

# INTO THE WILD

Screenplay  
by  
Sean Penn

(From the book INTO THE WILD by Jon Krakauer)

**DIR: SP**  
**PRODS: AL / SP**

Director's note:

What follows is a dominantly linear approach, however, be advised that time will be played with. Juxtapositions between journey and destination. In particular, more Alaska in the body of the film.

*There is pleasure in the pathless woods,  
There is rapture on the lonely shore,  
There is society where none intrudes,  
By the deep sea and the music in its roar;  
I love not man the less, but Nature more.*

**- Lord Byron**

1 EXT. THE STAMPEDE TRAIL - DAY

1

SUPER:

**Tuesday, April 28th 1992**

WIDE-SHOT: A vast, snow-blanketed wilderness that sits beneath the icy summits of the highest mountain range in North America. This is BIG Alaska.

A beat up 4x4 pick-up enters very small into the upper left corner of frame on an unkept, snow-packed road, and comes to a stop. A figure exits the passenger side and moves around the front of the truck. We can just make out the rifle sticking out of his backpack. We HEAR a very distant "Thank You" as the figure walks away from the road and away from the truck, seemingly into nowhere.

DRIVER

Hey!

The figure with backpack and rifle, henceforth BACKPACK, stopping in his tracks, turns around in the direction of the truck.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Come here.

BACKPACK walks back to the truck. As he approaches the driver's door, we

CUT IN TO: TIGHT SHOT over the back-packed shoulder onto the DRIVER.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

(referring to items we see  
sitting on dashboard)

You left your watch, your comb, your  
change...

We STAY on the DRIVER as BACKPACK speaks:

BACKPACK

Keep it.

DRIVER

I don't want your money. And I already  
have a watch.

BACKPACK

If you don't take it, I'm gonna throw it  
away. I don't want to know what time it  
is, what day it is, or where I am.

(MORE)

BACKPACK (CONT'D)

I don't want to see anybody. None of that matters.

The driver reaches behind the seat of the truck, pulls out an old pair of rubber work boots.

DRIVER

(handing him the boots)

Take em.

There is a pause as Backpack considers accepting the boots.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

If you make it out alive, give me a call, and I'll tell you how to get the boots back to me.

We can feel over Backpack's shoulder that he has taken the boots and is putting them on but we STAY on the driver.

BACKPACK

Hey, do me a favor, will ya? Take a picture of me.

Backpack hands him an Instamatic camera and starts walking backwards. We PULL BACK with him. And he maintains his back to us. When he stops, we CONTINUE until he is FULL-FRAME, head-to-toe from behind, posing.

CUT TO:

CU: driver

CLICK. He snaps the shot.

Backpack re-enters frame in an OVER-SHOULDER. Driver hands him the camera.

DRIVER

You gonna be alright?

BACKPACK

I'll be better than that.  
(I'll be who I am.)

As Backpack exits the frame, we SLOWLY ZOOM past the concerned face of the driver onto the loose change, the comb, and the watch on the dash.

Throughout the ZOOM, the SOUND of FOOTSTEPS CRUNCHING THE SNOW, FADE into the distance.

BACK TO:

ORIGINAL WIDE-SHOT:

We see the small form of the truck and the smaller form of the Backpacker walking away from the truck until the Backpacker has exited the frame. The truck takes a BEAT, turns around in the snow, and accelerates back into the direction from which it came. As the truck exits frame, we -

DISSOLVE TO:

2 EXT. COMMENCEMENT GROUNDS, EMORY UNIVERSITY, ATLANTA - 2  
DAY

SUPER:

**May 1990**

The crowd of family and friends, and of course, students. Assembled on fold-out chairs. The broad lawn.

INTERCUT: CHRIS MCCANDLESS. We don't see his face, just feet pounding the pavement at an increasing pace.

One by one the names of graduates announced. Their bright young faces, capped heads, and gowns, glide up to the podium to accept their diplomas.

INTERCUT: Chris, on his run, sweatshirt hood over head.

Amongst assembled crowd and family we find: THE MCCANDLESS': BILLIE, mid to late forties with dark striking eyes; WALT, a taciturn man, early fifties; and CARINE, eighteen, pretty with her mother's eyes and waist length brown hair, a gold crucifix dangles from her neck. They look around, looking for Chris, he's nowhere in sight.

INTERCUT: Chris, in a shower (PHOTO-SONICS) He TURNS INTO CAMERA, the water streaming down his face.

From the announcement podium comes the name of their son and brother, CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON MCCANDLESS. The McCandless family increasingly panicked over Chris' absence, when almost magically, he appears in full cap and gown.

Disregarding the steps that lead up to the podium platform, the small-framed but athletic CHRIS MCCANDLESS leaps jubilantly onto the stage in a single bound, frightening Billie, a little wince from Walt, and Carine "That's our Chris." And just as quickly as Chris has been handed his diploma, he civilly descends the platform steps.

TIME CUT:

SLO-MO: A ballet of graduation caps float upward into a frame of blue sky. We HEAR Chris' voice OVER this image as we intermittently cut away from the caps against the sky to focus on his parents.

(HIGH ANGLE: floating caps in FOREGROUND, Walt and Billie delight upon the caps.) An outer glee in sharp contrast to voice over:

CHRIS (V.O.)

*I see them standing at the formal gates  
of their colleges,  
I see my father strolling out  
under the ochre sandstone arch, the  
red tiles glinting like bent  
plates of blood behind his head,  
I see my mother with a few light books at  
her hip  
standing at the pillar made of tiny  
bricks with the  
wrought-iron gate still open behind her,  
its  
sword-tips black in the May air,  
they are about to graduate, they are  
about to get married,  
they are kids, they are dumb, all they  
know is they are  
innocent, they would never hurt anybody.  
I want to go up to them and say Stop,  
don't do it--she's the wrong woman,  
he's the wrong man, you are going to do  
things  
you cannot imagine you would ever do,  
you are going to do bad things to  
children,  
you are going to suffer in ways you never  
heard of,  
you are going to want to die. I want to  
go  
up to them there in the late May sunlight  
and say it,  
her hungry pretty blank face turning to  
me,*

(MORE)

CHRIS (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
*her pitiful beautiful untouched body,  
 his arrogant handsome blind face turning  
 to me,  
 his pitiful beautiful untouched body,  
 but I don't do it. I want to live. I  
 take them up like the male and female  
 paper dolls and bang them together  
 at the hips like chips of flint as if to  
 strike sparks from them, I say...*

The last graduation cap falls out of the 'blue sky'  
 frame, and into...

CUT TO:

3 INT. ATLANTA RESTAURANT - LATER 3

**(Graduation ceremony wardrobe)**

Walt and Billie sit at a table. A Cadillac can be seen  
 through the window (ATLANTA LANDMARK), parked beside the  
 restaurant.

BILLIE

Here they are.

Walt looks out the window and sees Chris drive up in his  
 old yellow Datsun with Carine in the passenger seat  
 beside him, and pulls up to the space beside the  
 Cadillac.

4 INT. DATSUN 4

Chris is holding a book from which he reads aloud the  
 LAST LINE OF THE POEM...

CHRIS

*I say...Do what you are going to do,  
 and I will tell about it.*

CARINE

Who wrote that?

CHRIS

Well, it could've been either one of us,  
 couldn't it?

He hands a book of Sharon Olds' poetry to her.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

There's a lot of great poems in there.

CARINE  
Thanks, big brother.

They exit the car and frame.

5 INT. ATLANTA RESTAURANT - SAME 5

Chris and Carine join Walt and Billie at the table.  
Billie gets up and gives Chris a big hug.

BILLIE  
You scared the daylights out of me,  
jumping on to that stage, oh my god.

Chris gives Carine a look. Walt extends his hand to  
Chris.

WALT  
Congratulations, son.

They all sit and pick up menus.

CHRIS  
I'm starving.

TIME CUT:

6 INT. ATLANTA RESTAURANT - LATER 6

The foods on the table. Chris is devouring a steak.

CHRIS  
My grades are gonna be good enough, I  
think, to get into Harvard Law.

WALT  
That's a big deal. What do you have left  
in your college fund?

CHRIS  
It's an inheritance, dad. I've only been  
spending it as a college fund...Exactly  
twenty-four thousand five hundred dollars  
and sixty-eight cents.

BILLIE  
That's very specific.

CHRIS  
I had to go to the bank this morning.

WALT

Well, we'll certainly contribute the balance for Harvard.

CHRIS

Yeah. I've got to figure out what I'm going to do. I got a lot of things to pack and organize here first.

BILLIE

I'm so glad you're getting out of that place you're living. It was so much nicer when you lived on campus.

WALT

You'll come to Annandale before you disappear on us, won't you?

CHRIS

(reluctantly)

Sure, I will.

Carine's not so sure.

BILLIE

You promise?

CHRIS

(whining)

Mom.

BILLIE

Well, your father and I want to make a present to you.

WALT

We want to get you out of that junker.

CHRIS

What's a junker?

Walt points outside to the Datsun.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

The Datsun?

WALT

Yes. We want to get you a new car.

CHRIS

(appalled)

A new car? Why the hell would I want a new car? The Datsun runs great.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

(Mocking the Cadillac)

Do you think I want some fancy boat? Or are you worried about what the neighbors might think?

BILLIE

We weren't going to get you a Cadillac, Chris. Just a nice new car that's safe to drive. You don't know when that thing's just going to suddenly blow up.

CHRIS

Blow up? Blow up?! Are you guys crazy? It's a great car. I don't need a new car. I don't want a new car. I don't want anything. Thing, thing, thing.

Under the table, Carine jabs Chris' leg. Chris returning to polite -

CHRIS (CONT'D)

But, thanks anyway.

WALT

Everything's gotta be difficult.

CHRIS

I said thank you. I just don't want anything.

The group returns to some superficial calm.

CARINE

I wouldn't say no to a new car.

CHRIS

(mumbling a rib)

Ivana Trump McCandless.

CARINE

(laughing it off)

Shut up, Chris.

(to her parents, seriously)

Seriously, I'll pay you back.

CUT TO:

7

INT. OFF-CAMPUS ROOMING HOUSE, SECOND-FLOOR, ATLANTA -  
DAY

7

OVER Chris' shoulder, he frisbees his graduation cap from the upstairs window to his parents parting Cadillac on the street.

As they wave goodbye, Carine catches the cap from the backseat window. And with a parting smile to her brother, she poses with it on her own head. Chris smiles and waves goodbye.

As the Cadillac drifts away, his smile disappears into something other than sadness.

TIME CUT:

8 INT. OFF-CAMPUS ROOMING HOUSE - NIGHT 8

In a warm ambient light, we SEE a black and white poster on a barren wall: Poncho-clad Clint Eastwood from "The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly."

We TILT DOWN a stack of books sitting on the floor - Tolstoy, Stegner, Thoreau, Jack London, and Pasternak. Beside them, a camper's backpack.

Chris sits in introspection at his desk by candlelight. The room is spare, supporting his monkish lifestyle. But on the desk before him, he counts out \$500.68 from a bank envelope. He pockets those bills and change, then removes a check for \$24,000 made out to OXFAM America from the same bank envelope. He scribbles a note: *These are all my savings. Feed someone with it.* Signed, *Chris McCandless*. He then slides the note and the check into a pre-addressed Oxford Famine Relief Fund (in Boston) envelope.

He pulls his wallet from his back pocket. Pulls all the cards and pictures from its sleeves. Considering each, he flicks them into a trash bin, one by one. Finally coming to his social security card, he holds it to the candles flame. As the flame burns bright we -

DISSOLVE TO:

9 EXT. ATLANTA HIGHWAY - SUNRISE' 9

MUSIC (Gordon Peterson's BIG HARD SUN or as radio source Tom Petty's FREE FALLING) rises and PRESENTATION TITLES OVER:

A 1982 DATSUN B210 emerges from the rising sun as the car heads west out of Atlanta. (HIGHWAY 20 TO 78 TO 40)

PRESENTATION TITLES and MUSIC carry OVER:

MONTAGE: We travel with Chris and his Datsun through the towns and open highways, landscapes and landmarks, days and nights, that lead to the Mojave desert in the West.

(In contrast to his introspection of the previous night, Chris is buoyant throughout this sequence.)

10 EXT. DESERT, SOMEWHERE BETWEEN KINGMAN, ARIZONA AND LAS VEGAS, NEVADA - SUNSET 10

(CRANE SHOT) We see Chris stop the Datsun in the middle of the desert road. We (CRANE?) DOWN to a close-up through the windshield. Chris looks left. Then, right. Into the rearview mirror, and suddenly turns the wheel, veering the Datsun off the paved highway into the vast desert.

As we CRANE back UP, the Datsun moves into the horizon.

END PRESENTATION TITLES. FADE MUSIC

11 EXT. DETRITAL WASH - TWILIGHT 11

ANGLE: WEST-FACING

The Datsun sits in the magical pastel twilight just before darkness slides over the desert. It is positioned at the foot of a wash wall that edges the soup bowl.

ANGLE: EAST-FACING

The Datsun, a yellow speck in the frame. Coyotes yap at the moon. Other than that, no sound on the desert floor.

In the distance, voluptuous cumulonimbus clouds boil upward catching the last rosy glow of the west-setting sun over the rim of the upper Detrital watershed.

We see strobe bursts of lightning followed by muffled thunder illuminating the thunder clouds from within.

Short SERIES OF ANGLES as we MOVE IN on the distant gullies and ravines, starting to run with copious amounts of water.

12 INT. DATSUN - NIGHT 12

Chris McCandless, in the same clothes he had been in back in the rooming house, sleeps in the back seat of the Datsun. His head supported by his backpack. We begin to HEAR a rumble. But this rumble is not thunder. It rapidly builds into an alarming ROAR. The roar grows to a deafening level. Chris awakens.

As he peeks up from the backseat looking forward through the windshield, he just barely catches sight of the leading edge of a flash flood. A four-foot high wall of water, mud and debris makes impact with the Datsun, momentarily enveloping it in water. Suddenly the car is SLAMMED against the cliff. CRACK! Chris sits upright, disoriented.

POV: As far as the eye can see in the desert moonlight, water has taken over the desert with a flash flood.

However, there's no panic in Chris' face as we observe him past a new crack in the wet windshield. The water, while violent seems to have topped off just above the wheels. Chris gets a slight smile on his face, as the car settles into its new position below the cliff. He returns to sleep.

CUT TO:

13

EXT. DESERT - DAY

13

What remains of Chris' travelling money burns in a pile beside the Datsun on the sun-lit but muddy desert floor.

We follow a very long set of footprints (CAMERA TRACKING/TRUE VERTICAL) away from the burning cash through the mud, finally tilting up to the footprint maker, Chris. Slogging toward high ground.

WIDE-SHOT: We see the abandoned Datsun nearly a mile behind Chris as he walks toward us wearing his backpack. He comes very close to camera (only a day or two's stubble on his face) and as we PAN him 180, we see as much wilderness before us as we did behind.

REPRISE MUSIC OVER MAIN TITLE:

**( INTO THE WILD )**

Chris walks into the distance.

COMPLETE AND END MAIN TITLES.

CUT TO:

14

INT. COLLEGE BUILDING

14

SHAKY HAND-HELD HOME VIDEO IMAGE (4 YEARS EARLIER):

Chris McCandless speaking to camera holds a microphone in a shadowy room, doing his Geraldo Rivera. It's tongue-in-cheek at best.

CHRIS

This is Emory University freshman Chris McCandless reporting from the vault at Thompson Hall.

He indicates a hatchway in the floor leading to a brightly lit corridor below.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

We have just dynamited the hatchway and are the first human beings to step foot into this vault in over a hundred years. Somewhere in here lies the secret of the great beast within us all. A beast built on lies, corruption, and greed.

We HEAR a GROWLING SOUND from behind Chris.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

And there it is! The legendary beast Mocra.

CAMERA quickly PANS to a blanket-wrapped, crawling FELLOW STUDENT in a grotesque Halloween mask.

We MOVE INTO CU on the monster growling.

QUICK PAN back to Chris.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

(in mock fright)

We've got to get out of here quick and re-secure the hatch while we make a plan of how to kill the beast.

CAMERA SHAKES all over like a bad horror film trying to stay with Chris as he makes a quick escape down the hatchway into the University dorm corridor.

CLUMSY VIDEO TIME CUT: Chris nailing the last nail in the hatchway from below. He climbs down the steps where he exchanges his hammer for his microphone from an off-camera source.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Well, it looks like we've succeeded -

We HEAR the monster's GROWL from above.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 - at least for the moment, in sealing the  
 beast back into the vault. Your humble  
 reporter, Chris McCandless will now  
 struggle with the journalistic question  
 of ethics: Will he retain his reporter's  
 objectiveness or save the future of human  
 truth by slaying this awful beast?

He gives us a look of vaudevillian puzzlement - *what will  
 he do?*

CONTINUE VIDEO:

We pick up with Chris in a corridor outside a door with a  
 cheap paper-and-tape label announcing the adjacent room  
 as the office of Ted Turner.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 Once again, your humble reporter Chris  
 McCandless.

We HEAR OS students commenting on Chris and his video  
 crew:

OS STUDENT  
 What is this? Filmmaking 101?

OS STUDENT #2  
 Point the camera at me. I'm a star.

Chris speaking straight to camera, still tongue-in-cheek:

CHRIS  
 (with a Wizard of Oz tone)  
 Pay no attention to the voices behind the  
 curtain.

15 INT. WOULD-BE TED TURNER OFFICE

15

A FELLOW STUDENT PLAYING TED TURNER with obvious fake  
 mustache is locked into an episode of Matlock on his  
 television set as our bold reporter, Chris, barges in.

CHRIS  
 Ted! We've got a monster in the vault.  
 It represents all the corruption, the  
 deceit, and greed within us all. I must  
 slay it.

TED TURNER/STUDENT  
(worst acting we've ever  
seen)

McCandless, how many times have I had to tell you? I've had to tell you that you are a journalist and you can't get personally involved in your cases...or your stories.

CHRIS  
Ted! I know how to kill it. And I'm the only one who knows. You can't keep sending me on stories and expecting me to do nothing! I look like some kind of an idiot.

TED TURNER/STUDENT  
Do you know who you're talking to? I'm Ted Turner.

Behind Chris in the corridor outside Ted's office, a PANICKED STUDENT arrives at the door.

PANICKED STUDENT  
McCandless! You've got to hurry! The monster is scratching at the hatchway. He'll be out in no time.

TED TURNER/STUDENT  
(threatening)  
It'll mean your job, Chris McCandless.

CHRIS  
(to Ted)  
That's it, Ted. Fire me if you want but this beast must be slayed.

Microphone in hand, Chris makes haste. The CAMERA RUNS WITH HIM out the door, through the corridor, up a set of steps to the hatchway. As he arrives, the monster appears above him in the hatchway crawl space having pulled off the board Chris had nailed.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
(into camera)  
This is the only thing that can kill the monster. It's gonna be risky but without great risk, there is no freedom. So we will now hear from the famous singer - Chris McCandless.

A piano is PUSHED INTO FRAME beside Chris. A YOUNG BLACK STUDENT pulls a stool in front of the piano and begins to play. Chris begins to serenade the monster, intermittently sharing the serenade directly into camera as well. He bursts into an uninhibited solo of *Tender Is The Night*.

CAMERA TILTS UP to the monster looking out the hatchway, slowly dying from the song being sung.

As the song continues to be sung and the monster continues to die, the AUDIO RECEDES and VIDEO IMAGES GO TO SLO MO.

CARINE (V.O.)

When we were little, Chris was very to himself. He wasn't anti-social, he always had friends, and everybody liked him - but he could go off and entertain himself for hours, he didn't seem to need toys or friends. He could be alone without being lonely. The secrets our parents kept, though unknown to Chris and I, led to bouts of rage and even violence between them that we had been forced to witness since we were very young. It seemed like they never fought without us. I remember the first family meeting to let Chris and me in on their plans for getting a divorce. They wanted us to choose which of them we'd live with. I cried my eyes out. But the divorce never happened, though the threats and meetings never stopped. It wasn't long before Chris and I shut off -- we would tell mom and dad to go ahead and get the divorce. Chris and I just wanted to get away from their fights and mom kept promising to get out and take us with her as soon as their company made enough money. Dad had been the young genius [that] NASA enlisted to do [crucial] designs for the American satellite radar systems that would be our answer to the Russian Sputnik. And mom and he later started up a consulting firm combining her get-up-and-go resourcefulness with his wealth of knowledge. By the time the company actually made its first million, the careerism and money seemed to erase her memory of the promise she'd made us.

(MORE)

CARINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I think this is when Chris began to see "careers" as a diseased invention of the twentieth century and to resent money and the useless priority people made of it in their lives. He'd begun planning to "slay the beast"...to make himself free.

VIDEO IMAGE:

The beast dies.

FADE OUT.

CHAPTER 1: BIRTH - FADE  
IN:

16 INT. TENT (IN THE SCRUB BRUSH BESIDE LAKE MEAD) - DAY 16

We see a pile of berries sitting atop a handkerchief. Beside them, a survivalist's guide to edible growth.

POV: THE TOP OF THE TENT - SOFT FOCUS

The glare of the sun penetrating the canvas. A fly buzzes and lands, hanging upside down. The image is blurry.

ECU: CHRIS' EYES

Delirious in the heat, we WIDEN OUT to see that he's filthy (2 weeks of growth on his face and naked.) He makes his way out of the tent, peers at the relentless sun and scurries to his backpack where he removes a canteen, barely a sip of water left in it. He downs it.

TIME CUT:

17 EXT. LAKE MEAD DAY 17

The following short vignettes are silent and focused exclusively on Chris:

1. Recreational BOATERS on Lake Mead. GIRLS in bikinis. BOYS on boats eating Kentucky Fried Chicken.

CUT TO:

2. At lake-side, an unusual sight - the NEW Chris McCandless, a sun and dirt-beaten bum with a backpack.

CUT TO:

3. A family ski-boat has taken Chris on. They give him water, dropping him at the north end of the lake at TEMPLE BAR MARINA. (**Director's Note: HIGH ANGLE, TIGHT, sees Chris and the glimmering water treadmill below**)

CUT TO:

4. Chris washes himself in the lake by the marina.

CUT TO:

18 ESTABLISHING SHOT: CAFE, TEMPLE BAR MARINA 18

CUT TO:

19 INT. MARINA CAFE, UNISEX RESTROOM 19

Chris brushes his teeth.

CHRIS (V.O.)

I need a name.

He takes a swallow of water. Rinses his mouth. Spits it out. Then checks his bearded face in the mirror. He likes what he sees.

As he wipes the corners of his mouth with a tissue and throws it into the bin below the sink, he notices a discarded tube of lipstick. He picks it up. It's down to its end. Yet with what lipstick remains, he writes on the mirror:

ALEXANDER SUPERTRAMP WAS HERE JULY 1990

CUT TO:

20 EXT. MARINA CAFE (BLDG REAR) - SUNDOWN 20

Chris is behind the cafe beside a pair of dumpsters. He removes the Datsun's license plates from his backpack and discards them deeply into the garbage.

CUT TO:

21

EXT. MARINA CAFE (BLDG FRONT) - SUNDOWN

21

Chris appears from behind the cafe lugging his backpack up the rise from the cafe to the highway and starts thumbing for a ride.

CUT TO:

22 INT. MCCANDLESS HOME, ANNANDALE 22

VARIOUS shots to accompany V.O.

CARINE (V.O.)

Toward the end of June, Chris had mailed our parents his final grade report.

Walt and Billie open the envelope.

CARINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Almost all A's. "A" in Apartheid in South African Society and History of Anthropological Thought; A- in Contemporary African Politics and the Food Crisis in Africa; and on it went. Clever boy, my brother.

We observe Carine in a delicate afternoon light. She is sitting up on her bed with an unread book, looking out the window toward us.

CARINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But by the end of July we hadn't heard anything from him and my parents were getting very worried.

Carine's POV: Walt with his arm around Billie in the yard.

CARINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Chris had never had a phone, so they decided to drive down to Atlanta and surprise him.

CUT TO:

22A EXT. ROAD TO TAHOE 22A

Chris, backpack on, walking away from camera.

CUT TO:

23 EXT. HIGHWAY - ATLANTA - DAY (END JULY 1990) 23

We see Walt and Billie's car pass under an Atlanta mileage sign.

CARINE (V.O.)

When they arrived at the apartment, there was a "For Rent" sign in his window, and the manager told my parents that Chris had moved out at the end of June.

24 EXT. OFF-CAMPUS ROOMING HOUSE, ATLANTA - DAY 24

We observe Walt and Billie chatting with Chris' apartment manager.

CARINE (V.O.)

When they got home, I had to hand them all the letters they had sent Chris that summer which had been returned in a bundle.

25 INT. MCCANDLESS HOME, ANNANDALE 25

The bundle of letters are splayed out on the kitchen table - "Return to Sender" stamps visible.

CARINE (V.O.)

Chris had instructed the post office to hold them until August 1st so that mom and dad wouldn't know that anything was up. Some part of me understood what he had done. That he had spent the previous four years fulfilling an absurd and onerous duty in graduating from college.

We return to the image of Carine sitting on her bed as she plops on Chris' old graduation cap. We slowly ZOOM IN on her throughout the remaining V.O.

CARINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And now, at last he was unincumbered. Emancipated from the stifling world of parents and peers. Abstraction, security, and material excess. Those things that cut Chris off from the raw truth of his existence. I only hoped he was safe...and I missed him.

CUT TO:

26 EXT. SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAINS (LAKE TAHOE AREA) - DAY 26

HELICOPTER SHOT: **(MUSIC OVER: PHILIP GLASS)** WE FIND CHRIS MAKING HIS STRIDES THROUGH PINES AND PEAKS, IN AWE OF THE SCALE AND POWER OF THIS LANDSCAPE.

TRACKING SHOT (GROUND LEVEL): CLOSE ON Chris, surrounded by a summit grove embraced in its nature.

ANGLE: A DEER drinking from a creek, pops its head up between trees and scrub, watching the alien human pass.

An EAGLE soars above (perhaps it was this POV represented in our helicopter shot)

WATER babbling in a mountain creek.

VARIOUS WILDLIFE SHOTS

ANGLE: Chris - In his eyes we see the landscape inject itself.

CUT TO:

27 EXT. CAMPSITE, PACIFIC CREST TRAIL - SUNSET 27

SEQUENCE: Chris makes camp beside a stream pulling a sack of rice from his backpack and cooking it.

28 EXT. CAMPSITE, PACIFIC CREST TRAIL - NIGHT 28

Wrapped in his own "The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly" poncho, Chris eats rice while crouched beside a campfire reading from Jack London's *White Fang*.

CUT TO:

29 EXT. PACIFIC CREST TRAIL - FURTHER NORTH - DAY 29

Chris is on the move north through the gorgeous landscape of the Sierras, humming as he walks, when he comes upon a sign on the trail: *PERMIT CAMPING IN DESIGNATED CAMPGROUNDS ONLY.*

Chris bows to the sign as one would to speak to a small child.

CHRIS

(singing)

*Sign, sign. Everywhere a sign. Fuckin' up the scenery, breakin' my mind.*

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

*Do this. Don't do that. Can't you read  
the sign?*

And then, very impulsively, he karate kicks the sign off  
its post into a log collapsing into ---

CUT TO:

30 OMITTED 30

31 EXT. CAMPSITE II, PACIFIC CREST TRAIL - NIGHT 31

A burning log collapses in Chris' campfire, reduced to  
glowing embers.

32 INT. TENT 32

Chris is awakened by the SOUND of TWIGS SNAPPING in a  
nearby thicket. He quickly grabs a knife from his  
backpack, unzips six inches of the tent door open. We  
see his eyes peering out. The CRACKLING moves closer.  
His grip on the knife tightens.

Suddenly a hot white light hits his face. And a VOICE  
comes from behind the light.

FOREST RANGER

U.S. Forestry. Could you step out of the  
tent please?

Now we see the FOREST RANGER appear from the thicket.  
Chris exits the tent, catching himself holding the knife.

CHRIS

(as he drops the knife to the  
ground)

Sorry. I thought you were a bear.

FOREST RANGER

(approaching)

I don't blame you. You're less than a  
hundred yards from the nearest den.  
That's why I came over here to talk to  
you. Do you have some identification?

CHRIS

No. I'm sorry. My name's Alex. I've been travelling a lot and I got robbed and my identification was taken.

FOREST RANGER

You mind if I take a look in your tent?

CHRIS

Go ahead.

The Forest Ranger bends over. Pops his flashlight through the tent door and peers around a bit before re-addressing Chris.

FOREST RANGER

You're not the character who knocked down our sign, are ya?

CHRIS

(giggles)

No.

FOREST RANGER

Because there was a sign indicating that camping was allowed by permit only.

CHRIS

Well, I don't have a permit.

FOREST RANGER

No, I'm sure you don't. Listen, it looks like you've got your food secured pretty good, so I'm not gonna make you move on tonight. But, these bears out here are nursing young and you know how that goes. Next time, stop at the Rangers station and get yourself a permit.

CHRIS

Alright. I appreciate it. I'm gonna be headed towards the coast tomorrow.

FOREST RANGER

Be careful.

They shake hands and the Forest Ranger disappears into the thicket.

CUT TO:

33 EXT. THE NORTHERN CREST - DAY 33

Chris descends the mountains where they meet the Redwoods. Every perilous step creates a mini landslide down the hill; dirt and gravel.

Chris stops briefly to observe an over-flying commercial airliner.

CHRIS  
(mocking imaginary  
conversation among  
passengers)

Is that a man mommy?  
That's no mere man, sweetheart. That's  
Alexander SuperTramp! King of the wild  
frontier!

Chris briefly waves to the airplane above and continues his descent.

CUT TO:

34 OMITTED 34

35 EXT. HIGHWAY NEAR WILLOW CREEK (AUGUST 10, 1990) 35

A car slows to a stop.

36 INT./EXT. CAR-HIGHWAY 36

DRIVER  
This is where I turn off.

CHRIS  
Alright man. Thanks a lot.

Chris is dropped off. The driver veers off the highway and into the distance. Chris is left behind to hitch another ride.

36A EXT. HIGHWAY 36A

CAMERA is across the road from Chris as one by one cars pass him by. He turns to move north by foot and we track with him, his back to oncoming traffic, he continues to hitchhike with an extended thumb. Something catches his eye in the treeline beside the road.

REVERSE: Chris, moving to the mysterious object. As he lifts it, we see that it is a goofy looking straw hat. He dusts it off, and snugs it onto his head, when a police car comes into frame and stops beside Chris.

With a quick blast of the siren, Chris turns to regard the police car. The POLICEMAN gets out of the car and moves to Chris.

POLICEMAN

How're you doin' this evening?

CHRIS

(reluctantly)

I'm alright. What's the matter?

POLICEMAN

You wanna put your backpack down on the hood of my car.

Chris does not oblige.

CHRIS

Why?

POLICEMAN

Because I asked you to, sir.

CHRIS

But I haven't done anything wrong. These are my personal items.

POLICEMAN

Do you know that it's unlawful to hitchhike on this stretch of highway.

CHRIS

You're kidding.

POLICEMAN

Do you see a safe area for a vehicle to stop? We got a tree-lined highway without a substantial shoulder here. And we've had a lot of accidents on this road from people stopping in the traffic lane for hitchhikers.

CHRIS

Alright, but...I mean, you stopped your car. You're in the traffic lane. And you can see, there's hardly any cars out here. Plus, it's a straight road; you can see for a long ways.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 (in disbelief)  
 There's really been accidents along here?

POLICEMAN  
 May I see some identification?

Now Chris is worried.

CHRIS  
 I don't have any.

POLICEMAN  
 You don't have any identification?

Chris shakes his head "No."

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)  
 (pulling out a ticket)  
 Well, I'm gonna site you for unlawful  
 hitchhiking. You don't have to appear.  
 You can send a check directly to the  
 Humboldt County Clerks Office for  
 restitution. If you don't pay it within  
 30 days, you're subject to fine and  
 warrant. I'm gonna trust that you're  
 gonna give me accurate information.  
 What's your name?

Chris can't bring himself to lie.

CHRIS  
 (a beat)  
 McCandless. Christopher Johnson  
 McCandless.

CUT TO:

37

INT. MCCANDLESS HOME, ANNANDALE (MID-AUGUST 1990)

37

Walt, Billie, and Carine sit around the kitchen table in August. A copy of Chris' ticket has been sent to the Annandale address and sits before them. Billie and Carine sit silently. Walt's on the phone.

CARINE (V.O.)  
 If Chris were trying to disappear, it  
 would have been a pretty uncharacteristic  
 lapse for him to give the police his real  
 place of residence. Though my parents  
 had already contacted the Annandale  
 police with their initial concerns, this  
 ticket arriving from California made them  
 frantic.

(MORE)

CARINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

My father called one of his old government friends who put him in touch with a private investigator, someone who'd done work with the DIA and the CIA. Using the Willow Creek ticket as a starting point, the investigator began chasing down leads. Most of them led far afield -- to Europe and South Africa. Ultimately turning up nothing. What my dad couldn't believe was that he'd given up his car. He seemed to love that Datsun so much. It sounded just like Chris to me, though. He was very much of the school that you should own nothing except what you could carry on your back at a dead run.

38

EXT. NORTHERN CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY, NEAR ORICK, 60 MILES SOUTH OF THE OREGON LINE - DAY (MID-AUGUST 1990) 38

With his backpack lunging and a free hand holding his goofy new hat onto his head, we find Chris at a "dead run" to catch a ride that had overshot him. (**Director's note: Don't leave this image too soon.**) An old van idles waiting for him. As he gets to the passenger side, the woman passenger gets out. This is JAN BURREN, early 40's, looks to be still on the long road home from Woodstock. A little heavysset, dark wavy hair with a lot of premature grey in it.

Jan moving to the side door.

JAN

Hi. We just barely saw you there, under that crazy hat of yours. We couldn't back up - the van's reverse is broken.

CHRIS

(as Jan fiddles with side door handle)

Oh. That's okay. Thanks for stopping.

JAN

This door's a little tricky, I'll get it.

And with a little pulling, it opens. Indicating the pony-tailed and bearded driver (RAINEY), early 50's, definitely Woodstock...

JAN (CONT'D)

Hop in, that's Rainey.

RAINEY  
Hey, I'm Rainey.

JAN  
And I'm Jan.

CHRIS  
Hey, Rainey. Hi Jan. I'm Alex.

RAINEY  
Alex of the hat.

CHRIS  
(closing the side door)  
Yeah.

Jan jumps back in passenger seat and the van rolls on.

39

INT. RAINEY &amp; JAN VAN

39

3-SHOT - CHRIS BETWEEN THEM IN THE BACKSEAT.

RAINEY  
Were you out there a long time hitching?

CHRIS  
Couple of days. But sometimes I forget to  
put my thumb out.

JAN  
Probably, the rest of the time, that hat  
scares 'em away.

Chris checks himself in the rearview mirror and gets a  
kick out of what he sees (That hat's staying on.) Jan is  
looking at the rearview mirror too, observing Chris with  
mild concern.

JAN (CONT'D)  
When's the last time you ate something?

Chris pulls out a bag of berries and edible plants he's  
collected.

CHRIS  
(excited)  
See that? I've got this book and it  
shows you all the plants and berries that  
are edible. You can find things wherever  
you go.

Jan steals a glance to Rainey. He's hip.

RAINEY

We were just in town getting some beads and stuff. Jan does handicrafts, so we're usually going from one swap meet to another. She's so good at what she does, we sold everything. So, we set up camp at Orick Beach. You're welcome to camp there with us.

JAN

And eat there with us.

Chris is beaming at the thought of real food.

CUT TO:

40

EXT. CAMPSITE, ORICK BEACH - NIGHT

40

Chris, Jan, and Rainey are beside a campfire, sitting on blankets. Their tents loom behind them.

Jan is weaving some sort of craft art. Chris is chomping on chicken and beans like they're going out of style.

CHRIS

(between large swallows)

So, I just left the car. It was a great car too. I'd driven it cross country the first time when I got out of high school. I had some really great adventures with it. That thing would just go and go. I mean, it was an '82 but if I'd kept it, it would've lasted me forever.

RAINEY

So, you're a leather now.

CHRIS

I'm a leather?

Rainey nods, smiling.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

(looking to Jan)

What's a leather?

JAN

You're a leather tramp. That's what they call the ones that hoof it on foot. So, we're technically rubber tramps.

RAINEY  
 (interjecting)  
 As we have a vee-hi-cle.

Rainey makes a move to put his arm around Jan. She goes a little stiff and fends it off. Chris notices.

JAN  
 Alex could have a vehicle. If he didn't burn his money. Why would you want to do that?

CHRIS  
 I don't need money. It makes people cautious.

JAN  
 (a little irritated)  
 Well, you have to be a little cautious Alex. That book of yours is all well and fine but you can't depend entirely on leaves and berries.

CHRIS  
 I don't know if you'd want to depend on much more than that.

JAN  
 Where's your mom and dad?

CHRIS  
 Makin' their money somewhere.

JAN  
 Come on Chris. You look like a loved kid. Be fair. \*

CHRIS  
 Fair? \*

JAN  
 You know what I mean. \*

CHRIS  
 I'll paraphrase Thoreau -- "Rather than love, than money, than *fairness*, give me truth." \*

RAINEY  
 You look like shit. There's the truth. \*

They all laugh. \*

CUT TO: \*

41 INT. CHRIS' TENT, ORICK BEACH - LATER 41

Chris sits up reading, his tent entry flap ajar to let the small candle lantern ventilate.

OS we HEAR a ZIPPING SOUND. It's Rainey. We see him from Chris' POV coming out of his tent deep in thought.

As he moves to the glowing embers of what remains of the campfire, Rainey's face goes out of frame and all Chris can see are his booted feet, tapping bits of glowing wood into the center of the fire. The tapping is slow and thoughtful. Micro-embers float upward into the night.

Chris' tent flap closes by his own hand.

ANGLE: Chris' dog-ears his book and puts out the lantern.

CUT TO:

42 EXT. ORICK BEACH - DAY 42

We see Chris foraging for firewood in the bluffs above the beach. He's got it tied to his back and his front. If we didn't know better, we'd think he was camouflaging himself.

Chris' POV: The rocks beside the water's edge. We see Rainey sitting beside the water, staring out to sea. We follow Chris' gaze to Jan, some fifty yards down the beach, walking melancholically in the opposite direction of Rainey.

ANGLE: Rainey at the water's edge. Chris appears beside him.

RAINEY

(regarding Chris wrapped up  
in wood)

Geez. If I struck a match to you, I'd  
have warmth and dinner at the same time.

But Rainey's humor does not hide an inner turmoil.

CHRIS  
Where's Jan going?

RAINEY  
Well, my friend, all is not well on the hippie front.

Chris pulls out his pocketknife, cuts the twine that binds the firewood to his body, and takes a seat beside Rainey.

RAINEY (CONT'D)  
You're an industrious little fucker, aren't ya... Yeah, it's funny how things happen at particular times. I've loved that woman for a lot of years. But you know, she's got a...story. We've been going through this *thing* real quietly cause, well...So, after running into you last night, this thing we were going through quietly, she started talking about. You know what I mean?

CHRIS  
I think so.

RAINEY  
You think what?

Chris is looking off at Jan walking in the distance.

CHRIS  
I think she's probably quietly disconnecting. It doesn't feel right to her to be close to you if there's a hole of some kind somewhere else.

RAINEY  
That's a helluva insight. Jesus!... You're not Jesus, are you? You gonna walk on that water and get her back for me?

CHRIS  
Actually, I'm a little afraid of water.

Rainey gives him a sideways glance.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
It's true. But it's something I've got to get over sometime.  
(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

So, I'll swim in it if you'll carry the firewood back to the campsite.

RAINEY

I'll carry. Shit-yes I'll carry.

And with that, Chris runs down the beach toward Jan. Rainey watches Chris and Jan chat briefly. Then they strip down to their underwear and jump into the ocean, splashing and laughing.

ANGLE: Rainey. A warmth comes over him, watching his old lady having some fun. He grabs two armfuls of wood and heads to the campsite.

ANGLE: Chris and Jan swimming in the chilly water, having a ball.

Jan increasingly indulges herself a motherly closeness and joy with Chris. And Chris allows it. She pushes the stringy hairs from his eyes, worries when he descends below the surface for too many seconds, and smiles and laughs in tender relief when from below surface one of her toes is pulled on by the big fish Chris. As he re-surfaces, she gives him a splash right in the face.

TIME CUT:

43

EXT. CAMPSITE, ORICK BEACH - LATER

43

Through a burning campfire in the late afternoon, we see the chilly bodies of Chris and Jan carrying their clothes run shivering toward us.

Rainey sits beside the campfire.

RAINEY

I thought you guys might need a little heat.

Jan smiles appreciatively.

JAN

(moving to Rainey)

That's not hot enough. Put your arms around me.

As they embrace, Chris throws a coat on from his tent, puts on his funny straw hat, and grabs a book.

Rainey has wrapped a blanket around Jan and they sit beside the fire.

CHRIS

I'm going to go down the beach a ways and read a little bit. I'll bring the rest of that wood back before nightfall.

RAINEY

Alright. We might take a run into town to grab some food for tonight.

CHRIS

Sounds good.

He heads off down the beach.

44 EXT. ORICK BEACH MONTAGE

44

MUSIC OVER:

1. The ocean moving toward sunset.
2. Seagulls, gliding inches over the water.
3. The breeze on the sea grass.
4. Chris in his big hat reading at water's edge.
5. Jan and Rainey deeply engaged in conversation beside the fire.
6. Chris closing his book, remaining meditative at water's edge.
7. Jan and Rainey in town, buying groceries and being playful with each other.
8. OVER Chris' shoulder, the sun sets and day becomes night.

CUT TO:

45 EXT. CAMPSITE, ORICK BEACH - NIGHT

45

Jan and Rainey on a blanket sharing a joint. Chris lying beside the campfire in his sleeping bag. Jan takes a toke, passes the joint to Rainey.

JAN

You know what Alex ought to do, Rainey? He ought to come out to the Slabs this winter.

RAINEY

Oh yeah.

Rainey takes a toke on the joint.

RAINEY (CONT'D)

You'd like that if you're still on the road. Lot of fellow travelers.

Rainey offers the joint to Chris. Chris passes it up with a hand gesture.

CHRIS

What is that? The Slabs?

RAINEY

It's down in Niland, California. You know where the Salton Sea is?

CHRIS

Near San Diego, yeah?

RAINEY

Well about 200 miles Northeast of there, but yeah. Niland's off the east shore of Salton. Wild place. The navy bulldozed and abandoned a base there. All that's left is a grid of concrete foundations. They're scattered over about a square mile or so.

JAN

When the weather turns cold across the rest of the country, people show up there by the thousands: snow birds...

RAINEY

Drifters...

JAN

Sundry vagabonds...

RAINEY / JAN

Like ourselves.

JAN

Livin' on the cheap under the sun.

CHRIS

You sell your handcrafts there?

JAN

Oh yeah. And a lot of second-hand goods. There's a swap meet. The people are cool. There's even some kids running around sometimes. Most everyone there, if they're not avoiding the cold, are at least dodging the IRS.

RAINEY

Or the FBI. CIA! DDT!!!

The three of them laugh.

JAN

It's good. You should check it out. If you come, I'll make a proper hat for you.  
(standing, shaking out her blanket)

Well, Alex. I'm gonna clean up and the old man and I are gonna get some rest.  
(indicating the sleeping bag)  
Looks like you got yourself a good bag there.

CHRIS

Yeah...my mother made it from a kit.

Jan sees an almost imperceptible mother pang in Chris, but he pushes it away quickly.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I'm gonna sleep out here by the fire. I want to read a little bit.

Jan moves to Chris, hugs him, kisses him on the cheek.

JAN

You're wonderful. Don't make me worry about you.

TIME CUT:

46

EXT. CAMPSITE, ORICK BEACH - LATER

46

The fire is burning low. Chris reads from Thoreau's *WALDEN* from the chapter on "Higher Laws" as we move slowly in toward him, we begin to HEAR quiet sounds of what may be love-making coming from Rainey and Jan's tent. A gentle smile comes over Chris' face and in its irony, he looks to the page before him.

Chris' sliding fingertip underlines the following passage:

*Chastity is the flowering of a man; and what are called genius, heroism, holiness, and the like, are but various fruits which succeed it.*

CUT TO:

47 EXT. CAMPSITE, ORICK BEACH - MORNING 47

Gulls pierce into the grey morning ocean, snapping from schools of fish. And the subtle crackling of a campfire's death. There on the beach, Jan and Rainey's van, their tent, and the fireless coals of last night. But no sign of Chris, his bag or his tent.

Jan appears from her tent, rubbing her eyes. She wears a sarong which she re-secures at the breast, then notices that Chris has left. But where his tent had been, the words:

THANK YOU JAN AND RAINEY

are spelled out in the sand with bits of driftwood.

CU: Jan - We see her sadness. Rainey appears at her shoulder. He understands what is inside his woman.

JAN

He reminded me...

RAINEY

I know.

Go to WIDE SHOT: Jan and Rainey remaining as they were.

FOREGROUND: Seagulls GLIDE THROUGH FRAME.

CHAPTER 2: ADOLESCENCE  
DISSOLVE TO:

48 EXT. CASCADE RANGE - DAY 48

MUSIC OVER: Joe Henry's *King's Highway*

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

1. Chris hitchhiking through the Sage Brush Uplands
2. Chris squatting over a water bucket, shaving.

3. Camping in the lava beds of the Columbia River Basin.
4. Walking across the Idaho Panhandle.
5. Cooking the last of his rice on the Montana border.
6. Hitchhiking in the Montana sunset.

49 EXT. CUT BANK, MONTANA - SUNSET (SEPTEMBER 10 1990) 49

We see Chris hitching down a lonely two-lane road surrounded by fields and distant mountains.

CARINE (V.O.)

In early September, mom and dad got a call from the Annandale police notifying them that Chris' abandoned car had been identified by the Arizona Highway Patrol after a group of rare flower hunters stumbled upon it in the desert. There were no signs that Chris had intended to return to it. But there wasn't any evidence of struggle. The police said they thought Chris had chosen to leave it behind and not that it had been taken from him. Nonetheless, the initial comfort that gave mom and dad, quickly turned to their realization that Chris was actually trying not to be found.

50 EXT. ANNANDALE STREET - DUSK 50

We see Walt. He walks out the door of his house into the street. He keeps walking. And we go with him in his silent but internal Armageddon. We PULL him in CU throughout all that follows...(Refer to SCENE 171: "Dad calls it 'suspended animation.'" This may affect our visual approach)

CARINE

The year Chris graduated high school he bought the Datsun, used. He wanted to drive it cross-country and visit our old neighborhood in California. The day before he left was my dad's birthday. Chris made a speech...

51 INT. MCCANDLESS HOME, ANNANDALE (PAST)

51

Chris stands beside the family piano, speaking to a party of his parent's friends, Walt and Billie among them. Beside him, a large gift-wrapped present. Carine sits at the foot of the stairs at the back of the room watching her brother with a hint of concern.

CHRIS  
(a little drunk, a little emotional)

Dad, you and I have had our differences over the years...but on your birthday I want to tell you how grateful I am for all the things you've given me. And that you did it starting from nothing to working your way through college and busting your ass to support us kids. So, in return, I've been busting my ass a bit...at Domino's Pizza -

Chris moves to the gift.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
and I've gotten you this token, this damned expensive token, as a token of that appreciation.

Chris holds the large gift toward Walt. Walt moves through his friends to Chris and strips the paper, exposing a beautiful Questar Telescope.

WALT  
(patting his son the back)  
Would you look at that.

Walt holds the telescope up for all to see. And the party responds with applause.

Chris walks through the cheering family friends to take his place beside Carine at the bottom of the steps.

CARINE  
Jesus, you must've had a lot to drink.

CHRIS  
Too much and not enough. I used to believe all that stuff. That whole story. I thought maybe if I said it again, I'd believe it. But I don't.

Tears have come to Chris' eyes. He puts his head in his hands. Carine puts an arm around him.

BACK TO:

52 EXT ANNANDALE STREET - DUSK 52

PRESENT: Walt expressionless, walking into camera.

CARINE (V.O.)

The day after the party, Chris left on his trip and ended up staying away most of the summer. It was nearly three months before he walked back into our house in Annandale. He had a scruffy beard, his hair was long and tangled, and he was rail thin. As soon as I heard he was home, I ran into his room to talk to him. In California, he'd looked up some old family friends who still lived there. He'd found out that long after he had been born, our dad had continued a relationship with his first wife Marcia in secret.

53 EXT CUT BANK, MONTANA - SUNSET 53

BRIEF CUTAWAY to Chris hitching on the Montana highway.

CARINE

And that one lie had led to another. That two years after Chris was born, dad had had another son with Marcia. Worse yet was that it was Marcia to whom he was still legally married at the time. And it was Chris and I who were the bastard children.

BACK TO:

54 EXT ANNANDALE STREET - DUSK 54

Walt.

CARINE

Dad's arrogance made him conveniently oblivious to the pain he caused. And mom, in the shame and embarrassment of a young mistress, became his accomplice.

(MORE)

CARINE (CONT'D)

She and my dad had decided to bend the truth about this other child saying that dad wasn't the father and they maintained that their fraudulent marriage was real.

(MORE)

## CARINE (CONT'D)

Chris was quiet when he told me this. He said it made his "entire childhood seem like a fiction"; that "the truth had been dying everyday." If something bothered Chris, he'd usually keep it to himself. And he made me promise to do the same.

(MORE)

CARINE (CONT'D)

He never did tell mom and dad that he knew. But Chris measured himself and those around him by an impossibly rigorous moral code. He loathed what he considered mom and dad's hypocrisy and resented what they considered guidance. Chris submitted to dad's authority through college but I knew he raged inwardly the whole time. It was inevitable that Chris would rebel. And when he did, he did it with characteristic immoderation.

Walt suddenly collapses to his knees weeping, heartbroken and ashamed on a quiet Annandale street in the shadowless light of dusk.

CARINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

My father is a brilliant man. But he had made some terrible mistakes. And to some extent, it seemed Chris was making him pay an awful price.

The image of Walt DISSOLVES INTO...

BACK TO:

55

EXT. CUT BANK, MONTANA (SEPTEMBER 10, 1990)

55

A pick-up truck pulls over for Chris. As Chris jumps in, we see on the passenger side door, the name WAYNE WESTERBERG boldly painted across it. Chris hops in beside a hyper kinetic man with thick shoulders and a black goatee.

WAYNE

(rolling a cigarette without moving forward with the truck, his knees rattling up and down)

How're you doing? Wayne Westerberg.

CHRIS

(shaking hands)

Hi Wayne. Alex McCandless.

WAYNE

Seems like every time I come on this road, there's somebody hitching out here who looks as skinny and unfed as you.

Chris nods with a laugh. Wayne continuing...

WAYNE (CONT'D)

Look, I gotta stop in Ethridge to *drop something off* (know what I mean?)

Chris is not sure about the "drop something off" part.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

How 'bout you and I grab something to eat down there?

CHRIS

Oh, I wouldn't want to burden you.

WAYNE

How long has it been since you've had anything to eat?

CHRIS

Couple of days. I kinda ran out of money.

WAYNE

Well, there's no choice about it. I'm gonna get you some dinner.

Wayne lights his cigarette, puts the truck in gear and they head down the road.

As the sun dips behind the horizon we TILT UP off the departing truck to the sky. Ominously mounting clouds stunningly reflect the red rays of the hidden sun:

CUT TO:

56

EXT. SUNBURST - NIGHT

56

Wayne's truck cuts through a track in a wheat field moving toward a compound of three trailers, one a double-wide, the other two on wheels, smaller. Beside them, a *Wyeth*-esque farmhouse. He eases the engine and comes to a stop in front of the double-wide.

As he and Chris dismount the truck, Wayne gives him a hushing finger across the lips. They tip-toe up to the door, where Wayne shuffles a bunch of keys.

A little thunder kicking in the distant sky.

56A INT. DOUBLE-WIDE - NIGHT

56A

As Wayne and Chris enter, they tip-toe over empty booze bottles and passed out work crew; Wayne's harvesting team.

They make their way to a small table in the kitchenette. Remains of the evening's dinner are on the stove. Wayne turns on the stovetop coils to heat it up.

WAYNE

So where is it you're headed?

CHRIS

I was thinking about doubling back through the Canadian side of Glacier Park.

WAYNE

Yeah, I used to have a girlfriend who'd go there, camp on the Black Feet Res. She was into all that American Indian stuff.

(MORE)

WAYNE (CONT'D)

I can bring you to the border at Sweet Grass once you've had some food.

CHRIS

Well, that'd be great. What do you do out here?

WAYNE

Well, I do a lot of things. Computer programming. Video game repair. I'm a licensed pilot, own a grain elevator in Carthage and another one a few miles out of town. But in the summertime I run a combine crew, follow the harvest from Texas way the hell north to the Canadian border. We just got done cutting barley for Coors and Anheuser Busch. But then I got this little black box deal on the side (You know what I mean?)

CHRIS

You mean those free satellite TV deals?

WAYNE

(as though he hadn't brought it up)

You said it, not me.

Chris is dazzled by this renaissance man of the plains.

Wayne stands to dish out a couple of plates of heated food. As Chris starts digging in, a major gust of wind rocks the trailer.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

(smiling, responding to wind)

OOOOOHH.

Chris doesn't respond, digs into the food. Points to the unconscious tribe splayed out. SIX GERMANIC-LOOKING UNCONSCIOUS BODIES.

CHRIS

Who are these guys?

Wayne gets a little giggle.

WAYNE

Those are my Hudderites. Agriculture's a pretty transient business. These guys come off the Hudderite colony looking for work. I always got work for people.

Then that guy -

(MORE)

WAYNE (CONT'D)

(pointing at guy making most  
of his snore)

That's Kevin. He's with me most of the  
time. He's not a Hudderrite. He's from  
Madison.

CHRIS

Madison. Okay.

Just then, the rain kicks in full gear outside, pounding  
the trailer shell. A couple hits of lightning follow.

WAYNE

Listen, you don't want to go out there on  
the road tonight. Why don't you just  
roll your sleeping bag out and play like  
a Hudderrite until morning.

Chris looks about. There's not much room but it beats  
the pelting outside.

CHRIS

Thanks Wayne. I will.

TIME CUT:

Chris, with a grin on his face, lays in his sleeping bag  
between a Hudderrite and the sleeping KEVIN. Wayne comes  
from the back bedroom, tip-toes through the sleeping  
bodies to hand Chris a pillow.

WAYNE

Get a good sleep. See you in the  
morning.

Chris waves a thanks, puts the pillow beneath his head  
and closes his eyes.

57	OMITTED	57
58	OMITTED	58
59	EXT. SUNBURST - DAY	59

We are TIGHT on Chris' hand atop the shifter of one of  
Wayne's lumbering harvesters.

WAYNE (O.S)

Okay. Now take hold of the joystick, get the feel of header, idle it down with the toggle switch...

As Chris makes the attempt, we immediately hear the grinding of gears, the instrument alarms in chaos.

WIDE SHOT: Chris and Wayne sit atop a combine. In the background we see Wayne's trailer and two other combines piloted by Wayne's crew members on the ocean of ripe blond grain.

Chris tries his hand at the shifter once more. This time the thing starts to move.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

That's it. That's it. Now take it on out and make yourself some money.

Wayne jumps off the combine and Chris begins to cut his pattern, intermittently struggling with the shifter.

Wayne laughs his ass off.

60

EXT SUNBURST - DAY

60

SERIES OF SHOTS indicating a SERIES OF DAYS passing as Chris gets a hang of the machines a little more at a time.

CUT TO:

61

INT. DOUBLE-WIDE, SUNBURST - NIGHT

61

Six men including Wayne and Chris, two among them - Hudderites, crowd in to the small dinner area of the trailer. Talking politics and bullshit, and eating a welcome meal.

WAYNE

I'm gonna break out some whiskey. Alex, you want anything other than that beer?

CHRIS

I'd take a White Russian if you've got it.

The group of men laugh at the youngster's order of a fancy drink.

MAN #1

What are you Alex, a Commie?

CHRIS

No, I just like White Russians.

WAYNE

I haven't got anything like that here.  
But I tell ya what. And I know I speak  
for everybody. You wanna come work with  
us in Carthage, we'll hook you up on the  
grain elevator and get you a White  
Russian down at the Cabaret.

CHRIS

Really?

WAYNE

Dawn tomorrow, engines roaring.  
(to the others like a mock  
blues singer)  
*"Pot o Gold. Oh that pot o gold."*

They all join in to the chant/song:

ALL

*"Pot o Gold. Gotta get that pot o gold!"*

CHRIS

(raising his beer)  
To Carthage.

WAYNE AND HIS MEN

(toasting)  
To Carthage.

CUT TO:

62 OMITTED

62

62A EXT. HIGHWAY BETWEEN SUNBURST AND CARTHAGE

62A

MAGIC HOUR. TELEPHOTO LENS. The harvesting convoy rolls  
toward us like a herd of mammoths.

63 EXT. CARTHAGE - NIGHT (LATE SEPTEMBER 1990)

63

A series of silent, quaint establishing tableaux.

**(Director's Note: Condor above street)**

It's a sleepy little town. Population: 274. Cluster of clapboard houses, tiny yards, and weathered brick storefronts rising humbly from the immensity of the northern plains. Stately rows of cottonwoods shade a grid of streets, seldom disturbed by moving vehicles.

From UNDER CAMERA, the series of tableaux is interrupted as the convoy roars into our frame from BENEATH CAMERA.

CUT TO:

63A INT. WAYNE'S TRUCK

63A

In the passenger seat, Chris is glowing at his new surroundings. Wayne picks up the CB radio.

WAYNE

Okay Kevin, get all the machines back to the elevator. I'm gonna show Chris to his room.

KEVIN (O.S.)

(over CB)

I've got dibs on that shower, that shower's all me.

WAYNE

(laughs)

First come, first serve buddy.

Wayne signs off and veers off the road.

64 OMITTED

64

65 OMITTED 65

66 EXT. WESTERBERG'S CARTHAGE HOME - NIGHT 66

A two-story Victorian in the Queen Anne style. Wayne veers his truck into the front yard, parking under the big cottonwood that towers above.

SHORT TIME CUT:

67 INT. WESTERBERG'S CARTHAGE HOME - SAME 67

Chris follows Wayne up the narrow stairwell.

WAYNE  
 (carrying Chris' pack for  
 him)  
 Come on up in here. This'll be your room  
 for as long as you hang about.

Wayne opens the door at the top of the stairs.

68

INT. CHRIS' ROOM, WESTERBERG'S CARTHAGE HOME - SAME

68

Wayne plops Chris' pack beside a single bed in the tiny  
 but comfortable room. Chris enters, very happy with his  
 new quarters.

WAYNE  
 Shower's down the hall. If you hurry you  
 can beat the rest of the boys to it. But  
 you do want to grab a shower cause we're  
 all heading over to the Cabaret in  
 exactly thirty-six minutes. So, get your  
 dancing shoes on. There's foo-foo in the  
 medicine cabinet. I think it's Brut.  
 (slaps his own face as if  
 he's putting on cologne)  
 Then you want to put your charm in  
 overdrive cause we like to PAH-TAY!

Wayne gives Chris a wink and exits, shutting the door  
 behind him.

Chris takes in his new surroundings. He's on a work crew  
 and he likes it. Chris makes the move for the shower but  
 by the time he opens his door to the hall, all the other  
 crew members are barreling up the stairs in front of  
 them, clamoring for dibs (Chris' POV)

MAN #1  
 I got first!

MAN #2  
 (in a kid voice)  
 You had first last night!

MAN #1  
 (entering the bathroom)  
 Well, if you wanna wash my back,  
 cowboy...

MAN #2  
 You go ahead, fairy. Just don't use all  
 the soap.

ANGLE: Chris. He gets a kick out of these guys. He closes the door.

CUT TO:

69

INT. CABARET BAR, CARTHAGE - NIGHT

69

The Jack Daniels is flowing. Wayne's crew drinks, smokes, and strikes out with every fat woman in the place. GAIL BORAH, an on-again, off-again girlfriend of Wayne's tends bar. A petite sad-eyed woman, slight as a heron, delicate features and long blond hair. Wayne and Chris sit at the end of the bar.

WAYNE

Alex, this is Gail. This is the one to go to for that White Russian you've been wanting. Of course the quid pro quo can be hazardous.

GAIL

Shut up, Wayne.  
(to Chris)  
You want a White Russian, sweetie?

CHRIS

(shyly)  
Yes please, ma'am.

WAYNE

*Yes please, ma'am?*

Wayne slaps Chris on the back.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

Ain't he great?

GAIL

(to Chris)  
Don't pay any attention to him.

With that Wayne reaches over the bar, grabs Gail and gets her in a lip-lock, to which she ultimately gives in.

TIME CUT:

70

INT. CABARET BAR, CARTHAGE - LATER

70

Wayne and Chris are both drunk.

WAYNE

Anything to do with hunting, preserving the meat, smoking it or whatever, you talk to Kevin over there. That's your man.

ANGLE: KEVIN. He looks every bit the Grizzly Adams part.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

Outdoors-man. What's the interest in all that?

CHRIS

I'm thinking about going to Alaska.

WAYNE

Alaska, Alaska? Or city Alaska? The city Alaska does have markets.

CHRIS

(with a drunken, excited energy)

No, Alaska, Alaska. I want to be all the way out there. On my own. No map. No watch. No axe. Just out there. Big mountains, rivers, sky. Game. Just be out there in it. In the wild.

WAYNE

In the wild.

CHRIS

Yeah. Maybe write a book about my travels. About getting out of this sick society.

WAYNE

(coughing)

Society, right.

CHRIS

Because you know what I don't understand? I don't understand why, why people are so bad to each other, so often. It just doesn't make any sense to me. Judgement. Control. All that.

WAYNE

Who "people" we talking about?

CHRIS

You know, parents and hypocrites. Politicians and pricks.

Chris is clearly troubled by his own words. Wayne leans into Chris.

WAYNE

(tapping a long finger  
against Chris' forehead)

This is a mistake. It's a mistake to get too deep into that kind of stuff. Alex, you're a helluva young guy, but I promise you this: You're a young guy. Blood and fire! You're juggling blood and fire!

GAIL

(chimes in)

Who are you to be giving advice to anybody?

WAYNE

Blood and fire...What? Mr. Happy. That's who I am. Gimme a kiss.

Gail pushes him off with mock disgust.

WAYNE (CONT'D)

(mock opening his zipper, in  
a high-pitched voice)

Come on, give Mr. Happy a kiss!

On the television above the bar appears Reverend Jesse Jackson. We can't hear him but we can see him. Chris points at the television and yells out to the entire bar of cowboys and ranch hands -

CHRIS

Now, that's who could be President!

Wayne buries his face in his hands.

CUT TO:

71 INT. CHRIS' ROOM, WESTERBERG'S CARTHAGE HOME - DAWN 71

Chris is sacked out from his night of drinking when -

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The door knocks blast into Chris' head. He awakens to Wayne opening his bedroom door. Wayne, despite his own drinking the night before, is wide awake and fresh as a daisy.

WAYNE  
Workin' time!

CUT TO:

72 EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - SUNRISE' 72

All the boys are hard at it, including Chris and Wayne.  
Wayne moves to Chris' side.

WAYNE  
So, what do you think about all this?  
(The working life)

CHRIS  
I like all this.

TIME CUT:

73 EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - DAY - LUNCH BREAK 73

While Wayne and most of the crew get a little rest in the shade of the grain elevator and eat their lunches, Chris and Kevin are deep in a bald patch in the field.

Kevin is taking Chris through the paces of smoking and curing meat in the wilds. Chris listens and takes notes.

**(Director's note: Cast a "Kevin" who knows this shit and shoot it as a dialogue scene as well as a silent tableau.)**

CUT TO:

74 INT. CABARET BAR, CARTHAGE - NIGHT 74

The place is packed and Chris is taking over the piano, surprising everyone with a tremendous talent. Segueing from honky-tonk country to ragtime, he's become the life of the party.

The MUSIC continues OVER:

75 EXT. GRAIN ELEVATOR - DAY 75

All the men of Wayne's crew (who by now we've come to know) and Chris are working their asses off.

POST LAP MUSIC FADES OUT as we:

INTERCUT the crew at work with a SERIES OF MYSTERY ANGLES: Tires kicking up dust on dirt roads, through town, and into the field behind the grain elevator. Back to the work, back to the tires. Back to the work, back to these several cars hauling ass through the field. Back to Wayne, up high in the grain elevator -

WAYNE

(to Chris, as he lowers  
himself down the man-lift)

I gotta take a piss.

Chris' POV: from high in the grain elevator. He watches Wayne below, as Wayne saunters out to the field to take a piss. With his back to us, Wayne whips it out and starts pissing about 25 yards from the grain elevator.

CU Wayne. He looks up from his urination, the grain elevator behind him. We see a slight mischievous smile come to his face. He puts his hands up into the air when suddenly -

Six unmarked FBI vehicles surround him.

**(Director's note: Triangulate three long lenses on Wayne as the mysterious cars enter each frame, as they skid to a dusty stop on all sides of him.)**

Chris and the men of his crew look on.

MAN #1

I warned him about those little black boxes.

As Wayne is handcuffed and led away, he nods up to his boys.

WAYNE

(to arresting agent)

You wanna get that zipper for me?

(and then calling out to his  
crew)

Sorry boys. Gonna have to shut down for a while. Alex! You come back and work for me anytime.

(to Chris and the men)

Gail's got all your checks, guys. I shouldn't be away too long.

With that, the FBI agents have hustled the good-natured Wayne into the back of one of the cars.

As they take off into the distance, we move in on Chris, bemused.

GAIL (O.S.)  
(pre-lap)  
Where are you gonna go?

CUT TO:

76

INT. CABARET BAR, CARTHAGE - LATE AFTERNOON

76

Chris sits at the end of the bar with Gail Borah.

CHRIS  
I've been thinking a lot about Alaska.

GAIL  
Alaska? What kind of nut-nut are you?  
Alex, it's October for Christ's sake.  
You go to Alaska, you go in the Spring.  
This time of year you wanna head south.  
Personally, I like Las Vegas. One-armed  
bandit. That's what I like.

CHRIS  
Yeah, maybe I ought to put off going to  
Alaska, at least so I can get settled up  
there in decent weather.

GAIL  
South. You want to go south. You want  
me to take you out to the highway?

CHRIS  
(putting on his cowboy)  
Little lady, I walked in, I can walk out.

He puts a few bills down on the bar, saddles up his  
backpack, and gives Gail a hug.

GAIL  
You take care of yourself now, Alex. You  
got a whole family here depending on it.

CHRIS  
I will. Thanks Gail. And tell Wayne,  
I'll drop him a line.

He gives her a kiss on the cheek and he's off.

CUT TO:

77 EXT. CARTHAGE STREETS 77

Empty Carthage streets but for Christopher Johnson McCandless walking off as we CRANE UP.

CUT TO:

78 EXT. HIGHWAY BETWEEN CARTHAGE, SD AND THE GRAND CANYON - NIGHT (OCTOBER 28 1990) 78

Chris has hitched a ride with a long-haul trucker.

SERIES OF ANGLES: MUSIC OVER: Traveling shots.

CUT TO:

79 EXT. COLORADO RIVER, STRETCH OF THE GRAND CANYON - DAY 79

Chris disembarks the long-haulers truck, waves a goodbye, and the truck moves on.

SERIES OF ANGLES: Chris walking south through the desert following the river bank. He covers twelve miles before he arrives in an Arizona town, a dusty weigh-in station.

80 EXT. ARIZONA TOWN - NIGHT 80

The town is quiet but along the storefront lane where Chris walks, he comes upon a sporting goods store. In the window, a fiberglass river kayak. Chris stares at it.

CUT TO:

81 EXT. INTERSTATE UNDERPASS - NIGHT 81

We HEAR passing cars humming above. Chris has set up camp and he's digging in the dirt. He buries many of his belongings. He makes sure he's got his check from working with Wayne in his pocket. He packs only the essential items, burying all else. He gets into his sleeping bag and goes to sleep.

CUT TO:

81A EXT. LEE'S FERRY ROAD - DAY

81A

Chris backpacks past the mushroom rock forms at the entrance of Lee's Ferry.

CUT TO:

82 INT. RANGER'S STATION - LEE'S FERRY - DAY

82

Chris approaches the GREEN-SUITED FUNCTIONARY at the front desk.

GREEN SUIT

Can I help you?

CHRIS

Yeah. If I wanted to paddle down the river, where's the best place to launch out of?

GREEN SUIT

"To launch out of?" What's your experience level?

CHRIS

Not much.

GREEN SUIT

Any? Do you have a permit?

CHRIS

A permit for what?

GREEN SUIT

You can't paddle down the river without a permit. If you like, you can apply for one here, get yourself some experience, and I'll put you on the wait-list.

CHRIS

Wait-list? To paddle down a river?

GREEN SUIT

That's right.

CHRIS

(giggling)

Well, how long do you have to wait?

GREEN SUIT

I've got an opening May 2003.

CHRIS  
 (laughing)  
 Twelve years?

GREEN SUIT  
 Well, you could always join a commercial  
 raft trip and go with a licensed guide.  
 They usually have a few last minute  
 cancellations. I think it's about two-  
 thousand dollars.

Chris busts a gut.

CHRIS  
 Thanks for your help.

The Green Suit eyes Chris' departure with suspicion.

CUT TO:

83

EXT. COLORADO RIVER - DAY

83

Chris stands beside a dramatic section of rapids. The  
 whitewater roars.

As we SLOWLY ZOOM INTO Chris' face, terrified and  
 absorbed by the torrent, a bead of sweat drops across his  
 forehead, TILTS OUR CAMERA to his trembling hands and  
 legs, when Peter Gabriel's *I Have The Touch* begins to  
 play.

BACK TO:

ZOOM INTO Chris' face...a decision:

Fear becomes determination

We SMASH CUT ON CUE with Peter Gabriel's vocals. SLO MO,  
 SUPER DRAMATIC - Chris blasting out of a shoot in the  
 rapids in the kayak we saw the night before. It's  
 outrageous. Hair-raising. Just like Peter Gabriel sings  
 it, he has the touch.

This kid's never kayaked before, certainly never on  
 rapids. But it's that immortal stage of life, no care,  
 no helmet, no life-jacket, pure adrenaline. He can  
 hardly believe he's surviving it as he goes but there's  
 no looking back now. And with every thump of the music,  
 we share his rush. His pure unadulterated exhilaration.

With the culmination of the music, Chris has successfully  
 shot the rapid. He paddles through quiet waters.

We move in on him as he maneuvers the kayak to face upstream. There before him, the impossible rapid he had just completed.

CHRIS  
(to himself)  
I'm Superman. SuperTramp.

He feels immortal. He makes his about-face and is about to head down stream when he sees at the river's edge, a group of RIVER TOURISTS and their GUIDE lunching beside a pontoon raft. The tourists look like a bunch of bewildered tubby-troopers in their misfitted orange life-vests and cereal bowl helmets. The RIVER GUIDE yells out at Chris as Chris moves PAST CAMERA and away. The guide gets on his satellite phone to alert the Rangers. We ZOOM SLOWLY away from them toward the rapid.

CUT TO:

84 EXT. ANOTHER QUIET SECTION OF RIVER - LATER 84

Phillip Glass' *Cloudscape* plays OVER: Chris paddles on.

LOW ANGLE: It is a narrow gorge of solid rock, looking up from hundreds of feet below the canyon crest.

CUT TO:

85 EXT. FURTHER ALONG THE RIVER - LATER 85

The canyon has widened to beach-like banks. Music FADES.

Along the banks he sees a YOUNG BLONDE COUPLE. This is MADS and SONJA, in their 20's, Danish. They play at the river's edge beside their campsite, hotdogs cooking on a Hibachi. Chris averts his eyes when Sonja rises from the water, topless.

MADS  
(yelling out to Chris)  
Hello!

CHRIS  
Hello.

MADS  
You can join us!

Chris doesn't know quite what to do. But Mads seems quite comfortable inviting a stranger into the presence of his topless girlfriend.

MADS (CONT'D)

We have hotdogs!

Chris - *can't turn that down!* He paddles to within feet of the water's edge.

MADS (CONT'D)

I am Mads.

CHRIS

Hi. Alex.

SONJA

I am Sonja.

Chris gives Sonja a little wave. She bypasses it, wading up to the Kayak, giving him a big hug.

SONJA (CONT'D)

Hello Alex.

This couple is extremely energetic. Can't wait to please. And a bona fide American adventurer in their midst. It's everything they could've wanted.

MADS

We are from Copenhagen. And you are from the rapids.

CHRIS

I am.

SONJA

My Got!

MADS

Crazy man. You're a crazy man! Sonja, he is a crazy man.

(to Chris)

I'll make you a hotdog.

Mads grabs a hotdog from the Hibachi.

MADS (CONT'D)

Just one minute. One minute...

Sonja has moved to the tent to put on a dry T-shirt. But as she moves back to the water's edge, those nipples keep saying *Hello*.

Chris, meanwhile, simply cannot wipe the smile off his face in the presence of these warm, open people.

MADS (CONT'D)

I love this. Don't you love this? This is nature. We see it in the American movies. How come you're crazy?

CHRIS

Well...

MADS

(interrupting)

Because that's crazy! You come down the rapids. What do you want on your hotdog? Mustard and relish?

CHRIS

You have ketchup?

MADS

No, I have mustard and relish.

CHRIS

Mustard and relish it is then.

MADS

Sonja, you want a hotdog?

SONJA

(in Danish)

Of course I want a hotdog. Why are you stupid?

Mads plops two more hotdogs onto the grill.

MADS

(translating)

She asked me why I'm stupid. And I say, well...like I ask you why you're crazy and you say "well." Where are you going?

CHRIS

I haven't decided.

MADS

We like it here very much. We went to Los Angeles. And then, we went to Las Vegas.

SONJA

Las Vegas is very nice. The universe is very good.

MADS

And then, we come here. Maybe you go to  
Mexico.

(MORE)

MADS (CONT'D)

You can take kayak around Lake Mead and then take the river down to Mexico.

Chris likes the idea.

CHRIS

How far are we from Lake Mead?

MADS

Sonja, how far is Hoover Dam?

Sonja grabs a map from the tent, opens and scrutinizes it. We follow her finger tracing the river.

SONJA

Maybe three hundred thirty kilometers...like two hundred miles.

Sonja walks the map over to Chris at water's edge and hands it to him. He studies it.

CHRIS

Man, I wonder if I could go all the way down into the Gulf of California.

Chris traces his finger along the impossibly long route leading to El Golfo de Santa Clara.

MADS

(entering the water with  
Chris' hotdog)

I go with you. We leave Sonja here. You and me in kayak - we go to Mexico.

SONJA

(in Danish)

You're embarrassing. Idiot.

Mads with a burst of re-exhilaration, grabs Chris' hand, shaking it violently.

MADS

I like the meeting you.

CHRIS

Thank you. I'm very happy to meet both of you too.

Sonja heads back for her hotdog taking her T-shirt off on the move. Chris is about to bust a gut. Sonja returns to her sunbathing. These two are a hoot.

Just then, something catches Chris' attention upriver. We can just barely make out the SOUNDS of a jet boat motor. His eyes narrow a bit, then -

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Well, guys I really appreciate the hospitality but I wanna make camp down-river a ways so I better take off before dark.

CUT TO:

86

EXT. COLORADO RIVER - MOMENTS LATER

86

Chris, back in the kayak is paddling down river. Mads and Sonja on the bank, wave a boisterous goodbye. And they just keep waving. And Chris keeps waving until he has drifted out of sight, when around the upriver bend arrive the RIVER PATROL.

At river's edge, Mads, thinking quickly, waves for their attention. Pointing the river patrol back upriver, he yells:

MADS

He went thattaway! The crazy man - he went thattaway!

And miraculously, the river patrol makes an about face and heads in the opposite direction of Chris. Suddenly Sonja thinks Mads is the most clever man on earth. As she jumps his bones right there on the river's edge -

SONJA

Just like in the movies.

CUT TO:

87 EXT. DESERT ROAD, NEAR HOOVER DAM - DAY 87

Chris and the kayak are in the back of a pick-up truck heading down river by road. We pass the Hoover Dam.

CARINE (V.O.)

It would be Christmas in a couple of months. And the last news we'd had was about his car being found. I woke up a couple of days ago, and for the first time, I was surprised to realize that it wasn't only my parents who hadn't heard from Chris. I wondered why he hadn't tried to call in case I might answer. He could've hung up if it wasn't me.

88 EXT. COLORADO RIVER, TOPOCK, ARIZONA - DAY 88

Chris is re-stocked on some food items which he packs in his bag and shoves into the bow of the kayak. This lower stretch of the river has little in common with the unbridled torrent that explodes through the Grand Canyon. Emasculated by dams and diversion canals, the lower Colorado burbles indolently from reservoir to reservoir, through some of the hottest, starkest, most austere country on the continent.

CARINE

But why he didn't send a letter, maybe through a friend. I got mad. But I told myself it was good. It made me remember that there was something more than rebellion, more than anger that was driving him. Chris had always been driven, had always been an adventurer. When he was four years old...

89 EXT. DARK NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - NIGHT 89

Chris at age four.

CARINE

...he once wandered six blocks away from home at three o'clock in the morning.

90 INT. NEIGHBOR'S KITCHEN - NIGHT 90

Four-year old Chris opening a kitchen drawer.

CARINE

He was found in a neighbor's kitchen, up on a chair, digging into their candy drawer.

91 EXT. COLORADO RIVER, TOPOCK ARIZONA - DAY 91

As Chris paddles downstream with Mexico in his sights, he is stirred by the saline beauty and the clean slant of light.

**(Director's Note: ANGLE over Chris ONTO water reflecting the landscape and diamond flashes of sunlight.)**

CARINE

Whatever drawer he was opening now must have something sweet in it.

CUT TO:

91A EXT. COLORADO RIVER, TOPOCK ARIZONA - DAY 91A

Chris floats in SLO-MO through the air, his hair wisping skyward.

As he pierces feet first, a clear blue surface of the river's water, CAMERA goes UNDERWATER with him and follows him in CU as he surfaces, jubilant in the beauty of the Topock gorge. He shakes the water out of his hair.

CUT TO:

Chris continuing down river through the Imperial National Wildlife Refuge, drifting past saguaros and alkali flats.

CUT TO:

92A EXT. IMPERIAL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE - DAY 92A

Chris, on a day hike, the river behind him, he (TELEFOTO LENS played in beautiful BACK LIGHT) tracks a herd of wild horses.

ANGLE: Chris: The herd moves in an S-pattern. Chris runs beside them and in our LONG LENS PERSPECTIVE, he seems to be among them.

CUT TO:

93 EXT. RIVER CAMPSITE - NIGHT 93

Chris sits outside his tent, beside a campfire scrawling a letter. His "bought-food" bounty in evidence.

The words APPEAR ON SCREEN in his handwriting OVER THE IMAGE:

WAYNE, SOMETIMES I WISH I HADN'T MET YOU. TRAMPING IS TOO EASY WITH ALL THIS MONEY. MY DAYS WERE MORE EXCITING WHEN I WAS PENNILESS AND HAD TO FORAGE AROUND FOR MY NEXT MEAL. I COULDN'T MAKE IT NOW WITHOUT MONEY HOWEVER...

94 EXT. YUMA POST OFFICE - DAY 94

CONTINUE letter OVER:

...AS THERE IS LITTLE FRUITING AGRICULTURE DOWN HERE AT THIS TIME.

Chris moves up the steps of the post office with an enveloped letter in hand.

CONTINUE letter OVER:

I'VE DECIDED THAT I'M GOING TO LIVE THIS LIFE FOR SOME TIME TO COME. THE FREEDOM AND SIMPLE BEAUTY OF IT IS JUST TOO GOOD TO PASS UP...

95 INT YUMA POST OFFICE - DAY

95

Chris is in the elegant, 1930's-style post office buying a stamp.

CONTINUE letter OVER:

ONE DAY I'LL BE ABLE TO REPAY SOME OF YOUR KINDNESS. A  
CASE OF JACK DANIELS, MAYBE? TILL THEN, I'LL ALWAYS  
THINK OF YOU AS A FRIEND...

Chris licks the stamp.

Continue letter on screen:

GOD BLESS YOU, ALEXANDER.

The stamp comes down onto an envelope addressed:

WAYNE WESTERBERG

C/O GLORY HOUSE

SIOUX FALLS WORK RELEASE FACILITY

SIOUX FALLS, SD 57104

CUT TO:

95A EXT. THE SAND DUNES ON THE AMERICAN SIDE OF MEXICAN  
BORDER - DAY

95A

Chris ports his kayak over the dunes, snaking a scar  
through the sand in his wake. Mexico in his sights.

POV: Morelos Dam at the Mexican border.

96 EXT. MORELOS DAM AT THE MEXICAN BORDER - DAY (DECEMBER  
2ND, 1990)

96

Careful not to be seen, Chris shoves off, just upriver  
from the dam/border.

The floodgates are open just enough to allow Chris to lay  
back in the kayak and drift prone under the gate. He  
sits back up and paddles through having passed the  
border, either unnoticed or ignored by patrols.

FADE OUT.

97

INT. IMMIGRATION OFFICE - NIGHT

97

A television set with George Bush plays. SOUNDS of typewriters.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER (V.O.)

Why'd you go to Mexico?

CHRIS (V.O.)

I thought I'd run the whole river into the Sea of Cortez. The stupid dams dried it up.

98 EXT. 50 MILES SOUTH OF THE MEXICAN BORDER 98

Chris is kayaking. He dead ends in a reeded tributary.

99 OMITTED 99

100 INT. IMMIGRATION OFFICE (CONTINUED) 100

IMMIGRATION OFFICER (V.O.)

How long were you on your own down there?

CHRIS (V.O.)

36 days.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER (V.O.)

How'd you know?

CHRIS (V.O.)

Fingers and toes.

We see Chris' fingers and toes. (DOWN ANGLE into interrogation room)

CHRIS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

After the river dried up, I ported the kayak and got a lift to Golfo.

101 EXT. FISHING VILLAGE, EL GOLFO DE SANTA CLARA - DAY 101

We see Chris jump down off the back of the duck hunter's truck. He slides the kayak off the truck bed onto the street. Chris goes into his pocket, pulls out a sealed sandwich bag of cash. He tries to pay the hunters for their time but they refuse the money. Nonetheless, Chris is insistent and they relent.

Chris pulls his backpack from inside the bow and saddles it up on his shoulders. The hunters pull away.

102 EXT. EL GOLFO DE SANTA CLARA 102

(1000mm lens) LOW ANGLE: SAND AND HEAT WAVES IN FOREGROUND AND BACKGROUND: Chris, paddling his kayak toward us, seemingly in the sand dunes. As we BOOM UP SLIGHTLY, we see that there is a bend in the water's edge and that he is in fact, paddling in the crystalline blue of the Gulf.

CHRIS (V.O.)  
I paddled south about 20 miles.

103 EXT. EL GOLFO DE SANTA CLARA 103

UNDER-WATER SHOT: We are directly UNDER the passing kayak as it slices the water's surface above us. We BACKFLIP the CAMERA as it passes.

CHRIS (V.O.)  
That's when I saw the cave and everything went upside down.

104 EXT. EL GOLFO DE SANTA CLARA 104

See the ocean and sand, wind whipping them. CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal Chris in a cave where he has made camp; watching, waiting.

CHRIS (V.O.)

A sandstorm hit and I was pretty much stuck. My kayak blew away, so I left it and walked up the beach, hitched back north, and here I am.

CUT TO:

105 OMITTED 105

106 OMITTED 106

107	OMITTED	107
108	OMITTED	108
109	OMITTED	109
110	OMITTED	110
111	OMITTED	111

112	OMITTED	112
113	OMITTED	113
114	OMITTED	114
115	INT. IMMIGRATION OFFICE - NIGHT Chris sits with the IMMIGRATION OFFICER.	115

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

36 days, wow. I guess they're gonna have to watch that spillway a little better.

CHRIS

What they ought to do is open up the dams and let the rivers flow.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER

I can't disagree with you on that. Okay, Alexander SuperTramp. I think we're gonna let you out of here shortly but you've got two working weeks to get an ID card in the United States. You can't be crossing these borders without identification, are we understood?

CHRIS

Yes, sir. I've eaten enough sand to send me back to the city anyway.

CUT TO:

116

EXT. TRAIN YARD, SOMEWHERE NEAR ALGODONES - NIGHT

116

A freight train cranks up its great engines and starts its move west.

Chris POV: We see a BULL (hobo slang for a railway security guard) making his rounds. As the bull disappears around the caboose, and the train's motion picks up, Chris appears from behind a fuel pump. He makes his move in the shadows to the passing freight cars, not quite sure how to board them. He begins to slowly jog beside the train. There is a vertical steel rod on each passing car. He times the train by putting his hand out and letting the vertical rods slap it.

CHRIS

(counting)

One...Two...Three -

And with that he accelerates to a run, throws his pack into the moving freight car before him, simultaneously leaping up to grab the rail and throw himself into the car.

But his left foot misses and he's suddenly dangling from the moving train. He grabs hand over hand on the rail.

ANGLE: Dangling feet and razor sharp wheels.

ANGLE: Chris. He puts everything into pulling himself up, growling the strength into his muscles finally...

117 INT. FREIGHT CAR - NIGHT 117

As Chris rolls forward into the car -- he made it!

CHRIS

As Alexander Supertramp returns to civilization...a hobo.

(quietly)

I'm a for real hobo.

He's very happy about this (despite the near surrender of it.) Chris uses his pack as a pillow, lays back on it and begins to sing Roger Miller's *King of the Road*.

CUT TO:

118 EXT. FREIGHT TRAIN - NIGHT 118

We TRACK with train by HELICOPTER as we SEGUE from Chris' rendition of *King of the Road* to Roger Miller's. We let the train get away from us and disappear.

CUT TO:

119 EXT. TRAIN YARD, LOS ANGELES - DAY (FEBRUARY 3, 1991) 119

Chris' train pulls into the yard. Bulls and loaders greet the train. Chris jumps off and breaks for the fence unseen.

CUT TO:

120 OMITTED 120

121 EXT. DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - EARLY EVENING (STILL LIGHT) 121

The streets are crowded with business people on their way to homes and happy hours, buses and parking garages, showers and comforts. Among the throngs, we find Chris walking up Grand Street, backpack on his shoulders. We find he is not such an unusual sight, there are homeless to the left and homeless to the right.

CUT TO:

122 EXT. MIDNIGHT MISSION, LOS ANGELES - NIGHT 122

Chris walks in.

123 INT. REGISTRATION DESK, MIDNIGHT MISSION - SAME 123

**(Reminder: Condition of Mission is circa 1991)**

Chris stands at the registration desk talking with a a HEAVY-SET BLACK FEMALE SOCIAL WORKER.

CHRIS

Can you tell me how to get an ID card?

SOCIAL WORKER

Did you lose your identification sir?

CHRIS

Yeah.

SOCIAL WORKER

No birth certificate? Nothing?

Chris shakes his head apologetically.

SOCIAL WORKER (CONT'D)

Ouch. Alright. Well you're gonna have to work that out with the DMV. You can catch them in the morning.

The social worker begins to write an address on a piece of paper.

SOCIAL WORKER (CONT'D)

The closest one is Montebello and we can help you with a bus voucher.

She hands the Montebello address to Chris.

SOCIAL WORKER (CONT'D)

So, just come to this desk when you need the voucher.

CHRIS

And, if I want to apply for a job somewhere, can you help me with that?

SOCIAL WORKER

If you know how to cook, we might have a space for you in our mobile kitchen. But I'll have to talk to my supervisor about it in the morning.

CHRIS

Alright then. Thank you. Oh, one last thing. Do you have a bed for me?

SOCIAL WORKER

(handing him a form)

Sure. Just fill this in and I'll get you all set up.

Chris begins filling in the form.

CUT TO:

124 INT. MIDNIGHT MISSION DORM, LOS ANGELES 124

Throughout the next two scenes, there is steady HONKING of CAR HORNS, WAILING of POLICE SIRENS, AMBIENT HOSTILE BANTER, GRINDING ENGINES OF BUSES, puffs of diesel exhaust choke us.

300 HOMELESS occupy nearly as many beds in the dorm. Chris searches the locker wall for his assigned locker. When he comes upon it, he double checks the number with that on the key, opens it, and puts his backpack inside.

CU: The lock, as Chris closes and secures his locker.

CUT TO:

125 EXT. LOS ANGELES STREETS - 6TH AND WALL - NIGHT 125

Chris walking among the hordes of homeless at 6th and Wall streets. Open fires burn in front of cardboard shacks. There are blacks, whites, Mexicans, even families with children, junkies, winos, hustlers, and hookers.

CUT TO:

126 EXT. LOS ANGELES STREETS - BROADWAY - NIGHT 126

NEW ANGLE: Chris walking down Broadway. This is clearly just blocks away from where we last saw him, yet the atmosphere is as if of a different world. One of those downtown LA hip yuppie blocks. He comes upon a bar. Through the window Chris sees young men and women roughly his own age - working people, suits, gold-chainers. Metallica blares on the sound system.

CUT TO:

127 INT. MIDNIGHT MISSION DORM, LOS ANGELES 127

Same CU on locker as before, but this time it's being opened.

CUT TO:

128

INT. REGISTRATION DESK, MIDNIGHT MISSION

128

We don't even see Chris but the camera is his POV as he passes the social worker (same as before) The social worker catches a thrown key.

SOCIAL WORKER  
 You leaving us so soon? I know them DMV  
 lines are long...

CUT TO:

129 EXT. MIDNIGHT MISSION, LOS ANGELES - NIGHT 129

**(Director's Note: Traffic and pedestrians move in an accelerated speed while Chris moves nearly in slow-motion.)**

Chris exits the building into CU. He looks left, then right, then directly into camera.

CHAPTER 3: MANHOOD

FADE OUT/IN:

130 OMITTED 130

131 EXT. TRAIN TRACKS OUTSIDE LOS ANGELES - NIGHT 131

Chris' train barrels along.

132 INT. TRAIN CAR - NIGHT 132

Chris goes into his pack, grabs his canteen and drinks some water. Mid-sip, the train begins to make a surprising stop. Screeching wheels on track. Chris is alarmed. As he moves to peer out the door, even before he has a chance to see what's coming -- WHAM! He's smashed in the head with a baton. A BULL jumps into the car with him.

BULL #2  
 Lay down on your stomach, spread eagle!

Chris turns to reason with the man. And that's all it takes -- six straight blows to the ribs, legs, and arms. We hear it more than we see it. Chris is in agony.

BULL #2 (CONT'D)

Let me see your face.

The bull shines a flashlight into Chris' eyes.

BULL #2 (CONT'D)

I never, ever, ever forget a face. If I see yours again, I won't arrest you. I'll kill you. This is the god-damned railroad. And we will do whatever we have to, to keep you freeloaders from violating our liability.

Chris is trying to understand what the man is saying.

BULL #2 (CONT'D)

If one of you people gets hurt on our train, we are liable. Do you understand that?

CHRIS

(despite the violent irony)  
I'm sorry, sir.

BULL #2

You have I.D.?

CHRIS

No, sir.

BULL #2

Of course you don't.

CUT TO:

133

EXT. TRAIN - NIGHT

133

Chris is pushed off the train, his pack thrown out after him. The bull jumps down beside the track as well and walks down track away from Chris, signalling an "all clear" with his flashlight to some unseen engineer.

BULL #2

(to Chris over his shoulder)  
Last time, my friend.

Chris stumbles to his feet. The pain of the beating is real. He bleeds from the back of his ear. But he can walk. And he does.

CUT TO:

134 EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - DAY 134

Chris sits on his pack on the roadside, hitchhiking and eating from a can of beans he opened with his pocketknife. The odd car passes but doesn't stop.

CUT TO:

135 EXT. ARIZONA INTERSTATE OVERPASS - NIGHT 135

Chris hops out of a Camaro that gave him a ride. The lighting is anonymous and so is the driver.

CHRIS

Thanks very much.

He closes the door and the car drives off. We follow Chris as he goes to the overpass edge. He drops his pack over the side. Chris climbs down the edge of the overpass, grabs his pack, and scurries into the UNDERPASS below. (We suddenly recognize this as his pre-river run campsite)

He digs up his buried belongings, returning them to his pack. Last to come out of the ground, Chris' copy of Jack London's *Call of the Wild*. He pulls off a temp wrapping and dusts it off.

Chris lights his candle lantern and begins to read.

O.S. VOICES from the PAST:

BILLIE (O.S.)

(screaming, angry)

I'm not talking about this anymore!

Feet stomping off.

WALT (O.S.)

Don't walk away from me WOMAN!

BILLIE (O.S.)

Fuck you! I hate you!

Sounds of scuffle.

BILLIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
KIDS! LOOK WHAT YOUR FATHER'S DOING TO  
ME!

136 INT. MCCANDLESS HOME, ANNANDALE (PAST)

136

ELEVEN-YEAR OLD CARINE sits in the stairwell leading to her parent's room where an argument ensues. Carine's head in her hands, a delicate tear moistens the webs between her small fingers.

FIFTEEN-YEAR OLD CHRIS enters from O.S. He leans against the stairwell and looks up the stairs. Our focus remains on Carine. In the B.G. SOFT FOCUS, Walt is pinning Billie down onto the bed. She flails at him but he holds down her shoulders.

WALT  
LOOK WHAT YOUR MOTHER IS MAKING ME DO!

Billie slips his grasp. Walt reaches out with a hit/push of her back. She is thrust out of the bedroom onto the landing above the staircase followed by Walt who positions himself in the doorway like a hostile crucifixion.

WALT (CONT'D)  
(raging)  
I'll just cancel Christmas then!

Billie returns to him, punching on his chest:

BILLIE  
Who do you think you are? God?

WALT  
Yes. I'm God!

Chris puts his hand out to Carine. She looks up to him. He gives her a smile and a wink. She takes his hand and they exit frame as the argument continues.

WALT (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Where do you kids think you're going?

BILLIE (O.S.)  
(not in desperation so much  
as a demand for their  
witness)  
Kids, get back here!

We HEAR a DOOR SLAM OC.

CUT TO:

137

EXT. ANNANDALE STREET - DAY (PAST)

137

The young Chris and Carine. She sits atop the handlebars of his bicycle beaming as Chris peddles her down the middle of the street. We PULL THEM as they ride.

CHRIS  
(mockingly)  
I'll cancel Christmas!

CARINE

(humored out of her sadness)

Who do you think you are? God?

CHRIS

Yes. I'm God.

138 EXT. ARIZONA INTERSTATE UNDERPASS - NIGHT 138

As they both laugh we DISSOLVE BACK to Chris (PRESENT) reading beside his candle lantern.

CARINE (V.O.)

In the nine months since Chris' disappearance, my parents went through enormous changes. Guilt was giving way to pain. And pain seemed to bring them closer. My father had humbled dramatically. And what had always been a sort of curt arrogance, the kind of man who actually thought he could cancel Christmas, had given way to the vulnerability of a father's heart. Even their faces had changed. It made me sad that I couldn't share with Chris the new closeness I felt toward our parents.

The image of Chris reading begins a SLOW DISSOLVE INTO...

139 INT. FREIGHT TRAIN CAR - NIGHT 139

CARINE

I close my eyes at night sometimes and imagine where Chris might be.

Suspicious, ghostly faces briefly appear in the strobing lights that hit the train car from outside. They're toothless and tattooed. Aged and young. Punks and piercings. They're train tramps.

We see Chris observing them. Warmly he speaks but we DO NOT HEAR, "I'm Alex."

140 EXT. TRAMP CAMP, LAS VEGAS - DAY 140

CARINE

Was there beauty around him? Was he hurt? Was he alone?

We see Chris sharing camp with the train tramps in the outskirts of Las Vegas. DISSOLVE...

141 INT. LAS VEGAS RESTAURANT - NIGHT

141

CARINE

Was he having the great adventure that he  
wanted?

We see Chris working as a waiter in a Las Vegas  
restaurant. DISSOLVE...

142 EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY 142

CARINE

Could he feel the changes here at home?  
By some kind of supernatural osmosis?  
Chris once wrote to me from college  
saying he wanted to talk to me about all  
the problems he had with mom and dad.

We see what may be Chris' POV from a train car snaking  
through a mountain pass.

DISSOLVE TO:

143 EXT. LAS VEGAS DESERT - NIGHT 143

CARINE

He said I was the only person in the  
world who could've possibly understood  
what he had to say.

We see Chris in the Las Vegas desert by a campfire at  
night.

DISSOLVE TO:

144 EXT. SEATTLE - DAY 144

HIGH ANGLE CU: We see Chris walking the streets of  
Seattle. As we WIDEN OUT, he becomes a dot in the  
Seattle landscape.

CARINE

In those silent moments, with my eyes  
closed trying to picture where Chris  
might be at that very moment, probably  
climbing some scary mountain, I want to  
reach into that picture and bring him  
back to see what mom and dad, what our  
family might become.

LONG LENS: Chris disappears over the rise into the  
Seattle marketplace overlooking Puget Sound (**per location  
photography.**)

DISSOLVE TO:

145 EXT. ANNANDALE SUPERMARKET - DAY

145

CARINE

But instead when I open my eyes, what I see is my mother, sitting at the dining room table, sifting through photo albums and pictures of Chris. It's all she can do to examine the snapshots. And, though she breaks down from time to time, she studies them with a sort of hungry intensity - like looking at food you can't eat, or into a window at a family around a table that you were once a part of and can be no more.

We see Billie driving out of the Annandale supermarket onto the boulevard. She sees a hitchhiker roadside. She cranes her head - *is it Chris?* It's not.

CARINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She convinces herself it's Chris; that it's her son, whenever she passes a stray. And I fear for the mother in her...

DISSOLVE TO:

146 EXT. BARREN DESERT - DAY

146

We see Chris hitchhiking in a barren desert.

CARINE

Instincts that seem to sense the threat of a loss so huge and irreparable that the mind balks at taking its measure - I begin to wonder if I do understand what Chris is saying any longer. But I catch myself in doubt and remember that these are not the parents he grew up with. That in the forced reflection that comes with loss, indeed everything Chris is saying, has to be said. And I trust for him that everything he is doing has to be done. This is our life.

CUT TO:

147 EXT. BULLHEAD CITY, ARIZONA - DAY (OCTOBER 1991) 147

Chris is in the passenger seat of a Mac truck cab. Both Chris and the TRUCKER look outward as though to find an address or landmark.

TRUCKER

I don't know where to drop you.  
Bullhead's kinda haphazard - there's no  
"center." You sure you don't want to be  
in Laughlin? It's casinos versus  
chiropractors.

CHRIS

Yeah, no. This is good. Right here.

TRUCKER

Alright then. Chiropractors it is.

He pulls over. Chris grabs his pack and exits the truck in front of a laundromat. As the truck pulls away, Chris sees a "Help Wanted" sign for Burger King on the laundromat window.

TIME CUT:

148 INT. BURGER KING, BULLHEAD CITY - DAY 148

The place is packed with a line out the door. LORI, the second assistant manager, hurries back into the kitchen, where we find Chris in paper cap, bunning whoppers at a leisurely pace.

LORI

Chris, you gotta go faster. We've got a  
line out the door.

CHRIS

(a bit oblivious)  
Okay.

But then just continues on at his leisurely daydreaming pace. Lori is about to say something but by now she knows there's no getting through to him. She looks down to the floor where we see that Chris wears no socks.

LORI

(extending patience)  
Chris, I don't mean to be on you about  
everything. You're doing a great job.  
(MORE)

LORI (CONT'D)

I want to keep you on. And we all want to help you get to Alaska, but you've got to start wearing socks.

CHRIS

Right, right. I forgot.

LORI

And please. Hurry. We're ten deep.

CHRIS

Okay.

But the pace remains.

CUT TO:

149 INT. BANK, BULLHEAD CITY - DAY

149

Chris stands at the counter making a deposit with a YOUNG FEMALE TELLER.

CHRIS

How much do I have in the account now?

TELLER

It looks like...let me see. Including this latest deposit...One thousand, two hundred and fifty two dollars and...twenty-two cents.

CHRIS

What's the interest on twenty-two cents?

The young teller giggles.

CUT TO:

150 EXT. BANK, BULLHEAD CITY - DAY

150

We're TIGHT ON Chris' sock-less feet, pedalling away from the bank on a bicycle. The growing independence of his financial situation felt in the MUSIC OVER:

SERIES OF ANGLES as Chris rides out of town, into the desert, from a late afternoon sun into a sunset as he arrives at his -

151 EXT. CAMPSITE, OUTSIDE BULLHEAD CITY - SUNSET

151

The casino lights of Laughlin, Nevada distantly in B.G.

Chris pedals up a dirt path to find many of his belongings strewn about. And in particular, some food supplies have been torn into. A coyote yips in the distance as Chris finds his old straw hat torn to shreds. Across the desert, scurrying away beyond the tumbleweed, three young coyotes head for the hills. Chris picks up his tattered hat and smiles.

CUT TO:

152

INT. BURGER KING, BULLHEAD CITY - DAY

152

We are TIGHT on the PUNCHCLOCK as Chris' timecard comes into frame and is punched out.

WIDEN OUT to see Chris taking off his paper hat and Burger King overshirt.

He walks his timecard over to Lori. The place is all but empty.

CHRIS

Lori, I'm punching out.

LORI

Okay. Just put it in the drop.

CHRIS

No, I mean I'm punching out for good.

LORI

(happy for him)

We've made our quota, have we?

CHRIS

Yeah. Also, I've got to do some things before I head north.

LORI

Alright Chris. Well, we've enjoyed knowing you. I won't be able to get that last check to you right away though.

CHRIS

That's okay. I'll let you know where to send it.

LORI

Alright then Chris. Bye-bye now.

CHRIS

Bye-bye.

CUT TO:

153 EXT. BULLHEAD CITY - DAY 153

City crews string Christmas lights and ornaments along the main drag. We CRANE DOWN to find Chris' bike leaning on a lamppost. A cardboard sign attached to it reads -

FREE BIKE. MERRY CHRISTMAS. - ALEXANDER SUPERTRAMP

CUT TO:

154 EXT. DESERT, HIGHWAY 95 - DAY 154

MUSIC OVER:

Chris is hitching south on the 95 into the Big Maria Mountains. Beyond him we see a sign for *Niland 206 miles.*

155 EXT. TRUCK STOP ON INTERSTATE 10, BLYTHE, CA - NIGHT 155

CONTINUE MUSIC OVER:

156 INT. MEN'S ROOM, TRUCK STOP - NIGHT 156

CONTINUE MUSIC OVER:

Chris gets a clean shave and a whore's bath.

CU: Chris

Music FADES.

CHAPTER 4: FAMILY  
DISSOLVE TO:

157 EXT. THE SLABS, NILAND, CA - DAY 157

This is the vista of former barracks foundations Rainey and Jan Burres had told Chris about. Hundreds of people in tents and trailers, a quarter inch to the right of a Rainbow Gathering as hillbillies and renegades mix with the hippies. There are canvas-covered booths set up for swap and trade. Even a few makeshift food stands.

We SEE that many of the inhabitants have set up CHRISTMAS TREES outside their trailers and tents. Kids play naked in a mud pool.

CUT TO:

158 EXT. THE BOOTH OF JAN & RAINEY, THE SLABS - SAME 158

We see Rainey selling their wares. Beside the booth, their van with its backseat door open. A little dog, Sunni, jumps out the van door, sniffing something out. Jan exits the van after the dog.

JAN

Sunni! Come here boy.

But Sunni has sniffed out Chris' large backpack leaning against the rear of the van. Jan is just beginning to recognize it, when from behind the van appears Chris, looking like a million bucks.

CHRIS

Surprise!

JAN

(overjoyed)

Alex!

As she goes to hug him -

ANGLE: Rainey hearing his name, jumps up from his stool to join them.

Big embraces all around.

CUT TO:

159 EXT. THE SLABS - NIGHT 159

An impromptu campfire celebration with live music from a makeshift stage. Jan, Rainey, and Chris sit on chairs outside the circle of inhabitants, taking in the music.

JAN

You have to tell us everything.

**(Note: This scene should largely be improvised. They all know their characters, their history. Jan and Rainey are doing great. And while Chris is intermittently aware that the eyes of a pretty 16-year old girl are upon him, Chris lays out his travels and his PLAN FOR ALASKA.)**

Jan remarks, "I guess if you can figure out how to paddle a canoe down to Mexico, hop freight trains, and score beds at inner-city missions, you can figure out Alaska too.")

At this point, the PRETTY 16-YEAR OLD GIRL who had had her eyes on Chris, takes the stage with an acoustic guitar, introduces herself as TRACY, then SINGS an innocent love song of her own composition, stealing seductive glances at Chris throughout the performance. \*

JAN (CONT'D)

I think you've made yourself a friend.

CHRIS

(blushing)

She's only a teenager.

JAN

Good luck.

The girl finishes her song.

CUT TO:

160

EXT. THE BOOTH OF JAN & RAINEY - DAY

160

Chris and Rainey man the second-hand goods booth while Jan bathes Sunni in a steel bucket by the van. Among the goods, a USED ORGAN. Chris is thrilled to have access to all the second-hand books that are part of Rainey and Jan's inventory. As he skims through Jack London's *Odyssey of the North*, Rainey notices Tracy sitting on the steps of her vagabond parents' rig across from the booth. She picks silently at her guitar with her bright eyes fixed on Chris. \*

RAINEY

How long can you stay with us?

CHRIS

Well, I'm waiting on a check from my last job to come into Salton City the day after Christmas. I've got to start thinking about getting ready for Alaska. When the sun gets a little lower tonight, I'm going to start a calisthenics routine. I think after the check comes in, I'll try to find some mountains I can climb everyday till spring comes. I gotta see how far the money's gonna go.

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I'm going to have to pick up a lot of supplies before spring. So, I might take another job or I might be okay.

RAINEY

Well, you know, we'll give you a little something for every day you work the booth.

CHRIS

I'm not taking any money from you, Rainey. It's been a real great twist meeting you two. You look like you're doing good.

RAINEY

We are, and you were a big part of that, coming along when you did. Yep, things are good.

(gives a little giggle)

Man, I used to think Tantric sex was just a bunch of reading. Speaking of which, don't you think you ought to introduce yourself to Joni Mitchell over there?

Chris looks up from his book to the wide open 16-year old smile of Tracy. Rainey laughs aloud. Chris smiles back, and against his better instincts, gives her a little wave-over with the paperback. Tracy jumps off her step, putting her guitar inside the rig, and trots like a little wood nymph to Chris.

TRACY

Hi.

CHRIS

Hi.

TRACY

You selling books?

CHRIS

I am. We are.

TRACY

I read a lot.

CHRIS

Do you?

TRACY

Yeah.

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

CHRIS  
That's good. I heard you play your song  
last night.

TRACY  
(embarrassed)  
I'm terrible.

\*

Rainey amused by all of this.

CHRIS  
You are not terrible.

TRACY  
I'm not?

\*

CHRIS  
No. You sing sweet.

TRACY  
Thank you. I was going to go watch the  
kids play in the mud. Do you want to go?

\*

RAINEY  
Go on. I'll watch the store.

CHRIS  
I'm sorry. This is Rainey. And I'm  
Chris.

Whoops, a slip on the name, but...

RAINEY  
Hi. Rainey. And this is Alex. ("Don't  
lie to her.")

TRACY  
I'm Tracy.

\*

\*

Chris realizes his slip but before Rainey can question  
anything, Chris stands and goes off with Tracy.

\*

Rainey and Jan share a conspiratorial smile.

161

EXT. THE MUD PIT, THE SLABS - SAME

161

(Salvation Mountain?) (Leonard?)

LONG LENS: We watch Chris and Tracy sit pit-side with a foreground of frolicking naked children splashing about in the mud. We don't hear their conversation. We just watch its gentleness.

\*

CUT TO:

162

EXT. RAINEY &amp; JAN'S VAN, THE SLABS - NIGHT

162

Tracy helps Rainey cook dinner on the barbecue, meaning to demonstrate to Chris what a wonderful wife she would be. Jan and Chris sipping on beers sit beside each other on folding chairs, out of Rainey and Tracy's earshot.

\*

\*

JAN

I wasn't much older than Tracy when I got pregnant. And I thought my husband and I were going to invent peace on earth and stay together forever. But it didn't work out that way. He left. History. Now ancient history. And that was the end of that. So, I raised Reno by myself - that's my son. Then I met Rainey. And that was really good for a while. But Reno was already a teenager and was becoming a man in his own way. And then, I don't know. He kinda followed in his father's footsteps - out the door and gone. And I really don't know where he is. I haven't heard from him in two years.

\*

CHRIS

I hope I get to meet him sometime.

Jan looks into Chris' eyes and smiles with pure love. She leans over and gently kisses Chris on the cheek.

JAN

Do your folks know where you are?

Chris aims to deflect the question as Tracy enters the scene.

\*

TRACY

Soup's on. Oh, I'm sorry. Are you guys getting heavy?

\*

JAN

No, sweetheart. Just hungry. You've been doing a fantastic job over there.  
(to Chris)  
Shall we eat?

CHRIS

Yeah.

Tracy grabs Chris' hand and proudly leads him to supper. As they exit frame, we remain for a moment with Jan and her thoughts. \*

CUT TO:

163 INT./EXT. SLABS MONTAGE - DAY

163

MUSIC OVER:

MONTAGE:

1. Chris reading and selling books.

2. Chris and Tracy taking walks with Sunni. \*

3. Rainey and Jan stealing some afternoon delight in the van. (It's the days of wine and roses)

4. Chris' new daily regimen of calisthenics.

5. Tracy's new daily regimen of watching Chris do calisthenics. His lean body tighter and stronger everyday. \*

CUT TO:

164 EXT. RAINEY & JAN'S VAN, THE SLABS - (CHRISTMAS) DAY 164

Rainey stands over Chris as Chris does sit-ups. Rainey's gut hanging a little heavy over his belt.

OS VOICES exchange Christmas greetings.

RAINEY

I really ought to get myself doing that.

CHRIS

You should Rainey. Makes that Tantric stuff go even better.

RAINEY

How the hell would you know? That poor girl over there is about ready to vault onto a fence post. And here you are, the monk of Jack LaLane.

They share a laugh. Chris comes to the end of his sit-ups. Wipes his brow with a towel. Rainey squats down next to him.

RAINEY (CONT'D)

I guess Jan filled you in. About Reno and everything. Children can be harsh judges when it comes to their parents. They don't grant clemency easily. I think Reno tended to see things in black and white. I just hope he lives long enough to forgive her.

The connection is not lost on Chris.

RAINEY (CONT'D)

But painful as it is, you turned a light on in her and I'm grateful.

CHRIS

Me too.

RAINEY

For what?

Chris doesn't answer. A kid rides by on a bright new Big Wheel. Must be from the rich side of the commune.

RAINEY (CONT'D)

Do your folks know where you are?

CHRIS

No.

RAINEY

Don't you think they ought to?

CHRIS

They should. But I can't. Not yet, anyway. I got a sister though, Carine. She's the most beautiful girl in the world. But, it's all got to stay behind me until I get where I'm going.

RAINEY

Alaska?

CHRIS  
Yeah, Rainey. Alaska.

Rainey won't intrude any further. He just nods. Chris notices Tracy in the door of her parent's rig, stealthily waving him over. Chris gives Rainey the "Uh-oh" look, pulls on his T-shirt, and walks over to the rig. Tracy has disappeared inside. \*

CUT TO:

165 INT. TRACY'S PARENTS RIG - SAME 165 \*

Chris pops his head in.

CHRIS  
Hello? Merry Christmas?

TRACY (O.C.)  
Come in here. \*

As Chris mounts the steps, he finds Tracy laying on the bed inside, wearing a skimpy white girl's tank top and underpants. \*

TRACY (CONT'D)  
Guess what. \*

CHRIS  
(deer in headlights)  
What?

TRACY  
My parents went into town. \*

CHRIS  
No!

TRACY  
Yes, they did. They went to call my grandma for Christmas. \*

CHRIS  
No, I mean, no, we can't do that.

TRACY  
Why not? \*

Chris moves to sit on the edge of her bed. Tracy sits up beside him. \*

CHRIS  
How old are you?

TRACY  
Eighteen.

Chris throws her a look of doubt.

TRACY (CONT'D)  
Seventeen.

CHRIS  
What year were you born?

As soon as she has to think about it, the jig is up.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
You want to do something together?

Shyly, she shakes her head "yes."

CUT TO:

166 EXT. THE SLABS - NIGHT

166

We SEE the used Christmas trees of the residents being thrown onto an existing campfire, building into the enormous, celebratory bonfire that lights the scene.

As we did with the footsteps in the mud and the kayak slashing the sand, we TRACK VERTICALLY along an extension cord from one of the trailer generators to the stage until we find -

Tracy with her guitar and Chris with the second-hand organ from Rainey and Jan's booth on the stage. They enter into a duet of John Prine's *Angel from Montgomery* for the crowd of the Slabs' fire-lit inhabitants.

In the crowd, we find Rainey and Jan clapping and dancing along to Chris and Tracy's song. Merry Christmas.

CUT TO:

167 EXT. THE SLABS - DAY

167

Jan is pulling the van out from their plot. Rainey is guiding the single-directional vehicle.

Chris and Tracy stand beside the car path. Chris writes down Wayne Westerberg's Carthage address.

CHRIS  
 You can always get in touch with me by  
 sending mail here. I don't know when  
 I'll get it, but I'll get it.

TRACY  
 (crying)  
 Okay.

\*

CHRIS  
 You're pretty magic.

TRACY  
 I am?

\*

He hugs her. And kisses her. (cheek, lips? I don't  
 know.)

Jan pulls up in the van. Rainey walks over to Chris and  
 gives him a paternal hug.

RAINEY  
 You take care of yourself, kiddo.

CHRIS  
 You too, Rainey. Thanks for everything.

Chris gives Rainey's gut a full-hand pinch.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 New Year's resolution?

Rainey gives him a wink and puts his arm around Tracy as  
 Chris jumps into the car. Then he and Jan hit the road.

\*

CUT TO:

168

EXT. MARKET POST OFFICE, SALTON CITY - DAY

168

This market/liquor store/post office serves as the  
 cultural nexus for the greater Salton Sea area.

As Jan's van pulls up opposite the post office and makes  
 a U-turn to curbside, Chris gets out of the van. Now  
 Jan's eyes really well up.

JAN  
 (sweetly)  
 Just get your pack out of the back and  
 get out of here. I can't take a hug.

Chris says nothing. He just looks at Jan. They understand each other. Chris closes the door. He fiddles with the broken handle of the back door, gets it open, gets his pack out. On top of his pack, A WRAPPED XMAS GIFT and when he closes the back door, Jan heads straight off back to the Slabs. Chris opens the giftwrap; it's the new hat Jan had promised. Chris is touched.

CUT TO:

169 EXT. TWO-LANED ROAD, ANNANDALE, VA (PAST) - DAY 169

TELEPHOTO LENS: A long two-laned road before us rises and falls in a series of saddles and peaks. The narrow shoulders are densely wooded. SLOWLY APPEARING over the near most peak, a TEAM OF EIGHT SHIRTLESS HIGH SCHOOL RUNNERS. Leading the group - 17 YEAR-OLD CHRISTOPHER MCCANDLESS. Lean, softly handsome, and graceful.

CARINE (V.O.)

In high school, Chris became captain of the cross-country track team. They called themselves the Road Warriors.

REVERSE ANGLE: The group of young runners, led by Chris suddenly veer off the paved road into the adjoining woods.

170 EXT. TRAILS, ANNANDALE (PAST) - DAY 170

SERIES OF ANGLES: The runners, led by Chris, pace unchartered trails, grassy hillsides, and shallow streams.

CARINE

He'd take them on what he loved to refer to as "epic" runs. The whole point was to run until they were completely lost and so exhausted that they were on the verge of puking. Then they'd slow down a little, somehow he'd find their bearings, and lead them home again at full speed. This was my brothers idea of fun.

We FAVOR Chris as he jogs in place at the exhilarating point of being lost. When he has identified a most likely return route, he quickens his pace, leading the group in the direction of return.

CUT TO:

171 INT. MARKET/POST OFFICE, SALTON CITY 171

Chris heads out with his last Burger King check in hand, proudly wearing his new hat and in search of mountains to climb.

CARINE (V.O.)

A year and a half into Chris' disappearance, each day that goes by now feels like two. Dad calls it "suspended animation." I kept telling myself that he had to get lost to prove his independence to himself. But this was no day run for the Road Warriors and after so much time, I could no longer keep out the haunting thoughts.

172 EXT. MARKET/POST OFFICE, SALTON CITY - DAY 172

Chris, with pack and new hat walks away from camera toward the interstate and the brittle mountains beyond.

CARINE (V.O.)

In many ways, my life and even my parents had begun to move in new directions. I'd fallen in love. And mom and dad had even ventured out on a brief vacation. But, when a search of tax records uncovered Chris' contribution to OXFAM, the weight of his disappearance just seemed to lie down on us full length.

CHAPTER 5: GETTING OF  
WISDOM DISSOLVE TO:

173 EXT. BADLANDS OF ANZA-BORREGO DESERT STATE PARK - DAY 173  
(JANUARY 1992)

WIDE SHOT: We see the Oh My God Hot Springs. Steaming pools lined with rocks and shaded by palm trees. A small group of campers and Charlie Manson wannabes in FOREGROUND.

We ZOOM past them to the sheer rock faces and landforms of the badlands, several miles beyond.

CUT TO:

174 EXT. STONE WALL, ANZA-BORREGO DESERT - DAY 174

SLO MO: We are looking down a radically steep rock face. A shirtless Chris is in training running towards us under the hot desert sun.

We HEAR only breath and footsteps.

CUT TO:

175 EXT. CHRIS' CAMP BESIDE THE STONE WALL - DAY 175

Chris rests on the sand under a tarp, hung from a Creosote branch. A plate of beans and rice eaten nearly clean and an empty water jug beside him. Flies buzz and pick.

CUT TO:

176 EXT. OH-MY-GOD HOT SPRINGS - DAY 176

Chris on a morning jog, wearing a shoulder bag and carrying an empty water jug. A quick wave to one of his distant "neighbors" at the spring's camp as he runs by.

CUT TO:

177 EXT. PAVED TWO-LANE ROAD INTO SALTON CITY - DAY 177

Chris continues his jog, cars whisk by and dust kicks into the air. But Chris is undeterred, keeps running.

178 EXT. MARKET/POST OFFICE, SALTON CITY - SAME 178

Chris approaches, slowing his jog to a walk. Chris sets down his water jug and stretches his calves. In the distance we see the peaks of the badlands landforms from where he ran.

Chris shakes off the jog, picks up the jug, and we go with him around the side of the building. There's a water faucet dripping slowly into the desert mud. Chris pops his jug under it and fills it up.

CUT TO:

179 INT. MARKET/POST OFFICE - SAME

179

Chris walks the aisles, sipping from his jug, as he comes across bags of rice on the market shelves. A HEAVY SET GIRL passes him in the aisle with her well-mannered dog following her.

CHRIS

(no high-pitched pet voice)  
Hey boy. You are a handsome fellow.  
(over shoulder to the girl)  
Beautiful dog.

THE GIRL

Thank you.

As the girl continues on, the dog wants to stay with Chris.

CHRIS

Go on, boy. Go on.

And the dog obeys him.

As he sorts through the various rice selections, brown, white, wild, we notice a MAN peering over the opposite shelf at Chris. This is RON FRANZ, between 70 and 80 years old, six-feet, thick arms, barrel chest, and large ears. He wears old jeans, an immaculate white T-shirt, a decorative tooled leather belt, white socks, and scuffed black loafers. His deeply pitted nose demonstrates a purple filigree of veins which unfold like an finely wrought tattoo. And on either side of it, the wary blue eyes of a soldier. He is the archetypical American man. Chris has caught his sympathetic eye. Chris moves to the counter to pay for rice.

CUT TO:

180 EXT. MARKET/POST OFFICE - SAME

180

In WIDE SHOT, we watch Chris from behind, walking out across the two-lane road. He puts out his thumb to hitch a ride.

When a truck comes from BEHIND INTO FRAME heading straight for Chris, the truck makes a relaxed L-turn, pulling up beside Chris.

181

INT. RON'S TRUCK

181

RON  
Where's your camp?

CHRIS  
(pointing)  
Out past Oh-My-God Hot Springs.

RON  
I've lived in and around here six years now and I've never heard of any place that goes by that name.

Ron leans across the bench seat of the truck, opening up the passenger door.

RON (CONT'D)  
Show me how to get there.

Chris hops in beside Ron, who extends his hand -

RON (CONT'D)  
Ron Franz.

CHRIS  
Alex.

RON  
Alex. Where are you from Alex?

CHRIS  
West Virginia.

RON  
Okay, Alex from West Virginia. I like a fellow who doesn't raise the pitch of his voice when he talks to animals...shows he doesn't condescend.

Chris remembers now the dog in the store and why Ron must've thought to give him a ride.

And they head off.

182

EXT. FEW MILES UP ROAD

182

Ron truck drives up the road.

183 INT. RON'S TRUCK 183

As we come upon a 4x4 track twisting down a narrow wash -

CHRIS  
You go left here.

Ron turns the truck down the 4x4 track.

184 EXT. 4X4 TRACK, ANZA-BORREGO DESERT - SAME 184

We watch the truck bump and grind on the mangled dirt road about a mile in.

Out the window, Ron's eye has been caught by something.

Ron's POV: Oh-My-God Hot Springs -

We see a couple of day-glo vans and rusted out Studebakers that hadn't been turned over since Eisenhower was in the White House. Several of those living there mill about buck naked. And at the center of the camp, the steaming pools lined with rocks under the palm trees.

RON  
You live here?

CHRIS  
No, we keep going. I'm further up.  
Another half-mile or so, out on the Bajada.

185 EXT. CHRIS' CAMP BESIDE THE STONE WALL - SAME 185

Ron and Chris drive up in the truck. Ron shuts off the ignition and gets out of the truck to stretch his legs. Chris follows, puts his full water jug under the tarp at his campsite, hooking it onto a branch. He throws his shoulder bag with the rice in it into his backpack.

RON  
Well, this is somethin' out here. Don't you worry about those dope smokers and nudists down below there?

CHRIS  
No, they keep to themselves pretty much and so do I.

RON  
(skeptical)  
Hmmm. You strike me as a bright young man. Am I wrong about that?

CHRIS  
I think I got my head on my shoulders pretty good.

RON  
That's what I mean. How long have you been out here?

CHRIS  
Couple of weeks.

RON  
And before that?

CHRIS  
A lot of places. I've been moving around.

RON  
How old are you?

CHRIS  
Twenty-three.

RON  
Twenty-three years old! Son, don't you think you should be getting an education? And a job? And making something of this life?

CHRIS  
Look Mr. Franz. I think careers are a twentieth century invention and I don't want one. You don't need to worry about me. I have a college education. I'm not destitute. I'm living like this by choice.

RON  
In the dirt?

CHRIS  
(laughs)  
Yeah, in the dirt.

RON  
I just don't know. Where's your family?

CHRIS  
Don't have one anymore.

RON  
That's a shame.

Chris can see some deep sadness in this man.

CHRIS  
Hey, Mr. Franz. I want to show you something.

Ron follows Chris to the rockface we'd seen Chris running earlier. They begin to walk up it. It's tough on the old-timer, walking this steep hill. But he's a tough old-timer, at least for the moment...

ANGLE: The two men nearly half way to the summit. It's getting steeper and higher. Ron stops.

RON  
This is getting a little steep. And a little high for me kid.

CHRIS  
Alright. But look out there. Even from half way out, it's quite a sight isn't it?

Their POV: Enormous beautiful vista all the way across the Bajada.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
From the top you can see all the way to the Salton Sea too.

Ron looks up the precarious rock wall. He ain't gonna be seeing the Salton Sea today.

RON  
You can see the Salton Sea from up there?

CHRIS  
Yes, sir.

RON  
(starting his way down the hill)  
My goodness.

CHRIS  
You don't want to go up?

RON

Nope. I don't do these kind of things.

Chris smiles and follows Ron. As they approach the bottom of the hill -

RON (CONT'D)

How about you and me take a drive? About fifty miles or so up highway, I know a place that's got a view, great food, and requires no climbing. How's that sound?

Chris thinks about it. Then -

CHRIS

Yeah, sure. It'll take me a couple of minutes to clean up.

RON

Fair enough.

CUT TO:

186 EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - AFTERNOON 186

Ron's truck drives through frame.

187 EXT. INDIAN AVENUE SOUTHBOUND, PALM SPRINGS - DAY 187

We see Ron and Chris driving parallel on the windmilled road (Our frame will only hold the lower fraction of the spinning windmills in the background)

CUT TO:

188 EXT. SAN JACINTO TRAMWAY - LATE AFTERNOON 188

VERTICAL POV: We are thousands of feet in the air over the rigid rocky canyon as we ascend toward San Jacinto summit. It's high. Scary HIGH.

189 INT. TRAM 189

MUSIC OVER: As Chris and Ron ride the tram to the peak, we watch Chris watching Ron, his kind, moist old eyes, slowly blinking at the wonder of the nature around him. Other passengers on the tram seem nervous, but Ron is meditative, almost hypnotized.

And with each roll-through of the tram through the cable towers, the tram car rocks and sways, but Ron's peace goes unbroken. And Chris continues to admire the gentle blinking of his eyes.

CUT TO:

190 INT. ELEVATION RESTAURANT (SAN JACINTO SUMMIT) - TWILIGHT90

The two of them sit in a quiet, corner booth of the tramway eatery that sits on the summit of San Jacinto overlooking the lights of Palm Springs and the desert clear back to Salton Sea. Chris is on a roll.

CHRIS

How old are you, Mr. Franz?

RON

Seventy-nine years old.

CHRIS

Seventy-nine...see, all due respect, but the real difference between people is the quality of their soul and not on how long they've trudged around like a dip-shit.

Ron laughs.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

But it's true.

RON

It is. No question about that.

Ron continues to let Chris vent.

CHRIS

The government's the same as my parents. They don't respect anybody. Regulation. Regulation. Regulation. WE can't do this. But THEY can do that. I mean, the hypocrisy of the whole...culture. Makes me crazy. My father was having children with two women at the same time, and then has the gall to think that he can be of some guidance to me? Make judgments on me? My mother, of course, goes along with all of it. Keeps the secret, which of course, makes my whole life a fiction. Everything I thought was, wasn't. They're such fools! Fucking idiots!

\*  
\*

RON

Alex, please don't lump me in amongst your judges. And your tyrants. But I'd prefer to not hear that kind of language.

CHRIS

(realizing his slip)

Sorry. I don't usually use that kind of language either. I just get so angry thinking about it.

Ron reaches across the table. Puts his sturdy hand on Chris' shoulder.

RON

You got a lot of passion, young man.

Chris smiles at Ron.

CUT TO:

191

EXT. CHRIS' CAMP BESIDE THE STONE WALL - NIGHT

191

As Ron and Chris pull up in the pick-up truck, we see SPORADIC FIREWORKS WHISTLING AND CRACKLING into the air above the hot-springs, and HEAR the distant HOOTING of its inhabitants. Chris hops out and walks around to Ron's side of the truck.

CHRIS

Awww, that was a great time Mr. Franz. Thank you.

RON

Look here. If Charles Manson and his buddies don't kill me on my way out of here, I'd like to cook you up a home cooked meal tomorrow night. If I come out here about, say, four o'clock tomorrow, how would that be?

CHRIS

That would be swell.

Ron is thrilled.

RON

Good, good. I'm no gourmet but I know where the spices are. Good night, kid.

CHRIS

Good night Mr. Franz.

And with that, Ron hits the road.

CUT TO:

192 EXT. STONE WALL - SUNSET 192

Chris hikes up it with his backpack on, one laborious step at a time.

DISSOLVE TO:

193 EXT. STONE WALL SUMMIT - SAME 193

Chris summiting the rock formation. He looks down over the desert and there before him, The Salton Sea.

CUT TO:

194 EXT. RON'S HOUSE, SALTON SEA - SUNSET 194

The house is a single-level, beige structure, sitting between the Salton Sea and a small inlet where he keeps a fishing boat. Underneath a canopy in the backyard, there is a small workshop of some kind.

HIGH ANGLE: Chris, looking at his own reflection in the water below Ron's dock. In the reflection, we see his hands full of dirty laundry.

CUT TO:

195 INT. KITCHEN, RON'S HOUSE - SAME 195

Ron broils a couple of steaks. Chris enters and moves past Ron carrying his laundry into another room.

196 INT. LAUNDRY ROOM, RON'S HOUSE - SAME 196

Chris pours detergent over his long-in-need clothes. Starts the cycle.

197 INT. KITCHEN, RON'S HOUSE - NIGHT 197

As Chris enters, Ron is pulling the steaks from the broiler.

Above the kitchen sink, Chris sees a row of approximately ten photographs, each in vertical 4x6 frames, some black and white, some color: all of Japanese boys and girls in formal American and Japanese attire.

RON

Did you find everything you need?

CHRIS

(breaking his gaze from the photographs)

Yeah. I hope I don't wreck your machine. There's a lot of grime in that stuff.

RON

Well, that's what it's for. How do these steaks look?

Ron pops the steaks on the kitchen table.

CHRIS

Great.

RON

Well, sit down.

Ron grabs some silverware from a drawer, plops it down on the kitchen table with some paper napkins.

RON (CONT'D)

What do you drink?

CHRIS

You got a White Russian?

RON

Nope.

CHRIS

Beer?

RON

Nope. Don't have any alcohol. I had to quit all that. How about a guava juice?

CHRIS

I'll take a guava juice, that sounds good.

As Ron gets the drinks -

RON

Yeah, I had a little spell with the bottle, you could say.

Ron pops the drinks down on the table, then sits with Chris. They lift their glasses toward one another, then -

RON/CHRIS

Cheers.

RON

I spent most of my life in the army. On New Year's Eve 1957, I was stationed over in Okinawa. My wife and son were here in the States, just driving down the road when a fellow who'd had too much to drink plowed right into them. Killed them both. Anyway, you might think that the last thing in the world I'd do, is go to the whiskey, but at the time, it felt like the only thing I could do. And I did it hard. But pretty soon, I figured I wasn't doing my wife and son any good, mourning them with a bottle. So, I pulled myself together and quit drinking, cold turkey. And then...

Ron, spinning his body around, points to the photographs over the sink.

RON (CONT'D)

(brightening)

You see all these kids over here?

CHRIS

Yeah, I was gonna ask you.

RON

Yeah, that's...

(pointing at each with his  
finger)

Fuki, Kenjiro, Yoshiko, Keiko, Masaro,  
Junichi, Kimpei, Nayoko...

For the last picture frame, Ron stands and takes it off the shelf -

RON (CONT'D)

(pridefully shows Chris the  
picture)

And this is Akira. Just finished medical  
school.

Chris takes the picture and studies Akira's face. Ron sits back down.

RON (CONT'D)

Yeah, I unofficially adopted all of them. It did my heart some good but I guess really it was just writing a few letters and sending some money. Anyway, it was important to me. I get a letter from each of them from time to time. You know. So, since all that, this is pretty much me.

(indicating his small  
reclusive abode)

CHRIS

Do you ever travel, Mr. Franz?

RON

No. I can't seem to get too far from my leather. I'll show you after you finish eating. I do a lot of leather engraving. I got a little workshop in the garage. Between that and my pension, I do pretty well. But every time I think I might take a trip somewhere, I get too far behind on orders and such to consider it.

CHRIS

(having wolfed down the  
steak)

Well, I'm finished eating. I'd love to see your workshop.

RON

Would ya?

Chris nods.

RON (CONT'D)

(standing)

Alright then.

Ron picks up the picture of Akira and replaces it on the shelf above the sink.

CUT TO:

198

INT. RON'S GARAGE/WORKSHOP - NIGHT

198

As we begin, Ron is instructing Chris in the skills of leather engraving.

DISSOLVE TO:

199 EXT. CHRIS' CAMP BESIDE THE STONE WALL - MORNING 199

Chris, a clear plastic bag of clean laundry beside him, sits alone, cross-legged. He begins to carve into a leather belt.

CUT TO:

200 EXT. STONE WALL - LATER 200

We follow Chris in a LOW ANGLE up his mountain run framing from mid-back to just above his head, sweating profusely.

CUT TO:

201 EXT. 4X4 TRACK, ANZA-BORREGO DESERT - DAY 201

Ron's truck cuts along the 4x4 track.

BACK TO:

202 EXT. STONE WALL, ANZA-BORREGO DESERT - SAME 202

Chris reaching the summit. He bends over to catch his breath, hands on knees.

RON (O.S)

How about some fishing?

Chris turns to the voice. And down at the bottom of the rock wall beside the campsite, is Ron holding up two fishing poles.

RON (CONT'D)

(referring to the Sea)

That thing's twice as salty as the ocean.

Did you know that?

Chris has barely the breath to speak.

CHRIS

Anything alive in it?

Ron shrugs his shoulders in a "who cares?" fashion. Chris laughs but nods in the affirmative and gives Ron the thumbs up.

203

EXT. ANZA-BARREGO DESERT - DAY + NIGHT

203

BEGIN MUSIC OVER: MONTAGE:

1. Chris and Ron fishing in the Salton Sea. (no catch)
2. At Ron's workshop/garage, Ron guides Chris in his leather belt project.
3. At Chris' campsite, Chris does push-ups while Ron sits on the tailgate of his truck spying on the "Manson family" through binoculars, shaking his head.
4. Chris at his campsite working on the belt by campfire light. We MOVE IN on the belt, he's beginning to form the letter N in the leather.
5. Chris jogging in the morning beside Oh-My-God Hot Springs.
6. Chris and Ron at the leather bench in Ron's workshop/garage.

In a EXTREME CLOSE-UP, MUSIC FADES OUT as we PAN across Chris' leather belt and the story being told on it through the engravings:

204

EXT. RON'S WORKSHOP - DAY

204

ALEX is inscribed at the belt's left end; then the initials C.J.M. (for Christopher Johnson McCandless) frame a skull and crossbones. Across the strip of cowhide one sees a rendering of two-lane blacktop, a No U-turn sign, a thunderstorm producing a flash flood that engulfs a car, a hitchhiker's thumb, an eagle, the Sierra Nevada, salmon cavorting in the Pacific Ocean, the Pacific Coast Highway from Oregon to Washington, the Rocky Mountains, Montana wheat fields, a South Dakota rattlesnake, Westerberg's house in Carthage, the Colorado River rapids, a canoe beached beside a tent, Las Vegas, and at the buckle end, finally, the letter N.

RON

What's the N stand for?

CHRIS

...North.

CUT TO:

205

EXT. CHRIS' CAMP BESIDE THE STONE WALL - DAY

205

AN ISOLATED CLOUD ECLIPSES THE SUN AGAINST A BLUE DESERT SKY.

Ron is sitting on his tailgate, watching Chris, backpack on, climb the stone wall.

RON

Alaska?

Chris summits.

RON (CONT'D)

Son, what the hell you running from?

CHRIS

(yells down from above)

I could ask you the same question.  
Except I already know the answer.

RON

You do, do you?

CHRIS

I do, Mr. Franz. You've got to get back out in the world. Get out of that lonely house of yours, that little workshop, and go live on the road.

Ron waves him off.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Really. You're going to live a long time, Ron. You should make a radical change in your lifestyle. The core of man's spirit comes with new experiences. And there you are, stubborn old man, sitting on your butt.

RON

Sittin' on my butt, huh?

Ron gets up off the tailgate.

RON (CONT'D)

I'll show you sittin' on my butt.

And Ron starts making the old man hustle. Shifty shoulders and all, up the stone wall.

RON (CONT'D)  
(mumbling)  
"Stubborn old man."

Chris is laughing and clapping.

CHRIS  
Come on, old man! Come on!

RON  
(mumbling)  
Ya little pinhead.

Chris is jumping up and down, thrilled for Ron's efforts. Now the old man's shuffle has turned into an old man's walk. But he ain't stopping. And bit by bit he shows he's got it in him after all.

As Ron is just about to mount the summit, Chris extends a hand. Ron swats it away.

RON (CONT'D)  
Ya little pinhead.

Ron drops down onto his back to catch his breath and let his thumping heart slow down.

CHRIS  
You alright?

Ron, after taking one more deep breath, sits up and Chris sits next to him. He's actually pretty happy with himself. He looks out and sees the distant Salton Sea.

RON  
I'm going to miss you when you go.

CHRIS  
I'll miss you too, Ron. But you're wrong if you think the joy of life comes principally from human relationships. God's placed it all around us. It's in everything. In anything we can experience. People just have to change the way they think about those things. You ought to put a little camper on the back of your pick-up and go take a look at some of the great work god's done out here in the American west.

RON  
Alex...You're probably right. And I'm going to take stock of that.

Chris offers a skeptical glance.

RON (CONT'D)

No, I am.

A second skeptical glance. Which Ron squashes with genuine sincerity.

RON (CONT'D)

(almost to himself)

I am.

Chris buys it this time and feels he's accomplished something with Ron.

RON (CONT'D)

But I'll tell you something. The bits and pieces I've put together, you know, what you've told me about your family. Your mother and dad. And I know you got your problems with the church too, but there's some kind of bigger thing that we can all appreciate. And it sounds like you don't mind calling it God. But when you forgive, you love. And when you love...God's light shines on you.

Miraculously, it is just at that moment that the cloud clears from the sun and the light shines in Ron's eyes. Chris points at Ron's face at the light shining on him -

CHRIS

Holy Shit!

RON

I told you about that language.

The two men, their eyes welling up, fall back laughing.

EXTREME WIDE SHOT FROM BELOW: The two men on the summit with the echoing of laughter and Ron's screams -

RON (CONT'D)

I told you so! I told you so!

CUT TO:

Chris pulls his laundry out of the dryer. He's got his pack sitting in the doorway to the kitchen. He folds his things and tucks them into his pack.

Ron appears in the doorway dressed for travel.

CHRIS

What are you doing up? It's three-thirty  
in the morning.

RON

Heard you get up off the couch half an  
hour ago, and had a funny feeling you  
might not be here for our breakfast.

Chris says nothing.

RON (CONT'D)

I'm going to drive you a hundred miles to  
somewhere where you can pick up a train,  
a plane, or hitch a ride without getting  
stuck on this desert. I'd take you all  
the way to Alaska if I didn't have to get  
to an eight o'clock mass.

CHRIS

Ron, you don't have to do that.

RON

I want to do it. Get you started on this  
thing of yours.

CHRIS

On my Great -

RON

(interrupting)

I know. On your "Great Alaskan  
Adventure."

From just out of Chris' eye-line, Ron leans out of frame,  
picking up a zippered duffel bag. He opens it,  
displaying the contents to Chris.

RON (CONT'D)

There's a machete, an arctic parka,  
collapsible fishing pole, and a few odds  
and ends I threw in there for you.

CHRIS

Ron...

RON

Oh, just take it.

Chris does, nodding his thanks.

RON (CONT'D)  
I'll wait for you in the truck.

CUT TO:

207 EXT. HIGHWAY 10, OUTSIDE SALTON CITY - DAWN 207

We follow the two men (on this nondescript locale) driving along the highway east from dawn through sunrise. They ride in silence through Coachchella Desert Center and Blythe.

CUT TO:

208 EXT. HIGHWAY 10 208

The truck exits at a North/South junction 95.

209 INT. RON'S TRUCK 209

As Ron begins to pull over.

RON  
Well my friend.

CHRIS  
Yep.

Both of them are uncomfortable. Chris goes for the door handle. Ron's gnarled hand reaches out to take Chris' elbow.

After a long beat, Ron speaks without looking at Chris.

RON  
I had an idea. You know my mother was an only child. So was my father. And I was their only child. Now, with my own boy gone, I'm the end of the line. When I'm gone, my family will be finished. What do you say, you let me adopt you. I could be, say, your grandfather.

This takes Chris by surprise. He knew it would be hard but not this hard.

CHRIS  
How about we talk about this when I get back from Alaska, Ron. Would that be alright?

Silence. Ron nods. Releases Chris' elbow.

CHRIS (CONT'D)  
 Alright, Ron. We'll talk about it then.

RON  
 (trying to mask. The  
 blinking, moist eyes again)  
 Yep. We can do that, yep.

CHRIS  
 Thanks, Ron.

Ron nods. Chris gets out of the truck. Ron watches as Chris saddles up his bag including the duffel that Ron gave him.

Chris crosses the exit junction to where he can pick up a ride north on the far side of the road.

We ZOOM SLOWLY through the windshield into Ron's face as he watches Chris hitching away.

We HEAR the first bars of Neil Young's *My My, Hey Hey*. This will carry throughout the following MONTAGE.

DISSOLVE TO:

210

INT./EXT. VARIOUS - MONTAGE

210

1. We ZOOM into Walt McCandless' face as he looks through the Questar telescope that Chris had given him. ANGLE: The stars through the telescope. The same stars his son walks under...somewhere. We PAN ACROSS SPACE.

**(Note: This montage will intercut Chris' traveling POV with objective shots. However, we never SEE Chris.)**

2. We PULL BACK from the starry night sky to see it framed from within a moving train.

3. Carine in her shower, water cascades over her face.

4. Billie in her kitchen, making dinner.

5. Through the windshield of a semi-truck, the sun rises on Glacier National Park.

6. A HANDHELD ZOOM-OUT from Canadian border crossing, CAMERA TURNS to the woods beyond and MOVES INTO THEM.

7. SERIES OF TRAVELING SHOTS: (Through Skookumchuk and Radium Junction, Lake Louise to Prince George and Dawson Creek) STATIC NATURE SHOTS: HELICOPTER SHOTS

8. On the bed in their van, Jan sits on Rainey's bare feet while he does sit-ups.

9. Ron holding a garage sale, while hooking a trailer to his truck.

10. Wayne being released from jail.

11. Mads and Sonja, side by side, one-armed bandit-ing in a Vegas casino.

12. Tracy at a high school dance, slow-dancing with her young date. \*

13. Looking through the windshield of another semi. A bear lopes across the two-lane road before us. We PAN and ZOOM with it into the tundra beside the road. HANDHELD, WALKING, we pass Mile 0 of the Alaska highway: The sign: Fairbanks 1523 miles.

14. A waterfall.

15. Intercut hand and thumb hitching - a sense that rides are few and far between.

16. A misting mountain peak.

17. Beavers in streams.

18. Melting blue ice-walls.

19. A lynx skittering across a snowy mound.

20. Walt and his telescope.

21. The hitchhiker's VIEW on a two-lane road, walking past a highway sign for the Yukon Territory. (Through Johnson's Crossing, Whitehorse, and Beaver Creek.)

22. From a passenger car window, a series of road signs reading: *Closed for winter.*

MUSIC FADE OUT

211 INT. MCCANDLESS HOME, ANNANDALE - DAY

211

CARINE (V.O.)  
 About a month short of the second  
 anniversary of Chris' disappearance, I  
 had gotten engaged to my boyfriend Jerry  
 Ray and was moving in with him...

Carine, packing her belongings into boxes, stumbles upon  
 the Sharon Olds book Chris had given her on his  
 graduation day.

CARINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 ...when I stumbled upon the book Chris  
 had given me on his graduation day. For  
 some reason, it was the last line of the  
 poem he read that really stuck out.

FLASH BACK: (From page 2-3)

212 INT. DATSUN

212

Chris is holding a book from which he reads aloud the  
 LAST LINE OF THE POEM...

CHRIS  
*...and I will tell about it.*

CARINE (V.O.)  
 I asked Chris who had written the poem.

What we SEE of Carine plays with the VOICE OVER TRACK and  
 SILENT with the production track; in essence lip synching  
 herself.

Chris' dialogue comes directly from the flashback image.

CARINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Who wrote that?

CHRIS  
 Well, it could've been either one of us.  
 Couldn't it?

We see pictures of Chris on the night-stand of Walt and  
 Billie's bedroom

CARINE (V.O.)  
 What would he tell about now? What did  
 his voice sound like now?  
 (MORE)

CARINE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I realized that the words to my thoughts  
were of less and less meaning. Chris was  
writing his story and it had to be Chris  
who would tell it.

The pictures in the scene BLUR as -

CHRIS (O.C.)

(in a far away, tunnel-like  
sound)

Mom, help me.

CUT TO:

213 INT. BEDROOM, MCCANDLESS HOME, ANNANDALE - NIGHT 213

Billie sitting bolt upright in the middle of the night,  
tears rolling down her cheeks.

Walt awakens beside her.

WALT

What is it?

BILLIE

I wasn't dreaming! I didn't imagine it!  
I heard his voice, Walt. I heard Chris.

Walt takes her in his arms, trying to squeeze life into  
both of them.

CHAPTER 6: DELIVERANCE  
FADE TO BLACK.

214 FAIRBANKS ALASKA, SERIES OF STATIC IMAGES: 214

Berms of cleared snow line the streets

1. A GAS STATION (Gold Hill Gas and Liquor)

We see Chris' writing appear on screen:

APRIL 27, 1992

2. OLD ALASKA PROSPECTOR'S STORE

WAYNE,

GREETINGS FROM FAIRBANKS! THIS IS THE LAST TIME YOU  
SHALL HEAR FROM ME. ARRIVED HERE TWO DAYS AGO.

3. A SALOON

4. A LIBRARY

IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO CATCH RIDES IN THE YUKON TERRITORY.

5. TRAIN STATION6. BARBER SHOP

BUT I FINALLY GOT HERE. PICKED UP A NEW BOOK ON THE LOCAL FLORA AND FAUNA (TANAINA PLANTLORE / DENA'INA K'ET'UNA: AN ETHNOBOTANY OF THE DENA'INA INDIANS OF SOUTHCENTRAL ALASKA BY PRISCILLA RUSSELL KARI)

7. BOOKSTORE

MIGHT BE A VERY LONG TIME BEFORE I RETURN SOUTH. BUT I'M PREPARED AND HAVE STOCKED ALL NECESSARY COMFORTS TO LIVE OFF THE LAND FOR A FEW MONTHS.

8. A GUN AND SPORTING GOOD STORE

INCLUDING A NYLON 66 MODEL SEMIAUTOMATIC .22 REMINGTON. JUST WANTED TO LET YOU KNOW, YOU'RE A GREAT MAN. I NOW WALK (PAUSE WRITING ON SCREEN) INTO THE WILD.

ALEX

9. A SIGN AGAINST A RADIO TOWER "RADIO FAIRBANKS" (Perhaps we hear a weather report)

215 EXT. ALASKAN RANGE (STAMPEDE TRAIL) - DAY 215

We return to the area of Scene #1.

MUSIC OVER: Of religious scope. Perhaps choral.

HELICOPTER SHOT: We travel a long ways across snowy peaks and valleys (clearly far from anywhere) passing between two escarpments of outer range bordering bottomlands five miles wide until we barely see a tiny form within it trudging through the snow. We overfly it.

CUT TO:

216 EXT. STAMPEDE TRAIL - DAY 216

Chris, crunching through two to three feet (not more) of snow, in arctic parka, big boots, his warm hat, rifle slung over his shoulder, and pack.

He moves TOWARD CAMERA. We PAN AROUND with him as he walks past, where beyond Chris on the snow plain, rises a tree line.

CUT TO:

217 EXT. TEKLANIKA RIVER - DAY 217

Its banks lined with a jagged shelf of frozen overflow. At its center, a channel of gently flowing water, opaque with glacial till. Beyond the far ice shelf, Chris appears from the riverside treeline. He eases across the ice, then wades through the latte-colored channel and on to the other side.

REVERSE ANGLE: Chris moving toward the opposite tree line, he turns back to the gentle river behind. Chris' POV scanning the terrain.

From the river to a distant mountain peak and then to a second mountain peak, triangulating his location. He makes a drawing on a pad of paper and piles some medium-sized rocks to mark the spot before moving on into the trees.

CUT TO:

218 EXT. VAST ALASKAN SNOWSCAPE - DAY 218

Total silence across the beatific white vista of snow, mountain, and colorless trees UNTIL a DISTANT ECHOING GUNSHOT.

CUT TO:

219 EXT. CAMPSITE, BESIDE SUSHANA RIVER - NIGHT 219

Chris has skinned and is cooking a squirrel.

CUT TO:

220 EXT. CAMPSITE, BESIDE SUSHANA RIVER - MORNING 220

Chris packs the last of his camp and begins his march upriver.

CUT TO:

221 EXT. UPRIVER - DAY 221

As Chris walks upon a clearing in the tree line, he catches his first glimpse of Denali's (Mt. McKinley's) high-blinding white bulwarks. Chris stands in awe. We remain in his WIDE-SHOT POV as it -

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME SHOT - NIGHT

But now Chris' tent sits in its foreground with the moonlit Denali still visible.

CUT TO:

222 EXT. WOODS BESIDE RIVER - DAY 222

CAMERA ANGLED SKYWARD into the broken rays of grey light. We TILT DOWN to find (and TRACK through the trees with) Chris moving along the river, when he sees something just OFF CAMERA.

Chris' POV: Through the trees and fireweed, he sees something metallic and rusty. Chris moves up through the underbrush and the snow into the narrow tree line and on into the clearing, where before him:

A DERELICT SCHOOL BUS. It is a vintage International Harvester from the 1940's.

Chris approaches the bus, lifts the hood a little bit seeing that the engine is gone. As he moves around the vehicle, we see several windows are cracked or missing altogether. The green and white paint is badly oxidized. Weathered lettering: Fairbanks City Transit System Bus 142.

223 INT. BUS 223

Broken whiskey bottles litter the floor. Chris may well have found his new home. The bus is outfitted with a bunk and a barrel stove. Previous visitors had left it stocked with matches, bug dope, and other essentials.

224 EXT. BUS 224

We follow Chris back out of the bus, surveying the area of the clearing. He loves what he sees.

CELEBRATORY MUSIC OVER:

He runs up a berm to look down into the river.

He runs from corner to corner of this "Magic Bus" area like a new bride surveying her honeymoon suite with glee.

He climbs a tree, swings from its branch, doing a flip in the air, landing on his feet, but then slipping on the snow and onto his butt and then onto his back. He grabs a handful of snow, shoves it in his mouth, melts it into water, and swallows it.

CRANE SHOT: We PULL UP from Chris to high above the clearing.

MUSIC FADES OUT

CUT TO:

225

INT./EXT. BUS

225

He re-enters the bus and pulls his pen from his pocket, scribbling on the wall of the bus:

TWO YEARS HE WALKS THE EARTH. NO PHONE,  
NO POOL, NO PETS, NO CIGARETTES, ULTIMATE  
FREEDOM. AN EXTREMIST. AND AESTHETIC  
VOYAGER WHOSE HOME IS...

ANGLE: Chris: He continues to write as he SPEAKS the words aloud:

CHRIS

...the road. Escaped from Atlanta. Thou shalt not return 'cause the "west is the best." And now after two rambling years, comes the final and greatest adventure.

Chris is cleaning up the bus.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

The climactic battle to kill the false being within and victoriously conclude the spiritual revolution.

Chris shoveling snow away from the bus entrance with a rock.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Ten days and nights of freight trains and  
hitchhiking, bringing him to the great  
white north.

Back to Chris, REAL TIME as he continues to write as he  
speaks:

CHRIS (CONT'D)

No longer to be poisoned by civilization,  
he flees, and walks alone upon the land  
to become lost in the wild.

Chris signs his doctrine -

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JUMP CUT TO:

226 INT. BUS 226

Chris posts a found piece of paper on the inner wall of  
the bus alongside his doctrine.

CU: Chris' hand, he writes and circles the number:

1 - MAGIC BUS DAY.

CUT TO:

227 EXT. BUS - DAY 227

Chris comes out, rifle in hand. We TRACK with him as he  
moves into the woods on the hunt.

SERIES OF ANGLES:

Chris searching for game. He moves through the woods  
along the river and at the base of a nearby mountain.  
Finding animals for food seems more difficult than  
expected.

CUT TO:

228 EXT. A MOUNTAIN SADDLE - DAY 228

Chris stumbles upon a caribou as it steps out from the  
woods. He lines up his rifle on the animal, about to  
pull the trigger, when its calf appears beside it.

He lowers his rifle, unwilling to take a shot that would separate mother and child.

TIME CUT:

229 EXT. WOODS - DAY 229

A spruce grouse is spied on a foreground branch.

BANG!

The branch splinters and the bird makes haste.

ANGLE: Chris, rifle in hand.

CHRIS

Shit!

CUT TO:

230 INT. BUS - NIGHT 230

Chris, cooking rice. We see his single bag of rice. Its amount tells us the hunting had better improve soon.

We explore a PASSAGE OF TIME throughout which CHRIS GETS INCREASINGLY THIN AND PALE: hunting, sleeping, cooking, rice dwindling, line-ups of scrawny shot birds. He adds holes to his belt leather to accommodate his shrinking waistline.

CUT TO:

231 EXT. SNOWY PLAIN - DAY 231

BANG!

Chris bags a squirrel on a snowy plain.

CUT TO:

232 INT. BUS - LATER 232

Chris eats his measly catch but looks to his bag of rice with concern, perhaps only a day or so left of his rations. We come to the diary/log posted on the wall. We see that he has been there for a week's worth of entries as the squirrel is mentioned on day seven.

CUT TO:

232A OMITTED 232A

232B OMITTED 232B

233 INT. BUS - MORNING 233

Chris is awakened by a new May sun, streaming light through the windows of the bus.

POV: the sun, circling high in the heavens. Snowmelt dripping quickly across the windowpane.

CUT TO:

233A EXT. BUS - DAY 233A

Chris dances atop the bus, naked in the new spring.

CUT TO:

233B INT. BUS - DAY 233B

Chris shaves.

**(Note: We are in a time of year in this part of the world where the sun dips behind the horizon only four hours a day)**

CUT TO:

234 INT./EXT. BUS - DAY 234

INTERCUT: SERIES OF ANGLES throughout which Chris remains thin but his pallor improves:

1. The diary/log representing a small improvement on the hunting front.

2. Undergrowth exposing itself through snowmelt.

3. Establish a small waterfall near the bus.

Landing on:

235

EXT. WOODS - DAY

235

The snow has now all but vanished except on north-facing slopes and shadowy ravines, exposing a range carpeted in an amalgam of muskeg, alder thickets, and veins of scrawny spruce.

Chris traipses along the seasons rose hips and lingonberries, which he gathers in great quantity and snacks on as he walks.

CUT TO:

236 EXT. WOODS - DAY 236

Chris shoots a porcupine.

CUT TO:

237 INT. BUS - DAY 237

The diary/log: DAY 30 - PORCUPINE

DISSOLVE TO:

238 EXT. PEAK, NEARBY BUTTE - DAY 238

Chris stands triumphant at the peak of a 3000 foot butte overlooking the bus. CIRCLE CAMERA around him 360 degrees recording the broad vista.

ANGLE: CU - He's beaming with satisfaction.

We begin a SLOW ZOOM OUT and then accelerate the ZOOM encompassing the entire grandeur of the mountain with Chris at its peak.

CUT TO:

239 INT. BUS - LATER 239

The diary/log: DAY 31 - CLIMBED MOUNTAIN

DISSOLVE TO:

240 EXT. BUS ENVIRONS - COLLAGE - DAY 240

COLLAGE TIME IN A SERIES OF DISSOLVES:

1. The diary/log: MAP AREA.

Chris surveying and taking notes of area.

2. The diary/log: IMPROVISE A BATHTUB AND SMUDGE POT

Chris building a bathtub out in the front.

3. The diary/log: COLLECT SKINS AND FEATHERS TO SEW INTO CLOTHING.

Chris hunting and skinning.

4. The diary/log: CONSTRUCT BRIDGE ACROSS NEARBY NARROW CREEK.

Chris knee-deep in slow-moving water constructing a makeshift bridge across narrow creek.

5. The diary/log: BLAZE NETWORK OF HUNTING TRAILS.

Chris making a trail with his machete when -

A MOOSE appears from a nearby thicket. Chris drops the machete and pulls his rifle from his shoulder. The moose looks ready to charge Chris. There's no choice.

Chris aims carefully and fires six straight shots into the moose's head, dropping it. Chris can hardly believe his own success. He puts the rifle back on his shoulder, just staring at the dead moose. He begins back-peddalling away from it. Bit by bit, his steps turn into a jog and then he turns and runs back toward the bus.

CUT TO:

241 INT. BUS 241

**(Director's Note: Handheld)**

Chris scrambles through his pack and finds the piece of paper where he had written notes of how to cure beef by smoking it, taught to him by Kevin, Wayne's hunter friend back in South Dakota.

BACK TO:

242 EXT. WOODS - SAME 242

Back at the kill, the slow process of butchering begins. (This ain't going to be pretty.)

INTERCUT REPRESENTATIVE IMAGES WITH FOLLOWING DIARY/LOG ENTRIES:

1. The diary/log: BUTCHERING EXTREMELY DIFFICULT.

2. The diary/log: FLY AND MOSQUITO HORDES.

3. The diary/log: REMOVE INTESTINES, LIVER, KIDNEY, ONE LUNG, STEAKS.

4. The diary/log: GOT HIND QUARTERS AND LEGS TO STREAM.

5. The diary/log: REMOVE HEART.

6. The diary/log: DIGS SMOKER HOLE INTO EXISTING CAVE.

7. The diary/log: HAUL NEAR CAVE.

8. The diary/log: TRY TO PROTECT WITH SMOKER.

9. The diary/log: CAN ONLY WORK NIGHTS. KEEP SMOKERS GOING.

10. The diary/log: MAGGOTS ALREADY. SMOKING APPEARS INEFFECTIVE. LOOKS LIKE DISASTER. WISH I'D NEVER SHOT MOOSE. GREAT TRAGEDY.

11. The diary/log: ABANDON CARCASS TO WOLVES.

We see Chris hidden behind a rise, watching a WOLF PACK tug at the rancid meat from the carcass.

243 EXT./INT. BUS - DAY + NIGHT 243

SERIES OF ANGLES:

In and out of the bus. Day and night, portraying Chris mourning his killing of the moose. He even plants a cross by its skeletal remains.

244 EXT. BUS ENVIRONS 244

SERIES OF SHOTS:

Sunrise and nature awakens. Bird songs and flower blooms. A waterfall cascades.

CUT TO:

245 INT. BUS - DAY 245

Chris reading Tolstoy's *Family Happiness*. His POV: The page: what Chris reads:

*I have lived through much and now I think I have found what is needed for happiness.*

*A quiet, secluded life in the country with the possibility of being useful to people...*

CUT TO:

246 EXT. BUS - DAY 246

Chris sits amongst the pink bunches of fireweed choking the vehicles wheel wells, growing higher than the axles, his back leaning against the bus, finishing the reading of *Family Happiness*.

ANGLE: Chris, reading with great interest. His POV: The page: what Chris reads:

*And then, on top of all that, you for a mate, and children, perhaps - what more can the heart of a man desire?*

ANGLE: Chris: He looks up from his book. A gentle breeze tickles morning flowers. The sunlight dances in a coppice of aspen and leaves of trees above. The sound of buzzing flies mutes. He is taking one last look at his paradise.

CUT TO:

246A EXT. SMALL WATERFALL NEAR BUS - DAY 246A

Chris showers (PHOTO-SONIC)

MUSIC, LYNYRD SKYNYRD'S *Simple Man* (lyrics in cursive) begins to play OVER:

CUT TO:

247 INT. BUS 247

*My momma told me / when I was young*

Chris packs his gear.

*Come sit beside me / my only son*

A last look about the bus.

248 EXT. SUSHANA RIVER - DAY 248

*Listen closefy / what I say*

Full pack and rifle mounted in WIDE SHOT beside the Sushana River.

*If you do this it will help you / some sunny day*

249

EXT. ALASKA TRAIL - DAY

249

MUSIC CONTINUES OVER:

A SERIES OF ANGLES:

*Just take your time / don't live too fast*

We pass the familiar landmark of the Mt. McKinley clearing where Chris had camped.

*Troubles will come / and they will pass*

Chris walking and camping his way back to the Teklanika River and the road home.

*Find a woman / you'll find love*

*and don't forget son / there's someone up above...*

MUSIC FADES OUT

CUT TO:

250

EXT. TEKLANIKA RIVER - DAY

250

In the trees beside the river, we find Chris. The river is not yet in sight but Chris starts to HEAR it: A building rumble.

As Chris exits the treeline, there she is: The Teklanika at full flood. Seventy-five foot wide banks, replacing the narrow ice canal of four months earlier. Snowmelt from glaciers high in the Alaska range, its opaque glacial sediment the color of wet concrete. And what had been a distant rumble in the woods, now had the volume and power of a freight train, a seventy-five foot wide one.

Chris grabs a hold of a riverside branch and takes one slow, careful step into the river. Without mercy, WHAM! the river kicks his feet out from under him! The branch he holds SNAPS! By some miracle, his hands move like lightning and he grabs a lower, sturdier branch below, saving himself from a certain death.

We SEE the broken branch catapulted down river and into a rocky shoot below. He pulls himself back onto the bank, drops his pack at riverside, and eases to a sitting position beside it.

CUT TO:

251 INT. BUS - NIGHT 251

It's pouring rain outside. The rain pelts the top of the bus.

Chris' pack is thrown onto the bunk. His hand appears at the diary/log on the wall. He writes:

DAY 82 - DISASTER. RAINED IN. RIVER CROSSING  
IMPOSSIBLE. LONELY, SCARED.

CUT TO:

252 EXT. BUS, THE EDGE OF ITS SURROUNDING CLEARING - DAY 252

EXTREME CU: Beaded and shimmering from the past night's rain, a bright red berry moves in the breeze like a tiny vibrating bell. RACK FOCUS to Chris' eyes spying it. He plucks it from its stem.

CUT TO:

253 EXT. BUS - DAY 253

Chris adds another hole to tighten his belt.

CUT TO:

254 INT. BUS - DAY 254

Chris looking very thin. Too thin. He is noshing on a bag of collected berries while reading from Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*.

ANGLE: The book

CHRIS (V.O.)(O.C.)  
*Here she stopped and, closing her eyes,  
took a deep breath of the flower-scented  
air of the broad expanse around her. It  
was dearer to her than her kin, better  
than a lover, wiser than a book.*

ANGLE: Chris pulls more berries from the bag and chews on them as he reads.

ANGLE: The book

CHRIS (V.O.)(O.C.)

(CONT'D)

*For a moment, she re-discovered the purpose of her life. She was here in earth to grasp the meaning of its wild enchantment and call each thing by its right name.*

ANGLE: Chris

CHRIS (CONT'D)

(echoing)

By its right name. By its right name.

He puts down the book and brings one of the ripe berries in front of his face (as close as shot of when he picked it.)

Chris then grabs *Tanaina Plantlore*, the flora and fauna book he had gotten from the library in Fairbanks. And it takes him out of the bus like a divining rod. His nose in the book, he follows it.

CUT TO:

255

EXT. BUS - DAY

255

Plant to plant. Bush to bush.

SPEAKING ALOUD the names of everything he sees as he identifies them with the book.

CHRIS

Beautiful blueberries - *Vaccinium uliginosum*. Eskimo potato - *Hedysarum alpinum*...etc.

We follow Chris over a number of days as he eats from these identified species of plant, each being logged, one by one by name on the bus diary/log.

CUT TO:

256 EXT. SUSHANA RIVER - DAY 256

With *Tanaina Plantlore* by his side, Chris digs into the soft earth on the berm of the river bank and digs up a wild potato root.

CUT TO:

257 INT. BUS - NIGHT 257

Chris pulls the seeds from the root, noshing on them as he reads from *Doctor Zhivago*.

We drift from him reading to the diary/log on the wall.

The day representing: July 24th

The diary/log: WILD POTATO ROOT

We drift back to Chris. Fatigue shows in his eyes as he puts the book down and lays down to sleep.

CUT TO:

258 EXT. BUS - MORNING (JULY 30 1992) 258

WIDE SHOT of the bus. It's a beautiful July morning. Birds chirp in the trees. A soft breeze sweeping down from the mountains massages the valley below.

We SLOWLY ZOOM into the bus.

CUT TO:

259 INT./EXT. BUS - SAME 259

The open bag of seeds beside Chris' sleeping body. We drift over to Chris' face, his lips de-hydrated, and skin parched. He breathes heavily. He awakens. He tries to sit up. It's a terrible struggle. Barely makes it to his feet.

Chris stumbles to the door of the bus, looking up at the hot sun. He has to sit back down on the small bus steps. From his position on the step, he leans back into the bus and is able to grab his water jug. He pours it into his mouth but nothing seems to satiate or hydrate him. He drinks it all. It spills over his face and chest.

We observe Chris for a moment as the wheels turn inside his haunted eyes. And a curiosity seems to overtake him. He crawls back to his copy of *Tanaina Plantlore*, flipping the pages one by one until he arrives at the photograph identifying the wild potato root and the word "edible" beside it. He reads the page to its conclusion and as almost an afterthought, turns the page to see if there might be more.

The word -

*POISON*

jumps off the page at him.

The book describes the tiny green seeds of the potato root and warns that those with:

*lateral veins, such as those invisible on the leaflets of wild sweet peas are poisonous.*

The words -

*...leading to partial motor paralysis...*

*...inhibition of digestion...*

*...nausea, starvation...*

*ECU: ...STARVATION*

CRASH ZOOM into Chris' face, realizing his desperate plight.

CUT TO:

260

EXT. BUS

260

Chris kneels, holding one of the potato seeds to the sunlight and there we see them -

the lateral veins that indicate poisonous seeds.

CUT TO:

261

INT. BUS

261

ANGLE: The diary/log: EXTREMELY WEAK. FAULT OF POTATO SEED.

CUT TO:

262 EXT. BUS - DAY 262

Chris, barely able to walk, moves, at the pace of an elderly man, with his rifle, through the underbrush. He needs food now.

CUT TO:

263 EXT. WOODS - DAY 263

He shoots a squirrel. But as he moves toward what he thinks is his kill, the squirrel makes off with a bleeding tail. Chris fires several desperate shots at the squirrel but misses with each one.

CUT TO:

264 INT. BUS - NIGHT 264

Chris, having a fitful sleep. Short breaths and mutterings.

CUT TO:

265 EXT. CLEARING AROUND BUS - NIGHT 265

A big moon shines above and we find on a tree branch, the squirrel Chris had clipped in the tail earlier in the day. On the last legs of bleeding to death, it falls from the tree.

The moon becomes the sun and we pass a couple of days through visions of the nature about in varying light.

CUT TO:

266 EXT. SUSHANA RIVER - DAY 266

Chris labors up the riverbank with his water jug full. He is shirtless and absolutely emaciated. Frightening. He pauses at the river's edge to take air into his lungs. It's all he can do just to breath.

WIDE ANGLE TABLEAU (CONTINUOUS): Chris standing at the river's edge catching his breath framed against the background of the 3000 foot butte that he'd so recently climbed with ease.

Now, maintaining this tableau, something moves from near CAMERA RIGHT into frame. Bit by bit we'll realize it's a LARGE BEAR ENTERING FRAME and moving away from camera toward Chris. It lumbers to within feet of him.

CU OVER BEAR onto Chris: Chris, passive to the bear's presence.

ANGLE: The bear, just as passive towards Chris, as though he didn't represent enough of anything to eat.

BACK TO TABLEAU as the bear, passing Chris, disappears over the rise toward the river. Chris, a motionless and slight silhouette.

CUT TO:

266A INT. BUS - NIGHT

266A

Chris lays on the floor. CU Chris: Orange light twinkles in his eyes. Chris' POV: through the bus window, we see the orange glow of smoke rising into the air. CU: Chris writes in his diary log.

CHRIS (V.O.)

Set small signal fire today - watched it die tonight.

Back to POV as the ambient orange light fades into the blackness of smoke.

CUT TO:

267 INT. BUS - DAY

267

The diary/log: DAY 100 - MADE IT. BUT IN WEAKEST CONDITION OF LIFE. TOO WEAK TO WALK OUT. HAVE LITERALLY BECOME TRAPPED IN THE WILD - NO GAME IN SIGHT.

A SUBTLE DRUM (HEART)BEAT BEGINS OVER:

Chris plops himself down into the middle of the bus. He shakes his head as if trying to say something, and then considers his rifle and abundant ammunition. But taking his own life to avoid the agony of starvation is not an option for him. "No, no, no, don't do this to me." The frustration builds enough adrenaline in him to scream out.

He does, but with a low, gurgled animal sound. He shakes it off and looks to his copy of *Doctor Zhivago* for distraction. Thumbing through the pages he focuses his eyes on the page -

ANGLE: The page: what he reads:

CHRIS (V.O.)(O.C.)  
*And that an unshared happiness is not  
 happiness...*

Chris steals his pencil from within the pages of the book, scribbling across the page:

CHRIS (V.O.)(O.C.)  
 (CONT'D)  
 HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED.

He flips backwards a couple of pages to where he had written the quote:

CHRIS (V.O.)(O.C.)  
 (CONT'D)  
 CALL EVERYTHING BY ITS RIGHT NAME.

He tears the back cover off the book and scratching the pencil across its blank side, writing these words quickly, as if in panic:

I HAVE HAD A HAPPY LIFE AND THANK THE LORD. GOODBYE AND  
 MAY GOD BLESS ALL!

And now, these words arrive slowly as we HEAR Chris repeating:

CHRIS (O.C.) (CONT'D)  
 (with a weak voice)  
 Call everything by its right name.

The drumbeat increases as he signs the note:

CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON MCCANDLESS.

We move from the page back up to Chris. We see that he has put on his eyeglasses to strengthen the vision of his weakening sight. He removes them, folds them, and lays them by his side. His body begins to tremble. His eyes dance wildly.

The drumming intensifies.

Chris takes one last look out the window. The sun is covered by a well-defined and puffy cloud.

His arm nearing spasm reaches up to the bunk, grasping at the blue sleeping bag made by his mother.

With great suffering and shattering trembles, he forces his body to defy its agony and pushes it into the sleeping bag.

SKYWARD, the cloud obscuring the sun.

Drumbeats ESCALATE - BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!  
We TIGHTEN on Chris' anguished face.

**(Director's note: These CU's on Chris' face, combine both static and hand-held CUs, upside down and right-side up moving, zooms, and push-ins. Straight, side, and dutch angles. Perhaps some intermittent distortion.)**

268

INT./EXT. BUS

268

\*

We INTERCUT between Chris and the sky in a dance transitioning to the next world. It is hopeful, anguished, sad, and elated.

269 INT./EXT. ANNANDALE HOUSE - DAY

269

Chris, approaching the Annandale house. His backpack on and body healthy.

Billie parts the curtains, ecstatic to see Chris approach, alive and healthy.

We SEE but do not hear her call to Walt.

A smiling Chris steps up the curb, approaching home.

Walt and Billie - we PUSH INTO them as they gleefully run out the front door to their returning son.

PUSH INTO Chris - he dispatches his backpack to the ground and runs toward his parents' embrace.

CHRIS (V.O.)

What if you saw me running into your arms...

Chris, Walt, and Billie on the cusp of a jubilant and loving embrace!

CHRIS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Would you see then...

The DRUMMING resumes with a BLAST OF BASS and before an embrace is possible...

CHRIS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...what I see now?

A SUDDEN CUT TO:

270 INT. BUS

270

TOTAL SILENCE

Chris looking at the sky, a cathartic tear falls from his left eye. Another from his right as the obscuring cloud clears the sun.

Chris: The LAST, AIRY EXPULSION OF HIS BREATH.

His open face as the clearing light of the sun shines in his eyes. It is a face of peace, love, a face of true, deep serenity.

The eyes joyously open and the corners of his mouth ease into the subtle smile of euphoric wisdom.

That's the way he settles to stillness, looking directly into our camera.

He made it. He lived. He loved. And he died *alive*.

Cat Stevens' *Miles from Nowhere* plays OVER:

As we PULL AWAY from Chris' face through the bus window and up into the sky -

We drift further and further away, above the stunted trees and the shimmering roof of the bus like a tiny white gleam in a wild green sea grows smaller and smaller.

REPRISE IMAGE of truck driver taking picture of Chris in scene #1.

Then it's him:

The smiling STILL IMAGE we saw taken in the first scene from behind, but now we are seeing it from the front and it is the image of the real Christopher McCandless on the edge of the Stampede Trail. As it takes over the screen, we ZOOM SLOWLY into his smiling face. And then, these words appear superimposed over it:

*Dedicated to the memory of Christopher Johnson McCandless  
February 12, 1968 - August 18th, 1992*

As those words dissolve, these words appear:

*On September 19, 1992, Carine McCandless flew with her brother's ashes from Alaska home to the eastern seaboard. She carried them with her on the plane...in her backpack.*

- THE END -