

Dancing Under a Buzzing Streetlamp

written by

William Parsons

williamparsons1969@gmail.com
(434) 466-2683

BLACK SCREEN

SUPER: "When the mask is removed, the thing itself remains.
Eripitur persona manet res. Lucretius, De rerum natura"

FADE IN

EXT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

A light breeze pushes autumn leaves across the sidewalk busy with students and teachers headed into the private school.

SUPER: "Sherman Oaks, California - 1973"

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

MIKE DEMETRIANO, 16, smiles, excitement in his eyes, as JEFF VELMAN, 16, holds Mike by the lapels of his school blazer.

Jeff plants his lips on Mike's, and they kiss passionately. The crotch of each boy's dress slacks begins to bulge.

HAL GODDARD, BARRY STEPHENS, and FLYNN LLOYD, all 17, come into view from around some banging pipes.

Hal's got a marijuana joint pinched between his lips, and Barry and Flynn puff on cigarettes.

All three boys stop short and stare at Mike and Jeff. Hal in particular narrows his hawkish gaze at the two of them.

Jeff immediately tries to make his escape.

Barry and Flynn stand in his way.

HAL

Hold on there, fudge-packer.

He grabs a fistful of the back of Jeff's blazer and drags him back and slams him against the wall.

Jeff grits his teeth as he squirms against the bolts and pipes and fastenings.

HAL

Oh, did that hurt? Man, Jeff, buddy, I'm sorry.

Hal slams his fist into Jeff's stomach.

Barry chortles, and Flynn lights another cigarette, his expression blank. He could practically pass as a mannequin.

Jeff drops to his knees right in front of Hal.

HAL

What, wanna suck my cock, Velman?

Hal knees Jeff in the face, then turns to Mike. Hal ignores Jeff who clamps his hand over his mouth and nose, blood oozing from between his fingers.

Mike glances down at Jeff, then stares wide-eyed at Hal.

MIKE

Ca-Can't you just leave us alone?
Hal, don't say anything. C'mon.

Hal snorts.

HAL

You've gotta be fuckin' kidding me.
An opportunity like this?

He punches Mike in the mouth.

Mike flies back against the wall, and he clamps his hand to his face and groans.

Hal steps up to Mike and slams his fist into Mike's tight midsection, slams it harder than he did into Jeff's.

Mike drops to his knees, spitting and coughing.

Hal gets on his haunches. He makes Mike look at him.

HAL

Expect your life to become a living
hell, you fucking faggot.

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Mike's hand shakes so hard he can't get his locker open.

He glances sidelong at KAIT LEVIN, 15, and PAUL WU, 16, who have stopped at Kait's locker.

Paul kisses Kait on the cheek, hefts his laden bookbag over his muscled shoulder, and heads off into the crowd.

Kait, a spring in her step, walks over and stops next to Mike. She holds a flyer she's clearly excited to show him, but the soft grin on her face immediately drops.

KAIT

Jesus, Mike, what cliff did you
fall down this morning?

Mike presses in on the left side of his mouth and grimaces.
He works his lower jaw a couple of times.

MIKE

Just leave me the hell alone. I
don't need your shit this morning.

KAIT

My "shit"? Well, how indecorous.
That's today's word, "indecorous".
I still miss yesterday's word:
"disingenuous".

MIKE

Well, you can take today's word --
and yesterday's -- and --

He rolls his eyes.

MIKE

Just forget it.

He snatches the flyer and flutters it at her.

MIKE

I keep telling you, Kait, I'm not
going out for the school musical.

Kait snatches the flyer back and folds it and tucks it into
the tattered paperback she's holding.

KAIT

Mike, are you okay? Really. I'm
being serious. C'mon. It's me.

He looks back at her, his expression almost softening, then
returns his attention to his locker.

Kait flinches when Mike slams his fist into it.

MIKE

Why won't this fucking thing open?!

KAIT

Mike, Mike.

She edges him aside and has his locker open after only a
couple of easy spins of his lock.

She takes out a book and goes to hand it to him but realizes Mike isn't taking it. She looks at him and sees he's staring at Hal, Barry, and Flynn who are walking by.

Hal narrows those hawkish eyes at him and flips him the bird.

Kait makes Mike face her.

KAIT
How'd you get on the Three
Musketeers' radar?

MIKE
Just drop it, Kait. I can fight my
own battles.

She purses her lips.

KAIT
I really hate it when you say that.

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Mike sits in class and listens with half an ear as his ENGLISH TEACHER drones on about a passage in Hamlet.

Mike stares over his shoulder at the empty desk one desk over and two desks back from him.

ENGLISH TEACHER (O.S.)
Mr. Demetriano.

Mike glances at his watch: 2:17 o'clock. He returns to staring at the empty desk.

ENGLISH TEACHER (O.S.)
Mr. Demetriano.

Mike turns a look of total disgust onto the teacher.

MIKE
What?!?

His teacher looks back at him with a stern gaze as he straightens his shoulders.

ENGLISH TEACHER
For the third time: How do you
interpret Hamlet's not being able
to kill his uncle?

MIKE

Dammit, I don't know. Who gives a
shit? I don't. I promise you no one
else in this room does either.

ENGLISH TEACHER

This is Honors English, young man.
I promise you, your classmates
care. You used to, Mike.

Mike pinches the bridge of his nose.

MIKE

Sir, may I be excused?

The teacher points at the door.

ENGLISH TEACHER

Go. And I expect far better
language, a far better attitude --
and an answer, by the way -- when
you get back.

Mike stands.

MIKE

Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.

INT. BOYS BATHROOM - DAY

Mike enters a stall and shuts the door behind him.

He slips his hand inside his blazer and brings it back out
holding a silver flask.

He unscrews the top and takes a long drink from it.

He closes his eyes and breathes a long, shuddering sigh.

EXT. DEMETRIANO MANSION - NIGHT

A beautiful stucco and stone villa, as if plucked off the
shore of southern Italy.

INT. DEMETRIANO MANSION - NIGHT

The beautiful dining room table groans under the weight of a
magnificent antipasto accompanied by crystal goblets and
dusted-off bottles of wine.

Two Oscar statuettes perched on the marble mantle of the huge fireplace watch over the gathering.

Mike eagerly shakes the hand of FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA, 34.

Francis smiles at the boy's excitement.

Mike darts his eyes at the adults surrounding him, especially GIANCARLO, his grandfather.

Kait, beautiful in a turquoise dress, bores her stern stare into Mike's back.

Paul, who's first generation Chinese-American, looks more hot-shot CEO of a Fortune 500 than co-captain of the swim team. He leans in to Kait.

PAUL

Let it go already, willya, Kait?

KAIT

As soon as he comes to his senses.

PAUL

When he does what you tell him to?

KAIT

Yeah. Someone's gotta be the one with the level head around here.

Mike finishes shaking Francis's hand as he tries to ignore his friends' exchange behind him.

MIKE

Thank you, sir, for the internship. I want to tell Mr. Pacino how great he was in the first Godfather.

Francis grins.

FRANCIS

Mike, you saw my R-rated movie?

Mike bites his bottom lip. He flinches and presses in on the corner of his mouth. He catches Francis's curious glance.

MIKE

I cut myself shaving.

Francis tousles his hair.

FRANCIS

Yeah? How many knuckles did your razor have?

Mike immediately looks at his grandfather and shrinks under Giancarlo's withering stare.

ARNALDO steps beside Mike, puts his arm around his shoulders.

ARNALDO

It's not gonna be all fun, Mike.
Francis is known for running a
tough set.

FRANCIS

Listen to your father, son. I do.

INT. MIKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mike walks into the room lit brightly, even harshly by the four bulbs in the crystal globes of the spinning ceiling fan.

Kait and Paul follow him in. Kait shuts the door.

Mike sheds his perfectly-tailored Saint Laurent suit jacket and tosses it aside. He loosens the knot of his tie.

KAIT

I'm mad at you.

MIKE

Oh, gee, how could I have guessed?

Mike walks over to his desk and picks up the flyer announcing the auditions for Buckley's winter musical, Fiddler on the Roof. He crumples it up and pitches it in the trashcan.

MIKE

I sure as hell don't need that now.

Kait puts his fists on his hips, stares hard at him.

KAIT

I had that there for a reason.

MIKE

Uh-huh.

Mike then picks up the business card that reads "Heidi's Dance Studio, Heidi Batchelder, Choreographer" and pitches it in the trashcan too.

Kait rushes over, retrieves both, and flattens out the flyer.

Mike shakes his head and rolls his eyes. He bounces down on his bed and leans his head back. He grits his teeth and squirms a little bit, pressing his hand down on this stomach.

Interlacing his fingers, Mike clasps his hands behind his head. He crosses his feet.

MIKE

Drop it, Kait. Even before Mr. Coppola's internship, I told you I'm not doing either of those.

He uses his left elbow to point at the half-done painting on the easel in the corner.

MIKE

Nonno says I'm entering that art contest.

Kait shakes the flyer at him.

KAIT

This is what you should be going for, not that stupid contest your grandfather's ordering you to enter or running away to Italy to that ridiculous internship.

MIKE

Stop holding back, Kait. Tell me how you really feel.

KAIT

If you would just listen to me --

Mike silently stares at the hamster-wheeling ceiling fan.

Kait throws up her hands and storms out of the room.

Paul stops at the end of the bed and gives Mike's crossed feet a friendly slap.

PAUL

Hey, Mike, she might have a point.

When Mike says nothing, Paul just shrugs and leaves.

INT. DEMETRIANO HOUSE - NIGHT

Mike, changed into a T-shirt, shorts, and running shoes, reaches out to grab the handle of the front door when it opens and PETE DIGIACINTO, 26, stands there.

PETE

Oh, hey, ace.

Arnaldo walks up. He puts his hand on his son's shoulder and rubs it. Arnaldo looks at Pete.

ARNALDO
Get Francis back to his hotel?

PETE
Signed, sealed, and delivered, as
ordered, *Signore*.

Arnaldo looks at Mike.

ARNALDO
Francis awarded us the contract.
Thanks to you.

MIKE
Thanks to me?!

ARNALDO
Your excitement for the internship
is what won him over.

He narrows his eyes at Mike.

ARNALDO
You are excited?

MIKE
Oh, yeah! Sure I am, Papa. C'mon!
You even have to ask?

He waves at the both of them as he pushes past Pete and disappears into the night lit brightly by the city lights and by a full moon.

EXT. VALLEY VISTA BLVD - NIGHT

Mike runs and runs, faster and faster, his sweat-soaked T-shirt plastered to his long, lean, tight frame, then just skids to a stop in some gravel.

He bends at the waist and puts his hands on his knees as he breathes like a freight train and sweat rains off him.

He stands up straight, lets his breathing calm. He sees he's, again, in the courtyard beside Heidi's Dance Studio.

He steps a little closer and watches HEIDI BATCHELDER, 29, shout instructions and encouragement over the blaring music.

He watches her students go through their choreography. The students all move exquisitely in sync.

Mike focuses on PARKER STRAYER, 22, whose perfect dancing shows off his even more perfect dancer's physique.

Mike glances toward the sidewalk, then returns his attention to Parker. Mike gulps as he massages a couple of times the hardening bulge in the crotch of his shorts.

Mike steps back into the middle of the courtyard. He's bathed in the light of the buzzing streetlamp.

The pulsing music, the students' pounding surround Mike.

His body sways to the rhythm and to the beat as Mike swings out his arms.

He glances around, then straightens.

Mike's feet start to move, then it's as if the spirit of the music, the glow of the streetlamp, the sound and hum of the city overtake him, and soon he's moving around the courtyard in his own, impromptu, whirling, wonderful choreography.

Faster and faster, more intricate and more intricate, Mike dances until he ends in a great flourish.

HEIDI (O.S.)

That offer still stands, kiddo.

Mike stares at her, darts his eyes at her STUDENTS watching him through the studio's windows. He takes off out of sight.

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Mike slows his step as he approaches his locker. He stares at the word "Queer" scrawled across the front of it.

He jumps when Kait puts her hand on his arm.

KAIT

Ah, graffiti, an ancient artistic medium. You know there's ancient graffiti on the pyramids? You should be honored to be part of such a storied tradition.

MIKE

Right, Kait. Real honored. Oh yeah.

Kait winks at him, then takes a lipstick out of her purse and adds "and proud!" to the graffiti.

Mike immediately looks up and down the busy hallway.

MIKE

Wipe that off! Now!!

Kait grins, goes to come off with a quip.

MIKE

I said now, Kait! I mean it!!

She stares at him.

KAIT

Awright, awright. Jeesh.

She wipes off the lipstick and smears out the word "Queer".

Mike straightens the strap of his bookbag on his shoulder.

MIKE

Thanks. Sorry I --

Paul rushes up to them.

PAUL

Did you hear about Jeff Velman?

Mike white-knuckles the straps of his bookbag and of the art satchel he's carrying. He bites his bottom lip.

MIKE

Wh-What about him?

PAUL

He killed himself last night.

Kait gasps.

MIKE

What?!

Mike catches himself and slows down his reaction.

PAUL

Yeah. His dad came and yanked him out of school yesterday. Last night he shot himself. Flynn's spreading the news all over school.

Paul takes Kait into his arms.

PAUL

Headmaster Moore doesn't want any of the lower-schoolers to know.

Kait scrutinizes Mike.

Mike looks back at her and stiffens.

MIKE

What are you looking at me for? I didn't know the guy. What the hell do I care if he offed himself?

KAIT

Jesus, Mike.

PAUL

God, Demetriano.

Kait moves away from Paul and steps right up to Mike and stands there, rigid and stern.

KAIT

What's been wrong with you lately?

MIKE

I'm warning you. Get off my case.

Kait snorts.

KAIT

Me? You're warning me? Remember who you're talking to. I used to shove your face in the litter pan when we were little. I'll do it again too, just watch me.

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Mike's bloodshot eyes and tired expression lighten as he diverts his path to walk over to GREG, 12, a scrawny lower-schooler struggling to get his left arm into his blazer.

Mike gets down on his haunches in front of Greg and leans his art satchel against the lockers.

MIKE

Let me help you there, kiddo.

Mike straightens the kid out.

JOSH BRENINGER, 16, walks up and, smiling, taps Greg's nose.

GREG

Hi, Josh.

The boy looks at Mike.

GREG

Thanks, Mike.

Mike watches the kid disappear into the crowd and chuckles. He returns to a full stand.

JOSH
Any of of them know about Jeff?

Mike shakes his head.

MIKE
None are acting like they do.

JOSH
Good. They're just little kids.

MIKE
(quietly)
Yeah.

He clears his throat and looks Josh squarely in the eye.

MIKE
That shiner: you're on the Three Musketeers' radar too?

Josh shrugs, his expression sad.

JOSH
"Smear the queer." "Screw the Jew."

Mike squares his shoulders.

MIKE
I'm no queer, Josh.

JOSH
You think Hal, Barry, and Flynn give a damn?

Mike presses in on his stomach, tries not to grit his teeth.

MIKE
God, I'm glad I'm getting out of this dump for four months.

Josh hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

JOSH
Let's get outta here.

Mike frowns.

MIKE
I have to work on something for my grandfather.

His expression grows distant, his tone bitter.

MIKE

I'm always working on something for my grandfather.

Josh watches Mike as his frown deepens. Josh gingerly fingers his black eye.

JOSH

This, Mike...This black eye isn't the Three Musketeers. My...my...

Mike hardens his expression.

MIKE

Yeah, well, I have a sonofabitch grandfather too, so just do what I do and deal with it. Got it?

Josh takes some steps back.

JOSH

Fuck you, Demetriano.

Josh disappears into the end-of-school crowd.

INT. ART CLASSROOM - DAY

Mike sits alone and scowls at his painting, a dance and chorus of colors, shapes, and symbols.

Mike pounds his fist on the table next to him.

MIKE

I've got to get this right! Why can't I get this right?! Dammit!

He picks up the note from Mrs. Bazelon. A circled "B+" adorns the top of it accompanied by the scribbled note "Your De Rerum Natura piece, Mike -- Great job so far".

He slaps the note back down on the table.

MIKE

Bullshit, lady.

Mike gets up and starts gathering his "Zecchi Colori Firenze" art supplies into his napa-leather art satchel. He looks at a tube of the expensive oil paint, and a slight grin cracks his grim expression, brightens his tired eyes for just a moment.

MIKE

Nonno spent all this money on me.

Mike shrugs, frowns, and tosses the tube in the satchel along with the rest of the supplies.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE ART CLASSROOM - DAY

Mike presses himself against the lockers as the Three Musketeers, changed into their street clothes and into their football letterman jackets, surround him.

Hal covers Mike's mouth, forces him to look at him.

HAL

Need someone to fight for you?
Huh, faggot?

Mike stares at the floor.

HAL

Get my message this morning, queer?

Mike darts his eyes at Hal, then stares at the floor again.

HAL

Hey, guys, I don't think we
finished yesterday. Whadaya think?

Hal laughs.

HAL

Well, not with this fudge-packer.

Hal looks over his shoulder at Flynn.

HAL

Flynn boy, you sure took real care
of Jeff yesterday, huh?

Flynn smiles. For as handsome as this tall, muscled young man is, it's an ugly smile, a look down into his lack of a soul.

Flynn walks up, puts his face practically right into Mike's.

Hal takes his hand away from Mike's mouth, moves aside.

FLYNN

My dad works with Mr. Velman, and
all I had to do was tell Dad to get
the ball rolling. Made for a good
chuckle, a better one this morning.

Mike widens his eyes.

MIKE

Jesus. Flynn, Jeff killed himself.

Flynn, that smile again. He nods energetically.

FLYNN

Yeah, I know. Funny as fuck, huh?

Mike opens his mouth, but Flynn slaps his face.

FLYNN

Did any of us say you could talk?

Flynn slams his fist into Mike's midsection.

Mike doubles over, then drops to his knees.

Barry laughs.

BARRY

Watch your cock, Flynn. Faggot'll
suck you off, give 'im a chance.

Mike glares up at them.

Flynn steps aside, and Hal slams his fist in Mike's face,
then shoves him down flat on the floor.

As Flynn presses the sole of his western boot against Mike's
cheek, Hal and Barry upend Mike's art satchel.

Mike struggles and claws at Flynn's boot and his pants leg.

Flynn laughs as he just presses down harder on Mike's face.

MIKE

Stop!! Don't!! You don't
understand! My grandfather!!

Hal opens Mike's sketchbook and makes a show of scrutinizing
the drawings it contains.

HAL

Not bad, Demetriano.

He glances down at Mike.

HAL

Really, buddy. Seriously.

Mike's expression creases with agony as he watches Hal then
tear page after page out of the sketchbook and rip each up.

Mike darts his eyes to watch as Barry breaks the Zecchi paint brushes, then squeezes the tubes of oil paints and sprays the walls and door with them.

MIKE

Stop!!

Hal and Barry toss all the ruined supplies down on Mike.

Flynn steps away from pressing Mike's face against the floor and grinds some charcoals under his boot heel.

Mike, his body trembling, scrambles to stop Flynn, who just more viciously destroys the expensive charcoals.

Mike picks up a handful of broken paintbrushes and a squirted tube of oil paint. He looks up at the three of them.

MIKE

Dammit, guys, I'm not a queer. Jeff and I were just...just...You didn't see what you thought you did!

Hal kicks Mike hard in the side, then gets on his haunches and spits in Mike's face.

HAL

Bullshit we didn't.

Mike groans and holds his stomach.

Hal stands and high-fives Barry.

Flynn kicks Mike hard, twice.

Mike drops onto his side, which he holds wrapped in his arms.

Flynn faces his two buddies.

FLYNN

Beer, weed, and pool at my place?

When he sees Mike struggling to rise, Flynn kicks him again, this time in the face.

The three bullies, laughing and joking, leave.

Mike agonizingly gets to his knees, spitting and coughing, bloody snot running out of his nose, his eye already starting to swell. Mike stares at the destruction around him as he wipes Hal's spit off his face. Mike rams what's left of the supplies into the satchel. He bites his quivering lower lip.

EXT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Mike stands in front of the open trunk of the Bentley where he tosses his blazer, tie, and that morning's shirt. He grabs a fresh shirt from the drycleaning Pete had picked up and looks up as he slips the shirt on and starts buttoning it.

MIKE

Ah, shit.

Kait finishes walking up to him and Pete.

She grabs Mike's chin to better examine his swelling eye.

He jerks his chin out of her grip.

MIKE

Kait, I really don't need you riding my ass right now.

PETE

Hey! Watch the attitude with her. She cares, all right?

MIKE

I don't need shit from you either.

PETE

Oh, really? Looks like you need something, ace.

KAIT

What, the Three Musketeers? Again?

Mike makes an ugly face at both of them.

Kait glances behind him.

KAIT

Let's go tell Headmaster Moore.

MIKE

No.

Pete opens his mouth.

MIKE

No. Both of you, no. I'll fight my own battles, thank you.

Pete grits his teeth.

PETE
Yeah, well, you sure are doin' a
bang up job of that, ace.

MIKE
Pete, go fu--

He catches himself, glances at Kait.

Pete shuts the trunk, with more force than necessary, and
walks around to the driver's side.

PETE
Well, hop in, you two.

MIKE
I'll walk her home. I need the air.

KAIT
And I need the exercise.

She puffs out her cheeks.

MIKE
I've talked to you about that. You
are not fat, Kait. Right, Pete?

PETE
Not one extra ounce.

Kait snorts.

KAIT
You're sweet. Liars, but sweet.

Pete narrows his eyes at her.

PETE
That Paul joker sayin' you're fat?

Pete, built like a linebacker, punches his fist into his
other hand.

PETE
Him and me are gonna have us a
little talk.

KAIT
No, no. Pete, really. Paul's very
sweet. Confused about just about
everything, but sweet. He treats me
like I'm made out of porcelain.

She shrugs.

Mike glances at Kait.

MIKE
One sec, okay?

She nods.

Mike walks over to Pete.

MIKE
Pete, sorry for bitin' your head
off. Put my stuff in my room?

PETE
You got it, ace.

MIKE
No, Pete, man, I'm serious. Go up
the private way. Don't let anyone
see any of it. Especially Nonno.

Pete laughs.

PETE
Mike, he's not back from San Diego.

MIKE
Maybe's he is.

Pete narrows his eyes at him.

PETE
Then, why'd he come home to your
place and not his own?

MIKE
Pete! Dammit, just do it! Who the
fuck do you think you work for?

Pete stands up rigidly straight.

PETE
I work for your grandfather and
your father. But excuse me, Mr.
Demetriano. I'm sorry that I forgot
my place, *Signore*.

Kait stomps over to Mike and punches him on the arm.

Mike grabs his arm and his face contorts into a grimace.

Pete watches this, and the corners of his lips curl slightly
upwards. He removes a pack of cigarettes from the breast
pocket of his denim jacket.

PETE

Mr. Demetriano, *Signore*, may I
light up a cigarette?

Mike sags his shoulders.

MIKE

Pete, I'm -- I'm sorry. I don't
know why I said that. It's been a
really, really bad day.

INT. BRENINGER KITCHEN - DAY

Josh, changed into black jeans and a maroon Henley shirt,
whistles as he prepares the Shabbat meal -- according to his
mom's handwritten directions.

Josh only belatedly notices that DAVID BRENINGER, 65, had
entered, and Josh drops the antique metal spatula in the cast
iron skillet with a clang. He immediately stops whistling.

JOSH

Shalom, Saba.

Josh gulps and starts backing away as David steps toward him.

INT. KAIT'S BEDROOM - DAY

Mike flops on his back on Kait's big bed. He takes a careful
deep breath as he holds his side. He sighs and looks at Kait.

MIKE

So, how much did you get thru that
Lucretius guy in Latin class today?

Kait, cross-legged on the other side of the bed, eyes him.

KAIT

I hate it when you don't want to
talk to me about something.

MIKE

Well, I hate it when you press me
about something I don't want to
talk to you about, so we're even.

Kait huffs and throws a stuffed animal at him.

Mike props the wild-haired toy on his chest and articulates
its limbs as if it's dancing a crazy two-step.

MIKE
Go, Mr. Hair Bear!

Kait looks at him, rolls her eyes, shakes her head.

Mike starts to grin, then flinches and grimaces. He fingers the various wounds on his face. He tosses the toy aside and settles back and shuts his eyes.

Kait takes a long swig of her Tab cola as she pulls out the tattered paperback: De rerum natura by Lucretius.

KAIT
Numquid ibi horribile apparet...

Mike relaxes his body as he loses himself in the sound of Kait's voice reading the strange but beautiful language.

He looks at her when she finishes.

MIKE
That's nice. Whatsit mean?

KAIT
"After we finally die, what is there that looks so fearsome? What's so tragic? Isn't it more peaceful than any sleep?"

Mike props himself up fast on his elbows.

MIKE
What?!?

KAIT
Ain't that great?

MIKE
I guess! If eternal oblivion's your bag. God, Kait. I got enough to think about, if you don't mind.

Mike crosses himself.

Kait shakes her head.

KAIT
Ah, the opiated masses.

MIKE
Wha'?

She dismisses him with a wave.

KAIT

Paul and I are going to see Jesus Christ Superstar tomorrow. I want you to come too. We'll swing by your place at six o'clock.

MIKE

Kait, I keep tellin' ya, no guy wants a third wheel on his dates.

Kait simply stares at him.

Mike stares back at her, then finally relents.

MIKE

Awright. The movie's when, six o'clock? I'll see if I can pencil you in. Don't count on it, though.

Kait purses her lips in impatience.

MIKE

You got something you want to say, so say it.

KAIT

It's about Adam.

His expression immediately turns suspicious.

MIKE

What about Adam?

KAIT

Ever since Adam left, all you do is hole up in your room.

MIKE

(sulking)

You just don't understand.

KAIT

I understand you were leaning on poor Adam too much, making him let you feel you actually had your life together.

MIKE

I'm warning you, Kait.

KAIT

Ever since he left, you've been skulking like a lost little kid.

He swings his long legs over the side of the bed and stands.

MIKE

You have no idea what it's like to
be lost, really lost. You've
crossed the line this time, Kait.

He darts out of the room.

Kait rushes to the open door of her room and shouts after him
as he pounds down the stairs.

KAIT

Mike! C'mon! Dammit, talk to me!

The front door slams.

INT. THE BRENINGER DINING ROOM - SUNDOWN

Josh wears his yarmulke and his best suit. His black eye,
which had already been far from healing, is now all the way
freshly swollen shut.

As he sings the "Shalom Aleichem" with David, Josh stares
into the two flickering flames representing peace and unity
as David chants the Shabbat prayer over their feast.

EXT. COURTYARD OUTSIDE HEIDI'S DANCE STUDIO - NIGHT

Once again Mike finds himself outside the studio. He's
drenched in sweat, his chest heaving.

Once again he finds himself lost to a dance he has no idea
where it is emerging from deep, deep inside him.

And once again Heidi makes her offer, yet again is rebuffed.

EXT. VALLEY VISTA BLVD - CONTINUOUS

Across the street from the courtyard, Pete sits in his '68
Mustang and watches Mike take off down the sidewalk.

INT. DEMETRIANO KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mike, showered and changed into sweatpants and a T-shirt,
gets on his haunches and opens the big cabinet door.

The deep space is crammed with liquor bottles.

Mike picks through a few of the bottles up front, then reaches far in the back and pulls out a fancy one.

He stands and examines the label in the light and shrugs.

He looks up fast as he hears a door open upstairs.

He grabs the Los Angeles Times (headline: "Soviet Observers / Brezhnev asks U.S. to Follow Suit") and rolls up the bottle in it.

Mike darts up the stairs and has his hand on the knob to his bedroom door when Arnaldo exits his own bedroom, reading a report, his expression grim.

Arnaldo looks up and immediately grins.

ARNALDO

Hey there, Mike. Whatcha got there?

MIKE

This?

ARNALDO

It's not a trick question, Mike.

MIKE

We got current events tomorrow.

ARNALDO

Tomorrow?

He glances at the headline.

ARNALDO

You're gonna talk about Brezhnev to a bunch of little kids? What exactly do you and Kait do down at that rec center?

MIKE

Tomorrow?! I meant Monday. Y'know. Government class. Beside, Kait's begged off. She's got a date. Obviously it takes all damn day to get ready for it.

ARNALDO

How 'bout you try being happy for her? Paul's really helping her feel better about herself.

MIKE

How 'bout you try minding your own damn business and leave my friends to me?

ARNALDO

How 'bout you remember who you're talking to?

MIKE

I don't need this bullshit. I've had one fuckin' hard day today.

Arnaldo narrows his eyes at his son.

ARNALDO

Yeah, I can tell that from the state of your face. Michaelangelo, are you in some kind of trouble?

Mike barges into his brightly-lit bedroom and slams the door behind him. The door's lock clicks.

Arnaldo just stands there, blinking.

He shakes his head a couple of times, then, frowning, steps over to his son's bedroom door and knocks.

ARNALDO

Mike, I want you to know you can talk to me, talk to us, about anything. Please, son.

Pause.

MIKE (O.S.)

(through door)

Papa, sorry I got angry.

ARNALDO

I don't really care about --

MIKE (O.S.)

I'm really tired, Papa. Really.

Arnaldo stands there a moment, shrugs, heads downstairs.

INT. DEMETER DESIGN - DAY

Mike stands there and scans the activity all around him: men and women measuring and cutting bolts of cloth and spools of ribbon and a dozen other such tasks, large and small.

Mike jumps when Pete rushes up to him and puts his arm around him and, while laughing, sandpapers the top of Mike's head with his knuckles.

PETE

All this is yours someday.

He punches Mike in the arm.

MIKE

Ouch!

PETE

Do you know how lucky you are, ace?

Some WOMEN come out of one room, see Mike, and their expressions light up.

ERICA, 27, grabs his arm and pulls Mike into the makeup lab. She gasps when she sees Mike's face under the lights.

She grabs his chin and moves his face at different angles.

ERICA

Michaelangelo Leonardo, what have you done to this face of yours, sculpted in marble by the gods themselves?

Mike, grinning abashedly, shrugs.

SAMANTHA, 52, walks over.

SAMANTHA

I at least hope you left the other guy in sorrier shape.

She plants her big hands on Mike's shoulders, turns him around while practically spinning him off his feet, and forces him down onto the makeup chair.

SAMANTHA

Nothing we can't fix. There's a reason they us the Miracle Workers.

In the doorway Pete finger-guns Mike with both hands.

PETE

Better you than me, ace.

Samantha throws a box of cotton balls at him.

SAMANTHA

You're beautiful too, Pete, don't worry. We'll grab you next time.

INT. DEMETER DESIGN - DAY

With all the laughter and discussion and friendly arguing and fussing over Mike, no one notices Giancarlo standing in the makeup lab's doorway, a grin on his face as he looks at his grandson all made up.

Mike laughs hardest of all of them.

Mike glimpses his grandfather in the mirror and immediately stops laughing. He stiffens in the makeup chair.

Everyone grows silent.

GIANCARLO

Don't stop having fun because of me. I like laughter around here.

Mike reaches for some tissues.

MIKE

I look ridiculous.

GIANCARLO

No, you look like the future head of a successful and creative Hollywood makeup house, a head who's ready to get his hands right in the thick of things.

The women start gingerly wiping their creation off Mike.

MIKE

Nonno, can I talk to you?

INT. NONNO'S OFFICE - DAY

Photographs: sepia to modern. Plaques. Flags: American and Italian. Memorabilia. Framed genealogies. The whole room is a shrine to the Demetrian generations.

Mike takes the competition notice out of his back pocket and hands it to his grandfather.

MIKE

The competition you want me to enter.

Giancarlo reads it, looks up at his grandson.

MIKE

I think I have a real chance.

Mike's expression is halfway excited but then deflates when his grandfather frowns, first down at the notice then at him.

GIANCARLO

Why? I don't see you taking much of anything seriously anymore, Michaelangelo. I'm right, aren't I?

Mike stares hard at him.

GIANCARLO

You only came down here today because you want something.

MIKE

How'd you know that?

GIANCARLO

Parents know. When you become one, you'll figure that out. And you'll know how that feels.

Giancarlo snorts in disgust.

GIANCARLO

Today's the first time you've been down here to Demeter in months. Do you even care about this place or these people anymore?

Mike hangs his head.

MIKE

(under his breath)
I've been busy.

GIANCARLO

Look at your face, that fat lip, that black eye, how your nose is bruised. Fights. Solving your problems with your fists. Michaelangelo. Disgusting.

MIKE

I don't sol --

Giancarlo pounds his big fist against Mike's right shoulder, sending Mike back a few steps.

GIANCARLO

And your grades. Straight F's last quarter. A Demetriano with straight F's?! You promised to improve those, and I suspect they're just as bad as ever. Do you know how embarrassing that is?

MIKE

I am bringing my --

GIANCARLO

And here you are, your hand out to me. I just can't believe you.

Giancarlo shakes his head in disgust.

GIANCARLO

You used to be such a fine boy, Michaelangelo.

MIKE

S-si, Signore.

Giancarlo picks up a folder off his desk.

GIANCARLO

What is it you want?

MIKE

I want to do something extra special for the competition. I need more supplies from Zecchi. Will you be in Florence again soon?

Giancarlo eyes him.

GIANCARLO

I'm going the middle of the week. Casa dei Tessuti just got fantastic new fabrics in. I'll be there through Saturday.

A very slight grin lends a hint of softness to Giancarlo's expression stitched with hurt, anger, and disappointment.

GIANCARLO

I take great pride, telling them at Zecchi and Casa how they're helping to groom the third generation to run Demeter. I like being proud of you, Michaelangelo. I want to be proud of you.

Mike gulps. He sniffs and winces.

MIKE

I want you proud of me, Nonno.

Giancarlo's slight grin disappears.

GIANCARLO

At least we agree on something. We haven't agreed on much lately, have we, Mike?

MIKE

No, *Signore*, I guess we haven't.

He hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

MIKE

I should get going. Kait invited me to see Jesus Christ Superstar with --

He cuts himself off and mouths the word "Shit!"

GIANCARLO

Demeter was offered to costume and make up that production. A huge contract. A lot of money.

He grimaces as if he's sucking on a lime.

GIANCARLO

But can you imagine? My allowing the Demetrisano name to be attached to something like that? A bunch of *froci* parading across the screen. Disgusting. And insulting our Lord and Savior like that.

Giancarlo narrows his eyes at Mike.

GIANCARLO

The Godfather Part II, that's what we're working on.

Mike stands up straight and lets himself grin as he nods.

Giancarlo waits for his grandson to say something.

GIANCARLO

I wish you'd talk to me, Mike, the way you used to. We used to talk a lot, didn't we? You'd tell me everything, you and Adam.

Giancarlo takes a deep breath. He looks very sad.

GIANCARLO
It's sometimes, Mike, like you left
as much as he did.

MIKE
I'm -- I'm sor --

Mike just shrugs.

MIKE
(barely audible)
Just fucking forget it, old man.

Grandfather and grandson stand there, within feet of each other while a gulf as wide as the Mediterranean divides them.

GIANCARLO
I'll get you those supplies.

MIKE
Gracie, Nonno.

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Kait races up to Mike who is getting stuff out of his locker. She pounds Mike on his arm.

KAIT
You stood me up on Saturday, jerk.

He glares at her.

MIKE
Kait, just leave me alone.

KAIT
That's all I hear from you anymore.

She looks in his eyes.

KAIT
Your grandfather? Long weekend?

He stands and slams his locker door shut.

MIKE
"You used to be such a fine boy,
Michaelangelo." Asshole.

LOGAN PETERSON and his best friend BRAD CISNEROS, both 17, pass by.

LOGAN

Fag hag!

KAIT

Screw you, Logan! Why don't you go
lose us another basketball game?!

Mike puts his fist to his mouth and spits a laugh into it.

The Three Musketeers walk by and stop. Hal glances at his two cohorts, then catches attention from many passing STUDENTS:

HAL

(loudly)

Hey, Demetriano!! After you two
swapped spit, did you fudge pack
Jeff Velman?!

Mike charges Hal and shoves him hard.

Before Mike knows it, Flynn and Barry have him pinned against some lockers. Hal steps up and puts his face right in Mike's.

KAIT

(loudly)

Hello, Mr. Moore!

Hal, Barry, and Flynn immediately step back.

Hal darts his feral eyes up and down the busy hallway.

The Three Musketeers disappear into the crowd.

Mike storms over to Kait.

MIKE

I fight my own goddamn battles.

Kait grabs his arm and drags Mike toward a classroom door.

INT. EMPTY CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kait shuts the door and drags Mike to the back of the room.

KAIT

Mike, just stop. All of this,
everything this has been for
months, just stop it. It's me.
Since when can't you talk to me?
About anything.

Mike white-knuckle grips the strap of his book bag.

MIKE

About what, dammit?

KAIT

Well, about you being gay, to start with.

MIKE

What? You can't know that. I mean -
- No, I'm not.

Kait shakes her head.

KAIT

You never could lie worth a damn.

Mike darts his eyes toward the closed door, leans in to Kait.

MIKE

Kait, you can never -- never --

KAIT

Are you about to tell me I can never tell anyone you're gay? You really think I'd do that, Mike?

He watches her for a long moment, lets out a shaky breath.

MIKE

Of course not.

He punches his fist into his hand.

MIKE

I don't want to be gay. I don't want Nonno to call me a *frocio* too. He hates everything else about me. I just want to keep this one thing from him. He used to love me, Kait. I really do think he did once.

KAIT

Mike, you've got to talk to him, you just have to. He can't read your mind, you know.

MIKE

Talk to Nonno? You don't talk to my *nonno*, Kait, you know that. You stand there and take your orders like a good little Demetriano. We're not a family, we're a fuckin' Roman legion.

Kait shakes her head.

KAIT

Mike, I know Mr. Demetriano isn't very nice or easy to get along with, but I also know he's not a monster. And, oh, yeah, there's something else I know.

She reaches inside his blazer and withdraws the silver flask.

KAIT

I've known about this for way over a month. Did you ever plan on telling me what this is all about?

Mike swipes to retrieve it.

MIKE

Wait. How could you know?

KAIT

Jesus Christ, Mike. We're best friends, and I love you. You must be drunk if I actually have to say all that to you out loud.

MIKE

What the fuck, do I wear all this shit on my sleeve or something?

KAIT

Mike, you definitely can't talk to Mr. Demetriano if you're drunk all the time. You actually wanna try explaining this to me?

She indicates the flask.

Mike darts his eyes at the door. He grabs the flask.

MIKE

No, not really. I was hoping to keep this one thing from you.

He returns the flask inside the inner pocket of his blazer.

KAIT

Wait a minute: you can turn to booze, but you can't turn to me or to Pete or to your folks? Why are you so convinced, Mike, you have to go through everything that's eating you up alive alone?

She grabs him by his tie and draws him close so they're touching noses.

KAIT
You don't have to, by the way.

Mike pulls his tie out of her grasp, stands his full height.

MIKE
Anything else private you want to know about me, like how many times I jack off each night?

Kait scoffs.

KAIT
Don't flatter yourself anybody would actually want to know that.

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Mike and Kait walk down the corridor that remains crowded.

Josh rushes up behind them, beaming a huge smile, and drapes his arms around their shoulders.

JOSH
Hi, all!

Kait laughs.

KAIT
Josh, you're crazy.

Josh steps in front of them and bows with a flourish. When he bends back up, he magically produces a bouquet of silk flowers, which he presents to Kait.

JOSH
Milady.

Kait blushes as she accepts them.

MIKE
Nice jacket, man.

Josh shows off his brand new black leather jacket.

JOSH
Saba got it for me.

His smile beams even wider, if that's possible.

JOSH

It's from Golden Bear Leather, up in San Fran. We drove up there Saturday, then went to our favorite magic shop. It was great. I think we bought out the whole store Then we found this great steak place you wouldn't believe.

Mike eyes him at this news, in particular his black eye.

In a flash Josh produces an egg from behind Mike's ear.

KAIT

Wow, Josh. Your granddad's fun. Wish mine treated me like that.

Josh's smile becomes not so wide.

JOSH

Yeah, Saba's -- he's great.

Still confused, Mike looks at Josh with knitted brows, but then turns his attention to Kait.

MIKE

Are you joking?! Mr. Patel gives you anything you want.

KAIT

I'm talking about my dad's dad. He's a total tightwad.

Josh clears his throat.

JOSH

Um, guys. Last one to class is a --

He holds up the egg.

JOSH

-- rotten egg.

He takes off through the crowded hall.

Mike watches after Josh, frowning.

EXT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Mike stands with Kait on the front steps of the school as schoolmates push past them to head home.

Paul, holding Kait's hand, leans in and kisses her.

PAUL
I'll call you later tonight.

As he heads off around the building, she shouts after him:

KAIT
Have a great practice!

Mike sees Josh, his heavy bookbag slung over his one shoulder, his leather jacket hooked in two of his fingers slung over his other. Mike waves him over. When Josh arrives, Mike looks from him to Kait.

MIKE
Come with me downtown to sign up
for that art competition? Pete will
drive us.

Josh shrugs.

JOSH
Sure.

Kait narrows her eyes at him.

KAIT
You know how I feel about that.

MIKE
Practically the whole world knows
how you feel about that, Kait.

He rolls his eyes.

MIKE
Listen, I couldn't go out for the
musical auditions even if I wanted
to -- which I don't -- because the
internship starts first, and I gave
my word.

Kait opens her mouth.

Mike grabs his forehead with his hand.

MIKE
Everything's a battle with you.

KAIT
When I'm right, you bet it is.

MIKE
Can you give me this one thing?

Kait opens her mouth, closes it, considers. She regards Josh.

Josh shrugs.

JOSH

This one thing. Doesn't seem he's asking for too much.

MIKE

Right! See? See?

She waves him off dismissively. To Josh:

KAIT

You don't even know what we're talking about.

Josh gives them both a lopsided grin.

JOSH

No, not really.

MIKE

Kaitlyn, don't you even try to get another ally in him.

KAIT

Oh, awright, dammit. Don't expect this to happen a lot.

MIKE

Your generosity is duly noted, Your Highness.

He turns and high-fives Josh. He then hooks his thumb toward the parking lot.

MIKE

Let's go. I see Pete.

As they walk through the crowd, Mike leans in to Josh.

MIKE

Sorry, man, how I blew you off about your grandfather. It ain't cool, it ain't cool at all, how he's hitting you all the time.

Josh gets a distant look in his eyes.

JOSH

(barely above a whisper)
No. No it's not.

MIKE
But, hey, we gotta fight our own
battles, right?

Josh looks at him and shrugs.

JOSH
I guess.

Mike reaches out his hand.

MIKE
Anyway. You and me, copacetic?

Josh shakes his hand, that grin back on his handsome face.

JOSH
You bet.

Josh's whole expression explodes with a wide smile as he sees the Ferrari Pete leans against. Josh rushes up to it.

JOSH
A-h-h-h-h, man. This thing's
incredible!

Pete takes a long drag off his cigarette and blows out the smoke in a big plume.

PETE
Hey, kid.

Pete smiles and laughs as he watches Josh who can't get enough of taking in the beautiful four-seater road car.

JOSH
Can I touch it?

Pete laughs.

PETE
A'course you can. It's not gonna
break, I promise. Not this baby.

Josh tosses his jacket in the open passenger's-side window, then runs his hands over the car's sleek roof.

PETE
You like cars, kid?

JOSH
I like this car.

Pete laughs as he takes a last drag off his cigarette, then grinds the butt under his biker boot.

MIKE

Pete, take us downtown so I can sign up for that art competition?

PETE

No prob, ace. You can tell your nonno about it. Maybe it will help his mood. He's been in a real bitch of one all day.

He looks at Kait.

PETE

Sorry, Kait.

KAIT

Give me a break, Pete. I do have a big brother, y'know. Don't you start treating me the way the rest of these clowns do.

She takes all three of them in the wide sweep of her gaze.

KAIT

I'm getting fed up with being treated like I'm made out of 5000-year-old Chinese paper.

Pete darts his dark eyes heavenwards.

PETE

Oops, I think it's about to rain.

He dodges her swiping at him and walks round to the driver's side. He looks at the three young people across the roof.

PETE

How's pizza on me sound?

JOSH

Messy.

INT. GIANCARLO'S STUDY - NIGHT

Mike marvels at the brand new art supplies laid out on the table before him. He looks at his grandfather and smiles.

MIKE

Grazie mille, Nonno.

Giancarlo smiles back, pats his grandson's shoulder. He fingers Mike's lip, eye, and nose, and his smile broadens.

GIANCARLO

Almost like new. *Mio nipote* doesn't solve his problems with his fists.

Mike keeps the smile in place.

MIKE

No fights, Nonno. I promise.

He snaps his fingers.

MIKE

Oh, yeah!

He takes some folded stapled sheets out of his back pocket and hands it to Giancarlo, who opens it.

It's an Honors English test, with an A+ circled at the top.

Giancarlo's smile grows wider, and he nods. He taps the test.

GIANCARLO

As I said, Michaelangelo, I like telling people I'm proud of you.

Mike nods as he continues to smile broadly.

EXT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Mike rushes around the back of the school and up to the commotion which has attracted a large crowd. He pushes his way in to the front.

The Three Musketeers push and shove and torment Greg. At one point they half-choke the scrawny kid with his tie, the lower-schooler's eyes like those of a snared rabbit.

Mike, his own eyes bloodshot, laughs practically the loudest amongst the crowd, which catches Hal's attention.

Greg watches Mike laughing along with everyone else.

GREG

Mike?!? Help me, Mike!!

Mike really laughs along with the rest of the crowd when Flynn rams his knee up between Greg's legs.

The crowd roars when Greg vomits.

Hal moves over to Mike and grabs him by a fistful of his shirt and tie, drags him back to the building, and slams Mike up against the wall beside Greg.

Hal leans in to Mike and sniffs.

HAL

Drink all you want, faggot. It's not gonna help you forget what a worthless piece of shit you are.

Mike shoves Hal back several feet.

MIKE

I keep telling you, you asshole, I'm no faggot. What the hell I ever do to you, Hal?

Hal steps back up to Mike, slams his fist into his stomach.

Flynn rams Mike between the legs.

Barry just looks at Hal. Hal looks angrily back at him, and Barry merely shrugs and smashes his fist into Mike's face.

The crowd goes absolutely wild.

Mike clamps his hand over his eye and writhes.

MIKE

Jesus, Barry! You fucking asshole!

Hal grabs a fistful of Mike's hair and forces him down on the ground, where he grinds Mike's face in Greg's vomit.

HEADMASTER MOORE (O.S.)

Everyone! Back to class! Right now!

The crowd scatters. A few seniors and other students hang around for the show.

The Three Musketeers stand quickly aside.

HAL

Sir, these two underclassmen were having a big fight.

JOSIAH MOORE, 56, is one of those men who very much wants to be doing something else at any given moment.

He regards Mike and Greg with knitted brows.

HEADMASTER MOORE
 These two were having a fight.
 These two. That's what you're
 trying to tell me.

HAL
 Yes, sir.

HEADMASTER MOORE
 More like he --

He points at Mike.

HEADMASTER MOORE
 -- was beating the crap out of this
 lower-schooler.

He walks right up to Mike.

HEADMASTER MOORE
 What's the matter with you? This
 boy's at least half your size.

He sniffs.

HEADMASTER MOORE
 Mr. Demetriano, are you drunk?

Still holding his hand over his eye, Mike grins stupidly.

MIKE
 I think the word's "polluted", sir.

He laughs and wipes his nose.

Headmaster Moore hands Mike a handkerchief.

HEADMASTER MOORE
 Wipe that vomit off your face. Now!

Greg glances white-eyed at Hal, then angrily at Mike. Greg has his hands clamped between his legs, and he grits his teeth in equal parts pain and embarrassment. He vomits again, this time all down the front of his school uniform.

CHRISTIAN BRANDO, 16, raps Logan Peterson on the arm, points at Greg, and cackles.

Logan shoves him.

LOGAN
 Fuck you, you fuckin' acid-head.

Headmaster Moore's voice practically explodes.

HEADMASTER MOORE

For God's sake, somebody help Greg!
What the hell's wrong with you
people?!? He's just a kid!

Logan goes over to Greg, touches the boy's shoulder.

GREG

(whimpering)
Everyone's laughing at me, Logan.

LOGAN

C'mon, let's get you to the nurse.

Logan escorts Greg, his hand on the trembling boy's back.

Greg, his eyes welling, looks up at Logan and presses his
hands more tightly against his crotch.

GREG

(whimpering more)
It really hurts.

Logan's frown deepens. He pats the boy's head.

They disappear around the school building.

Mike just stares straight ahead.

HEADMASTER MOORE

Wipe that ridiculous smirk off your
face and come with me.

INT. MIKE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Josh sits, watching Mike. Josh is leaning back in the desk
chair, with his chukka-booted feet swaying.

JOSH

You're not so much as suspended?

Mike, in a fresh T-shirt, with one hand dabbles at his
painting with one of the new paintbrushes and with his other
hand holds a bag of frozen peas against his eye.

MIKE

Christian of all people told Moore
what really happened. Go figure.

JOSH

So he suspended the three of them.

Mike snorts.

MIKE

That's a joke, right? Barry's pop is the football team's "Dr. Feel-Good" and Flynn's folks just bought the school a new library. What do you think Moore did?

JOSH

And Hal, damn. If it's got DNA, he hates it. There's something real twisted inside that guy.

Mike stabs at his painting.

MIKE

God, I hate those three.

Mike tosses down the brush and leans away from the painting and tilts his head back, pressing the bag more tightly against his eye. He lets out a pent-up breath.

Mike swivels around in Josh's direction and hooks his thumb over his shoulder at the painting.

MIKE

I better get this thing good. Shit, I gotta get it great.

His shoulders sag.

MIKE

Who the hell am I kidding? I have to get it perfect.

Josh knits his brows.

JOSH

You have to? Or what?

He sits up and tosses the bag of frozen peas onto his bed.

MIKE

Exactly what do you think, Josh? Do I have to draw you of all people a roadmap? Huh?

Mike stands and steadies himself. He pinches the bridge of his nose, grits his teeth, and closes his eyes for a moment.

Mike picks up his blazer, stops, and looks at Josh.

Josh looks back at him.

JOSH

Whassup?

Mike pulls out his flask and starts unscrewing the top.

He squares his shoulders.

MIKE

Got a problem with this?

Josh shrugs.

JOSH

Hey, man, your house, your room,
your life. I wouldn't, but, hey.

Mike takes a long gulp.

They both look at the door when a knock comes to it.

MIKE

Shit!

Mike shoves the flask under his mattress, opens the door.

Kait walks in.

KAIT

Oh, hey, Josh.

He looks up at her and grins.

JOSH

Milady.

Kait giggles.

She sits on Mike's bed and watches Mike as he sits back down on the stool and picks the paintbrush back up.

Josh watches Kait watch Mike. Both remain silently intent.

Then suddenly:

MIKE

No.

Kait straightens.

MIKE

No, Kait, I didn't stop them from
bullying me again. I'm a loser,
remember?

KAIT
I have never once called you a
loser, Mike.

She punches him in the arm.

KAIT
I've called you an idiot, but never
a loser.

She starts ticking off her fingers.

KAIT
Jackass. Time-waster. Dilettante.
Spoiled brat.

She glances at Josh.

KAIT
He's a really spoiled brat. Whoa.

MIKE
We get the point, Kait.

She keeps ticking as she continues to look at Josh.

KAIT
Brown-noser. He doesn't take a dump
unless that tyrant he calls a
grandfather tells him he can.

Mike sits up ramrod.

MIKE
Okay. Enough.

He points at the door.

MIKE
Get out of my room. Now.

Kait dismisses his command with a wave and a sputter.

KAIT
I'm mad at you.

MIKE
Seems to be a lot of that lately.

KAIT
Well, you're pissing me off a lot
lately. Like, you didn't stop them
from beating up poor Greg. What the
hell's wrong with you?

Mike wipes viciously at his nose.

KAIT

You know how much so many of those boys look up to you.

Mike jabs at the painting with random colors.

MIKE

Not like I ever asked them to.

KAIT

But they do.

Mike slams the paintbrush down.

MIKE

Dammit! I never asked them to! I never asked for any of this!!

His expression goes from angry to haunted.

The room crackles with a deafening silence.

Mike stares hard at the chaos he's created on the canvas.

Frowning, Kait shakes her head.

KAIT

In case you happen to give a shit about anyone but yourself, Greg had to have emergency surgery today.

Josh sits up fast in the chair, plants his feet on the floor.

JOSH

Yikes.

MIKE

(distantly)
Hope he'll be okay, poor kid.

KAIT

But you're too damn drunk nowadays to care about anyone but yourself. Right, Mike? Tell me I'm wrong.

Mike gives her a sidelong glance, then drops his eyes.

KAIT

Where's the flask, Mike?

She bounces on the bed a couple of times where she sits.

KAIT

Oh.

She shakes her head.

KAIT

I never thought, Mike, I'd ever be outright ashamed of you.

Mike just stares hard into the excuse of a painting. He balls his left hand sitting on his thigh into a fist.

Kait stands.

Josh does too.

KAIT

I came over here to invite you to my Sweet Sixteen party on Saturday.

Mike looks up at her.

MIKE

No, you didn't. You know perfectly well I know what next Saturday is. You came here to hand me my ass.

Kait smirks.

KAIT

Yeah. Did a fine job of it, too, now didn't I? Look at that fist.

Mike immediately relaxes his left hand.

Kait looks at Josh.

KAIT

I want you there too, Josh.

JOSH

Thanks, Kait. You bet.

Kait looks down at Mike and tries to maintain her stern expression but softens it as she brushes her fingertip gently over his black eye.

As Mike stands and walks over to the bedroom door, Kait takes her tattered De rerum natura paperback out of the pocket of her windbreaker and leaves it on his bed.

INT. MIKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In nothing but his boxers, Mike crinkles his brows when he sees Kait's paperback sitting there on his bed.

He picks it up, and, after stretching out on the bed and situating his head comfortably on the pillow, he opens it to the page she'd marked with the flyer. He starts to read.

MIKE (V.O.)

"Your life is death already, though
you live/And though you see, except
that half your time,"

Mike's jaw muscles twitch under the skin, and he has trouble keeping the words in focus, both from his hands shaking and his eyes blurring with tears.

MIKE (V.O.)

"You waste in sleep, and the other
half you snore/With eyes wide open,
forever seeing dreams,"

Mike's chest rises and falls faster and faster as big tears drop down his cheeks and stain his pillow.

MIKE (V.O.)

"Forever in panic, forever lacking
wit/To find out what the trouble
is, depressed,/Or drunk, or
drifting aimlessly around."

Mike grits his teeth and breathes in gasps, tears flowing down his face.

He looks at the painting, mocking him from its easel.

He glances over at a poster, which reads "Hang On There, Baby!" of a kitten hanging on for dear life to a tree branch while its hind paws dangle in midair. The poor thing hangs there, forever frozen in its unanswered cry for help.

Mike viciously throws the paperback across the room, then stares at the ceiling fan and its ceaseless hamster-wheeling while its four globes drench the room in its bright light.

Mike rolls over onto his side, draws his knees up to his chest, buries his face in the pillow, cries himself to sleep.

INT. LEVIN HOUSE - DAY

The doorbell rings at the front door.

Kait, beautiful in her turquoise dress, answers it.

She looks over her shoulder.

KAIT

That's okay, Mom! I found us a warm
body to help move the tables!

She grabs Mike by the sleeve, pulls him willy-nilly inside.

INT. LEVIN HOUSE - DAY

Josh sets his plate of cake aside and walks over to the Levin's Bechstein piano. He runs his hand over the mahogany, then moves in front of it, does a quick flourish on the keys.

Mike and Paul walk over.

MIKE

You play?

Josh shrugs. He sits down and puts his fingers on the keys. He starts in on Chopin's "Nocturne Op. 9 No 3".

Paul and Mike exchange glances.

MIKE

Wow.

PAUL

Wow.

Josh grins as he finishes. Partygoers applaud.

PAUL

Playing like that, you can go pro.

Josh looks up at him and grins.

JOSH

Twelve years of lessons, that's
what I'm hoping.

Kait hurries over to the three of them. She gives them each a peck on the cheek, takes Mike by his hand, brings him out into the center of everyone's attention.

Mike plays nervously with the knot of his tie.

KAIT

I know the gift I want from you.

Mike points at the gift table.

MIKE

C'mon, Kait. I got you something
real nice. Picked it out myself.

KAIT

And I love it, Mike. I do. But you
know what I really want.

Mike darts his eyes about the interested audience. He leans
in to his best friend.

MIKE

Kait! I can't. You know I can't.

She scans the crowd.

KAIT

Mike's a beautiful singer,
everyone, and an incredible dancer.

MIKE

How could you possibly know that?

KAIT

I've seen you in that lady's
courtyard. I didn't tell you,
because I wanted you to tell me.

Mike forces a grin, though his eyes reflect his terror.

KAIT

Sing for me? Dance with me?

She grabs a nearby piece of music, hands it to him.

Mike reads the cover: "Sixteen Candles".

KAIT

Do you know this?

MIKE

Um...Well, sure, like, off the
radio, yeah. Kait, really,
I...C'mon. Jesus Christ, Kait.

He moves to leave.

She grabs his sleeve, pulls him back.

KAIT

You can do it, Mike.

He squares his shoulders and angrily narrows his eyes.

MIKE
(teeth clenched)
No, I can't.

KAIT
I'm the Princess, and this is my
birthday.

Kait snatches the music out of Mike's hand, gives it to Josh.

KAIT
Josh?

He winks at her.

JOSH
Happy birthday, Milady.

She smiles at him, then hurries back to Mike, takes his hands, smiles even more as she looks him in the eyes.

She leans in to Mike and whispers to him.

KAIT
Mike, I know you're terrified, but,
please, show all of them what I
already know: everything beautiful
you have inside, right here.

She places her hand over his heart.

KAIT
Share it, Mike. Let it out. You'll
see, it's not so scary, it's not
wrong. That's your grandfather
saying those things, not you.

He stares at her. His eyes water.

Josh has his fingers poised over the keys.

Mike gulps. He squeezes his eyes shut and breathes in and out a shuddering breath.

Josh starts playing.

Mike opens his eyes, darts them around the room.

Kait cups his cheeks, makes him look directly into her eyes.

MIKE
(hardly a whisper)
"Sixteen candles make a lovely
light."

He breathes a breath more shuddering than the one before.

Mike continues to sing, starts to dance with Kait. Within moments it's as if the two are one as his voice becomes more confident, and they command the room: soon Mike has the Princess swept up in a dance of impromptu magnificence.

Mike finishes the choreography with Kait's back pressed against his torso and his arms wrapped around her waist.

MIKE
(loudly)
"For I love you so."

As the room erupts in applause, Mike turns Kait around, and, as his eyes glisten as he touches his forehead to hers, he mouths the words "Thank you".

INT. LEVIN HOUSE - DAY

As KAIT'S FATHER and she finish their dance, everyone cheers.

Josh gets a wicked grin on his face. He starts pounding out a rousing round of "Hava Nagila".

His folks, CHARLIE and LOREENA, laugh and start clapping with their son's piano playing, and soon they start singing the Hebrew lyrics, joined by a number of other partygoers.

Josh ends with a flare, and his smile is a mile wide as he jumps up and pounds out the last few notes, then throws his arms in the air.

The applause fills the room.

Josh punches Mike in the arm. Smiling, Mike punches him back.

Paul looks all around with his signature baffled expression.

PAUL
That's a weird song.

He shrugs and heads back over to the food table, his hand pressing in on his flat, muscled, growling midsection.

Josh sees David watching them from across the room. Grandfather and grandson lock eyes.

The room settles down.

Josh sits back down at the piano. He looks at the keys, takes a deep breath, slowly places his fingers back over them.

He looks at David, meets his grandfather's eyes and only then starts playing the somber opening tones of the "Kol Nidrei".

Charlie and Loreena narrow their eyes, first at each other, then at their son.

Josh's stare at his grandfather becomes more intense the more he plays the ancient hymn of atonement.

David gulps as he stares back at his grandson. He darts his eyes at his son and daughter-in-law.

Josh's parents look from Josh to David, then at each other.

Josh stops mid-note and, breaking the intensity of his expression, launches into a light-hearted soft tune to act as background to the festive, fun gathering.

INT. BRENINGER HOUSE - DAY

Josh reaches out as his parents leave, but David puts a hand on his arm, and Josh stops.

Josh shuts the door, turns, and faces his grandfather.

David glances out the living room window, watches his son's car leave, then steps right up to Josh and shoves him hard against the door.

JOSH
Please, Saba.

DAVID
Shut up!

Josh visibly trembles.

DAVID
What was that back there? Some kind of challenge?

JOSH
It was nothing, Saba. I was just playing for my friends.

DAVID
Friends? You? You don't have friends. People who are worth something have friends. A nothing piss-ant piece of shit like you doesn't deserve friends.

Josh's eyes water.

DAVID

And it was nothing? Embarrassing me, embarrassing your parents, embarrassing your people, your faith, that's nothing to you?

David slaps the door right beside Josh's ear.

Josh cringes.

David grabs the front of Josh's button-down shirt tucked into his jeans which are belted to his tight waist. David shoves Josh toward the stairs.

Josh looks up them, then back at his grandfather.

JOSH

Saba, please, I don't want to. I don't want to do that anymore.

DAVID

Get. Up. Those. Stairs. Now.

Josh whimpers, then half-stumbles his way up the stairs.

David starts up them after him.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM - DAY

David sits on the edge of his bed while Josh stands in front of him, within his grandfather's easy reach.

Josh gulps, and his eyes dart anywhere but meeting his grandfather's.

DAVID

Look at me.

Josh refuses to do so.

DAVID

Joshua Aaron, look at me.

Josh finally meets his grandfather's eyes.

DAVID

There's some things you seem to have forgotten about all this.

Josh doesn't reply, just continues to stare at him.

DAVID

The only reason I don't hurt any of your cousins is because I hurt you.

JOSH

Wha-what?

DAVID

I end up hurting your cousins, it'll be your fault, right? You really want that on your conscience?

JOSH

My fault? How could it be my fault? That doesn't even make sense. You're the one hurting me. You could just not hurt anybody, Saba.

DAVID

Really, Josh? Do you really see that happening?

David shrugs his shoulders and pathetically shakes his head.

DAVID

Well, I'm seeing your Aunt Chrissie for a couple of months starting next week.

David looks his grandson straight in his eyes.

DAVID

I hope you're okay what your selfishness is going to make me have to do to your cousin Jack.

Josh is breathing even harder, sweat trickling down his face.

JOSH

Saba, Jack's only nine years old.

David pshaws.

DAVID

You were eight when I started you.

Josh narrows his eyes at him.

JOSH

(defiantly)

His brothers and sister will protect him.

David smirks at him.

DAVID

Give me a break. I know how to keep a kid quiet. You've never said anything all these years.

David shrugs again.

DAVID

Sad thing is, Jack's a happy kid. That'll be driven out of him pretty quick. A lifetime of unhappiness and misery, all because of you. But, clearly, you don't give a damn about ever seeing that bright, wide smile of his again or those happy, beautiful eyes he has.

Josh's bottom lip quivers as he bites down on it.

David rolls his eyes.

DAVID

So which one is it? You keep making me do what I do to you, or you be real selfish and make me have to hurt Jack and ruin his life?

JOSH

Oh, God. I didn't know. You've always told me how much what we do is my fault, but I didn't know it was that much my fault.

DAVID

Well, Josh, it is. You're a bad person. Bad things are the fault of bad people. Really bad things are the fault of really bad people, and that's you.

Josh whimpers and can barely get his words out.

JOSH

I don't want to be a bad person.

DAVID

Well, you are. And remember: you're a nothing, you're less than a nothing, and you don't deserve friends or good things to happen to you. That's why they don't.

JOSH

Good things do happen to me. Lots of good things. Saba, they do. People like me, and I like them.

DAVID

You just tell yourself those lies to make up for what a horrible person you are. Face it, Josh, if you weren't so horrible, I wouldn't do these horrible things to you. You're the ugly monster, not me.

Josh puts his hands up to his forehead.

JOSH

That's...that's just crazy, Saba.

He gulps again and squeezes his eyes shut.

JOSH

I guess it has to be how it's been.

Josh keeps his eyes squeezed shut, but big tears leak out between his eyelids and drop down his soft cheeks and off his chin. He whimpers, and his lips quiver like a small child's as he reaches down and starts to undo his belt.

INT. FERRARI - NIGHT

The silence among Mike, Josh, and Pete is deafening.

Pete pulls the car in front of the Demetriano house.

He looks at Mike beside him, then twists around and regards Josh, now wearing a checkered flannel shirt, in the backseat.

Josh refuses to look him in the eye.

INT. MIKE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mike sits beside Josh and looks into his tear-streaked face.

MIKE

Josh, my God, what is it?

Josh squeezes his eyes shut.

JOSH

I can't tell you. I can't. My cousin. I have to protect Jack.

He snaps his eyes open and looks at Mike.

JOSH

Mike, I'm going to explode.

His breathing comes in gasps.

JOSH

If Saba touches me one more time,
I'm going to kill him. I swear, I
will. I don't care it breaks the
Commandments, I'll do it. I will.

He wipes his nose with his sleeve.

JOSH

He didn't get my message today.
He's never going to stop, Mike.
Never. And if I make him stop with
me, he's just going to hurt Jack.

Mikes knits his brows.

MIKE

Wait a minute. Slow down. What?

JOSH

Mike, I'm so fucking stuck.

MIKE

He's never going to stop what? What
do you mean, touches you? Wait, no,
he hits you. That's bad, but...

Josh stares at him. His Adam's apple dances up and down his
throat. He shakes his head a couple of times.

Mike's eyes widen.

Josh jumps to his feet.

JOSH

I'm sorry, Mike. But I had to come
to someone. Saba -- tonight -- one
more time -- If I stayed there
another second --

Mike stands, grabs Josh's arm.

Josh flinches, grits his teeth, clamps his arm to his side.
He slams his fist against the middle of his chest.

JOSH

Mike, I'd take a hundred black eyes
and twisted arms than --

He pounds his chest right over his heart with his fist.

JOSH

-- than how he's killing me here,
from the inside out. It hurts,
Mike. It really, really hurts.

Mike helps Josh to sit back down.

MIKE

Josh, sssh. It's gonna be okay.

Josh erupts:

JOSH

How can it be okay?! Goddammit,
Mike, my fuckin' grandfather makes
me suck his cock and rams his dick
up my ass!!

Mike looks like he's going to throw up.

JOSH

Jesus, Mike, I've lost count how
many times I've shit blood.

Mike puts his hand on Josh's shoulder, and his friend
flinches again as he sucks in air through his clenched teeth.

Mike moves the shirt's collar slightly aside, gulps at the
sight of the big deep-purple bruise he sees there.

MIKE

Josh, I'm sorry I said that.

Josh stares at the floor and picks at the sleeve.

JOSH

I...ah...I had to change my shirt
because...I...because Saba, he...

Mike very, very carefully puts his hand on Josh's back.

MIKE

Josh, breathe. My God, breathe.

Josh nods and takes two, deep breaths.

JOSH
 Saba, he reached inside
 my...my...pants, then
 he...he...ah...

MIKE
 Josh, you don't have to --

JOSH
 He smeared it all...all...over the
 front of my...

Josh looks straight at Mike with tears flowing down his face.

JOSH
 I know it's stupid, Mike, but that
 was one of my favorite shirts.
 Savta and Saba Cork sent it to me
 from Israel for my bar mitzvah.
 That was one of my favorite shirts,
 and what's more, Saba knew it was.
 Mike, I loved that shirt, and now I
 can never wear it again.

Inconsolable, Josh grabs Mike into a tight embrace and sobs
 into Mike's shirtfront.

Mike, his eyes wide, strokes Josh's hair and whispers "Sssh"
 in his ear.

Josh pulls away from Mike, takes three deep breaths.

JOSH
 Mike, Saba's going to hurt my
 little cousin, and it's going to be
 totally my fault. Totally.

MIKE
 What?! How could that possibly be
 your fault? Your grandfather's the
 horrific monster, Josh, not you.

Josh wipes snot off his top lip with the back of his hand.

JOSH
 No. I'm the ugly monster, not him.
 I just tell myself lies to convince
 myself I'm not, but I am. I have to
 be horrible, Mike, or Saba wouldn't
 do all these horrible things to me.

Mike just sits there in stunned silence, blinking. Then:

MIKE

That's the most twisted fucked-up thing I've ever heard. Josh, you must be able to hear how absolutely crazy that sounds, right?!

Josh just stares at him, then shakes his head.

JOSH

No.

MIKE

Your own grandfather -- your own grandfather -- jerks you off and smears it all over your favorite shirt just to humiliate you, and you're the monster?!

Josh nods, with a casualness that chills one to the bone.

Mike impulsively grabs Josh by two fistfuls of his shirtfront and brings him nearly nose to nose.

MIKE

You listen to me, Joshua Breninger: none of that shit you just spewed is the truth. None of it. You hear me? Dammit, Josh, do you hear me?!

Josh practically collapses like a Raggedy Ann doll.

He croaks out the one word:

JOSH

Yes.

Mike pulls Josh into another tight embrace, and the two boys sit there like that for a long moment.

Mike pulls away from Josh enough to look again into his eyes.

A wordless communication passes between them, and Mike leans in to Josh, aiming his lips for Josh's.

Josh stops him.

JOSH

You don't want to do that, Mike. I'm filthy and gross and used.

MIKE

You're not any of those things.

Mike leans forward again, kisses Josh on his forehead.

Josh puts his cheek down on Mike's shoulder.

JOSH

Can you just hold me again, Mike?

MIKE

As long as you need me to, buddy.

EXT. DANCE STUDIO COURTYARD - NIGHT

Mike stands there under the light of the buzzing streetlamp, hands on his hips as he catches his breath. He watches through the windows as Heidi pushes her students.

Mike cocks his head, slowly grins, and steps over to the door and, hesitating for a moment, opens it.

INT. HEIDI'S DANCE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Heidi looks up and smiles. She waves Mike over.

Mike remains in the back, hand on the handle of the door.

Heidi waves at him more emphatically.

MELISSA SHANLEY, 21, rushes up to him and, smiling, drags Mike into the middle of the class.

Mike darts his eyes around the group. He meets Parker's eyes and straightens.

Heidi starts clapping in time with the music, and her well-oiled, well-disciplined platoon of students immediately returns to their routine.

Mike stands there for a moment, then starts dancing, out of sync at first with the group, but quickly he gets their rhythm, and soon he dances right in step with them.

The studio thunders with the joy of rhythm and laughter.

INT. BRENINGER HOUSE - DAY

David places his luggage down at the front door.

CHARLIE

Give our love to Chrissie.

Josh walks up to David, throws his bar mitzvah shirt at him.

David barely catches it, then darts his eyes at Charlie and Loreena as he wrings the garment in his hands. He gulps several times as he locks eyes with his grandson.

LOREENA

Sweetheart, isn't that your favorite shirt, the one Ima and Aba sent you for your bar mitzvah?

Josh nods, never unlocking his gaze from his grandfather's.

JOSH

Yeah. But Rod, the last time he visited, said he really, really liked it. I don't need it anymore. Isn't that right, Saba? You know why, right?

David takes a long, deep breath, then finally looks at Charlie and Loreena.

DAVID

I'll call when I arrive.

David hands the shirt back to Josh.

DAVID

Rod won't have any use for it.

Josh darts his eyes first at Charlie, then at Loreena, then back at David.

JOSH

That's exactly what I thought. But how 'bout Jack?

LOREENA

Oh, honey, Jack's way too small yet for that. Why you so quick to give away your favorite shirt?

Josh doesn't let up locking his eyes with David's.

JOSH

That's right, Jack's just a kid. Isn't he, Saba? Just a little kid.

David picks up his luggage and heads out of the house.

INT. HOME ON SMITHSON STREET - DAY

With one YOUNGSTER nestled in his lap, Mike, as wide-eyed and smiling as the LITTLE KIDS among whom he sits, watches Josh enthrall the birthday party with his magic.

Josh is completely at ease when he makes a bunny rabbit appear from a top hat. He plops the hat atop his head with a flourish. Before their eyes the bunny becomes a white dove.

Josh takes a deep bow, and when he straightens back up the dove has become a bright and bushy bouquet of flowers.

Josh basks in the applause Mike leads the kids in.

INT. VAN NUYS/SHERMAN OAKS AQUATIC CENTER - NIGHT

Paul slices through the water down his lane, a full two body lengths ahead of his competition. He slaps the wall and stands, then shoots up his muscled arms in victory.

His TEAMMATES jump in, grab him, whoop and laugh and cheer.

Up in the stands Kait and Mike and Josh go equally crazy, jumping to their feet and grabbing each other and throwing their own hands up in the air. They see Paul looking up at them, and they all three throw him big double thumbs up.

INT. BUCKLEY SCHOOL BATHROOM - DAY

Mike walks in, stops short.

Hal looks up from where he's got TREY, a lower-schooler, by a fistful of shirt and tie while Hal has his fist poised to wipe out the kid's tear-streaked face.

Flynn, who looks bored, and Barry, who looks disgusted, just stand there.

Mike rushes up to Hal, shoves him hard against the far wall.

Mike pulls Trey up next to himself and puts his arm around the lower-schooler's narrow shoulders.

Trey looks up at Mike distrustingly at first, then presses in even closer to him.

Hal rushes Mike. Mike rams his shin up between Hal's legs.

Hal drops to his knees, gasping and spitting.

MIKE

Yeah, that's for Greg! He lost a nut because of you guys! He's just a kid, for God's sake.

Mike looks hard from Hal to Flynn to Barry. He glances down quick at Trey and squeezes the kid's shoulders.

Mike slowly moves with Trey past Flynn and Barry.

Barry goes over to Hal and gets on his haunches next to him.

Mike turns, still holding Trey tight beside him.

MIKE

You want to pound on someone, you pound on me, but you leave these kids alone. You hear me?

Hal looks up at him.

HAL

You're dead, Demetriano! Dead!!

Mike backs out of the bathroom with Trey.

INT. HEIDI'S DANCE STUDIO - DAY

Heidi looks up as the door to her studio opens.

Giancarlo and Pete enter.

HEIDI

Mr. Demetriano.

Giancarlo walks over to her while Pete remains at the door.

GIANCARLO

I understand my grandson spends a lot of time here. Cavorting around like some sort of *frocio*.

HEIDI

I don't know what that word means, but it sounds ugly. What about Mike spending time here? It's what he wants to do. He's happy doing it.

Giancarlo narrows his dark eyes at her.

GIANCARLO

He's sixteen years old. He doesn't know what he wants, what happy is.

He clears his throat.

GIANCARLO

This isn't actually your main source of income. Your main revenue stream is doing choreography for the various studios around town.

Heidi regards him with deep suspicion.

HEIDI

Yes, it is. Allows me to train most of these kids for free, or at least for really reduced fees.

Giancarlo nods.

GIANCARLO

I have a lot of pull at the studios. It wouldn't take too many phone calls from me to see your choreography -- "gigs" I believe's the word? -- dry up and blow away.

Heidi's eyes widen.

HEIDI

You would hurt me and hurt my students just to control your grandson?

GIANCARLO

Not control. Protect. Protect him from himself if necessary.

Heidi shakes her head in equal parts disgust and disbelief.

HEIDI

Your grandson, Mr. Demetriano, has a raw, natural talent for dancing like I've never seen. You'd take that from him?

Giancarlo stands there, unmoved and unanswering.

Heidi stares at him and shakes her head.

HEIDI

You don't give one goddamn if your grandson's happy or not.

GIANCARLO

I know happiness is a rare luxury few of us encounter.

Giancarlo hardens his expression even further.

GIANCARLO

Mike's got to learn that like the rest of us. Duty to family trumps everything.

Heidi stands there, wide-eyed, with her mouth open.

HEIDI

Wow. That's a helluva worldview, Mr. Demetriano.

Heidi looks past him at Pete.

HEIDI

And you! You stand there silent while this man ruins Mike's life.

Pete can't meet her eyes. Pathetically:

PETE

He's doing what he knows is best for his grandson.

HEIDI

You're both disgusting. Get the hell out of my studio.

An ugly smirk creases Giancarlo's expression.

GIANCARLO

That's the way you want it?

HEIDI

All I care about is the way Mike wants it. I seem to be the only one who does give a damn about that.

She takes a step toward Giancarlo.

HEIDI

I may not be able soon to pay the rent on this place, but I'm paid up for now, so it's still mine.

She stomps her foot.

HEIDI

Get out!

Giancarlo snarls something vicious-sounding in Italian and turns. After a few steps, he turns back around.

GIANCARLO

Oh, yes. If you tell my grandson I was ever here, I'll make sure you never choreograph anything ever again this side of the Milky Way.

Giancarlo smiles.

GIANCARLO

You be sure to have a nice evening.

INT. HEIDI'S DANCE STUDIO - NIGHT

Mike breezes into the studio.

MIKE

Sorry I couldn't make tonight's class. I got over here for our one-on-one as fast as I could.

Heidi walks over to him. She squints into his bloodshot eyes.

HEIDI

Um...Yeah, about that.

Mike's grin disappears.

HEIDI

Uh...Mike, I'm not going to be able to teach you anymore.

MIKE

Why didn't you just call about cancelling tonight? That'd be fine.

Heidi can't look at him.

HEIDI

No, Mike, I can't teach you anymore.

Mike's expression goes from confused to disappointed to angry. He spins on a dime and trudges toward the door.

HEIDI

Mike! If I could do anything else, you know I would.

He flips her the finger over his shoulder.

EXT. DANCE STUDIO COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Mike bangs out the door and slams it closed behind him.

His chest heaving all the more, he jams his fists into the pockets of his sweatpants and heads across the courtyard.

He stops under the buzzing streetlamp.

An angry frown cuts across his expression as he narrows his sharp, dark eyes straight ahead.

His expression goes from resolute to morose as his shoulders sag as he shakes his head and walks out of the glow of the streetlamp's bathing light.

But then Mike stops.

He steps back directly under the lamp and straightens to his full height. He throws out his arms. He rises up on the tip of his foot and twirls, executing a perfect spin. He ends the move by stomping his foot hard on the gravelly ground.

Within moments Mike is in total command of the courtyard with a choreography that speaks to his anger, hurt, and passion.

He finishes back bathed in the light of the streetlamp and facing the studio. He meets the eyes of Heidi watching him.

Sweat pouring down his face, his chest heaving, Mike stands there and stares at Heidi, his lips tight, jaw muscles twitching. His eyes reflect his anger verging on rage.

Heidi can't stop staring into those eyes, her own wide at what she had just witnessed.

HEIDI

(under her breath)

"Once you've seen the light, you
can never go back into the
darkness."

She rushes to the door and throws it open.

HEIDI

Mike, get back in here!

He looks at her suspiciously.

HEIDI

Mike, please.

Slowly he walks toward her and enters the studio past her.

INT. HEIDI'S DANCE STUDIO - NIGHT

Mike runs through the murderous dance routine Heidi has choreographed for him while she ruthlessly barks directions.

Mike stops and, his chest heaving and sweat pouring off him, stands there with his hands on his hips.

Heidi cuts the music.

MIKE

You're deliberately torturing me,
Heidi. What's wrong with you?

HEIDI

"Deliberately"? I'm not working you
one-tenth I could -- and should,
certainly what you're capable of.

MIKE

You're mad at me because of what
happened out in the courtyard.

HEIDI

No. I'm ashamed of myself because
of what happened out there.

Mike tries to muster a grin, but his expression simply remains sad.

MIKE

Listen, Heidi, fuck it. Who am I
kidding with all this? I'll just go
home and be the good little
Demetriano Nonno wants me to be.

Heidi blinks at him several times.

HEIDI

Where the hell did that suddenly
come from?

Mike sags his shoulders.

MIKE

I'm tired. I'm just...tired. You.
Josh. Kait. Adam. Nonno. Hal. Greg.
I mean, he's a little kid. He might
never be able to have his own.

Mike looks like he could drop to his knees any second.

MIKE
 (bitterly)
 Happiness is for chumps.

Mike suddenly spins around and heads toward the door.

HEIDI
 Mike, get back here!

Mike keeps moving.

HEIDI
 Michael Demetriano, stop! And don't
 you dare flip me off again!

Mike halts in midstep, keeps his back to Heidi.

HEIDI
 Turn around.

Mike remains how he is.

HEIDI
 Now!

Mike turns. He narrows his eyes at her.

MIKE
 It's Michaelangelo.

HEIDI
 I don't give a damn what it is. I'm
 your dance instructor. You ever
 disrespect me again by turning your
 back on me and walking away, you
 and me, mister, we're going to have
 a lot of trouble.

MIKE
 You don't understand. My family --

HEIDI
 I don't care, Mike.

MIKE
 BUT I HAVE TO!! ABOUT EVERYTHING!!!

They stand there, staring each other down.

MIKE
 Don't you think I figured out why
 you said you couldn't teach me
 anymore? I know my grandfather.
 (MORE)

I know what he did, he came down here, gave you an ultimatum. Don't you think I know he's never going to let me be happy? That's it, he's won. He always wins. I've got to accept my place, that's running Demeter. I've got to give up on caring about anything else.

Heidi surprises Mike by striding right up to him. She jabs her index finger on his chest right over his heart.

HEIDI

All you have to do is right here. That's it. That's all. Dammit, Mike, you were born into your family. You weren't bought on some Boston street corner auction block.

Mike looks down at her finger, then into her eyes.

MIKE

(immensely sad)
You don't understand. You don't understand at all.

HEIDI

No, you don't.

She takes some steps back from him.

HEIDI

Get out of my studio. And I don't want to see you in the courtyard anymore either. That little performance you pulled out there tonight, save that for someone else. You only get that once.

Mike gulps as his feet remain rooted to the floor.

HEIDI

You know full well, Mike, I make no habit of giving my orders twice.

MIKE

Heidi, don't give up on me. Please.

HEIDI

Give up on you? You've already given up on yourself. "Happiness is for chumps." "He's won. He always wins." Those are bullshit excuses from a bullshit quitter.

She makes a sound of disgust and points at the door.

HEIDI

And I don't have quitters in here.

Nervous sweat drips off Mike's eyebrows and down his cheeks.

MIKE

I have to do this, Heidi, what I do
in here. I have to.

Heidi doesn't speak for a long moment, just watches him.

HEIDI

Why?

Mike's eyes water.

MIKE

Because...because...i-it's...

He closes his eyes, opens them, and takes a few breaths.

MIKE

It's the only time I feel alive.
It's like I wake up from a da --

He catches himself for a moment.

MIKE

It's like I wake up from a pit.

Heidi knits her brows.

HEIDI

Were you going to say "dark pit"?

Mike doesn't answer her.

Heidi frowns, then softens her expression.

HEIDI

And how does that feel, Mike?

MIKE

Well, I think --

HEIDI

No. Mike, how does that feel?

MIKE

(in a shaky whisper)
It feels real.

Heidi grins.

HEIDI

I bet, kiddo. Life always does.

She clears her throat.

HEIDI

Now, is it okay, Michaelangelo
Demetriano, if we get back now to
what we were doing?

Mike grins shyly and nods.

EXT. DANCE STUDIO COURTYARD - NIGHT

Mike stands under the buzzing streetlamp and takes in two big lungfuls of the cool night air. He musters a grin.

His grin broadens as he regards the graffiti over on the far brick wall. He walks up to the wall and scans with admiration and fascination the kaleidoscopic display of who knows how many imaginations.

Mike looks down and sees some discarded spray paint cans. He gets down on his haunches and picks one up -- a deep green, his favorite color -- and shakes it and smiles to hear it still has some contents.

Mike stands and takes another deep breath. With equal parts care and flare, Mike paints the letters: R I S K

He takes a step back, watches as the letters streak and dry. Satisfied, he tosses the can down and leaves the courtyard.

EXT. VALLEY VISTA BLVD - CONTINUOUS

Mike makes it about a block down the sidewalk when he stops. He looks in both directions at the moderate nighttime crowd.

He gulps and closes his eyes for a quick moment, and, when he reopens them, he strikes his best dancer's pose, then dances his way down the next block and a half, capturing the attention of many of the pedestrians, some of them annoyed, some of them bemused, many of them smiling.

When he stops, Mike has a wide grin on his sweat-streaked face. He hides the grin behind his hand as he ducks through the crowd and out of sight.

EXT. BRENINGER HOUSE - NIGHT

Josh and Mike sit on the marble stoop outside the big oak front door.

Mike glances behind him, then across the expansive yard, then way over at the sidewalk which has next to no traffic this time of the night.

He returns his attention to Josh and holds Josh's hand.

MIKE

Something happened when I was five.

He breathes a deep sigh before continuing.

MIKE

We were in Prague, and I got separated from everyone, and I got lost in this alleyway. It was da -- it was so da -- dark.

He seems to choke on the word.

MIKE

These people, they -- I was in there for hours. All these people, I couldn't understand them, they just kept walking by out there on the sidewalk. I didn't know what to do. I screamed and screamed, but nothing came out of my mouth.

A big tear drops down his cheek.

MIKE

I had this big lollipop, looked like a whirlygig. I held it tight in my little hands, thinking it somehow could protect me.

He looks Josh square in the eyes.

MIKE

They left me, Josh, there in the dark. Why? Why did they do that, Josh? They say they love me, but they left me, all alone, for hours. Who does that?

Josh puts his arm around Mike's shoulders.

MIKE

Josh, I never want to feel that way
ever again. Ever.

Josh nods and squeezes his shoulders.

JOSH

Thanks for sharing that, Mike.

MIKE

Well, you trusted me in telling me
what your grandfather had done, I
figured I could risk trusting you.

They both look up when Pete drives his Mustang up to the
Breningers' front door.

Josh immediately pulls his arm from around Mike's shoulders,
and Mike immediately lets go of Josh's hand.

The boys arise, walk over to the car as Pete cuts the engine.
They both tightly lean in the open passenger-side window.

Pete reaches across and pats Josh's forearm.

PETE

You okay, kid? The other day, you
looked pretty rough.

Josh nods and even musters a grin. His beautiful eyes glint
in the Mustang's domelight.

JOSH

You ever off the clock?

Pete chuckles and shrugs.

PETE

It's a Monday night. Where else
would I be but home in bed?

Mike chuckles mischievously.

MIKE

With who is anyone's guess.

Pete eyes him with mock sternness and finger-guns him.

PETE

That is none of your business.

He points at the both of them.

PETE

I know it's late and a school night
and all, but you want to go grab an
ice cream?

Mike and Josh look at each other and shrug. Josh hooks his
thumb over his shoulder.

JOSH

Let me go ask my folks.

Josh heads towards the front door. Mike watches after him.

Pete watches Mike watch Josh, and Pete cocks a brow.

EXT. EYE SCREAM EWE SCREAM BONANZA-RAMA - NIGHT

The three of them dive into their bounties: Pete, a banana
split to end all banana splits; Mike, a sundae the mechanics
of which only NASA engineers could understand; and Josh, his
eyes wide at the sight of the quadruple-scoop cone that is
already starting to drip down his fingers.

PETE

Oh, yeah.

He pulls a folded sheet of paper out of his breast pocket and
gives it to Mike.

PETE

Your *papa* asked me to give you
that. It came today.

Mike unfolds and reads it.

MIKE

Ah, shit.

Josh, ice cream smeared all around his mouth, leans forward.

JOSH

Whassup?

MIKE

Mr. Coppola wrote. The internship's
pushed out to next spring.

Pete regards him quizzically.

PETE

Isn't that a good thing? That'll give you more time with your friends, to say nothing of the less school you'll miss. At least that's what your *papa* mentioned.

Mike huffs.

MIKE

Whatever.

He glares at Pete, then he looks in the rearview mirror and glares at Josh.

MIKE

Nobody, but nobody tells Ms. Buttinsky about this.

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Kait races up to Mike in the cafeteria.

KAIT

That's fantastic news, Mike! Now you can go out for the auditions.

Mike slams his tray down.

MIKE

I'm gonna kill him.

Josh walks up to them.

JOSH

Wha'? Kill who?

Mike jabs him hard in the chest.

MIKE

Kill you.

JOSH

Me?!? What did I do?

Mike points at Kait.

MIKE

You told Holier-Than-Thou here about Mr. Coppola's letter. Now I'm never gonna hear the last of it.

KAIT
Because I'm right.

MIKE
Kait, you're impossible!

KAIT
That's what you love about me.

Mike buries his face in his hands and shouts into them:

MIKE
I'm gonna go crazy!!

KAIT
Keep that melodrama. It'll really
help you up on the stage.

INT. HEIDI'S DANCE STUDIO - NIGHT

Heidi works her class hard, stomping her feet in time with the booming music.

Mike pliés and sautés and élevés, and everything else Heidi has to throw at them, in his place among his classmates.

Kait, Paul, and Josh stomp, clap, and sway to the music and to the dancing, wide and happy smiles lighting their faces.

Before Mike knows it, though, he takes Heidi's choreography into a realm of his own making, and his arms, his legs, his whole lean, long, dancer's body whirl and twirl and twist.

Mike's classmates move aside and, forming a ring around the dance floor, relinquish it to Mike. They clap and stomp, Heidi right in there with them. Kait, Paul, and Josh too.

Mike beams a huge smile and rushes over to his three friends, pulls and gestures them into the center of the dance floor.

Before Kait, Paul, and Josh know it, they're holding hands in the center of a circle Mike is whirling with wild abandon.

Faster and faster Mike makes the circle turn, and he laughs louder and louder, and soon Kait is laughing too, then Josh, then even Paul who seems finally to have let go of his confusion and given in to their fun and joy and recklessness.

Kait looks at Paul and winks and gestures for her and him to join the ring of spectators. Paul shrugs and nods, and Kait takes his hand, and they leave the floor to Mike and Josh.

Josh glances around, his eyes wide as he sees it's just the two of them now in the middle of the dance floor.

Mike whirls in close to Josh and comes up behind him and presses his torso to Josh's back. At first Josh exudes anxiety and fear but then calms as Mike, keeping his dance steps in perfect motion, runs his hands up and down Josh's arms and then brushes the back of his hand along Josh's cheek and then the fingers of both his hands through Josh's hair.

Paul's eyes are the size of half-dollars. He tears them away from what he's watching, looks aghast at Kait. Kait grins at him and nods, and Paul, shrugging again, refocuses forward.

Mike does a quick impromptu solo choreography, then swoops back in to Josh. He takes Josh by the hand, and at last Josh starts to dance with him.

Heidi switches off the music. Now all attention is completely on Mike and Josh, the two dancers, the two potential lovers.

Mike slows their dancing down until they're perfectly in the center of the dance floor and their forms are almost as one as they wrap each other in each other's arms and in each other's legs, crotch to crotch, heart to heart, forehead to forehead. They stare long into each other's eyes.

Mike mouths the words "I love you." and Josh, crying, nods.

Mike brushes his lips ever so gently against Josh's, and at first Josh resists, jerking his head away. Then, though, he lets Mike press his lips against his own, and Josh closes his eyes as they kiss, long and for real.

Paul's eyes go wide again, and Kait raps him on the arm.

The class erupts in applause.

Mike and Josh come out of their kiss, and they look around, as if from a daze. Looking like kids caught with their hands in the cookie jar, they part, but do keep their arms around the other's shoulders.

EXT. DANCE STUDIO COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Pete watches from his spot which allows him a clear view into the windows of Heidi's studio.

PETE

Whoa. Thought so.

He moves away from his spot and keeps himself in the shadows, avoiding the light of the buzzing streetlamp. He disappears around the corner onto the sidewalk.

INT. DEMETRIANO MANSION - NIGHT

Pete finds Giancarlo in his study.

Giancarlo looks up from paperwork filling his desk.

GIANCARLO

And?

Pete pauses for a moment.

PETE

He was working late at the library.
He said he wanted to walk home,
clear his head. He's...ah...got a
lot on his plate.

Giancarlo nods.

GIANCARLO

Eccellente.

Pete quietly shakes his head.

PETE

Si, Signore.

INT. DEMETRIANO MANSION - DAY

Mike glances out the big bay window and jumps to his feet. He races over to the front door and throws it open.

MIKE

Adam!

He pulls Adam to him in a tight embrace.

Adam returns the embrace just as tightly.

Finally, they pull away from each other.

Adam is short and stocky to Mike's tall, long, and lean.

Adam narrows his eyes at Mike, his big smile fades a little.

ADAM

You okay?

Mike shrugs, looks past Adam.

MIKE
Where're your folks?

ADAM
Tokyo.

MIKE
At Thanksgiving?

ADAM
Dad had some big deal to close. And
you know Mom: she'll go anywhere.

Eugenia heads their way.

EUGENIA
Adam, Michaelangelo, shut that
door. We are not heating all of
L.A. County, you know.

The entire time she speaks, the two boys mouth her words
right along with her.

EUGENIA
Don't think I don't see that.

They both mouth that too.

She shuts the door, then faces them and smiles.

Adam and Mike stand there, arms around the other's
shoulders. Two rapscllions chomping to cause mischief.

She pinches Adam's cheeks.

EUGENIA
My two handsome grandsons. Look at
you. Adam, girlfriends? You have to
beat them off with a stick, I'm
sure, at that school of yours.

Adam chuckles.

ADAM
No one serious, Nonna.

She looks at Mike.

EUGENIA
Michaelangelo, I always see you
with that fat girl, but you never
talk about dating her. Or any girl.

Mike glances for an instant at Adam.

MIKE

She has a boyfriend, Nonna, the same boyfriend she had at the dinner with Mr. Coppola. A real nice guy. I'll find someone, Nonna.

ADAM

Um, Nonna, I think they're burning everything in the kitchen.

Eugenia curses in Italian and darts off.

Adam looks at Mike.

ADAM

You still haven't told them?

Mike steps a little away from his cousin.

MIKE

Adam, you look great. You haven't written in a while. Catch me up on everything.

They chatter as they walk into the vast living room.

INT. DEMETRIANO MANSION - DAY

The Thanksgiving dining has slowed down.

Giancarlo pours himself some more wine.

Arnaldo and Amelia exchange glances and frown.

GIANCARLO

Mike, tell Adam your big news about the art competition.

MIKE

Um...Yeah, the city's putting on a student art competition. I'm going to enter a painting I'm working on.

GIANCARLO

And he's going to win it.

Adam glances from his cousin to his grandfather and back.

ADAM

Try not to sound too excited about the whole thing, Mike. Man.

Mike glares at him, then immediately erupts in a huge smile.

MIKE

Goddammit, I am excited about it. I am going to win the damn thing.

EUGENIA

Michaelangelo! Language!

Giancarlo raises his glass.

GIANCARLO

Hear, hear. A toast to the third generation to run Demeter Design.

He looks at Adam.

GIANCARLO

And the next generation to run the legal team. If you're anything like your father, Adam, you'll keep all the bastards off our doorstep.

Giancarlo looks at everyone around the table and narrows his bloodshot eyes.

GIANCARLO

And as my father always tells me: they're all bastards.

ARNALDO

Papa!

Adam squares his shoulders.

ADAM

Well, Nonno, I've had a lot of time to think, and I, um, might go into a different type of law. Everyone thinks all this civil rights stuff is slowing down. I think it's the start of something really huge, and I want to be along for the ride.

Giancarlo sits back slowly and takes a long sip of his wine.

Adam and his grandfather lock each other in a tight stare.

Eugenia breaks the uncomfortable silence.

EUGENIA

That Francis Ford Coppola is such a nice boy. And seeing Sicily again was so wonderful.

Arnaldo looks at his father.

ARNALDO

Hey, Papa, they're only sixteen.
How 'bout we not decide the whole
rest of their lives over one
dinner? Whadaya say?

Arnaldo looks at Mike, then back at his father.

ARNALDO

There's been enough of that in this
family, don't you think?

EXT. FOSSIL RIDGE PARK - DAY

Adam and Mike have both loosened their ties and collars and
rolled up their sleeves.

Adam has his hand on his stomach as they slowly walk. His
eyes go wide as he suddenly belches.

ADAM

(melodramatically)

I am become slime, lurker of couch.

Mike smirks.

MIKE

That's what Nonna was afraid of.
God forbid anyone just relax.

ADAM

Well, actually, she did want me to
talk to you.

MIKE

Wants you to find out what's got
Mike so fucked up, right?

ADAM

Well, out with it.

MIKE

I can't believe you actually dared
tell Nonno you're thinking of not
going to work for Demeter.

ADAM

I didn't dare nothin'. It's how I
feel. Y'know, you could tell him
how you feel.

Mike scoffs.

MIKE

Right! The old fucker's already told me how I feel.

ADAM

And you're okay with that?

MIKE

Listen, Adam, do you see my folks getting me out from under all this shit and letting me breathe?

ADAM

I didn't do it. It wasn't my idea. Don't get mad at me.

MIKE

Shit, next thing you'll be telling me, you've done it with one of those girls who's "no one special".

Adam hangs his head.

MIKE

And you didn't even tell me?!

ADAM

Mike, we're not kids anymore.

MIKE

We're brothers. Brothers tell each other everything.

ADAM

We're cousins.

Adam pulls Mike's flask out of his own front pocket.

ADAM

We're brothers, and we tell each other everything, huh?

Mike swipes the flask from him.

MIKE

You were going through my jacket?

ADAM

Found it when I left you my newest clue for our scavenger hunt.

Mike quickly stuffs the flask into his pocket, walks over to a bench, sits.

Adam takes a seat beside him.

ADAM

Mikey, what's going on? Drinking?
You? That's Nonno's bag, but you?

MIKE

What do you know? Way far away at
that fancy goddamn school of yours.

Mike stares at his hands in his lap.

ADAM

Mike, talk to me. What is going on
in that twisted-up head of yours?

Mike looks at him sharply.

MIKE

Nothing's going on. I'm fine.

Adam scoffs.

ADAM

Yeah, right. You sure as hell look
"fine", that's for sure.

Mike looks out across the lake.

ADAM

I forgot how beautiful this lake
is. Lots of lakes at Cranbrook, but
this one's home.

MIKE

Wouldn't a time machine be great?

Adam looks at him and snorts. He ticks off his fingers.

ADAM

The Three Musketeers? Jeff killing
himself? Headmaster Moore? This
stupid internship? Nonno and Uncle
Arnie landing everything on your
shoulders? Gimme a break, Mike. You
really want to relive all that?

Mike looks at his cousin with a sidelong glance.

MIKE

You forgot one, the biggest one:
you leaving.

He sniffs.

MIKE

Why did you have to do that, Adam?
I had everything together when you
were here.

ADAM

No you didn't, Mike. You've been
twisted up inside for a long time.
That's part of the reason I left.

Mike looks at him sharply.

ADAM

Yeah. That's right. Partly I was
sick of carrying you on my
shoulders. And partly I felt like a
fucking failure I couldn't help my
brother be happy.

Adam takes a deep breath.

ADAM

Mike, ya gotta tell Uncle Arnie and
Nonno what you want to do with your
life. We both know what that is.

He sits up.

ADAM

Let's go. Right now. I'll stand
there while you tell them.

Mike glares at him. He snaps at Adam:

MIKE

I fight my own battles, thank you.

Adam flops back and rolls his eyes.

ADAM

Ah, shit. Are we back to that? The
Prague thing, you're still harping
on that?

MIKE

"The Prague thing" -- Fuck you,
Adam.

ADAM

Fuck you back. Don't talk to me like that.

Adam glares at his cousin.

ADAM

See, this is why I left. Mom and Dad didn't give me a choice, but I didn't fight them on it either.

Mike gets up, starts walking away.

Adam stands.

ADAM

"I fight my own battles. I fight my own battles." You're a broken record, you asshole. Secrets and never letting go of anything -- it's making a mess of everything in this goddamn family.

Mike spins around, glares at Adam.

ADAM

And you want to know something else? I'm fed up to here --

He puts his hand to his forehead.

ADAM

-- with you, Michaelangelo Demetriano! Go drink yourself sick! I don't give a goddamn anymore. How do you like that? Huh? Huh?!

Mike takes off.

ADAM

You can't run forever, Mike!!

Adam spins around and viciously kicks a stone into the lake.

He sits hard back down on the bench and puts his forehead in his hands. He shakes his head slowly in disgust.

ADAM

Jesus, Adam. What the fuck's wrong with you? He's your brother.

EXT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Approaching his friends, Mike watches as Paul, angry, points at him, then puts his arm around Kait.

Mike walks up. He glances at Josh, who remains silent.

MIKE

What's going on?

PAUL

Do you know what that psycho Goddard just did to me? Behind the building he put his switchblade to my throat, then threatened to slice my dick off if I didn't drop Kait.

MIKE

What?

PAUL

I told him to hike it, he grabs my belt and starts unzipping my pants.

Paul holds Kait more tightly to himself.

PAUL

Listen, you got a war going with Hal, keep us the hell out of it.

He leads Kait away.

Mike watches after them, then looks at Josh, who puts his hand on Mike's shoulder sagging under more than the weight of just his laden bookbag and the heavy art satchel he clutches.

The boyfriends head off in the opposite direction.

INT. VAN NUYS/SHERMAN OAKS AQUATIC CENTER - NIGHT

Kait's cheering is subdued as she sits in the bleachers, alone. She distractedly keeps glancing at the two empty spots beside her.

INT. BUCKLEY SCHOOL BATHROOM - DAY

Mike leans on his palms on the sink, stares into the mirror.

He pulls a folded sheet of lined paper out of his pocket and unfolds it. He sags his shoulders and frowns.

ADAM (V.O.)
 I need you to stop the drinking,
 Mike, or I'll have to tell my folks
 and yours.

Mike tosses the letter aside. He looks at the door, then reaches inside his school blazer and takes out his flask.

His hands shaking, he unscrews the top and upends the flask and watches as the expensive brandy gurgles down the drain.

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Mike opens his locker and Kait's tattered De rerum natura paperback falls out. His brows crinkled, he picks it up and opens it to the spot marked with the auditions flyer.

On the flyer, in Kait's handwriting: "Look to your left."

He does so.

Kait, in front of her locker, shyly waves at him.

Mike just as shyly waves back and musters a small grin.

He gathers his stuff and walks over to her.

Kait squares her shoulders. In her best Princess tone:

KAIT
 I'm talking to you again.

MIKE
 (melodramatically)
 Of which I'm unworthy.

She punches him on the arm.

KAIT
 You got that right.

Mike indicates the auditions flyer.

MIKE
 Kait, I've got to do the
 internship. I gave my word. I've
 got to help my family.

KAIT
 Your grandfather gave your word.

She waves this aside.

KAIT

After this Monday it won't matter anymore anyway. But, whatever you do, I want you to know something.

She takes the paperback from him and opens it to the page the flyer had been holding.

KAIT

Eripitur persona manet res. "When the mask is removed, the thing itself remains."

Mike takes the message in for a moment, takes a deep breath.

MIKE

It's not that easy, Kait.

She puts her hand over his heart.

KAIT

Yeah, maybe, but I believe in you, Mike. I know you'll take that mask off someday. There's a lot under it, a lot that's really beautiful.

Bathing her in a warm and loving grin, Mike puts his arm around her shoulders, and the two best friends head off.

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - DAY

Hal sits on his haunches in front of Mike's locker, his big Magic Marker at the ready.

Mike comes up behind him and grabs the collar of his blazer and yanks Hal to his feet. Mike spins Hal around and pins him up against the lockers. Hal's stronger than Mike, but Mike is operating on pure adrenalin.

A crowd has gathered around him and Hal. Paul and Kait stand closest to the two of them.

Mike has his face right in Hal's.

MIKE

You hurt Paul just to hurt Kait.
And you hurt Kait just to hurt me.

Hal bares his teeth.

HAL

Damn straight I did.

Mike slams Hal against the lockers, and Hal grimaces.

MIKE
Paul's my really good friend, and
we think of a Kait as the Princess.

PAUL
Damn straight we do, Hal.

MIKE
You hurt them ever again --

Mike slams Hal against the lockers even harder.

MIKE
You hurt anyone around here ever
again, you have me to answer to.
This is my school now, Goddard.

Mike shakes him.

MIKE
Capiche?

Hal knits his brows.

MIKE
Do you understand?

Hal darts his eyes around the interested audience.

Mike just stares at him.

MIKE
You hate me that much just because
-- ?

He gulps a couple of times and glances over one shoulder,
then over the other, at his schoolmates crowded around,
listening intently.

Mike looks at Kait, who, smiling, nods.

Mike looks back at Hal.

MIKE
Just because I'm gay?

Hal, those hawkish eyes, he drills them deep inside Mike.

HAL
(between clenched teeth)
Yes. I. Do.

Mike takes a deep breath and, shaking his head, releases Hal, who straightens his shirtfront and blazer.

HAL

A faggot who lives on our street
signed up for Vietnam the same time
my brother did.

Hal fights the tears welling in his eyes.

HAL

That fudge-packer came home, and
Derrick didn't.

Mike relaxes his shoulders and his expression.

MIKE

Hal, why didn't you just explain
that? Why'd you have to keep
puttin' your fist in my face?

Hal's expression is creased with anger and rage.

HAL

Because it's the only thing that
makes me feel alive.

MIKE

Hal, goddammit, it's your brother
who died, not you.

Tears fall down Hal's cheeks, and he viciously wipes at them.

HAL

All I know is, that faggot came
home, and Derrick didn't.

Hal is visibly shaking.

HAL

And I hate all of you for that.

MIKE

Hal, do you think Derrick would
want you this unhappy?

Hal's eyes blaze.

HAL

Fuck. You. No fudge-packer is going
to say my brother's name.

Hal raises his fist at Mike.

Mike shoves him, hard, back against the lockers.

MIKE

Hal, I'm sorry, I am so sorry,
about your brother, but I'm not
your punching bag anymore. Get the
fuck out of my life, you hear me?

Hal for a lingering moment tries to maintain his fiction as the school's apex predator, then deflates and shoves past Mike and pushes his way through the crowd.

Mike, tall with his shoulders back, watches after him.

INT. FERRARI - NIGHT

Mike yawns.

Pete glances at him and grins.

PETE

Long day.

MIKE

You have no idea.

Pete shoots him a sidelong glance.

PETE

How late is that library open?

MIKE

Not late enough. I'll need to go
back tomorrow to finish my paper.
Thanks for picking me up.

PETE

At least this time you were there
for real.

Mike looks at him funny.

MIKE

What?

Pete waves his quip aside.

Mike is silent for a moment.

MIKE

Pete, can I ask you something?

PETE

A'course you can, ace. You can ask me anything anytime. You know that.

Mike takes a deep breath.

MIKE

What's it like to point a rifle at a man and pull the trigger?

Mike watches Pete fix his stare straight ahead.

PETE

It's something very very sad, Mike.

They continue the rest of the way home in silence.

INT. DEMETRIANO HOUSE - NIGHT

Mike walks into his room, exhausted, and shuts his door firmly behind him.

He tosses his bookbag and art satchel on his bed and loosens the knot of his tie.

He looks up at the ceiling fan whose four bulbs encased in crystal globes bathe the room in that neverending light.

His eyebrows knit, and he gulps a couple of times.

Mike turns his eyes to the light switch on the wall just beside the door. He reaches his shaking hand out to it.

He snatches his hand back.

Breathing a shuddering breath, he clenches his hand into a tight fist, then relaxes it. He glances up again at the ceiling fan lights, then again at the wall switch.

Mike reaches out again to the switch and...

And...

And...

And he flips it down.

INT. DEMETRIANO HOUSE - NIGHT

Pete has his hand on the handle of the front door.

PETE
'Notte. A domani.

Screams. Blood-curdling screams. From atop the stairs and behind a door.

Pete bounds up the stairs two at a time.

Arnaldo and Amelia follow close behind him.

Arnaldo bursts into Mike's bedroom and knits his brows at the darkness that greets him. He slaps the light switch on.

He looks here. He looks there.

Mike sits with his back pressed in tight against the far corner, under the kitten poster. He has his legs folded up against his chest and his arms wrapped in a strangle hold around his forelegs.

Tears stream down his face which is contorted with fear and terror and hurt and anger.

Arnaldo and Amelia rush over to him, get down on his level.

Pete remains in the doorway.

Mike darts his eyes from one parent to the other and back.

MIKE
You left me in the dark. Why? Why
did you do that to me? Why?

Both parents wrap Mike in a hug.

Mike, his face pressed into his father's shoulder, shakes as he cries. He unwraps his legs and pulls his parents to him in a tight, desperate embrace.

Arnaldo strokes his son's hair.

Mike quiets down, his body stops shaking.

Arnaldo exchanges a glance with Amelia.

Arnaldo gently moves his son's head so they can see his face.

Mike has fallen asleep.

Pete steps all the way into the room and tosses Mike's bookbag and art satchel off the bed. He moves over to the parents holding their son and gets on his haunches, then helps Arnaldo move Mike over to the bed.

They take off his school blazer and his chukka boots and stretch him out on his bed.

Amelia returns from the hallway with a quilt and spreads it over Mike, tucking him in.

The three of them move over to the door. Arnaldo looks into Pete's eyes with a loving expression and cups Pete's cheek and pats it several times.

Pete grins shyly.

Amelia glances at the wall switch, then regards her husband.

ARNALDO

It just might be time it's okay to turn it off.

Amelia turns the lights out.

The three of them linger in the doorway as Arnaldo, staring at his son who shifts a little, slowly closes the door.

PETE

I knew Mike was afraid of the dark, but...What's he talking about? What did he mean?

Arnaldo frowns.

ARNALDO

We can talk about it in the morning. Right now, you gotta get home, Pete. You look damn near as exhausted as he is in there.

Pete scoffs.

PETE

I'm not going anywhere. What if ace wakes up screaming? No, sir. I'm setting up a chair outside his room for the night.

ARNALDO

Pete, there's more to your life than protecting all of us.

Pete narrows his eyes at him.

PETE

I know that, *Signore*. Maybe I can't pass math or get a degree like the rest of you, but I'm not stupid. I do pick up on stuff eventually.

He glances at the bedroom door, then back at them.

PETE

But, tonight, I'm right there.

He points at the spot right outside Mike's door.

Arnaldo glances at his wife, then looks Pete directly in the eyes for a long moment. He takes a deep breath.

ARNALDO

I'll get the chair.

INT. BRENINGER HOUSE - NIGHT

Josh sits relaxed on the couch, reading.

He looks up when the front door suddenly opens. His eyes go wide, and he gets to an immediate and rigid stand.

David, luggage in each hand, takes up the doorway.

JOSH

Saba, what happened to another six weeks at Aunt Chrissie's?

David kicks the door closed hard behind him. He drops his luggage with a bang.

DAVID

Yeah, well, it seems my own daughter doesn't trust me.

A look of horror comes over Josh's face.

JOSH

Oh, my God.

The look of horror contorts into one of rage.

He picks up the nearest object -- the phone -- and hurls it at his grandfather.

David ducks just in time.

JOSH

You did it! You touched Jack the way you touch me!

Wordlessly, with unerring menace, David approaches Josh.

Josh backs away from him until he's pressed up against the fireplace. He moves his hand around behind him until he grabs the poker and he wields it in front of him like a sword.

He swings the poker at David.

JOSH

Ima and Aba will be home soon, and I'm telling them everything.

Josh goes to swing the poker at David again, but David grabs it and yanks it out of Josh's hand and throws it aside.

David grabs a fistful of Josh's shirtfront and pulls him in close, his face right in his grandson's.

DAVID

Everything, huh?

Josh nods emphatically. He spits in David's face.

David wipes it away, then drags Josh over to the piano.

Josh's eyes grow wider as David flips open the lid, then grabs Josh's right wrist and puts his hand down on the keys.

Josh struggles and struggles and tries to resist his grandfather, who proves surprisingly strong. He kicks David in the shin, and the old man doesn't even flinch.

David grabs the lid.

JOSH

Saba, no!!

David slams the lid down on Josh's fingers, and Josh screams. David slams the lid down again, then again.

David lets go of Josh, who drops down onto the couch, tucking his ruined hand into his side.

DAVID

Everything? You're not telling them anything. You understand me?

Josh narrows his tear-flowing eyes at this grandfather.

JOSH

I hate you. I hate you! You're killing me from inside my soul, but at least I have one!

Charlie and Loreena walk in the front door. They both glance down at the luggage, then at the phone, then at each other.

They are barely two steps into the house when Josh runs up against his father who, at first startled, puts his arms around his son.

Loreena examines Josh's hand. Josh cries out as she tries to move one of his fingers.

LOREENA

What the hell's going on here?

Pressed even harder against his father and tears flowing down his face, Josh points at David with his left hand.

David straightens to his full height.

DAVID

He was being insolent. The boy needed punishing.

LOREENA

By smashing his hand in something?!?

Josh whimpers.

JOSH

The piano lid.

Loreena looks at her husband.

LOREENA

We got to get him to the ER.

Charlie strokes the top of Josh's head, trying to calm the boy. He stares hard at his father.

CHARLIE

Aba, just what is going on here?

David steps forward. His expression is pale with panic.

DAVID

He'll tell you I've done things to him. They're all lies. He's a liar. He's got you two totally fooled.

(MORE)

He's a horrible kid. Joshua Aaron,
admit to them how horrible you are.

Josh presses himself more tightly against his father.

Charlie stares at his father, his eyebrows touching.

CHARLIE

What? "Liar"? "Horrible"? Aba, what
are you talking about? You know
damn well our Joshua's none of
those things.

Charlie moves his son so he can look Josh in his eyes.

Charlie's expression changes from one of confusion to one of
total horror. He returns his hard stare back at his father.

CHARLIE

What have you done to our son?

David stands there. He gulps, and sweat streaks his face.

Charlie hands Josh off to his wife, then attacks David,
punching his father in the face.

David staggers backwards.

Charlie swipes the fire poker off the floor and wields it
over his head and chases toward David who presses himself
against the wall beside the front door.

Never has rage blazed more in a man's eyes than it did at
that very moment in Charlie Breninger's.

JOSH

Aba, no!! Then you'll just be
exactly like him!

Charlie's entire body shakes as he holds the poker raised
over his head, ready to bring it down upon his own father,
the man who had raised him, the man who had taught him right
from wrong, the man who had stood beside him at his bar
mitzvah. Charlie fights to get his words out.

CHARLIE

You have exactly five seconds to
get out of here before I kill you.

David narrows his eyes at his son, then turns, bangs the
front door open, and grabs his two bags.

He looks at his daughter-in-law, opens his mouth to speak.

Loreena squeezes Josh to her.

LOREENA

Get out! Get out!! GET OUT!!!

They both watch as the old man leaves, never to return.

Charlie shuts and locks the door, tosses the poker aside, and wraps his wife and child in his arms.

At first Josh just whimpers, but then in a totally sudden outburst he wails as his entire body quakes with sobs.

For the first time in eight years Joshua Breninger feels...safe.

INT. BUCKLEY SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

Kait looks at the metal splint folded along the top and bottom of Josh's right-hand ring finger and taped in place. His other fingers are a grotesque black and blue, with his pinky finger the worst of them.

KAIT

Your grandfather did that?

Josh nods.

JOSH

He's not the nice man you think he is, Kait. He never was.

KAIT

Josh, your magic. And, my God, your beautiful piano playing.

PAUL

God, man, you wanted to go pro.

Josh manages a slight grin.

JOSH

Ima and Aba promise to do everything they can to get my hand back to full functioning. They've got a call in to a specialist. There are doctors who specialize in just the hand. Go figure.

He wiggles his fingers a little bit, grimaces. He breathes a short shuddering breath when he stops.

JOSH

And, believe it or not, I can play
sorta like normal even like this.
The important thing is that I can
still bridge an octave.

He wiggles his thumb, the whole time broadening his grin.

JOSH

And --

With his left hand he produces seemingly from another
dimension a silver dollar.

JOSH

-- I always have my other hand.

He beams a big smile, his cheeks a cascade of dimples. He
even chuckles a bit.

Kait watches Mike who is staring, his brows creased, at Josh.

Mike moves his eyes from Josh to Kait, then to Paul, then
back to Josh, first at Josh's hand then deep into his eyes.

Paul looks at Kait.

PAUL

What's going on?

KAIT

I don't know.

Suddenly:

MIKE

I love you, Josh.

Josh darts his eyes around the table, then around the room.

MIKE

I'm proud of you. All my trivial
bullshit, I just selfishly piss and
moan, and all your stuff, and you
can still smile and laugh.

He looks right at Kait.

MIKE

You are so right, Kait. I am
fucking spoiled as hell. Too
spoiled to recognize my own
bullshit excuses.

Mike stands and declares for the whole room to hear:

MIKE

I love you, Joshua Breninger.

Before Josh can reply, Mike leans down and kisses him, letting the passionate kiss linger.

EMILY SANFORD, 52, librarian, shoots to her feet.

EMILY

Mr. Demetriano! Mr. Breninger!

She walks over to their table, her chunky heels loud on the wooden floor.

All four teenagers look at her.

EMILY

You need God to fix you.

PAUL

God doesn't need to fix them, you old bag, because they ain't broken.

All three of his friends stare at him wide-eyed.

Josh and Mike regard each other with grins.

MIKE

No matter how much our grandfathers tried, right?

Mike grabs his stuff and rushes out of the library.

Josh lifts his right hand, examines it, turning it over, then back. He nods, at first a little, then with conviction.

He pushes his own chair back, looks at the librarian.

JOSH

Shove it, lady.

He rushes out of the library.

Kait jumps up and, as she passes Mrs. Sanford:

KAIT

Yeah! What he said!

Paul darts his eyes at the three suddenly-empty chairs.

EMILY

What just happened here, Mr. Wu?

PAUL
Obviously, something wonderful.

He hurriedly gathers his stuff and follows after his friends.

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Mike's three friends gather around him as he talks on the pay phone in the atrium.

MIKE
Pete, I know it means ditching school. Just come get us, and bring the Bentley. And where's Nonno? Tell me he's in his office.

INT. DEMETER DESIGN - DAY

The four kids burst into Giancarlo's office, followed hesitantly by Pete, who hangs back in the doorway.

Giancarlo and Arnaldo, poring over a conspicuously-sparse ledger, both stop speaking as they stare at the interruption.

ARNALDO
Pete, you had better not have gone and gotten these four in the middle of a school day.

Pete hangs his head.

ARNALDO
We'll discuss that later. Now, as far as you four, you --

Arnaldo notices his father staring at Mike and Josh holding hands. Arnaldo stiffens, exchanges a frown with his father.

Mike winks at Josh, then returns his attention to his father and grandfather, who both stand.

MIKE
I'm gay. And Josh is too. And we're boyfriends. I kissed him in front of the entire library less than a half an hour ago.

GIANCARLO
A *frocio*?!!? No, you're not!

Mike squeezes Josh's left hand as he stares down his grandfather.

MIKE

That's an ugly word, Nonno, and you will never call me or him that ever again.

GIANCARLO

You dare to give me orders?!

Mike snorts.

MIKE

You're a small, angry man. I can't believe I ever let you scare me.

Grandfather and grandson lock each other in a hard stare.

Mike breaks the silence between them.

MIKE

Nonno, I'm not going to --

He ticks off his fingers.

MIKE

-- do the internship.

GIANCARLO

Oh, yes, you are.

MIKE

I'm not going to do the art competition.

He puts the art satchel on his grandfather's desk.

Giancarlo shoves the satchel back toward Mike.

GIANCARLO

Oh, yes, you are!

MIKE

And I'm not going to --

He takes a deep breath and squeezes Josh's hand again.

MIKE

-- run Demeter. Ever.

GIANCARLO

YES, YOU ARE!!

Giancarlo slaps Mike hard across the face.

ARNALDO
ENOUGH!!!

Arnaldo grabs his father's right wrist in a steel grip. He narrows his eyes straight into his father's.

ARNALDO
You will never lay a hand on my son
ever again.

Giancarlo yanks his wrist out of Arnaldo's grip.

ARNALDO
And you --

He looks just as hard at Mike.

ARNALDO
You will respect your elders. You
still have big britches to grow
into, boy.

The room is silent for a long, electric moment.

Arnaldo turns his attention back onto his father.

ARNALDO
My son will do whatever he wants
with his life.

He waits for Giancarlo to say something.

ARNALDO
Capiche?

Mike stares at his father with a widening grin.

Mike squeezes Josh's hand.

MIKE
Nonno.

Giancarlo only reluctantly looks at him.

MIKE
Nonno, I was born into this family.
I wasn't bought on some Boston
street corner auction block.

Giancarlo sneers.

GIANCARLO
Where'd you get that little gem,
off some fortune cookie?

MIKE

Someone who cares a lot for me.

GIANCARLO

Oh, and we don't, of course. We love you very much, Michaelangelo.

MIKE

Yeah? Well, I haven't felt that from you in a long time, old man.

The hardness of Giancarlo's angry expression cracks for a moment, replaced by a look of horror.

GIANCARLO

What?

The hardness returns, and Giancarlo looks at Arnaldo and indicates Josh and Mike.

GIANCARLO

You approve of this?

ARNALDO

Papa, I -- I -- I don't know. But I do know I love my son. And I know Michaelangelo has to go where his heart tells him.

He looks sternly at his father.

ARNALDO

And Lazzaro would tell you the same exact thing about Adam.

Arnaldo softens his own expression.

ARNALDO

Papa, Demeter will be just fine.

GIANCARLO

Just fine? Demeter Design without a Demetriano at the helm? That's your idea of fine?

He stares hard first at his son, then at his grandson.

GIANCARLO

Put my father in an early grave.

He jabs the ledger hard with his finger.

GIANCARLO

More than this ever will.

Giancarlo shoves his way past Arnaldo and walks right up to Pete who stands up straight from leaning against the wall.

GIANCARLO
Where's the Ferrari?

PETE
Um...

GIANCARLO
Where the hell's the damn Ferrari?!

PETE
In its space out front, *Signore*.

Giancarlo snaps his fingers loudly right in Pete's face.

Pete flinches, fishes in the inside pocket of his denim jacket for the keys, and hands them to his boss.

Giancarlo shoves his way past the kids and out of the office.

The young people watch after him.

Arnaldo takes a deep breath.

ARNALDO
Give him space, give him time.
He'll come around.

Mike looks at his father. He continues to hold Josh's hand.

Arnaldo looks at the clasped hands.

ARNALDO
Give me time too, Mike. This is all
coming kinda fast.

He pinches the bridge of his nose.

ARNALDO
Have you considered how you're
gonna tell your mother this, to say
nothing of your grandmother?

He rubs his forehead.

ARNALDO
She's going to have an absolute cow
over this. To say nothing of Father
Pietro.

MIKE
I'm taking this one step at a time
too, Papa.

Kait suddenly steps into the middle of their gathering.
Mike sees the wide-eyed look on her face and returns it.
All four friends exchange equal looks of dread. In unison:

ALL FOUR OF THEM
The auditions!

Pete steps forward.

PETE
When are they?

KAIT
This afternoon.

Pete glances at his watch.

PETE
You'll be there in plenty of time.

MIKE
Papa, Adam! I can't go up on that
stage without Adam there. He's got
to be there, Papa. I've got to tell
him something he's got to know.

Arnaldo is silent for a moment, then holds up his finger.

ARNALDO
You leave that to me. Pete.

Arnaldo points at the door.

Pete nods. He follows the kids rushing out of the office.

ARNALDO (O.S.)
Bob? How soon can you have
Paramount's jet in Detroit? What?
Listen, Bob, you owe me and Demeter
a big apology, and you know it. Two
words, Bob: Doctor Doolittle.

INT. THE BUCKLEY SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY

Mike, shed of his blazer and tie and standing at the base of the stairs stage right, scans "Team Mike" taking up practically an entire row of seats: Kait, Paul, Josh, Arnaldo, Amelia, Heidi, Melissa, Parker.

Mike darts his eyes anxiously at the doors at the back of the auditorium. He glances at his father, who can provide only a shrug in response.

MR. BARRON, 39, slams his fist on the podium. He points at JACOB, 15, short, pudgy, and who can't sing a note.

MR. BARRON
Get off my stage.

As Jacob dejectedly leaves, Mr. Barron looks at Mike.

MR. BARRON
Listen, Demetriano, I'd like to get this miserable experience over with. I put you at the end of the list like you wanted. Now, get up there and let's hear what you got.

Mike stares anew at the back doors.

As if going to the gallows Mike mounts the stairs and moves over to the center front of the stage. He keeps darting his eyes from his entourage to the back doors and back to them.

He keeps opening his mouth like a gasping fish.

Barron rolls his eyes.

MR. BARRON
Okay, that's it. Get --

GIANCARLO (O.S.)
(booming, commanding)
Give my grandson time!!

Everyone turns to see Giancarlo and Eugenia standing at the rear of the auditorium. Giancarlo's shoulders are back, his head high, his expression one of a Roman general going into battle against the Celtic hordes.

Mike watches his grandfather hardest of all.

Giancarlo stares down Barron.

GIANCARLO
 You will give my grandson all the
 time he needs.

Barron wets his upper lip. Finally:

MR. BARRON
 Yessir.

He turns.

MR. BARRON
 Mike, when you're ready.

Mike rushes off the stage and over to his family and friends.

MIKE
 Papa, where're Adam and Pete?

ARNALDO
 I...I don't know, Mike.

Mike looks at Josh, who nods, then at Kait.

KAIT
 Even if Adam's not here, I know
 he's thinking of you.

Mike just shakes his head.

MIKE
 It's not the same. He's got to be
 here. I've got to tell him
 something, and I've got to share
 this with him. I've got to.

Giancarlo and Eugenia arrive to join "Team Mike".

GIANCARLO
 Michaelangelo, go up there now.

Giancarlo reaches out, caresses his grandson's right cheek.

GIANCARLO
Mi dispiace.

Mike nods and manages a slight but warm grin.

MIKE
 I know you are, Nonno. *Ti voglio
 bene.*

Mike turns and, his shoulders down, trudges over to the
 stairs and puts his foot on the first stair.

Mike looks up fast when the door at the back of the auditorium pounds open and slams against the wall.

Adam runs down to him.

Mike envelopes Adam in a tight embrace. His chin on Adam's shoulder, Mike looks up the aisle at Pete standing in the doorway. He flashes Pete a big smile and a thumbs up.

Pete returns the big smile along with double finger-guns.

Mike lets go of Adam, pulls Adam's letter out of his pocket.

They both glance at the piece of paper, then into each other's eyes again.

MIKE

Adam, I'm sorry!

ADAM

Yeah, yeah. I'm sorry too. I had no right interfering in your life like that. And all those things I said by the lake. Oh, God, Mike, I'm sorry for saying all those things. Now get up there on that stage.

MIKE

Adam, I'm not leaning on you, not anymore, and I never had the right to in the first place. I never should have put that kind of pressure on you.

ADAM

It's all right, Mike. Really. I mean, that's what brothers are for, right?

MIKE

Yeah. You bet. I love you, Adam.

ADAM

I love you too, Mike. Now, I didn't just ditch my two favorite classes and come all this way just to blubber with you. So will you for the love of God shut up and get up there already?!

Mike quickly hugs Adam again, then turns and mounts the stage. He moves over to the center.

Mike looks at his father. Then at Josh.

And then he looks at Kait, into her eyes which look right back into him, down to his very soul. She smiles.

Mike watches with wonder as Josh steps up to Mr. Barron, then hops up onto the stage and heads towards the piano.

Josh asks the KID to let him play, and Josh takes over at the keys. He grimaces as he flexes the fingers of his right hand.

Mike jumps a little when SARAH, 17, taps him on the shoulder.

SARAH

Hi, Mike.

MIKE

Hi.

SARAH

Okay. I'm Tzeitel, and I'm doing everything I can to get you, Motel, to ask my father for my hand in marriage.

Mike nods.

She clears her throat.

SARAH

"You could ask my father for my hand tonight. Now!"

Mike stumbles over his lines.

SARAH

"Motel..."

MIKE

"I'm just a poor tailor."

SARAH

"Motel! Even a poor tailor is entitled to some happiness!"

Mike opens his mouth, then stops and just blinks at her. He looks out at his family and friends. Slowly, he smiles.

MIKE

"That's true."

He takes a deep breath, then, practically under his breath, he begins to sing as Josh starts playing.

MIKE

"Wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles."

Sarah nods.

MIKE

(angelically)

"Wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles/God took a Daniel once again/Stood by his side and -- "

But then Mike stops singing. He stands there.

The entire auditorium crackles with nervous quiet.

Mike closes his eyes. He breathes in deeply once, then twice.

He opens his eyes.

Josh resumes playing "Miracle of Miracles".

Mike throws out his arms in a great flourish and performs a perfect spin which he stops with a triumphant STOMP.

Mike pliés and sautés and elevés, then erupts in an impromptu choreography that makes the entire stage his canvas. Though impromptu, Mike dances perfectly in sync with Josh's music.

Mike grabs a chair. He puts the improvised prop through its paces as he uses it to whirl and twirl and as a fulcrum of breathtaking leg movements.

Mike's bulging biceps threaten to tear the sleeves of his sweat-drenched shirt and T-shirt.

Josh watches his boyfriend in wide-eyed awe, and he finally just stops playing the music.

Mike dances faster with more unrehearsed abandon, though it seems he has perfected his rehearsal over a thousand years.

He pulls the front of his shirt open, buttons flying, and he yanks the shirt off his body and flings it aside.

Mike pulls his T-shirt off and tosses it atop the shirt.

Mike dances his way across the stage with fancy footwork straight out of a 1950's James Cagney flick, which Mike then segues into a merengue with which he controls the stage, then into a flamenco which he equally does so. Then he dances some simple teenage-abandon footwork he'd indulge on a gym floor at a school dance.

Mike picks up speed and now commands the stage with something more "proper" Heidi had taught him out of Swan Lake, which Mike then of course had taken and made his own, which he does even more so at this very moment now.

At a precise moment he presses all his weight down on his left foot and uses the built-up momentum to launch his entire body into the air where he executes a perfect spinning side flip, his arms in close to his chest.

After each midair spinning side flip Mike lands on his left foot again from which he launches the next flip, picking up speed, grace, and excitement with each one.

He performs these side flips not once, not twice, not three times, not four times, but five times, in perfect succession and in flawless execution.

With both his feet now back firmly on the stage, Mike spins, spins, spins, faster, faster, faster, once, twice, three times, and comes magnificently to a dancer's halt at the very lip of the stage, the razor edge of his new life.

Mike stands there, his powerful chest heaving, his feet firmly spread apart, his arms raised, his hands open.

His eyes, those beautiful eyes, overflow with happy tears as that once small smile grows into one brighter than the sun.

FADE OUT