

TOO FAR DOWN FOR NORMAL

by

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FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL PSYCHIATRIC WARD - NIGHT

LINCOLN, seventeen, sits on a bed, his hospital gown thrown next to him. He wears no shirt and he is muscular, if gaunt. His left forearm is bandaged from his recent suicide attempt.

There is a clipped packet of handwritten pages on the bed. He unclips them and flips impatiently toward the end.

He picks up a pen, crosses out a sentence on the page, skips a few lines and writes.

The pull of the IV on his forearm annoys him and he looks with disgust at the bags of fluid and medicine flowing into him, and yanks the needle from his arm.

He picks at the bandage on his other arm, slowly unwrapping it, until he just rips it off without concern for the pain.

The now exposed wounds and stitches are still fresh -- still gruesome. He rubs his hand over them, winces, and smiles.

He can still feel.

So he can write.

LINCOLN (V.O.)

The philosopher Hillel asked if I'm not for myself, who will be for me? Even to ask implies you are someone worth being for. But what if you're not? For why else would I start my story here, when I proved to be a failure even at killing myself?

EXT. HOSPITAL - DAY

A torrential storm pounds the sidewalk. A beat-up car, the kind held together by rust and the dirt being washed away by the rain, pulls up and honks.

LINCOLN (V.O.)

Perhaps I should begin when Un-Hun picked me up and forced me to go to the diner. Where I began this futile quest to prove to that woman who calls herself my mother that she's wrong about me.

Lincoln pushes the hospital door open and exits without an umbrella or coat, as though he can't bother to care.

INT. CAR

UN-HUN, a lanky Laotian teenager who is Lincoln's only friend, pulls out of the hospital parking lot.

Lincoln drips all over the car. Un-Hun hands him a stack of fast food napkins and smiles, as though to emphasize that they are no match for Lincoln's soaked clothes and skin.

UN-HUN  
They didn't have an umbrella?

LINCOLN  
I had to sneak out. I was supposed to be released only to a parent.

UN-HUN  
(looking at Lincoln's bandaged wrist)  
You definitely don't want that.  
What are you going to tell her about the scars?

LINCOLN  
(pulling his sleeve down)  
I need to go the movie theater.

UN-HUN  
Why?

LINCOLN  
Tonight's my shift.

UN-HUN  
It's a good thing you didn't die.  
Who would've ripped tickets?

LINCOLN  
You're going the wrong way.

UN-HUN  
We're stopping at the diner. I'm hungry. And it'll be good for you to be part of normal life.

LINCOLN  
Is that what this is?

INT. DINER SEATING AREA - NIGHT

Lincoln stares at RILEY, seventeen, who sits a couple of booths away. She's attractive, but approachable. While her smile is infectious, it's her eyes that show that she has an intelligence beyond the average high schooler she appears to be at first glance.

She sits with her friend, KAREN, who is more social but doesn't have Riley's smarts, and ROGER, a good-looking, confident sixteen year old boy -- the kind who always manage to date older girls.

Karen looks disdainfully at Lincoln and turns to Roger.

KAREN

(to Roger)

I think your girlfriend has a crush on him, Roger.

RILEY

He can stare.

KAREN

(playful)

Do you get off on it, Riles?  
Knowing he brings you into his bed every night?

ROGER

(turning to look at  
Lincoln)

That dude lives on my street!

KAREN

(mocking)

You poor thing.

ROGER

He's a freak. Let's go. Jake's  
texted me like five times already.

Riley, Karen and Roger make their exit.

Lincoln stares at Riley as she passes, and she looks back at him, uncomfortable, and yet intrigued by how intensely he watches her -- a sharp contrast to Roger's indifferent normalcy.

UN-HUN

We should crash Jake's party. Get  
the scoop on the senior trip.

LINCOLN  
I'm late for work.

Lincoln gets up and sees that Riley left a school folder on the seat at her table. He walks over, grabs it and holds it as if deciding what to do with it. He throws it back on the table and walks toward the exit but then goes back and takes it.

INT. CAR

Lincoln looks through Riley's folder while Un-Hun drives.

LINCOLN  
It's her papers from AP English.

UN-HUN  
I'm sure she'll be thrilled that you're going through them. Girls love having their privacy invaded.

LINCOLN  
She's getting straight A's. But she hangs out with morons.

Un-Hun looks over at Lincoln and smiles.

INT. AP CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

MR. LEVIN, Riley's father and Lincoln's creative writing teacher, hands out graded papers.

Memorabilia and other postings on the walls reveal that he is the former book critic for the New York Times. Now he teaches high school and spots in his senior year creative writing class are highly treasured.

The bell rings and kids pack up their backpacks and head out of class. Mr. Levin continues to pass out papers as though the bell is irrelevant.

MR. LEVIN  
So far nobody has turned in the extra credit assignment. It's supposed to be the opening chapter of an autobiographical novel. In the unlikely event that any of you write something good enough, I'll submit it to the Simon and Schuster New Voices competition. For those of you who want to be writers -- it's a chance to prove you belong.

Mr. Levin throws Lincoln's homework down on his desk, as though it was a burden even to have to hold it. It is marked with a "B" in red writing at the top.

Lincoln notices that Mr. Levin watches him as he exits, and so he deliberately throws his graded paper in the trash by the door.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY

At a table, Riley bangs her hands on her keyboard in frustration. Karen sighs. The bell rings.

KAREN

Didn't I say you'd never write an essay on Crime and Punishment before class? You wasted your whole free period, like you're doing with senior year.

Lincoln approaches Riley, carrying a printed out report.

KAREN

She has a boyfriend.

He barely acknowledges Karen's existence let alone registers that she spoke, and he drops the paper on the table in front of Riley and walks away.

KAREN

What is it?

RILEY

An essay. On Crime and Punishment. In my name. He was watching us when I told you I had to stay here to do it, and he must have went and wrote it just now. In thirty minutes.

KAREN

Maybe I should let him stare too.

Riley looks up but Lincoln is gone.

RILEY

Your father's not the head of the English department.

INT. DR. FADER'S PSYCHIATRIC OFFICE WAITING ROOM - DAY

Lincoln flicks a light switch on and off and the room grows dark and light again.

Lincoln's mother, Evelyn, sits on a designer couch and reads the New York Times.

EVELYN  
Stop turning the lights on and off!

LINCOLN  
Who would paint a light switch?

EVELYN  
(annoyed)  
Maybe they're trying to hide it.

LINCOLN  
Like people won't know?

EVELYN  
(angrily)  
I was trying to tell you what you are supposed to say to Dr. Fader.

LINCOLN  
Why should I tell him anything?

EVELYN  
He said you lack conviction. You prefer to take the easy way out to avoid confrontation.

LINCOLN  
I'm not the one trying to hide a light switch by painting over it.

Lincoln sits down on the other end of the couch, deliberately ensuring an empty space separates him from his mother.

EVELYN  
That's why you'll inform him you're going to see a different psychiatrist. One who is actually going to find something.

LINCOLN  
What do you want him to find?

EVELYN  
What's wrong with you. And prescribe something to fix it.

The door opens but Lincoln doesn't move. His mother stares at him impatiently and finally he gets up and walks past her into the office and slams the door behind him.

INT. WAITING ROOM - FORTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER

Lincoln walks back in as Dr. Fader's office door closes with an impersonal click behind him.

He sees his mother, chipping the paint off the switches.

EVELYN

What kind of an idiot would paint  
over a light switch?

Lincoln smiles as he realizes that his mother has chipped off the paint for him, because he complained about it.

LINCOLN

Don't we have to get to the book  
store now?

EVELYN

So I can be reminded of what I used  
to be?

LINCOLN

(hopeful)  
And still are.

INT. BOOKSTORE

The book store is set up for a book signing.

There are huge displays advertising the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of Evelyn's Pulitzer Prize winning novel, The Suicide Note. The size and enthusiasm of the crowd reveals that this is a big event.

Evelyn reads a passage to the audience who look on with rapt attention.

EVELYN

(reading)

Sometimes it's hard to believe it's  
been my life. But whose life could  
it have been? Yet, how I wish it  
was a book I read once, or scenes  
from a movie I could leave behind  
and return to the imaginary bliss  
that should have been mine.

Upstairs, hidden away, Lincoln sits on the floor between the fiction stacks and writes.

He has a folder opened on the floor, with a disorganised mess of handwritten pages. He picks up the dog-earned worn out paperback that is next to him.

It's the original paperback edition of his mother's novel, and he turns it over and looks at the back. He runs his finger over one of the quotes with the same motion, and same reaction he did when he was running his finger over the wound on his wrist.

"The voice of a generation" one quote says. "A true masterpiece!" says another, attributed to "Roger Levin, The New York Times".

A voice from behind startles him.

DUNCAN FLEMING

Lincoln!

Lincoln hastily stands up and turns around to see DUNCAN FLEMING, publishing executive.

DUNCAN FLEMING

It's been a long time. You're almost a man now.

LINCOLN

Yes sir.

DUNCAN FLEMING

I used to poke your mother's stomach so we could feel you turn around. You can call me Duncan.

LINCOLN

Yes sir. . . Duncan.

Lincoln sees Duncan looking at the writing spread out on the floor and he nervously bends down and shoves everything into the folder.

When he stands up, Duncan is right on top of him and snatches the folder and opens it.

DUNCAN FLEMING

She still writes by hand. Her handwriting hasn't changed.

Duncan reads and eagerly flips a few pages and smiles like he has discovered a secret.

DUNCAN FLEMING

Jesus. She's still got it. Nobody writes like your mother.

LINCOLN

She didn't . . .

DUNCAN FLEMING

Don't worry. I won't let on. I know she hasn't given me anything to publish in twenty-five years but as you can see downstairs the demand is still there. She just needs the confidence to put herself out there again, and not worry about living up to her own legend. If these are what she's up to there's no doubt of that.

LINCOLN

I should go back down.

DUNCAN FLEMING

That's a good way to learn. Reading her work. It's like having a great athlete as a parent.

LINCOLN

I don't write.

DUNCAN FLEMING

You'd have no problem getting published, with your pedigree.

LINCOLN

If I ever did I'd use a pseudonym.

DUNCAN FLEMING

Why?

LINCOLN

To make sure I made it because of what I wrote. Not my last name.

Before Duncan can respond, Lincoln reaches angrily to grab the folder, but Duncan resists. As Lincoln pulls on the folder Duncan sees the bandage on his wrist and grabs Lincoln's arm.

DUNCAN FLEMING

Trying to imitate art?

Lincoln rips his arm and the folder from Duncan's grasp.

INT. CAR - DAY

Lincoln and Evelyn drive home from the book signing on the highway. A car cuts in front and Evelyn erupts in a rage.

EVELYN

Look at this asshole! All right you son-of-a-bitch, you want to play games? I can play games!

Evelyn slams on the gas and the car lurches forward.

EVELYN

Roll down your window and give him the finger, Lincoln!

LINCOLN

It's a hybrid! He's in his sixties.

EVELYN

Well, he's not going to make it to seventy the way he's driving.

Lincoln doesn't do anything and Evelyn's rage grows.

EVELYN

Give him the finger!

Lincoln flinches, takes off his seatbelt and rolls down the window, afraid of provoking a full manic episode in his mother. The wind whips around and he hesitates again.

EVELYN

Now!

Lincoln sticks his head out and faces the other car, which now nearly touches theirs, and holds up his middle finger as the two cars race down the highway.

The man in the other car looks at Lincoln, and Lincoln smiles at him and spreads his hands out and shrugs.

Lincoln's mother slams her foot on the gas again to race in front of the Toyota. She narrowly dodges it before she swerves toward the highway exit.

She looks over at Lincoln and he laughs now that the tension has passed. It's a cover for deeper emotions that are too painful to admit, but it's and contagious, and Evelyn laughs too -- a mother sharing a rare and genuine moment with her son after nearly killing him and a stranger on the highway on a random sunny afternoon.

INT. CAR

Evelyn continues down the quiet street.

EVELYN  
(accusingly)  
You really think that you're going  
to write the great American novel?

LINCOLN  
(defensive)  
Who said I was?

At the top of the hill is a gigantic boulder in the middle of the road and the street divides and spreads around the rock.

Evelyn lapses into a manic episode and floors the gas pedal to launch them straight toward a horrifying crash.

At the last second, the car swerves around the boulder and the crash is averted.

EVELYN  
Goddamn it!

LINCOLN  
What?

EVELYN  
You know damn well who!

LINCOLN  
I don't!

EVELYN  
I didn't make it because of what I  
wrote? I only got published because  
my father was editor-in-chief?  
Isn't that what you're trying to  
tell me?

LINCOLN  
No!

EVELYN  
Duncan told me what you said. About  
using a pseudonym.  
(mocking)  
You think you're going to become F.  
Scott Fitzgerald? In between  
suicide attempts?

How many years have I been writing and suffering with writer's block while struggling to raise you without an ounce of effort from that jackass who calls himself your father? You think you could do what I do? We both know you can't write.

LINCOLN

(panicked)

I'm sorry.

EVELYN

Are you sorry about the hospital? You don't think that has an effect on me? My son tried to kill himself. What kind of mother do you think that make me look like? It's bad enough I have the New York Times calling me a failure as a writer. I have to be a failure as a mother too?

Its like a switch has been flicked again as the mania vanishes and she takes her hands off of the wheel and cries.

The car veers of the road and Lincoln reaches over and steers and manages to get it back under control.

LINCOLN

It's okay mom. It's okay.

Evelyn rests her head on Lincoln's shoulder and sobs.

EXT. CAR - MOMENTS LATER

They continue up a long street on a regular suburban afternoon. Only the car's erratic weaving across the road as Lincoln struggles to steer shows that life inside that car is not what it seems.

INT. LINCOLN'S BEDROOM

Lincoln writes, alone in his bedroom. He stops and stands up.

He takes a scissors and cuts up the pages, methodically and without emotion, into smaller and smaller pieces.

INT. AP CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

Long shadows fill the room as Lincoln enters.

He walks over to Mr. Levin's desk and takes an envelope from his bag and opens it to take out newly hand-written pages. He hesitates but puts them on Mr. Levin's desk and walks toward the door. He changes his mind, walks back and reaches for the pages to take them back when the lights flick on.

Lincoln sees JIM, the custodian standing at the door, watching with suspicion.

Now he has no choice, so he drops the pages back on Mr. Levin's desk and slinks out.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - THE NEXT DAY

Lincoln walks to class when Mr. Levin catches up to him.

MR. LEVIN  
You write everything by hand.

LINCOLN  
It helps me visualize.

Lincoln's nonchalance and refusal to take him seriously angers Mr. Levin.

MR. LEVIN  
How hard do you think it is to recognize your handwriting?

The bell rings.

LINCOLN  
I'm going to be late for class.

Lincoln turns to go into a classroom, but Mr. Levin grabs him, almost violently.

INT. PRINCIPAL FIRTH'S OFFICE

Mr. Levin sits in front of PRINCIPAL FIRTH'S desk, his chair turned to face Lincoln.

MR. LEVIN  
You think I wouldn't know?

Lincoln looks at the two of them, trapped.

MR. LEVIN  
Your mother's novel was revolutionary. I wrote the review in the Times.

LINCOLN

She hasn't written anything since she was twenty-one.

MR. LEVIN

I've read the articles. About how the pressure of living up to being the next Salinger caused her to be in and out of mental institutions.

LINCOLN

It wasn't the pressure, she was always . . . She's better now.

PRINCIPAL FIRTH

And ghostwriting for her son.

LINCOLN

(angry)

She's not . . .

Mr. Levin's tone becomes more like a teacher now, one who has an important discovery he wants his student to understand.

MR. LEVIN

I've seen your previous work. And I went back and looked at the work you did last year in Mrs. Ross' class. And in Mr. Renault's class. And every year it's exactly the same. A B average in English. A perfectly ordinary student.

LINCOLN

(defensive)

You think I'm too normal for that contest of yours?

MR. LEVIN

There's no way that B student wrote the chapter left on my desk.

LINCOLN

Maybe it was some other B student.

Mr. Levin smirks, slightly amused, at Lincoln's attempt to goad him.

MR. LEVIN

Are you going to admit it?

He watches Lincoln carefully, and continues, calmly and almost with triumph.

MR. LEVIN

Or should I make your mother come to school and listen to you read it out loud?

LINCOLN

(standing up to leave)

Fine. She wrote it. I withdraw it.

PRINCIPAL FIRTH

Plagiarism is grounds for expulsion under our honor code.

LINCOLN

For the first time in twenty years she wrote something. I don't give a shit about your honor code.

He storms out of the office and Mr. Firth watches him as if the whole episode was an experiment designed to see how Lincoln would react. And while it largely went as planned, something troubles him.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL STAIRWELL - LATER

Lincoln sits down in the stairwell and eats his lunch from a brown paper bag.

He hears a sound and packs up his lunch and listens. He races to the top of the stairs and pushes the door open.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY

Down the hallway, he sees a group of kids and ducks like a thief back into the stairs.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL STAIRWELL

Lincoln slams into Riley, who carries a stack of binders.

RILEY

Lincoln!

He stares at her, unable to speak.

RILEY

Where are you going?

Riley bends down and picks up her binders.

LINCOLN  
I was about to eat my lunch.

RILEY  
(slightly condescending)  
Lunch is over.  
(softening)  
But I'll sit with you for a few.

He sits down on the step right where they are, and opens up his lunch again, as Riley stares at him, flabbergasted.

RILEY  
What are you doing?

LINCOLN  
This is where I eat.

RILEY  
Here?

LINCOLN  
This way no one bothers me.

RILEY  
But you don't have a hall pass.

LINCOLN  
That's why I use the stairwell.

Riley sits down next to Lincoln and smiles, and Lincoln looks at her, unsure how to react, but he can't help but smile too.

RILEY  
I guess having a famous mother  
isn't all it's supposed to be.

LINCOLN  
It has it's moments.

RILEY  
That's what I say about my father,  
but he can be pretty hard to handle  
sometimes. He even critiques the  
notes I write on his birthday cards  
each year. Is your mom like that?

LINCOLN  
Last year she locked herself in the  
car on her birthday and wouldn't  
come out until after midnight.

RILEY  
Jesus. It's no wonder . . .

LINCOLN  
No wonder what?

RILEY  
That you eat your lunch here.

Lincoln throws his lunch back in his back and gets up but Riley grabs his hand and holds it.

RILEY  
I hide too, you know.

LINCOLN  
What do you have to hide from?

RILEY  
Being what my father wants.

The bell rings and Riley gathers her binders and heads out. She comes back and goes up to Lincoln and kisses him, seductively, and then races out the top door.

Lincoln smiles as he watches her leave, but then his smile vanishes and he races down and out the bottom door.

INT. AP CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

Lincoln confronts Mr. Levin who sits at his desk behind a cavernous pile of papers and books.

LINCOLN  
Did you send her?

MR. LEVIN  
Who?

LINCOLN  
To sit with me on the stairs?  
Because you felt sorry for me? Or  
to spy on me?

MR. LEVIN  
(playful)  
Riley does what she wants. If she  
did what I wanted being a father  
would be a lot easier. Maybe she  
enjoys your company.

LINCOLN  
Nobody enjoys my company. Am I  
going to be expelled or not?

MR. LEVIN

I know she didn't write it.

LINCOLN

(getting up and pacing)

I admitted it already. What more do you want?

MR. LEVIN

Even an average student will sometimes get a C. Or an A. Nobody gets a B on every single assignment. It takes a very skilled writer to pull that off.

LINCOLN

Or very predictable teachers.

MR. LEVIN

What you turned in is very close to how your mother writes. How she wrote. Except you have the potential to do what she couldn't.

Lincoln reacts as though he's been insulted.

LINCOLN

You don't know what she can do now.

MR. LEVIN

You can stick to your story that your mother wrote it, and be expelled. Or you can finish it.

LINCOLN

That chapter's finished.

Mr. Levin relaxes, now that he knows he's broken through.

MR. LEVIN

It may be. But the book isn't. You have until the end of the year to write the rest.

LINCOLN

How do you know I won't just get her to do the whole thing?

MR. LEVIN

Perhaps that's what I want. To get her to write again.

(wistfully)

The world could use another novel by your mother.

(clinical)  
You've got three weeks to write the next chapter. After that we'll have to pick up the pace.

Lincoln walks toward the door.

LINCOLN  
I'm not writing it.

Mr. Levin approaches Lincoln. Though his methods are a bit unorthodox, it's clear that he has real affection.

MR. LEVIN  
Why'd you write it then.

LINCOLN  
I didn't write it.

MR. LEVIN  
(ignoring his denial)  
And why turn it in? Why now?

LINCOLN  
You wanted entries for the contest.

MR. LEVIN  
If you read about a character who did this two weeks after he tried to kill himself what would you say?

LINCOLN  
That the contest was an excuse.

MR. LEVIN  
Not an excuse, but an opportunity. To get something he came back to life for. But what?

LINCOLN  
You're the English teacher.

MR. LEVIN  
You're the writer. But I'll tell you what I think. You realized you almost died without anyone knowing.

LINCOLN  
(derisively)  
Knowing what?

MR. LEVIN  
You can write. Better than her.

LINCOLN  
(as he exits)  
Let me know when it's time for my  
expulsion to start.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL ART CLASS

Lincoln and several kids paint plaster sculptures.

By the window, dozens of sculptures are laid out to dry in the sun.

Two boys, JOHN and CHARLIE, take the sculptures and throw them out of the third story window and watch them smash.

As each sculpture crashes, erasing yet another kid's work, they laugh.

Riley, Karen, Un-Hun, and Lincoln sit at a table and sculpt.

UN-HUN  
Somebody should get Mrs. Douglass  
to come back. Or Principal Firth.

KAREN  
You should just tell your dad,  
Riles. I'd love to see those two  
idiots get detention.

Lincoln holds his sculpture of a whale and Riley looks at it.

RILEY  
That's actually pretty good. Just  
don't put it on the sill to dry.

LINCOLN  
You think Michelangelo ever made  
such crap as this?

He deliberately takes his statue over toward the window where Charlie and John are.

Riley stands up, concerned, and makes a motion to go after him. Un-Hun grabs her and pulls her back.

Lincoln hands his sculpture to Charlie.

LINCOLN  
Here Chaz.

JOHN  
Only his friends can call him Chaz.

Lincoln looks with utter disgust at John, as if even having to address him is intolerable.

LINCOLN

I wasn't talking to you. I was giving this to Charlie, so he can throw it out the window.

JOHN

(shocked anyone would speak to him this way)  
Do you hear how this guy is talking? You should bust him up for calling you Chaz.

Charlie takes the sculpture from Lincoln and smiles.

CHARLIE

He can call me Chaz.

JOHN

What? This little freak?

Charlie winks at Lincoln.

CHARLIE

Lincoln can do what he wants.

Charlie leans out the window and drops the statue. The whale breaks into dozens of pieces on the pavement below.

John makes it a point not to watch.

Lincoln sits back down at the table and Un-Hun quickly moves a sculpture away from Lincoln's reach.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Kids walk down the hallway. Karen talks to Riley.

Charlie runs down the hall, grabs Lincoln and puts him in what is intended to be a playful sleeper hold.

Lincoln passes out.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Lincoln's on the floor and sees a circle of ghoulish faces.

JOHN

Is he dead?

KAREN

I think so.

JOHN

You held on too long Chaz.

CHARLIE

I was celebrating with my patented sleeper hold.

UN-HUN

You killed him.

KAREN

No, his eyes are moving.

Riley steps through the crowd and bends down and helps Lincoln get up.

RILEY

Are you alright?

CHARLIE

He's fine.

JOHN

He's going to turn you in and you'll be expelled.

Instead of answering, Lincoln backs away from everyone and disappears into the stairwell.

INT. STAIRCASE

Riley chases after Lincoln.

RILEY

Lincoln! Are you okay?

LINCOLN

I'm fine.

RILEY

You want me to walk home with you?

EXT. SCHOOL

Lincoln walks quickly and Riley races to keep up.

LINCOLN

I've been walking home by myself since grade school.

RILEY  
That's part of the problem.

LINCOLN  
(sarcastic)  
What problem?

RILEY  
(seductively)  
The one that keeps you home on  
Saturday night instead of going to  
the school dance.

LINCOLN  
Tell your dad you did your duty. I  
don't need any more of his charity.

Lincoln walks quicker but Riley grabs his arm -- the one that's scarred. He turns around and she looks at his cut marks and runs her fingers over them. Then their eyes meet.

She takes out a marker from her bag and writes her phone number on his wrist, right next to the lines.

RILEY  
That's my number. Not my dad's.

INT. LINCOLN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Evelyn cleans. She crushes a container of comet and takes off the metal top and pours green powder everywhere. She grinds it into the counter with a wet rag.

Lincoln tries to soak up the green mess his mother makes with a huge clump of paper towels.

EVELYN  
(accusing)  
Are you writing something?

LINCOLN  
No.

EVELYN  
I saw you in your room.

LINCOLN  
It was just a school assignment.

Evelyn grabs Lincoln's arm and looks at Riley's handwritten phone number.

EVELYN

You already told me she wrote her number on your arm. Are you going to keep it there forever? And what does it say about her that she's interested in you?

LINCOLN

She doesn't know me very well.

EVELYN

Can you expect her to love a person who doesn't have feelings for his own mother?

LINCOLN

Who said that?

EVELYN

You did. Every time you write you're insulting me by implying that the garbage you produce is worthy of coming from my son.

LINCOLN

I'm not writing. And I don't even like her. She's just a random girl.

Lincoln takes some of the comet and rubs it into his wrist to erase the phone number and winces as it rubs into his scars.

EVELYN

You're not capable of having a relationship with someone. Or you would never have done that.

He sees her look at his scars and he yanks his arm away from a drinking glass. It falls sideways on the counter.

Evelyn picks it up and examines it to see if it is cracked and smashes it in the sink. She smashes another and takes a wooden spoon and pushes the broken glass into the disposal, and dips the spoon in so it is torn and splinters fly up.

Lincoln tries to comfort her.

Evelyn throws his arms off and he loses his balance and knocks several pictures off the table. Glass shatters everywhere and Lincoln bends down to pick up a photograph out of the debris.

It is a photograph of his mother and him when he was six years old. They paint a hydrant to look like a happy fireman.

EVELYN

Don't worry about helping, just stand there like a lunatic and look at that picture.

Evelyn grabs the picture angrily from Lincoln but sees what it is and suffers one of her sudden mood shifts.

EVELYN

You see what we used to be? Before you became jealous of me and decided to denigrate what I do by pretending you can do it too?

LINCOLN

I know I can't write like you. No one can.

EVELYN

So I'm not a good writer anymore?

LINCOLN

I never said that.

EVELYN

No one can write like I used to. You just said that.

LINCOLN

That's not what I said.

EVELYN

I should have recorded you.

LINCOLN

That's not what I meant.

EVELYN

Then you should learn to say what you mean. Just because you're willing to commit suicide doesn't mean I am.

LINCOLN

(pleading)

I don't want to be a writer.

Evelyn stops cleaning abruptly and leaves Lincoln alone in the kitchen, now even more of a mess than before.

INT. LINCOLN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lincoln lies down on his bed. He covers his eyes with his hands and pulls his arm away, startled.

He looks at his wrist and sees Riley's number on it. He closes his eyes and opens them again.

With his eyes open, the number is gone.

INT. RILEY'S BEDROOM

Riley lies on her stomach on her bed. Her phone rings.

RILEY

Hello?

LINCOLN (O.S.)

I remembered your number.

RILEY

That's why I wrote it on your arm. Since you refuse to have an iphone or a computer like a normal person.

LINCOLN (O.S.)

I washed it. But I saw it anyway.

RILEY

My dad says we remember things we want to think about again. Things that are interesting. Or upsetting.

LINCOLN (O.S.)

That sounds right.

RILEY

Which am I?

LINCOLN (O.S.)

I haven't decided yet.

RILEY

Then why call me?

LINCOLN (O.S.)

There's the dance on Saturday. I've never been to one, but . . .

RILEY

Yes.

LINCOLN (O.S.)  
I didn't ask you yet.

RILEY  
When a girl says yes, don't keep  
talking. Pick me up at eight.

Riley hangs up and smiles.

INT. LINCOLN'S BATHROOM

Lincoln steps out of the shower. The mirror steams up and he  
wipes it with his hand and looks at his reflection.

He smirks and turns the hot water in the sink on, and watches  
his face become erased again by the fog.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM - NIGHT

The gym is decorated and colored lights swirl around while  
kids dance and mill about.

Lincoln dances with Riley -- a magical moment, completely  
unlike the rest of his life, as if he is temporarily inside a  
different world.

When the song ends, she puts her mouth close to his ear as  
she speaks and her proximity is torturous for him.

RILEY  
Want to go for a walk?

LINCOLN  
Sure, where?

RILEY  
Come on.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

It's cold, and they shiver as neither of them have jackets.  
They walk toward the edge of the parking lot and down a hill  
that leads to the football field.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD

Lincoln and Riley walk alone in the cold.

LINCOLN

I can't believe I'm voluntarily hanging around school at night.

RILEY

I would love school if I could write like you.

LINCOLN

I'm no better than anyone else.

RILEY

I know you stole my folder.

LINCOLN

(defensive)

I didn't steal it . . .

RILEY

And Un-Hun said you had it for like thirty minutes before he brought it to me at Jake's party. But that was enough for you to write my essay on Crime and Punishment in one period, exactly as I would have, so that even my own father couldn't tell I didn't write it. And dad said not once in four years did you get a grade on an essay other than a B.

LINCOLN

And you get all As.

RILEY

(coyly)

I get a few Bs. . . Well, B pluses.

LINCOLN

But you hang out with Karen and the popular kids. None of them get As.

RILEY

She's been my best friend since like first grade. And she knows where every good party is.

LINCOLN

Do you talk about books with her? Or with the kids at those parties?

RILEY

Do you talk about them with anyone?

LINCOLN

I used to talk about them with my  
mother. Before . . .

Lincoln realizes he's said more than he wants.

RILEY

Does it upset you? To be different?

LINCOLN

It's not my fault.

RILEY

I'm not jealous.

LINCOLN

What are you?

RILEY

Amazed?

Emboldened by the way she looks at him, Lincoln leans in and kisses her, softly. She pulls away, shocked, but then pulls him back to her and kisses him, more forcefully than he did, until she pulls away again.

RILEY

Did she write it? And if she did,  
why'd you turn it in?

LINCOLN

So she could feel what it was like  
to be published again. And remember  
what she used to be, and become  
that way again.

RILEY

Is that worth being expelled?

LINCOLN

If you loved someone who was broken  
and had the power to fix her  
wouldn't you do that too?

RILEY

I've never loved someone that much.

LINCOLN

Is this why you came to the dance?  
To find out for your dad?

RILEY

Yes. . . No. Not for my dad. It was  
a mistake. . . I have a boyfriend.

Lincoln walks away but Riley goes after him.

RILEY  
(challenging him)  
Are you going to write it?

LINCOLN  
(coldly)  
I'd rather be expelled.

She grabs him and spins Lincoln around to face her.

RILEY  
Who wrote those pages?

LINCOLN  
She did.

RILEY  
I don't believe you.

LINCOLN  
Why not?

RILEY  
Because I read them.

LINCOLN  
So?

RILEY  
Remember when Raskolnikov confesses to Sonya that he's the murderer? Do you know what she said?

LINCOLN  
She says he must be the most unhappy person in the world.

RILEY  
Before that.

Riley closes her eyes and speaks like she reads from a novel.

RILEY  
"What have you done? -- What have you done to yourself?' she said in despair, and, jumping up, she flung herself on his neck, threw her arms round him, and held him tightly."

Lincoln stares at her, amazed that she can remember it verbatim, and that she chose that passage. It's a side of her she doesn't let anyone at school see.

RILEY

You see. I don't spend all my time at parties.

LINCOLN

It's brilliant, both the passage and that you remembered it. But I'm no Dostoevsky.

RILEY

Not yet. But your writing made me feel that. It made me want to throw my arms around you and run away with you.

Lincoln pulls her toward him and kisses her. She takes his hand and puts in on her back.

Suddenly, she pulls away.

RILEY

Sh!

KAREN (O.S.)

(from a distance)

Riley! Come on, my dad's here.

RILEY

Okay!

(to Lincoln)

I have to go.

Riley takes a few steps away and turns and comes back.

RILEY

Write the rest of that book.

LINCOLN

You'll never react like Sonya did when you know my secrets.

RILEY

(jokingly)

Are you a murderer too?

Lincoln doesn't answer and just looks at her with a pained expression.

She meant it as a joke, but his silence scares the hell out of her, until she grabs the back of his head and kisses him, fiercely, and runs into the darkness toward the parking lot.

INT. GYM - MOMENTS LATER

The music ends and the lights come on as everyone exits. Lincoln looks around and sees that it now looks like a gym -- as ubiquitous as it is depressing.

EXT. STREET

Lincoln walks home by himself, and as he walks, it snows.

INT. LINCOLN'S BEDROOM

Alone, Lincoln writes, his pages barely lit up by a tiny desk lamp that flickers on and off.

LINCOLN (V.O.)

If I can silence those voices  
inside my head -- her voice -- long  
enough, I can do it. I can write  
something so good it'll be better  
than what she wrote. And she'll be  
forced to see that she's wrong  
about me.

INT. AP CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

Lincoln barges into Mr. Levin's classroom without knocking.

LINCOLN

I'll do it. On one condition.

MR. LEVIN

Only one?

Mr. Levin is playful, but Lincoln is deadly serious.

LINCOLN

Judge it like you would if you were  
still at the New York Times. As if  
she wrote it. And no one can know.

MR. LEVIN

That's two conditions.

LINCOLN

(desperate)  
I need your word.

MR. LEVIN

If you do one thing for me.

LINCOLN  
I'm writing it, aren't I?

Mr. Levin becomes deadly serious too.

MR. LEVIN  
Don't censor yourself. Don't settle  
for being mediocre.

LINCOLN  
That's two things.

MR. LEVIN  
No. It isn't.

INT. RILEY'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Lincoln and Riley sit on her bed and put together a jigsaw puzzle of a Monet painting with hundreds of tiny pieces.

The edge of the puzzle is nearly completed, and Riley has separated out the middle pieces to wait until the perimeter is complete.

While she reads a stack of Lincoln's handwritten pages, Riley sees Lincoln moving a middle piece toward the puzzle.

RILEY  
That's not an edge piece.

She grabs it and puts it in the pile of middle pieces.

LINCOLN  
What kind of person does jigsaw  
puzzles anymore anyway?

RILEY  
The kind who invites a boy like you  
into her room.

LINCOLN  
Why did you invite a boy like me  
into your room?

RILEY  
Your eyes. Or your crooked smile.

Riley looks at Lincoln seductively and grows serious.

RILEY

Or because that paper you wrote for me was like reading my own thoughts. And I don't understand how you can do that and still be so down on yourself that just having me sit next to you on the stairwell can make you smile. You're like a character in a novel that doesn't make sense. Except I don't know if the problem is the novel or me.

A car pulls into the driveway outside and Riley leaps up to look out the window.

RILEY

My dad is home.

LINCOLN

I'd better go then.

RILEY

Why?

LINCOLN

Because I don't want him to read that yet.

RILEY

You're letting me read it.

LINCOLN

You're not like your father.

RILEY

Karen says I'm too much like him.

Mr. Levin appears in the doorway, barely able to contain his surprise. Or displeasure.

MR. LEVIN

Hello, Lincoln.

LINCOLN

Hello Mr. Levin.

MR. LEVIN

Behaving yourself?

LINCOLN

I'm trying.

MR. LEVIN  
Are those your pages?

LINCOLN  
No.

Lincoln panics after he responds, as they can both see it's his handwriting.

LINCOLN  
I mean they're my pages, but they're not ready yet.

MR. LEVIN  
You can't have fears about your work. You have to be willing to be humiliated. And still keep writing.

Mr. Levin leaves the room and Riley follows him.

Lincoln works on the puzzle. He puts the pieces straight in where they belong instead of into Riley's separate piles.

INT. KITCHEN

Riley talks to her dad in the kitchen while he gets ingredients out of the refrigerator, more to distract himself and make it seem like he's doing something than to accomplish anything.

MR. LEVIN  
I sent you to ask some questions.  
Not become his boyfriend.

RILEY  
(angry)  
You sent me?

MR. LEVIN  
I asked you. For his sake.

RILEY  
Was it for his sake. Or for yours?

MR. LEVIN  
What are you getting at, Riles?

RILEY  
Just don't tell me who can be my boyfriend and who can't.

MR. LEVIN  
He's sick Riley. You can't lead him  
on. He can't handle it.

RILEY  
Is that what you think I'm doing?

Riley storms out of the kitchen and her dad calls without  
effect after her.

MR. LEVIN  
Riley!

INT. RILEY'S BEDROOM

Lincoln hears Riley coming and stops working on the puzzle  
abruptly.

RILEY  
Daddy says you can stay for dinner.

LINCOLN  
Where's your mother?

RILEY  
She'll be home soon. She's probably  
still at court. She has a case.

RILEY  
(picking up his pages)  
Why do you write by hand? It's like  
you're trying to be retro, but it's  
sort of lame.

LINCOLN  
Kafka wrote by hand. He threw The  
Trial into the fire, but pulled it  
out at the last minute. Some of the  
pages were burned too much, and  
those are gone forever.

RILEY  
That's why those of us who aren't  
lame use a computer. Even what you  
delete can be recovered.

LINCOLN  
That's why I don't use one.

RILEY  
Stop talking. I'm reading.  
(reading)

I brought my father his drink, and besides the occasional clinking of his glass, it was as though my dad wasn't there. He offered no fatherly words of advice or questions about the nature of the universe or what I had done in my day. My usefulness in his life had come and gone.

I did see him looking up for a moment at the airplane too, and I thought that somewhere beneath that head that had learned to use a stethoscope to hear the sounds of a heart was a person who understood that his son too had a heart, or, more importantly, a soul, and who, once or twice, had a thought like mine.

Then the airplane faded from view and we shared the same porch and the same DNA but not much else.

Riley puts the pages down and looks at Lincoln.

RILEY

The same porch and the same DNA but not much else. I love that line but . . . is it really true? You must have more in common than that.

LINCOLN

There's also the night when he beat the shit out of my mother and she coiled herself around me so I wouldn't get hit. I don't even think she was breathing when he finally stopped. She protected me and so now I need to protect her.

RILEY

(seeing that he's nearly completed the puzzle)  
What the hell?

LINCOLN

(panicked)  
I didn't mean to.

RILEY

You didn't even need to separate the pieces.

It's like you already knew where they fit. It was the same when you wrote my paper -- like you knew before you started what it had to say and each point you had to make to get there. And how to craft each sentence so it would read like I wrote it.

LINCOLN

I'm sorry.

RILEY

Quit apologizing for the things I love about you.

Riley's voice is angrier than she intended and Lincoln bursts up from the bed.

LINCOLN

(coldly)  
I should go.

RILEY

Don't you want to stay for dinner?

Lincoln sees a pile of applications and brochures.

LINCOLN

These are the colleges you're applying to?

RILEY

What's wrong with them?

LINCOLN

Why would you get straight As if you wanted to go here? And memorize Crime and Punishment?

RILEY

I might also apply to Yale. To make my dad happy.

LINCOLN

You should make yourself happy.

RILEY

Is that what you do? Where are you applying to then?

LINCOLN

I have to get home.

RILEY

Why?

LINCOLN

It's time.

He tries to take his pages from the bed, but Riley grabs them first.

RILEY

I told my dad you'd be here for dinner. Sit back down. We're not finished yet.

Trapped, Lincoln sits back down on the bed. Riley takes one of the last pieces of the puzzle and puts it in his hand. He doesn't grasp the piece, and so she holds it in his palm and traces the lines on his hand, and runs her finger across his scars and up the vein in his arm while neither of them speak.

The feel of her finger on his arm is torturous -- as though to be touched by another human being is too much to bear.

LINCOLN

It's too quiet in here.

RILEY

Too quiet for what?

LINCOLN

It's too . . . Normal. And normal isn't normal. It makes it seem like someone's going to come in and destroy everything.

Lincoln bursts from the bed and paces erratically as Riley grows alarmed at his emerging mania.

LINCOLN

Hasn't anyone ever come in here in the middle of the night?

RILEY

What's wrong with you?

LINCOLN

While singing nursery rhymes and smashing things? How can you stand this silence?

She tries to hide that she's freaked out by him and gets up to comfort Lincoln, but he pulls away.

RILEY  
Calm down, Lincoln. You're not  
making any sense.

LINCOLN  
(in a cold distant voice)  
I have to go.

RILEY  
Should I get my dad?

LINCOLN  
I'm sorry about the puzzle and your  
paper. And college. It's none of my  
business. Those are fine schools  
for you.

Lincoln grabs his pages and runs out of the room.

EXT. RILEY'S HOUSE

As Lincoln hurriedly races out of the house he runs past MRS. LEVIN, Riley's mother, without speaking. She looks at him curiously and then continues into the house.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

Riley stands in front of the school with several other students. She looks across the grounds and sees Lincoln by a small cemetery as he smokes a joint all by himself.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Festive decorations show the approaching year-end holidays.

As Riley talks with a group of other students, Lincoln sees her bare shoulders, her neck, her cheek. Her lips. It's too much for him, but he forces himself to look.

INT. DAY - LINCOLN'S BEDROOM

Un-Hun looks with content at an old Playboy while Lincoln lies on his bed.

UN-HUN  
They're your magazines.

LINCOLN

They were my father's. And I don't think it'll happen to me.

UN-HUN

Why shouldn't I think it will happen to me?

LINCOLN

Because it won't.

UN-HUN

You have little faith my friend. You should know that God eventually smiles on all creatures.

LINCOLN

I don't believe in God.

UN-HUN

So it won't come true for you, but it will for me.

(looking out the window)

Why is Riley Levin going in that house down the street?

LINCOLN

That's Roger Bennett's house.

UN-HUN

He's just a junior. Is she really going out with him?

LINCOLN

Pretty girls are always going into his house. Every week it's somebody else. I guess because he has blond hair and blue eyes.

Lincoln stares longingly out the window at Riley.

LINCOLN

God she's good looking.

Un-Hun gets up and puts his arm around Lincoln.

UN-HUN

Maybe she's visiting Roger because he lives on your street. Did you ever think of that? Or, it's because he has a twelve-inch penis.

Lincoln throws Un-Hun's arm off.

LINCOLN

He has what?

Un-Hun turns back to rummage absentmindedly through Lincoln's vintage vinyl collection.

UN-HUN

A twelve-inch penis. Man you have an awesome record collection.

LINCOLN

How would you know that.

UN-HUN

Just look at these records. Of course it's an awesome collection.

LINCOLN

(exasperated)

About Roger's penis.

Lincoln angrily collects his records and puts them back in their crates.

UN-HUN

I listen. That's how I'm going to get us invited on the senior trip.

Together, they look out the window again.

EXT. ROGER BENNETT'S HOUSE

Riley is on the porch. She speaks with Roger as her hair glistens in the sun.

INT. LINCOLN'S BEDROOM

UN-HUN

You should have been born with a bigger dick, my friend. Then Riley would be with you instead of Roger.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Lincoln stares at a girl several seats away from him.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - BATHROOM - DAY

In the bathroom stall, Lincoln masturbates. He climaxes and grimaces as he wipes himself with the hard, waxy toilet paper.

He hears a piano.

INT. LINCOLN'S HOUSE - MOTHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

An old piano is nearly buried with books and stacks of papers, an old unpacked moving box, and a broken lamp.

Evelyn manages to play despite the debris, but stumbles over the notes. She sings, her voice off-key and melancholy.

As she nears the end of the song, she makes a mistake, and tries to correct herself, but plays another wrong chord and slams her fists down on the keys in anger and stands up in disgust.

She turns around to see Lincoln in the doorway, and her robe opens and reveals her breasts.

EVELYN

What do you want?

LINCOLN

I just wanted to borrow your old album for my record player. The one you listened to when you wrote.

The window next to her bed is open, and the wind ruffles her robe. She see Lincoln glance at her naked breasts and leaves her robe open deliberately to provoke him.

EVELYN

Get out of my room, Lincoln.

In contrast to her words, her voice is seductive, but she finally closes her robe.

Lincoln turns to leave but then changes his mind and goes over to the piano instead and starts to play the song his mother was playing, without making a mistake.

Evelyn listens to him, and then sits down next to him and sings. Despite her voice being off-key, and melancholy, there is something endearing about it.

When he finishes, Lincoln looks at his mother and smiles, and she smiles back, but only for an instant.

Lincoln exits, but when he get to the door his mother's voice stops him.

EVELYN  
It wasn't the music.

LINCOLN  
What?

EVELYN  
Borrowing that record won't make you write like me. . . And when you speak to your father during your monthly phone call, make sure you ask about my check.

LINCOLN  
If you want it so badly, Evelyn, you ask for it.

INT. LINCOLN'S BEDROOM

Lincoln puts the record on his turntable, and sits at his desk and writes.

MR. LEVIN (O.S.)  
You know how to string words together beautifully, Lincoln. It's almost magic.

INT. AP CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

Lincoln is silhouetted in front of the window while Mr. Levin reads.

LINCOLN  
Thanks.

MR. LEVIN  
But you're holding back.

LINCOLN  
Says who?

MR. LEVIN  
Why did you write Riley's assignment in the library?

Mr. Levin holds up a page.

MR. LEVIN  
It's in here. Why?

LINCOLN  
She forgot. I didn't want her to  
get in trouble.

MR. LEVIN  
I'm sure she could have handled it.

LINCOLN  
(evasive)  
I had nothing else to do.

MR. LEVIN  
So you wrote a ten page essay on  
Crime and Punishment in half a  
period? After memorizing her  
writing style so you could make it  
seem like she wrote it?

LINCOLN  
What do you want me to say?

MR. LEVIN  
Why'd you write it?

LINCOLN  
(defensive)  
I didn't ask to be able to do that.  
I wish I couldn't.

MR. LEVIN  
Most of your classmates would kill  
to be able write as well and as  
fast as you can.

LINCOLN  
My mother taught me how to do that.  
From the moment I could read. And  
then she stopped.

MR. LEVIN  
Why?

LINCOLN  
Because she realized we were  
killing someone.

MR. LEVIN  
Her?

LINCOLN  
(realizing he's revealed  
more than he intended)  
A stupid little boy who couldn't  
write for shit.

Mr. Levin takes the pages back from Lincoln and walks over to his desk and speaks with his scholarly tone again.

MR. LEVIN  
I saw you getting stoned the other  
day across from school grounds.

LINCOLN  
So what?

MR. LEVIN  
Give me your matches.

Lincoln takes out a box and hands it to him. Mr. Levin strikes a match and calmly and deliberately sets Lincoln's pages on fire and drops them in the waste basket.

Lincoln leaps toward the flames in a panic.

LINCOLN  
What are you doing?

The flames are too high, so Lincoln grabs Mr. Levin's bottle of water and douses the fire as smoke fills the room.

LINCOLN  
Are you insane?

Mr. Levin stays eerily relaxed, as if he's enjoying himself.

MR. LEVIN  
Now you have no choice but to write  
them again, as yourself instead of  
your mother. Uncensored.

Lincoln erupts in a rage and tackles Mr. Levin, pushing him and the chair to the floor.

Jim, the custodian, hears the crash and rushes in to pull Lincoln off Mr. Levin. He easily subdues Lincoln and pulls his arms behind him.

LINCOLN  
You son-of-a-bitch!

Mr. Levin shakes himself off and regains his composure.

MR. LEVIN

Let him go, Jim.

Jim ignores him and continues to restrain Lincoln.

LINCOLN

Did she tell you to do that?

MR. LEVIN

I was just . . . What? Did who tell me to do it?

LINCOLN

My mother.

MR. LEVIN

(stunned)

Why would your mother tell me . . .

Lincoln breaks free from Jim and runs out of the room.

JIM

Are you okay?

MR. LEVIN

There used to be dozens of writers who wanted to do that to me after I wrote my reviews of their work. This time I deserved it.

JIM

Is he the one who tried to kill himself? What's his problem?

MR. LEVIN

He's afraid.

JIM

He didn't seem scared to me.

MR. LEVIN

He hides it. Which is why I needed to see how he'd react.

JIM

(slightly sarcastic)

Did he pass the test?

Mr. Levin takes a surprised look at Jim.

MR. LEVIN

For the first time in my life, Jim, I don't know.

INT. LINCOLN'S BEDROOM

Immersed in his writing, Lincoln doesn't realize his mother has entered his room and looks over his shoulder to read.

EVELYN

(mocking)

Why would you write about your father forgetting your sixteenth birthday? You think that's drama?

Lincoln hurriedly covers his pages. What a careless mistake -- writing in the open.

LINCOLN

It's just a school assignment. It's supposed to be autobiographical.

EVELYN

Is it supposed to be poorly written too? Emotionless, like you? Do you think your father has any interest in knowing you're alive? Did you ask him about my check?

LINCOLN

He said he has his own family now.

EVELYN

Well that's great. Did you tell him that he still owes me?

LINCOLN

I didn't tell him anything.

EVELYN

We were relying on you to get us that check. It's no wonder that girl can't stand you and you don't have any friends except for Un-Hun who's a loser just like you are.

LINCOLN

Un-Hun's not a loser.

EVELYN

Then what is he doing hanging around with you?

LINCOLN

Un-Hun doesn't just hang out with me, he has plenty of other friends.

EVELYN

What do you think it says that  
someone who came here from Laos has  
more friends than you?

The doorbell rings, a shrill, continuous ring that indicates  
that someone provocatively holds the button for a long time.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Lincoln runs over to the front door and throws it open.

UN-HUN

Am I interrupting something?

Evelyn comes out of Lincoln's bedroom.

EVELYN

What the hell does he want?

UN-HUN

Hello, Lincoln's mother.

EVELYN

You are a very rude individual. Do  
you know that?

UN-HUN

I try to act in a way that's  
appropriate for the setting.

LINCOLN

Let's go, Un-Hun.

EVELYN

Where do you think you're going?

LINCOLN

None of your business.

EVELYN

If it's none of my business don't  
bother coming home.

LINCOLN

Fine.

EVELYN

All right, Lincoln. You want to play games? You'll see how you like living here from now on.

LINCOLN

I hate living here now, so it can't get any worse.

Its like that switch has been flicked again, and Evelyn careens from anger to appearing to be genuinely stung by Lincoln's words.

EVELYN

You hate living with me?

Lincoln doesn't answer, and Evelyn walks past him. She turns around when she is halfway up the stairs, having flipped to a feigned indifference.

EVELYN

I hope you get hit by a car, and, as you lie there bleeding, and take your last breath, you'll regret being such a cruel and emotionless son. I'd wish that you'd get hit too, Un-Hun, but I'd feel bad for your mother.

UN-HUN

I'll tell her you thought of her.

Lincoln and Un-Hun go outside.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

They walk down the street, past the houses with neat yards that are a sharp contrast to Evelyn's house and Lincoln's life.

UN-HUN

You've had a rough evening.

LINCOLN

It was fine. It wasn't rougher than anybody else's evening.

Lincoln turns off the road and cuts through a yard as Un-Hun tries to keep up.

UN-HUN  
You're no fun are you?

LINCOLN  
I never said I was. Nobody told you  
to come over and get me.

EXT. WOODED TRAIL

The sounds of their footsteps on the cold, hard ground are  
the only sounds of life as they move past the barren trees.

UN-HUN  
I know, but somehow I feel an  
obligation to you. When I arrived  
in America, you were the only kid  
who would talk to me or treat me  
like I belonged. Seeing you this  
way makes me feel the hope I felt  
from you was a lie.

LINCOLN  
Of course it was a lie. Just leave  
me the hell alone.

Un-Hun takes a couple of joints out of his pocket.

UN-HUN  
Maybe we should get stoned. This  
stuff will send us to the catacomb  
state, that's for sure. The  
catacomb state.

LINCOLN  
Any state has to be better than  
whatever we're in now.

UN-HUN  
Boy, it sure has been a hard time  
for you, hasn't it?

LINCOLN  
Fuck you.

UN-HUN  
Ha! Don't worry, we'll make sure  
you get to the catacombs, and  
nothing will matter there.

Lincoln puts his hands in his pocket and disappears into the  
darkness of the forest.

INT. MOVIE THEATER LOBBY - NIGHT

ANTHONY and ROBERT, two ushers, stand in the corner, by a fish tank with a shot glass submerged at the bottom of the water. Robert releases quarters into the tank and tries to get them to drop into the shot glass but he fails.

ANTHONY

It's impossible. Frank and I have been trying all day.

ROBERT

Son of a bitch!

Karen, Roger Bennett, Riley and MATT, another preppy high schooler, enter the theater.

They don't buy tickets, and instead follow a few people toward Lincoln to see if he will let them in for free.

KAREN

Hello, Lincoln.

Lincoln doesn't answer.

KAREN

(seductively)  
Could you let us in?

Still no reaction. So now it has to be deliberate.

KAREN

(exasperated)  
To see the movie? For free?

Riley steps forward and Lincoln looks at her. She gets uncomfortable and turns away.

Lincoln moves his eyes and motions them past as Karen's triumphant reaction shows that she thinks it was her doing rather than Riley's.

KAREN

I knew you'd come through for us.

ROGER

Yeah, thanks dude. You're not as bad as I thought.

The four of them go past him without paying as Lincoln starts collecting tickets from the next group.

INT. MOVIE THEATER LOBBY - LATER

Lincoln is alone in front of the fish tank. He kneels down so he is level with the shot glass.

Through the water, his face is distorted.

He reaches up and spins a quarter on the center of the surface.

It descends in larger and larger circles. It seems clear that it will not make it, except when it almost reaches the bottom, the final circle brings it toward the shot glass and it clangs against the edge and falls inside.

Lincoln stands up and, startled, sees Riley watch him. She is holding a stack of clipped pages with his writing on it.

Riley hands him the ticket she just bought, even though he had previously let her in for free with Karen. She opens his hand and places it the way she did with the puzzle piece and again traces the scars on his wrist, to both torture and seduce him.

He takes the ticket, but doesn't tear it, and instead puts it in his pocket.

RILEY  
(holding his pages)  
I found these in my locker.

LINCOLN  
And?

RILEY  
It's beautiful. Except . . .

Riley hesitates.

LINCOLN  
Except what?

RILEY  
(nervously)  
These pages are hard to take. It's so bleak and the feelings he has about himself sort of makes me hate him. And if it's supposed to be about you then it makes me hate you. Nobody should feel the way that you do.

LINCOLN

You'd better go back in. Before  
your boyfriend gets lonely.

RILEY

How do you know I'm not still with  
him just to make you jealous?

LINCOLN

Are you?

RILEY

Is that what you want?

Riley smiles, almost with triumph, and walks through the door  
of the lobby into the theater.

INT. ANTEROOM BEHIND SCREEN

Lincoln climbs a ladder in the small space behind the movie  
theater screen. Through the images, he can see the audience.  
He scans the theater and finds Riley and Roger where they sit  
toward the back.

He sees Roger put his arm around Riley and kiss her, and  
Riley throws his arm off her. Lincoln smiles.

Roger puts his arm back around Riley and kisses her again,  
and this time she doesn't throw his arm off and Lincoln  
forces himself to watch them -- to watch Roger do what he  
can't.

EXT. UN-HUN'S HOUSE - DAY

Lincoln knocks on the door of the house. He wears a plaid  
sports coat with patches on the elbows and a pair of tortoise  
shell sunglasses.

UN-HUN

I don't see you for twenty-four  
hours and now look at you. It's  
like punk rock meets med student.  
Is this going to win Riley's heart,  
do you think?

INT. UN-HUN'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

They walk upstairs to Un-Hun's room and Lincoln goes right in  
and lies down on the bed.

UN-HUN  
Go right in! My room is your room.

INT. UN-HUN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM

Un-Hun follows Lincoln into the bedroom.

UN-HUN  
What did your mother say?

LINCOLN  
About what?

UN-HUN  
About what? That's clever.

LINCOLN  
Why are you so concerned about her?

UN-HUN  
Oh, I'm not concerned. I just want to know what her reaction was to your trying to dress exactly like your father. Well, I don't envy you that experience.

LINCOLN  
I don't care.

UN-HUN  
You've made that clear.

LINCOLN  
Are we going to get stoned or what?

UN-HUN  
Do you have any stuff?

LINCOLN  
Why do you think I came over? I have writer's block. Don't you still have some?

UN-HUN  
Why should I share it with you?

LINCOLN  
Because I need it to write.

UN-HUN  
You need it?

LINCOLN  
 (getting up)  
 I'm leaving.

UN-HUN  
 You get a new outfit and think  
 you're a whole new person.

LINCOLN  
 I've always been this way, now I  
 just look like it on the outside.

UN-HUN  
 Very profound. Are you using that  
 line in your book? I should  
 probably speak more carefully since  
 everything I say will end up in  
 your novel.

(mocking and playful)  
 That's it isn't it? You think this  
 is what a character would do. To  
 hide the fact that he hasn't  
 changed at all on the inside.

LINCOLN  
 If I wanted a sophomoric English  
 lecture, I would have gone to see  
 Mr. Levin. . . . Are we getting  
 stoned or not?

Un-Hun pulls out a bag of marijuana and waves at Lincoln like  
 he finally has the solution to all his problems.

UN-HUN  
 You know, when somebody offers to  
 share stuff this good with you, you  
 should show a little gratitude.

LINCOLN  
 Share it with me or don't.

UN-HUN  
 I love this new attitude. I can't  
 wait to see how your mother reacts.

LINCOLN  
 Don't talk about my mother.

UN-HUN  
 Let's talk about the senior trip.  
 I've got all the details.

LINCOLN  
 I'm not going.

UN-HUN

Everyone is going. I'm not going to let you sit in your room writing all the time. You need real life to write about. Riley will be there. And Roger isn't a senior, so he can't go. Close the door.

INT. LINCOLN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lincoln writes. His mother stands in the door, unnoticed until she speaks.

EVELYN

I really hope for your sake that's not a novel.

Lincoln freezes.

EVELYN

The fact that I give free reign to that part of myself that others would consider crazy is what allows me to be a great writer.

Lincoln covers his pages.

EVELYN

Do you really think you could be Hemingway. Or Salinger?

LINCOLN

I don't know. Maybe.

EVELYN

I feel sorry for you, Lincoln.

Lincoln doesn't respond so Evelyn takes her fists and stretches them out wide and then brings them crashing against her skull, almost like a child having a tantrum.

LINCOLN

(desperate)  
Stop!

Lincoln frantically grabs a scissors and cuts up his pages.

Evelyn looks at him and then smiles strangely and leaves.

After she is gone, Lincoln takes the cut up pieces and puts them on his desk -- like the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle.

Lincoln re-arranges them but then his eyes blur and they all look the same.

INT. CAR - DUSK

Snow flakes fall in front of him as Lincoln drives on a highway that leads toward the mountains in the distance.

Un-Hun wakes up and stares out the window.

UN-HUN  
Jesus! How fast are you going?

LINCOLN  
I'm not sure.

UN-HUN  
What do you mean you're not sure?  
Look at the speedometer.

LINCOLN  
It doesn't say anything. The needle  
is gone.

Un-Hun leans over.

LINCOLN  
I can't see with your head there!

UN-HUN  
There's the needle! It's all the  
way to the right. You've buried it!  
You're not supposed to go that  
fast. You'll blow the engine.

LINCOLN  
The engine's fine.

UN-HUN  
You must be going over a hundred  
miles an hour.

LINCOLN  
We're making good time. We're  
already at White River Junction.

UN-HUN  
We are? Good going.

LINCOLN  
I've got everything under control.

UN-HUN

I wouldn't go that far, but we should be there in an hour, which is good. I'm getting hungry.

Lincoln is silent.

UN-HUN

You know, your family is a little bit insane.

LINCOLN

A little bit? You're just realizing this now?

UN-HUN

Except for your mother.

LINCOLN

Except for my mother?

UN-HUN

Don't take this the wrong way, but she's seriously deranged.

After this brief moment of seriousness, Un-Hun grows sarcastic again.

UN-HUN

Of course, the amazing thing is it hasn't affected you at all. Other than the fact that you have no friends in the world besides me and refuse to talk to anyone or apply yourself at anything you do, and write your book but are too afraid to go after what you want.

Lincoln turns up the radio and the car rolls down the highway. Un-Hun looks at him and smiles sardonically.

INT. CAR - NIGHT - LATER

Un-Hun swerves and slams on the brakes, and wakes up Lincoln.

LINCOLN

Where the hell are we?

UN-HUN

There's a clearing up here, so I figured I'd pull over and rest a bit. Give me that.

Lincoln hands Un-Hun a water pipe and a lighter, and Un-Hun puts his face over the giant opening.

The flames of the lighter flicker through the car, and Un-Hun passes the pipe to Lincoln and he takes a hit and leans back and closes his eyes.

INT. NIGHT - VERMONT MOUNTAIN BAR

Several students, including Riley, Un-Hun, Karen, and Lincoln are inside and dance as the lights swirl.

Lincoln dances with Riley, lost again at last in her magic.

Karen moves over and pulls Riley away to dance with two other SENIOR BOYS.

Lincoln realizes he is alone and retreats from the dance floor. He sees groups of kids talking and using fake IDs to get drinks at the bar. He stares at Riley and then turns away, disgusted, and heads toward the door.

On the other side of the bar, Un-Hun sees him go and steps away from a group of kids to follow Lincoln.

EXT. NIGHT - VERMONT MOUNTAIN BAR

UN-HUN  
Lincoln, wait!

LINCOLN  
Go back in.

UN-HUN  
Why didn't you get a beer like everyone else?

LINCOLN  
They wouldn't accept my fake ID.

UN-HUN  
Why?

LINCOLN  
I forgot my birthday.

UN-HUN  
How do you forget your own birthday? That's got to be the stupidest thing ever.

Riley bursts out from the bar.

RILEY

What's the matter?

UN-HUN

Lincoln couldn't remember the birthday on his fake ID.

RILEY

You can memorize my essays but not your fake birthday? No wonder you get all Bs in school. . . I'll get Karen and we'll go somewhere else.

LINCOLN

Can't you go anywhere without your safety blanket?

RILEY

Can't you go anywhere without being you? . . . Just wait here.

While their words to each other are harsh, it's evidence that there's something between them that she could never have with Roger -- passion.

LINCOLN

Don't get Karen. Don't get anyone. That's not even why I left. Just go back in and leave me alone.

Lincoln walks toward the road in the snow, his hands stuffed into his pockets in the cold.

RILEY

Lincoln!

Lincoln doesn't stop, and Riley looks at Un-Hun who shrugs, and she goes back inside.

Un-Hun makes a snowball and throws it at Lincoln and it hits him and he turns around.

UN-HUN

You're going to go back to the hostel to work on your suicide note aren't you?

LINCOLN

My mother's book was called The Suicide Note.

UN-HUN

And you're writing your version. Or trying to live it.

LINCOLN

Fuck you.

UN-HUN

How are you going to be the voice of your generation when you can't even be part of your generation?

Lincoln doesn't answer, and walks alone next to the snow bank that rises along the side of the road in the darkness.

INT. VERMONT YOUTH HOSTEL - LATER

The fire crackles in the fireplace of the dilapidated hostel.

Lincoln sits alone on the couch with his legs folded. His pages are in his lap and he writes.

LINCOLN (V.O.)

Mr. Levin wants me not to censor myself, but Riley read what I wrote -- the most honest expression of who I am -- and it made her hate me. Like I hate myself.

INT. LINCOLN'S MOTHER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lincoln's mother sits alone in her bedroom.

INT. YOUTH HOSTEL

Lincoln throws the pages he just wrote into the fire and watches them burn. More words -- and thoughts -- that no one will ever see or know. Or be jealous of. Or hate.

INT. HOSTEL KITCHEN

Lincoln and Un-Hun eat breakfast, their bags lined up by the door. Riley enters.

RILEY

Have you seen David?

UN-HUN  
They left already.

RILEY  
What? They were my ride!

UN-HUN  
David said he wanted to get on the road before the storm. They thought you had gone with someone else because they couldn't find you.

RILEY  
I was taking a shower. My bags were right there.

UN-HUN  
Call and have them come back. Or ride with us. Maybe it was fate -- bringing you two together. We can discuss literature on the way.

RILEY  
Did you tell them to leave?

UN-HUN  
Why would I do that?

Un-Hun smiles wryly.

INT. CAR - DAY

Lincoln drives Un-Hun and Riley through a snow storm on the highway in Un-Hun's car.

UN-HUN  
Are we even still on the highway?

LINCOLN  
I have no idea.

UN-HUN  
What do you mean you have no idea?

LINCOLN  
I think we are, I can see a little bit of road.

UN-HUN  
I can't. How fast are you going?

LINCOLN  
About seventy-five.

UN-HUN  
Great, we'll know pretty quickly if  
you lose the highway.

LINCOLN  
Don't you worry, I've got  
everything under control.

UN-HUN  
Oh, I'm not worried. If I was meant  
to die in this blizzard on a  
highway in Vermont there's nothing  
I can do about it.

LINCOLN  
We're not in Vermont any more.

UN-HUN  
That's good. It'd be easier for my  
parents if I died in New York.

Un-Hun points toward the windshield.

There, amidst the snow flakes, a MOUSE runs almost comically  
up the windshield and gets swept back down by the wipers.

RILEY  
It's a mouse! What's it doing on  
the car?

UN-HUN  
Pull over!

Lincoln pulls them over to the side of the road and they race  
out into the snow storm.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY (BLIZZARD)

Un-Hun opens the hood and inside there is a pile of leaves  
and sticks.

RILEY  
Look at that.

UN-HUN  
It built a nest. A mouse built a  
nest in my car.

RILEY

Where's the mouse?

UN-HUN

It's gone.

LINCOLN

You made us knock it off the car by having me pull over so fast. He must have built that nest last night because the car was warm.

(in a panicked voice)

What are you doing?

Riley clears the nest from the engine and throws it on the road.

UN-HUN

What does it look like she's doing?  
What the hell do you care?

LINCOLN

That mouse spent a lot of time arranging things just how it wanted them, placing everything just so.

Riley looks at Lincoln, stunned by his passionate defense of the mouse.

RILEY

You have no feelings for people yet you're concerned about a dead mouse who almost killed us?

LINCOLN

(angry)

We were fine. He was the one who panicked when you saw the mouse.

UN-HUN

Maybe I should drive.

LINCOLN

(dejected)

Do whatever you want.

UN-HUN

Actually, I don't know if I can drive in this snow, but somehow the stress doesn't seem to bother you at all.

(mocking)  
As long as there are no mice.

Un-Hun smiles at Lincoln's expense.

INT. STATION WAGON

RILEY  
I'm sorry Lincoln.

LINCOLN  
No you're not.

Lincoln pulls back onto the road into the snowstorm.

RILEY  
(angry)  
You don't know whether I'm sorry or not. So don't tell me what I am. No one told you to get so worked up over a mouse.

LINCOLN  
I'm sure you enjoyed wrecking his nest though.

RILEY  
Do you want to get home or would you rather the car catch fire?

LINCOLN  
(mocking)  
His nest wasn't going to make the car catch fire.  
(growing angry)  
And home is what you have. I live in an asylum.

UN-HUN  
(enjoying himself)  
Home's a bit of a sore subject with him, Riles.

RILEY  
(genuinely concerned)  
Because of your mother?

LINCOLN  
Don't talk about her.

UN-HUN  
That's another taboo subject.

RILEY

(angry)

You don't want to talk about anything or relate to anybody. I asked to read more of what you're writing but you just ignore me.

LINCOLN

What do you care what I do?

RILEY

Because you're my friend.

LINCOLN

Since when are we friends?

Un-Hun looks at Lincoln and enjoys the conflict between him and Riley.

RILEY

What are we supposed to be if we're not friends?

Un-Hun laughs.

RILEY

If you don't want get thrown to the side of the highway then don't build a nest on top of a goddamn car engine!

LINCOLN

(sarcastic)

Brilliant. I'll make sure to write that. It's a good thing you didn't apply to Yale.

RILEY

(angry)

I did apply there.

LINCOLN

It's too bad you couldn't have included your advice about nests in your essay.

RILEY

My dad's right -- you are sick. And you write in everyone's style but your own because nobody could stand to read yours.

UN-HUN  
 (after Lincoln doesn't  
 respond)  
 Don't stop your lovers' quarrel on  
 my account.

Lincoln turns up the radio until its painfully loud and Un-Hun laughs again.

The car presses on into the snow storm, as Lincoln presses his fingers into his eyes to try to ward off one of his ferocious headaches.

INT. AP CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

Mr. Levin reads Lincoln's pages.

MR. LEVIN  
 (reading)  
 She was so young, but it felt as if  
 her whole life hung in the balance.  
 And I knew that I had to make her  
 see who I really was -- that I was  
 just pretending to be a vampire.  
 Because only then could I save her.

I put the fake teeth back in. The  
 screaming began again. I wanted to  
 slap her across the face so that at  
 last she'd see that the person who  
 smiled at her was the same person  
 who was dressing up like a vampire.  
 Then I realized that she was crying  
 because she saw the real me.

Mr. Levin hands Lincoln back his pages. Lincoln grabs them and nervously retreats to the side of the classroom.

MR. LEVIN  
 What does your protagonist want?

LINCOLN  
 It's supposed to be an  
 autobiographical novel.

MR. LEVIN  
 What do you want, Lincoln?

LINCOLN  
 What every high school boy wants.

MR. LEVIN

Not having to eat lunch alone on the stairwell? A girlfriend?

LINCOLN

(nonchalantly)

Something like that.

(more earnestly)

Or to show that I deserve not to be treated like I am a vampire.

MR. LEVIN

Does your mother deserve that?

LINCOLN

She wrote a best-seller. People still read her book. And they still love her for it.

MR. LEVIN

Do you think that's why she doesn't love you? Because you're not a good enough writer.

LINCOLN

Maybe.

MR. LEVIN

(stunned that Lincoln accepts this)

Just because you haven't written a great novel?

Lincoln doesn't answer with words, but his look shows that what was meant as a rhetorical question has managed to find the truth, almost by accident.

MR. LEVIN

(angry)

That's a swell moral philosophy, Lincoln. I guess the rest of us don't deserve to be loved either?

LINCOLN

It's not a philosophy. And don't ask so many questions if you don't want to hear the answers.

MR. LEVIN

That's what comes from being married to a lawyer. And Socrates taught only by asking.

LINCOLN  
And they killed him for it.

Mr. Levin moves closer to Lincoln -- realizing that he has him caught now.

MR. LEVIN  
But vampires don't kill. They just suck the life out of their victims. Who's the vampire in your story?

LINCOLN  
(hesitantly)  
I am.

MR. LEVIN  
And the little girl?

LINCOLN  
Just a random kid.

MR. LEVIN  
There's no such thing as a random character in a novel. Everything has meaning.

LINCOLN  
So I'll rip up that scene.

MR. LEVIN  
(angry and provocatively)  
Lazy! How about understanding it?

LINCOLN  
(earnest)  
You want me to say that Riley's the girl? Right?

Mr. Levin smiles -- a teacher who's spent his whole life interpreting words about to deliver.

MR. LEVIN  
Words don't lie. They reveal things whether we want them to or not. . . The little girl is you.

LINCOLN  
Me?

MR. LEVIN  
And the vampire is your mother.

LINCOLN  
 (protesting)  
 The vampire is me. With fake teeth.

MR. LEVIN  
 When he puts those teeth on in your pages he becomes your mother. And you become the little girl. Because only as the little girl are you willing to recognize the truth about her.

LINCOLN  
 What truth?

Lincoln tries to back up but he is already by the windows. Mr. Levin leans close to him.

MR. LEVIN  
 That she sees you've got a talent that she never had, that she never could have. And hates you for it.

LINCOLN  
 (his voice weak)  
 She doesn't need to hate me. And if she does it's my own fault.

MR. LEVIN  
 (softly)  
 She does it to protect herself.

Mr. Levin touches his scars -- Lincoln's one external point of vulnerability.

MR. LEVIN  
 (tenderly)  
 That's why you direct your murderous rage inward. To protect her from you.

LINCOLN  
 (defensive)  
 I cut myself so I wouldn't wind up like you. Stuck teaching writing at a high school because you're not good enough to do anything else.

MR. LEVIN  
 Or because you knew how your book was going to end.

LINCOLN  
I tried to kill myself before I  
began writing this.

MR. LEVIN  
You've been writing this story your  
whole life.

Mr. Levin walks back over to his desk and adopts his clinical  
voice again.

MR. LEVIN  
And you've got three weeks to  
finish it.

LINCOLN  
Or what?

MR. LEVIN  
Or you'll always know that you gave  
up your chance to shine so that she  
won't look dull by comparison. And  
you'll have to re-do senior year.  
With a different English teacher.

LINCOLN  
You son of a bitch! You don't know  
her. None of you know what she is  
really like inside. You just see  
that she doesn't publish any more  
and don't understand her.

MR. LEVIN  
Make me understand.

LINCOLN  
She was supposed to be the voice of  
her generation. Do you know what a  
burden that is?

MR. LEVIN  
What is that burden doing to you?

LINCOLN  
It's not doing anything because  
it's not true of me.

Mr. Levin stands over Lincoln. He realizes his fists are  
clenched and releases them and leans on his desk.

MR. LEVIN  
Why are you writing this Lincoln?

Mr. Levin walks over to the door and opens it and motions for him to leave. The clinical voice is back.

MR. LEVIN

If you can't confront the truth you  
can't be a great writer. You'll  
just be mediocre.

LINCOLN

It'll be your failure too.

After Lincoln storms out of the room, Mr. Levin picks up his copy of Lincoln's mother's book, and looks at the cover.

MR. LEVIN

(to empty room)  
Not yet, it won't.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY

Lincoln walks down the hallway toward the side door where the late afternoon sun illuminates a small patch on the floor.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL

Charlie stands alone as Lincoln approaches.

He takes out a written assignment with Charlie's name on it and hands it to Charlie.

LINCOLN

I typed it.

He hands Lincoln a bag of marijuana as payment and lights a cigarette and smokes.

CHARLIE

Every week, I just wish for Friday  
to come, and then it arrives. It's  
sad, you know? We're supposed to be  
young but all we want is for it all  
to be over.

LINCOLN

I know what you mean, Chaz.

With a flick of his cigarette, it arches high in the air and a few ashes fly off and sparkle as Charlie walks away.

The budding flowers and trees and their light clothes show that it's now spring, but for Charlie it might as well always be winter.

INT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Lincoln stands in the back of the theater and writes as the light from the projector flickers overhead.

He walks down the right aisle, through the light toward the door that appears tiny next to the massive screen.

INT. ANTEROOM BEHIND SCREEN - NIGHT

Lincoln walks past debris in the staging area, and then, Behind the movie screen, he reaches up to grab the bottom rung of the old metal ladder and climbs.

At the top, he pushes open a small trap door that opens into the foggy night.

EXT. RAILING BENEATH MARQUEE

Lincoln walks along the railing and climbs another ladder that leads to the roof.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER ROOF - NIGHT

Through the fog, he sees the highway and train tracks in the distance. He stands at the edge and reaches into his pocket and finds the ticket that Riley gave him.

He turns and goes back to the ladder and quickly climbs down.

EXT. RILEY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Lincoln stares at Riley's house.

He smokes a joint that glows orange and red as he inhales and holds the smoke in his lungs, gathering his courage

When he finishes, he walks up the path and rings the doorbell.

Mrs. Levin answers. It is foggy, and light from inside spills out as the door opens and Lincoln goes inside.

The door shuts, and all is dark again.

INT. RILEY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Lincoln and Mrs. Levin sit alone in the living room. Lincoln -- completely stoned -- squints in the light and puts on his tortoise shell sunglasses.

As he speaks, he takes his sunglasses off and chews on the ends and puts them back on as the light bothers him. His hair is unkempt, and his nails are long and broken. He's in no shape to meet the mother of the girl he wants, but there is nothing he can do now.

Riely's mother speaks like a lawyer, as if this is a cross-examination of her daughter's potential boyfriend rather than a conversation.

MRS. LEVIN

Riley says you could be the smartest boy in the school, but you don't try very hard.

LINCOLN

Well, if you do the work, like a drone, you can get a good grade. But then the grade doesn't mean anything, so what's the point?

MRS. LEVIN

To prove you can do it? And to learn along the way.

LINCOLN

And what if you can't do it? What do you prove?

MRS. LEVIN

Why did you come here, Lincoln?

Lincoln gets up and walks around nervously.

LINCOLN

I came to ask Riley to prom.

MRS. LEVIN

Did she know you were coming?

LINCOLN

I don't think so. We don't talk to each other.

MRS. LEVIN

You seem a lot different than the last time I saw you.

LINCOLN

I almost believed wishes could come true back then. And that they made a difference.

He retreats back to the couch and sits down as his bloodshot eyes squint in the light.

MRS. LEVIN

Are you high Lincoln?

LINCOLN

I don't get high any more. I just go from being someone I don't know to being who I really am.

MRS. LEVIN

Which are you now?

LINCOLN

A bicycle with no wheel.

MRS. LEVIN

What is that supposed to mean?

He leans forward and looks at Mrs. Levin strangely. If this is a trial, he's not winning over the jury. At the same time, something about Mrs. Levin, that she is both a near stranger yet also so closely connected to Riley and Mr. Levin, combined with the fact that he is stoned, allows him to reveal things he has kept hidden even from himself.

LINCOLN

Back in middle school, when I was eleven, someone had locked two bicycles to one of the signposts that lined the sidewalk outside of the church next door.

The owner had used one of those new black kryptonite locks that were supposed to be indestructible. Except they had locked only the frame and not their front tire. Such stupidity and lack of foresight. I would teach them a lesson about human nature.

Within thirty seconds, I popped the tire off and had it in my hands. As though possessed, I ran to the side of the building and climbed up the black metal staircase that led toward the roof. The gate at the top of the stairs was locked, but it was easy to climb over it after I threw the bicycle tire onto the other side. And then, a few seconds later, I was on the black roof and I ran toward a small red brick tower, holding the bicycle wheel.

I couldn't bear to hold it another moment, as if it might come alive and strangle me, and so I flung it as far away as I could. It landed on its side and rolled for about twenty feet before spinning off the other side of the roof.

Well, it was done. The bicycle owner would come back and find his wheel missing and would learn not to trust people with the temptation of an unsecured wheel. Thanks to me he would learn a valuable lesson about what human beings are like.

Was it wrong to have taken the wheel. Am I a thief? Is that who you think I am? I did it because I wanted to teach the bicycle owner a lesson and not because I wanted the wheel for myself, but the results are the same. Does the motive make any difference?

What had the bicycle owner ever done to me? And now he will come back to his bicycle and find it ruined. Why? All because he left his bicycle near where I could see it and I am a fool and a scoundrel.

I hated myself, but I realized I could still return the wheel and nobody would know. I ran over to the edge of the roof where it fell. My heart sank again. It was at the bottom of a tiny, inaccessible air shaft.

There was no way down, and even if I survived jumping, there would have been no way to get back.

There was nothing to do, except live out the choice I had made. Quickly, afraid I would be spotted at any moment, I climbed back over the iron fence and raced down the stairs toward the ground floor and back around the side of the building to the where the rest of the bicycle was.

I took a long look at it, but I could no longer imagine the face of the owner finding it anymore, or even conceive that it had an owner.

Lincoln grows angry, and we hear his disgust and contempt -- for the bicycle. And himself.

LINCOLN

It was a broken, defiled bicycle, and it stupidly stood there in the sunlight, as though everything would be all right and it might be ridden again. It was impossible even to have pity for such a criminally naïve thing.

His voice grows calm again, almost clinical. Like Mr. Levin's.

LINCOLN

So, I walked back into school, glad that I had revealed to the world what the bicycle really was. And, though I refused to realize it then, that bicycle is me.

MRS. LEVIN

(stunned)

Is that how you think of yourself?

LINCOLN

Sure, you see how I look don't you?

MRS. LEVIN

Did that happen Lincoln? Or did you write that?

LINCOLN

I'm not good enough to write that.

MRS. LEVIN

Do you live with your mother and your father?

LINCOLN

With my mother.

MRS. LEVIN

That's right. I remember. Where does your father live?

LINCOLN

In New Jersey.

MRS. LEVIN

Do you see him?

LINCOLN

We just talk on the phone a couple of times a year. On the weekends he's too busy making rounds. What does that have to do with anything?

Mrs. Levin shows her lawyerly training by picking up Lincoln's reference to his father making rounds -- as would a doctor at a hospital.

MRS. LEVIN

Your father's a doctor?

LINCOLN

Yeah. I guess that's what happens after you go to Yale for college, right?. . . Did Riley . . . ?

MRS. LEVIN

She didn't tell you?

LINCOLN

Oh, thank god. She's making a good choice. She can do something useful with her life.

MRS. LEVIN

Do you think your father does something useful?

LINCOLN  
Sure, he's a cardiologist. He saves  
lives. His patients live a little  
bit longer because of him.

MRS. LEVIN  
And what about his son?

LINCOLN  
What about him?

MRS. LEVIN  
Who's supposed to save his life?

LINCOLN  
I told you. My life is that  
bicycle. And the missing wheel  
can't ever be retrieved.

MRS. LEVIN  
And what about your mother?

LINCOLN  
What about her?

MRS. LEVIN  
What is she like?

LINCOLN  
She's like any other mother. Only  
more so.

MRS. LEVIN  
Does she love you?

LINCOLN  
(dismissively)  
Does she love me?

MRS. LEVIN  
Do you love her, Lincoln?

LINCOLN  
How can you love a creature like  
that? Why do you care anyway?

MRS. LEVIN  
We can't help who we love. And we  
can't choose who our mothers are.

Lincoln doesn't answer but instead takes his sunglasses off  
and looks at Mr. Levin.

MRS. LEVIN  
Where are you going to college?

Lincoln gets defensive again and puts the glasses back on.

LINCOLN  
Who said I was going?

MRS. LEVIN  
What are you going to do?

LINCOLN  
Who said I'm going to do anything?

MRS. LEVIN  
What are you going to do in the fall, when everyone is at college and you're here by yourself?

LINCOLN  
I'm not going to be around anymore next fall.

MRS. LEVIN  
Where will you be?

Lincoln looks at Mrs. Levin, and her expression shows that he's broken through her hard legal demeanor and she understands the meaning of his silence.

He gets up and heads toward the door.

MRS. LEVIN  
I'll tell Riley you came by.

LINCOLN  
(panicked)  
No! Please don't tell her.

MRS. LEVIN  
What about prom?

LINCOLN  
I'm sure she'll look beautiful. She always does.

Mrs. Levin can't help but smile upon hearing such a genuine and charming compliment as Lincoln steps through the door.

MRS. LEVIN  
We're here for you, Lincoln.

Lincoln takes off his sunglasses and looks right at her.

LINCOLN  
Goodbye Mrs. Levin.

She shuts the door and leans against it for support, stunned.

INT. RILEY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

In the kitchen next to the living room, Riley sits on the floor, hidden from sight, but she has heard the entire conversation.

She doesn't cry or make a sound but it's not clear if it's because she wants to make sure no one knows she's there or if she's heard too much to be able to react at all.

INT. ANTEROOM BEHIND SCREEN

Lincoln sits on the small ledge thirty feet above the floor, behind the movie screen. His bent legs stretch in front of him, and cradle his pages as he writes.

EXT. LINCOLN'S HOUSE

His dilapidated house is lit up by the moon. A light is on in his bedroom.

INT. LINCOLN'S BEDROOM

Lincoln lies on his bed and writes.

INT. MOVIE THEATER

In the back of the mostly empty theater, Lincoln's pages rest on the barrier that separates the walkway from the seats.

He writes, the light from the movie projector gleaming above.

EXT. LINCOLN'S STREET - NIGHT

Evelyn wears a long white nightgown that flows in the wind as she walks, lit up by the street lamps in the rain.

Evelyn turns on the gravel driveway and walks toward the only house on the street that is not maintained.

She sings You Are My Sunshine in a manic voice, a voice you should never hear from your mother.

INT. LINCOLN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

There is panic on Lincoln's face as the door to his room opens and Evelyn enters and sings, high-pitched and off-key.

EVELYN

(singing)

*You are my sunshine, my only  
sunshine. You make my happy when  
skies are blue. Please don't take  
my sunshine away. I'll always love  
you and make you happy, if you will  
only say the same. But if you leave  
me to love another, you'll regret  
it all some day.*

Evelyn throws everything off his shelves and his bookcase and spastically ransacks the room, searching for something.

Lincoln keeps his eyes closed and pretends to be asleep because that is the only way now to escape.

Hidden behind a stack of books, she finds what she is looking for -- Lincoln's folder, the one with his writing in it.

She opens the window and the wind and rain swirl into the room. She leans out and lets go of the pages and they get caught by the wind as the rain smears all of Lincoln's writing so it can no longer be read.

And then she leaves.

When Lincoln is sure she is gone, he comes down from the bed and closes the window.

Then he moves a small rug on the floor and takes out a trap panel he has cut into the floor to reveal a small compartment between the floor boards. This -- his mother's destructive rage -- has happened before.

There is money in there, and the bag of weed that Charlie gave him, and a pack of straight razors.

Lincoln takes one out and runs his thumb across the ultra-sharp blade and immediately bleeds. He then runs the razor across one of the scars on his wrists and that too bleeds. The blood drips from his arm into the compartment and onto a stack of clipped pages -- the new ones he's been working on.

He picks up the pages and presses one against the cut on his arm and smiles, even though the rest of his face is forlorn rather than happy.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY

Lincoln walks and carries his clipped pages.

INT. AP CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

Lincoln hands his handwritten manuscript to Mr. Levin.

MR. LEVIN  
(hopeful)  
You did it?

LINCOLN  
You're the critic. You decide.

MR. LEVIN  
You can still apply to college in the fall. After you graduate. Lots of students take a year off after high school. I'll help you.

LINCOLN  
You should read those first before making any promises.

MR. LEVIN  
Do you have any plans?

LINCOLN  
I saved good money working at the boat yard and the movie theater. I was going to buy a motorcycle and travel across the country. See what they wrote all those songs about.

Mr. Levin smiles.

MR. LEVIN  
The American road trip. You can tell me about it when you get back.

LINCOLN  
I'm not coming back.

Lincoln's solemn tone shows him that his smile was out of place, and Mr. Levin is silent and picks up the pages.

MR. LEVIN  
Why did you write this?

LINCOLN  
I didn't want to be expelled.

MR. LEVIN

Do you really think I was going to go through with it?

LINCOLN

I do. I think you'd enjoy it.

MR. LEVIN

I guess I deserve that. But it doesn't answer why you entered the contest to begin with. Or why you censor yourself by writing only in someone else's voice, so you can pretend it's someone else's words.

LINCOLN

Those are my words. My voice.

MR. LEVIN

Answer me one question then.

LINCOLN

Will I be expelled if I don't?

MR. LEVIN

You could have chosen a different English elective. Why my class?

LINCOLN

Because you gave me a spot. And you wrote this.

Lincoln takes out a faded but neatly folded newspaper clipping -- Mr. Levin's review of his mother's book in the New York Times from twenty-five years earlier.

MR. LEVIN

That was back when people still read newspapers.

LINCOLN

Is that why you teach high school? Because you think you'll find some fool to look up to you the way people used to at the Times?

MR. LEVIN

I realized I would never be Hemingway. But what if there was someone who could be that good?

LINCOLN

What if there was?

MR. LEVIN  
It'd be my job to help him.

LINCOLN  
And did you?

MR. LEVIN  
You tell me.

LINCOLN  
Not everything that's broken is  
worth the effort of fixing.

MR. LEVIN  
Unless they've won a Pulitzer  
Prize, is that it?

LINCOLN  
Goodbye Mr. Levin.

MR. LEVIN  
Goodbye Lincoln. You can be a great  
writer. And you're a good kid. No  
matter what you think of yourself.  
You can pick this up after  
graduation. Once I write my review.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

High school graduation.

The ceremony is over and kids walk around and congratulate  
their friends and take pictures

Most wear dresses or suits under their gowns.

Lincoln stands by himself, his gown open. He wears a ripped  
shirt and holds his diploma as if it might burn him.

Not far from him, a well-dressed family including  
grandparents take pictures.

Lincoln stares at them and sees that it is Riley's family,  
and Mrs. Levin looks at him and says something to Riley. As  
one of the pictures is taken, Riley turns away from the  
camera and toward Lincoln instead. She is uncomfortable that  
he is alone and has no friends or family with him.

She turns back to the camera and after the picture is taken  
Lincoln's gone. As though he was never there at all.

INT. AP CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOM

Riley stands in front of her father's desk. He has Lincoln's manuscript neatly packaged.

RILEY

Why is it so important that he sees you first.

MR. LEVIN

Now that I've read it I have to talk to him one more time. To find out if he wrote this.

RILEY

(disappointed)  
You don't think he did?

MR. LEVIN

I want him to be the author. Which is why I'm not sure. I might have been using him to justify my own choices. My own failures.

RILEY

If it can be as good as you say, isn't it a success either way?

MR. LEVIN

Not if she's using him. Or he's still concealing something.

Mr. Levin hands her the package.

MR. LEVIN

Give this to him, but promise me you won't read it.

RILEY

Why not?

MR. LEVIN

I gave him my word.

RILEY

Before you didn't even want me to see him.

MR. LEVIN

All I ask is that you try to convince him. For his sake.

RILEY

For his sake? Or yours?

MR. LEVIN

He's the reason I became a teacher.  
His writing can be as good as  
anything I've ever read. But I need  
to know if this is his.

RILEY

I'll tell him. But I don't think  
he'll see you.

Riley takes the package.

EXT. BOAT DOCK - DUSK - SEVERAL WEEKS LATER

Lincoln puts oars and supplies in a small rowboat and tries  
to untie a knot in a rope as the sun sets over the harbor. I

He sees Riley on top of a large stone wall next to the water.

RILEY

I've been trying to get in touch  
with you for weeks.

LINCOLN

I'm not hard to find.

RILEY

Are you kidding? You're not online  
and have no email or anything. It's  
like you don't exist.

LINCOLN

I'm here aren't I?

RILEY

You had nobody at graduation.

LINCOLN

My dad hasn't been present for any  
other event in my life so why  
should that change now? And her not  
being there was the only reason I  
could tolerate it.

RILEY

My mother told me you came by a few  
weeks ago.

LINCOLN

I wanted to ask you to prom, but it was a momentary fit of insanity.

RILEY

You should have come. We could have danced together.

LINCOLN

Didn't you go with somebody?

RILEY

So? We still could have danced. Roger was my date, not my owner.

LINCOLN

(coldly)

I was about to head out. Is that all you came here to say?

RILEY

That's just a row boat. It doesn't even look like it'll float.

LINCOLN

It's all I need. I'm only going to check on some of the moorings.

RILEY

I'll go with you.

Riley runs down the long gangway that leads to the wooden dock and walks over to the dinghy and steps in.

He gets in and pushes the boat away with the oar.

EXT. ROW BOAT - MOMENTS LATER

The sound of the oars in the water can be heard as they pass by the boats tied to their moors.

RILEY

Where are you going to college? I asked around but nobody knew.

LINCOLN

Who did you ask?

RILEY

Un-Hun. Your mom.

LINCOLN

You spoke with my mother?

RILEY

She said you didn't apply. She is very strange.

LINCOLN

What the hell would I want to go to college for?

RILEY

So I'm supposed to be some kind of fool for going?

LINCOLN

You? You're the reason everyone else goes. Because they think college will turn them into what you already are.

Riley smiles at this unexpected, and so disarming compliment.

RILEY

If you trusted people a little, we might surprise you.

LINCOLN

People are who they are. Even you.

RILEY

Is that why you ate lunch alone in the stairwell?

LINCOLN

I didn't think you remembered that.

RILEY

I think about it almost every time I see you.

LINCOLN

You see. That's what you see me as.

RILEY

As what?

LINCOLN

As someone who deserves to eat his lunch alone in the stairwell.

RILEY

(angry)

That's not how I think of you.  
That's not ever how I thought of  
you. My heart ached for you when  
you sat down on those stairs and  
said that was where you ate lunch.

LINCOLN

I went back there and waited for  
you the next day.

RILEY

(stunned)

I never knew you did that. Why  
couldn't you have told me this  
then? Or three weeks ago, when we  
still could have gone to prom?

LINCOLN

You weren't going to go with me.

Riley grows angry again at Lincoln's continuous attempts to  
impugn her motives or desires.

RILEY

How the hell do you know what I was  
going to do?

LINCOLN

Why did you come down here anyway?

RILEY

Because I was looking for you.

LINCOLN

Why?

RILEY

I don't know anymore. I thought  
that . . .

Her voice trails away as she thinks better of what she was  
going to say and gets angry again at Lincoln's coldness.

LINCOLN

You thought what?

RILEY

(angry)

I didn't think anything. I don't  
know what I thought.

I thought I was dealing with  
somebody other than you!

When she turns away, Lincoln puts the oars up and moves to the back of the boat and almost tips them over.

He grabs her, and kisses her fiercely, for the first time in his life taking what he wants.

Riley pulls away, but then she leans back in and kisses him again. She wants this too.

Lincoln takes her T-shirt off and she raises her arms up to let him. He fumbles with her bra but has no idea how to unclasp it.

Riley laughs and takes it off and looks at him, not saying anything. He caresses her skin, and closes her eyes, but opens them and pushes Lincoln away and takes his shirt off. He pulls her shorts off and makes her fall back into the boat as it rocks awkwardly.

RILEY

Are you trying to fuck me or  
drown me?

LINCOLN

A little of both.

RILEY

Try more of one and less the other.

She pulls his pants down and hands him a condom, which Lincoln mistakenly thinks means she's done this before.

He fumbles getting it on, and awkwardly climbs on top and enters her. Riley grimaces for a moment and her face relaxes and becomes almost ecstatic.

RILEY

Oh, god.

Lincoln speeds up and climaxes as she throws her arms around him as the dinghy drifts out into the harbor, leaving their childhood behind.

INT. ROW BOAT - LATER

Riley lies in Lincoln's arms.

She gets up and puts her T-shirt back on and reaches into her bag and takes out Lincoln's pages.

RILEY  
He read it Lincoln.

Lincoln rolls to his side and looks at her.

RILEY  
You never went to see him but he  
has a literary agent for you.

He sits up, concerned, and the boat rocks again.

RILEY  
It was so good my dad sent it to a  
friend who wants to sign you. All  
you have to do is ask. He's set it  
all up. But you have to ask.

LINCOLN  
(looking away)  
I can't do that.

RILEY  
Why?

LINCOLN  
I have my reasons.

RILEY  
It's your mom, isn't it?

LINCOLN  
What about her?

RILEY  
Did she write it?

Lincoln turns toward Riley, shocked. She was insightful enough to know that it was his mother who stood in the way of his publishing the novel, but he never thought that Riley, of all people, wouldn't be able to see that he's the author.

RILEY  
I promised my father I wouldn't  
read it. So I didn't.

LINCOLN  
But do you think I wrote it?

Riley doesn't answer, but her silence is clear -- she thinks, or at least suspects, that Lincoln's crazy but Pulitzer-prize winning mother wrote it.

LINCOLN  
Jesus.

Riley's voice gets defensive, almost angry.

RILEY

How can I be sure? You're so closed off. And you're so young.

LINCOLN

My mother was twenty-one when she wrote her book.

RILEY

You're only eighteen. That's a world of difference.

LINCOLN

I knew it.

RILEY

(angry)  
You knew what?

LINCOLN

That you see me like she does -- as a thief. And I could never trust you to believe I'm good enough to write that.

RILEY

(pleading)  
Make me believe it.

LINCOLN

I can't.

RILEY

(imploring)  
Why can't you at least try?

LINCOLN

Because she wrote it.

RILEY

(shocked)  
You're joking.

This time Lincoln let's his silence answer.

RILEY

Shit, Lincoln. How could you actually do that? How could you deceive everyone?

LINCOLN

Everyone? Or just your dad?

RILEY

(angry)

Everyone! You shouldn't have graduated. You've cheated all us who earned it.

LINCOLN

Don't forget to include that I deceived you specifically.

RILEY

Is that what this was about? What you wanted all along? Just to fuck me? Why do I mean so little to you?

LINCOLN

Because you're ordinary. And so you're meaningless. Just another mouse to be left alone at the side of the highway.

RILEY

God you're a jerk! How many times do you think a girl loses her virginity to the boy she loves?

LINCOLN

How do you know that you were Roger's first?

RILEY

(infuriated)

I was talking about you. About just now! You sure know how to make me feel like shit.

LINCOLN

That's what I'm good at.

RILEY

Hurry up and take me back to the shore. The last thing in the world I want is to be out here with you.

Lincoln rows and the boat glides through the mist.

They barely reach the dock when Riley bursts out and runs up the gangplank.

Lincoln stares at her as she goes and stumbles onto the dock and watches the boat drift back into the harbor.

Suddenly, an alarm beeps on the radio, a weather alert.

Rain sweeps across the harbor and Lincoln lets it soak him, as though it can somehow wash away what just happened. And everything else.

LINCOLN (V.O.)

As I watched her go, I felt a terrifying void, as though she was taking some part of me with her. But how can you be sad and mournful for a life you could've never had in the first place?

INT. LINCOLN'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Un-Hun stands at the door.

There is just a pillow, a lamp, and Lincoln's pages.

Lincoln looks out the window and wears shorts and no shirt.

UN-HUN

Where's all your stuff?

LINCOLN

It's all gone.

UN-HUN

What do you mean, it's gone?

Un-Hun looks around as if he expects to find Lincoln's belongings hidden somewhere.

He picks up the few items that are left and examines them.

Lincoln opens the window and a breeze brushes past them as he lights a joint, takes a hit and passes it to Un-Hun.

LINCOLN

I threw everything away. I won't need it where I'm likely to go.

UN-HUN

Where do you sleep?

LINCOLN

On the floor.

UN-HUN

What about your record collection?

LINCOLN  
Don't worry, I saved those for you.

UN-HUN  
What do you do without any records,  
or books or anything?

Lincoln opens the closet, which is also empty except for the crates containing his record collection.

LINCOLN  
I think. Time moves forward, no matter what you do. And a watched pot does boil. I did that experiment yesterday.

UN-HUN  
After all this time, you finally developed a sense of humor. I'll take credit for that.

UN-HUN  
(as he flips through the records)  
Are you sure you want to give me all these? Nobody has a collection like this.

LINCOLN  
I'm sure, Un-Hun. Think of me once or twice when you listen to them. But not more than that.

UN-HUN  
Do you remember that scene in Grey Lady Down, where the sailor gets trapped in the submarine and he kills himself to try save the sailors in the next compartment?

LINCOLN  
What about it?

UN-HUN  
I would have done anything I could to escape, and everyone would have drowned, including me. But you would have made that sacrifice.

Lincoln looks at Un-Hun and picks up a crate and carries it out of the house.

EXT. LINCOLN'S HOUSE

Lincoln loads his record collection into Un-Hun's car. Un-Hun gives him a plastic bag from his pocket filled with weed.

LINCOLN  
Thanks, Un-Hun.

UN-HUN  
I'll be back for Thanksgiving.

LINCOLN  
You know I won't be here.

UN-HUN  
Wherever you are, I'll find you.

Un-Hun's words and his demeanor show that he understands that Lincoln is thanking him not just for the weed, but for being his friend, and accepting his faults. And his choices.

LINCOLN  
From each, according to his  
abilities.

UN-HUN  
To each, according to his needs.

Un-Hun gets in his car and Lincoln watches him drive down the street, and stands alone at the edge of the overgrown yard.

INT. LINCOLN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Lincoln picks up a black chair and carries it through the open front door and places it in the middle of the lawn.

EXT. LINCOLN'S HOUSE

Lincoln sits on the chair and looks out at the last light of the day, and laughs. He then goes back inside and grabs another chair, and then a chest, and he methodically brings out as much of the furniture as he can onto the front lawn.

He takes a prescription bottle out of his pocket and opens it and dumps all the pills in his mouth.

Before he swallows, he hesitates and then spits all the pills out on the ground and goes back inside and slams the door behind him, leaving the furniture on the front lawn.

EXT. LINCOLN'S HOUSE - MIDNIGHT

Evelyn gets out of her car and sees her belongings stacked up on the lawn in the moonlight. She goes and inspects them like they're not hers but instead she's at a museum that has let her touch the exhibit.

INT. LINCOLN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Evelyn enters to find Lincoln playing the piano in the near empty room.

EVELYN

If you've got something to say to me say it with words. At least give me that.

Lincoln stops playing and stands up to face his mother.

LINCOLN

I finished it. My novel.

EXT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Lincoln sits on the bare floor in the hallway. Through a crack in his mother's bedroom door he can see her, in a chair. A light shines on his pages as she reads. His words.

INT. KITCHEN - A DAY LATER

Lincoln cleans the kitchen. Evelyn enters, in a nightgown.

EVELYN

I read it.

Lincoln's defenses go down and he can't help himself but look at Evelyn eagerly. Like a child.

LINCOLN

All of it?

EVELYN

Yes.

LINCOLN

(hopeful)  
And?

EVELYN

It reminded me of how I felt when I finished The Suicide Note. The incredible hope and the almost unbearable longing. The desperate craving for one person to see life as I do.

With the seeming arrival of the moment he's waited his entire life for, he can't help but smile.

Then Evelyn's face falls and becomes contorted by anger.

EVELYN

How could you do this to me?

He turns away like he's been punched.

EVELYN

Did you think I'd be happy?

LINCOLN

I wrote it for you.

EVELYN

To humiliate me!

LINCOLN

You've struggled for so long. But now your promise has been fulfilled, through me, through the gift that you've taught me.

She's touched by his devotion and love and Lincoln sees that there is still hope -- that his hidden and desperate plan to use his talents to rescue his mother's writing career and earn her love might work after all, despite everything.

Evelyn moves toward him as though to embrace him.

When she is only a few inches away she lets her robe fall open and since she's not wearing a bra, Lincoln sees her naked breast. She watches him look at it and then slaps him and draws blood from his lip.

He touches his mouth and then looks at the blood on his finger.

She tries to slap him again but this time he grabs her wrist before she can strike him. He holds her arm and presses hard into her wrist.

EVELYN

You're hurting me.

LINCOLN

I could do more than that.

EVELYN

You don't have the guts to do anything to me.

Lincoln lets go of her hand and she walks out of the kitchen and comes back out with a small wooden box. He looks at it and sees his book, cut up into tiny pieces the size of those in a puzzle, but these have no way to be put back together.

Evelyn reaches into the box and takes out the pages and throws them up in the air and they float like confetti.

She takes another handful and throws them at Lincoln's face and laughs contemptuously.

Lincoln erupts and pushes her to the ground.

He frantically tries to collect the pieces of his life's work but then sees her, in the corner of the room, where she shivers instead of cries.

He drops the box and rushes to her, and moves her hair off her face. There is a small cut on her cheek from when he pushed her to the floor.

LINCOLN

You're bleeding.

Lincoln runs his hand gently on the cut on her face.

Evelyn reaches her fists out wide and crashes them in to both sides of her skull so hard that her head shakes.

She looks at Lincoln and reaches her arms out again and brings them back in to smash her head again.

When she tries again, Lincoln grabs her arms.

LINCOLN

Stop it!

Evelyn kicks him off her like a rabid animal.

EVELYN

Why? Because you're not man enough to do it?

She strikes herself again and stares with the manic, nearly rabid expression of a woman who's too far gone to ever come back.

EVELYN

Get that garbage and the person who wrote it out of my house.

Lincoln grabs the box and turns around to see his mother standing in front of him, her eye swollen.

LINCOLN

Why can't I matter to you? That's the only thing I've ever wanted.

EVELYN

How does it feel, Lincoln? To know you don't?

LINCOLN

Like I finally understand what an impossible burden it is to be you.

Evelyn walks past him, toward the stairs. Without turning around, she speaks in a clinical voice.

EVELYN

Goodbye Lincoln.

As his mother disappears up the stairs, Lincoln drops the torn pages on the floor and races out of his house for the last time.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER ROOF - NIGHT

A train rushes past on the tracks below. Lincoln moves forward and peers over the edge. He's high enough up for it to be quick and painless when he jumps. They'll be no chance at failure this time.

RILEY (O.S.)

Are you trying to go further than Kafka? To destroy the writer so the pages can't be re-written?

Riley appears through the mist and Lincoln spins around.

LINCOLN

Did your dad send you again?

RILEY

If you loved a boy who was broken, wouldn't you look too?

LINCOLN  
 What you say you love isn't worth  
 looking for.

She follows him as comes down from the ledge and walks to the  
 other side of the roof.

RILEY  
 Why do you have to talk about  
 yourself life that?

LINCOLN  
 Because I'm a traitor to everything  
 that matters.

RILEY  
 Or you're just an average, confused  
 kid. No better than ordinary --  
 like the rest of us.

LINCOLN  
 I'm too far down to be like the  
 rest of you.

Lincoln climbs up on a metal walkway.

RILEY  
 I should thank you. . . . For  
 convincing me to go to Yale. Where  
 I can find other people to talk  
 books with.

LINCOLN  
 (dismissively)  
 Shouldn't you be on your way there?

RILEY  
 I'm not leaving until tomorrow.  
 Today, I'm going to the city. Are  
 you coming with me or not?

LINCOLN  
 I don't need your charity.

RILEY  
 (chasing after him)  
 I'm not offering you charity.

LINCOLN  
 Then what are you offering?

Riley reaches into her bag and takes out a stack of clipped  
 pages, like Lincoln's.

RILEY

I copied it. In case you burned it.

She hands the pages to Lincoln and he touches them desperately, realizing that she's saved him.

RILEY

When Un-Hun told me I was never going to see you again I broke my promise and read it.

LINCOLN

And?

RILEY

And now I understand. Why you can't feel. She stole that from you.

LINCOLN

(taunting)

How do you know I wrote these?

RILEY

(angry)

Because your novel has one fatal flaw. That's what doesn't make sense, not me. He just graduates from high school, but there's no ending -- no climax. He doesn't even get the girl.

Lincoln reacts like he's been punched in the gut.

LINCOLN

(defensive)

It has an ending.

RILEY

Your protagonist never changes. He says he does but I don't believe him. Because you haven't changed.

LINCOLN

If it's so bad why does that agent want to meet with me?

RILEY

Because the parts that work make your heart ache.

LINCOLN

And make you hate me.

RILEY

That's what's I love about it --  
your words make me feel like you  
do. And see things about me I can't  
even admit to myself.

LINCOLN

You said you'd run away with me if  
I finished it. So why are you here?

RILEY

Because I know your secret.

Lincoln tries to walk away but she challenges him.

RILEY

You think you stole her talent like  
Raskolnikov did with the  
pawnbroker's money. That's why you  
punish yourself and everyone who  
gets close to you and why you came  
up with that story about the  
bicycle wheel, because you think  
you're a thief like he was.

LINCOLN

(turning around)  
How do you know about that story?

RILEY

I was there. That night you  
confessed to my mom. I was hiding.  
Because I was scared for you. And  
of you.

LINCOLN

When I write I feel her within me.  
Like she's guiding my hand and I'm  
just watching.

RILEY

(realizing)  
That's why you told me she wrote  
it. You don't believe you should be  
able to write better than her.

LINCOLN

Do you remember why Raskolnikov  
killed "that old pawnbroker woman  
and her sister Lizavetta"?

RILEY

To prove he was entitled to kill.

LINCOLN

To prove he was someone worth being for. But he just showed he didn't deserve her money like I don't deserve to have my mother's talent.

RILEY

Maybe she doesn't deserve it either. Because she's wasted it.

LINCOLN

You sound like your father.  
(with a touch of humor)  
If slightly less insane.

RILEY

We can't help but become at least a little like our parents.

LINCOLN

Then I'll never be normal enough to fix that bicycle.

RILEY

Roger's normal. He didn't write anything that makes me want to climb onto a roof for him.

LINCOLN

He was good enough for prom.

RILEY

I didn't know if you were worth it. If you were a vampire or a kid with fake teeth.

LINCOLN

(with sarcasm)  
And now you know.

Riley walks to Lincoln and traces a line around his eye and down his cheek and across his lips -- to torture and seduce him again with her touch.

RILEY

Now I've seen the real you -- a boy who can be something great. Despite your flaws. Or because of them.

She throws her arms around his head and kisses him, but for him it's been too much and he lacks the emotional strength to react so she pulls away and takes his arm and runs her hand one last time along the scars from his suicide attempt.

RILEY

Do you deserve it, Lincoln? To run  
away with me? Even if you did steal  
that wheel?

When he doesn't answer, Riley disappears down the ladder,  
deliberately not looking back.

INT. RILEY'S CAR

Riley drives, and tries not to cry.

As she turns, the golden dawn sun lights up the car and her  
hair blows in the wind.

EXT. MOVIE THEATER ROOF - DAWN

Lincoln steps onto the ledge.

LINCOLN (V.O.)

I don't need those pages.

He holds up the pages and they scatter in the wind.

LINCOLN (V.O.)

I can write them again. In my own  
voice. Because now I understand  
what Hillel meant. It's the act of  
believing in yourself that proves  
you're worth it.

Lincoln turns and rushes toward the ladder.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The red taillights of a car can be seen in the distance --  
Riley's car. Lincoln sprints down the middle of the road.

Everything depends on him reaching her.

Gasping from the effort, for just a moment, Lincoln smiles.

FADE OUT