

CANTERBURY TRAILS



Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. STEVENSON HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

The Stevenson High School monument sign near the road reads, "SPORTS AWARD CEREMONY TONIGHT."

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - EVENING

The Stevenson High School auditorium is filled with students from various sports teams. At the back of the room, the golf team stands together in front of a backdrop, posing for a team photo. TODD, a 16-year-old, blonde-haired boy, and MIKE, a brown-haired sophomore, watch the photographer as she sets up her camera. With a mischievous grin, Todd sneaks closer to the golf team.

TODD

Fore!

The golf team ducks in unison as the camera flashes. Mike laughs and shakes his head.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM NEAR STAGE - EVENING

To the right of the stage, a slender woman, LAURA, approaches COACH DAVID KELSEY, an attractive 40-year-old.

LAURA

Hey Kelsey.

Coach Kelsey turns, firmly guiding Laura to the side. Her eyes widen in surprise, but a smile soon follows.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Are we going back to your place?

Kelsey leans in, his voice low yet firm.

COACH KELSEY

Laura, hey, you need to stop. It's getting ridiculous.

LAURA

I'm not sure what I did, but go ahead and arrest me.

Laura smiles, and Kelsey lets go of her.

COACH KELSEY

Those rumors are ridiculous. The janitor asked my opinion on bondage gear. He heard I was the expert.

LAURA

Oh really?

COACH KELSEY

Look, it's been months since we went out. Let it go already.

The loudspeaker screeches. They look up.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM STAGE - EVENING

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN, a 60-year-old gray-haired man, adjusts the microphone at the podium.

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN

Can everyone please take a seat? We'll start tonight's athletic awards ceremony with our boys' cross-country team. Let's give a warm welcome to Coach Kelsey.

The crowd claps as Coach Kelsey strides to the mic.

COACH KELSEY

Hi, everyone. After winning the state championship last year and losing most of our varsity team to graduation, I knew it would be tough to repeat. But you know what? These guys did it!

The crowd claps and cheers enthusiastically.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Now introducing our varsity lettermen: John Haas, Collin Green, Walter Warren...

Todd sits next to Mike, and they grin with anticipation.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Andy Cook, Jim Elek, Scott Oliverio, Joseph Hauser, and Michael Brock. Come on up!

The crowd cheers as Mike strides to the stage. In a stunned fury, Todd folds his arms tightly and gapes at his mother, MRS. EVANS, a busty, 40-year-old blonde-haired woman.

Coach Kelsey hands out the certificates. As Mike receives his award, Todd stands up and storms out of the auditorium.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
Give our championship team a well-deserved round of applause. Now, it seems everyone improved over last year, but the Most Improved Award goes to... Todd Evans. Todd had one of the top times this season.

Mrs. Evans hurries after Todd. Coach Kelsey scans the crowd.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
It appears he may have stepped out. It never fails, right? Let's move on to Rookie of the Year.

INT. COACH'S OFFICE - EVENING

The office is bright and big with monitors and whiteboards. Coach Kelsey sits at his desk as Mrs. Evans knocks on his open office door.

MRS. EVANS
Hi, I was told I could find you here. I'm Todd's mother.

COACH KELSEY
Oh, hi. I have Todd's award. Is he okay?

Coach Kelsey stands up and walks to the front of his desk. He picks up a plaque and extends it toward Mrs. Evans.

MRS. EVANS
He is very disappointed that he did not receive his varsity letter. There must be a mistake, right?

COACH KELSEY
Um, no.

Coach Kelsey leans back onto the edge of his desk.

MRS. EVANS
He did win one of the races.

COACH KELSEY
Yeah, he had a great race, but that was for the junior varsity squad.

MRS. EVANS

Why did his friend Michael get a varsity letter?

COACH KELSEY

Mike ran in four of our varsity meets when Joe got hurt.

MRS. EVANS

But Todd really thought he would get his letter.

Mrs. Evans walks seductively toward Coach Kelsey.

COACH KELSEY

Todd will definitely be on the varsity team next year, and he will likely be our star runner.

Mrs. Evans leans in, pressing Coach Kelsey against his desk.

MRS. EVANS

The letter meant a great deal to Todd. Is there something I can do to change your mind?

Her hand settles firmly on his shoulder, her gaze unwavering.

COACH KELSEY

Mrs. Evans.

MRS. EVANS

It's Ms. Evans... A little birdie told me you like role-playing... I'm the bad, bad student, and you need to discipline me.

Just outside the office door, Principal Donovan stops as he hears the conversation inside. Mrs. Evans takes his hand.

COACH KELSEY

What? Who did?

Her grip tightens as she pulls him closer. She hikes up her skirt and swings his hand toward her rear. The camera cuts to Principal Donovan entering the office. A loud slap is heard.

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN

The ceremony was a real... hit.

Principal Donovan gapes as his eyes widen.

EXT. COACH KELSEY'S DECK - MORNING

Coach Kelsey sits alone on his deck, coffee in hand, staring across the empty baseball field. The silhouette of Stevenson High slouches in the misty distance. He checks his watch, exhales quietly, and rises. He slides open the door and takes another look at the school in the distance before sighing and closing the door. Inside, he rifles through a battered box-papers, a whistle, loose markers. He stops, picks up a Stevenson High mug, studies it for a beat, then sets it on the counter. He grabs the box and walks out.

INT. COACH KELSEY'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Coach Kelsey's car glides past Stevenson High as the opening credits flash. He drives on.

EXT. CANTERBURY HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

An aerial view-school sign, track, athletic fields, parking lot. Coach Kelsey pulls into the back lot and steps out. It is empty and quiet except for birds chirping. He walks toward the school. Near the entrance, PRINCIPAL JACKSON, an older, dignified, African American woman, approaches. Coach Kelsey stops-a brief, weighted exchange of looks.

PRINCIPAL JACKSON

Hello, Mr. Kelsey.

COACH KELSEY

Ms. Jackson?

PRINCIPAL JACKSON

It's now Principal Jackson. I was informed about your situation at Stevenson.

COACH KELSEY

Yes, let me assure you that the incident wasn't as it seemed. And those rumors weren't true.

PRINCIPAL JACKSON

No need, Superintendent Jones informed me, but I'll be watching. You came from the district's newest school, a few miles down the road; however, as you can see, Canterbury is a bit more, let's say, rustic, but decency still applies. So, you will also be teaching history.

COACH KELSEY

Yes, that's correct. I've taught history for several years.

PRINCIPAL JACKSON

Very well. We learn from our history so we don't repeat our mistakes. Oh, and please give these kids on the team some guidance. Let's turn some lives around while you are working on the same.

COACH KELSEY

I'm confident I can coach these kids. I won't let you down.

PRINCIPAL JACKSON

Just don't let the kids down. Welcome aboard.

They walk to the school. Coach Kelsey turns his head, scans the field, and takes a deep breath before heading inside.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - MORNING

Coach Kelsey grips his clipboard as he checks his watch.

COACH KELSEY

Hey guys, I'm Coach Kelsey. Welcome to Canterbury cross-country.

Coach Kelsey scans the line of six boys, his gaze landing on one clutching a pair of skis. He strides toward him.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

What's your name?

MATT

Matt Ferraro.

COACH KELSEY

What's with the skis?

MATT

Yeah, I wasn't sure whether to bring them since there's no snow on the ground.

COACH KELSEY

Um, this is cross-country running, not cross-country skiing?

MATT

Oh, um, this sucks.

Matt takes his skis and walks toward the exit.

COACH KELSEY

We need some runners... are you interested in running?

MATT

(with his back turned)
Running blows!

COACH KELSEY

(to himself quietly)
This blows.

Matt leaves the gym, and Coach Kelsey walks back to the guys.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

So, who was on the team last season?

RUSS, a tall, dark-haired boy, raises his hand.

RUSS

Hi, I'm Russ. I've been on the team for the last two seasons.

COACH KELSEY

Great Russ. Anyone else?

Nobody responds. Coach Kelsey shakes his head in disappointment. He walks up to JAVON TAYLOR, a big, overweight African American boy who finishes a snack.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

You're a big dude. What's your name?

JAVON

I'm Javon.

COACH KELSEY

Hey Javon, um, did you ever consider joining the football team?

JAVON

My mama won't let me. She's afraid I'd get hurt.

COACH KELSEY

Alright, welcome to the team...
Okay, Puneet?

PUNEET, a skinny Indian boy wearing glasses, raises his hand high over his head.

PUNEET

Hi Coach.

COACH KELSEY

So, Puneet, are you an avid runner?

PUNEET

No, not really. I need to participate in activities that will help me get into college, and we don't have a robotics team.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, well, team sports do look good on college applications... Alright, where is Jeremy O'Brien?

After a pause, JEREMY, a young, tiny, red-headed boy, jumps from behind Javon with his arms out in a ta-da manner.

JEREMY

I'm Jeremy.

COACH KELSEY

So, you're a freshman?

JEREMY

Yes. I started school early, and I skipped a grade. I'm almost twelve.

COACH KELSEY

Wow, eleven, great.

JEREMY

It's not that great. Being this small, running is really the only sport I can do.

COACH KELSEY

Have you run for a team before?

JEREMY

No, I've only run when being chased. But I do have a lot of practice.

COACH KELSEY

Okay... Javier Guerrero?

JAVY, a Hispanic boy, slowly raises his hand and looks down.

JAVY
 (in a thick accent)
 I am Javy.

COACH KELSEY
 So, Javy, tell me why you're
 interested in cross-country.

JAVY
 Um, uh, when I run, I like to
 listen to music. And I like music,
 so I run a lot.

The door swings open, and BRIAN steps into the gym. His shorts reveal the metal post of his artificial leg as he moves, his gait slightly uneven. He makes his way toward the group, determination in his stride.

BRIAN
 Hi Coach, sorry I'm late.

COACH KELSEY
 Hi? Um, you know this group is for
 cross-country, right?

BRIAN
 Yes, I signed up and got the notice
 to meet here today.

Coach Kelsey looks down at the signup sheet.

COACH KELSEY
 Brian Hunter?

BRIAN
 Yes, that's me.

COACH KELSEY
 I love your enthusiasm, but, um,
 are you able to run?

BRIAN
 Oh, no, I'm not going to *run* run.
 I'm going to run the team as the
 manager. I was the team manager
 last year.

COACH KELSEY
 Oh, okay, I'm glad to have you.

BRIAN
 I keep track of statistics for all
 the runners. I also analyze video.
 (MORE)

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Oh, and I can prepare scouting
reports on all of our opponents.

He shows Coach Kelsey his iPad.

COACH KELSEY
Really? Okay, sounds great.
Alright, everyone, we'll start with
a warmup. Let's head outside and do
a lap along the fence line.

They all walk out the gym doors that lead to the back.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

As the guys step into the schoolyard, a battered white work van screeches into the parking lot, skidding to a stop near the gym. KEVIN, tall, laid-back, dressed in a t-shirt and jeans, takes a hit from his vape pen. The team and Coach Kelsey watch as he casually steps out. Kevin walks up to the group holding a paper form.

KEVIN
Is this cross-country?

COACH KELSEY
Yes, did you want to join the team?

KEVIN
Yeah, you know, because I need a
parking pass.

COACH KELSEY
Parking pass?

KEVIN
Yeah, you gotta do after-school
stuff to get one. I gotta park my
van. Can you, um, sign this form?

COACH KELSEY
Yeah sure. What's your name?

Coach Kelsey grabs the form and signs it.

KEVIN
Kevin Kelly... so I made the team?

COACH KELSEY
Yes, welcome to the team. Russ is
going to lead us on a warm-up run.
Um, bring some shorts tomorrow.

As Russ leads the guys around the fence line, Brian walks to the grassy area with his tablet to observe. The girls' cross-country coach, a fit, brown-haired woman in her thirties, JEN, approaches Coach Kelsey.

JEN

Hi, I'm Jen, the girls' cross-country coach. I assume you're the new boys' coach?

COACH KELSEY

Hi, yes, I'm Kelsey, David Kelsey. Nice to meet you.

JEN

Likewise.

The coaches shake hands.

JEN (CONT'D)

Are you teaching as well?

COACH KELSEY

Yep, history.

JEN

Ooh, fun.

COACH KELSEY

Yeah, I've always been a history buff. Hey, what's up with the boys' team and losing every year?

JEN

Yeah, I guess they never really had a motivating coach.

COACH KELSEY

You must be quite motivating. The girls' team has done great.

The runners on the girls' team approach the coaches.

JEN

Thanks, Kelsey. Let me know if you need anything.

Jen walks to the girls.

JEN (CONT'D)

Ok, girls, let's stretch before we start our workout.

Russ leads with Javy close behind. Behind them, it's chaos.

Javon slows to a walk, wheezing. Puneet hunches over, arms flailing like he's swatting invisible bees.

PUNEET

(to Javon)

I thought this would be easier.

Kevin sprints after Jeremy for a few steps before grinding to a halt, hands on his hips, gasping for air. Coach Kelsey watches and shakes his head in dismay. The boys stagger in and line up beside him while catching their breath.

COACH KELSEY

Ok, guys, gather around.

The boys, all out of breath, sit down.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

The first run of the year is always the hardest. It will get easier. Let's get some stretching in first.

The guys stretch. Jeremy raises his hand.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Yes Jeremy.

JEREMY

Didn't we just do our first run?

COACH KELSEY

That was our warmup. Did any of you run during the summer?

Nobody responds.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

How about you, Russ?

RUSS

No, I worked all summer.

COACH KELSEY

Ok, not a problem. I can help you all become great runners. You may have heard that distance running is 10% physical and 90% mental.

KEVIN

Mental work? I'm out.

Kevin stands up.

COACH KELSEY

It's not that bad, Kevin. We'll establish our physical base, then work on improving our speed. Let's do an easy run. Russ, lead the team to Hayes Road and back.

The team jogs down the school driveway toward the road.

EXT. ON THE SIDEWALK ALONG A ROADWAY - DAY

Russ and Javy run slowly along the sidewalk. Russ stops.

RUSS

Hold up and let them catch up.

Javy sings strange lyrics badly out loud and keeps running, oblivious to Russ's calls. After a few more strides, he finally notices, halts, and turns to face him. Meanwhile, eight Stevenson High runners charge down the same sidewalk—Javy, still distracted, unaware of their rapid approach. Javy sings out loud while he waits.

TODD

Move over, Swiftie!

Javy doesn't hear him. Todd shoves him as he passes. The Canterbury runners catch up to Russ and come to a halt, while the Stevenson team presses on, stopping just ahead of Russ.

TODD (CONT'D)

Canterbury still has a team. You should give up now and save yourself the embarrassment.

Stevenson runners laugh. Kevin pulls out a switchblade knife from his pocket, points it toward Todd, and pops it open.

KEVIN

Do you guys have a problem?

They all back away.

TODD

Calm down, psycho! Let's go.

Todd runs along the sidewalk, but Javon is blocking the way.

TODD (CONT'D)

Move it, fat ass!

The Stevenson runners run around Javon and continue down the sidewalk. Javy jogs to the guys.

KEVIN

Yo, don't take any shit from those a-holes.

RUSS

Yeah, those Stevenson guys are assholes, but Kevin, bruh, what's with the knife?

JEREMY

You can't bring that to school.

KEVIN

Yeah, man, I forgot I had it on me.

JEREMY

You also forgot you had your brain.

Kevin makes a fist and pretends to swing at Jeremy. Jeremy flinches.

KEVIN

Made you flinch!

Kevin punches Jeremy's arm.

JEREMY

Ow!

Jeremy covers his face and wails.

KEVIN

Sorry, man, I didn't hit that hard.

JEREMY

Got you!

The guys laugh as Kevin chases after Jeremy.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

The guys enter the school yard and jog to Coach Kelsey and Brian. The guys breathe heavily as they sit down.

COACH KELSEY

Welcome back, guys. Good job, you completed your first day. You ran approximately 5k today. It wasn't race pace, but I'm glad you all finished together.

BRIAN

That took about 45 minutes.

COACH KELSEY

A 45-minute 5K is the same distance
as a 15-minute 5K.

KEVIN

When do we start that mental work?
I'm exhausted.

COACH KELSEY

Speed work will come later, once we
gain our stamina over the next week
or so.

INT. BURGER JOINT - AFTERNOON

Mike sits in a booth across from ALLISON, an attractive 16-
year-old, blonde-haired girl, eating burgers and fries.

ALLISON

Sorry Mike. Never thought your dad
would be such a cheat.

MIKE

Now we gotta stay with my
grandparents.

ALLISON

You're moving!

MIKE

Yeah, they only live a few miles
down the road, but I'll be going to
Canterbury.

ALLISON

Really, that place is so cringe.

MIKE

We can still talk every day.

ALLISON

I guess.

Allison puts on a forced frown. Mike puts his arm around her
as she sinks into his chest. Todd and another Stevenson
student, KYLE, approach the booth.

TODD

Mikey, you missed the first
practice.

Todd sits next to Allison, and Kyle slides next to Mike.

ALLISON
Hey Todd... Kyle.

TODD
(mockingly)
Why the sad faces? Are you two
having problems?

Kyle and Todd laugh. Todd grabs a fry from Mike's plate.

ALLISON
Mike just shared some bad news.

TODD
Oh, sorry. What's wrong, buddy?

MIKE
My parents split up.

TODD
Congrats! That's great news! My
folks split up, and now they both
spoil me; it's great. Hell, I'm
guilt-tripping a car out of them.

MIKE
My dad took off, and now my mom and
I will be living with my grandma.

Kyle tries to take one of Mike's fries, but Todd stops him
and then takes one for himself.

TODD
Grandma's house, that sucks.

MIKE
Yeah, it does suck, and I'll be
going to Canterbury.

TODD
What? Canterbury? You're joking,
right? What about our team and the
threepeat?

MIKE
It's not like I have a choice.

KYLE
They forfeited to us last year.

TODD
Bruh, that school is for losers -
no offense. Do they still even have
a cross-country team?

MIKE

I don't know and I don't care.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

The sun beams through the clouds. The team gathers around Coach Kelsey and Brian.

COACH KELSEY

Ok, the weather cleared up. I think we should do a long run on the sidewalks. Russ, lead the team down to Dodge Park and back.

Brian and Jeremy notice Javon eating sardines from a can.

BRIAN

Javon, you can get cramps when you eat and run.

JEREMY

Are those sardines? Yuck!

JAVON

I'll take cramps over hunger. Look, this one's still alive!

Javon dangles a sardine in front of Jeremy's face. Jeremy recoils, letting out a sharp scream as Javon pops the last one into his mouth with a smirk. The guys shake their heads and start their run. Coach Kelsey watches them go, his eyes narrowing as he spots Puneet slouching mid-stride.

COACH KELSEY

Puneet, stop slouching and straighten out your back. Run erect.

KEVIN

What the what?

The guys giggle as they continue to run.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Hey Puneet, run erect! You can look at my ass if that helps!

JEREMY

Nobody wants to see your fat butt!

Kevin runs after Jeremy.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

The team runs along the sidewalk. A squeaking noise is heard. The guys look around for the source of the noise as they run.

RUSS

What's that squeaking noise?

JEREMY

I think it's Puneet's shoes?

KEVIN

It sounds like Jeremy's mom's bed.

JEREMY

Um, it kind of does.

PUNEET

It's not my shoes, it's my glasses.

Puneet's glasses squeak with every step.

RUSS

Oh great, here come those Stevenson knobs again.

The Stevenson team approaches with Todd leading as both teams run in a single file toward each other. As they come near, Todd steps hard onto a puddle and splashes Russ.

RUSS (CONT'D)

What the hell! Really?

The Stevenson team jogs by single file along the sidewalk, passing the Canterbury runners. As the last in line, Jeremy spots an overhanging tree branch and slows down as the Stevenson runners near. He casually jumps up and grabs it, then lets it snap back. Rainwater from the leaves dumps down, soaking the entire Stevenson team as they run beneath it. The Stevenson guys duck and sprint onto the street, trying to avoid the water. The Canterbury team bursts into laughter.

RUSS (CONT'D)

You dirty a-holes needed a shower!

TODD

You losers are dead, just wait!

The Stevenson team continues running while the Canterbury team gathers around Jeremy and high-fives him.

INT. COACH'S OFFICE - DAY/INT. PRINCIPAL DONOVAN'S OFFICE

Coach Kelsey sits in his chair, on the phone, while Principal Donovan sits at his neat desk using a computer as his phone.

COACH KELSEY

Hey Don, it's Kelsey.

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN

Oh, hi Kelsey, how's it going at Canterbury?

COACH KELSEY

That's what I want to talk to you about. Only six kids joined, and all but one are beginners. We won't be competitive. Is winning a meet really a condition for coming back?

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN

Yes, Chauncey Jones, our new superintendent, was quite passionate about breaking Canterbury's 10-year losing streak. As arbitrary as it might seem, he's the one approving your return. Honestly, you're lucky he's giving you the opportunity. Dr. Bradford would have just let you go.

COACH KELSEY

Look, I just need a full team.

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN

I suggest you do some recruiting. Work your magic. It's that or Gabe will be the permanent coach.

Coach Kelsey stands up quickly.

COACH KELSEY

Come on, Gabe is the new coach! You saw how he handled the track team. Nobody will join next year.

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN

Gabe agreed to serve as the interim coach until you return.

COACH KELSEY

Ok, one win and I can come back?

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN

Yes, Todd Evans will graduate this year. Just turn the Canterbury program around.

Kelsey drops into the chair—CRACK! The back snaps, and he lurches, catching himself.

COACH KELSEY

I've got to go before something else falls apart.

He hangs up, plants a hand on his forehead, and sulks.

INT. MIKE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Mike sits on his bed with his phone in hand. He sees a series of unanswered texts sent to Allison.

MIKE

(thinking out loud)
Why are you ignoring me?

Mike gets up and leaves his room.

EXT. MIKE'S HOUSE - DAY

Mike emerges from the front door. He runs down the street with a worried expression, but as he runs, his mood gradually shifts. He takes a deep breath, smiles, and picks up the pace. When he nears Allison's house, he suddenly stops, his face blank and unreadable.

EXT. ALLISON'S HOUSE - DAY

Todd lounges in the convertible, top down. Allison stands beside him, eyeing the car.

ALLISON

Wow, Todd, I love it!

TODD

Sweet, right? Get in. Let's take it for a ride.

Allison slides into the car. Todd backs out of the driveway and guns the engine, speeding down the road. Allison throws her arms up and screams with exhilaration as Mike watches them disappear into the distance.

EXT. CANTERBURY HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING (ESTABLISHING)

Kids rush to get into the building.

INT. CANTERBURY HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - MORNING

Students filter into their homerooms. Coach Kelsey hurries to his door—Jen steps up.

JEN

Kelsey, ready for your first day at Canterbury?

COACH KELSEY

Hey Jen, sure am. It may be a new school, but history doesn't change.

JEN

My classroom is across the hall if you need anything.

COACH KELSEY

Oh, ok, thanks.

Jen walks across the hall to her classroom.

INT. COACH KELSEY'S CLASSROOM

Coach Kelsey enters his room and stands next to his desk. He scans the class list as the final bell rings and writes his name on the whiteboard as students rush to their seats. Mike scans the classroom and recognizes Coach Kelsey at the board. Mike slowly grins.

COACH KELSEY

Hello class, I'm Mr. Kelsey.

The students talk and wander from their seats.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Alright, settle down. I know it's the first day, but please just take your seats.

He scans the class list.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Jose Aguilar

Jose raises his hand.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
Michael Brock?

Coach Kelsey scans the room and spots Mike.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
Mike, I didn't know you went here.

Embarrassment flickers across Mike's face.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
I want to talk to you after class.

Heads swivel. A chorus of teasing groans echoes. He flushes deep red.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MORNING

Jeremy walks down the empty hallway and spots Kevin slipping into the school.

JEREMY
Hi Kevin. You're late.

Kevin stops beside Jeremy. Jeremy spots Kevin's vape pen.

KEVIN
Well, you're late too.

JEREMY
I'm not late, I have a bathroom pass. When nature calls, I need to go quickly. Were you vaping? Vaping is bad for your health.

KEVIN
Shut up, bruh.

Kevin throws a mock punch. Jeremy instinctively flinches.

KEVIN (CONT'D)
You flinched!

Jeremy takes off down the hall with Kevin in pursuit.

INT. COACH KELSEY'S CLASSROOM - DAY

The bell rings. Chairs scrape back—students file out.

COACH KELSEY
Mike, can I talk to you for a sec?

LESLIE, a cute girl who sat beside Mike, rises. As she passes his desk, she glances at him.

LESLIE

Busted on the first day!

Mike hesitates, embarrassment flickering. Then, he heads toward Coach Kelsey.

COACH KELSEY

Mike, I didn't know you were going to Canterbury.

MIKE

Yeah, my parents split up, so I'm staying with my grandparents.

COACH KELSEY

Oh, sorry about that. Look, I'm coaching cross-country here now. You need to join the team.

MIKE

I don't know, Coach.

COACH KELSEY

Hey, divorce is tough, but this could help you take your mind off it. Just come out to practice and check us out. Think about it.

MIKE

Ok.

Mike walks off. Behind him, Coach Kelsey clenches a quiet fist pump.

EXT. CANTERBURY STADIUM - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

A view from above shows the track around the football field.

EXT. CANTERBURY TRACK - DAY

The team stretches on the track's grass infield. Coach Kelsey scans the area, searching for Mike. Beside him, Brian stands with a stopwatch dangling from his neck.

COACH KELSEY

Ok, team, we're going to work on speed. I want you to run one lap at full speed. Let's see what you got.

The kids line up on the track. Brian is on the infield of the track holding the stopwatch.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

On go. Ready, set, go!

The guys take off in a burst of energy. As they round the corner of the track, the pack begins to stretch out. Russ takes the lead, with Javy close behind, followed by Javon, Puneet, Jeremy, and Kevin bringing up the rear. Coach Kelsey hustles across the infield, cutting straight to the 200-meter mark to get a better view of the action.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

You're halfway there!

Javon then runs faster, taking the lead from Russ. Then Puneet, Jeremy, and Kevin pass the 200-meter mark. Kevin coughs, and Jeremy turns his head.

JEREMY

You probably have popcorn lung from vaping.

Kevin sprints after Jeremy, but Jeremy pulls ahead, widening the gap. Javon explodes into a final burst of speed, racing toward the finish line as the coach dashes across the field. Brian calls out the times as the guys cross the finish line.

BRIAN

(to Javon)

54

COACH KELSEY

I don't believe it!

Brian continues to shout out the times as Russ, Javy, Puneet, Jeremy, and Kevin cross the finish line.

BRIAN

59, 61, 64, 70, 72.

The guys gather around Javon.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Javon! That was spectacular!

COACH KELSEY

Just a fantastic time. Did you even know you could run that fast?

JAVON

(huffing out of breath)

No idea, Coach.

Coach Kelsey grins, excitement lighting up his face. The guys gather around Javon and congratulate him. Hidden behind the fence, Mike watches, torn. He turns away as he pulls out his phone. His hand hovers over his cellphone, uncertain. Then, with a sigh, he lifts it to his ear and walks off.

INT. NAIL SALON - AFTERNOON

Allison and ALLISON'S MOM—a bougie 45-year-old blonde—sit in pedicure chairs. Allison's phone buzzes. She picks up.

ALLISON
Hi Mike. What's up?

MIKE (O.C.)
I've been trying to reach you. You haven't answered my texts.

ALLISON
Oh, yeah, I've been swamped, you know, homework.

MIKE (O.C.)
Can I come over this weekend?

ALLISON
Um, I think I'm free.

MIKE (O.C.)
We can get a bite or something.

ALLISON
Um, I'll let you know, but I've got to go... bye.

ALLISON'S MOM
You're still talking to that boy?

ALLISON
He's super sweet, but...

ALLISON'S MOM
Don't settle, sweetie. You deserve only the best. It took me a couple of tries to get what I deserved. We wouldn't be here now if I had stayed with your father... Oh, did you know, Todd's dad is a lawyer?

Allison admires her newly painted toes and then looks at a photo of Mike on her phone's background.

EXT. CANTERBURY PARKING LOT - DAY

Mike walks through the parking lot, then glances back at the track. He hesitates, sighs, then runs toward the street.

INT. COACH KELSEY'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

Students settle into their seats. Coach Kelsey spots Mike entering, and he moves to meet him as he is about to sit.

COACH KELSEY

Hey Mike, I thought you were going to come to practice yesterday?

MIKE

Oh, yeah, um, I'm not sure about running this year.

COACH KELSEY

Really? You love running. You know you were going to be the star at Stevenson, and that's saying a lot. And now you can do it here. We had a great practice yesterday.

MIKE

I don't know, Coach.

The bell rings.

COACH KELSEY

Just think about it. We need you.

Mike takes his seat next to Leslie.

LESLIE

Did I hear that you run?

MIKE

Yeah, um, I did at Stevenson.

LESLIE

I run on the girls' cross-country team. You should run too.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, I hope everyone read the chapter last night.

Mike glances at Leslie, considering, then opens his book.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

The bell rings, and the kids pour out of the classrooms. Coach Kelsey spots Jen and beelines toward her.

COACH KELSEY

Jen! Hey, um, we have our first meet tomorrow.

JEN

Yep. Is your team prepared?

COACH KELSEY

Actually, where do I get their uniforms?

JEN

Uniforms? You mean you haven't ordered them yet?

COACH KELSEY

Order them?

JEN

Yes, you have a fundraiser, then you order them.

COACH KELSEY

Fundraiser? What?

Coach Kelsey spots Principal Jackson walking down the hall.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Mrs. Jackson!

Principal Jackson stops, and Coach Kelsey jogs up to her.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Hey, I just learned the school does not have uniforms to issue.

PRINCIPAL JACKSON

Yes, that is true. Mr. Kelsey, the district stopped issuing uniforms many years ago due to funding cuts. Now, kids have to buy their own. Unfortunately, as a Title 1 school, many cannot afford them.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, but why does Stevenson have uniforms to issue?

PRINCIPAL JACKSON

They had some generous donors when the school opened three years ago.

COACH KELSEY

What can I do now? The meet is tomorrow.

PRINCIPAL JACKSON

I suggest having the kids sell popcorn or chocolate bars. But it may take a few weeks.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, I'll figure it out. I won't let the kids down.

Coach Kelsey's expression hardens—brows low, eyes distant. A cheerleader approaches Kelsey with a pan of cupcakes.

CHEERLEADER

Do you want to support the cheerleaders?

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - AFTERNOON

Coach Kelsey and the boys file out of the locker room, slinging bags over tired shoulders.

COACH KELSEY

Come prepared to race tomorrow. I'll figure something out about the uniforms, I promise.

Jen watches the boys leave and turns to Kelsey.

JEN

Hey Kelsey. I may have a solution.

INT. STORAGE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Jen swings open the storage room—racks of battered gear and tangled nets. Her eyes sweep the shelves, landing on a box up top: "Boys CC." She braces a foot on the lowest shelf.

JEN

Ah, I think this is it. Can you give me a boost?

Kelsey's eyes briefly drift toward her butt as she steadies herself. He hesitates, unsure whether to support her by the waist or risk a more awkward push.

Just as she passes the box to Coach Kelsey, the shelf gives out. She tumbles back, landing in his arms with a startled yelp. His hands wrap around her chest. Their eyes widen. Without a word, she hoists herself upright, brushing off the moment. Kelsey promptly lifts her back on her feet.

COACH KELSEY

Sorry for, um, you know, grabbing you there. I just didn't want you hitting the ground.

JEN

Thanks, good catch. You're a lifesaver.

Coach Kelsey opens the box. He lifts a faded jersey-cracked lettering, soft with age—and smiles.

COACH KELSEY

The uniforms are awesome! You're the real lifesaver!

JEN

They're pretty old.

COACH KELSEY

Well, they're going to have to work... better than nothing.

JEN

Um, so hey, why did you want to come to Canterbury? You had back-to-back championships, and those facilities are state-of-the-art.

Kelsey puts down the uniform and pauses for a beat.

COACH KELSEY

Honestly, I didn't want to come here, but I really had no choice.

JEN

No choice?

COACH KELSEY

There was a misunderstanding, so it was easier for me just to transfer.

JEN

Hmm, really, a misunderstanding.

Kelsey stops inspecting the uniforms and looks at her.

COACH KELSEY
Have you heard something?

Coach Kelsey places the uniforms back in the boxes.

JEN
Well, to be honest, you've
developed a reputation around the
district.

COACH KELSEY
Oh god! Those rumors aren't true.

As they begin to walk out of the room, a shelf collapses and boxes tumble down. Coach Kelsey sees yellow-colored jackets that have spilled out of a box and holds one up.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
These are great!

INT. STEVENSON'S TEACHERS' LOUNGE - MORNING

Focusing on a Stevenson cross-country jacket and then zooming out to GABE, a middle-aged man, sitting alone, nursing his coffee. Around him, teachers fill their cups and chat at scattered tables. He sees Laura enter the room and sits up straight. Laura scans the room, then heads toward him.

LAURA
Gabe, you're coaching cross-country
this year?

Gabe stands up, nearly fumbling his steaming cup of coffee. His eyes light up as a smile spreads across his face.

GABE
Um, hi, Laura.

LAURA
I'm not used to seeing anyone but
Kelsey wear that jacket.

Gabe grimaces, then sticks out his chest proudly.

GABE
Well, I'm the coach now.

LAURA
I wonder why he chose to go to
Canterbury. I hated it there.

GABE

Oh, I'm not sure, but I bet it was about all those weird things I've been hearing.

LAURA

Hmm, maybe. Too bad he left.

GABE

We actually have a meet against Canterbury today.

LAURA

Oh, tell him I miss his face and that I hope he's doing well.

Gabe appears annoyed as Laura walks away and sits angrily. He takes a swig of his hot coffee, burning his mouth. He composes himself and looks around.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - AFTERNOON

Coach huddles the team.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, guys, listen up. This is our first meet, so no huge expectations; just try your best. We're running against Stevenson, my old school, and they won the last two state championships.

The team groans.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Hey, this is a learning experience. I came in dead last in my first meet. So just try your best.

He places two boxes on the bench and opens one of them.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Here are the uniforms.

Coach Kelsey pulls jackets out of a box.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Also, we have warm-up jackets. You will notice a different number on each jacket.

(MORE)

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
 At the end of every meet, we will swap jackets—the runner with the best time will get jacket number 1, the runner with the second-best time will get jacket number 2, and so forth.

PUNEET
 Cool idea, Coach.

COACH KELSEY
 Russ, since you have seniority, I want you to be our team captain. You'll start with 1.

Coach Kelsey tosses Russ the jacket.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
 The rest, you grab a random jacket. Brian, I want you to have this one.

He tosses Brian the jacket with "Ass. Coach" printed on it as the guys grab their jackets.

KEVIN
 Ass Coach! Hilarious!

The team laughs. Jeremy twerks.

JEREMY
 Am I shaking it right?

BRIAN
 Assistant coach! Thanks, Coach Kelsey. This is such a great honor!

COACH KELSEY
 Okay, get into your uniforms and meet me at the field.

The guys rush and crowd around the boxes.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - AFTERNOON

The sun gleams overhead as orange cones outline the cross-country course behind the school. At the starting line, Coach Kelsey and Jen stand ready—the Stevenson teams approach. Jen exchanges greetings with the Stevenson girls' coach while Coach Kelsey strides up to the boys' coach.

JEN
 Varsity girls head to the starting line.

The girls' teams line up at the starting line.

GABE
Hi Kelsey.

COACH KELSEY
Hey Gabe.

They shake hands.

GABE
Don told me about your situation.
How are things going at Canterbury?

COACH KELSEY
Um, yeah, things are great. How's
the team this year?

GABE
We're ready for another
championship.

COACH KELSEY
You should. The JV team looked good
last year. So take good care of
them. I want to continue the
championship streak next year.

GABE
How's your team?

COACH KELSEY
Oh, they're inexperienced, but
they're working hard.

The starting gun fires, and the girls take off running.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - AFTERNOON

Uniforms blanket the benches. The guys sift through, hunting
for their size.

RUSS
Give Javon the largest one.

Jeremy and Kevin hold the shorts to their waists.

JEREMY
This small looks way too small.

KEVIN
The large looks too small. Are
these women's shorts?

The guys put on the shirts.

RUSS
The shirt fits fine.

The guys frantically search through the piles of shorts. Kevin tosses the shorts over his head, checks the sizes, and eventually runs out.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - AFTERNOON

Jen is watching the girls run with the Stevenson girls' coach, BECKY, a 30-something, black-haired woman.

BECKY
So, how do you like working with Kelsey?

JEN
It's been good.

BECKY
I heard he's bad, if you know what I mean.

JEN
I've heard a few rumors.

BECKY
I wonder why he transferred? His addiction must have caused some issues. I bet Laura Thompson was involved.

JEN
Laura Thompson, huh.

The girls run by them on their final stretch. The coaches cheer them on.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - AFTERNOON

GABE
Well, the girls are almost done. Where's your team?

COACH KELSEY
Good question.

Coach Kelsey jogs up to the locker room door. The door does not have an outside handle, so Coach Kelsey pounds on it. Jeremy hears the knock and answers it.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
Come on, guys, we need to start.
Let's move it.

JEREMY
But, Coach, these are too small.

Jeremy holds up the uniform shorts.

COACH KELSEY
There are like 30 uniforms; one
should fit. Get a larger size.

Coach Kelsey walks away quickly.

JEREMY
This is a large!

Coach Kelsey gets back to Gabe.

COACH KELSEY
They'll be here in a second.

The guys stride onto the field— jackets slung low around
their waists. Coach Kelsey waits ahead.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
Guys, take off your jackets. We
need to start the race.

The guys take off their jackets, revealing that the uniform
shorts are super short and tight.

TODD
They're wearing booty shorts!

The Stevenson team bursts out in laughter. Todd bends over,
laughing, and points.

BRIAN
Does it turn you on or something?

The Canterbury boys laugh as they head to the starting line.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Good luck, guys.

TODD
Coach Gabe, they only have six
runners. They need seven.

GABE
Kelsey, where is your seventh
runner?

COACH KELSEY

Yeah, we only had six sign up, but we only need five runners that score. The other two are just pushers - they wouldn't contribute to our score, just make your score worse if they finish in front of your top five. So if anything, it helps you if we're short.

TODD

They need to follow the rules. I think they need to forfeit.

GABE

You might think rules don't apply to you, Kelsey, but you still need to follow them.

Coach Kelsey flinches at his tone. His eyes track the cluster of anxious parents, then lock onto Brian.

COACH KELSEY

Wait, we have a seventh runner. Brian, put down your tablet and get over here. We need you to run.

Brian walks over with his artificial leg.

BRIAN

Coach, you know, um, this isn't a running blade. I won't be very fast.

COACH KELSEY

That's okay. Don't worry about your time. Just move at your own pace.

BRIAN

Okay, anything for the team.

Brian strides to the starting line. The team high-fives him.

TODD

Really? He can't run.

COACH KELSEY

There's no rule against him running, Todd. Let's go.

Coach Kelsey grabs the starter gun as the boys line up.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Ready, set...

Coach Kelsey fires the starting gun, and they take off. Javon surges to the front alongside the Stevenson runners, led by Todd and Kyle, with Russ not far behind. As they round the first turn near the fence line, Javon takes the lead. Todd and Kyle exchange a look of disbelief.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Way to go, Javon!

Javon races ahead, then starts to slow down—way down. The rest of the Stevenson boys catch up to him.

TODD

What happened? Did you realize the buffet was closed?

All seven Stevenson boys are in the front. Coach Kelsey lowers his gaze, lips pressed into a thin line. He gives a slow shake of the head. Mrs. Evans approaches Coach Kelsey.

MRS. EVANS

Coach Kelsey.

COACH KELSEY

Mrs. Evans.

MRS. EVANS

It's Bethany. Hey, I'm sorry. I just thought Todd would get his letter.

COACH KELSEY

Role playing? Really.

MRS. EVANS

Yeah, I heard you were into it.

COACH KELSEY

Who told you that? Ah, never mind.

MRS. EVANS

So, how can I make it up to you?

COACH KELSEY

I think you have done enough.

MRS. EVANS

No, really, anything?

Kelsey watches the boys run by, then turns to Mrs. Evans.

COACH KELSEY

Actually, I do have one thing.

Coach Kelsey speaks (inaudibly) to Mrs. Evans as the girls' teams stretch, cheering on the boys. The coaches move toward the finish chute. One by one, all seven Stevenson boys cross the line, with Russ and Javy close behind. Puneet surges forward for a strong finish, trailed by Jeremy and Kevin. Brian rounds out his first lap. Javon pulls out a can of sardines and eats them as he jogs to the finish. Coach Kelsey sighs, just as Gabe steps up to him.

GABE

Well, Kelsey, I'm sorry to say, it looks like I'll be Stevenson's permanent coach.

COACH KELSEY

Not so fast. We may have a lot of work to do here, but it's early.

GABE

Good luck with that. Look at those kids... pathetic.

As Gabe turns away, Kelsey grabs Gabe by his shoulder.

COACH KELSEY

Don't talk about them that way.

GABE

You know, Kelsey, I never liked you... I don't understand why Laura does. She deserves someone better.

COACH KELSEY

Laura? She's crazy. What did she tell you?

GABE

Laura's a great gal, and you're pathetic, just like your team.

Kelsey yanks Gabe's shirt, his eyes darting, then catching sight of the kids.

COACH KELSEY

You're not worth it.

Kelsey lets go. Gabe walks away and turns around.

GABE

You're never coming back to Stevenson. Good luck with your... team.

Gabe turns and walks off, cackling.

INT. BURGER JOINT - DAY

Mike approaches the booth where Allison, Todd, and Kyle sit.

TODD
Hey Mikey boy!

Mike slides in next to Allison.

MIKE
Hey.

TODD
We trounced Canterbury yesterday!

MIKE
Actually, I was thinking of joining
the team. I miss running.

TODD
What? Join those losers! Did you
even see them? One kid is fatter
than a freaking elephant. They had
this little kid who looked like a
kindergartener. Oh, and one kid
only had one leg! One leg!

MIKE
Yeah, that's Brian. He's in my
biology class.

TODD
So you want to be one of those
losers? That's embarrassing.

MIKE
No, what's embarrassing is having
your mom get our coach removed
because you couldn't earn a letter
on your own.

Todd violently stands up next to the table.

TODD
Not true, prick! I earned that
letter, and I even had a faster
time than you.

ALLISON
Mike, that was rude.

MIKE

Rude, Allison? Rude is when you don't have time to answer my texts, but have time to go for a ride in Todd's new car.

ALLISON

Did you spy on me?

MIKE

No, I came over because I wanted to know why you wouldn't answer me.

ALLISON

You're never around anymore.

Allison stands up and gathers her purse and phone.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

I can't do this right now. Todd, can you take me home?

MIKE

So, you're just going to leave?
With Todd?

She shoots Mike a wounded look, and she rushes out.

EXT. BURGER JOINT - DAY

Allison and Todd step out of the restaurant, with Mike trailing behind. He watches as Allison drives away with Todd, his expression darkening. He takes off, sprinting down the street, and he veers into the nearby park.

EXT. MAGNOLIA PARK - DAY

Mike strides into Magnolia Park on a tree-lined path. His pace is steady as he follows a paved trail, his tension easing with each step. Rounding a corner, he nearly collides with Leslie, who's running toward him. Both abruptly stop.

MIKE

Oh! Sorry!

LESLIE

Mike?

Leslie jogs in place.

MIKE

Oh, hey Leslie. Whatcha doing here?

LESLIE

I usually run here on weekends. You know you can't take too many days off training. Are you joining cross-country?

MIKE

I don't know. I do miss running.

LESLIE

Yeah, when I sprained my knee, I was going nuts after not running for a month.

MIKE

Yeah, I'm getting antsy. Maybe I'll join.

LESLIE

I think you should.

They lock eyes for a beat—awkward silence hangs between them.

MIKE

Well, I'll see you Monday.

LESLIE

Yeah, I have to keep moving. See you in class.

They run off in opposite directions, but both glance back at the exact moment. Leslie gives a small wave. Mike quickly jerks his head forward. He takes a deep breath and smiles.

INT. COACHES' OFFICE - AFTERNOON

The guys enter the coaches' office holding their uniforms.

RUSS

Coach, we've all talked and, um, we're quitting the team. Here are the uniforms and jackets.

COACH KELSEY

Wait guys. We'll get new uniforms before the next meet, I promise.

RUSS

It's not the uniforms—well, maybe part of it—but we don't even have a whole team, no offense, Brian.

BRIAN

No offense taken. I'm just glad to help out and be part of something. There aren't many opportunities for me to participate in sports.

KEVIN

We suck. They swept us.

COACH KELSEY

Kevin, they were back-to-back state champs. We'll improve, I promise.

JEREMY

I thought you just wanted to get a parking pass. If you quit, you'll have to turn it in.

KEVIN

Shut up, you little...

COACH KELSEY

Come on, guys. Cross-country is more than just running. It's also about camaraderie. Don't you want to be part of a team?

PUNEET

Cross-country is not a team sport, really. It's just a collection of times produced by individuals.

COACH KELSEY

It's more than that. You will learn throughout the season how vital your teammates are to your success. Russ, what do you do in practice when someone is lagging behind?

RUSS

We pull them up to us.

COACH KELSEY

Right! Make them part of the pack. You all are essential to this team. You motivate each other. Of all the sports you could join, cross-country will be your most close-knit team, and you'll form lasting friendships. So come on, guys, what do you say? Will you at least give it one more chance?

The guys silently trade glances.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
Do it for Brian. Do it so Kevin
keeps his parking pass. Just do it
for yourselves. Who's in?

KEVIN
Hell, I'm in.

JEREMY
I'm in too.

Javon and Javy look at each other and shrug.

JAVON AND JAVY
In.

PUNEET
I'm in if colleges don't care
whether your team wins.

COACH KELSEY
No. No, they don't. Russ?

RUSS
Look, I just don't want to waste my
time. I could be doing other things
besides losing.

COACH KELSEY
Just give us some time to turn
things around. You all have the
potential to be great, but we need
all of you guys. Stay for the team
—they need their captain—and I
promise you won't regret it.

RUSS
I don't know.

Kevin starts a chant, and the guys join in.

ALL THE GUYS
Russ... Russ... Russ... Russ

RUSS
Okay! But let's win some meets.

The guys erupt with cheers. Kevin gives Russ a high-five.

RUSS (CONT'D)
But we're still short a runner.

The locker room door swings open. Mike steps in— silence
breaks, eyes turn.

MIKE

Hi Coach.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

The bell rings. Students flood the halls. Coach Kelsey passes Jen's door—spots her with Javy. He peeks in. Jen notices him.

COACH KELSEY

Is everything okay with Javy?

Jen walks up to Kelsey.

JEN

He wouldn't speak when I called on him. It's not like he didn't know the answer.

Coach Kelsey walks up to Javy and sits next to him.

COACH KELSEY

Javy, you know you need to participate in class.

Javy looks up and stares at Coach Kelsey.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Why didn't you answer Ms. Jen's questions? You're quiet, but you can't be that shy. I hear you sing at practice all the time.

He stares at Coach Kelsey for a beat.

JAVY

Um, I speak English... bad.

COACH KELSEY

Oh, Javy, you talk fine.

JAVY

I sound okay when I sing, but when I talk in English, people don't understand me.

COACH KELSEY

English is your second language. My Spanish is bad. Hablo como un... cerdo. (Subtitled: I speak like a... pig.)

Javy chuckles.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Don't worry about your accent or if you don't know a particular English word. It takes practice, just like running. The more you work at it, the better you get. Okay? Let's get to practice.

Coach Kelsey pats Javy's back as they walk toward the door.

JAVY

Sorry, Ms. Jen.

Javy leaves down the hallway. Coach Kelsey passes Jen.

JEN

That was really nice of you.

COACH KELSEY

Gracias. Eres una hermosa profesora. (Subtitled: Thanks. You're a beautiful teacher.)

JEN

¡Eres un hermoso cerdo! (Subtitled: You're a beautiful pig!)

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

The boys finish their warmup and stretch. Nearby, Leslie stretches next to her teammate, IMELDA.

IMELDA

Hey, it looks like there's a new guy on the boys' team. He's cute.

LESLIE

Hey, yeah, that's Mike. He is cute.

Leslie gets up and jogs over to Mike.

LESLIE (CONT'D)

Hi Mike, so you decided to run cross-country after all.

MIKE

Oh, hey Leslie. Yeah, my first day.

LESLIE

That's great, Mike. I'm glad you changed your mind.

MIKE

It's going to be totally different than running at Stevenson.

LESLIE

Yeah, I bet.

Leslie looks at the girls' team, who are about to run.

LESLIE (CONT'D)

I have a feeling it will be much more fun. Anyway, I've got to run.

Leslie jogs back toward the girls, looking back smiling, and then continues. The guys finish stretching and stand. Puneet is staring at Imelda, and Javon taps his shoulder.

JAVON

You like her, huh?

PUNEET

What? You mean Imelda?

JAVON

I see how you look at her.

PUNEET

Yeah, she's in my trigonometry class. She has beauty and brains.

JAVON

Man, you need to ask her out.

PUNEET

Oh, no way. The odds that a girl like her will go out with me are infinitely small. It would take a miracle.

JAVON

Miracles can happen.

Coach Kelsey approaches the boys.

COACH KELSEY

I know you're feeling pessimistic about our chances of winning, but I believe you have the potential to succeed, especially if we work together as a team. So today we are going to run as a team and not let anyone fall behind.

RUSS
Can we run to Red Run Park?

COACH KELSEY
Yeah, that would be a good run.
Okay, Russ, you lead the way.

The guys start their run.

EXT. RED RUN PARK - AFTERNOON

The guys run into the park. Russ and Mike slow down and jog in place as the team gathers.

RUSS
We're at the halfway point, guys.
So we can run back the way we came,
or, I say, we run along the river
and then cut back. It's the same
distance but with a nicer view.

MIKE
Let's do it!

Russ leads the team down the trail, then veers into a sea of tall grass.

JEREMY
Wait guys! Where's the trail?

RUSS
We're blazing our own trail!

The team runs through the field toward the river. Jeremy struggles to move through the waist-level grass.

JEREMY
I can't see where I'm going!

Russ and Javy are in front. As they pass, a deer that was bedding rises from the grass and leaps forward. Jeremy screams, and the deer runs toward Javy.

MIKE
Javy!

Javy, lost in his music, doesn't hear Mike. As he turns, a deer barrels toward him, hooves pounding. He dives to the ground just in time, the deer darting past. The guys rush over, and Kevin picks up one of Javy's fallen earbuds.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Are you okay?

JAVY
What was that?

He gets up, and the guys laugh.

KEVIN
Bruh! You just got run over by a
reindeer!

Javy checks his ears for his earbuds. Then looks frantically
on the ground. Kevin finds it and puts the earbud to his ear.

KEVIN (CONT'D)
Yo, I found it. What the hell are
you listening to?

Javy stands and dusts himself off as Kevin hands the earbud.

JAVY
Um, Taylor Swift.

KEVIN
Bruh, you're bumming me out.

RUSS
Let's get moving.

They continue down a path along the river.

RUSS (CONT'D)
Isn't this better than running
along a road?

MIKE
Yeah, we never did runs like this
at Stevenson.

They round a bend and slow to a stop. An abandoned minivan
sits ahead, its nose pitched down, front tires dangling over
a steep 30-foot slope to the river.

JEREMY
Wow, it looks like they tried to
drive it off the edge.

KEVIN
This is my lucky day.

Kevin walks toward the car door, but Russ stops him.

RUSS
Kevin, watch where you walk...
Guys, look at this plant.

As the team walks toward Russ, he points to the stinging nettle plants near the van's front door.

RUSS (CONT'D)

That's a stinging nettle. See those needle-like hairs on their leaves? If you touch them, they will burn—I mean, burn. They're common near creeks, so watch out.

Kevin walks to the back of the van, avoiding the nettles, and opens the back hatch.

JEREMY

You'd better not go in there.

KEVIN

Shut up.

Kevin scrambles over the back seat, landing with a thud as the van shifts under him. He reaches for the dashboard, fidgeting for a moment before attempting to retreat. His waist is wedged between the seats, and his foot is caught against the back seat's headrest. The van creeps forward.

RUSS

Kevin, get out now! It's sliding!

KEVIN

I'm stuck. I can't shift my weight.

JEREMY

I told you.

KEVIN

Shut up, Jeremy.

JEREMY

Maybe we just leave you in there.

Russ and Mike reach into the van and grab his feet.

RUSS

Damn, Kev, help us out. You're all dead weight.

Kevin wiggles, and the van creeps forward a bit.

KEVIN

Oh shit! Help me!

JAVON

I'll get him out.

Javon grabs Kevin's feet and pulls as Kevin wiggles. The van shifts and moves further down the edge of the cliff.

KEVIN
Just pull me!

Javon clutches his legs as the van skids down the cliff. He staggers backward, unintentionally yanking off Kevin's jogging pants. Flat on his back, he gapes at the pants, panic flashing across his face.

JAVON
Kevin!

The team watches the van tumble down to the river. Javon stands up and sees Kevin on the ground laughing in his tighty-whities. Javon angrily tosses the jogging pants at him. Kevin stands and puts on his jogging pants.

KEVIN
Oh, man, what a rush! Thanks, guys!

JEREMY
Was it worth it?

Kevin holds out his hand and reveals a knob from the radio.

KEVIN
Hell yes, it was! The volume knob on my van's stereo broke off. Now I can jam!

Mike smiles as the guys groan and mock Kevin.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Coach Kelsey and Brian watch the guys come back.

BRIAN
They ran pretty quickly.

Beaming with energy, the guys run toward the gym, grinning. Coach Kelsey glances at his watch.

COACH KELSEY
Yeah, they're looking good.

The guys run up to Coach Kelsey and Brian.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
Hey, did you make it all the way to Red Run?

RUSS

Yeah, we went there and back.

BRIAN

That was an incredible pace, guys.

COACH KELSEY

I'm glad you're having fun.
Camaraderie is key to success.

JEREMY

It was fun! We saw a deer and...

Kevin grabs Jeremy's arm. The guys stretch.

RUSS

We got to know each other better.

COACH KELSEY

That's great, bonding helps you run like a team. This week, we have a meet against Ford High. We should do much better. I don't think they won a meet last year.

Brian scrolls down his tablet screen.

BRIAN

They only had one win last year, and that was against us.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, they're rebuilding like us. Let's just try to get personal records - PRs.

BRIAN

I'll chart our progress.

COACH KELSEY

We'll do some speed work tomorrow. It's going to be tough work, but worth it. Great run today, guys.

Jen exits the building—the guys charge in, amped and grinning, Coach Kelsey trailing. Jen pauses, watching them barrel past. Coach Kelsey stops beside Jen.

JEN

Hey, what are you giving them? I've never seen the boys' team look so enthusiastic.

COACH KELSEY

I know. It looks like they're really enjoying themselves.

JEN

Well, keep up the good work.

COACH KELSEY

Thanks, Jen.

Coach Kelsey and the team enter the locker room.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The guys gather around Coach Kelsey as he opens a box.

COACH KELSEY

Hey, before you guys head out, I have your new uniforms.

Coach Kelsey hands out uniforms— spots an envelope in the pile. He opens it, pulls out a note, and scans the words.

MRS. EVANS (V.O.)

Sorry about our incident. I sent Principal Donovan a letter stating you did nothing wrong. Bethany.

COACH KELSEY

Someone owed me a favor. New uniforms for a new start.

The guys are all impressed by the new uniforms.

EXT. FORD HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

The boys' race is in full swing— a Ford runner leads, Russ and Mike on his heels, Javy close behind. They blaze past Coach Kelsey, who shouts from the sidelines.

COACH KELSEY

Good job, guys!

Javy trails a Ford runner, matching his pace. As the runner slows, Javy instinctively eases up too.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Javy, pick up the pace! You can pass him.

Javy speeds up and passes the Ford runner. Mike and Russ catch up to the race leader, with Javy now close behind.

MIKE

Let's get him.

The guys pick up the pace and slowly gain ground on the Ford runner. Up ahead, Puneet catches sight of Imelda and the girls' team cheering. His pace picks up. Kevin and Jeremy are in a group with four Ford runners. And trailing, Javon is with two Ford runners.

COACH KELSEY

They're gaining. We have a chance.

As the runners push into the final stretch, Ford fans erupt in cheers. Sensing his lead slipping, the Ford runner digs deep, kicking into a desperate sprint.

MIKE

(to himself)

Time to kick.

The guys sprint toward the finish line. Mike steadily closes the gap on the Ford runner ahead. Russ and Javy trail slightly behind. Mike catches up, but the Ford runner just edges him out, crossing the line first, followed closely by Mike, Russ, and Javy. Behind them, a tightly packed group of runners jostles forward. The four Ford runners launch their final kick, pulling away from the Canterbury team and finishing together. Puneet, Jeremy, and Kevin follow next. Javon is last, trailing two Ford runners entering the final stretch. Then, with a burst of speed, Javon catches both just before the finish. The team quickly gathers around Coach Kelsey and Brian, catching their breath.

COACH KELSEY

Great running, guys!

PUNEET

Did we win the meet?

BRIAN

They have 27 and we have... 28.

KEVIN

Awesome!

JEREMY

Duh, low score wins.

Kevin glares at Jeremy. Brian checks his iPad.

BRIAN

We did better than last week. I think everyone got PRs.

(MORE)

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Russ, this was your fastest time based on last year's records. Mike, I don't have your times.

MIKE
No, it was NOT my PR. We would have won if I had beaten that guy.

Mike looks down with his hands on his head.

COACH KELSEY
Mike, you did great. It was your first meet of the year -give yourself a break. Okay, team, let's head to the bus.

Brian walks toward the bus next to Puneet and Coach Kelsey.

BRIAN
Hey Puneet, I was reviewing video and noticed that you always slow down in the middle of the race but pick it back up at the end.

PUNEET
I keep thinking I need to conserve my energy to finish the race.

COACH KELSEY
You know you can finish the race?

PUNEET
Yes, but my mind keeps telling me to slow down.

COACH KELSEY
I used to sing songs in my head to keep my mind occupied. Try doing math problems in your head?

PUNEET
Oh, that sounds like fun.

COACH KELSEY
Long division or something should keep your mind occupied.

PUNEET
I'll give it a try. Thanks, Coach.

Puneet turns to Brian.

PUNEET (CONT'D)
I mean coaches.

Brian smiles, and Coach Kelsey pats Brian's back. As the boys and the girls' teams walk to the bus, Leslie jogs up to Mike.

LESLIE
Hey Mike, you did great!

MIKE
Yeah, but I should have beaten that guy.

LESLIE
Well, you looked good out there.
And you ran well, too.

Leslie smiles, stepping onto the bus. Mike slows—her words still echoing. He tilts his head, a quiet smile tugging at his lips— then climbs aboard.

EXT. CANTERBURY HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING (ESTABLISHING)

Kids are entering the school.

INT. COACH'S OFFICE - MORNING

Coach Kelsey is at his desk on speaker phone.

COACH KELSEY
Don, hey, it's David Kelsey.

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN (V.O.)
Hey David, how are you?

COACH KELSEY
I'm fine. Hey, did you get a letter from Bethany Evans?

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN (V.O.)
Um, yes, I did.

Coach Kelsey stands up.

COACH KELSEY
See, there you go. It was all a mistake. So, will I be able to come back now?

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN (V.O.)
Well, it's not that easy. First, we do not currently have a teaching position available. Second, we will need the superintendent's approval.

COACH KELSEY
Approval? You have the letter.

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN (V.O.)
Yes, but consensual or not, it was
not appropriate at the school.

COACH KELSEY
It wasn't consensual. I mean, I did
not consent! This whole thing is
screwing me over.

Coach Kelsey sits in his chair.

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN (V.O.)
Okay, okay, if a position opens up,
I will talk to the superintendent.

COACH KELSEY
Thanks, Don.

INT. COACH KELSEY'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

The class is in session. Coach Kelsey stands in front of his
desk, completing the lecture.

COACH KELSEY
The Apollo 11 moon landing marks
the pinnacle of the space race.

Leslie raises her hand. Coach Kelsey points and nods at her.

LESLIE
I don't understand how they were
able to walk on the moon with the
limited technology of the 1960s.

COACH KELSEY
Well, it took the effort of many
people to make this happen. Class,
how many people do you think it
took to get us on the moon?

STUDENT
One thousand?

COACH KELSEY
Way more than that.

STUDENT
One hundred thousand.

COACH KELSEY

Closer. It took an estimated
400,000 people to do their jobs so
that it could happen. We call that
teamwork.

The bell rings, and the students get up to leave. Mike
remains seated.

LESLIE

You're in deep thought.

MIKE

Oh, I was thinking about what Coach
said about cross-country being a
team sport.

LESLIE

Well, I think that if you don't get
moving, you'll be late for biology.

MIKE

True. You'd be a great teammate.

LESLIE

Of course I would.

MIKE

We could use you. You'd definitely
be on the varsity team.

LESLIE

What? On the guys' team?

MIKE

I'm joking. But you'd definitely be
the cutest on the team.

LESLIE

Maybe the second cutest. Bye Mike.

Leslie heads off to her next class. Mike rises slowly,
watching her disappear into the crowd, something thoughtful
in his eyes. Then he grabs his bag and moves on.

EXT. CANTERBURY HIGH - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

It's raining hard.

INT. COACHES' OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Coach Kelsey sits at his desk as a slow leak overhead drips onto the papers in front of him. With a sigh, he sets a wastebasket on the desk to catch the steady drops. Meanwhile, the guys huddle near the office door, watching.

JEREMY

Is practice cancelled?

KEVIN

Are you afraid of a little rain?

COACH KELSEY

Well, like they say, a little rain wouldn't kill you, but a little lightning can. We don't run when there's lightning.

A thunderbolt crashes. Jeremy is startled and jumps.

JAVON

Should we lift weights today?

COACH KELSEY

Yes, that's one thing we will do. We want to be strong but not bulky. I have something I want you to do first. Remember, I said running is 10% physical and 90% mental.

INT. GYMNASIUM - AFTERNOON

The guys are lined up in front of Coach Kelsey.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, guys, we're going to do some mental exercises.

Brian hands out eye masks to each of the guys.

KEVIN

Nice! I could use a nap.

COACH KELSEY

No napping. We're going to run a 5K today, but we'll do it mentally—visualizing the course. Brian has been analyzing your running and will provide you with some areas to work on. So, lie down, get comfortable, and put on your eye masks.

The guys sprawl onto the gym mats— grunting, adjusting, elbowing for space. One by one, they pull on eye masks.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Okay, visualize that we're at the starting line with your rival team, and the starting gun blasts. Get a pace going among the other runners. What do you see?

The girls' cross-country team approaches, coming to a halt as their attention shifts to the guys sprawled across the floor. Jeremy wiggles and accidentally kicks Kevin.

KEVIN

I see myself kicking Jeremy's ass if he touches me again.

JEREMY

Stop looking at my ass.

The girls laugh.

MIKE

Did I hear girls?

LESLIE

(in a sexy voice)
In your dreams, Mike.

The girls continue to walk by. Mike pulls up the mask and smiles. Brian walks in front of Russ and Mike.

COACH KELSEY

Focus guys.

BRIAN

The rival team has five runners ahead of you. Mike and Russ start to reel them in. Your speed has picked up, and you're gaining on them. Now you both run past them.

Brian walks toward Javy.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Javy, you tend to run behind your opponents, and if they slow down, you follow suit. You need to build confidence to pass them. It's time to come out of your shell and leave him in your dust.

KEVIN
Unleash the beast!

Brian walks toward Puneet.

BRIAN
Puneet, it's time to catch up to Javy. You see him wave for you to catch up. You pick up the pace—no need to conserve your energy.

Brian walks toward Jeremy and Kevin.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Jeremy, you are not afraid of tiring, so keep up your pace. Kevin, don't let Jeremy pull away.

KEVIN
He'd better run from me.

BRIAN
Javon, you are entering your second mile, and you're full of energy.

Jen enters the gym and walks over to Coach Kelsey.

COACH KELSEY
Okay, you have two more laps. Your opponents passed you. Now it's your turn to reel them in, and don't let them pass.

JEN
Interesting. What's going on?

COACH KELSEY
It's raining, so I thought I would have them do some mental training. If they can visualize overcoming a struggle, it will give them the confidence to do it in reality.

JEN
Does it work?

COACH KELSEY
I think so. When I was a kid, I was very shy. I had no confidence, especially when talking to girls.

JEN
Wait, you were shy?

COACH KELSEY

Yes, really, I was very shy. I remember wanting to talk to a girl, but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. Then Coach Art, my cross-country coach, told me to visualize the conversation. So I went over it again and again. Then I felt confident, so I talked to her.

JEN

How'd it go?

COACH KELSEY

Oh, it went horribly. I kept talking about something, and she had no interest. She was confused and eventually told me to go away.

Jen laughs.

JEN

All that preparation for nothing.

COACH KELSEY

No, after that day, I had the confidence to strike up a conversation with anyone. I know these kids might not be able to execute what they're visualizing right away, but if they don't see themselves doing it, they might never try.

Jeremy shifts his legs and accidentally kicks Kevin.

KEVIN

Was that you, shit squirt?

Kevin shuffles his legs to get closer to him.

COACH KELSEY

Guys, this is a mental exercise, not physical.

JEREMY

Sorry, I was just starting my kick.

JEN

(as she walks away)
You are doing a great job with these kids. I really admire your dedication.

Javon has his hands cupped, as if he is holding something, and puts it toward his open mouth.

BRIAN

Javon, what the heck are you doing?

JAVON

Eating a turkey sub for energy.

BRIAN

Oh, I think you should stop that for multiple reasons.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, guys, one more lap. This time, I want you to visualize yourself winning the race.

Smiles appear below their eye masks.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - AFTERNOON

The guys huddle around Coach Kelsey, holding their gear.

COACH KELSEY

Listen up, tomorrow we have a tri-meet. So, we must be prepared. Get a good night's sleep.

PUNEET

What's a tri-meet?

JAVON

It's what I always tell my sister.

KEVIN

What the what? That's sick, bruh!

JAVON

She is a vegan. You're not right.

BRIAN

We're competing against Eisenhower and Lincoln at the same time, but the scores are tallied as individual races.

All the guys, except Mike, head out of the locker room. Mike sits on a locker room bench, staring at his phone, which displays unanswered texts from Allison.

COACH KELSEY

One more thing, you guys have the ability to win. Don't forget that.

Coach Kelsey sits down next to Mike.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Doing okay, Mike?

MIKE

Everything has changed. Things were great at Stevenson.

COACH KELSEY

It's not too bad here, really.

MIKE

My girlfriend thinks I'm a loser.

COACH KELSEY

You know, you've got to fight to get what you want, but when it comes to new relationships, if you keep needing to fight, then the prize might not be worth it.

MIKE

I guess you're right.

COACH KELSEY

I know I am. I once spent years trying to prove myself to a girl. Little did I know she was doing the same thing to another guy. Anyway, just remember, you're a winner, and the prize is up to you.

Mike looks down at his phone and shuts it off.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - AFTERNOON

The tri-meet is in full swing— the guys are pushing through the course. Jen strides up beside Coach Kelsey and Brian.

COACH KELSEY

Congrats on the double victory. The girls looked great out there.

JEN

Thanks. The girls ran well today. How are the guys doing?

COACH KELSEY

Um, not too great.

Javy passes Russ. He waves for Russ to speed up, but he doesn't, and the runners continue to pass him.

BRIAN

It's not looking good, Coach.

The Eisenhower runners take first and second place. Mike finishes third, followed by two Lincoln runners. Eisenhower and Lincoln runners fill the next five spots. Puneet sprints to the finish, overtaking a Lincoln runner.

COACH KELSEY

Nice finish, Puneet!

Then Russ and the rest of the team cross the line. The team quickly gathers around Coach Kelsey and Brian.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

We had a tough one today, but you guys did okay.

RUSS

I sucked.

COACH KELSEY

You didn't suck. You went out on a blistering pace, and it caught up to you later in the race. Remember, we need to dictate the pace.

BRIAN

Good news, we had some PRs today. Javy, Puneet, Jeremy, Kevin, and Javon all had their best times.

The guys high-five and slap backs—sweaty, breathless, grinning. Mike spots Leslie and Imelda heading for the school. He peels off from the group and jogs after them.

MIKE

Hey Leslie, nice run today.

Leslie and Imelda stop.

LESLIE

Thanks.

IMELDA

I'll see ya tomorrow.

Imelda smiles at them as she leaves.

LESLIE
Tough loss for you guys.

MIKE
Yeah, but we're improving. Hey, I was gonna ask you something.

A car horn honks, and they both look at the parking lot—a young guy in the car waves for Leslie to come.

LESLIE
Oh, um, that's my ride. What did you want to ask me?

MIKE
Um, I was... nothing... nothing important. I'll see you tomorrow.

Mike watches Leslie sprint to the car, excitement radiating as she eagerly shares her victory. He pulls out his phone, staring at Allison's name. A pause—then, with a quiet resolve, he taps her name.

ALLISON (O.C.)
Mike, please...

MIKE
Wait, Allison, um, I miss you. I've been really lucky to have dated you. I don't want it to end.

ALLISON (O.C.)
Mike, it just hasn't been the same since you moved.

MIKE
Just give me a chance. We can make it work.

ALLISON (O.C.)
I don't know, Mike. I've got to go.

Mike strolls with his head slung low. The team catches up and heads together toward the school.

INT. STEVENSON'S TEACHERS' LOUNGE - MORNING

Gabe sits at a table drinking coffee when Laura walks by him, holding a steaming cup of coffee. Gabe stands up.

GABE
Hi Laura.

LAURA

Oh, hey, Gabe. How's the cross-country team doing?

GABE

We're undefeated.

LAURA

That's great.

GABE

Kelsey may not be the great coach we thought he was. He hasn't won a meet yet at Canterbury.

LAURA

Yeah, I don't think Canterbury won a meet the whole time I taught there. If you see him again, tell him I'm rooting for him.

GABE

Um, we're running against them in a couple of weeks.

Laura walks out of the room, leaving Gabe behind. He slams the cup down—hot coffee splashes onto his hand, and he frantically blows to cool it.

INT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

It's sunny and hot. Coach Kelsey approaches the team, his gaze sweeping over them. As they stretch, their movements feel sluggish, disappointment hanging in the air.

COACH KELSEY

Guys, I have a different workout for you today. Where's Russ?

BRIAN

He quit. He gave me his uniform.

COACH KELSEY

Quit? Why would he quit? Because he had a rough meet?

PUNEET

Coach, we'll be short a runner for the meets.

JAVON

I don't wanna disband—I've lost 15 pounds and feel great.

JEREMY

There goes Kevin's parking pass.

KEVIN

Nope, we're not disbanding. Brian will need to fill in.

BRIAN

Anything for the team, but we really need to recruit someone.

COACH KELSEY

All teams go through rough patches. We've lost a few meets in a row.

BRIAN

Six.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, several. But remember, we're improving. If we were to run against some of those schools now, I know we would win. I'll talk to Russ tomorrow. Alright, team, today we're going to do fartleks.

KEVIN

What? Um, I'm not licking no farts.

COACH KELSEY

Fartlek is a training style. It's Swedish for speed play.

BRIAN

You run hard for a minute or two, and then you run easy for a minute or two. Then repeat.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, let's head to the track.

MIKE

Do we have to run on the track? It gets so boring running in circles.

COACH KELSEY

I guess you can run on the sidewalks. Do a four-mile loop... Mike, you've done these at Stevenson -take the lead.

MIKE

Got it, Coach.

The guys sprint toward the street. As they reach the sidewalk, Mike abruptly halts. The guys stop beside him.

PUNEET

I thought we'd pick up the pace?

MIKE

We need Russ back. Where does he live?

JAVY

He's not home.

MIKE

Then where is he?

JAVY

He told me in math class that he quit so he can work at his father's shop.

MIKE

His shop? Where is it?

JAVY

I'm not sure. It's Hanks Nursery.

JEREMY

He's babysitting?

JAVON

It's a garden center off Mound Road. I know how to get there.

MIKE

That's probably too far to run there and back.

KEVIN

Yeah, but it's not too far to drive.

MIKE

Yes! We're not breaking up this team. Let's get him back.

Led by Mike, the guys sprint back to the school.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

The guys race to Kevin's van, and Kevin opens the back door.

MIKE

We need to convince Russ to come back, or our season is over.

The back of the van was gutted with no seats. Folded camp chairs lie on the bare floor. Javon gets into the front as the guys climb in back.

KEVIN

I'm still working on the interior.

JEREMY

Did you even start?

MIKE

Just get in.

KEVIN

You can use the camp chairs.

INT. KEVIN'S VAN - AFTERNOON

They unfold camp chairs and settle in. Kevin starts the van and peels out of the parking lot. The chairs shift slightly. He glides down to the street and takes a sharp turn, sending the chairs sliding sideways. The guys laugh, gripping their chairs tightly as they try to stay balanced.

KEVIN

Time for some driving music.

Kevin turns on some heavy metal music and cranks up the volume. Javy jams to the music.

JAVY

What are we listening to?

KEVIN

It's speed metal, bruh. Better than your Taylor Swift shit. When I crank this up, I feel the need for speed!

JEREMY

This is just a bunch of noise!

He floors it, and the guys flip backwards out of the chairs.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - AFTERNOON

Coach Kelsey sees Jen and walks toward her.

COACH KELSEY
Hey Jen, got a minute?

JEN
Sure, I'm just waiting for the
girls to come back from their run.

They sit on the bottom row of the bleachers.

COACH KELSEY
You've been at Canterbury a while.
You must like it here, then, huh?

JEN
Well, yeah.

COACH KELSEY
So you never thought of leaving?

JEN
No, not really. I enjoy teaching
these kids. It can be challenging,
but I love it.

COACH KELSEY
I may be able to get my old
position back next year.

JEN
Oh, is Laura Thompson leaving?

COACH KELSEY
No... You heard rumors, didn't you?

JEN
Everyone's heard them.

COACH KELSEY
They're not true! We had one date,
and she went nuts.

JEN
Yeah, I don't trust Laura. When she
worked here at Canterbury, I found
her somewhat aggressive.

COACH KELSEY
And vindictive! Geez. Anyway, this
is different—a misunderstanding.
But to go back, all I have to do is
show that I'm trying my best here.

JEN
I think you are.

COACH KELSEY

Thanks, but there was this lame condition to win at least one meet, you know, break the losing streak here. And we haven't won any.

JEN

Hmm, there are only a few meets left. Can you do it?

COACH KELSEY

I don't know. I feel like I'm failing these kids. It will be a miracle, but it's possible.

JEN

I've seen a vast improvement.

COACH KELSEY

It was so much easier at Stevenson.

JEN

Stevenson is a really nice school.

COACH KELSEY

Yeah, the facilities there are excellent, and I love walking to work. And of course, I can return to the championship program I built before Gabe destroys it.

JEN

If you leave, let's grab a drink after work before you go.

Brian waits for Coach Kelsey at the side of the bleachers and listens to the conversation. He shakes his head and goes back into the locker room.

COACH KELSEY

Oh, um, you're great and all, but I don't think I should date coworkers anymore.

JEN

Oh-sorry, I didn't mean it like that. I don't have many teacher friends, so it's been really refreshing having you here.

COACH KELSEY

Don't be sorry. What I mean is I might just stay here.

JEN

You're not leaving, even if you win?

COACH KELSEY

I'm not sure. I really like my coworkers. The team actually acts like a team. And in the classroom, the kids seem to care about what I'm saying. Sure, there are those kids who like to act stupid.

INT. KEVIN'S VAN - AFTERNOON

Kevin races down the street. The guys in the back are trying to hang on as Kevin swerves to pass traffic.

JAVON

Hank's Nursery is on the left.

He swings into the parking lot and slams the brakes. The guys lurch forward, crashing into the van's front. Recovering fast, they scramble out and dash into the store.

INT. HANK'S NURSERY - DAY

The shop has a few customers. Russ is at the counter.

MIKE

Russ.

Russ spots the guys. His brows knit, confusion flickering.

RUSS

What are you guys doing here?

MIKE

What are you doing here? You're missing practice.

RUSS

No, I quit the team.

MIKE

We need you back. Right guys?

All the guys agree.

RUSS

Look, my dad needs me to work the counter.

MR. HANKS, a tall man in his 50s, enters from the back room.

MR. HANKS

Who are your friends?

RUSS

These are the guys on the cross-country team.

JEREMY

We're trying to get him to rejoin the team.

MR. HANKS

Do you want to go back? You told me you didn't want to run anymore.

RUSS

I feel guilty for not helping out. And our team wasn't winning anyway. It's not like running is gonna get me a scholarship.

MR. HANKS

Don't feel guilty. And it's not just about winning. Okay, maybe you won't get a scholarship. But college applications ask for extracurricular activities.

PUNEET

Team sports do look great on college applications.

RUSS

What about the shop?

MR. HANKS

I'll make you a deal. You can help us here on weekends, when we're much busier. And you run during the week. What do you say?

RUSS

I don't know. What's the point?

MIKE

There's no team without you.

The guys stare at Russ, anticipation in their eyes.

RUSS

Okay, deal... Thanks, Dad!

The team does a group high-five and spills out of the shop, cheers ringing.

INT. KEVIN'S VAN - AFTERNOON

As they approach the school, they see that traffic is slowed. They drive down the residential street next to Canterbury High and see several parade floats slowly following the marching band as it heads to the school. Residents are out in their front yards watching.

KEVIN
What's all this?

JAVON
Oh, I forgot it's homecoming today.

A convertible with its top down is following the last float.

JEREMY
Hey, isn't that the Stevenson jerk
in the convertible?

JAVON
We do have a football game against
Stevenson. Um, is he trying to be
part of *our* parade?

Mike looks out the window and sees Todd and Kyle sitting on top of the doors and Allison sitting on top of the back seat, waving. Todd reaches with his foot to press the gas pedal.

TODD
Look at these idiots cheering us on
like we're royalty!

Kevin gets closer to Todd's car and passes it.

MIKE
Wait, that's my girlfriend... or ex-
girlfriend, I guess. I don't know.
She's been ignoring me.

Kevin squeezes the van between the last float and Todd's convertible. Todd honks his horn. Kevin sticks his head out the window and flips him off.

TODD
That's those Canterbury losers.

Todd honks his horn repeatedly.

KEVIN

Time to do our fart licks, boys.
Run fast...

Kevin shifts the van into neutral and lets it coast. Then he revs the engine hard, sending a thick plume of black smoke billowing from the tailpipe, right into the convertible behind them. Todd, Kyle, and Allison cough and frantically wave their hands in front of their faces, trying to escape the choking cloud.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

...then run slow.

Kevin eases off the gas, and the smoke clears.

TODD

Get that piece of shit off the
road!

The hum of the engine gradually slows until the van backfires loudly, startling Todd. Todd's car swerves wildly, clipping the curb, and Todd tumbles out onto the grass. Kyle grabs the wheel as Todd scrambles after the car. He hops in, pulls over. The guys burst out laughing as Kevin continues trailing the floats toward the school parking lot.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

The guys exit the van and see Coach Kelsey and Brian waiting for them just outside the gym. They walk up to Coach Kelsey.

JEREMY

Russ is back.

COACH KELSEY

It's good to see you back, Russ.
Okay, guys, tomorrow is the
Centerline Invitational. The bus
leaves at 8:15, so don't be late.

The guys head to the locker room, except Russ. They laugh and mimic wabbling as they did in the van.

RUSS

Sorry for leaving the team, Coach.

COACH KELSEY

You didn't even miss a practice.
So, I don't think that qualifies as
leaving. We all have ups and downs.
I'm just glad you're back.

(MORE)

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
Your teammates, your *friends*, count
on you as their leader.

RUSS
Yeah, I felt guilty for not helping
my dad. I didn't want to let him
down. But when the guys showed up,
um, I realized that I didn't want
to let them down either.

COACH KELSEY
Just do your best, and you won't
let anyone down.

RUSS
Thanks, Coach.

Coach Kelsey pats Russ's back, and they walk to the school.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

The guys linger near the parking lot, waiting for their
rides. A van pulls up, and MRS. O'BRIEN, Jeremy's strikingly
beautiful mother, steps out, waving. Jeremy rushes to her,
and she envelops him in a warm hug. The guys exchange
glances, their eyes lingering a little too long.

KEVIN
Damn, and she drives a van, too.

PUNEET
You should go over there... run
erect!

The guys laugh.

RUSS
Are you guys going to the game?

KEVIN
Wasn't planning on it.

RUSS
We can watch Stevenson get their
asses kicked.

KEVIN
Oh, I'm in then.

PUNEET
I'm not really into football.

JAVON

I can't, my ride is here... Um, Puneet, look who's coming.

Leslie and Imelda walk toward the football stands and stop next to Mike. Javon nudges Puneet to look at Imelda, then he heads to his ride, which is waiting in the parking lot.

LESLIE

Hey Mike, are you going to the football game?

MIKE

Ah, yeah, are you?

LESLIE

Yeah, we made a promise to support the cheerleaders, and they'll cheer at one of our meets.

Imelda looks at the rest of the guys.

IMELDA

Are you guys going?

Kevin puts his arms on Russ and Puneet's shoulders and forces them to walk with the girls toward the stands.

KEVIN

Yes, we're going.

They enter the stadium and make their way toward the rest of the girls' cross-country team seated in the bleachers. In the visitors' section, Allison spots Mike walking alongside Leslie. Jealousy flashes across her face, and she stands up and quickly approaches him. As the girls settle in their seats, Mike notices Allison waving at him. After a brief pause, he walks over to her.

MIKE

What are you doing here?

ALLISON

To watch the game, of course. I was going to text you, but, um, ah, I knew you had practice, right?

Allison glances over Mike's shoulder and spots Leslie watching them. Without hesitation, she grabs Mike and kisses him hard. Mike's eyes widen in surprise. She releases him, and he stands stiff, then grins as they sit down together. Across the stadium, Leslie stands and walks away. Noticing this, Allison quickly rises. Her eyes shift to the visitors' section, where she sees Todd talking to another girl.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

I'd better get to the visitor's side.

MIKE

Let's go.

ALLISON

You should probably stay with your school. Let's get together tomorrow night. Text me. We can go to Dino's for dinner.

Allison heads toward the visitors' section. Mike sulks, glancing at the empty spot where Leslie had been sitting—she's gone. Puneet inches toward Imelda. From the field, cheerleaders launch mini souvenir footballs into the crowd. Just as Puneet turns to Imelda to speak, one smacks his head. Kevin and Russ dive between them, wrestling over the ball. Mike looks back toward the visitors' section and sees Allison approaching Todd. Todd lifts her playfully, swinging her as if to throw her. They both laugh as he sets her down. Mike just shakes his head in disappointment.

EXT. CENTERLINE PARKING LOT - DAY

Teams get off the buses, and several are warming up. The Stevenson team walks to the field, and Todd notices the Canterbury team enthusiastically exiting their bus.

TODD

What do we have here? It looks like Canterbury was invited. I think we need to drag those losers.

The Canterbury teams walk to the field.

COACH KELSEY

I hope everyone brought their spikes. It rained all night, so it's going to be wet out there.

BRIAN

The course is fast here at the Centerline Invitational. It's a good opportunity to get PRs.

EXT. CENTERLINE COURSE - DAY

Mike jogs up to Leslie as the teams head to the field.

MIKE

Hey Leslie, I lost you at the game.

LESLIE

Yeah, sorry -I wasn't feeling well, so I left. I saw you were with Allison, so I didn't think you'd miss me.

MIKE

Wait, you know Allison?

LESLIE

Yeah, um, we used to be friends until she moved. She hasn't talked to me in years.

MIKE

Yeah, she's been ignoring me for the most part since I moved. You should have said hi to her.

LESLIE

She could've walked over to me. She looked straight at me when she kissed you. But it doesn't matter; she turned into a two-faced snake bitch.

MIKE

Hey now.

LESLIE

Okay, that might be a little harsh, but before she moved, she got jealous over some guy who liked me. Then, made up stupid lies and turned my friends against me.

MIKE

Wow, that's shitty. I didn't know she could be like that, sorry.

LESLIE

No worries, my true friends figured her out. Just be careful, Mike. She's very sus.

Mike slows as Leslie jogs to the girls. The guys catch up.

CUT TO:

Coach Kelsey and Brian are on the sidelines of the course, engaged in conversation.

COACH KELSEY

Brian, can you call out the mile splits to the guys, and I'll call out the 2-mile splits? We can meet at the finish line.

BRIAN

(sarcastically)

Whatever you want. Are you sure you'll be there at the finish?

COACH KELSEY

(with a questioning gaze)

Yes, we'll meet at the finish line.

Brian walks away toward the mile marker cone. Coach Kelsey walks by the Stevenson team.

GABE

Hey Kelsey, only two meets left.

Coach Kelsey stops next to Gabe.

COACH KELSEY

We're going to win. I guarantee it.

GABE

Oh, really, care to bet on it? The loser leaves the district.

COACH KELSEY

Leave the district, why?

GABE

I just don't want to see or hear about you anymore... afraid your pathetic team won't win?

COACH KELSEY

Oh, we're going to win, you're on.

GABE

It's a bet. You know, your final two meets are against us and Adams - you're screwed. No backing out!

Coach Kelsey walks away.

GABE (CONT'D)

Oh, and when you lose, you'd better leave; otherwise, you'll wish you had.

Gabe laughs.

EXT. STARTING LINE - DAY

The ground is soaked, with puddles scattered across the course. The guys line up, and the race begins. Mike and Javon burst out quickly, with Todd spotting them and closing the gap. Javy, Russ, and Puneet also get off to a strong start. The large field of runners stretches out as the race progresses. Puneet's glasses squeak and fog up, and he accidentally bumps into Russ.

PUNEET

Sorry.

A Stevenson runner sidles up to Puneet and deliberately bumps him. Stumbling off course, Puneet veers into the woods and crashes into a thicket of bushes. He gets up and continues.

PUNEET (CONT'D)

Ouch, running is hard!

The Stevenson runner glances back, chuckling. Meanwhile, Brian checks his tablet timer as Mike runs past.

BRIAN

5:07, 5:08, 5:09.

Two Stevenson runners close in on Javy and Javon, cutting ahead at a large puddle. Water erupts in a splash, drenching them. Behind, Jeremy runs just ahead of Kevin when a Stevenson runner suddenly veers into him, sending Jeremy crashing into a cluster of runners, causing a chaotic spill.

KEVIN

Oh, hell no.

Kevin chases down the Stevenson runner. Just as Kevin catches up, the runner suddenly stops and sticks out his leg, tripping Kevin, who slides headfirst through a puddle. Kevin scrambles up, drenched and dripping. Up front, five runners—including Todd—lead the pack. Mike passes Coach Kelsey on the sidelines.

COACH KELSEY

Great pace, Mike. Reel 'em in!

Mike locks in on the pack ahead. He closes his eyes briefly, visualizing himself surging past them. Then he kicks. One by one, Mike overtakes them—until only Todd remains. Just before the finish, Todd throws his arms up in celebration—too soon. Mike blazes past him and crosses the line first. Todd stares in disbelief. Coach Kelsey rushes to the finish, pumping his fist in the air.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
Yes! Way to go, Mike!

The other runners keep crossing the finish line. Kevin, soaked and gasping for air, pushes toward the end, passing the guy who tripped him. With a running nose, he plugs one nostril, turns his head, and blows—sending a snot rocket straight onto his face. The team finishes up and quickly gathers around Coach Kelsey and Brian.

EXT. WINNER'S PODIUM - DAY

The teams gather around the winner's podium. Mike, Todd, and another runner get their medals. Todd scowls as the second-place medal drapes around his neck. They get down, and the Canterbury team congratulates Mike. Leslie approaches.

LESLIE
Congratulations! That was awesome!

MIKE
Thanks, Leslie.

The loudspeaker shrieks.

ANNOUNCER
Now for the team results. The winner of the boys' varsity race is Stevenson High.

The crowd erupts in cheers while Kevin boos them. Gabe accepts the trophy. Spotting Coach Kelsey, he smirks, giving him a knowing nod before passing the trophy to Todd. Todd lifts it high, proudly displaying their victory.

BRIAN
Well, looks like we landed 6th place overall. Not too shabby!

COACH KELSEY
Great showing, guys. Sixth place is really good. That's the team effort needed to succeed. We have a good chance of winning next week.

BRIAN
(under his breath)
I'm sure you will like that.

COACH KELSEY
Okay, let's get to the bus.

The team walks to the bus, as do the other teams.

Russ walks with Brian, looking at his iPad.

RUSS
Man, we're really coming together
as a team.

Leslie strides up to Mike.

LESLIE
Bye Mike.

MIKE
You're not going on the bus?

LESLIE
No, I wish I could celebrate your
impressive victory with you, but I
have to do a family thing this
afternoon. My brother is picking me
up... Oh, he's here. Bye.

Mike watches Leslie head to the car, suddenly realizing her brother is the same guy who picked her up from school. With a knowing smile, he steps onto the bus.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

The kids get seated. Kevin squirms in his seat.

KEVIN
My damn underwear is soaking wet;
it feels like I freaking sharted.

Covering himself with his jacket, Kevin removes his wet underwear. The Canterbury bus is parked next to the Stevenson bus. Todd has his head out the window, holding their trophy.

TODD
Hey Canterbury! Remember this in
your dreams tonight!

Todd triumphantly waves the trophy as the bus starts to move.

RUSS
Shut your mouth.

TODD
You guys suck!

Kevin throws his soggy underwear out the window. It smacks Todd in the face, making him recoil - his grip slips, and the trophy drops onto the pavement.

KEVIN
Suck on that!

The kids roar in laughter as the bus runs over the trophy.

EXT. CANTERBURY HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON (ESTABLISHING)

An aerial view of the high school reveals the school and its athletic fields.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Coach Kelsey walks and smiles down the hallway and is approached by Jen.

JEN
Hey Kelsey, are you all prepped for the meet today?

COACH KELSEY
Yep. We're going to win today.

JEN
Oh, really now.

COACH KELSEY
The guys have been running great in practice, and the Adams coach said that their varsity team has been hit hard by the flu bug.

JEN
Are they forfeiting?

COACH KELSEY
No, they have just enough to race. But that means we have a very good chance of winning.

JEN
(as she walks away)
Okay, good luck. Oh, I want to tell you that I was actually using your visualization technique, and the Adams boys won.

COACH KELSEY
Why would you do that?

JEN
I don't know, maybe I'd like to make sure you stay here.

Jen puts her fingers to her temples and closes her eyes as she walks. Coach Kelsey stops, shakes his head, and smiles.

INT. COACH'S OFFICE - DAY/INT. PRINCIPAL DONOVAN'S OFFICE

The coach is on the phone at his desk, and Principal Donovan is seated at his desk using his computer as his phone.

COACH KELSEY

Don, I got your message. What's up?

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN

Hi David, good news. Janet Price will be taking maternity leave and has indicated she will not be returning for the rest of the year. I can speak with the superintendent to arrange for your transfer.

COACH KELSEY

Oh, wow, is this for real?

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN

Yes, I just need approval.

COACH KELSEY

You know, I think I just need to finish what I started here. I can't leave these kids midseason. We'll break the losing streak today anyway. Thanks for thinking of me.

PRINCIPAL DONOVAN

Sure, um, no problem. Take care.

Coach Kelsey has a huge smile on his face as he walks to the office door. He tries to open it, but it's stuck. His smile disappears as he twists the knob vigorously.

COACH KELSEY

I guess I'm stuck here.

He vigorously pounds on the door until it finally opens.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - AFTERNOON

The team huddles outside, wearing warm-up jackets, ready for the meet.

RUSS

Hey Brian, how's our competition?

BRIAN
(in a snarky voice)
I don't know. Does it matter?

RUSS
Geez, just asking.

BRIAN
Hey, sorry, I wasn't gonna say anything because I love this team.

RUSS
What is it?

MIKE
Yeah, what's going on?

BRIAN
Coach is leaving us.

PUNEET
Our meet is here today? Where would he go?

BRIAN
No, I mean after the season, he's going back to Stevenson.

The guys laugh.

KEVIN
Yeah, right, those guys are a-holes. He wouldn't go back there.

BRIAN
Yes, he is. I heard him talking to Coach Jen. He was transferred here due to an incident, and he will be moving back after this year.

RUSS
Wow, what a dick move. After he convinced me to stay on the team.

MIKE
Story of my life - everyone leaves.

BRIAN
He had a condition that he had to win just one meet and break the losing streak here.

JEREMY
Well, we haven't won any.

BRIAN

I know, but we're running against Adams today, and half their varsity team is out with the flu. Based on my calculations, we easily win. The last meet is against Stevenson at their course. Being real, I doubt that we win that one.

RUSS

Screw it, I'll just quit, and we won't have enough runners.

BRIAN

I'm sure Adams wouldn't mind since they're missing half their team.

KEVIN

I'll just go home.

JEREMY

What about your parking pass?

KEVIN

I'm not quitting. I'm just not showing up for this meet.

JEREMY

Well then, I'm not running either.

MIKE

Screw it, I'm out too.

JAVY

Where do we go during the race?

JAVON

I don't care, but I've got to be here at 5:30 when my mom picks me up, or she'll kill me.

KEVIN

I know. Get in the van!

BRIAN

I think I need to be here. Coach will worry when he sees that you guys are missing.

KEVIN

Okay, just make sure you tell him that he's a two-faced a-hole.

RUSS
Let's do this. Everyone in.

They form a circle and put a hand in the middle.

RUSS (CONT'D)
Screw it on three. 1,2,3!

TEAM
Screw it!

The guys run to Kevin's van, and Brian heads to the field.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - AFTERNOON

Brian waits as the Adams team stretches. Coach Kelsey emerges from the gym and walks over to the Adams coach.

COACH KELSEY
Hey, Landon. Good to meet you.

Coach Kelsey looks around for his team.

COACH LANDON
Hi Kelsey. Yeah, the flu hit us hard, but we managed to put together a team.

COACH KELSEY
Understood, we have been shorthanded all year.

Coach turns to Brian.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
Where's the team? They aren't in the locker room.

BRIAN
They're not coming?

COACH KELSEY
What? Hold on, Landon, we have a little issue.

He walks away out of earshot with Brian.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
What do you mean, they're not coming?

BRIAN

They're protesting. We know you're leaving after the season. With all your talk of being there for the team, we felt betrayed.

COACH KELSEY

Leaving? I'm not leaving.

BRIAN

I heard you talk to Coach Jen about going back to Stevenson. You said that you just needed to win one meet and you would go back.

COACH KELSEY

Well, okay, that was the plan, but you know what? It's better here.

BRIAN

So you are staying regardless?

COACH KELSEY

Yes, of course I'm staying.

BRIAN

Then I'm really sorry, Coach. You see, after my accident, everyone abandoned me. I finally felt like I belonged. I'm really, really sorry.

Brian's eyes tear up, and Coach Kelsey puts his arm around him for a quick hug and pats his back.

COACH KELSEY

I understand, Brian. You know that you're not just part of this team—you're its heart. Your help is invaluable to both me and the team. Speaking of which, where's the team?

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - AFTERNOON

The guys grab snacks. Russ pays, heads for the exit, and pauses beside Javon.

RUSS

Need cash? I can spot you.

JAVON

No, we're not running, so I'm not eating. Working on willpower.

Jeremy pours a frozen slushie. Kevin walks up to him.

KEVIN

Get your money's worth. Snow cone
the top.

Jeremy adds more to the top.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Add more... just give it to me.

Kevin takes a second cup, fills it to the top, stirs it, and then packs it down. Then flips that cup on top of Jeremy's cup and pulls off the top cup. It formed a very tall tower.

JEREMY

Dang! That's so cool.

KEVIN

I'm gonna get some vape carts.

JEREMY

You're not old enough.

KEVIN

Quiet, I've got an ID.

JEREMY

Seriously? Vaping is a sign of low
intelligence or low self-esteem.

Jeremy and Kevin step up to the counter. Jeremy pays, looks at Kevin, and shakes his head.

CLERK

What can I get you?

Kevin pauses, his thoughts turning as he gazes out the window. His teammates stand outside.

KEVIN

Um, actually, I'm good. Thanks.

JEREMY

Intelligent choice. I guess you
just had low self-esteem.

Kevin chases Jeremy out of the store.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - AFTERNOON

Kevin and Jeremy exit and head toward the guys, who are eating their snacks near the van.

RUSS

We probably should head back.

The guys get in the van.

INT. KEVIN'S VAN - MOMENTS LATER

The music is blasting, and the guys sing along while eating snacks. The camp chairs are rocking with every turn. Javy jams to the music while Jeremy tries to balance his frozen drink and takes a dramatic gulp.

JEREMY

Brain freeze!

KEVIN

Yo, careful back there. Don't spill anything.

JEREMY

I don't think anyone would notice.

They laugh. Kevin swerves quickly while changing lanes. Jeremy is balancing his slushie tower. Kevin watches the guys in the back through the rearview mirror and jams on the brakes. Jeremy's slushie splats into his face, leaving his eye sockets filled with red slushie. The van rolls into the school parking lot, and the guys exit. They see Brian and Coach Kelsey waiting by the school.

RUSS

Damn, Coach is waiting for us.

PUNEET

We're dead.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

The guys walk up to Coach Kelsey and Brian.

COACH KELSEY

Hi guys. Welcome back.

BRIAN

I'm sorry, guys. Um, there was a misunderstanding.

RUSS

Misunderstanding?

BRIAN

You see, Coach is not leaving us.

COACH KELSEY

Guys, you probably heard why I was transferred here. But I assure you, I'm not going back to Stevenson.

KEVIN

Who'd want to go there anyway?

PUNEET

They do have a good robotics team.

RUSS

But why do you want to stay here?

COACH KELSEY

Oh, there are many reasons. Come with me, I want to show you something.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Coach Kelsey strides down the hall. The guys follow, eyes on the trophy case ahead.

COACH KELSEY

See that trophy?

RUSS

Yeah, so, 1998 Cross-Country State Champions. That was decades ago. We haven't had a decent team since.

COACH KELSEY

Take a closer look at the name tag. Look at the first name in the second row.

RUSS

David Kelsey? That's you?

COACH KELSEY

Yep. Coach Art transferred after that season, and since then, they haven't had a dedicated coach. Who has jacket #4?

PUNEET

I do?

COACH KELSEY

Reach in the right pocket. It has a hole in it, right?

PUNEET
Yes, how did you know?

COACH KELSEY
They're from when I ran here.

JEREMY
Wow, these are ancient!

Principal Jackson approaches the group.

PRINCIPAL JACKSON
I remember that trophy.

COACH KELSEY
Hi Principal Jackson.

PRINCIPAL JACKSON
Your coach did not always get the best grades when I was his teacher.

The guys chuckle.

PRINCIPAL JACKSON (CONT'D)
However, he took direction very well, and when he learned something, he always helped others in need.

COACH KELSEY
You are a great mentor.

PRINCIPAL JACKSON
You're an excellent teacher and, from what I heard, an even better coach.

COACH KELSEY
Thanks, that really means a lot.

Principal Jackson continues down the hall and turns her head.

PRINCIPAL JACKSON
Oh, those jackets aren't ancient; they're vintage.

Principal Jackson swaggers down the hallway.

BRIAN
I blew our last chance to win a meet.

COACH KELSEY
No, we have one more meet left.

BRIAN

Yeah, but it's against Stevenson.

Puneet and Javy glance at each other, expressing doubt.

JEREMY

If Coach is staying, does it even matter if we win?

COACH KELSEY

I may still have to leave if we lose.

JEREMY

You said you'd stay even if we lose.

COACH KELSEY

Yes, it's complicated, and I may not have a choice. I won't get into that now. But if we win, I'm staying, guaranteed. Look, did you ever want just to beat someone so badly because they deserve to be beaten?

RUSS

Yes, those Stevenson jerks.

COACH KELSEY

Exactly!

PUNEET

But do we really have a chance?

COACH KELSEY

We do if we run as a team. Puneet, how does Stevenson run? You know, when you thought cross-country wasn't a team sport.

PUNEET

A collection of individual times.

COACH KELSEY

Yes! And what are we?

THE GUYS

A team!

RUSS

Huddle in. Teamwork on three.

The guys huddle and each puts a hand in the middle.

RUSS (CONT'D)
One, two, three.

THE GUYS
Teamwork!

Coach Kelsey smiles with pride.

INT. COACH KELSEY'S HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

The doorbell chimes. Coach Kelsey swings the door open. Laura Thompson stands there, draped in a long evening dress.

COACH KELSEY
Laura, what are you doing here?

LAURA
Hey Kelsey, I heard about your transfer to Canterbury. If it had something to do with us, I'm sorry.

COACH KELSEY
Those stupid rumors about me did not help.

LAURA
Huh, I never spread any rumors... but Gabe told me a couple of doozies. Can I come in?

Laura walks in past Kelsey.

COACH KELSEY
Gabe?

Laura steps into the living room— quiet, composed. She crosses to the bar cart, fingers grazing past whiskey bottles. She pulls one out.

LAURA
Yeah, he always brings you up when I talk to him, you know, in the teacher's lounge... Do you mind if I pour a drink?

Laura pours two drinks before Kelsey answers.

COACH KELSEY
So it was Gabe? I get it now. I think he's obsessed with you.

Coach Kelsey walks to Laura, and she hands him a drink.

LAURA
Gabe, really?

COACH KELSEY
Um, so why did you come over?

Coach Kelsey slides the door open and steps onto the deck. He eyes the kids playing on the Stevenson baseball diamond. Laura stands inside, near the open door.

LAURA
We never really had closure.

COACH KELSEY
Closure? We only had one date.

Kelsey continues to look at the baseball field as he leans on the railing. He scans the backstop and the bleachers.

LAURA
We had such a good time, though,
and we could've had more. I realize
being coworkers made you
apprehensive, but you know, we
don't work together anymore.

Kelsey stares at the backstop again and stands abruptly.

COACH KELSEY
That's it!

LAURA
Great!

Kelsey casually turns his head around and glances at Laura. Laura unties the back of her dress, which drops to the ground, revealing a full leather dominatrix outfit underneath. She gives a playful wave with a pair of handcuffs. Kelsey freezes, eyes wide in shock, then he bolts inside, guiding Laura away from the sliding door.

COACH KELSEY
Laura, what are you doing? The
neighbors can see.

LAURA
Relax, I'm going to cuff you.

Kelsey stares for a second, nodding approval.

COACH KELSEY
Sorry, Laura, you're um... you're,
wow... but I need to check
something out for our final race.

LAURA

But I thought you were into this?

Kelsey rushes out the front door. He turns around, comes back in, stops, and stares at her. Laura smiles.

COACH KELSEY

Oh, um, let yourself out.

Kelsey leaves again.

LAURA

Kelsey!

EXT. DODGE PARK - DAY

The sun beams overhead as the guys run into the park. Reaching the bathroom building near the entrance, they pull up and start jogging in place.

RUSS

We're halfway. Great job running together. Let's head back and make it count. We only have a couple of practices left.

JEREMY

Hey guys, nature calls. I need to use the toilet.

KEVIN

(in a baby voice)
Aw, do you need to go pee-pee?

JEREMY

No, I actually need to take a shit.

RUSS

Alrighty then, go ahead. We'll do a loop on the lower trail and meet you back here in a few minutes.

The guys run off, and Jeremy enters the restroom. Todd and Kyle see the Canterbury guys run into the woods as they enter the restroom. They take their spots at the urinals.

TODD

I'm surprised Canterbury is still training. We're gonna kill them.

KYLE

Yeah, it would be another sweep if they didn't have Mike.

TODD

The whole team is a bunch of losers, including Mike.

Jeremy steps out of the stall and moves to the sink. As he washes his hands, Todd's gaze flicks toward him.

TODD (CONT'D)

Is that the little shit from Canterbury?

KYLE

Yeah, isn't he the one who soaked us by pulling that wet tree branch?

Jeremy leaves the building, but sticks his head back in.

JEREMY

Um, you must be mistaken...
assholes!

Jeremy sprints toward the wooded trail. Todd and Kyle scramble after him, crashing out the door in hot pursuit. Jeremy reaches a fork in the path—straight leads to the lower trail, left climbs up the hill. Thinking fast, he ducks behind a tree at the split. The Stevenson guys glance straight ahead, don't spot him, and charge up the upper trail. Jeremy chuckles and casually jogs down the lower path—until he hears them circling back. He quickly drops into a crouch to hide... and instantly regrets it as he sees a patch of stinging nettles in front of him.

JEREMY (CONT'D)

Whoa!

Jeremy stands up, and the Stevenson guys see him.

TODD

He's down there!

Todd and Kyle blaze a path down to the lower trail, as stinging nettles brush against their legs. They get down to the lower trail, and Kyle grabs Jeremy.

KYLE

What should we do with this little shit?

TODD

It's his turn to get soaked. Throw him in the creek.

As Kyle holds Jeremy, he notices the burning sensation on his legs. Todd notices it too.

KYLE
My legs are on fire!

TODD
Mine too!

Kyle lets go of Jeremy as the Canterbury team approaches.

MIKE
What's going on?

JEREMY
They wanted to throw me into the creek.

KEVIN
Probably. But that's my job. You leave him alone.

JEREMY
They ran through those stinging nettles.

Todd and Kyle are rubbing their red legs.

RUSS
You'd better wash quickly.

Russ gestures toward the creek. Without hesitation, Todd and Kyle leap in, frantically scrubbing their legs.

KEVIN
Don't forget to scrub your nut sacks, jackoffs.

TODD
Screw you!

Todd slips and grabs Kyle, and they both fall into the creek.

The guys laugh as they run out of the park. As the guys continue running along the road, Todd and Kyle speed by in Todd's convertible.

EXT. PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

The guys finish their run at the back parking lot. Kevin's van has a flat tire and is leaning to one side. Kevin slowly walks to his van. Kevin inspects it and sees that the tire was slashed.

KEVIN

It was those Stevenson fuckers. I'm going to kill 'em! I really am!

The team gathers. Kevin paces, seething - then whips out his phone, fires off a text, and slams his hand on the fender.

RUSS

Kev, man, save it for the race. We can beat those a-holes on Friday.

KEVIN

Oh, we'll beat them, and then I'll beat them. They're dead! Ahh!

Kevin slams his hand on the hood several times.

MIKE

They don't respect us now. But they will. We'll get 'em back.

RUSS

We'll beat their asses on Friday, right, guys?

ALL THE GUYS

Hell yeah!

RUSS

Let's change it. Where's the spare?

KEVIN

I'm using the spare already.

JEREMY

My mom can drive you home.

KEVIN

Nah, I called in the cavalry.

A black van races into the parking lot, and two other vans follow shortly after.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Us van guys... we stick together.

EXT. SCHOOL TRACK - AFTERNOON (ESTABLISHING)

An aerial view of the track shows the guys running.

EXT. SCHOOL TRACK - AFTERNOON

The guys just finished a lap around the track. They all jog onto the infield of the track and collapse.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, guys... let's do one more.

JEREMY

Yeah, I don't think I can do another repeat.

COACH KELSEY

Guys, this is our last big workout... you're not going to beat Stevenson with that attitude.

PUNEET

Statistically, we only have a slim chance at best.

Russ stands up.

RUSS

I'm tired of losing. I only have one cross-country meet left before I graduate. I want to win for once.

Mike stands up.

MIKE

Stevenson thinks they're better than us. They push us around. They laugh at us.

RUSS

Let's kick their butts!

The rest of the team stands up.

KEVIN

(screaming)

Let's kill those mother fuckers!

Everyone is quiet and staring at Kevin.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Sorry, Coach.

COACH KELSEY

You all have what it takes to win. You've got to reach in and pull out the little extra something that you didn't know you had. When you find it, you'll be amazed. Everyone, up.

The guys sluggishly walk to the track.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

I want you to sprint one lap, but at your fastest collective team time. If you run as quickly as you can, then we'll be done. Or we'll try again.

BRIAN

We're going to stagger start based on your fastest 400 times. I calculated how much head start you will get. So, line up at the tape with your name on it.

The guys find their tape on the edge of the track.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

If you all run at your fastest pace, you will all finish together. The key is not to let anyone pass you. Coach, I have one for you.

COACH KELSEY

Me?

BRIAN

I thought you could be, you know, the rabbit they chase.

Coach Kelsey walks far ahead to find his spot. An aerial shot shows the guys spaced out along the track.

COACH KELSEY

Okay, but you'll never catch me with this head start.

RUSS

Let's run like a team and get him!

BRIAN

Ready, set, go!

The guys explode into a sprint. Because of the staggered start, Coach Kelsey leads the pack, followed by Jeremy, Kevin, Puneet, Javy, Russ, Mike, and Javon.

One by one, they start closing the gaps on the back stretch. As they round the final turn, they tighten into a unified wall, charging down the last straightaway in slow motion, eyes locked on Coach Kelsey. Just before the finish line, they catch him, and all cross together in perfect sync. They follow him onto the infield, where they collapse in a triumphant, sweaty pile on top of him. Mike lifts his head and looks toward Brian.

MIKE

Did we do it?

Brian stares for a beat, disappointment etched across his face. He shakes his head, slow and silent.

BRIAN

I'm very disappointed, guys.

COACH KELSEY

Everyone up.

JEREMY

I can't even stand.

They all begrudgingly stand.

BRIAN

I'm so disappointed that you guys didn't run like this all season! That was the fastest collective quarter mile I've recorded.

The guys smile and look at each other. They chase down Brian, lift him, carry him to the infield, and fall on each other.

COACH KELSEY

You guys have dug deeper than you ever have before. That's what it takes to win. You're now ready.

The guys cheer.

EXT. STEVENSON'S FIELD - AFTERNOON

The bus pulls into Stevenson. Todd's shiny convertible is already parked in the lot. The Canterbury guys step off the bus in silence, all wearing their game faces. Without a word, Javon hands Jeremy a couple of cans of sardines. Jeremy creeps over to Todd's car, pops open a can, and instantly recoils from the smell. Grimacing, he picks out the slimy sardines and chucks them between the seats, then tips the can to drizzle oil over the upholstery. He bolts back.

The ground is damp from earlier rain, and some fans gather near the starting line. Allison spots Todd flirting with another girl, then her eyes land on Mike. She strides over to him in white pants and high heels, heels sinking slightly into the wet grass.

ALLISON

Hi Mike, I didn't hear from you. We were supposed to go to Dino's.

MIKE

I haven't heard from you. I don't think you really want to date me, and I'm not sure if I can be with someone like you.

ALLISON

What do you mean?

MIKE

You won't talk to me, and you've been hanging all over Todd.

ALLISON

You're the one who left.

MIKE

Plus, Leslie told me all about you. How can you be so mean to her?

ALLISON

Really? Leslie? She's so mid.

Leslie walks up to Mike and Allison.

LESLIE

Really? You're wearing that cheugy outfit to an event in the mud.

ALLISON

My fit is cute, and there's no mud.

Leslie casually points to Allison's shoe. Allison tries to walk away with dignity, but her heel is stuck in the wet, muddy grass. She tugs once—nothing. She yanks harder, and her foot pops free as she tumbles backward, landing flat on her butt. Covered in mud, she scrambles up, fuming and disgusted.

ALLISON (CONT'D)

Ahh! I don't want to be with a loser anyway.

Allison scurries off, fuming— a muddy blotch stamped square on her backside. The girls line up, and the race begins. The girls' coaches walk along the sidelines of the course.

BECKY

So, Jen, have you had the opportunity to witness any of Kelsey's escapades firsthand? I heard he's still at it.

JEN

You know those rumors are false. You need to get a life, Becky.

Jen walks further down the course and cheers on the girls. Becky scowls. Near the starting line, an older man approaches. Coach Kelsey smiles widely when he spots him.

COACH KELSEY

Oh, wow, Coach Art! Good to see you. What brings you here?

COACH ART

Hey, Kelsey. I just came to see how you are handling the transfer to Canterbury?

COACH KELSEY

Oh, you heard about that. It's going very well.

COACH ART

You've got a big race today, huh?

COACH KELSEY

It's going to be a tough one.

COACH ART

If anyone can end the streak, it's you. I don't want to keep you. I just wanted to wish you luck.

COACH KELSEY

Thanks, Coach Art. I should say Principal Art. Are you still over at Shelby Consolidated?

COACH ART

No, it's Superintendent Art now. Good luck, Kelsey.

COACH KELSEY

Wait. So you're Chauncey Jones?

Coach Kelsey's eyes grow big as Coach Art smiles.

COACH ART

Chauncey Arthur Jones. I want you to bring back dignity to Canterbury cross-country. Make me proud, Kelsey.

Coach Art walks away. The guys huddle around Coach Kelsey.

RUSS

Who was that?

COACH KELSEY

That was my biggest inspiration. Okay, team, it's time to win. Just follow my plan. Javon, at around the mile mark, the course goes around the baseball backstop and along the bleachers. I need you to get there first, so push the pace and get there first.

JAVON

Got it, Coach.

COACH KELSEY

Mike, you just need to beat Todd.

MIKE

My pleasure. Consider it done.

COACH KELSEY

Remember, run together and pull each other up. Then that last quarter mile, you run like it's the last time you will ever run.

KEVIN

This *is* the last time I'm running.

COACH KELSEY

Just give it your best effort and redeem yourselves. We've come a long way from that first race. And I mean both you guys and me. Listen, if we don't win, fine. Just get yourself a PR. Either way, I'll be proud.

RUSS

Forget PRs, let's get a TR - team record! Guys, bring it in.

The guys put one of their hands in the middle.

RUSS (CONT'D)
Teamwork on three. One, two, three.

THE GUYS
Teamwork!

EXT. STEVENSON FIELD STARTING LINE - DAY

Cheers from the crowd are heard as the girls finish their race. The Stevenson team gathers around Coach Gabe.

GABE
Let's not ruin our perfect season.
They ran better than expected at
the invitational, so don't let them
beat you.

TODD
We're gonna kill 'em.

GABE
Really, Todd? Are you going to let
that Canterbury kid beat you again?

Gabe locks eyes with Todd, his glare wiping the smug smile off Todd's face.

The Canterbury team stares down the Stevenson runners as they march to the starting line, all wearing their game faces. Coach Kelsey steps up beside Gabe.

GABE (CONT'D)
So, were you thinking of moving to
a different county or out of State?

COACH KELSEY
I'm going nowhere.

GABE
Are you ready to do this then?

COACH KELSEY
Oh, I'm ready.

Todd notices Javy is wearing earbuds and points.

TODD
Coach Gabe. He's wearing earbuds.

Gabe looks at Javy and walks over to Coach Kelsey.

GABE

Hey Kelsey, your boy is wearing earbuds. It's not allowed, and yes, you need to follow the rules.

COACH KELSEY

Javy, you can't wear the earbuds.

JAVY

Coach, I can't run without music.

COACH KELSEY

Sorry, they're being sticklers. You'll manage, just do your best. Sing or something. Whatever works.

PUNEET

Do math problems in your head.

KEVIN

Javy, I've got your back.

Javy walks to the bench and puts his earbuds in his jacket. Kevin runs to his jacket, pulls out his phone, and texts as Javy puts away his earbuds. Javy walks back to the starting line. Kevin continues to text.

COACH KELSEY

Kevin, let's go.

KEVIN

I'm coming.

Kevin puts down his phone and runs up to the starting line. He stares at Todd and points his fingers at his eyes, then at him. Todd and Kyle's legs are still red from the nettles.

JEREMY

Good luck.

Jeremy extends his fish oil-covered hand to Todd, and he reluctantly shakes it.

TODD

Prepare to get swept again.

MIKE

Look at this.

Mike turns his back on Todd and points with his thumbs.

MIKE (CONT'D)

You'll be seeing this all race.

TODD
You ain't getting lucky again.

Todd smells his hand and winces. Mike scans the spectators and spots Leslie. She waves. The guys line up, and the starting gun blasts. Javon leads the pack with a blistering pace, and the Stevenson runners chase behind him.

TODD (CONT'D)
(to his teammates)
Fat boy won't last.

Javon stretches his lead, followed by the entire Stevenson team. The rest of Canterbury runs together behind them.

TODD (CONT'D)
Let's reel in that whale.

The Stevenson runner increases their already fast pace as they approach the baseball diamond. Coach Kelsey stands behind Brian, shaking him by his shoulders.

COACH KELSEY
Come on, Javon, you can do it.

The Stevenson team nearly catches up to Javon, but Javon digs in and sprints to the backstop first and slows to a very slow jog. The Stevenson team is stuck behind his large body as they cannot pass between the fence and the bleachers.

TODD
Move it, fat ass!

JAVON
Sorry, the buffet is closed.

The Canterbury team catches up to the log jam just as Javon passes the end of the bleachers. Mike races past the entire Stevenson team. The runners separate from each other. Javy slows down as Russ and Puneet pass in front of him. The girls' team is on the sidelines, cheering. Puneet runs by.

IMELDA
Way to go, Puneet!

Still smiling at Imelda as the course veers, Puneet runs straight into a fence.

COACH KELSEY
Come on! Focus, Puneet!

He pops up, sprints back onto the track, and picks up his pace as adrenaline flows. Kevin and Jeremy catch up to Javy, who looks lost. Then music starts playing.

A van drives down the street next to the course with the windows down, playing speed metal (e.g., DragonForce's cover of Taylor Swift's Wildest Dreams) on full blast. Then two other vans pull up, playing the same music on full blast. Javy hears the music as Kevin nods at him.

KEVIN

Release the beast!

Javy smiles and picks up his pace. He reels in the Stevenson runners one by one as he listens to the music. The squeaking of Puneet's glasses is heard as Javy passes him. Brian stands on the sidelines of the course yelling at Jeremy.

BRIAN

Jeremy, do what I told you, now!

JEREMY

(looking back at Kevin)
You run like a girl.

KEVIN

What the hell did you say?

JEREMY

Your van is a piece of crap.

KEVIN

Oh, you're dead!

Kevin picks up the pace, closing in on Jeremy. Jeremy lets out a scream and sprints faster to stay ahead. Up front, Mike leads the race with Todd trailing. Todd thinks of his coach.

GABE (O.C.)

Todd, are you going to let that
Canterbury kid beat you again? Do
what it takes to win.

A close-up of Todd's face shows a nervous and hesitant look. Todd glances around, then surges forward, closing the gap. He is right behind Mike, eyeing Mike's ankles. As Todd moves to the left to pass, he reaches out with his foot and spikes the back of Mike's Achilles tendon. They both tumble to the ground and immediately pop back up.

MIKE

Ow! What the...

Mike winces and trots with a noticeable limp, with blood on his ankle. Todd pulls away. Mike sprints forward, then hobbles. Coach Kelsey runs to the edge of the course.

COACH KELSEY

Mike! Stop!

Todd glances back. His grin fades as guilt floods his face. Mike ignores the coach, picks up speed, then stumbles, a limp creeping in. Coach Kelsey reacts instantly, sprinting onto the course and grabbing hold of him.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

Mike, stop! You're hurt!

MIKE

No!

Mike breaks free from Coach Kelsey. Adrenaline surging, he bolts after Todd, gritting teeth, each step a wince. He focuses on Todd in front of him and then closes his eyes.

EXT. ALLISON'S HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Mike remembers Allison in Todd's convertible, her arms raised and screaming with exhilaration as they sped away.

EXT. STEVENSON FIELD STARTING LINE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Mike remembers Leslie waving and smiling before the race.

END FLASHBACK

Mike smiles and digs deep, reeling in Todd with every stride. Nearing the finish, Todd reaches down to rub his reddened legs, his pace faltering. A waterlogged patch stretches across the course just before the finish line. Todd slows, picking his way carefully through the puddle—until the sound of fast, splashing footsteps closes in behind him. He turns his head and is stunned to see Mike gaining. Mike sprints past Todd and points with his thumbs to the back of his shirt as he crosses the line and collapses. Todd finishes, and Kyle crosses next. Kevin's friend's van is near, and the music is blasting. Javy grits his teeth and puts his arms up in the air, making devil horns with his fingers.

JAVY

Ahh!

Javy kicks it into overdrive and chases down the Stevenson runner in front of him.

BRIAN

Javy's gonna catch him! He's gonna catch him!

COACH KELSEY

We could win this. Let's go, Javy!

Javy unleashes his final kick, screaming as he chases down a Stevenson runner. With a final surge, he passes him and finishes strong. Behind them, Russ and Puneet are locked in a sprint, one Stevenson runner just ahead. Russ motions forward, urging Puneet on. Puneet digs deep and pulls up alongside him.

RUSS

Let's get him.

They catch up to the Stevenson runner. Hearing the squeak of Puneet's glasses, he glances right and spots Puneet just a few steps behind. He looks left and is startled to see Russ right beside him. Panicked, the Stevenson runner tries to block Russ with an arm, but loses his footing and face-plants into the wet, muddy grass. Russ charges ahead, and Puneet follows, glancing down at him as he passes.

PUNEET

2,924 divided by 43 equals 68,
bitch!

Russ crosses the finish line, followed by Puneet. The Stevenson runner gets up and finishes. Kevin still chases Jeremy with three Stevenson runners behind them and Javon trailing.

BRIAN

We're tied up, Coach! The next
runner to cross the line wins it.

Coach Kelsey grabs and shakes Brian's shoulders, making him look like a bobblehead as he yells to the guys.

COACH KELSEY

Come on, guys, one last push!

The guys near the finish line, and a Stevenson runner passes Kevin, catching up to Jeremy.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)

No! Don't let him pass! No!

The Stevenson runner passes Jeremy as they enter the wet area. Coach Kelsey puts his head down on Brian's shoulder.

BRIAN

Oh, so close!

Kevin nearly catches up to Jeremy.

KEVIN

AAAAHHH!

Kevin barrels toward Jeremy with his arms outstretched like a linebacker. He grabs Jeremy by the shirt and shorts, lifts him clean off the ground, and hurls him forward in one smooth motion. Jeremy sails through the air and skips across the puddle like a human skipping stone, landing just across the finish line ahead of the stunned Stevenson runner. The Canterbury team erupts, racing over and hoisting Jeremy onto Kevin's shoulders. Javon, the final runner, comes flying in at full speed and doesn't stop—arms spread wide as he crashes into Kevin, toppling them. The rest of the team dives into the pile. Coach Kelsey and Brian rush over, beaming. Gabe stands in disbelief as his team stares in stunned silence. The Canterbury boys rise triumphantly and break into a booming team chant.

ENTIRE TEAM

Teamwork! Teamwork! Teamwork!

The guys celebrate, exchanging congratulations. Kevin lifts a hand for a high five, then stops short. Jeremy flinches. Kevin smirks and delivers the high five.

COACH KELSEY

What a fantastic team effort! I knew you guys had it in you.

Gabe approaches Coach Kelsey and shakes his hand.

GABE

Congrats Kelsey.

COACH KELSEY

The guys did great.

GABE

So you're coming back to the team?

COACH KELSEY

Absolutely, I'm coming back to the team... Canterbury.

GABE

Um, you know I was joking about the bet, right? (nervously) Hahaha.

COACH KELSEY

Stevenson is all yours. Good luck, Gabe. Oh, um, just ask Laura out already, you might be surprised.

Gabe smiles as Coach Kelsey walks away. Across the field, Coach Art smiles and gives Coach Kelsey a thumbs-up.

Mike limps, blood trailing from his ankle. Leslie rushes toward him. Ahead, the team moves toward the bus.

LESLIE

Mike, you did it! Are you hurt?

MIKE

I'll be fine.

Leslie helps Mike walk toward the bus.

MIKE (CONT'D)

You know, it was a blessing in disguise going to Canterbury.

LESLIE

Yeah, you escaped from Allison.

MIKE

Yes, that's true. But I think I was really lucky to meet you.

Leslie pulls Mike into a tight embrace. As they slowly release, their eyes lock. A smile flickers between them before they lean in, their lips meeting in a kiss. The rest of the team walks toward the bus together.

RUSS

It feels great to win finally!
Amazing finish, guys! But, Javon,
what a great start! You need to
join the track team.

Russ pats Javon's back.

JAVON

Thanks, I just might.

RUSS

And Puneet, great second mile!

Russ high-fives Puneet.

PUNEET

It was fun dropping equations on
those bitches!

Kevin puts his arm around Javy.

KEVIN

Javy, you really released the beast out there, bud.

JAVY

Thanks for that music blast!

KEVIN

I've got your back, man.

BRIAN

Jeremy, I told you Kevin would chase you if you said that.

KEVIN

Wait, you set that up? Genius.

JEREMY

Your van really is a piece of crap.

KEVIN

Ohhh, you're dead!

The guys laugh as Kevin chases Jeremy to the bus. Imelda is walking alone just ahead of the guys. Javon nudges Puneet.

JAVON

Hey, go for it. We've proven that miracles can happen.

Puneet hesitates, then dashes toward her. Imelda lights up as they talk. Jen catches up to Coach Kelsey.

JEN

Hey, congratulations—you've got your required win. So, it looks like you can still go back to Stevenson.

COACH KELSEY

No, I can't leave. I was meant to be at Canterbury.

Jen puts her fingers to her temples and squints.

JEN

That's what I visualized.

COACH KELSEY

Oh really?

Coach Kelsey puts his arm around Jen as they walk to the bus.

COACH KELSEY (CONT'D)
Thanks for your encouragement and
for believing in me.

JEN
Hey, you believed in those kids,
and look what happened.

COACH KELSEY
You know, I'm visualizing a steak
dinner for two with a cold beer?

JEN
There had better be two cold beers
in your vision.

COACH KELSEY
Or four!

They laugh as they enter the bus. The camera lifts, catching
the bus door swinging shut. With a low hiss, it pulls away.

JEN (O.C.)
Hey, I thought you didn't go on
dates with coworkers?

COACH KELSEY (O.C.)
Who said I'm taking a coworker?

JEN (O.C.)
Oh, is that so?

COACH KELSEY (O.C.)
Would you like to go on a date...
friend?

JEN (O.C.)
Hmm, I don't know, I'll have to
check my schedule.

EXT. STEVENSON PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Todd, Kyle, and Allison, with her muddy pants, approach
Todd's car. Several cats are walking inside it.

TODD
I don't want you muddying up my
seats. What the...

Todd scares the cats away and notices they had scratched and
ripped the leather seats. Allison peeks in.

ALLISON

Maybe I can ride with you now? Ew,
it stinks. Never mind.

KYLE

I'm allergic to cats. See ya.

Kyle and Allison walk back toward the school. Canterbury's bus rolls past Todd. Jeremy grins, waving at Todd. Todd glances at his hand, sniffs it, then slams it against the car.

The bus nears the Stevenson monument sign. SPLAT—wet underwear smacks against it.

FADE OUT.

CREDITS ROLL

INT. GABE'S BEDROOM

Gabe and Laura lie in bed, each wearing part of their wild ensemble—Gabe sporting a spiked leather collar, Laura in her dominatrix outfit. One of their hands is cuffed, the chain looped tightly around the headboard. They stare at the ceiling, looking completely deflated. Stuck.

LAURA

Only you should be cuffed.

Laura reaches for her phone on the nightstand, which is barely within reach, and grabs it.

GABE

I thought we'd cuff each other.

LAURA

Not at the same time! We're going
to have to call someone.

She works her phone with one hand.

GABE

Don't call 9-1-1!

LAURA

I'm not... hello, Kelsey.

GABE

Nooo!