

THE BLACK BELT

by
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OVER BLACK:

GECKO

*If we kill him, the next one may
be worse, and we can't kill them
all. We'd better carry out
Teacher's orders.*

INT. AIRPLANE, FLYING - DAY

SIMON PALUSKA (13) sits in a window seat watching a movie on an old *portable DVD player* - 1978's kung fu classic, "*Five Deadly Venoms*". The source of "Gecko"'s sage words.

This is a modern airplane in modern times, with TVs in the back of every seat. Still, a portable DVD player.

Simon is an awkward lump of still-forming pubescent human; not fat or thin, not tall or short. He wears a Buffalo Sabres sweatshirt and inexpensive jeans.

What he does *not* wear is headphones. The DVD's AUDIO emits from the player's speakers (quietly - he is considerate, this kid).

Simon *mouths along* to the dialogue. He even *mimics some of the kung fu moves* - best he can, given the confines.

The middle seat of the row is empty. The aisle seat, decidedly not. A MAN, a tired man, gestures to a FLIGHT ATTENDANT.

The man WHISPERS to the Attendant, who then looks to Simon.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Sweetie do you have some
headphones you can use with that?
Or I can give you some?

SIMON

(from his trance)
They broke. The thing broke off in
the hole.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(apologetic)
I'll need to ask you to mute the
device. As a consideration to your
fellow passengers.

SIMON

...The mute's broken too.

The Flight Attendant's look turns even more apologetic.

Simon, understanding, shuts the DVD player - carefully, as you do with a treasured item.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Thank you sweetie. Wait *right* there.

The Attendant walks off. Simon gives a look: Where would I go?

Simon leans back in his seat, exhales. It can be understood: this is not the first bump in an otherwise perfect day.

The Attendant reemerges through the First Class curtain with a *glass bottle of Coke*, a glass of ice with a thick paper napkin elegantly wrapped around it, and a bag of seriously-gourmet looking mini chocolate chip cookies.

The Attendant hands them to Simon with a smile. Simon, under the immensity of this kind gesture, looks like he might cry.

EXT. LONG BEACH AIRPORT - DAY

Simon exits the airport, wheeling behind him a large *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* suitcase.

Simon squints in the sun, like he's never seen it that bright or hot before.

Simon scans the alien landscape. Finally,

VOICE (O.S.)

Dude!

Simon turns to see a MAN (mid-30s) in a Callaway Golf polo shirt, cargo shorts, flip flops, backward Callaway Golf hat.

SIMON

(evenly)

Hey Uncle Nate.

UNCLE NATE

Lose the hoodie dude, it's like 95!

SIMON

It's all I'm wearing.

UNCLE NATE

Well. Shit.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S JEEP WRANGLER, DRIVING - DAY

This car is a mess - empty Gatorade bottles, indeterminate clothing items, some loose golf clubs in the back.

Pearl Jam plays low from the radio. Uncle Nate drums lightly on the steering wheel. There is much to discuss, but it'll take some verbal greasing to get to any of it.

UNCLE NATE

So this is an adventure, right?

Simon nods.

UNCLE NATE

You *did* bring t-shirts right? And shorts? They have summer in Buffalo?

Simon again nods. He's still squinting. Nate fishes in the center console and produces a pair of filthy Oakleys. Hands them to Simon. Simon puts them on.

UNCLE NATE

Thought later we'd--

SIMON

(interrupting)

The casket was tilted because you weren't there to help carry it. Mom's was. They didn't even find Dad so that was less of a problem.

(then)

People talked about you.

On Nate, who anticipated some form of this.

UNCLE NATE

Anything of a...positive nature?

SIMON

People were pretty focused on how the casket was tilted.

A beat as Nate imagines what was said of him.

UNCLE NATE

I mean, dude. I had to prepare for your arrival. And your Pops didn't place much importance on "events"--

SIMON

But my mom did.

UNCLE NATE

Yea well I didn't know your mom
too well, did I.

Simon, unequipped to respond, cleans off the Oakley lenses with his sweatshirt. Really just rearranging the dirt.

It's on Uncle Nate to neutralize the tension.

UNCLE NATE

Here's a little tip for when you
learn to drive: Tilt the rearview
mirror up a bit more than you
would...

Uncle Nate does so with his center mirror. He sits up straight so he can see clearly through it.

UNCLE NATE

Encourages good posture.

On Simon. That seems like something he will actually file away.

They drive past a bland, two-story BRICK BUILDING.

UNCLE NATE

So that's your school.
(with a sense of pride)
I did some essential dad stuff by
getting your class schedule. There
are activities coming up too so
it's not *all* work. A talent
show...in case you're talented in
a way that should be shown. A
field trip - I signed the
permission slip, even put an
exclamation point after my
signature.

Simon vacantly nods, his mind elsewhere.

UNCLE NATE

Point is, I talked to the teachers
and they seem really nice...

SIMON

Adults are always nice.

It's implied: Kids, less so. Nate glances over to Simon.

UNCLE NATE

I'm sure the kids are--

Simon interrupts, comes out with it:

SIMON

I'm taking some gap years so it's really not an issue for me.

UNCLE NATE

That's...what? No, that's a...college thing.

SIMON

I'm not saying I won't *learn*. I'm just not gonna learn *school*.

On Uncle Nate. He decides: Best to table this for now.

UNCLE NATE

Thought later we'd hang up some posters in your room. I have a bunch - by my age, a man has some posters. You like The Matrix?

Simon nods. He does, in fact.

They stop at a red light. Simon's attention is CAUGHT, hard: Housed within a stock, sunbaked shopping center, sandwiched between an out-of-business travel agency and a small Greek restaurant, sits The:

TAEKWONDO ACADEMY OF LONG BEACH

Simon lowers his sunglasses. And gets a good look.

SIMON

(sotto)
There it is.

UNCLE NATE

...There's what?

Simon just pushes his sunglasses back up.

The traffic light turns green - reflects in Simon's glasses.

EXT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Establishing. A warren of "Luxury Spanish Villa Units" that in no way evoke the feeling of being in Spain. Built in the 80's.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Simon enters, Uncle Nate trailing with Simon's suitcase. Simon absorbs the two bedroom, carpeted apartment.

Notably, there are TWO LARGE TV's, *mounted side by side*.

What else: There's a small desk in the corner with a desktop Dell computer. A ten-speed bike hanging on hooks on a wall. Otherwise, not a tremendous amount to draw the eye.

SIMON

I thought you said it was a house.

UNCLE NATE

Did I?

SIMON

You said, "My house..."

UNCLE NATE

It's a..I guess a colloquialism.

SIMON

(sincere)

I don't care that it's not a house. I shouldn't have said anything.

UNCLE NATE

It's cool dude! Anyway, it's *our* house now. Welcome to your new house!

Simon is somewhat relaxed by the thought.

SIMON

Thanks.

(then)

Why do you have two TVs?

On Nate. This requires a considered answer.

UNCLE NATE

I watch a lot of golf.

INT. SIMON'S ROOM - DAY

Uncle Nate shows Simon the small bedroom. There's a treadmill in the corner, but it has otherwise been cleared of junk.

UNCLE NATE

Made your bed. I don't even make my bed.

SIMON

(impressed)

It's bigger than the one I had.

UNCLE NATE
 Hell yea it is! You're in
 California now. The big leagues.

SIMON
 ..What does that mean?

Nate doesn't know, so he moves on.

UNCLE NATE
 There are two sinks in the
 bathroom. Yours is the one without
 a bunch of shit around it.
 (realizing)
 Here's the deal dude: I curse.
 "Swear", what have you. I *really*
 want to not do it around you but
 that will require breaking a habit
 that I'm very much in the habit
 of. So..just do as I say, not as I
 do. Or I mean, do *what* I say, not
 as I say...which would inevitably
 involve some cursing. And actually
 you don't really have to *do*...what
 I tell you to do. Unless it's a
 matter of personal safety in which
 case I'd recommend it. Or...*do* you
 have to do what I say? We should
 figure all this out. I guess I'm
 your dad now...

Nate is in over his head. It's clear, even to an eighth grader.

SIMON
 Can we hang the Matrix poster
 another day?

INT. "LEGENDS" SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

Simon and Uncle Nate sit at a high-top near the bar. There are
 TVs everywhere except the ceiling and the floor.

Nate is locked in to the one TV airing a golf tournament. He
 tears at a bar napkin. It's quite clear that his involvement in
 this match goes beyond mere fandom.

The GOLFER on-screen *misses an easy 5-foot putt.*

UNCLE NATE
*God damn it are you fuckin kidding
 me Fowler?*

People look. Nate reels it in.

UNCLE NATE
 Fuckin 5 feet, straightaway.
 (to Simon)
 He should be making those all day
 long.

SIMON
 Yea.

VOICE (O.S.)
 Hey you.

Turn to find: BECCA RIGALLY (mid-30s). Easy smile. Golf clothes. Biceps that are larger than Nate's.

BECCA
 (to Simon)
 And hey *you!* This must be *The Mr. Simon!*

Nate stands and kisses Becca - a kiss that's appropriate for Simon-as-audience. Simon stands too, courteously.

Becca embraces Simon in a hug, knowing he needs one. Simon awkwardly hugs her back. And they all sit.

UNCLE NATE
 Fowler fuckin 3-putted on 17.
 Believe that shit?

Becca stifles an eye-roll. Directed at Nate, not at Fowler.

BECCA
 Guess dinner's on me...

Nate gives her hand an affectionate squeeze.

UNCLE NATE
 Si, Becca. Becca, meet Simon.
 (*really trying*)
 He is now my son and the light of
 my life.

Simon just doesn't know what to do with that.

A WAITER approaches - knows Becca and Nate.

BECCA
 Usual, pleeeeeease.

UNCLE NATE
 Iced tea for me. Three Splenda.
 Four lemons.

The waiter looks to Simon.

SIMON
I'll drink this water.

UNCLE NATE
You can have soda dude.
(to Becca)
I've decided I allow soda. Unless
you think otherwise?--

SIMON
I already had soda today.

Nate and Becca exchange a look, impressed.

The waiter departs. Nate's attention returns to the TV.

BECCA
So how was your flight Simon!?

Becca is warm with him, and it's genuine. It draws Simon out.

SIMON
...I watched a great film with
some great lessons about
integrity. And the importance of
displaying strength to your
enemies.

BECCA
Well *that* sounds awesome. Tell me
more!

SIMON
(*nervous* in her gaze)
You...want to act with integrity.
And always...display strength to
your enemies.

BECCA
I can't imagine *you* have enemies.

SIMON
I'm new here so I don't know yet.

UNCLE NATE
(to the TV)
Don't go at the pin, dipshit.

SIMON
(to Becca, noticing)
Your bracelet is nice.

Uncle Nate breaks from the TV to add,

UNCLE NATE
Isn't that an elegant bracelet?
(warmly)
She bought it for herself before I
even had the chance.

Becca, generously, smiles at Nate.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Simon and Nate enter. Long day for these two.

UNCLE NATE
It's 10. Where we at vis-a-vis
your bedtime?

SIMON
I went to bed after Mom and Dad.
They were always tired.

Simon sits on the couch. Uncle Nate collapses into a recliner.

UNCLE NATE
That fuckin store. Ya know, I told
your dad: People need artwork
framed, like, once a year max. And
now there are websites that do it.
Inexpensively.

SIMON
It was more of a workshop than a
store.

UNCLE NATE
Yea. Exactly.
(then, softening)
Sorry man. You wanna watch the
news or something?

SIMON
I'm pretty tired.

UNCLE NATE
(a beat, relieved)
I'm off tomorrow so we can do
whatever you want.

SIMON
(matter-of-fact)
I have to go sign up for karate
lessons. There's a dojo close to
here - we passed it when we were
driving so maybe you know it?

On Nate, making sure he heard that right.

UNCLE NATE
Karate lessons...

SIMON
Yea, I'm gonna be a Black Belt.
Once I accomplish that I'll start
back up at school.

UNCLE NATE
Dude. I hate to be so direct after
the day you've had. *Days*. Weeks I
guess. But karate is bullshit. And
you start school Monday.

Simon, quietly, short-circuits.

SIMON
No it's not. And no I don't.

UNCLE NATE
This guy on my floor in college
was a Black Belt. And he's in jail
for securities fraud.

Simon doesn't know what that means. Doesn't need to know.

SIMON
Martial arts teaches you honor and
discipline. And uppercuts.

UNCLE NATE
I'll teach you *all* that shit. Look
dude, I'm gonna give you the real
because life has made a man of
you: Your folks did *not* leave you
money.

(some pride, not much)
Fortunately, for us both, I'm the
Head of the Caddy Program at Tall
Oaks so I was able to get you a
job washing clubs after school.
(then)
I'm just...afraid there's no time
for karate.

SIMON
..You work at a Caddyshack?

UNCLE NATE
It's not a *shack*. It's an elegant
pagoda-like structure and my
office has a Nespresso machine.

SIMON

I thought you were a professional golfer.

UNCLE NATE

(a beat)

I no longer am that.

SIMON

So you help *other* people golf?

UNCLE NATE

Hey, man, there's a lot more to the situation. You're a grownup now, but that doesn't mean you understand nuance.

Simon is losing his emotional grip.

SIMON

Marcus Smith got his Black Belt and it earned him the respect of the whole school. Including teachers. Not even dead parents got me respect...

UNCLE NATE

(waves this off)

People respect you.

SIMON

No, they don't, they think I'm weird. But not for long. Black Belts aren't weird - they're leaders.

UNCLE NATE

You're not *weird*, Simon. Your parents just had weird rules and it made you *seem* weird. What parent makes their kid tuck their shirt in at *public* school?

SIMON

I'm not starting school again until I'm a Black Belt. Second Degree Black Belt, to be safe.

UNCLE NATE

(direct)

You're going to school, Simon.

SIMON
 (equally direct)
 Once I'm a Black Belt. Of course.
 I eventually want a school
 education in case I don't make the
 Taekwondo Olympic team--

Uncle Nate's patience finds its end.

UNCLE NATE
 You want to be a Black Belt? You
 can probably *buy* a karate Black
 Belt on Amazon.

Nate pulls out his PHONE. Opens the AMAZON APP.

UNCLE NATE
 (as he types)
 Karate...black...belt.
 (finds it)
 Here. Twenty five bucks. And you
 can be a Black Belt.

SIMON
 That's *not* how you do it.

UNCLE NATE
 Do you think you deserve people's
 respect?

SIMON
 Yes.

UNCLE NATE
 And they'll only give it to you if
 you're a Black Belt.

SIMON
 Yea. For me...yea.

UNCLE NATE
 (in partial jest)
 I don't know, man. I'm doing the
 math: If you deserve respect, and
 you feel you need a "Black Belt"
 to *get* what you deserve...I
 say...just *get a Black Belt*. And
 then...back up your skills through
 YouTube video lessons.
 (almost to himself)
 This is kind of the way of the
 world now.

Uncle Nate points his PHONE toward Simon. Open to Amazon.

And there it is, indeed: For twenty-five bucks, you can One-Click a real-deal karate Black Belt.

UNCLE NATE

It's either that...or you give people a chance to dig you for who you are. You pick.

(with parental insistence)

Because school starts Monday.

On Simon. He has no more resistance left in him today.

SIMON

I'm *tired*.

Uncle Nate nods, empathetically.

UNCLE NATE

I'll make sure you have a glass of water next to your bed. Every night.

INT. SIMON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Simon lies in bed, wide awake. Water, as promised, by his side.

Simon takes out his PHONE. Opens INSTAGRAM.

He taps on MARCUS'S STORY. VIDEO of Marcus at a *Taekwondo tournament*, victoriously hoisting a TROPHY.

Marcus's vanquished OPPONENT gives a respectful BOW.

In the bleachers behind, MARCUS'S PARENTS provide all manner of applause, love, support, *respect*. Beside his parents, a crew of Marcus's MIDDLE-SCHOOL FRIENDS *cheer*.

On Simon: His thoughts, it's reasonable to assume, go back to Uncle Nate's words.

Then...his thoughts go forward...

INT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Simon pads across the room to Uncle Nate's COMPUTER. He clicks the mouse, waking the screen.

Simon opens a browser. Types in *Amazon.com*. Amazon is *logged-in* to Nate's account.

Simon types into the search bar: **KARATE BLACK BELT.**

EXT. TALL OAKS COUNTRY CLUB, CLUBHOUSE - DAY

This place is beautiful. Unless you work there.

Simon, in an ill-fitting Tall Oaks polo, washes golf clubs.

A MAN approaches with his DAUGHTER, to whom the man pays no attention, probably ever.

The girl is Simon's age. She does not fit into the Club landscape - Sonic Youth t-shirt, dirty white sneakers, and a crude, seemingly-self-applied TATTOO of a PROPELLER on her forearm.

Simon is too busy to notice her. Simon polishes the last club, and the dad promptly collects the golf bag.

GIRL

Aren't you young to be working here?

Simon looks up. And now, notices her.

SIMON

Life has made a man of me. So I'm expected to work.

The girl digests that, bemused. And she and her dad move on to the valet stand.

UNCLE NATE (O.S.)

Alright buddy boy! Quittin' time.

Uncle Nate approaches.

UNCLE NATE

I'm making you steak for dinner. However you like it cooked.

SIMON

Is Becca coming?

UNCLE NATE

Maybe, she's still giving a lesson. But I always make extra for her in case.

(then)

She'll probably discard of me at some point, so I enjoy every day with her as though it's my last.

(it occurs to him)

You shouldn't take her for granted either. Our lives are sunnier for her presence.

EXT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT - DUSK

Simon and Nate approach the front door. Outside sits a *medium-sized plastic AMAZON ENVELOPE*.

UNCLE NATE

I didn't order anything. They always leave shit at the wrong house.

Nate picks it up. It's addressed to him. He's puzzled.

SIMON

...It's for me. And it's all I'll ever need from you.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM

Close on Simon. He delicately opens the envelope.

With great ceremony, befitting his reverence for the item inside, Simon pulls out: **THE BLACK BELT**.

TURN TO: Uncle Nate. Mouth slightly agape. Amused and *amazed*.

UNCLE NATE

You fuckin did it. Man, you *are* my son.

SIMON

Why do you keep saying that? Uncles don't have sons.

UNCLE NATE

(considers)

I aspire to be the exception to that rule. And we have a lot in common...Really I'm just surprised I didn't pull this stunt when I was your age.

SIMON

It's not a stunt...I'm gonna study all of the moves and philosophy online. I'm going to earn it.

UNCLE NATE

Yea of course. Who says you have to *end* with a Black Belt? Just start with one and work your way back. That's become a popular, modern way of thinking. For many types of pursuits.

(MORE)

UNCLE NATE (CONT'D)
 (clarifying)
 Fake it til you make it.

SIMON
 I'm *not* faking it. You'll see how
 hard of a worker I am.

UNCLE NATE
 Damn right. You're *making* it.
 (then)
 Just remember: With power comes
 responsibility.

On Simon.

SIMON
 I've always had a lot of
 responsibilities.

EXT. WILL ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Uncle Nate's Wrangler pulls into the parking lot. Hordes of
 MIDDLE SCHOOLERS funnel in for the start of the day.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S WRANGLER - CONTINUOUS

Nate wipes dust off the dashboard so he can see the CLOCK.

UNCLE NATE
 I meant to prep a whole
 motivational speech. Shit. And now
 I'm realizing I wouldn't even have
 had time to deliver it.

SIMON
 No worries.

Nate delivers his best "speech" anyway.

UNCLE NATE
 I have no doubt that you'll make a
 lasting and positive first
 impression. You're a very cool
 person, deserving of respect.
 That's my opinion and I think
 others will share it.

Simon fidgets with his backpack. All nerves.

Uncle Nate looks Simon over, with recognizable paternal care.

UNCLE NATE
Packed a lot of steak in your
lunch. Have a good day, alright?

EXT. WILL ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

We get a look at Simon, HEAD TO TOE:

Plaid button-down shirt, *tucked into khakis*. Worn-out New Balance sneakers. And around his waist,

STUDENT (O.S.)
(mocking)
Is that kid wearing a karate belt?

Simon, embarrassed, quick-steps toward the main entrance.

INT. WILL ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL, CLASSROOM - DAY

Students settle into HOMEROOM.

At the front of the class: MS. ROSA (early 30s). Exceptionally organized, from her outfit to her desk to her handling of a room-full of high-octane children.

Amongst those children, *THE GIRL FROM THE COUNTRY CLUB*. She whispers to ANOTHER GIRL at an adjacent desk.

This Other Girl: She has dark braided hair practically down to the back of her knees, wears a cool but homemade-looking *hemp dress*. And also: A PROPELLER TATTOO on her forearm.

Simon, avoiding their eyes, scans the room for an empty desk.

Simon notices a desk in the front row with a NAME CARD perched atop. *SIMON*. It is hand-drawn, his NAME surrounded by STICKERS.

Simon sits. His is the only desk with a name card. He could do without it.

MS. ROSA
(quiet, intentionally)
Good morning, class.

The kids' chatter stops on a dime. Respect.

CLASS
Good morning, Ms. Rosa.

MS. ROSA
You all know we have a new student
joining us.
(MORE)

MS. ROSA (CONT'D)
 Because you all so kindly
 contributed a sticker to his name
 card. Everyone, let's welcome
 Simon Paluska!

CLASS
*Welcome Simon Paluska / Hi Simon
 Paluska / Welcome Simon.*

Simon manages a half-wave.

MS. ROSA
 Simon, I know this is the last
 thing you want to do because it's
 horrifyingly awkward and
 difficult. But that can be a very
 good thing sometimes. Would you
 introduce yourself to the class?

After a beat, Simon, resigned, stands. No one looks at his eyes. They look at his *BLACK BELT*. As, of course, they would. There's a mix of snickers and genuine curiosity.

Ms. Rosa certainly notices the belt, but she's not going to draw any additional attention to it.

Simon's nerves paralyze his vocal cords. Rosa to the rescue.

MS. ROSA
 I'll start, introduce myself. My
 name is Ms. Rosa. I'm a Veteran of
 the United States Air Force. And
 my favorite hobby is deep sea
 fishing. Maybe I should've joined
 the NAVY instead!
 (then, all business)
 Simon?

Simon looks to her, relaxes some.

SIMON
 Um. Hi Ms. Rosa. Hi, everyone.
 I'm...Simon. I'm from Buffalo New
 York...*Go Sabres*. My parents died
 in an avalanche last month. They
 saved up for five years to go
 skiing in Austria and then there
 was an avalanche.

Most of the students give Simon a *pitying look*. Not what he wants. Simon stands up a bit taller, and delivers this,

SIMON

I live with my uncle now who is a professional golfer. And I'm a Black Belt in Taekwondo.

(a beat, emboldened)

Second Degree Black Belt.

Ms. Rosa gives a look to the class: *Be impressed.*

A KID, whose voice we might recognize as the mocking one from outside, speaks up. This is JAMES.

JAMES

Then why isn't there a second stripe on your belt?

SIMON

My Sensei is mailing it to me. Things got messed up after the avalanche.

JAMES

(dubious)

Show us some karate.

A chorus of "Yea!"s from the class.

MS. ROSA

(warning)

James.

JAMES

He doesn't look like a Black Belt.

THE GIRL

James, you look like what you sound like: A big asshole.

THE OTHER GIRL

James. Listen to her, she's right.

MS. ROSA

Olivia. Autumn.

(moving on)

James. There is no "look" associated with martial artists. Many of the skillsets are internal ones.

SIMON

Yea. It's mostly about perseverance and self-control.

Ms. Rosa nods, impressed with Simon. James is unconvinced.

JAMES

Whatever, I'm sorry. He just
doesn't look like a Black Belt.

On Simon. *Something rises in his eyes.* Perhaps, the indignation of a child who just lost his parents and now has to put up with *James*.

Simon WALKS OVER TO JAMES'S DESK...

Simon BOWS to James...

Then, with *all* of his might, Simon SIDEKICKS JAMES'S DESK.

The desk slliiides across the slick floor, then CAPSIZES, spraying SCHOOL SUPPLIES in all directions.

Everyone, Ms. Rosa included, and definitely James, is stunned.

Simon picks up a WOODEN RULER that fell out of James's desk. And Simon BREAKS IT IN HALF OVER HIS KNEE with a "Kee-HUP."

Simon *turns to Ms. Rosa*. And once again, BOWS.

On OLIVIA (LIV) and AUTUMN: They look at Simon. *They are in love.* Some form of it, anyway.

EXT. WILL ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Simon stands out front with Ms. Rosa. Just the two of them.

Uncle Nate's Wrangler rips into the lot, parks. Nate gets out.

UNCLE NATE

Already dude?!

MS. ROSA

You're Uncle Nate. Must be.

Nate nods cordially.

UNCLE NATE

I have great respect for school
teachers.

SIMON

She's in the Air Force too.

UNCLE NATE

(impressed)
Sick.

MS. ROSA

Principal Byrne, quite generously I think, decided to let this be a strike. On account of circumstances. But the responsibility is yours...

(then to Simon)

...and yours, to see that violence of any kind is absent from our school.

SIMON

He *mocked* me. He has no dignity or valor.

MS. ROSA

There's no excuse for retaliation.

UNCLE NATE

With respect, Ms. Rosa: As military personnel, you know that there *is* on occasion an excuse for retaliation. A vast portion of our tax-payer dollars are allotted to preparing for that eventuality. Like, if a terrorist "mocks" us, we retaliate. Not that Simon should sic battle-hardened canines on that little knucklehead or anything...But I think he made an effective statement. I mean, do you see that kid fucking with Simon again?

(glances to Simon)

Frankly, I think Simon earned his respect.

Ms. Rosa glares at Uncle Nate: *Are you possibly serious?*

UNCLE NATE

It was proportional, is my point.

(a nervous beat)

But *your* point is also well taken.

(to Simon)

By me and my new son.

Simon is just embarrassed. By himself, by Uncle Nate. He grips his Black Belt as though it's a security blanket.

EXT. TALL OAKS COUNTRY CLUB, "THE 19TH HOLE" - LATER

Simon sits alone at a picnic table outside the snack shack. He's off-duty, still in his school clothes. Still in his Belt.

A burger lies before him, uneaten. Simon looks at KARATE VIDEOS on his phone.

The GIRL, LIV, just appears, sits across from him.

LIV
Simon, I'm Liv. You're my hero.

On Simon, wondering if he heard that right.

SIMON
...What brings you to Tall Oaks?

LIV
Waiting for my dad. Most of my life is waiting for my dad.

SIMON
I get that. I'm gonna be waiting for my dad for the rest of my life.

LIV
(a beat)
I can't tell if you're bleak or funny. I'm fine with it either way.

Simon shrugs. He doesn't know either.

SIMON
You've been nice to me so I should tell you the truth.

Liv is listening. Simon has a big decision to make. And he makes it.

SIMON
I'm not really a...*Second Degree* Black Belt. I was days away from my test but then...

LIV
Your parents were consumed by an avalanche of snow. And rocks. Are you sad?

SIMON
Wow, I...didn't think about the rocks...
(then, with sadness)
Martial artists don't focus on sadness. Only on results.

Liv nods. Respect.

SIMON

Anyway I feel I have all the tools and skillsets to be a Second Degree - and I have what they call the indomitable spirit. But I couldn't take the test.

LIV

That's alright, I'll keep your secret. I'm really good at it.

This is the closest thing to a conversation with a friend that Simon has had in a very long time.

SIMON

You can have my burger if you want. I have a Skype training session with my Sensei from Buffalo later and I don't want to eat until after.

Liv believes what Simon is saying, in no small part because *Simon* is beginning to believe it - an understandable phenomenon for his age.

Liv takes a bite of his burger. Then, mouth full,

LIV

That's awesome you have a Sensei. You should do the talent show, do some awesome karate stuff.

Simon's mind, at the thought of it, goes *berserk*. We should see what that looks like. So we enter a brief **DREAM SEQUENCE:**

INT. WILL ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL, THEATER - DAY

Simon, onstage, does a succession of fifteen back flips.

Simon breaks a dozen cinderblocks with his bare fists.

Simon fights off Ninjas.

Liv climbs onstage and kisses him on the cheek.

The entire school ERUPTS IN APPLAUSE. Ms. Rosa included.

EXT. TALL OAKS C.C., "THE 19TH HOLE" - CONTINUOUS

SIMON

I can take a look at the sign-up sheet.

LIV

You should. Me and Autumn - you'll meet Autumn, she's hard to impress but she thinks you're impressive - we're gonna dissect a fetal pig onstage. It's performance art.

Simon thinks that's really cool.

LIV

We took it from science class and it's in Autumn's freezer - her parents are creepy hippies so it pretty much looks like the other stuff in their freezer.

Simon nods. That more or less makes sense to him.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Simon TRAINS along to a TAEKWONDO YOUTUBE VIDEO on Uncle Nate's computer - practicing his punches, kicks, and intensity. He has a long way to go, but damn, he is trying.

Uncle Nate enters the apartment carrying a LARGE DUFFEL BAG.

UNCLE NATE

Got the goods!

Nate drops the bag on the floor, unzips it. He takes out what look like SHEETS OF CONCRETE. But they are clearly *not heavy*.

They look, close up, like what they are: PAINTED STYROFOAM.

UNCLE NATE

Leslie in the golf cart garage - you owe her one.

SIMON

I'll send her a hand-written note.
(then)
Are you sure this is a good idea?

UNCLE NATE

Yea, it's clever and it furthers your goal. I'm sure everyone thinks you're awesome because you karate-chopped a bully's personal belongings. But it doesn't hurt to have insurance - believe me.

Simon goes along with that logic.

UNCLE NATE
Doesn't this shit look real? Looks
real to me. Here, try one.

Nate holds up the "concrete" slab. Simon focuses - the very
same focus as if it were real concrete - and PUNCHES THROUGH.

UNCLE NATE
Fuck yea dude!

Simon looks proud. But concern quickly takes over.

SIMON
What if they find out it's not
real concrete?

UNCLE NATE
Then...you'll find out who your
real friends are. Win win.

SIMON
But what if no one's my real
friend?

Nate has to think on that.

UNCLE NATE
Impossible. You've got me.
(a beat)
Unless, of course, you kill me
with a sick-ass uppercut.

Nate gets into a FIGHTING STANCE.

UNCLE NATE
Let's see what you've learned,
Grasshopper. Just be careful of
Uncle Nate's bad shoulder...

Simon, game, gets into *his* fighting stance. Then goes at Uncle
Nate, playfully punching and kicking.

Nate takes the mock-beating.

UNCLE NATE
*Karate King, I am no match for
you're sick-ass uppercuts.*

SIMON
Beware my awesome strength!

We FADE OUT from their "battle", to:

CLOSE ON: A SCALPEL tearing through the flesh of a FETAL PIG.

INT. WILL ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL, THEATER - DAY

Onstage. Liv and Autumn wordlessly dissect the animal. They have an iPhone trained on their operating table, STREAMING VIDEO to a LARGE PROJECTOR SCREEN behind them.

The student AUDIENCE is stunned silent. TEACHERS are seen side-stage, frantically whispering about if/how to stop this.

Simon is also side-stage. On deck. He watches Liv and Autumn, rapt by their "performance art".

Finally, Liv places a *My Little Pony* BEDSHEET over the pig.

LIV	AUTUMN
(loud)	(loud)
The.	End.

Liv and Autumn CURTSY, straight-faced, and wheel the table offstage. Simon is pretty much the only one to applaud.

As the girls pass him,

SIMON
That felt...important.

AUTUMN
(genuine)
Thank you.

Liv smiles at him.

TEACHER (ON STAGE)
Next, please welcome Simon
Paluska. Who will be
demonstrating...
(reads a card)
"Focus, strength and...concrete-
breaking with fists".

The students MURMUR. The Teacher kind of shrugs, steps aside.

Simon walks out ONSTAGE. In his school clothes, and Black Belt. A CURTAIN rises behind him, revealing: FIVE "CONCRETE" SLABS, held up on either side by several stacked milk crates.

Simon tenuously approaches a MICROPHONE. All eyes on him. Simon puffs his chest, and recites this CREED from memory:

SIMON
*"I come to you in peace and
brotherhood for I have no weapons.
(MORE)*

SIMON (CONT'D)

But should I be forced to defend myself, my principles or my honor; should it be a matter of right or wrong; then here are my weapons: My empty hands and feet."

(then, somewhat timidly)

...As we say in karate.

(quickly)

Today I will break through five reinforced concrete slabs using only my strength, spirit, determination...and fists.

Simon walks behind his set-up.

The student audience is *rapt*. Ms. Rosa is...tolerating this.

Simon focuses.

Simon *breathes*.

Simon puts his hands to the slabs, as if *feeling their energy*.

Simon RAISES HIS FISTED ARM.

SIMON

Kee-HUP!

BAM. Simon *pulverizes the slabs*.

The students go *NUTS*. Really, not far off from the dream-sequence reaction. Save for the Liv kiss; that's not happening.

Simon solemnly BOWS to the audience.

Then, amidst applause, Simon starts loading the broken slabs into Uncle Nate's big duffel bag. He makes a *real show* out of how "heavy" it all is. As the APPLAUSE continues...

INT. WILL ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL, CAFETERIA - DAY

Simon eats lunch alone. That applause - it was still no match for the preset social patterns of a middle school.

Until...Liv and Autumn alight upon his table.

AUTUMN

Can we sit?

Simon gestures, "please".

LIV
Everyone's talking about your
talent.

SIMON
Not to me they're not.

AUTUMN
We are.

SIMON
Yea that's true.
(then)
I think *your* talent was
misunderstood.

AUTUMN
I think it was perfectly
understood. It was meant to be
uncomfortable. And people were
uncomfortable.

SIMON
I wasn't. I've seen someone's
shin-bone get kicked out of their
shin by a Flying Roundhouse Kick.

The girls exchange the briefest glance: He's the real deal.

LIV
You're strong for a kid.

SIMON
Life--

LIV
--has made a man of you. I know.
And I told Autumn.

Autumn takes a baby carrot off of Simon's plate. Eats it.

LIV
So look: Me and Autumn are going
on an epic mission, and we want
you to join us.

Autumn, wisely, knows to speak Simon's language:

AUTUMN
It's a noble mission. Epic and
noble.

Simon is all ears.

SIMON

What is it?

LIV

We're gonna steal a watch. It's worth like forty grand.

SIMON

Wow...must be an Apple watch.

LIV

No, it's made of gold and it's important. My grandpa gave it to my older brother when he died--

AUTUMN

(clarifying)

When her Grandpa died--

LIV

Yea and my brother is a scumbag and he doesn't deserve it. He doesn't deserve a forty grand watch.

On Simon, digesting this all.

LIV

The house my brother lives in...they have expensive DJ equipment and dirtbikes and maybe a gun. We could use a Black Belt around.

AUTUMN

In case things get hairy. Which they will.

Simon sweats. This scenario would be frightening even if he were a Black Belt.

SIMON

They always do. That's what I train for.

(then, needs to know)

Why would you want forty grand?

LIV

(as if obvious)

So we can run away to Montana and build a log cabin and live off the land.

(then, sincere)

You're welcome to join us.

(MORE)

LIV (CONT'D)

You're cool and you could open
your own karate dojo there.

Simon's DNA, at the thought of all of this, pretty much
reconfigures before our eyes - the freedom, the friends, who
are girls. The dojo. He's being offered *everything*.

AUTUMN

Think about it, k?

LIV

But think quick. Their stupid
"album release party" is next week
and *that's* when this goes down.

(then, disgusted)

It's not even an *album*. They just
make noise and want people to
listen to it.

Simon, his mind everywhere, can only nod.

Liv and Autumn stand, and depart.

A look gradually emerges on Simon's face. He is ALL. IN.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S WRANGLER, DRIVING - DAY

Nate drives, Becca shotgun. Simon in the back. Nate and Becca
hold hands - it's one of their good moments.

Simon takes in the scenery, most of which is still new to him.

Becca fishes through her purse. She hands Simon a TWENTY.

BECCA

Here ya go honey. For lunch.

SIMON

(touched)

Oh. Wow. Thank you. I'll treat my
friends too if that's okay.

BECCA

You are a true gentleman.

(playing along)

Befitting your station as a Keeper
of the Belt.

Then, to Nate, with some judgement,

BECCA

Isn't he a gentleman?

UNCLE NATE

You just made him rich. He can afford to be.

Becca punches Nate's thigh, more-or-less playfully.

Nate pulls into the parking lot of a SHOPPING MALL.

INT. MALL - DAY

Liv and Autumn stand outside an ARMANI EXCHANGE store. Simon approaches.

AUTUMN

You made the right decision.

SIMON

(unsure)

I know.

(looks around)

This place is cool - the mall by us was closed. It's where people buy drugs now. And take them.

AUTUMN

I'm sure that's done here too.

SIMON

(nods)

But what else is there to do?

LIV

We need to buy you new clothes. You can't go to the party dressed like that. Aside from the belt, obviously.

AUTUMN

Definitely wear the belt so that nobody fucks with us.

SIMON

The belt is a warning. A fair one.

(then)

I apologize for the rest of my clothes, I don't pick them out.

AUTUMN

No worries. Even *I'm* gonna dress different.

LIV
 Yea, no hippie clothes are allowed
 at DJ parties.
 (to Simon)
 And no plaid shirts.

INT. ARMANI EXCHANGE - DAY

Simon stands in the Men's section. He is lost here, and looks it. The girls are visible in b.g. looking at women's clothes.

A SALESPERSON approaches Simon.

SALESPERSON
 That belt is *chic*.

SIMON
 Oh. Thank you.

SALESPERSON
 Where'd you get it, if you don't
 mind me asking?

SIMON
 It was...bestowed to me. By my
 Sensei.

SALESPERSON
 Ooh it's a karate belt. I see it
 now.
 (almost to herself)
 That would look great with like, a
 blouse? Like a Kill Bill kinda
 look? Damn, I should run this up
 the pole to Giorgio.

Liv and Autumn approach, each with a few clothing items.

LIV
 Hi. Our friend needs to look cool.

SALESPERSON
 Too late, girl. He already does.

On Liv and Autumn. They might not agree.

CUT TO:

INT. DRESSING ROOM, ARMANI EXCHANGE - DAY

Simon stands alone before the mirror in a *skin-tight black t-shirt* with a *bedazzled "A/X" across the chest*.

Simon hates it. Then he puts his Belt on. Kinda likes it now...

LIV (O.S.)
How does it look?

AUTUMN (O.S.)
Fashion show, dude!

SIMON
I think it might work.

Autumn and Liv ENTER THE DRESSING ROOM. They're still holding their items.

SIMON
Are you allowed in here?

LIV
We're practically family.

Simon has no time to process that before she demands:

LIV
Take the shirt off.

SIMON
Can you..leave first?

AUTUMN
No, this has to be fast.

Simon does as told, takes the shirt off. He feels *very* naked.

Liv removes a PAIR OF SCISSORS from her purse. She *cuts the fabric around the SECURITY SENSOR, snipping it off.*

Simon's eyes go wide. The following is HUSHED:

LIV
Holes in clothes are cool anyway.

SIMON
I have money!

AUTUMN
How much?

SIMON
Twenty dollars.

AUTUMN
(looks at price tag)
This is eighty-nine dollars. You have expensive taste.

SIMON
For a t-shirt? That's not possible.

LIV
Go distract the sales lady. We'll take care of the rest.

Simon, to protect his own neck as much as anything, puts his plaid button-down back on and hustles out.

INT. ARMANI EXCHANGE - CONTINUOUS

The Salesperson is staring into her phone. She sees Simon.

SALESPERSON
How'd that shirt work out?

SIMON
It's not expensive enough.
(then, quickly)
Do you want to try my belt on?

Her eyes light up.

SALESPERSON
Do I.

Simon removes his belt. He solemnly FOLDS IT - then he BOWS and hands it to the Salesperson.

The Salesperson awkwardly BOWS to receive it. Then she ties it on herself. Looks in a mirror.

SALESPERSON
(loves it)
Damn.

Simon sees Liv and Autumn *slip out of the store*.

SIMON
(quickly)
All it takes is strength and determination. And you can have your own.

INT. MALL - DAY

Simon, his Belt back on, RUNS. Catches up with Liv and Autumn.

Autumn opens her large purse, shows Simon the bounty.

There's a thrill coursing through them. *Simon included.*

MUSIC UP over the following scene. A song that captures the feeling of being thirteen and happy. So, a song that Simon would just now be absorbing for the first time.

The kids race to the exit, and vanish from the mall.

INT. PIZZA PLACE - DAY

Simon pays for three slices of pizza and three sodas.

He balances it all on a tray, brings it to Liv and Autumn who wait at a booth.

The three kids just tear into the food. There's an easiness about this unit.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Simon, Liv and Autumn get out of an Uber. Approach the house. Nice house. Needs landscaping - no one's tending to that.

AUTUMN
(to Simon)
Her dad sleeps between patients.
Straight upstairs ok?

Liv draws no more attention to that. She takes out keys and opens the front door.

INT. LIV'S HOUSE - DAY

They pad upstairs.

LIV'S DAD (O.S.)
Liv?

Liv ignores him, continues up. Dad does not call out again.

INT. LIV'S ROOM - DAY

Liv closes the door, firmly, behind them. Autumn collapses onto Liv's bed, like it's her own.

The room is messy. To the extent we can glean this: it's a result of an active kid, not of laziness. A giant poster of Green Day's "*Dookie*" album cover serves as a centerpiece.

This is the first girl's room Simon has ever been in. It shows.

SIMON
Nice framing job on that artwork.

LIV
(a beat)
I've never looked at the frame.

SIMON
Let me tell you, it's not easy to
get the joints that seamless on a
piece as large as that.

AUTUMN
(considers)
I always assumed frames just
happen.

SIMON
Yea. You shouldn't, they're hard
to make.

Simon has to actively draw his mind away from his parents, back to the present. He sits, awkwardly, on Liv's desk chair. On the edge of it.

Autumn dumps their stolen clothes out on the bed.

LIV
Okay. First let's try on our
clothes. Then let's plan our
heist.

SIMON
(uneasy)
I thought you said it was a
mission.

LIV
A mission to heist something.

AUTUMN
Nobly.

LIV
Look, Simon, you don't have to
come with us to Montana. We can
farm wheat and pomegranates with
or without you.

SIMON
No I--

AUTUMN
Pomegranates? We never discussed
that.

LIV

If the soil allows it. Why not?

On Autumn: "Yea I guess why not". It's clear, this fantasy is a longstanding one, and detailed.

SIMON

I want to come.

AUTUMN

Now that you mention it, *why* do you want to come?

(to Liv)

We should know why. Otherwise he might just be dead weight.

This pushes a button.

SIMON

I am not dead weight. I'm capable, and I can fend off thieves.

LIV

Thieves...like us?

AUTUMN

We're not thieves, Simon.

SIMON

I didn't mean you. I meant invaders, on the farm.

(then)

But you did steal clothes.

AUTUMN

From a *corporation*. Who cares? Do you know how much clothes get wasted every year and end up choking fish in the ocean? I read about it on Vulture.

Simon tries to shift course, back to the positive.

SIMON

...I didn't know about wasted clothes. Or the fish.

(then)

Should we try them on?

The girls are glad to have him back onboard.

LIV

Yes.

(MORE)

LIV (CONT'D)

But we both got boobs this year so you have to turn your back to us. Those are the rules.

SIMON

I know the rules. Many Black Belts are women. I know the rules.

Simon turns away from them. They all strip to their underwear, and put on their new clothes.

AUTUMN

Okay.

Simon turns back around. The girls in their all-black Armani Exchange duds.

Liv and Autumn look at Simon. And *try not to laugh*.

SIMON

What?

Simon looks down. The HOLE that Liv cut is *directly around his bellybutton*. Simon quickly covers it with his hand.

SIMON

Great. Great...great.

LIV

(stifling laughter)

No! It's cool! My brother's friend was an Israeli soldier and he pretty much only wears this brand. Even with holes.

AUTUMN

...Maybe the belt will cover it?

Simon ties on his Black Belt. It does not cover it.

SIMON

Great.

LIV

(sincere)

Simon. No one wears clothes with their bellybutton showing. Only you do. How original is that?

Simon, seemingly, has no choice but to accept that reasoning.

LIV
 K, let's look at the house on
 Google. I only know some of its
 weak points but we should know all
 of them.

Liv goes to her desk and opens her laptop. Enters an address,
 pulls up the Satellite View.

Autumn follows her over to the desk.

AUTUMN
 (back, to Simon)
 If this were an enemy fortress and
 you were a ninja - which you are -
 where would you infiltrate the
 fortress?

Simon, however dubious of this all, likes having his opinion
 valued. He approaches and takes a close look at the house.

Then, as though summoning one of his kung fu movies,

SIMON
 There are many vulnerabilities.
 (a beat)
 They will never see us coming.

INT. WILL ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL, GYMNASIUM - DAY

Students are lined up, PICKING TEAMS for dodgeball. James is
 one of the captains.

Only Simon and one other KID remain.

JAMES
 I'll take...Boris. Can't pass up
 the chance to throw my balls at
 the Karate Kid's *face*.

Boris heads over to James. Leaving Simon, last. And nervous.

Instead of joining the other team, Simon approaches the GYM
 TEACHER. Liv and Autumn look on.

SIMON
 Um, Mr. Fleet?

MR. FLEET
 What's up.

SIMON

(quietly)

I have a note from my Uncle. That I don't have to do gym because I train with my Sensei after school every day and it exempts me. My doctor says I might get overexerted if I do both.

Simon produces the NOTE from his pocket. Mr. Fleet reads it.

MR. FLEET

That's a valid note. Whether I like it or not.

Mr. Fleet heads off to get the dodgeballs. James approaches.

JAMES

Scared of having my balls in your face?

SIMON

(evenly)

No.

James doesn't know where to take it from there. Except,

JAMES

If you kick my desk *one more time*, I will come to your house and screw your favorite pet. I don't care if you are a ninja.

SIMON

I don't have a pet.

JAMES

I'll get you one. From the pound. And then I'll come to your house, and I'll sc--

BLAM. Simon SIDEKICKS JAMES IN THE THIGH. James *collapses*, moaning, clutching his thigh.

Simon assumes a polished fighting stance. "*Oh shit!*"s bubble up from the surrounding kids. Mr. Fleet marches back over.

On: Liv and Autumn, eyes on Simon. It's like they just witnessed the moon landing.

CUT TO:

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Simon sits in the waiting area by a very busy RECEPTIONIST.

Ms. Rosa enters from the hallway.

MS. ROSA
Cindy I'll take care of this.

Cindy, on the phone, gives a thumbs up.

INT. MS. ROSA'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Just Simon and Ms. Rosa. Simon sits in his desk. Ms. Rosa leans against hers.

Simon notes the PHOTO OF A TODDLER on her desk.

SIMON
Is that your daughter? She looks smart.

Ms. Rosa nods. Stays on track.

Ms. Rosa takes out her LUNCH COOLER. Removes a NECTARINE. Places the fruit on her desk. Draws no further attention to it.

MS. ROSA
I'm worried about you Simon.

SIMON
Wouldn't you be more worried if I *didn't* stand up for myself?

MS. ROSA
It's *how* you do so.

SIMON
As I told everyone at the talent show, through a microphone:
"Should I be forced to defend myself, my principles or my honor; should it be a matter of right or wrong"--

MS. ROSA
(matter-of-fact)
I know you're not a Black Belt.

The way she said it: He knows she knows. It puts him back in his seat. Still, he continues on defense.

SIMON

I'm not showy about it. That might be why you have that misconception.

Ms. Rosa picks up the NECTARINE.

She tosses it up high, elegantly, like a tennis serve...

...and at its APEX, she does a JUMPING-HIGH-KICK, *connecting with the nectarine MID-AIR*. The nectarine EXPLODES as though it were detonated internally.

Nectarine guts fly everywhere, including onto Simon's face. Simon is awe-struck.

MS. ROSA

Game recognize game. And game recognize...*not*.

(then)

Krav Maga. There's a lot of down-time in the military and I'm not one to let time go to waste.

Simon does not have access to language at the moment. Ms. Rosa hands him a paper towel. He wipes the fruit off his face.

MS. ROSA

Look, Simon...You have the *heart* of a Black Belt. But if you kick any more students, or any more school property...then it will be a problem for both of us.

(then)

Because I like having you around.

On Simon. He accepts the warning.

MS. ROSA

Why don't you *take karate lessons?* Earn the belt? I know you can do it.

SIMON

I *can*...but I can't. My parents took out loans against their life insurance before they drowned in snow...so I have to have a job.

(a beat)

But I'm using the internet to study and learn.

Ms. Rosa respects his effort. She's about to speak, then -

SIMON

Is there a farmer's market around here? I'd like to work on jump-high-kicking fruit, just like you.

On Ms. Rosa. She has her hands full with this kid.

EXT. TALL OAKS COUNTRY CLUB, CLUBHOUSE - DUSK

Simon cleans golf clubs. Drudgery. In the b.g., Liv and Autumn approach.

LIV

Hey.

AUTUMN

James cried after you left. Wish you saw it.

SIMON

I was just defending my honor.

AUTUMN

James has *no* honor.

SIMON

That's probably what he was crying about.

LIV

We're gonna go stake out the house. It's actually off the golf course. Eleventh hole.

AUTUMN

I brought binoculars. And kombucha - my dad unfortunately makes it.

LIV

Then afterward I thought we could get frozen yogurt and talk about our responsibilities in Montana.

AUTUMN

The cabin should have skylights. So we can have a lot of houseplants.

LIV

I was thinking that too. And we can dig a pool. And probably build a ping-pong/pool table combo.

They look at Simon expectantly. He's torn between the unappealing crime stake-out, and the very appealing Montana escape. Simon glances to the golf clubs.

SIMON

Let me just finish this pitching wedge.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Simon, Liv and Autumn wade through dense brush.

E.D.M. MUSIC can be heard, thumping. It GROWS as they near.

Finally, the HOUSE is in view. An ultra-modern monstrosity.

SIMON

Wow. Your brother is rich.

LIV

He's a houseguest. That's all he'll ever be.

Autumn takes out her BINOCULARS. We ENTER THAT POV:

Imagine one of those TIKTOK houses. That's what's going on here. Young people drinking from Solo cups on balconies.

Exit binocular POV.

SIMON

I thought you said the party is next week.

LIV

It is. This isn't a party...this is just how they live.

AUTUMN

I see Cory's room.

Autumn hands the binocs to Liv.

LIV

He used to use the safe as a nightstand because he doesn't understand furniture. But it might be in his closet now. Or somewhere else in the house, which would suck.

Simon's attention is on both of their ARMS. The TATTOOS.

Simon nods. While also realizing that their fantasy has some real shit anchored to it.

SIMON
Won't your parents miss you?

AUTUMN
(shrugs)
They're pot farmers who never wanted kids. They'll understand.
(then)
Where *is* she?

A thought occurs to Simon.

SIMON
Maybe it's a seaplane.

AUTUMN
Huh?

SIMON
Your propellers. Could be a seaplane. A plane *and* a boat.

Autumn is, in fact, mightily comforted by that thought. Like she and Liv are back together again.

AUTUMN
Yea. I guess that's what it is.

Simon feels like *he* should confide something now.

SIMON
My uncle is addicted to gambling. He's pretty good at it and he's saving for an engagement ring but--

LIV (O.S.)
(hushed)
All clear.

Autumn looks to Simon. No time now to address his issue. Simon and Autumn rush out toward Liv.

EXT. "THE DJ HOUSE" - NIGHT

Simon, Liv and Autumn stay low, approach one side of the house.

They speak in WHISPERS.

SIMON

How will you get into the safe? Is the combo your birthday or something?

LIV

(*as if*)

No.

AUTUMN

It's probably Daft Punk's birthday.

LIV

We're gonna *take* the safe and figure it out from there.

(then)

Good thing you have freak ninja strength to carry it.

On Simon. Yes. Good thing...

They're against the side of the house. Under a second-floor BALCONY. There is IVY-COVERED LATTICEWORK leading up the side of the house.

LIV

We just need to make sure the safe's still in there. Then we can bounce.

AUTUMN

I'll go.

SIMON

No. It might be necessary to disable someone inside with a Clinch Hold...I've been specifically practicing that Hold. I'll go.

The girls trust Simon. His skills. Their appreciation shows.

Simon begins to *ascend the latticework*. He makes it up to the BALCONY.

WITH SIMON. He looks in the room. Lights on, but unoccupied.

Simon shoots Liv and Autumn a thumbs-up.

Simon carefully opens the sliding glass door. Slips inside.

INT. CORY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Simon scans around: Various recording equipment. A bong that's taller than Simon. A NITROUS OXIDE TANK. But NO SAFE.

Simon goes to a CLOSET DOOR. Opens it, but it's in fact a BATHROOM, and inside is -

WOOF WOOF WOOF a *ROTTWEILER* BOUNDS OUT OF THE BATHROOM. *Stops just short of attacking Simon.* Simon freezes.

The dog SNARLS, TEETH BARED. It takes a step toward Simon. Simon is terrified, but tries to placate the beast.

SIMON

I...love...dogs.....they are...all lovable...

The dog *steps forward.*

SIMON

...St. Bernards even tried to save my parents. I...don't blame them that they couldn't...

The dog: *another step,* its bloodlust growing.

Simon notices, right beside him, the NITROUS TANK.

SIMON

...If I blast this helium in your open mouth, it's possible you'll float right out the window. God help you if you're high up when it wears off.

The dog *takes another step.*

Simon, *slowwwwwly,* *puts his hand on the Nitrous tank's* KNOB. *About to turn it on full-blast.* Then, realizes,

SIMON

I'd rather die than hurt you.

Simon BOLTS BACK TO THE BALCONY,

Tries to SLIDE THE DOOR SHUT BEHIND HIM but the dog SLIPS THROUGH, BARKING WILDLY,

Simon climbs over the edge, trying to *reach the latticework,* but now he's HANGING BY HIS FINGERTIPS.

The dog *BITES HIS ARM.*

And

Simon

Drops

THUD.

Liv and Autumn rush to him. Simon doing all he can to keep from crying. His arm GUSHING BLOOD.

SIMON

(weak)

The safe...it's in the
bathroom...where the animal lives.

The DOG CONTINUES its BLOODTHIRSTY BARKING.

VOICE (O.S.)

Who the fuck is there.

LIV

Go. Go go go.

The girls *pick Simon up onto his feet*. They bolt into the woods.

EXT. GOLF COURSE - NIGHT

Simon, Autumn and Liv emerge onto a deserted GOLF GREEN.

The bright moon illuminates the lush course. It would be a beautiful scene, were Simon not bleeding profusely.

Simon is panicked. Liv and Autumn are CHARGED UP. *Laughing giddily.*

SIMON

What the hell is funny?

The girls pull back on the laughs.

LIV

We have to put pressure on your
arm. Give me your belt.

SIMON

No!

AUTUMN

Her dad's a psychiatrist. A man of
medicine. Listen to her.

LIV

Do you want to LOSE the arm? How many one-armed karate guys do you know?

Simon, resigned, and in agony, takes off his Belt.

Liv carefully wraps it around his wound. Then PULLS IT TIGHT.

SIMON

Fuck! Fuck that!

AUTUMN

(sincere)

Nice tourniquet, Liv. Good to know you can do that in case we have any construction equipment accidents at the cabin.

Simon looks to his arm. The blood *soaking through, ruining his Black Belt*. He LOSES HIS SHIT.

SIMON

You're not going to build a cabin. No one will even sell you power tools. You have to be 18.

The girls did not expect that from him. It puts them on their heels. But that surprise turns...to anger.

LIV

Fuck you, Simon.

AUTUMN

I own power tools. That's how we're gonna *break open the safe*.

SIMON

Stop stealing stuff! *It's not honorable*.

LIV

I only steal what's mine.

SIMON

I was trained in the way of integrity and honor. Not *crime*.

LIV

You're a Black Belt. You're a fighter!

SIMON
 Karate's about *defense, not*
offense. You don't go *looking for*
trouble.

Liv, standing beside a SAND TRAP, reaches down and grabs and handful of SAND. She THROWS IT IN SIMON'S FACE.

Simon is stunned. He spits sand, wipes it from his eyes.

Liv's voice trembles:

LIV
 I have spent my whole life on
 defense. Autumn too. And we're
 done with that.

AUTUMN
 We're on motherfucking offense
 now. You can like it or not.

Liv *walks away*, toward the cart path. Autumn follows her.

Leaving Simon, alone on the green.

Simon watches as, moonlit, Liv and Autumn fade from view.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Uncle Nate has obscure European Tour golf tournaments on both TVs. He's glued to his phone, frantically texting. Not happy.

Simon enters, his face tear-streaked.

UNCLE NATE
 (distracted)
 How was frozen yogurt.

SIMON
 Hi.

Simon beeline's to the bathroom, shuts the door.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Simon gingerly unwraps the Belt. *Pain.* The deep TEETH MARKS on his arm start *gurgling blood.*

Simon wraps a towel tightly around his arm...

He secures the towel with a whole roll of dental floss...

And starts washing his Belt in the sink.

Bloody water circles the drain.

The Belt is now a faded, muddy black/red.

Simon chokes back tears.

INT. SIMON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Simon THROWS THE BLOODY, WET BLACK BELT IN HIS CLOSET.

Simon lies on his bed. Holds his arm tight. And silently cries.

MUSIC UP - appropriate to Simon's current devastation - as we enter a MONTAGE of the days that follow:

EXT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

By the DUMPSTERS. Simon has a pile of assorted garbage-plywood. His arm is now properly bandaged.

Simon holds pieces of plywood - attempts to KARATE CHOP through them. With limited success.

INT. WILL ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL, GYMNASIUM - DAY

Simon sits on the bleachers while the rest of the kids play dodgeball. Liv nor Autumn will meet his eyes.

James avoids his gaze too, but that's straight up out of fear.

EXT. TALL OAKS COUNTRY CLUB, CLUBHOUSE - DAY

Simon washes clubs. Nate and Becca are visible in b.g. by the Caddy Pagoda, quietly ARGUING. Simon looks, then looks away.

INT. SIMON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Simon lies in bed, his portable DVD player on his chest, vacantly watching Bruce Lee's "FIST OF FURY".

END MONTAGE/MUSIC.

INT. WILL ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Simon trudges through the hallway, crowded with socializing students. Liv and Autumn amongst them.

MS. ROSA (O.S.)

Hey.

Simon turns.

INT. MS. ROSA'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Just the two of them. Evident concern on Ms. Rosa's face.

MS. ROSA

I noticed a change of wardrobe--

SIMON

The belt was destroyed by blood.

MS. ROSA

...Should I be concerned? *Further* concerned?

SIMON

No. I was training so hard that I bled. That means I'm doing it right.

Ms. Rosa reads him, closely.

MS. ROSA

You'll have to tell me what's wrong if I'm going to do anything to help you with it.

On Simon, eyes down.

MS. ROSA

Or do you *not* want the advice of a Third Degree Black Belt.

Simon looks up at her, in awe. *Third Degree*. It's as though she's just revealed herself to be Captain Marvel.

But Simon still won't talk. Ms. Rosa takes another NECTARINE from her lunch cooler.

She places it on Simon's desk. Gives him an encouraging nod. Simon tries for a moment to resist the bait. But he can't.

Simon stands. Focuses. He tosses up the nectarine, and *kicks*. Total whiff.

Ms. Rosa picks it back up, gives it to him.

MS. ROSA

It's like..hockey.
(MORE)

MS. ROSA (CONT'D)
 Go where the puck is *going* to be.
 Not where it is.

Simon registers that. He tries again. CONTACT. The nectarine *flies against the wall*.

No fruit-explosion; nothing nearly as badass as Ms. Rosa. But he's also not a Third Degree Krav Maga Black Belt. He's pleased nonetheless, and so is Ms. Rosa.

Simon, now, opens up.

SIMON
 My friends don't share my values.

MS. ROSA
 And what would those be? Your values...

SIMON
 Courtesy. Discipline. Self-control.

MS. ROSA
 (deep inhale)
 Simon, man...you heard those words from karate movies and demo videos. But you're thirteen and still learning what they actually mean. Just like your friends.
 (then)
Here's a value, one I know you can nail: *compassion*. It's really hard being your age. So unless your friends are injuring themselves or others...maybe give them a break. And then, maybe, they'll give you one back.

That makes a lot of sense to Simon. He walks over and picks up the dirty, dented nectarine, goes to hand it back to Ms. Rosa.

MS. ROSA
 You can throw that out.
 (then)
 The bus is waiting. You excited?
 Ever been to the aquarium?

SIMON
 (a beat)
 I've never even been to the ocean.

EXT./INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Simon tentatively steps onto the bus. A cacophony of middle-schoolers amped up for a FIELD TRIP.

Simon Forrest-Gumps-it down the aisle, all seats taken. He nears Liv and Autumn.

SIMON

Hi.

Liv is staring at her phone. There seems to even be some tension between *Liv and Autumn*.

AUTUMN

Don't worry. We won't bother you.

SIMON

That's not--

BUS DRIVER (intercom)

Everyone. Take your seat.

Simon has to continue on. The only open seat is directly BEHIND JAMES. Great.

Simon sits. The bus lurches into motion.

Simon unzips his backpack and removes a DVD CASE. He taps James on the shoulder. James turns back.

JAMES

What.

SIMON

I wanted to lend you this. It's an awesome kung fu movie. You'll like it but you'll also learn from it. So that next time it's a fair fight.

James, intrigued, accepts the DVD.

SIMON

The fairest fight is the one that is avoided...

(then)

That's from the movie.

EXT. AQUARIUM OF THE PACIFIC - DAY

Establishing. The kids pour from the bus.

INT. AQUARIUM OF THE PACIFIC - DAY

Students are split into several smaller GROUPS, each led by a TOUR GUIDE.

WITH SIMON. Feeling all alone with his group of rando students. He glances over toward Autumn and Liv's group.

TOUR GUIDE

...why we call them Sea Jellies and not Jellyfish. Fish anatomy is centered around a backbone, while the Sea Jelly is a dome-shaped invertebrate...

The students vacantly nod along.

TOUR GUIDE

At the end of our tour, we'll visit the "please touch" Manta Ray tank. You can pet them!

On the students: *Now we're talking!*

Simon's group continues on. They pass the GIFT SHOP.

On Simon. And his new IDEA. Simon surreptitiously *slips away from the group*. And enters,

INT. AQUARIUM GIFT SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Simon browses around. Shark teeth. Sand Dollars. Stuffed animal sea creatures.

He stops at a JEWELRY CASE - necklaces and such made with pieces of coral, sea glass, etc. Simon, it's clear, is shopping for a girl. Or as is the case, girls.

Then, from the corner of his eye, he spots: A shelf with SMALL CERAMIC FIGURINES of SEA-PLANES. He has found the perfect gift, and it shows on his face.

Simon picks one up, spins the working PROPELLER. Pleased. Then he looks at the PRICE TAG. Forty dollars each!

Simon is not leaving without these sea-planes. He looks around, tracks the EMPLOYEES. His heart goes staccato.

Simon STUFFS TWO SEA-PLANES IN HIS BACKPACK.

And as the Jane's Addiction tune goes, he *walks..right..through the..door*.

INT. AQUARIUM OF THE PACIFIC - DAY

Simon spots Liv and Autumn's group. He races up, blends in.

SIMON
Liv, Autumn, hi.

LIV
(re: Tour Guide)
We're *learning*.

SIMON
I got you something.

He has their curiosity. Simon removes the two SEAPLANES from his backpack. Gives the propellers a little spin.

SIMON
It's a boat. *And* a plane.

AUTUMN
(to Liv)
I forgot to tell you. Our propellers, they must be from seaplanes. They're both.

Liv softens up. It appears to be a healing moment between the girls.

Then, a *concerned look* overtakes Liv's face.

A HAND lands on Simon's shoulder. He turns. SECURITY GUARD.

SECURITY GUARD
Can I ask you to come with me?

Simon looks to Liv and Autumn. All three of them wondering what he'll do. Then, we find out:

Simon RUNS, CLUTCHING THE SEAPLANES. To his mind, they're not even his anymore. They belong to Liv and Autumn. He cradles the planes, as if to reach the endzone would mean a Super Bowl.

Simon is fast and nimble, weaving between AQUARIUM-GOERS.

The burly GUARD PURSUES.

The STUDENTS look on in disbelief.

JAMES
(impressed)
Hell yea dude...

Simon looks back. He's far ahead of the lumbering Guard, but the Guard still pursues.

Simon STOPS. Turns. And steps into a KARATE FIGHTING STANCE. Ready to take the Guard on.

The Guard, obviously, just keeps running toward him...

So Simon reassesses, and CONTINUES RUNNING AWAY.

Then...Simon begins...to GLIDE. He's HIT A PATCH OF WATER ON THE GROUND.

Simon slides, fast, hard, RIGHT INTO THE "PLEASE TOUCH" MANTA RAY TANK. CRACK.

THE TANK'S GLASS SPIDERWEBS. AND SHATTERS.

WATER AND MANTA RAYS POUR OUT ONTO THE FLOOR.

Everyone nearby SCATTERS. Some scared CHILDREN SCREAM.

Simon is on his ass. Beside him...two broken seaplanes. And a FLOPPING MANTA RAY.

The GUARD reaches him. Simon tries to *gather the seaplane pieces*.

SECURITY GUARD
Forfeit the merchandise, son.

The Guard, trying not to slip, grabs for Simon and the seaplanes. While AQUARIUM PERSONNEL rush in to rescue the Rays.

Simon squirms on the wet floor, AMIDST FLOPPING MANTA RAYS, away from the Guard.

Just as the Guard is about to get his paws on Simon, Simon GRABS A MANTA RAY AND SLAPS IT ACROSS THE GUARD'S FACE.

The Guard, stunned, steps back, the writhing Ray in his hands.

Simon desperately *gathers up the rest of the seaplane pieces*...

...And runs for his life.

We land on Liv and Autumn, dumbstruck. They've created a monster. And they probably want to marry it.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Uncle Nate enters, with BECCA. Nate wears his golf clothes, and, respectfully, a blazer. Becca, too, clearly just stepped off the course. She holds her golf visor in her hands.

They take seats across the desk from THE PRINCIPAL. Ms. Rosa is seated adjacent the Principal's desk.

UNCLE NATE
Hi Principal--

PRINCIPAL
You can call me Miranda.

UNCLE NATE
(dubious)
I find that informality in
authority figures is a trap. Is
that what this is?

Becca places a hand on Nate's arm - *take it easy.*

UNCLE NATE
It's just that there's two of you
and--

MS. ROSA
There are two of you as well.

BECCA
(courteous)
Hello.

MIRANDA
Let's get to the matter at hand.
The violence. Theft. Vandalism.

UNCLE NATE
(genuinely curious)
Was there profanity? I've been
really trying to watch my mouth in
front of him.

Miranda looks to Ms. Rosa, who thinks, shakes her head, No.

MIRANDA
No profanity.

UNCLE NATE
That's a relief, right? To all of
us?

MIRANDA
Mr. Paluska. The aforementioned
behavior was perpetrated by,
seemingly, a lovely, sensitive,
intelligent boy.

BECCA
But damaged. You have to calculate
that in.

MS. ROSA

You are...

UNCLE NATE

She's his mother-figure.

Nate points back and forth between himself and Becca.

UNCLE NATE

This is very complicated. But what's crystal clear is that she's his mother-figure. And a damn good one.

Becca truly appreciates that. It's safe to say that her calculus on Nate just shifted somewhat, in Nate's favor.

MS. ROSA

The aquarium declined to pursue charges, on account of there being no Wet-Floor-Caution sign near the...wet floor. But I'm afraid disciplinary measures from the school will be necessary.

MIRANDA

And you *need* to talk to him about the karate. It is a *fantasy*, and it's become problematic.

Something about that didn't sit right with Becca. She uncrosses her legs. Leans back in her chair. Reeeal comfortable. She's got a *look* in her eye. And then, she leans *forward*.

BECCA

Ms. Rosa. *Principal* Miranda - I'll call you that if I may. When I was Simon's age, I went to this crappy day camp one summer. I was a *lonely* girl. A really..lonely girl. But as luck would have it, I met this *other* lonely girl - Cassie, I think. We were both only-children. Both pretty much poor. Both had mean, mean parents. So we decided to tell people we were *sisters*. *Rich* sisters. We didn't want to make other kids feel bad, so we mostly just talked about our immense, generational wealth amongst ourselves. We would talk about how happy we were that Jeeves added Airheads to the candy cellar.

(MORE)

BECCA (CONT'D)

How our olympic-size pool could use re-tiling. How the Barbies' hair in the Barbie Display Pavilion looked so so pretty at sunset. How our pregnant thoroughbred...Estelle...was due any day.

Becca is reliving this, and Miranda and Ms. Rosa are right there with her. Uncle Nate too.

On a dime, Becca is back to reality.

BECCA

"Fantasies", at Simon's age, are not a problem. They're a solution. And sometimes the *only* one.

(then)

We will talk to Simon about his behavior. But you *stay the fuck* away from his fantasy.

Miranda and Ms. Rosa are without a response to that.

Becca stands - "We're through here". Nate looks to Becca, lovingly. He stands as well.

Becca and Nate head for the door. Then, Becca turns back.

BECCA

It's fair that I add: I am a trained paralegal - my night job. And I read the fine print on the kids' permission slip. That wet floor? That's *your* problem...should we choose to make it so.

(then, gently)

So cut Simon some slack. The kid's parents just died, ya know.

After a beat, Nate decides it necessary to add,

UNCLE NATE

In a fucking. Avalanche.

Becca departs. Nate follows.

On Miranda and Ms. Rosa. Each hoping that the other has something to say.

INT. GOLF CART GARAGE, TALL OAKS C.C. - DAY

CLOSE ON: Simon. GREASE STAINS on his face.

He's *cleaning golf cart axles*. Unglamorous work. In this case, punishment.

Uncle Nate enters.

UNCLE NATE

When you're done with those I want you to hose down the lawnmowers.

SIMON

I already did.

UNCLE NATE

Then...wax them or something. Bec got you out of a real pickle, but I'd feel like a bad dad if I didn't teach you that hitting people with stingrays is wrong.

SIMON

(sotto)

Manta Ray. They don't sting.

(then, fed up)

I was just trying to do something nice for my friends. One of them might even be my girlfriend.

On Nate: Simon's behavior is making more sense to him now.

UNCLE NATE

Dude..you're headed down a dangerous path if you're willing to go all Clyde for your Bonnie.

SIMON

What?

UNCLE NATE

Don't get me wrong, I think it's sweet that you want to kick ass and commit crimes for a girl you love. But you're at a sensitive, developmental point in your life when trouble can become habit-forming. And listen to someone who's gotten in trouble: You don't want it.

SIMON

What have you ever done?

(MORE)

SIMON (CONT'D)
All you do is bet on golf. And
that's legal. I looked it up.

UNCLE NATE
You know what I've done?
I've...*swerved off a fucking*
bridge. That's what.

SIMON
On a golf cart?

UNCLE NATE
...No. And *that's* why I bet on
golf...instead of play it.

The information settles on Simon.

SIMON
(realizing)
Your shoulder.

Nate nods.

UNCLE NATE
Stay away from trouble. Okay?

REVEAL: LIV. Standing outside the garage.

Liv, expressionless, marches over to Simon...

...and FRENCH KISSES HIM.

Liv about-faces, and disappears from the garage.

It will take time for Simon to catch up with what he's feeling
right now. But he is *glowing*.

Uncle Nate's eyes are wide. Brimming with paternal pride.

UNCLE NATE
I can't be relied on to be right
all of the time. You might want to
follow your heart. Like, within
reason. No more crime. But, yea...

On Simon, frozen in time. He just lost his kissing-virginity.
Years, likely, before he ever thought he would.

CUT TO:

INT. SIMON'S ROOM - NIGHT

MUSIC UP. This time, of the *badass* sort.

Simon, wearing only his underwear, *takes the blood-caked Black Belt out from the closet.*

With great seriousness, he ties it on.

Simon opens up the screen on his DVD PLAYER. Presses PLAY. Another *Bruce Lee* movie.

Simon, all focus and intensity, kung-fu's along to the movie.

INT. PIZZA PLACE - DAY

Simon sits at a booth with a FULL PIZZA before him.

Liv and Autumn enter, sit opposite him.

Simon gestures to the pie, "Please." The girls dig in.

SIMON

How was school? I was suspended
for the day, as you're aware.

AUTUMN

I know you guys kissed.

Simon tries, in vain, not to blush.

LIV

I kissed *him*. I'm not so sure he
kissed me back.

SIMON

Yes I *did*.

Liv shrugs. She takes out her phone and opens ZILLOW.

LIV

Check this out. 18-thousand
dollars for four acres of land by
a river. We'd still have twenty-
two g's for cabin materials and
toiletries and stuff.

AUTUMN

I think we can get 45 for that
watch. Doris Day supposedly owned
it before your Grandpa - I heard
him say that once.

Simon gets with the vision.

SIMON

We could fish in the river, my mom taught me how to gut fish. We'd save money on food if we just eat sushi from the river.

LIV

(sincere)

That's great.

(then)

The DJ party is in three days. That doesn't give us much time to steal a getaway car.

Simon puts his slice down. Did he hear that right?

AUTUMN

Borrow a getaway car.

LIV

I thought you knew that's what I meant.

AUTUMN

I *didn't* know.

LIV

Simon, you knew what I meant...

SIMON

No...Steal and borrow are more *different* than similar.

LIV

Well we *have* to steal it before we can give it back. That's how stealing *becomes* borrowing.

On Autumn: "Yea, fair point."

Simon goes rigid. At the thought of more "trouble".

SIMON

Why do we need a getaway car? We have getaway *legs*.

LIV

The safe is heavy. And I told you, they have dirtbikes and probably a gun.

SIMON

Can't we "borrow" one of your parents' cars?

(MORE)

SIMON (CONT'D)
 Uncle Nate always needs his for
 work but maybe one of yours?

LIV
 (a beat)
 My dad...no.

A heaviness sets over Liv. Autumn breaks it by moving on.

AUTUMN
 (rolls her eyes)
 My parents *bike*.

LIV
 We don't have time to go over all
 of this again. We need to get that
 watch during the DJ party so we
 can escape from here and have a
 good life.
 (then)
 Does this really take convincing?

Simon, under their gaze, sips his soda.

LIV
 Are you in or not Simon?

Simon says this quietly, rationalizing his decision.

SIMON
*If you trust yourself, any choice
 you make will be correct.*

On the girls: Huh?

SIMON
 David Carradine. "*Kung Fu*".
 (then)
 I am in.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

With Simon, Liv and Autumn, dressed in black. Simon wears his Black Belt. The girls both have their hair pulled back in ponytails. All business.

Liv carries a CROWBAR. She tucks it inside her jacket.

LIV
 House is on the next block. It's a
 '99 Taurus. Easy grab.

SIMON

How do you know how to turn it on?

LIV

Videos on the Dark Web. You can access it through the computers at school - isn't that nuts?

Simon nods. That is nuts.

SIMON

Hey I don't mean to be a downer, but...do you think people will sell land to kids?

AUTUMN

My sister's gonna do it for us. She lives in Ojai. She doesn't believe in rules.

On Simon: That takes care of that.

SIMON

Can we use some of the money for throwing-stars and swords? To protect the property? My hands themselves are lethal weapons, but the sword is the extension of the hand. Doesn't hurt to have extensions.

Liv and Autumn look to each other, silently consult, decide.

AUTUMN

Yea. Sure.

SIMON

I also know how to use tools. My parents made me go to their shop after school so I'm pretty much a woodworker.

AUTUMN

I'd love a screened-in porch. So we can watch the sun rise without bugs.

SIMON

I'm sure I can do that.

LIV

We also need a barn for the cows.

SIMON
 (admits)
 I've been making a list. I'll put
 that on it.

On Liv and Autumn. Surprised, and touched, by his commitment.

They reach the end of the block. Up ahead, a modest two-story home. In the driveway: A late-model FORD TAURUS.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Simon, Liv and Autumn crouch behind hedges adjacent the house. And hereon, speak in WHISPERS.

LIV
 Autumn - wait here and keep
 lookout. Simon, come with me. In
 case you need to fight us out of a
 physical altercation.

Simon gives a sturdy nod, prepared to rise to that occasion.

Simon and Liv crouch-walk over to the car.

There are *lights on* in the house, but only upstairs.

SIMON
 You know...I did kiss you back.
 Why did you say I didn't?

LIV
 This *can't* be the time we talk
 about this...

SIMON
 I'm a martial artist, we're
 trained to multi-task. But if you
 don't want to--

LIV
Fine. You kissed me back.
 Just...not enough, I guess. It
 didn't seem like you liked me.

SIMON
 I...but I..

They reach the car, concluding that conversation, for now.

Liv unsheathes her CROWBAR.

Simon gives her an enthused thumbs-up - "good luck!"

Liv JIMMIES THE CROWBAR into the doorjamb. The door *OPENS*.

Liv and Simon look to each other, hearts racing, thrill coursing through.

Liv gets in the driver's seat and starts feeling around under the steering wheel.

She pops off the cover to the IGNITION WIRING.

That's when Simon notices: In the cupholder, a THERMOS. And *screen-printed onto it*: A PHOTO OF A TODDLER.

The exact same photo of a toddler from Ms. Rosa's desk.

Simon's heart DROPS.

SIMON

Liv. We have to bail. Liv. Get out of the car.

LIV

Did they see us?!

SIMON

No, Liv, *get out of the car*.

AUTUMN (O.S.)

What's going on?

SIMON

It's Ms. Rosa's car!

LIV

I know!

SIMON

You *know*?!

Autumn runs up.

AUTUMN

What's going on?!

SIMON

It's Ms. Rosa's car!

AUTUMN

(news to her)
Oh. Shit.

LIV

You knew that.

AUTUMN

I...don't think so.

LIV

What does it matter? I knew she drove a shitty old car that we can break into. So *that's what we're doing.*

SIMON

She's *nice*. She's a *good teacher*. And I shouldn't be telling you this...it was told to me in confidence, but...*she's a Black Belt.*

LIV

So are you!

SIMON

No, she's like a *real*...she's a *Third Degree*. She can *explode fruit* - imagine what she could do to our *heads*.

Liv, defiant, *touches the ignition wires together*. THE CAR STARTS.

SIMON

This has become dishonorable. I'm outta here.

Liv looks to Autumn: *Get in.*

AUTUMN

Maybe we shouldn't--

THE FRONT DOOR OF THE HOUSE OPENS.

MS. ROSA

What the *hell*?

Simon RUNS OFF.

Liv goes to put the car in REVERSE, but realizes...*it's a stick shift.*

Liv ends up putting it in NEUTRAL, and the car slowly *rolls forward toward the garage.*

MS. ROSA

I'm calling the police!

Liv *bails from the car*. The car lurches forward. Taps into the garage door and stops.

Liv and Autumn high-tail down the street after Simon.

We get a CLOSE LOOK at each of their faces. No thrill this time. Only fear.

EXT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - NIGHT

Simon, Liv and Autumn sprint up. Finally stop. Gasp for breath.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Simon opens the door, turns on lights. Liv and Autumn follow him in.

SIMON

He's not home. We can regroup here while we wait to get arrested.

LIV

She didn't see us.

SIMON

You don't know that. Black Belts have incredible vision. We train in the night.

Liv and Autumn are now slightly concerned.

Simon continues on to his room. Liv and Autumn trail.

INT. SIMON'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Simon sits on his bed, face in hands. Autumn lies down on the treadmill. Liv paces. They're still gathering their breath.

LIV

Maybe I messed up.

SIMON

Maybe?! She's a good teacher!

LIV

To *you*. When I hand stuff in late she always calls them "excuses" but they're *not*. They're *reasons*.

AUTUMN

She thinks I smoke pot. Just because I smell like it.

SIMON

Well...I can probably talk to her.
Maybe she doesn't see you two for
who you are yet.

LIV

Or she *does*. And maybe we don't
see who we are yet.

On Autumn, needing to think about that. Not wanting to.

LIV

And you know what? I don't give a
shit what she thinks about us.
After we take that watch to Big
Nick's Pawn and Jewelry Inc on
Sunday, she won't be our teacher
anymore. We're gonna home-school
each other about things that
matter. We'll make our own
curriculum of adventure books and
archeology books and we'll learn
which berries in the forrest will
kill us and which ones *won't*.

AUTUMN

And I have my sister's MasterClass
log-in. So we can do the R.L.
Stine one and write scary stories
for each other.

SIMON

...We'll have internet?

LIV

Yes we'll have *internet*.

(then)

And you'll teach us martial arts.
That way we can all be Black
Belts. We can *fight off bears* if
they decide to mess with us.

Simon's anger is fading. The fantasy again taking root; again
seeming real.

SIMON

...I'll definitely teach you.

Simon lays back on his bed. Exhausted. They all are. His eyes
begin to *close*.

Then, Liv's attention is caught by SOMETHING in Simon's OPEN
CLOSET.

LIV
 Oh we could actually use that. I
 bet the safe would fit in it -
 it'll be easier in case we need to
 drag it.

SIMON
 (eyes closed)
 Huh?

Liv goes to the closet and grabs UNCLE NATE'S BIG DUFFEL BAG.
The one Simon used for the "concrete" talent show slabs.

Liv unzips the bag.

Simon hears the sound of the ZIPPER and SHOOTS UP.

SIMON
Don't go in there.

Too late.

LIV
 What's this junk?

Simon tries to pull the bag away, but Liv pulls it back.

SIMON
 Those are personal effects!

Liv picks up a few pieces of BROKEN, PAINTED STYROFOAM.

LIV
 This is...this is your bag from
 the talent show.

Autumn walks over to get a look. Liv *crumbles* some styrofoam in
 her hands.

LIV
 This is...*not* concrete.

SIMON
 (panicked)
 That's not what I used. That was
 just stuff to test the set-up,
 to...make sure the dimensions of
 the set-up were good.

AUTUMN
 Then why is it *painted* like real
 concrete?

Simon doesn't have a ready answer for that.

Liv and Autumn look to each other, as it dawns:

LIV
 You can't break concrete with your bare fists. You can only break styrofoam with your bare fists...which anyone can do.
 (piercing)
 You're...not a Black Belt.

SIMON
 Yes. I *am*.

Liv PUNCHES SIMON'S ARM. HARD.

LIV
 You would have blocked that. On instinct.

Simon feels everything slipping away.

SIMON
 I...am a Black Belt...of Taekwondo. My Sensei--

AUTUMN
 (interrupting, calmly)
 Do a split.

SIMON
 What?

AUTUMN
 Do. A split. Every Black Belt can do a split. *Orange* belts can probably do a split.

Liv looks to Autumn. Then back to Simon.

LIV
 Do a split, Simon.

On Simon. Holding back tears. He takes a deep breath. Wishes upon a star, probably. *And tries to do a split.*

He gets about...30% of the way there. Maybe 25%. All he's got.

Liv and Autumn are aghast. By the *very* weak split. By the deception.

LIV
 You. Are a *fraud*.

SIMON
 I...am not...

AUTUMN

You are! You're *absolutely* that!

SIMON

...Batman's parents died and he created a persona. WHY CAN'T I?

LIV

Because you're not Will Arnett.
(then, pointed)
Not by a mile.

Simon's heart shatters.

AUTUMN

We can't trust him in Montana. I bet he doesn't even know how to gut a fish or build a screened-in porch.

(then)

I bet...his parents aren't even *dead*.

Liv looks to Simon. Well?

SIMON

(trembling)

They are. Both of them.
Permanently.

Simon, here, now, feels the loss of his parents, in its entirety, for the first time. There's a geyser of tears in wait behind his eyes.

SIMON

Not even a Taekwondo Black Belt has the power to change that.

LIV

(a measured beat)

Well...I'm sorry about that.

(then, self-protecting)

And I'm sorry you won't be joining us in Montana.

Liv walks out of the room. Autumn looks to him. Wants to be of comfort...But she follows Liv out.

Simon, stunned, hears the front door SLAM SHUT.

Simon doesn't know what to do. He *takes off his Black Belt*. And BITES DOWN ON IT, *hard*, as though he were getting a limb sawed off. Tears begin to stream.

EXT. TALL OAKS COUNTRY CLUB, PUTTING GREEN - DUSK

Uncle Nate putts on the practice green. Simon sits on the edge of the green, bored, miserable, watching. His Black Belt noticeably *absent*.

Nate sinks a glory of a 20-footer.

UNCLE NATE

That is *touch*.

(to Simon)

Get in on this, man. I wanna see what you got.

Simon shakes his head - no thanks.

Uncle Nate walks over. *Physically picks Simon up* and places him on his feet. Hands Simon his putter.

UNCLE NATE

(compassionate)

Bad news for you. There's a strict 24-hour moping period around here. That time has expired.

Nate places a golf ball on the green in front of Simon.

UNCLE NATE

Now show me your famous Black Belt focus, and sink that sphere!

SIMON

I'm not a Black Belt.

UNCLE NATE

Yea I know. But someday you will be. And you'll look back at this putt you're about to *sink*, and think to yourself: I had it all along. The focus. It was right there in my heart.

Simon, to placate Nate more than anything, lines up to putt.

He strikes the ball and.....leaves it short.

UNCLE NATE

Easy tap-in from there. I think you should feel encouraged by that shot.

Simon shrugs. Walks over to the ball. Taps it in. The sound of the ball hitting the cup cheers him, if minimally.

SIMON

I was starting to be in love with her. And now she's never gonna talk to me again.

UNCLE NATE

I think she'll get over it, man. Kids lie all the time. Shit. Your dad told me that our mom was always tired because she stayed awake to murder the monsters under our bed. But really, she was tired because she was sad.

Nate takes the ball out of the cup. Lines up a new putt.

UNCLE NATE

Kids lie. Because otherwise, everything seems too scary and hard.

(then)

He lied, but he was protecting me.

Simon gets that.

SIMON

He was good at protecting people.

UNCLE NATE

That is correct Simon. That's where you get it from.

(then)

Your lie wasn't a bad one, kiddo. You were just trying to protect *yourself*. Nothing wrong with that.

SIMON

I wanted to protect them too. Liv. And Autumn.

UNCLE NATE

Welllll, those chicks seem hardcore. I'm not sure they need your help. But I'm proud of you for being a good friend - showing up for them whether they need you or not. *That's* some Black Belt-level friend shit right there.

This *lands with Simon*. The "showing up". The "Black Belt-level friend shit."

Simon's moping-period, it seems, has indeed concluded. In its place: *Determination*.

MUSIC UP over the following. Appropriate to his determination.

INT. SIMON'S ROOM - MORNING

Simon springs from bed. Immediately hits the floor and does PUSH-UPS. He jumps to his feet and heads straight for the -

TREADMILL. He turns it up *way too fast*. But, determined, as he is, Simon sprints with all of his might.

EXT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

By the dumpsters. Simon, in the zone, *breaks plywood* over his knees. *Kee-HUP*.

INT. SIMON'S ROOM - DUSK

Simon stands before a mirror. In his SKIN-TIGHT ARMANI EXCHANGE T-SHIRT. *Bellybutton hole and all*.

Simon TIES ON HIS BLACK BELT.

Simon takes the DUFFEL BAG from the closet. He opens it, and dumps all of the styrofoam onto the ground.

Simon stuffs the duffel bag into his BACKPACK.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Simon opens the FREEZER. It's packed with FROZEN STEAKS.

Simon takes a few steaks and *stuffs those in his backpack too*.

Then he grabs a HANDFUL OF RANDOM COOKING UTENSILS.

EXT. TALL OAKS COUNTRY CLUB - NIGHT

Simon rides up on Uncle Nate's bike. Parks it. Walks with purpose toward,

EXT./INT. GOLF CART GARAGE - NIGHT

The garage is unattended. Simon approaches one of the big, gas-powered LANDSCAPING GOLF CARTS - the kind with a FLATBED in back. *The key is in the ignition*, as it is with all the carts.

Simon turns it on. And *drives out of the garage*.

EXT. TALL OAKS COUNTRY CLUB - CONTINUOUS

Simon drives past the Clubhouse, slowly, with great focus, hoping to avoid detection. It's his first time behind the wheel of anything.

Then he hears,

 BECCA (O.S.)
 ...Simon?

Shit. Simon stops. Becca approaches, carrying her golf bag.

 SIMON
Hi Bec!

 BECCA
Where's your uncle?

 SIMON
 (sincere, all the way)
Probably off doing something nice
for you. That's usually what's on
his mind.

Becca registers that, but stays on the immediate matter,

 BECCA
Are you here alone?...Why are you
driving the *landscaping* cart?

 SIMON
I have answers to all of those
questions. But I'm afraid I don't
have time to answer them.
 (then)
My friends could be in trouble.

 BECCA
 (concerned)
Do you need an adult?

 SIMON
No. I'm hoping not.

Simon, no time to waste, just starts *driving away*.

 SIMON
 (calls back)
Love you...
 (then, decides)
 ...*Mom!*

On Becca. That's a whole lot to absorb.

She watches as Simon *drives off the Tall Oaks property.*

With decidedly maternal concern, Becca takes out her phone.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

Simon drives, his hands at 10 and 2, nervous but intent. His BACKPACK on the seat next to him.

Various CARS pass him. Confounded looks from the drivers - on account of a middle-schooler driving a golf cart at night on a residential road.

Simon spots a POLICE CRUISER up ahead.

Simon drives up ONTO SOMEONE'S LAWN, trampling some innocent daisies in the process. Simon looks down at the now-2D flowers, feels genuinely bad about it.

The Cruiser passes by. Simon waits a beat, and drives on.

The SOUND of THUMPING MUSIC grows near.

EXT. "THE DJ HOUSE" - NIGHT

Simon drives past the house, slowly, *casing the place.* There are various EXOTIC CARS outside.

Inside, a party. *The party.*

Simon parks the golf cart around the corner from the house.

INT. THE DJ HOUSE - NIGHT

Simon - and again, let's remember what he's wearing - enters. BLACK BELT and BELLYBUTTON on full display.

The vibe is that of a frat party - elevated, somewhat, by some Vegas club-DJ's success.

That very DJ spins from a PODIUM at the rear of the cavernous living room.

Simon has never seen drinking or smoking, at least not like this. He wades through the much-taller crowd.

People cut him confused looks, but that's all.

Simon, overwhelmed, ducks into a SCREENING ROOM.

INT. SCREENING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

FIELD OF DREAMS plays on the massive screen, without audio. Simon is briefly transfixed by it, until,

VOICE (O.S.)
What are you?

Simon looks to his right to see a GUY and a GIRL (20s) sitting in recliners. The Guy holds an upturned FRISBEE with LINES OF COCAINE on it.

SIMON
...Hi. Do you know Liv and Autumn?

GUY
What are you?

SIMON
I'm Simon. I think that's what you're asking?

GIRL
(to herself)
I like that shirt.
(then)
What's in the backpack?

SIMON
Steak, mostly. If there's extra later you can have the rest.

The Guy *slides the frisbee away from himself.*

GUY
Things have become weird. No more for me.

GIRL
You seem...really young.
(re: coke)
I'm sorry, we can't offer you any.
You seem really...young.

SIMON
I wouldn't know what to do with that. Do you know Liv and Autumn?

GUY
Are you wearing a karate belt?

SIMON
Yea.

The Guy processes that. Along with everything else.

GUY
I don't think I have any more
questions.

Simon exhales, frustrated. These people are useless. He heads
back into,

INT. THE MAIN FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Simon makes his way toward the KITCHEN. His eyes peeled for Liv
and Autumn.

A HAND *grabs onto Simon's backpack*, YANKING him into,

INT. PANTRY - CONTINUOUS

Liv and Autumn. (The pantry, incidentally, is just beer,
coconut water, and dozens of bags of almonds).

LIV
*You better tell me why you're
here.*

AUTUMN
Nice belt.

SIMON
(to Autumn)
Thanks.
(then, to both)
I don't need your permission to be
here. This is a neighborhood party
and I'm a neighborhood boy.

LIV
This is a private affair and
you're a *trespasser*.

SIMON
How could you say that to someone
you kissed?!

AUTUMN
(to Liv, in Simon's defense)
He wore the shirt. That took guts.

SIMON
Yea it did. And you're gonna *need*
guts to pull off this "noble"
heist. Guts...and the stuff in my
backpack.

LIV

But you can't be trusted. I don't care what's in your backpack if you can't be trusted.

SIMON

How were you planning to get the safe out? Did you get a *car*?

AUTUMN

We brought a red wagon. We'll run through the woods with it.

SIMON

(scoffs)

A red wagon.

(then, full of guts)

I brought *real* wheels. And the stuff in my backpack.

Liv and Autumn are both glad he's here, and do everything they can to hide the fact.

LIV

You still can't come to Montana.

SIMON

It's a big state and I'll go there if I want. I doubt I'll even run into you.

Liv and Autumn look to each other. They respect his defiance. It's tacitly understood: He's back in.

INT. THE DJ HOUSE - NIGHT

Simon, Liv and Autumn make their way slowly toward the STAIRS - trying, perhaps too hard, to look like they belong there. Liv sips a BEER. Hates it.

SIMON

Where's your brother?

LIV

Sucking dentist medicine by the pool. I never want to be like him.

SIMON

Drugs make no sense.

AUTUMN

Tell that to my parents.

They walk UPSTAIRS. As other PARTYGOERS fumble their way down.

PARTYGOER
Whoaa, it's the Rugrats!

LIV
(to Partygoer)
Go and fuck yourself.
(then)
Is *that* how the Rugrats talk?

PARTYGOER
(scared)
Oh...I don't think so.

INT. THE DJ HOUSE, UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

They walk past people coming and going from assorted bedrooms, and head toward a ROOM at the end of the hall. Its door closed.

Simon does that military-style thing where he points with his pointer and middle fingers to his eyes, then to the room.

They reach the door. Liv slowly opens it.

INT. CORY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Liv quietly shuts the door behind them.

GROWLING, SNARLING emits from the bathroom.

LIV
I forgot about Edward...

Simon holds up his *scabbed arm*.

SIMON
I never will.

Simon opens his backpack, and takes out a FROZEN STEAK.

AUTUMN
(sincere)
Oh my god. He's a genius. He's a
genius who thought ahead.

Liv, with a look to Simon, acknowledges: Nice work.

Simon removes the steak from its plastic grocery store wrapper.

They approach the bathroom. The SNARLING intensifies.

Simon, in one ninja-like motion, *opens the door* and TOSSES IN THE STEAK.

Edward shuts right up, blissed out on the frozen meat.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

They enter the bathroom. Liv pets Edward, who pauses from the steak to lick her hand. The bathroom is marble-clad and filthy.

In the back, next to the tub: THE SAFE.

Simon, Liv and Autumn look to one another. Look to the safe: *Their ticket out.*

Simon opens his backpack again and removes the DUFFEL BAG.

Autumn is blown away.

AUTUMN
It's one genius thing after
another.

SIMON
Wait til you see my wheels.

Simon opens the duffel bag, lays it flat in front of the safe.

They TIP the heavy safe over into the bag, and zip the bag around it.

It takes all three of them to drag it out of the bathroom.

INT. CORY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

SIMON
Let's drop this out the window.
Run down. And get it to my wheels.

LIV
(realizing)
What if the watch breaks in the
fall? I say we just lug this out
the front door. People here only
pay attention to themselves.

SIMON
If the watch is as classy as you
say it is, it can withstand a
fall. Most of the expensive ones
are tested by mountaineers.

AUTUMN
I'm seeing merit to both of your
arguments--

VOICE (O.S.)
Who the fuck are you?

A MAN (early 40s) enters the room, holding a motorcycle helmet.

LIV
I'm Cory's sister. Who are you?

The man clocks the CUBE SHAPED OBJECT in the duffel bag.

MAN
Would you tell me what's in that bag?

AUTUMN
I'll tell you what's *not* in the bag: *Your business.*

The man LAUGHS.

MAN
I actually have a feeling my business *is* in that bag.

The man *lunges* for the bag. The kids try to stop him. He *elbows Simon to the floor*. Unzips the bag. Sees the safe.

MAN
You kids are insane. Walk away. Now.

LIV
No. This is *mine*. My grandpa meant to leave it for *me*.

MAN
(mocking)
Your grandpa left you 600 Ecstasy pills? That's...so weird of him.

On Liv, Simon, Autumn: Oh, shit.

LIV
Well, there's other stuff in there too.

AUTUMN
(to Liv)
We could sell the drugs to someone. Then we'd have enough to build an arcade room.

Liv likes the sound of that. Defiant, she *re-zips the bag*.

LIV
We're taking the safe.

The man threateningly walks toward her.

Simon, still dazed on the floor, *reaches for his backpack*.
Unnoticed. He creeps his hands in and pulls out:

*Two METAL KITCHEN SPATULAS, TIED TOGETHER WITH ROPE LIKE
NUNCHUCKS.*

Simon stands and WHIPS THE GUY ACROSS THE FACE, CUTTING HIS EYE
WITH THE SPATULA'S EDGE.

Simon gets in his *fighting stance*.

SIMON
(to the man)
It's three vs. one. You'd be wise
not to engage in this battle.

The man wipes blood from his face. He has had enough of this.

So he pulls out his GUN. POINTS IT AT SIMON.

LIV
(scared but strong)
Like you're gonna shoot a kid.

AUTUMN
Is that *worth* it? For *drugs*?

SIMON
Guys...I think he might think it's
worth it.

The BEDROOM DOOR OPENS AGAIN. It's UNCLE NATE and another GUY.

LIV
Ohh shit. Hey Cory.

SIMON
Uncle Nate?!

UNCLE NATE
Simon?!

CORY
Liv what the fuck are you doing up
here...

Cory then realizes the Man - a man he knows - with his *gun out*.

CORY

You have a gun out near my sister bro?! You better holster that fuckin thing before it goes off in your direction.

The man tucks his gun away.

MAN

They're trying to take the safe.

SIMON

UNCLE NATE WHY ARE YOU HERE?

UNCLE NATE

Why are you here? You said you had homework!

SIMON

I lied, okay? I lied and went to a party. So shoot me.

(to the gun man)

Don't, though.

(to Uncle Nate)

Why are you here?

UNCLE NATE

Cory...handles my bets.

SIMON

He's your bookie?! There are websites for that! Why are you doing something legal illegally?!

UNCLE NATE

I'll teach you about taxes but not right now.

Cory halts the proceedings.

CORY

YO. LIV. WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO TAKE MY SAFE.

LIV

Grandpa should never have given you that watch. It's extremely valuable and it means something to me and you don't even wear it.

On Cory: *That's what you want?*

CORY

I don't wear it because it's a piece of shit. He got it on Canal Street.

AUTUMN

But...he said Doris Day once owned it. I heard him.

CORY

By the time you knew him, he might have believed that to be true.

Cory OPENS THE SAFE. He takes out the WATCH (situated beside zip-lock bags of E pills).

LIV

(disbelieving)

If it's a "piece of shit", why do you keep it in a safe?

CORY

(softening)

...Because it was Grandpa's. I didn't even know you wanted it.

Cory tosses the watch to Liv.

CORY

Take it.

(sincere)

It'll look cool on you.

Liv feels the weight of it in her hands. It sure is light. Sure is fake.

The fact of this settles on Liv, Autumn, Simon.

Montana, the dream, vanishes.

But Simon won't let it go...

SIMON

We should confiscate the drugs. That'll at least buy us the land. We can start out with tents.

UNCLE NATE

(quickly)

Nope. Nope. We're leaving right now. The drugs belong to these gentlemen and we're leaving right now. Also, *what LAND?!*

(MORE)

UNCLE NATE (CONT'D)

(to Cory)

We'll settle up another time. Who knew Mickelson still had a 30 back-9 in him?

(then, to the Man)

Please keep your gun where it is. Me and the innocent children are vacating the room. Without your drugs. Right now.

SIMON

Let me just get your duffel bag and spatulas.

UNCLE NATE

Leave the duffel bag and spatulas, Simon.

On Simon: *Fine.*

EXT. THE DJ HOUSE - NIGHT

Uncle Nate escorts Simon, Liv and Autumn out of the house.

UNCLE NATE

(takes out his phone)

I Ubered.

SIMON

Oh it's cool. I brought wheels.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NIGHT

Uncle Nate drives the golf cart. Autumn sit shotgun. Simon and Liv sit on the flatbed in back.

SIMON

Sorry I took the cart Uncle Nate. I hope you don't get fired.

UNCLE NATE

(shrugs)

Becca's my boss, I'm not too worried about it. Plus: She is to be my wife.

SIMON

You *proposed?!!*

UNCLE NATE

I'm gonna get the shoulder surgery first so I can start training again for the Tour. She showed me the rock she wants...let us just say I am motivated to win.

Simon is very happy to hear this. Uncle Nate smiles. Knows what a mom (and Becca, specifically) would mean to Simon.

UNCLE NATE

(excited)

You kids wanna take a shortcut?
Hold on back there.

Simon holds on to the cart's edge. Liv holds on to SIMON. His heart flutters.

Simon looks down at Liv's hand, clutching his arm. He sees:
She's WEARING THE WATCH.

Simon looks closely at the watch. And notices,

SIMON

The time is right.

Liv allows a smile. It's sad but real.

Uncle Nate pops up over a curb, drives through someone's lawn,
Emerging onto,

EXT. TALL OAKS GOLF COURSE - NIGHT

Uncle Nate *steps on the gas*, to the great delight of the kids onboard.

As the wind whips through Simon and Liv's hair, Simon *unties his Black Belt*. And *drops it off the cart*. Like he were tossing it into an ocean.

Simon and Liv keep their eyes on it - a snake in green grass - until it disappears from view.

Then, from HIGH ABOVE:

The golf cart traverses the moonlit course. A joyride.

INT. WILL ROGERS MIDDLE SCHOOL, HALLWAY - DAY

With Simon, making his way through the rush of students.

He wears his normal clothes, and a belt - the kind that keeps your pants up.

Simon spots Liv at her locker. Approaches.

SIMON
Hey.

LIV
(in a rush)
Hey.

SIMON
Where's Autumn?

LIV
How should I know?

SIMON
She's just..usually with you
between third and fourth.

LIV
Well, she's a bitch, so who cares.

This sets Simon back.

SIMON
I don't understand.

LIV
She got to leave early for spring
break. Who needs Montana when you
have a cool sister in Ojai...
(then)
Has Ms. Rosa been weird to you?

SIMON
(thinks)
No.

LIV
Me either. Guess Black Belts *can't*
see in the dark.

SIMON
Yea. Guess not.

Liv shuts her locker.

LIV
I gotta get to math.

On Simon. Feeling no love from her.

SIMON
You're not wearing the watch...

LIV
It's broken. You said the time was
right but it's not. It's broken.

SIMON
(admitting)
I wanted you to feel better.

Liv, despite her resistance, gets momentarily choked up.

She gives Simon a look - one of defeat, but there's gratitude
in there, too.

And Liv walks off.

EXT. TALL OAKS COUNTRY CLUB, CLUBHOUSE - DAY

Simon cleans a bag of golf clubs.

Uncle Nate approaches, carrying a BUNDLE of 2X4's.

UNCLE NATE
Golf Cart Leslie to the rescue
again. This what you need?

SIMON
Yes. Perfect.

MUSIC UP. The following in MONTAGE:

INT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

We might expect Simon to be karate-chopping the 2X4's.

Instead, he is carefully *sawing them* into sections.

EXT. DRIVING RANGE, TALL OAKS COUNTRY CLUB - DUSK

Simon, Uncle Nate and Becca drive golf balls into the late-
setting sun. Nate and Becca, expertly. Simon tries.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Simon helps Nate and Becca shop. A highly quotidian scene of
family stuff, and Simon couldn't be more pleased with it.

The MUSIC/MONTAGE abruptly ends with,

MS. ROSA (O.S.)
Simon?

Simon turns to see Ms. Rosa. Her adorable TODDLER sitting in the front part of the shopping cart.

SIMON
(to Nate/Becca)
I'll have you called on the intercom if I lose you.

Uncle Nate and Becca give sheepish waves to Ms. Rosa, and continue down the aisle.

MS. ROSA
So this is how you spend spring break?

SIMON
This is how *you* spend spring break?

MS. ROSA
Yea. It is.

SIMON
Same.
(then, quickly)
I think you know that I tried to steal your car.

On Ms. Rosa, incredulous.

MS. ROSA
I...have to say that I did *not* know that, Simon.

SIMON
(deflates - shit)
I was sure we locked eyes for a moment. I was sure you were just waiting to have me arrested because you obviously know about the element of surprise.

Ms. Rosa, understandably, is unsure what to do with this.

SIMON
But please know: I intended to bring it back. And I didn't know it was your car until it was way too late.

Ms. Rosa's daughter gets antsy. Ms. Rosa touches her hair, calming her.

MS. ROSA
It's a...crazy thing you did,
Simon. Telling me that.

SIMON
If I'm ever going to be a real
Black Belt, I have to be
honorable. And car theft is not
honorable. I'm glad I came clean
about this, even if it means jail.

Ms. Rosa's daughter reaches out her hand toward Simon, amused
by him. Simon gives her a goofy smile, which she loves.

MS. ROSA
(just curious)
Who were the other kids with you?

SIMON
Well..ratting is also
dishonorable. I'm not trying to
dig myself a deeper hole.

Ms. Rosa exhales. She has a child and shopping to do. No real
time or interest for this.

MS. ROSA
(absolving him)
It was only attempted car theft, I
suppose. And you got an A on your
Civics test...

This is news to Simon. He perks up.

MS. ROSA
Keep it honorable, Simon. I'm
serious.
(then)
See you next week.

On Simon: He will keep it honorable.

Ms. Rosa nods, and heads off.

Simon grabs a box of Captain Crunch and goes in search of Uncle
Nate and Becca.

MUSIC UP AGAIN. The MONTAGE continues.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Close on Simon, *lacquering* a section of wood.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Simon rides Uncle Nate's bike. Wears his BACKPACK.

EXT. LIV'S HOUSE - DAY

Simon carefully deploys the kickstand, parks the bike.

MUSIC/MONTAGE ENDS.

INT. LIV'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Liv opens the door.

SIMON

I have a present for you.

Liv, intrigued, steps aside.

INT. LIV'S ROOM - DAY

Simon sits on her desk chair. Places his backpack in front of him on the floor. And unzips it.

He removes: TWO SMALL, SQUARE ITEMS, wrapped in newspaper.

SIMON

Only one's for you. But they're the same.

Liv unwraps one of them. A smile gradually appears.

SIMON

The propeller was all that was salvageable. But I think the propeller's what matters to you guys.

We now get a look at the ITEM in Liv's hands: A beautiful, handmade PICTURE FRAME. The result of Simon's intensive woodwork. Mounted inside the frame: The PROPELLER from the *stolen aquarium seaplane*.

It takes Liv a beat to find the right words. Then she does...

LIV

I love it.

SIMON

The other one's for Autumn.

LIV
She'll love it too.

SIMON
I don't know how to give it to
her--

LIV
I'm going to Ojai tomorrow. My
dad's letting me go. He never lets
me go on trips so I don't know
what got into him.

SIMON
..Maybe something good.

LIV
(hopeful)
Maybe.
(then)
You could come. I'm sure you could
come.

Simon would love that, more than anything, but,

SIMON
Uncle Nate's gonna teach me how to
golf this week. I don't want to
let him down.

Liv nods.

SIMON
So I guess I'll see you at schoo--

BLAMMO. Liv kisses Simon on the lips. Her eyes are closed,
appropriately. His are wide...open. In wonderful disbelief.

EXT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

Simon bikes up. A smile all the way around his head.

INT. UNCLE NATE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Uncle Nate and Becca prep dinner in the kitchen.

BECCA
Hey sweetie.

SIMON
I'm home.

UNCLE NATE
Yo, your teacher stopped by.

Simon's heart *sinks*. He looks like he's prepared for an ambush.

BECCA
Wish you told us she was a karate champion before I swore at her on her own turf.

SIMON
...I'm not sure I was aware of it at the time. But you don't have to be scared of her, she has a great awareness of her power and would never misuse it.

UNCLE NATE
She left something for you. I put it on your bed.

INT. SIMON'S ROOM - DAY

Simon enters, expectantly.

His eyes *illuminate* as he registers the item on his bed:

A karate WHITE BELT.

Simon picks it up. The belt rests in his outstretched palms.

Uncle Nate appears at the door.

UNCLE NATE
I guess she told her Air Force pal about you - runs that dojo over by the Wendy's. Said the lessons are on the house...
(clearly editorializing)
...considering your immense potential to be a karate champion of world renown.

Uncle Nate knows how much this means to Simon.

UNCLE NATE
You should stretch. It's all about flexibility, karate.
(then)
I'm telling you things you know.

And Uncle Nate heads back to the kitchen.

Simon clutches the White Belt in his hands. The Black Belt cost twenty-five bucks. This one is priceless.

EXT. SHOPPING CENTER - DAY

Uncle Nate's Wrangler parks.

Simon gets out, in his crisp *Gi* (uniform) and White Belt.

INT. TAEKWONDO ACADEMY OF LONG BEACH - DAY

Simon joins a group of OTHER WHITE BELTS on the mat - KIDS HIS AGE, and, it's reasonable to assume, soon to be his friends.

MUSIC UP as the kids assemble in a disciplined fashion before the SENSEI.

INT. LOBBY, TAEKWONDO ACADEMY - CONTINUOUS

Uncle Nate and Becca, their pride on display, observe through a glass wall. Alongside other parents.

CLOSE ON: Simon, in *Junbi*, the Ready Stance. Feet parallel, fisted arms before him at a slight bent. Focus ahead.

As Simon takes a moment to tighten the knot on his White Belt, we end on our TITLE:

THE BLACK BELT