



The Tree House

A Most Unlikely Love Story

When Love Breaks the Rules

A SCREEN PLAY

BASED ON A
TRUE STORY

Dave Barton

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Synopsis for "The Tree House"

The Tree House is a heartfelt drama set against the backdrop of high school life, teenage dreams, and complex family relationships. At its core, the story follows *Dave Barton*, a 15-year-old boy who excels in football and academics but struggles to navigate the emotional upheaval caused by his parents' divorce. As Dave faces the pressures of high school, sports, and his evolving family dynamics, he embarks on a tender yet complicated relationship with Serene Steele, a 14-year-old cheerleader dealing with her family challenges.

While Dave seeks solace in his athletic pursuits and burgeoning romance, the emotional weight of his parents' split and the following betrayals cast shadows over his achievements. His strained relationship with his father and his mother's declining health creates an inner conflict, forcing Dave to grow up quickly and shoulder responsibilities beyond his years.

Set in a small town, *The Tree House* explores love, loss, and resilience themes. The treehouse serves as a symbol of innocence and emotional sanctuary for Dave and Serene. As the couple struggles to balance their youthful romance with the complexities of their personal lives, the film paints a poignant portrait of young love in the face of adversity.

Ultimately, *The Tree House* captures the bittersweet journey of a young man learning to navigate love, family, and personal growth, leaving audiences with a powerful message about finding strength in the face of life's toughest challenges.

Characters

Character development in the screenplay "**The Treehouse**", focuses on fleshing out the arcs, motivations, and emotional depth of the main characters.

1. Dave Barton

Age: 15

Personality: Compassionate, determined, sensitive, introspective

Role: Protagonist, the fourth child of nine in the Barton family, a talented athlete with a desire to do well as a football player

Overview:

Dave Barton is a 15-year-old boy navigating the turbulent waters of adolescence while dealing with the complex and painful dynamics within his family. At the heart of *The Tree House*, Dave's story is one of emotional growth as he faces the disintegration of his family caused by his father's affair, his mother's deteriorating health, and the deep sense of betrayal he feels when his older brother Rick moves in with their father. Though football provides him with an escape and a sense of achievement, Dave's inner world is marked by feelings of abandonment, confusion, and a desire to protect those he loves, especially his mother.

Personality Traits:

- **Compassionate:** Dave's deep love for his family, particularly his mother, shines through in his actions. He cares deeply about her well-being and the well-being of his siblings, often taking on responsibilities beyond his years.
- **Loyal:** Dave's fierce loyalty to his mother creates inner conflict, especially when Rick leaves to live with their father. His loyalty to his family, especially during such a critical time, shapes many of his decisions and emotions throughout the story.
- **Resilient:** Despite everything he faces, Dave finds strength in adversity. Football becomes an emotional outlet, and through the challenges on and off the field, Dave grows stronger, even when the weight of his family's issues seems too much to bear.
- **Insecure:** Beneath the surface, Dave struggles with feelings of insecurity. His brother's departure, his father's betrayal, and the burden of helping care for his mother all lead to moments of self-doubt. He questions his value, not just as a son and brother, but as an individual navigating life's complications.
- **Conflicted:** Dave is torn between different emotional obligations—his loyalty to his mother, his resentment toward his father, and his complex feelings toward Rick. The internal tension of feeling abandoned and responsible plays a significant role in shaping his journey.

Relationship with His Mother:

Dave's mother is his emotional anchor. She is the one constant in his life despite her declining health. Dave admires her resilience in the face of hardship—raising nine children, coping with her illness, and dealing with the betrayal of her husband. As his mother's illness worsens, Dave steps in to help her, often feeling the pressure of trying to fill the void left by his father. His love and loyalty to her make him protective, and it's clear that he feels a great responsibility for her well-being.

Their bond is deep, and she offers Dave valuable life lessons and wisdom throughout the story. Her encouragement and unwavering belief in him motivate Dave to excel in football and face the challenges of his fractured family.

Relationship with His Father:

Dave's relationship with his father is strained and defined by anger and betrayal. His father's affair has torn apart the family, and Dave feels especially hurt by the abandonment during such a critical time in his mother's life. This sense of betrayal is compounded when his brother Rick chooses to live with their father, deepening Dave's feelings of resentment.

Dave views his father's actions as selfish and unforgivable. The affair isn't just about infidelity—it represents a break in the trust and stability that Dave had always believed in. Throughout the story, Dave struggles to reconcile his love for his father with his deep sense of disappointment and hurt. His father tries to repair their relationship, but the emotional wounds run deep for Dave, and he resists those attempts.

Relationship with His Brother Rick:

The relationship between Dave and his brother Rick is one of the most emotionally complex aspects of the story. As a boy, Dave looked up to Rick, seeing him as both a protector and a role

model. Rick was successful in football and someone Dave admired for his leadership and strong personality. However, Rick's decision to leave their mother's home to live with their father during the aftermath of the affair feels like an immense betrayal to Dave.

Dave perceives Rick's move as abandoning their mother in her time of need, which cuts deeply. He feels that Rick chose their father over their mother, leaving Dave to care for her. The emotional rift between them is a significant source of tension in Dave's life. Though they share a love for football and have moments of camaraderie, the unresolved feelings of betrayal linger throughout the story.

In moments of clarity, Dave realizes that Rick is also struggling. Still, he can't shake the feeling that his brother has taken the easier path, leaving him to shoulder the responsibilities. This creates a push-pull dynamic between them—while they're bound by blood and shared experiences, the emotional distance grows as Dave grapples with his resentment.

Relationship with Serene:

Serene offers Dave a brief escape from the emotional storm that engulfs his family life. Young, vibrant, and full of energy, Serene is a breath of fresh air for Dave, and their relationship provides him with some moments of joy and tenderness. However, as Dave's responsibilities at home intensify and his inner turmoil grows, the carefree nature of his relationship with Serene becomes increasingly challenging to maintain.

Still figuring out her emotional landscape, Serene begins to feel the weight of Dave's emotional baggage. Their relationship is tested as Dave's life becomes more complicated, and while there is genuine affection between them, it becomes clear that the emotional gap between them is widening. Dave, already feeling betrayed by his father and brother, must come to terms with whether he can continue to invest in a relationship when he feels so emotionally drained by the struggles at home.

Football as a Metaphor for Dave's Journey:

Football is a vital part of Dave's life and serves as both a refuge and a pressure cooker. On the field, Dave can channel his frustrations and push himself to succeed, but off the field, football becomes a reminder of the relationships he feels are broken. His brother Rick was also a talented football player, and this shared love for the sport is one of the few things they still have in common. Yet, even as football provides an outlet, it also intensifies the feelings of comparison between the brothers.

Dave's success in football, particularly during a high-stakes game, mirrors his journey. Just as he overcomes challenges on the field, Dave must navigate the complexities of family life, betrayal, and emotional growth. Football symbolizes perseverance and resilience, but it also represents his internal emotional battles.

Character Arc:

Dave's character arc revolves around his growth into emotional maturity. At the story's beginning, he is a teenager trying to navigate a complex family situation, feeling both the weight of responsibility and a sense of abandonment. Throughout the story, Dave is forced to confront his

feelings toward his father, Rick, and their choices. He learns that while loyalty to family is important, it is also necessary to confront the deep emotions of hurt and betrayal.

By the end of the story, Dave has grown into a more self-aware and emotionally resilient young man. He doesn't have all the answers, but he begins to understand that healing requires forgiveness, even when that forgiveness is hard to give. His relationship with Rick, while still complicated, evolves into something more mature as Dave learns that their bond as brothers can't be easily broken despite the challenges they've faced.

Conclusion:

Dave Barton is a young man caught between adulthood's responsibilities and adolescence's emotional struggles. His relationships with his mother, father, and brother, Rick, define much of his journey as he learns to navigate the complex waters of betrayal, loyalty, and forgiveness. As Dave grows, he understands that while family can be flawed, it is still worth fighting for and that sometimes, the most challenging battles are the ones fought within. Through football, family, and love, Dave's story is one of emotional resilience, healing, and hope.

2. Serene Steele (Dave's Love Interest)

Age: 14

Personality: Spirited, emotional, youthful, compassionate

Role: Dave's girlfriend, a central figure in his emotional journey

Overview:

Serene is a significant character in *The Tree House*, playing the role of Dave's girlfriend. She embodies the innocence and complexities of young love, serving as both a source of joy and conflict in Dave's life. Her relationship with Dave reflects the challenges of adolescence, first love, and the emotional turbulence that comes with growing up. Though young, Serene is perceptive, grappling with emotions and situations often beyond her years. Her character helps shape Dave's emotional development throughout the story.

Personality Traits:

- **Spirited:** Serene is full of energy and life. She approaches the world with a youthful exuberance and innocence that contrasts with Dave's heavier emotional burdens. Her vitality is infectious, and she brings light to the story, particularly in her interactions with Dave.
- **Emotional:** Like many adolescents, Serene feels things deeply. Her emotions are intense, and she's not always able to manage them effectively. Her feelings for Dave are genuine, but her jealousy and insecurities often complicate their relationship. She is still navigating the complex world of relationships and personal identity, which leads to emotional highs and lows.
- **Compassionate:** Serene cares deeply for Dave and those around her. She is nurturing and strongly desires to support Dave, though her inexperience often leads to

misunderstandings. Despite her youth, she often tries to show emotional maturity, particularly in moments when Dave needs her support.

- **Innocent but Insightful:** While she may be young, Serene displays moments of clarity and wisdom beyond her years. She can be intuitive, especially in understanding her limitations and the complexities of her relationship with Dave. This wisdom, however, is often clouded by the strong emotions that come with her age and inexperience.
- **Insecure:** Serene's youth is marked by insecurities, particularly about her place in Dave's life. She knows Dave's world is changing rapidly—his newfound attention, the complexities of his family life, and the growing pressures of his football career create tension in their relationship. Her fear of being left behind often manifests as jealousy, particularly in her interactions with other girls in Dave's life.

Relationship with Dave:

Serene and Dave's relationship is one of the central emotional threads of *The Tree House*. Their bond begins with the innocence of young love, but as Dave's life becomes more complicated, so does their relationship.

Initially, Serene represents an escape for Dave—a source of comfort, laughter, and simplicity amid the chaos of his family life and the pressures of football. Their time together in the treehouse and around the pond symbolizes a world apart from the complexities of high school and family drama. However, as the story progresses, their relationship is tested by jealousy, insecurity, and emotional immaturity.

Serene's jealousy is particularly evident when she feels threatened by Robin, another girl who enters Dave's life. Serene's youth makes her prone to overreacting and reading too much into situations, which often causes unnecessary tension between her and Dave. Despite this, their relationship retains a genuine sweetness, with both characters caring deeply for one another, even as they struggle to navigate the complications of young love.

One of the most poignant moments in the story is when Serene recognizes that she and Dave are growing apart. Despite her deep feelings for him, she has the maturity to realize that their lives are heading in different directions. Dave's world is evolving rapidly, while she still wants to enjoy her youth. This moment of clarity leads to her difficult decision to break off their relationship. It's an emotional turning point for both characters, as they acknowledge that their love, while real, isn't enough to sustain them through the changes they are both experiencing.

Relationship with Her Family:

Serene's family life is a source of support and conflict for her. Her mother's struggle with alcohol, as seen in the moments where Serene has to deal with her mother's inappropriate behavior, is a burden that weighs on her. Despite her age, Serene often takes on a caretaker role in her household, contributing to her emotional complexity.

Her relationship with her grandmother, Nana, is a stabilizing force in her life. Nana provides the wisdom and emotional support Serene often lacks from her parents. The close bond between Serene and Nana is one of the reasons Serene can make the difficult decision to break up with

Dave—Nana’s guidance helps her understand that it’s okay to prioritize her own emotional well-being.

Character Arc:

Serene’s character arc is one of emotional growth and self-awareness. At the start of the story, she is a bright, carefree girl deeply in love with Dave. However, as the story progresses, she is forced to confront the complexities of their relationship, her own insecurities, and the realities of growing up.

The turning point in Serene’s arc comes when she realizes that her relationship with Dave is no longer healthy for either of them. Though she loves him deeply, she knows they are moving in different directions—Dave is entering a world of attention, football success, and family drama, while Serene wants to remain a kid for a little longer. This realization is painful, but it marks her growth from a naïve girl to a young woman who understands that love sometimes means letting go.

Serene’s decision to break up with Dave is a moment of emotional maturity that shows how far she has come. She chooses to prioritize her own needs, even though it means ending a relationship that was once a source of joy for her. By the end of the story, Serene has grown into a more self-assured person who understands the complexities of love, relationships, and personal growth.

Conclusion:

Serene is a pivotal character in *The Tree House*, representing the innocence and emotional turbulence of first love. Her relationship with Dave is central to their character arcs as they navigate the highs and lows of young love amid personal and familial challenges. Serene’s growth throughout the story—moving from an insecure, jealous girlfriend to a young woman who understands the need for self-care and emotional independence—is a key emotional thread that enriches the overall narrative. Despite the heartbreak, her journey reflects the bittersweet nature of growing up and learning when to hold on and when to let go.

3. Marge Barton: A Resilient, Compassionate Mother

Age: Late 30s

Personality: Strong-willed, nurturing, spiritual, resilient

Role: Mother of nine children, central emotional figure in Dave’s life

Overview:

Marge Barton is the emotional cornerstone of her family. Despite battling a debilitating illness, she exudes inner strength, grace, and an unwavering devotion to her children. As a mother of nine, Marge has spent her life caring for her family, even as her health deteriorates and her husband’s betrayal shatters her marriage. Her resilience in the face of overwhelming hardship is a defining aspect of her character, and she plays a pivotal role in shaping Dave’s emotional journey throughout the screenplay.

Personality Traits:

- **Resilient:** Despite suffering from a debilitating illness that leaves her confined to a wheelchair and experiencing constant pain, Marge remains emotionally strong and committed to her family. Her resilience is rooted in her deep faith and her sense of duty to

her children, particularly in her determination to raise them with love and guidance despite the overwhelming challenges she faces.

- **Nurturing:** Marge's most prominent role is that of a caregiver. She is a loving and attentive mother, deeply involved in her children's lives, offering wisdom, support, and encouragement at every turn. Her nurturing nature is evident in how she handles Dave's emotional turmoil, providing him with strength and comfort when he needs it most.
- **Spiritual:** Marge's faith is central to her identity. She often relies on her spirituality to make sense of the challenges in her life, including her husband's infidelity and the pain of her illness. Her faith is a source of personal comfort and a guiding light for her children, whom she encourages to trust in God and maintain hope and perseverance in the face of hardship.
- **Courageous:** Marge's courage is evident in her battle with illness and how she handles her marriage's betrayal. Despite the emotional pain of her husband's affair, Marge faces the situation with dignity and composure. She refuses to let the betrayal define her, focusing instead on the well-being of her children and finding inner strength through her faith.
- **Self-Sacrificing:** Marge consistently puts the needs of her children before her own. She bears the weight of her illness in silence, not wanting to burden them with her pain. Even as her condition worsens, she continues to offer emotional and practical support, never losing sight of her role as a mother.

Relationship with Dave:

Marge shares a profound bond with her son, Dave. She is both his emotional anchor and source of wisdom during the tumultuous events of the screenplay. Dave looks up to his mother, admiring her strength and dedication despite her physical and emotional challenges.

Marge offers Dave guidance as he navigates his own emotional struggles, particularly his feelings of betrayal and abandonment by his father and brother. She teaches him important lessons about faith, forgiveness, and resilience, providing him with the tools to handle the complexities of his relationships. Though she is physically weak, her emotional strength is a constant source of comfort for Dave, and her influence on his character is pivotal to his emotional growth throughout the story.

Their relationship is filled with deep mutual respect and love. Dave frequently checks in on his mother, helping her whenever possible, and their conversations are filled with warmth and understanding. Marge's wisdom, compassion, and faith serve as a guide for Dave, helping him navigate his own pain and confusion, particularly when it comes to his father's infidelity and his fractured relationship with his brother Rick.

Relationship with Her Husband:

Marge's relationship with her husband is a source of deep emotional pain. His affair represents not only a betrayal of their marriage vows but also a failure of trust and commitment during a time when Marge is at her most vulnerable. Despite this, Marge maintains her dignity, never allowing the affair to break her spirit or diminish her love for her children.

Though the affair devastates Marge, she refuses to engage in bitterness or hatred. Instead, she focuses on what truly matters to her—her children. Marge’s strength lies in her ability to endure this betrayal gracefully, offering her children a model of forgiveness and faith even in difficult circumstances. Her emotional resilience in the face of her husband’s betrayal gives Dave an example of handling complex and painful emotions.

Relationship with Rick:

Marge is deeply hurt by Rick’s decision to leave their home and live with their father. She views it as a personal betrayal, especially since Rick had once been Dave’s protector and role model. However, Marge does not openly express anger or disappointment toward Rick, instead choosing to hope he will find his way back emotionally quietly.

Marge understands that Rick, like Dave, is dealing with his emotional struggles, but she cannot help but feel the sting of his absence. Despite this, she continues to love Rick unconditionally, praying for him and offering silent support, even as she focuses on raising her other children and dealing with her illness. Her quiet strength in dealing with Rick’s departure underscores her capacity for forgiveness and commitment to maintaining family bonds, even when strained.

Relationship with Her Other Children:

Marge’s love for her children is unwavering, even as her illness makes it increasingly difficult for her to care for them in the way she once did. She relies on Dave and her younger children for physical help but continues to provide emotional support and guidance to all of them. Marge’s relationship with her children is rooted in love, faith, and mutual respect, and she encourages them to look out for one another, even when life becomes difficult.

Her illness forces Marge to delegate responsibilities to her older children, but she remains the emotional center of the family. Her children look up to her as a source of strength and wisdom, even as she battles her pain and struggles. Marge’s influence on her children is profound; they all draw from her courage, faith, and love.

Marge’s Role in Dave’s Journey:

Marge plays a key role in Dave’s emotional development throughout the story. As Dave struggles with his father’s betrayal and Rick’s departure, Marge offers him a safe space to express his emotions and process his pain. Her conversations with Dave are filled with wisdom and faith, helping him understand that despite their family’s chaos, they can still find strength and hope through love and resilience.

Marge’s illness and her strength in the face of adversity inspire Dave to push forward in his personal life and on the football field. Her belief in him never wavers; this constant support helps Dave navigate his challenges. Marge’s guidance ultimately allows Dave to find the emotional maturity and strength to reconcile his relationships with Rick and his father, learning the importance of forgiveness and understanding.

Character Arc:

Marge's character arc is one of quiet but profound endurance. Throughout the story, she remains the emotional rock of the family, even as her body weakens. Her love for her children and her faith in God sustains her through the darkest moments, and she never loses sight of what is most important—providing emotional and spiritual support for her family.

Marge's health deteriorates throughout the story, but her inner strength remains unshaken. She continues to offer wisdom, love, and guidance to her children, and in the end, her legacy is the strength and resilience she instills in them. Marge's arc may be marked by physical decline, but emotionally and spiritually, she remains a towering figure in her children's lives, particularly Dave.

Conclusion:

Marge Barton is the heart of *The Tree House*. Despite her physical limitations and the emotional toll of her husband's infidelity, Marge never loses her faith or her commitment to her children. Her resilience, love, and unwavering faith guide Dave and the rest of her family through their darkest moments, making her the emotional backbone of the story. Through her strength, Marge leaves a lasting legacy of love, forgiveness, and hope that profoundly shapes Dave's emotional journey.

4. Dave's Father: Richard Barton Sr.

Age: Early 40s

Personality: Complex, distant, authoritative, conflicted

Role: Dave and Rick's father, husband of Marge Barton, former church leader

Overview:

Richard Barton Sr. is a central but complicated figure in *The Tree House*. He is the father of Dave and Rick and the husband of Marge Barton, though their marriage has deteriorated due to Richard's infidelity. His affair and subsequent departure from the family home create deep emotional scars for Dave and Rick, shaping much of their character development and relationships. Richard's role in the story is defined by his struggle with guilt, his estranged relationships with his children, and his attempt to reconcile his past choices with his present.

Personality Traits:

- **Authoritative:** An only child. As a father, Richard once embodied authority and leadership. His background as a former religious person reinforced his sense of control, and he held high expectations for his family, particularly his sons. While this authoritative nature worked during the earlier years of his family life, it eventually created an emotional distance between him and his children.
- **Distant:** Richard has difficulty expressing emotions and connecting deeply with his family. This emotional detachment leads to the breakdown of his marriage with Marge and the alienation of his children, especially Dave. His distance is both physical, as he moves out of the house, and emotional, as he fails to engage with the pain he has caused his family.
- **Conflicted:** Though he is portrayed as a man who makes destructive decisions, Richard is deeply conflicted about his choices. He struggles with the guilt of betraying Marge and the

damage his actions have caused his family. His affair is the result of emotional dissatisfaction, but he is torn between his responsibilities and his desires.

- **Authoritarian:** Richard's parenting style involves discipline, expectations, and authority. This creates tension, especially with Dave, who craves emotional connection and guidance rather than just discipline. Richard's inability to transition from being a strict father to a supportive one adds to the emotional gap between him and his sons.

Relationship with Marge Barton:

Richard and Marge's relationship is strained and ultimately collapses due to Richard's affair. Their marriage had been stable in the early years, but as Marge's illness progressed and Richard's emotional needs went unmet, he sought companionship elsewhere. The betrayal is a pivotal point in the story, affecting not only Marge's physical and emotional health but also the family's stability.

Marge is devastated by the affair but refuses to let it define her. Despite Richard's betrayal, she does not allow bitterness to consume her. Conversely, Richard is less emotionally equipped to deal with the consequences of his actions. While he does not seek to repair the marriage after the affair, his guilt manifests in subtle ways, particularly in his interactions with his children.

Relationship with Dave:

Richard's relationship with Dave is one of the central emotional conflicts in the story. Dave views his father's actions as a personal betrayal of his mother and their entire family. Richard's affair and departure from the family home create a sense of abandonment in Dave, who struggles to reconcile his feelings of anger, hurt, and confusion.

Growing up, Dave always sought his father's approval, but Richard's emotionally distant parenting style left Dave feeling neglected. After the affair, this emotional gap widens, and Dave's respect for his father deteriorates. While Dave craves emotional support, Richard cannot provide it, leading to further estrangement. Throughout the story, Dave wrestles with the idea of forgiveness, and his journey involves finding peace with his father's shortcomings.

Despite this, there are moments when Richard tries to connect with Dave, but his efforts often fall short. He remains uncomfortable expressing vulnerability, and the gap between them remains wide for most of the screenplay. Their relationship reflects the broader themes of forgiveness and emotional healing in *The Tree House*.

Relationship with Rick:

Richard's relationship with his eldest son, Rick, is equally complex but takes a different form than his relationship with Dave. After Richard's affair, Rick chooses to live with his father, a decision that profoundly hurts both Dave and Marge. This act of loyalty creates tension between the brothers and complicates Richard's relationship with both of his sons.

Dave sees Rick's choice to move in with Richard as a betrayal of their mother, but from Rick's perspective, it's an attempt to maintain a relationship with a father he still admires. Though grateful for Rick's presence, Richard does not fully understand this decision's emotional toll on his son.

Richard's inability to empathize with Rick's emotional conflict indicates his broader distance from his children.

While Richard appreciates Rick's loyalty, he still struggles to maintain a meaningful relationship with him. The affair has created emotional barriers between them, and Richard's focus on control and authority prevents him from fostering a deeper connection. Throughout the screenplay, Richard's relationship with Rick is marked by a lack of emotional intimacy despite their physical proximity.

Relationship with His Affair and the Aftermath:

Richard's affair is a critical turning point in the story. His infidelity betrays not just Marge but also the values and responsibilities he once held as a husband and father. The affair represents Richard's escape from the pressures of his life, but it ultimately causes more harm than he anticipates.

Though he never fully acknowledges it, Richard is consumed by guilt. His affair is a manifestation of his emotional struggles, but he lacks the tools to cope with the fallout. The affair fractures his relationships with his children, particularly Dave, and isolates him from the family. Richard's inability to confront the emotional damage he has caused leads to his continued distance from his family, even as he attempts to make amends.

Character Arc:

Richard's character arc is marked by a gradual realization of the damage his actions have caused, though he never fully redeems himself. His emotional distance and inability to communicate with his children leave him isolated, but as the story progresses, he begins to understand the consequences of his choices. He recognizes the pain he has inflicted on his family, particularly Dave and Marge, but he struggles to bridge the emotional gap.

By the end of the story, Richard is left to reflect on his failures as a husband and father. Though he attempts to reconnect with his children, the damage has been done, and his relationships remain strained. Richard's arc is one of partial understanding, but his inability to fully embrace emotional vulnerability prevents him from achieving true reconciliation with his family.

Conclusion:

Richard Barton Sr. is a complex and conflicted character whose choices have far-reaching consequences for his family. His affair and emotional distance create rifts that are difficult to heal, particularly in his relationships with Dave and Rick. Though he struggles with guilt and attempts to make amends, Richard's inability to fully confront his emotional shortcomings prevents him from achieving meaningful redemption. His character is a cautionary tale about the consequences of emotional neglect and the importance of communication, forgiveness, and emotional connection.

5. Gram (Dave's Grandmother)

Age: Early 60s

Role in the Story: Gram is a pillar of wisdom and emotional strength in the family. As Dave's maternal grandmother, she plays a critical role in providing moral guidance and practical support, especially during times of crisis. She steps in to help when Dave's mother is overwhelmed with her health challenges, and she often serves as the voice of reason in the family.

Personality: Gram is nurturing, wise, and resilient. Having lived through her struggles, she carries a quiet strength that Dave and his siblings admire. She's not one to raise her voice or assert herself forcefully, but her presence alone commands respect. She's deeply religious, and her faith plays a significant role in approaching life's difficulties. Gram profoundly loves her family; her wisdom often comes through gentle but firm advice.

Character Arc: Throughout the screenplay, Gram's role evolves from being a caretaker to more of a mentor for Dave. She helps him process the difficult emotions of growing up, from the complexities of love to the burden of responsibility. As Dave faces the challenges of his father's affair and the breakdown of the family, Gram provides him with the spiritual and emotional tools to endure these hardships. Her arc may involve her grappling with her aging and how she can best continue to support the family, knowing that her time is limited.

Relationship with Dave: Gram is one of Dave's greatest confidantes. She has been there for him since he was little, guiding him with her sage advice. Whenever Dave feels lost, confused, or weighed down by the challenges he faces, Gram is the one he turns to for clarity. She represents a moral compass for him, teaching him the values of faith, perseverance, and self-worth.

Defining Moment: One of Gram's defining moments comes when she prays by Dave's side, believing she may have lost him during a health scare after a reckless night. This scene is a testament to her unconditional love for her family and deep faith, even when she fears the worst. It's also the turning point for Dave to realize how important his family is and how much he relies on Gram's emotional support.

Themes Represented: Gram embodies themes of faith, family unity, and resilience in the face of adversity. Her character reinforces the idea that no matter how difficult life becomes, the love and guidance of family members can help heal wounds and provide strength.

Gram's role is essential in grounding the emotional intensity of the screenplay, and her character development serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of wisdom, love, and compassion.

6. Siblings:

Rick Barton: (Dave's Older Brother)

Basic Information:

- **Name:** Rick Barton
- **Age:** 17
- **Occupation:** High school senior, star athlete, and mentor to Dave
- **Family:** Oldest son of the Barton siblings, older brother to Dave

- **Role in the Story:** Rick serves as a central figure in the family, balancing his role as a mentor to Dave with his complex feelings about their fractured family, especially after making the controversial decision to live with their father.

Background and Context:

Rick is the eldest brother of the Barton siblings and has long been the stable, mature presence within the family, stepping into a caretaker role during his mother's illness and his father's increasing emotional distance. However, Rick's decision to move in with their father after the affair creates a significant emotional rift, especially between him and his brother Dave. Though Rick maintains his protective nature and sense of responsibility, Dave views his choice to leave his mother's house as a deep betrayal, causing tensions that reverberate throughout the family dynamic.

Rick was always the one to pick up the pieces when things fell apart, but his decision to live with their father complicates his relationship with his family, particularly Dave. Despite his actions, he feels his father deserves a place in their lives. In Rick's eyes, he isn't betraying his mother but rather trying to maintain some semblance of family unity. However, the emotional fallout from this decision is something Rick has to confront, especially with Dave, who feels abandoned by the one person he always looked up to.

Key Characteristics:

1. Protective but Torn:

Rick has always been protective of his family, especially his younger siblings. Before the affair, Rick took on many responsibilities, helping his mother with the household and offering guidance to Dave. However, when Rick chooses to move in with his father, his protective instincts become conflicted. While he believes both parents deserve his support, physically leaving his mother's home is a heavy blow to Dave, who sees it as Rick turning his back on their mother and the family unit.

Rick's internal struggle is evident. He loves his mother and siblings deeply but feels drawn to repair the broken relationship with his father, whom he still respects despite the affair. This creates a sense of inner conflict for Rick as he tries to navigate being there for both parents, a choice that unintentionally isolates him from his siblings, especially Dave.

2. Emotional Resilience and Quiet Suffering:

Rick is deeply affected by the family's circumstances but rarely shows it openly. His emotional resilience has been a defining trait, and he has learned to internalize his pain, mainly when dealing with his father's betrayal. Moving in with his father adds a layer of guilt, which Rick tries to suppress, even though he knows that his actions have hurt his mother and siblings.

Despite outward appearances, Rick struggles with the weight of his decision. While he maintains a calm and composed demeanor, he carries an underlying sadness and guilt. He doesn't regret trying to keep a connection with his father, but he wishes his family could understand his intentions. The emotional toll of trying to be the peacekeeper between two fractured worlds weighs heavily on him.

3. Mentor and Brother, Yet Distant:

Before Rick's move, he was Dave's primary mentor and protector. Dave admired Rick for his maturity and strength, relying on him for guidance on and off the football field. However, Rick's choice to leave and live with their father creates a deep rift between the two brothers. Dave feels abandoned, as though Rick has chosen their father over the rest of the family, particularly their mother.

This shift in their relationship adds tension, but Rick still tries to be a mentor to Dave. He checks in on him and offers advice, though the emotional distance caused by his departure makes it harder for Dave to accept Rick's help. Rick's attempts to bridge the gap are sincere, but Dave's betrayal makes it difficult for him to see Rick's perspective.

4. Moral Compass in Conflict:

His sense of duty drives Rick's character, but his morality is tested when it comes to choosing between his parents. On one hand, he feels obligated to stand by his father, who he believes still deserves a chance to be part of their lives. On the other hand, he knows the pain his mother has endured due to the affair, and he doesn't want to cause her more suffering. This creates a moral conflict for Rick, who often finds himself stuck in the middle, trying to please both sides but feeling like he's failing both.

Rick's belief that reconciliation and forgiveness are possible is central to his character. Still, it also causes friction with Dave, who focuses more on loyalty to their mother. Rick's internal struggle over prioritizing loyalty or forgiveness adds depth to his character as he grapples with complex family dynamics.

5. Relationship with Dave:

The relationship between Rick and Dave is one of the most important dynamics in the screenplay. The brothers were extremely close before Rick moved in with their father. Dave looked up to Rick for advice, guidance, and support in football and life. Rick's decision to leave, however, causes Dave to feel betrayed. Dave sees Rick's choice as abandoning their mother during her time of need, and this causes a significant emotional divide between them.

Rick, on the other hand, doesn't view his decision in the same way. He believes he's trying to keep the family intact by maintaining a relationship with their father, but he struggles to communicate this to Dave. The tension between the brothers is palpable throughout the story, with Rick trying to mend the rift while Dave remains hurt and distant.

Despite the tension, there is still love between the brothers. Rick supports Dave, especially during tough moments, but there's an emotional distance that wasn't there before. The challenge for Rick is to help Dave understand that his decision wasn't meant to hurt him or their mother but rather an attempt to salvage what's left of their fractured family.

Key Relationships:

1. Dave Barton (Younger Brother):

Rick and Dave's relationship is central to the story's emotional core. While Rick has always been a mentor and protector to Dave, their bond is strained by Rick's decision to live with their father. Dave feels abandoned, and the tension between them creates emotional distance. Despite this, Rick remains committed to being there for his younger brother, even if Dave hesitates to accept his help.

Rick tries to bridge the gap between them by offering advice and support, but Dave's betrayal makes it difficult for him to trust Rick again fully. The emotional reconciliation between the two brothers is a key part of the story, with Rick helping Dave understand the complexity of his choices.

2. Their Father:

Rick's decision to live with their father is one of the most controversial aspects of his character. He feels a sense of duty to maintain a relationship with his father despite the affair, believing that forgiveness is essential. Rick's relationship with his father is complicated, as he still respects him but struggles with the pain his actions have caused the family. Rick's attempt to balance his loyalty to both parents is a key part of his internal conflict.

3. Their Mother:

Rick's relationship with his mother becomes strained after he decides to move in with his father. While he still loves and cares for her deeply, his choice causes her emotional pain, and he feels a sense of guilt about leaving. Rick tries to stay involved in her life, visiting frequently and offering support when he can, but the distance between them is evident. He knows that his decision has hurt her, but he believes that it's important to maintain a relationship with both parents.

Character Arc:

Rick's arc in *"The Tree House"* concerns reconciliation and understanding. Throughout the story, Rick tries to navigate the difficult balance between being loyal to his father and supporting his mother and siblings. His decision to live with his father causes emotional rifts in the family, particularly with Dave. Still, Rick's journey is about trying to heal those wounds and help his family move forward.

As the story progresses, Rick learns better to communicate his intentions to Dave and his mother, helping them understand that his decision wasn't meant to hurt them but rather an attempt to preserve some form of family unity. Rick's arc is about reconciling his feelings of guilt and responsibility and finding a way to bring his family back together.

Conclusion:

Rick Barton is a complex character, defined by his sense of duty, emotional resilience, and the conflict between his loyalty to his parents. His decision to live with his father creates emotional tension within the family, particularly with Dave, who feels betrayed. Rick's journey in the story is about reconciling these tensions and finding a way to heal the wounds caused by the affair. His character adds depth to the story as he tries to balance his roles as a mentor, protector, and son while navigating the complexities of a fractured family.

Younger Siblings

To develop character profiles for Dave's siblings, focusing on their roles, personalities, and relationship dynamics within the context of the screenplay "The Treehouse." Here's a general approach based on the details of the story:

- **Roles in the Story:** The younger siblings add to the familial atmosphere of the screenplay, with a particular emphasis on their interactions with Dave. They may seek his guidance and support, reinforcing Dave's responsibility as the "man of the house."
- **Personalities:** Each younger sibling would have a unique personality, ranging from playful and innocent to thoughtful and curious. This creates a dynamic where Dave's role shifts between caretaker and mentor.

7. Kim (Dave's Best Friend and Teammate)

- **Character Traits:** Loyal, easygoing, athletic, supportive
- **Motivation:** Kim is Dave's close friend, sharing his passion for football. He wants to be successful on the field but values his friendships more than individual glory. Kim is the kind of friend who's always there to back Dave up, offering emotional and moral support.
- **Character Arc:** Kim's role in the story is more of a supportive friend who grounds Dave when he's feeling overwhelmed by the pressures of football and family. While his character doesn't undergo a dramatic transformation, his steady presence is an anchor for Dave.
- **Conflict:** Kim doesn't experience much internal conflict, but he occasionally finds himself caught between wanting to excel in football and keeping a more balanced perspective on life, unlike Dave, who is more intense.

8. Brad (Other Friend and Teammate – Also Joanie's Older Brother)

- **Personality:** Brad is an extroverted, laid-back character known for his sense of humor and easy-going nature. He tends to lighten the mood, especially during tense moments in the football team. His loyalty to Dave is unwavering, as he stands by him through personal trials, offering emotional support and friendship. His family is well off financially and offers to help whenever or occasionally.
- **Relationship with Dave:** Brad and Dave are close friends. As teammates on the football team, they share a bond forged through countless practices and games. Off the field, Brad helps Dave navigate the complex dynamics of teenage life, including relationships, social pressures, and the expectations placed on them as athletes.
- **Challenges and Conflict:** While Brad is often seen as a source of light-heartedness, he faces his struggles with balancing football and his personal life. His family expectations, future ambitions, and insecurities about his athletic abilities occasionally create moments of self-doubt. These challenges allow Brad to connect more deeply with Dave as both friends explore what it means to grow up and pursue their dreams while maintaining their friendship.

- **Role in the Story:** Brad's character helps emphasize the theme of brotherhood and teamwork. His interactions with Dave show the importance of friendships that transcend sports, offering emotional depth to the narrative. Through Brad's support and journey, the screenplay reflects the theme of overcoming personal and external obstacles with the help of close friendships.

9. Stephanie:

- **Role in the Story:** Stephanie is a supporting character, primarily involved as Serene's older sister. She provides a balance of light humor and sisterly advice, often guiding Serene through her emotional struggles with Dave. Stephanie is the more mature yet still playful sibling, who brings some levity and perspective to Serene's more intense emotions.
- **Personality:** Stephanie is confident, sharp-witted, and pragmatic. She has a grounded outlook on life, often acting as the voice of reason for Serene. Although protective of her sister, she also has a mischievous streak, which is evident when she convinces Serene to sneak into the prom. Stephanie has a good sense of humor, which she uses to help Serene navigate the ups and downs of teenage relationships.
- **Goals:** While Stephanie's goals aren't a primary focus of the story, she seems content with her life and is focused on helping her younger sister avoid the mistakes she's seen others make. She wants Serene to enjoy being young and be cautious and wise about her decisions, especially concerning boys and relationships.
- **Relationship with Other Characters:**
 - **Serene:** Stephanie has a close, big-sister relationship with Serene. She is protective but playful, often teasing Serene about her crush on Dave. While she supports Serene, she also helps her gain perspective, offering a more mature view of relationships. Stephanie provides comic relief and a grounding influence on Serene's emotional ups and downs.
 - **Dave:** Stephanie doesn't interact much with Dave but knows Serene's deep feelings for him and is a behind-the-scenes observer. She watches how Dave and Serene interact, sometimes offering her thoughts and advice to Serene about the reality of their relationship.
 - **Robin:** While Stephanie knows Robin from school, she doesn't directly interact with Robin. She sees her as a threat to Serene's relationship with Dave. Stephanie's protective instincts kick in, and she worries that Robin's interaction with Dave might hurt Serene.
- **Backstory:** Stephanie grew up with Serene in a somewhat turbulent household. Having witnessed some of the struggles of their parents and older siblings, Stephanie has learned to be more cautious and practical in life. This has shaped her into a protective older sister who doesn't want Serene to make impulsive decisions based on fleeting emotions.

- **Growth Over the Story:** Throughout the story, Stephanie's role evolves from being the playful older sister to someone who helps Serene make an important emotional decision. While she starts encouraging Serene to chase after Dave, she ultimately allows Serene to come to terms with the reality of their relationship. She supports her decision to end things with Dave. Stephanie matures in her role as an emotional guide for Serene, showing a deeper understanding of love and relationships by the end.
- **Conflict:** Stephanie's main conflict is her desire to protect Serene from heartache while encouraging her to experience life and make her own decisions. She walks the line between letting Serene explore her feelings for Dave and trying to prevent her from getting hurt. This creates tension, especially as she sees Serene's deep attachment to Dave and its potential to end badly.
- **Resolution:** By the end of the story, Stephanie supports Serene's decision to break things off with Dave. She helps Serene see the bigger picture, encouraging her to focus on her happiness and not tie herself down to something that doesn't feel right. Stephanie's pragmatic approach helps Serene make a mature decision.

10. Joanie (Serene's Best Friend and Brad's Sister)

- **Character Traits:** Outgoing, protective, witty, observant
- **Motivation:** Joanie is fiercely protective of Serene. She's a no-nonsense type who isn't afraid to speak her mind, especially regarding relationships. Her main motivation is to ensure Serene doesn't get hurt, and she often acts as a sounding board for Serene's emotional struggles.
- **Character Arc:** Joanie remains a strong, unwavering presence in Serene's life. Her arc doesn't have dramatic shifts, but she does serve as a voice of reason. Toward the end of the story, she helps Serene realize that it's okay to move on from her relationship with Dave.
- **Conflict:** Joanie's conflict stems from watching her best friend get emotionally invested in a relationship she knows may not last. She wants to protect Serene but also respects her friend's independence, which creates tension between wanting to intervene and letting Serene figure things out alone.

11. Siri (Serene's and Dave's Mutual Friend)

Siri grew up near Serene in the same close-knit neighborhood. She has been a cheerleader in the past and is now on the drill team at Skyline High. Despite being a year older, she always felt connected to Serene. Siri is genuinely happy that Dave and Serene are friends and appreciates they have made a connection. Siri has a natural warmth and kindness, wanting the best for both. She finds joy in seeing them together. She hopes their friendship continues to bring happiness and strength to them both.

12. Coach Schmidt (Varsity Football Coach)

- **Character Traits:** Tough, demanding, practical, experienced

- **Motivation:** Coach Schmidt is all about winning and discipline. He sees great potential in Dave and is determined to shape him into a top-tier athlete. His motivation is simple: success on the field, but he also believes in pushing his players to their limits to bring out the best in them.
- **Character Arc:** Coach Schmidt begins as a no-nonsense coach who seems to care more about results than personal connections. However, by the end of the story, he develops a soft spot for Dave, recognizing the personal struggles the young athlete is going through. His arc shows a subtle shift from purely focusing on the game to understanding the importance of emotional support for his players.
- **Conflict:** His conflict comes from balancing the demands of the game with his players' personal lives. While he pushes Dave hard, he eventually learns that not all players can be driven purely by competitive fire without emotional consequences.

13. Coach Haun (Junior Varsity Coach)

- **Character Traits:** Encouraging, patient, supportive, nurturing
- **Motivation:** Unlike Coach Schmidt, Coach Haun focuses more on player development and encouragement. His goal is to nurture young talent, build their confidence, and prepare them for the challenges of varsity football. He is invested in his players' growth both on and off the field.
- **Character Arc:** Haun's character doesn't undergo much transformation but is an essential counterbalance to Coach Schmidt's harsher methods. He's a calming influence in Dave's life, believing in positive reinforcement and guidance rather than just toughness.
- **Conflict:** Coach Haun's conflict lies in dealing with the high expectations of the varsity program while trying to maintain his more nurturing approach. He occasionally butts heads with Coach Schmidt over the best way to push the players to their potential, especially Dave.

14. Coach Rasmussen – (Assistant Coach)

Background: Coach Rasmussen is a former head coach of the high school football team, having held the position during the formative years of many current coaching staff members, including Coach Schmidt and Coach Haun, who served as his assistants. Now, the roles have reversed, with Rasmussen no longer being the head coach but continuing to involve himself with the team. Though no longer in the primary leadership position, Coach Rasmussen's presence is still strongly felt on the field as he offers advice and guidance to both coaches and players.

Personality: Coach Rasmussen is charismatic, full of confidence, and carries an air of authority mixed with a hint of self-importance. He often believes that his methods and experiences make him an invaluable resource to the team, and he does not hesitate to voice his opinions or take the spotlight when the opportunity arises. He's a man who enjoys being at the center of attention, frequently entertaining the thought that he could have been a movie star had his life taken a different path.

Despite his larger-than-life persona, Coach Rasmussen is well-liked by the players. He has a genuine passion for the game, and while his antics can be over the top, the team understands that he pushes them to achieve their highest potential. His sharp wit is often punctuated with his favorite phrase, "My grandmother could do better," which he uses liberally to motivate players not living up to his high standards.

Physical Appearance: Rasmussen's physical appearance reflects his years in sports. He still maintains a relatively strong and imposing figure. His graying hair is always neatly combed back, and he dresses in coaching gear that is slightly outdated, reminiscent of his peak years as head coach. His posture and demeanor project the attitude of someone who believes he is still very much at the top of his game, both physically and mentally.

Relationship with the Team: Coach Rasmussen shares a unique dynamic with the current coaching staff. While Schmidt and Haun are technically in charge, Rasmussen still acts like the mentor he once was to them, often providing unsolicited advice. There is mutual respect between them, but Rasmussen's tendency to overstep occasionally causes tension, particularly when he insists on offering input in critical moments.

Players see Rasmussen as a bit of a character—an old-school coach with larger-than-life opinions but a heart that remains deeply invested in their success. His unpredictable nature keeps them on their toes, but his passion for the sport is infectious, and they appreciate that, despite his antics, he has their best interests at heart.

Notable Traits:

- **Confidence Bordering on Arrogance:** Coach Rasmussen believes in his coaching methods and personal abilities, often reminding others of his past successes.
- **Sense of Humor:** His quick wit and sharp tongue are balanced by his frequent use of humor to motivate and challenge the players.
- **Aspirations of Stardom:** He jokingly (or not so jokingly) believes he could have been a Hollywood star, adding a layer of vanity to his character.
- **Unconventional Behavior:** One day, between practices, he got married and returned to practice with rice still in his hair and the distinct smell of alcohol on his breath, showing his casual, almost nonchalant attitude towards significant life events.
- **Leadership and Respect:** Despite his quirks, Coach Rasmussen knows the football game deeply and commands respect from players and other coaches.

Coach Rasmussen plays a critical role in maintaining the team's winning spirit. He blends humor and harsh reality into his coaching and pushes the team to higher expectations while never failing to provide comic relief.

15. Rick's Football Friends

- **Character Traits:** Competitive, confident, sometimes cocky

- **Motivation:** These characters serve as part of Rick's social circle and act as minor influences in Dave's world. They represent the competitive culture of high school football and sometimes tease Dave or challenge him to step up and prove himself. They motivate each other through a combination of camaraderie and rivalry.
- **Character Arc:** These characters don't have significant arcs but act as foils to Dave, showing what happens when athletes become too consumed by their sport or peer pressure. Some highlight the potential dangers of overidentification with football, while others are examples of balancing it with a normal social life.
- **Conflict:** Their conflict mainly revolves around their internal desire to stand out as individuals rather than work together as a team. They also reveal some of Dave's insecurities, which push him harder in his athletic journey.

16. Serene's Cheerleading Friends

- **Character Traits:** Energetic, social, sometimes superficial, gossip-prone
- **Motivation:** These friends focus more on social status and being the center of attention. They are less concerned with the emotional depth of their relationships and often gossip about Serene and Dave. Their motivation is often to enjoy the high school experience to its fullest without getting too caught up in drama.
- **Character Arc:** These characters don't undergo much development but serve as a reminder of the superficial aspects of high school life. They sometimes unintentionally cause friction between Serene and Dave by spreading rumors or making offhand comments about their relationship.
- **Conflict:** Their conflicts tend to be social—bickering over popularity, boys, and cheerleading positions. They occasionally offer comic relief or moments of levity in the story but can also be sources of emotional stress for Serene.

17. Margaret's Older Daughter - (12 years old)

Role in the Story:

Margaret's oldest daughter is a 12-year-old. She admires Dave's father for his easygoing, fun-loving nature and sees him as someone who brings joy into her life. However, her perspective is heavily influenced by her mother, who speaks poorly of her father, rationalizing her actions. She is caught in this conflict and tries to protect the situation from getting out of control, even when she doesn't fully understand the moral implications.

Personality Traits:

- **Affectionate:** Margaret's older daughter is drawn to people who make her happy, which attracts her to Dave's father. She appreciates his warm, carefree personality.
- **Loyal:** She protects her mother and tries to defend her actions, even though she may not completely grasp the consequences.

- **Naive:** At 12, she doesn't yet understand the full complexity of relationships and struggles to see beyond her mother's rationalizations. She trusts her mother's guidance but is still too young to question it deeply.

Motivation:

Margaret's older daughter is motivated by a desire to preserve the happiness she associates with Dave's father and the dynamic he brings into her life. She wants to protect her mother's choices, not realizing the weight of what she is doing.

Conflict:

Her conflict is internal mainly, balancing her loyalty to her mother with her admiration for Dave's father. She doesn't fully understand the wrongness of the affair but senses that she needs to shield it from others, like Dave's brother Rick. Her innocence and lack of understanding create emotional turmoil as she navigates these adult issues with limited maturity.

18. Margaret's Younger Daughter - (10 years old)

Role in the Story:

The younger sister is a thoughtful and sensible 10-year-old who recognizes that her mother's relationship with Dave's father is morally wrong. She deeply respects her family's values, especially her grandparents' and the role within their church. This causes her to feel uneasy about the affair. Unlike her older sister, she does not try to justify the situation and quietly disapproves of her mother's actions.

Personality Traits:

- **Mature and Sensible:** Despite her young age, she has a strong sense of right and wrong. She is thoughtful and reserved and tends to approach situations with more caution and reflection.
- **Morally Driven:** She respects the principles her family stands for, particularly those tied to their church community. This gives her a clear perspective on the wrongness of the affair, even if she struggles to vocalize it.
- **Observant:** While she doesn't always express her thoughts openly, she knows the situation and its complexities. She quietly notices the tension and tries to understand it in her own way.

Motivation:

Her motivation is rooted in her desire to maintain her family's moral integrity and to stay aligned with the values taught by her grandparents and church. She wants to ensure that she stays on the right path, even though she's confused and upset by her mother's actions. Her loyalty is split between love for her mother and a commitment to doing the right thing.

Conflict:

The younger sister's main conflict is an internal one. She knows what her mother is doing is wrong but feels powerless to change the situation. She wrestles with feelings of loyalty to her mother while wanting to uphold the values she believes in. She also feels pressure to keep the peace within the family while struggling with the weight of what she knows.

Emotional Arc:

Throughout the story, the younger sister grows more confident in understanding right and wrong. As events unfold, she learns that standing up for your beliefs sometimes means recognizing the flaws in those you love. Her quiet resilience allows her to maintain her integrity, even though she is deeply saddened by the affair and its impact on her family.

19. Tommy's Character Development (Dave's Father's Boyhood Friend)

Name: Tommy

Role in the Story: Tommy plays a pivotal yet secondary role as Dave's father's boyhood friend. He is someone with whom Dave's mother, in her vulnerable state, pleads to intervene in the betrayal of their marriage. He is a respected figure within the community, possibly holding a religious or leadership role, and is seen as a potential moral compass that could influence Dave's father.

Personality Traits:

- **Loyal:** Tommy has been friends with Dave's father for years, sharing a deep bond. His loyalty to this friendship is both a strength and a complication, making him hesitant to intervene in personal matters.
- **Diplomatic:** He often avoids conflict and prefers to mediate rather than take sides. This characteristic makes him appear reluctant when asked to intervene in the family's turmoil.
- **Conservative:** Tommy likely holds traditional values, particularly family, marriage, and loyalty. He may have strong beliefs about what's right but struggles with applying those beliefs to his close friend.
- **Empathetic:** He genuinely cares for Dave's mother and is aware of the pain the betrayal has caused, but his friendship with Dave's father creates an emotional conflict.

Backstory:

Tommy grew up as a back fence neighbor alongside Dave's father, sharing a bond dating back to their childhood. Over the years, their friendship deepened, and they have supported each other through various life challenges. Tommy is likely a respected figure within their church or local community, someone people turn to for advice and guidance. His conservative upbringing has instilled in him a deep sense of duty to his friends, which makes his position difficult when Dave's mother asks him to intervene in her marriage.

Motivation:

Tommy wants to balance loyalty to his friend and doing what's morally right. His hesitance to act when asked to mediate between Dave's parents comes from his internal struggle—he doesn't want to betray his long-time friend but knows that his friend's actions are wrong.

Conflict:

Tommy's main internal conflict is between his loyalty to Dave's father and his sense of morality. He's torn between staying neutral in their marital issues and stepping in to confront his friend for the sake of doing what's right. Externally, his reluctance causes tension with Dave's mother, who expects him to act as a moral guide and intervene.

Character Arc:

Tommy's arc is about accepting his responsibility as a friend and a moral leader in his community. Initially, he avoids getting involved and wants to stay loyal to his friend, but over time, the weight of his conscience may lead him to reconsider his role. Whether or not he intervenes is a critical turning point for his character.

If he does confront Dave's father, it shows his growth and recognition that doing what's right sometimes means risking personal relationships. If he doesn't, it illustrates his fear of the consequences, leaving him with a sense of moral failure.

Relationship with Other Characters:

- **Dave's Father:** They share a deep bond rooted in childhood. Dave's father respects Tommy but uses their friendship to avoid accountability, knowing Tommy is unlikely to challenge him openly.
- **Dave's Mother:** She sees Tommy as a potential ally who could influence her husband to reconsider his actions. Her disappointment in his reluctance to intervene causes emotional strain in their relationship.
- **Dave:** Tommy is more of a distant figure to Dave, representing the adult world's complicated dynamics of loyalty and morality. Dave might view Tommy as someone who let their family down by not stepping in when they could.

Symbolism: Tommy represents the challenge of balancing loyalty and morality. He's a figure of quiet conflict, reflecting that sometimes the most challenging choices involve risking long-term friendships to do the right thing.

In the end, Tommy's character highlights the difficulty of taking a moral stand when personal loyalties are involved, adding a layer of complexity to the narrative's themes of love, betrayal, and moral responsibility.

20. Margaret's Father

Role in the Story:

Margaret's Father is a church official and a respected figure within the community. He is close to Tommy, a similar church official. He is portrayed as a man of influence, trusted by his peers, and regarded as a moral compass for those around him. However, his stance on the affair

between Tommy and Dave's father reveals a more complex, rigid side to his character, prioritizing appearances and personal biases over empathy and intervention.

Personality Traits:

- **Authoritarian: Margaret's Father** is a stern, authoritative figure who values control in his family and as a church leader. He believes in maintaining order and strict adherence to rules in the home and in his community.
- **Moralistic, yet Hypocritical:** Although he preaches forgiveness and moral righteousness, **Margaret's Father's** response to Dave's mother's plea shows that he can be hypocritical, choosing to turn a blind eye when it's inconvenient for him or when his personal relationships might be affected.
- **Rigid and Unyielding: Margaret's Father** has a fixed mindset, unwilling to reconsider his stance even in the face of moral complexity. He blames Dave's mother rather than recognizing the affair as a breach of trust by Dave's father and Tommy. His inability to show empathy or intervene for the right thing exposes his lack of flexibility.
- **Prideful: Margaret's Father's** pride is a significant obstacle. He cares deeply about his reputation within the church and community, and this pride influences his decision not to get involved. He prefers to distance himself from the controversy, fearing that his involvement could tarnish his own standing.

Backstory:

Margaret's Father grew up in a conservative household where the church was central to his upbringing. His father was also a figure of authority, which ingrained in him a deep respect for tradition and hierarchy. Over time, Margaret's Father rose in the church ranks, gaining respect for his commitment to doctrine. However, this background also shaped his rigid approach to dealing with personal and moral issues, making him more focused on maintaining the status quo than addressing the nuances of human behavior.

Motivation:

Margaret's Father's primary motivation is to protect his position and uphold the image of moral authority within the church. He sees getting involved in Dave's father's affair as a risk to his reputation and the stability of his relationship with Tommy. By placing the blame on Dave's mother, he absolves himself of the responsibility to act and shields himself from the moral complexities of the situation.

Conflict:

Margaret's Father's internal conflict lies in balancing his public image as a moral leader with his private decision to avoid dealing with the affair. Externally, his refusal to intervene causes tension between him and Dave's mother and between him and Margaret, who may see through his hypocrisy. His conflict is between doing what is morally right and preserving his reputation.

Character Arc:

Margaret's Father's character arc could involve an eventual reckoning with his hypocrisy. As events unfold, he may face increasing pressure to address his inaction and recognize that his refusal to intervene diminishes his moral authority. If his relationship with Tommy deteriorates or the affair causes more damage, he may be forced to confront his failures as a leader and friend.

Relationship with Margaret:

Margaret's Father's relationship with Margaret is likely strained. While he expects her to adhere to the same strict rules he follows, Margaret may feel suffocated by his unyielding nature. She may also see his refusal to intervene in the affair as a betrayal of the values he preaches, which could lead to tension and disillusionment with her father.

21. Margaret's Mother

Role in the Story:

Margaret's Mother is pivotal in solidifying the family's stance on the affair. She represents the family's emotionally distant, judgmental side, choosing to side with her husband in dismissing Dave's mother's concerns. Her lack of empathy and harsh response to Dave's mother reveals her character's deep alignment with rigid, traditional values and an unwillingness to challenge the status quo.

Personality Traits:

- **Cold and Dismissive:** **Margaret's Mother** lacks warmth and empathy, particularly when emotional support is needed. She is quick to judge and dismiss others, as seen in her harsh response to Dave's mother's plea for help.
- **Self-Righteous:** **Margaret's Mother** believes in the superiority of her own moral standing and her family's way of life. She views herself as above reproach and judges others for their perceived failures, particularly in matters of marriage and family.
- **Conservative and Traditional:** Much like her husband, **Margaret's Mother** believes in women's traditional roles, mainly regarding marriage. She sees a wife's role as one of support and submission, and she blames Dave's mother for not being a "better wife" rather than holding Dave's father accountable for his actions.
- **Loyal to Appearances:** **Margaret's Mother** is primarily concerned with maintaining the family's reputation within the community. She is loyal to her husband and their public image, even at the expense of moral clarity or personal relationships. Her harsh reaction to Dave's mother stems from a desire to keep her family's image untarnished by scandal.

Backstory:

Margaret's Mother came from a conservative family that valued appearances, reputation, and traditional gender roles. She married **Margaret's Father**, expecting to uphold these values in her family. Over the years, **Margaret's Mother** has grown increasingly detached from those who

don't conform to her rigid view of the world. Her devotion to her husband and his authority has led her to dismiss her empathy and compassion in favor of judgment and rigidity.

Motivation:

Margaret's Mother's motivation is to protect her family's reputation and preserve the traditional values that she believes are essential to a successful marriage. She views Dave's mother's plea as an intrusion into her family's life and a threat to the stability of her husband's position in the church. By blaming Dave's mother, she reinforces her beliefs and absolves her family from any responsibility.

Conflict:

Margaret's Mother's internal conflict revolves around her refusal to acknowledge the emotional complexity of the situation. She struggles to balance her need for control and judgment with the reality that not all marriages are as straightforward as she believes. Externally, her conflict with Dave's mother highlights her coldness and unwillingness to empathize with those outside her circle. Her relationship with Margaret could also be a source of tension, as Margaret may see her mother's lack of compassion as a significant flaw.

Character Arc:

Margaret's Mother's character arc could involve facing the consequences of her coldness and judgment. Over time, the cracks in her family's perfect image may force her to confront her lack of empathy and the damage it causes to those around her. While she may never fully soften, **Margaret's Mother** could experience moments of doubt or regret as she realizes the limitations of her rigid worldview.

Relationship with Margaret:

Margaret's Mother's relationship with Margaret is likely distant. While she expects Margaret to follow traditional paths, Margaret may resent her mother's lack of emotional warmth and understanding. **Margaret's Mother's** strict adherence to appearances and reputation leaves little room for genuine connection, and Margaret may seek emotional support elsewhere, further straining their relationship.

Conclusion:

Margaret's Father and Margaret's Mother represent the rigid, traditional values that contrast with Dave's mother's more open and emotional approach. Their unwillingness to intervene in the affair highlights their deep investment in maintaining their family's image and moral authority, even at the expense of empathy and action. Their relationship with Margaret is complicated by their coldness and strictness, which may ultimately drive her away as she seeks a more authentic and compassionate way of life.

Character Development for Janine and Robin (Senior Girls from Dave's High School).

22. Janine:

- **Role in the Story:** Janine is a supporting character. She is Robin's close friend and interacts with Dave and the other key characters throughout the story. Her role is to provide comic relief, lightheartedness, and camaraderie while acting as a voice of reason in social situations. She is Robin's confidant and often offers perspective on Robin's ambitions and relationships.
- **Personality:** Janine is lively, outgoing, and always able to break the ice in social situations. She is currently the head cheerleader at Skyline High School and dates Steve Marshall, the star quarterback on Skyline's winning football team. She's a natural extrovert who thrives in social settings but also has an empathetic side, especially toward Robin. Janine's optimism and humor are some of her strongest traits, allowing her to navigate high school drama without getting too bogged down.
- **Goals:** Janine's primary goals revolve around her friendships and social life. She wants to support Robin, help her friends, and ensure they're all having fun during their last year of high school. She doesn't have big, dramatic life aspirations like Robin, but she's content with living in the moment and being there for her friends.
- **Relationship with Other Characters:**
 - **Robin:** Janine is Robin's best friend and confidante. She supports Robin's ambitions, encourages her to follow her dreams, and helps keep Robin grounded. She sees Robin's vulnerabilities and gives her advice when she feels unsure or insecure.
 - **Dave:** Janine doesn't have a deep relationship with Dave but admires him from afar. She recognizes his importance to Robin and enjoys being part of the group that supports him, especially when they're at social events like the prom. She brings out a light-hearted side in Dave when they interact.
 - **Steve Marshall:** Janine has a casual, flirtatious relationship with Steve, the quarterback and one of the team's stars. Their dynamic adds to the playful energy she brings into the story.
- **Backstory:** Janine has grown up in the same neighborhood as Robin and has been best friends since childhood. Unlike Robin, Janine doesn't aspire to leave her town or do something grand. She loves her school, her friends, and the comfortable world she's a part of. She's a small-town girl at heart and is okay with that.
- **Growth Over the Story:** Throughout the screenplay, Janine shows growth in understanding the complexity of relationships. She moves from being a carefree social butterfly to someone who starts reflecting on her future, her friendships, and what comes after high school. She becomes more serious as Robin and Dave's dynamic develops, realizing that change is coming for everyone.

23. Robin:

- **Role in the Story:** Robin plays a key role as a love interest for Dave and a pivotal character who represents ambition, dreams, and internal conflict. She's a senior at Skyline and has

one foot in high school life while the other is reaching for more significant things outside of it. Robin embodies grace, talent, and poise but is also sensitive and introspective. Her relationship with Dave brings depth to her character as she navigates her feelings and future.

- **Personality:** Robin is charismatic, talented, and driven. She's passionate about performing arts and has dreams of moving to New York to pursue a career in theater or singing. Though she appears confident on the outside, she harbors insecurities about relationships and often feels alone despite her popularity. She is mature for her age, often introspective and thoughtful about life, but hides her deep emotions behind her poised demeanor.
- **Goals:** Robin's main goal is to leave behind her smaller-town life and pursue her dreams in performing arts. She's determined to make something of herself outside of high school and away from the limited world she feels stuck in. At the same time, she's navigating her feelings for Dave, trying to balance her attraction to him with her ambition to stay focused on her future.
- **Relationship with Other Characters:**
 - **Dave:** Robin's relationship with Dave is complex. Initially, she finds herself attracted to his quiet strength and sees him as a friend. However, as they spend more time together, especially during the prom and in their private conversations, she realizes there's something deeper between them. Robin enjoys Dave's humility and sincerity, contrasting with her usual social circle. Ultimately, she grapples with whether to pursue something with Dave or remain focused on her career ambitions.
 - **Janine:** Robin and Janine are best friends, though Robin often feels like she's growing apart from the high school world Janine still enjoys. Janine is her anchor to social life and fun, and Robin appreciates Janine's lightheartedness. Janine also serves as a sounding board for Robin's internal conflicts, helping her see situations more clearly.
 - **Serene:** Robin is unaware of Serene's deep-seated feelings for Dave, but Robin represents what Serene fears: the older, more mature girl who could easily take Dave away from her. Robin is unintentionally part of the emotional conflict between Dave and Serene, and her actions at the prom—singing the love song to Dave and kissing him—catalyze Serene's decision to end things with Dave.
- **Backstory:** Robin grew up in a stable, loving household with supportive parents. Her family's support has given her the confidence to pursue her dreams. She's always been talented in school musicals, choirs, and talent shows, and she knows that her ambitions lie outside of high school. Though popular and well-liked, she often feels isolated because her dreams and maturity level differ from her peers.
- **Growth Over the Story:** Robin's growth throughout the screenplay is subtle but significant. She starts off as someone who seems to have everything figured out—her goals, her future—but as she grows closer to Dave and realizes her feelings for him, she begins to question whether she's truly ready to leave behind everything and everyone. Her changing

the song lyrics at the end reflects her internal struggle: part of her wants a regular teenage romance, while the other part knows she needs to stay focused on her dreams.

- **Conflict:** Robin's conflict lies in her feelings for Dave and her determination to focus on her performing arts goals. She knows falling for Dave could distract her from her aspirations, but she's also drawn to his kindness and authenticity. Her internal battle is about balancing her emotional desires with her career ambitions.
- **Resolution:** By the end of the story, Robin remains on her path to New York, having enjoyed her time with Dave but knowing that she cannot afford to let her emotions derail her ambitions. Her relationship with Dave remains one of mutual respect and admiration, but she realizes she needs to focus on her future.

Conclusion:

Janine and **Robin** play pivotal roles in the narrative, reflecting different aspects of high school life and personal ambition. **Janine** represents fun, lightheartedness, and friendship, helping keep Robin grounded, while Robin symbolizes aspiration and the complex emotions of leaving behind one's youth. Both characters help Dave grow as he navigates his relationships and figures out his path forward.

24. Character Development: Steve Marshall

Name: Steve Marshall

Age: 17-18 (High School Senior)

Occupation: Star Quarterback for Skyline High School

Personality Traits:

- **Confident and Charismatic:** Steve has the presence of a leader—he knows he's talented, and he carries himself with confidence on and off the field.
- **Competitive and Driven:** As the starting quarterback, he is focused on winning and proving himself as the best athlete in the state. He thrives under pressure and is determined to secure a scholarship for college football.
- **Popular and Social:** Steve is well-liked among his peers. His charm makes him a favorite at school events, parties, and pep rallies. He enjoys the attention that comes with being a top athlete.
- **Cocky but Respectable:** While he can come across as arrogant at times, Steve isn't a bad guy. He respects hard work and talent, even if he doesn't always show it.

Background:

Steve Marshall grew up in Utah and has been a football prodigy since his early years. From junior high, he was already being talked about as the next big thing, and by his senior year, he had multiple college scouts watching him. His life has revolved around football, and he's been under pressure to succeed from coaches, family, and his expectations.

As Skyline High's star quarterback, he's known for leading his team to victories, earning MVP awards, and being the face of the school's football program.

Role in the Story:

Steve plays a rival and counterpart to **Dave Barton**, especially during the Utah High School State Championship Game. As the star quarterback at Skyline, he is seen as the likely MVP—until Dave unexpectedly steals the spotlight with a game-changing performance.

- **Victory Rally and MVP Award:** Given his status and performance throughout the season, Steve hopes to win the MVP award. However, when Skinny Johnny Mitchell announces Dave as the winner, Steve is visibly surprised—perhaps even slightly frustrated—but accepts it gracefully.
- **Relationship with Janine:** Steve is dating Janine, the head cheerleader, adding another layer of social dynamics to the high school setting.

Key Moments:

1. The Championship Game Showdown:

- Steve enters the game as the expected hero, confidently leading his team.
- Dave, initially overshadowed, has a breakout moment, making a critical play that ultimately secures the win.

2. MVP Award Scene:

- At the rally, Steve is mentally preparing to accept the MVP award, but when **Dave's** name is called, he experiences a moment of shock.
- His reaction could range from a forced smile to a gracious nod, depending on how sportsmanlike he is.

3. A Possible Redemption Arc:

- If Steve is initially bitter about losing, he might later acknowledge **Dave's** talent, giving him a nod of respect in a later scene.

Character Arc:

- **Start:** Steve is the top quarterback, confident in his abilities and expecting to take home all the accolades.
- **Middle:** He faces an unexpected challenge when Dave steps up and steals the spotlight.
- **End:** Whether he accepts it with humility or struggles with jealousy depends on how his character is developed. He might shake Dave's hand, signaling respect, or storm off, leaving room for unresolved tension.

Symbolism:

- **The Established Star vs. The Underdog:** Steve represents the athlete who's always been in the spotlight, while Dave represents the unexpected hero.
- **Handling Defeat:** His reaction to losing the MVP award can reflect different aspects of sportsmanship—graceful acceptance or bitter resentment.

25. Character Development: Tony - Owner of The Five All's Restaurant

Role in the Story:

Tony is the warm, charismatic owner of The Five All's restaurant, a popular spot among Skyline High School students and faculty. He has a deep connection to the community, particularly the Skyline High School football team, of which he is a long-time supporter. He is a personal friend of Robin and Janine, often treating them like family when they visit the restaurant. Tony's restaurant serves as a gathering place for special occasions, including the pre-prom dinner.

Personality Traits:

- **Warm and Hospitable:** Tony is known for his welcoming demeanor. He treats everyone who enters his restaurant with kindness and respect, making each guest feel special. His outgoing nature makes him a beloved figure in the community.
- **Loyal and Supportive:** Tony's loyalty to the Skyline High School football program runs deep. He supports the team by attending games and offers his restaurant as a place for celebrations and team gatherings.
- **Generous:** Tony is known for his generosity. He often provides discounted or free meals to students, particularly those involved in the football program. He believes in giving back to the community that has supported him.
- **Protective:** As a father figure to Robin and Janine, Tony looks out for them, offering guidance and advice when needed. He has a soft spot for young women and is always ready to help them navigate the ups and downs of high school life.

Background:

Tony has owned The Five All's for over 20 years. As a young man, he worked from being a waiter to owning the restaurant. His success is tied to his strong work ethic and ability to create an inviting atmosphere that keeps customers returning. He has always been a Skyline football fan and has built relationships with many players, coaches, and families.

Motivation:

Tony's main motivation is to continue building his restaurant as a community hub where people can gather, celebrate, and create memories. His love for football and friendships with students like Robin and Janine inspires him to stay connected to the younger generation, giving them a safe space to relax and have fun.

Conflict:

Though Tony is generally a positive figure, he occasionally wrestles with the realities of running a business while maintaining his generosity. Balancing profitability with his desire to give back to the community can be challenging. Additionally, he feels protective of Robin and Janine. He worries about their challenges, particularly Robin's ambitions to move to New York for her performing arts career, which could take her away from the close-knit community he treasures.

Emotional Arc:

As the story unfolds, Tony continues to steadfastly support Skyline High and a trusted friend to Robin and Janine. He sees them grow and change, providing a reassuring presence in their lives as they face pivotal moments, like prom night. His emotional arc is subtle but reflects the pride and care he feels for the young people in his life. He learns to accept the inevitable changes, like Robin's future ambitions while remaining a cornerstone of stability for the community.

Relationships:

- **Robin and Janine:** Tony has a close, almost familial relationship with Robin and Janine. He has known them for years and considers them like daughters. He often gives them advice and offers a listening ear when they need it.
- **Skyline Football Team:** As a loyal football team supporter, Tony's restaurant is often the go-to spot for post-game dinners and celebrations. He takes pride in knowing many players and supporting the program in any way possible.

Tony's character serves as a grounding force in the story, providing the young characters warmth, support, and stability. His strong ties to the community and deep affection for Robin and Janine add emotional depth to his interactions with them.

26. Character Development for The Football Jock (Stephanie's Fling)

Role in the Story: The Football Jock, who has a fling with Stephanie, serves as a supporting character in the narrative, adding a layer of drama and complexity to the relationships around the central characters. He represents a more stereotypical, carefree high school athlete who contrasts with the depth and growth seen in Dave. While not the story's central focus, his relationship with Stephanie plays into the themes of fleeting high school romances and the emotional learning experiences that come with them.

Personality:

- **Charming and Confident:** Like many stereotypical high school athletes, he is charismatic and confident. His easygoing nature makes him popular with his teammates and the girls at school. He's fun-loving and enjoys the perks of being on the football team, including the social attention and admiration that comes with it.
- **Flirtatious and Noncommittal:** His relationship with Stephanie is lighthearted and casual. He enjoys the fling but is not emotionally invested in the long term. He prefers to keep things fun and doesn't take relationships too seriously, embodying the typical "high school jock" mindset of living in the moment.

- **Immature and Self-Centered:** Unlike Dave, who shows signs of maturity and depth, this character is slightly more immature and focused on his enjoyment. He lacks the emotional intelligence to navigate complex relationships and is often unaware of the emotional toll his actions may have on others, particularly Stephanie.

Goals:

- **Short-Term Enjoyment:** His primary goal is to enjoy his high school years, especially his popularity as a football player. He's not thinking ahead to the future and prefers to indulge in the fleeting joys of teenage life, including casual flings and social events.
- **Maintaining Social Status:** As a jock, he enjoys the social benefits of being part of the football team and is invested in keeping his status as one of the "cool" kids. His relationships, including his fling with Stephanie, are often driven by this desire to remain socially relevant and admired by his peers.

Relationship with Other Characters:

- **Stephanie:** The Football Jock's relationship with Stephanie is primarily physical and casual. While Stephanie is witty and pragmatic, she gets involved with him as part of her exploration of teenage romance. Their fling is fun for a while, but it lacks depth and emotional connection. Over time, Stephanie starts to see the superficial nature of their relationship and realizes that he's not what she needs in the long term.
- **Dave:** While he doesn't have a direct relationship with Dave, he represents the type of jock Dave could have become if he didn't have his grounded upbringing and the influence of his mother. The Football Jock serves as a contrast to Dave, showing what happens when someone embraces the superficial aspects of high school popularity without the emotional growth that Dave undergoes.
- **Steve Marshall:** Steve likely knows him from the team, and while they may get along, Steve doesn't share the same carefree attitude towards relationships. Steve is more mature and focused on leadership and teamwork, whereas the Football Jock is more self-centered and focused on having fun. They may get along on a surface level but don't share the same values.

Backstory: The Football Jock likely grew up as a popular kid, excelling in sports from a young age. He's always been admired for his athletic skills and has learned to enjoy the attention that comes with it. He's used to getting what he wants socially, including casual relationships with girls like Stephanie. He hasn't had to face many challenges or emotional conflicts, which has left him somewhat shallow and unprepared for deeper relationships.

Growth Over the Story:

- **Lack of Emotional Growth:** Unlike many of the other characters, the Football Jock doesn't show much emotional growth. His relationship with Stephanie is fleeting, and he doesn't develop a deeper understanding of himself or others through it. His role is to provide a contrast to the more developed characters, particularly Dave and Steve, who are shown to grow and mature throughout the story.

- **Stephanie's Growth:** While the Football Jock doesn't grow significantly, his relationship with Stephanie contributes to her development. She realizes that their fling is fun but lacks the emotional connection she's looking for, and this helps her mature and understand what she truly wants in a relationship.

Conflict:

- **Shallow Relationships:** The Football Jock's main conflict, though subtle, is his inability to form deeper connections. He's content with superficial flings and doesn't realize that this limits his personal growth. While this isn't a major conflict in the story, it serves as a contrast to the deeper emotional conflicts faced by other characters like Dave and Stephanie.
- **Fear of Commitment:** He enjoys the benefits of being popular and attractive but shies away from commitment. His fling with Stephanie is fun, but he avoids getting too emotionally involved, ultimately fizzling the relationship.

Resolution:

- **Parting Ways:** By the end of the story, Stephanie has grown beyond the Football Jock, realizing that she wants more than a superficial fling. Their relationship ends without much fanfare, and he likely moves on quickly, not realizing the impact he had on her emotional development. The jock remains largely unchanged, continuing to live in the moment without much thought for the future or more profound connections.

Conclusion: The Football Jock represents a common high school archetype: the carefree, fun-loving athlete who enjoys the perks of popularity without much introspection. While his fling with Stephanie provides some fun and lighthearted moments, it lacks the emotional depth she wants. His role in the story is to contrast Dave's emotional growth and to catalyze Stephanie's realization that she wants more out of a relationship. Ultimately, he remains a static character, content with the superficial aspects of high school life, while the other characters around him mature and grow.

27. Character Development for Mrs. Steel (Serene's Mother)

Role in the Story:

Serene's mother is a secondary character whose actions and influence significantly shape Serene's emotional world and decisions. She represents a flawed but impactful figure, contributing to Serene's struggles with relationships, self-esteem, and her desire for stability and love. Her character adds a layer of tension and complexity to Serene's life, influencing the dynamic between Serene and Dave and Serene's outlook on relationships.

Personality:

- **Unstable and Unreliable:** Serene's mother is emotionally erratic, and her behavior often fluctuates due to her substance use (possibly alcohol, as implied by her being slightly intoxicated in earlier scenes). Her mood swings, impulsive actions, and sometimes inappropriate behavior make her an unpredictable force in Serene's life.

- **Flirtatious and Inappropriate:** She sometimes acts in a flirtatious, careless manner, even toward Serene's friends or romantic interests, like Dave. This flirtation reflects her immaturity and lack of boundaries, which embarrasses and frustrates Serene.
- **Neglectful and Self-Absorbed:** Serene's mother tends to focus more on her needs and desires than on being a responsible and nurturing parent. She doesn't provide Serene with emotional support, often leaving Serene to fend for herself or turn to others, like her grandmother, for guidance.
- **Insecure and Broken:** Deep down, Serene's mother is insecure and unhappy. Her drinking and flirtation could be coping mechanisms for past disappointments, failed relationships, or an unfulfilled life. Her struggles, while not fully visible to others, have a profound impact on her behavior and the choices she makes, even though they often have negative consequences for her family.

Background: Serene's mother likely comes from a background of hardship, possibly having had her troubled upbringing or a series of difficult relationships that have left her jaded and emotionally unstable. She may have had Serene at a young age and has struggled to cope with the responsibilities of motherhood, especially in the absence of a strong support system or a stable partner. Her reliance on alcohol or other vices suggests a deep dissatisfaction with her life and an inability to find healthier ways to cope.

She may have experienced disappointments in love, career, or family, leading to her disengaged and sometimes reckless behavior. This backstory could explain why Serene's mother lacks the emotional bandwidth to fully care for her daughter and why Serene seeks stability and validation elsewhere.

Goals:

- **Seeking Validation:** Serene's mother craves attention and validation, which she often seeks through inappropriate flirtation or engaging in behavior that makes her feel desirable or noticed.
- **Escaping Her Reality:** Whether through alcohol or escapism, Serene's mother aims to avoid confronting her responsibilities and the realities of her life. She wants to avoid the pain of her past mistakes and present disappointments.
- **Maintaining a Sense of Youthfulness:** Her inappropriate behavior toward younger people, like Dave, suggests a desire to cling to her youth and recapture the carefree days she might feel she missed out on or lost.

Relationship with Other Characters:

- **Serene:** Serene's relationship with her mother is strained, characterized by emotional neglect and frustration. Serene often feels embarrassed by her mother's behavior and lacks the stable parental figure she craves. This dynamic has led Serene to grow up faster than her peers and seek advice and emotional support from her grandmother instead of her mother.

- **Serene's Grandmother:** While Serene's grandmother (Nana) stabilizes Serene, her presence sharply contrasts Serene's mother. The two women likely have a contentious relationship, with Serene's mother resenting Nana's influence over her daughter while also feeling judged or inadequate in comparison.
- **Dave:** Serene's mother's flirtatious behavior toward Dave is awkward and uncomfortable for Serene, further damaging their already strained relationship. It reinforces Serene's embarrassment and the disconnect between her and her mother. Dave, for his part, likely feels uncomfortable around Serene's mother, but her erratic behavior also gives him insight into why Serene behaves the way she does.
- **Other Characters:** Serene's mother's interactions with others in the community are likely sporadic and drama-filled. People may avoid or talk about her due to her reputation for being unstable, flirtatious, or unreliable.

Conflict:

- **Internal Conflict:** Serene's mother is trapped in a cycle of self-destruction and avoidance. She knows she's failing as a mother but lacks the emotional maturity or tools to change her behavior. Her internal conflict stems from a combination of self-loathing and an inability to face her own issues head-on.
- **External Conflict:** Her relationship with Serene is the primary source of external conflict. Serene's growing independence and desire for stability create tension between them. As Serene seeks healthier relationships and distances herself from her mother's chaos, her mother might feel abandoned or resentful, even though she's the cause of the strain.

Character Arc: While Serene's mother doesn't undergo a dramatic transformation in the story, she plays a critical role in Serene's development. Her behavior pushes Serene to mature faster, seek out alternative sources of emotional support, and ultimately make tough decisions about her relationships. Suppose there's any development in Serene's mother's character. In that case, it may come in small moments of vulnerability where she reveals her own pain, allowing the audience to see that her behavior stems from deep-seated issues rather than malice.

Her lack of growth contrasts with Serene's journey of self-awareness and emotional maturity, underscoring the idea that breaking free from toxic influences—even family—is sometimes necessary for personal growth.

28. Character Development for Serene's Grandmother (Nana)

Nana is a significant secondary character who serves as Serene's moral and emotional anchor. Unlike Serene's mother, who is unstable and neglectful, Nana provides the guidance, wisdom, and unconditional love that Serene lacks at home. She embodies stability, maturity, and wisdom from life experience, helping Serene navigate her emotional challenges. Nana is also a figure of comfort, offering a safe space for Serene to retreat when life becomes overwhelming.

Personality:

- **Wise and Compassionate:** Nana is deeply wise, not just because of her age but because of a lifetime of experience. She is empathetic and always knows what to say to comfort and clarify Serene. Her kindness and patience make her a nurturing figure in Serene's life.
- **Grounded and Stable:** Unlike Serene's mother, Nana is grounded, offering Serene the emotional and moral stability she craves. Nana's presence represents security and a sense of home, where Serene knows she can always turn for support.
- **Protective:** Nana has a fierce protective streak regarding Serene. She knows about Serene's instability with her mother and steps in to provide the guidance and emotional support that Serene's mother can't offer. Nana's protective nature often leads her to advise Serene on love, relationships, and good life choices.
- **Religious and Morally Upright:** Nana is likely religious or at least guided by strong moral principles, which shape the advice and values she imparts to Serene. She emphasizes the importance of faith, doing the right thing, and living a life of integrity, making her a grounding influence for Serene when she faces moral or emotional dilemmas.

Background:

Nana likely comes from a traditional background, having lived through hardships and challenges that gave her a deep well of wisdom. She could have been married for many years, raised her children with strong moral values, and witnessed the triumphs and failures of those around her. Her experience with family dysfunction—perhaps seeing her own child, Serene's mother, struggle—has taught her to take on the role of a caregiver and emotional guide for Serene.

Nana may have stepped in when Serene's mother began to fall apart, providing a more stable environment for Serene and guiding her in ways her mother could not. Nana's strong sense of responsibility and belief in the importance of family drives her to be a constant, reliable figure in Serene's life.

Goals:

- **Protecting and Guiding Serene:** Nana's primary goal is to ensure that Serene grows up with a strong moral foundation and emotional resilience. She wants Serene to make better choices than her mother and to avoid the mistakes that have caused instability in their family.
- **Providing a Safe Space:** Nana wants to be where Serene can go when things get tough, offering emotional refuge when Serene's home life with her mother becomes too chaotic. She provides this safety net through unconditional love, patience, and wise counsel.
- **Passing on Wisdom and Values:** Nana sees herself as a bridge between the past and the future. She wants to pass on her life lessons, particularly about love, self-respect, and faith, to ensure Serene has a moral compass as she grows into adulthood.

Relationship with Other Characters:

- **Serene:** Nana is Serene's emotional rock. Their bond is deeply personal, and Serene trusts her grandmother more than anyone else in her life. Nana's wisdom and stability give Serene a sense of security that her mother cannot. She offers Serene advice on relationships, particularly when Serene faces challenges with Dave and others. Nana helps Serene come to terms with her own feelings and decisions, guiding her to be more mature and self-aware.
- **Serene's Mother:** Nana's relationship with Serene's mother is likely strained. While she loves her daughter, she disapproves of her lifestyle choices, particularly her irresponsibility as a mother and her reliance on alcohol. Nana probably feels deeply disappointed in her daughter, but instead of confronting her directly, she focuses on helping Serene. There may be tension between Nana and Serene's mother, especially when Nana steps in to correct or overrule her daughter's decisions regarding Serene.
- **Dave:** While Nana may not interact directly with Dave often, she likely offers Serene advice about her relationship with him. She may be concerned about Serene getting too serious too quickly, encouraging her granddaughter to stay grounded and not rush into anything. Nana's advice helps shape Serene's decisions about her relationship with Dave, particularly when Serene decides to prioritize her emotional health and childhood over being in a relationship.

Conflict:

- **Tension with Serene's Mother:** Nana likely feels a deep internal conflict about her daughter's failings as a mother. While she wants to be supportive, she also knows that stepping in too much could create tension between them. Nana may struggle knowing when to intervene and let her daughter take responsibility for Serene.
- **Balancing Protectiveness with Letting Serene Grow:** Nana's instinct is to protect Serene from harm, but she also understands that Serene needs to make her own decisions and learn from them. This internal struggle plays out as Nana offers advice but lets Serene take the lead in her life choices, even if they may lead to heartbreak or tough lessons.

Character Arc: Nana doesn't undergo a dramatic transformation throughout the story, but her influence on Serene plays a key role in her personal growth. Through her guidance, Serene becomes more self-aware, learns to set boundaries in her relationships, and ultimately chooses her own path. Nana's wisdom and stability contrast with the instability of Serene's mother, making her a beacon of calm and reason in a chaotic world.

Nana's presence may also remind Serene of the importance of faith, values, and making choices that align with one's true self, helping her navigate teenage life's emotional ups and downs. Nana's role is less about changing herself and more about ensuring that Serene grows into a strong, independent person who can make healthy decisions.

Symbolism:

- **Anchor of Stability:** Nana symbolizes the stability that Serene craves in her life. In contrast to the chaos of her mother's actions, Nana is unwavering, providing the emotional and moral grounding that Serene needs.

- **Moral Compass:** Nana also serves as Serene's moral compass, offering wisdom rooted in faith and life experience. She reminds Serene of the importance of staying true to herself and making decisions based on her values, not just emotions.

Conclusion:

Nana is the heart of Serene's support system, guiding her through life's emotional and moral challenges with wisdom, love, and a strong sense of faith. While she may not have a significant arc, her influence is crucial to Serene's journey toward self-awareness, maturity, and emotional independence. Through Nana's nurturing presence, Serene learns the importance of making thoughtful decisions and finding peace in herself, even amid the chaos of adolescence.

29. Character Development: Henry (Dave's Mom's Mailman)

Name: Henry

Role in the Story: Henry is the neighborhood mailman and a recurring minor character who plays a subtle but meaningful role in the lives of Dave and his family, particularly Dave's mom. He represents the regular presence and small acts of kindness that contribute to the community and household, especially as Dave's mom deals with her illness.

Physical Description:

- Age: Mid-50s
- Average build, graying hair, and often seen wearing his postal uniform with a friendly and approachable demeanor.
- Carries a sturdy mailbag and has a gentle, patient smile.

Personality Traits:

- **Kind and Compassionate:** Henry is thoughtful and checks in on Dave's mom during his daily rounds. He notices when someone might need an extra kind word or gesture.
- **Reliable and Dependable:** Always on time and never misses a day, Henry's consistency is a comforting presence, especially in the challenging and sometimes chaotic life of Dave's family.
- **Quiet but Observant:** He doesn't talk much but notices more than he lets on. He observes the changes in the neighborhood and the lives of the families on his route.
- **Supportive:** Though not directly involved in the story's drama, Henry subtly supports Dave's mom by bringing her mail, asking how she's doing, and occasionally bringing small gifts like a flower or fruit.

Backstory:

Henry has been a mailman for over 30 years and has been on the same route for much of that time. He takes pride in his work and in being a small but essential part of the lives of the families he serves. Over time, he has developed a fondness for Dave's mom, often engaging in short but meaningful conversations about life, health, and family.

In the years since Dave's mom became ill, Henry has gone beyond the role of a simple mailman. He takes extra care to ensure she's okay, sometimes stopping to chat briefly and noticing when things seem off at her home. Though he's a minor character, he's one of the everyday people whose small, kind actions help hold things together for Dave's family.

Character Arc:

Henry's role is relatively static, but his presence grows more symbolic as the story progresses. His simple acts of kindness toward Dave's mom become a metaphor for the community's support network. He never involves himself deeply in the family's struggles, but his consistent presence reminds us that even small gestures matter in difficult times.

As the story nears its emotional conclusion, Henry, who has quietly witnessed Dave's journey and the family's ups and downs, remains a figure of stability. Dave appreciates his kindness, especially after his mother's passing, as Henry's presence has been a quiet source of support.

Relationship with Dave's Mom:

Henry and Dave's mom share a friendly, almost familial bond. While their interactions are brief, they carry warmth and a sense of mutual respect. Henry is not just the mailman; he has seen the family's evolution over the years, and Dave's mom finds comfort in their brief exchanges.

Key Moments:

1. **Small Gestures of Kindness:** Henry is seen bringing more than just mail — perhaps a tiny flower or something thoughtful for Dave's mom, showcasing his gentle nature.
2. **Final Scene with Dave:** After Dave's mom passes away, Henry might have a small but poignant moment with Dave, perhaps offering quiet condolences, showing that even in the face of loss, simple human kindness continues.

Motivations:

Henry is motivated by a sense of duty and the belief that every job can make a difference in people's lives, no matter how small. Empathy motivates his kindness, and he genuinely cares for the people he serves.

Symbolism:

Henry symbolizes the unsung heroes of everyday life — those who make difficult times more bearable through their consistency and small acts of kindness. He represents the quiet, steady presence of people who help others in ways that aren't always noticed but are deeply appreciated.

30. Character Development: Skinny Johnny Mitchell

Name: Skinny Johnny Mitchell

Age: Early 40s

Occupation: Radio and Television DJ (KCPX TV and Radio)

Personality Traits:

- **Charismatic and Energetic:** Skinny Johnny is the life of any event he hosts. His voice is instantly recognizable to anyone who listens to the radio or watches local TV. He knows how to work with a crowd, keeping them engaged and entertained.
- **Witty and Fast-Talking:** As a DJ, he has a quick wit and a smooth way with words. His humor and charm can turn any moment into a lively spectacle.
- **Larger Than Life:** His persona is big—not just in his voice but in his presence. He wears flashy but stylish outfits that make him stand out, adding to his superstar image in the local Utah entertainment scene.
- **Genuine and Supportive:** Despite his showman personality, Skinny Johnny cares deeply about the local athletes and students he interacts with. He takes pride in promoting young talent and ensuring they get the recognition they deserve.

Background:

Skinny Johnny Mitchell has been the most popular DJ in Utah for over a decade. He started as a late-night radio host and quickly gained fame for his high-energy style, humor, and deep knowledge of music and sports. Over the years, he transitioned into television, becoming the face of KCPX's most significant local events, from concerts to sports rallies.

Born and raised in Utah, he has always been passionate about his community. He sees his job as more than just playing records—he believes in bringing people together and celebrating local heroes, particularly athletes like Dave Barton.

Role in the Story:

Skinny Johnny is a special guest at the victory rally, where he presents **Dave Barton** with the Most Valuable Player (MVP) award for his outstanding performance in the Utah High School State Championship Game.

His introduction is met with thunderous applause during the rally, reflecting his status as a beloved public figure. His presence adds prestige to the ceremony, making the moment even more special for Dave and the rest of the team.

Key Moments:

- **The MVP Announcement:** Skinny Johnny builds suspense before announcing Dave Barton as the winner of the MVP award, adding to the dramatic impact of the moment.
- **On-Air Personality:** Throughout the event, he keeps the crowd engaged with his lively banter, proving why he is Utah's most beloved DJ.
- **Dave's Reaction:** Dave is surprised when his name is called, expecting another player (Steve Marshall) to win. In his signature fashion, Skinny Johnny highlights Dave's perseverance and how he led his team to victory.

Character Arc:

While Skinny Johnny does not transform the story, his role is pivotal in giving Dave a moment of recognition and validation. He represents community appreciation and shows how local icons like himself help uplift young athletes.

Symbolism:

- **The Voice of the Community:** His role as a DJ and TV personality makes him a unifying force in Utah, connecting people through music, sports, and entertainment.
- **Encouragement and Legacy:** By presenting the MVP award, Skinny Johnny symbolizes the bridge between hard work and recognition, reinforcing that effort and dedication lead to success.

THE TREE HOUSE

EXT. DAVE'S HOUSE – DAY

DAVE (as a young boy, rides his bike over a dirt pile in the driveway).

DAVE'S FATHER (shouting from a distance)
I'm trying to work here. Go in the house!

DAVE (innocent)
This is the first time I've been able to ride my bike since I got it for Christmas.

DAVE'S FATHER
There's plenty of time to ride later. Get back in the house!

DAVE continues to ride through the dirt pile. After repeated warnings, **Dave's FATHER** throws dirt in front of **Dave's** tire, causing him to slide and fall.

DAVE'S FATHER
I warned you! See what happens when you disobey?

EXT. CEMETERY – DAY

Adult **DAVE** kneels near a gravestone that reads **MARGIE PETERSEN BARTON**. He kisses his fingers and touches the headstone, speaking softly.

DAVE (V.O.)
Once in a great while, a person touches the lives of many. That was my mother. Her story is one of strength and grace; this is her legacy.

EXT. JR. HIGH SCHOOL TRACK – DAY

15-YEAR-OLD DAVE crouches in the starting blocks for the junior high championship track meet finals. The **TRACK OFFICIAL** raises his arm.

TRACK OFFICIAL
On your marks...

The runners get into position.

TRACK OFFICIAL

Get set...

The gun fires, and **DAVE** takes off, pulling ahead quickly. He crosses the finish line in first place. **KIM**, his teammate, approaches him, smiling.

KIM

Nice race, man. Great start!

DAVE

Not bad for a guy who was told he'd never run again after breaking both legs as a kid.

KIM

You've beat the odds.

Two coaches, **COACH SCHMIDT** and **COACH HAUN**, approach from the sidelines, eyeing **DAVE** with interest.

KIM

Isn't that Coach Schmidt?

DAVE

Yeah. I've met him before with my brother, Rick.

COACH SCHMIDT

Congrats on your races today, Dave.

DAVE

Thanks, Coach. Appreciate it.

COACH SCHMIDT

We talked with your brother Rick. He told me you'd be running today. This is Coach Haun, the JV coach.

COACH HAUN

Nice to meet you, Dave. You handled that pressure well. Do you think you can handle some more?

DAVE

I like a challenge.

COACH HAUN

Good. We need players who can handle split-second decisions. Have you ever thought about playing quarterback?

DAVE

I usually play halfback, but I'd love to learn.

COACH SCHMIDT

We run special quarterback training sessions at 5:30 AM. Can you make that commitment?

DAVE

I'm usually up early anyway. I'll be there.

COACH SCHMIDT

Great. And we'd like to officially invite you to try out for the varsity team this summer.

DAVE

Thank you.

EXT. TRACK MEET PODIUM – DAY

DAVE and **KIM** stop for a moment, admiring the view of the pond.

DAVE walks to the podium and reaches the top tier to receive his award. After stepping down, he walks off toward the starting block area with **KIM** to retrieve his sweat suit. They pass by, looking over the pond adjacent to the field.

DAVE

Have you ever been swimming in that pond? That is so sweet!

KIM

I can't say that I have. Brad Mills lives in that area and said that it's a fun place to hang out.

DAVE and **KIM** stop briefly, panning over the pond area. They then make their way to pick up their sweats.

KIM

Do you think they'll invite me to try out?

DAVE

Anyone can try out. Sophomores are encouraged to play on the sophomore team to get some experience first. From what Rick says, they expect over 160 players to try out next year for varsity. They only take about 40 players. To get a helmet, you have to cut your hair short.

KIM

We both know that losing these curls is going to be hard. Do you know what happened to Samson when they cut his hair?

DAVE

I know. I'm not looking forward to that. But it's a small price to be part of this dynasty! I'll try to put in a good word for you.

KIM

Thanks.

DAVE and **KIM** go to celebrate with their teammates. Team points are totaled, and no school comes close to the points of **DAVE** and **KIM's** junior high team (Churchill Jr. High).

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – DAY

DAVE arrives home.

DAVE

I'm home!

DAVE'S young **SIBLINGS** run to greet him but quickly return to their favorite cartoon show. **DAVE'S MOM** is sitting in her wheelchair in the kitchen.

MOM

Did you win today? Did your team win?

DAVE

Yep, and yep!

MOM

Wonderful! Is there any way you can help me for a few minutes?

DAVE'S moment of glory takes a turn to reality. **MOM** explains what needs to be done around the house, and **DAVE** listens, slightly bummed that he can't just relax. He starts peeling some potatoes.

MOM

Could you peel me about ten potatoes?

DAVE has an 'are you kidding me' look on his face but grabs the sack of potatoes from under the sink.

MOM

I'm sorry I couldn't make it. Are you mad at me?

DAVE

I'm not mad. Gram was there. I'm sure she'll fill you in on the details.

MOM

You know how bad the sun feels on my burning skin.

DAVE

I know. You don't have to make excuses.

MOM

Was your dad there?

DAVE

You mean was Dad and Margaret there? No, they weren't. He never comes. I'm glad he doesn't. He would be a distraction.

MOM

That's not what I was asking. You have to acknowledge that she will be part of your life. She's your stepmother.

DAVE

Don't remind me. How could one of your best friends do this to you?

MOM

Let's not talk about that right now. I want to hear about your day.

DAVE

I won all my events. I had some great times. I set a new school record.

MOM

That's great, honey. Was Rick there?

DAVE

I know he knew about it. He told Coach Schmidt about it. I never saw him.

MOM

I'm sure he was busy with recruiting appointments or something like that. I can't believe he would miss it.

DAVE

Rick has changed. He doesn't talk or fool around with me as much.

MOM

It's called 'growing up'. No matter what you do, things will never be the way they once were. I have to deal with the same situation. I know it's hard.

DAVE

How does a person go from hating Dad for what he did to being so kissy-poo-poo with him and his step-wife?

MOM

Step-wife. That's funny!

DAVE

Yeah, real funny. Steps out on her marriage and yours.

MOM

Dave, it's time to move on. What's done is done.

DAVE

I know, I know. One thing that happened today was interesting.

MOM

What's that, honey?

DAVE

The football coaches from Skyline approached me at the track meet and invited me to try out for the varsity team.

MOM

That's great. Does Rick know?

DAVE

I'm sure he does. He talks to Coach Schmidt and has even talked about our family situation.

MOM

Does that bother you?

DAVE

How can it not bother me? Everyone in this community knew what was happening between Dad and Margaret before you accepted it. Your church members all knew that this was bigger than just an affair and divorce. We became 'that' family. I don't like being 'that' family.

MOM

I know, sweetheart. I didn't ask for this either.

DAVE

I know that I sound selfish. You're the one who's been affected the most by this situation. One that you didn't deserve.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – CONTINUOUS

DAVE and his **MOM** continue hugging. The scene fades out.

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH PRACTICE FIELD – DAY

The camera pans over the Skyline High School practice field, where **DAVE** and other players train without equipment for the upcoming season.

DAVE (V.O.)

My name is Dave Barton, and my story dates back to 1969. What happened that year was monumental in my life. At the time, I was 15 years old and excited to compete at a new level. Skyline had shown that it was a dominating force in high school football back then. Sophomores rarely were invited to try out and usually played on the sophomore team. I had been invited to try out for varsity. Many of my friends said I was riding on the 'coattail' of my brother Rick, a senior. He had proved to be one of the top defensive tackles in the state. I was often referred to as 'Rick Barton's younger brother'. That might have influenced the invitation, but I believe I had proven I could qualify on my own merits.

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH PRACTICE FIELD – CONTINUOUS

COACH RASMUSSEN is standing by with a whistle while **COACH HAUN** times **DAVE** running the 40-yard sprint.

COACH RASMUSSEN

On your mark... set...

COACH RASMUSSEN blows the whistle, and **DAVE** takes off down the field. **COACH HAUN** watches his stopwatch closely.

COACH HAUN

Barton... I don't think I got it right. Go do it again.

COACH HAUN turns to **VICTOR**, the team manager.

COACH HAUN

4.4 seconds. That's the fastest time so far today. I want to see if he can do it again.

DAVE walks back to the starting position, shaking out his muscles and limbering up.

COACH RASMUSSEN

On your mark... set...

COACH RASMUSSEN blows the whistle again, and **DAVE** sprints down the field. **COACH HAUN** checks the time.

COACH HAUN

4.4 again. I guess it was right the first time.

COACH HAUN walks over to **COACH SCHMIDT**.

COACH HAUN

Ken, I think we've found our punt and kickoff returner. Young Barton.

The **COACHES** watch as **DAVE** heads to the water cooler, holding a piece of ice on the tip of his tongue.

COACH SCHMIDT

He's young and might be unable to handle the pressure. He said he likes pressure, didn't he? We lost a few players to injury last year in this position. Is he durable enough?

COACH HAUN

He's 6'2" and 170 pounds. How often do you see a fifteen-year-old kid with that size and speed? His speed alone should help him. He just has to outrun everyone!

COACH SCHMIDT pauses, thinking.

COACH SCHMIDT

Barton. Young Barton.

DAVE runs over to the coaches, still icing his tongue.

COACH HAUN

What happened to your tongue?

DAVE

I accidentally bit myself, Coach.

COACH SCHMIDT

After Coach Haun and I watched your final track meet last spring, we were impressed by your wins in the sprints. Your 40-yard time reflects your ability to sprint short distances. With your speed, we can use you on special teams as a kickoff and punt returner. Are you up for that?

DAVE

Yes, sir!

COACH SCHMIDT

You'll be working with Lance and Jim. They both played on those special teams last year.

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH PRACTICE FIELD – CONTINUOUS

The camera pans over **LANCE** and **JIM** catching punts. **COACH SCHMIDT** watches.

COACH SCHMIDT

We haven't had a punt or kickoff return for a touchdown in the past three years. Let's make it happen this year.

DAVE

Yes, sir.

COACH SCHMIDT

Are you ready to focus on football? Two-a-day practices start next week.

DAVE

Yes, sir.

COACH SCHMIDT

Make good choices, and you could be a great football player. Follow our rules, and you'll succeed just like your brother has.

DAVE

Thank you, sir. I'll be ready.

COACH SCHMIDT

And Barton...

DAVE

Yes, Coach?

COACH SCHMIDT

Wear a mouthguard when you're working out. This way, you can avoid any more cuts to your tongue.

DAVE

Yes, sir.

DAVE runs back to his friends on the sideline.

DAVE

The coach wants me to return punts and kickoffs.

STEVE

Good luck with that. I returned punts in little league. You can take some brutal hits. Just thought I'd let you know.

DAVE

Thanks for the encouraging news. I'm going to give it a try.

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH PRACTICE FIELD – CONTINUED

DAVE runs over to **LANCE** and **JIM**, taking a few punts. He drops both.

COACH HAUN blows the whistle, gathering the players around. **COACH SCHMIDT** steps forward to address the team.

COACH SCHMIDT

If you want to play on this year's football team, it requires total dedication. I want you to think about football all the time. 160 players are trying out for varsity this year, but only 50 will make the team. There's no room for errors, either mentally or physically. No distractions! Focus on football. I have seen some of you hanging around with girls. I don't want my players being led around by girls with their little fingers pulling them around by their scrotums.

DAVE laughs.

COACH SCHMIDT

Barton, do you think that's funny?

DAVE

No, sir!

COACH SCHMIDT

How can you concentrate on football if you're distracted by girls? It will ultimately hurt the team. I want you to think only about football and completing your schoolwork to remain eligible to play. Let's plan on taking the state championship!

RICK (YELLING)

Who are we?

TEAM

Skyline!

RICK

Who?

TEAM

Skyline!

RICK

Who?

TEAM

Skyline!

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH PRACTICE FIELD – PARKING LOT – DAY

DAVE walks to the parking lot with **RICK** after practice.

RICK

Need a ride home?

DAVE

Thanks, I'm headed in a different direction and hanging out with friends. Did you hear I'm on special teams as a punt and kickoff returner?

RICK

I did—way to go. You'll be great.

DAVE

I'm pretty nervous about it. I'm working on catching punts. I drop a lot of them.

RICK

Keep your eye on the ball, and you'll do just fine. You've worked hard to get to this point. You deserve it.

DAVE

During two-a-days, can you pick me up in the mornings? I don't want to walk to school. I need to save as much energy as possible.

RICK

I'll drop by at 6:20. Don't make me wait.

DAVE

I'll be waiting outside. When I get my license, can I drive your car?

RICK

I'm sorry, bud, but I've been instructed not to let you drive under any circumstances. I'm sure it's because of insurance issues. Anyway, you've got a few months before you get your license.

DAVE

You know I can drive a car. I have driven Mom and the kids everywhere since the accident. I've been doing it for over two years. Come on!

FLASHBACK – EXT. STEEP HILL NEAR DAVE'S HOUSE – DAY

MOM is driving with hand controls. The engine stalls as they return from errands, and the car starts rolling backward down the hill. **MOM** tries to steer but has little control. The car heads directly toward **CHURCHILL JR. HIGH**. The curb diverts the car, which crashes into the living room of the **KANELL** family home.

MRS. KANELL

Dave, your mother's had an accident at our house. Can you come down now?

DAVE

I'll be right there.

DAVE sprints down the street and sees the car sticking out of the **KANELL**'s house. He makes his way into the house through the front door.

DAVE

You could have killed someone! You can't do this anymore.

MOM (crying)

I know.

DAVE tries to get the wheelchair from the back seat, but the doors won't open. He helps his mother out of the car and, seeing she can barely walk, he carries her up the hill on his back.

BACK TO PRESENT – EXT. SKYLINE HIGH PRACTICE FIELD – PARKING LOT – CONTINUOUS

RICK

There's a big difference between driving an Impala and a Z28.

DAVE

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know what's going on. I can't believe you moved in with Dad after what happened last year. You've forgotten about that brutal day.

FLASHBACK – INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – KITCHEN – DAY

MOM is cooking in the kitchen.

MOM

Dave, can you get me two scoops of wheat from storage? And bring up some powdered milk.

DAVE

Mom! Don't add that powdered crap to perfectly good milk.

MOM

Milk's too expensive to drink like water. You alone are drinking three gallons a week. We have to make it last.

DAVE reluctantly goes to the basement, grabs a box of powdered milk, and opens a container of wheat. He sees weevils crawling in the bucket.

DAVE

(shouting)

Mom! Weevils are crawling in the bucket!

MOM

I know, honey. Bring up the smaller container, and we'll get them out before using it.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – KITCHEN – DAY (CONTINUOUS)

DAVE reluctantly scoops the wheat and brings it upstairs to the kitchen, where **MOM** sits in her wheelchair, boiling water.

MOM

Just scoop the weevils out, honey. We'll get rid of them before using the wheat.

DAVE (reluctantly)

All right.

DAVE brings the wheat over and sets it down as there's a knock at the front door. **DAVE** answers the door. It's their mailman, **HENRY**.

DAVE

Hi Henry, thanks for bringing the mail up to the door. It really helps my mom.

HENRY

No problem, Dave. One of these letters wouldn't fit in the mailbox anyway.

MOM

Thanks, Henry. How's your wife doing with her pregnancy?

HENRY

Just two weeks to go. Everything's going perfectly. Take care, Marge.

HENRY leaves, walking down the steep steps in front of the house. **DAVE** notices their neighbor, **MRS. MILLER**, watching from her front window across the street.

DAVE

I'm glad we have someone looking out for us.

MOM

Yes, Henry's been so good to our family over the years.

DAVE

I wasn't talking about Henry. Mrs. Miller is watching from her window, as usual.

MOM

Jean's looking out for us. She knows everything about everyone in the neighborhood.

DAVE

She tells you that Dad isn't up to anything with Margaret because she doesn't want to hurt you. But you know everyone in this neighborhood knows what's going on.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – KITCHEN – DAY (CONTINUOUS)

MOM attempts to add salt to the boiling water but burns her arm on the pan. She quickly rubs her arm and flinches back.

MOM

Can you get me an ice cube from the freezer?

DAVE opens the freezer, grabs a tray of ice, and twists it to remove an ice cube. He hands it to **MOM**, who places it on her burn.

DAVE

Cracked wheat again? Can't we get some boxed cereal?

MOM ignores **DAVE**'s remark, turning her head slightly and then looking back.

MOM

Could you add about half a teaspoon of salt to the water before putting it in the cup of wheat?

DAVE (sighing)

Sure.

DAVE puts a cup of wheat into the boiling water, adds salt, and tries to skim off the remaining weevils. He shrugs and covers the pan with the lid.

DAVE

Mom, I know you're trying your best, but this marriage is just not working for you. You can't keep doing this.

MOM

I can do it. I have to.

DAVE

It's dangerous for you to cook in this kitchen. You can't even boil water without getting burned. The stove's too high for you.

MOM

What am I supposed to do? Dad's hardly ever home. He stays at Grandma and Grandpa Barton's house to save time when he's on call for a delivery. He doesn't give me enough money to live like we used to. I have to make do with what we have. I don't want to make him angry.

DAVE

It's not about trying to please him all the time. He hasn't been here for you in a long time. Why can't you accept that Dad's having an affair with Margaret? Everyone knows it.

MOM

I find it hard to believe that my good friend and sorority sister would do this to our family... especially to me.

DAVE

Come on, Mom. The whole community knows. They're all talking about it. We've become "that family."

MOM tries to maintain composure but keeps looking away.

MOM

We'll know more when we get the detective's report. I'm sure it'll prove that nothing is going on.

DAVE

How long did they follow Dad?

MOM

Gram Peterson gave me the money to hire the detective agency, but it was only enough for two weeks.

DAVE

Well, I think some answers might lie in this envelope.

DAVE hands **MOM** the large envelope from the private investigator. She looks at it, hesitant.

MOM

I'll read it later.

DAVE

No, Mom! You're going to read it now. Do you want me to read it to you?

MOM hesitates, then nods slightly.

DAVE

Okay, let's see what it says.

DAVE opens the envelope and begins reading the report out loud.

MOM tries to maintain composure but keeps looking away.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – KITCHEN – CONTINUOUS

DAVE begins reading the report aloud.

DAVE

"The subject's car left the home on Diana Way at approximately 8:30 p.m. Checked back at Margaret's residence between 8:40 p.m. and 9:15 p.m. with negative results."

MOM

See, this report will probably conclude that Dad isn't doing anything wrong. I told you.

DAVE

I've barely started reading the report, Mom. Are you going to assume everything's fine without finishing it? Please, just let me read.

DAVE continues skimming through the report. Play scenes of the **PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR** following **DAVE'S FATHER**. The scene fades in on **DAVE'S FATHER** kissing **MARGARET** as the investigator watches.

FLASHBACK – EXT. MARGARET'S HOUSE – NIGHT

The private investigator observes **DAVE'S FATHER** and **MARGARET** engaging in an intimate moment. **MARGARET** removes her top, and the scene fades back to the present.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – KITCHEN – CONTINUOUS

DAVE

It looks like they caught him in the act.

DAVE'S MOM reads the detailed account of the betrayal. She covers her eyes and begins to cry.

DAVE

I'm so sorry.

MOM wipes away her tears and composes herself.

MOM

I'm so sorry you had to read this and realize the truth.

MOM

I have to talk to your dad.

DAVE

Do you think you can change his ways?

MOM

I have to try. Maybe I can talk to Tommy. Dick might listen to him.

DAVE

Tommy and Dad have been friends forever. Just because Tommy's a church leader doesn't mean he'll intervene. He'll probably stay loyal to Dad.

MOM

A man of God will do the right thing. I'm sure of it. He'll help your dad change his ways.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – CONTINUOUS – Rick enters the front door.

RICK

What's going on?

DAVE hands the report to **RICK**, pointing to the section that proves the affair.

DAVE

Here, read this paragraph.

RICK reads the report. **DAVE** stirs the cracked wheat in the pan, skimming off any remaining weevil remnants.

RICK

That son of a bitch!

RICK throws the report down and storms out, heading to his room in the basement.

DAVE

Rick has such a bad temper. What do you think he'll do?

MOM

Rick and your father both have anger issues. I hope he doesn't do anything stupid.

RICK exits through the basement door and speeds off in his **VOLKSWAGEN SQUAREBACK**, tires screeching.

INT. MARGARET'S HOUSE - Rick arrives at **MARGARET'S HOUSE** and barges inside. **MARGARET'S TWO DAUGHTERS** are watching TV.

RICK

Where's your mom?

MARGARET'S OLDER DAUGHTER

She's not here.

The **YOUNGER DAUGHTER** points upstairs.

RICK

Is my father here?

MARGARET'S OLDER DAUGHTER

No!

The **YOUNGER DAUGHTER** points upstairs again. **RICK** bolts up the stairs and checks the master bedroom and the other bedrooms. He sees a closed door to the den and tries to open it, but it's locked. **RICK** kicks in the door and finds **DAVE'S FATHER** and **MARGARET** in a compromising position.

RICK (pointing to Margaret)

How could you do this to my mom? Your friend? Dad, what are you thinking?

EXT. MARGARET'S HOUSE – CONTINUOUS

RICK, in distress, runs out of the house, sobbing. He pounds on the steering wheel as he drives recklessly back home. He enters the house through the basement and slams the door.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – BASEMENT - DAVE hears him and goes to his room, finding **RICK** visibly upset.

DAVE

What happened?

RICK

The report's true.

DAVE

Tell me what happened.

RICK

I went to Margaret's. They were being nasty.

EXT. DAVE'S HOUSE – DRIVEWAY – CONTINUOUS

DAVE and **RICK** hear a car screech into the driveway. Looking through the storm door, they see their father approaching the house.

DAVE

What are we going to do?

RICK

Stay back. I'll handle this.

DAVE'S FATHER enters the basement and stands in front of **RICK**.

DAD

Let me explain.

RICK

What you're doing is pretty obvious. You're disgusting. You can't even be discrete. You're doing this

in front of Margaret's children, and they seem to condone it. We've taken vacations with them. I thought they were friends. If you don't want to be married, get a divorce. Don't tiptoe around and make Mom think things are okay.

DAD

It's complicated. Just let me explain!

RICK lunges at **DAD** and pushes him back.

RICK

You don't deserve to be here. Get the hell out!

DAD

This is still my house. You'll listen to what I have to say.

RICK

Nothing you say will excuse what a 'dick' you are. I guess you're just living up to your name! Get out!

RICK pushes **DAD** again, and they get into a brawl. After about 30 seconds, **RICK** lands a punch on **DAD's** jaw, knocking him unconscious. **RICK** sobs, holding his sore hand, and storms out of the house.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – STAIRWELL – CONTINUOUS

MOM hears the commotion and yells down the stairs.

MOM

What's going on?

DAVE

Dad and Rick just got into a fight. Dad's lying on the floor. He isn't moving!

MOM

Is he all right?

DAVE

I don't know.

MOM

You have to check and see if he's all right!

DAVE

I'm afraid of him. I don't know what he'll do.

MOM

I'm coming downstairs.

MOM tries maneuvering herself into the stair glide, but **DAVE** stops her.

DAVE

I'll check on him. Stay right here!

DAVE runs back down the stairs and into the basement. He sees his **DAD** lying there, still unconscious. He goes over to him and feels under his nose to see if he is breathing. Just as he puts his finger out, his **DAD** begins to regain consciousness. **DAVE**, unsure of what to do, runs into the furnace room and hides behind the water heater. **DAD** slowly gets up and leaves. **DAVE** can't hear anything and doesn't know his **DAD** is gone for sure, so he remains in the furnace room.

MOM (yelling)
Are you here?

DAVE hears his **MOM** and makes his way out of the furnace room to the bottom of the stairs, looking at where his dad is lying.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – HALLWAY – CONTINUOUS

DAVE
It looks like Dad left.

MOM
What happened?

DAVE
Rick and Dad got into a fight, and Rick left, not knowing how badly he had hurt him. I think Rick must be really upset and scared.

MOM
Rick has a temper. He needs time to get ahold of his emotions. I think I know where he's going.

DAVE
Gram's house?

MOM
Yes. I'll call and let her know if he shows up to tell him Dad left on his own.

DAVE (concerned)
What are we going to do now?

MOM
I don't know. God will provide a way for us to get through this.

DAVE
I don't think God will do anything. You can't just wait for God. You have to do something.

MOM
I'm going to call Tommy. He'll know what to do.

MOM makes her way up the stairs. She has the personal telephone number of **TOMMY**, one of the church leaders to whom their family belongs. She calls him. **DAVE** sees her talking on the phone and heads into the kitchen. **DAVE** looks at the pan with the cracked wheat in it. He opens the lid to see a cold batch of cracked wheat. He puts a spoon in it and tastes it, immediately spitting it out.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – KITCHEN – CONTINUOUS

DAVE walks over to the fridge, opens the door, and grabs a milk bottle. He pours out the last of the contents, only filling the glass about a quarter of the way. **DAVE** downs it in one gulp. He then grabs a potato from under the sink, scrapes off the sprouts, and eats it like an apple.

MOM wheels into the kitchen.

DAVE

So, did you get ahold of him?

MOM avoids the conversation by going over to the stove to look at the pan of cracked wheat. She takes a spoon, dishes a bowl, and adds some brown sugar.

DAVE

Mom! Did you get ahold of him?

MOM

You know Tommy is very busy calling the church.

DAVE

Mom, you were talking to him. What did he say?

MOM struggles to find words. She hesitates. **DAVE** can tell she doesn't want to answer. Finally, she sees that **DAVE** is concerned and upset.

DAVE

Tommy was the best man at your wedding. He will help, won't he? Won't he?

MOM tears up, a tear running down her cheek.

MOM

He told me he didn't want to get involved.

DAVE

What! A man of God, and he doesn't want to get involved? He believes in the Ten Commandments, doesn't he? If I remember correctly, doesn't it say "Thou shalt not commit adultery?" Doesn't it? Doesn't it? Why won't he intervene?

MOM

I don't understand it either. I'm so disappointed. Maybe I'll call Margaret's father. He's a church leader, too. I know him well. He might help, and he might have some influence in resolving this situation.

DAVE

I don't think he'll do anything. Your church is a farce. I'll never be part of it. I don't believe any of it.

MOM

You really can't mean that?

DAVE

I'm done with it. What are we supposed to do now? We have seven kids in this house. Becky is only one year old. We don't even have edible food most of the time. I'm working out every day to build up

my body so I can play football. I can't bum any more food off my friends and their families. It makes me feel uncomfortable. Mom! What are we going to do?

DAVE walks downstairs, disgusted.

SCENE: SHOW DAVE'S MOM MAKING SEVERAL ATTEMPTS OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS TO TALK WITH DAVE'S DAD.

DAVE

Mom, have you made contact with Dad?

MOM

He's avoiding my calls. I think he knows he's in trouble.

DAVE looks out the window and sees his **FATHER** pull up in the driveway. **DAD** makes his way into the house.

DAD

I came to get a few things.

MOM lets him in the front door.

MOM

When were you going to tell me? Did you think you could live this double life?

DAD

I want to get my things and get the hell out of here.

DAVE'S MOM watches as **DAD** gets things out of the closet, grabs some personal items, and walks out the front door.

DAVE

So, are you convinced that things are over with you and Dad?

DAVE'S MOTHER wheels herself into her bedroom. **DAVE** shakes his head in disgust.

NEW SCENE: SIX MONTHS AFTER DAVE'S PARENTS' DIVORCE. HIS DAD REMARRIES THE DAY AFTER IT BECOMES FINAL. DAVE CONFRONTS HIS MOM ABOUT HOW SHE FEELS BEING SINGLE.

DAVE

Well, seems like Dad couldn't wait long to get married after the divorce was final. How long was it? Twelve hours? So, how do you feel now?

MOM

Still a little numb. I'm not talking about my body parts, either. The worst part was living with someone who you thought you knew. That was the hardest time.

DAVE

So, where do you go from here?

MOM

With God's help, hopefully, forward. No one is going to fall in love with me.

DAVE

Never say never.

DAVE'S MOM looks at **DAVE** and smiles.

INT. RICK'S ROOM – DAY

RICK is in his room, packing up his clothes. **DAVE** enters through the basement door and sees him.

DAVE

Who's new car is in the driveway?

RICK

Dad's.

DAVE

Why are you driving it?

RICK

He said I could.

DAVE

Why is that?

RICK

I sold my Volkswagen. It was having issues. Dad told me he'd provide me transportation if I moved in with him.

DAVE

You're moving in with him and that home wrecker?

RICK

I am.

DAVE

That car outside is a brand-new Camaro Z28! Is that what Dad's driving now? I know he has to get to the hospital quickly for deliveries, but this is not the kind of car Dad drives. You've had a picture of this model car hanging on your bedroom wall for years. It's your favorite car, not Dad's. You're moving out to live with him and his new wife and family and conveniently have a muscle car you've been dreaming about for years? Dad and Margaret got married the day the divorce was final. What kind of jerk does something like that?

RICK

You don't understand!

DAVE

I understand perfectly. You got bought! I can't believe that you would abandon this family.

RICK

You will always be my best buddy. We know everything about each other. We even have a special handshake. We used to touch tongues. You're not going to let this ruin what we have as brothers, are you? I'm so busy with athletics. I'm trying to get a scholarship in football. I have to stay focused.

DAVE

You can't leave me here with a mom who can't walk and five younger brothers and sisters. I have dreams too—to play football for Skyline and someday get a scholarship too. You can't do this.

RICK

It's already decided. I had a long talk with Dad. He and I came to an agreement. He has feelings too. You don't understand him. It was a tough decision for him to leave Mom.

DAVE

I know he has feelings. He's always felt like things needed to be perfect. Sometimes things don't go as planned, and you have to step up and do the best you can. He bugged out! He deserted us as a family, and now you're part of a new family? Good riddance. You don't deserve to live here.

DAVE walks away in disgust.

RICK

You'll never understand!

EXT. HOUSE – DAY

RICK walks upstairs to tell **MOM** that he's leaving. She's visibly upset. They talk briefly before **RICK** drives off in the **CAMARO Z28**.

SCENE FADES BACK TO THE SCHOOL PARKING LOT WHERE DAVE AND RICK ARE TALKING.

DAVE

Is there a way to borrow a few steaks from your freezer?

RICK

Drop by tomorrow at noon. Dad and Margaret will be gone then. Tell Mom hi.

DAVE

I will. See you tomorrow.

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL – POND – DAY

DAVE walks with his friends, carrying football cleats and a gym bag with a few footballs for practice. They walk past the pond adjacent to Skyline High School. **DAVE** sees **SERENE** practicing her cheerleading routines on her family's property. It used to be a farm, but it is now leased to a friend who farms it.

Kim

You know what Coach says about girlfriends.

Dave

I know, I know!

KIM

I know you like Serene. You've only known her for a few weeks, and it looks like she likes you too. Be careful. You don't want to blow your chances of playing varsity this year. Brad's sister said she and her sisters have a bad reputation.

DAVE

Well, I don't believe that. I'm not going to judge her based on hearsay from a jealous so-called friend. Don't worry. I'll tell her we can't hang out for a while.

KIM

Wise choice!

DAVE

You guys go on to Lumpy's Burgers. I'm going to talk to her.

DAVE splits from his friends and heads over to where **SERENE** is practicing. He sneaks up behind a haystack she's using as a landing area. Just as she completes her final handspring, **DAVE** appears and spots her like a gymnastics coach but grabs her, and they fall into the hay.

SERENE tries to kiss **DAVE**, but he pulls away.

DAVE

I love your family's property. You've got your pond and a great place to work out. How many people can say that?

SERENE

Yeah, that's one of the reasons my dad wanted this property. The pond is peaceful and serene. That's how my parents came up with my name. They used to hang out here together all the time. I'm at the treehouse almost every day.

DAVE and **SERENE** walk to the base of the treehouse.

SERENE

So, what's up?

DAVE

I just finished summer training at school. It's pretty much set that I'll be returning punts and kickoffs. That's what I've been practicing for these past few weeks. I finally have my chance to prove myself, but I'm worried because I still mishandle the ball sometimes. I know I can catch it, but I get distracted easily. I'm glad we've been practicing with the football launcher.

SERENE

That's good news! Practice makes perfect. (looking at a launching mechanism)

DAVE

Where did you come up with the launcher idea?

SERENE

When you live in a place like this, you get creative. We used the launcher to catapult water balloons at people on the pond who weren't supposed to be there.

FLASHBACK – EXT. POND – DAY

A young couple sneaks a canoe onto the pond without permission. The young man kisses his girlfriend. **SERENE** loads a water balloon into her launcher and scores a direct hit on the canoe. The young man stands up to see who did it, and the couple loses their balance, falling into the water.

EXT. SERENE'S FAMILY PROPERTY – DAY (CONTINUOUS)

SERENE

I've practiced launching for a while. I'm pretty accurate!

DAVE

This is so cool! (looking around the property)

SERENE

I love this place. It's special. Especially the treehouse. My dad built it for me when I was eight. He named it "Serene Place." That is why I come here almost every day. It's my safe place. I think he knew I needed an escape from everything going on at home.

DAVE

What was going on?

SERENE

My mom and dad fought a lot. It drove my dad to drink. When he was home, he was drunk most of the time. It just made things worse. They finally got divorced when I was ten.

DAVE

I know a little about what you went through. My parents divorced last summer. Do you miss not living with your dad?

SERENE

I do, and I don't. I know he loves me, but our house is better without him. My mom and sisters are more at ease.

DAVE

I know exactly how you feel. We have so much in common. It's nice to know someone who can relate. I'm here for you whenever you need me.

SERENE

I'll be there for you too. Thanks for making me feel so good when you're around. I'm glad you were bold that first day.

DAVE

You know, my tongue is still healing. During practice, it starts bleeding if I aggravate it. Coach thinks I hurt it working out.

SERENE

I'm so sorry. I guess I wanted to make a point. You came by my house with some friends, ditched them, and then came back to try to kiss me after only knowing me for a few minutes. What was I supposed to do?

FLASHBACK – EXT. LUMPY’S BURGERS – DAY

DAVE walks with his new friends to **LUMPY’S**, a popular burger joint and teen hangout.

BRAD

Hey, after we eat, let’s take a swim in the pond. I’m sure Serene’s family won’t mind. They’ve got a killer rope swing.

DAVE

Who’s Serene?

BRAD

She’s a friend of my sister Joanie. I’ve known her since she was five.

DAVE

That sounds like fun. Can we get permission?

BRAD

Why not.

EXT. SERENE’S HOUSE – FRONT LAWN – DAY

The group stays on the front lawn while **BRAD** knocks at the door. **SERENE’S MOM** answers.

SERENE’S MOM

You know it’s proper to greet the woman of the house with a kiss?

BRAD

Why of course, Mrs. Steele.

BRAD leans in for a kiss on the cheek, but she turns her head, causing him to kiss her on the lips.

SERENE steps in quickly.

SERENE

Mom, I’ll handle it from here. Thanks.

DAVE sees **SERENE** for the first time, and seems awestruck, gazing at her in a trance-like state.

BRAD

We just finished our workout and wondered if we could take a quick dip in the pond to cool down.

SERENE

Sure. Thanks for asking. We have to chase off strangers all the time.

The group starts running toward the pond, except for **DAVE** and **BRAD**. **DAVE** hesitates, still staring at **SERENE**. They make eye contact for the first time and just stare for a moment.

SERENE

Could you tell the guys not to climb the treehouse rails? One is loose, and one is missing. I don’t want to be responsible for anyone getting hurt doing extracurriculars, ya know what I mean? I put a lock on the door because someone sprayed graffiti inside. I’m so pissed!

DAVE

Who would do something to such a cool treehouse? If you ever see who's messing around, just let me know. I'll take care of them!

SERENE

Thanks. Now, who are you?

BRAD

This is Dave. He and some of my friends are trying out for the varsity football team. He went to Churchill Junior High, so you probably haven't seen him before.

SERENE

Nice to meet you... um...

SERENE seems a little struck by the encounter, at a loss for words.

SERENE

So, Brad, what's Joanie up to today? Is she in town? I was hoping we could practice cheer routines.

BRAD starts heading toward the pond. **DAVE** follows, looking back at **SERENE** a few times.

BRAD

She's at our aunt's house for a few days but will be back early next week. Thanks again for letting us use the pond.

BRAD and **DAVE** run down to the pond to join the others. As they near the pond, they shed their shirts and shoes and run full speed into the water. **DAVE** gets distracted, looking back at **SERENE**, who's practicing cheer routines near her house.

EXT. POND – DAY

KIM

Do you think we could get into the treehouse to use the rope swing?

BRAD

Better not. Serene seemed mad at someone for messing with her treehouse. Let's do it some other time. Come on, let's hustle over to Lumpy's and grab some grub.

The group puts their clothes back on and starts walking down the lane. **DAVE** tells **BRAD** he's going to head home instead, but he has no intention of going home. He just wants an excuse to go back to **SERENE**.

DAVE

I think I'm going to pass on Lumpy's. I don't have any money, and I'm sure my mom has lunch waiting for me.

BRAD

I'll buy you a burger.

DAVE

Thanks, but I should head home.

BRAD

Okay, see you later.

EXT. SERENE'S YARD – DAY

BRAD runs to catch up with the group that is already on their way. **DAVE** makes his way back toward **SERENE'S** yard, where she is practicing doing flips.

DAVE

I saw you practicing. You're amazing with your cheer routines.

SERENE

Thanks.

SERENE is stretching, trying to look busy as if she's not amused by **DAVE**. She wipes off sweat with a small towel.

SERENE

I thought you were going to Lumpy's with your friends.

DAVE

I changed my mind. I think I'll head home.

SERENE

Where do you live?

DAVE

The Cove area on Mount Olympus.

SERENE

For school, I did a report on the ancient gods of Mount Olympus. What god are you, ha-ha?

DAVE

Zeus, to be exact.

SERENE

Are you serious?

DAVE

What can I say!

SERENE

Zeus rules as king of the gods. Is that what you think?

DAVE

If I were a god, that's who I'd be.

SERENE

Well, you seem to have a lot of...

DAVE

A lot of what?

SERENE

Confidence (hesitantly).

DAVE

I think I can 'walk my talk.'

SERENE just shakes her head and laughs.

SERENE

You live in the Cove? Isn't that where all the rich people live? I'm surprised you're not driving a car.

DAVE

I do drive a car, but I don't have a license yet. And we don't live in one of those mansions, and we're definitely not rich.

SERENE

You drive a car?

DAVE

It's a long story. So, you made the cheer squad?

SERENE

Yeah.

DAVE

So, you'll be in the ninth grade?

SERENE

Yeah.

DAVE

I bet you're going to be the best ninth-grade cheerleader Wasatch Jr. has ever seen.

SERENE

Why do you say that?

DAVE

Most people just practice at school. You're practicing at home. That's what it takes to be the best. That's cool. I practice at home too.

SERENE

How can you practice at home for football?

DAVE

I lift weights and practice ball-handling skills. I throw the football to whoever wants to catch passes.

SERENE

Do you have equipment?

DAVE

I have footballs to throw. When it comes to lifting weights, I improvise.

SERENE

How's that?

DAVE describes how he lifts weights with paint cans and wheat buckets, using his brothers and sisters for exercises: pull-ups with siblings sitting on his foot, push-ups with someone on his back, and balancing kids while lifting.

DAVE

For weights, I use whatever I can hold onto. Paint buckets and pails of wheat work well. My brothers and sisters love to help me. They think we're playing games, but I use them as exercise tools.

SERENE

Sounds like you love them. You have a big family?

DAVE

Yep. There are nine of us kids. When Becky was born, we had enough players to be a football team!

SERENE

Is that how you relate to everything? Is it all about football?

DAVE

I don't just think about football. I don't have that option. I'm the oldest at home and have to make sure things are done. My mom depends on me. I wish I could concentrate on football more. I want to play for Skyline. I've dreamed about it since I was nine.

SERENE

Well, I don't care much for football. I think the players all think they're gods. You should try out for cheerleader.

DAVE

Cheerleader? I never thought about that. I think I could do that.

SERENE

Okay, I want to see it.

EXT. SERENE'S BACKYARD – HAY PILE – DAY

SERENE takes **DAVE** behind her house to a pile of hay.

SERENE

This is where I practice. I like to land in the hay when I try something new. Show me what you can do.

DAVE

I don't think I should. It might make you jealous. I'm not going to do it. You go ahead.

SERENE

I knew you were just talking big. 'Walk your talk,' huh? Just like all those other football players who can't 'walk their talk.'

SERENE makes her way over to the haystack. She runs and lands a perfect handspring.

DAVE

That was awesome. Why don't you add another handspring and a flip at the end?

SERENE

I want to, but I'm scared to do that yet. I've tried it at the gym at school, but I always have a spotter to help me if I mess up.

DAVE

Do you mind if I 'walk my talk'?

SERENE

Go for it!

DAVE runs at the haystack and performs three handsprings, ending with a flip and a full twist.

SERENE

I can't believe you just did that. Can you teach me?

DAVE

Of course, I can. I can do anything!

SERENE

There you go again, Zeus!

DAVE

I know I might come off as a little overconfident. My Gram always ingrained in me that if I worked hard enough and long enough, I could do anything. It's been in my nature since I can remember.

SERENE

I think I like your Gram. She reminds me of my Nana.

DAVE

Isn't it great to have a grandparent who believes in you? We're lucky. My mom's always supported me, but my dad is another story.

SERENE

Do you and your dad get along?

DAVE

I never really talk to him anymore. He let me know early on that I talked too much and to keep my distance.

SERENE

That's sad. Why would he be so mean?

DAVE

I spent my first three years at an Air Force base in Morocco, Africa.

EXT. MOROCCO – DAY (FLASHBACK)

DAVE narrates his story as we see a scene of him as a child, riding on the back of a **FATIMA** (a young Moroccan maid).

DAVE (V.O.)

As a child, I spent many hours on the backs of young Moroccan maids. My parents couldn't believe how cheaply they worked, so they helped my mom a lot, especially with my older siblings.

EXT. SERENE'S YARD – DAY (PRESENT)

SERENE

Do you remember that at all?

DAVE

Not really. It was the time I was supposed to learn to talk, but I didn't know what language to learn. The maids spoke French and Arabic, so I was picking up more Arabic than English. When we came back to the U.S., I couldn't communicate well in English.

SERENE

You couldn't speak at three years old? That's really weird.

DAVE

It took me a while, but I eventually learned to talk. My dad used to make fun of me, though. He'd embarrass me in front of his friends by saying, "Dave finally learned to talk and hasn't stopped since." I hated that.

SERENE

Sounds like you were pretty sensitive about it.

DAVE

Yeah, it made me feel bad. To make things worse, I couldn't pronounce the letter "R." It came out as a "W." My best friend was Richard, but I called him "Whichowed."

SERENE

You talked like Elmer Fudd! "You pesky wabbit!"

DAVE

Funny, funny.

SERENE

That still bothers you, doesn't it?

DAVE

I'm over it now, but it was a real challenge. Because I talked funny, my dad would tell me to "shut my yap." I think he thought I was stupid because I talked differently. There were times I'd find a spot and just cry.

SERENE

That's so sad.

SERENE holds **DAVE'S** hand, facing him.

SERENE

I swear, I'll never make fun of that again.

DAVE

Now you're feeling sorry for me. I don't want that. I finally learned to talk correctly.

SERENE

And when did that happen? (sheepishly asking)

DAVE

Fifth grade!

SERENE

You talked like Elmer Fudd until the fifth grade?

DAVE

There you go again!

SERENE

I'm sorry, I couldn't help it. Most kids grow out of that way earlier. How did you learn to speak correctly?

DAVE

My mom was concerned and sought help. My school provided speech therapy. I was in a class with twins, Carla and Carlene, who couldn't even pronounce their own names.

SERENE

Now that would be embarrassing.

DAVE (jokingly)

Hi, my name is Cawla. Meet my twin sister Cawlene. (Serene bursts out laughing)

SERENE

I'm so sorry! That's just funny.

DAVE

Okay, smartie pants. Try saying this: "I bought a pair of ruby red shoes on Redwood Road."

SERENE

I bought a pair of ruby red shoes on Wedwood Woad. (Serene covers her mouth in astonishment)

DAVE

See? You've got a little "Elmer Fudd" in you!

DAVE and **SERENE** laugh as they start walking, still holding hands.

DAVE

I've known you for such a short time, but it feels like you're one of my best friends. I don't usually open up like this to strangers.

SERENE

So, you think I'm strange?

DAVE

I didn't mean it like that. It's just that I don't usually share my deepest feelings, even with my best friends.

DAVE and **SERENE** stop, facing each other. **DAVE** takes her other hand.

DAVE

I know you're going into ninth grade this year. How old are you?

SERENE

I turned 14 in December.

DAVE

I just turned 15 in December. We're only a year apart. We can't be that different, right? We have a lot in common. Can I see you again?

SERENE

I'd like that.

DAVE and **SERENE** look at each other admirably for a few moments. **DAVE** leans in and kisses **SERENE**. He gets bold and tries to add a little tongue. **SERENE** latches onto **DAVE'S** tongue and doesn't let go.

DAVE (struggling to talk)

What are you doing?

SERENE

You kiss me, and I've only known you for less than an hour?

DAVE

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Let go!

SERENE

So you think I'm that type of girl?

DAVE

No! No!

SERENE finally releases her grip on **DAVE'S** tongue. **DAVE** checks his finger and notices blood.

SERENE

See what you get when you're fresh and out of line?

DAVE

I'm sorry. It won't happen again.

SERENE puts her arms around **DAVE** and kisses him.

SERENE

Well, it just did!

SERENE hugs **DAVE**, and he lifts her, spinning her in circles. He lets go, and she lands on her feet, then runs back to where she was practicing.

DAVE

Can I see your cheer routine?

SERENE runs toward the haystack, doing handsprings. She starts a cheerleading chant.

SERENE

Ready... Lean, lean, lean to the left, lean to the right, stand up, sit down, fight, fight, fight!

SERENE turns around and continues the chant.

SERENE

Lean, lean, lean to the left, lean to the right, stand up, sit down, fight, fight, fight!

DAVE joins in, pretending to box as she says "fight, fight, fight."

SERENE

Lean, lean, lean to the left, lean to the right, stand up, sit down, fight, fight, fight!

SERENE throws a playful punch and hits **DAVE** square in the jaw, surprising him. She has an "oops" look on her face and runs behind the haystacks.

EXT. SERENE'S YARD – HAYSTACKS – DAY

DAVE

You bite my tongue, you punch me in the face, and then just take off?

The sound of **SERENE'S** footsteps fades. After about 15 seconds of silence, **DAVE** hears her yell:

SERENE

Fire in the hole!

DAVE looks around, confused. Suddenly, a softball shoots into the air. **DAVE** positions himself and catches the ball.

DAVE

What the heck?

SERENE

You're a football player, aren't you? Prove it.

DAVE

I have a few footballs in my gym bag. Do you think your launcher could handle them? I'm hoping to return punts and kickoffs this year at Skyline. I need practice.

SERENE

Sure.

DAVE runs over to his gym bag and brings back two footballs. **SERENE** already has several footballs near her launcher.

DAVE

Where did you get these footballs?

SERENE

They're from games where the ball ended up in our yard. The school never seems to come and get them.

DAVE

These are awesome! Regulation and everything!

SERENE loads up the first football then stretches the launcher, and the ball soars through the air.

DAVE lines up to catch it but misses.

SERENE

Hey, pretty boy, if you're going to be returning punts this year, you'd better think of a way to catch the ball!

DAVE gets serious and puts on his cleats. **SERENE** prepares to load more footballs into the launcher. **DAVE** misses the first two balls. He kicks the ground, visibly frustrated.

SERENE walks over to **DAVE** with a bushel basket that had been holding some softballs near the launcher.

DAVE

I know Coach wants me to return punts. I told him I'd try, but he said Skyline High hasn't returned a punt for a touchdown in over three years. He thinks with my speed and our awesome team, there's no way we can't return one this year. The problem is... I can't even catch the flipping ball! I've never returned punts before, not with thousands of people watching. It's scary. You take your eyes off the field, looking up at the ball, not knowing if a mass of bodies is racing toward you, ready to crush you. I don't know if I can handle the pressure, even if I catch the ball. And the hits... they could be dangerous!

SERENE throws the bushel basket to **DAVE**.

SERENE

Quit feeling sorry for yourself. Try this!

DAVE

What am I supposed to do with this?

SERENE

Just try it. You'll see!

SERENE launches two more footballs. **DAVE** catches them with the bushel basket. He then mimics the basket with his arms.

DAVE

Now all I have to do is figure out how to carry this onto the field.

SERENE

Make your arms into a basket by putting your elbows together.

In the next series of launches, **DAVE** successfully catches the footballs. **SERENE** runs over to him, giving him a fist bump.

SERENE

See? You can do this. Practice makes perfect!

DAVE

You're amazing! Thank you for helping me with catching punts. I'm so much better now. Thank you, thank you! (bowing)

DAVE tries to hug **SERENE**, but she pushes him back.

SERENE

Keep your distance. You're sweaty. You stink!

DAVE

Sorry.

SERENE sees **DAVE'S** expression of apology and feels bad for being rude. She places her hands on either side of **DAVE'S** face.

SERENE

The last one in is a rotten egg!

SERENE takes off running toward the pond. **DAVE** chases after her but, just as **SERENE** reaches the shore, she stops abruptly. **DAVE**, running at full speed, can't stop in time and ends up in the pond.

DAVE looks back at **SERENE** and starts laughing. He begins washing his armpits, pretending to bathe.

DAVE gets out of the pond and walks toward **SERENE**.

SERENE

Now that you've taken a bath...

SERENE quickly runs toward the treehouse. She climbs up the steps nailed to the tree. Just as **SERENE** enters the treehouse, **DAVE** catches up. **SERENE** jumps up and wraps her legs around **DAVE'S** waist, giving him an intimate hug. They rub their noses and exchange butterfly kisses.

DAVE looks around the inside of the treehouse.

DAVE

So, this is the place you hang out?

SERENE

Yep!

DAVE

Very interesting.

DAVE notices a locked closet.

DAVE

A locked closet?

SERENE

That's where I keep some of my treasures... and some dry clothes.

DAVE

Treasures?

SERENE

Want to see?

DAVE

You've got me curious.

SERENE opens the combination lock and reveals towels, clothes, and some of her treasures, including an old guitar.

DAVE

Very interesting. You've got an old guitar?

SERENE

It was my grandfather's. My Nana gave it to me after he passed.

DAVE takes out the guitar, tunes it, strums a chord, and then puts it back in the closet.

DAVE

Do you play?

SERENE

A little. Not much. I want to learn.

DAVE

I can teach you. At least get you started.

SERENE

You teach me to tumble, now you can teach me the guitar?

DAVE

It's hard to be humble when...

SERENE

Don't say another word! I'm guessing Zeus comes to mind again. You are something else. Is there anything you can't do?

DAVE

Remember, my Gram always said I could do anything if I worked hard enough for it.

SERENE

Well, she might have created a false sense of what life is really like.

DAVE

For now, it's working. I don't dare change my mindset.

SERENE shakes her head in disbelief. **DAVE** grabs a towel from the closet.

SERENE

I keep plenty of towels, so after my friends swim in the pond, we can dry off.

DAVE

Do you swim often?

SERENE

Whenever I can, it gets so hot here in the summer.

SERENE opens a back door, revealing a platform.

SERENE

This is the rope swing. It's a quick way to get into the pond, and I practice some of my cheerleading flips on it.

DAVE

How's that?

SERENE

I do flips and stuff off of it.

DAVE

Cool! I want to try it sometime, but I should go first. My mom probably has a long list of things to do.

SERENE

I'll walk you to the street.

SERENE grabs a pen and writes her phone number on **DAVE'S** hand.

SERENE

Here's my number.

DAVE

Thanks. I was just about to ask you for it.

SERENE

Oh, sure you were.

DAVE

Absolutely! I've only known you a short time, but it feels like I've known you all my life. You and I... are we a thing?

SERENE

Yep. We're a thing!

DAVE and **SERENE** climb out of the treehouse. **SERENE** holds **DAVE'S** hand as they walk to the street.

DAVE

I'm glad I came back today.

SERENE

I'm glad you did. See you again?

DAVE

You can count on it.

EXT. SERENE'S YARD – DAY

SERENE and **DAVE** hug as they part ways.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – NIGHT

DAVE rushes inside and immediately picks up the phone. He dials **SERENE'S** number. The phone rings, and **SERENE'S SISTER, STEPHANIE**, answers.

DAVE

Is Serene there?

STEPHANIE

Who's calling?

SERENE playfully smacks **STEPHANIE**, knowing it's probably **DAVE** on the line.

DAVE

Tell her it's Dave.

STEPHANIE

I'm sorry, she's not allowed to talk to boys on the phone.

SERENE grabs the phone from **STEPHANIE** as they laugh.

SERENE

Hi! My sister's being a pest. What's up?

DAVE

Just checking to make sure you didn't give me a bogus phone number.

SERENE

Why would I do that?

DAVE

I just wanted to make sure you knew how much I enjoyed today. I have to go now, but can I see you tomorrow?

SERENE

Sure. Why not? I'm sleeping in, but you can come over around 1?

DAVE

Looking forward to it. See ya.

SERENE

See you tomorrow.

SERENE hangs up the phone, and **STEPHANIE** starts teasing.

STEPHANIE

Serene's got a boyfriend! Serene's got a boyfriend!

SERENE starts chasing **STEPHANIE** around the house as they laugh. The scene fades out.

INT. TREEHOUSE – NEXT DAY

DAVE and **SERENE** are lying on their backs, staring up at the ceiling of the treehouse. **DAVE** hears **COACH SCHMIDT'S** voice echoing in his mind:

COACH SCHMIDT (V.O.)

If you want to play on this year's football team, it requires total dedication. I want you to think about football.

DAVE looks troubled. He knows he needs to talk to **SERENE** about keeping their relationship under wraps during football season. He starts bouncing a tennis ball on the ceiling, catching it over and over.

SERENE

Stop doing that. It's annoying.

DAVE

This is what I do to improve my hand-eye coordination.

SERENE

I don't care. It's driving me crazy.

DAVE continues bouncing the ball off the rafters. **SERENE** intercepts the ball and tosses it out the window. **DAVE** looks amused and laughs, but then his expression turns serious.

DAVE

Serene, you know I... really, really like you?

SERENE

I kind of like you too.

SERENE playfully straddles **DAVE** and starts to remove her sweatshirt. **DAVE**, a little confused, hesitates.

DAVE

Do you know what you're doing?

SERENE

I sure do!

SERENE stands up, removes her sweatpants and shoes, and stands there in shorts and a swimsuit top. Before **DAVE** can react, **SERENE** bolts for the platform leading to the rope swing that extends over the pond.

DAVE follows, tossing off his muscle shirt and shoes. A series of rope swing stunts ensue, leading to playful competition. After some time, they end up back in the treehouse, drying off.

SERENE

That was so much fun!

DAVE

It was fun in the tenth degree for sure.

DAVE pauses, trying to find the right moment to bring up the conversation that's been weighing on his mind.

DAVE

There are some things that the coach requires of us. I don't think you'll like what I'm going to say. Coach doesn't agree with us having girlfriends. He thinks it'll be distracting.

SERENE

Is it distracting like this?

SERENE begins a seductive dance routine as she dries off with a towel, eventually wrapping herself in **DAVE'S** arms.

SERENE

What about this type of hand-eye exercise?

SERENE kisses **DAVE'S** hand and gives him butterfly kisses over his eyes.

DAVE

You're making this so difficult. Can we cool it for a few months while football season is my focus and my dream?

SERENE

You don't want to see me? You don't want to give me butterfly kisses

DAVE

You are so cool. You make me forget about things that are hard to deal with at home. I like you, Serene, but we're both so young. I'm fifteen, and you're just fourteen. You're in junior high school; I'm a sophomore with a chance to play varsity football on a great team. I know what I want to do, but I have to decide what I need to do to accomplish my goals. I think we need to take a step back... just for a little while.

SERENE

I know what'll probably happen.

DAVE

What?

SERENE

You're going to be this popular jock in high school... and the girls will flock around you. You're going to meet someone. I know you will. They'll be older, and probably much prettier.

DAVE

I promise we'll stay together—just in a different way. I'd love for you to come to my games and watch. It'd be nice to know you're there.

SERENE

My older sisters got into trouble with high school football players. My mother forbids me from going near the school or the football stadium during games.

DAVE

And you'd miss me returning a punt for a touchdown—the first one Skyline's had in years?

SERENE

Don't make this tougher than it is. I can't believe this is happening.

DAVE

Serene, I like you a lot! In fact, after knowing you for such a short time, I think I'm falling in love with you. I can't believe I'm saying this to you... I've never met anyone like you.

SERENE

Do you love me?

DAVE

Yes, I think so.

SERENE

I can't stop thinking about you since you left yesterday. I love you too. I don't know if I can go without seeing you for the entire football season. It lasts for months.

DAVE

Football season will be over before you know it. We'll pick up where we left off.

SERENE

For some reason, I feel like that might not happen.

DAVE

It will. I promise.

SERENE

You know I'll be watching you from the treehouse... with my telescope and binoculars.

DAVE

After every punt I catch and return at home games, I'll look toward the treehouse. You'll be part of the reason for my success. If you see me pound my chest and point in your direction, you'll know I'm thinking of you.

DAVE and **SERENE** climb down to the base of the treehouse. **DAVE** begins to walk away.

SERENE (YELLING)

I love you, Dave Barton!

DAVE looks back, pounds his chest over his heart, and points at her. **SERENE** climbs back up into the treehouse and starts pounding the floor in frustration.

EXT. TREEHOUSE – DAY

DAVE begins walking home but changes his mind and makes his way back to the tree house. He gathers a few rocks and throws them at the treehouse. **SERENE** hears something but stays lying down. **DAVE** throws another rock. **SERENE** jumps up and opens the wood shutter.

DAVE (MIMICKING SERENE’S CHEER)

Lean, lean, lean to the left, lean to the right, stand up, sit down, fight, fight, fight!

At the end of his routine, **DAVE** does a backflip and makes his way back to the base of the tree house.

SERENE

So... what?

DAVE

I have a better idea.

SERENE

Get up here. Right now!

DAVE scurries up the rails and enters the treehouse. **SERENE** lunges at **DAVE**. They kiss passionately.

DAVE

I still have to stay focused on football. If my friends see me with you, they’ll know I’m not obeying the coach’s warnings. They might say or do something that’ll get me in trouble with the coaches. We have to keep our relationship secret.

SERENE

I can’t tell anyone?

DAVE

No one.

SERENE and **DAVE** stare at each other for a few moments.

DAVE

We’ll meet here after every game. I’ll share my experience with you. I need someone to share it with.

SERENE

What about your family? Don’t they come to watch your games? Don’t you tell them about how you play?

DAVE

Last year, none of my family except for my Gram attended any of my games. When I go home, they don't even talk about football or anything I'm doing. I need you.

SERENE

You want me to be your cheerleader?

DAVE smiles and looks at **SERENE** admiringly.

DAVE

Yes. You can be my personal cheerleader.

DAVE and **SERENE** hug and kiss.

DAVE

Gotta go.

SERENE

When will I see you next?

DAVE

We start two-a-day practices on Monday. We'll do nothing but think, learn, and live football. I really need this time to focus. In three weeks, let's meet after the Bountiful High game—it's on our home field. I'll meet you as soon as I can pull away.

SERENE

Well then, Mr. Barton... I'll be here! Until then, I'll be working on my triple handspring and backflip.

DAVE

I'm sure you will!

DAVE and **SERENE** climb down the rails of the treehouse. **DAVE** picks out a football from his gym bag.

DAVE

Do you want to be my girl?

SERENE

Yes!

DAVE

Some guys give a ring. I'm giving you a football. Will it do?

SERENE

Absolutely!

DAVE and **SERENE** hug and kiss one more time. **DAVE** heads toward the road, then turns around, bumps his chest, and points at her. **SERENE** bumps her chest over her heart and throws him a kiss.

EXT. TREEHOUSE – DAY

DAVE heads down the road after giving **SERENE** the football. He walks with a light step, feeling both excited and nervous about the upcoming football season.

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH FOOTBALL FIELD – DAY

A montage of **DAVE** and his teammates practicing for the next three weeks. The sun beats down during their intense two-a-day sessions. The players run drills, perfecting their plays. Sweat drips off their faces, and their muscles ache, but their determination remains unwavering.

COACH SCHMIDT gathers the players around for a final talk.

COACH SCHMIDT

Gather around. Listen up. We've been practicing hard for over a week in this heat. You know the plays, you know the situations. Now it's time to execute. Starting today, we're doing what I call "ten perfect plays." After each practice, we'll run ten offensive plays. If we execute each one perfectly, we hit the showers. But if one of you screws up, we start over. Three tries, that's all you get. If you don't make it, we run wind sprints. Understood?

TEAM

Yes, sir! (mumbling)

COACH SCHMIDT

I didn't hear you!

TEAM (louder)

Yes, sir!

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH FOOTBALL FIELD – LATER

The team lines up for their first set of ten perfect plays. The pressure is on. They run through the first play. One of the linemen jumps too early, and the whistle blows.

COACH SCHMIDT

Start over!

The players groan but get back in formation. Another play, another mistake—this time a missed block.

COACH SCHMIDT

Again!

Frustration builds, but the team keeps pushing. By the third set, they managed to run through a few plays without mistakes.

After practice, **DAVE** and **JIM** are exhausted.

DAVE

Hey Jim, we run wind sprints during the ten perfect plays. The linemen don't have to run like we do. It isn't fair.

COACH RASMUSSEN overhears them.

COACH RASMUSSEN

What are you mumbling about, Barton?

DAVE

The backs already ran wind sprints during the ten perfect plays.

COACH RASMUSSEN

Do you want to play on the line?

DAVE

No, sir.

COACH RASMUSSEN

Then suck it up. And you'd better not dog it—you're one of the fastest on the team. You should win every time!

DAVE

Yes, sir!

DAVE turns to **JIM** as they prepare for another sprint.

DAVE

Let's time it so we come in together.

JIM

Sounds good to me.

The two sprint together, finishing at the same time, but **COACH RASMUSSEN** isn't impressed.

COACH RASMUSSEN

Barton, Brennan, you're dogging it. Two extra sprints!

DAVE and **JIM** exchange a glance, knowing their plan backfired. They run the extra sprints. On the second one, **DAVE** edges out **JIM**, pushing himself to the limit.

COACH RASMUSSEN

Now that's more like it.

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH LOCKER ROOM – DAY

The team trudges toward the locker room, exhausted. **DAVE** feels the toll of the practice but doesn't let on that he is hurting.

COACH SCHMIDT pulls **COACH RASMUSSEN** aside.

COACH SCHMIDT

Hey, **Ras**, don't you think you're being a little tough on those guys?

COACH RASMUSSEN

Maybe. But at some point, they'll thank me for it.

INT. LOCKER ROOM – DAY

The players head inside, sweaty and sore. **DAVE** catches sight of the roster posted on the wall. Players gather around, anxious to see if they made the cut. One player, devastated to see his name missing, slams his fist into the roster.

DAVE walks over to console the cut player.

DAVE

That's tough, man. I hope you'll try out again next year.

PLAYER

This sucks. I'm a junior! I have to wear my hair like this and I'm not even on the team. Everyone's gonna know I failed. It's all because they're bringing in sophomores now. It's so unfair.

DAVE

You didn't fail. 160 players tried out, and only 50 made the cut. You're good, man. I hope you try next year.

PLAYER (angry)

No way. I'm done. This was so not worth it. Thanks a lot, sophomore boy!

The player grabs his gym bag and storms out, hitting the locker on his way out. **DAVE** watches him leave, feeling the weight of the competition.

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH FOOTBALL FIELD – DAY

Another round of "ten perfect plays." The offense huddles up.

STEVE MARSHALL (in the huddle)

Come on, you guys. Let's do this. 80 quick screen on two. Ready?

OFFENSE

Break!

The play runs, and **STEVE** drops back, the line holding off the defense. He throws to **DAVE**, who's behind blockers. The pass is a little high, and the ball bounces off **DAVE'S** hands. He tips it but manages to catch it on the second try. The team cheers as **DAVE** runs down the field.

COACH SCHMIDT calls the final play as the offense huddles again.

COACH SCHMIDT

Wing left 43 counter on three. Ready?

OFFENSE

Break!

The team lines up. The count is on three, testing the offensive line's concentration. The play runs perfectly, and the team cheers like they've just won a game.

COACH SCHMIDT

Gather around.

The whole team surrounds the coaches.

COACH SCHMIDT

Way to go, offense. I know we've ridden you hard these past weeks, but we do it because we want to win. We can't win if we make mistakes. Final cuts are done. You are the team!

The team erupts in cheers.

COACH SCHMIDT

We have our first game against Bountiful next Friday. Two-a-days are over. Next week, one practice a day. Keep up the focus. Good job. Hit the lockers.

The team runs toward the locker room, celebrating as if they've already won a game.

INT. LOCKER ROOM – GAME DAY

It's the first game of the season, and **DAVE** and the team are getting ready in the locker room. Players are putting on their equipment, and getting taped up. **DAVE** walks over to **JIM**, who's dry-heaving over the toilet from nerves.

DAVE

Do you get nervous before the games?

RICK

See Hicks over there? That'll be me in a few minutes.

DAVE

I'm not that nervous yet. I don't think I'll end up like that!

RICK

You're a sophomore. You've got two more years to prove yourself. For some of these guys, this is it. Football is their life. It's crunch time. Get used to it—it happens every game.

INT. TAPE ROOM – GAME DAY

DAVE enters the tape room, where **COACH HAUN** and the trainers are wrapping players' ankles and knees.

COACH HAUN

How are you feeling?

DAVE

I feel fine.

COACH HAUN

Today's going to test your ability to play in front of thousands of people. Are you ready?

DAVE

I'm a little nervous about punts. I've heard Bountiful's punter is really good—kicks long and high.

COACH HAUN

You'll do just fine. You're also returning kickoffs today. We've scouted their team and decided to return right up the gut. Just keep your eye on the ball and follow your blockers.

DAVE

Sounds good.

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH FOOTBALL FIELD – DAY

The players warm up on the field. **DAVE** practices catching punts and focusing hard. He catches them all, but his nerves start to build. He looks around at the crowd filling the stands. **LANCE** walks over to him.

DAVE

Hey Lance, if we win the toss, could you cheat over toward my spot? I don't think I want to return the kickoff on the first play of the season. I'm starting to get nervous. Look at how many people are here.

LANCE

Sure, no problem.

EXT. FIELD ENTRANCE – MOMENTS LATER

The whistle blows, and the energized team runs toward the locker room. Seniors chant and yell, hyping each other up. Inside, the team gathers in the room just outside the gymnasium.

COACH SCHMIDT

Listen up! Bountiful has a good team. But we are better. Team captains, get us out on the field. Let's play some football!

RICK, LANCE, and STEVE MARSHALL stand before the team, ready to lead.

RICK

We've worked hard this past month. We've trained in the offseason. We're in the best shape. There's no way we're doing anything but winning today. Give it your best and don't make mistakes. Who are we?

TEAM (shouting)

Skyline!

RICK

Who?

TEAM (shouting louder)

Skyline!

RICK

Let's go!

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH FOOTBALL FIELD – DAY

SKYLINE takes the field, and the stadium is alive with energy. The **ANNOUNCER** begins his pre-game spiel, introducing the teams. The ceremonial coin toss takes place, and Skyline wins, electing to receive the kickoff.

DAVE jogs up and down the sideline, making sure he's warmed up and ready.

DAVE

Lance, remember what we talked about?

LANCE

Yep, I'll slide over closer to the sideline. Jim and I will split the difference.

DAVE

Thanks. (fist bump)

COACH SCHMIDT (to **COACH HAUN**)

What's Barton doing?

COACH HAUN

Looks like he's trying to avoid receiving the ball. Nerves, probably.

COACH SCHMIDT

I called a middle return. I hope Lance gets the kickoff and just takes it straight upfield. We need good field position to start strong.

The **BAND** plays, and the fans roar from both sides, the excitement palpable. More people than usual fill the stands for a practice game. The camera zooms in on the treehouse where **SERENE** watches, binoculars in hand.

REFEREE blows the whistle. The teams line up, ready for the kickoff. The ball, initially heading toward **LANCE**, hooks, and veers straight for **DAVE**. He doesn't have to adjust—it's coming right to him.

DAVE catches the ball cleanly and cuts toward the middle of the field, where a wall of blockers awaits. He darts up the field, dodging tackles, making it to the 32-yard line before a pile of players brings him down.

Underneath the pile, an opposing **BOUNTIFUL PLAYER** whispers to **DAVE**.

BOUNTIFUL PLAYER

Next time, you'll be unconscious.

DAVE (smirking)

That's if you can catch me.

The **RETURN TEAM** runs off the field, replaced by the offense. **RICK** is the first to greet **DAVE** on the sideline.

RICK (slapping **DAVE** on the butt)

Nice return.

Teammates congratulate **DAVE**, boosting his confidence and calming his nerves. **DAVE** settles next to the coaches, waiting to bring in plays to the offense.

COACH SCHMIDT

What's the deal with your positioning on the field?

DAVE

I just had a feeling the ball would end up there.

COACH SCHMIDT

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Are you ready to play?

DAVE

I am so ready. Get me in there. I can't wait.

COACH SCHMIDT

Stay close. I'm rotating you and Bushman at halfback. You'll be running the plays to the offense, so listen up.

DAVE

Yes, sir.

SKYLINE marches down the field, capping off the drive with a touchdown pass to **LANCE**. The extra point is missed.

COACH SCHMIDT (to **COACH HAUN**)

Looks like Pace has the jitters. He never missed in practice—I hope he can shake it off.

DAVE sits on the bench next to **KIM**, catching his breath.

KIM

What's it like out there?

DAVE

It's incredible. We've worked so hard, and it's paying off.

KIM

I can't wait to get in. Hopefully, we build a lead, and I'll get some time.

DAVE

I've got a feeling you'll get in today. We're holding their offense pretty well.

KIM

Put in a word for me if you can.

DAVE (smiling)

I'll see what I can do. Gotta get ready for the punt.

SKYLINE continues to dominate, keeping **BOUNTIFUL'S** offense off the field. **DAVE** stands ready next to the coaches, waiting to return the punt.

COACH SCHMIDT

I already talked to the return team, straight up the gut. Make something happen.

The punt comes directly to **DAVE**. He mishandles the catch, the ball slipping through his arms and hitting the ground. He quickly recovers but is hit immediately. Dejected, **DAVE** heads to the bench.

COACH SCHMIDT

We can't have fumbles after a defensive stand like that. Focus! Fundamentals. Catch the ball.

DAVE

Yes, sir.

Back on the sideline, **KIM** walks over to check on **DAVE**.

KIM

You good?

DAVE

Yeah, I just need to focus.

KIM

Just have fun, like in Little League. Don't stress what you can't change—show them what you can do.

DAVE

Thanks, Kim.

The two exchange shoulder bumps and high-fives to keep each other motivated.

SKYLINE'S DEFENSE holds **BOUNTIFUL** on their best offensive drive yet, forcing them to punt again.

COACH SCHMIDT

Punt return team!

The team huddles around **COACH SCHMIDT**, who grabs **DAVE** by the shoulder pads.

COACH SCHMIDT

Concentrate!

COACH SCHMIDT pushes **DAVE** onto the field. As **DAVE** takes his position, he notices the spot on the field—exactly where he and **SERENE** had been the night before.

FLASHBACK – EXT. TREEHOUSE – NIGHT

DAVE climbs up the ladder to the treehouse. **SERENE** hears someone coming and hops up from her homework.

SERENE

What are you doing here?

DAVE

I needed to see you. I'm getting nervous about the game tomorrow.

SERENE

But didn't you say you needed to stay focused?

DAVE

I know. I'm breaking my own rules. But I had to see you. You always make me feel better.

SERENE (whispering)

Don't make any noise—my mom thinks I'm doing homework. She'd kill me if she knew you were here.

DAVE

What are you reading?

SERENE

Just a love story about you and me.

DAVE

You and me? What's it called?

SERENE

Romeo and Juliet.

DAVE

Didn't that end badly?

SERENE

Don't spoil it! I was just at the love parts.

DAVE

Sorry. I thought you knew the ending.

SERENE

I have something for you.

DAVE

Oh yeah?

SERENE pulls out a small statue and hands it to **DAVE**.

DAVE

You're giving me a naked man?

SERENE

It's art! My mom bought it in Italy. I put a leaf on it so you wouldn't get embarrassed. Do you like it? It even has your name—David.

DAVE

Well, he has more hair. Thanks, I'll treasure it forever.

SERENE

My mom threw it in the trash, so I rescued it. He's got the perfect body, doesn't he?

DAVE

So, you're into pornography now?

SERENE

I just appreciate a good physique.

DAVE

Like this? (Pulls up his shirt and flexes his abs)

SERENE

Oh yeah, no difference at all.

DAVE takes the statue and puts it in his backpack.

DAVE

I'll keep it in my locker, so I can remember who gave it to me. Especially since you think I have the perfect body.

SERENE

I never said that!

DAVE

But you meant it, right?

SERENE

Sure, Zeus.

They both lie down on the treehouse floor, staring up at the ceiling.

SERENE

I can't believe you came by. You said we weren't going to see each other until tomorrow.

DAVE

I'm anxious. I can't wait for tomorrow.

SERENE

Anxious or nervous? Are you ready, Zeus?

DAVE

I feel confident. I just wish you could be there to see it.

SERENE

I told you, my mom would ground me for life if I went to a high school game before I was actually in high school.

DAVE

Well, she didn't say anything about non-game days, did she? Come on, let's go to the field.

SERENE

Sure, but it'll take a while to walk on the roadway over to the field and hop the fence.

DAVE

Maybe that was a bad idea.

SERENE

I have a shortcut.

DAVE

A shortcut? Follow me.

SERENE leads **DAVE** to a hidden part of the chain-link fence where a few wires hold it together. She unties them and opens the fence.

EXT. (CUT IN CHAINLINK FENCE) SHORTCUT NEAR FOOTBALL FIELD

DAVE

How long has this been here?

SERENE

Since my sister showed me a few years ago.

DAVE

Your sister who fell in love with the football player.

SERENE

Yep.

DAVE

With this shortcut, you're just a minute away from the field.

SERENE

Yep.

DAVE

This way, I don't have to climb the fence to get onto the field.

SERENE

Yep.

DAVE

How come you never told me about the shortcut?

SERENE

You never asked!

DAVE

Does your mother know about the shortcut?

SERENE

No. And I don't think I'll ever tell her.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD – EVENING

DAVE and **SERENE** run onto the field. **SERENE** does one of her classic handsprings, pretending to be a cheerleader in front of an imaginary crowd.

They embrace. **DAVE** spins **SERENE** and gently sets her down on the **50-yard line** in the middle of the field. He sits, staring at their surroundings. **SERENE** begins rubbing **DAVE'S** back.

They begin to kiss. After a moment, they lie back, gazing at the stars.

SERENE

I have long talks with my Nana. I talked to her about you. I even told her I loved you.

DAVE

I'm sure your grandmother loved hearing that.

SERENE

She didn't discourage me from having a relationship with a boy. She told me about meeting the love of her life at a young age. But, of course, she warned me about boys like you!

DAVE

Like me?

SERENE

Our family went through a crisis with my sister involving a football player at Skyline. She told Nana she was "in love" and wanted to marry him someday. It ended badly. It hurt her so much that she became depressed and anti-social. So... Nana doesn't want me to get hurt.

DAVE

I hope they're not judging me just because I play football.

SERENE

No. They're not. My family loves me and only wants what's best for me. From what they've heard, they like you. I told them how you take charge at home, making sure everything gets done.

DAVE

Yep. Sometimes, it's hard to get everyone motivated, so I try to make work into a game.

SERENE

And they fall for that?

DAVE

One time, we had a weed problem...

FLASHBACK – EXT. BARTON YARD – DAY

The **NORTH SLOPE** of the **BARTON YARD** is full of weeds. **DAVE** gathers his siblings. He pulls out a **roll of string** and helps them **cordon off sections** of the yard.

DAVE

Now we've got a guide to work with. Just one square today, that's all. Let's see how fast we can clear this first section.

His siblings—some relatively young—join in, pulling weeds in the section. Once they finish:

DAVE

That wasn't so bad, right? It only took five minutes. Let's celebrate and have some fun.

JEFFREY

The job isn't done. We can do more.

DAVE

I think we've done enough for today.

SIBLINGS

Just one more! Just one more!

DAVE

(grinning)

Okay, okay. Just one more. But after, we're grabbing popsicles and playing 'Red Rover.'

FLASHBACK ENDS – EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD – EVENING

DAVE and **SERENE** are back on the field, laughing about the story.

SERENE

Well, I have to give you credit. In a few years, though, they might not fall for that kind of 'game playing.'

DAVE

I have no choice. I have to do things for my family.

(pausing)

Sometimes, I don't want the responsibility. I just want to be a typical teenager.

SERENE

Do you resent your dad for the position he's put you in?

DAVE

Sometimes, I get angry at him, even at Rick, for taking the easy way out. But then I remember how bad it was when Dad was around.

SERENE

What was it like when your parents were together?

DAVE

It was like a storybook marriage until Mom got sick... then everything changed. (Scene fades back to present)

CUT TO: EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD – PRESENT

DAVE stands on the field, preparing to receive a punt. He taps his helmet.

DAVE

(to himself)

Focus... focus.

BOUNTIFUL COACH calls a time-out. **DAVE** sighs with relief, taking a few moments to collect himself. He jogs back to his teammates, huddled on the field.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD – CONTINUOUS

BOUNTIFUL'S PUNT TEAM lines up. **DAVE** stands deeper than he had in previous punts.

COACH HAUN

What's Barton doing? He's way too far back.

(The ball is snapped)

COACH SCHMIDT

Barton, catch the damn ball!

DAVE hears the coach's words and sprints forward. He cradles his arms and catches the ball at nearly full speed. His unusual positioning and speed confuse **BOUNTIFUL'S DEFENSE**, leaving them with no chance to catch him.

DAVE runs full speed, untouched through the defense. He crosses the end zone for the touchdown. After scoring, **DAVE** looks toward the **TREEHOUSE** and pounds his heart with his right hand, signaling to **SERENE**.

PRESSBOX ANNOUNCER

Barton returns the punt 75 yards! This breaks a three-year dry spell for Skyline's special teams.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD – LATER

SKYLINE is in the fourth quarter, leading BOUNTIFUL 19-0. You'd expect the coaches to be ecstatic, but instead:

COACH SCHMIDT

I thought you said Pace never misses extra points. This makes two today. We can't keep making these stupid mistakes.

COACH HAUN

This is our first game. Pace is a junior—nerves are getting to him.

COACH SCHMIDT

The team needs to focus. We've had too many mistakes and too many periods of weak intensity. After the game, we're running wind sprints.

COACH HAUN

We're going to win this game. The defense has kept Bountiful from scoring. Don't you think we should cut them some slack for their first game?

COACH SCHMIDT

They've played football before, and we've been practicing for weeks. Our goal is perfection, so we run wind sprints after the game.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD – END OF GAME

The game ends with a final score of **SKYLINE 19, BOUNTIFUL 0**.

COACH HAUN

Do you want to tell them now, or wait?

COACH SCHMIDT

Let them celebrate. We'll do the extra sprints tomorrow.

COACH HAUN

Thanks, Coach.

EXT. SKYLINE FOOTBALL STADIUM – NIGHT

After the game, **Dave and Kim** run off the field together, celebrating. A group of reporters stops **Dave** for an interview. **Dave** spends about five minutes there and then runs back with Kim.

KIM

What was that all about?

DAVE

Reporters. They're interested in covering me and Rick. Go figure.

KIM

You know everyone's heard about your family, right?

DAVE

I know. But right now, victory is sweet. This is what we've worked for all this time. Feels good, huh? Think all the hard training was worth it?

KIM

Absolutely!

INT. SKYLINE WRESTLING ROOM – LATE AFTERNOON

The team enters for a post-game talk by the coaches.

COACH SCHMIDT

Congratulations on the win.

SKYLINE TEAM (SHOUTS WITH DELIGHT)

Yeah!

COACH SCHMIDT

But we made way too many mistakes. Perfection is our goal. If we want to take State, we need to improve. Tomorrow at 7 AM, we'll have a short workout to work out the kinks. See you tomorrow.

The **TEAM** cheers. The **COACHES** leave, heading to their office. **RICK** leads the team in a victory song.

RICK

One, two, three...

TEAM

Bullshit, it's all the band could play,
Bullshit, they played it night and day,
Bullshit, tra la la bullshit,
Tra la la bullshit, bullshit, bullshit!

INT. SKYLINE LOCKER ROOM – AFTERNOON AFTER THE GAME

The **TEAM DISPENSES**, and the players make their way to their lockers. **DAVE** quickly showers and waits for **RICK** to come out, hoping to get a ride home.

RICK

Need a ride home?

DAVE

Sure do.

RICK

You did great today. You had some shaky moments, but you played through it, and I'm proud of you. And a punt return for a touchdown? That was awesome.

DAVE

I had some nerves and lost focus at times, but I'm happy with today.

RICK

Focus?

DAVE

Yeah, but I figured it out. It's a long story. I'll tell you about it sometime. I can't wait for our next game. Could you pick me up in the morning?

RICK

I'll be there at 6:50.

INT. BARTON HOME – NIGHT

DAVE enters the house and is greeted by **GRAM**, who's doing the dishes.

GRAM

Dave, you did great today. I got to see your touchdown.

DAVE

Was Mom able to come too? I didn't see her.

GRAM

She stayed with your brothers and sisters.

DAVE

I know it's hard for her to go to the games, especially with her leg spasms. Do you think there's a way she could see one at some point?

GRAM

I'll see what I can do.

INT. MOM'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

DAVE enters his mother's bedroom. Upon seeing him, **MOM** tears up. They embrace as she struggles with **HIP-FLEXOR SPASMS**, her legs flailing uncontrollably.

MOM

I heard all about the game from Jean across the street. She went to the game and was so excited for you.

DAVE

Are you okay? Can I help you with anything?

MOM

I'm fine. The news I got is so great! I wish I could've been there. I'm so happy for you. I guess you're on your way to that dream you've had your whole life.

DAVE

Yep! Gunna be the hero of a big game someday. You just watch.

MOM

I wish I could have watched you today.

DAVE

I wish you could have been there, but it wasn't a division game—just a practice game.

MOM

A game is a game. They're all important. Now, tell me all about it.

DAVE sits beside **MOM** on the bed, putting his arms around her for a big hug and kiss. He shifts position and starts doing **PHYSICAL THERAPY** on her legs while recounting the game.

DAVE

I warmed up and caught punts before the game. Only mishandled one during warmups. I even took a few kickoffs from our kicker.

MOM

Were you as nervous as you told me you were last night?

DAVE

I was even more nervous than last night. When I told Rick I was scared, he assured me to just focus, and I'd do great.

MOM

Rick's a good brother. He loves you and wants the best for you.

DAVE

If he did, he'd be back in this house helping out. I still can't believe he lives with that homewrecker.

MOM

Now, give me every detail!

MONTAGE: DAVE TALKS ABOUT THE GAME

*Music plays softly in the background as **DAVE** continues giving **MOM** physical therapy. The conversation plays faintly underneath the music.*

MOM

So, do you feel like you did okay?

DAVE

I did alright. As a running back, I got to run the ball several times, but my primary job was to return punts. I received three today, and I mishandled two of them.

(laughs)

Serene gave me a sign from the treehouse just before I caught the final punt.

MOM

A sign?

DAVE

Yeah. Crazy, huh? She threw an apple crate into the air.

MOM

An apple crate?

DAVE

She reminded me about the fundamentals—catching the ball without dropping it.

MOM

And you had this interaction with her during the play?

DAVE

I know. Sounds crazy, huh?

MOM

How can you stay focused when your girlfriend watches you from a treehouse overlooking the field? That seems like it'd be a big distraction.

DAVE

I know, but she can't go to the games. I wish she could sit in the stands, but her mom won't let her. She's very protective.

MOM

Protective against what?

DAVE

It's a long story. Her sister had a bad experience with a football player.

MOM

You're only 15. You've got plenty of time to have a relationship with a girl. I think it's too soon to do this again after the last one left you devastated.

DAVE

Maybe, but I'm so drawn in by her. I need someone my age to talk to. She really helps me.

MOM

Just be careful. We've had this talk before.

DAVE

I know. Do you want to hear what happened after the game?

MOM

Absolutely.

DAVE

A bunch of sportswriters—including the ones we see on TV—ran up to me and started asking me questions.

MOM

What did they ask?

DAVE

They asked about our family.

MOM

Like what?

DAVE

One asked if living apart from Rick was hard.

MOM

Why would they ask that?

DAVE

COACH SCHMIDT approached me after the game and clarified a few things.

FLASHBACK – EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD – DAY

COACH SCHMIDT grabs **DAVE** and pulls him aside after the team meeting.

COACH SCHMIDT

Come into my office before you leave.

DAVE nods. After showering, he heads to **COACH SCHMIDT'S OFFICE**.

INT. COACH SCHMIDT'S OFFICE – DAY

COACH SCHMIDT

Nice job today. You need to make sure you cradle the ball. We can't afford turnovers.

DAVE

I know. I'm working on it. I'll stay focused. No more dropped punts!

COACH SCHMIDT

You've got a talent I can't coach.

DAVE

What's that?

COACH SCHMIDT

God-given speed. Not everyone has that—especially at your age.

DAVE

God-given? I've worked hard for years to refine my sprinting.

COACH SCHMIDT

Sure, but some things can't be taught. You've got something special.

DAVE

So, why am I here?

COACH SCHMIDT

I saw you with reporters after the game.

(pauses)

It's happening faster than I thought. With today's runback, you've sent shockwaves through the league.

DAVE

How's that?

COACH SCHMIDT

Remember when Coach Haun and I invited you to try out for varsity?

DAVE

Yeah.

COACH SCHMIDT

We weren't the only coaches there that day.

DAVE

Really?

COACH SCHMIDT

We get calls from recruiting coaches all the time. You need to know the rules.

DAVE

Rules?

COACH SCHMIDT

College coaches can't legally recruit players until they're juniors. Just be aware. You've got the whole season ahead of you.

DAVE

Can they talk to my mom?

COACH SCHMIDT

They're not supposed to.

DAVE

Do you think this could be a problem?

COACH SCHMIDT

Maybe. But you've got a unique situation.

INT. COACH SCHMIDT'S OFFICE – DAY

COACH SCHMIDT sits behind his desk, leaning forward, talking to **DAVE**, who stands attentively.

COACH SCHMIDT

You have a special situation. Bill Marcroft calls all the local university football and basketball games. He's been promoting your brother. If Rick continues to perform at the level he has in the past, he'll get numerous scholarship offers. I've talked with several coaches who are definitely interested in him.

DAVE

That's all great, but what does that have to do with me? We don't even live in the same house.

COACH SCHMIDT

Bill and his wife are friends of your parents, from what I understand. They even went out on double dates with them.

DAVE

How do you know that?

COACH SCHMIDT

Your brother, Rick, told me a little about your family. He's our team captain. We have special meetings in my office, and sometimes, Rick shares aspects of his life with me.

DAVE

So, do you and Bill get together and talk about my family?

COACH SCHMIDT

Bill and I are friends. He's mentioned your family because he loves your mom.

DAVE

And?

COACH SCHMIDT

And he's mentioned you in many of these recruiting conversations. He's been telling coaches about

this 'speedy sophomore prospect' who's won numerous track titles and Little League football championships.

DAVE

Our family knows Bill. He treats my mom very special and isn't happy with my dad. I'm sure he means no harm by talking about me and my family.

COACH SCHMIDT

It seems, though, that many of the sportswriters and recruiters are rooting for your family. When they found out about some of your situation, many of them felt compassion for your mom.

DAVE

Really? Is that a bad thing?

COACH SCHMIDT

Not really, but it might be distracting. Because you and Rick are bringing some notoriety to our team, it's become a human interest story. The media seems interested in following you guys.

DAVE

Most of my friends feel sorry for my mom and her unfair situation. My older sister hated being referred to as "So, you're THAT family."

COACH SCHMIDT

Does that bother you?

DAVE

We've learned to live with our story. There's nothing we can do about it other than move on. Maybe this is a good thing. My mom could use the attention, and for sure, she loves to talk. I'll let her know she can be my agent!

COACH SCHMIDT

That's brilliant. But still, I hope this doesn't put any undue pressure on you.

DAVE

Meaning?

COACH SCHMIDT

There will be coaches in the stands observing what you and your brother do. You'll have people there only because they want to support your family. And the reporters will be there to fill people in on the details. Do you think you can perform at your best under these circumstances?

DAVE

Absolutely! I'm not doing this just for myself. I'm doing it for my family, especially for my mother. This diversion might work out better for her. At least it might take her mind off the burning pain she endures all the time.

COACH SCHMIDT stands up and **SHAKES DAVE'S HAND**. **DAVE** turns to leave but then stops and returns to the desk.

DAVE

Am I still going to quarterback the JV team?

COACH SCHMIDT

Yes, for sure.

DAVE

I like playing quarterback, but if we get far enough ahead, can you ask Coach Haun if I can play halfback in those games?

COACH SCHMIDT

You're taking a higher risk of getting injured playing halfback.

DAVE

I know, but it's my favorite position. I only rotate with Bushman on varsity. I need the game experience as a halfback.

COACH SCHMIDT

All right, all right. Go home to your family. You did a great job out there today. I think you're on your way to great things here.

DAVE shakes **COACH SCHMIDT'S HAND** again.

DAVE

Thanks, Coach.

DAVE turns and exits the office.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE – MOM'S BEDROOM – NIGHT

DAVE continues therapy on his **MOM's** legs, working diligently to ease her spasms and cramps.

MOM

I'm going to try to get to some of your games. It's just so hard to manage our family right now.

Suddenly, one of **MOM'S** leg contractions pulls **DAVE** onto the bed as his shirt catches on her knee.

DAVE

Wow! That was powerful. Your legs are so strong. You just made an unassisted tackle.

MOM

I guess I don't even know my own strength!

They both laugh. **DAVE** continues working on her legs.

DAVE

Let me see if we can get those spastic legs quiet for a time.

MOM

I would love that!

DAVE

I'm so glad you had me train with the physical therapists at the University Hospital. Not only did I learn these skills, but we also made good friends with many people who had physical trials.

MOM

I know. It made me feel like I had it good compared to some of them. I count my blessings. And you are one of the biggest blessings in my life.

DAVE

Thanks, Mom. You didn't ask for these trials, but maybe good things can come out of bad things, right?

MOM

Absolutely. Let's focus on a positive mental attitude!

DAVE continues working on **MOM'S** legs, which are slowly calming down.

DAVE

I know you want to be there for my games, but I know it will be difficult in your condition. I'll always tell you everything that goes on in great detail, but I think you need to get to these games.

MOM

It isn't that I don't want to go to the games. I just... am embarrassed that everyone warned me about Dad's and Margarete's affair. I wouldn't believe it. And then it turned out to be true.

DAVE

That's precisely why you need to go. Show them what you're made of and that you're tough. So, start going to my games.

MOM

I will be there for you and look forward to supporting you. You have such special physical talents that many don't have, and I'm happy for you.

DAVE stares at his mom's legs and her uncontrolled body. A tear wells up in his eye. He quickly wipes away the emotion and continues doing therapy.

MOM

I can't wait to hear about everything you're up to in school, too.

DAVE

Well, I'll start on Monday. I haven't been to the main school yet. I hope I can find my classes okay. The school is so big. There are over 3,000 students that go there.

MOM

You'll be fine. I just know it. My boy is a sophomore at Skyline High School. You've worked hard to get to this point. You are amazing.

DAVE

Thanks. You've worked hard too. You're my hero. You're valiant, and I feel for you. You didn't ask for the situation we're in now. God hasn't made the life you should have been blessed with.

MOM

God doesn't bless you because you're valiant or because you deserve it. Life goes on despite what you think is fair.

DAVE

I don't know if I believe in God. If he actually exists, I don't feel that he's been fair with our family. We deserve to be blessed. If we're not blessed, then he must not exist.

MOM

You know I believe in Jesus. We're here to be tested. This is our test.

DAVE

I don't like tests. They're so unfair. You don't deserve what you've been given lately.

MOM

I believe that God's plan is that we have been placed here on Earth to receive mortal bodies. Mortal bodies that are subjected to all sorts of blessings as well as trials. If God were to bless you every time you did something good or punish you when you made mistakes, no one would ever make bad choices. We'd all, most likely, always make the proper choice. I believe that God wants us to make choices, either good or bad, and be accountable for them.

DAVE

So that's God's plan?

MOM

I genuinely believe it is the plan.

DAVE

We won't be blessed for doing good or punished when we make bad choices. For some reason, I don't quite understand why a loving God wouldn't want us all to pass this 'mortal' test. You've been a model, a gymnast, a ski team competitor, and most importantly, a mother to nine children. If I were you, I'd be extremely mad about how God laid out your life.

MOM

These hardships and heartaches have made me a better person. I try every day to learn what the Lord would have me learn. I'd rather become worthy to walk in his presence than be beautiful, socially prominent, or famous.

DAVE

Do you think these hardships have made your life better? Don't you miss being able to walk?

MOM

I have often wondered if I would have reached the depth of commitment in any other way.

DAVE

I love you, Mom. You're unique in your own way. I don't fully comprehend how you go on with such a positive attitude, especially after your traitor friend stole your husband. I hope someday I'll comprehend God's plan. It still makes no sense to me.

MOM

Sometimes, logic is not God's way. I'm going to be just fine.

DAVE

I'm not so sure about that. You know my bedroom is just below yours. At night, I can hear you cry. It's so sad for me to see you this way. I know you miss Dad. I know you still love him. He has so many great talents and qualities. It's a shame he's so selfish. What do you think makes him turn into that self-centered, evil person?

MOM

I didn't see this side of him until I started getting more symptoms of MS and had less control of my body. Your dad needs perfection, and I am not the definition of perfection now.

DAVE

I guess he's the definition of a 'fair-weather' husband. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. At least, that's what coaches say. When the going gets tough for Dad, he finds someone else.

MOM

Don't you think he deserves something better?

DAVE

I know it would be hard for him too. But I wish he would be noble and be a loving husband and father. And stop scaring us kids with his temper. I don't miss him being around. Life is more tolerable when he's not here.

MOM

When I talked to Tommy and asked for his help with this situation with him and Margarete, he declined to get involved.

DAVE

I have a hard time thinking that this so-called man of God, preaching to millions of people on TV, wouldn't stand up for what he preaches.

MOM

He was your dad's best friend. I think he feels some loyalty to stay out of this.

DAVE

Has Tommy talked to Dad about Margarete?

MOM

Yeah, in a roundabout way. He said that your dad claims our marriage was failing before I got sick.

DAVE

Was it?

MOM

If it was, I never felt it. Do you believe I was a bad wife?

DAVE

Of course not. I see through him. He's a doctor who sees naked women all day long. His mind can't stay on his convictions as a husband.

MOM

He's a women's doctor. That's what he does for a living.

DAVE

Well, if anyone was in the wrong profession, it's Dad. His patients think he's God. I see the way they admire him, almost in a flirting way. It's a formula for a failed marriage, at least in Dad's case. Does it bother you knowing what he does every day?

MOM

My dad was a doctor. I worked in his office in high school. He was professional, and I never saw him act inappropriately. I know many doctors with the utmost integrity.

DAVE

I don't know if you can fix a person like Dad. I'm so sorry for you. I'm glad he's out of the house, especially the way he's been acting.

MOM

I get why you feel that way. I wish I had the answers.

DAVE flips on the radio next to his mom's bed. It's her favorite spiritual music station.

DAVE

I know you and Dad used to go dancing every week when you were first married.

MOM

Your dad taught at a dance studio while in medical school. He was such a good dance teacher. And yes, we went dancing often. Those were such memorable years! I sure miss dancing.

DAVE

Well, I guess we'll just have to give it a whirl. Now that your legs are calm, may I have this dance, please?

DAVE picks up his **MOM**, cradling her in his arms. As he twirls gently in circles, he talks lovingly to her.

MOM

Dave, don't hurt yourself. I'm dead weight.

DAVE

Just close your eyes. This is your 'more pleasant life' dance. Think of those better times for a few minutes.

This moment transforms into a dream sequence, with **MOM** dancing with **DAD**. Tears roll down her face as she remembers dancing with the love of her life. Flashbacks show clips of her younger years—skiing, dancing, gymnastics. The music, "**Alleluia**," plays softly in the background. **DAVE** also tears up as he hears her sniffle.

FADE BACK TO REALITY:

MOM is now asleep in **DAVE'S** arms, completely relaxed, her spasms stilled. **DAVE** gently places her onto the bed, wiping away her tears and kissing her forehead.

INT. HALLWAY – NIGHT

DAVE closes the door softly behind him, leaning against the hallway wall. He pounds the wall in frustration, quickly wiping away more tears. He makes his way to the kitchen to grab some food. His younger brothers and sisters spot him and immediately run up, prodding him to play with them.

DAVE

Not now!

His siblings look bewildered—he never turns down a chance to play.

HOLLY

What's wrong with Dave?

JEFF

Maybe he's tired. He played football today.

HOLLY

I think he's sad. Let's go cheer him up.

By now, **DAVE** is in the kitchen, pouring himself some cereal. Before he can pour the milk, he rests his head on the counter, covering his face. His siblings quietly gather around him, putting their arms around him.

DAVE

You are all just what I need right now. I love you guys. Let's do some tricks.

His siblings scream joyfully as they all run into the family room, where they begin doing their favorite tricks.

INT. FAMILY ROOM – MORNING

The following day, **RICK** picks up **DAVE** in his Camaro Z28.

RICK

How are you feeling?

DAVE

I'm a little sore, but not too bad.

RICK

Did you see the newspaper this morning?

DAVE

No, we don't take the paper.

RICK

You'll have to dig one up and read it. It mentions you.

DAVE

How long do these Saturday morning practices last?

RICK

About an hour. We just run and stretch to get the kinks out from yesterday.

DAVE

Nice. I need the day to take care of some things.

RICK

What sort of things?

DAVE

Mom has a list of things that need to be taken care of.

RICK

That is BS. You want to see your girlfriend, don't you? I know all about her. I know her sister. She told me about you two.

DAVE

I'm trying to do what I'm supposed to do. If I see her, what does it matter? The coach isn't being realistic. You have a girlfriend. What's the difference?

RICK

Don't worry. I'm not going to rat on you. Just be careful. Don't mess up. I'll be at the university next year. You'll be a junior in high school. There's a big difference.

DAVE

I know what I'm supposed to do. I won't let you or the team down. I promise.

RICK

Like I said, be careful. I'm leaving after practice to meet a university coach for breakfast.

DAVE

It's awesome that you're probably going to get a scholarship. No worries, I can find a way home. Don't worry about me.

After practice, **RICK** leaves. **DAVE** heads to the treehouse, where he and **SERENE** spend the afternoon talking and spending time together. They decide to run over to **Lumpy's**, the high school hangout. They run into their mutual friend, **SIRI**.

SIRI

Hey, you two! Nice game yesterday—a 75-yard punt return. That was impressive!

DAVE

Thanks, Siri. Beginner's luck, I guess. Do you two know each other?

SERENE

Siri and I have been neighbors since... forever!

SIRI

Hi, Serene. You're giving this guy a break?

SERENE

Yeah. I bless him with my presence!

SIRI

You guys are meant for each other. Nice to see that you two linked up. We need to hang out sometime.

SERENE

You know you're always welcome at the treehouse. We need to catch up sometime.

SIRI

I'd like that. By the way, did you read the paper today? The news article mentioned you. I guess you're famous now. Are you still going to give me the time of day?

DAVE

Funny, Siri. You know I'll still give you my autograph.

SIRI

Yeah, yeah, yeah! Don't let this go to your head, big boy. Hey, I noticed your mom wasn't at the game. Is she okay?

DAVE

It was only a practice game. She'll be there for the regular season games.

SIRI

I love your mom.

DAVE

Have you met her?

SIRI

No, but I've heard about her. What a nightmare she's gone through. I'd love to meet her sometime.

DAVE

I'm sure she'd love you, Siri. We'll make that happen.

DAVE turns to **SERENE** and whispers in her ear.

DAVE

Let's find a paper!

SERENE

The line is too long, anyway. I think I'll make you a sandwich at my house. Let's go.

DAVE

Good idea. See you, Siri.

They make their way back to **SERENE'S** house. **SERENE** spots a newspaper lying in the next-door neighbor's driveway.

SERENE

Look, there's a newspaper. They're out of town. I'm doing them a favor by taking it.

DAVE

Justifiable five-finger discount?

SERENE laughs, grabs the paper, and they sprint to the treehouse.

INT. TREEHOUSE – DAY

SERENE reads from the paper.

SERENE

"Skyline Scalps Braves, 19-0. Skyline High School opened their grid season Friday with late-season precision. In the process, they bowled over Bountiful, 19-0, before the Eagle home crowd."

DAVE

Did they mention that the stands were packed?

SERENE

Blah, blah, blah. "But in the final frame, Dave Barton completed the scoring when he gathered in a punt on his 25-yard line and swept down the left sideline to scoring territory. The speedy punt return specialist had only to outmaneuver one man en route, as no one touched him."

DAVE

No one even got close!

SERENE

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Zeus, right?

DAVE

Of course... well, not really. Not yesterday. "Speedy punt return specialist!" I might have been speedy, but the punt return specialist part may have been a stretch. I've only been back for punt returns on a handful of occasions in my life. I dropped two of the three punts that came to me yesterday. It's not pretty, but I'll take any positive publicity at this point.

SERENE pins the article up on the wall.

SERENE

Week 1!

DAVE

One game down. Only eight more varsity games and eight more JV games until the playoffs. I hope I don't get injured. Right now, it feels like rigor mortis is setting in. My body is so sore.

SCENE: **DAVE** lays down on his stomach as **SERENE** rubs his back.

DAVE

Be gentle.

INT. TREEHOUSE – DAY

SERENE looks around and is contemplating what to do next and heads to the door to the swing rope.

SERENE

Well, Elmer Fudd, do you want to swing from the ‘wope’?

DAVE

Really funny.

SERENE prepares to engage the rope swing.

DAVE

Okay, smarty pants, making fun of my Elmer Fudd days. I guess I’ll have to pull your ‘wope’.

DAVE grabs **SERENE’S** bra string as she takes flight on the swing. Her top comes loose, and two pads fly into the air. As **SERENE** lands, she frantically tries to cover up and swims toward the floating pads.

DAVE

What are those? Falsies?

SERENE

Those are none of your business.

DAVE quickly swings off the rope and lands in the water, swimming frantically to the floating bra pads. He grabs one before **SERENE** can reach it and throws it to her. She swims toward him using one arm, holding her top and covering her chest.

SERENE

You are going to pay for this! Now tie my swimsuit, you troublemaker.

DAVE ties **SERENE’S** bathing suit top. They play in the water for a while before returning to the treehouse. They climb up the ladder, drying off with a towel from the closet. They lay down once more, reflecting on what just happened.

DAVE

That was interesting.

SERENE

Never a dull moment!

DAVE

You know, you make me so happy. I sometimes wonder why life brings so much unhappiness to people who once seemed so happy.

SERENE

My parents were happy at one time. My mom said the first time she saw my dad it was “love at first sight.”

DAVE

So what happened?

SERENE

Alcohol.

DAVE

What do you mean?

SERENE

Every time life got hard—raising the family and dealing with my sisters—my dad drank heavily. That was his way of dealing with things. I remember when my sister had this boyfriend...

SERENE'S voice fades out to a flashback, depicting family turmoil. **STEPHANIE**, **SERENE'S** sister, became pregnant at 16. The scene is set in a tiny, overcrowded house, where the family also cares for **SERENE'S** grandmother. **SERENE** enters **STEPHANIE'S** bedroom and finds her crying.

SERENE

What's wrong?

STEPHANIE

Nothing.

SERENE

It doesn't look like anything. Tell me!

STEPHANIE

I've missed my period for three months. I think I'm pregnant.

SERENE

Oh God, no! Who's the father?

STEPHANIE

A guy from Skyline's football team.

SERENE

How did it happen?

STEPHANIE

Don't act stupid. You know how it happened!

SCENE FADES TO THE BLEACHERS IN THE STADIUM: A **FOOTBALL JOCK** is reading a book on the bleachers. **STEPHANIE** walks by, trying not to look over at him.

FOOTBALL JOCK

So don't say hi?

STEPHANIE

Are you talking to me?

JIMMY (FOOTBALL JOCK)

Well, I'm not talking to those pesky ducks flying overhead!

STEPHANIE

They're not pesky. They're beautiful birds, and they're landing on our family's pond. Don't ever say that again!

JIMMY (FOOTBALL JOCK)

Well, aren't you the little pesky one now! You sure have an attitude.

STEPHANIE

You're rude. I don't want to talk to you.

JIMMY (FOOTBALL JOCK)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you.

STEPHANIE

Who are you? Why are you bothering me?

JIMMY (FOOTBALL JOCK)

Why wouldn't I want to bother a beautiful and... interesting girl?

STEPHANIE

Interesting girl?

JIMMY (FOOTBALL JOCK)

I'm Jimmy. I go to school here.

STEPHANIE

I go to this school, and I've never seen you before.

JIMMY (FOOTBALL JOCK)

My family just moved in a few months ago. This school is big. I guess our paths just never crossed. If they had, I would have made sure to get to know you.

STEPHANIE walks over and sits next to **JIMMY**.

STEPHANIE

Do you think I'm interesting and...beautiful?

JIMMY (FOOTBALL JOCK)

Why would I take time out of my busy schedule to talk to you? Of course, I think you're beautiful and have discovered that you're absolutely interesting.

STEPHANIE

You don't look that busy. You're sitting here by yourself, reading a book.

JIMMY (FOOTBALL JOCK)

Well, maybe that was a stretch. I want to get to know you, that's all.

STEPHANIE

No one's ever talked to me like this before. You're right, I *am* interesting. I'm the queen of interesting!

JIMMY (FOOTBALL JOCK)

Well, tell me about how interesting you are.

SCENE: Show the two talking on the bleachers. **STEPHANIE** becomes very animated, describing how "interesting" she is. **FADE BACK TO THE BEDROOM**, where **SERENE** and **STEPHANIE** are talking.

SERENE

You know Dad warned you several times not to talk to strangers. You really didn't know anything about him.

Their **MOTHER** walks down the hall, overhearing the conversation. She leans against the door and listens.

STEPHANIE

He seemed so nice, and he thought I was beautiful.

SERENE

So, how did he manage to get you pregnant?

STEPHANIE

We hit it off and decided to meet at the bleachers after his workouts. We started liking each other and kissed.

SERENE

Apparently, you did more than kiss him. What happened?

STEPHANIE

I told him about the treehouse. He wanted to see it.

SERENE

Did you bring him to the treehouse? Why would you do that?

STEPHANIE

I know it was a mistake, but I liked him.

SERENE

So, is that where he got you pregnant?

STEPHANIE

Yes. It started with kissing, but he got aggressive and started taking my clothes off.

SERENE

What were you thinking? Why didn't you stop him?

STEPHANIE

I wanted him to like me so much... I let it happen. I'm so sorry! I made a mistake. I just wanted him to like me. (*sobbing*)

Their **MOTHER** enters the room.

MOTHER

Sorry, I overheard your conversation.

STEPHANIE

Did you eavesdrop on our private conversation? This is none of your business!

MOTHER

It *is* my business. I'm your mother. We need to deal with this.

STEPHANIE

Are you going to tell Dad? His drinking gets out of control when he tries to parent me. Who knows what he'll do?

MOTHER

I'll handle him. It's going to be okay, honey.

Their **MOTHER** comforts **STEPHANIE** as she continues to cry.

BACK AT THE TREEHOUSE, **SERENE** explains to **DAVE** what happened after her mother told her father about **STEPHANIE'S** pregnancy.

SERENE

Mom tried to confront my dad that night.

Show no dialogue—just the interaction of her **DAD** pacing in circles, grabbing his head, acting frantic. He holds a bottle and starts drinking. **SEREN'S MOTHER** tries to grab the bottle, and he pushes her. She falls, hitting her head and cutting her forehead.

SERENE

That's the last time my father lived at our house. He packed up and left.

DAVE

Did that make you sad?

SERENE

It made me sad because we used to have a great relationship. But things changed. He changed. I can't say we were disappointed to see him go. The house was calmer without him.

DAVE

So what happened with Stephanie? Did she have the baby?

SERENE

She miscarried a few days later.

DAVE

So, all that for nothing?

SERENE

Not really. It brought positive change. My parents are friends now. They're much happier living apart. Sometimes, hard things bring about good changes, right?

DAVE

I guess so. But it's still sad. I can relate, though. Our house is a much calmer place now that my dad's gone. I feel sorry for my mom. She didn't deserve the way he changed. Why do grown-ups turn into such a-holes?

SERENE

Yeah. Such dickheads!

DAVE

Did I just hear you say dickhead?

SERENE Oh, you don't even know what a potty mouth I have. Don't even get me going.

DAVE Like what... pee-pee?

SERENE Piddle!

DAVE Piss!

SERENE Tinkle!

DAVE Whizz!

SERENE Wee-wee!

DAVE Take a leak!

SERENE Realize that you will never beat me at this!

DAVE Pooh-pooh!

SERENE Number two!

DAVE Turd!

SERENE Dung!

DAVE

(slowing down, struggling for words)

Manure...

SERENE Fart!

DAVE

(in desperation, passes gas)

Ah!

SERENE What the heck was that?

DAVE

Just my way of letting you know that you win!

SERENE

You stink up my treehouse and think it's okay? Get out and take that smell with you!

DAVE Okay, okay. I'm leaving. I have to go anyway. I need to work out.

SERENE

Go, Zeus! You need to get big and strong.

DAVE And great!

SERENE Oh my heck, you are so... so... (*shaking her head*) wonderful!

MONTAGE – SERIES OF SHOTS

- **DAVE** working out, sweating, lifting weights.
- **DAVE** at practice, throwing passes and running plays.
- **GAME SHOTS: DAVE** playing football, scoring touchdowns.
- **SCOREBOARD SHOTS:** After each game, **SERENE** updates a chalkboard in the treehouse with stats.
- **SERENE** and **DAVE** in the treehouse after each game. **SERENE** applies first aid to **DAVE's** injuries.
- **SERENE** pins up news articles about **DAVE's** games.

EXT. TREEHOUSE – DAY

SERENE

Another win. Are you satisfied with your performance?

DAVE

I'm doing okay. In the JV games, I play mostly quarterback, but sometimes I get to run the ball at halfback.

SERENE

You don't like playing quarterback as much?

DAVE

It's not that. I love playing two games a week. There's not as much pressure on Thursdays when we play JV.

SERENE

Pressure?

DAVE

Most players would love the position I'm in right now. But there's so much I need to know. I have to know all the plays and what every player does on each play. I try to take on the role of team leader.

SERENE

You're the leader of the team?

DAVE

Yeah. As a kid, I'd go to church and sing a song that stuck with me. I think of it when I get discouraged and need a quick reminder to stay focused.

SERENE

A church song to stay focused?

DAVE

Yeah, believe it or not.

SERENE

What are the words?

DAVE

Most of the words don't apply, but some do.

SERENE

What words apply to a star football player?

DAVE

I need some help. Hand me your guitar.

SERENE

Really?

DAVE

Humor me!

SERENE retrieves the guitar from the closet and hands it to **DAVE**. **DAVE** tunes the guitar for a moment, then starts to strum.

DAVE

Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,
Help me find the way...

SERENE (*interrupting*)

Those are the words to a church song? Sounds more like a football coach telling you to help the other players when they forget what they're supposed to do.

DAVE

Yeah, the head coach of the universe.

SERENE

The universe?

DAVE

My mom teaches me that God controls everything in our lives. To her, He's the ultimate head coach.

SERENE

Do you believe in God?

DAVE

I think so.

SERENE

Well, you either do, or you don't. Which is it?

DAVE Do you believe in God?

SERENE

You're putting me on the spot? I asked you first.

DAVE

I hope so, at least for my mom's sake. She believes in God and tells me that her troubles in life are tests.

SERENE

Yeah, tests that are so unfair and so unjustified in her case.

DAVE

She's endured a lot of pain and lost most of her ability to do what she loved. Modeling, skiing, tennis... all gone. She's still so young.

SERENE

Sounds like her God is pretty unfair to her. If there were actually a God, He wouldn't let her go through so much pain.

DAVE

That's precisely what I told my mom. For some reason, she feels like her test will strengthen her faith.

SERENE

I'm glad she feels that way. Can you imagine if she felt sorry for herself and started drinking, or... worse?

DAVE

Worse?

SERENE

Yeah, worse. A few years ago, my neighbor found out she had cancer. After a few months of suffering, she ended her life in the garage. Her husband found her... dead. It was so sad.

DAVE

Wow. That's a sad story. I'm glad my mom has a great attitude. She rarely complains.

SERENE

She doesn't complain?

DAVE

Not about her situation. Sometimes, she complains if we don't do our chores.

SERENE

She's an amazing person. I'd love to meet her.

DAVE

I'm sure there'll be a time for that. She worries about me a lot.

SERENE

Worries?

DAVE

Yeah, she always says I'm a boy in a man's body. She thinks I might get myself into trouble if I have a girlfriend.

SERENE

What do you think?

DAVE

I think I can manage a girlfriend.

SERENE

Manage?

DAVE

I don't mean it THAT way! I have enough intelligence and willpower to make wise decisions at my age.

SERENE

Well then, manage me!

DAVE and **SERENE** Embrace

EXT. DAVIS HIGH FOOTBALL FIELD – NIGHT

COACH SCHMIDT

I know the late game will be a slight change for most of you. We don't play under the lights very often. You know the plan. Let's get out there and win!

TEAM

(jumping up and chanting)

CUT TO:

SERIES OF CLIPS:

- Shots of **SKYLINE** players making mistakes and turning the ball over.

- **COACHES** looking frustrated on the sidelines.

SCOREBOARD: Skyline loses 13-7.

INT. LOCKER ROOM – NIGHT

COACH SCHMIDT

I know this team is good, but we are better. This won't affect our division standings. All the rest of the games now count. Are we going to let this happen again?

SKYLINE TEAM

No, sir!

COACH SCHMIDT

Do you like the feeling of losing?

SKYLINE TEAM

No, sir!

COACH SCHMIDT

Let's learn from this. Now go get on the bus. It's a long ride home.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT – NIGHT

The bus arrives back at the school. Parents and classmates are there, cheering. The team walks quietly into the locker room.

PARENT FROM THE CROWD

Love you guys!

EXT. TREEHOUSE – NIGHT

SERENE is waiting impatiently for **DAVE**. He finally climbs up the ladder, and she hugs him.

SERENE

So...

DAVE

We lost.

SERENE

So what happened?

DAVE

They were big and came to play.

SERENE

Maybe it was just a bad day. I know all about that.

DAVE

Oh, you have bad days?

SERENE

Especially when my little friend visits.

DAVE

Little friend?

SERENE (*rubs her stomach*)

Oh, that little friend.

DAVE

I get cranky! Maybe we can be cranky together.

They lay down on the mat. This time, **DAVE** starts therapy on **SERENE**.

SERENE

What are you doing?

DAVE

Sounds like you need this more than I do. I'm doing fine. I feel for the seniors on the team—this is their final season, at least in high school.

SERENE

So what did your brother Rick say about it?

DAVE

Rick doesn't talk when he's angry. I just let him sulk.

SERENE

Do you ever get angry?

DAVE

Very rarely. At least I try not to act like my father.

SERENE

Is that the reason why?

DAVE

Not really. I think people who get angry look and act stupid. What does it prove anyway? It just makes matters worse.

SERENE

I agree. So let's just be happy!

They embrace.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD – DAY

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER IN THE BOOTH)

We are at East High School for our Prep of the Week football matchup between East and Skyline. East has one win and two losses. Skyline had one loss against Davis last week and a record of two wins and one loss. We'll see what each Region Two team can do on this beautiful fall day.

POSSIBLE MONTAGE OF GAME CLIPS ENDING IN A WIN:

- Kickoff.
- Play starting.
- Cameras pan across the field.

INT. SERENE'S HOUSE – DAY

SERENE is watching the game on TV with her sisters. **SERENE** jumps and cheers as she watches **DAVE** and **RICK**'s special play run for over 75 yards.

SERENE'S MOM

What's all the commotion about?

STEPHANIE

Serene's boyfriend is playing football on TV.

SERENE (*smacking STEPHANIE*)

He's not my boyfriend!

SERENE'S MOM

So who is this boyfriend?

SERENE

It's just a friend of Brad Miller's across the lane. He introduced us, and he knows tumbling. He's taught me some stuff for my cheerleading.

SERENE'S MOM

Does this football player have a name?

STEPHANIE

His name is Dave. He's my friend Rick's younger brother and is my age.

SERENE

(*pointing to the TV, trying to change the subject*)

Pay attention to the game!

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

It's been a hard-fought game, but Region Two's game is in the books. Skyline beats East 13-6. Skyline is now 3-1. East takes a record of one win and two losses. The leading rusher for Skyline is Dave Barton, who rushed for 76 yards. From what I've heard, the Barton Brother duo has again shown its power and speed running around the end on a unique play called the "Barton Special." These brothers have a special bond off the field as well as on the field. I know their mother and she's very proud of these two. Join us next week for the Prep of the Week game between Olympus and West High. See you next Friday.

INT. SERENE'S LIVING ROOM – DAY

SERENE'S MOM

Sounds like your little boyfriend isn't so little.

SERENE

Isn't he wonderful? I mean, isn't he such a great football player?

SERENE'S MOM

I didn't know Serene was into football.

SERENE'S MOM gives **SERENE** a knowing look as if to say, "You're playing with fire."

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD – DAY

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

With the win over Kearns last week and today's win over Roy High School, Skyline will face Layton High School in the State Championship.

INT. TREEHOUSE – DAY

SERENE puts up another newspaper clipping on an overflowing bulletin board. She hugs **DAVE**.

SERENE

End of your regular season?

DAVE

Yep!

SERENE

You've done all right. Look at your stats.

SERENE points to the wall of the treehouse, showing the stats she's been keeping.

DAVE

We have a great team. It isn't hard to do what I've done with players like we have.

SERENE

You're still in one piece.

DAVE

Barely. I'm pretty banged up. There isn't a part of my body that doesn't hurt.

SERENE

So, does this hurt? (*touches his arm*)

DAVE

Yep.

SERENE pulls off **DAVE**'s shirt and touches his chest.

SERENE

So, does this hurt?

DAVE

Yep.

DAVE points to his butt.

DAVE

This hurts!

SERENE

Sorry, I'm not kissing your—

DAVE

(interrupting)

I'm just kidding. But this hurts. *(points to his forehead)*

SERENE kisses his forehead.

DAVE

This hurts. *(points to his cheek)*

SERENE kisses his cheek.

DAVE

This hurts. *(points to his lips)*

SERENE and **DAVE** kiss.

CAMERA PANS OUT from inside the treehouse to the outside, eventually viewing the football field.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD – DAY

ALL PLAYERS are stretching out on the field.

COACH SCHMIDT

We ended the regular season, winning our division.

CHEERS erupt from the players.

COACH SCHMIDT

We'll be playing Kearns in the quarterfinals. All the teams now are division winners. This is where we show what we're made of. We can't slack off because it's the last few weeks of the season. We will hit the weights hard, run, and practice harder. If we stay focused, we'll take state.

SERIES OF CLIPS: Skyline playing playoff games intermixed with **BILL MARCROFT** calling games against Kearns and Roy High School.

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

Looks like with the win over Kearns last week and the win today over Roy High School, Skyline will face Layton High School in the State Championship.

INT. TREEHOUSE – DAY

SERENE is putting up a newspaper article from yesterday's game. She seems more somber than usual.

DAVE

What's up? You aren't as happy as usual. Your little friend show up?

SERENE

No, it's not that. I talked with my sister, and she said you're going to the girl's choice dance the day after the state game.

DAVE

Yeah, I was going to tell you about that.

SERENE

When?

DAVE

It just happened yesterday. I swear I was going to tell you today.

SERENE

Who is she?

DAVE

Her name is Robin.

CUT TO: INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY – DAY

It's after school, and **DAVE** is getting his things before practice at his locker. Students are bustling, trying to leave the building or catch buses and carpools. A few girls stand near **DAVE**, talking. **DAVE** glances over at **ROBIN**, a 5'10" tall, beautiful girl with lead roles in school plays and an incredible voice. She is also a friend of **DAVE**'s brother, **RICK**, and a senior. **DAVE** looks away when **ROBIN** notices him.

GIRL 1

I hear you'll ask Rick's brother to the girl's choice dance. Robbing the cradle, huh?

ROBIN

Yeah, but he could easily pass for a senior. I was introduced to him once when he was with his brother. I doubt he remembers me, but I'm going to ask him anyway. I'm ready for something... different in my life.

GIRL 2

Well, I feel sorry for him if he says yes. You date, and you dump. That's what you do.

ROBIN

You know I'm not a steady type of girlfriend. I like to have fun with lots of people. Is there anything wrong with that?

GIRL 2

Well, you'd better ask him before he finds out what he's getting into from everyone else.

ROBIN

Give me a break, you two. I just want to have some fun.

ROBIN walks over to **DAVE**, who is standing by his locker.

ROBIN

Hi, Dave. Do you remember me?

DAVE

Hi, Robin. How are you?

ROBIN

You remembered my name. That's quite a feat, considering there are over three thousand students here.

DAVE

Your name is easy. I always associate names with objects. You sing like a robin.

ROBIN

You associate me with a bird?

DAVE

Yeah, funny huh?

ROBIN

So, what should I associate you with?

DAVE hesitates momentarily, then opens his locker and points to his **Statue of David**. They both laugh.

ROBIN

Well, that was interesting. Statue of David? I get it. I'll never forget your name now as if I would anyway. You've made a name for yourself these last few months. Quite admirable, if I say so myself.

DAVE

Thanks. It's been an interesting ride, especially for my first year here. I've had some great opportunities so far and love every minute of it.

ROBIN

Well, I'm going to make it even more interesting.

DAVE

How's that?

ROBIN

I was wondering if you'd go to the girl's choice dance with me. It shouldn't interfere with football because it's the day after your state game.

DAVE

I'm sure there are plenty of senior studs who would love to go with you.

ROBIN

I knew this was a bad idea. Why would you want to go with an old lady like me, anyway?

DAVE looks away down the hall, thinking. **ROBIN** gets a worried look on her face, but **DAVE** finally responds.

DAVE

Sure, why not? I hope I can still dance that night. I get pretty sore after games sometimes.

ROBIN (excitedly)

We're going to have so much fun! We'll be doubling with another couple.

DAVE

Do I know them?

ROBIN

Yes! It's your quarterback, Steve Marshall, and Janine, the head cheerleader.

DAVE

Wow. Quite the power date. Did Steve or Janine have anything to do with this?

ROBIN

Well, kind of.

DAVE

I hope you're doing this because you want to, not because they put you up to it.

ROBIN

I didn't think you'd say yes. I'm so happy!

DAVE

Well, I guess I'm your date for the girl's choice dance. I'll have to dust off my suit if it still fits.

ROBIN

One more thing.

DAVE

Yeah?

ROBIN

You might have to sit out one dance. The band has asked me to sing a song during the dance.

DAVE

I love your voice. I've seen one of your plays. It'll be a pleasure to gawk at you for a while.

ROBIN

Gawk?

DAVE

Well, you're not hard to look at.

ROBIN

I'll take that as a compliment.

DAVE

What song will you be singing?

ROBIN

It's the new Dionne Warwick song. I love it, and my band buddy wants me to sing it.

DAVE

I love that song, too. It's a love song.

ROBIN

It is. It has a catchy melody and is perfect for a slow dance.

DAVE

I know. I've sung it to my siblings before, just changing a few words to make it apply to them. They love it when I play my guitar and sing to them.

ROBIN

Maybe you can help me practice!

DAVE

I don't think so. I'm not that good. I've got to go, but I look forward to being your date.

ROBIN

Thanks, Mr. Statue of David.

DAVE

I...

ROBIN twirls away, singing a line from the song.

ROBIN

(singing) You see this girl, this girl's in love with you.

DAVE laughs as he heads to the locker room, shaking his head.

INT. TREEHOUSE – DAY

DAVE continues his conversation with **SERENE**.

DAVE

I was roped into it. Steve and his girlfriend put her up to it so they could all go to the dance together. It's no big deal.

SERENE

We've had this talk before. You're the big jock now, and I'm sure all the girls are throwing themselves at you.

DAVE

Of course!

SERENE

Stop it! I'm being serious.

DAVE

I'm sorry. It's going to be all right. It's just a dance. You're my girl. You know how I feel about you. I'd better get going.

DAVE hugs **SERENE** and starts heading toward the ladder. He looks back and sees **SERENE** take off her sweatshirt, revealing her tight workout outfit.

DAVE

What do you think you're doing?

SERENE

(provocatively) Like what you see? Look what I have to offer.

DAVE

This is precisely what we talked about. We agreed we're not going there. I have to go.

SERENE puts her sweatshirt back on and starts to cry.

SERENE

You're just saying that to make me feel better. You like her, don't you? I heard she's beautiful.

DAVE

I'm not listening to this. Rethink this craziness.

SERENE

I'm sorry.

SERENE tries to hug **DAVE**, but he steps away.

DAVE

I really have to go.

DAVE leaves the treehouse. **SERENE** drops onto the couch and cries.

INT. UNIVERSITY LOCKER ROOM – DAY

The **SKYLINE** football team is preparing for the state championship game.

COACH SCHMIDT

Today is the culmination of a lot of hard work. This is the result of our two-a-day practices in hundred-degree temperatures. This is the result of sacrificing yourself for the team. We are family now. We look out for one another. We block, we protect, we defend our goal. We will win today!

TEAM

(erupting in chants) Eagles! Eagles! Eagles!

COACH SCHMIDT

Now, let's get out there and win.

EXT. UNIVERSITY STADIUM – DAY

The **LAYTON** and **SKYLINE** teams are warming up. The camera pans to the press box, where **BILL MARCROFT** is providing pre-game commentary for the television broadcast.

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

Today marks the end of a hard-fought football season. Both Layton and Skyline have only one loss. Layton has two All-Americans, Kenny Nelson and Phill Graham, who have made it challenging for most teams to run the ball and contain their offense. Today, there will be a test for Skyline's running backs, John Bushman and Dave Barton, who share rushing responsibilities. The Barton brothers have had quite a season running their famous "Barton Special." I know these boys personally and their mother, who cheers from a wheelchair but never lets that stop her from supporting her sons. These boys may have a special play named after them, but the real special Barton is their mother.

INT. PRESS BOX – DAY

The TV producer counts down: 3, 2, 1. The show is off the air for a five-minute break.

DICK ROSETTA (sportswriter for the Deseret News) enters the press box and greets **BILL MARCROFT**.

BILL MARCROFT

So, what's up?

DICK ROSETTA

Just thought I'd make a friendly wager on today's game. I know who you're rooting for, but the odds are with Layton. They've got two All-Americans. Tough to beat.

BILL MARCROFT

Standard bet?

DICK ROSETTA

You got it! I'll be right next door, ready to collect at the end of the game.

BILL MARCROFT

Same to you, my friend.

They laugh and exchange a handshake. **DICK ROSETTA** moves to his spot as the game goes live again, and **BILL MARCROFT** resumes his commentary.

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

Today's game is cool and crisp, with snow falling yesterday. This is football weather, folks. Prepare for what's been touted as the game of the year. And now, the National Anthem.

EXT. STADIUM – DAY

The **National Anthem** plays as the camera pans across both teams and coaches. It lingers on the **Skyline crowd**, showing **Dave's mom, dad, Serene's mother, and sisters**. The anthem ends.

COACH SCHMIDT

Team captains, take the field.

RICK BARTON, LANCE ROBBINS, and STEVE MARSHALL make their way to the center of the field.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

REFEREE

Welcome to your state championship game. Layton, your team will show on the visitor portion of the scoreboard. You will call heads or tails to see who has the choice of possession. Are you ready? What do you call?

LAYTON PLAYER

Heads.

REFEREE

It is heads. Layton, what do you want to do?

KENNY NELSON

We'll receive.

REFEREE

Skyline, what direction do you want to kick?

RICK BARTON signals north. The players exchange handshakes and return to their sidelines. Both teams jump and chant as they prepare to take their positions on the field.

INT. PRESS BOX – DAY

BILL MARCROFT begins his pre-game narration.

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

The weather is chilly for the fans but perfect for the players. Both teams look ready to play. Skyline will be kicking off. Here's the kick. We are underway. Phil Graham fields the kick. It's first and ten at the 15-yard line. The snap... Layton has fumbled the ball. Skyline recovers it at the ten-yard line!

EXT. FIELD – DAY

BILL MARCROFT

The Eagles' Marshall recovered the ball at the Layton 10. John Bushman gets two yards to the eight. Steve Lyman pounds to the seven. Third and seven. Marshall drops back and finds Lance Robbins alone in the end zone. Skyline leads six to zero with an extra point upcoming.

SKYLINE fans throw **confetti** as the **band** plays the Skyline victory song in the background.

COACH SCHMIDT

Extra point team, gather around.

The **offensive unit** surrounds **Coach Schmidt**.

COACH SCHMIDT

We're going for two. Gather around Rick so the defense can't see him. 29 quick pitch. 1-2-3.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

BILL MARCROFT

Skyline is going for two points. The pitch goes to Dave Barton, with his brother Rick leading the play.

DAVE gets tackled almost immediately by **Kenny Nelson**.

BILL MARCROFT

Barton gets tackled for a loss and upended by Kenny Nelson. Looks like Barton is slow getting up.

EXT. SIDELINE – DAY

DAVE limps back to the sideline, where the crowd is still cheering. His mother, seated in her **wheelchair**, looks worried. **Coach Haun** and the **trainer, Victor Checketts**, greet **Dave**.

COACH HAUN

Are you okay?

VICTOR pulls down **Dave's tube sock**.

VICTOR

He's got a pretty bad contusion.

COACH HAUN

Get some ice on it.

DAVE

I'm fine. I need to walk this off.

COACH HAUN

Let me know when you're ready to go back in.

DAVE nods and starts walking down the sideline. **Victor** straps an ice pack onto **Dave's leg**, and **Ed**, another trainer, places a warmup jacket over **Dave's shoulders**. **Dave** sits next to **Kim** on the bench.

COACH SCHMIDT

Is Barton okay?

COACH HAUN

He took a brutal hit to his leg. He says he's okay.

COACH SCHMIDT

We might have to use him sparingly.

COACH HAUN

He's not going to like that.

EXT. BENCH – DAY

KIM

You alright?

DAVE

It hurts bad.

KIM

Can you play?

DAVE

Yeah. Everyone knows that when Rick comes in, we run that quick pitch. That was stupid.

KIM

Well, Layton did their homework.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

Marshall finds Robbins lurking again on the left sidelines. Robbins slithers down the sidelines. 30, 20, 10, and scores! This was a 57-yard touchdown pass. The extra point is good! Skyline 13, Layton 0.

EXT. BENCH – DAY

Dave throws off the ice and walks back to the sideline.

DAVE

Coach, really, I'm okay and ready to play.

COACH HAUN

Take it easy for a while longer. Go sit down and ice that leg again.

Dave reluctantly sits back down as **Victor** replaces the ice on his leg.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

Skyline has intercepted the football deep in their territory. There are ten seconds left in the half. Skyline's offense lines up... Marshall throws to a wide-open Barton. Incomplete.

Dave pounds the turf in frustration before running to the locker room.

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

A sad sophomore heads to the locker room after missing a sure touchdown pass.

INT. LOCKER ROOM – DAY

COACH SCHMIDT addresses the team.

COACH SCHMIDT

We have a 13-point lead right now.

The **team cheers wildly**.

COACH SCHMIDT

But the game isn't over. We have to dominate. Rest up and get ready for the second half.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

The **second half** begins with **Skyline** receiving the ball.

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

It's the end of the third quarter. Skyline still leads 13-0, but they seem flat. Dave Barton has been quiet today.

EXT. SIDELINE – DAY

Dave and **Kim** sit on the bench.

DAVE

I hope we can score. It would put the game out of reach.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

Skyline fumbles the ball! Layton takes over with a chance to go ahead.

EXT. SIDELINE – DAY

DAVE

We have to hold them.

EXT. FIELD – DAY

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

Layton powers into the end zone. The extra point is good. Layton leads 14 to 13 with 49 seconds left.

The **Layton stands** erupt in celebration.

EXT. SIDELINE – DAY

KIM

I guess you're not feeling great right now.

DAVE

I'm going to be the scapegoat for this game. That pass I missed...

A **senior** walks by **Dave**, giving him, what he thinks is a dirty look.

DAVE

Even my teammates hate me.

COACH SCHMIDT calls out **Dave's name**.

KIM

Coach called you.

DAVE runs over as the **offense** takes the field.

COACH SCHMIDT

Wing right, 80 quick screen. You can do this!

Coach Schmidt pushes **Dave** onto the field.

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

Marshall throws to Barton... He's got it! Barton's following his blockers... 50, 40, 30, 20, 10...
TOUCHDOWN, SKYLINE!

The **Skyline stands** erupt into pandemonium.

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

The extra point is good. Skyline leads 20 to 14 with less than 20 seconds left.

COACH SCHMIDT

Where's Barton?

COACH HAUN

He's celebrating. I'll send someone in.

SERENE runs onto the field and hugs **Dave**.

DAVE

You're here! Can you believe it?

EXT. FIELD – DAY

BILL MARCROFT (SPORTSCASTER)

The game is over! Skyline wins 20 to 14 in one of the most dramatic championship games ever.

INT. PRESS BOX – DAY

BILL MARCROFT hands **Dick Rosetta** his money (five dollars).

BILL MARCROFT

It ain't over till it's over.

INT. LOCKER ROOM – DAY

COACH SCHMIDT

We did it! You guys never gave up.

The **team cheers wildly**.

COACH SCHMIDT Great job. Grab your things.

INT. UNDER THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH STADIUM STANDS – EARLY EVENING

The **Skyline** team, fresh from their victory, makes their way under the **university stands** toward the buses. The tunnel echoes with the cheers of adoring fans and family members. Reporters from across the country gather to cover **Dave** and **Rick's** story.

NATIONAL NEWS REPORTER

Dave, you are the hero of this game. What are your feelings right now?

Dave starts to answer, and the camera pans over to **Marge Barton** in the stands, surrounded by well-wishers. She radiates happiness. **Dave** and **Rick** look up toward her, grinning, and point to her. She raises her arms like a referee signaling a touchdown and blows them a kiss.

DAVE

Well, I definitely could not have done this myself. A very talented and dedicated team made this happen. But the real hero here today is our mother. She inspires and loves unconditionally and, most importantly, has engrained in us the attitude never to give up. We followed her example and knew we could win this game. We are truly blessed because of her.

CHANNEL 5 REPORTER (LOCAL)

Dave, what was going through your mind when the situation looked so bleak, and that final play was called?

Rick puts his arm around **Dave** as he answers.

DAVE

When I knew the play would come to me, my first reaction was to change it. I wanted Marshall to do a power screen instead and throw the ball to Lyman, our fullback. But when I ran onto the field, the pain in my leg from earlier in the game was mostly gone. If Marshall could get me the ball, I'd be led by a powerful force and know exactly where to go.

FADE OUT of the interview. Bring in music: "Lead Me, Guide Me, Walk Beside Me." Show **Dave** and **Rick** leaving the interview area, heading toward the bus.

EXT. UNIVERSITY STADIUM - NIGHT

Dave and **Rick** board the bus, the last ones on due to the numerous reporters asking questions about both the game and their family story. **Rick** enters first.

RED CARLSON

Aren't you Dave Barton's big brother?

The team **roars with laughter**. **Rick** smiles proudly, receiving the comment with dignity. The bus ride home is filled with singing and cheering.

EXT. SKYLINE HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

The bus arrives back at **Skyline High School**. As the players step off the bus, cheers erupt from the student body that gathered there. The team hits the showers, preparing for a well-deserved celebration.

INT. LOCKER ROOM SHOWERS - NIGHT

The camera pans discreetly across the players, showering from the waist up.

NOAL

I told a few of the players on the sidelines in that final minute that if you scored, I would kiss your butt!

Dave laughs, not taking him seriously, but to his surprise, **Noal** bends down and **kisses Dave's butt**.

JIM looks at **Kim**, shocked.

KIM

Now, there's something you don't see every day.

Jim and **Kim** burst into laughter.

EXT. LOCKER ROOM DOORS - NIGHT

Dave and **Rick** leave the building together, but reporters are waiting outside.

RICK

We'll never get out of here if we go this way. Let's sneak out of the east side building.

DAVE

Good idea!

EXT. CAMARO - NIGHT

Rick and **Dave** ride in the Camaro. **Rick** drops **Dave** off at his house. They share a grin.

RICK

The seniors are invited to Randy's for dinner. Want to come?

DAVE

If it's for seniors, then...

RICK

Really? You need to be there. I'll pick you up in half an hour.

DAVE

Sounds good.

EXT. DAVE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dave is greeted by cheering neighbors as he approaches his front door. News cameras capture his arrival. His family opens the door, screaming with delight.

DAVE

Well, if it isn't my favorite team!

His **siblings** swarm him in a group hug. Then they head inside.

MOM

Here's the hero!

DAVE

Oh, Mom!

Dave and his **mom** embrace.

MOM (whispering)

I was praying for you those last few moments of the game.

DAVE

I know. I know.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The brief celebration winds down as **Mom** tells the kids to prepare for bed.

DAVE

Rick's picking me up in a few minutes. We're going to eat a victory dinner at Randy White's house.

MOM

Sounds fun. Before you go, can you grab me a few things from the basement?

DAVE

Sure, what do you need?

MOM

A box of powdered milk and a can of dehydrated eggs.

As **Mom's voice fades out**, **Dave** grabs the items from the basement. He looks around, eager to get back to celebrating. He checks himself in the mirror, making sure he looks presentable and heads back upstairs.

DAVE

I'm still on cloud nine. It was quite the emotional rollercoaster, those final minutes.

MOM

Tell me how you felt.

DAVE

I thought maybe I was being punished for my bad behavior lately. But I guess you were right about how God works. Though, I still think it was a wake-up call.

MOM

However it works, I'm proud of you. That dream you've had all your life came true today.

DAVE

That's right! And you're famous too.

They chuckle as a horn honks outside.

DAVE

Mom, I'm leaving. Rick's here.

MOM

Have fun. Be safe.

INT. RANDY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Randy's father turns on the TV as the team gathers for dinner.

RANDY'S FATHER

Listen up! The sports recap is starting.

PAUL JAMES (on TV)

Today, thousands witnessed a thrilling State Championship between the Skyline Eagles and the Layton Lancers. With the Lancers going ahead 14-13 with under a minute left, Dave Barton's 69-yard touchdown sealed the victory, 20-14.

The team erupts into cheers, celebrating once again. As dinner wraps up, **Rick** approaches **Dave**.

RICK

What are you doing tonight? Want a ride home now?

DAVE

Yes. I'm heading out with a few friends.

EXT. DAVE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rick drops **Dave** off.

RICK

I'll head back to the party for a bit. Proud of you. See you tomorrow.

Just as Rick pulls away, Jim arrives with **Kim** in the car and picks up **Dave**.

JIM

You want to celebrate?

Dave nods, and the car heads up the hill to **Les's house**.

INT. LES'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Les sneaks a bottle of vodka from his parents' bar.

DAVE

Isn't this what adults do to celebrate?

LES

You won't feel pain after drinking this, but go easy. It's 80 proof.

DAVE chugs about a fourth of the bottle.

DAVE

This is nasty.

INT. DODGE CHALLENGER - NIGHT

As they head to a frat party, **Dave** shows signs of being drunk, slurring his speech.

DAVE

Yeah, let's check it out.

INT. FRAT PARTY - NIGHT

The music is loud, and the room is packed with people dancing. **Dave** stumbles, falling onto a coffee table and breaking it.

PARTIER 1

Get him out of here. You're paying for that!

LES hands over a **hundred-dollar bill**.

LES

This should cover it.

INT. LES'S DODGE CHALLENGER - NIGHT

On the way to the bowling alley, **Dave** throws up in **Les's brand-new car**.

JIM

Dave is barfing!

LES

Get this cleaned up. My car stinks!

After a messy cleanup, **Les** drops the group off at the bowling alley.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - NIGHT

Dave slumps in a booth, barely able to stay conscious. **Jim** heads to the counter for coffee.

JIM

See if you can get some of this down him. I think the party's still going on at White's house. I'll find Rick to help take care of him.

KIM

Good idea. I'll stay here with Dave.

Jim leaves to find **Rick**. **Kim** stays with **Dave**, who is passed out. Moments later, **Rick** arrives at the bowling alley, rushing to **Dave** and shaking him.

RICK

What do you think you're doing?

DAVE (slurring)

Just celebrating.

RICK sees how drunk **Dave** is and helps him get into his car, driving him home. **Rick** helps **Dave** up the steps and into the house, guiding him downstairs to his bedroom. Robin is thereby **DAVE'S**

mother trying to give the final details for the dance the following night. **Rick** undresses him and tucks him into bed.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

MOM

What happened?

RICK

Dave doesn't know how to hold his liquor. He's a little out of it.

MOM

Dave's been drinking? Why did you let him do this?

RICK

He said he was going out to celebrate with friends. I had nothing to do with it.

MOM

Is he going to be okay?

RICK

I hope so. He's pretty out of it.

MOM

I'm calling Gram. She'll know what to do.

RICK

Are you sure? She'll be disappointed. Maybe just let him sleep it off. Don't broadcast this to anyone. He'll regret it.

RICK glances into the family room and sees **Robin**. He walks over to her.

RICK

Sorry you had to see that. He's a little out of it.

ROBIN

I can see that. Do you think he's okay?

RICK

He'll be fine. What are you doing here?

ROBIN

I asked Dave to be my date for the girls' choice dance tomorrow night. I was going over the details with your mother.

MOM

Robin and I went over everything. I'll let Dave know in the morning.

RICK

Again, I hope you don't think any less of Dave for being irresponsible.

ROBIN

Boys will be boys, right?

MOM

Nice meeting you, Robin. I'll make sure Dave knows the details.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Robin leaves the house. **Rick** stays behind to talk with **Mom**.

MOM

I heard from Jean across the street that you two have been drinking liquor. I thought it was just gossip, but I guess it's true.

RICK

I'm sorry, Mom. Yeah, we have. It was a bad idea. You were right—it's not great at our age.

MOM

At any age!

RICK

I know your convictions and standards. I'll talk to Dave tomorrow and make sure this doesn't happen again.

Rick and **Mom** hug, and **Rick** makes his way to the front door.

MOM

I wish you still lived here. I need you so much.

RICK

Mom, we've been over this before.

MOM

I love you.

RICK

Love you too, Mom.

Rick pulls away in his Camaro Z28. **Mom** heads to the phone and calls **Gram**.

MOM

Mother, Dave is drunk. He's downstairs in his room. I'm worried about him.

GRAM

I'll be right over.

INT. DAVE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Gram arrives in minutes. She enters the basement entrance and proceeds to **Dave's room**, where she checks his pulse and counts the beats using her watch. His pulse is at a dangerously low rate.

GRAM

David, wake up.

Gram shakes **Dave**, but he doesn't respond. She heads to the bathroom, wets a washcloth with warm water, and places it on his forehead. Hours pass, and **Gram** monitors **Dave's** condition. When she can no longer detect a pulse, she cries out.

GRAM

David, you can't leave us. No. No. No!

Gram bows her head in prayer, thinking **Dave** has passed.

GRAM

Dear God, please spare him. He's so young. So much life to live. Please!

Gram begins to cry. Just as she gets up to inform **Marge**, **Dave** begins to stir.

GRAM

David. David. Can you hear me? Let me know if you're okay.

Dave slowly opens his eyes, startled.

DAVE

How did I get here? What are you doing here?

GRAM

Rick picked you up from the bowling alley and brought you home. Your mom called me because she was worried. When I came over, your breathing was slow, and I couldn't detect your heartbeat.

DAVE

I'm so sorry. You must think I'm so stupid. Sorry. Sorry. So sorry.

GRAM

I hope you learn from this. I'm just so glad you're okay.

DAVE

I'll be fine. How long have you been here?

GRAM

About five hours.

DAVE

You're always here for me. Thank you. But for now, I want to sleep. You go home. I'll call you in the morning.

GRAM

Okay, dear. Make sure you do that. I was so worried.

DAVE

I promise this will never happen again.

GRAM

I know, dear.

DAVE

Love you, Gram.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE - STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Gram makes her way out of the house. At the top of the stairs, she sees Marge sitting in her wheelchair.

GRAM

How long have you been there?

MOM

The whole time. I was hoping for good news about Dave.

GRAM

I was worried for a while. But he's okay. He wants to sleep.

MOM

Thank God. Prayers are answered.

GRAM

I'll be back tomorrow to help out.

MOM

Thank you, Mother. You're a lifesaver. See you tomorrow.

INT. DAVE'S ROOM - MORNING

Dave is sleeping but is suddenly awakened by **Serene**.

SERENE

Wake up, sleepyhead. My family is waiting for you at my house. We're making a celebration breakfast.

DAVE

I'm so tired. I did too much celebrating last night. Just let me sleep!

SERENE

My sister is waiting in the car. You have to come. Please!

DAVE

Give me a few minutes, and I'll be out.

Serene leaves. **Dave** takes a quick shower to wash off the remnants of last night. **Mom** calls from upstairs.

MOM

Dave, are you up? I met Serene. She's waiting for you.

DAVE

I know. I'm hurrying.

EXT. SERENE'S CAR - DAY

Dave gets into the car with **Serene** and her sister **Stephanie**. They drive to **Serene's** home, where a victory breakfast is brewing. **Dave** leans against the car door, fighting a massive hangover. As they arrive, **Dave** pretends nothing is wrong. He walks into the house, greeted by cheers from **Serene's family**.

DAVE

Thank you, thank you. No applause, just throw money.

Serene's family laughs, and they all hug **Dave**. Breakfast is served. After the family eats and heads home, **Serene** and **Dave** make their way to the tree house.

INT. TREE HOUSE - DAY

SERENE

So... you did it!

Serene and **Dave** hug.

DAVE

No, we did it—with some help from the most incredible high school team ever!

They spin each other around in celebration. **Serene** leads **Dave** to the wall of clippings, now filled with articles. She starts reading one aloud.

SERENE

The author of "Cinderella" may never forgive Dave Barton. Barton, a Skyline High School sophomore, gathered in a screen pass from quarterback Steve Marshall with 38 seconds left and scampered 69 yards to win the Class AA football championship Friday, defeating Layton 20-14 in a storybook contest.

Dave listens somewhat. His eyes fixate on an article titled "Happy Mom Cheers Son." **Serene** notices and removes it from the wall.

SERENE

Let me read it to you.

She begins to read the article aloud. Show scenes of flashbacks of Marge Barton cheering, "Give it to Dave!" from the stands, scenes of their conversation in her bedroom, and memories of her comforting **Dave** during his childhood.

SERENE (reading)

Happy Mom Cheers Son by Hack Miller, Deseret News Editor.

Marge Barton is a typical mother. Well, maybe not so typical, at that. She's been raising a family for a long time now—from her wheelchair. She had become a football fan too because her son Dave, a spindly kid just starting to fill out, was cutting something of a swath as a sophomore in high school football. And he was sort of the man about the house too. Everyone knows now that Dave Barton

was the hero in Skyline's 20-14 victory over Layton in the Class AA finale. But even being a hero in his sophomore year was more than Dave had dreamed of. And surely his mother never thought it could happen. Yet Dave's mother did have confidence in her young man...

Dave begins to pay closer attention as **Serene** continues reading.

SERENE

...Steve Marshall called the screen play, Barton to receive it. "I hope they give it to Dave and let him run," his mother said as she stretched from her wheelchair. It went to Dave Barton—not a perfect pass, but just scrambly enough to set up the play. "Run, Dave, run," his mother screamed, and Dave ran—faster than any sophomore had ever run before...

Dave is overwhelmed with emotion, tears welling in his eyes. **Serene** comes up behind him and hugs him as he tries to keep his composure.

DAVE

I'm so glad Mom got this credit. She deserves it.

SERENE (hugging him)

I know. I know.

Dave lays on the floor, exhausted, and **Serene** straddles him, rubbing his back.

SERENE

Are you feeling okay?

DAVE

Yeah, I'm just so...

Dave pauses, propping himself up on his elbows and running his fingers through his hair.

SERENE

So...?

DAVE

So ashamed. I did something great and then tore it all down by being a disgusting drunk... all in one day!

SERENE

Why did you drink? We've talked about how much we hate alcohol.

DAVE

I know. I'll never let that happen again.

Serene continues rubbing **Dave's** back, but her expression changes, concerned.

SERENE

So you're going on a big date tonight. I bet you're looking forward to that.

DAVE

Meaning?

SERENE

Now you're the big hero and going to a dance with an... older woman.

DAVE

You make it sound like I planned this. I didn't. It just happened.

SERENE

I know. It's just that I'm feeling...

Serene tears up and starts crying.

SERENE

I've fallen for a guy who's sooo wonderful. I just...

Dave turns over, and **Serene** is lying on top of him.

DAVE

You're my girl. You're... my girl.

They kiss. Then, **Dave** gets up.

DAVE

I'd better go. I need to get some things done at my house.

SERENE

Stephanie will take you home.

They return to **Serene's** house, and **Stephanie** drives **Dave** home with **Serene** sitting beside him in the back seat. When they pull up to **Dave's house**, they exchange final words.

SERENE

I'm going to miss you today.

DAVE

I know. I'm going to miss you too.

They hug, trying not to make **Stephanie** uncomfortable. **Dave** exits the car and heads up the stairs to his house. He glances back, hits his chest, and points to **Serene**.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE

DAVE (yelling as he enters the house)

I'm home!

Dave's younger siblings run up to him, all jumping with excitement.

JEFFREY

Football season is over!

DAVE

Are you glad it's over?

JEFFREY

Yeah, now you can spend more time with us.

Dave and his siblings huddle together for a group hug, playfully knocking him over and jumping on him.

DAVE

I thought you said football season was over! Now you're giving me the worst beating I've had in months!

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dave's brothers and sisters continue laughing and playing with him. The scene fades to later that evening as **Dave** prepares for the dance. He stands in front of a mirror, trying to figure out what to wear. Frustrated, he goes to find his mom.

DAVE

Mom, how does this look? You were into fashion at one time. What do you think?

MOM

You look very handsome. You are dressed just right!

DAVE

Thanks, Mom, but I know you'd say that regardless. You're the best!

MOM

Thank you, dear. I talked to Robin last night. She came over to go over the details with you.

DAVE

I wonder why she didn't just call.

MOM

Are you kidding? From what I can tell, she likes you. And why wouldn't she come when she has the chance to meet the 'big hero' in person?

DAVE

Mom, you know that's not me. I'm not a hero. You are. I read the article about you in the paper.

MOM

That was so nice of Hack to do that.

DAVE

Hack?

MOM

Yes, Hack Miller.

DAVE

So how long have you known... Hack?

MOM

He's the newspaper editor. We've become friends over this football season.

DAVE

I'm glad you've had the chance to make new friends. Are you having fun with it?

MOM

I get calls all the time from sports writers and coaches. I'm having...

Dave's mom pauses, not quite sure how to express herself. Then she smiles.

MOM

A blast!

Dave and **Mom** laugh together. **Dave** hugs her, picks her up, and cradles her in his arms, dancing.

DAVE

You know, I need some practice for tonight.

MOM

Dance away, my son!

EXT. DAVE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dave waits for his ride. Nervous, he wipes sweat from his forehead. A car pulls up, and **Robin** steps out, heading to the front door. **Dave** answers, with his mom behind him.

ROBIN

I'm here to pick up 'Cinderella.' The pumpkin coach is ready to take him to the ball.

Dave laughs.

DAVE

So, you read the article in the paper?

ROBIN

Yep. Are you ready to have some fun tonight?

Mom inches forward, camera in hand, ready with flashcubes.

MOM

Can I take a quick picture?

Dave and **Robin** pose together for the photo.

MOM

I want another picture, but put your arm around her this time. She is your date to the ball, after all!

Reluctantly, **Dave** puts his arm around **Robin**. **Mom** snaps a few more photos.

DAVE

Okay, okay, Mom, that's enough!

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

Dave and **Robin** head to the car. **Steve Marshall** is driving with **Janine** sitting beside him. **Robin** sits on the far side, and **Dave** follows, leaving a space between them. **Robin** scoots closer.

JANINE

Hi, Dave. I'm glad you could come with us. Are you ready for dinner? We're going to the Five Alls.

DAVE

Sounds great!

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

They enter the restaurant, and the host welcomes them.

HOST

Welcome to the Five Alls.

Other couples from Skyline High spot **Dave**, **Steve**, **Robin**, and **Janine**, cheering as they walk to their table.

RESTAURANT OWNER, TONY

Welcome. I'm a proud parent of a Skyline student. I watched the game yesterday and was very happy with the outcome.

ROBIN

Thanks, Tony. We wouldn't have come anywhere else for this special occasion.

TONY

On behalf of our staff, we're honored to have you here tonight. Here are some menus. We'd love for you to sign one so we can post it on our wall.

Steve and **Dave** sign the menu. **Tony** whispers to **Robin** that the meal is on the house. **Janine** and **Robin** are amused by the attention.

ROBIN

Do you sign autographs often?

DAVE

This is a first for me.

The waitress arrives to take their order.

WAITRESS

Are you ready to order?

Janine whispers to **Robin**.

JANINE

What are you ordering?

ROBIN

My outfit's tight enough already. I'm not that hungry. Split a salad?

JANINE

Sounds like a plan.

Robin gives the order.

ROBIN

We'll split a Caesar salad.

The waitress turns to **Steve** and **Dave**.

WAITRESS

And what would you like?

STEVE

I'll have the prime rib, medium rare, and water.

DAVE hesitates but goes along with it.

DAVE

I'll have what Steve's having.

JANINE (whispering to Robin)

They just ordered the most expensive item on the menu.

ROBIN

Tony said the meal was on the house. He wanted to show his appreciation, and I didn't argue.

JANINE

Wow! That's so groovy!

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

Everyone enjoys the meal. As it ends, **Tony** and the staff bring a cake with sparklers that says, "STATE CHAMPS 1969." Everyone claps as the staff cuts and serves the cake.

EXT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Steve drops the group near the entrance while he parks. **Jennifer**, **Robin**, and **Dave** wait. **Dave** fidgets nervously, putting his hands in his pockets and glancing toward the treehouse. There are no lights on, so he assumes no one is there. But in the dimly lit treehouse, **Serene** and her sister **Stephanie** watch him through a telescope.

STEPHANIE

I see him. Come look.

SERENE

No, I can't. It isn't fair to spy on him. I'll just sit here.

STEPHANIE

Wow, he looks pretty handsome.

SERENE

La, la, la.

Serene puts her fingers in her ears, trying to block out **Stephanie**.

STEPHANIE

Oh my gosh, you should see what the girls are wearing!

Eventually, **Stephanie's** coaxing works. **Serene** pushes her aside and takes a peek through the telescope.

SERENE

Yes, he's so handsome. And look at him—he's not even standing next to his date. I'm sure he's hating this prom. You know he got roped into it. He'll be glad when this is over.

Serene sits on the beanbag, staring at the dimly lit bulletin board.

STEPHANIE

For hating this date, he sure grabbed Robin's hand pretty quickly!

Serene jumps up and checks the telescope again.

SERENE

Dang. I missed them going in. Did he really grab her hand?

STEPHANIE

Well, I'm not sure, but I think so.

SERENE

Well, I guess we'll never know, will we?

STEPHANIE

If you really want to know, we could sneak in and take a quick look.

SERENE

We can't do that. That would be immature and... just not right.

STEPHANIE

Okay. Suit yourself.

Serene contemplates, then changes her mind.

SERENE

Suit myself? What if we disguise ourselves so we can't be seen as easily?

STEPHANIE

Glad you changed your mind. Grab your sweatshirt. We can pull the hoods to hide our faces. Let's go.

Serene and **Stephanie** put on their sweatshirts and head toward the secret opening in the fence.

INT. PROM - NIGHT

The group enters the prom. **Robin** pulls **Dave** aside.

ROBIN

They want us to wait here for just a second until the song ends.

STEVE

Who's "they"? What's going on?

JANINE

You'll see!

As they wait, **Robin** disappears.

DAVE

Where did Robin go?

JANINE

We have a special surprise for you two. The song just ended, and they want us to go in now.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

Serene and **Stephanie** manage to sneak into the gym by slipping past the back door, which some prom-goers opened to smoke. With their sweatshirts' hoods pulled low over their faces, they position themselves near the band, where they remain mostly hidden. **Dave**, **Janine**, and **Steve** enter the gym as the prom is underway. Suddenly, the band starts playing the Skyline fight song, and the crowd erupts with cheers as **Dave** and **Steve** make their way toward the band area. **Robin** appears, holding a microphone, leading the crowd in the school fight song while **Janine** performs cheer movements.

Serene and **Stephanie** inch closer, trying to get a better view.

SERENE

I think this was a bad idea. What if we get caught?

STEPHANIE

No one's going to catch us. Don't you want to see what Dave is doing?

SERENE

I changed my mind. Let's get out of here.

As **Serene** and **Stephanie** prepare to leave, they hear the **Band Leader** speaking into the microphone and continue to watch.

BAND LEADER

Please warmly welcome our starting quarterback Steve Marshall and Dave Barton, who were both instrumental in our win yesterday. A shout-out to everyone on the team who all contributed to our

State victory. Please come up front with your dates for a special slow dance. Here's Robin with one of this year's biggest hits. Enjoy!

The crowd applauds as many football team members head to the front. **Dave, Steve, and Janine** join the group as **Robin** starts to sing. The band begins playing "This Girl's in Love with You" by Dionne Warwick.

ROBIN (singing)

You see this girl

This girl's in love with you

Robin walks over to **Dave**, grabs him by the hand, and pulls him to the front stage. She dances around him, motioning to the crowd to swing their arms. Everyone, except the football team, begins to sway back and forth.

ROBIN (singing)

Yes, I'm in love

Who looks at you the way I do

Robin takes **Dave's** arms and wraps them around her. Stephanie grabs Serene, trying to pull her away, but Serene shrugs her off and moves closer to get a better look.

ROBIN (singing)

When you smile, I can tell

We know each other very well

How can I show you I'm glad I got to know you? 'Cause

I've heard some talk

Robin twirls with **Dave**, spinning into him, then away.

ROBIN (singing)

They say you think I'm fine

This girl's in love

And what I'd do to make you mine

Tell me now is it so

Don't let me be the last to know

My hands are shakin'

Don't let my heart keep breaking up

I need your love

I want your love

Robin looks at **Dave** adoringly and starts to smile warmly as he looks at her.

Say you're in love, and you'll be my guy

If not, I'll just die.

Serene and **Stephanie** are both shocked at what is happening.

Serene

Did you see the way he looked at her? He likes her. I knew this would happen.

Serene has tears rolling down her cheeks.

ROBIN (singing)

Tell me now is it so
Don't let me be the last to know
My hands are shakin'
Don't let my heart keep breaking up
I need your love
I want your love
Say you're in love
And you'll be my guy
If not I'll just die

As the song ends, **Robin** finishes with a dramatic pose, leaning back into **Dave's** arms, their faces nearly touching. **Dave** appears mesmerized by **Robin**. The crowd starts chanting.

CROWD

Kiss the girl! Kiss the girl!

Dave feels the pressure but hesitates. **Robin** leans in and gives **Dave** a brief kiss. **Serene**, who has been watching the entire time, removes her hood to get a better view. **Dave** spots her, and their eyes lock. **Serene** freezes momentarily and then bolts out of the gym with **Stephanie**. The crowd resumes dancing when the band starts a new song, and **Dave** turns to **Robin**.

DAVE

I'll be right back.

ROBIN

Is something wrong?

Dave doesn't respond and rushes out to find **Serene**. He knows the path she's likely to take and quickly catches up to her and **Stephanie**. **Dave** tackles **Serene** on the football field, about the 50-yard line. **Stephanie** stands nearby, watching as **Dave** and **Serene** talk.

SERENE

She loves you. I knew this was going to happen!

DAVE

Serene, listen to yourself. We talked about this. I don't even know her that well. Everything's fine. It was just a song.

SERENE

But the words. She meant them. I could tell!

DAVE

She's into drama and acting. She's a singer and puts on a great show. That's all it was—a show!

Look at yourself. This isn't you. It's scaring me. We need to talk, but not right now. Go home. I'll call you tomorrow, and we'll talk later.

Serene nods, and the two part ways. **Dave** heads back to the dance.

INT. PROM - NIGHT

Dave returns to **Robin**.

ROBIN

There you are. I thought you might've ditched me!

DAVE

You know I would never ditch Dionne!

They laugh and continue dancing. After the dance, **Steve** drops off **Robin** and **Dave** at **Robin's** house so she can pick up her car.

ROBIN

Just drop us off at my house. I'll take Dave home. Thanks for the fun evening.

JANINE

It was. Have fun, you two!

Janine smiles at **Robin**, giving her a smile and a thumbs-up, suggesting a romantic connection.

Robin gives **Janine** a "stop it" look. **Robin** retrieves her car keys, opens the passenger door for Dave, and he gets in. Robin has a smile on her face as she heads to the driver side of her car. She clearly acts as if she wants to spend some alone time with **Dave** as she drives him home.

INT. ROBIN'S CAR - NIGHT

DAVE

Why, thank you for being so chivalrous! What great manners you have.

ROBIN

You're welcome. What an enchanting evening. I'll have you home before midnight before your coach turns back into a pumpkin.

DAVE

Funny, Robin. You don't have to get me home early. I napped this afternoon, and my mommy said I could stay up late!

ROBIN

Okay, you're making fun of me. I'm older and probably much wiser, for sure!

DAVE

I sense you're the one who needs to be home by midnight. Am I right?

ROBIN

Yes, you are, Mr. Smarty-pants. So, what do you think about that?

DAVE

I think you have parents who really care about you.

ROBIN

My parents are my best friends. I'd never want to let them down.

DAVE

I envy you, Robin. You seem to have it all.

ROBIN

I'm very blessed. I owe it all to my faith in God. That's what keeps me out of trouble.

DAVE

Now I'm really going to make you feel old. You sound just like my mother!

ROBIN

Well, don't be rude! Your mother?

DAVE

It's not a bad thing. My mom always lives her life with God in it. That's what helps her cope with her troubles. She calls them her tests.

ROBIN

Well, I agree with her 100%. How does this 15-year-old sophomore seem to have the wisdom of someone much older?

DAVE

My mom still thinks I'm a boy in a man's body!

ROBIN

Well, you know what I think?

DAVE feels more comfortable with **Robin** and moves closer, leaning over on the armrest.

DAVE

What do you think?

ROBIN

I think you're a man in a boy's body.

DAVE

You may be right about that. I tend to agree with you. Do you want to come in?

ROBIN

Just for a few minutes. Remember, when the clock strikes midnight, I have to be home.

Dave and **Robin** move from the car up to Dave's house and enter his living room. The house is quiet, and no one is stirring.

INT. DAVE'S LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

Robin

I read the newspaper article about your mother this morning. After meeting her last night and reading the article, I realized that she is a very special person. And you, “a man about the house.” I can only guess you have more responsibilities than most people your age.

Dave

Not by choice. I wish it could be simpler, and I could just be a 15-year-old kid. But I don’t have that luxury.

Robin

Don’t grow up too fast. You can still be the man about the house and the boy who wants to be a kid. You can do both.

Dave ponders what Robin just said and shakes his head in agreement.

Dave

You’ve opened my eyes a bit tonight. After your wise counsel, I need to look at things differently.

Robin

Wise counsel? There you go again, making me feel like an old lady!

Dave

Well, you are a... senior. What are your plans after high school?

Robin

I’m going to New York to study in a special program in performing arts.

Dave

Wow. Sounds like you’re going to be a big star someday. I’d better get your autograph now while it’s cheap!

Robin

Why is it that you’ve made me feel so special?

Dave

Because you are.

Robin

Thank you, Dave.

Robin

I spent some time in your house last night. I was worried about you when you showed up...

Dave

Showed up drunk?

Robin

Well, yes. I wasn’t expecting that when I came.

Dave

I made some very bad choices last night. I hope you don’t think that’s who I am.

Robin

We all make mistakes we regret. I made one once!

Dave (laughs)

That's funny! But probably true.

ROBIN and **DAVE** sit in the living room; the house is quiet, and no one is stirring.

Robin

Last night, your mom was so nice to me. We talked for a while.

Dave

Yep. She likes to talk. I hope she didn't tell you her life story.

Robin

Well, actually, she did.

Dave

I'm sorry for that.

Robin

No, I'm glad she did. It helped me understand things better in my life. She gave me a new perspective on not losing faith when things don't go as planned. I wish she didn't have to deal with everything she has these past few years.

Dave

Thanks for listening to her. I'm sure you brightened up her day.

Robin

No, she brightened up mine.

Dave

You seem to know what you want. I wouldn't have thought of you this way just from seeing you at school. You were great tonight. You killed that song, and everyone loves you.

Robin

Well, I don't know if that's true. Sometimes I wonder.

Dave

How's that?

Robin

Sometimes, when you put yourself out there to do things that are out of the ordinary, people tend to ignore you. Sometimes I feel all alone.

Dave

That's hard to believe in your case, but I think I can relate. Sometimes, I walk down the hall, and no one says hi. I don't get it, but then I think, am I guilty of doing the same thing? When people get intimidated, sometimes the easiest thing is to look the other way.

Robin

Is that why you never seem to even look at me?

Dave

Well, when you ask me directly, yes. I admit you intimidate me. When my brother introduced me to you, I was awestruck because you are, quite frankly, very beautiful and so talented. I never imagined I'd end up at a dance with the most beautiful and talented girl in the school. But then again, I never thought the last few days would've happened like they have.

Robin

This morning's newspaper article said the author of Cinderella may never forgive you. I know a lot about drama. That game was totally dramatic! Is that analogy correct?

Dave

Well, there may be a little truth in that analogy. What happened this weekend still hasn't sunk in. I'm sure I'll come off the cloud I'm riding on next week.

Robin

From what I've heard, you've worked hard. You deserve to float in the clouds for a while.

Dave

Well, the clock is nearing midnight. I'm so glad you asked me to go to the dance. I had so much fun. And now, I'm convinced you have a bright future.

Robin

Thank you, Mr. Statue of David. Please don't ever look away when you're nearby. I'll say hi and even give you hugs! You'll be a special friend forever.

Dave

Thanks, Robin. I'm so glad we had this conversation. I'll walk you to your car.

They get up, and **Dave** holds hands with Robin and walks her to her car. He then opens the door for her.

Dave

Now it's my turn.

Dave kisses **Robin** on the cheek.

Robin

There you go again, kissing me like I'm your mother.

Dave pulls **Robin** close and kisses her passionately. **Robin** smiles as she gets into her car and rolls down the window.

Robin

Thanks, Dave. I really needed that!

Robin

(singing)

Say you're in love

And you'll be my guy
If not, I just tried.

Dave hears the lyrics and scratches his head, knowing Robin changed the words. **Robin** drives away, and **Dave** heads into the house. He goes to the kitchen to get a glass of milk. As he puts the milk away, he closes the fridge door and stares at the pictures stuck to it. He pans through old family photos, including some of his playing Little League football. He taps on a picture saying "DREAM BIG" before heading to bed.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

DAVE enters his **MOM'S** room, ready to make breakfast.

Dave

So you're already awake. Want some pancakes?

Mom

Hi, Dave. So, how was it?

Dave

It was really fun. I had a very interesting evening.

Mom

So, how did you get along with Robin?

Dave

I was pretty nervous at first because I didn't know her that well.

Mom

I had a chance to talk with her on Friday night.

Dave

That's what she said. I thought that after seeing me drunk, she would just call off the whole thing.

Mom

She never gave me that impression. She seemed like a nice girl and was very concerned.

Dave

She is very pretty. Gram has always told me to stay away from pretty girls.

Mom

Really?

Dave

She says they're nothing but trouble!

Mom

Well, that might be true but don't ever let that stop you.

Dave

I agree. Last night, I talked with Robin about her being intimidating to me. She wondered why I never looked at her or said hi. I flat-out told her that I was avoiding her.

Mom

What did she say?

Dave

She told me she gets that treatment all the time. She even feels lonely many times.

Mom

Well, now you've learned a life lesson. Don't judge a book by its cover.

Dave

There you go again, teaching me about life.

Mom

That's what mothers do. So, what else happened last night that was so interesting?

Dave (hesitates)

Well...

Mom

Come on, tell me.

Dave

When we got to the dance, Steve and I were spotlighted. I knew Robin would perform with the band, but I didn't know what would happen. She pretended to sing a love song to me, which was very convincing.

Mom

A love song?

Dave

Yes. At the end of the song, she kissed me.

Mom

I bet you didn't expect that.

Dave

It was totally unexpected! I felt a little guilty because I had told Serene that nothing was going to happen and that she was my girl.

Mom

Is she your girl?

Dave

I don't know now. Serene and her sister sneaked into the prom and spied on me. She saw Robin and me interact. I spotted her, and she ran out. When I finally tracked her down, I tried to console her.

Mom

Were you successful?

Dave

I don't know yet. I still have to talk to her about it.

Mom

Do you still want Serene as a girlfriend?

Dave

I think we've both learned a lot. I'll know in the next day or so.

Mom

Do you have feelings for Robin? She really impressed me.

Dave

I got this funny feeling when I was with her. I can't describe it. I felt different in a way that I liked. But I'm pretty sure Robin doesn't want a relationship with anyone right now. She said she wants to focus on her goals.

Mom

That's admirable.

Dave

I was a little taken aback when she drove away and sang the lyrics to the song, but she changed some words.

Mom

Are you sure?

Dave

The original lyrics are, "Say you're in love
And you'll be my guy
If not, I just die."

Mom

What did she change?

Dave

She sang, "Say you're in love
And you'll be my guy
If not, I just tried."

Mom

Maybe it was just a mistake?

Dave

I don't think so. I never gave Robin any impression that I had any romantic interest in her or wanted to start a relationship. I was a little taken aback by those words. Do you actually think a girl like her would go for me?

Mom

I think you don't have to settle for anyone who isn't perfect for you. Always go for what you want. Never settle for anything less.

Dave

I hate it when you make sense!

Mom

Well, it sounds like my boy is learning from life experiences. It's the best way to let things actually sink into your mindset.

Dave gives his mom a hug and lifts her into her wheelchair. He helps comb her hair and hands her a mirror so she can primp.

Mom

So, tell me more about Serene spying on you. What happened?

Dave

It wasn't pleasant. I caught a glimpse of her just after Robin kissed me, and she ran away. I had to chase her down and explain that the song was just a performance. Just a show.

Mom

Did she accept that?

Dave

I hope so. She seems really jealous. Her older sisters have made her aware of things she probably shouldn't know about yet. Serene has lived with sisters and parents who've made bad choices. I really like her, but I see now that we're so different. Maybe we're not a good match.

Mom

It's called life. You progress, and you find yourself making critical decisions.

Dave

After talking with Robin, I can see how different they are—not just in age but in life experience.

Mom

How so?

Dave

When I first met Serene, I was in a different place. We were good for each other. But now, after these past months dealing with the press, coaches, and new friends, I think I need to tell Serene that we need to part ways. My life has changed, and it wouldn't be fair to her.

Mom

That's probably a wise decision. I didn't even have to suggest it.

Dave

So you agree?

Mom

You'll be sixteen next week. Not only will you be legally driving, ha ha, but your life has changed forever. I talk to coaches and sports writers almost every day. You're in a different world now.

Dave

I know. I'm going to talk to Serene and break it off.

Mom

I know it'll be hard. Keep me posted on how it goes. And yes, I'm starving. Let's make some pancakes!

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE - DAY

Dave (on the phone)

Hello, is Serene there?

Serene's Mom

(Slightly intoxicated)

She sure is. Can't wait for you to come over so I can get my big kiss!

Serene grabs the phone from her mother and gives her a dirty look.

Serene

Hello.

Dave

How are you doing?

Serene

Well, I could be doing better.

Dave

We need to talk.

Serene

I don't want to talk right now.

Dave

I understand. Can I meet you at the treehouse tomorrow afternoon?

Serene

I don't know. I have to think about things.

Dave

I'll be there after school. I hope you'll meet me.

SERENE hangs up the phone. **DAVE** looks a little confused and hangs up. He lays down on the couch to rest but is quickly met by his siblings wanting to play.

INT. SCHOOL - MONDAY MORNING

The students are seated in their classrooms when an announcement comes over the intercom.

Skyline Principal

Good morning. We congratulate our state champions. To let you know, everyone is now invited to a special program in the gym.

Cheers erupt from the classrooms as the students eagerly make their way to the gym, where the band is playing. The principal stands at the podium.

Principal

We want to welcome you all to this victory rally. Congratulations on a great season. Here is Coach Schmidt.

The student body cheers. As the cheers subside, **Coach Schmidt** begins to speak.

Coach Schmidt

Thank you. I am going to introduce the team. Juniors and sophomores, please stand as I read your name. After that, I will introduce our seniors and present a senior gift from the school.

Coach Schmidt starts reading the names of the junior players, and applause follows each name. **Dave** is sitting next to **Kim**.

Kim

So, are you feeling okay today?

Dave

Well, I definitely had a rough night on Friday. I'm still feeling the effects. I almost stayed home today, but I'm glad I decided to come.

Kim

Yeah, you probably didn't want to miss this. It's a fitting tribute to everyone who made this happen. Plus, I avoided a quiz in homeroom today.

Coach Schmidt calls out the sophomores' names.

Coach Schmidt

Dave Barton!

Dave stands up and quickly sits down. The crowd gives an enormous cheer that lasts almost a minute. As the cheers continue, **Coach Schmidt** quiets the crowd.

Coach Schmidt

Well, I was only going to have the team captains say a few words, but I think I'll make an exception for Dave. Please come up and say a few words.

The students roar with excitement again. **DAVE** stands, touched by the standing ovation. He pounds his heart to the cheering student body and makes his way to the podium.

Dave

This season was awesome. I couldn't have imagined how things would turn out. But I know I'm playing on the best high school football team in the whole world!

Cheers erupt again.

Dave

I owe a lot to the coaches who believed in me, even after I dropped that pass before halftime. They still believed in me. Thank you, Coach.

Dave looks at **Coach Schmidt**.

Dave

If I've learned anything this season, hard work makes anything possible. Dreams can come true, and despite hardships, you never give up. We never gave up, and that's why we're here today. Thank you again, and let's do this again next year!

Cheers rise once more. **Dave** sits down next to **Kim**.

Kim

That had to be unexpected!

Dave

It sure was. If I had known, I wouldn't have slept last night.

Kim stands as his name is read.

Kim

I didn't quite get the reaction you did.

Dave

Your time is coming. Just wait!

Kim

Yeah, yeah.

The principal introduces a special guest after the names are read and the seniors receive their gifts.

Principal

We have a special presentation today. Please welcome Skinny Johnny Mitchell!

Cheers erupt from the crowd as a KCPX camera takes shots of the event.

Skinny Johnny Mitchell

What a great game on Friday! I was there, and it was very entertaining. On behalf of KCPX TV and Radio, it's my pleasure to present the Most Valuable Player Award.

Cheers ring out from the students. **DAVE** leans over to **KIM**.

Dave

Definitely Steve Marshall.

Dave stretches his back, expecting **Steve** to win.

Skinny Johnny Mitchell

I'm honored to present the Most Valuable Player of the Utah High School State Championship Game to...

The camera pans to STEVE MARSHALL, but after a pause...

Skinny Johnny Mitchell

...Dave Barton!

The crowd erupts again. **DAVE** looks at **STEVE**, confused, but makes his way to the podium. **SKINNY JOHNNY'S** assistant, a beautiful model-type girl, hands **Dave** the trophy.

Principal

Well, this has been a wonderful celebration. Before we dismiss, I hereby proclaim today as Sophomore Day at Skyline!

Cheers erupt from the sophomore crowd as the student body leaves the gym.

EXT. TREEHOUSE - LATER

Dave arrives at the treehouse with his backpack. He pulls out the MVP trophy and stares at it. **Serene** pops out of the treehouse.

Serene

So, what's that?

DAVE climbs up and hands the trophy to **SERENE**.

Serene

Most valuable player. So, what do you think?

Dave

You know what I think. I didn't deserve this. Statistically, it was my worst game of the season.

Serene

I don't think it was based on stats. You did good, and you never gave up. Congratulations. This is your dream.

Dave

I know, but I'm confused now. How do I top this? People are even accusing me of messing with the Cinderella story. Go figure.

Serene

I love the Cinderella story. It goes from bleak to... happily ever after.

Dave

You seem happier today. Why's that?

Serene

I had a few days to think things over. I even stayed home from school. I talked to some special people. After that, I went to my Nana, and we decided on the next step.

Dave

Next step?

Serene walks to the wall of clippings and starts gathering them into a pile.

Serene

The next step is cleaning up. These are your memories now. Take them home.

Dave

You don't want any for keepsake?

Serene

Absolutely not. I don't even like football!

Dave

That's funny! So, what about cheering at games?

Serene

Well, everyone will see the important part: the cheerleaders. It's all about the tumbling show.

SERENE smiles at **DAVE**, who looks confused.

Dave

Why are you smiling?

Serene

Because I'm at peace.

Dave

Peace?

Serene

Yes, peace. I need to tell you something. You and I are good together, but now you're in a different world. I just want to be a 14-year-old cheerleader and have fun. I'm not ready to give up being a kid.

Dave

Haven't you been having fun?

Serene

I've been having fun, but in a world that's in my future. You're on your way to your dreams, but they're not mine. I'm happy for you, but it's just not for me.

Dave

Are you breaking up with me?

Serene

I won't sugarcoat it... yes.

Dave is shocked but quickly realizes they're on the same page.

Dave

I didn't expect this, but I respect your decision. You make sense. You know I'll always have a deep love for you. You're part of all this...

DAVE holds up the articles.

Serene

You bet I am. Without me, you'd be nothing!

They both laugh. **DAVE** and **SERENE** finish packing the memorabilia and walk down from the treehouse.

Serene

Take this.

SERENE hands him the "Going Steady" football.

Dave

Now it's really final.

They walk in silence, holding hands, until they reach the street.

Dave

Well, I guess this is it.

Serene

I guess so.

Dave

See you around?

Serene pushes him, smiling.

Serene

Now go!

SERENE watches **DAVE** walk away, putting his hand on his chest and pointing to her. A tear runs down **DAVE'S** cheek as he watches **SERENE** run home.

INT. SERENE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

SERENE bursts through the front door and sees **NANA** sitting in the living room. She runs to her and begins to sob.

Nana

So, I gather you told him?

Serene

Yes. I love him, Nana. I love him.

Nana

I know. You loved him enough to let him go.

SERENE curls up with her **NANA**, visibly distraught, as she sobs. The camera transitions to **Dave**, now running home, his mind filled with memories. As he gets closer to his house, his tears stop, and a smile creeps across his face, knowing this was all for the best.

INT. DAVE'S HOUSE - DAY

Dave enters the house and sees his brothers and sisters playing in the backyard. He makes his way to his mother's bedroom, where she's lying in bed with ice packs and orange juice cans.

Dave

What are you doing in bed so early?

Mom

My hands and legs are burning. The kids brought me some ice packs and orange juice cans.

MOM shows **DAVE** the ice pack around her feet and the orange juice cans she's holding.

Dave

I'm sorry, Mom. Is there anything I can do for you? Can I get you anything?

Mom

Maybe later. But for now, tell me about your day.

DAVE sits down next to her.

Dave

Well, it was full of surprises.

Mom

How so?

Dave

The day started with a victory rally at the school.

Mom

I know.

Dave

You knew?

Mom

The school called me and told me to make sure you were on time.

Dave

I asked if I could stay home today, and you said I needed to be at school. You keep a good secret.

Mom

I would have dragged you there in my wheelchair if I had to.

DAVE laughs and gives her a playful slap on her hand.

Dave

Thanks. I wouldn't have wanted to miss it. I was spotlighted and even got the MVP award.

Mom

I know. News travels fast when you have a phone. I'm happy for you. What about your meeting with Serene?

Dave

After school, I met her at the treehouse. She dumped me!

Mom

She dumped you?

Dave

Yeah, I didn't even get the chance to break up like we talked about.

Mom

She called me.

Dave

She called you?

Mom

Serene.

Dave

Why didn't you tell me?

Mom

I felt it needed to come from her, not me.

Dave

She didn't mention that she talked to you.

Mom

I'm sure she had her reasons.

Dave

What did she say?

Mom

When she called, she said she loved you very much. I mentioned that love is special, and I told her about when I was fourteen and had a crush on an older guy in my church. After some experiences, I realized we weren't a good match.

Dave

And how did she react?

Mom

She said her grandmother told her something similar. She asked if I thought you'd be upset if you two broke up.

Dave

And what did you say?

Mom

I told her that you had dreams and goals, and yes, you'd be upset, but life would move on in the right direction.

Dave

And that's all that was said?

Mom

Well, there might have been a few more things, but that's between me and her.

Dave

I'm not going to pry, but I'm amazed at the change in her attitude about us. I thought it was just a lucky break for me. So, you did have something to do with this?

Mom

Not just me. God is watching over you. You're always His child.

DAVE and his **MOM** embrace, just like they did when he was a child.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Dave sits by his mother's side, holding her hand. The monitors in the room show her vital signs fading. The scene transitions to a serene, peaceful image of **Mom**, now transformed, dancing in heaven.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

DAVE, now older and wiser, stands at his mother's grave, reflecting on his life and his relationship with his unique mother.

Dave (Narrating)

As I've lived a fuller life, I can now look back and understand why it was that way. My mother may not have been the president of a company or invented some miraculous product, but she was content being a loving mother of nine children. More importantly, she lived a good life, living her Christian values despite overwhelming challenges. What more could someone like me ask for?

EXT. TREEHOUSE AND POND - DAY

The camera shows the treehouse and pond from a distance. The scene slowly pans upward into the sky, leaving the world below as it fades into the heavens.

FADE TO BLACK: THE END