

SUPER: THE BLACK DEATH

EXT. EUROPEAN HAMLET - NIGHT

DEATH in a tattered black cloak holds a scythe. He marches.

Balls of light and phantom figures follow. As he passes bodies in the street, souls rise from the corpses and fall in line behind him.

The figure does not waver from his path. His gaze does not waver as the living weep and wail and plead.

A dirty, HAGGARD WOMAN wails over her dying child.

HAGGARD WOMAN

Take me instead!

He passes by without regard. The child's shimmering hand grasps his cloak and is dragged from her body.

The woman wails as the growing legion of victims follow him to the next village.

SUPER: THE THIRTY YEARS WAR

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Mediaeval French and British forces clash on muddy battlefields.

Bloody, dirty, exhausted.

The first casualties decay, covered in flies. Death dances through the carnage as a skeleton held together by mummified flesh.

Spectral figures rise from the corpses and follow the skeleton like zombies.

One soldier kneels beside a dying comrade.

SOLDIER

Don't take my brother. Take me instead!

Soldiers fall. Their ghosts rise, adding to the spectral army that follows him, unseen by the mortals who continue to die.

SUPER: THE GREAT FAMINE

EXT. IRISH COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

The reaper floats through the Irish countryside following the wails of banshees.

The sick and starving congregate. A church.

A flood of souls, waiting for his deliverance, form a wake of lights behind him. He waits a moment for the final one.

A YOUNG MAN holds his young wife's hand and pleads:

YOUNG MAN
Please Lord, take me instead.

Her hand goes limp and her soul falls in line with the others.

SUPER: THE TAIPING REBELLION

EXT. CHINESE COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

The Heibai Wuchang, the Chinese Grim Reaper, rides through cities on a white horse, the massive trail of lights behind him growing with every *li*.

An ELDERLY ASIAN WOMAN wails near a young man with a sword wound in his chest.

ELDERLY ASIAN WOMAN
dài zou wo ba, bùyào wo de érzi

SUPER: WORLD WAR I

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

The Grim Reaper marches through a battlefield, at the edge of a French hamlet. Mortars explode all around. Souls of the fallen soldiers march behind him in formation, eyes forward. With each explosion, each volley of bullets, more soldiers join the macabre march.

One young FRENCH SOLDIER kneels beside an older comrade.

FRENCH SOLDIER
S'il vous plaît, ne prenez pas mon
père. Prenez-moi à sa place !

SUPER: THE SPANISH FLU

EXT. SPANISH TOWN - NIGHT

Death rides a white horse. He carries a bow. He gallops. The growing cloud of lights behind him keeps pace.

A YOUNG BOY sobs next to a wagon with his dead parents.

YOUNG BOY
Llévame a mí en su lugar!

SUPER: THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR - DAY

EXT. TSARITSYN - DAY

Russian battles Russian. Civil war, brother fights brother, sons fight fathers.

A GRIZZLED SOLDIER holds the hand of another who bleeds.

GRIZZLED SOLDIER
Voz'mi menya vmesto nego

His light joins countless others as Death marches on, eyes forward.

SUPER: WORLD WAR II

EXT. CONCENTRATION CAMP - NIGHT

The Angel of Death moves silently among the barracks and barbed wire, wrapped in his black wings.

Around him, the living move as specters, their eyes hollow.

In the distance, a MOTHER softly sings to her child. Death is summoned by her voice. A sick child breathes shallowly in her mother's arms.

MOTHER
Nimm mich stattdessen!

The child stops breathing and her wispy light falls in line behind Death. He continues to march through the camp, collecting souls.

He stops by the camp's perimeter, overlooking the expanse of human-made hell. Here, the trail of ghosts behind him seems to stretch endlessly. Death turns to gaze behind him for a moment, for the first time.

SUPER: THE KOREAN CONFLICT

EXT. FROZEN BATTLEFIELD

Death in the frozen landscapes of Korea, as families are torn apart. Jeoseung Saja wanders through the battlefield of frozen corpses amid cries of "Nareul daesin gajyeoga jwo."

SUPER: NATURAL DISASTERS

A rapid sequence of earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods around the globe, all resulting in mass casualties.

The pace quickens, the cuts grow shorter, the scenes more intense and frequent, reflecting the accelerating pace of global events.

Death's continues to provide service to the victims.

The crescendo of human suffering and death builds until suddenly, everything stops.

INT. ELI BENNETT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - NIGHT

An unseen observer walks through the hotel lobby. Hospital employees go about their duties. Two NURSES walk toward the observer.

NURSE 1

Dr. Bennett says he's going to die.

NURSE 2

He's old.

NURSE 1

He says he's dying tonight.

They briskly walk past as two DOCTORS hurry in the other direction.

DOCTOR 1

He's on his deathbed and still sees patients.

DOCTOR 2

I guess that's why they named the hospital after him.

A gaggle of MED STUDENTS huddle at a table.

STUDENT 1

He's Trey's Grandfather.

STUDENT 2
I thought the last name was a coincidence.

STUDENT 3
Is that why he isn't here?

STUDENT 4
He says he knows Death.

STUDENT 2
Trey?

STUDENT 4
No, his grandfather.

STUDENT 1
Of course he does. He was a doctor for over 50 years.

STUDENT 3
No, like, Death the person.

The invisible observer walks past.

INT. VIP WARD - NIGHT

ELI "TREY" BENNETT III (25) exits the elevator and approaches the front desk.

TREY
How is he?

CHARGE NURSE
Stable and alert.

She hands him a file. He enters the corner VIP suite.

INT. VIP SUITE - NIGHT

An old man lies in a spacious hospital suite reserved for special guests. A baseball glove, ball, and dirty old baseball cap rest on the nightstand.

DR. ELI BENNETT (80s) sits up, eyes bright.

OLD ELI
Eli! My favorite grandson. Here to say goodbye?

TREY

I'm your only grandson. Why do you have to be so cavalier?

OLD ELI

You've heard the rumors. Doctor Bennett says he's going to meet Death tonight.

TREY

Allusions aside...

OLD ELI

No. Not an allusion. Death. My friend. He's coming for me tonight.

TREY

You're impossible.

OLD ELI

I get that a lot.

TREY

How can Death be your friend?

OLD ELI

"Analysis of death is not for the sake of becoming fearful but to appreciate this precious lifetime."

TREY

What hippie said that?

OLD ELI

The Dalai Lama.

TREY

Aren't we Catholic?

OLD ELI

No group owns the truth.

Eli looks at his grandfather and sighs.

TREY

Where did you first meet Death?

OLD ELI

I'm the only one left who knows the entire story.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY (1962)

A quiet, dimly lit hospital room of the 1960s.

Death, wearing a hand tailored black suit, enters the room where a young boy (ELI BENNETT, 12) lies.

DANIEL BENNETT (30s) watches over his son. Next to the uncomfortable chair is a small nightstand. On top is a new baseball glove, baseball, and a baseball cap with a red "M".

A doctor walks in, consults a chart, listens to the boy's heart. He looks at the man and shakes his head.

The doctor exits. The man looks to the ceiling and pleads.

DANIEL

I can't do this any longer. Please
take me. Take me instead.

An INVISIBLE FIGURE studies him. Looks at the boy in bed.

Back to the man. He cocks his head to the side. Looks back at the boy.

He reaches out. Touches the boy's hand. Stops. Then turns to the man and touches his forehead.

To the man, a stranger in a black suit miraculously appears.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

What the...?

DEATH

Should I?

The startled and confused man wipes his tears and frowns.

DANIEL

What?

DEATH

Should I take you instead?

The man looks at his son and nods.

DANIEL

Yes. Take me. Let my son live.

DEATH

Why?

DANIEL

I've had a life. He's been sick since the day he was born. He loves watching baseball but we've never even been able to play catch.

DEATH

That is his lot in life.

DANIEL

It isn't fair.

DEATH

Nothing is.

DANIEL

How can you be so callous?

DEATH

It's clinical detachment.

DANIEL

Do you feel nothing?

Death takes notice of the mortal's lack of awe.

DEATH

Do you not fear me?

DANIEL

My only fear is of you refusing my request. Take me. Take me instead.

DEATH

What about those you leave behind?
A wife, perhaps?

DANIEL

She's strong. Stronger than I. She can raise our son alone.

Death studies the man with...Intrigue? Respect? He eyes the boy. The unused baseball glove.

Death holds out his hand. Daniel grasps it. Stands. He and Death turn to walk down a long, glowing tunnel that forms in front of them. He looks over his shoulder to see his own lifeless body slumped in the chair.

Death glances back as well. The boy's eyes open. He sits up and exhales frosty fog as if the air is ice cold. His eyes follow them.

INT. HOSPITAL - FLASHBACK -(1950)

Eli's Father rushes a very pregnant Miriam to the hospital.

They push her to maternity.

Eli's Father waits outside.

They gaze down at BABY ELI while in the recovery room.

Eli turns blue. They panic. Doctors take him.

They wait.

They visit Eli in ICU. He's in an incubator.

They take turns sitting with him.

INT. BENNETT HOUSE - FLASHBACK (1950)

Home. The nursery is unused. They sleep with baby Eli so they can monitor him.

Midnight trips to the emergency room.

Medicine.

Eli cries the least.

OLD ELI (V.O.)
Your great-grandma Miriam didn't
believe me.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST'S OFFICE - DAY (1962)

Young Eli sits with his mother MIRIAM BENNETT (30) across the desk from DR. STEIN. Eli wears a dirty Washington Senators baseball cap.

DR. STEIN
Eli has had a difficult time
recently. I'm not concerned.

YOUNG ELI
I know what I saw.

His mother whispers harshly.

MIRIAM
Don't breathe a word of this to
anyone. Do you want everyone to
think you're crazy?

DR. STEIN

He isn't crazy. He's been through a lot and his brain is trying to make sense of things.

Eli huffs and crosses his arms.

YOUNG ELI

That doesn't sound any better.

MIRIAM

You know what being an outcast is like. Don't go from being the crippled kid to being the weird kid. Life is easier if people don't have ammunition to use against you.

INT. SCHOOL - DAY

Eli walks through the halls at his junior high school, books in hand.

A gaggle of boys stand next to their lockers laughing. They stop as Eli nears. JAKE MORRISSON(12), their ringleader knocks the books out of Eli's hands.

YOUNG JAKE

Oops. Sorry.

He turns and snickers with his friends. Eli leaps at Jake while his back is turned, knocks him down and pummels him. His friends scatter as the principal approaches.

PRINCIPAL

My office!

He drags them away by their collars.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Eli and Jake sit in the hallway outside the office while their mothers are inside. They study their fingernails. Jake has a piece of bloody tissue in his nose.

The both look up as their mothers enter the hallway. One look at their expressions and they study their shoes.

LAURA MORRISSON (40) speaks first.

LAURA

What were you thinking? Picking on
the sick kid whose dad just died?
Apologize.

She grabs him by the collar and drags him away. He shouts
over his shoulder.

YOUNG JAKE

Sorry.

Miriam and Eli watch Laura march Jake out of the building.

MIRIAM

Looks like you got a couple of good
ones in.

Eli nods. The corner of her mouth tics up.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)

Ice cream?

INT. BENNETT HOUSE - DAY

Miriam bags Eli's lunch.

YOUNG ELI

I'm going to be a little late
today.

She drops her arms to her side and gives him "the look".

MIRIAM

Do you have detention again?

YOUNG ELI

No. I want to try out for the
baseball team.

She turns toward the sink so he doesn't see her cry.

MIRIAM

Your Father would be proud. Even if
you don't make the team.

EXT. CITY PARK - FLASHBACK - DAY (1960)

Eli and his Father visit the park.

The other kids stare at the one in the wheelchair.

He learns not to care. Eli loves watching baseball.

An errant ball rolls toward him and stops.

Eli bends over to pick it up with his brand new glove.

A boy runs and grabs it before Eli can.

Daniel exhales heavily.

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY (1962)

Eli tries out for the baseball team. Jake avoids him. Boys take turns running the bases, swinging at pitches and trapping line drives.

The COACH (40s) takes notes. Eli does well. The other boys take notice also.

COACH

Bennett!

Eli stops playing catch and runs over.

YOUNG ELI

Yeah Coach?

COACH

What position you like?

YOUNG ELI

Um...pitcher?

Some of the other boys snicker. Coach tosses him a ball.

COACH

Hit the mound. Who wants to catch?

Jake slowly raises his hand. Eli sighs.

EXT. CLEVELAND STADIUM - FLASHBACK - DAY (1960)

Indians vs. The Senators. Eli and his father sit behind home plate.

The Senators fight hard, but lose. Eli drinks it all in.

After the game, players greet the fans. They all ignore Eli. All but Tex Clevenger, pitcher for the Senators.

He gives Eli his baseball cap.

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - CONTINUOUS (1962)

Eli stands at the mound wearing his prized, worn Senators cap. Jake wears catcher's gear. The Coach stands behind him.

YOUNG JAKE

You sure about this coach? He's
always been too sick to do sports.
Pitcher is the hardest position.

COACH

Let him try. Whenever you're ready,
Bennett!

Eli nods. He takes a breath, winds up and throws.

A heater straight down the middle. Jake doesn't even need to move his glove. The ball sounds like a bullet as it hits the catchers mitt. Jake shakes his hand in pain.

The other boys stop snickering.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Eli walks in. Jake waves and shouts.

YOUNG JAKE

Eli! Over here!

Eli sits at Jake's table with him and his friends. The mood is much more in Eli's favor than the last time they all met.

YOUNG JAKE (CONT'D)

Um...sorry, Eli.

Eli shrugs.

YOUNG JAKE (CONT'D)

Man, where did you learn to pitch?

YOUNG ELI

Watching TV with my Dad.

YOUNG JAKE

Maybe we should all do that.

YOUNG ELI

My Dad said the pros watch more
tape than they practice. I'll ask
my Mom.

INT. BENNETT HOUSE - DAY

Eli, Jake and the team huddle around the TV in the Bennett's living room watching the Saturday baseball game.

The unused baseball and glove from his father sit on the mantle next to his prized baseball cap.

Jake's mom Laura helps Miriam with snacks and drinks.

LAURA

Thanks for having the boys over,
Miriam.

MIRIAM

Eli was always too sick for
friends.

She gazes into the living room and smiles as Eli interacts with his new friends.

LAURA

Kids can be cruel. He turned out
great though. Eli's a strong boy.

MIRIAM

I wish his father was here to see.

Her eyes move to the floor.

LAURA

I'm sure he's watching.

INT. BENNETT HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Miriam and Eli clean up after the team leaves. Eli is quiet.

MIRIAM

You okay?

YOUNG ELI

yeah

She stops. Clearly a "no".

MIRIAM

You're great at baseball. You have
a lot of new friends. Doesn't that
feel nice?

YOUNG ELI

All I ever wanted to do is play
catch with Dad.

MIRIAM
I'm sure he's watching.

YOUNG ELI
Maybe he's watching with that other
man.

MIRIAM
This again? You're going to lose
your new friends if you keep
talking crazy.

YOUNG ELI
I know what I saw, Mom.

MIRIAM
It doesn't make sense.

YOUNG ELI
It will once I figure it out.

MIRIAM
Don't get caught.

OLD ELI (V.O.)
You see, while my mother's instinct
was to baby me since I was so sick
as a kid, she did the best thing
ever. She never cut me any slack.

BEGIN MONTAGE: (1962-1965)

Eli grows. He leads his junior high school baseball team to
the finals.

He starts on the high school team as a freshman.

His best friend Jake is his partner in everything.

When Eli isn't practicing or watching games with the team, he
studies.

In the library he reads books on death.

Religious tomes, science books, books on metaphysics. Past
lives, the afterlife, mythology.

END MONTAGE.

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY (1965)

Jake finds Eli.

TEEN JAKE
What's with the books? We're
jocks, man?

LIBRARIAN
Shhhhhhhhhhh!

They lower their voices.

TEEN ELI
It's nothing.

Jake looks at the pile of books.

TEEN JAKE
It don't look like nothing.

Jake stares at Eli until he cracks.

TEEN ELI
(whispering)
You can't tell anyone. Especially
my Mom.

Jake crosses his heart.

TEEN JAKE
What's up?

TEEN ELI
I'm looking for my Dad.

Jake blinks three times.

TEEN JAKE
Your dad. Your dead dad.

TEEN ELI
When I was in the hospital, I saw
my Dad's body in a chair AND I saw
him walk out with some guy in a
black suit.

Jake frowns.

TEEN JAKE
You were on a lot of drugs, right?

TEEN ELI
Maybe, but I know what I saw.

TEEN JAKE
Uh-huh.

Eli scoffs.

TEEN ELI

I knew you wouldn't believe me.

Jake looks at his best friend hard. He opens his mouth to speak several times before he decides on the right words.

TEEN JAKE

You believe it. That's good enough for me. Let's go talk to an expert.

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Jake leads Eli into his church.

TEEN JAKE

The Father here is great. He knows everything.

Eli looks around at the ornate old church in awe of the high ceilings and stained glass windows. FATHER BLIVEN (60) steps into the nave to greet Jake with a scowl.

FATHER BLIVEN

What did you do now?

Jake's face falls.

TEEN JAKE

Nothing. I swear.

FATHER BLIVEN

You aren't here for confession?

Eli looks at Jake out of the corner of his eye and grins.

TEEN JAKE

My friend Eli needs to talk.

The Father looks at Eli and raises his eyebrows.

TEEN ELI

When my Dad died I saw a man walk away with him.

Father Bliven's eyes dart back and forth between Jake and Eli, expecting them to break.

FATHER BLIVEN

Let's go to my office.

INT. FR. BLIVEN'S PRIORY - DAY

Father Bliven listens to Eli's story. He nods. Jake listens. The Father stands and pulls an old book from the shelf behind him, sets it on the table and opens it.

FATHER BLIVEN
Did he look like this?

Eli looks it over. It's a depiction of a skeleton in a black cloak holding a scythe. He shakes his head.

TEEN ELI
He looked like a rich guy in a
black suit.

Father looks at Jake.

FATHER BLIVEN
Are you two messing with me?

They both shake their heads vigorously. He stares down Jake.

FATHER BLIVEN (CONT'D)
Do you believe him?

Jake nods again.

FATHER BLIVEN (CONT'D)
Every culture has one. Baba Yaga,
Grim Reaper, Angel of Death. A
personification to help us cope
with the concept of mortality.

YOUNG ELI
Do a lot of people see him?

FATHER BLIVEN
As far as I know you're the first.

YOUNG ELI
Why did I see him?

FATHER BLIVEN
I don't know. We need more
information.

YOUNG ELI
Where do we get that?

FATHER BLIVEN
God has a plan. If He revealed this
to you, it's important. Why do you
want to know so badly?

YOUNG ELI
Baba is the key to why I'm alive
and my Dad is dead.

EXT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Eli and Jake leave the church. Eli looks at the ground as they walk.

TEEN ELI
That wasn't very helpful.

TEEN JAKE
Sure it was! Now two people believe
you. We got this.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

The team returns from an away game, giddy from their win.

TEEN JAKE
Nice no-hitter, *captain*.

Eli rolls his eyes.

TEEN ELI
I'm not team captain.

TEEN JAKE
You're gonna be if you keep
pitching like that.

The bus slows down and stops. Eli leans forward.

TEEN ELI
What is it?

BUS DRIVER
Car wreck. We might be a while.

EXT. BUS - NIGHT

Eli, Jake and a few of the others exit to stretch their legs.

TEEN ELI
Let's see if anyone needs help.

Eli and Jake walk past a line of cars. Flashing lights ahead.
An ambulance. The EMTs don't rush.

TEEN JAKE
We should turn back.

Eli squints in the direction of the accident.

TEEN ELI
Hold on.

He marches forward. Jake follows. Eli spots two figures near the cars. Broken glass crunches beneath their feet.

A man in a black suit and a woman stand with their backs to him. His breath fogs in the warm spring air.

TEEN JAKE
Eli, let's go.

Eli waves him off and continues forward. The figures turn.
It's him. The man who took his Dad.

TEEN ELI
Mister?

The man looks around. Points to himself. Eli nods.

DEATH
How can you see me?

TEEN ELI
Dunno. You're the Baba Yaga.

He smiles. It makes him appear almost approachable

BABA
I always liked that name.

TEEN ELI
I saw you take my Dad.

Death cocks his head. Squints. The smile disappears.

BABA
Go away kid. I'm working.

TEEN ELI
Where did you take my dad?

BABA
Where he was supposed to go. Where
you all go.

TEEN ELI
Why do you do it?

The man opens his mouth to answer, but closes it again.

OLD ELI (V.O.)
It was then I realized he didn't
know either. That question started
us both on a deep and profound
journey for the next seventy years.

Jake appears behind Eli. He whispers.

TEEN JAKE
Who are you talking to?

Eli turns to look at Jake and points behind him.

TEEN ELI
That guy holding the lady's hand.

TEEN JAKE
There's no one there, man.

Eli turns back around. The man and woman are gone.

INT. FR. BLIVEN'S PRIORY - DAY

Father listens to Eli's story.

FATHER BLIVEN
We need more information.

TEEN ELI
Where do we get it?

FATHER BLIVEN
Ask him directly.

OLD ELI (V.O.)
And that's when I got the bright
idea to volunteer at the hospital.
It was selfish of me. I wasn't
there to help people. I was only
there to meet Death again.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Eli's first day as a candy striper.

Jake sneaks up behind him.

TEEN JAKE
Nice apron ma'am.

TEEN ELI

Shut up.

TEEN JAKE

You're so busy already. How are you going to fit this in between baseball and school?

TEEN ELI

I'll figure it out.

TEEN JAKE

Do you really think you'll see him?

TEEN ELI

The other two times I saw him were when someone died. Sooner or later he'll show up here.

TEEN JAKE

How long will it take?

TEEN ELI

Five or six people die in our hospital every year. I should bump into him sooner or later, right?

TEEN JAKE

You might want to practice making that sound less creepy.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

Eli, Jake and the team eat lunch at "their" table.

SOPHIE TUCKER (17) plops next to Eli. They all freeze.

SOPHIE

MR. WILLIAMS died last night.

Eli slumps.

TEEN ELI

Oh no!

SOPHIE

I wanted to be the one to tell you. I know you two were close. His service is on Sunday.

She stands to leave. They all watch her then their heads snap toward Eli in unison.

TEEN JAKE
Does Sophie volunteer at the
hospital too?

Jake hides his smile behind a sandwich.

TEEN ELI
It's not like that.

TEEN JAKE
Then what's it like?

Eli scowls. Jake drops it, but the team is quietly amused.

INT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - SUNDAY

Mr. Williams' mass is fully attended. Sophie sits next to Eli. Father Bliven presides.

Eli waits for everyone to leave.

FATHER BLIVEN
Did you meet him?

TEEN ELI
No, Mr. Williams passed when I
wasn't there.

FATHER BLIVEN
Better luck next time. Oh goodness.
That sounded horrible.

EXT. CATHOLIC CHURCH - SUNDAY

Eli is surprised to find Sophie waiting for him outside. They are adorably nervous with each other.

SOPHIE
Is everything okay?

TEEN ELI
I just wanted to see Father Bliven.

Sophie flashes an intrigued smile. Eli's knees grow weak.

SOPHIE
Captain of the baseball team, star
pitcher, hospital volunteer,
straight "A" student and friends
with a priest?

Eli stammers.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
Walk me home?

They stroll down the sidewalk. Eli is too shy to reach for her hand. Unwilling to wait, she grasps his hand tightly.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

The hallway is abuzz as Eli and Sophie walk down the hall holding hands. Eli avoids eye contact. Sophie holds court.

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA - DAY

The popular girls now sit with the baseball players. Boys wink at Eli. Girls share glances with Sophie.

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

After class, the pretty girls stay after and watch the boys practice baseball. The boys' performance is comically awful.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Eli bumps into Sophie while they do their rounds as volunteers at the hospital.

SOPHIE
Where are you working?

TEEN ELI
Cancer.

SOPHIE
I can't work there. It's too sad.
Doesn't it remind you of your dad?

Eli smiles.

TEEN ELI
That's why I do it.

Sophie steps closer to Eli. She licks her lips.

SOPHIE
Why did it take me so long to find
out how wonderful you are?

She rests her arms on his shoulders. He smiles.

TEEN ELI

Some people are just slow, I guess.

She giggles, he puts his hands on either side of her waist.
Her lips part. His eyes open wide. They lean in.

NURSE

I'm gonna send you two to work
maternity. Screaming babies will
kill those urges.

They chuckle and go to their separate wings.

INT. MRS. JEPPELSON'S ROOM

Eli reads to Mrs. Jeppson. She isn't aware of her
surroundings. No relatives visit.

INT. CANCER WARD - CONTINUOUS

Breaktime. Sophie walks through the halls looking for Eli.

She peeks into windows and finally finds him reading to a
patient. Her gaze softens. She watches.

Eli closes the book and stands. He hits the call button. The
nurse ushers Sophie aside and rushes into the room.

The on call physician arrives, listens to her with his
stethoscope and calls it.

DOCTOR

Time of death, 10:47 PM

Eli stands over Mrs. Jeppson as the doctor and nurses leave.
They let Eli say goodbye. Sophie gives one last look through
the window and leaves, giving him privacy.

Eli's breath fogs.

A man in a black suit appears. He sees Eli and does a double-
take.

BABA

You again?

TEEN ELI

Where's my Dad?

BABA

I don't know kid, I'm just the
delivery guy.

TEEN ELI
Where did you deliver him?

BABA
They follow me to a place. They
stay. I leave.

TEEN ELI
Is it heaven?

BABA
I don't know. It goes on forever.
It glows with a soft white
light...wait. Why am I talking to
you? Get lost.

He reaches out to touch Mrs. Jeppson's hand. He draws a shimmering, opaque form from her body. He turns to walk away and her soul follows him down a bright tunnel that forms in front of them.

INT. FR. BLIVEN'S PRIORY - DAY

TEEN ELI
He's kind of a jerk.

FATHER BLIVEN
How so?

TEEN ELI
He gets testy when I ask questions.

FATHER BLIVEN
Why are you the only person in
history that can see him?

TEEN ELI
He doesn't know. He seems not to
know a lot of things.

FATHER BLIVEN
Keep digging.

INT. SCHOOL LIBRARY - DAY

Jake and Eli sit far away from other people.

TEEN JAKE
You saw him again? What did he say?

TEEN ELI

Not much. It was like he didn't know the answers to my questions.

TEEN JAKE

Weird. You'd think he'd have all the answers.

TEEN ELI

Maybe he does and he's just lying.

TEEN JAKE

What are you gonna do?

TEEN ELI

Keep trying.

TEEN JAKE

When will you have time? In addition to everything else, you have a girlfriend now and you have to start applying to colleges.

TEEN ELI

You do too. I'm not going to college without you.

Jake fidgets.

TEEN JAKE

I don't have the brains or the grades.

TEEN ELI

You'll get a baseball scholarship. How can the star pitcher go without his catcher? We're a package deal.

Jake shifts in his seat and averts his eyes.

TEEN JAKE

Don't let me drag you down.

TEEN ELI

What are you talking about?

TEEN JAKE

I'm nowhere near as good as you, and I'm not nearly as smart.

Eli's volume increases.

TEEN ELI

None of that talk. We go together.

LIBRARIAN
Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Eli helps nurses and patients. He sits and reads to MR. CROWLEY (80s), even though he's in a coma.

Eli stops when he hears Mr. Crowley's breath grow uneven. He hits the call button. He stands out of the way as the nurses and doctor check him out.

DOCTOR
Time of death, 11:53 PM.

They leave Eli alone in the room. His breath fogs. His eyes dart around the room.

BABA
Are you kidding me?

Eli spins around.

TEEN ELI
I have a lot of questions.

BABA
I don't have any answers, kid.

TEEN ELI
You're Death, aren't you?

BABA
I guess.

TEEN ELI
What's God like?

BABA
Dunno, kid. We've never met. I don't even know if He exists.

TEEN ELI
Who do you report to?

BABA
No one.

TEEN ELI
Why do you do what you do?

BABA
I don't know. I just do.

TEEN ELI

Why?

BABA

I. Just. Do.

TEEN ELI

When were you born?

BABA

I sprang into existence when the first humans came along.

TEEN ELI

That doesn't make sense.

BABA

Let me do my job, kid.

TEEN ELI

You gotta give me something.

BABA

Do I?

Eli pleads silently with his eyes. Death sighs.

BABA (CONT'D)

I'll answer one question. But make it snappy. This guy has an appointment.

TEEN ELI

Why did you take my Dad?

Death frowns. Not an angry frown. One of calculation.

BABA

It was his time.

TEEN ELI

That's not an answer.

BABA

Just because you don't like it doesn't mean it's not an answer.

TEEN ELI

What does it mean?

BABA

Souls become separated from their bodies.

(MORE)

BABA (CONT'D)
They follow me to the place of
light. I leave. They stay. That's
all I know.

TEEN ELI
But why?

Baba rolls his eyes then glares at Eli.

BABA
I don't know. Leave me alone.

TEEN ELI
Aren't you curious?

Baba stops. Blinks and thinks.

BABA
I wasn't before I met you.

TEEN ELI
For thousands of years you never
once questioned your reality?

Baba frowns.

BABA
No. strange, right?

TEEN ELI
If you take us somewhere after we
die, doesn't that mean life isn't
just a cosmic accident?

Baba digests this for a moment before shaking his head.

BABA
I don't know and I don't have time.

Death yanks the soul from Mr. Crowley's body and leads him
down the tunnel.

A frustrated Eli looks at the ceiling and shouts.

TEEN ELI
What!?

He doesn't know Sophie watches him through the window.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Eli and Sophie hold hands while walking to their next class. Sophie looks at him out of the corner of her eye several times before she speaks.

SOPHIE

You still upset about Mr. Crowley?

TEEN ELI

No. I'm okay.

SOPHIE

You just, seemed um...upset after he passed.

TEEN ELI

What do you mean?

SOPHIE

I saw you through the window. You were talking to someone. Were you upset with God?

He responds without thinking.

TEEN ELI

No. Death.

SOPHIE

I don't understand.

Eli looks around, drags her into an empty classroom and closes the door.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

My Mother told me not to tell anyone. I should have listened.

INT. BENNETT HOUSE - NIGHT

Eli and Jake wait for the team to arrive to watch the evening's televised game. No one has arrived by opening pitch. Eli goes to the phone.

TEEN ELI

Sophie? Are you coming over?

His face falls.

TEEN ELI (CONT'D)

I see.

He hangs up.

MIRIAM
What did she say?

Eli starts to answer, but the phone rings.

TEEN ELI
Hello? Oh. I see.

Miriam sees the pathetic look on his face.

MIRIAM
What?

TEEN ELI
That was the hospital. They don't
want me volunteering anymore.

MIRIAM
Why aren't Sophie and the team
here?

TEEN ELI
Um...

Miriam folds her arms and frowns.

MIRIAM
You told your girlfriend and she
blabbed. I warned you. Now everyone
thinks you're the town weirdo.

Jake stares into his soda cup.

TEEN ELI
But Mom...

Miriam holds up her hand.

MIRIAM
I don't want to hear it. And I'm
guessing your best friend knows and
he's an outcast now too?

TEEN ELI
But Mom...

MIRIAM
You of all people should know how
cruel kids are.

I/E. GRADE SCHOOL - FLASHBACK- DAY (1957)

The only kid in a wheelchair. The outcast.

The few kids who talk to him tease him.

Kids whisper to each other and look at him.

Eli sighs as he watches the bus full of students leave as he waits alone for his Mom to pick him up from school.

INT. BENNETT HOUSE - DAY

Eli and Jake watch baseball at Eli's house. Miriam and Laura socialize.

TEEN ELI

With your extra curriculars,
baseball and grades you can get in.

TEEN JAKE

It was hard enough to get okay
grades and bad test scores. It's
only going to get harder.

TEEN ELI

No way! Athletes have it easy.

TEEN JAKE

You make me look good. Without you
I'm just a big dumb farm kid.

TEEN ELI

What's this really about?

TEEN JAKE

Nothin'

Eli takes his eyes off the TV and gives Jake "the look" he inherited from his mother.

TEEN ELI

Really?

Jake pauses to gather his courage. He replies without eye contact.

TEEN JAKE

We'll grow apart. You'll major in
pre-med and I'll major in dufus
studies. You'll get better friends
after I flunk out and I'll move
back here to sell used cars.

TEEN ELI
I'll never find a better friend
than you.

Jake looks at Eli after a long pause.

TEEN JAKE
Try to kiss me and I'll punch you.

Their mothers watch, listen and try not to laugh.

EXT. BENNETT HOUSE - DAY (1968)

Moving day.

Eli loads his meager suitcase into the car. Jake is there to see him off.

TEEN JAKE
Call me.

TEEN ELI
I'll be back on Thanksgiving,
Christmas, Spring break and Summer
vacation.

TEEN JAKE
You'd better. Don't make me hunt
you down.

They shake hands and Eli climbs into the car.

INT. CAR - DAY

Miriam drives. Eli is silent.

MIRIAM
You can cry in front of your mother
you know.

Eli turns his head and his quivering lip toward his window.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

As Eli unpacks a whirlwind blows through the door. TOMMY
TEPPER (18) flops on one of the twin beds, props his head on
one elbow and smiles. Eli sets his mitt, ball and cap on the
bookshelf. His shrine.

TOMMY
Eli. Tommy.

Even in Eli's sour mood, Tommy evokes a smile. Tommy's eyes grow as he sees the pile of science books on Eli's desk.

TEEN ELI

Premed.

TOMMY

I wanted to be a theater major, but my Dad made me go business. C'est la vie. Let's go meet some girls.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

I met your grandmother that day. I fell in love with her as soon as I saw her. I had no idea she felt the same.

EXT. QUAD - DAY

Orientation festivities abound. Tables with sign-up forms for clubs and activities sit around the area. All the new students mill about.

Tommy, of course, has already met plenty of people. He grabs Eli's hand and drags him to the pre-med table.

TOMMY

You're going to like this girl. She's pretty, smart, and her parents are dead so you won't have to deal with in-laws.

ELI

What?

TOMMY

Nora! This is Eli, my dormmate. He's premed too.

Eli tries to speak but forgets how. He sticks out his hand. NORA JACOBS (18) captivates him. Tommy is amused.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

This is how his people say "hi". I promise he isn't an idiot.

Nora's eyes sparkle as she looks at Eli. Her face flushes.

TEEN NORA

It's okay, Eli. You're cute enough to be stupid.

Eli smiles, stunned. He can't break from her gaze.

TEEN ELI
You too. I mean...um...

Nora and Tommy enjoy watching him flail. She smirks.

TEEN NORA
See you in class.

INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

Eli assembles with the rest of the baseball team. The upper classmen hang together and eye the newbies. COACH BELL (40) shouts.

COACH BELL
Alright ladies! Listen up! No drinking, no girls, no bad behavior. I don't care if you're here on scholarship. If you don't keep your grades up, I'll cut you. You all think you're going to the majors and I'm here to tell you that none of you will make it that far so you need your education. Hear me?

They nod their heads.

COACH BELL (CONT'D)
I didn't hear that, ladies!

A chorus of "yes Coach" comes from the boys.

COACH BELL (CONT'D)
See you tomorrow morning at practice.

They begin to file out.

COACH BELL (CONT'D)
Bennett!

Eli stops and turns. Coach stares at him. He motions with his head to come back.

COACH BELL (CONT'D)
I scouted you myself. You're good. You might be the only one here to move up in the baseball world.

TEEN ELI
Um...thank you sir.

COACH BELL

Don't mess it up. And watch your back. Some of the other boys will be jealous.

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

The team warms up. Eli takes the mound. A few of the other boys stop to watch him as they hear the explosive sound of the fast balls hitting the catcher's mitt.

Soon, all stop what they are doing and gather to witness Eli throw strike after strike. Even the coach is mesmerized.

The Coach mutters in a distracted voice.

COACH BELL

Hit the showers everyone.

INT. DORM HALLWAY - NIGHT

TEEN ELI

Sorry I didn't call last week.
Practice ran late.

TEEN JAKE (V.O.)

Don't worry about it. You still coming home for Thanksgiving break?

TEEN ELI

Yeah. Anything new?

TEEN JAKE (V.O.)

Nah. Father Bliven asked about you.

TEEN ELI

I'll visit him.

TEEN JAKE (V.O.)

You must be busy. I'll let you go.

Jake hangs up. Eli looks at the receiver with a scowl.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Eli sits in the front of the classroom. He is vaguely aware that people stare at him. Some whisper.

He tries to ignore them.

A GIRL steps closer as if she is going to sit beside him, but Nora snakes the seat from her with a glare.

TEEN NORA
You didn't tell me you were on the
baseball team.

Eli looks at her, then looks away.

TEEN ELI
Oh. Yeah.

Nora smiles at his awkwardness. He glances around the classroom at the others whispering.

TEEN NORA
They're talking about you.

TEEN ELI
That isn't always a good thing.
What are they saying?

TEEN NORA
That we make a cute couple.

TEEN ELI
You've been sitting here twelve
seconds.

TEEN NORA
Every epic love story starts
somewhere.

TEEN ELI
You sound crazy.

TEEN NORA
Just focused.

TEEN ELI
On what?

TEEN NORA
What I want.

TEEN ELI
Which is?

TEEN NORA
I want to be a doctor, have a cute
doctor husband, have adorable kids
with him and die surrounded by
people who love me.

TEEN ELI
You know life never works out that
way for anyone, right?

TEEN NORA
If we are going to be married,
you'll need to change that
attitude.

TEEN ELI
Are you asking me?

TEEN NORA
Are you accepting?

TEEN ELI
I have high expectations.

TEEN NORA
Such as?

TEEN ELI
You can't spend all night out with
the boys and come home reeking of
booze and cigars while I'm at home
working my fingers to the bone.

TEEN NORA
How long have you been planning
that speech?

TEEN ELI
Since I flubbed our introduction at
orientation.

Eli grins slyly. Nora returns it.

TEEN NORA
You're starting to grow on me *Dr.*
Bennett.

TEEN ELI
You're starting to grow on me *Dr.*
Bennett.

INT. BENNETT HOUSE - DAY

Jake and his mom visit on Thanksgiving day.

They snack and watch football. Jake isn't very talkative.

TEEN ELI
How's work?

TEEN JAKE

S'okay.

TEEN ELI

Why didn't your dad come?

TEEN JAKE

He had an emergency at the lot.

They stare at the TV.

TEEN ELI

I'm here for two more days. Wanna hang out?

TEEN JAKE

I have to work. Weekends are the busiest days.

Eli nods. Jake fidgets.

TEEN JAKE (CONT'D)

We're never going to be the same, are we?

TEEN ELI

Nonsense.

TEEN JAKE

Real sense. You're moving on with your life and I'll be stuck here.

TEEN ELI

We'll still be best friends.

TEEN JAKE

Until you graduate, get a job, get married and move somewhere far away.

The conversation trails off, but they both know he's right.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY

Eli reads at his desk. Tommy slithers in, drops his bag and plops onto his bunk.

TEEN ELI

How was the family?

TOMMY

I'm screwed. My mid-terms were terrible. Christmas break is going to suck.

TEEN ELI

There's time to bring your grades up. I'll help you study.

TOMMY

I'm hopeless. I might as well go out with a bang.

TEEN ELI

It's Sunday night. Do you really wonder why your grades suck? Crack a book.

TOMMY

There's something wrong with me. I read two lines and my eyes glaze over.

TEEN ELI

Maybe your dad will let you switch majors.

TOMMY

That isn't the Mr. Tepper way. I have a better chance at joining the circus.

TEEN ELI

You'd make a great dog-faced-boy.

Tommy gets up and gives Eli a noogie. They laugh. Eli sees the time on Tommy's watch.

TEEN ELI (CONT'D)

I'm late!

Tommy mocks.

TOMMY

Another study date with Nora? Keep at it. Sooner or later you'll figure out where babies come from.

Eli laughs as he grabs his book bag.

TEEN ELI

Shut up.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Eli and Nora have the library to themselves. They go over their notes from class.

TEEN ELI

He said this would be on the final.

Nora scoots a bit closer to look at Eli's notes. He doesn't notice, so she scoots even closer.

TEEN NORA

We've been studying together a lot.

Eli nods and reads. She scowls at the response.

TEEN NORA (CONT'D)

It's Sunday night.

Eli nods as he reads.

TEEN NORA (CONT'D)

Why don't we take a break?

Eli looks up.

TEEN ELI

Sure! What do you want to do?

Nora sighs.

TEEN NORA

You really are an idiot.

He turns his head toward her, not understanding. Before he knows what is happening she grabs his face and kisses him.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Eli and Nora grab lunch together.

KIRK DOBSON (22), the Senior baseball pitcher walks by with two of the other Seniors on the team.

KIRK

Look guys. It's the new kid. You think you're pretty cool, huh?

TEEN ELI

I've seen you pitch, grandma. I'll be the starter by end of season.

None of them were prepared for Eli to talk back.

TEEN NORA

Ignore them. They want you to take a swing at them so you get kicked off the team.

KIRK

Listen to your girlfriend, Eli. She's the smart one here.

TEEN ELI

And I'm the one here that can pitch.

Kirk sees red and launches himself at Eli, but his buddies hold him back.

KIRK

I'm gonna kill you, Bennett!

Eli laughs.

TEEN ELI

You can try. I know Death personally.

Kirk has no response. He walks away confused.

TEEN NORA

You know death personally? You sound like a mobster.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

It just came out of my mouth. I prayed she'd drop it. I didn't want to lose her too.

INT. BENNETT HOUSE - NIGHT (1969)

Miriam and Eli sit by the Christmas tree. The fire pops. They sip cocoa.

MIRIAM

Are you going to spend time with Jake?

TEEN ELI

I invited him over.

MIRIAM

What's going on with you two?

TEEN ELI

It's weird. Awkward.

Jake storms in like a force of nature.

TEEN JAKE
I've been drafted.

TEEN ELI
What? Into the Army?

TEEN JAKE
No dufus, the Girl Scouts. Of course the friggin' Army.

TEEN ELI
What does that mean?

TEEN JAKE
I don't know. I have to report to boot camp in two weeks.

MIRIAM
That isn't much time.

TEEN JAKE
How do I become 4F? I heard some guy was disqualified because he lost his pinky toe.

TEEN ELI
I'll have to do some research.

TEEN JAKE
Can I puncture just one eardrum?

Miriam answers the phone. She covers the receiver with her hand. Eli can't read her expression.

MIRIAM
It's for you. Someone named Nora?

Eli leaps for the phone. Miriam gives them some space. After an hour Jake leaves.

INT. CAR - DAY.

Miriam drives Eli back to school.

MIRIAM
We need to talk.

Eli's face blanches. Those are never good words.

TEEN ELI
What's wrong?

She clears her throat and tries to stare expressionless through the windshield.

MIRIAM
Who's Nora?

Eli is even more scared. He looks out the side window.

TEEN ELI
My study partner.

She fights to keep a smile from her face.

MIRIAM
What are you studying together?

TEEN ELI
We're both pre-med.

MIRIAM
That's nice.

TEEN ELI
What's that supposed to mean?

MIRIAM
Nothing. Do you feel guilty about something?

He scoffs.

TEEN ELI
No.

MIRIAM
Then why are you blushing?

TEEN ELI
I'm not blushing!

He folds the visor down to check the mirror.

MIRIAM
I never thought I'd see you grow up to be just like everyone else. I'm proud of you.

TEEN ELI
Mom?

MIRIAM
Yes?

TEEN ELI
Are you lonely?

Her expression hardens.

MIRIAM
No. Why?

TEEN ELI
If I had died instead of Dad, you
wouldn't be alone now.

MIRIAM
What a horrible thing to say, Eli!

TEEN ELI
It's just a fact. Your reaction
tells me I'm right.

MIRIAM
Putting those psychology classes to
good use?

Eli pauses.

TEEN ELI
Are you scared?

MIRIAM
I'm not scared of being alone, I'm
scared of leaving you alone. It's
just us now.

TEEN ELI
I won't be alone.

MIRIAM
You'd better be talking about Nora
and not Death again.

TEEN ELI
I call him Baba. Trust me. Next
time I see him I'll ask him to
introduce himself to you so you
won't be afraid of him.

MIRIAM
Do you hear yourself? You have a
pet name for the Angel of Death and
you're going to ask him to stop in
for tea?

TEEN ELI

It sounds stupid when you put it that way.

MIRIAM

Normal boys would tell their mother about their new girlfriend.

TEEN ELI

She's not my girlfriend.

MIRIAM

She's your pretty girlfriend.

TEEN ELI

How did you know she's pretty?

MIRIAM

Your reaction tells me I'm right.

YOUNG ELI

I guess I'm not the only one who took a psychology class.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Eli returns to school early from Christmas break to spend time with Nora. His dorm room is so cold his breath fogs. He turns on the lights. A figure is there. He jumps.

It's him. Baba Yaga.

TEEN ELI

Baba! I'm glad you're here. I need a favor.

Baba turns around and sighs.

BABA

I usually only see humans once. Why does this keep happening?

TEEN ELI

I was going to ask you.

BABA

Sorry, kid. I'm on a schedule.

TEEN ELI

Eli. My name is Eli.

BABA

See you around, Eli.

TEEN ELI

Wait!

Baba stops, rolls his eyes and turns back around.

BABA

I don't do favors.

TEEN ELI

I need you to appear before my mother.

BABA

I can't appear before people.

TEEN ELI

Then why can I see you?

He stops a brief moment.

BABA

I don't know, kid.

TEEN ELI

Eli.

BABA

I don't know, *Eli*.

TEEN ELI

Has anyone ever seen you?

BABA

No.

TEEN ELI

Then why can I? If we figure that out, you can appear before my Mom.

BABA

I'm not a science project, I'm not your pet and I'm definitely not your friend, *Eli*.

He sneers his name.

TEEN ELI

You must have some idea.

Baba pauses again. Eli notices.

BABA

I don't.

TEEN ELI
I don't believe you. What was
different when you took my Dad?

Baba stiffens.

BABA
I don't have time right now. This
is my busy season.

TEEN ELI
Busy season?

Something clicks. Busy season. Christmas. Tommy.

TEEN ELI (CONT'D)
Why are you here?

His voice is hollow. He doesn't want Baba to answer.

Death steps aside to reveal Tommy lying on his bunk. Eyes open, froth on his lips. Needle in his arm. Baba reaches down and pulls Tommy from his lifeless shell. Tommy looks down at his body, then at Eli.

TOMMY
I flunked out of school. Dad
disowned me.

TEEN ELI
Why this, Tommy? You had options.

TOMMY
I'm not strong like you, Eli.

Baba turns to take Tommy away.

TEEN ELI
Wait!

Baba turns back angry and snaps at Eli.

BABA
How dare you spoil someone's death
with your selfishness?

Eli stubbornly presses him.

TEEN ELI
What was different about my Dad's
death?

BABA
Nothing. It was like every other.

Baba turns to lead Tommy away.

TEEN ELI
Then why are you upset?

Baba stops, turns, shakes his finger at Eli.

BABA
Because you're out of line. *This* is
out of line. This isn't your time,
Eli, it's his.

Baba nods towards Tommy's shimmering form.

TOMMY
I don't mind.

TEEN ELI
See? Tommy doesn't mind. Tell me
what was different. Think hard.

Eli waits eagerly for a response. Baba explodes with anger.

BABA
You! Alright?

TEEN ELI
I don't understand.

BABA
You were different! He traded his
life for yours. "Take me instead,"
he said. He begged me. I've been
hearing that from humans for
millennia.

TEEN ELI
So, you...

BABA
I did it. My curiosity got the
better of me. You're supposed to be
dead, *Eli*. That's why you can see
me, *Eli*. Only the dead can see me.
Eli.

Baba spits Eli's name each time.

Baba exits with Tommy leaving Eli alone with Tommy's body.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Eli and Nora try to study but they are both still distracted by Tommy's death. Eli is still sad and angry because of Baba.

TEEN ELI
I can't think.

TEEN NORA
Me either. Wanna grab a beer?

TEEN ELI
I don't think I'll be very good company.

TEEN NORA
Me either. Let's go.

INT. SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

A sports bar on campus. It's not busy. A TV is on. Something about the war in Viet Nam. They order beers.

TEEN NORA
What's your discipline going to be?

TEEN ELI
Oncology. You?

TEEN NORA
Me too.

TEEN ELI
Why oncology?

TEEN NORA
Cancer sucks. You?

TEEN ELI
I'm mad at Death.

TEEN NORA
Sounds personal.

TEEN ELI
It is.

They make small talk and get tipsy.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

The night is cold. They are bundled. They approach the woman's dorm.

TEEN ELI
Thanks for the company.

TEEN NORA
Are you going back to your dorm
room?

TEEN ELI
No. They haven't given me a new one
yet. I'll sleep in the common area.

TEEN NORA
My roommate isn't back yet. Wanna
stay with me tonight?

TEEN ELI
That's very considerate of you.

TEEN NORA
I'm not asking to be considerate.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Eli and Jake trade a few letters while Jake is in boot camp.

The season changes from Winter to Spring.

Eli and Nora are inseparable.

Baseball practice begins.

Eli receives a letter from Jake but he's too busy to respond.

Kirk and a few of the older players glare at Eli all through practice. Nora watches practice and glare back at them.

Eli throws the most wicked pitches he can. He smiles at Kirk after each one.

END MONTAGE.

INT. DORM ROOM - DAY (1970)

Eli studies at his desk with the door open.

STUDENT (O.S.)
Bennett! Phone!

Eli stands and rushes to the phone in the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

TEEN ELI
Hello?

TEEN JAKE
Hey, loser!

The reception is horrible.

TEEN ELI
Jake?

TEEN JAKE
Yeah, dufus. I'm coming to visit.

TEEN ELI
When did you get back?

TEEN JAKE
I'm on my way now. I'll be there
tonight. Let's play catch.

TEEN ELI
I can't wait.

TEEN JAKE
Meet you on the diamond.

INT. CLASS - DAY

Eli sits next to Nora. The class bell rings and he nearly bolts from his seat.

TEEN NORA
Where are you going in such a
hurry?

TEEN ELI
My best friend Jake is on leave.
We're going to meet on the field to
play catch.

TEEN NORA
I'd like to meet him, but I have a
tutoring gig tonight.

TEEN ELI
Stop by later. I'll introduce you.

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

The team practices. The weather is better but the ground is still damp. The players are quickly covered in mud.

Day turns to dusk.

COACH BELL
Okay, wrap it up, ladies.

The team gathers their gear. Eli helps Coach bell take it to the equipment room.

Kirk sneers.

KIRK
Kiss ass.

Eli can't control himself.

TEEN ELI
I should let you do it then. You need brownie points more than me.

KIRK
What's that supposed to mean?

TEEN ELI
You didn't throw one strike today. How long before I start and you warm the bench?

Kirk steps forward and they go nose-to-nose.

COACH BELL
Cut it out you two. You're teammates. Act like it.

They separate but the looks on both their faces say this incident isn't over. Kirk heads for the showers.

TEEN ELI
Coach, mind if I borrow a ball and a catcher's mitt?

COACH BELL
Sure, Eli.

Coach Bell tosses Eli a ball and a spare mitt.

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - CONTINUOUS

The sun has set. The air cools. Eli pitches at the batters box.

TEEN JAKE
Hey, loser.

Eli turns around. Jake wears his Army fatigues. He's fit. Fitter than Eli has seen him. His hair is short too. And his posture...he stands straight. No more slouching. He looks like a grown-up.

TEEN ELI
Hey, Soldier.

Eli tosses him the mitt.

Jake takes his position behind the plate.

Eli throws. An explosive fast ball. Bang!

TEEN JAKE
You're getting better.

Jake throws the ball back.

TEEN ELI
Thanks. Hey, um...

Eli hurls the ball again. Bang!

TEEN JAKE
Ouch. Take it easy, man.

Jake tosses the ball back.

TEEN ELI
Sorry I didn't answer your last letter yet. I'm swamped.

Eli throws. Another perfect pitch. Bang!

TEEN JAKE
It's okay. I was stuck in the jungle. There was no mail there.

TEEN ELI
How is the jungle?

TEEN JAKE
Hot and humid. It's like living in a fat guy's jock strap.

Eli laughs and wrinkles his nose.

TEEN ELI

Gross.

Jake laughs and throws the ball back.

TEEN JAKE

How is your girlfriend?

TEEN ELI

Nora? She's great. You can meet her
if you want. She's on her way.

Eli throws. Jake catches and looks at the ball. He avoids eye
contact.

TEEN JAKE

I don't know how much longer I can
stay.

TEEN ELI

You have to leave already?

Jake inspects the ball further.

TEEN JAKE

Yeah, I ship out again real soon.

TEEN ELI

How soon?

He exhales in frustration. The air is cold enough for his
breath to fog.

A voice comes from behind him.

BABA

Now.

Eli doesn't turn around. Realization paralyzes him. He looks
at Jake and shakes his head, willing it not to be true.

TEEN ELI

No.

TEEN JAKE

Baba is just doing his job.

Eli croaks.

TEEN ELI

Jake...

TEEN JAKE

I asked if I could see you one last time. I think he did it more for you than me.

Jake walks past Eli, toward Baba. Eli stands with his back to them, unable to watch.

BABA

Sorry, Eli. It's time.

He looks at the ground. They walk toward the outfield and disappear into the tunnel.

TEEN NORA

Eli!

She runs up behind him. His head hangs. She spins him around and sees the tracks where his tears have rinsed the baseball dirt from his face.

Her smile fades.

TEEN NORA (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

TEEN ELI

Jake is gone.

TEEN NORA

I'm sorry. Maybe next time?

TEEN ELI

There won't be a next time.

Eli leaves for his dorm room. She shouts after him.

TEEN NORA

What does that mean?

INT. DORM HALLWAY - NIGHT

STUDENT

Bennett! Phone!

Eli walks from his room still wearing his dirty baseball gear.

TEEN ELI

I already know, Mom.

Miriam sniffs.

MIRIAM (V.O.)

What? How?

TEEN ELI

Baba brought him by just now. We played catch before he left.

MIRIAM (V.O.)

I'm sorry, Eli.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

And that's when my Mom started believing me. A little.

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

Practice. Kirk and two other upperclassmen glare at Eli as he bats with the pitching machine. Eli crushes pitch after pitch trying to keep his mind off of Jake.

KIRK

He's good at bat too. Not common for a pitcher. Let's see if he can bat against me.

Kirk heads to the mound and turns off the machine.

KIRK (CONT'D)

Bennett! Wanna try against me?

OLD ELI (V.O.)

I rolled my eyes. I was still profoundly angry and upset about Jake.

TEEN ELI

Whatever.

His dismissiveness annoys Kirk. He winds up. Throws.

Eli knew what was coming. Bean ball. Aimed straight at his head. He easily ducks it.

TEEN ELI (CONT'D)

Maybe you could get it inside the batter's box, grandma.

Eli's taunting infuriates Kirk.

He throws again. Another bean ball. Eli ducks it.

TEEN ELI (CONT'D)
One more and I get to start
tomorrow.

KIRK
Yeah? Hit this.

Kirk throws a fast ball. Eli is ready. He drives it hard up the middle. Kirk can't react fast enough. It hits him right in the throat.

Eli hears the sickening crunch and knows what to do. He runs toward Kirk and fishes the pocket knife out of his pants.

His buddies think he's going to attack Kirk so they stop him.

TEEN ELI
Let me go or he's going to die!

Confused, they release him. Kirk's face is blue.

TEEN ELI (CONT'D)
Get me a ball point pen.

Eli opens his knife. Kirk has his hands around his throat. His eyes are wide.

Kirk loses consciousness. Eli finds the right spot and cuts a hole in his windpipe.

TEEN ELI (CONT'D)
Where's that pen?

Someone hands him a pen. He takes it apart and sticks one piece into the hole he cut into Kirk's neck.

TEEN ELI (CONT'D)
Tape!

Someone produces some white athletic tape. He tapes the pen barrel in place.

Kirk breathes. The coach comes running.

COACH BELL
What the hell is going on here? I
can't leave you girls alone for
five minutes...

He figures out the scene quickly.

COACH BELL (CONT'D)
One of you run to the office and
call an ambulance.

One of the players races away.

Kirk wakes up. He looks at Eli and holds up his thumb.

COACH BELL (CONT'D)
Did you do this, Bennett?

TEEN ELI
Yeah, coach.

COACH BELL
How did you know what to do?

TEEN ELI
I'm pre-med.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Nora plops down next to Eli in the empty room. He jumps as she slams her books down.

TEEN NORA
Are you avoiding me?

TEEN ELI
A little.

TEEN NORA
Stop it. Talk to me.

TEEN ELI
I have a funeral Sunday.

Her gaze softens.

TEEN NORA
I'm sorry. Who?

TEEN ELI
Jake.

OLD ELI (V.O.)
Your Grandmother was very smart.
She mapped out the timeline in her
head and realized something was
off.

TEEN NORA
When did you find out?

TEEN ELI
A few minutes before you showed up.

TEEN NORA

But you were nowhere near a phone.
Didn't he leave just before I got
there? That would mean he died
before you saw him.

Eli sighs.

TEEN ELI

The last time I told someone it
didn't end well.

TEEN NORA

Told someone what?

He looks around the room and exhales once he is satisfied
they are alone.

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Nora stares at Eli. He can't read her expression.

TEEN NORA

My boyfriend knows Death?

Eli's eyebrows rise.

TEEN ELI

Am I still your boyfriend?

TEEN NORA

As long as you don't tell anyone
else. I don't want everyone knowing
I'm dating a crazy person.

He smiles and begins to reply, but students walk in.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Nora drives.

Nora and Eli, hand in hand, walk up to Eli's family home.

Miriam opens the door and hugs Nora.

Jake's funeral. Eli and Nora sit together, her hand on his.

Jake's parents sob in the front row.

Miriam glances at Nora and Eli. Father Bliven presides.

The burial site. Nora stands firmly by Eli.

Eli looks at a photo of Jake. Nora joins him.

After the funeral, they meet up with Miriam. They go to the Bennett house.

END MONTAGE:

OLD ELI (V.O.)

After Jake's funeral, emotions were raw. I don't blame Mom for being conflicted, but I took it personally that day.

INT. BENNETT HOUSE - DAY

Miriam, Eli, Nora and Father Bliven sit.

FATHER BLIVEN

What's he like?

Father Bliven eagerly awaits Eli's response.

TEEN ELI

He's not a bad guy. He's just doing his job.

Miriam scowls at the priest.

MIRIAM

Don't encourage him.

TEEN ELI

How do you explain everything, Mom?

MIRIAM

Your overactive imagination.

TEEN ELI

You know that's not true. I knew about Jake before you called.

MIRIAM

Lucky guess.

TEEN ELI

I saw Baba with Dad.

MIRIAM

Don't bring your father into this.

TEEN ELI

It's Dad's fault. He traded his life for mine.

Miriam gasps.

MIRIAM
Take that back.

TEEN ELI
He was healthy, I was dying. I
walked out and he's dead.

MIRIAM
Your father wouldn't be so selfish.

TEEN ELI
Giving up his life was selfish?

MIRIAM
No. Leaving me alone was selfish.

Eli grows cold.

TEEN ELI
I see. Sorry I lived.

MIRIAM
I didn't say that.

TEEN ELI
You didn't have to.

She exhales with her jaw clenched.

MIRIAM
You call him Baba?

TEEN ELI
Short for Baba Yaga. He likes it.

MIRIAM
Do you know in how many languages
Baba means father? Death is your
surrogate Dad? It makes me sick.
Your psychiatrist would have a
field day.

TEEN ELI
Sorry to have upset you, *Mother*. It
won't happen again.

He closes the front door behind him without looking back.
Nora follows after an awkward goodbye.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Nora and Eli drive back to school in silence. They both stare through the front windshield.

Nora grips the wheel with both hands. Her eyes are wide. She sneaks glances at Eli out of the corner of her eye.

She takes a breath.

TEEN NORA

Maybe we should fix Baba up with
your mom.

Eli exhales. Glares at her sideways. The corner of his mouth tics up. He smiles. Chuckles. She looks at him and smiles. Soon they roar with laughter.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

Of course Mom and I got over it,
but it would have taken a lot
longer without your Nana Nora to
cheer me up.

EXT. BASEBALL DIAMOND - DAY

The team practices before their season opener. Kirk is in his street clothes in the bleachers with a bandage on his neck. He makes notes on a clipboard.

The coach waves everyone in.

COACH BELL

I have an announcement.

Kirk hands him the clipboard. The coach reads it and nods.

COACH BELL (CONT'D)

We have a key injury so a few
positions are going to change.
Outfield stays the same. Douglas,
you will move to short-stop...

He pauses and looks at Kirk. He nods.

COACH BELL (CONT'D)

Bennett.

Eli finds himself holding his breath.

COACH

You'll be on the mound.

Murmurs. Eli looks at Kirk, who nods and smiles.

INT. ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - DAY (1972)

Eli, now 22, sits with his faculty advisor, DR. GRAVES, in his office.

DR. GRAVES
You're in an enviable position Mr. Bennett. You are being scouted by baseball teams and medical schools.

ELI
Yes, sir.

DR. GRAVES
What's your decision?

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY (1978)

Eli, Nora and SIX other residents follow the attending through rounds.

DR. PHILLIPS
Mrs. Smith's primary complaint was abdominal pain. Initial imaging came up negative.

Eli goes through her chart.

DR. PHILLIPS (CONT'D)
Dr. Bennett?

He checks her eyes with his penlight. While he's near he smells her breath.

ELI
Diabetic Ketoacidosis.

DR. PHILLIPS
Treatment?

ELI
0.9% saline and insulin once fluids are restored.

DR. PHILLIPS
Bonus points. Why did the ER doc miss it originally?

ELI

She's a type 2 diabetic. DKA is associated with type 1 diabetes and is atypical in those with type 2.

DR. PHILLIPS

Congratulations, Dr. Bennett. You just saved her life. Next patient!

Nora nudges Eli.

NORA

Nice work, Dr. Bennett.

ELI

Thank you, Dr. Bennett. I was lucky.

NORA

You're getting lucky tonight.

DR. PHILLIPS

Neither one of you are getting lucky tonight. You're both on NOC.

ELI

Night shift!

Dr. Phillips shakes his head.

DR. PHILLIPS

Why do you like graveyard?

ELI

I meet lots of interesting patients.

DR. PHILLIPS

Most of them are in a coma.

ELI

Exactly.

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

NURSE ON PA (V.O.)

Drs. Bennett to oncology. Drs. Bennett to oncology.

Eli and Nora rush to the front desk at the oncology ward.

ONCOLOGY NURSE

Mrs. Stevens is circling the drain.

INT. MRS. STEVEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Eli and Nora walk in. Mrs. Stevens is unconscious. They check her vitals.

NORA
It won't be long.

As she speaks his breath fogs.

NORA (CONT'D)
Is he here?

BABA
Right here.

Eli turns.

ELI
Nora can't hear you. Why don't you
appear to her?

BABA
You know I've tried.

OLD ELI (V.O.)
We did try. Nora was a trooper. We
experimented on her every chance we
had. Nothing worked. She was more
disappointed than we were.

Mrs. Stevens is decrepit, pale and emaciated. Baba looks down upon her as she takes her last breath.

BABA
Why do you doctors make people live
this long?

ELI
People crave every second of life.

Baba takes Mrs. Stevens' hand and relieves her from her shell. She's disoriented.

BABA
How were your final days?

MRS. STEVENS
Horrible. So much pain.

BABA
Would you have been willing to
leave earlier?

MRS. STEVENS

Yes. Thank you for ending this.

Baba gives Eli a smug look.

BABA

Where's the line between prolonging
life and prolonging death, *Doctor*?

He sneers the last word and leaves with Mrs. Stevens.

Nora sees none of this but tries to read Eli's face.

NORA

What?

ELI

I need to think.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

I thought. A lot. The more I
thought, the more I realized I
could use my gift to become a
better doctor. To help alleviate
suffering. Find the right balance
between quantity of life and
quality of life.

INT. DR PHILLIPS' OFFICE - DAY

DR. PHILLIPS

It's a minefield, Eli. A lot of
doctors are on your side but it's
career suicide.

ELI

As physicians we need to talk about
the morality of extending people's
agony.

DR. PHILLIPS

It's medicine's third-rail.

ELI

We've prolonged life to the point
people now die a prolonged death.

DR. PHILLIPS

Most can't communicate their
wishes. Are you going to murder
them because you *think* that's what
they want?

ELI

There's a lawyer in Illinois who developed what he calls an "Advance Healthcare Directive". While people still have their faculties, they decide what end-of-life care they want, if any.

DR. PHILLIPS

Get a copy and I'll run it through legal.

ELI

Thank you.

DR. PHILLIPS

You really are infuriating.

ELI

I get that a lot.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

A few years passed and we finally had a framework for accepting advance care directives. Our test case, however, was challenging on a personal level.

INT. ELI'S OFFICE - DAY (1982)

Eli walks into his office. The glove, ball and hat are on the bookshelf. Fr. Bliven is there.

FATHER BLIVEN

Sorry to drop in unannounced, Dr. Bennett.

Eli rolls his eyes and shakes his hand.

ELI

Call me Eli. What brings you here?

FATHER BLIVEN

I heard about the work you've done with advanced directives.

ELI

Are you disappointed in me?

FATHER BLIVEN

Quite the contrary.

He hands Eli an envelope. He reads the contents.

ELI

This is your advanced directive.

FATHER BLIVEN

I have about six months. I want to be with you when it happens. I want to meet Baba with you.

Eli swallows hard.

ELI

Of course. Let's set it up.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

Nana Nora was on maternity leave with your father when I came home and told her. My Mother had moved in with us as soon as she heard we were having Eli Junior. It was now time for Nana Nora to come back to work.

INT. BENNETT HOUSE - NIGHT

The evening whirlwind. Eli comes home late. Miriam and Nora herd LITTLE ELI (1), who is almost walking.

MIRIAM

He didn't tell anyone he was sick.

ELI

He didn't want a fuss.

MIRIAM

Is he taking any heat from the church?

ELI

Some say it opens the door to euthanasia without consent. But he'll stand up to them.

MIRIAM

His last days shouldn't be spent fighting for his own death with dignity.

ELI

I'll have something to say about that.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

OLD ELI (V.O.)

About six months later, Father Bliven checked himself into the hospital. There were a few protesters, a local camera crew and me, growing angrier by the moment.

An ambulance parks. Two EMTs open the back and bring out Father Bliven. Pale, emaciated, but alert.

One of the protesters, HARLAN PIKE (40) holds a sign that reads: "Life's End is God's Choice".

Father Bliven stops the gurney in front of the protesters. The camera crew films.

FATHER BLIVEN

Who are you to speak for God?

HARLAN

Advanced directives are a slippery slope. Soon doctors will be allowed to kill their patients.

FATHER BLIVEN

God gives each of us one life and one death. Stay the hell out of mine.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

That shut them up. It was glorious.

INT. VIP SUITE

OLD ELI (V.O.)

We set Father Bliven up in a suite. This one, actually. Nora, Mom and I came and went over the next week. He had so many visitors. People whose lives he touched. The seventh night he suddenly said:

FATHER BLIVEN

It's time.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

I don't know how he knew.

ELI

Can I get you anything?

He smiles.

FATHER BLIVEN

Scotch.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

I left and grabbed a nice bottle from my desk and two glasses. We toasted each other and made small talk. After a lull in the conversation he broke the silence.

FATHER BLIVEN

I'm not afraid.

ELI

Why not?

FATHER BLIVEN

I lived my entire life for God but there was always a kernel of doubt in the back of my mind.

ELI

What changed?

FATHER BLIVEN

I met you. Your story, your zeal for Baba and your magical life is the greatest evidence for a benevolent creator I've ever seen. I'm honored to have known you, Eli.

Eli chokes up. Looks away. When he looks back, Father Bliven's eyes are closed. Eli exhales. His breath fogs.

BABA

This is your friend? The priest?

ELI

Yeah. Take care of him.

Baba nods and pulls his soul from it's former shell.

Father Bliven takes a moment to orient himself. His eyes fall on Baba.

FATHER BLIVEN

I'm right. Eli isn't crazy.

Baba's sly grin betrays his sense of humor.

BABA

He's crazy. He just wasn't lying.

FATHER BLIVEN

Thank you, Eli. See you on the
other side.

They walk away. Eli can't make out what they say, but they converse until they disappear.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Eli and Nora leave the hospital after saying goodbye to Father Bliven. The protesters are there. They become animated when they spot Eli and Nora. Harlan shouts.

HARLAN

Doctors Bennett! Kill any patients
today?

Sad and tired, Eli steps off hospital property to punch Harlan in the face. He falls to the ground so shocked he doesn't even complain. Eli whispers to Nora.

ELI

Don't tell my Mom.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY (1990)

Eli does rounds with med students in tow. He notices his mother's name on the patient list.

ELI

Take a break, everyone.

He searches the floor but doesn't find her. He has a hunch.

INT. NORA'S OFFICE - DAY

Eli knocks twice and walks in. She and Miriam are there.

ELI

What are you two cooking up?

They look at each other and are slow to speak. He pieces things together.

ELI (CONT'D)

What do we know?

NORA

CBC 400,000. Blast percentage 19.

Eli gasps. His eyes mist over.

ELI
Mom! Leukemia? Why didn't you say anything?

NORA
She didn't want to worry you until we knew for certain.

ELI
Next time, worry me.

MIRIAM
Do you really think there's going to be a next time, Eli?

Eli shakes his head.

ELI
We'll find a clinical trial.

Nora shakes her head.

NORA
With these numbers no one will take her.

ELI
There must be something we can do.

Nora gives Eli her stern look.

NORA
Your speaking as my son. What would Doctor Bennett say?

Eli gathers himself.

ELI
The treatment is aggressive. It involves chemotherapy, radiation, and stem cell replacement.

MIRIAM
How much time will that give me?

ELI
About a 60% chance at a 5 year survival rate.

MIRIAM
How long is treatment?

ELI
Two years.

MIRIAM

I'll live 5 more years but I'll
wish I was dead for two of them?

ELI

That's a bit melodramatic, Mom.

MIRIAM

But it's not wrong.

ELI

It won't be fun, but you'll have
more time with your grandson.

MIRIAM

You should have been a used car
salesman.

ELI

If you sign up for treatment today,
I'll throw in a set of steak
knives.

They share a damp chuckle.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

That's how your great-grandmother
beat cancer. But now that we were
known as the advance directive
hospital, she had one drawn up just
in case. Ten years later she used
it.

INT. VIP SUITE - NIGHT (2000)

Eli, and Nora sit with Miriam. She is pale and gaunt. Eli
dabs his eye with a tissue.

MIRIAM

You aren't making me feel any
better.

ELI

Sorry, Mom.

MIRIAM

That's it? "Sorry, Mom?" Shouldn't
you be telling me not to worry?
That your friend Baba will take
care of me? I feel cheated.

Nora suppresses a giggle as Miriam winks at her.

ELI
Still pressing me, Mom?

MIRIAM
That's why you turned out so well.

ELI
You can stop. I'm grown now.

MIRIAM
You'll always have a tiny sliver of
that crippled little boy inside of
you. In this life it's too easy to
crawl back into victimhood.

ELI
This is your way of saying goodbye?

MIRIAM
It's my way of making sure a piece
of me lives on to watch over you.

ELI
I never thanked you.

MIRIAM
My son is a successful doctor.
That's thanks enough. I can die
content.

ELI
I'm sorry you were lonely.

MIRIAM
I wasn't lonely. I had your
father's memory. I had you.

Eli can't speak. A long pause.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)
Do you think I'll see your father?

Eli needs a moment.

ELI
I don't know. Baba drops everyone
off at the place of light and
returns.

MIRIAM
If Baba exists, and he takes us
somewhere, it must be for a reason.

ELI
If you see Dad, thank him for me.

MIRIAM
I will. Nora?

NORA
Yes?

MIRIAM
Don't let him slack.

Nora sobs.

NORA
Never. You taught me too well, Mom.

ELI
Don't be frightened. I told Baba
you were coming.

MIRIAM
I'm not afraid. I trust you. Both
of you.

Miriam trails off and closes her eyes. Eli's breath fogs.

NORA
Is he here?

BABA
I can't figure out how to make
people see me.

He snaps his fingers in front of Nora. She has no idea.

ELI
Me too.

BABA
You ready?

Eli nods. Baba pulls Miriam from her withered husk.

MIRIAM
Eli?

ELI
Mom.

She looks at Baba.

MIRIAM
You must be Baba. I have a lot of
questions.

Baba smiles.

BABA
That's where he gets it.

MIRIAM
Now what?

BABA
We walk.

Baba offers her his arm and they walk away. She calls over
her shoulder.

MIRIAM
Bye, Eli.

ELI
Bye, Mom.

Nora watches, left out of the conversation, but pieces it
together by watching and listening to Eli.

NORA
How do you do it?

ELI
Say goodbye twice?

Nora nods.

ELI (CONT'D)
Because it's not "goodbye", it's
"see you soon".

INT. VIP WARD - NIGHT

Eli stops as a NURSE checks his vitals.

OLD ELI
Thanks for indulging me, Trey.

TREY
I've never heard any of these
stories. Why did no one tell me?

OLD ELI
That I know Death? Nana Nora and I
decided not to tell anyone.

TREY
Why tell me now?

OLD ELI
I have a surprise for you.

TREY
What is it?

OLD ELI
Not yet. There's more to tell.

Trey smiles at his grandfather's crafty smile.

OLD ELI (CONT'D)
As time passed, the protesters realized we weren't murdering patients, so only the hardcore wackos remained outside the hospital. I attended debates and TV interviews and the public started to see the truth. Some days there were no protesters at all.

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY (2004)

Eli and Nora park in the lot and walk to work.

OLD ELI (V.O.)
After all that time, a few nuts would occasionally hang out by the hospital with the same stupid chants and slogans. It didn't matter that their predictions didn't come true. I debated Harlan on TV once and made him look like an idiot.

INT. LOCAL TV STUDIO - DAY (1992)

MODERATOR
I'm here today with Dr. Eli Bennett and Mr. Harlan Pike. Dr. Bennett, can you please tell the audience what an advance directive is?

ELI

An advance directive is nothing more than a letter to your care team telling them what level of care you would like at the end of your life should you become unable to communicate those wishes.

HARLAN

You just said it. Unable to communicate. What if someone changes their mind?

ELI

The point is that when drafting an advance directive the patient is in their right mind. If the patient is in a coma, they are not.

HARLAN

It gives you permission to kill your patients.

ELI

No, it doesn't. It allows the patient to refuse extraordinary measures to lengthen their lives...

HARLAN

So you can hasten their deaths. Someday doctors will be able to execute patients who can't communicate.

ELI

No. We've had advance directives for 40 years and not once has a doctor been allowed to murder their patient.

HARLAN

You could starve a patient. Or let them die from dehydration.

ELI

We can't withhold basic needs. All we can do is follow the instructions of the patient.

HARLAN

People's deaths shouldn't be hastened. God has ordained a time and manor of death for everyone.

ELI

By your logic we shouldn't give people any care at all. Isn't medical science unnatural? Should we move back into mud huts and die of dysentery by the age of 30?

HARLAN

You're deliberately twisting my words.

ELI

No, I'm pointing out your words are twisted.

Harlan stands and shakes his finger at Eli.

HARLAN

The Lord will judge you!

ELI

And also judge you. I sleep well at night. Do you?

Harlan advances toward Eli. Two security guards move between them and the video cuts.

EXT. HOSPITAL - CONTINUED

Chants in the background.

PROTESTERS (O.S.)

"Life's a gift, don't dismiss,
playing God we must resist!"

NORA

What's wrong with them?

ELI

Too much free time.

OLD ELI (V.O.)

Something changed that day. Harlan stepped onto the property to confront me. They had the right to protest, but not trespass. The guards moved to intercept him but he was faster.

Harlan steps in front of Eli and Nora.

HARLAN

Murderers!

ELI
Shut up, Harlan.

The guards hustle toward them. Eli pushes him out of the way. He and Nora walk past.

HARLAN
You murdered your own mother.

Eli stops and turns. Nora tries to stop him but he shrugs her off and storms back to stand nose-to-nose with Harlan.

ELI
Would you like a front row seat to
your own murder?

Eli shoves him and he falls back on the pavement. Eli turns and rejoins Nora on their way in.

HARLAN
You bastard!

The guards are now on Harlan. They flank him. Help him up. He resists. They tussle. Harlan grabs one of their pistols.

A gunshot.

Eli and Nora jump at the sound. They stop. Eli turns to see the guards lying on top of Harlan as he struggles. Satisfied, Eli looks at Nora. Her eyes are wide. She coughs blood.

NORA
Eli?

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Eli works on Nora as she's wheeled into emergency.

ER DOCTOR
Eli, we got this. Go.

Eli lets them wheel her into triage. His white coat is stained red. His hands drip her blood on the linoleum.

INT. VIP SUITE - DAY

Eli sits next to Nora's bed. She's ventilated. Machines beep. He hasn't washed or changed.

CHARGE NURSE
Can I get you anything, Dr.
Bennett?

He shakes his head.

CHARGE NURSE (CONT'D)
You should at least take a break.
Go home and change. It's been three
days.

ELI
I don't want to miss saying
goodbye.

One of the machines beeps. A crew runs in. Eli stands back to let them work.

He sits. Nora crashes three more times.

INT. VIP SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Eli checks Nora's chart. Checks the machines. Checks the clock. He drags his chair close enough to hold her hand.

The monitor shows her heartbeat slowing. Erratic. It stops. He turns off the monitor.

A nurse walks in. Eli holds his free hand palm out while still staring at Nora's face. The nurse backs out.

Eli exhales, exhausted. His breath fogs.

BABA
I'm sorry, Eli.

ELI
You'll take care of her, right?

BABA
Of course.

He reaches down and pulls Nora from her spent body.

NORA
Baba?

He nods his head. Nora looks at Eli.

NORA (CONT'D)
It's true.

ELI
You sound surprised.

NORA
Not surprised. I trust you
completely.

Eli croaks.

ELI
I'm not ready to say goodbye.

Eli weeps.

NORA
Don't be sad. You said something to
me once.

ELI
What was that?

NORA
It's not "goodbye", it's "see you
soon".

Baba takes Nora's hand. Eli watches them walk away. They chat
as they fade.

NORA (CONT'D)
Tell me all about him. What was he
like as a kid?

BABA
Insufferable. All the questions...

Nora's infectious giggle echoes down the tunnel.

INT. VIP SUITE - NIGHT

OLD ELI
That coward Harlan hung himself in
prison. I asked Baba once if he
escorted him. He just nodded.

TREY
I didn't know Nana Nora was
murdered.

OLD ELI
You were only 4. Your parents
thought it would be too traumatic
to tell you.

TREY
It's hard enough to hear at 24. How
did you cope?

OLD ELI

My old friend, Baba. I buried myself in work. Tended to the sickest of the sick. I saw Baba a lot.

TREY

But you could only see him a few minutes at a time while he harvested souls.

OLD ELI

It's not like we can go out for lunch and chat. He's always busy. Too busy.

TREY

You've spent maybe a dozen hours your entire life with him?

OLD ELI

If you add it all together. But it's all quality time.

TREY

Is he lonely?

OLD ELI

That's a great question. Let's ask him when he comes for me.

TREY

I can't ask him if you are the only one who can see him.

Old Eli ignores Trey's statement.

OLD ELI

Knowing death personally made me a better doctor. People used to tell me we kept them alive too long.

TREY

That's why you are such an advocate for advance directives.

OLD ELI

Doctors are so caught up in being able to prolong life they don't ask themselves if they should.

TREY

To be fair, most doctors probably don't believe in an afterlife.

OLD ELI

True. I'm spoiled. I've known it
existed since I was 10 years old.

TREY

Baba seems to have changed too.

OLD ELI

My constant barrage of questions
led him to wonder about things too.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT (2005)

BABA

If humans go somewhere after they
die, will I?

ELI

It would be unfair if you didn't.

BABA

What do humans think about the
afterlife?

ELI

Some think we are reborn in an
endless cycle.

BABA

That sounds like a punishment.

ELI

Some think it's an eternal
existence without pain or trouble.

BABA

Sounds boring.

ELI

I prefer to think it's a new place
with new challenges.

BABA

An adventure? I like that. I choose
to believe that I will move on
someday.

ELI

What would you like your adventure
to be?

Baba frowns, then his expression brightens.

BABA
I'd like to be human.

The tunnel forms. He removes the soul from its husk.

BABA (CONT'D)
Mrs. Jackson, I'm Baba. I'll be
your guide. You are in for quite an
adventure.

INT. VIP SUITE - CONTINUOUS

TREY
You rub off on people.

OLD ELI
Hopefully in a good way.

TREY
You enrich the lives of everyone
around you.

OLD ELI
I cheated. My father gave me a
gift. He traded his life so I could
live and that gave me a special
perspective. Insight into what
happens after we die. I'm at peace.

TREY
Your peace is infectious.

Eli looks at the clock. Baba appears.

OLD ELI
It's almost time.

TREY
How do you know?

Eli smiles.

OLD ELI
Would you like to be able to see
Baba?

TREY
Of course. But I thought you were
the only one who could.

OLD ELI
Baba thinks if we can replicate the
original conditions he can pass the
ability on to you.

Eli's eyelids grow heavy. He lays his head on the pillow.

TREY
What do I do?

OLD ELI
You need to say the words.

Eli's machine makes a solid tone. Trey turns it off.

TREY
The words? What did he mean by
that.

He frowns. His eyes dart around the room as if searching for
the words in the air.

It clicks.

TREY (CONT'D)
Take me instead.

Trey's breath fogs. Baba appears in front of him, one hand on
Eli's hand and a finger touching Trey's forehead.

Baba smiles.

BABA
Did it work?

Trey is so stunned, he can only nod. Baba pulls Eli's soul
from his worn-out shell.

OLD ELI
Did it work?

Trey nods again.

A tunnel forms.

BABA
Shall we?

TREY
Wait. What do I do now?

OLD ELI
Listen to Baba. He'll help you
become an amazing doctor.

TREY
When will I see Baba again?

BABA
What is your discipline?

TREY
Oncology.

BABA
You'll be seeing a lot of me. Ta
for now.

Trey watches as they walk down the tunnel hand-in-hand. They converse like old friends.

BABA (CONT'D)
What is the meaning of life?

OLD ELI
To have a meaningful death.

BABA
Did you have a meaningful death?

OLD ELI
Of course.

They take a few more steps.

BABA
Will I die someday?

ELI
I don't know. But you certainly
have a purpose. And the Creator is
fair.

BABA
Who will guide me when it's my
time?

ELI
You already know the way. You don't
need a guide.

BABA
I'll miss you my friend.

ELI
I have a feeling we will see each
other one day. In the meantime,
take care of my grandson.

Eli stops and turns.

OLD ELI

My hat, ball and glove are yours.

Trey watches as the tunnel collapses onto itself, leaving him alone in the hospital room.

He picks up the hat, glove and ball. He tries on the hat and glove. They both fit perfectly. He checks the mirror. He looks nearly identical to Eli at his age.

DORA PAGE (25), Trey's casual girlfriend and fellow resident, knocks lightly and sticks her head in.

DORA

Trey? You okay?

He nods. She steps in. Gives him a hug. Checks Eli.

TREY

You can call it.

DORA

Time of death, 11:59 PM.

She notes it on his chart.

A pause fills the room. She sees Trey in the baseball hat and smiles.

DORA (CONT'D)

You look 12 years old in that hat.

TREY

It was my grandfather's. It's a genuine Washington Senators cap given to him by Tex Clevenger in 1960.

DORA

Your grandfather was a great man.

TREY

I didn't know how great until tonight.

DORA

You were in here for hours. What did you talk about?

TREY

Death.

DEATH

His death?

TREY

Death the person.

DORA

I heard that he told people he met death personally. I thought it was just something he said.

Trey takes a deep breath and looks at his feet. He fidgets with the ball and glove.

TREY

I met him.

Dora is unfazed. She stares at Eli. He can't read her expression.

DORA

My boyfriend knows Death?

Trey is surprised.

TREY

I'm still your boyfriend?

DORA

As long as you don't tell anyone. I don't want everyone knowing I'm dating a crazy person.

TREY

Fair enough.

DORA

Death, huh? Did he have a scythe?

TREY

No. He looked like a rich guy in a dark suit.

She steps toward Trey, nearly nose-to-nose. She takes off his hat and puts it on.

DORA

If you're up for it a few of us were going to have a few drinks in honor of your grandfather.

TREY

I'm not sure I'll be very good company.

DORA

Me either. Let's go.

They walk out of the room, hand in hand. Trey stops, looks back at Eli's empty shell and turns out the lights.