

THE DEAD POETS SOCIETY

by

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USE FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

He whom a dream hath possessed
knoweth no more doubting.

- O'Sheel

INT. WELTON ACADAMY DINING HALL - DAY - VARIOUS SHOTS

CREDITS ROLL

On the left is a life-sized mural depicting a group of young school boys looking up adoringly at a woman who represents liberty. On the right is a mural showing young men gathered around an industrialist in a corporate boardroom.

Between the murals stands a boy. An odd, blaring MUSICAL SOUND starts and stops, interrupted by the noise of pumping. A teacher hurries to the boy, adjusts his tie, and leads him off. On another wall is a full-sized portrait of a 19th century Scotsman in a kilt.

In front at this, young boys carrying banners, and several elderly men in old-fashioned costumes assembling into a processional formation. Nervous younger boys (7th graders) are shown their places in line and handed candles.

They light each others' candles until all their candles are lit. Suddenly the MUSIC BLASTS FORTH in its full splendor. It is a BAGPIPE. The bagpiper, in a kilt like the one in the portrait, begins a processional march.

INT. CORRIDOR ADJACENT THE DINING ROOM - SAME

The bagpiper enters a long slate and stone hallway. The haunting timbre of his antiquated instrument reverberates through the building. Momentarily, he is followed by the other processional marchers. He leads them down the corridor and down a threshold staircase into:

INT. WELTON'S OLD STONE CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

Where two hundred high school-aged boys -- most of whom wear black blazers -- sit on either side of the central aisle watching the procession move onto the dais in front. Beside most of these boys are their parents.

VARIOUS ANGLES ON THE PROCESSION

FOUR 16-YEAR-OLD Boys CARRY BANNERS. Each boy is dressed in an archaic, turn-of-the-century outfit. On each banner is emblazoned a different word. One reads "TRADITION," another reads "HONOR," a third reads "DISCIPLINE," the last reads "EXCELLENCE."

THE ELDERLY MEN

in their 70s and 80s, obviously the school's oldest alumni, each wearing a name tag and the uniform of his day, make their way toward the stage.

THE SEVENTH GRADERS

carrying candles are nervous and self-conscious. Most concentrate intently on keeping their candles lit while they march. One young boy's candle has gone out and he can barely keep from crying.

The bagpiper stands at the corner of the dais, marching in place. Behind him, in black robes, sit the school's 30-odd teachers. The processional's elderly alumni fill the chairs of honor on the dais.

The four young BANNER CARRIERS peel off from the main aisle and take seats beside their parents in the audience. The 7th graders take seats with their parents too.

A purple and black robed man who brings up the rear of the procession walks up to the podium. He is HEADMASTER GALE NOLAN, a big man, in his mid-60s. The music stops.

NOLAN

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished alumni, and students: This year marks the one hundredth year that Welton Academy has been in existence.

Applause begins. Soon the whole room is standing in a thunderous ovation. After an appropriate amount of time, Nolan motions for everyone to be seated.

NOLAN

One hundred years ago, in 1859, forty-one boys sat in this room and were asked the same question that now greets you at the start of each semester: Gentlemen, what are the four pillars?

All of the students stand at attention. Find TODD ANDERSON sitting between his parents. Todd is 16, good looking, but he seems beaten down, lacking confidence, unhappy. He wears a name tag and no Welton blazer. When the others stand, Todd's mother nudges him. Todd stands. He watches as the other students:

ALL THE BOYS IN UNISON

Tradition! Honor! Discipline!
Excellence!

All the boys sit. Todd sits too. All is silent again.

NOLAN

In her first year, Welton Academy graduated five students. Last year we graduated fifty-one and over seventy-five percent of those went to the Ivy League!

Applause. During it we rind KNOX OVERSTREET and CHARLIE DALTON, both 16, and both in Welton blazers. Knox (sitting between his parents) carries a banner. He has curly hair, looks outgoing, is short but well built. Charlie, also with his parents, has a handsome yet friendly face. He carries no banner but, when Nolan mentions Ivy League, both these boys fit the bill.

NOLAN

This kind of accomplishment is the result of fervent dedication to the principles taught here. This is why you parents have been sending us your sons, and this is why we are the best preparatory school in the United States.

(more applause)

New students.

All turn to look at the new students the 7th graders and transfer students. Todd Anderson is among them and he looks incredibly self-conscious.

NOLAN

The key to your success rests on our four pillars. These are the bywords of this school and they will become the cornerstones of your lives. Welton Society candidate Richard Cameron...

In the audience, not far from Todd is Richard CAMERON, one of the banner carriers, 16, his father's little clone. He stands eagerly to attention. Too eagerly.

CAMERON

Yes sir!

NOLAN

What is Tradition?

CAMERON

Tradition, Mr. Nolan, is love of school, country, and family. Our tradition at Welton is to be the best!

NOLAN
 Good, Mr. Cameron. Welton Society
 Candidate George Hopkins. Honor.

Cameron sits. His father beams smugly.

HOPKINS (O.S.)
 Honor is dignity and the
 fulfillment of duty!

NOLAN
 Good, Mr. Hopkins. Honor Society
 Candidate, Knox Overstress Knox, as
 mentioned, is a banner-holder.

He stands.

KNOX
 Yes sir.

NOLAN
 What is discipline?

KNOX
 Discipline is respect for parents,
 teachers, headmaster. Discipline
 comes from within.

NOLAN
 Thank you, Mr. Overstress. Honor
 Candidate Neil Perry.

Knox sits. Knox's proud father and mother give him pats of encouragement. NEIL PERRY stands. Whereas some boys have two or three achievement pins on the lapels of their coats, Neil has a huge cluster of them on the pocket of his jacket. Neil is 16, intense, a born leader. However, there is more than a hint of anger and dissatisfaction in his eyes. Beside him sits his unsmiling father, MR. PERRY.

NOLAN
 Excellence, Mr. Perry.

NEIL (ROTE)
 Excellence is the result of hard
 work. Excellence is the key to all
 success, in school and everywhere.

Neil sits. He doesn't look at his father nor does his father look at him.

NOLAN

Gentlemen, at Welton you will work harder than you have ever worked in your lives, and your reward will be the success that all of us expect of you. I would now like to call to the podium Welton's oldest living graduate - Mr. Alexander Carmichael, Jr., Class of 1866.

An octogenarian on stage shuns help from those beside him and makes his way slowly -- excruciatingly slowly -- to the podium as the audience rises to another standing ovation.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE WELTON ACADEMY - MAIN LAWN - DAY

Welton Academy is a cluster of traditional weathered stone buildings. The time is 1959 but at Welton this is irrelevant. This school with its traditions is completely isolated from the politics or trends of the outside world.

The students stand with their parents under a giant tent. Finger food, coffee, tea and punch are laid out on white clothed tables.

Charlie's mother stands dotingly fixing Charlie's hair. Then she kisses him. Knox's father has his hand affectionately around his son. Mr. Perry stands adjusting the achievement pins on Neil's jacket. Todd Anderson's parents stand chatting with another couple, paying no attention to Todd who looks very much alone. Mr. Nolan walks by and looks at Todd's name tag.

NOLAN

Ah, Mr. Anderson. You have some big shoes to fill, young man. Your brother was one of our best.

TODD

(faint, almost inaudible)
Thank you.

Neil's father, Neil in tow, approaches Nolan and interrupts.

MR. PERRY

(somewhat disturbed)
Gale, what's this I hear about a new junior English teacher?

NOLAN

Mr. Gladden took the Headmaster's post at Malford, so we've hired John Keating.

MR. PERRY

(suspicious)

A former student, I hear?

NOLAN

A star student, Mr. Perry. And he's spent the last ten years teaching at the McMillan School in Edinburgh.

MR. PERRY

(acting impressed)

Oh. McMillan.

Nolan looks around. He finds, then indicates: ACROSS THE LAWN a black-robed teacher stands with his back to us, staring at the beautiful Welton LAKE. As if he sensed he was being watched, he turns and faces us. This is JOHN KEATING, late 30s, sparkling eyes. Nolan puts his arm on Mr. Perry's shoulder and leads him off.

NOLAN

Come meet him. You'll like him.

We watch Nolan escort Mr. Perry across the lawn and introduce him to Mr. Keating who walks up to greet them. Todd stands alone, looking around. Neil Perry, now left alone, does the same. Both watch the other students saying good-byes to their parents.

EXT. THE WELTON ACADEMY PARKING LOT - DAY

The 7th graders are saying good-bye to their parents. Chins quiver. Young eyes hold back tears. Some boys sob. For most of these young boys this is the first time in their lives that they will be away from their parents and their homes, and it is a devastating experience.

EXT. LONG SHOT, WELTON ACADEMY - SAME

Welton Academy sits in a lonely and isolated valley in woods of Vermont. Though the setting is beautiful, its isolation only highlights the loneliness that most of the 7th graders feel at this moment.

INT. THE WELTON ACADEMY OAK PANELED HONOR ROOM - DAY

The 50 or so members of the junior class sit in chairs or stand around the room. The students that were featured earlier are here: Todd Anderson, Neil Perry, Knox Overstreet, Charlie Dalton, Richard Cameron. All except Todd wear Welton blazers. Todd sticks out and he knows it. A staircase against a wall leads to a 2nd-floor door. That door opens and down the stairs file five boys. An old teacher (DR. HAGER) comes to the door and calls out five names.

HAGER

Overstreet, Perry, Dalton,
Anderson, Cameron.

These boys file up the staircase. As they do, a seated boy (PITTS) leans to the boy next to him (STEVEN MEEKS). Meeks has sweet egghead looks and very short hair. He wears a pocket watch and chain.

PITTS

Who's the new boy?

MEEKS

(shrugs)
Anderson.

Old Hager sees this conversation.

HAGER

Misters Pitts and Meeks. Demerits.

Pitts and Meeks look down. Pitts glances at Necks and rolls his eyes.

HAGER

That's another demerit, Mr. Pitts.

Pitts' smile vanishes. Hager closes the door.

INT THE HEADMASTER'S OFFICE - SAME

The five boys take seats in a row of chairs facing Mr. Nolan. Nolan sits behind his desk, a HUNTING DOG on the floor beside him.

NOLAN

Welcome back, Mr. Dalton. How's
your father?

CHARLIE

Doing fine, sir.

NOLAN

Your family move into that new house, Mr. Overstreet?

KNOX

Yes sir, about a month ago.

NOLAN

Wonderful. I hear It's beautiful.

(he gives the dog a snack)

Mr. Anderson, since you're new here, let me explain that at Welton, I assign extracurricular activities on the basis of merit and desire. These activities are taken every bit as seriously as your class work... right, boys?

CHARLIE, CAMERON, KNOX

Yes sir!

NOLAN

Failure to attend required meetings will result in demerits. Mr. Dalton the school paper, the Service Club, soccer, rowing. Mr. Overstress Welton Society Candidates, the school paper, soccer, Sons of Alumni Club. Mr. Perry Welton Society Candidates, Chemistry Club, Mathematics Club, school annual, soccer. Mr. Cameron Welton Society Candidates, Debate Club, rowing, Service Club, forensics, Honor Council. Mr. Anderson based on your record at Balincrest, soccer, Service Club, school annual. Anything else I don't know about?

Todd struggles. He looks like he is trying to speak but nothing is coming out of his mouth.

NOLAN

Speak up, Mr. Anderson.

TODD

(barely audible)

I would prefer rowing sir.

It is apparent that Todd's fear of speaking is overwhelming. Nolan looks at him.

NOLAN

Rowing? Did he say rowing? It says here you played soccer at Balincrest.

TODD

(again barely audible)
I... did... but...

Sweat breaks out on Todd's brow. He clinches his hands, turning his knuckles white. He looks like he is going to burst into tears. The other boys look at him.

NOLAN

You'll like soccer here, Anderson.
Dismissed.

The boys stand and exit. Todd looks absolutely miserable. The teacher at the door calls out more names.

EXT. WELTON CAMPUS - DAY

The Welton students walk toward their dorms. Neil Perry approaches Todd Anderson who walks alone. Neil offers his handshake.

NEIL

I hear we're going to be roommates.
Neil Perry.

TODD

(softly)
Todd Anderson.

Todd keeps walking. There is an awkward silence.

NEIL

Why'd you leave Balincrest?

TODD

(overlap)
My brother went here.

NEIL

Oh, so you're that Anderson.

INT. THE JUNIOR DORM LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Neil and Todd have walked into the dorm lobby.

TODD

My parents wanted me here all along
but my grades weren't good enough.
(MORE)

TODD (CONT'D)
I had to go to Baltimore to pull
them up.

NEIL
Well, you've won the booby prize.
Don't expect to like it here.

TODD
I don't.

INT. THE WELTON JUNIOR CLASS DORMITORY ROOM - DAY

Each small room contains two single beds, two closets, and
two desks. Suitcases sit on the floor. Neil enters.
Richard Cameron sticks in his head.

CAMERON
Heard you got the new boy. He's a
hell of a speaker, huh? Oops.

Todd Anderson walks in. Cameron ducks out. Todd has heard
Cameron's comment, but he ignores it. He puts his suitcase
on his bed and begins unpacking.

NEIL
Don't mind Cameron. He's an
asshole.

There is a knock on the door. Knox Overstress, Charlie
Dalton, and Steven Meeks enter. Charlie speaks to Neil.

CHARLIE
Hey, I heard you went to summer
school?

NEIL
Yeah, chemistry. My father thought
I should get ahead.

CHARLIE
Well, Meeks aced Latin and I didn't
quite flunk English so if you want,
we've got our study group.

NEIL
Sure, but Cameron asked me too.
Anybody mind including him?

CHARLIE
What's his specialty, brown-nosing?

Some chuckles.

NEIL
Hey, he's your roommate.

CHARLIE
That's not my fault.

Nobody is excited about Cameron but no one objects.

MEEKS
(to Todd)
I don't think we've met. I'm
Steven Meeks.

TODD
(shyly extending his hand)
Todd. Anderson.

Knox and Charlie offer Todd handshakes.

CHARLIE
Charlie Dalton.

KNOX
Knox Overstreet.

Todd shakes their hands.

NEIL
Todd's brother is Jeffrey Anderson.

CHARLIE
Oh yeah. Sure. Valedictorian,
National Merit Scholar...

Todd nods affirmative.

MEEKS
Well, welcome to "Hell"ton.

CHARLIE
It's every bit as hard as they say.
Unless you're a genius like Meeks.

MEEKS
He flatters me so I'll help him
with Latin.

CHARLIE
And English, and trig.

Meeks smiles. There is a knock on the door.

NEIL

It's open.

Neil's father enters. Neil is surprised.

NEIL

Father. I thought you'd... gone.

All the boys stand.

MEEKS, CHARLIE, KNOX

Mr. Perry.

MR. PERRY

Keep your seats, boys. How's it going?

THE BOYS

Fine, sir. Thank you.

MR. PERRY

Neil, I've decided that you're taking too many extracurricular activities. I've spoken to Mr. Nolan about it and you can work on the school annual next year.

NEIL

But father, I'm assistant editor.

MR. PERRY

I'm sorry, Neil.

NEIL

But father, it's not fair.

MR. PERRY

Fellows, would you excuse us a minute?

Mr. Perry walks into the hall, Neil follows.

INT. THE JUNIOR DORMITORY HALLWAY - SAME

MR. PERRY

I will not be disputed in public, do you understand me?

NEIL

Father, I wasn't disputing you.

MR. PERRY

When you've finished medical school and you're on your own, you can do as you please. Until then, you will listen to me.

NEIL

Yes sir. I'm sorry.

MR. PERRY

You know what this means to your mother, don't you?

NEIL

Yes sir.

Using the pressures of guilt and punishment, Mr. Perry is the most subtle of bullies. Neil's resolve crumbles in front of his authoritarian father. Neil fills the pause.

NEIL

You know me, always taking on too much.

MR. PERRY

Good boy. Call us if you need anything.

He turns and walks off.

INT. NEIL'S ROOM

The others wait in silence. A chastened Neil enters.

CHARLIE

Why doesn't he let you do what you want?

KNOX

Yeah! Tell him off! It couldn't get any worse.

NEIL

Oh that's rich. Like you tell your parents off, Mr. Future Lawyer and Mr. Future Banker!

Neil takes the school annual achievement pin off his shirt and hurls it at his desk.

KNOX

Wait a minute. I don't let my parents walk on me.

NEIL

Yeah, you just do everything they say! You'll be in daddy's law firm as sure as I'm standing here.

(to Charlie)

And you'll be approving loans till you croak.

CHARLIE

Okay, so I don't like it any more than you do. I'm just saying...

NEIL

Then don't tell me how to talk to my father when you're the same way. All right?!

KNOX

All right. Jesus, what are you gonna do?

NEIL

What I have to do. Screw the annual.

MEEKS

I certainly wouldn't lose any sleep over it. It's just a bunch of people trying to impress Nolan.

NEIL

(bitterly)

Screw it all. I don't give a damn about any of it.

He slams his hand into his pillow and lies back silently. Everyone is quiet, sensing Neil's disappointment. Finally, Charlie breaks the silence.

CHARLIE

I don't know about anyone else, but I could use a refresher in Latin. Eight o'clock in my room?

NEIL

Sure.

CHARLIE

You're welcome to join us, Todd.

KNOX

Yeah, come along.

TODD

Thank you.

The boys leave. Neil lies in silence. He sees the achievement pin that he threw and picks it up. Todd continues to unpack. He unpacks a photo of his mother and father with their arms around an older boy who is obviously Todd's brother Jeffrey. Todd stands to one side, slightly apart from the family group. Todd unpacks an engraved leather desk set (pens, blotter, etc.) and puts it on his desk.

NEIL

So what do you think of my father?

TODD

(softly, to himself)
I'll take him over mine.

NEIL

What?

TODD

Nothing.

NEIL

Todd, if you're gonna make it
around here, you've gotta speak up.
The meek might inherit the earth
but they don't get into Harvard.
Know what I mean?

Todd nods.

NEIL

The goddamn bastard!

He presses the metal point of the pin into his thumb, drawing blood. Todd winces. Neil doesn't. Neil hurls the pin again.

INT. A CHEMISTRY CLASSROOM - DAY

The classroom is a laboratory: filled with flasks, etc. Neil, Todd, Knox, Charlie, Cameron, Meeks and other members of the junior class sit around the room. A bespectacled teacher stands in front, passing out thick textbooks.

CHEMISTRY TEACHER

In addition to the assignments in the text, you will each pick three lab experiments from the project list and report on one every five weeks. The first twenty problems at the end of chapter one are due: tomorrow.

ANGLE ON CHARLIE DALTON as the thick textbooks arrive at his desk. He shoots a disbelieving glance at Knox Overstreet who can only acknowledge with a shake of his head. Todd takes his books without reacting.

INT. LATIN CLASS - DAY

The same students sit before a Latin teacher in his early 60s. He declines a Latin noun with a thick Scottish brogue.

LATIN TEACHER (MCALLISTER)

Agricola, agricolae, agricolas,
Agricolas, agricolatis,
agricolatus.

ANGLE FAVORING TODD, NEIL, KNOX AND THE OTHERS as they struggle to follow along with McAllister's lesson.

INT. A MATHEMATICS CLASS - DAY

Mathematical charts hang on the walls. The elderly bald teacher (the one from Nolan's doorway), Dr. Hager, passes out books. The students' work load is huge.

HAGER

Your study of trigonometry requires absolute precision. Anyone failing to turn in any homework assignment will be penalized one point off his final grade. Let me urge you now not to test me on this point. Who would like to begin by defining a cosine?

Richard Cameron stands.

CAMERON

A cosine is the sin of the compliment of an angle or arc. If we define an angle A, then...

INT. ENGLISH CLASSROOM - DAY

The junior students -- Todd, Neil, Knox, Charlie, Cameron, Meeks and some of the others we've seen -- enter. They are loaded down with books and look weary.

Sitting in the front of the room, staring out the window is JOHN KEATING, the teacher we glimpsed earlier. He wears a collared shirt, tie, no jacket.

The boys take seats and settle in. Keating stares out the window a long time. The students start to shuffle uncomfortably.

Finally Keating stands, picks up a yardstick, and begins slowly strolling the aisles. He stops and stares into the face of one of the boys.

KEATING
(to the blushing boy)
Don't be embarrassed.

He moves off, then stops in front of Charlie Dalton.

KEATING
(as if discovering
something known only to
himself)
Uh-huh.
(he moves to Todd
Anderson)
Uh-huh.
(he moves to Neil Perry)
Ha!

Keating slaps his free hand with the yardstick, then strides to the front of the room.

KEATING
Nimble young minds!

He steps up onto the desk, turns and faces the class.

KEATING
(energetically)
Oh Captain, My Captain. Who knows
where that's from?

No one raises a hand.

KEATING
It was written by a poet named Walt
Whitman about Mr. Abraham Lincoln.
(MORE)

KEATING (CONT'D)
 In this class you may refer to me
 as either Mr. Keating, or Oh
 Captain, My Captain.

Keating steps down and starts, strolling the aisles.

KEATING

So that I become the source of as
 few rumors as possible, let me tell
 you that yes, I was a student at
 this institution many moons ago,
 and no, at that time I did not
 possess this charismatic
 personality. However, should you
 choose to emulate my manner, it can
 only help your grade.

Pick up a textbook from the back, gentlemen, and let's retire
 to the honor room. He steps off the desk and walks out. The
 students sit, not sure what to do, then realize they are to
 follow him. They quickly gather their books, pick up texts,
 and follow.

INT. THE WELTON OAK PANELED HONOR ROOM - DAY

This is the room where the boys waited earlier. The walls
 are lined with class pictures: dating back into the 1800s.
 School trophies of every description fill trophy cases and
 shelves. Keating leads the students in, then faces the
 class.

KEATING

Mister...

(Keating looks at his
 roll)

Pitts. An unfortunate name. Stand
 up, Mister Pitts.

Pitts stands.

KEATING

Open your text, Pitts, to page
 forty and read for us the first
 stanza of the poem.

Pitts looks through his book. He finds the poem.

PITTS

"To The Virgins to Make Much Of
 Time?"

KEATING

That's the one.

Giggles in the class. Pitts reads.

PITTS

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may
Old time is still a flying
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying."

KEATING

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.
The Latin term for that sentiment
is "Carpe Diem." Anyone know what
that means?

MEEKS

Carpe Diem... seize the day.

KEATING

Very good, Mr....?

MEEKS

Meeks.

KEATING

Seize the day while you're young,
see that you make use of your time.
Why does the poet write these
lines?

A STUDENT

Because he's in a hurry?

KEATING

Because we're food for worms, lads!
Because we're only going to
experience a limited number of
springs, summers, and falls. One
day, hard as it is to believe, each
and every one of us is going to
stop breathing, turn cold, and die!
Stand up and peruse the faces of
the boys who attended this school
sixty or seventy years ago. Don't
be timid, go look at them.

The boys get up. Todd, Neil, Knox, Meeks, etc. go over to
the class pictures that line the honor room walls.

ANGLES ON VARIOUS PICTURES ON THE WALLS. Faces of young men
stare at us from out of the past.

KEATING

They're not that different than any of you, are they? There's hope in their eyes, just like in yours. They believe themselves destined for wonderful things, just like many of you. Well, where are those smiles now, boys? What of that hope?

THE BOYS are staring at the pictures, sobered by what Keating is saying.

KEATING

Did most of them not wait until it was too late before making their lives into even one iota of what they were capable? In chasing the almighty deity of success did they not squander their boyhood dreams? Most of those gentlemen are fertilizing daffodils! However, if you get very close, boys, you can hear them whisper. Go ahead, lean in. Hear it?

(loud whisper)

"Carpe Diem, lads. Seize the day. Make your lives extraordinary."

Todd, Neil, Knox, Charlie, Cameron, Meeks, Pitts all stare into the pictures on the wall. All are lost in thought.

EXT. THE WELTON CAMPUS - DAY

The class files out of the honor room. Todd, Neil, Knox, Charlie, Cameron, Necks, and Pitts walk together, books in hand. All thinking about what just happened in class.

PITTS

Weird.

NEIL

But different.

KNOX

Spooky if you ask me.

CAMERON

You think he'll test us on that stuff?

CHARLIE

Oh come on, Cameron, don't you get anything?

EXT. THE WELTON CAMPUS - CONTINUOUS

MEEKS

How about a trig study group?
Right after dinner.

VARIOUS BOYS

Good by me. Sure. Great.

KNOX

I can't make it. I gotta sign out to have dinner at the Danburrys' house.

PITTS

Who are the Danburrys?

CAMERON

Big alums. How'd you pull that?

KNOX

They're friends of my dad. Probably in their nineties or something.

NEIL

Listen, anything's better than mystery meat.

CHARLIE

I'll second that.

The group disperses. Neil finds himself walking near Todd who has been silent through this whole discussion.

NEIL

Want to come to the study group?

TODD

Thanks but... I'd better do history.

INT. TODD AND NEIL'S DORM ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Todd enters alone. He puts down his books and sits at his desk. Flipping through the stack of books in front of him, he sighs at the work load that is piling up. Todd takes out his notebook and opens his history book.

He stares at his notebook for a moment, then writes "SEIZE THE DAY" in big letters. He looks at the words that he's written, sighs, tears the page off, then plunges into his homework.

EXT. THE WELTON CAMPUS - DUSK - WIDE SHOT

The autumnal colors are muted by the onset of nightfall. Old Dr. Hager drives the school "woody" station wagon out of the campus.

EXT. WALTON VILLAGE (NEW CASTLE) - DUSK - WOODY DRIVE-BY

EXT./INT. A LARGE MANSION - DUSK

Knox Overstreet gets out of the woody. Dr. Hager pulls away. Knox walks to the door of the home and is admitted by a maid. Knox is amazed by this palatial home.

INT. THE DANBURRY MANSION LIBRARY - DUSK

JOE DANBURRY is a sharp looking man of about 40, well dressed, friendly. His wife, an attractive blonde about the same age, sits beside him.

JOE DANBURRY

Knox, come in. Joe Danburry. This is my wife, Janette.

KNOX

(surprised)

Nice to meet you.

MRS. DANBURRY

You're the spitting image of your father. How is he?

KNOX

Great. Just did a big case for GM.

JOE DANBURRY

Ah. I know where you're headed.

Like father like son, eh?

(looking off screen)

Ginny. Come meet Knox.

GINNY DANBURRY -- 15, cute, shy, a shock of misplaced hair -- enters.

MRS. DANBURRY

Knox, this is our daughter, Virginia.

GINNY

Ginny, mom.

Knox shakes her hand. His "hello" is polite. Her "hi" is shy. CHET DANBURRY -- a tall jock of a guy a couple of years older than Knox -- enters. With him is a lovely teenage brunette, CHRIS NOEL, in a short tennis dress. Soft glowing eyes, athletic figure, this girl is stunning.

CHET

Dad, can I take the Buick?

JOE DANBURRY

What's wrong with your car?

MRS. DANBURRY

Chet, where are your manners?
Knox, this is my son Chet and his
girlfriend Chris Noel. This is
Knox Overstreet. Excuse me while I
check on dinner.

CHET

(perfunctorily)

Hi.

Knox shakes Chet's hand. Knox is THUNDERSTRUCK by Chris. Chris offers Knox her hand and a smile. Knox shakes her hand, his mouth practically hanging open.

CHRIS

Pleased to meet you.

KNOX

The pleasure is mine.

CHET

Come on, Dad, why is this always a
big deal?

JOE DANBURRY

Because I bought you a sports car
and suddenly you want my car all
the time.

CHET

Chris' mom feels safer when we're
in a bigger car. Right, Chris?

Chet shoots her a wicked smile. Chris blushes.

CHRIS

It's all right, Chet.

CHET
It's not all right. Come on, Dad

Joe Danburry walks out of the room. Chet follows him.

CHET
Come on, Dad.

Knox, Ginny, and Chris remain in the room. Knox smiles at Chris.

KNOX
So, uh, where are you in school?

CHRIS
Ridgeway High. How's Henley Hall, Gin?

GINNY
(flat)
Okay.

CHRIS
(to Knox)
That's your sister school, right?

KNOX
Sort of.

CHRIS
(to Ginny)
You going out for the Henley Hall play?
(to Knox)
They're doing "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

GINNY
Maybe.

KNOX
How did you meet Chet?
(both girls look at him)
I mean... Er...

CHRIS
He plays on the Ridgeway football team and I'm a cheerleader. He used to go to Welton but he flunked out.
(to Ginny)
You should do it, Gin. You'd be great.

Ginny looks down, shyly. Chet comes to the door.

CHET
Chris. We got it. Let's go.

CHRIS
Nice meeting you, Knox. Bye, Gin.

KNOX
(dying inside)
Nice meeting you, Chris.

Chris and Chet exit. Through the window, we see Chet and Chris walk out and put their arms around each other.

GINNY
(confiding to Knox)
Chet just wants the Buick so they
can go parking.

KNOX
Oh.

Outside, Chris and Chet get in the Buick and kiss. Knox stares with envy.

GINNY
Something wrong?

KNOX
Nah.

EXT. DANBURRY HOUSE - DUSK

Chet and Chris drive off.

INT. THE JUNIOR CLASS LOUNGE - NIGHT

The dorm is quiet. Neil, Cameron, Weeks, Charlie and Pitts are gathered studying math. As they do, Pitts works to assemble a small crystal radio. Todd is in his room, studying alone. Knox, looking shell-shocked, shuffles into the lobby.

CHARLIE
How was dinner?

KNOX
Terrible. Awful! I met the most
beautiful girl I've ever seen in my
life!

NEIL

Are you crazy? What's wrong with that?

KNOX

She's practically engaged to Chet Danburry. Mr. Mondo Jocko himself.

PITTS

Too bad.

KNOX

It's not too bad. It's a tragedy! Why does she have to be in love with a jerk?!

PITTS

All the good ones go for jerks, you know that. Forget her. Take out your trig book and figure out problem twelve.

KNOX

I can't just forget her, Pitts. And I certainly can't think about math!

MEEKS

Sure you can. You're off on a tangent -- so you're halfway into trig already...

CAMERON

Duh, Meeks!

MEEKS

(sheepishly)

I thought it was clever.

KNOX

(sitting down)

You really think I should forget her?

PITTS

You have another choice.

Knox drops to his knee like he is proposing.

KNOX

Only you, Pittsie.

Pitts pushes Knox away. Knox sits back down but despair is beginning to wash over him.

EXT. WELTON CAMPUS - MORNING

The Welton bagpiper marches on the lawn, practicing. Students emerge from their dorms and head to breakfast.

INT. KEATING'S ENGLISH CLASS - DAY

The lights are out and shades are drawn. Keating sits in a chair beside the teacher's desk. He looks solemn. All is still.

KEATING

(soft and soothing voice)

Boys, quietly open your texts to
page fifty four.

The boys follow instructions. Keating reads the following in a tone of quiet reverence.

KEATING

"Little Boy Blue," by Eugene Field:
 "The little toy dog is covered with dust,
 But sturdy and staunch he stands.
 And the little toy soldier is red with rust,
 And his musket moulds in his hands;
 Time was when the little toy dog was new,
 And the soldier was passing fair;
 And that was the time when our Little Boy Blue,
 Kissed them and put them there.
 'Now don't you go till I come,' he said,
 'And don't you make any noise!'
 So toddling off to his trundle bed
 He dreamt of pretty toys;
 And as he was dreaming, an angel song,
 Awakened our Little Boy Blue --
 Oh the years are many, the years are long,
 But the little toy friends are true.
 Ay, faithful to Little Boy Blue they stand,
 Each in the same old place --
 Awaiting the touch of a little hand,
 The smile of a little face.
 And they wonder, as waiting the long years thru,
 In the dust of that little chair,
 What has become of our Little Boy Blue,
 Since he kissed them and put them there.

Keating is a masterful reader. With his marvelous voice, he has milked this sentimental poem for everything it is worth. Many of the boys are on the verge of tears. Suddenly Keating shouts:

KEATING

AHHGGGG!!

The students jump halfway out of their seats.

KEATING

Treacle! Mawkish treacle! Rip it out of your books. Rip out the entire page! I want this sentimental rubbish in the trash where it belongs!

He marches down the aisles with the trash can and waits for each boy to deposit the page from his textbook. The boys, having been led down the sentimental path, cannot help but laugh at this sudden change of mood.

KEATING

Make a clean tear. I want nothing left of it! Eugene Field! Disgraceful.

INT.MCALLISTER'S CLAS5RDOM - DAY

Mr. McAllister, the Scottish Latin teacher, exits his room and walks across the hall to Keating's classroom. He peeks in the door window and sees boys ripping pages out of their books. Alarmed, McAllister opens the door and enters Keating's room.

INT. KEATING'S CLASSROOM - SAME

McAllister is about to reprimand the boys when suddenly he sees Keating. McALLISTER What the... Sorry, I didn't think you were in here, Mr. Keating. Baffled and embarrassed, McAllister exits. Keating strides back to the front of the room, flips the trash can on the floor, and jumps into it. He stomps the trash a few times, then kicks the can away.

KEATING

This is battle, boys. War! You are souls at a critical juncture. Either you will succumb to the will of hoi polloi and the fruit will die on the vine -- or you will triumph as individuals. It may be a coincidence that part of my duties are to teach you about Romanticism, but let me assure you that I take the task quite seriously.

(MORE)

KEATING (CONT'D)
 You will learn what my school
 wants you to learn in my class, but
 if I do my job properly, you will
 also learn a great deal more. You
 will learn to savor language and
 words because they are the stepping
 stones to everything you might
 endeavor to do in life and do well.
 A moment ago I used the term 'hoi
 polloi.' Who knows what it means?
 Come on, Overstreet, you twirp.
 (laughter)
 Anderson, are you a man or a boil?

More laughter. All eyes are on Todd. He visibly tenses all over. He cannot bring himself to speak. He shakes his head jerkily "no." Meeks raises his hands and speaks:

MEEKS
 The hoi polloi. Doesn't it mean
 the herd?

KEATING
 Precisely, Meeks. Greek for the
 herd. However, be warned that,
 when you say "the hoi polloi" you
 are actually saying "the the herd."
 Indicating that you too are "hoi
 polloi."

Keating grins wryly. Meeks smiles. More chuckles. Keating paces to the back of the room.

KEATING
 Now, many will argue that
 nineteenth -- century literature
 has nothing to do with business
 school or medical school. They
 think we should I read our Field
 and Pipple, learn our rhyme and
 meter, and quietly go about it our
 business of achieving other
 ambitions.

He slams his hand on the wall behind him. The wall booms like a drum. The boys jump and turn around.

KEATING
 (defiant whisper)
 Well, I say drivell! One reads
 poetry because he is a member of
 the human race and the human race
 is filled with passion!
 (MORE)

Medicine, Law, Banking) these are
 necessary to sustain life -- but
 poetry, romance, love, beauty!
 These are what we stay alive for.
 I read from Whitman.
 "Oh me, Oh life of the questions of
 these recurring.
 Of the endless trains of the faithless
 of cities filled with the foolish...
 skipping...
 What good amid these O me, O life?
 Answer: That you are here --
 That life exists and identity
 That the powerful play goes on, and
 you may contribute a verse."

Keating pauses. The class sits, taking this in.

KEATING
 (awestruck tone)
 "That the powerful play goes on,
 and you may contribute a verse."
 Incredible.
 (pause)
 Poetry is rapture, lads. Without
 it we are doomed.

Keating waits a long moment.

KEATING
 What will your verse be?

CLOSE ON the faces of NEIL, KNOX, CHARLIE, MEEKS, CAMERON,
 PITTS, and TODD as they contemplate this question. Softly,
 Keating breaks the mood:

KEATING
 Let's open our textbooks to page
 sixty and learn about Wordsworth
 notion of romanticism...

INT. THE WELTON DINING ROOM - DAY

On the dais in the front of the room is the teacher's dining
 table. Below them are the students' tables. Mr. McAllister
 sits to Keating's right. McALLISTER Quite an interesting
 class you had today, Mr. Keating.

KEATING
 Sorry if I shocked you.

MCALLISTER

No need to apologize. It was quite fascinating, misguided though it was.

KEATING

You heard it all?

MCALLISTER You're hardly a Trappist monk. McAllister smiles. So does Keating.

MCALLISTER

You take a big risk encouraging them to be artists, John. When they realize they're not Rembrants or Shakespeares or Picassos, they'll hate you for it.

KEATING

Not artists, George, free thinkers. And I hardly pegged you as a cynic.

MCALLISTER

A cynic? A realist! Show me the heart unfettered by foolish dreams and I'll show you a happy man.

He chews a bite.

MCALLISTER

But I will enjoy listening to your lectures Keating grins with amusement

ANOTHER ANGLE - THE DINNING ROOM - SAME

Todd, Knox, Charlie, Cameron, Pitts, and Meeks sit at a table eating. Neil enters and joins them.

NEIL

I found his senior annual in the library.

Neil opens the annual and reads.

NEIL

Captain of the soccer team, editor of the annual, Cambridge bound, Man most likely to do anything, Thigh man, Dead Poets Society.

Hands grab the old annual away from Neil.

CHARLIE

Thigh man? Mr. "K" was a hell raiser.

KNOX

What is the Dead Poets Society?

MEEKS

Any group pictures in the annual?

NEIL

Nothing. No mention of it.

CHARLIE

Nolan.

Mr. Nolan approaches the boys' table. Under the table, Cameron insistently hands the annual to Todd. Todd looks at Cameron, then takes it.

NOLAN

Enjoying your classes, Mr. Perry?

NEIL

Yes sir. Very much.

NOLAN

And our Mr. Keating. Finding him interesting, boys?

CHARLIE

Yes sir. We were just talking about that.

NOLAN

Good. We're very excited about him. He was a Rhodes Scholar, you know.

Nolan exits. Todd looks at the annual that he hides in his lap under the table, then continues eating.

EXT. THE CAMPUS - LATER

Keating walks across the school lawn wearing his sport coat and a scarf, carrying his books. Pitts, Neil, Cameron, Knox, Charlie, Meeks and Todd approach him.

NEIL

Mr. Keating? Sir? Oh Captain My Captain.

(Keating stops)

What was the Dead Poets Society?

KEATING

Ah, so you boy's have been snooping.

NEIL

I was just looking in an old annual and...

KEATING

Nothing wrong with research.

The boys wait for more.

NEIL

But what was it?

Keating checks around to be sure they are unwatched.

KEATING

The Dead Poets was a secret organization. I don't know how the present administration would look upon it but I doubt the reaction would be favorable. Can you keep a secret?

An instant sea of nods.

KEATING

The Dead Poets Society was dedicating to sucking the marrow out of life. That phrase is by Thoreau and was invoked at every meeting. A small group of us would meet at a cave and there we would take turns reading Shelley, Thoreau, Whitman, our own verse -- any number of poets -- and, in the enchantment of the moment, let them work their magic on us.

KNOX

You mean it was a bunch of guys sitting around reading poetry?

KEATING

(amused)

Both sexes participated, Mr. Overstreet. And, believe me, we did not simply read, we let it drip from our tongues like honey. Women swooned, spirits soared... Gods were created, gentlemen.

The boys think a minute.

NEIL

What did the name mean? Did you only read dead poets?

KEATING

All poetry was acceptable. The name simply referred to the fact, that to join the organization, you had to be dead.

SEVERAL

What?

KEATING

Full membership required a lifetime of apprenticeship. The living were simply pledges. Alas, even I am still a lowly initiate.

The boys don't quite know what to say.

KEATING

The last meeting must have been 25 years ago. Hasn't been another since.

Keating exits. The boys stand watching. Neil turns to them.

NEIL

I say we go tonight. Everybody in?

PITTS

Where is this cave he's talking about?

NEIL

Beyond the stream. I think I know.

PITTS

That's miles.

CAMERON

Sounds boring to me.

CHARLIE

Don't come.

CAMERON

You know how many demerits we're talking?

CHARLIE
So don't goddamn come! Please.

CAMERON
All I'm saying is we have to be
careful. We can't get caught.

CHARLIE
(sarcastic)
Well, no shit, Sherlock.

NEIL
Who's in?

CHARLIE
I'm in.

Neil looks at Knox, Pitts, and Weeks.

PITTS
Well...

CHARLIE
Oh come on, Pitts...

MEEKS
His grades are hurting, Charlie.

NEIL
Then you can help him.

PITTS
What is this, a midnight study
group?

NEIL
Forget it, Pitts, you're coming.
Meeks, your grades hurting too?

Laughter.

MEEKS
All right. I'll try anything once.

CHARLIE
Except sex.

More laughter. Meeks blushes.

CAMERON
I'm in as long as we're careful.

CHARLIE

Knox?

KNOX

I don't know. I don't get it.

CHARLIE

Come on. It'll help you get Chris.

KNOX

It will? How do you figure?

CHARLIE

Women swoon!

KNOX

But why?

The group walk off. Knox holds, then follows,

KNOX

Why do they swoon?! Charlie, tell me why they swoon!

Knox moves off after the others. Todd remains behind. No one asked Todd and he moves off by himself.

INT. THE STUDY HALL - LATE AFTERNOON

Students study. Neil sits near Todd.

NEIL

(hushed voice)

Listen, I'm inviting you. You can't expect everybody to think of you all the time. Nobody knows you.

TODD

Thanks but it's not a question of that.

NEIL

What is it then?

TODD

I... I just don't want to come.

NEIL

But why? Don't you understand what Keating is saying? Don't you want to do something about it?

TODD

Yes. But...

NEIL

Put what? Goddamn it, tell me.

TODD

I don't want to read.

NEIL

What?

TODD

Keating said everybody took turns reading. I don't want to do it.

NEIL

God, you really have a problem, don't you? How can it hurt you to read? I mean isn't that what this is all about? Expressing yourself?

INT. THE DORM - LATE NIGHT

Old Dr. Hager, the resident dorm marshal, putters in his room, door ajar, making tea. Neil, Charlie, Knox, Meeks, Pitts, Cameron, and Todd sneak silently past his door and out.

EXT. THE WELTON CAMPUS - NIGHT

The school hunting dog comes up and growls at the boys. Pitts slips the dog a piece of food and it goes away.

EXT. THE SCHOOL GROUNDS - NIGHT

The stars are out and the wind is blowing. A SERIES of SHOTS show the boys crossing the campus. They reach a stone wall with an old iron gate that is chained shut. The boys squeeze through the gate and disappear into the woods beyond.

EXT. THE WELTON WOODS AND STREAM - NIGHT

The boys make their way through the eerie forest searching for the cave. They reach the bank of the stream and begin looking for an appropriate spot amongst the tree roots and erosion. Charlie suddenly looms out of the cave entrance.

CHARLIE

Yaa, I'm a dead poet!

MEEKS
 (frightened)
 Ahh!
 (then recovering)
 Eat it, Dalton!

CHARLIE
 This is it.

SHORT DISSOLVE
 TO:

INT. THE CAVE - A BIT LATER

A newly lit fire comes to life... The boys huddle around the flames.

NEIL
 I hereby reconvene the Welton
 Chapter of the Dead Poets Society.
 These meetings will be conducted by
 myself and by the rest of the new
 initiates now present. Todd
 Anderson, because he prefers not to
 read, will keep minutes of the
 meetings.

Todd is unhappy with this role but he tries not to show it.

NEIL
 I will now read the traditional
 opening message from society member
 Henry David Thoreau.

Neil opens Keating's copy of Thoreau's Walden, and reads.

NEIL
 "I went to the woods because I
 wanted to live deliberately."
 (skips thru the text)
 "I wanted to live deep and suck out
 all the marrow of life!"

CHARLIE
 All right. I'll second that.

NEIL
 "To put the rout all that was not
 life.
 (skips thru the text)
 And not, when I came to die,
 discover that I had not lived."
 Pledge Overstreet.

Knox steps up. Neil hands him Walden. Knox flips thru the book until he finds another underlined passage. He reads.

KNOX

"The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive."

CHARLIE

Hey, this is great.

Knox hands the book to Cameron. Cameron reads.

CAMERON

"If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours."

KNOX

Yes! I want success with Chris!

Cameron hands the book to Todd. Todd holds the book, frozen. Before the others notice Todd's fear, Neil takes the book from Todd and hands it to Meeks.

MEEKS

"If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost. That is where they should be. Now put foundations under them."

NEIL

God, I want to do everything! I'm going to explode.

Neil looks imbued with the desire to break out of his mold. He slams the palms of his hands together with an expression of determination. Charlie opens a book he brought and flips through it.

CHARLIE

Listen to this:

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be for my
unconquerable soul!"

PULL BACK from this small band of boys standing huddled in the night. Something is swirling their heads, something alive and exciting like the wind and the swaying trees that surround them. Charlie raises his hands in the air.

CHARLIE

I here and now commit myself to
daring!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. KEATING'S CLASSROOM - DAY

KEATING

So avoid using the word 'very' because it's lazy. A man is not very tired, he is exhausted. Don't use very sad, use morose. Language was invented for one reason, boys -- to woo women -- and, in that endeavor, laziness will not do. It also won't do in your essays.

The class laughs appreciatively. Keating closes his book, then walks over and raises a map that covers the blackboard in the front of the room. On the board is a quote, which Keating reads aloud:

KEATING

"Creeds and schools in abeyance I permit to speak at every hazard, Nature without check, with original energy." -- Walt Whitman. Ah, but the difficulty of ignoring those creeds and schools, conditioned as we are by our parents, our traditions, by the modern age. How do we, like Whitman, permit our own true natures to speak? How do we strip ourselves of prejudices, habits, influences? The answer, my dear lads, is that we must constantly endeavor to find a new point of view.

He leaps onto his desk.

KEATING

Why do I stand here? To feel taller than you? I stand on my desk to remind myself that we must constantly force ourselves to look at things differently.

(MORE)

The world looks up from up here. If you don't believe it, stand up here and try it. All of you. Take turns.

Keating jumps off. The boys, with the notable exception of Todd, go to the front of the room and a few at a time take turns standing on Keating's desk. As they do, Keating strolls up and down the aisles.

KEATING

Try never to think about anything the same way twice. If you're sure about something, force yourself to think about it another way, even if you know it's wrong or silly. When you read, don't consider only what the author thinks, but take the time to consider what you think. You must strive to find your own voice, boys, and the longer you wait to begin, the less likely you are to find it at all. Thoreau said, "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation." I ask, why be resigned to that? Risk walking new ground. Now. A flame in your hearts could change the world, lads. Nurture it.

Keating goes to the door. He locks at the class, then flashes the room lights on and off over and over. He makes a noise like crashing thunder.

KEATING

In addition to your essays, I want you each to write a poem -- something your own to be delivered aloud in class. See you Monday.

He exits. Momentarily, he pops his head back in.

KEATING

(impish grin)
And don't think I don't know this assignment scares you to death, Mr. Anderson, you mole.

Keating holds out his hands and pretends he is sending lightning bolts at Todd. The class laughs. Todd forces a hint of a smile.

INT./EXT. WELTON CAMPUS, AFTERNOON - VARIOUS LOCATIONS

Pitts and Meeks climb up the inside of the bell tower that sits atop the Welton Chapel. They affix Pitts' crystal radio antenna to the chapel cross. Momentarily, they tune in a fuzzy rock 'n roll station.

PITTS
Radio Free America.

They try to tune in the music but it soon dissolves into static. They jiggle the radio in frustration. Some of the Welton students run on the green, kicking soccer balls. Down at the lake, the Welton crew team is practicing. Mr. Nolan sits in a rowboat, smoking a pipe, watching.

Knox rides down a wooded lane on his bike. He comes to RIDGEWAY HIGH SCHOOL. Beyond a fence, uniformed boys practice football. Not far from them, cheerleaders practice. Knox stops. He sees: Among the cheerleaders is Chris. She laughs as she practices the cheers with the other girls.

Knox watches her with intense longing in his eyes. Chet Danburry catches a pass in front of Chris, struts for her amusement, then moves on. Chris laughs. Knox gets back on his bike and pedals away.

INT. TODD AND NEIL'S ROOM - AFTERNOON

Todd sits at his bed, a pad of paper beside him. He starts to write something, scratches it out, then covers his face in frustration. The door opens. Neil enters, looking like he's just seen God. He lets his books fall to his desk.

NEIL
I've found it.

TODD
Found what?

NEIL
What I want to do! Right now.
What is really inside of me.

He hands Todd a piece of paper. Todd reads it.

TODD
A Midsummer Night's Dream. What is it?

NEIL
A play, dummy.

TODD

I know that. What's it got to do with you?

NEIL

They're putting it on at Henley Hall. See, open try-outs.

TODD

So?

NEIL

So I'm gonna act! Ever since I can remember I've wanted to try it. Last summer I even tried to go to summer stock auditions but of course my father wouldn't let me.

TODD

And now he will?

NEIL

Hell no, but that's not the point. The point is for the first time in my whole goddamned life, I know what I want, and for the first time I'm gonna do it whether my father wants me to or not! Carpe diem, goddamn it!

Neil picks up the play and reads a coupe of lines aloud. They delight him. He clenches his fists in the air with joy.

TODD

Neil, how are you gonna be in a play if your father won't let you?

NEIL

First I gotta get the part, then I'll worry about that.

TODD

Won't he kill you if you don't let him know you're auditioning?

NEIL

As far as I'm concerned, he won't have to know about any of it.

TODD

Come on, that's impossible.

NEIL
Horseshit. Nothing's impossible.

TODD
Why don't you ask him first? Maybe he'll say yes.

NEIL
That's a laugh. If I don't ask, at least I won't be disobeying him.

TODD
But if he said no before then...

NEIL
Jesus Christ, whose side are you on? I haven't even gotten the part yet. Can't I enjoy the idea even for a little while?

Todd turns back to his work. Neil sits on the bed and starts reading the play.

NEIL
By the way, there's a meeting this afternoon. You coming?

TODD
(blase)
I guess.

Neil puts down his play and looks at Todd.

NEIL
None of what Mr. Keating has to say means shit to you, does it?

TODD
What is that supposed to mean?

NEIL
Being in the club means being stirred up by things. You look about as stirred up as a cesspool.

TODD
You want me out... is that what you're saying?

NEIL
No, I want you in. But being in means you gotta do something. Not just say you're in.

TODD

(turns angrily)

Listen Neil, I appreciate your interest in me but I'm not like you. When you say things, people pay attention. People follow you. I'm not like that.

NEIL

Why not? Don't you think you could be?

TODD

No! I don't know, I'll probably never know. The point is, there's nothing you can do about it so butt out, all right? I can take care of myself just fine. All right?

NEIL

Er... No.

TODD

No? What do you mean 'no'?

NEIL

(shrugs matter-of-factly)

No.

Neil opens his play. Todd waits for Neil to relent. He doesn't.

EXT. CAVE - AFTERNOON

The boys enter the cave.

INT. THE CAVE - AFTERNOON

It is a clear, crisp fall afternoon. Charlie, Knox, Todd, Necks, Neil, Cameron, and Pitts sit around. Neil recites from Thoreau.

NEIL

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life."

KNOX

(moans)

God, I want to suck all the marrow out of Chris. I'm so in love, I feel like I'm going to die!

NEIL

You know what the dead poets would say: "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may..."

KNOX

But she's in love with: the moron son of my father's best friend. What would the dead poets say about that?

Knox walks away from the group. Despair is washing over him.

CHARLIE

I feel like I've never been alive. For years I've been risking nothing. I have no idea what I am or what I want to do! Neil, you know you want to act. Knox wants Chris.

KNOX

Needs Chris! Must have Chris!

CHARLIE

Meeks, you're the brain here. What do the dead poets say about somebody like me?

MEEKS

The romantics were passionate experimenters, Charles. They dabbled in many things before settling, if ever.

CAMERON

There aren't too many places to be an experimenter at Welton, Meeks.

Charlie paces a moment, then gets an idea. He addresses the group.

CHARLIE

I hereby declare this the Charles Dalton Cave for Passionate Experimentation. In the future, anyone wishing entry must have permission from me.

PITTS

Wait a minute, Charlie. This should belong to the club.

CHARLIE

It should, but I found it and now I
claim it. Carpe Cavem, guys.
Seize the cave.

Charlie grins. The boys look at each other and shake their
heads. Neil heads out.

NEIL

I gotta get to the tryouts. Wish
me luck.

MEEKS

Good luck.

Neil exits. Charlie finds a rock and begins carving his name
on a wall of the cave. Pitts shakes his head.

EXT. SOCCER FIELD - AFTERNOON

Gusts of wind blow across the field. About 50 boys stand in
their sweats, moving around, trying to keep warm. Among them
are Todd, Charlie, Pitts, and Knox who is in a state of
lovesick despair. Keating walks up, carrying some soccer
balls under one arm and a case under the other.

PITTS

Say, look who's the soccer
instructor.

KEATING

Here here, there are quite a few of
us so we have to be quiet if we're
to get anything accomplished. Who
has the roll?

SENIOR STUDENT

I do, sir.

SENIOR STUDENT

Keating takes the three-page roll
and examines it.

KEATING

Answer "present." please. Chapman?

STUDENT (CHAPMAN)

Present.

KEATING

Perry?

(no answer)

Neil Perry?

Keating glances at Todd. Todd doesn't know what to say.

KEATING

Hmmmm. Watson?

(no answer)

Richard Watson? Absent too, eh?

SOMEONE

Watson's sick, sir.

KEATING

Hmm. Sick indeed. I suppose I should give Watson demerits. But if I give Watson demerits, I will also have to give Perry demerits and I like Perry.

He crumples the roll up and tosses it away.

KEATING

Boys, you don't have to be here if you don't want to. Anyone who wants to play, follow me.

Keating marches off. Astonished and delighted by this capriciousness, most of the boys excitedly follow.

EXT. NEW ANGLE - FAR SOCCER FIELD - LATER

Most of the boys from earlier sit on the ground. Keating stands before them.

KEATING

Devotees may argue that one game or sport is inherently better than another. For me the most important thing in all sport is the way other human beings can push us to excel. Plato, a gifted man like myself, said, "Only the contest made me a poet, a sophist, an orator." Each person take a slip of paper and line up single file.

He passes out slips of paper to the curious students.

EXT. THE SOCCER FIELD - LATER

The boys form a long line. Todd stands listlessly at the rear. Ten feet in front of the boy at the head of the line, a soccer ball rests on the ground.

KEATING

You know what to do... Now go!

McAllister walks past the soccer field. He watches in fascination as the boy at the head of the line steps out and reads loudly from his slip of paper.

FIRST BOY

"Oh to struggle against great odds,
To meet enemies undaunted!"

He runs and kicks the ball at the goal, missing. Keating puts down another ball, then puts a record on a portable record player. Classical music starts. The second boy, Knox, steps out.

KEATING

Rhythm, boy! Rhythm is important.

SECOND BOY (KNOX)

"To be entirely alone with them, to
find out how much one can stand!"

Knox too runs and kicks the ball. Just before he smashes it with his foot, he yells: "CHET!" ball. Keating puts down another ball

THIRD BOY (MEEKS)

"To look strife, torture, prison,
popular odium face to face!"

Meeks runs and kicks the ball with great intent. Next, Charlie steps out and reads.

CHARLIE

To indeed be a God!

With determination, Charlie kicks the ball through the goal. McAllister smiles and walks on.

INT. NEIL AND TODD'S ROOM - NIGHT

Todd sits at his desk, a half-composed poem before him. He adds a line, then breaks the pencil in frustration. He paces, sighs, then picks up another pencil and tries to again.

INT. THE DORM HALLWAY - SAME

Neil enters, looking stunned.

NEIL

I got it. Hey, everybody, I got the part! I'm going to play Puck. Hey, I'm Puck!

VOICE FROM A ROOM

"Puck" you! Pipe down.

CHARLIE AND OTHERS

All right, Neil. Congratulations!

INT. NEIL AND TODD'S ROOM - NIGHT

Neil enters and closes the door. Incredibly excited, he pulls out an old typewriter and begins to type. Todd watches.

TODD

Neil, how are you gonna do this?

NEIL

Sssh. That's what I'm taking care of. They need a letter of permission.

TODD

From you?

NEIL

From my father and Nolan.

TODD

Neil, you're not gonna...

NEIL

Quiet. I have to think. Neil mumbles lines from the play, giggles to himself, then keeps typing.

Todd shakes his head in disbelief.

INT. KEATING'S CLASSROOM - DAY

Knox stands before class reading the poem he wrote.

KNOX

"I see a sweetness in her smile
Bright light shines from her eyes
But life is complete: contentment mine
Just knowing that she --

Knox stops. He lowers his paper.

KNOX

I'm sorry. It's stupid. Knox walks back to his seat.

KEATING

It's fine, Knox. Good effort.
(to the class)

What Knox has done demonstrates an important point, not only in writing poetry, but in every endeavor. That is, deal with the important things in life love, beauty, truth, justice.

Keating paces.

KEATING

And don't limit poetry to the word. Poetry can be found in a work of art, music, a photograph, in the way a meal is prepared -- anything with the stuff of revelation in it. It can exist in the most everyday things but it must never, never be ordinary. By all means, write about the sky or a girl's smile but when you do, let your poetry conjure up salvation day, doomsday, any day, I don't care, as long as it enlightens us, thrills us and -- if it's inspired -- makes us feel a bit immortal.

MEEKS

Oh, Captain, My Captain. Is there poetry in math?

Chuckles from the class.

KEATING

Absolutely, Mr. Dalton, there is elegance in mathematics. If everyone wrote poetry, the planet would starve, for God's sake. But there must be poetry -- and we must stop to notice it -- in even the simplest acts of living, or we will have wasted the truly wonderful opportunity that life as human beings offers us. That said, who wants to recite next? Come on. I'll get to everyone eventually.

Keating looks around. No one volunteers. Keating grins.

KEATING

Look at Mr. Anderson. In such
agony. Step up, lad, and let's put
you out of your misery.

All eyes are on Todd. He is dying inside. He stands and
walks slowly to the front of the class like a condemned man
on his way to his execution.

KEATING

Todd, have you prepared your poem?

Todd shakes his head no.

KEATING

Mr. Anderson believes that
everything he has inside of him is
worthless and embarrassing.
Correct, Todd? Isn't that your
fear?

Todd nods jerkedly yes.

KEATING

Then today you will see that what
is inside of you is worth a great
deal.

Keating strides to the blackboard. Rapidly, he writes: "I
SOUND MY BARBARIC YAWP? OVER THE ROOFTOPSOFTHE WORLD." --
Walt Whitman.

KEATING

A yawp, for those who don't know,
is a loud cry or yell. Todd, I
would like you to give us a
demonstration of a barbaric yawp.

TODD

(barely audible)
A yawp?

KEATING

A barbaric yawp.

Keating pauses, then suddenly moves fiercely at Todd.

KEATING

Good god, boy! Yell!

TODD
 (frightened)
 Yawp!

KEATING
 Again! Louder!

TODD
 YAWP!

KEATING
 LOUDER!

TODD
 AHHHHHH!

KEATING
 All right! Very good! There's a
 barbarian in there after all!

Keating claps. The class claps too. Todd, red-faced, swells
 a bit.

KEATING
 Todd, there's a picture of Whitman
 over the door. What does he remind
 you of? Quickly, Anderson, don't
 think about it.

TODD
 A madman.

KEATING
 A madman. Perhaps he was. What
 kind of madman? Don't think!
 Answer.

TODD
 A crazy madman.

KEATING
 Use your imagination! First thing
 that pops to your mind, even if
 it's gibberish!

TODD
 A... A... sweaty-toothed madman.

KEATING
 Now there's the poet speaking!
 Close your eyes and think of the
 picture. Describe what you see.
 NOW!

TODD

I... I close my eyes. His image
floats beside me.

KEATING

(prompting)
A sweaty-toothed madman...

TODD

A sweaty-toothed madman with a
stare that pounds my brain.

KEATING

Excellent! Have him act. Give it
rhythm!

TODD

His hands reach out and choke me
All the time he mumbles slowly.
Truth... Truth is like a blanket
that always leaves your feet cold.

This brings chuckles from the class. This angers Todd.

KEATING

To hell with them, most about the
blanket!

Todd opens his eyes and addresses the class in defiant
cadence.

TODD

Stretch it, pull it, it will never
cover any of us. Kick at it, beat
at it, it will never be enough...

KEATING

Don't stop!

TODD

(struggling, but getting
it out)
From the moment we enter crying to
the moment we leave dying,
It will cover just your head as you
wail and cry and scream!

Todd stands still for a long time. Both he and the students
have felt the magic or what has just taken place. Neil
starts applauding. Others join in. Todd swells and, for the
first time, there is a hint of confidence in him. The
applause stops. Keating walks to Todd.

KEATING
Don't forget this.

EXT. THE SOCCER FIELD - DAY

A soccer ball careens off a kicking foot. Beethoven's Ninth symphony, fourth movement, "Ode To Joy," blares forth. Keating stands on the sidelines beside his portable record player, watching the boys play soccer, waving his arms like an orchestra conductor.

In front of Keating, the boys play soccer to this spectacular music. They run, kick, pass, fall, block, head, dribble, take -- all to the overpowering chorus of one of the most inspirational pieces of music ever written.

EXT. DEAD POETS CAVE - AFTERNOON

Boys enter the cave.

INT. DEAD POETS CAVE - AFTERNOON

Neil hurries in carrying a small, broken statue. The other pledges of the Dead Poets Society are assembled around Charlie who sits silently cross-legged before them. His eyes are closed and, in one hand, he holds an old saxophone.

NEIL
Look at this.

PITTS
What is it?

NEIL
The god of the cave.

The statue has a stake sticking out of its head with a candle stuck in it. Neil plants the statue in ground and lights the candle. It illuminates a red and blue drummer boy, face pitted from exposure, yet noble in its visage. Charlie, who hasn't moved, clears his throat. All turn to him and settle in.

CHARLIE
Gentlemen, "Poetrusic" by Charles Dalton.

He blows scattered notes on the saxophone. Random, blaring, they sound like bad John Cage. Suddenly Charlie stops.

CHARLIE
(trance-like, run-on
delivery)
(MORE)

Laughing, CHARLIE (CONT'D),
 mumbling, gotta do more. Gotta be
 more.

He plays more notes on the sax, then:

CHARLIE
 (more rapid than before)
 Chaos screaming, chaos dreaming,
 crying, flying, gotta be more!!
 Gotta be more!!

Charlie plays a simple but absolutely gorgeous melody. The skeptical looks on the faces of the boys disappear. As Charlie gets lost in the music, so do the others. The melody ends with a long, beautiful, haunting note.

NEIL
 Charlie, That was great! Where did
 you learn to play like that?

CHARLIE
 My parents made me take clarinet
 but I hated it.
 (putting on a mock British
 accent)
 The sax is more sonorous.

Knox stands. He backs away, full of torment and frustration.

KNOX
 God, I can't take it anymore! If I
 don't have Chris, I'll kill myself.

CHARLIE
 Knox, you gotta calm down.

KNOX
 No, I've been calm all my life! If
 I don't do something, it's gonna
 kill me.

NEIL
 Where are you going?

KNOX
 I'm calling her!

INT. THE DORM PHONE ROOM - LATER

All of the boys stand around. Knox picks up the phone, boldly dials some numbers, then waits.

INT. CHRIS' HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Chris is in wet hair and a damp towel, but she looks stunning. She enters and answers the phone.

CHRIS

Hello?

INT. THE DORM PHONE ROOM/STAIRWELL - AFTERNOON

Knox hears Chris' voice. He starts to speak, then hangs up the phone.

KNOX

She's gonna hate me! The Danburrys will hate me. My parents will kill me!

He looks at the faces of the others. No one says a word.

KNOX

All right, goddamn it, you're right! "Carpe diem" even if it kills me.

He picks up the phone and dials again.

INT. CHRIS' HOUSE - SAME

Again the phone rings. Again Chris enters and answers.

CHRIS

Hello?

INT. THE DORM - SAME

KNOX

Hello Chris, this is Knox Overstress.

INT. CHRIS' HOUSE - SAME

CHRIS

Knox. Oh yes, Knox. I'm glad you called.

INT. THE DORM - SAME

KNOX

You are?
(excitedly to his friends)
She's glad I called!

INT. CHRIS' HOUSE - SAME

CHRIS

I wanted to call you but I didn't have the number. Chet's parents are going out of town this weekend so Chet's having a party. Would you like to come?

INT. THE DORM - SAME

KNOX

Well, sure!

INT. CHRIS' HOUSE - SAME

CHRIS

Chet's parents don't know about it, so please keep it quiet. But you can bring someone if you like.

INT. DORM - SAME

KNOX

I'll be there. The Danburrys. Friday night. Thank you, Chris.

He hangs up the phone. He is thunderstruck. He lets out a yelp.

KNOX

Can you believe it? She was gonna call me! She invited me to a party with her!

CHARLIE

At Chet Danburry's house.

KNOX

Yeah.

CHARLIE

Well?

KNOX

So?

CHARLIE

So you really think she means you're going with her?

KNOX

Well hell no, Charlie, but that's not the point. That's not the point at all!

CHARLIE

What is the point?

KNOX

The point is she was thinking about me! I've only met her once and already she's thinking about me. Damn it, it's gonna happen! I feel it. She's going to be mine!

He exits the phone room, his head in a cloud. The others look at each other, not sure what to think.

EXT. THE HENDLY HALL AUDITORIUM - DAY

The buildings at this school are white brick. Neil parks his bicycle and enters the auditorium.

INT. THE AUDITORIUM STAGE - LATER

High school actors are on stage rehearsing Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Neil stands center stage, playing Puck. He holds a stick with a bell accoutered jester's head on one end of it.

NEIL (AS PUCK)

"Yet but three? Come one more.
Two of both kinds makes up four.
Here she comes, curst and sad.
Cupid is a knavish lad
Thus to make poor females mad."

Enter Ginny Danburry playing Hermia, crawling on stage, looking exhausted. As she starts her lines, the DIRECTOR of the play, a woman in her 40s, interrupts.

DIRECTOR

Good, Neil. I really get the feeling your Puck knows he's in charge. Remember that he takes great delight in what he's doing.

NEIL

(broadly, boldly impish)
"Cupid is a knavish lad
Thus to make poor females mad!"

DIRECTOR
Excellent. Continue, Ginny.

As Ginny re-enters and starts her lines...

GINNY (AS HERMIA)
"Never so weary, never so in woe,
Bedabbled with the dew, and torn
with briars I can no further crawl,
no further go."

EXT. THE WELTON DORMS - NIGHT

Neil rides up on his bike and parks it. As he starts into the dorm, he spots a figure sitting motionless on a wall.

NEIL
Todd?

Neil walks over to get a better look. It is Todd, sitting in the dark without a coat.

NEIL
What's going on?

Todd doesn't answer.

NEIL
Todd, what's the matter?

TODD
It's my birthday.

NEIL
It is? Happy Birthday. You get anything?

Todd is motionless. Then he points to a box. Neil looks. In the box seems to be the monogrammed desk set that we've seen on Todd's desk.

NEIL
This is your desk set.
(pause)
I don't get it.

TODD
They gave me the exact same thing
as last year!

NEIL
Oh...

TODD

Oh.
 (mocking)
 Long pause.

NEIL

Well, maybe they thought you'd need another one. Maybe they thought...

TODD

Maybe they don't think at all unless it's about my brother! His birthday's always a big to-do.
 (pause: looks at the desk set)
 The stupid thing is, I didn't even like the first one.

He puts the desk set down.

NEIL

Look, Todd, you're obviously underestimating the value of this desk set.

TODD

what?

NEIL

I mean, this is one special gift! Who would want a football or a baseball bat or a car when they could get a desk set as wonderful as this one!

TODD

Yeah! And just look at this ruler!

They laugh. A silence falls.

TODD

(thoughtful)
 You know what Dad called me when I was growing up? "Five ninty-eight." That's what all the chemicals in the human body would be worth if you bottled them raw and sold them. He told me that was all I'd ever be worth unless I worked every day to improve myself. "Five ninety- eight."

Neil shakes his head.

TODD

When I was little, I thought all parents automatically loved their kids. That's what my teachers told me. That's what I read in the books they gave me. That's what I believed. Well, my parents might have loved my brother but they did not love me.

He takes a deep, anguished breath. Neil is groping for something to say. Todd walks into the dorm.

EXT. A WELTON BRICK COURTYARD - DAY

The class pours into the courtyard expectantly. Another Keating stunt? Keating addresses them.

KEATING

People, I am delighted with your progress as reflected in your essays and poems. However, I know the school policy is to encourage study groups and I believe that a dangerous though inevitable element of conformity has been seeping into your work. Misterns Pitts, Cameron, Overstreet, and Chapman line up please over here.

Keating indicates for the four boys to stand near him.

KEATING

On the count of four, begin walking together around the courtyard. Nothing to think about. No grade here. One, two, three, go.

The boys begin walking. They go down one side of the courtyard, across the back, up the other side, then across the front.

KEATING

That's the way. Please continue.

As the boys walk around the courtyard again, they begin to walk together in step. Soon it becomes like a march, producing a one-two-three-four cadence. Keating begins to clap.

KEATING

There it is Hear it?
 (clapping louder in time)
 One two, one two, one two, one two

ANGLE THROUGH A WINDOW

McAllister sits in his empty classroom, reading a book. He sees the commotion in the courtyard and watches.

ANGLE FROM ABOVE

The marching boys get into it. The class joins in clapping. Soon the tour boys are marching vigorously to the rhythmic clapping of the entire class.

NEW ANGLE

Inside his second-story office, Nolan is looking out his window at the marching boys below.

ANGLE ON KEATING

KEATING

All right, stop. You way have noticed how at the beginning Mister Overstress and Pitts: seemed to have a different stride than the others, but soon they were all walking in the same cadence. Our encouragement made it even more marked. Now this experiment was not to single out Pitts or Overstress. What it demonstrates is how difficult it is for any of us to listen to our own voice or maintain our own beliefs in the presence of others. If any of you believe you would have marched differently, then ask yourself why you participated in the clapping. Lads, there is a great need in all of us to be accepted. However, that need can be like a nasty current, whisking us away unless we're strong and determined swimmers. Don't insist on the separate path simply to be different or contrary, but trust what is unique about yourselves even if it's odd or unpopular. As Mr. Robert Frost said, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I...

(MORE)

I took the Keating (CONT'D)
 one less grave led by,
 And that has made all the
 difference."

A bell rings, signifying the end of class. Keating walks off.

ANGLE ON NOLAN IN HIS OFFICE

Nolan moves away from the window. ANGLE ON McALLISTER IN HIS CLASSROOM Amused at Keating's antics, he turns back to his book.

INT. ENTRANCE TO THE DEAD POETS CAVE - NIGHT

Todd, Neil, Cameron, Pitts, and Meeks sit around. A fog has moved in and the trees sway in the breeze.

MEEKS

Where's Knox?

PITTS

Getting ready for that party.

CAMERON

What about Charlie? He's the one who insisted on this meeting.

NEIL

I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately. To live deep and suck out all the marrow of life...

In the woods there is a noise: the sound of girls' laughter.

GIRL'S VOICE

I can't see a thing.

CHARLIE'S VOICE

It's just over here.

Charlie and TWO GIRLS arrive at the cave. One is pretty, the other is plain. The girls are about 20, blonde, beers in their hands. They aren't the type to be seriously interested in Charlie or the other boys. They're just here for a good time.

CHARLIE

Hey guys, meet Gloria and...

PLAIN GIRL (TINA)

Tina.

CHARLIE

Tina and Gloria, this is the pledge
class of the Dead Poets Society.

GLORIA

It's such a strange name! Won't
you tell us what it means?

CHARLIE

I told you, that's a secret.

GLORIA

Isn't he precious?

Gloria gives Charlie an affectionate hug. The other members
or the club are flabbergasted. These girls are wild, exotic
creatures, the kind whose unashamed love of men causes young
boys' hearts to come to rest in young boys' throats. The
girls giggle.

TINA

I can't call you Charlie anymore?
(puts her arm around
Charlie)
What does Numama mean, honey?

CHARLIE

It's Nuwanda, and I made it up.

GLORIA

I'm cold.

Charlie puts his arm around Gloria.

MEEKS

Let's build a fire.

Charlie shoots Meeks a look. As the boys move off to gather
wood, Charlie scrapes some mud off the wall of the cave and
wipes it on his face like an Indian brave. Meek shoots
Gloria his sexiest stare, then goes off with the other boys.
The girls whisper and giggle together.

EXT. THE DANBURY HOUSE - NIGHT

Knox parks his bicycle along the side of the house. He takes
off his overcoat, and stuffs it in the bike saddle bag. He
straightens his tie, then goes to the front door. He knocks.
He can hear music inside. He knocks again. Finally, since
no one comes to the door, Knox opens it.

INT. THE DANBURRY HOUSE - SAME

Knox enters. "Open the Door to Your Heart" by Darrell Banks is playing on the Hi-Fi. On the entrance hall couch is a couple, making out like crazy. Up and down the stairs are other couples doing the same. Knox stands there, not knowing what to do. Momentarily, Chris walks through, her hair an uncombed mass.

KNOX

Chris!

Chris turns and sees Knox.

CHRIS

Oh, hi. I'm glad you made it. Did you bring anybody?

KNOX

No.

CHRIS

Ginny Danburry's here. Look for her.

KNOX

But, Chris...

CHRIS

I gotta find Chet. Make yourself at home.

She exits. Knox watches her. He slumps in dejection.

EXT. THE WOODS AROUND THE CAVE

Charlie is gathering wood. Neil, Pitts, Todd and the other boys surround him.

NEIL

Charlie...

CHARLIE

It's Nuwanda.

NEIL

Nuwanda, what is going on?

CHARLIE

Nothing, unless you object to having girls here.

PITTS

Well, of course not. It's just that... You could have warned us.

CHARLIE

I thought I'd be spontaneous. I mean, that's the point of this whole thing, isn't it?

NEIL

Where'd you find them?

CHARLIE

They were walking along the fence past the soccer field. Said they were curious about the school so I invited them to the meeting.

CAMERON

Do they go to Henley Hall?

CHARLIE

I don't think they're in school.

CAMERON

They're townies?!

CHARLIE

Cameron, what is the matter with you. You act like they're your mother or something. You afraid of them?

CAMERON

Hell no, I'm not afraid of them just, if we get caught with them, we're dead.

GLORIA (O.S.)

Say, what's going on out there?

CHARLIE

Just gathering wood.
(low, to Cameron)
You just keep your mouth shut, jerkoff, and there's nothing to worry about.

CAMERON

Watch who you call a jerkoff.

NEIL

Oh calm down, Cameron.

Charlie gives Cameron an expression of mock fear, then heads off. The others follow. Cameron watches Charlie and Neil for a moment, then walks after them.

INT. THE DANBURRY PANTRY - NIGHT

Knox, looking suicidal, wanders through the crowded party and ends up in the pantry. Kids stand talking. A couple in the corner is involved in a long kiss. His hand keeps wandering to her knee and her hand keeps pushing his away, yet the kiss never breaks. This happens over and over through the entire next scene.

Ginny Danburry is in the corner and she and Knox exchange smiles. At the sink a guy stands making bourbon and Cokes. The guy eyes Knox.

GUY

You Mutt Sanders' brother?

Knox shakes his head no.

GUY

Bubba...

BUBBA is a big, drunk jock leaning on the refrigerator.

GUY

This guy look like Mutt Sanders?

BUBBA

You his brother?

KNOX

No relation. Never heard of him.
Sorry.

BUBBA

Say Steve, where's your manners?
Here's Mutt's brother and you don't
offer him a drink? Want some
bourbon?

KNOX

Actually I don't...

Steve puts a glass in Knox's hand and fills it with bourbon, adding only a hint of Coke. Bubba clinks the glass with him.

BUBBA

To Mutt.

STEVE

To Mutt.

KNOX

To Mutt.

Bubba and Steve drain their glasses. Knox follows their lead, then bursts into a coughing fit. Steve pours everyone more bourbon.

BUBBA

So what the hell's Mutt been up to?

KNOX

(coughing fitfully)

Actually I don't really know Mutt.

BUBBA

(toasting)

To fucking Mutt.

STEVE

To fucking Mutt.

KNOX

Fucking Mutt...

They drain their glasses again. Knox continues coughing.

BUBBA

Well, I'd better find Patsy.

(slaps Knox on the back)

Say hello to Mutt for me.

KNOX

Will do.

Knox and Ginny exchange knowing smiles. Bubba leaves Knox, who is still coughing. Ginny wanders out. Steve pours him and Knox more bourbon.

INT. THE CAVE - NIGHT

The boys have lit a fire and the girls are warming their hands. The candle on the head of the "cave god" FLUTTERS. Tina notices the pitted statue.

TINA

I heard you guys were weird but not this weird.

She takes out a pint of whiskey and offers some to Neil. He takes it and sips. He obviously hasn't had much whiskey in his life but he tries to act like he has. He hands it back.

TINA

Go ahead, pass it around.

Neil does. It goes from boy to boy. Each boy tries to act like he likes the terrible bitterness he tastes. Unlike most of the others, Todd manages to keep from coughing as he swallows the whiskey. Everyone is impressed.

GLORIA

(to Todd)

Yeah!

(to the others)

Don't you guys miss having girls here?

CHARLIE

Miss it? It drives us crazy. That's part of what this club is about. In fact, I'd like to announce that I've published an article in the school paper, in the name of the Dead Poets society, demanding girls be admitted to Welton, so we can all stop beating off.

NEIL

You what?! How did you do that?

CHARLIE

I'm one of the proofers. I slipped the article in.

PITTS

Oh God, it's over now!

CHARLIE

Why? Nobody knows who we are.

PITTS

Don't you think they'll figure out who did it?! Don't you know they'll come to you and demand to know what the Dead Poets Society is? Charlie, you had no right to do something like that!

CHARLIE

It's Nuwanda, Cameron.

GLORIA
 (putting her arm around
 Charlie)
 That's right, it's Nuwanda.

CHARLIE
 And are we just playing around out
 here or do we mean what we say? If
 all we do is come and read a bunch
 of poems to each other, what the
 hell are we doing?

NEIL
 You still shouldn't have done it,
 Charlie. You don't speak for the
 club.

CHARLIE
 Hey, would you not worry about your
 precious little necks? If they
 catch me, I'll tell them I made it
 up. All your asses are safe.
 Look, Gloria and Tina didn't come
 here to listen to us argue. Are we
 gonna have a meeting or what?

GLORIA
 Yeah, how do we know if we want to
 join if you don't have a meeting?

NEIL
 (casts a surprised look at
 Charlie)
 Join?

Charlie ignores this. He turns to Tina.

CHARLIE
 "Shall I compare thee to a summer's
 day? Thou art more lovely and more
 temperate..."

In his recital, Charlie has aimed these words directly at
 Tina. She melts into warm goo.

TINA
 Oh, that's so sweet!

Tina hugs Charlie. The other boys look at each other, trying
 unsuccessfully to hide their incredible jealousy.

CHARLIE
 I wrote that for you.

TINA

You did?

CHARLIE

I'll write one for you too, Gloria.

(closes his eyes then)

"She walks in beauty like the
night.."

Charlie's eyes open. He has forgotten the words to this poem. Covering, he walks across the cave.

CHARLIE

"She walks in beauty like the
night..."

Charlie turns his back, opens a book, and reads quickly to himself. He closes it, puts the book down, and turns back to Gloria.

CHARLIE

"Of cloudless climes and starry
skies; All that's best of dark and
bright; Meet in her aspect and her
eyes."

Gloria squeals with delight.

GLORIA

Isn't he wonderful?!

The other boys are absolutely appalled, but desperately jealous that Charlie is getting away with this. Gloria hugs Charlie.

INT. THE DANBURY LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Music by the Drifters is playing loudly. Every light in the room is out. The only illumination is moonlight through the windows. Only after our eyes get adjusted to the dark can we see that the room is filled with couples making out. Knox, carrying another drink and looking tipsy, enters. He walks a bit, then trips over a couple on the floor.

ANGRY GUY'S VOICE

Hey!

KNOX

Sorry.

Knox falls onto the sofa. To his left sit a couple making out heavily. Their breathing is like that of some giant beast. To Knox's right is another couple, making out too.

Knox tries to get up but the couple he tripped over has now rolled against his shins, pinning him. Knox tries to get comfortable in his little spot on the sofa. The music stops.

The room sounds like an artificial respiration ward. The couple to Knox's right look and sound as if they are going to chew each other's lips off. Knox glances at the couple to his left. He hears:

BOY'S VOICE

Oh Chris, you're so beautiful.

The couple are Chris and Chet. Chris is sitting right next to Knox. Music starts again. It's "This Magic Moment" by the Drifters. Chris and Chet continue petting heavily. Knox tries to look away but can't keep his eyes off Chris.

CHET

Chris, you are so gorgeous.

Chet kisses Chris hard and she leans against Knox. In the moonlight-filled room, Knox sees the outline of Chris' face, the nape of her neck, the curves of her breasts. He downs the rest of his drink and tries to look away.

KNOX

Oh my God help me.

Chris obliviously continues to lean against Knox. Knox is struggling with temptation -- trying not to even look -- but he's losing. Suddenly, he turns and looks at Chris again. Every rational thing inside of him says "no" but his emotions are saying "yes."

KNOX

(to himself)

Carpe breastum. Seize the breast.

CHRIS

(to Chet)

Huh?

CHET

I didn't say anything.

Chet and Chris continue to kiss. As though his hand were being drawn by a magnet too powerful to resist, Knox's hand reaches out and begins to ever so lightly stroke the nape of Chris' neck down toward her breast. Chris obviously thinks that the hand is Chet's and she lets it continue. Knox moves his hand up and down her, sensuously. He closes his eyes, breathing heavily.

CHRIS
(in the dark)
Oh Chet, that feels fabulous...

CHET
(in the dark)
It does?
(pause)
What?

CHRIS
(in the dark)
You know...

Knox pulls his hand away. Chet thinks a moment, then kisses Chris again.

CHRIS
(in the dark)
Don't stop.

CHET
(in the dark)
Stop what?

CHRIS
(in the dark)
Chet...

Knox puts his hand back on Chris' neck. Again he starts rubbing her, ever so gently, moving down toward her breast.

CHRIS
(in the dark)
Oh... oh...

We can see Chet's silhouette pausing over Chris, trying to figure out what she is talking about. Giving up, he goes back to kissing her. Chris continues to show her pleasure. Knox leans his head back on the sofa and his breathing becomes heavy.

The music builds. Unable to resist, he rubs Chris' chest, getting dangerously close to her breast. Chris is breathing hard. Knox is slipping into ecstasy. His drink falls out of his hand.

Suddenly Chet's hand grabs Knox's hand and a lamp light flicks on. Knox is face to face with a furious Chet and a confused Chris.

CHET
What are you doing?!

CHRIS

Knox?!

KNOX

(feigning surprise)

Chet! Chris! What are you doing here?

CHET

Why you...

Chet smashes Knox in the face with his fist. Chet grabs Knox by the shirt, throws him to the floor, and jumps on him. He begins swinging at Knox's face which Knox is doing his best to protect.

CHET

You fucked up little prick!

CHRIS

(beginning to feel sorry for Knox)

Chet, you don't have to hurt him.

Chet's fists hit Knox over and over.

CHRIS

Chet, stop! He didn't mean anything.

She pushes Chet off. Knox rolls over, holding his face.

CHRIS

That's enough!

Chet stands over Knox, who is holding his bloody nose and bruised face.

KNOX

I'm sorry, Chris. I'm sorry!

CHET

You want some more, you little son of a bitch? Huh?! Get the hell out of here!!

He moves at Knox again, but Chris and some others hold him back. Others lead Knox out of the room.

KNOX

(drunk)

Chris, I'm sorry!

CHET

Next time I see you, you're dead!

INT. THE CAVE - NIGHT

The fire casts warm light on the wall of the cave. Gloria sits with her arm around Charlie, staring adoringly. The bottle passes between Tina and the others.

CHARLIE

Hey guys, why don't you show Tina the Dead Poets garden?

MEEKS

Garden?

PITTS

What garden?

Charlie silently motions with his eyes for Pitts and the others to vamoose. Neil elbows Pitts and makes a motion outside with his head. Suddenly Pitts gets it.

PITTS

Oh. Right. That garden. Come on, guys.

The boys head out with Tina.

TINA

This is so strange! You guys even have a garden?

Meeks stands in the cave, still not getting it.

MEEKS

What are you guys talking about?

All of the others are gone. Meeks looks at Charlie, who stares daggers at him.

MEEKS

Charles, uh, Nuwanda, we don't have a garden.

Neil comes back in and pulls Meeks out. Charlie waits for them to go.

CHARLIE

(to Gloria)

God, for a smart guy, he's so stupid.

Gloria stares into Charlie's eyes. Charlie smiles.

GLORIA
I think he's sweet.

CHARLIE
I think you're sweet.

Charlie looks at her. He closes his eyes and leans slowly in to kiss her. Just as he is about to, she stands.

GLORIA
You know what really excites me about you?

CHARLIE
(blinking)
What?

GLORIA
Every guy that I meet wants me for one thing my body. You're not like that.

CHARLIE
I'm not?

GLORIA
No! Anybody else would have jumped my bones by now but you're after my soul. Make me up some more poetry.

CHARLIE
But...

GLORIA
Please! It's so wonderful to be appreciated for my mind!

She gets up and starts pacing. Charlie puts his hand over his face. Gloria turns and looks at him.

GLORIA
Nuwanda? Please?

CHARLIE
All right! I'm thinking!
(pause)
"Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds
Or bends with the remover to remove."

Gloria emits sensual moans.

GLORIA
Don't stop.

CHARLIE
(more and more rapidly and
punctuated by Gloria's
moans)
"O, no, it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never
shaken; It is the star to every
wandering bark whose worth's
unknown, although his height be
taken."

GLORIA
This is better than sex any day.
This is romance!

As a frustrated Charlie continues reciting...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WELTON ACADEMY CHAPEL - DAY

There is a buzz in the student body as they move to their seats, passing school newspapers amongst themselves. Knox's face is marked with bruises. Neil, Todd, Pitts, Necks, Cameron and especially Charlie's faces are marked with exhaustion. Pitts hands Charlie a briefcase.

PITTS
(low)
All set.

Charlie nods. Mr. Nolan enters. All put away the newspapers and stand. Nolan strides to the podium and motions for everyone to sit. All obey.

NOLAN
In this week's issue of Walter
Honor, there appeared an
unauthorized and profane article
about the need for girls at Welton.
Rather than spend my valuable time
ferreting out the guilty parties --
and let me assure you I will find
them -- I am asking any and all
students who know anything about
this article to make themselves
known here and now.
(MORE)

Whoever the Nolan (CONT'D) persons are,
 this is your only chance to avoid
 expulsion from this school.

Suddenly, somewhere in the room there is the sound of a
 TELEPHONE RINGING. Charlie briskly lifts the briefcase into
 his lap and opens it. Inside the briefcase is a ringing
 telephone. Everyone in assembly is astounded. No one has
 ever done something this outrageous here. Charlie,
 undaunted, seemingly serious, answers the phone.

CHARLIE (INTO PHONE)
 (for all to hear)
 Welton Academy, hello? Yes, he is,
 just a moment. Mr. Nolan, it's for
 you.

NOLAN
 What?!

Charlie places the receiver back to his ear.

CHARLIE (INTO PHONE)
 It is? You do? I'll tell him.
 Mr. Nolan, it's God. He says we
 should have girls at Welton.

There is a blast of laughter from the students. On stage
 with the teachers, Keating is surprised and amused, but
 worried. He and McAllister exchange concerned looks. Blood
 red, furious, Nolan strides down the aisle to Charlie. He
 sweeps the phone off of Charlie's lap.

NOLAN
 I will not be mocked, Mr. Dalton!

He takes Charlie by the arm and jerks him out of the
 assembly. Keating watches with concern.

INT. NOLAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Charlie stands in the middle of the room. Nolan paces
 furiously.

NOLAN
 Who else was involved in this?

CHARLIE
 No one, sir. It was just me. I
 did the proofing so I inserted my
 article in place of Rob Crane's.

NOLAN

Mr. Dalton, if you think you're the first to try to get thrown out of this school, think again. Others have had similar actions and they have failed just as surely as you will fail. Bend over and grab your shins.

Charlie obeys and Nolan produces a paddle. The paddle has holes drilled in it to speed its progress. Nolan takes off his jacket and moves behind Charlie.

NOLAN

Count aloud, Mr. Dalton.

He slams the paddle into Charlie's buttocks.

CHARLIE

One...

Nolan swings the paddle again. This time he gets more power into it. Charlie winces.

CHARLIE

Two...

Nolan delivers and Charlie counts. By the fourth lick, the pain is so intense that Charlie is barely audible. By the seventh lick, tears are flowing down Charlie's cheeks. The ninth and tenth licks have Charlie choking on his words, speechless. Nolan stops after ten licks.

NOLAN

Do you still insist that this was your idea and your idea alone?

CHARLIE

(choking back pain)

Yes... sir.

NOLAN

What is this "Dead Potts Society"?
I want names.

CHARLIE

(still in agony)

It's only me, Mr. Nolan. I swear.
I made it up.

NOLAN

If I find that there are others,
Mr. Dalton, they will be expelled
and you will remain enrolled.
Stand up.

Charlie obeys. His face is blood red. He fights back tears
of pain and humiliation.

NOLAN

Welton can forgive, Mr. Dalton,
provided you have the courage to
admit your mistakes. When you are
ready to make your apology to the
entire school, let me know.

INT. THE JUNIOR DORM - AFTERNOON

The boys are milling in their rooms, waiting for Charlie's
return. Someone sees him coming. All pretend to be
studying.

Charlie enters, moving slowly, trying not to show his pain.
As he walks toward his room, Neil, Todd, Knox (bruised face),
Pitts, and Necks approach him.

NEIL

What happened? Were you kicked
out?

CHARLIE

(not looking at anyone)
No.

NEIL

What happened?

CHARLIE

I'm supposed to turn everybody in,
apologize to the school and all
will be forgiven.

Charlie heads into his room. The others look at each other.

NEIL

What are you going to do?..
Charlie?

CHARLIE

Damn it, Neil, the name is Nuwanda.

Charlie gives the boys a pregnant look, then goes into his room and slams his door. Smiles of admiration cross the boys' faces. Charlie has not been broken.

INT. WELTON CLASSROOM BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Keating walks down the corridor. He is just about to stop and talk to McAllister when Nolan passes.

NOLAN

Mr. Keating, could we have a word?

INT. KEATING'S EMPTY CLASSROOM - DAY

Keating and Nolan enter. Keating turns on the light. Nolan looks around.

NOLAN

This was my first classroom, John, did you know that?

(looks at Keating's desk)

My first desk.

KEATING

I didn't know you taught.

NOLAN

English. Way before your time. It was hard giving it up, I'll tell you.

(pause)

I'm hearing rumors, John, of some unusual teaching methods in your classroom. I'm not saying they have anything to do with the Dalton boy's outburst, but I don't think I have to warn you that boys his age are very impressionable.

KEATING

Your reprimand made quite an impression I'm sure.

NOLAN

(letting this pass)

What was going on in the courtyard the other day?

KEATING

Courtyard?

NOLAN

Boys marching. Clapping in unison.

KEATING

Oh that. That was an exercise to prove a point. About the evils of conformity.

NOLAN

John, the curriculum here is set. It's proven. It works. If you question it, what's to prevent them from doing the same?

KEATING

I always thought education was learning to think for yourself.

NOLAN

(almost laughs)

At these boys' age? Not on your life! Tradition, John. Discipline.

(pats Keating on the shoulder)

Prepare them for college, and the rest will take care of itself.

Mr. Nolan smiles and leaves. Keating stands, thinking. After a beat, McAllister sticks his head in the door.

MCALLISTER

I wouldn't worry about the boys being too conformist if I were you.

KEATING

Why is that?

MCALLISTER

Well, you yourself graduated from these hallowed halls, did you now?

KEATING

Yes?

MCALLISTER

So if you want to raise a confirmed atheist, give him a rigid religious upbringing. Works every time.

Keating stares at McAllister. He suddenly lets out a laugh. McAllister smiles, then disappears down the hall.

INT. THE JUNIOR CLASS DORM - AFTERNOON

Boys are walking out on the way to their activities. Keating enters and approaches Charlie, who is exiting with his friends.

CHARLIE
(surprised)
Mr. Keating!

KEATING
I don't know what misguided impulse caused you to pull that ridiculous stunt, Mr. Dalton, but, whatever it was, I hope you've learned your lesson.

CHARLIE
You're siding with Mr. Nolan?!
What about carpe diem and sucking all the marrow out of life and all that?

KEATING
Sucking out the marrow doesn't mean getting the bone stuck in your throat, Charles. You still have responsibilities to yourself and those who care about you.

CHARLIE
But I thought...

KEATING
There is a place for daring and a place for caution as well, Charles, and a wise person understands which one is called for. Getting expelled from this school is not an act of wisdom. It's far from perfect but there are still opportunities to be had here.

CHARLIE
Yeah? Like what?

KEATING
Like, if nothing else, the opportunity to attend my classes, understand?

CHARLIE
 (smiling)
 Yes sir.

KEATING
 So keep your head about you -- the
 lot of you -- understood?

NEIL, TODD, PITTS, MEEKS, CAMERON,
 KNOX
 Yes, Sir.

Keating gives them a slight smile, then exits.

INT. KEATING'S CLASSROOM - DAY

The boys are seated. Keating walks to the blackboard and in
 a big scrawl writes: "COLLEGE."

KEATING
 Gentlemen, today we will consider a
 skill which I consider
 indispensable for getting the most
 out of college analyzing books you
 haven't read. College will
 probably destroy your love for
 poetry. Hours of boring analysis,
 dissection and criticism will see
 to that. College will also expose
 you to all manner of literature --
 much of it transcendent works of
 magic which you must devour; some
 of it utter drek which you must
 avoid like the plague.

Keating pauses.

KEATING
 Suppose you are taking a course
 entitled "Modern Novels." All
 semester you have been reading
 masterpieces such as the touching
Pere Gorier by Balzac and the
 moving Fathers and Sons by
 Turgenev, but when you receive your
 assignment for your final paper,
 you discover that you are to write
 an essay on the theme of parental
 love in The Doubtful Debutante, a
 novel -- and I use that term
 generously here -- by none other
 than the professor himself.

Keating looks at the boys with a raised eyebrow, then continues.

KEATING

After reading the first three pages of the book, you realize that you would rather volunteer for combat than waste your precious earthly time infecting your mind with this sewage, but do you despair? Take an "F." Absolutely not because you are prepared.

Keating paces.

KEATING

Open The Doubtful Deb and learn from the jacket that the book is about Frank, a farm equipment salesman who sacrifices everything to provide his social climbing daughter Christine with the debut she so desperately desires. Begin your essay by disclaiming the need to restate the plot while at the same time regurgitating enough of it to convince the professor that you've read his book. Next shift to something pretentious and familiar. For instance, you might write, "What is remarkable to note are the similarities between the author's dire picture of parental love and modern Freudian theory. Christine is Electra, her father is a fallen Oedipus." Finally, skip to the obscure and elaborate like this:

Keating pauses, then...

KEATING

"What is most remarkable is the novel's uncanny connection with Hindu Indian philosopher Avesh Rahesh Non. Rahesh Non discussed in painful detail the discarding of parents by children for the three headed monster of ambition, money, and social success. Go on to discuss Rahesh Non's theories about what feeds the monster, how to behead it, etcetera etcetera.

(MORE)

KEATING (CONT'D)
 End by praising the professor's
 brilliant writing and consummate
 courage in introducing The Doubtful
Deb to you.

Meeks raises his hand.

MEEKS

Oh Captain, My Captain. What if we
 don't know anything about someone
 like Rahesh Non?

KEATING

Rahesh Non never existed, Mr.
 Meeks. You make him or someone
 like him up. No self important
 college professor such as this one
 would dare admit ignorance of such
 an obviously important figure and
 you will probably receive a comment
 similar to the one I received:

Keating finds a paper on his desk and reads from it:

KEATING

Your allusions to Rahesh Non were
 insightful and well presented.
 Glad to see that someone besides
 myself appreciates this great but
 forgotten Eastern master. A plus.

He drops the paper.

KEATING

Gentlemen, analyzing dreadful books
 you haven't read will be on your
 final exam, so I suggest you
 practice on your own. Now for some
 traps of college exams. Take out a
 blue book and pencil, boys. This
 is a pop quiz.

The boys obey. Keating passes out tests. He sets up a
 screen in the front of the room, then goes to the back of the
 room and sets up a slide projector.

KEATING

Big universities are crowded Sodoms
 and Gomorrahs filled with those
 delectable beasts we see so little
 of here: females.

(MORE)

The level ~~of distraction~~ ^{KEATING (CONT'D)} is dangerously high, but this quit is designed to prepare you. Let me warn you, this test will count. Begin.

The boys begin their tests. Keating puts a slide in the projector. On the screen in the front of the room appears a blow-up of a beautiful girl, college age, leaning over to pick up a pencil. Her figure is quite remarkable, and, bending over as she is, you can see her panties. The boys glance up from their tests, then most do a double-take on the photo.

KEATING

Concentrate on your tests, boys.
You have twenty minutes.

Keating changes the slide. This time we see a beautiful woman in scanty lingerie (an ad from "Vogue" or a similar magazine). The boys find it extremely difficult to concentrate on their tests. The slide show continues with slide after slide of beautiful women in revealing and provocative poses, tight blow-ups of naked female Greek statues, etc. The boys try in vain to take their tests. Knox writes "Chris, Chris, Chris" over and over on his paper.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE WELTON CAMPUS - DUSK

Boys in heavy-hooded jackets and winter mufflers move from building to building. The wind blows leaves around in swirling torrents.

ANGLE ON A PATH where Todd and Neil walk together. Todd holds a copy of "A Midsummer's Night's Dream." Neil is using his Puck jester's stick like a sword while practicing his lines.

NEIL

Here, villain, draw and ready.
Where art thou?

TODD

(reading)
I will be with thee straight.

NEIL

(from memory)
Follow me then to plainer ground.
God, I love this!

TODD

This play?

NEIL

Yes, and acting! It's got to be one of the most wonderful things in the world. Most people, if they're lucky, live about half an exciting life! If I could get the parts, I could live dozens of lives.

With a theatrical flourish, he runs and leaps onto a wall.

NEIL

To be or net to be, that is the question! God, for the first time in my whole life, I feel completely alive! You have to try it.

Neil jumps down from the wall.

NEIL

You should come to rehearsals. I know they need people to work the lights and stuff.

TODD

No thanks.

NEIL

Lots of girls. The girl who plays Hermia is incredible.

TODD

I'll come to the performance.

NEIL

Chicken shit. Where were we?

TODD

Yea, art thou there?

NEIL

Put more into it!

TODD

YEA, ART THOU THERE?!

NEIL

That's it! "Follow my voice. We'll try no manhood here." See you at dinner.

Neil and Todd have arrived at their dorm. Neil runs in. Todd shakes his head and walks off.

INT. TODD AND NEIL'S DORM ROOM - DUSK

Neil enters in a whirlwind of excitement, fencing the air with the Jester's stick. Neil turns and sees his father, sitting at his desk. Neil is shocked.

NEIL

Father!

MR. PERRY

Neil, you are going to quit this ridiculous play immediately.

NEIL

Father, I...

Mr. Perry jumps to his feet and pounds his hand on the desk.

MR. PERRY

Don't you dare talk back to me!
It's bad enough that you've wasted
your time with this absurd acting
business. But you deliberately
deceived me!

(paces furiously)

Who put this in your head? How did
you expect to get away with it?
Answer me!

NEIL

Nobody... I thought I'd surprise
you. I've got all As and...

MR. PERRY

Did you really think I wouldn't
find out?! "My niece is in a play
with your son," Mrs. Marks says.
"You must be mistaken," I say. "My
son isn't in a play." You made a
liar out of me, Neil! Now you will
go tomorrow and tell them you are
quitting.

NEIL

Father, I have the main part. The
performance is tomorrow night.
Father, please.

MR. PERRY

(moves at Neil)

I don't care if the world is coming to an end tomorrow night, you are through with that play! Is that clear? Is that clear!

NEIL

Yes sir.

Mr. Perry stops. He stares hard at his son.

MR. PERRY

I've made great sacrifices to get you here, Neil. You will not let me down.

He turns and exits. Neil stands there for a long time. He goes to his desk, then suddenly begins pounding his fist on it. He pounds and pounds as tears roll down his face.

INT. THE WELTON DINING ROOM - EVENING

All of the society "pledges" except Neil sit eating. It could be noticed that the boys -- Charlie, Knox, Todd, Weeks, and Pitts -- seem to be having difficulty eating. They look awkward. Old Hager approaches.

HAGER

Mr. Dalton, what is wrong, son?
Are you having difficulty with your meal?

CHARLIE

No.

Hager watches the boys.

HAGER

Misters Necks and Overstreet and Anderson, are you normally left-handed?

BOYS

No sir.

HAGER

Then why are you eating with your left hands?

The boys look at each other. Knox speaks for the group:

KNOX

We thought it would be good to
break old habits, sir.

HAGER

What is wrong with old habits, Mr.
Overstreet?

KNOX

They perpetuate mechanical living,
sir. They limit your mind.

HAGER

Mr. Overstreet, I suggest you worry
less about breaking old habits and
more about developing good study
habits. Do you understand?

KNOX

Yes sir.

HAGER

That goes for all of you. Now eat
with your correct hands.

Hager watches. The boys obey. After he moves away, Charlie switches hands and begins eating with his left hand again. One by one, the others do the same. Neil enters, looking solemn and upset. He silently takes his seat at the table.

NEIL

Visit from my father.

TODD

Do you have to quit the play?

NEIL

I don't know.

CHARLIE

Why don't you talk to Mr. Keating
about it?

NEIL

What good will that do?

CHARLIE

Maybe he'll have some advice.
Maybe he'll even talk to your
father.

NEIL
 Are you kidding? Don't be
 ridiculous.

EXT. KEATING'S ROOM - EVENING

Keating's quarters are on the second floor of a dorm, but they are entered from the outside. Charlie, Todd, Pitts1 and Neil stand outside the door. Charlie knocks.

NEIL
 This is stupid.

CHARLIE
 It's better than doing nothing. No
 one comes to the door.

NEIL
 He's not here.

Charlie tries the door and it opens.

CHARLIE
 Let's wait for him.

Charlie goes in.

OTHERS
 Charlie! Nuwanda!

Charlie doesn't come out. Curiosity gets the best of the others, who reluctantly follow Charlie in.

INT. KEATINGS ROOM - SAME

The furniture is simple and spartan and the room looks almost lonely. The boys stand around looking uncomfortable.

PITTS
 (low)
 Nuwanda, we shouldn't be in here.

Charlie and the boys survey the room. There is a suitcase on the floor by the door. A few books lay by the bed. Charlie walks to the desk.

CHARLIE
 Whoa, look at her!

On the desk is a framed picture of a beautiful girl in her 20s. Lying next to the picture is a half-written letter. Charlie picks it up and reads.

CHARLIE

(reading)

My darling Jessica. It's so lonely
at times without you bla bla bla.
All I can do to put myself at ease
is study your beautiful picture or
close my eyes and imagine your
radiant smile -- but my poor
imagination is a dim substitute for
you. Oh, how I miss you and
wish...

The other boys have sensed an extra presence in the room.
They back away from Charlie. Suddenly Charlie stops and sees
Mr. Keating.

CHARLIE

Hello!

Keating calmly takes the letter from Charlie and folds it.

KEATING

A woman is a cathedral, boys.
Worship at one every chance you
get.

He opens a drawer.

KEATING

Anything else you'd care to rifle
through, Mr. Dalton?

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. I, we...

Keating puts the letter in the drawer and closes it. Charlie
looks around for help. Neil steps forward.

NEIL

Oh Captain, My Captain, we came
here so I could talk to you about
something.

KEATING

Okay.

NEIL

Actually, I'd like to talk to you
alone.

Charlie and the others are glad to be let out.

PITTS
I gotta go study.

OTHERS
Yeah. See you, Mr. Keating.

They hurry to leave.

KEATING
Drop by any time.

BOYS
Thank you, sir.

PITTS
(low, while exiting)
Damn it, Nuwanda. You idiot.

CHARLIE
(also exiting)
I couldn't stop myself.

Keating can't help but smile to himself. Neil and Mr. Keating are alone. Neil paces, looking around.

NEIL
Gosh, they don't give you much room around here, do they?

KEATING
(wryly)
Maybe they don't want worldly things distracting me from my teaching.

NEIL
Why do you do it? I mean, with all this seize-the-day business, I'd have thought you'd be out seeing the world or something?

KEATING
Ah, but I am seeing the world, Neil. The new world. Seeing a student like you take root and bloom. It's worth everything. That's why I came back here. A place like this needs at least one teacher like me.
(smiles at his joke, then:)
Did you come here to talk about my teaching?

NEIL

Mr. Keating, my father is making me quit the play at Henley Hall. When I think about carpe diem and all that, I feel like I'm in prison! I mean, I can see his point. We're not a rich family like Charlie's. But he's planned the rest of my life for me and he's never even asked me what I want!

KEATING

You can't live a life for someone else, Neil. You can only live for yourself. Have you told your father what you just told me? Have you shown him your passion about acting?

NEIL

Are you kidding? He'd kill me!

KEATING

Then you're playing a part for him too, aren't you? A dangerously self-destructive one.

Keating watches Neil pace anxiously.

KEATING

Neil, I know this seems impossible but you have to go to your father and show him what you're feeling. You have to let him see who you are. It's your only chance.

NEIL

I know what he'll say. He'll say that acting is just a whim and that it's frivolous and that I should forget about it. He'll tell me how they're counting on me and to put it out of my mind "for my own good."

KEATING

Well, if it's more than a whim, then you'll have to prove that to him. You'll have to show him with your passion and commitment that it's what you really want to do.

(MORE)

KEATING (CONT'D)
 If that doesn't work, at least by
 then you'll be eighteen and able to
 do what you want.

NEIL
 Eighteen! That's two years! What
 about the play? The performance is
 tomorrow night!

KEATING
 Give your father the benefit of the
 doubt. Talk to him. Let him see
 who you are.

NEIL
 Isn't there an easier way?

KEATING
 Not if you're going to stay true to
 yourself.

Neil sits there for a long time.

INT. CHARLIE'S CAVE - NIGHT

The boys sit in the candle-lit room. Charlie blows notes on
 his saxophone. Knox sits in the corner, mumbling to himself,
 working on a love poem to Chris. Todd sits writing something
 too. Cameron is studying. Pitts is scratching a quote out
 of a book into the wall. Knox looks at his watch.

KNOX
 Ten minutes to curfew.

Nobody responds. Knox looks at Todd.

KNOX
 What are you writing?

TODD
 I don't know. A poem.

KNOX
 For class?

TODD
 I don't know.

Charlie keeps playing the sax. Todd keeps writing. Knox
 looks at his love poem to Chris. He slaps it on the side of
 his leg.

KNOX

Damn. Damn! If I could just get
Chris to read this poem!

PITTS

Why don't you read it to her? It
worked for Nuwanda.

KNOX

She won't even see me, Pitts.

PITTS

Nuwanda recited poetry to Gloria
and she jumped all over him...
right, Nuwanda?

Charlie stops blowing on his sax. He thinks a moment about
his answer.

CHARLIE

Absolutely.

He starts blowing notes again. Off in the distance, we hear
a bell ring. Charlie finishes his melody, puts his sax in
its case, and moves out. Todd, Cameron, and Pitts exit too.
Knox stands there, alone, looking at his poem, then exits
determinedly.

KNOX

Damn! Goddam! If it worked for
him, it'll work for me.

EXT. THE WELTON GROUNDS - EARLY MORNING

The dawn rises over the frozen Welton campus. Snow covers
the ground. The school bagpiper stands, playing a haunting
melody.

EXT. THE JUNIOR DORMITORY - SAME

Knox comes out of the dorm building, bundled against the
freezing weather. He hurries onto his bike and speeds away.

EXT. RIDGEWAY HIGH SCHOOL

A large sign proclaims Ridgeway High School. Knox bikes up
to the school at full speed. He now carries a bouquet of
flowers. Out of breath, he quickly discards the bike and
runs into the school.

INT. THE HALLWAYS OF RIDGEWAY HIGH - MORNING

Students of both sexes move through the hallways of this public school. Students are at their lockers, putting up their coats and getting out their books. Knox runs through, erratically looking around. He hurries down one hallway, stops and asks a student something, then runs up a flight of stairs.

INT. ANOTHER RIDGEWAY HIGH HALLWAY - SAME

Chris stands in front of her locker, chatting with a couple of girlfriends, taking out some books. Knox spots her and approaches.

KNOX

Chris!

CHRIS

Knox! What are you doing here?

She pulls Knox away from her girlfriends.

KNOX

I came to apologize for the other night. I brought you these and a poem I wrote.

He holds out the flowers and the poem. Chris sees them, but doesn't take them.

CHRIS

If Chet sees you, he'll kill you, don't you know that?

KNOX

I don't care. I love you, Chris. You deserve better than Chet and I'm it. Please accept these.

CHRIS

Knox, you're crazy.

A bell rings. People clear the halls.

KNOX

Please. I acted like a jerk and I know it. Please?

She looks at the flowers as if she's thinking about accepting them.

CHRIS

No! And stop bugging me.

She walks into the classroom and closes the door. The hallway clears. Knox stands holding his flowers and his poem. There is a moment's hesitation, then he opens the door and walks into the classroom.

INT. CHRIS' CLASSROOM - SAME

Class hasn't started but students are taking their seats. The teacher leans over a student's desk, helping her with her homework. Knox enters and walks to Chris' desk.

CHRIS

Knox, I don't believe this!

KNOX

All I'm asking you to do is listen.

(he opens his poem and
reads)

"The heavens made a girl named Chris,
With hair and skin of gold
To touch her would be paradise
To kiss her glory untold."

Chris turns red with embarrassment. Her friends restrain giggles. Knox continues reading.

KNOX

"They made a goddess and called her Chris,
How? I'll never know.
But though my soul is far behind,
My love can only grow."

The rest of the class has now seen what is happening and all eyes are on Knox. Chris covers her face but Knox continues.

KNOX

"I see a sweetness in her smile,
Bright light shines from her eyes,
But life is complete -- contentment
is mine, just knowing that she's
alive."

Knox lowers the poem. Chris looks up at him, utterly embarrassed. Knox puts the poem and the flowers on her desk.

KNOX

I love you, Chris.

He turns and leaves.

INT. KEATING'S ENGLISH CLASSROOM - DAY

The boys sit. Keating hasn't arrived. Momentarily, Knox enters and hurries to his desk.

CHARLIE

How'd it go? Did you read it to her?

KNOX

Yep.

PITTS

All right! What'd she say?

KNOX

I don't know.

CHARLIE

What do you mean you don't know?

KNOX

I'll tell you later.

The door to the room opens. In walks Keating, wearing his usual scarf and jacket. He puts his books on his desk, then looks out over the class.

KEATING

Neil, could I see you a moment.

He walks into the hallway.

INT. THE HALLWAY OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM - SAME

The corridor is empty except for Neil and Keating. Keating closes the door to the classroom.

KEATING

What did your father say? Did you talk to him?

NEIL

(lying)

Yeah.

KEATING

Really? You told your father what you told me? You let him see your passion for acting?

NEIL

Yeah. He didn't like it one bit but at least he's letting me stay in the play. Of course, he won't be able to come. He'll be in Chicago on business. But I think he's gonna let me stay with acting. As long as I keep my grades up.

Neil heads back into the classroom. Keating watches.

INT. THE DORM PHONE ROOM/STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Todd, Knox, Cameron, Pitts, and Meeks all wear coats and ties. They mill in the dorm lobby. Knox is off to himself, still looking morose.

MEEKS

Where's Nuwanda? We're gonna miss Neil's entrance.

PITTS

He said something about getting red before he left.

CAMERON

What the hell does that mean?

PITTS

You know Charlie.

Charlie scampers down the stairs.

MEEKS

What's this getting red?

Charlie checks around, then opens his shirt, revealing that he has painted a red lightning bolt on his chest.

TODD

What's it for?

CHARLIE

It's an Indian warrior symbol for virility. Makes me feel potent. Like I can drive girls crazy.

PITTS

But what if they see it, Nuwanda?

CHARLIE

(winks)
So much the better.

The others shoot each other looks, confirming their mutual suspicion that Charlie has finally lost his marbles. As they head out of the lobby, they pass Chris who is entering.

KNOX

Chris!

CHRIS

Knox, why are you doing this to me?

KNOX

(looking around)

You can't be in here.

He leads her out of the dorm.

EXT. THE DORM BUILDING - NIGHT

It is snowing. Knox ushers Chris out of the building and down the sidewalk away from the others.

KNOX

If they catch you here, we'll both be in big trouble.

CHRIS

Oh, but it's fine for you to come barging into my school and make a complete fool out of me?

KNOX

I didn't mean to make a fool of you.

CHRIS

Well, you did! Chet found out and he's nuts. It took everything I could do to keep him from coming here and killing you. You have to stop this stuff, Knox.

KNOX

But I love you.

CHRIS

You say that over and over but you don't even know me!

At the dorm, the others are waiting. Knox waves them on.

KNOX

Go ahead. I'll catch up.

The others walk on. Knox waits for them to disappear.

KNOX

Of course I know you! From the first time I saw you, I knew you had a wonderful soul.

CHRIS

Just like that?! You just knew?

KNOX

Of course just like that. That's how you always know when it's right.

CHRIS

And if it so happens that you're wrong? If it just so happens that I could care less about you?

KNOX

Then you wouldn't be here warning me about Chet.

This gives Chris pause.

CHRIS

Look, I've got to go. I'm gonna be late for the play.

KNOX

Are you going with Chet?

CHRIS

Chet? To a play? Are you kidding?

KNOX

Then come with me.

CHRIS

Knox, you are so infuriating!

KNOX

Just give me one chance. If you don't like me after tonight, I'll stay away forever.

CHRIS

Uh-huh.

KNOX

I promise. Dead Poets honor. Come with me tonight, then if you don't want to see me again, I swear I'll bow out.

CHRIS

God, if Chet found out he'd...

KNOX

Chet won't know anything. We'll sit in back and sneak away as soon as it's over.

CHRIS

Knox, if you promise that this will be the end of it...

KNOX

Dead Poets honor.

CHRIS

What is that?

KNOX

My word.

He crosses his heart with his fingers and looks sincere. He leads a reluctant Chris off.

CHRIS

I must be losing my mind.

INT. HENSLEY HALL AUDITORIUM AND STAGE - NIGHT

The auditorium is filled to near capacity with families, teachers and students. Charlie, Todd, Meeks, Cameron, and Pitts find seats in the back. They spot Mr. Keating a few rows over and wave at him. Beside him is Mr. McAllister.

The lights go down. A small musical accompaniment -- panpipes, bongos, triangle -- plays. The curtain rises. As the actors make their entrances, they are applauded by their friends and families.

As the actors begin the play, Charlie notices out of the corner of his eye Knox entering with Chris. They find seats and sit down together. Charlie shoots Knox a surprised look of excitement. Knox gives a little nod.

SHORT DISSOLVE
TO:

THE STAGE

Neil makes his entrance as Puck, he wears a crown of flowers. The members of the Dead Poets Society cheer loudly. For a moment Neil looks lost. Todd crosses his fingers.

NEIL (AS PUCK)

"Flow now, spirit. Wither wander
you?"

HIGH SCHOOL ACTOR (AS FAIRY)

"Over hill, over dale, through
bush, through brier..."

Keating glances back at the Dead Poets and gives them the thumbs up for luck for Neil. They acknowledge with gestures of their own.

NEIL (AS PUCK)

"Thou speakest aright: I am that
merry wanderer of the night. I jest
to Oberon and make him smile when I
a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a filly
foal..."

ANGLE ON THE "DEAD POETS"

intently watching the show. As Neil delivers his lines, getting laughs in the right places, Todd sits mouthing the lines with him, as if this might help Neil get through it. Neil clearly needs no help, though, and his performance is quite winning. Charlie leans to the others.

CHARLIE

(excited whisper)

He's good! He's goddamned good!

Someone from behind whispers "Sssh." Charlie whispers "sssh" back at them, then turns back and watches the show. Suddenly he does a double-take. He sees: Mr. Perry enters in the rear of the auditorium, and stands alone beside the door.

CHARLIE

Oh my God.

TODD

What?

Charlie indicates for the others to look. Todd and the others glance back and see Mr. Perry.

TODD

Jesus...

All turn back and watch the play, though they are now quite tense about Mr. Perry's presence.

THE PLAY

On stage are the characters of Lysander and Hermia. Hermia is played by Ginny Danburry, who is fetchingly dressed in a costume of leaves and twigs.

LYSANDER

"One turf shall serve as pillow for
us both, One heart, one bed, two
bosoms, and one troth."

GINNY (AS HERMIA)

"Nay good Lysander. For my sake,
my dear, Lie further off yet: do
not lie so near."

ANGLE ON THE DEAD POETS

Charlie is looking through the program.

CHARLIE

Hermia's Ginny Danburry. Knox is
crazy. She's beautiful!

Meeks holds his finger to his lips for Charlie to be quiet.

THE STAGE

GINNY (AS HERMIA)

"But gentle friend, for love and
courtesy Lie further off, in human
modesty. Such separation as may
well be said Becomes a virtuous
bachelor and a maid, So far be
distant: and goodnight, sweet
friend. Thy love ne'er alter till
they sweet life end."

Charlie sits absolutely enraptured by her.

ANGLE BACKSTAGE

Neil is hurriedly changing from his Puck costume into Puck's
"Robin" disguise. Neil's father approaches.

DR. PERRY
 (through gritted teeth)
 Neil. Get over here!

Neil is shocked to see his father.

NEIL
 Father!

DR. PERRY
 (furious - moving at Neil)
 I gave you orders and you
 deliberately disobeyed me!

Dr. Perry grabs Neil by the arm.

NEIL
 (pulling away)
 Father, I had to do it. Please,
 Father, I have to be on stage.

DR. PERRY
 You will not go back on stage!

Neil steps towards the stage, trying to wrench away from his father's grip. He inadvertently pulls his father onto the stage with him.

ANGLE ON THE STAGE

The audience stirs. Some laugh, thinking this is part of the play. Dr. Perry is furious.

DR. PERRY
 You will do as I say!

NEIL
 I'm sick of doing what you say!

Neil still tries to pull away. Dr. Perry, blood red with anger and embarrassment, slaps the struggling Neil across the face. The audience gasps. Many stand as if to do something. Dr. Perry drags the humiliated, protesting Neil off the stage.

EXT. THE AUDITORIUM PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Dr. Perry exits the auditorium holding the struggling, protesting Neil.

Todd, Charlie, Pitts, Cameron, Meeks, Knox, Chris, Mr. Keating, Jessica and a few others rush out of the auditorium.

They see Dr. Perry push Neil toward a car. Keating rushes to them. He puts a hand on Dr. Perry's arm.

KEATING

Dr. Perry, give Neil a chance to explain. He...

Dr. Perry shoves Keating away.

DR. PERRY

Don't you dare tell me how to raise my son!

Dr. Perry puts Neil in the car then gets in. Charlie starts to move at the car. Keating grabs him.

KEATING

Don't make it worse than it already is.

Dr. Perry starts his car and pulls away. Neil looks imploringly back at his friends as the car drives off.

TODD

NEIL!

EXT. THE CLUB CAVE - NIGHT

The wind is blowing. Todd, Charlie, Knox, Chris, Meeks, and Pitts are huddled for warmth.

KEATING

Don't make it worse than it already is.

Dr. Perry starts his car and pulls away. Neil looks imploringly back at his friends as the car drives off.

TODD

NEIL!

EXT. THE CLUB CAVE - NIGHT

The wind is blowing. Todd, Charlie, Knox, Chris, Meeks, and Pitts are huddled for warmth.

PITTS

Where's Cameron?

CHARLIE

Who knows? Who cares?

Charlie walks over to the wall of the cave and pounds it with his fist.

CHARLIE

Next time I see Dr. Perry I'm gonna
smash him. I don't care what
happens to me!

He strikes the wall again. Keating enters, Jessica at his
side. He looks at the faces of the boys.

KEATING

Let us have a moment of silence in
support of fellow pledge Perry.

The boys and Keating stand in silence. Momentarily Keating
looks at the boys.

KEATING

All right, we mustn't be glum.
Neil wouldn't want it that way.
Let us join with the howling night.

Keating walks off. The others follow. Chris looks at Knox.

CHRIS

Knox, what is going on here?

KNOX

You'll see.

CHRIS

I have to go home.

KNOX

It's just for a little while. You
promised.

Chris reluctantly follows Knox.

EXT. THE CAMPUS OF WELTON - NIGHT

The moon is full, the stars are out, the night is clear and
cold. Every tree is covered with icicles. A freeze has
turned the otherwise barren forest into a wintertime marvel.
Mother Nature has covered the world with sparkling diamonds.
Keating leads the boys up a wooded path to a cliff
overlooking the creek. The boys quickly gather sticks and a
fire is built.

KEATING

Would you like to convene the
meeting, Mr. Meeks?

MEEKS

"We went to the woods because we
wanted to suck all the marrow out
of life." Who wants to read?

.KEATING

Come on boys, don't be shy.

Keating produces a pocket knife and quickly whittles a stick
into a skewer. From a small brown paper bag he produces
pieces of raw food.

TODD

I have something.

Todd's volunteering surprises everyone. Todd steps forward
and takes some papers from his pocket. He passes slips of
paper to each of the others.

TODD

Everybody read this between verses.

Todd opens his poem and reads.

TODD

"We are dreaming of tomorrow and tomorrow
isn't coming,
We are dreaming of a glory that we
don't really want.
We are dreaming of a new day when the new day's
here already
We are running from the battle when it's one
that must be fought."

Todd nods. All read.

ALL

"And still we sleep."

TODD

"We are listening for the calling but
never really heeding,
Hoping for the future when the future's
only plans.
Dreaming of the wisdom that we are
dodging daily,
Praying for a savior when salvation's
in our hands."

ALL

"And still we sleep."

TODD

"And still we dream.
And still we pray
And still we fear
(pause)
And still we sleep."

Todd closes his poem. There is a big applause.

KEATING

Bravo, Mr. Anderson. Wonderful!

Todd nods, taking this all in. As he steps down he gets congratulatory slaps on the back. Keating begins putting the raw meat onto the skewer.

PITTS

What's that stuff, Mr. Keating?

KEATING

Food for thought, my boy.

He lays the skewer on the fire. Flames flare around the sizzling meat.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE PERRY HOME - INT. DR. PERRY'S CAR - NIGHT

Dr. Perry and Neil pull into the driveway in silence. Dr. Perry turns the engine off. He turns to Neil.

DR. PERRY

Son, I am trying very hard to understand why you insist on defying me. Whatever the reason, I am not going to let you ruin your life. Tomorrow I am withdrawing you from Welton and enrolling you in Norfolk Military School.

Tear well fresh in Neil's already bloodshot eyes.

NEIL

No, Father. Please...

DR. PERRY

You have opportunities I never had, Neil. I won't, let you squander them.

Dr. Perry opens his car door and gets out.

EXT. THE CLIFF ABOVE THE CREEK - NIGHT

Keating takes the skewer off the fire.

KEATING
Food, people.

He hands pieces of the food to the boys.

KEATING
For Mr. Dalton, marrow.

Charlie looks at the piece in front of him.

CHARLIE
(slightly disgusted)
Really?

KEATING
Absolutely, Charles.

All eyes are on Charlie. He takes the piece and eats anticipating disgust. A slight smile crosses his face.

CHARLIE
Hey, not bad.

He holds the bone to his mouth and makes a loud sucking sound. All laugh.

KEATING
For Mr. Meeks, brains.

More laughter. Meeks looks at the brains. He musters his courage, then shovels them down and chews. The thought of them clearly makes him a queasy but he keeps chewing.

KEATING
For Mr. Anderson... a tongue.

More laughter. Todd takes it in good humor and eats.

KEATING
For Mr. Overstreet and his friend,
a heart.

A chorus of mock sighs. All laugh. Chris looks in disgust at the heart she and Knox are supposed to eat.

CHRIS
Are you people crazy or what?

Knox eats some of the heart. Chris reluctantly does the same. The others applaud.

KEATING

And for the rest of us, toes.

He hands toes to Jessica and Pitts.

KEATING

The toe should be nibbled, I believe. Right Miss Jessica?

Jessica smiles then elbows Keating. Pitts tentatively nibbles a toe.

KEATING

The world offers such variety, people. We must rush at it with our mouths open and partake of it greedily.

He pops a toe into his mouth and, chews it with delight.

INT. A HALLWAY IN NEIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Down the hallway, in his bedroom, Dr. Perry is undressing. A door to another room opens and Neil walks into the hall. Unseen by his father, he turns a corner and moves off.

INT. DR. PERRY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Moonlight illuminates the room. There are a few medical plaques on the wall. The bookcases are full of medical books. Neil enters.

Neil stands looking around the study then walks to his father's desk. He sits for a moment looking at the objects on the desk: prescription pad, a stethoscope, a miniature gold plated heart that serves as a paper weight. Neil opens the top drawer and reaches in the back. From this he pulls out a key. With this key he unlocks the bottom drawer of the desk. Sitting in this drawer is a revolver.

EXT. THE CLIFF ABOVE THE CREEK - NIGHT

Keating kicks dirt on the fire and stands.

KEATING

And now same words from the poet
Vachel Lindsay. When I pause, you
ask, "Are you washed in the blood
of the Lamb?"

(recites)

(MORE)

KEATING (CONT'D)
 "Booth led Keating through his big
 brass drum..."

ALL

"Are you washed in the blood of the
 Lamb?"

Reciting loudly, Keating takes off trotting through the
 woods. All trot off after him:

KEATING

"The Saints smiled gravely and they
 said, 'He's come.'..."

ALL

"Are you washed in the blood of the
 Lamb?"

INT. DR. PERRY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Neil checks the chamber of the revolver. The gun is loaded.

EXT. THE CLIFF ABOVE THE CREEK, NIGHT.

We see the group following Keating through the woods, past
 icy trees, over snow covered hills, reciting Vachel Lindsay's
 poem, "General William Booth Enters Into Heaven".

KEATING

"Walking-lepers followed rank on rank,
 Lurching bravos from the ditches dank,
 Drabs from the alleyways and drug fiends pale-
 Minds still passion ridden, soul-powers frail:

ALL

"Are you washed in the blood of the
 Lamb?"

INT. DR. PERRY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Neil puts the gun to his temple. He stares into nowhere.

EXT. ATOP A HILL - NIGHT

Keating stands before a towering, frozen waterfall. This
 gorgeous, icy sculpture seems to defy the laws of gravity.
 The night sky is incredibly clear. The people in the group
 are lit by moonlight on the snow.

KEATING

"Christ came gently with a robe and crown,
 For Booth the soldier, while the throng knelt down.
 He saw King Jesus. They were face to face,
 And he knelt a-weeping in that holy place.

ALL
 "Are you washed in the blood of the
 Lamb?"

INT. DR. PERRY'S STUDY - NIGHT

Neil's finger slowly pulls the trigger of the gun. PAN away from Neil's face to the snowy view out the study window. We HEAR a GUNSHOT.

EXT. THE HILLTOP - SAME

Keating stops. He turns and looks at the fields, valley, and at the magnificent sky that surrounds them. All are out of breath, but exhilarated.

KEATING
 We may or may not be the stuff of
 eternity, people, but while we are
 here we are part of a vast, awesome
 magnificence.

He raises his hands to the heavens.

KEATING
 Don't waste a second of it, people.
 Exalt in it.

He holds his head back and shouts to the heavens.

KEATING
 ALIVE!! ALIVE!!

The others do the same. Shouts go up, cries of joy and ecstasy. Knox looks at Chris. Tears are streaming down both of their faces. They turn to each other and kiss. Passionately.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE CAMPUS - PRE-DAWN

Keating walks through the frozen snow with Jessica, Todd, Charlie, Pitts and Meeks. Chris and Knox are close behind, embracing and kissing. The majestic beauty of the snow covered surroundings as the sun begins to rise is breathtaking.

TODD
 Oh Captain, my Captain?

KEATING
 Yes Todd.

TODD
Are you dying?

This takes Keating aback. The others too. But they await Keating's answer.

KEATING
We're each of us dying, Mr. Anderson. I am simply dying faster. A rare trait, I'm told. Inherited from my father.

Todd and the boys look at Keating. Many want to cry but none do. Todd swallows hard.

TODD
Are you afraid?

KEATING
Every minute of every day. Though to be honest, I think I'm more afraid of being forgotten than of dying. The dead are treated frightfully, I think. They should be planted alongside football fields and golf courses, next to swimming pools and movie theaters. So they won't be alone.

TODD
Why are you teaching; why aren't you writing?

KEATING
I no longer find joy working alone in my room. I find it in teaching. Perhaps teaching is what I should have been doing all along.

TODD
Gosh, if it I were me, I'd want to be out seeing the world or something.

KEATING
Why Mr. Anderson, teaching is seeing the world. The new world. Seeing a student like you take root, ready to flower and bloom any day...

TODD

(low)

Tell it to my parents.

KEATING

Did it occur to you, Todd, that your parents could be dead wrong about you? How long have you been away at school? How many years?

TODD

Since I was eight.

KEATING

Then how are they qualified to pass judgment when they hardly know you! They simply aren't looking.

TODD

But why?

KEATING

I don't know and you don't know but whatever the reason, it's wrong! You know that, Todd.

Keating grabs a round icicle off of a tree and holds it up to the dawning sun.

KEATING

I hold in my hand a crystal ball. In it I see great things for Todd Anderson if he would only learn to stand up for what he knows.

(lowers the icicle and
faces Todd)

Believe in yourself, Todd Anderson. I do.

Todd looks at Keating. Tears well up in Todd's eyes. Suddenly Todd hugs the man. Keating hugs him back then turns to the others.

KEATING

Don't think I'm too ill do deliver a whale of a final exam or to grade you off severely if you confuse Wordsworth with Whitman. That goes for all of you. Now, go to bed. Miss Jessica and I have things to do.

He takes Jessica's hand and rushes off with her through the snow. He makes a snowball and chases her off into the woods.

INT. TODD'S DORM - DAWN

Todd enters. The room is getting it's first dose of the winter's morning light. Todd plops down on his bed and covers himself with his blankets. He turns, glances at Neil's empty bed, then closes his eyes.

INT. TODD'S DORM ROOM - MORNING

Todd sleeps in his bed. The door opens and in comes Charlie, Knox, and Meeks. They look shaken. They look at each other, then gently wake Todd.

CHARLIE

Todd. Todd...

Todd opens his eyes. He sits up, looking exhausted. His eyes adjust to the light, then he closes them and lies back down. He picks up his clock, squints at it.

TODD

Jesus, it's only eight. I gotta sleep.

He lies back down for a moment, then opens his eyes again. He sees the other boys, sitting there, staring at him. He senses something wrong. He sits up.

CHARLIE

Todd, Neil's dead. He shot himself.

Todd looks at Charlie for a minute. The other faces confirm what Charlie is saying.

TODD

Oh my God...

He starts to vomit. As he does, he runs out of the room. The other boys look at each other. Suddenly, Charlie breaks into tears. He covers his face with his hands.

INT. THE DORM BATHROOM - DAY

Todd is moving back and forth, tears streaming down his face. He hits the walls with his hand.

TODD

Someone has to know it was his
father! Neil wouldn't kill
himself! He loved living!

KNOX

You don't seriously think his
father...

TODD

Not with the gun! Damn it, even if
the bastard didn't pull the trigger
he....

Todd sobs. Finally he controls himself.

TODD

Even if Dr. Perry didn't shoot him,
he killed him. They have to know
that!

He runs across the room.

TODD

NEIL! NEIL!!!

He falls against the wall, sobbing uncontrollably.

INT. THE HONOR ROOM - LATER

The entire Junior class is assembled. Standing along the
walls are the teachers, Keating included. Nolan enters.

NOLAN

Gentlemen, the death of Neil Perry
is a tragedy. He was a fine
student one of Welton's best and he
will be missed. We have contacted
each of your explain the
situation. Naturally, all are
quite concerned. At the request of
Neil's family, I intend to conduct
a thorough inquiry into this
matter. Your complete cooperation
is expected.

INT. KEATING'S CLASSROOM - DAY

The room is dark. Todd, Knox, Charlie, Meeks and Pitts
enter. Keating stands solemnly in front of his desk. On the
blackboard behind him is written the following:

"On the Day of Judgement, Man will judge God."

KEATING

Life is not fair that we should
lose one so young and talented.

(pause)

I fully expected to be the first
lull fledged member of the Dead
Poets Society. It is with great
sadness that instead we must induct
Neil Perry. Do not go gentle into
that good night, Neil Perry. Rage,
rage against the dying of the
light.

There is a long silence as Keating stands motionless.
Suddenly Keating yells:

KEATING

RAGE!!

INT. DORM BATHROOM - DAY

Charlie, Todd, Knox, and Pitts stand waiting. There is a
knock on the door then Meeks enters.

MEEKS

I can't find him.

CHARLIE

You told him about this meeting?

MEEKS

Twice.

CHARLIE

Oh shit...

Charlie goes to the window and looks out across the lawn. In
the distance is the administration building.

CHARLIE

That's it guys, we're all fried.

PITTS

You don't know that. Maybe he...

CHARLIE

Cameron's a-fink! Why else wasn't
he at the last meetings? He's in
Nolan's office, right now, finking!

PITTS

But why? Why would he do that?

CHARLIE

To save himself.

Down the hall there is the sound of a door opening. Knox goes to the door and looks out. He sees:

Cameron opening the door to his room.

KNOX

(loud whisper)

Cameron... Cameron...

Cameron looks at Knox. Cameron looks away and goes into his room.

Knox turns back to the others. He is stunned.

KNOX

You're right.

INT. CAMERON AND CHARLIE'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Cameron is at the window, looking out. The door blasts open. There stands Charlie, the others crowding behind him.

CHARLIE

You finked, didn't you Cameron?

CAMERON

I don't know what you mean.

CHARLIE

You were the one who had Nolan search my room, and you just told Nolan everything about the club.

.CAMERON

In case you hadn't heard, Dalton, there's something called an Honor Code at this school. If a teacher asks you something, you tell the truth or you're expelled.

Charlie moves at Cameron.

CHARLIE

Why you...

Meeks and Knox restrain Charlie.

KNOX

Charlie...

CHARLIE

He's a rat! He's in up to his eyes
so he ratted to save himself!

KNOX

Don't touch him, Charlie. You do
and you're out!

CHARLIE

I'm out anyway!

KNOX

You don't know that. Not yet!

CAMERON

He's right there, Charlie. And if
you're smart, every one of you will
do exactly what I did and
cooperate. They're not after us.
We're the victims. Us and Neil.

CHARLIE

What does that mean? Who are they
after?

CAMERON

Why Mr. Keating, of course. The
"Captain" himself. You didn't
really think he could avoid
responsibility, did you?

CHARLIE

Mr. Keating? Responsible for Neil?
Is that what they're saying?!

He pulls himself free of Meeks and Knox's grips.

CAMERON

Who else do you think, you dumb
ass? The administration? Dr.
Perry? Keating put us up to all
this crap, didn't he? If it wasn't
for him Neil would be cosied up in
his room right now, studying his
chemistry and dreaming of being
called doctor.

TODD

That's not true! Mr. Keating
didn't tell Neil what to do. Neil
loved acting.

CAMERON

Believe what you want, but I say
let Keating fry. Why ruin our
lives?

CHARLIE

You fucking asshole.

Charlie bolts across the room and strikes Cameron across the
face. Cameron falls to the floor. Charlie stands over him.

KNOX

Charlie!

CAMERON

(at Charlie)

You just signed your expulsion
papers, "Nuwanda".

Cameron grabs a towel and holds it to his bleeding nose.
Charlie turns and walks out. The others walk out too.

CAMERON

(shouting after them)

If the rest of you guys are smart
you'll do exactly what I did! They
know everything anyway. You can't
save Keating but you can save
yourselves!

INT. TODD'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Neil's bed is stripped and his desk is empty. Todd sits at
his window, looking across the campus at the administration
building. Momentarily Meeks is escorted out by Dr. Sager.
Sager escorts Meeks across campus, back to the dorm.

INT. THE DORM HALLWAY - SAME

Todd peers out of the door of his room. Meeks and Sager
enter the hallway. Sager stops at the end of the hall.
Meeks walks silently back to his room. As he passes Todd, he
doesn't look at him. But tears stream down Meeks' face.
Meeks enters his room and shuts the door.

SAGER

Knox Overstreet.

Knox comes out of his room and joins Sager at the end of the
hall. The pair exit together. Momentarily, Todd walks across
the hall to Meeks's room. Todd knocks.

TODD
Meeks, it's Todd.

MEEKS (O.S.)
Go away, I have to study.

Todd pauses, realizing what has happened.

TODD
What happened to Charlie?

MEEKS (O.S.)
Expelled.

Todd stands stunned.

TODD
What'd you tell them?

MEEKS (O.S.)
Nothing they didn't already know.

Todd turns away.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TODD'S ROOM - LATER

Todd watches as Knox is escorted across campus and back to the dorm by Dr. Sager. Again Todd peers into the hall.

INT. THE DORM HALLWAY - SAME

Knox and Sager enter. Knox's chin is quivering. He is on the verge of a breakdown. He goes into his room and shuts the door.

Todd steps back into his room and leans against the wall. The fact that Knox has been broken clearly shakes him up. He breathes hard and looks up at the ceiling.

DR. SAGER (O.S.)
Todd Anderson.

INT. NOLAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Headmaster Nolan sits at his desk. On one side of the room is Dr. Perry. On the other side are Todd's parents (recognizable from the picture on Todd's desk). Todd enters with Dr. Sager. Todd sees Dr Perry, then his parents.

TODD
 (stunned)
 Mother. Dad.

Todd's parents stare at him.

MRS. ANDERSON
 I have never been so disappointed
 in my life.

MR. ANDERSON
 How could you do this after all
 we've done for you?

Todd's lip quivers. Nolan looks at Todd.

NOLAN
 Have a seat, Mr. Anderson.

There is an empty chair - like the prisoner's chair at an inquisition - in front of Nolan's desk. Todd sits. He looks at his parents who are still steely eyed. Perspiration breaks out all across Todd's brow.

NOLAN
 Mr. Anderson, I think we've pretty well put together what's happened here. You do admit to being a part of this Dead Poets Society?

Todd looks at his parents and Nolan. He closes his eyes. He starts to nod yes. Before he can, his father speaks.

MR. ANDERSON
 Answer him.

TODD
 (almost stuttering)
 Yes... sir. Yes. Yes sir.

NOLAN
 The regular members besides Neil were Knox Overstreet, Charles Dalton, Steven Meeks, Richard Cameron, Gerrard Pitts and you who acted as secretary. Any others?

TODD
 (softly looking at his
 parents, pleading with
 his eyes)
 No... No sir.

NOLAN

I can't hear you, Todd.

TODD

(not much louder than
before)

No sir. No sir.

Nolan looks at Todd then at the boy's parents. Nolan decides not to press the issue of Todd's inaudibility. Nolan holds up a piece of paper.

NOLAN

I have here a detailed description of what went on at your meetings. It describes how your teacher, Mr. Keating, encouraged you boys to organize the club and to use it as a source of inspiration for reckless, self indulgent behavior. It describes how Mr. Keating's behavior, both in and out of the classroom, encouraged Neil Perry to follow this obsession of acting when Mr. Keating knew it went directly against the explicit orders of Neil's family. It is Mr. Keating's blatant abuse of his position as a teacher that led directly to Neil Perry's death.

Nolan hands the paper to Todd.

NOLAN

Read this carefully, Todd. If you have nothing to add or amend, then sign it.

Todd takes this paper and reads it. He spends a long time doing so and by the time he finishes his hands and the paper are shaking. Todd looks up.

TODD

(to Nolan with great
difficulty speaking)

What... what is going to happen...
to Mr. Keating?

MRS. ANDERSON

What does that have to do with you?

NOLAN

(to Mrs. Anderson)

That's all right. I want him to know.

(to Todd)

We are not yet clear as to whether Mr. Keating has broken any laws. If he has he will be prosecuted. What we can do - and yours and the others' signatures will help to guarantee it - is see to it that Mr. Keating will never teach again.

TODD

(tears flowing down his face)

Never... teach...

Todd's father stands and moves toward Todd.

MR. ANDERSON

I've had enough. Sign the paper, Todd.

TODD

But... teaching is all he has... It means everything to him.

MR. ANDERSON

What do you care?

TODD

(cold)

What do you care about me? He cares about me. You don't.

Todd's father stands over him and picks up the pen.

MR. ANDERSON

Sign the paper, Todd.

Todd shakes his head no.

TODD

I won't sign it.

MR. ANDERSON

Todd!

TODD

It's not true! I won't sign it.

Todd's father grabs the pen and tries to put it back in Todd's hand. Nolan stands.

NOLAN

That's all right! We don't need his signature. Let him suffer the consequences.

Nolan walks around his desk to Todd.

NOLAN

You think you can save Mr. Keating? You saw it, boy, we have the signatures of all the others. But, if you don't sign, you're on disciplinary probation for the rest of the year. You'll do work duty every afternoon and every Saturday. And, if you set foot off campus, you'll be expelled.

Todd's parents and Mr. Nolan watch Todd, waiting for him to change his mind. Todd thinks, then:

TODD

I won't sign.

NOLAN

Then I'll see you back here after classes. You may go.

Todd stands and exits. Nolan looks at Todd's parents.

NOLAN

Don't worry. We'll bring him around.

INT. THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Todd, Knox, Meek, Pitts, Cameron and the rest of the class are there. Conspicuously empty are Neil's desk and Charlie's desk. Todd looks numb, his gaze downward, reminding us of the way he looked when we first met him. Knox, Meeks, and Pitts look humiliated. All of the former club members are too ashamed of themselves to look at one another. Only Cameron looks halfway normal. He sits at his desk studying as though nothing had happened.

The door opens. In strides Mr. Nolan. All stand. Nolan sits at the teacher's desk. All sit down.

NOLAN

Since the semester is so near to a close, I will be taking over this class through exams. We will find a permanent English teacher during the Christmas holidays. Who would like to tell me where you are in the Hutton textbook?

Nolan looks around. There are no volunteers.

NOLAN

Mr. Anderson?

TODD

(softly, barely audible)
The... Hutton...

Todd looks through his books. He fumbles nervously.

NOLAN

I can't hear you, Mr. Anderson.

TODD

(still low)
I... think we...

NOLAN

(exasperated with this)
Mr. Cameron, kindly inform me.

CAMERON

We skipped around a lot, sir. We covered the romantics and most of the chapters on post civil war literature.

NOLAN

What about the realists?

CAMERON

I believe we skipped most of that.

Nolan flips through the text. The door to the classroom opens. Mr. Keating enters.

KEATING

(to Nolan)
I came for my personals. Should I wait until after class?

NOLAN

Absolutely not. Get your things
and get out.

(to the class)

Gentlemen, turn to page fifty four.
Mr. Cameron, read aloud the poem by
Eugene Field.

CAMERON

Mr. Nolan, that page has been
ripped out.

NOLAN

Then borrow somebody else's book.

CAMERON

They're all ripped out, sir.

NOLAN

(staring at Keating)

What do you mean they're all ripped
out?

CAMERON

Sir we...

NOLAN

Never mind, Cameron.

He carries his textbook to Cameron's desk.

NOLAN

Here. Read.

CAMERON

"Little Boy Blue" by Eugene Field:
"The little toy dog is covered with dust,
But sturdy and stanch he stands.
And the little toy soldier is red with rust,
And his musket moulds in his hands..."

As Cameron continues reading, Keating, who is at the closet
in the front corner of the room, looks out at the students.
He sees Todd, whose eyes are full of tears. He sees Knox,
Meeks, Pitts, too shamed to look him in the eye but
nevertheless full of emotion. The irony of Nolan choosing
the "Little Blue Boy" is too incredible.

Keating finishes his packing. He walks across the room
towards the door. Just as Keating reaches the door, Todd can
no longer hold it in.

TODD
 (interrupting Cameron's
 reading)
 Mr. Keating, they made them sign
 it!

KEATING
 I know that, Todd.

NOLAN
 Quiet, Mr. Anderson! Leave, Mr.
 Keating!

TODD
 But it wasn't his fault, Mr. Nolan!
 Neil's father did it. Neil wanted
 to be an actor more than anything.

Nolan strides down the aisle and slaps Todd mightily. The boy falls to the floor.

NOLAN
 One more outburst, Mr. Anderson!
 (turns to the class)
 Or anyone else! And you are out of
 this school!

He turns toward Keating who has taken a few steps back towards Todd as though to help.

NOLAN
 Leave now.

Keating stands facing Nolan. He turns and faces the class.

KEATING
 Wonderful things are possible if we
 only dare dream them, boys. Be
 bold.

NOLAN
 GET OUT!

The boys stare at Keating. He stares at them, taking them in for the last time. Keating turns and moves towards the door.

TODD
 Oh Captain!

Keating turns. So does everybody else. Todd pulls himself off the floor, props one foot up on his desk then stands up on it. He stands atop his desk, holding back tears, facing Mr. Keating.

NOLAN
(moving at him)
You little...

As Nolan moves down the aisle, Knox (whose seat is on the other side of the room) calls Mr. Keating's name and stands up on his desk too. Nolan turns and sees this. Meeks musters his courage and stands on his desk. Pitts does the same. One by one and then in groups, the rest of the class follows suit. Soon the entire class is standing on their desks in silent salute to Mr. Keating.

Nolan who started at Todd, then at Overstreet, stands motionless. He is amazed by this overwhelming response.

Keating stands at the door, tears welling in his eyes.

KEATING
Thank you, boys.

Keating looks into Todd's eyes, then into all their eyes, gives a nod, then exits.

ANGLE ON each of the members of the Dead Poets Society standing on their desks:

MEEKS

PITTS

KNOX

and finally, TODD, who is holding back tears but standing proud.

BLACKOUT.