

UNBECOMING

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EXT. BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS - DAY - AERIAL

The grandeur of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It is late summer, but fall threatens. This outcropping of densely forested peaks and valleys is said to be the Appalachian Mountain range's most ethereal. And it is.

We are flying, floating, sailing on air. Trees and houses and roads and lakes disappear beneath us as we descend, dropping from the piney peaks into the pastoral valley below.

There is a HOUSE in the distance. An old, stone-set estate home with a SWIMMING POOL.

And in that pool, finishing his morning laps, is THE SENATOR.

EXT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY

The Senator, a man with the face of George Washington if George Washington was a matinee idol, breaks the surface of the water, stands, leans on the side to catch his breath. He's been a swimmer since childhood, but nowadays it takes a helluva lot to push the blood through octogenarian veins. He breathes in deep, open mouth gulps of air.

Nearby, a CHAISE LOUNGE covered by a fading beach TOWEL. Next to it, a small cocktail TABLE with a highball GLASS that is filled with dirty rainwater. A soggy PAPERBACK, too.

The Senator weeps.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The living room of the Senator's house is lit on one side by tall windows that run the length of the room and open onto a terrace overlooking the swimming pool.

The room has been lovingly furnished by a matriarch who hosted decades of family holiday gatherings here. But there are also flowers -- sprawling FUNERAL BOUQUETS scattered around the room. Dry, wilting flora and fauna that's been here for a while, and isn't going anywhere.

Framed PHOTOGRAPHS are scattered about: the Senator with his wife and family, the Senator with JFK, with LBJ, Nixon, Ford, Reagan and all the rest.

The Senator ambles through the room on his way to the kitchen. He wears his fancy hotel ROBE like a Brooks Brothers suit and the TOWEL around his neck like an ascot.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The Senator peels the lid off a can of VIENNA SAUSAGES and dumps the little fingers onto a small SAUCER. He adds a stack of SALTINES to the plate and opens a CAN of Donald Duck orange juice.

Squawk.

He looks up. Silence. Then another shout from outside.

Yelp.

He leaves his breakfast on the countertop, dashes out.

EXT. KUDZU FIELD - DAY

The Senator, dressed like a rancher who is more comfortable on a golf course than the prairie, makes his way down a stone path behind the house to find a very distressed GOAT HERDER.

The Goat Herder, a woman who is a generation younger than the Senator, calls out toward the mountain range in the distance:

GOAT HERDER

Maggie!

The Senator looks off in the direction of her cries. Nothing. Behind the woman, a herd of goats munches away on a hillside of kudzu vines.

GOAT HERDER (CONT'D)

MAGGIE BELLE!

Her voice echoes across the valley.

SENATOR

Ma'am. Are you okay?

The Goat Herder whips around, startled but relieved. She wears cat-eye glasses and lopsided denim overalls.

GOAT HERDER

(desperate)

I can't find Maggie!

SENATOR

Did she run off?

GOAT HERDER

She must've. *Jiminey Christmas!*
That girl will be the death of me.

SENATOR
 How old is she? What's she wearing?
 I'll call the sheriff.

The Goat Herder pauses, looks at the old man. The sheriff?

GOAT HERDER
 Maggie's one of my goats.

The Senator is perplexed, maybe even annoyed.

SENATOR
 A goat?

GOAT HERDER
 (becoming agitated again)
 Yes! And I have to find her! *Land sakes*, I'm gonna have another heart attack.

SENATOR
 We'll find your goat. Maggie. We'll find her. You need to take a breath... Calm down.

GOAT HERDER
 (near tears)
 But...she's my Maggie!

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Goat Herder sits on the couch, finishing off the Senator's plate of Vienna sausages and saltines. She washes it down with his orange juice.

The Senator sits across from her, not sure what happens next.

GOAT HERDER
 Thank you. That helped.

The Senator nods politely.

GOAT HERDER (CONT'D)
 You were right. I needed to calm down. Maggie can't have gone far. No point in giving myself a stroke trying to find her.

SENATOR
 My Barbara had a stroke laying out by the pool. Doesn't have to be stress.

This catches her off guard. She didn't know.

GOAT HERDER

Oh, I'm so sorry...

SENATOR

If a stroke's coming for you, it'll find you. Even if you're sipping a Pimm's by the pool.

The Goat Herder looks around the room, notices the flowers.

GOAT HERDER

(kindly)

It may be time to relocate these flowers.

The Senator had forgotten dead bouquets don't belong in a living room.

GOAT HERDER (CONT'D)

My girls will mulch 'em for you. Free of charge.

She offers a smile. He doesn't accept.

SENATOR

I think you'd better go find your goat now.

She hadn't meant it to be mean. The Goat Herder sets her saucer and orange juice can down on the coffee table, stands, straightens her overalls, thinks.

GOAT HERDER

(terse)

You must've been pretty important.

He looks at her, frowns.

SENATOR

I... I knew some important people once. I suppose that made me pretty important, too. What's your point?

GOAT HERDER

You act like a man who figured he might just might get away with it.

SENATOR

(taken aback)

Get away with what?

GOAT HERDER

It. Death. Like you mighta been
able to give it the slip.

The Senator stands, collects himself a bit. Sighs. Breathes
in deeply. Sits again, stares at the floor.

SENATOR

I've never told a soul what I'm
about to tell you. Not even my
wife.

He motions for her to sit. She does. He looks at her, dead
serious.

SENATOR (CONT'D)

In 1959 I went to work for J. Edgar
Hoover. I was a G-man. A government
lawyer, actually, but I thought of
myself as a G-man. And it was...
I'm telling you, it was heady
stuff. Russians and civil rights
and gangsters. Heady stuff. A few
years into it, they sent me to
Dallas. Somebody had tried to shoot
an Army general in his home.

The Senator pauses. He thinks on this.

SENATOR (CONT'D)

What I mean to say is that...I
tried to shoot an Army general in
his home. Missed. But my attempt to
kill General Walker would
eventually be attributed to
somebody else.

The Goat Herder's bearing has changed. She's scared.

SENATOR (CONT'D)

I don't know if they really wanted
Walker dead or figured I was a bad
shot and might miss. (a beat) I
tried to hit him. (another beat) In
retrospect, I guess it worked out
okay for them. They used my rifle
to shoot the President a couple of
months later. And tied it all to
Lee Oswald for the history books.

GOAT HERDER

(whispered, stunned)
Jiminey Christmas.

SENATOR

I was told if I ever breathed a word of this to anyone, I'd be shot dead. My family, too. Also, if I kept my mouth shut... I might just grow up to be President one day.

The Goat Herder shakes her head. She can't believe what she's hearing. And suddenly, she wants to confess something, too:

GOAT HERDER

(solemn)

I had a menage a trois with Catherine Bach and Paul Williams. In the late seventies.

He looks at her. *Really?* She nods, ruefully.

Tap, tap, shuffle.

There is a sound coming from the living room windows. The Senator looks up. The Goat Herder stands, turns, looks.

At the window, MAGGIE THE GOAT. The animal stands there looking at them, curious...as though it is she who has been looking for them.

GOAT HERDER (CONT'D)

Maggie!

She bolts for the door and the Senator follows.

From inside the window we see Maggie hear the door clatter and trot off across the terrace toward the swimming pool. After a beat, the Goat Herder passes the window following after her. And a moment later, the Senator.

They've gotta get that goat.

- END FILM ONE -

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Only one kid in day-long school detention today: BEV, a sober-looking anime kid who wears an Edward Elric T-shirt, faded black jeans, and Totoro beanie.

The girl slouches in her desk, doodling on her left arm with a Sharpie.

At the front of the classroom, COACH CLARKE sits, skimming an unauthorized biography of Alex Karras on his tablet.

A twenty-year high school sports coach and award-winning in-school suspension auditor, Clarke chuckles at one of the anecdotes.

Bev pays him no mind.

Clarke looks up from his reading, stands, stretches, walks over to the teacher desk and sorts through a stack of Speech & Debate textbooks. Curious, he flips through one. Then:

CLARKE

You ever read *Lysistrata*? It's a Greek play. A comedy. But honestly, it's not that funny.

Bev looks his way, says nothing.

Clarke scans a couple more pages, then flips the textbook shut. He walks back to his chair, sits again.

CLARKE (CONT'D)

Ye old battle of the sexes. (beat)
One guess who loses.

Bev caps her Sharpie, drops her head on the desk. Tries to sleep.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL OFFICE - DAY

Coach Clarke is making copies in the school office. Bev, dutifully at his side.

CLARKE

Hell with the classics. I prefer the Watergate approach. What did the president know and when did he know it? I mean, let's be frank. Truth isn't gender-specific. Women don't *want* to lie any more than men do. So. Why *do they*?

Bev looks at him, rubs her nose. Shrugs.

Clark drums his two forefingers on the top of the copier like Keith Moon.

CLARKE (CONT'D)

That...was a rhetorical question.

Forefinger rim-shot.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - LATER

Bev hunches over her desk. She's sketching in the margins of her Geometry exam with a #2 pencil.

Coach Clarke sits near.

CLARKE

Suddenly it dawns on me. The woman I've been chatting up at the bar, the one with the (indicates big boobs); she's a former student. I taught her Western Civ when she was in ninth grade. Can you believe that?

Bev looks at him, sighs. She takes another stab at the math.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - DAY

Clarke shooting baskets in the school gymnasium.

Bev slouches on the bleachers. A rack of basketballs nearby.

CLARKE

You think Hackl would go out with me? She's cute. Totally my type, too. Pretty. Smart. Doesn't smile too much. We talked once. After a faculty meeting. She seemed...perturbed. I said something to her like, 'I know, right?'

Bev pulls her beanie down a little lower: to the lids of her eyes.

CLARKE (CONT'D)

There was definitely some empathy there. I don't know. I heard she was going through a divorce.

Jump shot. Swish.

An intense-looking 11th grader, BROOKS, enters the gymnasium.

BROOKS

Coach Clark.

Clark collects his basketball, dribbles, looks at the boy. Brooks comes to him. It's better that way.

CLARKE
 (businesslike)
 Yessir.

BROOKS
 Just wanted to know if you'd be
 willing to do an interview about
 this year's cross-country team.

Clarke inspects the amber-colored gym lights for a long moment. Exhales heavily.

CLARKE
 Brooks. I maintain an open-door
 policy with the press. You know
 that. But. And here's your big
 butt...

Brooks smiles a little. This is Coach Clarke's joke for students he likes.

CLARKE (CONT'D)
 Last year's spring sports coverage
 was abysmal.

BROOKS
 We have a new sponsor this year.
 Ms. Hackl. She's great. Got
 everybody pumped up.

Clarke looks over at Bev: can you *believe* this? It's a sign.
 A perfect pass to the girl.

A little too perfect. Bev squeals. The ball bounces off her hands.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL CAMPUS - DAY

Clarke and Bev briskly walk across campus.

End-of-day announcements echo through the school P.A. system:

ANNOUNCEMENTS
 Can't carry a tune? Terrified to
 stand on stage? No worries.
 Auditions for the Fall musical are
 next Tuesday and Wednesday after
 school in the Auditorium. Please
 see Mr. Bezold to sign up.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE OFFICE - DAY

Clarke and Bev wait at the guidance office counter.

From the back, MS. HACKL appears, sees them.

CLARKE
(thumb to the girl)
What are we gonna do with this one?

Hackl grabs the ISS paperwork from under the counter.

HACKL
She do okay today?

CLARKE
(the old pro)
I suppose. How'd you do today, Bev?

Bev shrugs. Hackl signs the paperwork, hands it to Coach Clarke to sign...which he does with a flourish.

CLARKE (CONT'D)
So. (reaching) How are
the...enrollments going?

HACKL
Enrollments?

CLARKE
New school year, bound to be some
bumps. But hey. Keep your head
above water, stay the course, and
all that jazz.

Hackl is genuinely confused.

CLARKE (CONT'D)
Talked to Brooks Drayton today.
Says the kids are pretty pumped for
newspaper this year.

HACKL
We're excited, yeah.

CLARKE
Well I told him I'm totally down
for an interview. Open-door policy.

Hackl nods. Suddenly, Bev speaks.

BEV
Ms. Hackl. Do you have a boyfriend?

HACKL
 (a beat)
 I have a husband.

BEV
 How's that going?

HACKL
 How's it *going*?

BEV
 Are you happy?

A long moment. Hackl looks at Coach Clarke. She's not happy.

BEV (CONT'D)
 (to Hackl)
 It's a rhetorical question.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

Bev. Back in in-school suspension.

Clarke sits in his chair, eyes fixed on his tablet: "Paper Lion" by George Plimpton. He looks up.

CLARKE
 Did I ever tell you about the girl
 I dated in middle school? I say
 dated, I mean went with...for about
 two months. She broke up with me.
 Only, she never *really* broke up
 with me. She sent a second. Some
 fat kid walked up to me at recess
 and told me Dawn wanted to break
 up. (he thinks) So technically,
 we're still together.

Bev thinks about this. Nods sagely.

- END FILM TWO -

EXT. VARIOUS SUBURBAN AND RURAL SETTINGS - DAY

CARL, a dishevelled octogenarian, is lost. And wandering.

INT. DINER - DAY

Carl sips water from a small cup at a quick service restaurant that has seen better days.

He is dazed, confused. His stare out the window at the passing cars is intent, but lacks any agenda.

Almost no one is in the diner at this time of day. A COOK and a WAITRESS run the place, and they speak only in Spanish.

REBECCA, thirty-something mother and wife, absently stirs a milkshake with her straw. She is slumped in a booth, cater-cornered from Carl. On her face, big round sunglasses that make her look like an alien.

Or is it an insect?

Next to her milkshake is a cell phone which is dark, dead. She half-sighs, half-coughs. Carl starts, turns his head, sees the woman. He furrows his brow. Is she an alien?

After a long moment, Rebecca notices. She shifts in her seat, looks around the restaurant, then at Carl.

REBECCA

What?

Carl doesn't answer. He keeps staring. Maybe she's an insect.

CARL

Why are you wearing those glasses?
Is it a disguise?

REBECCA

(a beat)

No.

The Waitress comes by Carl's table, refills his water. He nods at her slightly, then looks out the window again.

Rebecca stirs her milkshake, sits up straight, flicks her phone like a board game spinner.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Phone's dead.

Carl turns back to her. She shrugs.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Won't hold a charge longer than
twenty minutes. Phone company says
its my GPS sucking the juice.

She *is* an alien! Carl rummages through his pants pockets.

From his left pocket: two nickels, four dimes, a binder clip, and a rubber finger puppet that looks like an Ed Roth monster. From his right: three worn grocery store coupons and four individually wrapped candies.

He holds up one of the candies.

CARL
Butterscotch?

She thinks. Yeah, she could use a butterscotch.

REBECCA
Okay.

Carl stands, restuffs his pockets, grabs his water cup, shuffles over to her table, sits across from her in the booth.

Rebecca hadn't expected him to join her. She resets her milkshake and phone accordingly.

Carl offers the butterscotch candy. She takes it. Unwraps it, puts it in her mouth, drops the wrapper on the table.

After a moment, she pulls a wisp of pocket lint from her mouth.

Carl still can't figure those bug glasses.

Rebecca sighs. Removes the sunglasses, sets them on the table. No. On her head like a headband.

Carl grins. She's pretty.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
This your place?

CARL
My place?

REBECCA
Do you come here often?

Carl thinks for a moment.

CARL
I don't know. (beat) Do you?

Rebecca laughs.

REBECCA

Never. I was just out. Driving. Had to calm down. Came in here. Phone died.

Carl looks at the phone, then back at her.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

My husband's probably wondering where I am. Kids are at my mama's. I don't know. Just needed a minute. Gotta breathe.

CARL

(helpful)

Have you tried yoga?

Rebecca frowns.

REBECCA

I do yoga four times a week.

CARL

No! *Yogurt*. The ice cream kind. "Froyo."

REBECCA

With toppings? Yeah. Sure.

CARL

We don't have toppings. Just straight "froyo." House rules. (whispered like gossip) But I think she's diabetic, so...

Rebecca nods. This guy's an alien.

REBECCA

So you're married?

CARL

(thinks)

I am. Or was. She's not come around in a while.

Rebecca nods, looks away for a long moment.

REBECCA

You still love her?

Is she hitting on him? Carl blushes.

CARL
(careful)
Yes.

Rebecca looks at him, hard.

CARL (CONT'D)
I... I still love her. (a beat)
That doesn't mean I don't
ever...notice...other women.

Rebecca narrows her eyes. This could be helpful.

REBECCA
So would you... Did you ever, you
know. Fool around?

Carl blushes again, caught. He looks around the restaurant,
then back at Rebecca. Ashamed, he nods.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Really?

Carl nods again, thinks. He knows where she's going with
this. He straightens his hair.

CARL
(conspiratorially)
We could get a motel.

Rebecca looks at him: *What?*

CARL (CONT'D)
(leaning in)
With a swimming pool.

REBECCA
(indignant)
Oh come on. You give me one piece
of candy and you think I'm suddenly
open for business?

She spits her butterscotch into the wrapper.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Men are so...the same.

And suddenly she is crying.

Carl is helpless, hapless. *What'd he say?*

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Would you... I mean, honestly...
Would you just, *like that* go to bed
with me?

A CUSTOMER at another table looks up in their direction.

Carl nods sheepishly.

CARL
I'm pretty sure my wife is dead.

Rebecca returns to her senses, breathes again. She almost smiles.

CARL (CONT'D)
(kindly)
Go home to your husband. Talk to
him. (a beat) You'll both be dead
one day and this, all the drama...
You'll have worked through it by
then.

She looks at him. Thinks.

CARL (CONT'D)
You two'll be in the ground
together having the last laugh.

Deep breath. Rebecca stands, collects her phone, puts her
insect eyes back on.

She starts for the door, then returns for the re-wrapped
butterscotch. Carl notices this. He is pleased. And she is
gone.

Carl stares straight ahead, foggy again. A brief flicker as
he remembers something beautiful. And then, just like that,
the ember is gone.

He is lost.

- END FILM THREE -

INT./EXT. FAMILY CAR - DAY

TIM (42) at the wheel of a family car, cruising along
Interstate 85 in South Carolina. At his right, wife RUTH
sleeps. In the back, nine year-old daughter DOROTHY sings a
made-up pop song.

The trip has been days-long, but Tim is alert. He's looking for something on the far horizon. And suddenly he sees it. The PEACHOID, South Carolina's best well-known novelty water tower looms in the distance.

Tim's face goes white. As if he's seen a ghost.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO

EXT. OLD-FASHIONED THEATER - NIGHT

Tim, still 42, but fully present in his 25 year-old life, beams as KASEY (25), basks in post-show glow. The young woman still wears her stage make-up, hair pulled back clumsily. She was wearing a wig on stage tonight and it shows.

KASEY

(British, sing-song)

So, my dear sir, I take it you
approve of my accent?

TIM

I do.

KASEY

(still British)

Ah! Good, good. And of the lady's
acting?

TIM

(smiles wide)

Fantastic!

KASEY

(mock outrage)

Merely fantastic?

TIM

Wonderful!

KASEY

That's more like it! Flattery will
get you everywhere, laddie!

TIM

I had no idea the word "malaprop"
came from this play.

KASEY
(with grand gestures)
*And now you know. And it was I who
brought her to life for you!*

Tim beams. Kasey's mock grandiosity fades. She likes his face. It's kind.

EXT. USED CAR LOT - DAY

Tim and Kasey stroll among the cars.

KASEY
This is so hard, though. Like...
How does anyone ever *really know*?

TIM
You've got two grand, right?

KASEY
(she pouts)
I'm poor.

TIM
That's plenty, Kasey. Let me talk
to the guy.

KASEY
(smiles)
Why are you taking care of me?

He stops. Turns to her. She's gorgeous.

TIM
I... I like you.

KASEY
Do you think I'm hot?

TIM
(he laughs)
Yeah. I think you're hot.

KASEY
But I'm poor!

He smiles again, hapless. She leaps up onto him. Full-body hug and a grrrrr.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Kasey sips the last little bit of iced tea from her cup. Tim sits across from her, offers his hands to her. She looks at him. Curious. Smiles, then affects an invisible cigar. She offers her right hand for a firm, businesslike handshake.

KASEY
(mock fat cat)
Put're there, fella!

Tim shakes her hand, laughs.

KASEY (CONT'D)
Atta boy. This deal's gonna shake
up the industry, I tell ya.

TIM
You think?

KASEY
I see big things ahead, fella!

TIM
(serious)
Sleep with me.

Kasey freezes, shocked at his blunt offer. She guffaws. Tim smiles, shrugs. Yeah, she'll sleep with him.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

Tim walks quickly across the small college campus. Kasey exits a classroom building, walks down the steps, sees Tim, waves, jogs toward him. They meet, kiss. Tim takes her bags.

KASEY
Okay, so they observed my acting
class today.

TIM
You killed it, right?

KASEY
Oh. Of course. The dean pulls me
aside after and says I'm awesome.
So I say, how about the assistant
professor opening and he's just
like, *absolutely*. I want to move
you from adjunct for next fall.

TIM
What? That's amazing!

KASEY

I know!

TIM

You're legit!

KASEY

Too legit to quit!

They kiss again.

INT. BEACH MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Tim lays in bed, exhausted and drunk from a full day in the sun and a dozen cocktails. Kasey comes out of the bathroom wearing an oversized black pirate T-shirt that reads SURRENDER THE BOOTY. She has a half-empty bottle of tequila in her hand. He watches as she dances for him: sexy, sweet, awkward, drunk...laughing the whole time. She almost passes out, falls onto the bed, crawls up to him, takes his face in her hands. It's getting serious.

EXT. PEACHOID - DAY

Tim and Kasey stand in awe of the towering, peach-shaped water tower.

KASEY

It looks like a butt.

TIM

It looks like *your* butt.

KASEY

You saying I have a big butt?

TIM

Yeah. Like a big water tower butt.
Like that one.

KASEY

(shoves him playfully)
Ass.

Tim reads from a brochure.

TIM

(impressed)
It says the Pee-shwa holds a
million gallons of water.

KASEY

The what?

TIM

(he points)

It holds a million gallons of water.

KASEY

Wait. What did you call it?

TIM

...pee-shwa.

He offers her the brochure. On the cover flap is the title: PEACHOID. She sees this, looks back him. Is he joking?

KASEY

Pee-shwa?

He's not joking. He points at the word PEACHOID.

TIM

I think it's French. Like... Pee-shwa. It means...lukewarm water...from above. (a beat) If I'm not mistaken.

And with that, Kasey's face just...falls. She can't love this man anymore.

KASEY

(whispers)

Actually, I think it's...Peachoid.

Tim looks at her askance. He's pretty sure its pee-shwa.

INT./EXT. FAMILY CAR - DAY

Back to the present. The memory of the gaffe that ended his one great romance still haunts him. Tim almost cries, thinks better of it. Ruth is still asleep and Dorothy has stopped singing.

DOROTHY

Daddy. What's that huge peach?

Tim's lips start to move, but he cannot bring himself to speak.

Pee-shwa.

- END FILM FOUR -

INT. ANGLICAN CHURCH SANCTUARY - NIGHT

The dimly-lit interior of an Anglo-gothic-style church sanctuary.

A teenage ALTAR SERVER dressed in white suplice reverently extinguishes the tall white candles at the altar.

A memorial service happened here earlier. But now, the century-old granite-walled sanctuary is cozy, quiet. From the parking lot outside we hear gentle conversation and the sounds of retreating car tires on gravel.

ELLEN, a thirty-year old woman with a pixie haircut and vintage black dress sits emotionless, sullen on the aisle side of the third row pew. She's too young to be here tonight (for this reason) and she knows it. She stares off, blankly, dazed.

His task completed, the Altar Server makes a formal exit from the sanctuary, stealing a glance at the woman as he passes. He exits the rear sanctuary door with his brass candle extinguisher held high.

Ellen remains glued to the spot. She turns her head to the pulpit on the left side of the altar. There, next to it in a large gilded frame, is a blown-up snapshot of her FATHER:

Dad. Wearing a khaki work shirt and black "Gamecocks" ballcap.

Ellen cries.

Ellen's brother JOEL enters tentatively from the rear door of the sanctuary. Joel is a couple of years older than his sister and wears a dark suit with a white shirt and tie loosened at the neck. It's been an exhausting day.

As Joel starts down the aisle toward Ellen we see that he's holding a large, 80's-style "jambox" portable stereo.

He stops, next to his sister's pew, sets down the jambox, shuffles into the row, and sits next to her. After a beat, he forces a weak smile.

His sister is still staring at the photo of their Father. She's stopped crying, her tears dabbed by a well-worn tissue.

ELLEN

You look just like him, you know.

JOEL
 (he can't see it)
 He's got your eyes. And chin.

They sit in silence for a while. After a long moment, Ellen readjusts her stare: the ceiling above the altar.

ELLEN
 Fourteen years. (a beat) That's all
 he got after mom died.

JOEL
 (nods)
 Nine with Polly.

Ellen sighs wearily. Joel knows what she's going to say.

ELLEN
 Bless her heart.

Joel shakes his head. Don't even say it, sis.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
 That dress she wore. Whoa.

Joel starts to get tickled, but he tries not to laugh.

ELLEN (CONT'D)
 She told Aunt Cat that she had her
 makeup done at the Dillard's
 Clinique counter this morning.

They can't help it. Both are laughing now. And it feels good for a moment. Then, not so much.

JOEL
 She didn't have him as long as we
 did, El. Or mom.

Another long pause.

ELLEN
 When do you guys go back?

JOEL
 Tomorrow. Early flight. Connect
 through Charlotte. Kids start
 school Tuesday.

ELLEN
 Already?

Joel nods. He looks down at his hands, stretches the fingers wide, flips them over, back again.

JOEL

I remember the black hairs on dad's hands and wrists. The wrinkles around the sides when they bent. (a beat) Now I got 'em.

Ellen puts her arm around her big brother, looks at him. He sits up straight, looks dead ahead.

ELLEN

You didn't play daddy's music at the reception.

JOEL

I know. It just, we got there...it seemed dumb. Besides, no telling what's on that tape.

ELLEN

Who cares? Probably Elvis Pressley and Hank Sr. Jerry Clower routines. Dad stuff.

JOEL

(and suddenly he is crying)

I just thought...you know, we'd play his tape. From his workshop. I thought it'd be, maybe...you know, important. Like...some big message from the grave. Last words, you know.

Ellen cries, leans close to him. She'd hoped for the same.

ELLEN

(whispers)

Play it, Joel.

Joel looks at her. She nods. He thinks, stands, shuffles out of the pew.

Joel squats down next to the jambox stereo. He ejects the tape, checks it. It's an old copy cassette. The sunbaked, wrinkled label reads: "Gretest Hits." (sic) He shows it to his sister.

Ellen shrugs. Joel slides the tape back into the deck, snaps it shut, presses the house paint spattered "play" button.

After a moment of tape hiss, pops and starts, we hear the echoey twang of a bluegrass mandolin.

SONG: "The Great Atomic Power" by The Louvin Brothers

Joel looks up at Ellen: what the...? She smiles. One of dad's old Kentucky gospel songs.

SONG LYRICS

Do you fear this man's invention
that they call atomic power? Are we
all in great confusion? Do we know
the time or hour when a terrible
explosion may rain down upon our
land, leaving horrible destruction,
blotting out the works of man.

Joel's head has started bobbing to the swing beat of the song. He stands, Texas two-steps up the front of the sanctuary, spins on his heel and *dances*.

SONG LYRICS (CONT'D)

Are you ready for that great atomic
power? Will you rise and meet your
savior in the air? Will you shout
or will you cry when the fire rains
from on high? Are you ready for
that great atomic power?

During the guitar solo, Joel do-si-does over to Ellen, takes her hand and the two of them two-step back to the front of the church. Suddenly, as the lyrics begin, they snap into a full-on, choreographed country line dance.

SONG LYRICS (CONT'D)

There is one way to escape it: be
prepared to meet the Lord. Give
your heart and soul to Jesus he
will be your shield and sword. He
will surely stand beside you, and
you'll never taste of death, for
your soul will fly to safety and
eternal peace and rest!

Both dancers wear a serious game face: no smiles, all business. And though their moves are clearly deliberate, choreographed, there is the sense that this event is more ethereal than literal...as though heartbroken brother and sister are *choosing joy*.

SONG LYRICS (CONT'D)

Are you ready for that great atomic
power? Will you rise and meet your
savior in the air? Will you shout
or will you cry when the fire rains
from on high? Are you ready for
that great atomic power?

Ellen solos during the piano part.

The Altar Server, peeks his head in from the parking lot. He can't believe what he sees!

Joel lets out a whoop! And the line dance choreography is on again to the end.

SONG LYRICS (CONT'D)

There's an army who can conquer all
the enemy's great band. It's a
regiment of Christians guided by
the Savior's hand. When the
mushroom of destruction falls in
all its fury great, God will surely
save his children from that awful,
awful fate!

CUT TO BLACK

END CREDITS OVER THE LAST CHORUS: Are you ready for that
great atomic power? Will you rise and meet your savior in the
air? Will you shout or will you cry when the fire rains from
on high? Are you ready for that great atomic power?

- END FILM FIVE -

THE END