

EXT. HERMAN'S HOUSE- MORNING

"Morphine" by Michael Jackson begins.

Herman wakes up to an alarm clock. 6:30 A.M.

He reaches over and shuts it off.

Coffee pouring into a paper cup.

He quickly pets and kisses his dog.

Herman gets in his truck.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Herman arrives at school.

Fancy cars pull into the lot. Girls step out of them.
Friends laughing.

Herman shows up in his truck alone.

He steps out.

He takes a sip of coffee.

Students flood through the front doors.

Some shoving each other. Herman walks through the crowd. He
says what's up to a few people but mostly stays to himself.

He doesn't really interact with anybody.

INT. SCIENCE CLASS - MORNING

Students laugh around lab tables.

The teacher explains an experiment.

Herman sits by a window and stares out it.

Watching a student with their hood popped up and classmates
standing around it.

The room is full.

He still feels isolated.

INT. GYM - LATER

A game of dodgeball.

One kid struggles to catch the ball.

He gets hit in the face hard. His glasses fall off.

Laughter erupts.

Tyler shouts across the gym.

TYLER

Come on, faggot!

Your sister plays harder than that!

His sister is on Tyler's team and gives him a look of disgust.

Everyone laughs.

Jack elbows Herman.

JACK

Say something.

Herman hesitates.

He looks at the embarrassed kid.

Then he looks back at his friends.

A long beat.

Herman forces a laugh.

HERMAN

Guess McLovin is on the wrong team.

The boys burst into laughter.

The kid lowers his head.

Herman's smile disappears almost immediately.

He doesn't feel good about it.

INT. CAFETERIA - LUNCH

Tyler's table is loud.

People crowd around them and spread rumors and jokes.

Girls walk by.

Everything looks perfect.

Herman laughs with them, but not because he finds it funny.

He laughs because everyone else does.
Across the cafeteria, the same kid from gym eats alone.
Their eyes meet for a split second.
Herman looks away.

HERMAN (V.O.)

The funny thing about fitting in...
is sometimes it costs you pieces of
yourself.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Students shove past each other.
Lockers slam.
Teachers yell.
Herman walks with the crowd.
But he feels completely separate from it.

HERMAN (V.O.)

I wasn't a bad person. I just kept
letting the wrong people decide who
I was.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL AUTO SHOP - LATE AFTERNOON

The final bell rings.
Students slam toolboxes shut.

JACK

Yo, party at Tyler's tonight?

A few guys laugh.

One tosses Herman a set of keys.

TYLER

Bring the Civic.

Herman looks over.

They're already halfway out the door.

He glances back at the old Honda on the lift.

The teacher notices.

MR REYES

You heading out?

Herman shakes his head.

HERMAN

Need to finish the brakes.

Auto teacher smiles.

MR REYES

Nobody's paying you to stay.

Herman shrugs.

HERMAN

Yeah...

Beat.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

...I know.

The shop slowly empties.

The buzzing fluorescent lights are the only sound.

Herman slides underneath the car.

Wrench.

Ratchet.

Clink.

He closes his eyes for a second.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

This place is quieter than out there.

INT. AUTO SHOP - LATE AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

Herman struggles to balance a wheel.

He keeps fighting it.

The auto teacher watches.

He doesn't laugh.

Mr Reyes walks over.

MR REYES

You're fighting the tire.

Herman looks confused.

He adjusts the wheel by less than an inch.

He changes the angle.

Applies pressure differently.

The tire pops into place.

POP.

Herman smiles.

HERMAN

That's it?

INT. GROCERY STORE - EVENING

Herman pushes a shopping cart.

Frozen vegetables.

Bread.

Eggs.

Coffee.

Laundry detergent.

Nothing exciting.

His phone buzzes.

He glances.

Nothing important.

He puts it away.

An elderly woman reaches for a case of water she can't quite grab.

Without saying a word.

Herman reaches up and hands it to her.

She smiles.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Thank you.

HERMAN

Of course.

He keeps walking.

Just another Monday.

INT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The house is quiet.

Herman sits on the floor beside his DOG.

The dog is old.

Tired.

But still happy to be beside him.

Herman scratches behind its ears.

HERMAN

Who's a good boy?

The dog's tail taps against the floor.

Herman smiles.

INT. KITCHEN - LATE EVENING

His mom comes home exhausted.

She drops her keys onto the counter.

Herman is already making dinner.

Nothing fancy.

Pasta.

Garlic bread.

MOM

She smiles.

You didn't have to.

HERMAN

He shrugs.

I know.

They eat.

Mostly in silence.

Comfortable silence.

Herman cleans up dinner.

He puts the dishes in the dishwasher.

And saves the leftovers for work the next day.

They both get ready for bed.

He turns the kitchen light off.

And leaves only the small light over the stove.

INT. HERMAN'S BEDROOM - 6 A.M.

Before the alarm.

Herman's eyes open.

Silence.

The room is small.

No neon lights.

No expensive gaming setup.

Just things that mean something.

An old baseball glove.

A family photograph.

Work boots and school shoes lined up perfectly.

A small stack of books.

His truck keys hanging from a nail.

He sits on the edge of the bed.

Stares at the floor.

Already thinking.

Already somewhere else.

His alarm finally rings.

He was already awake.

He shuts it off before it can finish the first beep.

INT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Silence.

Herman brews a cup of coffee.

Then walks into the living room.

He looks toward the dog's usual spot.

He stops.

The dog is lying peacefully.

Herman kneels.

He doesn't speak.

He rubs the dog's belly.

The dog breathes heavily.

And spends more time resting lately.

EXT. AUTO CLASS - LATE AFTERNOON

An old car sits with its hood open.

A group of teenagers surround it.

Nobody knows what's wrong.

Herman pushes through the crowd.

He leans over the engine.

He doesn't say much.

Just listens.

A slow crank.

A click.

He reaches behind the alternator.

Finds a loose ground cable.

Tightens it.

HERMAN

Try it.

The engine ROARS to life.

Everyone cheers.

One of the guys laughs.

JASON

You're the man, Hernandez.

Herman smiles.

The group starts talking about racing that night.

Then...

Jason notices his vape died.

He points toward the convenience store by the school.

JASON (CONT'D)

Let's go pick up some nic.
Hernandez are you coming?

HERMAN

I can't tonight.
Maybe tomorrow.

Tyler looks at him.

TYLER

Hernandez doesn't make time for his
homeboys anymore.

JACK

Yeah, come on, dawg.
We know you ain't going out with
the bitches tonight.

HERMAN

Alright, alright.
Keep it moving.

A beat.

Nah, for real. I got work.

TYLER

Come on, bro.
The old heads got you covered.
They don't need you today.

JACK

Laughs.

Yeah.
Slide through.

HERMAN

It's our busiest season right now.
Otherwise you know I'm there.

Tyler shrugs.

TYLER

Alright bro, whatever.

Starts walking away.
Better skip class with us tomorrow.

Herman watches them leave.

EXT. PARKING LOT - AFTER SCHOOL BEFORE WORK

Everyone leaves together.

Laughing.

Making plans.

Herman walks toward his truck.

His phone comes out.

He checks it.

No messages.

No replies.

Puts it away.

Three steps later...

He checks again.

Still nothing.

He stares for a second.

Shuts off his phone.
Starts the engine.
He pulls out of the parking lot.

EXT. TRAFFIC - LATE AFTERNOON

Traffic.
Not glamorous.
Not fast.
Just life.
Herman sits behind a line of cars.
Brake lights stretch ahead of him.
A construction crew has narrowed the road to one lane.
A SCHOOL BUS stops.
Everyone waits.
Herman waits.
A driver waves him into traffic.
Herman gives a little wave.

HERMAN

Thanks.

He continues.
A car suddenly cuts in front of him.
Herman hits the brakes.
Looks at the driver.
A beat.
Honks.
He throws his hands up.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

What the fuck are you doing?

Keeps going.

Another red light.

He stops.

The clock on the dashboard moves.

4:37.

Then—

4:38.

Herman drums his fingers against the steering wheel.

Looks ahead.

Waits.

The light turns green.

Traffic moves.

Herman follows.

Nothing cinematic.

Just a teenager trying to get to work.

He finally merges onto the next road.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

"MONEY FOR NOTHING" begins.

A montage.

A young man steps out of a brand-new sports car.

His parents bought it.

Another kid walks into an expensive restaurant, barely looking at the price on the menu.

A trust-fund family gathers around a pool.

A stack of cash lands on a table.

A luxury house.

Designer clothes.

A brand-new watch.

A car being handed down from parent to child.

Money for nothing.

The song continues.

Then—

A firefighter walks out of a house fire.

A construction worker lifts a heavy beam onto his shoulder.

A warehouse employee pushes another loaded pallet.

A garbage collector climbs onto the back of a truck.

A landscaper drags equipment across a lawn.

A cook works over a scorching grill.

A janitor mops an empty hallway.

An electrician works inside a cramped utility room.

A delivery driver carries another package to a front door.

A farmer works beneath the morning sun.

A nurse finishes another long night shift.

An accountant sits at a desk typing away.

No one notices them.

No one applauds.

They just keep working.

The guitar in the song picks up.

Around a minute and thirty seconds in.

CUT TO—

INT. TIRE SHOP - DAY

The little boy waits beside his mother, watching through the glass.

He watches Herman work.

Herman notices.

He pauses.

The boy looks at the impact gun in Herman's hand.

Herman gives him a small smile.

He takes a sip of coffee.

Takes a deep breath.

Now the song really picks up and gets louder.

An impact gun HAMMERS against a lug nut.

Herman works beneath the wheel of a car.

He tightens the last lug.

Checks his work.

Moves to the next tire.

Another impact gun fires somewhere behind him.

Then another.

Customers wait.

A technician shouts across the bay.

Another tech is using a blow torch.

A customer complains at the counter.

Herman doesn't respond.

He's already moving to the next car.

His hands are covered in dirt and grease.

His shirt is soaked with sweat.

The song begins to fade beneath the sounds of the shop.

For a moment—

Nothing but the impact guns.

The compressors.

Compressed air pops from the discharge line.

The fluorescent lights.

Herman stands.

Across the shop, a television plays an INDYCAR race.

The winning driver gets out with showgirls all over him.

"Money for nothing, and your chicks for free"

Herman glances over.

Another technician watches beside him.

Herman shakes his head.

HERMAN

Man...

The things we'd sacrifice to end up
on the Grid.

The technician shakes his head.

They watch the cars fly around the track.

Then—

A car pulls into the bay.

Herman looks over.

Back to work.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY/NIGHT

The montage continues.

The firefighter takes off his boots.

The construction worker clocks out.

The warehouse employee removes his gloves.

The garbage truck pulls away.

The landscaper loads his equipment.

The cook finally steps outside.

The janitor turns off the lights.

The electrician packs his tools.

The nurse walks out into the darkness.
The farmer closes the barn.
The delivery driver gets back into his van.
The accountant stretches outside.
Different people.
Different jobs.
Same exhaustion.
They stop for gas.
Coffee.
Fast food.
AutoZone.
They sit alone in their cars.
They drive home.
Nobody knows each other.
But they're all living almost the same day.
The song continues.
And tomorrow—
They'll do it all over again.

EXT. TIRE SHOP - NIGHT

Herman finally clocks out.
The parking lot is nearly empty.
He gets into his truck.
Starts the engine.
Drives home.
The music fades.

INT. HERMAN'S GARAGE - MIDNIGHT

The truck's hood is open.

Everything is fixed.

Nothing is wrong.

Herman checks the oil.

Again.

Checks tire pressure.

Again.

Looks underneath.

Again.

He wipes the same spotless wrench for the third time.

His brain won't shut off.

He is restless.

His phone says...

12:48 A.M.

He finally closes the hood.

Walks toward the house.

Stops.

Turns around.

Opens the hood again.

Nothing.

Nothing is wrong.

But he checks anyway.

Herman closes the hood.

He stands there for a moment.

Alone in the garage.

Then walks inside.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - MORNING

The bell rings.

Cold air.

Bright fluorescent lights.

Jason grabs chips.

Jack pockets an energy drink.

Tyler slips a pair of sunglasses into his hoodie.

Herman watches.

JASON

Come on.

Grab something.

Nobody pays for shit here.

Herman hesitates.

He grabs something.

He slips it into his sweatshirt.

They walk toward the exit.

Almost there.

BEEP.

Everyone freezes.

The cashier looks up.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - CONTINUOUS

The boys explode into a sprint.

Someone yells.

The cashier points.

A police cruiser sitting across the street lights up.

Red.

Blue.

Red.

Blue.

Herman runs.

Vaults a bush.

Cuts behind a fence.

His breathing is hard.

He looks back.

The officer is already there.

Herman stops.

The officer approaches.

OFFICER

Empty your pockets.

Herman slowly does.

The officer looks at what he's carrying.

A beat.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Go back inside.

Herman looks up.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Apologize.
And pay for it.

Herman nods.

No handcuffs.

No dramatic arrest.

Just a lesson.

EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING - MIDNIGHT

Spray cans rattle.

Glass shatters.

Someone kicks in a window.

Tyler tosses Herman a can of spray paint.

TYLER

Come on.
Leave your mark.

Herman stares at the wall.

He imagines...

His mom scrubbing graffiti off a building after work.

Herman looks back at the wall.

His spray can lowers.

HERMAN

Man...

He shakes his head.

Herman mumbles.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

This dumb shit isn't worth it.

Jack looks over.

JACK

What?

Herman looks toward the street.

HERMAN

We just got caught.
What if the cops come back?

Jack laughs.

JACK

They ain't gonna catch us here,
bro.
Quit tripping.

Herman looks at Tyler.

Tyler is already painting.

Herman sighs.

HERMAN

Alright.

He shakes the can.

Herman steps toward the wall.

He starts painting.

But instead of copying what everyone else is doing—

He creates something of his own.

The others laugh and continue vandalizing the building.

Herman looks at what he's painted.

He stares at his work.

Then—

A distant SIREN.

Everyone freezes.

They look toward the road.

Nothing.

The group laughs it off.

Herman doesn't.

Shakes his head again.

EXT. INTERSTATE - RAINY MORNING

Rain pounds against the windshield.

Herman skips school.

He needs to get away from everything.

He goes on a drive.

Streetlights streak across the windshield.

"Heavydirtysoul" explodes through the speakers.

Herman's grip tightens around the steering wheel.

His jaw is clenched.

His eyes are red from sleep deprivation.

He accelerates.

Shifting gears.

The speedometer climbs.

Cars blur into streaks of light.

His breathing gets faster.

For one dangerous moment...

It looks like he's trying to outrun something no car can catch.

Then Herman lets off the gas.

The engine quiets.

The music keeps playing.

He pulls onto an overlook.

Turns the car off.

He takes the next exit.

EXT. OVERLOOK - MORNING

Herman pulls into an empty overlook.

Rain continues falling.

He shuts off the engine.

Silence.

Just the sound of rain and distant traffic.

Herman sits behind the wheel.

His hands slowly loosen.

He looks out through the windshield.

The anger is still there.

But underneath it—

He's exhausted.

Herman gets out.

Walks to the edge of the overlook.

Looks out over the city.

A long beat.

Then he turns back toward his car.

INT. HERMAN'S GARAGE - RAINING - NOON

Rain taps against the roof.

The door rolls shut behind Herman.

The garage is quiet.

He walks over to an unfinished project.

Opens an old wooden toolbox.

He pulls out a worn ratchet.

The chrome is scratched.

The handle still smooth, though.

He flips it over.

Tiny engraved initials.

Herman runs his thumb across them.

His grandpa's ratchet.

Herman smiles.

Not because it's worth money.

Because someone else built things with these same hands before him.

INT. HERMAN'S KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

The front door opens.

Herman's mom enters.

She sets her belongings down.

Herman quietly walks in from the garage.

She looks at him.

She already knows.

MOM

You skipped school again.

No answer.

She starts sorting through a stack of bills.

MOM (CONT'D)

You're throwing your life away.

Herman's face tightens.

HERMAN

You think I don't know that?

Silence.

He immediately regrets it.

The words hang around in the room.

She looks exhausted.

Not angry.

Just tired.

She quietly folds another bill.

MOM

I just don't want you to become
your father.

That sentence hits harder than any slap.

He looks at her.

Then at the bills in her hands.

He starts to walk away.

Stops.

Turns back.

HERMAN

I'm sorry, Mom.
She looks up.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

I love you.

He walks toward her.

Hugs her.

Herman breaks down.

His mother holds him.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to get us out of here.

A beat.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

I promise.

She holds him tighter.

EXT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - SUNSET

The rain has finally stopped.

The clouds begin to break.

Herman sits beneath the porch light.

His dog rests beside him.

Herman looks up at the stars beginning to appear.

The dog rests its head against his leg.

Herman looks down.

Smiles.

HERMAN

You know you're my best friend,
right?

The dog looks at him.

Herman scratches behind its ears.

For the first time all day—

He's peaceful.

INT. HERMAN'S GARAGE - MIDNIGHT

Silence.

Only the hum of an old fluorescent light.

A half-finished convertible sits on jack stands.

The hood is open.

Herman's hands disappear deep into the engine bay.

A socket slips.

CLINK.

He sighs.

Wipes sweat from his forehead with an oil-covered sleeve.

Outside...

Kids his age laugh somewhere down the street.

Music echoes from a house party.

His phone lights up.

TYLER

Bro where have you been??

Another text.

TYLER (CONT'D)

Come through.

Herman looks at it.

A beat.

Then flips the phone face down.

He reaches for another wrench.

Then he pauses and stops what he is doing.

Looks toward his dog lying nearby.

He reaches down.

Pets him.

He turns back toward the convertible.

INT. HERMAN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

FALL - SENIOR YEAR

Sunlight cuts through the blinds.

Herman's alarm goes off.

He reaches for his phone.

For a moment, he stares at it.

Then—

He gets up.

MONTAGE - "SWEET DREAMS"

Herman opens his laptop.

Checks his school email.

An overdue assignment.

He writes it down.

Another email.

Another deadline.

He opens his calendar.

Starts organizing.

INT. HERMAN'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Herman checks the weather.

He looks outside.

Golden leaves cover the yard.

He grabs his backpack.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Herman sits near the front.
His phone stays in his pocket.
He takes notes.
Actually listens.

INT. LIBRARY - AFTERNOON

Herman works through an assignment.
He gets stuck.
Frustrated.
He keeps going.
Finishes.
Checks his work.
A small smile.

INT. HERMAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Herman scrolls through social media.
Fancy cars.
Parties.
People hanging out.
People showing off.
Tyler.
Jack.
People Herman knows.
Everyone seems to be living their best life.
Herman keeps scrolling.
Faster.

His expression changes.

He stops.

Looks at the screen.

Then locks the phone.

A beat.

He unlocks it.

Opens the app again.

Scrolls.

Stops.

He looks at himself reflected in the dark screen.

He deletes the app and deactivates his accounts.

One by one, he deletes the others.

He sets the phone down.

Opens his textbook.

EXT. OPEN ROAD - FALL - DAY

Golden leaves.

Windows down.

The truck hums along.

No music.

Just engine noise.

For once—

Herman isn't thinking.

He's just driving.

A smile slowly appears.

It lasts maybe ten seconds.

Then—

His phone BUZZES.
The smile fades.
His mind starts racing again.
He looks at the phone.
Doesn't answer it.
He keeps driving.
The road stretches ahead.

INT. HERMAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

LATE FALL

Herman studies.
A calendar beside him.
Assignments crossed off.
A savings envelope sits on his desk.
He adds money.
Writes:

MOM

He puts it away.

EXT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - WINTER - MORNING

Snow covers the driveway.
Herman scrapes ice from his windshield.
Checks the weather.
Checks his schedule.
Gets in his truck.
Drives to school.

INT. CLASSROOM - WINTER - DAY

Herman receives a graded assignment.

He looks at the grade.

Better than before.

He smiles.

Puts it in his folder.

INT. GARAGE - WINTER - NIGHT

The convertible sits beneath the fluorescent lights.

Herman works.

A small space heater hums nearby.

He tightens a bolt.

Checks the part.

Writes something down.

The car is slowly coming together.

INT. HERMAN'S BEDROOM - WINTER - NIGHT

Herman checks his savings.

More money than before.

He looks at the envelope.

Then at a picture of his mom.

He puts the envelope away.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - SPRING - MORNING

Snow is gone.

The trees are beginning to bloom.

Students walk into the school.

Herman walks with them.

But he's different now.

Focused.

He passes the AUTO SHOP.

Stops.

Looks inside.

His AUTO TEACHER, MR. REYES, is unlocking the garage.

Herman walks over.

HERMAN

Morning, Mr. Reyes.

Mr. Reyes looks up.

Surprised.

MR. REYES

Morning.

He looks at Herman.

Then at the clock.

MR. REYES (CONT'D)

You're early.

Herman smiles.

HERMAN

Trying something new.

Mr. Reyes opens the shop.

Herman steps inside.

A half-finished project sits on a lift.

MR. REYES

How's that convertible coming?

Herman looks over.

HERMAN

It's coming.
But I think I am finally almost
there.

Mr. Reyes nods.

MR. REYES

You've been working on it every night?

HERMAN

Pretty much.

A beat.

MR. REYES

Are you keeping up with school?

Herman nods.

HERMAN

Trying to.

Mr. Reyes smiles.

MR. REYES

Good.

He hands Herman a shop rag.

MR. REYES (CONT'D)

Being good with cars only gets you so far.

Herman takes the rag.

HERMAN

I know.

Mr. Reyes looks at him.

There's something different about Herman.

More intentional.

MR. REYES

You know what I like about you?

Herman looks up.

MR. REYES (CONT'D)

You don't give up on broken things.

Herman grins.

Mr. Reyes turns back toward the shop.

MR. REYES (CONT'D)

Just don't forget—

He looks back at Herman.

MR. REYES (CONT'D)

You're not one of them.

Herman pauses.

He knows exactly what he means.

Mr. Reyes heads inside.

Herman follows.

INT. CLASSROOM - SPRING - DAY

Herman finishes an exam.

He puts his pencil down.

Looks around.

Then turns it in.

He looks at the grade.

C.

A small smile.

INT. HERMAN'S GARAGE - SPRING - EVENING

The convertible is almost finished.

Herman wipes his hands.

Steps back.

Looks at it.

A smile.

He opens the driver's door.

Sits behind the wheel.

Doesn't start it.

Just sits there.

Imagining.

INT. HERMAN'S BEDROOM - SPRING - NIGHT

Herman opens his laptop.

An email.

He reads it.

His expression changes.

Something good.

He rereads it.

A smile slowly appears.

He closes the laptop.

Looks toward the window.

INT. HERMAN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Herman checks his calendar.

Crosses off another day.

He looks at the savings envelope.

Then at a photo of his mom.

He puts the envelope beside it.

A quiet smile.

He closes the drawer.

Turns off the light.

END MONTAGE.

CUT TO NEXT MORNING--

EXT./INT. PUMP SEVEN - FRIDAY MORNING

No music.

Herman's truck pulls into an old gas station.

He stops at **PUMP SEVEN**.

CASHIER

Twenty on seven?

Herman smiles.

HERMAN

You already know.

The cashier laughs.

Herman walks inside.

The cashier grabs the receipt.

CASHIER

Still keeping that thing alive?

Herman glances back at his truck.

HERMAN

Trying.

The cashier hands him the receipt.

CASHIER

She's a survivor.

Herman smiles.

HERMAN

Yeah.

He heads back outside.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL BASEBALL FIELD - GYM CLASS - NOON

Gym class.

The field stretches out beneath the afternoon sun.

Herman sits alone in the bleachers.

Students play below.

A pitch.

CRACK.

The ball sails over the fence.

HOME RUN.

The players erupt.

Herman watches.

A small smile.

He's not jealous.

Just wondering.

For a moment, he imagines another version of his life.

What if he'd taken a different path?

What if he'd stayed with baseball?

What if things had gone differently?

His phone RINGS.

He looks down.

MOM.

His expression immediately softens.

He answers.

HERMAN

Hey.

He stands.

Walks away from the bleachers.

The game continues behind him.

Some things matter more than wondering what could've been.

INT. - AUTO PARTS STORE- AFTERNOON

The door opens.

A bell RINGS.

Herman walks in.

The EMPLOYEE behind the counter looks up.

Immediately recognizes him.

EMPLOYEE

You're back.

Herman smiles.

HERMAN

Yeah...

The employee laughs.

EMPLOYEE

What broke now?

Herman looks around.

HERMAN

Nothing.

A beat.

Herman sighs.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Hopefully.

The employee walks toward the shelves.

EMPLOYEE

Oil filter?

HERMAN

Yep.

The employee grabs one.

Turns around.

EMPLOYEE

Check engine light?

Herman pauses.

HERMAN

...Maybe.

The employee laughs.

Tosses him the filter.

Herman catches it.

EMPLOYEE

You're keeping us in business.

HERMAN

Somebody's got to.

Herman heads toward the register.

The employee already knows what he's going to need.

This isn't really a parts store or gas station anymore.

It's part of Herman's routine.

They're places where people know him.

INT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Herman arrives home.

The house is unusually quiet.

Herman walks into the living room.

He looks toward the dog's usual spot.

Empty.

He stops.

His face changes.

He kneels beside the dog.

His hand rests gently on its fur.

Herman doesn't speak.

His mom appears in the doorway.

She sees him.

She knows.

She walks over and sits beside him.

Herman looks at her.

HERMAN

He's gone.

His mom nods.

She puts an arm around him.

Herman leans into her.

Neither of them says anything.

They just sit there.

EXT. HERMAN'S BACKYARD - SUNSET

A small hole has been dug beneath the tree where Herman used to sit with his dog.

Herman carries the dog outside with his mom.

They lower him into the ground.

Herman kneels beside him.

He looks down.

HERMAN

You were my best friend.

His voice cracks.

He takes a breath.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Thank you.

His mom kneels beside him.

She places a hand on Herman's shoulder.

They cover the grave together.

A long silence.

Wind moves through the trees.

Herman looks at the spot where his dog is buried.

MOM

He knew you loved him.

Herman wipes his eyes.

Nods.

HERMAN

Yeah.

A beat.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

I hope he did.

His mom pulls him into a hug.

Herman holds onto her.

They stay there together.

EXT. HERMAN'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

The yard is empty.

The newly covered grave sits beneath the tree.

Herman's old chair is beside it.

A gentle breeze moves through the branches.

HERMAN

Goodnight, beloved.

INT./EXT. TIRE SHOP - SATURDAY - MORNING

The garage doors ROLL OPEN.

Morning light spills across the shop floor.

Air compressors HISS.

Impact guns ECHO through the bays.

Herman walks in carrying a beat-up travel mug.

A COWORKER looks at it.

COWORKER

That's your third coffee.

Herman looks inside the mug.

He looks heartbroken and sleep-deprived from the night before.

HERMAN

Sighs.

...Second.

A beat.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

I think.

He sets it down on a toolbox.

Before he can take another sip—

COWORKER

Herman!

He looks over.

A car is already waiting in the bay.

HERMAN

Coming.

He grabs his tools.

Gets to work.

INT. TIRE SHOP - LATER

The morning disappears.

Tires roll across the floor.

Impact guns hammer.

Herman moves from car to car.

Lift.

Remove.

Replace.

Tighten.

Check.

Next.

A customer waits at the counter.

Another car pulls in.

Herman wipes his hands on his shirt.

Keeps moving.

INT. TIRE SHOP - LATE MORNING

A lug nut refuses to move.

Herman tries the wrench.

Nothing.

He looks at it.

Reaches for a MAP gas torch.

CLICK.

A blue flame ignites.

WHOOSH.

The flame heats the metal.

Orange.

Then red.

Herman watches carefully.

He shuts off the torch.

Reaches for the wrench.

The lug nut finally turns.

CRACK.

Herman smiles faintly.

Back to work.

EXT. TIRE SHOP - AFTERNOON

A truck slowly backs toward a tight driveway.

Herman stands behind it.

He directs the driver.

Hand up.

STOP.

The truck stops.

Herman points left.

A little more.

His hand moves downward.

EASY.

The truck inches backward.

Herman raises his thumb.

PERFECT.

The driver gives him a thumbs up.

Herman steps aside.

The truck disappears into the driveway.

INT. TIRE SHOP - LATE AFTERNOON

The shop is quieter now.

The last few cars are being finished.

Herman leans against the toolbox for a moment.

A CUSTOMER approaches.

He looks toward the driveway.

Then back at Herman.

CUSTOMER

How'd you guys do that without
talking?

Herman looks at his coworker.

Shrugs.

HERMAN

You stop needing words after a while.

The coworker nods.

Herman grabs his travel mug.

Takes another sip.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Coworkers crowd around a table after work.

Everyone's laughing.

Talking over each other.

Making inappropriate comments about the waitress.

The waitress approaches.

WAITRESS

What can I get you?

Herman looks at the menu.

HERMAN

I'll do the grilled salmon.

One of his coworkers looks at him weird.

COWORKER

Bro orders fish everywhere.

Another laughs.

COWORKER#2

What are you, eighty?

They chuckle.

Herman smiles politely.

HERMAN

Yeah, yeah.

COWORKER

Don't forget his greens.

A bigger laugh.

Herman forces a grin.

Laughs with them.

Only because everyone else is.

The conversation moves on.

Nobody notices.

Nobody apologizes.

Nobody even realizes they crossed a line.

Herman looks down at his plate.

Keeps eating.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The group exits.

Everyone says goodbye.

Herman walks toward his truck.

The others head toward their cars together.

COWORKER

See you Monday Hernandez.

Herman raises a hand.

HERMAN

Yeah.

He gets into his truck.

Jackass.

INT. HERMAN'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Silence.

Herman sits behind the wheel.

He unwraps a piece of gum.

Looks through the windshield.
The parking lot slowly empties.
He starts the engine.
Drives home.
No speech.
No crying.
No revenge.
Just quiet disappointment.

INT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - SUNDAY MORNING

Sunlight comes through the kitchen window.
Herman walks in half-awake.
His MOM is making coffee.
She looks at him.

MOM

You going to church with me?

Herman pauses.

HERMAN

Today?

She nods.

MOM

It's Sunday.

Herman looks at the clock.

A beat.

HERMAN

I don't know, Mom.

She doesn't push.

Just looks at him.

MOM

I'd like you to come.

He remembers the conversation they had.

The promise he made.

He nods.

HERMAN

Alright.

His mom smiles.

MOM

Thank you.

Herman grabs a piece of toast.

HERMAN

Give me ten minutes.

She laughs.

MOM

You have five.

HERMAN

Alright whatever you say boss.

EXT. CHURCH - SUNDAY MORNING

Herman and his mom walk toward the entrance.

People greet each other.

Families arrive together.

Herman looks around.

He doesn't say much.

His mom gently touches his shoulder.

They walk inside.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

The congregation settles in.

Herman sits beside his mom.
The service begins.
Herman looks forward.
Then down.
His thoughts begin drifting.
The school.
Tyler.
Jack.
Work.
Money.
The Grid.
Everything.
He takes a slow breath.
His mom notices.
She doesn't say anything.
She simply puts her hand over his.
Herman looks at her.
A small smile.
He squeezes her hand.
Then looks forward again.

EXT. CHURCH - LATER

Herman and his mom walk toward the parking lot.

MOM

Thank you for coming.

HERMAN

Of course.
I really enjoyed the service today.
I need to come here more often.

His mom smiles.

MOM

You doing anything later?

Herman looks at his phone.

A text from Tyler.

TYLER: CAR MEET. COME THROUGH.

Herman hesitates.

Then looks at his mom.

HERMAN

Probably just going to see some friends.

His mom nods.

MOM

Be careful.

HERMAN

I will.

EXT. CAR MEET- SUNDAY- LATE AFTERNOON

Lifted trucks.

Modified imports.

Loud exhaust.

Girls laughing.

Beer and vapes scattered around.

Smoke hangs in the summer air.

Tyler leans against Herman's truck.

TYLER

You going to stay all night?

Herman shrugs.

Across the parking lot...

A kid struggles to start an old Accord.

The hood is open.

Everyone laughs at him.

Herman notices.

He walks away from Tyler.

He heads toward the broken car.

TYLER (CONT'D)

Yo!

Where you going?

Herman doesn't answer.

Five minutes later...

The Accord starts.

The younger kid smiles.

Herman smiles back.

He gets in his own car.

Leaves.

INT. HERMAN'S GARAGE- MIDNIGHT

No music.

Just sounds.

Ratchet clicking.

Rain hitting the garage door.

Deep breathing.

The bolt won't move.

Breaker bar.

Nothing.

Penetrating oil.

Wait.

Try again.

Nothing.

The socket slips.

He smacks his knuckles.

He yells.

HERMAN
GOD DAMN IT!

Keeps trying.

The breaker bar bends slightly.

Nothing.

He grabs another tool.

Doesn't fit.

He searches for ten seconds.

Can't find it.

Finally...

He throws the wrench across the garage.

Punches the truck.

Puts a small dent in the truck.

His hand starts to bleed.

Silence.

Kicks the tire.

Hurts his leg.

He laughs once.

Not because it's funny.

Because life keeps piling on.

Then he just sits on the garage floor.

He rests his head against the convertible tire.

No dialogue.

Just breathing.

CUT TO THE NEXT DAY HERMAN IS OFF SCHOOL FOR HOLIDAY -

INT. TIRE SHOP- MONDAY- DAY

The tire shop is chaos.

Phones ringing.

Impact guns.

Customers complain.

TECH 1

How much longer?

TECH 2

Herman! Need you on bay three!

MANAGER

Can someone answer the damn phone?

Herman keeps moving.

One tire.

Two.

Three.

Fourth car.

Then...

He walks into the bathroom.

Locks the stall.

Sits.

Doesn't even use it.

Just...

Sits.

Hands over his face.

Complete silence.

For the first time in the movie.

His breathing slows.

His eyes close.

Five seconds.

Ten.

Fifteen.

Outside—

MANAGER (CONT'D)

"HERMAN!"

Knocking.

"You good?"

He wipes his eyes.

Looks at himself in the mirror.

HERMAN

Yeah.

Walks back out.

INT. HERMAN'S TRUCK- EARLY EVENING

Herman's had enough.

Bad boss, shitty friends, and long nights.
(His truck has a flat tire
now.)

His friends betrays him.

Everything piles up.

He's driving alone.

Finally...

He cranks the stereo.

"Hot Dog" by Limp Bizkit blasts.

Herman starts screaming the lyrics in the truck because he is exhausted.

Pouring every ounce of frustration into it.

Every person who's ever worked a miserable job understands that feeling.

The song becomes emotional instead of just aggressive.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - CONTINUOUS - EVENING

Herman is a block away from home.

His work shirt is stained.

Hands dirty.

He's exhausted.

A group of teenagers on dirt bikes speed right next to him.

One notices Herman.

Grins.

Raises his middle finger.

The light turns green.

For a second...

Herman just stares.

Then—

He laughs.

Shakes his head.

HERMAN

Little shits.

Then pulls into the driveway.

EXT. HERMAN'S GARAGE- SUNSET

Herman works beneath the hood of his convertible.

His phone BUZZES.

TYLER CALLING.

Herman answers.

HERMAN

What's up?

TYLER (PHONE)

Yo, you busy?

Herman looks at the engine.

HERMAN

Kinda.

TYLER (PHONE)

I need you to look at my car.

Herman sighs.

HERMAN

Alright, dawg.
I'll slide through in thirty.

Herman finally repairs the convertible.

Goes to start it up.

Nothing.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Laughs.

Then yells.

FUCK.

Then he takes the truck to Tyler's.

EXT. TYLER'S HOUSE - LATE EVENING

Herman works beneath Tyler's hood.

Jack and Tyler stand nearby, barely paying attention.

JACK

You sure you know what you're
doing?

Herman looks up.

HERMAN

You called me.

Tyler laughs.

Then tosses Herman a wrench.

Herman shakes his head.

He gets back to work.

A few minutes later—

The engine starts.

Tyler smiles.

TYLER

See? That's why we keep you around.

Herman looks at him.

Something about the way he says it bothers him.

But Herman lets it go.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - AFTERNOON

Students exit out of the building.

Herman walks toward the parking lot.

He sees Tyler and Jack surrounded by a few other students.

A YOUNGER STUDENT stands in front of them.

Nervous.

Tyler has the kid's backpack.

TYLER

Come on, you little freak.

He taunts him with the backpack.

The kid reaches for it.

Tosses it to Jack.

JACK

Taunts him.

Relax.

Everyone laughs.

Herman stops walking.

He watches.

The kid looks embarrassed.

YOUNGER STUDENT

Leave me alone.

I didn't do anything.

Tyler shrugs.

TYLER

Cry.

More laughter.

Herman walks over.

HERMAN

Give him his bag.

Tyler turns.

TYLER

Uh oh.

Here comes the hero.

Herman holds out his hand.

HERMAN

Give it to him.

Tyler doesn't move.

TYLER

Why do you care?

The kid is a freak.

Herman looks at the kid.

Then back at Tyler.

HERMAN

He didn't do anything.

Forget about it.

Let's get up out of here.

Jack laughs.

JACK

Since when did you spicks give a
shit anyways?

Herman snaps.

HERMAN

What the fuck did you just say to
me?

The crowd goes quiet.

Nobody moves.

Silence.

Herman gets in Jacks face.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Watch how you're talking to me.

TYLER

Careful.

Herman doesn't move.

HERMAN

No.
I'm not the one for that.

A beat.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Grow up.

Herman snatches the backpack from Tyler.

Tosses the backpack towards the kid.

The kid catches it.

He immediately walks away.

Herman watches him leave.

Then turns back to Tyler and Jack.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Cut the shit.
I don't play like that.

A beat.

Tyler rolls his eyes.

TYLER

Oh my God.
You're acting like a female.
We were just giving the freak some
shit.

JACK

It's that time of month for
Hernandez.

They laugh.

Herman stares at them with disgust and frustration.

He's done.

He walks away.

EXT. HERMANS DRIVEWAY - AFTERNOON

Herman finally gets home after a long day of school.

He gets out his truck to get the mail.

Starts walking back from the mailbox.

The little kid from the tire shop is riding his bike too
close...

SCRAAAPE.

A long scratch across the fender.

The kid freezes.

He's terrified.

He thinks Herman is going to explode.

HERMAN

You again?

Herman looks at the scratch.

Grins.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

It's just paint dude. Don't worry
about it.

He pats the kid on the shoulder.

You okay?

The kid nods.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Looks over at the car.

She needs a lot more work anyway.

The kid nods again.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Tell you what.

He gestures towards the truck.

I'm going to be working on this
tomorrow.

I could use an extra set of hands.

KID

Really?

Herman smiles.

HERMAN

Yeah.

I'll show you how to fix a flat
tire.

It will be easy.

But bring some snacks.

And a speaker.

The kid smiles.

KID

Okay.

HERMAN

See you tomorrow, dude.

The kid begins to pedal away.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

And be careful with that thing,
don't be running into any old
ladies.

The kid laughs.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

The bell rings.

Students flood the hallway.

Herman walks through the crowd.

TYLER and JACK are leaning against the lockers.

They see him.

Tyler smirks.

TYLER

There he is.

Herman keeps walking.

JACK

Yo, Herman.

Herman stops.

Turns.

Tyler pushes himself off the locker.

TYLER

Still driving that piece of shit?

A few students laugh.

Herman looks at them.

He's heard enough.

HERMAN

You know what?

Beat.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Fuck both of you.

You're both assholes.

I never liked hanging around either
of you.

The hallway goes quiet.

Tyler's smile disappears.

Jack steps forward.

JACK

You sure you want to do that?

Herman stares at him.

For a second, it looks like he's going to stay.

Fight.

Then—

"BEAT IT" begins.

Herman shakes his head and walks away.

Jack and Tyler watch him go.

TYLER

Yeah.

That's what we thought.

Herman keeps walking.

He smiles and doesn't turn around.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Herman disappears into the crowd.

A STUDENT standing nearby looks at Tyler.

Then at Jack.

STUDENT

Why don't you two just race?

Tyler looks over.

TYLER

Race?

STUDENT

Yeah.

He gestures toward Herman.

STUDENT (CONT'D)

You wanna prove who's better?

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - LUNCH

Herman sits with his new friends.

Kids that are less popular and wealthy than Tyler and Jack.

A student walks past.

STUDENT

Yo, Herman.

Herman looks up.

STUDENT (CONT'D)

You racing Tyler Thursday?

Herman's expression changes.

HERMAN

What?

The student walks away.

Herman looks at his new friends.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

What the hell is he talking about?

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - LATER

Word spreads.

Students whisper.

Phones come out.

Texts fly.

A group gathers around Tyler.

STUDENT

Thursday night?

Tyler nods.

TYLER

Thursday.

JASON

Where?

Tyler looks toward Herman.

TYLER

You know the backroad.
Where everyone meets up for the
cars and coffee on Sundays.
Everyone knows it.

(MORE)

TYLER (CONT'D)
The road outside town.
The one students drive down when
they want to get away from
everything.

A STUDENT pulls out his phone.

JACK
I'll get everyone there.

Before Herman gets the chance to agree, it's already too late.

HERMAN
Fuck it.

Looks at Tyler.

TYLER
You got a car to race with?

People laugh.
Or you still driving around that
piece of trash.

More laughter.

HERMAN
Nah I got something.

And I built mine.
I don't need daddy's credit card to
race.

Everyone laughs at Tyler.

Tyler attempts a comeback, but it fails miserably.

Herman walks away.

INT. HERMAN'S GARAGE - AFTERNOON

The garage door is open.

Herman's truck sits in the middle of the driveway.

Tools are scattered across the floor.

A small speaker plays music.

The KID sits nearby, watching Herman work.

Herman removes the wheel.

HERMAN

Hand me that socket please.

The kid looks through the tools.

Finds it.

Hands it over.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Perfect.

Herman continues working.

The kid watches.

KID

You're really good at this.

HERMAN

Thanks, dude.

You do something long enough, you
get pretty good at it.

The kid looks around the garage.

KID

Who taught you how to do all of
this?

HERMAN

My grandpa.

KID

What happened to him?

HERMAN

A beat.

I'll tell you later.

KID

My sister says cars are a waste of
money.

Herman laughs.

HERMAN

Your sister?

The kid nods.

KID

Yeah.

Herman looks over.

HERMAN

What's her name?

The kid tells him.

Herman freezes for a second.

Then laughs.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Wait.

You're her little brother?

The kid nods.

KID

Yeah, why?

Herman shakes his head.

HERMAN

No way.

He looks back at the tire.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Yeah, I know your sister. She's in my grade.

A beat.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

And I actually just got into it with her boyfriend earlier.

The kid looks up.

KID

Tyler?

Herman looks at him.

HERMAN

Yeah.

The kid makes a face.

KID

He's kind of a jerk.

Herman laughs.

HERMAN

Yeah?

KID

Yeah.

Herman shakes his head.

HERMAN

He used to be my friend.

The kid looks surprised.

KID

Really?

HERMAN

Yeah.

He tightens the lug.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Long story.

The kid nods.

KID

I like you better.

Herman looks over.

Laughs.

HERMAN

You barely know me.

KID

Still.

Herman smiles.

He looks at the kid for a moment.

Something about him feels familiar.

The curiosity.

The willingness to learn.

The way he actually listens.

Herman sees a little bit of himself in him.

The kid watches Herman work.

KID (CONT'D)

Hey...

HERMAN

Yeah?

KID

You know those kids that flipped
you off the other day?

Herman looks up.

HERMAN

Yeah.

The kid laughs.

KID

I know them.

Herman raises an eyebrow.

HERMAN

Of course you do.

KID

They're assholes.

Herman laughs.

HERMAN

So you know everybody around here?

KID

Laughs.

Pretty much.

Herman shakes his head.

HERMAN

Small world.

A beat.

The kid looks at Herman.

KID

You going to race Tyler?

Herman looks at him.

A smile slowly appears.

HERMAN

Apparently.

KID

I'm rooting for you.

Herman laughs.

HERMAN

Don't tell your sister.

KID

I won't.

They laugh.

Herman hands him another tool.

KID (CONT'D)

You're racing in this?

HERMAN

I think I could run faster than
this thing could race.

Herman walks over to a tarp covering the convertible.

Takes it off.

KID

WOAHH.

That thing is sick.

HERMAN

It was my grandpa's.

Since he passed, I have been
restoring it for months.

(MORE)

HERMAN (CONT'D)
I haven't been able to get it
running.
But I am hoping a miracle will
happen tonight.

HERMAN (CONT'D)
Anyway.

He puts the tarp back on.
Let's finish this thing.

They get back to work.

Herman looks over at him.

For a moment, everything is quiet.

No Tyler.

No Jack.

No school.

Just the garage.

The kid.

And the car.

Herman smiles.

INT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Herman sits on his bed.

His phone BUZZES.

A text.

THURSDAY. 10 PM.

Another message.

TYLER VS HERMAN.

Another.

BACKROAD.

Herman stares at the screen.

He tosses the phone onto his bed.

Looks out the window.

His convertible sits in the driveway.

He smiles.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - PARKING LOT- THURSDAY - DAY

The entire school knows.

Whispers follow Herman down the hallway.

Some students bet on Herman.

Others bet on Tyler.

Herman keeps walking.

Tyler appears at the other end of the hallway.

They lock eyes.

Neither says a word.

The bell rings.

They walk in opposite directions.

INT./EXT. HERMAN'S GARAGE - THURSDAY AFTERNOON

Herman walks toward his convertible.

He opens the door.

Gets inside.

Months of work have gone into this car.

It **STILL** won't start.

And he has no idea why.

He's frustrated and needs this car to race Tyler.

He can't race in the truck.

He realizes the only thing missing is the ignition fuse.

He finds the correct fuse in the toolbox.

Puts it in.

HERMAN

Here we go.

Turns the key one more time.

Silence.

One crank.

Another.

Then—

VROOOOM.

He laughs.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

WOOOO!

He finally figured it out.

And something so simple was holding him back all this time.

EXT. EMPTY PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Cars line both sides.

People drink.

Someone lights a firework.

Jason walks over carrying a six-pack.

Herman pulls up in his convertible.

Everyone stares.

TYLER

You choose to race in the family
heirloom?

Herman stares at his car.

He hears laughter.

Someone's doing donuts.

Someone else is spray-painting the back wall

Herman looks at the track.

Smirks.

HERMAN

How about you let the cars do the talking.

DRAG RACE

EXT. EMPTY BACKROAD - THURSDAY NIGHT

"KICKSTART MY HEART" kicks in.

Two cars roll to the starting line.

Herman sits behind the wheel of his 1960 V8 Mustang convertible.

Beside him—

TYLER'S car.

A 2025 Porsche 911 convertible his dad bought him.

The crowd gathers along the roadside.

Phones come out.

Herman looks over at Tyler.

Tyler revs his engine.

Herman follows.

Then he just stares forward.

A GIRL steps between the cars.

Raises her hand.

The music builds.

She looks at Herman.

Then Tyler.

Her hand drops.

The engines ROAR.

Both cars launch.

The crowd ERUPTS.

People chase after the cars, recording on their phones.

Herman's convertible surges forward.

Tyler pulls alongside him.

For a moment, they're even.

Herman glances over.

Tyler grins.

Herman grins back.

He looks forward.

The road stretches endlessly ahead.

The music pounds.

Tyler inches ahead.

Herman watches him.

Then looks back at the road.

He doesn't panic.

He stays focused.

The cars disappear into the night.

EXT. BACKROAD - LATER

The crowd waits.

Headlights appear in the distance.

Everyone turns.

Two cars come flying back toward them.

The boys cross the finish line at the same time.

The crowd can't tell who won.

Both cars slow.

Herman pulls into the lot.

Everyone clears out of the way.

Silence.

People begin recording again.

Tyler gets out.

Herman follows.

He looks at Herman.

Then at the convertible.

He laughs.

TYLER

Okay, Hernandez.

A beat.

I didn't expect that.

HERMAN

Nothing beats the family heirloom.

Tyler nods.

For the first time, there's respect between them.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. HERMAN'S BEDROOM - THURSDAY NIGHT

Herman sits on the edge of his bed.

Waiting for his mom to come home.

Herman stares at the ceiling, smiling.

HERMAN

What a day.

His phone rings.

MOM.

He smiles faintly.

He answers.

Nothing.

His smile disappears.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Hello?

A faint voice on the other end.

MOM

Herman, I got t-boned and spun into
a ditch.

His face slowly drains of color.

HERMAN

What?

Silence.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Where?

He stands.

INT. HERMAN'S HOUSE - THURSDAY NIGHT

Herman grabs his keys.

His hands shake.

He moves toward the door.

Then stops.

His eyes fall on the dog's old collar sitting on a shelf.

A memory.

His dog.

His best friend.

Gone.

Herman's breathing changes.

Herman starts tearing up.

HERMAN

I am not losing you too.

He runs out.

EXT. HERMAN'S DRIVEWAY - THURSDAY NIGHT

Herman throws open the door of his convertible.

SLAMS IT SHUT.

Starts the engine.

His hands grip the steering wheel.

He looks forward.

HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO begins.

The convertible leaves tire marks in the driveway.

INT. HERMAN'S CONVERTIBLE- THURSDAY NIGHT

His hazards flash.

Herman drives aggressively but not uncontrollably.

He's completely focused.

His eyes are locked on the road.

His phone sits beside him.

A call comes through.

He ignores it.

He hits the clutch and shifts aggressively.

His jaw tightens.

He lets out a scream of anger.

HERMAN

I'm coming, mom.

The music builds.

Herman pushes the accelerator.

Traffic becomes a blur around him.

He runs a red light.

A car swerves into his lane.

Herman jerks the wheel.

The car narrowly misses him.

His breathing gets heavier.

Another red light.

He blows through it.

Herman grips the wheel tighter.

Terrified and desperate.

He takes a sharp turn, the rear tires breaking loose for a split second.

He corrects the car and keeps moving like nothing happened.

He doesn't slow down.

He can't.

His mom needs him.

INT. HERMAN'S CONVERTIBLE - CONTINUOUS - THURSDAY NIGHT

Herman grips the wheel tighter.

His breathing becomes unsteady.

He whispers to himself.

HERMAN

Please.

A beat.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

Please don't take her too.

The song reaches its peak.

EXT. CAR CRASH- MIDNIGHT

Herman arrives as paramedics and firefighters pull up.

Herman throws open the door and runs to the car.

It's flipped over in a ditch.

He breaks the window and drags his mom out.

Crying.

He's holding her unconscious body in his hands.

Herman weeps.

First responders rush over to him.

They take her in the back of an ambulance.

Herman joins.

CUT TO-

INT. HOSPITAL- FRIDAY MORNING- 3 A.M.

Herman is in the waiting room.

He looks around desperately.

He taps his foot, one hand pressed against his forehead.

A NURSE approaches.

NURSE

Herman?

He nods.

HERMAN

My mom.

The nurse looks at him.

A beat.

NURSE

She's alive.

Herman's entire body goes still.

His eyes close.

Relief.

But the fear hasn't completely left him.

He nods and holds back happy tears.

HERMAN

Can I see her?

The nurse gestures down the hallway.

Herman walks.

Slowly now.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT BEFORE GRADUATION

His mother lies in the bed.

Bruised and shaken, but conscious.

Herman enters.

She looks at him.

MOM

Hey, sweetie.

Herman stops.

He tries to hold himself together.

He can't.

He walks to her bedside and hugs her carefully.

His mother holds him.

Herman closes his eyes.

For the first time since losing his dog—

He allows himself to feel safe again.

HERMAN

I thought I lost you, Mom.

Weeps.

MOM

Herman, I am fine.
You better get some sleep.
You know, I am still making you
walk the stage for graduation
today.

He lets out a small laugh.

HERMAN

Really, Mom.

They both laugh.

EXT. HERMAN'S BACKYARD - SUNRISE MORNING BEFORE GRADUATION

A small grave.

A collar rests beside it.

Herman stands alone.

He looks down.

Kisses the grave.

HERMAN

I miss you so much.

It's been so hard without you.

He takes a deep breath, then walks away.

The world keeps moving.

But Herman doesn't feel like it should.

EXT. GAS STATION - MORNING BEFORE GRADUATION

Same station.

Same cashier.

Except this time...

He pulls in with the restored convertible.

The cashier walks outside.

He just looks at the car.

Big smile.

CASHIER

No way...

HERMAN

Told you I'd get it running.

Cashier walks around the car.

CASHIER

You actually did it.

HERMAN

Nods.

Alright, I got a graduation to get to.

GRADUATION

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD - SUNSET

Rows of folding chairs stretch across the field.

Families cheer from the bleachers.

The scoreboard glows up.

Graduates wait nervously.

One by one...

Names are called.

Students shake hands.

Smile for pictures.

Move on.

"Herman..."

He walks across the stage.

Receives his diploma.

Notices his mom in the stands.

Blows her a kiss and holds up his diploma proudly.

Applause.

He steps off the stage.

Students gather in groups.

Phones come out.

Parents cry.

Friends throw graduation caps into the air.

A friend calls after him.

"Herman! Picture!"

He turns.

Smiles politely.

Raises a hand.

Keeps walking.

He finds his mom.

They hug.

HERMAN

How are you feeling?
Did you find out any new
information?

MOM

Yes, honey, I am completely okay.
They said the man who hit me was
under the influence and is being
detained by authorities.

The insurance company covered
everything.

HERMAN

That's great news, Mom.
I'm just glad you are okay.

MOM

Yes. I'm so proud of you.

HERMAN

Thanks, Mom.
Love you.

They separate.

She notices him looking toward his convertible.

She smiles.

HERMAN (CONT'D)

I'll see you at home.

She watches him leave.

Not sad.

Just knowing.

Her son is becoming his own man.

POST GRADUATION

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - GOLDEN HOUR

The parking lot is beginning to empty.

Graduates celebrate behind him.

Their laughter fades into the distance.

Herman reaches the door of his convertible.

He unlocks it.

Looks down at the graduation cap.

He tosses it into the passenger seat.

The gown follows.

He slips off his dress shoes.

Then his socks.

His bare feet touch the warm pavement.

For the first time all day...

He smiles.

A quiet, genuine smile.

Freedom.

The little boy walks by with his sister and Tyler.

They are supposed to have dinner reservations, but the boy doesn't want to go.

He wants to go with Herman.

Herman overhears them.

The kid runs up to him.

KID

Hey! Can I come with you?

HERMAN

Of course.

If it's okay with your family.

Tyler notices Herman barefoot.

He lets out a small laugh.

A beat.

TYLER

You're not so bad, Hernandez.

Tyler looks towards his girlfriend.

TYLER (CONT'D)

Be careful with my girls, little
bro.

Tyler gives Herman a nod of respect.

The kid opens the door to the convertible and climbs inside,
buckling himself in.

Herman gets in.

The kid looks over at him.

KID

Where to?

Herman doesn't answer.

He looks up at Tyler.

Tyler gives him one final nod.

Herman lets out a soft smile.

He turns the key.

The convertible pulls out of the school parking lot.

FINAL SCENE

EXT. TREE-LINED HIGHWAY - GOLDEN HOUR

The opening beat of "**Speed Demon**" fills the car.

The town grows smaller in the rearview mirror.

No arguments.

No drama.

No crowds.

Just Herman and the kid.

Top down.

Warm summer air.

He taps the steering wheel.

He laughs.

Not because he's leaving everything behind...

Because, for the first time in years...

he isn't driving to escape.

He's driving toward something.

The camera slowly rises above the road.

The convertible becomes smaller and smaller.

The highway stretches endlessly through the trees.

Fade to black.

THE GRID**OVER THE CREDITS:**

Don't You (Forget About Me) montage
of behind-the-scenes footage from
The Grid

POST - CREDIT SCENE

Morning at Road America.

The sound of race cars echoes through the air.

Herman walks through the IndyCar paddock.
Beside him, the little kid walks along.
The kid wears oversized hearing protection.
He can't stop smiling.
They stop outside the pit wall.
Cars scream past.
The kid's eyes go wide.
Herman grins.
Not because of the race.
Because he's watching the kid experience it.
The kid points toward the track.

KID

One day.

Herman looks down.

HERMAN

Yeah?

The kid smiles.

KID

I'm going to drive one.

Herman nods.

HERMAN

Then I'd better start saving for
tickets.

They laugh.

An IndyCar flies by.

Cut to black.