

DEAR JOHN

Screenplay By Jamie Linden

Based On The Novel By Nicholas Sparks

OVER BLACK:

JOHN'S VOICE
There's something I want to tell
you.

OPEN ON:

STAFF SARGEANT JOHN TYREE -- who is in his mid-20's, who has a shaved head beneath his GREEN BERET, and who is completely unaware that two bullets are seconds away from entering him.

John looks around the ramshackled room he's in, then turns and says something we cannot hear to someone we cannot see.

JOHN'S VOICE
After I got shot, you wanna know the
very first thing that entered my
mind, right before I blacked out?

A BULLET slices into his left shoulder, inches away from his heart. John's eyes widen, but he's too stunned to cry out.

JOHN'S VOICE
Coins.

Despite the EERIE SILENCE, a second BULLET hits him in the gut and sends him to his knees.

His hand flies to his stomach. In no time at all his fingers are coated with blood. John falls onto his back. His eyes search the dingy ceiling above him. All is still SILENT.

Sunlight pours in from a large mortar hole, and as John stares at it, the light ENVELOPES THE SCREEN, AND --

EVERYTHING GOES WHITE.

FADE IN ON:

John as a LITTLE BOY, standing in front of a sprawling metal contraption that seems to stretch on and on. From his POV it looks like a Rube Goldberg machine.

JOHN'S VOICE
I'm eight years old again, on a tour
of the US Mint, listening to the
guide explain how coins are made.

The other CHILDREN around John are bored out of their minds. But John is not. John is fascinated.

ON A BLANKING PRESS --

--as enormous metal coils are fed through a reel that cuts out individual round discs called blanks.

JOHN'S VOICE
How they are punched out of sheet metal.

ON AN UPSETTING MILL --

-- which squeezes the edges of the blanks, giving them a slightly raised surface.

JOHN'S VOICE
How they are rimmed and beveled.

ON A COINING PRESS --

-- which actually engraves the blanks.

JOHN'S VOICE
How they are stamped and cleaned.

FINALLY, ON A PRESS OPERATOR --

-- who uses a magnifying glass to spot-check the new coins.

JOHN'S VOICE
And then how each and every coin is personally examined, just in case one has slipped through with the slightest imperfection.

The operator finds a bad coin and flicks it off the conveyor belt into a waste funnel.

The rest of the coins CLATTER off the belt down into an automatic counting machine, while --

MATCH CUT:

BACK TO THE DINGY ROOM -- PRESENT DAY

-- where spent M-16 rounds CLATTER onto the ground, making the exact same noise. Now all SOUND can be heard, and it is LOUD.

Whoever shot John is paying for it dearly. Three other GREEN BERET'S are unloading their ammo.

John is still flat on his back, still bleeding profusely, still staring up at the ceiling.

JOHN'S VOICE
That's what popped into my head.

One of the soldiers, Staff Sergeant TONY GALLO, stops firing and turns to John, kneels over him. A vein pops out of his forehead. John desperately tries to make eye contact.

JOHN'S VOICE

*I am a coin in the United States
Army. I was minted in the year 1980.
I have been punched from sheet metal,
I have been stamped and cleaned, my
edges have been rimmed and beveled.*

Tony cuts open John's fatigues. Blood flows freely.

JOHN'S VOICE

*But now I have two small holes in
me, and I am no longer in perfect
condition.*

John looks at his punctured stomach and draws a sharp breath.

JOHN'S VOICE

I am no longer in perfect condition.

He glances up at Tony, sees the panic in his face.

JOHN'S VOICE

I am no longer in perfect condition.

John GULPS for air. His PUPILS begin to DILATE.

He's fading fast. The chaos around him begins to slip away.

JOHN'S VOICE

*So there's something else I want to
tell you before I go.*

His eyelids flutter. He GASPS again.

JOHN'S VOICE

*After I got shot, right before
everything went black, you wanna
know the very final thing that
entered my mind?*

And then as John's eyes finally close --

FADE TO BLACK

JOHN'S VOICE

You.

FADE IN ON:

A WAVE --

As it crashes over John, submerging him completely.

He closes his eyes. Then his surfboard pops back above water, and because John is on top of it, he pops up too.

He is younger now, and he is back in North Carolina. But his head is still shaved.

SPRING 2001

Before he can even catch his breath, another wave is coming. John positions himself, paddles into the wave -- stands up --

ON THE SHORE -- he catches a brief glimpse of TWO GIRLS in bikinis as they wade into the water --

-- but there's not time to focus on them -- he's caught the wave and rides it towards shore, when all of a sudden --

--another SURFER cuts him off -- John has to wipe out to avoid a collision --

UNDERWATER -- he gets lost in the power of the crashing wave, doesn't try to fight it, lets himself get dragged to shore --

-- until he can finally find his footing. He stands up in waist high water, angrily yells out to the other surfer --

JOHN

Hey! What the hell--

-- then suddenly realizes he's only a few yards from the girls he saw earlier.

One's BLONDE, the other is BRUNETTE. They're both knockouts, and they're both staring at him. The Brunette smiles.

BRUNETTE GIRL

Nice wave.

John wipes the salt out of his mouth.

JOHN

Shoulda been.

The Brunette's eyes twinkle, but the Blonde rolls hers, tugs at her friend. Although the Brunette allows herself to be pulled away, she smiles back at John before she goes.

John watches her disappear down the beach while the surfer that cut John off wades over to him. John is tall and muscular, not somebody to mess with, and this guy knows it.

OTHER SURFER

Sorry, bro. Didn't see you there.

John turns towards him fast -- the other guy flinches slightly. But John is smiling now, too.

JOHN

What? Oh -- no problem.

Then he climbs on his board and paddles back into the ocean.

ON THE PIER -- LATER

John leans against the rail, drinking a beer, watching the sun set. His board is next to him.

Nearby, he hears GIGGLING -- and when he turns, he sees the same two girls from before walking up the pier. They stop 20 feet away or so, but they don't see him because of his board.

John peeks over at them for a second... thinks...

But before he can make a move, TWO GUYS in polo shirts walk up behind the girls. They're good-looking and loud, each with a beer in hand. The one in the YELLOW SHIRT wraps his arms around the Blonde Girl. They're clearly a couple.

But John's focused on the Brunette Girl, and he watches with interest as the guy in the BABY BLUE SHIRT hops up easily on the rail next to her-- and knocks her tote bag off the edge. It hits the water with a SPLASH.

BRUNETTE GIRL

My bag!

BLUE SHIRT

Whoops. Son of a--

BRUNETTE GIRL

My purse is in there. My credit cards, all my cash, everything!

BLUE SHIRT

I'm really sorry.
(off her look)
Oh. Should I, um...

BRUNETTE GIRL

My whole life is in that bag!

YELLOW SHIRT

You knocked it in, dumbass. Be a man, go save the day.

Blue Shirt SIGHS. Then he sits down, ponderously takes off his shoes, carefully stuffs his socks into them.

He hesitates... takes a deep breath... looks down at the ocean swirling twenty feet below him... hesitates some more...

BRUNETTE GIRL

Oh, for crying out loud.

John watches the Brunette Girl kick off her own shoes, start to climb up the rail.

John grins. And then, without hardly even thinking about it, he sets his beer down, hops the rail, and jumps down into the ocean himself.

He dives under -- John is clearly comfortable in water -- and finds the bag on the ocean floor quickly. He reemerges to find the group on the pier staring down at him in astonishment.

John just paddles back to shore. The Brunette Girl meets him at the bottom of the pier, all smiles.

BRUNETTE GIRL

Thank you so much!

Blue Shirt trails close behind her.

BLUE SHIRT

Yeah, thanks. But you really didn't have to do that, I was just about to jump in...

JOHN

I know you were. I was just saving you the trouble.

He hands the bag to the Brunette. Their fingers brush briefly.

BRUNETTE GIRL

My name's Savannah.

JOHN

I'm John.

She and John hold eye contact. Blue Shirt clears his throat.

BLUE SHIRT

Maybe you should give him a reward.

Savannah glares at Blue Shirt. John registers the insult.

JOHN

I don't want a reward. I was just trying to help.

He nods goodbye to Savannah, turns to leave.

JOHN

You all have a good night.

Then he starts to walk away. But Savannah calls after him.

SAVANNAH

Wait.

She hurries over, alone. Blue and Yellow Shirt trade a look.

SAVANNAH

I'm staying right over there.
We've got food, and -- I mean, do
you want something to eat?

JOHN

Thanks, but I should really be
getting home.

SAVANNAH

C'mon. One good deed deserves
another, right?

JOHN

It's just that my Dad's expecting me
back for dinner. I don't want to
ruin my appetite.

SAVANNAH

Oh, you won't. Our food is terrible.

She smiles at him. Reaches her hand out. Looks him in the eye.

SAVANNAH

Come on, John. Don't make me beg.

John pauses... then he holds out his hand, too, and their
fingers touch again.

AT A BONFIRE -- LATER

COLLEGE KIDS wander around near the house. While Blonde Girl
and Yellow Shirt take a walk down the beach--

--John sits in awkward silence across from Blue Shirt.

Then Savannah returns with two drinks, to both their relief.
Blue Shirt scoots over on his log, making room for her.

But she takes a seat beside John, hands him the other drink.

Blue Shirt eyeballs John, notices that under his armpit,
above his rib cage he's got a 'meat tag', which is basically
a tattooed dog tag with his name, ID #, etc.

BLUE SHIRT

You in the military or something?
(off John's nod)
What branch?

John flashes him his sapphire ring (which he never takes off,
not even when he's surfing).

JOHN

Army. Special Forces.

BLUE SHIRT

Yeah? Nice ring -- where's your beret, did you leave it at home?

Blue Shirt grins -- he's egging John on. John just ignores the comment, but Savannah levels her gaze at Blue Shirt.

SAVANNAH

Hey, Randy? I thought Susan told me you were smart.

BLUE SHIRT (RANDY)

I am smart.

SAVANNAH

Then why are you making fun of a guy who could kill you with his bare hands?

The smile wipes off Randy's face. He looks down, chagrined. Suddenly realizes there's a crowd.

RANDY

I'm... gonna go get another beer.

He leaves. John and Savannah are alone now. John grins.

JOHN

I'm not so sure I could kill him with my bare hands, actually. He has a thick neck.

SAVANNAH

Sorry about him -- he thinks he likes me.

JOHN

I think he likes you, too.

SAVANNAH

Nah. I'm not his type, he just doesn't know it yet.

(off John's grin)

What? What are you smiling about?

JOHN

I just think you're probably everybody's type.

At that moment, a SIX YEAR-OLD BOY comes out of nowhere and bear hugs Savannah, almost knocking her over.

JOHN

See what I mean?

The boy's name is ALAN, and although it may or may not be apparent right away, he's autistic. But Savannah's delighted to see him.

SAVANNAH
Alan, this is John. Say hello.

Alan hides his head instead.

SAVANNAH
He's shy. Alan, where's your Dad at?

VOICE
Two steps behind him, as usual.

They turn to find TIM, a friendly looking guy in his early 30's. When he rubs Savannah's head as a greeting, it's obvious they've known each other for years.

TIM
Sorry. He's like a heat-seeking missile when he sees you.
(then, noticing John)
Oh, hey. I'm Tim.

They shake hands. Tim notices his sapphire ring right away.

TIM
Special Forces, huh? Where you stationed out of, Fort Bragg?

JOHN
Germany, actually.

TIM
You're on leave.
(off his nod)
Good for you. I hope you're enjoying yourself.

John glances over at Savannah. She smiles.

JOHN
Yeah. Yeah, I think I am.

Tim sees the smile and realizes what he's walked into.

TIM
Well, sorry to interrupt. Nice to meet you, though -- c'mon, son.

Alan gives Savannah one last hug. Then, as he goes, Alan calls back to John, almost as an afterthought --

ALAN
Hello, John.

John smiles. Waves goodbye.

JOHN
Hello, Alan.

Tim and Savannah trade a quick look, impressed. Then Tim heads Alan back inside the BEACH HOUSE next door.

SAVANNAH
Wow. That was a pretty big deal.

JOHN
Yeah?

SAVANNAH
Alan doesn't talk to just anybody.
He doesn't talk to anybody at all,
actually, other than his family.

JOHN
He talked to you.

SAVANNAH
Well we're practically family.
I've known him since he was born.

She looks back up at the impressive house behind her.

SAVANNAH
This was my great-grandparents
beach house. They passed it down
to my grandparents, who passed it
down to my parents.
(re: the house next door)
Same thing with Tim's family. I've
spent every summer of my life right
here. So has Tim. And so has Alan.

JOHN
It's -- it's a beautiful house.

SAVANNAH
Yeah, well don't let it fool you.
I'm not one of those girls.

JOHN
Which girls?

SAVANNAH
You know perfectly well which girls.

She motions towards the house. College kids are everywhere--
in the house, on the deck, by the beach. And some of them are
definitely "those girls".

SAVANNAH

I don't even know all these people,
actually. But the more the merrier,
right? It is vacation, after all.

John pauses. Watches the college kids be college kids.

JOHN

Yeah. It is.

Savannah looks at John. Studies him as he watches the others.
They're all by themselves now -- no one else is nearby.

SAVANNAH

When do you go back?

JOHN

A week from Monday.

SAVANNAH

It must be scary, what you do.

JOHN

It's boring, mostly. Long stretches
of boring. Occasional flashes of
scary.

There's a lull in conversation. Not an uncomfortable one
though. Savannah looks out on the ocean. It's getting dark,
and the moon is rising on the horizon.

SAVANNAH

Full moon tonight. Look at how
huge that thing is.

She stands. From John's view, the moon is as large as she is.

SAVANNAH

You ever notice how big the moon is
when it's rising, but how little it
gets when it's up in the sky?

JOHN

That's just an optical illusion,
actually. C'mere, I'll show you.

He stands behind her, very close now, and raises her arm.

JOHN

The moon's size doesn't ever change,
only your perspective does. When
it's against the horizon, it looks
like it's enormous, but if you shut
one of your eyes... and hold out
your hand like this...

He holds his thumb up. She does the same -- and from their perspective, the moon disappears behind it.

JOHN

No matter where it is in the sky...
No matter where you are in the
world... the moon is never bigger
than your thumb.

Savannah opens her other eye. The moon is big again. Then she does John's trick, and again, the moon becomes thumb-sized. She smiles up at him. His face is inches from hers.

SAVANNAH

Where'd you learn that?

John looks down at her. Shrugs.

JOHN

Somewhere along the way.

FROM THE DECK --

Randy watches John and Savannah look out at the ocean, so close together and backlit by the giant moon. He takes a heavy swig of his beer, unable to hide his bitterness.

THE MOON --

--is way up in the night sky now. An hour or two have passed, and the bonfire is long out now. Savannah lies in the sand, watching John inspect a dangerous looking hot dog.

JOHN

How is it possible for a hot dog to
be so burnt on the outside and so
raw on the inside?

Savannah doesn't answer, just smiles. So John grabs a few pieces of wood and gathers some kindling.

Then he produces a flint and magnesium block keychain from his pocket, shaves off some magnesium with a pocketknife, and strikes the flint. Instant sparks slowly reignite the fire.

Savannah watches, amused, as John recooks his hot dog.

SAVANNAH

Wow. You can start your own fire. I
don't think I've ever met a boy who
can start his own fire.

(off his modest shrug)

No no, it's very impressive.
Very primal. What're you gonna do
next, make me a sundial?

John grins, shakes his head, nods up at the dark sky.

JOHN
Wouldn't do much good now.

But that reminds him... he grabs Savannah's arm, checks the time on her watch. Time has flown by.

JOHN
Shoot. I should go.

Savannah nods. She knew he was gonna have to leave eventually.

SAVANNAH
Sorry. I hope you won't get in too much trouble.

John looks at her. Laying there in the sand, under the stars, she looks just about perfect. John chuckles to himself.

JOHN
Too late.

Savannah smiles at him. But John shyly turns away, grabs his surfboard, prepares to leave. Savannah watches him.

SAVANNAH
Well...thank you. For what you did.

JOHN
You're welcome.

Takes a few steps... then turns around.

JOHN
Any chance you'd wanna do this again tomorrow night?

Savannah smiles wider.

SAVANNAH
Tomorrow night is chicken. You're not gonna want to try the chicken.

JOHN
Yeah, I was thinking we could let someone else cook this time.

SAVANNAH
Are you asking me out on a date?

JOHN
I guess I am.
(re: half-eaten hot dog)
One good deed deserves another, right?

She thinks. Smiles at him again.

SAVANNAH
Tomorrow night then?

He smiles back at her.

JOHN
Tomorrow night then.

ON A ROAD -- TEN MINUTES LATER

John walks north, carrying his surfboard. Headlights from the occasional car illuminate him as they pass by.

A truck comes up from behind him. But this one slows down to a crawl as it passes John... and then the reverse lights come on, and the truck backs up until John sees that the driver --

-- is Tim. Next to him, Alan is in the passenger seat, totally focused on his GAME BOY.

TIM
Need a lift? We're headed into town for some ice cream.

JOHN
Thanks. But I don't mind walking.

TIM
How long's the walk?

JOHN
Couple miles.

Tim looks at him. Then, without a word, he gets out of the car, takes John's board and puts it in the back of his truck. He calls to Alan in the cab.

TIM
Scoot over, son.

Alan does as he's told. John opens the passenger door. Alan looks up from his game, makes eye contact.

ALAN
Hello, John.

John smiles at him, impressed he remembered. So is Tim.

JOHN
Hey, Alan.

But then Alan just goes right back to his game. Tim gets in and they start on down the road.

JOHN

So how long are you in town for?

TIM

Oh, we live here year round now. Alan loves the water, and we were driving down every weekend anyway. I finally convinced my wife this just made the most sense.

John looks over at Tim, who's focused on the road ahead.

JOHN

She didn't want any ice cream?

TIM

Who? Oh, my wife -- no. She's on vacation herself, actually.

He smiles to himself, but doesn't take his eyes off the road.

TIM

I guess I thought if we spent all year in our vacation house, we'll have a year-round vacation. But it doesn't really work like that. And it's kind of tricky to take trips together, since...

He trails off, but it's clear he's talking about Alan -- although Alan is too wrapped up in his video game to notice.

TIM

But it's fine. We make it work.

JOHN

I'm up here on the left.

Tim turns into his driveway. John opens the car door.

JOHN

Thanks for the lift, Tim.
(as he gets out)
Bye, Alan.

But Alan doesn't even look up from his game. Tim pauses.

TIM

Hey, John? Just -- for the record -- if you do anything to hurt Savannah, I'll have to break... something. Something in your leg. One of the bones in there somewhere.

John looks at him, surprised. Tim sighs, a bit embarrassed.

TIM

I know her father, he'd want me to say that. Although it would've sounded a lot more natural coming out of his mouth.

JOHN

It -- sounded fine.

TIM

No it didn't. Thank you, though.

Tim smiles at John. He's pretty hard not to like.

TIM

Goodnight, John.

Then he pulls away. John watches the tail lights slowly disappear down the road.

INSIDE HIS FATHER'S HOUSE --

John walks into the LIVING ROOM. The whole house is dark and quiet, except for a light beneath one hallway door.

IN HIS FATHER'S STUDY --

MR. TYREE is balding. His shirt is a size too small and a decade too old. He is intently focused on a COIN in front of him and does not turn away from it when John walks in.

JOHN

Hey, Dad.

MR. TYREE

Your dinner's in the fridge.

John stands in the doorway. This does not appear to be a room that he walks into often.

JOHN

Sorry I didn't make it home earlier.

Mr. Tyree shrugs. Grabs a magnifying glass, turns the coin over, doesn't say another word. John just watches him, waiting for a response even though he knows nothing's going to come.

JOHN

Anyway. See you tomorrow, Dad.

MR. TYREE

Goodnight, John.

John closes the door behind him as he leaves.

IN THE KITCHEN -- THE NEXT DAY

It is bright outside now, and Mr. Tyree is making a large salad. His socks are mismatched.

John walks out of his bedroom in a nice shirt, sees his Dad at work on the salad, realizes he hasn't mentioned his plans.

JOHN
I'm not staying for dinner, Dad.

MR. TYREE
But... I made lasagna.

JOHN
Yeah, it's Sunday night. I know you made lasagna.

Mr. Tyree glances up at him. Then quickly turns back to his salad. John sighs, feels like he should explain.

JOHN
It's just, I've got a date...

MR. TYREE
Okay.

This time John does not wait long for the follow up question he knows won't come. He heads to the front door, then turns.

JOHN
Hey, Dad?

Mr. Tyree looks up at him. John hesitates long enough for us to know he wants to say something more.

JOHN
Can... I borrow the car?

Mr. Tyree digs in his pocket, holds the car keys out.

THE SHRIMP SHACK -- THAT EVENING

John pulls his dad's old Lincoln Continental into the parking lot of the SHRIMP SHACK, which looks exactly like it sounds.

He hurries over to open Savannah's door for her. She is studying the restaurant intently.

JOHN
I know it doesn't look like much.
But it's got the best seafood
you've ever had. Seriously.

She takes his hand and lets him pull her out of the car.

INSIDE --

Savannah and John are the best dressed customers by far. The place is crowded with regulars, not tourists. John nods evenly at the OWNER BEHIND THE BAR.

JOHN

Hey Steve.

Steve doesn't respond, just gives John the death stare. John sighs, then heads over to the bar and quietly takes him aside.

JOHN

C'mon, man. It's been three years.

STEVE THE OWNER

I don't want any trouble.

JOHN

You won't get any. Okay? I promise.

Steve pauses, weighing his options. Then, finally, he nods over to the hostess, giving his okay.

She takes them to a table by a window overlooking the water. Savannah looks at John curiously.

SAVANNAH

What was that about?

JOHN

I just haven't been here in a while, that's all.

A HOSTESS arrives to get their drinks, and Savannah orders a sweet tea.

John glances over at Steve behind the bar again. He's watching John closely, listening to what he's gonna order.

JOHN

Uh... sweet tea for me too, please.

The hostess heads off. But Savannah noticed the look John stole toward the bar and misreads it, thinking that she's the reason he only ordered tea.

SAVANNAH

It's okay. You can get a beer if you want, don't let me stop you.

JOHN

Nah. I don't drink.

Savannah cocks her head at him.

SAVANNAH

You were drinking when I met you.

John doesn't have to look over at the bar this time to know that Steve is watching him. He stumbles for an excuse.

JOHN

Um-- anymore. I don't drink anymore.

SAVANNAH

I met you yesterday.

JOHN

Yeah, well things change. But don't let me stop you -- you can get a beer if you want one.

SAVANNAH

Nah. I don't drink anymore either.

JOHN

Oh yeah? Since when?

She looks him in the eye. Grins.

SAVANNAH

Since that Zima back in 8th grade.

He smiles back at her.

JOHN

Musta been one hell of a Zima.

SAVANNAH

Those things can knock you over, lemme tell ya.

The waitress drops their teas off at the table. John orders a bucket of shrimp as an appetizer and she's off again.

SAVANNAH

So. Did your Dad get mad at you for coming home late last night?

JOHN

Nah. My Dad... my Dad's not the kinda guy who really gets mad.

SAVANNAH

Oh yeah? What kinda guy is he then?

JOHN

A quiet kinda one.

Savannah studies him, feeling him out.

SAVANNAH
Could be worse, I guess.

JOHN
I guess.

The waitress drops the shrimp off. John waits for Savannah to take one first, but she doesn't. She just looks at him.

John SIGHS, realizing he's going to have to give her more.

JOHN
It's no big deal. Him and I... we just don't talk very much.

SAVANNAH
Why not?

John shrugs. He breaks the standoff, starts to peel a shrimp.

JOHN
I have my theories.

Savannah snatches the shrimp out of his fingers and eats it herself. She grins at him.

SAVANNAH
Wow. Those are good. I want to meet him.

JOHN
Meet who? My father?

Savannah nods. John hesitates.

JOHN
Okay.

SAVANNAH
Tonight. I want to meet him tonight.

John hesitates again.

JOHN
That's not quite what I had planned.

SAVANNAH
(playfully)
And what did you have planned, exactly, John?

JOHN
Nothing, no that's not -- I didn't have any specific plans -- but they definitely did not involve my Dad.

Savannah peels John a shrimp now. Her eyes twinkle.

SAVANNAH

Well... guess we've got a change of plans then, huh?

BACK AT JOHN'S HOUSE -- LATER

John walks in the front door. Savannah follows. Again, all the lights are off except the one in his Dad's office.

JOHN

You're not gonna get much out of him. Don't take it personally.

Savannah nods. John lightly knocks on the office door.

JOHN

Dad? Got someone I want you to meet.

Mr. Tyree is focused on his coins, as usual, but he stands awkwardly when they enter.

JOHN

This is Savannah.

She smiles at him, offers out her hand. He shakes it.

SAVANNAH

It's really nice to meet you.

Mr. Tyree doesn't respond. Silence fills the room. Mr. Tyree glances back at his desk, which seems to offer him some comfort. Savannah follows his gaze. So does John.

JOHN

Um -- my Dad collects coins. It's his big hobby.

SAVANNAH

Really? How interesting.

Mr. Tyree shrugs, inching closer to his desk as Savannah looks around the room. Coins really are everywhere.

SAVANNAH

You have so many! How'd you get started in all of this?

Mr. Tyree stands perfectly still, scratches his bald head.

MR. TYREE

Through John, actually.

He glances over at John. John just looks away.

MR. TYREE

But they're not really his thing anymore.

JOHN

Okay. Anyhow, we should probably--

SAVANNAH

Tell me about this one.

She picks up a very worn and faded PENNY off his desk.

MR. TYREE

This one? This one's a mule. Most all of these are mules, actually.

Savannah glances at John, mouths "What's a mule?" John rolls his eyes, shakes his head -- trust me, you don't wanna know.

Mr. Tyree doesn't notice, however, too focused on the coin in Savannah's hand. He politely but firmly takes it away from her. Obviously he doesn't like other people touching them.

As he returns the coin to it's proper spot, John's face burns with embarrassment. This is his father, antisocial to a fault.

But then Mr. Tyree looks over his shoulder at Savannah, makes eye contact with her for the first time.

MR. TYREE

Wanna see some more?

Savannah smiles at him. And so John-- half annoyed, half amazed -- watches his father show off his collection.

BACK AT SAVANNAH'S BEACH HOUSE -- LATE THAT NIGHT

John pulls his father's car into Savannah's driveway. They sit in his car, neither in a rush for the night to end.

SAVANNAH

I like your Dad. I like people that have a passion for life.

JOHN

He has a passion for coins. Not the same.

SAVANNAH

Passion's passion, John. He raised you all by himself?

JOHN

Ever since I can remember. I was two when my Mom left.

SAVANNAH

Has he always been that... solitary?

JOHN

Ever since I can remember.

SAVANNAH

So what's your theory? On how come you guys don't talk?

John gets quiet, looks away.

JOHN

Why?

SAVANNAH

Because I have a theory too and I want to see if it's the same.

John shrugs, stares out the window into the ocean.

JOHN

I just... I don't think we like each other, to tell you the truth.

SAVANNAH

John. Come on. You're family.

JOHN

Exactly. We're stuck with one another -- it's not like either of us had much choice in the matter.

Savannah still doesn't say anything. She doesn't push him to talk, doesn't ask too many questions, just waits him out.

JOHN

I... well, I was a headache when I was younger. I was a lot of trouble, I got kicked out of school a few times. I think at some point he just musta figured-- enough was enough. He'd rather deal with his coins than with me. His coins don't argue, and they don't talk back.

John stops, suddenly self-conscious of how much he's talking.

JOHN

Why, what's your theory?

Savannah smiles back at him.

SAVANNAH

My theory's a little different.

She leans in, kisses him on the cheek.

SAVANNAH

Don't be too hard on him, okay? He loves you. I can tell, even if you can't.

Then she gets out, leans back into the window. The wind blows through her hair, and he doesn't take his eyes off her.

JOHN

When can I see you again?

SAVANNAH

When do you want to see me again?

JOHN

As soon as possible.

She looks back at him. Her eyes do that twinkling thing.

SAVANNAH

As soon as possible then.

Then she turns and heads up to the house. John watches her go, still unable to take his eyes off her.

BACK AT JOHN'S HOUSE -- LATER

John walks in the door. His father's office light is still shining through the crack beneath the door.

John walks past it, into his own bedroom.

IN THE OCEAN -- THE NEXT DAY

John out on his board, having positioned himself directly in front of Savannah's place. The waves are good, but he keeps missing them, too busy stealing glances into the house.

There are a lot of people milling around inside. But there's no sign of Savannah. John grimaces, misses another wave.

A FEW HOURS LATER --

It's getting dark now. Most of the surfers are heading home.

John, stays out, however, paddling in the water, eyeing the beach house. It's quieter now -- the crowd's headed somewhere else, apparently -- and there's still no sign of Savannah.

IN THE BEACH HOUSE -- NIGHT NOW

Even quieter. Only a few people snooze on the couches.

Then, finally, the front door opens and Savannah enters, tired and sweaty. She looks around, surprised at how quiet it is.

ON THE DECK --

Savannah walks out, looks at the night sky. The deck and beach are empty, too -- only one figure still remains in the water. Savannah smiles when she realizes who it is.

IN THE OCEAN --

It's too dark for John to see the waves until they're almost on top of him, and even then it's hard to measure their size. He misses a good wave, curses at himself under his breath.

Then he sees the figure waiting for him by the water. When he realizes who it is, he smiles too, and quickly paddles in.

SAVANNAH

Little late to be out, isn't it?

JOHN

Nah, I have the whole ocean to myself now. It's quiet out there, it's peaceful, it's...

SAVANNAH

...dark?

JOHN

And it's dark. Yes. Very dark. Where have you been all day?

She shrugs. Grins at him.

SAVANNAH

None of your business.

JOHN

You're on spring break. You're supposed to be lounging around on the beach, wasting the day away. You're not supposed to be out... doing things.

SAVANNAH

You have your spring break, I'll have mine.

John steps out of the water.

JOHN

What if I want yours, too?

She pauses. Then she smiles again, and as she reaches out to take his hand once again --

CLOSE ON THEIR HANDS --

--as John helps Savannah out of his car now. It's an hour later, they've changed clothes, and they're in front of:

A HALF BUILT HOUSE -- NIGHT NOW

No one is around, but construction materials are everywhere, and the house is clearly a work in progress.

SAVANNAH

The family that lives here, their home was severely damaged by Hurricane Dennis. So we ripped it down and we're building them another one from scratch. We're a little behind schedule though.

JOHN

Who's we?

SAVANNAH

Habitat for Humanity. I've been volunteering since I was little.

JOHN

Wait a minute, let me get this straight. You've been secretly sneaking off every day... to do manual labor. On a house for the needy. On your spring break.

(off her shrug)

Okay, you're kinda making me nervous here.

SAVANNAH

Why?

JOHN

I'm a little worried that you may be too good of a person for me.

SAVANNAH

I'm not that good of a person.

JOHN

You do charity work for fun.

SAVANNAH

It's not that fun.

(beat, then:)

Okay. It's pretty fun.

JOHN

You don't drink...

SAVANNAH

Nope.

JOHN

You don't smoke...

SAVANNAH

No way.

JOHN

You probably don't sleep around.

She moves close, almost -- but not quite -- seductively, and she smiles up at him.

SAVANNAH

Absolutely not.

John eyes her. Registers how close she is to him.

JOHN

You gotta have a fault in there somewhere.

SAVANNAH

Sure. I have lots of them.

JOHN

Well just name one. Please. Cause I'm getting a little intimidated.

Savannah narrows her eyes at him. Thinks.

SAVANNAH

I curse like a sailor.

JOHN

No you don't. You haven't said a single bad word the entire time I've known you.

SAVANNAH

Well I think them. There's a never-ending internal stream of cuss words going on up here.

JOHN

Oh yeah? What are you thinking right now?

SAVANNAH

I can't say. But it's filthy, I swear.

Savannah grins, looks him in the eye. They are very close now.

SAVANNAH
I have faults, John. I have plenty
of them. You'll see.

John steps even closer. Thunder RUMBLES in the distance.

JOHN
Hope so.

Savannah does not take her eyes off of him. Their faces are
just inches apart. They are having a moment.

Then... she grabs his hand again.

SAVANNAH
C'mon.

INSIDE THE HOUSE --

The concrete slab is set and the wooden framework is mostly
complete, but there's not even a roof yet. Nevertheless,
Savannah gives John the grand tour under the open night sky.

SAVANNAH
These rooms are gonna be the boys
wing back here... and then -- oh,
come on, I want to show you this.

John follows her into another room of the house.

SAVANNAH
The Mom is a great cook, so this is
gonna be a huge kitchen, and there's
gonna be one of those marble islands
right here, so -- look --

She points at a square in the wooden frame. Through it is a
partially obscured view of the beach.

SAVANNAH
...so she can see the ocean while
she cooks.

Right then, rain drops begin to fall on the nonexistent
marble island, light at first but getting heavier quickly.

SAVANNAH
And there's gonna be a roof, too, so
she won't get wet while she cooks.

It's one of those Southern spring showers that comes on fast
and strong, so they duck under a nearby overhang and wait for
it to pass. John builds a couple of makeshift seats with
some crates. Savannah studies him as he works.

SAVANNAH

Where'd you get your scar?

There's a decent sized scar on one of his eyebrows. He reflexively brushes it with his hand.

JOHN

Knife fight. Five years ago. Big guy, drunk as a skunk. Dirtier than one, too. He was going for my eye.

SAVANNAH

Oh my god. That's terrible.

JOHN

Why? He missed.

John helps her up on one of the crates.

SAVANNAH

Can I touch it?

John nods. She slowly runs her finger over his eyebrow.

SAVANNAH

The way people act around you -- the way they treated you at that restaurant. It's like they're scared of you.

JOHN

They're not scared of me. They're scared of who I used to be, maybe.

SAVANNAH

And who was that?

JOHN

Somebody different.

The rain begins to come down even harder.

SAVANNAH

When did you change? When you went into the army?

JOHN

Partly.

She moves closer to him. Looks him in the eye.

SAVANNAH

And the other part?

John looks away. Shrugs.

JOHN

Still working on the other part.

Savannah watches him. Finally she smiles.

SAVANNAH

So you used to be tough. And maybe you still are. But you don't scare me one bit, John.

He smiles back, leans in towards her.

JOHN

No? Well you scare me.

Then he kisses her. It starts small, but it builds into something much bigger. It becomes so intense that it's a struggle to catch their breath.

JOHN

Jesus.

Savannah straddles John.

SAVANNAH

You shouldn't... take the Lord's... name in...

(as he kisses her harder)

Oh Jesus.

The rain around them gets heavier and heavier. So do they. John starts to take off her shirt. Savannah stops him.

SAVANNAH

John...

(off his hesitation)

I'm sorry. It's just that I...

I've never actually... quite, uh...

John suddenly realizes what she means.

JOHN

It's okay. You don't have to explain.

She looks up at him, looks into his eyes, looks at his scar.

SAVANNAH

I know I don't. I feel like I don't have to explain anything to you.

She kisses him, pulls him down beside her.

SAVANNAH

And that... that scares me.

They lay together, there on the crates.

SAVANNAH

Can you see it? What this house is going to be like when it's done?

JOHN

Yes. I can.

John looks out at the ocean through the square where the kitchen window will be.

SAVANNAH

We only have two weeks left, though.

JOHN

Don't worry. You'll finish.

THUNDER rolls in the distance.

SAVANNAH

I wasn't talking about the house.

Then, as they lay together while the rain pelt the wooden frame around them --

MATCH CUT:

ON THE HOUSE -- NEXT DAY --

The rain has stopped, the sun is out. Savannah arrives again, bright and early and ready to work.

A few other volunteers are already here. Savannah heads over to say hello -- and her mouth falls open.

There's John, up in the rafters, fitting a beam into it's frame. He grins at her, nods a silent hello.

OUT IN THE OCEAN -- ANOTHER DAY

John holds his surfboard for an unsteady Savannah, teaching her how to balance on it.

A wave comes and John loses his grip. Savannah falls into the water, disappears below it.

John looks around, can't find her. Then she suddenly pops up behind him, pushes him down under the surface.

UP ON THE BEACH --

Savannah's friend Susan watches warily on as Savannah and John splash in the water, laughing and kissing, completely unaware of the world around them.

BACK AT THE HOUSE -- ANOTHER DAY

The roof is being tar papered, the walls are being stuccoed.

Up front, Savannah and John work together to fit the kitchen ocean window into it's frame.

AT THE DINNER TABLE -- ANOTHER NIGHT

Three places have been set for once. Savannah, John, and Mr. Tyree eat their meatloaf in an easy silence.

IN THE KITCHEN -- LATER

As Mr. Tyree carefully measures out the exact right amount of detergent, then begins to load the dishes into the sink --

IN THE HALLWAY --

Savannah's heading to the bathroom when John pulls her into his bedroom. He gently pins her against the wall, kisses her on her shoulder, her neck, her lips.

Savannah starts to get into it. She glances out in the hall, sees Mr. Tyree standing over the sink, his back to them but still only feet away.

JOHN

Don't worry. He gets very focused.

Back in the bedroom, John can't keep his hands off her. She grins up at him.

SAVANNAH

Yeah, so do you.

She makes her escape by slipping out from under his arm, but John grabs her by the waist, pulls her onto the bed.

Savannah laughs, rolls right over him back onto solid ground. John makes a couple of playful swipes at her legs. She puts a hand on his forehead, mockingly holds him at arm's distance.

Then John breaks free and Savannah SHRIEKS, ducking by him again, jumping into --

HIS CLOSET --

-- where she slides the door shut and holds it closed, laughing harder now.

But then, when she realizes what's surrounding her, the smile wipes off her face. She stares at the clothes hanging in this closet. Clothes she's never seen John wear.

Here are indoor and outdoor fatigues. Here are a pair of urban camos. And here are two blue dress uniforms.

She's alone in this four foot box, surrounded by reminder of who he is, and where he's going.

AT THE HABITAT FOR HUMANITY HOUSE -- THE NEXT NIGHT

-- it's dark and empty, but almost finished now. The roof is done and the exterior is almost all painted. A lot has been accomplished in the past six days.

OVER AT SAVANNAH'S BEACH HOUSE --

John walks up the driveway to find the front door wide open. Inside, an End-Of-Spring-Break party is going strong.

The house is more crowded than ever. John walks in, looks around for Savannah. She's nowhere to be found.

OUTSIDE--

Plenty of people are around the bonfire, as well, including Randy and Susan and her boyfriend. Savannah's neighbor, Tim, is over on his deck next door, chatting with a couple KIDS. Nearby, his son Alan has his nose in his Game Boy, as usual.

John looks all around, but Savannah's not out here. Then he glances down the beach, sees a LONE FIGURE down on the pier.

NEAR THE BONFIRE --

-- through the flames, Randy ignores the girl YAMMERING next to him as he watches John head up the beach, alone.

AT THE END OF THE PIER --

Savannah sits on the edge, her back to John.

JOHN
You're missing the party.

She startles, tries to wipe her tears away before he sees.

SAVANNAH
It's managing just fine without me.

JOHN
(noticing the tears)
What's wrong?

She wipes her eyes again, tries to pretend she doesn't know what he's talking about. John's not buying it, though.

Savannah SIGHS, gives up the act. She looks straight at him.

SAVANNAH

I'm dying, John.

John reacts. But Savannah rolls her eyes.

SAVANNAH

Sheesh. I'm not dying, you sap. Do I look like I'm dying? Quit being so melodramatic.

John glares at her, not amused. Savannah shrugs.

SAVANNAH

I'm just sad cause it's almost over.

John turns. Knows she's not talking about Spring Break.

JOHN

Savannah. It's not almost over.

SAVANNAH

I leave tomorrow. I have to be in class on Monday, and you have to be on an airplane overseas--

JOHN

But I'll be back. Twelve months until my commitment is up and I'll be back for good.

SAVANNAH

A lot can happen between now and then, okay? Don't sit here and make me promises--

JOHN

I will sit here and make you promises. And I'll keep them, too.

(off her silence)

You think you're worried about promises? I'm the one who's gotta go over there -- wherever there is. I'm the one who's gotta go to sleep alone in that tent or those barracks or that hut, hoping that tomorrow might be the day you'll call or you'll write, hoping that tomorrow won't be the day you forget about me, that tomorrow won't be the day you meet some great new guy at the Friday night Sigma Nu mixer who'll make you realize waiting for me isn't worth it anymore.

SAVANNAH

John... you've obviously never been to a Friday night Sigma Nu mixer.

She smiles. He squeezes her hand.

JOHN

It's a helluva jump. But we take it together.

She looks at him... then she kisses him hard.

JOHN

I'll be back for your graduation. Then we figure out what's next.

SAVANNAH

Well... graduation may take me a little longer now. I decided to switch majors.

JOHN

Really? When?

SAVANNAH

I dunno. Sometime this week, though, spending all this time with your Dad. You're gonna laugh but -- I want to teach special education. I want to help people.

John does laugh.

JOHN

You don't say.

SAVANNAH

I don't know why it took me so long to realize it. I grew up next door to Alan. He's always been drawn to me for some reason, and I'm drawn to him too, and I'm just, I'm not drawn to marketing, you know? I don't care about marketing, and I don't think it makes any sense to get a degree in something I don't care about.

(off his grin)

What?

JOHN

Nothing. I just don't care about marketing either. In fact, I don't give a shit about marketing. So I think it's great.

(MORE)

JOHN (cont'd)

When I get back I'll move to Chapel Hill, I'll get a job somewhere, you'll get your Special Ed degree, and neither of us'll ever think about marketing again for the rest of our lives.

(re: a nearby Nike advertisement)

Hey, I like those shoes.

Savannah laughs. They stare out at the water together.

JOHN

How did hanging around my Dad make you come to a decision like that?

He says it with a smile -- not suspicious at all. But Savannah looks down, pulls away from John slightly. She hesitates, trying to pick the right words.

SAVANNAH

There...are signs, John. You've seen them yourself, even if you didn't realize you were seeing them.

JOHN

Wait -- what?

SAVANNAH

I just think there's an explanation for why he is the way he is, a medical reason that might account for his... deficiencies--

JOHN

Deficiencies? Hold up, what are you saying? You saying he's retarded or something?

SAVANNAH

No, of course not. I'm just saying he does show some classic signs of mild autism--

JOHN

Whoa whoa. Autism? You think he's like Alan?

SAVANNAH

Alan is severely autistic, but there are milder cases, too, functional cases that go undiagnosed all the time. There's something called Asperger's Syndrome, and I think your Dad--

JOHN

You don't know shit about my Dad,
okay? You've met him twice.

John stands up. Glares down at her.

JOHN

You let him show you his coins for
a half hour and all of a sudden
you're his doctor and his
psychiatrist? All of a sudden
you've got a couple PhD's and
you're an expert on my father?

SAVANNAH

No. No, I'm not saying--

She grabs his hand, but he rips it away.

JOHN

I've lived with him my whole life,
okay? I've put up with him my whole
life. I know he's not normal. You
think I need you to tell me he's not
normal?

She tries to grab his hand again, but John yanks it away
again, then turns and starts to walk away.

SAVANNAH

John, wait! John!

But John doesn't stop.

BY THE BONFIRE --

Randy sees John stalk back towards the house. Randy finishes
a beer and calls out to him, emboldened by alcohol.

RANDY

Trouble in paradise?

John doesn't answer. Randy glances over at the pier, sees
Savannah hunched over in the distance.

RANDY

What happened? Hold on -- did you
hurt her or something?

John still doesn't answer. Randy steps in front of him.

RANDY

If you laid a finger on her--

JOHN
 What? What're you gonna do?
 (off his silence)
 Just get out of my way, okay?

But Randy doesn't. People around them start to notice.

RANDY
 You think you're so tough. You're
 Mr. Tough Army Guy, aren't you?
 Well I don't give a shit who you
 are, you're not going anywhere
 until I know she's okay.

JOHN
 Get out of my way. I'm not gonna
 ask you again.

John tries to walk through him, but Randy shoves him back.

John does his best to stay calm. He takes a deep breath --
 then walks around Randy -- but Randy shoves him back again.

So John squares off. Takes a step directly at him --

-- and Randy makes the mistake of trying to throw a punch.

John catches his fist, yanks it behind Randy's back, and gives
 him a quick, debilitating shot to the solar plexis.

Susan's boyfriend (Yellow Shirt) is already charging at John,
 but one quick right jab sends him straight into the sand too.

Then there's a voice from behind -- HEY! -- and then a hand
 on John's shoulder -- and John reflexively swings his elbow
 up -- causing a nose to audibly CRUNCH.

John turns to find Tim, already sunk to his knees, his nose
 already a bloody mess. It's all over in a flash.

Savannah hurries up from the pier, takes in all three guys,
 crumpled over and in pain. She looks up at John, aghast.

SAVANNAH
 What'd you do?

John looks back at her. Regret already flashes on his face.
 But there's nothing he can say. So --

ON A ROAD -- FIVE MINUTES LATER

John tromps down the side of the road. Headlights from the
 occasional car illuminate him as they pass by.

But this time, none stop for him. John walks home, alone.

BACK AT JOHN'S HOUSE -- THAT NIGHT

John shuts the front door behind him. As always, his father's office light is the only one on in the house.

The door to his office is cracked. John pushes it open.

Mr. Tyree is in the same spot, his back to the door, going over his coin collection as usual. He either doesn't hear John behind him, or just pretends not to.

John stands in the door and silently watches his father work.

OUTSIDE SAVANNAH'S BEACH HOUSE -- THE NEXT DAY

John paces back and forth in the driveway, unsure of whether he should go knock on the front door or not. He hesitates...

...and then just as he decides it's probably best for him to leave, the front door opens and Susan walks out, towing a suitcase. She stops when she sees John.

SUSAN

She's not here. And you shouldn't be, either. If they see you, there's just gonna be more trouble.

JOHN

Randy and your boyfriend... are they okay?

SUSAN

They'll be fine.

John pauses. Decides what else there is to say.

JOHN

Will you just... will you let her know I stopped by?

SUSAN

(re: her suitcase)
I'm heading home right now.

John nods. Gets the picture.

JOHN

Well... tell the others I'm sorry.

He turns, starts to walk down the driveway. Susan loads her bag in her car, then calls after him.

SUSAN

I've known her for a long time, John. I've never seen her like this.

JOHN

She's angry. I get that. But--

SUSAN

That's not what I meant. I've seen her angry plenty of times, trust me.

(off his confusion)

I meant that before you went all Heart Of Darkness yesterday, I'd never seen her this happy.

She gets in her car, turns it on, then rolls down the window.

SUSAN

You've come this far. Don't screw it up now.

With that, she puts the car in gear and drives away. As John watches her go, he notices that --

NEXT DOOR --

--Tim is taking the garbage out. He has a serious shiner and his nose has been set.

JOHN

Jesus.

TIM

(re: his nose)

When this thing comes off I'm gonna look so tough, you have no idea.

JOHN

Tim... I swear, I didn't realize it was you back there--

TIM

It's my fault. I don't know what I was thinking, sneaking up behind an angry Green Beret like that.

He looks over at Savannah's house, quickly susses out what John's doing here. He nods towards the door.

TIM

I'm not sure if she's left yet. She normally says goodbye before she goes back, but...

JOHN

If you see her, will you give her a message for me?

TIM

Sure. Wanna write it down?

He pulls a pen out of his pocket and a tossed away phone bill from the top of the garbage, hands them to John.

Tim heads over to dump the trash out, gives John some privacy. John writes something down. It doesn't take long. Then he folds the paper and as he holds it out to Tim --

BACK AT JOHN'S HOUSE --

Mr. Tyree pulls two trays of lasagna out of the oven. John walks in, nods hello to his Dad.

MR. TYREE

I didn't know if anybody else might be coming, so I made double.

John glances at the two trays, surprised at the divergence from the norm.

JOHN

Okay. I'll set the table.

MR. TYREE

Already did.

John walks into the dining room. It's been set for three.

John pauses. Then removes one of the settings. Mr. Tyree watches him from the kitchen, but doesn't say anything.

IN THE DINING ROOM -- LATER

One of the lasagna trays is empty, the other sits untouched. John's just pushing his food around, watching his Dad.

JOHN

Guess you're gonna have some leftovers for once.

Mr. Tyree shrugs. Considers the untouched lasagna.

MR. TYREE

I'll freeze that. Have it next Sunday.

He nods to himself, satisfied with his plan. Then goes back to his dinner. John keeps watching him.

JOHN

It's been good, Dad. Being home again.

Mr. Tyree looks up. Has no idea what to say in response. He glances away, out the window.

MR. TYREE

Hey, John?

John follows his gaze to see --

Savannah, getting out of her car in their driveway. John glances at his Dad, who just shoots him a look back.

The look says: well what are you waiting for?

OUTSIDE --

John hurries out to greet Savannah.

SAVANNAH

Got your note.

She holds it up. We still can't see what it says.

SAVANNAH

Short and to the point. I like that.

JOHN

Listen... I'm really sorry--

SAVANNAH

I'm the one who needs to apologize. I had no business -- no, John, I mean it. I'm not a doctor, I'm not even close, and I have no business pretending like I am.

John glances at the house. Mr. Tyree quickly turns back to his dinner. John SIGHS.

JOHN

I've been watching him today...

SAVANNAH

John. Really. I'm not a doctor. I have no idea what I'm talking about.

She turns his head away from his Dad, back towards her.

SAVANNAH

I'm headed back to school, but I had to make sure. You still taking that jump with me?

John grins, relieved, and kisses her.

JOHN

Already did.

Savannah pulls a sealed envelope out of her purse.

SAVANNAH

You wrote your first letter to me.
So I wrote my first one to you.

John takes it, starts to open it. Savannah stops him.

SAVANNAH

Don't read it till I'm gone, okay?

John nods. Tucks the note carefully in his back pocket. Then he takes Savannah by the hand and pulls her towards the house.

JOHN

Come have some lasagna. My Dad
made extra for you.

SAVANNAH

I can't stay long.

John looks back at her. Smiles sadly.

JOHN

I know.

MONTAGE OF IMAGES:

INSIDE THE HOUSE -- Mr. Tyree, John, and Savannah sit down to eat, together.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

Dear John...

AT HER CAR -- John and Savannah make out like teenagers.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

*Two weeks together. That's all it
took.*

FROM INSIDE THE HOUSE -- Mr. Tyree is watching John -- who's watching Savannah -- who's driving away.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

Two weeks for me to fall for you.

IN SAVANNAH'S CAR -- Tears fall down her face as she watches John disappear in the rearview mirror.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

*Now we have one year apart. But
that's all it'll take.*

AT THE BUS STATION -- John's in uniform (green beret and all). He shakes his father's hand, then boards the bus.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

*And what's one year apart, after
two weeks like that together?*

INSIDE THE BUS -- John watches Mr. Tyree make his way back to his car, head down, avoiding everybody possible.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

*You told me you wanted to make me
promises. Promises you'd keep.*

John pulls out Savannah's letter. Carefully opens it, taking great care not to crease the pages (it's obvious he's read it plenty of times already).

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

*But I only want one promise from you,
during this year we spend apart.*

ON A PLANE NOW -- John's in the middle seat between two other uniformed soldiers.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

Tell me everything.

It's dark, and everybody in the cabin except John is sleeping.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

*Write it all down, John. Scribble
it in a notebook. Type it out.
Email it to me. I don't care. But
I want to know everything.*

John is unable to sleep. He flips on the overhead light (the only one on in the whole cabin). He carefully pulls out Savannah's letter, unfolds it, reads it again.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

*That way, we'll be with each other
all the time -- even if we're not
with each other at all. And somehow
we'll get through this. Together.*

He turns to the very last page. The very last sentence is:

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

So we'll talk soon then?

John runs his finger over it.

JOHN

We'll talk soon then.

ON THE PLANE -- as it touches down in the afternoon sun.

ON THE TARMAC -- John exits the plane, shields his eyes from the glare. Walks down the staircase onto the GERMAN SOIL beneath a massive Army Base in Stuttgart, Germany.

IN A BARRACKS -- John walks in to find the rest of his 12 MAN TEAM here as well, all unpacking from their leave.

John greets everybody warmly -- they're clearly a close-knit unit. Staff Sargeant Tony Butler (nicknamed Noodles) WHOOPS when he sees John. John grins back at him.

JOHN

Noodles! How was Atlantic City?

NOODLES

Ugh. You don't wanna know.

JOHN

C'mon. How's Shante doing?

NOODLES

Ugh. I don't wanna know.

JOHN

You're kidding. You two are already over?

NOODLES

Two grand on calling cards over the past six months, down the drain. Very little return on investment there, my accountant will not be pleased.

(off John's grin)

Hey, but the good news is-- I'm back. I'm single again! Come on, you and me, prowling the streets of Germany together? Sprechen Sie Deutsch!

John doesn't answer... and Noodles can immediately read it all over his face.

NOODLES

Ah shit. You met a girl?

(off John's face)

Son of a -- you're kidding me.

John... the girl? You met the girl?

In two weeks?

John shrugs -- what can he say? Noodles smirks.

NOODLES

Yeah yeah, whatever. I've been there before -- we'll see what you're saying six months from now.

JOHN

I'm not like you, Noodles. I don't fall in love with every girl who gives me a blow job and a smile.

NOODLES

C'mon. We both know they don't need to smile.

(off John's look)

Look, I'm happy for you, I am. I'm just saying we'll see how happy you are six months from now, that's all.

John shrugs again -- he knows what he knows. Then he turns back to his bag, but just as he starts to unload his gear --

VOICE FROM BEHIND

Don't bother unpacking, guys.

John turns to find that CAPTAIN JASON STONE has entered the barracks. No one salutes him -- no need, they're not that kind of unit -- but everyone does GROAN.

Stone just shrugs. And so then the MONTAGE begins again --

AT THE ASSCRACK OF DAWN -- as the 12 Green Berets load their gear onto a small turboprop plane.

JOHN'S VOICE

Dear Savannah. I promise.

UP IN THE AIR -- While the rest of his team sleeps, John concentrates on writing this letter to Savannah.

JOHN'S VOICE

*I promise I'll write all the time.
I promise I'll tell you everything.
But be patient with me, because it
may take a while for these letters
to get back to you.*

IN A BLACKHAWK HELICOPTER NOW -- the men look out over the barren African landscape.

JOHN'S VOICE

*We've already been dispatched out
on a field assignment.*

THE HELICOPTER TOUCHES DOWN -- in an empty dirt field. A shirtless AFRICAN BOY watches them file off the copter.

JOHN'S VOICE

*The problem is, the local postal
service here does not appear to be
all that reliable.*

JOHN AND THE MEN -- walk through an African "neighborhood" (in the loosest sense of the word). John stares at a mail box in front of a "house", which is toppled over in the dirt.

INSIDE THE DESERTED HOUSE -- John walks in. The light switch doesn't even work. There's no electricity at all.

JOHN'S VOICE

Internet connections do not appear all that reliable, either, so I'll have to send everything from here out by airmail.

ON ANOTHER COPTER -- dropping off FOOD and SUPPLIES for the troops. John pulls the letter out of his pocket, hands it to the AIRMAN, shouts instructions over the WHIR OF THE CHOPPER.

JOHN'S VOICE

And unfortunately, it's against regulations for me to tell you exactly where 'here' is.

JOHN'S LETTER -- is thrown into a batch of other letters, wheeled into a MILITARY POST OFFICE.

JOHN'S VOICE

Not that I care about regulations. But the Lieutenant in Germany who's probably reading this does.

IN A WINDOWLESS ROOM -- an AMERICAN LIEUTENANT armed with nothing but a letter opener skims through John's letter.

JOHN'S VOICE

Guten Tag, Lieutenant.

The Lieutenant rolls his eyes.

IN THE BELLY OF ANOTHER CARGO PLANE -- John's letter sits atop a huge pile of other mail.

JOHN'S VOICE

So all I can tell you is that the place we've been sent makes me miss America very much.

IN A US POST OFFICE -- John's letter is sorted and stacked.

JOHN'S VOICE

The lack of anything resembling a tree makes me miss North Carolina.

A MAILMAN -- takes a sip of his morning coffee, unlocks his truck. It's packed with mail, already preloaded. He SIGHS, turns on the engine, starts another day.

JOHN'S VOICE
The lack of anything resembling an
ocean makes me miss Wilmington.

ON A WALL OF COLLEGE POSTBOXES -- Savannah casually opens up box number 232, pulls out a bill, a catalog, a magazine...

JOHN'S VOICE
And everything around me makes me
miss you.

...then finally, John's letter. Savannah's face lights up. She drops the rest of the mail, rips it open. And the MONTAGE ENDS.

ON THE CAMPUS GREEN -- DAY

Savannah sits on a bench outside a lecture hall, reading John's letter until she's interrupted by:

RANDY
 Wow. You're in this class? I'm in
 this class.

She looks up at him evenly.

SAVANNAH
 I can't remember ever seeing you.

He gives her an easy grin.

RANDY
 That's because I can't remember
 ever actually coming.

IN HISTORY CLASS -- LATER

Savannah sits next to Randy, listening to the PROFESSOR lecturing about The Battle of the Bulge.

The accompanying slides of war are brutal and jarring. Savannah stares at them, her mind racing.

ON A SLIDE -- of a WWII soldier staring past the camera, bundled up in full uniform, heavy snow falling around him.

BUT BACK IN AFRICA --

-- John is a study in contrasts. There's no snow here, nothing close, and John's not even wearing a uniform.

But he's just as uncomfortable. John swats at an ENORMOUS FLY, sweating uncontrollably, as he stands with his team in front of a hundred AFRICAN REBELS.

But Stone overlooks John as he sends the rest of the team out on their individual assignments. So John steps up.

JOHN
Hey Captain?

CAPTAIN STONE
Ammo duty, Tyree... and son? No
ranks in the field, okay?

John nods, then heads off into the sweltering heat.

LATER -- TIME PASSES (OVER SCORE) AS --

-- the soldiers separate the Rebels into groups. One group learns how to load a gun. One group learns how to shoot. One group learns the art of camouflage.

LATER --

-- John sits on a porch next to Sargeant Don Rooney (100% Mississippi hick, nicknamed ROOSTER), enjoying some idle time.

John writes a letter to Savannah while Rooster watches some native boys play soccer. Two nearby AFRICANS watch Rooster.

Rooster spits out a giant HUNK OF CHEW. The other men copy him exactly. They are quick studies.

ON THE BLACKHAWK HELICOPTER -- THE NEXT WEEK

As John hands the pilot two of his letters to Savannah.

JOHN
Got any mail from the States?

HELICOPTER PILOT
Sorry. Probably'll be in the air
drop.

The Pilot gets back in the chopper, prepares it for takeoff.

AT THE SUPPLY DROP -- DAYS LATER

Two dirt clouds settle. Noodles and John unpack the booty. Noodles finds the correspondence folder first...

NOODLES
Let's see, nothing for me, nothing
for me, what a surprise...
(then he gets to the end)
Sorry, man. Nothing for you, either.

John reacts. His disappointment is obvious.

ANOTHER DROP -- A WEEK LATER

Noodles sorts through the letters again, then looks up at John apologetically. John's confused.

JOHN

But it's been two weeks.

Noodles shrugs. It's not much consolation.

ANOTHER DROP -- A WEEK LATER

Noodles sorts through the letters once again. John looks on anxiously. Noodles glances up from the folder, downbeat...

...but then he grins and holds up SEVEN LETTERS, all from Savannah. John can't help it -- he grabs Noodles, hugs him.

IN NORTH CAROLINA --

Savannah lays in bed, writing John one of those letters.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

Dear John. I'm back at my parent's ranch for the weekend, and they have some other houseguests you may know.

VOICE FROM DOWNSTAIRS

Savannah! They're here!

Savannah carefully puts the letter aside, hurries DOWNSTAIRS--

--to find Tim and Alan there with her MOTHER and FATHER. Alan sprints over to Savannah, and she lifts him into a hug.

OUTSIDE -- LATER

Savannah and Alan ride horses, side by side.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

I took Alan out riding with me today. It was his first time on a horse.

They're moving at a slow trot, but Alan WHISPERS SOMETHING to his horse, and the horse starts to canter. Savannah's a little worried at first, but Alan's in complete control.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

You've heard of horse sense -- how horses are somehow able to sense danger, to sense out evil? Well I think autistic kids have that, too.

As they start to gallop, Savannah watches the horse WHINNY once to Alan. It makes Alan smile.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

Alan didn't really say very much, and his horse didn't either. But they understood each other perfectly.

BACK AT SAVANNAH'S PARENTS HOUSE --

Tim watches in amazement as Alan eats ice cream, LAUGHS at something. Tim leans over to Savannah, nods at his son.

TIM

I've never seen him like this. I've never seen him this relaxed.

Savannah watches Alan. A smile grows on her face.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

So I have this idea. This dream. I want to open up a camp, a summer camp, for autistic kids. A place where they can learn how to take care of horses. And the horses can learn how to take care of them.

She watches Alan, laughs to herself. Her eyes become moist.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

Whaddaya think? Pipe dream, huh?

IN AFRICA -- NIGHTTIME

John rests against a fence, Savannah's seven letters spread around him. He finishes the letter we just heard.

Nearby, two of the other soldiers, BERRY and STARKS, listen to American music with some of the Africans. *Lady Marmalade* is playing, and the Africans do not seem too impressed.

John watches them for a second, then pulls out his pen.

JOHN'S VOICE

Dear Savannah. I got seven of your letters all at once this morning. So it's been a very good day.

BACK IN NORTH CAROLINA --

Savannah reads this letter under a poplar tree on campus.

JOHN'S VOICE

But we both might want to number our letters from here on out, just in case this happens again.

A FRIEND sits next to her. Savannah doesn't even look up.

JOHN'S VOICE
And no. It's not a pipe dream.
It's a perfect dream.

QUICK MONTAGE -- AS MONTHS PASS --

Of John and Savannah, reading, writing, mailing.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE
Letter number ten. Dear John...
Letter number fifteen... Letter
number twenty-one...

John takes great care to save each letter, keeping them in a careful stack that is already a few inches high...

JOHN'S VOICE (OVERLAP)
Letter number thirty-three... Dear
Savannah. The good news is we've
been sent somewhere new -- although I
can't tell you where that is, either.
Weider Guten Tag, Lieutenant!

ON A DESERTED ROAD --

John and his team trek through a depressing city that looks vaguely Eastern European.

JOHN'S VOICE
The bad news is, this new place
actually makes me miss the old place.

ON THE MOON -- as John stares up at it.

JOHN'S VOICE
But it's a full moon here tonight,
which makes me think of you.

He sticks his finger out, covering the moon with his thumb--

JOHN'S VOICE
Because I know that no matter what
I'm doing, no matter where I am,
this moon will always be the same
size as yours, half a world away.

WHILE BACK IN WILMINGTON --

Savannah is doing the exact same thing with her moon.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE
Dear John. Most nights I fall asleep
worrying about you. Wondering where
you might be out there. But not
tonight.

She's on the pier again, yards away from where they first met.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE
Tonight you're here with me.

AT MR. TYREE'S HOUSE --

Mr. Tyree is in his office with his coins, as usual, when the doorbell RINGS. He looks up, surprised.

HE OPENS THE FRONT DOOR --

-- to reveal a smiling Savannah, carrying a homemade pie.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE
I visited your Dad yesterday.
Summer's almost over, and I wanted
to see him before I went back to
school again. I hope that's okay.

AT THE DINING ROOM TABLE --

Mr. Tyree sets two places.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE
He made me dinner -- it was Sunday,
so we had lasagna -- and I got him
talking about his coins, so we had
plenty of conversation.

IN HIS OFFICE --

Mr. Tyree takes Savannah on another tour of his collection.

MR. TYREE
This one's kind of a cull, so you
have to look really close to see the
double indentation, but it's there.

SAVANNAH
A cull?

MR. TYREE
Yeah, it's what the ones in really
bad shape are called. Coins are
normally graded on a scale from 0
to 70, but culls are below zero,
the bottom of the barrel. They're
basically worthless to collectors.

SAVANNAH
But not to you?

MR. TYREE
No. Not to me.

Savannah watches Mr. Tyree sort through his coins.

SAVANNAH

Do you have a favorite? Out of all of these, is there one that's your absolute favorite?

MR. TYREE

(without much hesitation)

The '78 Jefferson mule. Definitely.

He opens his desk door, carefully removes the glass encased nickel (though it looks more like a penny), shows it off.

SAVANNAH

Why this one? Is it worth the most?

MR. TYREE

It's worth a lot. Not the most.

SAVANNAH

Must be a good story behind it, huh?

Mr. Tyree shrugs, his face drawn.

MR. TYREE

Not really my story to tell.

SAVANNAH

Well... whose story is it then?

SOMEWHERE IN EASTERN EUROPE --

John sits outside, finishing up Savannah's letter.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

*So I'll ask you instead, John,
wherever you may be...*

The last words on the page are: *What's the story?*

John grimaces. Looks around at his surroundings. Then dutifully picks up a pen and paper and starts to write.

JOHN'S VOICE

*Dear Savannah. Only because I did
promise to tell you everything.*

AT AN ICE CREAM SHOP -- FLASHBACK

YOUNG JOHN buys a double scoop of mint chocolate chip. The MAN BEHIND THE COUNTER hands John his change.

JOHN'S VOICE

*When I was seven years old, I
bought an ice cream cone.*

DOWN THE STREET --

John passes a SURF SHOP and a vending machine selling bouncy balls for a quarter. John digs in his pocket for some change.

JOHN'S VOICE

On my way home, I noticed one of the pennies -- wasn't actually a penny.

He ignores the penny at first, goes for the quarter... then stops, takes a second look.

BACK AT HIS FATHER'S HOUSE --

Mr. Tyree holds the penny up to the light. He is perplexed.

AT A FLEA MARKET --

A COIN DEALER holds the penny under a magnifying glass now.

Through the glass (although John and his father can't see this) the Dealer's eye WIDENS. But when he looks up at them, his expression is normal -- bored even.

COIN DEALER

It's a mule.

(off their blank stares)

A mule. An error coin. Every now and then they make a mistake, a batch accidentally slips through. This one-- head's a penny, tail's a nickel. Thing's a mule. They're really more of a novelty than anything else.

The Dealer SIGHS, lazily opens up his cash register.

JOHN'S VOICE

Remember the horse sense you were talking about?

COIN DEALER

Tell you what. Since the kid found it, I'll buy it anyway. 20 bucks.

He winks at John, who's thrilled. But Mr. Tyree isn't.

MR. TYREE

No thank you.

He abruptly walks away. John's bummed-- he was already spending that twenty bucks in his head. The Dealer CALLS after them... but Mr. Tyree does not turn around.

JOHN'S VOICE

Well my Dad has it too.

AT ANOTHER COIN SHOP --

A SECOND DEALER's eye widens under his own magnifying glass.

SECOND DEALER

I'll be damned... you know what this is? You know how much this is worth?

Mr. Tyree and John shake their heads. The Second Dealer digs through a pile nearby (there are piles of everything stacked everywhere) finally finds what he's looking for.

It's a clipped magazine article called THE HOLY GRAIL OF MULES. John and his Dad flip through it, see sentences like:

*...one of the rarest US minted mules in existence...
...has fetched up to four thousand dollars at auction...*

And right next to the article is a picture of their exact same coin. Now it's Johns' turn for his EYES TO WIDEN.

SECOND DEALER

Listen, I'll give you the full four grand for that thing right now. But-- you want some advice? Dad to Dad?

Mr. Tyree glances up at him but doesn't say a word.

SECOND DEALER

Keep it. Just hold on to it. Pass it down to your son, have your son pass it down to his son, and forty, fifty, one hundred years from now... You'll have something worth much more than four grand, I promise you.

Mr. Tyree considers him. Then looks down at John deferentially, lets him know -- this one's up to you.

John pauses... and then he grins back at his Dad.

AT A COIN SHOW --

Rows and rows of dealers. John and Mr. Tyree scour them all.

JOHN'S VOICE

At first I loved it, chasing after these mules with my father. We finally had something to talk about, something we could do together.

ANOTHER COIN SHOW --

John has grown, 12 YEARS OLD now, and is much more interested in the baseball cards at the next display case.

Mr. Tyree's focus is unwavering, though. He points a dealer to one mule in particular, pulls out his wallet.

JOHN'S VOICE
But he became obsessed with them.
You know how he is.

ANOTHER COIN SHOW --

-- where John, FIFTEEN now, can barely hide his contempt.

JOHN'S VOICE
Then I became a teenager. And you
know how I am.

BACK AT HOME --

EIGHTEEN YEAR OLD JOHN opens an OLD GREEN REFRIGERATOR and drinks some milk out of the gallon.

JOHN
 I'm not driving all the way up to
 Wooster for another goddamn coin
 show, Dad. Jesus.

Mr. Tyree stands silently at the doorway, his coat already on.

JOHN
 You spend all our money on those
 stupid coins. How about you buy a
 fridge that works, for chrissakes.

John shuts the fridge, walks past him into the living room, and doesn't see the hurt that creases his father's face.

IN HIS OFFICE -- LATE AT NIGHT

Mr. Tyree sequesters himself away with his growing collection.

JOHN'S VOICE
Eventually, he stopped talking about
coins with me altogether.

The front door OPENS. Mr. Tyree turns hopefully...

JOHN'S VOICE
And when that happened, we found
there just wasn't all that much left
to talk about.

...but then he hears John walk into his bedroom and SHUT THE DOOR. Mr. Tyree looks down at their '78 Jefferson nickel mule.

JOHN'S VOICE
So that's the story. I miss you so
much it hurts.

ON CAMPUS -- BACK IN THE PRESENT

It is morning, and the campus is still sleepy. Savannah reads John's letter under her poplar tree, as usual, and when she finishes she looks up, affected by it.

There's a group of people gathered around a TV in the nearby cafeteria. No one speaks. Their body language seems off.

Something is wrong. Savannah gets up to see what's the matter.

IN EASTERN EUROPE --

Ten time zones to the east, John's late for dinner. He pushes open a door, walks into their makeshift mess hall...

...but no one's eating. They're all gathered around a small TV here, too. John heads over to take a peek. He's confused at first, not understanding what he's looking at.

JOHN

What is that? Is that the Empire State Building?

STARKS

No, Tyree. That's the World Trade Center.

The rest of the team stares at the TV, takes in these images that we cannot see.

No one speaks. No one says another word.

IN STUTTGART, GERMANY -- DAY

John and the rest of the team sit in a briefing room.

FALL 2001

Captain Stone walks in.

CAPTAIN STONE

Just got off the phone with C-Team.
We ship out on Thursday.

ROOSTER

About damn time! Let's go kick
some Afghani ass!

CAPTAIN STONE

We're not going to Afghanistan,
Don. We're going to Serbia.

NOODLES

Serbia? What the hell's in Serbia?

Stone shrugs. Stays perfectly calm.

CAPTAIN STONE
Our orders.

IN A SMALL AIRPLANE -- DAY

It's a bumpy ride, and the plane is too small for twelve people. Captain Stone stands up front to address his troops.

CAPTAIN STONE
Okay, listen up. As you guys know, the world's changed a whole heck of a lot in the past three weeks.

The plane hits a big air pocket. Stone grimaces through it.

CAPTAIN STONE
The Army has asked anyone who's up for separation within the next year to reenlist for another tour right now. At this point, reupping is still voluntary. I want to stress that. And this doesn't even apply to all of us-- personally, I'm not eligible to leave till next December.

He pauses, looks around at his troops.

CAPTAIN STONE
But I reupped this morning anyway. Now if any of you would like to follow suit, let me kn--

ROOSTER
I'm not goin nowhere, Captain.

OTHERS
Neither am I. / Me neither.

One by one, the soldiers all volunteer to reenlist.

In the back of the plane the last two to speak up, John and Noodles, trade a heavy look. Then Noodles shrugs.

NOODLES
What's two more years? I'm in, too.

ON JOHN'S FACE -- heavy and tortured...

THE TOP OF A BUNK BED -- NIGHT

All the other soldiers SNORE around him, but John just stares up into space, his face just as heavy and just as tortured...

IN A BATHROOM MIRROR -- MORNING

John brushes his teeth, staring at his reflection, his face still the same. There's a KNOCK on the door.

CAPTAIN STONE
I need to talk to you.

John follows him out into the hall.

JOHN
I need to talk to you, too. Listen--

CAPTAIN STONE
I'm putting you on the next plane back to Germany.

JOHN
What? Why?

CAPTAIN STONE
You've been granted a week of emergency leave. I tried to get you more, but it's just tough right now.

JOHN
Emergency leave? What happened?

Captain Stone pauses. Looks him in the eyes.

CAPTAIN STONE
It's your father, John.

ON AN AIRPLANE --

Flying over the Atlantic Ocean, not a cloud in the sky.

INSIDE THE AIRPLANE --

John stares out the window, down into the water.

AT AN AIRPORT IN NORTH CAROLINA --

John's plane touches down on the runway.

IN A STERILE YELLOW WAITING AREA --

Savannah sits in an uncomfortable chair, distractedly flipping through a magazine without actually reading it.

Then her cell phone RINGS -- she snatches it up, answers it immediately.

SAVANNAH
John? Have you landed?

BACK ON THE PLANE --

The main door opens and passengers begin to de-board. John, cell phone up to his ear, politely but firmly forces his way through the mass of people.

JOHN

How is he?

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

He's fine, I was just with him.

JOHN

He's fine? What do you mean by fine?

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

I mean he's recovering. The heart attack was followed by a minor stroke -- minor, John, minor, no permanent effects. It's good news, I promise. The doctor says he's recouping ahead of schedule -- they think they're actually gonna release him in a couple days.

John steps out of the corridor arm into the terminal. Relief washes over his face.

JOHN

So he's okay?

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

He's okay.

John finally smiles, hurries through the bustling terminal.

JOHN

Alright. I just have to get my bags and catch a cab and I'll be there. I'll see you in a half hour or so--

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

John. I'm here.

John freezes, looks around at all the strangers around him. He searches everywhere, but she's nowhere to be found.

JOHN

What do you mean you're here?

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

I mean I'm here at the airport. They won't let anybody go to the gates anymore after what happened, but I'm here. I'm by baggage claim.

John looks up. He's standing a few yards away from an escalator, and above it is a sign reading BAGGAGE CLAIM BELOW.

He's suddenly gripped with the realization: he's actually about to see her again. He swallows hard.

JOHN

Well I...I guess I'll see you in a minute then?

DOWN AT BAGGAGE CLAIM --

Savannah's in the same sterile yellow waiting area as before, but now we notice a luggage conveyor behind her, which has just switched on. She smiles widely, giddy at the idea.

SAVANNAH

I'll see you in a minute then.

She hangs up the phone, stares at the escalator in front of her. Lets it sink in: she's actually about to see him again. And then the smile immediately wipes off her face, too.

She turns and hurries into the bathroom.

IN A BATHROOM UPSTAIRS --

John splashes water on his face. Stares at his reflection. He's tired and it shows -- he's definitely looked better.

Nothing he can do about it now though. He nervously glances at the bathroom door, knows he has to walk through it eventually.

IN A BATHROOM DOWNSTAIRS --

Savannah touches up her makeup, covers up a blemish that nobody but her would ever notice.

Nothing else she can do about it now, either. She looks at her bathroom door, knows she has to walk back through it too.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR --

Savannah nervously walks out of the bathroom, looks up at the escalator. The stairs roll downwards, but nobody's on them. Savannah can't take her eyes off the empty escalator.

Then, finally -- a pair of feet appear -- and her heart jumps in her chest. The rest of John follows.

They make eye contact. Savannah's eyes fill with tears. She's thrilled and scared at the exact same time.

John's eyes fill with relief. She's even more beautiful than he remembered.

As soon as he steps off the escalator Savannah is there, hugging him hard, holding on tight, refusing to let go.

IN THE CAR -- TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Savannah drives. John's beside her. Neither of them speak.

Instead, Savannah habitually flips through the radio stations. One after another after another, indiscriminately jumping between DJ's and commercials and perfectly good songs.

Finally, after the tenth flip in as many seconds, John gently grabs her hand. Savannah knows he can sense her nervousness.

SAVANNAH

Sorry.

John smiles over at her, but doesn't speak. Which doesn't do much to calm Savannah's nerves. The silence lingers on way too long for her comfort, so finally she blurts out the first thing that pops in her head --

SAVANNAH

So. Feel good to be back?

John looks at her, still doesn't answer. Savannah grimaces, knows that was a stupid question under the circumstances.

SAVANNAH

I'm sorry. Wow, I don't... God.

(after a pause)

You know, every time I sat down to write you a letter I'd think -- what I wouldn't give to be able to say all those words to you in person. But now here you are and I can't think of a single good thing to say.

John squeezes her hand. Looks out the window.

JOHN

It's okay. I don't mind the silence.

She looks over at him, watches him stare out at nothing.

AT NEW HANOVER HOSPITAL -- A HALF HOUR LATER

John stares into his father's room with an equally blank look on his face.

Inside, Mr. Tyree is asleep in a hospital bed, surrounded my medical equipment, frailer than he's ever been.

Savannah sees how uncomfortable John is, takes him by the hand.

SAVANNAH

Let's wake him up. I know he wants to see you.

But John doesn't budge. He just stands there in the hallway, staring at his Dad, until he finally shakes his head.

JOHN

Nah. Might as well let him sleep a little more.

IN THE HOSPITAL PARKING LOT -- LATER

John's walking Savannah to her car.

SAVANNAH

I want to stay, though, I do. If it wasn't for this stupid midterm...

JOHN

Savannah. Please don't feel guilty. You've done too much already.

Savannah eyes him. Sees the bags under his eyes.

SAVANNAH

You okay?

JOHN

Yeah. It's just... it's just been one hell of a month.

Savannah kisses him. Opens her door.

SAVANNAH

I'll be back after my parent's party, okay?

John nods. She touches his scar, smiles at him.

SAVANNAH

I hate the circumstances. But I'm so glad you're home.

She gets in her car. John watches her drive away.

IN THE HOSPITAL ROOM -- A FEW DAYS LATER

John and a Nurse help a very frail Mr. Tyree into a wheelchair. John pushes him out into the hallway.

BACK AT HOME --

Mr. Tyree sits on the couch, watching John make Saturday meatloaf in the kitchen. His expression is tough to read.

IN THE DINING ROOM --

John and Mr. Tyree eat slices of meatloaf. Mr. Tyree pauses.

MR. TYREE
How much salt did you add?

JOHN
Three teaspoons. Like you told me.

MR. TYREE
I said two teaspoons.

Mr. Tyree takes another bite anyway. He does not, however, look up at his son.

IN MR. TYREE'S BEDROOM --

Mr. Tyree is in bed, under the covers. John's by the door.

JOHN
Anything else I can get you?

MR. TYREE
No. Goodnight, John.

John flips off the light.

JOHN
'Night, Dad.

THE NEXT DAY --

John's in the kitchen, making dinner again. Mr. Tyree hobbles in, looks over John's shoulder at his work.

MR. TYREE
John, it's pasta, then meat, then cheese, then pasta again.

JOHN
That's what I'm doing.

Mr. Tyree doesn't respond. Instead he steps up next to John, takes the meat himself, and starts spreading a new layer.

MR. TYREE
You follow with the ricotta.

John does as he's told.

MR. TYREE
Evenly now, spread it even. Good.
That's good.

Pull away from John and Mr. Tyree, father and son, standing side by side, finishing the lasagna together.

IN THE DINING ROOM -- LATER

They eat in silence.

MR. TYREE
You should go see her.

John looks up at him. Knows he's talking about Savannah.

JOHN
Nah. I'm here to take care of you.

MR. TYREE
I can take care of myself.

He doesn't glance up, continues to avoid eye contact.

MR. TYREE
You only have a few days left. Why are you wasting them with me?

JOHN
I'm not wasting them, Dad.

MR. TYREE
Yes you are.

Mr. Tyree cuts himself a second portion of lasagna. John just stares at him, unsure whether he should be touched or hurt.

ON A COLLEGE CAMPUS -- THE NEXT DAY

Savannah's walking to class with Randy when she sees --

John, leaning up against a nearby building. She nearly faints from shock, then recovers and runs over, kisses him hard.

SAVANNAH
What are you doing here?

JOHN
My Dad kinda sent me, actually.

SAVANNAH
You're kidding. How's he doing?

But John doesn't answer -- he's too busy looking past her, where Randy's doing a bad job of pretending not to watch them.

JOHN
What, you hang out with that guy now?

SAVANNAH

Ah, he's not so bad. We've become friends-- he's actually pretty funny.

Savannah gently grabs his head, moves his eyes back to her.

SAVANNAH

Are you really here? Can you really come with me this weekend? My parents want to meet you so badly.

JOHN

Of course I can.

She kisses him again, thrilled, then takes him by the hand.

SAVANNAH

C'mon. There's somewhere I want to take you.

John grins... right now, he'd follow her anywhere. But --

AT A COLLEGE BAR -- THAT NIGHT

The smile has left John's face by now as he's introduced, one by one, to a table full of Savannah's friends -- who all happen to be college FRAT-TYPE GUYS.

Somebody makes an inside joke that John doesn't get and everybody LAUGHS, Savannah loudest of all. John just downs his beer and CHUCKLES, too, because it seems like he should.

Savannah sees her friend Susan nearby and goes to say hello, leaving John momentarily alone. The FRAT GUY nearest him leans in, tries to start polite conversation.

FRAT GUY

So you're Savannah's boyfriend.
(off John's nod)
That's cool. Where do you go again?
You're out of state, right?

John pauses, decides it's not worth it to correct him.

JOHN

Right.

FRAT GUY

Somewhere up north, wasn't it? I'm blanking -- Michigan? Penn State?

The guy's making an honest mistake, obviously confusing him with somebody else, but John resents it anyway -- resents the question, resents the guy asking it, resents having to backtrack now. He levels an icy glare across the table.

JOHN
I'm in the army, actually.

FRAT GUY
(realizing his mistake)
Oh. I must've... I'm sorry.

Now anger really begins to boil up inside John. He eyeballs the guy hard, challenging him now.

JOHN
For what?

The Frat Guy's no pushover, though, and he meets John's eye contact, shoots back a 'what's your problem?' look.

But before anything can escalate, Savannah wraps her arms around John's neck and kisses him on the cheek. She says something, but the din of the rowdy table drowns her out.

SAVANNAH
I'm so glad you're finally getting
to meet everybody!

JOHN
What?

SAVANNAH
I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE FINALLY MEETING
EVERYBODY!

JOHN
Me too. How long we staying?
(off her look)
I'm just hoping to spend some time
with you without the frat pack here.

SAVANNAH
Relax. You're coming home with me.
They aren't.

John raises his eyebrows. Savannah shakes her head.

SAVANNAH
Don't get any ideas. I'm still the
same girl you left behind.

JOHN
I hope so.

SAVANNAH
What?

JOHN
I SAID I HOPE SO!

John meant it to be flirty, but when he yelled it the second time, it sure didn't come off that way.

Savannah gives him a look that's hard to read at first... then she shrugs it off and nods towards his empty glass.

SAVANNAH

Go get another beer, soldier.

UP BY THE BAR -- LATER

The place is crowded, and the bartenders are understaffed and overworked. John isn't having much luck waving one down.

RANDY

Whatcha drinking?

Randy sidles up next to John.

JOHN

Just a beer. Good luck getting somebody's attention, though.

RANDY

Billy! Two Hef's.

Down the bar BILLY THE BARTENDER nods, immediately goes to get their beers. Randy shrugs by way of explanation.

RANDY

I'm here way too much.
(re: John's money)
Put that away. Please.

Billy brings them their drinks along with two shots on the house. Randy winks, holds a shot out to John.

RANDY

Listen, I want to apologize. For the way I treated you before.

John tries to wave him off.

RANDY

No no. If I had any idea she was actually gonna stay with you, I'd never have acted like that.

Randy CHEERS him and downs the shot, but John hesitates before he follows suit, trying to figure out whether he's just been paid a compliment or an insult.

RANDY

Yo, Billy! Two more just like that.

BACK AT SAVANNAH'S APARTMENT -- LATE THAT NIGHT

John and Savannah make out as they stumble through the door. Something is undeniably off between them now, though -- it's like they're both trying just a little bit too hard.

Plus John is more than just a little bit drunk. Savannah pulls away from him, nervously heads over to her refrigerator.

SAVANNAH

Um, you want something to drink,
or...?

John leans over her, looks into the fridge.

JOHN

Any beer in there?

There's juice, water, diet coke. But no beer.

SAVANNAH

Nope. Still don't drink, remember?

John sighs, totters slightly into the living room.

JOHN

And yet we spent all night at a
bar...

SAVANNAH

Sorry?

John turns, waves it away.

JOHN

I said it was hot tonight at the
bar. Sorry if I'm a little sweaty.

He smiles at her again. Strides back towards her, attempting to be seductive but not entirely succeeding.

SAVANNAH

It's okay. I'm sweaty too.
(nervously, as he kisses her)
Maybe I should take a shower...

JOHN

You don't need a shower.

He kisses her again. Moves in closer. Savannah shuts her eyes tight... and then she ducks away.

SAVANNAH

You know what? Yeah I do. I'm just
gonna go take a shower.

IN HER BATHROOM --

After she turns on the water, Savannah covers her face with her hands and grimaces, angry at herself for acting that way.

TEN MINUTES LATER --

Freshly showered, Savannah stares at her reflection. Wet hair, no makeup. It won't do. She grabs her cosmetics bag and starts to go to work, calls out into the living room --

SAVANNAH

John? I'll just be another minute.

But there's no answer. Savannah peeks out through the door --

--sees John slumped over on the couch, passed out.

She sighs, watches him sleep for a second. Then she turns back to the mirror and starts wiping the makeup off her face.

IN THE LIVING ROOM -- THE NEXT MORNING

John stirs awake. Looks around. He's on the couch with a pillow and blanket. And he's got a pounding headache.

He gets up. On the table is a note read that reads:

Dear John.

Woke up this morning, saw you, pinched myself.

Milk in the fridge, be back by two.

IN SAVANNAH'S ROOM -- LATER

John eats a bowl of cereal outside her room. Her ROOM. This is where she lives. This is where she sleeps.

He hesitantly walks in. Takes in the sheets, the pictures, the furniture. Then he glances at her bookshelf. Stops on one book in particular.

AT A QUARTER AFTER THREE O'CLOCK --

John's halfway through the book when the front door OPENS and he hears Savannah enter.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

John? Sorry I'm late, but my professor had an open slot for once and I really needed to go over my thesis with him and then I had to take care of this huge scheduling issue in the mentoring group that I'm forming -- did I tell you I'm forming a mentoring gr--?

She walks into the bedroom, sees the look on his face.

SAVANNAH

Oh no. You've been cooped up by yourself in this tiny apartment all day and you're furious with me.

JOHN

Nah, I just shouldn't have come early, that's all. I shoulda waited till you weren't so busy.

Savannah grins at him, throws her jam-packed bookbag onto the bed next to him.

SAVANNAH

Well then you'd be waiting an awful long time.

But John doesn't smile back. Then Savannah notices what he's reading (it's a book on Autism and Aspergers).

They look at each other. Savannah sits down beside him. Almost says something.... then decides not to. She smiles instead, kisses him on the forehead.

SAVANNAH

I'm so glad you came, John. I still can't believe it -- I wake up and you're actually here. I come home and you're actually here. It still doesn't feel real to me yet.

JOHN

I just wish we had more time, that's all.

SAVANNAH

One more night together. But then only five more months apart, right?

John looks away. Savannah doesn't notice, pulls him up.

SAVANNAH

Ten-hut, Tyree. We got a little bit of a drive ahead of us.

AT AN ESTATE IN LENOIR -- HOURS LATER

Savannah and John walk up to an old but still grand Southern Colonial house. Cars are parked all over the yard, and above the front door hangs a banner reading HAPPY 25TH ANNIVERSARY.

They enter to find that the party is already in full swing.

MRS. CURTIS

My girl!

Savannah's MOTHER hurries over and throws her arms around Savannah. They're obviously very close, but then she surprises John by hugging him just as vigorously.

MRS. CURTIS

And John, I feel like I know you already. How's your father?

JOHN

Better. Thank you for asking.

MRS. CURTIS

Of course. He's been in our prayers.

John smiles, unsure of how to respond.

MRS. CURTIS

I'm so glad you're finally here. But I can't say I envy you -- there's a lot of people to meet tonight. Things could get ugly.

SAVANNAH

I've been briefing him in the car. Background on family members, history of feuds, that sorta thing.

JOHN

Good intel. Solid tactical training. I'm as ready as I'll ever be.

Mrs. Curtis grins at Savannah, mouths "I love him already" to her. Then she links arms and leads them both into the fray.

MRS. CURTIS

Let's get this show on the road then.

IN THE PARTY --

Mrs. Curtis plays a great hostess, introducing John to PARTY GUESTS with Savannah by his side, beaming.

When Mrs. Curtis tells somebody what John does for a living, GUESTS begins to come up to him and shake his hand, thanking him for his service. John handles it all terrifically until Randy passes him on the way to the bathroom.

RANDY

Hey. Shots on you tonight, huh?

He SLAPS John on the back as he walks by. John doesn't respond, just turns to Savannah after he's gone.

JOHN
What's he doing here?

SAVANNAH
(with a shrug)
I invited him.

Before John can follow up, he's pulled aside by a tree-trunk of a MAN IN HIS LATE 40'S. The people nearby (including TIM and Tim's FATHER) fall silent. The Man glares at Savannah.

MR. CURTIS
So this is him?

SAVANNAH
Daddy, please. Not the tough guy routine this time, okay?

MR. CURTIS
Routine? I benchpress refrigerators, honey. I shoot large animals for sport. Your boyfriends need to know these things.

Nearby, John notices Tim smiling. They trade a nod hello, and then John, emboldened by a friendly face, sticks his hand out.

JOHN
Nice to meet you, Mr. Curtis. And for what it's worth, Tim's already threatened me with bodily harm if I ever hurt your daughter...

TIM
Yeah, I was very convincing, too. I'm sure I made quite an impact.

Mr. Curtis pauses...then grabs John's hand, pumps it heartily.

MR. CURTIS
Well if that's the case, then let's just skip right over that part and get back to the drinking. Cheers, son -- glad you could join us.

He raises his glass just as an OLDER COUPLE walk in the front door. Mr. Curtis waves at them, instantly distracted.

MR. CURTIS
Billy, ya egg sucking dog, you actually showed up!

He heads over to greet them, while Savannah and her Mother get pulled into a nearby circle of WIVES. That leaves John and Tim, pretty much alone. They shake hands warmly.

TIM

Good to see you again, John.

JOHN

You too. Where's Alan hiding at?

TIM

He's been riding horses all day so he's upstairs, out cold.

JOHN

Yeah, I heard he's a helluva jockey.

TIM

It's the craziest thing. No complaints here, though.

Another PARTY GUEST comes over to say hello to Tim.

PARTY GUEST

Tim -- so nice to see you! Where's your wife? It's been ages, I really must say hello.

TIM

Oh, she's on vacation. I'll let her know you asked after her, though.

Tim holds a forced smile. John watches him carefully, long after the Party Guest leaves and they're left alone again.

JOHN

Another vacation, huh?

Tim shrugs, tries to play it off. John considers biting his tongue, but then --

JOHN

Is that what you tell Alan, too?

Tim glances over at John. Pauses.

TIM

I don't tell Alan anything.

JOHN

He doesn't ask?

TIM

He asks. I just don't know how to answer.

John looks away. Watches Savannah, LAUGHING with her Mom at one of the other women's jokes.

JOHN

Listen, I'm not in any position to give you advice, Tim...

Tim shrugs, lets John know it's okay to go on.

JOHN

When I was a kid, I woke up every morning hoping today'd be the day my mom would finally come home. And it took me fifteen years to realize that was never gonna happen.

John turns to Tim, looks at him honestly.

JOHN

As painful as it would've been for my Dad to tell me the truth... it coulda saved me a lotta years of waiting around, you know?

Tim looks back at him silently. Not offended, just thoughtful. Then another PARTYGOER butts in and breaks the silence.

PARTYGOER

I'm sorry -- you're John, right? Savannah's John? I just want to say thank you. For what you're doing.

JOHN

You're... welcome. But I--

PARTYGOER

We're praying for you. Know that. I just hope it's all over soon so you boys can come home safe and sound.

War talk always attracts men -- Mr. Curtis and his friends are no exception, and they jump in freely.

MR. CURTIS

Oh, this thing aint gonna be over anytime soon. Afghanistan's just the first stop of many, believe me.

A DEMOCRAT

He's right. Soon they're gonna ask y'all to reenlist for another tour. And then, slowly but surely, they'll stop asking and start telling.

JOHN

They've already requested we re-up for two more years, actually.

A REPUBLICAN
I bet every soldier in the service
will do it, too, no questions asked.

JOHN
Every soldier I know already has.

Suddenly a VOICE FROM BEHIND cuts through the crowd.

SAVANNAH
So you're gonna reenlist? For two
more years, just like that?

John turns to find Savannah behind him. The rest of the
chatter dies down. John pauses, looks away.

JOHN
It's...something we need to discuss.

Some of the Men start to back up, give Savannah some space --
she's eyeballing John hard, potentially about to blow.

But she doesn't. Instead she flips a switch, turns on a half-
convincing smile.

SAVANNAH
Well. Can I freshen up anybody's
drink?

LATER --

As Mr. Curtis introduces John to yet another group of FRIENDS,
John glances over to see Savannah, deep in discussion with
Randy. They're out of earshot, but she is serious and intense.
Then Randy says something that makes her finally smile.

She looks over at John. They make eye contact. Then they
both look away.

OUT IN THE FRONT LAWN -- LATER

The cars have thinned out. Only a few stragglers are left.

IN THE HOUSE --

John watches Mr. and Mrs. Curtis show the last of their
guests to the door. He turns, heads --

OUT TO THE BACK DECK --

-- where Savannah is all alone, staring out at the lake.

JOHN
There you are. Where's Randy, in
the bathroom popping his collar?

SAVANNAH

No, Randy went home a while ago.

John wraps his arms around her, trying to cut past the tension.

SAVANNAH

Two more years, John...

JOHN

I know.

SAVANNAH

It's selfish of me to act like this. I get that. This isn't even about me -- you're the one who has to make the sacrifice.

JOHN

It's your sacrifice too.

She finally turns to John, looks up at him, tries to smile.

SAVANNAH

What's two more years apart after those two weeks together, right?

She already knows what she has to say next. She doesn't look away -- she has to say this in a way he can believe.

SAVANNAH

I think you should do it. I want you to do it.

JOHN

You sure?

She smiles reassuringly... but then stops. She sees something flash in his eyes, and she immediately knows what it is:

Relief. Her heart drops into her stomach.

SAVANNAH

Wait a minute -- you already have. Haven't you. You've already reupped.

JOHN

No, I--

SAVANNAH

Don't lie to me. That's the one thing you cannot do, John. Don't look me in the eye and lie to me.

Inside the house, Tim comes down the stairs, carrying a sleeping Alan in his arms.

He steps out on the porch to say goodnight, no idea what he's walking into. John turns when he hears him.

SAVANNAH

Don't look at him, John. Look at me.

JOHN

I--I had to, okay? Every single one of the guys committed on the spot. Every single one--

SAVANNAH

I don't care about them, I care about us. What happened to "together", John? What happened to the leap we're taking "together"?

JOHN

You don't understand--

He tries to put his hand on her arm, but she SLAPS it off.

SAVANNAH

You son of a bitch. Don't ever tell me I don't understand.

Then she turns and walks away. Tim tries to inch back into the house, pretend like he was never here. But John knows he is.

JOHN

That's the first time I've ever heard her curse.

Alan stirs in Tim's arms, but doesn't quite wake.

TIM

She's angry because she loves you that much. Because she misses you that much. Trust me... that's a lot better than the alternative.

John watches Savannah get smaller and smaller as she heads out towards the lake.

JOHN

So what do I do?

Tim carries Alan to the door, looks back before he leaves.

TIM

You go after her, John.

OUT BY THE LAKE -- LATER

This pier is much smaller than the one in Wilmington, but as John comes up behind Savannah, it's a very familiar sight.

John pauses. Tries to find the right words.

JOHN

I have a responsibility to those guys, okay? Just like they have a responsibility to me. They cover my back, I cover theirs. It's the only way the whole thing works.

Savannah doesn't turn to him, just stares out at the water.

JOHN

I did re-up. But I didn't do it for my country. I didn't do it for some cause. I did it for the eleven guys standing beside me wherever we go, wherever we're sent.

With that she finally turns, looks him in the eye.

SAVANNAH

How about the one girl standing in front of you right now, John?

John can't look back at her. Something shifts inside of him -- whether it's nerves or desperation, he starts to sweat, suddenly has a tough time catching his breath.

JOHN

You want me to reenlist? Then I'll reenlist. I won't even get on the plane tomorrow. I'll go AWOL, I don't care -- you're all that matters to me. Okay? You are all that matters.

His voice turns intense, his eyes desperate.

JOHN

I just-- I don't know what happened. I have no idea what happened. I woke up one day and skyscrapers were suddenly falling down and people were suddenly dying and a war suddenly popped up at the exact moment that my Dad's heart suddenly stopped working right and I don't know what to do, I have no clue what to do, I just know that I want it all to go away so I can stay here with you, right here with you for as long as I possibly can.

Savannah stares at John. He looks like he's six years old all of a sudden, anxious and scared and vulnerable. Her anger quickly melts away.

She puts her hand on his face, trying to calm him down.

JOHN

I'm just trying to do the right thing here, but I'll tell you what, I'm so turned around I don't have a friggin idea what that is anymore. So you tell me. Tell me what to do, Savannah. Tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it.

She quietly wraps him up, holds on as tight as she can. Then she kisses him lightly on the lips.

SAVANNAH

I want you to come with me.

INSIDE AN OLD STABLE --

Savannah leads John inside. The place is empty now. There were horses here once, but not anymore.

She pulls John back to the far-most stable, which is different than the others. There are stacks of hay but there are also blankets, a flashlight, a bunch of paperbacks, an old radio.

SAVANNAH

Whenever I used to sneak out of the house, late at night... this is where I'd come.

She looks through the open window at the house she grew up in. She smiles to herself, the memories obviously flooding back.

SAVANNAH

Kinda pathetic, huh? Even when I ran away, I never went very far.

Then, finally, she shakes the nostalgia away, turns to John and pushes him down on the bed of hay. She gets on top of him, slowly pulls her shirt off.

John looks through the window up at the house. It's a distance -- no one can see them here, no one can hear them.

Savannah turns on the radio. The song that starts to play is THE LUCKIEST by Ben Folds (download it, give it a listen, the album it's on happened to be released September 11th, 2001).

Then she removes the rest of her clothes. Takes his shirt and his pants off. John doesn't breathe.

JOHN

You sure about this?

She nods. John hesitates, though, still unsure.

But Savannah isn't. She pulls him down to her, helps to guide him. John gives in.

Then, over the music -- images:

-- of them together.

-- of John, going slowly and gently, but--

-- of a single tear falling down Savannah's face.

As the song continues to play over all the following scenes:

OUTSIDE THE OPEN WINDOW -- PREDAWN

-- of Savannah, sadly watching the moon disappear below the horizon, John asleep on a blanket behind her.

THE NEXT MORNING --

-- of John, rolling awake, looking around... realizing Savannah's already gone up to the house. He's all alone in the stables, and that worries him.

IN THE CAR --

-- of John and Savannah, silently driving back to Wilmington.

AT THE AIRPORT --

-- of John, saying goodbye to his hobbled father with a crisp handshake, then turning to Savannah. He eyes her carefully.

JOHN

Is everything okay? Nothing...
nothing's changed between us, has
it?

She pulls him to her, kisses him hard enough for Mr. Tyree to turn away. Relieved, John kisses her back, having already forgotten that she didn't actually answer the question.

JOHN

I'm not sure when my next leave will
be, with everything going on...

Savannah nods, understanding.

JOHN

But I'll see you soon then?

Savannah kisses him again. Knows what her line is here.

SAVANNAH

I'll see you soon then.

IN THE PLANE -- OVER THE ATLANTIC OCEAN

-- of John staring out the window into the night.

IN SERBIA --

-- of a helicopter landing somewhere in Northern Kosovo.

John steps out of the copter, sees Noodles waiting in a nearby jeep. Noodles mock salutes him, and John grins.

IN A CITY IN KOSOVO --

-- of John, reunited with his team as they watch UN troops (in those familiar blue helmets) march through the city, here to aid the Serbs in peacekeeping efforts with the Albanians.

AT BASE CAMP --

-- of John, sorting through boxes and boxes of Small Arms weapons, futilely looking for the correspondence package.

AT A MAKESHIFT HELIPAD --

-- of John coordinating the delivery of more supplies. The pilot knows what he really wants, though, and hands it over.

John tears the package open-- smiles when he finds two letters from Savannah.

AT A BOMBED OUT ALBANIAN CONVENIENCE STORE --

-- of John and his team as they help an ALBANIAN COUPLE sort through the rubble of their family business.

John looks down. Sees a small but pristine POCKET CALENDAR amongst the debris. He picks it up.

JOHN

You mind if I have this?

The ALBANIAN STOREOWNER waves him off. His business is ruined. He could care less about a pocket calendar.

BACK AT BASE CAMP --

-- of John ripping open a new correspondence package, thrilled when three letters from Savannah tumble out.

IN HIS BUNK --

-- of John, checking the dates on her letters, making the corresponding marks in his calendar. Savannah's consistent: Seven days. Seven days. Seven days. Like clockwork.

John smiles. Pulls out a clean sheet of paper. And starts to write: *Dear Savannah...*

CLOSE ON THE POCKET CALENDAR --

-- of the red X's, more than a year of them now, all consistently seven days apart.

OUTSIDE CAPTAIN STONE'S ROOM --

-- of John, making a spontaneous late night call on the team's new SATELLITE PHONE. He types in all the digits (there's a whole slew of them) and hopes for the best.

IN NORTH CAROLINA --

-- of Savannah's cell phone, silently VIBRATING on a desk. It rings so much it finally falls onto the floor, and no one is around to pick it up.

BACK IN KOSOVO -- AT MIDNIGHT

-- of John, on a picturesque hill, staring up at the waxing moon directly above him.

A TIME LAPSE --

-- of John on this hill, as days turn into weeks and weeks turn into months; as the moon and the sun fly over him through the sky, almost like they're chasing each other.

BLEEDING OVER THIS IS AN IMAGE --

-- of John's pocket calendar, panning past the red X's, week after week.... and then, suddenly, the X's stop.

ON A CRATE NEAR THE HILL --

-- of John, away from the rest of his team. A few of the guys are playing a game of poker outside the barracks, but John is off to the side, staring down at the calendar.

EIGHTEEN MONTHS have passed now, but after 72 straight Red Xs, it's been six weeks since the last one. Clearly he's worried.

Suddenly there is a SUDDEN EXPLOSION within the city. The Ben Folds song abruptly cuts off. A FIREBALL reaches into the sky.

WINTER 2003

John jumps up, heads over to the hill. Some of the other guys get up from their poker game and gather there as well to take in this all too familiar scene.

Then, there is music to John's ears: the WHIR of an incoming helicopter is heard as it becomes visible on the horizon.

AT THE MAKESHIFT HELIPAD --

John anxiously greets the pilot as he touches down.

JOHN

Please say you've got, like, seven letters for me.

The pilot digs into his bag....but pulls out only a SINGLE LETTER. It's a familiar sight. It's got Savannah's handwriting on it. It's in her normal clean, white envelope.

But it brings John no comfort. Instead, this lone letter scares him to death.

OVER BY HIS CRATE -- LATER

John sits, far enough away from the others to have privacy.

Carefully, he opens the envelope. Unfolds both sheets of paper inside. This one begins as they always do. *Dear John...*

He takes a deep breath. And then he reads the rest.

ON JOHN'S HANDS -- as they start to shake.

ON JOHN'S FACE -- as every muscle tenses.

ON JOHN'S EYES -- as he does not cry.

ON JOHN -- sitting perfectly still on this crate, reading and rereading this letter, all alone on the horizon.

BACK IN BASE CAMP --

John ransacks Stone's desk until he finds the satellite phone. He takes it, starts pacing the room like an animal in a cage, going over in his mind what he's going to say.

Then he begins to dial. He knows all the numbers by heart, and there's a lot of them. Fourteen in a row, one after the other... but he stops before he hits the fifteenth.

His finger hovers over the button... but he can't bring himself to push it. No matter how hard he tries.

So instead, he kicks a metal briefcase across the room.

IN THE BARRACKS --

John barrels in, a man on a mission. Noodles nods hello as he walks by their poker game, but John's too focused to notice.

John pours all the stuff from his footlocker onto the ground, sorting through it until he finds what he's looking for.

OUTSIDE --

John takes all 112 of Savannah's letters and dumps them out loose on the ground. What had been a carefully organized chronological stack is now just a messy pile.

John pulls out the flint and magnesium block from his pocket and starts to shave the magnesium off over the letters.

NOODLES

Need a lighter?

Noodles has appeared behind him, but John just shakes his head, focused only on the flint now. A spark catches the magnesium and the letters ignite. John watches the fire spread.

NOODLES

You wanna talk about it?

John looks away. Knows he's being completely transparent right now, and hates himself for it.

JOHN

Not much to talk about. She found somebody else. Somebody who's there, and not here.

NOODLES

You know who it is?

JOHN

She didn't say. But I have a pretty good idea.

The anger flashes in John's eyes again.

NOODLES

Don't worry, man, you'll get her back. As soon as you go home, she'll come running -- you know it's true.

John stares into the fire, wearily shakes his head.

JOHN

No. It's not.

NOODLES

Trust me, man, this is what--

Noodles...

I know what I'm talking ab--

Noodles. They're already engaged. Okay?

That stops him cold. He pauses, unsure what to say.

NOODLES

I...Jesus. I'm sorry, John.

John doesn't respond. Instead, he takes out Savannah's breakup letter and drops it onto the flame, watches it turn into ashes along with the 112 letters that preceded it.

IN THE CITY -- THE NEXT DAY

A mini-convoy navigates through the streets of Kosovo. The team is split into two, and John drives the front humvee.

Rooster is in the middle of a rant, but John tunes him out from his bubble, focused only on the road ahead of him.

ROOSTER

All I'm sayin is, they recruit us,
train us for five years, tell us
we're their goddamned best and
brightest, and then a war breaks out
and they send us everywhere but
there. Now what sense does that make?

BERRY

Look around you, man. It aint like
we're patrolling the Kansas State
Fair, you know.

Indeed, up the road is a smoldering building. It's not exactly a war zone, but it's not too far away either.

ROOSTER

So what? These aren't the sons a
bitches that attacked us, are they?

As they get closer, they can see that it's a Serbian church burning to the ground. Three BODIES lie in the street, and a group of angry SERB CIVILIANS have gathered nearby.

CAPTAIN STONE

No, they're just attacking each other
-- Daniels, go see what happened.

DANIELS, their language guy, gets out and converses in SERB with one of the civilians. Then he reports back to Stone.

DANIELS

Molotov cocktail, half hour or so
ago. Good news is, the church was
empty -- no casualties.

CAPTAIN STONE

(re; the bodies)
They probably beg to differ.

DANIELS

Yeah, well there was also an
Albanian sniper hiding somewhere up
in that building, but--

Nearby, three SERBIAN FIGHTERS unload a DShK (an old Soviet anti-aircraft machine gun like the American Browning) into the side of the building Daniels was pointing at. The already demolished structure gets that much more demolished.

The Serbs grin, flash them a cheery thumbs up.

CAPTAIN STONE

Christ. Are UN troops on the way?

Daniels shrugs. Stone SIGHS, then opens the door, steps out.

CAPTAIN STONE

Berry, Daniels, go commandeer that weapon. Everybody else...

INSIDE THE DEMOLISHED BUILDING --

The Berets enter, systematically casing the first floor. John trails behind -- physically he's here, mentally not so much.

They come upon the body of an OLDER ARMENIAN WOMAN. This was somebody's grandmother. It's a tough sight, even for them. Captain Stone turns away first, quickly starts up the stairs.

The others follow, and Stone wordlessly split them into two groups -- Stone takes half at the second floor, while Starks, John, Noodles, and Rooster make their way up to the top floor.

NOODLES

He always knows exactly what to say in those situations, doesn't he? I wonder if he's so inspirational because he's a Captain, or if he made Captain because he's so inspirational?

STARKS

How about you ponder that dilemma while you clear east, Noodles. Rooster, you take west, I got north.
(then to John)
Yo, Tyree -- snap out of it and clear south, willya?

John comes out of the clouds and does as he's told. He heads to the back room, scans left to right, floor to ceiling.

It's clear. He walks in, flips a nearby light switch, expecting nothing, but lo and behold, the room lights up.

JOHN

I'll be damned. Electricity still w--

Suddenly a bullet SLICES into John's left shoulder.

His eyes widen, but he's too stunned to cry out. A second BULLET hits him in the gut and sends him to his knees.

His hand flies to his stomach and he falls onto his back. His eyes search the dingy ceiling above him.

Meanwhile, Starks, Noodles and Rooster charge into the room, guns blazing. The wounded ARMENIAN hiding in the corner of the room is riddled with dozens of bullets.

Noodles finally stops firing, kneels over John, cuts open his fatigues. John desperately tries to make eye contact.

NOODLES

Medic! I need a medic up here!

John draws a sharp breath, GULPS for air. His PUPILS begin to DILATE as he stares up at the SKY.

He GASPS again. Try as he might, he can't hold on. And as his eyes finally close, and the sound fades away --

EVERYTHING TURNS SILENT.

EVERYTHING GOES BLACK.

THEN, FADE BACK IN:

As John opens his eyes again. He's in a strange room. The walls are yellow cinderblock. A NURSE is changing his IV.

NURSE

Welcome back, Sargeant Tyree.

John struggles to get his bearings. He tries to speak, but his mouth is parched and dry. The Nurse turns his morphine drip a notch higher.

NURSE

Rest easy, okay? You're alive, and that's all that matters right now.

But although John does not appear to agree, and although he fights as hard as he can to maintain consciousness --

-- it is ultimately a losing battle.

IN THE HOSPITAL ROOM --

John abruptly sits upright in bed. Weeks have passed -- obvious because his arm is now in a sling, his stomach is wrapped in gauze, and his face is lined with impatience.

He stands up, goes into the small bathroom. Stares at his reflection in the mirror.

Then he slowly pulls his arm out of the sling. It causes him immense pain, but he pushes through.

He grabs his dress uniform out of the closet. Winces as he buttons his shirt. Tight. Tighter still.

Winces as he pulls on his rather sparsely decorated jacket.

Winces as he tries to tie his tie with one good arm.

By the time he puts on his beret, his forehead gleams with sweat. He wipes his face, stares at his reflection.

At least now he looks like a soldier again.

IN A MAKESHIFT OFFICE --

John stands at attention in front of Captain Stone, who's catching up on some paperwork.

JOHN

Requesting permission to return to active duty, sir.

Stone looks up at John. He's trying hard to look whole and healthy, but he's not fooling anybody.

CAPTAIN STONE

It's been three weeks, son. I'm impressed, but I'm not stupid.

He turns back to his paperwork.

CAPTAIN STONE

Why don't you go home first, get some R&R. Take as much time as you need -- your family's probably worried sick about you.

JOHN

My father's just glad I'm okay, sir.

John's not budging. Stone glances back up at him, then SIGHS.

He puts down his pen and looks John honestly in the eye.

CAPTAIN STONE

I'm being transferred, John. Back home.

(before John can object)

It has nothing to do with what happened, I put in for it months ago. I just miss my family is all.

He stands up, walks over to John.

CAPTAIN STONE

Berry and Daniels have decided to leave, too, everyone else is gonna be reassigned. Now you have less than four months until separation yourself. You've served your country well -- there's no need to go the extra mile at this point.

John stands even straighter, his eyes focused on the wall behind Stone.

JOHN

Requesting permission to officially reup, sir.

Stone stares at him in disbelief.

CAPTAIN STONE

Let me get this straight, Staff Sergeant. I'm handing you a ticket home and you're telling me no thanks, cause you actually wanna go back out there for another year?

John doesn't move, still rigid as a board.

JOHN

Better make it two, sir.

FADE TO:

THE SUN --

Beating down from the sky. John looks up at it, shielding his eyes from the glare. He's at --

AN ARMY BASE IN SAUDI ARABIA --

-- still in full uniform. But now his once sparsely decorated jacket is full of bars, medals, accommodations, badges.

John's head is still shaved, but his wounds have long healed. Four full years have passed, and he's in his late 20's now.

An F-15 Eagle jet screams overhead, blocking out the sun for an instant and casting John in a brief shadow.

SUMMER 2007

John watches it lands at a nearby airstrip. After a moment, a PRIVATE appears behind John.

PRIVATE

The Colonel's ready for you now.

IN A COMMAND CENTER --

COLONEL KITTRICK sits at a desk as John enters.

COLONEL KITTRICK
Sargeant Major Tyree. Have a seat.

John does as he's told.

COLONEL KITTRICK
Heard you and your team did good work in Algeria. Must be hard to believe it's actually hotter here than it was there, idn't it?

John just smiles politely. Kittrick gets the message and cuts to the chase. He opens up John's folder.

COLONEL KITTRICK
It's come to my attention that you haven't taken leave in over nine months. That's a terrible oversight on our part, I apologize on behalf of the United States Army and I'm rectifying it effective immediately.

JOHN
Sargeant Swift hasn't had one in nearly as long, why don't you send him instead?

COLONEL KITTRICK
Sargeant Swift's scheduled leave is next month.

JOHN
But sir--

COLONEL KITTRICK
I'm not sending Sargeant Swift, I'm sending you. Go home, son, get some rest. Take a vacation for once.

JOHN
I don't need a va--

COLONEL KITTRICK
It's not up for debate, Sargeant Major. I promise you, we'll all still be here when you get back.

John hesitates. Kittrick just nods towards the door.

COLONEL KITTRICK
That's all.

AT THE AIRSTRIP IN SAUDI ARABIA -- TWO WEEKS LATER

A military plane flies up the runway, goes airborne.

IN THE AIRPLANE --

John sits in a jumpseat, staring up at the plane's ceiling, trying to ignore the bumpiness of the flight.

AT THE WILMINGTON AIRPORT --

The escalator runs emptily. Finally John's feet appear. The rest of him follows.

He looks around. The airport has not changed one bit except for the fact that this time, no one is here to greet him.

AT HIS FATHER'S HOUSE --

John gets out of the cab with his duffel bag, walks up the driveway. He tries the front door. It's locked.

Annoyed, he fishes under the pot of a nearby fern. Pulls out the spare key. Opens the door. Walks --

INTO THE HOUSE --

-- and can immediately tell something is not right. There are dirty dishes stacked in the sink. Flies buzz around them. His father has never left a dish dirty anywhere in his life.

Then what John sees in the living room makes him drop his bag.

JOHN

Dad?

Mr. Tyree lies on the couch, pale and weak. His eyes are glazed and his shirt is soaking wet from sweat.

He tries to stand, but it's such an incredible amount of labor that he goes entirely white. His whole body shakes intensely.

John grabs him, afraid that he'll fall over, and lowers him back on the couch. Then, quickly, he reaches for the phone.

IN A HOSPITAL ROOM -- LATE THAT NIGHT

Mr. Tyree lays in bed, asleep, tubes coming out of him from every angle. If he looked older before, he looks downright ancient now.

John does not touch him. Instead he just stands there, silently watching his father breathe through a tube.

OUTSIDE IN THE HALLWAY --

John speaks quietly with a DOCTOR.

JOHN

How long do you think he coulda been like that, though? Cause I was calling him once a week before I went on assignment and things were fine...

DOCTOR

How many weeks since you last spoke?

John looks away. Guilt flashes on his face. He speaks quietly.

JOHN

Three, maybe.

The Doctor sees the pain in him and takes pity.

DOCTOR

It's hard to say how long it's been, really. I've treated patients who've had mild strokes without realizing it, but a stroke that significant... it's mind boggling that he didn't hospitalize himself right away.

John lets that sink in. Then he turns, starts to pace.

JOHN

Okay. So how long till he's back to normal this time?

The Doctor doesn't respond. John looks at him, stops in his track, quickly turns white. Understands what that means.

JOHN

If...if I'd come home earlier... if I'd found him like that earlier... would it have made a difference?

The Doctor looks at John, his face creased with sympathy.

DOCTOR

I doubt it.

No matter how convincing he sounds, it does not appear to do John much good.

BACK AT THE HOUSE --

John walks inside. Sets the spare key down on the counter.

Then he takes one look around at the darkened, silent, messy house around him and it's one look too many.

He grabs the key off the counter and walks right back out.

AT THE SHRIMP SHACK --

The place is practically empty at this late hour. John sits at the bar, alone, peeling shrimp but not eating them.

Reveal that the table he sat at with Savannah on their first date is right behind him. John steals a glance back at it.

IN HIS CAR -- LATER THAT NIGHT

John stares at a HOUSE in the middle of a quiet neighborhood.

Through the big bay windows in front, John sees a FAMILY watching TV together. Two BOYS rough house on the floor.

INSIDE THE HOUSE --

The MOTHER gets up, goes into her big chef's kitchen to check on a pie.

She pulls it from the oven, puts it on the windowsill to cool, glances out the window.

John's car is there in plain sight, but she looks past him, out at her partially obstructed view of the ocean.

Although she doesn't know it, here, right where she is standing, is the exact spot John first kissed Savannah.

BACK IN THE CAR --

John's seen enough. He puts the car into gear and pulls away.

AT HIS FATHER'S HOUSE -- LATE AT NIGHT NOW

John walks back in, sets his keys back down. Gets his bearings. Then heads through the house, back to his bedroom.

But he pauses in front of his father's office. Then, despite himself, he enters, flips on the light. Looks around the room.

Here are his father's coins, stacked all over the furniture. Here is his father's desk, and his father's chair.

John takes a seat. Looks down at the desk. Starts to open drawers. Look through cabinets.

He finally finds what he was looking for: a clean sheet of paper. He clears some room on the desk, lays the sheet of paper down in front of him.

Then John grabs a pen, and he begins to write.

BACK AT THE HOSPITAL -- THE NEXT DAY

John walks into his father's room. Mr. Tyree is now awake and at least partially lucid. His eyes flash with recognition when he sees John.

JOHN

Hey, Dad.

Although Mr. Tyree is very weak, he reaches up and tries to pull the oxygen mask off his face, yank the tube out of his mouth. He's trying to say something.

John gently grabs his hand, pulls it away.

JOHN

It's okay, Dad. It's fine.

John guides his hands back down by his side. Mr. Tyree makes a NOISE, but it's indistinguishable. John grins at him.

JOHN

So now you wanna talk, huh?

John takes a seat in the chair next to the bed, lets the familiar silence hang in the room.

Then John pulls out an envelope from his back pocket. He holds it out to his Dad.

Mr. Tyree takes it, looks back at John -- asks "what's this?" with his eyes.

JOHN

It's nothing. Just a letter I wrote.

Mr. Tyree tries to open it. His hands are shaking heavily.

JOHN

No, don't read it now. Read it when I'm not around, okay?

Mr. Tyree stops. His hands still shake, but he follows John's instructions, tries to put the letter on a nearby table. It's not far away at all, but he has a hard time reaching it.

John watches him. Sees how hard even that is for him.

JOHN

You know what? To hell with it -- here, just...

He takes the letter back, opens it himself. But he doesn't start reading yet -- there's something he wants to say first.

JOHN

Listen, I know that... I know I haven't been around very much the last couple of years, and...

He stops. This speaking from the heart thing isn't working.

So he looks down at the letter, unfolds the sheet of paper. It's only one page. And then he starts to read.

JOHN

Okay. Dear Dad. There's something I've been wanting to tell you.

He glances up -- Mr. Tyree is listening carefully.

JOHN

Remember a few years ago, back when I got shot? Well you wanna know the very first thing that entered my mind at that moment, right before I blacked out? Coins.

John looks up again, sees Mr. Tyree's eyes GLINT with pride.

JOHN

Suddenly I was eight years old again, on a tour of the US Mint, listening to the guide explain how coins are made. How they are punched out of sheet metal. How they are rimmed and beveled. How they are stamped and cleaned. And then how each and every coin is personally examined, just in case one has slipped through with the slightest imperfection.

(off Mr. Tyree's look)

Remember that, Dad? You remember that trip to Philadelphia we took?

Mr. Tyree nods. John has to turn away or else he's gonna start crying. He focuses back on the letter.

JOHN

Well that's what popped into my head. I am a coin in the United States Army. I was minted in the year 1980. I have been punched from sheet metal, I have been stamped and cleaned, my edges have been rimmed and beveled.

Now John can't help it. Tears drip out of his eyes, even though he fights hard against them.

JOHN

But now I have two small holes in me, so I am no longer in perfect condition.

He reflexively rubs his shoulder, right where he was shot, and looks down at his invalid father trapped in a hospital bed.

JOHN

How about it, Dad? We're just a couple of culls, huh?

He starts crying harder now. Focuses down at the letter.

JOHN

But there's one more thing I want to tell you, too.

Now he's all starts and stops -- he's too emotional to read any more, although he tries to push through as best he can.

JOHN

After I got shot... right before I blacked out... you wanna know the very last thing that... I'm sorry, just.... the very last thing that... that entered my mind?

But he's sobbing now, unable to get it under control. And he just can't get the last word out. No matter how hard he tries. He sits in his chair, unable to speak, unable to finish.

Then Mr. Tyree reaches his hand out. Puts it on top of John's. It is remarkably steady.

They look each other in the eye. And through the tears, John can see -- his Dad understands.

AT THE BEACH --

It's getting dark, and a storm is coming. One or two adventurous SURFERS still remain, but most everybody else is giving up and heading in.

Except for John. John is heading out. The waves are huge right now, but he doesn't appear interested in catching anything. Instead, he barrels straight into the waves, takes the brunt of their force.

A big wave hits him, nearly knocks him off his board. John forces his way through it. Then another wave appears-- an enormous one, the kind you brag about for weeks afterwards.

The other few surfers turn, paddle furiously to catch it. But John does not. John paddles straight into it.

The waves SMASHES into him so hard his surfboard is ripped right off his leg strap. John goes under, lost in the current and a sea of whitewater.

Finally, John regains his bearings, finds his footing. But he stays below water, no rush to pop back up.

UNDERNEATH THE SURFACE -- his body shakes, his tears getting lost in the water around him.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON JOHN --

-- Dry, in his dress uniform. It's not quite clear where he is yet, but wherever it is, he sits rigid and straight. His jaw is set. His eyes are focused in front of him.

SLOWLY PULL BACK --

To reveal we're in a church. And other than John, the church is completely empty.

And in the front of a church is a casket.

A PASTOR walks in from behind the pulpit. John notices him check his watch beneath his robe.

PASTOR

I'm sorry. You're welcome to stay as long as you'd like, of course, it's just that they were hoping to lock the outside doors, and...

(then, delicately)

You're not... still expecting anyone else, are you?

John doesn't respond. In his silence, it's clear he was at least hoping for someone else. Anyone else. Or perhaps someone else specifically.

And then, just like that, without a word, he makes up his mind. He stands up. Turns. And begins to walk out.

PASTOR

Where are you going?

JOHN

Somewhere I should've gone four years ago.

OUT ON THE HIGHWAY --

John drives his father's old Lincoln Continental, which is even older now. But yet, he pushes 80 miles per hour, unconcerned with anything except where he's going.

John stares out on the road, his focus unwavering.

A STABLE OF HORSES --

Six or seven of them in all. In the very far stable, a HAND taps the kneecap of a horse, causing the leg to rise.

A SCALPEL like instrument is stuck into the cracks of the horseshoe, cleaning out the caked dirt and finally, a particularly painful looking pointy acorn.

SAVANNAH

There we go. Feel better now?

The horse WHINNIES her approval. Savannah smiles up at her.

She stands, finishes cleaning out the feeding trough. She wears work boots and her hair is cut short. She's still pretty, but she's aged four years, and it shows.

She pets the horse goodbye, then walks out, checking on each of the other horses as she passes by.

Then as she exits the stable, she finally looks up -- and what she sees makes her GASP.

There, standing next to a tree up on the hill where the end of the driveway meets the road -- is John, still in uniform.

He walks towards her. Savannah tries her best to recover.

SAVANNAH

Wow. Just like that, huh? After all these years?

John just shrugs. Savannah stares at him, there in front of her, four years older than she last saw him.

SAVANNAH

What are you doing here, John?

John thinks...then chuckles humorlessly to himself. Remembers having this conversation five years ago up at Chapel Hill.

JOHN

I guess my Dad kinda sent me again.

Savannah clearly remembers the conversation as well.

SAVANNAH

Yeah? How's he doing?

John glances away. It's quick, just a split-second look, but Savannah immediately realizes what it means.

SAVANNAH

No -- oh, John. I'm so sorry. I...
I wish I'd known.

JOHN

Wouldn't have changed anything.

SAVANNAH

No. I don't suppose it would've.

They're only a few feet apart now, but Savannah doesn't move.

SAVANNAH

How'd he die?

This time John looks away for a much longer amount of time.

JOHN

Alone.

Savannah can see the pain creep onto his face.

JOHN

He never had a bad word to say about anybody. He treated everybody with respect, everybody with decency. And none of that mattered one goddamn bit, because you wanna know how many people came to his funeral?

He doesn't need to answer the question. Savannah's face creases with sympathy.

SAVANNAH

He wasn't alone, John. He had you.

John doesn't respond. Instead he searches for something else to talk about. He glances at the stable behind her, remembers the last time they were in a stable like that together.

Then he looks up. Above the barn door is a sign that reads CAMP HORSE SENSE. John smiles. Remembers her letter.

JOHN

So. You finally did it.

SAVANNAH

No. I didn't. But... I tried.

(off his look)

It only lasted one summer. We raised a lot of money, but it was just so expensive.

Savannah turns, stares sadly back at the stable.

SAVANNAH

Life is expensive. Isn't it? You just don't think about that stuff when you're in college. You have these dreams. Every sentence starts with 'when'. But that's not real life, is it?

JOHN

Sentences in real life start with 'why'.

Savannah looks at him again. Sees the pain there.

SAVANNAH

I am sorry, John. It might not be worth much, but I am sorry. He was a good man.

JOHN

I know.

They eye each other. She smiles, nods to the main house.

SAVANNAH

You wanna come inside?

John turns, takes in the house. It's large but dilapidated -- it could use a new paint job, and the yard needs to be mowed. John hesitates.

JOHN

I'm not sure. Is...

SAVANNAH

(quickly)

No. He isn't home.

Off John's face, reacting without moving a muscle --

IN HER KITCHEN --

Savannah sets two cups of coffee down, takes a seat.

SAVANNAH

So how'd you find me?

JOHN

Stopped by your parents' house. Had to arm wrestle your Dad for the address.

SAVANNAH

(rolling her eyes)

Guess we know how that turned out.

JOHN

He claimed he lost on purpose, since
he always liked me and all, but...

He shrugs. They accidentally make eye contact, then both
quickly look away. Savannah thinks of something else to say.
She nods at his dress uniform.

SAVANNAH

I guess you're still...?

(...in the Army?) John nods.

SAVANNAH

How long you back for?

JOHN

Just till I get his things squared
away.

Savannah nods -- that's what she was expecting. She takes a
sip of coffee. Her WEDDING RING gleams in the sun. John
stares at it, clears his throat.

JOHN

How's married life?

SAVANNAH

Can't complain. How about you?
Settled down yet?

John just shakes his head.

SAVANNAH

Must be dating lots of girls, huh?

John doesn't answer, just patiently holds eye contact until
Savannah becomes uncomfortable and has to look away.

Finally the phone RINGS, bailing her out. She excuses
herself, goes to answer it.

SAVANNAH

Hello? Hi, honey. I'm fine. No,
nothing's wrong. Why do you think--
oh be quiet, I do not sound strange.

She looks over at John. Bites her lip.

SAVANNAH

Well...I'm sitting across the table
from John, actually. Yes. John
Tyree. Um... I'm not sure he'll...

Savannah pauses, listens to the voice on the other end.

SAVANNAH

Okay, I'll tell him. No no, I'm still coming, I'm just about to leave. I'll be there soon.

(off his response)

I love you, too.

She hangs up the phone. Turns back to John.

SAVANNAH

He wants to see you.

JOHN

Are you serious?

(off Savannah's nod)

What's he expecting, a hug? Has he forgotten what I did to him at the beach?

SAVANNAH

No. He hasn't forgotten.

John finishes his coffee. Then he abruptly stands.

JOHN

Thank you. For the coffee.

He turns to leave. Stops. Looks back at her.

JOHN

Sorry. But I didn't come out here...

(he trails off)

Well I'm not sure why I came out here. But it wasn't to shake Randy's hand and tell him it's all water under the bridge, okay?

Savannah stares at him oddly. Then she gets up, walks past him into the living room.

SAVANNAH

John... I didn't marry Randy.

John's confused. But then he follows her gaze to a picture, perched on the mantle over the fireplace.

John walks over. Picks the picture up. Stares at it.

It's a WEDDING PHOTOGRAPH OF SAVANNAH AND TIM.

John can hardly believe his eyes. Savannah stands over his shoulder, watches him look at this picture of her in a flowing white wedding gown.

SAVANNAH

I'm gonna go see him now, bring him an afternoon coffee. It would mean a lot to him -- to both of us -- if you came along.

John puts the picture back on the mantle. He looks over at her, genuinely torn.

BUT IN HER CAR --

Savannah drives in silence, John in the passenger seat. They get on the highway.

JOHN

How far away does he work?

Savannah keeps her eyes focused on the road.

SAVANNAH

We're not going to his work.

John glances over at her. But Savannah's not gonna elaborate.

LATER --

Still silent. John looks over at Savannah, who's still staring straight ahead.

Then she puts on her blinker, turns into a parking lot. She pulls into a space, checks her makeup in the rearview mirror. John looks up at the building in front of him. It is the GASTONIA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL.

JOHN

Savannah. What's going on?

She shrugs without looking at him, busying herself with her makeup, trying hard to be as nonchalant as possible.

SAVANNAH

It started as melanoma. Skin cancer, just a little spot on his leg. He had it removed. It went into remission. Then it came back. Now it's spread into his lungs.

Without another word, she gets out of the car. Reluctantly, so does John.

GASTONIA MEMORIAL HOSPITAL -- OUTSIDE ROOM 131

Savannah motions to John -- after you. John walks into the room. There's a 14 YEAR OLD BOY sitting in the chair beneath the TV, and he glances up as they enter.

14 YEAR OLD BOY
Hello, John.

John does a double take.

JOHN
Alan?

But Alan's already focused back on the NINTENDO DS in his hands. John can hardly believe it's him.

JOHN
Wow. You've gotten big.

TIM
Yeah, they grow up fast, don't they?

John turns to find TIM sitting up in the hospital bed. He looks much older -- his skin is pale, almost translucent, and he's lost a lot of weight.

Savannah kisses him hello, hands him a thermos of coffee. They make some small talk, then she turns to Alan in the chair.

SAVANNAH
Alan? Let's go get a soda, okay?

Alan dutifully follows Savannah out. She glances back into the room before she goes, but she doesn't say a word. Now John and Tim are suddenly left all alone.

TIM
Guess you must want to kick my ass,
huh?

John shrugs.

JOHN
Not much I can do about that in
here, is there?

Tim grins back at him.

TIM
All part of my master plan.

JOHN
Yeah?
(as he surveys the room)
Helluva plan.

TIM
Thanks.

JOHN

I can't stay long. I've really, I've got... somewhere I need to be--

TIM

It's okay, I understand. You want some jello? It's lime today. The menu said cherry, but that's what they do, they keep you on your toes here.

JOHN

I'll pass.

TIM

I love her. Just so you know.

John glances at him, surprised by the sudden shift in topics.

TIM

I've loved her for as long as I can remember. Whatever my life was like before I fell in love with her, it's gone now, wiped away. I want you to know that. It probably doesn't matter to you, but it matters to me.

John doesn't respond.

TIM

I am sorry, though. For how it happened, with you so far away. I am sorry for what I did--

JOHN

Tim...

TIM

No. Let me finish. I'm sorry for what I did. But I wouldn't undo it. Because now, if...

(he trails off)

...well, now I know Alan will always have somebody to take care of him, no matter what. Now I know he'll always be in good hands. And as much as I like you, John... I'm his father, so he's the most important thing in the world to me.

(then, directly to John)

And I think that's something you, especially, can understand.

John looks away. Tim continues to watch him carefully.

Then he starts to COUGH. It comes on normally, maybe a little raspy at first, but turns into a full-on COUGHING FIT.

John watches on hopelessly as Tim seems to cough up a lung. John has no idea what he's supposed to do -- is he supposed to call a nurse? Supposed to help him somehow?

And then, just as quickly as it started, it stops again. Tim lies in bed, sweating like crazy, waving John off.

TIM

I'm fine, I'm fine, I am. Didn't need that lung anyway, no big deal. She still loves you, you know.

Once again, John's taken by surprise.

TIM

Trust me, it's plain as day. She's never quite looked at me the way she used to look at you. I wish that wasn't the case, but I've had plenty of time to make my peace with it, believe me.

John stands uncomfortably by the side of the bed.

TIM

I'm glad you came, though, John, I am. Because the question now is, who's gonna take care of her no matter what? She's young. She's beautiful--

JOHN

Tim...

TIM

What? I can't be realistic? She'll meet somebody else. Eventually. She'll have to.

Then Tim looks John directly in the eyes.

TIM

And I don't have any control over it, obviously. I just wish I had the chance to look whoever it'll be in the eyes and tell him to take care of her. To treat her right. To love her as much as I do.

Just then a nurse interrupts, bringing Tim nightly cocktails of drugs. It's an obscene amount of pills. Tim grins.

TIM
 Alright. My hors d'ouvres.

The nurse smiles -- obviously she likes him. She hands over the pills, lets him start on them while she preps his arm for a shot, pulls out an enormous 14 gauge needle.

John backs away, trying to give Tim his privacy.

JOHN
 I should go, Tim. But... good luck.

Tim looks over at John as the giant needle enters his arm.

TIM
 Thanks. I won't lie, I could probably use a little luck right now.

Then, as he bites down on his lip, CRINGING from the pain:

BACK OUTSIDE THE HOSPITAL --

John walks out. Finds Savannah sitting on the steps, puffing on a cigarette. He can't believe what he's seeing.

JOHN
 What, you smoke now?

She stands up. Puts the pack back in her purse.

SAVANNAH
 Just one or two when I'm stressed.

John stares at her. Sees how much she's changed.

JOHN
 Am I stressing you out?

She SHRUGS. Exhales a puff of smoke.

SAVANNAH
 Get in line.

Then she calls over to Alan, who's lying nearby in the grass.

SAVANNAH
 Alan, let's go say goodbye to Dad.

Savannah looks back at John as she leads Alan inside.

SAVANNAH
 Give us a minute?

John nods. Watches them disappear through the doors.

IN SAVANNAH'S CAR -- LATER

Savannah drives. John sits quietly in the front seat next to her. Alan's in the back, his nose in his videogame as usual.

They come to a stop at a red light and pull up next to a van. Inside is an adult DRIVER and a bunch of KIDS. It's a church group, or a school trip, or a children's home -- or something.

One LITTLE GIRL looks out the van's window longingly back into Savannah's car. She and John make eye contact, and John can tell what she sees.

She sees what looks like a family.

BACK AT THE HOUSE IN LENOIR --

Savannah turns the car onto the dirt driveway. As soon as she pulls up to the house, Alan bolts out, heading straight for the stables. Savannah calls after him.

SAVANNAH

Dinner in ten minutes!

Alan waves as he disappears inside the stable. Savannah stares after him for a beat, then turns to John.

SAVANNAH

You hungry?

IN THE KITCHEN -- LATER

John, Savannah, and Alan finish off plates of beef stroganoff and potatoes au gratin. John's impressed.

JOHN

I didn't know you were such a good cook.

SAVANNAH

I'm not. My mom is. She makes it, wraps it up, sends it over. All I do is heat it up.

Alan finishes first, slams his fork down like it's a race.

ALAN

Can I be excused?

Before Savannah can even finish nodding, Alan's out the door, back to the stables. John watches him through the window.

JOHN

He still loves those horses, huh?

SAVANNAH

Oh, he'll be out there till bedtime.
No point convincing him otherwise.

John turns around to find Savannah opening a bottle of red wine, pouring out a glass for each of them.

JOHN

You drink now too?

SAVANNAH

Just a glass of wine or two after dinner. Tim got me started.

She hands him his glass. John watches her take a long sip.

JOHN

Is he gonna make it?

Savannah sits down at the table. Looks more tired than ever.

SAVANNAH

Not with the treatment he's getting now. He needs to get out of here. Out of that hospital. All they can do there is interferon, and it's not working. MD Anderson starts testing a new vaccine in June -- not for prevention like most vaccines, but for treatment. It's his best chance, but the health care company won't pay for it, those--

She stops herself. Takes a deep, calming breath.

SAVANNAH

It's an experimental treatment, the vaccine, and no health care company in the world pays for experimental treatments.

JOHN

And going ahead without coverage isn't an option?

She laughs out loud, despite herself.

SAVANNAH

Like I said -- life's expensive. My parents sold the beach house a year ago to help with the medical costs. It's only gotten worse since then.

She finishes her glass (John's barely started his), pours herself another.

SAVANNAH

They took a second mortgage on their main house. We took a second on ours. But we've already gone through most all of it. We opened up a charitable foundation for donations, we'll do some fundraisers, but...

She trails off. Stands up. Goes over to the window, stares out at the stable and the night sky.

SAVANNAH

He got the diagnosis eight months after I saw you last. Eight months after that night at my parents.

She doesn't look over at John. Keeps staring out the window.

SAVANNAH

At first, I just wanted to help. I started coming by as much as I could to give him a hand with Alan. To give him a shoulder to cry on.

John stands in the kitchen silently. Doesn't interrupt. Lets her say whatever she needs to say.

SAVANNAH

We didn't plan it. I don't even know how it happened, really.

She starts to become emotional. Tries to push through it.

SAVANNAH

I kept writing you letters, though. Every seven days. I felt terrible about it, but I couldn't stop. I couldn't stop writing to you. I couldn't stop trying to tell you.

She turns away from him. John doesn't move.

JOHN

I tried to write back, you know. While I was holed up in the hospital after I got shot, I started to write you a bunch of times. Never sent any of them, though. Never even finished them.

Savannah turns back around. Finally looks at him.

SAVANNAH

You were shot?

John nods. Savannah's face is pained.

SAVANNAH

Where?

John pauses. Then he stands up, slowly removes his coat and tie. Unbuttons his shirt.

Maintains eye contact with her the whole time while he pulls the shirt off. Underneath is an army issue wife beater.

His shoulder wound is visible, round and only a quarter of an inch wide. Hard to believe it's so small. Savannah touches it lightly -- the tip of her thumb completely covers it up.

She steps around him, looks for the exit wound. She GASPS when she sees it -- it's huge, and scar tissue covers the entire back of his shoulder. She brushes it with her hand.

Then she steps back in front of John. Slowly, he lifts his shirt up. She finds another small, rounded scar above his abdomen. She brushes her finger over this one, too.

When she finally looks up at him, tears are streaming down her face. She touches his left eyebrow, just like she did back at that half-built house in Wilmington seven years ago.

SAVANNAH

So many scars...

She starts to cry harder now. John lets her.

SAVANNAH

I'm sorry, John.

John still doesn't respond. Knows she's not apologizing for these scars, but for the other ones.

SAVANNAH

Why do these things happen to us?
Huh? What'd we do to deserve all
this? Is it karma? Is that it?

She pauses, trying to regain her composure.

SAVANNAH

It's like those two weeks we spent
together were too perfect, you know?
It wasn't fair for us to have a few
weeks like that in a world like
this, and so we have to pay them
back for it. I think we've been
paying them back for it ever since.

John looks away. Savannah wipes her eyes, pours them each a

new glass, tosses away the bottle.

SAVANNAH

C'mon. There's something I want to show you.

IN THE LIVING ROOM --

John sits on the couch with his glass of wine. Savannah comes into the room with a thick folder, sits next to him.

SAVANNAH

I saved every single one of them.

John opens the folder. Flips through all the letters he ever wrote her. The memories flood back.

The very last letter is on the back of an old phone bill. He flips it over-- it's just four words: I LOVE YOU. JOHN.

SAVANNAH

Even your first.

John looks over at her. They are suddenly very close.

Savannah does not take her eyes off of him. Their faces are just inches apart. They are having a moment.

Then Savannah accidentally knocks her wine glass over. She rescues the folder of letters, but her blouse and John's undershirt are doused.

SAVANNAH

Shoot. I'm sorry.

JOHN

Don't worry about it, it's a two dollar undershirt.

She looks down at her own blouse, which is much worse off.

SAVANNAH

This is one of my favorites, though. I should get it soaking.

She heads down the hall, turns into one of the BEDROOMS. John stands too, heads into the HALLWAY BATHROOM --

-- turns on the faucet, starts spot rinsing his shirt.

BUT IN THE MIRROR'S REFLECTION --

-- he can see Savannah through the cracked door of the bedroom across the hall. She's topless, with her back to him.

Although he tries, he cannot turn away. Savannah senses him staring, looks over her shoulder. Caught, John waits for her to cover herself and close the door. But she does neither.

Instead, she catches his eye and holds it, willing him to continue watching her. And then, slowly, she turns around.

They stand there facing each other through the reflection, with only the narrow hallway separating them. Neither one of them moves. Neither one of their gazes waver.

Suddenly the front door CRASHES OPEN and shatters the quiet.

ALAN

Ten o'clock! Bedtime!

Savannah turns, grabs a shirt to pull on. John walks out of the bathroom just in time to see Alan hurry up the stairs.

JOHN

Goodnight, Alan.

But he doesn't respond. Savannah comes out into the hallway, fully dressed now, and calls up after him.

SAVANNAH

Take a bath and brush your teeth, okay? I'll be up in fifteen minutes to tuck you in.

ALAN'S VOICE

Twelve minutes! Gotta be in bed in twelve minutes!

SAVANNAH

So I'll be up in twelve minutes then.

Savannah grins over at John. Looks at him hopefully.

SAVANNAH

Only twelve minutes. If you wanna stay I could... make coffee, or...

John sighs. Knows what's left unsaid when she trails off. He looks back at her... and then he makes his mind up.

He turns, walks back into the kitchen. Savannah follows him, watches him grab his shirt and coat. She's stunned.

SAVANNAH

You're leaving?

John looks back at her sadly. Apologetically.

JOHN

I'm sorry.

Savannah's eyes start to well up, but she fights the tears back. John watches her, chooses his words carefully.

JOHN

The thing is -- I think I was always so busy feeling bad for myself, I never realized how tough it must have been for you. How tough that decision must've been to make.

He finishes getting dressed, walks towards her.

JOHN

But you made it. You made a decision because you had to. And I respect that. I have to respect that.

Savannah starts to tremble.

SAVANNAH

John, I... I'm so --

JOHN

(interrupting)

It's okay. You've said "I'm sorry" enough. It's my turn now.

She reaches out, wraps her arms around him, holds on tightly. Knows he's leaving and there's nothing she can do about it.

SAVANNAH

We'll see each other again, though. Right? I'll see you soon then?

John doesn't answer. He pulls himself away, heads to the door.

JOHN

Goodbye, Savannah.

SAVANNAH

No. No, you're supposed to say "I'll see you soon then". Remember? When I ask "I'll see you soon then?" You're supposed to...

She trails off. John turns to her. She's crying softly now, desperate and indignant and pleading --

SAVANNAH

John. You're supposed to say it. You're supposed to say "I'll see you soon then."

John looks back at her. Takes her in one final time. This might be the hardest thing he's ever had to do.

Then, without another word, he walks out.

Savannah goes to the window, watches as he gets into his car, turns it on, and heads up the driveway.

Only when he finally disappears from view does she finally start to sob.

IN A MOSTLY EMPTY COIN SHOP -- THE FOLLOWING DAY

The front door CHIMES, and the DEALER looks up (his is a face we've seen before). John nods hello.

JOHN

Hi. You probably don't remember me, but you know my father-- Bill Tyree?

COIN DEALER

Course I do. Haven't seen him in a while, how is he?

John doesn't answer at first. He just takes in the store, remembers the first time he stepped foot in here, almost twenty years ago now.

JOHN

You offered to buy his whole collection once. Didn't you?

COIN DEALER

Sure did. More than once.

John walks through the display cases, eyeballs the rows and rows of coins laid out under the glass.

JOHN

Just out of curiosity... how much do you think it's worth? All his stuff?

COIN DEALER

A collection big as your Dad's?

He WHISTLES, lets him know -- serious money. John nods, finally looks the Dealer in the eye.

JOHN

Think you could lend me a hand?

OUTSIDE --

John POPS his trunk.

JOHN

There's only one condition-- the mules stay together. Offer them as a set. Keep them yourself. But they stay together, okay?

The Dealer eyes the boxes and boxes jammed into the trunk. Sees that even more boxes are stacked in the backseat. Turns to John in disbelief.

COIN DEALER

You're really gonna sell me all your Daddy's coins?

John looks over at him.

JOHN

All but one.

SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE EAST -- MONTHS LATER

John stands in the middle of the desert. Takes in the view.

IN HIS HAND -- he flips a GLASS-ENCASED COIN through his fingers. A very familiar glass-encased coin.

Around him, his TEAM (many of whom are new faces) argue where base camp should be set up. John SHUSHES them all.

JOHN

Guys. This comes up nickel side, we set up here, where we've got shade. Comes up penny side, we set up on the ridge, where we have visibility.

John FLIPS the coin high up in the air, lets it fall into the sand. One of the others goes to check out the result.

GREEN BERET

It's tails.
(beat)
So what does that mean?

John takes the coin back. He carefully wipes a smudge from the glass, then tucks it safely into his pocket.

JOHN

It means we're gonna need sunscreen.

Some of the soldiers GROAN -- but they all get to work. As John helps to coordinate the move, a YOUNG BERET walks up with a delivery.

YOUNG BERET

Sargeant Major?

JOHN

No ranks in the field, son.

He looks down at the delivery in the kid's hand -- it's a LETTER. The handwriting is familiar. So is the clean, white envelope. He instantly knows what it is.

John takes the letter, finds himself a secluded spot, carefully opens it up.

And then he begins to read.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

Dear John...

Drift away from John, alone in this sea of sand.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

It's been almost five years since I wrote a letter with an actual pen, on an actual sheet of notebook paper. I don't think I realized until today how much I've missed it.

BACK AT THE HOUSE IN LENOIR --

Savannah watches Alan sit at the kitchen table, carefully penciling in words on a large banner.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

Though I suppose it's not really writing letters that I miss. It's writing letters to you.

She hands Alan a magic marker. Watches as he starts back at the beginning, tracing his pencil lines with the marker. Watches the ink seep into the paper.

SAVANNAH

So I thought maybe I could write to you, now, and let you know all that's happened since I saw you last.

IN HER BEDROOM --

Savannah sits in a private corner, all alone, and puts her own pen to paper again.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

A few weeks after you showed up in Lenoir, an anonymous donation was made to Tim's foundation, a donation big enough for us to buy him a spot in the experimental vaccination program at MD Anderson.

IN THE OUTPATIENT WING OF A STRANGE HOSPITAL --

Tim sits in bed, much of the color back in his face. He smiles warmly at the nurse checking his blood pressure.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

He's back in Houston right now for his final treatment, but he's been in remission for two months. We're not sure if it will last...

ON A PAIR OF AUTOMATIC DOORS --

-- as they WHISK open, and Tim steps out in street clothes.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

...but it might, and that's good enough for us.

DRIFT TOWARDS THE HOUSE IN LENOIR --

-- where cars are parked all over the yard, and above the front door hangs Alan's banner, very impressively lettered, which reads: WELCOME HOME, DAD.

Drift through the doors to find the party already in swing.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

As for the donation, I cannot even begin to imagine who out there would do such a selfless thing as that in such a selfish world as this.

Savannah shows a healthy looking Tim through the crowd. They greet their guests: here are Mr. and Mrs. Curtis, who happily hug their son-in-law...

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

And I realize, of course, that all this person has asked, in return for saving my husband's life, is to remain anonymous.

...here is Alan, dressed up in a suit, shyly trying to engage a GAWKY GIRL in actual conversation...

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

So although it is difficult, I know I must respect his wishes. Which means all I can do is wake up every morning and say thank you. To the sky. To no one. To everyone.

Savannah looks at Alan, her parents, her healthy husband. She looks around at all of these people, here to support him.

Her eyes water with gratitude.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

It's a small gesture, but it's all that I have. I hope that it is enough.

Then she excuses herself from the group, walks across the room to an empty corner.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

And that's the gift this person has given me. That's what has been missing from my life, and that's what's been returned to me now.

In this empty corner, there is a window, and Savannah stares out it, lost in thought.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

Hope.

BACK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PARTY --

Tim looks around the crowd, surrounded by all these people who love him. He knows how lucky he is.

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

I hope this letter finds you well, John.

Then Tim suddenly realizes that something is missing. He looks around the party, trying to find his wife...

...but she's nowhere to be found now.

OUTSIDE --

Although the party is in full swing indoors, things are much quieter out here. As the wind rustles through the trees --

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

Actually, I just hope this letter finds you, period.

IN THE STABLES --

Alan shows off his favorite horse to the Gawky Girl. While they stand there, petting her in silence, drift past them...

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

I hope that you're safe, and that you're happy. I have no idea where you are out there in the world, but I understand that I lost the right to know these things long ago.

TOWARDS THE MAIN HOUSE --

-- where Savannah stands on the porch, alone.

Then she looks up, into the night sky --

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

*I want you to know, though, that no
matter how much time passes, no
matter how far away you are...*

-- where she finds the full moon above her... and as she
raises her thumb to cover it up --

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

*...on nights like these, you'll
always be here with me.*

DRIFT AWAY FROM HER --

-- pulling back from the house, heading down the driveway, up
the hill, towards the woods by the main road...

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

*And more than anything else, I hope
that part of me is out there with
you, too...*

...landing by one tree in particular...

SAVANNAH'S VOICE

...wherever you may be.

...to find John standing in the shadows behind it.

He watches Savannah staring up at their moon, like he'd hoped
that she would, and it makes him smile.

Then, after a long moment, John turns... and as he starts to
head back to his car, to his house, to wherever he came from--

-- he disappears back into the shadows underneath the moon,
which looms large above everything.

FADE TO BLACK