

PUNCH KID PUNCH

Life moves forward, one punch at a time.

Written by

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OVER BLACK

Cheers roar.

JIMMY (V.O.)
So there I was at my second Olympic
Gold Medal Match.

Screams deafen.

JIMMY (V.O.)
This time it was in Munich,
Germany.

INT. OLYMPIC BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1972

WE FOCUS ON JIMMY, 22, dead still, center ring. Sweat cuts
through the blood on his face.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I had a lot on my mind.

Hands up tight, chin down. Blood drips from his red gloves
and spatters onto the canvas.

JIMMY (V.O.)
People who should've been in my
corner... weren't.

IN SLOW MOTION, a right blue glove drives towards his face.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I still felt it was my fault our
Coach Gus wasn't there.

Jimmy stays still.

JIMMY (V.O.)
But I still hear my ma telling me,
none of this was my fault.

The glove twists, knuckles turning.

JIMMY (V.O.)
But he always said different.

The glove closes in.

JIMMY (V.O.)
And in some ways... he was right.

Jimmy closes his eyes.

JIMMY (V.O.)
A lot of things were and became my
fault, no matter what anyone said.

The crowd roars.

Jimmy's eyes snap open. He slips the cross. THUD! his left
hook buries into the liver.

His OPPONENT grunts.

JIMMY (V.O.)
And I won my second Olympic Games.

CRASH! his opponent hits the canvas.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1992

SMASH! MIKEY, 12, snaps a clean cross into the focus mitts.
Jimmy, 42, shakes off the mitt.

JIMMY
You got a good punch, kid. You've
come a long way.

NORA
Yeah, good punch, Mikey. Almost as
good as me.

NORA, 12, resembles Jimmy. Gloves tight to her chin. She
grins and dances in place.

MIKEY
Thanks, Nora. But where was Tommy?

Nora stops. She looks at Jimmy.

Jimmy lowers his gaze.

NORA
He wasn't there.

Jimmy takes off the mitts and drops them onto the wooden
floor. His eyes glisten.

Nora slips an arm around him.

NORA (CONT'D)
You alright, Dad?

JIMMY
(nods)
I almost didn't go. Wouldn't have
bothered me. Too many bad things
happened in Munich.

OVER BLACK

CLICK-CLICK-CLICK! a camera snaps nonstop.

PHOTOGRAPHER (O.S.)
Oh my God, he's got a gun!

EXT. MUNICH - APARTMENT - DAY - 1972

CLICK-CLICK! a PHOTOGRAPHER leans over a balcony railing,
firing off photos.

JIMMY (V.O.)
People died during those Games. Too
many.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1992

Mikey and Nora go still, listening.

JIMMY
A terrorist group broke in and took
athletes hostage. It didn't end
right.

MIKEY
Wow. Did you see it?

JIMMY
No. We were lucky. But we were
close enough.

NORA
That's scary.

JIMMY
It was. You know, someone took a
photo of one of the masked men.

EXT. MUNICH - APARTMENT - DAY - 1972

CLICK! the photographer snaps a final shot.

The image freezes, the masked man in a balaclava, iconic and
chilling.

JIMMY (V.O.)
That picture... the whole world
remembers it.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1992

JIMMY
I've seen a lot of death. People I
didn't know... and people I loved.

MIKEY
Did something bad happen to Tommy
there?

Jimmy's eyes well.

JIMMY
No. Not there.

NORA
It's okay, Dad.

MIKEY
I'm sorry, Coach. I... I just
noticed on the picture wall, there
aren't many photos of Tommy after
the Olympics and--

JIMMY
--Vietnam. You're a smart kid, kid.

NORA
Uncle Tommy died in Vietnam.

INT. BACK WALL - CONTINUOUS

Jimmy, Nora and Mikey study the photos covering the wall.

JIMMY
As much as our Coach Gus tried to
protect us from the draft, it was
inevitable.

Jimmy points to several photos of himself and Tommy in their
army uniforms.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
We both went to Vietnam. But not
before Annie and I got married.

He points to a wedding photo of him and Annie kissing.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
 Right after my first Olympics.
 Christmas Day. By the lake where we
 first kissed.

NORA
 (cringing)
 Oh, Dad.

JIMMY
 We were married six wonderful
 months before I had to go to
 Vietnam... and leave my Annie.

INT. VIETNAM - RECREATIONAL ROOM - DAY - 1969

Dozens of soldiers crowd around a black-and-white TV. Live
 footage of the moon landing plays. NEIL ARMSTRONG waits to
 take his first step. Silence fills the room.

JIMMY (V.O.)
 I missed the moon landing with
 Annie.

A ping-pong ball taps fast and constant in the background.

JIMMY (V.O.)
 But I met a young man visiting the
 bases, entertaining us with table
 tennis. Some people called it ping-
 pong.

Jimmy and Tommy watch FORREST GUMP, 25, focused, showing
 sharp and precise skill.

NEIL ARMSTRONG (O.S.)
 That's one small step for man, one
 giant leap for mankind.

JIMMY (V.O.)
 He earned a Purple Heart for saving
 his whole platoon.

Jimmy and Tommy take positions opposite Forrest at the
 table.

NEIL ARMSTRONG (O.S.)
 The, uh, surface is fine and
 powdery. I can, I can pick it up
 loosely.

FORREST
 The secret is to keep your eyes on
 the ball.

Forrest serves. Jimmy watches and hits it back.

JIMMY (V.O.)
When he finished his tour, the army
let him play table tennis for his
country.

Forrest hits it to Tommy. Tommy swings and misses.

CLICK! an ARMY PHOTOGRAPHER snaps a photo of Jimmy and Tommy
either side of Forrest, all three holding paddles.

Jimmy and Forrest smile, eyes half-closed.

JIMMY (V.O.)
We even showed Forrest some boxing.

INT. RECREATIONAL ROOM - NEXT DAY

Forrest stands still, red boxing gloves down, face blank.

JIMMY
Hands up tight. Chin down.

Forrest mirrors him, hands up tight, chin down.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Our secret is to keep moving your
head.

Jimmy slips side to side. Forrest copies perfectly,
mechanical but precise.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Good, Forrest, good!

JIMMY (V.O.)
Forrest caught on quick.

JIMMY
Slip, Forrest, slip!

Jimmy throws light, continuous jabs and crosses. Forrest
slips side to side, never stopping.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Hopefully he never needed it
though.

JIMMY
Make'em pay!

Jimmy holds his gloves out like mitts. Forrest jab-crosses
cleanly, then continues slipping.

JIMMY (V.O.)
We became good friends. Some said
he was slow, but I found him quite
intelligent. He was good at
everything he did.

CLICK! the army photographer snaps another photo of all
three wearing boxing gloves, hands up tight.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1992

Jimmy holds the same framed photo, eyes welling, staring at
Tommy.

JIMMY
But Tommy never got to see those
photos.

EXT. VIETNAM - DIRT ROAD - SWAMP BANK - DAY - 1969

CLICK!

The CAPTAIN, 30, raises a clenched fist mid-air. His platoon
halts in unison.

JIMMY (V.O.)
It was our first mission out.

Far down the line of sweating green uniforms, Jimmy looks
over Tommy's shoulder as the captain turns slowly towards
his SERGEANT, 40, frozen, staring down at his own boot.

SERGEANT
Run.

JIMMY (V.O.)
It was an ambush.

BANG! a single gunshot cracks the silence. IN SLOW MOTION, a
bullet rips through the sergeant's temple.

CAPTAIN
Sniper!

BOOM! a landmine explodes under the sergeant's boot.

The blast tears through the front line. The captain and
sergeant vanish in fire and dirt. Jimmy's eyes widen as
nearby soldiers are ripped apart.

He reaches for Tommy. IN SLOW MOTION, the explosion rolls down the line, bodies flung into the air. It reaches Tommy and hurls him backwards.

The gust slams into Jimmy, knocking him off his feet. He crashes into the dirt. Tommy splashes into the swamp below.

JIMMY (V.O.)
We didn't stand a chance.

Machine gun fire erupts, deafening. Standing soldiers convulse and drop. Others dive for the swamp, vanishing into mud and reeds.

JIMMY (V.O.)
My whole platoon was taken out in seconds.

Jimmy shakes his head. Everything goes silent. His ears ring, a high, hollow tone that drowns the chaos.

JIMMY
Tommy!

JIMMY (V.O.)
I couldn't hear the screams.
Soldiers around me either died then
and there or scattered the best
they could to survive.

Jimmy crawls for the swamp. Bullets chew up the dirt around him. Crawling soldiers shudder, riddled with gunfire. He reaches the bank and tumbles down the slope, clawing through the long reeds.

JIMMY
Tommy!

TOMMY (O.S.)
Jimmy!

A trembling hand reaches from the reeds and grabs Jimmy tight.

JIMMY
Tommy!

TOMMY
We gotta get out of here!

Tommy clutches his side. Blood seeps through his fingers and his fatigues. He grimaces.

JIMMY

You hit?

The gunfire suddenly stops. Jimmy and Tommy lock eyes.
Distant voices start shouting.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Strange thing was, as soon as the
gunfire stopped, my hearing came
back.

TOMMY

We gotta go, Jimmy!

JIMMY (V.O.)

And it was just as frightening as
the gunfire.

Jimmy and Tommy crawl low through the reeds, climbing over
dead soldiers.

The voices grow closer.

GENERAL (O.S.)

TÌM HỌ!

Jimmy and Tommy freeze.

JIMMY (V.O.)

"Find them," a voice ordered.

Jimmy peers through the reeds. On the dirt road, a GENERAL,
50, stands with a platoon of soldiers.

JIMMY (V.O.)

That voice belonged to a general.

The general points to his SERGEANT, 45. A dozen soldiers
follow the sergeant down the bank.

JIMMY (V.O.)

It was only a matter of time before
they found us.

Jimmy watches as the soldiers spread out, stepping carefully
down the slope.

The general watches an injured soldier crawling for the
bank's edge. He walks over, presses his boot on the
soldier's neck, and grins. He draws his pistol. BANG!

JIMMY (V.O.)

He was a cruel man.

Jimmy and Tommy flinch. The dead soldier's head slumps over the edge, eyes staring down at Jimmy.

Jimmy looks back up at the general.

GENERAL
GIẾT CHÚNG!

The soldiers disappear from view.

JIMMY (V.O.)
"Kill them," he ordered.

Gunfire bursts off screen, then silence.

JIMMY (V.O.)
They made sure every soldier, dead
or alive, was in fact dead.

Tears well in Jimmy and Tommy's eyes.

TOMMY
They're gonna kill us, Jimmy.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I didn't know what to say. I
thought the same thing.

Jimmy spots the sergeant nearby, ramming the butt of his rifle into the swamp. Grunts cry out. The sergeant turns his rifle. BANG! He smirks.

SERGEANT
Tôi có một cái.

JIMMY (V.O.)
"I got one," he laughed.

TOMMY
You gotta get back to Annie.

JIMMY
What?

TOMMY
Stay down. Get ready to crawl fast.

Tommy rises with his hands in the air. The sergeant sees him.

JIMMY
No, Tommy, no!

GENERAL (O.S.)
GIẾT CHÚNG!

JIMMY (V.O.)
He wanted to kill Tommy.

Jimmy looks up at the general pointing at Tommy. The sergeant raises his rifle.

JIMMY
No!

Jimmy springs up, grabs the rifle, deflects it upward, and throws a right cross. Tommy fires a body hook.

The general raises a halting fist.

The sergeant grunts and lets go of his rifle. Jimmy drops him with another cross, then quickly steps in front of Tommy, hands and rifle raised.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Don't shoot! Don't shoot! Đừng
bắn! Đừng bắn!

GENERAL
Đừng bắn!
(subtitle)
Don't shoot!

JIMMY (V.O.)
We were taught some Vietnamese just
in case we were caught.

Jimmy looks up at the general. He lowers his fist but keeps his eyes fixed on Jimmy.

The soldiers surround them.

Jimmy lowers the rifle, still watching the general.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I could have opened fire, but it
wasn't my rifle. I didn't know how
many bullets were left, and we were
outnumbered. Our best chance was to
surrender.

The sergeant gets up, grabs his rifle, and stares at Jimmy. He drives the butt of it hard into Jimmy's stomach.

EXT. PRISON CAMP - PIT - DAY

A large rusty tin sheet opens. Rats squeak and scatter.

JIMMY (V.O.)
They threw us in a pit first. It
felt like a lifetime down there.

Jimmy, Tommy and six POWs, hands tied, look up, squinting at
the blazing daylight.

The pit is deep, circular, barely two meters across. Stone
walls slick with mud and moss.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Over a few days, they brought in
more POWs.

Two NORTH VIETNAMESE GUARDS drag a POW, kicking and
screaming, heels scraping dirt.

POW
No!

With a laugh, the guards hurl him into the pit.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Some didn't make the fall.

CRACK! he hits another prisoner shielding his face. A neck
snaps.

The guards spit into the pit.

NORTH VIETNAMESE GUARD
Hãy quay trở lại đất nước của bạn.
(subtitle)
Go back to your own country.

Jimmy stares blankly at the body. A tear threatens to break.

JIMMY (V.O.)
For some, they might've been the
lucky ones. But that was no way for
a soldier to die.

Jimmy looks up. SLAM! The tin sheet drops.

JIMMY (V.O.)
They filled the pit, but starved us
until they were ready.

EXT. PRISON CAMP - PIT - DAYS LATER

The tin sheet opens. Light floods in. The prisoners squint.

JIMMY (V.O.)
They didn't want injured soldiers.

The general appears at the edge of the pit, staring down.
His gaze locks onto Jimmy.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Tommy was, though... but they used
that to their advantage.

His eyes shift to Tommy.

KONG, 30, muscle-bound and six feet tall, tosses a bloodied
meat hook tied to a knotted rope into the pit. The prisoners
cover their faces with bound hands.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Each day we fought to survive. As
did my Annie back home, not knowing
what had happened to us.

GENERAL
HÃY TỰ MÓC MÌNH!

He points at their binds.

GENERAL
HÃY TỰ MÓC MÌNH!

Then at the hook.

Jimmy looks at his bound hands, then at the dangling hook.

GENERAL (CONT'D)
TUNG!

TUNG, 15, thin and tall, steps beside the general.

TUNG
The general said to hook yourself
to the rope.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRISON CAMP - PIT - MOMENTS LATER

Kong hauls the rope hand over hand.

He lunges forward, grabs Jimmy, and yanks him from the pit.

Jimmy squints against the daylight.

JIMMY (V.O.)
The camp was hidden deep in a
bamboo field, thick like a
rainforest.

Kong drags Jimmy by his bound hands, joining Tommy and six other POWs in a line.

Kong glares at him.

Jimmy stares past him. A short distance away, the general watches with a Phu Quoc Ridgeback at his side.

Beside them, the sergeant steps forward. Tung follows.

The general and the dog remain, still and tense.

JIMMY (V.O.)

That general had a mean Phu Quoc
Ridgeback from South Vietnam.

Jimmy's eyes meet the dog's, unflinching.

The dog looks away first.

The sergeant makes his way down the line, studying the POWs, the dirt, the stink, the flies hovering. He grimaces, breathing out like the smell is in his mouth.

JIMMY (V.O.)

They starved us. Some didn't make
it.

A weak POW collapses. Tommy reaches down to help him.

SERGEANT

BỎ NÓ ĐI!

TUNG

No! He said to leave him.

Tommy stares at the sergeant. He lifts the POW to his feet.

The sergeant marches up to Tommy, glaring.

He smugly side-glances at Jimmy and pulls his pistol. BANG! he shoots the POW in the leg. The man screams and drops.

TOMMY

No!

THUD! the sergeant buries a body hook into Tommy's ribs. Tommy grunts and folds sideways.

Jimmy's eyes widen. He springs forward. WHACK! with bound hands he backhands the sergeant's chest, sending him backwards.

Kong draws his pistol.

Jimmy moves in front of Tommy.

The sergeant charges at Jimmy, pressing his pistol into Jimmy's forehead.

SERGEANT
CON ĐỂ HOANG!
(subtitle)
BASTARD!

BANG! a pistol echoes. Everyone stops.

The sergeant lowers his pistol, glaring at Jimmy.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
Người chết.
(subtitle)
Dead man.

Jimmy looks past him. Smoke curls from the general's pistol.

GENERAL
(waving the pistol)
Lấy ba cái đó đi!

TUNG
He wants you three.

INT. FIGHT PIT - LATER

Rowdy cheers rise from dozens of NORTH VIETNAMESE and CHINESE SOLDIERS.

CRASH! a bloodied CAUCASIAN POW hits the blood-soaked dirt. He's out cold.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Hand-picked soldiers were made to
fight other soldiers.

A SOUTH VIETNAMESE POW raises his arms in victory.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Warlords and generals brought their
best-trained prisoners to compete
for money.

The winning soldiers cheer louder, exchanging money between themselves.

JIMMY (V.O.)
We were forced to fight our allies
to survive.

The soldiers make a path. Kong drags the weak POW behind him by his bound hands, pulled over his head. His boot heels scrape the dirt. Blood pours from his leg wound, leaving a trail. Soldiers laugh. Some throw rotten food. Others spit.

JIMMY (V.O.)

The others too sick or injured were
used for a different type of sport.

They pass the general, his dog, the sergeant, and Tung, sitting front row. The dog licks his lips. They all grin, all but Tung.

JIMMY (V.O.)

It was horrid. A barbaric ring
where the strong fought each
other...

Kong throws the weak POW into the makeshift ring. Its single rusty barbed-wire top rope drips with fresh blood. Flesh dangles from the spikes. Bamboo posts glaze with fresh blood. The dirt ground dark with dried stains.

JIMMY (V.O.)

...and where the weak fought the
general's dog.

GENERAL

Ăn!

(subtitle)

Eat!

The dog growls and bolts into the ring, saliva gushing. He leaps to the screams and cheers of the soldiers. He bowls the POW into the barbed wire. The spikes dig deep into his back. His flesh tears. He screams.

JIMMY (V.O.)

It was horrible.

The dog drags him down. His jaws clamp the throat. Blood pours. Cheers roar. He shakes the neck until, CRACK! it breaks.

JIMMY (V.O.)

None of those soldiers were seen
again.

The POW's legs twitch. His eyes stare dead.

The crowd roars.

Tung looks away, closing his eyes.

INT. FIGHT PIT - LATER

A guard opens a large bamboo door. Kong fills the doorway, hauling the ropes tied to Jimmy and Tommy's wrists, dragging them inside. The soldiers go silent. They part a pathway.

The crowd watches Jimmy pass. Some shake their heads, others nod. They start placing bets.

Ahead, the general, his dog, the sergeant and Tung stand by the ring.

Jimmy studies it. More flesh hangs from the spikes. Fresh blood soaks into the dirt.

Kong plants Jimmy and Tommy before the general and kicks the backs of their legs. They drop to their knees.

The dog snarls at Jimmy. Jimmy just stares back. The dog whimpers, steps back, and lowers its head, refusing to look at him.

Jimmy looks up at the general.

JIMMY

What do you want from us?

TUNG

(shakes his head)

No. Do not speak.

Soldiers cheer. Jimmy and Tommy scan the crowd. A FILIPINO PRISONER heads to the opposite side of the ring under armed guard. The soldiers roar, waving bets.

TUNG (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Do what you're told and you live longer.

The Filipino prisoner stops front row and bows to his CHINESE LEADER, 60, who sits between two giggling whores. He steps into the ring and raises his arms. The crowd roars.

GENERAL

Bạn chiến đấu!

TUNG

You fight.

Jimmy just stares at the general.

GENERAL
(pointing at the ring)
Bạn chiến đấu!

Jimmy looks back at the bloodied ring, then back at the general.

JIMMY
(shakes his head)
No. Tell him I won't fight.

The general raises a halting hand. He stares at Jimmy, draws his pistol, BANG! he shoots the sergeant in the head. The body drops hard in front of Jimmy and Tommy. Blood soaks into the dirt. The dog licks his lips.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Just like that, he killed his sergeant.

GENERAL
Nếu tôi giết người lính của mình
thì tôi không ngần ngại giết kẻ thù
của mình.

TUNG
If I kill my soldier, I have no
hesitation in killing my enemy.

The general jams his smoking pistol into Tommy's forehead. Tommy breathes hard. The dog snarls at his face.

JIMMY
No!

GENERAL
You fight!

JIMMY (V.O.)
He spoke English well enough.

GENERAL
He lives...

TUNG
You must fight. No more warning.

GENERAL
No fight--

JIMMY
--Alright. I'll fight.

Kong hauls Jimmy to his feet. He pulls a long, jagged knife and cuts the binds.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Some fighters had been POWs for too long.

Jimmy pulls off his shirt. His singlet soaks with sweat.

JIMMY (V.O.)
They had a thirst for blood and glory.

Jimmy ducks under the barbed wire and into the ring.

SMASH! a right cross floors Jimmy. The Filipino prisoner shakes his arms, the crowd cheers.

JIMMY (V.O.)
It was dirty boxing. Our Coach Gus warned us about that.

Soldiers cheer, waving money. Some, disgusted, hand over their bets early.

Jimmy shakes his head.

TUNG
(shouts)
Get up or he will die.

Jimmy slowly rises. He sees flesh on a spike.

CRACK! a low uppercut hits Jimmy's groin. He hits the dirt.

The Chinese leader smiles and claps. The whores giggle.

The Filipino rains blows. Jimmy digs his nails into his opponent's leg and climbs. Downward elbows crack into Jimmy's head. He keeps climbing into a clinch and rams him into the corner post.

THUD! Jimmy breaks free with a hook. SMASH! a cross. THUD! a body hook finds the liver. CRASH! the Filipino drops, screaming, clutching his side.

The soldiers go silent with shock.

TOMMY
Yes!

GENERAL
Giết nó!
(MORE)

GENERAL (CONT'D)
 (subtitle)
 Kill him!

JIMMY (V.O.)
 I heard that word before.

GENERAL
 Kill him!

JIMMY
 What?

GENERAL
 YOU KILL HIM!

JIMMY
 He's already done for. I don't box
 dirty.

The general stares. He draws his pistol. Jimmy's eyes widen.
 BANG! he shoots the Filipino prisoner.

The Chinese leader jumps to his feet, grunts and storms off.
 His whores follow.

JIMMY (V.O.)
 The winner could kill the loser if
 he chose. I don't know why the
 general chose to.

Tung appears with a wad of money and hands the winnings to
 the general.

JIMMY (V.O.)
 I guess it got rid of the
 competition.

GENERAL
 MANG CHÚNG ĐẾN!
 (subtitle)
 Bring them!

INT. BAMBOO CELL - AFTERNOON

Jimmy and Tommy are shoved into a small bamboo cell. Thick
 shoots rise from the ground, forming a crude cage.

JIMMY (V.O.)
 The general knew he had something,
 so we didn't go back to the pit.

Tommy hits the dirt hard. He clutches his side and rolls onto his back. Rats scatter from under a hole-ridden blanket.

JIMMY

Tommy!

The bamboo door slams shut.

Jimmy grabs the bars.

EXT. BAMBOO CELL - CONTINUOUS

A GUARD, 20, yellowed and missing teeth, levels his rifle through the bamboo.

GUARD

TRỎ LẠI!
(subtitle)
Get back!

TUNG

Get back please.

JIMMY

He's hurt.

Tung looks down at Tommy... back at Jimmy.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

He needs medicine!

Kong snaps the padlock shut. He grins. Tung lowers his eyes.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

We need water.

Tung turns to leave with Kong and the guard. He looks back.

TOMMY (O.S.)

Jimmy...

INT. BAMBOO CELL - CONTINUOUS

Jimmy crouches beside him, lifting Tommy into a sitting position.

TOMMY

(grunting)
I'll be alright.

Jimmy peels back Tommy's torn shirt. The skin beneath is bruised and blackened.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
Must've been the mine blast... sure
wasn't that sergeant's hook.

He laughs, then coughs up blood.

Jimmy sees the blood in his hand. Tommy hides it.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
I'm alright... it's nothing.

JIMMY
I'll get you outta here, Tommy.

INT. BAMBOO CELL - NIGHT

Moonlight falls on Tommy. He shivers beneath the blanket.

Jimmy checks the bamboo door and bars. He gives them a shake. Nothing moves.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I didn't like that cough Tommy
had... it reminded me too much of
our Coach Gus.

The same guard appears at the bamboo door. He grins at Jimmy. Moonlight catches his stained teeth.

GUARD
Tien bac...
(rubs his fingers)
Make money, buy gold teeth. Ha ha
ha.

Jimmy watches him leave.

He scratches at the dirt around a bamboo thicket. Hard-packed, it doesn't move.

From the shadows, Tung appears.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I don't know why, but that night
that young boy Tung brought us what
he could.

TUNG
Take.

He slips an army canteen through the bars.

TUNG (CONT'D)
No medicine, but drink will help
the pain.

JIMMY
Thank you, Tung.

JIMMY (V.O.)
It was alcohol for the pain.

TUNG
You have family back home?

JIMMY
Yes. My wife Annie.

Tung nods, then quickly leaves.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I didn't know why Tung helped us at
the time. I guess he didn't like
what was going on... what had gone
on for a long time.

Tommy takes a swig from the canteen and grimaces.

Jimmy rips a wide strip from the blanket. Tommy hands the
canteen back. Jimmy pours some alcohol over Tommy's wound.
Tommy grunts and sits up. Jimmy doses the strip and begins
to wrap the wound.

TOMMY
(looks around)
Guess we got the fighter's
accommodation.

Jimmy gives a sad smile and ties the bandage off.

INT. BAMBOO CELL - DAY

Brown water splashes through the bars. Jimmy and Tommy jump
to their feet, frantically wiping themselves.

TOMMY
What the hell!

EXT. BAMBOO CELL - CONTINUOUS

GUARD
Không nói!

The guard points his rifle through the bars. He cackles.
Spit drools between his missing teeth.

TUNG

No speak.

Kong unchains the door.

INT. BAMBOO CELL - CONTINUOUS

Kong and Tung enter. Tung sets a bucket of water next to Jimmy. A ladle hangs off the rim.

Kong snatches a mouldy loaf of bread from Tung's other hand. He points it at Tommy.

KONG

Food!

(points at Jimmy)

You fight.

JIMMY (V.O.)

And that's what I had to do.

INT. FIGHT PIT - LATER

A THAI PRISONER, huge, ducks under the barbed wire. His chest and back shine with old scars.

Soldiers cheer and place their bets.

The general sits front row, center ring. Tommy kneels, hands bound behind his back. The dog growls at his side.

The general stares at Jimmy and nods towards the ring. His hand slowly moves towards his holster. Jimmy sees it and turns for the ring.

TOMMY

Dirty boxing, Jimmy! He's heavier too. Remember what Coach Gus said about that...

Jimmy nods.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1960

GUS, 58, throws a haymaker. Jimmy, 10, weaves. THUD! his body hook slams into the focus mitt.

GUS

Good! Good work. Now, I don't care how big they are, son. If they ain't conditioned, boom!

(throws a fast body hook)

They'll drop like a sack of potatoes.

INT. VIETNAM - FIGHT PIT - DAY - 1969

Jimmy weaves. THUD! his body hook slams the liver. The Thai prisoner drops to his knees.

Jimmy glances at the general.

JIMMY

Drop'em like a sack of potatoes.

The general stares.

GENERAL

(points)

GIẾT!

Jimmy looks at the Thai prisoner in pain. He shakes his head at the general. The general's eyes widen. He rushes to his feet, grabs Tommy by the hair, and slaps his face. He pulls his pistol.

THUD! Jimmy's hook knocks the Thai prisoner out. CRASH! the body hits the dirt hard. Soldiers cheer.

Tung appears next to the general with his winnings. The general slowly holsters his pistol and jerks Tommy free by his hair.

Jimmy looks at the Thai prisoner.

JIMMY (V.O.)

It was like the war was just in the background for them.

The prisoner's chest rises with a shallow breath.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1992

JIMMY

Those that could fight were treated better. We got food once a day. Old bread, whatever corn was left on a cob, and, if we were lucky, scraps of chicken.

MIKEY

You must have been starving.

JIMMY

I was too worried to think about food.

INT. VIETNAM - BAMBOO CELL - NIGHT - 1969

Through the bars, Tung hands Jimmy another canteen and some bread.

JIMMY

Thank you... You have family, Tung?

Tung looks at Jimmy. Tears well in his eyes.

TUNG

You miss your wife, Jimmy?

JIMMY

I miss my Annie all the time.

TUNG

I miss my family all the time too.

Tung quickly leaves.

Tommy wakes. His face purple with bruises, sweat running off him.

TOMMY

Room service?

Jimmy holds the canteen out to him.

JIMMY

Drink up.

Weakly, Tommy lifts his head and drinks, then coughs it out in a hard burst.

Jimmy sees blood in Tommy's hand. Tommy turns away and coughs again.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Tommy was getting worse. We both knew something was wrong. I had to get him out quick.

Tommy suddenly flinches, flicking his hand.

JIMMY (V.O.)

And that's when we met an unlikely friend.

A small white RAT scampers across his blanket.

TOMMY

Ah, yuck! That rat was nibbling my hand.

Jimmy notices the rat returning and points gently.

JIMMY
I think he likes you.

Tommy freezes. The rat sniffs the blood on his hand.

Tommy finds a few crumbs and sprinkles them in his lap. The rat climbs up and nibbles one.

Jimmy and Tommy smile to each other.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Looks like he's a nibbler.

TOMMY
I think I'll call you Nibbles.

INT. BAMBOO CELL - NEXT NIGHT

Nibbles scurries in. He sniffs the air and heads for Tommy.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Nibbles came back every night.

Tommy feeds him a small piece of bread from his lap.

JIMMY (V.O.)
He was tame for a wild rat.

INT. BAMBOO CELL - ANOTHER NIGHT

Nibbles goes straight to Tommy again. He nibbles corn kernels from Tommy's palm.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Then one night, he brought something with him.

INT. BAMBOO CELL - ANOTHER NIGHT

Nibbles inches in backwards, dragging a wrapper. He stops and sits beside it.

Jimmy and Tommy stare at the wrapper.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1992

MIKEY
What was it?

JIMMY
A chocolate bar.

MIKEY
(shakes his head)
No way.

JIMMY
It sure was.

NORA
I didn't believe it either.

INT. VIETNAM - BAMBOO CELL - NIGHT - 1969

Tommy holds Nibbles in his palm, hand-feeding him a square of chocolate.

TOMMY
Now that's room service.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1992

Jimmy hangs the FRAMED PHOTO of Tommy back up.

JIMMY
You know, our Coach Gus told me
that when he started, it was
illegal bare-knuckle boxing. It
wasn't until those fights got
raided that he straightened up and
got on the right boxing path.

Jimmy looks at the photo of Gus lifting Jimmy's arm, after the semi-final win in Mexico.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
I fought straight my whole life...
but there...

INT. VIETNAM - FIGHT PIT - DAY - 1969

BANG! BANG! Jimmy pounds his jab-cross into a U.S. PRISONER'S face. The man drops to his knees, eyes swollen shut. Blood pours down his face, soaking his fatigues.

The soldiers cheer for more blood.

JIMMY (V.O.)
...I had to survive any way I
could.

Jimmy looks at the general. The general presses his pistol hard against Tommy's temple.

U.S. PRISONER
(struggling)
Do it.

Jimmy freezes, shaking his head.

U.S. PRISONER (CONT'D)
Do it... or he'll kill us both.

Jimmy looks back at the general. The general cocks his pistol. Jimmy's jaw tightens.

U.S. PRISONER (CONT'D)
Better you than them.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I did what I had to.

JIMMY
I'm sorry.

U.S. PRISONER
DO IT!

THUD! Jimmy left hooks the temple. CRACK! the prisoner's neck snaps sideways. He slumps face-first into the bloodied dirt.

The soldiers erupt in louder cheers.

Jimmy drops to his knees, bloodied hands shaking.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I had to get Tommy back home.

He checks the prisoner's pulse. Jimmy covers his own mouth, stunned. Tears run down his face. He closes the prisoner's eyes.

JIMMY
I'm sorry.

He pulls the dog-tags free and slips them into his boot.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I had to return to my family.

Jimmy lifts the body. The soldiers fall silent. He carries him from the ring and lays him at the general's feet.

Jimmy digs into the dirt with his hands. The general rises, disbelief and contempt in his eyes.

Tommy, hands bound, digs beside him.

The general spits on the body, then storms off.

JIMMY (V.O.)
He didn't like it, but Tommy and I
buried that soldier right there and
then.

Tung watches from the shadows, a tear in his eye.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1992

JIMMY
You know, I didn't mean for it to
go that far. I still have that
soldier's blood on my hands.

MIKEY
Did you tell his parents what
happened?

Jimmy lowers his eyes.

JIMMY
No... I dreaded it. If I survived,
I didn't know how I was gonna tell
his poor folks what I had done.

He wipes his eyes.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
In a way, lucky for them, they had
passed long before the war. They
didn't have to suffer the loss of a
child.

Nora lowers her eyes. Mikey doesn't notice.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
But in the end, I got him home. I
got everyone home, dead or alive.

EXT. VIETNAM - PRISON CAMP - MORNING - 1969

Kong drags Jimmy and Tommy by their binds. Jimmy sees Tung
with the general. The dog barks.

JIMMY (V.O.)
But because of my actions, we all
paid for it.

Kong stops them before the general and kicks the back of
Tommy's knee. Jimmy stares at Kong. The dog growls at Tommy.
Jimmy locks eyes with it. Slowly, it lowers its head to a
whimper.

Beyond the dog, SIX CAUCASIAN POWs hang stripped to their soiled boxer briefs, hands tied above their heads, arched against tall bamboo.

Tung steps in front of Jimmy, holding out a three-foot bamboo stick.

TUNG

The general orders you to whip
every prisoner.

Jimmy looks at the general.

JIMMY

No. I won't do that.

GENERAL

Kong.

Kong grabs Tommy by the hair and jams his pistol into Tommy's temple.

TUNG

He will kill him. Take it.

Jimmy slowly takes the bamboo stick. He looks at it, at Tommy, then back at the general.

JIMMY

No.

He drops the stick.

JIMMY (V.O.)

I risked everything on that
decision.

The general glares at Jimmy.

JIMMY

I'm not whipping them. You want me
to fight and make you money, then
whip'em yourself. Otherwise take us
back to our cell and leave us be.

GENERAL

Đón anh ấy!

(subtitle)

Pick him up!

With one hand, Kong lifts Tommy by the neck.

The general points at the bamboo stick. Tung picks it up and hands it to him.

GENERAL (CONT'D)
Yes, I want you to fight... So
fight him.

JIMMY
What?

JIMMY (V.O.)
He wanted me to fight Tommy.

GENERAL
Fight him now. Your rules.

Jimmy shakes his head.

GENERAL (CONT'D)
Fight, and no more pain will come.

JIMMY
No.

The general steps closer, eyes hard.

GENERAL
Dù bạn có làm hay không thì cũng sẽ
có người đánh.

TUNG
Whether you do or not, someone will
take a beating.

GENERAL
Hôm nay sẽ có người chết!

TUNG
Someone will...

GENERAL
Someone will die today! Fight him
now!

JIMMY
No.

GENERAL
CHỐNG LẠI!
(subtitle)
Fight!

JIMMY
KHÔNG!
(subtitle)
NO!

The general smiles with contempt. WHACK! he canes Tommy's leg with the bamboo stick. Kong grips Jimmy's binds. The general grabs Tommy's binds and drags him away.

GENERAL
GIẾT TÙ NHÂN!
(subtitle)
KILL THE PRISONERS!

Kong grabs Jimmy's neck and turns him towards the POWs. Six gunshots crack.

JIMMY
NO!

Jimmy closes his welling eyes.

JIMMY (V.O.)
They killed the prisoners...

Tommy screams. Jimmy's eyes fly open.

INT. TORTURE CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Jimmy bursts through the door.

JIMMY
You bastard!

TOMMY (O.S.)
Jimmy!

Kong charges in and pistol-whips the back of his leg. Jimmy hits the wooden floor and looks up, grimacing.

Tommy hangs from his bound wrists on one of many bloodied long meat hooks lining the bamboo ceiling beams.

WHACK! the general canes Tommy's blackened ribs. A welt instantly appears. Tommy screams. His body jerks violently. The rafter flexes and creaks.

JIMMY
No! Stop it!

Tung watches, a tear in his eye.

WHACK! the general strikes the welt again. Skin tears open. Blood splatters across the floor. Tommy coughs up more blood.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Tommy!

The general looks down at Jimmy with a satisfied grin. He nods at Kong.

BANG! Kong smashes the back of Jimmy's head. Jimmy slumps to the floor.

JIMMY (V.O.)
That general made Tommy pay for me
standing up to him.

TOMMY
Jimmy...

Kong lifts Jimmy with ease and mounts him onto another meat hook.

Tommy's head slumps forward. Dark blood drips from his mouth.

JIMMY (V.O.)
They kept us strung up all night.

INT. GENERAL'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

The general stands by an open window, looking out towards the torture cabin. He downs a glass of whisky.

GENERAL
Giết nó.
(subtitle)
Kill him.

Kong smiles, nods, and leaves. Tung remains still, quiet.

The general turns and stares at Tung. Tung's eyes well with tears.

GENERAL (CONT'D)
Họ là tù nhân. Họ là thú vui.
(subtitle)
They are prisoners. They are
amusement.

A tear escapes Tung's eye.

GENERAL (CONT'D)
Ban do yếu đuối.
(subtitle)
You are weak.

INT. TORTURE CABIN - SAME TIME

The door creaks open. Moonlight cuts across the room.

JIMMY (V.O.)
We had a visitor that night.

JIMMY
Tommy...

Tommy slowly lifts his head, squinting.

Nibbles slips in through the doorway and scurries toward Tommy. He reaches him and sniffs the dripping blood.

Tommy's eyes widen.

TOMMY
Nibbles!

Nibbles looks up at him. Tommy smiles.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Tommy's rat had tracked us down. He
even knew his own name.

Nibbles sniffs the air, then studies Tommy's binds, the meat hook, and the bamboo beam...

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1992

JIMMY
And you wouldn't believe what he
did next.

MIKEY
What did he do?

JIMMY
He left...

INT. VIETNAM - TORTURE CABIN - NIGHT - 1969

Nibbles scampers across the beam, down the bloody meat hook.

JIMMY (V.O.)
...for higher ground.

He balances on Tommy's binds.

TOMMY
Nibbles!

JIMMY (V.O.)
And then, he worked quickly.

Nibbles frantically nibbles at Tommy's binds.

TOMMY
He's a smart one, Jimmy.

JIMMY
He sure is, Tommy.

JIMMY (V.O.)
We just needed one good rip.

CREAK... CREAK... RIP! the rope snaps. Tommy and Nibbles fall.

JIMMY
Tommy! You okay?

Tommy painfully gets to his knees. He rubs his shoulders. Nibbles watches.

TOMMY
You're a good boy.

Tommy puts his hand out. Nibbles jumps into his palm.

BANG! the door slams open. Moonlight floods the room. Tommy looks up.

JIMMY
TOMMY!

Kong grabs Tommy's hand, trapping Nibbles. He rams Tommy backwards into the wall. Tommy fires off body hooks. Kong grunts, punching viciously into Tommy's chest and ribs. Tommy gasps.

Jimmy frantically jerks at his binds.

Kong squeezes Tommy's hand harder, a sadistic smile. CRACK! his hand breaks. He screams.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
NO!

Kong continues squeezing. Nibbles squeals. CRACK! his bones crush. Blood and guts drip down.

TOMMY
NO!

Kong laughs.

CLICK! Kong looks down. His holster is empty. Tommy cocks the pistol.

JIMMY

No! Tommy!

BANG! the pistol fires. Tommy gasps for breath.

JIMMY (V.O.)

That was Tommy's first and last
kill.

Kong freezes. CRASH! he falls.

Tommy stands frozen, looking at his shaking, broken hand. He
glances at Nibbles. Tears stream down his face.

Tung rushes in and sees Tommy standing over Kong's body.
Tommy points the pistol at him.

TUNG

No!

BANG! a gunshot. Tommy's pistol flies across the floor. It
stops at Tung's boots.

JIMMY

No, Tommy!

Tommy grabs his chest, blood flooding around his hand. He
falls to his knees.

BANG! another shot echoes. Smoke rises from the barrel. The
pistol shakes in Tung's hand. CRASH! the guard in the
doorway drops to the floor.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1992

Tears stream down Jimmy's face. Nora steps in close, placing
a steady hand on his shoulder.

JIMMY

Tommy was only nineteen... That
night, he died in my arms.

INT. VIETNAM - TORTURE CABIN - NIGHT - 1969

Jimmy cradles Tommy, rocking him back and forth. His tears
fall freely.

TOMMY

Run, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Not without you.

TOMMY
Get back home.

Tommy's body trembles. His eyes roll back. His head slumps to Jimmy's chest. Nibbles rolls out of his hand.

JIMMY
Tommy... no...

TUNG
(panicking)
We must leave. They will come.

Jimmy clutches Tommy tighter.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Tung was right. We had to leave...
everyone did.

EXT. PRISON CAMP - PIT - NIGHT

Jimmy rushes, carrying Tommy in his arms.

Tung lifts the tin sheet cover.

Faint high-pitched squeaks, gnawing and scurrying sounds echo.

Jimmy steps closer to the pit.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I couldn't just leave. There were
others... I had to get them out. I
had to get Tommy out.

Tung shines a flashlight.

Rats scatter wildly over a dozen piled bodies.

JIMMY (V.O.)
But there were no others left.
Every POW in that pit had been
killed.

Jimmy squeezes his eyes shut, turning away. A tear falls.

INT. TORTURE CABIN - SAME TIME

The general stands over the bodies of Kong and the guard. His dog growls low beside him.

GENERAL
Kẻ phản bội.
(MORE)

GENERAL (CONT'D)
(subtitle)
Traitor.

EXT. HILL - ESCAPE TUNNEL ENTRANCE - LATER

Tung pulls aside vines and shrubs, revealing a hidden bamboo door. He opens it and motions Jimmy forward. Moonlight streaks along the tunnel's slanted path.

Voices shout in the distance. Tung freezes, eyes locked on Jimmy. Flashlights flicker through the dense bamboo.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Tung led us to a secret tunnel they
used if the camp was ever
discovered.

TUNG
Follow the tunnel all the way to
the end. Don't stop.

JIMMY
What? You're not coming too?

TUNG
No. Hurry. I hold them back,
otherwise both dead in the tunnel.

JIMMY
No! Come with us.

TUNG
No time! Go!

Jimmy hesitates. His eyes well.

TUNG (CONT'D)
Get Tommy back home.

Jimmy's tears break.

JIMMY
Why did you help us?

TUNG
I was a prisoner too... but no home
left, no family left for me. You
get back to your Annie.

SNAP! a twig breaks. Leaves crunch. Tung spins towards the sound.

GRRR! the general's dog leaps, knocking Tung off his feet.

JIMMY

Tung!

The dog bites at Tung's face. He screams, clawing at it as it snaps at his hands. It clamps onto his neck. His screams gurgle in blood. His hand fumbles for his knife.

WHACK! a bamboo cane cracks across Jimmy's leg. He drops to his knees, curling over Tommy to shield him.

The general points his pistol at Tung. WHACK! another strike hits Jimmy's back.

GENERAL
KỂ PHAN BỘI!
(subtitle)
TRAITOR!

Tung pulls his knife and drives it into the dog. It yelps and collapses. Tung grasps his throat, blood flooding his hand.

The general's eyes widen in rage.

GENERAL (CONT'D)
KHÔNG!
(subtitle)
NO!

He cocks the hammer.

THUD! Jimmy's hook crushes the general's knee. He collapses, screaming, struggling to aim.

THUMP! the general freezes, stunned. He reaches towards Tung...

GENERAL (CONT'D)
Kể phan...

Tung drives his knife deeper into the general's chest. Blood gurgles from his mouth.

GENERAL (CONT'D)
...bội.

Tung drops to his knees. Their eyes meet.

TUNG
For my family.

He unhooks a grenade from the general's belt. They both collapse.

JIMMY

Tung!

Tung gasps, clutching his throat. His breaths come in panicked bursts.

Jimmy presses his hand over Tung's. Blood spurts between their fingers.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

I can't stop it!

TUNG

(gurgles)

Go.

He struggles, resting the grenade on his chest. Jimmy shakes his head, tears breaking.

JIMMY

No.

The voices grow closer.

TUNG

They... coming.

Flashlights cut through the bamboo, closing in.

TUNG (CONT'D)

No time... left... for me. I go...
to my family...

JIMMY (V.O.)

Tung was only fifteen... but with
Tommy, he was the bravest man I
ever knew.

INT. ESCAPE TUNNEL - MOMENTS LATER

Black. No light. Jimmy breathes fast. Mud squelches under his frantic steps.

EXT. HILL - ESCAPE TUNNEL ENTRANCE - SAME TIME

Flashlights sweep over the general.

SOLDIER

TỔNG QUAN!

(subtitle)

GENERAL!

The beams shift onto Tung. The corner of his mouth curls into a faint smile.

A flashlight catches his hand.

A grenade pin drops to the dirt.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)
 LŨU ĐẠN!
 (subtitle)
 GRENADE!

INT. ESCAPE TUNNEL - SAME TIME

A deep rumble rolls through the earth.

Light floods the bamboo-framed tunnel. The blast tears in. Jimmy clamps Tommy tighter, shielding him, fighting to stay on his feet. Bamboo beams shudder. Dust and wind slam into him. Rats scatter.

JIMMY (V.O.)
 I did what Tung told me to do.

Darkness swallows the tunnel.

INT. ESCAPE TUNNEL - MORNING

Heavy breaths echo in the dark. Jimmy's frantic footsteps slow to a stop.

JIMMY (V.O.)
 I walked until the end...

A faint light flickers overhead. Jimmy hurries toward it, eyes widening.

EXT. ESCAPE TUNNEL EXIT - CONTINUOUS

BANG! the shrubs shake. BANG! BANG! a bamboo door, hidden under the shrubs, tips back.

Jimmy's head emerges, caked in mud, streaked with sweat. He squints into the light, Tommy still clutched to his chest.

JIMMY (V.O.)
 We wouldn't have made it home
 without Tung.

LIEUTENANT (O.S.)
 DỪNG ĐI CHUYỂN!

JIMMY (V.O.)
 I thought they caught me. But
 then...

LIEUTENANT (O.S.)
DON'T MOVE!

JIMMY (V.O.)
...they spoke English.

Rifle barrels aim at Jimmy. Camouflaged SOLDIERS surround him.

Through the lieutenant's M16 rear sight, Jimmy squints up. The lieutenant suddenly raises his fist.

LIEUTENANT
Halt! He's one of us!

The soldiers lower their weapons.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I couldn't believe who it was.

LIEUTENANT
Jimmy? Jimmy Duncan?

JIMMY
I don't believe it. Is that you,
Milo? Milo Otis?

Milo rushes in and helps Jimmy out of the tunnel.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I got Tommy out. And the army
raided the camp. Everyone went
home.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1992

JIMMY
People said a lot of things weren't
my fault. Maybe they were right.
Maybe not. But that day Tommy
died... I broke my promise to keep
him safe.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - MORNING - 1969

Endless trains wait. Hundreds of young men in crisp uniforms fill the platforms. Loved ones hug, cry, kiss, wave goodbye.

Annie, 19, heavily pregnant, hugs Tommy tight, crying.

ANNIE
You keep Jimmy safe.

TOMMY
I will, Annie.

ANNIE
And you come back to Ma and Pa.

She lets go. Their parents, NEIL, 49, and SARAH, 44, hug Tommy. Tears pour freely.

Annie hugs Jimmy tight, tears glistening on her face.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
You keep Tommy safe.

Jimmy nods. Tears streak his face.

JIMMY
I promise.

ANNIE
(whispers)
And you come back to us.

JIMMY
I will... I love you, Annie.

Annie kisses him, holding tight.

ANNIE
I love you, Jimmy.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1992

Jimmy tears up.

JIMMY
Losing someone young... someone you
love... it stays with you.

NORA
(eyes welling)
None of it was your fault, Dad...

Jimmy wipes his eyes, steadying himself.

EXT. LAKESIDE - CEMETERY - DAY - 1970

Jimmy and Annie stand with Milo before Tommy's tombstone. Gus and Evelyn's stones sit just behind it.

JIMMY (V.O.)
After Milo finished his tour, he
came to pay his respects.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1992

Jimmy points at a photo of Milo raising Jimmy's arm at the 1972 Olympics.

JIMMY

It was Milo who pushed me
forward... told me to go for the
next Olympics. To do it for Tommy.
And with his help, I did.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BOXING RING - DAY - 1970

Jimmy weaves Milo's hook. BANG! BANG! BANG! he fires a cross-hook-cross and circles behind him. Milo shakes his head and turns to follow.

JIMMY (V.O.)

After Vietnam, I had to relearn how
to fight straight again.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BACK WALL - AFTERNOON - 1992

JIMMY

More importantly, lead my life the
way my ma and our Coach Gus raised
me. And I did just that.

MIKEY

Wow, that's amazing, Coach Jimmy...
I'm sorry about Tommy though.

JIMMY

Thank you, Mikey. I dedicated all
my wins to Tommy. He was a good
man, and we still miss him.

MIKEY

I hope I can be half the man Tommy
was... and you are, Coach Jimmy.
And one day, even compete and be a
champion too.

Jimmy goes still. He stares at an empty spot on the wall. He doesn't move. He doesn't breathe.

JIMMY (O.S.)

NO, JAMES! NO!

NORA

Dad?

MIKEY

Coach, you ok?

NORA

Dad!

Jimmy shakes his head, lost in memory.

JIMMY

Like you know, Mikey, you're welcome to train here anytime. But I... I won't be training anyone for competition anymore.

MIKEY

(confused)

But--

JIMMY

--No. It's too dangerous. And that's final, okay?

OVER BLACK

Cheers roar.

JIM LAMPLEY (O.S.)

Down goes Moorner by a right hand!

The crowd erupts.

JIM LAMPLEY (O.S.)

I don't believe it! Big George Foreman has won the heavyweight championship at forty-five years old!

INT. BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1994

The crowd roars.

GEORGE FOREMAN, 45, raises the heavyweight championship belt.

Jimmy stands between Nora and Mikey, both 14. They cheer and applaud loudly.

MIKEY

I want to compete, Jimmy. I want to be just like you.

JIMMY

(still clapping)

What was that?

MIKEY

I want to compete!

Jimmy stops applauding. His face goes blank. He closes his eyes.

JIMMY (O.S.)
NO, JAMES! NO!

He shakes the memory away and starts to clap again.

Mikey looks at Nora, confused. She glances at him, then away.

OVER BLACK

CHUCK (O.S.)
So you want to compete, hey kid?

INT. HIT'EM HARD BOXING GYM - BOXING RING - AFTERNOON - 1995

Dust drifts through sunbeams over a dirty, worn boxing ring.

Mikey, 15, red gloves and headgear, waits center ring.
JOHNNY, 17, black gloves and headgear, glares at him.

CHUCK, 50, leather-faced, leans on the frayed ropes.

CHUCK
Let's see what you got, kid.

Mikey raises a glove to touch.

BANG! a sharp jab cracks Mikey's nose. He staggers, blinking through watering eyes. Johnny swarms. Mikey slips a cross and lands a body hook. Johnny grunts, clinches, and slams him into the corner post.

JOHNNY
You remember me?

MIKEY
What?

CRACK! a headbutt whips Mikey's head back. Blood sprays. A brutal uppercut folds him to his knees. He clutches his stomach, grimacing, blood streaming from his nose onto the canvas.

JOHNNY
Because I never forgot you.

Chuck casually ducks under the ropes.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Still got that bike, ya punk?

MIKEY

Johnny?

Chuck looms over Mikey, cleaning his teeth with his tongue.

CHUCK

Johnny says you're from Gus's
Boxing Gym. I know the owner.

(spits)

Tell Jimbo we only take serious
fighters here, kid. You're bleeding
in my ring. Hit the road.

OVER BLACK

Thumping footwork echoes. Heavy breaths exhale.

JIMMY (O.S.)

(sounding like Gus)

Slow and steady.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BOXING RING - AFTERNOON

Behind the corner post, Jimmy watches Mikey and Nora spar in headgear.

BANG-BANG! Nora's double jab knocks Mikey back a step. Nora chases.

Mikey slips Nora's jab-cross and counters with a body hook. Nora covers tight and fires an uppercut to his stomach. He doubles over, gasping, one hand clutching his stomach, eyes tight.

JIMMY

Time! Good work! You okay, Mikey?

MIKEY

Yeah.

NORA

You're getting better.

They remove their headgear.

MIKEY

Thanks.

NORA

Yeah, I didn't hit you as much as usual.

MIKEY

Haha.

NORA
I'm still better though...

Jimmy ducks under the ropes.

MIKEY
(whispers)
I want to compete, Nora.

NORA
Not again, Mikey. You know how my
dad feels about that.

JIMMY (O.S.)
Feels about what?

MIKEY
(to Nora)
No, I don't know how he feels. None
of you will tell me!

NORA
Mikey wants to--

MIKEY
--Compete.

Jimmy freezes. A tear wells.

JAMES (O.S.)
I want to compete. I want to be
just like you.

JIMMY (O.S.)
NO, JAMES! NO!

MIKEY
Coach!

Jimmy blinks, the memory breaking. He shakes his head.

JIMMY
No.

He leaves the ring.

NORA
Why? Why do you want to compete so
much?

MIKEY
This is all I got! Why don't you
want me to?

Mikey ducks under the ropes.

MIKEY (CONT'D)

Coach!

NORA

Mikey!

INT. OPEN AREA - CONTINUOUS

Jimmy stops but doesn't turn around.

MIKEY

I train all the time. Just like you did. I'm good enough, Coach.

Nora catches up, concern on her face.

JIMMY

Good enough isn't always enough.

MIKEY

I want to compete, just like you did. Even Coach Gus said it was the next step.

Jimmy closes his eyes, taking a slow breath.

GUS (O.S.)

Jimmy... it's time to take the next step, son.

JIMMY (O.S.)

NO, JAMES! NO!

Jimmy turns to face Mikey, eyes glistening.

JIMMY

Everything our Coach Gus did... it wasn't just training. It was protection, from life, from the draft, from everything.

MIKEY

I've been here five years, why won't you train me to compete?

Nora lowers her gaze.

JIMMY

Why do you want this so badly?

MIKEY

Because... I just do...

JIMMY
I can't train someone on "just
because," Mikey.

MIKEY
Because my dad... he boxed. He died
when I was young.

Nora's eyes glisten.

MIKEY (CONT'D)
I wanted to be him. Be the champion
he never got to be. You're a lot
like him. I want to be a champion
like you.

Jimmy stares...

JAMES (O.S.)
I want to be just like you, Pa.

JIMMY
I... I didn't know. I'm sorry.

MIKEY
I don't talk about my parents...
But at least tell me why. Then I'll
decide if I stay or go.

ANNIE (O.S.)
Because, Mikey...

Mikey flinches and turns around. Annie, 45, stands there,
tears streaking her face.

ANNIE
...our son died in that damn ring.

MIKEY
(shaking his head)
Your son? I... I didn't even
know... I'm so sorry, Mrs Duncan.

Annie wipes her eyes, steadying herself. Nora steps closer,
placing a gentle hand on her shoulder.

NORA
It's time he knows why.

Jimmy exhales slowly. He sits on the edge of the ring and
leans back against the ropes.

JIMMY
Take a seat, son.

OVER BLACK

A baby cries.

JIMMY (V.O.)
While I was in that prison camp...
our baby boy was born.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - 1969

Annie lies breathing hard on her hospital bed. Her mother, Sarah, holds her hand.

JIMMY (V.O.)
We named him James, after our Coach
Gus's son.

A nurse hands Annie her baby, wrapped tight in a white receiving blanket.

SARAH
Oh, Annie, he's so precious.

ANNIE
My James... Your dad can't wait to
meet you.

Annie's eyes well.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Mum, I hope they find them.

SARAH
They will, Annie. They'll be back
soon.

Annie's tears break.

James opens his eyes and looks up at his mother.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1995

Mikey and Nora sit with Jimmy and Annie on the edge of the ring, backs against the ropes, legs dangling above the floor.

JIMMY
I can't imagine what Annie went
through... not knowing if Tommy and
me were ever coming home.

ANNIE
I never gave up. Even when the army
couldn't tell me if you were alive
or not.

EXT. THE DUNCAN HOUSE - PORCH - MORNING - 1969

Annie cradles James. He stares up at her. She smiles at him.

SOLDIER (O.S.)
Mrs Duncan?

Annie looks up. Her smile fades.

A SOLDIER, 30, in full uniform, stands at attention, a
yellow envelope held to his chest.

ANNIE
(shakes her head)
No... no...

Tears fill her eyes. She drops to her knees, clutching James
closer, bowing her head over him.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Annie made sure the army never sent
her parents bad news about Tommy.

The soldier hesitates, eyes down. He steps forward, slowly
extending the envelope. A tear runs down his cheek.

JIMMY (V.O.)
But it meant she bore the burden
herself... and had to tell them
alone.

Annie stares at the envelope, holding James tighter. Her
hand trembles reaching for it. She opens it with shaking
fingers and unfolds the letter. Her eyes tighten, tears
flooding fast, her breath catching.

ANNIE
No! Tommy!

James begins to cry.

The soldier lowers his head.

SOLDIER
My condolences.

OVER BLACK

JIMMY (V.O.)
 After everything that happened in
 that camp, the army discharged me
 as soon as I was rescued...

JIMMY (O.S.)
 Annie!

ANNIE (O.S.)
 Jimmy!

EXT. THE DUNCAN HOUSE - PORCH - MORNING - 1970

Annie bursts out the door, holding James.

Jimmy rushes onto the porch. Tears stream down both their
 faces as they hug and kiss.

James lets out a small cry. Jimmy looks down, smiling
 through tears.

ANNIE
 Jimmy... this is our son.

Jimmy gently strokes James's head.

JIMMY
 Our James.

Annie slowly hands Jimmy their baby. James cries for a
 moment, then quiets instantly in his father's arms.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
 He's perfect.

James looks up at his father. Slowly, a smile spreads across
 his face, matching Jimmy's.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1995

Jimmy smiles.

JIMMY
 James was such a good boy. Quiet...
 barely cried. But at five, he was
 diagnosed with a brain condition
 that caused seizures.

EXT. THE DUNCAN HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY - 1974

Jimmy tosses a soft ball to Annie.

ANNIE
Ready? Catch.

She gently throws it underarm. It hits James, 5, in the face with no reaction.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
You missed it, sweetie.

James stares ahead, blank.

JIMMY (V.O.)
We knew something was wrong when
James went into a blank stare.

ANNIE
Sweetie, are you okay?

She waves her hand in front of him. Still no reaction.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
Jimmy, something's wrong with
James.

Jimmy kneels in front of his son.

James's face twitches. His body starts jerking.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
What's happening?

James shakes violently.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
James!

Jimmy scoops him up, holding him tight.

JIMMY
Call an ambulance!

Annie bolts for the house. Jimmy rocks James in his arms.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
It's alright, son. I'm here. It's
alright...

James's shaking eases. He lies limp against Jimmy's chest.

JIMMY (V.O.)
James was the bravest little man
you could ever know.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - OPEN AREA - DAY - 1979

Jimmy, 29, feeds the focus mitts. BANG! BANG! James, 10, fires a jab-cross and slips his head side to side.

ANNIE (V.O.)

We were hesitant for James to box,
but physical activity was advised
as treatment. It seemed to help
him.

Jimmy throws a jab-cross. James slips and counters with another.

JAMES

I want to compete. I want to be
just like you, Pa.

Jimmy smiles sadly.

James's eye twitches.

Jimmy's smile fades. He quickly takes off the mitts.

JIMMY (V.O.)

For a while, the seizures had
become few and far between.

The twitch spreads through James, his body shaking violently. Jimmy scoops him up, cradling him tight.

JIMMY (V.O.)

We believed it was not only because
of the boxing...

JIMMY

Just breathe. Slow and steady...

JIMMY (V.O.)

...but also because we didn't treat
him any differently than we'd like
to be treated.

He strokes James's hair. The shaking begins to fade.

JIMMY (V.O.)

We made sure he had every
opportunity he deserved.

JIMMY

It's alright, son.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1995

Jimmy shifts forward, the ropes creaking behind him as he wipes his eyes.

JIMMY

Years passed, and the seizures all but disappeared. James loved to box, and he was good. He wanted to compete, but Annie and I... we weren't sure.

ANNIE

We didn't want to shelter him. So, in the end, we let him fight.

Jimmy's eyes glisten. He lowers his gaze.

JIMMY

I should've said no.

OVER BLACK

JIMMY (O.S.)

NO, JAMES! NO!

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1985

The crowd roars.

WE FOCUS ONLY ON JAMES, 16, tall and lean, hands up, standing dead still in the center of the ring. Sweat and blood drip from his face.

JIMMY (O.S.)

STOP THE FIGHT!

IN SLOW MOTION, a white towel arcs through the air over James's shoulder.

His OPPONENT's right cross drives forward, tearing straight through James's guard.

The towel drops towards the canvas.

SMASH! the cross lands flush on James's chin.

THUD! the towel hits the canvas.

OVER BLACK

JIMMY (O.S.)

NO, JAMES! NO!

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BAG AREA - ONE WEEK LATER - NIGHT

BANG! bloodied, bare-knuckled fists hammer the heavy bag. Angry grunts echo through the empty gym. Annie drives her rage into every strike. The bag buckles under her blows.

THUD! one last body hook, fueled by a vicious exhale, tears the bag open. Stuffing and sand spill across the wooden floor.

She stops. Sweat and tears streak her face. Her breath comes short and ragged. Her knuckles drip blood.

She drops to her knees, sobbing... A scream tears out of her.

ANNIE

My James.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1995

Jimmy and Annie wipe away their tears...

NORA

I remember when James would let me beat him at boxing. I was five.

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - BOXING RING - DAY - 1985

Nora, 5, wears gloves too big for her hands. James playfully spars with her.

Nora winds up and throws a clumsy cross right into his stomach.

JAMES

Arrr! You got me!

He clutches his stomach, hamming it up and stumbles backwards, grinning.

JAMES (CONT'D)

The champ can't take it. He's down!

He drops to his knees and falls forward with an exaggerated groan.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Nora's the new champion!

Nora jumps, triumphant.

NORA

Yeah! I won! I'm the champion!

She looks down at James.

NORA (CONT'D)

James.

He doesn't move. His grin fades. His eyes go blank. A final shudder runs through him.

OVER BLACK

NORA (O.S.)

Daddy... Daddy! James won't get up!

INT. GUS'S BOXING RING - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1995

NORA

That was one of the last memories I had of James. But I always remember how much he loved us, and how much he loved boxing.

ANNIE

James loved boxing as much as we did, and because of that we kept the gym going... and let Nora train in his memory.

JIMMY

It was the mildest of seizures... but I shouldn't have let him fight that night.

Jimmy stands, eyes lowered, and walks back to the picture wall.

ANNIE

Jimmy's always blamed himself, but it was never his fault.

INT. BACK WALL - CONTINUOUS

Jimmy softly smiles at a photo of his ma hugging him when he was ten years old. He looks to another photo, Coach Gus holding up Jimmy's glove in the ring.

Mikey steps beside him.

JAMES (O.S.)

I want to compete just like you.

JIMMY

James wanted to compete just like me.

JAMES (O.S.)
I want to be just like you, Pa.

JIMMY
He wanted to be just like his old
man... I don't know why. I've lost
too many people I've loved.

Mikey puts a hand on Jimmy's shoulder.

MIKEY
Why are there no photos of James?

ANNIE (O.S.)
There are.

Annie and Nora join them.

ANNIE
Those gaps on the wall once held
photos of James. We took them down
and hung them at home.

JIMMY
We see him first thing in the
morning and last at night.

NORA
Maybe it's time, Dad. Maybe we need
to move forward and give Mikey his
chance... if that's what he really
wants.

Jimmy lowers his eyes, exhales, then looks at Mikey.

JIMMY
Is that what you really want,
Mikey?

MIKEY
(nodding)
It is, Coach.

Jimmy studies him for a moment, then nods.

JIMMY
Alright then.

MIKEY
Really?

JIMMY
Yeah. But you're underage, you'll
need permission.

MIKEY
Oh... my grandma will sign.

JIMMY
Alright, kid. I'll train you for
amateurs.

Annie glances at Jimmy, worried, and lowers her eyes.

OVER BLACK

MIKEY (O.S.)
Hey! That's my bike!

JOHNNY (O.S.)
It's my bike now, ya wimp.

MIKEY (O.S.)
Give it back! It's mine!

JOHNNY (O.S.)
You'll pay for that. Nobody shoves
me!

MIKEY (O.S.)
Leave me alone!

INT. CRAWFORD HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - 1990

Jimmy sits on a torn two-seater couch, his gaze fixed on
MAX, 30, looming near the doorway.

MAX
Get in here, boy!

Johnny, 12, walks in, oblivious. Max instantly grabs him by
the ear and yanks him forward.

JOHNNY
Arrr!

JIMMY
(stands abruptly)
Please don't do that to your child.

MAX
(gesturing to himself)
That's right, he's my child.

He releases Johnny, who moves away, rubbing his ear.

JOHNNY
Coach?

MAX

Coach tells me you stole a bike and started a fight with some kid named Mikey.

Johnny stays silent, still rubbing his ear.

MAX (CONT'D)

I'll take that as guilty then.
You're gonna get a good hiding for that.

Johnny lowers his eyes.

MAX (CONT'D)

Did you even land some good shots?

Johnny nods, pride and shame crossing his face.

MAX (CONT'D)

At least we know he can throw a punch.

JIMMY

I don't teach my kids to box so they can fight.

MAX

What do you teach? Boxing is fighting. Kids bully. Kids steal. Kids fight.

JIMMY

Kids learn from their parents. Giving him a hiding and bragging about it only confuses him. Teach them right. Be a good example, Mr Crawford.

MAX

So this is my fault?

JIMMY

Actions speak louder than words. Change your ways, or he'll become just like you.

MAX

My ways? Don't worry, Coach, I'll make sure he learns his lesson good.

OVER BLACK

RING ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 And a late substitute, from the
 Hit'em Hard Gym...

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1996

Center ring, Johnny, 18, clad in black gloves, singlet, and trunks, stands beside Chuck, dead still, glaring.

RING ANNOUNCER
 JOHNNY "THE BRAWLER" CRAWFORD!

Chuck thrusts Johnny's arm into the air. Johnny punches the air, whipping the crowd into a frenzy.

Standing opposite, Mikey, 16, in red gloves, singlet, and trunks, waits with Jimmy, eyes locked on Johnny.

Jimmy casts a concerned glance at Annie, who mirrors his worry from the corner.

RING ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 And making his debut bout, from
 Gus's Boxing Ring... MIKEY TURNER!

Faint cheers die off fast.

RING ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
 (quietly to Mikey)
 Good luck with this crowd, kid.

As the ring announcer slips out between the ropes, the sports hall reveals its age. Seats lie ripped and broken. Banners hang faded and limp, bearing the names of champions long forgotten.

TWO OLYMPIC OFFICIALS sit ringside, clipboards in hand, studying the beat-up ring, the frayed ropes, the bloodied canvas, and the fighters.

Johnny steps forward, chest to chest, smirking. Mikey doesn't back down.

Chuck's glare never leaves Jimmy, and Jimmy returns it, unblinking.

REFEREE
 Alright, we ready?

JIMMY
 (to referee)
 What's going on? Where's the boxer
 we were supposed to fight?

REFEREE

He got a bad case of the runs. But
Johnny will fight anyone, anytime.

JOHNNY

Back for round three, punk? This
time I won't go easy on you.

Jimmy turns to Mikey.

JIMMY

This time?

JOHNNY

You didn't tell him?

MIKEY

This time you won't get a chance
for cheap shots.

REFEREE

Alright, enough. Follow my
instructions at all times. Protect
yourselves. Coaches, protect your
fighters. Back to your corners.

Mikey heads back. Jimmy follows, eyes fixed on him.

JIMMY

What did he mean?

Mikey turns and leans against the post.

MIKEY

I'll tell you when I beat him.

JIMMY

Don't get cocky. That gym plays
dirty. We can call the match.

MIKEY

What? No! I'm ready. Don't call it.
Please, Coach.

Jimmy takes a breath, weighing it.

JIMMY

Whatever happened... did you learn
from it?

MIKEY

I did, Coach.

Jimmy fits in Mikey's mouthguard.

JIMMY
Be careful, son. Use your
aggressive defence.

Mikey nods. Jimmy steps down to join Annie and Nora.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
(to Annie)
Can you believe this? Chuck Jones
is Johnny's coach.

ANNIE
He'd be better off with his father.

The bell rings.

JIMMY (O.S.)
NO! JAMES! NO!

Jimmy snaps out of it, shakes his head, and grabs a folded white towel.

Center ring, Johnny extends his glove to shake. Mikey hesitates.

Johnny's shake turns into a sucker-punch cross. Mikey slips it. BANG-BANG! Mikey's jab-cross blasts Johnny backwards, firing up the crowd.

Mikey chases. Johnny swings a wild haymaker. Mikey weaves, pounding out body hooks. Johnny grunts, clinches, and slams Mikey into the corner post.

CHUCK (O.S.)
HIT'M HARD, JOHNNY!

Johnny rams his head into Mikey's face, and unloads brutal uppercuts to the stomach.

NORA
Come on, ref!

Jimmy watches, his grip tightening around the towel.

Mikey answers with rapid body hooks. Johnny clinches tighter and rams his head again.

REFEREE
No holding!

The ref forces separation.

REFEREE (CONT'D)
(pointing at Johnny)
Warning! Head contact. Get back
center ring.

He checks a small cut above Mikey's right eye.

REFEREE (CONT'D)
You good, son?

Mikey nods and returns center ring.

REFEREE (CONT'D)
Shake. No cheap shots this time.

They touch gloves lightly.

REFEREE (CONT'D)
Fight!

Johnny charges with a barrage. Mikey slips, weaves, pivots,
making every punch miss.

Jimmy's grip around the towel turns white-knuckled.

THUD! Mikey buries a left body hook. CRACK! snaps a left
uppercut. Johnny staggers into the corner post.

The crowd erupts.

Johnny shakes his head, furious, and charges again.

Mikey backpedals fast. THUD! he pivots with a vicious right
check hook smashing Johnny's jaw, launching him into the
ropes.

The crowd leaps to their feet.

The bell rings. Mikey turns towards his corner, smiling.

JIMMY / ANNIE / NORA
NO!

BANG! a huge punch from Johnny blasts Mikey on the temple.
Mikey's eyes roll back.

JIMMY
MIKEY!

He collapses sideways. CRACK! his neck bends sickeningly
against the top rope. He drops lifeless to the canvas.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
NO!

A stunned silence sweeps the hall.

Nora and Annie rush into the ring. Jimmy stands frozen.

JIMMY (O.S.)
NO! JAMES! NO!

INT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY ROOM - LATER

A heart monitor beeps. An IV drips. A ventilator breathes. A neck brace holds Mikey's head in place. He lies completely still.

Annie and Nora stand on either side of Jimmy. Nora grips Mikey's hand.

JIMMY
I'm sorry, kid.

Jimmy closes his eyes.

JIMMY (O.S.)
NO, JAMES! NO! NO! MIKEY! NO!

Jimmy's eyes snap open. Tears stream down his face.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NEXT DAY - AFTERNOON

Jimmy stands alone beside the bed, wiping his eyes.

JIMMY
Doctors still don't know when
you'll wake, son.

He takes Mikey's hand.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
I hope it's soon.

OVER BLACK

JIMMY (O.S.)
I saw your grandma this morning.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - MORNING

A derelict caravan sits between two burnt-out wrecks. Flies swarm an overflowing trash can.

GRANDMA (O.S.)
He what!

INT. CARAVAN - CONTINUOUS

Old, cramped, filthy. Jimmy sits in a faded lawn chair between towers of newspapers.

Johnny's overweight GRANDMA, 55, sits in her ripped recliner, legs up. Her stained house dress is peppered with burn holes. The ashtray in her lap overflows. Magazines pile around her. Chocolate wrappers gather at her feet.

GRANDMA

A coma... how long's that take? I need him to clean this dump and get me ciggies.

JIMMY

(shaking his head)

Excuse me, what?

GRANDMA

Me cigarettes. I'm running low.

JIMMY

You don't seem too worried about him.

GRANDMA

Why should I be? He got himself hurt. Same as his bum father. Thought he was a boxer too, until he died in the ring.

JIMMY (O.S.)

NO! MIKEY! NO!

GRANDMA

Guess the apple didn't fall far.

JIMMY

Your son died in the ring?

GRANDMA

Not my son. One of my daughter's fellas. He was the only one who ever stuck around. Not for long, mind you. Took one punch too many and bled out inside.

JIMMY

I'm sorry to hear that.

GRANDMA

So am I. Been stuck raising his kid ever since. Neither of them worth a damn in the ring.

JIMMY

And Mikey's mother?

GRANDMA

His mother?

She jams a cigarette between her lips and flicks a dead lighter.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Probably dead, for all I know.

She tosses the lighter aside, digs between the cushions, and pulls out another.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

(flicking)

Didn't want either of them. That one night stand wrecked my life.

The lighter still won't spark.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

Bloody useless things.

JIMMY

That's very sad.

GRANDMA

Sad? His old man dropped the boy off when he went to fight and never came back. You think I wanted to look after some kid my daughter didn't even want.

The lighter finally sparks. She drags hard on the cigarette.

GRANDMA (CONT'D)

You know my pension won't cover that boy's hospital bills, or his care when he comes out.

(points with her
cigarette)

Maybe I should sue you.

JIMMY

You do what you like, but my concern is for Mikey.

She exhales a thick cloud of smoke.

GRANDMA

Guess I don't have a leg to stand on, signing those papers for him to fight. Well, he better be able to take care of himself when he gets out, I shouldn't have to.

JIMMY

He almost died. He'll need care. He shouldn't be left to look after himself.

GRANDMA

Look! I can't get outta this chair half the time, and you want me spoon-feeding him? You come here to judge me?

JIMMY

No.

(stands)

But just to make things clear, I'll take care of him.

GRANDMA

Well, aren't you the hero. Go on then. Play saviour.

JIMMY

Good day.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - CONTINUOUS

Jimmy steps out, walking away.

GRANDMA (O.S.)

Go on then! Waste your time on that boy!

Jimmy shakes his head and keeps walking.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - AFTERNOON

JIMMY

I'll make sure you're looked after, kid.

ANNIE (O.S.)

How is he?

Annie and Nora enter.

JIMMY
He hasn't woken up yet. Doctor says
he's stable.

Annie moves beside Jimmy. Nora stands opposite, eyes fixed
on Mikey.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
You okay, Nora?

NORA
Why hasn't he woken up?

Jimmy's eyes glisten.

JIMMY
Head and neck trauma can put
someone in a coma... They can't say
when he'll wake.

NORA
I hope he wakes up soon.

ANNIE
He will, sweetie.

NORA
And then I'll knock him back out
for making me worry.

Annie gives her a gentle look.

ANNIE
What about his neck?

JIMMY
It's not broken. The brace is just
support.

ANNIE
That's something.

JIMMY
I shouldn't have trained him.

ANNIE
It's not your fault.

JIMMY
Isn't it? Feels like it is this
time.

NORA
Dad?

ANNIE

You need rest, Hun. There's nothing
we can do right now.

Jimmy exhales.

JIMMY

Do you remember why our Coach Gus
hated hospitals... how his son died
in his arms...

Tears spill.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

I couldn't save our James... I
can't lose Mikey too.

Annie pulls him in. Nora steps into the hug.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NEXT DAY

Jimmy and Annie stand bedside watching Mikey. Annie gently
holds his hand.

MRS WILSON (O.S.)

How is he doing?

They look up. MRS WILSON, 65, stands in the doorway,
clipboard in hand.

JIMMY

He's stable.

Mrs Wilson steps inside, flashing her badge.

MRS WILSON

Mrs Wilson. Child Services. Mr?

JIMMY

Duncan. Jimmy. This is my wife,
Annie.

MRS WILSON

Duncan... Jimmy Duncan. I've heard
that name before. And your relation
to Michael Turner?

JIMMY

We're very close to Mikey. And with
only his grandma left, we plan on
being here for him.

ANNIE

I'm sorry, why is Child Services here? Is something wrong?

MRS WILSON

Unfortunately yes. His grandmother's caravan burnt down last night.

ANNIE

Oh no... is she alright?

MRS WILSON

No. It appears she fell asleep smoking. The fire spread through a pile of magazines. She passed from smoke inhalation.

JIMMY

Oh my.

ANNIE

That's terrible.

MRS WILSON

Yes, it is. And now that Mikey has no family left, I need to ensure he is taken care of.

JIMMY

We're sorry about what happened to her, but we'll look after Mikey now.

MRS WILSON

I understand. But when a child loses their only guardian, I'm required to place them with an approved foster carer.

JIMMY

I'm pretty sure our Coach Gus wasn't a foster carer when he took me in. He just stepped up.

MRS WILSON

Coach Gus?

ANNIE

Gus McCready.

Mrs Wilson gives Jimmy a curious look.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
He took Jimmy in when he lost his--

JIMMY
--Look, I'm his coach, and I'll
take full responsibility for him.

ANNIE
He can stay with us.

MRS WILSON
That's very kind of you, but I
still have to follow procedure.

JIMMY
We're the only parents he has right
now.

MRS WILSON
I can see that, Mr Duncan. And I
believe you both care deeply about
him.

She unclips a card from her clipboard and hands it to him.

MRS WILSON (CONT'D)
Make an appointment. We can talk
about foster arrangements. Put in
an application, and if it clears,
I'll rush it through. But for now,
a temporary family has been
arranged for Mikey.

JIMMY
Well, we're still going to help
him. No matter what red tape gets
in the way.

MRS WILSON
I believe you will.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING

George wipes a tear from his eye. He stands opposite Jimmy
at Mikey's bedside.

GEORGE
(sniffs)
No spinal injury?

JIMMY
Thankfully not. A grade two neck
strain, but his spine's okay.

GEORGE

Lucky it wasn't a grade three. He's one tough kid, Jimmy. You trained him well.

JIMMY

Not well enough.

George studies him.

GEORGE

Don't be too hard on yourself. You taught him right. It's others who should be looking at themselves for what's happened here... Maybe we should say a prayer.

JIMMY

I'm right. You go ahead, George.

George kneels, clasps his hands and closes his eyes.

Jimmy watches.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1985

OVER SILENCE.

Jimmy's face glistens with tears. Eyes closed, hands clasped, he prays over James's body.

Annie weeps beside him, hunched over James.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MORNING - 1996

Jimmy shakes his head and walks out.

JIMMY

(to himself)

Did me no good.

INT. HIT'EM HARD BOXING GYM - LATER

BOOM! BOOM! a heavysset BOXER pounds the bag, eyes tracking Jimmy as he crosses the gym towards the ring.

Chuck stands ringside, watching Johnny beat up an overweight kid. BRAD, 15, shiny new gloves, headgear, and boots, covers up under a storm of wild hooks.

Jimmy stops and watches.

CHUCK
Work him into the corner!

Johnny shoulder-barges Brad into the corner and clinches.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
Don't let him out!

Johnny plants his foot on Brad's boot, grins, and rams his head into Brad's face. Brad grunts, unable to throw back.

BOXER (O.S.)
(still hitting)
Hey, Coach! You got a visitor.

Chuck turns.

Johnny breaks the clinch and sneaks in a cheap hook. Brad slumps, breathing hard, and climbs out of the ring.

CHUCK
Duncan.

JIMMY
Chuck.

CHUCK
Something you need, Jimbo?

Jimmy looks past him at Johnny. Johnny won't meet his eyes.

JIMMY
Haven't seen you in six years,
Johnny. Seeing you again was a
surprise, but the result wasn't...
not with him in your corner.

CHUCK
Now you wait a minute, Jim--

JIMMY
--I thought you should know that
cheap shot of yours put Mikey in a
coma.

CHUCK
Maybe your fighter wasn't ready for
a real fighter.

Chuck glances towards Brad heading for the door.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
(to Brad)
We only take real fighters here.
You get that?

Brad leaves.

JIMMY
We don't know when he'll wake up.

Chuck shrugs.

CHUCK
Maybe he should have been trained better.

JIMMY
You could have killed him. You don't want that blood on your hands.

JOHNNY
I...

CHUCK
You don't have to explain a thing. You got a real coach now. He didn't want you, remember?

JIMMY
Your actions say enough, Johnny. This place hasn't helped you.

Chuck steps closer. Jimmy doesn't move.

CHUCK
I got a fighter to train. Get the hell out of my gym before you regret walking in here. You caused Johnny enough trouble before. I look out for him now.

JIMMY
(looks at Johnny)
Like I said... I thought you should know.

Johnny looks down.

EXT. HIT'EM HARD BOXING GYM - CONTINUOUS

The gym door swings shut behind Jimmy. Above it, a fading sign: HIT'EM HARD BOXING GYM, letters chipped and rust eating the edges.

Brad waits curbside, head down, holding his gloves and headgear tight to his chest.

JIMMY
Are you alright, son?

Brad looks up. Tears glisten on his puffy face. He blankly stares at Jimmy. His Down syndrome is evident.

BRAD
I don't want to come back here no more. I think I'll just quit. I'll get teased no matter what.

JIMMY
From my experience, I don't think you should give up. It took guts to step into a gym. You're a brave kid.

Brad looks down, uncertain.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Not all gyms are like this. There are better ones out there.

BRAD
Are you a boxing coach, sir?

JIMMY
Just Jimmy...

Jimmy looks down, the quiet settling over them.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
I used to be.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAYS LATER

Jimmy stands next to Mikey's bed. The heart monitor beeps steadily, the green line strong and smooth. The IV drips. Mikey breathes unaided now, soft and rhythmic.

A nurse checks his chart.

JIMMY
Doctor says you're doing better. No ventilator now... We just wish you'd wake up.

She places the chart on the rail and gives Jimmy a gentle smile before leaving.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Police wrapped up their report.
Johnny's sticking to his story,
says the crowd was loud, adrenaline
pumping, didn't hear the bell. Got
off with a warning and suspension.
That gym's bad news.

Mikey lets out a faint groan.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Kid?

Jimmy grabs Mikey's hand, waiting for another sound.
Nothing.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, kid. I didn't know
Johnny was a last-minute sub. Guess
he still had a score to settle with
me.

The heart monitor jumps an extra beep. Jimmy freezes,
staring at the screen.

Mikey's eyelids twitch, then settle again.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
And he took it out on you.

INT. HIT'EM HARD BOXING GYM - AFTERNOON - 1990

Johnny, 12, pounds a heavy bag with angry, wild hooks. The
thuds reverberate through the gym.

JIMMY (V.O.)
Looks like he trained hard after he
left my gym.

Chuck watches with a slimy grin.

CHUCK
That's it, kid! Hit'em hard!

Johnny hits harder, teeth clenched.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
You wasted your time at that other
gym. Now you're at a real one.

JIMMY (V.O.)
I should have done more for Johnny.

INT. CRAWFORD HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

A policeman stands beside Max, watching closely.

Mrs Wilson carries one bag and guides Johnny out. Johnny glances up at his father.

JIMMY (V.O.)
But by the time I met his pa, it
was already too late.

Max gives Johnny a mean "you got me in trouble" look and shakes his head.

JIMMY (V.O.)
He was already too much like him.

Johnny leaves, head down.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - 1996

Mikey's eyes flicker.

JIMMY
If I'd done more, none of this
would've happened.

Mikey's hand twitches. His eyes flicker again... and finally open.

MIKEY
(weakly)
It's not your fault.

JIMMY
Kid!

Jimmy leans over and hugs him.

MIKEY
(whispers)
None of this was your fault,
Coach...

NORA (O.S.)
Mikey! Mum!

Nora bursts in. Jimmy steps back.

NORA
He's awake!

Annie rushes in. They wrap Mikey in hugs. Nora grips his hand.

ANNIE

You had us worried, Mikey. How do you feel?

MIKEY

Sore... and tired.

NORA

Well, you would be. You were out for a month, you lazy butt.

MIKEY

A month? You're kidding?

NORA

Nope. You really were.

MIKEY

Wow... It's weird. I think I heard you a couple times... maybe.

NORA

Really? Good thing I didn't say anything embarrassing.

MIKEY

Or maybe I dreamed it. You all talked a lot.

ANNIE

Mikey... your grandma...

MIKEY

She died, didn't she?

Annie nods.

MIKEY (CONT'D)

So I did hear everything...

Mikey tears up. Nora squeezes his hand.

MIKEY (CONT'D)

She was my grandma, and I loved her... but like my mum, she never wanted me.

ANNIE

I'm so sorry.

MIKEY

Still... I decided a long time ago I wouldn't be like them. I'd try to be a good person... like my dad.

(MORE)

MIKEY (CONT'D)
(looks at Jimmy)
And like you, Coach Jimmy. You
remind me of him.

Jimmy nods, eyes wet.

JIMMY
Thanks, Mikey. That means a lot.

MIKEY
So... what happens now?

Jimmy takes a breath.

JIMMY
Because of your age, you'll have to
go into foster care for a while.

MIKEY
Oh...

A flicker of worry crosses his eyes. He looks down.

MIKEY (CONT'D)
So... back to training, Coach?

NORA
You must've been hit pretty hard
there, dummy.

JIMMY
Let's give boxing a break for now.

MIKEY
But Coach--

JIMMY
--You've got rehab to keep you
busy. And a foster family to get to
know.

INT. GUS'S BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - MORNING

ARCHIE MOORE, 82, white mutton-chops and a sly grin, watches
GEORGE mop the scarred wooden floor.

ARCHIE
Who taught you to mop?

GEORGE
You're hilarious, old man.
(under his breath)
Bloody Mongoose.

The entry bell jingles. George glances up past Archie.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Kid! You're back!

MIKEY enters with a small smile.

MIKEY
Hey, George. Hey, Archie.

They shake hands.

ARCHIE
Well, it's about damn time the next
champ showed up. Four months
gone... bet you're hungry to get
back to work.

MIKEY
(sniffs the air)
Yeah. Especially after three months
of rehab.

ARCHIE
Rehab? We just wrapped tape around
it and kept swinging.

GEORGE
Yeah, you should wrap tape around
something else. How you been, kid?

MIKEY
Getting there.
(eyes the mop)
What's that smell?

ARCHIE
Old George couldn't handle last
night's steak.
(grins at Mikey)
I only hit him once.

GEORGE
And Mongoose here says he's too old
to clean it up.

ARCHIE
You want an eighty-year-old mopping
your mess? Chew your steak next
time.

MIKEY
(laughs)
So what's been happening here?

GEORGE
Just helping out. Boxing politics.
I've got the time.

MIKEY
Haven't seen Jimmy in a while.
Where is he?

ARCHIE
Good question, kid.

GEORGE
Barely shows. Comes in, does the
books, and goes.

ARCHIE
If he comes at all.

GEORGE
I'm just trying to keep the place
alive. Don't want the kids ending
up on the street like I did.

ARCHIE
(mutters)
Yeah, your belly's proof you ain't
starving now.

GEORGE
What was that?

The entry bell jingles again.

ARCHIE
Well, look who's here.

Jimmy steps inside, head down.

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
Coach! Look who's back.

Jimmy looks up, sees Mikey, and forces a half-smile.

JIMMY
Hey, kid. How's it going?

MIKEY
Haven't seen you in months.

ARCHIE
(to George)
Come on. Your puke's waiting.

Archie and George step aside but stay within earshot. George slowly resumes mopping.

MIKEY

Nora's seen me every day. Mrs Duncan too.

JIMMY

I know. And I'm sorry. Just been... sorting things out. How's life with the foster parents?

MIKEY

They're good people. Took me in when they didn't have to.

JIMMY

Takes a lot of heart to do that.

MIKEY

Yeah... guess so. Look, I need help getting back... and sounds like you do too.

JIMMY

What do you mean?

MIKEY

George said you're barely around. I hope it's not because of me. I don't want the gym closing because you're stuck on what happened.

JIMMY

Boxing isn't everything, kid.

MIKEY

It is to some of us. It's all I've got.

JIMMY

Well, I'm done with it.

MIKEY

What? Coaching?

JIMMY

Yeah. Probably won't keep this place running much longer either.

MIKEY

What? What am I supposed to do? End up like Johnny?

JIMMY

You've got school. A future outside this ring.

MIKEY

Really? What future? I just wanted to be like my dad... like you.

JAMES (O.S.)

I wanna be just like you, Pa.

MIKEY

I can't believe this. Thanks for nothing.

He storms off. The door jingles shut.

George stops mopping.

GEORGE

It's not your fault, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Stop saying that. Whose fault is it then? I trained him. I let him fight. It's on me.

Silence hangs thick.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

I wish I never did.

GEORGE

And I wish you'd stop pitying yourself. You're making that kid feel unwanted. Everyone feels it.

JIMMY

I'm just trying to protect him.

ARCHIE

By shutting him out? You're poisoning yourself with guilt, Jimmy.

JIMMY

He could've died. Just like James. I can't do that again.

GEORGE

None of us can. But you can't protect everyone. These kids need this place. Life moves on, Jimmy. You know that better than most.

JIMMY

Yeah... but maybe it's time to hang up the gloves.

GEORGE

You know what... I should slap you.

Jimmy frowns.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

You think Gus built this place for you to run scared? You're turning your back on what he taught you. Mikey never blamed you. Annie didn't either.

ARCHIE

Every fight's a risk, son. What matters is you keep stepping back into the ring.

GEORGE

Exactly. You don't quit. You get back on your feet. Like you always have.

George pulls Jimmy into a hug. Jimmy's eyes lift towards the picture wall: "HANDS UP TIGHT. CHIN DOWN."

GUS (O.S.)

Hands up tight. Chin down. Move your feet, son.

The entry bell jingles.

BRAD (O.S.)

Coach Jimmy? Remember me?

Jimmy turns. BRAD, taller and leaner now, clutching gloves and headgear, stands in the doorway.

JIMMY

Brad, right?

BRAD

(smiling)

Yeah.

George nods towards Jimmy.

GEORGE

Kids need this place, Jimmy.

Jimmy allows a faint smile.

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY

Mikey and Nora stand before the wreck. The caravan's black shell leans inward, its charred steel ribs creaking in the wind.

Mikey's tears finally break.

NORA

Why didn't you tell us?

MIKEY

Tell you what? That I lived in a caravan with my grandma? That I was taking care of her?

NORA

There's nothing wrong with that... except the way she treated you.

MIKEY

She didn't know better. Her mum treated her the same.

NORA

And your dad?

MIKEY

It's not something I talk about. We've known each other for years, and I didn't even know you had a brother.

NORA

Yeah... it's not something we just talk about.

Mikey crouches and picks up a burnt boxing glove.

MIKEY

Your dad won't train me. Be lucky if there's still a gym soon.

NORA

He feels guilty. He always has. Especially after James.

MIKEY

Yeah...

Mikey studies the glove.

MIKEY (CONT'D)

But everyone shouldn't have to pay for it.

NORA

Pay for it? My parents went through hell losing James. We all did, and we still do. That night, with you out cold on the canvas, they felt it all over again. My dad thought you were dead. We all did.

The glove crumbles in Mikey's hand. He lets it fall.

Nora wipes her tears.

MIKEY

Just so you know... I'm going to compete again.

NORA

What? Compete? After everything that just happened?

MIKEY

I'm stronger now. The therapy helped, but I need real training again.

NORA

Then start there. Don't jump straight into competition like nothing happened. You scared the hell out of us that night. We don't want to lose you.

MIKEY

I'm sorry, Nora.

She turns to him, searching his eyes.

NORA

I don't want to lose you.

MIKEY

You won't.

They move closer. Nora kisses him first.

MIKEY (CONT'D)

So all I had to do was get knocked out to get you to kiss me?

WHACK! Nora smacks his arm.

MIKEY (CONT'D)
Ow! That hurt.

NORA
Of course it did. You're lucky it
wasn't a body shot. And you've gone
soft. Give me ten push-ups.

They laugh.

NORA (CONT'D)
But seriously... if you're going to
compete, make sure it's for the
right reasons.

MIKEY
It's not about a grudge. If that's
what you mean.

NORA
Good.

INT. GUS'S BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - DAY

Mikey lies flat on a yoga mat. He tries to bridge, lifting his hips with the weight on his neck, but collapses after one rep.

MIKEY
Damn it!

NORA
No negativity. That's already more
than yesterday. Keep going.

INT. BAG AREA - LATER

Nora holds the heavy bag. Mikey leans in close, forehead pressed to the leather. Short, light, constant punches...

THUD! the bag thunders, chain rattling as his body hook slams through. He resets, short, light punches...

THUD! another hook. He breathes hard.

Jimmy glances over from the picture wall.

INT. BOXING RING - LATER

Nora holds up the focus mitts. Mikey, gloves raised, circles with her.

She fires random jabs and crosses. Mikey barely slips them. She tags him a few times, repeats the drill, and his defence sharpens.

NORA
Better!

She feeds a jab-cross. Mikey, gasping, slips side to side.

NORA (CONT'D)
Make'em pay!

Mikey fires back fast with a jab-cross. They circle in rhythm.

Jimmy walks past, watching Mikey struggle for breath.

INT. OPEN AREA - NEXT DAY

Mikey bridges again. Five reps this time before collapsing. He exhales in bursts.

Nora smiles.

NORA
Good work.

INT. BAG AREA - LATER

Nora swings the heavy bag. Mikey steps back, double jabs, then drives forward. BANG! his cross lands clean. He pivots, circling.

Mikey glances over towards the open area where Jimmy coaches Brad to keep his hands up.

Nora swings again.

CRASH! the bag smacks Mikey off balance.

NORA
Gotcha! Pay attention. Again!

INT. BOXING RING - LATER

Mikey and George, gloves tight, circle each other. Mikey slips slow jabs and crosses.

GEORGE
That's it, kid. Get that timing back.

George adds hooks. Mikey weaves awkwardly out behind him.

INT. OPEN AREA - SAME TIME

Jimmy feeds hooks with his focus mitts in constant rhythm. Brad ducks each one, sharp and clean.

With every duck, Jimmy watches Mikey slip and weave George's punches. Mikey's breath is ragged.

JIMMY
(to himself)
Keep going, kid.

INT. OPEN AREA - DAY - WEEKS LATER

Mikey bridges faster, smoother. He holds the last rep, steady... and exhales long.

Nora smiles.

NORA
Twenty. You're getting better.

INT. BAG AREA - LATER

BANG-BANG! Mikey's jab-cross is crisp. He circles the bag.

BANG-BANG! his cross-hook lands heavy. He circles faster.

INT. BOXING RING - LATER

Nora, in blue headgear, slips a jab-cross, covers a body shot, slips and weaves the cross-hook, circling out behind Mikey.

MIKEY
You got better.

INT. OPEN AREA - SAME TIME

Jimmy feeds constant hooks. Brad weaves each one, in sync with Nora's perfect defence.

JIMMY
(to himself)
Make'em pay.

INT. BOXING RING - SAME TIME

THUD! Nora's hook slams Mikey's headgear. Mikey clinches.

Nora wraps around his waist, lifts and turns him into the ropes. They lock eyes. She pecks him on the lips.

Mikey freezes.

THUD! another hook.

GEORGE
(clicks stopwatch)
Time! Haha... Nora, that's some
tricky boxing.

They touch gloves. Nora breathes steady, Mikey, not so much.

NORA
Don't you remember? I was always
the better boxer.

INT. OPEN AREA - DAY - WEEKS LATER

Nora presses a twenty-kilo medicine ball onto Mikey's hips.
He powers through neck bridges, faster now.

INT. BAG AREA - LATER

THUD! the bag echoes. Mikey double weaves. THUD! his body
hook lands clean. He keeps the drill flowing, relentless.

INT. OPEN AREA - SAME TIME

In sync with Mikey, Jimmy feeds a left-right hook. Brad
weaves each one. THUD! he counters with a body hook. Jimmy
keeps his eyes on Mikey with every motion.

JIMMY
Good punch!

Jimmy feeds a right-left hook. Brad weaves each one. THUD!
another perfect counter.

INT. BOXING RING - LATER

Nora taps the mitts into Mikey's sharp combination, left
body hook, left uppercut, left hook, right cross.

Nora throws a left hook. Mikey weaves and fires his mirror
combo, right body hook, right uppercut, right cross, left
hook.

The rhythm between them tightens. Nora continues the feed.

INT. OPEN AREA - DAY - NEXT WEEK

Mikey pumps through neck bridges with Nora sitting side-
saddle on his stomach.

OVER BLACK

BOOM! the heavy bag echoes through the gym, chains rattling with every thump.

INT. BAG AREA - LATER

THUD! a hook pounds the bag. Mikey chases, working close, short, light punches.

THUD! a body hook explodes him free.

He circles, slips, weaves. Fast combinations flow, precise and fluid.

Nora and George watch, smiling. Nora notices Jimmy watching too, still working the mitts with Brad but focused on Mikey.

INT. BOXING RING - LATER

Mikey, red headgear on, slips a jab-cross, covers a body hook, slips and weaves a cross-hook, circling out behind Nora.

NORA
You're getting better.

INT. OPEN AREA - SAME TIME

BANG-BANG! Brad lands a jab-cross. Jimmy feeds a left hook. Brad weaves.

Jimmy glances toward the ring. Nora throws jabs.

JIMMY
Make'em pay.

BANG-BANG! Brad counters with a cross-hook, grinning.

Jimmy feeds a right hook. Brad weaves.

Jimmy watches Nora throw a jab-cross.

INT. BOXING RING - SAME TIME

Mikey slips the jab-cross. BANG-BANG! his jab-cross lands flush.

Nora shakes her head.

JIMMY (O.S.)
Time!

INT. OPEN AREA - SAME TIME

JIMMY
Good work, Brad. You're doing well,
son.

Jimmy pats him on the shoulder. Brad beams.

BRAD
Thanks, Coach Jimmy.

Jimmy removes his mitts.

JIMMY
Same time tomorrow?

BRAD
I can't wait.

Brad takes the mitts for him.

BRAD (CONT'D)
Bye!

INT. BOXING RING - MOMENTS LATER

GEORGE
TIME!

Nora and Mikey touch gloves. They smile... their heads move in close.

JIMMY (O.S.)
Got one more round left, kid?

They turn. Jimmy waits ringside, gloves on.

MIKEY
Oh... okay. Sure. I could go a few
more rounds.

Jimmy and Mikey touch gloves. Jimmy's guard is tight. Mikey jabs, steady pressure. Jimmy slips each punch, backpedaling towards the corner.

Nora and George watch from the post.

Mikey chases. He feints a jab, a cross-hook explodes. Jimmy slips the cross, weaves the hook deep behind him. SMACK! he shoulder-barges Mikey into the corner.

NORA (O.S.)
Dad!

Mikey turns, firing fast and angry. Jimmy stays glued to him, evading every punch, smothering Mikey against the corner post.

GEORGE (O.S.)
Come on, kid! Get outta there!

Mikey grunts through wild punches. Jimmy weaves a hook. SMACK! another shoulder barge.

He clinches hard, pins Mikey in the corner, steps on his boot, presses his head in close.

JIMMY
What're you gonna do when someone
dirty-boxes you again?

Mikey grunts, struggling.

NORA (O.S.)
Dad! Stop!

Jimmy pushes closer, smothering Mikey's hooks.

MIKEY
I'm not gonna stop!

NORA (O.S.)
Break it up!

MIKEY
I'm not going to stop training,
Jimmy!

JIMMY
What am I gonna do if I lose you
too?

Nora and George rush in, prying Jimmy off.

Jimmy and Mikey lock eyes.

MIKEY
You won't.

NORA
Dad?

MIKEY
It's alright, Nora.

She exhales, checking Mikey's face.

JIMMY

That wasn't even one round, kid.
You got angry fast. You do that in
a fight, someone's gonna get
hurt... or killed.

Mikey pants, eyes on the canvas.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

You ever see George fight angry?

GEORGE

Fighting angry, son, makes losing
even harder to deal with.

JIMMY

No matter what your opponent does,
if you can't control your anger,
you can't control the fight. You
started angry, and it worked
against you.

Mikey nods. Jimmy steps closer, rests a glove on his
shoulder.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Otherwise... you're doing well,
kid. Nora's a good trainer.

GEORGE

Hey, what about me, Coach?

JIMMY

George too.

MIKEY

Thanks, Jimmy. Thanks, everyone.

JIMMY

Why don't you come by the house
tonight. There's something we need
to talk about.

INT. THE DUNCAN HOUSE - ENTRANCE FOYER - NIGHT

Jimmy, Annie, Nora and Mikey stand before a wall crowded
with framed photos.

JIMMY

That's our son, James.

MIKEY

He looks like you.

Jimmy leans in, squints at the photo, and shakes his head with a soft grin.

JIMMY

I can't see it. Must be the closed eyes.

NORA

He's the spitting image of you, Dad.

ANNIE

He sure was.

JIMMY

He was a good kid... just like you, Mikey.

ANNIE

You remind us a lot of him.

NORA

(mumbling to herself)

Not me... that's gross.

Jimmy smiles faintly at Nora's comment.

JIMMY

And because of that, anything that happens to you really hits us hard. You're like a son to us.

Jimmy carefully lifts a photo frame. In it, a younger Jimmy and James stand together in boxing trunks and gloves, arms hooked around each other, both with half-closed eyes, mid-laugh.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

And as a father, you always want to protect your children. Sometimes... maybe too much.

He stares at the photo, his eyes glistening.

JAMES (O.S.)

I want to be just like you, Pa.

Jimmy's breath catches.

JAMES (O.S.)

I want to compete, just like you.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1985

SILENCE.

James, hands up, stands dead still in the center of the ring, unfocused, distant.

Jimmy watches from the corner, frozen.

JIMMY (V.O.)
It wasn't the punch that killed
James that night.

James's stare goes blank.

JIMMY (V.O.)
It was the seizure, the blank stare
coming back.

JIMMY
No!

He shakes his head, panic rising.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
STOP THE FIGHT!

IN SLOW MOTION, Jimmy hurls the towel over the ropes.

James's opponent swings a brutal right cross, ripping through James's guard.

The towel drifts toward the canvas.

SMASH! the cross lands flush on James's chin.

CRASH! James hits the canvas in front of Jimmy and Annie.

The towel lands beside him.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
NO, JAMES! NO!

Annie screams.

INT. DUNCAN HOUSE - ENTRANCE FOYER - NIGHT - 1996

Jimmy and Annie's tears slip free.

JIMMY
It's things like that... I couldn't
protect him from.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1985

Jimmy and Annie cradle James in their arms. Their faces shine with tears.

ANNIE

No! James, my boy!

INT. DUNCAN HOUSE - ENTRANCE FOYER - NIGHT - 1996

Jimmy hangs the photo back and wipes his eyes. Annie does the same.

ANNIE

So how's your foster family going?

MIKEY

They're nice... but kind of distant.

JIMMY

Guess they don't want to get too attached to kids who come and go.

NORA

Maybe they just don't like you.

ANNIE

Nora.

JIMMY

Mikey, we bypassed the foster care process and went straight for adoption.

MIKEY

Oh... What does that mean?

JIMMY

You can stay with us. Officially. We'd like that.

Jimmy hands him a large white envelope.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

You just have to sign the papers.

Mikey stares at it, hesitant.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

Mrs Wilson recognized my name. She was our Coach Gus's contact who pushed my adoption through, all those years ago.

MIKEY

Wow. Small world. This means a lot,
Coach Jimmy... Mrs Duncan... but
I'm sorry. I can't.

Mikey offers the envelope back. Jimmy doesn't take it.

ANNIE

Why not, Mikey?

MIKEY

I can't accept this, then go off
and...

JIMMY

And what?

NORA

Compete!

JIMMY

Compete?

Jimmy exhales hard.

NORA

We all know he wants to compete,
Dad.

JIMMY

After what happened? No. You don't
have permission. And your foster
parents can't sign off on that.

NORA

He's recovered and almost ready for
competition. Still can't beat me,
though.

ANNIE

Nora, this is serious.

JIMMY

Physically, yes. But mentally?
Trauma doesn't heal overnight.

MIKEY

Maybe it's you who can't get over
it.

JIMMY

You're right! I can't. And as a
parent, I never will.

Jimmy takes the envelope.

MIKEY

I'm not going to stop training. You'll have to accept that. I'll be of age soon, and if I have to, I'll do it without you. I'll start the same way Coach Gus did with illegal fights.

JIMMY

Let's not go to extremes, okay? It was different back then. You've got better choices now.

MIKEY

And I've made them.

NORA

He's going to compete anyway. And I'll keep helping him. But I can't do it alone, Dad. We need you, both of you.

MIKEY

I want you in my corner. All of you.

ANNIE

Enough with the boxing! Mikey... if it weren't for competing, and how we feel about it... would you stay?

MIKEY

Yes. I would.

Jimmy's eyes soften. He hands the envelope back.

JIMMY

Okay... sign it.

Mikey's face lights up. He hugs Jimmy tight.

OVER BLACK

RING ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

You're that kid who came out of the coma, right?

MIKEY (O.S.)

Um... yes sir.

RING ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

MIKEY "THE COMEBACK KID" TURNER!

The crowd cheers.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1997

The bell dings.

The two Olympic Officials, clipboards in hand, sit silently in the front row, center ring.

In Mikey's corner, Jimmy stands between Annie and Nora, gripping a folded white towel tight. They watch Mikey head towards center ring.

NORA
Go, Mikey!

Mikey slips his OPPONENT's double jab. He slips the cross, weaves the predictable hook. SMASH! he fires a sharp cross.

His opponent freezes, eyes rolling back.

Mikey pulls his next punch mid-swing. His opponent collapses face-first to the canvas.

The referee waves it off.

The crowd explodes with deafening cheers.

Nora ducks under the ropes and rushes to Mikey.

Jimmy and Annie exhale, the tension leaving them. Jimmy lets the towel go.

Nora throws her arms around Mikey, cheering. She lifts his glove high, and the crowd erupts.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - ANOTHER NIGHT

The crowd cheers.

The two Olympic Officials sit quietly in the same seats.

In Mikey's corner, Jimmy grips the folded white towel.

BANG-BANG! BANG! Mikey's double jab-cross jolts his OPPONENT's head back. He rebounds off the ropes. THUD! Mikey's hook knocks him sideways into the corner post.

The referee steps in, protecting the opponent, and waves off the fight. The crowd erupts.

Jimmy and Annie exhale. Jimmy lets go of the towel.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1998

The crowd cheers.

The two Olympic Officials still sit quietly in the same seats.

Mikey slips and weaves with flawless ease. Every angry, frustrated punch misses by inches. The crowd roars louder.

Jimmy grips the towel tighter.

JIMMY

Ready... ready...

Mikey weaves left.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

NOW, KID!

THUD! Mikey's body hook slams the liver. CRACK! his uppercut smashes the chin. His OPPONENT crashes flat to the canvas.

The crowd erupts.

Jimmy and Annie exhale.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - ANOTHER NIGHT

Jimmy grips the folded white towel tight, pinned to the canvas edge.

CRASH! Mikey's OPPONENT hits the canvas. The referee waves off the fight. The crowd roars.

Nora ducks under the ropes. Jimmy releases the towel.

THE CROWD

COMEBACK KID! COMEBACK KID!

Jimmy and Annie turn. The standing crowd chant with fists raised. Jimmy's eyes widen as the Olympic Officials rise and applaud.

JIMMY

(to Annie)

Well, I'll be.

Jimmy looks back into the ring. Nora lifts Mikey's glove high. The crowd erupts.

Mikey looks down at Jimmy. They nod and smile at each other.

INT. GUS'S BOXING GYM - BAG AREA - NIGHT - 1999

THUD! one last body hook caves the heavy bag's side. Mikey wipes sweat from his brow with his glove.

JIMMY

Good work, kid. We'll call it a night. Let's get some rest.

Jimmy walks over to the picture wall...

INT. BACK WALL - CONTINUOUS

Mikey joins him, towel slung around his neck, drying his face.

MIKEY

Everything alright, Coach Jimmy?

Jimmy stares blankly at the photos.

JIMMY

You know, when I made my first Olympic Games, our Coach Gus didn't even tell me I was one match away. He didn't mention those men in suits were Olympic Officials either. You can imagine my surprise.

He lifts a photo from the wall. In it, Annie and George hold Jimmy's arms up in the ring. Milo cheers in the background.

JIMMY (CONT'D)

That was Montreal in '76... But before I made those Games, I faced a not-so-sportsmanlike boxer in the qualifier.

OVER BLACK

The crowd roars.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1975

Chuck, 30, clinches Jimmy into the corner with an angry grunt. Blood runs from a split above his eye. He rams his forehead into Jimmy's face, unseen by the referee.

JIMMY (V.O.)

I believe you met him a while ago.

THUD! THUD! THUD! Jimmy pounds three body hooks that force separation.

THUD! THUD! a double hook slams into Chuck's ribs and temple. His split eye bursts open, blood spraying across the ring. His head spins and his body follows. CRASH! he hits the canvas hard.

JIMMY (V.O.)

Chuck Jones.

INT. GUS'S BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - NIGHT - 1999

MIKEY

That's Johnny's coach... Yeah, I met him... I wanted to tell you.

JIMMY

It's okay, kid. You don't have to explain anything. Unfortunately, Chuck's lack of respect has no place in boxing. And Johnny's picked up plenty of those habits, as you've seen.

MIKEY

Yeah, I know. But I'm not afraid of him.

JIMMY

Good. You've got one more match, kid. And I can promise you, Johnny hasn't changed. And Chuck will do whatever he can to stop us.

OVER BLACK

JIMMY (O.S.)

You can still back out, kid.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT

The two Olympic Officials sit quietly in the same seats amongst the rowdy crowd.

Mikey and Jimmy stand center ring, still and composed. Across from them, Chuck and Johnny glare back. Mikey meets it, unshaken.

JOHNNY

I missed the last Olympics, and my gym's gone because of you.

MIKEY

No. That's on you and your coach.

Johnny steps closer.

JOHNNY

You don't want to get hurt again.
You can still back out. Because
this time there ain't no comeback.

Mikey's eyes drop to the canvas.

INT. GUS'S BOXING GYM - BACK WALL - A FEW NIGHTS EARLIER

JIMMY

You can still back out, kid...

MIKEY

(shaking his head)
No. I don't run from bullies.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT

Mikey raises his eyes again. His stare slices through the noise. Johnny falters for a heartbeat.

MIKEY

I don't run from bullies.

The referee steps between them, spreading his arms, separating them.

REFEREE

Break it up!
(points at Chuck)
Control your fighter. No crap this time. Alright, both of you protect yourselves at all times, you hear?

Mikey and Johnny nod, their stare unbroken.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

Coaches protect your fighters.

Chuck stares at Jimmy. Jimmy returns a blank, cold look.

REFEREE (CONT'D)

Back to your corners.

Heading back to his corner, Mikey glances at Annie and Nora below. Nora gives him a small, steady smile. He smiles back.

JIMMY

Remember, he fights dirty.

Mikey turns and leans against the post.

MIKEY

I'm expecting it.

Jimmy fits in Mikey's mouthguard.

JIMMY
Play your game, not his. Throw his
attack off. Stick to your
aggressive defense.

Mikey nods. Jimmy hugs him.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
Good luck.

He ducks under the ropes and joins Annie and Nora. Annie hands him the folded white towel.

The bell dings. The crowd cheers.

Mikey heads for center ring, slipping side to side. Johnny rushes him, a wild hook replacing the glove shake. Mikey weaves. THUD! his body hook slams the liver. Johnny drops to his knees.

The crowd roars. Mikey's corner cheers.

REFEREE
(pointing Mikey away)
Neutral corner!

Mikey backs into a neutral corner, eyes fixed on Johnny. Johnny clutches his side, gasping.

CHUCK
GET UP!

JIMMY
Stay down.

REFEREE
... SIX!

CHUCK
GET UP AND FIGHT!

REFEREE
SEVEN!

Johnny forces himself upright. The referee wipes Johnny's gloves on his shirt, gives them a shake. Johnny holds steady.

REFEREE (CONT'D)
EIGHT! YOU GOOD?

JOHNNY
Yeah... yeah.

Johnny yanks his gloves away and charges.

Mikey bursts from the corner, slipping side to side. BANG-BANG! his jab-cross cracks Johnny back. The crowd erupts.

Mikey chases. Johnny springs forward. SMASH! his cross nails Mikey. Mikey barely slips another and counters with a body hook. Johnny smothers it, clinches, and rams Mikey into the corner post. The referee lingers behind...

REFEREE
No holding! No holding!

He grabs Johnny. Johnny releases and fires a low uppercut. Mikey grunts, clutching his groin.

REFEREE (CONT'D)
(to Johnny)
WARNING! Low blow!

The bell dings.

REFEREE (CONT'D)
Cut the crap, Johnny!
(pointing)
Chuck! Control your fighter!

Annie sets the stool. Jimmy and Nora rush in. Mikey sits, grimacing.

ANNIE
ICE!

She hands Jimmy an ice bag under the ropes. He drops it onto Mikey's groin.

JIMMY
Breathe. You're doing good, kid.
He's hurt.

Nora squirts water into Mikey's mouth. He spits into the bucket she holds.

MIKEY
So am I.

NORA
Yeah, from a cheap shot.

She wipes his face, then glares towards Johnny's corner.

JIMMY
He's all over the place.

NORA
Gets off with a warning.
Unbelievable.

JIMMY
He's rushing. Shift left. Double
hook.

REFEREE (O.S.)
Twenty seconds!

Mikey nods and stands.

JIMMY
You hear me? Double hook.

Another nod. Jimmy and Nora exit the ring.

The bell dings.

They come center ring. Johnny snaps a fast jab and misses.
Another jab, another miss. Mikey slips the predictable
cross. THUD! his body hook hammers Johnny's covering arm.
THUD! his next hook crashes across Johnny's jaw.

The crowd roars.

Johnny clinches, over-hooking Mikey's arms and turning his
back to the referee.

REFEREE
NO HOLDING!

BANG! Johnny headbutts Mikey's right eye. A cut opens, blood
pouring fast.

NORA
COME ON, REF! YOU BLIND?

SMASH! Johnny's cross cracks into the cut. Mikey stumbles
back.

The crowd goes wild.

Jimmy lifts the towel, ready.

BANG-BANG! Mikey fires a cross-hook. Johnny stumbles. Mikey
chases, slipping fast side to side. Johnny backpedals
towards his own corner. Mikey closes in.

Jimmy raises the white towel to shoulder height.

On Mikey's next slip, SMASH! Johnny's right cross lands flush on the nose. Mikey hits the canvas. Blood streams from his nose and the open cut.

The crowd roars.

Jimmy goes blank.

JIMMY (O.S.)
NO, JAMES! NO!

REFEREE (O.S.)
THREE!

JAMES (O.S.)
I want to compete just like you,
Pa.

MIKEY (O.S.)
I want to compete just like you,
Coach.

The bell dings. Jimmy snaps out of it, shaking his head.

NORA
GET UP, MIKEY!

Mikey forces himself up. Jimmy lowers the towel.

REFEREE
EIGHT! Can you go on, kid?

Mikey nods.

REFEREE (CONT'D)
(pointing)
TO YOUR CORNERS!

Johnny grunts, furious, and heads back.

Mikey slumps onto his stool.

NORA
Mikey! Are you alright?

Annie tilts Mikey's head sideways. She flushes the cut with an adrenaline wash and presses three cotton buds together to soak the blood.

MIKEY
I'll be okay.

Annie thickly packs the cut with vaseline. She gives Jimmy a worried shake of the head.

ANNIE

The cut's too deep. It won't last long.

JIMMY

You have to end it quick unless the doc ends it.

The RING DOCTOR springs up behind Mikey, leaning over the rope.

RING DOCTOR

Can you go on, kid?

NORA

It's not that bad, doc.

MIKEY

I'm good.

RING DOCTOR

If it opens again, Jimmy, I'll have to call it.

He leaves.

REFEREE (O.S.)

Twenty seconds!

MIKEY

Don't know what happened. He got me good, Coach.

JIMMY

He's anticipating your aggressive defense.

NORA

More like a lucky shot.

JIMMY

No. It may be a dirty gym, but it's not a dumb one, unfortunately.

MIKEY

So what do I do?

Jimmy looks at Mikey...

MIKEY (O.S.)

I want to compete just like you, Coach.

...then Annie and Nora...

JAMES (O.S.)
I want to compete just like you.

Jimmy sees the towel on the edge of the ring...

GUS (O.S.)
You punch, kid!

Jimmy looks back at Mikey.

JIMMY
You keep him away from that cut.
You go out there and you punch,
kid, you hear? You punch, kid.
Punch!

OVER BLACK

The crowd cheers. Their screams deafen.

Hard breaths exhale.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT

Johnny weaves and shoulder-barges Mikey into the corner. He pounds at the body and head. Mikey frantically slips and weaves. A hook catches the cut and blood pours. Mikey clinches. Johnny rams his head into the cut. Mikey grunts.

REFEREE (O.S.)
NO HOLDING!

Mikey traps Johnny's arm and clamps around his waist. He sees the referee coming.

NORA
NOW, MIKEY!

Mikey lifts Johnny and swings him hard into the corner post. The referee freezes.

The crowd erupts to their feet, roaring.

THE CROWD
COMEBACK KID! COMEBACK KID!

NORA
GO MIKEY!

IN SLOW MOTION, Mikey's hands come up tight. BANG! his jab crushes Johnny's nose. THUD! his jab recoils into a hook, smashing the cheekbone. SMASH! his right cross pinpoints the jaw. THUD! the body hook sinks into the ribs.

Johnny throws a desperate haymaker. Mikey weaves and unleashes hard and fast. THUD! left body hook. CRACK! left uppercut. THUD! left hook. SMASH! right cross.

Johnny slams into the corner post. His eyes roll back. He falls forward. CRASH! he hits the canvas even harder. Out cold.

The crowd screams. The roar deafens.

The referee waves it off.

Jimmy, Annie, and Nora explode with cheers. They rush into the ring and huddle Mikey. Jimmy raises Mikey's arm high.

Nora plants a big kiss on Mikey's lips.

NORA (CONT'D)
You did it, Mikey! You're in the
Sydney Olympics!

THE CROWD
COMEBACK KID! COMEBACK KID!

OVER BLACK

JIMMY (O.S.)
This is for you, kid.

INT. OLYMPIC CHANGE ROOM - NIGHT - 2000

Jimmy stands with Annie and Nora, holding up a red robe. Silver thread glistens across the back: "MIKEY 'THE COMEBACK KID' TURNER."

JIMMY
We brought it for our James.

ANNIE
But it's yours now.

Mikey's eyes fill. He pulls Jimmy and Annie into a hug.

MIKEY
This one's for everyone... my dad,
your James... and for you, Coach
Jimmy. Thank you.

OVER BLACK

Cheers roar.

REFEREE (O.S.)
...NINE... TEN!

Screams deafen.

OLYMPIC ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
IT'S OVER! HE'S WON! HE'S WON GOLD
AT THE SYDNEY OLYMPICS!

INT. OLYMPIC CHANGE ROOM - LATER

Nora sits next to Mikey, both staring downward in disbelief.

Annie leans in and cuts the stitching above Mikey's right eye.

ANNIE
Now how many times do I have to
stitch up this eye, Mikey?

JIMMY
So what did you learn, son?

Mikey keeps his stare down. A soft smile appears. He looks up at Jimmy.

MIKEY
That no matter what happens... you
keep moving forward. Especially for
the ones who can't anymore.

Jimmy nods. He looks down.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE - CEMETERY - DAY - 1985

Jimmy looks downward. His eyes glisten.

JIMMY
My James died, Ma.

His tears slip free.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
He died in my arms, just like you
did... I miss him, and I miss you,
Ma.

Jimmy collapses to his knees. He cries hard, leaning his head against the gravestone. It reads: "In loving memory of Nora Duncan."

JIMMY (CONT'D)
You always said none of this was my
fault.

NORA (O.S.)
None of this is your fault,
Jimmy...

JIMMY
I think this time it was... What am
I supposed to do, Ma?

INT. JIMMY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 1960

NORA, 40, lies curled on Jimmy's bed, tears streaking. A fresh bruise swells on her cheek.

Jimmy, 10, 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 and rests his head on her shoulder.

JIMMY
And it's not yours either, Ma.

Nora leans her head on his.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
I don't want to lose you.

NORA
And I don't want to lose you,
Jimmy.

She pulls him into a tight hug.

NORA (CONT'D)
The worst thing a parent can go
through is losing their child...

She cups the back of his head, holding him close.

NORA (CONT'D)
I'm going to make sure he never
hurts us again.

Jimmy lifts his eyes to her with a small, hopeful smile.

NORA (CONT'D)
But promise me... no matter what
happens to me, good or bad...

INT. OLYMPIC CHANGE ROOM - NIGHT - 2000

Jimmy looks back up at Mikey. He smiles and nods.

NORA (O.S.) / JIMMY
...you keep moving forward.

Mikey smiles and nods.

MIKEY
We did it, Coach.

Mikey raises the gold medal.

Jimmy, Annie and Nora smile with him.

MIKEY (CONT'D)
We did it.

They keep looking at the medal, the weight of the moment
settling in.

FADE OUT.

THE END.