

127356

THE
SPECTACULAR
NOW

by

Scott Neustadter

&

Michael H. Weber

Based on the novel by Tim Tharp

Second Draft
August 24, 2010

OVER BLACK, we hear a teenage voice:

VOICE (O.S.)

"Question number two. Describe a challenge, hardship or misfortune you have experienced in your life.

FADE IN:

EXTREME CLOSE UP on a single BEAD OF SWEAT. The skin it belongs to is out of focus.

VOICE (O.S.)

What have you learned from this and how has it prepared you for the future?"

The lone bead of sweat begins its slow descent.

RACK FOCUS on the bead of sweat to REVEAL the "skin" is actually a beer bottle.

And then we SLOWLY PULL BACK to show who the voice and beer belong to: SUTTER KEELY, 18, boyishly handsome, killer smile. He takes a swig of the beer, staring at a college application on his computer.

As he thinks about the answer, we get a glimpse of Sutter's room. A small desk. A twin bed. Clothes on the floor. Decorations include a baseball pennant from some minor league team and a framed photo of the Rat Pack.

BACK ON Sutter, staring down the application. An idea comes to him. He starts to type.

SUTTER (V.O.)

"Dear... Dean of Admissions... My name is Sutter Keely and up until yesterday I had the best fucking girlfriend in the world."

INT CASSIDY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

CASSIDY (18, Scandinavian blonde, pure soft skin, hot) takes off her shirt, revealing her voluptuous body. She's on top of Sutter, who lies on his back on the floor. Sutter looks up at her, can't believe how lucky he is.

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - SAME

Sutter types.

SUTTER'S VOICE

I know I probably shouldn't say "fuck" right there but I'm sorry, I have to.

INT CASSIDY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Naked, Cassidy grinds on Sutter. Getting into it. Her eyes are closed. She's in control.

SUTTER'S VOICE

She's tremendous. High definition. And so damn beautifully fat. Like, in a good way. You know what I mean? Immaculate proportions. I dated Cassidy two months longer than anyone else. It was magic.

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - SAME

Sutter stops typing. Takes another drink. Mulls something over.

SUTTER (V.O.)

Shit. I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's start at the beginning.

EXT CONVENIENCE STORE PARKING LOT - MORNING

Sutter pulls into the parking lot of a suburban strip mall off the highway. There's a vast openness in every direction. The horizon unsettlingly far away.

SUTTER (V.O.)

Like all great stories, mine begins with a breakfast burrito...

Sutter gets out of his car and notices, in front of the store, a YOUNG KID (8), hands in his pockets, kicking a rock.

SUTTER

Hey little man, you ok?

(no answer)

Shouldn't you be in school or something?

The Kid shrugs. Sutter nods to him as he walks:

INT CONVENIENCE STORE - SAME

Sutter goes to the soft drink counter and pours himself a Big Gulp of 7UP. The Kid follows him inside. As the Clerk rings Sutter up, the Kid sheepishly tugs on his shirt.

YOUNG KID

Can I borrow a dollar?

SUTTER

What do you need a dollar for?

YOUNG KID

Three Musketeers.

SUTTER
How bout a tasty breakfast burrito? On
me.

YOUNG KID
And a Three Musketeers?

SUTTER
(laughs; to the Clerk)
You heard him.

EXT CONVENIENCE STORE - MINUTES LATER

Sutter and the Kid exit the store. Sutter has his Big Gulp. Kid has his breakfast. Sutter is about to walk away when he realizes -- this Kid isn't going anywhere.

SUTTER (V.O.)
Granted I was late to pick up Cass for school. But I couldn't just leave him on the side of the road, could I?

INT SUTTER'S CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Sutter drives and Walter sits next to him. Barren branches on the tree-lined streets.

SUTTER
So where to my good man?

WALTER
Florida.

SUTTER
(surprised)
Florida?

WALTER
I'm going to see my Dad.

This effects Sutter, who turns to look at the Kid.

SUTTER
What's, uh, what's he doing there?

WALTER
He was fighting a lot. With my Mom. She made him leave us.

SUTTER
No shit, dude! High five!
(off his confused look)
Same thing happened to me and my sister!

WALTER
Really?

SUTTER

Mm-hmm. I was 8 or 9. Just like you. My Dad was the best...

Sutter takes a drink from his Big Gulp. His heart breaking for this kid.

SUTTER

You're really going, huh?

Walter nods.

SUTTER

Well good for you, kid. I think that's very brave.

(beat)

Got any money?

(he doesn't)

Cash? Credit cards...? Nothing like that? You know Florida's pretty far, right?

What if you get hungry?

(he shrugs)

Well you're gonna need food, aren't you?

WALTER

I could hunt it.

SUTTER

Ha. That's true. You could hunt it. You got a gun? Knife? Fishing rod, at least...?

WALTER

I have a baseball bat.

SUTTER

That could work! Where's your bat?

WALTER

It's at home.

SUTTER

Hmm. You know what I think? I think maybe we should go get your bat.

WALTER

But we can't. My mom is there.

SUTTER

What if I talk to her? Explain the situation.

WALTER

I don't know...

SUTTER

Hey, you're with the Suttermen.
 (takes a big drink)
 Don't you worry bout a thing.

EXT WALTER'S HOUSE - LATER

Sutter knocks. WALTER'S MOM (late 20s, pretty) opens it.

WALTER'S MOM

Walter!? What are you doing out of
 school?

SUTTER

Pardon me, ma'am, but, uh, Walter's sort
 of upset.

The Woman looks at Walter who looks away. At which point
 she looks at the Big Gulp, then back up at Sutter.

WALTER'S MOM

Who are you?

SUTTER

My name's Sutter Keely. I found him over
 at the 7/11.

WALTER'S MOM

(beat; smells something)

Have you been drinking?

SUTTER

Uh, no ma'am.

(already backing away)

Just thought you might like your kid
 back, that's all. I'm gonna go now.

And once at his car:

SUTTER

By the way... you are just stunning to
 look at.

The Woman eyes Sutter one last beat, then walks inside,
 angrily slamming the door behind her. Sutter shakes his
 head -- the nerve of some people -- gets in his car.

SUTTER (V.O.)

Moms... what can I tell ya?

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - AGAIN

ANGLE ON a framed picture by his bedside, showing Sutter
 (5) on the shoulders of a HANDSOME MAN, his father.

Back on Sutter, at his desk, as he continues typing:

SUTTER (V.O.)

I enjoy a drink from time to time. For me, it's like a hobby.

EXT HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - MORNING

Sutter parks his Mitsubishi Lancer. He takes a swig from a flask before walking into school.

SUTTER (V.O.)

A pleasant diversion from all the annoying responsibilities that come with being a kid.

EXT HIGH SCHOOL - GYM CLASS - DAY

The class runs laps around the track. We see Sutter in the middle of the pack running backwards, smiling. Kids crack up at his antics.

SUTTER (V.O.)

Gym class.

INT SUTTER'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Sutter's family sits at the table. Mom MARY, sister HOLLY, Holly's husband JOE. The family says "Grace" and with their eyes closed, Sutter seizes the opportunity for a quick drink.

SUTTER

Xmas Dinner with my family.

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - AGAIN

SUTTER

This essay.

Sutter takes another sip. Continues.

EXT HOUSE PARTY - NIGHT

Sutter reveals, from beneath his T-shirt, a keg tap. PARTYGOERS cheer and applaud. Sutter is the man.

SUTTER (V.O.)

People talk about the dangers of drinking, how harmful it is... Nobody talks about the good stuff. How great it feels. How much fun it can be.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Sutter does shots with friends, including Cassidy.

- Sutter standing up on a couch leading the room in a song.

- Sutter diving into a pool fully clothed. Partygoers follow him in. Over which we hear:

SUTTER (V.O.)

When I'm drinking, it's like I can see another dimension to the world. Words and ideas I never knew I had come flying out of me. I'm funny, compassionate, in love with everything.

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - AGAIN

Sutter typing.

SUTTER (V.O.)

Besides, it's not like I'm some toothless derelict drinking by himself late at night. I'm 18. This is what I'm supposed to be doing.

Sutter takes another swig. Confident now. He continues:

EXT CASSIDY'S HOUSE - DAY

Sutter knocks on the door. No answer. He can hear loud, angry music blaring from inside.

SUTTER (V.O.)

So meanwhile, thanks to Walter, I'm late to pick my girlfriend up for school.

Sutter calls for her. Nothing. Knocks again. Still nothing.

SUTTER

Shit.

Sutter walks around back. He sizes up the large tree next to the house. Takes a sip from his cup.

QUICK JUMP CUTS of SUTTER:

- climbing the tree, Big Gulp in hand
- leaping to the roof, Big Gulp in his teeth
- lunging for the Big Gulp and losing his grip on the roof
- hanging from the gutter when Cassidy appears at the window:

CASSIDY

Sutter?!

SUTTER

Hey gorgeous.

CASSIDY
What are you -- ?

The gutter rips from the side of the house, taking Sutter down with it. He lands hard on his tailbone with a yelp. Cassidy stands over him, arms crossed, livid.

INT CASSIDY'S LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Sutter sits on the couch, rubbing his injuries. Cassidy paces as she reprimands Sutter.

CASSIDY
Do you even remember what we talked about?

SUTTER
(no idea)
Of... course I do.

SUTTER'S VOICE
I had absolutely no idea what she's talking about.

Cassidy's lips move as she continues her rant but all we hear is:

SUTTER'S VOICE
She's always saying something or other and I try to listen, honest to God, but I mean... look at her.

CASSIDY
Cause it's the last time I'm gonna say it.

SUTTER
I...m with you. 100 percent.

CASSIDY
Promise?

SUTTER
Cross my heart, hope to die.
(beat)
Now how bout a kiss?

Cassidy tries to stay mad at Sutter but it's virtually impossible. He throws her that smile and her resolve crumbles. They quickly undress and start getting into it. Sutter looks up at her. Can't believe how lucky he is.

SUTTER (V.O.)
What can I say, I'm a romantic. I am in love with the feminine species. It's a shame you only get to pick one, but since that's the rule, I was very grateful for the one I had.

EXT LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Home of the Plainsmen.

SUTTER (V.O.)
Well the next day, it all went to shit.

A bell rings, signaling the end of the day. Kids spill out of the building and head in all directions.

SUTTER (V.O.)
You remember high school. Everyone's got their thing.

ANGLE ON a tough-looking jock with a varsity jacket.

SUTTER (V.O.)
Denver Quigley, his thing is sports.

ANGLE ON a long-haired kid in a back Jim Morrison shirt.

SUTTER (V.O.)
Josh Green. Biggest Doors fan in the state.

ANGLE ON Sutter, who stands by the entrance with his best friend RICKY (18, undersized, Indian-American). Sutter points to a girl. Ricky shakes his head no.

SUTTER (V.O.)
My best friend Ricky... he's Indian.

Sutter points to another. Again, Ricky rejects.

SUTTER (V.O.)
And me, my thing is making people feel good. I'm the fun guy. Just like my dad. There's no feeling down when ol' Sutter's around.

SUTTER
Colleen Marshall?

RICKY
Way too tall. I'd look like her son.

SUTTER
That's it. I'm tired of your excuses. I say, "tonight's the night."

RICKY
What night?

SUTTER
The night I get you some action.

INT/EXT SUTTER'S CAR - DOWNTOWN STREET - NIGHT

Cars zoom by as Sutter and Ricky drive extra slow with the windows down, scoping left and right for something or someone to perk up the evening. It may be "Downtown" but there's little to do. Ricky pulls out a blaze and lights it. Sutter sips from his Big Gulp.

RICKY

I don't know about this.

SUTTER

Relax.

From behind the car, headlights flash. Sutter squints through the rearview. See two girls waving excitedly. Sutter smiles.

RICKY (CONT'D)

What is it?

SUTTER

Potential.

Sutter pulls into a shopping plaza. The girls' car pulls up alongside him. The driver is BETHANY, the passenger TARA.

SUTTER (CONT'D)

Hi Tara. Bethany.

TARA

Just the man I was looking for. Know where we can score some beers?

SUTTER

(does he ever)

Step into my office ladies.

Sutter gets out and gestures to the back of his car. He pops the trunk, revealing that he's turned the trunk into a cooler -- it's filled to the brim with ice and beer.

TARA

My hero.

SUTTER

Bethany, you know Ricky don't you?

Ricky awkwardly waves. Bethany awkwardly waves back.

TARA

So what's your plan for tonight?

SUTTER

(laughs)

Plans? You know me better than that. I don't plan, I improvise.

Sutter looks around.

SUTTER
You guys up for a boat ride?

Off their faces we...

CUT TO:

EXT CANALS - NIGHT

A canal runs between two long rows of buildings like a river at the bottom of a canyon. Sutter helps Ricky and Bethany get on the boat.

SUTTER'S VOICE
It takes me all of 30 seconds to get them alone.

SUTTER
Oh shit. I left my wallet in the car.

RICKY
I have enough --

SUTTER
(hinting)
No dude, don't worry about it. You guys go ahead. I'll run back and get it.
(to Tara)
You'll come with me, right?

TARA
Sure.

As the boat floats away Sutter winks at Ricky, who's now "trapped" on the boat with Bethany.

SUTTER
(calling after them)
See you guys in a bit.

Ricky looks at Bethany and can only shrug.

Back on land:

SUTTER
Want some ice cream?

TARA
I thought you lost your wallet.

SUTTER
(pulls it out of his pocket)
Hey, whaddaya know?

TARA
You're terrible.

SUTTER
They make a cute couple, don't they?

INT SUTTER'S CAR - LATER

Sutter and Tara are drinking. A baseball game plays on the radio.

TARA
I can't wait to get out of this place.
Can we put on some music or something?

SUTTER
No I like this.

Tara thinks this strange but doesn't say so.

It's at this point when a car comes careening into the parking lot. Sutter and Tara turn. Cassidy storms out of the car. Furious.

SUTTER
(upbeat)
Hey Cass --

CASSIDY
Can I speak to you in private please?

Sutter goes to give Cass a hug but she pushes him off.

CASSIDY
Kendra said she saw you with Tara. I didn't believe her.

SUTTER
Uh, yeah, the girls wanted some beers so--

CASSIDY
I asked you to do one thing for me. One.
And you still couldn't do it.

SUTTER
What are you so mad about? What thing?

CASSIDY
I asked you to put someone else's feelings before your own. For once in your life!

SUTTER
Wait a sec. That is what I'm doing!

CASSIDY
Oh please --

SUTTER
It's the truth! Ask Ricky. I'm just here to --

CASSIDY

You're the most selfish person I've ever met.

SUTTER

Are you hearing me? I'm doing this for Ricky. I'm completely unselfish.

Cassidy sees Tara in the car, beer in hand. Tara looks away, like she knows she was doing something wrong.

CASSIDY

You're a lost cause, Sutter.

SUTTER

Cass, you gotta believe me --

CASSIDY

I'm sorry. No. We're done.

SUTTER

Cassidy!

It's too late. She gets in the car and drives off. Sutter stands there. Buzzed enough to not be upset. Yet.

EXT SCHOOL PARKING LOT - AGAIN

We're back with Sutter. He looks up from the page. Thinks for a moment, and then continues writing:

SUTTER (V.O.)

A misunderstanding. No big deal. She'd come around, right? Well listen to this. Fucking last night...

INT SUTTER'S CAR - AGAIN

Sutter drives crosstown, the sound of a baseball announcer again fills the car. He nips from the flask.

EXT SUBURBAN CUL DE SAC - NIGHT

A nicer neighborhood. There's nowhere for Sutter to park so he decides, fuck it, he's double parking. Sutter gets out and walks towards the biggest house on the block. There's a party going on inside. En route to the front door, he plucks a handful of flowers from a neighbor's garden.

INT HOUSE PARTY - SAME

Flowers in hand, Sutter wanders through the place looking for Cassidy. The house is huge and expensively decorated. Occasional partygoers high-five him on the way but he's in no mood to be social right now. And then he sees her. Sitting on the couch, playing with the hair of MARCUS WEST (18, tall, lanky, athletic).

SUTTER

Well this is unexpected.

Cass and Marcus turn. Cassidy is surprised to see him.

CASSIDY

What are you doing here?

Knowing he's lost her, Sutter hides the flowers behind his back.

SUTTER

You got a haircut.

CASSIDY

Yeah I... seemed like a good time for a change.

SUTTER

Goddamn stunning, that haircut.

MARCUS

Are you drunk or something?

SUTTER

Well if drunk equals A, and something equals B, let's just say the answer is... definitely not B.

Marcus looks at Sutter with a touch of sympathy.

MARCUS

Look man, I know this is awkward. Maybe we should talk outside--

SUTTER

Marcus West! Speaking to me?! What an honor!

CASSIDY

Oh God, Sutter...

MARCUS

Come on man, let's go out to my car.

SUTTER

Thank you excellency, but that won't be necessary. I am a fair-minded individual who thoroughly understands the meaning of the phrase 'kicked to the curb.'

Sutter bows, struggling to keep his balance. Then backs away.

MARCUS

Sutter...

SUTTER
I bid you both a pleasant evening.

Marcus wants to stop Sutter from leaving but Cassidy puts her arm out.

CASSIDY
Let him go. He drives better that way.

SUTTER
(still backing away)
Thanks for the vote of confidence,
beautiful! You are the most understanding
woman... in everything but love.
Arrivederci!

Sutter turns with a flourish and stumbles away.

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - AGAIN

Sutter finishes the essay in a flurry.

SUTTER (V.O.)
Unbelievable, isn't it? You want
hardship, misfortune, well there you go.

JUMP CUTS:

- Sutter getting dressed for the evening.
- Sutter drinking some more.

SUTTER (V.O.)
A weaker-minded individual would get
depressed. Sit in his room, maybe cry
about it. Not this guy. Not Sutter Keely.
Don't count me out just yet, Dean of
Admissions. It's another day, and the
night is just getting started. So forget
Cassidy, forget exams, forget these
pointless college apps. Fuck the past,
fuck the future... all that matters is
the here and now.

- Sutter looking at himself in the mirror, psyching
himself up for the night ahead.

SUTTER (V.O.)
I'm Sutter Keely and I say... it's time
to be alive.

And with that, on Sutter smiling:

Music up: The Walkmen/ "The Rat"

INT SUTTER'S CAR - NIGHT

Music continues over Sutter driving, two hands on the wheel. Drumming a bit to the loud music. Psyching himself up for a good night. (Note: when Sutter is drinking, his world is vibrant, sharp, rich in color. It won't always be this way.)

EXT DOWNTOWN - OUTSIDE A BAR - LATER

- Sutter gets turned away by a BOUNCER. Pretends it doesn't bother him.

- Sutter ambles along down the promenade. Takes a nip at his flask. All around him, YOUNG COUPLES stroll past. He tips his imaginary hat at a BUSKER playing acoustic guitar on the street.

- Sutter turned away from another bar. Now getting frustrated. Sees a sign for a bar across the way and the best part -- no bouncer.

INT BAR - LATER

In comes Sutter. The place is crowded. As luck would have it, he spots a table full of COLLEGE GIRLS. Decides to approach.

SUTTER

Ladies... I'm 18 years old and I just got dumped by my girlfriend. Will someone, anyone, please have a drink with me?

A beat. The Girls are delighted to meet him!

- Sutter and the Girls do a round of shots. Then another. They love this kid.

- Sutter dances between two of the Girls. They play with his hair, pinch his cheeks. Innocent fun.

EXT BAR - LATER

Sutter and the Girls are leaving. We quickly realize they're not leaving together. As they walk away Sutter yells after them.

SUTTER

I love you!

The Girls look back and laugh -- he's so cute.

SUTTER

I love everyone!

But the Girls keep walking.

INT SUTTER'S CAR - LATER

Cruising - windows down, wind in his face, radio on.
Drunk and feeling much better now.

SUTTER
(yelling out the window)
You are holy! You are beautiful! Down
with the king! Down with the
motherfucking--

SMASHCUT TO BLACK.

HUGE FUCKING TITLE CARD: THE SPECTACULAR NOW

AND THEN DARKNESS. SILENCE. UNTIL:

FEMALE VOICE
Um... hello...

A face.

Or, at least, a head. Female. Completely in shadow from
the bright morning sun and thus impossible to make out.

Sutter, who has clearly spent the night passed out on the
ground, looks up, disoriented. Puts his hand up to see
who it is.

And we see her. Sutter's age but looking younger. Pale
with freckles and glasses. Her hair is strawberry blonde
and her eyes the color of a public swimming pool. Her
name is AIMEE FINECKY.

AIMEE
You're alive.

When she talks it's like she just discovered her voice.

AIMEE
I thought maybe you were dead.

Sutter blinks a few times.

SUTTER
I don't think I'm dead... Where the hell
am I?

AIMEE
You're in the middle of a yard. Do you
know who lives here?

Sutter sits up. Looks at the ugly pink little house.

SUTTER
Jesus, I must have gone to sleep. Hey,
where's my car?

AIMEE
Is it one of those?

Sutter looks at the nearby parked cars. Can't find his anywhere.

SUTTER
Maybe I parked it at home and just went for a walk.

AIMEE
You don't live in this neighborhood. Do you, Sutter?

SUTTER
You know my name?

AIMEE
We go to the same school... You wouldn't remember me.

SUTTER
No... of course I do. You're um...

AIMEE
Aimee. Aimee Finecky.

SUTTER
Right. Aimee. I was about to say that.
(standing)
What time is it, Aimee?

AIMEE
6am.

SUTTER
Are you coming back from a party or something?

AIMEE
I'm on my paper route.

She motions to the white pickup truck that's pulled over. We see the back is filled with papers.

AIMEE
It's really my mom's paper route but she went to the casino last night with my step-dad. She hasn't come back yet.

SUTTER
You need some help?

AIMEE
I can manage.

SUTTER
No I'll help you.

AIMEE

You don't have to --

SUTTER

Aimee, you're driving round the neighborhood, I gotta find my car. I'm thinking we can help each other out. Whaddaya say?

Off her look:

INT AIMEE'S CAR - LATER

Aimee drives and Sutter throws papers while looking for his car. It takes a few throws until Sutter gets the hang of it.

SUTTER

I didn't realize newspaper throwing was such big business. You must reel in some cash.

AIMEE

My mom does.

SUTTER

What, and you get nothing?!

AIMEE

I get an allowance.

SUTTER

An allowance? That doesn't sound fair. I mean, You do all the work.

AIMEE

Well yeah but... she pays the bills... most of them.

SUTTER

Most of them?! Aimee, she's your mom!

(off her shrug)

Aw man, I don't know. Sounds to me like a pretty raw deal, this paper route. If I were you, I'd say something.

A sad smile comes over her face. Standing up for herself is the last thing Aimee ever does. Sutter feels bad for her, decides to change the subject. Throwing more papers:

SUTTER

I'm getting the hang of this, aren't I?

AIMEE

You're a natural.

SUTTER

Back in Little League, You should have seen me. I had this booming arm. Here. Watch this.

(throws right on target)

Look at that! Are you impressed?

AIMEE

Very.

SUTTER

I had the gift, Aimee. That's what my Dad used to say. Probably could have gone pro if I stuck with it.

AIMEE

So what happened?

SUTTER

Hmm?

AIMEE

Why didn't you stick with it?

Sutter doesn't answer.

SUTTER

Hey look! There it is!

Sutter's Mitsubishi is parked sideways in the middle of a lawn. Aimee pulls over.

AIMEE

What's it doing on the lawn?

SUTTER

That is a very good question.

Aimee assumes that now the car has been spotted Sutter will take off.

AIMEE

Well... thanks again. For helping me.

SUTTER

(motioning to all the papers)

Whaddaya mean? We're not done yet!

AIMEE

You don't have to --

SUTTER

Hey it's the least I can do. Besides, I'm enjoying myself. Let's keep going.

The light flips back on in her eyes.

AIMEE

OK!

(beat)

Should you move your car first?

SUTTER

Yes. Good idea.

Sutter jumps out to move his car. Aimee waits. Smiles.

INT AIMEE'S CAR - LATER

Now they're having fun delivering the papers.

AIMEE

Fire the torpedo, Special Agent Danger!

SUTTER

Aye aye, Captain!

Sutter launches another paper. It lands right on the doorstep.

SUTTER

(explosion sound effect)

Direct shot!

They share a laugh. It's nice.

- LATER. Paper route over.

SUTTER

We make a good team, don't we?

AIMEE

You think so?

SUTTER

Absolutely.

Sutter catches the look on Aimee's face. She's beaming.

SUTTER

You know what, Aimee Finecky? I had a pretty rotten night last night until you came along. We should get lunch sometime.

AIMEE

How bout Monday?

SUTTER

Oh...k Monday it is. Where should we meet?

AIMEE

The cafeteria?

SUTTER

Why not! We can relive our greatest triumphs of newspaper delivery!

Aimee smiles at him. It's nerdy but endearing.

SUTTER

See you Monday, Captain.

With that, he's off. Feeling pretty good about it too.

INT SUTTER'S HOME - LATER

It's a modest house, the bottom rung of middle class. In the kitchen Sutter finds his mother, MARY (40s, faded beauty) already up and dressed in her work clothes. She moves in and out of the room as she readies for the long day, barely looking at her son.

MARY

You're up early.

SUTTER

I uh...

MARY

(not listening)

They have me on a double shift... again.

Sutter heads up to his room.

MARY

(suddenly)

Dammit Sutter.

Sutter stops in his tracks. Uh-oh. Mary comes out of the utility room holding her uniform jacket.

MARY

Didn't I asked you to hang this for me?
Look how wrinkled this is?

That's what she's mad about?

SUTTER

I'm sorry. I forgot.

MARY

It would have taken you two seconds to hang this up and help me. Is that too much to ask?

SUTTER

I'm sorry, I just --

MARY

It's not like I ask you to do so much around here. Christ.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)
(shakes head; almost to
herself)
Sometimes you act just like your father.

Sutter's face suggests that's alright with him. Like a tornado, Mary passes through one last time.

MARY
I may not be back in time for dinner.
There's leftovers in the fridge. Or if
you want, call your sister --

SUTTER
(hates that idea)
No thanks.

MARY
K, well, I've got to go.

Sutter starts to walk off.

MARY
Sutter.

Sutter turns back around.

MARY
Next time I ask you do to something...

Mary doesn't finish. She just shakes her head. And with that she's out the door.

SUTTER
(to no one)
I love you too.

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - LATER

Sutter lays in his bed, looking up at the baseball pennant. Thinking. Miles Davis plays softly in the background. His alarm goes off but of course he doesn't need it. He hasn't slept.

INT RICKY'S CAR - MORNING

Ricky drives Sutter to school. Sutter has his flask and is back to his completely relaxed self.

RICKY
...who knew dinner and a movie would cost
more than 30 bucks?

SUTTER
Pretty much anyone who's ever been on a date.

RICKY

Oh but the best part is... she didn't care, dude! She paid for the popcorn and everything. She's just... mmm.

SUTTER

You kiss her?

RICKY

Check.

SUTTER

Tongue action?

RICKY

Double check.

The boys high five. Sutter looks at Ricky and smiles. Likes seeing him happy. Knows he had a hand in it.

RICKY

Wanna go to the Barons game tonight?

SUTTER

Hell yeah.

RICKY

It's father/son night. We'll pretend to be brothers.

Hearing this, a look comes over Sutter's face.

SUTTER

Oh I, uh, actually... shit. I forgot. There's a... I promised my mom I'd help her with something.

RICKY

You sure?

Sutter nods. Ricky turns back to the road. Sutter looks out the window.

SUTTER

So, uh, where to for lunch today?

RICKY

I thought you were eating with what's her name.

SUTTER

Oh shit. That's right.

RICKY

I gotta tell ya Sutter. Aimee Finecky? Strange choice for a rebound.

SUTTER
She's not a rebound.
(off his look)
She's not!
(another look)
I have no interest in dating Aimee
Finecky.

RICKY
Then what's the point of lunch?

SUTTER
I think she's nice, is all. Maybe too nice. Did I tell you bout her paper route? Listen to this. Her mom has her throwing newspapers at 5am, 6 days a week, schooldays and all. She keeps all the money, pays half the bills, and Aimee never says a word about it!

RICKY
That sucks.

SUTTER
It's bullshit's what it is.

RICKY
So where do you come in?

SUTTER
I can help her.

RICKY
Oh, here we go. Sutter to the rescue.

SUTTER
She just needs a little confidence is all. Who better than me to bring it out of her?

RICKY
Uh-huh. So... you don't want to nail her?

SUTTER
Dude, what is wrong with you?

INT CLASSROOM - DAY

MR. ASTER (50s, beard) solves a geometry problem on the chalkboard. The bell rings and students begin to leave.

MR. ASTER
Sutter, can I have a word?

SUTTER
Uh... actually I have to--

MR. ASTER
Have a seat, Mr. Keely.

Sutter really doesn't want to have a seat but there's not much he can do about it.

MR. ASTER
Noticed you didn't turn in the homework.

SUTTER
(suddenly animated)
And I have a really good reason why, Mr. Aster. You're not even gonna believe it when I --

MR. ASTER
Stop talking.

SUTTER
Yes sir.

MR. ASTER
Sutter, as your teacher, I only want to see you succeed. You know that, don't you?

SUTTER
Sure I do.

MR. ASTER
And if you fail... that means I fail.

SUTTER
I know, Mr. Aster. And believe me, I will get it together. From here on in.

MR. ASTER
I wanna believe you.

SUTTER
(standing)
Well you should. I'm turning a corner, I promise --

MR. ASTER
Let's see you answer this.

SUTTER
Sorry?

MR. ASTER
(handing him a sheet)
If one of the acute angles is 2 times as large as the other, what's the measure of the two angles?
(no idea)
Siddown, I'll show you.

Sutter is a deer in headlights.

INT HALLWAY - LATER

Sutter emerges from Aster's class, super late to meet Aimee. He races through the hallway on his way to:

INT LUNCHROOM - SAME

Sutter enters, looking all around for her. Just as he thinks he's missed her, there she is. Standing alone by the lunch line. Waiting.

SUTTER

I'm so sorry --

AIMEE

You came!

SUTTER

Well of course I did. Why wouldn't I?

Sutter takes in the scene (only the lamest of the lame eat in the lunchroom).

SUTTER

You actually eat here?

AIMEE

Isn't that what it's for?

SUTTER

Well yeah but nobody ever... I mean, I've never...

(not wanting to insult)

What's good, I'm starving?

He gets up to go to the lunch line, gesturing for her to come with.

AIMEE

The tater tots are pretty solid.

- LATER. Sutter and Aimee at the table.

AIMEE

That's so crazy! How fast were you going?

SUTTER

20, 25 miles per hour.

AIMEE

And you just jumped out of the car?

Aimee is hanging on every word.

SUTTER

There was snow on the ground. I didn't think it would hurt.

AIMEE

That's amazing.

SUTTER

Look at you, you're such a great listener. Ok, now you go.

AIMEE

Um... well, I remember... sophomore year. When you wore that mascot head to gym class and wouldn't take it off...

SUTTER

Oh yeah.

AIMEE

That was so funny.

SUTTER

Yeah, no, I mean, stories about you.

AIMEE

I don't have any stories.

SUTTER

Of course you do. Everyone does.

AIMEE

Not me.

SUTTER

Come on. What's your thing?

AIMEE

My thing?

SUTTER

Yeah, like... what do you love? What do you want to be known for? Larry Rourke's the stoner. Greg Jacoby's the rich kid. We all have a thing.

AIMEE

(beat; thinks)

I'd like to think there's more to people than just one thing. You know?

Sutter smiles, impressed.

AIMEE

Is that ok?

At which point, a supremely uncool girl approaches. This is KRYSTAL.

KRYSTAL
So he finally got here, did he?

AIMEE
Hi Krystal.

SUTTER
(standing like a gentleman)
Krystal, hey, Sutter Keely.

KRYSTAL
I know who you are. Come on Aimee. French Club. They're waiting for us.

Aimee clearly wants to stay but standing up to people isn't her thing.

AIMEE
I forgot about the meeting. I'm sorry.

SUTTER
No worries.

As she's walking away:

SUTTER
Hey Aimee, you ever have Aster for geometry?

AIMEE
Freshmen year.

SUTTER
Probably thought it was easy, huh?

AIMEE
Kind of.

SUTTER
Could you tutor me? I never know what that guy's talking about.

AIMEE
Uh, sure, anytime.

Aimee writes down her number and hands it to him.

SUTTER
Terrific, thanks. I'll call you.

Aimee nods, gets up to go, unable to hold back a smile. Krystal gives Sutter one last angry look before walking away. Sutter watches them go. Eats another tater tot.

INT LEWIS FINE MEN'S CLOTHING STORE - DAY

The store has seen better days. Sutter finishes up a sale to a customer.

SUTTER

You're very welcome. It's gonna look great on you.

Customer leaves passing the owner, BOB LEWIS (late 30s, kind face) saying goodbye to his WIFE and BABY at the door. Sutter watches them go. Once they're gone:

SUTTER

Will you please just adopt me already?

BOB

Sorry bud, two's my limit on mouths to feed. So where were we...

SUTTER

Cassidy.

BOB

Oh right. That's a shame. I really liked that one.

When Bob is turned around, Sutter pours some whiskey into his soda can. Careful not to let Bob see this.

SUTTER

So did I.

BOB

I kinda thought she'd be the one to yank you out of neutral.

SUTTER

Neutral? What neutral? I'm in overdrive.
(off his look)

What?

EXT/INT AIMEE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A small brick cube surrounded by a bare yard. Some shingles are missing from the roof and the original paint color has faded away. Sutter knocks.

CHILD'S VOICE FROM INSIDE

Aimee, your boyfriend's here.

AIMEE'S VOICE (V.O.)

Shut up Shane. Please.

The door opens. Aimee has put some effort into her looks this afternoon. Most notably, she's wearing lipstick. He'd never say so but Sutter would rather she wasn't.

AIMEE

Hi.

SUTTER

Hey there.

AIMEE

Come in.

Sutter follows Aimee inside. We take in the total mess that is Aimee's living situation. Clothes piled up on the recliner, opened containers covering the tiny coffee table, VHS tapes scattered on the floor. Aimee's little brother SHANE (11) plays an ancient video game system wearing shorts and no shirt.

AIMEE

This is Shane, my brother.

SUTTER

Hello Shane.

Shane flips Sutter the two-handed bird.

AIMEE

He just learned that.

SUTTER

Charming.

AIMEE

We can study in my room.

SUTTER

Lead the way.

Sutter follows Aimee down the narrow hallway. Notices more mess, some tacky wall hangings. Sutter catches a glimpse of Aimee's step-dad RANDY, taking a nap in one room (dressed exactly like Shane).

Finally they get to Aimee's bedroom. Sutter is expecting the worst but when she opens the door, it's an awesomely neat and colorful place, clearly a sanctuary from the world outside. Sutter is impressed.

SUTTER

Wow, nice.

AIMEE

I like to keep it clean.

Sutter walks around the room, admiring. The back wall is a giant map of the Milky Way. There's some pencil drawings and ceramic cats scattered about. On one wall is a massive bookshelf covered in notebooks and paperbacks. Welcome to Aimee's World.

SUTTER

You must really love reading.

AIMEE

They're mostly science fiction. A few mysteries.

Sutter picks up one book that's half in Japanese. "Battle of the Immortal."

AIMEE
(apologetically)
I know it's weird.

SUTTER
No that's cool. Weird is good. I say
"embrace the weird." Why's it backwards?

AIMEE
That's how you read them. See?

She shows Sutter how it works. He's impressed. Notices on the wall one of the pencil drawings -- an anime-style scene of a woman flying through space.

SUTTER
Is this you flying through space?

AIMEE
No, it's, um... it's nothing. Just this thing I like.

SUTTER
Who is she?

Aimee is embarrassed... but Sutter silently encourages her to answer.

AIMEE
She's... Shirei Migoto. From the Bright Planet books. Stupid, I know.

SUTTER
If you like it, it's not stupid. What makes her so special?

AIMEE
She's the leader of the Neexo Ark. It's up to her to escape the Dark Galaxy and find the Bright Planet star system.

SUTTER
(looking at another drawing)
I... see...

There's drawings of the Commander everywhere.

AIMEE
(still shyly)
She's kind of my hero... and stuff.

Sutter feels exceedingly bad for this girl right now.

SUTTER

You know what? You'll be my hero if you can straighten me out on this geometry business.

AIMEE

Sure.

They sit down and get situated. Sutter opens the big textbook.

SUTTER

So... quadrilaterals. Talk to me.

AIMEE

How much of this have you read?

Sutter looks up. Smiles. He hasn't read a word of course.

- LATER. They've been at it a while.

AIMEE

So, in this figure, angle 2 and angle 4 are...

(Sutter has no clue)

Complementary angles.

SUTTER

Complementary. Got it. Man, you're a wonderful teacher, Miss Finecky.

AIMEE

So then, you understand?

SUTTER

Well... here's what I don't understand. When on earth will I ever need to know this stuff?

AIMEE

Um...

SUTTER

I mean, seriously. Vectors? Slopes? Coplanar lines? Who gives a shit? Who calculates slopes at their job?

Aimee laughs. And then:

VOICE (O.S.)

Aimee! Come out here right now, will you!

The craggy voice belongs to Randy. Hearing it saps the fun vibe of the room almost immediately.

AIMEE

My step-dad.

SUTTER

That's ok.

RANDY'S VOICE (O.S.)

We're all out of milk, Aimee. I thought you were going to get some.

AIMEE

I will!

RANDY'S VOICE (O.S.)

Do it now, crissakes. The hell has she been doing all afternoon?

It's quiet for a beat.

AIMEE

I should really...

Aimee smiles her sad smile, starts putting on her shoes.

SUTTER

Yeah, sure. No problem.

The expression on her face is like her ship just crashed back to Earth. Sutter feels terrible.

SUTTER

You know what, there's this party on Saturday. I think you should go with me.

AIMEE

Me?

SUTTER

Yeah you. I'll come by and grab you around 8:30. What do you say?

AIMEE

Um... ok?

SUTTER

Is that an answer or a question?

AIMEE

No, I mean, yeah, yes. I'd like that.

EXT STRIP MALL - 7/11 - LATER

Sutter comes out of the convenience store with his Big Gulp. On the way to his car, he passes a comic book store. Sutter walks right by before stopping and turning around.

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sutter finishes mixing a drink, turns on Thelonious Monk's "Straight, No Chaser", and sits down at his desk.

We see a stack of Manga books which Sutter bought at the store. He puts his feet up and begins to read through one in reverse.

INSERT: elegantly drawn images from the books, the occasional caption about dreams, freedom, the future.

Sutter finds himself surprisingly captivated.

We hear the chime of an Instant Message. Sutter looks up from the book to his computer. He's got a message from "CASSIDY210." (Her icon is a seductive personal pic). The message just says "Hey."

Sutter perks up. This is a nice, new development. He writes back... Sutter&7: "Hey." (His icon: Sinatra). Takes a swig.

Her message: "How are you?" Sutter drinks some more. Writes back: "Fabuloso." Then it's quiet for a few beats. Sutter scratches his head, thinking of the right thing to say.

But then he gets this: "I miss you." Sutter's eyes open wide. Writes back: "Will I see you tomorrow?" And then "Alisa's party." Her message: "Think so." Then, as Sutter is writing back, she sends: "Gotta go. Talk soon." And signs off. Sutter returns his attention to the Manga but his mind is now very much elsewhere.

EXT LAKE SIDE HIGH SCHOOL PARTY - NIGHT

A bonfire. Picnic tables. Kegs. Music. Twenty or so high school kids already in the swing of things. Sutter and Aimee approach the party. Aimee wears an oversized purple winter coat that makes her look rotund. Sutter badly wants her to take it off.

SUTTER

You sure you don't want me to carry your coat?

AIMEE

It's kinda chilly out.

Oh well, he tried. As they walk towards the keg, pretty much everyone they pass says "Hi" to Sutter or slaps him five. He's the king of these high school parties.

SUTTER

See anyone you know?

AIMEE

I don't really know a lot of people.

SUTTER

Well that, my dear, is about to change.

At the keg, Sutter is saluted by some classmates.

SUTTER
How bout a brew?

AIMEE
Um, I don't... really...

SUTTER
Don't drink it, just hold it. Gives off
the illusion you're having fun.

JASON DOYLE
Now it's a party!

This is JASON DOYLE (collar up, smarmy as hell). Sutter has no love for this dude.

JASON DOYLE
Whattup Suttermen? You gonna dive in the lake again tonight?

SUTTER
We'll see.

JASON DOYLE
You're crazy dude.
(eyeing Aimee)
And who might I ask is this?

AIMEE
Aimee.

Jason and Aimee shake hands. Jason is either going to hit on her or poke fun at her. Sutter doesn't care to find out which.

SUTTER
Doyle, what are you doing talking to us?
Shouldn't you be going for Alisa Norman now that she's single?

JASON DOYLE
Alisa Norman? Since when?

SUTTER
Couple days.

JASON DOYLE
You shitting me?

SUTTER
I am shitting you not.

Jason, intrigued, hurries off to find Alisa.

SUTTER
 (to Aimee)
 I am shitting him big time.

AIMEE
 (realizes)
 You're gonna get that guy killed!

SUTTER
 Yeah I feel real bad about it.

Aimee laughs. Takes a sip of her drink. Winces. But she takes another sip nonetheless.

SUTTER
 You get used to it.

Meanwhile, Sutter's eyes land on a small, preppy kid with a baseball cap. He stands by a picnic table alone with his hands in his pockets.

SUTTER
 Come with me.

Sutter walks Aimee over to the kid, CODY DENNIS.

SUTTER
 Cody, my man.

CODY
 Hey Sutter.

SUTTER
 You guys know each other? This is Aimee.

They exchange sheepish "hellos."

SUTTER
 Cody's a sophomore but he's in all my classes. Aimee here's a genius too.

That doesn't get them talking very much either. Hmm...

SUTTER
 You're a reader, aren't you Cody? You ever read the Bright Planet books?

CODY
 (cautiously)
 One or two.

SUTTER
 (to Aimee)
 I forgot to tell you. I started the first one last night.

AIMEE
 You did?

SUTTER

It's really cool. I like the part where Shirei Migoto takes on the Galactic Warlord. She fucks that guy up!

AIMEE

I know, right?!

SUTTER

And all that stuff about "inner prosperity." Happiness from within. That's my shit.

AIMEE

You should read the second one. It's so awesome.

CODY

I love those books.

SUTTER

(of course he does)

Do you?

As Cody tries to get back into the convo, Sutter sees Cassidy appear. Her beauty makes him wince. Meanwhile:

CODY

Have you read "Solar Bull?"

AIMEE

Oh my god, I love Solar Bull!

SUTTER

Haven't read that one yet.

Cody and Aimee start enthusiastically chatting about it.

SUTTER

You know what. You guys discuss. I'll be back in like, two seconds. Ok?

Aimee and Cody don't mind. Sutter starts to walk towards Cassidy. On the way, however, he turns back to make sure Aimee is ok. Seeing she's fine, Sutter makes his way over to Cassidy. She waves. He waves back -- only to discover it wasn't him she was waving to. It was Marcus. They hug tightly. This stings.

Sutter quickly ducks in the direction of the keg. TWO CLASSMATES are playing Beirut.

CLASSMATE #1

... I was so pumped when I got in.

CLASSMATE #2

Yeah no shit.

CLASSMATE #1
I can't wait to get out of here.

CLASSMATE #2
Fucking five more months.
(sees Sutter)
Hey Sutter.

SUTTER
What's up guys?

Sutter refills his cup, keeping one eye on Cass and Marcus.

CLASSMATE #1
Mike's here if you wanna surf on his car again.

SUTTER
Maybe later.

Sutter downs one drink, pours two more, carries them over to Cassidy.

SUTTER
Hello gang.

MARCUS
Sutter.

SUTTER
(to Cass)
Who could use a drink?

CASSIDY
(as expected)
Sure.

Sutter notices that the crew around Cass and Marcus seem to be waiting for some kind of incident. Well he's not going to give them one.

SUTTER
Everyone's so serious tonight.
(beat)
How bout a joke? What do you call a fish with no eye?

They all wait for it.

SUTTER
A fsshh.

It takes a second but eventually Cass starts to laugh. The others join in.

SUTTER

Heard that from an 8 year old running away from home. Want another? Where would you find a dog with no legs...? Right where you left him.

Even Marcus finds this one funny. Denver, the athlete, approaches.

DENVER

What are you guys laughing at?

CASSIDY

Sutter.

DENVER

I should have guessed.

SUTTER

I know. I'm hilarious.

DENVER

Anyone see Alisa?

SUTTER

Did you two break up or something?

DENVER

No. Why'd you say that?

SUTTER

Sorry. I thought I saw her with Jason Doyle.

DENVER

What the fuck --!

Denver turns to go find Jason and kick his ass.

MARCUS

Denver, slow down!

But he's off. Jason Doyle is in trouble.

MARCUS

(to Cass)

I'll be right back.

The other guys go with them, leaving Cass and Sutter alone. Sutter has a canary eating smile on his face.

CASSIDY

What did you do?

SUTTER

(winks)

Me? Nothing.

LATER. Sutter and Cassidy are catching up by the keg.

CASSIDY

So Ricky and Beth are officially
together?

SUTTER

I wonder how that happened.

CASSIDY

You really weren't going for Tara that
night?

SUTTER

Are you nuts?

(holds hands out like scales)
Over here I have cute little Tara. Nice
girl. Good skin. Attractive. But over
here, I have spanktaculously perfect
you. Who do you think I would choose?

Cassidy blushes, causing Sutter to smile.

CASSIDY

Don't give me that smile.

SUTTER

I'm sorry. I can't help myself.

At which point a shout rises up on the other side of the crowd. Catcalls of "Fight! Fight!" are audible.

SUTTER

Guess they found Doyle.

Sutter and Cass move to get a closer look. Denver is on top of someone, pushing him into the ground. Marcus is trying to hold him back. Cass runs to Marcus's aid, leaving Sutter alone.

But when Sutter is able to see the kid being beaten, it isn't Jason at all. That's weird. Confused, he looks around for Jason and finally sees him away from the crowd, standing against a tree -- talking with Aimee.

SUTTER

Fuck.

Sutter makes haste over to Aimee, noticing that she looks ready to hurl at any moment.

SUTTER

What's going on here? Where's Cody?

JASON DOYLE

Couldn't handle the competition.

SUTTER
(to Aimee)
You all right?

AIMEE
Um, yeah, I'm just, you know, not used to
drinking.

SUTTER
Let's go for a walk.

Sutter grabs Aimee and helps her up.

JASON DOYLE
Hey, man, what the --

SUTTER
Get lost douchebag.

Sutter takes Aimee by the arm and walks her in another direction. As he does, he catches Cassidy watching him with Aimee.

LATER. They walk on a dirt road, far away from the rest of the revelers.

SUTTER
You sure you're alright?

AIMEE
Thank you. I'm a little... you know.

SUTTER
You like it?

AIMEE
It's good. It's... different.

SUTTER
Hey, I'm sorry about Doyle. He's a dick.
I hope he didn't --

AIMEE
No, we were just... we were just talking.

SUTTER
Wow. You're hammered, aren't you?

Aimee leans up against Sutter. Their shoulders touching. She looks at him and smiles. Sutter isn't sure what to do so he takes a nip from the flask.

AIMEE
Can I try that?

SUTTER
This? No. This is some serious stuff.

AIMEE

Just a taste.

Sutter hesitates but then hands it to her. She takes more than a sip and is immediately coughing and choking.

AIMEE

How can you drink this?

SUTTER

I've been at it a while. You know who gave me my first beer?

AIMEE

Who?

SUTTER

My father. I was probably... 6. We used to go to baseball games every Saturday and he would let me take little sips.

AIMEE

Did you get drunk?

SUTTER

Nah. But it sure felt nice and warm...

He smiles at this memory.

AIMEE

Where is he now... your father?

SUTTER

He's an airline pilot. Flies all over the country.

AIMEE

That's so cool!

SUTTER

He's a cool guy. The best. I don't know what he was doing with my mom that whole time.

AIMEE

They're divorced?

SUTTER

Oh yeah. She threw him out of the house a long time ago.

(beat)

But it's fine. Believe me, he's way better off now.

Aimee takes another sip. Winces but doesn't choke.

AIMEE

Sounds like we have the same mother.

SUTTER

How's that?

AIMEE

Well for example... I got into college today and there's no way my mom will let me go.

SUTTER

(beat)

You got into college today?

AIMEE

Uh-huh.

SUTTER

No shit!

AIMEE

In St. Louis. Where my sister lives.

SUTTER

That's, I don't know what to say, Aim. Congratulations!

AIMEE

It doesn't matter, though... cause my mom
--

SUTTER

Hold on. What's your mom have to do with it?

AIMEE

She needs me. There's no one else to help with the route.

SUTTER

(disbelief)

Aimee, seriously. Your mom will be fine. She's a grown woman. You have to go to St. Louis.

AIMEE

Yeah but --

SUTTER

No. No buts. Don't you see? You're like this extraordinary genius chick but you've got all these people making you do stuff. It's gotta stop.

AIMEE

How?

SUTTER

It's your life! Stand up for yourself.

AIMEE
It's not that easy.

SUTTER
I'll teach you. Here... have another swig.

Aimee takes the flask. Drinks another sip.

SUTTER
Now repeat after me. "Mom, get off my motherfucking back!"

AIMEE
What?!

SUTTER
Say it.

AIMEE
No!
(beat; quietly)
Get off my back.

SUTTER
Dude, you've got to say it like you mean it. And the motherfuck is key. Trust me.
"Mom..."

AIMEE
"Mom..."

SUTTER
"Get off my MOTHERFUCKING back, Mom!"

AIMEE
(beat)
"Get off my... fucking... back, Mom!"

SUTTER
Motherfucking.

AIMEE
Motherfucking back! Motherfucker! Aaaah!

SUTTER
Yes!

AIMEE
That sorta feels good.

SUTTER
I told you.

AIMEE
Get off my motherfucking back, mom. Stay out of my motherfucking business,
Krystal.

SUTTER

Oh! Krystal got one. Who else?

AIMEE

I think that's it.

SUTTER

How bout an ex-boyfriend? Fuck you ex-boyfriend!

Aimee clamps up. Sutter notices.

SUTTER

Come on. You can't be 17 and not have one horrible ex-boyfriend you want to curse out.

(she doesn't)

Nobody?

AIMEE

It's not... guys don't really look at me... like that. You know?

SUTTER

You're crazy. Didn't you see Jason Doyle hitting on you? And Cody Dennis?

AIMEE

They weren't hitting on me.

SUTTER

Of course they were. You're a sweetheart. I mean, look at you.

Aimee is not at all convinced. To convince her, Sutter takes hold of her chin, tilts it up, and plants a kiss on her. When it's over:

AIMEE

Whew.

SUTTER

You're damn right "whew."

Sutter smiles. Aimee smiles back. So Sutter goes in for another one. Why the hell not? And as they kiss, CUT TO:

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - THE NEXT DAY

Sutter's asleep in his clothes from the night before. Food wrappers and a stray beer can are littered around the bed. The clock reads: 12:06pm. Sutter stirs. Moans. The hangover is upon him.

INT BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sutter showers. He leans against the wall, head in his arms as the water falls on him. He tries to remember the night before.

- FLASH: Sutter and Aimee walk away from the party. Cassidy watching.

BACK TO Sutter in the shower. Remembering.

- FLASH: Sutter kissing Aimee, like we saw.

BACK TO Sutter in the shower. Ok, yeah, that happened.

- FLASH: Sutter helping Aimee to get to her front door.

SUTTER

Of course you're going to the prom. I'll take you.

BACK TO Sutter in the shower. Can't believe he said that. Rolls back his head in disgust.

INT RICKY'S HOUSE - LATER

Sutter and Ricky watch a baseball game on TV. Sutter fixes himself a drink.

RICKY

You made plans with her? Like, future plans?

SUTTER

It's no big deal.

RICKY

It's you making plans. You never make plans.

SUTTER

Relax, will you? I'm just trying to help the girl.

RICKY

Right I forgot. Sutter to the rescue.

SUTTER

Exactly.

RICKY

And if she falls for you, what happens then?

Sutter dismisses this as nonsense. Ricky holds his gaze.

INT SUTTER'S HOUSE - LATER

Sutter comes in. Walks into the kitchen. Puts down his stuff. There's a message on the answering machine. He presses play and hears:

AIMEE'S VOICE
Sutter, hi, it's, um, it's Aimee. Wasn't sure if we were studying tonight. Call me. If you want.

Sutter barely reacts to the message. As he listens, he goes to the fridge. Reads a note from Mom, something about working late and chicken in the microwave. Sutter doesn't react to that either. Whistling, he bypasses the food and goes straight to the liquor cabinet.

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - LATER

Sutter sits in front of his computer, stirring a drink. He looks at the application essay he has written ("Describe a hardship...") Sutter highlights the essay (from our opening) and deletes the whole thing. He takes a deep breath. Is about to start over when he hears a sound.

ON SCREEN we see "CASSIDY210 is now online".

Sutter opens the chat window. We see "Sutter&7" send her a message: "Hey, beautiful." Sutter waits for a response. Gets one: "Hello you..." Sutter thinks about what to say next. Writes: "What are you doing? Let's hang out." Sutter debates sending that. One beat. Two beats. Wills himself to hit send.

No response. Now he's nervous. Then it comes: "I'm heading out to the mall." Sutter sits back in his chair. About to give up. And then he receives: "Wanna come?"

INT MALL - LATER

They pass Sutter's flask back and forth as they walk, reminiscing.

CASSIDY
...and the time under the bleachers. Who could ever forget that?

SUTTER
Remember the lightning storm?

CASSIDY
On your roof! That was amazing!

SUTTER
You're telling me.

CASSIDY

(beat; reflective)

I don't know how many times I've ever
felt like that.

SUTTER

Not a lot.

CASSIDY

But every time was with you.

SUTTER

I think I feel it right now.

Cassidy smiles and walks on.

CASSIDY

Stop it.

SUTTER

It's true. When we're together, it's
like, we're invincible. Like nothing can
touch us, like everything else in the
world - the problems, the
responsibilities - they all just
disappear.

Sutter looks right in her eyes. Cassidy looks down.

CASSIDY

I don't want to lose you Sutter.

Sutter tenderly touches her cheek.

SUTTER

Then you won't.

She looks back up at him. Deciding.

INT CASSIDY'S BEDROOM - LATER

And now they're making out on Cassidy's bed. Clothes are
coming off. Every time Sutter tries to say something, she
bites his lip.

SUTTER

God you're beautiful.

CASSIDY

Don't talk.

Cassidy lies down. They continue kissing. Sutter moves to
her neck. Suddenly her hands stop moving and her body
freezes. Sutter is confused.

SUTTER

What's wrong?

CASSIDY

Nothing. Just go ahead.

SUTTER

What do you mean, 'just go ahead'?

CASSIDY

Just do it.

She lies perfectly still with her eyes closed.

SUTTER

I can't... I'm not gonna just do it.
What's wrong with you?

Sutter pulls away.

SUTTER

Are you thinking about Marcus?
(she says nothing)
Are you in love with him?

CASSIDY

I don't want to talk about him right now.

SUTTER

It's just a yes or no thing. I'm not
asking for a whole essay.

CASSIDY

I don't know... Maybe.
(starts to cry)
I'm, like, really confused right now.

SUTTER

What about us? This afternoon?

CASSIDY

That's what got me so confused. Today has
been... great.

SUTTER

But?

CASSIDY

We always have fun. I mean, I don't have
fun with anyone like I do with you.

SUTTER

I agree --

CASSIDY

But you can't go around having fun all
the time. Sometimes you have to be
serious.

SUTTER

I am serious. I'm 100 percent serious.

CASSIDY

About what?

SUTTER

About... not being serious. Enjoying things. Living in the moment.

CASSIDY

I want more than just... "moments." I want --

SUTTER

What?

CASSIDY

A future.

Sutter looks away. Starts to get dressed.

CASSIDY

Are you mad?

SUTTER

I'm not mad. Whatever. You and I... friends. That's terrific.

Music up: a girl singing a contemporary folk song on acoustic guitar. CUT TO:

INT MOTEL ROOM - LATER

On Sutter's utterly distraught face, we PULL BACK TO REVEAL he is at a birthday party, where all the kids are drinking pop and watching a pig-tailed GIRL play a song about Jesus on the guitar.

He looks at Ricky who sits on the couch holding hands with Beth. They actually seem to be enjoying this. Sutter can't take it anymore. Gets up and walks out.

INT MOTEL - DOWNSTAIRS

Sutter walks down the stairs, wanders through the atrium.

VOICE (O.S.)

Yo, Carmine!

Sutter turns. It's SHAWNIE BROWN (18, brunette, funky glasses, hip), on her way inside.

SUTTER

Ay Carmine, how you doin'?

SHAWNIE

I'm doin' bravissimo, Carmine. Whatchoo doin'?

SUTTER

Just tryin' to put some distance between
me and dem stiffz upstairs at dat lame-
ass party.

SHAWNIE

Ay-oh, I was just goin' to that. No good?

SUTTER

Fuggettaboudit.

SHAWNIE

No, you fuggettaboudit.

SUTTER

Aaaay, you're breakin' my balls.

They both burst out laughing and hug.

SHAWNIE

So, really, the party's lame?

SUTTER

Whatever you do Shawnie, do not go in
there.

SHAWNIE

Shit. There's, like, nothing else going
on tonight.

SUTTER

(holding up his flask)
There's always something going on when
I'm around.

INT MOTEL GAME ROOM - LATER

A couple of old arcade games in the corner and a beat up
ping pong table. They talk while playing ping pong.

SHAWNIE

Why didn't you tell me that before I
started dating him?

SUTTER

Would it have made a difference?

SHAWNIE

Probably not... Point game.
(she serves)
What about you?

SUTTER

What about me?

SHAWNIE

What's up with you and Cassidy?

SUTTER

Cassidy who?

SHAWNIE

(not buying it)

Uh-huh.

SUTTER

The past is past, Shawnie Brown. You know me. I live in the now.

She smashes a shot past Sutter.

SHAWNIE

Woo! Three games in a row, sucker.

SUTTER

Ping pong's not my game.

SHAWNIE

Clearly.

SUTTER

(eyes a hot tub in the next room)

Now that's what I need.

Sutter races to it, Shawnie follows. He feels the water.

SHAWNIE

You're not really going in there, are you?

SUTTER

Of course I am.

SHAWNIE

Bullshit.

Sutter steps into the hot tub, fully dressed. He eases himself down into the tub.

SHAWNIE

You're crazy.

SUTTER

Yeah but that's why you like me so much. So, Miss Queen of Ping Pong, your move...

SHAWNIE

You can never outdo me, Sutter.

Shawnie follows him in, her white t-shirt clinging to her body, showing all. Sutter's mouth drops and Shawnee smiles at him, knowing she's won.

For a beat they sit there together. And then, almost without thinking, Sutter kisses her.

It works -- for about a second before Shawnie starts giggling. Then it's a full-blown laugh. Sutter can't help but to laugh too. It's contagious.

SHAWNIE

You know what, Sutter? You're my favorite ex-boyfriend of all time. I'm sure going to miss you next year.

SUTTER

Why, where you going?

SHAWNIE

College.

(beat)

Aren't you?

SUTTER

Haven't really thought about it.

SHAWNIE

Yeah, right.

(beat)

Wait, you're serious?

Sutter shrugs. Shawnie splashes him in disbelief.

SHAWNIE

You're not going to college?

SUTTER

What for?

SHAWNIE

Sutter!

SUTTER

What?

SHAWNIE

It's fucking college!

SUTTER

My Dad never went to college and now he's, like, the number two real estate developer in Cook County. Who needs it? I have everything I need right here. A job. A car... A naked girl in a hot tub.

Shawnie laughs. Sutter smiles at her.

SUTTER

Look at us. This moment right here. You're gonna remember this, aren't you? It's beautiful. You think beauty's in some classroom? A text book? It's not. It's here. It's all around us.

SHAWNIE

You're drunk.

SUTTER

Yeah but I'm not wrong.

Shawnie thinks about it. Not completely wrong anyway.

SHAWNIE

Ay, you're breakin' my balls here.

SUTTER

You're breakin' my balls!

They engage in a friendly splash fight as we TRACK AWAY.
CUT TO:

INT SUTTER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sutter comes in and sits at his computer. Again opens the college application window. The essay is now totally blank. He looks at the question. Quick glance to the pennant on the wall. Sutter takes a swig from the flask. Says out loud:

SUTTER

Fuck this.

And turns off the computer.

INT HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Crowded with kids heading in all directions. And then there's Sutter. He strolls down the hall until he spots Aimee at a distance. Her back is turned. Sutter quickly turns down another hallway.

EXT SCHOOL PARKING LOT - LATER

Sutter is walking to his Lancer when:

VOICE

Just who do you think you are?

It's Krystal Krittenbrink, and she doesn't look happy.

SUTTER

The King of Mexico?

KRYSTAL

Don't think you're going to joke your way out of this, Sutter. Aimee told me about your little party out by the lake.

SUTTER

And?

KRYSTAL

And now you're avoiding her.

SUTTER

I'm not avoiding anyone.

KRYSTAL

Really? Have you seen her since the party? Have you even called?

SUTTER

How bout you get off my back?

KRYSTAL

Ha, I knew Aimee got that from you. She said the same thing.

SUTTER

Did she? Good for her.

KRYSTAL

No, it's not good for her. Aimee's isn't like you, Sutter. She's a sweet girl. She doesn't need you causing problems in her life.

SUTTER

(walking away)

The only problem Aimee has is you bossing her around like she's your personal assistant.

KRYSTAL

(yelling after him)

You shouldn't treat her this way.

SUTTER

(not stopping)

Whatever buzzkill.

INT SUTTER'S CAR - LATER

Sutter drives around. Takes a drink from the Big Gulp. We can tell he's thinking about what Krystal said. Rolls his eyes and makes a U-Turn.

EXT AIMEE'S HOUSE - DUSK

Sutter knocks. It takes a few moments for the door to open. It's Shane. Before Sutter can say anything Shane turns his head.

SHANE

Aimee! Your boyfriend's back!

AIMEE (O.S.)

What? Oh, um, tell him to hold on a second, I'll be right there.

SHANE
(running off)
You tell him!

SUTTER
(to no one)
Bye Shane.

Sutter waits in the doorway. Drinks. After a few moments Aimee appears. She's wearing what looks like a new shirt and her hair is all staticky from a quick brushing.

AIMEE
I didn't know you were coming over today.

SUTTER
Yeah, no, I wasn't, but uh... I was driving around and I thought, 'I don't care how busy I am. I want to see how Aimee's doing.'
(off her smile)
So... how you doing?

AIMEE
Good.

SUTTER
Good. Great. Listen, my sister is having a dinner for her swanky friends and I'm being forced to show --

AIMEE
You have a sister? I didn't know that.

SUTTER
Yeah, well, we're not really close.
Anyway, would you wanna come with me?

AIMEE
Um... ok! When is it?

SUTTER
Ten minutes.

AIMEE
Oh. Uh... Sure! I'll go get my coat.

SUTTER
Let's leave the coat.

INT HOLLY'S DINING ROOM - LATER

ANGLE on HOLLY, Sutter's sister, (25, heavily made up, dyed blonde hair, fake breasts and dressed to show them, jewelry glistening everywhere).

HOLLY

...and I said "could I get you boys anything else?" And he said, tell 'em what you said honey.

Holly's husband JOE (early 40s, confident without cause) sits to her right.

JOE

I leaned back in my chair, puffed out my chest and I said... "You could give me your number gorgeous?"

The PARTY GUESTS (mostly OLDER MEN and their YOUNGER SECOND WIVES) like this. Sutter, at the other end of the long table, makes the "vomit" face to Aimee. She laughs.

HOLLY

I had no idea he was a big fancy lawyer but I gave it to him anyway. And I'm sure glad I did!

JOE

Hasn't worked a day in her life since.

Joe squeezes her leg. Holly pecks her husband on the lips. Aimee rolls her eyes at this. Signals for another top-off from the flask which Sutter provides out of view from the others.

HOLLY

Isn't that a great story?

SUTTER

Wow. You guys sure are a breath of fresh air.

HOLLY

Thank you Sutter.

SUTTER

It's rare to see such happy couples nowadays. Seems like everyone's divorced.

HOLLY

That's not true.

SUTTER

Isn't it? My parents, (to Aimee) your parents, most of my friend's parents --

JOE

Kid's got a point.

SUTTER

Thank you Joe.

AIMEE

Mine didn't.

SUTTER

(confused)

They didn't? But I thought...

Aimee shakes her head no.

HOLLY

See Sutter. Not everything is doomed.

AIMEE

My Dad died.

That sucks the air out of the room.

HOLLY

I'm so sorry.

AIMEE

Not your fault.

Aimee takes a drink. The guests shuffle in their seats.

HOLLY

Oh honey, what happened?

AIMEE

He was a great guy. He just... he had
a... problem. Painkillers, mostly.

No one really knows what to say.

AIMEE

He tried to stop a bunch of times, but...
One day my sister came home and he was
just lying there. She had to close his
eyes.

JOE

Jesus.

She takes another sip of her drink but this time doesn't flinch.

AIMEE

(to Sutter)

Anyway, I don't agree with you. About
marriage. Mine's gonna totally work.

SUTTER

Oh yeah?

AIMEE

I've thought it all out. We're going to
live on a horse ranch, my husband and I.
I'll work for NASA. And my husband...

(MORE)

AIMEE (CONT'D)
he'll do something completely different.
And we'll offset each other. Like we'll
have some things in common but we'll also
have all these other dimensions that we
bring to the relationship. And that's how
I know it'll work.

Sutter is taken aback. Really impressed with her now.

JOE
(dismissive)
Sounds like a dream.

AIMEE
(right back at him)
It's good to have dreams. Don't you
think?

Aimee looks at Sutter, smiles. Sutter, still stunned,
smiles back. Raises his glass.

SUTTER
To dreams.

EXT WATER TOWER - NIGHT

Where kids hang out cause there's nowhere to go. Away
from the party, Sutter and Aimee share a drink sitting on
the roof of his car.

AIMEE
Did you mean what you said at the party?

SUTTER
Uh... which... thing --?

AIMEE
When you asked me to the Prom?

SUTTER
(beat)
Well of course I remember that. Are you
kidding? I wouldn't forget something like
that.

There's an awkward pause.

AIMEE
Do you still want to go? I mean, if you
don't, I'll understand.

SUTTER
What are you talking about? I totally
want to go. I wouldn't have asked you if
I didn't.

AIMEE
Really?

SUTTER
Sure. Can't wait.

She looks at him and smiles. He smiles back. Starting to really like how happy he makes this girl.

SUTTER
(shutting off radio)
Come here.

They start to kiss. Sutter then stops. Takes off her glasses. Sets them on the hood. Kissing resumes. This lasts a few seconds before someone whistles at them from the water tower. Aimee and Sutter laugh.

SUTTER
Come on. I'll take you home.

INT HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

In the hallway, Aimee kisses Sutter goodbye. Holds on to his arm for as long as she can as they part. Sutter goes one way, she goes the other. Ricky joins Sutter with a disapproving look.

SUTTER
It's under control.
(Ricky shakes his head)
Hey, did it ever cross your mind that I might actually be attracted to her?

RICKY
No.

SUTTER
That's cause you haven't really looked at her. I'm telling you. You have to talk to her a while before you can really see her.

Ricky's expression doesn't change.

SUTTER
What am I doing that's so wrong? Really?
Worst case scenario, I'm giving her some much needed boyfriend experience.

RICKY
That's worst case scenario?

SUTTER
Totally.
(Ricky still shakes his head)
You and I both know, another month tops before she's done with me and moves on.

RICKY
And what if she doesn't?

SUTTER

Well then that would be a first, wouldn't it?

Fair point. Jason Doyle walks over.

JASON DOYLE

Hey Sutter, Marcus was looking for you.

SUTTER

Marcus? What for?

JASON DOYLE

I'll let him tell you that.

Jason walks away, smiling maliciously. Sutter and Ricky look at one another, knowing that can't be good.

INT LEWIS'S FINE MEN'S CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Sutter is shadowboxing while talking to Bob at the men's shop.

SUTTER

...and he's like yay big and I'm like yay big... so that's bad. Plus, he's fast. And his reach has got to be way out --

BOB

Sutter, what are you doing? You're not a fighter.

SUTTER

Tell me about it!

BOB

So why's he want to fight you?

SUTTER

I don't know. He must think I'm still after Cassidy.

BOB

Is he right?

Sutter stops boxing (clearly winded). Takes a drink from his Big Gulp.

SUTTER

No. I mean -- we talk, a little. Online mostly.

(off his look)

Hey, I'm the victim here. She chose him.

(beat)

Just cause I want to keep in touch with my ex doesn't make me a bad guy. Does it?

BOB

You're not a bad guy, Sutter. You just don't have a real good grasp of the idea of consequences.

LATER. Sutter turns off the lights. Goes outside, locking the door behind him. Big Gulp in hand. As he walks to his car:

VOICE

We need to talk.

Oh shit, it's Marcus. Here we go.

SUTTER

Ok sure. Long as it's quick --

MARCUS

What's up with you and Cassidy?

SUTTER

Nothing's up. Why, what have you heard?

Marcus just stares Sutter down. Intimidating.

SUTTER

Look, man, I don't want any trouble.

MARCUS

Tell me the truth.

Marcus gets right up in Sutter's face. Sutter knows if this gets physical, he's not gonna win.

SUTTER

We're just friends. Honestly. She's moved on. I've moved on....

MARCUS

You've moved on?

SUTTER

(not convincingly)

I have.

MARCUS

Everyone knows you'd drop Aimee Finecky in a second if Cass would go back to you.

SUTTER

Everyone knows that? Well guess what... everyone's wrong.

(beat)

Look, Marcus, trust me, ok. We hang out sometimes, we have fun, but I promise you, nothing's going on between Cass and me.

Marcus continues to stare Sutter down. A beat. And then it's Marcus who breaks the stare first. He looks down at his feet. Sutter realizes something -- he isn't angry, he's distressed.

MARCUS

(beat)

Can I ask you something?

SUTTER

Oh...k.

MARCUS

Why can't it be me she has fun with?

SUTTER

(beat; not expecting that)

What?

MARCUS

I'm not like you, Sutter. I don't know how to make her laugh and stuff. I want to, I just... I don't know what to do. Can you help me?

The direction of this conversation has thrown Sutter for a loop.

SUTTER

Dude... you're Marcus West. Star athlete. Class President. What's that charity you started?

MARCUS

The Hope Brigade.

SUTTER

The Hope Brigade, for fuck's sake. You're the man, Marcus! You don't need my help.

MARCUS

The way she talks about you... it's not the same, man. I want her to like me like that. And she doesn't. I know she doesn't.

Sutter is stunned to see Marcus so distraught and vulnerable. This is too weird.

SUTTER

Look, Marcus, you don't want to be like me. Trust me. I make jokes and stuff but you... you get shit done. You're gonna change the world. You guys are perfect together.

Marcus's mood is slowly improving. Sutter is on a roll.

SUTTER

You just need to loosen up a bit. You're too tense.

MARCUS

Maybe.

SUTTER

All that charity work you do. Volunteering. It's nice but, I mean come on, you're young. Not everything has to be serious all the time. See a movie. Maybe have a beer once in a while.

MARCUS

That's not for me, man.

SUTTER

I'm just saying... relax. Enjoy yourself, you know? Live in the now.

Marcus sighs, taking it all in. What Sutter's saying makes sense.

MARCUS

Thank you for talking to me like this, Sutter. I appreciate it. I really do.

SUTTER

Well sure --

MARCUS

You're a good man.

Sutter nods, feeling pretty good about the whole thing. Marcus walks back to his car.

MARCUS

Hey Sutter!
(Sutter turns)
They're wrong about you.

SUTTER

What's that?

MARCUS

You're not the joke everyone thinks.

Sutter flinches, as if he just received the punch he was expecting all along. Marcus leaves and we remain on Sutter, thinking about that. CUT TO:

INT AIMEE'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Sutter and Aimee sitting close together on her couch, watching TV.

SUTTER

What do you think of the movie?

AIMEE

I've seen it before.

SUTTER

Oh. We can watch something else.

AIMEE

No I like it. Used to watch it with my Dad all the time. He loved this stuff.

SUTTER

Really? My kind of guy.

AIMEE

You would have liked him a lot. He's the one who turned me onto music and manga and stuff. He was cool.

Sutter puts his arms around her. Aimee likes the feeling.

AIMEE

What about you?

SUTTER

Hmm?

AIMEE

Do you miss your Dad?

SUTTER

Nah it's cool.

AIMEE

He's not flying back soon?

SUTTER

What?

AIMEE

You said he was an... airline pilot.

SUTTER

Um... yeah, exactly.

AIMEE

So... why can't he fly to come see you?

SUTTER

Why are we talking about this?

AIMEE

It's important. If my Dad was alive --

SUTTER

I'm trying to watch the movie.

AIMEE

I'm just saying... you should see him,
before it's too late.

Sutter says nothing.

AIMEE

Maybe you can ask your mom --

SUTTER

(jumping up)

Goddamit Aimee! Will you shut up already?
Jesus Christ.

Aimee's face flushes red and she shrinks away. This is
the first time Sutter's gotten mad at her and it stings.

AIMEE

I'm sorry.

SUTTER

(realizing he snapped)

No, I'm sorry. You just... kept going on
and on.

AIMEE

(looking away)

I know. I don't know what's wrong with
me.

SUTTER

(sitting back down)

Nothing's wrong with you. I'm just... a
little touchy about my Dad, ok. Come
here. I'm sorry I yelled.

Sutter hugs her tight. He then lifts her chin to look at
him. Then he kisses her. The mouth. The forehead. The
eyelids. Kissing the tears away. It grows in intensity.

INT AIMEE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

And now they're on the bed, kissing, fondling.

AIMEE

Can we take off our clothes?

There's no stopping it now. Sutter lifts off Aimee's
shirt. Aimee takes off her own bra. Sutter then takes his
shirt off. Aimee helps him with his pants. It's awkward
but there's a real romance to it. Sutter sees Aimee in a
new light. And he's amazed at what he sees.

SUTTER

Nudity looks awesome on you.

They get under the covers together. Feeling each other's bodies. Aimee stops first. Reaching over to the night stand. She pulls out a condom.

AIMEE
Just to be safe.

Sutter is surprised. Girl's got all the bases covered. Aimee helps him put the condom on. And then pulls him over towards her so he can be on top.

AIMEE
I like you so much.

SUTTER
You're spectacular. You really are.

AIMEE
I'm so glad I met you.

SUTTER
I'm glad I met you too.

Slowly, tenderly, they begin to have sex. Sutter looks down at Aimee's face. Her eyes are closed. It's very different from sex with Cassidy but in a way it's better. More intimate. More connected. Sutter is entranced.

- LATER. They lie in bed together. Post-coital.

AIMEE
You're incredible.

SUTTER
Nah. It's easy to seem that way on your first time.
(Aimee looks away)
It was your first time, wasn't it...?
Aimee?

Her silence says maybe it wasn't.

SUTTER
I thought you said you never had a boyfriend.

Aimee sits up, pulls her knees to her chest. Chin down, looking very distraught.

AIMEE
I don't want you to hate me.

SUTTER
Hate you? I won't hate you. You're unhatable.

AIMEE

It's just something that happened... I was 14. I didn't know anything about boys.

SUTTER

Ok.

AIMEE

Randy's son Troy was sleeping over.

SUTTER

Randy? Your Step-father Randy?

AIMEE

(nods)

We all went to sleep and then I heard this knock on my door. Troy said he couldn't sleep and would I mind if he came in, talked for a while.

SUTTER

Of course he did.

AIMEE

He climbed in my bed. Got under the covers. And started... saying all this stuff to me...

SUTTER

What kind of stuff?

AIMEE

You know. How warm I feel. How much he likes my mouth and my hair.

SUTTER

Smooth talker, this Troy.

AIMEE

No one ever spoke to me like that. It felt... I don't know... special. So I just... let him do it.

(beat)

I should have known better.

SUTTER

How could you? You were 14.

AIMEE

I still should have known no 20 year old would actually like me --

SUTTER

20? Are you fucking kidding me?

AIMEE

And the worst part is... when we... finished... he couldn't look at me. Drove away in the morning. I've never seen him since.

SUTTER

Oh man! That dude is king of the creeps. If I ever see that guy -- I can't believe your mom stayed with Randy after that.

AIMEE

I never told her.

SUTTER

You never... How could you not --

AIMEE

I've never told anyone that. Until now.

They both lie there quietly. Aimee puts her head on his chest. Sutter sits there thinking. Then he hears her lose it.

SUTTER

Don't cry.

AIMEE

You must think I'm awful.

SUTTER

I don't think you're awful. Why would you say that?

(beat)

I'll tell you a secret.

(beat)

My Dad's not a pilot... I'm not sure what he is. Or where. I just said that because... I don't know... I don't know anything about him. He's been gone half my life and I... I guess I just miss him.

AIMEE

Doesn't anyone know where he is?

SUTTER

Just my mom. She refuses to tell me.

AIMEE

That's terrible! She can't keep him from you. He's your father.

Sutter looks away. Uncomfortable.

AIMEE

(beat)

I'll make you a deal. I'll stand up to my Mom, if you stand up to yours.

Sutter looks at her. Aimee puts out her hand to shake.

AIMEE
What do you say? Deal?

Sutter hesitates. Then he just smiles, touches her face. Instead of answering he says:

SUTTER
You're spectacular.

And then they lay together. She strokes his hair as he looks at the ceiling.

INT SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - DAY

Sutter waits in line to take his Yearbook picture. Cassidy approaches.

CASSIDY
(fixes his hair)
There you go.

SUTTER
Thanks.

CASSIDY
Haven't seen you in a while.

SUTTER
How's Marcus?

CASSIDY
Good. How's Aimee?

SUTTER
Couldn't be better.

A beat.

CASSIDY
I gotta say, Sutter, I'm impressed.
(off his look)
I admire you... for going out with her.

SUTTER
"Admire?" That's an odd word.

CASSIDY
No I mean... you don't usually go for those kinds of girls.

SUTTER
What can I say? I'm evolving.

CASSIDY

(coy)

Maybe you'll amount to something after all.

SUTTER

I'm already something. I'm a miraculous marvel is what I am.

She laughs. It's comfortable between them.

CASSIDY

Anyway... I'd better get back. Good seeing you.

She turns to go. He watches.

INT HALLWAY - LATER

Sutter is walking to class when he hears:

VOICE

Sutter!

Mr. Aster calls to him from inside his classroom.

MR. ASTER

Would you come in here please?

Sutter exhales and turns left into Aster's class.

MR. ASTER

Have a seat.

Aster hands him a homework assignment. A big red D+.

SUTTER

(upbeat)

It's not an F.

MR. ASTER

I thought you were getting help.

SUTTER

I am.

MR. ASTER

Well now you need a C on the final or you fail my class.

SUTTER

I'll try harder.

MR. ASTER

No you won't.

That takes Sutter by surprise.

MR. ASTER

I don't get you, Sutter. You're a smart kid. Thoughtful. Do you even want to graduate?

SUTTER

(beat; thinks about it)
I'm not sure.

MR. ASTER

Excuse me?

SUTTER

I'm being honest with you. The truth is, I really don't know. I like it here. I like being young. Everybody's rushing me to grow up, move on -- why? What's so great about it?

Aster doesn't know what to say.

SUTTER

Are you happy, Mr. Aster?

Aster is silent. Sutter shrugs. Takes his paper and goes.

INT AIMEE'S HOUSE - PROM NIGHT

Tuxedo-clad Sutter stands in the kitchen with Aimee's MOM and Randy. Aimee's Mom has the camera out and is readying to take some prom pictures.

AIMEE'S MOM

Randy, get in there with Sutter.

The two men pose for the picture. As odd a couple as you're likely to see. Sutter pretends to be comfortable.

Finally Aimee comes down. She's wearing the lipstick again, her dress is a pale yellow that doesn't quite match her skin tone, and she's done her hair up in a leaning tower of Pisa style do. An awkward girl trying too hard to look elegant. Sutter doesn't care about that.

SUTTER

You look fabuloso.

AIMEE

Thanks. So do you.

They do the boutonniere/ corsage exchange. Mom takes a few more. Randy's already turned his attention to the game on TV. They say their goodbyes and they're off.

INT SUTTER'S CAR - LATER

Sutter's car has been washed for the occasion. They sit together.

SUTTER
Sorry I didn't get you a limo.

AIMEE
That's ok.

SUTTER
Let me make it up to you.

He pulls out a small wrapped gift from the glove compartment.

AIMEE
You didn't have to --

SUTTER
I wanted to.

Aimee tears the wrapping paper off of the box. Opens it. A flask.

SUTTER
Just like mine. And you'll notice it's already full too.

AIMEE
I love it!

SUTTER
Shall we (toast)?
(raising his flask)
To you, Aimee Finecky.

They toast. Aimee leans in to kiss him. When it's over:

SUTTER
Ok then. Let's go to prom!

EXT HORSE RACING TRACK - LATER

Sutter and Aimee arrive at the venue which, when not hosting a high school prom, is a horse track. Tonight it's lit up with white Xmas lights and made to look very romantic. Aimee adjusts the straps on her ill-fitting dress. Sneaks a drink from her flask. Sutter takes Aimee's arm and they walk inside.

INT BANQUET HALL - SAME

The prom is already in full swing and it's very much like you'd expect -- DJ, punch bowl, padded chairs, white tablecloths. Through Sutter's eyes, the whole place sparkles.

People greet him as they always do when he shows up to a party. High-fives etc. Sutter and Aimee choose a half-empty table to sit at. Sutter pulls out a chair for her like a gentleman. They sit and take it all in.

SUTTER
You want some punch?

AIMEE
Sure.

SUTTER
Back in a jiff.

Sutter heads over to the punch bowl. Pours two glasses. Nods to Ricky who is sitting with Beth. And then he sees Cassidy, on the dance floor with Marcus. Her dress is amazing, showing off her voluptuous body in the perfect way. Sutter takes a moment to watch but then shakes it off, heads back to his table, hands Aimee the punch which she immediately spikes.

AIMEE
Cheers.

Sutter wants to give Aimee his full attention but his eyes can't help returning to Cassidy. Eventually:

AIMEE
She's a good dancer.

SUTTER
Hmm?

AIMEE
Cassidy.

SUTTER
Oh, yeah, I hadn't noticed.

Aimee doesn't push the issue. Sutter downs another drink. And so does Aimee. The song ends and Cassidy sees Sutter at the table. She walks over with Marcus.

CASSIDY
Why aren't you two dancing?

SUTTER
You know I hate this kind of music.

CASSIDY
Who cares? It's the prom. Aimee, c'mon!

AIMEE
I'm not much of a dancer.

SUTTER
That's why you got me. I can teach you some of my moves.

AIMEE
(taking a big sip)
I'm good right here. You two go ahead.

Sutter and Cassidy share a look.

SUTTER

You sure?

AIMEE

It's fine.

Aimee takes out her flask and re-spikes the drink. Sutter hesitates for a beat, sizing up whether Aimee is telling the truth.

SUTTER

If you change your mind...

Aimee turns back around. Sutter shrugs. He and Cassidy head to the dance floor. Once they're dancing:

CASSIDY

She looks nice.

SUTTER

She does.

CASSIDY

What's with the flask? You're not turning her into a lush are you?

SUTTER

You wanna dance or lecture me about Aimee?

CASSIDY

I wanna dance.

Sutter spins her. They're getting more comfortable now. Sutter accidentally bumps into another guy who looks pissed. Sutter apologizes.

Song over, Sutter bows to Cassidy who curtsies back. Then they part ways. He watches her walk over to Marcus before turning to walk back to Aimee.

Sutter kisses her cheek as he sits down next to her. Aimee smiles. Seems like she means it. Then again, might be the alcohol talking. Sutter takes her hand and holds it at the table. He looks around the room. Sees Ricky and Beth having fun. Sees Shawnie twirling on the dance floor with her date. Everything he sees makes him happy.

SUTTER

Amazing, isn't it, Aim? All these kids. Dressed up, dancing, singing, falling in love... This is our night! St. Patrick's Day for the young.

(beat)

Do you realize -- right now, this moment, this is as young as we're ever gonna be.

(MORE)

SUTTER (CONT'D)

This is it. The spectacular now.
(beat)
God, I love these people.

The song ends and a new one begins, slower, more romantic. Sutter grabs Aimee and gestures to the dance floor. This time she doesn't resist. They dance. She puts her head on Sutter's shoulder.

AIMEE

I'm sorry I can't dance like Cassidy.

SUTTER

You dance like Aimee. And that's perfect.

We stay with them a few beats. A nice moment.

- LATER. Sutter and Aimee walk out of the main room and out onto the grounds.

AIMEE

We're gonna miss the King and Queen.

SUTTER

Fuck that. We're all Kings and Queens tonight.

AIMEE

(starting to slur)
That's right! I'm the Queen.

SUTTER

And I'm your King.

AIMEE

I need to sit down.

They take their seat on a bench. The stars are out tonight. It's beautiful. Neither says a word for a second. Aimee starts to but stops herself.

SUTTER

What is it?

AIMEE

You have any more?

SUTTER

Uh, yeah, here.

AIMEE

(drinks)

I've been thinking... about the summer.
My sister said she could get me a job at
a book store.

SUTTER

In St. Louis?

AIMEE

Uh-huh.

SUTTER

A book store's perfect for you.

AIMEE

I know! And it'll help pay for college.

SUTTER

Have you talked to your mom yet?

AIMEE

No but I will.

SUTTER

That's excellent. I can't think of anything better.

AIMEE

I can.

(beat)

Come with me....

Sutter doesn't know what to say to that.

AIMEE

I've looked into it. You can take classes at the junior College. We'll both get jobs downtown. In our free time we can go to Forest Park or hang out by the river. Have you ever seen the Mississippi? I've only seen pictures but it looks amazing.

SUTTER

(beat)

Wow. That's... that's some plan. You've really done your homework.

AIMEE

Yeah. And best of all my sister says there's tons of vacancies in her building cause of the economy and stuff. They're not expensive at all. We could move at the end of June. You and me.

Sutter remains dazed, silent.

AIMEE

Sutter... what do you think?

Looking at Aimee, Sutter knows there's only two possibilities. Break her heart right now -- or just go with it.

SUTTER

I think... that's a terrific idea. Best I've ever heard.

Aimee embraces him. They kiss. We can tell what she can't: Sutter is not convinced about any of this.

- LATER. Sutter and Aimee walk back into the room. Aimee is ecstatic. Sutter looks pained now. The joy of the buzz completely sucked out of him.

The prom itself seems to be equally pallid. The room has thinned out. The glitter is crumbling. The lame decorations are half on the ground. There's no sign of Sutter's friends. Depression threatening, Sutter makes his move.

SUTTER
This is ridiculous.

Hops up on the riser and grabs the mic from the DJ.

SUTTER
Can I have everybody's attention?

The music stops. There's a little feedback from the mic.

SUTTER
Come on people, let's pick this party up.
This is our night.

Some people yell out "woo Sutter" etc. Aimee is by this point too drunk to shout. Others are clearly less enthusiastic.

SUTTER
How bout I add a little class to the evening?
(clears his throat)
A 1 and a 2 and 1 2 3..
(sings)
"You're nobody till somebody loves you.
You're nobody till somebody cares." Sing it with me.

Sutter doesn't remember the next line. The crowd starts to turn on him.

SUTTER
Da da da... shit. Um... "Head keeps spinning, go to sleep grinning, if this is just the beginning, my life will be beautiful!"

SOMEONE IN THE CROWD
Sit down!

SUTTER
You sit down. Dickhead.

SOMEONE ELSE
Go back to rehab!

Other kids start shouting too. Mr. Aster runs over to put a stop to it.

MR. ASTER
Alright Mr. Keely, that's enough.

SUTTER
I'm just warming up.

MR. ASTER
I said that's enough.

SUTTER
This is our night, Mr. Asterhole, not yours.

Some people cheer the dig at the teacher but not everyone.

MR. ASTER
That's it, your prom's over.

SUTTER
Fine. We'll take this party elsewhere.

Sutter drops the mic on the ground. Hops off the riser. Stumbles a little on the way down but covers it up well enough. He still thinks he's under control but the stares from his classmates say otherwise. Sutter pays them no mind. Cassidy runs up to him.

CASSIDY
You have to take Aimee home.

SUTTER
Cass where you been?

CASSIDY
In the bathroom with your girlfriend. She passed out on the floor!

SUTTER
Ouch. Was it my singing?

CASSIDY
This is not a joke Sutter.

SUTTER
Ok, ok, I'll take care of her.

CASSIDY
I don't think you know how.

SUTTER
Hey, this is none of your business, Cass.

CASSIDY

It's not about me. And it's not about us.
It's about -

AIMEE

Stop!

Aimee comes out, walking at a bit of a tilt, covered in vomit, angry.

AIMEE

Get away from him. You're not his boyfriend.

CASSIDY

I was just trying to get him to --

AIMEE

I know what you were trying to do. You were practically... dancefucking!

SUTTER

Whoa.

CASSIDY

Aimee --

AIMEE

Stay away from him, you fat bitch.

At which point Aimee winds up and slaps Cassidy across the face, hard. But in the process, she loses her balance and falls onto the punch bowl table, crashing it to the floor. Cassidy looks at Sutter as if to say "look what you've done to her." Sutter receives the look, brushes it off, and runs to Aimee's aid.

SUTTER

Can you sit up? Are you cut? Come on, let's get you up in this chair.

He lifts her up, gently.

AIMEE

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

SUTTER

Don't be sorry. It's the prom, things happen at the prom.

AIMEE

I'm such a mess.

SUTTER

You're beautiful. Let's get out of here.

Sutter helps Aimee to her feet. She takes one step and vomits again onto the floor.

Anyone still watching the scene (which is most people) groan at the sight. Sutter sees Cassidy still giving him that look, the same one he got a thousand times as her boyfriend.

SUTTER

She's just not used to partying so hard.

AIMEE

Cassidy, I'm sorry...

CASSIDY

It's OK.

AIMEE

(starts crying)

No, really...

CASSIDY

Take her home, Sutter.

SUTTER

I will. Come on, baby, you'll be alright.
Everything's gonna be alright.

And with Cass watching, as he helps her out of the room:

AIMEE

I love you, Sutter. I love you so much.

And this is like a gunshot to Sutter. Of all the things to happen tonight, that one stings the most.

BLACK.

HOLD A FEW SECONDS AND THEN FADE IN:

INT CLOTHING STORE - A FEW DAYS LATER

Sutter rings up a customer -- Jason Doyle.

SUTTER

Nice-looking suit.

JASON DOYLE

Present from my pops. You should have seen him when I got into Dartmouth. Guy was in tears.

Sutter doesn't say anything.

JASON DOYLE

You pick a college?

SUTTER

Yeah.

JASON DOYLE

Which one?

SUTTER

(beat)

F.U.

JASON DOYLE

Nice. Go Gators.

SUTTER

See ya around Jason.

Once he's gone, Bob appears in the doorway to the back room.

BOB

Sutter --

Bob gestures for Sutter to follow him into the back. Sutter does. Sits down in the desk across from him.

BOB

You've probably noticed we're not too busy these days. And because of that... well, I can only keep one clerk.

(Sutter nods, waits for it)

You know I like you, Sutter. More importantly, the customers like you. So I think you should be the one I keep.

SUTTER

That's excellent, Bob. Thank you! You won't regret it.

BOB

Hold on a sec.

(beat)

I've given this some hard thought, and the only way I can let you stay is if you promise me, 100 percent, that you'll never come in here loaded again.

Sutter is taken aback by this. He never thought Bob was on to him.

BOB

I'm serious. Not even a light buzz. And if you do, one time, I'm gonna have to let you go. Do you understand?

SUTTER

I do.

BOB

Can you promise me, Sutter?

Bob looks Sutter in the eye. Sutter holds his gaze for a beat, then laughs to himself.

SUTTER

You've got me there, don't you, Bob? You know I can't promise that.

Bob looks at Sutter, disappointed, hoping he'll reconsider. Knows he won't.

BOB

I appreciate your honesty.

SUTTER

Of course, Bob. I'm always up front with you.

Sutter, proud of himself, rises to shake Bob's hand.

SUTTER

It's been a pleasure working for you Sir.

Bob stares at him a beat. Then shakes his hand.

BOB

I guess... if I was your dad, here's where I'd give you a lecture or something... 'bout what you're doing to yourself.

SUTTER

You know what, Bob... If you were my Dad, you wouldn't have to.

EXT CLOTHING STORE - END OF DAY

Sutter leaves, loosening his tie on the way out. Feeling pretty good until:

CASSIDY

Can we talk to you for a minute?

Cassidy stands on the sidewalk.

SUTTER

Who's we?

She points to a parked car. Marcus and Ricky are inside.

INT MARCUS' CAR - CONTINUOUS

Sutter sits next to Ricky in the back. Marcus and Cassidy are in the front. They all look at him.

SUTTER

Please tell me this isn't one of those, 'We're worried about your drinking' intervention type things.

RICKY

No, Sutter. We know you better than that.

CASSIDY

It's more like an Aimee Finecky intervention thing.

SUTTER

What are you talking about?

MARCUS

You're hurting her, dude. Don't you see that?

SUTTER

I'm hurting her? How am I hurting her?

CASSIDY

We never once saw her drink before. Now she's gets drunk between classes. She's hungover every morning --

SUTTER

Excuse me. Since when do any of you give a shit about Aimee?

MARCUS

That's not the point --

SUTTER

Of course it is. You don't know her. You look at her and see this little mouse who should keep quiet and hide in the corner, don't you? Well I see more than that. I see someone whose dreams are as big as all of yours put together. Someone who can stand up for herself now. And do you know why? Cause of me. I did that.

RICKY

You think you're some kind of hero?

SUTTER

Yes as a matter of fact --

RICKY

Fuck off, Sutter. You're not a hero. You're just using her... to keep from dealing with your own shit.

SUTTER

Really. One girl gives you the time of day and now you're an expert --

RICKY

Fuck you.

SUTTER
Fuck you!

Before push comes to shove:

CASSIDY
Guys. Cool it!
(beat; to Sutter)
Can we talk alone for a minute?

EXT PARKING LOT - SAME

Sutter and Cassidy lean against Sutter's car. Silent at first.

CASSIDY
It's a nice night.

SUTTER
I've had better.

CASSIDY
This was my idea. So don't blame the guys. Look, we just want what's best for Aimee.

SUTTER
And that's not me?

CASSIDY
It could be. Maybe. If you tried.

Sutter stands there for a moment without saying anything. He watches some garbage get blown across the parking lot.

SUTTER
If you really have this vast knowledge about me and relationships, then you'd know I don't need to break anything off. She'll take care of that soon enough, just like you did.

CASSIDY
You think that was easy for me? Say what you want, but you're the one who made it clear we didn't have a future. And I get it. That's you, that's who you are. But Aimee's different. You're her whole world. She thinks there's a future with you and there isn't.

SUTTER
Yeah? What makes you so sure?

CASSIDY
What do you mean?

SUTTER

I mean... maybe there is one. A future.
Maybe in the Fall the two of us are
moving in together.

CASSIDY

What?

SUTTER

It's all set. Her sister got us a place
in St. Louis. Heading out right after
graduation.

CASSIDY

You can't be serious.

SUTTER

As a heart attack. Just gave my two weeks
notice to Bob.

(beat; Cass is shocked)

Guess you don't know everything, do you
Cass?

And with that, Sutter (like Shane) flips the double bird
to his friends and gets in the car. Cassidy watches him
drive off, shocked.

EXT HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Sutter and Aimee walk towards the parking lot. Some kids
laugh and point. One shouts:

CLASSMATE

Puke-a-reena!

Sutter wants to go get in that guy's face but Aimee keeps
him walking.

AIMEE

It's ok. Come on.

SUTTER

Where are we going?

AIMEE

Just come on.

They get to his car and Aimee pulls out her flask.

SUTTER

You sure you wanna --

AIMEE

We're celebrating.
(off his look)

I did it. I talked to my mom.

SUTTER
(surprised)
What did you say?

AIMEE
I just walked in, shut off Nancy Grace,
and I told her. It's my life and I'm not
going to let that stupid paper route get
in the way.

SUTTER
And it worked?

AIMEE
It was ugly at first. She tried to guilt
me into staying but I refused to back
down. I just said, look, if I can afford
it, I'm going and there's nothing you can
do about it.

SUTTER
That's amazing! I'm so proud of you!

AIMEE
I'm proud of myself! Cheers.

SUTTER
(beat)
Cheers.

They drink.

SUTTER
Wow Aim, you're like my hero.

AIMEE
It wasn't so bad. You'll see.

SUTTER
Hmm?

AIMEE
When you do it.

Sutter looks away.

AIMEE
We made a deal.

SUTTER
Aimee --

AIMEE
You can do it Sutter. I know you can.

SUTTER
You don't know her. She's...

AIMEE
You can do it.

Sutter isn't so sure.

AIMEE
Repeat after me. "I want to call him,
Mom." "I want to motherfucking call him."

Sutter looks at Aimee. Aimee looks back. Smiles.

INT HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT

An elegant, upscale hotel downtown. Mary works behind the Front Desk checking in a customer. Sutter takes a deep breath and walks in through the automatic doors. Waits patiently for his Mom to finish.

Mary sees him. This is a surprise. Beckons him over.

MARY
What's wrong?

SUTTER
Nothing. I, uh, I want to ask you something.

MARY
What is it?

A beat.

SUTTER
It's about Dad.

MARY
(not again)
Sutter --

SUTTER
I just want to talk to him.

MARY
We've been over this. It's not a good idea --

SUTTER
Why not?

MARY
I don't need a reason, do I?

SUTTER
Yes you do! He's my father.

MARY
Well I'm your mother and you live under my roof.

SUTTER
I wish I didn't.

MARY
(beat)
I know that, Sutter, but that's the way it is.

SUTTER
You can't keep him from me. It's not right.

MARY
(quiet but stern)
Sutter... this is my job. We'll talk about it later, Ok? I have guests.

SUTTER
Mom, please --

MARY
Enough!
(to Guest)
Hi, may I help you?

The Guest looks at Sutter. Sutter looks at his Mom. Mary ignores him. A standoff. One that Sutter is not gonna win.

SUTTER
No wonder he left you.

And with that, Sutter grabs a handful of mints from the jar on the counter. Storms off.

EXT SUBURBAN HOUSE - DAY

Sutter sits on the patio with Holly, who, as usual, is overdressed for the occasion. Sutter watches with amusement as she fusses with food and drinks.

HOLLY
How do you like the way we've relandscaped back here? Joe and I planted some --

SUTTER
That's nice, yeah. So like I said on the phone, I wanted to talk to you about Dad.

HOLLY
Oh Sutter, why do you want to dredge that up?

SUTTER
Dredge? Come on, Holly. Dad's not something you dredge. He's great.
(MORE)

SUTTER (CONT'D)

Remember how he used to tell us stories
out in the tent in the backyard?

HOLLY

That was mostly you. I was a little old
for stories by the time we got that tent.

SUTTER

Well, you remember our vacation in
Mexico? He had us going up to people and
asking 'em 'Where can we find the belt
buckle museum?' or 'Why is there no
artichoke ice cream?' It was hilarious.

HOLLY

It was embarrassing.

SUTTER

People thought it was funny. They loved
us.

HOLLY

They loved you because you were little
and cute.

SUTTER

But the guys loved you. They thought you
were a hot little muchacha.

Holly remembers, then smiles.

HOLLY

He did know how to make friends, didn't
he?

SUTTER

Damn right he did.

They sit in silence for a moment.

SUTTER

Do you know happened? Between him and
Mom?

HOLLY

He cheated on her.

SUTTER

How do you know that? That's her version.

HOLLY

You think it's a lie?

SUTTER

I'm not saying she's lying. I'm saying
there's two sides to every story.

HOLLY

Sutter --

SUTTER

Think about it. She won't let us see him.
Won't say where he is --

HOLLY

Let's talk about something else. How's
your friend, how's Aimee?

SUTTER

-- won't even give us his number. You
gotta admit, it's suspicious.

Holly's face shows that she's thinking about it.

SUTTER

I tried asking Mom but she refuses.
That's why I need your help. Would you
call her for me? Find out where he is?
(off her look)
Please, Holl. Will you ask her?

HOLLY

(beat, looks at Sutter)
I don't have to ask her. I know where he
is.

Sutter looks at her, expectantly. She goes inside for a
moment. When she returns she hands Sutter a slip of
paper. Sutter looks at a phone number, then at his
sister. Psyched!

SUTTER

Thanks, Holl. Seriously. You're the best!

Sutter jumps up to go.

HOLLY

Sutter!
(he turns, beat)
Come by for lunch sometime. Ok?

SUTTER

I will. Promise!

Holly watches him go, apprehensive.

INT SUTTER'S HOME - DAY

Sutter is alone. Miles Davis plays in the background. He
fixes himself a drink. Downs it. Takes a deep breath.
Then takes out a piece of paper on which there is a phone
number. Sutter picks up the phone. He seems nervous.
Dials. After a few rings a deep, masculine VOICE answers.

VOICE (O.S.)

Hello?

SUTTER

(tentative)

Um.... Dad?

VOICE (O.S.)

I think you got the wrong --

SUTTER

It's me, Sutter.

SUTTER'S DAD (O.S.)

(perks up)

Sutter!? No shit, kiddo! How you doing?
You sound like a man now!

SUTTER

(smiling)

Well, yeah.

SUTTER'S DAD (O.S.)

How are you?

SUTTER

I'm alright.

SUTTER'S DAD (O.S.)

Good. Good. You still playing baseball?

SUTTER

What?

SUTTER'S DAD (O.S.)

You were a heckuva pitcher back in the
day. Small for your age but what an arm.

Sutter is overcome with emotion but he sucks it down.

SUTTER

You remember that?

SUTTER'S DAD (O.S.)

Sure, son, sure I do. Still throwing?

SUTTER

I, uh, no. Not really.

SUTTER'S DAD (O.S.)

How's your Mom and Holly doing?

SUTTER

They're good, Dad... Real good.

SUTTER'S DAD (O.S.)

That's great. That's... tremendous.

And then silence for a beat.

SUTTER

Listen, Dad, I, uh, I was thinking...
could I come see you sometime...?

SUTTER'S DAD (O.S.)

Of course you can. Come on over! How's Friday?

SUTTER

Oh, uh, really?

SUTTER'S DAD (O.S.)

Come by at like 3 o'clock. Maybe we'll go to a game.

SUTTER

(cloud nine)

That would be great.

SUTTER'S DAD (O.S.)

Tremendous. See you then --

SUTTER

Hey, uh, Dad... where, um, where do you live?

INT SUTTER'S CAR - DAY

Sutter and Aimee speed down the highway, filled with excitement. Music on, windows down, feeling good. Sutter sips from the Big Gulp. Aimee looks through the recently released High School Yearbook.

AIMEE

How much further is it?

SUTTER

Another three hours or so.

(beat; sincere)

Hey Aim... thank you.

AIMEE

For what?

SUTTER

I wouldn't have done this without you.

He grabs her hand. She holds his, touched. Smiles. Sutter looks at the road again. Anticipation building.

EXT DAD'S HOME - LATER

Sutter and Aimee pull into a parking area in front of a row of townhouses. The whole place looks very poorly cared for.

SUTTER
(checking slip of paper)
Here we are.
(beat)
I think I need that shot of vodka now.

They take a couple of shots. Then a couple more. Sutter looks at her.

SUTTER
Ok. Let's do it.

EXT DAD'S DOORSTEP - MOMENTS LATER

Sutter rings the doorbell. After a few moments he rings again. After the third ring the door opens. TOMMY KEELY, (late 40s) extremely handsome but in a worn, creased way.

TOMMY
Well, hello there. What can I do for you?

SUTTER
(confused)
It's... me.

Tommy stares blankly at him.

SUTTER
Sutter.

TOMMY
(realizing)
Sutter! Hey! Oh, of course. Man, what am I thinking? I forgot you were coming. Good to see you buddy.

Tommy shakes Sutter's hand. No hug.

TOMMY
And who is this striking young lady?

SUTTER
This is Aimee. My girlfriend. Aimee, this is my Dad.

He takes Aimee's hand, then kisses it. She blushes.

TOMMY
Call me Tommy. You have immaculate taste in the ladies, don't you?
(winks at her)
Just like his old man.

Tommy smiles at Sutter. This is followed by an awkward silence. Tommy doesn't yet invite them in.

TOMMY
Man it's good to see you.

SUTTER

You too Dad --

TOMMY

Listen, I was on my way to meet some friends of mine but now that you're here, let's all go together. What do you say?

SUTTER

(looks at Aimee; she shrugs)

Um... ok.

TOMMY

Great. You take your car and follow me there. It's just up the road. Come on.

Tommy gets in his beat-up Wagoneer. Sutter and Aimee head back to the Mitsubishi. Once inside:

AIMEE

Another shot of whisky, doctor?

SUTTER

Stat.

INT LARRY'S - LATER

A dark and dirty little bbq joint adjacent to the highway. The BARTENDER and some of the REGULARS greet Tommy when he enters, much like Sutter's friends when they see him enter a room. After a few hello's:

TOMMY

Everybody... this here is my son, Sutter.

Everybody welcomes Sutter with raised glasses and a few pats on the back. Tommy seems proud. Sutter and Aimee are elated. When they reach the end of the bar the bathroom door opens and out comes ROBERTA (45, short dress, trashy). Tommy is surprised to see her.

TOMMY

Well if it isn't the most beautiful woman in this here entire state.

ROBERTA

Last week you said the country.

TOMMY

Did I?

Tommy smiles at her. Winks.

ROBERTA

(beat)

Aren't you gonna introduce me to your friends?

TOMMY
(realizing)
Where are my manners? Roberta... I'd you
to meet my son. The amazing Sutter Keely.
And his ladyfriend Aimee.

Sutter beams. Roberta moves right up to him.

ROBERTA
Get your good looks from your mother, did
ya?

SUTTER
Ma'am.

Roberta kisses Sutter on the cheek and walks away.

TOMMY
(watching her go)
Ain't she somethin'? Let's get some
drinks!

LATER. Tommy sits with Sutter and Aimee at a corner table. Sutter and Aimee drink beers. Nobody's minding.

TOMMY
... and after that I moved to Key West.
You guys ever been down there?
(they haven't)
You don't know what you're missing. Key
West, now that is the life, boy. Sunsets
like a butterscotch sundae with swirls of
strawberry mixed in, melting into the
ocean. Everyone with a drink and a smile.

Tommy grins, and so does Sutter.

SUTTER
Sounds perfect.

TOMMY
It was.
(beat)
Wish you could have been there kiddo.

SUTTER
So how come you left?

TOMMY
Ran out of dough is why. Would have
stayed there forever if I could, believe
me.

Tommy looks in the direction of Roberta, who is sitting at the bar chatting with other men. His stare lingers there a bit.

SUTTER

Hey how bout some music?

TOMMY

That's a great idea. You take care of that. I'll go get us a refill.

Tommy gets up and walks over to the bar. Sutter goes to the jukebox with Aimee.

AIMEE

You OK?

SUTTER

Never better.

She squeezes his arm and smiles back. Sutter finds exactly what he's looking for on the jukebox. Dean Martin's "Aint That a Kick in the Head" begins to play. They go back and sit down.

ANGLE ON Tommy, new pitcher in hand. On his way back to the table, he stops and whispers something in Roberta's ear. She eyes him flirtatiously.

Tommy sits back down. Sutter smiles, expecting Tommy to react to the music. He doesn't.

SUTTER

(beat, proud)

Dean Martin.

TOMMY

Uh-huh.

SUTTER

Don't you like this song?

TOMMY

Eh, this was always your mother's thing.

This is news to Sutter. It's a bit of a shock. His only response is to take a large drink of his beer.

SUTTER

But it's... fun. I can't imagine Mom ever having fun --

TOMMY

Your mother? Are you kidding? When we first got married... boy was she something. Nobody was more fun than that woman.

Again, Sutter is stunned. And again Tommy is looking away at Roberta.

SUTTER
So... what happened?

TOMMY
(still looking away)
What do you mean?

SUTTER
What happened... between you two?

Now Tommy turns back around.

TOMMY
(takes another drink)
Things don't work out sometimes.

Sutter processes. Aimee watches him, growing increasingly concerned. And then:

SUTTER
You know she blames you for everything.
Won't even let us talk about you.

Tommy does not seem the least bit surprised.

SUTTER
I defend you though. I always defend you.

TOMMY
Thanks, kiddo. I appreciate that.
(beat)
Wasn't all my fault.

SUTTER
Right. There's two sides to every story.

TOMMY
Damn straight.

SUTTER
And whatever happened, she still
shouldn't have kicked you out of the
house.

TOMMY
Oh she didn't kick me out.

SUTTER
What?

TOMMY
I left.

Sutter can't believe it.

TOMMY
I had to. I mean, I did want to be there
for you. Man, did I ever want that.
(MORE)

TOMMY (CONT'D)

You guys were more important to me than anything in the world. But... well... things between your mother and I just got to be so... uncool. Once she caught me with that --

(beat)

Guess I wasn't cut out to be a family man, not in the traditional sense anyway.

Tommy laughs. The room is now spinning for Sutter. Tommy sees his face.

TOMMY

You know how it is. One thing leads to another... the girls don't mean anything.

SUTTER

Girls? Like, more than one?

TOMMY

(shrugs)

Not like I kept a running tally.

(beat)

But hey, I don't live in the past. I live in the now. That's what it's all about.

Right, kid?

Sutter looks like he might throw up. Tommy sees Roberta get up and leave the bar. Tommy jumps up.

TOMMY

I'll be right back. Settle the tab for me, will ya?

SUTTER

Um, sure.

TOMMY

Thanks bud. You're a miraculous marvel.

And with that he heads outside. Sutter just watches him go.

AIMEE

Sutter...?

But he's just sitting there, staring out the window at Tommy, who's now pressing up close to Roberta, whispering in her ear. She laughs and playfully pushes him away.

AIMEE

Sutter.

Sutter snaps back to attention. Opens his wallet to pay Tommy's bill. He only has a few bucks. He looks to Aimee with embarrassment.

AIMEE
Don't worry about it. Really.

SUTTER
I'm sorry.

AIMEE
Don't be.

Tommy comes back inside.

TOMMY
(winks)
So Roberta's had a few too many drinks.
Think I'd better give her a ride home. If
you know what I mean.

SUTTER
Oh... Um... you want us to follow you?

TOMMY
I got it covered. Won't be more than an
hour.

SUTTER
But -- why don't we come with you? We're
not doing any--

TOMMY
No need. You guys head on back to my
place. I'll be right there I promise.

The bad feeling growing, Sutter tries one more time.

SUTTER
Dad, we came all this way...

Tommy smiles at his son. Puts a hand on his shoulder.

TOMMY
And I'm sure glad you did, kiddo... See
you soon.

EXT TOMMY'S DUPLEX - LATER

Sutter and Aimee sit parked outside Tommy's house. The rain is pounding down on the roof of the car. Sutter takes a big hit from his flask.

SUTTER
It's getting pretty bad out. We should probably head back.

AIMEE
It's only been a few hours. We can wait --

Sutter angrily turns on the ignition, quickly pulls away.

INT. SUTTER'S CAR - LATER

ANGLE ON SUTTER in the driver's seat. The car is not moving. The only sound are the wipers sweeping back and forth.

REVEAL what Sutter is looking at: his father, right back at the BBQ/bar. Tommy tips back the last of his beer and laughs at something one of his buddies said.

BACK TO SUTTER. Frozen. Aimee doesn't know what to say. Without a word, Sutter composes himself. Drives away.

We stay with them in the car. The silence continues. The wipers keep sweeping. Sutter looks like he's about to burst. Aimee watches him, expecting the explosion any moment. She puts on the radio, tuning until she finds a baseball game. They listen for a few moments. Sutter angrily turns it off.

More silence. Sutter takes a long swig as he drives. Finally:

AIMEE
I'm sure he wanted to come back --

SUTTER
Aimee --

AIMEE
You saw her. She was in no condition to drive.

SUTTER
Please --

AIMEE
That's probably what happened. If it wasn't for her, he would have come right back.

SUTTER
Sure, and if he hadn't cheated on mom then we'd still be a family and I'd be president of my Sunday school class and you and I would ride silver stallions to Pluto.

This shuts her down. Sutter glances over, feeling bad for snapping. Takes a deep breath and another drink.

AIMEE
Maybe we caught him on a bad day...

SUTTER
And maybe that's just who he is. Huh?
Maybe he's been like that since day one.
(MORE)

SUTTER (CONT'D)
Just a selfish, lowlife, motherfucking
asshole!

Sutter shakes his head in disgust at himself. Aimee stays silent. They listen to the rain pour down. Until:

AIMEE
Sutter.

SUTTER
What?!

AIMEE
I love you.

Sutter exhales. Not what he wants to hear right now.

AIMEE
Did you hear me?

Sutter still won't engage.

AIMEE
I love you.

SUTTER
Stop saying that.

AIMEE
Why?

SUTTER
Because --

AIMEE
I want you to hear it. I love you.

SUTTER
You're wrong.

Aimee bristles at this. But Sutter has been waiting to say it. Can't stop now.

SUTTER
Come on, Aimee, you don't love me. You're just... drunk and you're... grateful... someone came along and showed interest in you.

AIMEE
Don't say that, Sutter. Don't try to mess this up --

SUTTER
Mess what up? What do you think this is?

At which point a loud horn blares from an oncoming car.

AIMEE

Watch out!

All this time, the car has been swerving slowly into the other lane. Sutter quickly rights the wheel and the car fishtails in the other direction, the road slick and wet from the rain. With no seatbelt on, Aimee slips down into the floorboard as Sutter struggles to regain control.

The car sideswipes a concrete abutment before Sutter is finally able to wrestle it to a stop in the high grass off to the left, facing the wrong way (passenger door closest to the highway).

When the dust settles:

AIMEE

(peering up from the floor)

Are you alright?

SUTTER

What?

AIMEE

Are you ok?

SUTTER

You're asking me that? Jesus Christ,
Aimee, no! I'm way fucking far from ok.

AIMEE

(moving in for a hug)

Thank god you're not hurt.

SUTTER

(pushing her off)

What is wrong with you?! I nearly killed
you and you wanna hug me?

AIMEE

I wanna make sure you're --

SUTTER

You need to run, Aimee. You need to get
as far away from me as you possibly can.

AIMEE

No.

SUTTER

They're right about me. Everyone's right.

AIMEE

Sutter, what are you --

SUTTER

Get out of the car.

AIMEE

No!

Sutter leans over and opens the passenger door.

SUTTER

Get out of the fucking car!

Aimee doesn't move. Tears start to fall from her eyes. She bites her lip and finally gets out. Aimee stands there. On the side of the road, the door still open.

AIMEE

I'm sorry.

SUTTER

Jesus Christ, Aimee, what are you sorr--?

But he doesn't get the rest of it out. An approaching car can't see Aimee through the rain and the fog. She's hit! Knocked off of her feet by the blow. Goes down hard.

And everything changes.

Sutter freaks, jumping out of the car, running as fast as he can to her side. Aimee lies in the grass, hair soaked, face caked in mud, blood dripping from her scalp. She isn't moving.

SUTTER

Aimee, oh fuck, Aimee. What have I done?

Sutter kneels over her. Afraid to touch her. Falling apart.

SUTTER

Please, God, don't do this. Oh please, fuck. I'll do anything. I swear. I'll never drink again just don't let her go.

Finally Aimee opens her eyes. Seeing him, she still can't help but smile. Then she collapses again.

SUTTER

Aimee!

INT HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - LATER

Sutter waits, fidgeting, his right foot tapping nervously on the floor. Seems like he's been there a while.

Finally a DOCTOR (40s, serious) leaves Aimee's room. In the BACKGROUND we see Aimee's Mom sitting at Aimee's bedside. The Doctor approaches Sutter.

DOCTOR

The bone fragments were only partially split so it doesn't require surgery.

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

That's the good news. The bad news is she suffered a minor concussion. There may be some dizziness so she should take it easy the next few days.

SUTTER

Yes sir.

The Doctor puts down his chart and looks hard at Sutter.

DOCTOR

She didn't say much about what happened.

Sutter says nothing.

DOCTOR

(beat)

I'll give you a choice, kid. The cops or your parents?

CUT TO:

INT HOSPITAL - HALLWAY

Sutter waits. Through the glass of the room behind him we can see Sutter's Mom arguing with the Doctor. The voices are muffled but he can hear clearly enough.

DOCTOR

Her blood alcohol level was twice the legal limit and I'd be willing to bet his was too. Did you know where he was tonight, Mrs. Keely?

MARY

What gives you the right to talk to me like that?

DOCTOR

I'm sorry if I sound harsh --

MARY

Don't tell me how to be a parent! I work 15 hours a day to support my family.

DOCTOR

A lot of moms work hard, Mrs. Keely, and their kids don't drink and drive.

Mary is silenced by this.

DOCTOR

Your son is lucky. And so is his girlfriend. Not everyone gets a second chance.

Mary doesn't respond. Sutter hasn't moved an inch.

INT MOM'S CAR - LATER

They drive silently. We stay on them for a while. Sutter looks at his Mom. She looks straight ahead. A mixture of anger and guilt on her face.

EXT/INT AIMEE'S HOUSE - DAY

Sutter rings the doorbell. Aimee's Mom answers and immediately hugs him.

AIMEE'S MOM
There he is! The hero!

SUTTER
(uncomfortable)
Hi Mrs. Finecky.

Once inside Randi and Shane wave hello from the living room. Sutter waves back.

AIMEE'S MOM
Aimee's in her room.

Sutter leaves them and heads to Aimee's room.

INT AIMEE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aimee's on the bed, reading. Sutter enters and sits on the end of the bed. He looks at her in her cast.

AIMEE
Should we talk about it?

Sutter's face says he'd rather not.

AIMEE
I agree.

SUTTER
Aimee, I'm so sor --

She silences him with a kiss.

AIMEE
Let's never speak of it again, ok? I don't want anything getting in the way of St. Louis.

She touches his face with her hand. Sutter looks pained.

EXT CONVENIENCE STORE - PARKING LOT - DAY

Sutter parks his car. Baseball game in the background. He's about to go in to the 7/11 when out comes little Walter (from the first scene). Walter holds hands with his mother while sipping from a Big Gulp. Sutter stares at the image, unnerved.

FADE UP: "Pomp and Circumstance." CUT TO:

EXT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION CEREMONY - DAY

Where Aimee, still in a cast, grabs her diploma from the PRINCIPAL MCNULTY. She turns to the crowd, waves, and walks on, taking her seat on the lawn amongst the rest of the graduates.

It's a beautiful day and the grounds are packed with students and their families.

A few more students are called to get their diplomas. There's still no sign of Sutter. Is he graduating?

PRINCIPAL
Sutter Keely.

There he is. Principal hands him the diploma. Students shout for him.

STUDENTS
Woo Sutter!

Someone else shouts:

STUDENT
Cartwheel!

ANOTHER STUDENT
Sing us a song!

Sutter pretends he doesn't hear them. He walks off. Aimee excitedly claps. On the way to his seat, Sutter opens the diploma folder a tiny bit. It's empty. He's not surprised. Closes it before anyone else can see.

Sutter takes his seat. Aimee turns around to look at him. She's never looked happier.

LATER. Aimee and Sutter are away from the crowd. Aimee takes out a flask and spikes her drink. She's about to do the same for Sutter but he stops her.

AIMEE
Really? Why not?

SUTTER
Think I'll just drink on the weekends from now on.

AIMEE
More for me.

Aimee takes a drink. Sutter watches her.

AIMEE
Is your family here?

SUTTER
I told them it was next week.

Aimee laughs. Sutter can't help but smile at her. Krystal, standing with her family, calls Aimee over.

AIMEE
I should go say hi. Be right back.

She runs off. Sutter remains, alone for a beat or two. And then:

CASSIDY
Hey there graduate.

SUTTER
Hey Cass.

CASSIDY
How you doing?

SUTTER
I'm good. You?

CASSIDY
Ready for some news...? I'm not going to State anymore.

SUTTER
(surprised)
You're staying here?

CASSIDY
Oh god no. I'm going with Marcus.
California baby!

SUTTER
You're... really? Isn't that a little... sudden?

CASSIDY
We talked about it and we just... we're doing it! Crazy, huh?

SUTTER
Well, that's... that's great.

CASSIDY
I know, it's exciting! Like a whole new era in my life is beginning.

SUTTER
Very cool.

CASSIDY
And you know what Sutter, if it wasn't for you and Aimee, going off together, I don't think we would have done it.
(MORE)

CASSIDY (CONT'D)

But now it feels, I don't know, it just
feels right. So thank you.

Cassidy hugs him. Tight. Sutter is still surprised. Once she pulls away:

CASSIDY

You'll stay in touch, won't you? You'll
write us from St. Louis.

SUTTER

You got it.

Cassidy leaves. Sutter is alone again. He looks at Aimee, taking pictures with her Mom. He looks at his shoes. Runs his fingers through his hair.

EXT BUS STATION - DAY

The bus to St. Louis is already boarding. Aimee waits to the side, suitcase in hand. She's nervous. Her mood is sinking. She checks her watch. The last passenger boards.

BUS DRIVER

Miss.

AIMEE

Just... two more minutes ok.

The Driver gets back on the bus. Aimee is nervous for a few more beats. And then she just starts to cry. The sadness overwhelms her. And then, just as quickly, she stops crying. She takes a few breaths, wills herself to be brave, picks up the suitcase and boards the bus.

As the doors close, and Aimee takes her seat, REVEAL Sutter has been watching this from a far. Tears in his eyes as well. The bus drives off in the distance. He watches it go.

INT SUTTER'S CAR - DAY

Driving. Trying not to be overcome with emotion. Silently convincing himself he's done the right thing. And that he doesn't need a drink.

He drives by a very seedy looking dive bar. He keeps driving. He looks in the rearview mirror, the bar still in view, beckoning.

INT SEEDY DIVE BAR - NIGHT

The lowest of the low. Dank, dark, and dusty. Two thuggish MEN play pool on a wrinkled table. Sutter sits at the bar next to a rumpled DRUNK in his late 60s. The BARTENDER has a wispy goatee and is missing some teeth. They've all been there a very long time.

SUTTER

Another round for the table.

(BARTENDER nods)

Thank you, Earl, thank you for serving
me. This is better. Much, much better.

RUMPLED DRUNK

You're a good guy, Sutter.

SUTTER

That's what I think too. I agree.

(to BARTENDER)

What do you think? Was I wrong to let her
go? Did I do the right thing?

BARTENDER

For you or for her?

The question doesn't get to hang for too long as the
Drunk chimes in.

RUMPLED DRUNK

You had to! You had to save that girl.

SUTTER

That's what I did. I saved her.

RUMPLED DRUNK

You're not wrong. You're a hero. You're a
King!

SUTTER

That's right! You're exactly right.

RUMPLED DRUNK

Look at you, Suther. What are you 19, 20?

SUTTER

I am 18 years old.

RUMPLED DRUNK

Beautiful. You got your whole life ahead
of you.

SUTTER

So do you, my man.

RUMPLED DRUNK

Not me. I'm old. My friends are gone.
I've wasted all this time...

Sutter flinches at the words for a second but is able to
dismisses them.

SUTTER

We're your friends.

RUMPLED DRUNK

You are.

SUTTER

Absolutely.

RUMPLED DRUNK

Thank you boy. Then let's have a drink.
To friendship.

They toast.

EXT SUTTER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sutter's Lancer takes the turn into the driveway too fast, crashing into the mailbox. Sutter exits the vehicle, leaving it half on the lawn.

SUTTER

(re: damage)

Shit.

A light turns on inside the house. Mary comes outside, pulling a robe around herself.

MARY

What the hell?

(seeing the mailbox)

Sutter!?

Sutter ignores her. Mom watches him stumble towards the house.

MARY

Have you been drinking?

Sutter says nothing.

MARY

Jesus Christ! We just went through this.
The hell is wrong with --

SUTTER

What do you care?

MARY

Excuse me?

SUTTER

You don't care about me. You've never cared about me.

MARY

Sutter.

(beat)

Look, I'm sorry, ok? I know I haven't always been there for you and I'm gonna try harder --

SUTTER

It's cause I remind you of him.

MARY

What are you talking about?

SUTTER

That's why you hate me. That's why you can't stand to look at me.

MARY

(stunned)

Sutter! How can you say that?! You're my son!

SUTTER

I'm his son too. We're exactly the same.

MARY

(beat)

You're wrong... You're nothing like him.

Sutter won't listen. He storms past her and walks inside. Mom follows. She walks right past Sutter and into the kitchen. Sutter, about to climb the stairs, hears his mom rummaging in the other room. He stops. Mom reappears, handing him a piece of paper.

CU: the paper has an address on it.

SUTTER

What's this?

MARY

Go to him. Then you'll see.

Sutter looks at the slip.

SUTTER

I thought you didn't --

MARY

I was trying to protect you from --

(beat)

I was wrong. Take this. Go see him. See for yourself how different you are.

Sutter is stunned by this.

SUTTER

I've already been.

Now it's Mom's turn to be surprised.

SUTTER

Holly gave me his number and... we drove there last week... You were right. He's... you were right all along.

And Mary knows what Sutter is really saying.

MARY
You're not your father.

Sutter tries to hold himself together but he can't look his mother in the eye. Mary grabs him into a hug. Sutter allows it but doesn't respond, not yet.

MARY
 (beat)
 Sutter listen to me. That man... that man's never loved anyone but himself. His heart is this big. But you... you love everybody. You've got the biggest heart of anyone I know.

Sutter's hit hard by this. Starts to lose his composure.

MARY
 Remember 3rd grade, when Ricky was on crutches for a month. Who carried his books every day? Or when you were 10 and Rosemary Clark lost her mother. You invited her to live with us, said I'd be her new mom. Remember that? You've always been so special, Sutter. That's why everyone loves you.

SUTTER
 Nobody loves me Mom.

MARY
 You're wrong.

And now Mom is crying too. Holds him tighter.

MARY
 You hear me, Sutter? You're wrong.

And finally Sutter hugs back. He closes his eyes as they hold each other. Over her shoulder, we see him crumble the slip of paper in his hand.

CUT TO:

A COMPUTER SCREEN. "Describe a challenge, hardship or misfortune you have experienced in your life."

Sutter sits at his desk. Eyes still wet. Reads on.

"What have you learned from this and how has it prepared you for the future?"

Sutter stares at it a beat. And then he starts to write.

SUTTER'S VOICE

My name is Sutter Keely and I'm 18 years old... Compared to other kids, I haven't had that many hardships. Not really. Shit's happened...

Sutter pauses, deletes "shit" and replaces it.

SUTTER'S VOICE

Stuff's happened, sure, stuff always happens... but the real challenge in my life, the real hardship... is me. It's always been me.

ANGLE ON SUTTER, deciding whether to continue. He does.

SUTTER'S VOICE

As long as I can remember, I've never NOT been afraid.

CUT TO:

Sutter behind the wheel. He doesn't look afraid. And then the Big Gulp in hand. He takes a sip.

SUTTER'S VOICE

Afraid of failure. Of... letting people down. Hurting everyone. Getting hurt.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Cassidy angry with him, Sutter not knowing why; Sutter catching Cassidy with Marcus on the couch; the first time he sees Aimee;

SUTTER'S VOICE

I thought if I kept my guard up, focused on other things, other people...

SERIES OF SHOTS: Sutter bringing Walter to his mom; hooking Ricky up with Beth; coaching Aimee to shout and curse at the party;

SUTTER'S VOICE

...if I couldn't even FEEL it... well then no harm would come to me.

SERIES OF SHOTS: Sutter drinking excessively. Goofing off. Jumping into the hot tub. Singing at the prom. Reaction shots of pity from his classmates.

SUTTER'S VOICE

I was wrong. Not only did I shut out the pain, I shut out everything. The good and the bad.

SERIES OF SHOTS: peacefully in bed with Aimee; Holly reaching out to him; the disappointment on Bob's face as he has to let Sutter go; Aimee's bus pulling away; Sutter and Mom hugging.

SUTTER'S VOICE
Until there was nothing.

BACK ON Sutter at his computer...

SUTTER'S VOICE
I'm not gonna do that anymore.

SERIES OF SHOTS: the future. Sutter empties his flask in the sink; Sutter uses a lighter to set the pennant ablaze, watches it burn; Sutter sitting at the kitchen table with Holly and Mom. Saying grace. All together.

SUTTER'S VOICE
It's fine to just "live in the now." But the best part about "now" is -- there's another one tomorrow. I promise not to waste that one. Sincerely, Sutter Keely.

EXT COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

A beautiful, sparkling day on a beautiful college campus.

SUTTER'S VOICE
P.S. I don't know if this was due a long time ago. Probably was. But that's fine. The truth is...

Aimee comes out of a classroom looking confident, secure. She says goodbye to friends and walks down the steps.

SUTTER'S VOICE
It may be too late for this essay...

And then she sees him. Standing there. Waiting for her. And he's cleaned up too. Steady on his feet. Haircut.

SUTTER'S VOICE
...It's not too late for me.

In his hand is Aimee's purple ski jacket.

AIMEE
What are you doing here?

SUTTER
(beat)
You forgot your coat.

And before we ever know what happens next:

BLACK.