

EXT - RIVER'S EDGE - NIGHT

1968. An August moon illuminates the Clark Fork river outside Missoula, Montana, as WILL MCGEE, 19, soft-spoken and lanky, leans against a fallen willow. He stares out at the river and peels bark from a willow branch he has pulled off of the trunk.

WILL (V.O.)

The moon on the Clark Fork is what
I remember best about Missoula.
Even now, it's where I'm closest to
my dreams... or at least closest to
Jenna, somehow.

EXT - RIVER'S EDGE - DAYTIME

Flashback. One year earlier. The same spot on the river's edge is radiant with April sun. Will straddles the fallen willow as 16-year-old JENNA HOLLMAN, spunky and petite, lies along the length of the trunk, facing away from Will. The banks of the river explode with a variety of wildflowers.

WILL

Jenna, wake up!

JENNA

I wasn't sleeping.

WILL

You've been quiet for almost ten
minutes. I figured you must be
asleep or dead.

JENNA

William McGee!

Jenna bolts to an upright position and spins around to push him from the tree. Will laughs as he backs away, out of her reach.

JENNA

Should we check the huckleberries?

She jumps from the tree.

WILL
Huckleberries?! In April?

Jenna tugs at his arm, pulling him off the willow.

JENNA
C'mon.

WILL
You lunatic!

She runs up the bank and he chases, laughing.

EXT - BERRY PATCH - DAY

Jenna and Will forage through huckleberry briars.

WILL
What'd I tell you?

JENNA
Here's one for you!

She tries to force an old dried berry into his mouth as he laughs and pushes her away. They scramble to collect more dried berries, which they pelt at each other.

SUSAN MCGEE, 39, Will's mother, runs down the hillside.

Before she reaches them, Will runs up to meet her. Tears stream down her gentle, work-worn complexion.

SUSAN
It's your father. At the quarry...

Her words dissolve into sobbing as she embraces him.

Jenna walks toward the two of them, horror-struck.

EXT - CEMETERY - DAY

April has turned sour. A bitter breeze scours the cemetery as several hundred people gather around a freshly-dug grave. Will stands with his mother near the grave while Jenna stands opposite with CRAIG AND KELLY HOLLMAN, her parents.

A PRIEST sprinkles holy water over the site.

PRIEST

May John, and all the faithful
departed, through the mercy of God,
rest in peace.

ASSEMBLY

Amen.

Will clutches his mother in a long embrace. Jenna walks over behind him. Susan sees her approaching and opens the embrace to include her. She examines Jenna's face.

SUSAN

My dear Jenna...

Susan moves to greet Jenna's parents. Jenna turns to Will.

JENNA

I heard you'll be moving to Ohio.

WILL

And you believed it?

JENNA

It's true, isn't it?

WILL

Yeah. Columbus.

Jenna is silent.

WILL

Remember my cousin Kevin? That's his home.

JENNA

How soon?

WILL

Pretty soon.

They walk away from the graveside together.

JENNA

How soon is that?

WILL

Before fall.

JENNA

And for school...

WILL

I guess I'll finish in Columbus.

Jenna stops walking, and Will turns to her.

JENNA

I'm going to miss you, Will.

Will looks away.

WILL

I'm not leaving now, you know.

JENNA

I know. I'm going to miss you.

He faces her again and his voice wavers.

WILL

Yeah. Miss you too, Jenna.

They embrace.

EXT - BERRY PATCH - DUSK

A light BREEZE massages the August landscape. Will and Jenna hover over the briars, collecting berries. A full moon rises over peaks across the river.

WILL

These bushes are loaded.

JENNA

How early do you have to go?

WILL

About six.

JENNA

I was going to make some jam for you. I'll send a package soon.

WILL

That'd be great, Jenna. Thanks.

A GUST OF WIND rustles through the aspens. Will stands up straight and faces the moonlight.

WILL

That moon... it's perfect. Let's go down to the river!

They both rush down the path.

EXT - RIVER'S EDGE - NIGHT

The moon sends a sparkling beam across the Clark Fork. Will and Jenna sit on the sand with jeans rolled up to their knees.

WILL

I love when the moon shines on it
like that. The river looks so much
wider.

He picks up a stone and sends it skipping across the river.

WILL

You know, I used to dream about
crossing the river on that moon
path.

JENNA

Me too. Seemed so magical, didn't
it? 'Course, you could always just
cross at the Keller Bridge and walk
down...

WILL

But it wouldn't be the same.

He skips another stone.

WILL

If you ever cross on that path, let
me know what you find.

JENNA

What?

WILL

If you ever cross, tell me what you
find.

JENNA

Walk across the water?

WILL

C'mon, I'm sure we could do it!

He pulls her up and drags her into the water.

WILL

What, are you sinking? You're
pulling me down! If you weren't so
heavy!

They laugh and SPLASH each other in the moonlight.

EXT - HIGHWAY - DAY

An old automobile with a luggage rack chugs down the highway
through the Dakota prairie.

WILL (V.O.)

And so I finished high school in
Columbus.

INT - BEDROOM - DAY

Out the window snow falls. Will sits at a desk beneath a
shelf displaying cross-country trophies and a large jar of
jam. He places a letter he has been reading in a shoe box,
then pulls a fresh sheet out of a drawer and writes.

WILL (V.O.)

Jenna and I wrote back and forth
almost every week. She had plans to
study forestry in Missoula, I was
planning on Ohio State.

INT - SERVICE GARAGE - DAY

Will lays beneath a car performing an oil change.

WILL (V.O.)

I worked hard after graduation.
Jenna wanted me to visit, but I
told her I needed to save money for
school. It all made sense till that
one August afternoon.

JOE, the owner of the garage, stout and matter-of-fact, bends
down to see Will.

JOE

Will, your mom's on the phone.

WILL

Can't it wait?

JOE

Sounds urgent. You better take it.

Will wheels out from under the car and runs to the office.

INT - OFFICE - DAY

Will grabs a paper towel from the cluttered desk and picks up the phone.

WILL

Mom? What's wrong?

He pushes the office door shut and leans against it.

WILL

Jenna?! How sick?

EXT - HIGHWAY - DAY

A Greyhound bus heads West across Montana, passing a sign which reads "Butte Pass ahead. Chain-up area: ½ mile."

WILL (V.O.)

The doctors didn't know what was wrong with Jenna, other than to say it was some kind of virus. All I needed to hear was that she might not make it through the week. I left that afternoon.

INT - HOSPITAL RECEPTION DESK - DAY

Will walks into an open reception area in the hospital lobby. At the desk, he sets down his backpack.

MARGE WILLIAMS, a retired hospital volunteer with a tight bun and wire-rimmed glasses, looks up from her papers.

MARGE

May I help you?

WILL

I'm looking for Jenna Hollman's room.

As Marge flips to the front of her directory, a look of recognition crosses her face

MARGE

Did you say Hollman?

WILL

Yes.

Marge picks up the phone and dials.

MARGE

There's a young man here inquiring about Jenna Hollman. Thank you.

She puts down the phone and turns to Will.

MARGE

Someone will be with you in just a moment. Please have a seat.

WILL

Can't I just go up to her room?

MARGE

I'm afraid not.

Will takes a seat. He is the only one seated in the reception area.

He picks up a magazine. No sooner does he flip to the table of contents than he hears FOOTSTEPS from beyond the reception area. PASTOR GREG, 48, all in black with a collar, approaches. He has a broad, kind face.

Will turns pale as he stands to meet him. Pastor Greg shakes his hand and smiles warmly.

PASTOR GREG

I'm Pastor Greg. You must be Will.
The Hollmans told me you'd be
coming. They asked me to...

WILL

Is Jenna okay? Can I see her?

PASTOR GREG

I'm sorry, Will.

Will collapses into his chair and begins to sob. Pastor Greg sits down beside him, uneasy.

End of flashback.

EXT - RIVER'S EDGE - NIGHT

Will moves away from the willow and crouches down on the shore. The moon casts its beam across the river. The light also catches tears on Will's face.

He skips stones across the river.

WILL (V.O.)

I used to want to cross the river
on that beam. See the other side.
Now I don't want any of that
adventure, any of that mystery. All
I really want is for Jenna to cross
back over to my side. I guess I'm
still a dreamer.

FADE OUT