

SUNNYCREST FARM FOR BOYS

Original Drama TV Series

by

Michael Jackson

Based on a True Story

EPISODE ONE: 'Leaving Philly'

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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. PHILADELPHIA - NORTH PHILLY PROJECTS - DAY

SUPER: "YEAR 1962 - NORTH PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA"

JOHN F. KENNEDY stands on a makeshift wooden stage in front of a large CROWD consisting mostly of AFRICAN AMERICANS.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

It was hard growing up as a kid in North Philly. There was violence everywhere. But that was nothing compared to what was going on in the rest of the country. There was the south, where Martin Luther King was leading the civil rights movement, and horror stories about Vietnam. The country was in a state of protest. Meanwhile, a young Senator from Massachusetts came to visit our neighborhood. He came with a message, that somehow things were going to change.

JFK speaks to the crowd, including MICHAEL JACKSON, 12, his mother VAN JACKSON, 36, his brother ADRIAN JACKSON, 7. Michael's grandparents, BIG MOMMA, 50s, and BEE MANUAL, 55.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

It was funny, that whole week before that senator came, there wasn't a single gunshot, murder or death in North Philadelphia. I couldn't understand why it couldn't be that way all the time. But not long after he left, things returned to normal.

INT. PROJECTS - APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Michael and his younger brother are in the bathtub being scrubbed by mother Van. They hear GUNSHOTS in the distance, with the window open.

MICHAEL

What was that?

VAN

Never you mind. Give me that shampoo and get your head over here.

They hear more GUNSHOTS as Van pours shampoo over Michael's head and scrubs his hair.

MICHAEL

Do you think he'll be our next president, Momma?

VAN

I sure hope so. It took a lot of guts coming to North Philly the way he did. I doubt many others would have come here.

ADRIAN

Who's going to be President?

VAN

John F. Kennedy. That's who. Now hurry up and get yourselves dried off, and into bed.

She rises and hands them both towels. The two boys climb out of the tub and dry themselves off.

EXT. PROJECTS - DAY

Michael, Van and Adrian exit the projects building, dressed for school and work. A group of BLACK MALES stands outside, exchanging drugs and conversations. Michael looks at them as Van pulls him quickly past the gang and down the walkway, along with Adrian.

MICHAEL

Why are they out here so early?

VAN

Probably never been to bed. Keep your eyes to yourself and don't let me see you ever talking to any 'em them kinda boys. You hear?

MICHAEL & ADRIAN

Yes, Momma.

The Jacksons cross the street and turn the corner. They head down another street.

EXT. PROJECTS - MOMENTS LATER

Van exits a house with Michael. Adrian stands in the doorway with ELLEN, 30s, a tall African American woman, who has two other small Negro BOYS with her.

VAN

Thanks, Elle. See you after work.

A 1960s Chevy stops in front of the house and HONKS. Van sees Bee driving and approaches the car.

VAN (CONT'D)

What you doing here? I thought you were at work?

BEE

Had the day off. I'm going to the doctor's later and can drive you and Michael if you want.

MICHAEL

Hey Grandpa. Can I get in the front seat?

BEE

If your Ma says so.

Van nods as Michael gets into the front seat. Van gets into the back seat as the Chevy drives off.

INT. BEE'S CHEVY - DAY

Michael looks out the window, as they pass by more project buildings with GANG MEMBERS and DRUG DEALERS out front.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Don't talk to them. That was hard. The gangs were everywhere in North Philly. On the way to school, on the way home. Even in the stairwells of our buildings.

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - MORNING

Michael gets out of the car. He runs up to the school. Van gets into the front seat. The Chevy drives off.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A MALE African American TEACHER, 30s, teaches math to the class, which consists mostly of Negro kids. He points to the math problem on the board. Michael raises his hand. Michael gets the answer right. The Teacher writes the answer on the blackboard as Michael smiles.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

I studied as much as I could in between working at Big Momma's salon and looking after my baby brother. I wanted to make something of myself and be a businessman some day. But that wasn't easy, growing up in Philly.

INT. PROJECTS - STAIRWELL - DAY

Michael makes his way up the stairs with Adrian, carrying his school bag. He passes by several DRUG DEALERS conducting business.

DRUG DEALER #1

Hey, little man. You babysitting again today?

Michael walks along with Adrian, ignoring them.

DRUG DEALER #2

You think we don't see you or know your name? You'll be working with us soon. Your time will come. You'll see. You and your brother.

The men hear GUNFIRE outside and duck. The men remove their guns and run down the stairs. Michael runs up the stairs with Adrian.

EXT. PROJECTS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Michael runs down the hallway, terrified, holding Adrian's hand. He unlocks the apartment door and enters, locking the door behind them.

INT. PROJECTS - APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Michael drops his bags to the floor as they hear more GUNFIRE followed by police SIRENS. Michael looks out the window at the street below as Adrian sits on the sofa, crying.

Michael tries to calm him down by turning on the TV. He closes the window and draws the drapes.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Michael exits the elementary school. Michael sees his grandfather Bee in his 1960s Chevy parked out front. Adrian is sitting in the back seat of the car.

BEE

Hurry up there. Big Momma needs you at the stop, pronto! Busy day for her and your mother.

Michael gets into the front seat of the car. The car drives off.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

That was my daily routine mostly. Going to school and taking care of Adrian, except the days when Big Momma needed me.

INT. BEE'S CHEVY - DAY

Michael looks at Bee's nice sport jacket, new slacks and polished black shoes.

MICHAEL

You get a new jacket, Grandpa?

BEE

Nothing wrong with looking sharp for the ladies. I work hard and like to spend my money making them happy.

ADRIAN

What kind of work you do, Grandpa? You mixing the paint for them Dutch Boys?

Bee laughs.

BEE

Yeah, I mix the paint all right. Nothing wrong with hard work, as long as it pays well.

MICHAEL

I'm gonna work hard too someday, Grandpa.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I'm gonna wear nice clothes like you, have my own business like Big Momma, and know how to treat the ladies.

Bee laughs.

BEE

You do that, boy. You go right away, and you do that and you'll be a happy man.

EXT. BIG MOMMA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

Bee's car stops in front of a modest beauty shop in downtown Philly. Michael gets out of the car and heads inside. Bee drives off with Adrian.

INT. BIG MOMMA'S BEAUTY SHOP - DAY

Michael enters the busy beauty shop with lots of Negro WOMEN getting their hair done. The shop is a mess as Big Momma approaches him.

BIG MOMMA

Get busy Michael. We had a whole lot of walk-ins today, and we're nearly out of clean towels.

Hair on the floor, towels stacked up on the counters. Some towels lying on the floor. Michael starts to grab the towels off the floor as Van approaches with a basket.

VAN

Get those towels in the dryer now and fold them.

MICHAEL

Yes, Momma.

Michael carries the dirty towels into the back of the shop where there is a laundry machine. He opens the dryer, takes out the clean towels, and starts to fold them.

EXT. PROJECTS - NIGHT

Bee drives the Chevy into the projects. Van, Adrian and Michael get out of the car. Big Momma in the front seat, sees the gangs near the entrance to the building.

BIG MOMMA

Those gangs are here again? When you gonna move back in with us and stop living in this horrible place?

VAN

It's the only place I can afford, living on my own with two children. I told you that a hundred times.

BIG MOMMA

You don't need to be living alone, not now and not ever. Not when we have a perfectly good duplex we own.

VAN

I'm not going to spend the rest of my life living with my parents. I need a place of my own, and for now, that's the best I can do. So let's just stop discussing it, okay?

BIG MOMMA

(to Bee)

It's no sense talking to her. I swear, sometimes I don't even know who raised you, you're so stubborn.

VAN

You did!

BEE

Enough, the both of you now. We all need some peace around here. Ain't that right, Michael?

Michael laughs.

MICHAEL

That's right, Grandpa!

BIG MOMMA

Oh hush up! I'm tired of this whole family now. Especially of you and your driving. Slow down.

BEE

It is slow! We're here now.

The Chevy slows down and stops in front of Van's building.

INT. PROJECTS - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Van, Michael and Adrian enter the lobby of the projects building. It's dark, run down and has graffiti on the walls. They walk over to the elevator, which has a handwritten sign on it which reads: "BROKEN".

VAN

Again? That's the fifth time this month.

They head for the stairs.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

That was their favorite game, those drug dealers. Break the elevator and make everyone climb the stairs. That way they could get you alone, and try their games on you.

INT. PROJECTS - STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

The Jacksons pass by the dark and dirty stairwells, climbing up to the third flight. They pass by some broken lights on the ceilings.

VAN

Now they're even playing with the lights. Just wait till I call that building manager again.

They pass GANG MEMBERS on the stairwells talking to some black WOMEN. Some have BABIES, others have small CHILDREN. They hand the women money and drugs. Van, Michael and Adrian make their way around them.

GANG MEMBER #1

What's your day been like, Miss Jackson. Or is it Missus?

VAN

Never you mind!

GANG MEMBER #2

Need any help with them children? I'm a hell of a babysitter.

The WOMEN laugh.

VAN

Leave us alone. We don't need nobody's help.

GANG MEMBER #1

Ain't she the princess? Don't need help. She'll come around sooner or later.

Van gives them a dirty look as she continues up the dark stairwell with Michael and Adrian.

INT. PROJECTS - APARTMENT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Van gives Michael and Adrian a bath in the old tub. Tiles on the walls are missing and the floor has cracks in it. She washes their hair with shampoo as they hear GUNSHOTS outside in the distance, through the open window.

ADRIAN

What was that?

Van gets up and closes the window. She continues washing their hair.

VAN

Never you mind. Get your head over here. I can't reach you sitting way back there.

Adrian scoots forwards.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

That was how it was. Momma refusing to move back in with Big Momma and Grandpa. So we lived in the projects and did the best we could.

INT. BEE'S CHEVY - DAY

Van, Adrian and Michael sit in the back seat of Bee's Chevy. Big Momma sits in the front seat with Bee driving. The car drives out of the city and heads into a highway.

INT. BEE'S CHEVY - LATER

The Chevy is now in the countryside -- Lancaster County, PA. They pass by miles of pastures with farm, barns, horses and cows grazing in the meadows.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

On the weekends, we always got away from the city. Grandpa took us out to Lancaster where we'd have a nice lunch and enjoy the fresh air.

(MORE)

MICHAEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Sometimes, we'd even have ourselves  
 a good old-fashioned picnic.

Michael sticks his head out from the back seat of the car and smells the fresh air.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

The Chevy sits parked in the busy parking lot of a large family restaurant. It looks relatively upscale.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

The Jackson family sits at a large booth in the corner, enjoying their lunch.

BIG MOMMA

I told you before, those projects are no place to be raising boys. We have to do something soon, before Michael is sent to that school.

BEE

That's it. You two keep this up and I'm taking my dinner out to the car again. What do you say, Michael? You in?

MICHAEL

Sure am! I'll take my hamburger to go!

Big Momma grows even more annoyed.

BIG MOMMA

Oh, you two hush up! You never did take my side when it comes to this anyway. You've spoiled them both rotten and then who's the one to blame when they're in trouble?

Van sighs.

VAN

Good Lord, Big Momma! Can't we just have out lunch in peace this one time?

BEE

I swear, you're making this whole family crazy with this talk.

(MORE)

BEE (CONT'D)

If she doesn't want to move, let  
her be, for God sakes. Lay off her,  
woman!

Big Momma's eyes widen. She looks around to see if anyone is listening.

BIG MOMMA

How dare you talk to me that way.  
And in a restaurant.

BEE

Just give me some peace, woman,  
that's all I ask.

The WAITRESS brings him some ice cream for the two boys and takes away their plates. They are both excited. Big Momma keeps right on talking as Van rolls her eyes.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

But that didn't stop Big Momma. She just kept right on talking about the projects. About how some kids got killed and how I was about to be sent to Gilbert Junior High school next year, and how it was the worst school in the entire country.

BIG MOMMA

They're my grandchildren too! You hear? Something has to be done here, 'cause you too busy acting a fool.

Michael notices three Negro BOYS dressed in sport jackets, ties and dress slacks, also eating dinner at another table. They sit with a tall, grey white-haired white woman, MISS STUCKLAND, 60s.

Miss Stuckland wears a high-collar blouse, long grey skirt almost down to her ankles, thick black shoes, and a cameo brooch near her collar. She has her hair all pinned up and appears to be a Quaker.

MICHAEL

Who's that, Big Momma? That lady with those boys?

BIG MOMMA

How do I know? You think I know everybody in Lancaster?

BEE

You know everyone everywhere else!  
I never saw anyone get into anyone  
else's business the way you do.

BIG MOMMA

I own a hair salon. It's my job to  
know everyone's business. That's  
what they're paying me for. To  
listen to their problems.

Van laughs. She continues eating her fried chicken.

VAN

More like solving them, is what you  
think.

BIG MOMMA

You make fun, but mark my words,  
one day you'll be thankful you had  
such a good mother.

VAN

I'm thankful now. I just -- wish  
you'd shut up for five minutes.  
That's all.

Big Momma finally shuts up and eats her steak. A horse and  
buggy passes by the front window with an Amish FAMILY on the  
carriage. Michael looks out the window, along with Adrian --  
watches the family trundle by, dressed in black-and-white.

ADRIAN

Who's that?

MICHAEL

I don't know, Adrian. They sure  
look funny, don't they?

BEE

That's the Amish. The Good Lord  
taught them about how to take care  
of the farm. And they're really  
good at it too.

MICHAEL

The Amish. You sure see a lot of  
strange things when you leave  
Philly, don't you Momma?

VAN

Yes, you do.

The family continues eating as Michael watches Miss Stuckland, sitting with the three Negro boys. She eagerly shows the boys how to use the silverware and their napkins.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Bee stands at the pump, filling up his car tank with gas. Inside the gas station store, Michael, Van and Adrian buy sodas and candy.

INT. GAS STATION - STORE - DAY

The boys eye the candy counter as Adrian points at the Hershey bar.

VAN

You just had ice cream and a burger.

ADRIAN

Please, Momma. It's for the ride home. I will eat it later.

VAN

Okay, but it's going to ruin your supper.

(to Cashier)

We'll take two Hershey bars.

She pays the CASHIER at the counter who hands Michael and Adrian each a large-size Hershey candy bar.

INT. GAS STATION - LADIES ROOM - DAY

Big Momma comes out of the bathroom stall as the toilet flushes behind her. She washes her hands at the sink and fixes her hair in the mirror.

The white-haired woman Miss Stuckland comes out of another stall and washes her hands beside her at the sink.

BIG MOMMA

It's you.

MISS STUCKLAND

Excuse me?

BIG MOMMA

We just saw you at the restaurant. You were sitting with those three Negro boys.

MISS STUCKLAND

(dries hands)

Yes, I was. Those are my sponsor children.

BIG MOMMA

Sponsor what?

MISS STUCKLAND

Sponsor children. They attend Sunnycrest Farm for boys not far from here. It's a school program for boys where they learn about agriculture and -- well, lots of other things.

BIG MOMMA

Those boys, they live around here?

MISS STUCKLAND

For three years they do. But mostly they come from the inner cities. Boys who have no families or are otherwise destitute. We give them a chance to get to see what country life is like and to learn a skill or trade as well as get a proper education.

BIG MOMMA

And how much does all that cost? For those boys to attend this school, that is?

MISS STUCKLAND

It's free.

BIG MOMMA

Free!? How can that be?

MISS STUCKLAND

Why? Do you know of some boys who might be suited for the program?

BIG MOMMA

Why sure I do! I've got two sitting right out there in the car.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Big Momma and Miss Stuckland exit the rest room.

BIG MOMMA

You see, that's my grandson and his younger brother right over there.

Big Momma points the car with Michael and the others.

MISS STUCKLAND

Well, we only take boys of a certain age. And the other requirement is generally that they are destitute.

BIG MOMMA

Destitute?

MISS STUCKLAND

Boys who don't have any permanent homes.

BIG MOMMA

But what about boys who live in the projects? I'm sure you know how bad that is. Especially at Michael's age. When the gangs are --

MISS STUCKLAND

Well, we could make an exception. Here's my card.

Miss Stuckland hands Big Momma her business card with the name of the school on it.

MISS STUCKLAND (CONT'D)

I provide most all of their personal needs, and after school they help with the farm work that provides the food, and also agricultural education that helps them learn more about caring for themselves and the farm.

BIG MOMMA

(eyes business card)

Sounds like a wonderful program. How long does it last? Them living in the country, that is?

MISS STUCKLAND

Three years.

BIG MOMMA

You mean, all year round? They don't even come home for vacations?

MISS STUCKLAND

That's right. You think it over and let me know if you'd care to learn more about it. I have to go. My boys are waiting.

Miss Stuckland waves to the boys in her car and walks over to them.

BIG MOMMA

Thanks for the information. It was nice talking to you --  
(eyes card)  
Miss Stuckland. I'll be in touch.

Miss Stuckland gets into her car with the boys and drives away. Big Momma waves to her. She then approaches the car with her own family.

INT. BEE'S CHEVY - DAY

Michael and Adrian sit in the back seat, eating Hershey candy bars. Van looks up at Big Momma as she gets into the car.

BEE

Who was that you were talking to?

BIG MOMMA

It was the lady in the restaurant.

MICHAEL

What were you talking to her about?

BIG MOMMA

She's going to help us.

VAN

Help us what?

BIG MOMMA

With Michael.

VAN

What about Michael?

BIG MOMMA

(big smile)  
I'll tell you all about it on the way home.

The car starts and pulls away from the gas station.

ACT TWO

INT. BEE'S CHEVY - DAY

Adrian, Michael and Van sit in the back seat as of the car as Big Momma keeps on talking.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

On the way home, we learned all about it. How the school was for boys who were destitute, and how they kept them out of trouble if they lived in the cities. And how it was a three-year program paid for by the Quakers.

VAN

Three years? And you want Michael to go there, and stay year-round, away from his family?

BIG MOMMA

Would you rather him end up working for one of them gangs one day? What's wrong with you? Are you even listening to me? It's all paid for and away from the city. On a farm no less, where they learn all about farming as well as get all their other lessons.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

She went on and on till Momma couldn't listen anymore.

Van covers her ears with her hands and shakes her head. The car continues down the highway.

MICHAEL

But I was fascinated. Living in the country on a farm away from the projects? It sounded like Heaven to me.

Michael stares out at all of the farm. The wind blows on his face as he takes in the sweet smell of the country.

EXT. PHILADELPHIA - DUPLEX - DAY

Miss Stuckland's black car sits parked outside a small, modest duplex in North Philadelphia, in a modest but clean, mostly-black neighborhood.

INT. DUPLEX - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Big Momma serves tea to Miss Stuckland. Van serves sandwiches while Michael and the rest of the family are also present.

MISS STUCKLAND

Thank you, but that wasn't necessary.

BIG MOMMA

It's the least we can do since you drove all this way. This is Michael, my grandson. And his younger brother Adrian. And this is--

VAN

I'm Van, his mother.

They all sit down.

BIG MOMMA

He's a good boy. Has been helping me and his mother, both with baby-sitting and helping out in my beauty shop.

MICHAEL

That's right. I make twelve dollars a week sometimes. I even have a savings account. I've been saving up since I was six, ask Big Momma.

MISS STUCKLAND

Since you were six? That's an awfully long time to be working. What do you plan on doing with all that money some day?

MICHAEL

Spending it on clothes.

The others laugh.

MISS STUCKLAND

Clothes?

MICHAEL

Or having a business one day. I'm not sure which first.

BEE

That's my grandson. Always thinking about the future.

(MORE)

BEE (CONT'D)

He likes to dress sharp, because he gets that from me.

MICHAEL

See my new shoes? I got them today, just 'cause you were coming.

He shows off his new shiny black dress shoes and new socks.

MISS STUCKLAND

Very nice. Indeed.

MICHAEL

Thank you.

MISS STUCKLAND

Of course, living on a farm in Lancaster County means you'd have to be not only doing farm work, but also living away from your family for quite a long time. For three years, exactly. Do you think that's something you'd like to do, Michael?

She sips her tea and looks at Michael.

MICHAEL

They'd still come to visit, couldn't they?

MISS STUCKLAND

Yes, they could. Twice a month, in fact. And you could call them on the weekends also, if you'd like.

MICHAEL

That doesn't sound so bad. Does it, Momma?

Van isn't sure about this. She tries to not get too involved.

VAN

The first thing is, if you get accepted. And then of course, we'd have to see this school and --

BIG MOMMA

Why are you being so difficult? The woman already said he could go.

VAN

Don't rush me, Big Momma. This is a very big decision.

BIG MOMMA

It's either that or he ends up as Gillespie Junior High School! I don't see what is left to even talk about.

MISS STUCKLAND

I understand. It is a big decision. And a big commitment. I think you should all discuss it and get back to me later this week. I will hold his spot open till then. Until I hear from you, that is.

She rises and picks up her pocketbook.

MISS STUCKLAND (CONT'D)

It was very nice meeting you, Michael. I'm glad I had a chance to get to know you a little better. And your interests.

Michael rises.

MICHAEL

No problem.

Michael stares at Miss Stuckland's cameo broach around her neck with the high-collar blouse.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I couldn't take my eyes off her broach. I'd never seen anything like it, or a woman like her before. She was so tall and like made in pearls or something. I wondered how she ever got to be like that, and what made her wear that thing around her collar so high up like that.

Miss Stuckland shakes Michael's hand and smiles.

MISS STUCKLAND

Perhaps we'll meet again. When you have time to come up to the school next week. Would you like that?

MICHAEL

Yes, I would like that.

MISS STUCKLAND

Good.

She walks towards the door.

MISS STUCKLAND (CONT'D)

Thank you for tea and the  
sandwiches. Have a nice day.

BIG MOMMA

Thank you for coming, Miss  
Stuckland. We'll be in touch.

EXT. DUPLEX - DAY

Miss Stuckland walks over to her car, gets in and drives off.  
The Jackson family heads back inside.

ACT THREE

EXT. DOWNTOWN PHILADELPHIA - DAY

Big Momma, Van and Michael walk down the sidewalk in an upscale section of downtown Philadelphia. They pass by several clothing stores. Michael holds his wallet. He looks inside and counts all his money.

BIG MOMMA

Put that wallet away. You want to get mugged out here?

MICHAEL

How many sport coats do I need? I  
And what kind of black shoes --

VAN

Don't you worry about all that.  
Whatever you don't have, Miss  
Stuckland will get it for you.

MICHAEL

But I want to buy my own clothes. I  
saved up all this money, so why  
can't I get what I want? Look,  
Momma. Did you see that? Isn't that  
snazzy?

He stops and sees a sport jacket that is yellow cloth.

BIG MOMMA

Good Lord. He's thinking he's going  
to be a pimping boy now. You can't  
wear that to no farm school! You'll  
get thrown out.

MICHAEL

Is that right?

VAN

Don't listen to her. You get what  
clothes you want. It's your money,  
not hers. And I won't have you  
wearing nothing secondhand or cheap  
neither.

Van gives her mother an annoyed look and enters the shop with Michael.

BIG MOMMA

Are you going to bring that up again? It was six years ago. And I paid a lot of money for that dress!

VAN

It was still secondhand and for my Beauty School graduation. You had no right not buying me something new and you know it!

Big Momma shakes her head and follows them inside.

EXT. LANCASTER COUNTY HIGHWAY - DAY

The family Chevy heads down the highway. Two large suitcases are tied to the hood of the car.

INT. BEE'S CHEVY - DAY

Michael sits in the back seat, nervous. Dressed in a new sport jacket with tie, a white shirt, new grey slacks, and black shiny shoes, he fidgets with a comic book. Van and Adrian sit beside him, Bee and Big Momma in the front seat.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

I was all ready to do it, but suddenly I was having my doubts about all this. How was I going to live way out here, so far away from my family? What if something went wrong or I got lost? Who was going to know about it?

BEE

Are you excited, Michael?

MICHAEL

I guess so.

VAN

You see, he's getting nervous already. And who can blame him? Being away from his family for three whole years. Who even heard of such a thing? Boys belong home, with their mothers. And he --

BIG MOMMA

Stop scaring him so. He's going to be just fine.

(MORE)

BIG MOMMA (CONT'D)

And every two weeks we can come to visit him. Isn't that right, Michael?

MICHAEL

I guess so.

BEE

Sure we will. We'll be up here like clockwork, checking on your progress and giving you hell if you even talk back to any of those people.

BIG MOMMA

You are going to behave now, aren't you Michael?

MICHAEL

Of course I --

BIG MOMMA

That's all we need to know.

VAN

It still seems awfully far.

Van pulls Michael closer and hugs him in her arms.

BIG MOMMA

Stop babying that boy already. He's lucky they are even willing to take him. Did you hear what she said --

Big Momma spots a passing sign.

BIG MOMMA (CONT'D)

Hold on! Wait. You just missed the exit! Turn around.

The car slows down.

BEE

Well how would I know? You're too busy talking and not looking at the map! I never been out here before.

Michael frowns as he looks out at all the farm and cows in the pastures.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

Suddenly I wasn't so sure about this. Maybe I wasn't as ready as I thought I was, or as brave.

The Chevy pulls off the highway and takes the next exit.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The Chevy passes by the sign which reads, "Sunnycrest Farm for Negro Boys", and stops in front of it.

INT. BEE'S CHEVY - DAY

Bee turns around and looks at Michael in the back seat.

BEE

Well, there it is. It don't look so bad, do it?

Michael looks out the window and then sinks back down in the seat.

BIG MOMMA

No it doesn't. Just look at all them school buildings and that big barn up there. We never had nothing like that back in Jacksonville, did we Grandpa?

BEE

No, we sure didn't.

They head up the long dirt road leading to the school.

EXT. SUNNYCREST FARM FOR BOYS - DAY

Bee parks the car near the main building. The Jackson family gets out of the car. Miss Stuckland stands on the porch, talking to some of the STAFF and CHILDREN as she sees the car. She approaches them, followed by some of the boys.

MISS STUCKLAND

You made it. I hope you didn't get lost trying to find your way out here.

BEE

No, but we missed the exit. Had to turn around, but we made it all right.

She looks at Michael, who stands next to his grandfather, Bee. The other Negro BOYS, his own age, watch him.

MISS STUCKLAND

Are you ready to meet your new schoolmates yet, Michael?

MICHAEL

I guess.

VAN

He's feeling a little shy. I guess he's afraid of --

BIG MOMMA

He's not afraid of nothing. He's excited to be here. He's talked of nothing else the entire week long. Ain't you excited, Michael?

MICHAEL

Yeah.

Miss Stuckland sees Michael's shy face. Bee gets his luggage down from the top of the car.

MISS STUCKLAND

Well don't you worry. It takes a few days to settle in for all the boys here. Doesn't it, Wilbert, Zack and Roger?

Michael eyes the other three boys.

WILBERT

Yes, ma'am. It does.

MISS STUCKLAND

Why don't you take his luggage over to the cottage and I'll show him around?

The boys take Michael's suitcases and carry them towards a group of ten cottages over by a field.

MISS STUCKLAND (CONT'D)

I'll give you all a chance to say your goodbyes and then introduce you to your Housemother, Miss Mary. She's going to be looking after you and the other boys, once you get settled into your new cottage. Okay?

Michael nods, even more anxious. Miss Stuckland walks away and talks to some other STAFF as Michael starts to panic.

MICHAEL

Do I have to stay?

BIG MOMMA

What are you talking about? Of course you're going to stay! We went through all this trouble and now --

VAN

Don't talk to him like that. He's scared, is all. And I don't blame him. Who are these --

BEE

Now stop it, the both of you. He's going to be just fine, I know he is.

Bee bends down and looks at Michael.

BEE (CONT'D)

Remember what I told you? About how to treat the ladies around here, and how to --

MICHAEL

I know. Be kind, flatter them and treat them like pearls.

BEE

That's right.

BIG MOMMA

Good Lord. He's not going to date them, is he? He's supposed be a good student, that's all. Give us a kiss now, and don't make such a big deal about all this. Okay? Make Big Momma proud!

She opens her arms. Michael hugs her.

MICHAEL

I'll try, Big Momma.

BIG MOMMA

Yes, you will. And before you know it, we'll be back. Me, Grandpa, Adrian and your Momma. In two weeks' time.

VAN  
 (fixes Michael's tie)  
 You going to be okay till then,  
 honey?

MICHAEL  
 I'll try, Momma.

VAN  
 And if you need anything, you call  
 me right --

BIG MOMMA  
 He can't just call you anytime he  
 wants. She already told you that.  
 He can call on Saturdays at 10 a.m.

VAN  
 Then you call me, first thing  
 Saturday, you hear?

MICHAEL  
 Yes, I will, Momma.

VAN  
 Okay, let's have a kiss then. She  
 looks like she's waiting for you.

Michael kisses them all and watches as they get back into the car. They see Miss Stuckland standing off in the distance, waiting for them to leave.

VAN (CONT'D)  
 It doesn't seem right, her making  
 us leave so fast, does it? I mean,  
 we only just --

BIG MOMMA  
 Stop fussing in front of the boy.  
 Wave goodbye to him and let's get  
 out of here.

They all wave goodbye to Michael and drive off down the road. Michael starts to panic and almost starts to run after the car.

MISS STUCKLAND  
 Michael!

He stops and sees Miss Stuckland coming up behind him. She takes him by the hand.

MISS STUCKLAND (CONT'D)

Come on now. We have a busy day  
ahead. Lots to see and many people  
who are all waiting to meet you.

She pulls him away from the road and back towards the  
building. Michael's eyes tear up as Miss Stuckland leads him  
across the field and towards the small cottages.

ACT FOUR

EXT. SUNNYCREST - DAY

The school is buzzing with activities as the NEGRO BOYS run from the school building, wearing their sport jackets, ties, dress pants and shoes, towards the large dining hall.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

The next several days were like a blur. All I kept thinking about was my family. What had I done to deserve such a fate? Each night in my bunk bed, I cried and tried to hold on till the weekend when I would be allowed to call my mother. I would tell her then, I didn't want to stay here.

INT. SUNNYCREST - DINING HALL - DAY

The BOYS stand in a long line, getting food at the counter. MISS BESSIE, a large black woman with long gray and black braided hair, serves them at the counter. She wears a long skirt, high-collar blouse, and white nurse shoes.

MISS BESSIE

Hi, Michael. How's your day going?

MICHAEL

Okay.

Michael gets his food and sits at a table with several other NEGRO BOYS. They include ZACHARY SMITH, 12, tall and chubby, WILBERT GRAY, 12, short for his age, and ROGER WILLIAM, 12, who wears horn-rimmed glasses. They all eat together at a large table along with other BOYS.

MICHAEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Saturday was nearly here. I couldn't wait. I'd tell my family to come and get me. That I made a mistake in coming here.

MISS MARY, 50s, is a dark-skinned black woman with straight gray hair, also braided, walks up. She looks somewhat American Indian and Negro mixed, and also wears Quaker-style women's clothing.

MISS MARY

How'd you sleep, boys? Rooms and beds okay?

BOYS  
Yes, Miss Mary.

She smiles and walks off to speak to Miss Bessie. The boys eat in silence. Michael barely touches his food. Zack can't seem to get enough of it.

WILBERT  
Where you from, Mike?

MICHAEL  
North Philly.

ROGER  
Why you been crying at night?  
Something bothering you?

Michael looks at Roger, confused. Then at Wilbert.

WILBERT  
Sorry. I guess I told him.

ZACK  
Yeah, what's up with that?

MICHAEL  
Nothing. I just miss my family, is all. Don't you?

The boys look at each other.

ZACK  
Family? If we had one, we wouldn't be here.

MICHAEL  
What do you mean?

ZACK  
Most kids here haven't got one. Or at least not ones who want them anymore.

MICHAEL  
Is that true?

ROGER  
So how'd you end up here? If you got one, that is?

MICHAEL  
I guess they thought I'd be safer.

WILBERT  
Safer than what?

MICHAEL  
The projects. And that new school I was going to. It's one of the worst in the country, from what Big Momma says.

ROGER  
Who's Big Momma?

MICHAEL  
My grandmother.

WILBERT  
I've got a grandmother. Only she's too sick to take care of me anymore. And as for my three sisters, they're too young.

ROGER  
That's tough, Wilbert. Me, I don't even remember mine.  
(continues eating)  
I've been in other people's homes for as long as I can remember.

ZACK  
(to Michael)  
So what's it like having a real family?

Wilbert kicks Zack under the table. He looks at him, annoyed.

ZACK (CONT'D)  
What?

WILBERT  
Leave the kid alone. He's having a hard enough time just getting used to it here.

Zack adjusts his glass and sips his milk.

ZACK  
Join the club. At least they feed us here. The last place I lived, we barely got fed. Six of us and they nearly starved us to death.

Zack enjoys his chicken with mashed potatoes and gravy. He dips his biscuit in the gravy and eats it whole.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

That made me even more upset. Who was I to complain, when these three kids had it even harder.

Michael looks at his plate, not feeling very hungry.

EXT. SUNNYCREST - FARM FIELD - DAY

The BOYS are being taken around the farm by MR. K, 50s. Mr. K wears overalls and a plaid shirt and shows the boys some seeds. He teaches them how to plant corn. The boys are also dressed in jeans, tee-shirts, overalls and other work clothes, as they stand in the Sunnycrest Farm field.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

We were given work chores to do every day after school. Mr. K was in charge of showing us how to plant things. We'd learn how to grow our own food and about how to take care of the farm and all its animals.

MONTAGE

Michael and the other boys are having a ride on the back of Mr. K's tractor. They make rows for new planting of the corn and other vegetables.

The boys learn how to milk the two cows in the barn. They have a hard time getting the hang of it, and laugh as the cow gets mad and stomps at them. The milk gets spilled.

The boys feed the pigs and chickens. Others rake out the barn stalls where the horses and cows are. Zack nearly loses his lunch as he shovels the large cow poop out of the stalls and puts it into a manure cart.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

I was told every other Saturday we'd get the day off. That was either when the families came to visit, or we could spend the day fishing or swimming. They said there was a pond not far from here, where most of the boys went. Especially those who didn't get any visitors.

ACT FIVE

EXT. SUNNYCREST - BOYS' COTTAGE - MORNING

Michael wakes up in his bunk. He sees the sun shining outside the open window. He gets up and looks at the clock. 6 a.m. Wilbert stirs in the bunk below him as Michael climbs down from the top bunk, dressed in his pajamas.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

It was finally Saturday. A few more hours and I could call home.

EXT. SUNNYCREST - BOYS' COTTAGE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Michael heads down the hallway and enters the boy's bathroom.

EXT. SUNNYCREST - DINING HALL - MORNING

The boys are all eating together. They are dressed in their Saturday work clothes.

ZACK

I'm so glad we don't have to work today. What about you, Wilbert? You get those new poles they said we could borrow yet?

WILBERT

Sure. I got them. But I haven't finished making any flies for them yet.

ZACK

What flies?

WILBERT

For fishing. You gotta have bait, don't you? I don't think they got any worms for sale around here.

ROGER

Nobody said anything about having bait. And how do you use a fly, anyway? Won't it break when you put the hook in it?

Wilbert laughs.

WILBERT

It's not a real fly. It's fake! You make it look like a fly, stupid.

ZACK

I gotta see that.

WILBERT

I'll show you after breakfast. We'll make a bunch and have plenty of fish to catch. You'll see.

They look at Wilbert, impressed. They continue eating their breakfast.

INT. SUNNYCREST - BOYS' COTTAGE - DAY ROOM - DAY

They boys stand around watching Wilbert making fake flies for the fishing poles. A few rods are stacked in the corner of the room, along with a net and some other tackle gear.

MICHAEL

I guess I won't be able to go with you.

ROGER

What do you mean?

MICHAEL

I'm calling my family soon. I'm going to ask them to come and get me.

ZACK

Why? You don't want to stay here anymore?

MICHAEL

I guess not.

WILBERT

That's too bad. I was going to show you how to fish. You did bring a bathing suit, didn't you?

MICHAEL

I don't have one.

WILBERT

You don't have a bathing suit? How you expect to go swimming with us today?

MICHAEL

I told you, I can't go. I've got to go call home now. You guys have a good time.

ROGER

You mean you might not be here, when we get back?

MICHAEL

I suppose so.

Miss Mary comes into the room.

MISS MARY

Come on, Michael. You call home now. And after you can go fishing with the other boys.

MICHAEL

I might not still be here.

MISS MARY

What?

Michael walks over to her.

MICHAEL

I'm not sure I belong here.

MISS MARY

Well that's a funny thing to say. I guess it's a little hard adjusting, but you'll feel better once you call home, I'm sure.

He walks out of the day room with Miss Mary. The other boys look on.

ZACK

Lucky kid.

WILBER

What's so lucky about him? Did you ever meet his family before?

ZACK

No.

WILBERT

Then how do you know they're nice? They could be murderers for all you know.

ZACK

You're nuts. Say, what is that you're using for that fly there?

WILBERT

Cowhide. And some feathers.

ROGER

Where'd you get that from?

WILBERT

I collect the stuff. Find it all sorts of places and put it in my chest. See?

He opens a chest showing all sorts of disgusting things -- dead mice, spiders, butterfly wings, rawhide, and bird feathers.

ROGER

That's what fish like eating?

WILBERT

You bet they do!

(closes chest)

Now hold this. I'm going to need some more wire too.

Zack hands him more wire as Wilbert finishes making the fake fly. He holds it up as the other boys look at it, amazed.

INT. SUNNYCREST - MAIN OFFICE BLDG. - DAY

Michael is on the phone, talking to his mother. Miss Mary stands in the hallway, talking to the two male counselors, MR. HARPER, and MR. RIVERS, 30s. They are both dressed in collegian-style casual clothes.

Michael on the phone, nearly in tears.

MICHAEL

But I don't want to stay. Please say you'll come and get me. I don't belong here.

VAN (V.O.)

After all we've done to get Miss Stuckland to take you? Why would you even be saying that? Have they been bad to you?

MICHAEL

No. I just don't like it here. I want to come home.

VAN (V.O.)

Has anybody hurt you or said bad things to you?

MICHAEL

No.

VAN (V.O.)

Then what is it?

MICHAEL

I just don't like it here. I'd rather be with you and Adrian. I don't care about living in the projects anymore. I just want to come home.

VAN (V.O.)

Now Michael, you get a hold of yourself now.

INT. PROJECTS - APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Van is in the kitchen as Adrian eats at the table.

VAN

We'll be up there next weekend, and we can talk about it then.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

But I don't want to stay here till then. I want you to come and get me today, right now. You and Big Momma.

VAN

Big Momma's working today, and so is Grandpa. We don't have the right to just come up any time we want, and you already know that. We can only come on visiting day, and that isn't till next Saturday.

INT. SUNNYCREST - MAIN OFFICE BLDG. - DAY

Michael is still on the phone, wiping his face on his sleeve.

MICHAEL

But it's not fair. I made a mistake, Momma. You've gotta come today!

VAN (V.O.)

Now stop that. You be a brave boy and stop fretting so much about nothing. Really, Michael, I'm surprised at you. For weeks now you've been saying nothing but how much you wanted to go, and now this. What happened to all your talk about hating the projects and wanting to live in the country?

MICHAEL

I guess I didn't think it through so much till I got here.

VAN (V.O.)

Isn't there anything at all you like about that school?

MICHAEL

Some things, sure. The farming's okay. And the pigs and --

VAN (V.O.)

Now you see. I think this is just a case of your not being used to being away. Either way, you'll have to wait it out another week, and we can talk about it then, when we get up there.

MICHAEL

Okay, Momma. I'll try.

VAN (V.O.)

Good. Now stop all your worrying. We'll see you next weekend, okay?

MICHAEL

Yes, Momma.

Michael hangs up the phone. He wipes his eyes as Miss Mary approaches.

MISS MARY

Everything okay?

Michael nods, not very convincingly.

MISS MARY (CONT'D)

Good. Now get back to the cottage  
before the boys leave without you.  
You don't want to miss fishing with  
them, now do you?

Michael hangs his head down and slowly exits the building.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The four boys walk off down a long, tranquil dirt road.

ZACK

So I guess you're stuck with us  
now? Ain't you?

MICHAEL

For another week, I guess.

WILBERT

That ain't so bad. We can teach you  
things you can take back to the  
projects with you.

MICHAEL

Things like what?

WILBERT

Like fishing and swimming and  
stuff. You even been fishing or  
swimming in a pond before?

MICHAEL

No.

ROGER

Me either. Where is this pond,  
anyway? We've been walking for  
miles already and all I see is  
trees.

ZACK

Not much further. Did you bring  
your sandwiches with you? I'm  
getting hungry.

WILBERT

You're always hungry.

A deer darts by, followed by her two young fawns. The boys  
stop, spotting it dashing into the trees, with its babies.  
They exchange looks.

ROGER

Did you see that? It was a deer  
with babies.

WILBERT

They're called fawns.

ZACK

Too bad. We should have brought a  
gun.

Roger's eyes widen.

ROGER

You want to shoot 'em?

ZACK

I'm kidding. You guys are nuts, you  
know that?

They continue down the road and turn the corner. They stop,  
spotting the large pond in the distance with rocks and cliffs  
around it.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Holy crap! That is awesome!

WILBERT

Last one in is a dead man.

Wilbert runs up to the pond, dropping the fishing poles and  
tackle gear. He climbs onto rocks and grabs a long rope that  
hangs down from a tree.

ZACK

Is that the rope they told us  
about? For diving into the middle?

WILBERT

Sure looks like it. I'm going in  
first.

ROGER

Hey! I thought we were going  
fishing first?

WILBERT

We can fish later. I'm hot and want  
to get some swimming in!

The boys take off their clothes, revealing swim trunks  
underneath. They grab the rope and jump into the pond.  
Everyone jumps in except Michael.

ZACK

Well come on. What are you waiting for? The water's great!

They swim around as Michael stands on the rocks, nervously watching them.

WILBERT

Take off your clothes and come in!

MICHAEL

I told you, I don't have any swim clothes. I don't own any.

ZACK

Then use your underwear. Nobody cares. Or go naked if you want to.

Michael looks around and takes off his clothes. He stands in his underwear and grabs the rope.

MICHAEL

You're going to catch me, aren't you? If I go in too far?

ROGER

What's he talking about? Why would we have to catch him?

ZACK

Just come on in! Stop being a baby about it.

WILBERT

Just jump! We're all waiting for you!

Michael steps back and swings away on the rope. He lets go and lands in the water near the other boys with a large splash.

ROGER

That's a killer. Where'd he go?

WILBERT

Stop being a turd. Give the boy some room to swim in.

Michael suddenly surfaces, feeling out of depth. He flaps his hands and feet around, spitting out some water.

MICHAEL

God! It's too deep. I can't feel the bottom. I --

He goes down in the water again.

ROGER  
Where'd he go?

WILBERT  
Yeah, what's up with that? Why  
isn't he swimming with us?

ZACK  
Are you sure he knows how to swim?

WILBERT  
Well why else would he dive in if  
he --

Michael comes up again, gasping for air.

MICHAEL  
Help! Help me! I can't --

He goes under again.

WILBERT  
Holy crap! You're right. He can't  
swim!

ROGER  
Well somebody do something.

ZACK  
Dive! You have to dive! Someone  
look for him!

Wilbert dives into the water. Michael emerges again, flapping  
his hands.

MICHAEL  
Help!

ZACK  
Hold on! We're coming for you!

They all swim towards Michael as Michael goes down again. The  
boys each dive for him. They surface again with no luck.  
Wilbert comes up and sees Roger and Zack beside him.

WILBERT  
Well, where is he?

ROGER  
I don't know! Maybe we should get  
the police or something?

WILBERT  
He'll be dead by then!

Wilbert dives again as the other boys dive as well. Roger and Zack come up again, empty-handed. Finally Wilbert surfaces, holding onto Michael. Michael isn't breathing.

ZACK  
You got him! Is he all right?

ROGER  
Is he all right?

WILBERT  
He isn't breathing!

The boys get him to the shore. They lift him out of the water and place Michael on the rocks. Wilbert looks at him and pounds on his chest.

ZACK  
What are you doing!?

WILBERT  
I don't know. I saw it in a movie once.

ROGER  
Aren't you supposed to breathe into his mouth?

ZACK  
What do you mean, like kiss him?!

ROGER  
Get away from there. Let me try!

Wilbert doesn't skip a beat. He breathes air into Michael's mouth and pounds on his chest again. Suddenly Michael COUGHS up the pond water and starts to breathe again. The boys are relieved as Michael finally opens his eyes again.

WILBERT  
Holy crap! He scared the livin' shit out of me.

Wilbert leans back, clearly shaken. Michael sits up, still weak and disoriented.

MICHAEL  
What happened?

ZACK

You nearly died on us, that's what!  
Why the hell didn't you tell us you  
can't swim?

MICHAEL

I thought you knew. I told you to  
catch me, remember?

ROGER

All right, that's it. From now on,  
nobody does anything around here  
unless we know they've done it  
before. Okay?

MICHAEL

Okay. I'm sorry. I didn't mean  
to... scare you or nothing.

Wilbert rises.

WILBERT

Let's just forget about it for now.  
And whatever you do, don't tell  
anybody back at the farm what  
happened here.

ROGER

Why not?

WILBERT

They'll never let us come back  
here.

ZACK

Wilbert's right. This will have to  
be our secret? Right? What do you  
say, Michael? You in?

Michael nods as he stands up.

MICHAEL

I'm in.

WILBERT

Good. Now let's do some fishing.  
There ain't no way in hell any of  
us is going back into that pond  
today.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to ruin  
your day or nothing.

WILBERT

Let's not talk about it.

They all put on their clothes again and grab their gear and fishing poles.

MICHAEL

Oh, by the way. I never fished before either. Is that going to be a problem?

They all look at Michael, then burst out laughing.

ZACK

He's plum crazy!

ROGER

That's not going to be a problem!

MICHAEL

It ain't?

WILBERT

Hell no! A dumb old fish ain't about to kill ya!

They continue laughing and walk down the dirt road together.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

That's when I learned having friends wasn't such a bad deal after all. Especially Wilbert, who not only saved my life, but was about to become my newest and smartest best friend.

Michael eyes Wilbert as he talks on and smiles.

ACT SIX

EXT. SUNNYCREST - DAY

Michael, Wilbert, Roger and Zack, dressed in their sport jackets and dress clothes, stand by a tree near the cottages. They are surrounded by several OLDER NEGRO BOYS.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

The next day, we met some of the older boys on the way back to our cottage to get changed for work duty.

An older boy, LYNCH, 14, light-skinned with freckles, shoves ALEX, 13, towards Wilbert.

LYNCH

Go ahead. Fight him. I say you can't take him, and I'm willing to bet five bucks on it!

ZACK

Do your own fighting, Lynch. Nobody's asking Wilbert to fight him for you.

LYNCH

Oh, yeah? How about I see you fight him! He's too short for me to fight! What's the matter, you too afraid to fight him?

Lynch now shoves Zack towards Alex.

ROGER

You want to get us in trouble? Miss Mary's going to hear all about this!

LYNCH

Not if we meet in the corn fields.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

That's the first time any of us heard about it. The "corn fields", where kids go to fight without the school staff knowing about it.

WILBERT

Fine. Let's go! I'll beat the tar out of him, just to shut you up once and for all.

Wilbert looks at Alex, who is taller than him.

WILBERT (CONT'D)  
I'll meet you both out back, as  
soon as I change my clothes.

Wilbert storms off towards the cottages. Michael and the other boys follow after him. Lynch smiles.

ALEX  
Why you making me fight him? Why  
can't you do your own fighting,  
asshole!?

LYNCH  
Shut up! You want me to kick your  
ass too?

Alex shuts up and frowns.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Roger, Wilbert, Michael, and Zack walk down the dirt road, followed by Lynch, Alex and a few of the OLDER BOYS.

ROGER  
(to Wilbert)  
You really going to fight him?

WILBERT  
I'm tired of that Lynch kid. I'm  
going to show him I'm not gonna  
take his crap. Not his or those  
other kids.

ZACK  
But aren't you afraid? That kid's  
taller than you!

WILBERT  
He's his friend, ain't he?

ROGER  
But he's older than you are. Maybe --

WILBERT  
Hell no! I've taken kids bigger  
than him before. Hell, I'll fight  
the whole bunch of them. I kill 'em  
if I have to.

The boys stop, even more impressed by this. They follow Wilbert and the others into the corn fields.

EXT. CORN FIELDS - MOMENTS LATER

The boys are standing in a cleared area where all the corn stalks are broken down to form a circle. The surrounding corn stalks are so tall they hide the circle from prying eyes.

Lynch pushes Alex towards Wilbert again.

LYNCH

Go on! What you waiting for? Show him who's boss, the stupid punk.

Wilbert and Alex eye each other. They stand in the middle of the circle and start fighting. Michael and Roger watch, feeling helpless as Zack enjoys the excitement. A few of the older BOYS look on, smiling.

ZACK

Go on, Wilbert! Knock his teeth out! I dare you.

ROGER

Shut up, Zack. Leave 'em alone.

Wilbert takes several jabs at Alex and misses. Alex gets the better of him and lands a blow to his face. The fight escalates and gets increasingly dirty. Alex kicks Wilbert with his feet, trying to trip him onto the ground. But Wilbert's not having any of it.

WILBERT

Dirty fighter. That's what you are!

ROGER

(to Michael)

Do something, Mike. Talk 'em out of it, before someone gets hurt.

ZACK

Of course someone's gonna get hurt. That's what we're here for, ain't it?

MICHAEL

Why you asking me to stop it? I can't do nothing about it. I've never even been in a fight.

LYNCH

Sissies, all of you! What kind of place you babies come from? Some kindergarten?

The older boys laugh as Wilbert lands a blow, sending Alex back, reeling.

ZACK

Atta boy, Wilbert! Show him who's boss!

Zack coaches Wilbert as Wilbert makes another jab at Alex's face. He hits Alex on the nose before he can duck. He lands another one as Alex gets his feet tangled in the corn stalk stubs and nearly falls. Lynch grabs him and throws him back at Wilbert.

LYNCH

What's taking so long? Get him now and get this done with!

The boys hit each other, both now with bruises and bloody faces. They grab each other and start to wrestle. Getting more tired, they land on the ground.

After a struggle around the ground, Wilbert finally pins Alex down and gets on top of him. Alex can't move as Wilbert twists his arm. Alex yells in pain.

ALEX

Stop it! Get off me.

LYNCH

Get up, Alex! Get the hell up and fight him now!

Alex struggles but can't win. Wilbert finally shoves Alex's face in the dirt. Michael hears a SHUFFLING NOISE behind him and turns around.

He sees a group of AMISH BOYS, 11-13, in the corn stalks watching the fight. They see Michael's face as Roger turns around. They instantly run off, into the corn stalks.

ROGER

Who was that?

MICHAEL

I don't know.

Alex screams in pain as Wilbert keeps his face in the dirt. He continues to twist his arm.

WILBERT

You give up, or don't you?

ALEX

Yeah.

WILBERT

What? I didn't hear you!

ALEX

I said yes! Yes I give up!

Wilbert gets off Alex. He wipes the dirt off his pants as Lynch and the older boys look on, pissed as hell. Alex rises and wipes his bloody face with his hands. Zack runs up to Wilbert and hugs him.

ZACK

You did it. You beat the crap out of that little shit.

Wilbert pushes Zack off him and walks off.

ZACK (CONT'D)

Hey, where you going?

WILBERT

Leave me alone.

Wilbert storms off, headed back towards the farm as Michael and Roger head after him. Zack looks back at Lynch, gloating, and chases after to catch up with them. Lynch grabs Alex and shakes him silly.

LYNCH

What the hell's wrong with you? Who the hell taught you to fight?

ALEX

You did!

Lynch walks off, humiliated.

LYNCH

Get the hell away from us. I never want to see you again!

ALEX

What are you talking about? I didn't even want to fight him!

LYNCH

You're no longer part of this gang.

The older boys head down the dirt road, walking behind Wilbert, Michael, Roger and Zack, as all head back towards the farm. Alex is far behind them all, limping and bloody as hell. Michael looks back at Alex, feeling bad for him. They pass by some tall corn stalks -- the Amish boys, hiding inside, peer out.

ACT SEVEN

INT. SUNNYCREST - BOYS' COTTAGE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Michael is in his top bunk. Wilbert is in the bunk below with a few bruises on his face. They are both dressed for bed. Wilbert has a pack of ice in his hand and holds it over his right cheek.

MICHAEL

Were you scared?

WILBERT

I dealt with kids like that before. The only thing you can do is not show you're afraid. Otherwise, they already know they got you and never leave you alone.

MICHAEL

I wish I was as brave as you are.

WILBERT

It's not brave. It's --

MISS MARY (O.S.)

Everyone in bed?

BOYS

All in bed, Miss Mary.

MISS MARY (O.S.)

Good night, boys. Lights out.

The lights go out in the cottage. Wilbert lies down, yawns.

WILBERT

Tomorrow's Saturday. I guess that means you're leaving, right? As soon as your family gets up here?

MICHAEL

I guess it's not been a bad first two week. I learned a lot. From you, Mr. K and the rest. And especially from you Wilbert. You taught me --

Michael hears Wilbert SNORE. He peers down over the side of the bunk and sees Wilbert now fast asleep. Michael leans back in his bed, worried.

MICHAEL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

That was when it hit me. I was going to miss being here. But there was no going back now. My family was coming to get me. And I already made a huge stink about leaving. But I was sure going to miss old Wilbert.

The moonlight shining in from the window. Michael looks up at the full moon surrounded by moonlight clouds. Sadly, he shakes his head and sighs.

INT. SUNNYCREST - RED BARN - EARLY MORNING

Michael, Wilbert, Zack and Roger are in the red barn hiding behind the tall haystacks. Wilbert lights up a cigarette and takes a puff. He hands it to Zack, who takes a puff. Zack hands it to Roger, who passes.

ROGER

I don't want it. Give it to Michael.

MICHAEL

I don't want it.

ZACK

What's the matter? Ain't you never had a cigarette before? You being from the projects?

MICHAEL

No. I don't even like smoke.

WILBERT

Give it to me then.

Wilbert takes a puff and exhales, like a real pro.

ROGER

Where'd you get it, anyway?

WILBERT

I stole it.

ROGER

You stole it? From who?

WILBERT

Mr. Rivers. He left the pack in the day room and I forgot to give them back.

Mr. K comes into the barn as the boys freak out. He opens the doors wide as Wilbert puts out the cigarette and hides the pack. Michael and the other boys come out from behind the corn stalks, looking guilty.

MR. K

What are you guys up to?

ZACK

Nothing, Mr. K. Just come to check on the cows.

MR. K

You've come to check on the cows, and it's your day off? That don't sound right.

They look at him, guilty as they walk past him and head for the doors. Michael hears a car HORN HONK and sees it's his grandfather's car heading up the dirt road and approaching the main building.

MICHAEL

They're here! It's my grandfather's car!

He runs out of the barn as the other boys follow him.

MR. K

You guys stay out of trouble today, you hear?

ROGER

Yes, Mr. K. We're going fishing.

MR. K

Is that right?

The boys nod and walk off.

EXT. SUNNYCREST - PICNIC AREA - EARLY MORNING

Michael runs up to the car as the other boys watch. Michael's family gets out of the car -- Big Momma, Van, Adrian, and Bee. They all give Michael a big hug.

ROGER

Gee. I guess he really does have a family.

WILBERT

Who cares? Let's get our poles and do some fishing.

They boys walk past the main building and picnic area and head over to the cottages.

ROGER

Shouldn't we wave goodbye to him?  
He might not be here when we get back.

ZACK

No. He didn't say goodbye to us, did he? He doesn't even like this place.

ROGER

Still, he is a nice guy, though.

WILBERT

Yeah, he's nice all right. Good luck to him, is what I say.

The boys enter the cottages. Roger stands on the porch, looking back at Michael with his family. They take out baskets of food and put them on the picnic table. Roger sees them all talking and happy together. He enters the cottage.

EXT. SUNNYCREST - PICNIC AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Michael sits at the picnic table with his family as they share sandwiches and sodas.

MICHAEL

Sure we did. We planted corn, milked cows, and I even learned how to swim.

BEE

Who taught you how to do that?

MICHAEL

Wilbert did. He's taught me a lot since I got here. And Mr. K, too. They've all been nice.

BIG MOMMA

And you still want to come home?

MICHAEL

Well, maybe I -- yes, yes, I do want to come home. Three years is too long to be here. And I can only see you every few weeks.

BIG MOMMA

Miss Stuckland's going to be very upset to hear about that. After all she did to get you in here. What am I going to say to her, that you don't even like being here? What?

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, Big Momma. You'll just have to think of something.

Michael eats his sandwich and smiles.

BIG MOMMA

And all this money she's paying too, to be your sponsor. It just doesn't seem right.

VAN

Let the boy eat his meal, and we'll talk about it later.

MICHAEL

You are taking me home with you today, aren't you? You're not going to leave me here for another whole week, just so you can --

ROGER (O.S.)

Hey, Mike! See you around! It was nice meeting you and all.

Michael turns around and sees -- Zack, Wilbert and Roger come out of the cottage, holding their fishing poles, tackle gear, swim towels and lunches. Miss Mary stands next to them, on the porch.

BIG MOMMA

Who's that?

MICHAEL

Those are my friends. Roger, Zack and Wilbert. He's the one I bunk with.

BEE

Why don't you have them come over and say hello? I'd like to meet some of your friends.

MICHAEL

You would? Okay, I'll ask.

Michael gets up and runs over to the boys.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Hey guys. Why don't you come over and say hello to my family. They'd like to meet you.

WILBERT

What for? You're leaving today, ain't you?

MICHAEL

I don't know yet.

He looks at Miss Mary, who appears upset by this. She heads back into the house.

ZACK

There's no sense in us meeting them, if you're going home today, is there?

MICHAEL

I guess not.

ROGER

Then you are leaving, right?

MICHAEL

Look, just say hello to them. It'd only take a --

Bee walks over to Michael and the boy.

BEE

Hey there, boys. Would you like to join us for a few sandwiches? We brought extra?

ZACK

No thanks. We got our lunches right here.

He holds up the bag. Big Momma approaches, followed by Van and Adrian.

VAN

Where you off to? Fishing?

MICHAEL

Show her the flies, Wilbert. He makes these flies all by himself. Out of bones, and mice tails and all kinds of stuff. Show him, Wilbert.

Wilbert opens his box and shows them the flies he's made. Bee looks at them, very impressed.

BEE

That is impressive. I guess you catch a lot of fish with that. Don't you?

WILBERT

Tons. Miss Bessie's even going to cook them. Once they get cleaned and all.

VAN

Who's Miss Bessie?

MICHAEL

Our cook. She cooks everything. Rabbits, possum, squirrel, pheasant. All sorts of stuff. Right, guys?

They guys look at Michael, slightly hurt.

WILBERT

We oughta get going. It's a long walk to the pond and we have to get back by --

BIG MOMMA

I got an idea. Why not come with us for a ride instead?

WILBERT

What?

BIG MOMMA

Sure. We'll take you guys all out to town for some ice cream, and then drop you off at this pond. How's that?

ZACK

Is that right? For ice cream!?

Miss Mary comes back out on the porch, and hands Zack his towel.

MISS MARY

You forgot your swim towel again, Zack.

ZACK

Miss Mary, can we go in town for ice cream with Michael and his family? Can we!?

She looks at Michael and his family.

MISS MARY

I suppose so. But what about your day of fishing?

ZACK

We can do that when we get back.

BEE

We'll be sure to drop them off, if it helps any. Where is this pond anyway? I'd like to see it myself, actually.

MISS MARY

It's about a mile or two down this road here. You can also reach it if you take a right off Mainland Road. Which is headed back to town.

BIG MOMMA

Sounds good to me. What do you say, boys? You want to get some ice cream?

ROGER AND ZACK

We sure do!

MISS MARY

Is that okay with you, Michael?

Michael looks at Wilbert, who looks away.

MICHAEL

Are you coming too, Wilbert?

WILBERT

I guess so. If we get a ride to the pond still.

MICHAEL

Then let's go!

Michael looks at the boys, excited. They all walk off with their fishing gear and head over to Bee's parked car. He opens the trunk at they put their tackle inside.

The all get into the car. The boys' poles stick out of the rear open windows. Michael gets into the front seat with his family. He turns around and looks at the boys, excited to see them all in the car. Bee gets into the front of the car and starts up the engine.

BEE

Everyone have enough room?

ZACK/ROGER/WILBERT

Yep! We're fine! What about you?

BIG MOMMA

We're fine too. Let's go.

The car drives off down the dirt road. Miss Mary watches it leave as she waves to the boys the cottage. Michael sees her and waves back.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

I knew then I wasn't going to be leaving Sunnycrest Farm after all. I didn't even want to tell Big Momma or Grandpa anymore about what happened to me the last two weeks. Not about my nearly drowning or the corn fields or about my finally standing up for myself.

Michael eyes Wilbert, and his other new friends and smiles.

MICHAEL (V.O.)

None of it seemed to matter anymore. I was getting used to this strange new world, and that was all that mattered now.

Michael stares out the window as the wind blows on his face. The Chevy disappears down the long dirt road, passing by the corn fields and barns. It disappears from view as we pan up to the bright blue sky, filled with gorgeous white clouds.

FADE OUT.