

CONVICTION

ON BLACK

The SOUND of polite APPLAUSE. It subsides.

UNIVERSITY DEAN (O.S)  
The Medal for Excellence in  
Elementary Education is awarded to  
Kathleen Anne Burnes.

Rising, enthusiastic APPLAUSE. A piercing WHISTLE.

FADE IN:

A confidant WOMAN in cap and gown strides across stage toward the DEAN. At the podium, she reaches to accept her medal --

-- and a NURSE hands her a newborn BABY. Now in pj's and robe, she cuddles the infant, opens a door, and in walks --

-- an awkward TEENAGER in a powder blue tux. He nervously pins a purple orchid on her prom dress. She smiles as a --

-- MAN in a black tux lifts a white veil from her face and straightens it behind her. He kisses her cheek, but it's --

-- a young BOY that pulls back from the kiss. She sits in a circle of fourth graders holding a small gift which is now --

-- on a stack of presents beside a cake blazing with candles. She takes a huge breath, holds it, and as she blows out the candles, a FLASH BULB explodes in WHITE LIGHT --

ABRUPT CUT TO:

EYES SNAP OPEN

Blue. Defiant. A dream? A memory?

INT. PRIVATE HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

MATT BURNES, 72 years of triumph and tragedy etched into a tired, handsome face. A full head of hair. Neatly combed. Ash gray. Freshly shaven, flecks of dried blood on his chin. He sits in bed, supported by pillows, oxygen, and morphine. Beneath the covers, he clutches something to his chest. He's had enough pain. He's ready to die. Let's get on with it.

By the door, a redheaded NURSE reads a thick paperback.

A crucifix on the wall above the bed. On the night stand, a small lamp with a purple shade, and a photo of a man and a young girl, arms around each other, smiles and goofy hats.

Three MEN and a BOY mill around Matt's bed. Tense, moody. The first MAN, 42, dishevelled, oily, scraggly beard. The second MAN, 65, nattily attired, tweed jacket, silk tie, a small gold ring on his lapel. The third MAN, 22, crew cut, Princeton sweatshirt. The BOY, 14, left arm in a cast, wears an old style Phillies baseball cap from the 1940s.

MATT

You're still here. Thank God for the morphine.

MAN, 65

Judgment day, Matt. Ready? Worried?

MATT

Should I be?

The Man, 65, shoots the Man, 42, a derisive look.

MAN, 42

Don't look at me like that you old bastard. You would have done the same thing. Choices get a lot simpler at your age.

The Man, 65, raises a hand to interject, then points to Matt.

MAN, 65

He'll answer for it. It's him you left unprotected.

MAN, 42

You're living in the past. Jump in there beside him, get it over with.

MAN, 65

Over with? Now there's something you know. Alcoholism, depression, separation, waking up in your own piss. Well, I care about his soul.

MAN, 42

No such thing. We live. We die. End of story.

MATT

Give it a rest you two. Did I ever tell you about my friend Rocco?

MAN, 42

Only a few hundred times. But go ahead, we never get tired.

MATT

Good looking Italian. Thick black, wavy hair. Spent hours in the boys room. Looking at it, combing it.

They wait for Matt to continue. He doesn't.

MAN, 22

Hey, I'm driving up to Boston. A little nervous. First time meeting Abby's folks. Any advice?

MAN, 42

Yeah. Don't have the clam chowder. Trust me. The water's different.

MAN, 65

Oh, God, remember that fiasco? Puked all over her grandmother.

(to MAN, 22)

Abby's a good girl. A lawyer will come in handy. Eventually. And your mother will be pleased.

MAN, 22

I guess.

MAN, 65

No, she will. One of the few times. Don't worry, it won't last.

MATT

A year after graduation, Rocco was bald as a baby's ass. All that great hair -- lost. Devastated him. Couldn't date for years.

MAN, 42

Would you stop with the hair? Nothing belongs to us. It's all bullshit. We don't lose. We just give back what we've borrowed.

BOY, 14

I was the only kid in my class to make the Phillips Academy.

The others look at him as if they didn't know he could speak.

BOY, 14

But dad wants me to go to Saint Joseph's. No Jews. The kids are more like me.

MAN, 42

That's a bunch of shit. They're not like you at all. Hang in there kiddo. Rough four years ahead.

MAN, 65

When you get to college, don't be afraid of different. Don't circle the wagons like your old man. Give your life a purpose, an impact on others' lives. In the end, (a beat) that's all that will matter.

MATT

Then Rocco got invited to France by his uncle. Sam. 101st Airborne at Bastogne. That redefined hell.

Severe frostbite. Had to cut both his legs off. Above the knee. He never looked at his Silver Star. And never mentioned his hair again.

The group falls silent. The Man, 22, looks shaken.

MAN, 22

You never forgot that, did you?

Matt looks at his IV bag. A drop gets fatter, then falls.

MATT

But he was lucky, in a strange way. His losses came in order.

MAN, 22

Whatever happened to him?

MATT

His heart stopped beating at the VA. But he died long before that.

MAN, 42

Where was your God when they were cutting his legs off? Where was the morphine? How do you get over that, move on with your life?

MATT

Life's small disappointments should come first. Prepare you for the large ones. If disappointment is out of order, if the crucial one comes early, the rest won't matter.

MAN, 65

Matt, focus on what lies ahead.

Matt looks at the pressure gauge on a portable green oxygen tank near his bed. The needle quivers toward the low side.

MATT

Which one of us will drop first?  
Me or the gauge. How many breaths  
are in one tank? How many tanks  
could I possibly have left?

I wonder if my life was worthwhile.

The Nurse peers over her reading glasses and shakes her head. She sees Matt talking to himself, gesturing with his hands. But there's no one else in the room. She approaches.

MATT

Did I make a difference?

NURSE

(in an Irish brogue)

Calm down, Mr. Burnes. Try to get  
some rest.

She reaches for the lamp. He grabs her with alarming force.

MATT

Leave it. Don't ever shut that  
lamp off.

She pries his hand off her wrist and returns to her chair. Annoyed, she snatches up her book and resumes reading. The THREE MEN and the BOY are back. They exchange amused looks.

MAN, 65

Some of the old fire. If she only  
knew how long that bulb has lasted.

The MAN, 42, stares at the photo on the night stand. The MAN, 65, places a hand on his shoulder and starts --

MAN, 65

(singing)

I'll find you in the morning sun,  
And when the night is new,  
I'll be looking at the moon,  
But I'll be seeing you.

Matt stares out the window. His eyes mirrored in the glass.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Eyes retreat from the window. NATALIE BURNES, 36, lovely in a navy Talbot's suit. A book, THE LAZY ANT FARM, on her lap. Beside her, BILL RYAN, damp, overweight, and scared shitless.

STEWARD (O.S.)

Ladies and gentlemen, we've begun our descent into Philadelphia Airport. Local time is five twenty. If your plans include Trick or Treating, it's a brisk fifty degrees. At this time, we ask that you return your trays and seats to their upright positions.

Natalie puts her book away, stores her tray, notices Bill's blanched knuckles on the armrest. She stores his tray.

BILL

Thanks. Hate flying. Most plane crashes happen on take off or landing. And we've already --

She places a comforting hand on his.

NATALIE

We'll be fine. Besides, it's not my time.

BILL

You know when you're gonna' die?

NATALIE

I know it's not now. By the way, I'm Natalie Burnes.

She extends her hand. He surrenders a clammy mitt.

BILL

Bill Ryan. Nice to meet you.

NATALIE

C'mon Bill, look around. Do you think God wants to process this bunch on the Eve of All Souls?

Bill scans a passenger melting pot. Laughs, more relaxed.

BILL

Nah, probably not.

EXT. AIRPORT TAXI STAND - NIGHT

Beneath a blinking amber light, a DISPATCHER directs weary travellers to waiting taxis. Bill and Natalie, with carry-on luggage, creep forward. He hands her a business card.

BILL

You have a convincing way with people. My company could use you.

DISPATCHER

Welcome to Phil A Del Fee A!  
Brotherly Love. Where to brother?

A man moves toward a taxi. Natalie glances at Bill's card.

NATALIE

Motivational speaker?

Bill shrugs -- Yeah, go figure. They move forward.

BILL

So what brings you to Philly?

NATALIE

I was born here. My dad's in the hospital. He's taken a turn for the worse.

BILL

I'm sorry. Why didn't you say?

NATALIE

It's okay. He's ready. But, I've always known -- don't ask me how -- that I would be with him when he passed away. That I would hold the hands that steadied my two-wheeler, and steered me through life.

Her eyes glisten. A look of dawning on Bill --

BILL

Is your father Matthew Burnes?

Natalie nods, inches forward. She's first on line.

NATALIE

He is the kindest, bravest man I will ever know. What happened to him is nothing short of a miracle. And I'll get to tell him, once again, what he means to me.

(MORE)



NATALIE(cont'd)

And there is one thing . . . I have to ask him.

BILL

My girls love his books. Me too. He wrote like he could see through the eyes of a child. What a gift.

DISPATCHER

Yo Adrian, where to? Get to Pat's. Best cheese steak on the planet!

NATALIE

Good-bye, Bill. May all your landings be safe ones.

She slips into a taxi. She sees the blinking amber light above Bill. For a split second, she sees a young girl on a summer night, releasing lightning bugs from a glass jar.

BILL

He's in good hands.

She nods and smiles as the taxi pulls away.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

ABIGAIL BURNES, 71, elegant, stunning. Her son BRIAN, 38, his wife, and their two children. Her daughter BETH COLE, 39, intense, edgy, a caffeine addict. CHRISTOPHER COLE, her amiable ex, and their daughter. FATHER KEVIN DOYLE, an elderly Catholic priest, holds a small Bible.

BETH

It's not that bad. Get on the turnpike, put on cruise, pop in Bruce. Four hours later. Wa la.

ABBY

Bruce?

BRIAN

Springsteen. (pause) The singer?

ABBY

Oh, him. I thought you were seeing someone named Bruce.

BETH

Yeah, mom. I'm dating Bruce Springsteen. He got my letters. Realizes true love is at the end of the Pennsylvania turnpike.

(MORE)

BETH(cont'd)

So after provin' it all night at  
the factory, we take back streets  
through the badlands and go racing  
down thunder road to the promised  
land, cause baby we were --

Brian puts an arm around his sister and leans in close.

BETH AND BRIAN

(singing)

-- born to run.

ABBY

What on God's green earth are you  
talking about?

BRIAN

Song titles, mom.

ABBY

In your father's and my day --

BETH

Oh, God, here it comes.

ABBY

-- singers were singers. And they  
sang nice songs.

BETH

(croons)

Night and day, you are the one.

ABBY

Go ahead, make fun. But they had  
talent. And you could understand  
the words. None of this profanity.

BETH

(still crooning)

Only you beneath the stars,  
and under the fuckin' sun.

ABBY

Elizabeth! Keep your voice down.  
There are sick people here.

Christopher, her ex, points to his head, then to Beth.

CHRISTOPHER

There are sick people here, too.

ABBY

Father Doyle heard you.

BETH

Oops! Sorry Padre.

FATHER DOYLE

God loves a Cole Porter tune.

BETH

Oh, I doubt that Father.

(with a lisp)

Cole was hom-o-sexual.

(regular voice)

Not allowed in the club.

FATHER DOYLE

Oh, you'd be surprised.

ABBY

He was not. He was married.

(off Beth's look)

To a woman. A beautiful woman.

BETH

Mom, would you look at his songs.

Do you think a straight man wrote

Begin the Beguine or Miss Otis

Regrets? Anything Goes? Do you

have any idea what that's about?

Beth moves a finger in and out of her clenched fist.

BETH

(squeaky mattress sound)

EEE--EEE, EEE--EEE, EEE--EEE.

DOCTOR PATRICK CONWAY, 42, boyishly good-looking, comes out of Matt's room and approaches.

CHRISTOPHER

Head's up.

DOCTOR CONWAY

(to Abby)

Good evening, Judge. Father.

ABBY

Hello Patrick. How is he?

DOCTOR CONWAY

Comfortable. I gave him something to help his breathing and decreased the morphine. He was getting a little loopy.

BETH  
How could you tell?

Abby shoots her a look -- Not here, not now.

ABBY  
Thank you. For all you've done.  
You've been a tremendous help  
during a very difficult time.

DOCTOR CONWAY  
I wish there was more we could do.

ABBY  
You know, I'm not so sure he'd want  
that. He feels he's been here long  
enough. He's anxious to get on  
with the rest of his life.

DOCTOR CONWAY  
Hmm, that's an interesting outlook.  
Oh, do you have another daughter?

Beth catches Brian's look. Abby's lip twitches slightly.

ABBY  
She's on her way.

DOCTOR CONWAY  
Good. He's asking for her.

Brian looks at his mother, then Beth.

ABBY  
She's flying in from Chicago.

DOCTOR CONWAY  
I thought it was the morphine. He  
kept repeating her name.

ABBY  
Natalie is our youngest.

Doctor Conway looks puzzled. He leans in, whispers --

DOCTOR CONWAY  
That's not the name he's calling.

Abby's jaw tightens. Brian and Beth exchange looks.

DOCTOR CONWAY  
He wants to speak with Katie.

Abby begins to respond, pauses, then smiles, resigned.

ABBY  
She'll be here soon.

DOCTOR CONWAY  
That should cheer him up. I'll  
check on him later. You have my  
cell, call me if you need anything.

ABBY  
I will. Thank you, Patrick.

He leaves. Abby takes a deep breath and, as she enters --

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- the Nurse leaves. She takes in the room then sits beside him. Notices and can't help but reorganize the items on the night stand. She runs her fingers through his hair and his eyes open slowly. She lifts his hand to kiss it.

ABBY  
Hi, snookums. How are you feeling?

MATT  
Like a million bucks. When they  
take the tube out of Mr. Happy,  
I'll get dressed, we'll go dancing.

ABBY  
I'm ready. Got my dancing shoes  
on. (pause) Can I get you anything?

MATT  
New heart? Liver. Onions.

ABBY  
I've known you fifty one years.  
There's nothing wrong with your  
heart.

MATT  
Cardiologists. What do they know?  
(chuckles) My little wutzsie.

ABBY  
Oh, God, you haven't called me that  
in years. How did that start?

MATT

The stuffed animal I sent you when we were dating. It had a name. Wutzsie. German for --

ABBY

-- little pig! How romantic!

MATT

It was! That curly tail we called Fuzz Butt. I think it's in the attic. Probably bacon by now.

Forty-three years of marriage come down to moments like these and there are not many left. She wells up, eyes glisten, face frozen in the anguish of losing him.

ABBY

Should I leave the radio on? Do you want some water? Can I --

MATT

Yeah, leave it on. Maybe later.  
(off her look)  
Don't start. We made a good life.  
We had our crosses. We survived.

Matt takes shallow, rapid breaths, then coughs in fits.

ABBY

Calm down, don't get all worked up.

MATT

I'm not, I'm winding down. I thought I'd be afraid. But I feel like a kid on Christmas morning.

Abby tenses. She scans his face for recognition, then turns her back to him and stares out the window.

ABBY

That Christmas. What was I thinking? If I could have it back.

MATT

Sweetie, you were fine. No one--

ABBY

You never understood.

MATT

You weren't perfect that time. So what? She didn't need you to be --

She turns to him.

ABBY  
She didn't need much from me.  
(a beat) Did she?

MATT  
She understands you better than you  
understand yourself.

She squints, uncertain, searching for sincerity.

MATT  
We did the best we could.

She sits on the bed. Tired. He reaches for her hand.

MATT  
Promise me you'll keep the  
Foundation vital. Watch Beth, the  
other two will be fine.

His eyes look past her. Abby turns and sees Natalie in the doorway. Abby approaches and they embrace. Gently, like strangers, so not to shatter the fragile peace between them.

NATALIE  
Hi mom. I got the first flight I  
could. How is he?

Abby brushes Natalie's hair off her forehead, tucking it behind her ears. Just as she's done for 30 years.

ABBY  
You wouldn't have to fly if you  
lived closer. You need a haircut.

NATALIE  
What does the doctor say?

ABBY  
He's not sure. Your father's a  
tough old bird.

NATALIE  
Has he talked with Katie?

Abby stops smiling. She takes Natalie's coat, glances at the label, picks off lint, and puts the coat on a hanger.

ABBY  
No. And, please, don't mention  
her. He needs his rest.

NATALIE  
I need to talk to him about her.

ABBY  
Not now, honey, maybe later.

NATALIE  
There may not be a later.

MATT  
Is that my baby?

ABBY  
I'm going to the cafeteria, Matt.  
I'll see you in a little bit.  
(to Natalie)  
The morphine has him confused.  
Don't upset him. Let it rest.

Before leaving, Abby straightens the coat on the hanger.

NATALIE  
Hi pop.

MATT  
Come here and give your old man a  
hug. Watch the tubes.

She hugs him, tentative, then like she'll never let go. As she closes her eyes, he pats her like burping a baby.

MATT  
Now, now. Don't start that. Your  
mother already got weepy on me.

She dabs her eyes and holds up two fingers.

NATALIE  
Promise. Scout's honor.

MATT  
That's my girl, let me see you.

He shields his face as if viewing a total eclipse.

MATT  
If you get any more beautiful, I  
won't be able to look at you.

A male ORDERLY enters the room with a cart. Matt eyes him.

NATALIE  
Practicing that line on the nurses?



MATT

Just your mother. You know her.

Matt gestures toward the night stand. She rolls her eyes, hands him his WALLET, and closes the drawer.

NATALIE

How's Mom holding up?

Matt removes a yellowed NEWSPAPER ARTICLE from his wallet.

MATT

Oh, she'll be fine. She could stop breathing if she put her mind to it. She's just upset.

(a beat)

Not over me. Over not controlling death. Here, I want you to have this.

He hands her the newspaper article. She recognizes it and smiles. The Orderly eyes them and empties the trash.

NATALIE

Pop?

MATT

Yeah, pumpkin.

NATALIE

You know I have to ask.

MATT

Yeah, I know you do. Funny, your sister and brother were in here and that never came up.

NATALIE

You know me, the nosey one. Well?

MATT

Well what?

NATALIE

Have you talked with Katie?

He shakes his head. The sound of a breaking heart. She places the newspaper article by the photo on the night stand.

NATALIE

It's okay, pop. I'm a good listener. I got my father's ears.

He's far away. She taps him on the chin with her fist.

NATALIE  
Whatcha' thinkin'?

Matt sighs, grins, shakes his head at some inner truth.

MATT  
Funny how your mind works. I was  
thinking about the apostle, Peter.

NATALIE  
Okay. I'll bite. What about him?

MATT  
He denied Christ because he feared  
for his own life. His faith was  
weak. But he restored his faith,  
and never wavered again.

NATALIE  
Faith is alive. It grows stronger  
when challenged.

MATT  
His was put to the test. They  
nailed Peter to a tree. Upside  
down. Imagine that. He could have  
saved himself by denying Him.

NATALIE  
Maybe he did. Save himself.

The Orderly glances at them, then the night stand.

MATT  
Boy, to have that kind of faith.

NATALIE  
You have that kind of faith. Is  
there anything you need?

MATT  
There's only one thing I need. And  
I can't have it.

NATALIE  
What?

MATT  
One more trip. With the monkeys.

Natalie chuckles, holds his hand. A long, affectionate look.

NATALIE  
Wouldn't that be nice.

FADE TO BLACK:

The SOUND of WOULDN'T IT BE NICE on an AM car radio.

EXT./INT. STATION WAGON (MOVING) - DAY (FLASHBACK)

SUPER: "JUNE, 1966"

MATT, 41 going on 14, drives. Mischievous and magnetic. Charming, entertaining, everything is funny. Neighborhood's favorite dad. Protective, but insulated.

ABBY, 40, smart, handsome, inner steel. Controlled and calculated. Most respected defense attorney in Philadelphia. Tenacious. Single-minded. Edits a thick brief on her lap.

In the back, NATALIE, 5, BRIAN, 7, BETH, 8. The oldest is KATIE, 10, hazel eyes, pigtails, cuffed Levi's, lime shirt, Keds, no socks. A cute, lovable pixie. The kids act up.

MATT  
If you monkeys don't settle down,  
I'm sending in the Big Magilla.  
(to Abby) Ready Magilla?

KATIE  
We're not afraid of the Magilla.

BRIAN  
(mimics Katie)  
Not fraid of the 'Gilla.

MATT  
Oh, you better be.

THE CHILDREN  
We're nooooot!

MATT  
Katie, do you know what the Magilla  
does to children who misbehave?

KATIE	MATT
Noooo.	First, he steals their socks.

Katie sticks her legs in the air to show her bare ankles.

KATIE	MATT
I don't have any socks.	Then he eats the little toe.
	A snack. Then, one by one --

Matt makes a deep, blood curdling moan over the music of children laughing -- a squealing, gleeful chaos.

They pass a road sign: GETTYSBURG.

EXT. PEACH ORCHARD, GETTYSBURG NATIONAL PARK - DAY

At the front of a group tour, Abby and the kids listen to a PARK RANGER, crisp and full of himself. Way in the back, Matt and Katie are bored and restless. This is trouble.

PARK RANGER

By July 3, the Army of the Potomac  
had the superior field position.

Matt and Katie roll their eyes and exchange superior looks.

PARK RANGER

The battle that day determined the  
outcome of the war. It is known as  
Pickett's Charge.

Matt pretends to ride a horse. He bobs up and down, pulls imaginary reins, slaps his butt, and Picketts his nose.

PARK RANGER

In this ill-fated effort, the  
confederates were sitting ducks.

Matt tucks his hands into his armpits, flaps his arms, and does a CHICKEN DANCE. Now Katie flaps her arms and makes duck faces. The Ranger, exasperated, has had enough.

PARK RANGER

Excuse me, sir. Would you like to  
share something with the group?

The crowd turns, sees Matt. Muffled giggles. Abby cringes.

MATT

Uh, no. That's okay. We were, uh,  
just acting out the charge. It  
makes the history come alive.

PARK RANGER

Your version is quite lively. The  
rest of us, however, would like to  
proceed. That is, if you're done.

MATT

Absolutely. You go ahead. Right  
on, proceed, you're doing a great  
job, officer, ranger, sir.

Abby shoots Matt a frigid look. He looks to Katie. Bug-eyed, tight-lipped, I'm in trouble. The crowd turns back to the Ranger. Coast clear. Matt looks cross-eyed, tongue out, head bobs side-to-side. Katie stifles a laugh with her hand.

INT. BATTLEFIELD CAFETERIA - DAY

Matt carries a tray of food. He passes a black family with a son Katie's age and sits at a table with a white family.

MATT

Here's a good one.

Katie pauses by the black boy. She sees his two slices of pizza to her one. She grins and nods approvingly.

MATT

Sweetie? C'mon, let's eat.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD CABINS - DUSK

The ground is wet from a late afternoon shower. Matt and Katie lean against the station wagon. RAG DOLL plays on her transistor radio. He shows her a small FROG he has caught.

MATT

See, they're not slimey. Look at his toes, they -- Whoa! Whoa! Wait a second, don't do that --

The frog PEES on his leg. He holds it away from him.

KATIE

Daddy, he's peeing all over.

MATT

Hey pal, put a cork in it. Jiggle it will ya', I'm getting soaked.

He puts the FROG down and it HOPS across the wet gravel road.

MATT

Go back to your buddies. Tell them it's better to be pissed off than pissed on. (wipes both hands down his pants) I hope that's not acid.

They sit on the cabin steps. A RAINBOW arcs over the pine trees. He wraps an arm around her and pulls her close.

MATT

Look sweetie, a rainbow. (a beat)  
Did you have a good time today?

KATIE

Yes, I did. Thanks for taking us.

MATT

What was your favorite thing?

He takes out a pack of cigarettes, taps one down, lights up.

KATIE

The tower. And that map that lit up. What was it called?

MATT

A diorama. Do you think you'd like to study history?

KATIE

I still want to be a teacher.

MATT

You could be a history teacher.

KATIE

That's true. I could teach people it's stupid to kill each other. Especially when you don't even know why you're mad at them.

MATT

You could be a lawyer like mom. The fine art of compromise.

KATIE

What's compromise?

Matt smokes, holds it, blows two perfect SMOKE RINGS.

MATT

Say two people can't agree. So, they meet each other half way. Fifty-fifty. They compromise. It's like a mutual promise.

KATIE

What if you know you're right? Would it be wrong to compromise?

MATT

Sometimes. But if you see another view, some good may come of it.

KATIE

Have you ever compromised?

MATT

Oh, sure. Plenty of times.

KATIE

Like when?

MATT

When I met mom, she was set on law school. I wanted to get married. We compromised. She went to law school, we postponed the wedding.

KATIE

Does mommy ever compromise?

MATT

Never. Welllll, (a beat) there was that one time.

KATIE

Really! What was that?

MATT

She married me.

Katie slaps his arm, they fall into each other, laughing.

KATIE

What good came from that?

MATT

You. And Beth, Brian, Natalie.

He hugs her and kisses the top of her head.

KATIE

Daddy, let's make a compromise.

MATT

Sure. What do you have in mind?

KATIE

I'll clean my room. You let me stay up an extra hour.

MATT

Half hour and take out the trash.

KATIE

A deal.

An exaggerated handshake. Behind them, Abby appears at the screen door. They don't hear her.

MATT  
See how easy it is.

KATIE  
Let's do another one.

MATT  
Okay, but something more important.  
A mutual promise.

They look at each other a long time. Another SMOKE RING.

MATT  
I tell you what. You promise to  
always be my little girl -- and I  
promise to build a rainbow between  
us. So no matter where you are,  
I'll always be on the other end.

KATIE  
That's an easy one. But I won't  
always be little.

MATT  
But you'll always be my girl.

A SMOKE RING. Katie makes an OKAY sign around the RING.  
Matt makes an OKAY sign and interlocks his with hers. Abby  
watches them as if admiring someone else's new Porsche.

KATIE  
You know those guys Lee and Grant?  
They should have compromised.

ABBY  
Who wants lemon meringue pie?

Matt and Katie turn, surprised, and stand up.

KATIE  
I do, I do!

Katie runs inside. Matt stands, kisses Abby, follows Katie.  
Abby turns from the door and strides into a --

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Packed. District Attorney WILLIAM HENDERSON watches her as  
if he's trapped in an aquarium with a barracuda. At the  
defense table, Abby confers with JONATHAN BERG, 40s, bookish.



INT. COURTROOM - LATER

Abby stands behind Berg at the defense table.

ABBY

I hope none of us experiences what Jonathan Berg went through. When this trial is over, we can block it out. Go back to our normal lives. Forget what we've heard. Forget those awful photos.

She places a hand on his shoulder.

But Mr. Berg's life will never be the same.

She walks toward the far end of the jury.

Imagine the horror of watching your only child murdered. And for what? Forty dollars? Then have the killer mock you? In a court of law? This court. And through some technicality, be set free?

She stops, faces the jury, motions toward Henderson.

The D.A. wanted justice for Sarah Berg. He wanted a conviction. But mistakes were made. Perhaps due to circumstances beyond his control.

She continues walking, then stops abruptly.

ABBY

Mr. Berg seeks justice again. This time ladies and gentlemen, and make no mistake about it, only one thing stands between him and justice. And that is the choice you make today.

She walks back toward the middle of the jury.

He'll live his life in unending pain. Nothing will bring Sarah back. Don't punish him again. Don't let the system that failed him once, fail him a second time.

INT. ABBY'S OFFICE - DAY

Oak, table lamps, lean. An Amish quilt on a wall of achievement and heroes -- Phi Beta Kappa, Princeton, Harvard Law, Peace Corps, Eleanor Roosevelt, Scott and Zelda, JFK.

A newspaper headline: BERG ACQUITTED OF MURDERING DAUGHTER'S KILLER, lies beside an opened package. Abby cradles the phone and continues to work while on hold.

KEVIN REILLY, 20s, pokes his head in, shoots a finger at her.

KEVIN

If I kill anyone, you're my lawyer.

ABBY

If you kill anyone, I'll strap you in the chair myself.

(waves him off)

Hello Henry, how are you?

(sifts documents)

Very well, thank you. Oh, they're fine. And Helen? Good.

Abby's secretary, JOAN, calls out.

JOAN (O.S.)

Partners' meeting, five minutes.

ABBY

I just received a package with a Cambridge postmark. (playfully)  
You live in Cambridge, don't you?

Abby lifts a book from her desk and feels the cover, almost sensuously. She turns to the title page which is inscribed.

ABBY

You've outdone yourself Henry. A first edition Gatsby, with dust jacket, and signed by Fitzgerald!

(places book down)

Well, thank you, but --

(sorts files)

You don't have to get them all.

(opens a file)

Well, you taught me everything I could know about our Constitution.

(reads, distracted)

Uh, sure, what do you have?

She closes the file and reaches for a yellow legal pad.

ABBY

Sounds like a Legal Aid disaster.  
Interesting issue. Send me the  
transcript. We do some pro bono.

She digs into the box and pulls out a thick document.

ABBY

That sure, heh? Let me run it by  
the partners and get back to you.  
Oh, Henry -- I just love saying  
that -- stay out of old book  
stores. My love to Helen. Bye.

JOAN (O.S.)

Matt on two.

ABBY

Tell him I'll call him later. Is  
it important?

JOAN'S DESK. Joan, 20, bouffant hairdo, dangling earrings.

JOAN

Mr. Burnes, can she call you back?  
(licks an envelope)  
Oh, just the usual insanity around  
here. That's always our defense.  
(laughs) I'll let her know. Bye.

Abby bolts out carrying a huge stack of files.

JOAN

Your mom has the kids, Katie has a  
game, he'll see you at home.

ABBY

I thought baseball was over?

JOAN

Basketball. I did your billing for  
June. Three hundred and ten hours.  
You've got to slow down. Maybe a  
(sings each letter to the Connie  
Francis tune) V-A, C-A, T-I-O-N.

Abby frowns, ignores her, and distributes a pile of work.

ABBY

These are signed, ready to go.  
Pull these. I need these edits by  
four. Call John at Hirsch, change  
the six o'clock to seven.

(MORE)

ABBY(cont'd)

Make sure the conference room is booked.

(hands her the transcript)

Have Kevin outline this. I need everything on bite mark evidence. I'll meet with him around eight. Tell him I think we'll take it.

Abby charges into the partners' meeting. Joan holds the transcript up like a two-week-old dead fish.

JOAN

Bite mark evidence? Some vacation.

INT. PRISON INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Abby sits across from ROBERT REYNOLDS, black, 34, slight, orange-colored jumpsuit. She slides a carton of cigarettes across the table. He takes them and nods. She notices his HANDS -- thin, sinewy, immaculate nails.

ABBY

They're open. Sorry, prison rules.

She starts a small tape recorder.

ABBY

Abigail Burnes, interview with Robert Reynolds, Trenton State, July fourth, nineteen sixty six. My firm accepted your case. I'll represent your appeal. There are two issues. Adequate counsel and admissibility of bite marks.

REYNOLDS

(stutters)

I, I, I -- understand.

Surprised, Abby glances at his TEETH, then his HANDS.

ABBY

Tell me what happened.

REYNOLDS

I did, did not kill that little girl. Those are not my tee, teeth marks on her but, but, but --

ABBY

-- buttocks.

He nods rapidly, to make the acknowledgement less painful.

REYNOLDS

I've made mi, mistakes in my life,  
and I may be a, a, lot of things.  
But I'm not a mur, murderer. If I  
lu, lose this appeal, they're  
gonna' put me in that chair. In  
front of my wa, wa, wife and kids.  
(a beat) Do you believe in God?

ABBY

I just have to believe in you.

REYNOLDS

Do you have any chil, children?

ABBY

Four.

She glances at his HANDS. He tucks them under his arms.

REYNOLDS

Then you understand.

ABBY

I believe I do. Let's get started.

EXT. BURNES BACK YARD, JULY 4TH PICNIC -- CONTINUOUS

Matt, chef's hat and apron, surrounded by kids. He holds out both fists. A boy taps one. He opens it. Nothing. Other one. Nothing. He swipes the kid's ear, holds up a quarter.

MATT

Don't wash your ears, Eric.  
They're sprouting money.

The kids wander off -- How'd he do that? Matt turns back to STEVE and CHRISTINE ROMANO, and their daughter ANN, 10. He flips burgers and dogs on a raging, charcoal grill.

MATT

But now LBJ is sending more boys.  
It's ridiculous. We should take  
care of our own. Stay out of it.

STEVE

Who's gonna' stop the commies if we  
don't get involved?

ANN

Is Katie taking intermediate?

MATT

Absolutely. She's got webbed feet.

STEVE

Must be nice, so much free time.

CHRISTINE

How goes the new book?

MATT

Slow.

STEVE

Maybe less time on the monkey bars?

CHRISTINE

Is Abby getting home earlier?

MATT

Nah, not really. Always something.  
Some crisis, some fire to put out.  
It's tough on a woman in her field.  
Sometimes we wonder if maybe the  
price is a little too high.

The grill flares. Katie approaches with a paper plate loaded  
with cold salads, baked beans, and three hot dog buns.

KATIE

Hi, daddy. Three franks, please.  
Can I have my quarter back?

MATT

I still need it, sweetie. Later.  
Three? Do you have a tapeworm?

Katie shakes her head. Matt places three franks on the buns.

KATIE

Don't forget. C'mon Ann, let's go.

Katie and Ann stroll off together, whispering secrets.

CHRISTINE

I admire her. It can't be easy.  
Maybe Ann and Katie will benefit  
from her sacrifice.

STEVE

Ever wish you had a more, you know,  
traditional job?

MATT

No, I enjoy my time with the kids.  
Abby's always been, how can I say --

Matt stirs the air, searching for a word.

CHRISTINE

Driven? You know what I mean.

MATT

I know. She enjoys moving walls.

STEVE

While you move the laundry.

MATT

They're my socks, too, Steverino.  
Okay, who's ready for a dog?

INT. NEIGHBOR'S LIVING ROOM -- LATER

Modest, even in better days. MRS. GALLAGHER, 70s, on a couch draped with doilies, eats a hot dog. Ann looks uneasy being with someone so old. Katie pours three glasses of lemonade.

MRS. GALLAGHER

These wieners remind me of my own  
Frank.

She flashes a wicked smile. Her watery blue eyes glisten.

MRS. GALLAGHER

He always loved them on the grill.  
Hmmm. Just plain sinful.

KATIE

Do you want another one?

MRS. GALLAGHER

Oh, no dear, three's my limit.

KATIE

We'll have chocolate eclairs later.

MRS. GALLAGHER

You're such an angel.

EXT. BURNES HOME, BACKYARD - NIGHT

Katie and Natalie catch LIGHTNING BUGS in glass jars.

NATALIE

I'm going to keep mine.

KATIE

No, you can't. If you let them go,  
they'll live forever.

Lightning bugs glide from the jars. Beacons of amber light.

NATALIE

How will I know they're okay?

KATIE

Every time you see their blinking  
lights. That's how they talk.  
They say "I'm okay, how are you?"

NATALIE

They can talk?

KATIE

Of course. Listen.

Katie cups her ear. Natalie listens with her mouth open.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Sunday mass. Beth fans herself. Katie occupies Natalie.  
Matt's chin hits his chest. The priest's homily fades.

EXT. GOLF COURSE - DAYDREAM

Matt lines up a shot, approaches, checks his grip, swings,  
anticipates, PLUNK! He waves to the crowd. Now in a green  
sports jacket, he holds a trophy and an oversized check.

ABBY -- She elbows him. His head snaps up. End of daydream.

EXT. CHURCH - LATER

Matt, Abby, and FATHER KEVIN DOYLE, 40, hair black as hell,  
eyes bluer than heaven. A leading man if not a priest.

FATHER DOYLE

It's just abysmal. Good day Mrs.  
Callahan. Tell David we hope to  
see him sometime.

(to Matt and Abby)

The average child in public school  
reads two levels beneath grade.

MATT

Kids have to love reading and it  
has to begin at home.



FATHER DOYLE

I disagree. The flame can be lit  
in the classroom.

MATT

Not if it's extinguished every  
night at home. Those kids don't  
have the discipline for reading.

FATHER DOYLE

The Bishop wants to try. We're  
starting an after-school reading  
program for inner-city kids.

Matt catches Doyle's expectant look -- Yeah, what?

FATHER DOYLE

You'd be perfect for the job.

MATT

I don't have the patience for that.

ABBY

You love to read, you love to  
teach, love kids. You'd be great.

Matt shoots her a look -- You're not helping!

MATT

How's your knee, Father?

FATHER DOYLE

Nice, real subtle. Better, thanks.  
St. Joseph's will host the program.  
I'm calling other alumni. I hope  
you can get involved, Matt.

(to Abby)

I understand you're representing  
Robert Reynolds?

ABBY

How did you know?

FATHER DOYLE

I'm the prison chaplain. He asked  
for the sacrament of penance.

Abby looks at him as if he'll blurt out the answer.

FATHER DOYLE

That's between him and God. I will  
say this. He has a strong faith.

(to Matt)

(MORE)

FATHER DOYLE(cont'd)

Those kids could use your help.  
Give it some thought.

MATT

I will, Father. Have a good week.

Matt and Abby turn and the kids run ahead of them.

FATHER DOYLE

And Matt. Get some sleep. You're  
missing my best stuff.

Matt smiles sheepishly. They continue to walk away.

MATT

Great. I'm gonna' burn, I know it.

ABBY

Oh you're not obvious. Just when  
you drool and your head bobs up and  
down like a baseball doll.

MATT

There's no way I'm driving into  
Philly for that program. Take your  
life in your hands. He doesn't  
think I work.

ABBY

Remind me. What is it you do?

Matt's all Ralph Kramden -- the smirk, head shake, raised  
fist. One of these days Abby. POW! Right in the kisser.

INT. BURNES HOME, DEN - DAY

Cozy, a writer's womb. Framed dust jackets -- A SPIDER'S  
DIARY, THE THANKSGIVING MOUSE, THE LAZY ANT FARM. In a  
Princeton Track sweatshirt and an old Phillies baseball cap,  
Matt leans back, feet on his desk. He tosses a Spalden ball  
off a well-worn spot on the wall. A clock at 9:00 a.m.

LAUNDRY ROOM - LATER

Matt installs wall shelves. A real amateur Harry Homeowner.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Matt plays classical piano, then rips into a boogie woogie.

DEN - EVEN LATER

Matt stares at a blank page in the typewriter. It's 2:00.

INT. PUBLISHER'S OFFICE - LATER

Matt flings a copy of WRITERS DIGEST onto a table, his feet come crashing down on the perfect teeth of the cover story.

MATT

(to the guy on the cover)  
So how did you get on the cover?  
Oh, your uncle is the publisher.  
Interesting. (a beat) Prick.

He tosses the Spaldeen against the wall behind JOHN SCHMIDT, 50's, glasses, crew cut, ex-marine. A wall clock at 2:30.

SCHMIDT

Give it time, Flash. But if we're shooting for spring, we'll need galleys. Soon. No pressure.

MATT

Right. What's the advance buzz?

SCHMIDT

People who know children's books are anxious for it. Critics too.

MATT

Just not the buying public. If I could make just enough to take care of my family. (looks at his watch) I've got to get the kids.

Matt throws the ball just as Schmidt stands up. It bounces off Schmidt's head and Matt catches it one-handed.

MATT

Whoops! Can I still count on you to buy five copies? Autographed.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - THAT NIGHT

Matt coaches girls' basketball. Katie drives, passes, back to Katie, lay up. Two points! The crowd erupts.

INT. BURNES HOME, LAUNDRY ROOM - LATER

Smug with accomplishment, Matt shows Abby the shelves.

MATT

Go ahead, try them out.

She places a huge Clorox jug on the middle shelf. All the shelves rip from the drywall and crash in front of them.

MATT

It may need a little work.

ABBY

Think so, my little handyman? Try  
using the studs next time.

MATT

Think I'll check on Katie.

KATIE'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

On her canopy bed, lots of small bags, some pink, some blue,  
filled with school supplies. Each has a note attached with a  
matching ribbon. Matt wanders in and lowers the volume of a  
Top 40 tune on her AM radio. Katie rubs her temples.

MATT

Not too late, sweetie. Headache?  
Why don't you put another light on?

He tries the small purple LAMP on her desk. Nothing.

KATIE

It's broke. Can you fix it?  
I'm doing the cards. Wanna' see?

He takes a card and reads aloud.

MATT

Have a great year! Hope these  
things come in hardy, love, Katie.

KATIE

Handy. These things come in handy.

MATT

It says hardy.

KATIE

That's an "n" not an "r."

MATT

Whatever you say. It's very nice.  
You have a lot of stuff here.

KATIE

Woolworths donated a lot. Then  
Kresge's, then Wanamakers, then --

MATT

Impressive. Maybe instead of a teacher, you should run a business. How do you decide who gets what?

KATIE

Sister Theresa knows a teacher at P.S. 41. He's coming tomorrow.

He messes her hair and kisses the top of her head.

MATT

Good night sweetie. Not too late. Don't forget your teeth.

As he walks out, he taps the door frame with his hand.

MATT (O.S.)

And work on those "n's."

KATIE'S ROOM - LATER

Katie kneels by her bed and clutches a stuffed collie dog.

KATIE

Dear God, let Brian score a basket. Just once? Help Natty get used to kindergarten and Beth learn the state capitols. Help mommy come home sooner and daddy quit smoking.

She blesses the stuffed dog, a nightly ritual.

KATIE

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

She scoots under the covers and pulls them over her head.

KATIE (O.C.)

Thank you for the school supplies. If you get a chance, could you fix my lamp? (pause) Hope everything's okay with you. Say hi to your mom.

KATIE'S ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Matt opens the door without making a sound. He watches her sleep, then kisses her softly on her forehead.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

In her school uniform, Katie stands by an elderly nun, SISTER THERESA. A mentally challenged Custodian, CHARLIE, helps Matt transfer little shopping bags to GERARD JOHNSON, 50s, black, who loads them into a white van spotted with primer.

MATT

That's the last of them. I hope these kids appreciate it.

GERARD

Oh, we'll put them to good use. Don't you worry about that.

KATIE

Thanks for your help daddy.

Katie hugs her dad. He kisses the top of her head.

MATT

Okay sweetie, see you at three.

Katie and Charlie stroll toward school. She slips him a handful of CANDY HEARTS, which he eats with child-like enthusiasm. Gerard closes the van and turns to Matt.

GERARD

Sister tells me she thought of this on her own. You must be proud.

Matt, distracted, glances back at Katie and Charlie.

MATT

Yeah, we are. She's a good kid.

GERARD

I've got to head. Good meeting you.

MATT

You too.

They shake hands. Gerard gets in the van and drives away.

MATT

Is he okay? Do you trust him?

SISTER THERESA

Mr. Johnson?

MATT

No, no, the custodian. You know, he seems a little, you know --

SISTER THERESA

Charlie's fine, just a little slow.  
They're great friends. (a beat)  
Your daughter has a true gift.

MATT

She wants to be like you. (pause)  
A teacher, not a -- you know. I  
mean there's nothing wrong with --  
But I think she could be anything  
she put her mind to.

SISTER THERESA

She's certainly very bright. But  
that's not the gift I meant.

MATT

What do you mean?

SISTER THERESA

I've taught fifth grade for nearly  
forty years Mr. Burnes. I have  
never met a child her age so  
selfless, so kind to others. She  
is an absolute joy to be with.

MATT

She is isn't she. We're very lucky.

SISTER THERESA

It's more than luck. The fruit  
doesn't fall far from the tree.

MATT

Believe me Sister, I wish this tree  
was half as kind as that fruit.

SISTER THERESA

Don't be so harsh on yourself. You  
must be doing something right.

MATT

Half nature, half nurture, half  
miracle.

SISTER THERESA

I thought you weren't religious.

MATT

I'm not. But kids change your  
perspective. Especially her. When  
I look at the world through her  
eyes, I see a much better place.

SISTER THERESA  
When you look at the world through  
her eyes, you see it the way God  
meant it to be. That's her gift.

MATT  
I hope she never changes. I hope  
life doesn't beat it out of her.

SISTER THERESA  
I have a feeling it won't.

INTERCUT Abby's presentation and Katie's piano recital.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Kevin Reilly and two MEN work amidst the remains of carry-out  
dinners scattered across an oak table. Abby glances at her  
watch and walks in and out of an image projected on a screen.

SLIDE: A photo. Husband, wife, two kids, golden retriever.

ABBY  
Robert Reynolds, 37, high school  
graduate, navy veteran, unemployed  
carpenter, quickie wedding. Two  
kids, one dog, no picket fence.

SLIDE: ANN MARIE CARR, 10, white, glasses, school photo.

ABBY  
Ann Marie Carr, ten, found dead on  
the roof of her apartment building.

SLIDES: Morgue photos of Ann Marie. Gruesome.

ABBY  
Cause of death, asphyxiation.

SLIDES: Close-ups of purple bruises on her neck.

ABBY  
Her killer is unbelievably strong.  
Her trachea was crushed, twisted,  
and then severed. With bare hands.

SLIDES: Close-ups of bite marks on flesh.

ABBY  
Then, in a fit of rage, he bit her,  
multiple times, on the buttocks.

SLIDE: A newspaper clipping about Reynolds's arrest.



ABBY

Reynolds was the former super and had keys to the roof. He was seen in the building that day. Police found her blood-stained panties in his garage.

KEVIN

Any priors?

ABBY

No convictions. One arrest. Four years ago. Endangering the welfare of a minor. Charges were dropped when the girl's family became uncooperative.

SLIDE: CLICKS back to the close-up of bite marks on flesh.

ABBY

See the double impression? The killer bit her, moved his lower jaw, and bit her again. Kevin, what do you not see?

Kevin holds his hands up -- I got nothing.

ABBY

A ruler. When the photo was enlarged for comparison with Reynold's teeth, what scale did they use?

KEVIN

Can we reshoot the bite mark?

ABBY

No, it's in formaldehyde. The flesh is swollen and distorted.

KEVIN

So what now?

ABBY

We hire our own dental expert and prove the bite marks could have been made by any number of people. Or, we find the real killer.

KEVIN

How do you explain the panties?

ABBY  
Everybody needs a hobby?

Groans all around. Lights on, projector off, people get up.

ABBY  
Good night, folks. Get some sleep.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

On stage, Katie plays ODE TO JOY on a grand piano. Matt glances at his watch, then the back of the auditorium. Where is she? Beside him, Natalie, Brian, Beth, and an empty seat. Katie finishes, bows. Matt applauds as if Beethoven himself just played. He flashes an okay sign. Embarrassed, Katie grins and relinquishes an okay sign held close to her dress.

END INTERCUT

INT. Burnes HOME, KITCHEN - LATER

Matt dries dishes, eyes the clock. Katie rubs her temples.

MATT  
A few more carrots Brian.  
Headache sweetie?

BETH  
When's mom coming home?

KATIE  
I guess. MATT  
Later. Want an aspirin?

BETH  
Can I wait up? KATIE  
No, I'm okay.

BRIAN  
I ate six. And a half. I'm  
stuffed. Can I have some cake?

MATT  
No. One show, then bedtime. You'll  
be asleep, Beth. Finish your milk.

Katie rubs her temples. Brian brings his plate to the sink.

MATT  
Thanks slugger. Take an aspirin.

BETH  
You said she'd be home more. KATIE  
I'm fine.

BRIAN  
Come on, dad. Batman's on.

Matt throws two wildly fake punches at Brian.

MATT  
Pow! Zap! Be right in Robin.  
Hey, we're going to the zoo  
tomorrow. Mom too.

BRIAN  
All right!

BETH  
She won't come. She never  
does.

Beth storms out. Matt looks at Katie -- what's eating her?  
Katie shrugs. Natalie slingshots a spoonful of mushy blob  
that SPLATS onto Matt's cheek. He wipes it with his hand and  
chuckles at the insanity of dinner with four kids.

MATT  
No ice cream for her.  
(to Natalie)  
And you, my little mush mouse, it's  
rub a dub dub time.

KATIE  
I'll get her, daddy. You get the  
ice cream. I'll have chocolate.

NATALIE  
Me too, poppy. Choclit.

Natalie sticks her tongue out and wiggles it. Matt smiles,  
shakes his head, and watches Katie carry Natalie upstairs.

BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A great bubble bath. Natty scrunches her face as Katie, in  
black kerchief and eye patch, brandishes a Q-tip sword.

KATIE  
(like a pirate)  
Hold still Matey while I cleanyer  
ears or yawalk the plank!

NATALIE  
That tickles. I didn't know  
pirates had such clean ears.

KATIE  
It's a little-known fact.

EXT./INT. STATION WAGON - DAY

Brian and Natalie eat Pop Tarts. Beth sulks out a window. Matt gets in beside Katie, pats his pockets for the car keys.

KATIE

No, you're not sure, or no you don't wanna' sit up front?

BETH

Both.

Katie dangles the keys. Matt stops patting his pockets, glances over at her, swipes the keys, and starts the car.

MATT

Ten to nine, we're off. Natty? Potty? No? Good. Beth, why is your hiney like the Liberty Bell?

BETH

Why?

MATT

They're both cracked. Get it?

BETH

Very funny.

Katie and Brian laugh hysterically. Matt eyes the mirror. She rolls her eyes as the car pulls away from the curb.

INT. BURNES HOME - HALLOWEEN NIGHT

Matt and the gang get dressed. BRANDO (Matt), ELVIS (Brian), BLACKBEARD (Katie), JAMES DEAN (Beth), and MARILYN (Natalie).

EXT. STREET - HALLOWEEN NIGHT, LATER

Brando strolls hand-in-hand with Marilyn and other costumed parents. JOHN WAYNE runs up, flushed and out of breath.

JOHN WAYNE

Mr. Burnes, Mr. Burnes, something's wrong with Katie.

Matt grabs the Duke by his shoulders.

MATT

Where is she?

JOHN WAYNE

By Johnny Eagan's.

Matt scoops Marilyn up. Her platinum wig flies off. He bends down, grabs it, and runs down the street.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Natalie sits close beside Katie on the curb. Candy lies scattered on the sidewalk behind them. Katie winces each time Matt dabs a blood-stained cloth above her right eye.

KATIE

I don't want to go. I'm okay.  
(blocks Matt's hand) Help me pick  
up my candy.

MATT

C'mon then, let's go home.

NATALIE

(like a pirate)  
We can have ice cream. Matey.

INT. BURNES KITCHEN - LATER

Matt, still as Brando, smokes, paces, talks on the phone.

MATT

She blacked out. (exhales) I don't  
know. She's not sure. (testy)  
I don't know. Her knee, her elbow.  
Do you have me on the speaker?  
(pause) Better. Her right eye  
looks funny. (smashes the butt)  
Not too late. Love you, too. Bye.

KATIE'S ROOM - EVEN LATER

She's asleep. Still with fake scar and beard. Matt, still as Brando, slouched, exhausted, keeps watch over her.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. OPHTHALMOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Dark. Lights come on. Katie on an exam table. Her right eye turns in and there's a cut above it. Matt and DOCTOR JAMES FITZGERALD, 40s, turn as Abby storms into the room.

ABBY

Sorry I'm late. Abby Burnes.  
What have you found?

DOCTOR FITZGERALD  
I was telling your husband there's  
swelling around her right optic  
nerve. An optic neuritis.

He starts scribbling on a prescription pad.

ABBY  
What causes that?

DOCTOR FITZGERALD  
Most likely an infection.

ABBY  
Wouldn't she have a fever?

DOCTOR FITZGERALD  
Not always. I'm prescribing an  
antibiotic and anti-inflammatory.  
I want to see her in a week.

He hands Matt two prescriptions.

DOCTOR FITZGERALD  
If there's no improvement, I want  
her to see a neurologist at Penn.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BURNES KITCHEN - DAY

Paper-mache pilgrims and Native Americans greet each other  
amidst art supplies. Abby and Katie decorate a purple lamp  
shade. Katie's right eye still looks a little lazy.

KATIE  
Purple is so neat.

ABBY  
When I was a little girl, it was my  
favorite. My mother would braid my  
hair with purple satin ribbon.

KATIE  
You had long hair?

Abby checks on a golden brown turkey bursting with stuffing.

ABBY  
Another hour. When I met your  
father, it was to my waist. I  
swore I would never cut it.

KATIE  
What happened?

ABBY  
Law school. I didn't have time to wash it every night. So I cut it real short. Let's set the table.

KATIE  
What did daddy think?

ABBY  
He said he'd love me even if I went bald. Then he shaved his head.

Katie laughs, shakes her head, and starts to clear the table.

KATIE  
Daddy is so nutty.

ABBY  
You're just finding that out?

They laugh and laugh. Matt walks in. Oblivious.

MATT  
When you two laugh like that -- it ain't good. What's so funny?

ABBY  
Oh, nothing.

MATT  
Kathleen?

KATIE  
(conspiratorially)  
Oh, nothing.

They crack up. He swipes some stuffing with his finger. Abby bops him with a wooden spoon. He spins and slinks out.

ABBY  
I have some purple ribbon, do you want me to braid your hair?

MATT (O.S.)  
Not yet, I'm letting it grow.  
Brian, wanna' toss the football?

KATIE  
Yes! That would be so cool.

INT. REYNOLDS HOME - NIGHT

Immaculate. A Christmas tree, but few gifts. Abby, in a wrinkled suit, looks at photos with DENISE REYNOLDS. Her children, JEFFREY and JANET, dive into a box of chocolate.

DENISE  
That's Robert with the kids at  
Coney Island. Enough you two.

ABBY  
So brave, riding the Cyclone.

JEFFREY  
I'm going to be an astronaut.

ABBY  
What's your favorite subject?

On the spot, Jeffrey grins and taps his chin with his finger.

JEFFREY  
Hmmm. Recess.

ABBY  
Well, don't tell anyone, but that  
was John Glenn's favorite, too.

DENISE  
Can I get you some more tea?

ABBY  
Oh, no thank you. I really should  
be going. What time is it?

Denise slips a photo from the album, then stands beside her.

DENISE  
I'm sorry. I've just been chewing  
your ear off. Oh, dear, it's nine.  
You two, bedtime, say good-night.

The kids kiss Abby and mom good night, and scamper upstairs.

DENISE  
Pj's, teeth, and prayers.  
(a beat, to Abby)  
Thank you for coming.

ABBY  
I'm glad I did. They're great  
kids. He speaks of them all the  
time. (pause) And you, of course.



DENISE  
I'd like you to have this.

Denise hands her the photo. The family at happier times.

ABBY  
Thank you, I'll keep it on my desk.

DENISE  
Do you have any children?

ABBY  
Three girls and a boy.

DENISE  
This is a nightmare. They have the  
wrong man. Robert is innocent.

Abby holds Denise's hand. She notices a statue of the Sacred  
Heart towering above lit votive candles on a small table.

DENISE  
The children worship him. What if  
we don't win? What if --

ABBY  
We'll win, Denise. We'll win.

DENISE  
I always believed God protected the  
innocent. Do you believe in God?

ABBY  
It's not -- (a beat) I believe in  
free will. Maybe some higher force  
set things in motion. The rest is  
up to us. We choose right or  
wrong. I don't think God, or  
whatever, intervenes beyond that.

Denise nods, looks down at the floor, then at Abby.

DENISE  
Maybe we're both right.

ABBY  
Let's hope so.

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Matt, Abby, and the kids sit crammed into the audience,  
winter coats on their laps. The Nativity unfolds.

Katie, a beautiful Blessed Mother, beholds a porcelain BABY JESUS. Suddenly, she falls by the creche twitching uncontrollably.

MATT

Unimaginable terror. He runs onto the stage and kneels beside her. Her eyes are unfocused, teeth clenched, limbs flaccid, then rigid. Matt speaks to her and screams for help. But, as in a dream, we cannot hear him. SHEPHERDS and WISE MEN look on, mouths gaping through fake beards, in fear and astonishment. The BABY'S glass eyes are fixed ahead.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA - LATER

Matt and Abby, in the same clothes, with DR. MICHAEL KIM, 40s, Asian, thinning hair, glasses, calm and self-assured.

DOCTOR KIM  
She's resting comfortably. We'll  
know more when the tests are back.

ABBY  
What is it?

DOCTOR KIM  
I don't know.

ABBY  
You're the chief of neurology.  
What do you think it is?

Matt places a hand on her knee.

DOCTOR KIM  
It could be meningitis, inner ear  
infection, hypoglycemia, epilepsy,  
liver shunt. Something central.

MATT  
Central?

DOCTOR KIM  
The brain.

ABBY  
What are you saying?

DOCTOR KIM  
It could be an infection, an  
abscess, a lesion of some sort.

MATT  
Lesion?

DOCTOR KIM  
A mass. (pause) A tumor.

MATT  
A brain tumor?

DOCTOR KIM  
Unlikely in a child her age. I  
think it's an infection.

MATT  
What do we do now?

DOCTOR KIM  
We've taken blood, urine, spinal  
fluid, EKG. We'll know more soon.  
Let's keep her on IV antibiotics.  
My guess is she'll be fine.

ABBY  
What if your guess is wrong?

Matt tightens his grip on her knee.

DOCTOR KIM  
A figure of speech, Mrs. Burnes. I  
apologize for my choice of words.  
I understand this is difficult.  
Let's take it one step at a time  
and see what we learn from the  
tests. Right now, she's fine.

Abby removes Matt's hand. Her eyes seem to pierce Dr. Kim.

ABBY  
When can we see her?

DOCTOR KIM  
When she's back from radiology.

INT. RADIOLOGY DEPARTMENT - LATER

A dark, ominous room. Loud mechanical WHIRRING. Katie's  
chin is strapped in a bracket to immobilize her head. A  
monstrous x-ray machine rotates 360 degrees around her skull.

INT. BURNES KITCHEN - EVEN LATER

Matt sits at the table and smashes a cigarette butt into a  
crowded ashtray. Abby stands, arms folded across her chest,  
and bites the skin near the cuticle of her middle finger.

ABBY

This is the first time one of the kids has had anything this serious.

MATT

She'll be okay. Let's see how tomorrow goes.

ABBY

Oh, Jesus, the Reynolds brief. It has to be at the court by five.

MATT

Hand it off.

ABBY

I can't. Not an appeal. This may be his only chance.

Matt massages her neck and shoulders. On the fridge, a child's drawing of a RAINBOW with a figure at each end.

MATT

Why don't you work a little. I'll bring you a cup of tea, with lemon.

ABBY

That sounds wonderful. Remember the hours we spent at Mill Mountain in Princeton. Consuming massive amounts of coffee and biscoti.

MATT

After we graduated (laughs, harder) they discontinued the free refills.

ABBY

What did we talk about?

MATT

You were in love. You were trying to snag me. Land the big Kahuna.

Matt makes a "Reeling in the Big Fish" motion.

ABBY

Who's the one that changed his major to be in more of my classes?

MATT

I wanted a well-rounded education. You know, elevate my thinking.

ABBY

Education my ass. The only thing you were interested in elevating was Mr. Happy. And you were trying to ditch that psycho you were dating. What was her name?

Matt evades her by lighting the burner under the tea kettle.

MATT

Shall I make the tea?

ABBY

The one with the big knockers who kept rubbing them on your arm.

Abby mimics a big-boobed bimbo, approaches in baby steps.

ABBY

(bimbo voice)

Oh, Matt, can you help me with my homework? I don't know what I'd do without you.

Chest first, she tries to rub her breasts on him.

ABBY

(bimbo voice)

Does this sweater fit? You don't think it's too tight, do you?

MATT

I should have gone for the boob.

ABBY

(regular voice)

I have no doubt that you did.

He tries to grab her, but she giggles and spins away. He reaches out, touching her arm. She stops laughing. Serious. She tucks her hair behind her ears. He draws her close and kisses her tenderly. The kettle is SCREAMING.

BETH (O.S.)

Would you two cut it out!

Abby puts a hand to her mouth. He pats her back -- We'll get through this. Over her shoulder, he watches the whistler blow off the kettle and thick clouds of STEAM billow out.

INT. DOCTOR KIM'S OFFICE - DAY

Dr. Kim slumps behind his desk, hand under his chin, preoccupied. He fidgets with a pencil and stares at a photo on his desk of a young Asian GIRL about Katie's age.

INT. DOCTOR'S WAITING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Abby and Matt, in winter coats, sit alone. Matt looks at the clock, then a thick mahogany door. It opens.

DOCTOR KIM  
Mr. and Mrs. Burnes --

They vault out of their seats like uncoiled springs.

DOCTOR KIM  
-- come in. Have a nice Christmas?  
MATT ABBY  
As good as we could. I had to work.

DOCTOR KIM  
How's Katie?  
MATT ABBY  
She's doing -- You tell us.

DOCTOR KIM  
Have a seat. The blood, urine,  
spinal fluid, EKG, liver function,  
chest x-rays, all normal.

MATT  
Oh, thank God.

DOCTOR KIM  
However --

Matt and Abby stiffen. They stare at Dr. Kim. He speaks, but for a few moments they cannot hear him. As if time has ceased to exist. Then, suddenly, his VOICE kicks in --

DOCTOR KIM  
The skull x-rays show a  
radiodensity in the telencephalon.

ABBY  
English?

DOCTOR KIM

A shadow in the front of her brain.  
It's causing a shift. I cannot be  
completely sure. But --

ABBY

Are there other tests? Is there  
someplace else we can take her?

DOCTOR KIM

What I suspect, and I'm sorry to  
have to tell you this, is a tumor.

Matt and Abby do not move. Stunned beyond belief as his  
words smack them across the face.

MATT

How can that be? She's so young.

DOCTOR KIM

We'll need a biopsy.

ABBY

Can you remove it?

DOCTOR KIM

If it's a discreet mass, like a  
jelly bean in jello, it might be  
resectable. But if it's invasive,  
with finger-like projections into  
the tissue, we may not get it all.

Matt squeezes Abby's hand. He looks like a lost child.

ABBY

Would it be better to operate?  
Now, before it gets, you know --

DOCTOR KIM

Surgery is an option. It's not  
without risk. She may lose some  
normal function. There's a  
chemotherapeutic agent called 5-  
fluorouracil, 5FU, that shows  
promise in shrinking some tumors.

MATT

What is the best hospital for this?

DOCTOR KIM

You want her here at Penn, with me.

ABBY  
When can we start.

DOCTOR KIM  
Let's schedule the biopsy.

MATT  
What are we looking at?

Dr. Kim chooses his words with a surgeon's precision.

DOCTOR KIM  
Let's see how she responds.

INT. RECTORY - NIGHT

A holiday wreath on the front door. Father Doyle opens it.  
Matt -- haggard, anxious.

FATHER DOYLE  
Hey Matt, second thoughts? Could  
still use your help with that  
reading program.

MATT  
Uh, no, Father. It's Katie. Do  
you have a minute?

INT. RECTORY - MOMENTS LATER

Irish whiskey on ice in Waterford tumblers.

MATT  
She's tired, she's throwing up,  
she's losing weight. Now she's  
dragging her left leg.

FATHER DOYLE  
Have you prayed?

MATT  
I pray all the time, Father. I  
don't know what else to say.

FATHER DOYLE  
The power of prayer is not in what  
is said, it's in the one who hears  
it. We expect to get what we want  
right now. But prayer is not like  
that. And what we think we need is  
not always what God gives us. God  
gives us what we truly need at the  
moment we need it.



MATT

Well I need a miracle and I need it now. Do you believe they happen?

Doyle nods over the tumbler. He chews on some ice.

FATHER DOYLE

Ever hear of John Neumann?

MATT

I think so. Is he a saint?

Matt lights a cigarette with the end of another.

FATHER DOYLE

No. Not yet, at least. He was the Bishop of Philadelphia before the Civil War. Devoted his life to the immigrant poor. Built churches, schools, taught them how to read.

You know the saying, the shirt off his back? He did things like that.

MATT

I've never heard of this guy.

FATHER DOYLE

There's a shrine to him at Saint Peter's on Fifth and Girard. He's buried there. Beneath the altar.

He was declared venerable in nineteen twenty-one and beatified in sixty-three. Beatification takes two miracles approved by the Vatican. To be declared a saint, requires a third.

MATT

How does the church decide?

Doyle uncaps a crystal decanter and tops off their drinks.

FATHER DOYLE

Well, strictly speaking, a perfect, instantaneous, and lasting cure that defies medical explanation.

Does the name Michael Flanigan ring a bell? Six year old, west Philly.

Matt shakes his head, belts back a long, stiff drink.

FATHER DOYLE

Bone cancer. Throughout his body. Doctors gave him six months. Told his parents it was hopeless.

They couldn't accept that. They brought Michael to Father Neumann's Shrine. They had to carry him into the church he was so weak.

Doyle pauses. Matt smokes, looks at him -- Yeah, then what?

FATHER DOYLE

That was three years ago. The doctors had never seen anything like it. Kept testing. But it was gone. A perfect and lasting cure.

MATT

That's amazing.

FATHER DOYLE

I'll show you amazing.

He stands to get a binder, opens it, hands it to Matt.

FATHER DOYLE

Kent Lenahan, a music teacher at Villanova. July eighth, nineteen forty-nine. Hits a telephone pole at eighty miles an hour. Head first through the windshield. Skull crushed, eye hanging out, chest caved in, collapsed lungs, bleeding everywhere. A mess.

Matt looks at a yellowed NEWSPAPER ARTICLE with photos. A young man, his parents, a grisly auto wreck.

FATHER DOYLE

His parents couldn't give up. They pulled some strings and --

Doyle makes quotation marks in the air.

FATHER DOYLE

-- borrowed the cassock Father Neumann wore as a young priest. They brought it to the hospital and laid it over their dying son. Within hours his vital signs were normal. A week later, he went home. A miracle? You tell me.

Matt looks at him -- for the first time, hope.

EXT./INT. STATION WAGON, PHILADELPHIA STREET - NIGHT

Matt struggles to read directions. Suddenly, a MAN scrapes a squeegee oozing filthy water across his clean windshield.

MATT

No, don't do that, get out of here.

The Man looks confused. Matt lunges through the red light.

SQUEEGEE MAN

Happy New Year.

INT. ST. PETER'S CHURCH - LATER

Matt is alone at the back of a cavernous church. Near the marble altar, a bank of candles flicker the only light. He looks around self-consciously and holds his cap to his chest.

FADE TO BLACK:

UP ON

A barren tree trimmed in powdery snow. A scarlet CARDINAL perches, rubs his beak on a branch, flies away.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Flowers cheer the room. Abby reads each Get Well card. Katie looks pale, her hair thinner. She sips a milk shake.

KATIE

Wasn't it nice of Sister Theresa to bring my books and homework? Did you see what Johnny Eagan wrote on my card? He's so retarded.

MATT

I read it. You're right, he is retarded. Are you eating all your food, sweetie? You have to keep your strength up for the surgery.

KATIE

The spinach is really disgusting. Don't stop bringing these shakes. Can we go to Dunhams on Saturday?

ABBY

No, not before the surgery. Maybe after. If you're up to it.

KATIE  
I'll be okay.

ABBY  
I have to go. Give me a kiss.

Abby leans over, spilling the milk shake all over the bed.

ABBY  
Shit! See, that's why they don't  
want outside food in here.

MATT  
I'll get it, hon. Go to work.

ABBY  
Have them change the sheets. I --

MATT  
We'll be fine, we'll get it.

ABBY  
Give me a kiss. See you later.

Abby kisses Katie and Matt, grabs her briefcase, and leaves.

KATIE  
Daddy, I need to buy Ann's present.

MATT  
I know. (nods) We'll go Saturday.

INT. SURGERY PREP ROOM - DAY

Through a window, Matt watches a Nurse shave Katie's head. She grins, rubs her dome, flashes their okay sign. Matt flashes okay. Out of her view, he holds a milk shake.

INT. HOSPITAL CHAPEL - LATER

Matt, alone in the back pew. Beside him, the milk shake.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - EVEN LATER

Abby writes on a legal pad. Matt smokes and looks out a window onto a courtyard below. He watches a MAN push what appears to be a BUNDLE of BLANKETS in a child's SWING.

Dr. Kim, in surgical scrubs and booties, mask loose around his neck, approaches and speaks to Matt and Abby. By their reaction, the surgery went well.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL GARDEN - DAY

A NURSE steers Katie's wheel chair into a patch of sun. Katie looks pale. She wears a hat and a lilac sweater.

A young bohemian, JACK, 20s, shaggy hair, jeans, poncho, sandals, WHITTLES a small chunk of WOOD.

COPPER, his golden retriever, sleeps by an acoustic guitar, a pile of shavings, and a chewed on stuffed animal of a LAMB.

Katie, curious, unlocks her wheels, and scoots over.

KATIE

Hi.

Jack doesn't look at her. He continues to whittle.

JACK

Hello.

KATIE

What's his name?

JACK

Copper. He's a police dog.

KATIE

Hi, Copper. Sleeping on the job?

Copper picks up his stuffed lamb, and rests his big, regal head on Katie's lap. She tugs at the lamb. He tugs it back.

KATIE

What are you making?

Jack looks at Katie.

JACK

Not sure. It's not finished yet.  
It'll come to me, though.  
Something will take shape. Most  
things become clearer with time.

KATIE

You must have something in mind.

JACK

No, not really. It's in the wood.

KATIE

What if you cut something you need?

JACK  
Then it will be what it becomes.  
And that part was unessential.

KATIE  
Like a compromise?

Jack grins -- quizzical, charmed.

JACK  
I prefer artistic expression.

KATIE  
Oh, an artiste. So what are you  
doing here, Mr. Artiste?

JACK  
I like it here. It's peaceful.  
There's a good feeling here.

Katie looks at the other patients and makes a doubtful face.

KATIE  
I think they might disagree.

JACK  
Not if they thought about it.  
You're closer to God's heart in a  
garden than anywhere else on earth.  
So why are you here?

She lifts her hat up, revealing a railroad track of dark  
sutures and purplish bruises against her pale, bald head.

KATIE  
The hot wax and shine.

JACK  
It's working.

KATIE  
I had a glee --

Katie concentrates and pronounces the tumor phonetically.

--o-blas-toma. It's a brain tumor.  
Size of a walnut. They cut it out.

JACK  
Does it hurt?

KATIE  
Not all the time.

JACK  
How do you get that?

KATIE  
You send for it, through the mail.

Jack looks at her oddly, smiles, continues whittling.

KATIE  
No one knows. It just happens.

JACK  
So are you cured?

KATIE  
They're not sure. I have to come  
back every week.

JACK  
You must be very brave.

Katie shrugs.

KATIE  
No choice.

JACK  
You always have a choice.

The Nurse returns --

NURSE  
Time to go Kathleen.

-- pivots the wheel chair. Copper plants a wet kiss on  
Katie's nose. She scrunches her face and giggles in delight.

KATIE  
See ya' . . .

JACK  
Jack. See you around, Katie.

Katie plays with Copper. Jack looks at the Nurse.

JACK  
(in Slavic with English  
subtitles)  
Take good care of her, Katherina.

The Nurse, her name tag evident, is startled to hear her  
native tongue. She smiles, warmer now, friendlier. The  
unanticipated pleasure of encountering someone from home.

NURSE  
(in Slavic with English  
subtitles)  
I will. Where are you from?

JACK  
(in Slavic with English  
subtitles)  
Futog. Spend time with her.

KATIE  
(jokingly)  
Are you two talking about me?

JACK  
Of course.

The Nurse wheels Katie away. Copper drops the lamb, sits, and whines his displeasure. Jack stares at the chunk of wood, then watches Katie recede in the distance.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - NIGHT

Matt holds a shake and flowers. He stares at the courtyard below. The same MAN pushes a BUNDLE of BLANKETS on a SWING.

NURSE  
You can see her now, Mr. Burnes.  
Visiting hours are til eight.

Matt turns, startled, as if awakened from a dream.

MATT  
Oh, okay. (pause) Thank you.

He looks back, drawn hypnotically, at the courtyard.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Katie appears to be asleep. A pink scar beneath spiky hair.

MATT  
I guess I'll have to drink this  
chocolate shake all by my lonesome.

She doesn't move. He looks at her face, then her chest.

MATT  
Katie. KATIE. Wake up, sweetie.

He listens for breathing, shakes her arm. Vigorously. Finally, she rouses and spots the shake on the night stand.



KATIE

Oh, hi daddy. Oooh, a shake!

She misses Matt's sigh of relief, and pops the straw open.

MATT

How are you feeling?

KATIE

Better now! How's everybody?  
How's gram? How's mom?

MATT

Oh, they're fine. Mom sends her love. She wishes she could visit more, but she's very busy at work.

KATIE

I understand. Tell her not to worry. Do you think he did it?

MATT

I'm not sure sweetie. I hope not.

KATIE

Mom wouldn't defend someone who was guilty. (sips her shake) Would she?

MATT

I'm sure your mother believes he's innocent.

KATIE

Does an electric chair plug in?

MATT

No. It sends an electric current through your body, until you die.

KATIE

Ugh, creepy. I don't think I like that. Does your heart explode?

MATT

No, your heart just (considers her) stops. Beating. Enough of that. Was the hippie in the garden?

KATIE

Jack is a perfect gentleman. He's not a hippie. You should meet him.

MATT  
I think I better.

KATIE  
And Copper is the best dog in the  
whole world. He's so pretty.

MATT  
Prettier than you?

She rolls her eyes and takes a long sip of chocolate shake.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - LATER

Matt walks down the hall, stops abruptly. Coming toward him,  
a MAN carrying a BUNDLE of BLANKETS disappears into a room.

INT. ST. PETER'S CHURCH - NIGHT

Matt kneels before the Neumann Shrine. His eyes are closed.

INT. LAW OFFICE - NIGHT

Abby works, dressed casually. An untouched carry-out dinner  
and the Reynolds family photo sit beneath the desk lamp.

INT. BURNES HOME, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Matt, Gram, the kids are crammed on the couch watching TV.

KATIE  
Good night, Gram.

GRAM  
Good night sweet pea, sleep tight --

KATIE  
-- don't let the bedbugs bite.

A PHOTO of ROBERT REYNOLDS flashes on the screen.

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)  
The Third Circuit Appellate Court  
will hear the appeal of convicted  
murderer Robert Reynolds.

A PHOTO of ABBY appears next. The kids react wildly --

THE CHILDREN  
Mommy! Mommy!

MATT  
Sssh! Pipe down.

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)  
 Reynolds will be represented by  
 former assistant DA Abigail Burnes  
 who has never lost a case. But not  
 everyone is pleased by the news.

ON TV

Media swarm a courthouse. ANDREW CARR is interviewed.

ANDREW CARR  
 How many trials is he gonna' get?  
 They already convicted him. That  
 nigger murdered my little girl.

Gram winces, stands, and shuts off the TV.

GRAM  
 Come on my little chickadees,  
 school tomorrow, time for bed.

The kids say good-night as Gram ushers them out. She glances  
 back at Matt. He stares straight ahead at the dark screen.

INT. BURNES HOME - NIGHT

The house is dark. Abby comes home, drops a heavy briefcase,  
 hangs up her coat, kicks off her shoes, trudges into the  
 kitchen, and collapses at the table. She thumbs the mail.

Matt, in pajamas, slips in silently. She jumps --

ABBY  
 Oh -- you scared me. I didn't  
 think you'd be up. How was she?

MATT  
 A little stronger. Kept her dinner  
 down. Even the spinach.

ABBY  
 Good. (yawns) Today was hell. A  
 case I cited in the Reynolds' brief  
 was overturned. So, that's out.

MATT  
 She wants to get a dog. (awkward  
 pause) Her new friend Jack brings  
 his golden to the visitor's garden.

Abby removes her wristwatch, earrings, and rings.

ABBY

A dog? No. The last thing we need is a dog. Just more work. (yawns)  
Who would take care of it?

MATT

I could. (nods, convincing himself)  
She asked for you. She asked if you thought Reynolds was innocent.

ABBY

Huh? I'm sorry, I didn't hear you.

MATT

That's okay. Go to bed.

ABBY

No, don't do that. I'm alright.  
What did you say?

MATT

She asked if I thought you thought Reynolds was innocent.

ABBY

What did you tell her?

MATT

I told her you must. To be working this many hours.

ABBY

Matt. It's capital punishment.  
It's a man's life. I can't let up.  
I thought you understood that.

MATT

I do understand that. I just wish you would spend more time with her.

ABBY

I will. As soon as this is over.  
You have no idea what it's like.  
And, yes, I believe he's innocent.  
His family is counting on me.

Abby collects her jewelry. Exhausted, annoyed, frustrated.

ABBY

I need to sleep. I'm going up.  
Good night.

She pecks at his cheek like a pet bird and leaves.

MATT  
(whispers to himself)  
We're counting on you, too.

EXT. HOSPITAL GARDEN - DAY

Copper snoozes beside his LAMB. Katie, in a new HAT, plays Jack's guitar. He positions her fingers on the frets.

KATIE  
(strums and sings, slowly)  
The answer is blowin' in the wind.

JACK  
Good. Keep that up and you'll be  
touring with Bob in a few years.  
Just don't go electric on me.

Jack takes the guitar and pick from Katie.

KATIE  
Who invented music?

JACK  
No one. It's always been there.  
Like a gift. God speaking directly  
to our hearts. The notes are you  
and me. Individuals.

Jack plays notes, chords, then richly layered music.

JACK  
But when they connect with each  
other, they create something more,  
something exquisite. Endless  
arrangements. Infinite potential.

Plato said music touches the  
innermost reaches of the soul.  
When you listen, music carries you  
to a clear and peaceful place.

He puts the guitar down, removes a BUNDLE from his knapsack,  
unwraps a KNIFE and the chunk of WOOD, and starts to WHITTLE.

KATIE  
I like talking to you and Copper.  
I can talk about stuff I can't talk  
about with my mom and dad.

JACK  
Oh, yeah, what kind of stuff?

Katie points to her head and frowns.

KATIE  
I wish they wouldn't worry.

JACK  
You're their child.

KATIE  
They can't do anything about it.  
It's like the song -- que sera.  
Right, Copper?

He cocks his head and plants a sloppy kiss on her cheek.

KATIE  
You're such a handsome boy.

JACK  
Do you ever think about dying?

KATIE  
Hmmm, sometimes.

JACK  
Ever wish you could speed it up.

KATIE  
No.

JACK  
What if the pain was unbearable and  
there was no hope.

KATIE  
No. Why are you talking like that?

JACK  
You never wish it was over?

That one stings. Her eyes are full and moist.

KATIE  
I wish I didn't throw up. I wish I  
could still play basketball. But  
every day brings something good.  
Like seeing you, you handsome boy.

She shakes Copper's head. He bathes in the affection.

JACK  
Do you believe in heaven?

She nods, as if there never was any doubt.

JACK  
How can I get there?

KATIE  
Love God. And have faith.

JACK  
What about doing unto others?

KATIE  
If you love God and have faith,  
everything else falls in place.

Copper growls and throttles the LAMB side to side.

KATIE  
Did you know that dog spelled  
backwards is god?

JACK  
I better start feeding him better.  
Nothing but steak from now on, bud.  
(a beat) Can dogs go to heaven?

KATIE  
No, they don't have a soul. But in  
my heaven, I'd make an exception.  
He's got a big heart. Doncha' boy?  
You deserve to go to heaven.

Copper puts his nose in the air and shakes his butt proudly.

JACK  
That seems fair. It's your heart  
that sees what truly matters. Not  
race, age, status, money. Until  
you see with your heart, your soul  
remains unawakened.

INT. PUBLISHER'S OFFICE - DAY

Matt bounces a Spaldeen. Schmidt files thick manuscripts.

SCHMIDT  
Not a problem. We'll postpone it  
until you're ready. (wedges in a  
file) How are things at home?

MATT  
Not good. She's working sixteen  
hour days. Weekends. Never home.

SCHMIDT  
It's got to be tough on her.

MATT  
Do you think he killed that girl?

A long look. Schmidt nods. The file drawer slams shut.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - NIGHT

Matt looks onto the courtyard. Mesmerized. The same MAN pushes the BUNDLE in the SWING. Dr. Fitzgerald approaches.

DOCTOR FITZGERALD  
That's Mr. Castaldi. And his  
infant son, Francis.

Matt turns, startled, then back to the window.

MATT  
Why is he bundled up like that?

DOCTOR FITZGERALD  
Cockayne's syndrome, a rare genetic  
disorder. He can't fix mistakes in  
his RNA, the material that makes  
new proteins. They usually die by  
two. He's fifteen months.

Matt opens a new pack of cigarettes. They sit down.

DOCTOR FITZGERALD  
I first met him in the newborn ICU.  
Something was clearly wrong.

Matt holds out the pack with one cigarette protruding out.

DOCTOR FITZGERALD  
No thanks. And you should quit.  
He only weighed three pounds. He  
has extraordinarily small eyes and  
malformed ears. A profound loss of  
vision and hearing.

Dr. Fitzgerald holds up a seemingly crippled hand.

DOCTOR FITZGERALD  
Joints so contracted he cannot  
extend his hands or feet. His skin  
burns with the slightest exposure.  
He got his first sunburn in the two  
hour car ride here. Completely  
covered. On a cloudy day.



MATT

God, what a miserable life.

DOCTOR FITZGERALD

Cockayne's children suffer a progressive loss of hearing, sight, smell, and touch. Christ, even Helen Keller could feel and smell.

MATT

Why are kids like that even born?

DOCTOR FITZGERALD

Mr. Castaldi has provided him as rich a life as possible. He stayed by his bedside throughout cataract surgery, a tracheotomy, and feeding tubes. He even takes him on vacation. By driving at night.

Matt shakes his head, equally amazed and depressed.

MATT

Where's Mrs. Castaldi?

DOCTOR FITZGERALD

She died. (a beat) In childbirth.

INT. ST. PETER'S CHURCH - NIGHT

Matt prays at the Neumann Shrine, head bowed, eyes closed.

MATT

Please, God. Please save her. Don't let her die. Not her. Not my Katie. Let her be okay. I'll do anything. Anything you ask.

EXT./INT. STATION WAGON - LATER

Matt cranks the ignition. It won't start. A car circles, parks, and three BLACK MEN get out. They approach Matt.

MATT

Ah, shit! What do I have on me?

Matt hides his watch beneath the seat. One man, a toothpick in his mouth, motions for Matt to roll down his window.

MAN

Yo, brother, you got gas?

MATT  
Yeah, a full tank. Listen, I don't  
want any trouble.

The Man grins and glances at his two friends.

MAN  
No man, we don't want any trouble.  
You got cables?

MATT  
No.

MAN  
Tell me you got a jack.

MATT  
Yes.

MAN  
Good. Get it out.

The Man maneuvers his car directly in front of Matt's car  
until the CHROME METAL BUMPERS touch. He pops his hood.  
Matt hasn't budged from his car.

MAN  
C'mon homes, we ain't got all  
night. Get the jack.

Warily, Matt goes to the trunk and hands him the JACK.

MAN  
Now pop the hood and get back in.

From around the hood, Matt sees the Man make a turning key  
motion. Matt cranks it. It CHUGS, CHUGS, CHUGS, kicks over.  
He guns it, VRROOOM, gets out and walks to the front of the  
car. He sees the JACK touching the positive terminals of  
each battery as the METAL BUMPERS provide the ground.

MATT  
That's amazing.

MAN  
Ol' mechanics trick. Works like a  
charm.

MATT  
Can I give you something?

MAN  
Nah, man, that's alright. Besides,  
if we wanted money --  
(arches his eyebrows)  
-- we woulda' robbed you.

Matt stands by his car as they drive away. Without thinking,  
he glances down at his watch, but sees only his bare wrist.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - DAY

Dr. Fitzgerald holds Natalie. Dr. Kim greets Matt and Abby.

DOCTOR KIM  
Hello Mr. and Mrs. Burnes. Can I  
speak with you, in private?

Matt glances at Dr. Fitzgerald -- Go ahead, I've got her.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Fitzgerald reads Katie's chart as Natalie sits by her bed.

NATALIE  
You're gonna' get better?

KATIE  
Natty, I'll always be okay.

NATALIE  
When grandpa was here, he never  
came back home.

KATIE  
Hey, remember the lightning bugs?

She nods, a little sad. Fitzgerald looks up from the chart.

KATIE  
Every summer, I want you to collect  
a jar of them. And promise me  
you'll let them go. Promise?

NATALIE  
I promise.

KATIE  
Why?

NATALIE  
So they can live forever.

KATIE  
And how will you know?

NATALIE  
By their blinking lights.

KATIE  
And what are they saying?

NATALIE  
I'm okay. How are you?

Fitzgerald looks at Katie with affection and admiration.

INT. DOCTOR KIM'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Dr. Kim points to a series of skull x-rays.

DOCTOR KIM  
We have to be cautious, but I think  
I have some good news.

MATT  
Oh, thank God . . .

DOCTOR KIM  
There's no evident shadow. We'll  
continue the treatments as planned  
and recheck the x-rays every month.

MATT  
That's great news, doc. Thank you.  
Thanks so much. Can she go home?

DOCTOR KIM  
Yes. Same restrictions and I still  
want to see her every week.

Matt and Abby embrace. She glances at her wristwatch.

ABBY  
She's going to be okay. (pause)  
Listen, I'll see you at home. I  
have a meeting at the prison.

Abby leaves. Matt and Dr. Kim consider each other. Matt  
turns and, unexpectedly, touches the x-ray of Katie's skull.  
His fingertips linger over where the tumor had been.

INT. PRISON VISITORS' AREA - DAY

Around a gray metal table, Abby confers with Robert and  
Denise Reynolds. The Reynolds children look on respectfully.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Matt maneuvers Katie's wheel chair like it was a race car.

KATIE

Hey Mario Andretti, can we make a pit stop? There's someone I want you to meet.

EXT. HOSPITAL GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Katie pours water into a bowl for Copper as Jack whittles.

MATT

Where in New York?

JACK

The east village.

KATIE

We should get a dog, daddy. Isn't he magnificent?

Copper drops his LAMB in Katie's lap -- Play with me!

MATT

He is, sweetie. We will, sometime. What do you do there?

JACK

I'm a student. NYU.

MATT

Good school. What are you studying? Do you live on campus?

KATIE

Can we get a dog this weekend?

MATT

Maybe not this weekend. Let's talk it over with mom.

JACK

She really loves him. When I come here, he cries and moans until he spots her. Music theory. I live off campus.

KATIE

Daddy, do you think Copper could go to heaven?

MATT

I'm not sure, sweetie. I suppose it would be alright. What brings you to Philly?

JACK

Family. She feels safe with him. Problems are easier to bear. As if they melt away when she's with him.

MATT

In the city or --

Jack holds up a hand to interject.

JACK

Mr. Burnes, (nods toward Katie)  
don't miss these moments.

At first, Matt is annoyed. Then he sits back, visibly more relaxed. He watches Katie play tug of war with Copper. Laughing, giggling, enjoying one of life's simple pleasures.

KATIE

You're such a handsome boy, Copper.  
What would I ever do without you?

INT. CHURCH, FIRST COMMUNION - DAY

Little BRIDES on one side, little GROOMS on the other. Katie looks back at her parents with dark sunken eyes. She adjusts an obvious wig beneath a white veil. Father Doyle holds his knee as he climbs the steps to a hand-carved oak pulpit.

FATHER DOYLE

A reading from the prophet Isaiah.  
The Lord who created you says, Do  
not be afraid for I have saved you.  
I will be with you at all times. I  
will not let anything hurt you.

Matt squeezes Abby's hand. She pats his hand reassuringly.

FATHER DOYLE

You are precious and wonderful to  
me, and I love you. You are the  
one I have chosen to know me and  
believe in me. There is no other  
God. No one can save you, but me.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

Children proceed up the center aisle to receive Communion from Father Doyle. At the front, a young girl blesses herself and returns to her seat. Katie steps up to him.

FATHER DOYLE  
Kathleen, receive the body of Our  
Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

KATIE  
Amen.

She closes her eyes and Father Doyle places Communion on her tongue. He puts his hand firmly on the top of her head, then traces the sign of the cross on her forehead. She opens her eyes and smiles at him. Filled with a genuine joy.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Katie, in a new HAT, and her friends, ANN and PEGGY, eat lunch. Katie notices a girl with braces sitting by herself.

ANN  
She's new. She's from Maryland.

KATIE  
Let's go sit with her.

PEGGY  
We don't even know her. What would  
we talk about?

KATIE  
Anything. Just stuff. Like what  
do you do for fun in Mary Land?

Katie joins the new girl. Ann and Peggy follow the leader.

BEGIN MONTAGE

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

Matt, Katie, and Charlie, the custodian, help Mr. Johnson load pink and blue bags, larger than before, into his van.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

SCOREBOARD: Home down by one, nine seconds remain.

In street clothes and new HAT, Katie diagrams a play. Her teammates cheer and run onto the court.

The play unfolds as the seconds tick down. SWOOSH. BUZZER. PANDEMONIUM. Matt and Katie celebrate the win. He looks up at the --

SCOREBOARD. TIME REMAINING: 0:00.

EXT. BURNES HOME, BACKYARD - DAY

Matt and Katie kneel beside a cardboard box. She holds an orphaned baby squirrel and nurses it with a doll bottle.

INT. DINER - DAY

Matt and Katie, in a new HAT, eat burgers at a booth. A waitress brings a chocolate SHAKE and winks -- on the house.

INT. BURNES HOME, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Matt watches from the doorway as Katie begins to play ODE TO JOY on the piano. She stops. She starts from the beginning. She stops at the same place. She starts again. She's unable to continue. She slams the piano shut and sits there, her hands placed flat on the wood as if poised to play.

INT. THE MAD HATTER SHOP - DAY

Matt and Katie try on goofy hats. He shows a salesgirl how to use his camera, then poses with Katie. The picture freezes as the PHOTO we recognize from the night stand.

END MONTAGE

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Katie, in yet another HAT, carries her books. In the b.g., a WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL banner hangs from the ceiling. She stops at her locker. From around the corner, she hears --

SNOTTY GIRL (O.S.)  
It was like a softball. She only  
has half a brain left.

GULLIBLE GIRL (O.S.)  
That's why she's so slow in class.

SNOTTY GIRL (O.S.)  
Yuck! I hope we don't catch it.

Laughter, lockers SLAM, footsteps trail off. From behind --

CHARLIE  
Miss Burnes, look what I got.

Charlie, the custodian, holds out a handful of CANDY HEARTS.



KATIE

No, Charlie. That's okay.

CHARLIE

But they're your favorite? (pause)  
Don't listen to those girls, Miss  
Burnes. They talk about me all the  
time. Say I got half a brain, too.

He pops a huge bunch of candy hearts in his mouth.

CHARLIE

I got a whole one.

He smacks his lips, really enjoying those candies.

CHARLIE

But I guess only half works.

He holds out a handful of candy hearts. Now she takes some.

CHARLIE

Try ten at a time. You won't be  
able to feel your tongue.

KATIE

Wanna' go to the library?

His face lights up and they walk off together.

INT. PUBLISHER'S OFFICE - DAY

Schmidt hands Matt the photo of Matt and Katie in goofy hats.

SCHMIDT

We'll use this for the dust jacket.  
Let's shoot for Fall. The trial  
will be over, Abby will be home --

BRRRIIING, the phone.

SCHMIDT

-- you can promote the book. (into  
the phone) Schmidt. (removes his  
glasses) Can I tell him who's  
calling. (to Matt) Sister Theresa?

Matt looks at the phone like Clark Kent looks at kryptonite.  
He takes it, reluctantly, and holds it to his ear.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - LATER

Matt paces. Absolutely distraught. He looks like he's about to unravel. He spots Abby and bolts toward her.

ABBY

What happened? Where is she?

MATT

She had a seizure at school. They brought her by ambulance.

ABBY

Where is she?

MATT

Kim's with her, we can't go in.  
It's bad.

He sits, then leans forward with his elbows on his knees. He presses his head between his hands, like a vise, as if to keep it from splitting open.

ABBY

What's wrong?

He slumps back like a prizefighter beaten into his corner.

ABBY

Matt, what's wrong?

He looks at her, crying now, his face twisted in pain.

MATT

She can't see.

Abby steps back and sits down, deflated -- Oh God, no.

MATT

She can't see.

INT. DR. KIM'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

Matt and Abby listen as Dr. Kim points to skull x-rays. Tense. We cannot hear what is said. We don't need to.

INT. RECTORY - NIGHT

Matt trails Father Doyle through the rectory.

FATHER DOYLE

I don't have that kind of pull.  
The Vatican has an ongoing inquiry.  
His cassock is kept secure.

MATT

This may be her only chance. If it  
works, it may be the third miracle  
he needs. Who makes that decision?

FATHER DOYLE

The Bishop of Philadelphia. (pause)  
And the pastor at Saint Peter's.

MATT

How well do you know him?

FATHER DOYLE

We were in the seminary together.

Matt looks at him -- There it is.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- NIGHT

Dark. On the night stand, a crucifix, Bible, and holy oil.  
Katie lies motionless. Matt and Father Doyle kneel by her  
bed and pray the Our Father. Father Neumann's black CASSOCK,  
fragile and more than a century old, lies draped across her.

EXT. HOSPITAL COURTYARD - NIGHT

From a ground-level doorway, Matt watches CASTALDI push his  
son, FRANCIS, wrapped completely in a blanket, in the swing.  
He hesitates, then approaches.

MATT

Beautiful night.

Castaldi turns, then back in time to push the swing.

CASTALDI

(in an Italian accent)  
Yes, it is.

MATT

Matt Burnes, nice to meet you.

CASTALDI

Frank Castaldi. My son Francis.

MATT

I think we share a doctor. Jim  
Fitzgerald?

CASTALDI

Yes. He operated on Francis's eyes. A very kind man.

MATT

He told me about your son. I hope you don't mind.

CASTALDI

Oh, no. No. Not at all.

MATT

It must be very hard.

CASTALDI

I know I won't have him much longer. Every moment is precious.

In granite profile, Castaldi rocks Francis tenderly.

CASTALDI

Francis loves being outdoors. Swinging back and forth. I feel his whole body relax, his breathing becomes less labored. He's calm. Serene. (a beat) And I believe, for a little while, he experiences joy and beauty.

MATT

Forgive me for saying this, but do you ever, you know, get . . . angry -- at God, for --

CASTALDI

God created my son. He may not have made him perfect, but He loves him the way he is. Maybe more.

And soon, on the other side of those stars, Francis will be with Him. Perfect. In a way that you and I cannot imagine.

Matt, lips pursed, jaw clenched, struggles to speak.

MATT

What makes you believe that?

CASTALDI

Faith, Mr. Burnes. What else is there?

MATT  
I see. Well . . . good night.

Matt turns away. Castaldi gently stops the swing.

CASTALDI  
Would you like to push his swing?

Caught off-guard, Matt looks anxious and uncertain.

MATT  
Are you sure it's okay?

CASTALDI  
What could happen?

Matt approaches. He checks the safety bar. He gives the swing a gentle push and watches the little BUNDLE soar to and from the heavens. Matt seems more peaceful. Serene. After a while, he motions for Castaldi to step back in.

MATT  
Thank you. That was kind of you.

CASTALDI  
You're very welcome.

Castaldi catches the swing and holds it close to him.

MATT  
Well, take care. Good night.  
(pause) Good night Francis.

Matt touches the BUNDLE. The touch becomes a caress. The caress becomes a lifeline. He starts to cry, lifts a thumb and forefinger to his eyes, and turns away, embarrassed.

MATT  
I'm sorry.

CASTALDI  
Mr. Burnes?

Matt turns back to him. Tentative. His eyes are wet.

CASTALDI  
He created your Katie, too.

Matt cocks his head, quizzical, starts to --

CASTALDI  
I believe we share a doctor.  
Francis and I will pray for her.

MATT

Thank you. What else is there?

INT. ST. PETER'S CHURCH - NIGHT

Matt straightens the wick of a new candle. He lights it and blesses himself. A half-empty box of candles is beside him.

INT. APPELLATE COURT - DAY

No jury. Two families worlds apart. Henderson at one table. Abby, Kevin, and Reynolds, in a polyester suit, at another.

JUDGE

When the amber light comes on,  
thirty seconds remain. The red  
light, sit down. Counsellor.

Abby stands, buttons her suit jacket and approaches a podium.

ABBY

Thank you, your Honor.

Abby's voice trails off.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APPELLATE COURT - MINUTES LATER

Behind Abby, a lurid enlargement of a bite mark in flesh.

ABBY

So any number of sets of teeth  
could have made these marks --

JUDGE

You've made your point. I'm not  
sure I agree with that conclusion.  
Move on.

The AMBER LIGHT comes on. She takes a sip of water.

ABBY

In Robertson versus Nebraska, the  
court ruled that a photograph of a  
footprint could not be compared to  
the defendant's work boot because  
there was no scale given.

She checks the light. Still amber.

ABBY

The lower court erred in allowing  
bite mark photos of the victim.

ANDREW CARR

The victim had a name. Ann Marie.  
Her name was Ann Marie.

JUDGE

Sir, I'll have to ask you to  
refrain from speaking out.

Abby looks rattled. A new experience.

ABBY

Furthermore, the defendant did not  
have competent --

JUDGE

Counsellor, choose your words  
carefully.

ABBY

Your Honor, a Legal Aid attorney,  
fresh out of law school, is not  
prepared for a case like this.

The RED LIGHT snaps on.

JUDGE

Thank you, now sit down.

ABBY

Had Mr. Reynold's prior counsel --

JUDGE

I said sit down.

ABBY

He would not have been convicted.

Abby catches Denise's worried look -- That didn't go well.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - NIGHT

Matt marches toward the window overlooking the courtyard.  
But the swing is empty and still. He nods and gazes at the --

SKY AND STARS

They twinkle and appear to fall as a light snow begins and  
steadily blankets the courtyard with grace and beauty. We  
feel much time has passed.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - NIGHT

Matt, now in a winter coat, turns from the window. Under bad fluorescent lighting, he's ashen, gaunt, unshaven. A little grey now apparent in the temples. He collapses in a chair, exhausted. He rubs his eyes. His mouth a wide gaping yawn. Beside him, a full ashtray and a milk shake.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

The milk shake beside a poinsettia. Katie lies comatose. Pale, thin, short hair. On IV fluids and a respirator. A Nurse checks her vitals as Matt closes his note book.

MATT

That's all I have so far, sweetie.  
You'll have to help me with the  
rest when you come home.

The Nurse glances at her. Katie does not respond.

MATT

Hey, I almost forgot to tell you,  
Brian scored a basket. You should  
have seen him. He was so proud.  
He did the chicken dance. Gram is  
making lasagna for Christmas.

She has heard these stories too many times. We sense she's been thinking this for quite some time.

NURSE

Excuse me, Mr. Burnes.

MATT

Yes?

She sits beside him in a comforting way.

NURSE

I've watched you visit every night  
for the past three months. I've  
listened as you've read to her as  
if she could respond. I've counted  
the chocolate shakes you've poured  
down the sink. It breaks my heart.

No one admires you more than I do.  
But I need to say this and, please,  
don't take it the wrong way.



Matt steels himself and nods, uncertain of what's coming.

NURSE

Katie is not going to get well.  
She won't ever be able to go home.

MATT

There's still a chance.

NURSE

Very slight.

MATT

But a chance.

NURSE

Mr. Burnes, I think you need to  
accept that Katie is going to die.  
For your sake, and hers.

Matt looks at her blankly. Stunned, confused, lost.

MATT

I can't do that. I can't do that.

NURSE

She needs to hear you tell her that  
it's okay to let go. She needs  
peace. You can give that to her.

MATT

I would give anything, if she could  
be okay. (bites his lip) Anything.

She takes his hand firmly. Matt closes his eyes, squeezes her hand, and sobs inconsolably. She holds him in her arms, like a mother, and over his shoulder, she sees --

KATIE

Eyes closed, pasty, gaunt, frail. Ravaged by the cancer.

INT. ST. PETER'S CHURCH - NIGHT

A bank of candles. Some lit, some not. A hand moves toward each lit candle, extinguishing the flame between thumb and forefinger. TZSE. Tiny plumes of SMOKE. From above, Matt stands before the smothered candles, turns, and walks away.

INT. RECTORY - NIGHT

Father Doyle watches Matt pace like a caged animal.

FATHER DOYLE

I know you don't want to hear this,  
but faith is not something you pull  
off the shelf when it's convenient.

MATT

How can He let this happen? How  
can He let her suffer like this?

FATHER DOYLE

God doesn't cause these things.  
What's happening to Katie is an  
offense to God.

MATT

What's happening to Katie is an  
offense to everything that is good.  
How can I have faith in a god that  
would let this happen to a child?

FATHER DOYLE

How can you not? Don't give up on  
prayer. Don't miss God's answer.

MATT

I didn't give up on prayer, Father.  
It gave up on me.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Jack slips in. Katie is still. He takes the morphine bottle  
from the IV pole and studies the pump that controls the rate.  
He straightens the tubing and hangs the bottle back up. He  
removes a small bundled cloth from his jacket and unfolds it,  
revealing a hand-carved WOODEN CROSS with a CROOKED STAFF.

JACK

You see with your heart, Kathleen.

With his thumb, he traces the SIGN of the CROSS on her closed  
eyelids, then places the WOODEN CROSS over her heart.

He kneels and bows his head. A long beat. He stands, kisses  
her gently on her forehead, and touches the wooden cross.

JACK

It is finished now.

EXT./INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Family and doctors. Silent. Numb. Father Doyle gives her  
the last rites. He comes out, dazed, eyes red and swollen.

Matt and Abby walk into Katie's room for the final time. For as long as they live, they will remember this as the worst moment in their lives. Monitors, BEEPING monotonously, intrude on their grief. In her hand, the WOODEN CROSS from Jack. Matt's face could crumble under the slightest touch.

MATT

Oh, sweetie, we have to say good-bye now. You have to go on without us. You'll be okay. You'll be in a better place. Wait for me and mommy. Pick us a good spot, okay?

He caresses her face and forehead with just his fingertips.

MATT

Remember our promise. Keep an eye out for that rainbow.

Matt weeps openly. Heart wrenching. A soul on fire. Abby places a hand on his shoulder, but is unable to comfort him.

MATT

You'll always be my little girl.  
My heart will never be the same.

Abby holds Katie's hand and bends to whisper in her ear.

ABBY

I'm so sorry. Please forgive me.

Katie squeezes her hand lightly. She glances at Katie's hand, then her face. The monitors fall silent. She's gone.

Matt and Abby, heartbroken, as the awful reality sinks in. He holds Katie's lifeless body in his arms, a hand supporting her head, and hugs her close. His sobbing descends into pitiful, wretched heaving. A painful release of emotion.

Outside the room, Drs. Fitzgerald and Kim cannot speak or swallow. Gram, tears coursing down her sturdy face, places Father Doyle's hand between hers. Matt walks out as if in a trance. Father Doyle places a timid hand on Matt's arm.

FATHER DOYLE

No one knows God's plan --

Matt holds up a hand -- Stop, not now.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Outside a viewing room, a FUNERAL DIRECTOR glances at his watch. He approaches Abby and whispers in a hushed tone.

Abby nods. He walks back to the room and peers in. The room is empty except for Matt, alone in the first row. Before him, Katie's profile in a small WHITE CASKET. The director enters tactfully. He places a hand on Matt's shoulder.

FUNERAL DIRECTOR

Mr. Burnes. (no reaction) We have to close the casket now.

INT. CHURCH - LATER

Packed. Family, friends, classmates, familiar faces. At the foot of the altar, her WHITE CASKET. Abby and the children sit stoically in the first pew. Father Doyle looks on as Matt eulogizes Katie. His eyes are swollen and red as he struggles to find the words. He looks up in pain to the sound of 200 broken hearts.

MATT

I'm sorry. I can't do this. It's just too hard.

Matt turns to leave the altar and spots Mr. Castaldi seated off to the side, alone. The image of grace and courage. Castaldi's look seems to hold Matt in place. He nods to Matt -- You're okay, go on, you have to do this. Matt turns back.

MATT

She was such a good kid. Always thinking of others. She used to get off her bike and walk it over Mrs. Gallagher's sprinkler so she wouldn't hurt the hose. Such a cheerful optimist. Wasn't she? She wanted to be a teacher. She would have been a great one.

Sister Theresa closes her eyes. Beside her, Charlie, the custodian, looks down at his clenched fist. He opens it, fingers rising slowly. Two CANDY HEARTS stuck together.

MATT

I'll miss her so much. I'll miss her laugh. And her mischief. How will I ever find my keys?

I guess she was only loaned to us. To learn from, to grow by, to love. At some point, we must give back everything we borrow. Sometimes --

Matt looks over at Castaldi.

MATT  
-- even our children.

Mrs. Gallagher, the elderly neighbor, shakes her head, bewildered -- Why her, why not me?

MATT  
She saw the good in everyone. And helped us find it in ourselves. I should be more like her. Let's remember her that way. And find comfort in her life and the joy we felt by simply being with her.

He walks to the casket and touches it as if he was touching her. Tears run down his face as he bends to kiss it.

MATT  
Good-bye, sweetie. I'll think of you every day. You may be gone, but you'll never leave me.

INT. BACK OF THE CHURCH - LATER

Matt embraces Castaldi. Something in the last pew catches Matt's eye. What is that? A slow realization. The STUFFED LAMB that belonged to Copper. He looks around, puzzled.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Matt, Beth, Brian, and Natalie eat dinner in silence.

BATHROOM - NIGHT

Matt wraps Natalie in a towel, lifts her from the tub, and dries her hair. She turns toward him and, for an instant, he sees KATIE instead of Natalie.

DEN - DAY

Matt slouched in front of a typewriter. A clock at 3:00 p.m.

EXT. SCHOOL - DAY (DAYDREAM)

From his car, Matt watches kids Katie's age run from school beneath a banner wishing them a safe summer.

EXT. SUBURBAN SIDEWALK - DAY (DAYDREAM)

Katie rides a bicycle with a bright purple seat. She gets off and walks the bike over a green garden hose.

DEN - NIGHT (END DAYDREAM)

It's 6:30 now. He's roused by the sound of a KEY turning in the front door. He hurries to feed the typewriter.

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Steve Romano spots Matt and ducks down an aisle to avoid him.

INT. PARTNER'S MEETING - DAY

Abby struggles to stay engaged, but the VOICES fade and disappear. We hear only the silence engulfing her.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Matt stands outside a closed bedroom door. Knocks softly.

MATT

Beth? Dinner's ready.

No answer. After a while, he walks away.

BEDROOM - NIGHT

Abby asleep on her side. The other half of the bed is empty.

LIVING ROOM - DAY

Matt sits at the piano, his hands on the closed keyboard.

BACKYARD - DUSK

Matt and Natalie release lightning bugs from glass jars.

ATTIC - DAY

Matt places Katie's hats into an antique wooden trunk.

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

From the bleachers, Matt watches a girls' basketball game.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Matt kneels by a grave. He removes weeds and brown leaves.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

From above, Matt is alone in unending rows of headstones.



ABBY(cont'd)

My work doesn't afford me the  
luxury of grief. People depend on  
me. I have three trials in the  
next two months. I have to focus.

Matt drinks his wine. A long beat.

ABBY

She was my daughter too.

They eat in silence.

ABBY

Are you going to speak to me?

MATT

What do you want me to say?

The Waiter returns.

WAITER

How is everything?

MATT

Just fine. Thank you.

She smiles. The Waiter leaves. They sit in silence.

MATT

How can you do it?

ABBY

Do what?

MATT

Stop thinking of her. Move on.  
You don't even speak her name.

She looks away, exasperated, then back.

ABBY

I have to stay busy. It's better  
that way. For me.

MATT

I feel like we're in two different  
places. Do you think your client  
appreciates the sacrifice you made?  
There was so much you missed.

His words cut deep and she struggles not to cry in public.

ABBY

I stop, I die.



An extended beat. He regards her without blinking.

MATT

Maybe that's our problem.  
Because when she died, I stopped.

The Waiter is back.

WAITER

Would you like the dessert menu?

A long, awkward silence.

MATT

Just the check please.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Abby works at her desk. The intercom buzzes.

JOAN (O.S.)

Clerk's office on two. The  
Reynolds decision.

Abby answers the phone. She grunts acknowledgements. She slams the phone down, then pounds the desk with her hand.

ABBY

Damn it! Damn it!

An opened package sits on her desk. Another first edition by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *THE BEAUTIFUL AND DAMNED*, lies beside the photo of the Reynolds family smiling back at her.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. PHILADELPHIA STREET - DAY

Carrying groceries, Matt walks aimlessly down an urban street. He's thin, disheveled, oily hair, scraggly beard. He climbs a graffitied staircase into a low rent apartment building. From a parked sedan, Father Doyle eyes him.

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

A wreck. Plates with caked on food. Trash can stuffed with old garbage. Stacks of mail and newspapers. A pile of laundry. Matt unpacks the groceries -- nothing nutritious here. TV dinners, chips, toilet paper, beer.

HALLWAY

In front of a door, Father Doyle rehearses his lines.

## FOYER

A BUZZER. Matt mopes in, checks the peep hole. Hesitates. Annoyed. Then he opens the door, guarded, uninviting.

FATHER DOYLE  
Hello, Matt. How are you --

Matt goes to shut the door. Doyle grabs it, holds it open.

FATHER DOYLE  
Let me finish. How are Abby and  
the children?

MATT  
How'd you find me?

FATHER DOYLE  
Can I come in?

MATT  
Suit yourself.

Doyle steps in. Matt walks away. Doyle closes the door.

FATHER DOYLE  
I haven't seen you in church.

MATT (O.S.)  
Well, Kevin, I don't see the point.  
I don't get much out of it.

## KITCHEN

Doyle walks in. A disgusted look comes over his face.

FATHER DOYLE  
Whew, time to change the kitty  
litter.

Matt stuffs a donut in his mouth, talks with his mouth full.

MATT  
I don't have a cat.

Matt goes to the fridge, pulls out two beers. POP, POP.  
Offers one to Doyle.

FATHER DOYLE  
It's nine o'clock.  
(off Matt's look)  
No thanks.

## LIVING ROOM

Matt carries in two beers. Doyle follows past an empty desk.

FATHER DOYLE  
Working on a new book?

No answer. Matt removes a pile of clothes from a beat up sofa and drops them on the floor. He motions to Doyle.

MATT  
Have a seat. Can I get you  
anything? Coffee?

FATHER DOYLE  
Tea?

Matt leaves. Doyle stands with his hands in his pockets.

MATT (O.S.)  
How do you take it?

FATHER DOYLE  
Milk and sugar. Thanks.

Doyle walks toward Matt's desk and gazes at a photo of Katie before the illness. Suddenly a voice intrudes --

MATT  
Wasn't she a beautiful child?

FATHER DOYLE  
Uh, yes. She, she certainly was.

They sit on the second-hand sofa, Matt takes a swig of beer.

FATHER DOYLE  
You have a handle on that?

MATT  
No, (considers the bottle) but that  
would make 'em easier to drink.

FATHER DOYLE  
You know what I mean.

MATT  
I'm fine. What's it matter. It's  
all bullshit. We all die someday.  
Then what? Nothing.

FATHER DOYLE  
Is that it? Give up? Stop living.

MATT

Don't start.

FATHER DOYLE

Maybe Abby has a point.

MATT

Not for nothing, Kevin, but you don't know what it's like to raise a child. Bathe her, feed her, pace the floor. Do homework, teach her piano. Imagine her graduation and wedding. Allow yourself to have dreams for her. Then watch her slip away. An hour at a time. (a beat) Until her time runs out.

He crumples an empty cigarette pack, throws it on the floor.

FATHER DOYLE

Don't give up on prayer.

MATT

I prayed like I never prayed before. I would have given anything. Anything. If He had only answered my prayer.

When I buried Katie, I buried my faith, too. Maybe some people go on. They process it or whatever the hell they call it. Put it behind them. Good for them. I mean that. Good for them. But I don't know how to do that. I don't know how to go on without her. She was -- my joy. And He could have saved her. But He let her die.

Doyle leans back, removes his collar, loosens his top button.

FATHER DOYLE

You know I'm Irish.

Matt looks at him, chuckles -- Is the Pope catholic?

FATHER DOYLE

But I grew up in England. My father moved for steady work. Then the war broke out. So much for the luck of the Irish. When London was bombed, my dad's factory was the first hit. I never saw him again.

(MORE)

FATHER DOYLE(cont'd)

My mother took me and my sisters to a shelter in a church. We were safe. But, God, we were so hungry.

One morning, mum went to look for food. She was quite a woman. She was on her way back, walking fast, balancing some apples in her apron. I waved to her, to hurry up.

A plane came out of nowhere. Droning. Like an insect. It strafed the street. She bled to death before I could reach her.

He places a sofa pillow on his lap, hugs it unknowingly.

FATHER DOYLE

At first, I blamed everyone. Hitler, the Nazis, the whole damned war. But I never blamed God. I think of her every time I celebrate Mass. Now and then, different memories sneak in.

The way her eyes sparkled when our family gathered around the dinner table. How she laughed at the world and all its troubles. The smell of warm bread on her blouse.

Doyle holds the sofa pillow close to his chest. He closes his eyes and SMELLS the bread imperceptibly.

FATHER DOYLE

And for as long as I live, the one thing I'll never forget. The memory that is with me always. Her sacrifice and selflessness.

When I need to remind myself, as even priests do, of God's presence in this sometimes dark and dirty world, I think of her.

He gave me a glimpse, however brief, of His great love.

Doyle looks at Matt. An extended beat, direct, unblinking.

FATHER DOYLE

I suspect He gave you a glimpse of it as well. What you do with that gift . . . that's up to you.

The tea kettle is screaming by now. Relentless.

MATT  
I'll get that tea.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - NIGHT

A car's exhaust puffs pale, blue smoke. Matt sits alone behind the wheel, engine running, across from the home he once shared with Abby. He looks like he hasn't bathed in weeks. He smokes and exhales a SMOKE RING. He spots the children run past a window. In his mind, he hears --

MATT (V.O.)  
God damn it, Katie, how many times  
do I have to tell you? Stop  
running in the house.

-- and flinches at the memory, closing his eyes to block out a regrettable loss of patience. He hangs his head. The smoke RING drifts until it slowly comes apart.

INT. MATT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Matt slumps on the shabby sofa. He looks awful. With his right hand, he applies intermittent pressure to the crook of his left elbow, causing a vein in his forearm to engorge, then subside. Engorge, then subside. Engorge. Subside. He sits watching the rhythmic filling up and letting down.

INT. MATT'S APARTMENT - DAY

In different clothes, Matt rouses from the sofa, stretches stiffly and shuffles to the kitchen. He spots a letter under the apartment door. He reads it. Is that a slight smile?

INT. BURNES HOME, DINING ROOM - THANKSGIVING NIGHT

Abby, the kids, Gram, and Matt finish pumpkin pie. Abby and Matt are as cautious as two teenagers on their first date.

MATT  
That was delicious. Even better  
than I remembered.

NATALIE  
Daddy, can you read me a story  
before bedtime?

Matt glances at Abby -- Sure, that's fine.

MATT  
Of course, Natty. Which one?

NATALIE

The Lazy Ant Farm by Matt Burnes.

MATT

That's my favorite. He's such a good writer. So under appreciated.

Matt chuckles and smiles at Natalie with affection.

ABBY

Actually, there is one other thing.

BASEMENT

Abby and Matt stand in front of the washing machine. He wipes his hands on a rag and tosses it into a tool box.

MATT

That should do it. (teasing) Until the next time you overload it.

ABBY

It was Beth. She's been helping out. I hate to be critical.

Matt plugs the washer in. It spits electrical SPARKS, then FLAMES, then BLACK SMOKE. He hurries to unplug it.

MATT

It may need a little work.

A beat of remembered old times. Finally, the dam breaks. They burst out laughing. Infectious, doubling over, tears streaming down their faces, soothing their wounded souls.

TOP OF BASEMENT STEPS -- CONTINUOUS

The kids eavesdrop. Natalie grins impishly, Beth raises a finger to her lips, and Brian does his CHICKEN DANCE.

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- LATER

Matt holds a book and starts to close a bedroom door.

NATALIE

Can you come over tomorrow night?  
You know what Friday means!

MATT

We'll see. Okay? Go to sleep.

She's disappointed. Matt shuts out the light.

NATALIE

Daddy?

He peers into the DARKNESS, unable to see her.

NATALIE

We're still here.

Her honest feeling registers on Matt's face.

MATT

Thank God for that. Good night,  
sweetie. (pause) Friday night?  
Is that still macaroni and cheese?

He walks down the hall and stops in front of a closed door.

KATIE'S ROOM

Unchanged since her death. Matt sits on her bed. He lifts her lilac SWEATER to his face and breathes in. He tries the purple lamp, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, but it does not come on.

MATT

Never did get to that. When you  
were sick, I kept going on the hope  
you'd be all right. I didn't have  
time to feel. Now. Now it's worse  
than ever. I'm in trouble sweetie.

Clinging to her sweater, Matt cries inconsolably.

MATT

I'm lost. I don't know what to do.  
I don't know how to go on, I don't  
know if you're safe, I don't know  
if I'll ever see you. I don't know  
how I'll ever find you.

He kneels by her bed and rests his head sideways so that his cheek touches her comforter. He closes his eyes.

MATT

Oh God, please help me.

He stands, places her sweater on the pillow beside the stuffed collie, leaves. As he closes the door behind him, the LAMP comes on. He walks away. But then he stops, turns, and comes back. He stares at the closed door. Uncertain.

He opens the door, slowly. LIGHT spills out of the room. He sees the purple LAMP, burning brightly beside her bed.



INT. MATT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A series of shots of Matt typing feverishly. His fingers barely keep pace with his thoughts. CLACK, CLACK, CLACK, CLACK. WHIRRR. DING. An overflowing ashtray, an empty coffee pot, and a growing stack of pages.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PUBLISHER'S OFFICE - DAY

A thick manuscript falls onto Schmidt's desk with a heavy THUD. Three titles -- KATIE'S ROOM, THE PURPLE LAMP, THROUGH THE EYES OF AN ANGEL.

MATT  
Merry Christmas.

Schmidt looks up, sits back, and removes his eyeglasses.

SCHMIDT  
Working titles?

MATT  
Three books. Don't change a word.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. BOOK STORE - DAY

Matt and Schmidt at a book signing. Behind them, an easel holds a blow up of the dust jacket for THE PURPLE LAMP with best seller blurbs and pictures of Matt's other books.

A WOMAN, 30s, with two young children, puts down a stack of books. Schmidt opens one and reads from a slip of paper.

SCHMIDT  
To Allison and Douglas.

Matt stares toward the back of the line at a TEENAGE GIRL.

SCHMIDT  
Matt?

WOMAN  
You write so beautifully. They read your books over and over.

MATT  
Thank you. Thank you so much.

Matt smiles at the kids, then makes a monster face. The kids giggle and laugh. Schmidt leans over and whispers --

SCHMIDT

I told you it would happen. Now  
your only worry is how to spend it.

Matt looks puzzled. He's never given that a thought.

INT. EXECUTION CHAMBER, TRENTON STATE PRISON - NIGHT

A drab, claustrophobic room. A dozen or so people on metal folding chairs. ANDREW and BARBARA CARR frozen by fear and hatred. The D.A., Bill Henderson, sits beside a BEEFY GUY with a crew cut, white socks, and a gold detective's shield in the breast pocket of his size 52 suit jacket.

Abby arrives late. Denise Reynolds spots her and turns away. Father Doyle nods to Abby. A curtain opens across a thick window, revealing Reynolds strapped in the chair. Head shaved. An electrode strapped on one leg. Humiliated.

WARDEN

Do you have any final words?

Reynolds nods. The metal skull cap CLANGS grotesquely.

REYNOLDS

Mrs. Burnes, I wanna' thank you for  
your work and for believin' in me.

Abby looks stunned. Robert looks at Denise for the last time. Denise looks back at him, her face wet with tears.

REYNOLDS

You know I love you. Raise our  
kids right. Tell 'em daddy was a  
good man who got caught up in some  
kind of mistake. It'll be okay.  
Our faith's gonna' make it right.

WARDEN

Is that it?

REYNOLDS

There's one fi, final thing.

WARDEN

Go ahead.

REYNOLDS

I hope I get this right.

He closes his eyes, takes a deep breath. An eerie calm comes over him. He speaks purposefully, without a stutter.

REYNOLDS

I confess to almighty God. And you  
my brothers and sisters. I've  
sinned through my own fault. In my  
thoughts and words. In what I've  
done, and what I failed to do.

ABBY -- She looks puzzled.

REYNOLDS (O.C.)

I ask Mary, the angels and saints,  
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

He nods to the Warden. Abby is horrified as the execution proceeds and Reynolds is electrocuted. Denise's sobbing echoes through the room until it becomes just unbearable.

Father Doyle shakes his head and stares down at a black rosary. He looks at Abby who has been watching his reaction.

INT. MATT'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

Matt types at his desk. A television provides background noise. Through a break in typing, he hears --

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)

In his final words, Reynolds  
recited a prayer acknowledging his  
sinfulness and asked his wife to  
never lose her faith. He will be  
buried in a private location.

Matt leans back and stares somewhere beyond the typewriter.

HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Matt drops a coin into a pay phone. A relentless DIAL TONE. Dials slowly, hangs up. The coin CLINKS into the return slot. Redeposits, dials rapidly. He shifts, turns, runs his fingers through his hair. After many RINGS, he hangs up.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - LATER

A blinding, horizontal rain.

EXT. FRONT DOOR, BURNES HOME - CONTINUOUS

Abby opens it. She is, at first, surprised, then softens.

MATT

Alone in the pouring rain. No hat, no jacket. Drenched.

MATT  
Cup of tea?

An extended beat as they consider each other. She smiles.

ABBY  
Lemon?

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. BURNES HOME, FOYER - NIGHT

Matt and Abby, older, dressed for a night out. Beth, now 13, Brian, 12, and Natalie, 10, run down the rules.

BETH  
Come straight home. No joy riding.

BRIAN  
And no smooching either.

NATALIE  
Can you bring home some ice cream?

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

Enjoying dessert are Matt, Abby, KENNETH HART, 30s, an accountant, and DAVE ROSS, 40s, an attorney, who organizes recently signed documents into several neat stacks.

DAVE  
With non-profit status, corporate sponsorship, and the profits from your books, the Foundation will be financially sound for many years.

MATT  
I want you both on the committee to select the neediest families.

DAVE  
I'll draft the application.

ABBY  
I'm taking a leave from the firm.  
(slides a folder to Dave) Here's information on two children without a father. We're going to establish college funds for each of them.

KEN

I hate to sound like an accountant,  
but we have to be clear on what  
expenses will be covered.

MATT

The goal is to help as many  
families as possible. Anything  
else? (looks around) Good.

Everyone seems satisfied. Matt lifts a wine glass.

MATT

Then, to the Halo Foundation.

Glasses CLINK, cheers abound, Matt hands out HALO lapel pins.

DAVE

You're going to make a difference  
in many people's lives.

KEN

Mr. Burnes, what gave you the idea?

Abby and Dave look at each other, then Matt. A long beat.

MATT

Oh, you try to see the world  
through the eyes of a child.

INT. BURNES HOME, UPSTAIRS OFFICE - DAY

Abby, older, writes on a legal pad. She hears ODE TO JOY on  
the piano. She listens, then goes downstairs to investigate.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Abby pauses in the doorway. Matt plays ODE TO JOY. Beside  
him on the piano bench is Natalie, now 12.

MATT

Your sister loved playing this.

NATALIE

Daddy, can you teach me to play it?

Abby closes her eyes and lets the music wash over her.

FADE TO BLACK:

ON A POSTMARKED ENVELOPE -- OCTOBER 4, 1977, BOSTON, MA

OVER TO THE SENDER -- REVEREND KEVIN J. DOYLE

INT. BURNES HOME, DEN - DAY

From the envelope, an older Matt removes a LETTER and a NEWSPAPER ARTICLE. He opens the letter and reads --

FATHER DOYLE (V.O.)

Dear Matt. I read Boston is now the tenth city to start a Halo Foundation. Truly inspiring. The kind of thing Katie would do. She would be proud. Faith is belief in prayer even when it seems no one is listening.

I thought you may like to know that a third miracle, the healing of a young girl in Italy, was approved by the Vatican. I've enclosed an article. I hope you find some comfort in this news. Say hello to Abby and the children. Kevin.

He unfolds the NEWSPAPER ARTICLE. The headline: VATICAN DECLARES JOHN NEUMANN A SAINT. He's drawn in hypnotically. From the desk, he removes a hand-held magnifier and holds it over the article. He leans in closer. Seems agitated and doubtful. Then he gets up and walks out.

ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

From an antique wooden trunk, Matt lifts out a small BOX.

DEN - CONTINUOUS

Matt hurries in, puts the BOX on the desk, removes the lid. He looks back and forth from the ARTICLE to the BOX. He holds the magnifier over the article. Incredulous. He sits down. He folds the article and places it in his WALLET.

INT. JUDGE'S CHAMBERS - DAY

Abby, older, glasses, writes at her desk. Kevin Reilly, heavier, grayer, pokes his head in and KNOCKS on the door.

KEVIN

Your Honor, got a minute?

ABBY

Hi, Kevin. Sure. What's up?

Kevin saunters in, drops his briefcase, plops down across from her. He looks apologetic for opening an old wound.

KEVIN  
Remember the Reynolds case?

Abby puts her pen down, her smile fades -- Of course.

KEVIN  
The one prior he had? Endangering  
a minor. (pause) A young girl.

ABBY  
Right. The family didn't press it.  
They told the detective their  
daughter made up the story.

KEVIN  
Well, that girl's in high school  
now with my oldest. I'm at a game  
last week and I run into Detective  
Polowski. Remember him? The one  
who arrested Reynolds and found the  
panties. That girl is his niece.

Abby removes her glasses and leans forward.

ABBY  
He never disclosed that.

KEVIN  
I did some digging. Three unsolved  
murders of young girls. All of  
them after Reynolds was executed.  
Remember Ann Marie Carr's trachea?  
In the sixties, Polowski was the  
PAL's weight lifting champ three  
years in a row. He could bench  
five hundred pounds.

Abby sits back and absorbs the news with some skepticism.

INT. DETECTIVE'S OFFICE - DAY

Abby sits across a gray metal desk from STEFAN POLOWSKI,  
older, but clearly the detective at the execution. His short-  
sleeve, starched white shirt strains against massive biceps  
and a shoulder holster. If he has a neck, it ain't showing.

POLOWSKI  
I didn't think it was relevant.

ABBY  
Not relevant? Your niece accused  
Reynolds of exposing himself. You  
don't see a conflict of interest?

POLOWSKI

What's done is done. The guy was a pervert, he got what was coming to him. He won't hurt another girl.

ABBY

Detective, this is a serious breach of ethics. A man was executed on your testimony, and you had a conflict you did not disclose.

POLOWSKI

I nailed that fucker so he wouldn't beat a conviction cause of some god-damned, bleedin' heart mouth-piece like you.

ABBY

You set him up.

He stands up. A VEIN on his temple bulges and snakes into his crew cut. The muscles over his jaw tighten and twitch.

POLOWSKI

Watch your mouth. I got three years to go. I ain't about to lose that cause of some bitch like you.

ABBY

We'll see about that.

He lifts a thick TELEPHONE BOOK and POUNDS it onto his desk. Abby flinches at the sudden violence.

POLOWSKI

We'll see about dick, lady.

ABBY

I better be going.

POLOWSKI

Fuckin' right, you better be. And if you know what's good for you, you'll keep walking. Understand?

ABBY

Are you threatening me?

Enraged, he RIPS the telephone book in half and SLAMS it down on his desk. Abby looks at the shredded pulp.

ABBY



INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Abby, younger, in front of the slide projector.

ABBY  
Her trachea was crushed, then  
severed. With bare hands.

INT. DETECTIVE'S OFFICE - DAY (END FLASHBACK)

Abby stares at him, horrified -- Oh, my God. It was you.  
She moves toward the door, opens it, and looks back at him.

ABBY  
Don't underestimate me detective.  
And don't plan on that pension.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A SQUEEGEE MAN looks puzzled. He reaches into a fast food bag, pulls out a burger, and a \$100 bill clipped to a Halo Foundation business card inscribed "PLEASE CALL."

EXT./INT. MATT'S CAR (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

A smeared WINDSHIELD. Matt chuckles and shakes his head.

INT. ST. PETER'S CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Matt stands before the Shrine to Saint John Neumann and the bank of candles. He kneels, makes the sign of the cross, and lights a candle. He watches the flame struggle to take hold, then, once lit, glow and burn brightly. Close on the flame --

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL LOBBY - NIGHT (RETURN TO PRESENT TIME)

Abby, 71, sips a cup of coffee by an elevator. The doors open. She starts to enter, then steps aside for ELENA RODRIGUEZ, 35, and her three CHILDREN. The oldest, MARIA, doe-eyed, twelve going on fifty, wears a Phillies cap.

ELENA  
Judge Burnes?

ABBY  
Yes?

ELENA  
I'm sorry to bother you. I know  
you're a busy woman.

ABBY

Oh, no bother. Can I help you?

Abby presses the doors open button in the elevator.

ELENA

I'd like you to meet my children.  
Theresa is seven. Daniel is ten.  
And this is Maria. Today is her  
birthday. She's twelve.

ABBY

Well, it is certainly my lucky day  
to meet such beautiful children.

ELENA

Maria received the most blessed  
news today. There's no sign of the  
cancer. And it's been two years.

ABBY

I'm so happy for you sweetheart.

ELENA

Judge Burnes, when --

ABBY

Please, Abby.

ELENA

(pauses, smiles)

When Maria was first sick, I didn't  
know what to do. I had no help.  
She was afraid to be alone. I  
couldn't leave her in the hospital.

ABBY

It's a very hard thing for a family  
to go through. Especially alone.

ELENA

A friend told me about the Halo  
Foundation. They were so kind.  
They made sure Maria received the  
treatments she needed. And they  
arranged for me to stay with her.  
A determined young woman, Colleen,  
was assigned our guardian angel.

Elena lifts her lapel -- a small gold ring, a HALO.

ELENA

She bought groceries, cooked, did laundry, and ironed their school clothes. She read them a story every night. They love to read.

Abby smiles at the memory of Matt and the reading program.

ELENA

Some nights I had to stay late at the hospital. When I'd get home, she'd be dozing on the couch. (reflects) Such an angel. They were bathed and tucked in bed. Homework done, shoes polished, book bags in a row by the front door.

ABBY

Maintaining a normal life for the other children is so important.

ELENA

A counsellor spoke with me. In my own home. I could not begin to tell you what that meant to me.

A moment between them. So different, but so much the same.

ELENA

I gave up my second job so I'll have more time to spend with her.

Abby looks far away. She manages a faint smile.

ABBY

That's a choice you'll never regret.

ELENA

There is so much pain and suffering in this world, Mrs. Burnes, that sometimes we miss its beauty and kindness. In all the noise, we do not hear God's whisper. But your husband heard it, clear and true.

ABBY

He saw a need and tried to help.

ELENA

I pray for him every night. I know he'll be in heaven soon.

(MORE)

ELENA(cont'd)

Please tell him about my Maria.  
Tell him she's going to be okay.

ABBY

I will, thank you. He's a good man.

Elena smiles at Abby's modesty and shakes her head.

ELENA

The world is full of good men, Mrs.  
Burnes. Your husband . . . is a  
saint. (nods) A saint.

Maria smiles at Abby. For an instant, just as the elevator doors close, Abby sees KATIE instead of Maria.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

Doctor Conway, who we recall from the beginning, sits with Abby, Beth, Brian, Natalie, and Father Doyle.

DOCTOR CONWAY

He's very weak. I've increased the  
morphine. If you have anything to  
say to him, now's the time.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Matt is asleep. The Orderly we remember from the beginning watches him and glances back at the door. He walks over to Matt, reaches under the covers, and takes the object Matt clutches to his chest. Matt stirs, disoriented at first.

MATT

No! No! Give me that!

ORDERLY

You don't need it anymore.

The Orderly now holds the hand-carved WOODEN CROSS with a CROOKED STAFF that Jack gave to Katie.

MATT

That was hers. Everything I did  
was for her.

ORDERLY

(now a familiar voice)  
I know. That was the miracle you  
prayed for.

MATT

He looks at the Orderly. Absolute astonishment. It's JACK.  
He hasn't aged.

JACK  
Each life has one great test. When  
she died, you stumbled. But you  
stood back up. You lost your  
faith. She led you back to it.

Matt looks around, disoriented -- How can this be?

JACK  
Her death changed your life. It  
made you see with your heart.  
Perhaps, for the first time. Your  
life then made a difference. But  
your prayer was answered not  
because of what you did. It was  
your faith that saved you.

Matt struggles to sit up.

MATT  
Katie? Katie?

Jack eases him back down. He glances at the door.

JACK  
Listen to me. I have to go. You  
cannot imagine the wonders God has  
prepared for you.

Jack motions for Matt to stay calm, then --

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

-- as the Orderly leaves, family and friends enter.

MATT  
Katie? Katie?

Matt lapses into a prolonged coughing fit. Doctor Conway  
adjusts the oxygen and morphine. Matt collapses, weak,  
exhausted, dying.

ABBY  
Oh, Matt, please, calm down.

MATT  
That was him, Natalie, that was  
Jack. He took the cross.

Abby and Natalie look skeptical. Natalie holds his hands in hers. She knows this is it. He motions for her to lean in.

NATALIE

Daddy?

MATT

(whispers)

Believe.

Crying, she squeezes his hands, kisses him on the forehead.

NATALIE

I always have.

He looks up at Abby. She leans in.

MATT

Don't ever (deep breath) give up  
(another breath) on prayer.

He drifts off. Abby and Natalie sit beside him. Friends and family circle the bed. The grandchildren shift awkwardly.

Matt sees whirling, dream-like figures. Dying? Morphine?

Abby pours a glass of water. The LIGHT from the purple LAMP strikes the GLASS like a prism, casting a RAINBOW into a corner of the room. Matt's gaze follows it. Abby and Natalie see him look toward the corner. Nothing there.

Familiar faces cross his sight. In the corner, beside the rainbow, he begins to see a FIGURE, hazy, out of focus. More people cross. As they become hazy, the figure becomes a little clearer. It seems to be a CHILD. Abby and Natalie gaze into the corner. Again, nothing.

Matt sees the CHILD, clearer still, as a YOUNG GIRL in a lilac dress, head down, back toward him. He begins to smile. Abby and Natalie exchange puzzled looks -- What's he doing?

Matt sees the GIRL turn toward him, as in a dream. She lifts her head. It's Katie. Beautiful, radiant, whole. She smiles and makes an OKAY sign. On his face, a look of perfect joy and peace. She bends down on one knee and hugs a golden retriever, COPPER, who licks her chin repeatedly.

Matt struggles to lift his hand. Slowly, he makes a feeble, but determined OKAY sign. Abby and Natalie look to the corner. They see no one. But now they look as if they read each other's minds -- Could it be? Suddenly, his arm drops with the sound of letting go and the monitors fall SILENT. He is, at last, at peace.

A Nurse comes in, shuts the monitors off, checks his pulse.

NURSE  
I'm very sorry.

As an afterthought, the Nurse hands something to Abby.

NURSE  
Did one of the children lose this?

ABBY  
Oh, my --

Abby looks down at a ragged STUFFED LAMB. Natalie smiles, takes it from her mother, and places it on Matt's pillow.

NATALIE  
Here you go, pop. You lost it  
once. I'm glad you got it back.

We see the stuffed lamb, Matt's peaceful profile, the purple lamp, the photo of a young Matt and Katie wearing goofy hats, then, on the night stand, the yellowed newspaper article that Matt carried in his wallet all those years.

Again, the headline: VATICAN DECLARES JOHN NEUMANN A SAINT.

Beneath the headline, a grainy black and white photo of Saint John Neumann as a young priest.

He wears the black CASSOCK that will survive him.

In his hand, a hand-carved WOODEN CROSS with a crooked staff.

CLOSE ON

Father John Neumann's face. Clearly, it is Jack.

FADE OUT.

THE END