

"FIRST LIGHT", BY THE ANNIE MOSES BAND, PLAYS

RURAL IOWA - DAY - EARLY SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON

The sun blazes in a blue sky. A hawk's faint cry floats across huge, white clouds. An aerial view shows a gray ribbon of country road cutting through acres of green. On the road is a line of cars, headlights on, slowly following a hearse. The view swoops hawk-like over, around, and alongside the procession as opening credits roll. Shot closes on the car behind the hearse, and as the music ends, slides through the windshield into the interior.

"FIRST LIGHT" ENDS

INT. THE BODEYS' CAR

10 yr old **JAMES "JIMMY" FRANKLIN BODEY**, in dark suit, white shirt, and tie, slouches in the back seat staring out the window. Quiet gospel music plays. Jimmy squirms upright to lean around the driver. The hearse's back door is just a few yards away. Jimmy stares ahead as if trying to see past the door. The back of the hearse shimmers in the hot sun. Jimmy moves abruptly back, leaning into the door as the tears come. Lowering the window, he closes his eyes and sticks his head into the wind. **LINDA SUSAN BODEY**, well-dressed in a black dress & hat, sits erect in the front seat. Her reddened eyes look back at Jimmy.

LINDA

We have the air-conditioning on,
honey. Please roll up the window.

Jimmy doesn't respond so she touches his knee gently.

LINDA

Jimmy. Close the window.

Jimmy obeys. Linda pats him tenderly then turns to look at the driver, **JEFFERSON THEODORE "J.T." BODEY**. His reddened eyes meet hers. She squeezes his shoulder, then turns quickly as a sob escapes.

EXT. RURAL CEMETERY - SAME DAY

The hearse pulls slowly onto the white gravel cemetery road, crunching toward the grave site. It stops and its gleaming chrome grill fills the shot.

EXT. GRAVESIDE - SAME DAY

The crowd moves to their cars, leaving the Bodeys alone. **EARL C. JOHNSON**, an old, wiry man in his best overalls and a clean cotton shirt, stands off to the side solemnly holding a shovel. J.T. has an arm around Linda, his other around Jimmy. The **UNDERTAKER** solemnly starts to lower the casket into the grave. The family leaves, pausing before the gravedigger.

EARL

So sorry, Mrs. Bodey...J.T...Jimmy.

J.T.

Thanks, Earl.

As Jimmy puts his hand on the door handle a hawk's distant cry makes him look up.

INT. THE BODEYS' CAR - SAME DAY

The car crunches slowly down the drive. Jimmy looks back to see Earl shoveling dirt into the grave. It hits him - hard. The tears begin again.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF IOWA HOME - DRIVEWAY - SAME DAY

The car pulls into the driveway and stops. The Bodeys get out and woodenly move towards the house. J.T. hangs back, leaning on his cane.

J.T.

I'll be in a bit. I-I need a walk.

Linda absently nods as her arm goes around Jimmy. J.T. walks out onto the deserted country road, his limp evident.

EXT. HAY FIELD - SAME DAY

J.T. walks over the hill. Turning into a neighbor's field, he walks in a ways then drops suddenly to his knees, releasing a scream of anguish. Swaying a bit, he doubles over into shuddering sobs, his head near the ground. He pounds the dirt before glancing up at the sky, the question and its pain carved on his face. He slowly pounds the ground as his head drops again, the sobbing increases. One hand slowly opens. Trembling, it reaches skyward.

EXT. IOWA COUNTRY CHURCH - DAYTIME - MID-NOVEMBER

The church is surrounded by the dead, brown remains of a harvest done. Faint sounds of a hymn leak out into the autumn morning.

INT. IOWA COUNTRY CHURCH - SAME DAY

The congregation is standing, finishing the hymn. Linda wears a hard look. J.T. glances at her as he moves to the pulpit. Absently shuffling his notes, he sighs.

J.T.

This message is a hard one for me. Very hard. I've had some long, tough months of wrestling with it. (beat) "*The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away*". We can all agree on that. It's the next part that's the problem - "*Blessed be the Name of the Lord*".

Linda glares up at him.

J.T. (CONT'D)

Can I believe the promises of a God that let's bad things happen to good people? Innocent people. Why would God do that? I'm finding the answer to that question is not quite what I expected. God allows these things - because He loves us.

Linda blinks like she's been slapped. She stands and walks quickly to the back. All eyes watch the doors bang shut behind her. All eyes swing back to J.T.. Several folks give each other looks, (*the Three Hens*). J.T. clears his throat as he shuffles his notes.

INT. IOWA CHURCH NARTHEX - SAME DAY

The service is over. The congregation mills around talking. Mothers scold as fathers vainly grab air where kids used to be. Adults are talking in groups of two and three. One of the groups (*the Three Hens*) are a bit louder than most: **Mrs. Olson**, **Mrs. Redinger**, and **Miss Glenn**.

MRS. OLSON

That is NO way for a pastor's wife to act.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. REDINGER
And especially in front of the
whole congregation. Really!

MISS. GLENN
It's a poor witness, I'd say.

MRS. OLSON
If they just had more faith, I'm
sure Richie would still be alive.

MISS. GLENN
Or taken care of unconfessed sin -
that takes away the Blessing. Yes.

MRS. OLSON
Well, I heard -(stops abruptly)

Mrs. Olson stiffens as she sees Linda's eyes lock onto hers. Linda straightens up from talking to Jimmy. Her eyes flashing, she approaches them slowly, her disgust more evident with each step.

LINDA
I apologize, ladies, for not
performing up to your standards.
Please forgive me. It was my first
death of a child. I'm sure I'll
get it right with the next one.

MRS. OLSON
Well! I never-

LINDA (INTERUPTING)
Let us hope that a member of your
family dies soon, so you can show
us how it is properly done.

The Three Hens storm out the front doors, leaving Linda trembling in rage. Jimmy stands opened-mouthed.

JIMMY
(softly) Whoa.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF IOWA HOME - SAME DAY - NOON

The Bodey car pulls up to the house. Linda gets out, walking briskly towards the backyard. J.T. and Jimmy watch her go.

(CONTINUED)

J.T.
J, go in and turn on the game for
us, will ya?

JIMMY
Sure, Dad.

Jimmy bolts away followed by a screen door slamming.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF IOWA HOME - TREE & TREE HOUSE - SAME DAY

Linda stops by the large tree that holds the tree house. The breeze whispers through the high, ramshackle structure as a knotted rope gently sways near the trunk. Hugging herself tightly she stares ahead. J.T. approaches.

J.T.
Hey, Babe...

LINDA
Leave me.

J.T.
I -

LINDA
(interrupting)
Now. Just go.

J.T. leaves. At the sound of the screen door slamming, Linda lifts a tear-stained face and shakes her fist at the sky. She whispers defiantly.

LINDA (CONT'D)
I hate you, God! I-I hate you!

Racked by sobs, she straightens up to glare at the sky.

LINDA (CONT'D)
I gave you everything and You've ruined it all! I believed in You. I trusted You! And you take my firstborn. You took Richie. And why? What did we do wrong? What did I do-

She leans heavily against the tree trunk, weakly striking it.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA (CONT'D)
What did I do wrong?! What do I do
now?

Across the yard, J.T. watches from a window, his eyes
shining as he turns away.

INT. IOWA HOME - LIVING ROOM - SAME DAY

Jimmy & J.T. are sprawled across the living room. Both have
on Packers hats. The TV is loud with play-by-play. Cans of
pop and popcorn kernels are scattered around the
room. Crashings and bangings are coming from the
kitchen. Jimmy is oblivious, screaming at the TV. J.T.
gets up and leaves.

INT. IOWA HOME - KITCHEN ENTRANCE - HALLWAY - SAME DAY

J.T. peeks around the corner. Linda slams a cooking pot
into the sink, then individual pieces of silverware. She
puts her hands on the counter as she cries.

INT. IOWA HOME - KITCHEN - SAME DAY

J.T. moves to hold her. At his touch she stiffens. J.T.
slowly turns her towards him.

J.T.
Babe?

Linda begins to cry again, putting her head slowly onto his
shoulder. She doesn't reach for him.

INT. IOWA HOME - KITCHEN ENTRANCE - HALLWAY - SAME DAY

Jimmy sneaks up to the kitchen. He peeks around the corner
and ducks back.

INT. IOWA HOME - KITCHEN - SAME DAY

LINDA
Jeff, I can't live here
anymore. There's too much
pain. Just too much.

J.T. holds her, putting his head on hers.

(CONTINUED)

LINDA (CONT'D)
Next week is Thanksgiving (beat)
then Christmas.

Linda stiffly endures his embrace until shattering. She falls into him.

LINDA (CONT'D)
The Holidays without Ritchie!
Without our son!

Sobs wrack Linda as J.T.'s eyes fill with tears.

LINDA (CONT'D)
I won't survive here, Jeff. I have
to get out. I have to.

J.T. holds her tighter as his tears fall.

INT. IOWA HOME - KITCHEN ENTRANCE - HALLWAY - SAME DAY

Jimmy leans back against the wall, sliding down until he's hugging his knees. He's crying as well.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF IOWA HOME - TREE & TREE HOUSE - SAME DAY

J.T. walks out of the house and looks around. He heads toward the tree house. Looking up, he walks around the tree.

J.T.
J?

No response. J.T. backs away from the tree for a better look.

J.T. (CONT'D)
J? You up there?

A voice comes from high above the tree house.

JIMMY
Yeah, Dad.

J.T. backs up more to see Jimmy in the top branches.

J.T.
Whatcha doin'?

JIMMY
Thinkin'.

J.T.
'Bout what, J?

JIMMY
Richie. I feel closer to him up here.

J.T.
Makes sense. (beat) You remember which corner of Heaven we're supposed to meet in?

JIMMY
Yeah. The southeast corner. You think Ritchie'll remember?

J.T.
Yeah, pretty sure. Wanna come down? You're missing the end of the Packers game.

JIMMY
So are you, Dad.

J.T.
Yeah. I guess I am.

J.T. sits with his back against the tree trunk, staring over the brown landscape.

JIMMY
Dad?

J.T.
J.

JIMMY
Do we hafta leave?

J.T.
Yeah. I think so, J. It's - time.

JIMMY
But we'd be leaving Richie here and-and *everything* he's done. This tree house. The football field. The school, the church. It's all here.

(CONTINUED)

J.T.
We'll never forget him,
J. Never. And we'll trust
God. And we'll never quit. Ever.

Jimmy looks down at his dad.

JIMMY
He never got to do the "Richie
Run". He would've loved that.

J.T.
The Route 66 trip? Yeah, Ritchie
was pumped. (beat) Hey. What if we
do it when you graduate high
school?

JIMMY
Nah, Dad. That's somethin' you'n
Ritchie were gonna do.

J.T. moves away from the tree to look up at Jimmy.

J.T.
No, J. We'll call it, ah, the
"Double-J" Run. You, me, and Route
66. The "Double-J" Run. Whadda ya
say?

JIMMY
Promise?

J.T.
I promise, J.

JIMMY
That is if we're not dead, right?

J.T.
Yeah. If we're not dead.

JIMMY
Okay. The "Double J" Run.

J.T.
Now get down before your mother
catches you that high up or we're
both dead.

JIMMY
Yeah. Good point.

Jimmy climbs down as J.T. turns to wipe his eyes.

INT. IOWA HOME - KITCHEN - NEXT DAY - MORNING

The family is gathered in the farm kitchen, finishing breakfast. J.T. glances at the clock.

J.T.
Better hustle, J. The bus is here
in 4.

Jimmy stuffs a muffin in his face, says something mumbled, and flies out of the kitchen, barely missing Linda who spills coffee on her hand.

LINDA
James Franklin Bodey!

J.T. quickly kills a laugh as Linda lets a small smile escape.

J.T.
I'll walk him out. I wanna go to
town. Need a walk-about.

LINDA
It might rain.

J.T.
No problem, Babe. Been wet before.

J.T. gets up with a grimace. Limping slightly, he moves to the kitchen door, taking down a well-worn denim coat. He shrugs into it before jamming on an old black baseball cap with a SEALs emblem on it. Lifting an old backpack from its peg, he grabs his cane as he shouts over his shoulder.

J.T.
C'mon, J. Gotta go now!

JIMMY (O.S.)
Yeah, I know!

Jimmy swoops into the kitchen, banks the turn, and flies toward the door. J.T. blocks him with the cane, nodding toward Linda.

JIMMY
Oh, yeah. Thanks for breakfast,
Mom!

Jimmy makes a loop around the table, catches Linda's cheek with a glancing kiss then out the door at full throttle. J.T. catches the door and smiles at her. Linda's small smile disappears as the door shuts behind him.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF IOWA HOME - DRIVEWAY - SAME DAY

Jimmy waits at the end of the driveway. J.T. arrives just as the school bus pulls up. J.T. and Jimmy go through their parting ritual.

J.T.
Give 'em Heaven, son.

JIMMY
You, too, Dad.

J.T.
See ya later alligator.

The bus door opens. Jimmy thunders up the stairs while shouting back over his shoulder -

JIMMY
In a while, crocodile.

The bus driver waves as she closes the door. The bus pulls away.

"KISS THE RAIN" PLAYS OVER THE NEXT ELEVEN (11) SCENES

EXT. OUTSIDE OF IOWA HOME - DRIVEWAY - SAME DAY

J.T. puts his arm through the dangling strap to begin the walk into town.

INT. IOWA HOME - SECOND FLOOR - SAME DAY

Linda watches out a window as J.T. walks by.

EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE OF IOWA HOME - SAME DAY

J.T. shoots a glance at the house. Shrugging the backpack into place, he settles into an easy stride.

INT. IOWA HOME - SECOND FLOOR - SAME DAY

Linda shuffles down the upstairs hallway. She pauses briefly at Richie's room, hugging the doorjamb. The room is neat and unused, a shrine to the Green Bay Packers and the game of football. A sob escapes as she turns away.

EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE OF IOWA HOME - MORNING - SAME DAY

J.T. walks head-down, wearing a scowl. The wind makes the dead brown grass bob and ripple. J.T. absently flips up his collar. An old pickup drives past and honks. J.T. quickly looks up to smile and wave before looking back down. The scowl returns.

INT. IOWA HOME - SECOND FLOOR - JIMMY'S ROOM - SAME DAY

Linda walks down the hall carrying dirty sheets and towels. She turns into Jimmy's room.

EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE OF SMALL IOWA TOWN - MAIN ST - SAME DAY

J.T. is on the sidewalk of the little town. He walks past old, freshly painted houses, well-kept yards, and huge trees.

INT. IOWA HOME - SECOND FLOOR - HALLWAY - SAME DAY

Linda moves down the hall, her load of laundry much bigger. She glances inside J.T.'s office door.

INT. IOWA HOME - J.T.'S OFFICE - SAME DAY

J.T.'s journal sits open on the desk.

INT. IOWA HOME - SECOND FLOOR - HALLWAY - SAME DAY

She walks to the stairs, chucks the laundry over the railing, and returns.

INT. IOWA HOME - J.T.'S OFFICE - SAME DAY

Entering the office, she cautiously approaches the desk. She picks up the journal and begins to read.

EXT. MAIN STREET/DOWNTOWN - SAME DAY

J.T. walks to the town's center, waving greetings. He shrugs off his knapsack by the front door of the Red Stool Diner.

INT. IOWA HOME - J.T.'S OFFICE - SAME DAY

Linda gasps as she reads the journal, slowly backing up to sit on the edge of a chair, her eyes glistening.

A LINE OF THE HANDWRITTEN JOURNAL FILLS THE SCREEN: "WHY GOD? WHY DID YOU TAKE HIM?"

Linda's eyes go wide as tears begins to fall.

ANOTHER LINE FILLS THE SCREEN: "HOW DO I TRUST YOU NOW?"

ANOTHER LINE: "WHERE DO I GO IF YOU ARE NOT TRUSTWORTHY?"

ANOTHER LINE: "I MUST TRUST YOU. I KNOW YOU LOVE ME EVEN"

ANOTHER LINE: "I BELIEVE YOU LOVE ME."

ANOTHER LINE: "OH GOD - HELP MY UNBELIEF."

Linda sobs as she slowly closes the journal.

"KISS THE RAIN" FINISHES TO FADE

INT. RED STOOL DINER - MID-MORNING - SAME DAY

J.T. opens the well-worn door. The tinny bell sputters a ring, making **Dominic Dobrinski**, the rotund proprietor, look up. Over his white paper hat is a sign, professionally hand-painted high on the wall: *"Everybody goes to the Stool sometime!"*. His face breaks into a happy growl.

DOMINIC

J.T.! Another walk-about,
huh? Sit down and take a load
off. Coffee?

J.T. nods a smile. Dominic pushes a cup across the counter.

J.T.

Bobby D or Big Carl been in yet?

DOMINIC

Not yet. Set your clock by 'em,
though. By the time you get that
drank, they'll be here.

J.T. settles into a corner booth. He gets in a swig before the two men, **ROBERT "BOBBIE D" KOLBY**, a good friend of J.T.'s and about the same age, and **CARL "BIG CARL" SANDERSON**, a huge retired farmer, come through the door. They're hotly debating the college quarterback situation.

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BOBBIE D

He's got an arm like my sister and
he's dumber than my dog!

BIG CARL

Then it must be Divine Intervention
that amassed over 3,000 yards, 16
touchdowns and only 7
interceptions.

They nod to Dom who nods toward J.T.. Bobbie D and Big Carl
move to the corner booth, still loudly giving their
opinions.

BOBBIE D

Yeah-okay-*BUT* most of those yards
AND touchdowns came against four
unranked and truly pitiful teams.

BIG CARL

Now that's a load of fertilizer,
Bobbie D, and you know it. But I
will give you this - the boy does
look like your dog.

Bobbie D slides in next to J.T. while Big Carl takes a deep
breath before jamming his massive frame into the other side.

BIG CARL

Dom - you moving these booths
closer together so you can get more
people in here?

DOMINIC

Nope. Your pants are movin'
farther away. Leave my booths out
of it.

BIG CARL

You're not gonna sell them donuts
that way, Dom.

DOMINIC

*"The humidity is causing the wood
to swell."* That better?

BIG CARL

Yep. Gimme a chocolate and a white
sprinkled one - you boys want some?

J.T. shakes his head as Bobbie D holds up his hands. Dom
brings over two mugs of coffee and a plate with the
donuts. Bobbie D blows on his coffee as Big Carl attacks
bakery.

(CONTINUED)

J.T.
I've made a tough decision and -

BOBBIE D
(interrupting)
You're leavin', aren't ya, J.T.?

J.T. is stunned. Big Carl drops his donut, sighing heavily.

BIG CARL
Shoot, J.T.. We can tell you've
been havin' a hard time with
everything since Richie
passed. It's a tough row to hoe,
son. I understand.

BOBBIE D
Me, too. Fact is half the church
and half the Deacon Board feel it
might be time for (beat) new blood.
Carl, me, and a couple others have
said wait 'til J.T. and Linda sort
it all out, but honestly, they have
bigger families and more votes.

J.T. takes a deep breath, shaking his head.

J.T.
Looks like the work's been done and
everyone's been - waitin' on me.

There's an awkward silence. Suddenly, Big Carl holds his
cup out towards J.T..

BIG CARL
It's time to stop circlin' Jericho
and start blowin' them trumpets.
Here's to J.T. and Linda and their
new Promised Land! God bless 'em
real good!

Bobbie D thrusts out his cup and bellows.

BOBBIE D
Amen!

DOMINIC (O.S.)
Amen!

They all look at Dominic, who shrugs gruffly.

DOMINIC
Hey. Jericho. Know the
story. Love the song.

Dominic continues wiping the counter, muttering loud enough
to be heard across the room.

DOMINIC
I'm not a *complete* degenerate, ya
know!

The three men laugh. J.T. looks at his friends, raising his
mug to tap theirs.

J.T.
To the Promised Land.