

GOODBYE MR. ADAMS

Written by

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INT. ROOM

BRADY

It was September. Senior year. And I already wanted the fuck out of there. We were supposed to have Ms. Stephano for English but she went on mat leave. So that first week we had a bunch of subs in. A different one every day. Our school had a reputation. Not a good one. So I don't blame them. Then, after about four different ones, we got this guy. He walked in, and right away, you knew he was different. Like, he made eye contact with each and every one of us before even saying his first word. Just stood at the front, hands on his hips, like a general, this grin in his face, as if he liked what he saw. Confused the hell out of us. Because most teachers, they walk in. And you can tell: they're scared. Half the guys were on the football team, some of them roided out. So it can be intimidating. But this one. He wasn't scared. Not at all.

BRADY (cont'd)

He turned his back to us and went to the chalkboard. And he made a joke. Something about donating his pay so we can get a whiteboard like every other school in the district. No one laughed. And he started to write his name on the board. And then this guy at the back of the class, Russell-- he's one of our defensive linemen. Big kid. He rips this huge fart. And next thing you know, this piece of chalk goes flying through the room and hits Russell right in the middle of his forehead. It was a small piece, so it just exploded into bits of chalk and dust. You should have seen Russell's face. It was like he didn't know what happened, like he'd been shot. We all sat there stunned. And I...I remember the sound of his shoes, the teacher, as he walked slowly from the board to the back of the room, until he's standing right in front of Russell.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

And he leans forward on to Russell's desk and says, "Are you hurt?" And Russell shakes his head no. Like, he was scared. And he says, "Good. My name is Mr. Adams. You're going to remember that, right?" And Russell nods yes. Well, he got our attention. That's the year, he taught me English. He taught me a lot of things. How to construct a thesis. How to carry myself with confidence. How to write about my pain. And how to kill.

INT. STUDIO

MICHAEL

From QRX you're listening to The Big Loop. I'm Michael Kim. Today's episode: "Goodbye Mr. Adams." We begin with Part One.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

Fag. Faggot. Homo. Yeah. They weren't too imaginative. But faggot was the popular one. But it's typical, right? Jocks have been picking on guys like me since public education was invented. The way they designed schools--it's like a human zoo. With all the stages of our evolution free to roam the grounds. I don't play sports. I don't date girls. I look the way I do and...I'm the zoo animal no one comes to see. Or one the other animals hunt. Maybe it's not too bad in big city schools. But this was a small town. Everyone grew up with each other. So there was no hiding. The only grace I could think of is that this was before social media, so the bullying wasn't as bad as it could have been. And it was bad.

BRADY (cont'd)

I got beat up twice my junior year. It's so...when you hear the story, it's almost too cliched to be real. You know? A locker room.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

How the fuck? They even tried to drag me to the toilet to dunk my head in it. It's like a bad 80s movie. I missed about six days of school which was the worst part. Because my stepdad, Wayne--he didn't like me hanging around the house too much. Especially after school. I always had a bad feeling about him, but what was I supposed to do? It's not like my mom had a lot of options, you know? She's trying to support Tammy and me. She can't do it on her own.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

There was this boy I liked in English. Jeff. He transferred to our school near the end of the previous year when his dad died of some kind of rare bone cancer, so his mom took him and his brother back to her folks' place in town. She ended up working at the print shop by the Pay Less. His brother took tickets at the theater. And Jeff kind of...moped around. Like me. And, I was really shy. You learn to keep your head down, to not stick your neck out in this kind of environment. Like, I had a sense about him, but I wasn't sure. What if I said hi, and he's like, "What are you? Gay?" It would have crushed me.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

One day, I was crossing the student parking lot at lunch and I heard someone yell "fag". And I thought it was me, so I started panicking. And I looked over to the other side and I could see three guys picking on Jeff. I couldn't really make out what was happening, but I think back on it now, and I'm ashamed, cuz the thought or instinct to run towards them and stick up for Jeff...it didn't cross my mind at all.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

To be honest, I was relieved it wasn't me. I know. I know. It's a shitty way to be, but that's what I felt. But they didn't beat him up or anything. They just pushed him around and took his bag of chips. I turned away because I didn't want him to see that I saw what happened. And I looked up at the school, and there on the second floor, I could see Mr. Adams standing at his window. Watching me. And...you know, he was too far to really see his face, but I could kind of see he was disappointed in me. Maybe it was in my head because I was disappointed in me. But...anyways. That's the way it was.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

The next day I had English, and I avoided making eye contact with Mr. Adams. We were reading war poems. Every time he got to a line about courage and bravery, I swear he looked at me. Like, he was singling me out, letting me know these words were meant for me. And it was getting to me. Because I liked Mr. Adams. Everyone did. Even the jocks. Wait.... No. I take that back. They respected him. No one gave him shit. Like, I've had better English teachers, but he had our attention, and he wasn't boring. Which, in itself, I guess was something.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

It was a Monday. Jeff didn't show up for class. Word got around that a bunch of guys from school jumped him over the weekend. Beat the shit out of him. Those guys like to party by Sherwood Park on weekends. It's like, everyone knows they're there drinking, so no one goes there except to party. I guess Jeff walked by without knowing.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

This was still early in the year so Mr. Adams still did roll call, like in the army. And it was weird cuz when he read Jeff's name, I know he knew Jeff. I'd seen him help him at his desk before. He knows his name. But he kept calling it out. And he looked around the room, looked every one of us in the eyes, saying Jeff's name, over and over again. It was really, really weird. Like, intense. And then he smiled, and started talking about Emerson.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

I think it was the following week. It was a big deal because Channing was our star linebacker. It was him and two of the defensive back-ups. I guess they were on their way to some house party and never showed up. Their parents had to call the cops early the next morning. They found all of them in Channing's car. They were knocked unconscious and shoved into the trunk. Someone bound and gagged them. They were taken to the hospital and all of them had trouble remembering what happened. Their stories were all too weird. Like, one of the guys, Gary--he said they were smoking up when someone grabbed Todd in the passenger seat and dragged him out the window. Now, that's impossible. Todd's like, maybe two hundred and thirty pounds before breakfast. You're not dragging him out by yourself through a window. But Gary was sitting behind Channing and swears that's how it went down. And Channing... He says he saw this... shadow man standing in the trees just after that. They got out of the car... and that's supposedly all they remember. That's when word started going round about their lockers.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

Someone had drawn a small black symbol on Channing's locker with a permanent marker. It was four concentric circles. Like a bullseye. But with a line cutting through them. And then they found them on Gary's locker, too. And Todd's. No one was sure when the symbols were drawn, or who drew them, but it was strange, right? Like, if it happened before they got jumped, then it's like someone marked them for it. Like a warning.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

The cops came and interviewed everyone. No one could make sense of it. The guys on the team, they were sure it was some crew from Hillside. They're the closest school to us. Cross town rivals, I guess. I don't follow football but I knew enough to keep me out of trouble. So, things got pretty tense between our schools. There were fights off grounds. The police had their hands full cuz of all the vandalism going back and forth. But no one but me noticed the connection. All three of the guys-- those were the ones who picked on Jeff that day in the parking lot. Now, there's no way Jeff beat up those guys. And I know I didn't. But Mr. Adams saw the whole thing. He wasn't huge. But he was in shape. You could tell. He always wore a shirt and tie, and a vest. But you could see his muscles under it all. If you had told me he was a Navy SEAL, I would have believed it. But...there's no way. Right? Like, my English teacher's not going around on weekends beating up high school kids. Right? Cuz... that'd be psychotic.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

A few weeks later, there was a crowd near the gym by one of the lockers. I could hear the kids talking. Someone found another one of those signs on another locker. This kid named Drew Cummings. He wasn't on the football team or anything. But he was still a douchebag. There was this girl at our school the previous year. Stacy Shevsky. Freshman. I guess she was at a party and he got her rip drunk and took advantage. He took some pics and showed everyone. Again, thank god this was before social media and all that. But it was still awful. She had to move schools. I heard her dad took it real bad and beat the shit out of her. Yeah. [pause...thinking] You get raped by this fucking asshole, and then your dad beats you up for getting raped. This fucking world, man. I don't know sometimes. But, now, he had this target on his locker. Like, he was next. We all waited for him to come back to his locker, and he lost his shit. He had this public meltdown, like he was going to die. It was kind of funny but also sad, cuz he had this reputation as this cool guy, this party dude. I hated him, but people seemed to like him. And now here he was begging everyone and anyone to help. But help with what? No one knew what was going on. That's the last I ever saw of him. Drew's parents filed a missing person's report. But no one bought that. He probably got the hell out of town. He supposedly had this girl, this stripper over by Stockton. They hooked up a lot. Or, that's what he told his friends.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

But I was standing there at the back of the crowd, watching Drew go apeshit and I hear someone go, "He really doesn't like drawings." And I turn around...and it's Jeff. He nodded his head at Drew's locker, and I realized he was talking about the bullseye. And I said something like, "Some people are just frightened by art." And that's how it started.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

It was... it's hard to describe without sounding typical. Like, everything I'm saying about my life is typical. Except the parts about Mr. Adams. But...Jeff was everything to me. I never got to share anything with a guy. My first kiss was Karen Blanchard in the fourth grade. But my first crush was Matthew Wayburn in the fifth. But, obviously nothing came of that. It's weird, right? Everything about school is so unnatural. We sit in these rows for most of the best years of our lives and pretend to be people we're not. And the most natural thing in the world, to love somebody, to want somebody--like, that's not a complicated thing. Animals do it every day. But for us, we make it impossible. I had to wait until senior year, when I'm almost an adult, to act on what my heart wants. And my heart wanted Jeff. And for the first time in my life, someone wanted me back.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

I think we were dating...six weeks? You know, completely in secret.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

But it was like we squeezed a lifetime of lost opportunities into those few weeks. Whenever I was at home on the phone with him, I'd tell my mom and sister it was a girl. One night, I was on the phone, and my stepdad, Wayne, he'd been drinking. And he said something about wanting to talk to my girlfriend. I told him to leave me alone. He kept reaching for my phone. And while I'm telling him to back off, Jeff is yelling at me on the phone to just hang up. I guess Wayne heard his voice, and he stops for a second, then just grabs my phone and pushes me on the ground. He's yelling in to the phone, "Who is this? What's your name, buddy?" And I'm picking myself up off the ground. And that's when my mom starts hitting him on his shoulder. You know, to leave me alone. And I can see Tammy is scared shitless. So I try to grab my mom, to get her away, and that's when I feel this thing on the back of my head. And I fall down. And I hear my mom screaming and I turn to see him slap her on the face. And then, he left.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

Yeah, I was angry with my mom. For keeping him in the house. For not protecting Tammy from him. I know what I said about feeling like she's run out of options, but when you're a parent, I think you have to make sacrifices. So, yeah. I was upset at her. For not being...the parent I needed.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

Next time I had Mr. Adams, I could tell he knew something was up. He asked me if everything was okay. I nodded my head. And, he looked at me funny. Like, he knew I was lying.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

Everyone else was busy in groups, and he kneeled at my desk so only I could hear, and he said, "You know, sometimes, you have to judge people by their intent, not by their actions. Because often, people are too afraid to take action. That's when you take action for them." And, yeah, I had no clue what he was talking about. But he patted me on the shoulder, and said, "You're a good young man."

INT. ROOM

BRADY

I was walking home after school. It was near the end of October. I could see the Halloween decorations of some of the houses. And this car goes by and suddenly brakes. It starts to back up. And it's the ones who beat me up in the locker room. I tried not to show any fear and just stood my ground. It wasn't completely dark yet so if it got bad, I was hoping the neighbors would come out and call them off or something. That's what I was thinking. The main asshole, Brian, he was in the passenger seat. And he had the window rolled down and asked if I needed a lift. I asked them what they wanted. But he kept saying, "Get in the car." So, I ran. I ran as fast as I could. But they had a car so were right there. So, when I reached the woods, I took off into the trees. I heard the car skid to a stop behind me and heard them all pile out. I knew they were after me. And they were faster. It was so dark in there, I couldn't really see. And I remember tripping on something and landing on my nose. It hit something hard, like a rock. And I heard one of them yell, "There he is."

INT. ROOM

BRADY

I've been ganged up on before. You turtle up, protect your insides. Give them your back and they'll tire themselves out kicking you all over the place. But I knew this wasn't going to be good. These guys were athletes. I could hear them whistling for me, talking about making me eat their dicks. And I'm laying there, covering my head, and I guess my hands were covering my ears too, cuz I could hear them yelling but it took a while to realize they weren't getting any closer. And then...and then...I heard nothing. And, I thought they must have found me, and are standing over me waiting for me to open myself up so they can punch me in the face or something. But... nothing was happening. So I opened my eyes. And I sat up. No one was there. And I stood up, and I could hear groaning. And, in the dark, I could kind of make out the shapes of the guys on the ground. They were moaning, and crying, and...well, I didn't stick around to find out what. I took off.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

The next day, those guys weren't in school. Everyone heard what happened. That they were jumped in the forest. No one mentioned me. But there weren't any signs on their lockers. No bullseyes. I was in English class and Mr. Adams asked me why I didn't hand in an assignment. We had this paper on Robert Frost due. I told him I had a rough week. He asked me to stay after the bell. And I'm thinking, Shit, after all that, and now a detention?

INT. ROOM

BRADY

After everyone was gone, he shut the door, and sat at the desk next to me. It was weird cuz he never sat there. He was very organized. With, like, routines. Like you'd expect from a military guy. So when he sat there, it was suddenly really relaxed but in a weird way. And then he asked me what happened to my nose. I forgot that I hit it against a rock. But it wasn't broken. Just scratched up. I told him I tripped. And he says, "You shouldn't run in the dark." And... it's like the room started to tilt. Like, I was getting dizzy. And I said, "How do you know?" And he said, "I know you can keep a secret. You keep a lot of secrets. Which is why I'm trusting you." And he showed me the back of his hand. His knuckles were all scraped up. And he said, "I forgot to wear gloves. I didn't expect you to go running in the woods."

INT. ROOM

BRADY

How do you respond to that? What do you say in that situation? It's like, you life suddenly seems like a play. And you never felt like you were in it, and you weren't really watching it from the audience. Life becomes like...hanging out in the aisle, somewhere between being in the play and watching the play. And you never really know where you stand until something like this happens where someone pulls back the curtains and tears down the sets and gives you a peek behind the illusion.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

And Mr. Adams. I could see he's seeing everything going on in my head. And he says, "I can show you how to stand up for yourself. For your mother. For your sister." And I'm thinking, What the fuck is he talking about? And he says, "I've lived it as well. I've been there. At the end of a bully's fist. And worse." And he looked at me in a way like he was looking into me, you know what I mean? Kind of like...he knew...he knew a lot of things. Things he shouldn't know. Then he said, "I learned, this has to be corrected. There has to be a corrective action. And it has to be from me, to make my life correct." I've never forgotten that. Because he said it often. During my training.

INT. STUDIO

MICHAEL

When we return, the conclusion of "Goodbye Mr. Adams," after these messages from our sponsors.

[MIDROLL MUSIC AND ADS]

INT. ROOM

BRADY

Our dad left us when I was five. Tammy was just born. I barely remember any of this. Mom told us he died in a car accident. And then when I was thirteen, she told us the truth: that he just packed up and left one day. She thinks it was with a woman he worked with but when it comes to him, I don't know what's true any more. I was upset with my mom for a while. I guess I'm still a bit mad at her, but then Wayne moved in and...I guess I'm too worried about her to be angry any more. You know?

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

What other choice does she have? I'm just glad she stopped drinking. Yeah, fuck. Again. My life. It's so... typical. Right?

INT. ROOM

BRADY

So when Mr. Adams came into my life, I guess I was drawn to him. He was, like, that one good man in my life. He asked me once if I ever felt rage. And he asked it in a way as if he already knew I did. Like, that's how he drew it all out of me. Just...the way he listened to me. Or...the fact of him listening to me. Of anyone listening to me. So I told him... about this one time. Rumors were spreading about me being gay. And I became a target. And...I didn't want to deny it really. Because at my old school, it would have been okay. I think. People were more accepting of things. I knew older guys who'd come out, and they were fine. Just...why can't every place be like that, right? So, yeah, it became a thing. But I could handle it. Then one day, this kid really went after me. There was a large crowd, and he was itching for a fight. And I tried walking around him, and he said, "The reason you like dick so much is cuz you miss your daddy's." [pause to collect himself] And...I lost it. I punched him. I punched him...so hard. In the nose...with everything I had. He stumbled back and then I tackled him. I'd never tackled anyone before. And...it was almost this out of body experience. I could see myself sitting on his chest, punching him over and over again in his face. At one point, I remember his eyes closed. Blood everywhere. He was unconscious, but I kept at it until someone pulled me off of him. The rest is kind of a blur, but I was suspended. After that, everyone avoided me. My friends too. I became the crazy guy.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

My mom saw it was too much for me and my sister so we moved here.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

I told Mr. Adams all of that. And he looked so intense. And he asked me how that made me feel, beating up that kid. And I said I was ashamed. And he said, "No. How did you really feel?" And he touched my chest. And there's something about the way he did that, that I...I could feel my chest heaving. Like, he was pulling the truth out of me. And I said, It felt great. It was...exhilarating. Like, a relief. And then he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "You have nothing to be ashamed about. You're a good man. I know it. You're the best man here." And that's when I started to cry. Cuz no one had ever said anything like that to me.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

I told Jeff what happened and he found it creepy. I didn't expect that. I told him it meant a lot to me, to have someone like Mr. Adams say that to me. And he said that he's seen stuff like that before, and it's called "grooming." I know what that is, and...I might have got a bit upset. Cuz I don't remember what I said but he stormed out of the diner. But...I guess the way he stormed out, after us sitting together. It drew some attention.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

They found him in the alleyway behind his house. Someone followed him home and beat the shit out of him. Someone. Or some guys.  
(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

I don't know because the police couldn't do anything without witnesses. And Jeff couldn't talk because...because they beat him bad. He was in the hospital for five days. And then his mother took him and his brother and they moved to another town. [Pause. Breath.] You could have taken my heart out of my chest and stepped on it and it wouldn't have been as painful as that day he moved away. Neither of us had a car or money so we just talked on the phone. But even that was limited, because... you know.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

When you've never trained before, all you have is rage. No skill. No discipline. Just rage. But what Mr. Adams started to show me was...there is power, in rage. He said, "When you have rage, and the advantage of surprise, you have all the tools...to take back the power they took from you."

INT. ROOM

BRADY

He'd given us a writing exercise. A timed writing trial. He'd make us do that once in a while where he gives us a topic and we write nonstop, like, subconsciously letting our pens just spill out our thoughts on paper. The topic that day: what makes you angry. And...I wrote. A lot. I could see him later at his desk going through our writings. One by one. And I saw him slow down, and pick up one student's paper. He read it slowly. I knew it was mine. Even before he looked up at me, I knew. And I also knew: he understood.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

After school, I went to his room. And he had cleared all the desk to the sides of the classroom, leaving this big space in the middle. And he wasn't wearing his vest. He was unbuttoning his dress shirt. And when he took it off, you could see all his muscles under his t-shirt. He picked up a school sweater and wrapped it around his hand. And he said, "Hit it." So, I punched it. He said, "Harder." I hit harder. He then moved my legs so that my feet were positioned better. He told me to turn my hips, to put my back into it, so the power comes from my legs in through my back and shoulders and out through my fist. To focus on landing through and behind the target. He told me to imagine putting my fist through a skull. We practiced that for a month. Just that. One punch. Over and over again. By the end of the month, I was doing that one punch with him five hundred times a day. Plus some other things he wanted me to know. A left hook. A kick to the groin. A straight elbow. A strike to the throat. An eye gouge. And... a special choke. A lethal one. But he showed me that if you hold it for twenty seconds, it'll just put him to sleep. Any more, and he'll die. So I practiced holding and counting. One, two, three...get to twenty...release.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

We had this understanding. In hindsight, it's strange how I never really asked him about his past. Well, I did a couple times, and he just looked at me, and said he's done things he's ashamed of. And now he's trying to make up for it. And then he took me out on my first hunting trip.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

He called them "game." He let me pick the targets. By then I'd told him about every time I've been beaten up at our school. And he picked up the yearbook and handed it to me, and said, "Pick." So, I turned the page until I found Daryl Cotton. He shoved me into the drinking fountain so hard, I cracked a tooth. My mom had to work extra shifts just to pay for the dental work. He still tried to get at me. So I wanted *him*.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

I watched him for a while. Observed his patterns. Followed at a distance. Found the quietest time when he'd be alone. He worked for his dad's office every Tuesday and Thursday after football practice. And he walked to his car which he always parked on the far side of the lot because he didn't have a reserved spot. Mr. Adams picked up a rock and on his first throw, he broke the lamp over his car. So it was dark. He gave me a ski mask to wear. And then, I waited.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

He went to unlock the car door and I started walking to him. I was a bit clumsy cuz he heard me coming. Cuz he turned quick. And before I could do anything, he shoved me hard. Now, two months ago, I would have fallen. But I kind of deflected his arms, and sidestepped and sent a kick into his groin. He bent over and I threw an elbow at his temple. He fell to the ground and I kicked him over and over again. I must have kicked him over a dozen times. And then I noticed, he wasn't moving. I kind of stood there, in shock.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

I...I'd just beaten someone up. Badly. But it wasn't just anyone. It was my bully. And...and it felt great. It was...exhilarating. Liberating. I felt...free. Then I heard Mr. Adams calling me back to get the hell out of there. So we left.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

There was a crowd around Daryl's locker the next day. The bullseye was there.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

The next one was Tom Kellerman. Big guy. He was the one who tried to shove my head in a toilet. He was always around his friends. It was school, football practice, hanging out, and straight home. Mr. Adams had to personally unlatch his bedroom window for me so I could wait in his closet. He was always home on weeknights before eleven.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

I heard him come in, close the door. Took about an hour. Twenty minutes of that he spent jacking off, I think. But then the lights finally went off. Mr. Adams taught me to wait until I was sure he was asleep. About fifteen minutes in I heard him snoring. He was big. I could make out his shape in the bed. Laying on his back. Mouth wide open. So, I smashed him over the face with a metal pipe. He didn't even have time to react. His body kind of convulsed, and then it was like he was asleep the whole time. Mr. Adams had the bullseye on his locker the next day.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

After that was Timothy Blanchard. He was the one who led the charge against me in the locker room. I waited for him after a night practice in the back seat of his Honda. He never looked. Pulled a choke on him and dragged him into the back. And I went to work. He almost pulled my ski mask off. I'd forgotten how strong people get when panic sets in. Luckily, my rage was greater than his fear. It felt like all this power from deep inside was firing out of my fists. It felt...incredible.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

The next day was the argument. I asked Mr. Adams why he didn't put a bullseye on his locker. He said it was starting to draw suspicions towards me. I told him no one would suspect me. And he said, "You haven't noticed the changes in you. You're bigger. Much bigger. Stronger. People have noticed." And, yeah, it upset me. Maybe I was too amped up. Maybe it's because I felt I was just getting started. Or...I don't know. In hindsight, it felt like another father figure abandoning me. Yeah. Typical again, right? Gay teenager. Daddy issues. I was a piece of work. Unoriginal work. Well, that's how I felt.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

I was in my room that night. And I heard my mom arguing with my stepdad. I opened my door so I could hear it. And I don't know what they were going on about, but I heard Tammy say "Leave her alone." And then, a noise. Then it all went quiet.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

And I walked into the kitchen, and I see my mother and sister on the floor, like, hugging each other. They're crying. They looked scared. And there he is, standing with his sleeves rolled up. I remember the sound of that moment. The blood pumping in my ears. And it's like... everything went red. He stepped up to me, I don't remember what he said. But his hand came up. And...I let it go. I let it all go. I think I sent a palm up into his nose because he went stumbling back into the stove. And then I kicked him in the balls. Real hard. I pulled him up by the hair, and elbowed him in the temple. He fell down face first. But then I saw him trying to get up. So I got on his back, and put a choke hold on him. The one Mr. Adams taught me. I started counting. One. Two. Three. It was like trying to choke a horse. He was so big, I was off my feet, crashing my back into the fridge, the table. It felt like everything was breaking, collapsing. And I held the choke. Counting. Four. Five. Six. He grabbed a pot and tried to hit me with it but he had no leverage. I kept counting. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten. He sank to his knees. I felt this fingers trying to pry open my hold. But I felt strong. Stronger than I'd ever felt in my life. And I was counting. Eleven. Twelve. Thirteen. And he finally fell. And I kept holding on. Fourteen. Fifteen. Sixteen. Just like Mr. Adams taught me. Don't stop counting. Seventeen. Eighteen. Nineteen. And I got to twenty. And even then, I didn't want to let go. Just in case. I felt my mother's hand on my shoulder. I turned up to look at her face, and she had this expression....of pure horror. I remember her saying, really soft, "Brady. Brady." You know, real quiet, like she was trying to wake me up from a nightmare. And I finally let go.

BRADY (cont'd)

I sat up, and there's Tammy staring at me and her eyes are real wide. Like she'd seen a monster. And there's Wayne under me. He's not moving. And my mother kind of pushes me off him, and turns him over on his side and listens for his breath. And she feels his throat. He's not breathing. And she's like, "What have you done?" And I'm having trouble making sense of it all.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

I ran to the school. I knew he'd be there. And of course everything's dark and the doors are locked. I'm running around the school looking for any lights inside. But then I see someone standing in the shadows on far side near the football field. It's Mr. Adams. It was strange. He was wearing a knit cap and long pea coat. And he had two duffel bags on the ground next to him. He told me to open the smaller one. I unzipped it, and it was filled with cash. He said, "Don't tell anyone. I've spent the last ten years saving this for you. Use it to take care of your mother and sister. Get them something nice."

INT. ROOM

BRADY

You ever have a whole room, your whole field of vision, start to tilt on you? As if your whole world were being recalibrated to a new reality? Like, rebooted? [pause] He then said, "There's something in there for you." I dug inside the bag and pulled out a small photo album. I opened it and there was a photo of him with another man. It looked like it was taken a long time away because he looked way younger. And he...he suddenly looked familiar. He said, "I found out too late who I was."

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

I didn't mean to hurt any of you. It was a confusing time. Don't wait your whole life to find out who you are. Start looking now. And don't let anyone stand in your way." I asked him who this was, the guy in the picture. He said it was someone he loved. For a very long time. Until he was gone. Because of bad people. I flipped to the next page in the album. There was a news clipping about a loan shark in Chicago found dead in a warehouse. Shot in the head. The next page had a headline about a serial rapist found dismembered in a cabin. The next one was about a gangster in Vegas found dead in the trunk of his car. There were pages of it. And then I got to the last headline. About Drew Cummings. The kid who molested that freshman earlier that year who everyone thought moved away. He was found chained outside a women's shelter in Iowa City. Someone had kidnapped him and beat him up for hours. I asked him why he was showing me this. And he said he wanted me to know why he left, and why he came back. He nodded at the album. And I turned the page. And there it was. A photo of him. Much younger. I now remembered seeing that face before. It wasn't just in my dreams. And he said, "I looked at that photograph every day. I never stopped thinking about you. I kept watch over you, knowing I'd come back to teach you. How to be a man. How to be happy." And there I was. The boy in the photograph. Holding my father's hand.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

He then told me there were video cameras all over my house. He'd put them there. For this day. He said I'd find a video recorder in my basement. I was supposed to give the tape to the police. To clear me of murder.

(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)

I was like, "What are you talking about? I didn't murder Wayne." And then he said, "That chokehold. The way I taught you. It was meant to be lethal. The tape shows you protecting your mother and sister. You'll be fine."

INT. ROOM

BRADY

And then he turned to leave. And I said, "Where are you going?" And he said, "To find joy." And I think I broke down. I told him, I need my father here. I want my father. And... I think he was crying. I couldn't tell. He told me there were some car keys in the bag. The car was parked two blocks away. And he said, "Go where you need to be. Be who you want to be." And then...he walked away. Again.

INT. ROOM

BRADY

The investigation took a while. Rumors were all over the school, but Mr. Adams left a note confessing to all the crimes. No one made the connection to me. And the police questioned me and took me in for the murder of Wayne Laforge. But the videotape cleared me just as quick. Before we knew it, it was Christmas. I made my mother quit her job and take one as a legal secretary. She never asked about where I got the money from. After that crazy night, she looked at me in a different way. Like, I'd become a man over night. She knew not to ask too many questions. I'd be taking care of her. And Tammy. Who I took shopping for a whole new wardrobe. And when school let out for Christmas, I got in the car, and drove five and a half hours through the night. Just in time to wake Jeff up with his Christmas gift.  
(MORE)

BRADY (cont'd)  
Because I now knew what I wanted. And  
fuck everything else.

OUTRO MUSIC (ELSA's "In Two")

INT. STUDIO

MICHAEL  
[outro]