

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

Screenplay

by

Richard Friedenberg

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RIVER

1.

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - EARLY MORNING, PRESENT DAY

A car stops on the side of the road above a wide, dark river, and NORMAN MACLEAN, age 75, emerges from it. He's dressed in old and practical clothes, well-oiled leather boots, a warm shirt, an obviously cherished, shapeless hat, pierced with dozens of beautiful handmade flies. He opens the trunk of his car and gently removes a fishing rod, holding it out straight before him, eyeing along its length. The polished bamboo glows in the early light. The tip vibrates with the old man's pulse. Satisfied, he starts slowly down the slope to the river. A narrator's voice begins. It is Norman's, old and thin but still beautiful, a voice used to reciting poetry and telling stories.

NARRATOR

In our family, there was no clear line between religion and fly fishing. We lived at the junction of great trout rivers in Western Montana, and our father was a Presbyterian minister and a fly fisherman who tied his own flies and taught others. He told us about Christ's disciples being fisherman and we were left to assume, as my brother and I did, that all first-class fisherman on the Sea of Galilee were fly fisherman and that John, the favorite, was a dry-fly fisherman.

As he speaks, Norman's arm begins a motion, lifelong, almost unconscious, a small arc above his head, back and forth, the rod picking up speed, the end whipping; and finally he lets it go. The line snakes out, a bright flash against the dark water, and hits, fly first, soundless and perfect.

EXT. RIVER - MISSOULA, MONTANA, 1912 [POSSIBLY: STILL PERIOD PHOTOS]

Another river runs through the center of a small, dusty town. Above its banks, in a block of plain wooden buildings, stands a new brick church. The street running past it is dirt. Horses hitched to carriages stand out front.

NARRATOR

It is true that one day a week was given over wholly to religion.

INT. CHURCH

NARRATOR

On Sunday mornings my brother Paul and I went to Sunday school and then to morning services to hear our father preach, and in the evening to Christian endeavor and afterwards to evening services to hear our father preach again.

At the pulpit the Reverend Maclean stands, a slim red-haired man of forty, elegant in tailored suit and high collar. He is not a hellfire preacher. His voice is soft, his sermon a story, his Scottish burr charming and magnetic to the faithful who sit attentively in their Sunday best. In the front pew his wife watches, unconsciously mouthing phrases he's practiced on her during the week. She is thirty-five, plump, comfortable, with a fair English complexion. Norman, a slight, dark 10-year-old, sits beside her, trying dutifully to pay attention. Paul, an extraordinarily beautiful child of 8, his hair golden ringlets, leans against her other side, his eyes glazing, his body rocking back and forth.

EXT. THE BIG BLACKFOOT RIVER - DAY

Norman and Paul walk with their father along the wild, beautiful river.

NARRATOR

In the afternoon we would walk with him while he unwound between services. He almost always chose a path along the Big Blackfoot, which we considered our family river. Paul and I had known it since nearly the turn of the century, my father long before, and it was there he felt his soul restored and filled again to overflowing for the evening sermon.

(the Reverend picks
up a rock)

His imagination was always stirred by the thought that he was standing in ancient rain, spattered on mud before it became rocks, but that even before that, beneath the rocks, from the very beginning of time, were God's words...

As the boys study the fossilized raindrops, touching them with their grubby fingers, the Reverend's voice can be heard under narration:

REVEREND

These were raindrops once. Long ago rain fell on mud and it became rock. Over millions of years. From the cellar of time. But even before that, beneath the rocks are God's words. They came first. Listen.

NARRATOR (Cont'd)

...And if Paul and I listened very carefully, all our lives, we might hear those words.

The boys listen to the sounds of the river. The ripples and eddies and waves of the river flow past, bringing us to the Reverend, Paul and Norman on a dock preparing to fish.

NARRATOR

Even so, in a typical week of our childhood Paul and I probably received as many hours of instruction in fly fishing as we did in all other spiritual matters.

As a Scot and a Presbyterian my father believed that man by nature was a damned mess and had fallen from an original state of grace, and that only by picking up God's rhythms were we able to regain power and beauty. Unlike many Presbyterians, he often used the word "beautiful."

The Reverend pulls on a thin glove and buttons it, while the boys watch, impressed with his style. Then he holds his rod out straight. The boys imitate him. We hear his voice lecturing under the narration.

NARRATOR

Before beginning, he would hold his rod straight out in front of him, where it trembled with the beating of his heart. Then he would say, "Casting is an art that is performed on a four-count rhythm between ten and two o'clock."

My brother and I would have preferred to start learning how to fish by going out and catching a few, omitting entirely anything difficult or technical in the way of preparation that would take away from the fun...

The Reverend starts an old wooden metronome and begins casting, the boys following with difficulty.

NARRATOR

...but it wasn't by way of fun that we were introduced to our father's art. If our father had had his say, nobody who did not know how to fish would be allowed to disgrace a fish by catching it.

The scene becomes a series of images--the boys' concentrated faces, a hand holding a rod, the Reverend's gloved hand gently correcting, the lines arcing over the water, etc.

NARRATOR

So my brother and I learned to cast Presbyterian style, on a metronome. It was my mother's metronome, which father had taken from the top of the piano in town. She would occasionally peer down to the dock from the front porch of the cabin, wondering nervously whether her metronome could float if it had to.

Then mother appears on shore, watching nervously as the metronome dances with the pounding of feet on the dock until she can't stand it.

MOTHER

Stop!

The three men turn in surprise. The metronome teeters near the edge. Silently, mother holds a hand out. While Norman and the Reverend look guiltily away, Paul takes the metronome and hurries it to her. The Reverend waits a respectful beat as she turns back up the path, then:

REVEREND

And...

He starts clapping the four-count rhythm with his cupped hands and the boys begin the lesson once more.

NARRATOR

My father was very sure about certain matters pertaining to the universe. To him, all good things, trout as well as eternal salvation, came by grace and grace comes by art, and art does not come easy.

EXT. THE MANSE - MORNING

In the center of downtown Missoula, next to the church, sits a solid wooden two-story house with a large front porch.

INT. HOUSE

Norman reluctantly descends the staircase, a sheet of paper in hand, and walks the dark hall to the Reverend's study.

NARRATOR

So it was my formal education as well. Each weekday from nine a.m. till noon, while my father worked on his Sunday sermon and my mother tended the flock, I attended the school of the reverend Maclean.

Norman waits while his father works on a sermon with deep concentration. Norman's eyes wander to a plaque on the wall behind the Reverend. It reads: "No one will touch me with impunity," and is surrounded by angry carved Scotch thistles. Finally the Reverend looks up. Norman holds out his paper. Automatically the Reverend takes a thick red pencil from a jar, obviously made by one of the boys, and begins to read the theme entitled, "Grace." Norman's shoulders slump in expected defeat as the Reverend marks ruthlessly sentence after sentence. At the door, little Paul watches unseen, taking it in, his blond curls, caught by the morning sun, the only brightness in the dour, book-lined room.

NARRATOR

He taught nothing but reading and writing, and, being a Scot, believed that the art of writing lay in thrift. His critique of a theme I struggled over was simply, "Again, half as long."

The Reverend finishes. Norman stiffens as he hands back the paper and says, not unkindly:

REVEREND

Again. Half as long.

INT. NORMAN'S ROOM - LATER

NARRATOR

So while my friends learned their ABC's at the public elementary school, I learned to write the American language.

He sits hunkered over a new piece of paper, struggling to solve his father's critique. Paul appears at the door and leans against it, waiting, picking his nose. Viciously, Norman crosses out his latest sentence, ripping the paper. A tear drops onto it. Norman grits his teeth, refusing to cry. Paul's mouth compresses in empathy.

INT. STUDY - LATER

Once more Norman stands before his father watching the red pencil poised above the sheet, ready to attack the theme, now reduced to a single paragraph.

NARRATOR

However, there was a counter-balance to my father's stern system: at exactly noon I was set free, untutored and untouched until supper, to learn on my own the natural side of God's order.

REVEREND

(smiles)

Good. Now throw it away.

INT. WASTEPAPER BASKET

With immense satisfaction, Norman crumples the theme into a tight ball and fires it into the Indian wicker basket.

INT. KITCHEN

Norman runs through the kitchen, but mother calls, "Norman, wait for your brother...!" And Norman dutifully waits as little Paul comes out with his fishing gear. Then they both burst outside.

NARRATOR

And there could be no better place to learn than the Montana of 80 years past. It was a world with dew still on it, more touched by wonder and possibility than any I have since known.

EXT. THE WOODS AND FIELDS - DAY

MONTAGE: The boys run in the primeval forest, fish, swim with friends, watch Indians at the river.

NARRATOR

It was also a harsh teacher. Only the straightest shooter, the best rider, the toughest fighter could succeed on the frontier. Even as children we understood that, and admired it.

EXT. THE TOWN - DAY

MONTAGE: A rough frontier town with horses, saloons, six guns, liquor and gambling. Paul does a cootchy-coo dance for a gaggle of whores, who laugh and do it back. The boys pull down the pants of a drunk. The boys watch a real, frightening fight.

NARRATOR

And, of course, we tested it. I knew I was tough because I had been bloodied in battle.

Norman scuffles with another boy, his nose bleeding. Paul cheers him on proudly.

INT. N.D.

C.U. Paul's face, quiet and composed, head bowed.

NARRATOR

Little Paul was different. His toughness came from some secret place inside of him. He simply knew that he was tougher than anyone alive.

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Now we can see that he is sitting at the breakfast table, before him an untouched bowl of oatmeal. The family, long finished, is waiting for him to begin eating. But he doesn't move. The moment stretches, tense. Finally, quiet but strong:

REVEREND

This morning you will eat the oatmeal, Paul.

There is no response. The little boy doesn't move. The Reverend sighs, ironic.

REVEREND

Men have been eating God's oats for a thousand years. It is not the place of an eight-year-old boy to change that tradition.

Norman and Mother stare at Paul, willing him to eat. Nothing. The Reverend's face reddens.

REVEREND

Pick up your spoon!

Nothing. He explodes.

REVEREND

By God, you will eat now or I will know the reason why! Do you hear me?

Nothing.

REVEREND

SPEAK!!

Paul's lips move. The Reverend jumps.

REVEREND

What?

(to Mother)

What did he say?

MOTHER

He said he doesn't like it.

Norman breaks into a grin, fighting it, not daring to look at Mother who bites her lips against laughter. At a loss, the Reverend stands up and starts out, speaking with drained authority.

REVEREND

Grace will not be spoken until your bowl is clean...

The moment he's gone Norman and Mother burst into laughter, Mother shaking her head with worry.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Mid-day light floods in. FOOTSTEPS can be HEARD in other rooms, CHILDREN'S VOICES outside, happy, laughing. But Paul remains as still as a statue, bowed over the oatmeal as if praying.

INT. STUDY

At the same time the Reverend sits bowed in exactly the same attitude over his work. The mantle clock ticks. Neither moves. It is a test of will.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

The door opens. The Reverend enters, defeated. Norman and Mother rise nervously. Avoiding their eyes, he speaks one word:

REVEREND

Grace.

INT. DINING ROOM

The four kneel beside their chairs, eyes closed, hands clasped as the Reverend murmurs grace. Norman peers, impressed and unsettled at Paul, his cherubic face giving no indication of the victory he has won. Above the family, on the bare table, the bowl of oatmeal sits untouched.

EXT. MISSOULA - DAY [POSSIBLE: STILL PERIOD PHOTOS]

Soldiers march up Main Street. Crowds wave.

NARRATOR

Circumstances, too, helped widen our differences. The draft of World War I immediately left the woods short of men, so at 15 I started working for the U.S. Forest Service.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Endless, primeval. In a logging camp we find Norman, full-grown, at one end of a saw, sweating.

NARRATOR

Paul was too young to join me, and besides, he had decided this early he had two major purposes in life: to fish and not to work, or at least not to allow work to interfere with fishing. In his teens, then, he got a summer job as a lifeguard at the municipal swimming pool, so in the early evening she could go fishing and during the days he could look over the girls in their bathing suits.

EXT. PUBLIC POOL - DAY

Paul, full grown, blonde, handsome, helps a kid out of deep water while the girls flock around him.

EXT. A MOUNTAIN - DAY

Norman stands all alone in his lookout tower.

EXT. A CAR - NIGHT

Paul necks with a girl in the back seat.

INT. THE CHURCH - DAY

The Reverend preaches while the family listens as always. Paul is now taller than Norman.

NARRATOR

Undoubtedly our differences would not have seemed so great if we had not been such a close family. Painted on one side of our church wall were the words "God is love." We always assumed these three words were spoken directly to the four of us in our family and had no reference outside, which my brother and I soon discovered was full of bastards, the number increasing rapidly the farther one got from Missoula, Montana.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY [POSSIBLE STILL PERIOD PHOTOS]

Soldiers march back down Main Street. People cheer. The town has changed.

NARRATOR

The war ended much as it began, with doughboys marching and the town turned out in celebration of their return, everyone believing that this first year of peace would be the best. But no one's 1919 would be better than mine. I considered myself a lumberjack and a poet and, at last, a man, and I intended to make the end of my high school career indelible.

INT. A HOME - EVENING

A dance. Norman drinks surreptitiously with CHUB, HUMPH, CONROY, etc. They all shout with the SONG on the GRAMOPHONE: "I'll say she does!" As couples dance the "shimmy."

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Norman and a girl sit by the river. He reads Wordsworth to her. There are tears in her eyes.

EXT. COURTHOUSE STEPS - EVENING

The gang sits around listening to Norman tell a story about forest fires. They are silent, gripped in his spell.

INT. THE MANSE - DAY

Norman bangs in, runs up the stairs. But, from the study:

REVEREND

Norman.

Norman winces, turns dutifully back.

INT. THE STUDY

He stands in the same spot he stood as a boy, unable to keep from glancing at the same thorny motto above his father, who sits at his desk tying an elegant fly on a jig, the bright colors glowing in the filtered light.

REVEREND

I have received a rather disturbing telephone call.

Norman tenses.

REVEREND

From Ethel McGuire.

NORMAN

(snorts, disdainful)

Oh.

REVEREND

(unsmiling)

She has been known to speak the truth.

Norman nods, wiping the smirk off.

REVEREND

And in this...

(wry)

...conversation she felt compelled to inform me that Paul was seen...

His directness fails. He returns to the jig, searching.

REVEREND

..."stepping out" with a Miss Lucy Hauser.

NORMAN

Stepping out...?

REVEREND

Actually, the term she used was more...descriptive.

NORMAN

(smiles)

Petting?

And the Reverend finally looks up, his face dead serious.

REVEREND

Sinning.

Norman gapes. The Reverend's gaze levels on him, rigorous and demanding.

REVEREND

Is it true?

Norman splutters, laughing, innocent, honestly amazed.

NORMAN

What...Paul? My brother, Paul? No.

The Reverend holds his eyes a beat longer, then nods once, willing to accept Norman's denial.

EXT. THE MANSE - NIGHT

Out of an upstairs window the shadowy figure of Paul steps, then leaps wildly off the porch roof. Cheers and laughter come from a Model T truck parked at the curb. Inside is the same gang we've seen before--Humph, Chub, Conroy, etc. Then another figure emerges from the window. It is Norman, who does not jump but lowers himself down the drainpipe. The HORN HONKS. He winces, shushing them, sprinting to the truck,

but it pulls away before he reaches it, forcing him to run, hissing curses as they chant, "PREACHER! PREACHER!" Finally, he hauls himself in, immediately punching everyone.

INT. THE TRUCK

It rounds a corner and they are all thrown against one side in a heap, laughing and struggling.

HUMPH

Don't spill any--!

He holds up a bottle of hooch and the others grab for it, Norman getting there first, taking a long pull, gasping:

NORMAN

Moose piss!

Laughter. Conroy, driving, yells back:

CONROY

Where to?

Everyone speaks together, disagreeing.

EVERYONE

Front Street. No. Murph's. Again?
Toss the pigskin. Oh, thrill. The
University. Crash a party. No, no,
etc...

NORMAN

Wait a minute, I have it...

(to Paul, quiet,
smiling, challenging)

What say we drop in on Lucy
Hauser...?

The others keep arguing, not in on the joke. But Paul smiles back at Norman, bland, innocent. Then:

PAUL

I have a better idea. How would you
boys like to go down in history?

(makes headline
with hand)

"The Peppiest Class at Missoula
High... One dark night in May, 1920,
the bravest men of MHS... 'borrowed'
old man Seifert's rowboat...

(pauses for effect)

...and shot the Chutes."

He gets a blank stare from everyone. Pleased, he takes a drink, waiting. Finally:

EVERYONE
Impossible. Crazy. Stupid.
Madman! Etc.

CONROY
You can't shoot the Chutes, Paul.

PAUL
You can try.

HUMPH
You can die trying.

PAUL
And they'd bury you with full honors.

His eyes meet Norman's and Norman sees the sheer joy in them and can't resist smiling, both of them grinning now, excited, bursting into laughter. The others, infected, join in, laughing and cursing their fate as the truck drives into the night.

EXT. THE CHUTES - LATER

Down the slippery embankment an old rowboat seems to fly on its own.

EVERYONE
AAAAAAAAAAHHH!!

They manage to stop it just above the void, and, grinning, Paul motions widely.

PAUL
Gentlemen, the Chutes!

They are standing on a cliff above the highest of a series of waterfalls that snake away into the night. For a moment all they can do is stare, then:

HUMPH
Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Clearly, they all feel the same way, fear replacing bravado as the liquor wears off. But Paul is still high and excited.

PAUL

Come on. The boat'll take six.

(no response)

Come on. Don't you want to go down
in history?

No response. Paul imitates a chicken, quietly.

PAUL

. Bawk, bawk, bawk...

The others rise as one, angrily, but Paul only smiles.

PAUL

Alright, alright. Then it's just
me, and Norm and Chub.

Chub seems to shrink in size.

CHUB

Jeez, Pauly...

PAUL

Just me and Norm?

He looks at Norman who crouches by the bank, expressionless.
A look of hurt crosses Paul's face.

But then, Norman smiles jauntily up at him.

NORMAN

You need ballast, brother.

Paul grins, reaches out and takes Norman's hand firmly,
pulling him up.

EXT. WATERFALL - LATER

The first streaks of dawn reflect in the fast-moving river as Chub pushes the boat over the gravel bank and onto the water fifty feet above the shoots. Spaced along the bank, the boys watch, ashamed, as Paul in the prow and Norman in the stern steer an expert course with their paddles, straight down the gut of the river toward the falls. Unable to let them go, the boys begin to jog next to the boat, running faster as it's caught and pulled along in the current. Paul turns to Norman, smiling, pointing to a splash in the water.

PAUL

Good fishing.

Norman nods, trying to keep his smile intact, unable to stop his chin from shivering. The roar grows louder. Spray

envelops Paul. Norman turns one last time to shore, desperate, feeling a scream rise in his throat, and he sees Chub, still running, his expression very worried. Then there is a jolt. Norman snaps back, grabbing both sides, and the prow slides over the falls, poises there for one timeless moment, then plunges.

Paul grins from ear to ear, in love with the crazy, rushing danger. Norman's face is chalk-white and set in a grimace of fear and outrage.

From above, as the boys stand watching in awed silence, the dark form of the boat whips away, disappearing in a few seconds.

But for Paul and Norman the whole trip seems to take place in SLOW MOTION, as they are pummeled by the white water, their bones shaken by the pounding, and above it all, Norman can hear Paul's wild, happy laughter.

EXT. THE TOP

The boys strain into the darkness, trying to pick out the boat, but they can see nothing beyond the foam and jagged rocks. They stand a moment, the full impact of what has happened dawning on them. Then, very quiet and frightened:

CHUB

Oh, jeez...

EXT. THE RIVER - LATER

Dawn streaks the sky. The boys, soaked, exhausted, scared to death, search up and down the rocky bank, shouting:

BOYS

Helloooo! Macleans! Paul-eeee!
Preeeeecherrr!

Then Humph calls to them, his voice quavering. They run up to see the rowboat, battered and abandoned in a backwater. Cold fear descends on them. For a moment no one speaks, then Chub breaks off, running away as he yells desperately:

CHUB

MACLAYYYYNS!!!

And, suddenly, from behind a tree, Paul leaps out.

PAUL

Bugga bugga bugga!!!

Chub jumps as if he's been shot and Paul drops to the ground, dissolving in hysterics as the boys stand there dumbfounded, staring at him. From the shadows Norman emerges, soaked, an ugly knot on his head, and looks helplessly from the others to Paul, his expression hardening with anger.

EXT. THE MANSE - MORNING

HORN HONKING, the truck pulls up to the Manse. In the back sit Norman and Paul, wrapped in blankets. Humph, Conroy, and several others stand next to them, waving their arms and shouting gleefully:

VOICES

...Shot the Chutes. The Maclean brothers, class of '20, rejoice!
etc...

A scattering of people gather. Mother and the Reverend stand at the door, Mother's pale face working, trying not to cry.

Studiedly diffident, Norman and Paul walk through the slaps and handshakes, and emerge at the bottom of the porch steps where Mother, sure of their well-being, clamps her jaw against the tears and strides upstairs. Norman sees with foreboding the Reverend's terrible eyes behind the screen door.

INT. HOUSE

As Norman and Paul enter the house, the Reverend suddenly grabs the hand of each with an immensely strong, desperate grip, pulling them forward, almost, but not quite embracing them. Paul stares, surprised at this display of affection. Norman sees, in the daylight, his father's fear and fatigue-lined face, and he looks away guiltily.

Then the Reverend speaks, his voice nearly exploding with controlled anger.

REVEREND

You will go to church this day and
pray for forgiveness...!

The boys murmur assent. Norman feels his father's hands tremble with pent-up emotion.

REVEREND

You will get down on your knees
to Mother, who spent the night in
agony...!

Pained, Norman hangs his head. The Reverend sighs, relenting slightly.

REVEREND
Who gave you the boat?

NORMAN
We...

PAUL
(very quiet)
We borrowed it...

REVEREND
(voice rising again)
Borrowed?

He drills Norman with his eyes.

REVEREND
You will work off every cent of
its value!

NORMAN
Yes, sir.

PAUL
I'll work it off, Father. It was my
idea.

Taken completely by surprise, the Reverend allows his expression free reign for a beat, and Norman can't miss the flash of pride in it, the same look he had watching Paul fish.

INT. KITCHEN - LATE DAY

The house is quiet. Norman stands at the icebox, studying the contents. Paul enters, still pumped up with the amazing event.

PAUL
God, I'm starving.

He carries an armload of food to the table and smiles, beholding it.

PAUL
Ahhh.

And he proceeds to build an impossibly huge sandwich with care and flare, talking on, so pleased with himself, so happy.

PAUL

This is what you want, brother.
Ham, mustard...

(turns to Norman)

Did you hear Chub out there? He's
telling everybody that the class
of '20 is going down in history.

(snorts)

Class of '20. I can still see him
with that big...that sheep face of
his, saying...

(imitates wickedly)

"Jeez, Pauly."

(laughs)

"Jeez, Pauly," what a Skeeex.

And out of nowhere, Norman swings his right arm as hard as he
can, catching Paul on the ear, knocking him backward into the
table, the sandwich flying off.

PAUL

He-e-ey...!

Without grace or elegance, Norman wades in, his eyes flat with
rage, a strange, frightening sound rising from him.

PAUL

Hey...What the hell!?

And he rises to his full height, towering over Norman, and
responds, bellowing, flailing, both of them swinging as hard
as they can in a flurry of madness. They don't feel the blows
that rain on their faces, blood spattering their clothes. And
then Mother is there, horrified, running toward them, arms
out, pushing in between.

MOTHER

Stop! Stop! Stop!!

But they pay no attention to her, trying to fight through her.
Only her hair shows between them, bobbing up and down, and
then suddenly it's gone as she slips on the fallen food, and
drops heavily on to the floor, her glasses skittering away.
Both boys stop instantly, staring in shock. Then they yell:

NORMAN AND PAUL

You hit her! You son of a bitch!

You knocked my mother down! Etc...

They launch themselves like madmen, and the fight resumes,
even wilder than before, as Mother scrabbles, pulling herself
up between them, chicken salad and sardines clinging to her
dress.

MOTHER

No! I slipped, I just slipped...

And she staggers around in circles, groping blindly at both boys as they fight on, murmuring, crying:

MOTHER

Stop. Please. I slipped, that's all. Please. I just slipped...

NARRATOR

That was the only time we ever fought. Perhaps we wondered afterward which of us was tougher, but, if boyhood questions aren't answered before a certain point, they can't be raised again. So we returned to being gracious to one another, as the church wall suggested.

EXT. THE BIG BLACKFOOT RIVER - DAY

A beautiful dry fly floats in SLOW MOTION through the air, settling on a pool of crystal green water and floating there, drifting. Suddenly, the black head of a huge trout breaks the surface, its jaws snapping up the fly and darting away.

At the edge of the pool Paul strides, feeling the pull of the fish. The Reverend and Norman, sweating, tired from a long day's fishing, watch as young Paul moves with grace, smooth and strong, pulling in line, fighting the fish. The Reverend is stopped by the beauty of his son, and stares openly at him. Norman sees his pride and surprise, the same look he had when Paul took responsibility for the Chutes. Landing the fish, Paul dispatches it with a quick smash, then holds it up, ~~grinning and wet.~~

PAUL

A monster...!

REVEREND

~~Beautiful.~~

It is impossible to tell whether he's referring to the fish or Paul. With a stab of envy, Norman pulls a fish out of his creel. It is also big, but not as big as Paul's, the two laid side by side on the bank, both boys tensing slightly with the competition. Sensing this, the Reverend says, sincerely:

REVEREND

They are both marvels.

And he drops his creel in front of them, pulling out a behemoth trout. Laid next to the boys', it is clearly the winner. The boys laugh in acknowledgment, the tension dissolving. The Reverend is careful to add:

REVEREND

I'd say the Lord has blessed us all today.

But, as he puts the fish back, he can't resist:

REVEREND

But he's been particularly gracious to me.

And he starts off, grinning happily.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Norman is dressed in a suit and high collar. Luggage is piled next to him. The rest of the family stand stiffly, none of them liking farewells.

NARRATOR

The year ended with my acceptance into college. Some time before, Father had taken me aside and told me that I could go to any college in the world I could get into. Knowing he earned eighteen hundred dollars in his best year, his telling me this was one of the most important things in my life. So, in the autumn of 1920, I boarded the Northern Pacific for a three thousand-mile trip to the unknown and a great Eastern college.

Boarding begins. Norman holds out his hand for a formal farewell from the Reverend, then to Mother who resists the urge to hug him. Instead, she gives him the barest peck on the cheek. Finally, he turns to Paul, who beams, proud of his older brother, and shakes his hand with love. Then Norman hurries aboard and the train huffs out of the station, Norman looking back at the last moment, already homesick, but the family is lost in great puffs of steam.

NARRATOR

Between school and the Forest Service I was away from home nearly all of the next seven years.

EXT. COLLEGE [POSSIBLE: STILL PERIOD PHOTOS]

MONTAGE: an ivy-covered Eastern college, brick buildings, football games, men in raccoon coats, etc.

NARRATOR

During that time Missoula grew up. Streets were paved. The whores' cribs and plank saloons along Front Street were banished. Even the hitching posts were torn down.

EXT. MISSOULA [POSSIBLE: STILL PERIOD PHOTOS]

Pictures of a town growing into a small, modern city.

NARRATOR

My Father was elected president of the Presbyterian synod of the entire Intermountain West, an honor Mother reveled in.

Paul decided to stay home for college, unwilling to leave the great rivers of Montana, and the fish in them he hadn't yet caught. When he was done with school, he took a job as a reporter for the Helena Bee and moved a hundred miles east, his connection with the family dwindling, growing almost as sparse as my own.

MONTAGE CONTINUED

Stills of the family, church, Paul in college, Paul fishing, Paul with his diploma, Paul as a reporter, the Helena Bee office, etc.

NARRATOR

After my graduation, I stayed on at college for a doctoral degree, feeling that my father's hard-earned investment should be given full value.

EXT. COLLEGE - DAY

Norman with a diploma, stands wearing mortarboard and gown.
(Possible: still photo)

NARRATOR

As a part of my degree, I was required to enlighten incoming Freshmen on the wonders of the Romantic poets.

EXT. COLLEGE - DAY

An ivy-covered college hall.

INT. A CLASSROOM

Norman recites Wordsworth. He is mature and well-dressed, his manner and delivery just like the Reverend's.

NARRATOR

And, although I was unaware of it at the time, teaching fit me.

INT. FRAT HOUSE - EVENING

Norman plays poker with frat brothers, a cigarette dangling from his lips, his expression shrewd and tough.

NARRATOR

But most of those years I spent in the card room of my fraternity house, giving my blue-nosed brothers a lesson in Front Street poker.

Unfortunately, when my time at college was over, I lacked one thing that was most important to bring home with me, a vocation. Neither poker nor even Wordsworth had provided me the clear path I'd expected, and I returned uncertain of my future, and ashamed of my uncertainty.

EXT. THE WEST - DAY

A train clacks past the spectacular rockies.

INT. THE TRAIN

Norman sits looking out the window as the Big Blackfoot comes into view. He smiles, relieved.

EXT. THE STATION - LATER

Norman descends with his luggage and sees his parents approach through the crowd. They are grayer and older, and to them Norman seems a miraculously fullgrown, cosmopolitan man. As formal as ever, the Reverend shakes Norman's hand. Mother smiles warmly, and pecks his cheek in the same spot.

INT. THE MANSE - LATER

MOTHER

Dinner is in half an hour, you have time for a bath. The towels are on your bed. I put out one of your Father's robes. Do you have any decent socks? Take a pair of Father's if you don't. Not his argyles. We're having a ham. A nice ham from Mrs. Hauser. She sends her best...

She winds down, allowing herself to study her son in the privacy of their home. Norman smiles at her concern.

NORMAN

Do I look thin, Mother?

She smiles back, then asks shyly:

MOTHER

Do I look old, Norman?

Norman is completely surprised by this uncharacteristic question. He reacts vehemently.

NORMAN

No, Mother. You...
(searching)
You look...

MOTHER

(quickly saving him)
I wish Paul could have been here tonight. He's working late...

And she hurries into the kitchen. Alone, he looks around the quiet unchanged house a moment! Everything seems smaller, older, familiar, strange. He catches sight of himself in the hall tree mirror, an adult in a fashionable suit, his face thinner, more mature. He leans closer in the dim light and smiles, not displeased, then starts up the staircase two at a time, and his father's voice calls, exactly as it used to.

REVEREND

Norman?

And Norman is a child again, caught.

REVEREND

Would you come in, please?

Dutifully, he turns back and trudges down the hall.

INT. FATHER'S STUDY

Norman's eyes go immediately to the plaque. "No One Will Touch Me With Impunity." He stops before the polished desk in the same place he always has, but the Reverend motions him to the oversized red-leather armchair.

REVEREND

I'm sorry Paul won't be here.

(shrugs, smiling)

The life of a newspaperman...And now he seems to have taken on the whole of Anaconda Copper. You know how he likes to...

(makes a blade of his hand)

...walk the edge.

NORMAN

(smiles)

I do.

Then the Reverend's face clouds with concern.

REVEREND

I also hear that he...

But he changes his mind, blinking, smiling abruptly, Norman noticing the change.

REVEREND

...he changed the spelling of our name...MacLean, with a capital L. Now everyone will think we're Lowland Scots...!

Norman smiles at the Reverend's mock horror as he shakes his head ironically:

REVEREND

I'm afraid I hear everything. God forbid Ethel McGuire leave me in ignorance.

(MORE)

REVEREND (Cont'd)

(Norman laughs)

Yes, and you can expect that everyone from here to Helena knows the details of your education...
Doctor Maclean.

Norman smiles, pleased and embarrassed, as the Reverend passes his judgment with sincerity:

REVEREND

It is an achievement, Norman.

And Norman basks in the rarely spoken approval.

REVEREND

And, so, to what use shall you put that achievement?

Norman is caught. His smile fades.

NORMAN

Uh...I'm, I'm not absolutely...
(searches, gives up)
sure.

But the Reverend keeps his gaze leveled, waiting, forcing Norman to stumble on.

NORMAN

I was, um, considering the Forest Service...

REVEREND

As a career?

NORMAN

No. No, for the summer...

REVEREND

Uh-huh. A break. A respite.
A good idea. The body fuels the mind...

NORMAN

(hopeful)
Yes. Yes, that's...

REVEREND

And after?

NORMAN
 And after I'm...I'm...
 (no where to
 go, deflates)
 I'm not sure.

He can't look at the growing disappointment on his father's face.

REVEREND
 Well, but...you have thought about
 it. Your future.

NORMAN
 (weakly)
 Oh...

REVEREND
 You've had seven years to think
 about it. That is what your
 education was intended for.

NORMAN
 Yes.

There is a pause. In his growing tension the Reverend reaches unconsciously for a thick red pencil, still kept in the same jar. Norman sighs inaudibly.

REVEREND
 Have you considered a further
 degree? Law? Medicine?
 (hopeful)
 The ministry?

NORMAN
 Uh...

REVEREND
 (hits on it)
Teaching. You've taught several
 classes.

NORMAN
 Yes.

REVEREND
 Did you like them? Did you feel...?

NORMAN
 (struggling)
 I...

REVEREND
The experience was...

NORMAN
Uhh...

REVEREND
(over him, determined
to finish)
Rewarding?

NORMAN
I, I'm not...
(searching)
I'm not...
(gives up)
Sure.

He glances up guiltily, sees the betrayed, confused look on his father's face. A miserable beat of silence, then mother calls, her voice bright and happy.

MOTHER
Dinner! Gentlemen...!

EXT. THE MONTANA CLUB - HELENA - MORNING

Norman opens the big oak door and enters.

INT. THE CLUB

It is dim and almost empty at this early hour. Adjusting his eyes, Norman finds Paul at a table in the bar, a pad of paper before him. For a beat Norman watches, unseen. Paul is a man now, filled out, bright and clean and golden. Then he lifts a paper bag from its place beneath the table and tips the contents into a glass. Norman glances at the big clock. It is 10:30 A.M. A shot of worry crosses his face as Paul lifts the liquor to his mouth, and in that instant feels Norman's eyes on him. Turning, caught, he stares for a second before breaking into a grin, its power and sincerity banishing Norman's concerns.

PAUL
Brother!

He jumps up and rushes to him, only at the last coming to his senses and reducing his welcome to a firm handshake, both turning ever so slightly away in embarrassment. Paul shouts proudly to the few hardened clients:

PAUL

Hey, boys--the Professor's here!

He pulls Norman to his table, babbling happily.

PAUL

When did you get in? What are you doing in Helena? How did you find me?

NORMAN

They told me at the paper you'd be in your...

(dry)

...other office.

PAUL

(laughs)

Yeah, yeah. I can't work there.

The women are all over me.

And Norman laughs, happy to be with his brother. Paul shakes his head in wonder.

PAUL

Jesus, the professor. Say...

(lifts up the
bagged bottle)

...how about a celebration?

NORMAN

Oh, maybe a little early for me...

PAUL

(pours him a drink)

Aah, gotta shake those soft Eastern ways. What are you doing here, anyway?

(raises glass)

To the sheepskin on your wall...!

They drink. Norman coughs, shocked. Paul laughs.

PAUL

Swell hooch, hm? The guy who makes it even washes the bottles.

NORMAN

(laughs)

You weren't at dinner last night, so...

PAUL

Huh?

NORMAN

So that's why I'm here.

He sees Paul's smile fail as he suddenly remembers the dinner he missed. But he covers immediately.

PAUL

Ohh. Damn. I'm knocking myself out on this story. Anaconda. I'm sorry. What did mother make?

NORMAN

"A nice ham"...from Mrs. Hauser.

He and Paul laugh at the memory of Lucy.

PAUL

Ohhh, boy...

(suddenly)

Hey. Do you do much fishing out East?

NORMAN

(sadly)

None.

PAUL

Well, then, what say?

(sweeps his work aside)

The hell with Anaconda. How about the Big Blackfoot instead?

And Norman laughs like a boy, happy and excited.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Paul's car drives past heady views to the river.

EXT. THE BIG BLACKFOOT - DAY

Norman follows Paul down the bank to the beautiful, familiar river. For a moment he stops, cocking his head, listening hard. All the subtle sounds of the river sweep over him, the "words" that he's listened to all his life. Goosebumps rise on his skin.

PAUL (V.O.)

Set?

Norman drags himself back from the moment.

NORMAN

Hold on...

And he picks up the rod, holding it out, watching the tip beat with his pulse. He can't help chuckling with pleasure. Paul smiles at him, then turns and starts upstream. Norman follows, stopping at the first "hole," a backwash of dirty foam and insects out a way in the water. Trees and brush crowd the shoreline so that he can't try an overhead cast for fear of tangling his line in the branches behind him. He's forced to attempt a "roll" cast, one that doesn't move the rod rearward at all. It is difficult and Norman can't help glancing upstream at Paul who has settled at the next hole trying very hard not to watch. Norman's first cast is shaky. He tries again, a small improvement. Paul watches openly now, unable to turn away, and finally speaks, gently:

PAUL

The fish are out farther.

Norman doesn't react, doesn't turn. He reels his line in slowly, his back to Paul, who adds quickly, shrugging:

PAUL

Just a little farther...

He hesitates, trying to turn away, sensing Norman tense. A long beat, then, sweetly, wanting to help:

PAUL

If you take your line in on a diagonal instead, it'll give you a better base, add some distance...

Neither man looks at the other. Norman acts as if he hasn't heard anything at all, and Paul turns away immediately and marches out of sight around the bend. But the moment he's gone, Norman follows his directions precisely, casting ten feet farther, right into the edge of the hole. He looks quickly around, but Paul is gone, and he allows himself to smile at his newfound ability. Again, he casts, putting solid power into the fragile rod. The line sails out and lands light as a feather right in the center of the backwash. Almost instantly, the fly disappears and Norman knows he has hooked a big one. Setting the hook, he strides into the fast current unheeding, concentrating everything on the play of the line, the fish fighting, but inexorably losing ground until, exhausted, it surfaces, a long, dark form in the swirling backwash. Norman lands it on a sandbar where it flips weakly. He stands looking down at the beautiful, iridescent trout, its gills opening and closing with its last breaths.

EXT. THE RIVER - LATER

A changed man, Norman walks along the bank, smiling proudly, hoping to run into Paul with his bulging basket weighing on his

shoulder, the trout's tail sticking out the back, proclaiming its magnificent size. But as he rounds the bend, he is struck by a sight that brings him to a halt. Paul has managed to climb a chunk of cliff in the middle of the river and Norman watches him standing at the top in the clearest blue sky, beginning to "shadow cast," an intricate and dramatic process used to tempt the fish below. First he casts hard upstream, skimming the water with his fly, but never letting it touch. Then he pivots, reversing his line in a great oval above his head and driving it low and hard downstream, again skimming the water with his fly. This he repeats over and over, his wet shirt open, revealing the play of his muscles, rainbows forming in the vapor around him. Norman is awed, humbled, overwhelmed by his beauty, by the perfection of his movement. Then he hears voices behind him and turns, annoyed, as if they are violating something sacred. It is a middle-aged couple, both carrying fishing rods, the woman wearing big overalls and big boots and they too are caught by the scene, staring in astonishment. The woman sits, smoothing the pine needles without looking, murmuring:

WOMAN

My, my.

And her husband breathes in response:

HUSBAND

Jesus.

Satisfied, Norman turns back and all three watch. Another moment, then again:

HUSBAND

Jesus.

And Norman feels himself begin to smile with pride and delight, as Paul stands unaware, alone, suspended in his perfect place.

EXT. COURTHOUSE STEPS - EVENING

Paul's car stops. The old gang is already waiting. They jump up and greet Norman warmly--Preech! Mac! Barraging him with questions, laughing, all talking at once, happy in the familiar hangout.

EVERYONE

How was it? Are they all rich? Did you ever get to New York? Did you hear real jazz? You ain't married?

NORMAN

No.

PAUL

(imitating Reverend)
God forbid.

CHUB
Wait, where's the gargle. Didn't
you visit uncle?

Conroy pulls out a bottle of hooch.

CONROY
Never fear.

Laughing, joking, they pass it around.

HUMPH
Good to be home?

NORMAN
It's the bees knees.
(laughter)

CHUB
You gonna stay?
(Norman shrugs)
What are ya gonna do with the
dee-gree?
(Norman shrugs)
What do you do with a Phud?
(laughs. Norman shrugs)
Gonna get a job...?

NORMAN
(slight irritation)
Gee, "pop," I really don't know.

Laughter. But Paul sees the discomfort in Norman's face and comes to his rescue.

PAUL
Wait a minute, something's wrong.
What...?
(he listens, puzzled.
Then:)
I know--Norman's not telling a
story...!

Laughter. Norman catches Paul's eyes, grateful. Then the others begin the old chant:

EVERYONE
Preacher, preacher, preacher...

And Norman smiles wryly, settling back in his old story-telling pose, staring out at the star-filled sky, thinking.

NORMAN
Well...okay....

And the others immediately stop, settling into their old listening positions, loving the return of their past.

NORMAN

It was, in my...sophomore year, that I decided to join the boxing team...

HUMPH

(can't resist)
Flyweight.

NORMAN

(over laughter)
And...as it happened, the coach, Jim Harrold, whose claim to fame was an undercard fight at Madison Square Garden, told me one day that he actually knew--John L. Sullivan. Knew him by his first name.

(everyone is impressed)
And he said to me, Mac, I'm going down to Boston on the weekend. How'd you like to come with me and meet John L. I didn't jump, I leaped. I sprang. You all know, this was not a man to me. This was a god. John L. Sullivan. Bare knuckle champion for ten years. Thirty rounds, forty rounds, he went. I had a picture, remember? Like this?

He stands, posing in the old-fashioned straight-back style, fists high in front of him. They all chuckle, remembering. Norman shakes his head.

NORMAN

John L. So...we took the train down to Boston, went over to Charlestown, through somebody's house, into the back yard, and there was a little...

(shrugs)
...shack sitting there. Coach knocked on the door. John? he called out, and then I heard a big, rumbling voice, with an Irish lilt. Come in, it said.

Norman is up and acting it out now, the others caught.

NORMAN

We walked inside and there stands my idol--as big as a wall, dressed in
(MORE)

NORMAN (Cont'd)

his Union suit with a gut hanging down to his knees. John, says coach, I'd like you to meet a boxer of mine--a welterweight...Mac Maclean. I put my hand out to shake and it disappears into this bear paw of his, and he says to me, is that Maclean or Mclean? Irish or Scot? And I say, Scot. Sir.

(chuckles)

He smiles, as friendly as can be, and pumps my hand. The Scots, he says, a filthy people.

Norman mugs his amazed response. Chuckles, murmurs from the boys.

NORMAN

Then he says, do you know how they come by the Highland Jig? And all I can do is stand there looking like I really want to know.

He is imitating John L. now, his huge paunch, his Irish brogue.

NORMAN

Well, it seems they live in these here sod huts up in the Highlands, he says, and it gets ferocious cold up there in the winter time. So when nature calls they run to the outhouse, but the cold prevents 'em from makin' it all the way, and they squat right there and do it on the ground.

(everyone laughs in disbelief)

And then it gets even colder, so they can only make it halfway to the crapper, then only a quarter of the way, and on and on. Well, by the time Spring rolls around, there are piles of human excrement goin' from the front door of the house all the way out to the trench. And you know what they have to do then? They have to jump between them piles! And then this huge, fat, old man puts his hands up over his head like a ballerina, and does the goddamn Highland Jig for me, jumping between "the piles," and singing...!

Norman demonstrates, springing, twirling, singing a jig, the others laughing in amazement. Finally, he drops down, shaking his head at the mortifying memory.

NORMAN

Which just goes to show, that the world is full of bastards, the...

Grinning, knowing, Paul joins in perfect sync.

NORMAN AND PAUL

...number increasing rapidly, the farther one gets from Missoula, Montana.

The brothers smile warmly at each other. The others applaud, joking and laughing.

CHUB

See? That's why you have to stick around here.

(agreement)

Say, I got it. I'm gonna take you to the dance up at the U, Fourth of July. Every girl you need to know will be there. Without mamma. We'll find you a sheba...

Big laughs at the term. The courthouse bell sounds the hour.

CHUB

She'll keep you here. C'mon, what do you say and don't say no.

Before Norman can answer, Paul rises.

PAUL

Well, gentlemen, it's been swell, but I must rush...

Warmly and almost surreptitiously, he squeezes Norman's shoulder as he walks to his car. The others smirk and nod knowingly.

CONROY

Heavy date, Paul?

HUMPH

(snorts)

With a poker table.

(chuckles)

CHUB

Hey, you see they got new signs on the road down, Paulie? "Does your husband misbehave? Grunt and grumble, rant and rave? Shoot the brute some..."

(everyone)

Burmashave!"

Big laughs as Paul gets into his car, waving breezily back. Norman asks Chub:

NORMAN

The road down to where?

CHUB

(wagging his eyebrows)

Lolo.

And as Norman looks at Paul, who honks the acoogah horn and drives off, the narrator begins speaking.

NARRATOR

Lolo Hot Springs was forty miles outside of Missoula, at the end of the darkest canyon I've ever seen.

EXT. LOLO - NIGHT

Paul's car sits beneath a faded sign touting the powers of the Lolo Hot Springs. Beyond it is a ramshackle resort building. From its windows comes the only light at the end of a long, dark road.

NARRATOR

Originally, it was a resort where the wealthy came to take its magical waters. But by the mid-twenties it had become a gambling joint, and the only water taken was by whores who came to boil out in the Springs.

Next to the building lies abandoned a pool of bubbling water, steam from it rising into the night.

NARRATOR

Unlike the saloons along Front Street in Missoula, there was a lethal absence of noise at Lolo. Loggers and grifters and petty gangsters peopled the tables, and they had driven the forty miles of bad road for only one reason, to play stud poker.

INT. LOLO - NIGHT

Brief, almost impressionistic shots of the gambling parlor--men sitting around tables, rough, unshaven, fierce. Whores next to them are serving drinks.

NARRATOR

They didn't play it well, either. But what they lacked in finesse they made up for in unpredictability, and aggression. The only thing you could know for sure about a Lolo player was that he just hated to lose.

Paul, equally intense, fans his tight-held cards. Behind him is a young Indian woman, her long black hair strikingly beautiful.

EXT. THE CHURCH - DAY

From inside the Reverend's voice can be heard preaching.

INT. THE CHURCH

The Macleans still sit in the first pew, making Paul's absence apparent. Norman studies the Reverend, smiling slightly, appreciating his ability.

NARRATOR

Being back in my father's church seemed to complete my return. The same faces gazed up at him. The same sign stood above us all.

But it was my father's words that most made me feel at home. They were what he would call beautiful, words that he had spent a lifetime listening to in the waters of the river. And I understood, perhaps for the first time, the power of words.

The Reverend's words roll out, soft and poetic and moving, Mother's lips moving with them in memorized snatches, the congregation silent, caught in the beauty of the sermon. On the wall is the sign which still proclaims, "God is Love."

INT. GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

A sign on one wall proclaims:

JULY 4, 1927
IT'S THE BERRIES

A live band including a female saxophonist plays behind a crooner who belts out "Jeepers Creepers," while couples foxtrot in a tight knot on the gym floor. Into this madhouse walk Norman and Chub, who wears baggy bellbottoms, saddle shoes and a striped blazer. He rubs his hands together and grins widely.

CHUB
Recognize anybody?

NORMAN
Um...

CHUB
You've been gone too long, son.
Ohh, lookit...

NORMAN
Where?

CHUB
Mary Norton.
(chortles)
Calls herself Marie now.

NORMAN
Where...?

CHUB
Ohhh--save me!

NORMAN
Where? Where?

And Chub grabs Norman's head, swivels it to a group.

CHUB
Daisy Redmond, now a blond.

Norman recognizes the big healthy-looking girl. Then she turns as a smaller girl comes into view, wearing a man's snap-brim hat set rakishly on her head. Norman is jolted. There is an essence that emanates from her, a glow. She is magnetic in the same way that Paul is magnetic--beautiful, laughing, with an edge of danger.

CHUB
Thinks she's Joan Crawford since...

NORMAN
(interrupts)
Who's the...
(she's blocked)
...with the hat...?

CHUB
Where?

Norman pulls him halfway onto the dancefloor until she comes into view again.

NORMAN
Her.

CHUB
Oh. Ohh, yeah.
(smiles)
In-fatuated?

NORMAN
(colors)
Chub...

CHUB
(grins at his discomfort)
Jessie Burns, from Wolf Creek.
Her brother went to Hollywood.

NORMAN
Jessie Burns...

As he speaks the musicians strike up "runnin' wild" and Jessie is swept onto the dancefloor by a handsome young man. The two do a fast foxtrot, Jessie's short skirt flaring around her slim legs, showing her rolled stockings. Norman stares hotly.

CHUB
Swishhh.

He sighs, takes a swig from his flask, and holds it out to Norman, but Norman isn't there, and Chub keeps turning in a full circle, puzzled.

INT. OTHER SIDE OF HALL

The song ends. The dancers applaud. The young man releases Jessie and Norman pops up before her, trying to be suave.

NORMAN

Dance?

She turns to him, dizzyed from the last spin, but before she can respond, the band begins "Bye Bye Blackbird." Immediately open and friendly, she smiles, fanning her face, and leans close so he can hear.

JESSIE

Would you be a darb and get us a drink?

NORMAN

(can refuse her nothing)

Sure.

He tries to saunter casually to the punchbowl. As he fills the cups, he turns to her with a prepared, jaunty smile, but she isn't looking. She's pulling her stockings up her thighs, rerolling them. His breath catches. Two other girls come up, panting and red-faced, full of talk, and Norman finds himself hurrying back, walking like Groucho Marx so as not to spill the drinks. Jessie steps away from the girls to meet him.

JESSIE

A lifesaver....!

She gulps down the drink. A little dribbles on her chin. She wipes at it with her hand.

JESSIE

How ladylike.

Norman laughs, charmed by her forthrightness.

NORMAN

Just a sec...

He pats his pockets, pulls out a clean white handkerchief and hands it to her with a self-mocking bow.

JESSIE

Thank you.

She pats her face cautiously..

JESSIE

Have to be careful. I'll wipe off all the powder. Phantom of the Opera.

He laughs like a complete fool. She looks at the smudged hankie, but Norman waves it off.

NORMAN

It's alright, my mother loves to wash.

They both laugh, Norman amazed at his own forthrightness. Then there is a pause. Neither knows what to say. Jessie sings along with the band.

JESSIE

Bye, Bye, Blackbird...

Feeling it all slipping away, he plunges:

NORMAN

You know, I...I heard this song in a little Speak in...Greenwich Village. New York. And, um, you know who was singing it? Louie Armstrong.

JESSIE

Really?

NORMAN

(relaxing, getting suave)
Yes. Yeah, this little place we used to go down to every once in awhile, best Jazz in the world. Colored Jazz, y'know? The real mccoys. Not Paul Whiteman, or...
(snorts)
...the Clicquot Club Eskimos.

JESSIE

(her smile thinning)
My mother loves the Clicquot Club Eskimos.

NORMAN

(smirk failing)
Does she?

She smiles blandly and looks away again, humming along. He can't stop himself.

NORMAN

Well...chacun a son gout...

She turns back to him, a devilish glint in her eyes, and asks, completely innocent:

JESSIE

Pardon me?

The music finishes. He has nothing left to say. Beneath the crumbling facade she can see the desperation, the young man's pure longing. A beat of silence. The buzz of the crowd. A girl's voice calls, "Jessie!" But she keeps her eyes on him. Then the band strikes up "The Shiek of Araby" and Norman manages:

NORMAN

Dance?

Silently, she raises her slender right arm into the dance position and he places his hand against hers, the contact electric, and at that moment a voice yells through the megaphone cutting the band off:

MAN ON STAGE

Yowsah, yowsah, yowsah--the fireworks have beeeegun!

There is an instant headlong plunge for the exits. The two girls appear and sweep Jessie away with them, leaving Norman looking into emptiness as the fireworks explode outside.

INT. THE MANSE - DAY

Norman paces the house, through the silent livingroom, past the study in which the Reverend works, down the hall to the kitchen where Mother stands talking into the wooden wall phone.

MOTHER

Yes, he's here. Oh, we're fairly sinning with pride...

(laughs)

Well, the reason I'm calling, Eva, is that I've been, I guess you could say, elected--although it seems to me John McGuire just pointed his finger and said, you're it.

(chuckles)

But, what we're trying to do is organize some relief for the poor souls out on the Reservation? Have you been out there lately? No, well, the children haven't any shoes or jackets. The food they eat is pitiful. They have God, thanks to the Reverend, but they need--oh, anything at all, old clothes, food, tools, any left over money you might have...

She laughs, and Norman stands in the kitchen, picking nervously at a jar of cookies, watching her with admiration handle her endless duties.

MOTHER

I'll put you down then, on my little list here. The Reverend thanks you, Eva, and we both hope that you can join us when we hand out the booty, see for yourself how the poor souls are living. Oh, I'll let you know. I sure will. Bye, bye.

She looks at Norman, smiling mischievously.

MOTHER

It'll be a cold day in you know where when Eva Connery sets foot on a Reservation.

Norman tries to smile. She sees his anxiety.

MOTHER

Are you waiting for the phone?

NORMAN

No, if you're busy...

MOTHER

No. Go ahead...

NORMAN

No...

MOTHER

No, I need a rest.

And she walks off, trying not to smile at him as he calls weakly after her:

NORMAN

No, it's...I don't have to...

He waits until she is gone, then pulls the door closed and, sighing, picks up the receiver.

NORMAN

Hello, Mrs. Hatcher. I'd... Fine. They're all...everybody's fine. Um...I'd like the Burns residence in Wolf Creek, please.

(closes eyes)

Yes, I know it's long distance, Mrs. Hatcher. Thank you.

The phone rings and a voice answers.

NORMAN

Hello. Is Jessie there? This is...
well, Norman Maclean, but I don't
think she...

"Hold on" is heard. He waits until another voice comes on,
then he melts.

NORMAN

Hello.

Jessie asks a question and his smile fails.

NORMAN

Uh, no, I'm the one who brought you
a drink...

(she still can't
place him)

No, we didn't get a chance. The
fireworks started and, and...um, we
talked about the music?

(still nothing)

And, I said...

(hates himself for
what he said)

I heard Louie Armstrong sing the...

(recognition, he winces)

Yeah. Chacun a son gout. That's
me.

Friendly laughter comes from her end. He can't help smiling,
encouraged.

NORMAN

I...I was a little nervous, it
just...huh? Well, because you're
so...uhh...

He can't say beautiful. So he grins mischievously and does an
overripe French accent.

NORMAN

Je ne sais quoi.

And they both laugh with great relief.

NORMAN

Yeah...So, anyway...I called because
I thought maybe I could come over
and listen to the Clicquot Club
Eskimos with your mother...

He grins at her delighted laughter.

NORMAN

No, but I...I really would like to...to see you, that's why I... What? Um, well...Saturday? Well, this Saturday or...uhh...eight?

(she says okay and he smiles in surprise)

Okay.

(he grins)

Okay. That's just...Right, I'll see you then. I'll...

(she says bye)

Bye.

He hangs up and breaks into a grin, sauntering off, murmuring:

NORMAN

The Shiek strikes again...

EXT. FRONT STREET - NIGHT

The Reverend's Model T sedan turns down Front Street. Sidewalks are crowded with people, mostly young. The car stops and Norman hops out, his hair plastered, wearing a summery suit and outrageous bowtie. He opens the door for Jessie who takes his hand as she steps down and smiles at him with Clara Bow lips, her hair a perfect cap, her dress shimmery and short. They walk arm-in-arm up an alley to a door. Norman knocks. A panel slides open revealing the owner, Murphy.

NORMAN

Hey, Murph.

MURPHY

Preacher...!

JESSIE

Preacher...?

INT. SPEAKEASY

The joint is jumping. People dance. Smoke swirls.

MURPHY

Your brother's already here.

(disapproving)

With the Injun...

Jessie reacts to the word. Norman is about to say something caustic but Murphy cuts him off with a worried look, leaning close.

MURPHY

Gimme a minute, would you Preach?

And before Norman can respond, he's towed into a corner, leaving Jessie.

NORMAN

Wait, wait, what about...?

MURPHY

She'll live. Listen, a word to the wise. Paul's playin' in the big game down to Lolo. No two-bit stuff for your brother, y'know? But the thing is--he's behind in the big game. And that is not good, you get me?

Surprised, worried, Norman can only nod.

MURPHY

Why don't you take him fishin', huh? Okay. 'Nuf said. Have fun, Preach.

And he lets Norman go.

Distracted now, Norman, murmuring apologies, leads Jessie to a table where Paul sits with the stunning Indian woman we saw at Lolo, her straight black hair cascading over her shoulders. Her dress is daringly low-cut and backless. Norman hesitates, concerned about Jessie accepting all this but Paul rises, smiling broadly. He's dressed all in white with a white Panama hat still on, and he looks as arresting as his date. Norman studies him a moment, worried, unable to understand him. Then, wry:

NORMAN

Jessie, this is my baby brother, Paul.

Paul laughs, shakes her hand firmly, looking straight at her.

NORMAN

And this is...this is Moh-Na-Se-Tah.

With a slightly tough edge she corrects him.

MABEL

Mabel.

Paul is still looking at Jessie as she smiles politely to Mabel. Nervously, Norman seats her. Paul pulls a barmaid over familiarly.

PAUL

Swell hooch here, they even wash the bottles.

Jessie laughs. Norman makes a face, not entertained.

PAUL

What'll it be? They have some liquers they smuggled in, sweet and not too...

JESSIE

I'll have a martini.

PAUL

(impressed)

Well. Rightyo. And...
(observes Norman's stiffness)

I guess the regular for Norman here--gin and prune juice?

This cracks everyone up, even Norman, who relents, giving into his brother's jolliness.

NORMAN

Please, a double.

Mabel drains her glass and bangs it down on the tray. Wincing, Norman tries to make conversation.

NORMAN

So...Where are you working now, Mabel?

PAUL

(answering for her,
mocking, challenging)

She sells bait.

Norman sighs, glancing apologetically at Jessie. But she just smiles and turns to Mabel saying, in that innocent and sincere way of hers:

JESSIE

You have the most beautiful hair I've ever seen.

And Mabel brightens, touching her hair self-consciously.

MABEL

Do you think I should get it bobbed?

JESSIE

Not in a million years.

And Mabel smiles for the first time, her toughness dissolving. Proud of Jessie, Norman gives Paul a look of triumph and Paul raises his glass in concession.

PAUL

Well...

But before he can think of a toast:

NORMAN

My candle burns at both ends.
It will not last the night.
But ah my foes and oh my friends
It gives a lovely light.

His reading is simple, but touches the others, raising goosebumps on Jessie's bare arms, leaving Mabel nodding in agreement. Then, somewhat solemnly, they drink. Paul tries to change the mood.

PAUL

Well, how about--to my editor, the
old far...the old "curmudgeon..."
(laughter)
...who just took me off the Anaconda
story...
(to Jessie)
I'm a reporter at the Bee.

JESSIE

I know.

NORMAN

(surprised)
How do you know?

PAUL

(trying not to gloat)
I'm famous.

JESSIE

"The Fishing Newspaperman."

NORMAN

You know he fishes too?

JESSIE

I thought everybody knew.

PAUL
You've been away a long time,
brother. Anyway, the old man's been
getting calls. No names, just
threats.

Norman sees Jessie bite the hook.

JESSIE
Real threats?

PAUL
It's nice to know you're touching a
nerve, but...

JESSIE
What'd they say?

PAUL
(shrugs)
Oh...

NORMAN
You'll have to cut it out of him.

PAUL
(smiles)
The usual...
(imitates gangster)
Some'a the boys are gonna come down
and pay me a little visit...

Laughter. Then, surprisingly, Jessie does her own impression.

JESSIE
Fit you wit a pair 'a concrete
galoshes...

Startled, Paul laughs out loud. Norman can't miss the clear
attraction between them. A new song starts.

SONG
My memories cling to me by moonlight on
Honolu-lu Bay.
And all the beaches are filled with peaches
Who bring their Ukes along.
And in the glimmer of the moonlight
They like to sing this song...

PAUL
Ah.
(mocking)
Our song.

For a second it seems that Paul is going to ask Jessie to dance, but he leans past her and takes Mabel's hand. The two make their way onto the small dancefloor and begin a slow foxtrot.

SONG

If you like a ukelele lady
Ukelele lady like you...

But what they make of it is incredible--swooping, spinning, in perfect sync. Everyone's eyes turn to them and they accept the spotlight, familiar with it.

JESSIE

Wow.

And Norman seems to shrivel next to her, until abruptly, Jessie turns to him.

JESSIE

Don't you want to dance?

NORMAN

(surprised)

Sure.

She holds out her hand and he takes it, feeling the thrill. Unnoticed, he leads her to a corner of the floor and starts, stolidly, not without a conservative kind of style, both of them watching Paul and Mabel, and he can't help saying:

NORMAN

He's so damn good...

JESSIE

Mm.

And with that she dismisses Paul altogether and snuggles against Norman. He is completely surprised, utterly delighted. Tentatively, he squeezes closer and she responds, nestling into him. A blissful smile grows on Norman's face as he breathes in the perfume of her body, and Paul and Mabel careen by unseen, the crooner crooning on, soft and mellow.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

A church picnic is in full swing. Meat sizzles over a grill. Food of every description covers the picnic tables. Children run around dirtying their Sunday clothes. A large group is gathered by a horseshoe pit, watching the Reverend play, his movements as elegant and disciplined as if he were casting. Norman watches, smiling, noticing the intensity, the edge of competition in his father's play. Mother holds Norman's arm

proudly as a host of people converge on her son, welcoming him back home, asking every sort of question, mothers pushing daughters towards him, men talking about business prospects, everyone very warm but slightly cowed by his accomplishments, treating him exactly as he can see them treat the Reverend, who hurls a high, floating shoe, and hits just off the mark, his expression flashing a less-than-Christian look for a second. All the while Mother whispers in Norman's ear delectable tidbits about the congregation.

MOTHER

Mrs. Hauser. There. With the picture hat? Her Lucy? Seems to have gone off somewheres mighty quick, and then come back with a little one. He's a darling, though. Croupy. But I fixed up a plaster. Poor little thing.

(to woman approaching,
welcoming Norman)

Ethel. Thank you. Oh, yes, we're fairly sinning with pride for him.

(laughs, whispers)

She's on the phone to your father twice a day, I swear. So and so is drinking, so and so is running after girls. She needs a husband and children. Poor thing.

NORMAN

Hello, Mr. Ponds. I'm just fine, thank you. Uh, well, I'm not a hundred percent sure. Insurance? Uh, I never thought of that...

MOTHER

(whispering)

Oh, lordy, look at how fat Paulina McDowell has gotten. But isn't her daughter a beauty? In the gingham. Twenty just a week ago. Bright as a light, Norman.

(smiles at old man)

Mr. Murchison.

(louder)

Mr. Murchison! No! No, it's Norman. Nor--man!

And she smiles and shouts as the deaf old man pinches Norman's cheek, a wad of tobacco stuffed in his mouth, and Norman glances nervously at his watch, and the Reverend's toss rings the pole with an echoing clang, his smile, unprotected for a moment, as open and happy as a boy's.

NARRATOR

My mother realized, perhaps too late, that when she married a minister she married his flock. From that day, while my father worked on words behind his study door, my mother took on the role of social secretary, social worker, counselor, nurse, and all around shoulder-to-cry-on. And I don't remember her flagging at any of those duties.

I always admired her heart, and normally I would have enjoyed her catching me up on the idiosyncracies of the congregation, but today I had been invited to meet Jessie's family. They were coming in for the arrival of her brother, Neal, who was returning home at last after a long stay in California. And Jessie considered our meeting not only convenient, but almost providential.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Norman hurries in nervously, carrying flowers, dressed very properly. It is not difficult to spot the Burns family in a huge, excited gaggle, carrying baskets of food and peering anxiously down the tracks.

NARRATOR

The Burns were a poor family. Mr. Burns ran a general store in a one store town and still managed to do badly. They were Methodists, a denomination my father always referred to as, "Baptists who could read." But I found them as surprising and delightful, and as overwhelming, as Jessie herself.

Jessie sees Norman and beams, unguardedly happy. Immediately, the whole family descends on him with no sense of decorum or distance, sweeping him up as one of their own, fussing over the flowers, while Jessie shouts introductions to parents, aunts, uncles, etc., and Norman stands, smiling, overwhelmed.

MR. BURNS

Are you related to the fishing newspaperman?

NORMAN

My brother.

AUNT SALLY

Jessie says you just got your Ph.D?

(continuing)

Can you imagine? With that kind of an education you can do anything. Jessie, you know, was at the University. She was majoring in...

KEN

Flapperism.

AUNT SALLY

Political Science, I believe, wasn't it? But she dropped out.

JESSIE

Aunt Sally...

AUNT SALLY

She could learn from you-- stick-to-ativity...

MRS. BURNS

Let him breathe. He's not used to all of this. He's a Presbyterian.

Norman bursts into laughter with the others, surprising himself, beginning to relax in the ease of their warmth.

MRS. BURNS

What he needs is some peace, and some food.

NORMAN

Oh, I...

MRS. BURNS

Jessie, get him a sandwich. Here.

(opens it up)

Chicken.

(through Ken)

Do you like chicken?

KEN

We killed it especially for you.

JESSIE

It's his favorite.

Trapped and laughing, Norman takes a big bite, Mrs. Burns, Aunt Sally, all the women watching and smiling with approval. Then a whistle blares. Instantly, Norman is forgotten.

The whole clan turns anxiously toward the tracks where a locomotive is pulling in. Steam fills the station, and as it clears, everyone sees Neal Burns, twenty-five, handsome but slightly dissipated, step off the train, wearing white flannels and two tennis sweaters. Norman's eyes narrow as he sizes Neal up quickly.

NARRATOR

Neal Burns stepped off the train trying to remember what he thought a Davis Cup tennis player looked like, which struck me as odd, especially since you couldn't jump over a tennis net in Wolf Creek without landing in cactus. But then he recognized his relatives, and realizing he couldn't be Bill Tilden or F. Scott Fitzgerald anymore, he simply turned his profile and waited to be kissed.

The clan covers him, the women hugging and kissing him, Norman seeing with a pang how accepting and expressive their love for this bloated pretender is. Grinning like a little girl, Jessie pulls Neal to Norman.

JESSIE

Neal, this is Norman Maclean.

NEAL

(shakes, suave
and phoney)

Old boy...

Norman's smile hardens with dislike, but the troupe sweeps past him, not noticing, leaving Norman alone with Neal's suitcase which sits forgotten, and Norman sees that it is a battered affair, its straw sides breaking open, one of its clasps gone. Surprised, even touched, he picks it up and follows the raucous group out.

INT. THE BURNS DINING ROOM - EVENING

Mr. Burns pops the cap of a bottle of homemade beer. It erupts, splashing everyone. Laughter and protests, Norman happily joining in. Mr. Burns pours glasses for everyone, licking it off of his fingers.

MR. BURNS

Umm. A good year.

Laughs, jokes. Neal raises his glass.

NEAL
To the famdamily.

Everyone drinks, beaming. Neal makes a small, disgusted face at the beer and heads to the liquor cabinet, pouring himself a drink. Norman notices everyone tense, fills the silence with an innocuous question.

NORMAN
How long are you planning to stay?
Neal turns to him for the first time and smiles.

NEAL
Sport. Sport c'mere. C'mere...
Wagging, the dog trots over to him.

NEAL
I don't know.
He begins tussling with Sport, looking at no one else.

NEAL
I miss the ocean.

JESSIE
(hopping on it)
What's it like?

NEAL
Big. Blue. People ride in on the waves. They...let go, let go!
(he pulls hand out of Sport's mouth)
They swim out and pick the biggest wave. It's always the sixth.

NORMAN
(automatically)
Seventh.

Neal ignores this, tussles harder with Sport, working him into a frenzy. Jessie reaches out as if to stop him.

NEAL
And they lie on top of it and just coast in. I got pretty good at it.
Ow! Dammit. Bad! Bad dog!

He slaps Sport smartly across the nose.

NEAL
Jeez, Ma.

MRS. BURNS
(miserable)
You get him excited...

Poor sport slinks away on his belly. Neal pours another drink and Norman eyes him coldly, liking him less every minute.

NEAL
Anyhoo. What was I saying?

FATHER
The ocean...

JESSIE
The water...

AUNT SALLY
Waves...

NEAL
Yeah. We'd ride those waves all day, all the boys...Ramon, me, Ronnie Coleman. I got pretty good...

AUNT SALLY
(amazed)
I can't picture Ronald Coleman riding on waves.

Jessie bursts into laughter, unable to stop herself. And the rest join in, somewhat hysterically and with great relief. Disconcerted for only a moment, Neal joins them.

NEAL
Some Kodak, hey? Yeah, well...

He takes a step toward the door. Laughter dies.

MRS. BURNS
Aw, honey...

NEAL
Gotta stretch my legs, Ma.
Long trip...

Norman sees the pained expressions on the whole family. Then, suddenly, Mrs. Burns blurts:

MRS. BURNS
Maybe you could go fishing with Norman some time...?

Both Neal and Norman stop, at a complete loss. The family brightens, looking hopefully at Norman.

NORMAN
Oh. Ah...yeah, ah...
(hits on it)
I could get my brother Paul to come...

FATHER

And how.

MRS. BURNS

Wonderful. Wouldn't that be...?

NEAL

Fishing.

NORMAN

(dry, challenging)
You do fish?

EVERYONE

Sure he does. Yes. Who doesn't?

NEAL

Oh, you betcha.

He eyes Neal, beginning to enjoy himself.

NORMAN

Well, then, how about Saturday?
We have a cabin up at Seeley Lake...

EVERYONE

Saturday's good. Fine, etc.

NORMAN

Say about, oh...
(torturing him)
Six?

NEAL

A.m.?

Everyone laughs as if it's a joke.

MRS. BURNS

He'll be there, won't you honey?
That's so very, very kind of you,
Norman.

NORMAN

(angelic)
My pleasure.

NEAL

Yeah. That's just...dandy...

With a doomed smile he edges out the door, but Jessie can't
let him go.

JESSIE

I think...why don't you go with him,
Norman? To...you know, make your
plans....

NEAL

Oh, I don't...

NORMAN

Oh, well, I...

FAMILY

Yes. You have to plan.
It never works if you
don't, etc.

And beneath the table Norman feels Jessie's hand take his and
squeeze, tight and loving, and he hears himself murmur:

NORMAN

Dandy.

EXT. BLACK JACK'S BAR - EVENING

A car sits in front of the dilapidated ex-boxcar stuck on the
edge of the hamlet. A crude sign reads, "BLACK JACK'S."

INT. BLACK JACK'S BAR - MIRROR

In a crude, wavy mirror is a reflection of Neal, looking back
intently at his face as his mouth moves between drinks.

NEAL

It was an otter and her pups.
I had a hard time trailing them
because they turn white in the
winter. Anyhoo, I trailed them
all day right up to the top of
Rogers Pass, where, did you know
this? There's a thermometer up
there that's stuck, this is
official, at 69° below zero...

INT. THE BAR

Norman, next to Neal, rolls his eyes and sips at the horrible
moonshine. A frail, trembling old barkeep leans against the
split-log bar.

NARRATOR

After a few shots of the especially
vile whiskey brewed by old Black
Jack himself, Neal began to hold
forth. He'd chosen Montana subjects
to spin his pointless lies about,
shooting, hiking, trapping,

(MORE)

NARRATOR (Cont'd)

probably, I figured, to impress the only other client at the bar, whom he had particularly ignored so far, a ploy that was beginning to pay off.

At the end of the bar sits a thirty year old woman, pretty, tough, staring at Neal's profile, very interested.

NARRATOR

The woman Neal was not looking at went by the name of Old Rawhide. About ten years before she'd been elected Beauty Queen of Wolf Creek. She'd ridden bareback standing up through the one hundred and eleven inhabitants, mostly male. Her skirts flew high and she won the contest. But since she didn't have what it takes to become a professional rider, she did the next best thing. However, she still wore the divided skirts of a horsewoman, although they must have been a hardship in her new profession.

RAWHIDE

(unable to stand it)

Hey, buster. What are otters doin' on the top of Rogers Pass. I thought they swam down in the cricks.

Neal stops in mid-sentence and, not turning his head, finally looks at Rawhide in the mirror, transforming himself at once into F. Scott Fitzgerald. With a small, suave smile, he says to Black Jack, his voice beginning to slur with drink:

NEAL

Jack--give the lady a whiskey...

And Rawhide slides eagerly across the intervening packing crate stools until she bumps into Norman, giving him an ugly look.

NORMAN

Yeah. Well, I gotta shove off...

He finishes the last of his glass, shivers at the foul brew, and starts off. Rawhide slips into his seat, smiling seductively at Neal's profile. At the door, Norman can't resist.

NORMAN

Don't forget, fishing Saturday.
Old boy...

In the mirror he sees Neal blink, looking up blankly for Norman's face.

NEAL

What...?

And Norman exits, thoroughly disgusted.

EXT. THE MONTANA STATE HOUSE - DAY

Norman walks up the broad steps of the domed building and enters.

INT. GALLERY

He walks into the steep gallery above the gaggle of newsmen who limply watch the debate below. Some read newspapers. Some scribble notes. At their center is Paul, clearly a leader despite his youth. He banters quietly with several others close to him, keeping an eye on the floor. Unseen, Norman takes a seat just as Paul comes alive, pointing:

PAUL

Ah...ah...he's up.

Everyone looks. An elder senator is standing to take the podium. They all lean forward. Norman cranes over them, puzzled, until he sees that the man's fly is gaping. The reporters crack up.

REPORTERS

Stop the presses! He's done it
again, etc.

Paul rises and applauds politely. The others follow. Everyone below looks up. The old senator smiles and waves in happy ignorance, bowing. Paul turns to joke with Number Three and Norman, standing behind them, catches his eye. Paul smiles cheerfully.

PAUL

Say. It's my big brother, boys...

The others turn, smiling at the height differential, as Norman and Paul shake.

PAUL

Looking for a job?

NORMAN

A favor.

PAUL

Uh-oh.

(waggles eyebrows)

Um...want a drink? We could go over
to my "other office..."

Norman's eyes move to the big clock hanging above the senate
chamber. It is not quite ten a.m. Paul deflates.

PAUL

Yeah, rightyo.

He leads Norman out to the hall.

INT. HALL

PAUL

What's the favor?

NORMAN

Go fishing with me.

PAUL

(brightens)

Done.

NORMAN

And...

(sighs)

Jessie's got a brother. He's in
from California...

PAUL

Uh oh.

NORMAN

And I said I'd take him fishing--
with us. I won't lie to you.
He's a world-champion pigfucker.

PAUL

(smiles)

Bait fisherman.

NORMAN

He didn't say.

PAUL

He'll show up with a coffee can
full of worms. Red can. Hills
Bros. coffee.

He holds out a hand as if to bet. Norman sighs, admits:

NORMAN
I promised Jessie.

PAUL
Ah.
(eyes Norman)
Are you getting serious?

NORMAN
I don't know. She...

PAUL
What?

Norman shakes his head, waving it away. Paul smiles, kindly.

PAUL
Well, then I guess we better do it.
Norman returns a smile of gratitude, adding dryly:

NORMAN
You're a darb.

He turns to leave, but Paul calls.

PAUL
Hey. Where are you going tonight?
Hot date?

NORMAN
No.

PAUL
Well then, what do you say we do the town?

NORMAN
Oh...

PAUL
No, don't be the professor, okay?
Just for one night be my brother.
Norman. Mac.
(grins)
The Preecher.

Norman smiles, shrugging.

NORMAN
What the hell...

EXT. FRONT STREET - NIGHT

Banging out of Murphy's come Norman and Paul and with them Mabel of the glistening black hair, all roaring drunk and happy.

NORMAN

Where to?

PAUL

Sleezy Sams!

NORMAN

(echoes)

Sleezy Sams!

PAUL

And how!

NORMAN

And now!

Big laughs. As they step out of the alley Mabel pushes between them, locking her arms around theirs and turning them, wobbling, onto the sidewalk.

PAUL

Uh oh, uh oh...

NORMAN

Trouble!

PAUL

I should hope to tell you...!

Big laughs as they push down the sidewalk like a plough, filling it up, and Mabel starts to sing:

MABEL

Ohh, Donderbeck, oh Donderbeck
How could you be so mean,
To ever have invented such a terrible
machine...

(they all join)

Now dogs and rats and pussy cats
Will never more be seen
'Cause they're all ground up to sausage meat
In Donderbeck's machine!

College kids, cowboys, hulking loggers, all are driven before the plough, their choice to get off the sidewalk or stand and fight. Mabel's eyes glitter. She looks like a warrior of ages past, pulling the brothers along, daring anyone to stand before them. Paul and even Norman are caught up in it, tough, dangerous, roaring out their song.

EVERYONE
Donderbeck, oh Donderbeck
How could you be so mean, etc.

Then, as they pass a dark alley, Paul's head turns as if he's heard something. Lighted cigarettes illumine the outlines of several men. Paul slows, stops singing. Norman and Mabel keep on until his arm stops them.

NORMAN
Woah...

But he sees Paul's expression change, his smile vanish.

PAUL
Just a minute...

He starts for the alley.

NORMAN
What...?

He starts toward him but Paul holds a hand out firmly.

PAUL
No. Stay here.

And then he disappears into the darkness. Mabel leans against a lamp post and begins singing again. Norman waits a moment, then follows, peering around the alley mouth unseen, watching Paul in huddled conversation with three tough-looking men, their faces barely recognizable from Lolo. Suddenly, Paul feints with his big right fist. All three men flinch away, and Paul bursts into laughter, genuinely enjoying himself. Then he walks abruptly away, catching Norman. But he only smiles with great tolerance, shrugging it off.

PAUL
Games.

And Mabel plunges in, grabbing them both again and pulling them off. Norman, worried now, looks across her as she bursts into song.

MABEL
Ohh, Donderbeck, oh, Donderbeck...

He sees Paul, laughing, singing, seemingly untouched, and as always, he is deeply puzzled.

EXT. SEELEY LAKE - DAY

The sun beats down on the still blue lake. It is completely silent. Nothing moves, not a bird, not a leaf.

EXT. THE CABIN

Paul sits alone in the shade of the stoop. He wears last night's clothes, rumpled and damp with sweat, as he puts on his beautiful, well-oiled boots, his hands shaking. Finally, with an angry sigh, he speaks to the air.

PAUL

Alright, what time is it?

And from the outhouse comes Norman's quiet response.

NORMAN (V.O.)

Almost noon.

PAUL

May he catch three doses of clap.

He wipes at a drop of sweat rolling down his face.

PAUL

They're not going to bite anyway,
it's too damn hot.

(no response)

Sure glad I didn't go home first and
get some sleep...

No response. He taps his foot a moment, then:

PAUL

You fall in?

A horn honks. Norman comes out carrying a newspaper to see a cloud of dust through the trees resolve itself into a Model T, steam rising from the radiator cap. Neal, in wilted white shirt with matching braces and sleeve garters, leans on the horn again. Norman sighs and walks to the front of the car, waving.

NEAL

Oh.

He stops honking, and Norman sees the top of another head slowly rise to reveal Rawhide.

PAUL

As I live and breathe.

She gives Paul a tough look, points a thumb at Neal.

RAWHIDE

Buster here wants to fish.

Neal, "Buster," is busy fumbling with something. The two men peer in to see a bottle of hooch and a bottle of strawberry pop, which Neal is splashing in the vicinity of a paper cup.

PAUL

Yum.

NORMAN

You're late, Neal.

Neal's eyes take awhile to focus.

NEAL

I...didn't get in 'til three...

PAUL

I didn't get in at all, but I was here at 6.

Neal cowers slightly. Norman sighs.

NORMAN

Neal, Paul...

Paul takes Neal's hand and squeezes hard but speaks quietly.

PAUL

Remember this, Neal--in Montana there are three things you're never late for--church, work, and fishing. Okay?

Neal grimaces at the handshake, then points in the direction of Rawhide.

NEAL

Yeah. Rightyo. This, this is...

PAUL AND NORMAN

We've met.

But Rawhide holds out her hand anyway. Norman, nearest, can't reach it. She giggles.

RAWHIDE

Don't go 'way...

She steps out of the car and immediately begins weaving away, fighting to reach Norman like someone climbing a mountain. Uncertain, Norman starts toward her, hand remaining out, until she finally manages to reach and hold on tightly.

RAWHIDE

Watch the first step, it's a LouLou.

And she breaks into disarming laughter, which infects both Norman and Paul, who smile widely.

PAUL

So.

NORMAN

Yeah, ah...you ready?

NEAL

(blank)

What?

NORMAN

Fishing.

Rawhide sinks heavily to the running board, her skirt hiked up past her tattered stockings, and mumbles:

RAWHIDE

Buster wants to fish...

Neal nods in sage agreement, a pink mustache forming from his drink. Cheerfully, Paul calls out:

PAUL

Well, then--we're off...! Oh, wait a minute. What about the bait, Neal?

NEAL

(brightens)

Oh. Dumb Dora...

He fumbles in the back seat and comes up with a red Hills Brothers coffee can full of earth. Paul grins triumphantly at Norman.

EXT. THE RIVER - LATER

Paul has already reached a deep, clear hole, and is practice casting on the gravelly bank. Norman stops and studies the strong right hand that Paul scared the toughs with the night before, the rippling muscles in Paul's arm as he casts beautifully, the fly hitting precisely where it was intended. Norman smiles. There is a perfection to the scene--his brother, the casting, the "words" of the water coming to him; peaceful and reassuring.

NORMAN

You know...

His voice breaks the stillness, too loud, too sudden, alarming him. He knows he should stop but can't.

NORMAN
...if you need anything, any
money...

Paul looks away. Norman stumbles on.

NORMAN
I can help you...

Paul pulls his line in. Norman can't stop.

NORMAN
I thought, because of last night,
you know, the...? You might need
some...money, or...
(sighs, hating this)
I can help.

His voice trickles away. Paul won't look at him. A
miserable, embarrassing beat, then Paul turns back as if
nothing's been said.

PAUL
Where's Neal?

Norman looks around. Neal is nowhere in sight. Norman sags.

NORMAN
Aw...

EXT. DEAD HOLE - LATER

Looking everywhere, Norman toils up a rise and there below him
sit Neal and Rawhide, on the edge of a "dead hole," a piece of
the river not connected to the main body, its surface covered
with scum.

NORMAN
What the hell are you...?

He fights back his anger, approaching them, conciliatory.

NORMAN
See, ah, this is what they call a
dead hole, Neal. You can't...

NEAL
There are lots of fish.

Norman peers beneath the surface to see several mud-colored
fish lying at the bottom.

NORMAN
Those are suckers.

NEAL
What's a sucker?

Rawhide laughs in disbelief. Norman rolls his eyes, disgusted.

RAWHIDE
Quick, Henry, the flit...

Norman turns back. Rawhide is waving vainly at the clouds of insects around her head as Neal reaches into the coffee can and comes up with a handful of wriggling worms. His brow knitted in concentration, he skewers the lot with his hook, then drops them into the tepid water. Norman can only stare as the botch of squirming pink sinks to the bottom, almost on top of the fish. Not one of them stirs. Norman tears his eyes away from this spectacle, hesitating, sure he shouldn't leave them, but finally shrugs.

NORMAN
Well...Good fishing...

NEAL
(foggily)
What?

And Norman walks away, defeated.

EXT. THE RIVER - LATER

The river runs in waves and ripples and backwaters and little rapids, each with a different sound, a different motion, carrying itself on endlessly, the merciless sun glinting off its surface like diamonds. Paul appears, stepping out of the glare as he searches along the bank, finally smiling, seeing Norman asleep in the shade of a willow. Quietly, he crouches beside him and opens his creel. One sad fish lies in the fresh picked laurel leaves. Norman opens his eyes.

NORMAN
I know. You have twenty.

Paul opens his creel. It's empty. They smile.

PAUL
Where's Neal?

NORMAN
Screw Neal.

Paul laughs. Norman struggles up, cranky and disgusted, brushing himself off.

PAUL

I thought we were supposed to help him.

NORMAN

How do you help that son of a bitch?

PAUL

(shrugs)

By taking him fishing.

NORMAN

But he doesn't even want to be here. He doesn't like the river, he doesn't like Montana, he doesn't like me, and he sure as hell doesn't like fishing...

Paul smiles up at him, squinting against the sun. Then he says, thoughtful and quiet:

PAUL

Well...but maybe what he likes is somebody trying to help him.

Automatically, Norman begins to respond, aggravated, but then, comprehending the words, he is brought up so sharply Paul can see it on his face as he stares back, surprised at Paul's perception, both of them understanding that Paul was talking about himself as well, baring himself for a brief moment in the hot shade of the willow. Then, with the same serious expression, he breaks the moment:

PAUL

Did you sink the beer?

And Norman answers just as seriously:

NORMAN

You bet your life.

EXT. RIVER - LATER

Under the blazing sun, Norman hurries toward a deep, cold hole, his mouth dust dry. Behind him Paul strides, twirling a bottle opener on one finger.

PAUL

I can taste it. I can taste it...

But Norman is stopped short, peering into the hole. Paul looks in after him. The hole is empty.

PAUL

Are you sure this is...?

Norman nods, watching Paul's expression turn deadly with sudden comprehension.

PAUL

I'm gonna kill him.

EXT. RIVER - LATER

Paul's boot kicks viciously at an empty beer bottle. Norman watches it skitter along the shore, finally bursting against a boulder. He has to run slightly to keep up with Paul's angry stride as he follows Neal's trail like a bloodhound. They round the bend and spot two more empties near the mouth of the river.

PAUL

...five, six.

He looks at Norman with murder in his eye, then turns in a circle, searching the area for the criminals. But it is Norman who spots them first. On a sandbar stretching across the river lie two bumps. Norman takes a step forward, squinting into the heat mirages.

PAUL

What?

And the bumps suddenly take on the form of two rearends, raised to the sun.

NORMAN

Holy Christ.

He splashes past Paul and the rest of the bodies appear, naked, face down, fast asleep, side-by-side, their clothes strewn about, signs of wild lovemaking in the sand. The last of the liquor and pop sizzle in the heat. The red can rests faithfully by Neal's side, its earth as cracked as Norman's lips, its color no brighter than the cruel blistering sunburn that covers both sleepers from the soles of their feet to the roots of their hair. Norman sucks in his breath.

NORMAN

Oh, shit.

(sags)

I think I'm in trouble.

PAUL

(peering closer)

Hold on...She's got a tattoo.

NORMAN

Huh...?

He looks closer and sees on one blazing buttock the letters LO and on the other VE.

PAUL

Initials?

NORMAN

No, look...

He points. Directly in the center, crossing from one cheek to the other, is a hyphen.

NORMAN

L O - V E. Love.

They look at each other and burst into laughter like a dam overflowing, then sink to the ground, hysterical.

EXT. THE BURNS HOUSE - LATE DAY

A very subdued Norman pulls up in Neal's car. Next to him Neal sits, covered only in a towel draped around his middle. He seems to be asleep, so Norman gently puts the key in his lap.

NEAL

Ahh!

NORMAN

Sorry, sorry...

Norman looks worriedly at the house and hurries out of the car, opening Neal's door for him. His face screwed into a mask of pain, Neal starts up the path, clutching the towel to his waist, but the flexing of his knee to reach the first step is too much.

NEAL

Ahhhhh!

NORMAN

(cringing)

Shhhh!

Too late. Jessie and Florence stand at the door in horror.

NORMAN

Ah, he...he...

FLORENCE
Sweet Jesus....!

She runs to Neal, reaching out with two protective hands.

NORMAN
No, don't...

NEAL
(as she grabs him)
AHHHH!

Florence releases him in anguish and bewilderment.

NORMAN
He...fell asleep...

Norman turns Neal around, revealing the sunburn.

NORMAN
...in the sun.

FLORENCE
Oh, my Lord in heaven...!

JESSIE
Naked?

Norman glances up at her, his expression pleading, but Jessie's horror has transformed into rage. She fixes him with merciless eyes, reminiscent of Paul's "expression."

JESSIE
You left him alone.

NORMAN
I...

As he struggles, Florence recovers, spiriting Neal gingerly inside as he moans.

FLORENCE
Alright, honey. We'll fix it, we'll fix it...

NORMAN
...he was, he brought someone along, and...

JESSIE
You left him alone.

NORMAN
No, you see...he...I...

But Jessie has already turned on her heel and walked inside, slamming the door behind her. Sighing tragically, Norman turns and walks back to the car, only then realizing that it isn't his, and he doesn't have the keys. He groans, hesitates a beat then turns around and walks up to the door, rings the bell. Jessie opens it, her face set and cold. Pitifully, Norman motions over his shoulder to Neal's car.

NORMAN

I...I need a ride home.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Norman sits humbly, watching the narrow road as Jessie drives Neal's open car. Her expression remains set. She doesn't speak. Norman steals a look at her--short hair blowing slightly, a slender hand shifting the gears competently, delicate knees showing beneath her skirt. They turn into the deep canyon and Jessie slows. Up ahead two cars sit stranded in deep water that covers the road. Norman looks for her reaction. A beat, then her face hardens with determination. She speaks, quietly.

JESSIE

You'd better hold on.

And suddenly, she veers off the road and roars straight up the canyon side, lurching over the rocks and ravines. Norman, almost tossed out, grabs onto the seat.

They crest a rise and railroad tracks come into view. With her thin arms, she fights the big steering wheel and muscles the car right onto the roadbed, flooring it. Norman's hat blows off. He grabs it, clamps it down. The car speeds up, every piece of metal in it rattling in concert with the ties. He shouts over the noise, trying to chuckle.

NORMAN

Um...Got a train schedule...?

All she has is a small smile on her face. Clearly, she is enjoying the ride and Norman's discomfort.

NORMAN

You know...

(leans closer)

You know...when I worked for the Forest Service? We'd send freight trains down this way, any old time. Big, you know, a hundred cars full of logs, and the hell with the schedule...!

Before he finishes they are suddenly engulfed in a tunnel. For a moment there is only darkness and a roar of the engine and a whoosh of the wind. Then they're out.

The clear blue sky surrounds them on both sides. Norman looks down and sees the girders of an immense trestle stretching to the river far, far below. He gasps in shock. The wind whistles into his mouth. His hat flies off unheeded. He grabs the side of the car with all his strength, his knuckles whitening. Angry, he turns to Jessie but sees her caught in the light, her profile clear, her eyes snapping with intensity and spirit, her hair swirling like a dark halo. She is smiling, wide and open, no longer just showing off, but truly joyous, and Norman forgets his fear and stares at her, enraptured by her strength and her beauty, as the car sizzles along the ribbon of gleaming track at fifty miles an hour.

EXT. THE MANSE - TWILIGHT

The car pulls up. Inside, Jessie and Norman sit, their hair in wild tangles. Wryly, Norman finally lets go of his vice-like grip.

Jessie allows herself a fleeting smile. A moment of silence stretches, her expression softer, more receptive than before. Then, tilting her head back, she shakes it hard, settling the hair into a perfect, gleaming cap.

Norman, pierced by the beauty of it, tries but can't summon words to express himself. Finally, just as he opens his mouth, Paul roars around the corner, driving right at them, screeching to a halt inches from Neal's bumper, and stands up, yelling cheerfully:

PAUL

How's the mixed grill?

Neither Norman nor Jessie can help smiling, and as Paul hops from his car, Jessie turns to Norman, very casually.

JESSIE

See you.

NORMAN

You will. You will see me...

And he holds her eyes as she backs up to clear Paul's car, holds them as she rolls forward past him, and then she suddenly guns the engine and heads straight for Paul, who leaps up on the running board as she sails past, calling out:

JESSIE

Ta ta!

Norman grins after her in admiration. Paul shakes his head.

PAUL

Very swish.

(Norman keeps smiling)
Maybe a little too swish for you,
brother.

NORMAN

(immediately worried)
Do you think so?

Paul studies his expression in the gathering dark. Then:

PAUL

Oh Lord, he's in love.

Norman smiles back like a child and a look of the slightest
resentment crosses Paul's face.

PAUL

Jesus, with all the fish in the
stream...

NORMAN

Not like her.

PAUL

Remember...marriage is an institu-
tion. Marriage is love. Love is
blind. Therefore, marriage is an
institution for the blind.

Norman smiles. The courthouse clock chimes.

PAUL

Must rush.
(imitating Jessie)
Ta ta...

And he drives happily off.

INT. THE MANSE - DAY

It is very quiet. The mantle clock ticks. Norman sits in the
parlor with a book of poetry open in front of him, but he's
staring past it, his expression soft and far away. Clearly,
he has nothing but Jessie on his mind. Footsteps sound on the
porch. Mail is pushed through the slot. A moment, then the
Reverend leans into the parlor.

REVEREND

A letter for you.

Norman smiles distantly. The Reverend hands it to him.

REVEREND

Who do you know from the University
of Chicago?

NORMAN

Pardon...?

He glances at the letter and shrugs.

NORMAN

Death threats from an old student.

The Reverend smiles, but doesn't leave. Norman looks at him, expectant, and he breaks a growing silence by pointing to Norman's book.

REVEREND

Which poem are you on?

NORMAN

Umm.

He focuses on the open page, beginning anywhere.

NORMAN

What though the radiance which was once so
bright
Be now forever taken from my sight;
Though nothing can bring back the hour...

The Reverend joins in from memory, closing his eyes with the beauty of the poem, his voice soft and full of inflection.

NORMAN AND THE REVEREND

Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the
flower
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering...

Norman stops, but the Reverend finishes.

REVEREND

In the faith that looks through death.

The poem sends a chill up Norman's spine. His father opens his eyes, nodding with the slightest of smiles and Norman smiles back, understanding and sad, the distance between them bridged. Then the Reverend leaves, as quietly as he came.

Norman gazes after him a long moment, then a shiver runs across his shoulders and he shuts the book. The forgotten letter falls to the floor. He picks it up, opens it and reads blindly, his mind far away. Then he blinks and reads again: "Dear Dr. Maclean, As chairman of the English Literature Department it gives me great pleasure to offer you the position of Instructor, beginning Fall term, 1927. Your outstanding record, etc." Norman stares at it in disbelief and growing excitement. Abruptly, he opens his mouth to call his father, but doesn't. He sits back, torn, then the phone rings. He pays no attention, pondering. It rings and rings. Finally, irritated:

NORMAN

Okay...

He strides angrily to it.

NORMAN

Yes...?

(Jessie's voice.

He melts)

Oh. Hello. No, I'm fine. I...
Did you get home okay? No freight
trains?

(she laughs, jokes)

No, you didn't scare me. I just
have an extremely fair complexion.

(he laughs, loving it.

She explains something)

Oh, is he? Back to Hollywood?
Good.

(quickly)

I mean, good for Neal... He does?
Are you sure he wants me to come?
When? Seven, at the train
station... Um...

(doesn't want to go)

Well...will you be there, too?

(yes, she says.

He smiles widely,
speaks meaningfully)

Then I'll come.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

The Reverend, Mother and Norman sit at the dining table. They are eating in a tense, unhappy silence. Paul's place, set and waiting, remains empty. Mother's body seems to stretch toward the front windows as she listens vainly for Paul's car. The Reverend picks up the carving knife, slowly sharpens it. There is no sound but the scraping. Finally, unable to stand the strain, Mother murmurs:

MOTHER

He's working late...

The Reverend doesn't react, keeps scraping. Norman forces his food down, miserable, angry at Paul. The mantle clock dings seven times. Norman rises as if throwing off a huge weight.

NORMAN

I have to go...

But he doesn't leave. The Reverend looks up at him, his expression openly hurt, the honesty of it surprising, paining Norman. Quietly, flatly, the Reverend says:

REVEREND

I don't understand your brother.

Touched, Norman doesn't know what to say. He glances at Mother, sees her looking at her husband with great sympathy. A beat, then:

NORMAN

I won't be late...

And he hurries out.

EXT. TRAIN STATION PLATFORM - EVENING

Out of breath, Norman hustles through the station door and onto the platform, where the Burns clan swarms around Neal, almost smothering him. Norman picks Jessie out of the crowd. She looks particularly beautiful and vulnerable, her eyes bright with suppressed tears. Quickly, he steps up to her.

NORMAN

Hi.

JESSIE

(smiles warmly)

Here's Norman...!

As one, everybody turns. The women embrace him. The men shake his hand. As before, he glows under the treatment, rising to it. Neal, acting as if nothing awful has gone before, shakes his hand.

NEAL

Thanks for showing, old man.

NORMAN

Wouldn't have missed it...

He glances down, notices the back of Neal's hand, red and peeling with sunburn. His father smiles hopefully.

FATHER
Back to Hollywood.

NORMAN
I heard.

NEAL
More my style...

NORMAN
Mm.

FATHER
And how. And how...

CONDUCTOR
Aboard!

A sudden, desperate flurry runs through the group. Florence's voice rises above the rest.

FLORENCE
Sandwiches!

An overstuffed paperbag appears, passed from hand-to-hand and finally to Neal, who raises his eyebrows at the ridiculous amount of food, sharing his first bit of humor with Norman. He stands his ground, milking the scene, allowing the women to hug and kiss him once more. Norman watches Jessie hold him as tightly as she can. He feels a pang, seeing the kind of unreserved love she feels for her brother. Then it is Florence's turn. With a tragic expression, she clings to her son. The train clanks. The car behind Neal begins to move. He steps back from Florence and, with all eyes on him, sticks up his arm and the handrail is magically there. He grasps it, swinging casually onto the platform, his Bill Tilden sweater draped over his shoulders, his Scott Fitzgerald profile carefully calculated, and Norman eyes him with genuine dislike. Then he sees the old suitcase resting next to Neal's elegant black-and-white shoes, and almost winces, feeling the Burns' pain as their youngest son and brother leaves them again, growing smaller, disappearing in a cloud of smoke and steam. Before they can turn away, Norman murmurs to Jessie:

NORMAN
Walk out with me?

JESSIE
(distracted)

Hm?

Then understanding, she touches his chest in that special, familiar way.

JESSIE

Wait.

He watches her move to Florence and whisper. Florence turns, nodding sadly, and then Jessie puts her arms around her and Florence breaks down, burying her face in her daughter's shoulder and sobbing. Others gather around, patting her gently, murmuring, while Jessie rocks her like a baby, and Norman looks on, moved by the scene, even envious of it.

EXT. MISSOULA - NIGHT

Norman and Jessie walk along a sidestreet, her expression far away and sad. After a long, quiet moment, she speaks.

JESSIE

Did you see his suitcase?

(Norman nods)

God.

She shivers. Norman takes her hands solicitously.

NORMAN

Look, it's...I don't now, maybe it's for the best.

It was the wrong thing to say. She cools.

NORMAN

It's more his style out there.

He feels her hand stiffen but he keeps trying.

NORMAN

That's what he told me. He said, "It's more my style..."

JESSIE

He also said that Ronald Coleman is his best friend.

Norman chuckles. Angrily, Jessie pulls her hand away.

They walk a beat in silence, Norman struggling to think of something. Then, gently:

NORMAN

I don't think you can help him, Jessie.

JESSIE

It doesn't matter. I have to try. He's my brother.

This stops Norman, hitting home hard and clear. He looks at her, unable to respond as they continue walking. Finally, tentatively, he broaches a new subject.

NORMAN
Would you like to see something...
strange?

JESSIE
(too tired for shocks)
I don't know.

NORMAN
Look at this.

He hands her the University of Chicago letter, trying to suppress a twinge of excitement.

NORMAN
Read it...?

She steps under a streetlamp and reads. Norman watches with satisfaction as her smile grows, wiping away the concerned sadness. Finally, she looks up at him, beaming with delight.

NORMAN
What do you think?

JESSIE
I think it's...the berries.
(he laughs)
I think it's heaven. To get away.
Chicago.

NORMAN
Have you ever been?

JESSIE
No. Not anywhere.
(concedes)
Helena.

Sad for herself, happy for him, she hands back the letter.

JESSIE
Congratulations.

He looks at her a moment, then confesses:

NORMAN
I...I'm not sure.

JESSIE
(shocked)
What?

NORMAN
I didn't expect it. I didn't...I
didn't ask for it, you know...?

Jessie bursts into laughter, unbelieving.

JESSIE
Tell me another.
(sees he's serious)
Oh, c'mon, you're not going to be a
professor of English Literature...

NORMAN
Instructor...

JESSIE
Because they didn't "consult" you
first?

NORMAN
(chuckles)
No...

JESSIE
Well then, what do you want?

NORMAN
I...

He struggles to speak but can't. Jessie finds herself leaning
forward as if to help. She essays:

JESSIE
Don't you like teaching?

NORMAN
(continues struggle)
I...

JESSIE
(mocks, like a seal)
I...I...I...I what, Norman?

And he gives up, confessing:

NORMAN
I don't want to leave you.

Jessie is taken completely by surprise. Her mouth opens
wordlessly before she manages to breathe:

JESSIE
Oh.

And they stand facing each other, unguarded, overcome by their emotions. Norman feels his throat constrict, his breath come harder. He leans forward. His lips meet hers, softly, and they hug each other, eyes closed, as tight as they can.

INT. THE MANSE - LATE NIGHT

The phone rings cutting the stillness. Foggily, Norman descends the stairs, wearing only his shorts, and answers.

NORMAN

Yes...? Yes, this is...

(man's voice.

Norman stiffens)

What...? Uh...yes, I'll...I'll be there in...right away...

He hangs up, very worried, leans over the stair railing and peers up fearfully. Nothing. Silently, he sneaks upstairs, two steps at a time.

EXT. THE MANSE - LATER

In the moonlight Norman, dressed hurriedly, runs down the street. From an upstairs window, the Reverend watches, brow knit.

EXT. POLICE STATION - LATER

Norman hurries up the steps of the police station, tucking his shirt in.

INT. POLICE STATION

He arrives at the sergeant's desk, out of breath. The sergeant looks up and smiles sadly.

JOHNNY

Hey, Preach.

NORMAN

Hey, Johnny...

JOHNNY

How you been keepin'?

NORMAN

No complaints.

JOHNNY

They say you're a doctor now, like
your old man.

(Norman smiles politely,
distracted)

You gonna be takin' over the pulpit?

NORMAN

If it'll get you back to church...

Johnny chuckles. A beat. The forced jocularity dies in the
strange, late night environment. Norman looks toward a heavy
door.

NORMAN

Um...

JOHNNY

Yeah, okay.

(looking at arrest sheet)

It says here a guy up at Weiss's
made a remark about the, you know,
the Indian he's with and, pow, your
brother let him have it. Knocked
out two of his teeth.

NORMAN

(relaxing)

Well. The guy deserved it.

JOHNNY

(not sure)

Mm.

NORMAN

How much?

JOHNNY

No, no. He covers the cop beat.
We like your brother.

NORMAN

(grateful)

Thanks, Johnny.

He starts toward the heavy door.

JOHNNY

Wait a sec, Preach...

Norman turns. Johnny begins reluctantly.

JOHNNY

You know about the stud poker game
down to Lolo, the big game...?

NORMAN

Yes.

JOHNNY

Well...What this report don't say is
that the guy Paul walloped is in the
game. Now it could be he made a
remark about the Indian, but I don't
think so. You wanna know what I
think?

NORMAN

(feeling a chill)

Okay.

JOHNNY

I think they sent the guy up to get
their money. I think your brother's
way too far behind in that game, and
I gotta tell you, 'cause I know,
that's my business--you don't get
behind in the big game down to Lolo.
Because if you do...

(shakes his head)

Your brother thinks he's tough
'cause he's got that right hand of
his, but I'll tell you, he don't
know what tough is, Preach.

And he fixes Norman with a sad, meaningful gaze.

JOHNNY

You should talk to him.

INT. CELL BLOCK

Chilled to the bone with fear now, Norman pushes the big door
open and walks past the cells, peering in. From somewhere a
drunk is singing: "Ma, He's Making Eyes At Me." Paul is in
the last cell. Norman stops a distance from it and studies
his brother sitting on a mattressless bunk, right hand over
his face, the knuckles cut and bleeding, as if hiding from the
demeaning scene. Only when Norman steps closer does he see
Mabel sprawled at Paul's feet. Her beautiful legs are splayed
out, useless. Her stockings are hanging down. Her glistening
hair lay across the floor, soaked in what is unmistakably
vomit. Norman can only stare a moment, stunned by the impact
of the hideous scene. Then he reaches for the latch, glancing

over at the jailer who nods. Norman opens the door and walks in. The smell weakens his knees. He gasps, involuntarily holding his breath. The creak of the door seems to wake Mabel. She looks up dully. Norman turns to Paul, not sure what to say, but Paul's face remains hidden behind his hand. Norman's attention is taken by Mabel, who is struggling to rise. Norman watches her legs buckle again and again, and finally she falls back, rolling in the vomit, helpless. Norman winces, looks to Paul for help, but Paul doesn't move, doesn't look. Norman sighs, and heaves her up. She's heavy and awkward and the best he can do is to drag her out, her toes bumping against the rough floor. After she is well down the hall, Paul rises and follows like a ghost, his hand still over his face.

EXT. ROAD - LATE NIGHT

Paul's car drives through town.

INT. CAR

Mabel lies crumpled next to Norman. In the rear sits Paul, silent, hidden in deep shadows. The Model T turns down a dirt road past the slaughter house. The headlamps light up barrels full of beef heads, eyes open. Then the Indian shanty town comes into view. Norman stops at one of the shacks. Paul makes no move. Sighing, Norman gets out and goes around to Mabel's side, guiding her to the ground. Her legs refuse to work. She reaches blindly for him, scared and sick, and pity rises in him. As he begins to lead her slowly toward the shack, he can't help glancing back at the car. Silhouetted strongly by the moon, Paul remains in the back seat, motionless.

EXT. THE MANSE - LATER

Dawn lights the sky. Paul's car pulls up in front of the manse and stops. The lights go out. Inside, the brothers sit a moment in silence. Finally, Norman turns to the back seat, determined.

NORMAN

Paul...

but from the deep shadows, his hand still covering his face, Paul speaks in a shamed whisper.

PAUL

I am so sorry for this, brother...

Moved, Norman nods, letting it all go. He murmurs gently:

NORMAN

Can you drive?

Paul nods back, still hiding. Norman reaches as if to touch him, but it is too much of a gesture. Instead, he gets out and starts up the path. Then, very quietly, Paul calls.

PAUL

Norm...

Norman looks around. Paul's face is bared now, and Norman can see that he's been hit. One eye is swollen. There is dry blood around his nose and mouth.

PAUL

Maybe we can go fishing this weekend...

Taken aback, Norman doesn't know how to respond.

PAUL

Maybe we can get pop to come.

Now Norman sees his expression, almost pleading, wanting it all to be forgotten, fixed, made whole again, and Norman softens, understanding, as Paul murmurs:

PAUL

You ask him...?

Then he sits back, disappearing in the darkness.

EXT. THE MANSE - MORNING

It is a perfect summer morning.

INT. THE KITCHEN

The Reverend and Norman in fishing attire, sit eating silently. Paul's place is empty. A tension fills the room as Mother hustles around, cooking and serving, her mouth shut tight. Then the door bursts open. They all turn, their expressions full of relief as Paul hurries in, bringing sunlight and happiness with him. Before anyone can react, he grabs Mother and twirls her around, and she laughs, overwhelmed and delighted. But when he finally stops, she lets out a gasp, pointing, and the Reverend and Norman can see his damaged face, a plaster over one eye, a ragged cut along his lips. Norman glances quickly at his father who stares with a mingled look of anger and concern. But Paul just waves it away, his smile brilliant.

PAUL
Oh, you want to hear about this?
I'll tell you. Hang on -- What's
for eats? Not oatmeal...

MOTHER
(holding pan proudly)
Muffins.

PAUL
Perfection!

She beams and he's off again, standing before them like an actor on stage.

PAUL
Okay. Now--you remember they took
me off the Anaconda story...
(juggles hot muffin)
Ouch, ouch...

MOTHER
Sit down.

PAUL
Well, you won't believe what they
gave me instead--what he gave me,
my genius editor. He comes into
the office...
(imitates perfectly)
Maclean, I got a hot one he says.
Now, I'm trying to stay upwind from
him 'cause he's just back from
drinking his lunch.
(mother tsks)
Then he says to me--"Go over
to South Dakota and cover the
President."

They are all impressed, even the Reverend, who is beginning to warm up.

PAUL
He doesn't tell me what the
President's doing there, but I grab
it. I'm not gonna wait until he
sobers up and realizes how much gas
money this is gonna cost him. So.
I drive all night, get there at the
crack of dawn. And I find a bunch
of the newspaper boys trying to wake
up the bar keep so they can get a
good start on the day...

Everyone is chuckling now, caught by the story.

PAUL

And I ask, where is the President? Oh he's fishin' today, they tell me. Well, I'm impressed. I didn't know old Cal was a fisherman. Fly fisherman, they say. Now I'm really impressed. Here's a man I didn't vote for. I don't want to believe that the business of America is business, but, gosh, a fly fisherman--he can't be all bad. So, I follow the boys out to this river, and we see about a hundred cars, big ones, men in black milling around. And, there, way off on his own is Calvin Coolidge, dressed in a three-piece suit, patent leather shoes, and, get this, white gloves. With a split bamboo rod I'd kill for held away from him like it smells bad. My hero.

Laughter.

PAUL

And fourteen other men dressed in real clothes are standing at a respectful distance, like dogs awaiting a command. When old Cal jerks the line out of the water they dash for the hook, fussing with it, sticking on some newfangled fly the size of a chicken.

They are all laughing now, swept away in his story as he acts it out before them.

PAUL

They figure if Cal can't hook a trout at least he can scare it to death. And then the photogs come running up, yelling, wait, sir! Wait! And he poses, winding up like he's gonna throw the whole rod for a distance record, and click, click, click, fifty shutters go off, recording him for posterity. My President the fly fisherman.

And he drops into a seat, exhausted and exhilarated.

PAUL

It'll be in the Sunday paper.
"Closed-mouth Cal Communes with
the Crappies."

Laughter. Whole-hearted applause. A beat. Then, innocent:

MOTHER

But what about your face?

PAUL

Hm?

Taken by surprise, he touches his lip. His eyes dart to Norman.

PAUL

Oh, yeah...I forgot the punch line.

He keeps his eyes on Norman as if begging him to cooperate, to conspire in the lie, and Norman remains mute.

PAUL

I...drove back that night, all night
again, and, um, I don't know...some-
where in Wyoming I ran head-on
into a pronghorn antelope. Of all
things...Beautiful creatures, but
real Dumb Doras...

(shrugs)

Hey, I can tell my grandchildren I
met Calvin Coolidge.

Norman feels himself reddening with the lie, but he says nothing. However, none of them can miss Paul's shaking hands as he butters his muffin, and Norman sees the Reverend's relaxed, happy smile begin to fade. Quickly, he blurts:

NORMAN

I have some news...

And he pulls out the letter from Chicago. But now that he's begun, he grows shy, hesitates, then:

NORMAN

Well, it's...

(clears throat, plunges)

Um, it says, Dear...

(embarrassed)

Dr. Maclean...

Murmurs, chuckles. Norman reads the rest quickly.

NORMAN

As chairman of the English Literature Department, it gives me great pleasure to offer you, um, the position of...instructor, beginning Fall term, nineteen twenty-seven and so forth...

He looks up, meeting three stunned faces.

NORMAN

I'm, uh...
(a deep breath,
a big sigh)
I'm going to take it.

A moments silent shock, then an unmistakable look of pain crosses Paul's face. Norman doesn't notice as mother rises with a look of wonder and kisses him carefully on the cheek, in the same spot she's always kissed him. But it is the Reverend to whom Norman's eyes turn, seeking the ultimate approval, and the Reverend responds with a small, helpless smile, only able to repeat softly:

REVEREND

Well, I am pleased. I am pleased...
(nodding)
I am pleased.

Then, abruptly, Paul explodes out of his seat.

PAUL

A professor?! A real professor!?
Damnation!

He pumps Norman's hand and slaps his back, making Norman laugh like a happy child.

PAUL

Wait, wait, a celebration is in order. Break out the bubbly! Get the chorus girls...!
(laughter)
No, I got it! We don't just go fishing--here it is, are you ready for it?
(holds arms wide)
We go to--the Chutes!

The Reverend lights up. Norman applauds gladly, echoing:

NORMAN

Chutes!

And they both jump up, grabbing at the pile of tackle, chanting, "Chutes, Chutes...!" Laughing, the Reverend stands.

REVEREND
I'll get my rod...

INT. THE STUDY

He walks in, still smiling, as the kitchen celebration continues. He stands a moment in the dim light, looking around absently for his rod. It sits on a corner chair. He starts for it and, without planning, he breaks into a tiny jig, jumping lightly and elegantly and joyously across the floor, grinning with delight.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - LATER

The three men finish piling their equipment in the rumble seat of Paul's car, and get in, still laughing and joking.

PAUL
Contact!

He revs the engine. Mother shouts above it:

MOTHER
Wait, wait...

And, carefully, while the men strain with impatience, she checks both car doors to make sure they are secure.

MOTHER
Alright.

Smiling, she watches them wave gayly as they drive away, the Reverend looking young and carefree.

EXT. THE CHUTES

It is unchanged from the boys' teenage years. Paul stops at a steep slope above the bank and all three gaze up at the awesome sight. Paul catches Norman's eye. They turn to each other and smile nostalgically. Then Paul imitates Chub perfectly.

PAUL
"Jeez, Pauly, jeez..."

They both burst into laughter, and the Reverend joins them, unsure of what he's laughing at, but enjoying it anyway. Then Paul springs out of the car, grabbing his tackle, and runs precipitously toward the slope, yelling:

PAUL

Ya-hooooooo!

And without stopping, he leaps into the void. Norman and the Reverend rise, alarmed, but he hits solidly, his tackle clattering, dust flying as he bounds down the bank. Behind him Norman descends with less display, as Paul calls:

PAUL

Dibs on the far bank!

Norman skids to a stop, smiling at the youthful term. Then both of them remember the Reverend and look up. He stands motioning toward a gentle slope with the tip of his rod.

REVEREND

I believe the high road will suit me better.

Automatically, both boys deny his weakness, but the Reverend only smiles at them with a tinge of sadness.

REVEREND

There was a time.

And he starts off. They watch him a beat, then Paul calls up:

PAUL

You'll make a killing....!

And then the Reverend is gone. Paul turns to Norman.

PAUL

He'll make a killing...

Norman smiles reassuringly. Paul hesitates as if there is more to say, and splashes off across the shallows until he disappears behind the jumbled boulders along the far bank. Norman keeps looking after him, troubled, then the sound of the water creeps up on him, slowly impinging on his consciousness. His eyes lose their focus as he listens to the voices echoing in the empty canyon around him. It is both eerie and beautiful. He feels gooseflesh rise on his bare arms. Then an insect smashes into his mouth, pulling him back to the moment. He spits, wiping at it, and in his open palm is a yellow-striped fly, which suddenly rises from its seeming death and buzzes away. Norman smiles, finds a rock and sits down, rummaging through his fly box until he comes up with an almost perfect copy of the insect. Grinning now, he ties it to his line and steps toward the nearest hole, beginning the gentle movement of a cast. Before the fly hits, the dark head of a trout leaps out of the water, striking at it and missing.

NORMAN

Ha!

Impatient for victory, he casts again. This time the fly rests on the water like an insect trying to swim. A long beat, then the fly is taken, snatched, as the big trout dives with it, and Norman sets the hook, watching the tip of the rod bob madly with fight, and beyond it, standing in silence, is Paul, hands on hips. Even with a big lusty fish on the end of his line, Norman has time to notice that Paul's basket is empty. Grinning even wider than before he plays the big fish until it is exhausted, and scoops it up with his net, trying to look casual.

PAUL

Not bad.

NORMAN

(shrugs)

Medium.

He glances up unable to keep smug victory out of his expression. Paul smiles wryly back.

PAUL

Alright, what are they biting on?

NORMAN

(torturing him)

What? Louder...!

PAUL

(sigh)

What are they biting on?!

His voice echoes. Satisfied, Norman calls back:

NORMAN

Stone flies!

PAUL

Ah...

He takes off his hat, where he keeps all his flies, and Norman watches him turn it around and around fruitlessly. Finally, he looks up at Norman's controlled smile.

PAUL

Stone flies?

NORMAN

(relents)

I have a couple...

He starts across but Paul waves him away.

PAUL

No...

NORMAN

(louder)

I have a couple extra...!

He continues across but Paul waves him off, the old stubborn expression crossing his face.

PAUL

No.

Norman stops in mid-stream, feeling a surge of anger well up in him. He murmurs, to himself.

NORMAN

I have another one, you stupid
bastard...

And with grim determination, he plods forward, splashing through the shallows directly toward Paul.

EXT. FAR SIDE

He comes to a halt uncomfortably close to Paul, challenging him. Without thinking, Paul takes a step away, but the bank rises sharply behind him, trapping him, and Norman holds a Stone Fly up to his face.

NORMAN

Means' Bunyan Bug number two Yellow
Stone Fly.

PAUL

Gorgeous.

NORMAN

Take it.

PAUL

I don't want it.

NORMAN

You need it.

PAUL

I don't want it.

NORMAN

(cold)

You need it.

They eye each other long and hard, a sense of incipient battle rising. The "expression" solidifies on Paul's face, but Norman refuses to back down. Finally, surprisingly:

PAUL

Christ almighty, "Perfesser," big deal...

And he snatches the fly with a sudden sweep of his right hand, making Norman flinch involuntarily. But Norman's feet remain planted. He watches as Paul turns to his rod and begins changing flies, his jaw muscles working. Slowly, in the silence between them, filled with the voices of the water, Norman's body relaxes. His expression softens, but his intensity remains. He must speak now. The time is at hand. But it is as difficult as ever. He watches for another moment, then, gentler than he had intended:

NORMAN

I'm going to marry Jessie.

He sees that pang of pain cross Paul's face. Not looking at Norman, he murmurs:

PAUL

Quite a day.

His brow furrows as he ties on a new fly. Again, Norman speaks with an unwanted gentleness.

NORMAN

Come with us.

(Paul turns away, bushy

You can't stay here, Paul.

(no response)

Chicago's a thousand miles away.

It's...it's a big city, Paul.

It has a dozen papers. You can get a job. You can be right in the middle of things.

(no response)

I know a few people, maybe I can...

(steels himself)

Let me help.

Paul's back doesn't move. Norman feels his teeth clenching once more. His voice rises, angrier.

NORMAN

Paul. You can't--stay--here.

(nothing)

Can you?

He stares at the unmoving back, willing a response. Then Paul turns, the anger gone from his expression, replaced by a sweet, accepting, sincere smile.

PAUL

Oh...I'll never leave here,
brother...

And he turns away, heading upstream. Norman can only watch, feeling that same ice cold chill run through him.

EXT. THE RISE - LATER

Slowly, his feet heavy, Norman crests the rise and spots his father sitting on the edge holding a book. In the bright sunlight his faded hair is lit red and flaming again. Norman stands next to him, glancing down at the book, seeing that it is the Bible in Greek. The Reverend smiles vaguely at him, his eyes on Paul who is emerging at the roughest and wildest spot on the river. As he wades in, the powerful current rises in a wave against his side. He is far enough away so that his line is invisible. He appears to be a man with a wand, settling deeper and deeper into the rushing river. Captured by the scene, Norman sits down next to his father, and the Reverend reaches a hand out to pat him, but misses. He has to turn his eyes away from Paul's drama and make the act of touching deliberate. He does so, patting Norman gently, looking shyly up into his eyes. Then both men turn away, moved and embarrassed, concentrating on Paul who has begun to swing his right arm back and forth, his eyes fixed firmly on a rock far out in the river.

REVEREND

No small one for his last one.

NORMAN

(smiling)

Never.

Paul's arm swings rhythmically now, in a perfect circle, each circle inflating his chest, each circle faster and higher and longer, gathering enormous strength and speed and power. Norman and his father both tense, leaning forward. Paul's chest opens all the way, and the Reverend whispers:

REVEREND

Now...!

Paul's body pivots as if he is going to drive a golf ball three hundred yards. His arm goes high in a great arc. The tip of the rod bends like a spring. The line whips out, sailing, catching the sunlight. And then Paul is immobile. The rod points to ten o'clock and ten o'clock points at the

rock outcropping. Norman and the Reverend hold their breaths. Then the rod jumps convulsively. Paul's left hand works frantically, trying to feed line to something very big and very powerful. And far down stream, too far to seem connected, a huge, glittering fish leaps out of the water.

NORMAN

There...!

REVEREND

Good Lord...!

Paul leans back and the seemingly disconnected fish topples into the water. The rod leaps again with convulsions. Paul's left hand feeds more line. The Reverend's body imitates him unconsciously, just as it did long ago when Paul told the story of the Chutes, and the two men sit, leaning forward, riveted on the battle. At last, the fish tires, rising valiantly from the water, but not high, and Paul glances backwards, begins backing up, holding the rod higher and higher, readying himself to flip the fish on the shore while the Reverend gives orders to himself.

REVEREND

Ease back, ease back. Eeesy...

Then the rod convulses and Paul thrashes forward, surprised, drenched, fighting the unseen fish, and Norman yells joyfully:

NORMAN

The son of a bitch still has fight!

Then he realizes he has sworn in front of his father. But the Reverend only smiles, shaking his head in wonder at the scene before him. Paul raises the rod very high, and with a swift and sure motion, he skids the fish onto a sandbar, where it rests a moment stunned, then rises in the sand and dances on its tail for a final, glorious moment before it dies. Paul splashes across to it. Warily, he reaches out and grabs hold of it, then raises the fish. The two men hood their eyes but Paul is too far away to see clearly. Understanding, he hesitates before the strong, wild current, and the Reverend says:

REVEREND

He'll swim it.

And, as if hearing him, Paul plunges in, swimming with one arm, holding his rod high with the other. Almost immediately, the current catches him, pulling him downstream, his clothes, the fish basket dragging at him. Both men stand up, worried, edging forward until pebbles roll down the slope. Unable to help, they can only watch Paul fight his foolish, dangerous, courageous battle alone. It is Paul summed up and they know

it, and they begin to relax, to smile, as he closes on the rocks in the middle of the river, beating the current, winning once again. The Reverend's expression softens, filled with love and admiration and sadness, and Norman hears him murmur:

REVEREND

He is beautiful, isn't he?

And Norman feels sudden and surprising tears well up, stinging his eyes, as Paul rises on the rock, caught in the sunlight like a golden god, water spraying silver off him, the huge fish held high, his expression joyous, conquering, simple and pure. Quickly, Norman pulls his Kodak out and snaps a picture, to preserve the perfection of the moment. Over this sepia still, the Narrator begins.

NARRATOR

At that moment I knew, surely and clearly, that I was witnessing perfection. My brother stood before us not on a rock in the Big Black-foot River, but suspended above the earth, free from all its laws, like a work of art. And I knew just as surely and just as clearly that life is not a work of art, and that the moment could not last, and my brother would fall back to earth.

EXT. THE BURNS HOUSE - DAWN

A police car stops in front of the rambling house. Johnny gets out and hurries up the path. Chickens scatter before him, clucking angrily.

NARRATOR

And so, when the police sergeant awakened me early the next summer just at daybreak, I rose and asked no questions.

INT. BEDROOM

Norman leans over a peaceful, sleeping Jessie, his hair tousled, his shirt unbuttoned. He kisses her very gently on the cheek, so as not to awaken her.

EXT. COUNTRY - EARLY MORNING

Norman sits next to Johnny as they drive along the river, forests and mountains stretching before them, drenched in the rich, early light.

NARRATOR

Together we drove across the Continental Divide and down the length of the river to tell my father and mother that Paul had been beaten to death by the butt of a revolver and his body dumped in an alley.

INT. THE MANSE - LATER

The Reverend and Mother stand as in a still photo, wearing robes and stunned expressions, incapable of grasping the message. Then, abruptly, Mother turns and walks up the stairs. Johnny and Norman and the Reverend all watch her disappear, wait to hear a door close.

NARRATOR

Without speaking, my mother turned and went to her bedroom where, in a houseful of men and rods and rifles, she had faced most of her great problems alone.

All three men finally turn away from the staircase. The Reverend stands another moment, blank, then asks quietly:

REVEREND

Is there anything else you can tell me?

Norman tries to think, looking at Johnny for help. Then he remembers.

NORMAN

Nearly all the bones in his hand were broken.

The Reverend nods thoughtfully and starts without knowing it towards his study. Norman watches, heartbroken, unable to help. Then his father stops and turns back.

REVEREND

Which hand?

Norman holds up a fist.

NORMAN

His right hand.

NARRATOR

During the next few months my father struggled for more to hold on to, asking me again and again, had I told him everything. And I'd answer, "Everything." And he'd ask, "But isn't there anything else you know?" And finally I said to him, "Maybe all I really know about Paul is that he was a fine fisherman." "You know more than that," my father said. "He was beautiful." And that was the last we ever spoke of my brother's death.

As the narrator speaks, the Reverend stands for a long moment looking at Norman and the sergeant without really seeing them, nodding very slightly to himself. Then he turns and starts toward the study. But he stops, checking himself, and walks slowly up the stairs to comfort his wife, passing the picture of Paul, who still smiles and holds up the beautiful fish, suspended in time.

EXT. THE MOUNTAINS - DAY

A tinny church bell sounds.

NARRATOR

Indirectly, though, Paul was always present in my father's thoughts.

EXT. A SMALL UNPAINTED WOODEN CHURCH IN A FIELD - DAY

NARRATOR

I remember the last sermon I heard my father give, long after he'd been retired to the North Cheyenne Reservation.

INT. CHURCH

Indians fill the roughhewn pews, except one row, in which the Maclean family sits, mother, old and gray, older Norman and Jessie, and their two small children. At the pulpit stands the Reverend, slight and not as straight, his hair pure white. But his voice is still elegant and moving.

REVEREND

...and so it is those we live with
and love and should know who elude
(MORE)

REVEREND (Cont'd)

us. However, it is also true that you can love completely without complete understanding...

Norman listens intently, moved, while mother mouths the practiced words, as always.

NARRATOR

Now, nearly all those I loved and did not understand in my youth, are dead, even Jessie. But I still reach out to them.

EXT. THE RIVER - PRESENT

Norman, the old man, stands at the shore, casting.

NARRATOR

Of course, now I am too old to be much of a fisherman, and now of course, I usually fish the big waters alone, although some friends think I shouldn't. But, when I am alone in the half-light of the canyon, all existence seems to fade to a being with my soul and memories and the sounds of the Big Blackfoot River, and a four-count rhythm and the hope that a fish will rise.

Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words. And I know that some of the words are theirs.

I am haunted by waters.

FADE OUT

THE END