

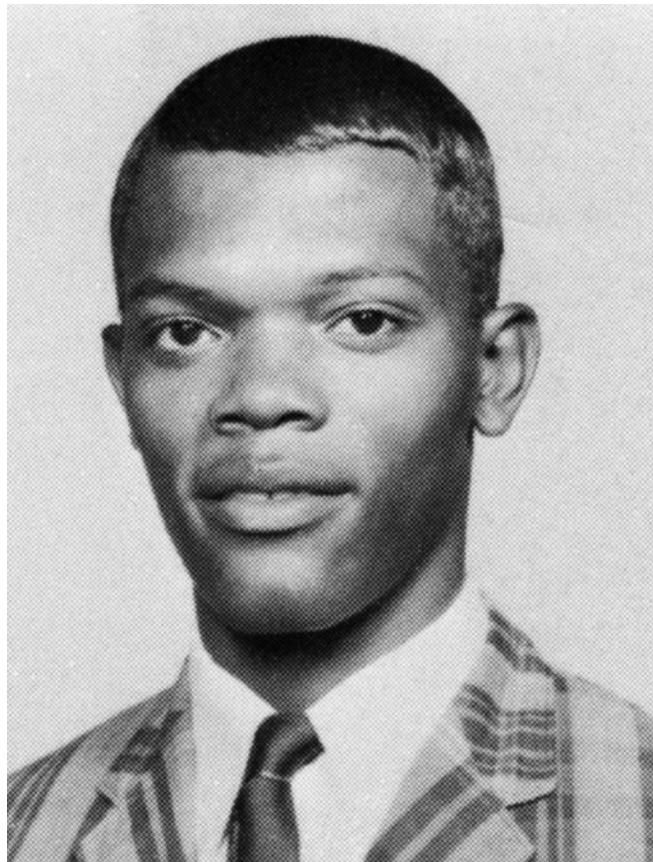
THE KINGS OF COOL

by

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Based on a TRUE STORY

Daniel Vang
Good Fear



SAM



RED

OVER BLACK.

A ROUSING jazz-rock INSTRUMENTAL, welcomed with raucous APPLAUSE and CHEERS.

The familiar nails-on-chalk VOICE of...

JAY LENO (V.O.)

... It hailed! It hailed here like three hours ago. Isn't that unbelievable? Hail.

(punchline beat)

Ya know, people out on Hollywood saw those tiny white pieces of ice, and they thought it was crack--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. THE TONIGHT SHOW - DAY

SHAMELESS LAUGHTER. We peruse the thoroughly entertained CROWD -- a snapshot of America, WHITE and BLACK locals seated next to BLACK and WHITE tourists. Too busy cackling, knee-slapping, and ogling a late night legend to realize the social relevance of this integration.

TITLE OVER: Los Angeles, California, 2004

Jump-cutting through the stock footage, we land on--

JAY LENO, sitting behind his oak desk, jutting his fabled chin, shaking his fabled head. Adjacent to the stage, band leader KEVIN EUBANKS can't stop smiling.

JAY LENO

...and Chad Michael Murray, so we've got good guests all week.

(then)

Let's get right to it -- my first guest you know from films like Pulp Fiction, Star Wars, Triple X, and one of my favorites, Shaft -- he's a bad motha--

KEVIN EUBANKS

(chuckling)

Shut yo mouth.

JAY LENO

He'll next be lending his voice to the character of Frozone in the animated movie The Incredibles, please welcome the King of Cool, Samuel L Jackson.

Back on the ECSTATIC crowd -- the standing ovation FADES into an audience glued to their chairs, a sea of eyeballs fixated on...

The venerable actor supreme, the foul-mouthing poet, SAMUEL L JACKSON.

As he lounges in his plush guest chair, Kangol hat cocked backwards, beady eyes and venomous smile exuding a unique combination of confidence, humility, and give-no-shits charisma, we realize that "King of Cool" is apropos as fuck.

SAMUEL L JACKSON

Of course. I wouldn't have said it if I didn't mean it.

(then)

Do you think more actors of color are worthy of Oscars than nominations suggest?

Jay squirms ever so slightly under the heat of Jackson's accusatory gaze. Giggles from the gallery.

JAY LENO

I one hundred percent agree with anything and everything you say--

More LAUGHTER.

JAY LENO (CONT'D)

Moving right along -- well, we all know it's an election year. Now, I'm not going to ask who you voted for--

SAMUEL L JACKSON

Cause I'm sure everybody already knows the answer.

JAY LENO

But I will ask if you've ever run for office yourself?

Jackson smirks as he adjusts in his chair.

SAMUEL L JACKSON

(stroking chin)

Yeah.

(then)

Ran for president once actually.

Jay feigns surprise, as if his producer hadn't hand-fed him the question and answer pre-show. Skeptical, the audience forces a guffaw.

JAY LENO

Really?

SAMUEL L JACKSON

No I'm serious. It wasn't on the big stage or anything, but it was kinda intense. In high school, there was this cat... he was like this teacher's pet kinda dude.

(then)

I ran for school president against him.

Having curbed their doubt, the audience collectively GASPS, leans in -- they're eating up the suspense, imagining a teenage King of Cool clashing with a teacher's pet.

JAY LENO

Well? Did you win?

Off Jackson, eyes narrowing, considering--

SMASH TO BLACK.

SHAMELESS LAUGHTER.

TITLE: Based on a true story...

TITLE: ...told to Jay Fucking Leno.

TITLE: So, you know... a completely unexaggerated and honest reenactment of events.

The laughter fades, replaced with distant CHIRPING birds and a WHISPERING breeze in the hot south, where...

EXT. CHATTANOOGA NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

The trunk of a large oak tree stares at us -- a HOLLOW in it shaped embarrassingly similar to a lady's naughty bits.

MORGAN (O.S.)

What that look like to you?

TWO BLACK BOYS study the tree from a couple yards away.

TITLE OVER: Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1965

The PINT-SIZED one, with skin so fair and freckly you'd doubt his blackness, scratches his cheek. The breeze bobbles his robust, CINNAMON-TINGED AFRO -- a dandelion dipped in Cheeto dust.

This isn't a young Samuel L Jackson, because Samuel L Jackson isn't the hero of this story. No, this is a young SKIP "RED" DORSEY (17), the wannabe-cool "teacher's pet" known as **MY DAD**.

RED

What's it look like to you?

He stands beside his darker, more average-heighted friend MORGAN GINNIS (17, all talk, would steal from a collection plate to buy nudie mags).

MORGAN

RED
You say it.

MORGAN
You don't even know what it is--

RED

They return their focus to the sexy tree hole. Skip looks at Morgan out the corner of his eye, then quickly looks back at the tree.

MORGAN
Same time then.

RED
Fine.

MORGAN
One--

Two-- RED

MORGAN
Three--

RED MORGAN
Quercus virginiana. A pussy.

Morgan BURSTS out laughing.

What?! MORGAN (CONT'D)

RED
That's what it is! Also known as a southern live oak--

MORGAN
Not the tree, negro! The hole --
ain't you seen a pussy before?

RED

Red cocks his head, studies the tree further as Morgan collects rocks.

RED (CONT'D)

(not sold)

There's no bush. It's virtually
unrecognizable without the pubic
hair.

MORGAN

Tummy afro, no tummy afro -- pussy's
pussy.

They sling rocks at the hole, target practice.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

My cousin showed me Playboys growin'
up. So I don't get lost down there
when it's time to...

Morgan CLUCKS his tongue as he scores a bullseye. Red's
throws keep RICOCHETING off the side of the tree.

RED

Confounded!

MORGAN

(chuckling)

Maybe when the moss grows in around
the clit you'll figure it out.

He scores again.

RED

First of all, moss doesn't grow on
trees around here. We're too far
north.

Morgan rolls his eyes.

RED (CONT'D)

Secondly, who in the heck copulates
from the free throw line?

Red suddenly runs up and DUNKS a rock inside the hollow,
they crumble with laughter.

But the unmistakable and glorious sound of GIGGLING GIRLS
alarms the boys -- they scramble to hide behind the massive
tree trunk, watching as...

An unaware crew of three BLACK GIRLS stroll by, carrying
school books and book bags.

MORGAN

(whispering)

Think moss grows on them?

But Red's in another dimension, wonderstruck by the group tomboy, PATSY PALM (17, quirky dreamer, future bra burner), as she catches up to her friends, TRISH and VI (17).

Morgan clocks Red's disgustingly doting face, SCOFFS.

MORGAN (CONT'D)
(caressing tree)
Negro, you best tend to the woman
you got right here. Good woman.
Sturdy. Can't run away--

RED
Keep your voice down.

As soon as the gaggle of girls distances itself, Red scoops his book bag off the grass and trails them with stealth, sliding behind a bush. Morgan shakes his head, but follows suit.

MORGAN
Wait up.

ON PATSY AND THE GIRLS

Strolling home from school. The neighborhood is quaint, remnants of 1950s suburbia. Due to "white flight", only BLACK NEIGHBORS and BLACK FAMILIES pepper the streets and pilot the CLASSIC CARS cruising by.

PATSY
You know what? It's Jim Crow all over again, except this time they're separating women from the top of the food chain instead of blacks!

VI
I know that's right -- Jane Crow is upon us!

The girls giggle as they pass a house, where Red and Morgan's heads suddenly POP into view, still stalking from a distance.

MORGAN
(whispering)
My cousin said girls don't like it when you sneak up on 'em.
(thinking)
Maybe that's why he's in prison...

RED
(whispering)
I'm not sneaking, confounded.

Red quickly TIP-TOES onto the sidewalk, Morgan shadows him -- they mirror the girls' pace from the other side of the street, mesmerized by the rhythmic BOUNCE of their curves.

ON PATSY AND THE GIRLS

Oblivious.

TRISH

Girl, y'all know The Man can't walk
and chew gum at the same time. What
makes you think he can stop racism
and sexism at the same time?

VI

Child, I know that's right--

PATSY

But see, accepting it is just as
dangerous as the "it" itself--

TRISH

I'm sure the school election board
has a reasonable explanation--

PATSY

Yeah, they don't want a woman
president!

TRISH

Well, what you gon' do? Chop off
your tits?

(spanking Patsy)

You'd have to narrow your hips too.
And do something with that hair.

VI

(nodding)

Yeah, them big ol' child-bearers
scream woman.

Off their giggles...

ON RED AND MORGAN

Red considers crossing the street to make contact, but stalls.

MORGAN

(whispering)

If you're gonna make a move, make a
move--

RED

Get your hands off me.

Morgan gives Red another little shove. Heart pounding, eyes
ballooning, Red makes his move--

HONK! A rusty BLUE '56 CHEVY PICKUP screeches to a halt,
nearly clipping Red, causing him to jump back.

The driver, a dusty, glowering WHITE LADY (50s), snarls at the frozen boys. She narrows her eyes, then slowly drives off.

Red looks up just in time to see Patsy and her friends disappear around a corner.

ON PATSY AND THE GIRLS

An unhinged Patsy digs through her book bag.

PATSY
(searching)
If the election board wants a man...

She draws a banana from her bag, unzips her pants, and JAMS the phallic fruit through the zipper opening, exposing her "penis" to the world.

PATSY (CONT'D)
I'll give 'em one!

The girls SQUEAL as Patsy attacks them with her makeshift cock.

PATSY (CONT'D)
And maybe, just maybe, if I dangle
my meat just right, drag my knuckles
ever so slightly, and slow my speech
to a crawl? They'll be fooled!

Patsy THRUSTS her hips, pretending to hump invisible woman after invisible woman. The girls can't stop laughing.

PATSY (CONT'D)
(best man voice)
Oh c'mon, baby -- gimme some sugar!

As Patsy strokes her banana, they round a corner and the other girls suddenly stop laughing and straighten up.

PATSY (CONT'D)
Watch me spread my seed--

She's the last to notice...

Three strapping, BLACK TEENAGE BOYS painting a wooden fence. The shirtless one, with abs for days, wipes his brow, smiles at his blushing audience. This is the captain of the Riverside High School Basketball Team, DOUGLAS (17, too smooth to be humble).

DOUGLAS
Ladies...?

The boys stare curiously at Patsy's penis -- embarrassed, she quickly ZIPS UP her fly, causing the smooshed banana to

squeeze out of its peel and PLOP onto the sidewalk. Douglas's TEAMMATES recoil in horror.

TEAMMATES

Goddamn.

TRISH

(twirling hair)

We don't know her.

VI

I know that's right--

Patsy smacks Vi's shoulder as she stuffs the remaining peel down her pant leg and closes the zipper. Douglas chuckles, scoops the banana off the warm concrete.

DOUGLAS

Very attractive.

The girls melt. Douglas tosses the fruit into a trash bag.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

To ants. Can't be having them all over the sidewalk.

Patsy deflates a little.

TRISH

(fake as shit)

I keep sayin', litter bugs are the plague of our generation!

TEAMMATE #1

Y'all comin' to the game on Wednesday?

VI

(coy)

Maybe. Y'all got special seats for us?

TEAMMATE #2

The best seat in the house is right here on my lap. I'll reserve it--

DOUGLAS

Now how she gon' sit on your lap if you're playing in the game?

Teammate #2 realizes his fucked up logic.

TEAMMATE #2

Hell, I'll ride the pine then!

TEAMMATE #1

You're a goddamn fool.

TEAMMATE #2

At least I have the option of pullin'
my ass off the bench. Coach ain't
called your number since the
Greensboro Four went hungry--

Teammate #1 pushes Teammate #2 in the chest, his fist
tightening.

TEAMMATE #2 (CONT'D)

Don't start nothin' you can't finish,
now.

PATSY

(to girls)

Let's go--

Douglas steps through the testosterone-filled jocks, wiping
his paint-stained hands, flaunting his shiny teeth.

DOUGLAS

How 'bout you, Ms. Patsy Palm? Your
Friday nights free?

(then)

Or you got a date with another banana?

As Patsy absorbs the attention of Riverside's most popular
student, and the other girls swoon, we RISE above the half-
painted fence to the steep...

ROOFTOP

Of a one-story HOUSE, where Red and Morgan inconspicuously
inch towards the lip of the gutter, giving them a perfect
view of the flirt-party they weren't invited to.

MORGAN

(whispering)

Well. She's in Douglas's web now.

("rest in peace")

She'll be missed.

Morgan scoots away from the edge, but a focused Red isn't
giving up that easily.

PATSY

(to Douglas)

What I do with my Friday nights is
none of your business.

DOUGLAS

Oh, c'mon now. Don't miss out on a
chance to witness stallions at work
on account of your pride--

PATSY

And what makes you think we'd be at
all interested in... in...
(re: his body)
Whatever you want to call this.

DOUGLAS

My body?

Douglas turns to find Trish and Vi giggling as the boys flex.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

Just a guess.

She rolls her eyes -- her friends are not helping her argument
at all.

PATSY

You know, you're very lucky. Popular
with the girls, popular with the
boys. And I'm assuming you've got a
real banana to boot -- you could run
for school president and help change--

DOUGLAS

(scoff)

That nonsense is for losers and
squares--

PATSY

It's an honor. One not afforded to
everyone, so you should respect it!
(day dreaming)
Besides, leaders are... sexy. Nelson
Mandela, Malcolm X -- heck, even
President Kennedy had a certain
allure. For a white boy...

Red's eyes LIGHT UP.

Patsy looks down from the clouds to find Douglas is no longer
paying attention to her. He's staring at the fence.

PATSY (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

DOUGLAS

Watching the paint dry.

Well fuck you, asshole -- offended, Patsy drags the girls
away by their arms, storms off.

PATSY

I hope y'all lose!

DOUGLAS
Come again? I can't hear ya over
the paint.

The boys laugh and slap skin.

Red watches Patsy march down the street, smiles.

MORGAN
(whispering)
Hurry up.

Excited, Red rises and creeps towards the opposite side of the roof where Morgan descends a ladder...

RED
(whispering)
I have a plan--

But a shingle SLIPS beneath his footing and he TUMBLES down the steep slope and off the roof, barely GRABBING the gutter -- his feet dangle just above the startled fence painters.

TEAMMATE #2
What in the fuck!

Losing his grip...

RED
(to Morgan)
Help--

But as Morgan reaches back for his friend, Douglas and the jocks YANK Red to the ground by his legs.

DOUGLAS
The hell you doin' on the roof?!

Red rises, dusts himself off. He GULPS as the three towering athletes close in.

TEAMMATE #1
(shoving Red)
He asked you a question.

DOUGLAS
What, you spying on us?

RED
I was hired to fix the membrane shrinkage. Causing some cracks up there.
(then)
Lack of roof maintenance is a roof's worst enemy.

DOUGLAS

Oh, okay.

Douglas smiles. Red smiles. The teammates smile. Douglas suddenly SNATCHES Red's collar and drags him off the grass and into the street.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

I'm gonna kick your ass--

RED

Wait, why?

DOUGLAS

Membrane shrinkage? That's something a commie spy would say--

RED

I'm not a spy!

DOUGLAS

Well, put up your dukes and we'll find out.

Douglas releases Red's collar, takes a boxing stance, and circles his terrified prey.

RED

No.

DOUGLAS

You're gonna catch this beating dukes up or dukes down. If you put 'em up, at least there's a chance some of my blows careen away from your face.

RED

My face?

DOUGLAS

Yeah.

Red POUTS, raises limp wrists and loose fists.

A scared Morgan watches, hidden by the side of the house. He "yells" at a decibel nobody can hear.

MORGAN

(weak)

No! Leave him alone! I'll avenge you, Red!

Douglas cocks back to throw a punch, so Red hops away and cowers.

RED
Talking fixes things. Let's talk.

The boys laugh as Douglas shoots them a look -- "is this nigga serious?"

DOUGLAS
Talking fixes broken toys and skinned knees, pahtna.
(then)
It don't fix grown man shit.

Douglas charges but halts when...

TEAMMATE #2
Hey Douglas, man. I don't know about you, but I ain't tryin' to deal with no repercussions from beatin' down a cracka.

Confused, Red peaks up from his cowering position -- "cracka?"

DOUGLAS
(holding frozen punch)
Didn't they pass the Civil Rights Act last year.

TEAMMATE #1
Man, you know history takes its sweet-ass time.
(then)
You kick this white boy's ass and cops will be swarmin' our streets like milkmen be swarmin' Pookie mom's bedroom.
(then)
Standin' room only, ya dig--

Teammate #2 (aka Pookie) shoves Teammate #1 in the chest, who returns the favor, and an all out shoving match commences.

Douglas sighs, drops his frozen punch, spits on the pavement.

DOUGLAS
Scram, white boy--

RED
Now, wait one confounded minute -- I'm not white. Don't you see the fro?

DOUGLAS
(snickering)
Sure.

RED
We go to school together!

Ignored. Douglas strolls back towards the blossoming fight between his teammates -- he tries to break it up, but gets sucked into the roughhousing after stepping in paint.

Morgan utilizes the diversion, scurries over to Red.

MORGAN
Let's split.

But Red simmers, unwilling to let this go.

RED
(to Douglas)
We've gone to school together for
the past two and a half years!

Amongst his black peers, Red might as well be a ghost -- the meatheads are more focused on circling each other in street, knuckles up.

RED (CONT'D)
Riverside? The all black school?!

Morgan desperately yanks on his appalled friend's elbow. See, Morgan has a healthy 1960s fear of white people and just now he spots...

That dusty WHITE LADY a kitty-corner away, unloading junk wood from the back of her blue Chevy pickup. We notice GIANT WOODEN SCULPTURES in her front yard. Hideous art.

She doesn't seem to mind the swelling commotion, continues to pull wood pieces from her truck.

MORGAN
(nervous)
C'mon, Red! While the gettin's good.

But Red rips his arm away, picks up a rock...

RED
I am NOT WHITE!

And LAUNCHES it towards Douglas's crew to get their undivided attention -- unfortunately, his throw clears them and manages to sail across the street, THUMPING one of those ugly fucking pieces of art.

Morgan's eyes bulge as the White Lady pauses, eye twitching, then abruptly draws a Louisville Slugger from her truck and marches towards the tomfoolery.

Red and Morgan freeze with fear.

WHITE LADY
Hey!

But the jocks don't notice her, so she swings and CRACKS a mailbox five times -- overkill, but it works.

WHITE LADY (CONT'D)
Which one of you threw it?!

Silence. She studies their faces, baseball bat extended. She WHACKS the mailbox again.

WHITE LADY (CONT'D)
I will not be intimidated, you
understand?!

(then)
Don't care how many of y'all move
'round here, I ain't leavin'! And
if I have to come over here again,
it'll be with a shotgun and the full
force of the Nooga police!

That word "police" makes all the boys shudder -- Morgan and Red run off as she turns on a dime and stomps back towards her house. The jocks strut back to their fence painting.

DOUGLAS
(sotto)
Racist bitch.

ON RED AND MORGAN

Doubled over, catching their breath from a safe distance. Red smirks.

MORGAN
Why you smilin'? You could've gotten
us all killed!

RED
Because Patsy Palm thinks presidents
are sexy.

MORGAN
So?

RED
So, I'm going to run--

MORGAN
("yeah right")
You mean, you're gonna lose.

As a mischievous smile crawls across Red's face, *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* from THE NUTCRACKER SUITE plays.

RED
You can't lose if nobody else is
running.

Off the magical high octave, staccato MUSIC NOTES--

SMASH TO BLACK.

3 DAYS UNTIL ELECTION...

EXT. CHATTANOOGA MIDDLE SCHOOL - PARKING LOT - DAY

TIGHT on a perpetually vexed black face -- chiseled jaw, clean haircut with a pomade sheen, familiar beady eyes squinting as he drags on a JOINT that's been reduced to a roach. A kettle not yet hot enough to blow.

This, my friend, is the young "King of Cool", the teenage "SAM" JACKSON (17)...

WIDER to reveal his tall, gaunt frame, overstated by the tight BALLERINA TUTU and WHITE LEGGINGS he casually wears as he leans against the brick facade.

As *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* fades, Sam checks his watch, takes one last drag until--

AUNT MAVIS (O.S.)

Sam?!

Shit! He extinguishes the roach against the brick, launches it as far as he can with all of his might, then shimmies and waves his hands violently to curb the smell.

The back door creaks open and out pops his sweet AUNT MAVIS (40s).

AUNT MAVIS (CONT'D)

(rushed)

You're almost on, baby!

She shoots him an accusatory glance, but then beams, pinches his dimple.

AUNT MAVIS (CONT'D)

Don't you look perfect.

Sam gives her a cheek-busting grin, then follows her inside, dropping the smile once her back is turned.

INT. CHATTANOOGA MIDDLE SCHOOL - BACKSTAGE AUDITORIUM - LATER

From stage left, Sam watches anxiously as BLACK MIDDLE SCHOOL KIDS (13) perform The Nutcracker Suite to an audience of enthralled BLACK PARENTS. He's suddenly startled by--

Aunt Mavis and his lovely, hard-working Christian mother, SARAH (40s).

AUNT MAVIS
Didn't I tell you he looks perfect.

SARAH
He sure looks like somethin'--

SAM
I'm n-n-n-not doin' it.

And just like that, we realize that Sam has a heavy STUTTER.

SARAH
(sympathetic)
Is it an N day?

SAM
Why are we even doin' n-n-n-nutcracker
in September?

AUNT MAVIS
(pointing at her brain)
So we ain't gotta compete with the
white production.
(then)
Listen, baby, it's like I said --
you ain't got any lines. You just
gotta be... fairy like.

Sam walks away, but Sarah pulls him back by the hand.

SARAH
The way I see it, you made a
commitment to your auntie. She asked
for your help, and you obliged.

Aunt Mavis watches her production on pins and needles,
cringing. The PIANIST starts to play *Dance of the Sugar
Plum Fairy*, but the performers look around confused.

AUNT MAVIS
Lord I'ma have a heart attack -- the
critics'll eat me alive if I ain't
got no Sugar Plum Fairy!

Sarah lifts Sam's chin, stares into his eyes.

SARAH
When you commit, you commit good and
hard. Now, be the best fairy you
know how. For your auntie.
(whispering)
But really, for your momma.

SAM
Yes, ma'am.

A momma's boy through and through, Sam can't help but smile -- Aunt Mavis claps HARD to get the pianist's attention, motions for him to start over. She grabs Sam by the arm and swings him towards the stage.

AUNT MAVIS
(to Sam)
Remember, with passion!

ON STAGE

The SPOTLIGHT rocks Sam, stunning him -- the audience, shrouded in darkness, seems to extend forever -- the belt-high child performers impatiently gawk.

Snapping out of it, Sam finds the rhythm of the staccato piano notes. He twirls and parades across the stage, mouthing the poorly choreographed steps to himself.

The weed kicks in as he spins back towards the spectators, whose eyes now GLOW YELLOW like wolves at night -- snow-covered TREES and TOY SOLDIERS come ALIVE on stage.

Frightened, Sam looks over to Sarah and Aunt Mavis who slowly nod with delight.

He fights through the terror, audience members and kid performers stifling laughter as the music SWELLS and the Sugar Plum Fairy's dance ends with a flurry of pirouettes.

Silence.

Sam stares out into the darkness, then abruptly DARTS off stage, brushing past his mom and aunt.

AUNT MAVIS
Bravo, I said bravissimo!

SARAH
(concerned)
Baby--

But Sam POPS the backdoor and disappears.

ON STAGE

APPLAUSE from the audience -- it's the kind of penny-budget production parents adore. The OVATION carries us to...

EXT. WOODS - LATER

Where Sam smokes a fresh joint, eyelids shut. Therapy. The CLAPPING continues as Sam blindly hands the weed to a large, rotund teen sitting beside him. This is DARIUS BLACK (17, overgrown teddy bear, an easy punching bag given his shyness).

They're both sitting Indian-style, so in-tune they don't need to see in order to seamlessly pass the mary jane back and forth. But just as the APPLAUSE crescendos, Sam breaks concentration, pops his lids, and the CLAPPING stops--

SAM
I'm tired of waiting!

Now wearing crisp slacks and a polo shirt, Sam snarls.

SAM (CONT'D)
You w-w-wanna dine, you wanna ride,
you w-w-wanna pick your dang teeth,
you gotta w-w-w-wait for the so called
superior race to do it first! I'm
tired of it!

Darius shrugs.

DARIUS
You bring any Yoo-hoo?

SAM
Shut up and hand me my trunks, I'm
going swimmin'.

Darius peeks over a fallen tree, down an embankment to the river below where WHITE TEENS swim and play.

DARIUS
But white folk still down there.

SAM
W-what did I say?

Darius digs through Sam's backpack, curiously pulls out the tutu and leggings.

SAM (CONT'D)
Don't dirty the tutu. Gotta give it
back to my auntie.

He stuffs the tutu back in the bag, hands Sam his swim trunks.

DARIUS
Your auntie turning you into a
thespian?

SAM
(scoff)
I'm n-n-no actor. I hate that
froufrou stuff. I'm an activist.
Like Dr. King.

Darius stares blankly as Sam disrobes. Sam pauses.

SAM (CONT'D)
(beat)
Go on, put yours on too.

Darius SIGHS, but follows orders.

LATER

Looking like a human number 10, Sam and Darius stand side by side at the edge of the embankment with nothing but their swim suits on -- they stare nervously at the activity down at the river below.

Darius suddenly turns to leave, Sam grabs him.

SAM
(re: white people)
They're like sharks -- they'll eat
your fear, but respect your power.

DARIUS
I don't know, Sam--

SAM
N-now, to keep them on their toes,
you should go first--

DARIUS
What?!

Darius shakes his head. Sam scoffs.

SAM
You're such a b-b-baby.

But Sam can't quite muster the courage either. And just when he does--

A white boy, TAYLOR (17), approaches from behind, joined by a WHITE GIRL and WHITE BOY (17) -- frolicking towards the river with towels. They're slightly startled by the black teens, but otherwise pleasant.

Darius gasps, stares at the ground despite towering over everyone. Sam holds his poise, smiles warmly.

TAYLOR
("greetings")
Boys.

Sam fights his instinct to stare at the ground, makes eye contact with Taylor, nods.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Nice out here, ain't it? Perfect
day for a swim.

SAM
N-n-n-nice. Yeah.

The white kids stifle chuckles.

TAYLOR
Right on.

And as the white folks pass through, Sam nods to the girl.

SAM
Ma'am.

Taylor suddenly stops.

TAYLOR
Say what now?

Darius hyperventilates.

SAM
I d-d-didn't--

TAYLOR
D-d-didn't what?
(then)
You eyein' my girl?

Defiantly, Sam locks eyes with the bully.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
That's some mighty fine swim wear.
I bet you'll be the shiniest garbage
man in the city.
(then)
You do know you ain't gonna be nothin'
more than a garbage man, right? Not
like that's news.

Sam's jaw tightens.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Well, shoot. I'm gonna do you a
solid and give ya your first lesson
in waste management.

He digs in his pocket, pulls out a stick of gum. Taylor chews it slowly, then crumples up the wrapper and tosses it on the ground.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Pick up that trash.

Giggles. Sam's eyes burn from not blinking.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Don't fail my course now.

Darius, eyes still glued to the dirt, leans in to pick it up himself--

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Nope. I want Shiny to do it.
(staring at Sam)
So what's it gonna be, Shiny?

Sam boils, opens his mouth to speak, but then... he abjectly bends down and picks up the gum wrapper.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
There. Now that's a goddamn garbage man.
(then)
I'm sure we'll be done before dark.

Laughing, the white folks head down the embankment, leaving a deflated number 10 in their wake.

SAM
(beat)
They lucky they left when they d-
did. I was about to--

But Darius has heard enough, turns away to collect his things.

SAM (CONT'D)
W-w-where you goin'?
(nothing)
Fine, ya big b-baby. But w-w-when I
go to Morehouse and follow in the
footsteps of Dr. King, don't come
crawlin' b-back.

Darius mumbles something under his breath.

SAM (CONT'D)
(livid)
What?!

DARIUS
You ain't going to Morehouse.
(then)
Not with your grades.

Looking up, Darius finally clocks Sam's furious eyes boring through him and trails off.

DARIUS (CONT'D)
(scared)
But if you added a major
extracurricular activity to your
resume...

SAM
I'm drum major!

Darius frowns -- that ain't enough.

Sam absorbs this, then squeezes Darius's shoulders.

SAM (CONT'D)

Grab my b-bag.

(then)

We've got work to do.

Determined to keep his dream alive, Sam strides off, leaving an incredulous Darius to pick up both of their bags and catch up. Suddenly, the loud RING of a school bell...

EXT./INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A classic facade, kempt and sturdy enough -- but as we glide through the front doors...

And into a hallway brimming with a SEA OF BLACK STUDENTS scampering to their respective classrooms, we notice peeling tiles on the floors and cracked walls with crumbling plaster.

A MAINTENANCE MAN (50s, black) kicks a bucket in place to catch water drips from a leaky pipe. He's satisfied until a second drip line splats his head. Sigh -- new day, same shit.

We dip in and out of various classrooms, a couple with boarded-up windows, ALL packed to the gills with an abnormal amount of BLACK STUDENTS -- wobbly desks practically on top of each other. Students along the perimeter sit with no desk at all, balancing notebooks and textbooks on their knees.

Even still, we push back outside into the PARKING LOT where a row of parked SCHOOL BUSES house more students in makeshift classrooms.

INT. SCHOOL BUS CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

We find dozens of students sitting in the bus seats. They have the exuberance of typical teenagers, oblivious to their school's inadequacies.

At the head of the "class", a black teacher, MR. IRVING (40s), hands a stack of WORN TEXTBOOKS to Red, who distributes them to his classmates.

MR. IRVING

(to class)

These are new editions, used, but at least no pages are missing.

(then)

And as a result, we will be able to continue our exhaustive studies of the American history. In. Its. Entirety.

Collective GROANS from the students. Red hands out a couple of books, moves down the aisle, stops at the row of...

Patsy Palm. He just stares.

PATSY
(hello?)
May I have one?

RED
Yeah, of course.

He struggles to pull a textbook from the middle of his teetering stack rather than from the top.

RED (CONT'D)
This one looks like it has the crispest pages.

PATSY
Crisp is good, thanks.

He just stares.

PATSY (CONT'D)
Yes?

RED
Do you like that one? You can have anyone you want really, I just -- I could take his back.

Red tries to repossess a book he already handed out but the owner hangs on for dear life.

PATSY
(blushing)
No, this is...

She pops open her book and notices a black square, as if someone had covered writing with marker. She rubs the square, then curiously flips to the next page where the writing has left an impression -- she closes the book.

PATSY (CONT'D)
It's great, thank you.

Red nods, keeps it moving with an unbreakable smile. As soon as he leaves, Patsy reopens the book and lightly rubs pencil lead over the impression, spelling out "DIE NIGG" -- she SLAMS the book shut, no need to finish that.

MR. IRVING (O.S.)
Remember. Cherish these books,
protect them.
(MORE)

MR. IRVING (O.S.) (CONT'D)
They will be yours for the remainder
of the year, but they will be someone
else's thereafter...

Patsy deflates.

Done helping, Red takes a seat next to Morgan towards the back of the bus.

MORGAN
(whispering)
I'm shocked teacher let you off your
leash--

RED
(whispering)
Fool, it's a quid pro quo. I hand
out the books, and he'll let me hand
out these after class.

Red opens his backpack, filled with handmade FLIERS that read "VOTE SKIP DORSEY FOR PRESIDENT". Morgan nods -- nicely played.

MORGAN
Too bad your charm only works on
educators.

RED
What?

He follows Morgan's gaze to the front of the class, where Patsy exchanges the textbook Red gifted her for another one.

Red sulks in his chair.

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - LATER

A crack in the wall is abruptly covered with a basic-ass poster that reads "FEEL BLUE NO MORE, VOTE RED FOR PRESIDENT!". Beneath the slogan is a picture of a sad sack next to a black & white photo of an awkwardly smiling Red.

Red finishes mounting the poster, Morgan stands behind him, unimpressed. Nobody in the crowded hall seems to care.

MORGAN
Spent a lot of time on that did you?

RED
("fuck off")
I only need one vote.

Red heads for his rusty locker, struggles to pry it open.

MORGAN

Your slogan shoulda been more provocative -- like "what does the blood of Christ and your next president have in common? They're both Red!"

Dramatically, Morgan mimics Christ dangling from the cross.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

With your head on his body, suffering for the people. Blood everywhere--

RED

Sounds remarkably blasphemous.

MORGAN

("suit yourself")

My cousin says controversy is like your mornin' coffee, it wakes you the hell up.

RED

(working locker door)

Don't hurt yourself. All I have to do is give the requisite speech at assembly today and I'm a shoo-in--

PATSY (O.S.)

Having trouble?

They spin to find Patsy calmly leaning against the next locker, studying Red's flier.

Fearful of embarrassment, Red fights even harder with his stuck locker door.

RED

Not at all.

PATSY

(re: flier)

I'm impressed. I was starting to think nobody would run.

RED

It's my patriotic duty. I'm surprised nobody else had the guts to put their name in the hat.

She blinks away her frustration.

PATSY

As a matter of fact, I put my name in the hat--

Morgan belly laughs as Red continues to strain against the rusty locker.

MORGAN
That's rich -- a girl president?!

PATSY
(seething)
I suppose you agree with the Election Committee then -- that I'd be more suited running for Miss Riverside?

Just then the reigning MISS RIVERSIDE (18) struts by, stealing everyone's attention -- a vapid black debutante in a flowing halter dress and a SASH around her torso that reads "Miss Riverside".

Catching whiffs of her passing perfume, the BOYS in the hall melt. She stops for her audience, does a twirl and curtsey, all while giggling like a field mouse.

MORGAN
(still distracted)
I dunno, that's a mighty big sash to fill--

Red flicks Morgan's shoulder, then gives one last yank, CRACKING open his locker door. Proud of himself.

RED
I think you'd be a fantastic Miss Riverside--

She SLAMS the locker door shut.

PATSY
Miss Riverside doesn't have the ear of faculty, the president does.
Now, how do you plan on bettering our school?

RED
Come again--

PATSY
This black facility is in a shameful state--

RED
Now wait a minute, we're in no worse shape than everyone else. Black or white.

(then)
Every school has its headaches.

Patsy shakes her head, smirks at the naivete. She steps in close, fixes Red's collar, which makes him and Morgan gulp.

PATSY
You are doing this for the right
reasons, aren't you?

RED
(sweating)
Of... of course, but--

PATSY
And if you win, you'd do everything
in your power to enrich the
educational experience of our student
body, wouldn't you?
(seductive)
Like, say, making sure we don't have
to use hand-me-down books anymore?

Red can only muster a nod.

PATSY (CONT'D)
Outta sight! Then I hope you beat
Sam Jackson.

On a dime, she perks up, and skips down the hallway.

MORGAN
(beat)
I change my mind. She definitely
has what it takes to be Miss
Riverside.

But the swooning is short lived -- Red's eyes suddenly bulge.
He grips Morgan by the lapels.

RED
Confounded, who the heck is Sam
Jackson?!

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - BACK LAWN - LATER

The SHRIEK of a WHISTLE.

It's nestled between the lips of Sam Jackson as he marches
on the grass, twirling a baton. He uses the whistle in an
attempt to command the pitiful BLACK MARCHING BAND following.

They're all wearing civilian clothes during practice, though
Sam rocks his formal white hat adorned with a large blue
feather.

Yards away, Red and Morgan spy, hiding beneath a school bus.

RED
(nervous)
He's the confound band leader?!

MORGAN

This cat ain't nothin'. I heard he
lives on the wrong side of the tracks.
And get this, he barely speaks, a
total loner, ya dig?

As Red watches Sam shimmie and shake his hips, a goddamn
dancing machine, his confidence wanes.

RED

I'm not exactly James Brown--

MORGAN

Damn right, you're not! But nobody's
as popular as James Brown, cause
nobody's as good!

RED

Amen.

MORGAN

I don't care what the white man says,
Elvis got twice the jaw and half the
charisma.

RED

A disgrace to even mention them in
the same breath.

MORGAN

But here's the rub, negro. You've
got a true gift, the gift of gab --
all you have to do is win 'em over
with a bitchin' speech.

Red's fixated on Sam jutting that baton up and down, up and
down, up and down...

RED

(steely eyed)

The pen is mightier than the baton.

Confidence rising.

MORGAN

Pretty sure that ain't a saying, but
fine.

Red and Morgan scoot back, disappearing into the darkness of
the bus shadow.

ON SAM

As he whistles and marches with confident steps, but the
band lags off beat, nowhere close to following its leader.

Sam finally turns to face them, recognizing the lack of enthusiasm and blatant disrespect.

SAM

C'mon, p-p-people. We haven't found the tempo yet. And we certainly haven't f-found the formation. Where's your sp-pirit?
(then)
Blue and white, fight fight!

MARCHING BAND

(singing, no energy)
We are the Trojans, mighty, mighty Trojans...

They defiantly wave him off.

BAND MEMBER #1

We get your concern, but here's the thing: we don't care.

SAM

Excuse me?

Collective MOANS and heavy eye rolls as the band members slowly peel away, leaving Sam behind with his feathered hat.

BAND MEMBER #2

He didn't stutter.

Sam opens his mouth to call after them... but doesn't. He sighs.

DARIUS (O.S.)

I think they're warming up to you.

Darius is seated beneath a tree, sipping a tasty Yoo-hoo. Sam strides over to him...

SAM

Shut up.

And SLAPS the chocolate beverage out of his hand, then storms off. Darius pouts.

EXT./INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

Silence. The buses and classrooms are curiously empty. But as we make our way through the deserted hallways, the THUNDER of a thousand footsteps mounts, growing bigger and bigger until we enter the...

GYMNASIUM

Which is OVERFLOWING with impatient students, STOMPING their feet in the packed stands.

Their collective chatter is deafening.

At the front of the auditorium, the reigning Miss Riverside completes a horrendously sultry, Marilyn Monroe-esque cover of *The Star Spangled Banner*. A mixed bag of applause and boos.

Mr. Irving takes the podium, testing the microphone with echoing taps. He's flanked by Red and Sam, both seated, both sweating bullets.

MR. IRVING

Thank you, Miss Johnson for that...
flavorful rendition of our nation's
anthem.

(then)

The Election Committee is happy to
announce we finally have not one,
but two candidates for Student Council
President. Mr. Sam Jackson and Mr.
Skip Dorsey!

The audience follows Mr. Irving's lead in clapping, though most students share confused looks like "who?".

MR. IRVING (CONT'D)

Now, since it took so long for us to
find these brave gentlemen, they'll
only have a matter of days to campaign
before the big election. So let's
get started, shall we?

Mr. Irving steps away from the podium, to find Red, in a full suit and tie, waiting to greet him with a firm handshake.

RED

I won the coin toss. Thank you for
your eloquent introduction.

What the fuck -- Mr. Irving forces a smirk, shakes the boy's hand. Red makes his way to the seated Sam, extends a hand.

RED (CONT'D)

Good luck, young man.

Sam furrows his brow, looks away without shaking. Red smiles.

At the podium, Red clears his throat, organizes his index cards, then adjusts the microphone down to his level.

RED (CONT'D)

(to audience)

What makes a leader?

(beat for effect)

Is it the totality of their words?

The totality of their actions?

His index cards suddenly SLIP through a crack in the wood, disappearing inside the podium. He stifles panic, wings it.

RED (CONT'D)

Ummmm... the answer? The answer is -- neither! Because a true leader is born, not made. A true leader rises from the ashes of injustice to give voice to the disenfranchised!

The crowd is at a loss, students and teachers alike managing lion-sized yawns.

RED (CONT'D)

Fear not, for a leader is among you! One who will not build walls but bridges -- between student and teacher, boy and girl, freshman and senior. One who will scream to the heavens until the world knows our name! Blue and white, fight fight! (big finish)
We are the Trojans, mighty-mighty Trojans!

A standing ovation from a single member of the audience: Morgan. A smattering of weak applause from the rest. Red scans the house, finds Patsy and her friends whispering -- they're clapping, compulsory claps, but clapping nonetheless.

He reclaims his seat with a sigh of relief.

MR. IRVING

(into microphone)

Now. Sam Jackson.

No suit, no index cards, Sam wipes his damp palms on his slacks, reluctantly steps up to the podium and adjusts the microphone up to his height.

SAM

(to audience, a beat)

Th-th-th-th-the...

Kids choke down giggles. Sam's a deer in headlights, the audience seemingly extends forever, their eyes GLOWING A DEMONIC YELLOW.

He clocks an EXIT SIGN stage right, salvation -- no, he fights the urge, deep breath.

SAM (CONT'D)

Th-th-the Negro is still not free.

Raised brows -- that certainly got their attention.

SAM (CONT'D)
The l-life of the Negro is still s-
sadly crippled by th-the chains of
discrimination.

People sit up in their chairs, Red flusters.

RED
(to himself)
Confounded, he stole that from Martin
Luther King, Jr.

SAM
So too is th-the life of the Negro
student. I promise to g-give you
your freedom back. Freedom to l-
leave campus during lunch.

Students nod in agreement.

SAM (CONT'D)
F-freedom for seniors to park their
cars in the teacher's lot.

Seniors CHEER. Mr. Irving folds his arms, incredulous --
"over my dead body, negro."

SAM (CONT'D)
(a dramatic beat)
F-f-free potato chips in the
cafeteria.

The crowd loses its FUCKING MIND as Sam simply takes a seat.
Red can barely contain his disbelief, but the audience is
eating up the empty promises.

Sam sends Red a cocky wink. As Mr. Irving makes his way to
the podium, Red suddenly rips off his tie and blazer then
beats Irving to the mic.

RED
(to audience)
My brothas. My sistas.

Red bows his head and raises a fist in the air.

RED (CONT'D)
I forgot to mention, if you vote for
me... I will work tirelessly to make
sure James Brown performs at prom.
(lying)
I have an in.

Students go wild, the tide turning in his favor. So caught
up in the battle, Red fails to notice a disappointed Patsy
shaking her head.

RED (CONT'D)
(catching the holy
ghost)
Free at last, free at last!

Irving rolls his eyes as Red steps away from the podium, shooting Sam a proud smirk.

But before Irving can conclude the assembly, Sam jumps back onto the mic.

SAM
(to audience)
Vote for me and I'll m-m-march in
Washington until they paint at least
half the White House black!

Roars for Sam.

SAM (CONT'D)
(looking at Red)
That's black. Not high yellow.

Enraged, Red hip checks Sam and steals the mic.

RED
Vote for me and I'll put a black
president inside the White House!

The audience balks at that -- an idea too bold for 1965.

MR. IRVING
Okay, let's pump the brakes on this
magical fantasy land.

Mr. Irving shoves Red away from the mic.

MR. IRVING (CONT'D)
(to audience)
That concludes our assembly, back to
classes.

The charged mob files out as a seething Sam and Red stare daggers at one another.

RED
You're full of it -- how are you
going to pay for free chips?!

SAM
The s-s-same way you're gonna pay
for James Brown.

Red groans, mad he stooped to using such gutter tactics.

SAM (CONT'D)

N-n-not used to playing in the mud,
are you, Bourgeois Bob?
(leaning in)
Your sh-shiny suits and fancy grammar
m-might impress the teachers, but
when it c-comes to dazzling our peers?
Well, you're just a couple shades
short--

Red clenches his fist.

RED

I'm just as black as you!

Sam juts out his chin with a grin, baiting his rival to swing.

SAM

("no you're not")
The face of the s-students should
have the face of the students. Don't
you th-think?

But Red simply deflates, loosens his hands as Mr. Irving re-enters.

MR. IRVING

Gentlemen? Class.

With confidence, Sam struts off leaving a stewing Red in his wake. Mr. Irving flips a light switch as we--

SMASH TO BLACK.

2 DAYS UNTIL ELECTION...

We hear the POP of gun shots.

INT. DORSEY RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's like the set of *Bewitched* threw up in here -- clean, warm, inviting, yet reeking of the autumn color scheme popular at the time.

The GUN SHOTS come from the bulbous TV, where cowboys protect the Ponderosa from encroaching villains. A seething Red sits in the middle of the couch, focused on the boob tube.

The good guy gets shot and Red's eye suddenly twitches, then he abruptly screams into a couch pillow and rises.

RED

I can't even enjoy Bonanza!

In a chair, his wise and patient mother, FAY (40s), calmly continues her knitting.

FAY
(without looking up)
Then turn it off.

RED
Confounded, I'd rather watch and not enjoy it than not watch it at all!

She barely looks up from her half-cooked sweater -- it's enough.

RED (CONT'D)
Sorry.

He looks down to find his precocious sister, DEWANA (12), lying on the rug, making easy work of a crossword puzzle. She peeks up at her brother.

DEWANA
Kitty Kelly is odd and queer, but not peculiar.
(then)
She likes swimming pools, but not water.
(then)
Isn't that interesting?

Red grimaces -- fuck your games.

RED
Not interested.

She rolls her eyes, carries on with the puzzle. He paces, thinking.

RED (CONT'D)
Mom, can I get an advance on my allowance? I'm going to need ten, no, twenty posters. And fifty fliers. Ooh, I can dust off the ol' button maker and really whet their whistle!

FAY
(still knitting)
Ask your father.

Red kneels down to Dewana's level, brightens up.

RED
Hey, Waney! Wanna help me make some hip campaign swag--

DEWANA
Not interested.

An offended Red backs off just as James Brown's hit *Night Train* amplifies...

We're tight on spinning vinyl that plays just outside of the
BATHROOM

Where a dapper man, years removed from his sailor gruff, marvels at his trimmed mustache in the mirror. This is Red's father, BILLY (40s) -- Clark Gable's light-skinned doppelgänger.

Red grooves to the music in the doorway as Billy meticulously straightens his hair with an electric hot, metal comb. His eyes never leave his reflection.

RED
JB is so boss--

BILLY
You're not going to settle your beef with a button, son.

RED
It's an election, not a backyard brawl.

BILLY
He challenged your blackness, didn't he?

RED
Yeah--

BILLY
Then that's a fight.
(then)
See, son, it's about respect. You let 'em take the "rest" all you're left with is a "pec".

Red rolls his eyes.

BILLY (CONT'D)
He eye your girl -- that's a fight.
He scuff your Sunday loafers -- that's a fight. He have the gall to not bless your sneeze?
(then)
Damn.

Billy accidentally burns his finger, sucks it.

BILLY (CONT'D)
(back to Red)
You better believe that's a fight.

RED

I want to win the right way, through
diplomacy. Not because my opponent
is unconscious.

BILLY

Well at least be bold, son.

RED

Bold?

His father pauses, finally looks his son in the eye. Billy
studies the hot comb.

BILLY

You know who invented this?

RED

(playing dumb)

Madam CJ Walker?

Billy damn near faints. Red chuckles.

BILLY

Confound it, boy! Get serious!

(then)

Your great grandfather invented this.

John G Higgins...

Red hangs on his father's story as we INTERCUT with a DREAM
SEQUENCE:

INT. TENNESSEE BARBER SHOP (1907) - DAY (DREAM)

The sharp glint of a straight razor being held by JOHN G HIGGINS (50s), a stern-faced gentleman with the same light skin and coiffed mustache as Billy. He wears a black bow tie and white coat -- a total fucking professional.

BILLY (V.O.)

Or as his friends knew him: Captain Jack.

The razor glides down to the frothy cheeks of a black patron, and gives him a close shave.

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

A purveyor of style. A man of action.
Bold.

Captain Jack puffs his cigar as the patron beams.

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

But flipping barbershops wasn't enough for the Captain. The only way to win at life? Was to make a lasting contribution to negro-kind...

INT. SHED (1907) - NIGHT (DREAM)

Captain Jack, sleeves rolled up, works tirelessly at a wooden workbench cluttered with metal scraps and old books on hair.

He puffs his cigar then slowly raises the hot comb prototype up to the light.

BILLY (V.O.)

Painstakingly fashioned from a combination of metals with the highest degree of heat conductivity, the Eureka Comb was born.

We witness a MONTAGE of black men and women using the hot comb to straighten their kinky hair, allowing them to style it intricately -- they do this with ecstatic, frozen smiles.

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

Revolutionizing what it meant to be hip.

*(then)
Bold.*

EXT. TENNESSEE FACTORY (1917) - DAY (DREAM)

A quaint residential factory built behind a simple two-story house.

Captain Jack (60s), rocking a three-piece suit, derby, and cane, puffs his cigar as he stands on the sidewalk, staring proudly at the half-dozen black employees assembling combs in each of the big shop-windows of the factory.

BILLY (V.O.)

Global sales hit like a tsunami, but so too came the War to End All Wars.

The sunny tableau suddenly TIME LAPSES into a picture of gloom and doom -- the last remaining employee pulls a shade down over the only open factory window.

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

The army appropriated all the brass and copper to fight those damned Germans. The same materials needed to make the comb.

We hear a cacophony of GUN SHOTS and TANK BLASTS from WW1.

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

No materials. No sales.

Captain Jack tightens his jaw, puffs his cigar then drops it to the cement, killing it with the tip of his shoe.

INT. BEDROOM (1919) - DAY (DREAM)

As sunshine pours in, Captain Jack sits on the floor, leaning against the bed. He loosens his tie, takes off his derby hat. He smirks defiantly.

BILLY (V.O.)

The government wanted to take away his victories, everything he worked so hard to achieve.

The sharp glint of a straight razor being held by the Captain.

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

So he took it first.

He suddenly puts the razor to his throat as his eyes bulge.

INT. DORSEY RESIDENCE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

The DREAM SEQUENCE ENDS, we're back with Billy and a horrified Red.

Billy holds his wet hand at his throat, flicking his fingers so that the water sprays his son.

BILLY

Now that's bold.

RED

Jesus Christ, dad!

BILLY

You want to leave a mark? Be bold. Got tons of these boxed up in the garage, you should hand them out as campaign swag--

RED

My great grandfather's death muse?!

BILLY

You missed the point -- just take the confound thing and be inspired.

Billy holds out the hot comb, but Red recoils.

RED

I don't want that!

BILLY

Boy, it's your heritage.

RED

Heck no.

Red pats his afro, does a spin.

RED (CONT'D)
This is my heritage. Ya dig?

Frustrated, Billy shakes his head as Red scoots passed his entering mom.

FAY
You get your materials?

RED
Don't need them. I think I'll do something bolder.

And Red is gone. Fay helps her husband slick his hair back with water, stares at their reflection in the mirror.

BILLY
If he asks me if 'I dig' one more time.

FAY
If you tell that hot comb story one more time.

He chuckles, gives his wife a smooch...

EXT. BLACK RESIDENCE - DAY

Just as Sam kisses his joint, inhales. He watches as Darius attempts a granny-style free throw on a ramshackle basketball court attached to a house that could use some sprucing.

DARIUS
(lining up shot)
How are you gonna pay for free chips in the cafeteria?

SAM
It doesn't matter, dummy. I just gotta t-t-tell 'em what th-they wanna hear until th-they elect me.

Darius holds the basketball between his knees, hesitant to shoot.

DARIUS
But couldn't Dorsey do the same?

SAM
(scoff)
Th-that flake doesn't have the guts--

DEACON BLACK (O.S.)
Boy, have some got damn respect for yourself!

Sam quickly hides the joint behind his back as Darius's excessive father, DEACON BLACK (40s), bursts out the back door smoking a square and eating a slice of cantaloupe -- a personality so big it needs its own area code.

DEACON BLACK (CONT'D)
(tabling fruit)
Ain't no son of mine gonna shoot
like a bitch.

Deacon slaps the ball outta Darius's hands, pinches his cigarette between his lips as he dribbles terribly then shoots a brick that CLANGS off the rim and disappears in shrubbery.

DEACON BLACK (CONT'D)
The motherfucker's flat.

SAM
(beaming)
Th-that was solid form th-though,
Mr. Black.

Eyeing Sam, Deacon takes a long drag of his cigarette.

DEACON BLACK
The fuck's wrong with you?

SAM
(shy)
It's a t-T day.

DEACON BLACK
Nigga, what in the hell is a T day--

DARIUS
(embarrassed)
I told you Sam has a stutter, pop.

DEACON BLACK
Man, that ain't shit. Have you tried
choppin' your throat?

SAM
(chuckling)
No.

DEACON BLACK
How 'bout barking? Whistlin'?
Yellin'?
(then)
There was this retard in the army,
yammered all over the goddamn place.
So I told 'em, next time you feel a
yammerin' comin'? Just shout out
motherfucker. Cleared him right up.

SAM
My mother raised me t-t-to be a good
Christian. I don't cuss.

Disappointed, Deacon scratches his brow.

DEACON BLACK
(sotto)
Pussies of a feather.
(then)
Well what's this 'bout an election?

Darius ventures into tall grass to find the basketball.

SAM
I'm running against Dorsey--

DEACON BLACK
Ah yes, I know them uppity niggas.
Could a negro falute any higher?

Sam can't help but laugh. There's something about Deacon's charisma and unfiltered swag that inspires him.

Deacon grabs a seat, takes a sloppy bite of juicy cantaloupe.

DEACON BLACK (CONT'D)
(dragging cigarette)
And why, pray tell, do you want to
win?

SAM
I'm gonna go to Morehouse--

DEACON BLACK
Nah, young buck. Why do you really
wanna win?

Sam squirms slightly, uncomfortable.

DEACON BLACK (CONT'D)
Ain't got nothing to do with proving
to everyone you ain't a deadbeat
like your daddy?

Wow, that was pointed. Deacon's lips curl into a mischievous grin. Testing the kid's mettle, but Sam holds his ground.

SAM
(shaking head)
I want t-to follow in Dr. King's
footsteps.

Deacon nods as he smokes.

DEACON BLACK
 Good, good. The motivation dictates
 the advice--

SAM
 Oh, I'm fine -- we're just gonna h-
 hand out some fliers--

DEACON BLACK
 No!

He catches himself -- masking his personal investment.

DEACON BLACK (CONT'D)
 (smiling)
 No, nigga. From what I hear you
 ain't got time for that. See,
 whatchew gotta do is make a splash.
 (then)
 When you go to the pen, know what
 the first thing you gotta do is?
 Find the toughest, most renowned
 criminal in the joint and get 'em on
 your side. Get him? The rest will
 follow.

Sam absorbs this as--

DARIUS
 Found it!

Darius stumbles out of the bushes with the basketball. Deacon
 rolls his eyes, rises.

DEACON BLACK
 This nigga.

Deacon slaps the ball out of Darius's hands, misses a layup,
 heads back inside.

DEACON BLACK (CONT'D)
 Y'all mow this motherfuckin' lawn.
 (then)
 Oh, and Sam? Even good Christians
 smoke a little Mary Jane. Ain't
 that right?

And with a wink, Deacon disappears. Sam smirks, brings the
 joint he's been hiding this whole time back to his lips.

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Patsy Palm grabs a raggedy calculus textbook from her locker --
 the pages abruptly detach from the spine and smack the floor.
 She sighs, scrambles to put her math lesson back in order.

Her attention is stolen by COMMOTION down the hall...

A huddled group of black students jeering and laughing at SOMETHING.

Patsy pushes through the crowd to find the kids mocking Red's campaign poster, which someone has defaced to read: "FEEL BLUE NO MORE, VOTE ~~RED~~ YELLOW FOR PRESIDENT!" They've even colored Red's black & white photo with yellow marker.

Sympathy kicks in, Patsy shrinks amidst the laughter.

BLACK STUDENT
What a square!

The student rushes to the poster with a pen adding "HIGH" above the "YELLOW", crossing out "PRESIDENT" and replacing it with "SQUARE". More cackling.

Realizing, Patsy's eyes suddenly balloon.

PATSY
(to herself)
He's gonna lose.

VI (O.S.)
I know that's right.

She finds her friend Vi standing to her right, amused by the mob. Vi clocks Patsy's alarm, shrugs.

Patsy focuses on the marred photo of Red, gears turning.

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - LATER

RIVERSIDE HIGH STATE CHAMPION BASKETBALL banners hang from the rafters. BLACK CHEERLEADERS practice basic routines in the middle of the dusty, warped basketball court below.

We find Sam Jackson in the corner, collecting dirty towels from the floor. He gathers another soggy towel, rises to find Patsy standing before him, all smiles.

PATSY
Mr. Jackson. Or should I say Mr.
President?

Unbeknownst to them, ACROSS THE GYM, from the locker room tunnel, Red watches their conversation with distress.

DOUGLAS (O.S.)
Ain't got all day.

Red whips around to address the captain of the basketball team towering before him, and fights to stay focused.

RED
Right. You may recall we had a bit
of a scuffle the other day.

Douglas dabs his sweaty forehead with a towel, tries to remember.

DOUGLAS
Oh yeah. Cause I scored with your old lady, right?

RED
(wtf?)
Um, no.

Douglas shrugs -- must've been someone else's mom he fucked.

ON SAM AND PATSY

Sam ain't buying what she's selling, fills his arms with another towel.

PATSY
So, I'm sure when you win, you'll be fighting to upgrade band uniforms.

Never crossed his mind.

PATSY (CONT'D)
(giddy)
Now, imagine if we allocated just a fraction of those funds to get brand spanking new books to--

SAM
Man, n-nobody cares about no dang books!

Appalled, Patsy covers her heart, gasps.

ON RED AND DOUGLAS

Red panics when, out the corner of his eye, he spots Patsy striding away from Sam.

RED
Listen, I'll just cut to the chase.
(then)
If the basketball team endorses me for school president, I'll... wash your jockstraps for the whole year.

Douglas smirks knowingly, folds his arms.

DOUGLAS
We don't wear jockstraps.

RED
I'll wax your cars, anything!

DOUGLAS

Here's the thing, Yellow. Somebody beat ya to the punch.

RED

What?

Sam suddenly cuts in, struggling to carry all of those sweaty towels. Douglas adds his dirty towel to the pile.

SAM

(to Douglas)

I'll start p-polishing your shoes as soon as I'm done washin' these.

He winks at Red, whose jaw tightens.

RED

(desperate)

Whatever he's offering, I'll double it! I'll shine your shoes next year too -- heck, I'll be there on your wedding day just to make sure your wingtips sparkle--

SAM

Have some respect for yourself.

(then)

N-nobody can shine as good as me--

RED

Confounded, I can shine!

DOUGLAS

Boys, boys. Let's not fight. Clearly you both have passion for the office of the presidency.

(then)

The way I sees it, there's only one way to jar this pickle.

(dastardly)

Last time we played Chattanooga High, those bastards stole our most prized possession. If someone were to, say, retrieve it? I think that'd warrant an endorsement.

Sam drops the towels, determined.

SAM

Done.

RED

(scared)

You said Chattanooga High School?

DOUGLAS
You yella for real?

Red's wrinkled brow and saucer eyes hip us to the gravity of this task.

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

Red and Morgan march down the hallway -- Red's wrapped in thought, while Morgan is beside himself.

MORGAN
It's certainly a bold move, but Lord Jesus.
(then)
You're gonna actually go inside Chattanooga High?

RED
I have to.

MORGAN
Negro, have you ever been inside a segregated white school? Cause I sure as hell have not.

RED
It's probably no different than Riverside. The student body is just... a little melanin deprived.

Morgan stops on a dime, startling Red. Morgan grabs his friend by the lapels, nostrils flaring.

MORGAN
You have no idea what goes on in there.
(ominous)
But my cousin? He told me everything.

Red slaps Morgan's hands away, readjusts his shirt.

MORGAN (CONT'D)
It's a right-good hell on earth, where nothing remotely colored exists.
(beat)
And all the teacher's are white she-devils--

RED
Your cousin's an idiot--

MORGAN
And that's not even the worst part!
(MORE)

MORGAN (CONT'D)

(then)

Those schools are patrolled by evil
incarnate -- they call him the KKK
Cop. And if he catches you?

Morgan mimics a noose tightening around his neck and choking
him. Red just turns and walks away. Morgan catches up.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Don't believe me?

(then)

Ask Tommy Taylor what happened to
his older brother--

RED

(scoff)

Man, he went to Vietnam--

MORGAN

Wrong!

(spooky)

He stepped inside a white school...
and nobody's seen him since.

Nerves getting to him, Red exhales.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

What happened to diplomacy? Your
gift of gab? Winning the right way?

(then)

Don't you think this is kinda
desperate--

He has lead his friend to the defaced poster, references it.

RED

You feel it, I feel it -- if there
was a poll, I'd be losing.

(unhinged)

I need this.

Morgan softens.

MORGAN

You are pretty passable. You could
probably just waltz right in.

Red shoots Morgan an evil eye.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Well it's true -- and it's a good
thing too, otherwise this would be a
definite suicide mission.

(shaking head)

Instead of a probable one.

He's right.

RED

Confounded.

(then)

Well, if I'm going to do this, it's
got to be the real McCoy.

And with that, Red RIPS the poster off the wall.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DORSEY RESIDENCE - BATHROOM - LATER

A shirtless Red stares at his big hair in the mirror. Sigh. He looks down at the sink, reluctantly grabs his father's Eureka HOT COMB, and starts straightening out his afro.

As he occasionally burns his fingers we INTERCUT with...

INT. BLACK RESIDENCE - DARIUS'S ROOM - INTERCUT

From his backpack, Sam empties makeup, wigs, and costumes onto Darius's bed. Darius winces.

SAM

I borrowed some st-stuff from my
auntie's drama supplies.

DARIUS

I'm not sure there's enough makeup
in the world--

SAM

Shut up, dummy, and apply.

Looking like a burnt mop, Red struggles to push his flattened hair strands from his face as he finishes.

Sam's seated, great posture, as Darius applies thick white makeup to his friend's face.

Red wets his hair and slicks it back. Not bad. He digs his fingers into a can of pomade and rubs it through his new do.

Exposed skin fully covered in white, Darius places a blonde male wig atop Sam's head, completing the "look".

The INTERCUT ENDS as Darius steps away revealing Sam in full on WHITEFACE. Darius cringes as Sam looks in a mirror.

SAM (CONT'D)

("well shit")

I mean...

DEACON BLACK (O.S.)
 What in the holy hell is y'all
 nigglets doin'?!

Sam and Darius whip to find Deacon Black standing in the doorway horrified, lit cigarette dangling from his lip.

Eyes bulging, Darius just stares at the floor.

SAM
 We were j-just... s-see, I got to
 infiltrate th-th-this white school,
 cause I n-need an endorsement--

Deacon holds up his hand -- please stop. He takes a drag of his square.

DEACON BLACK
 How 'bout, I call some cats that
 work the janitorial services at these
 schools and get you a gig for the
 day?

Sam and Darius share a look, then nod.

SAM
 Yes--

DARIUS
 That's a remarkably better plan--

SAM
 P-please, thank you.

Okay then.

DEACON BLACK
 (to Darius)
 Now. Get yo' cracka-ass-honkey friend
 the hell up outta my house.

Whiteface Sam glowers--

SMASH TO BLACK.

1 DAY UNTIL ELECTION...

EXT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - DAY

A gorgeous stone building with pillars and an immaculate lawn covered with awesome topiary.

Red stands across the street with his slicked-back hair and buttoned-up shirt -- he looks like a white teen with a good tan. He trembles, staring up at the imposing school.

Mustering the courage, Red starts across the road when--

HONK! That same rusty BLUE '56 CHEVY PICKUP screeches to a halt, nearly clipping Red AGAIN. He jumps back.

The same dusty, glowering WHITE LADY from earlier snarls at Red as she peels off. It sends a shiver down his spine, but he quickly shakes it off and ascends the stairs to enter the segregated white facility.

INT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - LATER

The spotless halls are eerily empty, save for a timid Red padding across marble floors, absorbing every nook and cranny. Everything -- the skylights, lockers, walls -- is pristine. A far cry from the black high school.

Dumbfounded, Red caresses a wall.

RED
(to himself)
Not a scratch--

WHITE PRINCIPAL (O.S.)
You don't belong here.

Oh fuck.

Red whips around to find a WHITE PRINCIPAL (60s, crotchety) sizing him up.

WHITE PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)
(suspicious)
Classes are in session.

RED
Right. Sorry.

Red turns to leave.

WHITE PRINCIPAL
Wait a minute. You're not a student
at Chattanooga High.

Sweat beads building. Red halts, addresses the principal.

RED
I... am... prospecting. Sir.

WHITE PRINCIPAL
Prospecting?

RED
Yes, sir. My father... was recently
stationed at Arnold AFB.

WHITE PRINCIPAL
(perking up)
Military?

RED
Yes, sir.

WHITE PRINCIPAL
But Arnold is nearly two hours away?

Jesus help me.

RED
I... pride myself on learning from
the best, sir.

WHITE PRINCIPAL
So you've already looked into
Tullahoma schools?

RED
("I wasn't impressed")
Like I said, prospecting.

The principal likes the cut of his jib, chuckles.

WHITE PRINCIPAL
(leaning in)
Tullahoma is horrendous at basketball.

Red smiles.

RED
I had a feeling. In fact, I think
I'll check out your gymnasium first--

WHITE PRINCIPAL
No, no. Let's see if we can't find
you a proper tour guide.

The principal gestures for Red to follow, Red's smile fades.

LATER

Red follows the principal down the hallway, rapt by the
sparkling display cases, state-of-the-art P.A. system, and
most notably...

The large, uncrowded classrooms where every student is
afforded his very own desk. Red can't believe his eyes.

RED
Are your bus classrooms as spacious
as these?

WHITE PRINCIPAL
Bus classrooms?

RED
You know, for the overflow.

WHITE PRINCIPAL
("silly kid")
We have more than enough space within
our walls. And more than enough
teachers, substitutes, and volunteers
to make sure every student gets the
attention they need to thrive.

Red furrows his brow, disillusioned.

RED
Everything's so... top-notch.

WHITE PRINCIPAL
(scoff)
Well what did you expect?

Suddenly a swelling ANGELIC VOICE invades Red's soul, catching
him off guard -- what is this magical utopia?

RED
Is this... is this heaven?

As the voice grows closer, the principal smirks, guiding his
enchanted guest towards the doorway of a

MUSIC ROOM

Where MRS. AMSTERDAM (white, 50s, nun-like) sings *Ave Maria*
from the heart. Pious sun rays cut through the room.

WHITE PRINCIPAL
Choir's in session.

A group of a dozen WHITE STUDENTS gracefully join, harmonizing
with the siren. Astonished, Red looks to the principal,
who's nearly brought to tears -- he locks eyes with Mrs.
Amsterdam, who smiles and head-bows as the song comes to an
end.

The principal carries on, dabbing his eyes.

WHITE PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)
Gets me every time.

They stroll past a door labeled "JANITOR'S OFFICE". The
principal suddenly stops, listens closely for the faint SOUL
MUSIC emanating from inside.

He grumbles, POUNDS the door twice, then continues on with a
smile. A stupefied Red follows, but we stay on the door.

JANITOR'S OFFICE

A large closet more so than an office. A weathered janitor, in navy blue coveralls, dutifully jumps from his seat and quickly turns off his portable radio, killing the SOUL MUSIC.

This is LARRY (black, 60s). He rubs his aching back.

LARRY

See, you can stray from the line oh
so much, but most of the time it's
best to just stay right on that line.

He turns to size up Sam Jackson standing in the corner, wearing matching coveralls.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Now, Deacon says you know how to
mind your environment.

SAM

(reluctant)

Th-that's right.

Larry hands him a bucket and a mop.

LARRY

Good. Just focus on the work, nothin'
else matters. And I mean nothin'.

(then)

If you ain't moppin', you're dustin'.
If you ain't dustin', you're fixin'.
If you ain't fixin', you best figure
somethin' out.

(then)

The name of the game is lookin' too
busy to matter. Understand?

Sam nods despite himself.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Get started before the rush.

(then)

And whatever you do, stay away from
classroom 401.

Curiously, Sam waits for a reason -- Larry decides to leave it at that.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Just. Stay away.

Ignoring the indignation, Sam refocuses on the mission at hand. He exits the office into the

HALLWAY

Checks the coast, then strides with purpose when the classrooms suddenly flood into the hall.

Sam quickly drops his bucket, "mops". He does his best to keep his eyes glued to the floor as chatty and oblivious white students pass by.

INT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - LATER

As if it's the Holy Grail, Red opens a box and pulls out a brand new textbook, fresh from the printer. He sniffs it, listens to the crackle of its spine, opening for the first time. The pages? Smooth as baby ass.

The office and desk are cluttered with weird keepsakes -- arbitrary school banners, broken trophies, a taxidermy bulldog rocking a crown and a cape. Creepy.

WHITE PRINCIPAL

I guess the new editions came in.

The principal takes the book from Red, studies it.

WHITE PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

We probably won't need these until
next year.

He puts the textbook back in the box. Red's jaw hangs open -- everything he thought he knew dispelled in a matter of minutes. He blinks through the shock.

WHITE PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)

Oh, there he is.

(then)

Taylor, I'd like you to meet ol'
Skippy here.

Red turns to find TAYLOR entering with a cocksure grin -- he's the same white boy that punked Sam by the river, but of course Red wouldn't know that.

Taylor extends a hand.

TAYLOR

Hey there, Skippy.

Red reluctantly shakes Taylor's hand.

RED

Just Skip is fine.

TAYLOR

Right on.

WHITE PRINCIPAL

(to Red)

He'll be showing you around.

(to Taylor)

Give 'em the... platinum experience.

Taylor and the principal chuckle with corny vigor. Red grimaces -- what the fuck has he gotten himself into?

TAYLOR

No sweat, sir.

(to Red)

Let's jet.

Red forces a clenched smile, follows Taylor out of the office.

HALLWAY - LATER

Eyes darting from one oblivious white student to the next, an anxious Red follows Taylor -- like Luke Skywalker infiltrating the Death Star in a storm trooper suit.

TAYLOR

I'm gonna be honest with ya, Skippy -- the key to a bitchin' high school experience ain't the academics.

Believe it or not, it ain't the girls either. It's the buds.

(then)

Whatever you do, do not surround yourself with squares.

This grabs Red's attention.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

You seem like a pretty hip dude.

Really? Red can't help but smile, flattered.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

So I'm gonna do you a solid and introduce you to the coolest buds at Chatty High.

They approach a crew of three WHITE JOCKS loitering by the lockers. Taylor smacks Red on the back.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

Just don't embarrass me, yeah?

(to jocks)

Boys. Meet a future Red Hawk, by way of... where did you say you're from?

RED

San Diego.

The boys nod, impressed.

WHITE JOCK #1

Nice tan.

TAYLOR

(to Red)

You're looking at three fifths of
the fighting Red Hawks' starting
five.

RED

("you don't say")

The basketball team?

WHITE JOCK #2

(to Red)

I'd ask if you play, but...

He bends down to Red's height and delicately pokes the tip
of Red's nose.

WHITE JOCK #2 (CONT'D)

Boop.

They all chuckle. Red forces a hearty laugh to overcompensate
for his rage.

RED

(sotto)

Don't touch me.

INT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - GYMNASIUM - LATER

A cautious Sam enters to find a Phys Ed class in full swing --
unathletic kids failing to climb ropes suspended from the
ceiling.

He keeps his head down, strategically mops past them without
notice. He makes his way to the adjacent

BOYS LOCKER ROOM

Where a couple stragglers leave behind musty towels for Sam
to pick up. But once they empty out, Sam gets to work quickly
sifting through locker after locker looking for that stolen
PRIZED POSSESSION.

He checks everywhere -- the showers, the coach's office,
under benches, in bathroom stalls -- nothing.

Sam takes a seat on one of the wooden benches, thinks.

Suddenly, students pour in, so Sam hops to his feet and
"mops", head down. One by one, the students absentmindedly
drop sweaty towels at Sam's feet. One towel even lands on
his shoulder. Oh, the disrespect.

Jaw tightening, he squeezes the shit out of the mop stick -- the clueless, disrobing kids completely unaware of what's about to explode. But then Sam simply... deflates, gathers the towels and discards them in a nearby laundry bin.

INT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - CAFETERIA - LATER

Bustling with hundreds of gossiping white students at dozens of dining tables.

We find Red seated, staring at the bountiful food line -- like everything else in the school, it's damn impressive.

Red turns to address Taylor and the jocks, eating lunch at the same table.

RED
Are the chips free?

Chuckles.

TAYLOR
Of course. We ain't animals.

Red frowns, then bites into a tuna sandwich and rolls his eyes -- he hates that it's delicious.

RED
So, fellas. I heard you lost to
Riverside not too long ago.

The boys nearly choke on their meals.

TAYLOR
(annoyed)
Who told you that?

All eyes on Red. Shit.

RED
(covering)
You know those Tullahoma boys talk
more than a sewing circle.

WHITE JOCK #3
Well those Riverside bastards are
cheaters! Every last one of 'em!

He's losing his audience, Red pivots.

RED
Don't I know the type.
(then)
Boy, if I had to face such injustice?
I would've done just about anything
to get those bastards back.

TAYLOR
 (excited)
 Oh yeah?

RED
 Yeah. Like, I don't know, take
 something from them?

The jocks share looks.

RED (CONT'D)
 And I suppose the smart thing to do
 would be to hide it at school -- you
 know, to manage accountability.
 (coy)
 But where would I hide it, I wonder.

Taylor leans in, mischievous.

TAYLOR
 Let's just say, great minds think
 alike.

Red masks his disappointment -- he was hoping to get a
 location.

WHITE JOCK #1
 You're alright, Skippy.

WHITE JOCK #2
 Yeah, most kids at this school ain't
 sharp like that.
 (then)
 Just the other day, some buffoon had
 the nerve to tell me moss grows on
 trees in Chattanooga.

Red lights up despite himself.

RED	TAYLOR
But we're too far north!	But we're too far north!

More laughter, but this time Red joins without pretense. It
 catches him off guard -- he's actually enjoying himself. A
 respect and acknowledgement he doesn't receive at the black
 school.

As the fun dies down...

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
 Hey, man. I think I know just about
 everything I need to know about ya.
 (then)
 Just one last thing.

Taylor leans on Red's shoulder, lighthearted -- it's an easy
 question.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
You an Elvis fan or a James Brown
fan?

Red blinks and grins, as if his brain can't compute. The table stares, urging him to just say it -- I mean, what white kid in the 60s isn't an Elvis fan?

WHITE JOCK #1
Did you hear 'em? Elvis or JB?

But the longer Red goes mute, the more concerned his new friends grow.

TAYLOR
C'mon, Skippy. Thought I was givin'
you a layup.

Then suddenly, out of nowhere, with tears building in his eyes...

RED
(forced)
Who's James Brown?

The table goes FUCKING WILD, cheering, slapping Red on the back. One by one, Taylor and the jocks join in singing a heartfelt rendition of *Can't Help Falling in Love*.

Before he knows it, the entire cafeteria is singing along, closing in on Red. They sway to the beat -- strange white boys giving Red fives, strange white girls giving him hugs.

The jocks put Red on their shoulders, the zenith of this tightening flesh circle. He can't help himself, Red eats it up, basking in the lone ray of sunshine warming his face.

INT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - HALLWAY - LATER

Lightly peppered with students making their way to class.

Sam "dusts" the glass of a trophy case. His eyes lock on the reflection of the room number behind him: 401. Clearly he's been casing the forbidden classroom.

Once the coast clears, he slowly turns and makes his way towards the door. Anxiety building, but he's seemingly searched everywhere else. One last coast check, then he slithers inside

CLASSROOM 401

Nothing out of the ordinary, but devoid of human life.

Hopeful, Sam darts for the large fish tank by the window. He peers inside -- nothing but coral, tropical fish, and some funky thing sucking the glass. Fuck.

Not quite what he's looking for, Sam searches for SOMETHING else when suddenly the door knob rattles!

Shit almighty. Head on a swivel, Sam weighs his hiding options. He dives beneath the large teacher's desk at the front of the class just as--

MRS. AMSTERDAM, the angelic singer from earlier, enters with a large brown lunch bag. She locks the door behind her.

With a warm smile, she feeds the fish, then makes her way to an extension cord plugged into the wall. She unravels it, brings power closer to HER DESK.

BENEATH THE DESK

Sam winces, panics. But he's curled up so deep in its shadowy cavern she can't see him.

ON MRS. AMSTERDAM

As she methodically opens the brown paper bag and pulls out not a lunch, but a 1950s "Spot Reducer" -- a brass handheld device with a green, rubber suction cup on the bottom.

She places it on the desk, suction side down, plugging it into the extension cord.

Next, she pulls from the brown bag a worn-the-fuck-out book: *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D.H. Lawrence.

To Sam's absolute chagrin, an unaware (or shameless) Mrs. Amsterdam takes a seat, exposing her knees.

The teacher finds her place in the book, reads -- with each word, her breaths hasten, chest heaving. She can't take it anymore, and reaches for the Spot Reducer, but it's stuck to the desk.

She gives it a good yank, de-suctioning with a wet POP. She giggles to herself before flicking the switch on its brass cover -- the device hums to life VIBRATING.

Oh hell -- Sam's horrified with no where to go. Mrs. Amsterdam's hand suddenly falls below the desk as she places the "massager" under her dress.

She returns to her book, but now with eye rolling intensity. Incessant HUMMING. One hand stays below while the other grips the desk, the vein in her neck throbbing. Sweet mama!

She's almost there, almost there, ALMOST THERE--

Then she abruptly deflates, closes the book, and turns off the device. She plants it back on her desk. A beat.

MRS. AMSTERDAM
Enough foreplay.

ON SAM

Wondering who the hell she's talking to -- her head suddenly pokes under the desk.

MRS. AMSTERDAM
(to Sam)
You should be rock hard by now.

Petrified, Sam crawls past her legs for dear life. He rises, she takes in his length and youth -- likes what she sees.

She rises, stalking her prey.

MRS. AMSTERDAM (CONT'D)
You had the best seat in the house.
(then)
Did you pay for those seats?

SAM
(wtf?)
Excuse m-me?

MRS. AMSTERDAM
Larry doesn't like to watch. I have to make him. But you -- you got right in there, didn't you?

Sam can't stop shaking his head.

SAM
I w-wasn't t-trying--

MRS. AMSTERDAM
(angry)
You're such a tease!

She corners him, dives into his chest.

MRS. AMSTERDAM (CONT'D)
And I love it.

He's frozen as her well-manicured nails crawl down his shirt.

MRS. AMSTERDAM (CONT'D)
The help is usually so... mature.
(then)
Yet you're just so strapping and delicious--

SAM
I'm just here to c-clean--

MRS. AMSTERDAM
Damn straight, Hot Shot.

SAM
No. I mean, I could get in s-s-
serious trouble--

MRS. AMSTERDAM
Nonsense--

SAM
T-tell that to Emmett Till!

Sam slides away, but she blocks him from going for the door.

MRS. AMSTERDAM
I'll let you go, if you tell me where
you'd like to stick that duster.

He looks down at the duster tucked in his pocket, then back up to her. Already panicking when--

The door knob rattles!

IMPATIENT STUDENT (O.S.)
Mrs. Amsterdam?

Loving the tension, she grins from ear to ear.

MRS. AMSTERDAM
Tell me. Or we'll all burn.

POUNDING at the door.

IMPATIENT STUDENT (O.S.)
Mrs. Amsterdam! I thought we were
gonna go over my paper!

She shrugs -- what's it gonna be?

SAM
(closing his eyes)
I'd like to st-stick it in... your...
fanny.

Mrs. Amsterdam SQUEALS with delight as Sam chastens, stripped of his dignity. With precision, she wraps up the Spot Reducer, returning it and her erotic book back to the brown paper bag.

She smoothes out her dress, then unlocks and opens the door, resuming her meek facade.

IMPATIENT STUDENT
I don't have much time before my
next class, Mrs. Amsterdam.

MRS. AMSTERDAM
Then we should hop to it.

IMPATIENT STUDENT
(clocking Sam)
What's he doing here?

Sam exits with his eyes down.

MRS. AMSTERDAM
Being a nuisance.

As the teacher and student disappear inside, Sam stands in the hallway just beyond the door, grating his last nerve.

INT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - CLASSROOM - LATER

A white chemistry teacher DRONES on at the front of the class. White students busy themselves taking notes. In the back corner, newfound besties Red and Taylor sit at adjacent desks, giggling and whispering.

Red marvels at his very own clean desk.

RED
(whispering)
How did I even get my own desk? I'm
just visiting!

Taylor smirks and shrugs, seems to be jotting in his worn chemistry textbook. Red tries to stifle his delight and focus on finding that PRIZED POSSESSION.

RED (CONT'D)
(whispering)
So tell me, if it's not in the
gymnasium or the library or the dark
room, it's got to be hidden in a
classroom, right?

He keeps writing, but Taylor's having a hard time playing coy with his bud. A beat, fuck it.

TAYLOR
(whispering)
You've already been where it is.
(then)
And he's an even bigger fan of the
game than we are.

Red absorbs the clue, tucks it in the back of his mind.

RED
(whispering)
Do you usually take notes right on
the page?

TAYLOR
 (whispering)
 Oh, I'm not taking notes.
 (doodling)
 This book has just about kicked the
 bucket, so we'll secondhand it to
 some Negro school.
 (finishing)
 I like to make sure they get a proper
 salutation.

Taylor snickers as he hands his textbook to Red. What color he has escapes Red's face as he reads the doodle: "SLAVES CAN'T READ".

A wave of anger, shame, and nausea washes over Red as Taylor proudly nods.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 Pretty boss, huh? See the trick is
 to write on an important lesson page
 so they have to either keep it or
 ruin the lesson.

Red SLAMS the book shut, startling Taylor and the entire class. Red quickly finds his composure.

RED
 (to teacher)
 Sorry.

The teacher carries on with his droning.

TAYLOR
 What gives?

RED
 (clenched)
 Nothing. Must've been the tuna.

Red rises and calmly walks out of the class. Taylor furrows his brow, suspicious.

INT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - BATHROOM - LATER

Water runs from the sink. Red splashes his face, looks at himself in the mirror. He scowls, mutters to himself.

RED
 Confound racist with his confound
 clues...
 (mocking)
 You've already been where it is.
 (gasp)
 Principal's office!

INT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - JANITOR'S OFFICE - LATER

A miserable Sam enters and is immediately grabbed by a desperate Larry.

LARRY

Why'd you go into classroom 401,
boy? Why!

SAM

G-get off of me.

Sam brushes away.

LARRY

You gave her a taste and now that
goddamned she-devil is ravenous.

But Sam doesn't care. He slams his bucket and mop into the corner.

LARRY (CONT'D)

The hell's gotten into you!?

SAM

The world!

(then)

Look at this -- you break your back
for th-these p-people and they st-
stick you in an overgrown c-closet!

LARRY

Now, wait a--

SAM

You sh-should stand up for yourself,
d-d-demand their respect!

Larry shrinks.

SAM (CONT'D)

(deflating)

I don't w-want to be a garbageman.
Or an alcoholic. Or a d-deadbeat.

LARRY

(but...)

I'm not an alcoholic--

SAM

I just want... that st-stupid
Riverside bowl.

LARRY

The Riverside fishbowl?

Sam perks up.

SAM
The one that was stolen.

LARRY
(shaking head)
Those boys -- worst basketball players
I ever seen.
(then)
You know, everytime they lose, they
be stealin' from the other team.
Accumulated quite a bit of booty.
(finally)
And the principal be the ring leader.

Energized, Sam darts out the "office". Larry grabs the mop and bucket, slowly follows.

LARRY (CONT'D)
(sigh)
Mrs. Amsterdam's gonna eat me alive.

INT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - LATER

Red enters with stealth, making sure nobody's around to bust him.

For the first time he's noticing the odd keepsakes decorating the room -- basketball banners from multiple neighboring high schools, broken basketball trophies awarded to everyone EXCEPT Chattanooga High.

Even the cape on the taxidermy bulldog reads: "FIGHTING BULLDOGS".

RED
Confound thieves.

He notices a plastic sandwich bag filled with an egg salad sandwich resting on the desk. Blech. He quickly searches the booty, and finally finds...

SOMETHING on a bookcase, covered with a silky blue & white flag.

Like Indiana Jones, Red slowly uncovers it, revealing a FISHBOWL with a Riverside High sticker at the top. And floating about inside it? A classic, if dumb-as-shit, 1960s pet:

RED (CONT'D)
("gotcha")
Sea monkeys--

SAM (O.S.)
Finally showing your tr-true colors,
huh?

Red replaces the silky flag over the bowl and turns to come face to face with a disgusted Sam.

RED
We have to get out of here.
("trust me")
It's a right-good hell on earth--

SAM
N-not without that bowl.

Sam pushes past Red, but Red grabs Sam's sleeve.

RED
If I wasn't black, I wouldn't feel
like somebody just punched me in the
gut.

Sam considers this, but rips his sleeve away. A beat as they size each other up -- Red suddenly lunges for the bowl, but Sam pulls him back.

They're in the midst of a shoving match when--

Taylor, the jocks, and the principal enter, shocked.

TAYLOR
I knew it!

Sam quickly looks to the floor, downtrodden. Red panics, a deer in headlights.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
He's trying to steal our spoils.

Red hyperventilates, but Taylor points his finger at...

SAM! The white men close in. Taylor smacks Red on the back.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
And I bet 'ol Skippy here was tryin'
to stop 'em. Way to go, Skippy.

Not sure how to play this, Red'd eyes just dart around.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
(re: Sam)
I knew I recognized this twit roaming
our halls.
(then)
How's it shakin', Shiny? Had a
feelin' you'd make a fantastic garbage
man one day.

Taunting laughter from the jocks. Red's jaw tightens, hating this, but also feeling utterly helpless.

WHITE PRINCIPAL

(rubbing forehead)

I wonder if it'll always be this
hard to find respectable help.

(then)

Well, boy. What do you have to say
for yourself?

Still looking at the ground, Sam blinks away the frustration,
his nostrils flaring, fists tightening.

SAM

I... was j-j-just--

TAYLOR

J-j-just what, Shiny?

More laughter, more heckling -- poking fun at his stutter.
Sam's eyes bulge, then suddenly narrow and twitch.

Just outside the office, Larry stands with his mop and bucket,
watching in awe. Everything slows to a crawl, then out of
nowhere--

SAM

Sh-sh-shut... MOTHERFUCKER, SHUT UP!

Everyone flinches. HARD.

WHITE PRINCIPAL

How dare you--

SAM

Motherfucker, I said shut the fuck
up!

Frightened, the principal backs off.

The cocktail of bullshit has finally pushed him over the
edge -- he stalks the room with a familiar swagger, a bold
confidence, a stealy gaze -- the foul-mouthed anti-hero we've
come to know and love, born in this moment.

WHITE JOCK #1

We c-called the police--

Sam POUNDS the shit out of the desk, everyone jumps.

SAM

(nostrils flaring)

Oh, I'm sorry. Did I break your
concentration?! Please, continue.

TAYLOR

Listen, we don't want any trouble--

SAM
Sit your ass down.

The white men quickly take seats. Red remains standing, but on edge, fading back towards the bookcase.

Sam continues to pace with conviction. He spots the egg salad sandwich, leaves the empty SANDWICH BAG behind -- Red eyes it.

SAM (CONT'D)
(to principal)
I'm famished. May I?

The principal nods, and Sam downs it in three bites.

SAM (CONT'D)
Goddamn, motherfucker! That was delicious, thank you.
(then)
Now, I've been trying real hard to be a good Christian -- a righteous brotha. But y'all haven't exactly made things a walk in the park.

The school bell RINGS, one of the jocks rises for class, but Sam calmly gestures for him to remain seated. He abides.

SAM (CONT'D)
What's fucked up is, I've been coal my entire life. And motherfuckers like yourselves were nice enough to remind me of that fact every chance you got.
(then)
But the thing with coal? His long lost love is pressure. And when coal and pressure get to fuckin'? Well shit, negro. You start makin' diamond babies!
(then)
It took me a while to figure it out, but I get it now. You need me, and I need you. You need me to make yourselves feel superior and powerful. And I need you to draw out the best in me, to make me a diamond.
(leaning in)
You need me, and I need you.
(leaning back)
And as a sign of my gratitude, I'm gonna give you a gift.

Sam takes a dramatic beat.

SAM (CONT'D)
I'm going to let you call me a nigga.
Free and clear.

The white men share concerned looks. Even Red and Larry's eyes widen.

SAM (CONT'D)
(pleasant)
Go ahead, I know you want to. It's how you see us, isn't it?

Sam stares a terrified Taylor in the eyes.

SAM (CONT'D)
(not pleasant)
Isn't it, motherfucker?!

Taylor can't stop shaking his head, mouth agape.

SAM (CONT'D)
(to the room)
Nobody?

They're all frozen, shitting themselves. So Sam struts over to the bookcase and calmly takes the Riverside fishbowl, keeping it covered with the silky flag.

SAM (CONT'D)
Then I guess you'll be showing this level of respect and deference to everyone, won't you?

They all nod vigorously. Sam strides out.

SAM (CONT'D)
Solid.

Leaving the white men in a haze. Sam passes a stunned Larry.

LARRY
You didn't sutter once.

SAM
Keep them in check.

LARRY
(smiling, grateful)
I will now.

SAM
Good, cause I gotta get the hell up out this motherfucka.

Sam takes off running with the covered fish bowl, doing his best to prevent it from splashing.

PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Back inside, Red slowly steps past the still dazed white men.

TAYLOR
(to Red)
Can you believe that?

RED
Believe it?! Confounded, I endorse
it! And you know why?
(big reveal)
Because I'm black!

Crickets.

TAYLOR
(scoff)
No you're not, Skippy.

Offended, Red scowls as everyone rises to leave.

RED
It's Skip... damnit. And nobody's
better than JAMES BROWN!

GASP.

TAYLOR
You are black!

James Brown's iconic GROWL kicks off his hit *I Got You* as Red races out of the room, with the students giving chase!

INT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - CONTINUOUS

Red darts down the immaculate hallways, checking his six.

The commotion draws WHITE STUDENTS and TEACHERS to the doors of their respective classrooms, in time to see Red zoom by, followed by Taylor and the jocks, hot on his heels.

Slipping and sliding as he takes a corner at top speed, Red catches up to Sam, who's slowed down by his fishbowl balancing act. They share a look -- at times like these, beef goes on the back burner.

RED
(to Sam)
This way!

Red takes another hot corner, Sam follows.

Their eyes light up at the sight of the main entrance up ahead. Salvation.

They look back to see Taylor and the jocks fading at the opposite end of the hall, out of range. Red smirks, but when he turns back around terror wipes his face...

Sam puts on the breaks and Red skids to halt, falling on his ass. Eyes bulging at the sight of a white, stone-cold badass rocking shiny aviators, dressed in uniform blues. He strolls through the door.

RED (CONT'D)

KKK Cop!

FUCK -- he does exist! Red scrambles to his feet, yanks Sam by the elbow, and they run back the way they came.

The KKK Cop grits his teeth, instinctively gives chase.

Caught between a rock and a hard place, Red and Sam slow down in the middle of the hall. Up ahead, Taylor and the jocks close in fast. Back behind, the KKK Cop approaches hard. They're cooked until--

The girl's bathroom door suddenly swings open.

LARRY

Through here!

You don't have to tell them twice -- Sam and Red dive inside, following Larry past occupied stalls...

WHITE GIRL (O.S.)

Get out!

The SCREAMING girls fade as Larry leads the boys out the bathroom's second entrance.

ON KKK COP

Who freezes when he realizes the bathroom door is marked with the female symbol. But Taylor and the jocks don't hesitate for a second, power through. More screaming girls.

ON RED AND SAM

As they follow Larry through the halls towards a back exit. Red gets out first. Before Sam steps out the door...

SAM

(to Larry)

I wouldn't mind being a garbage man--

LARRY

Shoot, I'd mind! You destined for so much more -- don't let nobody tell ya different.

Larry winks, holds open the door. But a hand grabs Sam's sleeve. A white hand.

Sam and Larry recoil at the sight of Mrs. Amsterdam!

MRS. AMSTERDAM
(to Sam)
We're not done. Not by a long shot.

Larry grips his mop stick and duster, creating a makeshift cross.

LARRY
(to Mrs. Amsterdam)
Get back, she-devil -- back I say!
(to Sam)
Go!

Sam slips out the door. Mrs. Amsterdam pouts as she backs away from Larry.

MRS. AMSTERDAM
(sensual)
You're gonna pay for that.

LARRY
Not if I hip your husband, Principal
Amsterdam, to your deplorable
behavior.

She considers, scoffs, and storms off.

Taylor and the jocks barrel around the corner and immediately slip, CRASHING to the floor and sliding into a wall.

Larry coyly foot-nudges a slippery-when-wet sign into view as he continues "mopping."

LARRY (CONT'D)
Watch out now.

They struggle to their feet, look around. No interlopers, damn. The boys continue down the hall as Larry carries on, whistling with a smile.

EXT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - BACK LAWN - LATER

Red holds up a low branch so Sam can duck through the hedge lining the school's perimeter.

SAM
This don't change nothin'.

And Sam takes off with the covered fishbowl. Red bites his tongue then ducks through the hedge.

Yards away, at the edge of the parking lot, the KKK Cop watches -- on his mirrored sunglasses we see the boys disappear in the treeline.

He drags a cigarette, drops it to the cement. Then kills it with his boot heel. The KKK Cop fumes.

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

A basketball game in full swing. Douglas leads the Riverside High Trojans, in blue & white jerseys, against another all black team, donning green away colors.

The stands are filled to the brim with raucous black high school students and teachers, as well as a few proud parents. Black cheerleaders inject energy from the sidelines.

In the front row sits Trish and Vi, mesmerized by the players' lean bodies and flexed muscles. They CHEER a Riverside basket.

Vi locks eyes with TEAMMATE #2, who's riding the pine. He smiles, she twinkles her fingers.

VI
What a hunk.

PATSY (O.S.)
We're losing.

Reveal a bitter and uninterested Patsy seated next to her friends.

PATSY (CONT'D)
And he's contributed absolutely nothing.

Vi scoffs.

TRISH
("momma likes")
He sure looks good doing absolutely nothing.

Vi's on the cusp of dropping her signature catchphrase, but Patsy beats her to the punch--

PATSY
(mocking)
I know that's right!

Patsy rolls her eyes as her friends give her the side eye -- what crawled up her ass?

The HORN sounds, ending the half, with Riverside down. Douglas and his discouraged teammates mope towards the locker room.

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - LOCKER ROOM - LATER

A feeble BLACK COACH (50s), with child-bearing hips, pulls at what remains of his hair. He's damn near in tears.

BLACK COACH

You're state champions for Pete's sake!

(then)

Now, I don't know why y'all playin' like you're Chatty High, but you've got a half to fix it.

(sniffling)

I need a tissue.

He storms off as Douglas and his team hang their heads. Silence, then suddenly...

SAM (O.S.)

I'll cure what ail's ya.

Eyes rise to find a proud Sam standing before them, still wearing his coveralls, holding the covered fishbowl.

Douglas beams.

DOUGLAS

Don't be joshin' now.

TEAMMATE #1

Is that what I think it is?

Sam slow-nods as the team closes in.

Douglas grips the blue & white flag atop the bowl and oh-so-carefully pulls it away.

Douglas's broad, anticipatory smile falls off the earth -- that twinkle in his eye? Dead.

DOUGLAS

Nigga, what is this?!

Shocked, Sam looks down to find the fishbowl filled with scummy water, but NO SEA MONKEYS. Sam holds it up to the light. Nada.

SAM

Fuck.

RED (O.S.)

What's a soup without the beef?

Heads turn to find Red strolling in, hands in pockets. Sam sets the bowl on a table, grumbles and stews knowingly.

RED (CONT'D)
Gentlemen, I give you the prestige.

Red pulls from his pocket the white principal's SANDWICH BAG, now filled with SEA MONKEYS and just enough scummy water to keep them alive.

The basketball team loses their shit -- not in a masculine manner, mind you, but with the tears, hugs, and praises-to-Jesus typically reserved for mothers when their children come home from war.

Red pours the sea monkeys back into their original home, they swim around.

Douglas and his teammates press their faces to the fishbowl glass.

DOUGLAS
(to sea monkeys)
Hiya, guys -- you've gotten so big.

TEAMMATE #1
Look, there's Leroy -- and Eleanor --
and Charlie -- hey, Charlie.

TEAMMATE #2
(breaking down)
I missed them so much...

Red and Sam stare curiously at these men they thought were adonises. Douglas puts a comforting hand on Teammate #2's shoulder before rising and addressing Sam and Red.

DOUGLAS
(wiping eyes)
Sam. Well, you brought the hog...
(to Red)
But you brought the bacon --
congratualtions, Yellow, you just
earned yourself a state champion
sized endorsement!

The team ROARS, their pride and confidence restored. They take it with them as they hoot and holler back towards the court. Red tries to mask his fist pump, looks around but Sam is nowhere to be found.

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - LATER

Douglas and the Trojans are really kicking ass now -- hitting graceful fadeaways and jamming nasty alley-oops.

The crowd cries out, loving the comeback.

Red snakes his way through the congested stands, annoying those whose feet he has to climb over.

RED
Excuse me. Sorry.

He finds the seat he was targeting, sits. Unable to contain his glee, he leans in and taps the shoulder of Patsy, seated right in front of him, holding a small bag of popcorn. She peers over her shoulder.

PATSY
(unenthused)
Oh. Hi.

She turns back around. Red thinks, then leans in again, taps her shoulder.

RED
I got the team's endorsement.

She doesn't even bother looking back this time.

PATSY
Fantastic.

What the fuck.

RED
I'm going to win--

She whips around, startling him.

PATSY
Is that what you care about? Winning?
("fuck your response")
What ever happened to people running
because they respect the position?
Because they want to reweave the
fabric of our lives? Because they
actually believe in something?!

Red's tongue tied, so she turns back around.

PATSY (CONT'D)
Forget it.

Unfortunately, Red knows exactly where she's coming from now, after witnessing what Taylor did to his textbook. He sighs, speaks to the back of her head.

RED
(heartfelt)
I believe... that the stains of racism
are still deeply embedded in our
society. And I want to do everything
in my power to build a healthy space
for our students, free from the
tarnish of ignorance.

Red takes a breath -- at least he got it off his chest. Suddenly, Patsy blindly reaches back with her bag of popcorn, offering Red a bite. He smiles, grabs a handful.

Beaming as they watch the Trojans dominate. Patsy digs into her popcorn just as...

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - LATER

Darius digs into his, but Deacon Black snatches it away. Darius hangs his head as they walk away from the student-run concession stand.

DEACON BLACK
Look at this motherfucker here --
you want some popcorn? Then win!

They huddle up with an irritated Sam, hanging just outside the gym entrance. Sam keeps an eye on his idol's treatment of Darius. We overhear the cheers and shoe squeaks from the game.

DEACON BLACK (CONT'D)
(to Sam and Darius)
I can't believe you two idiots let
that high-and-yella humiliate you
like that.

Deacon flicks Darius in the shoulder.

DEACON BLACK (CONT'D)
Stand up straight, nigga.

Fuming, Deacon gnaws at the popcorn like a horse.

DEACON BLACK (CONT'D)
Just like his high-yella daddy.
Think he better than a nigga cause
he on the good side'a town now --
you know I saved that motherfucka
from a whoopin' in the third grade?
Shit negro, and taught him everything
he know 'bout pussy in the sixth!
(then)
Nah, they gone get theirs. Well, at
least we got our back up plan --
always gotta have a back up plan.

He flicks Darius in the shoulder again.

DEACON BLACK (CONT'D)
I said stand up straight--

SAM
("enough")
Stop, damn.

Amused, Deacon narrows an eye at Sam.

DEACON BLACK
Whatchew say, my nigga?

Darius's eyes go wide -- they've never spoken to his father like that before. Sam doesn't blink.

SAM
I said stop.

DEACON BLACK
(tickled)
So tough. You even said it without stammerin'.
(wicked)
I'm impressed.

Sam's jaw tightens.

DEACON BLACK (CONT'D)
Now unbunch them breeches. Hard love's the only love--

SAM
No. There's no we -- you're just using us to get back at your childhood friend. And I don't have nothin' to do with that.

DEACON BLACK
I see the nigglet think he's become the nig-man.
(then)
Well listen here, jack. I will do and say whatever the fucks I please, cause--

SAM
No, you listen, motherfucker!

Deacon recoils, covering his heart -- impressed as much as scared.

SAM (CONT'D)
(nostrils flaring)
I am the captain of this ship. I am the keeper of my brotha. And come hell or high water, I will be the champion of my future. Nobody else.
(then)
Do you understand me, my nigga?

Deacon can't seem to wrap his head around this changing of the guard.

SAM (CONT'D)
Do you understand me?!

Sizing Sam up, Deacon smirks, relinquishing the badass throne.

DEACON BLACK
Okay, nigga.
(then)
Okay.

Sam's gaze cuts through him as he strides away. Sam stops, looks back.

SAM
(to Darius)
Let's go, nigga!

Sam keeps on walking. Darius' eyes light up. He SNATCHES the popcorn out of his father's hands, and hustles to catch up with his true friend.

The loud HORN ending the game sounds.

DEACON BLACK
(pleasantly surprised)
I created a motherfuckin' monster.

He pockets his hands, turns to head back inside the

GYMNASIUM

Where Douglas and the Trojans celebrate on the court with high-fives and skin slaps. We make our way to the rickety scoreboard: HOME - 89 vs. VISITORS - 56...

SMASH TO BLACK.

ELECTION DAY

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

There's a thick buzz and excitement in the air -- from the hallways, to the bus "classrooms", to the gym, to the cafeteria -- students whisper, giggle, and gossip about the day's election.

We see STUDENTS erecting dozens of VOTING BOOTHS throughout the school, equipped with wooden ballot boxes and privacy curtains.

The MAINTENANCE MAN teeters atop a wobbly ladder, securing a net, filled with blue & white BALLOONS, to the gymnasium ceiling.

Below him, members of the SCHOOL ELECTION BOARD (40s) hang a banner that reads: "CONGRATULATIONS PRESIDENT!".

They cover it with a velvet cloth rigged to fall.

A black hand adjusts the microphone, dusts the podium clean as a finishing touch.

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - LATER

Not nearly as fancy as the Chattanooga High School dining space, but serviceable. It's bustling at the moment, making Red all the more anxious.

He's seated at a worn table, knee bouncing. He musses his hair, restoring its curl. Time seems to slow as he scans the room, as if trying to sense his chances.

He clocks Douglas and his teammates wearing letterman jackets in one corner, looking suave as fuck. Douglas shoots Red with a finger gun, nods.

Red continues to scan, clocking Patsy as she walks by. She makes eye contact, hides a bashful smile. He's got this.

But just as his confidence builds, we land on Sam and Darius in another corner, surrounded by members of the marching band. Sam appears uncomfortable and agitated.

Red just stares at his oblivious opponent, studying him, students passing back and forth through his sightline -- then suddenly, Sam's looking right at Red with a stink eye--

Shit. Red quickly looks away, scrapes at a nonexistent stain on his shirt. Someone takes a seat across from him, but it's just--

MORGAN
Big day, negro.

Deep breath.

RED
Yeah.

MORGAN
Relax.

Sam, Darius, and the marching band stroll by, paying Red no mind.

MORGAN (CONT'D)
(re: Sam)
Look, obviously you probably aren't gonna get the marching band. But we knew that going in.
(then)
Otherwise? You're sitting pretty -- you're in the driver's seat!
(MORE)

MORGAN (CONT'D)

(then)

Can you feel it? Feels good, huh?

Good pep talk. Red smirks, slaps Morgan some skin.

RED

I'm confident. You just never know until the final tally.

MORGAN

Well, I'm just glad you didn't go full demagogue, ya dig.

RED

What?

MORGAN

You know, losing your integrity -- letting the ends justify the means.

(dramatic)

Doing whatever it takes.

Red frowns -- the last thing he wants is to lose his integrity, especially now.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

My cousin says cats that waste honor?
Never had it to begin with.

Huh? Morgan rises, excited.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Time to vote!

Red takes a moment to gather himself, then rises.

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

Students rush to get in one of a dozen lines building all over the school -- one by one, they file into the private voting booths to cast their ballots.

We INTERCUT with kids pouring into the GYMNASIUM, eager to grab their seats -- the student body is noticeably more engrossed than they were three days ago.

Trish, Vi, Douglas, Darius, Morgan, Patsy, and Sam all cast their ballots as...

MISS RIVERSIDE sings (MOS, thank God) the National Anthem on stage -- students and teachers cover their ears, cringe.

A CHANT swells from the audience.

BLACK STUDENTS
 Blue and white, fight fight! Blue
 and white, fight fight! Blue and
 white, fight fight!

It carries into the closing moments of the MONTAGE, where Red stands in a booth. Deep breath, he folds up his paper scrap, kisses it, then jams it into the ballot box.

BLACK STUDENTS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Blue and white, fight fight!

He turns, faces the closed curtain. Then quickly rips the curtain open--

And the CHANT STOPS.

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - GYMNASIUM - LATER

You could hear a sea monkey drop. Everyone's on the edge of their seat, glued to the stage, where a BLACK TEACHER hands Miss Riverside an envelope -- she opens it, pulls out an index card, and studies the results.

Red's sitting towards the front of the crowd, next to Morgan. Sam's seated in the nose bleeds, next to Darius.

Miss Riverside peaks up with an impish grin. Mr. Irving, sitting on the side of the stage, rolls his eyes -- just announce the goddamn winner.

MISS RIVERSIDE
 It's a landslide! Your new council
 president is Skip. Red. Dorsey!

The crowd ROARS to its feet. Everyone except Red, who buries his face in his hands, and Sam, who shrinks in his seat, folding his arms.

MORGAN
 (to Red)
 Get up, negro!

Morgan yanks Red to his feet. The applause is overwhelming.

Fighting joy-tears, Red makes his way across the row and towards the stage. He takes a moment, stands at the front of the dais, waving to his constituents, absorbing the respect and acknowledgement and acceptance he coveted.

On the count of three, Mr. Irving and the maintenance man tug on their respective ropes, causing balloons to shower Red just as the velvet cloth falls away from the wall behind him, exposing the congratulatory banner. The ROARS get louder.

Mr. Irving gestures for the kids to bring it down a notch, they abide. Red heads for the microphone, but Miss Riverside gives him a quick introduction first.

MISS RIVERSIDE
(re: index card)
With a vote of 1036 to 41, please
welcome Mr. President!

As Red reluctantly takes the podium, Mr. Irving furrows his brow, does math in his head.

RED
First of all--

MR. IRVING
Stop!

That's odd. Red turns to find Mr. Irving taking the index card from Miss Riverside. He looks at it, then looks to the black teacher -- is this right? The teacher shrugs -- yeah.

RED
As I was saying, I would first like
to thank--

MR. IRVING
I said stop, Mr. Dorsey.
(regrettably into mic)
Would Sam Jackson please come to the
stage.

GASPS from the audience. Confused, Sam reluctantly rises and makes the long, awkward walk down the aisle. All eyes on him. Red panicking.

RED
(to Mr. Irving)
What's happening?

Students once again on the edge of their seats -- this is better than *As the World Turns*!

As a clueless Sam steps on stage, Mr. Irving sighs.

MR. IRVING
(into mic)
There are only 983 students at our
school.

Murmurs from the crowd -- "Dorsey stuffed the ballots..."

MR. IRVING (CONT'D)
(to Red)
Would you care to explain? Was
winning so important?

But Red's thoroughly stunned, too frozen to speak. Shaking his head, Mr. Irving has no choice.

MR. IRVING (CONT'D)

(into mic)

Pursuant to voting code 7 dash B, if a candidate forges ballots in an effort to win, they are deemed disqualified.

Another collective GASP.

MR. IRVING (CONT'D)

Which means, by default...

Red's mouth hangs open, agony in his eyes.

MR. IRVING (CONT'D)

Mr. Jackson is your new council president.

The maintenance man looks at the empty net on the ceiling. Well shit. He flips balloons from the floor in a half-assed attempt to shower Sam.

Darius rises, applauds, though everyone else is unsure how to respond.

Sam unfurrows his brow, exhales, reluctantly accepting the news. Red simply turns and abruptly races out of the auditorium.

INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - BATHROOM - LATER

No tears, just shock as Red stares at himself in the mirror.

HALLWAY

Red exits the bathroom to find students whispering and staring. He does his best to ignore it, chin up as he walks.

He passes Douglas and the basketball team, who shake their heads with disgust.

He passes Morgan, who can't find the words, and simply frowns.

Red's making his way for the exit, but just before he gets there, he passes...

Trish, Vi, and Patsy. Trish and Vi are quick to turn their backs on Red. Patsy sighs, pleads with her eyes, practically begging him to say something, anything! But Red refuses to dignify the accusations and marches right out the door.

EXT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Where his excited, and clearly uninformed, family is waiting. His father holds a congratulatory cake, his mother a congratulatory balloon. His sister stands between them.

BILLY

Way to go--

RED

I didn't win.

FAY

("come again?")

But you secured the team endorsement.

RED

I didn't win.

Billy hands the cake to his wife, grips Red's shoulder.

BILLY

Now son. If we're talkin'
improprieties...

He balls up a fist as if to say "you know what that means." Red shakes his head.

RED

I just need a second. Please.

FAY

(concerned)

Okay. Well, we'll just wait over
here by the car.

His parents walk away with the cake and embarrassing balloon. Red looks to the heavens and takes a giant breath of fresh air. He looks down to find...

His sister, Dewana, still standing there, staring up at him, right in the eyes. As if appraising his soul. It creeps him out.

DEWANA

Kitty Kelly is odd and queer, but
not peculiar.

(then)

She likes battles, but not wars.

(then)

Isn't that interesting?

He grimaces.

RED

Can you not speak in riddles right
now.

She beckons for him to come close.

DEWANA
Losers win battles. Winners win
wars.
(intense)
Kitty Kelly likes winning.

With a pat on his cheek, she smiles. He straightens, frowns.

ON FAY AND BILLY

Waiting by the car. They turn to find Dewana skipping towards them. Alone.

FAY
Where's Skip?

DEWANA
("oh nothing, just...")
Finishing something.

Her parents share a curious look.

EXT. CHATTANOOGA NEIGHBORHOOD - LATER

As night falls, Sam and Darius parade through the streets, a small crowd of students following with a plain-clothes marching band accompaniment. Darius flicks a LIGHTER, holds the flame up high.

It's a lively victory lap, akin to a New Orleans procession -- black adults seated on their porches wave and applaud as the new president passes by.

We RISE above the revelry to the steep...

ROOFTOP

Of a one-story HOUSE, where an inconspicuous Red scans the festivities. Eyes narrowing, when he suddenly hears a RUSTLING behind him. Sartled, he looks back to find--

Morgan climbing the ladder. Red ignores him, continues spying. Morgan lies prone next to his friend, peaking out over the gutter. A beat.

MORGAN
If I knew you were gonna stuff the
ballots, I coulda helped ya be a
little less obvious. Ya dig?

RED
What happened to honor?

MORGAN
 ("pfft")
 I don't listen to everything my cousin
 says.

Incredulous, Red shoots Morgan a side eye.

MORGAN (CONT'D)
 So what we gonna do?

RED
 I don't know yet.
 (then)
 But it's a war I have to win alone.

And with that, Red slaps his bud some skin, then scoots away from the edge, leaving an oddly impressed Morgan in his wake.

MORGAN
 (saluting)
 God speed.
 (then)
 Mr. President.

EXT. CHATTANOOGA NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

The parade has halted at a street corner. The entourage huddles around as Sam sparks a joint and smokes it with shut eyes and a wide smile -- his therapeutic treat after a hard-fought campaign.

The chatter is abruptly interrupted by--

RED (O.S.)
 Samuel L Jackson!

The crowd parts. Sam slowly turns to find Red approaching. Alone.

RED (CONT'D)
 You know, I always wondered what the
 L stood for.

Sam drags his joint, exhales through his nose.

SAM
 (with a grin)
 Stands for lucky.

The crowd chuckles. Red holds his ground.

RED
 I was hoping it stood for lawful.
 (then)
 Because a lawful man would have the
 guts to admit when he cheated.

Murmurs. Sam takes another hit, hands the pot to Darius.

RED (CONT'D)
But I guess the L stands for liar.

Amused, Sam shakes his head.

SAM
Motherfucker, do you have a point?
Or are you just gonna dazzle us with
your command of the letter L?

Red laughs maniacally, holds up his hand as if begging the jokes to stop.

RED
I'm sure I could go on for hours
dazzling the likes of you with fancy
words. But I had something else in
mind.

SAM
Like what?

Red's laughter screeches to a halt.

RED
Like kicking your confounded ass!

Red CHARGES his towering rival, catching him off guard. Red spears Sam, taking him to the ground. Shocked, the crowd spreads out, cheers -- never one to pass up a good brawl.

Sam FLIPS Red over his head, gets back to his feet. Red pops up, they circle one another. Sam relies on his appreciation of Kung Fu films to get into a battle stance.

SAM
It's on, motherfucka!

Red puts up his dukes like a 1920's boxer -- overcoming his reluctance to settle things "like a man."

RED
It's about time!

What happens next is far from an impressive display of martial arts or trained combat. But what it lacks in technique, it makes up for in sheer determination, grit, and pride.

Sam has a massive size advantage, which he uses to toss and SWING his opponent around. But Red uses his quickness and heart to keep things even -- dodging kicks, CHOPPING the backs of knees, even biting ankles to tire Sam out.

The melee makes its away through the street and across yards. The crowd follows, cringing and hooting after every blow.

Sam finally sneaks in a clean PUNCH to the jaw, laying Red out cold on the sidewalk. It surprises him.

Spent, Sam pants, hands on knees. He straightens and we realize he's standing right in front of a familiar GIANT WOODEN SCULPTURE on the lawn of the mysterious White Lady from the blue pickup.

Darius scurries over.

DARIUS

You okay?

SAM

(re: joint)

Gimme that.

Sam snatches the weed from his friend, takes a healthy drag.

SAM (CONT'D)

Sonofabitch just kept comin'.

Unbeknownst to Sam, Red's eyes suddenly SHOOT open.

SAM (CONT'D)

But he was no match for this Tiger Style.

As the joint hangs from his lip, Sam demonstrates Kung Fu, tiger claw form, to an unimpressed Darius, when suddenly--

Out of nowhere, Red SPEARS Sam in the gut, driving them both CRASHING into one of the hideous wood sculptures.

INT. WHITE LADY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A closet light FLICKS on. Hands grab a SHOTGUN. Hands that belong to...

The WHITE LADY. She grumbles to herself.

WHITE LADY

(to herself)

I told 'em, goddamnit. I told 'em!

EXT. CHATTANOOGA NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

As Sam and Red roll around in the grass, the wooden sculpture teeters, pieces falling away from its supportive frame, until nothing is left but a giant wooden CROSS.

At the base of the cross, we find Sam's still burning joint, which ignites the lacquer -- flames quickly ride up the wood, just in time for...

INT. WHITE LADY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The White Lady to recoil at the sight of a GIANT BURNING CROSS outside her kitchen window! Scared to death, she drops the shotgun and darts back into the heart of her home.

EXT. CHATTANOOGA NEIGHBORHOOD - CONTINUOUS

Red and Sam continue to roll around, unaware of the unfortunate symbol they created.

However, the crowd is fully aware, jaws dropped. And the approaching COP SIRENS don't help -- they quickly disperse.

A swarm of SQUAD CARS close in, CHERRIES FLASHING. It finally grabs Red and Sam's attention. Oh Fuck. From the grass, still gripping each others' collars, they share a look -- let's book!

The cars screech to a halt, uniformed cops spilling out, as Sam and Red take off down the street.

ON RED AND SAM

Racing for dear life, hopping over parked cars, scaling fences. Half a dozen white policemen nip at their heels. This is not good.

Red damn near trips, stumbles. He looks around to find Sam has abandoned him, panics.

SAM (O.S.)

This way!

Red finds Sam straining through the rip of a tall fence. After Sam makes it, Red slides right through, just barely escaping the reach of an officer.

Sam helps Red to his feet. They take off, smashing through white bed sheets hanging from a clothesline, bursting free only to ram past a tire swing.

They stumble in the dirt, heading into the night when--

WHAM! The headlights of a squad car flash on, cutting through the darkness, stopping them in their tracks.

Time seems to slow, fear curling up their spines -- breaths accelerating, eyes swelling, as the door to the squad car flings open, and out steps...

The KKK COP, rocking his aviators at night. Evil incarnate.

Red's frozen with fear. And as the weed kicks in, Sam's eyes dart around for a salvation that doesn't exist -- behind the KKK Cop, from the depths of night, dozens of officers emerge, their eyes GLOWING YELLOW.

Sam spins around in time to see more cops squeezing through the rip in the fence, determined strides through the hanging bed sheets which fluidly fall off the clotheslines and form, cloaking the cops in KLAN ROBES.

Panicking, Sam turns back around to find KKK Cop standing in front of them, backlit by the hellish red and white lights of his car. KKK Cop spits in the dirt, grits his teeth.

KKK COP
It's time we put an end to this.

Red falls to his knees, nearly in tears. Sam stands his ground, but here's the thing, he's not dealing with some punk kid -- this is the fucking police, in the 1960s South!

Sam can see his trembling reflection in the aviators, caves. He drops to his knees, but keeps his chin high -- do with me what you will.

KKK Cop points behind the boys.

KKK COP (CONT'D)
(to officer)
String up that rope.

Oh Lord. Red clasps his hands in prayer.

KKK COP (CONT'D)
Y'all thought you could get away
with terrorizin' my dominion?

Sam blinks through the horror.

An OFFICER slings a long rope high, trying to get it over a thick tree branch. He's struggling. His PARTNER takes a crack at it, fails.

KKK COP (CONT'D)
(to boys)
I'm the only terror 'round here.
(distracted)
I said string up that rope!

OFFICER
We're tryin' -- the blasted thing's
heavier 'en it looks--

KKK COP
Well put your damn hip into it, Todd!

The Officer fails again -- disgusted, KKK Cop walks behind the boys to do it himself. Red and Sam are too scared to look.

KKK COP (CONT'D)
(tossing rope)
Ain't got time for this.

KKK Cop gets the rope over the branch, hands it back to the Officer.

KKK COP (CONT'D)
(to boys)
Get the dirt off your knees. I said stand!

Red and Sam slowly rise to their feet, backs to the rope, shaking.

RED
I know it's in your nature, KKK Cop,
but you do have the power to change.

Incensed, the KKK Cop cocks his head.

KKK COP
Whatchew say?

RED
I'm sure you're familiar with The Scarlet Letter? Sometimes a life of shame is far worse than death.

The cops share a look -- what the fuck is this kid talking about?

KKK COP
Death?!
(shaking head)
You boys high? Turn around.

Red and Sam slowly turn to find the cops struggling to resecure the tire swing that was knocked off the tree branch. Oh. Sam shoots Red a guilty side-eye.

SAM
(sotto)
I'm high as fuck.

KKK COP
(to Officer)
Get this rope secure. Don't want Mrs. Annabelle's children breaking a neck.
(to boys)
Let's go for a ride.

Cops lead Red and Sam to the back of the squad car.

INT. SQUAD CAR - LATER (MOVING)

They drive past the still smoldering cross in the White Lady's lawn, as she tosses water to put it out. From the backseat, shame paints Sam and Red's faces as they look out the window.

Red peeks up to catch the KKK Cop's aviators in the rearview mirror, clearly watching them.

INT. POLICE STATION - SHERIFF'S OFFICE - LATER

The KKK Cop sits at his cluttered desk, smoking a square. He's still wearing those goddamn sunglasses.

Red and Sam sit in chairs facing him, at an utter loss.

A pregnant beat.

KKK COP

The KKK Cop.

(then)

It's what y'all call me, huh?

They just stare, swallow hard.

KKK COP (CONT'D)

You questioning my decency? That what y'all gettin' at?

Silence. He drags on his cigarette.

KKK COP (CONT'D)

Get one thing straight. I'm what stands in the way of chaos.

(then)

And as you might've guessed, a goddamned burning cross in a neighbor's yard is chaotic!

(then)

I don't care if you're negro, engine, oriental, or a good 'ol fashion cracka. That dog don't hunt 'round here. Am I clear?

Red nods quickly. But Sam just stares, trying to match the steely gaze of this so called authority figure.

KKK Cop leans back in his chair, amused. Sam's moxie inspires Red.

RED

It was my fault! Throw the book at me.

Sam and Red share a look -- a bond? Nope.

SAM
(to KKK Cop)
I'm okay with that.

Appalled, Red stink-eyes Sam.

RED
It was an accident, sir. We didn't
mean to burn--

The KKK Cop stomps his foot to shut them up, rubs his forehead.

KKK COP
Of course it was a goddamned accident.
(then)
I ain't never heard of no black folks
torching a cross on a white lawn!
(then)
Plus. She refuses to press charges.

Red and Sam absorb the White Lady's gesure, until the cop suddenly SLAPS the desk with both hands and leans in close.

KKK COP (CONT'D)
But I still want an apology!

RED
We couldn't be more sorry--

KKK COP
Not about that!

Without looking away, he grabs something from the corner of his desk and plants it in front of them: it's a name plate that reads "SHERIFF KYLE KENNETH KLOSS".

They look down at it. Red furrows his brow -- the sheriff's initials are literally KKK.

KKK COP (CONT'D)
My name is Sheriff Kloss. Sheriff
Kyle Kenneth Kloss.
(then)
And that's it. Understand?

RED
Yes, sir.

The sheriff puts his sunglasses back on. A beat.

RED (CONT'D)
So. No punishment?

Kloss plants his boots on the desk, signals for them to scram.

KKK COP
I'll leave that to your guardians.

Sam's eyes balloon -- oh fuck.

EXT. POLICE STATION - LATER

Sam and Red sheepishly exit to find Sam's mother and auntie waiting, as well as Red's father.

The boys split, advancing to their respective guardians.

ON SAM

As he walks behind Aunt Mavis and Sarah, head down.

AUNT MAVIS
(shaking her head)
I give the boy an opportunity to
emote and express like the acting
greats of a bygone era, and what do
I get?
(then)
A thief, stealin' my good wigs and
best makeup!

Mavis gives him the once over with disgust.

AUNT MAVIS (CONT'D)
Now look atcha. Clothes tattered,
Sunday shoes scuffed to high heaven.
(to Sarah)
He look like a no good bum! There,
I said it.

SARAH
He sure looks like somethin'.

Sam peeks up at his mother, but she can barely look at him. It's maddening.

SAM
That high-yella nigga started it!
Hell, I was just finishing that
motherfu--

He finds the women have stopped walking. They're staring at him, hands on hips -- no nonsense.

SARAH
No, you will not. Not on my watch.

The only authority figures that matter.

SAM
Yes, ma'am.

They carry on to their car.

INT. BILLY'S CAR - LATER

Red sits in the passenger seat. His father on the driver side. Silence -- Billy feeling a tad guilty for encouraging his son to fight. He's about to start the engine, but then pauses, searches for words.

BILLY

You know why your great grandfather
was so obsessed with winning at life?

As Red listens curiously, we FLASH to the DREAM SEQUENCE from earlier:

Where Captain Jack sits on the floor, smirking defiantly at us.

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

It's because winning breeds respect.

Back on Red and his father. Red absorbs this, until Billy surprises him...

BILLY (CONT'D)

But he was wrong.

(then)

He wasn't respected because of what he invented, or what money he made.

(then)

He was respected because he believed in something, and was willing to stand up for it. You believed in yourself, son, and that's something nobody can take away.

Getting it, Red nods. Billy nods. He starts the car and they drive off.

EXT. WHITE LADY'S HOUSE - DAY

Though the rest of her ugly art remains intact, there's a torched mound of ash and char where the cross stood.

A gloved hand jams a shovel into the mound and dumps debris into a wheelbarrow. The hands belong to...

Red, sweating beneath the hot midday sun. He wipes his forehead, peers through the bright light to see Sam approaching. Red keeps on shoveling.

RED

(cold)

What are you doing here?

SAM
I don't usually apologize to white
people, but--

RED
I'm not white!

SAM
Not you, nigga!

Red follows Sam's gaze to a window, where the watchful White Lady quickly ducks out of sight.

Sam rolls up his sleeve, guides the wheelbarrow to a nearby dumpster, empties it.

SAM (CONT'D)
She tell you why she ain't press
charges?

Red shakes his head.

RED
Haven't even spoken with her. I
just showed up and got to shoveling.

Interesting. Suddenly her front door unlocks and creaks open. The boys share a look -- spooky.

SAM
Don't be rude, go on--

RED
You go!

They muster the courage together, dropping the shovel and wheelbarrow. They cautiously step inside.

INT. WHITE LADY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dim lighting casts somewhat chilling shadows, but otherwise homey and inviting.

RED
Ma'am?

Sam's busy looking at her pictures on the wall -- classic wedding photos and awkward family portraits.

RED (CONT'D)
Hello--

He jumps when the White Lady steps out of the kitchen. She sizes them up, eyes landing on their shoes. A beat.

RED (CONT'D)
Oh, sorry.

Red takes off his shoes.

WHITE LADY
 I'd offer y'all water or lemonade.
 But the faucet don't work, and I
 didn't make none.
 (then)
 I figured a little shade might help
 speed this along.

She grumbles at Sam, who still hasn't taken off his loafers -- he's too busy being mesmerized by a particular picture.

SAM
 You know Martin Luther King, Jr.?

She swats the air.

WHITE LADY
 Know is a strong word.
 (then)
 Marched with 'em though. Down in
 Albany. He was nice enough to take
 a photo.

Red takes a look and sure enough, hanging right there on the wall is a picture of Dr. King with a smiling White Lady. Sam's stunned, can hardly contain his excitement.

SAM
 Well, what is he like?

She takes a moment to think. The memory makes her smile.

WHITE LADY
 Pure.
 (then)
 Like everything he said, and
 everything he did, was... for the
 right reasons.

The sentiment lands on Red and Sam as they share a look -- their behavior not exactly admirable the past couple of days.

She points to another picture of Dr. King standing next to light-skinned Thurgood Marshall, with slicked back hair and a mustache.

WHITE LADY (CONT'D)
 And that light fella is Mr. Thurgood Marshall. While Dr. King fights in the streets, he fights in the courtrooms.
 (then)
 They don't always see eye to eye, but I reckon we need 'em both.

Red and Sam size each other up.

WHITE LADY (CONT'D)

Now, y'all finish up.
(then)
And tell them other hooligans this
is my home too, and I ain't leavin'.

SAM

(quick)
Yes, ma'am.

Red takes in Sam's newfound respect for this woman, smiles.

RED

Yes, ma'am.

WHITE LADY

Oh, and between you and me? I ain't
got no shotgun shells. But the rest
of 'em don't need to know that.

She cackles, disappearing into the heart of her home as Red
puts on his shoes and heads out.

EXT. WHITE LADY'S HOUSE - LATER

Together, Red and Sam dump the last of the char into the
garbage. An awkward pause as they look around.

Red breaks it by wiping his hand on his pants and extending
it. Unlike before, Sam accepts the handshake. Good eye
contact, respect in its purest form.

RED

Well. I guess the honorable thing
to do, is for us to both forfeit the
presidency and give it to someone
more deserving.

Sam smirks, nods.

SAM

Nah, nigga -- I'm going to Morehouse.

Sam walks off.

RED

But you cheated!

SAM

I didn't cheat.

RED

At least admit it, there's no one
around!

SAM
I didn't cheat!

Red scowls, but can't help but chuckle as he shakes his head.

EXT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A swarm of students enter the main entrance.

Patsy Palm is stopped on the stairs by a tap on the shoulder. She turns to find Red approaching.

PATSY
Well if it isn't the corrupt candidate.

RED
I didn't cheat!

PATSY
Prove it.

Red stammers, at a loss. She begs with her eyes for him to win back her respect.

RED
I can't.

She frowns, turns to go.

RED (CONT'D)
But I don't care.

She pauses.

RED (CONT'D)
Sam can have the presidency -- we probably need a bold voice to help expedite change anyway.

PATSY
(skeptical)
You really think things will ever change around here?

RED
The first step is realizing a change is needed -- check. The next step? We stand up for what's right--

PATSY
We?

RED
Guess what? You don't have to be a president to be a leader.
(MORE)

RED (CONT'D)

(then)

Clearly you don't have to be a man
either.

Patsy smirks, grabs Red by the arm.

PATSY

You're full of shit, but keep talking.

RED

Besides, Sam's bound to do something
stupid like hold the Board of
Education hostage, so we need
oppositional leadership for checks
and balances--

PATSY

(laughing)

He's not that militant--

A whistle SHRIEKING across the front lawn. It's nestled
between the lips of Sam Jackson, donning his entire marching
band uniform -- a sharp blue & white costume with his band
leader hat on top, giant blue feather and all.

Sam stomps the grass, twirls his baton. He looks back to
see his lethargic BAND MEMBERS, also in full uniform, and
scratches his brow in frustration.

SAM

C'mon, people. Give me some spirit.

(then)

Blue and white, fight fight!

They pout, exhausted.

BAND MEMBER #1

Why are we practicing in full uniform?

BAND MEMBER #2

Yeah! We helped you win, the least
you can do is get off our backs.

BAND MEMBER #1

Now that's the damn truth--

SAM

I said gimme some goddamn spirit,
motherfucker!

That jolts them awake -- scared shitless, the band straightens
up and PLAYS like they've never played before -- the TRUMPET
blares, igniting a soulful rendition of James Brown's *It's a
Man's Man's Man's World* (but it wouldn't mean nothing without
a woman or a girl).

SAM (CONT'D)
One foot, two foot, nigga!

Sam wiggles his hips and juts the baton up and down as he leads the now disciplined band across the lawn. And just in case the back of the formation attempts to slack off...

Darius charges like a rottweiler.

DARIUS
(ferocious)
March, motherfucker! March!

The band snakes its way towards the stairs, where...

Red stares incredulously.

RED
Not militant? He's literally leading
a goose step--

Patsy steals a kiss off Red's cheek to shut him up.

For a split second, Sam winks Red's way. Red and Patsy disappear inside.

And as those trumpets ring, Sam marches straight for us -- the steely gaze of those beady eyes, his mouth curling into a venomous smile, his posture exuding a unique combination of confidence, humility, and give-no-shits charisma -- he is the motherfucking "King of Cool".

SMASH TO BLACK.

343 DAYS POST ELECTION...

INT. CHATTANOOGA HIGH - CLASSROOM - DAY

Someone defaces a history textbook with a noose cartoon and "GO BACK TO AFRICA" doodle. It's Taylor, proud of his best work. He's suddenly startled by his teacher standing in front of his desk.

Taylor looks up smugly and we realize the teacher is Mr. Irving! Yes, the black history teacher from Riverside High!

MR. IRVING
Come with me please.

Irving grabs the tainted textbook as Taylor rises with a smirk. We realize the rest of the class is still mainly white but with a couple of black students peppered in.

TAYLOR

What, you gonna send me to the
principal's office?

(then)

You do realize you ain't my daddy?

Stifled laughter from White Jock #1 as Taylor struts towards the door.

MR. IRVING

No, I'm not your daddy. I'm your
teacher.

(then)

And no, you're not going to the
principal's office. I'd like for
you to read to the class what you
wrote in here.

Mr. Irving hands the textbook back to Taylor, now standing in front of his peers. Nervous chuckles from Taylor, judgemental eyes on him -- both black and white. Taylor sweats, stutters, a deer in headlights.

EXT./INT. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

We glide past a row of parked school buses in the parking lot that are all EMPTY. We make our way through a window, and down the hallway to the

CAFETERIA

Where a student council meeting is in session around a table.

NERDY TREASURER

Which will balance our budget and
give us enough funds for a prom to
remember.

The treasurer slides a document across the table to Sam, sitting at the head. Sam nods enthusiastically as he peruses the paper, then suddenly balls it up and tosses it.

SAM

Fuck a prom to remember -- we hold
that motherfucker in Petey's backyard,
and finance a mandatory field trip
to the Slave Mart Museum.

(then)

Meeting adjourned, niggas.

Darius POUNDS a gavel as we glide down another hallway and enter a

CLASSROOM

Where a black teacher POPS open a box and hands fresh books down the rows of students. Each student has their own desk.

Douglas passes a book behind him to Red. In turn, Red hands the new book behind him to an impressed Morgan.

MORGAN

Still ain't gonna read it, but damn it smells good.

Red laughs, turns to his side where a doting Patsy sits one desk over.

PATSY

(re: fresh books)

The crispest.

RED

(smiling)

Crisp is good.

Delighted, Patsy cracks open her book. We close in on the clean, untainted pages as she flips through them.

FADE TO BLACK.

SHAMELESS LAUGHTER.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. THE TONIGHT SHOW - DAY

We're back where we started. A thoroughly entertained CROWD -- a snapshot of America, WHITE and BLACK locals seated next to BLACK and WHITE tourists. Too busy cackling, knee-slapping, and ogling a late night legend to realize the social relevance of this integration.

They watch with bated breath as JAY LENO interviews SAMUEL L JACKSON on stage.

TITLE OVER: Los Angeles, California, 2004

SAMUEL L JACKSON

No I'm serious. It wasn't on the big stage or anything, but it was kinda intense. In high school, there was this cat... he was like this teacher's pet kinda dude.

(then)

I ran for school president against him.

Having curbed their doubt, the audience collectively GASPS, leans in -- they're eating up the suspense, imagining a teenage King of Cool clashing with a teacher's pet.

JAY LENO

Well? Did you win?

Jackson's eyes narrow as he considers, almost offended Jay had to ask.

SAMUEL L JACKSON
Of course, man!

The audience ROARS.

SAMUEL L JACKSON (CONT'D)
I mean, I cheated, but...

The audience doubles over with laughter. Jackson just shrugs, puts up his hands as if to say "it is what it is."

FADE TO BLACK.

THE motherfucking END

POSTSCRIPT:

SAM GRADUATED FROM MOREHOUSE COLLEGE AND WENT ON TO BECOME A RENOWNED ACTOR. IN 1968, HE WAS AN USHER AT DR. KING'S FUNERAL IN ATLANTA. AFTERWARDS, HE FLEW TO MEMPHIS TO MARCH FOR EQUAL RIGHTS.

RED RECEIVED HIS PhD IN OPHTHALMOLOGY AND BECAME THE CEO OF A HOSPITAL IN CHICAGO. IN 2016, WHILE FILMING SCENES AT SAID HOSPITAL FOR THE TV SHOW *EMPIRE*, TERRENCE HOWARD ASKED RED IF HE WAS BLACK OR WHITE. RED MANAGED TO NOT FIGHT TERRENCE.