could be one of the many reasons why she'd be crying. Who knows really?

Gwen approaches the girl.

GWEN
Hey, are you okay?

LITTLE GIRL ON BENCH
I'm not supposed to talk to
strangers.

DOUG
I'm a principal. And her son, who's
right over there, goes to my
school.

LITTLE GIRL ON BENCH
So are you guys dating?

DOUG
Uh... yeah.

LITTLE GIRL ON BENCH (V.O.)
Sounds inappropriate.

DOUG
We met at a school dance she was
chaperoning, I don't really see the
problem with...

GWEN
Doug -- focus up.

DOUG
Sorry.

GWEN
Why are you out here by yourself?

LITTLE GIRL ON BENCH
Because my family doesn't know I'm
alive, so I just ran away. They
even forgot my birthday.

Gwen looks at Doug -- "how could you have possibly known?"

DOUG
Lucky guess.

GWEN
I'm sure your family didn't mean to
forget your special day. Sometimes
adults can be--

DOUG
--Dill weeds.

LITTLE GIRL ON BENCH
You can say that again.

DOUG
Dill weeds.

The girl chuckles.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Sometimes adults can get so wrapped
up in their own little thoughts
that they lose sight of the bigger
picture. But we don't mean to.

GWEN
We should call your parents.

The little girl wipes her eyes and nods in agreement.

DOUG
Just one sec before you do.

Doug races up to the funnel cake stand and orders some doughy-fried goodness, that gets piled high with whipped cream and a cherry. He then purchases some sparklers from another near by cart.

Next, he walks over to one of the CARNIVAL GAME ANNOUNCERS and whispers something to him, pointing to the disheartened young girl.

The game announcer hands over the mic to Doug. He lights the sparklers and places them into the funnel cake before hopping on top of the game's table.

Tommy takes notice and walks over.

DOUG (CONT'D)
This song goes out to a special
little lady... who is turning--

LITTLE GIRL ON BENCH
Ten.

DOUG
Alright everybody, let's all show
her how cool it is to be ten, huh?

Doug grabs a GIANT TEDDY BEAR from one of the game booths, but before he can hand it to the girl an ANGRY VENDOR shakes his head "no way".

DOUG (CONT'D)
C'mon, it's her birthday.

The vendor gives Doug a tiny doll that he then hands to the little girl.

DOUG (CONT'D)
 Sorry, I tried. And a one and a two
 and a three and a four--

Doug SINGS a Sinatra-esque "Happy Birthday" ballad to the little girl. The entire scene smacks of Ferris Bueller's *Twist and Shout* parade moment.

Soon, everyone at the pier is singing along. Tommy can hardly believe his eyes.

TOMMY (V.O.)
 Okay who is this man and what did
 he do with the principal?

The little girl is now smiling from ear to ear, as Doug completes the song and presents her the lit funnel cake to blow out.

Gwen and Tommy WHISTLE AND CLAP like mad.

DOUG
 Make a wish.

The girl blows her candle out.

WE ANGLE ON DOUG'S SMILING, NOTICEABLY MOVED FACE, as he is the only one that could hear what she wished for.

INT. DOUG'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Doug digs a dusty old BOX OF MEMORABILIA out of his closet. Inside the box are OLD CLASS PHOTOS that serve as reminders of the joy he used to have working with kids. Behind the photos is Doug's dusty gold plated medal.

Doug runs his hand along the surface of the medal to wipe away the years of caked-on dust, revealing an embossed "Principal of the Year" logo.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Doug walks into the office, sporting a new look. He's wearing a sweet leather motorcycle jacket and jeans -- a physical manifestation of his new attitude.

Doug approaches his white board and immediately wipes it clean, making his "phases of success" nothing more than a distant memory.

He writes something new on the board which we are not yet privy to.

Peggy enters, instantly taking notice of her boss's new look.

PEGGY
Woah, nice duds.

DOUG
You like?

PEGGY
Yeah, you kinda look like Michelle Pfeiffer from "Dangerous Minds".

DOUG
Not exactly what I was going for, but "thank you". I woke up this morning and just felt like doing things a little differently.

Doug pulls out a TON OF TEACHER REQUEST FORMS from his bag. They all have the words "denied" stamped across them.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Look at what I did to this place, just so I could look great on paper; impress the board. I cut programs, denied my teachers the basic supplies they needed to do their job. Yeah, it kept the budgets way down, but look at what it really cost us.

PEGGY
The old you was a real A-wipe, no denying that.

DOUG
As always, you are my rock, Peg.

Doug finally stumbles upon the SCIENCE TEACHER'S REQUEST FOR A CLASS TRIP, it too has a huge RED "DENIED" STAMP ACROSS IT.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Remember field trips? How great they used to be? How fun they were when you were a kid?

PEGGY
Do I! You'd get the day off school. Finally got a chance to be in the dark with the boy you liked -- mmm.

Peggy drifts off into space, her head tilted to the side as a smile washes over her face.

DOUG
(disturbed)
Okay, please keep the rest to
yourself.

Doug slaps the form down on his desk and grabs the phone.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - LATER

A frustrated Doug paces about his office while trying to negotiate a deal on the phone.

DOUG
(on phone)
Yes... I know it's been a while
but... I just need a bus ... I'll
pay whatever I need to... Are you
serious? Nothing? Thanks anyway.

Doug hangs up the phone, dejected.

PEGGY
Nada?

DOUG
Not a single school bus available,
they're all booked until next year.
I just want to do something nice.

PEGGY
If you're not too picky, maybe you
still can.

INT. SCIENCE CLASSROOM - DAY

WE ANGLE ON BILL, the science teacher, who uses fruit to replace missing planets in a solar system visual aid.

BILL
Now the school won't give us any
more money for visual aids, so I'm
going to use this orange from my
lunch to represent Jupiter.

Doug bursts into the room with great news.

DOUG
We're going on a field trip!
California Science center. Boom!

SCIENCE TEACHER

What? I thought you said --

DOUG

--Forget what I said. These kids
deserve their year end trip.

(to class)

Grab your stuff, we're heading out.

The kids, including Tommy, CHEER.

SCIENCE TEACHER

Right now? You mean it? But what
about permission?

DOUG

Sometimes when you ask for
permission you're just giving
someone a chance to say "no".
Sometimes you just gotta go for it.
I'll handle it.

SCIENCE TEACHER

But we need two teachers to
chaperone a field trip.

Doug points to himself -- "what do you think I'm here for?"

DOUG

Head out to the front of the
school, guys. Ride's on the way.

The kids pile out. Tommy nods at Doug, who nods back and
reaches up for a high-five. Tommy shakes his head--

TOMMY (V.O.)

Not here, dude.

DOUG

No? That's cool.

The science teacher more than makes up for the rejected high-
five by giving Doug a huge bear hug.

SCIENCE TEACHER

This is gonna be so much fun you
won't regret it. They have a whole
exhibit on "the woods of the world"
featuring the Majestic red oak,
it's gonna be pretty phenomenal.

JOEY RIGGS (V.O.)

Get a room.

Doug frees himself from the hug.

DOUG
Well played Riggs, Well played.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - LATER

Doug, Peggy and the rest of the science class stand before a GAUDY STRETCH HUMMER LIMO. It's only redeeming quality is that it's A VIBRANT SCHOOL BUS-YELLOW.

This is the coolest mode of transportation the kids have ever seen. For Doug, not so much but it'll hafta do.

Doug looks at Peggy, dumbfounded.

DOUG
Who are you?

PEGGY
It's alright, I know a guy. Let's leave it at that. Treat her right.

She gently pats Doug on the chin Mafioso style and walks off.

Tommy's entire class loads into the stretch hummer as Doug calls out the seating assignments.

DOUG
We're gonna stick with our partners for the day, Jeff Peters you're with Kelly Pierce. Stephen James you're with Brandon Myers. Tommy Miller you're with...

TOMMY (V.O.)
Please say "Kim". Please say "Kim".

DOUG
Uh, Kim Taylor.

TOMMY (V.O.)
Yes.

Doug cracks a smile and gives Tommy a little wink.

As the hummer loads up, WE SEE DANH poke his head out from around the corner. He snaps a few photos on his iPhone, spy camera style and then calls Cole.

DANH
 (on the phone)
 "Little Ceaser" calling "Emperor Nero": The canary is leaving the nest. I repeat--

COLE PRUETT (O.S.)
 (on the phone)
 Alright, don't repeat it because I don't know what that means.

DANH
 Unauthorized, high-capacity, "pimp wagon" being used for transporting an entire class full of kids and our "mark". Destination, unknown.

COLE PRUETT (O.S.)
 No matter. All I care about is when they'll be back. Can you hear me smiling through the phone, Danh?

DANH
 (whispering)
 I can, sir.

INT. STRETCH HUMMER - LATER

Tommy tries to make small talk with Kim.

TOMMY
 Your perfume smells really nice.

KIM
 Um, thanks.

TOMMY
 It smells like the one my mom wears. She's not even that old.

Kim cracks an awkward smile, unsure of how to take the compliment. She then ignores Tommy by staring out the window.

EXT. CALIFORNIA SCIENCE CENTER - LATER

The stretch Hummer pulls up to the California Science Center. Kids file out. Doug and Tommy are the last to exit.

DOUG
 So Kim Taylor's pretty cute, huh?

TOMMY (V.O.)

Gross.

DOUG

For you. For you. I just noticed you have a little crush.

TOMMY

No way.

TOMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She's just the woman of my dreams.

DOUG

Okay, but if you did like her, it's probably not the best idea to say she smells like your mom. Even though your mom smells like hope and glimmer--

TOMMY

--Just forget it.

TOMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She'd never go for me anyway. She's into bad boys like Josh Powell.

DOUG

Nuh uh, not anymore she isn't.

TOMMY

What do you mean?

DOUG

Josh is dating Wendy Peters, gave her his wrestling jacket and everything. It's too legit.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Shut. Up.

DOUG

You want my advice?

TOMMY

Ummmm...

TOMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Not really.

DOUG

Tommy, I know how to deal with the señoritas.

(MORE)

DOUG (CONT'D)
Trust me, makin' her laugh is the
first step to making her smile. Go
get your girl.

INT. CALIFORNIA SCIENCE CENTER - DAY

The class runs wild in the science center, cutting loose and
enjoying themselves to the n-th degree.

Bill the science teacher is fully engrossed in a "woods of
the world" exhibit featuring "the majestic red oak tree".

BILL
(re: exhibit, overjoyed)
So much "wood".

JOEY RIGGS (V.O.)
Too easy.

Several of kids do crazy flips and dives in a vertical wind
tunnel -- an iFly sky diving simulator.

Doug walks over to Sarah who studiously takes notes on the
exhibits while watching the kids have fun out of the corner
of her eye.

DOUG
Havin' fun?

SARAH
Uh... there's learning all around
us -- of course I'm having fun.

SARAH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Maybe not as much fun as those
"troglodytes" in the wind tunnel.

DOUG
Look Sarah, I admire your work
ethic, I wish more students were
like you, but there comes a time
when you just gotta say... "to heck
with it."

SARAH
I do?

DOUG

Yes. Seize your childhood before it whips by, otherwise you'll end up a bitter old lady -- mumbling to yourself, swearing at strangers, shacking up with a bunch of cats. You don't want that do you?

Sarah shakes her head "no".

DOUG (CONT'D)

Then get out there, cut loose.

Sarah cracks a smile, puts down her notebook and runs to the wind tunnel to join the other kids.

DOUG (CONT'D)

This principal stuff ain't so tough after all.

Doug scans the place looking for anyone else he can impart his wisdom to. He spots Joey Riggs, who stares a naked cave woman exhibit up and down.

JOEY RIGGS (V.O.)

Nice rack!

DOUG

Not much more, I can do to help over here.

WE ANGLE ON TOMMY, who saunters over to a giant metal ball used to demonstrate static electricity. As he touches it, his hair instantly stands on end, catching Kim's attention.

Tommy's radical hairstyles change by the second as he places different combinations of fingers on the ball.

TOMMY

Is my hair alright? I've been using this new gel, adds wicked volume.

KIM (V.O.)

(chuckling)

Kind of a dork -- but a cute dork.

Doug looks over at Tommy giving him the thumbs up -- it's working.

Doug approaches Tommy once the crowd disperses.

DOUG

You're doing pretty good out there.

TOMMY
Psssh, yeah I know.

DOUG
You know what to do next, right?

TOMMY
Oh yeah, all under control.

TOMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Not a clue.

DOUG
You gotta take her on a date.

Doug eyes the entrance to the planetarium theatre. He walks up to the box office and approaches the BOX OFFICE ATTENDANT.

DOUG (CONT'D)
Thirty-two tickets please.

BOX OFFICE ATTENDANT
With a group discount. That'll be \$462.00.

DOUG
Jeez, what's playin', Avatar?
Uh, I'll just put it on my card.

Doug reluctantly hands over his personal credit card, but has trouble letting go of it. The attendant practically has to pry it out of his hand.

DOUG (CONT'D)
(under his breath while
looking at Tommy in the
distance)
Hope he appreciates all this one
day. Man, my first date cost a
little over two bucks.

BOX OFFICE ATTENDANT
Surprise, surprise.

INT. SCIENCE CENTER THEATRE - LATER

The entire class sits in the science center theatre waiting for a constellation show. The whole set up is similar to something one would find in a planetarium.

Tommy saves Kim a seat. He waves her over.

KIM (V.O.)
It's so cold in here.

Tommy's totally on this, well, not totally --

TOMMY
Sure is.

TOMMY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
You probably shoulda brought a
jacket like I did.

Doug shakes his head, motioning for Tommy to give up his
jacket.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Why don't you take mine.

Much better. Tommy wraps his jacket around Kim's shoulders.

MUSIC UP: "Chasing Cars" by Snow Patrol

KIM
Thanks. That's, like, real sweet.

The entire place goes dark as the constellation show begins,
showering the theatre with thousands of stars.

INT. CALIFORNIA SCIENCE CENTER - DAY

As the field trip comes to a close Doug attempts to wrangle
his students.

Doug scans a class attendance list and quickly notices that
Tommy and Kim are not present. He checks his watch.

BILL
We should head out. We're pretty
behind schedule.

DOUG
We're missing a couple students.
I'll go back in and check for 'em.

INT. WOODS EXHIBIT, CALIFORNIA SCIENCE CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Tommy and Kim reflect on the day, as they wander back into
the "woods of the world" exhibit.

KIM

That space show was pretty baller.
I was never really into junk like
that.

TOMMY

There's a whole new world out
there.
(matter of fact)
Aladdin.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

Wanna see something cool?

KIM

Shouldn't we, like, head back?

TOMMY

(acting tough)
Meh, let him wait. Check these out.

Tommy pulls out a handful of MARBLE-SIZED FIREWORKS -- THE BANG SNAPS, that Doug had purchased for him at the mall.

KIM

What are they?

Tommy hands Kim a couple of them and then throws one of his near her feet. The bang snap hits the ground with a LOUD CRACK AND A SMALL SPARK, much like a cap gun would make.

Kim SQUEALS at the loud bang and then laughs like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*. She throws one of hers at the ground near Tommy's feet.

KIM (CONT'D)

Dance, fool!

The pair can not control their laughter.

Doug hears the LOUD CRACKING sounds and knows instantly what is causing them.

He rushes to find Tommy and Kim still pelting the bang snaps.

Tommy pelts his last one, the spark from which catches the nearby "woods of the world". The majestic oak instantly bursts into flames causing a cascade of smaller fires throughout the exhibit.

Doug arrives on the scene too little too late.

COMPLETE CHAOS ENSUES.

Bill, the science teacher, lets out a HIGH-PITCHED, GIRLY-MAN SCREAM as he sees the precious oak burning.

BILL
Aaaaaaah! Oh the humanity!

THE FIRE BELL RINGS. THE SPRINKLERS DOUSE THE PLACE EXTINGUISHING THE FLAMES. THE KIDS RUN AROUND YELLING AT THE TOPS OF THEIR LUNGS WHILE BEING SOAKED FROM ABOVE.

The entire place and all the exhibits are drenched by the time the sprinklers shut off.

TOMMY
I didn't mean to--

DOUG
--But you did. Outside. Now!
Get in the stretch humvee.

TOMMY (V.O.)
You can't talk to me like that.
You're not my dad.

DOUG
(snapping)
I am your Principal!
(trying to calm down)
Go. Everyone. Outside.

Tommy and the rest of the soaked kids march out of the science center.

EXT. EDISON MIDDLE SCHOOL - LATER

A sopping wet Doug and his class arrive back at school an hour later than they should have.

They pile out of the stretch Hummer to see Cole, Danh and a BUNCH OF ANGRY PARENTS storm out of the school and approach Doug. Among them are Peggy and Gwen.

COLE PRUETT (O.C.)
It's five in the afternoon... do you know where your kids are? Hate to break up the festivities, but I just had to see this tidal wave of inappropriate conduct myself.

DOUG
Stay out of this, Cole.

Angry parents jump in.

JULIAN'S MOM

What is this? You think you can just take our kids out of school, no permission slips, not a word. And why is my child soaking wet?

JULIAN

Mom, it was great! We got to see--

JULIAN'S MOM

--Not now, Julian. Go wait in the car, before you catch pneumonia.

Doug is even more disheartened that the kids aren't being heard by their parents.

DOUG

There was a little mishap on the field trip, today. Everyone is fine and in one piece. No one got hurt. The fireworks were confiscated, the flames were extinguished--

COLE PRUETT

--And the hits just keep on coming. You can bet the superintendant will be hearing about this.

TOMMY (V.O.)

This is all my fault.

DOUG

I knew if I presented the trip to the board it would have gotten shut down because of the budget. I paid for everything myself. I wanted to give the kids something.

KIM'S DAD

By driving them around in that monstrosity?

DOUG

It's yellow!

COLE PRUETT

(whispering in Doug's ear)

It's over you know?

Parents march off dragging their kids behind them. Cole and Danh share and explosive fist bump before walking off.

PEGGY

Hey, since we're both gonna be out of work next year maybe you can put some feelers out for me.

DOUG

Sure, I'll make some calls.

PEGGY

Not talking about a job. I'm over that. Just if you know any rich dudes, let 'em know it's open season. Night.

Peggy takes off. Gwen and Tommy hang back.

GWEN

What's come over you? This is so unlike you. You can't just take people's kids out of school without their permission.

TOMMY

But mom--

GWEN

--Tommy, go wait in the car.

TOMMY

Just let me--

GWEN

--Now, Tommy!

A downtrodden Tommy slinks off.

DOUG

I know. I know.

GWEN

You're supposed to be a role model for these kids. For Tommy.

DOUG

Role model? You don't even listen to him half the time? None of these parents listen to their kids. And for once I tried to do something for them, not the board or the parents, not for me -- and it blew up in my face. Maybe this whole thing just proves that my time with kids should be over.

GWEN

I wasn't trying to imply that at all. Tommy was really starting to warm up to you.

DOUG

Was he? Was he, Gwen? I'm done trying to be Tommy's dad, because I'm not his dad. I'm just some guy. Some guy who was trying to get your son to like me, so that you'd like me more.

GWEN

What are you saying, Doug?

DOUG

I'm saying for the past nine years, I worked as a principal dealing with kids, their constant noise, just filled up my head and wouldn't go away and I couldn't wait to go home, because I could be free of all that. Then you and Tommy came into my life--

GWEN

--And then you had to deal with a kid on your "you time", huh? Well, you don't have to anymore.

Gwen storms off.

DOUG

That's not what I was gonna say. I was gonna say--

GWEN

--You don't need to say anything else, I hear you loud and clear.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - LATER

Doug sits in his office, staring into space as an answering machine message from the superintendant plays out.

SUPERINTENDENT REED

(on answering machine)

Barnes, I am really disappointed in you.

(MORE)

SUPERINTENDENT REED (CONT'D)

I've spent the better part of my evening talking to outraged parents and what's worse I had no explanation to give them as to why you would take their kids out of school without consulting anyone and let them run amuck in the science center like some out of control flash mob. I don't want to see you at that presentation tomorrow.

BEEP.

Doug takes a step back and stares at his trusty white board. WE REVEAL WHAT HE WROTE EARLIER -- A SIMPLE ONE LINER SMACK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BOARD: "WHAT DO KIDS WANT?".

Doug takes his BOUND AND LAMINATED PRESENTATION BOOKLET and chucks it into the trash.

WE FOLLOW A FEW KIDS WHOSE LIVES HAVE BEEN TOUCHED BY DOUG.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

Julian attempts to walk home, unnoticed, as he passes Joey Riggs and A FEW OTHER DELINQUENTS hanging on a street corner.

JOEY RIGGS

"Hey you!" Get back here!

Julian speeds up, but can't outrun Riggs. He turns around, shocked to see Riggs presenting him with a SKETCH BOOK.

JOEY RIGGS (CONT'D)

You dropped this back there.

Riggs rifles through it, revealing some cool art sketches throughout.

JOEY RIGGS (CONT'D)

These are pretty sick.

JULIAN

Uh, thanks.

INT. SARAH'S ROOM - EVENING

Sarah pulls out a huge sheet of mural-sized paper, some old paint brushes and some dried up paint. She cleans off one of the brushes in a jar of water causing the paint colors to run off and vibrantly dance together.

She dips the clean brush into a luscious red and puts the brush head to paper with unabashed joy.

INT. KIM'S ROOM - EVENING

Kim stares at her way too grown up self in the mirror. She reaches into her shirt pulls out some KLEENEX from her chest and uses it to clean off the caked on make-up on her face. While doing so, she eyes her cellphone on the corner of her dresser.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. TOMMY'S ROOM - SAME TIME

WE CLOSE UP ON A CELL PHONE, A TEXT MESSAGE READS: "HAD A GR8 DAY, LET'S HANG SOMETIME, K."

WE PULL BACK TO REVEAL TOMMY, looking at his phone with his jaw dropped open, in absolute awe that Kim just texted him.

Tommy bolts down the stairs.

INT. GWEN'S KITCHEN - LATER

Gwen sits at a kitchen table with a shot glass full of milk and the carton close by. She throws back the milk and fills it up again.

Tommy peers into the kitchen, taking in his mother's sadness.

TOMMY

Hey, are... are you okay?

GWEN

I'll be fine... Tommy, do I listen to you?

TOMMY

Uh, I... maybe... sometimes you kinda... What do you want me to say?

GWEN

Jeez, he was right. I was on his case about not knowing how to deal with you and look at me.

TOMMY

Call him.

GWEN

That's not such a good idea. It's probably best that we have a little cooling off period. In a lot of ways I don't think Doug's ready for a... family.

TOMMY

Mom, I gotta tell you something. I'm the reason that the trip got all messed up. Doug bought me these little fireworks and Kim and I--

GWEN

Woah, he bought you fireworks?

TOMMY

He bought me everything I asked for. He was trying really hard to get me to like him. I didn't know the stupid forest would catch on fire and set off the sprinklers.

Each passing word out of Tommy's mouth causes Gwen to rub her temples faster and faster.

GWEN

Why didn't he tell me about this?

TOMMY

He was trying not to get me in trouble, I guess.

GWEN

And who's Kim?

TOMMY

My lady. Doug was just helping me step up my game, please don't tell anyone I said that.

Gwen starts to tear up.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, mom.

GWEN

My little boy is turning into a little man. I can't believe it, your first crush.

TOMMY

Mom, please just punish me severely it'll be easier than this.

GWEN

Oh don't worry about that, it's coming.

TOMMY

I accept, just don't punish Doug.

Gwen looks at the phone.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

It's the end of the school day. Tommy enters Doug's office.

TOMMY

Is Dou-- Principal Barnes here? I haven't seen him all day.

PEGGY

He didn't show up for work today.

TOMMY

Today's his presentation.

PEGGY

I don't think he's going.

Tommy looks up at Doug's white board with his new mantra:
"What Do Kids Want?"

Tommy fishes Doug's binder from the garbage can and heads out of the room with purpose.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Kid's flood the schoolyard, ready to go home. Tommy exits the school, followed closely by Peggy.

PEGGY

There's not much we can do. It's over, Tommy.

Gwen pulls her car into the school parking lot. Tommy approaches.

GWEN

Hey squirt, ready to hit the book store? You got some free hours to put in as part of your punishment. Child labor laws be damned.

TOMMY

Mom, I was kinda thinking that this is a good time to make things right with Doug.

GWEN

It's a little soon. I don't know if that's such a good idea for me.

TOMMY

I was talking about me.

Tommy dashes off.

GWEN

Tommy, what are you doing?

TOMMY

--I got this, mom.

He grabs an ORANGE PYLON from the parking lot and climbs to the top of the monkey bars for his "Braveheart" moment.

Tommy flips the Pylon around and uses it like a megaphone.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

(addressing schoolyard)

Hey Guys, I know I might look like a total nerd-bag right now, and that I might get fully beat up in the face for this, but -- our Principal needs our help. I know what you're thinking: He was a spazz before, no one's denying that. Is it right for him to date a dude's mom? Remains to be seen.

The other KIDS in the schoolyard look at one another, confused.

Gwen COUGHS uncomfortably, causing Tommy to "get on with his speech"

TOMMY (CONT'D)

He was supposed to do a presentation tonight over at Hillcrest and was gonna represent for us. Well, now we need to represent for him.

Tommy looks out at the entire class. They nod in solidarity.

WE SEE EACH KID DRAGGING THEIR PARENTS INTO THEIR CARS. The parents reluctantly cave one by one.

INT. DOUG'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

A disheveled Doug props himself up on his couch staring at a television that has been going all day. His eyes ride that fine line between sleep and semi-consciousness.

There's a KNOCK at the door. It's Frank and Connor.

FRANK

Hey buddy, saw your car outside.
Have you been up all night?

DOUG

Yup -- watching infomercials.
Ordered a couple of sets of kitchen
knives I didn't even need. You
could have one if you want. I just
have to pay separate shipping and
handling.

FRANK

Thanks for thinking of me, man, but
what are you still doing at home?
Your presentation is in less than
an hour.

DOUG

Not going.

FRANK

Are you kidding me? It's all you've
been talking about for the past two
weeks--

DOUG

They told me not to bother. I
messed up Frank and I lost
everything: Gwen, the kid's trust,
the promotion.

FRANK

And you're gonna let that stop you?
That is not the Doug Barnes I know.

Frank walks over to Doug's desk where his old *principal of the year* medal sits. He brings it over to Doug.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Doug, they don't just hand these
out to anyone.

DOUG

Sure they do, I had it made myself.
But it was during a time when I
felt like I really deserved it.

FRANK

Well, do you still feel like you
deserve it now or what?

DOUG

Kinda.

Frank puts the medal around Doug's neck.

Doug looks over at Conner who's got his hands in his pockets.

CONNOR (V.O.)

Hey, there's a hole in my pocket! I
can touch my weenie from here.

DOUG

Jeez, Frank, it's hard to be
inspired when your boy over there
just discovered something more fun
than "Six Flags".

Frank walks over and breaks up the festivities.

FRANK

Enough of that, champ!
(to Doug)
Sorry.

DOUG

Don't even bring it up again.

FRANK

Doug, you need to go to that
presentation and show them that you
are the man for the job.

DOUG

It's too late now, they've probably
made up their mind to give the job
to Cole anyway... and he's gonna
end up shutting down everything
that matters. It'll be awful.

FRANK

So if you don't want that to happen
you need to get off this couch and
do something about it. This is
about more than just some
promotion. This is about--

DOUG
 (having an epiphany)
 --The kids. It's always been about
 the kids. I just never really saw
 it like that until just recently. I
 gotta be at that presentation.

EXT. HILLCREST MIDDLE SCHOOL - LATER

Doug and Frank walk towards Cole's school all business. The school grounds are nothing short of pristine. Doug on the other hand looks like straight hell. His one saving grace is that he is still wearing his "Michelle Pfeiffer leather jacket".

He and Frank do a SLOW MOTION STRUT toward the building as Coolio's *Dangerous Mind's Theme* plays.

FRANK
 What's the plan?

DOUG
 No idea... but it's coming and it's
 gonna be huge.

INTERCUT:

INT. AUDITORIUM, HILLCREST CHARTER SCHOOL - SAME TIME

An auditorium packed full of DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE BOARD give Cole a standing ovation as he takes center stage.

Behind him sit a GROUP OF OTHER CANDIDATES WHO ARE UP FOR THE COVETED SUPERINTENDANT POSITION AND AN EMPTY CHAIR MEANT FOR DOUG.

Cole cues up Joe Esposito's "You're The Best Around" from the Karate Kid montage to play during his walk out.

COLE PRUETT
 Thank you all for being here today.
 I am thrilled and honoured to be
 able to host this auspicious event
 on these wonderful school grounds
 that many of you had a hand in
 building. I would also like to
 congratulate my fellow colleagues
 who are up for this position. Let's
 give the remaining ones a firm
 round of applause, shall we?

Cole gives the other candidates a condescending round of applause.

INT. HILLCREST HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Doug, Frank and Connor nervously approach Cole's office. They see Danh patrolling the area in a hall monitor outfit.

DOUG

Just be cool -- don't freeze or we're both going to jail. I need you to grab the little guard, lock him in a classroom and steal his phone.

FRANK

Abduction, Dougie? That's abduction.

DOUG

It's a very mild form, we're not leaving the property. I'll be in Cole's office.

Doug dashes off.

Frank takes a deep breath... then tries to sneak up behind Danh.

Once Frank is close enough, Danh quickly and deliberately roundhouses him square in the soft stuff causing him to double over.

FRANK

Ugh, right in my plums.

Danh rushes up to Frank to finish the job, but is soon tripped by Connor who then grabs Danh's phone from his "utility" sash.

CONNOR

I got it, dad!

FRANK

'Atta boy, Con, run!

Connor bolts down the hall as Danh recovers and gives chase.

Frank gets between Connor and Danh and sets a pick, planting his feet firmly into the ground. Danh collides with Frank who doesn't budge an inch. Danh hits the floor.

Frank flexes his muscles posing like a crab before picking the kid up off the ground.

INT. COLE'S OFFICE - LATER

Doug immediately dives into Cole's office, stealthy. As he enters the room something catches his attention: A WHITEBOARD WITH COLE'S STEPS FOR SUCCESS.

DOUG
A whiteboard -- jerk.

EXT. HILLCREST CHARTER SCHOOL, PARKING LOT - DAY

SEVERAL CARS containing the kids and their parents, Peggy and Gwen pull into the Hillcrest School Parking lot.

They all pile out of their vehicles and dash for the school.

GWEN
Hope we're not too late.

EXT. HILLCREST HALLWAY - LATER

Frank and Connor stand casually with their backs bracing a Janitor's closet that now houses Danh.

Frank uses Danh's phone to text Cole.

INT. AUDITORIUM, HILLCREST MIDDLE SCHOOL - SAME TIME

Cole winds down his elaborate presentation that includes several DIORAMAS OF HIS EDUCATIONAL UTOPIA.

COLE
Aside from water and maybe
aluminum, our children our are most
precious natural resource.
I believe if we opened up our
wallets just a little wider this
kind of elevated learning is well
within our grasp. Thank you.
Arigato. Namaste.

As the crowd bursts into APPLAUSE, Cole receives a text message about his office breach. He takes a few more bows and slips out of the presentation as another candidate takes the stage.

INT. COLE'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Doug tries to position his body in the most heroic way possible, readying himself to stand up to Cole.

First, he stands with his legs apart and his hands on his hips superhero style -- nah.

DOUG

Too pretentious.

Next, he tries hopping up on Coles desk and posing with one leg up, Mrs. Robison style.

DOUG (CONT'D)

This just looks like I want to date him.

Doug hops off the desk, just as Cole arrives.

COLE PRUETT

This is the big emergency? A washed-up fool who's lost his dignity?

DOUG

Don't talk to me about dignity. You're planning on shutting down all of our public schools. Charging parents for their kids to learn, treating education like its an assembly line. NEXT! And what about the kids that can't afford it? Are they supposed to stuff themselves into classes that are too small, in front of teachers that are too taxed to teach? Are they supposed to commute two hours a day through the bad parts of town because that's where the only school that will take them is?

COLE PRUETT

Are you kidding me? You think I care about those sniveling kids. Sure it's nice to mention them in a speech now and again to get the sympathy vote, but on the whole no one that matters gives a "shiz" about the antiquated public school system. At the end of the day it's a business and businesses need to make money to be successful.

(MORE)

COLE PRUETT (CONT'D)

When I'm superintendant I'm gonna bulldoze all of those eye-soars starting with your school and I'm gonna revel in it. For now, I'm gonna revel in the fact that security will be up to escort you from the building. I suggest you come along without a struggle.

Cole opens the door to his office to see that the hallway is filled with ANGRY BOARD MEMBERS, PARENTS, A FURIOUS SUPERINTENDANT, DOUG'S CLASS, PEGGY AND GWEN.

COLE PRUETT (CONT'D)

What are you guy's doing here?

Cole looks back at Doug who had his finger on the intercom button the entire time. He realizes that his rant had just been broadcast to the entire school over the P.A. System.

DOUG

Ooops. I guess they overheard.
Don'tcha hate when that happens?

ANGLE ON FRANK WHO lets a furious Danh out of the Janitor's closet.

FRANK

You're free to go.

DANH

I'm gonna go to the cops and tell them you locked me in a closet.

FRANK

(leaning in, whispering)
Who are they gonna believe? Me? Or a kid from another country? Sorry, I didn't want to go there but you forced my hand. Run along.

Frank and Connor head off to join the crowd.

TWO SECURITY GUARDS ALSO arrive at the scene.

SUPERINTENDANT REED

There's your man. He's being a bit too hostile for my taste, drag him off will you?

The guards haul Cole off, in spite of his protest.

COLE PRUETT

This is my school you can't do this to me. I'm a vegan.

DOUG

Soy-anara.

SUPERINTENDANT REED

You know you're not supposed to be here either, Douglas.

TOMMY

Please, you gotta let him do his presentation.

SUPERINTENDANT REED

Young man, I've always stuck to my decisions. You'll understand when you're older but for right now, you're just a --

TOMMY

--A kid? You were gonna say kid? That's the problem, no one ever listens to kids. At least that used to be the way it was. Things are different now. Our principal hears us. He really hears us.

DOUG

Metaphorically. He means metaphorically.

The kids start listing the ways that Doug has improved their lives. The stuff they think means far more to Doug than the stuff they say aloud.

Julian steps up.

JULIAN

He stuck up for us.

JULIAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And taught us that it's okay to be as different as we wanna be. Hopefully, I taught him how to dress a little better.

Doug chuckles.

Joey Riggs steps up.

JOEY RIGGS

He taught me that planting flowers
is sometimes better than hitting
stuff and if anyone has a problem
with that we can talk about it
outside.

JOEY RIGGS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And that I might have a future one
day.

Sarah steps up.

SARAH

He taught us that school is about
more than learning.

SARAH (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And that it's okay to just be kids
sometimes.

Kim's two air-headed friends step up to Doug, chewing gum in
unison. They have nothing to say, moreover their minds are
still blank. Doug just stares at the girls for a beat,
waiting... nothing.

DOUG

(re: two air heads)

No? Still nothing? That's cool.
They're not all diamonds.

(addressing the crowd)

These kid's made me so proud today.
Made me remember why I love this
job. It's nice to hear all the
things they've learned from me. But
they've taught me so much more. All
of these kids have their own
special talents, their own big
ideas, but if we don't start
listening, all of that gets lost.

TOMMY (V.O.)

He finally gets it.

DOUG

I guess I'm finally getting it.

Tommy peaks up.

DOUG (CONT'D)

As parents, as educators, somewhere
down the line we stopped paying
attention.

(MORE)

DOUG (CONT'D)

The best and brightest ideas on how we can improve our school should come from our kids, because sometimes the biggest ideas come from the littlest places. Like what about having students start their own extra curricular programs based on their interests? How great would that be, letting our kids decide what they were interested in for a change?

JULIAN (V.O.)

So awesome.

KIM (V.O.)

Now that sounds pretty rad.

DOUG

We don't need chandeliers in the library or latte dispensers in the cafeteria to make school a better place. We need to help our kids find out who they really are, so they can one day be confident, kick-ass adults.

A tidal wave of APPLAUSE washes over Doug.

ANGLE ON: Frank, who is now standing close to Peggy.

FRANK

Well, looks like my work here is done. I should probably get going, patients to see in the morning.

PEGGY

You're a doctor?

FRANK

Sure am.

PEGGY

I'm Peggy.

FRANK

Frank.

Connor stares at Peggy's ample chest smiling from ear-to-ear.

CONNOR

I like her dad.

FRANK
 (chuckling)
 Kids.

CONNOR (V.O.)
 She has some big ol' "breasticles".

Doug motions to Frank regarding Connor, "keep an eye on him."

ANGLE ON: DOUG AND TOMMY.

DOUG
 Hey, thanks for everything.

TOMMY
 I don't want this to get weird, so
 I'll keep my thoughts to myself.

DOUG
 Sure, think away.

Doug's grin can't be contained.

Superintendent Reed approaches Doug.

SUPERINTENDANT REED
 Wild day.

DOUG
 Tell me about it.

SUPERINTENDANT REED
 I like what you had to say, the
 entire board did, maybe this old
 man was wrong. I take it you're
 still interested in my job?

DOUG
 Thanks for the offer, but there are
 a lot of great candidates here, I
 know you'll find someone perfect.
 I'd actually like to stay on at
 Edison as principal and make sure
 my school gets what it needs. It's
 my home. I need to be there.

TOMMY (V.O.)
 And we need you there, too.

Doug practically ignores the Superintendent as he listens to
 Tommy's inner thoughts. It's a lot different this time as
 Tommy's thoughts grow fainter with each passing word.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Jeez, how do I put this? I want to let him know that he's growing on me, but I don't want to give him too much credit either, even though he totally deserves it. I guess I should just tell him that--

Soon Doug here's absolutely nothing.

He excuses himself from the Superintendant and walks up to Tommy.

DOUG

(smiling)

It's gone. It's totally gone.

TOMMY

What?

DOUG

Just a little headache. Hey did you have something on your mind? Something you wanted to tell me?

TOMMY

No, not really.

DOUG

That's what I thought.

TOMMY

Actually, I was just thinking--

DOUG

(excited)

--Yeah?

TOMMY

(caving in)

I was just thinking that it wouldn't be so bad, if we could do family stuff once and a while, but don't read too much into that.

DOUG

I won't. Hey, maybe I can teach you some more of my spirit club dance moves.

TOMMY

Yeah, that might be alright.

DOUG
You know all this stuff is
probably up to your mom.

TOMMY
Well, she's right over there --
(quoting Doug)
-- Go get your girl.

Doug walks over to Gwen.

DOUG
Thanks for coming.

GWEN
I couldn't miss this. You put on
quite a show.

DOUG
I'm sorry about everything, but
what I was gonna say before you
walked off was that you and Tommy
are the best part of my day and I
don't want that to ever stop. There
are things in this world, that you
can't explain, like--

GWEN
--Stop talking.

Gwen throws her arms around Doug and gives him a huge kiss.

TOMMY
Ugh, that is gonna take some
serious getting use to.

WE STAY ON THE KISS AS WE...

MATCH CUT TO:

SUPER: A FEW MONTHS LATER

INT. DOUG'S HOUSE - MORNING

Doug gives Gwen a kiss goodbye before he and Tommy leave for
a day of school.

GWEN
Bye guys, have a good day at
school.

She hands them two brown bag lunches labeled with a SHARPIE: One lunch says TOMMY MILLER, SON and the other says DOUG BARNES, FIANCE.

GWEN (CONT'D)

Don't forget to take all these donated books from the store.

DOUG

The Edison Middle School Library and I am forever in your debt.

Doug grabs a stack of BRAND NEW TEXT BOOKS, meant for his school library.

TOMMY

Byyyyyyye.

DOUG

Byyyyyyye.

They bolt out the door. As they leave WE SEE A FRAMED PICTURE featuring Doug, Tommy and Gwen.

EXT. EDISON MIDDLE SCHOOL - MORNING

It's the beginning of a new school day. WE GLIDE THROUGH A NEWLY IMPROVED EDISON MIDDLE SCHOOL.

A SPORTS AUTHORITY TRUCK PULLS INTO THE PARKING LOT. The Spicolli-esque employee unloads ALL THE BALLS THAT DOUG SPILLED.

Doug and Tommy pull into the lot. They exit the car.

SPORTS AUTHORITY EMPLOYEE

Yo bro, thanks for buying up all the stuff you dropped. That was a real classy move.

DOUG

Thanks, that means a lot, bro.

TOMMY

(off Doug's comment)
You can't pull that off.

DOUG

Always keeping me honest, kiddo, have a good one.

TOMMY

You too.

Tommy runs into the school and as he does so, the camera follows behind him to show all the new improvements within the building.

INT. EDISON MIDDLE SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

WE SNAKE THROUGH THE SCHOOL passing by the cafeteria. There is a sign on the door that reads: EDISON MIDDLE SCHOOL BREAKFAST CLUB. Inside the cafeteria is a nice spread of cereal and muffins that the kids thoroughly enjoy.

Tommy bursts through the doors of a re-done auditorium where Kim and a bunch of other students prepare for a school play.

Julian and A FASHION SQUAD create elaborate costumes for the show and even though it's Shakespeare, Tommy choreographs the dance moves.

TOMMY

I was thinkin' Romeo is gonna want
to come in strong with a little
shoulder action before breaking
into full pop n' locks.

EXT. SCHOOLYARD, EDISON MIDDLE SCHOOL - LATER

WE PULL BACK TO SEE DOUG in the middle of the schoolyard enjoying his beautified grounds.

Sarah leads a group of friends who paint an idyllic mural on the side of the building.

Peggy brings Doug his morning coffee and in exchange Doug hands her a form.

PEGGY

What's this?

DOUG

Just one more form that I ignored
for way too long.

Peggy reads it.

PEGGY

You're giving me a raise?

DOUG

It's for putting up with me all
these years. You deserve it.

PEGGY
(awe-struck)
Oh my Gosh, I... I really do
deserve this. Thank you.

DOUG
Didn't think you needed the money
anymore, heard you landed a doctor?

Peggy blushes.

EXT. FIELD, EDISON MIDDLE SCHOOL - SAME TIME

Joey Riggs continues to beautify the front of the school. He
barks out a few orders --

JOEY RIGGS
C'mon, put your back into it. Those
begonias aren't gonna plant
themselves. And call me "sir."

WE REVEAL COLE PLANTING A ROW OF FLOWERS. HIS UNIFORM READS:
GROUNDS KEEPER.

COLE
Right away, sir, I'm on it.

In the distance WE HEAR A VOICE coming from the kickball
field... It's the Sports Authority Employee.

SPORTS AUTHORITY EMPLOYEE
HEADS UP!

Cole looks up just as a brand new red kick ball is about to
make full contact.

COLE PRUETT
Sweet mother--

Just as it connects with his face we...

FADE TO BLACK.

ON BLACK

SPORTS AUTHORITY EMPLOYEE
That's gonna count as my third
strike for sure, bro.

THE END