

DIVE

by

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FADE IN:

BLACK

A scuba diver checks the flow of oxygen to his respirator.

Cleans his mask.

Splash. Another splash. A third.

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

The scuba diver floats in blue, surrounded by disappearing bubbles. This is DALTON C. RILEY (17) in his element.

The still water surrounds Dalton as he levitates. Inside his mask, his eyes swell with the hint of tears.

He wipes his mask.

EXT. HOME - POOL - CONTINUOUS

Rising like a periscope, Dalton's head breaks the water.

The above ground pool sits antithetic to the brittle, terrestrial landscape that surrounds the oasis of blue. This is an Arizona summer -- burnt-up-brown and flat.

Dalton sinks back into his oasis.

EXT. HOME - BACKYARD - MORNING

Dalton flip-flops across the barren lawn.

ERNIE, a round, pudgy 9 year old runs out of his house next door and scampers after him.

Dalton's wet suit clings to his lanky body. It's his uniform. His skin.

Dalton walks through the open sliding-glass door of his run-down, pre-fabricated home and slams it shut in Ernie's face.

INT. HOME - CONTINUOUS

Large flipper footprints trail behind Dalton as he walks through the kitchen, past his haggard MOTHER (44).

MOTHER (MUFFLED)
Dalton C. Riley! Were you out in
that pool again?! That's all you
do. Swim swim swim. What have I
told you about all that?

Dalton's mother motions up and down at Dalton's scuba gear.

MOTHER (MUFFLED) (CONT'D)
You answer me boy!

Dalton stops, but remains silent.

MOTHER (MUFFLED) (CONT'D)
Shouldn't be doin' it. Bad luck is
all it is. And what have I told you
about them flippers in my house?!

Dalton continues to walk toward his room.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
You best not be walkin' away from
me.

INT. HOME - DALTON'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dalton SLAMS his door. He's alone.

MOTHER (O.C.)
You are in big trouble now young
man. Fine. You stay in there.
That's where you'da been anyhow
anyway if you didn't have to go to
school. Which you're gonna be late
for. Again. Dalton! Dalton?

Stripping off his scuba gear his eyes wander along his walls,
blue and soaking with posters and pictures of life under the
sea. His eyes stop at his scuba certification certificate
surrounded by pictures of him and his father.

Laying on the floor, his eyes zone to the ceiling. Dalton's
walls come to life. Lapping at the floorboards are waves.
His ears are tuned to the tone of the ocean. Heaven.

With a KNOCK, the ocean drains away.

MOTHER (O.C.) (CONT'D)
Dalton. School. Now.

JUMP CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Dalton pedals hard on his rusted bicycle down a cracked road. The land is bleak behind him. The school bus roars past him.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Dalton skids to a stop in front of the bike rack, locks up his bike, and enters the main building.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Dalton, zoned out, sits in his crowded, English class.

MR. KOOKEN paces in front.

MR. KOOKEN

...within poetry, my friends, lies
the ability to say more and say it
more intensely...

Dalton doodles undersea scribbles around the words of his English book. His ears tune to the undersea HUM. His feet are flippered under his desk, tapping in a puddle of water. A few kelp plants unfurl behind Dalton -- now fully outfitted in his scuba gear.

A gnarled pencil drips with saliva as it's inserted into Dalton's ear. Dalton's scuba gear is gone. CHESTER cackles next to Dalton, wiping off the pencil on his shirt.

Mr. Kooken's drone halts.

DALTON

Gross.. Come on! What the hell--

MR. KOOKEN

Am I interrupting, Mr. Riley? Feel
like learning today or forcing
everyone to sink to your level?

DALTON

But Mr. Kooken, Chester--

MR. KOOKEN

We all expect it from Chester.

Chester's face goes red.

DALTON

But I didn't--

MR. KOOKEN

Alright. You may all thank Dalton here for the essay now due tomorrow.

The class GROANS.

MR. KOOKEN (CONT'D)

I'd like for you all to examine Robert Frost's poem 'The Road Not Taken' and explain how the speaker feels about following the road less travelled.

(beat)

Or is that too much to ask?

CLASS

No, Mr. Kooken.

DALTON

(under his breath)
No, Mr. Kooken.

Mr. Kooken's voice trails off as the class eye burns Dalton.

Dalton drops his forehead to his desk.

INT. CLASSROOM - AN HOUR LATER

Dalton's head raises. His forehead dons a reddened indent.

Mr. Kooken sits with his feet crossed on top of his desk reading. The sleeves of his cardigan are rolled to his elbows.

Dalton starts to quickly pack his belongings.

MR. KOOKEN

Slow down, Mr. Riley.

DALTON

I'm really sorry. I don't--

MR. KOOKEN

Dalton. What's going on? It's like you're not even here.

DALTON

It's nothing. Just tired. I really have to go.

MR. KOOKEN

Then go. But know this Mr. Riley, that essay is make or break for you. Floating by is not an option.

Mr. Kooken re-opens his book and continues to read.

Dalton slinks from the classroom, the door SLAMS shut.

INT. HOME - DALTON'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Dalton storms into his room, the door SLAMS shut. He begins to put on his scuba gear.

The door opens. Dalton's mother carries a laundry basket. Her eyes are puffy.

MOTHER

And how was school?

DALTON

Same.

MOTHER

I could use some help with dinner.

DALTON

Sorry, have homework.

MOTHER

In the pool?

Dalton doesn't respond.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

You know why I hate this, Dalton.

It's not the way. Not healthy.

Dalton, now fully outfitted, flip-flops out the door.

Dalton's mother drops the clothes in her hands back into the laundry basket.

The door closes with a...

EXT. UNDERWATER - AFTERNOON

...SPLASH. Dalton sinks to the bottom of the pool. Sitting cross-legged, bubbles erupt around Dalton's face. He starts to write on an underwater note pad.

EXT. HOME - POOL - CONTINUOUS

Ernie scampers from his house next door to the edge of the pool.

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

From above the water's surface, Ernie's face creeps into Dalton's view. Ernie gives a toothy smile.

EXT. HOME - POOL - CONTINUOUS

Dalton surfaces.

ERNIE

Yo yo yo. Mister D. Super D. Scuba
D. Dal-to! How's it go-- ing.

Dalton removes his respirator.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

Just doin' some divin'.

(beat)

Awesome.

(beat)

I mean, nice afternoon for it, for
sure. Plenty hot.

Dalton cleans his mask.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

Can I please dive today? Please.
Come on!

DALTON

Ernie. Not now. Not ever.

ERNIE

I'm not afraid! I can do it!

DALTON

No. You can't. And you won't.

(beat)

Why can't you just leave me alone?
I don't want to talk anymore, okay.
I've put up with you, but that's
over with. That's it. Every single
day, every time I want to be alone,
you are here. I don't want you
here. I don't like you here. I
don't like you. Just. Leave.

Ernie's face flushes red while his chin quivers. He runs
away.

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Dalton sinks back to the pool bottom and continues to write on his underwater note pad. His English Book rests next to him on the pool's bottom. More bubbles erupt from Dalton's respirator.

Through the bubbles, a fish slinks in front of Dalton's mask. The fish lacks sheen, is stiff as if crafted for a school play instead of alive. More pageant-like fish swim around Dalton. A piece of ribboned kelp reaches toward the surface. A crab climbs atop the English Book. The HUM of the ocean surrounds him.

INT. HOME - DALTON'S ROOM - DUSK

Dalton lays on his bed. The HUM of the ocean remains.

EXT. HOME - POOL - CONTINUOUS

Ernie is poised on the edge of the pool. He's dressed in a homemade scuba outfit crafted from taped-together black, plastic garbage bags, a child's mask and snorkel, and ping-pong paddles attached to his feet like flippers.

Two Ziplock bags filled with rocks hang over both his hips from a rope around his waist.

ERNIE
(to himself)
Ain't scared. Be alone. Don't need
you, anyhow.

INT. HOME - DALTON'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A large SPLASH stirs Dalton.

MOTHER (O.C.)
Oh God! Dalton!

Dalton lurches from his bed.

EXT. HOME - POOL - CONTINUOUS

Ernie struggles, pinned to the bottom of the pool.

Dalton's mother stands horrified, then drops to her knees.

Dalton rushes past his mother and, without hesitation, dives into the pool.

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Dalton struggles to lift Ernie from the bottom of the pool. He tugs at the rope securing the bags of rocks around Ernie's waist. It releases. Pulling Ernie to his chest, they begin to rise.

EXT. HOME - POOL - CONTINUOUS

Dalton and Ernie break the surface. Carrying Ernie to the ground, Dalton lays him down. Ernie coughs hard, breathes heavy.

Dalton, out of breath, collapses next to Ernie.

ERNIE
(turning to Dalton, out of
breath)
What's up Scuba D?

Dalton coughs a chuckle.

Dalton's mother rises from her knees, shaking.

MOTHER
That's it. That is it. Not again.
Never again. That scuba gear, that
pool, all of it, it's gone
tomorrow. It'll finally be gone.

DALTON
No it's not. You can't.

MOTHER
Oh yes I can. I will.

Dalton's mother storms inside.

INT. HOME - MOTHER'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dalton's mother collapses on the edge of her bed holding Dalton's scuba gear. The room is black until an old film projector spins to life, casting a soft glow on Dalton's mother's face.

The film crackles images of her husband, Dalton's father as a young man. On a boat out to sea, he dons the same scuba gear Dalton wears.

Dalton's mother cries as the film plays.

EXT. BOAT AT SEA - DAY - FILM

Dalton's father breaks the surface of the ocean, spits out his respirator, and smiles at the cameraman. The film cuts.

Dalton's father is now on deck, his face close to the camera. Grabbing the camera, he turns it on the cameraman. Dalton's mother, young and vibrant, smiles wide.

INT. HOME - DALTON'S ROOM - MORNING

Dalton's eyes open wide awake. He steps quietly from his bed and creeps from his room.

INT. HOME - MOTHER'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Dalton cracks the door open, slinks through the crack, and spots his scuba gear. Tucking it under his arm, he sneaks from the room while his mother continues to sleep.

EXT. ROAD - MORNING

Wearing his scuba gear, Dalton pedals fast down the road on his bike.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Dalton flip-flops through his classmates.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Dalton sits among the other students. Bubbles erupt around him. The CHATTER of his classmates is muffled as if underwater.

Mr. Kooken walks through the classroom door without looking up.

MR. KOOKEN

G'morning, my friends. If you'd please make a stack of your, I'm sure, stellar essays to my left.

The class begins to file toward the front. Dalton flip-flops in line, his essay held in his gloved hand -- it's dripping with ink and water.

Dalton splashes it down on top of the stack of essays. The desk begins to leak.

Mr. Kooken looks up with astonishment at Dalton's outfit. The stack of essays and the desk are dry.

MR. KOOKEN (CONT'D)
This supposed to be humorous, Mr. Riley? Supposed to be clever?

Dalton, his respirator clogging his speech, shakes his head.

MR. KOOKEN (CONT'D)
Then, what? What is this?

Dalton stares at Mr. Kooken. Spits out his respirator.

DALTON
My analysis.

MR. KOOKEN
Swim away, Mr. Riley.

A few pageant-like fish gather outside the window behind Mr. Kooken.

MR. KOOKEN (CONT'D)
Outside. Now.

The fish are gone.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Dalton stands against the wall. Mr. Kooken paces in front of him.

MR. KOOKEN
Dalton. Talk to me. What is all this?

DALTON
You want to know? My mom was gonna give this away. All of it. So I stole it back and put it on to keep it safe. It's all I've got left of him, okay. It's part of me.

Dalton wells with tears. Mr. Kooken takes a deep breath.

MR. KOOKEN
(grabbing at the scuba gear)
This isn't you. Nothing on you can ever be what's in you. Never.

Dalton looks up sheepishly.

EXT. HOME - POOL - AFTERNOON

Dalton sits on the rim of the pool, his feet dangling above the browned lawn.

Dalton's mother moves busily around the kitchen, stopping briefly in front of the window looking out over the pool. She smiles at Dalton, wide and sincere.

Dalton smiles back and gives a small wave.

Dalton's mother continues cooking.

Ernie rounds the corner and walks toward Dalton.

DALTON
Hey, Ernie.

ERNIE
Hey.

DALTON
Doin' okay?

ERNIE
Yeah, yeah. Thanks.

DALTON
Why're you so crazy about me,
Ernie?

ERNIE
Yeah. Like you don't know. You're
the coolest, D. Major cool.

DALTON
I rode my bike to school while
wearing all of my scuba gear. Does
that sound cool to you?

ERNIE
Uh, yes.

DALTON
It's not, man. I'm not cool. Not
even close. And you're not cool.
But you know what? Fuck it. We
don't need it.

ERNIE
Whoa. You--

DALTON

What d'you say we teach you a
little bit about the water
tomorrow?

ERNIE

You serious? No take backs?

DALTON

Don't want to take anything back.
Not any more.

ERNIE

All right! See you then Dal-to!
Yes!

Ernie skips away as Dalton turns toward the water.

EXT. UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

SPLASH. Dalton floats in blue. As he swims deeper, further,
his gear begins to shed away.

Bubbles erupt through Dalton's teeth as he smiles wide, free.

FADE OUT.