

✡ when i fell for traci reed 🖊

by
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EXT./INT. CEMETERY - DAY

Aged Jewish cemetery -- stained cement walls, iron gates with a Star of David woven in. Out front, a worn '79 Dodge Aspen.

JACK
I'm in trouble, Max.

On the passenger's seat, a pamphlet: "Nowhere to turn? Call 1-800-TROUBLE."

JACK (V.O.)
I mean, sure, you spent your teen years skipping school, raiding Mom and Dad's liquor cabinet and setting Hebrew School trash cans on fire.

Haphazard rows of graves, from shiny white beacons of wealth to tilted stones of neglect.

JACK (V.O) (CONT'D)
But even you never -- I can't say it.

The humble final resting place of "Max Heitner, Beloved Son and Brother, 1966-1983."

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Now I could slither out of this. No one would know except me, you and obviously...her.

Pacing before it is JACK HEITNER (17, Caucasian, wiry, disheveled in a white Who concert tee).

JACK (CONT'D)
Or I could stand up, face the music, be exiled from the family forever, and watch my future go up in flames.

He peters out, plops down at Max's grave, traces the engraving with his finger. In his head, SCREEEEEE...a car shrieks down a road and BANG! He rips his finger away.

JACK (CONT'D)
I need help, Max. For once, I need you to be a real big brother and tell me what to do. See, for 17 years I was exactly who they expected me to be. Who I set out to be. Who I'm supposed to be. Until six months ago.

Max's gravestone, Star Of David prominent above his name, superimposed over...

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - DAY

...a tired, tall brick twin in the "nice" section of gritty Norristown, PA, Chevy Celebrity and the Dodge Aspen from the cemetery stuffed in the tiny driveway.

JACK (V.O.)

When I met her.

The Star Of David from the gravestone now melds into...

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - COMBO DINING/LIVING ROOM - DAY

...a tiny, gold Star Of David necklace on Jack (youthful, unburdened, and dreadfully bored).

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The girl who blew it all to smithereens.

Table brimming with Jewish soul food and seven people -- mouths chewing, arms going, lively banter.

On one side of him, his first girlfriend HANNAH KLEIN (16, cute, innocent, trying to look engaged); on the other, his mother LANA HEITNER (48, worn, perpetually worried).

"UNCLE BEN" ROTH (53, mountain of a man), exasperated!

UNCLE BEN

Come on, Rho. Nobody's stealing it.

"AUNT RHODA" ROTH (50, fiery, red hair), insistent!

AUNT RHODA

So it disappears into thin air?

UNCLE BEN

No, they don't deliver it. You should see this paper boy, Jackie. Looks like an extra from *Deliverance*.

AUNT RHODA

Don't listen to him, Lana. Right off the porch it goes.

LANA

And I thought this neighborhood was going downhill, right Jackie?

Jack shrugs.

GRANDMOM (O.S.)

I know who's exactly who's doing it.

UNCLE BEN

Oh, here we go.

LILA "GRANDMOM" BARON (82, stern, dangling costume jewelry) chews angrily on a pumpernickel bagel, fired up as usual.

GRANDMOM (CONT'D)

It's that one next store. Heimbach.
German. Case closed.

Uncle Ben SNORTS, waves her off. Jack pleads "Walk?" to Hannah, who ignores him.

AUNT RHODA

Ma's right, Ben. Anti-Semite sure as
we sit here.

UNCLE BEN (O.S.)

According to you two Yentas
everybody's an anti-Semite. Girl at
Shoprte gives you wrong change?
Anti-Semite.

Hannah's parents RABBI DAVID KLEIN (45, youthful, bemused) and SHARON KLEIN (44, proper) at the end of the table, watching.

GRANDMOM

Then it's the ones across the street.

AUNT RHODA

The Baylors?

UNCLE BEN

Don't, Lila.

SHARON

German, too?

GRANDMOM

Shvartzehs!

RHODA

Easy, Ma.

GRANDMOM

What? Watch the news. That Louis
Farrakhan's no friends of ours.

UNCLE BEN

You think the Baylors hang out with
Louis Farrakhan?

Jack mouths *Please??* to Hannah.

SHARON

We have a Black couple a few streets over. Always so well dressed. Seems a girl's living there now. Have you seen her, Hannah?

Hannah shakes her head. Jack walks two fingers to her plate. She fights a giggle.

GRANDMOM

Norristown used to be all Jews.

UNCLE BEN

When? 1943?

LANA

Mom's right. When we were kids you could've held a Minyan in Math class, right Rho? Now it's black, blue, green. Not that it's a bad thing.

GRANDMOM

Oh, it's bad. The crime, the drugs--

RABBI KLEIN

We can all agree times change, eh?

AUNT RHONDA

Amen, Rabbi.

SHARON

Lana, thanks for having us. The congregation's been so generous since we arrived.

RABBI KLEIN

And tell Alan we missed him. Working on a Sunday, poor guy.

Conspicuous silence, downward looks.

GRANDMOM

Don't get me started.

AUNT RHODA

Mother!

LANA

It's OK.

(CONT'D)

LANA (CONT'D)

(pats Jack's hand)

I still have my rock until next fall,
then off to Penn State. He's going to
be a lawyer one day, right, honey?

Jack considers a protest, thinks better of it.

SHARON

And in a few years our Hannah will
follow her sister to Harvard, right
sweetie?

Hannah squirms inside her half smile.

GRANDMOM

(points at the kids)

Bah. What matters is raising a good
Jewish family. Six million of us
gone, you two have a responsibility.

JACK

But that was, like, 40 years ago.

UNCLE BEN

That's nothing!

GRANDMOM

Blink of an eye!

AUNT RHODA

It could happen again.

RABBI KLEIN

We must never forget.

They all stare at Jack and Hannah, who exchange a glance...

EXT. JACK'S NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

...and trudge down a tight street of copycat twin houses, both
bundled, cold, and wet, gloved hands linked.

JACK

Why don't they trust me? I mean I'm
dating the rabbi's daughter!

Hannah side eyes him -- that's all I am to you?

JACK (CONT'D)

The rabbi's awesome, brilliant, sexy
daughter who somehow agreed to give
this shlub the time of day.

She playfully smacks his arm.

JACK (CONT'D)

The Harvard thing must be a lot of
pressure.

HANNAH

Nah, no big deal, course I should get in so, um, at your school do you have actual, like, Black friends?

JACK

Me? Yeah. Sure, I mean not friend friends, but everyone's pretty cool.

HANNAH

Yeshiva's definitely not cool.

JACK

It's Jewish day school, Hannah. Kind of narrows the options.

HANNAH

Still, everyone's all boring and perfect and pompous. Except Micah.

JACK

Got his spell over you, too, huh?

HANNAH

Please. I'd have to fight through a million girls before I could convince the great Micah Greenbaum to have a secret affair with me.

JACK

Couldn't be secret. Micah and I don't keep secrets from each other.

HANNAH

You won't keep them from me, either?

JACK

Don't worry, Hannah. I never do anything worth keeping secret.

She leans up, pecks his cheek.

HANNAH

Come on. I'm freezing.

She pulls him around so they're headed back.

JACK

Noooo. Aunt Rhoda's gonna cry about how sad she is Reagan can't run for a third term and Grandmom's gonna...

JACK (V.O.)
 No, Hannah Klein is not smithereens
 girl. But for me, she was perfect.

She laughs as he pontificates away.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 So mark it down, Max.

EXT. "RECORD REVOLUTION" - DAY

Strip mall record shop -- "Record Revolution."

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 January 1st, 1988 and Jack Heitner's
 life is exactly where it should be.

INT. "RECORD REVOLUTION" - DAY

The Rolling Stones' "She's A Rainbow" PLAYS over neat racks of records and tapes. Aging hippie REGGIE RINKS (late 50s, Caucasian, white ponytail, tie-dyed Santana tee) marks Madonna cassettes with a price gun.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Then comes January 2nd.

Jack, "Record Revolution" badge on, sorts Pink Floyd albums.

JACK
 Everyone sells CDs, Reg. And why are
 these Floyd albums alphabetical?

REGGIE
 CDs. You know I don't trust lasers.

JACK
 Lasers don't, like, shoot out. I'm
 putting them chronologically. That's
 how a real fan would search them.

REGGIE
 Can't afford to stock CDs anyway.

JACK
 I thought it was our best Christmas
 ever.

DING! of a bell on the door, but neither looks.

REGGIE
 You know who'd understand? Your
 brother. To him even these--
 (CONT'D)

REGGIE (CONT'D)
 (waves a cassette)
 --were an affront to musical purity.

TRACI (O.S.)
 Uh, excuse me?

Pink Floyd's *The Wall* album in hand, Jack turns to TRACI REED (17, Black, warm brown eyes, designer jeans), fights to breathe, overtaken by her...everything.

"She's A Rainbow" reaches its DELICATE PIANO BRIDGE, the store disappears, and Traci turns into ANIMATED TRACI.

In a bucolic field, dress rainbow hued, she dances pirouettes ala the Oklahoma dream ballet. She's sweet and joyous and altogether beautiful...until she stops, faces Jack (and us).

ANIMATED TRACI
 You gonna help me or just stare like
 a dog in heat?

Jack jolts awake from Fantasyland.

JACK
 What?

REGGIE
 (funny look)
 She said she needs a tape, dude. Now
 if you'll excuse me, I need to go see
 a man about a horse.

He winks, heads for an open doorway in the back.

TRACI
 I'm looking for Nina Simone. Trust
 me, you've never heard of--

JACK
 Blues singer. Civil rights icon.
 "Strange Fruit." "Mississippi
 Goddamn." Lives in France now.

TRACI
 Damn, you go.

He leads them back. She follows, eyes on the window.

JACK
 Never listened to her, though.

TRACI
 Why? Too female or too Black?

JACK
What? No, I'm just more of a Who,
Zeppelin, Stones kind of guy.

TRACI
So the kind that likes white men who
steal Black music.

He flips through cassettes in the rack.

JACK
Having influences isn't stealing.

He hands one over, leads them to the front. She lights up.

TRACI
Greatest hits. Nice, RB!

JACK
Arby? Like the restaurant?

TRACI
RB. Record Boy. Your nickname.

JACK
It's actually Jack. Heitner.

TRACI
Traci Reed. You're Jewish, huh?

He looks back, thrown. She taps her throat. His necklace.

TRACI (CONT'D)
I know a lawyer named Heitner.

JACK
Another Jewish lawyer. Imagine that.

She cracks up. Jack slips behind the counter, rings her up as she slides him a ten.

TRACI
So you like it here?

JACK
My favorite place in the world. I'll
miss it bad when I leave for college.

TRACI
Hm. You find something you care about
that much? But it's your life.

The slightest pause, but he shakes her off.

TRACI (CONT'D)

Just wish I had a job I loved instead of working at sorry-ass Bradlee's.

JACK

My mom shops there. Clothes smell like moth balls. What do they--

TRACI

Damn! That boy doesn't quit.

Jack tracks her gaze to the window. MORRIS MANN (18, Black, tall and slender, glasses) climbs from a beat-up Ford, eyes on the store. She scoots for the back. Jack chases.

JACK

You know Morris? He goes to Norristown. Do, um, do you?

TRACI

Hoping I say yes?

JACK

No, no, I didn't--

TRACI

Psych! I'm at Bishop Kendrick. And Morris? Met him at a party, two dates later he's saying he loves me. Been avoiding his ass ever since.

JACK

Why?

TRACI

I don't want to hurt his feelings. Now do me a favor, say I'm not here.

JACK

What? No. I don't even know you!

TRACI

Shit, RB, we're old friends now.

She winks, darts inside the doorway where Reggie had gone. Jack stares out the window, panicked. Morris peers into a black Olds Cutlass in the lot.

JACK

I'm not lying for you. Everybody likes me because I don't lie.

TRACI (O.S.)

But you lie to yourself all the time.

He stares back, thrown, then front. Morris nears the store.

JACK

I'm not doing it. Come out because
I'm not doing it. I'm not.

TRACI (O.S.)

You ever tell someone you love them?

JACK

What? No.

Morris peers in the window. Their eyes meet, Jack petrified.

TRACI (O.S.)

Me neither. Too risky. I've had
enough pain. Bet you have, too, RB.

Startled, he looks back again. DING! Eyes wide, he turns.
Morris, up front, scans the store, starts toward Jack.

MORRIS

Hey, you see a girl come up in here?
Real good looking.

Jack blocks his way, glances back, hems and haws.

JACK

What? Me? Uh, nope. Sorry. No good-
looking Black girls here.

MORRIS

I never said Black.

Traci peeks out, panicked. Muffled Reggie HUMS the Beatles'
"She Came In Through The Bathroom Window" behind her.

JACK

What? No, I -- I guess I assumed--

MORRIS

What's back there?

Traci rips her head back out of sight!

JACK

You know. Back stock. Employees only.

Morris stares at the doorway, senses something, bites his lip.

MORRIS

Huh. Doesn't make any damn sense.

He gives up, marches out. Traci emerges with a killer grin. They watch Morris take a last look at the Cutlass.

TRACI
Nice work, RB!

Jack shakes his head, leads them back up front.

JACK
I don't get girls like you. He's going to Princeton next year. You have your pick of good guys but I bet you go for the bad ones every time. You must drive your parents nuts.

TRACI
I doubt it. Since they're dead.

JACK
Oh. Sorry. It's hard -- must be hard -- losing people.

She glances at him, touched, roots in her purse, yanks out a half-empty package of communion wafers, plops them on the counter, takes her cassette.

TRACI
Here. I stole them from the school chapel. Body of Christ. Not bad in a pinch. Something to remember me by.

She heads for the door, stops, turns, waves the cassette.

TRACI (CONT'D)
I'll play her for you sometime. When the mood's right.

With a wink, she's out. Reggie arrives, spots the wafers.

REGGIE
What are those?

Jack, mesmerized, watches her hop into the Cutlass.

JACK
Body of Christ.

REGGIE
Huh. Good to know.

PRE-LAP: Hebrew chanting

INT. SYNAGOGUE - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Men in prayer shawls and yarmulkes, some women with doilies on their heads, Rabbi Klein on the altar leading their CHANTS.

Jack with Lana, prayer books open; Aunt Rhoda, Uncle Ben, and Grandmom a row up.

Hannah, up front beside Sharon, peeks back at Jack, grins, winks. He smiles back, raises his eyebrows. She laughs, turns.

INT. SYNAGOGUE - ALL-PURPOSE ROOM - NIGHT

After services, the crowd hovers around tables of desserts and a massive bowl of punch. Jack and Uncle Ben fill plates with cookies. Lana and Aunt Rhoda nosh on goodies nearby.

HELEN KRAUSS (50, excessive makeup, sourpuss mouth) passes, nods at them, pauses.

LANA
Shabbat Shalom, Helen.

HELEN
Shabbat Shalom, how's everything?

LANA
Fine.

HELEN
Good to hear. Rhoda, nice to see you.

RHODA
Helen.

LANA
Jackie, say hi to Mrs. Krauss.

Jack nods at her, half smile.

HELEN
They grow so fast. I had him in Hebrew School, what, six years ago? Take care, Lana. You look tired.

Lana flashes a bitter smile. Helen shrugs, leaves.

AUNT RHODA
I never liked that woman.

LANA
Know what the kids call her? Sour Krauss.

Aunt Rhoda and Lana crack up.

UNCLE BEN

What are you two clucking about?

AUNT RHODA

That's half a dozen cookies. You know what Dr. Schulman said.

UNCLE BEN

I should listen to him? Man drinks like a chimney, smokes like a fish.

Jack laughs, sneaks a cookie from Uncle Ben's stash. Uncle Ben shoots him a mock stink eye. Grandmom approaches chewing a piece of rugelach, three more on her plate.

GRANDMOM

Tried these yet? Uch. Dry as a bone.

She downs another.

LANA

I don't see Ethel Bangowitz.

AUNT RHODA

Still at Montgomery Hospital.

GRANDMOM

It's the son's fault, you know. Minute he secretly started carrying on with that Shiksa from Cherry Hill, she keeled over.

UNCLE BEN

They said it was indigestion.

GRANDMOM

It was a vision!

LANA

I heard she was half Puerto Rican.

GRANDMOM

Everyone needs to keep with their own kind. They don't bother us, we don't bother them.

UNCLE BEN

(winks at Jack, to Lana)
So what would you do if Jack brought home a little senorita?

LANA

God forbid.

AUNT RHODA

Benjamin! You trying to make her keel
over like Ethel?

Jack and MICAH GREENBAUM (17, '80s hot, bobby-pinned yarmulke)
spot each other across the room. Micah nods towards an exit.

EXT. SYNAGOGUE - BACK ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Jack and Micah shiver, walk along the side of the brick
building. Micah devours a roast beef on rye in foil.

JACK

You see the spread in there?

MICAH

I needed real food, man. Haven't
eaten since yesterday.

Micah pulls a white envelope from his pocket, hands it over.
Jack extracts two concert tickets -- Culture Club.

MICAH

Next weekend. The Spectrum. You in?

JACK

No, Micah, I'm not friggin' in! Last
year you were listening to
Quadrophenia, Close To The Edge, now
it's Howard Jones, Boy George, and
the other poppy garbage you're into.

Jack tosses the envelope back.

MICAH

You're such a snob, Jackson. I can't
believe Wavy Gravy hasn't canned you
for insulting the customers.

JACK

Reggie's like family.

MICAH

Never trust a grown man in tie-dye.

Micah offers Jack a bite. Jack shrugs, obliges.

MICAH (CONT'D)

So I talked to your father-in-law.

JACK
Hilarious.

MICAH
He's letting me do a sermon.

JACK
Will your parents come?

MICAH
You kidding? Klein's not Orthodox enough for my dad, and my mom just follows orders. That's why I'm gonna be a reform rabbi -- it'll kill him.

JACK
What will you talk about?

MICAH
Whatever life brings.

JACK
More sucky music?

MICAH
Why, I oughta...

They laugh.

INT. CHEVY CAVALIER (MOVING) - NIGHT

After services, Jack drives, Lana beside him, contemplating.

LANA
I don't have to worry about you, do I, Jackie?

JACK
What?

LANA
Like Uncle Ben said.

JACK
Mom.

LANA
You know how important it is to me that you live the proper life. After all the tsuris I've had.

JACK
Mom, I know, OK? You of all people.

LANA

I know, sweetie. A mother worries.
Just need to hear it from the horse's
mouth every so often.

(a beat)

Listen, honey, when you meet your
father for breakfast, ask him what
his plans are, like when he's leaving
that farkakte apartment and coming
home already. Three months, enough's
enough. And make it sound natural.
Not like it's coming from me. OK?

He nods, uneasy. She smiles, pats his knee.

INT. DENNY'S - DAY

ALAN HEITNER (50, morning shadow, tense) gorges on eggs and
bacon. Jack nervously toys with his untouched pancakes.

ALAN

She put you up to this, didn't she?

JACK

No.

ALAN

Is it money?

JACK

She misses you.

ALAN

We all dealt with Max's death in our
own way.

JACK

You call moving out dealing with it?!

ALAN

You know what she said to me? Over
and over for five years -- what
happened to him is your fault, she
said. A husband, a father can only
take so much.

JACK

She didn't mean it. She's had it
hard.

ALAN

We've all had it hard. You included.
Don't forget that.

Thrown, Jack takes this in.

ALAN (CONT'D)

Just focus on school. I'll figure out what to do with your mother.

An idea hits Jack. He looks down, timid.

JACK

You know, what if I stuck around to help out? I could just, I don't know, work full-time at the store, save up more, start college in a year or two.

ALAN

What?! That's ridiculous!

JACK

(mumbles)

I mean it is my life.

ALAN

It's all our lives! We scrimped and saved for years to build up that account. The whole family put money in. You'll still need loans but six grand's nothing to sneeze at. That pays for almost two years.

JACK

But everyone could take their money back.

ALAN

Enough! I call deadbeats with defaulted car loans and your mother works for that quack eye doctor. That's why you're in a 1959 duplex in Norristown while the rest of the shul live like kings in East Norriton and Blue Bell. One day that could be you!

JACK

I don't care about that stuff.

ALAN

Then think of your mother. Take this away, you'll see her in real pain, and guess whose fault that'll be.

EXT./INT. CHEVY CAVALIER - DAY

The Chevy idles behind the restaurant, Lana in the driver's seat. Jack hops in, disturbed.

LANA
What'd he say?

JACK
He -- he said--
(looks away)
He said he misses you.

She faces forward, ecstatic but plays it cool.

LANA
Well, of course he does, Bubbelah. Of course he does. Now, a quick errand.

JACK
Where?

EXT. "BRADLEE'S" DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Busy lot of a mid-sized standalone department store, "Bradlee's" emblazoned on the front.

INT. "BRADLEE'S" DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

Shopping carts and affordable goods -- Target's ancestor.

JACK (O.S.)
Can we please go somewhere else?

Among circle racks, Lana holds up various pants to Jack's midsection. He looks about nervously.

LANA
Why, you're too good for Bradlee's now? You need these for shul.

His eyes shoot open at the sight of a Black girl in a red store smock, back to him, hair similar to Traci's. Panicked, he ducks down!

LANA
Stand up. What's wrong with you?

The girl turns -- a stranger. Whew! He stands.

JACK
Look, I have to get ready for work so can we go?

LANA

Oy, with that store. Your brother was the same. So you're five minutes late. You'll be there 'til dinner. Then it's you and me. I'm glad Hannah's understanding of our little date night. Some girls wouldn't be. She's a good egg, that one. You hold on to her. Just because you're going to college doesn't mean your eyes should get bigger than your stomach.

JACK

I'm crazy about Hannah, and God don't call it a date night.

LANA

And don't you be so serious. I rented "Guess Who's Coming To Dinner" for us, too. Sidney Poitier. So handsome. Go try these on.

She hands him every boy's dream pants -- royal blue cords!

JACK

I hate cords! They swish.

LANA

They're all the rage. Might be too tight in the crotch, though. Wear them out here so I can see.

Horrified, he grabs the pants, books for the fitting room.

INT. "BRADLEE'S" DEPARTMENT STORE - FITTING ROOM STALL - DAY

He yanks the stall door shut, unbuttons his pants -- THUMPTHUMPTHUMP on the door.

JACK

Oh my god, Mom!

Jack unlocks the door, opens it a sliver and in bursts Traci, name tagged and red vested.

TRACI

Record Boy! Saw you come in.

She locks the door behind her. He backs against the wall, hyperventilates, grits his teeth, holds his pants together.

JACK

My mother. Is right. Outside.

TRACI

Mm-hm. What are you doing tonight?

LANA (O.S.)

Jack! What's taking so long?!

JACK

Be right out!

TRACI

I'm taking you on an adventure.
Address?

JACK

What? No.

TRACI

I want to thank you for covering my
ass the other day. Besides, you said
hang out with nice guys.

JACK

I didn't mean me!

TRACI

Why? Mommy wouldn't approve?

JACK

No. I mean, I have a girlfriend.
People will get the wrong impression.

TRACI

What, like me and you were...
seriously? Boy, you crack me up.
We're just friends.

JACK

No, we're not.

TRACI

Fine, RB. We'll do this the hard way.

She slips out, Jack flustered.

INT. "BRADLEE'S" DEPARTMENT STORE - FRONT END - DAY

Row of registers. Lana and jumpy Jack approach cashier KARL
BUNDT (16, Caucasian, pimply). As Lana rests the pants on the
counter, Traci appears, Jack now filled with terror.

TRACI

Karl, wanna take your break?

KARL

Really? Lorraine. You're my density.

Karl zips off. Traci shakes her head, grins at Lana.

TRACI

Hope you folks found what you need.

She types in the SKU numbers.

LANA

Yes, thank you--

(studies her name tag)

--Traci? Thought you were Lorraine.

TRACI AND JACK

It's from *Back To The Future*.

They glance at each other, then away. Lana readies cash.

TRACI

Sorry, ma'am. Registers are down.

Checks only.

LANA

Check it is, then, dear.

JACK

Look, I have enough pants at home.

Lana pulls out her checkbook.

TRACI

(eyes glued on Jack)

Address is on there, right, ma'am?

Lana nods, writes while Traci bags the pants.

JACK

Seriously, I don't need these pants!

LANA

I know what's in that closet, Jack.

Listen to your mother.

TRACI

Yeah, Jack, listen to your mother.

She winks at Jack as Lana slides over the check. Traci studies it, hands Lana the bag.

TRACI (CONT'D)

Thanks, ma'am. We'll see you soon!

LANA
Thank you, hon.

As Lana heads out, Jack hangs back, whispers harshly--

JACK
Seven. Record Rev, not my house. Got
it? And we are not friends.

INT. "RECORD REVOLUTION" - NIGHT

-- Jack stocks a display of Bon Jovi's "Slippery When Wet"
cassettes, glances at the clock -- 4:25.

-- 5:30. He downs a sandwich in the stock room. From behind a
closed door nearby--

REGGIE (O.S.)
(loud whisper)
I know, I swear I'll get you the
money...no need for that, man, just
take a chill pill, OK? Hello? Hello!

TING! -- a receiver slams down. Reggie motors past Jack.

-- 6:10. At the counter, a customer plops a Bon Jovi cassette
on the counter. Jack shakes his head, smacks a *Led Zeppelin
III* cassette in its place.

-- 6:45. Jack alone at the counter, on the phone, turned away.

JACK
I know, I'm sorry, he needs me for
inventory...I don't know, late, I'll
make it up to you...love you, Mom.

He hangs up, sighs.

HANNAH (O.S.)
Excuse me, sir.

He spins, eyes wide, to Hannah perusing the Pink Floyd rack.

JACK
What are you doing here?!

HANNAH
I wanted to see my favorite salesman
before his big date.

JACK

What?

(glances outside)

I don't know what you're talking--

HANNAH

Uh, with your mother?

JACK

Oh. Right. Big date.

He scoots around the counter. She holds up a record.

HANNAH

Does he dress in pink or something?

JACK

No, Pink Floyd's a band, not a person, now I don't want Reggie to think I'm distracted so...

He heads for the door, assuming she's following.

HANNAH

Why is there a picture of a wall?

Eye roll. He turns. She holds a copy of Pink Floyd's *The Wall*.

JACK

Because that's *The Wall*! Now--

HANNAH

Do you own it?

JACK

I'm saving up. It's a double album and Max's copy is beat to hell.

He glances back, spots Traci's Olds pull up to the curb!

JACK (CONT'D)

I really gotta finish up here, date night and all so I'll call you--

She stops him with a deep kiss, deeper than normal.

HANNAH

Something to remember me by.

She spins, floats out the door, leaving him woozy.

EXT. SCHUYLKILL EXPRESSWAY/INT. CUTLASS (MOVING) - NIGHT

The Olds Cutlass flies down the highway. Traci, tight black top and jeans, at the wheel, Jack petrified.

JACK

Jesus, can you slow down!? This is the Schuylkill, not the Autobahn.

TRACI

What's that? Go faster?

She floors it! He grips the arm rest between them.

TRACI (CONT'D)

You tell your brother what you're up to tonight?

Jack stares at her.

TRACI (CONT'D)

Your boss mentioned him.

JACK

Oh. No. He died in a crash.

She slows waaaaaay down!

TRACI

Oh, shit, I didn't mean to--

JACK

It's fine. Who do you live with now since your parents, you know, died?

TRACI

My aunt and uncle.

Jack nods. Silence as she heads for an exit.

JACK

Now can you say where we're going?

EXT. NORTH PHILLY STREET - NIGHT

Desolate. They walk among boarded houses, a parking lot with broken glass and a chain link fence. Jack cowers, wide eyed.

JACK

I thought you said North Philly, not North Beirut.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

They stop at a huge metal door. Jack gapes at her.

JACK

Seriously?

Traci grabs the handle, turns, and CREEEAAAK!

INT. CLUB - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Heavy thumping hip-hop beats GROW LOUDER as they head down a dark hallway. They reach a black curtain.

TRACI

Just be cool, you won't stick out.

She yanks the curtain. They step atop a metal staircase above a packed, no-frills room mostly made up of a dance floor.

Jack gapes at the crowd -- all ages...and all Black. Eyes wide, he spins to leave, but she grabs his arm.

INT. CLUB - FLOOR - NIGHT

A pause in the music as they reach the edge of the floor.

TRACI

You ready?

JACK

For what?

"Push It" by Salt-N-Pepa IGNITES the crowd.

TRACI

Oh, shit! That's my new jam!

She grabs his hand, pulls him through the crowd.

JACK

Look, I really don't dance.

TRACI

Here? Everybody dances.

She busts into smooth, sexy moves. He watches, petrified.

TRACI (CONT'D)

Come on now.

Jack loosens up a bit with a head nod and a foot tap.

TRACI (CONT'D)
OK, there it is.

DAMONE WILKES (Black, 18, tight physique) shimmies up, admires her, dances inches behind. She looks back, rolls her eyes. He whispers. She nods at Jack. Damone SNICKERS.

TRACI (CONT'D)
What's so damn funny?

He grinds against her. She jumps forward.

TRACI (CONT'D)
Stop!

Damone shakes his head, heads off. Shaken, she dances again.

JACK
You OK?

She nods but her eyes say otherwise. He moves more, awkwardly but with heart, trying his best to lighten her up.

TRACI
Damn, boy. I knew you had it in you.

He breaks into the robot.

TRACI (CONT'D)
On second thought...

They crack up, move closer.

JACK
I'm the only white person here.

TRACI
Does that bother you?

JACK
Yes.

TRACI
Good. Now you know how I feel at school every day. Come on.

She points to her butt.

JACK
What?! I can't do that.

She shoves her butt near his crotch, gyrates. He freezes.

TRACI
Move your hips.

He does, slightly. They nearly touch. Damone watches, enraged.

EXT. NORTH PHILLY STREET - NIGHT

They walk, chattering, laughing.

JACK
I don't know what got into me. I was
actually dancing! I never do things
like that. Or this.

He can't help but stare at her. She looks down, grins.

DAMONE (O.S.)
Yo!

They turn. Damone jogs up from behind.

DAMONE
You ain't fuckin' him, are you? Boy,
she ain't fuckin' you, is she?

Damone crowds Jack, who tries not to soil himself.

TRACI
None of your damn business, Damone!

JACK
Uh, sure it is and believe me--

DAMONE
You keep away from a fine sister like
Trae here. Stick with Peggy Sue or
whoever the fuck. You hear me, boy?

Traci - TING! - flicks open a switchblade. Jack gulps.

TRACI
You'd better back the fuck up 'fore I
turn your face to chop suey.

Damone snickers, backs off, hands up, eyes on Jack.

DAMONE
You want a real man 'steada Opie
here, you call me, girl.

TRACI
In your dreams.

She grabs Jack's arm, pulls him along.

INT. CUTLASS (MOVING) - NIGHT

Rattled, Traci drives.

TRACI

Am I a scary person?

JACK

You mean that machete you carry?

TRACI

I wouldn't have thought twice about pulling a knife back in Camden, but now I feel different. Like something's wrong with me.

JACK

You're not scary. People who think so never walked in your shoes.

She glances his way, deeply touched.

EXT. "RECORD REVOLUTION" - NIGHT

Traci pulls up beside the Aspen in the otherwise empty lot.

INT. CUTLASS - NIGHT

He readies to get out.

JACK

Thanks. I mean it was fun. In a face-your-own-mortality kind of way.

TRACI

What's up next weekend?

JACK

Wait, Traci, come on, we can't seriously, like, be friends.

TRACI

Too late, RB.

JACK

No, see, you forced me into this.

TRACI

You said it was fun.

JACK

I know, but--

TRACI

Listen, this past year's been a shit show. New school, new neighborhood, everyone judging me. I need someone to be myself with. And you need someone who'll be real with you, 'cause from the looks of her, your girl sure as hell won't.

Jack stares at her.

TRACI (CONT'D)

I saw her when I pulled up. Cute. Dressed all proper. Bet she got money and she's dull as hell.

JACK

Look, Traci. Last year this white kid at my school got in like six fights 'cause he was always hanging out with this Black girl at Upper Merion.

TRACI

So if I was white, you'd be fine.

JACK

I didn't say that.

TRACI

Jewish, then. White and Jewish. Shalom, motherfuckers!

JACK

I don't know.

TRACI

Then you just don't like me.

JACK

That's not true! I swear to God. You're funny and smart and really--
(he swallows it)
Being friends with a girl, any girl, would be like cheating on Hannah. I'd never cheat. Ever.

TRACI

No?

She grabs his face, kisses him, quick but deep, pulls back.

TRACI (CONT'D)

Now get out.

He gapes, completely blown to bits.

TRACI (CONT'D)

Today, bitch!

She practically shoves him out.

TRACI (CONT'D)

(voice cracks)

Go live your perfect little life with
your perfect little girlfriend. But
you don't know yourself, Jack. You'll
never meet anybody ill as me who'll
give you the damn time of day!
Fuckin' nice guys, my ass.

She SCREEEECHES out of there. Jack, astonished, barely able to stand, touches his lips.

JACK (V.O.)

Shit.

INT. ASPEN - NIGHT

Jack drives, still dazed.

JACK (V.O.)

Shit, shit, shit, shit--

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - JACK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Small room, posters of rock Gods -- The Beatles, the Stones, The Who, Pink Floyd -- along with the Periodic Table and the State Of Israel. Jack lies wide awake on a twin bed.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

--shit, shit, shit, shit--

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Decor trapped in the 60's -- yellow paint, green appliances, wall oven. At the table, Lana GOSSIPs on an endlessly corded wall phone. Jack stares over his bowl of Froot Loops.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

--shit, shit, shit, shit--

INT. VIDEO STORE - DAY

Micah, yarmulke on, carries a stack of VHS boxes around the store, placing them in their spots on the shelves.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
--shee-yit!

Jack bursts in, agitated, runs up to Micah.

In front, manager GLENN MCNICHOLS (19, Caucasian, redhead) watches them closely.

MICAH
Jackson!

JACK
(speaks low)
Something happened last night. It's bad. Really bad.

MICAH
What, you and Hannah Fanna Fofanna finally sealed the deal?

JACK
What?! No! See, I met this--

GLENN
Soon as you two are done jerking each other off, there's a new shipment of tapes to unload. *Aliens*. Superior to the first one, by the way.

JACK
(softly)
I was, see I was with this--

MICAH
Bullshit, Glenn. All action, no horror.

JACK
--this girl and--

GLENN
You don't know horror from your asshole.

MICAH
And you swore *Evil Dead* was a --
(freezes, turns to Jack)
Wait, did you say girl?

Micah yanks Jack to the back of the store through a red curtain, "Adults Only" sign beside it...

INT. VIDEO STORE - PORNO ROOM - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

...and into a tight room with porn video boxes stuffed on the shelves. Jack stares at the debauchery around him.

MICAH
Now. What girl?

JACK
(nods at a video case,
his head sideways)
Can you really do that?

MICAH
Believe me, you can do anything you
put your mind to. So? Girl?

JACK
It wasn't my fault! She kidnapped me,
took me to North Philly.

MICAH
North Philly?!

JACK
And we almost got murdered. And then
she friggin' kissed me!

MICAH
Holy shit on a shingle.

JACK
And that's not even the worst of it!
She, well, she's...

MICAH
Jack, Jack, relax. Lemme guess. Blond
hair, blue eyes, right? The ultimate
Shiksa fantasy.

JACK
You're right about the Shiksa part.

MICAH
So you had a little taste of the
forbidden fruit. Big deal.

JACK
But I'm an adulterer now!

MICAH

Look, kid, you've got a good thing going with Hannah. Don't blow it over one little moment of weakness.

JACK

But I can't just pretend it never happened.

MICAH

You'd be surprised what you can do.

JACK

She'll see right through me!

MICAH

Then make a gesture. Something big. Like a commitment. Girls love commitments. Hm, hm, hm, let's see.

Then his eyes light up.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

Finished basement -- thin dark carpet, old sofa, TV cart with a clunky set and massive early '80s VCR.

HANNAH (O.S., OVER THE PHONE)

Are you sure?! That's months away.

Jack sits against the wall, to his ear the corded receiver from a dial desk phone on a little round table.

JACK

What can I say? I like commitments.

HANNAH (O.S.)

Then yesyesyes! Of course I'll go!

Jack closes his eyes, breathes out.

HANNAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I can't believe it. Me at a real prom! I'll get a pink dress -- like Pink Floyd! We'll go to a fancy steakhouse first and...

EXT. RHODA AND BEN'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Small twin house in a well-kept neighborhood, square yard out front, everyone neat and tidy.

INT. RHODA AND BEN'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Uncle Ben and Jack play chess at the table of a boxy dining room, living room through an opening on one side, couch and piano visible. On the other side, a doorway to a kitchen - CLANK of dishes and WATER RUNNING. Jack makes a move.

UNCLE BEN
Hm. Big step, Jackie.

JACK
I moved a pawn.

UNCLE BEN
No, I mean the prom. You know the rule. You can't break up with a girl once you ask her or else seven years of heartache.

JACK
Really?

UNCLE BEN
It's true. I speak from experience.

AUNT RHODA (O.S.)
(yells from the kitchen)
He speaks from his tuchus!

Uncle Ben waves her off, Jack uneasy.

INT. SYNAGOGUE - SANCTUARY - DAY

Jack sits beside Lana. Hannah turns back from the front with a bright smile. Jack offers a nod. A whisper tinges his ear--

TRACI (O.S.)
Hey. RB. Back here.

He slowly turns. In the last row, Traci, Bradlee's vest on, blows him a sensuous kiss. He turns front, so pale he's clear.

INT. "RECORD REVOLUTION" - SALES FLOOR - DAY

1970s rock PLAYS overhead in the store. Jack and Reggie load a rack with LPs -- Fleetwood Mac's "Rumors."

JACK
I'm telling you, Reg, replace half of these with CDs--

REGGIE

We can't afford them, Jack. OK? We can't afford to be open Sundays, can't afford CDs. We're in trouble.

JACK

What do you mean trouble?

REGGIE

I mean I-need-five-grand-yesterday-or-we're-shutting-down trouble.

JACK

Wait, what?! Why?!

REGGIE

Because those bastards won't wait anymore! They'll force my hand.

JACK

I don't understand. This can't be happening.

REGGIE

Twenty years, my man. Our own little utopia 'til The Man finally caught up. Sorry to lay this on you. I know there's nothing you can do.

(a glance, a pause)

Thing is you love this place much as me. I mean me, you and Max, we're all like brothers in a sense. Brothers in music. And this? This is our home, man. This is our home.

He side-eyes stunned, devastated Jack.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jack lies on the couch, tries to read *Rolling Stone*, young U2 on the cover, while drama ensues in the kitchen -- Lana at the table, receiver to ear.

LANA

(near tears)

Alan, I'm begging you, please come home...but we made a commitment.

Now he looks.

LANA (CONT'D)
 Please don't hang up. Alan, please.
 I'm not trying to pressure you. Alan,
 wait! Alan? Alan!

She tosses the receiver to the table. HOOOOO of the dial tone.

LANA
 Jackie! Jackie, Jackie, Jackie.

He runs in.

JACK
 He'll come around, Mom. I know he
 will.

He hugs his tearful mother from behind.

JACK (CONT'D)
 It's OK, Mom. I'm here. I'll fix it,
 I swear.

EXT. ROYAL ARMS APARTMENTS/INT. DODGE ASPEN - DAY

Low-rent garden apartment building, outside halls and doors.

Jack crosses the parking lot, nervous.

He approaches Apartment 1B. He pauses, knocks. Waits. Closes his eyes, takes a breath. The door CREAKS.

JACK
 (deep voice)
 Look, uh, Dad, enough's enough. You
 have to come home. Now. You have to.
 Mom needs you and I need you. Got it?

Nothing.

He opens his eyes to...Sour Krauss?! Robe on?! Towel wrapped around her head?! She gapes. He gapes back.

ALAN (O.S.)
 Honey, that the Chinese? I'm...

Alan appears behind her, stunned.

ALAN
 Jesus. Jack.

Jack slowly shakes his head.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Wait! Jack! I can explain!

Jack turns, runs.

JACK (V.O.)
Bullshit. Nobody could explain.

INT. ASPEN - DAY

Jack drives, focused, eyes moist.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
My world had stopped making sense.

EXT. VIDEO STORE - DAY

Jack pulls into a space.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The store, Mom and Dad were finished,
and Hannah couldn't--

He plows out, marches to the store.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
--understand anything. So that left
one person to make sense of it all.
One person I could truly depend on.

INT. VIDEO STORE - SALES FLOOR - DAY

Jack enters, looks around. Empty. He eyes the red curtain.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The person I knew like the back--

INT. VIDEO STORE - PORNO ROOM - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Jack draws back the curtain.

JACK (V.O.)
--of my -- my--

He freezes, eyes wide.

In the back corner, Micah and Glenn kiss passionately. Jack just watches, helpless.

Micah finally glances up. Their eyes meet. And Jack runs.

INT. VIDEO STORE - SALES FLOOR - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

...through the store...

EXT. VIDEO STORE - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

...to the Aspen and leaps in. Micah bursts outside.

MICAH
Jack! Jack, wait!

Jack starts the car, tears off.

EXT. HANNAH'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

McMansion, '80s style. Jack stands at the rail, Coke in hand, stares off. Hannah, on a porch swing, book in her lap, beside her Jack's backpack (a Beatles sticker makes it obvious).

HANNAH
What's wrong, sweetie? You're all
jacked up.

JACK
It's just -- it's nothing. Bad day.

HANNAH
Why, what happened?

Long pause. He turns, studies her. Should he?

HANNAH (CONT'D)
Something with your parents? School?

JACK
It's the record store. It might
close. Reggie's running out of cash.

HANNAH
Oh. I'm sorry. You love that place.

JACK
I just want to help him. When he told
me he was so sad. He's really been
there for me.

HANNAH
He's probably trying to guilt you
into giving him money, Jack.

JACK
What? Bullshit!

HANNAH

It's not. Why do you think he owes so much?

JACK

Electric bills?

HANNAH

My uncle owned a kosher restaurant. And he played poker. Electric bills weren't the problem.

JACK

No way. Hippies don't gamble.

HANNAH

Hippies don't think right, either. You said he drank acid in the woods!

JACK

He dropped acid at Woodstock.

Blank stare from Hannah.

JACK (CONT'D)

Point is Record Rev's the one place where me and Max bonded. When he worked there, he used to bring me in, teach me about music. Those are my only good memories of him.

HANNAH

You must have other good ones.

JACK

Jesus, Hannah, it's, like, the most important place in the world to me.

HANNAH

So what're you supposed to do? Don't start taking risks. What matters now is college, law school, our--

JACK

I never said I was definitely--

HANNAH

--careers, and our future together.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Our future matters. Right?

She reaches for his hand but he moves away, grabs his backpack.

JACK
 You don't get it, Hannah. You can't
 get it.

He storms off the porch, Hannah exasperated.

HANNAH
 Come on, Jack! Penn State'll have
 great record stores!

EXT. "BRADLEE'S" DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

The Dodge flies up to the curb at the entrance.

INT. "BRADLEE'S" DEPARTMENT STORE - CUSTOMER SERVICE - DAY

Jack marches across the front of the store.

At a counter, exasperated Traci talks on the phone.

TRACI
 No, ma'am, we don't sell tires.

He approaches. She glances up, then quickly back down.

TRACI (CONT'D)
 Cheese?! What the hell department
 store sells -- hello? Well, fuck it.

She tosses the receiver down, still won't look up, writes. He
 waits. Waits.

JACK
 Traci? Traci, I'm coming apart.

Nothing.

JACK (CONT'D)
 I need a friend. Nobody gets me. And
 you were right. Hannah doesn't get me
 either. But I think you will.

She stops writing, still doesn't look up.

TRACI
 You'd better not be playing.

JACK
 I'm not.

TRACI
 See, I don't trust most folks.

JACK

I know.

TRACI

You mess with me, I'll fuck you up.

JACK

Machete in the purse. Got it.

Traci shakes her head, suppresses a smile.

TRACI

I'm off at nine. I'll need to eat.

EXT. WENDY'S - NIGHT

Wendy's out in front of a shopping center, Jack and Traci's cars parked along with very few others.

JACK (V.O., PRE-LAP)

I thought this through, OK?

INT. WENDY'S - NIGHT

Few patrons, Jack and Traci in a booth. She downs a burger and fries. Jack, empty-handed, pumps his knee, cases the joint.

JACK

Three rules. We can't tell anyone.

She writes with a French fry on her napkin.

TRACI

Lie. Go on.

JACK

(annoyed)

We can't meet in public like this.

TRACI

Hide in shame. And?

JACK

And no phone calls. I'm not kidding.

TRACI

Smoke signals. Got it.

She eats the "pencil."

JACK

We can make plans via notes on each other's cars.

(CONT'D)

JACK (CONT'D)
 (stares front, alarmed)
 Shoot, you know them?

He nods towards two BLACK GIRLS (18) at the counter. They smile at Traci, who smiles back.

TRACI
 Yeah, we all know each other, now why are you so scared? It's '88, not '58.

JACK
 Not to my family.

TRACI
 So they're racists.

JACK
 I didn't say that!

TRACI
 Bet they use that word Jews call Black people -- Schwartzes.

JACK
 They just think people should stick with their own kind.

TRACI
 So they judge people they never met.

JACK
 No, but think of the stuff people like Farrakhan say about Jews.

TRACI
 He is Black. Guess I gotta agree with him.

JACK
 Point is, long as the average person -- Black, white, green, whatever -- doesn't do--

TRACI	JACK
Damn, you know green people?	--anything to them, their fine.

TRACI
 Yeah? What do they think of the average German person who doesn't do anything to them?

No response.

TRACI (CONT'D)

Why do you care so much about what they think?

JACK

After all they've been through, it's up to me to keep them happy. And my mother's crazy about Hannah. I mean me too, of course.

A nervous glance at Traci, then down.

TRACI

Then it sounds like adding me to the mix is the last thing you need.

JACK

Traci? It's exactly what I need.

A lingering gaze. She heaves a French fry at him and giggles.

JACK (CONT'D)

Traci. Stop. People'll look.

She heaves two more.

JACK (CONT'D)

I swear I'll walk out of here.

TRACI

(mock imitation)
I swear I'll walk out of here.

She gets ready to heave the whole damn burger, but he jumps up, heads for the door.

TRACI (CONT'D)

Damn, boy, wait up!

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Fleetwood Mac's "Never Going Back Again" PLAYS from inside Jack's Aspen, parked beside Traci's Cutlass. They sit on the hood of each of their cars downing Frosties.

TRACI

Damn, you have had a day.

JACK

Not great.

TRACI

What'd you think your pops was doing, though?

JACK

Not that. And not with her.

TRACI

Men are men. And about your boy? I've got a cousin who's gay.

JACK

He actually told you?

TRACI

Boy went trick or treating dressed like Lena Horne. He moved out when he was 16. Last I heard he was working at a club in New York. I should've been nicer. He must've felt so alone.

Jack softly looks at her, takes this in. They eat.

JACK

Where are you going to college next year?

TRACI

You assume I'm going to college.

JACK

Why wouldn't you?!

TRACI

You sound like my aunt. She's all -- "You need your education. You represent the future of Black women in America." Fuck the future of all Black women. I need to figure this Black woman's shit out first.

JACK

So what will you do?

TRACI

Bradlee's, I guess.

JACK

That doesn't seem right.

TRACI

You don't seem right. You're going off to get some boring-ass degree while the most important place in your world shuts down.

JACK

I never said it was the most important place.

TRACI

All I'm saying is sometimes you gotta be badass for the greater good. Besides, girls dig a badass.

He glances her way. Noted.

JACK

Not Hannah. She likes me how I am. Steady and dependable.

TRACI

What would Max do to save the store?

JACK

Something stupid.

TRACI

He'd take a risk.

JACK

I don't take risks.

TRACI

You sure about that?

She winks, downs a spoonful whole.

EXT. BANK - DAY

Outside a small, local bank, the Aspen. In the car, Jack sweats, silently rehearses, takes a big breath.

INT. BANK - OFFICE - DAY

Jack sits across from LES CLAYTON (40s, Caucasian, balding) sweating bullets. Les studies a clunky monitor.

LES

But the account's not just in your name, it's in your father's, too. He'd have to sign off.

JACK

Look, Mr. Clayton. I overheard my Uncle Reggie on the phone. He can't afford his cancer treatments but he doesn't want to bother my parents.

(chokes up)

See, they have their hands full. They've, um, separated.

LES

Oh, my.

JACK

After everything with my brother, now poor Uncle Reggie, I just want to do what's right for my family. I'll tell them after I give him the money, I swear. Please, Mr. Clayton. Please?

Les sighs. Jack looks down, bites his lip.

INT. "RECORD REVOLUTION" - DAY

Jack enters, check in hand, approaches Reggie at the counter.

JACK

I was 12 when Max died. You let me "volunteer" to help me get through it. I owe you, Reg.

Reggie comes around the counter, takes the check -- five thousand dollars! He pales.

REGGIE

I -- I don't know what to say. I won't cash this, OK? I swear. It's just insurance. You'll have it back in a week, two tops. My God, Jack.

He pulls Jack in for a hug.

REGGIE (CONT'D)

You don't know what this means to me. To us. To Max!

"Never Going Back Again" returns for the last line.

LINDSAY BUCKINGHAM

I'm never going back again.

HANNAH (V.O., PRE-LAP)

(answering machine)
Hey, Jack, it's me.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Jack, pained, stands over an ancient answering machine on a small table, tiny tape rolling inside.

HANNAH (O.S.)
Look, I'm sorry I was insensitive.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - JACK'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jack sits on the twin bed, head in hands.

HANNAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Can we just, take a walk, anything?

EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL FIELD - NIGHT

Unkempt field, the Olds and Dodge parked near second base.

HANNAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I miss you.

Headlights illuminate Jack and Traci playing catch with a softball, Traci effortless, Jack bumbling.

TRACI
What happened with your boss?

JACK
I did like you said and...helped.

TRACI
Damn. Badass looks good on you, RB.
Not that you didn't already.

JACK
Didn't what already?

She grins, throws. He misses.

TRACI
Game's called catch, RB. Something
good comes your way, you catch it.

Their eyes meet...before Jack stumbles for the ball.

LATER--

Together on the grass on their backs, they stare up.

TRACI
You first. Go.

JACK

What's more believable -- *Good Times*
or *The Jeffersons*?

TRACI

Jeffersons every day.

JACK

Really?

TRACI

Why really, 'cause Black people have
to be poor and struggling? Punk-ass
JJ strutting around like a damn
chicken. George Jefferson would fuck
him up. He made something of himself.
That's what the Black people I know
do. Mostly. Now, why do Jews own all
the sports teams?

JACK

You saw me out there. What else are
we supposed to do? Why can't Black
people swim?

TRACI

No pools where I come from. Just fire
hydrants. Can't swim in a fire
hydrant. Why do Blacks and Jews fight
all the time?

No answer.

TRACI (CONT'D)

You ever think of telling Hannah
about us?

JACK

Are you crazy? We're having enough
trouble these days.

TRACI

(bites her lip, nods)
Guess as long as you're with her,
nobody'd suspect us.

JACK

What us? I mean, we're just friends.

She shrugs. They stare.

JACK (CONT'D)

Do you believe in God?

TRACI

God stayed the fuck out of Camden.

JACK

Why, no swimming pools?

TRACI

Shut up, boy.

JACK

Always thought I believed. But after Max, my parents, and the last few months I doubt anything's up there.

TRACI

Except stars. I always loved them. So quiet. My life's never been quiet.

They ponder, their hands dangerously close together.

INT. ROLLER RINK - DAY

'80s pop PLAYS as Jack and Hannah skate, Jack badly.

JACK

It's a stupid magazine quiz.

HANNAH

It's not stupid. It's *Seventeen*.

JACK

Well, I mean next to *Newsweek*...

HANNAH

Jack, stop, I'm worried about us.

JACK

And I refuse to measure our relationship by taking a phony exam by some pseudo-scientific half-wit.

LATER--

At a table, they share a plastic container of nachos. Hannah, pen in hand, reads intently from *Seventeen*, Jack miserable.

HANNAH

OK, one to five, how do you feel about me? Five is head over heels, one is time to hit the road.

JACK
 How am I supposed pick a number?
 You're great. There.

HANNAH
 (circles something)
 So, three.

JACK
 I didn't say that!

She rolls her eyes, grabs the magazine, leaves.

LATER--

Jack and Hannah return their skates at the counter.

HANNAH
 I called four times this week.

JACK
 I've just been extra busy.

HANNAH
 With what?

JACK
 School. Work. Family.

EXT. ROLLER RINK - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

They head for his Dodge, stop outside of it as they talk.

HANNAH
 It's like you don't trust me anymore.

JACK
 Of course I do.

HANNAH
 Then prove it. Tell me a secret.
 Something nobody else knows.

JACK
 But I don't have any -- any secrets.

She hops in the car. Freaked, he follows suit.

INT. ASPEN - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

HANNAH

I swear, Jack, I wonder what the point is of even being a couple. We might as well just--

JACK

I caught Micah kissing his manager! OK? That a big enough secret?

HANNAH

Wait, wait, what?! Are you serious?!

Jack nods, looks away, regretful.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I didn't know he had a female manager, too. Oh my God, wait, is she even Jewish?

JACK

Nope. Definitely not a Jewish girl.

HANNAH

Micah Greenbaum kissed a goy! That's some secret. You really do trust me!

She kisses his cheek. He smiles weakly, starts the car.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Hey, who's T?

He eyes a wrinkled note in her hand, eyes wide.

JACK

Who? What? T?

HANNAH

"Meet me at the creek at five. T."

JACK

Oh. Ha. Yeah, that. Inside joke with Micah. It's from a movie.

HANNAH

What movie?

JACK

Demon -- Demon Slayers. Two. Demon Slayers Two. "Meet me at the creek at five." Famous line. There's this demon who consumes people, see.

HANNAH
Never mind! I'll have nightmares.

INT. SYNAGOGUE - SANCTUARY - NIGHT

At the podium, Micah readies, Rabbi Klein sitting behind him.

In the pews, Jack, infamous royal blue cords on, with Hannah on one side, Lana on the other. Hannah sniffs, puzzled.

HANNAH
Do you smell moth balls?

JACK
What? No.

He glances at his pants.

HANNAH
He should mention his sexy manager during the sermon, right?

She raises her eyebrows up and down. Lana leans to him.

LANA
I need to stay late for cleanup. Aunt Rho'll give me a ride.

MICAH
Shabbat Shalom, everyone.

CONGREGATION
Shabbat Shalom.

MICAH
Judaism is full of rules. Laws. Mitzvot. Six hundred thirteen, to be exact. Of course, nobody actually follows them all, right? I bet we've each broken some just this week! Rabbi, close your eyes. Now, how many of you recently sampled a cheesesteak or a bowl of Wonton soup?

LAUGHS and knowing smiles as SHELLY GREENBAUM (40s, Caucasian) sneaks in back, stands behind the pews, shy and scared.

MICAH (CONT'D)
Fine, don't raise your hands, but you know who you are.

LAUGHS. He spots Shelly, grips the podium, thrown.

MICAH (CONT'D)

And -- and most of us drove tonight,
right? Prohibited on Shabbat.

Jack glances back, spots Shelly, turns forward, surprised.

MICAH (CONT'D)

In reality, none of us follow a
fraction of them. They're inhumane,
like stoning people to death, or
irrelevant, like handling slaves. But
God, the rabbis, or whoever included
one specific set of rules to be read
on our holiest day, Yom Kippur. In
fact, for the last three years, at
the very end of that day, I've stood
up here and recited these very laws
in Hebrew myself. Things like
adultery. Relations with non-Jews.

(Jack swallows)

And homosexuality.

(Mich eyes Jack)

So considering when these rules are
recited, are they therefore the most
important rules of all? If you break
one should -- should you wallow in
shame and self-hate. Pray to God
every night that one day you'll
finally wake up to be -- normal?

He pauses, clears his throat.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Or what if these rules aren't meant
for the guilty? What if they're
actually a test for the innocent?
Look around. What would you do if you
discovered the person next to you, or
even on this very alter broke one?
Would shun them, or treat them as
humans? Flawed, struggling, confused.

(eyes Jack and Shelly)

Could you still love them? Would you?
Should you?

Devastated, Jack meets Micah's gaze, looks down.

EXT. HANNAH'S NEIGHBORHOOD/INT. DODGE ASPEN (MOVING) - NIGHT

Led Zeppelin PLAYS on the car radio. Jack drives Hannah.

HANNAH

He was good. Very rabbinical. Who was that woman in back?

JACK

His mom.

HANNAH

Oh! Hey, I saw Max on the Yahrzeit list. What's the actual date?

JACK

I don't know. Sometime around now.

HANNAH

He slipped on the ice, right? What happened? You never talk about it.

JACK

That's because I don't want to.

HANNAH

Well if you can't even tell your girlfriend, who can you tell?

No answer. She slumps back, arms crossed, nods at the radio.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Who is this anyway?

JACK

Led Zeppelin.

HANNAH

He sings that dumb "Staircase To Heaven" song, right?

JACK

Oh my god, it's stairway, and it's a band. Not a him, a band. Zeppelin, Floyd, Fleetwood Mac -- all bands! Jesus. It's not that friggin' hard.

She turns to the window, tears up. He pulls up to her house, barely at a stop when she jumps out. He bangs the wheel.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Lana, still dressed up, at the table. WHUMP of the door downstairs. Stomps up steps. Jack enters in a huff.

LANA

Hello, Jack.

JACK

Um. Hi?

He searches cabinets. She speaks with eerie calm.

LANA

Just got off the phone with Mrs. Baron. She told me some things. About your father.

JACK

Look, Mom, I'm pretty--

LANA

You told me he missed me, Jack.

JACK

What?

LANA

You said he would come home soon.

Jack freezes, but doesn't turn.

JACK

Who? Dad? I mean, yeah, sure he--

LANA

Shut up.

Now he turns, terrified.

LANA (CONT'D)

You knew.

JACK

What are -- knew what?

LANA

Don't play dumb with me! You knew all about him and that -- Sour Krauss!

She stands, stares hard, approaches. He backs against the sink.

JACK

No, see, you don't understand.

LANA

You lied to my face! Your own mother!

JACK

What else could I do?! Break your heart?! I try making you happy but it's never enough. It's not fair!

LANA

Not fair?! Did you lose a child? Did you lose a spouse? Not fair. Like my life's not hard enough.

JACK

(mutter)
We all have it hard.

LANA

What did you just say to me?

JACK

I said we all--

WHAP! of her hand across his cheek. A beat -- shared look of horror. Jack touches his face, stunned. He turns, runs.

JACK (V.O.)

All these years being perfect.

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jack runs into the pouring rain.

JACK (V.O.)

Imagining the family, hell, the entire Norristown Jewish community--

Jumps in his car, starts it up.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

--watching my every move.

EXT. "BRADLEE'S" PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Rain pummels cars scattered about, employees leaving, umbrellas popping.

JACK (V.O.)

I'd never acted like an actual kid.

Traci, papers over her head, jogs toward her Cutlass.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Never let go, gave myself a break.

Jack -- teary, wet -- leans against it. She glances back.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 'Til tonight, when for the first time
 all that mattered was this moment.

TRACI
 Jack, what are you doing--

JACK (V.O.)
 This girl.

He takes her face, kisses her softly, quickly, tentatively.
 She pulls back, stunned. He waits, measures, and kisses her
 again, this time not so softly.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And this kiss.

BEN (PRE-LAP, V.O.)
 Now, in memory of what God did--

INT. ROTH HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

At the Passover Seder, Jack and Ben in yarmulkes, Aunt Rhoda,
 Grandmom, Lana with Haggadahs. On the table, a tray of matzoh
 and a Seder plate.

UNCLE BEN
 --to free us from Egypt, we'll recite
 the ten plagues.

ALL
 Blood.

Everyone dips their pinkies in their glasses of wine and dabs
 it on their plates as Jack stares into space.

JACK (V.O.)
 And so it kicked into high gear.

INT. "BRADLEE'S" DEPARTMENT STORE - FITTING ROOM - DAY

Jack and Traci, in her work uniform, kiss.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 The lies heavier.

ALL (V.O.)
 Frogs.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - REC ROOM - DAY

JACK (V.O.)
The secrets deeper.

Jack and Hannah on the couch. She smiles, hopeful, as he opens a present -- a copy of *The Wall*. He forces a grin, nods, thanks her, looks away in pain. Her smile fades.

ALL (V.O.)
Lice.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - NIGHT

On a blanket, Jack and Traci kiss vigorously.

JACK (V.O.)
The desire stronger.

ALL (V.O.)
Flies.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Dark, crowded theater. LAUGHTER. Hannah smiles, looks over to Jack, stern-faced. She looks ahead, rattled.

JACK (V.O.)
The guilt unbearable.

ALL (V.O.)
Cattle disease.

INT. SYNAGOGUE - SANCTUARY - DAY

At services, the congregation rises. Jack, oblivious, stays seated, staring off.

JACK (V.O.)
But I forged ahead.

ALL (V.O.)
Boils.

EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD - NIGHT

Jack and Traci lie on the hood of the Aspen, hold hands, stare at the stars.

JACK (V.O.)
I was helpless.

ALL (V.O.)
Hail.

INT. CUTLASS - NIGHT

They make out in the back seat.

ALL (V.O.)
Locusts.

EXT. BOATHOUSE ROW - NIGHT

They walk along the Schuylkill River in Philly, hand in hand, laughing.

JACK (V.O.)
I was intoxicated.

ALL (V.O.)
Darkness.

She leans her head on his shoulder.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Jack listens, creeps down the hall, peeks into Max's tiny room, preserved in time -- turntable and speakers on the floor, Budweiser mirror, poster of Led Zeppelin's famous Icarus angel wings image on the wall.

JACK (V.O.)
And a total wreck at the same time.

ALL (V.O.)
Slaying of the first born.

Lana lies atop the twin bed, fetal position, sobs softly.

INT. NORRISTOWN HIGH SCHOOL - GUIDANCE OFFICE - DAY

CHARLIE GAINES (50, Black, husky, whitening hair), nameplate on this desk, papers before him, pounds on an electric typewriter, shakes his head, rips out the paper.

CHARLIE
Damn! Get some computers in up here.

He crumples the paper, heaves it as Jack flies in, wired, eyes red, heads for a rack of college apps, starts taking some.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Oh. Jack. You have an appointment?

JACK
Nah, it's fine, just grabbing some college applications.

CHARLIE
But you're already accepted.

JACK
Not for me. For a friend.

CHARLIE
Jack, Jack, slow down.

Jack stops, turns to Charlie.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
You don't look so good.

JACK
Me? I'm fine, not sleeping great is all, lots on my mind.

Charlie motions for a chair. Jack sighs, sits.

CHARLIE
You can talk to me, you know.

A pause. Jack looks away, tries to brush him off.

JACK
Oh, yeah, no, just school and work and home and -- and girl stuff.

CHARLIE
Ah.

JACK
See, there's this girl. Girl X. She's the wrong girl for me. Like, really really wrong. Meanwhile I'm still officially dating the right one.

CHARLIE
Why is this Girl X so wrong?

JACK
She's, uh, she's--

CHARLIE
Not exactly Jewish, huh?

Jack bites his lip, glances at photos on the wall -- Martin Luther King. Frederick Douglas. Malcolm X.

JACK

Not exactly -- white.

CHARLIE

Oh! I see. Hm. Well I get it. I'm open-minded. I keep with the times. Can't imagine your folks are pleased, though. Or hers.

JACK

They don't know.

CHARLIE

Smart. Still, you do realize you're using Ms. Right as a cover.

JACK

What? That's ridiculous. I like them both. I can keep going. I'm not, like, hurting anyone.

Charlie sets a new slice of paper in the typewriter.

CHARLIE

Oh, you will, Jack. Mark my words.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Overcast. Traci and Jack walk along a creek, padded yellow envelope in Traci's hand, a soda in Jack's.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

I just hope this Girl X is worth it.

She pulls out a sheet of paper -- "Drexel University Application." She gapes. He nods at the envelope.

JACK

Temple's there, too. Go North Philly.

TRACI

Jack, I told you I'm not--

JACK

You're afraid you can't get in.

A knowing glance from her.

TRACI

You believe in me that much?

JACK
Believe in you? You're, like, the
whole friggin' package.

She stares softly at him. He takes a nervous drink. They walk.

TRACI
You just said friggin'.

JACK
Yeah, you know. Friggin'.

TRACI
So you don't know how to curse.

JACK
I do so. I say hell. Damn.

TRACI
Not regular TV words. Cable words!

JACK
I say the S word.

TRACI
The S word? Damn, gangster. Now, say
fuck it.

JACK
Fuggit.

TRACI
Fuck doesn't have a "g." Fuck it.
Repeat after me. Fuck. It.

JACK
Fuck. It.

TRACI
There you go! Now say motherfucker.

JACK
Motherfugger.

They crack up, take hands, stroll.

TRACI
Come on, motherfugger. Got something
to show you.

And far above the creek, Damone watches from behind a tree,
lit cigarette in one hand, other fist clenched. He takes a
drag, heaves it to the ground, stomps it, storms off.

EXT. CAMDEN NEIGHBORHOOD/INT. CUTLASS - DAY

Light rain taps Traci's car in front of ragged row homes. Across the street, a tiny, rundown apartment building.

TRACI

Happened in 3A in the kitchen over ten-dollar blackjack. I held his hand while he bled out. Same one he beat us with. Closest I ever felt to him.

JACK

God, I'm sorry, Trace. Where was she when--

BUMPBUMP on Traci's window -- they jump! Outside, a SHAKY WOMAN (40s, Black, ragged, smoking, wasted).

TRACI

Fuck.
(window down partway)
What.

SHAKY

Damn, girl. That's how you greet me?

TRACI

What do you want?

SHAKY

Who's this?

TRACI

Nobody.

SHAKY

How you been?

Traci reaches into her purse, pulls out lump of cash, shoves it through the window. Shaky grabs it.

SHAKY (CONT'D)

I didn't ask for this, Trae.

Traci powers up the window.

SHAKY (CONT'D)

I just wanted to talk, girl!

Traci peels out of there, Jack looking back. She turns a corner of a similar street, parks, rattled.

TRACI

Few weeks after Daddy died, my uncle woke me up one morning, told me I was moving in with him and my aunt. Mama said she was leaving and couldn't take me. But she just wanted to get rid of me. So she could give up.

Traci motions out the back window.

JACK

You mean -- but you said she was dead!

TRACI

Sorry I brought you here, Jack. You don't need my drama. Your family's sad 'cause of Max's accident but it's normal sad, not fucked up sad like--

JACK

It wasn't some random accident.

She turns to him, eyes welling and wide.

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Zeppelin's "Going To California" PLAYS from inside. In the drive, a souped up '70s Plymouth Duster behind the Cavalier.

BOOMBOOMBOOM on a door.

ALAN (O.S.)

Max! I'm warning you!

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - JACK'S ROOM - NIGHT

The **SONG PLAYS** from Max's room. Here, rock posters and Periodic Table are gone, leaving just the state of Israel.

Young Jack, in bed, fetal position, eyes wide, hums along with the song to calm himself.

LANA (O.S.)

(from the hall)

First you steal alcohol, now they find drugs in your locker?!

MAX (O.S.)

(slurry)

Pot's not a drug, it's a fucking plant!

BOOMBOOMBOOM!

ALAN (O.S.)
 (from the hall)
 God knows what else you have hidden
 in there, now open this goddamn door!

MAX (O.S.)
 Go to hell! I can't wait to escape
 this fucking gulag! I'm going west.
 Like this song. You two hear me?!
 Just like this fucking song!

The song CRANKS. Lana BAWLS. BOOMBOOMBOOM! Young Jack shoves a pillow over his head.

LATER--

Quiet. Moonlit. Young Jack sleeps.

VRRRRR, VRRRR -- the Duster revs and he jolts awake and sits up and from outside -- SCREEEE up, up the street and...BANG!

He turns to the window in horror.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Young Jack, on the couch, rocks and hugs himself as ambulance lights bounce off of the front window.

LANA (O.S.)
 (wailing)
 Don't let them take him! Oh, don't
 let them take my boy!

ALAN (O.S.)
 (deadened)
 He's gone, Lana. Our son is gone.

Young Jack turns to a framed photo on the wall of himself with grinning MAX HEITNER (17, long hair, '70's cool).

INT. TRACI'S CAR - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Stunned and moved, Traci watches him.

JACK
 He crashed because he was wasted.
 Trying to run off to California but
 he never got out of the neighborhood.
 My parents said to tell everybody he
 slipped on ice, but there was no ice.
 (CONT'D)

JACK (CONT'D)
See why I hate lying? And why I'm so
good at it?

She nods softly.

JACK (CONT'D)
I'm telling you this because you're
not alone. We all have our drama.

A beat. Then she grabs him, hugs him hard.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Blinking light on the answering machine.

JACK (V.O.)
I liked being seen how Traci saw me.
Smart. Funny. Imperfect. I didn't
care how hard it was.

Backpack over his shoulder, Jack enters from downstairs.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Only an act of God would pull me from
her. If I believed in God, that is.

He spots the blinking light.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Uncle Ben sits, finishes a bag of M&Ms. Jack flies in.

JACK
Where is she?! Where is she?!

UNCLE BEN
Hey, kiddo, she's fine. Come on.

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

Uncle Ben and Jack stroll past rooms, Jack agitated.

UNCLE BEN
It was mild, they said.

JACK
Mild what? What happened?

UNCLE BEN
Wait. I need a chaser for those M&Ms.

They stop at a vending machine. He buys Mike and Ike's.

UNCLE BEN (CONT'D)

She's at our place making rugelach with Rho when suddenly she stops, looks off like she sees something horrible, then boom! On the floor.

Candy in hand, Uncle Ben leads pallid Jack onward.

JACK

(mutters)
Because of me. All because of me.

UNCLE BEN

(funny look at Jack)
Anyhow, she's sedated now. They're keeping her to run tests. You'll stay with us tonight, boychick.

INT. HOSPITAL - LANA'S ROOM - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

Uncle Ben and Jack enter.

Lana, in bed, hooked to an IV, sleeps. Aunt Rhoda sits beside her with ETHEL BANGOWITZ (75, Caucasian, heavysset). Grandmom sits by the window.

AUNT RHODA

(whispers)
Jackie. You remember Mrs. Bangowitz.

Jack's eyes go wide. Ethel leers at him, then Lana, then back at him with a stare that betrays her wan smile.

ETHEL

Least you came. My son barely showed his face the whole time I was here.

GRANDMOM

It was his fault, you know. Minute he sneaks off to see that Shiksa--

AUNT RHODA

Easy, Mom.

ETHEL

Now she collapses, too. Isn't that something?

She and Grandmom stare daggers at Jack, who looks away, sick.

ETHEL (CONT'D)

They start off so good, but they change. Lord knows they change.

UNCLE BEN
 Aaaaand we're done here. Let's give
 Jackie some space, huh?

LATER--

Jack sits beside sleeping Lana.

JACK (V.O.)
 They're right. I had changed.

He takes her hand.

INT. ROTH HOUSE - SPARE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jack lies awake, face up on an old wooden-framed twin bed.

JACK (V.O.)
 I became someone I'm not.

HUCCCHH! from nearby. He turns, looks to the bed beside him where Grandmom snores away. He shoves the covers aside.

INT. ROTH HOUSE - LIVING ROOM/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Jack descends the stairs, notebook in hand. On the couch, Aunt Rhoda, eyes closed, leans on a sleeping Uncle Ben's shoulder. On the boxy old color TV, a shot of the American flag as the National Anthem PLAYS.

JACK (V.O.)
 So it was time to hit stop, rewind,
 and tape over the mess I'd made.

Jack clicks off the TV, settles at the dining room table, opens the notebook, writes.

AUNT RHODA (O.S.)
 What's that?

He looks up, startled, as Aunt Rhoda settles across from him.

JACK
 Letters. I have to fix things.

AUNT RHODA
 Hm. Listen, Jackie. Mothers and sons
 fight sometimes. It's natural. But in
 the end she's lucky to have you.

He looks up.

AUNT RHODA (CONT'D)
Ignore Grandmom and that Ethel
Bangowitz. You'll always be good.

She pats his hand, stands, heads for the living room.

AUNT RHODA
Don't stay up too late.

She gives Uncle Ben a few light arm smacks. He GRUMBLES.

AUNT RHODA (CONT'D)
Come on, sleeping beauty.

Jack ponders her words, shakes his head, writes again.

JACK
Aunt Rho? Do you have envelopes?

EXT. WEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD/INT. ASPEN - DAY

On the passenger seat, a pile of four envelopes, "Hannah" scribbled on the top one. He eyes the mailbox outside the Klein house up two houses and across the street.

JACK (V.O.)
(strong and resolved)
Dear Hannah. You are such a great
girl. I'm so lucky.

He grabs the envelope, opens the door.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But sometimes feelings change.

And a red Mercedes pulls into the drive. He jumps back in the car! Sharon and Hannah emerge, Hannah lugging a pink dress in clear plastic. They laugh, head for the house.

JACK
Nope. After prom. Least I can do.

He shoves her envelope in his glove box, "Micah" on the next.

JACK (V.O.)
(a bit less resolve)
Dear Micah. I miss you, man.

INT. VIDEO STORE - DAY

"Micah" in hand, he approaches Glenn at the counter.

JACK (V.O.)
Let's reconnect. Talk. Try to--

GLENN
He's not here, dickhead.

JACK
Oh. OK. Can you leave this for him?

GLENN
No because he's not coming back.
Ever. His dad made him quit.

JACK
What? Why?

Glenn tears up.

GLENN
None of your fucking business! And
for the record, he never wants to
talk to you again, either.

INT. DODGE ASPEN - DAY

He shoves "Micah" hard in the box atop "Hannah."

JACK (V.O.)
(weaker)
Dear Reggie.

EXT. "RECORD REVOLUTION"/INT. DODGE ASPEN - DAY

Empty lot but for the Aspen. Jack approaches the closed store.

JACK (V.O.)
I made a terrible mistake. I'm going
to need the money back. All of it.

At the door, he leans to slip the note through the mail slot.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I was trying to help, but--

He freezes, peers through the glass, eyes wide.

Empty shelves!

JACK
No. No, no, no.

He yanks on the locked door over and over.

JACK (CONT'D)

No! No! No!

INT. ASPEN - DAY

Nearly tears, he shoves "Reggie" even harder into the glove box, crunching the others.

JACK (V.O.)

(quiet, solemn)

Dear Traci.

EXT. "BRADLEE'S" PARKING LOT/INT. CUTLASS - NIGHT

Jack's and Traci's cars parked together in the empty lot.

JACK (V.O.)

(quieter)

Dear Traci.

Traci wolfs down Wendy's. Jack, war torn from his terrible day, watches nervously.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(quietest)

Dear Traci.

TRACI

Five grand?! Damn, boy, I didn't mean give him cash. I meant have a bake sale or work for free for a while. Giving money to a gambler.

JACK

You knew, too?!

TRACI

Guess we've all got our blind spots.

JACK

You don't.

TRACI

Every relationship I've had has been a blind spot. 'Til now.

She grins. He grazes his pocket where the envelope pokes out.

TRACI (CONT'D)

So your prom's Saturday, right?

JACK

Yeah.

TRACI

You're going, I guess.

He shrugs, still won't look at her.

JACK

I'm breaking up with her afterward.

She battles a grin.

TRACI

So, um, why now?

He sighs, grazes the paper in his pocket.

JACK

Look, Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love" was based on a song by Willie Dixon and recorded by Muddy Waters in 1961. They basically stole it. So you were right. You were right about a lot of things. I'm really sorry.

TRACI

Sorry about what?

He shakily pulls out the "Traci" envelope.

TRACI (CONT'D)

What's that?

He offers it to her, then pulls it back.

JACK

No. That's not right.

He opens it himself, clears his throat, and reads.

JACK

Dear Traci. The past few months have been the best months of my life.

TRACI

Jack, what are you doing?

JACK

(reads faster)
But we've let things go too far.

TRACI

What the fuck are you doing?!

JACK
 (flying, louder)
 Being friends was hard enough but now
 we've passed the point of viability.

TRACI
 But you kissed me! You kissed me.

JACK
 (still reads)
 It's bad. For us. For our families--

TRACI
 You met my mama! Nobody meets her!

JACK
 --so we just can't--

TRACI
 Nah. Fuck this.

She grabs the paper, shreds it to pieces, tears falling.

TRACI (CONT'D)
 Goddamn. Goddamn! For once I wasn't
 alone. Somebody took me seriously,
 let me be myself, and now you just
 throw me away?! Why?! 'Cause of
 Mommy?! 'Cause you haven't grown
 since your brother died?! You
 promised you wouldn't fuck me over
 but you did, you lying piece of fuck!

Bawling now, she fires her burger at him, ketchup splashing
 across his body like blood.

EXT. "BRADLEE'S" PARKING LOT - NIGHT

"Bloody" Jack, alone in his car, cries.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Early evening. Lana eats alone, reads the paper. Jack appears
 from the living room, somber in his suit. She offers a quick
 nod. He nods back, heads for the basement stairs.

LANA
 I'm sorry. For all of it. Now go have
 fun. But not too much.

JACK
 Oh, don't worry about that.

INT. STEAKHOUSE - NIGHT

Fancy restaurant, SOFT MUSIC overhead, Hannah in her pink dress. They saw through steaks, quiet and awkward. Then, she stops, eyes him, speaks with an odd calm.

HANNAH

So. Things have been off between us for a while. Haven't they, Jack?

He looks worried, but doesn't look up.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Sometimes I thought you were about to, you know, break up with me. But then I figured out what was wrong.

CANK -- his fork on the plate. She takes a deep breath... waits...Jack dying.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

You're a guy, see. And guys expect -- certain things. So. I'm ready.

She reaches across the table, takes his hand.

JACK

What? Wait. Hannah, no.

HANNAH

Sh. My friend Danielle's with her family in Margate. She told me where they hide the spare key. Jack, I want to make you as happy as you make me.

She smiles. He forces a tortured grin.

INT. SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - NIGHT

1980s pop BOOMS over a room decked out in streamers, a disco ball and tables with snack food. Kids dressed to the nines dance, flirt, make out.

On the dance floor, Hannah moves with surprising ease as Jack taps a foot, shimmies a bit with a forced smile. She laughs.

HANNAH

Come on, move your hips.

JACK

Sorry, it's not really--

INT. CLUB - DANCE FLOOR - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Jack moves well, Traci egging him on.

INT. SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - NIGHT (BACK TO PRESENT)

JACK
It's not my thing.

HANNAH
It's fine, we can sit.

Journey's "Open Arms" KICKS IN.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
Wait! Oh my God! I love this song!

She pulls him close, rests her head on his shoulders.

JACK
You know Journey was a real band
before Steve Perry turned them into
this sappy--

He freezes, stunned. Across the floor, Traci and Morris dance!

HANNAH
Thanks for tonight. It means so--

JACK
Uh-huh.

He watches Traci whisper to Morris. They laugh.

HANNAH
What's wrong? Jack?

He tears his eyes away.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
You're being weird.

Another look back.

HANNAH (CONT'D)
Jack, what are you doing?

He still watches...until Traci and Morris kiss. He gasps!

HANNAH (CONT'D)
Oh my God forget it! I should never
have brought up that stuff at dinner.
I'm so stupid! I need to go.

She runs off into the hall. Jack watches, doesn't follow, looks back at the dance floor, Traci and Morris gone. He looks everywhere. Was it a dream?

END MUSIC CUE

LATER--

1980s dance pop PLAYS. Jack slumps in a chair at an empty round table, stuffs his face with Pringles, sucks down mystery punch, watches the scene.

JACK (V.O.)
How is this fair, Max?

Morris whoops it up with a circle of guys.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Why does every other kid live so free
and easy--

A gaggle of girls laugh and dance in a circle.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
--while I deal with the dead brother,
broken parents, controlling family,
AWOL best friend--

A HORNY COUPLE (17) make out wildly against the wall under a poster -- "Abstinence Is The Best Birth Control."

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
--and now I had to break the heart of
the girl I was supposed to love?

Finally, he looks up. Hannah appears, sways as she walks. Jack straightens his suit jacket. Deep breath.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The truth? I don't even like her. Not
sure I ever did. Maybe I just liked
the idea of her, I don't know, but
enough was enough. I had to do what
was right and end it.

She reaches him, wobbles, grabs the back of the chair.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But first, I had to come clean.

JACK

Look, Hannah, I have to say some things and they aren't going to be easy to hear. See, you're a great--

HANNAH

Ssshhh! All you do is talk talk talk.

She giggles at herself, grabs his cup of punch, downs it, tosses the cup on the floor, grabs some Pringles from his plate, shoves them in her mouth. He watches, stunned.

The Stones' "Start Me Up" STARTS UP.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Hey! Listen! You love The Beatles!

She grabs his arm, yanks him up and onto the dance floor, sways. He stands perfectly still, takes a whiff of her.

JACK

Hannah, are you -- drunk?

She tilts a bit, grins.

HANNAH

Moi? Why would you think I -- I--

BLEHHHHHHHH! - she yaks on the floor, kids leaping back, yelling. Jack watches, horrified.

EXT. WEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD/INT. DODGE ASPEN (MOVING) - NIGHT

The car rolls slowly. Hannah swallows air through the window.

JACK

Where'd you get liquor anyway?

HANNAH

This girl in the bathroom who was in love with her boyfriend but he broke her heart. What was the boyfriend's name? Something weird. She lives nearby. Invited me to her afterparty but I'm not cool enough. I'm a joke.

JACK

You're not the joke here. I am.

HANNAH

I read you all wrong, Jack.

He pulls up to the curb in front of her house.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I thought you wanted to do sex stuff
but you really just wanted to...to...

She bursts into tears.

JACK

Hannah--

HANNAH

Just do it. I don't blame you. You're
so perfect and I'm so pathetic.

JACK

No, you're not!

HANNAH

You can do way better than the
rabbi's innocent little daughter
who's about to lose the best thing
that ever happened to her.

She cries. Jack closes his eyes, struggles.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I should've known from the start that
you were too good for me.

She cries and cries, ripping him apart.

JACK (V.O.)

God, she didn't deserve this. I had
to make her feel better and realize
none of this was her fault.

JACK

Hannah?

She looks up. He stares into her soaking wet eyes.

JACK

Listen, I -- I, uh--

JACK (V.O.)

But I still had let her go. She
needed to put me behind her, find the
kind of guy she deserved. I had to
finally stand up and--

JACK

Hannah, I -- I love -- you?

Her mouth drops.

JACK (V.O.)

You. Idiot!

HANNAH

Wh-what?

He looks away, demolished with shame and regret.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

You -- you love me?

He's drowning.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Oh my God. Oh my God! This is -- this is the best night of my life! I love you, too, Jack! I love you too!

She leans over, grabs him, kisses him, his eyes stuck open.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

You know, we could still, uh, swing by Danielle's, right? Two people in love, who knows what could happen?

She leans in for another kiss but he gently slips away.

JACK

Maybe we should just call it a night, I mean after all your, um--
(drinking gesture)
--it wouldn't seem right, you know?

HANNAH

My boyfriend. Always the gentleman.

She squeezes his hand, gets out.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I love you, Jack Heitner!

She starts for her house. He bangs the wheel.

HANNAH (O.S.)

Oh! I remember now!

He jumps, whips his head to the open passenger window.

HANNAH

Her boyfriend's name. The Black girl from the bathroom.

JACK

Black?

HANNAH

His name was Arby. Like the restaurant. Crazy, right?

She winks, skips away. Jack stares off, dizzy, pale and...

EXT. WEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD/INT. DODGE ASPEN (MOVING) - NIGHT

...*furios* as he slowly rolls past homes like Hannah's.

JACK (V.O.)

So she lived around here. The girl having a party for a prom she only was at to torture me. The girl who made me just say the last thing I should've said to the person I'm supposed to end it with. The girl who ruined my life.

He turns a corner, jams the brake.

Muffled dance beats EMANATE from a house like Hannah's, kids and cars everywhere. He scans, spots Traci's Olds, seethes.

JACK (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was time to give her a piece of my mind. Loudly. With cable cursing.

EXT. TRACI'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

The dance song plays inside, teens everywhere, some in the remains of their prom night best, plastic cups in hand. Jack approaches the opened front door, wide eyed.

INT. TRACI'S HOUSE - FOYER/HALLWAY/KITCHEN - NIGHT

He pauses in the foyer, takes in the scene -- kids everywhere, chandelier above, grand staircase, huge living room with cream furniture and plush carpets.

He shimmies past Horny Couple from the prom making out against the wall, enters a large kitchen, shiny white appliances, kids drinking, liquor on the island counter, peeks out the sliding doors to the packed back yard, grabs the handle.

JACK

There you are. Time to--

He stops, stares at Traci, jean shorts, cut off shirt, alone under a tree.

The Stones' "She's A Rainbow" floats into his and our brains.

Captivated, he drops his hand from the door.

She looks up, spots him.

He turns, flies out, down the hall, the foyer, and--

TRACI (O.S.)

Jack.

He freezes, doesn't turn.

INT. TRACI'S HOUSE - TRACI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dark. A light CLICKS on. Jack and Traci enter a beautiful room, puffy white comforter on a queen-sized bed, huge desk. On the walls, female pop artists -- Madonna, Janet Jackson.

Jack looks around, nervous.

JACK

Hm. Big room. Must be nice.

She nods at her bed.

JACK (CONT'D)

Look, I'm not staying.

She shrugs. He sits, arms crossed tight. She inserts a tape in a huge boombox, hits Play. **Nina Simone's "I Put A Spell On You" EMERGES.**

TRACI

Why are you here, Jack?

JACK

To tell you how shitty it was for you to show up at my prom with Morris just to drive me crazy.

TRACI

I decided I deserved some fun after that bullshit you pulled. Can't blame me for that.

JACK

Yeah, what about how you got Hannah wasted and told her all that crap about love and your boyfriend breaking up with you and then inviting her to a party so, what, you could torture me more?!

She smiles, closes her eyes, sways. Jack tries not to watch.

TRACI

Just helping a sister feel better.

JACK

But you're supposed to hate me! It'd be way easier if you did.

TRACI

I tried.

She approaches, stands over him.

TRACI

Until I saw you gaping at us tonight. What else can I think except--

She straddles him, pushes him on his back.

TRACI (CONT'D)

--it ain't over 'til it's over.

She kisses him hard.

JACK

Traci. Wait.

She sits back, unbuttons her shorts, pulls off her top, only her bra left. He stares, breathless.

JACK (CONT'D)

But we can't -- I mean, Hannah--

She stands, wriggles from her shorts.

TRACI

You two broke up tonight, right?

She hops back on, starts on his shirt, button by button.

TRACI (CONT'D)

Said you were going to.

She unbuckles and unzips his pants, yanks them down. Pauses.

TRACI (CONT'D)

If not, tell me and I'll stop.

He looks her over, can't get out any words. She grins, climbs on top, pulls the covers over her shoulders.

He closes his eyes, breathless, overwhelmed...then opens them.

JACK

Wait, wait, I don't have -- anything.

TRACI
Nothing to worry about. Trust me.

JACK
But what if I'm not ready?

She reaches down under the covers. He moans.

TRACI
Oh, you're ready, RB.

They kiss relentlessly.

TRACI (CONT'D)
You're damn ready.

Nina Simone RISES...

EXT. WEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD/INT. TRACI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

...and COVERS everything, all else silent.

-- Down the street, Hannah stares at the party house.

-- A black sports car rolls up, parks behind Jack's car. The window rolls down - Damone!

-- Outside Traci's room, door shut.

-- Hannah steps into the foyer, wide-eyed.

-- Damone, menacing, crosses the street.

-- Hannah shyly approaches two girls in the kitchen, says something to them. They both nod up at the ceiling, giggle.

-- In the yard, Damone looks up at a window, curtains pulled.

-- Hannah climbs the stairs.

INT. TRACI'S HOUSE - TRACI'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Jack lies under the covers, naked, elated and distraught at the same time. Traci clicks off the tape, pulls on her jeans.

TRACI
Told you you'd like Nina. Not every boy gets to lose it to music royalty.

JACK
But did this even count? There's gotta be, like, a five-second rule.

Traci laughs, heads for the door.

TRACI
Drink?

Traci opens the door....

JACK
What, that moonshine you fed Han--
Hannah, in the flesh!

JACK (CONT'D)
Hannah! Oh shit! Oh shit!

He sits up, bare-chested. Hannah shakes, gapes.

HANNAH
You -- you said you -- you loved me.

TRACI
He said what now?

Hannah runs. Jack leaps out of bed, fumbles with his pants.

TRACI (CONT'D)
Did she just motherfuckin' say that
you motherfuckin' told her--

JACK
I know, I know, it's complicated,
where's my shoes?! Damn it.

He throws on his dress shirt and scours the floor for shoes.

TRACI
Even though you just motherfuckin'
said to me that--

JACK
Technically I never said anything.

He grabs the shoes, shoves them on, hops up.

JACK (CONT'D)
Honestly, you -- we took this way--

TRACI
Get the fuck out my room!

He runs.

INT. TRACI'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

He flies down the stairs, Hannah already outside.

JACK
Hannah, wait!

He shoves through the crowd, blindly passes simmering Damone.

EXT. WEALTHY NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Jack runs out, spots Hannah motoring up the sidewalk.

JACK
Hannah!

She stops, won't turn. He approaches.

JACK
Look, whatever you think you saw...

He touches her shoulder, but she violently shakes him off, finally faces him with tear-streaked eyes.

HANNAH
How could you do this to me?! How?!

JACK
Look, I'll explain everything.

HANNAH
You lied to my face. Pretended to like me. You played with my heart and you broke me in two. I hate you, Jack Heitner. You're a horrible person.

She walks.

JACK
Wait! Hannah. You won't tell anyone, will you?

She snickers bitterly, saunters into the dark. Jack yanks out his keys, slinks to his car.

DAMONE (O.S.)
Yo, Opie!

Jack looks back, eyes wide. Damone charges fast! Jack frantically rattles the door handle, turns back.

JACK
D-D-Damone, hey, man, I--

WHUMP! -- a punch in the side of his head. Jack wobbles.

DAMONE
Keys, motherfucker!

JACK
Wh-What?

Damone grabs the keys from Jack, heaves them into oblivion.

JACK (CONT'D)
Please. I don't want any trouble.

DAMONE
Pssht. Listen to this motherfucker.
Don't want trouble. Didn't stop you
from tappin' my girl!

Damone shoves Jack against the car, towers over him. Jack winces in pain, eyes welling. He checks Traci's porch, hopeful. Traci, there now, shakes her head, disgusted, goes inside, shuts the door, and all hope melts away.

DAMONE (CONT'D)
I've been watching you two.

JACK
Whatever you think you saw--

Another hard shove and a firm smack on the other cheek. Jack grabs his face.

JACK (CONT'D)
Oh, God.

DAMONE
What were you saying?

JACK
Just let me go home.

DAMONE
Right after I finish fucking you up.

JACK
I won't talk to her again, I swear!

Damone grabs him by the shirt, shoves him on the street. Jack throws his arms over his head.

JACK (CONT'D)
Please don't hurt me.

Damone steps above him, Jack between his legs.

DAMONE

What's she see in your punk-ass
anyway?

JACK

You think I know?

Damone kneels on him, unleashes two punches to his torso. Jack whimpers, coughs, tries to roll over.

JACK (CONT'D)

I do know one -- one thing.

DAMONE

I'd shut your mouth, I were you.

JACK

She doesn't like me anymore and she
doesn't like you either.

Damone freezes.

DAMONE

What did you just say?

JACK

I said she doesn't--

DAMONE

Bitch, I heard what you said! That
girl messes with your head.

JACK

Yes.

DAMONE

Makes you all mixed up inside.

Jack nods, coughs, winces.

DAMONE (CONT'D)

Tonight I heard she was going to the
prom with that skinny motherfucker,
looks like Raj from *What's Happening!*

JACK

Morris Mann.

DAMONE

Yeah, yeah, that's him. I came to
fuck him up, only he's gone and
you're here. Didn't expect that shit.

JACK
Believe me, neither did I.

DAMONE
Know what?

Damone stands.

DAMONE (CONT'D)
Fuck this. Ya'll can have her. I got
work tomorrow. I'm out.

JACK
You are?

Damone hops in his car, revs it, tears out of there. Jack sits up, feels his pockets for his keys, then remembers, looks to the dark yards beyond.

INT. HEITNER KITCHEN - NIGHT (LATER)

Jack, at the table, bag of ice to his face.

INT. NORRISTOWN HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Packed with kids. Jack shoves books into his locker. An ASSHOLE BOY (17, Caucasian, dopey) arrives with two MINIONS.

ASSHOLE BOY
Hey, Heitner! Nice prom date. She
always hurl all over you like that?

They laugh. Jack WHAMS his locker shut, pushes past them.

INT. SYNAGOGUE - ALL-PURPOSE ROOM - DAY

Congregants snack. Jack stands with Lana, who talks to an ELDERLY COUPLE (70s, Caucasian).

Sharon and Hannah approach. Jack holds his breath. Sharon nods at Lana, Hannah looks away, and they pass. He breathes, spots Micah laughing with some other guys across the room.

INT. SYNAGOGUE - CLOAK ROOM - NIGHT

Jack slips a cassette case into a jacket pocket, "Poppy Crap" handwritten on the label.

EXT. ROAD/INT. DODGE ASPEN - DAY

He stops at a light, looks to his right at Bradlee's.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - JACK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

On the bed, he sadly downs a communion wafer, crinkled package beside him.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

In the white Who t-shirt he eventually wears to the cemetery, Jack glumly roots through the fridge, when BRIINNGG! He turns to the wall phone. Heads over. Answers.

JACK

Hello?

And he lights up.

EXT. LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Traci paces outside her still-running Cutlass, the pamphlet that ends up in Jack's car now in her grip.

Jack pulls up, hops out, bounces toward her.

JACK

God, I'm so glad you called, you have no idea how bad I missed you. Traci?

She averts her eyes, shoves the pamphlet into his hands -- "Call 1-800-TROUBLE." He flips it over -- "Pregnant? Now what?" in bold above.

JACK

This -- this is a joke, right? Fine, you got me, now say psych.

She looks away. He tears up.

JACK (CONT'D)

Traci, come on, say psych. Please, please, please say psych.

She cries gently. He paces.

JACK (CONT'D)

You said we had nothing to worry about!

TRACI

I thought we didn't. It was almost my period.

JACK

What are you gonna, you know, do?

TRACI

I don't know.

JACK

And you're sure you're--

TRACI

I tested twice.

JACK

I mean are you sure it's -- me?

Her eyes pop out. She rips open her car door.

TRACI

Fuck this shit. Soon as my aunt and uncle come home from work today I'm telling them.

JACK

Traci please, we can figure this out on our own!

TRACI

Know what, Jack? I should've known you couldn't handle when shit gets real. I won't tell who it was. Just go live your nice, cushy life. Pretend nothing happened. You're good at that. See, honestly? I wouldn't want a child like you involved in grown-up shit like this. I wish so bad we never met.

JACK

Traci, wait wait wait!

She hops in.

TRACI

Wait, my ass! Fuck that piece of shit record store, fuck Nina Simone, and fuck you!

She SLAMS her door, tears off. He teeters, stunned, as the Cutlass disappears in a cloud of dust.

INT. DODGE ASPEN - DAY (SAME)

Jack drives in a daze.

SILENT QUICK FLASHBACKS

-- At the record store, Jack stares at empty shelves.
 -- In the video store, Glenn yells at him.
 -- In the street, Hannah berates him on prom night.
 -- In the hospital, Lana in bed, sedated, Jack with her.

INT. ASPEN - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

Jack suddenly SWERVES INTO A U-TURN.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

The Aspen screeches to the curb of the cemetery.

JACK (V.O., PRE-LAP)
 You get it now, Max?

INT. CEMETERY - DAY

Jack sits on the ground against Max's gravestone, listless.

JACK
 You see how screwed I am? So what do
 I do? Tell me. Please! What do I--

MAX (O.S.)
 Who, whoa, whoa.

Jack calmly turns to Max, to Jack very much alive -- long hair like the photo on the Heitner wall, jean jacket and t-shirt of Zeppelin's winged Icarus, just like his poster.

MAX
 Five years, not a peep, now you want
 my help?

Max smacks a pack of Marlboros against his palm.

MAX
 I mean, first of all, riding bareback
 on prom night. Did you take Sex Ed?

JACK
 Yeah.

MAX
 Did you fucking pass?!

Jack jumps up, approaches as Max casually lights up a smoke.

JACK

Know what? This is your fault!

MAX

So you brought me here to blame me?
You're just like the rest of them.

JACK

I needed you to show me the ropes,
teach me how to handle life like big
brothers are supposed to, but instead
you had to drink, do drugs --

MAX

Oh my God. Pot. Is not. A drug.

JACK

It was when you smashed into a
telephone pole!

MAX

It was laced! Believe me, if I hadn't
ended up in this dump I would've gone
after the asshole behind 7-11 who
sold it to me. Randy fucking James.
Never trust a guy with two first
names. Who had a full beard in 5th
grade. And failed lunch. Twice.

JACK

You shouldn't have bought it in the
first place!

Max fires his cig to the ground, paces.

MAX

You think it was easy for me? I was
already a mess when you, God's gift
to child rearing, showed up. So I
wasn't exactly prepared to kick into
Greg Brady mode. And besides, who
else would've explained that *The Wall*
is metaphor for loneliness, "Sugar
Mountain" isn't about a fucking
mountain, and side B of *Abbey Road* is
the greatest 16 minutes of rock ever
recorded? In fact if it wasn't for me
you'd be listening to Howard Jones,
Boy George, and--

JACK

I needed more than a hobby, Max!

Touche. Max simmers down.

MAX

Fine, I screwed the pooch on the whole big brother thing but you had it way easier than I did. Mom and Dad made it clear from Day One that you were the golden child and I was the fuck up. Fact you're actually luckier than most kids you know. Like Micah.

INT. MICAH'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Morning. Sleep in his eyes, Micah stares at himself in the mirror with contempt.

MAX (V.O.)

Waking up every day praying he's someone he's not. Or Morris.

INT. SCHOOL - GYM - NIGHT

Basketball game -- Norristown vs. Kendrick -- players standing on the court, staring up as a woman in the stands, clearly drunk, fights against two guards seizing her.

MAX (V.O.)

The time his Mom came to the game?

Morris, one of the players, watches in horror.

MAX (V.O.) (CONT'D)

What's his life like? Even Hannah.

INT. HANNAH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Sharon waves a paper with a red B grade on it, berates Hannah, who's in tears at the table.

MAX (V.O.)

You try being the rabbi's daughter with a sister at fucking Harvard.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Max paces. Jack sits atop Max's gravestone, looks down.

MAX (CONT'D)

And of course Traci. Living in Camden? Mom an addict? Abusive father shot and killed in front of her? I'm not saying it's been a breeze, but you sure as hell don't appreciate what you've had.

JACK

Still, if I'd just kept being the person I was meant to be then--

MAX

You can't keep being the same person! You have to grow. Sure, you went overboard, fucked up beyond all that's holy, but you're a man now.

JACK

A man with no future.

MAX

Forget the future. Instead of worrying about what you think is supposed to be in front you, face what actually is in front of you. Or live in denial and end up like Mom and Dad, dressed in black in the living room while half the shul eats whitefish and chants the Kaddish.

A long, sad look between them.

MAX (CONT'D)

Don't waste your life like them. Or like me. Go be with that girl. Help her. Do what's right, bro.

JACK

But look at you. Look at what you did with your life. How can I possibly trust you?

Max taps Jack's temple.

MAX

Because today, I am you.

Jack sighs, nods, turns to go.

MAX

Hey, what's it like?

He turns back.

MAX

Being in love. I never was. And Fiona Finkelstein doesn't count. She was in love with half the confirmation class. You should've seen what went on in the synagogue attic. But I never had what you had.

JACK
I wish you could've met her.

MAX
Me too. She's good for you.

Jack nods, spins, walks.

JACK
And it wasn't love.

MAX
Bullshit. Now answer. What's it like?

Jack raises his hand to wave without turning.

EXT. TRACI'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Jack knocks at the front door. It opens.

JACK
Listen, I --

Traci's hand reaches out, grabs him, yanks him inside.

INT. TRACI'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Traci paces as Jack sits on the sectional, knee pumping.

TRACI
They're gonna kick me to the curb.
I'm just a charity case.

KEYS JANGLE outside. Traci quickly sits beside him.

TRACI (CONT'D)
Let me do the talking.

JACK
What will you say?

TRACI
How the fuck do--

The door opens. DEE GAINES (40s, Black, suit on) enters with a briefcase, yet to see them.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
I'm telling you, Dee.

Jack jaw drops as guidance counselor Charlie Gaines enters!

CHARLIE

They weren't taking you seriously. A Black lawyer representing the city where a Black mayor dropped a goddamn bomb on a Black neighborhood!

DEE

MOVE was two long years ago.

Charlie finally looks their way, freezes.

CHARLIE

The hell are you doing in my house?

Dee follows his gaze to the kids on the couch.

TRACI

Aunt Dee. Uncle Charlie.

JACK

(weakly)
Uncle?

TRACI

We -- we need to talk.

Charlie looks back and forth at them, confused. Then his eyes shoot wide open.

CHARLIE

Wait! You mean she's--

JACK

Girl X.

TRACI

Who?

DEE

I don't understand. You and this boy know each other?

JACK

Remember how you said you were open-minded, Mr. Gaines?

CHARLIE

Not in this damn house.

Charlie grabs an armchair, carries it over a foot from Jack and Traci, plops it down, sits.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Mind's as closed as Fort Goddamn
Knox. Now. What is it you need to
talk about, Jack?

DEE

Uh, kitchen, please?

CHARLIE

Damn it, Dee. I don't have time for a
damn kitchen talk. I want to know the
big secret.

DEE

Charles. Kitchen.

Charlie rolls his eyes, stands up.

CHARLIE

Don't move. Not an inch, you hear me?

He leaves. Traci and Jack whisper-fight.

JACK

It never occurred to you to mention
that your uncle works at my school?!

TRACI

It never occurred to you to keep your
mouth shut?

JACK

Six months ago my biggest concern was
asking Hannah to the friggin' prom.

TRACI

And mine was getting a tape of my
parents' favorite singer so I could
feel good about them for a change!

Jack stares at her, struck with sadness.

Dee and Charlie enter, Dee with a silver tray of designer
cookies and glasses of lemonade, Charlie with a scowl. Dee
sets the tray on the table, sits across from them. Charlie
sits in the armchair, struggles to remain calm.

Jack reaches for a cookie; Traci gently taps his hand away.

JACK

Look, I just want to--

CHARLIE

Stop talking, Jack.

DEE

Charlie? So. I understand you kids
have a -- friendship.

Charlie snickers bitterly.

CHARLIE

What happened to that boy you were
seeing before? The tall one. Looked
like Raj from *What's Happening!!*

TRACI

He wasn't a good fit.

CHARLIE

He wasn't a good fit? My lord.

DEE

Kids, go on.

TRACI

OK, but promise you'll stay calm?

EXT. TRACI'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

YELLS from inside, pale Jack on a porch swing.

TRACI (O.S.)

I said it was an accident!

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Accident, my ass! See, Dee. Warned
you what happens when you put a girl
in a Catholic school uniform. She
can't wait to take it off!

Dee steps partway outside.

DEE

Charles? Lower. The volume.

Dee closes the door behind her, sits beside Jack, speaks
plainly without an ounce of consolation.

DEE (CONT'D)

You understand what's happening here?

JACK

Yes, ma'am. I'm sorry.

DEE

You should be.

JACK
What happens now?

DEE
What do you think should happen?

JACK
I think --

DEE
Quiet, Jack. You don't have a say.
Nor do we. I just don't want her to
end up like her mother.

JACK
Traci's nothing like her mother.

DEE
You've never met her mother.

He glances at Dee, clears his throat. Dee sits back, puzzled,
then gets it, impressed.

DEE (CONT'D)
Hm. Well, then.
(taps his knee, stands)
After he gets this out of his system
we need to go even the equation, so
to speak. Only fair, right?

He looks up, alarmed.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie, Dee, Traci, and pallid Jack crowd onto the couch.
Lana enters with a plastic tray of Entenmann's mini chocolate
doughnuts and smudged glasses of water.

LANA
Sorry, it's all I could scrounge up.
I didn't expect company.

She shoots Jack a look, settles into a chair.

DEE
It's very nice, Mrs. Heitner.

Charlie goes for a doughnut, but Dee smacks his hand away.

LANA
So.

She looks them over as they stare at Jack.

JACK

Um. Well it's kind of a long story.

CHARLIE

Mm-hmm.

JACK

See one day at work in walks Traci.

LANA

Traci. Wait, you're that cashier from
Bradlee's. Jack, you never told me
you knew her.

JACK

I didn't yet, not exactly, anyway.

CHARLIE

Ma'am? Your boy got my niece in
trouble.

Dee and Traci glare at him.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

What? Somebody's gotta get the ball
rolling or we'll be here all night.

LANA

What kind of trouble?

JACK

Um -- funny you should ask that.

LANA

Why is it funny?

JACK

I mean not funny, just--

TRACI

Mrs. Heitner. Jack and I started
hanging out, one thing led to
another, and we hooked up.

Lana stares at Jack.

LANA

What does she mean hooked up?

Charlie rolls his eyes.

CHARLIE

You know. Hooked--

He makes a circle with his thumb and forefinger, shoves the other forefinger through.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

--up.

DEE

Charles, that's crude.

CHARLIE

Can't help it. I work with teenagers.

Lana blinks, slowly rises, zombie gaze.

LANA

I'm sorry. I'm not feeling well.
Pleasure meeting you, Mr. and Mrs.
Gaines. Young lady.

She nods at them, starts a slow climb up the stairs. They watch. Charlie leans over, whispers to Jack.

CHARLIE

This normal?

DEE

Charlie.

CHARLIE

Might be a stroke. I hear that's how
it starts. You enter a fugue state.

JACK

You guys go. I'll deal with her.

They stand. Charlie nabs a doughnut, shoves it in his mouth. Dee catches him.

CHARLIE

One for the road.

As they bicker, Traci slides next to Jack, nods at the photo of Young Jack and Max on the wall.

TRACI

He looks so happy.

JACK

We're good at pretending around here.

TRACI

Thanks for showing up today.

JACK

Least I could do. Now, you don't hear from me soon, call the authorities.

He grazes her hand, heads for the stairs.

CHARLIE

Good luck, son. You're gonna need it.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - LANA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Queen-sized bed, large dresser with a mirror attached. Lana sits, faces her reflection. Jack's appears behind her.

JACK

I know this is -- a lot.

She doesn't turn. He circles the bed, sits beside her.

LANA

You know when Max died I blamed your father. Now I blame myself. I'm an empty shell, Jack.

JACK

But it's nobody's fault.

LANA

I need quiet in my life, Jack. I have to be alone. Look inward. To do that, you need go away for a while.

JACK

Go where?

LANA

Your father's.

JACK

You're throwing me out?!

She fixes a stray hair hanging down his forehead.

LANA

You messed up, kiddo. More than I ever thought you could. I don't know what's next for you and that poor girl, but whatever it is, it won't happen in this house.

She pats his knee, stands, heads for the door.

JACK

Mom? Is it because Traci's too
Gentile? Or too Black?

Lana stops, shakes her head, gently laughs.

LANA

Oh, it's got nothing to do with her,
Jackie. Only you. Only you.

She's gone. Jack faces himself in the mirror.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - MAX'S ROOM - NIGHT

Moonlit. Jack peeks in, stares at the turntable.

INT. ROYAL ARMS APARTMENTS - ALAN'S APARTMENT - DAY

Decent sized, generic apartment. Helen prepares food while Alan carefully sets a copy of *Rolling Stone* on a coffee table -- young U2 on the cover.

BZZZZ!

He hesitates. Helen nods at him. He heads over, opens the door -- Jack with Max's turntable and a backpack. A pause. Then Alan heartily hugs his son.

INT. MALL - DAY

Jack, alone on a bench, scans the crowd. Then stands. Micah approaches, yarmulke gone.

INT. MALL - DAY (SAME)

They walk and talk, cups of soda in hand.

MICAH

My mother begged him not to kick me
out but he still might do it.

JACK (V.O.)

How did she know, though? The sermon?

INT. GREENBAUM HOUSE - FOYER - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Foyer of a large house. MR. GREENBAUM (40s, Caucasian) -- heavily bearded, yarmulke on -- approaches the front door, opens it -- Glenn with a bouquet of flowers!

INT. MALL - DAY (BACK TO PRESENT)

MICAH

Dude's got balls of steel, I'll give him that. The sermon was true, you know. The self-hate.

JACK

Is that why you weren't eating?

MICAH

The only thing I could control, according to my English teacher.

JACK

You told your English teacher?!

MICAH

I knew he'd get it. Really get it.

JACK

Oh. Oh!

MICAH

Seminary's off the table. I'm done hiding. People hate me, they hate me. I figured you hated me, too.

JACK

I was scared. And stupid. I'm sorry.
(a beat)
What made you say yes today anyway?

MICAH

That lame tape you made. I mean, Gloria Gaynor? The Weather Girls? Just 'cause I'm gay doesn't mean I don't have taste. Besides, asshole. I missed you.

They walk in silence.

MICAH (CONT'D)

Now, why's Hannah been stumbling around school in a daze like "Jewish Night Of The Living Dead?"

INT. MALL - FOOD COURT - DAY

They eat, Micah voraciously.

MICAH

Jesus, Jackson, I thought my life was a mess! What's she gonna do?

JACK

I don't know. We meet in an hour.

MICAH

So can I be Uncle Micah?

JACK

Not funny.

MICAH

First birthday? Totally getting the kid a Culture Club record.

EXT./INT. WENDY'S - DAY

Rain pelts Wendy's, Jack and Traci's cars outside.

In a booth, Jack and Traci, no food. She fights tears.

TRACI

I've been thinking about what it would be like having a kid. Someone with no history. No pain. Unconditional love. I could make sure it stays that way.

(looks up at him)

But that's what my mother must've felt and she should never have had me. I can't be like her, Jack.

(struggles, cries now)

I don't know why I'm crying. I should be happy now.

JACK

Why?

TRACI

This morning, there was blood, Jack. It died. It's gone. It's over.

He reaches across, takes her hand, squeezes.

EXT. TRACI'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

Light rain. Jack and Traci on a porch swing.

JACK

I'm sorry, Trace. For everything.

TRACI

Takes two to tango, Record Boy.
Question is, assuming you wore a damn
rubber like every other kid on prom
night, would you do it all again?

He ponders. Nods.

TRACI (CONT'D)

Good. Me too.

Jack stands, puts out his hand for her to take.

JACK

Come on. I want you to meet someone.

EXT./INT. JEWISH CEMETERY - DAY

Jack's car parked outside.

Jack and Traci at Max's grave. She places a pebble on top.

TRACI

Like this?

JACK

Yeah. Keeps away evil spirits.

TRACI

You ever talk to him?

JACK

(shrugs)
He thought -- would've thought you
were good for me.

TRACI

Then he knows what's up.

They turn, walk towards the entrance. **Joan Jett's cover of "Everyday People" EMERGES from a car radio.** She stops him.

JACK

What?

She leans in for a kiss but he leans back, nods at the graves.

JACK (CONT'D)

Hear that? Sound of a few hundred
Jews spinning in their graves.

She cracks up. And they kiss.

JACK (CONT'D)

One sec.

He jogs back to Max's grave, glances behind him.

JACK (CONT'D)

Want to know what love is like? It's like hearing side B of *Abbey Road* for the first time and every time you see her it's like hearing it for the first time all over again. Sorry you missed out. See you soon.

He jogs to Traci as the SONG RISES. They hold hands, walk.

TRACI

So what happens now?

JACK

For once in my life, I have no idea. I mean it can't get any worse, right?

EXT. BANK - DAY

Few cars in the lot. Another pulls in. Alan gets out.

INT. BANK - OFFICE - DAY

Alan, paper in hand, sits before sweaty Les.

ALAN

So we got word the bill's due.

Les shifts in his chair.

ALAN (CONT'D)

I'm gonna need a cashier's check.
(checks the paper)
For 4,100 dollars.

LES

Right. I, uh...

He wipes his wet brow, offers a weak grin.

ALAN

There a problem? Les?

THE END