

REN

Please! If I could only –

SHAW

Mr. McCormack, I would like to be alone!

REN

(Emphatic.)

Sir, you already are!

(That stops SHAW in his tracks. Long pause. REN realizes that his words have stung deeply. Now calmly, kindly.)

REN

We both are. You and me. We've both lost somebody. And even though people say they understand, they don't really. I bet you stop a hundred times a day and wonder "why?" I do. I wonder why'd my Dad leave? Was it something I did? Something I didn't do? Could I have made him stay? Maybe I could bring him back? But I can't.

(SHAW looks up.)

But I don't have to tell you. You know what that's like.

SHAW

(Quietly, defeated.)

I do.

REN

So, I guess I came to town frustrated and angry, and it felt really good to kick up a fuss. And I know it got people upset, and I'm sorry for that. But I'm just trying to move on. Cuz I'm so tired of looking back.

(Shrugs.)

And I can't stand still.

SHAW

I've noticed.

(BOTH smile; the ice has been broken, but neither knows what to say next.)

REN

Okay, look, I'm gonna go. I know you're gonna do what you've gotta do – about the dance and all – but thanks for listening.

(He starts out.)

SHAW

Ren?

(REN turns; SHAW tries to find the words.)

I'm sorry that your father won't ever get to know you.

REN

(Touched.)

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Thanks.

(REN goes.)

(SHAW is lost in thought. ARIEL appears and speaks softly.)

Daddy?

ARIEL

Oh. I didn't hear you come down.

SHAW

I heard voices.

ARIEL

That was your friend, Ren. He sure asks a lot of questions.

SHAW

And what did you tell him?

ARIEL

For once, I had very little to say.

SHAW

(Smiles ruefully, shakes his head.)

I think I'm running out of answers.

(She can see how troubled he is.)

MUSIC 15: ARIEL COMFORTS SHAW (UNDERScore)

ARIEL

Daddy? I know it's hard for you, and I know I don't make it any easier. It's just that I don't know if I believe in all the things you believe in. But I believe in you.

(He hugs her close. They break.)

Get some sleep. You have a sermon in the morning.

SHAW

If I can figure out what to say.

ARIEL

You will.

(She goes. SHAW is alone with his thoughts.)

MUSIC 16: HEAVEN HELP ME (REPRISE)

SHAW

WHEN SOULS COME TO ME FOR PROTECTION
I GUIDE THEM, WHATEVER THE COST
BUT WHILE I'VE BEEN GIVING DIRECTION
MAYBE IT'S ME WHO GOT LOST

HEAVEN HELP ME FIND MY WAY NOW
 OPEN UP MY HEART AGAIN
 HELP ME FIND THE WORDS TO SAY NOW
 HEAVEN HELP ME
 OH, HEAVEN HELP ME

MUSIC 16A: AFTER HEAVEN REPRISE

(The CHOIR joins with soft "ooohs" of ON ANY SUNDAY as the Church assembles around SHAW, who ascends the pulpit.)

ALL

OOH...

Scene 6A: The Church

SHAW

I'm standing before you this morning with a very troubled heart. You see, my friends, as your minister, I should be helping you to find the joy in your lives; last night I realized that I haven't been doing that. After all, we all remember that terrible night five years ago when the lives of four young people ended on the Potawney Bridge. Everyone in this community lost someone that night – a child, a neighbor, a friend. I – Vi and I – we lost our son.

(He looks to his family.)

Ariel lost her brother. Now, somehow I got into my head that my loss was the greatest. That my pain was the deepest. And then, last night, someone much younger than I made me realize how tightly I had been holding onto that memory. A memory that has weighed me down as surely as a great stone. And in that moment, I did something I haven't done for a very long time: I laid down my burden. It was a terrifying moment. And it was exhilarating. This morning I offer you the same opportunity.

(Beat.)

The Senior Class of Bomont High School has asked permission to hold a dance. Ren, I think that might be a good idea.

(The CONGREGATION reacts with muted jubilation.)

Please join me in asking our Lord to guide and protect our children.

(He bows his head and the CHOIR finishes with a triumphant "Ah-ah-ah-Amen," punctuated by RUSTY waving a hand overhead and riffing, "Thank you, Lord, Amen!")

CHOIR
 AH-AH-AH-MEN

RUSTY
 THANK YOU, LORD

(SHAW casts a glance back in her direction – and smiles.)

(The CONGREGATION disperses.)

Scene 6B: The Churchyard

(The KIDS gather to congratulate REN, patting his back, shaking his hand, etc., but they fall silent and step back when CHUCK struts over to REN and ARIEL. After a tense face-off, CHUCK sneers.)