

A WALK TO REMEMBER

Screenplay by

Karen Janszen

Based on the novel by

Nicholas Sparks

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BLACK

A young man's V.O.:

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)
I was born in Beaufort, North
Carolina. A place where the air
always smells of pine and salt and
sea.

The voice is gentle. Slightly Southern in inflection. A
young doctor's soothing manner.

FADE IN:

EXT. COASTAL NORTH CAROLINA (DECEMBER) (PRESENT)

A vast view of the coastline in winter -- beaches, rivers,
sea marshes, inlets -- ebbing and flowing.

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)
For many, days and nights are
spent fishing Pamlico Sound or
crabbing the Neuse River.

The CAMERA FINDS a small coastal town, edged by a harbor
on which fishermen toil.

EXT. BEAUFORT, NORTH CAROLINA - MORNING (DECEMBER)

The CAMERA, MOVING inland, CROSSES OVER modest houses
decked with plastic rooftop Santas...

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)
While the ocean may be the focus
of daily labor, churches have
always tried to be the focus of
life.

And MOVES UPHILL TO...

EXT. MAIN STREET

Where fake snow is sprayed on store windows. The CAMERA
CONTINUES TO the far side of Main Street -- with its
stately homes with big lawns, flower beds, and tasteful
Christmas garlands.

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)
When I lived here, there were
eighteen churches within town
limits alone.

EXT. FOUR-WAY STOP

From each corner, four churches face each other. The Fellowship Hall Christian Church, the Church of the Forgiven People, the Church of Sunday Atonement, and All Saints Church.

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)
They sponsored pancake breakfasts,
rummage sales, car washes, and
softball games.

EXT. LANDON'S TRUCK - TRAVELING

The CAMERA FINDS and FOLLOWS a newish sport utility vehicle with MD plates as it passes a rummage sale and a softball game.

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)
You'd think that all the people
here were friendly, welcoming,
open-hearted...

Dr. LANDON CARTER, 33, drives the truck.

INT. CAR - TRAVELING

Landon looks urban, prosperous, well-groomed -- but retains his boyish whimsy and sense of irony. A cell phone and overnight bag on the seat next to him.

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)
... and that money or family
background or education or luck
didn't matter.

Landon reaches out to adjust his side mirror, revealing a simple gold wedding band on his left hand.

EXT. STREET - TRAVELING

Landon's truck turns the corner and slows in front of the huge Southern Baptist church.

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)
But they did matter. They
mattered to everyone. Except
Jamie Sullivan...

Landon's truck turns into a driveway just past the church and heads for a cluster of buildings. Behind the buildings, a cemetery.

EXT. CLUSTER OF BUILDINGS - CONTINUOUS ACTION

The truck pulls up in front of the old parsonage -- it's a different color than he remembers.

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)
 ... Astronomer. Actress.
 Believer in God...

Landon hesitates a moment, then climbs out of his truck.

EXT. OLD PARSONAGE - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Landon heads up the walk and onto the front porch.
 Presses the DOORBELL. It RINGS inside. Landon is edgy,
 unsettled.

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)
 ... Believer in me.

A nurse opens the door.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BEAUFORT HIGH GYM - NIGHT (NOVEMBER, 1985)

ROCK MUSIC drifts out open doors -- barely recognizable as "Born in the U.S.A." Students hang. Brains, preps, richies, heavy metals, jocks, punk rockers, goths, geeks. Mixing without mixing. Most are red-eyed, woozy, wasted. A couple of boys break dance to a BOOM BOX.

Missing are the criminals...

A shiny T-top CAMARO ROARS up. Stops, TIRES SQUEALING. VAN HALEN BLASTING. LANDON, 18, at the wheel. He is impulsive, sexy-troubled, with the nothing-to-lose courage to act on destructive whims. He is envied, copied, feared.

INT. CAMARO

EMPTIES roll and CLINK on the floor. A tiny plastic skeleton dances as it hangs from the rearview mirror. Landon stamps a joint into the ashtray.

LANDON
 (impatient, edgy)
 Where is he? He's supposed to be here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERIC
(from back seat)
I need to whizz.

ERIC's skinny, high-energy. A leg always jigglng.

LANDON
Eric. You're such a hummingbird.

BELINDA
I wanna dance.

BELINDA is Landon's girlfriend. Richie princess, a bad-girl pretender. Big shoulder pads. Jellie bracelet. Swatch watch.

LANDON
So go dance.

BELINDA
With you.

LANDON
I. Don't. Dance.

ERIC
(pointing, like
Tattoo)
Dee plane. Dee plane.

They laugh. Clay's by the dumpster.

EXT. DUMPSTER

CLAY, obese, wearing a too-small student monitor vest, is dumping garbage from a trash can. A loud HONK. Clay turns to see the Camaro, then turns back to the school, coast clear. He quickly heaves in the empty trash can as the Camaro pulls up.

Eric pushes a door open. Empties fall from the back seat. Clay climbs in.

CLAY
Go go go go.

PRINCIPAL ED KELLY, middle-aged, pockmarked skin, Casio calculator watch, exits the gym.

INT. CAMARO

Landon's looking at Kelly in the rearview mirror.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

(mocking)

Kelly. He looks like his face
caught fire and he tried to put it
out with a fork.

Landon inches the car forward, teasing Clay, teasing
Kelly.

ERIC

He couldn't find his own butt with
both hands at high noon in a hall
of mirrors.

Sniggering laughter.

CLAY

Go!

Landon presses the gas. The CAR ROARS away.

CLAY

Kelly's so old he --

LANDON

We're done with that already,
bonehead.

Clay smiles, good-natured. He often misses social cues.

EXT. CAMARO - TRAVELING

Landon drops Clay's student monitor vest out onto the
road. Another car runs it over.

EXT. ROAD

Mr. Kelly walks over, picks up the vest. Shakes it.
Frustrated. Eyes the empty beer bottles by the dumpster.

EXT. OUTSIDE CEMETERY GATE - LITTLE LATER

Camaro is parked on the dirt access road, headlights
shining through the locked rear gate. JOHN COUGAR
MELLENCAMP's "Small Town" playing.

INT. CAMARO

Landon, Clay, and Belinda sit drinking, smoking weed.
Under the MUSIC, a CB RADIO scanner CHATS quietly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERIC (O.S.)
So which is it?

EXT. CAMARO

Eric finishes taking a leak.

ERIC
(calling over,
repeating)
Landon. To save your life, you
have to either go deaf or go numb
in your dick and balls.

Eric climbs back in the car.

INT. CAMARO

Landon, Belinda, Clay, Eric.

LANDON
I'm thinking.

ERIC
No thinking. The doctor only
gives you three seconds to
decide□--

LANDON
Could I lose one ear and one nut?

ERIC
No questions, no negotiating --

BELINDA
(to Eric, annoyed)
Where do you get these stupid
questions -- ?

LANDON
Hypotheticals --

ERIC
(to Belinda)
I'm just wondering --

BELINDA
Don't wonder.

Landon's looking out at the night.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON
Jamie Sullivan.

Everyone looks up. Derisive laughter.

THEIR POV

A pale, contemplative GIRL, 17, is jumping down off the gate, caught in the headlights. Wearing clothes she probably made herself; long hair hiding her face. She lives in her mind, not her body.

BACK TO SCENE

BELINDA
Brain.

ERIC
Bible freak.

LANDON
Cherry.

EXT. CAMARO

JAMIE (GIRL), hearing the laughter, gathers herself and approaches Landon's window, her SNEAKERS CRUNCHING in the GRAVEL. She crosses her pilly brown sweater across her chest.

JAMIE
(to Landon,
tentative)
Hey. Hi. Your lights. Any
chance you could... turn them
off?--

BELINDA
(leaning over
Landon)
God give you this road?

JAMIE
No --

BELINDA
Then we'll be keeping the lights
on.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON
 (to Jamie, seeming
 nice)
 If you want the lights off, I'll
 turn them off.

And he does. Darkness.

JAMIE
 Thank you. Thank you so very
 much.

She backs away from the car, grateful. From the car:

BELINDA (O.S.)
 I can't see a friggin' thing.

INT. CAMARO

Landon switches on the dome lights for Belinda.

BELINDA
 (imitating Jamie)
 'Thank you. Thank you so very
 much.'

But Landon's looking at Jamie. Almost counting the
 seconds...

HIS POV

Jamie scaling the fence, practiced at it.

BACK TO SCENE

Landon quickly flicks the high beams. Belinda, Eric, and
 Clay snicker and snort as they see --

EXT. CEMETERY GATE

Jamie, startled, paused at the top. But instead of
 looking bullied, her face shows determination, humor even.
 A moment later, she jumps down on the far side.
 Disappears.

INT. CAMARO

Belinda, Eric, Clay are still laughing. Landon's smiling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERIC
 Ten years. Where're you gonna be?
 (to Belinda, mocking)
 Hypothetically?

BELINDA
 Paris.

CLAY
 Dead.

Laughter.

LANDON
 Right here. With you.

He clinks Eric's raised beer. More laughter. But Landon's face clouds slightly -- maybe this isn't where he'd really like to be.

CLAY
 'Twilight Zone.' 'One Step
 Beyond.' 'Tales from the Dark
 Side.'

ERIC
 'Twilight Zone,' dipshit.

LANDON
 Don't call him a dipshit.

ERIC
 You do --

LANDON
 And you don't.
 (beat, re: Jamie)
 What's she doing in there?

BELINDA
 Nothing I'd be doing.

Laughter. Landon kisses her. With tongue.

A blinding white light dances through the car and settles on Landon and Belinda's faces.

LANDON
 Shit!

He scrambles out of the car.

EXT. CAMARO

Landon looks up at the fence.

LANDON'S POV

Jamie sitting atop, holding a large mirror, reflecting the headlights back into the car.

BACK TO SCENE

They stare at each other. His annoyance turns to mild respect.

The CB RADIO comes to life inside the car. A GARBLED TRANSMISSION.

BELINDA (O.S.)

Landon!

INT. CAMARO

Landon leaps in. Pops out the Van Halen.

LANDON

The address?!

ERIC

York Ave.

Landon pops in a WHAM! tape. AMPS it UP. "Freedom."

LANDON

What number?

Nobody answers.

LANDON

Dildoes.

Landon turns the car around.

EXT. ACCESS ROAD

The Camaro fishtails away. TIRES CRUNCHING, red taillights bouncing on the rough road. The car turns left onto the paved road and speeds out of sight.

INT. CAMARO

Landon drives recklessly. Rushing. He makes a SCREECHING turn.

LANDON'S POV - STREET AHEAD

Two fire trucks rumbling by houses, SIRENS WAILING.

EXT. CAMARO

Turns right, following the fire trucks.

INT. CAMARO

Landon smiles at Belinda. She smiles back. Fun. Landon takes a slug of beer. Turns his eyes back to the road.

LANDON'S POV - FIRE TRUCKS

make another turn. Then a flash of light, movement. A figure on the road.

EXT. ROAD

An old man walking his little dog. Crossing the street.

INT. CAMARO - LANDON

turns the wheel hard. Jams his foot on the brake.

EXT. ROAD

The Camaro swerves. TIRES SQUEALING. A LOUD, HEART-SEARING THUMP.

The old man -- sideswiped, drops to the asphalt.

The CAMARO SLAMS into a light pole. CRUNCHING METAL. TINKLING GLASS.

INT. CAMARO

Quiet. Landon, Eric and Clay are banged up.

CLAY

Christ, man.

LANDON

You okay?

ERIC

Yeah.

Belinda's head leans on the dash. Her shoulders shake. Landon, bleeding on the forehead, reaches over. Scared.

LANDON

Belinda?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She lifts her head. Looks at him. She's laughing. He kicks his door out.

EXT. STREET

The Camaro crumpled into the light pole. Headlights askew. Clay and Eric and Belinda getting out, dazed.

Landon runs to the old man. Kneels. Shakes him. No response. The man's TERRIER BARKS at Landon.

LANDON'S FACE

Frightened, anguished. The real Landon showing for an instant.

Police SIRENS WAIL in the b.g., growing LOUDER.

EXT. OLD CHEVETTE - HALF HOUR LATER

A battered Chevette steers through a working-class neighborhood.

INT. CHEVETTE

Landon's mother, CYNTHIA, 35, drives. She's weary with sun-worn skin, but still attractive. She wears a skimpy black-and-white cocktail waitress uniform under her coat.

CYNTHIA

What if they expel you?

LANDON

Kelly wouldn't do that.

CYNTHIA

Why not?

LANDON

Cuz nothing happened at school.

He smiles his biggest most reassuring smile.

CYNTHIA

Don't smile at me. It's not going to get you out of this.

LANDON

Why not? It always has before.

EXT. BEAUFORT HIGH - MONDAY (7:59 AM)

By daylight, a modern brick and glass structure.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - 8:05 AM

Mr. Kelly gestures for Landon to sit. Landon doesn't. His forehead still shows a bruise.

MR. KELLY

I had hopes for you.

LANDON

Like I'd grow up to be president,
another Reagan.

MR. KELLY

(not laughing)

Like you'd make it to June. Even
cutting half your classes, you
have a B- average.

LANDON

I'm no dummy.

MR. KELLY

That's right. You just act like
one.

On his desk, he places the empty bottles that rolled out of the Camaro.

LANDON

Those aren't mine.

MR. KELLY

They came from your car.

LANDON

I wasn't the one drinking.

Kelly holds up the police test finding.

MR. KELLY

Your blood alcohol level. Maybe
you were legally in the clear, but
I make the rules here.

Landon scowls, knows he's defeated.

LANDON

You expelling me?

MR. KELLY

I am.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

Now I can do what I want.

MR. KELLY

That's right.

(sarcastic)

The world is your oyster.

EXT. SCHOOL ENTRANCE - MINUTES LATER

Landon busts out, arms high, fists tight, like a righteous political prisoner. Freedom. He struts through the courtyard. Not a care in the world.

EXT. CARTER DRIVEWAY - HOUR LATER

Landon watches a tow truck lower the crumpled Camaro. A neighbor kid, JOSH, 12, watches from across the street, on his way to school.

EXT. CAMARO - MINUTES LATER

Landon pokes and prods his car -- the engine, underneath, the body, the paint. A discouraging mess.

INT. CARTER HOUSE - HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

Landon knocks on Cynthia's bedroom door.

LANDON

Mom. I need a ride.

INT. CYNTHIA'S BEDROOM

Dark. She wears a black eye-shield. Her waitress uniform hangs over a chair.

CYNTHIA

(sleepy, annoyed)

I'm not getting up to drive you somewhere.

(beat)

What're you doing home?

EXT. GARAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Landon lifts the garage DOOR.

LANDON'S POV - INSIDE GARAGE

A murky place. Filled with old tools and junk and a grim old bike.

EXT. MINI-MALL - AUTO PARTS SHOP - LITTLE LATER

Landon comes out the glass door, his arms loaded, sees his bike. No way to carry. He looks around. The bus stop. A bus approaching.

EXT. UNDER CAMARO - LATER

BANGING, RATCHETING, CLINKING. Landon's working hard. A BOOM BOX playing SIMPLE MINDS' "Alive and Kicking."

LANDON'S POV - HIS MOTHER'S LEGS

and worn terry slippers appear.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

I want to talk to you.

He pauses, annoyed, then rolls himself out.

EXT. CARTER DRIVEWAY

The mangled front bumper's on the ground. Cynthia stands there in her bathrobe. Upset. Landon's almost too much.

CYNTHIA

You're not hanging round here all day.

LANDON

I'm not hanging. I'm fixing my car --

CYNTHIA

You don't need a car you can't drive for a month. Go see Marvin.

LANDON

'Bout what?

CYNTHIA

About a job.

Landon ignores her. Slides back under his car.

EXT. UNDER CAMARO

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

He's going to try you as assistant manager.

(beat)

You could be manager someday.

Landon can't believe this.

EXT. DRIVEWAY

Landon slides back out.

LANDON

I'm not working there.

Cynthia sets her jaw. He knows that look.

INT. RESTAURANT - KITCHEN - LUNCH HOUR

Landon is sweating, scouring pots. A crooked cap on his head, an assistant manager name tag on his shirt. He's making some headway; only two more to wash.

MARVIN, the owner, walks over. Beer belly, greasy hair. Dumps another pile of dirty pots and pans in Landon's sink. Landon glimpses his future.

INT. PRINCIPAL KELLY'S OUTER OFFICE - EARLY AFTERNOON

Landon paces, jumpy. Kelly's secretary, MISS TARBOX, quietly locks her purse in her bottom drawer.

LANDON

Who's he in with?

MISS TARBOX

He'll be with you when he's available.

The door to Kelly's office opens. Jamie Sullivan exits with her father, the tall stern REVEREND HEGBERT SULLIVAN. Jamie eyes Landon as she passes by.

LANDON

(joking)

You expelled, too?

Nobody laughs or even smiles.

INT. PRINCIPAL KELLY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Mr. Kelly makes a note in Jamie's file.

MR. KELLY
Finding the real world to your
liking, Mr. Carter?

LANDON
I want to come back.

MR. KELLY
(looking up,
surprised)
Back? Were you ever really here?

They both know Kelly has the upper hand. Kelly leans back in his chair, relishing it.

LANDON
(mumbling)
I want to graduate.

Kelly studies Landon, the boy who can't get out of his own way.

MR. KELLY
(thinking aloud)
You could grace our hallowed halls
again, if, while you're here, you
make a sincere effort to be part
of our little school community --

LANDON
(relieved)
I'd do that --

MR. KELLY
How would you do that, Mr. Carter?

Landon shrugs, clueless.

MR. KELLY
(smiling)
Shall I give you a few ideas?

LANDON
(smiling, too)
Please.

MR. KELLY
Besides attending all your regular
classes, I'd like you to help our
janitorial staff after school --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

For pay?

MR. KELLY

For the inner satisfaction it will bring.

(beat)

Saturday mornings, I'd like you to tutor disadvantaged students at our sister school --

LANDON

(joking)

I'm as underprivileged as they are --

MR. KELLY

The fact that you attend this school makes you privileged.

His tone quiets Landon.

MR. KELLY

Finally, I'd like you to join the drama club. Rehearsals are Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

LANDON

(grumbling)

I'd work backstage or something?

MR. KELLY

Or something. They're doing a play for the holidays.

LANDON

When do I get time for me?

MR. KELLY

You don't. That's the point.

Landon's not happy, but he'll work with this. As he heads for the door:

MR. KELLY

(softer, trying to reach him)

Landon, none of us faculty see you the way you see yourself.

(beat)

Some of us remember how your father --

LANDON

Then you remember more than I do.

CLOSE ON BROOM

pushing gum wrappers under a radiator.

INT. SCIENCE CLASSROOM - AFTER SCHOOL

Landon sweeps at the floor during the Star Club open house. A dozen nerds, including Jamie Sullivan (wearing her brown sweater), stand at astronomy exhibits. Students wander in, listen, look.

JAMIE

(answering question)

-- Saturn's 15 degrees to the right of red Antares and much brighter.

To her small audience, she holds up a contraption made from a wire coat hanger.

JAMIE

This is a very simple device made from a coat hanger, plastic wrap and typewriter correction fluid. Does anyone know what it is?

No one does.

LANDON

(barely audible)

A star frame.

But Jamie hears. She regards him a moment, then keeps going.

JAMIE

This is a star frame.

Clay and Eric enter, checking on Landon, glancing at Jamie.

JAMIE

A star frame will help you locate stars and planets with your naked eye --

CLAY

(scoffing, setting her up)

-- Did God create the sun?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

(taking him seriously)
Yes, God created the universe and
all its physical laws. Even
Einstein said it's a miracle that
our world is comprehensible --

ERIC

-- If God can do all that, why
can't he get you a new sweater?

Landon laughs loudly. Members of the club look at him.

LANDON

That was a joke. Laugh.

Jamie smiles. She can laugh at herself. And she finds
Landon funny.

INT. CARTER KITCHEN - EVENING

Landon washes up while his mother sets the table. The
MICROWAVE HUMS in the b.g.

CYNTHIA

Your father dropped off an extra
check.

LANDON

I don't want his money.

CYNTHIA

It could help with a new car[]--

LANDON

-- I like the car I have.

He picks up the envelope with wet hands. Without looking
inside, rips it in half. Cynthia smiles, quietly happy.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - TRAVELING - SATURDAY MORNING

Enthusiastic preppies, richies, other do-gooders, singing
"Karma Chameleon." Jamie sits in an aisle seat, reading,
not singing. She turns around to look at Landon. He
rides in the back row, staring out the window, wearing a
Sony Walkman, glum.

HIS POV

To Z.Z. TOP'S "Sleeping Bag." Out the window -- Jefferson
High School coming into view. Bars on every window,
chain-link fence around the parameter, no grass.

INT. JEFFERSON HIGH - LIBRARY - LITTLE LATER

A big room with tables and chairs but few books. Pairs of heads are bent over textbooks and notebooks. Landon sits with LUIS, a freshman boy of mixed ethnicity. A geometry text between them.

LANDON

(reading)

-- 'So what is the measure of angle x if A and B are similar triangles?'

Luis is lost, intimidated.

LANDON

Know what 'similar' means?

Luis shrugs. Luis looks down at the book as if for the answer, then at Landon, hopeless. He gets up and walks off. Landon looks up in disbelief and catches Jamie studying him. She's at a nearby table with her student, ISABEL.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - NOON

The DOOR SWISHES SHUT behind Landon as he hops aboard. He's late and heads for the rear bench seat.

LANDON'S POV

Jamie sitting there. And no vacant seats save next to her.

BACK TO SCENE

The bus begins to roll. Landon lurches forward.

TRAVELING - LATER

The bus is moving through Beaufort. Landon sits next to Jamie. Putting a new tape into his Sony Walkman. His body turned away. She's reading her book.

JAMIE

You going to visit Harold?

Landon scowls. What—who is she talking about?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

They let him out of the hospital yesterday. He's in a rest home on Oak Street.

That old man.

JAMIE

He goes to my father's church. He could've died --

LANDON

-- This your idea of small talk?

JAMIE

I don't make small talk --

LANDON

-- Obviously.

JAMIE

I just wanted to tell you not to give up. Sometimes you've got to back into the teaching from somewhere else.

If he heard her, he makes no sign. She goes back to her book. A long beat, then:

JAMIE

What makes you volunteer?

(pause)

Want to know why I tutor reading?

Not really.

JAMIE

Because, growing up, books were my world.

LANDON

(mean)

Were?

JAMIE

You don't know me.

LANDON

Your book and your brown sweater and your hair. What's more to know -- ?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

-- I wear the sweater because I'm cold. I read because no one talks to me. My hair is my hair. What is it exactly that's bothering you?

LANDON

You don't care what people say?

JAMIE

You mean care what you say? I'm worrying about other things.

LANDON

Like what? The moons of Jupiter?

JAMIE

Can't you have a normal conversation?

LANDON

I don't want to have any conversation.

JAMIE

Good, cuz talking to you is like trying to explain red to a blind person.

She reads again. The bus pulls to a stop in front of Beaufort High. Belinda, wearing a neck brace, is waiting, leaning on her Cabriolet. Jamie watches Landon exit the bus.

JAMIE'S POV - OUT THE WINDOW

Landon greeting Belinda, kissing her.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - TUESDAY EVENING

Landon opens a side door, peers in at the Drama Club.

LANDON'S POV

A big space with a stage. MS. GARBER stands before six geeky boys, and a dozen fat girls and Jamie.

BACK TO SCENE

Landon reacts -- this girl actually chooses to be in these places? Ms. Garber looks up from her papers.

MS. GARBER

We're waiting, Mr. Carter.

He slides in a row behind the others. Leans forward and pokes a boy, EDDIE JONES. Eddie's pimply and talks with his eyes squinched up.

LANDON

What's the play?

Eddie hands him a photocopied script, The Rainmaker.

EDDIE

The-the-there's this drought an'
-- and a smooth t-t-alking guy
comes and says he can m-make
rain--

LANDON

-- And the ugly farmer's daughter
falls for him. I saw the movie.

EDDIE

Yeah. It's really g-g-good --

LANDON

-- It blows.

ON STAGE - MINUTES LATER

Jamie and Landon sit in folding chairs, reading from scripts. Landon's wooden, showing how lame this is.

LANDON

(as Starbuck)

'I hope your dreams come true.'

JAMIE

(as Lizzie, sad)

'They won't.'

LANDON

(as Starbuck)

'Believe in yourself and they
will. Let me ask you, Lizzie.
Look in the mirror? Are you
pretty --?'

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MS. GARBER

-- Landon, are you trying to be bad at this?

LANDON

No, it just comes naturally.

Jamie smiles. Garber taps her script -- continue.

LANDON

(as Starbuck)

'It's got to be inside you. Then one day the mirror will be the eyes of the man who loves you. You'll look in that mirror and you'll be more than pretty. You'll be beautiful.'

Ms. Garber eyes Landon, motions for him to keep going.

LANDON

(as Starbuck)

'Look at me. Tell me what you see!'

As Lizzie, Jamie looks into his eyes.

JAMIE

(as Lizzie)

'Is it really me?'

LANDON

(as Starbuck, hamming)

'Yes. You're-you're b-b-beautiful.'

Hoots and laughter. Jamie looks away, humiliated.

MS. GARBER

Quiet!

(announcing)

Landon will play the role of Bill Starbuck.

Groans among the boys. Jamie is horrified. So is Landon.

LANDON

(to Garber)

No way. No thanks. I can't do it--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MR. KELLY (O.S.)
 (offstage)
 -- You can and you will, Mr.
 Carter.

Kelly's been standing in the wings.

MR. KELLY
 (warning)
 With all the sincerity and dignity
 you can muster.

Everyone stares at Landon. He's trapped.

EXT. AUDITORIUM - LATER THAT EVENING

Raining. Landon exits behind all the others. Stands under an overhang, lights a cigarette, angry, waiting for a ride. Jamie approaches, something on her mind.

LANDON
 (rude)
 You're like this fly, buzzing
 buzzing everywhere --

JAMIE
 -- This play means a lot to me.

LANDON
 (snorting)
This play -- ?

JAMIE
 -- I know you don't suck at
 acting.

Landon laughs. Refusing to take her seriously. Behind him, the lights go out as the school closes for the night.

JAMIE
 But you have to make it a big joke
 because only dorks and dweebies
 like doing theater --

LANDON
 -- What are you going on about?

Pause.

JAMIE
 I can judge too.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He exhales, eyeing her, daring her.

JAMIE

You don't care about classes or graduating. But you like school because you're popular and you know you'll never be on top again.

LANDON

That's deep --

JAMIE

-- Your act only works with an audience.

LANDON

My act?!

She walks off toward her father's old Pontiac. The last car in the parking lot.

Fire trucks rush by on the street below. Landon's ears twitch. He looks about. No one, no ride. He sees the Pontiac backing out of a parking spot.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Landon bangs on the side of her car as she drives past.

LANDON

A ride?! Please!

INT. PONTIAC

Jamie turns to look at him.

JAMIE'S POV

Landon, wet, desperate, his eyes pleading.

LANDON

(insincere)

We can talk about your helping me with my lines.

INT. OLD PONTIAC - TRAVELING - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie's at the wheel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

I know you don't want help.

LANDON

Then we both know.

(beat)

I'll point. You drive. Faster.

He points the way, to the taillights of the fire trucks.
The wet road glistens.

JAMIE

We're following fire trucks?

LANDON

Yeah.

JAMIE

Why?

LANDON

(duh)

Because that's where the fire is?

He fishes in his pocket for a tape. Pulls one out. He's
searching the dash -- no cassette player.

LANDON

Fire is like a living thing.
Wild. Unpredictable.

JAMIE

Like me.

LANDON

No. Not like you.

She jerks the car across the center lane. Driving on the
wrong side of the road. He grips the dash.

LANDON

What the -- ?!

JAMIE

So you agree you need help?

LANDON'S POV - OUT WINDSHIELD

Headlights looming, a car coming. Closer and closer.

BACK TO SCENE

LANDON

Yes!

She swings the Pontiac back to the right lane. Smiling.
A car zips by in the other direction, HORN BLARING.

JAMIE

Really?

Landon drops his attitude, his act. He toys with the
glove compartment knob.

LANDON

Yeah. Kelly'll make me leave
school if I screw up the play.

JAMIE

(to herself)
28 and 42.

Pause. He acts like he doesn't hear, but he's interested.

LANDON

What's with the friggin numbers?

JAMIE

28 is do something illegal. 42 is
befriend an enemy.

LANDON

I'm an enemy?

JAMIE

Kinda. Yeah.

EXT. ACROSS STREET FROM FIRE - LITTLE LATER

Landon and Jamie walk around the fire, watching the fire
and the firemen. Landon is just tolerating her.

JAMIE

The reason I got the part... I'm a
little like Lizzie. Except I
don't worry about some man
rescuing me.

LANDON

Good thing.

If she's offended, she keeps it to herself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON
You got some kind of list?

JAMIE
Are you asking to mock me or do
you really want to know?

LANDON
Maybe a little of both.

They both smile.

JAMIE
I'll take a chance.

LANDON
Go for it.

JAMIE
It's like a to-do list, but for my
life.

He smirks.

JAMIE
If you can't imagine the future,
you won't have one.

He lights a cigarette. She reaches for it.

LANDON
(joking)
Having a cigarette. 100.

She grins and takes a drag. They share the cigarette.

LANDON
So what else is on this list?

JAMIE
It's private.

LANDON
(cajoling)
You want to tell me...

She eyes him, not certain she's willing to risk sharing
her dreams with him.

LANDON
(guessing, rudely)
Get very wasted. Lose your
virginity --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE
 (correcting)
 Spend a year in the Peace Corps.
 Make a medical discovery --

LANDON
 (contemptuous)
 Ambitious.

JAMIE
 Being negative's a lot more work
 than being positive.

LANDON
 Like you'd know.

JAMIE
 I do know.
 (pause)
 Be two places at once... learn to
 hit a baseball or turn a
 cartwheel... eat breakfast with
 chopsticks...

He likes the frivolity of these.

LANDON
 What's... Number one?

She looks away, embarrassed.

JAMIE
 (changing subject)
 If you want help with your lines,
 I have two conditions.
 (smiling)
 You have to promise not to fall in
 love with me.

He's certain she's joking.

LANDON
 No problem --

JAMIE
And you have to meet my father.

He looks at her like she's crazy to worry about this.

LANDON
 Fathers love me.

CLOSE ON PARSONAGE FRONT DOOR

swinging open. Reverend Sullivan looming tall. Ichabod Crane in a collar.

EXT. PARSONAGE PORCH - WIDER - NEXT EVENING

Landon gives a cheery little wave. He's very sweaty. His bike teeters on its kickstand in the b.g.

LANDON

Hey. Landon Carter.

Landon offers his hand. The Reverend shakes reluctantly, eyeing him closely: Landon's Army boots, torn jeans, dirty t-shirt, aloof manner.

REV. SULLIVAN

(surprised)

You're in the play?

LANDON

Lead man.

Jamie slides out the door. She looks good in jeans and a white t-shirt. Almost normal. In the b.g., Landon's BIKE CRASHES over. He bounds down the porch steps.

LANDON

(explaining bike)

They took my license for 30 days.
But nobody's pressing charges.

The Reverend looks at Jamie, concerned. Landon tries the kickstand, then leans the bike against a carefully trimmed bush. Not the best place.

JAMIE

I'll get something for us to
drink --

LANDON

Don't bother!

But she's already gone. The Reverend gestures toward the open front door.

INT. SULLIVAN LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dark and prim with stiff furniture left to fade. Landon pokes around, then stares at a photo of little girl Jamie with her parents. He looks up, aware that the Reverend is studying him closely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

You know our planet would not suffer for one nanosecond if humans died off. But if ants disappeared, that would be catastrophic.

The Reverend waits, letting Landon suffer the silence.

LANDON

(confidence flagging)

Apropos of nothing... so. So so so so --

REV. SULLIVAN

Let's get something straight. You don't know me. I don't know you. But I know what you're about.

(beat)

Keep your distance from this house -- and from Jamie.

His eyes lock with Landon's. His message clear. A NOISE and Jamie is there, carrying glasses of lemonade, all cheerful.

JAMIE

I miss anything?

INT. PARSONAGE - KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

Jamie washes the lemonade glasses, happy. Her father comes in.

REV. SULLIVAN

The Carter boy. Tell me about him.

JAMIE

He wants help with his lines --

REV. SULLIVAN

He was driving the car that hit Harold Keene --

JAMIE

By accident --

REV. SULLIVAN

Jamie, he's careless. Reckless.

(beat)

Is this really the best time to be making a new friend...?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

I'm supposed to always be alone?

REV. SULLIVAN

I don't want you to see him
outside school activities.

JAMIE

Fine. But I need to start
deciding how to spend my time and
my life.

Pause.

REV. SULLIVAN

(gentler)

I'm sorry your mother isn't here
to help you become a woman.

JAMIE

Dad, I've become a woman without
her. Just not a pretty one.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM - ONE AM

Jamie hops out of bed, pulls on jeans and a sweatshirt.

INT. HALLWAY

Jamie peers into her father's room. He's sleeping. She
tiptoes to the staircase and down. Sneaking out.

EXT. REAR ACCESS ROAD TO CEMETERY - TEN MINUTES LATER

Landon is waiting when Jamie appears. He has scripts in
his back pocket. They smile at each other, laugh.

JAMIE

(re: her father)

I know. Don't say anything.

LANDON

He's a softy. Got him wrapped
around my finger.

JAMIE

You think so.

LANDON

Know so.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She grins, skeptical.

JAMIE

This way.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Jamie leads Landon toward the cemetery rear gate.

JAMIE

People think I'm strange, don't they?

LANDON

(smiling)

Yes.

JAMIE

Because I try to be nice to people?

LANDON

Yeah. Maybe. I dunno.

JAMIE

Do you think I'm strange?

Pause. Landon's caught off-guard by her frankness.

LANDON

Yeah. But that can be good.

EXT. CEMETERY - REAR GATE - NIGHT

Jamie quickly scales the fence. Landon's right after her.

LANDON

Why are we here?

INT. CEMETERY

Jamie drops down. Takes a flashlight from her bag.

JAMIE

Cuz it's dark and quiet and you can see into another world.

LANDON

(on top of gate)

The world of the dead?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE
(being mysterious)
Could be...

He drops down, not sure what she means. She's already walking away. He follows.

JAMIE
My mother's buried near here.

LANDON
My father's alive but it's like he's dead.

She looks at Landon, feeling his sorrow, then unlocks a storage shed. Opens the door. Enters. Returns a moment later carrying several pieces of an odd-looking home-made cylindrical device.

LANDON
What is that?

JAMIE
(proud)
That is my telescope.

SAME SCENE - MINUTES LATER

The ten-inch Dobsonian telescope is pointed at the sky. The eye-piece is at the end of the long scope; the scope rests on a plywood base. Landon looks through the eye-piece.

POV (THROUGH TELESCOPE) - CLOSE ON GOLDEN PLANET

a beautiful view of a golden planet with a broad, flat ring system.

WIDEN.

LANDON
(impressed)
Saturn. Beautiful.

JAMIE
Before Voyager we expected maybe a dozen rings --

LANDON
But there are thousands of them, made of floating ice --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

Maybe debris from a moon that
broke apart.

LANDON

Or building blocks for a world
that never formed.

She looks at him. He smiles, embarrassed.

LANDON

I'm not smart. Just a sponge.

She smiles, disagreeing, then looks through the telescope
and changes its view.

JAMIE

Sometimes I come here and just
scan the heavens.

LANDON

(joking)
Looking for intelligent life?

JAMIE

Looking for something -- someone.

Pause. He doesn't know what to say.

LANDON

Do you believe you'll see your
mother again?

JAMIE

I hope so.
(beat)
I think maybe she sees me now.

Their eyes meet. She looks away. Changes the subject.

JAMIE

(re: telescope)
I'm building a larger one to see
the nucleus of Haley's Comet --

LANDON

The dirty snowball at its core.

JAMIE

Yeah.
(beat)
I'm probably not going to be
around next time it comes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

In 76 years, me neither.

She likes that he knows a little about astronomy. They each lean back on a tombstone and stare at the stars.

LANDON

You're really into God, right?

JAMIE

In ten words or less?

LANDON

Yeah.

JAMIE

My relationship with God is my own.

LANDON

But you think about Him -- It -- Her.

JAMIE

Don't you?

LANDON

Not really.

Pause.

JAMIE

When you do, how do you?

Landon could joke or he could reveal something.

LANDON

Like in a church painting. I see this giant hovering over the ground. He's wearing a robe, and has long flowing hair, and he's pointing his finger at something.

JAMIE

Do you ever wonder why things happen the way they do?

LANDON

No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

I know there's a plan for everyone, but sometimes I don't understand what the message is -- or what the point is.

LANDON

There is no point. You live. You die. The end.

JAMIE

Maybe we're not supposed to understand, but we're supposed to have faith that someone else sees the big picture.

LANDON

You have to believe to have faith.

JAMIE

You don't believe in anything?

LANDON

The Bible. Why should I read a bunch of dumb stories about some ancient guy who supposedly worked miracles.

JAMIE

Interpreted by another guy like my father.

LANDON

Your father doesn't like me.

Pause.

JAMIE

He doesn't trust you.

LANDON

Sometimes I don't even trust me.

He sits up and pulls Rainmaker scripts from his back pocket. He holds one out to her. A moment passes. She takes it.

JAMIE

I'm not afraid of you.

LANDON

Likewise.

INT. PARSONAGE - HALLWAY - LATER THAT NIGHT

Jamie sneaks from the stairs to her room. Shuts the door. A light glows under the door, then goes out.

INT. REVEREND SULLIVAN'S BEDROOM

He opens his eyes, listens, then turns over and goes back to sleep. Not suspecting. Not yet.

INT. LANDON'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Dreary. Landon lies in bed, flipping the TV CHANNELS, past "Square Pegs," "Miami Vice," MTV, to a British nature documentary. After a moment, he searches for a pen and paper. Titles it "Life List." Pause. He doesn't know what to write.

EXT. BEAUFORT HIGH PARKING LOT - MORNING (BEFORE SCHOOL)

Landon, Clay, Eric, Belinda. Eric's pickup is parked by Belinda's Cabriolet. RADIOS ON, BLASTING the same station, same song: JOHN FOGERTY'S "Rock and Roll Girls."

ERIC

Women are definitely evolving into men.

CLAY

The moustaches on some girls. Unbelievable.

BELINDA

Why is Jamie Sullivan staring at us?

They look. Jamie's watching them. They laugh.

ERIC

She wants to jump Landon's bones.

BELINDA

That is so pitiful.

LANDON

She's very confused.

CLAY

Deluded.

ERIC

Deranged.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

Demented.

BELINDA

She's coming over here...

LANDON

Heart be still.

They laugh more and she's there.

JAMIE

(to Landon)

Hi.

He doesn't respond. She shifts from foot to foot. Confused.

JAMIE

The play's going to be really good.

LANDON

(mocking her)

I'm really glad you think so.

His friends snicker and guffaw. She looks at them, then back to Landon.

JAMIE

I guess you don't want to practice lines tonight.

LANDON

You guessed right.

She gives him a funny look and walks away. A better person than he and he knows it.

BELINDA

That's one girl who can't take a hint.

LANDON

Because she doesn't know what a hint is.

They laugh. Landon the loudest. It feels good, but he also feels a little... bad.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Cleaned up. Swept out. The Camaro is still a dented mess. But Landon drops its hood down, wipes his hands, and climbs behind the wheel. The ENGINE STARTS.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

No posters of pop stars. Books by Houston Smith, Thomas Merton, Alan Watts, Carlos Castaneda. Jamie studies, listening to JONI MITCHELL's "I Wish I Had a River." The DOORBELL RINGS.

INT. FRONT HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie opens the front door. Landon. A stern voice from the living room. Reverend Sullivan's.

REV. SULLIVAN (O.S.)
Better not be the Carter boy.

Jamie shuts the door.

EXT. SULLIVAN FRONT PORCH

Landon can't believe this. He presses the BELL again.

LANDON
(talking to door)
Jamie?
(beat)
Open up.
(beat)
Open the door. Please.
(long beat)
Reverend Sullivan, I have to talk
to your daught--

JAMIE
What is your problem?

She's standing in the front yard.

LANDON
You're not in a very good mood.

JAMIE
You don't miss a thing.

WIDER

He steps down off the porch.

LANDON
The play's in a couple of weeks.

JAMIE
Yes. And?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

I was hoping we could run lines together.

JAMIE

Oh. Just not at school...

LANDON

Yeah --

JAMIE

Or anywhere where people might see us.

LANDON

Belinda's a very jealous person.

JAMIE

That would be the reason.

Pause. He thinks she might be going for this.

JAMIE

So it's like you want to be secret friends.

LANDON

That's it! Exactly! You're reading my mind --

JAMIE

Then maybe you can read mine.

She walks up the porch steps, goes in the front door, and opens it. Before she goes in:

JAMIE

I thought I saw something in you, something good. But I was wrong.

INT. SULLIVAN FRONT HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie leans against the closed door, trembling, almost crying. In the living room, her father looks up from his reading, sees Jamie, then parts the curtains, looks out, glowers.

REVEREND SULLIVAN'S POV - OUT WINDOW

Landon standing in the front yard, confused that Jamie would reject his generous offer of friendship.

EXT. FRONT YARD

Landon walks to his car, then yells back at the parsonage.

LANDON

Why do you have to be so weird?!

The front door opens, startling Landon. It's the Reverend. Red-faced with fury. Landon glares back, but then climbs in his car and drives off. Ashamed.

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Jamie sits on the sofa. Her father doesn't look up from his reading.

REV. SULLIVAN

The first time I met him I knew.
I'm proud of how you're handling
yourself.

Tears well and Jamie's face cracks with guilt and heartbreak. She leaves before her father can see her distress.

INT. LANDON'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Landon lies in bed watching another British nature DOCUMENTARY, this one on astronomy. He reaches for his school yearbook. Flips the pages until he finds Jamie's photo.

CLOSE ON JAMIE'S PHOTO

She's smiling and looks almost cute. Listed under her photo are clubs: Red Cross, Stars and Planets, Drama. Ambition: To Witness a Miracle.

INT. JEFFERSON HIGH - LIBRARY - SATURDAY MORNING

Landon and Luis sit over the geometry text. Landon has just asked a question and Luis is shrugging sadly. Landon's eyes wander out the window.

LANDON'S POV - BASKETBALL HOOP

BACK TO SCENE

LANDON

Let's get outta here.

EXT. JEFFERSON HIGH - BASKETBALL BLACKTOP - MINUTES LATER

Landon and Luis face each other across the half-court. Landon's got a ball and is further from the basket.

LANDON

You, me, and the basket. We're the three corners of a triangle. Take one step in.

Landon and Luis both step forward.

LANDON

Am I at the same angle to you and the basket as before?

LUIS

Yeah.

LANDON

Are you?

LUIS

Yeah.

LANDON

So what did we just make?

LUIS

A similar triangle?

LANDON

What else? What kind of triangle has three sides of different lengths.

LUIS

Scalene?

LANDON

Okay. Make me an isosceles.

Luis steps outward, directly opposite Landon.

LANDON

Yes! Two sides the same.

Landon tosses him the ball. They play. Jamie glances over from a picnic table where she works with her student, Isabel. Landon looks at her, she looks away, he looks back. Thoughtful. Watching her. But not staring.

INT. BOOK STORE - EVENING

Landon studies the books in the spiritual/religion shelf.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He picks out a book, then sits in a corner.

But before he opens the text, he looks around him, suddenly taking in all the books, all the learning, all the knowledge that could be his.

EXT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - WEEK LATER

On the marquee: The Rainmaker. Under this, "All Invited." Under this, a full parking lot.

INT. AUDITORIUM

A full house. Parents, teachers, students, churchgoers, booster club and rotary members.

ON STAGE

The set is a wealthy Midwestern ranch house of the 1950s. Eddie and two other BOYS play other characters. The play's underway...

STAGE LEFT

Landon watches, dressed as Bill Starbuck in a nicely fitted suit. Waiting for his entrance.

LANDON'S POV - STAGE

BOY #1

(as H.C., the father)

'Then why don't you talk to her?'

EDDIE

(as Jim)

'Because if we do, she'll think we're trying to get rid of her.'

BOY #1

(as H.C., the father)

'She'll sure think the same if I do it. You're her father and comes a time when a father's gotta mention.'

BACK TO SCENE

From stage right, Jamie makes her entrance as Lizzie. A collective gasp from the audience.

LANDON'S POV

Jamie, wearing makeup, a dress that clings, her hair pulled back.

BACK TO SCENE

Landon can't take his eyes off her.

JAMIE

(as Lizzie)

'Morning, Pop. Boys. I dreamed we had a rain, rain coming down in sheets! Lightning flashed, thunder rolled up and down the canyon like a kid with a big drum!'

AUDIENCE

Reverend Sullivan -- enraptured. Principal Kelly -- hopeful. Cynthia Carter -- uncertain. Clay, Eric, and Belinda -- rocking in their seats, snickering.

JAMIE

(as Lizzie)

'I know why you sent me to Sweetriver. Six boys in that family. The first three days, I stayed in my room.'

BOY #2

(as Noah, the brother)

'What'd you do that for?'

BACK OF AUDITORIUM

A well-dressed man, DR. JONATHAN CARTER, Landon's father, slips in and takes a seat a couple of rows behind Cynthia.

JAMIE (O.S.)

(as Lizzie)

'I knew what I was there for and they knew it, too!'

BACK OF AUDITORIUM - LATER

Dr. Carter hangs on every word. Others sit on the edge of their seats. Even Clay, Eric, and Belinda. Belinda leans forward to take a photo.

BELINDA'S POV THROUGH CAMERA LENS

As she ZOOMS -- Landon and Jamie on stage, growing larger.

ON STAGE

Landon, Jamie, and the three boys.

ON STAGE - LANDON

is Starbuck.

LANDON
 (as Starbuck,
 genuine)
 '... You'll look in that mirror
 and you'll be more than pretty.
 You'll be beautiful. Look at me.
 Tell me what you see!'

Jamie looks. She sees something in his eyes she hasn't seen in them before. Love.

JAMIE
 (as Lizzie, choked
 up)
 'Is it really me?'

LANDON'S POV

Jamie, her face lovely. Her eyes shining, radiating, looking directly at him.

BACK TO SCENE

Landon is dumbstruck.

LANDON
 (as Starbuck,
 heartfelt)
 'Yes.
 (beat)
 You're beautiful.'

Landon changes the line and nails it. Surprising himself. Surprising her. They both know it's sincere. A moment passes. Her stomach churns with anticipation.

He leans in. She closes her eyes. They kiss. Gently, genuinely. When Jamie opens her eyes, they are filled with tears.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The curtain crashes down. End of act two.

CLAPPING from the other side of the curtain. Landon tries to meet Jamie's gaze. But she's looking at the floor.

AUDIENCE

Principal Kelly, pleased. Cynthia Carter, proud. Clay and Eric, surprised. Reverend Sullivan, frowning, concerned. Belinda's face is cold, hard.

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - HOUR LATER

Landon runs out, looking for his friends. Mr. Kelly shakes his hand, then deals with parents.

LANDON'S POV

Belinda getting into her car.

WIDER

LANDON

Belinda!

Belinda stops.

BELINDA

What?!

She waits. Landon struggles with what to say.

BELINDA

That's what I thought!

Landon watches her START her CAR, back from a parking space --

DR. CARTER

Landon.

Landon turns. His father is standing on the curb.

DR. CARTER

Fine performance.

LANDON

Who invited you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. CARTER
Ed Kelly. I thought we might get
a bite --

LANDON
Not hungry.

Landon moves toward his Camaro.

DR. CARTER
Landon! Please. Don't walk away
from me.

LANDON
Like you walked away from us?

Landon opens his car door and gets in. Not forgiving.

INT. BEAUFORT HIGH - CORRIDOR - NEXT MORNING

Landon waits by Jamie's locker. The BELL RINGS. No
Jamie.

INT. CAFETERIA - NOON

Landon walks along the lunch line, looking. No Jamie.

INT. LIBRARY - LATER

Many many books. Landon cruises the stacks. No Jamie.
Belinda, sitting at a table with a girlfriend, sees Landon
and turns away. He doesn't pursue it.

EXT. CARTER DRIVEWAY - DUSK

Eric and Clay watch Landon hammer out dents in the Camaro.
They're smoking, sharing some beers. Josh, the neighbor
kid, stands across the street, wanting to be invited over.

ERIC
(contemptuous)
She's like some Puritan.

LANDON
She's not. She's got her own
ideas.

CLAY
Mutant ideas.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

Maybe to you.

Eric and Clay exchange a look -- is Landon defending her?

ERIC

Belinda's telling everyone that
kiss was real.

LANDON

It was.

Eric and Clay smirk in disbelief.

ERIC

And that you're scamming on Jamie
Sullivan.

LANDON

(not denying it)
Scamming's a strong word.

INT. BEAUFORT HIGH - CORRIDOR - NEXT MORNING

Landon's waiting when Jamie approaches her locker. Her
hair pulled back. She looks good in a simple, fresh way.

LANDON

You weren't in school yesterday.

JAMIE

I went to the doctor with my
father.

LANDON

He okay?

JAMIE

Healthy as can be.

Pause. She doesn't help him. She opens her locker, gets
what she needs.

LANDON

You were great the other night.

JAMIE

Thank you. So were you.

Pause. He tries to touch her hair. She ducks.

LANDON

I haven't been nice to you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE
You're hardly nice to anyone.

LANDON
(sincere)
I'm sorry.

JAMIE
(walking away)
I wish I could believe you.

INT. CAFETERIA - LATER

Jamie sits alone, reading, wearing her old brown sweater.
Landon walks by Clay and Eric at a table.

ERIC
Landon!

LANDON
Later.

Puts his tray down on Jamie's table and sits. Making a
public statement.

JAMIE
People can see.

LANDON
And that would ruin your
reputation how?

She goes back to her book. Ignoring him.

LANDON
(re: her book)
What's that?

She doesn't look up. Shows him the spine: The Scarlet
Letter.

JAMIE
I'm reading all the novels on Mr.
Rothberg's best American authors
list.

LANDON
How many books are there?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

(annoyed)

A hundred. Then there's his classics list. And his European list.

Landon realizes this is why she's always reading.

LANDON

That on your 'Life List.' To read all those books?

She doesn't deny it. He just dives in.

LANDON

Jamie. Maybe I want to try being positive.

She looks up. Examines his face for the truth.

LANDON

Maybe I miss doing that dumb play with you.

Students seated near them have overheard. Whisper.

LANDON

Maybe you inspire me.

JAMIE

That sounds like horseshit.

LANDON

Which part?

JAMIE

All of it.

LANDON

It's not.

JAMIE

Prove it.

She picks up her books and tray. Everyone is watching.

LANDON

I just did!

EXT. PARKING LOT - AFTER SCHOOL

Landon follows Jamie out of the building. Catches up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

Jamie --

JAMIE

You lack honor. You lack
compassion. You lack honesty.
You lack humanity.

She heads to the old Pontiac. Landon jogs after her.

LANDON

Okay. Maybe some of that is
true--

JAMIE

You don't know the first thing
about being someone's friend --

LANDON

I don't want to be just your
friend --

JAMIE

You don't know what you want --

LANDON

You don't either. Take a look at
yourself. Maybe you're scared
that someone might actually like
you --

JAMIE

And why would that scare me?

LANDON

Because then you couldn't hide
behind your books and your
telescope and your sweater and
your God.

She gets into her car. Slams the door. STARTS the
ENGINE. She recognizes the truth.

LANDON

But the real reason you're scared?
You like me!

She drives off. Clay and Eric, watching, guffaw at
Landon's spectacle.

LANDON

If you were really my friends,
you'd be helping me, not running
me down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ERIC

The only one running you down is
you.

EXT. BRIDGE OVER INTERCOASTAL WATERWAY - NIGHT

Landon sits alone. Legs dangling over. Lighting and
dropping matches into the black beyond his feet. His body
caught in the occasional sweep of car headlights.

Nearby, an abandoned car. A rusty old Yugo.

INT. CARTER KITCHEN - NIGHT

Landon comes in from outside. Is surprised to find
Cynthia sipping tea, wearing her uniform.

CYNTHIA

Out with Belinda?

LANDON

That's over. Way over.

CYNTHIA

I can't know things if you don't
tell me.

Pause.

LANDON

Dad came to the play.

CYNTHIA

(surprised)
You saw him?

LANDON

We talked. He wanted to get a
bite -- after. I said no.

CYNTHIA

(disbelief)
After he moved out, I invited him
to every practice, every game,
every parent-teacher conference
you ever had. He didn't show, not
once.

LANDON

He wants to show now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CYNTHIA

You going to let him? You going to reward him by being the son he was never man enough to be a father to?

Landon doesn't answer.

CYNTHIA

(angry)
You do that.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE SCIENCE LAB - NEXT AFTERNOON

The door is open to a lab where Jamie and the Star Club is meeting. Landon mops, working hard, while listening in. Inside, Jamie ignores him.

Mr. Kelly watches from near the trophy case. Almost approving.

MR. KELLY

Mr. Carter. Don't wear a hole in that one spot there.

Landon grins and moves on. Behind Landon's back, Mr. Kelly peeks into the science lab. Sees Jamie. Looks back at Landon. Wonders.

EXT. JEFFERSON HIGH - SATURDAY (DECEMBER)

Landon parks his Camaro. It's shiny and buffed and perfect again.

INT. JEFFERSON HIGH - LIBRARY - MINUTES LATER

A Christmas party for the tutors and tutored. A ROCK 'N' ROLL CHRISTMAS CD plays. A raffle ticket box by the door. A sign reads: "Win Movie Tickets."

Landon enters, buys a ticket, then takes off his leather jacket. Underneath, a nice shirt and tie.

LANDON'S POV

Across the room -- Jamie, looking pretty in a dress, laughing with her student, Isabel. Mr. Kelly talking with MR. REGINALD ADAMS, principal of Jefferson High.

Luis runs over, diverts Landon's attention.

FRONT OF ROOM

Mr. Adams goes to a microphone. Taps it.

MR. ADAMS

Everyone? Quiet please. As you all know, we're here to celebrate the holidays and to raise money to buy books for our library. The book drive is being led by Beaufort High's Jamie Sullivan.

Applause. This is new. Landon looks at Jamie, who's smiling. She steps to the microphone.

JAMIE

Thank you for buying tickets. We've raised two hundred and eighty-five dollars.

More applause. She steps down.

LANDON AND LUIS

Off to one side.

LANDON

(to Luis)

About enough to buy maybe five volumes in a set of encyclopedias.

Luis smiles. Jamie overhears.

JAMIE

It's a start.

LANDON

Yeah, with a finish in about a decade.

She smiles. He looks at her.

LANDON

So you're talking to me?

JAMIE

When I have something to say.

He smiles.

LANDON

What's number one on your list?

She shakes her head.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

My number one would be getting out
of Beaufort.

JAMIE

Getting out won't be your problem.
It'll be figuring out what you
want when you get somewhere.

She walks away.

LANDON

What does that mean?!

JAMIE

(turning back)
It means you can do anything.

Landon smiles, not sure why she believes in him.

EXT. CARTER HOUSE - CHRISTMAS EVENING

Hanging on the front door: a simple evergreen wreath with
a plaid bow.

INT. CARTER HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Dark save for a gilded fake tree lit with tiny blinking
lights and the glow of Cynthia's cigarette in the dark.

CYNTHIA

Landon! Come enjoy the tree!
Landon?!

Landon comes down the stairs. Sits on the sofa. Wearing
another good shirt. She tries to reach out.

CYNTHIA

You look nice. I should have
dressed.

LANDON

You're fine like that, Mom.

CYNTHIA

There's hot cider in the kitchen.

LANDON

(not moving)
Thanks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CYNTHIA
I haven't seen Clay or Eric
lately.

LANDON
Me neither.

CYNTHIA
No great loss --

LANDON
I need to go out.

Pause.

CYNTHIA
(hurt)
To see your father?

LANDON
No. I won't be long.

He senses her hurt, but leaves anyway.

INT. PARSONAGE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

A Christmas tree with large colored lights stand in a corner. Jamie and her father playing cards. The DOORBELL RINGS. Then urgent BANGING.

JAMIE/REV. SULLIVAN
(recognizing)
Landon Carter.

EXT. PARSONAGE - FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Landon slides his backpack off his shoulder. Pulls out a shopping bag. Holds it out to Jamie.

LANDON
(awkward)
It's a present. Take it.

She does. She opens the bag, pulls out a beautiful pink sweater. She's overwhelmed.

Without a word, just a happy smile, Landon hops down the steps toward his car. Reverend Sullivan appears in the doorway.

LANDON
(calling back)
Merry Christmas! And to all a
good night!

INT. PARSONAGE - JAMIE'S ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Jamie hums to herself as she brushes her hair. She's wearing the new sweater. Her father KNOCKS. Enters.

REV. SULLIVAN

What's Landon Carter up to?

JAMIE

(innocent)

Up to?

REV. SULLIVAN

I thought we had rid ourselves of his disagreeable companionship.

JAMIE

Dad, why don't you get to the point where you get to the point.

REV. SULLIVAN

Why is he giving you a gift?

Jamie doesn't answer.

REV. SULLIVAN

Did you give him a gift?

JAMIE

No.

REV. SULLIVAN

I saw the way he looked at you. The way he kissed you.

JAMIE

It was a play.

REV. SULLIVAN

(unconvinced)

Boys like him have -- expectations.

JAMIE

I have expectations, too.

Pause. He's feeling her grow up, grow away.

REV. SULLIVAN

I'm not changing the rules.

JAMIE

I haven't asked you to.

They eye each other. He's losing her.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - HALLWAY - LATER THAT EVENING

A nurse points Landon toward a patient room. He carries a battered liquor-store box.

INT. PATIENT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A TV flickers. Landon comes in. Opens the box. Pulls out the evergreen wreath with the plaid bow.

LANDON

For me. Christmas is all about
the smells.

Landon leans the wreath in the window. HAROLD KEENE -- the old man from the accident, watches from his bed, baffled.

LANDON

Pine's my favorite. That and
cider with cloves.

Landon pulls a Thermos from his coat pocket. Unscrews the cap. Finds a drinking cup. Pours in cider. Offers Harold the cup.

HAROLD

Who are you?

LANDON

Landon Carter. I was driving the
car that --

HAROLD

You.

LANDON

Me.

Harold takes the cup, looks Landon over. Landon appears genuinely contrite.

LANDON

I'm very sorry --

HAROLD

What kind of a man are you, son?

Pause.

LANDON

(honest)
I don't know that I am -- a man.
Yet. I'm working on it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Pause.

HAROLD

I've worked on it my whole life.

Harold reaches under his pillow. Pulls out a small bottle of liquor. Tops off his cider.

HAROLD

Get yourself a glass.

LANDON

No. Thanks. Gotta keep my wits for the drive home.

Harold nods, liking Landon.

HAROLD

You'll sit a while.

LANDON

I will.

EXT. RURAL ROADS - LATER THAT NIGHT

Landon speeds, the windows open, WIND WHIPPING, DIRE STRAITS BLASTING. The Camaro turns and brakes and turns again, kicking up gravel, raising hell. The car slides to a stop.

INT. CAMARO

Landon turns OFF the RADIO. Sits still. Wipes the rearview mirror clean, spotless. Unties the dangling plastic skeleton and pockets it.

EXT. USED CAR LOT - NEXT MORNING

Colorful banners and flags flap in the brisk WIND. Landon talks with a used car SALESMAN.

SALESMAN

Eight hundred.

LANDON

It's got a new V-6 and transmission. Alloy wheels.

(beat)

Twelve hundred.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SALESMAN

Nine-fifty.

LANDON

New paint. Extra chrome. Not a scratch anywhere.

SALESMAN

The interior is --

LANDON

Reconditioned. Completely. Be a collector's someday. Twelve hundred.

They look at the Camaro. Shining in the sun.

SALESMAN

You can't expect me to pay you for your -- attachment to that car.

Landon gazes at another dealership across the street, then adopts the surly, vaguely-threatening attitude of old.

LANDON

I don't. I expect you to pay me for yours.

The Salesman looks from Landon to the car. He pulls a wad of cash from his pocket. Wearily counts out twelve bills. Landon takes the money, touches the Camaro's hood, then walks away.

EXT. BEAUFORT HIGH - FRONT LAWN - NEXT MORNING

The marquee reads, "HAPPY HOLIDAYS!"

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT - SAME TIME

One car. An old station wagon. At the parking space, a sign: "School Principal Only."

INT. PRINCIPAL KELLY'S OFFICE

Kelly looks up from paperwork.

MR. KELLY

Landon?

Landon drops a folded wad of hundreds on the desk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON
For Jefferson High. For books.

MR. KELLY
(suspicious)
Where did you get -- ?

LANDON
(angry)
It's mine to give. I didn't steal
it.

MR. KELLY
I didn't say you did.

But his tone implied it and Landon's already gone. Kelly is immediately sorry. He goes to his window and sees Landon pedal away on the old bike.

EXT. CARTER DRIVEWAY - NEXT DAY

Landon watches a tow truck lower the abandoned Yugo. When the car is down, he sees Jamie standing on the sidewalk.

EXT. FOOT OF DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Landon faces Jamie.

LANDON
Hey.

JAMIE
I heard what you did. Thank you.

He nods, but quickly changes the subject.

LANDON
(re: the Yugo)
She great or what?

JAMIE
Why are you doing all this? To
impress me?

LANDON
No.
(beat)
But are you -- impressed?

She smiles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE
Like fire.

LANDON
What?

JAMIE
You.

She heads for her father's old Pontiac.

LANDON
New Year's Eve. Would you go out
with me?!

She stops. Turns around. Surprised.

JAMIE
Yes. But not as a date date.

LANDON
Why not?

JAMIE
I'm not allowed to date.

She smiles and gets in the car.

EXT. SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH - NEXT AFTERNOON

Landon follows signs for the church office.

INT. HALLWAY BY REVEREND SULLIVAN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Landon looks into the Reverend's office.

LANDON'S POV

Reverend Sullivan is sitting behind his desk, examining legal-looking documents and records. He takes his glasses off, rubs his eyes.

BACK TO SCENE

Landon knocks. The Reverend looks up, furrows his brow.

LANDON
Reverend Sullivan. Can I ask you
something?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REV. SULLIVAN
Does it have to do with Jamie?

LANDON
Yes, sir.

The Reverend makes a small motion and Landon enters.

INT. REVEREND'S OFFICE

Landon doesn't sit.

LANDON
I'd like to take Jamie to dinner
on New Year's Eve.

REV. SULLIVAN
That won't be possible.

He looks back to his papers. End of conversation.

LANDON
I'm sorry I haven't always treated
Jamie the way -- I should have.
She deserves better.

Reverend Sullivan glances up. As if surprised Landon is still there.

LANDON
I care for her.

REV. SULLIVAN
I don't want to see her hurt.

LANDON
I wouldn't do that --

REV. SULLIVAN
This week.

LANDON
Ever again.

The Reverend looks out the window. A gray day, cold, bitter, stark. He considers his options.

REV. SULLIVAN
Have her home by one. And drive
carefully.

EXT./INT. YUGO (CARTER DRIVEWAY) - FEW DAYS LATER

Landon's under the Yugo's hood. Josh, the kid from next door, is in the driver's seat.

LANDON

Start the engine.

Josh turns the key. Nothing happens. Under the hood, Landon changes something.

LANDON

Again.

Josh tries the engine again. Still no go. Landon changes something else.

LANDON

One more time.

Josh tries one more time. The ENGINE ROARS, then DIES, then amazingly STARTS again. It's running. Landon high-fives Josh, then sees an old station wagon turn in.

EXT./INT. STATION WAGON - MOMENTS LATER

Kelly hands a paper to Landon.

MR. KELLY

Your grades for fall semester.
They're -- good.

LANDON

(incredulous)
You came here to give me my report card?

MR. KELLY

I've seen students with records like yours go to J.C. for a couple of years, then transfer to a good college.

Landon understands what Kelly is implying.

MR. KELLY

I'd gladly write you a letter of recommendation.

LANDON

Thank you.

MR. KELLY

You're welcome.

They shake hands.

INT. LANDON'S BATHROOM - NEW YEAR'S EVE

Landon, dressed with care, faces the mirror and wet combs his hair.

INT. FLAUVIN'S - HOUR LATER

A seafood joint on the waterfront. Quaint, not fancy. Twinkle lights illuminate Jamie's face. Landon finds her lovely. Jamie picks.

JAMIE

I can't believe you asked my father's permission.

LANDON

I wanted this to be a date.

She watches Landon, happy, then perplexed.

JAMIE'S POV

Landon wolfing down his food.

BACK TO SCENE

JAMIE

Is there a rush?

LANDON

I have to get you home by one.

JAMIE

It's only 7:30.

LANDON

We're going somewhere. After.
And no. I didn't ask your father.

INT. YUGO - TRAVELING - NIGHT

Landon drives. The CARS' "Tonight She Comes" PLAYS. He belches loudly, dramatically.

JAMIE

Excuse you.

LANDON

Your turn.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE
(laughing)

No.

LANDON
I know you want to.

She grins. And tries. A small burp.

LANDON
Bring the air all the way up from
your stomach.

He belches again. Just as loud. She tries again,
laughing.

EXT. YUGO

Landon steers the car into a parking lot for a miniature
golf course with a castle-shaped video arcade and Little
League diamond. A family entertainment center.

INT. YUGO

Jamie sees where they are.

LANDON
Before we do this.

JAMIE
We're doing something -- ?

LANDON
Before we do this, I just want to
say that a good life's gotta be
about more than achieving stuff --
like on your list.

She waits for more.

LANDON
It's about working with what you
already have -- right now -- at
your fingertips -- you know,
spontaneously.

JAMIE
What are you talking about?

LANDON
That little bit of larceny in your
heart.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

Excuse me?

LANDON

Fun.

INT. BATTING CAGE - NIGHT

Jamie's in the cage with a helmet on. A machine tosses balls. Landon coaches from outside.

LANDON

Swing! Keep your bat parallel to the ground. Follow through. Follow through!

Jamie is laughing too hard to hit anything. The balls keep coming. She ducks out of the way and grasps the fence and leans in. Landon leans in on his side. They'd be embracing if the fence weren't there.

In the b.g., kids from their school. Giggling, whispering.

Landon looks over at them.

LANDON

(to Jamie)

Let's go.

EXT. HIGHWAY - TRAVELING - NIGHT

The YUGO ROARS down the asphalt. A sign for the approaching state line whips by.

INT. YUGO - TRAVELING - NIGHT

Jamie and Landon. With STEVIE NICKS' "Talk to Me" ON the RADIO.

LANDON

The cells in our bodies are always changing. In six or seven years all your cells have changed. You could be like a completely new person from the inside out.

JAMIE

That what's happening to you, only faster?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He grins. Pulls the car over.

LONDON
Get out. Come on.

He leaps out, leaving the headlights on.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Landon takes Jamie's hand and pulls her toward some invisible place.

JAMIE
Where -- what -- are we -- ?

He keeps tugging her. She follows him. Laughing.

LONDON
Stand right here.

JAMIE
Where?

He leans down and lifts one of her feet a foot from the other. He notices a large bruise on her leg. She brushes her dress down.

JAMIE
You're acting like a crazy person.

LONDON
You're straddling the state line.
You're in two places at once.

She's thrilled at his solution to her wish. He walks to the shoulder of the road.

LONDON
Repeat after me.

Huh? He does a cartwheel. She laughs.

JAMIE
I can't.

LONDON
I'm gonna teach you.

EXT. BEACH (NEUSE RIVER) - LATE NIGHT

A starry night with a bright moon. Glimmering silver water. Jamie and Landon walk onto a dock. DISTANT FIREWORKS BOOM.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

It's places like this that make me
certain there's a God.

LANDON

(surprised)

You're sometimes not sure?

JAMIE

I'm sure. Pretty sure.

They reach the end of the dock. She turns to face the
WIND. It blows her hair. She turns his face the same
way.

JAMIE

It's like the wind. I can't see
it but I feel it.

He closes his eyes. Feeling the wind. Opens them again,
rejecting the idea.

LANDON

We can measure wind.

JAMIE

Uncertainty makes you
uncomfortable.

LANDON

What do you actually know with
religion?

JAMIE

Wonder. Beauty. Joy.
(beat, quieter)
Love.

She's embarrassed. She tries to avoid implying anything.

JAMIE

My mother told me God is love, so
when you're feeling love, you're
feeling God.

(beat)

I think talking about these things
-- threatens their very beauty and
mystery.

Her tone is matter-of-fact, but Landon's got a serious and
tender look on his face. He touches her hair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE
(almost a whisper)
I don't understand...

LANDON
Maybe you're not supposed to.

He moves closer.

LANDON
I might kiss you.

She looks down. Shy.

JAMIE
I might do it wrong.

LANDON
(tenderly)
Not possible.

He touches her neck, her cheek, her mouth. Then leans in and kisses her. A tender, soft kiss. He pulls away. They look at each other a moment.

LANDON
I love you, Jamie.

There, he put it out there, risked looking and feeling foolish. Not the old Landon. Jamie looks away. Mixed emotions. Happy and sad.

LANDON
(gently)
Now's when you say something.

JAMIE
(overwhelmed)
I can't.
(beat)
I can't -- explain.

She turns back to him, her eyes shining. She touches his face and they kiss again, deeply.

But after a few moments, she drops her chin onto his shoulder. Smiling, glowing even, but slightly aloof, staring at the water. He pulls away slightly to study her face. He touches her cheek and brings her back from wherever she's been.

JAMIE
You make me feel...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON
(hopeful)
Loved?

JAMIE
(smiling)
That. And less strange.

Tears run down her cheeks. Landon wipes them away with his thumbs, attributing them to happiness.

EXT. PARSONAGE - FRONT PORCH - LATER

Landon follows Jamie up the steps. The lights in the living room are on. THROUGH the windows, they can see her father taking down the Christmas tree.

JAMIE
Be very quiet.

He pulls her to him. Kisses her. The front door opens.

REV. SULLIVAN
(embarrassed)
Hello, Landon.

Landon and Jamie separate, but Landon keeps an arm over her shoulder.

LANDON
Hey, Reverend.

Reverend Sullivan studies the two young people.

LANDON
(whispers to Jamie)
Happy New Year.

And he goes. Jamie walks by her father and into the house. Not saying anything. He watches her. What has he allowed?

EXT. BEAUFORT HIGH - COURTYARD - DAY

Landon and Jamie head into school. Landon nods to Belinda, others. They glare back.

LANDON
(to Belinda and others)
What's your damage?

INT. CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Landon and Jamie arrive at his locker. It's been kicked in.

LANDON
Assholes. This happen to you?

JAMIE
Twice a year.

Bang, bang, bang. Landon kicks in every locker in his row. A dozen in all. Jamie watches, a little frightened by his anger. But then he turns to her and grins.

LANDON
Now they all match.

INT. CAFETERIA - NOON

Landon eats alone, ignored by Eric and Clay. Jamie approaches with her tray, red-faced, tearful.

She hesitates about sitting -- feeling bad that Landon's being diminished, ostracized. She thinks he doesn't see her. But as she turns to leave, he pulls a chair out for her and smiles. She sits. Landon sees her face.

LANDON
What's wr--?

JAMIE
(choked up)
The Challenger exploded.
Principal Kelly's about to make an
announcement.

The PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM CRACKLES. Landon takes Jamie's hand as the room hushes.

LANDON
Come on.

JAMIE
Where?

LANDON
Away from here.

EXT. FIRE TOWER (CONSERVATION LAND) - STAIRS - HOUR LATER

Landon leads Jamie up, round and round, to the top of the tall steel tower.

EXT. TOP OF TOWER - VIEWING AREA

They exit the staircase to a small 360 degree overlook. Jamie's amazed at the view.

JAMIE

How do you know this place?

LANDON

Before the divorce. My father used to take me here. Fire spotting was his summer job.

They look off to the curve of the horizon, where sea meets sky.

LANDON

From here he proved to me the earth isn't flat.

(beat)

On rainy days, we'd be above the clouds.

JAMIE

What would you do up here?

LANDON

Look. Talk. Not talk.

He pulls a deck of cards from his jacket pocket. They sit and he starts to shuffle. Not too well. Jamie takes the deck. Shuffles like a card shark.

EXT. CEMETERY - REAR GATE - NIGHT (FEW DAYS LATER)

Jamie is already waiting when Landon's Yugo pulls up. He gets out, walks to her, they kiss.

LANDON

What'd you tell your father?

JAMIE

The truth. I just left you out of it.

She climbs up and over the wall. He follows.

EXT. INSIDE CEMETERY - MINUTES LATER

Jamie fits the pieces of her telescope together.

LANDON

When did you build this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

I was twelve.

Landon shakes his head, amazed.

JAMIE

It's not that complicated.

Landon doubts this.

JAMIE

It's an alt-azimuth design with one parabolic mirror and one secondary flat one.

LANDON

Where's the one you're building?

JAMIE

In my back yard.
(pause, embarrassed)
I lied before. It's hardly started. But when it's done, it will have twice the power of this one --

LANDON

Wait, back up. You lied?

JAMIE

Kinda. Yeah.

He grins, loving her even more.

JAMIE

So what do you want to see?

LANDON

Mars.

JAMIE

Mars doesn't rise until 2:30 A.M. --

He opens his backpack. Pulls out the contents.

LANDON

A Thermos of hot coffee. A blanket. Socks.

JAMIE

You planned this --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

Hoped for it.

Pause.

JAMIE

Are you trying to seduce me?

LANDON

No. Why? Are you seducible?

JAMIE

(firm, but smiling)

No.

LANDON

That's what I thought.

He reaches back into his backpack. Pulls out a second blanket.

LANDON

Ergo, a second blanket. One for me, one for you.

He hands her one. She takes it, smiling, reassured.

JAMIE

Ergo?

LANDON

(slightly embarrassed)

What about your father?

JAMIE

I'm always home by midnight and he's always asleep.

INT. PARSONAGE - REVEREND SULLIVAN'S BEDROOM - MIDNIGHT

Reverend Sullivan sits up in bed. His feet find slippers on the floor.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Reverend Sullivan, wearing a robe, enters quietly. Checking on his daughter. Her bed is empty.

EXT. STREET TO ACCESS ROAD - LATER

The old Pontiac slows.

INT. OLD PONTIAC

Reverend Sullivan looks down the access road to the rear cemetery gate.

REVEREND'S POV

The Yugo parked by the gate.

BACK TO SCENE

The Reverend struggles with what to do. After a moment, he decides not to interfere; he'll pick his moment. He keeps driving.

INT. CEMETERY

Jamie and Landon are looking at the heavens through the telescope.

LANDON

Where's Pluto?

JAMIE

In Virgo, but it's about 1000 times too faint to see.

LANDON

What's the best thing I can see tonight?

JAMIE

Me.

He draws her close, they kiss. She shyly pulls away. Their hands still touching until she looks again into the telescope eyepiece.

JAMIE

The second best thing is Jupiter.

She swivels the telescope into position for Jupiter and steps aside so he can look. But he picks up the flashlight, pulls a diagram from his pocket.

LANDON

Can you locate XXI5639I?

JAMIE

Sure.

She takes the diagram, studies it, and adjusts the scope.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

Here. Why am I looking at this star?

LANDON

Because I had it named for you. I know it's not an official designation --

She couldn't be happier. She reaches for his hand.

JAMIE

It's wonderful. I love you.

It's the first time he's heard it. He pulls her into his arms. They kiss. Passionately. She starts to object.

LANDON

(respecting her boundaries)

Okay. I'm stopping.

And he does. They snuggle. Silence, then:

LANDON

What's number one?

Long pause.

JAMIE

(very shy)

In April when the dogwoods and wisteria are blooming... Get married.

He doesn't make fun. He strokes her hair. Kisses her forehead.

INT. KITCHEN - 5 AM

Landon enters from outside. Cynthia, still in her waitress uniform, is sitting at the table, drinking coffee.

CYNTHIA

A late night or an early morning?

LANDON

(honest)

Late night.

(smart-aleck)

You?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CYNTHIA

Were you with Jamie?

LANDON

Yeah.

CYNTHIA

You sleeping with her?

Landon doesn't dignify this question with an answer.

CYNTHIA

I was cleaning yesterday. I found this.

She pulls Landon's Life List from her pocket. Landon is horrified. She reads it.

CYNTHIA

Scuba dive. Touch a moon rock.
Learn to read Egyptian
hieroglyphs. Go to college?
(pause)
She talking to you 'bout this
stuff?

Landon doesn't answer. She puts the list on the table. Smooths it. Gently discouraging.

CYNTHIA

Honey, some of this is...
farfetched. You take after me.
People skills and common sense.
Good dependable qualities.

LANDON

I could take after Dad, too.

CYNTHIA

You do. You're handsome and
charming.

LANDON

I meant he's a doctor.

CYNTHIA

That's eight years of school and
training -- after college. And
all that doesn't necessarily make
you a better human being.

LANDON

I could do it if I tried. Even
Kelly thinks so.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CYNTHIA

That'd be something.

She doesn't want to discourage him, but she wants him to be practical and realistic.

CYNTHIA

But if it doesn't happen, grab for something within reach. Life's tough enough without causing yourself disappointment --

LANDON

(angry now)

Whatever my life is, I'm going to be friggin' sure I'm never disappointed --

CYNTHIA

(honest)

Disappointment isn't something anyone plans for.

(quieter)

It catches you by surprise.

Long pause. They are both sorry to have raised their voices.

CYNTHIA

Have I told you how proud I am of you -- ?

LANDON

Mom, great. But what I want is for me to be proud of me.

INT. PARSONAGE - SULLIVAN DINING ROOM - EVENING

Landon eats dinner with Jamie and Reverend Sullivan. Silence, then:

REV. SULLIVAN

Landon. You're not the quiet type.

LANDON

No.

REV. SULLIVAN

So talk to us about something.

LANDON

Like what, sir?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REV. SULLIVAN

You decide.

Landon searches his mind for just the right subject.

REV. SULLIVAN

How about your family?

LANDON

Okay. Sure.

(beat)

My grandfather. When he was seven, he shook the hand of an old guy, a war vet or something, who had once shaken President Lincoln's hand.

(pause)

Made a big impression on him.

Reverend Sullivan looks at his daughter. She's nodding, interested.

LANDON

My cousin Mike. He's from a big family. He's the fifth kid. He heard that every fifth child in the world is Chinese. So he thought he was.

Jamie smiles.

LANDON

We didn't tell him any different for years --

REV. SULLIVAN

(getting to the point)

Your parents are divorced?

LANDON

Since I was five. My mom's a cocktail waitress.

REV. SULLIVAN

How do you -- the two of you -- get by?

LANDON

Materially or spiritually?

REV. SULLIVAN

(surprised)

Either. Both.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

(honest)

I don't know. We used to try to believe in each other.

His eyes meet the Reverend's. The Reverend's got to respect him some.

INT. SULLIVAN KITCHEN - NIGHT

Reverend Sullivan looks out the window into the back yard.

HIS POV

Jamie showing Landon the junk pile that will become her newer, larger telescope. They are laughing, jostling each other, comfortable, happy.

INT. PARSONAGE - SULLIVAN KITCHEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

Reverend Sullivan and Jamie put the dishes away.

REV. SULLIVAN

You and the Carter boy. Want to catch me up on recent developments?

JAMIE

You're asking if we're involved?

REV. SULLIVAN

I'm asking how much.

JAMIE

Dad --

REV. SULLIVAN

It's time to tell him.

(pause)

It would be the right thing.

She turns to him, upset. Her anger spilling out.

JAMIE

Maybe. But that's not the real reason. You think if I tell, he'll disappear and that's what you want! Me all to yourself!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REV. SULLIVAN

(calm, stung)

No. I want what's best for you.

JAMIE

This -- him -- Landon -- is what's best for me!

REV. SULLIVAN

You're sure? You're sure you can trust him?

He's playing to her old insecurities. She's not one hundred percent sure.

REV. SULLIVAN

(gentler)

Isn't it better to know?

Their eyes meet. She knows he's right.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - EVENING (EARLY FEBRUARY)

Ferris Bueller's Day Off and Three Amigos! on the marquee.

Landon and Jamie exit as Belinda and a new boyfriend buy tickets. Clay and Eric and a crowd behind them.

LANDON

Hey, Belinda.

She takes her boyfriend's arm, turns away, snubbing him.

LANDON

Clay, Eric.

Eric says something inaudible and the whole crowd sniggers and laughs. He's become Landon. Landon reddens, now realizing for certain that he's become a Jamie Sullivan.

EXT. SIDEWALK (DOWNTOWN BEAUFORT) - MOMENTS LATER

Landon and Jamie walk. The theater in the b.g.

JAMIE

(re: his status)

From citizen high to citizen low.

LANDON

I don't care.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

Care, but just don't let it get to you. It gives them power.

LANDON

That what you do?

JAMIE

Yes. I try to keep my power.

He's impressed with how she manages.

LANDON

One of your secrets.

JAMIE

(serious)

Yes, one of many.

He doesn't notice her tone.

INT. YUGO - TRAVELING - NIGHT

WHITNEY HOUSTON's "How Will I Know?" ON the RADIO. Jamie flips the RADIO OFF. She's got something on her mind. Landon notices only that she seems a bit remote.

LANDON

You're worried about your college applications.

JAMIE

I'm not applying to college.

LANDON

(stunned)

But you said --

JAMIE

No, you assumed.

He looks at her, questioning. She's looking out her window.

LANDON

You're going to take a year off?
Join the Peace Corps -- ?

JAMIE

No.

LANDON

What are you going to -- ?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

Pull over.

LANDON

Where? Why?

JAMIE

Pull over. Now. Please.

Tears are running down her face. He pulls the car over.

EXT. WOODS BY SIDE OF ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie gets out of the car. Landon quickly follows.

LANDON

Jamie --

JAMIE

I'm sick.

LANDON

Then I'll take you home. You'll
feel better tomorrow.

He tries to take her arm. She shakes off his hand, steps back. Wanting to be heard and understood.

JAMIE

Landon. I'm sick -- with
leukemia.

Landon tries to say something. Nothing comes out. His soul numb.

JAMIE

I found out last winter. I'm not
responding to treatment anymore.

His face crumples with pain and anguish.

LANDON

Why didn't you tell me?

JAMIE

The doctors said to do everything
the same as long as possible.

(pause)

I didn't want anyone being --
weird around me.

LANDON

Including me?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

Especially you.

(long beat)

God gives me an illness, then you.
A cruel joke.

She gets in the car. Slams her door shut. He stands there, not knowing what to do.

EXT. YUGO - TRAVELING - LATER

Landon pulls up in front of Jamie's house. A long quiet ride.

LANDON

I'm not letting you die.

Jamie just looks at him. Feeling sorry for him -- what he wants doesn't matter.

INT. SULLIVAN KITCHEN - LATE NIGHT

The Reverend and Landon drink coffee.

REV. SULLIVAN

It's her decision and she's
decided not to tell people -- at
least for now.

LANDON

How -- how long does she have?

REV. SULLIVAN

Two, three months. Maybe less.
Maybe more.

LANDON

So you've given up.

Reverend Sullivan hears the challenge in his voice.

REV. SULLIVAN

Her doctors have. Jamie and I.
We're still praying for a miracle.

LANDON

(disdainful)

Praying.

REV. SULLIVAN

Landon. We've lived with this for
over a year now and --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

If there is a God, how could he
let this happen??!!

It's a long answer and by the time the Reverend opens his mouth to explain, Landon's out the door.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Moonless dark. Few cars. The YUGO RIPS down the road. Landon opens a map over the steering wheel. Turns on the dome light. Looks at the return address on an old letter.

EXT. CITY STREETS (RALEIGH) - 3 A.M.

Landon's Yugo winds through city streets.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD (RALEIGH) - MINUTES LATER

Mansions. Big lawns. The Yugo slows as Landon leans forward to read a street sign. His face is tear-streaked. He flicks his headlights to bright, then low again.

The car turns left.

EXT. DR. CARTER'S HOME - MINUTE LATER

Large new colonial. Landon slams his car door and stands in the street. Staring at his father's house. He heads up a flagstone path for the front door.

EXT. FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Landon RINGS the resounding DING-DONG BELL, then bangs on the heavy wood door. Grief-stricken.

LANDON

Dr. Carter!... Carter!... Dad!
Please!! I have to talk to you!!

INT. DR. CARTER'S HOME

Elegant, thick carpets. Dr. Carter, putting on his robe, parts the silk drapes in the upstairs hall.

DR. CARTER'S POV

His son standing on the front lawn. Distraught, tearful.

LANDON
Open the door! Please!!

EXT. DR. CARTER'S HOME

Landon backs away from the house. Angrily kicks over a decorative planter. Is halfway to his car when Dr. Carter opens the door and comes out.

DR. CARTER
Landon!

Landon doesn't hear.

DR. CARTER
Landon!!

Landon turns around. Sees his father. Breaks down, sobbing. His father goes to him. Hugs him, a big bear hug.

LANDON
You have to save her!

DR. CARTER
Landon, who? Is your mother all right?

Lights pop upstairs.

LANDON
It's Jamie -- my girlfriend -- she has cancer -- you have to come look at her -- right now!

DR. CARTER
(calm, trying to diffuse)
It's the middle of the night --

LANDON
I don't give a shit what time it is!

Landon pulls away. Angrier.

DR. CARTER
Landon, I'm a cardiologist, not an oncologist --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

You're a doctor, aren't you?!!

He waves his father off, dismissing him.

DR. CARTER

Landon! I'll look into it!!

But Landon hasn't heard. He's in his car. Dr. Carter watches his son's car move away, regretful.

INT. CARTER KITCHEN - DAWN

Landon quietly shuts the back door. Exhausted. Starts making coffee. Cynthia appears.

CYNTHIA

Your father called.

No response.

CYNTHIA

Jamie's a patient at his hospital.
He's having a colleague look at
her chart this morning.

Long pause.

CYNTHIA

I'm sorry. I didn't know.

LANDON

I didn't know either.

EXT. PARSONAGE - EARLY MORNING

The Yugo parked in the driveway. The morning paper lying on the grass. Landon paces in front of the front porch. Incapable of ringing the bell, lacking the courage, lacking the right words.

Upstairs, the curtains move.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM

Jamie looks out the window.

JAMIE'S POV

Landon pacing, talking to himself.

BACK TO SCENE

She starts to raise the window, to say something, to help him, but then lets the curtain drop. She needs for him to decide, for him to be ready to face this with her.

The sound of a CAR. She looks out the window again.

JAMIE'S POV

The Yugo driving away.

INT. LANDON'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT DAY

Landon lies on his bed in the dark. The PHONE RINGS. Landon stares at his extension. The RINGING STOPS. A voice from downstairs.

CYNTHIA (O.S.)
It's your father.

Landon picks up his phone.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALL - TWO MINUTES LATER

The door to Landon's room is ajar. Cynthia waits outside. Listening. Hearing nothing. She pushes the door open.

CYNTHIA'S POV

Landon sitting on his bed. Deflated.

LANDON
He can't do anything.

BACK TO SCENE

Cynthia is pained to see his suffering.

CYNTHIA
If it's incurable --

LANDON
I told him to leave me alone.

CYNTHIA
Landon --

LANDON
(re: Jamie)
It was the only thing I've ever asked him!

INT. LANDON'S BEDROOM - EVENING (NEXT DAY)

Landon's still in bed. Facing the wall. Cynthia KNOCKS.
Enters with a plate of food.

CYNTHIA

I brought some dinner.

No response. She leaves the tray and goes.

INT. PARSONAGE - SULLIVAN KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Jamie and her father eat dinner. Jamie is red-eyed,
heartbroken.

JAMIE

(not sure at all)

He'll call.

REV. SULLIVAN

I wanted to think he'd changed.

JAMIE

(angry)

No you didn't.

(beat)

But he did change. Just not
enough.

REV. SULLIVAN

Jamie, you're not mad at me.
You're mad at Landon --

JAMIE

(furious)

I am mad at you! And at Landon!
And the universe! And God!

(quieter)

I don't even know where to put all
my anger.

REV. SULLIVAN

That's normal. God accepts your
anger. He won't punish you.

JAMIE

By making me ill, he is punishing
me!

(quieter)

I just don't know what for.

She flees the room.

ANOTHER ANGLE - CONTINUOUS ACTION

Goes up the stairs. Keeps going. Up another flight to the attic.

INT. PARSONAGE ATTIC - MINUTE LATER

Jamie opens a closet door. Pulls out a dress, a scarf, jewelry, a worn book -- her mother's belongings. She opens the book and starts to weep. Missing her mother.

FOOT OF ATTIC STAIRS

Reverend Sullivan stands, looking up at the attic stairs. Frustrated, angry, worried.

INT. LANDON'S BEDROOM - NEXT DAY

Landon is still in bed. Cynthia enters. Pulls back the curtains. Yanks up the shades.

CYNTHIA

I don't care if you don't leave the house. But you have to get out of bed.

INT. CARTER KITCHEN - FEW MINUTES LATER

Landon sits at the kitchen table. Cynthia pours him a cup of coffee.

CYNTHIA

You and I may not be communicating very well right now. But let me be clear. Don't make this about you. It's about her.

Pause. Her words sink in.

LANDON

I have no idea what to say. How to act. What if I do the wrong thing?

CYNTHIA

(gently)

Be yourself and I don't think there is a wrong thing.

(beat)

Let Jamie take the lead. She'll let you know what she needs.

EXT. PARSONAGE - FRONT PORCH - LITTLE LATER

Before Landon can ring the bell, the front door opens.
The Reverend. Landon runs past him into the house.

LANDON

Where's Jamie?!

REV. SULLIVAN

At school. Where you should be.

Oh.

INT. BEAUFORT HIGH - CORRIDOR - HALF HOUR LATER

Deserted, classes are meeting. Landon runs, sliding to a stop at one classroom door. Looks in, keeps going, stops at another. Searching.

This is JAMIE'S POV from the top of the hallway.

JAMIE

She stands, holding her books, watching him, unsure.

LANDON

finally feels her gaze, turns to look.

JAMIE

turns away, still angry and disappointed.

LANDON

runs to her.

LANDON

Jamie!

He catches up to her.

JAMIE AND LANDON

face each other. Neither sure what to say.

LANDON

I'm so sorry. I'm a coward --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

I should have told you sooner --

LANDON

(guilt-ridden)

I made you do too many things,
kept you up all night --

JAMIE

No. The drugs just stopped
working. If anything, doing
things I love kept me healthy
longer.

Pause.

LANDON

Are you frightened?

JAMIE

All the time.

(beat)

I feel like I have no one.

She means not even God and he gets this.

LANDON

You have me.

He hugs her close, rocking her, comforting her and
himself.

JAMIE

Help me live until I die?

LANDON

I will.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - EVENING (MID-FEBRUARY)

A small group of students sit on stage reading from Our
Town, rehearsing. Jamie and Landon sit together in the
third row, holding hands. Landon glances at her, realizes
she's asleep. Pulls her sweater over her.

INT. JEFFERSON HIGH - LIBRARY - SATURDAY MORNING

Landon sits with Luis; Jamie at the next table with
Isabel. She looks pale. He catches her eye. They both
smile, a little sadly, then turn back to their students.

INT. YUGO - TRAVELING

Landon drives them home from Jefferson High. No music.

LANDON
They're going to build a tunnel
under the English Channel.
They're calling it The Chunnel.

No response.

LANDON
You hungry?

JAMIE
Nope.

LANDON
Anything you want.

JAMIE
Nothing.

He reaches into a cooler on the floor of the back seat.

LANDON
Slim Jim? Apple? Yogurt? You
like yogurt.

JAMIE
I used to like yogurt.

He places a red heart-shaped box in her lap.

LANDON
(apologetic)
Not very original. Happy
Valentine's Day.

He grins. She looks crestfallen, feels terrible.

JAMIE
I didn't even think about it.

He takes a chocolate. Pops it in his mouth. Grins.

LANDON
There. You gave me a chocolate.

LANDON'S POV (THROUGH JAMIE'S TELESCOPE) - VAST STAR
FIELD

PULL BACK to reveal...

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Jamie and Landon are looking at stars. A long quiet moment.

LANDON
What are you thinking?

JAMIE
(honest)
That I want you to take me home.

LANDON
Now? We just --

JAMIE
I don't want to come here anymore.

She begins taking the telescope apart. Depressed.

EXT. CEMETERY GATE - HALF HOUR LATER

Jamie looks at the high fence, weary, then reaches into a pocket for a key. Unlocks the gate. Swings the gate open. Landon's astonished.

LANDON
You have a key?

JAMIE
Yeah. I've just never needed it.
(pause)
Will you talk to my father?

LANDON
I've talked to your father.

JAMIE
That's what I mean.

Their eyes meet. Her look is serious.

EXT. PARSONAGE - BACK YARD - NEXT DAY

Reverend Sullivan is up a ladder. Cleaning a gutter. Landon stands below, a few feet away, gathering his nerve. He walks over.

ON LADDER

The Reverend is busy ignoring Landon standing below. A long beat, then:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

(calling up)

Sir. Being ignored is beginning to feel preferable to being noticed.

The Reverend looks down.

LANDON

I'll be honest. I don't know if I can pray, but I can do just about anything else.

Neither Landon nor the Reverend see Jamie come out of the house and walk over.

ON GROUND

Landon shields his eyes with a hand to see the Reverend better.

LANDON

Whatever you need. Whatever Jamie needs. I'm here.

(beat)

I could start by driving her to school --

JAMIE

I'm not going back to school.

Landon and her father both turn to her. Pale, wane. They understand what she is saying.

JAMIE

You can tell anyone you want. I don't care.

She goes into the house. Landon and Reverend Sullivan look at each other, then away, uncomfortable. That didn't sound like her.

INT. BEAUFORT HIGH - HALLWAY - MONDAY MORNING

Landon, looking haggard, moves slowly as he cleans out Jamie's locker.

Students stare as he carefully places her things, including the pink sweater, in a shopping bag. They part and hush as he passes by. News travels fast. Clay and Eric step forward.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAY

Hey. Landon.

ERIC

We heard 'bout Jamie Sullivan.
She --

LANDON

(fierce)
Say nothing. Nothing 'bout her.

ERIC

(misunderstood,
genuine)
No. Hey. We're sorry, man!

Landon turns back. Surprised. Inspects Belinda. Eric.
Clay. Others. No one speaks.

LANDON

Too late and not enough.

He pushes past Belinda's new boyfriend, heading for the
office.

INT. PRINCIPAL KELLY'S OFFICE - DAY

Mr. Kelly and Landon.

LANDON

I know it means not graduating,
but I need to be excused from all
school acti--

MR. KELLY

You're excused.

Landon heads for the door.

MR. KELLY

How is she?

Landon can't answer. Too emotional.

MR. KELLY

You will graduate.

Landon looks up, astounded.

MR. KELLY

If I have to tutor you myself.

Landon nods, accepting, appreciative.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Landon puts away the contents of the shopping bag.
Jamie's in bed, wearing the sweater.

JAMIE

Yesterday I felt sick, horrible.
Today I feel like riding my bike.
Or dancing.

He turns on the CLOCK RADIO next to her bed. Finds a
WALTZ. Offers his hand. Pulls her out of bed. She's in
pajamas.

JAMIE

You know how to waltz??

LANDON

(bashful)
I was going to fake it.

JAMIE

I always fake it.

So they waltz, faking, stumbling and laughing, holding
each other.

INT. PARSONAGE - STAIRCASE - SAME TIME

Reverend Sullivan hears the MUSIC and LAUGHTER. He
frowns, afraid for Jamie's health.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM

Jamie grips Landon's arms, seems to slip, suddenly too
exhausted to carry her weight. Landon picks her up,
gently carries her back to bed. Settles her in.

LANDON

How you doing?

JAMIE

(murmurs)
Tired.

Landon sits on her bed. Strokes her hair. They look at
each other. Landon reaches for her hand. When he looks
at her face again, she's asleep.

EXT. LANDON'S HOUSE - BACK YARD - ANOTHER DAY

Landon's sitting on his childhood tree swing, twisting
side to side. Pensive. His mother comes out of the
house.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

Time seems to be slowing down and speeding up at the same time.

She reaches to put a hand on his shoulder. He lets her.

EXT. CEMETERY - EARLY MARCH

The rear gate is open. A caretaker waits while Landon carries pieces of the older telescope to his car. A tall pile of parts is already at his car.

Eric and Clay drive up in Eric's pickup. Gravel flying. MUSIC BLASTING.

INT. PICKUP

Eric and Clay spy Landon.

EXT. CEMETERY

Landon freezes, not sure what to expect.

EXT. PICKUP

The truck makes a circle around Landon, then stops. The MUSIC QUIETS. Eric and Clay jump down. A long tense moment, then:

ERIC

Hey.

LANDON

Hey.

Without a word, Clay walks to the Yugo, lifts the heaviest telescope part, and carries it to the bed of the pickup. Eric follows suit.

EXT. PARSONAGE - BACK YARD - LATER

Landon studies the pieces of the smaller telescope and how they fit together. They are like a map for how to build the bigger one.

EXT. PARSONAGE DRIVEWAY - NEXT DAY

Landon unloads an impossibly large round cardboard concrete form-tube from his car. Carries it around the house toward the back yard.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Jamie wakes from a nap. She looks thinner, grayer. She hears HAMMERING. She hauls herself up and to a window.

JAMIE'S POV

Landon working on the new telescope. He looks up at her window. Sees her there. Smiles.

BACK TO SCENE

Reverend Sullivan comes in to check on Jamie. She's standing at the window.

REV. SULLIVAN

What's that boy doing?

She turns to look at him and collapses into his arms.

INT. HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - NIGHT

Jamie lies in bed, eyes closed. Hooked to monitors, pumps, an IV drip. Landon holding her hand. Reverend Sullivan talks quietly with a doctor. Hearing bad news.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAWN

The sky is pink. A squirrel runs along a telephone wire. The Yugo is the only car in the visitor lot.

INT. PATIENT ROOM

Landon, in yesterday's clothes, dozes lightly. Jamie moves and he starts, fully awake. She opens her eyes.

LANDON

You okay?

She nods. Sleepy. Closes her eyes again. He rests his head on her shoulder and weeps. Her eyes open, then close again. There's nothing to say.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE JAMIE'S ROOM - SAME TIME

Reverend Sullivan looks through the window in the door at the scene within. He hesitates, then pushes the door open.

INT. PATIENT ROOM

Reverend Sullivan enters.

REV. SULLIVAN
Landon. You go on home.

LANDON
I'm not tired.

REV. SULLIVAN
I need to be with her.

There's only one chair. Landon nods and goes.

The Reverend sits, closes his eyes a moment. When he opens them, she's looking at him.

JAMIE
Dad.

He kisses her forehead, then sits back.

JAMIE
So serious.

REV. SULLIVAN
Jamie, God is not punishing you.
No God I know wants anyone to be
sick or feel pain or suffer.

Pause.

JAMIE
When Mom died you told me God
wanted her more, loved her more --

REV. SULLIVAN
I was wrong. Nobody could have
wanted or loved your mother more
than we did. Not even God.

He lets this sink in.

REV. SULLIVAN
God loaned you to me, entrusted
you to my care. I'm failing you.

She looks away, agreeing without saying so.

REV. SULLIVAN
Jamie. I make you the same
promise that God does.
(beat)
I will always be with you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She sits up and embraces him. He wraps his arms around her. Tight. She closes her eyes, tears welling, never wanting to let him go. Her father.

EXT. BEAUFORT HIGH SCHOOL - HOUR LATER

On the marquee on the front lawn: "WELCOME HALEY'S COMET." The Yugo parks in the b.g.

INT. PRINCIPAL KELLY'S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Landon picks up a pile of books and assignments. Looks through them, then eyes Miss Tarbox.

LANDON

Where's Jamie's book?!

MISS TARBOX

That's everything Mr. Kelly gave me.

LANDON

(insistent)

The next book on that list! The Old Man and... and...

MISS TARBOX

The Sea.

LANDON

Yeah. I need it today!

Mr. Kelly steps out of his inner office. Sees Landon's anguished face, his exhaustion.

MR. KELLY

I'll drive a copy over to her.

Landon nods his appreciation.

INT. HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - DAY

Jamie looks smaller. Her eyes have blue circles beneath. The Hemingway novel on the bedstand. Belinda pushes the door open. Peeks in. Not sure she is welcome.

Landon is sitting in a chair. He sees her, motions for her to come in. Quietly.

BELINDA

She asleep?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON
I'll tell her you were here.

Pause. Awkwardness.

BELINDA
Give her this, okay?

She hands Landon a small photo album.

BELINDA
Pictures from the play. Jamie
looks pretty --

LANDON
I'm sorry about how we --

BELINDA
(conciliatory)
No. You're with who you should
be. It's like she chose you.

LANDON
(agreeing)
And I have no idea why.

BELINDA
I do.

She hugs him quickly, then leaves. Landon goes to the window, looks out.

SAME SCENE - HOURS LATER

The sky is grayer, darker. Landon is still at the window. Jamie wakes.

JAMIE
Hi.

He goes to her side.

LANDON
Hey.

He kisses her.

JAMIE
I have something for you.

She reaches under her pillow for the worn book from the attic. She offers it to Landon.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMIE

(smiling)

Don't worry. It's not a Bible.

He takes it.

JAMIE

My mother made it for me before I was born.

(beat)

It's got quotes from famous people. Her favorite lines from books. Her thoughts.

Landon looks at a page.

LANDON

(reading)

'What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies.'
Aristotle.

JAMIE

Lower. Same page.

LANDON

(reading)

'Find out who you are and do it on purpose.'
Dolly Parton.

A bookmark falls out. He studies that page a moment.

CLOSE ON PASSAGE

from Corinthians.

BACK TO SCENE

Landon reads it.

LANDON

'Love is always patient and kind.
It is never boastful or
conceited -- '

JAMIE

That was read at my parents'
wedding.

He takes her hand. Holds it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

How're you doing?

JAMIE

(looking away)

Better. I was really angry.

LANDON

I know.

JAMIE

It's gone now.

LANDON

(gently)

Because you have hope that you'll get better?

JAMIE

No.

(pause, shrugging,
accepting)

Maybe I believe God has a bigger dream for me than I had for myself.

(beat)

Maybe I believe the journey, the big adventure, never ends...

He kneels on the floor. Puts his head on her pillow next to hers.

JAMIE

Maybe I believe God sent you to me because I am ill. To help me through.

He touches her face tenderly.

JAMIE

(almost whispering)

I want to go home.

Pause. He gets her meaning.

LANDON

(trying not to
break)

I'll talk to your father.

JAMIE

(looking away)

It's not that simple.

(pause)

It costs money to do this at home.

INT. CARTER LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Cynthia pacing, talking on the phone, worried. The front door is wide open.

CYNTHIA

(into phone)

... He doesn't talk to me, maybe not to anyone, except Jamie...

She stands in the doorway and looks out.

CYNTHIA'S POV

Landon in his car in the driveway.

INT. LANDON'S CAR

Landon just sits. Exhausted, despondent.

INT. CARTER LIVING ROOM

Cynthia pacing.

CYNTHIA

(into phone)

... I've never asked you for extra. But we need it now... as soon as possible...

INT. HOSPITAL - PATIENT ROOM - ANOTHER AFTERNOON

Jamie's breathing is shallower. Landon's reading her The Sheltering Sky. He pauses, looks up. Isabel, Jamie's student, is standing in the doorway. Jamie sees her too. She smiles weakly.

JAMIE

Isabel?

ISABEL

(shy)

Hi.

Isabel comes in. Landon offers her the book. She takes it and keeps going from where Landon left off. Stumbling but reading. Jamie grins.

JAMIE

Who's been working with you?

Isabel looks shyly at Landon. Jamie shakes her head, amazed. Landon nods to Isabel and she begins reading again.

EXT. CARTER BACK STEPS - THAT NIGHT

Landon quietly opens the back door to the kitchen.

HIS POV

Cynthia sits at the table with Dr. Carter, his father.

CYNTHIA
Sit with us a minute.

INT. CARTER KITCHEN

Landon enters, but doesn't sit.

LANDON
(to his father)
What are you doing here?

CYNTHIA
He wants to talk to you.

LANDON
(to his mother)
Now it's okay?

CYNTHIA
Landon. You have two parents.
We're both here for you even --

DR. CARTER
-- even if we're not here for each
other anymore.

Landon is listening.

DR. CARTER
I want to do this. Please let me.

He holds out a check. For a lot of money. Landon takes it. Grateful.

LANDON
(quietly, to both
parents)
Thank you.

INT. PARSONAGE - JAMIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

A smaller Jamie lies in a hospital bed, seemingly asleep. Hooked to an IV. Bottles of pills. Landon dozes in a comfortable chair. A nurse sits in a corner, reading.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Eric and Clay stand in the doorway, not sure what to do.
Jamie opens her eyes, smiles.

JAMIE
Don't wake Landon.

They tiptoe in. Stand on either side of her bed.

JAMIE
Do I look scary?

ERIC
Not too bad.

CLAY
You all right?

A dumb question but she handles it well.

JAMIE
(smiling)
Things could be better.

Awkward pause.

CLAY
We thought you'd be asleep --

JAMIE
(trying to help)
I don't know what to say either.

Clay hands her an envelope.

JAMIE
What is it?

She pulls out a stack of worn bills.

CLAY
For the book drive. Landon told
us about it --

ERIC
We told everyone at school.

Jamie takes their hands, holds them. Thanking them
silently. Her eyes shining with tears.

INT. LANDON'S BEDROOM - LATE NIGHT

Landon sits at his desk, sketching the larger telescope,
making a few computations.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A library book on Haley's Comet is open. A stack of similar books by his elbow.

Cynthia enters wearing her waitressing outfit.

CYNTHIA

What can I do?

He shrugs. Tears fill his eyes.

LANDON

Everything's being done but it's not enough. I have to find something -- more.

CYNTHIA

(gently)

Landon, honey. There's nothing more.

LANDON

I don't mean about Jamie being sick. I mean about Jamie and me.

CYNTHIA

Be with her when she wants. Make sure she never feels alone.

Landon thinks his mother is also talking about herself.

LANDON

Mom, I'm not going anywhere. Not yet anyway.

Pause.

CYNTHIA

When you are ready, I want you to feel free to go.

They embrace.

INT. LANDON'S BEDROOM - LATER

Landon opens Jamie's mother's book. A photo of Jamie falls out -- one taken by Belinda.

CLOSE ON PHOTO

Jamie, beautiful, smiling at the audience.

LANDON

considers the photo, finds a page to tuck it into.

CLOSE ON HANDWRITTEN JOTTING

"For Landon" above some underlined text, a Psalm from the Bible.

LANDON

(reading aloud)

'I cry to you my Lord, my rock!
Do not be deaf to me, for if you
are silent, I shall go down to the
pit like the rest. Hear my voice
raised in petition as I cry to you
for help, as I raise my hands, my
Lord, toward your holy of holies.'

Landon knows Jamie underlined this for him.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Landon tears down the steps. Past his mother to the front door. He's out the door before she even turns around.

INT. PARSONAGE - REVEREND SULLIVAN'S BEDROOM - MIDNIGHT

Reverend Sullivan sits up in bed. His feet find slippers on the floor. He looks haggard, his hair thinner, his face defeated.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The Reverend, wearing his robe, checks on his sleeping daughter. The night nurse nods as he tucks in blankets.

A SOUND. Then another. Reverend Sullivan goes to the window. Parts the drapes. Looks out.

HIS POV

A dozen flashlights in a big circle. Landon in the middle, working feverishly on the new telescope.

EXT. BACK YARD - MOMENTS LATER

The back porch light comes on. Reverend Sullivan steps out onto the back porch. Landon looks up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON
(flushes, almost
manic)
I have to finish it tonight.

Without a word, the Reverend turns around and goes back inside. Leaving the porch light on. Landon goes back to work.

EXT. BACK YARD - MINUTES LATER

Reverend Sullivan comes out. Dressed. He carries two mugs of coffee and a brightly burning kerosene camp lantern. Peace offerings.

He walks over, sets down the lantern, hands Landon a mug. Ready to work.

LANDON
I've almost finished the rocker.
Did she order mirrors?

REV. SULLIVAN
In there.

As they walk to the garage.

REV. SULLIVAN
You have materials for the side
bearings?

LANDON
I'm using an old phonographic
turntable.

REV. SULLIVAN
For the focuser?

LANDON
A chrome-plated brass pipe from a
drain line.

The Reverend nods, impressed. He yanks the garage door up. Goes in.

LANDON
You know about this stuff?

REV. SULLIVAN
I helped Jamie with the first one.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON
(surprised)
I thought she built it herself.

REV. SULLIVAN
She did. But hardly anyone does
anything truly alone.

The Reverend carries out a large cardboard postal package.
Landon takes it as the Reverend lowers the garage door.

LANDON
(serious)
I need to do this alone.

Reverend Sullivan searches Landon's face for a long
moment, understanding, then turns and heads for the back
door.

INT. CHURCH - REVEREND'S OFFICE - NEXT MORNING

Landon stands in the doorway. The Reverend is wiping his
glasses, his face, maybe of tears. He sees Landon.

REV. SULLIVAN
You finish?

LANDON
A few minutes ago. I have to ask
you something.

Long pause.

REV. SULLIVAN
When I was seventeen, I was sent
up for a year for stealing a car.
(beat)
Sometimes I still feel that boy
inside me and I don't like him.
(beat)
But I like you.

The Reverend stands, offers Landon his hand. Landon takes
it. The two men shake. Allies now.

INT. JAMIE'S ROOM - THAT EVENING

Jamie opens her eyes. But can barely keep them open.
Groggy from pain medication. Landon's standing there.
Showered, clean clothes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

We're going out.

He starts helping the nurse disconnect her IV.

JAMIE

Can I -- go out?

LANDON

You'll be fine for a few minutes.

Jamie looks at the nurse. Uncertain. The nurse nods.

EXT. PARSONAGE ROOF - NIGHT

Landon carries Jamie out a large attic window. The finished large telescope is set up. Pointing at the sky. She's in her nightgown, wrapped in a blanket.

JAMIE

(grateful, touching
it)

It's beautiful... Thank you.

But she looks at the lights of the house and streets around them.

JAMIE

I don't know what we'll be able to
see... Help me stand.

He checks his watch.

LANDON

Wait a sec.

As she turns to him, questioning, the neighborhood suddenly darkens as the street lamps and lights in every nearby house are switched off.

EXT. DOWN STREET

Neighbors step outside. Hold up binoculars.

EXT. BEAUFORT HIGH - PARKING LOT

Members of the Star Club and other students look through traditional telescopes.

EXT. PARSONAGE ROOF

Jamie hugs Landon in gratitude.

LANDON
We have five minutes.

Jamie, tears streaming, braces herself against Landon and she peers into the telescope eyepiece. She pulls back, wipes her eyes, then looks again. She swings the telescope into the correct position.

HER POV THROUGH TELESCOPE

Haley's Comet, its icy nucleus issuing the jets and streamers of gas, dust, and debris that form the comet's hazy head and long tail.

JAMIE (O.S.)
The comet of the century...

BACK TO SCENE

She steps back so he can see. He looks quickly, then moves aside so she can keep looking. She's completely engrossed. A long, quiet moment, then:

LANDON
You love me?

She leans away from the eyepiece and looks at him -- yes.

LANDON
Will you do something for me?

JAMIE
Landon. I can't even do for myself.

LANDON
But if you could, you would?

JAMIE
Yes.

His throat tightens with nervousness, with hope, fear, sadness, and love.

LANDON
Will you marry me?

HER FACE

Illness, happiness, disbelief.

EXT. SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH - EARLY APRIL

A sea of pink, purple, and white blossoms. Dogwoods, wisteria, azaleas, and roses blooming.

INT. SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH

Bursting with everyone who knows Jamie and Landon -- every kid in their high school, including Eric, Clay, Belinda; teachers, including Ms. Garber; Mr. Kelly; Luis and Isabel and others from Jefferson High; her father's congregation; Cynthia Carter; Dr. Carter's new wife and their two kids; neighbors; hospital staff and home nurses.

Landon stands with his father by the altar.

The "WEDDING MARCH" begins...

The double doors at the back of the church open. Everyone turns to look at the bride. Gasps of joy and sadness.

LANDON'S POV - JAMIE

Flanked by a nurse and Reverend Sullivan. She's wearing her Lizzie dress from the play. It hangs loosely, but still becomes her. She's a beautiful bride.

BACK TO SCENE

Landon swells with pride.

Jamie smiles. Then, leaning on her father, she slowly makes her way down the aisle.

In the pews -- few dry eyes follow her.

Jamie -- halfway -- stops to rest and catch her breath. A moment later, she and her father continue.

A long, difficult walk. A walk to remember.

AT ALTAR

The nurse rolls a wheelchair up as Jamie and her father near.

Applause breaks out as Jamie reaches Landon's side.

Jamie sits. Exhausted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Landon kneels to be the same height as Jamie in her chair.

Pause. Dr. Carter kneels. Showing solidarity with his son.

Reverend Sullivan, standing, leans down to kiss Jamie's cheek. Trying to keep his emotions in check.

LANDON AND JAMIE'S POV

Reverend Sullivan towering over them.

BACK TO SCENE

Reverend Sullivan kneels, too.

Jamie takes Landon's hand in her right hand, her father's hand in her left. Linking the three together.

The congregation silences.

Reverend Sullivan looks up from his Bible. Struggling.

REV. SULLIVAN

As a father, I'm supposed to give away my daughter. But I can no more give Jamie away than I can give away my heart. But I can let another share in the joy she has given me. May God's blessings be with you both.

He reaches out, offering a hand to Landon. Completing the circle.

REV. SULLIVAN

Landon, repeat after me. Do you take...

As words are spoken and vows and rings exchanged, the CAMERA MOVES ACROSS the faces of those at the altar -- Jamie, Landon, Dr. Carter.

TO the first row of the congregation -- Cynthia Carter, Josh, Eric, Clay.

Then BACK row by row as the Reverend begins reading a passage from the book Jamie's mother made for her. His voice soft and melodious, like a poet reading his own work.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REV. SULLIVAN (O.S.)

'Love is always patient and kind.
It is never jealous. Love is
never boastful or conceited. It
is never rude or selfish. It does
not take offense and is not
resentful. Love takes no pleasure
in other people's sins, but
delights in the truth. It is
always ready to excuse, to trust,
to hope, and to endure whatever
comes...'

And the CAMERA MOVES OUT the double doors to find...

PARSONAGE

in a different season. Winter.

UP the front steps and INTO...

LIVING ROOM (PRESENT DAY)

As it is now, in present day.

The nurse disappears, leaving Landon Carter, 33, waiting.
Looking at a framed photo of Jamie as Lizzie in The
Rainmaker...

The nurse returns, helping an old man as he shuffles in.
Reverend Sullivan. He's stooped, thin, balding. His skin
parchment thin.

The two men embrace. Stiff, uncomfortable, uncertain.

REV. SULLIVAN

You've been well?

LANDON

Yes. You?

REV. SULLIVAN

Getting by.

Pause. Why is he here? The Reverend waits.

LANDON

(fumbling)

I'm -- I'm returning something.

He twists the ring on his finger. Removes it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDON

This belongs to you.

He gives his wedding ring to the Reverend. Pause. Landon searches for something meaningful to say.

LANDON

She taught me -- everything. She saved my life.

The Reverend turns away, overcome with sadness. Realizing now why Landon has come.

REV. SULLIVAN

You're marrying again.

LANDON

Yes.

REV. SULLIVAN

Jamie wanted that. She told me.

Landon is grateful to know this. He makes a move to go. Then turns back.

LANDON

I'm sorry she never got her miracle.

REV. SULLIVAN

She did. It was you.

Landon, deeply touched, embraces the old man again. Warmly, fully. Two men still grieving, saying good-bye.

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)

Jamie once said when you're feeling love, you're also feeling God.

EXT. NEUSE RIVER - THAT AFTERNOON

Landon walks alone. His hair and clothing tousled by a steady gentle wind.

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)

She made me a believer. In love. In life. In the journey that never ends...

Landon stops. Faces the wind. Lets the air swirl over him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ADULT LANDON (V.O.)
... And in the mystery of all
things you can't see but feel
everywhere around you...

He closes his eyes. She's there...

FADE OUT.

THE END