

PUNCH

Punching your way through life.

Written by

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OVER BLACK

Cheers roar. Screams deafen.

GUS (V.O.)
I don't know how I survived it,
Jimmy.

A brutal roar cuts through the noise.

INT. OLYMPIC BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1932

SMASH! MAX FLYNN, 18, fires a cross. GUS, 30, takes it on the chin. His head jolts back. He staggers center ring.

The crowd erupts to their feet.

GUS (V.O.)
That was the punch that knocked
everyone out.

Ringside, EVELYN, 30, and JAMES, 7, jump to their feet. Evelyn clasps her mouth.

The crowd roars for blood.

James stands frozen.

INT. OLYMPIC APARTMENT - GUS'S ROOM - NIGHT - 1968

Gus, 66, coughs into his arm. He sits upright in bed. JIMMY, 18, sits at the foot of it.

GUS
I was lucky... but I knew I
couldn't take another punch. But he
didn't follow to finish me.

JIMMY
What do you mean?

GUS
Because it looked like he was
chopping onions.

INT. OLYMPIC BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1932

The crowd roars for more blood.

Gus's eyes flicker. He steadies himself, hands up tight, chin down. He staggers forward.

Max doesn't move. Tears spill from his swollen eyes. He turns to the referee and shakes his head.

MAX

No more!

The referee steps between them.

Gus lifts his gloves in victory.

Evelyn and James cheer.

GUS (V.O.)

I thought I'd won the gold.

INT. OLYMPIC APARTMENT - GUS'S ROOM - NIGHT - 1968

Gus coughs loudly.

GUS

But I didn't. Not in the right way.
It made me angry and depressed for
a long time... But I had my Evelyn
and James to help me through it.

Gus wipes his watery eyes.

GUS (CONT'D)

My James was seven years old when
he saw that cheating mess.

INT. BOXING GYM - AFTERNOON - 1932

James follows Gus through the boxing gym. Sunlight catches
dust in the air. Focus and bag mitts sit on a shelf, covered
with dust.

Gus takes a focus mitt and dusts it off. James grabs a pair
of bag mitts.

JAMES

Why are you sad, Pa? We got to go
to the Olympics and watch you win.

GUS

It looked like I won, but I didn't
win the honest way, son... Let me
help.

Gus helps James put on the oversized bag mitts.

JAMES

What do you mean?

GUS

It seems people I trusted ended up
being nothing but cheaters...

Gus puts on the mitt.

GUS (CONT'D)
...and what people do on your team,
son, affects everyone on the team.
But I shouldn't have been
surprised.

Gus flashes the mitt. James fires perfect jab-crosses.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. OLD WAREHOUSE - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1929

BANG-BANG! Gus, 27, fires a jab-cross. Blood sprays. The dirty canvas stains darker. Gus's bare hands drip red.

The small crowd around the ground-level wooden-post ring cheers for more blood.

Gus's overweight OPPONENT charges with a wild haymaker. Gus weaves. THUD! his body hook buries into the liver. CRASH! his opponent hits the ground, screaming. He sobs.

Gus raises his bloodied knuckles. The crowd cheers. Bets exchange hands.

Gus helps his opponent off the ground.

EXT. LANEWAY - NIGHT

A dim street light flickers. Overflowing trash cans line the alley. A HOMELESS MAN sleeps against a wall. He clutches a full paper bag tight to his body.

JACK, 57, thumbs through a thin fold of cash. Smoke from the nub of his cigar engulfs his weathered face.

JACK
Thought you lost a hand in all that
fat for a moment.

GUS
He put up a good fight.

JACK
You respect your opponents too
much, kid.

LOUIE, 47, keeps watch from behind, eyes darting.

LOUIE
Yeah, you're too nice. He's nothing
but a bum. A fat one, too.

Jack gives Gus his cut. He looks at the few dollars.

GUS
Dough's getting less and less.

JACK
Odds ain't paying much, kid. Be happy you're still making bread.

LOUIE
Yeah, stop being greedy. We're getting squat too.

GUS
You look like you're doing alright on my wins there, Louie.

LOUIE
You giving me lip, son? Who ya think makes you look pretty? Without me you'd be bleeding all over that ring. You just keep winning these fights and--

JACK
--Hey, shut ya hole! Both of ya... Like you can see, kid, not much of a crowd lately, but they're still coming despite what's going on. And like I told ya before, you can always do some shakedowns with me and Louie.

LOUIE
Yeah, easy money, kid. Ya just stand there and act tough. Don't need to pick anyone off the ground either.

Gus looks down at the homeless man... with every snore, he grips his bag tighter... Gus shakes his head.

GUS
And rob people of what little they got left? People are already losing too much, and it's just the beginning.

JACK
Up to you, kid. You want to get through this depression, the offer's there. But stop your whining, you're winning, aren't you?

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)
(taps Gus on the cheek)
See you at work. That's if we still
got a job tomorrow.

LOUIE
(taps Gus's other cheek)
Yeah, see ya, kid.

Jack and Louie walk off.

Gus looks back down at the homeless man. A grotty coin lies beside him. Gus picks it up and places it under the man's grimy hand.

EXT. QUARRY WORKSITE - DAY

SMASH! a sandstone boulder shatters. Gus rests the head of his sledgehammer on the ground.

His attention moves to his SUPERVISOR, clean white shirt, tie, black trousers, who hands out white envelopes to each of the workers.

Their expressions range from confusion to anger. Some mime cuss words, others rip their letters.

Jack and Louie, sledgehammers at their feet, envelopes open in hand, look over at Gus.

The supervisor hands Gus the last envelope.

JACK
That's all of us then.

LOUIE
Let's get out of this hole.

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - SEWING ROOM - DAY

Evelyn stops the foot pedal on her sewing machine. Gus hands her the letter.

GUS
Never thought it would get this
bad. We all got the sack.

EVELYN
(reading the letter)
Oh dear... that's awful. All those
families.

GUS

Yeah. A lot of fathers out of work.
I'd better get out there and see
what I can find.

EVELYN

We'll make ends meet. We always do.
We'll get through this.

OVER BLACK

WALT (O.S.)

That's all I have this week.

THUG 1 (O.S.)

That's not enough, old man!

INT. WALT'S GENERAL STORE - DAY

The entrance bell jingles shut. Gus stops still. He stares.

GUS

Don't think anything here belongs
to you lot.

WALT, 55, behind the counter, holds his hands up.

THREE THUGS, 20s, look over at Gus. THUG 1 points a dirty
switchblade knife at Walt.

Walt's hands start to shake.

WALT

Gus, you get outta here, son. Go!
Go on.

THUG 1

Yeah, son, you get outta here and
mind ya business or I'll cut ya
dead.

Gus gives the thugs a hard stare.

GUS

You just made it my business, son.

Gus slowly strolls forward.

GUS (CONT'D)

You see, if something happens to
Walt here and he closes down, that
means we don't eat, and we won't be
happy about that.

THUG 1

We? Who you talking about, we, ya
old timer?

The entrance bell jingles again.

Jack and Louie stand just inside, watching.

Thug 1 looks at Jack. Jack nods his head towards the door.
Thug 1 subtly nods.

JACK

Who you calling an old timer, punk?

THUG 1

Come on, let's go!

GUS

You're forgetting something. Give
him back his money.

Thug 1 walks up to Gus, pointing the switchblade high at
him.

THUG 1

I told ya to mind ya business or
I'll cut ya!

GUS

You couldn't cut butter with that
thing.

Gus's stare intensifies.

THUG 1

(knife hand shakes)
I'll-I'll cut ya!

GUS

You really want to do that? You got
the gumption to go that far? You
know what it takes to gut a man?

Gus steps in closer. The thug's eyes widen in surprise. He
backs away. His hand shakes faster.

GUS (CONT'D)

The adrenaline pumps faster, so
fast you get tunnel vision. You
can't hear. Your grip's so tight,
your hand starts to--

--SMASH! Jack's sucker-punch cross hits Thug 1 hard. The
switchblade flies out of his hand.

His arms flail wide, knocking over a chocolate stand. His momentum sends him spinning sideways, head first into a bread rack.

Jack and Louie, guards up, rush toward the other two thugs.

JACK
(shakes his fists)
You wanna taste these too, punks?
Get the hell outta here, ya
greaseballs!

They both rush out of the shop.

Thug 1 clasps his mouth. He scrambles to his feet. Gus blocks him.

GUS
The money. Give it back.

He throws a few dollar notes onto the counter and bolts for the door, whimpering and tripping over himself.

GUS (CONT'D)
You ok, Walter? Take a deep breath.

Walt nods several times, breathing fast. He takes his money and pockets it.

WALT
(takes a deep breath)
Thank you, Gus... This depression
is bad enough...

He looks over at Jack and Louie.

WALT (CONT'D)
Damn punks gonna drive me out of
business.

He looks back at Gus.

WALT (CONT'D)
But you take what you want, ok?
Bread, milk, all on the house for
you, Gus.

Walt repositions the stand. He scoops the chocolate bars into a pile.

JACK
Yeah, punks like that only
understand action and money, Gus.

Gus watches Louie walk up to the counter. Walt stops sorting the chocolate bars and looks up.

LOUIE
Yeah, more action, Gus.

Walt lowers his head and walks over to the bread rack. Gus frowns. Louie flicks through the chocolate pile with one finger and helps himself to one.

LOUIE (CONT'D)
Cause you talk too much, kid.

He unwraps it.

GUS
Yeah, right... So you two got work?

Jack picks up the switchblade.

JACK
You know how it is, kid. There's no honest work around.

He folds the blade and pockets it.

GUS
Yeah, I been looking for days.
Guess you're both too busy anyway,
protecting the neighbourhood from
punks like that.

LOUIE
(mouthful of chocolate)
You giving us lip again?

JACK
Shut the hell up, Louie... Look,
Gus, whatever you've saved for
these rainy days ain't gonna cut
it, and you know it. I'm just
looking out for ya, kid... The
neighbourhood could use some help
so people like Walt here get some
protection.

Gus stares at Jack. He looks back at Walt, restocking the bread rack.

GUS
Is that why you're here? You
fleecing Walt too for protection?

JACK
We're his protection from punks
like that.

LOUIE
You just got here first. But we'll
get paid for it.

GUS
Think he needs a refund... and
you're gonna pay for that
chocolate, right?

LOUIE
You being a wiseacre?

Louie drops the wrapper and steps forward, chest up. Jack
steps between them.

JACK
Cool it, both of ya! Look, if you
want work, the offer's still there.
You're not gonna find anything
else, and we could use you. We both
know for men like us that's the
only way left to make any dough
these days.

GUS
No... The only rort I'm in on are
the dirty matches. You get me more
fights. My money will come from my
wins, not from some hard-working
family man like Walt here. At least
then I'm only hurting myself, and
the rich pockets betting. And I'll
be able to sleep at night.

LOUIE
Well ain't you a Robin Hood.

JACK
Shut it, Louie.

Louie frowns at Jack and sorts through the chocolate pile.

JACK (CONT'D)
Not many fights around, kid.

GUS
I'll take anything, anytime. My
family ain't gonna starve in no
depression.

Louie pockets a chocolate bar.

GUS (CONT'D)
(watches Louie)
And I ain't gonna steal either.

JACK
Alright, kid. I'll see what I can do.

GUS
And if you both want your cut, you take Walt off the protection list.

LOUIE
You don't want much, do ya.

GUS
I'm doing the heavy lifting.

JACK
It's not that simple, Gus.

GUS
Then I'll make it simple, Jack... you take his collection outta my wins, but ya both leave him the hell alone, you hear...

Jack finally nods.

JACK
Sure thing, kid. We'll see ya around soon.

Jack and Louie leave. The entrance bell jingles shut.

Gus picks up a loaf of bread. He hands Walt the money. Walt puts a stopping hand out and shakes his head.

WALT
No, Gus. On the house, son.

GUS
No. Take it, Walt, please. And for the chocolate too.

INT. CLUB - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Sweat beads on Jack's brow. He hides the nub of his cigar behind his back. Louie stands silent beside him.

VINNIE, 55, suit and tie, jet-black hair slicked back, sits at his desk, sipping an espresso.

THREE GORILLA-SIZED HENCHMEN stand behind Vinnie. Their hard stare fixed on Jack.

Vinnie puts his espresso cup down on a saucer. He stares at Jack, waiting for a bead of sweat to roll off his cheek.

VINNIE

(smirks)

So what's this I hear about you
beating some of my boys up today?

Jack and Louie look at each other, surprised.

VINNIE (CONT'D)

What, you think I wouldn't find
out?

LOUIE

What do you mean, Vinnie?

VINNIE

Vinnie? You talking back to me? You
playing dumb? Who told you to talk
anyway? Did I ask you a question?
I'm talking to your boss... The set
on you talking back to me.

LOUIE

I'm sorry, Mr Deluca, I-I mustn't
have heard you right.

VINNIE

Heard me right? You saying I'm
wrong? You saying I didn't speak
loud enough for ya Irish ears? How
loud you want me to speak? Is this
better? You know I could whisper
and these three gorillas behind me
could hear it all... matter-a-fact,
they heard your deal downtown with
that friend of yours, so you just
open your ears and shut ya trap,
you hear.

JACK

Our apologies, Mr Deluca--

VINNIE

--Vinnie, you know you can call me
Vinnie, Jack.

(looks at Louie)

Him, not you! His mother looked out
for me, so he can call me Vinnie.
Now you gonna answer my question?

JACK

Of course, Vinnie. Our-our good friend, Gus... he's a good kid, he needs work, but he won't do no shakedowns. I know your boys, but I didn't want Gus to know that. Thought he might join us after we protected that shopkeeper, Walt, but like I said, he don't do no shakedowns.

VINNIE

Sounds like he knows too much now.

JACK

All he knows is that we do some shakedowns, but he don't know for who. He's a smart kid and he don't ask no questions he don't need to stick his nose into.

VINNIE

Yeah? Well let's keep it that way.

Jack nods several times.

VINNIE (CONT'D)

So this friend of yours... I hear he's a boxer too. He any good?

JACK

Yeah Vinnie, he's really good. Matter-a-fact, we gonna get him some more bouts and make some money off his wins. He even said he'll pay Walt's protection. You believe that?

VINNIE

You don't say? Must be that good then, if he can share the wealth around like that... Your cut...

(looks at Louie)

...this bum's cut, my protection cut, and whatever's left for young Gus... He knows what will happen if he don't pay, don't he?

JACK

Yeah I'm sure he does Vin--

VINNIE

--You sure he does?

JACK

Yeah, yeah. If he said he'll pay,
he'll pay. I'll take that bet. Gus
keeps his word, Vinnie.

VINNIE

You'll take that bet...

Jack nods.

VINNIE (CONT'D)

You better hope he keeps his word
for your sake, Jack, 'cause you
made this deal behind my back, and
if he doesn't pay Walt's
collection...

Vinnie finishes his espresso.

VINNIE (CONT'D)

...these three gorillas will be
coming to collect from you two
bums, you hear? And we don't want
that now, do we?

JACK

No... no we don't.

VINNIE

You know you got some set of balls
making this deal when you both
already owe me a lot of money.

JACK

Ah, yeah we're sorry, Vinnie, just
that times are tough right now.

VINNIE

Yeah, times sure are tough, Jack.

Vinnie opens his desk drawer. He pulls out a small wooden
box and opens the lid.

Sweat beads on Jack's forehead.

VINNIE (CONT'D)

But that don't change what you owe
me.

Vinnie watches a bead of sweat fall... He pulls out a fat
cigar and chops the end.

Jack exhales.

Vinnie reaches into the drawer and pulls out a small pistol. Jack and Louie flinch, hands up.

VINNIE (CONT'D)
And that's lots of money.

Vinnie smiles. He puts the cigar in his mouth. He pulls the trigger. The pistol flicks a flame. He lights his cigar. Jack and Louie exhale and lower their hands.

VINNIE (CONT'D)
But I'm a patient and generous man.
So here's what I'm gonna do for
you. I'm gonna let you play with
the big boys, make some real money.
Your fighter, my warehouse, my
clientele... better odds, which
means bigger money. How's that
sound?

JACK
That sounds very generous, Vinnie.

VINNIE
It is.

LOUIE
What's the catch?

Vinnie glares at Louie. A bead of sweat slides down Louie's cheek.

VINNIE
The catch is, that's what's going
to happen. If your fighter wins,
you make some money and pay your
debt off, and these three gorillas
don't have to waste their time
putting out the trash... The catch
is, you return the favour, and me
and my associates make a lot of
money off your fighter. That's the
catch. You hear me now, ya Irish
bum?

LOUIE
I sure do.

JACK
Thank you, Vinnie. We won't let you
down.

VINNIE
Your fighter better be as good as
you say, Jack, because this is your
last chance. Now hit the road.

JACK
Thanks, Vinnie.

Jack and Louie leave.

Vinnie hand-gestures his closest henchman. The henchman
bends toward him.

VINNIE
You personally pick up our cut from
Walter, every week, regardless
who's paying his protection.

The henchman nods with a grunt.

VINNIE (CONT'D)
And you find out everything about
this Gus character too. I don't
want him getting too close.

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - BARN - MORNING

Gus works fast, stiff jabs on a large filled sack used as a
heavy bag.

James, 4, stands nearby. He shadowboxes Gus's jabs.

GUS
(throws jabs)
Ya set'em up with your jabs, son...
then... BOOM!

Gus throws a cross-hook-cross hard. The sack thunders. The
rafters shake.

James roughly copies Gus's combination.

GUS (CONT'D)
Your power punches follow.

Gus works in close, concentrating on hard body hooks.

GUS (CONT'D)
And then, when they're on the
ropes, you start on the body.

The sack echoes. Its side caves in.

James copies Gus's body hooks.

GUS (V.O.)
When I wasn't training...

EXT. STOREFRONT - DAY

Gus reaches for the door handle.

GUS (V.O.)
...I was looking for work.

He stops as a shopkeeper places a sign on the door window:

NO WORK HERE.

Gus shakes his head and walks off. He passes the next storefront. Its sign reads:

OUT OF BUSINESS.

Gus shakes his head.

OVER BLACK

Cheers erupt.

GUS (V.O.)
But at night, I was fighting to
scratch a living.

Punches slam into flesh.

JACK (O.S.)
FINISH HIM!

INT. WAREHOUSE - BOXING RING - NIGHT

THUD! Gus's left body hook slams into his OPPONENT's covering arm. The sound of bone cracking is sickening. THUD! Gus's follow-up left hook smashes the jawline.

His opponent wobbles. He lunges for a desperate clinch. WHACK! Gus shoulder-barges him back. SMASH! his cross cracks the chin. CRASH! he slams to the canvas, out cold.

In Gus's corner, Jack and Louie punch the air, cheering.

The small, upper-class, well-dressed crowd around the elevated ring cheers loudly.

Gus raises his gloves... and looks down. He kneels beside the referee on the blood-drenched canvas and helps his opponent up.

Jack rolls his eyes and shakes his head.

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - JAMES'S ROOM - NIGHT

Gus stands before a tall bookshelf. He looks over at James, sound asleep in a small bed. He smiles.

From the highest shelf, Gus takes down a Mickey Mouse cookie jar.

He slips his two-dollar winnings into the near-empty jar and places it back on the shelf.

GUS
That's for you, son...

He gives James a kiss on the forehead. James stirs, half-waking.

JAMES
Pa?

GUS
It's alright. Back to sleep, champ.

James stares at a bruise on Gus's face.

JAMES
(points at the bruise)
Are you alright, Pa?

GUS
I'm better now, son. Love you. Back to sleep, ok. Goodnight.

OVER BLACK

GUS (V.O.)
There was no work... I had no choice. Every fight I had to win.

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - BARN - MORNING - 1930

Gus works a smaller filled sack as a slip bag. He swings it hard. It swings back. He slips side to side.

GUS
Never forget your defence, son.

James mirrors him, shadowboxing the slips.

GUS (V.O.)
I had to win... so I trained hard.
And I trained extra at home.

The sack swings faster. Gus keeps slipping.

GUS
Make'em miss.

He swings the bag harder. It whips back.

GUS (CONT'D)
Then make'em pay.

Gus pivots and shadowboxes a jab-cross-hook. He pivots back to the bag. Slips, pivots again, throwing a cross-hook-cross. He keeps slipping.

James struggles to keep up. He slips. Throws a jab-cross-hook. Resets and tries again.

GUS (V.O.)
And I fought harder.

INT. WAREHOUSE - BOXING RING - NIGHT

SMASH! Gus's right cross sends his bloodied OPPONENT crashing backwards to the canvas, flat on his back.

The small crowd cheers.

His opponent shakes his head, trying to focus.

JACK (O.S.)
Stay down!

His opponent's head slumps back onto the canvas.

The crowd erupts.

Gus reaches out a hand and helps him up.

GUS (V.O.)
Night after night.

INT. WAREHOUSE - BOXING RING - ANOTHER NIGHT

THUD! Gus's hook pounds the liver. His overweight OPPONENT drops hard to his knees, clutching his side. He struggles to breathe. With a stopping glove raised, he shakes his head.

GUS (V.O.)
And I kept winning.

The medium-sized crowd cheers louder.

Gus helps him up.

INT. WAREHOUSE - BOXING RING - ANOTHER NIGHT

Gus's jab-cross-slip-cross-hook sends his muscular OPPONENT crashing into the corner post. Gus cocks his right hand, but his opponent drops face first, out cold.

GUS (V.O.)
And the crowd got bigger.

The large crowd cheers for blood.

Gus checks his opponent... He wakes with a shake of the head.

Jack shakes his head.

EXT. LANEWAY - NIGHT

Jack hands Gus his cut. They nod and head off in different directions.

GUS (V.O.)
And so did my winnings.

Gus stops and places another coin under the sleeping homeless man's hand.

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - JAMES'S ROOM - NIGHT

Gus puts the lid on the full Mickey Mouse cookie jar and places it back on the top shelf.

GUS (V.O.)
And I saved what I could.

He looks down at James, 5, asleep... and smiles.

James stirs.

JAMES
Pa?

GUS
It's alright. Back to sleep, champ.

James notices another bruise.

JAMES
Did you win, Pa?

GUS
Yeah, I won, son.

Gus pulls the blanket up under James's chin and kisses his forehead.

GUS (CONT'D)
I love you.

INT. WAREHOUSE - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1931

From the corner post, Louie scans the thick crowd packed tight around the ring.

GUS (V.O.)
With every win, the crowd got bigger...

Young, glamorous ladies, arm in arm with their well-groomed older men, cheer and smile at Gus.

GUS (V.O.)
...but that meant people talked...

Louie squints.

GUS (V.O.)
...which meant the risk got bigger.

LOUIE
Those two look a bit out of sorts.

Louie nods towards TWO MEN, 50s, in suits, standing apart at the back of the crowd. Jack and Gus turn to look.

LOUIE (CONT'D)
Haven't seen them around before.
Look like a couple of bookkeepers.

GUS
They been around here lots lately.
Always up the back.

JACK
Really? Look like a couple of coppers to me.

LOUIE
Yeah, looks that way.
(looks at Gus)
And you didn't think to say anything?

GUS
I'm not in charge of security. You want me to point out the hot broads too?

The two men in suits stand quietly, watching Gus.

GUS (V.O.)
And in one night, everything
changed.

BANG! the wooden doors slam open. A dozen POLICEMEN storm the warehouse, shotguns ready.

The crowd scatters like cockroaches.

JACK
Scram! And don't say nothing about
nobody!

Jack and Louie dive under the ropes. Gus follows.

FLATFOOT (O.S.)
FREEZE! THIS IS A RAID!

INT. POLICE RECEPTION - MORNING

Evelyn sits waiting. The entrance bell jingles open. She watches two men in suits walk straight to the high front reception desk.

They hold out their identification cards.

MAN IN SUIT 1
The boxer that came in last night.

The FRONT DESK OFFICER, 20s, studies the identifications. He nods.

FRONT DESK OFFICER
He's waiting. Holding room one.
This way.

Evelyn storms to her feet.

EVELYN
Excuse me, what's going on? That's
my husband! I've been waiting all
morning.

The Front Desk Officer opens a back door behind him.

FRONT DESK OFFICER
Go on through.

EVELYN
Wait! Who are you two, and what do
you want with my husband?

The two men in suits ignore her and walk through.

FRONT DESK OFFICER
I'm sorry, Ma'am. That's official
business. If you take a seat,
someone will see you soon.

EVELYN
I've been sitting all morning,
young man.

The entrance bell jingles open. Vinnie and his three gorilla henchmen walk in.

EVELYN (O.S.)
What do those men want with my
husband? Tell me what's going on!

FRONT DESK OFFICER (O.S.)
Look, they're here to see someone
else, ok.

Vinnie stands in line behind Evelyn.

EVELYN
Someone else? How many boxers do
you have back there?

Vinnie looks up at the Front Desk Officer.

FRONT DESK OFFICER
One moment, please, Ma'am... Ah,
you can come through, Mr DeLuca.

VINNIE
Excuse us, Ma'am. We don't mean to
interrupt.

Vinnie and his three gorilla henchmen walk past her.

The Front Desk Officer holds the back room door open.

FRONT DESK OFFICER
I'd take viewing room one. Nothing
will be happening in rooms two and
three.

Vinnie nods.

EVELYN
Are you here for my husband too?

VINNIE
I'm sure there's nothing to worry
about, Ma'am. Everything will be
taken care of soon.

INT. HOLDING ROOM ONE - MOMENTS LATER

Gus sits still at an empty table.

The two men in suits enter.

MAN IN SUIT 1
Mr McCready.

INT. HOLDING ROOM TWO - SAME TIME

Jack waits at an empty table. Smoke from the nub of his
cigar fills the room. He exhales a drag.

INT. HOLDING ROOM THREE - SAME TIME

Louie waits at an empty table. He grinds a toothpick between
his teeth.

INT. HOLDING ROOM ONE - MOMENTS LATER

The two men in suits sit opposite Gus.

GUS
Do I need a lawyer?

MAN IN SUIT 1
Far from it, Mr McCready.

MAN IN SUIT 2
We're not the police.

GUS
Then who are you?

MAN IN SUIT 2
We're impressed, Mr McCready.

MAN IN SUIT 1
Yes. Impressed with your boxing
talents. You see, Mr McCready, at
this point, we are what you would
call... scouts.

GUS
Scouts? For what?

MAN IN SUIT 2
The Olympic Games.

Gus lets out a short, disbelieving breath.

GUS

The Olympics... right?

MAN IN SUIT 1

Yes. You see, we are Olympic Officials, and we are very impressed with you. If all goes well, we'd like you to represent the country at the Los Angeles Olympic Games next year.

GUS

What? Is this some kind of wisecrack? In case you can't tell, I don't think I'll be doing anything right now.

MAN IN SUIT 1

I wouldn't worry about that. With the state of the country, and your talent, you're not going anywhere but to the Olympic Games.

GUS

You're both crazy. What if I say no?

MAN IN SUIT 1

In your situation, why would you? You'll be charged for numerous illegal activities and sent off to the slammer.

Gus stares in silence.

MAN IN SUIT 1 (CONT'D)

But in our position, those charges will be dropped if you compete. The offer stands, dependent on how well things go. But from what I've seen, Mr McCready, I believe we will see you fight for your country.

GUS

What do you mean, how well things go?

MAN IN SUIT 1

Although the country is short on boxers, the Olympic Games will only take a certain number.

GUS
What's that mean?

MAN IN SUIT 2
Nothing major. You'll have to go
through a qualifying process first.

GUS
You just said you wanted me. Now I
have to qualify?

MAN IN SUIT 2
At this point, does it matter?

MAN IN SUIT 1
If it were up to me, you'd be
straight in. This is just minor red
tape to cut through.

GUS
What if I don't qualify?

MAN IN SUIT 1
If you agree, the charges will be
dropped immediately, win or lose.
(leans in, whispers)
But if I were a betting man, you
and I both know you're not going to
lose.

Gus nods.

GUS
Alright... alright. I'll do it. But
I got a couple of conditions.

MAN IN SUIT 1
Very well. We're all ears.

GUS
This offer extends to the other two
that came in with me.

MAN IN SUIT 2
Them? They're too old to compete.

GUS
No, son. I need a trainer and a cut
man in my corner. I ain't changing
my winning team.

MAN IN SUIT 1
Very well. And the second
condition?

INT. POLICE RECEPTION - SAME TIME

Evelyn paces. She stops at the front desk.

EVELYN
Who were all those men?

The Front Desk Officer ignores her.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
What did they want with my husband?

FRONT DESK OFFICER
I'm sorry, Ma'am. You'll just have to wait.

EVELYN
Please... can you tell me anything?
I'm very worried about my husband.
He's a good man. He looks after his family.

The officer leans forward, glancing side to side.

FRONT DESK OFFICER
I can assure you, Ma'am, everything is being taken care of. You don't need to worry. I'm pretty sure he'll be out soon.

INT. VIEWING ROOM ONE - SAME TIME

In the glass, Vinnie's reflection stares back, his three gorilla henchmen faintly visible behind him.

The door opens. DETECTIVE JONES, 50s, steps in.

DETECTIVE JONES
Mr DeLuca.

VINNIE
Detective Jones.

Detective Jones joins Vinnie at the two-way mirror. They watch Gus and the Olympic Officials shake hands and leave the holding room.

VINNIE (CONT'D)
Smart kid. Knows when to keep his mouth shut. Would've been a shame if something happened to his lovely wife.

DETECTIVE JONES
You buying that Olympic jargon? You
want me to clean it up?

VINNIE
No. Let's see where it goes.

Vinnie turns to him.

VINNIE (CONT'D)
I hear you had a busy night.

DETECTIVE JONES
An eager flatfoot overreached.
(a knowing smile)
Illegally raided a legitimate
warehouse.

VINNIE
Based on what?

DETECTIVE JONES
Some drunk spectators were
overheard running their mouths
after losing money on boxing. None
of it held up.

VINNIE
And he ran with it.

DETECTIVE JONES
He took it upon himself to act.
Witnesses all said the same thing.
Charity exhibitions. Respectable
crowd. And your paperwork was
airtight.

VINNIE
I do like to give back.

DETECTIVE JONES
The department appreciates it.
(leans in)
The flatfoot won't be a problem.
He'll be out on his ear within the
hour.

VINNIE
(smiles)
Ambition's a dangerous thing.

DETECTIVE JONES
Especially when it threatens good
businessmen.

VINNIE
And the spectators?

DETECTIVE JONES
After they sobered up, it dawned on them what they'd stirred up. Now they're terrified. They've apologised, offered compensation, and made generous contributions.

VINNIE
Contributions travel further than apologies.

DETECTIVE JONES
They understand that now... Deeply.

VINNIE
Good.

DETECTIVE JONES
With your recommendation, I imagine I'll be moving up the ranks.

VINNIE
With overtime.

Detective Jones smiles.

DETECTIVE JONES
On behalf of the department, our apologies for the inconvenience.

VINNIE
Make sure it doesn't happen again.

DETECTIVE JONES
It won't.

Vinnie turns to leave.

VINNIE
Detective.

DETECTIVE JONES
Good day, Mr DeLuca.

A henchman opens the door.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HOLDING ROOM TWO - MOMENTS LATER

Vinnie walks in. His three gorilla henchmen follow, blocking the doorway.

Jack rushes to his feet.

JACK
Vinnie?

VINNIE
(pointing)
Sit down.

Jack drops back into his chair. Vinnie slowly takes the seat opposite him.

JACK
I didn't say nothing to no one
about no one. I swear, Vinnie.

Vinnie stares at Jack until a bead of sweat drops.

VINNIE
I know you didn't say nothing,
Jack. Even your big-mouth pal Louie
kept his trap shut. Easy to do when
you're just sitting here by
yourself. Don't worry. They ain't
got nothing on no one anyway.

Jack exhales.

VINNIE (CONT'D)
But you know what? Your other
friend didn't keep his mouth shut.

JACK
What? You saying Gus ratted?

Vinnie just stares at him.

VINNIE
He made a deal.

JACK
Nah-nah. I don't believe it. Not
Gus.

VINNIE
You were right about that kid.
(slides a smile)
You can bet on him.

JACK

What do you mean, Vinnie?

Vinnie laughs softly. Jack doesn't.

VINNIE

He made a deal all right.

INT. POLICE RECEPTION - SOON AFTER

A UNIFORMED OFFICER escorts Gus, Jack and Louie out through the back room door.

Evelyn storms to her feet and marches straight for Jack.

SMACK! Evelyn's slap echoes across the room. Jack's cigar nub flies from his mouth, skidding across the floor. A black-and-white wingtip pins it.

EVELYN

(pointing at Jack)

Don't you ever come near my husband again!

(points at Louie)

Either of you!

Jack rubs his cheek.

Evelyn turns and wraps Gus in a tight hug.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Are you alright, Love? What happened? What did those men want?

GUS

It's all taken care of, Love.

Still holding Gus, Evelyn shoots Jack and Louie a hard glare. Her gaze shifts past them to Vinnie and his three gorilla henchmen, watching from a distance.

GUS (CONT'D)

Come on. Let's go home. I've got some good news to tell you.

Vinnie grinds his shoe into the dead cigar nub.

GUS (V.O.)

Evelyn was excited for me, all except for Jack and Louie's involvement. Walt was excited too, but he had his own problems.

EXT. WALT'S GENERAL STORE - FOOTPATH - DAY

Gus watches Walt tape an OUT OF BUSINESS sign to the glass door.

GUS (V.O.)
Walt had lost everything. But as it
turned out, we were both able to
help each other out.

Gus opens the door and steps inside. The bell jingles.

GUS (V.O.)
He owned the building. At the time,
real estate wasn't an investment,
but I took the chance.

INT. WALT'S GENERAL STORE - LATER

Gus and Walt shake hands.

WALT
All the best, Gus. And thank you.

GUS
You too, Walt.

OVER BLACK

GUS (O.S.)
No peeking, ok.

The entrance bell jingles.

INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - DAY - WEEKS LATER

Gus walks Evelyn and James, 6, inside, his hands covering their eyes. The floorboards creak.

GUS
Ready? Open your eyes.

He removes his hands.

JAMES
Oh wow, Pa!

Evelyn looks around. What was Walt's general store is now stripped bare. She's not impressed.

GUS
I know it needs a bit of work.

EVELYN

Just a bit.

James looks around, excited. Focus and bag mitts sit on a shelf. An old speed bag hangs nearby. A potato sack serves as a heavy bag. Towards the back wall, four roped barrels form a makeshift ring.

JAMES

This place is tops, Pa.

GUS

(smiles)

I'm glad you like it, son.

EVELYN

So this is ours?

Gus nods.

GUS

I made a deal with Walt. We own it outright.

EVELYN

But how can we afford this?

GUS

Well, with no mortgage, we've been able to save. And my winnings have never been better. Walt gave me a fair deal too... You seem worried.

EVELYN

I am. With how things are... are we really going to be alright?

GUS

I know it's a risk, Love, but it's a sure bet. With the Olympic Committee agreeing to pay my wage while I train and fight, we'll be alright. And if all goes well, this gym will take off.

EVELYN

Eventually, yes, if this depression ends. But what happens if you don't make it into the Olympics?

GUS

I don't want you to worry. I'll make it in. And if I don't, I'll fight every night if I have to.

INT. OLYMPIC APARTMENT - GUS'S ROOM - NIGHT - 1968

Gus coughs into his arm. Jimmy listens closely.

GUS

As usual, Evelyn was right. I risked it all. I had no choice but to make it work. But I knew we'd be alright, one way or another.

JIMMY

It seemed to work out.

GUS

We worked hard. That's what got us through... I suppose I learnt that from my pa. He was a good man.

Jimmy's eyes well.

GUS (CONT'D)

I never told you... but my folks both passed when I was sixteen.

Jimmy wipes his eyes.

JIMMY

I'm sorry, Coach Gus.

GUS

I was lucky though. I looked older than I was, so no one questioned it, and I wasn't sent to a workhouse. I was able to stay in the family home my pa bought long before I was born.

Jimmy listens, moved.

GUS (CONT'D)

One day, when the time comes, Evelyn and I would like to leave the house and the gym to you.

JIMMY

I can't accept--

GUS

--you can. We want you to have them and take care of them, just like we did. But only if you want to, son.

JIMMY

Of course I do, and I'll look after them. Thank you... for everything.

Gus pulls Jimmy into a hug.

GUS

I had a lot of good memories in that house and that gym. I hope you have some too.

INT. BOXING GYM - BOXING RING - DAY - 1931

James watches his pa hit the focus mitts.

Jack feeds the mitts, squinting through smoke from the nub of his cigar.

JACK

Come on! One-two! Power!

BANG-BANG! Gus's jab-cross echoes.

James shadowboxes the jab-cross.

JACK (CONT'D)

Defence! Louie!

Louie claps his focus mitts and rushes in from the corner barrel post. Jack moves back into a corner.

Louie throws constant jab-crosses. Gus slips side to side.

Louie throws a random hook. Gus weaves. Mitts ready. BANG-BANG-BANG! Gus's cross-hook-cross thunders.

Louie repeats the drill over and over, each time faster. Sweat pours.

JACK (CONT'D)

Time!

Jack walks back to Gus. He starts to untie Gus's gloves.

JACK (CONT'D)

Good, good... now remember, these college broads in the Olympics fly straight. They won't take to dirty boxing... so a subtle headbutt, a shoulder barge, or a foot stamp won't go astray, you hear? Who cares if they dock you a point if you get the knockout in the end, right?

LOUIE
And they're younger and faster too.

GUS
I gotta get past the qualifiers
first. Pretty sure they don't fly
straight.

JACK
They shouldn't be a problem.

GUS
What do you mean?

JACK
Nothing. Probably just bums you're
fighting.
(looks over at James)
Hey, Jimmy, your pa's gonna win a
gold medal.

James doesn't answer. He keeps throwing jab-crosses.

JACK (CONT'D)
Hey, Jimmy?

James stops.

JAMES
Huh? You talking to me?

JACK
Yeah, kid.

JAMES
But you said Jimmy.

JACK
Jimmy's short for James.

James shakes his head, confused.

JAMES
But how can it be shorter if it's
spelt longer?

JACK
(laughs)
You're a smart kid, kid.

OVER BLACK

The bell dings.

GUS (V.O.)
The competition wasn't what I
thought.

The crowd cheers.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT

The sports hall is new and clean. The small crowd is rowdy.

Evelyn and James sit front row, center ring, cheering.

The Olympic Officials sit beside them, still and quiet.

Gus dominates with constant jabs. OPPONENT ONE, 20s, barely keeps his gloves up, breathing hard.

GUS (V.O.)
My first qualifying opponent put on
a good show in the first round, but
by round two, he ran out of steam.

THUD! Gus's jab turns into a hook. SMASH! his cross cracks the chin.

Opponent One, stiff as a plank, falls backwards. CRASH! a clean knockout.

Evelyn and James leap to their feet, cheering.

Jack and Louie rush into the ring. They raise Gus's hands in victory.

The referee shakes Opponent One. He wakes with a groggy shake of the head.

GUS (V.O.)
Win or lose, I was always gracious
in victory and made sure my
opponent was alright.

Gus helps Opponent One to his feet.

Jack shakes his head.

The crowd applauds.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - ANOTHER NIGHT

The crowd cheers louder.

Evelyn and James cheer even louder.

The Olympic Officials again sit beside them, still and quiet.

GUS (V.O.)
Although they weren't bums, they
didn't seem to have the heart or
drive I was expecting.

Gus dominates with constant jabs. OPPONENT TWO, 20s,
backpedals into a corner.

GUS (V.O.)
My second qualifying opponent
didn't even seem to land a punch.
It was that quick, it felt like a
blur.

SMASH! Gus's cross smashes the nose. Blood pours.

JACK (O.S.)
PUNCH HIM HARDER! POWER!

THUD! Gus's body hook pounds the liver.

GUS (V.O.)
So Jack was right, in the end they
weren't a problem.

Opponent Two drops hard to his knees. He gasps for air. The
referee waves it off.

Evelyn and James cheer to their feet.

Gus and the referee help him up.

The crowd cheers.

Jack shakes his head.

The Olympic Officials nod at each other.

OVER BLACK

GUS (V.O.)
But my final opponent pretty much
went the distance. He at least put
on a good show.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - ANOTHER NIGHT

The crowd cheers louder.

Evelyn and James cheer even louder.

The Olympic Officials still watch in silence.

JAMES
PUNCH, PA! PUNCH!

Jack and Louie watch from the corner post.

LOUIE
Should'a been over.

Jack gives a concerned look.

JACK
LAST ROUND! POWER!

Gus turns up his aggression. He presses forward. BANG-BANG!
Gus's double jab jolts OPPONENT THREE's head backwards.
SMASH! the cross cracks the sternum.

The crowd goes wild.

JACK (CONT'D)
PUNCH!

THUD! Gus's body hook thunders. BANG! BANG! his cross-hook
is unanswered.

The crowd roars for blood.

GUS (V.O.)
But I should have known better.

INT. SPORTS HALL - CHANGE ROOM - NIGHT

Vinnie's gorilla henchman flicks through a fold of money.

GUS (V.O.)
After Walt, the mob had left me
alone. They were making money off
my wins.

He holds a thick amount of notes out.

HENCHMAN
You dive in the second round.

Opponent One takes the money and nods.

INT. SPORTS HALL - CHANGE ROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT

The gorilla henchman flicks through more money.

GUS (V.O.)
But it seems I wasn't winning
because I was a good boxer.

He holds it out.

HENCHMAN
First round.

Opponent Two takes the money and nods.

INT. SPORTS HALL - CHANGE ROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT

The gorilla henchman holds a fold of notes out.

HENCHMAN
Third round.

Opponent Three takes the money and nods.

OVER BLACK

The crowd roars.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - THAT NIGHT

Opponent Three hits the corner post and sees Jack and Louie.
Jack gives him a nod.

GUS (V.O.)
Yeah, he put on a good show
alright. Until the third round.
Barely threw anything.

Opponent Three turns around with his gloves down.

Gus leans low and loads up. THUD! a thunderous hook smashes
the temple.

GUS (V.O.)
Something just wasn't right.

Opponent Three bounces off the ropes. CRASH! he hits the
canvas face down.

Evelyn and James rush to their feet, cheering.

The crowd goes wild.

The Olympic Officials nod at each other with a smile.

GUS (V.O.)
And like I said, I should have
known better.

Gus, center ring, dead still, looks down at Jack and Louie.

LOUIE
(to Jack)
Too close.

Jack raises his fist in victory up at Gus.

GUS (V.O.)
But I couldn't prove anything.

Gus subtly nods. He turns away and helps his opponent up.

Evelyn and James rush into the ring and hug Gus.

JAMES
You did it, Pa.

GUS (V.O.)
So in the end, I made it into the
Olympic Games.

OVER BLACK

GUS (V.O.)
But Jack and Louie had other plans.

INT. CLUB - BACK ROOM - DAY

Jack and Louie stand silently. Jack holds the dead nub of a cigar behind his back.

Vinnie sits at his desk. His gorilla henchmen stand behind him, their hard stares fixed on Jack and Louie. Vinnie finishes his espresso, takes a drag of his cigar, and watches a bead of sweat fall from Louie's brow.

VINNIE
So your boxer got into those
Olympics. Where were they again?

JACK
Ah, Los Angeles, Vinnie.

VINNIE
You been there? Bunch of fairies.
You know those Olympic pansies fly
straight. No dirty boxing. None of
those rorts you running. All legit.

JACK
Yeah. They all fly straight,
Vinnie.

Vinnie takes a long drag of his cigar.

VINNIE

So maybe your boxer does something wrong. Something dirty the judges don't like, and he goes home early.

JACK

Gus don't want to mess this up.

VINNIE

No, he don't. But what if he did?

JACK

What do you mean, Vinnie?

VINNIE

I mean for his age, he's still making us money. Lots of money betting on him. But if one way or another there's a chance he's going home early, I want to make sure I'm compensated. You know what I mean?

JACK

Yeah, I think so. You want Gus to take a dive.

VINNIE

Like I said, he's getting on with age, and they fly straight at those Olympics. He takes a dive, and we're all guaranteed to go home rich. Even you two.

JACK

Yeah, but Gus won't do that.

VINNIE

He'll do what he's told to do. Just like you two will.

JACK

Of course. Of course, Vinnie. But with all due respect... I haven't seen a boxer like Gus since that German Kraut, Smell-Schmeling. And I'm confident he'll win. Give it a chance. He's won so far.

Vinnie glares at Jack, exhales, and squints through the smoke.

VINNIE

Give it a chance. That's what we've been doing every time we bet, Jack. Yeah, he's won so far, but one way or another, everyone loses. Now I need some guarantees.

JACK

He's in his prime. He's got a wife and kid he doesn't want to let down. He knows if he wins, it'll put his gym on the map. He's got a lot riding on this.

VINNIE

Yeah? You that confident?

Jack nods several times.

JACK

Yeah, Vinnie. He won't let us down. You can bet on that.

VINNIE

You betting on that, Jack?

JACK

Yeah. We both are.

Louie gives Jack a sideways glance.

VINNIE

(laughs)

You two betting on that with your records, don't give me too much confidence, Jack.

JACK

I'd bet it all on Gus. He ain't gonna lose.

Vinnie stops laughing and stares at Jack, waiting for another bead of sweat to fall.

VINNIE

Alright. You want to bet it all on Gus. I'll tell ya what, Jack...

Vinnie opens his desk drawer and reaches in.

Jack and Louie exchange a nervous look.

Vinnie pulls out a thick bundle of hundred-dollar notes and slams it onto the desk.

Jack and Louie's eyes widen.

VINNIE (CONT'D)

Your boxer made me richer. He can make me even richer. So you take that bundle, and I want you to see, like those qualifiers, how straight those Olympic boxers really do fly.

JACK

Yeah sure, Vinnie. By the end, we'll have them flying as straight as a politician. Don't you worry.

Jack reaches for the money. Vinnie grabs his wrist and pulls a handgun, pointing it at him.

VINNIE

You just make sure your boxer wins. We got a lot of bets on him. And if he goes down, well...
(cocks the hammer)
...this one ain't no cigarette lighter.

Jack looks down at the handgun. Sweat beads fast.

JACK

Yeah. I'll make sure he wins, Vinnie.

Vinnie uncocks the hammer, lowers the handgun back into the drawer, and lets go of Jack.

Jack rubs his wrist. He slowly takes the money.

VINNIE

One more thing, boys. If he loses, then that bundle's on you.

INT. PLANE - AFTERNOON

Gus closes the overhead compartment door.

GUS (V.O.)

So we were off to the Olympics.

James looks out his window, bouncing in his seat with excitement.

GUS (V.O.)

James had just turned seven, and it was his first time on a plane.

Evelyn sits beside him. Gus takes his seat.

GUS (V.O.)

It was everybody's first time.

Evelyn looks at Gus and smiles. He looks nervous. She puts her hand on his. They lean their heads against each other.

LOUIE (O.S.)

Hey sweetheart, bring us a drink.

James turns in his seat, watching passengers settle in. He spots Jack and Louie in the back row.

A STEWARDESS, 20s, waves her hand through Jack's cigar smoke.

STEWARDESS

Anything for you, Sir?

JACK

Well that depends on who's buying, sweet-cheeks... you?

STEWARDESS

(slightly grimaces)

Ah no... but there is an Olympic allowance allocated, Sir.

JACK

Well then, whisky. Make it a double.

LOUIE

Yeah, and keep'em coming, gorgeous.

Louie watches the stewardess leave. He notices James peering over his seat, waving. Louie pokes his tongue out.

James watches with a blank stare.

LOUIE (CONT'D)

Dumb kid.

James pokes his tongue out and turns back around. Louie jolts forward.

JACK

Sit down. He's just a kid. What are ya gonna do? You started it, he finished it.

LOUIE
Little brat... How long's it take
for a drink round here.

INT. OLYMPIC APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

James opens the door with excitement.

JAMES
Wow! Our own place, Ma!

GUS (V.O.)
The room wasn't as flash as this
one, but we made do.

James runs around the small living room...

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

...and into the single bedroom. He jumps on the large king-size bed.

JAMES
This is my bed... Haha you get the
lounge.

From the doorway, Gus and Evelyn smile.

GUS (V.O.)
Lucky Tommy wasn't there, he'd be
sleeping on the floor.

INT. OLYMPIC BOXING GYM - MORNING

The boxing gym is new and clean. Each wall holds a heavy bag, speed bag, double-end bag, and a rack of free weights around an elevated boxing ring.

GUS (V.O.)
Now the training area was nothing
like yours, but it did the trick.

James dances back and forth in awe, watching his pa train.

GUS (V.O.)
And James was impressed.

BANG-BANG! BANG! Gus works the double-end bag. The ball's bounce echoes with a constant jab-jab-cross.

James shadowboxes the combination.

Jack and Louie surround Gus, focus mitts up tight.

Jack attacks from behind with two haymakers. Gus weaves out.

JACK
(sets the mitt)
Power!

BANG! BANG! BANG! the mitts slam with a double left hook-cross.

Louie attacks from behind with two haymakers. Gus weaves out.

JACK (CONT'D)
Speed and power! Drive him back!

BANG-BANG! BANG! Gus pounds out a constant jab-jab-cross, pressuring Louie to backpedal fast.

James follows behind, jab-jab-cross.

JACK (CONT'D)
BAG! Same combo!

Gus pivots to the heavy bag. BANG-BANG! BANG! and unloads fast and hard.

JACK (CONT'D)
Power!

BANG! BANG! BANG! the bag caves in.

JACK (CONT'D)
TIME!

Gus takes a deep breath and wipes his drenching sweat.

JACK (CONT'D)
Good. Good work. Speed to set up
that power. They won't know what
hit'em.

Jack gives Gus a light tap on the cheek.

James works the same combinations on the heavy bag. Gus watches with a smile.

GUS
That's it, son.

The gym door opens. They glance over. Max Flynn, blue gloves on, and his coach, BRUNO ROSSI, 50s, walk in. They pass Gus.

BRUNO
(gives a nod)
Gentlemen.

GUS
Sir.

Bruno smiles at James.

BRUNO
Starting young.

JAMES
Yes, Sir.

They head for the next training wall.

Jack and Louie give them a tough stare.

LOUIE
(to himself)
Yeah, you keep walking, Joe-
college.

Max glances back with a frown. Jack and Louie hold the glare. Max turns away.

EXT. OLYMPIC STADIUM - NIGHT

Lights shine. Cameras flash. Athletes march. Flags wave. Spectators cheer.

GUS (V.O.)
Now although there weren't as many athletes as the other Olympics, the opening ceremony was something else.

One thousand proud athletes march, wave, and cheer behind their country's flag bearer.

GUS (V.O.)
Over one hundred thousand people came that night to cheer the few countries that took part.

INT. OLYMPIC BOXING RING - MULTIPLE NIGHTS

The crowd cheers.

MONTAGE: GUS'S VICTORIES

THUD! Gus's hook buries into OPPONENT ONE's liver. He drops to his knees. The crowd roars.

Jack gives him a nod. He falls to the canvas. The referee waves off the match.

GUS (V.O.)
It seems not all competitors flew
as straight as you'd think.

SMASH! Gus's cross cracks OPPONENT TWO's nose. He slams into the corner post. Blood pours down his face. He makes eye contact with Jack below. Jack gives him a nod. He drops his gloves. The referee waves off the match. The crowd cheers louder.

GUS (V.O.)
Apparently, all of my opponents
were approached.

THUD! Gus's left hook pounds OPPONENT THREE's body. He grimaces in pain. He sees Jack across the ring and drops his gloves.

CRACK! Gus's left uppercut smashes the chin for a clean knockout. CRASH! Opponent Three hits the canvas. The crowd erupts with cheers.

GUS (V.O.)
And they all took a dive.

SMASH! Gus's cross smashes OPPONENT FOUR's mouth. His head jolts back, his body follows. He crashes through the ropes and spills out of the ring beside Jack and Louie.

JACK
Stay down.

Opponent Four concedes. His body goes limp.

The referee waves his hands. The crowd roars with deafening cheers.

GUS (V.O.)
All but one, my last opponent, Max
Flynn.

OVER BLACK

GUS (V.O.)
He flew straight.

A knock sounds loudly on a door.

JACK (O.S.)
You know who I am?

MAX (O.S.)
No. Who are you?

INT. MAX FLYNN'S CHANGE ROOM - NIGHT

Jack ignores the question, his gaze fixed on Bruno.

BRUNO
Yeah, I know who you are.

JACK
So you know who I work for?

BRUNO
No, but I have an idea.

JACK
Then hit the road, greaseball. I
gotta talk to your fighter.

Bruno doesn't move.

Louie appears beside Jack.

LOUIE
He said hit the road, old man.

MAX
What's going on, Coach? Who are
they?

BRUNO
Don't worry. You'll be right, kid.
Just hear'em out.
(whispers)
You decide what's right.

Bruno pats him on the shoulder and heads for the door. Jack
and Louie barely move out of the way.

JACK
I seen ya fights, kid. That's a
helluva cross ya got there, son.

MAX
Yeah, thanks, but I should be
getting back to training.

JACK
Yeah. About that.

INT. GUS'S CHANGE ROOM - SOON AFTER

Jack tapes off Gus's hand wraps. He lights the nub of a cigar and blows out a drag.

JACK

This next fighter, I want you to beat him good, and when you do, I don't want you picking his carcass off the canvas, you hear.

GUS

What? Why not?

JACK

Just don't do it, okay. He's an arrogant one, and so's his coach. You're gonna put'em both in their place.

Gus frowns.

GUS

Right... well that's even if I win.

JACK

You'll win alright. You better bloody win.

(shakes his head)

You know, I never understood why you help your opponents up after you beat'em. Kinda defeats the purpose, don't ya think?

GUS

No, not really. It takes a lot of guts to step into that ring. I don't go in there taking pleasure beating them to a pulp, and I don't do it to win the crowd either. You can lose everything, and I don't want to be responsible for taking someone away from their loved ones. So win or lose, I make sure they're okay. I do it because it's the right thing to do.

JACK

The right thing to do? Blimey... you're a dirty boxer. You started that way, and you'll always be one.

GUS

I may have started that way, but that's not the sportsman I want to be, or the example I want to set for my son, or anyone when the gym's up and running.

Louie walks in.

JACK

No matter what we do, we'll always be dirty, Gus. Remember that.

Louie hands Jack a brown leather bag. They nod at each other.

GUS (V.O.)

Max felt some things were more important than money.

Jack unzips the bag.

GUS

What's all this?

Jack pulls out a brand new pair of red gloves.

GUS (V.O.)

And that's when they made me a cheater... and dirtier than I was.

OVER BLACK

Cheers roar.

RING ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

THE WINNER... GUS MCCREADY!

INT. GUS'S CHANGE ROOM - LATER

Gus is silent. He holds his gloves upright, staring as Jack quickly unties them.

JACK

Ya did it, kid! I knew you would.

Louie stands ready with the brown leather bag open.

GUS

Did you?

Jack pulls them off. Gus snatches a glove.

LOUIE

Hey!

Louie moves forward. Gus steps back, raises his right hand ready for a cross.

GUS

Get the hell back!

Louie stops.

JACK

What are ya doing, kid?

GUS

You tell me, Jack.

Gus brings the glove closer and sniffs. His head jolts back. His eyes flicker.

GUS (CONT'D)

They're peppered.

Louie glances at Jack.

JACK

Ya talking hogwash.

LOUIE

Yeah, ya talking malarkey. Too many hits to the head, kid. Now give it back.

Gus studies the glove and spots an extra line of stitching along the side. He presses the knuckle area and feels barely any give.

GUS

(shakes his head)

Unbelievable... you not only peppered them, but you plated them too.

JACK

We won, kid. That's what matters.

GUS

I didn't win! You cheated! Ya both cheated and made me one too!

JACK

We had to make sure you won. You couldn't lose.

LOUIE
And you would have.

GUS
Made sure? I would have rather lost trying than cheat to win a gold medal.

JACK
Get off ya high horse. Are you that naive, kid? We had more than a medal riding on this.

GUS
So did I!

JACK
If you lost, then we lost. And we weren't taking any chances on that. There was too much money at stake. Bets were big, and we had to make sure you won.

GUS
Yeah, bets were big. Same as always. How long's this been going on? Was any of it straight, or was it all rigged by your shady backers? I'm done. This ends now.

JACK
Don't ya do anything dumb, ya hear. You don't know who ya dealing with.

GUS
You just both keep the hell away from me.

INT. OLYMPIC APARTMENT - GUS'S ROOM - NIGHT - 1968

JIMMY
That's awful, Coach Gus.

GUS
People called me a rat for giving them up. My reputation was ruined, so why would I protect those two after what they did to me and my family.

JIMMY
Good on you, Coach Gus. Too many people like that get away with breaking the rules for too long.

GUS

After that, Jack and Louie disappeared. I didn't hear from any of their associates, and they never came after me. I didn't know them. I never met them. I didn't ask questions, and I didn't talk about them. But they had people everywhere, and they knew what I said about who, and what I didn't say.

EXT. GUS'S HOUSE - PORCH - DAY - 1932

The screen door opens. Evelyn picks up a plain, unsealed box. She opens it and frowns.

EVELYN

Gus!

Gus rushes out.

GUS

What is it?

Evelyn shows him the box.

INT. CLUB - BACK ROOM - SAME TIME

Vinnie sips his espresso.

His three gorilla henchmen walk in.

HENCHMAN

All taken care of, boss. They won't be training anyone anytime soon.

VINNIE

Good. I don't like the chance of a rat infestation.

HENCHMAN

But what about this boxer, boss? He not a dirty rat?

VINNIE

In a way he is... but he won't rat on us. Dealing with Jack and Louie gave me no choice but to make sure they don't do any talking. This kid, though, I made sure he didn't know anything about us. He's got a nice-looking wife and a kid.

(MORE)

VINNIE (CONT'D)

He don't want nothing happening to them. He's smart. I know what he said about who, and I know what he didn't say. We know who he is... and he knows that.

OVER BLACK

EVELYN (O.S.)

What does this mean, Gus?

EXT. GUS'S HOUSE - PORCH - SAME TIME

Gus looks into the box. Jack's cigar nub rests on a neat stack of hundred-dollar notes.

GUS

It means we put all this behind us and move on.

INT. BOXING GYM - AFTERNOON

Gus swings a hook. James ducks. BANG-BANG! his jab-cross echoes. Gus lowers the mitts. James pants and wipes his sweaty brow.

GUS

So that's how I won the gold medal.

JAMES

That's awful, Pa... but you're still a champion to me.

Gus gives him a hug.

GUS

Thanks, son. That means a lot. Say, your punching's getting really good.

JAMES

Thanks, Pa. I want to punch hard and fast like you... When did Grandpa teach you to box?

GUS

He taught me when I was a little older than you.

EXT. THE MCCREADY HOUSE - BACKYARD - AFTERNOON - 1912

HANK, 30, and Gus, 10, dance back and forth.

HANK
Hands up tight.

Gus raises his hands tighter. Hank flashes his hands. Gus hits out jab-crosses...

Hank moves around. Gus follows...

HANK (CONT'D)
Cover your head!

Hank throws light, open-hand haymakers. Gus covers with his arms.

HANK (CONT'D)
Good. Alright... now duck!

Hank swings a faster haymaker. Gus ducks.

HANK (CONT'D)
Good! Jab-cross!

Gus throws a jab-cross. They continue the drill.

INT. BOXING GYM - AFTERNOON - 1932

Gus helps James take off his bag mitts.

GUS
And he taught me a really important lesson, son. If it ain't used for the ring, you should only be fighting to defend yourself and the ones you love.

JAMES
Did you ever have to use it to defend yourself?

GUS
One time I did, to fight off a bully.

EXT. MILK BAR - FOOTPATH - AFTERNOON - 1917

HARRY, 18, tall and skinny in a leather jacket, laughs and holds a handbag up in the air.

GUS (V.O.)
He was picking on a pretty young girl.

Evelyn, 15, jumps to reach for it.

EVELYN
Give it back!

HARRY
After you give me a kiss,
sweetheart.

GUS (V.O.)
But she was doing okay.

EVELYN
No!

Evelyn kicks Harry's shin. He yells. She tries to grab her bag. He grabs her around the waist.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
LET ME GO!

HARRY
Come on, just a kiss. I won't bite.

GUS (O.S.)
HEY-HEY!

The milk bar entrance bell jingles fast. BANG! the door slams open against the wall. Gus, 15, in a white uniform, white ice-cream cap and black bow tie, rushes out.

GUS
Leave her alone!

HARRY
Go make us a sundae, soda jerk!

Harry struggles to hold Evelyn still. He leans in to kiss her. CRUSH! she stamps on his foot. He yells and loosens his grip. He raises an open hand.

Gus grabs Harry's raised arm and spins him around. BANG-BANG! his jab-cross sends Harry stumbling to the ground, yelling, clutching his nose, blood pouring profusely.

Gus, hands up, dances back and forth, glaring.

Harry bursts into tears, scrambles away, and runs off.

Gus picks up Evelyn's handbag.

EVELYN
Thank you.

GUS
I'm Gus. Are you okay?

EVELYN
 Evelyn. Yes.

GUS
 We better make sure. How about that
 sundae?

Evelyn smiles and nods.

INT. BOXING GYM - AFTERNOON - 1932

JAMES
 Wow... I want you to teach me just
 like your pa taught you. I wanna be
 just like you and help people.

Gus's eyes water.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. OLYMPIC APARTMENT - GUS'S ROOM - NIGHT - 1968

Gus wipes a tear away.

GUS
 He wanted to be just like his old
 man. If it wasn't for my James, I
 would have thrown boxing away for
 good.

INT. BOXING GYM - BAG AREA - AFTERNOON - 1932

The heavy sack has been replaced with a large, worn heavy
 bag. A double-end bag hangs ready beside it.

Standing on a milk crate, James works the speed bag. Its
 rhythm tat-tat-tats.

GUS (V.O.)
 He wanted to be like me...

JAMES
 (to himself)
 One, two, three.

He hits it again.

JAMES (CONT'D)
 (to himself)
 One, two, three.

GUS (V.O.)
 ...so that's when I started
 training him.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BAG AREA - SOON AFTER

James drills his jab-cross-slip-slip on the double-end bag, nonstop. The bag deafens with every thump.

GUS (V.O.)
I even trained a couple of kids to
keep them off the street.

INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1934

The floorboards creak. James, 9, FRED, 10, skinny, and BOB, 10, skinnier, hands up tight, chins down, dance back and forth.

GUS (V.O.)
They weren't very good pickpockets,
so I got them away from that early.

James perfectly mirrors Gus's jab-cross. Fred and Bob clumsily shadowbox the stance and technique.

GUS (V.O.)
The Olympics compensated me enough
to make do, so I could give the
kids a fighting chance. If they
stuck with it, at least they had
something to fall back on.

James pumps out the combination.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - DAY - WEEKS LATER

In a training semi-circle, Gus feeds the mitts. BANG-BANG! James's jab-cross echoes.

Gus pivots from James to Fred. BANG-BANG!

Gus pivots to Bob. BANG-BANG!

Gus pivots back to James.

GUS (O.S.)
Offence-defence drill.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - DAY - MONTHS LATER

In their training semi-circle, Gus, red gloves on, throws a jab-cross. James slips side to side.

Gus pivots to Fred. They move their feet. He repeats the drill.

Gus pivots to Bob. They move. He repeats the drill.

GUS (V.O.)
They trained every chance they
could, and they all became best
friends.

Gus pivots back to James. They move their feet. Gus throws a jab-cross.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BOXING GYM - OPEN AREA - AFTERNOON - 1937

James, 12, slips side to side. Gus readies the mitts.

GUS (V.O.)
Everyone worked hard.

James's jab-cross-hook-double weave-cross-hook-cross-double weave combination is perfect.

Fred, 13, and Bob, 13, shadowbox the technique.

Gus moves to Fred and pounds the combination out hard.

Gus moves to Bob and hits the combination fast.

Gus moves back to James. He smashes the jab-cross hard and fast.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BOXING GYM - BAG AREA - AFTERNOON - 1940

James, 15, works the heavy bag. A left body hook, a left head hook, a slip, and repeats the combination.

GUS (V.O.)
Everyone improved so much.

Fred, 16, works the speed bag. Tat-tat-tat, a perfect rhythm.

Bob, 16, works the double-end bag. Its bounce is tight. His jab tighter.

GUS (V.O.)
And everyone strived, especially my
James.

James's body hook flattens the bag.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BOXING GYM - BOXING RING - ANOTHER AFTERNOON

THUD! James's red glove smashes a left hook into Fred's headgear. Fred stumbles sideways. He shakes his head and throws a jab-cross. James slips.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BOXING GYM - BOXING RING - ANOTHER AFTERNOON

THUD! James's left body hook pounds Bob's ribs. THUD! a left hook smashes Bob's headgear. He stumbles into the corner. He regains his balance and throws a jab-cross. James slips.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. BOXING GYM - BOXING RING - AFTERNOON - 1942

THUD! James, 17, smashes a left body hook into Gus's cover. Gus grunts and smothers the next hook, clinching James tight, driving him into the corner post.

GUS
Keep going! Come on!

James struggles in the clinch. Gus tightens his hold.

GUS (V.O.)
I was struggling.

Fred and Bob watch from the corner post.

FRED
Go, James!

BOB
Go, Coach Gus!

GUS
Get outta the corner! Come on!
Corner switch!

GUS (V.O.)
I felt old.

James grips Gus's waist, lifts him an inch and turns him into the corner post.

Gus throws constant combinations. James slips and weaves, making every punch miss.

GUS (V.O.)
But James was ready for the next
step.

James weaves, loading up his cross.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT

The crowd roars.

SMASH! James lands a powerful cross. His OPPONENT stumbles backwards into James's corner. Gus, Fred and Bob cheer.

GUS (V.O.)
James started amateurs at seventeen
to get some experience for the next
step.

James presses. He slips low and loads up. THUD! his body hook digs into the liver.

His opponent gulps for air. His hands drop. His knees buckle. He crashes to the canvas, gasping.

Evelyn, center row, cheers loudly. The crowd roars.

The referee waves off the match. Gus, Fred and Bob storm the ring, hugging James. Gus raises James's arm.

The referee checks the opponent. His breathing steadies.

Gus and James help him up.

The crowd cheers louder.

GUS (V.O.)
He raced through the amateurs.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - ANOTHER NIGHT

THUD! James's left hook pounds his OPPONENT's body. THUD! his left hook smashes the temple.

GUS (V.O.)
One after the other...

His opponent stumbles to the canvas.

The crowd cheers.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - ANOTHER NIGHT

THUD! James's left body hook cracks the ribs. CRACK! his left uppercut smashes the chin.

GUS (V.O.)
...James knocked them out.

His opponent crashes backwards to the canvas.

The crowd cheers louder.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - ANOTHER NIGHT

THUD! James's left body hook slams into his OPPONENT's cover. CRACK! his left uppercut smashes the jaw. THUD! his left hook cracks the temple.

GUS (V.O.)
He was a natural.

His opponent bounces off the ropes and crashes hard to the canvas.

The cheers roar.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - ANOTHER NIGHT

THUD! James's left body hook buries into his OPPONENT's liver. CRACK! his left uppercut smashes the chin. THUD! his left hook shatters the jaw. SMASH! his right cross cracks the chin.

His opponent's eyes roll back. His body stiffens, falling backwards. CRASH! he bounces onto the canvas.

GUS (V.O.)
And just before his eighteenth
birthday...

The screams deafen.

GUS (V.O.)
...he was off to the professionals.

OVER BLACK

RING ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
And making his professional
debut... JAMES McCREADY!

The crowd cheers.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1943

The bell dings.

GUS (V.O.)
And what a first opponent to go up
against.

The referee waits center ring.

James steps out of his corner.

His opponent, TONY ZALE, 30, heads for center ring.

GUS (V.O.)
None other than world champion Tony
Zale.

Looking up from their corner, Gus, Fred, and Bob cheer
loudly.

James gives a sideways glance and smiles down at his ma.

Evelyn cheers from front row center. Next to her, the two
Olympic Officials, 60s, sit quietly. On her other side,
Vinnie, 69, silver-haired, and his three gorilla henchmen
slowly clap.

VINNIE
That your boy, Ma'am?

EVELYN
(clapping)
That's my James.

VINNIE
Hope he's as good as his old man
was.

Evelyn looks at him, curiously.

EVELYN
Do you know my husband?

VINNIE
I was a big fan. He made me a lot
of money. Shame he retired.

Evelyn purses a smile, half nods, and turns back to James.

James and Tony touch gloves.

TONY
Good luck, kid.

They nod. Hands up tight. They circle.

James slips side to side, pressing forward.

Tony slips the jab--

--BANG! his simultaneous jab snaps James's nose. Blood splatters. The crowd roars. Evelyn clasps her mouth.

GUS (O.S.)
MOVE!

James barely slips the cross.

GUS (O.S.)
GET OUTTA THERE!

James weaves the hook, pivots out and circles away.

Tony chases, stiff jabs backing James hard into a corner. He works the body. James covers tight. Blood pours down his arms. Tony goes high. James slips and weaves a dozen punches. The crowd erupts.

THUD! James's hook smashes Tony's chin. He stumbles sideways.

James chases. BANG-BANG! BANG-BANG! his jab-crosses drive Tony back into the ropes. James dips low for the body hook--

--The bell dings. James pulls the punch.

GUS (V.O.)
That punch would've knocked me out.
But Tony was the champion.

Tony pats James on the shoulder. They head to their corners.

Gus slides the stool under the ropes. The corner rushes in. James slumps onto it.

Gus wipes the blood fast.

GUS
My son, toe to toe with the champ.

He tilts James's head back, packs cotton into his nose. James grimaces.

JAMES
He got me good, Pa.

GUS
So did you, son.

Fred hands over an ice pack.

FRED
Hell of a punch, James.

Gus presses the ice to James's nose.

Bob offers the water bottle.

BOB
Yeah, great punch. Should've been a
knockout.

James spits into the bucket.

GUS
You're doing great, kid. Keep
moving. Defend, short counters,
move.

James nods.

The bell dings.

Gus pulls the cotton, checks the swelling. Black and blue,
but no bleeding.

GUS (V.O.)
It wasn't the path I wanted for
him...

James rises.

GUS
Hands up tight.

James nods.

JAMES
Chin down.

Gus nods back, hugs him quick and pats his back.

GUS (V.O.)
...but with the depression, and now
this war...

James heads for center ring.

GUS (V.O.)
 ...he and his friends at least had
 something to fall back on.

James smiles at his ma.

INT. OLYMPIC APARTMENT - GUS'S ROOM - NIGHT - 1968

GUS
 We celebrated James's achievement
 and his eighteenth birthday a few
 days after his fight... but after
 that, well...

Gus's eyes well.

GUS (CONT'D)
 ...you know the rest, Jimmy...

JIMMY
 I'll never forget you telling me
 years ago what happened, Coach Gus.
 I've always been sad for you and
 Evelyn.

Jimmy gives Gus a hug.

OVER BLACK

GUS (O.S.)
 That damn war.

EXT. STREET - FOOTPATH - MORNING - 1939

A truck drives by. A kid, 12, in the back tray throws a
 bundle of newspapers. THUMP! it lands face up.

TROOPS OFF TO WAR.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FOOTPATH - AFTERNOON - 1941

MORE TROOPS OFF TO WAR.

James, 16, holds a newspaper. Fred and Bob shake their
 heads, looking down at it.

GUS (V.O.)
 For a couple of years, James, Fred
 and Bob tried several times to
 enlist.

FRED
This war doesn't look like it's
gonna end soon.

BOB
Everyone's enlisted. Even famous
boxers are going.

JAMES
Get outta here. Really?

FRED
Well I ain't waiting for no Kraut
to declare war on us. It'll only be
a matter of time, boys, until they
invade.

GUS (V.O.)
They thought I didn't know.

OVER BLACK

ENLISTING OFFICER (O.S.)
Get the hell outta here, kid!

INT. ARMY ENLISTING CAMP - DAY

James stands at the front of the line, facing the ENLISTING OFFICER. Fred and Bob wait directly behind James. The line stretches back, packed with boys.

ENLISTING OFFICER
Go on, son. Go back to your mother.
She doesn't want to outlive you.

James turns away, shaking his head.

FRED
I know a guy who can fix papers.

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - JAMES'S ROOM - MORNING - 1942

James, 17, takes what little money is in his cookie jar.

GUS (V.O.)
They didn't give up.

EXT. BUS STOP - LATER

The bus door opens. James gets on. The door shuts.

GUS (V.O.)
It took a couple of years, even
with fake papers.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. ARMY ENLISTING CAMP - LATER

The bus door opens. James, Fred and Bob get off.

INT. ARMY ENLISTING CAMP - LATER

The lines are long with young boys. James, Fred and Bob stand in separate lines.

GUS (V.O.)

He was still underage, but James kept on trying.

The Enlisting Officer studies James's identification. He frowns and shakes his head.

ENLISTING OFFICER

McCready?

JAMES

Yes, Sir.

ENLISTING OFFICER

Gus McCready?

JAMES

Yes, Sir, that's my pa.

ENLISTING OFFICER

He was a good boxer. I remember his fights. Damn shame they rorted him though. Say hello for me.

JAMES

Pardon, Sir?

ENLISTING OFFICER

I can't let you enlist, son.

JAMES

Please, Sir. I want to do my part.

ENLISTING OFFICER

This identification says you're twenty. Next time, try eighteen.

JAMES

What-what do you mean?

ENLISTING OFFICER

I could have you arrested for this. Look, it's hell over there, kid.

(MORE)

ENLISTING OFFICER (CONT'D)
Don't be in a hurry to be a dead
hero.

(hands the ID back)
Sorry, kid. Go home to your ma and
pa.

James walks off. He passes Fred and shakes his head.

GUS (V.O.)
Thankfully he looked too damn
young.

The Enlisting Officer gets up and leaves in a hurry.

INT. ARMY OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The Enlisting Officer waits, holding a phone. We hear the
dial tone.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

The phone rings. Gus picks it up.

GUS
Hello.

GUS (V.O.)
I knew a guy. That's how I found
out.

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

James fills his glass at the sink. Gus walks in.

GUS
You seem a bit flustered, son.
Everything okay?

JAMES
Fred and Bob got in. They're off to
Germany.

GUS
Oh really... I hope they'll be
alright. I hope they come back to
their mothers too.

JAMES
Yeah. Me too.

GUS (V.O.)

James never said he tried to enlist with his friends. He was upset they were going, but he was more upset he wasn't.

GUS

This damn war. There's so many boys not coming back. You know that's the worst thing a parent can go through, losing a child. As a parent, I'd rather die than see any harm come to you, son.

Gus gives him a hug.

GUS (V.O.)

And I never pushed that topic, but I tried my hardest to keep him from enlisting. I used what I had and hoped they wouldn't take him.

GUS

You know what? You've gone as far as you can in amateurs. It's time to take the next step, son.

OVER BLACK

GUS (O.S.)

PUNCH, KID!

The crowd cheers louder.

INT. SPORTS HALL - BOXING RING - NIGHT - 1943

Bloodied. Eyes swollen. Cuts open. James and Tony struggle. James's guard stays tight. Chin down. Feet moving.

GUS (V.O.)

It was his hardest and proudest fight I'd ever seen. They respected each other. And it went the distance.

Tony unleashes endless combinations, driving James into the corner. James stays on defence, slipping and weaving on the spot. He counters with a fast cross-hook.

Tony slips and weaves. SMASH! his right cross cracks the nose again. Blood spurts. James desperately clinches. Blood pours. The referee watches closely.

Evelyn clasps her mouth.

VINNIE
Hit him back, kid!

The crowd roars for blood.

GUS (V.O.)
Twelve rounds of excitement and
pain.

Tony digs with body hooks. James clinches tighter. The referee moves closer.

GUS
Ready. Ready... NOW, SON!

James lifts Tony an inch and spins him into the corner. The crowd erupts.

GUS (CONT'D)
PUNCH!

EVELYN
PUNCH, JAMES!

GUS
PUNCH, KID! PUNCH!

THUD-THUD! James rips two left body hooks. CRACK! his left uppercut smashes the chin. Tony's head jolts back sickeningly. The crowd rushes to its feet.

James slips low, loads up. THUD! his body hook buries into the liver. Tony screams in pain.

The bell dings. The referee jumps between them.

CRASH! Tony hits the canvas, struggling to breathe.

James's knees buckle. He drops beside Tony, presses a glove to his shoulder.

JAMES
(panting)
Deep breath...

Tony's short gasps ease into longer breaths. He draws one in, holds it, then lets it go.

James helps him to his knees. They rest their foreheads together.

TONY
Good fight, kid.

JAMES
You too, champ.

They help each other up, and raise each other's hands. The crowd roars even louder.

Gus, Fred and Bob rush into the ring, hugging James. Fred and Bob lift him onto their shoulders.

GUS (V.O.)
It was the fight of the year.

Evelyn stands, clapping, smiling proud.

The Olympic Officials sit quietly, clapping, nodding to each other.

Vinnie slowly claps and rises with his three gorilla henchmen.

VINNIE
Congratulations, Ma'am. Your boy's even better than his old man. You and your husband raised a good kid.

EVELYN
(still clapping)
Thank you.

VINNIE
Hopefully he succeeds where your husband didn't.

EVELYN
I'm sorry, but have we met before?

VINNIE
I'd remember if we did. You have yourself a good night, Ma'am.

Evelyn watches Vinnie walk past the ring. He locks eyes with Gus, gives a nod, and leaves.

Tony raises James's hand. The crowd roars.

Evelyn claps louder.

INT. OLYMPIC APARTMENT - GUS'S ROOM - NIGHT - 1968

Gus's tears spill.

GUS
I was so proud of my James. He would've been a great champion.
(MORE)

GUS (CONT'D)
He did it right, and more
importantly, he turned out better
than his old man.

Gus wipes his eyes.

GUS (CONT'D)
But in the end, James enlisted in
that World War.

Gus starts coughing, covering his mouth with his arm.

GUS (CONT'D)
You remember the framed photo on
the mantel, Jimmy?

Jimmy nods.

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - FIREPLACE - DAY - 1946

Gus, 44, holds a FRAMED PHOTO of himself and James in their
military uniforms. Jimmy's resemblance to James is uncanny.

Gus's eyes well quickly with tears.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - FIREPLACE - DAY - 1966

Gus, 64, stares at the FRAMED PHOTO.

GUS (V.O.)
I'd look at it every day.

Jimmy, 16, enters quietly and stands beside him.

Gus gives Jimmy a small, bittersweet smile. He sets the
photo back on the mantel. A tear rolls down his cheek.

GUS
Outliving your child is the worst
pain a parent can go through.

He pulls Jimmy into a tight hug.

GUS (CONT'D)
My James died in my arms... I
should have said no. I should have
stopped him.

Evelyn, 64, stops in the doorway.

JIMMY (O.S.)
You did what you thought was right.
You gave him the chance to fight
for something he believed in.

GUS (O.S.)
(coughs)
No... I gave him a chance to die.
He didn't need to go. He could have
stayed. It should have been me.

Evelyn's eyes well.

JIMMY
James chose to go. He had your
spirit and strength. There was no
stopping him.

GUS
And look what it cost him. What it
cost all of us. Because of me,
Evelyn had to bury our son. I
didn't stop him.

Evelyn wipes her tears.

GUS (CONT'D)
I've never forgiven myself... and
never will.

JIMMY
It's not your fault, Coach Gus.

Gus looks back at the FRAMED PHOTO.

GUS
It still feels like yesterday.

GUS (O.S.)
You got a future in boxing,
something I didn't have. Don't give
it up.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY - 1943

James stares blankly. A tear wells.

JAMES
I'm sorry, Pa, but what right do I
have to stay here when everyone
else has enlisted?
(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

They declare war on us and we're supposed to wait while everyone else is dying over there.

GUS

I won't allow it. I'm not letting you go.

JAMES

I'm legal age now. No one can stop me anymore. It's my decision, Pa.

GUS

And what about your poor ma? We talked about this. All those boys never coming back.

JAMES

I'll come back, Pa. For you and Ma.

GUS (V.O.)

I knew nothing I could say was going to stop him.

GUS

You're right. They're dying over there while we're here living. What right do we have? So I should be doing my part too.

JAMES

What? What do you mean?

GUS

I can't stop you. But I can go with you, son.

JAMES

What do you mean? You're going to enlist?

GUS

That's right.

JAMES

No. What about Ma? You're going to leave her all alone?

GUS

Then stay.

JAMES

You know I can't. But you can.

GUS

As much as she'll hate it, she'd rather I go and keep an eye on you than stay here worrying. So if you're going, I'm going. That's my decision.

GUS (V.O.)

He wasn't going to be convinced otherwise. So I enlisted too, and kept an eye on him as much as I could.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Hundreds of young boys in crisp military uniforms line the platforms. Loved ones embrace them. Mothers cry. Trains wait, engines hissing.

Evelyn clicks the camera. Gus and James, arms around each other, stand proud in their military uniforms.

James hugs her.

JAMES

It's alright, Ma. Don't cry.

EVELYN

I don't want you to go.

James's eyes well.

Evelyn wipes her tears with a handkerchief.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

(whispers)

You come back to me. You promise.

JAMES

I will. I promise.

EVELYN

I love you, son.

JAMES

I love you, Ma.

James wipes his eyes. Evelyn slowly lets him go.

GUS

Goodbye, Love.

Evelyn hugs Gus tight.

EVELYN
You bring him back.

GUS
I'll bring him back. I promise.

EVELYN
And you come back to me too. You hear?

Gus nods. He kisses her.

GUS
I love you, Evie.

GUS (V.O.)
But I couldn't keep all of my promise.

EXT. GERMANY - MASH UNIT 427 - DAY

Rain pours hard. Lightning strikes bright. Thunder cracks.

GUS (V.O.)
I wasn't quite by James's side as I intended, but we were both out of direct combat, to a point.

Three army trucks speed in. Red Cross symbols painted across their canvas panels drip with splattered wet mud.

GUS (V.O.)
I was stationed as a chief corpsman with one of the Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals. MASH units, as we called them. Working a boxing corner made me useful.

The trucks brake hard. The bog road trenches grooves under the weight. They slide to a halt.

GUS (V.O.)
So we had to move around quite a bit.

Gus rushes out of a camouflaged tent.

GUS (V.O.)
And it was hell.

GUS
INCOMING WOUNDED!

Dozens of corpsmen rush out of surrounding tents. In groups, they head for their designated trucks.

GUS (V.O.)
There must have been thousands of
young men that came through.

Stretchers are pulled from the trucks. Wounded soldiers lie bloodied, screaming, crying. Others lie still, shocked. Many lie dead.

The corpsmen rush them towards a large hospital tent.

Thunder cracks. A WHOOMP-WHOOMP-WHOOMP approaches fast. Gus looks up. Lightning silhouettes a helicopter overhead.

INT. HELICOPTER COCKPIT - SAME TIME

Hard rain pounds the windscreen. Lightning flashes, briefly revealing a large Red Cross painted on the hospital rooftop below.

The PILOT guides the chopper in.

PILOT
Med-chopper Three, incoming
casualties.

EXT. MASH UNIT 427 - LANDING FIELD - SAME TIME

The SIKORSKY R-4 MEDICAL HELICOPTER lands hard. Its weight sinks a foot into the mud.

Gus and CORPSMAN O'REILLY, 20, rush to the stretchers strapped along both skid landing gears.

A very young soldier lies strapped tight. His wide, bloodshot eyes lock onto Gus. He doesn't blink. He doesn't move.

GUS (V.O.)
Unfortunately, not everyone went
home.

EXT. ARMY BASE - BOXING RING - DAY

Hundreds of soldiers cheer loudly.

Hands up tight. Chin down. James fires two jabs and slips side to side, pressing forward.

GUS (V.O.)
I thought I did my best to keep my
promise and protect James.

BANG! a jab lands.

GUS (V.O.)
A buddy of mine made sure he was
out of direct combat.

BANG! another jab.

GUS (V.O.)
James represented the army in
boxing, travelling between bases in
exhibition matches with some of the
great boxers who enlisted.

BANG! a jab. SMASH! a cross. THUD! a body hook.

GUS (V.O.)
Billy Conn was one of them.

BILLY CONN, 26, slips James's cross, weaves the hook, and
gets clear. They dance around the ring. The soldiers cheer.

GUS (V.O.)
I even managed to get his friends
stationed there as corner men.

EXT. ARMY BASE - DAY - WEEKS EARLIER

An army truck comes to a halt. Soldiers, rucksacks over
their shoulders, pour out of the back tray.

Fred and Bob are the last ones out.

JAMES (O.S.)
Hey, you boxing bums!

Fred and Bob look over.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. ARMY BASE - BOXING RING - DAY

Fred and Bob cheer James on.

GUS (V.O.)
But in a way, I wish I didn't.

Billy throws a fast jab-cross. James slips.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. ANOTHER ARMY BASE - BOXING RING - DAY - 1944

THUD! James's left hook digs into the ribs.

GUS (V.O.)
There was also Bob Montgomery.

BOB MONTGOMERY, 25, grunts in pain. He fires a cross-hook.
James slips and weaves.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. ANOTHER ARMY BASE - BOXING RING - DAY - 1945

BANG! BANG! James lands a cross-hook.

GUS (V.O.)
And none other than the Brown
Bomber himself, Joe Louis.

JOE LOUIS, 31, stumbles sideways. James chases. He slips
Joe's desperate jab-cross. BANG! his counter jab lands. They
both load up for a right cross--

--The bell dings. They stop.

They smile at each other and raise each other's hands. The
soldiers cheer.

Joe slips an arm around James and walks him to the corner.

JOE
Good fight, kid. You'll go far.

JAMES
Thanks, Mr Louis.

JOE
Call me Joe.

They towel off.

JOE (CONT'D)
I remember seeing your pa fight at
the Olympics. He put on a good
show. Even helped his opponent up
off the canvas.

JAMES
He taught me everything I know.

JOE
Yeah, I could tell. I was
struggling to keep up with you.
Shame your pa never turned pro. I
heard you did, though. Fight of the
year. Now that's something.

JAMES

Thanks, Joe. I turned pro just before I shipped out. Guess my pa was hoping I'd stay home and fight in the ring instead of being here.

JOE

My pa died a few years back. Even knowing this is the right thing, he wouldn't have wanted me here either. No pa wants their kid fighting a war. He was looking out for you.

JAMES

I felt I had to do my part.

JOE

I never met him, but I can tell you're just like him. A good man.

Joe climbs out of the ring.

JOE (CONT'D)

Stay safe, kid. Anything can happen out here. I'll see you next match. And don't go too easy on me, you hear.

James smiles.

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - FIREPLACE - DAY - 1966

GUS

Out of all of them, Joe would have been his favourite to box. They would have become best friends. I'm sure he couldn't wait to tell me. But he never got the chance.

Gus wipes his tears.

GUS (CONT'D)

Every time a truck or helicopter came in, my heart sank. I thought of the parents whose boys never left that place. And as much as I missed my James, every time those transports arrived, I prayed he wasn't on one of them.

OVER BLACK

WHOOOMP-WHOOOMP-WHOOOMP! helicopter blades pound closer.

PILOT (O.S.)
Med-chopper One, incoming
casualties.

EXT. GERMANY - MASH UNIT 427 - LANDING FIELD - NIGHT - 1945

A helicopter slams into the mud.

GUS (V.O.)
That very night, all hell broke
loose.

Gus rushes out, waving corpsmen towards the landing field.

GUS (V.O.)
They just kept coming.

Two more helicopters come in hot. Gus points teams into
position.

GUS (V.O.)
And it got worse.

A soldier screams.

GUS (V.O.)
It was my boys.

GUS
Bob! No!

Bob lies unconscious, blood soaking his face. Gus checks his
neck for a pulse. His eyes glisten.

Two corpsmen unstrap the stretcher.

GUS (CONT'D)
Get him to theatre! Go!

They rush Bob away.

Gus moves to the next landing gear. A soldier thrashes,
screaming.

Corpsmen O'Reilly and CLINGER struggle with the straps.

GUS (CONT'D)
No-no. Fred!

Fred looks up, terrified. His face scorched and blistering.

FRED
Coach!

GUS
No! What happened? Where's James?

FRED
It burns!

GUS
Get him inside!

CORPSMAN O'REILLY
The clasps are jammed, Sir!

Gus yanks at them.

GUS
Ready the handles!

He pulls a fold-out knife from his boot.

The corpsmen brace the stretcher.

FRED
(crying)
Help me, Coach!

Gus cuts the first strap.

GUS
Where's James?

FRED
We were bombed. It burns, Coach.

Trucks roar in. Corpsmen flood the field. Another helicopter lands.

FRED (CONT'D)
I'm scared, Coach.

GUS
We'll take care of you. I promise.

Gus cuts the remaining straps.

GUS (CONT'D)
GO!

They rush Fred away.

FRED (O.S.)
Coach!

Gus sprints to the next helicopter.

TWO CORPSMEN lift the stretcher. Gus freezes.

GUS

No.

GUS (V.O.)

Joe Louis was on the next
transport...

Joe thrashes in shock, coughing blood.

GUS (V.O.)

...which meant...

Gus races to the other side.

CORPSMAN BURNS frantically unstraps another stretcher.

GUS (V.O.)

...my worst fear came true.

GUS

No! No!

GUS (V.O.)

My James was on that transport.

GUS

James. No.

James lies burnt, face blackened, hair singed. Gus pulls him close.

JAMES

(weak)

Pa?

GUS

I'm here, son.

JAMES

Tell Ma... I...

His eyes flutter. He goes limp.

GUS

Son!

CORPSMAN BURNS

Sir, we have to move!

Gus rips away the rain cover. James's uniform is burnt and fused into his skin. Shrapnel juts from his body.

GUS

No!

CORPSMAN BURNS

Handles!

Gus grips the front. They run him towards the hospital tent.
The distant drone of aircraft grows louder.

INT. MASH UNIT 427 - OPERATING THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

Dim lights flicker over the crowded operating theatre.
Blood-soaked uniforms lie cut on the floor. Nurses assist
surgeons, operating frantically.

GUS (V.O.)

It was like a revolving door.

Corpsmen carry blood-soaked stretchers with covered bodies
out.

NURSE (O.S.)

Doctor, he's gone.

More corpsmen rush wounded soldiers in.

SURGEON 1 (O.S.)

Damn it!

NURSE

There's nothing more we can do.

SURGEON 1, bloodied gloves, apron, and face mask, angrily
throws his forceps onto a metal tray.

SURGEON 1

Damn war.

SURGEON 2 (O.S.)

COME ON!

SURGEON 2, gloves bloodied, compresses his patient's chest.
The burnt body jolts on the stretcher. He pumps harder. He
starts mouth-to-mouth and listens for a breath. He resumes
compressions.

GUS (V.O.)

For every one they saved, two boys
never made it back home.

His assisting nurse watches, hands clasped, praying.

GUS (V.O.)
That hell started that night with
both Fred and Bob.

Surgeon 1 stares at his patient. A tear falls. Bob's
bloodied face, motionless, stares back.

Surgeon 2 stops compressions. He pants, staring at his
patient. A tear wells.

SURGEON 2
They're all young boys fighting a
man's war.

NURSE
None of them should be here.
They're still babies.

Fred's burnt face, motionless, stares up at them.

GUS (V.O.)
They both died together on the
table.

Gus rushes in with James. He stops cold, watching two nurses
cover Fred and Bob's faces.

GUS
No... not my boys...

The distant roar of planes grows louder. Everyone looks up.

SURGEON 1
What is that?

NURSE
Planes?

Explosions thunder in the distance.

GUS
Bomb raid!

The theatre shakes. Lights flicker violently. A nurse
screams. Outside gunfire erupts. Everyone flinches.

SURGEON 1
Who's shooting!

SURGEON 2
We need to evacuate!

SURGEON 1
Nurses and all non-medical
personnel out!

No one moves.

GUS (V.O.)
But no one left. No one was going
to leave those brave boys alone.

INT. GUS'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - FIREPLACE - DAY - 1966

Gus stares at the FRAMED PHOTO. His tears fall.

GUS
That night every base was bombed. I
barely survived. My James didn't
even make it onto the operating
table. He died in my arms. It
wasn't right. He should have lived.

Evelyn clasps her mouth, sobbing.

JIMMY
I'm so sorry, Coach Gus.

GUS
I shouldn't have let him go. James
was only twenty. He should be here.
Not me.

Evelyn steps in and wraps Gus in her arms.

GUS (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, Love.

EVELYN
It wasn't your fault.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT - 1968

ANNIE, 18, and TOMMY, 17, stand in the doorway. Annie gently sobs. Tommy wraps an arm around her.

Gus lies propped up in a hospital bed. His oxygen mask rests below his chin. Each breath is laboured.

Jimmy stands beside him, holding Gus's hand. Gus squeezes back and manages a faint smile.

Jimmy bursts into tears and hugs Gus tight.

JIMMY
You're the only pa I ever had.

Annie and Tommy rush to his side.

GUS
(weak)
That means everything to me, son.

JIMMY
(still holding him)
I couldn't save my ma... and I
don't know how to save you, Pa.

GUS
No, you don't have to, son. It's my
time now. I've lived my life, and
because of you, all three of you,
I've lived it longer, and happier.

They hug him in silence, holding the moment.

Jimmy's face trembles.

GUS (CONT'D)
It's time I hang up the gloves.

Annie and Tommy break down. Gus pulls them in tighter. A
tear slips from his eye.

GUS (CONT'D)
I love you all.

He closes his eyes, peacefully.

OVER BLACK

A heart monitor beeps.

JIMMY (O.S.)
Ma... he never told me, and he
still won't... but what's wrong
with Coach Gus?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Jimmy and Evelyn, 66, stand on either side of Gus's bed. He
sleeps upright. His laboured breaths stutter through his
oxygen mask. He clutches the FRAMED PHOTO to his chest.

Annie and Tommy sleep in an armchair, leaning against each
other.

EVELYN
He never wanted you worrying about
him.

JIMMY
I've been worried about him for a
long time. We all have.

EVELYN
I know.

JIMMY
I think it's time I knew.

Evelyn nods.

OVER BLACK

The distant sound of a plane grows louder.

EVELYN (O.S.)
That very night, planes flew over
all the MASH units.

EXT. GERMANY - SKY - NIGHT - 1945

A HENSCHEL HS 130 BOMBER roars. Wind howls along its
fuselage. Its open bomb bay doors shudder under the strain.

EVELYN (V.O.)
But unlike the other planes that
bombed the infantry units...

Three torpedo-sized silver canisters lower into position.
Red Nazi swastikas are painted large along their sides.

EVELYN (V.O.)
...these had other plans for the
hospital units.

One by one, the canisters release, noses dipping. Small rear
propellers kick in, whining louder.

EXT. MASH UNIT 427 - SAME TIME

The bomber roars past.

A platoon of soldiers frantically fire their M1 Garand
rifles.

Through a rifle sight, CORPORAL HARRIS, 30, tracks one of
the canisters dropping fast. Its metal skin flashes in the
lens.

BANG! he fires.

BOOM! the canister detonates mid-air. A bright flash tears through the sky. A heavy vapour bursts outward, spreading fast.

EVELYN (V.O.)
They herded them like sheep into
the MASH units to test their
chemical weapons.

The soldiers lower their rifles, watching the plane vanish. The vapour drifts down around them.

CRASH! another canister slams into the ground.

BOOM! shrapnel rips outward. The soldiers shield their eyes. Thick vapour billows up.

Corporal Harris watches soldiers clutch their throats. Some collapse. Others gag, coughing violently.

The corporal staggers back in panic. He turns and runs towards the hospital.

EVELYN (V.O.)
The Red Cross symbol gave them
away.

The last canister heads for the MASH unit's Red Cross symbol.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. MASH UNIT 427 - OPERATING THEATRE - SAME TIME

CRASH! the canister rips through the canvas roof. People scream. Rafters and joists collapse onto surgeons and patients. The remaining surgeons and nurses hunch over, shielding those on the tables.

Gus throws himself over James. He spots Corpsman Burns beside him, impaled by a broken rafter.

Gus's eyes well. He looks away.

The silver canister lies embedded in an impact crater, undetonated. Its rear propeller still whirls, shrieking.

Corporal Harris storms in, fumbling with a gas mask.

CORPORAL HARRIS
It's gas! Everyone--

--BOOM! the canister detonates. Shrapnel rips outward, slamming into the corporal, blasting him through the air.

Surgeons, nurses, and corpsmen are hurled backwards over patients.

Gus and James crash to the floor. Vapour thickens around them. Gus sniffs and clamps a hand over his mouth.

Surgeons and nurses clutch their throats, struggling for breath. Bodies collapse. Foam gathers at their lips. Eyes stare, lifeless.

GUS

James!

James lies pinned beneath his stretcher.

Gus drops to his knees and scrambles towards him. He spots the gas mask, snatches it up and presses it onto James.

Gus grabs a blood-stained surgical drape, twists it tight, wraps it over his mouth and nose, and knots it.

He heaves the stretcher upright, lifts James, and sets him back onto it.

EXT. MASH UNIT 427 - CONTINUOUS

BANG! the double doors slam open. Gus races the stretcher out. Gas vapour hangs thick.

EVELYN (V.O.)

The gas killed everyone. Gus had no choice. He had to get James out.

The stretcher jolts, banging and shaking violently. Gus pushes harder. The wheels jam. He looks down. Rifles lie scattered across the ground.

The vapour begins to thin.

He grimaces. His tears spill.

Dead soldiers lie everywhere. Shrapnel embedded in their bodies. Hands clenched at their throats. Foam crusts their mouths. Blood leaks from ears. Lifeless eyes stare upward.

Gus forces the stretcher forward, dragging it over the rifles. He doesn't stop.

One wheel wobbles violently and snaps off. The bed tilts. Gus keeps moving.

He reaches a medical truck and yanks open the passenger door.

He turns back for James.

Corpsmen O'Reilly and Clinger lie face down, bodies hunched over a stretcher, shielding the patient beneath them. Dead still.

Gus lifts James onto his shoulder and loads him into the truck.

A violent cough tears out of him through the wrapped drape. He clutches his throat.

He slams the door shut.

INT. MEDICAL TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

CRUNCH! Gus slams the gear into place. The engine roars. He grabs the hand mic.

GUS
MAYDAY! MAYDAY! ANYONE!

A violent cough rips out of him through the wrapped drape.

EVELYN (V.O.)
They had nowhere to go. Every base
had been bombed.

GUS
MASH unit 427 has been attacked!
All personnel K.I.A.! Gas-propelled
bombing! MAYDAY! ANYONE! ANYONE!
THEY'RE ALL DEAD!

EXT. ROAD - MEDICAL TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

The medical truck speeds away.

EVELYN (V.O.)
By the time they reached allied
help... it was too late.

EXT. FARM ROAD - MEDICAL TRUCK - MORNING

A platoon stands guard around the medical truck.

A MEDIC, hands bloodied, straightens. He looks to his commanding officer and gives a small shake of the head.

Leaning against the truck's wheel, Gus holds James propped against him. James's bandaged torso soaks through fast. Blood and pus seep from the bandages on his burnt face.

Gus cradles James to his chest, rocking him gently.

GUS
Don't give up, son. I'm gonna get
you home to your ma.

JAMES
(weakly)
Pa... I love both of you.

GUS
We love you too, son.

JAMES
I'm... I'm sorry--

--James's head slumps forward.

Gus pulls him closer.

GUS
James... James... no...

Gus's tears fall.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT - 1968

Evelyn's tears fall.

EVELYN
Our James was gone... he died in
Gus's arms.

Evelyn breaks down, clasping her mouth. Jimmy moves in and
hugs her.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
It was disgraceful. Despicable.
Unforgivable to bomb hospital units
full of injured boys. My Gus hated
them for those war crimes.

Gus wheezes through his oxygen mask. Evelyn wipes her tears
and caresses his face.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
By some miracle, he was the only
one who survived that night. He
would have died so James could
live. Instead, the gas damage took
him slowly over the next twenty
years. But he never gave up.
Especially when you came along,
Jimmy.

Evelyn lifts the FRAMED PHOTO from beneath Gus's hands.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
We never told you, but you always
reminded us of our son. You even
look alike.

Jimmy squints at the photo, then shakes his head with a faint smile.

JIMMY
I don't know... I can't see it. But
if I ever had a son, I'd want to
name him James.

EVELYN
That's really lovely, Jimmy. I want
you to know we love you as much as
we loved our James.

JIMMY
(wiping his tears)
That means everything to me. I love
both of you, Ma.

Evelyn looks at the FRAMED PHOTO again. Her eyes well. Her hand drifts to her chest. She grimaces.

JIMMY (CONT'D)
I always felt sorry you lost your
son. I can't imagine how you felt.

EVELYN
I hope no one I know ever has to go
through it.

Evelyn stiffens. She presses her hand to her chest.

JIMMY
What is it?

EVELYN
I don't know.

Jimmy watches her rub her chest.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
It's... it's probably nothing.

Jimmy's eyes well.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
I'll be alright.

GUS
(weakly)
Evie.

Gus stirs and reaches for her.

EVELYN
Gus.

She hugs him tightly.

GUS
(struggling)
I love you, Evie.

EVELYN
I love you, Gus.

She kisses his cheek.

EVELYN (CONT'D)
We all do.

Gus smiles softly at Jimmy. Jimmy smiles back through tears.

Gus closes his eyes. His head rests against Evelyn's, his peaceful smile holding.

Evelyn's eyes suddenly widen. She clutches her chest. Her breath falters. Her eyes flutter closed. Her head settles against Gus's.

Jimmy covers his mouth, shaking. He leans in and wraps his arms around them both.

FADE OUT.

THE END.