

CLOSE TO SUNSET

by
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SERIES OF SHOTS:

HOME MOVIE GRAINY. Many years ago. Two YOUNG BOYS in a backyard, goofing around. Laughing. Arms around each other.

They push one another on a SWING. Taking turns.

Smiles on their faces. Holding Hands. Hugging.

BROTHERS.

FADE IN:

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

Close to sunset as day's final light shrouds a modest neighborhood park.

The same two BOYS from before are its only occupants, doing what kids do best at a place like this.

JACK (8) is on a SWING.

JACK

Look how high I can go!

And he is indeed swinging pretty high.

However, SAMUEL (6), doesn't pay much attention to his brother. He hangs from the inside of JUNGLE BARS, and appears a bit worried.

A worn set of CRUTCHES rest against the bars.

JACK'S POV: His world surges to and fro. One moment, the sand beneath. The next, blue skies above.

OUTSIDE THE PARK

A GREEN SEDAN inches along the street. It stops at the corner.

PARK

Jack notices the jungle bars are empty. Samuel's crutches are gone.

He skids to a stop, hops off the swing, scans the playground.

The low-lying sun is blazing, and catches him in the eyes.
Difficult to see. Jack winces, shields his face.

OUTSIDE THE PARK

Samuel, alongside the green sedan, speaking to someone inside.

JACK

Sam?

Samuel turns and smiles.

The CAR DOOR opens. Samuel waves goodbye - gets in the car.

PARK

With the sun cloaking his vision, Jack runs a few paces and scrapes his knee on a SANDBOX.

JACK

(louder)

Sam!

The door shuts. The sedan drives off. Further down the street, it's as if the car just evaporates.

Jack's breathing quickens. His lips tremble. Curiosity has now become full blown terror.

He runs. Stumbles. Gets up. Mouth full of dirt. He opens the gate - *CLINK* - and disappears from view.

The SWING sways silently in the breeze.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

A key slides in the lock, a family walks in. DEBRA MCKEAN (49), her husband JACK (53, talking on his phone) and their daughter MADISON (16, staring at her phone).

The mood is decidedly somber, all three dressed in different variations of BLACK.

JACK

(into phone)

I understand. Yeah, I know. I'm gonna get head over there now. Okay? I'll see you there. Alright. Bye.

Jack pockets the phone.

Madison heads upstairs, Debra SIGHS.

DEBRA

Guess I gotta put some coffee on.

JACK

Don't bother. Trish just got in. I'm gonna meet her at the house.

DEBRA

She just got in now?

Jack nods.

DEBRA

Little late, don't you think?

JACK

She's got a lot going on.

DEBRA

Don't make excuses for her. Still doesn't make it right. Maybe if you opened your mouth once in a while people wouldn't walk all over you.

Debra trudges off.

MADISON (O.S.)

Dad?

Madison at the foot of the stairs.

JACK

Yeah?

MADISON

I-- I'm sorry about Grandma.

He places his hand on her shoulder, gives a crooked smile.

JACK

I know you are, honey.

Debra peers out from the

KITCHEN

Lights a cigarette with an unsteady hand, watching as Jack gives Madison a hug and a peck on the cheek.

A curling tendril of smoke exits her mouth.

EXT. MOM'S HOUSE - DAY

Not much to look at. In need of new siding, and the over grown lawn could use a watering.

A lonely REALTY sign stands out front.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - DAY

Jack behind the wheel. He looks out the window.

THE PARK

That park. It's been updated with some new equipment, but even that looks old now.

JACK - QUICK FLASH:

A grainy memory. Jack and his brother - Smiles on their faces - Flashes of sunlight - The cares of the world no bigger than the dimples on their cheeks, and now...

A WOMAN (30s) in a yellow house dress. She grins, shyly covers her face, waves sheepishly at camera.

She picks up Jack and nuzzles him.

BACK TO SCENE

EXT. MOM'S HOUSE - DAY

A CAR parked at the curb.

Jack pulls into the driveway, passes -- TRISH (43), standing on the grass in a t-shirt and jeans. She raises her hand.

Jack exits the car, heads straight for his SISTER and envelops her in a warm hug.

JACK

It's good to see you, sis.

TRISH

It's good to see you, too.

(backs away)

I'm so sorry. I should've been there.

I just... With work and the kids...

Jack wipes a tear from her cheek.

JACK

You don't have to explain to me.

TRISH

I know, but...

(composes herself)

I just can't believe she's gone.

JACK

Me too.

INT. MOM'S HOUSE - FOYER - DAY

The front door opens. Jack and Trish step in, boxes and cleaning supplies under their arms.

LIVING ROOM

Dusty shelves, trinkets and pictures. An old tube TV positioned in front of an even older easy chair.

Faded yellow drapes give the room a rusty aura.

TRISH (O.S.)
God, been ages since I've been here.

FOYER

TRISH
(sniffs the air)
Eesh. Musty. Whaddya think?

Jack glances around.

JACK
What do I think? I think the hardware
store's gonna make a fortune off us.

MOM'S BEDROOM - LATER

Unopened beauty products atop a vanity. A neatly made bed next
to a dresser that displays numerous family photographs.

Jack holds a broom, but he's too curious to sweep.

He crosses to a dusty ALCOVE. Inside, two suitcases. Above, a
crude wooden rod where clothes, some still covered in plastic,
dangle from wire hangers.

Above that, a plywood CEILING PANEL leading into the ATTIC.

TRISH (O.S.)
Jack?

Off the ceiling panel...

KITCHEN

Trish, hair covered with a bandana, stands at the sink, gazing
out a window.

TRISH
You find that bag with the twenty
thousand yet?

JACK
(grins)

No.

TRISH
(points outside)
Hey, remember that?

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

A small shed, just big enough for maybe a lawnmower and some tools. But, next to it...

A large STONE. In its center, a faded CROSS.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Jack peers through the streaky glass.

JACK
We buried Houdini there.

TRISH
Mmm hmm. Wasn't that the cat Mom got you after...

Suddenly quiet.

JACK
After Samuel disappeared.

TRISH
Jack, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to--

JACK
It's alright. We never did talk much about that.

TRISH
I've always wondered, though. It was kind of an awkward subject. I guess I never really wanted to bring it up.

JACK

It's okay. And Mom never got me that cat, by the way. He just kinda wandered into the yard after the, you know...the incident.

A long silence.

JACK

He had a gimp.

TRISH

Hmm?

JACK

The cat. His paw got messed up when he got hit by a car. He stayed with us for a little while after that, but it got so bad Mom had to put him down.

TRISH

I don't remember that.

JACK

You were young.

Trish sprays cleaner on the dirty window, swipes it with a paper towel.

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sounds like a convention of crickets parked on the lawn.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Forks CLINK on porcelain.

Jack at one end of the table, Debra at the other. In between, Trish and Madison silently pick at their food.

Debra picks up a near empty glass of wine.

DEBRA

So, when are you leaving?

Trish clears her throat.

TRISH

Day after tomorrow.

(to Jack)

We put a dent in that house today.

JACK

Yeah, we got a lot done.

MADISON

Maybe I can come over and help.

Debra puts the empty glass down.

DEBRA

No. I don't want you over there.

Probably smells of cat piss and... God knows what else.

Jack stabs his fork into a piece of meat.

TRISH

It's really not that bad, Debra.

Madison goes to speak and is cut off.

DEBRA

I said no.

(grabs the wine bottle)

God rest her soul, but... Your Mom had issues. We all know it.

Jack looks up.

Madison drops her napkin onto her plate, noisily pushes the chair out and leaves the table.

TRISH

And how would you know that, Debra?
You never went there.

Debra leans in.

DEBRA

I know crazy when I see it, Trish.
I've looked into your mother's eyes.
Like two crushed marbles baking in the
sun. Nothing there. And you know what?
I'm looking at your eyes now, those
same eyes, and I'm thinking--

Jack pounds the table, rattling the silverware.

JACK

That's enough!

Debra sits back, indignant, pours more wine.

Trish rises slowly.

JACK

Trish...

TRISH

No, it's okay.

(pushes in her chair)

Thank you for a wonderful meal.

She leaves. A moment passes. The front door closes.

Debra and Jack remain at the table in silence. She raises her
glass to her lips and drinks.

Jack lowers his fork beside a steak knife - drums his
fingers - stares at this woman across from him.

He gets up, slowly approaches.

Debra glances up. Defiant.

DEBRA

What--?

Jack grabs a fistful of her hair, yanks her head back
violently. Nose scraping against hers, eyes wild.

JACK

Don't you ever speak to, or about, a member of my family like that again.

Debra goes white, her mouth agog, yet unable to utter a word.

Jack releases, leaves the room.

JACK (O.S.)

And quit smoking. Fucking stinks.

EXT. MOM'S HOUSE - DAY

Jack drops two trash bags at the curb. Trish pulls up in her rental car, cuts the engine, gets out.

JACK

Hey you.

TRISH

Just wanted to say goodbye to my big brother.

JACK

When's your flight?

TRISH

A few hours. Then back to the grind.

JACK

I know. Hey, I'm... I'm real sorry about the other night.

She waves it off.

TRISH

Don't be. It's not your fault.

(then)

I'm really gonna miss Maddy, though. She's gotten so big. Practically a woman now.

JACK

Thanks.

Trish glances around the yard.

TRISH
Anything I can help you with?

JACK
Nah. I'm pretty much done. Just a few things to tie up. I'll be fine.

They embrace. Jack kisses her cheek.

TRISH
I guess I'll see ya when I see ya.

JACK
You bet.

Trish heads off, turns, blows him a kiss. She gets in the car, starts it up, and drives off.

Jack watches from the curb. Exhales.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Jack opens the door to the shed.

INSIDE THE SHED

Exactly what he'd expected. A lawnmower, a ladder. Tools.

He sniffs the air. Something's off. He looks down to see a large bowl filled with mushy cat food. FLIES buzz around it. It's been sitting. For a while.

INSIDE THE SHED - LATER

Anything that wasn't nailed down is gone.

BACKYARD

Jack wipes his forehead. Hot for September. He looks up at the SUN, blinks several times, looks away.

The lawnmower sits in the tall grass, and the ladder... The ladder leans against a tall tree.

INT. MOM'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jack fits the ladder in the alcove, steps on it, testing his weight. Another step. He reaches up, slides the ceiling panel off to the side.

Darkness awaits inside the small, square opening.

A flashlight on a shelf. He takes it.

INT. ATTIC - DAY

Barely enough light to see. He wiggles his body in, arms straining as he pushes himself up.

No room to stand. Grunting, he carefully crawls to what looks like a light chain. Pulls it.

A single light bulb flashes on and immediately *POPS*.

He turns on the flashlight, hits it a few times until it gives off a weak glow.

He follows the light to a few gift boxes close by. Opens the covers. They're empty. Except for the last one.

Jack lifts out Mom's *YELLOW DRESS*. The material's stiff to the touch and faded. He carefully lowers it back into the box, revealing...

A *STEAMER TRUNK*, about fifteen feet away, wedged under the angled arc of the roof.

And he just looks at it. Transfixed.

He crawls towards the trunk, taking care that his knees hit only the studs below.

The flashlight's dim glow weakens further.

Resting on his haunches, Jack positions himself before the trunk. He grips it's sides, pulls it out.

It's padlocked, and literally falling apart from age.

Jack turns his gaze back to the square hole in the attic, which seems so far away.

Touches the lock, then tries to claw at at thin wood. It flakes off with barely any effort.

The lock falls, lands between the studs. Jack reaches for it, drops the flashlight. It goes out.

He fumbles blindly, finds the flashlight and smacks it until the dim light returns.

Takes a deep breath, and slowly lifts the cover.

Murky black inside.

Jack raises the flashlight, it's feeble gleam dancing along the outside of the trunk.

He shines it in.

INSERT: TRUNK CONTENTS

SKELETAL remains of a small animal with a twisted hind leg.

BACK TO SCENE

Jack is nonplussed, and just stares straight ahead before closing the trunk's lid.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

The shadows grow long. Close to sunset.

The business end of a shovel pierces dirt.

Houdini's grave stone tossed aside.

Jack wipes sweat from his brow, stone-faced as he digs.

And digs.

His breath labored, he glances at the sun and shields his eyes. Wicked bright. The backyard swirls, and the hole is growing deeper.

CLINK!

The shovel blade hits something. Jack stops, gets on his knees, brushes away dirt with his ragged hands.

JACK

Oh God...

He looks around to make sure he's alone - he is - and can only repeat the words...

JACK

Oh God.

INT. MOM'S BEDROOM - DAY

The sea of pictures on the dresser. Weaving through them. Left, right... before settling on...

INSERT PICTURE:

A discolored image of Jack and Samuel. Happy, as always.

Mother, in her yellow house dress, between them. Her arm around Jack, and Samuel with his crutch, off to the side.

They stand in front of a GREEN SEDAN.

From outside, Jack's sobs filter in. Growing louder. And louder still.

JACK (O.S.)

Oh God, no!

CUT TO BLACK: