

**PUNCH KID**

A young life of struggle finds a relationship built on hope.

Written by

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OVER BLACK

Cheers roar. Screams deafen.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1968**

Dead silence hits hard like a punch.

WE FOCUS ON JIMMY DUNCAN, 18. Blood streaks down his face. Sweat drenches his red singlet. His gloves hang low.

JIMMY (V.O.)

My ma always said I was a good boy.

IN SLOW MOTION: Jimmy's opponent's left blue glove swings low.

JIMMY (V.O.)

That none of this was my fault.

Jimmy doesn't move. The wide body hook closes in. The glove clenches a tight fist.

JIMMY (V.O.)

But he always said differently.

Jimmy closes his eyes. A single tear slips free.

OVER BLACK

THUD! the punch lands thunderously.

MATCH CUT TO:

**EXT. BOXING GYM - FOOTPATH - AFTERNOON - 1990**

SMACK! MIKEY, 10, slams back-first into a brick wall. He gasps, panting.

MIKEY

Hey! That's my bike!

JOHNNY, 12, swings his leg over a rusty silver BMX.

JOHNNY

It's my bike now, ya wimp.

MIKEY

Give it back!

Johnny reaches into a bag dangling from the handlebars and pulls out a videotape.

JOHNNY

Ew! Even Stallone hated this one.

He flings it at Mikey. It falls short, case splitting open, tape bouncing out. Johnny laughs, readying a pedal.

Mikey growls and charges. CRASH! they hit the footpath hard.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Get off me!

Johnny thrashes beneath the bike. Mikey scrambles up, snatches his bike, and bolts.

JOHNNY (O.S.)

You'll pay for that!

SMACK! Mikey's head jolts forward. He groans, clutching his head.

JOHNNY (O.S.)

Nobody shoves me!

Mikey turns. WHACK! Johnny's fist splits his eyebrow. Blood trickles fast. Mikey grunts, covering his cut. His bike clatters to the ground.

MIKEY

Leave me alone!

Johnny cocks his arm.

Mikey grabs Johnny's shirt, driving him back. BANG! they slam into a glass door. The entrance bell jingles loud.

Johnny shoves forward, swinging a wild hook, catching Mikey in the face.

JIMMY (O.S.)

HEY! HEY!

The glass door swings open. Jimmy, now 40, rushes out, ANNIE, 40, follows. They yank the boys apart.

Mikey lunges again. Annie holds him back.

ANNIE

That's enough!

Jimmy stands between them, arms wide.

JIMMY

Calm down... We can all see you can take a punch, kid... but that's enough. Okay?

Mikey pants, hand pressed to his eye.

MIKEY

Okay sir.

Jimmy lowers his arms.

JIMMY

So what's going on here?

MIKEY

Well sir, I came to rent a video... and to ask about training. But he tried to steal my bike.

JIMMY

And you didn't let him. Good.  
(turns to Johnny)  
That true, Johnny?

Johnny looks down.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

You're always in trouble, Johnny. And now you're stealing and starting fights?

ANNIE

And he's half your size too.

Annie notices the blood running down Mikey's arm.

ANNIE (CONT'D)

Oh sweetie, you're bleeding.

She presses a tissue gently to his cut.

JIMMY

You should know better. I don't teach you to box so you can pick fights... I'll be having words with your pa.

JOHNNY

No! Please, coach. I won't do it again. I swear.

ANNIE

We've heard that before, Johnny.

JOHNNY

I'm really sorry, Mrs Duncan.  
Coach, please don't tell my pa.

JIMMY

You've left me no choice. You get  
going now and think about what's  
coming. Go on.

Johnny storms off, kicking a rock.

Annie lifts the wet tissue from Mikey's cut. Blood flows  
freely. She glances at Jimmy, worried.

ANNIE

What's your name?

MIKEY

Mikey.

Jimmy hands her a handkerchief. She replaces the tissue.

ANNIE

Well, Mikey, you're a brave boy.  
But that cut needs dressing. We'll  
clean you up inside.

MIKEY

Thank you, but I don't want to  
leave my bike. I'll be alright.

ANNIE

What are your parents going to  
think if you go home bleeding?

Mikey bends to lift his bike.

MIKEY

(under his breath)  
She won't care.

Jimmy picks up the video and slips it into its case.

JIMMY

Rocky V, hey? I heard Tommy  
Morrison's in it. Good boxer, "The  
Duke." He'll be a champion one day.

He drops it in Mikey's bag, and smiles.

MIKEY

Thank you, sir.

JIMMY

Sir? You're a polite boy. Call me Jimmy... You know, Annie's a great cutman. She'll fix that right up. Can't have you passing out, son.

Mikey glances at the soaked handkerchief, winces, and presses it back to the cut.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Besides, didn't you say you wanted to ask about training?

MIKEY

But... what about that kid?

JIMMY

Don't worry. Johnny won't be back.

**INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON**

Mikey sits on a corner stool. Annie tapes a small dressing over his cut.

ANNIE

There, that's better, isn't it?

MIKEY

Thank you, Mrs Duncan.

JIMMY

Good as new.

Mikey looks around, wide-eyed. The gym echoes with movement. Boxers skip rope, shadowbox, drill mitts, time speed and double-end bags, and pound heavy bags.

MIKEY

Wow... this place is great.  
(to himself)  
Dad would've loved this.

He soaks it all in. He gazes in awe at the boxing ring... Behind it, framed photos cover the back wall.

MIKEY (CONT'D)

That's a lot of photos.

JIMMY

A lot of memories.

Mikey notices the bold lettering painted center to the frames: "HANDS UP TIGHT. CHIN DOWN. MOVE YOUR HEAD." COACH GUS.

MIKEY  
Who's Coach Gus?

JIMMY  
Someone who means a lot to us. And  
I wanted to make sure everyone  
remembered his words... You want to  
meet him?

MIKEY  
Okay.

**INT. BACK WALL - CONTINUOUS**

Jimmy stares blankly at a FRAMED PHOTO... He carefully lifts  
it and stares at a woman and young boy hugging... His lip  
trembles, a tear wells.

JIMMY  
There's a lot of people on this  
wall I'll never forget.

Annie puts an arm around him.

Mikey watches the tear fall.

MIKEY  
Who's that, Jimmy?

JIMMY  
That's my...

Jimmy wipes his eye.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
You know, Mikey, my bike got stolen  
too when I was your age.

MIKEY  
Really?

JIMMY  
Yep, and it led me right here to  
this very gym.

MIKEY  
Wow. What happened?

JIMMY  
That's when my life changed like  
you'd never believe.

He stares back at the FRAMED PHOTO, a sad smile forming.

**INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON - 1960**

The apartment is old, but clean. A worn two-seater couch and armchair face a buffet and hutch.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Even now, I miss my ma. She was the best ma you could ask for.

JIMMY, 10, stands with his eyes covered, grinning wide. Faded bruises mark his arms and legs.

JIMMY (V.O.)

She got me my first bike for my tenth birthday.

NORA, 40, face bruised beneath worn concealer, wheels in a silver BMX. A big red bow decorates the handlebars.

NORA

Happy birthday, Jimmy!

Jimmy opens his eyes. They light up!

JIMMY

Oh wow, Ma! A bike!

JIMMY (V.O.)

She had this big smile... but it didn't last.

BANG! a door slams behind them. Jimmy and Nora flinch. Their excitement disappears.

HOWARD, 45, old burn scars cover the left side of his face and arm, looms in the doorway.

NORA

Howard... you're home.

She steps in front of Jimmy, sniffing.

NORA (CONT'D)

You've been drinking?

HOWARD

Yeah, what's it to ya?

He narrows his eyes at the bike.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

So what's all this then?

JIMMY  
It's my birthday.

NORA  
It's Jimmy's present. From us.

HOWARD  
From us?

NORA  
I'm sorry. I should've waited, but  
I wanted to surprise him.

HOWARD  
So much that I wasn't even  
invited... in my own house?

NORA  
What? I reminded you it was today.

Howard glares... Nora lowers her eyes. Jimmy steps out from behind her.

JIMMY  
It's not Ma's fault.

HOWARD  
What did you say?

JIMMY  
I couldn't wait for my present.

NORA  
It's alright, Jimmy.

HOWARD  
Oh, you couldn't wait... guess I  
should've gotten home earlier then.

Howard moves towards the bike and twists the handlebars  
childishly, side to side.

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
Well, isn't this a nice bike.

JIMMY  
I like it. Ma got it for me.

Howard eyes Nora.

HOWARD  
Yeah, Ma got it for you... and you  
think you deserve it? After she  
brought it without asking me first?

NORA  
Howard, please, it's his birth--

HOWARD  
--DON'T YOU "HOWARD PLEASE" ME!

Nora shields Jimmy behind her.

NORA  
(whispering)  
Go to your room. Hurry.

Jimmy runs off.

HOWARD  
Yeah, get outta my sight!

**INT. JIMMY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Jimmy's room is bare. A tarnished dresser sits beside the closed door. Its small mirror reflects him sitting at the end of his bed. Tight to his chest, he clutches a FRAMED PHOTO and an old brown teddy bear.

HOWARD (O.S.)  
What a waste of money! I could've used that!

Jimmy flinches, his body tensing. He hugs his teddy bear tighter, burying his face in it.

HOWARD (O.S.)  
He's too stupid to ride a bike!

**INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Howard rips the bow off the bike and throws it at Nora. He grabs the bike.

NORA  
Howard stop!

**INT. FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS**

Howard hurls the bike into the hallway. He slams the door.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

He rushes back in, pointing.

HOWARD  
Don't you dare touch it!

NORA  
What are you doing?

HOWARD  
You don't buy anything like that  
unless I tell ya! And he don't  
deserve no bike!

NORA  
Yes he does! He's a good boy! He's  
always been. You've ruined his  
birthday... You're nothing but a  
mean father and husband!

ANNIE (V.O.)  
Jimmy!

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy flinches, looking at Annie.

ANNIE  
I think we'd better get Mikey home.

MIKEY  
But what about the rest of the  
story? What happened?

ANNIE  
This might be a bit much for a ten-  
year-old who just met us. And  
besides, I'm sure your parents will  
be wondering where you are.

MIKEY  
They won't. It's ok... I'm not in a  
hurry to get home. I'd like to hear  
the story, Mrs Duncan. Jimmy, can I  
hear it, please?

They look at Annie. She glances at Jimmy and shrugs.

JIMMY  
Well... like so many times  
before... I heard that awful sound.

**INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON - 1960**

SMACK! Howard slaps Nora across the face. She crashes behind  
the lounge, clutching her cheek, crying out.

HOWARD  
(pointing)  
Don't you ever talk back to me!

Howard staggers to the buffet and hutch. He stares into the glass cabinet.

In the reflection, Jimmy, teddy bear in hand, sneaks in and hides behind the lounge.

Howard's scarred reflection stares back. He touches his cheek, grimacing. He opens the cabinet, grabs a nearly empty whisky bottle, and fills a dirty tumbler.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

A tear wells in Jimmy's eye.

JIMMY

I remember seeing my ma in tears.

MIKEY

That's terrible. Was she okay?

Jimmy stares blankly at the FRAMED PHOTO...

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON - 1960**

The tear slides down Jimmy's cheek.

JIMMY

Ma... are you alright?

Nora holds her cheek. Tears drip down her fingers.

NORA

Jimmy, go before he sees you.

JIMMY

I'm not leaving you, Ma.

NORA

I don't want him hurting you too.  
Please. Take your bike. Don't let  
him catch you. Go. I love you.

Jimmy hugs her tight.

JIMMY (V.O.)

I didn't want to leave... but I  
always did what my ma said.

JIMMY

I love you too, Ma. Here, take him.

He gives her his teddy bear.

JIMMY (V.O.)

I gave her my teddy bear, Teddy, to keep me close to her... then I left.

Nora hugs Teddy with a tearful smile.

**EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - FOOTPATH - AFTERNOON**

The entry door swings open. Jimmy bolts out, new bike in hand.

He throws a leg over. CRASH! he topples sideways, bike and all.

Back on his feet, he tries again. THUD! his foot slips off the pedal. SMASH! his groin slams the frame. He gasps in pain.

Catching his breath, he eases onto the seat. Takes a few steps... a push... a wobble... faster, faster. The bike steadies. His eyes light up. He's riding!

An elderly couple round the corner. Jimmy panics and swerves into a driveway. BANG! straight into the chrome bumper of a 1950 MERCURY MONARCH WAGON.

Down he goes, bike and all. The elderly couple stroll past, oblivious.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy smiles.

JIMMY

Don't worry, the car and I were fine. Just a few scratches. More importantly, so was my bike. Now I might've crashed a few times... but you know what? I learnt to ride that afternoon.

MIKEY

Wow, that afternoon? It took me a month.

JIMMY

I guess I wanted to surprise my ma. Show her I could do it... and maybe show him too.

ANNIE

That's not all Jimmy did that day...

Jimmy's gaze shifts to a PHOTO OF A BOXER raising 18-year-old Jimmy's glove in the ring.

Next to it hangs a framed newspaper clipping of the same photo. The headline reads: "SHOCK MEDAL WIN."

JIMMY

Yeah... that's when I saw a bigger boy picking on two kids.

**EXT. FOOTPATH - PARK - AFTERNOON - 1960**

Jimmy skids his bike to a stuttering halt. He frowns at a bigger boy in the distance, MILO, 15, pushing two smaller kids, ANNIE, 10, with short hair, and her brother TOMMY, 9.

ANNIE

Leave us alone!

Annie pushes back. Milo grabs Annie's shoulders and shakes her. Tommy tries to pull Milo's arm away.

JIMMY (V.O.)

And I didn't like it one bit.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON - WEEKS AGO**

Howard violently shakes Nora. She screams. Jimmy lunges, trying to pull Howard's arm away.

HOWARD

You useless woman!

He shoves Jimmy back hard.

NORA

Leave us alone!

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy holds the FRAMED PHOTO tighter to his chest. His gaze still fixed on the PHOTO OF A BOXER raising Jimmy's glove in the ring.

JIMMY

I really didn't like what I saw,  
and if I didn't do something then,  
I would have regretted it,  
especially how it all turned out.

MIKEY

So what did you do?

ANNIE

Well, Jimmy became a hero that day  
and raced right up to that bully.

**EXT. PARK - AFTERNOON - 1960**

Jimmy pedals furiously towards Milo.

JIMMY (V.O.)

But I almost ran him down because I  
couldn't stop properly.

MILO

Watch out!

Milo, Annie and Tommy scramble out of the way.

Jimmy squeezes the brakes. His bike stops hard on the front  
wheel, launching him over the handlebars into a sand pit.

He gets up and charges at Milo.

JIMMY

STOP PICKING ON THEM!

Jimmy smashes into Milo, pushing his face away.

MILO

Get away from me!

Milo struggles against Jimmy's arms.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

MIKEY

Wow, and you stopped him?

ANNIE

He sure did. And because of Jimmy,  
that boy stopped picking on  
everyone.

JIMMY

He didn't like me standing up to  
him, and even though he hit me, I'm  
glad I did.

OVER BLACK

WHACK! the sound of a punch hits hard.

**EXT. PARK - AFTERNOON - 1960**

THUD! Jimmy lands hard on his back.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
It didn't hurt... I've been hit  
harder before.

Annie and Tommy rush over, helping him sit up. He shakes his  
head, rubbing his bruised cheek.

JIMMY  
HEY!

Milo swings his leg over Jimmy's bike.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
That's my bike!

MILO  
It's my bike now, ya dummy.

Milo pedals off fast.

Jimmy jumps to his feet and gives chase.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy gaze shifts to a PHOTO OF AN OLDER MAN in a red plaid  
shirt, hugging Jimmy, age 10, Annie and Tommy.

He lingers on Annie's face in the photo and smiles.

JIMMY  
That girl was in my class. And that  
boy teased her because her ma cut  
her hair too short. But I didn't  
care... I thought she was the  
prettiest girl in the whole school.

Annie smiles at Jimmy.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
I didn't like what that bully was  
doing, so I helped her. And that  
girl... she not only became my best  
friend, but later, my wife.

MIKEY  
Your wife? You're the girl in the  
story, aren't you, Mrs Duncan?

Mikey points at Annie in the photo.

ANNIE  
That's right. Jimmy was very brave  
standing up for me and my brother.  
(MORE)

ANNIE (CONT'D)  
 Just like you were, standing up for  
 yourself.

**EXT. PARK - STREET - AFTERNOON - 1960**

Jimmy stops running. Annie and Tommy catch up. Together,  
 they watch Milo disappear. Tears stream down Jimmy's face.

ANNIE  
 I heard him talking to his friends.  
 I know where he'll be if you want  
 your bike back.

Jimmy wipes his face.

JIMMY  
 I do.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy looks down at the FRAMED PHOTO in his hands.

JIMMY  
 Now, it wasn't because I'd get a  
 beating if I didn't get my bike  
 back. It was because I knew how  
 hard my ma worked waiting tables to  
 buy it. So I wasn't going home  
 without it, not if it meant her  
 getting beat again.

He hugs the FRAMED PHOTO tight again and looks back at the  
 PHOTO OF A BOXER raising Jimmy's glove in the ring.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 Either way, I got a beating though.

His eyes shift to the PHOTO OF AN OLDER MAN in a red plaid  
 shirt, hugging Jimmy, Annie and Tommy.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 But it changed my life forever.

OVER BLACK

WHACK! the sound of a punch hits hard.

**EXT. BOXING GYM - AFTERNOON - 1960**

THUD! Jimmy crashes back-first into a glass door. The door's  
 entrance bell jingles.

Milo scoops up the bike.

JIMMY  
That's my bike!

Jimmy lunges, grabbing the handlebars. Milo yanks back. The bike jerks between them.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
It's mine! Let go!

Milo grabs Jimmy by the shoulders and shakes him.

MILO  
No!

Jimmy freezes, eyes stunned. He clutches his bike tighter.

ANNIE  
Stop it! Leave him alone!

Annie pushes between them, pulling at Milo's arm.

TOMMY  
Stop!

Tommy pulls Milo's other arm.

Milo shoves Annie and Tommy away. He swings two wild punches. BANG! BANG! smashing against Jimmy's forehead. Jimmy grunts, still clutching tight.

GUS (O.S.)  
HEY! HEY!

The glass door swings open. GUS, 58, RED PLAID SHIRT, rushes out.

GUS  
Break it up!

He yanks the boys apart with ease. Jimmy lunges again. Milo flinches back.

GUS (CONT'D)  
Hey! Calm down... We can all see you can take a punch, kid... but that's enough. Okay?

JIMMY  
(panting)  
Okay, sir.

GUS  
So what's going on here?

Jimmy, still catching his breath, points at Milo.

JIMMY

Well sir, he was pushing and teasing Annie and Tommy. Then he stole my bike.

ANNIE

And he punched Jimmy too when he stood up to him.

TOMMY

We were helping him get it back.

GUS

Really? So you stood up for everyone. That's brave, son.

JIMMY

And I'm not leaving without it.  
(shouts at Milo)  
My ma worked hard to buy it!

GUS

Then you take it, as you should.

Jimmy pulls the bike close. Gus turns to Milo, shaking his head.

GUS (CONT'D)

What am I gonna do with you, Milo? After everything I've taught you about being better than this... and now you're picking fights.

Milo looks down.

GUS (CONT'D)

Well, your pa's gonna hear about it. And when he does, he'll probably knock some sense into you, because I can't.

MILO

No, please don't. I won't do it again, I swear. I'm sorry.

GUS

It's too late, son. You've left me no choice. Go home and think about what you've done, and how you'll act next time. Go on.

Milo storms off, kicking a rock.

ANNIE

If you hadn't come out, he would've kept punching. Thank you, sir.

GUS

Sir? You can all call me Gus.

ANNIE

Thanks, Gus. I'm Annie, and this is my brother Tommy. And that's Jimmy, he's a hero.

GUS

He sure is.

Gus looks Jimmy over, noticing fresh and lighter bruises on his face and arms.

GUS (CONT'D)

You alright, son? Looks like you've taken a beating.

JIMMY

I'll be alright, thank you.  
(quietly to himself)  
I'm used to it.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy stares at the PHOTO OF GUS, hugging the kids...

JIMMY

Now, at the time, I didn't think our Coach Gus heard what I said, or understood what I meant. But he saw the bruises, new and old, and could tell which came from Milo, and which came from a grown man who should've known better.

**EXT. BOXING GYM - AFTERNOON - 1960**

Gus pats Jimmy on the shoulder.

GUS

I'm sorry he picked on all of you.

JIMMY

That's okay... he didn't hit that hard anyway.

Gus chuckles, a warm smile spreading across his face.

GUS

Well, like I said, you can take a punch, kid... and you know what? I can work with that, if you're interested.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

JIMMY

Now, I didn't know what he meant. But turns out, he was a boxing coach. And he told us we could all come by and learn how to box.

**EXT. BOXING GYM - AFTERNOON - 1960**

With their bikes parked along the wall, Jimmy, Annie and Tommy walk in the boxing gym.

JIMMY (V.O.)

And that's what we did, all of us.

The door's entrance bell jingles shut.

**INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON**

The boxing gym is old. Worn. Loud.

Boxers, ages 12 to 20, work their stations, the ring rumbles, heavy bags boom, speed bags rattle, double-end bags bounce, focus mitts clap, skip ropes whip, shadowboxers slip and weave, the timber floor creaks beneath them.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Day after day, we came back.

They all glance at Jimmy, Annie and Tommy, awkward in their stances, red gloves up, mirroring Gus's jab-cross.

JIMMY (V.O.)

And we loved it.

**INT. OTIS RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Gus shakes hands with Milo's parents, MR and MRS OTIS, 40.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Our Coach Gus did have words with Milo's folks... and they weren't happy.

**INT. MILO'S BEDROOM - DOORWAY - CONTINUOUS**

Milo opens his door, freezes, eyes wide, watching Gus sit down with his parents.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Apparently Milo, being from Greece, was having trouble fitting in at school. So his pa thought maybe boxing would help.

He watches his pa shake his head in frustration.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Even then, Milo kept getting into trouble. His pa was so frustrated that he didn't let him return to the boxing gym.

Milo frowns... BANG! he slams the door shut.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy stares back at the PHOTO OF A BOXER raising Jimmy's glove in the ring... a smile appears.

JIMMY  
Later on, Milo became a really good person...

**INT. JIMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1960**

Jimmy stands frozen in the doorway, a tear welling.

Still in her pink-and-brown waitress uniform, Nora lies curled on Jimmy's bed, clutching Teddy. Fresh tears streak her cheek, half-hiding a new bruise.

Jimmy's stares at it. His tear finally falls.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Jimmy glares at Howard, snoring in his armchair.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
That night, he stank of drink worse than usual. And my ma paid for it.

Howard jolts awake with a snort, snapping upright.

HOWARD  
 (groggy)  
 What... what happened to you, boy?  
 That didn't come from me. You look  
 too good.

Jimmy brushes a hand over his bruised cheek.

JIMMY  
 I stopped to help some kids--

HOWARD  
 --Who told you to help anyone? Look  
 what it got you. You'll always end  
 up paying for it.

Howard presses his finger deep into his scarred cheek.

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
 You see this? Believe me... I know.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

HOWARD (O.S.)  
 No one's gonna help you. No one  
 cares.

Jimmy shakes his head.

MIKEY  
 It must have been awful. Why didn't  
 you and your ma leave?

JIMMY  
 My ma never made excuses for his  
 violence. And she never gave up on  
 anyone... but I know she would've  
 been better off if she had.

OVER BLACK

A baby cries.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING - 1950**

NORA, breathing hard, lies back on her hospital bed. A  
 BLOOD-COVERED BABY cries in a nurse's hands. She gently  
 passes him to Nora.

The baby stops crying. He looks up at her.

NORA  
 My Jimmy...

JIMMY (V.O.)  
On the very day I was born... he  
was fighting in the Korean War.

OVER BLACK

Cracking thunder roars.

**EXT. KOREAN WAR - PUSAN PERIMETER - DAY**

CRASH! Howard slams back-first into a tree, rifle clutched to his chest. Panicked breaths spurt fast.

Machine-gun fire rips across the battlefield from the treeline. His platoon lies in ruins.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
And he saw things there that  
haunted him.

Some scream. Some pray. Some crawl without legs. Some flee without arms. Only a few return fire.

Howard's chest heaves. Tears stream down his face.

A YOUNG SOLDIER, dead still, stares... A tear falls onto his boot-BOOM! his legs explode. The blast tears upward, blowing him apart.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
And he was badly injured.

The blast hurls Howard and others violently into the air.

CRASH! Howard slams to the ground. Motionless.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Scarred for the rest of his life.

His uniform is charred and fused to his skin. Shrapnel embeds his body. His entire left side is badly burnt.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
As were we all.

The gunfire stops. Heavy rain falls. Thunder roars. Steam rises from Howard's burnt skin.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
What made it worse... it was an  
allied land mine.

A bloodied casing juts from his thigh. Stamped: "--IN THE U.S.A."

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

A tear breaks. Annie puts her arm around Jimmy.

JIMMY

He came back a different person  
from the man my ma once loved. Our  
Coach Gus had been through war, and  
lost so much... yet he still came  
back a good man.

Jimmy looks back at the PHOTO OF GUS hugging the kids.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

A good pa teaches, and keeps his  
kids safe. It was my ma and our  
Coach Gus who taught me so much...  
and made me feel safe.

**INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1960**

Jimmy, Annie and Tommy, gloves up, dance back and forth in a  
semi-circle around Gus.

JIMMY (V.O.)

We trained, day after day.

Gus feeds the focus mitts. Jimmy drills a jab-cross-hook.

GUS

Good!

He pivots from Jimmy to Annie to Tommy, repeating the drill.

JIMMY (V.O.)

We did everything together.

**EXT. FOOTPATH - ANNIE'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON**

Tommy races his bike ahead, grinning ear to ear, leaving  
Jimmy and Annie behind.

TOMMY

I'm gonna win!

JIMMY (V.O.)

We'd ride and race, and if I got to  
ride next to Annie, I'd always let  
Tommy win.

Tommy skids into the dirt yard of an old house, and throws  
his arms up in victory.

TOMMY

I won!

He drops his bike and runs inside.

Jimmy and Annie catch up.

Annie drops her bike next to Tommy's, dashes back and gives Jimmy a quick hug.

ANNIE

Bye Jimmy.

He beams.

JIMMY

Bye Annie.

She runs to the front door, turns back, smiles and waves.

JIMMY (V.O.)

And I'd make sure Annie and Tommy  
got home safe.

Jimmy waves back, still smiling.

**EXT. OLD PIER - LAKESIDE - LATE AFTERNOON**

Jimmy and Annie sit at the end of an old pier, legs dangling in the water, eyes on the sunset.

He nervously puts his arm around her. She smiles, and leans her head on his shoulder.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Sometimes, we just liked being  
alone. We were inseparable. Being  
with Annie... that was my favourite  
part.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy looks at Annie.

JIMMY

And it still is.

Annie returns the same smile she gave him by the lakeside.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BAG AREA - AFTERNOON - 1960**

Annie and Tommy brace a heavy bag steady.

Jimmy drills a sharp jab-cross-hook-cross combination.

Gus watches closely. His eyes linger on the bruises across Jimmy's neck and arms.

GUS  
You been falling off your bike again? You've got a few bruises there. Everything okay, son?

JIMMY  
I'm okay.

He keeps drilling the combination.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
(to himself)  
I'm used to it.

GUS  
(to himself)  
You shouldn't have to be...

ANNIE  
His pa is mean to him and his ma.

GUS  
Is that so?

BANG-BANG-BANG... BANG! Jimmy pounds the bag harder.

Gus steps in, gently easing Jimmy from the bag. He raises his hands like mitts, moving Jimmy away from Annie and Tommy.

ANNIE  
Your turn Tommy.

She holds the bag while Tommy swings wildly. Annie keeps glancing over at Jimmy.

Jimmy moves backwards, drilling into Gus's hands.

GUS  
Just so you know, son... I'm here if you or your ma ever need help.

JIMMY  
Okay. Thank you, Coach Gus.

GUS  
No doubt you can take a punch, kid... but we don't want to take any more punches, do we?

Jimmy keeps drilling.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I suspected our Coach Gus knew all  
along my ma and me had problems at  
home.

Gus stops pressing forward.

GUS  
It's time we make'em miss.

**INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING - DAYS EARLIER**

Jimmy eats quietly at the table, spooning cereal.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Now, I've been hit more times than  
I can count.

SMASH! Howard's coffee mug shatters on the floor.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Even for things that weren't my  
fault.

SLAP! Howard cracks Jimmy across the back of the neck. Jimmy  
chokes, spraying cereal. Howard yanks his arm hard.

HOWARD  
Useless! Look what you made me do.

Jimmy's eyes well up. His fist tightens, knuckles whitening.

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
Clean it up.

Howard storms off.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
He always said it was my fault.

Jimmy blinks his tears away.

**INT. JIMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Nora lies curled on Jimmy's bed, tears streaking. A fresh  
bruise swells on her cheek.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
But my ma always said it wasn't.

Jimmy sits beside her, staring... his fist clenched tight,  
knuckles white.

NORA

None of this is your fault, Jimmy.

He exhales... his fist loosens.

NORA (CONT'D)

You hear?

He nods faintly, resting his head on her shoulder.

JIMMY

And it's not yours either, Ma.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

JIMMY

I didn't like being hit, and I know my poor ma copped the worst of it. After a while, it makes you anxious about trusting or loving people. I didn't like being hit... so I just did what our Coach Gus told me to do.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BOXING RING - MANY AFTERNOONS - 1960**

TRAINING MONTAGE:

Jimmy, Annie and Tommy, dance back and forth in their training semi-circle around Gus. Their thumping bounce echoes under the elevated boxing ring.

GUS

Hands up tight! Chin down. Keep'em there!

They mirror Gus, red gloves up tight, chins down.

GUS (CONT'D)

Keep moving your head, side to side. Don't let me hit you.

Gus throws slow jabs and crosses at Jimmy. Jimmy slips side to side. Annie and Tommy shadowbox, slipping side to side.

Gus pivots to Annie.

GUS (CONT'D)

Duck, and roll out to the other side. Weave!

He throws slow hooks. Annie ducks and rolls, weaving. Jimmy and Tommy shadowbox, weaving continuously.

Gus pivots to Tommy.

GUS (CONT'D)  
Cover your hips! Elbows tight!

He throws slow body hooks. Tommy crunches side to side, elbows tucked. Jimmy and Annie shadowbox, protecting their sides.

Gus pivots back to Jimmy.

GUS (CONT'D)  
Move your feet. Don't stay in the line of fire.

Jimmy mirrors Gus, forward, back, sideways, pivoting, circling. Annie and Tommy struggle to keep up.

GUS (CONT'D)  
Good! Now put it all together, even if a punch ain't coming. Keep'em guessing. Keep moving, son!

Jimmy moves around Gus, slipping and weaving unpredictably. Each move smoother than the last. Gus smiles, impressed.

Suddenly, Gus stops, coughing violently into his glove.

JIMMY  
Are you alright, Coach Gus?

Gus spots blood in his glove and quickly hides it.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I'm pretty sure I saw blood coughed up, but our Coach Gus would always say:

GUS  
I'm alright, kid. It's nothing.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
But I knew he wasn't alright. It was something.

GUS  
I think we'll call it a day. You know what, son? I think you're a natural, a real boxer.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

JIMMY

I'd never really heard a compliment before. My ma always said I was a good boy... but he always called me awful names. So when our Coach Gus called me a natural... well, that meant everything.

Jimmy stares at the PHOTO OF GUS hugging the kids.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

He was always there for us... in every way.

**INT. APARTMENT - KITCHEN - MORNING - 1960**

Jimmy and Nora eat quietly at the table, spooning cereal.

SMASH! Howard's bowl shatters on the floor, cereal and milk splatter wide.

Jimmy and Nora freeze, eyes wide. Jimmy's fist clenches under the table.

Howard, nose swollen and bruised purple, stares at the mess. He shakes his head.

Nora starts to rise.

HOWARD

No. Stay there. I'll clean it up.

She freezes... and slowly sits back down.

JIMMY (V.O.)

One day, the abuse just stopped. He left my ma and me alone, for a short time, and things were good.

Howard kneels and picks up the broken pieces.

Jimmy watches, uncertain...

JIMMY (V.O.)

My ma told me they had a visitor the day before.

His fist loosens.

**INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - PUBLIC HALLWAY - DAY BEFORE**

Gus knocks firmly.

HOWARD (O.S.)  
 NORA! There's someone at the  
 door... Get rid of them!

The lock clicks. The door creaks open. Nora peeks out,  
 hiding most of her face.

NORA  
 Yes.

GUS  
 Mrs Black. My name's Gus McCready.

NORA  
 Nora, please... Gus McCready?

Gus's eyes linger on the fading bruises on her face.

NORA (CONT'D)  
 Oh, you're Coach Gus. Jimmy's  
 coach.

She glances over her shoulder. A fresh bruise catches Gus's  
 eye. She quickly covers it with her hand.

NORA (CONT'D)  
 It's nice to meet you, but I don't  
 think it's a good--

HOWARD (O.S.)  
 --What's going on here?

The door swings open. Howard steps in front of her.

HOWARD  
 Who are you?

NORA  
 Howard, this is--

HOWARD  
 --I'm about to have my breakfast,  
 that's who it is.

Howard glares. Nora lowers her eyes and leaves.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Nora backs against the wall, leaning towards the doorway.

HOWARD (O.S.)  
 So who are you?

**INT. PUBLIC HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

Gus steps forward, glaring.

GUS  
Gus McCready.

Howard stiffens, uneasy.

HOWARD  
Okay... So what do you want?

GUS  
I just found out what I needed to know.

Howard frowns.

HOWARD  
And what's that?

GUS  
The type of man you are... or rather, aren't.

Gus's menacing glare makes Howard shift, more uneasy.

HOWARD  
I think... I think it's time you hit the road, old timer.

Howard tries to close the door. Gus stomps his foot, blocking it.

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
Look, if you don't take off right now, I'll-I'll slap you senseless!

GUS  
Just like you do your wife and son?

Howard freezes, eyes wide.

HOWARD  
Who told you-What are you talking about?

GUS  
I'm talking about the bruises on your son, and that fresh one on your wife's face.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Nora touches her bruised cheek.

**INT. PUBLIC HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

HOWARD

What? Who do you think you are  
accusing me--

GUS

--No. I'm not accusing you. I'm  
warning you. If you ever touch  
Jimmy or his ma again, there won't  
be any more talking.

HOWARD

Is that a threat?

GUS

That's a promise...

HOWARD

This is my family. I do what I  
want, you hear?

Gus steps closer, eyes unblinking.

GUS

You just remember my words...

HOWARD

Wait a minute.

Howard points a shaky finger.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I remember you... I've heard your  
name before. Yeah... you're nothing  
but a cheater, a bum!

He clenches his fist and cocks his arm.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I'm not scared of--

--BANG! Gus intercepts with a sharp jab. CRASH! Howard slams  
into the wall. He groans, clutching his bleeding nose.

Gus keeps his guard high, eyes wide and menacing. Howard  
raises one arm in surrender.

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
 (muffled)  
 Alright-alright... Why do you care?

Nora rushes to the doorway.

GUS  
 I care because everyone should  
 care. That's your wife and son.  
 Change the way you are, or I'll  
 change it for you.

Nora mouths "Thank you." Gus nods and walks away.

**INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON**

**TRAINING MONTAGE:**

Jimmy, Annie and Tommy, all in red headgear, face off  
 against their training partners.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 We practiced our defence.

Gus watches closely, hand to his mouth catching a light  
 cough.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 Our partners would throw a set of  
 combinations.

PARTNER ONE, 12, fires jab-crosses, jab-cross-hooks, and  
 cross-hook-crosses.

Jimmy slips and weaves, fast, smooth.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 And we'd defend, trying to make'em  
 miss.

Partner One grows frustrated, swinging wildly. Jimmy moves  
 with ease.

Gus clears his throat again, a low, nagging cough.

PARTNER TWO, 14, throws double jabs, double jab-crosses, and  
 double jab-jab-crosses.

Jimmy slips faster, smoother, sharper.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 They were supposed to go slow, just  
 offensive-defensive drills.

Partner Two speeds up. Jimmy stays flawless.

Gus coughs deeper, burying it into his arm, eyes never leaving Jimmy.

PARTNER THREE, 16, unleashes a furious mix of the previous combinations.

Jimmy slips, weaves, and covers flawlessly.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Some of the older boys got  
frustrated... because they couldn't  
hit me.

Partner Three punches harder, angrier, but still can't land.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
It felt like they really wanted to  
hit me. But no matter how hard or  
fast they tried... they missed.

Annie, Tommy and the other boxers stop and stare in awe.

Jimmy keeps moving, faster, smoother, sharper, untouchable.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
And soon, there wasn't anyone in  
the gym who could catch me.

Gus nods with a proud smile, only to be cut short by a fit of coughing.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy stares at the PHOTO OF GUS hugging the kids.

JIMMY  
Our Coach Gus always asked if we  
learned anything. And I always said  
yes. Because I did.

Jimmy smiles sadly at the photo.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
He taught me things a real pa  
should've taught.

His eyes glisten.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
People said he was a has-been. That  
he wasn't a real boxer.  
(MORE)

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 Hell, he didn't even have a name  
 for his gym back then.

Jimmy wipes his eyes.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
 But they were wrong. We knew him.  
 And everything he taught us, always  
 led us to the next stage of our  
 lives.

**INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1960**

Jimmy slips a cross, weaves a hook, slips another cross.

Gus coughs deep into his arm.

Jimmy's TRAINING PARTNER, 16, puffing hard, stops. He braces his gloves on his knees and glances up to see Jimmy still moving with sharp, unpredictable defence.

Gus steps in.

GUS  
 Good work, kid. At this stage, your  
 defence is down pat. No one can  
 touch you.

Jimmy smiles wide.

GUS (CONT'D)  
 Now you know how to make'em miss...  
 now... we make'em pay.

Gus stifles another cough into his arm, before patting Jimmy on the shoulder.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

JIMMY  
 At the time I wasn't sure what he  
 meant because I never saw a cent  
 from the other boxers. But what we  
 did do, was turn that defence into  
 what our Coach Gus called:

**INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - MANY AFTERNOONS - 1960**

GUS (O.S.)  
 An aggressive defence.

TRAINING MONTAGE:

Gus, focus mitts on. Jimmy, red gloves on. Both face off.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 And that's what we did. Our Coach  
 Gus had me practicing simple  
 counters alongside my head  
 movement.

Gus feeds a jab. Jimmy slips, counters with a hard cross.  
 Drill continues smoothly.

Gus feeds a cross. Jimmy slips, counters with a stiff jab.  
 Drill flows.

Gus feeds a jab-cross. Jimmy slips side to side, counters  
 with a jab-cross. Drill flows.

Gus feeds a cross-hook. Jimmy slips, weaves, counters with a  
 cross-hook. Drill flows.

Gus feeds a left hook-right hook. Jimmy double weaves,  
 counters with a body hook. Gus feeds a right hook-left hook,  
 Jimmy flows into the same counter. Drill continues.

OVER BLACK

The door's entrance bell jingles.

**EXT. BOXING GYM - LATE AFTERNOON**

Gus locks the glass door and slips the keys into his pocket.

NORA (O.S.)  
 Hi, Gus.

Gus turns with a flinch, coughing into his arm.

GUS  
 Oh-hello, Nora.

NORA  
 Sorry to bother you.

GUS  
 It's no bother. What can I do for  
 you?

NORA  
 I just wanted to thank you for the  
 other day.

GUS

No need to thank me. You've raised a good boy. You don't deserve to be treated that way, no one does.

NORA

Thank you.

GUS

How's everything been since?

NORA

Your warning seems to have worked.

GUS

That's good to hear... but?

NORA

But knowing Howard... I don't know how long it'll last. He's like a ticking time bomb.

GUS

Yes, I can imagine... Look, it's not my place, but why stay with someone like that?

NORA

We... We made vows a long time ago. And unlike my husband, I won't break them. We loved each other once, more than we do now... So I hold onto hope. Hope that the man I loved will come back and be the husband and father he should be.

GUS

And what about Jimmy? Waiting on hope can cost you everything. By the time it changes... it may be too late.

Nora nods, her eyes filling.

NORA

I know... That's why I need your help, Gus.

**INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON**

Gus feeds a left hook-right hook. Jimmy double weaves, pivots, counters with a left body hook-left uppercut-right cross.

Gus beams, pulling off the mitts.

GUS  
Yes, that's it! Head movement,  
footwork, counters!

He pulls Jimmy into a hug. Sweat from Jimmy's hair soaks a dark patch on Gus's red plaid shirt.

GUS (CONT'D)  
Most boxers can only manage one of  
those, let alone combine the three.

JIMMY  
Thanks, Coach Gus.

GUS  
You're a natural, kid. You really  
are.

Jimmy grins ear to ear.

GUS (CONT'D)  
You know what? I think it's time we  
step it up a notch. I reckon you're  
ready.

**INT. BOXING RING - LATER**

Gus stands between Jimmy, in red headgear, and CHARLIE, 18, in blue. Both wear sixteen-ounce gloves.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
At first, I didn't know what was  
going on.

Charlie bounces, eager. Jimmy stands still, bored-like.

Annie and Tommy stand ringside, watching. Annie smiles at Jimmy. He smiles back.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
But our Coach Gus said I was ready  
to spar.

Gus grips a shoulder on each boy.

GUS  
Now Jimmy hasn't sparred before.  
Charlie here has. He's older and  
bigger, which makes it safer. He  
knows what to do, and what not to  
do. So take it easy on him.

CHARLIE

Yes, Coach Gus.

GUS

Jimmy, think of it like our drills.  
But random punches instead of set  
ones. Move, defend, and when you  
can, use your aggressive defence.

JIMMY

Okay, Coach Gus.

GUS

Good. Keep it slow and steady.  
Touch gloves.

They touch. Gus backs into a corner.

GUS (CONT'D)

Slow and steady.

Charlie's gloves sit loose in front of his chin. Jimmy's are  
tight, chin down.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Everything I'd learnt so far was  
just drills. Now it was time to  
apply them under pressure.

Charlie probes with light jabs, a cross. Jimmy slips,  
untouched. Charlie misses again. And again.

JIMMY (V.O.)

It was supposed to be light  
sparring. Safe. Slow.

Charlie's punches quicken. Jimmy moves fast. Charlie keeps  
missing.

JIMMY (V.O.)

I did what our Coach Gus told me to  
do.

Jimmy slips, weaves and moves with unpredictable rhythm.

JIMMY (V.O.)

But Charlie started getting  
frustrated really fast.

Charlie swings a wild hook. Jimmy weaves and circles behind  
him. Charlie chases, his right arm cocked. Annie frowns.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Especially when he couldn't land a  
single punch.

Jimmy slips the telegraphed cross.

GUS  
Slow it down, Charlie.

Charlie pressures with faster combinations. Jimmy moves  
faster.

GUS (CONT'D)  
Charlie! I said slow!

Charlie ignores him, punching faster, harder. Jimmy's back  
hits the ropes.

ANNIE  
Hit him back, Jimmy.

Jimmy slips and weaves more than a dozen aggressive punches,  
making them all miss.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I think he actually wanted to hurt  
me.

GUS  
Stop!

Gus steps forward, a coughing fit stops him.

Jimmy's head keeps moving. Charlie keeps missing.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
That aggression, it reminded me of  
my ma and me getting hit.

IN SLOW MOTION: Charlie's teeth clench. His cross launches.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
And I didn't like it.

Jimmy slips. The cross grazes past his ear.

ANNIE  
HIT HIM, JIMMY!

Jimmy grunts! THUD! his body hook slams hard into Charlie's  
liver. The sound echoes through the gym.

CRASH! Charlie hits the canvas, clutching his side, gasping.

JIMMY  
I'm sorry!

Gus rushes over.

GUS  
Breathe, Charlie, deep long  
breaths.

Annie and Tommy scramble under the ropes.

JIMMY  
I'm sorry, Charlie!

GUS  
No, I'm sorry. What happens in this  
ring reflects on my instructions.  
And this... shouldn't have.

ANNIE  
Jimmy! Are you alright?

JIMMY  
I'm okay.

TOMMY  
Great body hook, Jimmy!

Annie glares at Charlie.

ANNIE  
What were you thinking? It was  
supposed to be slow! You're bigger,  
you should know better!

CHARLIE  
(panting)  
I... I'm sorry.

ANNIE  
Yeah you'll be sorry, you'll be  
sparring me next!

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

JIMMY  
At that point, I wasn't sure if our  
Coach Gus meant me, or Charlie. But  
I knew one thing, Annie was ready  
to jump into the ring with him.

They share a smile.

ANNIE  
I sure was.

**INT. BOXING GYM - OUTSIDE CHANGE ROOM - AFTERNOON - 1960**

Jimmy towels his face and reaches for the door--

GUS (O.S.)  
--not how we do things.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Turns out, he meant Charlie.

Jimmy presses his ear to the door. Annie and Tommy lean in beside him.

GUS (O.S.)  
Ego and emotions can work for you,  
or against you. We spar to get  
better, not to hurt each other.  
Pressure builds, slow and steady.  
Safe.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

JIMMY  
After that talk with everyone,  
things calmed down. We were a small  
group, but we all listened. It made  
us better boxers and better people.

**INT. BOXING GYM - EXIT DOOR - AFTERNOON - 1960**

Charlie pats Jimmy's back.

CHARLIE  
That was a good punch, kid.

Annie frowns at him. Charlie drops his gaze and leaves.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy studies a CLASS PHOTO of the team. He and Charlie stand side by side, smiling wide.

JIMMY  
I didn't mean to hit Charlie that  
hard. But under that pressure... I  
just reacted.

He rests a hand over his liver.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Our Coach Gus told me once, you hit a grown man here, and no matter how tough he is, he'll drop like a sack of potatoes.

Jimmy stares back at the PHOTO OF A BOXER raising Jimmy's glove in the ring...

JIMMY (CONT'D)

He wasn't wrong about that.

OVER BLACK

The doorbell ding-dongs.

GUS (O.S.)

They're here, Love!

**INT. GUS'S HOUSE - FOYER - AFTERNOON - 1960**

Gus opens the door with a wide smile. Annie and Tommy rush in and hug him.

JIMMY (V.O.)

One time, our Coach Gus invited everyone to a dinner party.

Their parents, NEIL, 40, and SARAH, 35, follow. Gus shakes their hands.

Nora and Jimmy arrive next. Jimmy hugs Gus tight.

JIMMY (V.O.)

And that's when we met his lovely wife, Evelyn, the nicest person ever.

EVELYN, 58, bustles in, apron on, smiling.

EVELYN

Welcome, everyone.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER**

A black-and-white boxing match plays on a built-in cabinet TV.

On their stomachs, eyes glued to the screen, Jimmy, Annie and Tommy shovel popcorn.

JIMMY (V.O.)

After dinner, we all watched the boxing from the Rome Olympics on the biggest TV we'd ever seen. A whopping twenty-one inches.

Their parents sit with Gus and Evelyn, wine in hand.

CASSIUS CLAY, 18, dominates his opponent, ZBIGNIEW PIETRZYKOWSKI, 26, with stiff jabs thrown from every angle.

COMMENTATOR 1 (O.S.)

Clay's form looks casual, but Pietrzykowski just can't get close.

COMMENTATOR 2 (O.S.)

You can really see Peter-coffskey getting frustrated.

JIMMY (V.O.)

We saw this one particular boxer, now he really put on a show.

Cassius Clay teases his opponent, dropping his hands and poking out his tongue with wide eyes.

The kids burst into laughter.

COMMENTATOR 1 (O.S.)

This Clay sure is cocky.

COMMENTATOR 2 (O.S.)

Yeah, cocky boxers don't last.

Zbigniew Pietrzykowski takes the bait. Cassius Clay unleashes a barrage of unanswered punches, jolting his opponent's head back again and again.

The kids cheer louder than the TV.

COMMENTATOR 1 (O.S.)

He's got him on the ropes!

The bell dings. The REFEREE steps in.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Our Coach Gus predicted that boxer would be a great champion one day.

Cassius Clay strolls to his corner, arms raised, pumped.

JIMMY (V.O.)

And you know what? He was right.

OVER BLACK

The crowd erupts.

COMMENTATOR (O.S.)  
IT'S OVER! Sonny Liston has given  
up! Clay's the new World Champion!

**INT. BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1964**

Cassius Clay, now 22, leaps on the ropes, arms raised. His  
CORNER MEN go wild, hugging him.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Later on, he became known as "The  
Greatest." He even changed his name  
to Muhammad Ali.

Cassius Clay holds up the title belt. The crowd roars.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. GUS'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - 1960**

Cassius Clay shakes his arms, egging on the cheering crowd.

GUS  
You all have the potential to be  
champions. In boxing, or anything  
you choose. But knowing what you  
want, that's the easy part. The  
rest is constant hard work and  
determination.

JIMMY  
What about you, Coach Gus? Did you  
ever go to the Olympics or become a  
champion?

Gus straightens slightly. He drains his wine and sets the  
glass down.

GUS  
No, son. I never became a champion.  
I had a choice to make a long time  
ago... and my life didn't lead me  
down that path. But I'm happy with  
where it led me.

NORA  
Well, the children are happy they  
met you, Gus. You're very special  
to them, especially to my Jimmy.

GUS  
 Jimmy's a good boy. He even reminds  
 me of my...

Evelyn gazes at Gus. A tear wells in her eye.

Gus's eyes well. He lowers his head, pressing a hand to his  
 brow, his breath shallow.

NORA  
 Are you alright, Gus?

A small cough nags at him, erupting into a coughing fit.

EVELYN  
 Love!

The kids turn around. Gus fumbles out a handkerchief,  
 coughing hard.

JIMMY  
 Coach Gus?

EVELYN  
 It's alright, dear.

She sits on the arm of his chair, rubbing his back. Gus  
 muffles the cough into his handkerchief, the fit fading into  
 shallow wheezes.

EVELYN (CONT'D)  
 Just breathe. Slow and steady.

NEIL  
 Is there anything we can do?

Gus draws in a steadying breath.

GUS  
 I'll be alright... But I think  
 that's all the boxing I can watch  
 tonight. Please excuse me.

He rises quickly and leaves without waiting for goodbyes.

SARAH  
 (quietly, to Neil)  
 Perhaps we should leave too... Come  
 on, kids.

ANNIE/TOMMY  
 Aww, Ma!

COMMENTATOR 1 (O.S.)  
Cassius Clay wins by decision!

NEIL  
Come on, fights over.

Jimmy looks at his ma.

JIMMY  
Was it something I said, Ma?

NORA  
No... More like something I said.

EVELYN  
I'm so sorry, everyone.

NORA  
There's nothing to apologise for.

**INT. STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS**

Gus climbs slowly, coughing into his handkerchief. Evelyn watches from below, tears in her eyes.

A bedroom door clicks shut upstairs. Evelyn's tears spill.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

JIMMY  
At the time, I thought asking our Coach Gus about becoming a champion made him sad. But it was something much worse.

MIKEY  
What was it?

JIMMY  
Well, being ten, I didn't really understand everything an adult said... so I left it at that, mostly forgetting about it until later that night.

MIKEY  
What happened?

Jimmy looks down at the FRAMED PHOTO, his eyes welling.

ANNIE  
Jimmy, I think that's time.

JIMMY  
I think Annie's right, Mikey.

MIKEY  
(shaking his head)  
No-please. I want to hear the rest.  
I've got nowhere else to be...

**INT. JIMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1960**

Jimmy shadowboxes in front of his dresser mirror.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
That night, after watching Cassius  
Clay, I was too excited to sleep.  
So I shadowboxed everything I'd  
learnt. At one point, I even  
started mimicking him.

Jimmy loosens up, breaking his tight structure. He dances  
smoothly... drops his hands... snaps out fast jabs.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
But like I said, he left my ma and  
me alone, for a short time, and  
things were good... That night,  
though, he was drunker than usual.  
And that meant... meaner too.

HOWARD (O.S.)  
(slurring)  
I KNOW YOU WERE AT HIS HOUSE!

Jimmy freezes.

HOWARD (O.S.)  
WHAT WERE YA DOING THERE?

He edges to the door, slowly reaching for the handle.

HOWARD (O.S.)  
ANSWER ME!

He cracks the door open.

NORA (O.S.)  
I told you we were all invited to  
dinner!

HOWARD (O.S.)  
LIAR! I WASN'T INVITED!

**INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

Jimmy peeks out. He creeps towards the shouting.

HOWARD (O.S.)  
HE'S NOTHING BUT A CHEATER!

He stops just shy of the living room doorway.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

BANG! Howard slams an empty whisky bottle on the buffet. He guzzles his drink.

Jimmy's head peeks in.

HOWARD  
AND SO ARE YOU!

SMASH! He slaps Nora with his whisky glass. It shatters against her face.

Jimmy's eyes widen.

JIMMY  
NO!

Nora hits the floor, her body twitching.

Jimmy runs to her, tears already falling.

Howard stands over her, full of contempt.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
GET AWAY FROM HER!

HOWARD  
What did you say!

He grabs Jimmy by the scruff and slams him down.

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
Who do you think you are!

Jimmy scrambles through the glass, reaching his ma. He hunches over her, shielding her with trembling arms.

JIMMY  
Ma! Ma, wake up.

HOWARD  
Get away from her, ya idiot!

JIMMY

Don't you hit my ma anymore! You hear me!

Howard leans into Jimmy's face, eyes blazing.

HOWARD

You back talking me? You think that has-been coach gave you the balls to talk back?

JIMMY

I'm warning you. You leave my ma alone!

HOWARD

Warning!

Howard straightens, pointing a trembling finger.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

It was you. You sent him here!

Jimmy clings to his ma, sobbing.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You sent that old man to threaten me, didn't ya!

JIMMY

I didn't send him! You did! Every time you gave me a bruise. And now look at my ma.

HOWARD

You listen here. I do what I want in my house. I paid for it coming back a ruined man!

JIMMY

No! My ma did. She's been paying ever since you came back! You drink, you yell, you hit us. You're not a man, and you're no pa to me!

Howard's lips curl back, eyes blazing.

HOWARD

You little bastard!

He grabs Jimmy and hurls him against the wall. He storms forward, hand raised.

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
You're nothing!

Jimmy's hands go up tight.

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
And you'll never be anything!

Howard swings.

JIMMY  
NO!

Jimmy weaves. BAM! BAM! BAM! brutal body hooks hammer Howard's liver.

Howard grunts through clenched teeth and crumples to his knees.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Get out of my ma's house!

Howard clutches his side, gasping.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
GET OUT!

Jimmy bolts to his ma, cradling her limp body.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Ma... Ma, wake up... please...

His tears fall, pressing his head against hers.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
I love you, Ma.

OVER BLACK

JIMMY (V.O.)  
That night, my ma died in my arms.

**EXT. LAKESIDE - CEMETERY - DAY**

By an open casket, Annie clutches Jimmy. Gus and Evelyn, with Tommy and his parents, stand quietly behind.

Jimmy leans over his ma, sobbing against her shoulder. She lies surrounded by flower petals, Teddy tucked close to her heart.

JIMMY  
Goodbye, Ma.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Tears glisten on Jimmy's cheeks...

JIMMY

I buried my ma with Teddy... so she knew I would always be close to her.

Annie wraps her arm around him, the same way she did at the funeral.

MIKEY

That's really awful... I'm sorry about your ma... At least you got some time with her, I guess.

A tear falls onto the FRAMED PHOTO. Jimmy hugs it tight...

JIMMY

You know, Annie's right... maybe I shouldn't be telling you all this. But I've never really treated kids like kids... always more like adults, whether I should or not.

Jimmy stares at the PHOTO OF A BOXER raising Jimmy's glove in the ring...

JIMMY (CONT'D)

But I saw you getting bullied, and I felt like you needed to know, no matter how bad things get, there's always someone willing to help...

MIKEY

Thanks, Jimmy. I guess some kids don't mind being treated like adults... and can't wait to be one.

JIMMY

Don't be in a hurry to grow up, son. I went through things no kid should ever have to. For a long time, I was scared I'd turn into that man. I was ten... but I didn't get to be ten... I was lucky I had our Coach Gus to help me...

**EXT. GUS'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - MORNING - 1960**

A 1950 MERCURY MONARCH WAGON pulls up next to Evelyn. There's a slight scratch on the rear chrome bumper.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 My ma knew that one day something  
 bad was going to happen.

Evelyn opens the passenger door. Jimmy steps out, trembling.  
 He bursts into tears. She pulls him into a protective hug.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 So she made arrangements with our  
 Coach Gus to make sure I was looked  
 after.

OVER BLACK

GUS (O.S.)  
 Waiting on hope can cost you  
 everything. By the time it  
 changes... it may be too late.

NORA (O.S.)  
 I know... That's why I need your  
 help, Gus.

**INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - LATE AFTERNOON - WEEKS EARLIER**

Gus and Nora sit on opposite boxing stools.

NORA  
 You mean everything to Jimmy. He  
 talks about you all the time.

GUS  
 He means a lot to me too.

NORA  
 I'm sorry... but I don't have  
 anyone else I can ask.

GUS  
 What can I help you with?

NORA  
 I... I need to know that if  
 something happens to me, Jimmy will  
 be looked after.

GUS  
 Do you think something is going to  
 happen to you?

NORA  
 Like I said, he's a ticking time  
 bomb.

(MORE)

NORA (CONT'D)

I need to know you'll be there for Jimmy, to keep him safe. You're like a father to him.

GUS

Well, I think of Jimmy like a son...

Gus's eyes tear up... He looks away, wiping them.

NORA

Are you alright, Gus?

GUS

It's nothing... I promise you, Nora, I'll keep Jimmy safe and he'll grow up to keep being the good person he already is.

Nora's eyes well.

NORA

Thank you, Gus.

**INT. GUS'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY**

Jimmy sits on the edge of a bed, tears welling, hugging the FRAMED PHOTO to his chest. A few soft toys rest against his pillows.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Our Coach Gus knew someone in the government, and made arrangements for me to be adopted.

At the doorway, Gus and Evelyn appear...

GUS

If you'd like, son, this can be your room. You can live here with us... if you want to.

Jimmy nods, clutching the FRAMED PHOTO tighter.

JIMMY

I'd like to. Thank you, Coach Gus.  
Thank you, Evelyn.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. GUS'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY - 1965**

Jimmy, now 15, sits on the edge of his bed, tears breaking, still hugging the FRAMED PHOTO. More soft toys join the old ones, lined neatly across his pillows.

JIMMY (V.O.)

I soon changed my name to my ma's maiden name, Duncan. And even though a few years had passed, I never got over what happened to her... and I never forgot her.

Gus and Evelyn enter, older now. Gus's face is paler, worn. They sit on either side of Jimmy.

JIMMY

What if... what if I turn out like him?

GUS

From what I've seen, that's not going to happen.

EVELYN

You're a good boy, Jimmy. A good young man. Your ma raised you right.

GUS

No matter what we go through, I believe we choose the kind of person we become. And I know what kind of person you are. We all do. You're not him, son, believe me.

EVELYN

Your ma would be proud of you. Just like we are.

Evelyn hugs Jimmy tight...

JIMMY (V.O.)

Our Coach Gus and Evelyn were always there for me. They were kind and caring parents and I loved them as much as I loved my ma.

**EXT. LAKESIDE PIER - AFTERNOON**

Jimmy bolts down the pier and cannonballs into the lake, splashing Annie and Tommy.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 They lived by the lakeside, so our  
 Coach Gus would cook a barbeque  
 while we all swam.

The kids squeal and splash each other. Jimmy wipes his eyes and spots Gus at the barbeque, smiling. They wave at each other.

Gus's smile falters, coughing hard into his arm. Evelyn hurries from the picnic table to his side, rubbing his back.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 Not that he would admit it, but our  
 Coach Gus's cough was getting  
 worse.

EVELYN  
 Maybe it's time to go back to the  
 doctor's?

Gus fumbles out his handkerchief, wiping his mouth.

GUS  
 I've had this for twenty years,  
 Love. You know there's nothing they  
 can do about it.

EVELYN  
 It's worse now... and Jimmy sees it  
 too.

Gus looks back at Jimmy. Jimmy stares, worried.

GUS  
 I know he does. He's a smart kid...  
 always has been.

Another cough shakes him. Evelyn steadies him.

GUS (CONT'D)  
 That war really did a number on  
 me... but we both know I'm not  
 going to get better.

**INT. GUS'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING - 1966**

Gus sits at the kitchen table, reading a newspaper. The front page reads: "GOVERNMENT ISSUES DRAFT NOTICES!"

EVELYN (O.S.)  
 Thank you.

A door closes.

GUS  
Who was that, Love?

Evelyn enters. Her eyes glisten. She doesn't answer.

Gus lowers his paper, taking in her silence, and the letter trembling in her hand.

EVELYN  
It says they want to take Jimmy  
away from us.

She breaks down, sobbing. Gus rises fast, pulling her into his chest.

GUS  
No... no one's taking Jimmy away.

He eases the letter from her hand, reading. His eyes narrow.

GUS (CONT'D)  
That's not happening to us again.

**INT. LIVING ROOM - FIREPLACE - LATER**

Gus holds a FRAMED PHOTO OF TWO MEN in military uniforms, his eyes welling.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
They never talked about it... but  
they lost their son a long time  
ago.

Jimmy enters and stands quietly beside Gus.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
And even though they loved kids,  
they never had another.

Gus gives Jimmy a small, bittersweet smile. He sets the photo back on the mantle, a tear rolling down his cheek, and pulls Jimmy into a tight hug.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BOXING RING - AFTERNOON**

Jimmy slips a cross, weaves a hook, and fires a cross-hook-cross. Tommy hits the ropes.

Gus steps between them, hands raised.

GUS  
TIME! Good work!

Jimmy and Tommy pull off their headgear and shake gloves.

GUS (CONT'D)

It's time to take the next step,  
son.

JIMMY

Okay then.

**INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT**

The sports hall is old, grotty, smokey. Food wrappers and crushed cans line the feet of a couple hundred spectators.

The elevated boxing ring is worn. Ropes frayed. Canvas stained with blood.

Jimmy, red gloves, singlet, and trunks, waits with Gus, the RING ANNOUNCER and the REFEREE, center ring.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Everything Coach Gus taught me led  
to the next step in my life.

Jimmy glances back at his corner. Annie and Tommy stare up at him, eyes wide. Annie smiles, he smiles back.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Coach Gus said I was ready for  
amateur boxing.

He spots TWO MEN IN SUITS, clipboards in hand, ringside, out of place among the rowdy spectators.

JIMMY (V.O.)

I was excited, and I wasn't nervous  
either.

Jimmy turns back. His FIRST OPPONENT, 21, blue gloves, singlet, and trunks, glares down at him. Jimmy stays calm, almost bored.

JIMMY (V.O.)

At my first match, the ring  
announcer thought I looked like a  
kid. So he introduced me as "Jimmy  
'The Kid' Duncan." And since then,  
it stuck.

RING ANNOUNCER

How old are you, kid? Twelve?

JIMMY

(confused)

No sir. I'm sixteen--

RING ANNOUNCER  
 --Sixteen! You look like a kid,  
 kid.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

JIMMY  
 Like I said, I wasn't nervous. But  
 my opponents were. They tried to  
 hide it behind a mean glare and  
 intimidate me... I recognised that  
 from my past.

**INT. SPORTS HALLS - BOXING RING - MULTIPLE NIGHTS - 1966**

MONTAGE: GLARING OPPONENTS

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 But I didn't glare back.

Jimmy's SECOND OPPONENT glares at him. Jimmy remains calm,  
 placid.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 I didn't need to. It wasn't  
 personal.

His THIRD OPPONENT tries the same. Jimmy looks almost bored.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

JIMMY  
 Our Coach Gus told me, "Win or  
 lose, how you act before, during,  
 and after a fight is the type of  
 sportsman you'll be."

OVER BLACK

The crowd cheers!

REFEREE (O.S.)  
 ...NINE!...TEN! You're out!

The crowd roars!

**INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1966**

Gus, Annie and Tommy rush into the ring, cheering, hugging  
 Jimmy all at once, jumping up and down.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 So after every fight, I made sure  
 my opponent was alright, win or  
 lose.

**INT. SPORTS HALLS - BOXING RING - MULTIPLE NIGHTS**

MONTAGE: JIMMY'S OPPONENTS

Jimmy helps his First Opponent off the canvas and shakes his hand.

The two men in suits jot down notes.

Jimmy helps his Second Opponent up and pats him on the shoulder.

The two men in suits nod at each other.

Helping his Third Opponent up, Jimmy sees Gus ducking under the ropes. Gus turns, a cough erupting into his arm, blood staining his red plaid shirt.

Annie and Tommy exchange worried looks.

Jimmy hurries to his side, patting his back...

GUS  
 I'll be alright, son.

He fumbles for his handkerchief, wiping his mouth.

GUS (CONT'D)  
 It's nothing.

**INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1967**

Jimmy circles his frustrated OPPONENT, eyes spotting Gus in his corner, coughing hard.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 But it wasn't nothing.

Jimmy weaves a near-miss hook, glancing at Gus, handkerchief pressed to his mouth, coughing harder.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 And neither was the blood he'd  
 cough up.

He keeps moving, focus split between the fight and Gus coughing uncontrollably, blood soaking his handkerchief.

Annie and Tommy stand close to Gus, hands on his shoulders, worry on their faces.

Jimmy keeps his opponent out of reach, eyes on Gus, staggering away in a coughing fit.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
It got so bad he couldn't even stay  
in my corner for a whole fight.

Jimmy slips and weaves, catching Annie's worried gaze. SMASH! his cross drops his opponent cold.

Jimmy rushes to the ropes, scanning the roaring crowd. He can't find Gus.

**INT. SPORTS HALL - CHANGE ROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT**

Jimmy shadowboxes a burst of jab-crosses.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Once, he couldn't even make it out  
of the bathroom.

A coughing fit cuts through the room. Annie and Tommy glance at Jimmy. The sound grows louder from the bathroom.

Jimmy rattles the bathroom door handle. It's locked.

JIMMY  
Coach Gus, are you alright?

Gus lets out a phlegmy, throat-clearing cough...

GUS (O.S.)  
Annie, Tommy, you'll have to take  
Jimmy out... Go, they're waiting...

TOMMY  
Come on Jimmy... we'd better get  
you out there.

Annie and Tommy guide Jimmy towards the door.

Gus coughs louder. Jimmy glances back, frowning with worry.

GUS (O.S.)  
I'll be alright, kid... It's  
nothing.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy stares at a PHOTO OF GUS raising 18-year-old Jimmy's glove in the ring.

JIMMY

I fought in the amateurs for two years. In my last fight, even sick, our Coach Gus wasn't going to miss it. He never left my corner.

**INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1968**

Gus grips the ropes, handkerchief at his mouth, stifling a nagging cough, eyes fixed on Jimmy.

JIMMY (V.O.)

He looked nervous. Like everything hinged on this one fight.

Jimmy slips and weaves, a blur of flawless defence, a dozen punches miss.

JIMMY (V.O.)

But all I felt was relief. He was still there.

SMASH! Jimmy's cross lands flush on his OPPONENT's temple. CRASH! he hits the canvas, out cold.

The crowd erupts. Gus roars.

The two men in suits clap stiffly, out of step with the frenzy.

**INT. CHANGE ROOM - LATER**

Gus pulls Jimmy into a big hug, beaming with pride.

GUS

You did it, son! I knew you could.

Jimmy notices the two men in suits standing in the doorway.

JIMMY (V.O.)

After some fights, our Coach Gus would talk to these two men.

They step inside.

JIMMY (V.O.)

I'd see them ringside, quiet, clipboards in hand, never cheering. Always dressed in suits.

They shake Gus's hand.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Turns out they were Olympic  
Officials.

HEAD OFFICIAL  
Congratulations, son, you just  
qualified for the 1968 Mexico City  
Olympics.

Gus, Annie and Tommy erupt in cheers, hugging Jimmy. His  
eyes begin to well.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I couldn't believe it... I teared  
up, thinking how proud my ma  
would've been.

**INT. GUS'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING - DAYS LATER**

Gus and Evelyn stare at the letter on the kitchen table.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Now our Coach Gus wasn't just  
nervous about me getting into the  
Olympics that night.

Gus picks up the letter, eyes narrowing.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
He knew the horrors waiting.

Stamped in bold red: "GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL DRAFT NOTICE."

JIMMY (V.O.)  
If I didn't make it in, both Tommy  
and I would've been drafted into  
the Vietnam War.

Gus and Evelyn exchange a relieved smile. Gus rips the  
letter into pieces, smiling wide.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy and Annie stare at the picture wall, their eyes  
welling.

JIMMY  
But that war went on too long...  
and lots of boys were eventually  
drafted... no matter what.

Jimmy closes his eyes, a tear escaping...

JIMMY (O.S.)  
TOMMY! NO!

BANG! a pistol fires a single shot.

Jimmy flinches, opening his eyes to a photo of himself, aged 19, and Tommy, 18, in their army uniforms... He shakes his head, stunned.

JIMMY  
But that's a different story.

Annie's tears fall.

**EXT. GUS'S HOUSE - NIGHT - 1968**

Gus waits by an open meter box, hand on a switch... He flips it up.

MATCH CUT TO:

**EXT. LAKESIDE - SAME TIME**

Long-range spotlights shine from the house.

Jimmy, eyes covered, waits next to Evelyn, Annie and Tommy.

EVERYONE  
SURPRISE!

Jimmy opens his eyes. They widen in excitement.

JIMMY  
Oh wow! I can't believe it!

A long table, wrapped with a "CONGRATULATIONS JIMMY!" banner, is surrounded by Annie and Tommy's parents and fellow boxers, all cheering and clapping.

At its center, a large cake shaped like a boxing ring flickers, sparklers for corners, red ribbons for ropes. "Jimmy 'The Kid' Duncan" gleams in red and silver icing under the sparks. Food, drinks and presents crowd the table.

Everyone pats Jimmy on the back and shakes his hand.

Annie and Tommy hug their parents.

Gus and Evelyn wrap their arms around each other.

Jimmy gives them both one big, grateful hug.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Thank you, Coach Gus and Evelyn.

EVELYN

You're welcome, Jimmy. You deserve it... and we've got another surprise for you.

Gus and Evelyn guide Jimmy towards the table.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Your ma had a lot to do with this present.

JIMMY

My ma?

EVELYN

You'll see, Jimmy. Go on, open it.

Everyone gathers around the table watching Jimmy rip the wrapping paper. He pauses, staring in silence.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

She wanted you to have this when you were older.

Jimmy carefully unfolds a red silk robe. He stares at it, eyes welling, a sad smile forming.

GUS

She knew you'd go far, son.

Jimmy turns the robe around for everyone to see. His hand-sewn name, "Jimmy 'The Kid' Duncan," sparkles in silver thread. Everyone cheers and claps.

FLASH! Gus snaps a photo.

MATCH CUT TO:

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

The same photo hangs framed on the wall.

Jimmy smiles at it...

JIMMY

I was told my ma had hand-sewn my first name on it. Later on, Evelyn added "'The Kid' Duncan." Now, I'd say that topped the night, but it just kept getting better.

ANNIE

It sure did.

Annie smiles at Jimmy.

**EXT. LAKESIDE PIER - LATE NIGHT - 1968**

The full moon casts a bright glow over the pier. Gus and Evelyn dance slowly, hand in hand, gazing into each other's eyes.

**EXT. LAKESIDE - SAME TIME**

Jimmy and Annie watch... Jimmy's hand slowly brushes Annie's... their fingers softly touch... curling into one. They smile, still watching Gus and Evelyn swaying.

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. LAKESIDE PIER - LATER**

Jimmy and Annie sway gently, hand in hand, gazing into each other's eyes. Jimmy brushes a strand of hair from Annie's face. Slowly, they lean in, eyes closing, their lips meeting softly, sharing their first kiss under the full moon.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy and Annie break their kiss. Mikey cringes...

JIMMY

Now with the Olympics close, our Coach Gus had arranged for Annie and Tommy to be in my corner. I was so happy their parents said yes.

**INT. HIGH SECURITY PRISON - VISITOR ROOM - AFTERNOON - 1968**

Seated visitors fill a row of grotty cubicles, talking to inmates on phones.

Jimmy holds a phone to his ear, his blank reflection staring back at him in the dirty glass partition.

JIMMY (V.O.)

But before I left, I went and saw him in prison.

Jimmy's reflection vanishes as Howard steps into view. Gaunt and grey, his face marked with bruises, he stares Jimmy down. Without breaking eye contact, he sits.

Jimmy holds the stare, unblinking, unyielding... Howard shifts slightly, uneasy, his eyes dropping. He clears his throat and picks up the phone...

HOWARD  
(swallowing)  
Well, you... you've grown.

Jimmy keeps his eyes fixed, unrelenting.

HOWARD (CONT'D)  
You're the last person I ever  
thought I'd see.

Jimmy exhales, steadying himself.

JIMMY  
I just came to tell you that I made  
something of myself. That I learnt  
everything I was taught, the best I  
could, despite your abuse.

HOWARD  
Is that so?

JIMMY  
And that I qualified for the  
Olympics in boxing.

HOWARD  
Really... So that's why you're  
here. To gloat?

JIMMY  
I don't know why I'm really here,  
but it's not to gloat. You're lucky  
this glass is between us after what  
you did to my ma. You can imagine  
how hard I can hit now.

HOWARD  
They're big words talking back to  
your pa.

JIMMY  
You never were my pa. You never  
wanted to be...

HOWARD  
You know, I can't even remember you  
ever calling me pa.

JIMMY  
That's because you never deserved  
to be called that.

HOWARD

No... maybe not... But you think that coach does? You think you're both better than me? Because no matter how good you think you turned out, with threatening words like that, deep down, you know, you're exactly like--

JIMMY

--I'm nothing like you. I grew up afraid I'd turn into you... but I'm not. Those words are all you know how to say, so I hope you rot in here. And as for that coach, he's been more of a real pa to me than you ever were.

HOWARD

Yeah? Real? More like a real cheater. Did he tell you that? Why do you think he's got no champions in that gym? He's a has-been. He wasn't even a real boxer... and he's a bum.

JIMMY

Like I said, I don't know why I'm really here...

Jimmy's eyes glisten.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

I know you saw bad things, but I don't know why you treated Ma and me the way you did, or why you didn't love us... I thought maybe once you stopped drinking you'd change, but deep down I knew you never could. You're not even sorry for what you did to my ma.

He stands, wiping his eyes.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

I guess... that's why I'm here... I had to be sure.

He hangs up the phone and leaves. He doesn't look back.

JIMMY (V.O.)

That was the last time I ever saw him.

Howard watches Jimmy go... A single tear falls.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. HIGH SECURITY PRISON - COMMON ROOM - AFTERNOON - WEEKS LATER**

Howard lies face down, eyes open.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
He died not long after.

A pool of black blood spreads around him. A CRUDE SHIV juts from his liver.

**INT. PLANE - DAY**

Jimmy and Annie squeeze into their cramped window seats, eyes wide with excitement.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Now we'd never been on a plane before, but we were finally off to Mexico.

Gus and Tommy take their seats behind them.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Everything had been arranged by the Olympics from our departure.

Annie takes Jimmy's hand and they share a smile.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
To our pickup at the airport.

**EXT. MEXICO CITY AIRPORT - ARRIVALS - EXIT DOORS - DAY**

Beside a run-down minibus, their Olympic driver, ENRICO, 45, sweats profusely, waving a hand-written sign that reads "JIMMY DUNICAN."

TOMMY  
Looks like you've been spelling your name wrong this whole time, Jimmy Dunny-can.

JIMMY  
(laughing)  
Good one Tommy.

GUS  
Nice toilet humour, Tommy.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
To our accommodation at the Olympic  
village.

**INT. OLYMPIC VILLAGE APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON**

The front door swings open. Jimmy rushes in, grinning.

JIMMY  
Wow!

Annie and Tommy follow, dragging their luggage. Annie points to a sagging lounge.

ANNIE  
There's your bed, Tommy.

TOMMY  
Ha ha, Annie. Very funny.

Gus enters with his suitcase, pointing at the doorways.

GUS  
There should be enough rooms. If  
not, the lounge is yours, Tommy.

TOMMY  
Really?

JIMMY  
Yeah, looks comfy.

They scatter into the adjoining rooms.

Tommy opens the last door... a tiny bathroom.

TOMMY  
Great. I'll take the lounge.

Laughter bursts out from the other rooms.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
To our state-of-the-art training  
areas.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING GYM - EARLY MORNING**

A large open floor surrounds an elevated boxing ring at the gym's center. Heavy bags, speed bags, double-end bags, racks of medicine balls, and skip ropes line the walls.

TRAINING MONTAGE:

Jimmy in his official red headgear, gloves, singlet, trunks, and boots, jumps rope.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
We got there every day before  
anyone else.

He skips from boxer step, to skier, to crisscrosses, smooth and sharp.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
All the fights were three... three-  
minute rounds.

Teams from other countries start to enter, sneaking glances.

Jimmy drills the mitts with Gus. His aggressive defence rattles Gus, off-balancing him. Jimmy eases off.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
So I trained each station for that  
amount of time.

Jimmy hammers the speed bag with perfect rhythm. Gus watches, catching his breath.

More teams arrive, sneaking longer glances.

Annie slams a medicine ball into Jimmy's abs. He fires it back fast.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I'd trained fifteen rounds and  
more, no problem.

Jimmy attacks the double-end bag with relentless combos and smooth footwork.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
And at two thousand feet above sea  
level...

Jimmy spars with Tommy, sharp defence, precise counters, power controlled.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
...our Coach Gus had me train in  
full gear, so I'd acclimatize to  
the conditions.

**EXT. OLYMPIC JOGGING TRACK - MORNING**

Jimmy, in full gear, jogs at a sprinting pace.

He sidesteps ATHLETES warming up and passes JOGGERS, giving him curious stares.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 Soon, the other boxers caught on.

**EXT. OLYMPIC JOGGING TRACK - NEXT MORNING**

A group of BOXERS, in full gear, struggle to keep up with Jimmy's pace.

Athletes warming up and jogging give them curious stares, shaking their heads in disbelief.

Jimmy turns and jogs backwards, shadowboxing as he goes. The others still can't catch up.

**EXT. OLYMPIC STADIUM - OPENING CEREMONY - NIGHT**

Towering floodlights blaze down on a stadium packed with cheering spectators.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 I remember the opening ceremony,  
 marching out and waving proudly. I  
 couldn't believe it.

A river of ATHLETES and FLAG-BEARERS circle the track, flags swinging high. The crowd roars with thunderous applause.

Among them, Jimmy marches, wide-eyed, waving fast. He drifts to the outside lane, overtaking athletes from other nations.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 I'd never seen so many people in my  
 life, all cheering loud, but none  
 louder than my Annie.

ANNIE (O.S.)  
 JIMMY! OVER HERE!

Jimmy turns his head towards the stands, scanning.

ANNIE  
 (waving)  
 JIMMY! JIMMY OVER HERE!

Front row, Gus, Annie and Tommy wave wildly.

JIMMY  
 ANNIE!

Jimmy beams and breaks from the procession, sprinting over.

He hugs them all in a huddle. He kisses Annie and runs back to rejoin his team.

The athletes keep waving. Jimmy looks back, catching Gus's proud smile erupt into a coughing fit.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy looks at the PHOTO OF GUS raising Jimmy's glove in the ring.

JIMMY

The Olympics took care of everything, so we didn't have to worry. But I did... our Coach Gus was coughing worse than ever. I didn't think he'd be in my corner.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1968**

The boxing arena gleams, new and clean. Lights flash, cameras click. The capacity-filled crowd cheers.

Jimmy stands center ring with Gus and the REFEREE, facing OPPONENT ONE, 18, and his COACH.

JIMMY (V.O.)

But our Coach Gus was there in my corner.

Jimmy and Opponent One shake gloves, and return to their corners with their coaches.

JIMMY (V.O.)

So to win a gold medal, you just had to beat five opponents. If it went the distance, there's your fifteen rounds.

Gus faces Jimmy, fitting his mouthguard.

GUS

This may be the Olympics, son, but you've been in the ring hundreds of times, so in your mind, win or lose, treat it no different from any other match, okay?

JIMMY

Okay.

GUS

Good luck, son.

Gus hugs Jimmy and ducks under the ropes, rejoining Annie and Tommy in the corner.

The bell dings.

The two boxers meet center ring. Jimmy extends a glove, but Opponent One snaps a jab. Jimmy slips it clean. The crowd explodes.

He slips the cross. Weaves the hook. Pivots. SMASH! a cross flush to the temple. Opponent One hits the canvas, out cold.

Gus, Annie and Tommy erupt, arms in the air, cheering wildly. The arena shakes with thunderous cheers.

The referee waves off the match.

Gus rushes into the ring and scoops Jimmy up, hugging him tight. Annie and Tommy rush in, cheering, wrapping their arms around him. Gus proudly raises Jimmy's arm.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Boxing match two went pretty much the same way.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT**

Jimmy slips! THUD! a left hook to the ribs. CRACK! a left uppercut to the chin. OPPONENT TWO crashes to the canvas.

The referee waves off the match.

Gus, Annie and Tommy erupt with excitement.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Match three went just as quick, but with a few more punches thrown.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT**

Jimmy slips OPPONENT THREE'S constant jabs. He pivots. CRACK! a right uppercut to the body. SMASH! a right cross to the jaw. THUD! a left hook to the temple. Opponent Three spins into the ropes, arms hooking the top rope, his limp body barely upright.

The referee jumps between them and waves off the match.

Gus, Annie, Tommy and the crowd erupt, cheering wildly.

Jimmy and the referee unhook Opponent Three. They help him to his COACH and CORNERMAN, both nodding their thanks.

The crowd cheers even louder.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 Now my fourth opponent was  
 different.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT**

Center ring, Jimmy and OPPONENT FOUR shake gloves.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 He saw my boxing style earlier on.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - EARLIER MATCHES - NIGHT**

**MONTAGE: JIMMY'S FIRST THREE MATCHES**

SMASH! Jimmy's right cross lands flush. Opponent One drops. Jimmy spots Opponent Four and his coach, sitting still among the erupting crowd.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 I saw him and his coach in the  
 crowd each time.

THUD! Jimmy's left body hook drives hard into the ribs. CRACK! his left uppercut drops Opponent Two cold.

Again, Jimmy spots Opponent Four and his coach, same seats, sitting still.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 They stood out because they just  
 sat there, studying me.

Jimmy slips Opponent Three's jabs. Behind him, Opponent Four and his coach remain motionless.

With each slip, Jimmy and Opponent Four lock eyes.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 Their plan was a full-on offence.

MATCH CUT TO:

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT**

Slipping and weaving, Jimmy moves fast and sharp. Every punch misses. He cuts off the ring with sharp, pressuring jabs, smothering Opponent Four, driving him back.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 But I used what our Coach Gus  
 taught me.

A double jab. SMASH! a cross to the chin. THUD! a hook to the temple. CRASH! Opponent Four hits the canvas, out cold.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Aggressive defence.

The crowd erupts. Gus, Annie and Tommy rush in, cheering, embracing Jimmy. Gus and Tommy hoist him onto their shoulders.

The referee drops beside Opponent Four, shaking him, tapping his face. His eyelids flicker, groggy, dazed, alive.

Jimmy slides down, extends a hand. Opponent Four stares... he takes it. Jimmy pulls him up and hugs him.

The crowd explodes!

THE CROWD  
JIMMY THE KID! JIMMY THE KID! JIMMY  
THE KID!

Jimmy stares out at the sea of fans.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I couldn't believe it. I was in the  
Gold Medal Match... and the crowd  
was chanting my name.

He soaks it in, smiling, waving. The arena goes wild.

Gus raises Jimmy's glove high.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

The PHOTO OF GUS raising Jimmy's glove in the ring.

JIMMY  
Our Coach Gus was so proud.

**INT. OLYMPIC RECREATIONAL HALL - NIGHT - 1968**

On a small elevated stage, JAMES BROWN, 35, electrifies the room singing "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag." His band blasts funk while two glamorous dancers shake beside him.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
That night everyone celebrated with  
a party.

In the crowd, Gus, Jimmy, Annie and Tommy watch wide-eyed.

JIMMY (V.O.)

They had a musician called James Brown. And my word, did he have his own style. He sang about a brand new bag, but I never saw it.

Jimmy starts to nod with the rhythm.

GUS

Music sure has changed.

Gus frowns, shaking his head.

GUS (CONT'D)

Especially dancing.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy stares at a photo of himself with the 11 boxing champions of 1968, posing in front of the stage with James Brown singing in the background.

JIMMY

That night, I met the other boxers from all over the world, speaking every language you could imagine. But even the English-speaking ones were sometimes hard to understand.

**INT. OLYMPIC RECREATIONAL HALL - NIGHT - 1968**

James continues singing in the background.

JIMMY (V.O.)

I never got the pronunciation right, but there was Francisco from Venezuela.

FRANCISCO

(in Venezuelan)

Salve.

FRANCISCO, 23, waves. Jimmy, Gus, Annie and Tommy wave back, blank-faced.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Jerzy from Poland. Now, he not only won gold that year but gold at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics too.

JERZY

(in Polish)

Witam, jak się masz?

JERZY, 28, smiles. He stares at their blank expressions.

JERZY (CONT'D)  
Ello, how a you?

JIMMY  
Oh, hello. I'm good... you know, I  
saw your 1964 win on the TV.

They nod, smiling.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
There was Manfred from East  
Germany.

MANFRED  
(in German)  
Guten Tag.

MANFRED, 25, extends his hand, Jimmy shakes it. Gus grimaces  
and turns away, grabbing a glass of wine from a passing  
waiter.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Ricardo and Antonio from Mexico.

RICARDO/ANTONIO  
(in Spanish)  
Hola, Jimmy.

RICARDO, 21, and ANTONIO, 21, shake Jimmy's hand.

JIMMY  
Hola.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
There was Boris, Danas and Valerian  
from the Soviet Union.

BORIS/DANAS/VALERIAN  
(in Russian)  
Privet.

BORIS, 30, DANAS, 29 and VALERIAN, 22, nod and smile.

Gus leans towards Jimmy and Annie.

GUS  
(whispering)  
Did they just call me a pervert?

ANNIE  
I don't think so, Coach Gus.

TOMMY  
 (whispers to Jimmy)  
 Probably.

Jimmy and Tommy snort a laugh.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 Now Chris was from England, but we  
 didn't understand a word he said.

CHRIS  
 (in Cockney English)  
 Allo, alright there mate. Blimey,  
 that's a ding dong punch ya got  
 there, dustbin lid. Well ya ave to  
 excuse me, I ave to scapa flow bog.

CHRIS, 24, rushes towards the bathroom.

GUS  
 What the hell did he just say?

TOMMY  
 I think he called Jimmy a dustbin  
 lid. What does that mean?

GUS  
 I don't know, Tommy. I don't even  
 know if he was speaking English.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 It was Cockney English, and dustbin  
 lid meant "kid." I don't know why,  
 but it fit my nickname.

GUS  
 I couldn't understand a word.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
 And that left George and Ronnie  
 from the USA.

GEORGE  
 Man, you got one helluva punch,  
 kid. Straight dynamite!

GEORGE, 19, towers over Jimmy and pats him on the shoulder,  
 grinning.

RONNIE  
 That's a bang I ain't looking to  
 get close to.

RONNIE, 20, jokingly raises his hands, keeping away from Jimmy's fists.

GEORGE  
Good luck, kid.

**EXT. TIATILOLCO PLAZA - WEEKS AGO - DAY**

Hundreds of student protesters flood the street. Among them, many march with red balloons held high.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I didn't see it firsthand, but the 1968 Olympics were quite political. Even before they began, students were protesting for democracy, freedom, and basic rights.

Army trucks block the plaza. SOLDIERS stand ready. The students march on.

STUDENT PROTESTERS  
(in Spanish)  
NO QUEREMOS OLIMPIADAS!

JIMMY (V.O.)  
They didn't want the Olympics... Especially when people were starving, and getting shot for speaking out.

STUDENT PROTESTERS  
(in Spanish)  
QUEREMOS REVOLUCIÓN!

JIMMY (V.O.)  
They wanted a revolution.

The soldiers raise their rifles. The protesters freeze.

One girl gasps, her balloon slips from her hand, soaring into the sky...

BANG! it bursts. From below, gunfire erupts. Screams deafen. Gunfire roars...

The screams go silent... the gunfire stops...

The clear sky fills with balloons. Smoke follows. The sky darkens.

**EXT. OLYMPIC JOGGING TRACK - MORNING OF THE LAST DAY**

Jimmy jogs alone.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Some athletes protested in their  
own way.

A newspaper blows across the track. It sticks to Jimmy's leg. He stops, picks it up, and looks at the front page.

TOMMIE SMITH, 24, and JOHN CARLOS, 23, fists raised, stare back at him. The headline reads: "THE SALUTE."

JIMMY (V.O.)  
That salute became famous.

Jimmy's eyes glisten. He stares at a smaller headline:  
"BOXING COACH AND WIFE PASS AWAY IN HOSPITAL."

He closes his eyes. A tear falls.

**INT. OLYMPIC APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

A small TV casts a dim glow across the room. A Spanish soap opera flickers in black and white.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
But like I said, I didn't see that.  
I had other things on my mind,  
especially the night before my Gold  
Medal Match.

Jimmy quietly steps past Tommy, asleep on the lounge. He stops outside Gus's door and presses his ear to it.

GUS (O.S.)  
(mumbling)  
Cheater... Cheater.

Jimmy slowly eases the door open a crack.

JIMMY  
Coach Gus?

The bedroom light spills out.

**INT. GUS'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

The door creaks open a little more. Jimmy peeks inside. He watches Gus turn his head side to side.

GUS  
You're a cheater!

Gus coughs himself awake, gasping for air.

JIMMY  
Coach Gus!

Jimmy rushes to his side.

Gus turns his head away, coughing hard. Blood stains the pillow.

He pats his chest with one hand and holds Jimmy back with the other.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
Coach?

Gus sits upright, shielding the pillow from Jimmy.

GUS  
I'll be alright.

JIMMY  
I don't think you're alright. You always say that, but your coughing is getting worse.

GUS  
No, no... must've gulped some cold air while I was snoring.

JIMMY  
And what about that blood?

GUS  
It's nothing, son.

JIMMY  
It doesn't look like nothing to me. And it's not the first time... I'm really worried about you.

GUS  
Don't worry about me. You've got a big day tomorrow. Focus on that, not some old man, okay?

Jimmy lets out a frustrated breath.

JIMMY  
Well, I think you should see the doctor at least.

GUS

No! No, there's no need for that. He'll send me to the hospital, run a bunch of tests, and I'll end up missing your match, stuck in some bed with a gown on. I'd never forgive myself. I'd have to die to miss it.

JIMMY

Well, I wouldn't forgive myself if you died because of me.

GUS

Look, I'm sorry, son. But no doctors, and definitely no hospitals. I've seen too many go in and never come out. I'll be alright. I'm alright. See? I'm better now.

Jimmy stares, unconvinced.

JIMMY (V.O.)

But he wasn't getting better. And he wasn't going to talk about his health either.

JIMMY

You weren't snoring. You were talking in your sleep, calling someone a cheater.

GUS

A cheater... Oh.

JIMMY

Was it a bad dream? Something that happened?

Gus rubs his eyes, red and wet.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

I used to have bad dreams after bad things happened to me too.

Jimmy offers him a handkerchief. Gus takes it.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

My ma would sleep beside me so I'd feel safe. Just knowing she was there, and safe, helped a lot.

GUS

I have those dreams too, son. But nothing like what you went through.

JIMMY

Yours sounded bad enough, so I'm not leaving until I know you're okay... Okay?

GUS

(smiling)

Okay then. You're right. It was bad enough. And it's been weighing on me since your surprise party.

JIMMY

Really? What is it?

Jimmy sits on the edge of the bed.

GUS

Although I never became a champion... I did box in the 1932 Olympics.

JIMMY

Really? Wow. You never told us.

GUS

I was too ashamed. I thought I could leave that part of my life behind. But seeing how far you've come... it all came back. And now these dreams... maybe it's time I talk about it.

OVER BLACK

Cheers swell, louder and louder.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING RING - MULTIPLE NIGHTS - 1932**

MONTAGE: GUS'S VICTORIES

GUS (V.O.)

I was the oldest boxer there at thirty years old.

THUD! Gus, 30, fit and focused, pounds OPPONENT ONE's liver with a hook, dropping him with a teeth-clenching grunt. The REFEREE waves off the match.

The crowd cheers. The referee raises Gus's hand.

GUS (V.O.)  
 Everyone thought I was too old.

SMASH! Gus's cross crushes OPPONENT TWO's nose. Blood pours down his face. The referee jumps between them, waving off the match.

The crowd cheers louder. The referee raises Gus's hand.

GUS (V.O.)  
 They thought I was past my prime.

THUD! Gus's left hook cracks OPPONENT THREE's ribs. CRACK! his left uppercut smashes the chin. CRASH! Opponent Three hits the canvas, out cold.

The crowd erupts. The referee raises Gus's hand.

GUS (V.O.)  
 Some even said I was a has-been...  
 and later, a bum.

BANG! BANG! Gus's jab-cross cracks OPPONENT FOUR's mouth, jolting his head and body back, crashing over the ropes, out of the ring. The referee waves off the match.

The crowd leaps to their feet, roaring.

GUS (V.O.)  
 But I'd won my first four matches  
 convincingly.

The referee raises Gus's hand.

GUS (V.O.)  
 I was excited and confident... and  
 I thought my corner was too.

**INT. GUS'S ROOM - NIGHT - 1968**

GUS  
 My last opponent was eighteen.  
 Young, fast... he hit harder than  
 anyone I'd ever fought. So hard, he  
 knocked out everyone with his right  
 cross.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING RING - MULTIPLE NIGHTS - 1932**

MONTAGE: OPPONENT FIVE'S KNOCKOUTS

SMASH! his right blue glove cracks the chin.

One by one, OPPONENTS ONE, TWO, THREE, and FOUR hit the canvas, limbs splayed, out cold.

Cheers deafen!

GUS (V.O.)  
And I kept away from it at all costs.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING CHANGE ROOM - NIGHT**

JACK, 60, a nub of cigar clenched between his teeth, finishes wrapping Gus's hands.

GUS (V.O.)  
I remember my coach switching my gloves at the last minute.

LOUIE, 50, Gus's cutman, hands Jack an old leather bag. They nod. Jack pulls out a new pair of red gloves.

GUS  
Are they new?

Jack shoves a glove on and starts lacing it up.

GUS (CONT'D)  
Coach?

Jack squints through his cigar smoke, tightening the glove.

JACK  
Your old gloves weren't up to scratch. Okay?

He forces the second glove on and starts lacing it tight.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Not by Olympic standards anyway.

GUS  
They feel heavier.

Jack yanks the lace tighter.

JACK  
No, they're fine.

He pulls out a SMALL CLOTH from his pocket and thoroughly wipes the gloves.

GUS  
(uncertain)  
What are you doing, Coach?

JACK

Look, you wanna ask questions or  
box? I got a lot... we've got a lot  
riding on this match. So don't  
worry about what I'm doing, okay?

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING RING - NIGHT**

The crowd cheers.

GUS (V.O.)

It was close in the first round. My  
opponent landed hard punches that  
threw me off balance.

Opponent Five lands a powerful hook. Gus stumbles sideways  
into the ropes. The crowd cheers louder.

GUS (V.O.)

But I'd come back.

Gus lands a jab-cross. Opponent Five stumbles back fast. The  
crowd roars.

GUS (V.O.)

A few times, he staggered like he  
didn't know where he was.

Gus chases, landing another jab-cross. Opponent Five hits  
the ropes hard, shaking his head, blinking furiously. The  
crowd screams in excitement.

GUS (V.O.)

Or could even see where I was.

Opponent Five rubs his swelling eyes. Gus steps in, readies  
his right arm. The bell dings, he stops.

**INT. GUS'S ROOM - NIGHT - 1968**

GUS

Funny, at the time I didn't know  
why. But by round two, my  
opponent's eyes were swollen to  
slits. I don't know how he could  
even see. But his punches were  
harder, angrier... and I couldn't  
land a thing that round.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1932**

Opponent Five's relentless punches land hard. Gus struggles  
to clinch him against the ropes.

The referee pulls them apart.

GUS (V.O.)  
It was the hardest fight I ever  
had... I was just hanging on.

Opponent Five continues his onslaught. Punch after punch lands, harder, angrier. The crowd goes wild.

Opponent Five feints a jab. SMASH! his cross bludgeons Gus's eye. Gus stumbles into his corner. Blood pours down his face. He blinks frantically, shaking his head.

JACK  
KEEP GOING! HIT HIM!

Opponent Five cocks his right hand. The bell dings. He locks eyes with Jack below, and cocks his hand again. The referee jumps between the boxers, pushing Opponent Five away. Jack and Louie rush into the ring.

JACK (CONT'D)  
GET HIM BACK TO HIS CORNER, REF!

Gus clasps his glove to the bleeding cut, wincing. He slumps on his stool.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Get ya hand off that eye!

Jack angrily grabs Gus's gloves, and furiously rubs them with the same SMALL CLOTH, shining them.

Louie soaks Gus's bloodied face with a dripping sponge. He presses a towel firmly against the cut.

LOUIE  
(looking back)  
Ref's coming.

Jack keeps rubbing the gloves. The referee tries to peek over Jack and Louie, both blocking him.

REFEREE  
Can he go on?

JACK  
GET LOST, REF! Do ya job and  
control that fighter!

LOUIE  
And don't ya ever come back here  
again!

Louie glares. The referee backs away to center ring.

JACK

Now you listen good. You clinch him  
in the corner and stick ya gloves  
into his eyes, then ya go to town  
on him. Ya hear?

Louie checks the cut. The blood slows.

Jack finishes polishing the gloves, puts the cloth in his  
pocket, and slaps Gus hard on the cheek.

JACK (CONT'D)

Ya hear me?

Gus barely nods. Jack ducks under the ropes.

Louie thickly packs the cut with vaseline, and slaps Gus's  
other cheek.

LOUIE

(pointing)

Make sure ya do it!

The bell dings.

GUS (V.O.)

Round three came, and I didn't like  
what my corner wanted me to do.

Gus and Opponent Five meet center ring.

GUS (V.O.)

So I started using what would later  
become my aggressive defence.

Opponent Five restarts his onslaught. Gus slips, weaves and  
moves, fast, smooth. Every punch misses.

GUS (V.O.)

And I made him pay.

SMASH! a hard cross blackens Opponent Five's eye. Gus  
pressures with an unrelenting barrage, slamming him into a  
corner post. The crowd goes wild.

GUS (V.O.)

But I was down a whole round... I  
had to knock him out.

Opponent Five curls into a tight ball, covering his face.

GUS (V.O.)  
Then... he got me good.

Opponent Five grunts. SMASH! his cross lands flush on Gus's chin. Gus's head jolts violently back. His body staggers center ring. The crowd erupts to their feet.

GUS (V.O.)  
It stunned me. I couldn't believe I was still standing. That was the punch that knocked everyone out.

Gus regains his balance, shaking his head, eyes fluttering.

GUS (V.O.)  
I was lucky... but I knew I couldn't take another punch.

Gus squints, confused.

**INT. GUS'S ROOM - NIGHT - 1968**

GUS  
But he didn't follow to finish me.

JIMMY  
What do you mean?

GUS  
He just stayed in the corner.

JIMMY  
Doing what?

GUS  
Well, what I call, chopping onions.

JIMMY  
Chopping onions? What, was he barbecuing?

GUS  
(smiles)  
No... Even though his eyes were swollen shut, he started pouring tears... But I couldn't believe what happened next.

JIMMY  
What?

GUS

He waved off the match. The ref jumped in and my corner came in cheering, lifting my gloves high.

JIMMY

Oh wow! That's great Coach Gus.

GUS

You'd think so. But I was disgusted. If I'd accepted it, I'd have thrown that medal in my coach's face and knocked him out.

JIMMY

Why?

GUS

I knew something was wrong... The new gloves, their weight, even the smell. Back in the change room, my coach rushed to get them off... but I didn't let him. I checked them right there.

JIMMY

What did you find?

GUS

They were weighted with metal plates stitched into the knuckles. And worse, my coach had peppered them. He made out he was cleaning them, but he was rubbing in a hot ointment. So every time they touched my opponent's eyes, they'd sting and swell... like he was chopping onions.

JIMMY

That's terrible.

GUS

I told the Olympic Committee right away. That night, no medals were awarded in any division.

Gus coughs hard. He steadies himself with a deep breath.

GUS (CONT'D)

There was an investigation. Turned out my coach and cutman owed money to some bad people. They didn't think I could win, so they cheated.

(MORE)

GUS (CONT'D)

The only decency my coach had was not asking me to take a dive, but he asked my opponent, who refused.

Gus coughs into his arm, gripping Jimmy's shoulder for support. He straightens up. His eyes well.

GUS (CONT'D)

I was cleared, but the damage was done. I was branded a cheat... and worse, a bum. I was so ashamed... After that, you really find out who's in your corner... and there weren't many.

JIMMY

If I was in your corner back then, I wouldn't have gone anywhere. I love you Coach Gus.

Gus pulls Jimmy into a hug, tears streaking down their faces.

GUS

I love you too, son.

Jimmy closes his eyes with a faint smile.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING CHANGE ROOM - NIGHT**

Jimmy blinks open his wet eyes. He eases out of Gus's embrace. Gus looks at him proudly.

Annie and Tommy stand close by.

GUS

Good luck, son.

He adjusts the collar on Jimmy's robe and ties the belt snug.

ANNIE/TOMMY

Good luck Jimmy.

Gus turns away, coughing into his arm.

JIMMY (V.O.)

After what he told me, I felt sorry for our Coach Gus.

A few drops of blood stain Gus's sleeve.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I just wanted to make him proud.

Gus wheezes, his breathing laboured.

JIMMY  
Coach, are you okay?

Gus erupts into a violent cough, dark blood soaking his sleeve. His eyes flicker and roll back. He collapses hard.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
PA!

Jimmy rushes down, tilting Gus's head to the side.

ANNIE  
Get a doctor!

Tommy bolts out of the room.

JIMMY  
Just breathe, slow and steady.  
Help!

Gus continues coughing violently. Jimmy holds him upright against his chest.

Annie holds a towel to Gus's mouth, dark blood quickly saturates it.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
HELP! WE NEED A DOCTOR!

Tommy bursts back in with TWO MEDICS.

MEDIC  
Make room!

Jimmy doesn't move, keeping Gus upright. Annie and Tommy stand behind him.

An OLYMPIC OFFICIAL, 54, in a suit, walks in slowly, stopping at the doorway. Silent.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

JIMMY  
I wasn't about to leave him. The medics worked fast, and the ambulance arrived immediately... but our Coach Gus wanted nothing to do with hospitals.

## INT. OLYMPIC BOXING CHANGE ROOM - NIGHT - 1968

The medic straps an oxygen mask on.

MEDIC  
It'll be alright, sir. The  
ambulance is already here.

GUS  
No... No hospitals.

The medics slide Gus onto a gurney.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I later found out, from Evelyn, he  
was stationed in a hospital unit in  
the last world war, and he'd seen  
too many soldiers never leave.

MEDIC  
It's okay, we'll take care of you.

GUS  
(weaker)  
No...

MEDIC  
Your boxer's competing sir? We'll  
make sure you see it. Okay?

The medics lift the gurney. Its support legs unfold  
instantly.

Gus pulls Jimmy close, tugging his mask down.

GUS  
(struggling)  
You don't worry about me, okay...  
Remember, son, I'm proud of you.

JIMMY  
I want to go with you.

GUS  
No.

Gus holds Jimmy's hand tight.

GUS (CONT'D)  
You go out there... and you punch,  
kid. You hear me? You punch, kid!

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy's eyes well with tears. He stares at the PHOTO OF GUS raising Jimmy's glove in the ring.

JIMMY

You punch, kid...

A tear falls.

**INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT - 1968**

Annie and Tommy stand at Jimmy's side, watching the medics rush Gus away.

JIMMY (V.O.)

And that's exactly what I did.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT**

Jimmy pressures his OPPONENT backwards with hard, relentless punches.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Especially if that's what it took to see our Coach Gus again.

Jimmy fires a barrage of combinations to the face and body.

The crowd erupts.

THE CROWD

JIMMY THE KID! JIMMY THE KID! JIMMY THE KID!

JIMMY (V.O.)

But my opponent took everything... and it went the distance.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy wipes his eyes.

JIMMY

For a moment, I thought I wouldn't get to fight... and honestly, that would've been fine with me.

MIKEY

What do you mean?

JIMMY

Well, with our Coach Gus taken to the hospital, that Olympic Official had some unusual things to say.

**INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT - 1968**

Jimmy rests his head on Annie's shoulder, tears streak his face.

ANNIE

(angry)

What are you talking about?

TOMMY

Yeah, man, what are ya talking about?

ANNIE

This isn't the time for rules! Our coach was just taken to hospital!

OLYMPIC OFFICIAL

(calm, coldly)

As I've already stated... under Olympic rules, a qualified trainer must be present at all times. You and your brother are documented as corner support only.

(looks at Jimmy)

Mr. Duncan, you will not compete.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy stares at the PHOTO OF GUS raising Jimmy's glove in the ring.

JIMMY

I really wanted to go with our Coach Gus. I would have forfeited the match, but that's not what he told me to do.

He shifts his gaze to a PHOTO OF GEORGE holding Jimmy's glove high.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

That Olympic official was so adamant about the rules, arguing with my Annie, that George came out of his change room and boomed:

**INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT - 1968**

GEORGE (O.S.)  
I'm in his corner ya honky fool!

The Olympic Official flinches. He turns to see George, his coach DOC, 49, and his corner man ARCHIE, 55, distinctive white muttonchops, all towering over him, glaring.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy smiles at the PHOTO OF GEORGE holding up Jimmy's glove.

ARCHIE (O.S.)  
Hey, Coach Jimmy!

Jimmy, Annie and Mikey look up at the ring. Archie, now 76, same white mutton chops, leans against the ropes.

JIMMY/ANNIE  
Hey, Archie.

ARCHIE  
Don't mean to interrupt, but mind if the guys spar a couple rounds?

MIKEY glances at the two boxers in headgear, George, now 41, and MICHAEL SPINKS, 34.

JIMMY  
You go right ahead.

ARCHIE  
Yeah, believe me, they sure need it. Especially making a comeback in your forties.

JIMMY  
Well then, I insist.

ARCHIE  
You all heard the coach. Start training.

George and Michael touch gloves. They circle, trading light jabs.

JIMMY  
Archie, this is Mikey.

ARCHIE  
Hey, Mikey. You the next champ there champ?

MIKEY  
I'd like to be, sir.

ARCHIE  
Sir! I like this kid, Jimmy. Nice  
to meet ya, kid.

Archie turns back to the sparring. Jimmy watches George move.

JIMMY  
That was really kind of George,  
stepping in my corner. He had his  
own nerves to worry about with his  
Gold Medal Match... Guess it  
distracted him till then.

George dominates with steady jabs.

MATCH CUT TO:

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING RING - HEAVYWEIGHT MATCH - NIGHT - 1968**

George hammers JONAS ČEPULIS, 29, with powerful jabs. Blood sprays the canvas.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
That night, George went on to win  
the gold medal.

The referee cuts in between the boxers and waves it off. George throws his arms up. Doc and Archie rush in, cheering.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
When I heard what he did, I was so  
proud of him.

Archie hands George a small American flag. George smiles and holds it high. The crowd roars.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy smiles at George.

JIMMY  
That official didn't like it, but  
he sure didn't argue with Big  
George. Not after that stare down.  
He probably soiled himself.

Mikey laughs. He glances up at George and Michael...

George drags Michael off the ropes and breaks the clinch. They circle, trading fast jabs.

MIKEY

Hey, wait a minute...

Mikey turns to the picture wall. He zeroes in on the PHOTO OF GEORGE holding up Jimmy's glove. He scans more photos of Jimmy with George.

MIKEY (CONT'D)

That's George Foreman in your corner.

He points at another Olympic photo of Jimmy standing next to George Foreman.

JIMMY

It sure was.

ARCHIE (O.S.)

Hands up George! Or you'll be sparring me next! I didn't lose to Marciano cause my hands were down.

Jimmy and Annie look up at George and share a smile.

JIMMY

We all became good friends.

MIKEY

Wow, that's awesome... So what happened with your match?

Jimmy stares at the PHOTO OF A BOXER raising Jimmy's glove in the ring.

JIMMY

Well... with what happened to our Coach Gus, I couldn't concentrate like I normally did.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1968**

BANG-BANG! Jimmy lands two fast jabs. SMASH! a hard cross follows. He presses with a relentless barrage to the head and body. The crowd cheers.

JIMMY (V.O.)

With all the lights, the crowd cheering, the flashes, the pressure, I felt numb.

Arena lights blaze. Camera flashes flicker. Sweat drips into Jimmy's eyes. He keeps pressuring his opponent backwards. Each jab jolts his head violently. The crowd goes wild.

His frustrated opponent charges with a wild flurry. Jimmy slips side to side, weaving behind him.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
But our Coach Gus said, "Punch,  
kid." And that's what I did.

Jimmy slips a sluggish jab-cross. BANG-BANG! he fires a jab-cross and circles with stiff jabs. BANG-BANG-BANG! a cross-hook-cross follows. Blood sprays into Jimmy's face. His opponent crashes into the ropes, blood streaming from his nose.

The crowd erupts in a frenzy of deafening cheers.

THE CROWD  
JIMMY THE KID! JIMMY THE KID! JIMMY  
THE KID!

Jimmy stops dead in his tracks...

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

JIMMY  
I was one punch away from knocking  
him out... But that didn't happen.

MIKEY  
Why? What happened?

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1968**

WE FOCUS ON Jimmy's blood-streaked face. He stands center ring, gloves hanging low.

TOMMY (O.S.)  
PUNCH, JIMMY!

GEORGE (O.S.)  
PUNCH, KID! PUNCH!

The deafening roar of the crowd demands blood.

Jimmy's heavy breaths drown out the roar...

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I just stood there.

His breaths slow and fade into a high-pitched ringing, filling his ears.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
My ears rang, and then...

DEAD SILENCE...

Jimmy's faint heartbeat emerges...

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I remembered our Coach Gus saying  
he'd have to die to miss my match.

His heartbeat grows louder.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
And I thought... I hope he sees the  
match.

It races faster.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I should have called the doctor.

Louder. Faster.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
But all the while, I could hear my  
ma telling me I was a good boy...

His heartbeat eases... growing slower...

JIMMY (V.O.)  
That none of this was my fault...

Quieter. Slower.

IN SLOW MOTION: Jimmy's opponent's left blue glove swings low. Jimmy doesn't move. The glove clenches a tight fist. He closes his eyes. A single tear slips free.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
At that stage, my fear turned into  
pain, and everything became loud  
again.

THUD! the body hook slams into his liver. Jimmy doubles over, grunting, knees crashing to canvas.

The crowd roars back in, deafening and overwhelming.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Now I've been hit before, but  
nothing like this.

Jimmy spits out his bitten-through mouthguard. The REFEREE sends his opponent to a neutral corner.

Jimmy gulps for air.

The high-pitched ringing creeps back...

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I was in so much pain that my ears  
rang... I could barely hear  
anything around me.

The referee flicks a finger count... One... Two...

Jimmy looks up. Annie watches, eyes wet. Tommy holds her  
close. Her lips mouth "Breathe."

GUS (O.S.)  
(same time, muffled)  
Breathe.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

Gus lies propped upright in bed, an oxygen mask strapped to  
his face. A NURSE pumps the bulb, inflating the cuff tight  
around his arm.

GUS  
Just breathe...

His eyes stay locked on the boxing match, playing silently  
on a wall-mounted black-and-white TV.

**EXT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT**

A tear slips from Annie's eye. She grips a white towel,  
ready to throw it.

Jimmy steadies his ragged breaths. Annie hesitates.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I should have let Annie throw the  
towel in.

Jimmy inhales deep, posture straightening. He shakes his  
head at her. She lowers the towel.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
But that's not what our Coach Gus  
would have wanted.

Jimmy reads her lips "Get up."

HOWARD (O.S.)  
(same time)  
Get up.

**INT. HIGH SECURITY PRISON - COMMON AREA - DAY**

INMATES erupt, cheering wild, drowning out the boxing match flickering on a wire-caged, wall-mounted black-and-white TV.

Howard sits motionless in the front row.

Behind him, an INMATE, 50, sits stone-still, eyes locked on Howard, one hand buried deep in his orange overalls pocket.

HOWARD

Get up, Jimmy!

The inmate bolts upright, yanking out a CRUDE SHIV.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT**

The nurse unstraps the blood pressure cuff.

GUS

Get up, son.

The nurse glances at the TV.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT**

The referee's hand count hits eight.

The high-pitched ringing stops, dead silent.

JIMMY (V.O.)

And that's when I heard my Annie.

The referee hits nine.

ANNIE

GET UP JIMMY!

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy stares at the PHOTO OF A BOXER raising Jimmy's glove in the ring.

JIMMY

And that's what I did. I got up and beat the count. I didn't stop. The crowd loved it... But that was the first time I lost a boxing match.

MIKEY

Wait, what? But how?

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT - 1968**

The nurse looks at Gus, gently laying a hand on his shoulder.

NURSE  
He should've won.

Gus gives a subtle nod, a sad smile forming.

GUS  
He did.

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

ANNIE  
Everyone knew Jimmy won. Even the judges scored it. But the Olympic Committee overturned it.

JIMMY  
I guess the knockdown was enough. At the time, it didn't matter to me... But it sure mattered to the other boxer.

MIKEY  
What do you mean?

JIMMY  
You remember that bully, Milo?

MIKEY  
Yeah. He took your bike.

JIMMY  
Well, after our Coach Gus had words with his folks, his pa had enough, and moved his family back to Greece. Milo went to a military school that straightened him out... It even let him box again.

Jimmy smiles at the PHOTO OF A BOXER raising Jimmy's glove in the ring.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
And that night, he showed the world what kind of man he'd become.

MIKEY  
What do you mean that night?

Jimmy points at the photo.

JIMMY  
My opponent was Milo.

MIKEY  
Wow! That was Milo.

Mikey leans in, stunned. His eyes shift to the newspaper clipping beside it.

MIKEY (CONT'D)  
Shock Medal Win.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1968**

Center ring, the referee holds Jimmy's and Milo's gloves. Behind him, the Olympic Official whispers into his ear. The referee shoots him a sharp look.

He shakes his head and raises Milo's glove. The crowd boos. Milo shakes his head.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
I couldn't believe it... Milo was  
outraged by the decision.

Milo yanks his arm away. He steps forward and raises Jimmy's glove himself. The crowd erupts in cheers.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

The iconic PHOTO OF MILO raising Jimmy's glove in the ring.

JIMMY  
He even insisted we swap medals.

**INT. OLYMPIC BOXING ARENA - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1968**

Milo turns to the Olympic Official and snatches the gold and silver medals from his hands, leaving him stunned.

Milo puts the gold medal around Jimmy's neck. The crowd erupts louder in cheers and applause. Cameras flash like lightning.

Milo raises Jimmy's glove high.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

The iconic newspaper PHOTO OF MILO raising Jimmy's glove.

JIMMY

You should have seen the look on that official... Later on, an inquiry found he had no right to overturn the judges' decision. They said he had a conflict of interest.

MIKEY

What's that?

JIMMY

Turned out he was our Coach Gus's opponent back in the Gold Medal Match... and he held a very long grudge about it.

MIKEY

You're kidding?

JIMMY

He even made up those rules about a coach in the corner. Not surprisingly, he lost his job.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT - 1968**

Jimmy, Annie and Tommy stand at Gus's door, tears in their eyes.

An infusion tube protrudes from Gus's arm, connected to an IV drip. A heart monitor beeps steadily.

Tommy wraps an arm around Annie. Jimmy slowly steps into the room.

Gus sees him. With effort, he pulls down his oxygen mask and weakly smiles.

GUS

I saw it, kid... congratulations. I knew you could do it.

Gus holds his hand out... Jimmy takes it.

JIMMY (V.O.)

He saw the fight, which meant he wasn't going to die... That's what I told myself...

JIMMY

I lost the fight though, Coach Gus.

GUS

We all know who won, son.

Gus points to the gold medal around Jimmy's neck.

GUS (CONT'D)  
Even Milo knows it.

Jimmy stares at Gus. A tear slides down his cheek.

JIMMY  
What's wrong, Coach Gus? And no  
more "I'll be alright," alright?

GUS  
Alright then.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
But I knew he wouldn't tell me. He  
didn't want to waste precious  
moments talking about his health.

JIMMY  
Evelyn will be here real soon.

Gus squeezes Jimmy's hand, a soft smile crossing his face.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
The doctor said it was serious,  
that it was too late to operate...  
I don't want you to die.

Jimmy breaks down, hugging Gus.

JIMMY (CONT'D)  
You're the only pa I ever had.

Annie and Tommy rush to his side.

GUS  
That means everything, son.

Gus wipes his eyes with his handkerchief.

JIMMY  
I couldn't save my ma... and I  
don't know how to save you, pa.

GUS  
No, you don't have to, son. It's my  
time now. I've lived my life, and  
because of you, all three of you,  
I've lived it longer, and happier.  
I love all of you.

They hug him in silence, holding the moment.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Apparently our Coach Gus was sick  
for a long time.

Tears run down Jimmy's face.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
Evelyn told us that night he'd  
survived a chemical attack during  
the war.

Annie and Tommy break down, sobbing.

JIMMY (V.O.)  
His cough only got worse over the  
years, and his lungs never  
healed... In the end, it was too  
much for his heart.

Gus hugs them tighter.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER**

In Evelyn's embrace, Gus closes his eyes, a soft smile on  
his face. His head leans against hers. Evelyn's tears fall,  
closing her eyes.

Jimmy covers his mouth with a trembling hand, tears  
streaming. He leans in, hugging them both.

DISSOLVE TO:

**INT. BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1990**

Jimmy's tears fall. Annie wraps her arm around him.

JIMMY  
That night, both my parents passed  
peacefully in each other's arms.

MIKEY  
Oh... they both died... I'm so  
sorry.

Jimmy wipes his eyes.

JIMMY  
They said it was heart failure. But  
I think Evelyn died of a broken  
heart when her Gus passed in her  
arms. I miss them as much as I miss  
my ma...

Mikey points to the PHOTO OF GUS raising Jimmy's glove in the ring.

MIKEY

That's Coach Gus isn't it?

JIMMY

It sure is. That was the last photo taken of him at my semi-final win.

MIKEY

He sounded great, Jimmy.

ANNIE

He was so proud of all of us, especially Jimmy.

Mikey studies another photo.

MIKEY

(confused)

Is that you in the army?

Jimmy leans forward, squinting at the FRAMED PHOTO OF TWO MEN in military uniforms, standing proud.

Next to that, a photo of Jimmy and Tommy in their army uniforms. Beside it, another army photo of Jimmy and Tommy with Forrest Gump, holding ping pong paddles. Both Jimmy and Forrest smile, eyes half-closed.

JIMMY

No. Some say I look like that young man... but that was our Coach Gus's son, James.

ANNIE

He kept that photo on the fireplace mantle.

JIMMY

And he'd look at it all the time.

ANNIE

They were both handsome in their uniforms...

MIKEY

He died in the war, didn't he?

Jimmy and Annie's eyes glisten.

JIMMY

James enlisted against his pa's wishes. Our Coach Gus did everything he could to protect him, so he enlisted too. But James was fatally wounded and sent to the hospital unit where his pa was stationed... He died that night in his pa's arms. He was only twenty.

MIKEY

That's so sad.

JIMMY

Our Coach Gus never got over losing his son. And since then, he feared hospitals.

ANNIE

Outliving your child is the worst pain a parent can go through.

Their tears stream. Jimmy pulls Annie into a tight hug. She sobs into his shoulder...

MIKEY

Are you alright, Mrs Duncan?

Jimmy gently kisses the top of her head.

JIMMY

You know soon after, out of respect for our Coach Gus, we took over the gym and finally gave it a name.

Jimmy nods at a photo of himself, Annie and Tommy in front of the boxing gym's glass door. Above their heads, the sign reads: "GUS'S BOXING RING."

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Our Coach Gus was sixty-six. He boxed in the Olympics, fought in the war, and lost his only son... He was not only my coach and friend, but he became my pa. That night, he knew it was time to hang up the gloves, but he fought on long enough to see me fight. I still miss him.

Mikey points at the FRAMED PHOTO Jimmy still clutches.

MIKEY

What about that photo, Jimmy?

Jimmy holds it out, showing Mikey.

JIMMY

This is the only photo I have of just my ma and me... I would look at it everyday in my room.

MIKEY

That's a nice photo.

JIMMY

My ma had a nice smile.

Jimmy stares at the FRAMED PHOTO of his ma hugging him when he was ten-years old, and smiles, just like in the photo.

MIKEY

I think Coach Gus and your ma would be proud of all of you.

JIMMY

I hope so.

ANNIE

They would be.

MIKEY

Jimmy, can I come back tomorrow and start training?

JIMMY

You can come back anytime, son...

They continue looking at photos. Jimmy stares at a photo of Gus and Evelyn leaning in behind him, Annie, and Tommy, arms around their shoulders, all smiling wide.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Our Coach Gus always asked after each lesson, "Did you learn anything?" He never wanted an answer... but that night, he did.

**INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT - 1968**

Jimmy sits on the edge of the bed.

GUS

What did you learn, son?

Jimmy stares, blank...

JIMMY

How to love again... love for those  
who come into my life... love for  
you...

A tear wells in Jimmy's eye.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

And love for myself.

A tear slips down Gus's cheek.

GUS

Me too, son...

FADE OUT.

THE END