

AT RISK

Based upon the novel by Alice Hoffman

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FADE IN:

A page from a dinosaur book. An illustration of a Tyrannosaurus Rex and a triceratops basking peacefully near an enormous pond.

A small hand carefully begins to copy a section of the landscape onto a sheet of construction paper. Practical colors - grey, green, brown.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

My dad once told me, when the dinosaurs died, it happened quickly, a giant asteroid that might have looked like an exploding star. I wanted to know, at the end, did they know that it was coming? Did they help each other? Were they scared?

The hand belongs to CHARLIE FARRELL, ten years old. Charlie is small for his age, some might say fragile. He hangs the drawing - the beginning of a mural - on a classroom wall.

TITLE: AT RISK

EXT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - DAWN

A small white bungalow isolated on a marsh. A flock of egrets take flight, shocking the weeds behind them.

Charlie speeds his bike past the marsh.

EXT. POND - ESTABLISHING

Trees and mud surround a pond.

Charlie drops his bike and hurries towards the pond. He lines up jars for collecting specimens. He takes in the world around him with unusual focus.

CLOSE ON: the dark surface of the pond, a few bugs buzzing.

CLOSE ON: a patch of yellow flowers, a bee circling.

CLOSE ON: the shell of a turtle slowly emerging from the pond.

The turtle is enormous, almost five feet long and ancient looking. Charlie is transfixed.

His best friend, SEVRIN STAFFORD - also ten but stockier, louder, less observant than Charlie - pedals up.

SEVRIN

You said you'd stay for the whole game.

Charlie glances up, annoyed by this distraction. He looks back at the pond, but the turtle is gone.

EXT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - DAY

Charlie and Sevrin ride their bikes, speeding up when they pass the bungalow.

EXT. MORROW/FARRELL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS - SERIES OF SHOTS

Charlie and Sevrin ride down the quaint streets of Morrow, Massachusetts.

Sevrin turns left, Charlie turns right, rides up to a lovely, drafty two story house.

It's late August, everything still green but on the precipice of changing.

CAPTION: MORROW, MASSACHUSETTS, 1986.

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - DAY

CLOSE ON: A PINK GYM BAG, dropped on the floor.

CLOSE ON: The dregs of a Tylenol bottle, poured into a cup.

CLOSE ON: A wasp buzzing around a light fixture.

INT. FARRELL BASEMENT DARKROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON: A PICTURE of LAUREL SMITH submerged in developer. It slowly comes into focus: a pretty WOMAN sitting outside, her eyes closed, the marsh behind her.

POLLY FARRELL, early 40s, slight and focused, lifts the picture, hangs it next to another in which the woman (LAUREL SMITH) looks startlingly older, her hair heavy, as though she is drenched in water.

Stomping from upstairs makes this picture drop.

POLLY

Shit.
(calling upstairs)
Guys!

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Polly steps into the kitchen. Her daughter AMANDA, 13, crouches on the floor, a spaghetti strainer over her head.

Charlie stands on the counter, trying to catch the wasp with the inside of a water glass.

AMANDA

The moron brought a bee in here.

CHARLIE

A wasp. Its species has been on the planet since before we were.

POLLY

Charlie, down. IVAN.

CHARLIE

She's got a zillion eggs in her abdomen.

AMANDA

You really are disgusting.

CHARLIE

Shut up, metal mouth.

Polly hands Amanda Tylenol.

POLLY

Drink this.

AMANDA

I'm not missing my meet.

POLLY

Of course not. IVAN!

IVAN FARRELL - 40s, lanky, dazed - gallops down the stairs.

IVAN

What's wrong?

POLLY

A wasp.

She gestures towards it, he looks up at the tiny buzzing creature.

CHARLIE
What breed, Dad?

IVAN
Polistes fuscates. You can tell by
the gold markings.

CHARLIE
Her abdomen is full of eggs.

IVAN
You bet it is.

AMANDA
Dad, dad, dad!

POLLY
Can you just kill it?

Ivan puts the pasta strainer on his head. Amanda laughs.
She's got a great smile, and really embarrassing BRACES.

IVAN
Protective measures.

POLLY
That's a good look.

Ivan gives Polly a quick kiss, which she reciprocates before
pushing him away.

IVAN
Your hero approaches the wasp.

Ivan hops up on the counter.

CHARLIE
You won't kill it, right?

Ivan carefully catches the wasp and gently guides it to the
door, where it flies away. Charlie turns to his sister and
mother.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
See?

INT. CAR/EXT. MORROW - LATER

Polly drives past Morrow's quaint town square, Amanda in the front seat, Charlie in the back, paging through his dinosaur book.

The radio is on, a news story about a car bomb in Tehran. Then a story about Madonna's single "True Blue" remaining number one.

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL GYM - DAY

Anxious parents and restless kids filter into bleachers. A judges table is set up with score cards and staffed with volunteering members of the PTA.

Charlie reads his book as Polly steers him towards the bleachers.

POLLY
(to Charlie)
Can you put that away?

Charlie doesn't answer. Polly looks at him a moment, then turns and watches COACH EAGAN, 40s, talk intently to a group of adolescent gymnasts, including Amanda, who listens with calm focus.

POLLY takes a picture: SNAP.

CHARLIE
You're going to embarrass her.

LINDA (O.S.)
Polly!

LINDA GLEASON waves from her perch in the top row of the bleachers. She's the principal of Cheshire, devoted with a streak of mischief. Kids love her, parents sometimes find her a bit much.

Polly and Charlie squeeze past packed bleachers and find two seats next to Linda.

LINDA (CONT'D)
I'm hearing strange things about you. The occult?

POLLY
Laurel has nothing to do with the occult.

LINDA
One detail - one.

POLLY
My lips are sealed.

Polly loads more film, tilts her camera towards Charlie, an effort to engage him.

POLLY (CONT'D)
(to Charlie)
I can show you how to focus it?

CHARLIE
I'm reading.

She shoots a look to Linda.

LINDA
(to Charlie)
Do I get a hello?

CHARLIE
Hi Principal Gleason.

LINDA
Please. Call me Linda until after
Labor Day.

Polly snaps more pictures: Amanda flying through a graceful cartwheel: SNAP. Amanda, poised on the balance beam: SNAP.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Can you get Kris?

Linda's daughter, KRISTY, pulling herself over the parallel bars: SNAP.

Amanda nervously clasping hands with JESSIE EAGAN, her best friend and the coach's daughter: SNAP.

Amanda takes a deep breath as she stands before the parallel bars. Polly puts her camera down, nervous for her. Amanda grabs the higher bar and flips over it with seeming ease.

INT. CHESHIRE GYM - LATER

"Hungry Like the Wolf" plays. Amanda finishes her floor routine, a series of cartwheels, back flips, leaps. She's incredibly good.

INT. CHESHIRE GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Everyone in the gym stands and claps as Amanda, sweaty and pleased and really wiped out, is handed a trophy.

CHARLIE
(begrudging admiration)
Not so bad.

LINDA
(to Polly)
He's a tough guy to please.

Amanda bows, then quickly leaves the gym.

INT. CHESHIRE HALLWAY - LATER

Charlie watches Polly talk to a few MOTHERS as Coach Eagan approaches. *

POLLY
She's totally relentless. She's
saving her allowance to study with
this Olympian, Bela -

MOTHER #1
Karolyli?

POLLY
That sounds right.

The other women look at Polly with some envy. Jessie, who has changed out of her leotard into a summery dress, pokes Charlie.

CHARLIE
Did you know that tyrannosaurs
lived 83 million years after the
brontosaurus?

JESSIE
That's pretty cool.

COACH EAGAN
(to Jesse)
Jess! Get a move on.

Jessie begrudgingly heads to her father, hugs Polly.

POLLY
(to Jessie)
She still in there?

JESSIE
I think she's in the shower.

COACH EAGAN
(to Polly)
You should be proud. She picked
herself right up after that weak
start.

Polly glances towards the locker room, concerned.

INT. DEXTER'S SEAFOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A cozy, family owned New England seafood restaurant. Aging waiters wear alligator shirts. Polly and Ivan have ordered beer, fries, lobsters Charlie pokes at and Amanda doesn't touch.

Amanda's got a small cluster of roses next to her and she looks exhausted.

AMANDA
-He knows he shouldn't put me on
the parallel bars first because
that's my weakest event -

POLLY
- Well, he seemed impressed to me -

IVAN
- Of course he was impressed. I'll
go punch him in the face if he
isn't impressed by my daughter.

AMANDA
Ha ha funny Dad.

POLLY
(to Ivan)
You'd have to show up to do that.
(to Amanda)
Are you eating?

IVAN
(to Charlie and Amanda)
Your mother doesn't understand the
concept of a deadline -

POLLY
Oh really?

AMANDA
He starts classes Monday, mom -

POLLY

- I am fully aware of his packed schedule, thank you very much.

IVAN

Oh yeah? Fully aware? Or *medium* aware?

The kids crack up at this. Polly bristles.

AMANDA

Mom, everyone I know thinks she's creepy.

POLLY

She can creep you out all she wants. The advance on this project paid for your gymnastics camp.

Amanda gets up.

POLLY (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

AMANDA

Why do you always need to know that?

Ivan watches Amanda walk off, amused.

POLLY

(to Ivan)

Don't gloat. She'll turn on you next.

IVAN

Pol.

POLLY

I'm serious.

Charlie looks between his parents, assessing the tension between them. Polly takes a few frustrated bites of her food. Gets up.

IVAN

That's probably not the best -

But Polly's already headed in Amanda's direction.

INT. TWO STALL BATHROOM - LATER

Polly enters the bathroom. The decor is old and dark.
Amanda's sneakers visible in one of the stalls.

POLLY

Amanda?

Polly catches her reflection in the mirror. She never thought she'd be this way - a nagging mother. A beat.

POLLY (CONT'D)

Amanda - honey?

Another beat. Polly knocks on the stall door. Amanda opens it for her. She's doubled over, throwing up. Polly quickly steadies her.

POLLY (CONT'D)

I've got you.

AMANDA

It was that stupid lobster.

POLLY

You just worked too hard.

Polly kneels down, feels her daughter's forehead. She's got a fever, a high one.

INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie tries to sleep as his parents fight.

IVAN (O.S.)

- all I'm saying is stop beating
yourself up - that's all -

POLLY (O.S.)

- that's easy for you to say, you
don't even show up and you're still
father of the year-

IVAN (O.S.)

-Oh Polly, stop it -

Charlie sits up, pulls his dinosaur book out from under his pillow and starts to read.

EXT. POND - DAWN

CLOSE ON: The pond, the turtle sleeping on a rock.

CLOSE ON: Earthworms slithering.

CLOSE ON: A felled bird's nest, crushed abandoned eggs.

Charlie sits, taking notes in his SPECIMEN LOG.

*

Charlie turns his attention back to the turtle, which has woken and is wriggling its head out of its enormous shell.

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - DAY

Charlie fries French Toast. He's made a mess - egg shells, empty milk carton, a heap of bread crusts.

Ivan sits at the kitchen table, working. A bag of groceries unpacked on the kitchen table.

Polly gallops down the stairs, an empty glass in her hand and a washcloth under her arm.

She puts the cup in the sink and stares at the mess.

CHARLIE
I'm gonna clean it.

POLLY
Right.

IVAN
We are!

He tries to kiss her, she ducks under his arm.

IVAN (CONT'D)
What?

POLLY
You know what.

Charlie offers a plate of French Toast to Ivan. Ivan hands it off to Polly, she takes it, chews, grins. A conciliatory moment. Then:

POLLY (CONT'D)
You get the Tylenol and Gatorade?

IVAN
No gatorade at Lawson's.

POLLY
That's all you tried? Just one damn store?

IVAN
I'll go back out.

POLLY
Don't bother.

She grabs her purse.

POLLY (CONT'D)
(to Charlie)
You. Stay with Amanda.

Polly heads out.

CHARLIE
I'm meeting Sevrin -

POLLY
Sevrin can wait.

The door slams behind her. Ivan stands there.

IVAN
She'll cool off.

Charlie dumps maple syrup on his french toast, and his father's. Ivan starts to eat.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - LATER

Charlie holds a glass of gatorade in one hand and knocks on Amanda's door with the other.

No answer. He pushes the door open. The room is completely dark.

INT. AMANDA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Leotards strewn across the floor, pictures of Bruce Springsteen plastered on the wall. Amanda sleeps.

INT. AMANDA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie stands on tip toes in front of Amanda's closet, looks up at an PURPLE JAR stuffed with dollar bills.

AMANDA
Mom?

CHARLIE
It's me.

Charlie puts the gatorade on Amanda's night stand.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

She says you have to.

He sits next to his sister's bed. She takes a sip.

EXT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE/MARSH - DAY

Polly's car parked outside the house, another car (Betsy Stafford's), a beat-up Datsun, behind it.

INT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - SAME

CLOSE ON: Polly squinting through her camera as Laurel, who we see through Polly's lense, gives a reading in a sparse living room, carefully modulated light.

LAUREL (O.C.)

- I would like for you to imagine
we are surrounded by white light.
Please take a deep breath and
imagine that.

Laurel's voice has a slight accent. She is of indeterminable age, very pretty, long hair. There's something other-worldly and exotic about her. More Snow White than the witch.

WOMAN

Do you see her yet?

Polly SNAPS a picture. And another picture. She's in her element, eager and unobtrusive, completely focused and captivated by Laurel.

BETSY STAFFORD, a sharp-featured writer in her 40s, also Sevrin's mother, takes notes in a nearby wicker chair.

INT. DR. REARDON'S OFFICE - SAME

ED REARDON, 50s, trim and serious, finishes examining Amanda. Polly digs through her purse, trying to distract herself.

ED REARDON

(to Amanda)

One more deep breath.

(beat)

All done.

Amanda slides off the exam table and collects her clothes from Polly.

AMANDA

When can I go back to practice?

ED REARDON

Don't worry, I can tell just by looking at you: you're better than Mary Lou Retton.

AMANDA

Not yet. But I will be. Once I go to Oklahoma.

ED REARDON

What's in Oklahoma?

AMANDA

Bela Karolyi. He trains all the Olympians. He's the best coach, he's from Romania, but they let him become an American.

POLLY

Get dressed, you.

Amanda exits. Polly looks after her, worried.

POLLY (CONT'D)

I can't keep dragging her back here.

ED REARDON

We'll get to the bottom of this.

Ed squeezes her shoulder. She looks up at him - she trusts him implicitly.

POLLY

Thanks.

EXT. MORROW/MARSH - SUNSET

Charlie and Sevrin ride their bikes through the reeds.

SEVRIN

No way a turtle that size could get in that pond.

CHARLIE

It was! I swear.

They approach Laurel Smith's house. Someone has sprayed graffiti - a bright, jagged *Casper the Unfriendly Kike* - across the porch. The boys slow down, take this in.

SEVRIN

I bet she'll catch those kids and
turn them into ghosts.

CHARLIE

My mom never said anything about
ghosts.

He starts pedaling again, turns back to Sevrin.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Are you coming?

INT. ASTRONOMY INSTITUTE/AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Ivan gives a lecture to thirty freshman, all of whom pay
attention to him - he's an engaging, irreverent professor.

IVAN

The Supernova of 1604, most often
referred to as Kepler's Supernova,
the brightest exploding star
visible to the naked eye in the
last three hundred years. We'll get
to that later - what I want to
focus on with all you smart
fantastic people, is the event that
started it all. The Big Bang. I
know, you know what the Big Bang
is, but there's more to it than you
think -

A knock on the door. A SECRETARY comes in, speaks quietly to
Ivan. After a moment, Ivan turns back to the class.

IVAN (CONT'D)

And with that cliffhanger, excuse
me for a moment.

INT. ASTRONOMY INSTITUTE/IVAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Ivan's in his office on the phone. It's an organized mess,
papers scattered everywhere. *

Ivan carefully hangs up the phone. Sits there for a long
moment. What he has just been told has not yet sunk in. *

EXT. POND - DAY

CLOSE ON: The pond, fish darting under water.

CLOSE ON: A small frog gulping on a lily pad.

CLOSE ON: A stone skimming the far side of the pond, where the turtle once was.

Sevrin throws another stone into the pond. Then another. Then another. Fish dart away. The frog leaps off its lily pad. Then Charlie notices -

CHARLIE

Stop!

The turtle slowly emerges - enormous.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

That's him.

SEVRIN

Holy cow.

The boys watch. Sevrin creeps closer.

CHARLIE

Don't scare him.

SEVRIN

I'm not.

CHARLIE

I told you.

SEVRIN

Maybe someone was dumping
radioactive waste. Maybe he's a
mutant.

CHARLIE

Yeah right. The one who got away.

SEVRIN

Cowabunga!

Sevrin throws another stone.

CHARLIE

Stop it!

SEVRIN

I'm not gonna hit him, I want to
see what he does.

The turtle ducks back underwater. Charlie watches for a minute, miffed.

SEVRIN (CONT'D)

I bet tyrannosauruses hung out here. Attacked a brontosaurus right where we're sitting.

(off Charlie's look)

It could have happened. A giant, bloody attack.

INT. LAWSON'S STORE - LATER

Charlie and Sevrin examine medicine bottles and eat Devil Dogs.

CHARLIE

If he's actually a cryptodire we'll be the first kids in the history of Massachusetts and maybe the world to document an animal that's been alive since the time of the dinosaurs.

SEVRIN

Do you think we'll get rich?

CHARLIE

Maybe.

SEVRIN

Maybe we'll get rich from the book our moms are doing. I'll buy a motorcycle, then a yacht.

Charlie picks up a medicine bottle.

CHARLIE

Do you think newts need vitamin A?

SEVRIN

I haven't gotten my allowance yet.

Charlie takes five dollars out of his pocket, shows it to Sevrin.

CHARLIE

I stole it from my sister.

LAUREL SMITH enters the store, wearing a colorful dress she made herself.

Sevrin yanks Charlie's arm. Two TEENAGERS whisper to each other.

SEVRIN

Look.

CHARLIE

Don't stare.

Laurel selects two cans of PAINT. She sees the boys staring.

LAUREL

What is so interesting?

They freeze for a minute. Then they turn and run.

EXT. MORROW - SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Sevrin and Charlie pedal furiously.

SEVRIN

Go go go go go!

CHARLIE

Is she following us?

SEVRIN

Go!

EXT. MORROW - DUSK

Charlie and Sevrin ride their bikes, backpacks bulging.

EXT./INT. STAFFORD DINING ROOM - LATER

Sevrin's house is smaller than Charlie's, less orderly. Betsy's at the stove, making dinner. Charlie and Sevrin bang in, his dog FELIX barking with joy at their arrival.

BETSY

How bout you guys helping out?

SEVRIN

We had an exhausting day.

CHARLIE

A crytodire of a day.

SEVRIN

A mutant of a day.

The boys burst into laughter, head downstairs to the -

INT. STAFFORD BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

- basement, where there's a terrarium of newts that Charlie starts to feed. Also - books all over the floor, devil dog wrappers, half-drunk bottles of yoo-hoo, a video game console Sevrin plops in front of.

SEVRIN

Are you gonna play or what?

Charlie begrudgingly joins him. The video game is obnoxiously loud. After a moment, Betsy comes down.

BETSY

(to Charlie)

Your mom called.

Betsy gives them both lemonade, gives Sevrin a kiss on the head that he ducks away from.

BETSY (CONT'D)

Charlie, did you hear me?

CHARLIE

Tell her I'll stay for dinner.

BETSY

Well, you're gonna be happy because they need to go to Boston so you're staying here.

Charlie turns. A beat.

CHARLIE

I want to go to Boston.

SEVRIN

I want to go to Boston too.

BETSY

Tough, because you're stuck with me.

SEVRIN

Sleepover!!!

CHARLIE

Can we camp?

SEVRIN

Camping!!

Sevrin dashes around in excitement. Charlie does, too.

EXT. STAFFORD BACKYARD - NIGHT.

Charlie and Sevrin lie on the grass in sleeping bags. They pass yoo-hoo back and forth and stare up at the sky.

CHARLIE
See that? That's Pisces.

SEVRIN
How can you tell?

CHARLIE
My dad showed me.
(beat)
That's the milky way. That's where
the last supernova exploded. No one
knew it was going to explode, it
just did.

EXT. STAFFORD HOUSE - MORNING

Charlie blinks into sunlight. He can hear Betsy and Sevrin inside - arguing about Sevrin cleaning his room before his dad comes.

Charlie stands outside the house for a moment, then rolls up his sleeping bag. A beat.

EXT. FARRELL HOUSE - DAY

Charlie bikes up to his house. No car. His parents aren't back yet.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Charlie makes himself lunch - two devil dogs and a cheese sandwich.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - NIGHT

Charlie has fallen asleep watching David Letterman. After a moment, headlights cross Charlie's face.

Ivan comes in, looks at Charlie for a moment. Charlie sits up. His father looks exhausted, and his eyes are red.

CHARLIE
I would have come with you to
Boston.

Ivan sits on the sofa next to him. He says nothing.

Polly and Amanda come in. Amanda runs upstairs, and Polly follows.

EXT./INT. FARRELL HOUSE - NIGHT

The Farrells eat ice cream.

IVAN
(to Polly)
Your father called. And Betsy
Stafford.

POLLY
Jesus, they're relentless.

Ivan puts a pill next to Amanda's bowl. She hesitates, then takes it.

AMANDA
Mom?
(a beat)
What about school?

Ivan glances at Polly.

IVAN
We'll figure that out.

AMANDA
I'm going though.
(beat)
I'm going, right?

POLLY
Of course you are.

Charlie looks to Ivan. He doesn't have a clue what they're talking about, but he can tell his dad's upset.

Ivan starts clearing the bowls.

IVAN
(to Charlie)
You finished with that, buddy?

Charlie nods. Ivan dumps the bowls in the sink.

EXT. BOSTON - DAY

Honking cars, throngs of family, music blasting from open windows.

INT. FARRELL CAR - SAME

Charlie looks out at an imposing building - Boston Children's Hospital.

Polly, Ivan, and Amanda stand near the entrance, talking in hushed voices.

Ivan gestures towards the car. Polly shakes her head, leads Amanda into the hospital.

INT. BOSTON MUSEUM OF SCIENCE - DAY

Charlie and Ivan move through a throng of kids and parents to stare at a T-Rex behind glass.

CHARLIE

Dad. This is for kids.

IVAN

There's some cool stuff here.

Ivan feeds the T-Rex a nickel. His hands shake. Quickly, comically, the T-Rex ROARS.

CHARLIE

That's not what it really sounds like.

IVAN

You're right.

CHARLIE

How can we find out what they really sound like?

IVAN

That's a good question.

CHARLIE

Dad. When we get back, can I show you the cryptodire?

IVAN

The what?

CHARLIE

I told you. The turtle that could have been alive since the time of the dinosaurs. If we study him, maybe we can find out how they survived and the dinosaurs didn't.

(beat)

Maybe they helped each other, the turtles? Maybe they hid?

Ivan sits down on an empty bench, motions for Charlie to join him.

IVAN

Sit down for a minute.

Charlie sits, begrudgingly. Waits for his father to say something. Fidgets. After a moment:

IVAN (CONT'D)

Amanda's sick.

CHARLIE

I know.

(off Ivan's silence)

How sick?

IVAN

It's pretty bad.

CHARLIE

Is it cancer? Sevrin's aunt has cancer. She's OK though.

Ivan is trying hard to stick to the facts, to stay completely unemotional.

IVAN

It's a virus. It's called AIDS.

(beat)

She got it from a blood transfusion. Before they tested for contaminated blood.

CHARLIE

Who is they?

IVAN

Doctors, buddy.

CHARLIE

Why didn't they test for it?

Ivan puts his arm around Charlie and squeezes tight.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Dad?

He squirms out of his father's embrace.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Could we actually get lunch?

INT. BOSTON MUSEUM OF SCIENCE GIFT SHOP - LATER

A cashier rings up a new dinosaur book and a sew-on GLOW IN THE DARK DINOSAUR PATCH. Charlie puts ANOTHER PATCH on the counter.

CHARLIE

For Sevrin.

EXT. BOSTON CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL/FARRELL CAR - DAY

Polly and Amanda get in the car. Amanda's listening to her walk man. Charlie looks at her, trying to figure out if she is different.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Some scientists think that when the asteroid hit there was so much ash in the sky the world was dark for years.

Ivan reaches for Polly's hand. She lets him take it for a minute, then pulls her hand away.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

-Amanda looking out the window, headphones on her ears.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Some scientists think that the asteroid was caused by a collision of the star system and the sun.

-The tall buildings of Boston getting farther away.

-Charlie's dinosaur book - a Brontosaurus cranes his neck up, reaches for some leaves.

-Charlie's dinosaur book - a T-Rex rips into the carcass of a stegosaurus.

-Charlie's dinosaur book - a black, spinning asteroid barrels towards the earth.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - POLLY AND IVAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ivan sits in bed alone, reading through pamphlets the hospital has given him. Underlining. Reading again.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
They'd been getting closer and
closer, inching together for
centuries.

INT. FARRELL BASEMENT DARKROOM - LATER

Polly turns on the light. Looks around. The photos hanging, her equipment in the corner. The that she's been trying so hard at, and now it means nothing.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
Then the crash happened in minutes.
There's evidence it left a crater
six miles wide.

INT. FARRELL BASEMENT DARKROOM - LATER

Polly takes pictures of Laurel down, piles them in the corner.

Polly packs her gear away.

INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - LATER

Charlie lies in bed reading. The door cracks open, a sliver of light crossing his face. Amanda stands in the doorway, small in her nightgown.

AMANDA
Are you up?

CHARLIE
I'm up.

Amanda edges through the dark to Charlie's bed.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
I had a dream I was the last
dinosaur in the world. A T-Rex. I
couldn't find anyone else to eat.

AMANDA
Did you see one of those 3-D shows
at the museum?

CHARLIE

Nah.

AMANDA

I wish I got to go to the museum instead of that disgusting hospital. Or a movie. Or even Fenway Park.

CHARLIE

Dad hates Fenway Park. He only likes to watch it on TV.

AMANDA

Yeah, remember last time he wore ear plugs?

CHARLIE

And Mom made us bring boring turkey sandwiches.

AMANDA

And Dad bought hot dogs behind her back.

CHARLIE

How do you feel?

AMANDA

They're crazy. I'm fine. I'm great.

Charlie and Amanda look out the window. The stars are bright.

CHARLIE

That star's Sirius, I think.

AMANDA

Is that the one you wish on?

Charlie shrugs.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

I wish I could study with Bela. And I guess I wish we could win the meet in Concord but we probably will so I don't have to wish it.

CHARLIE

I bet you will.

Amanda smiles.

AMANDA

What about you?

CHARLIE

I wish it was just the beginning of summer.

AMANDA

Fourth grade is a good grade.

CHARLIE

Why?

AMANDA

It's way more fun. You get to study frogs.

(beat)

My throat hurts. Don't tell mom.

CHARLIE

Here.

Charlie reaches into his pocket and pulls out a lifesaver. He flinches when their hands touch - hers is freezing.

AMANDA

You can't catch it from touching me or anything.

CHARLIE

I'm not an idiot.

AMANDA

Well...I just wanted to see if you had fun.

Amanda gets up.

CHARLIE

I got you a present.

Charlie digs through his backpack, hands her the dinosaur patch he bought for Sevrin. It glows faintly in the dark.

AMANDA

What'd you do, put poison on it?

CHARLIE

If you don't want it I'll just take it back.

She looks at it carefully. Holds it up to the light.

AMANDA

I can put it on my gym bag. Thanks, beetle brain.

CHARLIE
You're welcome, metal mouth.

AMANDA
Just remember, no backsies.

CHARLIE
No backsies.

EXT. BRADLEES PARKING LOT - DAY

Polly circles for a parking spot. A Madonna song blasts from the tape deck. Amanda in the front seat, Charlie reading his dinosaur book in the back.

A car backs out and Polly almost crashes into it.

CHARLIE
Good going, mom.

INT. BRADLEES - MOMENTS LATER

A zoo of parents, children, shopping carts full of notebooks, folders, loose leaf. Awful elevator music plays.

Charlie follows Polly, who carries an armful of dresses for Amanda.

POLLY
Aren't these back in style?

AMANDA
Give me a break...Mom! This. This
is what I need.

She holds up a bra.

POLLY
I just bought you two.

AMANDA
Evelyn Crowley has like ten.

CHARLIE
I need new jeans.

POLLY
We just got you a pair.

CHARLIE
Last year.

POLLY

Meet us in aisle 7. With the school supplies.

(to Amanda)

Sweetie, look, what do you think of this.

AMANDA

Mom! Are you serious? That's for like a five year old.

CHARLIE

I don't know what kind to get.

POLLY

You like Levis.

AMANDA

This one's stupid, but I like both of these. I like the color.

POLLY

Take them both.

AMANDA

Really?!

POLLY

Put them in there.

Charlie walks away.

INT. BRADLEES - CONTINUOUS

Charlie wanders to the pants aisle. He pulls jeans from a stack. They are much too big for him. He looks up and sees Betsy Stafford, nearby, also picking out clothes. She sees him too. He freezes - he knows his mother hasn't been calling her back.

INT. BRADLEES - MOMENTS LATER

Betsy follows Charlie and Polly down a school supplies aisle, stopping to grab notebooks, pens, etc.

BETSY

All I'm saying is, it wouldn't have killed you to let me know, I called to remind you, twice -

POLLY

-I said I'm sorry -

BETSY

-It's just irresponsible, Pol. We have three clients lined up, all wonderfully suggestible, and you don't even show -

POLLY

(to Charlie)

Can you grab loose leaf for you and your sister?

Charlie grabs five loose leaf.

BETSY

- if you're playing at being a photographer, just tell me - there are five or six people I could have hired -

POLLY

Amanda's been sick.

BETSY

So call me! Show a shred of responsibility - I mean, I can't believe you would leave me alone with her -

POLLY

(to Charlie)

Meet me at the register, Charlie, OK?

INT. BRADLEES - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie watches through the shelves as Betsy and Polly quietly speak.

BETSY

That can't be right -

POLLY

It's what they're saying.

BETSY

You've got to get a second opinion. Polly, you've got to -

POLLY

- I know -

BETSY

Don't worry about the book. Don't
worry about anything until all this
is over -

INT. BRADLEES - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie loads school supplies, oversized pants, and a giant sweatshirt onto the conveyor belt. Nearby, Amanda talks to a GIRL (SUE SHERMAN) we recognize from the gymnastics team.

Polly approaches, adds Amanda's dresses, jewelry, and a nail polish set to Charlie's pile.

POLLY

Can you tell your sister that it's
time to go?

CHARLIE

That's Sue Sherman. She has a
German Shepard that's bigger than
she is. Smarter, too.

Polly almost cracks a grin. Watches the two girls talk for a minute.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - KITCHEN

Charlie's on the phone, which rings and rings. He watches Polly and Amanda prepare to paint their nails on the kitchen table with brand new polish.

CHARLIE

Mom?

(beat)

Sevrin's not answering the phone.

POLLY

He's probably at his dad's.

CHARLIE

He brings him back on Sunday
afternoons.

POLLY

He doesn't always, Charlie.

Charlie dials again. It rings and rings again. Charlie hangs up.

Amanda holds out extremely bright polish.

AMANDA
What about this one?

POLLY
You may like Cyndi Lauper, but
that's just...no...I draw the line
there.

Polly and Amanda both laugh. Charlie looks at them a moment.
The doorbell rings. Charlie opens the door: Ed Reardon.

ED REARDON
Hey, kiddo.

CHARLIE
Hi.

Charlie silently lets him in.

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - LATER

Charlie makes macaroni and cheese.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE/AMANDA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie watches as Reardon talks quietly to Polly. Amanda's
sleeping and it's afternoon.

POLLY
Charlie, can you give us a minute?

CHARLIE
I made dinner. For when dad comes
home.

POLLY
I thought we'd order pizza if your
sister's up for it. And make ice
cream sundaes. How does that sound?

This does not sound like his mother at all.

ED REARDON
That sounds pretty good to me, kid.

Polly sits down on Amanda's bed, smooths her daughter's hair.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - BASEMENT

Charlie tugs on the light, which shines dimly.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie looks through the pictures. There are a few of Amanda from the gym meet.

Then a stack of images of Laurel. In some she looks young. In some she looks older. In one she's drenched, as though she is drowning. In one there's a faint scar on her forehead. In one her hair stands on end, as though she's been struck by lightning.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie digs through his mother's equipment, hesitates for a minute, then puts the camera in his backpack.

EXT. ROAD - ANOTHER DAY

Charlie rides to the pond. *

EXT. POND - LATER - SERIES OF SHOTS

Charlie sits and waits for the turtle. *

The turtle emerges slowly. Charlie pulls out Polly's camera. SNAP. He walks closer. *

He struggles with the weight and girth of the camera. SNAP. The turtle ducks back under water.

LAUREL (O.C.)

Be very quiet. Then he'll let you
take his picture.

Charlie turns, sees Laurel Smith watching him. She's on her bike, groceries in a handmade basket. Charlie just stands there, terrified.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

You are Polly's son?
(off his silence)
I didn't mean to scare you.

Charlie doesn't say anything. After a long moment, Laurel rides away.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

Charlie bikes quickly, breathing hard. *

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL TEACHER'S LOUNGE - NIGHT

A cramped lounge, one couch and a few rows of seats that have been hastily assembled for the occasion.

We recognize a few of the mothers from the gymnastics meet.

Ed Reardon and Linda Gleason sit at the front of the room with a SUPERINTENDANT, who is taking notes.

Polly and Ivan slip in, sit in the back, There's a noticeable bristle as they take their seats, which Polly and Ivan pick up on.

LINDA

If you're truly worried, we can provide additional precautions. Your children can wear plastic gloves, which I'll keep in my office, but as Dr. Reardon just explained, it's not necessary -

MOTHER #1

What if her saliva gets on the water fountain?

ED REARDON

I've already explained that. It can't be spread through saliva.

*

LINDA

Guys, please, work with me here. I've been your principal for fifteen years, you know me. I love my kids. I've got four of my own, I understand how you're feeling, I promise you.

FATHER #2

And you would allow your children to go to school with this girl?

LINDA

My youngest is still a student here, so yes.

Ed makes eye contact with Polly, gives her a little nod, trying for some sort of silent comfort. Ivan notices.

ED REARDON

We've been through the statistics - your children have a better chance of getting hit by a car in his or her own backyard -

IVAN

- Jesus, that's what you're giving
them? Statistics?

POLLY

Ivan -

ED REARDON

We're learning more every day -

IVAN

This is unbelievable.

Ivan pushes his chair back, leaves. A beat. Polly gets up,
follows.

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Ivan hurries down the hall.

POLLY

Ivan!

Ivan doesn't slow down.

*

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL BATHROOM STALL - MOMENTS LATER

Polly sits on a toilet seat that is much too small for her,
taking deep breaths, on the verge of hyperventilating. Then
she cries, she can't stop.

She hears the door open. Footsteps follow. Polly tries to
collect herself.

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Polly crosses to the sink, splashes water on her face. The
toilet flushes. One of the mothers - also a parent from the
gym meet - comes out. A beat. The woman leaves quickly
without saying a word to Polly or washing her hands.

EXT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Polly crosses the parking lot, sees Linda standing outside
her car, smoking. She walks towards her.

LINDA

Are you all right?

(beat)

Sorry. What a thoughtless question.

Linda takes out a pack of cigarette and tries to light one. Her hand shakes. After a moment, Polly helps her light it.

LINDA (CONT'D)
I should have picked a smaller school. One with two or three students in it.

POLLY
Ivan shouldn't have attacked him like that.

LINDA
(re the cigarettes)
You want one?

POLLY
Why not?

She takes a cigarette, they smoke for a moment.

POLLY (CONT'D)
It really is OK for her to stay?

LINDA
Does she want to?

POLLY
More than anything.

LINDA
There's your answer.

A beat. Ivan's walking towards them.

IVAN
(to Polly)
I jogged around the building twice.
Got all the rage out.

Polly doesn't laugh. Linda offers him a cigarette, he shakes his head.

POLLY
Oh come on, Ivan. We went through a pack a day before the kids.

IVAN
Before being the operative word.

Polly gives him a look. He takes Polly's cigarette, takes a long drag. His eyes fill. Polly takes the cigarette back, a beat, a moment, their hands touch. And then they pull away.

*

IVAN (CONT'D)
(to Linda)
Are you really on our side or is
this some kind of hoax?

LINDA
I'm on the side of my students. And
Amanda's one of my students.

POLLY
(to Ivan)
I told you.

INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie watches out the window as his parents' car pulls up. They're arguing quietly, Ivan worried that Amanda could pick up a virus if she goes to school. After a moment, Ivan gets into the car and drives away.

INT. FARRELL BASEMENT DARKROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie pushes open the basement door, walks tentatively down the stairs. Polly's sitting with one small light on, looking through pictures of Amanda from the gym meet. She looks up, wipes her eyes.

POLLY
Charlie. Jesus. You scared me.

CHARLIE
Where did Dad go?

POLLY
He had work to do.

A beat. Polly stacks the pictures, gets up. Charlie glances at the corner, her equipment missing. She doesn't seem to notice.

CHARLIE
Mom?
(off her silence)
Can that woman Laurel really talk
to people after they die?

POLLY
No, Charlie.

CHARLIE

But Sevrin said one of the people
who died was struck by lightning
and when Laurel spoke to her she
looked like she was struck by
lightning.

(beat)

And in one of the pictures she was
talking to a woman who drowned and
it looked like she was drowning.

Polly looks at him for a moment. Puts the pictures away.

POLLY

It has to do with lighting.

She brushes past Charlie, turns out the light.

POLLY (CONT'D)

I told you not to come down here,
there's mold and mice.

He stands there on the stairs. After a beat, turns the lights
back on. Looks at the pictures of Laurel again.

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - MORNING.

Charlie watches TV while he eats breakfast. His jeans are too
big and his shirt is too small. Upstairs, his sister and
mother argue.

TV NEWSCASTER

On the heels of two bombings in
Paris, investigations continue into
the ringleader behind the hijacking
of Pan Am 73 -

AMANDA (O.S)

- because no one has their parents
come to practice! Mom!!

POLLY (O.S.)

You have two choices, leave early,
or one of us comes-

AMANDA (O.S.)

- you can't do this to me!

Ivan switches off the TV.

CHARLIE

I was watching that.

Ivan pours a bowl of cereal.

IVAN
Eat at the table.

Amanda stomps downstairs carrying her gym bag, wearing one of the dresses from Bradlees. Polly follows.

IVAN (CONT'D)
You look stunning. Gorgeous.
Beautiful.

AMANDA
Mom said I can go to practice. By
myself.

Ivan turns to look at Polly.

POLLY
Ivan, I swear to god -

AMANDA
No one has their parents at
practice. Charlie, tell them.

CHARLIE
It's true, dad.

EXT./INT. POLLY'S CAR - DAY

Polly, hair barely brushed, waits while Ivan hugs Amanda
goodbye.

Charlie gets into the car. Leans forward to the radio. Polly
blocks his hand.

POLLY
I'm putting on a tape.

INT. FARRELL CAR - CONTINUOUS

Bruce Springsteen on the tape deck. Almost a calm drive.
Charlie grips his dinosaur book, looks out the window.

INT. CAR/EXT. CHESHIRE STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Polly breaks hard. Charlie sees a mob of ANGRY PARENTS
protesting outside the Cheshire School.

CHARLIE
Mom.

POLLY
Jesus Christ.

Amanda sees them.

AMANDA
Is that because of me?

Polly backs up roughly, takes a sharp right turn away from the school.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
Mom, no!

EXT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL - SAME

A group of parents stand in front of the school, talking loudly, handing out flyers.

Linda does her best to ignore them, putting on a show of welcoming students.

ANGRY PARENT
You think we won't reach out to the Board of Ed? We won't be quiet about this.

Linda sees Polly drive by.

INT. FARRELL CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Polly drives.

POLLY
You're not going in there. Either of you.

AMANDA
But I have to go to school!

POLLY
Not there.

AMANDA
I want to go to school!

Polly keeps driving. Amanda tries to grab the steering wheel.

CHARLIE
Are you crazy?

AMANDA
(to Polly)
I hate you!

Amanda starts to cry. A long beat. Polly pulls over, stops the car. Tentatively touches her daughter's shoulder.

POLLY
Amanda.

AMANDA
I want to go to school.

CHARLIE
Because you're crazy.

AMANDA
Buzz off.

CHARLIE
Buzz away.

Amanda looks at her mom, wipes her eyes. On Polly, incredibly torn.

EXT. SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie watches the protesters continue to hand out flyers, scream at Linda.

Linda sees Amanda, makes eye contact, keeps the protesters occupied while Amanda dashes to the school.

EXT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Polly walks towards the protesters, furious. Linda intercepts her.

POLLY
You said it would blow over. You
promised it would blow over.

LINDA
It will.

POLLY
Yeah? When?

LINDA
She's staying. I'll leave before
she does, you know that, right?

Linda tries to put her arm around her friend.

POLLY

If she had something else - cancer,
a brain tumor - they'd be sending
us pies and casseroles.

Polly shakes Linda's arm off.

POLLY (CONT'D)

How can they be scared of a child?

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie walks through a rush of kids. Looks for Sevrin,
doesn't see him.

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie watches as Amanda reaches Jessie, who hugs her. They
hurry to their lockers.

AMANDA

My mom wanted to walk me inside.

JESSIE

Oh god.

AMANDA

I don't look sick, do I?

JESSIE

No. Your dress looks fantastic.

They both open their lockers, dump books in. There's a mirror
in Amanda's locker door. She catches her reflection. Checks
out her braces. Grimaces. A beat.

EXT. MORROW ROAD

Polly drives, protesters crowding her rear view mirror. She
speeds up, almost drives through a stop sign, and slams
quickly on the breaks. She grits her teeth.

EXT. DR. REARDON'S OFFICE

In a lot behind pediatrics, Polly watches through her window -
and through Reardon's - as he examines a child.

INT. CHARLIE'S CLASSROOM - DAY

The blackboard says, "Welcome to Fourth Grade."

A pretty young teacher, MISS LEVY, takes attendance.

MISS LEVY

Sam Woodward? Raise your hand, Sam-
Laura Miller, great! Matthew
Morris, hi Matthew!...Charlie
Farrell...

The seats next to Charlie are empty.

MISS LEVY (CONT'D)

And - all right - Scott Zeifer, hi
Scott!

INT. CHESHIRE GYM - DAY

Amanda practices on the parallel bars. Coach Eagan
approaches, stares up at her.

AMANDA

What am I doing wrong?

COACH EAGAN

Nothing.

Amanda jumps down, trying not to show how winded she is.

COACH EAGAN (CONT'D)

If you're ever tired, or don't feel
well, I want you to let me know.

AMANDA

I'm not an idiot.

COACH EAGAN

Nope. You're a champion. Champions
don't let themselves feel pain.
That's why I'm worried.

Amanda takes this in, nods. Eagan gestures to Sue Sherman,
who is practicing back flips.

COACH EAGAN (CONT'D)

She still can't get those right.
(off Amanda's silence)
Why, do you think?

AMANDA
She's not tucking in her legs
enough.

COACH EAGAN
Bingo. Tell her that, will you? She
won't listen to me.

AMANDA
I don't think she'll listen to me
either.

COACH EAGAN
Your call.

A couple girls have stopped practicing. Eagan notices.

COACH EAGAN (CONT'D)
What are you all looking at? This
isn't a show, ladies! Get back to
work.

Eagan walks off and starts to yell at Sue and Evelyn. Amanda
stands there, still catching her breath, watching him.

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Amanda changes in a bathroom stall. She's thinner than she
used to be. She can hear three girls - EVELYN CROWLEY, Sue
Sherman, and Kristy Gleason - whispering.

EVELYN (O.C)
Do you think she sat on the toilet
seats?

KRISTY (O.C.)
I'm never, ever, peeing in there
again.

On Amanda. Wanting to show them that she's there, stand up
for herself. She stays where she is.

INT. CHESHIRE GYM HALLWAY - LATER

Charlie waits nervously outside of the locker room as Evelyn,
Sue, and Kristy dart out. They glance at him and whisper to
each other.

Charlie watches them leave. Amanda pushes through the locker
room door.

Amanda has sewn the dinosaur patch on the side of her gym bag. Charlie notices.

AMANDA
What's wrong?

Charlie looks at the ground, pulls at the hem of his too-tight shirt.

CHARLIE
Sevrin's not in school.

AMANDA
Did you call him?

CHARLIE
Yesterday.

AMANDA
Don't be a baby. Go over to his house.

EXT. STAFFORD HOUSE - LATER

Charlie rides his bike onto the Stafford's front yard. Sevrin tosses a frisbee and Felix fetches.

Felix charges at Charlie and knocks him down, licking his face.

SEVRIN
Felix, get off him!

CHARLIE
Your dog has a gallon of saliva in his mouth.

SEVRIN
That's cause I don't let him slobber on me anymore.
(to Felix)
Get off him. Fatso. Get.

Charlie pets Felix.

CHARLIE
Where have you been?

Sevrin throws the frisbee. Felix fetches.

SEVRIN
My mom switched me to Camden.

CHARLIE
The prep school?

SEVRIN
Private school.

Sevrin ties Felix to the fence.

SEVRIN (CONT'D)
They have a swimming pool. I might
get to play on the soccer team.

CHARLIE
But why?

SEVRIN
My cousins go there.

CHARLIE
Oh.
(a beat)
We can investigate the turtle
Saturday.

SEVRIN
(quietly)
I'm not allowed.

CHARLIE
But it's Saturday.

Sevrin kneels down next to Felix, pets him. He looks really
upset.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
What's the big deal?

SEVRIN
I can't be friends with you. Cause
of Amanda.

CHARLIE
What did she do?

SEVRIN
Cause she's, you know... My mom's
scared I'll get it.

CHARLIE
Didn't you tell her that's
scientifically impossible?
(off Sevrin's silence)
Didn't you tell her that?

SEVRIN

She's really serious. She'll ground
me for my whole entire life.

Betsy opens the door. If she sees Charlie she does not
acknowledge it.

BETSY

Sevrin!

And then she's back inside.

SEVRIN

I have to go.

Sevrin walks towards the house.

CHARLIE

There's no proof. There's no
scientific evidence.

Sevrin's actually crying. He unties Felix, walks towards the
house with his dog.

SEVRIN

I'm really sorry.

Charlie gets on his bike.

CHARLIE

And you know what else? A
tyrannosaurus can't attack a
brontosaurus. They lived 83 million
years apart.

BETSY (O.S.)

SEVRIN!

CHARLIE

Good luck making the soccer team.

Charlie pedals away. He won't look back.

EXT. POND - LATER

Charlie sits at the pond, the turtle visible. Charlie walks
closer, takes out his notebook, jots down a few observations,
trying not to cry.

*

INT. FARRELL UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Charlie tiptoes to bed. The door to his sister's room is open. Polly holds Amanda. Ivan changes her sheets. His sister looks small and weak.

EXT. FARRELL HOUSE - ANOTHER DAY

Polly and Amanda get into the car. Charlie stands next to his bike, his backpack on.

AMANDA

Are you coming?

CHARLIE

I want to ride my bike.

This barely registers with Polly. She gets into the car, drives off. Charlie watches the car turn the corner. Gets on his bike.

EXT. POND - DAY

Charlie takes pictures of the turtle with Polly's camera. He tries to make himself as quiet as possible, like Laurel said.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Sometimes I think about how turtles survived the second extinction event, which was bad for the dinosaurs but good for us.

It starts to rain, but Charlie doesn't notice.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Maybe because they didn't need friends.

Charlie gets lost in the wonder of studying the turtle.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

Maybe because they were solitary, they evolved that way.

*

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - NIGHT

Charlie enters, camera in his backpack. Polly's talking on the phone, taking meatloaf out of the oven.

POLLY

(into phone)

I don't know, Dad. Ask Ivan, he's the scientist. No, you don't need to drive down. Don't. Because I'm asking you not to -

(to Charlie)

Can you tell your sister dinner's ready?

Charlie goes upstairs.

INT. FARRELL UPSTAIRS HALLWAY/AMANDA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie climbs the stairs. Madonna's. "True Blue" blasts from Amanda's room.

Charlie knocks on Amanda's door. No answer. Charlie opens the door to see Amanda lying on her gymnastics mat, exhausted. She scrambles to her feet and pretends to start a cartwheel.

AMANDA

I said I'm practicing gymnastics!

CHARLIE

It's just me.

Amanda pushes him out and slams the door.

INT. AMANDA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Amanda sits there, breathing heavily. She turns the music even louder.

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - NIGHT

Charlie, Polly, and Amanda silently eat meatloaf. Charlie watches as his sister mashes her food around her plate, trying to make it look like she's eaten. She's gotten thinner. Polly gets a couple of pills from the cabinet.

POLLY

Your father wanted you to take these.

*

Amanda pushes the pills away.

AMANDA

He's never even home.

POLLY

Just take them, will you
sweetheart?

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - NIGHT

Polly finishes drying the dishes. Looks out the window - Ivan isn't coming.

INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie lies awake, headlights illuminate his window. The sound of the car door opening and closing.

INT. FARRELL UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Charlie tiptoes down the steps. His father sits at the kitchen table, reading through a printed stack of papers.

Charlie roots through the nearly empty fridge, pours himself some milk. It's spoiled. Charlie throws it in the sink. Sits down next to Ivan, looks through a couple of his papers: - alternative therapies for AIDS, the creation and destruction of T-cells.

CHARLIE

Is this for Amanda?

IVAN

(beat, nods)

There has to be some sort of
antidote, a chemical reaction that
creates T-cells as the virus
destroys them.

CHARLIE

Can I read it?

IVAN

Knock yourself out.

Ivan's eyes are red. Charlie looks through the papers, he doesn't quite understand it.

*

EXT. FARRELL HOUSE - MORNING

*

A colder day, the leaves have almost all turned.

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - SAME

Charlie's at the stove on a step stool, helping Ivan make pancakes. Amanda and Polly set the table as they fight. *

AMANDA

I'm not eating till you let me go!

POLLY

Sweetie, please.

IVAN

This isn't helping your case.

AMANDA

Charlie, tell them!

CHARLIE

(torn)

It's true.

AMANDA

See! You can't go to a sleep over
and not sleep over!

Ivan puts four pills next to Amanda's plate. Drops medication into her orange juice.

IVAN

Take these. Now.

AMANDA

I take them, I sleep over, I take
them, I sleep over -

POLLY

(to Ivan)

What's one night?

IVAN

(to Polly)

One night too many.

AMANDA

Everyone else is! Don't do this to
me!

Charlie takes the spatula and scrapes the pancakes onto a plate.

POLLY

Ivan, come on -

IVAN

- I said, after dinner.

AMANDA

You hate me!

POLLY

We love you.

Amanda throws her pills into the trash.

POLLY (CONT'D)

Sweetie, you need those -

IVAN

You can go to Jessie's but you
can't sleep over. Period.

Amanda grabs her plate and throws it on the floor. It
shatters, surprising Charlie - he's never seen his sister act
this way. He hurries to the shards, begins picking them up. *

IVAN (CONT'D)

You're not going.

Amanda's off- running through the house, crying, wheezing,
throwing everything that's in her way. This takes more
strength than she has.

AMANDA

-you're ruining my life, you're
ruining my life, you're ruining my
life, you're ruining my life,
you're ruining my life-

POLLY

Amanda -

IVAN

Leave her be.

POLLY

It's one night -

IVAN

We decided this -

POLLY

- you're never even here.

Polly slams her coffee cup into the sink, heads out the front
door, after Amanda. Charlie throws the pieces of the plate
into the trash.

EXT. FARRELL HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie's still cleaning. He watches out of the window as Polly calms Amanda down.

EXT. MORROW ROAD - DAY

Polly drives Amanda towards Jessie Eagan's house.

EXT. EAGAN HOUSE - DAY

From the car, Polly watches Amanda hurry towards Jessie, who throws her arms around her.

INT. DR. REARDON'S OFFICE - LATER

*

Ed Reardon hands Polly a coffee, sits down across from her.

ED REARDON

I hope it's not terrible. Monica usually makes it.

POLLY

Thanks again.

ED REARDON

What are you thanking me for?

POLLY

Meeting on a Saturday.

ED REARDON

It's really no problem.

Polly takes a sip. The coffee is pretty bad, but she tries to hide it. She thinks for a moment. Speaks in a long blurt.

POLLY

When she got the transfusion. Who said it was fine, who signed the papers? Ivan keeps everything, all our taxes, all the medical files. It's all in a mess in his fucking office.

(off his silence)

Please.

ED REARDON

You don't want to go down this path, Polly.

POLLY

It's not a path. It's simple information.

ED REARDON

I did. The surgeon makes the call but the primary care physician signs off. So if you're looking for someone to blame, look no further.

POLLY

The parents have to sign off. Which one of us did?

ED REARDON

What can I do to help?

POLLY

The parents have to sign off. Which one of us did?

ED REARDON

Polly, I really don't remember.

Polly puts the coffee down, puts on her coat.

POLLY

She hasn't been breathing great. Do you think you could come see her tomorrow?

ED REARDON

Of course.

Polly heads to the door.

INT. PHARMACY - LATER

Ivan loads organic vitamins and supplements onto the counter. He waits, blinking away exhaustion, as the CASHIER rings him up.

Charlie watches.

EXT/INT. DEXTER'S RESTAURANT - LATER

Charlie watches lobsters floating in a tank.

Ivan waves at the a young HOST, who waves back and makes his way to the front of the restaurant.

IVAN
Two of us tonight.

HOST
Let me see what I've got for you.

He heads back into the fray of families, stops to talk to a WAITER, who gestures towards Charlie and Ivan.

IVAN
(to Charlie)
What are you thinking about, buddy?
Gonna splurge on a lobster?

CHARLIE
I don't like how you can see their eyes.

The host comes back.

HOST
I'm sorry, sir, we don't have any space tonight.

There is definitely space in the restaurant.

IVAN
There's a table right there.

HOST
We have a large party coming, sir, and unfortunately don't have space to seat you.

A few people are already looking at them.

IVAN
Are you kidding me?

HOST
I'm very sorry, sir.

CHARLIE
Come on, Dad.

Charlie grabs his dad's arm, steers him towards the door.

IVAN
Are you fucking serious?

HOST
We have to ask you to leave, sir.

IVAN

You know what? To hell with you.
I've been a loyal patron ten years.
Ten goddamn years. Are you fucking
kidding me?

HOST

I'm sorry, sir -

IVAN

And you can tell your manager to go
to hell. Louie. I know him. His kid
was one of my students. To hell
with all of you -

INT. FARRELL CAR - MOMENTS LATER

Ivan drives in darkness.

IVAN

Did you see the look on that kid's
face?

Charlie looks over at his dad. He's smiling? He's laughing.

IVAN (CONT'D)

He just kept repeating himself. *I'm
sorry sir, I'm sorry sir.*

Ivan keeps laughing. Charlie doesn't know what to do. After a
moment, Ivan stops.

IVAN (CONT'D)

Sorry, buddy. You must think I'm
pretty crazy.

(beat)

Can I ask you a question?

CHARLIE

I guess.

IVAN

At school, are the kids saying
anything to Amanda?

CHARLIE

They just don't talk to her. Except
for Jessie.

IVAN

Are they saying anything to you?

Charlie shakes his head.

CHARLIE
Is she going to die?

Ivan keeps driving. After a moment:

IVAN
We all are, bud, at some point.

CHARLIE
I'm not a baby.

IVAN
I know you're not.

Charlie looks out the window, the pitch black sky, so many stars.

*

CHARLIE
Did turtles survive the cretaceous period because they could hide?

IVAN
They were adaptable. The bigger carnivores weren't used to foraging for food, but turtles were.

CHARLIE
Is that why their life span is so much longer?

Ivan's lost in thought, he doesn't answer. Charlie doesn't press it.

EXT. MORROW/MARSH - EARLY MORNING

Charlie rides his bike past Laurel Smith's house. A new insult has been sprayed across her porch.

*

EXT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL - LATER

Charlie rides his bike up to the school. Two WOMEN are collecting signatures on a petition.

MOTHER #5
-We only need 200 signatures to request her resignation -

MOTHER #3
- We already have a hundred twenty seven -

Charlie watches one parent sign the petition. Another mulls it over. They don't notice him.

*

INT. CHESHIRE HALLWAY/GYM - ANOTHER DAY

Charlie watches Amanda struggling in gym practice. Jessie sits close to her.

INT. LUNCHROOM - ANOTHER DAY

Bustling with kids: screaming, yelling, throwing food. Charlie eats his lunch alone.

INT. FOURTH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

The young teacher, Miss Levy sits on her desk while the kids finish math quizzes.

Thanks to a seating chart prominently displayed on the black board, Charlie now has kids on either side of him.

MISS LEVY

3, 2, 1, and...time's up! Is
everybody done?
(off their silence)
Is everybody done?

KIDS

Yes, Ms. Levy.

MISS LEVY

Pass your papers to the left.
That's right, Bobby, pass yours
back a row.

Charlie tries to hand his paper to a little girl, who hesitates. Doesn't take it.

MISS LEVY (CONT'D)

Is there a problem, Donna?
(off Donna's silence)
Donna, please take Charlie's paper.

An overweight kid, BILLY, pipes up.

BILLY

-she doesn't want to get diseased.

Charlie turns around.

CHARLIE
You're a fat, stupid slob.

MISS LEVY
Charlie!

BILLY
Everyone is gonna die and it's all
his stupid sister's fault-

Charlie picks up his notebook and HURLS it at the kid.

INT. LINDA GLEASON'S OFFICE - WAITING ROOM

Charlie enters. The secretary is gone, her desk empty. Paper scraps scattered on the table, filling the waste baskets.

INT. LINDA GLEASON'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Charlie opens the door. Linda stands by the window, smoking the last of a pack of cigarettes. She sees Charlie, tries to put out the cigarette, and burns her finger.

LINDA
Shit! Don't tell anyone the
principal's been cursing.

CHARLIE
No one was out there.

LINDA
She quit.

CHARLIE
Why?

LINDA
Ha. Some days I don't blame her.

She empties the ashes into the trash can.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Don't smoke. Ever. It's a horrible
habit.

CHARLIE
Why do you do it?

LINDA
I have a horrible habit. Here- this
is the better chair.

She takes the note that Charlie hands her. Holds out two lollipops.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Take your pick.

Charlie takes one.

LINDA (CONT'D)
Good choice.

She unwraps the other. Skims Charlie's note.

LINDA (CONT'D)
People can be very stupid.

CHARLIE
Like those people outside?

LINDA
Yeah.

CHARLIE
Why don't they like you?

Linda lets out a short laugh.

LINDA
When you run a place a long time,
you find out a lot about people.
(beat)
People are scared when they
shouldn't be and they're not when
there's really something to be
scared of.
(beat)
You knew that, didn't you?

CHARLIE
I guess.

LINDA
I'll tell you what - I have an
idea. I just hope that it's a good
one.

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - ANOTHER DAY

Kids filter in noisily, fill up the pews. Miss Levy leads Charlie and his classmates in. Linda's at the podium, conferring with a tall woman (ELLEN SHAPIRO) in a business suit.

Charlie sits down. The KID following him hesitates.

MISS LEVY
Make space, guys.

The KID nervously sits next to Charlie. Charlie glares at him. Miss Levy smiles at Charlie. A kid next to Charlie snickers.

LINDA
As some of you upper graders may have guessed from my special guest, we're not going to be talking about the Spring trip. Until we have some unity as a school, we're not going to be having a spring trip. You can tell your parents I said that.

Charlie looks around. Kids are already whispering to one another.

LINDA (CONT'D)
This is Dr. Ellen Shapiro. She's a pediatric AIDS specialist, and she's come all the way from Boston to speak to all of you. It's been a scary few weeks, and I'm sorry for that. I hope it will seem a little less scary after Ellen talks to you today.

Linda switches a slide. The screen reads "FACTS ABOUT ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME."

LINDA (CONT'D)
The way this is going to go is, Dr. Shapiro is going to walk you through these facts and pictures here. We'll have time for questions after.

The kid sitting next to Charlie covers his eyes. There is murmurs and gossip in the rows behind and in front of him.

ELLEN SHAPIRO
Hi everyone. First: how many of you know what a sperm looks like?

A few uncomfortable giggles. Charlie gets up.

MISS LEVY
Charlie!

Charlie doesn't answer. He just runs.

INT. CHESHIRE LIBRARY - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie runs through the library, to the...

EXT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - CONTINUOUS

...playground, where Amanda's on the swings, swinging back and forth, gracefully, like on the parallel bars. Charlie watches for a moment.

CHARLIE

You want to see something amazing?

She looks up, surprised to see him.

AMANDA

Insect amazing or actually amazing?

MISS LEVY (O.S.)

Charlie! Back inside.

Miss Levy walks towards them, anxious.

CHARLIE

Let's run.

Charlie and Amanda take off...

EXT. MARSH - DAY

The road near Laurel Smith's house. Charlie and Amanda run. Amanda stops to catch her breath.

CHARLIE

Are you OK?

Amanda nods, smiles.

AMANDA

Sometimes I feel normal and
sometimes I'm just really tired.

(a beat)

Where are we going, beetle brain?

CHARLIE

We're almost there.

EXT. POND - DAY

Charlie and Amanda approach the pond.

CHARLIE
We have to be really, really quiet.

AMANDA
Is this where you go? To get your
specimens?

CHARLIE
Just wait.

Charlie reaches the edge of the lake. He drops a stone into
the lake.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Come on. We won't hurt you.

The turtle comes out. He seems even bigger than before.

AMANDA
Oh my gosh.

CHARLIE
Isn't he amazing?

AMANDA
He looks like a zombie lizard.

CHARLIE
No he doesn't.

AMANDA
I'm just joking.

CHARLIE
I think he would have been friends
with a stegosaurus.

AMANDA
Yeah, they're like cousins or
something.

EXT. POND - LATER

Amanda sleeps. Charlie takes pictures of the lake, the
turtle.

A flock of EGRETS fly south, waking Amanda. Charlie and
Amanda watch them rise and dip over the trees.

CHARLIE
The last ones.

Amanda's deep in thought.

AMANDA

That woman, Laurel? Who mom used to
take pictures of. Do you think she
can really talk to people after
they die?

(beat)

I'd ask mom, but I don't want to
upset her.

Charlie thinks about this.

CHARLIE

Why would everyone be scared of her
if she couldn't?

*

Amanda thinks about this. Doesn't have an answer.

EXT. MARSH/LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - MORNING

Charlie rides his bike to Laurel's house. Stops in front of
her bungalow. Watches a WOMAN go in.

EXT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie quietly drops his bike in the reeds and creeps up to
Laurel's house. Peers in through a window on the porch.
Laurel gives the woman tea. They sit on cushions. Laurel
takes a picture from the woman, looks at it, closes her eyes.

Charlie can't hear anything.

EXT. MORROW/MARSH - LATER

Charlie watches the woman leave the house. The woman is
crying, but other than that seems totally fine. She gets into
her car, drives away.

Charlie quietly gets up, inadvertently knocking into a broom,
which clutters to the floor. Laurel opens the door. Charlie
freezes.

LAUREL

It took me two days to scrub that
shit off, you know?

CHARLIE

I didn't do it.

LAUREL

That's what they all say, I'm
innocent, my friends made me, blah
blah.

*

CHARLIE

But I really didn't!
(beat)
I don't have friends, anyway.

Laurel regards him for a moment.

LAUREL

You like to spy, Polly's son?

Charlie shakes his head.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

Well?

CHARLIE

I was just....I wanted to see...if
you could really talk to people.
When they're dead.

LAUREL

What do you think?

CHARLIE

It's scientifically impossible.

LAUREL

And how do you know this?

CHARLIE

Because when a person dies they
just disintegrate. Their body and
their brain, too.

LAUREL

How do you know this?

CHARLIE

Everyone does.

She looks at him for a moment.

LAUREL

Tell your mother I hope she is
well.

Laurel goes inside. Charlie glances at the faint outline of
spray paint under the new white coat. He goes to the reeds,
where his bike is hiding.

EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie rides.

*

EXT. POND - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie pulls up to the pond. It's beginning to ice over. The turtle is nowhere to be seen.

INT. CHESHIRE HALLWAY - DAY

Charlie watches as Jessie and Amanda walk down the hall. Amanda has to stop for a moment, Jessie waits for her.

INT. CHESHIRE GYM - NIGHT

Polly, Charlie and Ivan search for seats, which isn't too hard because the attendance is about half. Linda sits in the front row with her husband, MARTIN, a small flower bouquet on her lap.

POLLY
Towards the back.

IVAN
Over there?

POLLY
Fine.

Charlie spots a man in his seventies, baseball jacket and baseball cap; a woman in her seventies, regal and dyed-blond. These are Polly's parents, AL and CLAIRE.

POLLY (CONT'D)
(to Ivan)
You invited my parents?

CHARLIE
Grandma and Grandpa?!

POLLY
(to Ivan)
Why would you do that?

IVAN
Polly -

POLLY
They're not even sitting on the right side.

IVAN

You want to tell them to leave, be my guest. Jesus.

POLLY

They're sitting on the wrong side. Everyone there is rooting for the other school.

IVAN

(to Charlie)

Go get 'em, buddy.

Charlie looks up at his dad, his mom. Then decides: he runs to his grandparents.

INT. CHESHIRE GYM - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie drags his grandparents to the right side of the gym.

CHARLIE

Everyone on that side is rooting for the other school.

CLAIRE

Silly of us.

Al and Claire clock Charlie's rumpled clothes and the jeans that are much too big for him. They reach Polly and Ivan. Tense hugs and kisses.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

(To Polly)

Hi, darling.

AL

How's my favorite grandson?

CHARLIE

I'm your only grandson.

Al slips Charlie a five dollar bill. Winks at him.

INT. CHESHIRE GYM - LATER

EAGAN crosses the gym and squats down, saying something harsh to Jessie, who joins the other girls. Amanda sits down next to her. She looks painfully thin.

IVAN

(to Polly)

Is she OK?

POLLY

Eagan wouldn't have her out there
if she wasn't.

They both watch their daughter, nervous.

Kristy Gleason walks the balance beam. Sue flubs a back flip.

The meet is underway and Amanda hasn't done one event.

INT. CHESHIRE GYM - LATER

Amanda moves to the center of the gym and stops, sets her feet, arms reaching towards the sky.

Madonna's "True Blue" begins. She's suspended in the tension of not moving.

Then, like a fish suddenly set in water, she does.
Cartwheels, layovers, back flips, hands stands, somersaults.

Amanda puts her whole self into this performance; when she is on the mat she is another person - luminous, graceful, adept beyond her years.

Even Charlie is riveted.

Amanda is done. In the center of the gym. Arms high again. If you looked closely you'd see how hard she was breathing, that this has taken everything she has.

The clapping starts. First the Coach, and this is something he has never done. Then Jessie, then Sue, then most of the other girls - even Evelyn.

The gymnastics team is on their feet. Amanda beams.

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL HALLWAY - LATER

A crowded hallway. Amanda runs out of the locker room and hugs her grandparents.

AMANDA

(To Claire and Al)
What'd you think?

POLLY

Amazing, honey. Absolutely
unbelievable.

Jessie comes over, hugs Amanda hard. Hugs Polly too.

INT. FARRELL LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

A game of monopoly on the coffee table. Polly, Ivan, Amanda, Charlie, Al, and Claire play and eats ice cream. They are mid-conversation. Al talks with his mouth full.

AL
- you'd think that, you'd think
that, but I was useless as a rat in
Rome. Hah! I was skinny-

CLAIRE
-he was skinny-

AL
-Got knocked over, got nosebleeds-

IVAN
Anyone want more ice cream?

CHARLIE
200! Passed 'Go,' 200!

AL
Coach used to say, 'hey Alvin, you
got shit in your blood?'

POLLY
It's your move, Dad.

CHARLIE
You gonna buy?

CLAIRE
You're awfully thrifty, darling.

AMANDA
I'm going to bed.

She stands, kisses her grandparents. Polly jumps up after her.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
I can do it myself!

Amanda shakily makes her way to the stairs and climbs them.

AL
Take a load off, kid, enjoy
yourself.

Polly doesn't sit.

AL (CONT'D)
Relax, will you?

CLAIRE
Sit down, Polly, please.

Polly just stands there. Al goes over to her, puts his arm around her.

AL
(quietly)
You've got two kids, don't forget that.

POLLY
You think that I don't know that?

CLAIRE
Darling, your father didn't mean anything -

POLLY
I would appreciate, if before you insult me, you swallow the ice cream you're dripping all over my sofa -

IVAN
Pol - he wasn't thinking.

POLLY
No, of course not, that's the problem.

Polly turns, walks out.

IVAN
(to Al)
You've got a lot of nerve.

Ivan follows Polly.

AL
(to Claire)
If you can't tell your own kids what to do, who can you tell?

CLAIRE
Anyone else.

Charlie looks between his grandparents.

CHARLIE

(to Al)

You owe me rent. A hundred dollars.

INT. FARRELL LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Charlie watches TV. Nearby, Polly cleans up the kitchen, Claire moves to help.

CLAIRE

Your father didn't mean that.

POLLY

It's fine.

(off Claire's attempt to
help)

I said, I got it.

CLAIRE

Why won't you let us help you?

POLLY

Because all I can do right now is
clean the kitchen and cook dinner,
OK? I don't have answers for
anything.

*

Claire begins loading the dishes.

*

POLLY (CONT'D)

Mom, for god sakes.

CLAIRE

You were like this as a girl, too.
Always had to control everything.
It's not helping you, sweetheart.

POLLY

Mom. Go to sleep. Please.

Charlie wanders over.

CHARLIE

It's late, Grandma.

Claire gives him a hug, kisses his hair, squeezes him, too tight.

CLAIRE

Come here, sweet boy, I never get
to see you.

*

INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - LATER

Charlie can't sleep. Loud coughing and whispered fighting from the hallway.

POLLY (O.S.)
Don't wake my parents.

Charlie tiptoes into the hallway, looks into the bathroom. Amanda's sitting on the floor, back against the toilet seat. Polly's wiping her forehead with a cool cloth. Ivan sees Charlie.

IVAN
Go back to bed.

INT. FARRELL HALLWAY - LATER

Polly and Ivan talk to Ed Reardon. Charlie peers through the banister bars.

ED REARDON
(to Polly)
There's fluid in her lungs, which
could mean pneumonia -

Claire and Al come in.

POLLY
Everything's fine, Mom.

AL
Like hell it is.

Reardon puts his arm around Claire, leads her away.

ED REARDON
We've got it under control, the
best thing you can do is get some
rest.

INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Charlie watches his parents' car pull away.

INT. CHARLIE'S ROOM - MORNING

Charlie wakes up. There's a brand new shirt and pair of pants on the end of his bed. They are pretty formal and don't look like anything he'd wear, but they fit.

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - MORNING

Charlie walks into the kitchen in the new clothes. His lunch is on the kitchen table. Al is making coffee.

AL
Don't you look sharp.

CHARLIE
Did grandma make these?

AL
No, you lucked out. She went to the Gap.

Charlie pulls Pop Tarts from the almost-empty cupboard and puts them in the toaster.

AL (CONT'D)
Ah. Pop tarts.

CHARLIE
You want?

Al shakes his head. He's boiling water.

AL
Your grandma is addicted to my coffee. I bet you didn't know that, did you?

CHARLIE
I don't know.

AL
Can you keep a secret?

Charlie nods.

AL (CONT'D)
It's instant.

He puts his finger to his lips.

AL (CONT'D)
I'm trusting you on this.

Charlie smiles.

INT. LUNCHROOM - LATER

Charlie enters. A noisy cluster of kids. Jessie sits alone. He walks up to her.

CHARLIE

Hi.

JESSIE

Hi.

She motions for him to sit down. He does. He unloads his lunch.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

Looks good.

His grandparents have packed two slices of bread. Some sort of rubbery lunch meat. A juice pack.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

Here. My dad would kill me if he knew this was in my possession.

She hands him half a chocolate bar. They chew in silence.

EXT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie and Jessie sit on the slide. Boys from Charlie's class run by, laughing and playing tag.

JESSIE

They're all morons.

CHARLIE

I wouldn't hang out with them if they asked me to.

JESSIE

Girls are worse. Trust me.

Jessie looks out at the playground.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

My dad hasn't shut up about her floor routine. She's like his favorite person in the world. He told my mom if anyone else used Madonna he'd confiscate the tape.

Bells chime. Kids start going back into the school.

JESSIE (CONT'D)

You coming in?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

But he doesn't move. Jessie gets up.

JESSIE

My teacher's gonna be mad if I'm
late.

Charlie nods and watches Jessie go.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL, AMANDA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Dim lights. Amanda sleeps, magazines with pictures of Cyndi Lauper and Bruce Springsteen spread around her. Polly tucks her in.

Reardon comes in, hands her a coffee.

ED REARDON

She comfortable?

Polly nods. Heads to the window, looks out at the parking lot. It's pouring outside.

ED REARDON (CONT'D)

You might want to grab the couch in
the lounge.

POLLY

I'm staying with Amanda.

ED REARDON

Of course.

POLLY

I'm sorry. About the other day. I
had no right to ask you that.

ED REARDON

Don't worry about it.

(beat)

I think I've been misleading you.
Letting you think there were
treatments, options. That this
wasn't terminal.

POLLY

I know that.

Polly turns to Ed.

POLLY (CONT'D)

I go to your office. It's so stupid...I sit there and watch you with your other patients and I wonder what's that like. To not have to worry? To know whatever it is, it'll be better tomorrow. I can't eat. I'd switch bodies with her if I could.

(beat)

I don't blame you, you know that, right?

(off Ed's silence)

There could be a million reasons but it all comes down to, I wasn't watching closely. I'm supposed to protect her.

ED REARDON

You're doing the best you can.

Polly shakes her head. He puts his arm around her shoulder. He holds her for a moment.

She leans in, kisses him. He reciprocates for a moment. They both pull away. A beat.

POLLY

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to -

ED REARDON

It's all right.

She moves next to Amanda's bed.

POLLY

Go home. Please. We need you too much for you to be tired.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL - AMANDA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Polly presses her hand to her lips, puts it on Amanda's forehead.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - NIGHT

Charlie eats dinner with his grandparents. Charlie pokes at his food.

CHARLIE

Grandma and Grandpa? How much do you know about the extinction event that ended the Cretaceous Period?

Al and Claire just look at each other.

CLAIRE

It was an asteroid, wasn't it, darling?

CHARLIE

Yeah but it killed off 75 percent of the animals. Why do you think some of them lived and some of them didn't?

AL

Beats me, Charlie.

Headlights glare through the windows. After a moment Ivan comes in, pats Charlie's head.

*

IVAN

She's staying there tonight.

Charlie watches his father put vitamins away. The weight of the world on his shoulders.

INT. FARRELL CAR/EXT. MORROW ROAD - LATER

Charlie rides his bike, sees Ivan's car behind him.

IVAN

Hey! Buddy!

Charlie doesn't stop.

IVAN (CONT'D)

Charlie!

Ivan pulls up next to Charlie, who pulls over. Nervous and caught.

IVAN (CONT'D)

Aren't you supposed to be in school?

Charlie doesn't look at him. Ivan gets out of the car, walks over to his son. Pats Charlie's enormous backpack.

IVAN (CONT'D)

What do you have in there? Rocks?

CHARLIE
Books, dad.

IVAN
Ah, I understand. You robbed the
library and now you're making a run
for it.

Charlie doesn't laugh.

IVAN (CONT'D)
Where you going?

CHARLIE
Just the pond.

IVAN
Take a load off.

Charlie leans his bike against the car. Ivan sits in the
grass on the side of the road and motions for Charlie to do
the same.

IVAN (CONT'D)
Great shirt.

CHARLIE
Grandma bought it.

IVAN
Oh yeah?

CHARLIE
It's really blue.
(beat)
Dad.

IVAN
Yeah?

CHARLIE
Is there anything that has the
lifespan of a day?

IVAN
Mayfly. Genus ephemera.

CHARLIE
What about a year?

IVAN
Mice. Chameleons.

CHARLIE

Is there any way to make it longer?

IVAN

I know you're worried about your sister. They'll find a cure. All they need is time and money.

CHARLIE

How do you know?

IVAN

Science, kiddo. Polio. Tuberculosis. Scarlet Fever. All used to be critical or terminal.

CHARLIE

Will it be in time for Amanda?

Ivan hesitates.

IVAN

Probably not.

CHARLIE

Yes or no?

IVAN

No. It won't be in time for Amanda.

CHARLIE

Then I wish she would just die.

Ivan watches Charlie pull at the grass.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I didn't mean that.

IVAN

I know, bud.

CHARLIE

Does mom know?

IVAN

I think she does.

CHARLIE

Shouldn't you talk to her about it?

They sit in silence. After a moment:

IVAN

How would you feel about coming
with me on a little trip?

EXT. IVAN'S CAR - DAY

Ivan drives, Charlie looks out the window.

CHARLIE

Do you think that turtles realized
if they wanted to survive, they
couldn't be horrible to all the
other animals?

Ivan glances at him. A beat.

EXT. ASTRONOMY INSTITUTE - DAY

Ivan's car pulls up, Charlie's bike on the back. They get out
of the car, walk towards the institute.

Charlie looks up at the building, then at his dad.

CHARLIE

You can't see stars during the day.

IVAN

Ah. You have yet to experience the
wonders of the Edwin Hubble
Institute.

He holds the door open for Charlie, who ducks under his arm.

INT. OBSERVATORY - CONTINUOUS

Ivan opens the door to a small room with two telescopes, a
glass domed ceiling.

Ivan closes the door. Turns off the lights. The room is
suddenly pitch black and the stars are visible, glowing even,
through the dome.

CHARLIE

Wow.

Ivan pulls a chair up to the larger telescope and Charlie
climbs up, looks through the lense.

IVAN

The brightest northern star. Do you
see that?

Charlie nods.

IVAN (CONT'D)

And the brightest southern star.
That's the constellation Orion. The
stars in the middle are bigger than
the sun.

CHARLIE

Why do they look so small?

IVAN

They're two million light years
away. I ever tell you how they got
there?

CHARLIE

No.

IVAN

I didn't tell you that story?

Charlie shakes his head.

IVAN (CONT'D)

Ah, jeez, if I can remember- I
think I've got it. OK. A long time
ago, millions of years ago-

CHARLIE

Before the dinosaurs?

IVAN

After the dinosaurs. There was a
bear. A big black bear that was
gentle but hunters didn't know it.
One day the bear was running
through the forest. And the hunters
saw the bear and they were scared.

CHARLIE

They killed it.

IVAN

With a spear. Right through his
heart.

CHARLIE

And then what?

IVAN

They knew they had made a terrible
mistake. Instead of eating the bear
they buried him.

(MORE)

IVAN (CONT'D)

Flowers grew out of his body. His
teeth rose up into the sky. Turned
into stars.

Charlie pulls back from the telescope.

CHARLIE

I like that story.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - DAY

Charlie and Claire draw cheerful pictures all over a sign
that says "Welcome Home Amanda."

EXT. FARRELL HOUSE - DAY

Polly parks the car, helps Amanda into the house. Amanda's
limp has gotten much worse.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - DAY

Polly and Amanda come in, are descended on by a surprise
party: Claire, Al, Ivan, Charlie, Jessie.

Amanda's pleased but exhausted. Jessie throws her arms around
Amanda.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - LATER

There's cake, a sense of diluted celebration. "Hungry Like
the Wolf" plays, the song bringing Polly back to the gym meet
a couple months ago. Charlie remembers too.

Polly and Ivan look at each other, a quiet acknowledgement of
how much has changed.

INT. AMANDA'S ROOM - DAY

Charlie comes in. Amanda's sitting on her bed, propped up by
pillows, counting the bills in her money jar. Listening to
"Hungry Like the Wolf" again.

CHARLIE

What are you doing?

AMANDA

Resting. All mom thinks I should
ever do.

Charlie sits on the edge of the bed.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
Duran Duran.

CHARLIE
It's good.

AMANDA
You really like it?

Charlie nods. She shoves the bills back in her jar.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
They're kicking me out. Of school.

CHARLIE
How can they do that?

AMANDA
I heard mom on the phone, I think
with Linda. I can stay till the end
of October but that's it.
(beat)
Charlie?

CHARLIE
Yeah.

AMANDA
Would you think it was stupid if I
wanted a different wish?

Charlie shakes his head.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
I was thinking about it. It would
be great to train with Bela. But I
really want my braces off.

CHARLIE
That's a good wish.

AMANDA
You think?

Charlie nods.

INT. FARRELL STAIRCASE - DAY

Charlie walks down the stairs. Ivan and Al and Claire watch
TV in the living room.

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Polly's in the kitchen re-arranging everything Claire's moved, cleaning even though the kitchen is extremely clean.

Charlie enters.

CHARLIE

Mom.

POLLY

You want something? There should be milk in here, I just bought some.

CHARLIE

Grandma threw out a bunch of stuff.

POLLY

Of course she did. Spick and span and you can't find a goddamn thing. Sorry.

CHARLIE

I'm not thirsty anyway.
(a beat)
Amanda has a wish.

POLLY

Let me guess. A training session with Bela Karolyi.

CHARLIE

She wants her braces off.

POLLY

You're kidding.

She starts to laugh.

POLLY (CONT'D)

It's such a little wish.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Polly picks up the phone, dials.

POLLY

Hi, Nancy? It's Polly Farrell.
Yeah, we need an appointment with Dr. Crosbie. As soon as possible, tomorrow, today, if he has time.

She rolls her eyes, grins at Charlie.

POLLY (CONT'D)
 There's nothing sooner? Amanda's
 sick, there's no way he can squeeze
 her in?
 (beat)
 Amanda, right.

Polly hangs up.

POLLY (CONT'D)
 Shit. Where the hell is-?

She looks down at the counter, where the phone book used to
 be. Stalks into the living room...

INT. FARRELL LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...where Claire reads, calmly. Al watches a Red Sox game.

POLLY
 -Mom, where's the phone book?

Claire waves at the coffee table. Books and papers have been
 stacked with a maximum of organization.

CLAIRE
 Right next to -

POLLY
 -did it not occur to you that I
 might want the phone book - oh, let
 me think - next to the fucking
 phone?

She tears through the pile, tossing books and magazines left
 and right. Ivan, hearing the commotion, comes downstairs.

CLAIRE
 There was so much clutter, darling -

IVAN
 Pol, she was trying to help -

POLLY
 (to Ivan)
 Why don't you go back to work, OK?
 (to Claire)
 I did not call maid service. I did
 not ask for my entire house to be
 reorganized. All I wanted was to
 come home and find things where, I,
 left, them-

She finds the phone book. She stalks back into the kitchen, slams the phone book on the table and thumbs through it.

Ivan trails behind, hands on Charlie's shoulders.

POLLY (CONT'D)
Shit-shit-shit-

Charlie points to a name. She picks up the phone. Waits tensely as it rings. All three of them do.

POLLY (CONT'D)
-I'm trying to make an appointment
for my daughter. She needs to get
her braces off today, Tuesday at
the latest.
(beat)
Amanda Farrell. Yes. No she would
be a new patient. Yes I can hold.
(beat)
Hello?

She hangs up. Charlie points to another name.

POLLY (CONT'D)
I'm trying to make an appointment
for my daughter, to get her braces
off. Tomorrow. Today? Thank god.
(beat)
We're in Morrow but we heard great
things.
(beat)
Amanda Farrell, she's had them on
since -
(beat)
Hello?
(beat)
Hello?

She hangs up.

POLLY (CONT'D)
Oh for fucks sake.

Ivan touches her shoulder.

IVAN
We could try Boston. A dentist in
Boston.

POLLY
I'm going to call Ed.

IVAN

Sure, fine, call Reardon, he's the only person that you'll listen to.

POLLY

Excuse me?

IVAN

He's always here. In the morning, at night, when the kids get home from school -

POLLY

- how would you know?

IVAN

-Jesus, doesn't he have any other patients?

POLLY

No! Most of them left! If you haven't noticed no one wants anything to do with us.

This stops Ivan. He hadn't thought about this.

POLLY (CONT'D)

You wouldn't know because you're never here.

IVAN

Tell me, Polly, where do you think I am?

POLLY

You're working. That's where I think you are. You're studying the goddamn solar system.

CLAIRE

Sweetheart.

POLLY

Stay out of this, Mom -

IVAN

You can't seriously think that.

POLLY

I don't know, Ivan. What am I supposed to think? I mean, I guess occasionally you buy her ineffective vitamins.

Ivan grabs his briefcase. Roots through it. Grabs a folder, slams it on the kitchen table.

POLLY (CONT'D)
What is that?

IVAN
Look. Have a look.

Polly picks up the papers with reluctance. Looks through them. Ivan's research on alternative therapies for AIDS patients. On nutritional remedies for the immune system. On T Cell regeneration. The folder is thick and the research is extensive.

IVAN (CONT'D)
There's a database at the institute. Medical libraries. And a pharmacy where I've been getting those vitamins, which have been proven to boost t-cell count.

POLLY
You could have said something.

IVAN
I shouldn't have had to.

Polly looks through his research.

IVAN (CONT'D)
I know you blame me.

POLLY
I don't.

IVAN
Yeah you do.

Charlie looks between his parents.

CLAIRE
(to Charlie)
Let's go upstairs, darling.

POLLY
(to Ivan)
You know what? Fine. I do. You understood about the blood transfusion, you knew about the risk. I didn't understand any of that.

Ivan puts on his coat.

POLLY (CONT'D)

Where are you going? Back to the
Institute? You haven't found
anything.

*

Ivan leaves, slamming the door.

CLAIRE

(to Polly)

Darling, is there anything we can -

POLLY

Just leave! Jesus Christ!

Claire says nothing. Charlie runs out of the room.

EXT. MORROW/MARSH - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie rides as fast as he can. The trees are bare. The
beginning of frost.

EXT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - LATER

Charlie rides his bike to Laurel Smith's house. Drops his
bike in the reeds.

*

EXT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - LATER

Charlie knocks. Laurel opens the door.

CHARLIE

You have to tell me if you really
can. Speak to people after they
die. You have to.

(beat)

Please.

Laurel looks at him for a long moment.

LAUREL

Come.

He hesitates.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

Come in.

INT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Laurel's bungalow is decorated sparsely, a big white lamp, a few black and white photos of Laurel as a little girl in Russia.

Charlie pauses to look. It's not as scary in here as he thought. It's actually fairly pleasant. A black cat creeps out, winds around Laurel's ankles.

LAUREL

This is Stella. You like cats?

Charlie shrugs. He's not sure, really.

INT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie sits in Laurel's kitchen. Laurel brings him a piece of tart, a mug of milk.

LAUREL

First, eat. The milk is warm.

Charlie hesitates. Then takes a bite. It's surprisingly good.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

Do you like it?

Charlie nods.

LAUREL (CONT'D)

My grandmother's recipe. She made it often, when I was your age.

CHARLIE

Did you talk to ghosts when you were my age?

LAUREL

Why do you want to know this?

CHARLIE

You said if I ate you would tell me!

Laurel nods at the plate. Charlie takes another bite. Pushes it away.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Who was the first dead person you ever talked to?

LAUREL

My mother.

*

CHARLIE

Did you see her?

LAUREL

I did not.

CHARLIE

So how did you know it was her?

LAUREL

I felt what she felt. Her hands
used to shake. Mine did too.

CHARLIE

What did she say?

LAUREL

She told me she would always be
there, as long as I remembered her.

CHARLIE

How old were you?

LAUREL

Thirteen.

CHARLIE

My sister's thirteen.

(a beat)

How did she die?

LAUREL

You ask a lot of questions.

CHARLIE

I know.

LAUREL

She was very sick.

CHARLIE

Who took care of you?

LAUREL

My grandmother came to stay with
us.

CHARLIE

Did she die before you came here?

LAUREL

It was not safe, where we were.

CHARLIE

Why not?

Laurel gets up, moves to the sink. She clearly doesn't want to talk about this.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Who was the second person you spoke to?

LAUREL

A janitor. The first school I went to in America. A nice man. Used to sneak me bologna sandwiches when everyone else treated me like shit. He had a heart attack.

(she touches her chest)

I could feel it, here.

CHARLIE

Is that why you sometimes look like the people you talk to?

LAUREL

Perhaps.

CHARLIE

My mom said it was just lighting. I guess she lied.

Laurel regards him, thinks for a moment, finally speaks.

LAUREL

It is different every time. All I can say is, I think of a person. I try to sense them. Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not.

*

On Charlie, thinking about this.

INT. FARRELL LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Polly looks through Ivan's research. She's been crying.

The door opens. Charlie comes in.

POLLY

Where were you?

CHARLIE

You never care when dad's gone.

Charlie sits down at the kitchen table. Starts to do his homework.

POLLY

Charlie.

Charlie ignores her. Polly walks towards him, puts her hand on his shoulder. He shakes it off.

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - LATER

Charlie's still doing his homework. Polly and Amanda watch the Olympics on TV.

The doorbell rings. Polly answers, still holding the folder.

Ivan steps in, carrying a box of pizza. Steam drifts from it.

IVAN

Your parents left.

She nods. She gestures towards the research.

POLLY

Thank you.

He puts the pizza on the table.

POLLY (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry.

IVAN

I found a dentist. Bernard Spielman. He's affiliated with the Children's Hospital but he's based in Brookline. He can do it Sunday.

POLLY

Oh my god. Thank god.

Charlie watches his parents.

POLLY (CONT'D)

I was ready to kill a dentist. I'm serious. Some poor slob would be filling a cavity and - bam.

He laughs.

POLLY (CONT'D)

What?

IVAN

You don't know how to shoot a gun.

POLLY

A bee-bee gun! My father must have one somewhere.

IVAN

Would've used it on your mother.

They're both laughing now.

POLLY

A bow and arrow! A fly rod!

Amanda comes into the kitchen and stands behind Charlie.

AMANDA

They're crazy.

CHARLIE

Definitely insane.

INT. DENTIST'S OFFICE - DAY

Amanda leans back as the dentist drills.

INT. WAITING ROOM - LATER

Ivan, Polly, and Charlie wait. Amanda limps out.

IVAN

Well?

POLLY

Come on, show us.

Amanda pauses, shy. Then smiles.

IVAN

You look beautiful.

Amanda throws her arms around Polly and Ivan.

AMANDA

You're the best parents in the whole world. The best.

POLLY

Come on now -

AMANDA

The best! The best. The best in the world.

Charlie watches his sister hug his parents. For the first time in a long time he feels calm.

EXT. RESTAURANT - BROOKLINE

A cozy restaurant with a jukebox. No one knows who they are here. Amanda and Charlie are ordering everything on the menu.

CHARLIE

Mozzarella sticks - two orders. And calamari.

AMANDA

But we're getting onion rings.

IVAN

Did you just hear her say that? I think my ears are playing tricks on me.

POLLY

We'll get both. It's a celebration.

A waiter brings drinks. A few glasses of wine. A coke for Charlie.

IVAN

I think this calls for a toast. To freedom from braces forever! To my daughter's first glass of wine.

AMANDA

Not my first...

IVAN

No?

Amanda laughs.

AMANDA

I've done a lot of things that you don't know about.

IVAN

Like what?

AMANDA
Just things.

Amanda takes a sip of wine, but it's really hard for her to swallow. Polly holds out water. She refuses. A song comes on the jukebox. Credence Clearwater.

IVAN
(after a beat)
We love this song.

POLLY
You do.

AMANDA
You tried to make me do a routine
to this song.

IVAN
That is not true.

AMANDA
It was way too slow.

POLLY
I think I remember that happening.
You can be pretty pushy sometimes.

IVAN
Isn't that the pot calling the
kettle..

POLLY
Yeah, it is. A little. OK, a
little.

IVAN
Dance with me, baby.

Polly smiles at Ivan, allows him to pull her up.

AMANDA
Gross.

But Charlie and Amanda watch their parents dance and there's something kind of lovely about it.

EXT. MORROW - DAY

Bare branches. The icy end of October.

INT. CHESHIRE LUNCHROOM - DAY

Charlie, Amanda, and Jessie eat lunch together. No one sits near them. Amanda looks thinner, sicker.

INT. CHESHIRE GYM - DAY

Amanda, jeans and a sweatshirt swimming over her leotard, watches Sue Sherman practice back flips. After a moment, she gets up and walks over with effort - her limp is the worst it's been.

SUE

What?

AMANDA

You're not tucking your legs in enough.

Sue stares at her.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

You need to kind of make your body a tight ball. And tuck your legs in.

SUE

Why do you care?

A beat. Amanda doesn't quite know how to respond to that.

SUE (CONT'D)

I'll never be as good as you.

AMANDA

You forgot the was.

(beat)

As good as I was.

Sue thinks for a moment, then repositions herself and tries again, tucking her legs in this time. It's better. Sue seems surprised.

SUE

Thanks.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - NIGHT

Charlie, Polly, Ivan, and Amanda watch TV together. Gymnastics. Amanda thinks about Sue, she's quietly pleased.

INT. CHESHIRE LUNCHROOM - DAY

Charlie watches Polly and Amanda pack up her locker. Jessie comes up behind him.

JESSIE

I hate everyone else. I only like her.

Charlie doesn't know what to say to this.

EXT. MORROW - ANOTHER DAY

Charlie rides home. Miniature witches and Goblins and Supermans run by.

INT. FARRELL LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

Charlie watches a horror movie on TV. A huge basket of candy sits at the front door, untouched. Ivan looks out the window.

Ivan plops down next to Charlie and tosses him a chocolate bar.

IVAN

What's this?

CHARLIE

This monster guy? With claws instead of hands? He just killed like ten girls.

IVAN

Sounds great.

CHARLIE

It's really bloody.

The doorbell rings.

IVAN

Oh yeah! What did I tell you? Trick-or-treaters!

CHARLIE

Don't hold your breath.

INT./EXT FARRELL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ivan opens the door. Linda Gleason, decked out in a witch hat and gaudy broomstick earrings. Holding two baskets of candy.

IVAN
You've got it backwards. We're
supposed to give you something.

LINDA
Who came up with that rule?

Ivan opens the door a little wider.

IVAN
I hope you like mars bars. We've
got about a thousand.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ivan goes upstairs. Linda sits down next to Charlie who
stares intently at the TV.

LINDA
Hey you.

CHARLIE
Hi.

LINDA
So. My plan. It didn't work great,
did it?

CHARLIE
It worked ok. It worked better than
nothing.

LINDA
Ah, you're just being nice.

Linda gives him one of the baskets. Charlie looks inside.
Chocolates. Glow in the dark bugs. 6 Foot Bubble Gum. He
empties it out on the coffee table.

Charlie holds up the glow in the dark bugs. A beat. Polly
comes downstairs, followed by Ivan. Polly looks paler,
thinner, stressed.

POLLY
(to Linda)
Hi.
(to Charlie)
I thought you'd be out trick or
treating.

CHARLIE
It's for kids.

Polly looks at him for a beat, at Linda seeming to understand something she doesn't.

POLLY
(to Linda)
You didn't have to bring all that.

LINDA
I never make house calls empty handed.

POLLY
Do you want coffee? Ivan, could you make coffee?

IVAN
You're the boss.

POLLY
(to Charlie)
Amanda was asking for you.

CHARLIE
(picking up the other basket)
Can I bring her this?

LINDA
That's what it's there for.

POLLY
You didn't have to do all that.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE/STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie crouches in the stairwell, watching Linda and his parents talk.

LINDA
- they can shove their damn petition. I wasn't fired.

POLLY
Where are you going to go?

LINDA
A private school in Maine. Very forward thinking, that's what I'm told. And don't ask what Kristy said.

(beat)

(MORE)

LINDA (CONT'D)
Is it possible by trying to protect
our kids we've actually screwed
them up more?

Charlie watches as Polly refills Linda's coffee cup, the adults silently contemplating her question.

INT. AMANDA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Charlie pushes open the door. Amanda's lying on her gym mat, fiddling with a cassette cover. He sits down on her bed, offers her the second treat basket from Ed.

CHARLIE
Linda Gleason brought it. The gum
is six feet long.

AMANDA
That's disgusting.

She looks out the window. Watches kids running down the street, passing their house.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
You shouldn't not go because of me.

CHARLIE
I'm too old.

AMANDA
Right.

She picks up the gum. Unravels it.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
I used to like this stuff.
(beat)
I need you to do me a favor.
(off his nod)
We had a really important meet. In
Concord. I need you to tell Coach
Eagan I tried to go. Can you tell
him?

Charlie gives her gatorade from the night stand. She has trouble swallowing.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
Can you do that?

CHARLIE
Yeah.

AMANDA

Can you find out if Sue got better at her back flips? And ask him if we won.

CHARLIE

OK.

AMANDA

You won't forget?

CHARLIE

I promise.

AMANDA

Thanks, Beetle brain.

CHARLIE

You don't have metal anymore.

Amanda smiles a little.

AMANDA

Charlie?

CHARLIE

Yeah?

AMANDA

I'm scared...but don't tell mom.

On Charlie, processing this.

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL GYM - DAY

Charlie looks into the gym. Sixth graders practice somersaults. Coach Eagan yells at them. Charlie tentatively pushes open the door and waits for a moment. Eagan sees him.

COACH EAGAN

Hey! Yeah, you. Get out of here. Go back to class.

Eagan jogs towards him.

COACH EAGAN (CONT'D)

I'm serious, son. This isn't a show.

CHARLIE

Amanda wanted me to find out if Sue got better at her back flips.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
(off Eagan's pause)
I'm her brother, Charlie.

Eagan looks at him for a moment.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
She wanted to say she's sorry for
not going to the meet in Concord.
She really tried.

COACH EAGAN
She's a great kid.

CHARLIE
She also wanted me to ask you if
you won.

COACH EAGAN
Tell her we did.

Charlie nods. Eagan steps back, looks at Charlie.

COACH EAGAN (CONT'D)
Ever think about gymnastics?

CHARLIE
I'm pretty bad at sports.

COACH EAGAN
Come here.

Charlie follows him to the parallel bars, where one boy
struggles to lift himself up.

COACH EAGAN (CONT'D)
Sean. Get your butt down.
(to Charlie)
Hold the bar with both hands.
That's it. A little wider - good.
Now pull yourself up.

Charlie hesitates, then tries. He is surprisingly strong.

COACH EAGAN (CONT'D)
Not bad. What grade are you in?

CHARLIE
Fourth.

Charlie drops back down.

COACH EAGAN
Let me know if you change your mind
by sixth.

EXT. FARRELL HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Charlie pedals up to the house. Reardon's car is in the driveway.

Charlie drops his bike on the grass and runs inside.

INT. FARRELL LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Charlie slams the door.

CHARLIE

Amanda!

Charlie throws his backpack on the kitchen table, next to Reardon's briefcase. He runs up the stairs.

INT. FARRELL UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

His parents are at the top of the stairs, talking quietly. Ivan notices Charlie, moves towards him.

IVAN

Do your homework downstairs.

CHARLIE

Why?

IVAN

Because I said so.

CHARLIE

But I need to see Amanda.

POLLY

Listen to Dad.

CHARLIE

But I need to see her.

IVAN

You can't now, so go downstairs.

CHARLIE

I need to see her!

POLLY

Charlie, come...

Charlie runs towards Amanda's room. It's too late, he's seen her. She's skeletal, her breathing labored, sicker than he's ever seen before. Charlie stares for a moment, shocked.

Ivan grabs him, carries him down the stairs.

INT. FARRELL LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ivan throws Charlie on the couch.

IVAN
STAY DOWNSTAIRS! STAY DOWNSTAIRS!
STAY DOWNSTAIRS!

Charlie sits in shock. A tense pause. Then he gets up, yelling like his father was.

CHARLIE
Why can't you save her? You're
supposed to be a scientist. You're
supposed to be able to save her!

Ivan slumps down on the couch and starts to cry.

Polly hurries down the stairs and over to Ivan. She puts her arms around him. Ivan's body shakes.

Charlie turns, runs out the door.

POLLY
Charlie!

EXT. MORROW ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie pedals furiously, speeding from his house. A small figure on a long dark road.

EXT. POND - MOMENTS LATER

Charlie reaches the pond. It's almost completely iced over. The turtle is nowhere to be seen.

CHARLIE
I'm sorry. I said I'm sorry.

Still nothing.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Can you just come?

Still nothing.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
JUST COME.

EXT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - DUSK

Charlie drops his bike in the reeds, bangs on Laurel's door. Bangs harder. No answer.

EXT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Charlie runs around the back of the house. Marshland. Empty. The birds have left.

EXT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - LATER

It's twilight. Charlie sits on Laurel's porch, shivering. He sees her bike from a distance, bells quietly jangling.

She rides up, takes a bag of groceries from the bike basket and moves towards Charlie.

CHARLIE

If I told you lots of things about
my sister, would you be able to
talk to her?

Laurel sits down next to Charlie. Puts her arms around him. For the first time, Charlie starts to cry.

INT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - LATER

Charlie's calmed down. He drinks his milk and finishes his cake. He looks around the house, pictures of Laurel as a child in a landscape that's worlds away from Morrow.

Laurel nods at Charlie's empty plate.

LAUREL

More?

Charlie nods. She cuts him another slice. After a moment:

CHARLIE

My sister is gymnast. She almost
always scores a ten. She wears
purple leotards, she has almost
twenty in her closet. She calls me
beetle brain even though she knows
that I like dinosaurs. She listens
to the same Bruce Springsteen and
Duran Duran and Madonna songs over
and over again. She likes
strawberry ice cream which I think
is disgusting.

(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

She saw Bruce Springsteen on the street once and started screaming his name and it was really embarrassing. I forgot about that.

(beat)

I can make you a whole list. My mom and dad can too.

(beat)

Every year when I start school I have to tell the class what I did over the summer and I have to tell them if I have brothers or sisters and I'm always going to say, I have a sister, Amanda, I'm never going to not say that.

(beat)

Is that enough? Will you be able to talk to her?

LAUREL

I will try.

Charlie accepts this. Nods.

EXT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Polly's car pulls up.

INT. LAUREL SMITH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Laurel leads Polly into the house. Charlie's sleeping on the couch.

LAUREL

He is all right.

Laurel hands her his backpack.

POLLY

Has he come here a lot?

Laurel motions with her hand - a little.

POLLY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I stopped working on the book.

LAUREL

You have more important things.

Polly stands there for a moment.

POLLY
I thought about coming here. All
the time. It would have been about
comforting myself, not about her.

Laurel nods. Polly sits on the edge of the couch. Gently
brushes Charlie's hair away from his face.

POLLY (CONT'D)
(to Charlie)
Amanda wants to see you.

INT. FARRELL HOUSE - NIGHT

Charlie stands in front of Amanda's bed. A loud MACHINE in
the room is now helping her breath. She looks so sick it
scares him, but he walks closer anyway.

CHARLIE
(whispering)
Amanda. AMANDA.

She opens her eyes.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
I'm going to remember you. So you
don't have to be scared.

Amanda smiles.

EXT. FARRELL HOUSE - DAYBREAK.

Al's car pulls up. Charlie watches from the window.

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Polly opens the door. Al and Claire stand on the porch.

Polly looks at her mother and her father.

AL
Hi, kid.

POLLY
Hi.
(beat)
I'm sorry.

INT. AMANDA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Polly watches her parents lean over Amanda's bed, talking to her.

Polly looks at her daughter, realizes something.

INT. FARRELL BASEMENT DARKROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Polly walks quickly down the stairs. Flips on the light. Charlie's bent over her darkroom, trying to develop a picture. Polly looks at him, surprised.

POLLY

It's a good thing someone was getting use out of this.

CHARLIE

They're all blurry. They're not very good.

Polly picks up a picture - half developed, but we can see the turtle, half in the water and half on the land.

POLLY

How long are you leaving these in the solution for?

CHARLIE

I just dip it in. Isn't that what you do?

POLLY

See, that's the problem. You need to time it. Put it back.

(beat)

Now we have to wait. Another minute.

The picture slowly comes into focus. The turtle.

CHARLIE

It's a cryptodire. It could have been alive in the Cretaceous Period.

POLLY

Charlie, this is good.

(off his doubt)

It is. You see things a lot of people wouldn't. The way you've framed it - it's very good.

She holds it up. Puts it on the bare line. Kneels down in front of her son, really looks at him for a moment.

POLLY (CONT'D)

When you asked me about Laurel, why she looked the way she did - I didn't know the answer. I still don't.

(beat)

Is that OK?

Charlie thinks about this. Nods. A moment between them, a new understanding. Ivan comes to the top of the stairs. Watches them for a beat. They notice him.

IVAN

Your dad insisted on Monopoly - he's slaughtering us, Pol.

(to Charlie)

Maybe you could help your Grandma out?

CHARLIE

I guess.

IVAN

Good boy.

Polly picks up the Minolta.

POLLY

Stay right there! Both of you.

Charlie and Ivan freeze.

Polly holds up the Minolta. Snaps their picture.

She gestures for them to join her. Puts her arms around Ivan's waist.

POLLY (CONT'D)

It'll only take a minute.

Polly unfurls the negative. Holds it out for them to see.

POLLY (CONT'D)

It's hard to see, but there we are.

INT. FARRELL KITCHEN - LATER

Ivan carries Amanda down the stairs. Polly follows.

Charlie sits at the dining room table with his grandparents. He hasn't touched his soup.

Ed holds the door open. Charlie gets up, trails them to the porch.

EXT. FARRELL HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ivan puts Amanda into the car. Polly and Ivan get into the car, follow Ed's car out of the driveway and into the street.

Amanda waves from the backseat, her hand small and white.

Charlie watches from the porch, Claire and Al behind him.

The cars drive out of sight. They still watch. A long silence.

CHARLIE
I'm going for a ride.

AL
You're awfully young to have a license, son.

CHARLIE
On my bike.

AL
That was a bad joke.

Charlie gets on his bike.

CHARLIE
My dad would have made that joke.

CLAIRE
Does your mother let you do that?

AL
It's all right.
(to Charlie)
Amanda left something for you.

EXT. MORROW - LATER

Charlie rides down the street, Amanda's GYM BAG slung over his shoulder. It's too light out for the dinosaur patch to glow.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

My dad once told me facts were all I needed to believe in. Facts like, before the dinosaurs died, carnivores and herbivores may have lived all over the world. Oceans were forming and continents were breaking apart. This was the Cretaceous Period.

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL - 5TH GRADE CLASSROOM - ALMOST A YEAR LATER - INTERCUT

Charlie stands in front of his new class, reading from his specimen log. The DINOSAUR MURAL we saw him coloring in the opening is pasted up behind him: big colorful dinosaurs, birds, plants - and his picture of the turtle, which fits right into the landscape.

CHARLIE

The Cretaceous Period is famous for the extinction event that was bad for the dinosaurs but good for us.

EXT. POND

Charlie sits writing in his specimen log. Patches of light snow on the ground. The pond is frozen.

CHARLIE (V.O.)

When the asteroid hit seventy five percent of the species on our planet were killed off, but we don't know why yet.

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL

CHARLIE

How long did it take for the dinosaurs to die? Did they die because the earth got cold, or did they die because it was such a big explosion? All scientists know now is that reptiles like turtles survived. What can we learn by studying these amazing reptiles?

EXT. POND

Charlie looks out at the pond, then goes back to writing.

CHARLIE (V.O.)
 We know they are adaptable, able to survive without food for long periods of time, store what they need for the winter. We know that they can live both in the water and on land.

INT. CHESHIRE SCHOOL - 5TH GRADE CLASSROOM

CHARLIE
 By studying these animals, maybe we can learn what made the greatest civilization die out so quickly. Maybe we can learn how to be better.

Charlie looks out at his classmates.

EXT. POND - END INTERCUT

It's almost dark. Charlie closes his specimen log. Puts it in the gym bag. The dinosaur patch starts to glow.

SEVRIN (O.C.)
 Hey.

Charlie turns. Sevrin is there with his bike.

SEVRIN (CONT'D)
 Your grandpa was looking for you. He called my mom.

CHARLIE
 She let you out?

SEVRIN
 She was mad. But I came anyway.

Charlie throws a pebble in the pond. Sevrin shifts his weight from foot to foot.

SEVRIN (CONT'D)
 Look - I don't care if you hate me. You're still my best friend.

Charlie throws another pebble.

SEVRIN (CONT'D)
 You don't believe me, do you?

Charlie plops down on the ground.

CHARLIE
Get me my flash.

Sevrin scrambles towards the bag.

SEVRIN
Isn't that Amanda's?

CHARLIE
She wanted me to have it.

Sevrin studies the bag. It's very pink. Definitely not the type of bag most boys would carry around.

SEVRIN
Cool dinosaur patch.

CHARLIE
It glows better when it's darker out.

Sevrin sits down next to Charlie. He hands him the flash. Charlie takes it. Takes a picture of the pond, which looks eerily bare and beautiful.

SEVRIN
The cryptodire?

CHARLIE
He's probably burrowing. He won't be back till April at least.

Charlie takes another picture. They sit in silence for a moment.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Did you know that some fish can get stuck in the ice and swim again when it gets warm?

SEVRIN
How?

CHARLIE
I don't understand how yet. But they can.

SEVRIN
We could look for other specimens. If you want.

Charlie looks over at Sevrin. He's grateful, but he'd never say it. The boys stare out at the pond, patchy ice, not a ripple.

FADE TO BLACK.