

SQUEAK

FADE IN:

EXT. FARMLAND FROM ABOVE - DAY

An idyllic pastoral day at dusk - nothing but sections of corn separated by perpendicular dirt roads intersecting on the half-mile.

From above, an old farm truck barrels down one of the roads, leaving a swirl of dust in its wake.

INSIDE THE TRUCK

A small Latino boy, GAEL, 12, bounces on the bench seat, his feet braced against the dash, clutching his back pack. Gael looks 8, small framed, curly black hair, long eyelashes, a pretty boy in a stark truck.

His PAPA, 32, is behind the wheel and looks like he's running from something, checking the rearview, which shows nothing but billowing dust.

He mutters to himself in Spanish and beats on the steering wheel.

SPEEDOMETER

The needle's pushing 65 on a thin slice of road.

BACK TO CAB

Gael stares straight ahead. The road comes at him fast and corn whizzes by in a blur.

A picture of a 20-year-old white woman with blonde hair holding a baby is clipped to the driver's side visor. GAEL'S MOTHER and him as a newborn.

Next to the photo is her funeral pamphlet.

Papa kisses two fingers, then presses them against the picture.

He reaches over and tussles Gael's hair.

PAPA
(in Spanish with
subtitles)
Don't worry, son, everything will
be okay.

Gael looks out the side window.

Between them, a six pack of beer, with only two cans left in the plastic rings.

Papa reaches for a beer, eyes on the road, but struggles to separate the beer from its twin.

He looks down quickly.

EXT. FARM ROAD - CONTINUOUS

From overhead, the truck veers to the right, runs off the road, and jerks back to the left, which launches it into a violent horizontal roll.

Unbelted, Papa is ejected when the truck rolls.

A second rotation slows momentum.

The third has it rock over onto its roof.

Black birds flutter from the corn.

SILENCE.

The scrap of metal smokes and hisses, surrounded by shattered glass and parts that fell off.

A gentle breeze RUSTLES the corn in the fields, then more stillness settles around the truck.

INSIDE THE TRUCK

Gael hangs upside down in his seatbelt, his head bleeding from bouncing off windows and the dash, eyes closed.

Except for the situation and angle, he could be peacefully asleep.

His eyes POP open. He takes in all of what just happened in one...two...three...blinks. Looking over to the empty driver's seat...

Gael

Papa?

Gael unbuckles his seat belt and drops to the metal roof of the truck, now its floor.

EXT. THE WRECKAGE - CONTINUOUS

The upside down skeletal remains of the truck - frame rails, exhaust, lumps of transmission and engine, wheels still spinning - smoke and dust roiling into the sunset.

Gael crawls from the truck and stands alone in the road, nothing except him and corn for miles.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. SOCIAL WORKER'S OFFICE - DAY

A small, cluttered, grey and white office with stacks of paper folders littered around like forgotten promises.

BEA, 48, white, a life-long smoker and victim of vodka, is a caseworker sitting across from MARIA, Latina, 56, and Gael.

Gael still sports a few stitches in his forehead and has his arm in a sling. His tattered backpack is at his feet.

Maria is Gael's paternal grandmother. She's in a maid's uniform, sturdily built, with a pleasant smile trying to hide her concentration.

MARIA

Can you slow down a bit? My English is not that fast.

BEA

(slower and louder)

Sure, just sign here and here. This transfers legal custody to you.

Maria catches Bea looking at Gael in a pitiful way.

MARIA

You wanna know something?

Bea looks at Maria with zero interest.

MARIA (CONT'D)

My son wasn't always a drunk. It was only after his wife died from those pills.

Bea, reaches for, and places, a pack of Virginia Slims on her desk.

MARIA (CONT'D)

A Mexican wife would have never gotten on those pills.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Only a gringa becomes a junkie from
un dentista.

Bea gathers the paperwork into a folder.

BEA

I know, dear, I get it. Best of
luck to you.

She stands and extends a hand.

Maria takes Gael's hand instead and they leave.

INT./EXT. MARIA'S CAR - DAY

An old car, bench seat. Gael strapped in. Maria behind the
wheel. She backs out and putters away.

MARIA

Living in the city will be
different, but everything is going
to be okay.

Gael clutches his backpack. At the exit of the parking lot,
he looks over and holds Maria's gaze.

GAEL

Thank you for coming for me.

MARIA

Of course, my love.

GAEL

They said I was going into the
foster system and would never be
adopted.

MARIA

Nonsense. I had to fight your
mother's parents for you, did you
know that?

GAEL

No. I didn't think they liked me.

MARIA

(lying)

Oh sure, they wanted to keep you
right here on their farm. But, I
see you becoming something special,
nieto.

GAEL

I liked helping Papa on the farm.

MARIA

My employer, missus Rothschild, has pulled some strings to get you in the best school in the city.

Gael, fighting against it, cries.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Nieto, it will be okay. Be strong.

The old car pulls out and joins light traffic.

EXT. INNER CITY STREETS - DAY

Aerial overview of an inner city neighborhood.

TITLE: 90 DAYS LATER

Federalist Brownstones restored to their original glory - Gentry Row - sodded grass, new stone stairs, period correct canvas awnings.

Urban renewal squeezing the poor to smaller and smaller sections of town.

Like the one on the next block.

Brownstones, but not well kept. Cheap aluminum awnings where they exist, crumbling steps, and thread bare patches of grass. Classic Section-8 housing.

The sidewalks are busy. Gang members working customers on the corners. The deranged, with their crooked walks, talking to the air, upset at the world.

Homeless, littering stoops with signs as worn out as their bodies, their makeshift shelters here and there.

A 40-ton yellow school bus lumbers between parked cars and passing traffic. It turns and heads down the tough gauntlet of town.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

As if trying to pick out a seat on the bus, the point-of-view moves from front to back looking at the students.

All wear some combination of blue and green private school uniform.

Lunchroom-level RACKET in a narrow tube on wheels.

- A shy brother and sister.
- Two boys playing a handheld game.
- Girls singing, "k-i-s-s-i-n-g..."
- ZZIIPP! The amplified sound of something being unzipped.

IN THE BACK SEAT

Thirteen-year-old boys, MORGAN and CHRIS, huddle together as Morgan UNZIPS his backpack.

Morgan, the seedling of a State College fraternity puke, and Chris, his perennial loud-mouthed sidekick, alternate glances between the backpack and the bus driver's eyes in the mirror he uses to watch the kids.

Morgan pulls out a four-inch engraved pocket knife. It's a beautiful, expensive, piece. A three-headed dragon is hand engraved with gold and copper inlays.

CHRIS

Wow!

(points to a dragon head)

I'm that one.

Morgan clicks the button and the blade instantly snaps open - more hand engraved Damascus steel.

The kid in the seat in front turns around to look.

It's GAEL.

MORGAN

Turn around, Squeak. This thing's worth more than your home.

The BUS DRIVER's eyes pop into his mirror, seeing Gael turned around and propped up.

BUS DRIVER

Turn around and sit down!

Gael does as told.

Morgan hands the knife to Chris.

MORGAN

Deadly.

Chris measures the heft and hands it back.

CHRIS
Your dad will kill you if he finds
it missing.

MORGAN
He never checks his knife drawer.

The bus comes to a stop.

CHRIS
(as a conductor)
Ghetto Land! This is your stop,
Squeak.

He kicks the seat back as Gael stands.

The other riders crack up and turn to watch Gael walk the
gauntlet-of-shame between seats.

Morgan pretends to jab Gael's back with the knife. The boys
crack up.

MORGAN
Don't forget to feed your pet
roaches, Squeak.

FROM GAEL'S POV

The sneers and snickers of the other kids morph into vivid
and energetic animation as experienced through Gael's
imagination.

ANIMATION - THE KIDS ON THE SCHOOL BUS

Facial features are exaggerated and monstrous to match the
comments being made.

CRINKLED NOSE
What's that smell? Gross!

PIGTAILS
Enjoy beans for dinner. Again!

MOP TOP
Squeak's a freak!

He reaches the front, chin quivering, and the doors open.

The Bus Driver's expression and body starts mean and
aggressive, but softens when their eyes meet.

BUS DRIVER
Don't pay them no mind.

He pulls the door lever.

As Gael exits, the world evolves back into live action.

END ANIMATION.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Gael steps from the bus to the sidewalk, tears dropping from his cheeks. He shuffles and snuffles, wiping his face.

Folks move along the sidewalk with purpose or despair, eyes equally vacant.

As the bus pulls away, Morgan and Chris hang out the windows.

CHRIS
Hey, Squeak!

MORGAN
Squeak! You're so poor, your picture's on food stamps!

Gael keeps walking.

The street is a different world. Nobody pays attention to kids. Business gets done by gang members speaking a language of hand signs, nods, and facial expressions.

A pair of prostitutes slink by with huge eyelashes, six-inch heels, and torn stockings.

A snaggletoothed and stringy-haired black bum, TRASH CAN MAN, 63, pushes a shopping cart filled with crumpled aluminum cans.

TRASH CAN MAN
Squeak, Squeak!

Gael keeps moving, looking at the ground.

TRASH CAN MAN (CONT'D)
Boy, why they call you that?

Gael ignores him, so he blocks him with his cart.

TRASH CAN MAN (CONT'D)
Boy, I'm talking to you. Why they call you Squeak, cause you're so small?

GAEL
(voice cracking)
I don't know.

TRASH CAN MAN

(grimacing)

Oh. Well, never-the-mind. You gotta stand up for yourself or this world will smash you down.

He moves his cart a bit and Gael keeps going.

TRASH CAN MAN (CONT'D)

You gotta punch dem in da mouff and dem devils will leave you alone.

Gael runs the rest of the way to the stoop of his apartment building.

He trots up the steps to get into the building...

INT. TENEMENT HOUSING - DAY

...And down the steps to his basement apartment.

INT. MARIA'S STUDIO APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Gael bursts through the door and slams his backpack down. The studio is small, but clean. A galley kitchen, with tiny, white mid-century appliances.

Along a wall, a small table for two. Maria's bed is off against one wall and a couch along another. A small television on a stand sits opposite the couch.

Maria is in the open bathroom doorway. A maid's uniform hangs on the back of the door as she puts the finishing touches on her diner's uniform.

MARIA

Hola, nieto. Make some tortilla rolls for dinner and record Dragnet for me tonight, okay?

She spins for one last check in the mirror and heads to the door.

Maria bends for a quick kiss on Gael's head and sees he's been crying.

MARIA (CONT'D)

What's wrong, mi amor?

GAEL

I hate those kids at school!
They're always picking on me.

MARIA

Ignore them. People who make fun
are jealous.

GAEL

How can they be jealous of me?
Abuela, we don't have much.

MARIA

We have love. Many people have
everything but that.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Eat. Homework. Dragnet. See you
later.

GAEL

Dragnet, again? C'mon, Abuela.

MARIA

Yes. That show taught me English.
Lock up and don't answer the door.

She reaches for the door.

INT. MORGAN'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Morgan's house is the opposite of Gael's. An open floor plan
includes kitchen, dining area, and living room, all
professionally decorated and neat as a pin.

Morgan and his dad, PAUL, 38, a shark from the trading floor,
have Chinese take out.

A cold silence separates them more than being on opposite
ends of the table.

PAUL

How was school today?

MORGAN

Boring.

PAUL

I got a call from the director,
what's her name, Skinner?

Morgan shovels chow mien into his mouth. Doesn't even shrug.

PAUL (CONT'D)

She says you've been hassling the
new Mexican kid.

Morgan stops eating and looks at his dad.

PAUL (CONT'D)
 (points with chopstick)
 I told her we'd have a talk. This
 is it. Leave that kid alone.

MORGAN
 Okay.

PAUL
 I mean it. He's not worth your
 attention.

Paul takes his box to the trash and whacks Morgan upside the head in a playful, but assertive way.

INT. MARIA'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

The blue-black light from the TV silhouettes an aluminum tray in front of a couch. An empty blanket sits in a lump on the far end. The sofa is also Gael's bed.

Gael stands in his underwear and a t-shirt, working the mini stove.

A tortilla warms in one skillet. A piece of baloney bulges in the other.

He cuts an inch in the baloney with a fork and flips it over. It begins to bubble again.

He slides the tortilla out of the skillet and onto a plate.

He follows with the baloney, placing it on the tortilla, then rolls it up and halves it with his fork.

Gael scurries over and puts his plate on the tray and sits on the couch.

ON THE TV - THE DRAGNET INTRO

GAEL
 (in time with the show)
 Ladies and gentlemen, the story you
 are about to see is true. The names
 have been changed to protect the
 innocent.

Gael rips into his tortilla, grease runs down his arm. He wipes it on his shirt.

It doesn't take long - two bites for each half.

Gael fishes around in his backpack and pulls out a notebook, a workbook, and a pencil.

Then takes his plate to the sink and rinses it and the two skillets.

Next, as the credits roll for DRAGNET, he turns off the TV.

At the couch, he reaches back into his backpack and pulls out a white and silver wrestler's mask and shimmies under the wool blanket.

With eyes closed, he rolls onto his side.

FLASHBACK - INT. CINDERBLOCK LOCKERROOM

A WRESTLER, 25, does jumping jacks and slaps his arms with his hands in front of a mirror. He wears the white and silver wrestling mask.

A CHUNKY MAN, 57, sticks his head in.

CHUNKY MAN
(in Spanish)
Two minutes.

The wrestler turns to Gael, 5, and his mom. He lifts the mask and gives Gael a wink. It's Gael's father.

GAEL'S PAPA
(in Spanish)
Do you think they'll know it's me,
little man?

He kisses Gael's mom, pulls down the mask, cinches it tight and runs out for his match.

END FLASHBACK.

BACK IN THE APARTMENT -

It's later and all the lights are out. Gael sleeps.

Maria comes in from her night shift and pulls the blanket up around his chin. She takes the mask from his hand and puts it in his backpack.

EXT. COURTYARD AT CHARTER ACADEMY - DAY

Students occupy different parts of a fairly tight playground at school.

Gael is by himself, kicking his soccer ball around and practicing some nice footwork.

Chris runs up behind him and knocks him down. Morgan takes over the ball.

Gael springs back up, but the game of keep away is already on. Though the same age, Chris and Morgan are much bigger and faster than Gael.

Gael
(voice cracking)
Give it back!

Chris
Come and get it, Squeak.

He runs toward Chris and the ball goes to Morgan.

Morgan
Got to be faster than that, pip-
Squeak.

Gael dives into Morgan to take him down. The ball goes over to Chris.

Gael's force rocks Morgan back a little, but Morgan punches him hard in the stomach.

It knocks the air out of Gael and he doubles over.

Morgan (CONT'D)
Don't touch me, beaner.

Gael tries to stand up straight. Morgan leans over and slugs Gael in the eye.

DIRECTOR SKINNER, 49, a bull in a business suit with black eyes and grey hair pulled into a tight bun, catches the tail end of the skirmish.

Skinner
(shouting from a distance)
Hey boys, knock it off!

She hustles over without actually breaking into a jog.

Morgan and Chris scatter.

She reaches Gael and snatches him by his arm.

Skinner (CONT'D)
What did you do to those boys?

He's still gasping for air.

INT. COUNSELOR'S ROOM - DAY

COUNSELOR DONOHUE, 32, is a fresh-faced bouquet of fake flowers, who still lights up a drab, cluttered office.

She meets with Gael.

DONOHUE

Okay, so the boys were playing with your soccer ball, you wanted it back and got violent with Morgan, right?

He doesn't answer. He looks at the wall next to her, avoiding eye contact.

DONOHUE (CONT'D)

And, that's when you say he hit you.

GAEL

No, that *is* when he hit me.

DONOHUE

He says he never hit you, you tried to tackle him and bounced off him to the ground.

Gael reads her eyes, shakes his head and looks away.

DONOHUE (CONT'D)

Chris backs his story up.

GAEL

(points to his black eye)
How did I get this?

DONOHUE

Must have happened when you fell, which is why violence is never the answer.

(hands him a pamphlet)
How else could you have handled this? Without violence?

GAEL

I don't know.

DONOHUE

You could have asked a teacher. Other ways?

Gael

I could have left my soccer ball at home.

Donohue

Yes, but I'm talking about after the boys started playing keep away.

Gael

I don't know. If I tell a teacher, I'm a tattler...

Donohue

(cuts in)

...You could have ignored them. Kids who pester others do so for the reaction. If you ignore them, they stop.

Gael

I have never seen Morgan stop.

Donohue

Try it. Ignore him and he'll give up. And, you won't get in trouble. Will you try?

Gael

Yes.

Donohue

Okay, then I won't recommend you for suspension this time. You can go back to class.

Gael starts to leave.

Donohue (CONT'D)

Hey, you won't get a second chance. You're here on scholarship, and the school has a waiting list of paying customers. Try hard, okay.

Gael shuts the door softly.

INT. DARK ROOM - NIGHT

A young, tan hand pulls a pencil line down a piece of notebook paper, dividing it in half.

INSERT - THE NAMES MORGAN AND CHRIS ARE ADDED ON ONE SIDE.

The hand closes the notebook.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Gael enters the bus and moves down the bus aisle. As he goes students change to animation.

ANIMATION - EL SANTO

The frenetic energy of the kids is amplified and their appearances pulsate between calm and mean to match how Gael perceives them in his imagination.

Gael sees an adult-sized kid crowded against a window.

This "kid" wears the Charter Academy starter kit - khakis, white shirt, blue and green striped tie, and a navy jacket embroidered with the Academy logo.

Plus, the WHITE AND SILVER MASK of Gael's papa. This is EL SANTO (THE SAINT), Gael's IMAGINARY FRIEND.

Gael sits with him. His animated self is overly small with large sad eyes.

Morgan and Chris are three seats behind Gael. They move up and toss the kids out of the seat directly behind Gael.

Both Morgan and Chris are oversized and overblown in their devious dispositions.

Morgan leans over the seat...

MORGAN

Dumb move today, Squeak. Trying to tackle me.

CHRIS

Sorta left you speechless, didn't it?

Gael ignores them and stares straight ahead.

MORGAN

There's plenty more where that came from, too, pretty girl.

Morgan locks his middle finger behind his thumb and flicks Gael's ear. Lightning bolts and stars accentuate the pain in the animation.

Gael jerks and scoots forward in his seat, ear instantly red.

FROM GAEL'S SEAT

El Santo turns and gives Morgan a threatening look.

EL SANTO

(to Gael)

You going to do anything to stop that?

Gael shakes his head no.

WHACK - Morgan smacks the back of his hand against Gael's neck, just below the hairline. More illustrated lines convey the impact of the action.

CHRIS

Oooh. That one stung, didn't it, Squeak?

FROM MORGAN'S SEAT

Santo spins and stands in his seat, towering over Chris and Morgan, hands out in a grappling gesture.

EL SANTO

(to Gael)

Now's the time, amigo.

GAEL'S SEAT

Gael moves as far forward in his seat as possible.

GAEL

(to himself)

I just have to ignore them.

MORGAN'S SEAT

From their point-of-view, Gael sits alone and mutters to himself.

MORGAN

Who are you talking to, Squeak?

CHRIS

Yeah Squeak, who are you talking to? Are you one of those crazy beaners?

MORGAN

Psycho Spic, you don't belong in our school, is that what you're saying to yourself?

Gael turns and lunges at them - they recoil in surprise.

Gael
(shouting)
I SAID, I JUST HAVE TO IGNORE YOU!

FROM THE FRONT OF THE BUS

The bus driver is driving forward, but looking back in the huge mirror, eyes ablaze with irritation.

BUS DRIVER
Knock it off back there! Turn
around, sit on your pockets, and
keep your mouth shut!

Morgan and Chris fall out laughing.

Gael turns and sits, still on the forward edge of his seat.

END ANIMATION.

INT. MARIA'S STUDIO APARTMENT - LATER

It's dark in the small apartment. Dragnet lights the room. Gael has two TV trays set-up in front of the couch.

He sits and eats from one. Tortilla smeared with peanut butter and a cup of water.

Gael looks at the other TV tray and the room animates.

ANIMATION - SANTO TALKS TO GAEL

Gael
Your dinner is getting cold.

Santo does push-ups, now in a full body leotard. He leaps to his feet and stretches his neck back and forth.

Gael ignores it all, eyes on TV, tiny bites from his tortilla.

EL SANTO
Those kids aren't going away.

He does a few jumping jacks, then bends left and right at the waist.

EL SANTO (CONT'D)
Everyday, every chance they get,
they are going to come for you.

Gael drops his tortilla, stands, and approaches Santo.

Gael

Look at me. What am I supposed to do?

Santo runs in place, slaps his arms, dangles his hands.

El Santo

You're undersized, for sure. Try a few push-ups.

Gael drops to the ground on his stomach. He strains, but can't muster a single push-up.

El Santo (CONT'D)

Ok, roll over and knock out a few sit-ups.

Gael rolls over and bends his knees. Arms behind his head, he squeezes his head, but can't do a sit-up.

El Santo (CONT'D)

Never mind, pop-up and do some jumping jacks.

Santo demonstrates. Gael starts out-of-sync, stops. Tries again. And again. Gets the cadence.

El Santo (CONT'D)

There you go. Start there. Do those every chance you get.

Gael does jumping jacks and stares at the door.

Gael

One. Two. Three. Four. Five.

That's enough, he stops and takes his dish to the sink, rinses it, and puts it in the dish rack.

When he turns around, the room returns to live action.

END ANIMATION.

El Santo is gone.

Gael collapses the TV trays and puts them in the space between the fridge and counter.

He stands in front of the door.

And reaches out to the door knob.

FLASH - TRASH CAN MAN

He sees Trash Can Man's mouth, his blood-stained eyes, wild and angry.

TRASH CAN MAN
Bust dem in da mouff!

END FLASH.

Gael jerks his hand away from the door.

GAEL
Sheesh!

He turns to the kitchen and splashes his face with cold water from the sink.

Then opens the door and goes out.

EXT. THE MEAN STREET - NIGHT

Street lights cut the sidewalk action into an accordion fold of light and dark.

Gael watches traffic and people slink down the way.

He leaves the safety of the steps, takes a left, and disappears into the darkness of the alley next to the building.

EXT. GAEL'S ALLEY - NIGHT

It's much darker in the alley. Past one dumpster to two aluminum trash cans with lids.

Gael stands on top of the cans and leaps up to grab the bottom rung of a suspended fire escape.

He hangs there like the last leaf on a branch in the fall.

Gael starts bouncing and wiggling as he dangles.

The ladder releases and drops closer to the ground.

Gael scampers up to the first landing.

He looks down on the alley and street below.

HIS POV - big rats run the edges of the buildings and bums occupy the corners made by the dumpsters.

THE FIRE ESCAPE

Gael zig-zags his way up the stairs, silent as snow.

He carefully climbs the ladder toward the top. As he goes, the ladder rungs become illustrated. The world is fully animated when he reaches the rooftop.

ANIMATION - GAEL SURVEYS HIS WORLD

EXT. ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

Two shadows stand dark against the grey night sky - a small silhouette and a muscular form with a cape.

Closer in, Gael and el Santo stand side-by-side.

Still smaller than in real life, Gael wears a trench coat and fedora like a detective. He turns to the city below them.

GAEL

(a la Jack Friday)

This is the city. I live here. I'm just a boy.

SANTO

They call you Squeak, spic, beaner, but never by your name.

Santo's cape ripples with the wind.

He walks the rooftop to the other side.

There's a commotion in the alley below.

Santo leans way over the edge to check it out.

SANTO (CONT'D)

That's a long way to fall. I say we stay away from the edge.

Gael leans over for his own look.

EXT. DARK ALLEY - NIGHT

The streets below are dark and busy with the desperate.

There's a rhythm to the streets that syncs with the spirited animation.

Horns HONK, cars REV their engines, air-brakes POP and FIZZ, trucks RATTLE and HUM, people MURMUR, SHOUT, and LAUGH. It becomes an off-tempo soundtrack.

Gael is mesmerized by its ugly beauty...

The color palette is a gritty combination of tobacco brown, dark reds, black, filtered through a yellow pall from street lights.

Neon signs provide a pop of color and a sense of movement.

INSERT - SIGNS: PAY DAY LOANS - MASSAGE - COLT 45 MALT LIQUOR

Store fronts have wrought iron bars over windows, and some places still have bits of plywood where glass used to be.

Drinking it all in, Gael sees someone familiar.

ON TRASH CAN MAN - his cart is empty of cans. Now, it only has a tarp and a coat. He stops and turns his head up as if to look at Gael.

But, it's the bottle in a brown bag that he's interested in.

With a stagger to the right, he pushes all of his possessions into the darkness of the alley for the night.

PROSTITUTE 1 (O.S.)
Hey baby! You lonely tonight?

The question redirects Gael's attention to the two prostitutes on the street.

One is leaning into a window of a car. The other vamps on the sidewalk, turning to show off her curves.

She bends over as if tying her shoes, then pops back up, and shoots a direct look into the car.

PROSTITUTE 1 (CONT'D)
(still loud)
Yeah, baby, taking a cruise around
the world is on my bucket list.

She opens the door, gets in, and waves to her friend as the car pulls off.

The other prostitute stomps her foot in an exaggerated pout.

Then continues her prance down the sidewalk, close to the edge.

LAUGHTER explodes at the corner. Drug dealers just cracked each other up, catching Gael's eye.

A vehicle turns off the main street into the alley and one of the boys, still laughing, leans into the driver's window.

The other two are still besides themselves with laughter. They bob up and down like doing a strange dance.

When the one wearing the hoodie bends over, Gael sees the GUN in his waistband.

BACK ON GAEL

Santo pulls Gael back from the edge.

SANTO

You're too young to see this.

GAEL

It's sure different than Kansas.

Santo looks away.

GAEL (CONT'D)

I can't make it here. This place is too big and mean. I'm too small.

SANTO

Nonsense. After all you've been through? Come on.

They run like action heroes toward the other side of the roof and leap off the edge, disappearing in darkness...

END ANIMATION.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Though smaller than a public school cafeteria, the lunchroom at the Academy is still loud and hectic.

Gael sits at the end of a table by himself. He eats a hot lunch from the cafeteria, but the richer kids bring their own meals from home.

OLIVIA FARMER, 14, a pretty and popular girl who talks nonstop, sits down next to him.

OLIVIA

Can I sit with you?

Gael looks and starts to answer, but she sits before he can.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

(rapid fire)

My mother says loners turn into lunatics and lunatics turn into school shooters and I don't want to be responsible for not talking to you and that making you crazy. Plus, if you go crazy, I want you to remember that we're friends, right, so you don't hurt me. It's all very complicated.

Gael stops eating.

GAEL

(voice cracking)

Don't worry about me.

OLIVIA

Well, nice to meet you. I've never known a poor person. You know what I mean? I see poor people walking around and smelling bad, but I don't know them. Mother says they should clean themselves up and find a job. I don't think it's that easy. Anyway, you're too young for a job and you don't smell.

Morgan and Chris walk over from across the cafeteria.

MORGAN

(to Olivia)

What are you doing sitting with this loser?

CHRIS

How's hot lunch, Squeak? You know our parents pay for that, right?

OLIVIA

Leave him alone, he's my friend.

MORGAN

Oh, I get it. He's your new pet project. Savior for poor Squeak.

They walk on, Gael looks relieved.

GAEL

I hate them.

OLIVIA

Never mind them. They're more important in their own minds than in real life. Morgan's new money. His dad's just a stock broker. Chris' money is more generational, but social etiquette skipped him. You know, it goes from the silver spoon to the rusty spoon, and he's got a lot of rust on his.

GAEL

Oh -

OLIVIA

(cutting in)

Morgan asked me to the dance and I told him I'd think about it. I don't like him, though, but it might make him jealous, me talking to you, and all.

GAEL

Awesome. You seem nice, and thanks for talking to me, but I don't need those two any madder at me.

OLIVIA

Oh, honey, they're not mad at you. Not really. They're just asserting their power over you. I mean, they'll never get in trouble for picking on you, so it's just sport.

GAEL

I'm sport?

OLIVIA

To them. Not to me. I'm really interested in what it's like to be poor and Mexican. I mean, you're sort of exotic around here. None of us have ever been to Mexico. No offense, but that's where poor Americans go for vacation.

The bell rings and Olivia stands to leave.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

See you later, mi amigo.

She claps her hands in excitement.

Gael
 (to himself)
 I haven't been to Mexico, either.

A tater tot dings him in the back of the head.

He turns to see - Morgan and Chris, laughing and pointing.

ANIMATION - EXT. MEAN STREETS - NIGHT

The streets undulate with kinetic animation. Gael and Santo walk down the sidewalk past the junkies, between the prostitutes, and over the homeless.

They stop short of the intersection and watch...

THE CORNER

The drug soldiers from before. They look like a group of friends just kicking it. Dangerous friends. One has a PANT LEG rolled up, it just seems sloppy. One wears an oversized HOODY. The third sucks on a LOLLIPOP.

BACK ON GAEL

SANTO
 Why does the street smell so bad?

A mangy dog squats and makes a puddle they step over.

Gael directs Santo's gaze to the corner with a nod.

SANTO (CONT'D)
 Agreed. Let's avoid them.

Gael
 The big hoody hides his gun.
 Working the lollipop keeps that one
 looking around. Making peg-leg the
 dealer.

SANTO
 How do you know all that?

Gael
 Dragnet. It's old, but it ain't all
 wrong.

AT GAEL'S FEET

Two homeless men appear to sleep. One has his shoes off so his feet can air out. The other opens an eye and looks around. He stands and picks up the shoes.

Gael (CONT'D)
(to the bum)
Those aren't your shoes. Put them
back.

BUM
Mind your business.

The exchange catches Lollipop's attention.

Lollipop
(to the bum)
Hey, pops - do what little man
says, drop the shoes.

The bum carefully puts the shoes back where they were.

Lollipop rolls over to Gael. His eyes are wild and alive,
hypnotic. The lollipop rolls by itself on its stick.

Lollipop (CONT'D)
Little soldier, when you ready to
be somebody, I'll hook you up.

Gael's size puffs up as Lollipop floats back over to his
boys.

Santo
(to Gael)
I don't think you want to be in his
army.

Gael and Santo continue walking and the cityscape vibrates
with spirited and dangerous energy.

END. ANIMATION.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

Gym class - every one is dressed out in their coordinated
Academy shorts and t-shirts. It's as chaotic as the
lunchroom, just without food.

Off to one side, Gael and Olivia bounce a basketball back and
forth to each other. Gym is not really their thing.

OLIVIA
(in mid sentence)
...so then I started thinking that
you're a really good listener.

Gael rolls his eyes and bounce passes the ball.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

Even my besties say I talk too much. They say I never stop and dominate the conversation, but you've never said anything that mean. Do you think I talk too much?

GAEL

Well, sometimes -

OLIVIA

(cutting in)

Right, sometimes I talk too much, but who doesn't? I bet even you talk too much sometimes, though I've heard that poor people have fewer words than everyone else, so maybe you want to say more, but just can't. I can help you with that.

GAEL

I just don't like -

OLIVIA

I know, I don't like being alone either. That's why I decided to talk to you in the first place, I thought to myself, I don't like being alone, he probably doesn't like it either. I knew I was right.

The ball is like a metronome bouncing back and forth.

Gael has his back to the wall and keeps an eye on Morgan and Chris. They're playing an aggressive game of half-court basketball.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

So, anyways, I was thinking that you're such a good listener, you might make a good boyfriend.

Gael catches the ball when it comes back to him and looks shocked.

He passes the ball back.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

You're also very pretty. The girls think you're going to be the most handsome boy in high school once you hit your growth spurt. I told them I saw you first, so back-off.

The ball hits the court and bounces back to Gael.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
Well, what do you think?

GAEL
Okay, I guess. But I don't know
anything about being a boyfriend.

The ball back to Olivia.

OLIVIA
I can tell you all about it. It
mainly means we hang out the most
and go to movies together, go to
dances, share milkshakes and stuff.
We can hold hands and I can teach
you how to kiss.
(whispers)
Even tongue kiss, but I'll kill you
if you tell anyone.

Gael's head quivers a bit, taking all this in.

GAEL
I don't think I can do any of that.

OLIVIA
Why not? I thought you liked me.

GAEL
It's not that. You're great and
all. I just, uh, well, I'm not a
good fit for you.

OLIVIA
Why? Because you're Mexican? I
could care less, I'm more
cosmopolitan than that.

Gael catches the ball again. Looks at the clock, the bell is
about to ring. He walks over to Olivia.

GAEL
I live with my grandma, and we
don't have extra for things like
movies and the treats that you're
used to. I mean, deserve. The
Rothschild's even have to buy my
uniforms.

She pulls her head back a little and laughs.

OLIVIA

Don't worry about that, silly. I
can pay for things when we go out.

His head drops.

GAEL

That's not how it works in my
culture.

OLIVIA

Well, you need to be more
cosmopolitan like me.

Like a cobra, she plants a kiss on his cheek to seal the
deal. Then runs off.

Dazed, Gael rubs his cheek and smiles.

Across the gym, Morgan is not as happy with what he just saw.

EXT. GENTRY ROW - NIGHT

The stretch of town that has been remodeled and upscaled into
multi-million dollar Brownstones.

Gael climbs the fire escape as the world animates.

ANIMATION - GAEL SPIES ON MORGAN

He reaches a landing and finds Santo waiting on him. They
look in through the window.

INT. MODERN TOWNHOME - NIGHT

The familiar open floor plan professionally decorated in a
masculine aesthetic. The animation is less lively.

It lacks warmth, all concrete, steel, wood, and sharp angles.

Morgan is seen from behind. He draws a GUN from his waistband
as fast as he can and drops into a shooting stance.

ON THE TRIGGER - his finger pulls slowly - CLICK - it dry
fires.

BACK ON MORGAN

He tucks it back into his waistband. And draws it again.

And Again.

He holds it out in front of him with both hands, then turns it horizontal like gangbangers.

He tosses the gun hand-to-hand, then crouches to shoot.

He stands and tucks the gun back in his waistband.

ON HIS HANDS

He lifts a magazine from a hall table and selects a bullet from a box of ammunition.

He loads it into the magazine. And another. Three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine.

Then he pulls the gun, slams the magazine into the grip, and racks a shell into the chamber.

BACK ON MORGAN

He tucks the gun, now loaded, back into his waistband.

Two heavy breaths. He draws it again.

THE DOOR

Morgan's DAD walks in. The boy instinctively turns the gun on him, then points it in the air.

END ANIMATION.

Paul moves fast toward Morgan.

PAUL
Jesus Christ!

He snatches the gun from his son.

PAUL (CONT'D)
How many times have I told you to
stay out of my gunroom?
(stalks around)
Ten? Have I told you ten times?
More?

Paul drops the magazine from the grip, it's loaded. He racks the action and ejects a shell.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I can't believe you loaded this and
chambered a round! This thing has a
three pound trigger job. If you
sneezed on it, it would go off!

He thumbs through the ammo in the magazine and empties it onto the floor.

His dad's temper builds, but he keeps his voice steady and serious.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Son, you can't be this cavalier with a gun. It's too dangerous...if your mother knew about this.

MORGAN

I know my way around a gun, you're overreacting.

PAUL

Really? If this goes off in the house it could kill you or it could enter a neighbor's house and kill them or it could shatter the window and cost thousands of dollars in damage. The police would be called, child protective services. I could lose my trading license and we'd be out on the street!

Paul punches the wall, knocking a hole into the drywall.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Go to your room!

Morgan pounds off to his room and slams the door.

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE - CONTINUOUS

Gael shakes in shock.

INT. MARIA'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gael is tucked into his couch bed. The grey-green light of Dragnet washes the room in a sickly color.

The door opens and Maria comes in from her night shift. She's as quiet as possible and shuffles straight to the bathroom.

Gael sees the yellow light under the door.

She comes out in a night gown and pours herself a glass of water. She's about to check on Gael on her way to her bed.

GAEL

Abuela?

AAAIIII! She screams and spills the water.

MARIA

Nieto! You frightened me to death.
Why aren't you asleep?

She sits next to him and tucks his cover around his chin.

GAEL

I don't know. I can't sleep.

MARIA

Did something happen at school?

GAEL

Just the usual. Those mean kids and
that talkative girl.

MARIA

Isn't she your girlfriend, mi
armor?

GAEL

Yeah, her.

MARIA

You are lucky to have her interest,
nieto, be nice to her and treat her
with respect.

GAEL

How do you do it?

MARIA

Treat a woman with respect? Listen
to her, take an interest in what
she likes, do nice things for her.
Little surprises.

GAEL

No, Abuela, how do you do it?

MARIA

What do you mean?

GAEL

You work all day and all night for
very little money, but seem happy.
Don't you get tired?

MARIA

Si. I'm tired a lot. But, I'm
blessed always. I have health, I
have you.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I work hard, but it's not too much when taken one day at a time.

GAEL

Are people hateful to you like they are to me?

MARIA

Sometimes, nieto, sometimes. I pay them no mind. They need more love in their lives, that's all. I feel sorry for them.

GAEL

I was hoping it gets better.

MARIA

It will for you. You'll go to school after high school and get a skill or go to college. Then, you'll only need one job.

Gael closes his eyes.

MARIA (CONT'D)

And, marry a fine Mexican girl. What beautiful and happy children you will have. Three girls, I think. Oh, the Quinciñeras! I'll make the dresses, mi armor.

Satisfied that he's asleep, she leans over and gives him a kiss.

GAEL

Abuela?

MARIA

Yes?

GAEL

I'm glad I stayed up for you.

MARIA

Me too, mi armor, me too.

She stands with a grimace and hobbles over to her bed, turning off the TV as she goes.

INT. MOVIE THEATER LOBBY - DAY

Olivia drags Gael by the hand into the theater. It's a typical cineplex with sweeping ceilings and a long concession counter.

Gael is amazed and looking all around. Lots of people mill about and stand in line for junk food.

Olivia has been talking the whole time and doesn't stop once waiting for popcorn.

OLIVIA

I knew they'd never stop making Star Wars movies. I mean, mother says, you never get rid of your cash cow, and this franchise has already made billions. I can't wait for Chewy's origin story. I mean you got part of it with Solo, but after baby Yoda, we need a baby Chewy.

The line moves up and it's their turn. The CASHIER behind the counter doesn't say a word, or crack a smile.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

We'll have the hot date combo.
 (turning to Gael)
 Do you like butter? I do. I like layered butter.
 (back to the worker)
 Layered butter please. And Junior Mints, of course. I'll have orange to drink, do you want orange, too?

Gael shrugs his shoulders.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

Two orange sodas! He's never been to the movies before, can you imagine? I mean, he's seen movies on TV and at school, but just never to a theater.
 (the worker rolls her eyes)
 I told him wait until you hear the digital surround sound, am I right? Not bad for a first date.

AN EXPRESSIONLESS TEEN slides the bucket of popcorn across the counter. ANOTHER TEEN pours the drinks, pushes down the "other" button on the lids, then passes them along. The cashier hands over the candy.

Olivia inserts her Platinum AMEX into the card reader and signs Olivia with a heart for the "O."

INT. THEATER TWO - CONTINUOUS

Olivia and Gael sit in the center of the theater and in the middle of a row. Others come in and sit all around them.

It's dark until the previews begin.

OLIVIA

(whispers)

Since you're new to dating, I'll tell you that most boys do this silly thing where they pretend to stretch, then put their arm around their girl's shoulders. It's okay if you do that, but it's not very comfortable, so I recommend we just share our popcorn until it's gone and then we can hold hands.

MOVIEGOER

Ssssh! The movie's started!

OLIVIA

Don't sssh me! I paid our ways in and I'll talk if I want to.

A BOY from behind them throws popcorn at her.

Olivia snaps around and is hit again.

She turns and looks at Gael for defense. He shrinks in his chair.

INT. PHOEBE'S CAR - NIGHT

PHOEBE, 38, is Olivia's mother, and through the convergence of science, wealth, and leisure time, she looks like her sister - the one just off to college.

She drives Olivia and Gael home from the movies. Olivia sits in the front passenger seat, silent for the first time, her arms crossed and face in full pout.

Gael sits in the back behind Phoebe. She talks to him by looking at him in the rearview mirror.

PHOEBE

How was the movie?

Gael
Really amazing, Mrs. Farmer. Thank
you for taking me.

Phoebe
I'm glad you liked it.
(to Olivia)
How about you Liv?

Instead of answering, she looks out the window.

Phoebe (CONT'D)
(looking back in the
mirror)
Oh, did you two have an argument?

Olivia snaps her head back around.

Olivia
Somebody shushed me, and someone
else threw popcorn at me.

Still watching Gael through the mirror, his eyes close and he
looks down.

She looks back at the road, then to Olivia.

Phoebe
Well, that sounds rude, what was
going on?

Olivia
What do you think?

Phoebe
Oh. You were talking?

Olivia
It wasn't even at the opening
credits. I was going to stop.

Phoebe sees Gael looking out his window.

Phoebe
Anything else?

Olivia turns in her seat and points at Gael.

Olivia
He wouldn't defend me.

Phoebe holds it together but her eyes sparkle with laughter
over the teenage drama. She nods a few times to think how to
help Gael out.

PHOEBE
 (through the mirror)
 Gael strikes me more as the
 thinking type, not the fighting
 type, and that's an admirable way
 to be.

OLIVIA
 He couldn't even think of anything
 to say.

PHOEBE
 We've talked about this before,
 honey. Not everyone is as talkative
 as you.

Gael leans forward to look out the front window.

OLIVIA
 People are so mean.

PHOEBE
 (to Gael)
 Are you okay, honey?

GAEL
 Yeah. It was just awkward. I mean,
 I wanted to do something about it,
 but I didn't know what.

He looks out front again.

GAEL (CONT'D)
 You can drop me off at the next
 intersection.

Phoebe looks back and smiles in the rearview.

PHOEBE
 Do you live on the corner, I don't
 want you walking far this late.

GAEL
 (lying)
 One back from the corner.

She turns on her blinker and inches over to the side. And
 then comes to a stop.

He scooches over and opens the door behind Olivia.

GAEL (CONT'D)
 Thanks again. I'm sorry I didn't
 defend you.

PHOEBE
She'll be fine. Goodnight.

He gets out.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Gael waves and walks like he's going to one of the houses, but this is the nice part of town.

He drops into the darkness of a shadow and watches the car drive off.

He waits until he sees the brake lights and the car turn left a block up.

We've seen this home before - it's where Morgan lives.

Gael walks to the intersection, then cuts down the side street to angle off toward his block. As he walks, the world transforms with his imagination.

ANIMATION - GAEL IS CHASED HOME

Gael's small version of himself casts an equally small shadow from the street lamps.

A SECOND BIGGER SHADOW appears as if right behind him.

Gael spins, and no one is there.

GAEL
Santo?

He looks around carefully. Nothing.

Dogs start BARKING - close.

When he turns to start walking again, the second shadow is back, and even bigger. He picks up his pace.

GAEL (CONT'D)
Come on, Santo, where are you?

A THIRD SHADOW, this one approaching from the front.

A FOURTH SHADOW, not entirely human-shaped, carries a large stick with nails sticking out of one end.

Police sirens WAIL. Blue and Red lights bounce off buildings up ahead and move past the next intersection.

Gael RUNS.

TUNNEL VISION - the intersection ahead seems far away. The buildings on either side reach the sky and crowd the sidewalk.

WHAM! Gael trips over the legs of a bum on the sidewalk. It's Trash Can Man.

Gael bounces up quick just as Trash Can Man reaches out to check on him. He looks monstrous, head misshapen, blood-stained eyes big and wet, his mouth a foul cavern with one or two spiked teeth.

TRASH CAN MAN

Hey, boy, what's wrong with you?

Gael swats at his clutch and continues

POP! POP! POP! - gunfire a few blocks away.

Another siren WAILS - an ambulance SCREAMS through the intersection up ahead.

Gael's face is sweat covered; his eyes are wide in panic.

He lunges toward the intersection and takes a right.

The lighting is better but he knocks into a corner THUG. He's big and scary and Gael sees a gun when his leather jacket billows open.

THUG

You better keep running, boy!

The street is busier with people, too, all scarier and more grotesque than in real life.

Gael slows down.

To a breathless jog.

To walking.

To bending over and gasping to catch his breath.

GAEL

(to himself)

Sheesh.

He looks across the street. It's his building.

GAEL (CONT'D)

(between gasps)

You made it.

Still struggling to breathe, he waits until the light turns, then hurries across the street and into his building.

END ANIMATION.

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

The library is one of the biggest parts of the school. Walls of books tower overhead like the buildings of the street.

They make long corridors with hard intersections.

Gael holds his TrapperKeeper notebook and an index card.

He walks slowly, eyes on the Dewey Decimal numbers of the books.

Lost in concentration, he takes a left, goes down a narrow row, turns around and follows it back.

Turns again. Another long row.

Turns again, and sees Morgan holding Olivia against a wall at the end of the row.

Gael freezes.

ON OLIVIA AND MORGAN

Morgan has her pinned against the wall, with his right hand on the wall above her shoulder and his body leaned in to block her escape.

Olivia stares him down.

MORGAN

I don't know what you see in that little chalupa, but it's time to stop slumming it and date your own kind.

OLIVIA

My own kind? You're not my kind. Puh-leese. You have the bravado and stench of new money.

MORGAN

Well, at least I have some money. That beaner doesn't have two pesos to rub together.

OLIVIA

I'm not going to ditch him and go
to the dance with you, you, uh, you
thug.

She tries to push away from him, but he doesn't budge.

Instead, he leans in. Nose-to-nose.

MORGAN

Come on, I know you want to be with
a hot-blooded, future All-American.

She turns away and sees Gael.

He seems small and far away, dwarfed by the stacks.

ON GAEL

From his perspective, they also seem far away, down the
narrow gauntlet of the walls of books.

Olivia turns her head and looks right at Gael.

She mouths the word: "RUN."

He turns and looks behind him. One silent step and he's gone.

The books start to blur - and the world animates.

ANIMATION - GAEL TO THE RESCUE

Gael runs TOWARD them.

INT. BETWEEN THE BOOKS - CONTINUOUS

Gael, in a loosely fitted Santo wrestling mask, a unitard,
black hightop grappling boots, and a cape, hauls ass between
the books.

OLIVIA'S POV

Gael sprints toward them in his school uniform.

She locks eyes with Morgan.

OLIVIA

(buying time)

I can't believe you think this
approach even works, what's the
matter with you?

GAEL'S POV

Obscured by the ill-fitted eye holes of the mask, he's on top of Olivia and Morgan in a few blinks

Gael (O.S.)

Hey!

Morgan turns to look at him.

WHACK! Gael slams Morgan in the face with his TrapperKeeper.

Morgan flies back into the racks. Books fall on his head.

INT. BETWEEN THE BOOKS - CONTINUOUS

Olivia runs to the right and out of sight.

Gael stops and hulks, to the extent he can, over Morgan, with his TrapperKeeper held high overhead, now more filled out and muscular in his wrestling outfit.

Morgan recovers fast. His eyes flare and he knocks more books off the shelves getting up.

OH NO! Gael takes off running to the left. Morgan gives chase.

It's the French Connection car chase, but between teens running through the stacks in the library.

Gael careens around a corner, grabbing the stacks and knocking books in Morgan's path.

No worries, Morgan swats them out of his way.

Hard left. Gael's outfit changes back to his school uniform. He ditches his backpack and pumps his arms as fast as he can.

Morgan stumbles over the backpack, but it doesn't slow him much.

Left again. A long, narrow corridor with a light at the end.

And the book check-out desk.

Staffed by the librarian, MRS. JONES, heavysset and old, like a set of encyclopedias.

Morgan reaches out and just brushes the shirt on Gael's back.

Gael leans into his run - a 40-yard dash for Olympic Gold - a finish line appears just ahead.

He dives into the light, rolls up against the Librarian's desk and gets to his feet.

Just as Morgan swings a ROUNDHOUSE RIGHT.

He misses, but Morgan is on Gael like a duck on a June bug.

WHACK! OOMPH! SMACK! Mrs. Jones' face tells the story with a series of clinched eyes, grimaces, and eye brow raises.

MRS. JONES

Stop it!

Like Kung Fu Panda, she unleashes a few moves of her own and yanks Morgan off Gael and pushes him against the wall.

Morgan struggles, his eyes still vacant with rage.

MRS. JONES (CONT'D)

Settle down or I will knock you
into next week's homework.

Another TEACHER comes in and checks out Gael.

He holds his arms up in defense and the world goes back to real life.

END ANIMATION.

Mrs. Jones is between Morgan and Gael.

MRS. JONES (CONT'D)

(to the teacher)

Go get Skinner, this one's going
home for a few days.

A dribble of blood spills from Gael's mouth. He locks eyes with Morgan...

AND SMILES.

Then lays on his back to laugh. And cough. And grab his ribs.

A group of students have gathered around to see what's going on. Olivia is among them.

She zooms in on Gael's puffy face, then covers her mouth and runs away.

INT. DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - LATER

Director Skinner sits behind her desk, with Morgan in a chair on the opposite side. It's a dark room with mahogany furnishings and bookcases.

SKINNER

You say Gael hit you first, but he and Olivia say you saw them talking, called Gael a racist name and took off after him.

Morgan rolls his eyes with exaggeration.

MORGAN

They're liars! He ran up and smashed me with a book.

SKINNER

That just isn't believable. But, we do believe Mrs. Jones.

She reaches for the phone on her desk.

SKINNER (CONT'D)

I'll have your dad come and get you. You're suspended for five days and when you come back, you're with the counselor to work on your anger.

MORGAN

Wait, wait, wait. Don't call my dad. Call my mom. Maybe you two can work something out.

SKINNER

What do you think we could work out?

MORGAN

I don't know. Maybe she hosts a fundraiser or makes a donation or something. Uh, I'll still see the counselor.

Skinner punches out numbers and lifts the telephone receiver to her ear.

She keeps her eyes on Morgan.

RING. RING. A receptionist answers.

SKINNER

Yes, this is Director Skinner from
the Academy calling for Mr.
Goodson.

Morgan sinks into his chair.

INT. PAUL'S BMW - DAY

Paul drives and Morgan sits in the passenger seat, leaning
away from his dad.

He looks over at his son, then back to the road.

Morgan looks dead ahead and doesn't even sneak a peek toward
his father.

All we hear is the HUM of the engine working its way through
the gears.

They pull up to their townhouse.

PAUL

The rest of the day inside your
room. No TV or games.

MORGAN

Okay.

PAUL

What?

MORGAN

Yes, sir.

PAUL

We'll deal with your consequences
when I get home. Be thinking about
it.

Morgan closes the door.

INT. MARIA'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

All is still and dark inside the apartment. The lock to the
door CLANGS as it releases and in walks Maria.

She turns the microwave light on for minimal lighting, drops
a bag of groceries on the kitchen counter, then makes her way
to the bathroom.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Now in her night gown, Maria puts away a few meager groceries.

She opens an empty refrigerator and transfers baloney, cheese, milk, and eggs.

Canned goods and a package of tortillas go into a cabinet.

A few bags are placed in the freezer.

She pours herself a glass of water and turns out the light from the microwave.

At the couch she looks down at Gael.

He sleeps on his side with a bag of frozen peas on the side of his face.

MARIA
(whispers)
My poor nieto, mi armor.

She sits on the couch and lifts away the peas, then leans in and kisses his cheek.

Gael sort of wakes up.

GAEL
Hi.

MARIA
Do you want to tell me what really happened today at school?

GAEL
(without opening his eyes)
I stood up for myself.

MARIA
Oh, nieto, you shouldn't have to fight to go to school.

GAEL
(still asleep)
Some people
(he yawns)
have to fight for everything.

MARIA
Maybe the best school is not the best for you.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I will meet with the church to see
if we can get you in there.

GAEL

No.

MARIA

No?

GAEL

Things will be better now. Can you
switch the peas out for frozen
corn?

She tucks a tuft of hair behind his ear and studies his
beautiful face marred and swollen by an ugly bruise.

As Gael returns to sleep, Maria pulls her rosary from the
pocket of her nightgown.

Her eyes are fixed on Gael.

MARIA

(a whisper)

O Lord, make haste to help me.

Her eyes close and her lips continue the rosary in silence.

INT. MORGAN'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

The living room is empty and darkish - some light comes in
from the street through large windows.

No one appears to be home.

MORGAN'S ROOM -

Except Morgan. He lays on his bed and throws a baseball
straight up then catches it in front of his face.

The ball goes up in the air.

And down towards his face.

Up.

And down.

He HEARS the front door open.

And catches the ball right before it makes contact with his
nose.

He sits up in bed. And pretends to beam the ball at the door.

His father opens the bedroom door and stands in silhouette against the light.

PAUL
Let's go, son, I brought pizza.

MORGAN
It's late. I'm not hungry.

PAUL
Then you can watch me eat.

DINNER TABLE

Paul and Morgan sit at opposite ends of the table as before. A big pizza box is in the middle. Paul glares at Morgan.

And Morgan stares right back.

Paul shovels a slice, folded in half, into his mouth for a bite. Grease runs down his hand.

As he chews, he takes a paper towel and wipes the grease off, then downs a few gulps of iced tea.

The teaspoon becomes a pointer.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You see, I've been warring with myself all day. Am I mad because you got tossed out of school for fighting?
(another swig)
Or because you let that Mexican kid outsmart you?

Another bite of pizza.

CHEW. CHEW. CHEW. WIPE. SWIG. POINT.

PAUL (CONT'D)
I don't know which it is.

Morgan smirks.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Don't smirk at me you ungrateful...

He slams what remains of his pizza slice to the table.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I pay through the nose for you to go that school. You hear me?

He stands and paces back and forth, but stays at his end of the table.

Paul puts both hands on the table and hangs his head down.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I could have twice the car or twice the house if not for your tuition. You think it's easy to have all this? Not to mention the money I spend on your basketball team. Do you have a clue?

MORGAN

Dad, I, uh -

PAUL

I didn't say you could talk. Does it look to you like I'm finished?

He walks to the other end of the table and stands over Morgan, then moves back to his side as he lectures.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Let me tell you how this works. You beat up the beaner and all the parents at that school, you know, my clients, call me. ME!

He turns and opens one arm toward Morgan as if allowing someone to enter the room.

PAUL (CONT'D)

The moms are outraged.
(mimicking voices)
Your son is out of control, or,
What's his problem? I can recommend a therapist.

He takes another sip of tea.

PAUL (CONT'D)

The dad's call.
(more impersonations)
Gesh, my wife's all over me, or,
the spic beat your boy, or, just
laughter.

MANIACAL LAUGHTER.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You get it?

Morgan keeps quiet. Paul speaks just above a whisper.

PAUL (CONT'D)
If you're a laughing stock, then
I'm a laughing stock.

He puts his foot up on a chair.

PAUL (CONT'D)
If you're a violent monster, then I
am. Is it sinking in? If you're a
racist, I'm a racist. If you're a
loser, I'm a loser.

MORGAN
Dad, I, uh -

PAUL
People don't do business with
losers, son. No business, no home,
no school, no food. Nothing.

He walks slowly back toward Morgan and puts both hands on the table to lean in real close.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Respect. The world turns on
respect. You lost it. Now you have
to get it back.

MORGAN
Dad, I'm sorry.

PAUL
You have a week to think about it.
Develop a plan. Get back in good
graces, son.

He walks back toward his end of the table and keeps going, leaving the room.

INT. SCHOOL ENTRY HALL - DAY

Olivia stands clutching her books and watching the entry doors like a widow watches for her husband lost at sea.

From inside, she sees Gael approaching.

He walks in the door and stops when he sees her.

She goes to him.

And looks at his damaged face.

OLIVIA
Are you okay?

He just shrugs.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
I told you to run.

He starts walking to home room and she follows.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry he hurt you like that.
Something's wrong with him.

Still nothing.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
Aren't you going to say anything?

He stops right outside of his home room.

GAEL
First, you were mad at me for not
standing up for you, now you seem
mad because I did.

She reaches out to touch his bruised cheek, but doesn't
actually touch it.

OLIVIA
I was. I am. It's complicated.

GAEL
Look, I can't be in a relationship.

OLIVIA
First, I was mad. I wanted the
storybook thing, you know, someone
who would defend my honor.

She grabs his hand.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
But no more. Not after seeing you
get hit. I never want to be the
cause of that.

GAEL
You weren't.

He goes into class and takes a seat.

INT. MORGAN'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Morgan shovels a spoonful of Cap'n Crunch into his mouth and reads the cereal box. He's in grey sweats and a hoodie.

His chewing stops - a thought - and starts again. He pulls a knife from his pocket. It's the same heirloom from the bus.

He soaks the spoon in the cereal and picks up the knife.

Pushes the button, the blade flips out.

He holds it to his face and looks at the pattern of the Damascus steel blade. It looks like the lines on a seismograph during an earthquake.

He turns the blade and the light sparkles off its edge.

Morgan closes the knife and walks to his father's gun room.

INT. GUN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The gun room is elaborate and neat. The safe stays cracked open.

Morgan opens the safe fully and interior lights illuminate a collection of guns.

He slides open a drawer and meticulously places the knife back in its obvious place with the other knives.

He closes the drawer and stares at the guns.

He touches the assault rifle - a custom ceramic-coated tan and olive weapon tricked out to be its lethal best.

He pulls the magazine out - empty. He jams it back into place.

And starts going through the drawers.

- Handguns.

- Knives.

- Magazines

- Ammo, a thousand rounds.

He closes the drawers.

Then he closes the gun safe - careful to match the original positioning.

He turns out the light.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Later that day, Gael is sitting by himself as usual at a cafeteria table.

A kid named JOEY, 13, joins his table. Then SARAH, 14. And ELEANOR, 13.

JOEY
I'm sorry Morgan beat you up.

SARAH
Yeah, we just wanted to say he sucks.

Olivia takes the seat right next Gael.

OLIVIA
(confused)
Hey friends, what's going on?

ELEANOR
We wanted to show our support and sit here. At least as long as Morgan is out.

OLIVIA
Oh.

Gael eats without paying them much attention.

JOEY
You know, when Morgan gets back, it's going to be worse, right?

Gael stands and takes his tray to the trash can. He scrapes away most of his uneaten lunch, puts the tray on the conveyor belt and leaves.

INT. DARK ROOM - NIGHT

A hand grips a number two pencil and adds names to the list.

Morgan and Chris are on one side.

Squeak and Olivia are on the other.

Joey, Sarah, and Eleanor are added under Olivia's name.

The notebook closes.

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Gael sits alone on the dark and shadowy rooftop. His knees are pulled tight to his chest and held by his arms.

The CLATTER of the streetscape below starts wide then narrows to sound like someone is coming up the fire escape ladder.

Gael stares at the ladder. It sparkles and the scene animates.

ANIMATION - GAEL HAS A GOAL

Santo springs from the ladder top like a wrestler launches himself over the top rope of the ring.

He lands, rolls, and springs up right in front of Gael, then stands in a power pose, hands on hips and chin up.

It doesn't get any response from Gael.

Santo looks down, rolls his head and strikes the pose again.

Still no response.

He goes down on one knee and gives Gael a good look over.

Gael doesn't make eye contact.

SANTO

Mi amigo, what is wrong? Are you sick?

Gael shakes his head "no."

SANTO (CONT'D)

Oh, I see. Don't want to talk about it.

Santo moves to sit beside Gael. He tries to bring his legs up to match Gael's pose, but can't. His legs just splay straight out.

Santo looks around. Just shadows and rooftop utility boxes.

GAEL

I don't understand girls.

Santo's eyes light up.

SANTO

I know about girls. Practically everything. Absolutely nothing.

GAEL

Olivia got mad at me for not standing up for her in the movies, then mad when I did stand up for her against Morgan.

SANTO

Oh.

GAEL

And, it takes a lot of time being her boyfriend.

SANTO

I see.

Finally, Gael looks at Santo with glassy eyes.

GAEL

If I can survive middle school, I, uh, well, I'm starting to think I can do well in high school and go on to college somehow.

Santo smiles and his eyes well up, too.

SANTO

Now we're talking. I hadn't thought about college for you, but now I can see it.

GAEL

I don't know if I have the time to do well in school and be a boyfriend.

SANTO

Why not?

GAEL

It feels like I have to work twice as hard as everyone else. Like they had a huge head start, or something.

SANTO

Mi amigo, it is not how you start the race that matters, only how you finish.

GAEL
It seems unfair.

SANTO
Oh, but you have an advantage, too.

GAEL
I don't have any advantages.

SANTO
You have heart. You have lost
important things and keep going.
You are in a strange place, but
keep trying.

Gael looks away to consider his losses. He cries.

GAEL
I miss my mother and father.

In the dark clouds, images of his mother and father appear
and look down at Gael and Santo. Gael looks up and sees them.

SANTO
They are proud of you. And, want
you to be happy. Does Olivia make
you happy?

The clouds change into an image of Olivia, then feather back
into just clouds.

GAEL
Yes.

SANTO
There you go.

Gael turns back to Santo.

GAEL
I just don't know how to make her
happy, too.

SANTO
Just be yourself, mi amigo. She
likes something in you.

GAEL
Mainly that I listen to her talking
about herself.

SANTO
She is still learning, too. About
herself, about others, about you.

GAEL

Some say she just likes me because I'm different.

SANTO

Who knows why one likes another. I have a thought about her, though.

They both look back to the shadows.

SANTO (CONT'D)

Do you want to hear it?

Gael just nods.

SANTO (CONT'D)

She cares enough to not want you to get hurt.

GAEL

It's all so confusing. I think I have to put school first. I only want to have one job when I grow up.

The two of them blend into the darkness as the clouds dissipate to reveal sparkling stars.

END ANIMATION.

INT. COUNSELOR'S ROOM - DAY

Counselor Donohue and Gael sit across from one another.

DONOHUE

Morgan's coming back soon. So, what do you think you do to make him want to pick on you?

GAEL

Exist.

DONOHUE

I'm serious. We're going to be working with him, but we need you to meet him halfway.

GAEL

Really?

DONOHUE

Yes. Just halfway.

GAEL

He hates me because I'm poor. I don't know how to meet him halfway on that.

DONOHUE

Oh.

GAEL

And, because I have dark skin. I'm small. My voice cracks. I don't belong here.

DONOHUE

Hmmm. Just give it some thought, okay? Focus on things you can change.

She stands and opens the door to her tiny office.

INT. MARIA'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gael has tortilla peanut butter rolls and a glass of milk on his TV tray, but he's on the floor doing push-ups. As he knocks them out, the apartment animates.

ANIMATION - GAEL WORRIES

Santo does jumping jacks and arm slaps - his warm up routine.

There's a drugstore calendar pinned to the wall. A Monday is circled. The words MORGAN'S BACK inside the circle.

Gael jumps up, does a few jumping jacks, then runs to the bathroom and throws-up.

He returns to the living room and starts again with the jumping jacks.

Santo takes a seat on the couch, and Gael joins him.

Shadow animals and people show up on the walls.

GAEL

Why is just living so hard?

Shadows of wolves with big fangs, hooded figures pulling knives, hands closing around a neck.

SANTO

Remember mi hijo, God is closer to the weak than the mighty.

The shadows morph into spears that stab the silhouette of a person who then falls to the ground.

GAEL
 Everybody says he's going to
 crucify me.
 (a small dry heave)

SANTO
 Maybe this has changed him.

A giant ogre and a small kid swirling a rock in a sling.

GAEL
 He's just so much bigger than me.

The giant steps on and squishes the kid.

SANTO
 Something has changed in you, too.
 You've learned something important.

Gazelles outrunning a lion. The lion catching the small one.

GAEL
 Yeah? I can out run him.

Santo shakes his head.

SANTO
 Not what I was thinking of, hijo.

GAEL
 What then?

Street thugs wailing on someone.

SANTO
 You can suffer his punch. It hurts,
 but you can take it.

GAEL
 Well sure, but I'd rather not.

SANTO
 You're not getting it. That's all
 he has. And you can take it away.

Gael looks off into space.

SANTO (CONT'D)
 There's nothing left to fear. No
 reason to be scared.

Gael takes a bite of his tortilla, chewing slowly as he thinks.

SANTO (CONT'D)

Bullies operate on fear. You're not afraid anymore. You can ignore him.

GAEL

I've tried ignoring him, remember the ears?

Shadows of kids flipping ears and laughing.

SANTO

Think. You can ignore the fear, but not him. He flips your ears, you smack him in the head. The teachers catch his next move.

GAEL

I have to play by the rules. Be nice, don't fight, don't name call.

SANTO

Sure, that's the best way. But, if someone is not treating you according to the rules, then you might have to bend them yourself, too.

GAEL

I can't disappoint my Abuela. She works so hard for me.

Shadow of an elderly woman in prayer, holding rosary beads.

SANTO

She doesn't want you living in fear of being hurt. I heard her prayers.

GAEL

I don't know.

SANTO

Surprise, speed, action.

Shadows of big, angry kid yelling at a smaller kid, who kicks him in the shin and runs.

GAEL

The first time he tries something, do something back. Fast. Hard.

SANTO

And run. The last will be first and
the first, will be last.

Gaels shimmies under his blanket, mask in his hand.

END ANIMATION.

EXT. CHARTER ACADEMY - DAY

In the morning, teachers are out front to greet students.
They open doors for parents dropping off and watch for the
bus so they can supervise the process.

The doors are open at this time and students pass freely
inside.

A sparkling BMW pulls up and Morgan gets out.

Ms. Skinner is there to greet him.

SKINNER

Welcome back, Morgan. I hope you've
had enough time to think about your
actions.

MORGAN

Yes, ma'am.

SKINNER

Counselor Donohue is waiting for
you inside.

He keeps walking, but stops at the doorway. He looks at the
speaker and video camera on the building.

Then counts to himself as he walks through the first set of
glass doors and the second set. A few steps inside and
Donohue leads him to her office.

Back at the driveway, the bus pulls in and stops. A dozen
kids unload, including Gael.

SKINNER (CONT'D)

Hi, Sarah. Good morning, Joey.
Eleanor.

When Gael unloads she just nods at him and smiles. Then
continues with everyone else by name.

SKINNER (CONT'D)

Hello Bradford. Jules. Hi
Cassandra.

Gael scans the area for Morgan and Chris. No where in sight.

INT. CHARTER ACADEMY - DAY

Olivia waits as Gael enters through the double sets of doors.

She saddles up next to him and they keep walking.

OLIVIA

I saw Donohue take Morgan into her office first thing. Class changes, lunch, and recess are the only times we need to worry about. But, my mother said if he hurts you again, she will personally represent you in a lawsuit. How about that?

GAEL

Let's just act normal and see how it goes.

OLIVIA

She says being an immigrant will go a long way with a jury.

GAEL

I'm from Kansas.

He looks over at Donohue's door to make sure it stays closed.

As they pass deeper into the hallway, Chris comes over and waits outside Donohue's office.

The flow of students is down to a few stragglers hustling not to be late.

The first bell rings and Director Skinner comes in from outside, closing and locking the doors behind her.

Seen through the glass doors, a kid runs and knocks on the locked doors. Skinner points to the intercom. The kid stomps in disappointment, but goes over and pushes the button.

Chris checks the clock, Donohue's office, then hurries off to homeroom.

INT. CHARTER ACADEMY HALLWAYS - DAY

Morgan and Chris meet in the hallway at Morgan's locker.

CHRIS

Did your dad go nuts, or what?

MORGAN

He wasn't too happy, but it wasn't as bad as I thought.

CHRIS

What are you going to do to Squeak?

Morgan slams his locker. And they start off to class. The halls aren't crowded like public schools.

MORGAN

I have to treat him just like everyone else.

CHRIS

Okay...I've always seen us as equal opportunity offenders.

MORGAN

I'm serious. I have to leave him alone. Donohue and Skinner are hawking me like dad watches the stock market.

CHRIS

Everyone is expecting something big.

MORGAN

I'm working on a plan that will blow everyone's minds. But, it starts with me laying low.

Way behind them, Gael peeks his head out from behind a row of lockers. He walks fast and ducks into his next class.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

A stream of students make a single file line to the cafeteria.

Gael stops before going in. Those behind him don't stop and accidentally bump him across the threshold.

HE LOOKS AROUND

- Empty tables.

- Kids opening their fancy lunch bags.

- No sign of Morgan.

He focuses on the LUNCH LADY. She smiles and greets each kid by name.

LUNCH LADY
Philip. Bartholomew. Ruth.

When it's Gael's turn she just nods and smiles.

Armed with a tray of food and a tiny chocolate milk carton, he finds his table and sits down alone.

He pulls the milk carton seams apart, pushes them back, and pinches them as he pulls them forward.

They don't fully separate but he jabs his straw through the membrane that remains.

When he looks up, Morgan stands at the end of his table.

Chris joins him.

MORGAN
Sorry, Squeak. I won't be bothering you anymore.

They move on.

Chris looks back at Gael and draws his finger across his neck. Then turns back and sits with Morgan and a few others.

Olivia sits down next to Gael.

OLIVIA
What did they say?

GAEL
Sorry.

OLIVIA
I don't think he meant it.

Gael looks over to see...

- Morgan's friends jostle him back and forth.

- One tosses a tater tot at him.

- He tosses it back, with more velocity.

CHRIS
The beaner beater is back, boys.

FRIEND

Who beat who? He didn't miss any school. Been sitting with Olivia everyday.

MORGAN

His day will come. And if you aren't careful, so will yours.

The boys laugh it off with Morgan's dark, evil grin landing on Gael.

INT. STUDY SPACE - NIGHT

The list gets longer. Morgan and Chris are still on one side. A hand finishes the last few letters of Jonas added to the other side - now all the way to the bottom of the page.

ANIMATION - INT. MARIA'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Even in the quiet of night, the animation quivers.

Gael sleeps on the couch.

Santo stands over him watching him sleep. The bolt on the front door CLACKS - Santo looks over.

Maria comes in, slumped by exhaustion. She turns on the microwave light and goes to the bathroom.

END ANIMATION.

Santo is gone.

In her night gown, she shuffles over to Gael.

On his TV-tray-desk she sees a note and picks it up.

INSERT - NOTE: CAN WE GO TO THE BASKETBALL GAME TOMORROW NIGHT?

She leans over and picks up his pencil and writes:

I'M SORRY I PICKED UP A SHIFT.

And lays the note back down.

Underneath her note, a list of names is visible with one side having many names and the other only two.

MARIA

(whispers)

One day you'll be accepted by everyone. And, you'll marry a nice Mexican girl.

She kisses two fingers and transfers it to his forehead.

INT./EXT. SCHOOL ENTRY HALL - DAY

As usual, Olivia stands and waits for Gael, arms crossed around her books.

Kids flow in all directions around her like she's a rock holding ground where three rivers collide.

Her face lights up when she sees Gael walking up the sidewalk and through the glass entry doors.

OLIVIA

Well, what did she say?

He hands her the note.

GAEL

I can't go, she has to work.

OLIVIA

What if my mom calls her and tells her we'll drive you home?

GAEL

That's not how it works in immigrant families.

OLIVIA

You said you were from Kansas.

GAEL

Yeah, but you thought I was an immigrant.

OLIVIA

So?

GAEL

So?

OLIVIA

Yeah, I didn't know.

GAEL

Right. You just make assumptions.
You know, with all your talking,
you never ask me about me.

OLIVIA

Oh.

(they keep walking)

I guess I never thought of it that
way.

(a few more steps)

Well...what do you want me to know
about you?

He stops her in the hall, but looks down at his shoes.

GAEL

I...uh...I'm not like you. Or
anybody here. Or anybody anywhere.
I'm not from here...or Mexico...or
Kansas, not really.

OLIVIA

Alright, but you are here, now. It
doesn't really matter where you're
from.

GAEL

It matters.

OLIVIA

Not to me.

GAEL

Nothing matters to you. You have
everything. I only have me and mi
abuela.

OLIVIA

And me. Don't I count?

GAEL

I have to do this myself. I can't
be your boyfriend anymore.

OLIVIA

What are you talking about? That
doesn't make any sense.

Gael walks into class.

The bell RINGS.

Olivia remains frozen in the hall.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - LATER

Gael exits the cafeteria line and carries his tray over to his empty table.

He takes his seat and looks up to see...

OLIVIA MARCHING TOWARD HIM.

She sits down across from him and unpacks her lunch.

Slams down her sandwich.

Jabs her straw in her juice box.

Pops open her veggie container.

Peels the lid off her ranch dressing.

OLIVIA

I'm not ready to break-up. I'm sorry I thought you were an immigrant and didn't know you were from Kansas. And, I don't think that should have caused you some kind of identity crisis. But, it's for sure not a reason to break up with someone. I really like you.

Hot lunch is chicken nuggets. Rubber chicken. Gael eats them anyway. He dips them in ketchup.

Olivia dunks a celery stalk in the ranch and crunches it up one bite at a time.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

I think you like me, too, right?

GAEL

Mostly. But you talk too much.

OLIVIA

I know. I think it's a nervous thing. I don't like silence and other people don't talk a lot, so maybe I try to just keep the conversation going and then I'm talking too much.

GAEL

It's not so bad. I mean, I don't have much to say usually.

OLIVIA
So, we're not breaking up, then?

Gael
Yeah, no, it's too much for me. I can't even go to a basketball game that's at school.

OLIVIA
I'm the only person in this whole place that even talks to you on a regular basis. Most of my friends make fun of me for liking you even though I know you're going to be handsome. I've put a lot into this relationship.

Gael
I know. That's the point. I don't have anything to add to it.

OLIVIA
I hate it when everyone else is right!

She stuffs the bits and pieces of her lunch kit back into the bag.

ON MORGAN AND HIS FRIENDS

Morgan and his friends are eating and talking at the same time. It's a flurry of fries and fingers.

Morgan and his crew feel something approaching and all look over to see...

OLIVIA MARCHING TOWARD THEM.

She stops at the end of their table.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
(to Chris)
Scooch over.

He does and she sits down and smiles at Morgan.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
I wanted to wish you good luck for tonight's game.

The boys straighten up and tidy their mess a bit.

In the background, Gael looks over.

Morgan shoots a finger pistol at him.

Gael gets up, then scrapes his tray and turns it in.

INT. MARIA'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

The apartment appears empty with an eye-level scan.

- The galley kitchen.

- Maria's bed.

- The couch.

- The TV.

Gael's elbows and head swing through and touch his knees.

He's on the floor doing sit-ups. Several, and fast.

GAEL

Twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty.

He lays back to catch his breath.

HIS POV

Asbestos ceiling tiles with a water stain. They transform with his imagination.

ANIMATION - GAEL AND SANTO

The animation tremors and quakes with energy.

Santo's masked face.

SANTO

Getting ready, huh?

GAEL

What are you doing here?

SANTO

Encouraging you.

GAEL

Well I'm tired of being encouraged by everyone, ever think of that?

Gael rolls to his stomach and starts knocking out push-ups. The animated world morphs back to live action as he finishes.

END ANIMATION.

EXT. MEAN STREETS - NIGHT - LATER

Gael's silhouette runs against the chaos of the street. He jumps, zigs, zags, and never loses stride.

How many intersections does he cross? Three, four? We don't count, mesmerized by his determination.

He stops at a particular building and drops into the adjacent alley...

He grabs the fire escape railing to swing onto a landing.

He's looking in a darkened room.

One we've been to before.

This is Morgan's room.

Gael opens the window and slides in, flashlight on.

INT. MORGAN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The bed is made, the floor clean.

Gael flashes his light to the desk. It's kid-sized, but has an executive leather pad and two gold pens on both sides, with a green banker's lamp to one side.

He checks the closet. Academy wear, jackets and shirts.

He lifts the pillow and picks up a magazine.

It's a ragged swimsuit edition of a sports magazine. He puts it back and shakes imaginary ick off his hand.

Gael sits on the bed to think and look around.

The room is sterile, lifeless.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - SAME TIME

Two boy's basketball teams warm up at half-time, cheerleaders cheer, and the fans settle in for tip-off.

The scoreboard shows the Charter Academy is losing by ten points.

Morgan gathers his team in a huddle as the half-time timer winds down.

MORGAN

Guys, this is your last chance.
Leave it all on the court and
you'll be remembered as heroes.
Play for each other like it's our
last day on earth!

They all put their hands in the center.

TEAM

WIN!

They break and Morgan takes his position for the tip.

The ref tosses the ball up and Morgan out jumps his opponent,
tipping the ball to a team mate.

INT. MORGAN'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gael is still on the bed.

He starts back to the window to leave and catches something
in the reflection.

He turns on the light and looks under the bed - something's
there.

Gael slides out a project board. It's one of those three-
panel jobs you get at the drug store.

He opens the panels and checks it out:

- A schematic of the school.
- Timed routes in red marker.
- Class photos of three teachers, X'd out.
- Olivia's photo, X'd out.
- A two column list of names.

Gael takes the list off the board. He sits on the bed holding
the list.

INSERT - THE LIST. FROM BOTTOM TO TOP, THE LIST HAS A BUNCH
OF NAMES ON ONE SIDE AND ONLY TWO ON THE OTHER.

"OLIVIA" stands out, marked through in red.

"SQUEAK" is at the top of the long list, right under the
header, KILL LIST.

Gael turns out his flashlight.

In the ambient light he starts to shake, but his face is hidden in darkness.

He SOBS and vibrates.

Then, like a robot, he stands, pins the list back to the board, carefully folds in the panels and slides it under the bed.

He turns and smooths out the bed spread and heads for the window.

Once outside, he closes the window and the streetlamp illuminates his face.

EXT. THE FIRE ESCAPE - CONTINUOUS

Gael crouches on the landing.

A LOUD RUMBLE of thunder and a sudden down pour.

Gael starts down the fire escape.

INT. MARIA'S STUDIO APARTMENT - LATER

Gael towel dries his hair on the couch. The room animates.

ANIMATION - GAEL'S DILEMMA

Santo paces back and forth like a prize fighter waiting to be called to the ring.

SANTO

I told you not to go there.

GAEL

I have to confront him.

SANTO

That could be dangerous. Why don't you just tell Skinner?

GAEL

Tell her what? That I broke into Morgan's house while he played basketball and found a kill list?

SANTO

Just tell her he threatened to kill you, that should get them to check things out.

GAEL

He'll say I'm just trying to get back at him and they'll believe him.

SANTO

Maybe you are overreacting, do you think he would really go through with it?

GAEL

I don't know. He'll be at the Seven-Eleven after the game with the team. I need to confront him.

Gael laces up his generic Chucks.

END ANIMATION.

He takes off out the door.

EXT. SEVEN-ELEVEN - NIGHT

The Seven-Eleven is busy. Cars come and go from the single island gas pump. The five boys from the basketball team exit the store in their lettermen's jackets with Slurpees.

The boys fist bump and all but Morgan climb into a gold-toned Cadillac Escalade.

MORGAN

See you tomorrow, don't be late.

They drive off and Morgan heads down a narrow alley behind the store.

BEHIND THE SEVEN-ELEVEN

Gael walks toward the Seven-Eleven.

He passes through a shadow. A flash of light crosses his face and reveals Santo's mask...

But Gael's normal face emerges from the shadow.

Seeing him stops Morgan in his tracks.

GAEL
Looks like you won.

MORGAN
Always do, what's it to you?

He slurps the last few sips of his drink and shoots the cup into the dumpster.

GAEL
I know about your kill list. Do you really want to hurt people?

MORGAN
I don't know what you're talking about.

They square off.

GAEL
I've been watching you.

MORGAN
Stalker.

GAEL
I snuck into your bedroom.

MORGAN
Yeah, right.

GAEL
Swimsuit edition under your pillow.
Kind of sad.
(off no response)
The plan under your bed.

MORGAN
Oh, you for real, then? Okay. So what?

GAEL
I have to turn you in.

MORGAN
It's too late. Besides, nobody would listen to you, anyway. By the time I told my version, they'll think it's your plan. Don't you know?

GAEL
Know what?

MORGAN

You don't have any juice, brah. No money, no power. You could disappear right now and nobody would even miss you.

GAEL

I can't let you do it.

MORGAN

You're the reason I am doing it.

GAEL

I haven't done anything to you, ever.

MORGAN

You offend me by existing in my school.

ANIMATION - THE SHOWDOWN

The back lot transitions to animation. Morgan is much bigger and scarier than in real life.

Gael closes the distance between them as they move around.

Morgan takes off his jacket and throws it aside. His dad's fancy knife bounces out of a pocket.

Morgan unbuttons the sleeves of his shirt and rolls them up.

Gael charges and Morgan lays into him with a hard right to the temple.

It drops Gael to a knee. A left upper cut to the chin lays Gael out.

A quick kick and Gael falls over.

Morgan exhales and inhales loudly, freaking out.

He drags Gael over to the dumpster.

And pulls a couple of bloated trash bags out of the dumpster and puts them on top of Gael.

MORGAN (CONT'D)

Won't be hearing another Squeak from you.

Gael's eyes flutter.

Morgan picks up his jacket and disappears in the darkness.

END ANIMATION.

INT. MARIA'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT

Maria follows her normal routine of entering quietly. She heads straight to the bathroom and turns on the light. The couch is empty, but she doesn't notice. She slips out of her uniform and into her night gown. The light goes out and she walks directly to her bed.

INT. MORGAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Morgan has his project board out. He marks SQUEAK off the list. Then, folds the board back up and slides it back in place. After that, he slips under the covers and rolls over to face the wall. He shakes violently from the adrenaline and shock.

EXT. DUMPSTER - NIGHT

Behind the 7-11, trash bags, the dark shadow of the dumpster, and the dumpster itself all hide Gael.

Gael stirs. A bag moves a little.

He pushes the bag covering his face. As it rolls to his feet, the scene animates.

ANIMATION - GAEL GETS UP

Santo is there.

SANTO

Get up.

Gael's eyes are closed, a purple pump knot distorts his right temple.

He lifts his hand up from his waist to his face, it's bloody.

His left eye slits open.

SANTO (CONT'D)
Come on hijo, you must get up.
Crawl to the front.

Santo reaches in with his hand like trying to tag a teammate.

Gael doubles over and crawls out from the trash bags and tries to stand.

He falls flat on his stomach.

SANTO (CONT'D)
That's it. Fight. Move.

GAEL
(whispers)
I'm too weak.

SANTO
You have to stop Morgan.

GAEL
(weak)
Olivia.

The darkness is giving way to light as the sun has its turn.

SANTO
A few more feet and you can yell
for help.

Santo stoops and turns Gael over. Gael's hand lands on the knife Morgan dropped. He grabs it.

Gael struggles to get up.

SANTO (CONT'D)
Yell for help.

Gael tries to yell but it's just a SQUEAK.

Santo grabs Gael's arm and pulls him to his feet. It takes such effort that Santo falls down when he lets go.

AND DISAPPEARS.

Gael puts the knife in his pocket.

Unsteady, he looks around the dumpster.

And takes a zombie-like step.

END ANIMATION.

INT. MORGAN'S TOWNHOUSE - DAY

The next morning, Morgan walks from his bedroom into the kitchen. He's already dressed in his school uniform.

He looks around and sees his dad's empty coffee cup.

He pours himself a cup of coffee and takes a drink.

MORGAN
(crinkled face)
That's awful.

He scoops in two spoons of sugar, takes half-n-half from the fridge and adds enough to turn it the color of light caramel.

Another sip.

MORGAN (CONT'D)
Better...Dad?

No answer.

Morgan walks with his coffee to the gun room. It's open.

INT. GUN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Morgan walks in and sees the safe is open.

He bumps it open more with his foot.

Morgan places his coffee on the top of the shelf.

- He pulls out an assault rifle and props it against the wall.

- Then, two magazines, already full of ammo.

- An automatic pistol.

- A pre-loaded magazine.

He slams the magazine in place, chambers a round, puts on the safety and tucks it in his belt.

Next, he seats a magazine into the assault rifle.

A long overcoat hangs like a piece of western art from an ornate hook.

Morgan tries it on. A little big, but the rifle disappears in the heft.

The extra magazine fits in a pocket.

INT. MORGAN'S TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Exiting the gun room, Morgan stops in the main room to check himself in the full-length mirror.

He practices hiding the gun. Clean lines.

He whips the coat open and lifts the gun to his shoulder - fast.

MORGAN
(to his dad)
I hope this plan is big enough for
you.

Morgan leans the gun against the wall, checks his watch, straightens his tie, grabs the gun and leaves for school.

INT./EXT. SCHOOL ENTRY HALL - DAY

As usual, Olivia stands and waits for Gael. She watches the bus unload. Kids trudge their way into the school and pass her.

No Gael.

STREETSIDE

Maria's old car parks along the street.

FROM OLIVIA'S POV

When the bus pulls away, it reveals Maria's old car and Maria, in her work uniform, walking with purpose. Olivia has never met Maria, but she stands out and Olivia makes the connection.

Maria enters the office.

Olivia heads into the office, too.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - DAY

It's a typical morning in the office. LINA, 28, a bright-eyed receptionist, is busy.

She sits behind two large computer monitors, with a phone crouched between her ear and shoulder, talking and typing at the same time.

LINA
(into the phone)
Yes, no, the internet is just slow
this morning...alright...

Maria and Olivia come together at the same time.

MARIA	OLIVIA
I'm looking for my nieto.	My boyfriend wasn't on the bus.

Lina holds up an index finger and manages a smile.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
Are you Maria?

MARIA
(understanding who Olivia
is)
Yes, have you seen or heard from my
nieto?

OLIVIA
No, I was just waiting for him, but
he wasn't on the bus.

MARIA
What is he up to?

Lina hangs up the phone, and turns her attention to them.

EXT. SCHOOL SIDEWALK - MOMENTS EARLIER

It's a beautiful morning. Some parents walk with their kids
to school, others drive through the drop off lane.

Even in the raw city, it is a pleasant morning.

Morgan walks slower than the other foot traffic, but blends
in with the masses lost in their morning habit.

He stops to kill time.

In the background, Maria's car drives by and parks.

The bus pulls away onto the street.

Morgan looks at his watch.

INSET: 8:00.

The bell RINGS.

Morgan starts walking again, turns the corner and putters toward the door.

FARTHER BACK

Gael runs with a hitch, holding his side.

He sees Morgan turn the corner.

EXT. SCHOOL ENTRY - CONTINUOUS

The courtyard is empty. Everyone else is inside and the doors are locked.

Morgan approaches the security kiosk and pushes the button.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE - SAME

Lina listens to Maria and Olivia explaining.

MARIA
 ...he's never been gone
 before me, so he has to be
 here.

OLIVIA
 He never gets by me, so what
 do we do?

A BUZZ - the security system.

Lina glances at the video and sees Morgan.

Olivia looks over her shoulder.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
 It's Morgan.

LINA
 I know.

INT./EXT. SCHOOL ENTRY - CONTINUOUS

Morgan looks into the camera and smiles.

MORGAN
 (via speaker)
 Sorry, I had a hard time getting
 organized this morning.

CLICK - the door unlocks.

Morgan pulls it open and starts to go in.

WHAM! Gael comes out of nowhere and tackles Morgan into the security vestibule.

Morgan's rifle goes skidding across the tile floor.

INSIDE

Olivia SHRIEKS and drops her books.

OLIVIA
Gun! There's a gun!

Lina slams a red button and starts toward Olivia and Maria.

SCHOOLWIDE INTERCOM ALARM: WHOOP! WHOOP! LOCKS, LIGHTS, OUT-OF-SIGHT. WHOOP! WHOOP! LOCKS, LIGHTS, OUT-OF-SIGHT!

Overhead lights go off and emergency STROBE lights flicker on red and white.

Morgan quickly draws his pistol and points at Olivia, but Gael knocks his hand away.

They wrestle in the safety corridor. Gael is knocked against the interior glass wall and it shatters.

Maria and Olivia both SCREAM.

Lina grabs them and shoves them deeper into the office and closes a door.

Morgan sees that Gael is down.

MORGAN
Squeak, you're tougher than I
thought.

Morgan grabs his rifle and runs into the school.

SEEN THROUGH SECURITY CAMERA POV

NO AUDIO.

The school's grainy, black and white closed circuit security camera picks up Morgan walking down the hall.

He looks right at the camera, face strobing in the lights.

The fire doors for the three corridors have closed.

He tries each of them - they don't budge.

He strikes the door knobs with the butt of the rifle and tries them again.

Nothing.

He throws his head back and SCREAMS.

Then rips off a few shots at the door, ceiling, and walls.

RAT-A-TAT-A-TAT-A-TATAT (pre-lap).

BACK TO NORMAL POV - INSIDE A CLASSROOM

A TEACHER has her group of kids hidden in a closet.

They're huddled together with their hands over their ears.

The teacher looks panicky and lifts a shaky finger to her mouth to signal "sssh."

INSIDE THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Lina has Olivia in an embrace. Maria shakes uncontrollably, her eyes glazed over in shock.

Director Skinner is on the phone.

SKINNER

(calm but strident)

This is not a drill, we have an active shooter, entered through the front door, hurt one student.

THE HALLWAY

Morgan is losing it. He is trapped in the main corridor and surrounded by steel fire doors.

He starts to hyperventilate.

SIRENS WAIL in the distance, getting closer.

Without many options, he walks back to the front and peeks out.

Nothing.

Gael tries to get up.

Morgan stands over him.

MORGAN

Why do you ruin everything?

Morgan slides down the wall next to Gael and starts sobbing.

Gael wobbles trying to get up.

Morgan rests his chin on the barrel of the rifle, finger in the trigger well.

Gael

Wait. Don't do this.

Morgan

It's over. There's nothing left to do.

Gael

Even after today, you will be fine.

Morgan

You don't know anything.

Gael

I know you'll get an attorney,
he'll get you counseling, and you
can go on to have a good life.

Morgan continues to cry.

Summoning all of his strength, Gael lunges toward Morgan and knocks the gun away.

They lay together in a heap.

POLICE OFFICERS in tactical gear swarm the building.

One stops and checks on Morgan and Gael. Then speaks into his headset.

POLICE OFFICER

Two suspects in entry, injured but
alive.

Two other officers kneel in shooting positions to provide security.

Officers spill in around them to clear the building.

EXT. CHARTER ACADEMY DRIVEWAY - LATER

Yellow police tape marks off the school in the background.

Parents reunite with their children, crying and hugging.

Students hold each other in shared terror.

Media trucks with tall antennas line the street.

A collection of Law Enforcement administrators stand in a semi-circle behind a podium with reporters all around.

Director Skinner and Lina are in the line-up.

Police Chief DON DRAKE, 52, unshaven and haggard, stands at the podium.

Drake motions Skinner and Lina forward to join him.

DRAKE

The brave and fast actions of these two ladies saved all the students. This worked exactly as practiced. They instantly put the school in lockdown, the shooters were trapped with no targets until law enforcement arrived.

Flash-bulbs and a BARAGE of questions are SHOUTED in their direction.

Their faces don't look heroic. Eyes are empty, make-up has smeared with tears. No expression to their mouths.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

Seen through an interior window, it looks like a typical school day, Olivia stands, staring ahead as if waiting for Gael to get off the bus.

Except her face is wrecked with fear, tears, and terror.

She's looking through an interior window at sealed doors placarded with NO ENTRY signs - the surgical suite.

ON HANDS

One brown, worn and callused, the other creamy white, polished and smooth as porcelain.

Phoebe and Maria sit together holding hands.

The contrast of the two is obvious - Phoebe meticulously made-up, expensive jewelry, and a sharp suit compared to Maria, in a maid's uniform, wrinkled, weathered, and hunched over.

Olivia turns to look at her mom and Gael's grandmother.

Phoebe reaches her free hand out and Olivia takes it. She kneels to complete a circle and takes Maria's other hand.

EXT. CHARTER ACADEMY DRIVEWAY - DUSK

Back at the makeshift press briefing podium in front of the school, it's getting darker.

Only a handful of reporters remain, waiting to give a live update for their evening news.

Drake is back at the podium, this time with only uniformed police officers behind him.

DRAKE

The investigation is on-going, however, we now believe this was the act of only one shooter, a student at the Academy, a white male, 13 years-old.

REPORTER

What about the other student?

DRAKE

Security footage shows he tried to stop the suspect. Their entanglement gave the others the crucial seconds to lockdown the school. Our prayers are with both families.

Drake's comments drown-out until he's speaking MOS.

Behind him yellow police tape ripples in the wind.

INT./EXT. SCHOOL ENTRY HALL - DAY

As usual, Olivia stands and waits for Gael. The entry to the school has been totally repaired.

TITLE: 30 DAYS LATER

Outside, Director Skinner stands among the kids and waves at parents dropping off their children.

Kids trudge their way into the school and past her.

The bus pulls up and stops.

Gael is the first one off. He takes the steps one-at-a-time.

Olivia smiles and claps her hands.

He walks slow and the other kids over take him as they enter the building.

Two stop and hold the doors for him.

Gael
(his voice doesn't crack)
Thank you.

Olivia rushes over to him.

OLIVIA
How do you feel? Does it hurt really bad, or just sort of bad? You cannot get addicted to those pain pills, I'm just telling you my heart can't take anymore. I mean ever. We have to get to happily ever after and sitting by the pool from here on out. I'm serious. I still have nightmares and my counselor says they'll last a while, but I'm over it. I knew you'd be back in time for commencement. And, don't worry about high school, it's supposed to be a surprise but they're going to cover your high school and college. I told you that you were special, remember?

Gael keeps shuffling along until she takes his hand and stops him.

Face-to-face she stares into his eyes.

His eyes are tired and sad even as he tries to smile.

Olivia kisses him on the cheek.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
(fighting tears)
I've never been so scared and worried in my life. Thank you for coming back to school, for living...

He puts a finger to her mouth to cut her off.

Gael
(his voice deeper)
Thank you for keeping me company during my recovery. For insisting I come back.

He leans in and kisses her.

SKINNER (O.S.)

Ahem.

They separate quickly.

SKINNER (CONT'D)

I'm going to pretend I didn't see that.

She has Gael's graduation cap and gown on a hanger. She hands it over to him, but Olivia takes it.

SKINNER (CONT'D)

Gael, we are glad you have healed enough to join us today for graduation.

She awkwardly pats his shoulder and walks off as fast and silent as her previous approach.

They carry on down the hall.

INT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

Toward the end of the day, the gymnasium is packed with parents in bleachers and students in chairs on the gym floor.

Navy blue and green balloons are everywhere.

A riser with over-the-top flowers stands in front of the students.

Teachers, in their college gowns, sit to the left and right of the podium.

Skinner is at the podium talking MOS.

FIND GAEL AMONGST THE GRADUATES

- A girl twirling her hair.
- Two friends with their heads together smiling.
- A boy chewing gum.
- Olivia smiling.
- Gael blank faced.

IN THE AUDIENCE OF PARENTS

Maria sits with Phoebe. Maria looks refreshed. Her hair is done, she wears a touch of make-up, and is in a nice dress.

Phoebe looks as polished as normal. She dabs her eyes with a tissue.

INT. MORGAN'S TOWNHOUSE - SAME TIME

The familiar, open floor plan of Morgan's home.

Paul wears Morgan's baseball glove on his left hand.

He removes the ball from the glove's pocket and tosses the ball back into it.

Then does it again.

And again.

Again.

He takes the glove off, starts crying.

INT. SCHOOL ENTRY HALL - LATER

Gael and Olivia pose together in their green gowns while Phoebe takes pictures with her phone.

Maria looks on and smiles.

PHOEBE

Are you sure you won't join us for dinner? My treat.

MARIA

Thank you, but Gael wants to complete the tradition of riding the bus home in his gown.

PHOEBE

That is a cute tradition, it shows his pride.

MARIA

Yes, and he still feels best at home. He just wants tacos - real Mexican tacos with onion and lime.

Phoebe hugs Maria.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

From above, the 40-foot long yellow school bus lumbers down the cramped city street.

It passes the intersection past Gael's building.

Yellow flashing lights turn red, and the bus stops.

ON THE SIDEWALK

Gael exits the bus with care. On the sidewalk he stops and watches the bus pull away.

In every bus window, a kid waves and smiles.

Gael smiles back.

TWO BOYS shout out the window.

BOYS
Way to go, Guy-ale.

He turns to walk to his house and is blocked by Trash Can Man.

TRASH CAN MAN
Hey, who is Gael?

GAEL
That's my name.

Trash Can Man's eyes are still impossibly blood shot and his mouth is a mess, but in this light, he's not scary looking.

TRASH CAN MAN
My name is Ben.
(eyes Gael's gown)
Looks like you did it.

GAEL
I did. I graduated middle school.

TRASH CAN MAN
I'm talking about dem devils, boy.
You finally smashed dem in da
mouff.

He pulls an apple from his jacket and tosses it to Gael.

Then backs his cart up and steers around Gael.

When he pulls even with Gael, he says...

TRASH CAN MAN (CONT'D)
There will be more. More devils in
dis here world than cans in my
cart.

Gael pats him on the shoulder, watches him take a few steps away. The neighborhood comes to life in vibrant animation, but with a more colorful and summer-ready color palette.

ANIMATION - GAEL SMILES

Gael's version of himself is bigger, now slightly larger than his actual self.

He turns back to go his own way, with a small, confident smile.

FADE OUT.