

A Year Without Ordinary Time

FADE IN:

EXT. COOKEVILLE, TENNESSEE - DAY

Pristine water streams down the 100-foot waterfall at Burgess Falls State Park. The trees at Tennessee Tech's arboretum are bare. The Dogwood Outdoor Performance Pavilion is quiet and still. A train WHISTLES as it goes through an intersection. A U.S. flag waves at the Putnam Country Court House. Manufacturing plants strew smoke into the air, gray on gray.

The West Side District is decorated for Christmas. Tinsel is wrapped symmetrically around the street lights. The store front awnings flap in the breeze. The Cookeville Depot Museum is decked out. The Cream City Ice Cream sign sits on its roof waiting for night.

INT. CHURCH ASSEMBLY BUILDING - DAY

Williams Hall is a modest gathering space with a raised stage. CHILDREN, 4-14, stand in front of BERNICE McCALL. She is nimble despite her 75 years, but her hair is a pale blue. AARON BAKER, a sixth-grader playing Joseph, stares at a kid dressed as a SNOWMAN who stands by the stage.

AARON

There weren't snowmen at the Nativity.

BERNICE

Well, Mr. Baker for your information the average low December temperature in Bethlehem is 42°, so the possibility of a snowman in Palestine is not so farfetched.

First grader LANDON STEINMETZ still isn't convinced.

LANDON

But snowmen can't talk, Mrs. McCall.

BERNICE

It's called creative license, Landon.

An innocent yet messy kindergartener named WYATT speaks up.

WYATT

Ms. McCall, why is your hair blue?

NOAH OSWALD, 8, GASPS. Indignity covers Bernice's face. It is quiet. Veins in her neck bulge, matching the hue of her hair.

BERNICE

My hair is not blue. It's a little grey. Maybe if you live to be my age, you'll have grey hair, too, Wyatt.

An awkward silence remains before MACY GRIMES, St. Jude parish's star of the play, chimes in.

MACY

Did Mary really ride a donkey?

BERNICE

No, Macy, she rode a Toyota Siena. Now could we please resume our rehearsal?

EXT. ST. JUDE CHURCH CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS - DAY

The church campus is on a large piece of land. In addition to Williams Hall, there's the church, rectory, and office. The foot of the Cumberland Mountains offers a serene backdrop.

It is late afternoon; FATHER MICAH JENKINS walks from the rectory. Wearing a winter coat and ear buds, there are no tell-tale signs that he is a priest. At 42, his hair has some gray, but he looks youthful. He takes his ear buds out when he sees Bernice standing outside the hall finishing a cigarette.

MICAH

How's play practice going, Bernice?

BERNICE

It's rehearsal, and it's not very good.

MICAH

Well, I won't hold you up. I've got to get to the hospital anyway.

BERNICE

Is George Steinmetz OK? I heard he had a heart attack.

MICAH

No, he fell off a ladder, actually.

BERNICE

I heard the heart attack made him fall.

MICAH

I'm pretty sure he just fell. That's what Doris said. Well, good luck with the show. I'm looking forward to it.

She stomps out her cigarette and opens to door. A cacophonous choir of children's CHATTER filters out before the door closes behind her. Micah walks to his modest sedan with its FRMICA license plate, Johnny Cash decal in the window, and Bonnaroo bumper sticker. A crucifix hangs from the rearview mirror; CDs sit in the passenger seat. Before he gets in, he sees a man in the distance walking with a fierce urgency.

ROGER GRABOWSKI gets closer. He's in his mid-40s. The shirt tail from a dated dress shirt sticks out from under his soiled University of Tennessee jacket. He wears corduroys and a ski cap. He carries a garbage bag and stops to pick up trash.

ROGER

Father Micah, did you know that there's a new made-for-TV Christmas movie on Lifetime tonight at 8:00 P.M?

MICAH

I didn't. Thanks for the heads up.

ROGER

I tape Christmas movies. Still use VHS. Hey where are you going?

MICAH

Visiting Mr. Steinmetz in the hospital.

ROGER

Give him my best.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

GEOGE STEINMETZ, white-haired and 70-something, lies in bed, bandaged but alert. His wife DORIS sits in a chair next to him watching the television mounted on the wall. There's a KNOCK at the door. Micah pops his head in the room.

MICAH  
Is anybody home?

GEORGE  
No, I'm in the hospital.

Micah laughs as he walks toward the bed.

GEORGE (cont'd)  
How come you're here, Father? It was just a little fall - some bruises and sprains. No breaks.

MICAH  
I'm glad to see it was nothing serious.

DORIS  
Landon's in the Christmas play again this year. Bernice has him as a shepherd.

MICAH  
A shepherd's not a bad part.

Micah looks down at the book in his hand.

MICAH (cont'd)  
George, would you like me to anoint you?

GEORGE  
Doris, do you know something I don't know?

DORIS  
He just wants to anoint you for healing.

GEORGE  
Well when we grew up, that sacrament was called Last Rites, so no disrespect Father, but I'll pass. Just say a prayer for me.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

Three candles are lit on the Advent wreath. Micah wears a pink vestment. He stands in front of the altar. His parents, BURT and MAGGIE JENKINS, mid-70s, are among those in attendance. Roger stands at the back of the church like it is his post.

MICAH

You know, most of us have so many  
fond memories of this time of year.

SHERMAN BEASLEY, a black man in his late 60s, smiles. George and Doris Steinmetz listen; George wears an arm cast.

MICAH (cont'd)

We remember certain presents like my Evil  
Knievel action figure and motorcycle in  
1975. There are certain places: my grand-  
parents' house on Christmas Eve, certain  
smells like my mom's chocolate chip cookies.  
Certain carols: my parents always played  
Andy Williams' Christmas music.

Bernice nudges a disinterested TOMMY MOORE, 19, to sit up.

MICAH (cont'd)

We remember so much about the holidays,  
but do you remember how you *felt*?

The Baker family listens. All are well dressed. JAMES and  
JEAN, 50s, are next to Aaron, 12, ALYSSA, 17, and AMANDA, 26.  
Amanda, pretty and stylish, ever so slightly moves a hymnal in  
its slot, as if to get it just right.

MICAH (cont'd)

Do you remember feeling so excited  
that you couldn't sleep? In her novel  
*The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison writes  
"If happiness is anticipation with  
certainty, we were happy."

Micah looks back at FATHER JACK LAWRENCE, gray and 70ish, who  
sits on the altar and offers a nod of approval.

MICAH (cont'd)

We felt that happiness, that joy and  
anticipation as children at Christmas.  
Adults can't be kids again, but we *can*  
get in better touch with our feelings.  
Because we're grown doesn't mean we  
can't share in the joy. Be happy. God  
didn't send his son down to spy on us.  
He was sent to *be* with us. So, during  
Advent, amidst all of the things you

MICAH (cont'd)  
have to finish on your to-do list,  
take time out just to feel the joy.

Micah sits. The Steinmetzs make the sign of the cross.

INT. VESTIBULE - MORNING

People file out of church. Roger holds the door for everyone. Micah and Father Jack greet those who pass. A family walks toward Micah. MATT OSWALD, 41, holds Noah's hand. Matt's wife AMY carries three-year-old COLIN. Matt taps Micah on the back.

MATT  
You look pretty in pink, sir.

MICAH  
Noah, does your daddy think he's funny?

Noah is not sure how to answer, but he looks at Matt and nods.

AMY  
Children are so honest.

MICAH  
Colin, do you think your daddy's funny?

Colin shakes his head no.

MATT  
You're coming on Christmas Eve, right?

MICAH  
Of course. What can I bring?

AMY  
Just bring yourself.

The Oswalds smile and walk past. The Bakers now stand before him. They have a look of Southern status. Micah shakes hands.

MICAH  
James, Jean, Aaron, Alyssa, good to  
see you all.

JAMES

Father Micah, this is our oldest daughter Amanda. She just finished grad school and moved back home.

While he didn't see her at first, Micah can't help but notice her now. She is young, but she conveys an air of maturity. Her smile is genuine. They shake hands.

MICAH

Where did you go to school, Amanda?

AMANDA

I went to the University of Virginia. Dad used to teach there.

MICAH

I saw U2 in Charlottesville on the 360 Tour.

AMANDA

Really? I saw them in Raleigh on the same tour like two nights later.

MICAH

Well, it's nice to meet another U2 fan.  
(to the boy)  
Aaron, be nice to your sisters. I've got an older sister; I understand.

JEAN

Take care, Father.

They walk on. Micah greets the next PARISHIONER in line.

INT. RECTORY - DAY

Father Jack reads in a well-lit easy chair. One wall of his room is lined with books. Micah KNOCKS at his doorway.

MICAH

So you liked the literary reference?

FATHER JACK

Very nice. There's more Morrison over there if you're interested.



Father Jack motions to his wall of books. Micah walks over and looks at the spines of the books. They are alphabetized.

MICAH

Oops, you've got George Eliot after Emerson. Want me to move it?

FATHER JACK

No, it's there on purpose. Eliot's real name was Mary Anne Evans. (beat) Hey somebody called for you when you were out. He didn't like the article in *Catholic Digest* about Reconciliation. Wanted to know how a Catholic priest could get away with disparaging a sacrament like you did.

MICAH

I didn't disparage it, Jack.

FATHER JACK

I know, but you can't please everyone, Micah, as much as you'd like to.

INT. CHURCH ASSEMBLY BUILDING - DAY

Bernice is in the shadows next to a PARENT. The hall is crowded. Micah sits by Father Jack and the Oswalds - except for Noah who is onstage. The Bakers are there watching Aaron perform. The set is a typical Nativity except for the snowman.

NOAH

We have no room in the inn.

Micah looks at Matt and Amy who beam with pride.

SNOWMAN

But the baby couldn't wait for a cancelled reservation. He was coming into the world, ready or not.

MACY

Joseph, we must stop. We've been walking so long my ass hurts.

She pats the poor excuse for a fake donkey. The crowd LAUGHS. Bernice frantically looks at the script.

BERNICE

That's not what I wrote. The Nativity wasn't a comedy.

PARENT

It sure wasn't a tragedy, either.

AARON

Look, in the distance. I see a stable.

MACY

We just need shelter from the elements.

AARON

You're right, Mary, it often gets chilly at night in Bethlehem, about 42°.

Mary and Joseph trudge onward slowly across the stage.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - OSWALD HOUSE - NIGHT

It's Christmas Eve. The Oswalds have a large tree, lights on the stairs, and stockings on the fireplace. Framed architectural sketches hang on the wall. Micah watches excited CHILDREN play. He smiles and sips a beer as Amy walks up.

AMY

Better go easy. Can't be tipsy at midnight mass. People might start talking.

They LAUGH. She pats him on the shoulder as she walks on. Micah watches alone as Matt plays the new Hungry Hungry Hippos game with Noah, Colin, and another BOY. Noah jumps up.

NOAH

We beat you, daddy!

MATT

Rematch!

Micah's eyes show both an appreciation and a longing. He turns and sees BEN and LACEY OSWALD stand with a PARTYGOER. Ben and Lacey are around 30. Lacey is showing, and the partygoer places a hand on her stomach and hugs her. He gives Ben a congratulatory handshake. Micah takes in the bustle and glow.

INT. DEN - JENKINS HOUSE - DAY

It's Christmas morning at Micah's parents' house. The older house is quiet. The tree is small and sits on a table. Burt, Maggie, and Micah unwrap gifts. Maggie gets a DVD.

MAGGIE

*The Golden Girls*. Thank you, Micah.

MICAH

It was always one of your favorites.  
(to Burt) Dad, your turn.

BURT

How many times have I told you I don't need anything? Save your money.

Burt opens a cardigan sweater and checks the tag.

BURT (cont'd)

You spent \$40 on one sweater?

MICAH

I got it on sale. It's OK, Dad. It's Christmas. Can't I get you something?

BURT

Thank you, but I wish you wouldn't do that.

Micah grabs a square-shaped package and looks at the tag.

MICAH

It's from Lisa.

He takes off the paper, revealing vinyl copies of The Beatles' *Rubber Soul* and Fleetwood Mac's self-titled album.

MAGGIE

Used records. Your sister went all out.

MICAH

These are the two albums she listened to the most when I was little.  
*Landslide's* on here. These are her copies.

He studies the backs of the albums, which have "LCJ" written on them in the corners with marker.

MAGGIE

Well, that was a cheap gift.

MICAH

No, these mean a lot to me, Mom.

MAGGIE

Let's see what she got your father and I.

She looks at the gifts and sees an envelope.

MAGGIE (cont'd)

Probably buffet gift cards again.

Maggie opens the card. She squints a bit, unfamiliar with what they are. Micah walks over.

MICAH

Two airplane tickets to Salt Lake City.

MAGGIE

I'm not going to fly anywhere. She knows I don't fly. This is worthless. We've been there once in fifteen years, and she wants us to visit all of a sudden?

BURT

Maggie, that's a very nice gift. You don't want to see your granddaughters?

MAGGIE

Of course I do, but ... I'm not going.

She walks out of the room.

BURT

You and your sister are different, Micah. Home always meant something to you. (beat) Each time I see you up on that altar, it's like watching you hit a homerun in Little League magnified 100 times. Look, I better go check on your mother.

Burt walks into the kitchen, leaving Micah alone.

INT. RECTORY - NIGHT

It's New Year's Eve. Micah watches the countdown on TV as the ball drops and couples kiss.

EXT. ST. JUDE CAMPUS - MINUTES LATER

Micah takes a deep breath, which rises in the cold air. He looks out on the hill and land behind the church and conveys a look of possibilities *and* uncertainties.

MICAH

Another year over. A new one just begun.

EXT. BAKER HOUSE - NIGHT

A car pulls into the driveway and parks in front of the garage. Christmas lights are lit. Amanda gets out and walks down a path and up three steps to the porch. She stops and goes back down and does it again. She finally arrives at the front door. She gets her key out and quietly opens the door.

INT. BAKER HOUSE - NIGHT

She tiptoes in past family pictures and her father's diplomas on the wall. She sits her keys and purse on the kitchen island. The stove clock says 2:17. She goes to the basement.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Amanda's basement room is sparsely adorned; she's not been back home long enough to decorate. A few pieces of her artwork hang on the wall. She sleeps. The nightstand clock says 3:10. Without warning, she jolts up in bed and YELLS at the top of her lungs, terrified. As quickly as the attack hits her, it is gone, and she lies back down. She takes a deep breath.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - DAY

Micah breathes heavily, pushing himself as he rides a bicycle up a hill. His collar shows under his slightly opened coat. He wears a Tennessee Smokies baseball cap and a drawstring

backpack. Across the street, Sherman Beasley walks MURPHY, a well-groomed yellow lab, who wears an argyle dog sweater.

SHERMAN

Father, I didn't know you rode a bike.

MICAH

New Year's resolution to get more exercise, Sherman. I thought I'd ride over to give Mrs. Geldner Communion.

Micah rides across the street, pets the dog and rubs his ears.

SHERMAN

Exercise does the soul good. At least that's what I tell myself when it's real cold and Murphy wants to go for a walk.

Micah and Sherman share a laugh.

MICAH

Murphy doesn't go without much does he?

EXT. DOWN THE SAME STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Roger walks along the edge of the street. He looks down, stopping every few minutes to pick up trash which he places in a Hefty bag. A garbage truck drives by and BEEPS at him. He looks up but is unfazed, not ignoring just unaware.

EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY

Micah rides his bike up to an old one-and-a-half story home. He sits his bike down and walks past the unkempt shrubbery and weathered Virgin Mary statue. He KNOCKS on the storm door.

INT. GELDNER HOUSE - DAY

The rooms are dimly lit. Everything is in its place. Shelves are filled with trinkets. Two framed 8x11 senior portraits circa 1975-1980 hang on the wall. EDNA GELDNER holds the door for Micah. She is in her late 80s. She wears a housedress, a shawl, and slippers. Her hair is a white helmet.

MICAH

How are you doing today, Mrs. Geldner?

MRS GELDNER

My head's hurting, ears ringing, foot's stiff, but I don't like to talk about my ailments. Come in.

MICAH

I just brought over the Eucharist.

She holds the door; he walks in. She locks the door.

MRS. GELDNER

Doris Steinmetz usually does that.

MICAH

She had to take her husband to physical therapy today. Looks like she'll be busy with that for next few weeks, so Father Jack or myself will be bringing it to you.

MRS. GELDNER

Doctors don't know what they're doing. My back's been sore for thirty years (beat) Can I get you something to drink?

MICAH

No thank you. I'm good.

MRS. GELDNER

I hope to make it back to mass soon. One thing after the other. I don't want you going to all that trouble.

MICAH

No trouble, Mrs. Geldner. It's what I do.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Amanda and a PRINCIPAL stand and shake hands. Amanda has a portfolio with her; she is dressed professionally.

AMANDA

Mrs. Sipes, thank you very much for the opportunity to interview today.

PRINCIPAL

Well, it was a pleasure meeting you,  
Amanda. We'll be in touch.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The late afternoon light streams into the dim hallway. Amanda walks past the rows of lockers toward the exit, gradually moving toward the light.

EXT. FRONT OF ST. JUDE CAMPUS - DAY

Bernice places letters on the church welcome marquee sign. She is done with one side, and that side's message is seen by...

I/E. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Amanda drives toward St. Jude's and sees the church sign: NEED TO TALK? GOD IS LISTENING. AND SO ARE WE.

EXT. FRONT OF RECTORY - DAY

Micah is at the mailbox. He pulls out envelopes and a large package from *Christianity Today*. He looks excited.

INT. RECTORY KITCHEN - DAY

Micah looks at a multi-page spread and artwork for the article "Grace Without Religion" by Fr. Micah Jenkins. A quote is bold in a margin: "Heaven's more like an open house than it is a country club."

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

A parish council meeting ends. MEMBERS walk away from the four tables that form a rectangle. Micah and Father Jack gather their papers. Bernice waits for the others to leave.

BERNICE

Father Micah, it was a productive  
meeting don't you think?



MICAH

I suppose as parish council meetings go.

Bernice was never any good at small talk.

BERNICE

I hate to ask this, but I really need a favor. My sister's son is 19, and he wants nothing to do with the church.

MICAH

Is he the boy whose father left?

BERNICE

That's him. He has no male role model, yet he's helping raise his little brother while my sister works.

MICAH

I don't feel comfortable trying to convert people, Bernice.

BERNICE

He just needs someone to talk to, to care.

MICAH

OK, set up a time and place. I'll be there.

INT. BOWLING ALLEY - DAY

Tommy Moore has perfect form - his positioning on the lane, his arm swing, his release. As his arm goes in the air, we clearly see a black and gold bracelet on his right wrist. His ball breaks perfectly for a strike. KOLBY, 9, doesn't look up from his Nintendo DS. He's seen it before. Micah is impressed.

TOMMY

So my aunt sent you to convert me, huh?

MICAH

No, not at all.

TOMMY

I think it's great how she volunteers at your church, but that's just not me.

MICAH

She's concerned about your happiness.

TOMMY

I wasn't born into happiness.

(to his brother)

Kolby, you can go. It's your turn.

Kolby rolls a slow, straight ball that knocks down three pins.

MICAH

I've heard the story about your dad.  
If you ever want to talk, I'm a good  
listener. Not a dad, but I am a father.

Micah laughs; Tommy doesn't. Kolby picks up only two more pins. He walks back and resumes playing his video game.

TOMMY

You didn't even try to pick that up.

KOLBY

I don't like bowling, Tommy. You do.

MICAH

You guys do a lot together I guess.

TOMMY

Mom works 1-11, so it's usually just us.

Micah leaves a 7-10 split.

TOMMY

You won't get that with a straight ball.

Micah rolls a straight ball that goes in the right gutter.  
Tommy smirks and then bowls another strike.

MICAH

Bernice didn't tell me you're a pro.

TOMMY

Not quite. I'd like to get through school  
first before I look into that.

MICAH

Where do you go?

TOMMY

I wanted to go to Vandy, but with Mom working, it made more sense to stay home with Kolby. So, I'm at Tennessee Tech.

MICAH

Nothing wrong with that.

TOMMY

There is if you want to be someplace else.

EXT. CUMBERLAND BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Nestled between rolling hills, the modest white siding church has a tall steeple. A couple of other buildings are nearby.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

MARY HELEN HADDAWAY works at a desk with her nameplate on it. Her hair is in a bun, her glasses are bifocals. REV. CLAYTON MERCER walks in. He is in his early 60s and has the rugged looks and southern dialect of an authentic country gentleman.

CLAYTON

Mary Helen. I'll be back in a few hours. My turn for lunch at the kitchen.

MARY HELEN

Oh, here's your mail, Reverend.

She hands him a stack of envelopes and a magazine.

MARY HELEN (cont'd)

What'd you do on your day off?

CLAYTON

I went to Burgess Falls and didn't do dang thing. Just sat and thought and prayed. It got a little chilly out there.

MARY HELEN

Sounds like a good day.

CLAYTON

Everyday is a good day, Mary Helen.

INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Clayton gets in his truck and sits the mail in the passenger seat. In the pile of mail is the *Christianity Today* issue that includes Micah's article. He buckles up and drives off.

INT. MICAH'S OFFICE - DAY

The room looks more dorm room circa 1990 than it does a priest's office. On the wall behind Micah is a sign that says "Body Change, Soul Never" and a pennant of the Knoxville Ice Bears hockey team. Across the room, the wall is covered with posters of bands: Drive-By Truckers, Hothouse Flowers, and a few Smiths posters. Micah works at his desk when Amanda appears nervously in his doorway. She KNOCKS on the doorframe.

MICAH

Hello.

AMANDA

Hi, Father. You probably don't remember -

MICAH

James and Jean's daughter. Amanda?

AMANDA

Yeah, I'm surprised you remembered me.

MICAH

You saw U2 in Raleigh. What can I do for you?

AMANDA

If this is a bad time, I can come back.

MICAH

It's not a bad time. Come in.

He leads her in, closes the door, and directs her to the chair in front of his desk. She doesn't see the wall behind her. He moves around the desk to take his seat.

MICAH

So, what's on your mind?

AMANDA

Regardless of what I tell you,  
promise me you won't think I'm a  
freak or crazy or anything.

MICAH

I won't think you're a freak. Promise.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

Clayton WHISTLES as he drives.

EXT. SIDE OF ROAD - CONTINUOUS

A car sits on the shoulder. Its hood is up and smoke rises. A  
middle-aged WOMAN stands head in hands.

I/E. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Clayton's truck approaches. He slows down as he passes the  
stalled car. He looks back at it.

EXT. SIDE OF ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Clayton's truck stops. The blinkers go on. He gets out and  
walks swiftly to the woman in the car.

CLAYTON

Can I help you?

WOMAN

It started smoking and the Check  
Engine light came on.

CLAYTON

Well, let's take a look. I'll see if  
I can get you up and running at least  
long enough to get you to a mechanic.

WOMAN

You think you can fix it?

Clayton looks under the hood.

CLAYTON

Looks like the hose that connects your PCV valve to the intake manifold's cracked.

WOMAN

What does that mean?

CLAYTON

It means I can tape it up; we can go to the Wal-Mart and get you a new one. They're cheap. Skip the mechanic completely.

WOMAN

I can't ask you to do that.

CLAYTON

You're not askin'. I'm offerin'.

Cars whiz by as he hurries back to his truck for tools.

INT. MICAH'S OFFICE - DAY

AMANDA

When I was little, I'd make mix tapes from albums where you had to drop the needle and push Pause 'cause you didn't want that click. I loved those tapes, but I hated making them. I never would get the click on the first try. Even if it was perfect, I'd usually stop, rewind, cue it back up, and do it again. I'd get so frustrated and mad at myself.

MICAH

If you had it timed right the first time, why'd you do it over?

AMANDA

I would get a thought like if I pressed Pause at a particular time, and I used that on the tape, something bad would happen. (beat) Told you it was crazy.

Embarrassed, she avoids eye contact.

AMANDA (cont'd)

I know that's impossible. I knew it was impossible *then* that pressing Record or Pause could harm anyone, but you can't rationalize stuff when you feel that way. You feel helpless. It still comes and goes with my anxiety. It's like I can't let myself relax. I am the queen of fatalistic thinking. I can never have heartburn; it's always a heart attack.

Micah remains silent. He can tell she needs to get it out.

AMANDA (cont'd)

And I get these panic attacks. I wake up and I think I'm dying. I can't breathe; I sit up in bed and yell and move to try and prevent what I'm sure is my impending death. But I don't want you to think I have these all the time.

MICAH

Have you seen a doctor about this?

AMANDA

No. My parents don't even know.

MICAH

Well, thank you for trusting me, but I'm not sure I'm the best person to help you.

AMANDA

You mean I should be seeing a psychiatrist.

MICAH

There's nothing wrong with that. You'd see a podiatrist if your foot was hurt, right?

She fishes a tissue out of her purse to wipe her nose.

AMANDA

I know. I've got OCD, too; it's not exactly a hard diagnosis, but I really don't want to see anybody else just yet. Could we meet some more? But I really can't blame you if you don't want to. I mean -

MICAH

I want to. We can work on it together.

Her eyes finally meet his and hold a moment.

AMANDA

Thank you. That would mean a lot to me.

He stands, grabs a card off his desk, and hands it to her.

MICAH

A rosary with my phone number seemed a little tacky.

She takes the card but doesn't laugh.

MICAH (cont'd)

Notice there's no hours on there. I'm always available if somebody needs me.

She stands, turns around, and notices the wall. She is frozen. Her eyes are big; her face lights up.

MICAH

You OK?

AMANDA

You like The Smiths?

MICAH

Just my favorite band of all time.

AMANDA

You're not serious? They're *my* favorite band of all time.

MICAH

What, were you like two when they broke up?

AMANDA

Everybody thinks of Morrissey, but Johnny Marr's the one who made their sound.

MICAH

Yes, the jangly guitar. He could make the most depressing lyrics sound happy.



AMANDA

OK, favorite Smiths' song?

MICAH

*There is a Light That Never Goes Out.*

Amanda is in disbelief, relieved from her stresses.

AMANDA

Shit! Sorry I just said 'shit' in front of a priest. No way. That's mine too. Have you heard Neil Finn's version?

MICAH

It's on the first *7 Worlds Collide* CD. In college on an economics test, the question was "What is New Zealand's biggest import to the US?" I said the Finn brothers.

AMANDA

(laughs)

No way. I can't believe it. I thought priests just listened to church music.

MICAH

Not this priest.

INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

Micah sits in the bleachers with Amy and Colin. On the court, Noah struggles. Matt stands on the sidelines, encouraging his team, the Spirits who are playing the Colonels. Two OFFICIALS follow the players but seldom blow their whistles.

MICAH

You gonna play when you're older, Colin?

COLIN

Yeah!

MICAH

Matt really likes coaching, huh?

AMY

He'd do anything for the boys.

Noah reaches in but slaps the boy dribbling.

AMY (cont'd)

They don't call a lot of fouls in third and fourth grade.

MICAH

You guys have a team at school?

AMY

We do, but it's such a long drive. It'd be really hard to get to the games and practice. I wish St. Jude had a school.

Noah grabs a rebound and turns, knocking a STOCKY BOY down with an errant elbow. The WHISTLE blows. The OTHER COACH runs to the aid of his fallen four-foot-seven center.

MICAH

I'm pretty sure *that's* a foul.

EXT. DECK - MORNING

Clayton wears a jacket and a Stetson hat. He sits at a table, a cup of coffee at his side. He reads *Christianity Today*.

CLOSE ON: A picture of Micah at the end of the article with the text: *Rev. Micah Jenkins is the pastor of St. Jude's Catholic Church in Cookeville, Tennessee.*

Clayton puts down the magazine. His face shows displeasure. He turns to the Cumberland Mountains, which are well beyond his property line. He knows he won't be able to let this go.

INT. SWEET SALLIE'S BAKERY AND CAFÉ - DAY

Micah has his laptop in front of him, a glass of tea at his side. Father Jack walks up with a paperback under one arm. He carries a piece of cake and a cup of coffee and sits down.

MICAH

Have you ever Googled yourself?

FATHER JACK

When I was growing up, Googling

FATHER JACK (cont'd)  
yourself was a mortal sin.

MICAH  
If it weren't for those two articles,  
I would barely come up at all. Jack,  
I'm not leaving my mark on the world.  
No offense, but you're older, do you  
ever feel like you live with a  
greater sense of urgency?

FATHER JACK  
Only in my bladder. Enlarged prostate.

MICAH  
I'm serious. What difference do I make?

Father Jack takes a bite and thinks about it.

FATHER JACK  
And here I thought we were going to  
have our normal morning chat at Sallie's.  
Herman Hesse said "Whether you and I and  
a few others will renew the world some  
day remains to be seen. But within our-  
selves we must renew it every day. (beat)  
Well, Micah if it's fame you seek, I  
think you're in the wrong line of work.

MICAH  
That's just it. I don't want people  
to know who I am; I want them to know  
what I did; I want to pass something on.

FATHER JACK  
You want to be Philip Van Doren Stern.

MICAH  
I do? Who's that?

FATHER JACK  
Exactly. He just happened to write a  
little short story called "The Greatest  
Gift" and sent it out as a Christmas  
card one year. You might have heard of  
the movie based on that story: *It's a  
Wonderful Life*.

MICAH

See, that guy made a real difference  
in the world and he did it anonymously.

FATHER JACK

And you don't make a difference?

MICAH

Like that? Are you kidding? No.

FATHER JACK

You make a huge difference in the lives  
of our parishioners.

MICAH

Jack, we've got only 300 families.

FATHER JACK

Well, you can change the world for them.

EXT. ST. JUDE CAMPUS - DAY

Micah walks to his car. Clayton's truck pulls up; he gets out.

CLAYTON

Excuse me, Reverend Jenkins?

MICAH

Uh, yes. "Father Micah" is fine.

CLAYTON

I'm Pastor Clayton Mercer from the  
Cumberland Baptist Church. I read  
your article in *Christianity Today*,  
and I'd love to talk to you about it.

MICAH

Sure. Thanks for reading it. I'd be  
happy to talk about it, but I'm  
running late for an appointment right  
now. Can we do this another time?

CLAYTON

Well, I suppose we could. I tell you  
what, I serve down at the Wayside Soup  
Kitchen on Thursdays, could you join me?

MICAH

Can I check my schedule and get back with you?

Micah unlocks his door. He's in a hurry. Clayton pulls out a piece of paper and pen and writes down his e-mail address and phone number. He hands it to Micah.

CLAYTON

Sure. Just contact me when you find out, and we'll go from there, OK?

MICAH

I'll let you know. Sorry about rushing off. I don't mean to be -

CLAYTON

It's alright. You go and have yourself a blessed day now.

MICAH

You do the same. Thanks.

INT. - BOWLING ALLEY - DAY

Micah bowls with Tommy. This time Kolby just sits and plays his video game. Tommy still appears reticent.

INT. GYM - DAY

Amanda works out on an elliptical machine. She looks tired. She looks at the display. It shows 29:30. As the timer gets closer to 30:00, she ups the time to 31:00.

EXT. ST. JUDE CAMPUS - DAY

Micah walks across campus toward the church.

INTERCUT: GYM AND CHURCH CAMPUS

The elliptical is now close to 31 minutes. Amanda breathes heavily but increases it to 32:00. She moves laboriously, a mix of fatigue and frustration.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Micah walks into the empty church, genuflects, and sits in a pew. He closes his eyes and bows his head.

INTERCUT: CHURCH AND GYM

Amanda's eyes are closed as she grips the machine's arms. The display reads 34:37. She reaches for the arrow button, but does not touch it. The machine stops as it flashes 35:00 - *Workout Complete*. She stands still, catching her breath.

Micah opens his eyes and takes a deep breath himself. Prayer has become more protracted than flowing.

Amanda walks to a water fountain. A 50-something MAN walks out of the locker room. He's bald on top with curly hair on the sides. He's short and sturdy. She remembers...

FLASHBACK: INT. GROCERY STORE - NIGHT

Amanda is 16. She leafs through a People in the checkout line. The CUSTOMER in front of her wears a sweat jacket and sits items on the conveyor belt. He has no hair on top just messy hair on the sides. He stretches out his arm and shakes it. Amanda pays no attention - until the man GASPS and falls down. A COMMOTION ensues as employees gather. She steps back in shock, unsure what's happening. A CLERK yells.

CLERK

Call 911!

Two WORKERS turn the man on his back. He takes a breath - his last. Amanda sees it all; her young face motionless.

INT. GYM - DAY

Back at the gym, she holds up the line at the water fountain.

GYM MEMBER

Excuse me, it's your turn.

AMANDA

Oh, I'm sorry.

She takes a sip of water and walks away.

At church, Micah slowly stands. He walks to the exit. He dips his hand in a font, makes the sign of the cross, and walks out, letting a sliver of light into the dark vestibule.

INT. MICAH'S OFFICE - DAY

Bernice stands by Micah's desk. His door is open.

BERNICE

So, you really think it's going OK?

MICAH

He seems like a nice kid to me - so did his little brother. We just bowled a couple times, Bernice. That's it.

BERNICE

Did you talk much about church or anything like that?

MICAH

Not really.

BERNICE

A father figure is not the only thing he needs in his life. I know he needs God because he's just drifting right now.

EXT. ST. JUDE PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Amanda rushes out of her car and into the parish office.

INT. MICAH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Bernice stands with her back to the opened door.

BERNICE

So, would you meet with him again?

MICAH

If he'd like to, sure. That would be fine.

BERNICE

Well, I think he's a little lost right -

Amanda's voice arrives before she does.

AMANDA (o.s.)  
I think I've figured it out.

Amanda stands at the door. Bernice looks at her, evaluating.

AMANDA  
I'm sorry. I didn't know you were busy.

BERNICE  
No, I'm leaving. I don't think I know you, though. Do you go here?

MICAH  
Yes, Bernice, she goes here.

AMANDA  
If this is a bad time; I can come back.  
It's no big deal.

BERNICE  
Well, it sounds like it's a big deal.  
(to Micah) I'll talk with Tommy.

Bernice leaves. She look backs and studies Amanda some more.

MICAH  
What happened?

AMANDA  
I think I know why I do things.

Bernice lingers, but Micah closes the door. They sit.

AMANDA (cont'd)  
When I was 16, I saw a man have a heart attack and die at the grocery. Maybe that triggered the panic attacks when I can't breathe because I saw him take his last breath? Is that even possible?

MICAH  
Traumatic events can trigger people to get these sort of attacks, sure. But so does heredity and other things.



She is quiet, in thought, slow to open up.

AMANDA

I was on a machine at the gym, and I couldn't stop it. I kept thinking if I did stop, my parents would die. And it all sort of makes sense now.

MICAH

What makes sense?

AMANDA

I'm afraid of dying. I know; you're going to say, "But you're 26. Why are you worried about dying?"

MICAH

No, I wasn't going to say that. (beat)  
Do you have a few minutes?

EXT. PARK - DAY

Micah and Amanda enter a playground in a city park. The LAUGHTER of children greets them.

AMANDA

We're going to swing?

MICAH

No, we'll just watch.

They sit on a bench and observe. A smiling MOTHER pushes a CHILD on a swing. ANOTHER MOTHER waits for her SON to come down a slide. When he does, she celebrates his courage. A FATHER stands by a 3-YEAR-OLD climbing without aid. ANOTHER FATHER holds his TODDLER up to the sky causing giggles.

MICAH

See the love between a parent and child?

AMANDA

Yeah. It's special.

MICAH

That, Amanda, cannot die. It won't. It doesn't. Love is stronger than death.

She looks at him and smiles. He is surprised and smiles back.

MICAH (cont'd)  
God wouldn't let something this pure and  
beautiful just end. Wouldn't make sense.

They are silent and watch as children's LAUGHTER continues.

MICAH (cont'd)  
There *is* a light that never goes out.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Matt holds Colin in the air as the little boy stiffens his body like he's flying. Noah runs around them. Micah watches.

NOAH  
I'm The Joker.

COLIN  
Look at me. I'm flying. I'm Batman.

NOAH  
Batman can't fly.

MATT  
Well, he's coming in for a landing anyway.

Matt sits Colin down.

NOAH  
Let's swing.

The boys run to the swings. Matt stops at the deck and picks two bottles of beer from a cooler; he hands one to Micah.

MICAH  
They play great together.

MATT  
Sometimes they do. Sometimes they don't.

MICAH  
Well, Lisa's six years older than me,  
and we didn't play together, but I  
suspect that was because she was a girl.

MATT

She's still a girl, right?

MICAH

She looked like one on her Christmas card.

They sit down on a wooden, glider swing with a green awning.

MATT

Ben and I always got along well, though.

MICAH

Oh, how's Lacey's pregnancy going?

MATT

Didn't even have morning sickness in the first trimester. She seems great.

MICAH

Good. I'll keep her in my prayers anyway.

Amy opens the backdoor.

AMY

Matt, the boys should have jackets on. It's not July.

MATT

They're fine, Amy.

AMY

OK, you're taking them to the doctor if they get colds, all right.

She goes back in. Matt nods at her as if to say "Yes ma'am." He turns to Micah as they watch the kids play.

MATT

I forgot to ask you. Did you meet with Bernice McCall's nephew?

MICAH

Yeah. He's a good bowler.

MATT

She still smell like a mix of Jean Nate body splash and Marlboros?

Micah nods. He looks out over the ball and toy strewn backyard. Silence between them.

MICAH

I want this.

MATT

(looking at the swing)  
You can get one. I think we paid like \$120 for it at Target last summer.

MICAH

I mean your life.

MATT

You want blueprint deadlines and a demanding boss and a mortgage and tuition, and a yard with crab grass?

MICAH

Yeah, if that's what comes with being a dad and husband, I'd take it. Matt, when you're a priest, nothing's your own. You get to know families and care about 'em, and then they make you move to another parish and start over.

Micah takes a sip of beer. Matt seems surprised by the talk. They sit and resume watching the boys play.

INT. PARISH OFFICE - DAY

Micah stands in the hall at a coffee maker. Bernice walks up.

BERNICE

Morning, Father Micah.

MICAH

Hello Bernice. You're here so much, it's like you're on staff.

She fishes in her pocket and pulls out three tickets.

BERNICE

Somebody gave me these for the hockey game this Saturday, could you use them?

She hands him the tickets. He takes a look.

MICAH

I could make it after mass I guess.

BERNICE

Would you consider taking Tommy and Kolby?  
His father never took him to a game.

I/E. CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Micah's car rolls east on I-40. Tommy sits disinterested in the passenger seat. Kolby appears more content in the back.

TOMMY

Did I mention how fired up I was to drive  
an hour to see minor league hockey?

MICAH

Who did your aunt get these tickets from?

TOMMY

The clerk at the store where she bought 'em.

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

The James White Civic Coliseum is a 50-year-old, utilitarian rectangle, but it's packed. Kolby shakes an IceBears cowbell.

KOLBY

I can't follow the puck, but I love it.

TOMMY

Look, I know Aunt Bernice wants you to  
make me a church person, but I'm not, OK.  
My mom finally marries a decent guy and  
he gets run off the road by a semi. I  
prayed for him to get better, and guess  
what? He died anyway. Praying is like  
pleading your case to save your job, but  
they've already decided who to let go.

MICAH

I think God listens. It's just that what  
he sees fit isn't always what we want.

The CROWD is into the game. Tommy looks around and sees a BOY in a wheelchair on the end of an aisle next to his FATHER. It's a custom chair, the type made for a child with permanent problems, not the type used when you break a foot.

TOMMY

Don't you think that little kid's parents prayed for him to be healthy? Why would God do that?

MICAH

God didn't do that. He -

TOMMY

Oh, sorry, he *let* it happen.

Micah isn't sure what to say. They're quiet; the crowd is not. Tommy walks down the stairs and out of view.

INT. - BAKER HOME - CONTINUOUS

Amanda works on a piece of art. She wears headphones as she fine tunes a half sculpture, half painting.

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

Tommy returns to his seat holding a beer.

MICAH

I thought you were 19.

TOMMY

I've got an ID that says I'm 22.

MICAH

Sips of wine are free at church you know.

TOMMY

And will you be performing at the Cookeville Days Inn lounge all month?

Kolby pays no attention to them. He's engrossed in the game.

MICAH

Look, I'm not trying to show you the

MICAH (cont'd)

light or whatever it is you think I'm trying to do, but if you ever want to talk, call me. No strings attached.

TOMMY

You got a Facebook page?

MICAH

No. Not sure they want priests on Facebook.

TOMMY

Well, if you ever want to get a hold of me, send me a message on Facebook.

The CROWD erupts as a goal is scored. The team celebrates.

EXT. COOKEVILLE MONTAGE - DAY

Spring has arrived. The trees in the Putnam County Courthouse Square are green. The Dogwood Park namesakes are in bloom. Sherman walks Murphy and carries a bouquet of flowers. Micah sits on Mrs. Geldner's porch with her. With headphones on, Amanda jogs. Across the street, Roger walks with a trash bag.

EXT. ST. JUDE CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

Father Jack hits golf balls in the empty lot behind the church. Micah rides his bike onto campus. He looks puzzled.

MICAH

Since when did you start golfing?

FATHER JACK

I've never golfed, but my nephew, you know the state trooper, he gave me these for Christmas. Since the weather's nice I just thought I'd give 'em a try.

Father Jack swings, barely knocking the ball off the tee.

MICAH

You may want to take lessons.

FATHER JACK

I just thought hitting balls would be a good stress reliever.

MICAH

Jack, you've got to be the most relaxed person I've ever known.

FATHER JACK

The Serenity Prayer, my friend. (beat)  
Oh, that Cumberland pastor called again asking if you could still meet sometime.

MICAH

Oh, I totally forgot about that.

EXT. CJs DINER - MORNING

The restaurant is modest and old, painted red and white. Newspaper machines are by the front door. The unpaved parking lot is full. The street is industrial and run down.

INT. CJ'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

An orange juice sits in front of Micah. Across the table from him, steam from a coffee cup filters up to Clayton.

CLAYTON

Thank you for meeting me. I appreciate it.

MICAH

Well, I'm sorry about putting it off.

CLAYTON

It's alright. We're all busy. I just wanted to talk to you about the article you wrote. It was hypothetical, right?

MICAH

I was just saying I believe God offers grace to everyone of us.

CLAYTON

Yes, he does, but we don't all accept it.



MICAH

I mention that some of us don't want it and don't act in a way that merits it.

CLAYTON

But I'm not sure that's what the Bible means by accepting it. As a matter of fact, I'm fairly certain it isn't. Are you familiar with John 3:16?

MICAH

Doesn't Luke 13:29 suggest that people of all nations will enter the kingdom?

CLAYTON

You should know the only way to salvation is to accept Christ as your savior. What you have written is warm and fuzzy, but it's not how things are. Are you spreading the right message to your people?

MICAH

Why does any of this bother you, Pastor?

CLAYTON

This isn't a gray area. It's very clear in Scripture: salvation is offered freely - to all who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

MICAH

So a good, kind Jewish man like - Mr. Goldstein at the hardware store over by Cream City, he can't go to heaven? And the 10 year-old kid who's been raised Buddhist, he isn't saved, either?

CLAYTON

That's a sticky wicket. He is probably old enough to decide for himself, so I don't know. Of course, I also don't know why you all baptize babies; they can't possibly make a decision for themselves.

MICAH

So, the serial killer who isn't sorry is saved just because he's a believer?

Clayton looks up from his plate. His face is tense.

CLAYTON

Those who have accepted Christ, can't  
fall from His grace.

MICAH

Jesus doesn't forgive you because you  
believe in Him; he forgives you because  
He believes in you.

CLAYTON

I feel responsible for saving non-believers.  
That is an awesome burden and a privilege.

A WAITRESS walks up to their table.

WAITRESS

Did ya'll need any more butter or  
sorghum or anything?

CLAYTON

We're fine. Thank you.

WAITRESS

Well, holler if you need anything.

Micah and Clayton smile at her as she walks away.

CLAYTON

When my wife passed, I realized I'm a  
wretch. We all sin; we're not worthy,  
yet we're accepted on our faith alone.

MICAH

I understand, but I think what we do  
with what God's given us means something.  
We have free will to do good or bad,  
and excluding people from salvation  
as a way of saying I told you so just  
doesn't sound like Christ to me. The fact  
is, the Catholic Church used to say  
some pretty exclusive things themselves.  
There was a time when it taught that  
there was no salvation outside the  
Catholic Church.

CLAYTON

That's nonsense.

MICAH

I agree. I wouldn't have signed up for that church; that's for sure.

EXT. DINER PARKING LOT - MORNING

Micah and Clayton walk to their car and truck, respectively.

MICAH

I'm sorry the article upset you so much.

CLAYTON

I'm not upset just confused. What are you saying to your congregation?

MICAH

To love one another.

CLAYTON

Can't argue with that. So, you'll join me at the soup kitchen next time?

MICAH

Yes, I'd like to do that.

Clayton puts out his hand, and they shake.

CLAYTON

It's a date. Take care, Reverend.

MICAH

You do the same.

They drive away in opposite directions.

EXT. FRONT OF CHURCH - NIGHT

It is dusk. PARISHIONERS gather around Micah who stands next to Father Jack, a DEACON, and three SERVERS. BOY SCOUTS monitor a bonfire that burns brightly nearby in the parking lot.

MICAH

Friends in Christ, on this most holy night when our Savior Jesus Christ passed from death to life, we gather with all the Church throughout the world in vigil and prayer. Let us pray.

A server brings over the lectionary. Micah catches a glimpse of Amanda who gathers with her family.

MICAH

Redeeming God, source of life and light, bless this new fire, and grant that we who are warmed by the celebration of Easter may share in your radiance, through Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Amen.

As Father Jack traces a cross on the Paschal Candle, Micah and Amanda's eyes meet. The servers hold the large candle as Father Jack takes a flame from the bonfire and lights it.

FATHER JACK

May the light of Christ, rising in glory, illuminate our hearts and minds.

MICAH

Friends, this is the light of Christ. May it dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.

CROWD

Thanks be to God.

The deacon takes the candle, and a line forms behind him. The procession begins into the darkened church.

INT. MICAH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Micah and Amanda wrap up their session.

MICAH

Oh by the way, I made you a CD.

Micah looks through his desk drawer and pulls out the disc. He hands it to her. She studies it and smiles.

MICAH

It's just to help you relax. Blue Nile,  
Travis, Elbow, stuff like that.

CLOSE ON: CD-R entitled "Amanda's Relaxation Mix" with a  
homemade cover of a serene ocean setting. A similarly serene  
picture is on the inside. The CD has a label of a rainbow over  
mountains. The track listing is on the back of the jewel box.

AMANDA

Thank you so much. This is great.  
Really, Micah, I can't wait to listen  
to it. (beat) Hey, I'm craving me some  
Moose Tracks. Let's go to Cream City.  
Come on. My treat.

MICAH

You don't have to buy me something because  
I made you a CD. I probably shouldn't go.

AMANDA

Why? You don't like ice cream?

EXT. BROAD STREET - DAY

In the West Side District, a National Registry of Historic  
Places sign sits in front of the Cookeville Depot Museum. A  
Baldwin steam engine and an L&N caboos are on the tracks.  
Across the street, is the two-story Cream City shop.

INT. CREAM CITY - DAY

Historic pictures of the region are lined on the green walls.

MICAH

Is the job search stressing you out?

AMANDA

There aren't a lot of openings because  
it's the middle of the school year.  
(beat) Hey did I tell you I'm showing one  
of my pieces of art at the Derryberry  
Gallery two weeks from Thursday?

MICAH

No. That's great. I didn't know you were an artist.

AMANDA

I dabble a little bit: sculpture and paint mainly. If you're bored and want to come, that would be great. It's on the Tech campus. The exhibit runs from five to ten.

MICAH

Yeah, I'll check my calendar.

The WHISTLE at depot museum blows. They eat ice cream

AMANDA

So, if you had a band, what would you name it?

MICAH

(without hesitation)

The Wrestling Lodge. Don't know why, but I know it'd be The Wrestling Lodge. You?

AMANDA

Not sure. I'll have to think about it.

Micah notices her straightening the napkin dispenser.

INT. MICAH'S CAR - DAY

Micah drives and Amanda holds the jewel box as the CD plays.

MICAH

You put it on random, but you know the art of the mix tape is in its song order.

AMANDA

Of course I know that.

She looks out the window; Cookeville is in full bloom. Micah glances at her. The song ends, and the next one begins ... The Smiths' *Girlfriend in A Coma*. Her face lights up.

AMANDA

I thought this was supposed to be a

AMANDA (cont'd)  
a quiet relaxation mix.  
(singing)  
"But you know I would hate anything  
to happen to her."  
(to Micah)  
Come on.

MICAH  
No.

Micah shakes his head. She pushes him on the shoulder.

AMANDA  
Come on.

He slightly smiles and gives in; they sing together.

MICAH AND AMANDA  
"Do you really think she'll pull  
through? Do you really think she'll  
pull through? Let me whisper my last  
goodbyes; I know it's really serious."

Amanda laughs; Micah looks like he shouldn't be doing this.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Micah and Matt work in Matt's driveway putting together a  
basketball goal. Tools and directions are spread out.

MATT  
This is harder than it looks.

MICAH  
Shouldn't it be easy for an architect?

MATT  
We design; we don't build. Hey, by the  
way I can't believe you got on Facebook.

MICAH  
I wanted to show that kid that I was  
serious about reaching out to him.

They read directions and reach for wrenches and screwdrivers.

MICAH (cont'd)

Kelly Eggers is on there. Well, it's Kelly Eggers Something now. She's married and living in Ashville.

MATT

Did you "friend" her?

MICAH

Naw, that would be sort of odd.

MATT

You could tell her that from '85-'90 she was all you ever thought about, but you accepted the whole just friends thing. Say, who's your third Facebook friend? She's really good looking.

Micah busies himself with his work, avoiding eye contact.

MICAH

That's just Amanda. She goes to St. Jude's. I've been helping her through some problems lately.

MATT

From her pictures, it doesn't look like she's got any problems to me.

MICAH

She's a very nice person who happens to have great taste in music, too. In fact, I made her a CD the other day.

Matt slowly looks up from the height-changing mechanism.

MATT

You made her a mix tape?

MICAH

A CD. So? I make them for a lot of people.

MATT

Guys don't make mix tapes for women unless they're interested in them.



MICAH

That's not true.

MATT

And how many mix tapes did you make  
for Kelly Eggers back in the day?

INT. MICAH'S OFFICE - DAY

Micah sits at his desk. His PC monitor is on Facebook, showing his three friends: Matt, Tommy, and Amanda.

MONITOR: A wall post from Amanda: "It will be good to see you tonight. I'm a little nervous about showing my art to the public, but it will help with you being there. Later gator."

The phone RINGS. Micah answers.

MICAH

St. Jude parish office.

(he listens)

Sure, Mrs. Geldner I can come over ...  
Do you think you should call your  
doctor? ... Well, I'll be right there.

EXT. FRONT OF GELDNER HOUSE - DAY

Micah rings the DOORBELL and waits. The door opens.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Geldner closes the door behind him.

MRS. GELDNER

Thank you so much for coming. I just  
felt a bit weak and got scared.

MICAH

Can I take you to the emergency room?

MRS. GELDNER

No, but I'd like an anointing. Here,  
let's go in the kitchen.

En route to the kitchen, Micah notices another room and sees an old, well-maintained mandolin hanging on the wall.

MRS. GELDNER

I so wish I could attend mass more often.

MICAH

Mrs. Geldner, I think God understands.

They make it to the kitchen, a spotless but dated area with white appliances and 1970s decor. She sits at the table, which has prayer books strewn over it. Micah gets out oil and makes the sign of the cross on her forehead.

MICAH

Through this holy anointing, may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

He takes her hands and does the same.

MICAH

May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.

MRS. GELDNER

Thank you. That makes me feel better right away. And thank you for bringing me Communion the last few months.

MICAH

If there's ever anything you need, a prescription to pick up, food, whatever, call the parish office. Whether you make it to the church building or not, you're still a part of our community.

MRS. GELDNER

You're so kind. Can I get you something to drink? I could make dinner.

MICAH

I'm fine but thank you. (beat) When we were walking in here, I noticed a mandolin hanging on the wall, and -

Her eyes light up. She walks to the other room. Micah follows.

MRS. GELDNER

My husband Hubert played with Bill Monroe.

MICAH

*The* Bill Monroe?

MRS. GELDNER

The one and only. He played bass and fiddle for Bill, but he had a chance to start his own band, and he took it. When he left, Bill gave him that mandolin and suggested he learn how to play it.

Micah takes a closer look at the mandolin.

MICAH

Wow, this is a piece of music history.

MRS. GELDNER

Hubert and I met in Renfro Valley. I was in the crowd; he was on stage. So handsome.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

It's a little later in the afternoon now. Micah and Mrs. Geldner sit at the table, drinking warm tea.

MRS. GELDNER

He wasn't a star when he went out on his own, but his band found steady work, and he was a great songwriter, too. We had a good life. You know the reason I cherish that mandolin so much is not that Bill Monroe gave it to him; it's because Hubert played it so often here at home. He played it when he was happy and when he was sad. He played it to get the kids to sleep.

MICAH

I didn't even know you had children.

MRS. GELDNER

Yes, a son and a daughter. They're older than you. They live out of town.

MICAH

So, did you play music, too?

MRS. GELDNER

He got me on stage sometimes, and we'd sing together evenings on the front porch. Don't get me wrong; I was no June Carter. (beat) Can I fix you some dinner? Can you stay a while?

Micah looks at the clock on the wall. It's already after 4:00, but he doesn't have the heart to say no.

MICAH

I'd like that. Thank you.

INT. ART GALLERY - DAY

The Joan Derryberry Art Gallery is crowded. A banner reads *Art in the Evening: Spring Showcase Series of Local Artists*. All types of work are on display: oil on canvas, mechanical sculpture, and fiber art.

Amanda stands by her piece. The half sculpture, half painting offers a shiny symmetry but seems less refined than other exhibits. She politely smiles at passersby, who are more interested in the other works.

INT. MRS. GELDNER'S KITCHEN - LATER

Micah and Mrs. Geldner eat dinner. She looks less frail and more alive as she talks. Meanwhile around Cookeville ...

I/E. COOKEVILLE MONTAGE - DAY

Sherman sits in a chair on his porch. Murphy is at his side. The clear sky darkens into an orange spring evening glow.

Roger walks out of the house he shares with his father. He eats an apple as he puts on his knit cap, holds a trash bag, and starts down the street on his nightly mission.

Tommy and Kolby play a bowling video game on a dated console.

Clayton walks to the table carrying a TV dinner and a glass of water. He sits, bows, and folds his hands in prayer.

CLAYTON

Come, Lord Jesus, be my guest, and  
let these gifts be blessed. Amen.

He looks up, picks up his utensils and starts eating. Alone.

INT. ART GALLERY - DAY

Amanda looks toward the front doors and waits.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - LATER

Micah sits in a chair with a cloth cover on it.

MRS. GELDNER

This has been such a nice day. I haven't  
talked about Hubert's band in so long.

He peeks at the clock. It's 8:50. Mrs. Geldner notices.

MRS. GELDNER (cont'd)

My goodness. Didn't you say you had  
some place you were supposed to be?

She gets up slowly - maybe because of her age and health,  
maybe because she didn't want him to go just yet. Micah senses  
it is the latter. His face shows he is torn.

MICAH

No, that's OK. Tell me more about  
Hubert's music.

INT. ART GALLERY - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: iPhone screen with its Smiths' *Louder Than Bombs*  
album cover wallpaper. It's 9:38.

Amanda looks up from her phone. A few guests smile as they  
look at her work. She keeps checking the crowd and notices the  
door open. Her face shows hope. - It's not Micah.

INTERCUT: THE ART GALLERY AND MRS. GELDNER'S HOUSE

Micah talks with Mrs. Geldner, who yawns, but keeps talking.

Amanda is embarrassed. She looks at the people gathered around other exhibits, checking the faces for Micah.

Mrs. Geldner is tired. She lies down on the couch.

The EVENT COORDINATOR is on a microphone in the gallery.

EVENT COORDINATOR

On behalf of the Joan Derryberry  
Gallery and Tennessee Tech University,  
I'd like to thank all of you who came  
out these evening to the new Art in the  
Evening series. Let's hear it for all of  
our talented artists from Putnam, White,  
and Cumberland counties.

The crowd APPLAUDS. Amanda looks at the door one more time.

Micah covers up Mrs. Geldner, who has fallen asleep.

INT. KITCHEN - RECTORY - NIGHT

Micah walks in. Father Jack sits at the table with coffee and a book.

FATHER JACK

I was about to send the state police  
out after you.

MICAH

I was at Mrs. Geldner's house.

FATHER JACK

You listened to the poor soul talk  
about her ailments for eight hours?

MICAH

Who does she have to talk to, Jack?

FATHER JACK

Oh, you got a call. May want to check the  
message. Couldn't get to the phone in time.

MICAH

Who's it from?

FATHER JACK

I wondered the same thing.

Micah clicks the button. It's Amanda, and she's upset.

AMANDA (o.s.)

I can't believe you didn't show up.  
You told me you would. I kept waiting.  
I thought I could count on you. I  
needed the support. It was a stupid idea  
anyway. I guess I'll see you later.

BEEP. Silence a moment. Micah isn't sure what to say.

FATHER JACK

You had a date and didn't show up;  
that's one thing. But you had a date  
and didn't tell me; that's another.

MICAH

It wasn't a date. Amanda Baker's been  
seeing me for counseling for a while.  
I told her I'd stop by her art exhibit,  
but I stayed at Mrs. Geldner's. That's all.

FATHER JACK

I've never gotten a call from a parish-  
ioner like that before.

MICAH

Well, she's wonderful and pretty and  
sixteen years younger than me, and,  
I'm a priest. So, that's that.

FATHER JACK

That voice on the message wasn't a  
voice that said she was disappointed  
in a priest but disappointed in a man.

The phone RINGS. Micah freezes. Oh great. He answers.

MICAH

St. Jude parish rectory.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

An upset Sherman is on a cell phone. He walks up and down the sidewalk in front of his house panicky.

SHERMAN

Father Micah, this is Sherman Beasley. I hate to bother you so late but Murphy got out, and I can't find him. He's got a bad sense of direction, and I'm not supposed to drive at night.

I/E. MICAH'S CAR - NIGHT

Micah drives slowly through the neighborhood. Sherman sits in the backseat, holding a flashlight out the opened window.

SHERMAN

He doesn't have a chip; I don't even have a collar on him. Never had a need to; he's always with me.

MICAH

Well, let's not give up just yet.

SHERMAN

Murphy! Murphy! Murphy!

He sits back and is quiet. Micah looks at him from the rearview mirror. Sherman has his hands clinched in prayer.

MICAH

Cookeville's not a big city. He's got to be around here somewhere.

SHERMAN

He'd never make it if he got out on Interstate Drive. Never make it.

MICAH

Not sure he could get that far that fast. Sherman.

Sherman looks out the window and holds back a tear.



INT. CAR - NIGHT

They pull into Sherman's driveway without Murphy. The dash clock shows 12:35. Micah turns to Sherman.

MICAH

I'll call the paper in the morning  
to place an ad. I'll post some flyers.  
He's got to be around here, Sherman.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Micah and Sherman walk from the car to the front door. Sherman stops. His face, his posture, everything changes.

SHERMAN

Murphy!

He hurries to the porch, where Murphy wags his tail and waits. Sherman embraces Murphy and looks him over.

SHERMAN

Oh, Murphy, Murphy. You're OK. Where  
did you go? I'm so sorry I left the  
gate open. Let's go in and get you  
some water. (beat) Father, would you  
like to come in?

MICAH

If you don't mind, could I use your  
restroom?

SHERMAN

I think that's the least I could do.

Micah walks up and pats Murphy as Sherman unlocks the door.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Murphy runs in; his tail wags. Sherman gives Micah directions.

SHERMAN

It's down the hall on the left.

Micah comes to a bathroom but notices a room across the hall. A light is on inside, illuminating dozens of paintings and easels. They are art gallery caliber. Micah had no idea.

INT. RECTORY - LATER

Micah and Father Jack sit in the living room.

MICAH

He's like a modern day Van Gogh.

FATHER JACK

People are full of surprises. Ask him to draw one for the church. (beat)  
Say, I listened to that message again.

MICAH

Jack, there's nothing there.

FATHER JACK

"Doubt, indulged and cherished, is in danger of becoming denial; but if honest, and bent on thorough investigation, it may soon lead to full establishment of the truth." Ambrose Bierce. (beat)  
Say, don't you have to be at the soup kitchen at 8:00?

Micah takes a tired breath.

MICAH

It completely slipped my mind. Something about that guy - I just don't get.

FATHER JACK

Well, helping serve the homeless isn't about him now is it?

INT. SOUP KITCHEN - DAY

A converted old warehouse is a shelter; rows of tables line the hall. There's a communal area with couches, chairs, and an old TV. A blackboard says TODAY'S MEALS' SPONSOR: CUMBERLAND BAPTIST CHURCH. Micah stands by Clayton behind the counter in a line of servers. Clayton smiles and he meets a MAN.

CLAYTON

Hello. Good to see you. God bless you.

ANOTHER MAN is now in front of him holding out his tray.

CLAYTON (cont'd)

Hello. Nice to see ya. God bless you.

He does that for all who pass through the line. In between diners, he nudges Micah.

CLAYTON

They're a person, not just another mouth to feed. Make eye contact.

An ELDERLY WOMAN stops in front of Micah.

ELDERLY WOMAN

What's that?

MICAH

It's cornbread casserole.

ELDERLY WOMAN

I used to make that. Could I have some?

MICAH

Of course.

Micah drops the food in a compartment of her rectangular cafeteria tray. She moves to Clayton.

CLAYTON

Hello, m'am. Glad to see you. God bless.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SOUP KITCHEN - LATER

Micah and Clayton are on a break. Micah looks a bit weary.

MICAH

So are you here in the hopes of converting some of these folks?

Clayton's face gets red. Angered, he stares at Micah.

CLAYTON

Did you hear me ask anybody what they believed - what religion they are? Did you see me refuse to serve anyone? I wasn't handing out pamphlets; I was handing out mashed potatoes. (beat) I go beyond the geography of my church. Do you? Maybe you should do something that'll help people instead of writing those articles of yours.

MICAH

I didn't mean to offend you. I think we have some misperceptions of each other.

CLAYTON

And if I was here to convert, what crime is that? You write about spirituality and nature but so little on religion. I love nature. I love Burgess Falls. I love it in the mountains. But if you're a pastor, you're not doing your job unless you invoke the Word and educate your congregation on the truth.

MICAH

Why are you so preoccupied with what I do. Aren't we on the same team?

CLAYTON

I sure as hell hope not.

Clayton walks back in the shelter.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Micah sits at his desk. He checks his e-mail. A link opens his Facebook page and a video message from Amanda.

INT. AMANDA'S ROOM - NIGHT

She wears sweats and sits at her desk. She holds 8x11 pieces of card stock paper and does her best imitation of Dylan's *Subterranean Homesick Blues* video. She is silent. MUSIC plays in the background. She shows the cards and drops them.

I AM / SO SORRY / I HAD NO REASON / TO LEAVE THAT MESSAGE / IT  
WAS SO IMMATURE / I JUST WANTED / YOU TO BE THERE /

INTERCUT: MICAH'S OFFICE AND AMANDA'S ROOM AS SHOWN AT HIS PC

Micah watches not sure what to make of it. She continues.

CAN WE STILL MEET? / YOU HAVE HELPED ME / SO MUCH / I HAVE AN  
INTERVIEW / AT A GOOD SCHOOL TOMORROW / SAY A PRAYER / I MISS  
YOU / CAN WE STILL BE FRIENDS? / I HOPE SO

She waves before leaning forward to stop the recording.

I/E. CAR - DAY

Amanda's car pulls into the school's parking lot. The time on  
the dash clock says 1:25. She turns off the ignition and pulls  
out her keys but places them back in. She does this a few  
times. She reaches for a portfolio in the passenger seat and  
touches it but doesn't pick it up. She stops and SIGHS,  
frustrated. She tries not to cry.

INT. CAR - DAY - LATER

Amanda is still behind the wheel. The portfolio remains in the  
seat. She places her keys in the ignition, takes them out, and  
then forces them in and turns it. The clock now says 2:10.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Micah sleeps. The phone on the table by his bed RINGS. It  
startles him. He wakes and answers.

MICAH

St. Jude parish rectory.

INT. DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

There's a huge college party going on - music, loud talking, a  
keg. Dozens of COEDs are crammed in a dorm suite. SETH wears  
an untucked yet snug flannel shirt. He is on the phone.

SETH  
Yeah, is this Michael?

INTERCUT: DORM ROOM AND RECTORY

MICAH  
This is Father Micah.

Seth puts the phone against his side and speaks loudly.

SETH  
Dude, this guy says he's your father. I  
thought you said you didn't have one.

We now see Tommy sitting on the floor, looking unsure whether or not to stand. Seth pulls a card out of his pocket and gives it a look before resuming the phone conversation.

MICAH  
Who is this?

SETH  
My name's Seth Mobley, but why do you  
care? You don't know me, anyway.

MICAH  
Then why are you calling me?

SETH  
Well, you know Tommy Moore.

MICAH  
Yes.

SETH  
Well, he's dead.

Even in his state, Tommy looks up at his friend like "what are you saying?" Micah sits up in bed.

MICAH  
What?

Seth laughs and Tommy finally stands.

SETH  
I'm just screwing with you; he's just

SETH (cont'd)  
dead drunk. He said you could give  
him a ride home.

MICAH  
Where are you?

SETH  
I'm standing near my bedroom door.

MICAH  
No, I mean where can I pick up Tommy?

SETH  
We're on campus. I can have him out in  
front of the Tech Village Apartments  
in like ten minutes.

MICAH  
I'll be right there.

I/E. CAR - NIGHT

Tommy is half asleep in the backseat. Micah drives.

TOMMY  
You cannot tell my aunt about this.

MICAH  
This isn't about your aunt, Tommy.

They drive on, approaching the house.

TOMMY  
Let me off here.

Micah stops the car. Tommy gathers himself and gets out.

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Tommy walks toward his house without the benefit of good  
balance. Micah watches from his car. Tommy gets to the front  
door and sits down on the welcome mat. Micah drives away.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A SON, professional looking in his 50s and a DAUGHTER, neat, stoic and in her late 40s sit in front of Micah's desk.

MICAH

You'll just need to decide on the readings. There are a few options.

The son quickly glances at the papers on Micah's desk.

SON

I guess the first choices are OK.

MICAH

You can read them. Please take as much time as you'd like.

SON

To be honest, I haven't been to church in a while, so it doesn't matter to me.

DAUGHTER

Whatever you think is best, Father.

MICAH

Well, this is about your mom and your family, so I value your input.

Micah pushes another piece of paper toward them.

MICAH

Here are some songs you may want to use. Processional, gifts, Communion, closing. If you see any that she liked -

SON

I doubt those are any bluegrass songs. Just use the most popular.

MICAH

Well, I'll check with our music minister. I presume one or both of you will be giving the eulogy.

The siblings look at each other.



DAUGHTER

We're not comfortable with public speaking.

MICAH

Sure, but this is your mother.

SON

We'd just rather not speak. Won't you say a few words?

MICAH

I typically give a brief homily, but that's about it. I let the loved ones make it more personal. I understand this isn't an easy thing to do. I know that it takes a lot to get up there and not break down, but --

DAUGHTER

We'd appreciate it if you just spoke.

The brother and sister look away. Micah gets the picture.

MICAH

Well, then, I'll just say a few words. Don't give it another thought.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

A picture of Edna Geldner sits on a casket in front of the altar. Her son and daughter and their SPOUSES and CHILDREN occupy the first couple pews. The church is sparsely filled. Micah walks slowly back and forth in front of the casket. George and Doris Steinmetz, Micah's parents, Bernice, and Sherman are among those few in attendance.

MICAH

To some, Edna Geldner was just a name in the bulletin in the *Pray for the Sick* section, but the truth is she was much more. Those of you who've been at St. Jude's for a while remember when she was a member of the Gold Timers Club. She made quilts for the picnic. She baked cakes. It's been about two years since she's been able to attend mass.

MICAH (cont'd)

But the thing is - she remained a vital member of our parish. How many of you knew she was a bluegrass singer once upon a time? She was a wife and a mother. She was a woman of great faith, but she was also a lonely woman who waited all week for Doris to bring her Communion.

Micah smiles at Doris, who smiles back.

MICAH (cont'd)

Don't get me wrong, Edna Geldner wanted to receive the Eucharist, but I'm pretty sure it was Doris' company and compassion that truly made her feel alive. You know, we often really don't know people as well as we think we do - their hopes and dreams their joys and heartaches. Our bodies change, but our souls remain beautiful and young. Edna Geldner's soul is singing right now. You know, only God can look into another's heart, but for those lonely, ill, old, or forgotten, it's up to us to look them in the eyes and say "Hello in there. Hello." Do that for Edna Geldner.

Micah sits down. Doris makes the sign of the cross.

INT. SACRISTY - DAY

In the back of church, it is the usual post service commotion. Micah takes off his vestments and hangs them up when he notices someone in the doorway.

AMANDA

You gave a very nice eulogy.

Micah is surprised. He hadn't seen nor expected to see her.

MICAH

Thanks. Somebody had to.

AMANDA

Had you come to the art gallery, you wouldn't have known all that, would you?

MICAH

Not all of it.

AMANDA

And here I was acting like a baby because you didn't see my crappy excuse for art.

Micah puts on his jacket and grabs a book.

MICAH

I don't mean to rush, but I have to be at the cemetery when everyone gets there.

AMANDA

It's gotten worse.

MICAH

What's gotten worse?

AMANDA

Me, my issues. Could we talk when you have more time?

MICAH

Sure.

Bernice sees Micah talking with Amanda. He touches Amanda's shoulder, says something, and walks out.

EXT. STREETS OF COOKEVILLE - DAY

The small, seven-car motorcade, goes through town.

EXT. CEMETARY - LATER

It is a gray and windy early June day. The service is over. The limousine and cars pull out. Micah's car remains. He stares at the GELDNER headstone. Hubert J. 1918-1998 and Edna A. 1925-. A car HORN gets his attention. His parents wave as they drive away. He waves back and then starts walking.

ANOTHER P.O.V.: From behind a tree, someone watches Micah.

Micah finally starts toward his car when Tommy steps out from behind a tree across the narrow road.

TOMMY

Hey, Father.

MICAH

(startled)

Geez Louise. What are you doing here?

TOMMY

My aunt said she was going to a funeral this morning. (beat) You hate me, right?

MICAH

No I don't hate you, but I wasn't real thrilled with getting the living you know what scared out of me last week at three in the morning.

TOMMY

Yeah, sorry. Thanks for picking me up.

MICAH

Well I think it was better for you and all of Putnam County that you weren't behind the wheel that night.

TOMMY

I do some really bad things when I'm drunk. I mean I'm a really stupid drunk.

MICAH

Most people are.

They stand in silence in the middle of the tiny road.

MICAH

You need another ride?

TOMMY

Actually, I rode my brother's bike.

Micah nods and heads for his car.

TOMMY (cont'd)

I owe you.

MICAH

You don't owe me anything, Tommy.

MICAH (cont'd)

You're not the first college student who ever got drunk at a party. You ever want to talk, you can still call me.

TOMMY

Or post on your wall. (beat) Look, Aunt Bernice isn't putting you up to being nice to me, is she?

MICAH

Being nice shouldn't take effort.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Matt stands outside the nursery looking in. The elevator door behind him opens, and Micah walks out.

MATT

Hey.

MICAH

Is he in there?

MATT

Yeah. He's getting his first bottle.

Micah and Matt watch a NURSE raise the BABY's head and give him milk. The baby looks healthy; he has good color and size.

MICAH

Where are Ben and Lacey?

MATT

Moving from the delivery room to their regular room.

MICAH

How are they?

MATT

Shocked. They had no idea. How is it possible with 3D ultrasounds and everything? Shouldn't they have known about it?

MICAH

But would that knowledge have mattered?

MATT

You mean would she have ended the pregnancy? I guess not, but at least they could've been prepared.

MICAH

Is anyone ever really prepared for their first child, Matt?

MATT

I can't believe it. Lacey's 28.

MICAH

I don't think the mother's age is always a factor. Down syndrome isn't a death sentence. There are varying degrees. Maybe -

Micah looks at the baby, unaware of his name.

MATT

Sam.

MICAH

Maybe Sam's will be less severe.

MATT

You know that stuff about God not giving you more than you can handle? Well that's a bunch of shit.

MICAH

I admit that when you told me, I wondered if I should tell them 'Congratulations' or 'I'm sorry.'

MATT

How could this be part of *any* plan?

Micah is quiet; he doesn't know the answer. Matt watches the nurse with his nephew.

MATT

He looks like my boys when they were born. He looks perfect to me.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - LATER

Ben and Lacey sit on the bed. Lacey holds Sam; Ben's finger is placed in Sam's tiny fist. Both look like they've been crying.

LACEY

Welcome to this world little Sam.

BEN

We love you, Sammy.

They can see nothing wrong with him, not even any facial signs of the condition. There's a KNOCK at the door.

BEN

Come in.

Micah and Matt walk in.

MICAH

I hear there's a new Oswald.

LACEY

Samuel Austin Oswald.

Micah leans down to take a good look at him.

MICAH

He's got his mommy's hair.

LACEY

Would you like to hold him?

MICAH

Are you sure?

Lacey hands the baby to Micah, who holds him, swaying just enough. He doesn't look at all uncomfortable.

BEN

You've had experience with this.

MICAH

Not really. My nieces live out of town.

LACEY

Well, you're a natural.

Micah smiles at the baby and then at the couple.

MICAH  
Congratulations.

Matt walks over to check out his nephew. Ben is slow to speak.

BEN  
Micah, do you think you could pray  
for us? For Sam?

MICAH  
Of course, Ben. No need to ask.

EXT. OUTSIDE RECTORY - EVENING

Micah walks from his car. He sees an envelope taped to the storm door with "Micah" written on it. He peels it off and opens it. It's a greeting card with the inscription. "Just thinking of you.♥ Amanda." A photo of Micah and Amanda together at Cream City falls out. He picks it up.

INT. KITCHEN - RECTORY - EVENING

Moments later, Micah walks in. Father Jack is at the kitchen table eating and reading. Micah sits down and SIGHS.

FATHER JACK  
You OK?

MICAH  
How many times have I told people  
that if we pray for something and it  
doesn't happen, it just means that  
it's God's will. Jack, I'm tired of  
saying that. There are times I feel  
like I can't even pray anymore. That's  
like an accountant saying they forgot  
how to add. I wish I were like you.

FATHER JACK  
Don't think I have all the answers, my  
friend. I'll never forget when I was at  
St. Mary's in Franklin, this little  
first grader came up to me on the play-



FATHER (cont'd)

ground. I could tell he was worried. He said his mom died two years ago, and his dad was going to get married again. And then he asks, "Who will my dad be with in Heaven? I don't want my mom to be alone." So I told him his mom wouldn't be alone, and that she would be with his dad someday - which very well may be true. But that little boy didn't need my speculation; he needed my promise. Micah, because you wear a collar doesn't mean you can't question.

MICAH

You're a better man than me, Jack.

Micah walks to the cabinet. Father Jack notices something on the floor. It's Micah's photo. Father Jack holds the photo.

FATHER JACK

I think you dropped this.

Micah cringes like a student caught in the act by a teacher.

FATHER JACK

She's very pretty, Micah.

MICAH

She's not interested in me; trust me.

FATHER JACK

But are you interested in her?

INT. NEIGHBORHOOD LIBRARY - DAY

Tommy looks at his laptop.

CLOSE ON: Facebook. On Micah's page, he sees posts from Amanda.

Tommy clicks on her picture to see her information.

CLOSE ON: Wall post to Micah: "Just heard *This Charming Man* and thought of you. Hope you're having a good day."

Tommy scrolls to another post.

CLOSE ON: Wall post to Micah: "So are we ever going to dinner or is that against the rules :)." The screen scrolls ...

INT. ARCHITECT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

... some more. Matt is at his desk. He also looks at Amanda's posts to Micah.

MATT

I knew it. He made her a mix tape.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Matt and Amy stand behind Ben and Lacey, who holds Sam. Micah is before them by the baptismal font.

INT. CUMBERLAND BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Clayton stands before the congregation. His hand is on the shoulder of an ADULT in a white robe. They are in a deep baptismal font. Clayton's other hand extends high, his gestures are demonstrative.

INTERCUT: CUMBERLAND BAPTIST CHURCH AND ST. JUDE'S CHURCH

Micah smiles at the Oswalds. He speaks softly.

MICAH

And what is it that you ask for Samuel William Oswald?

BEN and LACEY

Baptism.

Clayton looks thrilled to be doing what he's doing.

CLAYTON

Michael has made his public profession of faith; he has secured his salvation.

(to man)

Are you ready my brother?

(the man nods)

Well because of your intention and testimony, I now baptize you ...

Clayton holds the man's arms in front and places another hand on the man's back. He leans him back and submerges him.

CLAYTON (cont'd)  
 ... in the name of the Father ...  
 (another submersion)  
 ... the Son ...

Clayton submerges the man once more.

Micah gently pours water on Sam's head.

MICAH  
 ... and the Holy Spirit.

The congregation at Cumberland applauds as the man stands smiling arm and arm with Clayton.

The St. Jude community applauds Sam's arrival.

INT. CAR - DAY

Micah drives. Amanda is in the passenger seat. He is tense.

AMANDA  
 We're going out to dinner. We're not eloping, Micah. You obviously don't want anyone we know to see us out together or you wouldn't have made reservations for a restaurant in Crossville. Priests have to eat, too. You're not doing anything wrong.

MICAH  
 I know. I know I'm not.

AMANDA  
 If you really thought that why didn't we go to a restaurant in Cookeville?

MICAH  
 People might talk, Amanda.

AMANDA  
 If you didn't want to go out with me, why did you?

MICAH

I want to, OK.

Amanda turns on the satellite radio. A DJ comes on.

D.J. (o.s.)

That was New Order with *Bizarre Love Triangle* to kick off your evening here on *80s on 8*. Before that was Madness with -

She turns it off. They look at each other strangely.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Amanda appears more comfortable than Micah.

AMANDA

Why'd you become a priest?

MICAH

Well, I grew up surrounded by faith. Talk about oxymorons, my folks were fundamentalist Catholics. After college, I was working at a data entry job waiting for something better to come along. My girlfriend had broken up with me. So, I started thinking that there's more to me, more to life than what I was doing. Why did you want to be a teacher? I'll bet it's to help people; to make a difference. It's the same with me.

AMANDA

So, had you kept dating that girl, would you have left her for the seminary?

Micah pauses. He takes a sip of tea.

MICAH

It wasn't too serious. I know my decision made my parents really happy.

AMANDA

What about you? Have you been happy?

MICAH

Sure. The people at St. Jude mean the world to me.

AMANDA

Sometimes I look at you, and I can't help but think you want more.

They eat a moment silently.

AMANDA

Would you have left *me* for the seminary?

MICAH

Well, since you were like nine at the time, that would have been kind of creepy.

Amanda laughs.

I/E. MONTAGE - NIGHT

Father Jack is curled up on the rectory couch reading.

Bernice walks in Tommy's house. She holds a cookie tin. Her SISTER is at the door. Kolby runs up to her. Tommy stays back.

Sherman paints. It looks like a stained glass pattern with doves and religious imagery. Murphy lies beside him.

Clayton is alone in his church, his hands clinched in prayer.

INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

Dessert is half eaten. Micah seems more relaxed now. Amanda reaches in her pocket and pulls out a piece of paper.

AMANDA

OK, I've got a quiz for you, but there aren't any right or wrong answers. Just say the first thing that comes to mind.

MICAH

Uh, OK.

She smiles and tucks her hair behind her ears.

AMANDA  
OK, first thing: favorite color.

MICAH  
Purple.

AMANDA  
Most famous person you've ever met.

MICAH  
The guy who played Carmine on *Laverne & Shirley*. It was in an airport.

AMANDA  
Favorite Gospel?

MICAH  
Luke.

AMANDA  
Dogs or cats?

MICAH  
Dogs.

AMANDA  
Sweet tea or unsweetened tea?

MICAH  
Half and half.

AMANDA  
Would you rather be Pope or president?

MICAH  
Neither.

AMANDA  
Coolest singer ever.

MICAH  
Johnny Cash.

AMANDA  
First concert.

MICAH

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band.

AMANDA

Smiths song that best identifies you.

MICAH

(thinks a moment)

*Last Night I Dreamt That Someone Loved Me.*

She looks up from her list. Her smile leaves.

AMANDA

No need to dream.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Micah's car pulls onto Amanda's street. The headlights go off as he parks along the street a few houses down from hers, where a porch light remains on. They get out of the car.

AMANDA

I feel 17 again, sneaking around. Not that we have a need to sneak around.

MICAH

Right.

They're not sure what to do next. She walks out in the street.

AMANDA

We used to play kickball out here. First base was that fire hydrant. Third was that cracked part of sidewalk over there. Second was anything. (beat) I was a tomboy.

MICAH

You don't look like the tomboy type. I would have guessed you were a cheerleader.

Silence and then it starts to rain. Amanda doesn't move.

MICAH

You should probably go in.

AMANDA

We'd play in the rain when we were kids.

MICAH

But we're adults, and we're getting wet.

She walks over to the curb and stops in front of him.

AMANDA

Sometimes I'd just like to go back -  
before I got the way I am. (beat)  
You make me feel safe, Micah.

MICAH

I'm glad.

They look at each other a moment, really look at each other.

AMANDA

I probably should go in.

MICAH

Yeah, me, too. Look, I, I had a really  
nice time tonight. Eating with Fr. Jack  
is fine, but you're easier on the eyes.

AMANDA

I got a secret.  
(leans in and whispers)  
I think you're perfect.

She kisses him on the cheek. She pulls away and smiles at him.

MICAH

I hate to disagree, but I'm really  
not perfect - just exceptional.

He smiles back. They stand there in the rain under the street  
lamp's light. Her eyes look enticing yet sad. For a moment,  
Micah doesn't think about how he should act or feel. She is  
the first to lean in. It is slow, sincere, and soft - just the  
right length. It is like their first kiss ever - with anyone.

AMANDA

Now I can go in.



He watches her go in her house and stands there a moment, wet, confused, guilty, but completely alive.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The ACOUSTIC GROUP finishes their Communion song as Micah, Fr. Jack, and the Eucharistic MINISTERS sit. A sound comes from the back of church; the door has been opened. A VOICE booms.

CLAYTON (o.s.)  
 Reverend Jenkins, allow me a moment  
 of your time, please.

Clayton steps from the shadows and into the center aisle. The congregation turns. Micah is caught off guard.

MICAH  
 We're in the middle of mass.

CLAYTON  
 Sounds like the perfect time to me.  
 (walks through crowd)  
 Brothers and sisters, I fear Reverend  
 Jenkins is not leading you down the  
 righteous path. If you think doin'  
 good deeds gets you in good favor,  
 you're mistaken. We are wretches; we  
 sin; we don't need to ask for forgive-  
 ness; it's already there for believers.

MICAH  
 Clayton, we can talk later.

CLAYTON  
 Did you fine people read your pastor's  
 article on grace? He says it's everyone's  
 regardless of what you believe?

FATHER JACK  
 This is not the time or place, sir.

CLAYTON  
 But it's his job to save souls not  
 lead them astray. Friends, turn to  
 the good Book. It has the answers. You  
 don't need a man, saint, or statue as

CLAYTON (cont'd)  
 your go-between. God knows your sins.  
 Offer forgiveness to Him.  
 (points to the sky)  
 Not to him.  
 (points to Micah)  
 We do not choose to rid ourselves of  
 sin; that's been done for us. (beat) Our  
 doors are open at Cumberland Baptist.

INT. OFFICE WAITING AREA - DAY

Micah looks at a Nashville Lifestyles magazine. A SECRETARY sits at a desk. A crucifix hangs on the wall. A BEEP and she picks up the phone, listens, and hangs up.

SECRETARY  
 The archbishop will see you now.

Micah gets up and walks toward the closed door.

INT. ARCHBISHOP'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

ARCHBISHOP JAMES SHINDELL is in his mid 60s, gray-haired. He looks all business in his black blazer and collar. Micah sits in front of his desk. The office is ornate and important.

ARCHBISHOP  
 I heard about the little episode during  
 mass last week.

MICAH  
 It was nothing. Just for whatever  
 reason, this one preacher can't stand  
 me. I don't know what his problem is.

ARCHBISHOP  
 I should have met with you before. I  
 don't want you writing any more articles  
 in any type of journals or magazines or  
 whatnot. This man read your piece in  
*Christianity Today*; is that correct?

MICAH  
 Yes. But -

ARCHBISHOP

No buts; you don't need to go weighing in on theology or anything for that matter. And frankly, your article on Reconciliation was one that probably shouldn't have been published. You wrote some things that are against church teaching, and that's on my watch. So from now on, only write your homilies. That nut doesn't come in your church unless he reads that article. It's pretty simple now, isn't it?

MICAH

In all due respect, clergy submit articles to publications all the time.

ARCHBISHOP

Not the clergy of the Archdiocese of Nashville. Not anymore.

The archbishop turns his attention from Micah to his computer.

ARCHBISHOP (cont'd)

That's really all I wanted. You can go, Fr. Jenkins. Just remember I'm the boss.

Micah sits a moment. He thinks. He slowly stands, lingering.

MICAH

Archbishop Shindell, hypothetically, if a priest were to leave the priesthood, what sort of notice would you want?

ARCHBISHOP

Believe it or not, there is nothing in writing on that. But my priests don't leave, so I've never worried about that.

MICAH

I've been contemplating it.

ARCHBISHOP

Leaving the priesthood?

Micah nods. An incredulous look comes over the archbishop.

ARCHBISHOP (cont'd)

Why? To be a writer?

MICAH

I'm just not sure that I want to continue with this vocation. I've been praying about it, and -

ARCHBISHOP

So God told you to leave the priesthood?

MICAH

That's not what I'm saying. I just feel like lately I haven't spiritually been where I need to be to effectively lead a parish, so I was just thinking out loud.

ARCHBISHOP

That's not what I'd call thinking out loud. Thinking out loud is saying something like "That sweater looks awful" or "Did I take my medicine today?" You've been thinking a lot about this, or you would never have asked about it. Well, I'd just work a little bit harder on my spirituality.

MICAH

But that shouldn't be work.

ARCHBISHOP

Father Jenkins, I'll be honest with you, if you left St. Jude's, I wouldn't replace you. Pull a priest away from Davidson County to go to some 300-family parish in Cookeville? That's not very feasible.

MICAH

Wait a minute. You're saying if I left, you would close St. Jude's?

ARCHBISHOP

No, I'm saying if you left, you would close St. Jude's.

INT. MEETING ROOM - DAY

Micah sits in front of a dozen or so preschoolers and holds a book. The blackboard says "Vacation Bible School."

MICAH

Does anyone know the Golden Rule?

Wyatt, as disheveled as ever, quickly raises his hand.

MICAH

Wyatt.

WYATT

An eye for an eye?

A child next to him nudges him. BROOKE, 6, speaks up.

BROOKE

No, it's do to others like you want them to do to you.

MICAH

Very good, Brooke. Treat people the way you want to be treated.

A KNOCK at the door. Bernice peeps in and speaks quietly.

BERNICE

Father Micah, there's someone here to see you. He says it's very important.

MICAH

Bernice, unless it's a matter of life or death, he's going to have to wait a while.

BERNICE

I'm sorry. He said it was very important. I tell you what -I'll cover for you here.

MICAH

Are you sure?

BERNICE

I was a teacher for forty years. I'm sure.

INT. MICAH'S OFFICE - DAY

The ATTORNEY unbuttons his sport coat. His opened briefcase is on Micah's desk.

ATTORNEY

I didn't have any luck getting a hold of you when Mrs. Geldner's will was read.

MICAH

Edna Geldner? I don't understand.

ATTORNEY

She left her children her house, and they get her life insurance money.

MICAH

Yes, I would imagine that. Again, I'm teaching a class right now, sir -

ATTORNEY

Were you aware of Mrs. Geldner's financial situation?

MICAH

Well, she gave \$200 a month to church, which is generous. She had a modest house.

(it dawns on him)

Oh, well look, if she had some bills that were never paid, I'm sure the parish could help out.

The attorney can't help but smile.

ATTORNEY

Father, I'm not sure you understand. Did you know her husband was a musician?

MICAH

Yes, she told me about that just a few months ago.

ATTORNEY

Hubert Geldner wrote quite a few songs that were recorded by country artists: George Strait, Reba, Charley Pride - eight number ones in fact. And that made

ATTORNEY (cont'd)  
Mrs. Geldner a very wealthy woman.  
(beat) And she left most of it to you.

MICAH  
You mean she gave a bequest to St. Jude?

ATTORNEY  
No, specifically you.

He pulls out a piece of paper and reads.

ATTORNEY (cont'd)  
These are her words. 'I love my children  
dearly, but they have, on their own accord,  
taken themselves out of my life. You, on  
the other hand, made me feel important  
again. Thank you for caring. Thank you  
for listening. You are not just a man of  
God. You are one of his angels.'

He hands the handwritten note to Micah who looks it over.

MICAH  
But I didn't do anything.

ATTORNEY  
If you didn't do anything, I don't think  
she would've left you two million dollars.

Micah sits stunned; he doesn't know what to say.

ATTORNEY (cont'd)  
Oh, and a mandolin, too.

EXT. MAIN STREET COOKEVILLE - NIGHT

It is dusk at the Fall Fun Fest, and Main Street is lined with artists, booths, inflatables, and a rock climbing wall. Signs say Fresh Fruit Smoothies, Cheesecakes on a Stick, etc. A band PLAYS on a stage. Kids hold Food Lion balloons; Wyatt jokes with the Tennessee Tech Eagle mascot. Sherman is at a pet booth and shows a U.T. dog sweater to Murphy.

Roger holds a trash bag and hastily picks up garbage along the street, trying to keep pace with those tossing wrappers and

receipts. Bernice sits on a bench and watches Kolby climb the rock wall. She takes a picture of him climbing.

BERNICE

Be careful, Kolby. I don't want to have to take you to the hospital.

Bernice turns her attention to the passing crowd. Emerging from the crowd, we see Micah and Amanda walk and stop at a wheel where you put down dimes on numbers. Bernice watches as Amanda slightly leans into Micah, comfortable with their physical space. Bernice snaps a picture. They stay at the wheel a few moments and walk off down the street.

INT. GROCERY - DAY

Micah's parents shop; Burt pushes a basket as Maggie checks her list. Down the aisle, Bernice comes toward them.

BERNICE

Maggie, Burt, hello.

MAGGIE

Hello, Bernice. How are ya?

BERNICE

Oh, I'm OK. Taking advantage of senior day at the grocery.

They all laugh a polite, obligatory laugh.

MAGGIE

How are things with your nephew? Micah told us you had some concerns for him.

BERNICE

Tommy? Well, he's still just Tommy. I actually wanted to ask you about your son.

BURT

Our son? With all you do around the church, you see him more than we do.

BERNICE

I'm not trying to be nosey, but just how serious is he about that young woman?



Burt and Maggie look at her like she's crazy.

MAGGIE

We don't know what you're talking about.

BERNICE

You didn't? Well, it's not my place -

BURT

What the hell ya talking about, Bernice?

BERNICE

The Baker girl, the one back from college.

MAGGIE

Why would you say that? Micah's never said a thing to us about her.

BERNICE

Well, I've seen them together quite a bit, and they look thick as thieves to me.

INT. KITCHEN - JENKINS HOUSE - NIGHT

Micah and his parents sit at the table just starting dinner.

MAGGIE

So what's new at St. Jude?

MICAH

Not much. Have you talked to Lisa lately?

MAGGIE

She only calls when she needs something.

They continue eating. The parents are slow to mention it.

MAGGIE

We ran into Bernice McCall at the grocery the other day. She said you've been pretty busy lately.

MICAH

No busier than usual. I guess I have to always be on call. A parent doesn't

MICAH (cont'd)  
punch a clock and neither does a  
priest, I guess.

BURT  
Is there anything you'd like to tell us?

Micah has a look. He genuinely thinks his father is referring to the inheritance. Micah pauses and wipes his mouth.

MICAH  
You knew Mrs. Geldner. Well for some  
reason, she put me in her will. Me, not  
the parish. And nobody knew this, but it  
turns out she was rich. Anyway, it's still  
in the middle of all the legal wrangling.

BURT  
(sidetracked)  
How much are we talking about?

MICAH  
Well, I'll believe it when I see it,  
but the attorney said something like,  
um, a couple million dollars. I just  
didn't want to say anything until it  
was official.

Burt and Maggie are stunned.

MAGGIE  
Two million dollars? That's unbelievable.

BURT  
So how does the girl fit into that?

MICAH  
What girl?

MAGGIE  
Bernice told us you have a girlfriend.

MICAH  
Bernice McCall said that? I've been  
counseling Amanda Baker, so she's been  
in the office quite a bit. That's all.

MAGGIE

Do you like her?

MICAH

Mom, she's a great person who's going through some tough times. I want to help her. I don't see anything wrong with that. Are you going to believe Bernice or me?

BURT

Well, obviously you, son.

They continue with dinner. While his parents' countenance changes, Micah looks stricken and guilty.

EXT. ST. JUDE CAMPUS - DUSK

Micah walks up. Father Jack hits golf balls in the open field.

FATHER JACK

Want to hit some?

Father Jack takes a whack. The ball dribbles a few feet in front of the tee. Normally it would make Micah laugh. Not now.

MICAH

Jack, I don't know what I want. Is it love or the idea of being in love? It would devastate my parents if I left. And you know what the Archbishop said.

FATHER JACK

I'll become pastor if you leave. He won't shut it down. And he had the nerve to tell you he didn't want somebody my age taking over a parish? That's a bunch of malarkey. Jimmy's 65. As if I'm not capable? He's just threatening you, Micah.

MICAH

I'm pretty sure he meant it.

FATHER JACK

We'll see about that.

Another swing followed by a moment of silence.

MICAH

Jack, I want an epiphany.

FATHER JACK

Life is full of a lot of little epiphanies. We just don't always notice them.

MICAH

Did you ever think of leaving?

FATHER JACK

As long as Ann-Margaret wasn't single, I didn't give it a thought.

MICAH

So, should I leave or stay, Jack?

FATHER JACK

You said "should." It's probably not in our best interest to always feel we should do things. Try and do things because you want to do them. Do things out of purpose and joy as opposed to obligation, you get more out of it.

Father Jack whacks at another ball, but it slices sideways.

MICAH

But if we do just what we want, we're being selfish.

FATHER JACK

You ever heard of the William Carlos Williams' poem *The Red Wheelbarrow*?

Micah shakes his head no. So, Father Jack recites.

FATHER JACK (cont'd)

so much depends/upon/a red wheel/  
barrow/glazed with rain/water/beside  
the white/chickens.

MICAH

So what does it mean?

FATHER JACK

I suppose it means whatever you want  
It to mean. It's an image of a moment  
in time. You're the red wheelbarrow,  
Micah. You've been carrying the needs  
of this parish for seven years. They've  
depended on you, but you get tired.  
Your pursuit of happiness isn't selfish.

INT. COFFEE HOUSE - NIGHT

Micah and Tommy sit at a booth.

MICAH

I was a little surprised that you  
contacted me. How are things going?

TOMMY

Same as usual. Hey, I wanted to tell you  
my aunt went off on you the other day.  
So, what's the story with this woman?

MICAH

Oh no. What did your aunt say?

TOMMY

She said you had a girlfriend. Well, I  
just wanted you to know, I think it's OK.  
I've seen her on Facebook, and she's hot.

MICAH

First of all, we're not a couple.

TOMMY

Leave. It's not fair anyway. It's one  
thing to give up candy for Lent, but  
giving up women for life is just cruel.

MICAH

I knew the rules going in, Tommy.

TOMMY

Is there anything I can do to help you?

MICAH

I'll tell you what you can do; don't

MICAH (cont'd)  
listen to your aunt.

Quiet a minute. Out the window, people pass by on Main Street.

TOMMY  
So, do you want to date her?

MICAH  
You want to go to Vanderbilt, but right now you can't, right? So let's just drop it.

INT. CLAYTON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Clayton dresses for evening services. He walks to a drawer and looks for cuff links. He finds one and reaches for the other. He finds something else. He pulls out a napkin.

CLOSE ON: A wedding napkin that reads Clayton and Lucille November 4, 1973.

INT. RECTORY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Micah lies in bed, but he can't sleep. He tosses and turns and winds up on his back, watching the ceiling fan slowly turn.

EXT. DECK - NIGHT

Clayton sits outside. His eyes show that whatever it is he's thinking about, he just can't shake.

INT. ARCHBISHOP'S OFFICE - DAY

The Archbishop looks flustered as he reads. The door opens and Father Jack walks in.

ARCHBISHOP  
Come in, Jack. What's so important that you had to come to Nashville for?

FATHER JACK  
Well, Jimmy, I think it's important.

ARCHBISHOP

Archbishop Shindell. You know that's what I want to be called. So, is this about your impetuous troublemaker of a pastor? He won't go anywhere because if he does, that'll be the end of the parish. And even you'll have to find a new home.

The Archbishop smirks. He reaches in his drawer and pulls out a container of peanuts and digs in.

ARCHBISHOP (cont'd)

I'm going over the strategic plan, trimming the fat. (beat) I don't have a lot of time, Jack. What's on your mind?

FATHER JACK

If Micah leaves, I want to be the pastor.

ARCHBISHOP

No way. I'm not putting a 73 year-old retired priest in a position of pastor even at a Podunk parish like St. Jude. Not gonna' do it. Besides we know which parishes are our priorities.

FATHER JACK

So if we aren't a priority, what's it matter who our pastor is?

ARCHBISHOP

You're putting the cart before the horse. Look, if we had the numbers, I'd be glad he's gone. But the reality is parishes are starting to share priests.

FATHER JACK

The reality is I'm capable, but you'd close the parish before you'd make me pastor. I guess you've made your point.

ARCHBISHOP

Jack, it's nothing personal.

Father Jack walks to the door and stops. He turns around.

FATHER JACK

Jimmy, you know it'd be a shame if word got out how you've been pulled over three times for drinking and driving this year but didn't get even one DUI.

ARCHBISHOP

What are you talking about?

FATHER JACK

My nephew's a state trooper. They drove you home each time. They've been doing you some favors. Well, you could do me a favor.

ARCHBISHOP

That's blackmail.

FATHER JACK

And threatening to close a parish if a priest leaves, isn't?

ARCHBISHOP

No, that's business.

FATHER JACK

Mankind is my business. The common welfare is my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence. That should be our business.

Father Jack walks out and closes the door.

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

Eight PARISHIONERS gather. Doris Steinmetz and Bernice are among them. Father Jack sits next to Micah, who is at the head of the table. The meeting is wrapping up as members gather their notes and folders.

MICAH

Well, we're getting out of here on time for a change at a council meeting.

Before anyone can stand, Bernice does.



BERNICE

Since no one else will address the elephant in the room, I guess I will.

DORIS

What are you talking about, Bernice?

BERNICE

I'm talking about our pastor's social life. Don't act like you don't know.

DORIS

We don't. At least, I don't.

BERNICE

Well, Doris, Father Micah has a little girlfriend. And I mean girl.

MICAH

Trust me; what Bernice is saying is not accurate. I've spent some time with a parishioner who happens to be female, but -

BERNICE

They went to the Fall Fun Fest together.

FATHER JACK

Would it have been OK if he had gone with a nun?

BERNICE

Would the nun have been leaning on him?

She reaches in her purse and pulls out a photo. She passes it around.

LADY

Father Micah. This looks like you.

MICAH

I haven't seen it. I was at the festival, and I was with my friend. That's true.

LADY 2

You two look cozy in this picture.

MICAH

That doesn't mean we're getting married, Kathy, or that we're a couple, or that I'm going anywhere. Please don't make this out to be something it's not.

MAN

What exactly do you mean by "this?"

MICAH

Whatever you want it to mean, Tony. She's my friend, and there's no reason to apologize for that.

MAN

Who is she?

MICAH

That's not important.

BERNICE

Amanda Baker.

DORIS

James and Jean's daughter?

Bernice nods. She crosses her arms.

DORIS

So what happens now, Father Micah?

BERNICE

He either shits or gets off the can.

Bernice leaves. The rest of the council is silent and slowly walks out, leaving Micah and Fr. Jack.

MICAH

She's right. I can't lead both lives.

FATHER JACK

(pauses before...)

I can take over. If you leave, St. Jude won't close. I got the Archbishop's word.

MICAH

But Shindell said he'd close us down.

FATHER JACK

He's going to let me be pastor in the event you were to leave - despite my advanced age and general senility. So, at the very least you can make a decision with a little less guilt now.

EXT. PARKING LOT OF CUMBERLAND BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

Clayton sits behind the wheel of his truck, which is running.

EXT. COOKEVILLE - NIGHT

It's a windy fall evening. Flags wave on Main Street; storefront awnings flap. What is left of the leaves on the trees in Burgess Falls struggle to hold on to their branches.

EXT. ST. JUDE CAMPUS - NIGHT

Clayton's truck pulls up to the rectory. He slowly gets out and walks to the rectory. He lightly KNOCKS on the door. No answer. He knocks more loudly.

INT. RECTORY - CONTINUOUS

Father Jack sleeps. A book rests on his chest, but across the hall, Micah jumps up when he hears the BANGING on the door.

EXT. DOORSTEP - CONTINUOUS

Clayton waits as Micah opens the door. Micah is surprised.

CLAYTON

You got a minute?

MICAH

Clayton? You came to argue with me at three in the morning?

CLAYTON

Don't wanna argue. (beat) I wanna repent.

INT. CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

Micah and Clayton sit in a pew at the back of church. A vestibule light filters in providing just enough illumination.

CLAYTON

I just want you to know that me being here doesn't mean I need a middle man. I just need to talk and get somethin' off my chest. Somethin's been eatin' me up.

MICAH

You don't have to give me any conditions for being here. If I can help you in any way, that's good enough for me.

CLAYTON

Even though you can't stand me?

MICAH

I never said that, Clayton.

Clayton avoids much if any eye contact.

CLAYTON

We don't have to do anything to earn the love of the Lord, and we also can't do anything that can take away His love for us, either. (beat) Last week would have been my 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. My wife passed on a little over 12 years ago.

MICAH

You've mentioned that you're a widower. I'm sorry. I didn't know it was 12 years.

CLAYTON

We didn't always get along. In fact, Lucille got on my nerves like the dickens.

MICAH

Any couple can get on each other's nerves. That comes with living with somebody.

CLAYTON

She would try my patience. She'd get on me for not doing work around the house.

CLAYTON (cont'd)

I would tell her I'm in the business of saving souls, and she'd say I should be in the business of cutting grass and painting walls. She always said charity begins at home. Help your congregation *after* you help your wife. Sometimes I thought if our Lord came down to Earth, she'd drive *Him* crazy, too. I just got so tired of it - always nagging me. Not really a wife anymore. But she didn't deserve it. No one does. I should have never have betrayed her like I did. She just turned me away, but that's no excuse. I just regret it so. Think about it every day. It never goes away. The thing is I don't deserve to be forgiven.

MICAH

Not that it makes it any less wrong, but you're not the first or only man who's had an affair.

Clayton slowly lifts his head and looks Micah in the eye.

CLAYTON

I didn't cheat on my wife. (beat)  
I killed her.

Micah tries his best to contain his shock.

CLAYTON (cont'd)

I replaced her brake fluid with transmission fluid. I started to regret doing it, and I had time to fix it, to flush it out before she could have an accident, but I didn't. Was going to do it but kept putting it off. I just wanted out but didn't want the stigma of a divorce - not on a preacher. I was at a conference in Kingsport when it happened. (beat)  
I read that you priests can't go to the the police or anything if someone confides in you with their sins. Is that right?

MICAH

That's how it works.

CLAYTON

I just couldn't carry that alone any more. It just got too much. I live with it every day. Thank you for taking away just a bit of my burden.

Silence. Clayton stands and starts to walk away.

MICAH

Peace be with you, Clayton.

Clayton doesn't turn back. Micah remains in the shadows.

INT. AMANDA'S ROOM - DAY

Amanda is on the phone. She's in dress clothes.

AMANDA

It was like out of the blue. They called me this morning since they had my resume on file. I mean I know it's for a pregnancy leave, but they said it could lead to a full-time position. So, I really want to make a good impression. Oh yeah, and get out of the car this time.

EXT. ST. JUDE CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

Micah walks around the land behind the church as if surveying.

MICAH

You'll be fine; just say a little prayer.

INTERCUT: ST JUDE'S CAMPUS AND AMANDA'S ROOM

AMANDA

You know, Micah, I feel really good about this one.

MICAH

Let me know how everything goes.

AMANDA

I'll call you later. (beat) Love you. Bye.

She hangs up quickly. She bites her lip. Should she have said that? Micah seems flattered yet frightened.

I/E. COOKEVILLE MONTAGE - THAT AFTERNOON

At a school office, Amanda is at her interview with the ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL.

Roger picks up trash in the street. Sherman paints; Murphy sleeps at his feet.

Bernice puts papers in envelopes at the parish office. Micah's parents sit and eat in a restaurant.

At the Cumberland Baptist Church, Clayton stands silently at the pulpit of an empty church.

At the Tennessee Tech quad, Tommy laughs with two FRIENDS. They post flyers that read FREE KEG PARTY.

Amanda and the administrator laugh. It's an hour later than before.

Matt and his son shoot baskets in their driveway.

Amanda walks to her car in the school parking lot. She smiles. She feels good about her chances.

Micah's car - Micah drives.

Amanda's car - She gets out her cell phone to call, but the battery is dead. She plugs it in the charger and drives off.

EXT. MATT'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Matt and Noah play basketball as Micah pulls into the driveway, parking the car sideways to save playing space.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - LATER

The early November sky is darkening as Micah and Matt sit on lawn chairs in the opened garage and drink a beer. Noah plays in front of them - far enough away that he can't hear.

MATT

Let me get this straight, if you leave, the church won't close now?

MICAH

That's what Jack said.

MATT

The planets have lined up for you, my friend.

He takes a swig of beer. Micah isn't sure what he means.

MICAH

How so?

MATT

You meet a beautiful woman and then you get a fortune in inheritance, and now find out your church won't close if you leave. I don't think this all happened by chance. Do you?

MICAH

For one, I don't know what I'm going to do, and secondly I won't count on that inheritance thing until I see a check. And it's not even all about Amanda. I really don't know what I should do, Matt.

INT. MALL - EVENING

Amanda carries bags from clothing stores as she walks into another one. She looks hopeful and optimistic.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - EVENING

Micah plays basketball with Noah. Micah keeps up with the boy, not giving much away. Matt shouts from the garage.

MATT

Son, use the head fake. Shake him.

Noah fires up a wild shot but rebounds it. He lowers his shoulder to drive on Micah. He flails his free arm as he jumps



and hits Micah in the mouth. The ball goes in as Micah holds his chin.

MATT

You OK?

MICAH

Yeah. Just got a little smack.

Micah pulls his hand away, which is now bloody. Matt takes a look. He winces at the site of Micah's cut chin.

MATT

Chief, that's not a little smack.

BOY

I'm sorry, Father Micah. I didn't mean to. I injured a priest.

MICAH

It's OK. It was an accident, Noah.

INT. KITCHEN - OSWALD HOUSE - EVENING

Micah holds a blood-soaked towel on his face.

MATT

Let me see.

He pulls it away. Amy inspects it with Matt.

AMY

Micah, I don't think that's going to close up on its own.

I/E. AMANDA'S CAR - NIGHT

She drives on state highway 70N. She's on the phone. We hear Micah's message.

MICAH (o.s.)

Hi, this is Father Micah Jenkins. I am unavailable at the moment, but please leave a message and I'll return your call as soon as I can. Thanks.

She doesn't leave a message. She smiles, turns up her music, and sings along. Up ahead, there is a figure along the shoulder of the road. As she gets closer, she sees it is Roger picking up trash. He quickly returns to the brush by the road. She now watches this in her rearview mirror. Suddenly, her eyes show panic. She drives slowly and keeps looking back. She pulls over to the shoulder, parks, and gets out.

EXT. ROADSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Amanda stands there a moment as cars whiz past her. She runs back down the road toward where she saw Roger.

AMANDA

Oh my God. Oh my God.

She runs faster. She breathes heavily.

AMANDA (cont'd)

Did I hit him? Where is he?

She stops at the spot she saw him and keeps checking. She is unfazed by the cars going by, trapped in her obsessive moment.

AMANDA (cont'd)

I must have hit him. Where is he?

She is unaware that she is slowly drifting into the road as she backtracks from the shoulder.

I/E. SEMI TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

A DRIVER sees Amanda edging onto the road in his headlights.

DRIVER

Good Lord!

He swerves the truck but still hits her, clipping her body. The skidding tires finally stop well past the spot of impact.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Micah holds a towel on his chin. He wears a stringed backpack. SIRENS grow louder. Flashing lights appear at the entrance.

The sliding doors burst open as EMTs roll in a woman on a stretcher. She wears a breathing mask and has an IV. As they whisk past Micah, he recognizes Amanda. He gives chase. An E.R. ATTENDANT goes after him.

E.R. ATTENDANT  
Sir, sir. You can't go back there.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

They are far down the hall as Micah follows.

MICAH  
Wait! Please wait.

As he runs, he takes out his stole from his backpack and puts it around his neck. The door behind him opens.

E.R. ATTENDANT  
Sir, you can't go back there.

Micah sees the stretcher turn a corner and head for a room. An E.R. NURSE follows the EMTs.

MICAH  
I'm clergy. Please stop.

E.R. NURSE  
I'm sorry. No one is admitted past here.

MICAH  
Let me anoint her. Please.

Amanda lies helpless, breathless, injured and battered. Micah dips his finger into a small bottle to touch the oil. He makes the sign of the cross on her forehead.

MICAH  
Through this holy anointing may the  
Lord in his love and mercy help you  
with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

He touches her hands before they hastily get her in the room. The nurse closes the door. Micah stares in disbelief.

INT. HOSPITAL CHAPEL - LATER

Micah is the small chapel. Father Jack quietly walks in and sits next to him. They are quiet. Father Jack puts his hand on Micah's shoulder. Micah finally turns, fighting back tears.

MICAH

There was a small part of me that felt relieved. Can you believe that? I get this fleeting thought that if she didn't make it at least maybe my decision might be easier. I didn't mean it, Jack.

FATHER JACK

I know. It's all right. I'll stay in here and pray with you if that's OK.

Micah nods and turns away. Again they are silent.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

The Bakers gather. No one talks. Quiet - quite a contrast to ...

INT. COLLEGE DORM - NIGHT

... a noisy dorm suite. The halls and rooms are packed. Students have drinks in their hands. A GUY pours tequila on a GIRL's midsection. It is smooth and wet.

INT. OPERATING ROOM - NIGHT

A DOCTOR swabs Amanda's midsection, cleaning her abdomen.

INTERCUT: OPERATING ROOM AND COLLEGE DORM

The guy finishes preparing the giggling girl.

The doctor takes a scalpel and starts to make an incision on Amanda's stomach.

Tommy does a shot off the girl's stomach and takes a lime from her mouth.

The oxygen mask is over Amanda's mouth.

Friends YELL in approval. Tommy high-fives Seth. The girl looks happy but a bit disoriented. She gets up and hugs Tommy. She gets out a cigarette but doesn't light it. She slides a pack of matches in his pocket and walks away.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Micah walks in not knowing the Bakers are there. He wears a bandage over his chin having obviously gotten the stitches attended to in the interim. The Bakers are weary. Aaron and Alyssa just sit; they're not distracted by the TV. Jean clasps a rosary. James paces.

JAMES

Why are you here? Who called you?

MICAH

Actually, I was already here.

He motions to his chin.

JAMES

Did you see her?

MICAH

They wheeled her right past me.

JEAN

Did you anoint her by any chance?

MICAH

Yes, Jean, before she went in the O.R.

JAMES

Was she driving to see you? We've heard some things about you and our daughter.

MICAH

I've been counseling Amanda for a while.

JAMES

What for? Nothing's wrong with her.

MICAH

James, I'm afraid she suffers from panic attacks, anxiety, and OCD.

JEAN

Oh my Lord. We never knew, Father.

JAMES

You're not a doctor. You're a predator. That's what you are. I'd rather you not counsel her anymore.

JEAN

James, don't be that way.

JAMES

I can be any damn way I wanna be. My daughter's in there - she could be dying right now for all we know.

JEAN

Don't say that. And she's *our* daughter.

Micah says no more and leaves.

INT. ANOTHER HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Micah sits alone. The glow of the soda machine is the only light in the room. He sees a SURGEON walking down the hall.

MICAH'S P.O.V.: The phlegmatic surgeon stops at the Baker's waiting room.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The surgeon's face gives nothing away

SURGEON

Your daughter suffered a splenic rupture. The spleen's often a commonly affected organ in blunt injuries like car wrecks.

The surgeon puts his hands up to his stomach to illustrate.

SURGEON (cont'd)

The spleen sits in the left upper quadrant of the abdomen. It filters about 15% of your reserved red blood cells, so we'd rather save the spleen than remove it. In your daughter's case, she was suffering from an intra-abdominal hemorrhage, so we made a large incision through the abdominal wall to get to the abdominal cavity. This *can* be a life-threatening situation, but thankfully in your daughter's case, we were able to stop the bleeding and repair the spleen and save it. Now, she also has some other injuries because of the impact: a couple broken bones in her leg and some cracked ribs. And she's going to have a very sore abdomen for a while. But we'll just need to observe her, and she should be able to go home in a few days.

JEAN

Thank you, doctor. Prayers do get answered.

INT. ANOTHER HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Micah sees the surgeon walk back down the hall, but he can't make anything from his face or body language. Micah sits back down, slumping into a chair in the dim room.

I/E. TOMMY'S CAR - NIGHT

Tommy's car weaves as it pulls into the St. Jude campus.

EXT. ST. JUDE CAMPUS - NIGHT

Tommy stumbles out of the car and opens his trunk. He pulls out a plastic gas can and heads for the church.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

He pours gasoline at the base of the building and on the shrubbery. He pulls the matches from the party out of his pocket. It takes him a few tries, but he finally lights it.

TOMMY

Here's the favor I owe you.

He tosses the match, and the fire begins.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Micah walks. He looks at signs. He sees one for Post-Op and heads in that direction. His cell phone RINGS; he answers.

MICAH

Hello.

We can't hear who's on the other end, but Micah looks upset.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

Micah and Father Jack stand watching as the county FIREMEN finish extinguishing the fire. Debris lies in front of them. Some posts and joists remain upright. A few pews are spared.

FATHER JACK

Thank God the church is the people and not the building.

MICAH

How did this happen?

FATHER JACK

They don't know yet.

They watch helplessly. Both stare at the ruins.

FATHER JACK

How is she?

MICAH

I don't know yet, Jack. Don't know.

INT. RECTORY BEDROOM - NIGHT

Micah sleeps. The PHONE rings, waking him. He doesn't want to answer but slowly picks it up.



MICAH  
St. Jude's rectory.

INT. HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

Jean sits alone. She's on her cell phone.

JEAN  
Father Micah, this is Jean Baker. I am so sorry to call at this hour, but I wanted you to know Amanda's going to be OK. She's got some recovery ahead of her, but it looks good. I'm sorry James was so rude to you earlier.

INTERCUT: HOSPITAL AND RECTORY

MICAH  
No, Jean that's alright. I'm so glad she's OK. Thank you for calling me.

JEAN  
And it's OK if you want to visit her.

EXT. ST. JUDE CAMPUS - MORNING

It's a blue and orange sunrise. Micah sits on the fractured remnants of a pew and looks at the charred remains. Roger is in the distance pushing a red wheelbarrow through the debris, salvaging what he can. Micah's eyes still show disbelief.

MICAH  
Anything worth saving, Roger?

ROGER  
Yeah. A few hymnals and some other stuff.

Roger pulls out a few missiles, a light fixture, etc. Micah notices something else in the wheelbarrow. He reaches for it.

ROGER  
There's some places I couldn't get to because of the glass. I can get my steel-toed shoes and come back.

Micah picks up a black and gold bracelet - Tommy's.

ROGER (cont'd)

Mr. Steinmetz said we got insurance.  
That's good. A building like this must  
cost a \$1000 or more.

Roger finally realizes Micah is preoccupied and walks on.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Amanda sits up in bed. James and Jean sit and listen.

AMANDA

I thought I hit Roger so I got out and  
checked.

JAMES

I don't understand. How can you not be  
sure if you hit somebody with your car?

AMANDA

That's it. I don't know. I don't want  
you to think this sort of thing happens  
a lot, but I live with some sort of panic  
or anxiety almost every day.

JEAN

Why wouldn't you tell us?

AMANDA

It's embarrassing. Dad just said it.  
People don't understand.

EXT. ST. JUDE CAMPUS - DAY

Roger puts up Christmas lights on the rectory as Micah cleans  
up more debris on the church site. He wears headphones. A car  
pulls into the lot. Tommy gets out and walks toward Micah. He  
stands there a moment before Micah notices him and takes off  
the headphones.

MICAH

Oh, Tommy. How's it going?

TOMMY

I came over to see how you were doing.

MICAH

I'll survive. So will the church.

TOMMY

So will Amanda Baker, I hear.

Micah looks up, surprised by the comment. He nods. Silence as they look at each other. Micah is hoping..

TOMMY (cont'd)

I'm so sorry this happened. (beat) So, did you ever find out how it started?

Micah doesn't want to show his disappointment, but he doesn't want to completely let him off the hook, either.

MICAH

No. I guess we'll never know.

TOMMY

So I guess you're leaving now for sure, huh? I mean Amanda's OK; there's no church.

MICAH

We'll have mass in Williams Hall. (beat) Amanda? It's not just about her. Well, it's complicated. You know better than anybody how complicated life can be. Look, I'd like to talk, but I wanted to go through -

TOMMY

Sure. No problem. Just checking on you.

MICAH

Hey, if you ever hear any leads or anything about who could have done this, let me know, OK?

TOMMY

Yeah, sure, of course.

MICAH

I'd appreciate it. Be good.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Amanda lies in bed; she is awake but a bit groggy. Micah sits next to the bed.

AMANDA

I'm going to get help and start taking care of myself.

MICAH

That sounds like a plan to me.

She reaches out her hand. He clasps hers with his.

I/E. COOKEVILLE THANKSGIVING MONTAGE

Sherman walks Murphy on the sidewalk by St. Jude's and carries a dozen roses. Clayton's truck goes past him.

Storefront windows on Main Street show CLOSED. "Happy Thanksgiving" is written on the window of Cream City.

At the Moore house, Tommy, Kolby, and their mother sit around the table as Bernice says a prayer. Tommy looks distracted.

At the Jenkins' house, Maggie is in the kitchen. Micah and Burt watch football in the den. Micah's mind is elsewhere.

In her hospital room, Amanda sits up in bed as she and the rest of her family listen to a PSYCHIATRIST - identified as such by the embroidery on his white coat. Krystal bags sit on the tables, Thanksgiving dinner.

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

Sherman and Murphy walk in a cemetery. They know exactly where they're going - to a monument that reads: MATTIE BEASLEY.

SHERMAN

I sure could go for some of your homemade stuffing today, Mats, and your potatoes and pumpkin pie. Just talkin' about it gets me hungry.

Murphy sits at his side. Sherman places the flowers at the base of the stone. He squats, putting a hand on the stone.

SHERMAN

I am thankful for you every day of my life. I'll see you some day. I love you.

He kisses the monument and remains there awhile.

I/E. CLAYTON'S TRUCK - DAY

The pickup enters Burgess Falls State Park and stops at a bare tree just down from the waterfall. Clayton gets out.

EXT. BURGESS FALLS - DAY

Clayton walks toward the brush. We can't see much below his shoulders until a DIFFERENT ANGLE shows that he holds a shotgun in his hand. Just before he disappears into the trees, he looks back at the scenery. He hears the sounds of BIRDS. A dove flies onto a branch nearby. He looks at the waterfall and the red leaves that remain on the ground. He looks to the sky - and slowly disappears into the evergreens.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - BAKER HOUSE - DAY

Amanda, despite a cast and some bandages, looks good. She sits on the couch, her leg resting on pillows, and watches TV. James comes in and pulls up a chair.

JAMES

For the last couple weeks as you got well, I kept quiet. Didn't want to upset you, but I think it's time to say it now. (beat) Micah Jenkins is sixteen years older than you. If you didn't notice, he's a priest, Amanda. Please drop it. Focus on getting well and getting a job. I don't think you've been looking hard enough. You have an M.A.T. You're certified. Are you lying about going on interviews? (beat) You're not crazy, Amanda.

AMANDA

No, I'm sick.

JAMES

Well, I understand that now.

AMANDA

Do you really, Dad? You have a PhD in Environmental Sciences. You're not a real doctor.

JAMES

I want to help you, but one way you can help yourself is to stop seeing him.

AMANDA

I'm not *seeing* him, OK.

He nods unconvincingly and walks out of the room, leaving her alone.

INT. ARCHITECT'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Matt works on a sketch. Although it is some type of building, we can't yet tell what it is.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Mary Helen is at her desk. Clayton walks toward her and smiles; he doesn't let on that anything is wrong.

MARY HELEN

Where are you off to, Pastor?

CLAYTON

Some unfinished business, Mary Helen.

I/E. CLAYTON'S TRUCK - DAY

Clayton's face is weary. A satchel is in the passenger seat. He goes through Putnam County, which looks desolate and frail with the leaves gone and the sky gray. Along the way, he drops an envelope in a mail box. Finally, his truck pulls into a parking lot of a location not yet revealed.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Clayton slowly gets out of the truck, holding the satchel. He looks around, closes his eyes, takes a breath, and walks in.

EXT. HIDDEN HOLLOW PARK - NIGHT

A 50-foot tall illuminated cross glows with the power of 40 90-watt floodlights.

MICAH (o.s)

Supposedly in the late 70s, Arda E. Lee had a vision from God telling him to build this park and that cross.

I/E. MICAH'S CAR - NIGHT

Micah drives slowly through the Christmas lights. Amanda is in the passenger seat.

AMANDA

I know you're just trying to make small talk, but can we get some air?

EXT. HIDDEN HOLLOW PARK - NIGHT

The cross is in the distance, looking down on them. Amanda stands with the help of crutches.

AMANDA

We need to talk. (beat) I got a job.

MICAH

That's great. But you don't seem happy.

AMANDA

My dad got it for me in Charlottesville. He's got a friend at UVA whose grandkids go to a private school, and one of the special ed teachers there is retiring in the spring. So, it doesn't start until August, but it's mine unless I find something here first.

MICAH

That's a good backup plan.

They stand in awkward silence.

AMANDA

My dad thinks we shouldn't meet anymore.

MICAH

Well, I agree. A therapist will be a lot more helpful than I could be.

AMANDA

I mean, he doesn't think we should see each other anymore, period. And I've sort of been thinking about that, too.

MICAH

You're an adult, Amanda. You can work where you want to work, see who you want to see.

AMANDA

I know. I'm not even sure what I want. I just know I want to get well. I need to take care of myself before there could even be an us. I'm scheduled to start therapy, and I started taking medicine, too.

MICAH

If you move, I can move, too.

AMANDA

Your life is here, Micah. (beat) Look, I got you something.

She pulls a small present out of the pocket of her hoodie and hands it to him. It's wrapped in Christmas paper.

AMANDA (cont'd)

Go ahead. Open it. I guess it doesn't seem like much now.

He is deflated. He's slow to move. Finally, he unwraps it and unfolds a t-shirt. Slowly, he offers a little smile.

CLOSE ON: A grey t-shirt with a logo and the words THE WRESTLING LODGE.



AMANDA

I designed the logo myself.

He keeps looking at it; it obviously means a lot to him. He is calmer. He checks out the blank back of the shirt.

MICAH

No tour dates on the back?

AMANDA

You know The Wrestling Lodge. They're primarily a studio band.

They let themselves laugh a moment. She hugs him.

AMANDA

You're going to marry me someday, Micah. It may be to another man; but I want you to marry me - you know as the priest.

They pull apart. She kisses him on the cheek.

MICAH

It's not my preference, but it would be an honor - if I'm still here.

AMANDA

At St. Jude's?

He looks down as if to say, that's not what he meant.

AMANDA (cont'd)

You mean the priesthood?

INT. CHURCH ASSEMBLY BUILDING - DAY

Williams Hall's stage is now a makeshift altar. The young actors are in their spots as Bernice leads a rehearsal of the Christmas play. Noah is the innkeeper again. Macy reprises her role as Mary.

MACY

Joseph, we must stop.

A NEW BOY stands in as Joseph. He's trying to remember his line. Noah feeds it to him.

NOAH

Look, in the distance. I see a stable.

BERNICE

Noah, maybe you should worry about your own lines. I don't think you've memorized them yet. Food for thought.

NEW BOY

Are we almost done, Mrs. McCall? I wanted to go to the movies with some friends.

BERNICE

Yong man, if you want to succeed in the theater, you've got to make sacrifices.

PEYTON

But I want to be a marine biologist.

BERNICE

Five-minute break!

EXT. - COOKEVILLE - MORNING

A *10 Days Until Christmas* sign hangs in the town square. Tennessee Tech's campus and Cream City are not yet open. Burgess Falls is calm. The cross on the hill stands against a cloudless sky.

INT. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

Doris stands as the Parish Council minus Micah and Father Jack gathers. A disinterested Bernice sits next to her.

DORIS

Thank you all for coming on short notice.

MAN

Where are Father Micah and Father Jack?

DORIS

We've all heard a lot of rumors about Father Micah lately - about his interest in this woman and even some about him being unhappy with the priesthood.

BERNICE

They're not rumors.

DORIS

Regardless, I just think that we should support him and let him know how much he means to all of us - especially now after the fire. I was thinking we could do something for him before the play.

BERNICE

Well, I'll be busy with the kids.

The rest are slow to respond.

WOMAN

I think it's a good idea.

Once the ice is broken, the others nod in approval.

DORIS

So we need to come up with something and tell everybody. Stay or go, I think we should show him our gratitude.

WOMAN

I'll help you plan, Doris.

Doris smiles. Bernice is not as pleased.

EXT. ST. JUDE CAMPUS - DAY

Micah and Father Jack walk. Micah goes to the mail box. He pulls out a magazine and a card.

CLOSE ON: An envelope with his name handwritten on it. Micah pulls out a Thank You card and opens it. He reads.

CLAYTON (v.o.)

Pastor Jenkins, over the past few months, we've butted heads quite a few times, but without you I wouldn't have grown or admitted that my beliefs have been a self serving. I realize life is precious, and that I'm not to be a judge but instead the one who

CLAYTON (v.o.) (cont'd)  
should be judged. You made me look inward.  
You've made me a better man. By the time  
you read this, I will have turned myself  
in. Justice needs to be served on earth,  
too. Peace be with you also. Clayton.

FATHER JACK  
What is it?

MICAH  
Um - just a card from a friend.

I/E. AMANDA'S CAR - DAY

Amanda drives. She reaches in the middle section between the seats and grabs her sunglasses. She notices something else. It is the CD that Micah made. She smiles and puts it in. MUSIC plays as she drives. Moments later, the car pulls into the parking lot of the Horizons Family Therapy office.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Sherman works on a painting, slowly revealed as a portrait of the church building and Micah.

EXT. - COOKEVILLE - NIGHT

The courthouse has garland draped around its windows and is a glow with spotlights and ornaments. The cross on the hill stands against a starry sky that's overseen by the moon. Roger picks up trash in front of a used book and record store.

INT. BACKSTAGE - CHURCH ASSEMBLY BUILDING - NIGHT

Bernice tries to organize the children, who are in their costumes.

BERNICE  
Now we need to be extra quiet and wait  
while they do their little dog and pony  
show out there.

INT. CHURCH ASSEMBLY BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

It is crowded. Micah's parents are seated as are Father Jack, James, Jean, Aaron, and Alyssa Baker, Amy, Colin, Ben, and Lacey Oswald with baby Sam. Decorations are on the stage, the manger is in place. A microphone stand sits on the stage.

Doris looks back and nods at Matt, who stands by the door. He opens it and motions. Roger walks in with Micah. As soon as Doris sees this, she signals for the man and woman from the parish council to hang up a sign across the stage that says *We Love You, Father Micah!* They place an easel nearby with a picture collage of Micah with parishioners. Micah looks confused as he walks forward as Doris stands at the mic.

DORIS

Father Micah, since this is a special parish-wide event, we thought it would be the perfect time to let you know how much you mean to all of us. We know it's been a tough time for you over the last few months, and with the fire and all, we just want you to know we support you in whatever you do because we know you would be doing good work in whatever path you choose.

She sits and the crowd CLAPS as they look back at Micah. Burt and Maggie look at each other confused. They truly don't know exactly what she means. As Sherman walks to the mic, Matt sneaks out the back door. Sherman carries a covered package.

SHERMAN

Fr. Micah, you once came over at midnight to help me find Murphy; you have encouraged me to keep up my art. So, I just wanted to give you a little something back. If you don't mind coming forward.

Micah slowly makes it to the stage. He smiles at Sherman who hands him the large rectangular package.

SHERMAN

This is just a little something I did for you. I hope you like it.

Micah takes off the paper to reveal the finished painting. He is surprised, humbled, grateful. The crowd MUMBLES. They can't see it. Micah holds it up. The crowd is impressed. Micah leans over to Sherman. He doesn't speak in the mic.

MICAH

Sherman, this is beautiful. Thank you.

SHERMAN

No, thank *you*, Father.

They stand there a moment. Micah is not sure what to do next. Roger comes walking quickly up the aisle in the same manner he walks the streets. He carries a small plastic bag. He doesn't go to the mic. Instead, he holds the bag out to Micah.

ROGER

I got you these at the second-hand bookstore. I must have looked through hundreds of them.

Micah opens the bag and grabs a stack of used cassettes tapes. A variety of artists: Conway Twitty, Queen, U2, Johnny Cash ...

ROGER

I know you got his sticker on your car, and that last one - you got their posters on your office wall. Must be a family band.

The last tape is revealed - The Smiths *Louder Than Bombs*. Micah's face shows that although he already has it on CD and mp3, this tape with the scratchy case means the most to him.

MICAH

I really appreciate these, Micah.

ROGER

They're in Dolby whatever that is.

Matt walks in. He holds a cylinder container and walks to the stage. Micah looks at him with surprise. Matt takes the mic.

MATT

Hello, I'm Matt Oswald. My son Noah is the innkeeper again this year, so be on the lookout for him in a few

MATT (cont'd)

minutes. I will be the architect for the new church. Father Micah gave me a couple ideas but said its ultimate design would be your call, you being the parish. So I will be asking for your input and suggestions on the layout and design of the new facility. So be on the lookout for that in the next couple of weeks.

Some clamor in the audience. Matt goes to the easel and sits the collage down. He brings the easel up by the mic. He opens the end of the cylinder container.

MATT (cont'd)

And maybe I shouldn't be doing this, but Father Micah has been mulling over an idea of his for a while now, and I don't want to speak for him, but I anticipate it coming to fruition, and unbeknownst to him, I will do all of the design work free of charge as my stewardship to the parish and to my friend.

He pulls out a large poster and puts it on display.

MATT

These are just some preliminary sketches, but this is what I envision the outside of St. Jude School to look like.

The crowd is taken aback. Amy is shocked; she didn't even know.

MATT

Maybe I should let Father Micah tell you more about it.

The crowd CLAPS. A nervous Micah reluctantly walks to the mic.

MICAH

Wow. Where do I begin? Before I thank all of you for this completely unexpected - um, the school, yes, I would like to build a school. And I

MICAH (cont'd)

won't even have to ask anyone for money to build it. That's been taken care of by a very generous parishioner. We have a lot of children in this parish.

As Micah talks, we see the backdoor open and someone walk in, but we can't yet tell who it is.

MICAH (cont'd)

And some kids have to go 30 miles to the nearest Catholic grade school. This really wasn't anything I wanted to bring up just yet, but I'll forgive our architect since he said he'll be working free of charge.

Matt smiles and a few laughs come from the crowd.

MICAH (cont'd)

Um, my mom and dad are here tonight, And you're both probably pretty confused at this point. Whatever discernment I've been going through, I never wanted you to know, to worry. I guess I didn't want to disappoint you in any way, either. Maybe -

A voice is LOUD in the back of the room. It's Tommy.

TOMMY (o.s.)

I know who started the fire.

The voice gets everyone's attention, including Bernice who peeks out from behind the stage. The crowd is bewildered. Tommy is slow to speak, but he speaks to Micah.

TOMMY

I did. I was drinking, and I thought I was helping you out. In the state I was in, I figured if you had no church you could leave, and it would be OK. But while I was thinking I did you a favor, here I lied to you when I stopped by that day. (beat) You know, you've been too good to me this past



TOMMY (cont'd)

year, cared too much about me for me not to tell the truth. So, I take responsibility, and you press charges if you want to. I'm sorry, I really am. You know where to find me.

Tommy walks out. Bernice hurries after him; Roger holds the door for her. The stunned assembly finally turns back to face the stage and Micah, who is just as floored as they are. He looks out at all of their familiar faces.

MICAH

I don't know what to say to that, either - to any of this. I guess that's what the media would call a bombshell, huh? (beat) But I think I do know something, and that's that I've been wrong about a few things. One of which is that I don't have my own immediate family. No, I've got 300 immediate families.

EXT. CAMPUS - DAY

A homemade sign on the site of the former church reads: *New church design meeting. Tuesday 8 P.M. in Williams Hall.*

The hill and acreage behind the church site is bare except for a large, more official looking sign that reads: *Site of the future home of St. Jude Academy.* Matt's name is on the sign as the architect. Micah stands looking at the space, imagining. Father Jack walks up to him.

FATHER JACK

Pretty hefty price tag.

MICAH

Thank Mrs. Geldner for it.

FATHER JACK

That was your money - not the church's.

MICAH

I guess you'd say we're indelibly linked. Nobody has to know about it being mine.

FATHER JACK

You know American songwriter Mary Chapin  
Carpenter once sang, "Accidents and  
inspiration lead you to your destination."

MICAH

You're quoting music lyrics now? I'm  
finally starting to rub off on you, huh?

Father Jack smiles.

FATHER JACK

You're not just leaving your mark on me.  
You're leaving your mark on this world,  
my friend. You make a difference, and  
that's the best thing anybody can make.

Father Jack pats him on the shoulder and walks away toward the  
rectory. Micah remains. He looks at the field. He bows his  
head and says a quiet prayer. He makes the sign of the cross  
and looks up. He turns and examines the campus from the hill,  
a campus set to rise from the ashes.

FADE OUT