

# THE ♠RDTURNER

WRITTEN BY

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BASED ON THE NOVEL

THE CARDTURNER

BY LOUIS SACHAR

FADE IN:

ON A POOL OF WHITE LIGHT -

TIGHT ON KATIE, a beautiful teen laughing, in SLO-MO, her hair blowing in an open backseat window. Flooded in an angelic white glow.

REVERSE: Also in SLO-MO, her teen boyfriend, Alton, laughs along, staring at her from the adjacent backseat. Then we're back on Katie. And then...

INT. HONDA (MOVING) - EVENING

Alton, staring at the empty seat beside him, fantasizing -- until he is STRUCK BY A GRANOLA BAR.

From the passenger seat, his precocious sister, LESLIE, 11, leans towards him. She's in a party dress.

LESLIE  
Alton, stop daydreaming! We're almost there.

We now clearly see ALTON, 17, angsty but smart and kind. He's sucked back into reality. And he's annoyed by it.

ALTON  
How long is this going to take?

From the driver's wheel, we see his mother, MARILYN, mid-40s, a youthful energy which can sometimes be deemed "dorky" --

MARILYN  
What else do you have to do? Play video games with Cliff? It's not like you have a job.

Alton GROANS. Buries his face in his phone, playing a game app. The moment is broken as Leslie peers out her window.

LESLIE  
WHOA! Is that his house?

EXT. PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY - EVENING

As the car makes its way up the hill, on a labyrinth of winding roads covered in trees and flowering shrubs, CAMERA DRIFTS UP to reveal a large estate at the top, all stone and wrought iron with giant beams of wood.

MARILYN (O.S.)  
Yes, honey. He worked in finance. He had his own investment group.

INT. HONDA (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Leslie is glued to her window, in admiration. Then --

LESLIE  
He's rich?

Her mom nods.

LESLIE (CONT'D)  
Is that why you have us call him every Christmas?

MARILYN  
No! Uncle Lester is my favorite uncle. I just like to wish him a merry Christmas.

ALTON  
If he's your favorite uncle, how come I've never met him?

MARILYN  
He doesn't have many people in his life. I only see him on special events, like today.

ALTON  
(to Leslie)  
His housekeeper called Mom. His health has taken a turn for the worst. Mom wants to butter him up so he'll leave us some money.

MARILYN  
Alton... stop.

And as she turns back to the road, turning into the drive, Alton eyes his sister. He nods at her. And mouths...

ALTON  
It's true.

The car rolls to a stop. They have arrived.

INT. TRAPP'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The ornate home is filled with older people, all gathering for the man of the hour.

REVERSE ON: Alton's family, frozen, not sure how to approach. So they don't. And MRS. MAHONEY, a tiny old lady, appears.

MRS. MAHONEY  
Now scoot along. Don't block the doorway. What if there's a fire?

Alton looks up AT THE DOORLESS ARCHWAY. It's HUGE. He wrinkles his brow.

MARILYN  
Is Lester around? I'm his niece.

MRS. MAHONEY  
Oh, Marilyn! Yes! I'm Mrs. Mahoney, Trapp's housekeeper.

(MORE)

MRS. MAHONEY (CONT'D)  
I was the one who called you. Come  
on in. Make yourself at home.

MARILYN  
But is Lester here? I want to say  
hello.

MRS. MAHONEY  
Yes. He's right over there.

And through the activity, we see the remnants of Lester but  
he's hidden by the cluster, all fussing over him.

Alton exchanges looks with his mom. She's afraid to approach.

MARILYN  
He's pretty popular. We can talk to  
him later.

As party ambiance carries on behind him, Alton wanders the  
hallway beneath the staircase.

INT. TRAPP'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Stops to see A LARGE OIL PAINTING OF A YOUNG WOMAN in her  
20s. And on the gold frame is a PLACARD READING "ANNABEL."

Alton studies this curiously. And the moment is broken by A  
RINGING BELL, O.S. Dinner is being served.

INT. TRAPP'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alton returns to join his sister and mother. They stare at  
the cluster gushing over Trapp. And the group turns, heads  
towards the dining room. And from the darkness,

LESTER TRAPP, 80, emerges, using a cane to walk. *Click.*  
*Clack.* He oozes confidence, coolness, but there's a hint of  
irascibility.

MARILYN  
(sotto)  
Oh, my gosh... he's blind.

Mrs. Mahoney pops up behind them.

MRS. MAHONEY  
Diabetes. If you'd visit more  
often, you would know!

She disappears as quickly as she came.

INT. TRAPP'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Everyone is gushing over Trapp, at the far end of the table.  
PAN ACROSS to find Alton and his family at the opposite end.

They aren't sure what to do. Finally Leslie picks up her  
spoon, begins to eat. The other two follow suit.

In a WIDER SHOT, we see how disparate they are from the rest. Everyone else is near Trapp or angled towards him.

INT. TRAPP'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - LATER THAT NIGHT

Time has passed. The party is winding down. WE PULL BACK to find Alton and Leslie looking up at the painting from before. Marilyn's attention is elsewhere.

MARILYN  
We can't leave yet. We didn't even  
get a chance to talk to him.

She's talking to herself. Alton is fixated on the portrait.

ALTON  
Who is she?

MARILYN  
Oh, that was his wife. They were  
only married for a year, when he  
was young. He never married again.

Mrs. Mahoney appears from the foyer, a broom in hand.

MRS. MAHONEY  
That is not his wife. That's  
Annabel. His wife's sister.

ALTON  
Why does he have a painting of his  
wife's sister?

MRS. MAHONEY  
They were bridge partners.

She gives him a look, as if this explains everything. The three of them watch her sweep on. They're confused.

INT. TRAPP'S HOUSE - GAME ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Now the bottom floor is nearly empty. Alton is eating a slice of cake next to Leslie in Trapp's game room.

As Alton finishes his dessert, he plops the empty plate on an antique table. Ventures over to a TROPHY CASE at the end of the room. As he gazes inside, Leslie approaches.

TIGHT ON the trophies and certificates, citing BRIDGE.

ALTON  
He's really into bridge. I think  
that's a card game.

And they feel SOMEONE APPROACH.

TRAPP (O.S.)  
It's the best game in the world.  
It's even better than making videos  
of yourself on TikTok.

They turn to see the blind TRAPP, leaning on his cane.

TRAPP (CONT'D)  
(an idea sparked)  
Have you ever played?

Leslie shakes her head, no. Alton practically rolls his eyes. He shoots her a look. He's blind!

ALTON  
Nah. I heard it's, uh... really cool though.

Out of nowhere, MARILYN has submerged on the moment.

MARILYN  
I've always wanted Alton to get into bridge. Hi, Uncle Lester. It's Marilyn. And these are my kids, Alton and Leslie. We call you every Christmas. I'm glad you finally get to meet them. I always tell people, my daughter was named after my favorite uncle. Isn't that funny? Les-LEE. Les-TER.

TRAPP  
How old is he now?

MARILYN  
How old is...

TRAPP  
Your son! Can he drive?

MARILYN  
Yes. He has a license.

Trapp takes a moment, considering.

TRAPP  
I need a new cardturner. Toni used to do it but at the last game, I told her which card to play and she replied...  
(as a teen girl)  
Are you sureeeee?

He SCOFFS at the memory. Marilyn's eyes get big.

MARILYN  
Toni... Castaneda?

TRAPP  
Yes. I love her but now that she's a teenager, she drives me crazy. She's only learned about bridge by watching my games. Now she wants to question my moves? She basically told the whole table where the ace was! So if your son knows nothing about bridge, he'll make a great cardturner. I play at the club, four times a week, and I'll pay \$200 a game.

MARILYN  
That's perfect, Uncle Lester.  
Because Alton has been dying to get  
a job this summer.

Alton gives his mom a dead-pan stare.

INT. HONDA (MOVING) - NIGHT

As the car descends down the dark, winding road --

ALTON  
What's a cardturner?

MARILYN  
You just have to... I don't know...  
turn cards for him.

ALTON  
I'm not going to drive 20 minutes  
just to turn cards. Can't he get  
someone at the club to do it?

MARILYN  
It's more than that. You have to  
tell him what his cards are.

ALTON  
I'm not doing it!

MARILYN  
Alton, you don't have a choice. I  
want you working this summer. Not  
just lounging around with Cliff.

ALTON  
And this is a surefire way to make  
sure we're in Lester's will.

No response to that accusation. She can't even counter it.  
And SLOW PUSH IN on Alton's face as he declares --

ALTON (CONT'D)  
I know we're hurting for money and  
sometimes we can barely pay our  
bills. But you can't lay this  
burden on me. I'm 17 years old. I'm  
almost a legal adult. I have enough  
autonomy over my life to decide  
what I want to do with my time.  
Just because you're my mother  
doesn't mean you can force me to do  
something I don't want to do.

We hold on his defiant expression. Then SMASH CUT TO:

A DOORBELL IS RANG. Alton stands ON THE PORCH OF TRAPP'S  
HOUSE, wearing the cheap suit his mom made him wear.

TITLE CARD: Thirteen playing cards are SUPERIMPOSED over the  
frame -- shuffled, dealt, turned over to reveal individual  
letters, which are re-arranged to spell out **THE CARDTURNER**.  
The cards are wiped away as Alton waits for a reply.

But nobody answers the door. He grabs an iron knocker in the shape of a goat's head. Weird.

And JUST AS he goes to knock, the door is opened by Mrs. Mahoney. Her face lights up when she sees him.

MRS. MAHONEY  
Oh, Alton. Come on in.

INT. TRAPP'S HOUSE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Alton enters. Mrs. Mahoney shuts the door, grins at him.

MRS. MAHONEY  
Don't you look nice, all dressed  
up? Let me go get Trapp's jacket.  
(then)  
Now where did I leave it?

She looks around, puzzled. Starts off, then pivots, proceeds in another direction.

TIGHT ON a probing cane. Beating the ground, then moving forward. TILT UP to reveal Trapp, in a windbreaker and jeans.

TRAPP  
Let's go!

EXT. TRAPP'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Alton heads to his parked car, an OLD BEAT-UP CLUNKER, parked on the driveway. He unlocks his door and is about to slide inside when he hears a THUMPING. It's Trapp, with his cane.

Ohhh, yeah. Alton hurries around to the passenger's side, opens it for him. Trapp GRUFFS, gets inside.

INT. ALTON'S CLUNKER (PARKED) - CONTINUOUS

Alton buckles himself, then realizes he needs to help Trapp first. He unbuckles and leans over

BUT TRAPP has felt around, figured it out.

Alton buckles again. Goes to turn the car over.

It sputters. Won't start.

Alton turns red. Glances over at Trapp.

ALTON  
I'm sorry my car is so old...

And then comes to the realization --

ALTON (CONT'D)  
Although you... can't... even  
see...

He turns the ignition and the CAR STARTS UP.



TRAPP  
I knew. I can't see but I can still  
smell.

Touché. The clunker sputters out, on its way.

EXT. PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

Alton rolls through a parking lot into a complex of INDUSTRIAL OFFICES.

INT. ALTON'S CLUNKER (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

He looks down at his directions. Is this right?

Alton pulls to a stop in front of a building.

Without discussion, Trapp unbuckles, steps out of the car.

Alton looks at his directions again. Then scurries to join.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Trapp waits until Alton realizes, grabs his arm. Leads him up concrete steps.

EXT. CONCRETE BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

And then they find themselves at the door with the words BRIDGE STUDIO stenciled on the glass.

INT. LOCAL BRIDGE STUDIO - AFTERNOON

Alton leads Trapp inside and takes in the surroundings. There are THREE ROWS OF SQUARE TABLES, eight tables per row, four chairs at each table. Computer printouts are posted on the wall. And a murmur of voices all around.

Everyone's dressed casually, in shorts. Alton looks down. Realizes he's overdressed. Oops.

TIGHT ON Alton, not sure what's next. He turns to Trapp --

ALTON  
Where do we go?

TRAPP  
Table three. I always sit at table  
three, South.

Alton crosses over to a table with a laminated placard in the middle reading "3." There are two chairs at the south end.

ALTON  
Which one do I...

TRAPP

Take the one closer to the table.

We see the back of a woman's head as Alton takes a seat, Trapp dropping into the chair facing her.

GLORIA (O.S.)

Well, I see you have a new cardturner.

REVERSE: GLORIA, 80, sits across from them, in the North seat. She's elderly, gentle, kind. Dressed nicely, with lots of jewelry and earrings that look like playing cards.

Alton nods at her.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

(to Trapp)

Do you think maybe you can keep this one?

TRAPP

He's perfect. He knows nothing about bridge. And even better, he knows he knows nothing about bridge.

SILENCE.

GLORIA

Well? Aren't you going to introduce us?

Trapp doesn't reply.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

You forgot his name, didn't you?

Again, Trapp doesn't reply. Alton extends his hand.

ALTON

I'm Alton. Lester's my great-uncle.

GLORIA

I'm Gloria.

She shakes his hand.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

Don't feel bad. I've been Trapp's partner for 42 years. He only learned my name last Wednesday.

TRAPP

Hah!

And their attention is stolen as THE DIRECTOR appears, setting two metal trays #5 and #6 on their table. As he moves on to the next, doing the same, he speaks to the crowd --

LOCAL STUDIO DIRECTOR  
 There are fourteen tables. We will  
 play thirteen rounds, two boards a  
 round, with a skip after round  
 seven. Shuffle and play.

The board is slid open, revealing FOUR SLOTS of carts, each  
 slot labeled *North, South, East, and West*.

TIGHT as the cards from #5 are SHUFFLED and DEALT and each  
 hand is placed back into the slots on the board.

Hands reach in, pull out their cards from the slot. But the  
 South slot is untouched.

Alton stares blankly. Gloria gives him a look, then nods at  
 the cards.

TIGHT as Alton's hand reaches in, removes his cards.

As he looks down to observe them, Alton notices the hush from  
 before has quieted down to SILENCE. He peers around to see  
 everyone in deep concentration.

Alton looks up at Gloria. Not sure how to share his cards.

ALTON  
 How do I...

As she gestures, Trapp darts out of his seat and we follow  
 him into a COFFEE ALCOVE, right next to table 3. Alton grabs  
 the cards and FOLLOWS.

Alton is nervous. He waits for Trapp to prompt him. But he  
 says nothing.

Speaking in just above a whisper, Alton finally looks down at  
 the cards, rattles off --

ALTON (CONT'D)  
 Nine of spades, king of hearts,  
 three of clubs, jack of spades, ten  
 of di--

Trapp covers his ears --

TRAPP  
 STOP!!! What do you think you're  
 doing?

Alton watches as EVERYONE IN THE ROOM turns to look at him.

ALTON'S POV: All eyes are on him.

He swallows hard.

TRAPP (CONT'D)  
 Are you trying to drive me crazy?  
 Or are you just a moron?

A few gasps, a few chuckles.

ALTON'S POV: Some elderly women break into a sympathetic  
 smile and shoot it at Alton.

He decides he hates Trapp. Just as the director approaches.

LOCAL STUDIO DIRECTOR  
Is there is a problem?

TRAPP  
You bet there's a problem. My new  
cardturner is an imbecile!

And Alton is ready to throw the cards down, leave without him. But before he can say anything,

GLORIA APPEARS, placing her hand on Alton's shoulder.

GLORIA  
(to Trapp)  
Did you explain how you wanted it  
done?

Trapp doesn't reply. He just SCOFFS, loudly.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
If you haven't explained to him how  
you want it done, then he's not the  
imbecile.

A beat. Then LIGHT CHUCKLING fills the room, breaking the tension.

Gloria gives Alton a smile, then exits, alongside the director. He is left alone with Trapp, still fuming.

TRAPP  
You've got to group them into suits  
first. Highest to lowest. Spades,  
then hearts, diamonds, clubs.  
Always in that order. Got it?

ALTON  
Spades... hearts... diamonds...  
clubs. Reverse alphabetical order!

He smirks at Trapp, proud to have picked that up so quickly. Not so much of an imbecile after a--

TRAPP  
Sooo? Let's hear it!!

Flustered and still humiliated, Alton half-heartedly reads off Trapp's cards.

ALTON  
Spades: ace, jack, nine, three,  
two. Hearts: king, nine. Diamonds:  
ten, six, four. Clubs: ace, queen,  
three.

Trapp feels for his chair, sits back down. Alton slams down next to him.

ALTON (CONT'D)  
(contemptibly)  
Was that better?