



THE YOUNG AND PRODIGIOUS SPIVET

Directed by

Jean-Pierre Jeunet

Based on the novel

The selected works of T.S. Spivet

By Reif Larsen



Tapioca films

T.S. SPIVET



Screenplay by
Jean Pierre Jeunet
Guillaume Laurant

Based on the novel by Reif Larsen

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Screenplay translation by Fred Cassidy

THE WEST

1 - EXT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH

We see a simple but magnificent ranch house reflected in water so still and glassy, it's hard to tell it's a mirror image.

The title of the film appears.

A horse enters frame and starts to drink out of the water. The reflected image blurs and disappears.

We discover that the drinking hole is actually a large truck tire filled with water.

We can now see the actual ranch. It is tucked away in a Montana valley, surrounded by yellow hills, pine trees and rust colored bushes.

Gracie (fourteen years old) and her younger brother TS Spivet (ten years old) sit on the porch steps, both very busy. Their dog Tapioca sleeps nearby.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

One afternoon in August, the phone rang while my sister Gracie and I were on the porch shucking sweet corn into large metal buckets.

Gracie is actually doing all the shucking while TS, wearing a magnification headpiece, is sketching in a blue notebook. He is meticulously creating a diagram which details the shucking process.

The only SOUND is that of the corn husks being ripped off.

Suddenly, Gracie gives TS an exasperated glare. TS interrupts his drawing, looks back at her.

They return to their tasks.

A CLOSE UP of the tin bucket shows that its surface is pocked with a multitude of little indentations.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The buckets were riddled with teeth marks dating back to last spring when our dog Tapioca got depressed and started eating metal.

A telephone suddenly rings inside the house. Both Gracie and TS stop in mid-movement.

2 - EXT. DAY - HISTORICAL MUSEUM

The title: "Two years earlier" appears.

3 - INT. DAY - HALL AND ROOM OF MUSEUM

We follow TS Spivet as he walks down a hall in the museum. We hear and audio commentary from a documentary soundtrack.

COMMENTARY (O.S.)

In the 1760's, clockmaker James Cox invented a pendulum that didn't need any rewinding. In fact, his ingenious mechanism drew its energy from a hidden source: variations in atmospheric pressure.

TS arrives in a lightly populated room where a film is being projected on a makeshift screen.

We see animated illustrations of amazing contraptions straight out of Da Vinci's brain. TS watches, in awe. One of these machines is spinning around TS.

COMMENTARY (CONT'D)

The utility of the worm drive has long been recognized. Robert Flux built a mill based on the concept of perpetual rotation...

However, the inherent friction of the machine caused a significant loss of energy...

The Italian philosopher Marco Zimara imagined a machine that could recycle the wind. But the force required to compress the bellows was greater than the energy produced by the windmill, so it never worked. Johann Ernest Elias Bessler, also known as Orffyreus, perfected a wheel in which five marbles traveled inside tubes, creating an imbalance. This rocking motion however caused the energy to dissipate.

An elderly gentleman with windblown hair and dressed in a white coat, appears on the screen.

In the back of the room, TS listens, captivated.

SCIENTIST

...simple inventions such as the bottle cap or the paper clip have certainly brought success and great fortune to their inventors, but no scientific challenge remains greater, more prestigious or more mythical than that of finding the key to perpetual motion.

Superimposed credits start rolling. The film projector turns off. The overhead fluorescent lights flicker back on. A Lecturer comes and stands behind a microphone. We recognize the scientist of the movie, white haired and a few years older.

SCIENTIST (CONT'D)

...Yet some affirm that this quest is doomed to fail, that such a machine defies the laws of the universe... the very basis of thermodynamics assumes that all mechanisms eventually come to a stop.

A nerdy-looking student raises his hand.

STUDENT (*overconfidently*)

Given the current state of science and technology, isn't the quest for perpetual motion better suited for idealists and poets than real scientists?

The lecturer smiles benevolently.

LECTURER

What if imagination started where science ended? Those who pushed the boundaries of science, were they not all poets...?

The young student frowns condescendingly and sits backdown.

LECTURER (CONT'D)

I'm certain that as we speak, somewhere in this country, a budding Leonardo da Vinci is gearing up for the challenge...

The man gathers his papers as the audience filters out of the room. TS walks up to the lecturer, stands before him.

TS SPIVET (*intimidated*)

Sir... I am... the Leonardo... from Montana... and...
(solemnly) I accept the challenge!

4 - EXT. DAY - MONTANA LANDSCAPE

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Our ranch was located several miles north of Divide, lost in the Pioneer Mountains.

A dead tree sways in the wind. Black cows graze on a yellow hill. An aerial view of the Big Hole river and its serpentine curves...

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The closest thing to traffic was when the Union Pacific freight trains rumbled through the valley at 5:44AM, 11:53AM or 5:15PM.

We descend and fly above a freight train snaking along.

5 - A MAP OF UNITED STATES APPEARS

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Divide was literally located on the continental divide. To the east, the water spilled into the Atlantic, to the west it spilled into the Pacific.

6 - EXT. DAY - ON A HILL

We move towards the entrance of an abandoned mine shaft.

TS' brother Layton is wearing a pirate's bandana on his head. He climbs up the rusted carcass of a gallows frame at the mouth of the mine.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

One day, my brother Layton and I decided to christen this border determined not by politics or by war, but by tectonics...

Standing below, TS (age 10) is getting ready to photograph his brother with a pinhole camera made out of an old shoe box.

Layton reaches the top of the gallows frame, opens a jar filled with water and tosses the liquid to the right.

LAYTON

Hello N'awlins!

TS takes off a cap used as a makeshift shutter.

LAYTON (CONT'D)

Hello Big Sur!!

Layton pompously tosses the liquid to the left... IN SLOW MOTION

7 - EXT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

But Layton's two favorite pastimes were shootin' at anything that moved...

The nose of a cat appears through a hole in the wall of an old shack... Layton aims his rifle at the car.

In the cross-hairs of the rifle we see the cat emerging carefully. The cross-hairs move from the head of the cat... down to a tin can tied to the cat's tail.

Layton shoots! The cat meows and runs off, dragging the pierced tin can that bounces on the ground.

8 - EXT. DAY - BY THE RIVER

TS SPIVET

And spittin' in empty tin cans...

Layton is standing on a little bridge over a river. He is holding plums in his hands and is chewing on one. He turns around...

TS, standing on the opposite parapet, drops the pierced tin can into the water. It disappears under the bridge, carried by the current of the stream.

LAYTON

Now!

Layton spits a pit that lands right in the can as it floats past.

9 - EXT. DAY - ON THE HILLS

An excited Layton sits down in an old radio-flyer style wagon. His name is engraved on the side. TS watches disapprovingly.

TS pushes the wagon, frightened. Layton careens down a steep hill, screaming in delight. The dog is running after them.

9B - ABSTRACTED INTERIOR

TS handles a Nunchaku with an uncanny virtuosity, then a whip chain, he finally does the splits.

TS SPIVET

I would've liked to have been a daredevil too. But I knew I'd never be up to it.

10 - EXT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Upon my brother's request, Father built us a seesaw.

The boys are seesawing on a wooden plank rigged to a log.

Layton rides the plank and waves his hat like a cowboy in a rodeo. Their father, a solid cowboy with a weathered face, watches the younger son with a benevolent gaze.

On the other hand, TS rides the seesaw without any sign of enjoyment...

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

My father loved Layton more than anything else in the world.

FATHER

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree...

FADE TO BLACK.

11 - EXT. DAY - BACK AT THE COPPERTOP RANCH / PORCH

We return to Gracie and TS shucking corn, just like at the very beginning. A phone rings and they stop what they are doing.

A few more rings, followed by silence.

Gracie begins shucking again, at the same pace as before.

TS SPIVET

Gracie? What does the sound of shucking corn remind you of?

GRACIE

...of the sound of shucking corn.

TS SPIVET

It reminds me of the silk pants I wore at your oboe recital.

TS grabs an ear of corn and tears off a leaf.

Dr Clair, a woman in her early forties, steps out onto the porch. She's TS and Gracie's mother - both beautiful and odd looking, a rather alluring mix.

In one hand, she wields a pin with large scarab beetle at the end of it. Under the other arm, she holds a large dictionary.

DR CLAIR (*to TS, handing him the scarab*)

Here, hold this for a second.

TS stops drawing, grabs the pin while his mother quickly leafs through her taxonomic dictionary.

DR CLAIR (CONT'D) (*to herself*)

Look... just what I predicted... This cincidela purpurea lauta is none other than a subspecies of the Oregon cincidela...

GRACIE

Who was it that called?

DR CLAIR (*delicately taking the insect back*)

...at the same time, it has a hair at the tip of the mandible... and doesn't seem to have the white spot under the elytrons... Hmmm....

GRACIE

Mom... the phone. Who was it?

DR CLAIR

A call for TS.

GRACIE (*shocked*)

A call... for him?

DR CLAIR

Yes Gracie.

TS SPIVET

Who was it?

Dr Clair squints to better examine the feathery beard behind the creature's mandibles.

DR CLAIR

I don't know... She's still on the line. She's waiting... you should probably go.

TS carefully removes his frontal magnifying glass, closes the blue notebook and places the pencil on top, diagonally.

TS SPIVET (to Gracie)

If ever you finish before I get back, you have to count the number of good ears and the number of bad ones.

GRACIE (incredulous)

And how 'bout the number of kernels while we're are at it...

TS sees his mother putting his magnification headpiece on. He almost says something to her, but instead decides to step into the house.

12 - INT. DAY - CORRIDOR AND STAIRCASE IN THE RANCH

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

I had three options to get to the telephone: the Corridor-kitchen Route, the quickest but also the most boring.

View of the corridor leading to the kitchen.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

The Upstairs/Downstairs Route that gave me the most exercise, but the shift in altitude made me nauseous.

TS climbs the outside stairs, wearing a woolly hat and ski poles. He returns inside and slides down the banister.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I opted for the third and riskiest - particularly when Father was lurking around the house.

TS cautiously opens the door to a dark sitting room.

13 - INT. DAY - FATHER'S SETT'NG ROOM

It is dark as he steps in Father's sett'ng room. He turns the light on.

It is a veritable museum steeped in the nostalgia of the Old West.

He walks past movie posters like "Red River", "Stagecoach" and "The Searchers", a whole collection of horseshoes in a row, a gleaming saddle glistens in the light...

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

The Sett'ng Room smelled like whiskey-stained leather and moldy photographs.

He passes a shrine dedicated to Billy the Kid, replete with snake skins, rusty spurs and an old Colt 45.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

If you just closed your eyes, you could feel the dust falling onto a prairie after a cowboy posse galloped through...

TS exits the sett'ng room-museum, turns the light off and carefully closes the door.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Layton used to think the sett'ng room was the greatest thing since grilled cheese.

In the dark, an image of Layton's face briefly appears, as if on an old, scratched film print.

14 - INT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH KITCHEN, ALTERNATING WITH...

TS makes his way into the kitchen and grabs the phone receiver that is sitting on the stove. It is tethered to an overly-long spiral cord which hangs coiled up on a hook.

TS SPIVET

Hello?

A perplexing silence on the other side of the line.

JIBSEN

Hello, I would like to speak to T.S. Spivet. This is Miss Jibsen under-secretary of the Smithsonian.

TS SPIVET (*stunned*)

Hold on...

Overcome with panic, he improvises.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D) (*speaking away from the phone*)

Father! ... Phone!

He holds the phone close to his feet, imitates the sound of an adult approaching.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

Father... It's Miss Jibsen, from the Smithsonian.

(*to Jibsen*) He is all ears Miss Jibsen.

15 - INT. DAY ... JIBSEN'S SMITHSONIAN OFFICE

Miss Jibsen is in her fifties. She is wearing round glasses and a bun. Her office is decorated with small mechanical and electronic robots.

JIBSEN

Hello, Mr. Spivet?

TS SPIVET

Yes, my dad is listening...

JIBSEN

Could you hand him the phone?

TS SPIVET

No... My father is mute, Miss Jibsen. He can hear you but can only respond in sign language... I'll translate everything for you.

JIBSEN (*sensing the awkwardness of the situation*)

You are the TS Spivet who just invented the magnetic wheel?

TS SPIVET

One second... Father is saying...

(*TS moves his hands in sign language*)

Yes... well, I only sent you... the blueprints... because I didn't have the time to build it...

JIBSEN (*enthusiastic*)

The quest for perpetual movement! The holy grail of inventors!

TS SPIVET

Father says: (*signing*)... Perpetual, is not quite the right term... I'll have to... recharge the magnets every 400 years... That is, someone else will...

JIBSEN

Tell me Mr. Spivet... I take it you live in Montana?

TS SPIVET (*forgetting to translate*)

Longitude 112 degrees, 44 minutes, 19 seconds, latitude 45 degrees, 49 minutes, 45 seconds. Those are the coordinates to my bedroom.

JIBSEN

Clearly an eye for detail, a requisite for any great inventor.

TS SPIVET

Father is asking... So, you are... the head of the Smithsonian?

JIBSEN (*with pride*)

Technically, I am the under-secretary... but many would say I run the place...

TS SPIVET

Wow.

JIBSEN

Look, Mr. Spivet, I'll come out and say it: you're invention won our prestigious Baird Award!

TS SPIVET

The Spencer Baird award!?

JIBSEN

Indeed. Your invention will have ramifications beyond your imagination!

TS is speechless. The phone cord unwraps around his forearm and falls onto the kitchen floor.

JIBSEN (CONT'D)

You should probably join us here at the Smithsonian as soon as possible. Our 150th anniversary Gala is in one week, it would be the perfect occasion for you to make your acceptance speech... We would of course provide you with a sign language interpreter...

TS SPIVET

But, I'll be in class. I'm back at school on Monday...

JIBSEN

You must teach at the University of Montana. A quick phone call to your President Jack Campbell and it'll be taken care of. After all, we're talking about the Baird Award!

FREEZE FRAME

16 - EXT. DAY - T - JUNCTION - SPLITTING INTO A MOUNTAIN ROAD & A PRAIRIE ROAD

TS is now standing in the middle of a T-junction in the road. Before him, the road splits into two different directions.

One sign reads "Prairie of Truth".

The other reads "Mountain of Lies".

Layton suddenly appears, in cowboy garb. He sits on a fence, recessed a bit. He points to the 'mountain road' with his chin and spits on the ground.

TS looks at him, flabbergasted.

17 - INT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / KITCHEN

The IMAGE returns to normal. We are back in the kitchen.

JIBSEN (V.O.)
Hello? ... Hello?

TS SPIVET (*grabbing the receiver, in the trash can voice*)
...I'm still here Miss Jibsen... I was just thinking... I can't come out to receive the award... I have too much work to finish. Thanks anyway, have a good day.

TS hangs up.

18 - EXT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / PORCH

Gracie is listening to music on headphones. There is an unpleasant crushing noise in the background.

Camera reveals a vibrating metallic vegetable grinder.

The buckets, filled with ears of corn, are still on the steps. The chore is finished. The husks, however, have been disposed of.

TS runs back onto the porch.

TS SPIVET
How many bad ones did you count?

Gracie disregards the question with a detached air, still nodding her head to the music.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D) (*anxious*)
What did you do to them?

She points to the vegetable grinder. TS turns pale with anger.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)
But... You're going to mess up my data set...

GRACIE
You were on the phone like for fifteen hours. Who was it anyway?

TS hesitates between cautiousness and the irresistible desire to impress his sister.

TS SPIVET
Oh, a journalist from...uh New York... wants me to go there for an interview about my work.

Gracie's stares at him, dumbfounded.

19 - INT. DAY - INSIDE GRACIE'S CORTEX

The inside of Gracie's brain looks like a board meeting where all the members are her doppelgangers. The first Gracie puts forth her argument, vehemently.

GRACIE#1

Just laugh in his face - it's the only way to deal with this... Clearly he's making it up...

In the background, on the giant screen is the image of TS on the porch, in SLOW MOTION.

GRACIE#2

And what if it were true?

GRACIE#3

You mean this total spaz would be leaving Montana before us?

GRACIE#4

Yes and so what if he becomes famous? Would it be so bad to be a celebrity's sister...

GRACIE#1

This dork, invited to New York? What the...

20 - EXT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / PORCH

Back on the porch, Gracie is still staring at TS, stunned.

GRACIE

... to New York? for an interview... you're full of crap.

TS SPIVET

I told him it was bad timing cause classes start again on Monday... But he was insistent.

Gracie walks away, talking aloud.

GRACIE

What? What did I do to God for him to hate me? It's like, here Gracie, I found you a family of nutjobs. Oh yeah, and you have to live in nowhereville Montana. And by the way, your brother, who's a total spaz, is going to New York...!

TS SPIVET

I told you, I'm not going on account of school.

GRACIE (*not listening*)

...Newsflash Gracie. New Yorkers loves spazzes, it's kinda the new trend.

Gracie, furious, steps out of frame.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Too late. Gracie had already entered a deep state of ADP - Anti Dork Protection. Any chance she got, she'd wallow in the role of the misunderstood actress...

21 - INT. EVENING - AMATEUR THEATER STAGE

Gracie is on stage wearing flare pants and an afro wig, surrounded by her classmates in hippie

costumes. She is gesticulating, taking herself very seriously.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

She landed the lead in a retro anti-establishment theater piece.

In the front row, sits TS' family. Dr Clair is deeply moved. Layton watches, beaming. The father fiddles uncomfortably with his hat.

22 - INT. EVENING - TS' S BEDROOM

TS is busy drawing.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

But that night, I was busy working on a challenge set by Discover Magazine: how to drop an egg from the top of the Empire State building without breaking it.

He puts the finishing touches on a pen and ink drawing of a parachute with rotors. A little harness cradles an egg in it.

23 - EXT. EVENING - COPPERTOP RANCH / PORCH

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

In order to finish my project and get out of seeing Gracie's play... I had to enlist Tapioca to the rescue.

TS forces his dog Tapioca to eat sage, small bones and grape jelly. He then closes the pet's mouth with both hands, helping him chew.

Moments later TS holds the dog as it vomits on the porch.

Moments later, his mother and sister arrive on the porch and notice with disgust TS kneeling in front of the vomit, feigning that it is his own.

24 - INT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / KITCHEN

FLASH BACK:

The entire family (including Layton) sits quietly at the kitchen table for grace. Father mumbles something unintelligible in three seconds flat.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

One night, in her "Bette Davis" phase, Gracie launched into a heated diatribe about Father's museum-sett'ng room.

DR CLAIR

Gracie, just because I have mirror-lights in my office doesn't mean it's a place to leave your make-up kit. Every room in this house has its function and purpose, is that conceivable to you?

GRACIE

In that case, is it conceivable that father's cowboy mausoleum or rather, museum, could be turned into a normal living room where normal people can relax and have normal conversations!?!

Layton, TS and Dr Clair all turn to look at the Father, expecting the worst.

Nothing happens.

He sits perfectly still behind his pile of mashed potatoes. We hear a small cracking sound. His whiskey

glass has just shattered in his grip. A trail of blood begins to flow from his hand onto the potatoes.

They all watch, stunned. Except for Layton who finds this amusing.

25 - EXT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / CORRAL

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

My father, Tecumesh Elijah Spivet, was born a hundred years too late.
He had the soul, stature and mind-set of a cowboy.

Father is in a corral breaking-in young mustang horses.

26 - INT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / KITCHEN

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

For him, talking was a necessary chore like shoeing a horse.

We follow the overly long telephone cord as it snakes down the hallway, out the kitchen window, into the grass, and through the window of an abandoned trailer.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Cell phone reception was nowhere to be found at Coppertop Ranch
and Father refused to install a telephone in Gracie's room.

GRACIE (V.O.)

...This year it's Miss Cow-feed versus Miss Porcine-nutritional-additives!
Did you see how she walks? She's a hippopotamus on ice skates!...
And the other one's cheeks are so hamsterish, did you hear her voice?
She probably gargles with bleach... and her body type...!

...Inside the trailer, Gracie sits in an old rocking chair, rocking back and forth. She is talking on the phone.

GRACIE

Did you get a load of the Miss Montana finalists? It's no wonder that in
the history of Miss America pageants, never has Miss Montana ever
won. And this is like the worst selection ever. It's bribery I tell you! The
sponsors are all big agro-businesses and these girls must be the
CEO's daughters!

27 - INT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / KITCHEN

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

When he spoke to you, his eyes were always set on the horizon, never
on you.

Father is looking out the kitchen window.

FATHER

Layton, now would Jes's leave his unders on the kitchen floor? I reckon
not. Get rid of 'em fore I whup yer behind.

Layton turns to TS seated beside him. TS is staring up at the ceiling, playing dumb. Layton turns and
sees...

...on the refrigerator door, his 'unders' hanging, fixed by two magnets.

28 - INT. DAY - FATHER'S SETT'NG ROOM

CLOSE UP of two fingers breaking off a square of a chocolate bar.
Father's hand sticks the piece of chocolate between his toes.
Tapioca comes and licks it.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Every night in his sett'ng room, Father took off his boots and raised a glass of whiskey up to his lips, precisely every forty five seconds.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Then he would mutter some cryptic statement, without any further clarification.

FATHER (*muttering*)

Ya' cant get horse shit from a cricket...

29 - INT. DAY - DR CLAIR'S STUDY

Dr Clair is in her study, pinning an insect into a wooden box already filled with a multitude of specimens.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Crickets and insects were my mother's specialty. She spent most of her adult life studying tiny creatures with a magnifying glass, then classifying them into species and sub-species.

TS appears into the doorway. His mother is taking notes, consulting a large reference book.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

But what if it doesn't exist?

Dr Clair looks at him, perplexed. TS enters the room and passes behind his mother.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

I mean, for a year now you've stopped everything to prove that tiger monk cincinnelas exist... when for all we know they-

DR CLAIR (*still looking in front of her*)

Stopped everything? You mean... in a maternal sense or a scientific one?

TS is thrown off by the directness of her question.

DR CLAIR (CONT'D) (*to herself*)

One year... already.

(*to TS*) What is it you want me to start doing again, that I've stopped doing?

TS meticulously starts to place insects back in their wooden box.

TS SPIVET

I dunno. Your research on the parasitic scolyte caterpillar maybe? Your findings could have saved all the pine trees in Montana... every other scientific attempt had failed.

DR CLAIR

Failed? Perhaps from the ecologists' point of view, yes. But from the caterpillar's point of view, looks like a win-win situation. Furthermore, I never liked pine trees. So drippy and sticky. Good riddance.

30 - EXT. COPPERTOP RANCH YARD AND CORRAL

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

How my parents ever fell for each other is a mystery. They were like day and night.

SPLIT SCREEN:

On the left side, Father lassoes a calf. On the right one, dozens of butterflies twirl around in the night behind a back lit tight bed sheet.

Father sits on the calf to hold it down and brands the animal. While on the right, holding a butterfly net, Dr Clair suddenly appears from behind the sheet. She is waving her tool around.

31 - EXT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / PORCH

CLOSE UP through a microscope. We see an enlarged image of a mite.

FLASHBACK:

At the table on the porch, TS (younger) adjusts the focus on his microscope. He adds details to a sketch he is working on.

Father and Layton are seated on the porch steps, fastening a noose on a lasso.

Seated by TS, Dr Clair peers into the microscope and examines his diagram for accuracy.

DR CLAIR

Well done my boy. But watch the opisthosoma, it looks a fraction too large.

Father is fastening a noose on a lasso, he listens, wryly.

DR CLAIR (CONT'D) (to TS)

Beware of mediocrity, it is a fungus of the mind. We must constantly fight against it or it will creep into everything we do.

TS SPIVET

Darn, the mite got away!

Father turns around and hands a tiny thread from the rope he made a noose with.

FATHER

Here, I made a lasso to catch'em.

DR CLAIR (raising her voice)

A fool, by definition, is one who turns what's beyond his mental grasp into one big joke!

Layton (younger) laughs his head off.

32 - INT. DAY - HALLWAY IN HOUSE

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

And then, a few days later in the bend of the hallway, their hands brushed against each other... as if they were secretly exchanging a few seeds...

Father and Dr Clair walk past each other in the hallway.

33 - INT. EVENING - COPPERTOP RANCH / KITCHEN

The Spivet family, including Layton, is seated at the dinner table.

Dr Clair is toasting bread, making cheese sandwiches. As she cuts slices from a large block of cheddar, the toaster starts emitting serious billows of smoke. Dr Clair panics, and hits the toaster. It's getting worse... She throws water on the toaster and it blows up! She pulls the plug from the socket.

In the background, they all look at each other and grimace.

Dr Clair picks up what remains of the toaster and brings it to a shelf... where there is a collection of four other burned-out toasters - each sporting a tag describing the date and nature of their demise.

Moments later...

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

And then there was Layton, my dizygotic twin. That's when two sperm cells fertilize two separate eggs. To each his own embryo, to each his own lucky star. Layton got the height and I got the neurons.

The boy looks preoccupied.

LAYTON

Mom... have you ever gotten AIDS?

Mother looks up, surprised.

LAYTON (CONT'D)

Angela Ashworth said that AIDS are bad and that I probably have'em.

DR CLAIR

Next time, you tell her that just because she's insecure about being a little girl in a society that puts an inordinate pressure on women to live up to a certain physical, emotional and ideological standard, it doesn't mean she has to take her misplaced self-loathing out on a nice boy like you. You may be an inherent part of the problem, but that certainly doesn't mean you have AIDS.

LAYTON

I'm not sure I can remember all that.

34 - EXT. DAY - OLD BARN

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

But Layton died this past February during an accident with a gun in the barn. No one ever talked about it. I was there too, measuring gun shots. I don't know what went wrong.

A SOUND of a gunshot echoes.

35 - INT. DAY - TS' BEDROOM

We see TS in his bedroom, from behind. He is pouring over a sketch.

His bedroom shelves are filled with notebooks organized by different colors and subjects: "Maps of People Doing Things", "Zoological Diagrams."

Nearby, sits an old telescope and the skeleton of a young bird.

Pinned to the wall are incredibly sophisticated and detailed illustrations: "Washington DC sewer system circa 1959," "Hypothetical Projections of the US coastline in three hundred years."

On a wood panel, instruments hang on hooks: a compass, protractor, sextant..etc Each instrument is outlined in marker onto the wood - like in a mechanic's shop.

On the other side of the room, is a range of scale models of 'perpetual motion' machines made from an assortment of bric-a-brac. We recognize some of the inventions from the documentary film shown earlier.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

In the Spivet family, between a son who was ahead for his age, a father who was a hundred years late, a sister who dreamt of red carpets and a mother who searched for the entomological equivalent of the unicorn - we were far from anything you'd call "typical." Come to think of it, the only "normal" one was Layton...

36 - EXT. DAY - CABIN

Layton's little wagon sits there, abandoned, by the entrance of an old cabin.

37 - INT. DAY - BUTTE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

The seventh grade science teacher Mr Stenpock is handing back student reports. He has a paunch and a receding hairline. He sports a tweed jacket and "hip" bifocals.

STENPOCK

Daisy, B+... solid work, excellent illustrations of the lake formation process...

TS sits among the student. He stands out from the other kids on account of his dated and ill-matching clothes. He's even fashioned elbow covers out of shiny brown tape.

Teacher Stenpock grabs an inordinately thick report. He snickers ever so slightly knowing that it belongs to TS.

STENPOCK (CONT'D)

TS... C+. The report shows undeniable qualities but as usual, is way off subject. What does the formation of lakes in Montana have anything to do with the East/West migratory path of Canadian geese..?

Other students giggle.

TS SPIVET

I'm not sure if you read the introduction, but in it I laid out a comparative analysis of-

Stenpock suddenly turns toward TS.

STENPOCK

You think you're smarter than everyone else, don't you? As for your diagram, its very pretty but scientifically erroneous.

TS SPIVET (*pulling out a magazine from his satchel*)

Really? As a matter of fact, I sent it to "Discover" magazine and they liked it enough to publish it.

TS hands the publication to the teacher. Stenpock, shocked, grabs it violently and slowly bends over the boy.

STENPOCK

Don't play games with me TS... You're out of your league.

TS SPIVET

And what about the magnetic wheel, you didn't mention anything about that?

STENPOCK

I don't give a rat's ass about the magnetic wheel!

Dead silence falls over the class. TS, stares out, blinking nervously.

TS SPIVET (*bursting with confidence*)

Mr Stenpock, how can a man like you, supposedly devoted to opening our minds with scientific curiosity... how can you be so aggressively narrow minded?

Stenpock lowers his eyes.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

If every scientist were like you there'd be no penicillin, no relativity, no sewage drains... there wouldn't even be chocolate chip cookies.

Stenpock stares at TS with contempt. The boy lowers his eyes.

STENPOCK

A superiority complex. That's what you have TS... your talents in scientific observation would be put to better use in picking your socks in the morning!

The other students notice that TS' socks don't match. They burst into laughter.

38 - EXT. DAY - OUTSIDE SCHOOL

TS walks out of his school. He is about to climb into the school bus when, to his surprise, he notices Father's pick-up truck pull up.

FATHER (*in the driver's seat*)

Want to lend me a hand fer a second?

TS stops. Then approaches his father's truck.

TS SPIVET (*trying to talk like Father*)

What'cha need?

FATHER

Shovel out the crick. It's dryer then a mummy's pocket. But we'll get her to spit up all she's got 'fore sunset.

TS climbs into the pick-up, struggles with the door. Its moaning hinge resists his efforts to close it.

A cluster of wires sticks out of the radio, a horseshoe hangs from the rearview mirror. Everywhere, there is dust.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

To know that my father had to resort to asking for help from me, his only remaining son, the one who was useless on the ranch, filled me with sadness.

39 - EXT. DAY - DOWN THE VALLEY

The truck makes its way into the fields. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a horizontal light on the tall waiving grass.

TS is pensively looking out the window.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Layton should have been here, not me. One day he shot a coyote with his Winchester from 200 yards. Father was so impressed he took off his hat and slapped it on my brother's head. It was a special moment I knew would never happen to me.

An uncomfortable silence fills the space between the father and son. The pick-up truck bounces along the fence line and TS vigorously tries to hold on to the door handle so as to avoid hitting his head on the ceiling. His father, in a cowboy hat, drives stoically, upright, unperturbed.

FATHER (to himself)

She was still runnin' a bit last week. Snow pack still got some juice. It's like the crick is teasing me.

The truck makes its way toward the mountain.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

A couple months before Layton died, I built a scale model depicting the hydrology of our valley. You could see the various water tables, drainage trends, soil composition and seepage capacity.

40 - INT. EVENING - FATHER'S SETT'NG ROOM

FLASH BACK:

TS clumsily steps into his father's study carrying his large hydrology model. A hard rain falls on the windows. His father is seated on the couch watching an old western movie on television.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

I didn't mind helping dig out a creek but I thought that my research would be more useful to my father, given that my brain was much more developed than my muscles.

TS sets the model on the floor.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

You want to give her a look?

With a deep sigh, the father eases off the couch and slowly makes his way over. He glances down at the model.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

What d'you think? Because I say we should actually build a culvert to Crazy Swede road and...

TS grabs a glass of water and pours it onto the model. The water follows a specific drainage trajectory.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

See, if you dig a tunnel from here to here, the water is channeled to there. The laws of fluid mechanics make it unstoppable... that way you increase the flow of water that otherwise was stagnating and evaporating in that sector!... then you can estimate the-

FATHER

As far as I see, the stuff's piss in a can. Open your eyes and you'd see that.

He returns to his couch. His cowboy hat rests on the seat cushion next to him, as if it were keeping someone's place.

TS cries silently, turning his head to hide the tears.

He grabs his model and diagrams and makes his way to the door. Water drips onto the floor.

Father rubs his thumb on the rim of his whiskey glass, producing a tiny high-pitched sound. TS stops cold in his tracks and turns his head toward Father.

Feeling his son's stare, Father doesn't budge his eyes from the television set.

TS leaves the room.

41 - EXT. DAY - FIELDS

The pick-up truck pulls up to a wire fence. A black ram is stuck in the fence's barbed wire. Father pulls on the handbrake.

FATHER

Them ignor'nt sheeps!

TS SPIVET

I got'im.

FATHER

You're right. I 'd probably kill that critter anyway. Sonfabitch deserves to be ca-yotee chow.

TS walks up to the ram. Behind it, a flock of white ewes grazes on a hill.

TS approaches the black ram, it is standing still. The barbed wire is caught around its neck and blood drips down.

TS looks back toward the pick-up truck. Father is nowhere to be seen.

TS SPIVET (to the ram)

S'all right Pinky. Not gonna hurt you.

The ram breathes hard and heaves. Its pupils stare straight TS. The boy lies down on the ground, attempts to dislodge the animal without hurting it.

Suddenly the ram freezes. We hear a distinct rattling sound. TS follows the animal's gaze down to... a giant rattlesnake. Its head is up and swaying, its eyes aiming straight at TS.

The snake lunges and TS squeezes his eyes shut.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

My odds of survival were zero to negative infinity. But maybe dying on a ranch from a snakebite was more fitting than a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head by an old rifle in the cold barn.

SOUND of a gunshot. TS opens his eyes. The snake is headless and lifeless. Its body slowly coils up and then ceases to move.

TS is frozen still.

FATHER

You fixin' to kiss that poison rope?

Father walks toward TS, holding the rifle. He grabs TS by the arm and pulls him up. Misty-eyed, Father hits TS on the back, hard.

Father walks up to the goat and kicks him square in the head. The animal is ripped out of the barbed wire and rolls away. It then gets up then gallops up the hill.

FATHER (CONT'D) *(emptying the shells from the rifle)*

Damn ignor'nt sheeps. Come on, we got our business. Day's leaving.

They climb back into the pick-up and the engine coughs to a start.

42 - EXT. EVENING - IN THE FIELDS

They drive off under stormy sky. A multitude of bats are flying around erratically.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

That was the first time my father ever patted me on the back... but I couldn't tell if was to brush me off, to reprimand me or to substitute for a hug.

I would go to Washington DC tomorrow. I was a researcher, a scientist and they needed me there.

In the sky, a large number of bats engage in a frenetic aerial ballet, emitting their tiny ultra-sounds.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

If I stayed here, I'd end up turning round in circles like these bats. I'd only be the echo of myself.

43 - EXT. EVENING - COPPERTOP RANCH

The pick-up truck arrives at the ranch. Rain drops fall on the dusty windshield.

TS rushes out of the truck to help his mother and Gracie who are quickly gathering the laundry from the clothing line.

The rain starts to fall, hard. Dr Clair, Gracie and TS run to the barn carrying laundry baskets. In the shed, Father puts his tools away.

44 - INT. EVENING - COPPERTOP BARN

The sound of rain drums on the barn roof. TS hangs his mismatched socks on the edge of a horse feeder. He then starts to meticulously group them into matching pairs. In the background, Gracie and her mother are shaking a bed sheet.

TS SPIVET

What is for supper tonight?

DR CLAIR
Pureed corn.

Gracie rolls her eyes. She folds the sheet in two.

GRACIE (*trying to get TS' attention*)
Hello!?! TS? Can you take over my dish-washing duties tonight? I'll make it up to you. Tonight's the Miss USA pageant and I don't want to miss the opening...

TS SPIVET
You already owe me four.

Gracie smiles, taking his answer as a 'yes.'

DR CLAIR (*to Gracie*)
Miss USA?.. And these women are picked for their talents in what. Painting?.. Or yoga or karate perhaps?

Dr Clair and Gracie fold the corners of large sheet over and over, moving close and apart as if in a choreography.

GRACIE
No. Miss America's the one that has a talent section. Miss USA is a beauty contest and it's way better.

DR CLAIR
Well it's a mistake to not take in consideration these girls' intellectual aptitudes...

Gracie loses her temper, shakes the sheet furiously, and moves closer to her mother to grab the four corners of the sheet.

GRACIE
Mom! Its a beauty contest! It's Miss USA!... Or else it'd be called Miss High-IQ and no one would watch it because it would be boring - like my life!

TS grins as he folds pairs of socks into balls, lining them up methodically.

DR CLAIR
I'm sorry, but... if you, Gracie, were to enter this kind of contest it would be a shame not to showcase your talents as an actress. And as a singer, you have a pretty voice. And you play the oboe...

45 - INT. EVENING - KITCHEN COPPERTOP RANCH

The family is gathered around the table.
Sounds of forks on the plates and rain against the windows. Otherwise, complete silence.

Father cleans off his plate with a piece of bread till it shines.

Dr Clair breaks the silence.

DR CLAIR (CONT'D) (*to no one in particular*)
I have to go to Kalispell tomorrow to collect specimens. I'll be there several days. I've prepared all your meals, you'll just have to reheat them.

Father acquiesces with an imperceptible nod. He then stands and leaves the kitchen without so much as a word. TS stops, fork in mid-air, troubled.

Dr Clair turns to TS.

DR CLAIR (CONT'D)

I thought about what you told me the other day TS... about what I used to do, that I've stopped doing... and I was thinking-

TS looks at her, holding his breath as Gracie noisily grabs her plate and tosses it into the sink.

DR CLAIR (CONT'D) (to TS)

Do you want to come with me to Kalispell? It would be great to have your help.

He remains silent.

Gracie is about to leave the kitchen but turns abruptly and plants herself in front of her mother.

GRACIE (talking down to her)

Mom. I know it's hard for you to listen to me, but I want you to try: I like Miss USA. The women are not smart, not intellectual. They are dumb and beautiful and I love them. It is entertainment. EN-TER-TAIN-MENT!

Gracie storms out of the kitchen.

TS and Dr Clair are the last two seated at the table.

DR CLAIR

Did you think about what I asked you?

TS SPIVET

Sorry. I can't come with you tomorrow... I have... to... finish a project for Mr. Stenpock...

Dr Clair gets up and moves to the sink to hide her sadness and disappointment.

DR CLAIR

Next time, I'll try to give you more notice...

She exits the kitchen.

TS stays alone at the table. All of a sudden Tapioca appears from underneath the table, puts two paws on the edge and licks TS' plate.

46 - INT. EVENING - COPPERTOP RANCH / KITCHEN

TS finishes cleaning the dishes, wipes his hands dry and takes a deep breath to gather his courage.

He gets to the phone up and dials.

TS SPIVET (He couldn't help but act out the sign language with his hand)

...hello?... The Smithsonian? I'd like to speak to undersecretary G.H. Jibsen?... Oh... Well, in that case give me her voice mail...

(a moment passes) Um.. Yes! This is TS Spivet, the one from Montana. I invented the magnetic wheel... Anyway, I've managed to rearrange my schedule... so I'll be leaving for Washington DC first thing tomorrow... I will not be reachable... but I'll be there just in time to accept the Baird Award and make a speech and all... Good night!... I mean, good morning since you'll get this message in the morning and... uh...

He quickly hangs up and folds over, head down, riddled with anxiety and stress. He doesn't notice Gracie who walks across the kitchen, straight to the cookie jar.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D) (*jumping up and down in place*)
That was tt-ee-rr-ii-bb-ll-ee. TERRIBLE!

He stops cold when he notices Gracie staring at him gravely.

GRACIE
TS, from now on... could you at least pretend to be normal?

47 - INT. NIGHT - TS' BEDROOM

TS is sitting on the edge of his bed, staring into space, seemingly panicked.

A drop of sweat runs down his forehead.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)
I was terrified at the thought having to pack my suitcase. Even packing for school every day took me at the very least 23 minutes. OK maybe 22 minutes.

A TITLE appears behind him: THE FOUR STEPS OF PACKING

1- Visualization

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Play and replay the scenario of the trip in my head.

TS closes his eyes and concentrates. Smoke seems to emanate from out of his head.

2 - Inventory

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Put all the necessary devices and arrange them in order of importance.

Objects are laid out in rows on his table. TS changes two of them, freaking out.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

- eight pairs of underwear
- two sextants
- three burgundy sweaters
- four compasses
- only one telescope
- one thermometer, one barometer, one hydrometer
- one frontal headlamp, officially known as Tom
- five blank red notebooks and five blank purple notebooks
- two magnification glasses
- binoculars
- one tape measure
- and my set of Gillot pens
- twelve handkerchiefs
- three granola bars
- two apples
- one box of raisin
- twelve carrot sticks

TS crunches into a carrot.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...eleven.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

- a self-defense handbook
- my sparrow skeleton
- a water bottle
- One toothbrush and toothpaste
- my leatherman

TS SPIVET (CONT. D)

Pack everything and finally add my teddy bear "Big Jojo".

3 - The Great Doubt

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Avoid thinking about a scenario for which I would need a seismoscope.
Where a woodpecker would be soundscaping a tree..

4 - Assemblage

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Pack, Unpack. Re-pack.

TS fills the suitcase up with his objects until he disappears behind them.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

At four o'clock in the morning I was done with my final inventory.

He scotch tapes the list on the inside of his suitcase.

TS kneels on his suitcase to try to close it.

He cringes when he hears several creaking noises inside. Finally he gently pushes one of the latches.

48 - INT. NIGHT - HALLWAY AND STAIRS

TS drags his suitcase in the stairs trying to muffle the ka-thunka ka-thunk of his luggage on the stairs.

He reaches the second floor. He looks down the hall, toward the last doorway. The bedroom door is ajar.

He leaves his suitcase behind walks towards it.

49 - INT. NIGHT - LAYTON'S BEDROOM

TS pushes the door open and slowly steps into Layton's bedroom. He switches on the light and glances around.

It looks like everything has been left untouched. The bed is still undone. A sled is propped up against the wall. We see: spurs, a belt with bullets hanging on the wall, rodeo posters, a pony saddle, little figurines of Indians, a computer covered with clothing, a dart board set, a hat with a fox tail - everything sits still in a suspended state of chaos.

In the center of the room is a rocking horse. It too is perfectly still.

Suddenly from TS' point of view, Layton's ghost appears, sitting on the rocking horse. The boy practices his lasso throwing technique.

The room finds its former stillness again.

TS SPIVET

Goodbye Layton. I'm going away for a while. To Washington DC. I'll bring you back a souvenir.

Silence. Stillness.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

It's looking a little sad up here.

The rocking horse stares back blankly.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

I'm sorry for what I did.

He switches off the light, walks out and closes the door.

50 - INT. NIGHT - DR CLAIR'S OFFICE

TS opens the door, switches on the light and walks up to his mother's desk. He grabs a pen and paper and starts writing a note.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Dear Spivet family, I have gone for a while to do some work. Don't worry. I'll be fine. I didn't want to bother you by telling you about it ahead of time. Thank you for taking care of me. You are one of the best families in the world. Love, TS

TS takes a pin with an insect on it and uses it to tack his letter on a board.

Beside the pin board is a small shelf with a pile of notebooks on it. The letters 'TS' are written on the spine of one of them. The boy grabs it.

He looks at the notebook, puzzled. Suddenly a CREAKING SOUND comes from upstairs. TS quickly stuffs the notebook in his pocket and runs away.

51 - INT. NIGHT - STAIRCASE

TS takes his suitcase and carries it with difficulty down the stairs - one step at a time.

52 - INT. NIGHT - FATHER'S SETTING ROOM

The setting room door is ajar. TS passes by dragging his suitcase, disappears, then reappears in the doorway. The television is still on. White noise fills the screen.

Tapioca, the dog, is seated in front of the TV as if he were watching.

TS approaches, but the dog doesn't turn his gaze away from the screen.

TS SPIVET

Hello Tapioca.

TAPIOCA (back turned)

Hello.

TS SPIVET

I'll miss you.

TAPIOCA

Where you going?

TS SPIVET

To the Smithsonian, Washington D.C.

TAPIOCA

Seems like everyone ends up leaving in this house.

TS walks up to the dog and hugs him.

TS SPIVET

I'll come back.

The dog looks up and licks TS' ear.

53 - EXT. NIGHT - COPPERTOP RANCH

The silhouette of Coppertop Ranch stands starkly against the glow of daybreak. The house is silent and dark.

The front door opens and TS steps out onto the porch. The boy struggles to get down the front steps, carrying his suitcase.

He starts to make his way down the winding road that leads to the gate.

Half carrying half dragging the suitcase, TS stops every couple of steps to rest his aching muscles. He suddenly turns around towards the little cabin.

He enters the cabin and shines his flashlight towards Layton's radio flyer-style wagon. He brushes the cobwebs off it.

CUT TO:

The suitcase fits snugly into the wagon.

TS now moves down the path at a rapid pace. As he nears the bend in the road a sudden rumbling engine sound cuts through the silence. Head lights approach toward the bend in road. TS turns around and freezes. He recognizes the shape of his father's beat-up pick-up truck.

TS stays motionless, holding the cart's handle. The truck's head lights scan across the bend.

The headlights sweep across and catch him in their beam.

A second later, as the truck has just about reached him, TS distinctly recognizes the outline of his father's stoic silhouette, sitting upright with his Stetson on his head.

Father doesn't so much as turn his head. He keeps driving on.

TS watches incredulously as the tail lights get progressively smaller and disappear beyond the gate.

TS doesn't move, clearly distraught. He then gathers his strength and sets back onto the road with determination.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Why had he not stopped? Did he already know I was leaving? Did he want me gone? Why?... Because I was responsible for his favorite son's death and now I must be banished from the ranch. That's why.

54 - EXT. NIGHT ON THE ROAD

TS walks as fast as he can, dragging the cart and suitcase. He checks his watch often, preoccupied.

Letter after letter, as if typed:
"average pace 2.5 feet"
"Number of paces per minutes: 98"
"Speed: 241 feet per minute"
"Distance to the train tracks: 5280 feet"
"Train estimated time of arrival: 5:44"!!

TS suddenly stops in a panic, realizing he may very well miss the train. He then takes off, running as fast as he possibly can.

Severely out of breath, tripping over some rocks, TS finally walks along the embankment below the train tracks. He stops right below a railroad signal light.

At the top of the post are two powerful searchlights, one on top of the other - one white, one red. They don little brims over their tops to protect them from the weather. The upper white beam shines against the dimly lit sky - it signifies: ALL CLEAR.

55 - EXT. NIGHT - RAILROAD BALLAST

TS looks at his watch anxiously, then towards the railroad tracks.
He needs to come up with a quick solution.

He is about to open his suitcase, but is afraid that everything might spill out.
He changes his mind, grabs his Leatherman and makes a small incision on the side of the suitcase. He slides his hand inside and pulls out a pencil case.

As he carefully pulls himself up the post, we see that he holds a thick red sharpie felt pen between his teeth. It's clear by his climbing skills that he is not an athlete...

He reaches the top, grabs the sharpie and starts to color the white beam with red ink.

Soon TS' face is awash in the crimson glow of the beam. The lamp is now completely red.

Suddenly, a rumble emanates from the horizon. The white headlight of the locomotive emerges through the morning haze.

TS starts to climb down.

The train gets closer with a deafening roar. TS quickly jumps on the ballast. He slides down the ballast feet first, stone rolling down around him...

...he reached the bottom of the embankment. A bit shaken up, he can feel the vibration of the train through the rails.

The train proceeds down the track with no indication of intending to stop. A wall of air hits TS violently, projecting pebbles and dust on his face and into his eyes. He turns his head away.

A long succession of grain cars files down the track.

Suddenly, the sound of screeching metal rings out. The train begins to decelerate. A valve heaves a few times and the monster finally comes to a halt, letting out a final cloud of diesel exhaust.

A platform car stands directly before TS. He looks at his red marker. He can't believe it worked. He turns around to make sure no one can see him.

Fueled by adrenaline, TS gets up and extracts his suitcase from the wagon, not without difficulty. The platform car is roughly four feet high which makes heaving his suitcase onto it a herculean task.

TS then tries to pull himself up onto the platform, but is not strong enough.

Far ahead, toward the front of the train, silhouettes of people move busily around the locomotive.

56 - EXT. NIGHT - TRAIN TRACKS

TS spots them and, breathing heavily, jumps over the rails into the undercarriage area of the train. It looks like an endless tunnel.

A whistle blows, followed by a big jolt. The train starts lurching forward.

It's too late for him to get out from under the train. In a panic, TS grabs onto a coupling device. It is greasy and slippery. His hands grip onto the metal near moving parts that threaten to crush his fingers.

As the train gathers speed, TS keeps hanging onto the coupling above him. His legs start to jog backwards on the railroad ties. He lunges his feet upward and hooks onto the coupling with his legs. He now hangs upside down from his arms and legs, like a pig waiting to be butchered.

The railroad ties beneath are a complete blur.

His greasy hands almost let go. But TS manages to work one leg up, then the other. He struggles his way up and finally straddles the coupling upright, like a cowboy on a horse.

He climbs onto the platform and collapses next to his suitcase.

TS looks up, the platform car is carrying an enormous, brand new motor home.

On the side panel a stenciled sign reads: "The Cowboy Condo" with an airbrushed painting of a cowboy riding a bucking horse.

THE CROSSING

57 - EXT. EARLY MORNING - TRAIN PLATFORM CAR

The morning sun peers over the mountaintops, lighting up the green grazing fields. The train chugs along.

TS watches the landscape roll by. He is sitting at the end of the platform, arms crossed, freezing cold.

Daylight spreads across the valley. The mountains are no longer steeped in shadows, their grey faces turn from fir-green to a wooded brown hue.

Holding the self-defense manual in his hand, TS is clumsily practicing karate moves.

TS SPIVET (*reciting a poem*)

How beautiful the Sun is when newly risen,
An explosion of morning greetings

When the sun rays reach TS, he basks in their warmth. It relaxes his body a bit.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

Happy is the man who can lovingly salute his rising,
More glorious than a dream!

The train works its way between two steep mountain walls.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D) (*still declaiming*)

Sun - Chemical composition: hydrogen, helium, oxygen, iron, neon,
nitrogen, silicon magnesium and sulfur.

The train rolls along a large river.

58 - EXT. DAY - TRAIN PLATFORM CAR

The locomotive roars with steel's vibrations.

61 - EXT. DAY - TRAIN PLATFORM - SCENE MOVED

TS uses his sextant and suddenly notices...

62 - EXT. DAY - TRAIN PLATFORM - SCENE MOVED

... a bird dive into the swirling current of a river. Underwater, it is catching a fish with its beak.

63 - EXT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH - SCENE MOVED

FLASHBACK:

TS is crouched on the bank of a small river... he suddenly plunges his face under the surface of the water. He observes a multitude tiny minnows that oscillate like little flashes of light. Then Tapioca comes to lap up....

TS' head emerges from the water as he avidly inhales a large breath.

Gracie, who witnessed the scene, rolls her eyes.

64 - EXT. DAY - PLATFORM CAR - SCENE MOVED

The hawk bursts out of the water in an explosion of water drops, a silvery fish in its beak. TS cranes his neck to watch the bird fly away.

The train is now traveling autumn colored forest.

END OF SCENES MOVED

BACK TO SEQ. 58 - EXT. DAY - PLATFORM CAR

TS is lying face-up on the platform.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) *(eyes closed, smelling the air)*

...grease... rusted metal... diesel... moss-covered rocks... rotting reeds... silt... maple...

He suddenly sits up straight, beaming.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

maple syrup? Mmm... pancakes... cookies...

He starts rummaging through his suitcase. He pulls out a small bag of raisins. He picks up a single raisin and nibbles at it with his front teeth.

TS grabs a new raisin and eats it.

He is about to grab a third one, but changes his mind.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...and the disciple asked: why only three raisins?... The Lord replied: Because four would be gluttony and two would be pride...

He closes his eyes and concentrates.

59 - EXT. DAY - VISION OF THE TRAIN AT A STOP

In TS' imagination, the train is stopped and a vendor pushes a little food cart along the tracks.

VENDOR (*calling out*)

...Try our hobo breakfast special!!!... panhandler's pancakes! stowaway cereal!!

Hobos start emerging from between the train cars, they wave and call out to the vendor.

LAYTON (V.O.)

So, you officially a hobo now?

60 - EXT. DAY - TRAIN PLATFORM CAR

TS opens his eyes. The train is in fact still rolling. But Layton is sitting on the bumper of the motor home.

TS SPIVET

In case you haven't noticed, I am hitching a ride on a freight train, on my way to Washington DC. Just me and my suitcase.

LAYTON (*mischievous*)

And what's an adventurer never leave without....?

TS SPIVET & LAYTON (*synchronized together, and miming the objects*)

His knife!... His magnifying glass!... His maps! His whip and his hat!...

LAYTON (*alone*)

Betcha' forgot to bring the whip.

TS bursts into laughter.

TS SPIVET

I'm glad you're here.

LAYTON

Me too. I'm glad you're here.

The landscape in the background has changed. The mountains are further away. The convoy is entering the vast horseshoe shaped Jefferson Basin.

Layton is gone.

65 - EXT. DAY - PLATFORM CAR

Goats are grazing in a field. TS looks at them and smiles. It reminds him of...

66 - EXT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / BARN

FLASHBACK:

Goats are gorging themselves on a display of oranges in the open barn. The fruit had been carefully sliced in halves and arranged just so - for a scientific experiment. The fruit's flesh is festering with larvae.

Dr Clair runs toward the barn, yelling.

DR CLAIR

No! Not my Japanese snout beetles!

(standing up to her husband) These larvae survived the trip across the Pacific Ocean! All that to end up seven thousand miles away in the stomach of a goat?

Father's silhouette appears in the open door frame, shifting from one leg to another, holding his Stetson in his hand.

FATHER

They're just ignorant Montana goats. Don't know better.

DR CLAIR

Well if you can't manage to corral your goats maybe you should consider a new line of work.

FATHER

If that's what ya think... no use settin' my plate at the table!

67 - EXT. & INT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / KITCHEN

Dr Clair, exasperated, is looking out of the kitchen window, shrugging her shoulders.

We see Father on horseback, under a light rain. He is chewing on a sandwich.

68 - EXT. DAY - TRAIN PLATFORM CAR

After a long whistle, the train starts to slow down.

TS sees a small train station approaching. On the platform, he sees two men in uniform.

With the interminable sound of grinding metal, the train finally reaches a near crawl. TS crouches behind a raised section of railing as his platform car creeps past the two security guards.

A hundred feet later the train screeches to a complete stop.

SECURITY GUARD #1 (O.S.)

We got 10 minutes! Hop to it!

Between two planks of wood, TS sees that the guards are inspecting only two box cars away. One of them is literally a giant.

They move closer and check the car right next to TS'. The boy crawls backward and slips under the motor home.

He realizes that his suitcase is still on the platform, in plain sight.

As the two guards climb onto the platform car, the suitcase slowly slides underneath the motor home.

The giant guard steps over the slatted side of the platform car. He bends down to check under the motor home.

Nothing is there. TS has disappeared!

We see that TS is on the other side of the vehicle, balancing his feet on the edge of the platform rail and the mobile home doorstep. He tries to open the vehicle's door.

The giant works his way around the motor home. The vehicle's door just closes shut, one split second before the guard appears.

69 - INT. & EXT DAY - MOTOR HOME

Inside the motor home, TS closes the latch. He turns around and sees a pair of life size cardboard cutouts of a cowboy and a cowgirl. They are placed around the little dining table, vestiges of a county fair display.

Outside, the security guards check each and every doorknob and latch on the RV.

The giant presses his face against the tinted glass window and scans the inside. In the dark interior he notices three shapes around the table: a cowboy, a cowgirl and a boy with a stupid grin....

The giant stares for a long time, wipes off mist to see most clearly.

A pearl of sweat glides down TS' forehead and lingers at the tip of his nose. He resists the urge to look at it, for fear of looking cross-eyed.

The guard finally takes off, leaving a grease mark on the glass in the shape of the American continent.

TS hears the voices of the two security guards, followed by a whistle. The train jolts and starts to move again.

He is hopeful again. TS shuts his eyes and starts counting.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

.. 304!

When it hits "304" TS gets up, makes his way to the cab and sits at the driver's seat, still shaken up.

From the train's POV, we see the locomotive leave the little train depot and its two guards.

70 - EXT. & INT. NIGHT - MOTOR HOME

The train sinks into the night.

Exhausted, TS sleeps on the sofa. He has stowed the cardboard figures in a corner and his suitcase sits open.

Light from outside lamps moves across the living space. Their rectangular shaped beams sweep across the furniture and TS' face.

71 - EXT. & INT. DAY - MOTOR HOME

The first rays of the morning sun peer over the arid hills. The train convoy pushes forward.

Inside, TS is crouched on the sofa, knees under his chin, nibbling a carrot like a rabbit. Ill at ease, he gazes at: a fake steak made of plastic, the cheesy printed fabric, on the television screen, a large sticker proclaims: MADE IN THE USA!

Outside, the train moves across the farmland.

TS presses his forehead against the window, watches the moving landscape. He seems depressed.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

A melancholy feeling came over me. I couldn't get rid of. Maybe it was due to the motor home...

TS turns and looks into the RV's side view mirror.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

The motor home was pointed backwards, so I had the depressing feeling that I was traveling in reverse.

72 - EXT. DAY - A SMALL TOWN SUBURB

A red light lights up along the railroad. With the sound of grinding metal, the train comes to a stop right in front of the garden.

A little girl hangs upside down in a charming house's garden. TS tenderly looks at her.

Her hair streaming in the wind, the little girl is swinging towards the camera. She sees TS upside down. Stunned, she pulls herself up onto the trapeze and turns round towards TS, still upside down ! The little girl doesn't understand.

The train sets off again. TS, who was doing a headstand in front of the window, falls over.

73 - EXT. DAY - LANDSCAPE

The train crosses a steel bridge, rides past a line of tall cement poles that carry high tension wires...

The landscape is becoming a city scape.

74 - EXT. EVENING - MOTOR HOME & LANDSCAPE

Time has passed. Night is falling.

The train slowly winds through an industrial suburb. TS' interest is piqued by a hot dog stand.

The train is slowing down in a freight station surrounded by factories and warehouses. The breaks grind and hiss.

75 - EXT. NIGHT - FREIGHT STATION PLATFORM

TS carefully opens the RV's side door. Its rubber lining makes an unsticking sound 'pop' as the seal is broken.

He looks toward the end of the train. In the distance, a machine is loading a shipment of grain into a box car. Judging by the quantity, the train should be stopped for a while.

TS thinks, eyes wide open.

He looks back at his suitcase, wondering if he should leave it behind.

76 - INT. NIGHT - MOTOR HOME

TS looks back at his suitcase wondering if he should leave it behind.

Finally, after much hesitation, he grabs six essential items: a compass, a tape measure, a magnifying glass, a thermometer, a barometer and ...a hydrometer. TS puts the objects in his pocket.

77 - EXT. NIGHT - FREIGHT STATION PLATFORM

TS carefully descends the side ladder and slides cautiously underneath the train.

As he crawls out the other side, he lands face to face with... a drifter. The man is a hobo of an indescribable age, with a malicious look in his eye and a long beard. He bites into an apple.

DRIFTER

Where you goin'?

TS, surprised, drops his instruments then reaches down to pick them up. He mutters an inaudible answer.

DRIFTER (CONT'D)

Well I'm going to Salt Lake City on the grain-train... Then, maybe Vegas... haven't decided yet.

TS SPIVET

I'm... going to D.C.

The man whistles.

DRIFTER (*pointing at TS' train*)

That one dead-ends in Chicago. You'll have to find another ride there...

The drifter bites into his apple and looks over TS, up and down. He has keen and vivid eyes.

DRIFTER

Your first time?

TS SPIVET (*lowering his head*)

Yes.

DRIFTER

"Two Clouds."

TS stares back, not getting it.

DRIFTER (CONT'D)

"Two Clouds," that's my name.

TS SPIVET

I'm TS. T for Tecumesh, S for Sparrow.

TWO CLOUDS

You hungry TS?

He waves for the boy to follow him.

Two Clouds leads TS among cars, containers, signals, electric lights. He walks quickly, TS scurries along to follow him.

TWO CLOUDS (CONT'D)

Sparrow... as in the bird?

TS SPIVET

Yes... at the exact moment of my birth a sparrow crashed into our kitchen window and died right there on the floor. That's what my mother told me.

TWO CLOUDS

Your mother gave birth in the kitchen?

TS SPIVET (*perplexed*)

I don't think so... anyhow, she sent the sparrow to an ornithologist who gave me its skeleton for my first birthday.

TS checks his watch nervously.

TWO CLOUDS

Don't worry, you have time... even if they finish loading up, they gotta let the 9:12 pass through before they can reengage for Chicago.

He finishes his apple and tosses the core behind him. It flies in a perfect arc over the tank car.

Two Clouds interlaces his hands and waves them in a strange way.

TWO CLOUDS (CONT'D)

You see it?

TS looks at the hands, waiting for a magic trick to occur.

TS SPIVET

What?

TWO CLOUDS

The sparrow.

Pointing his mischievous eye in the direction of the tank car, we notice the projected shadow of his hands resembling a bird in flight.

TS is captivated. Suddenly the realistic looking shadow seems to have a harder time flying. Its wings seem weaker and less coordinated.

TWO CLOUDS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Once, there was a sparrow who was very ill and didn't have the strength to go south. "Go without me," he told his children. "I'll find shelter from the cold... and I'll see you in spring."

The shadow falls off the boxcar. TS turns toward Two Clouds. The drifter looks at him, slips his hands back into his pockets.

TS SPIVET

So?... Did he survive?

As the conversation continues, Two Clouds starts walking in the direction of the Hot dogs Stand. They make their way between the giant locomotives and freight cars.

TWO CLOUDS

The bird went to an oak tree and asked if he could take shelter in his leaves. But the oak tree was cold and hard, and refused. The maple tree was kinder, but not more generous... The beech, the aspen, the willow, the elm. They all said no. Can you believe this?

TS SPIVET

I guess...

TWO CLOUDS

Don't answer the question. It's part of the story.

TS SPIVET

Sorry.

TWO CLOUDS

The first snows came and the sparrow took a last chance with the pine tree, who said: "I can't offer you much protection, I only have needles that let in drafts. But my answer is... yes." Overjoyed, the sparrow found a welcome refuge. And you know what?

TS bites his lip, trying not to answer.

TWO CLOUDS (CONT'D)

He survived the long winter! His children returned and wept upon seeing him again. When the Creator heard this story he was mad at the other trees for their selfishness. And from that day on, all the other trees lose their leaves in winter, except the pine tree. It gets to keep its needles all year long.

My grandmother told me this story. Had you heard it before?

Again, TS is nervous about answering.

TWO CLOUDS (CONT'D)

You can answer now. The story is finished.

TS thinks to himself.

TS SPIVET

The story is very pretty...

(pauses to think) But the insulating properties of the pine needles could not realistically create a warm enough cocoon for a bird the size of a sparrow. Your grandmother lied to you.

Two Clouds looks at TS as if he were a martian.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D) *(smiling deviously)*

Then it's probably a legend...

TWO CLOUDS

Of course it's a legend. Just like your mother giving birth...

TS SPIVET

Actually, I like legends.

TWO CLOUDS

Hey, you got a cigarette... or two?

Caught off guard, TS searches in his pockets.

TS SPIVET

Sorry. How about a a compass?

TWO CLOUDS

I never know where I'm headed. Do I look like I need a compass? What else you got?

TS SPIVET

I have a thermometer, a barometer and a hydrometer.

Two Clouds mulls over the three choices.

TWO CLOUDS

Hmmm... I'll take the hydrometer.

He likes it. He gives TS an apple in exchange.

TWO CLOUDS

Here! Us drifters gotta look after each other.

TS's eyes twinkle with pride.

TWO CLOUDS (CONT'D)

How old are you anyway?

TS SPIVET (*lying*)

... thirteen.

TWO CLOUDS

You know, the world'll do its best to shit on you. So hang on to that scrap of thirteen for as long as you can.

TS SPIVET

Yeah. Like in a rodeo...

Two Clouds smiles.

TWO CLOUDS

Bye sparrow. I'm sure you'll find your tree.

TS SPIVET

Bye.

Two Clouds takes off, blowing the bird whistle.

TS turns and walks away, borrowing the drifter's solitary and nonchalant stride.

78 - EXT. NIGHT - HOT DOGS STAND

Seen from behind, TS walks up to the front of the restaurant.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Dr Clair... you can't stop me now.

79 - INT. DAY - VEGETARIAN RESTAURANT

The title appears: "Dr Clair's embargo"

FLASH BACK:

TS sits in front of a sinister looking plate of vegetables. His mother is eating next to him. He looks through the window and sees a hot dogs stand across the way.

TS SPIVET (*somberly*)

And what... is the reason behind this embargo?

DR CLAIR

TS. Do you know where the smell of those marvelous sausages comes from? From a smell factory on the New Jersey Turnpike. It was carefully designed and artificially synthesized to maximize its power of attraction. Need I go on?

80 - INT. NIGHT - HOT DOGS STAND

TS walks up to the counter, looks at the menu and points to an item with his tape measure. A female employee stands behind the register.

SERVER (*sighing*)

Mustard? Ketchup?

TS nods. He empties the items from his pockets looking for his money.

At that moment, two uniformed policemen walk in and stand behind him.

POLICEMAN *(to the girl at the register)*
How ya doing Marge?

He hands her a flyer that says MISSING CHILD in bold, with TS' photo on it. The woman is busy with her order and glances at the paper distractedly.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)
Some kid from Montana ran away... or got himself kidnapped. Mind if we post this?

The woman takes TS' money and puts it into her register, then points to a large posting board covered with local ads and flyers.

The cops walk over to the board.

TS has been looking down at the ground the whole time. He carefully grabs his bag of food, folds the top.

SERVER *(looks at TS suspiciously)*
I know someone who's not going to be happy with you... your mom!

TS is stunned, mouth agape.

SERVER (CONT'D)
Just kiddin', young man. But if you eat your hot dog before dinner, you're not gonna be hungry for the soup she made ya'!

TS SPIVET
Oh. I don't have a mother Mam. My parents are dead.

SERVER
Then take care of yourself little guy. You see what happens to kids that go astray...

The waitress fishes a small pirate figurine out of a big pot and drops it in the bag.
TS quickly makes his way to the exit. He prudently passes by the two officers who are fixing the flyer on the board.

81 - EXT. NIGHT - STREET

He holds his bag of food with both hands, walking faster and faster, without looking back.

Suddenly, he notices a pay phone on the opposite sidewalk. He stops and stares at it.

82 - INT. NIGHT - COPPERTOP RANCH

The phone rings. Dr Clair, Father and Gracie rush to answer. Dr Clair gets there first, grabs the phone.

DR CLAIR *(very emotional tone, unlike usual)*
Hello, TS... my son... you haven't been kidnapped... What a relief, thank God! You know, since you left I've been thinking... you're right, I'm wasting my time searching for the cincindela... I know I haven't given you enough love since-

Father grabs the phone from her hand. His usual cold and distant disposition has changed.

FATHER

Son. We still gotta situation wit'the crick. You were spot-on with that culvert. Whatcha' say you come on right back and we'll work together from yer plans.

GRACIE (*high pitched, begging*)

Come on TS! You promised you'd design my next Halloween costume!

83 - EXT. NIGHT - STREET CORNER WITH TELEPHONE BOOTH

TS hasn't budged an inch. He is still staring at the pay phone.

After an moment, he turns and walks back toward the train, making a crinkling paper sound with his bag.

84 - EXT. NIGHT - FREIGHT STATION

TS climbs up the platform car ladder holding the bag in his teeth.

From afar, we see him slip into the motor home.

Suddenly, in the foreground we see a worrisome person step into view.

It is a veritable giant in a trench-coat. He has a serious comb-over. His clothes are tawdry, greasy and dusty. He has a wandering eye that scans the horizon independently.

He gets near the train and climbs up on a coupling between two cars.

85 - EXT. NIGHT - IOWAN LANDSCAPE

The train is moving again. It crosses a big steel bridge, shining under a full moon.

86 - INT. NIGHT - MOTOR HOME

TS sits on the sofa finishing his hot dog. He sucks on the straw. The empty soda cup gurgles loudly.

While putting the used wrappers in the bag, he discovers a little plastic figurine of a pirate.

87 - INT. NIGHT - MOTOR HOME / BEDROOM

TS climbs up the ladder that leads to the little sleeping quarter above the vehicle's cab. He lies there, face-up.

A small skylight and side windows let the intermittent light in.

TS chews on a piece of gum intently, then uses it to stick the little pirate onto the night table.

He peers out past the curtain. The train is moving through a small town with yellow fluorescent street lamps.

As if the figurine was watching the scene, the little pirate's painted eyes are offset from the bulge where they should be. It lends the pirate a pensive and mournful look. Its shadow moves across the wall behind it.

88 - EXT. NIGHT - SMALL TOWN

The train moves through the small town. TS presses his forehead against the window, he is lit by the yellow fluorescent street lamps.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Maybe somewhere in one of these houses, a boy just woke up from the sound of my train. Maybe he's wondering what it'd be like to climb aboard and cross the desert.

89 - INT. NIGHT - CHILD'S BEDROOM

A child, the same age as TS, is looking through his bedroom window. He watches the motor home slowly pass by on the train.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

I kind of wanted to switch places with him and just watch the train roll away into the unknown.

The child jumps back into his bed. An animated night-table lamp projects the image of a small moving train onto the wall above him.

90 - INT. NIGHT - MOTOR HOME / BEDROOM

TS sits on the bed, staring out blankly. He suddenly begins to cry.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

I had to admit it. I was not a careless drifter. Just a ten years old boy who ran away from home.

He is not sobbing. It's more like silent tears falling down his cheeks - as if he were releasing something he'd held in for a long time.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Any more of this crying and I'd be peeing on myself like when I was little and afraid of the Pterodactyl's deadly bite.

CUT TO:

91 - INT. NIGHT - TS' BEDROOM

FLASH BACK:

Six years old TS lies in his bed. He needs to pee, badly.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Any more of this and I'd soon be peeing on myself, like when I was little and afraid of the jack o' lantern's deadly fangs.

Terrified, he sits on the edge of the bed. He doesn't dare to place his feet on the floor. As his feet nearly touch the floor, an inside lit Halloween pumpkin is baring its teeth.

TS retreats violently back into the bed.

He squirms around until he can't hold it any longer. He lets go and pees in his sheets.

Under the bed, the frightened pumpkin gets pee dripping on its head and... puts its flame out.

92 - EXT. EARLY - MORNING LANDSCAPE

The sun rises on the moving train.

93 - EXT. EARLY MORNING - MOTOR HOME / LIVING ROOM

Lit by a golden light, TS is clumsily rehearsing his martial arts movements.

Standing perfectly still, the pirate figurine speaks to TS.

PIRATE

You have any siblings matey?

TS SPIVET

One sister. Gracie. Actually, she's the only sibling I got left.

94 - EXT. DAY - ON A COVERED PLATFORM CAR

The freezing hobo wakes up. He blows on his fingers and moves his arms around. His trench-coat is clearly not keeping him warm enough. He stands up and notices the RV with a keen interest. He smiles, beaming.

95 - INT. DAY - MOTOR HOME / LIVING ROOM

TS is sitting at the table, facing the pirate figurine. He takes the remaining raisins out of the bag.

PIRATE

Why didn't she come with you?

TS SPIVET

Well... I didn't really ask her.

PIRATE

And why not?

TS SPIVET

Because... this in my trip! Anyway she'd be bored in two seconds... and then retreat into her deepest darkest Anti Dork Protection mode.

A knife suddenly slips down the inside of the door jamb. It starts to pry open the door.

PIRATE

You still love her, right?

TS SPIVET

What? Of course. Gracie is Gracie.

PIRATE

How about me. Why did you keep me?

TS SPIVET

Because with you... at least I can have a conversation.

The door abruptly opens behind TS. He quickly stands up. The hobo is as surprised as he is.

TS stumbles and falls over the two cardboard cutouts.

The hobo grins, then suddenly looks serious and threatening again.

HOBO

You every hear 'bout the 8th dynamic?

TS stands up and shakes his head. He slowly moves back as the hobo advances.

HOBO (CONT'D) *(speaking in theo-babble)*

Your mind's messed up with too many mental parasites, little guy...
They're stuck to your body. You need to be purified.

TS SPIVET *(terrified)*

No, thank you, I'm fine.

Terrified, TS edges his way back, towards a ladder leading to a little sleeping quarter above the vehicle's cab.

HOBO

Way your brain's been taught, you're stuck in reactive mode. You knew that?

TS SPIVET

No. Not really...

HOBO

Problem with the reactive mind is it "thinks" in identities, one thing identical to another.

TS SPIVET

... Huh?

HOBO

There! That's exactly what's wrong with the world today... where's your money?

TS SPIVET *(shoots a quick look up)*

Money?

HOBO

I can help you son, just like someone helped me open my mind to spiritual consciousness.

The man looks up to the sky, talking to a higher power.

HOBO (CONT'D)

He's small and weak and full of fear... He's doesn't know that once he's purified, his powers will be unlimited!

More and more freaked out, TS looks up the ladder.

HOBO (CONT'D)

How bout your dad. He have any money? Wait... look...

From his bag, the man pulls out a sort of home-made e-meter, equipped with knobs and gauges. Two long wires come out of the machine. They're attached to empty cans.

HOBO (CONT'D)

Here, take these... Hold'em tight, I got a few questions to ask you.

TS grips onto the cans, trembling. The man notices the US railroad almanac on the sofa.

HOBO (CONT'D)

Hah!... I see you like train schedules! Perfect. Just what I thought...

HOBO (CONT'D) *(he concentrates and recites)*

Are you logical and scientific in how your mind works? Are you uncomfortable with chaos? Do you chew on the end of your pencil?

TS SPIVET

Please, I just want to get back home.

HOBO *(pointing to the VU-meter's needle)*

You see! It moved!

(lowering his voice) We gotta explore this grey area...you have money right?

TS SPIVET

No... I don't... I-

The man's face turns angry. He kneels down and grabs TS by the neck and pulls out a crumpled flyer from his pocket - it's the Missing Child flyer with a photo of TS's face. He looks at the boy and smiles.

MAN

I think your parents might give a pretty penny to get you back purified!!

TS takes a peek above his shoulder and notices the self-defense handbook. All of a sudden, TS heavily punches his nose.

The giant is taken aback. A trickle of blood suddenly runs from his nose. Realizing it he gets back on his feet sniveling. He makes a U-turn and squealing in pain, looks for something in the motor-home.

Meanwhile, TS climbs the ladder at top speed and finds himself on the bed.

The giant abruptly turns round. He looks furious. Big paper cones are sticking out from his nose!

96 - EXT. DAY - ON THE MOTOR HOME' ROOF

As TS's head peers out, the wind slams into his face. He pulls himself out through the skylight, closes it and sits down on top of it.

The train rattles and shakes. The wind hits hard. TS is clearly freezing and terrified. He grips onto the edge of the skylight frame for balance.

The skylight window shakes violently and half opens. TS struggles not to fall over. Suddenly everything goes back to calm.

Suddenly the cardboard cut out's head appears at the edge of the motor home's roof.

TS is terrified, not knowing where to go.

The hobo, carrying the cowboy cut-out, is actually climbing up the back ladder. He tosses the cut-out away, which flies in the direction of the camera.

The man stands up on the roof and staggers towards TS. The wind in his back makes his pants fly like a flag.

HOBO *(sneering)*

Come to me son! For your own good! I am a well of love, throw me your bucket and drink from my water!

TS, on his knees, tries to find a way out. A steel bridge appears at the end of the railroad, but the man's

back is turned to it and doesn't see it coming.

TS tries to scream, but no sound comes out.

The steel bridge is getting extremely close to the hobo.

A beam's approaching the hobo's head. The hobo crashes him into it. But he gets up again covered in blood.

HOBO

Forgive him ! He's small and weak.

Suddenly, TS gives a hard kick in the hobo's stomach, whose falls over and ends up in the river.

TS is petrified. He sits down again, pale-faced. The hobo bursts out of the water, yelling, mad with rage.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

On impact...

CUT TO

97 - ALTERNATING WITH STOCK FOOTAGE

A STOCK SHOT of two sumo colliding.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

... two objects exert an equal amount of force against each other. But due to the enormous difference in their masses...

CUT TO:

A STOCK SHOT of an astronaut on the moon.

ASTRONAUT

Mister Galileo was right.

CUT TO:

STOCK SHOT of slapstick.

TS SPIVET

...The crazy preacher was subject to greater post-collision acceleration than the tunnel.

STOCK SHOT of Einstein bursting into laughter.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Along the same principle as he fell on the ground...

STOCK SHOT of a meteorite explodes on earth.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...it also deviated the earth ever so slightly from its orbit.

TS is sitting in an armchair in the study of an apartment. He is wearing a suit and tie, a false beard, and he is smoking a pipe. He talks like a scientist being interviewed for a documentary film, perfectly synchronized with the VOICE OVER.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Of course this impact was as tiny as the erosive effect of a wasp's feet on a plane of glass.

BACK TO:

TS sits up on motor home roof as the train emerges from the tunnel. He is in shock.

FADE TO BLACK.

98 - EXT. NIGHT - LANDSCAPE

The train advances in the night, unperturbed. It crosses an overpass in the middle of nowhere. A signal light blinks.

99 - INT. NIGHT - MOTOR HOME / BEDROOM

Shaken up and weak, TS is unable to sleep. The light of street lamps sweep across his face.

He looks at his mother's notebook on the shelf and grabs it.

Almost timidly, he cracks it open, starts to leaf through it. It is some kind of journal or scrapbook with photo-montages.

He looks through a few pages, nothing catches his attention. A few photos are glued on pages here and there, a class photo, a graduation shot, a theater ticket, a wedding photo.

He thumbs through several pages with scientific entries and finally lands upon a page with two identical drawings taken from a children's coloring book.

The first drawing is colored clumsily, mostly outside of the lines. Handwritten next to it: "By Layton, age 6"

The second drawing is not colored at all. Instead, the character's dimensions are fully measured in exhaustive scientific detail. Handwritten next to it "By T.S., age 6"

DR CLAIR (O.S.)

No comment.

TS looks at the two drawings and nods, approvingly. He keeps leafing with curiosity.

Further on, he finds a diagram that he had made - depicting a typical Spivet family dinner. Each family member is perfectly recognizable. A series of arrows connect them in various directions.

DR CLAIR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

'Patterns of cross talk and directional eye lines', by TS Spivet

CLOSE UP SHOT on the drawing of Father. It appears in 3D.

DR CLAIR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Frequency of Father's eye-contact with TS': Nil. Why? Is it that TS looks more like me? He doesn't like who I am... He doesn't love me.

TS drops the notebook with indignation.

TS SPIVET (*vehemently*)

Of course he loves you. You love each other!

He grabs the little plastic pirate figurine.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

Right!? If you make a baby, it means you love each other. And they had three babies! Right!?!

The pirate doesn't answer. His offset eyes look back sardonically.

TS grabs the notebook and opens up again, haphazardly.

100 - INT. NIGHT - COPPERTOP RANCH / BATHROOM – REMOVED

101 - INT. NIGHT - HALLWAY / BATHROOM DOOR – REMOVED

102 - INT. EVENING - COPPERTOP RANCH / BATHROOM - REMOVED

103 – INT. NIGHT - MOTOR HOME / BEDROOM

Back in the Motor Home, TS smiles - half amused, half sad.

He opens the notebook again and leafs through more scientific writings on beetles.

As he is about to close the notebook, something catches his attention. He notices a very small inscription. Much to his surprise, he sees the handwritten word 'Layton.'

The word is copied and re-copied over and over again, forming a line across the page, like an obsessively whispered mantra: "LaytonLaytonLaytonLayton..."

He turns the pages and sees that this 'line of Laytons' continues over the next twenty pages or so. Then all entries stop.

TS goes back to the first page with Layton's name and thumbs through the notebook like a flip-book.

The visual "flip-book" effect gives the impression that Layton's name slides from left to right - as if it were leaping off the page and then disappearing.

104 - EXT. NIGHT - LANDSCAPE

The train is chugs along in the moonlight.

Back inside, TS repeats the flip-book action several times, tears welling up in his eyes. Suddenly, he is jolted by the discovery of a final entry near the very end of the notebook.

DR CLAIR (O.S.)

TS came to see me in my study. For the first time since the accident.

TS looks up, pale, afraid of what he is about to read.

105 - INT. DAY - DR CLAIR'S STUDY

FLASHBACK:

We return to the previous scene when Dr Clair was working and TS was standing in the doorway.

DR CLAIR (to TS)

Stopped everything? You mean... in a maternal sense or a scientific one?

TS listens to her, thrown off.

DR CLAIR (CONT'D) (to herself)

One year... already.

(to TS) What is it you want me to start doing again, that I've stopped doing?

106 - INT. NIGHT - MOTOR HOME

With his knees pulled up against his chin, TS reads with apprehension.

107 - INT. DAY - DR CLAIR'S STUDY

Dr Clair watches TS leave the study. She is unable to focus on her work. She takes a key and opens a drawer and pulls out her journal.

She starts writing.

DR CLAIR (O.S.)

I'm not really there for TS anymore. I'm like an empty house...

108 - INT. DAY - HALLWAY LEADING TO LAYTON'S ROOM

FLASHBACK:

Dr Clair gets near the Layton's room door. She puts her right hand on the doorknob, about to open it. She pauses and strokes the wooden door with her left hand.

DR CLAIR (O.S.)

I still catch myself wanting to wake him up for school...

109 - INT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / KITCHEN

FLASHBACK:

TS and Gracie sit down for breakfast in the kitchen. They notice a third bowl on the table with Layton's name on it. They look at each other briefly and quickly turn away.

Suddenly, black smoke enters the frame. Both their heads turns around and they see... a toaster on fire.

Dr Clair rushes, trying to put it out, moving her hands up and down. A burst of sparks erupts.

110 - INT. DAY - DR CLAIR'S STUDY

Sitting at her desk, Dr Clair is deeply engrossed in her science reference books.

In the background, her window is half open. A creaking noise comes from outside.

Layton is on his rocking horse. The movement is perfectly synchronized with the creaking sound.

Dr Clair moves to the window and shuts it. Both the creaking noise and the superimposed image disappear.

111 - INT. NIGHT - MOTOR HOME

TS reads the final words on the page. He closes the notebook, his eyes clouded with tears.

112 - EXT. NIGHT - LANDSCAPE

The train advances under a menacing sky of dark clouds. The sound of its lazy whistle gets lost in the vastness of the landscape.

113 - EXT. EARLY MORNING - LANDSCAPE – REMOVED

114 - INT. DAY - MOTOR HOME'S SETTING ROOM

From the bag, TS drops the last raisins in his hand. He puts one down in front of the cow-girl and eats the last one.

115 - EXT. DAY - FIELDS - REMOVED

116 - INT. DAY - MOTOR HOME - REMOVED

117 - EXT. DAY AND NIGHT - REMOVED

118 - EXT & INT DAY - SUBURBS OF CHICAGO

Reflected in the window of the motor home, we see the train making its way into the suburbs of a big city. It passes big buildings with rooftop water towers and fire escapes that zigzag down.

Still, half asleep, TS opens the curtain wide and peers out.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Nature had vanished. Every millimeter of landscape was replaced by man-made constructions ruled by the laws of geometry.

Through the window a dense network of horizontal and vertical lines, huge avenues, buildings with a thousand windows.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

How could humans create so many right-angles, when their behavior is so convoluted and illogical?

119 - EXT. DAY - STREETS OF CHICAGO - REMOVED

120 - EXT. DAY - TRAIN YARD

The train clanks over the many rail switches of the yard depot.

TS is seated in the motor home sleeping quarter, watching from this backwards vantage point.

A multitude of signal lights blink along the tracks.

The train passes welders working amidst a shower of sparks.

The train breaks, making a long grinding sound, then comes to a complete stop.

121 - INT. DAY - MOTOR HOME / BATHROOM

In the diminutive bathroom, TS tries to wash up with a meager trickle of water from the tap.

TS vigorously rubs his moist hands across his face.

122 - INT. DAY - MOTOR HOME

He slips on one of his grey sweater vests.

He reaches out to pick up the pirate figurine, but stops himself.

TS SPIVET

See you Captain Hot Dog, I'm sure you'll find your pine tree.

123 - EXT. DAY - TRAIN YARD

TS checks to see if the coast is clear, then tries his best to give the suitcase a soft landing on the ground.

He drags it along the row of train cars.

He looks around at the dozens of blue and yellow CSX trains with their long convoys of cars. He realizes that he'll never find the right train with his heavy suitcase weighing him down.

He spots a electric utility box. It's door is ajar.

TS pulls the panel open. There's just enough room under the large insulators to slide his suitcase. It'll have to do for now.

He grabs his backpack and without over-thinking, he stuffs in his notebook, binoculars, compass and... the sparrow skeleton.

He pushes his suitcase into the utility box and closes the doors.

123B - EXT. DAY - INDUSTRIAL ZONE

TS leaves the train yard and arrives in the industrial zone.

A security guard's car arrives and crosses TS. Suddenly, the car stops.

Ts walks faster while the car is backing up and rolling by TS's side.

The car is still backing up.

RAILWAY PATROLMAN

Are you playing hooky from Kindergarden?

TS SPIVET

No sir.

A stocky officer with a club hanging off his belt steps out of the vehicle.

RAILWAY PATROLMAN

What you got in that bag? Spray paint? You vandalizing, stitch? D'you paint that car?

With his chin, he points toward a train car tagged with graffiti.

TS SPIVET

I like Chicago.

RAILWAY PATROLMAN *(surprised)*

What?

TS SPIVET *(Suddenly speaking in Russian)*

Well, it's kind of busy, but it's got a nice buzz. I mean it takes some getting used to.

The ranch is quieter though, just Gracie and her music, and not so much bass. But this place is fine, really.

RAILWAY PATROLMAN *(stunned)*

You shittin' me stitch? Where you from?

TS begins to speak in Russian.

RAILWAY PATROLMAN

What? Well you little shit, welcome to the great state of Illinois. I'm sure you'll get to know it well soon as we book you for trespassing, destruction of railroad priority...

TS SPIVET

Railroad property...

RAILWAY PATROLMAN

What?

TS SPIVET

Property. You said priority.

RAILWAY PATROLMAN (*yelling*)

Get in the car!

TS bursts into action, pushes his way past the railway patrolman.

The officer manages to grab TS' backpack, but the boy squirms his way out of the shoulder straps...

The patrolman trips and falls on his stomach. TS runs away as fast as he can. Furious, the patrolman tosses the backpack into the sky, like a quarterback.

Turning around TS catches it like an able football player, and keeps running full force. The patrolman runs hard too, trailing not far behind.

124 - EXT. DAY - INDUSTRIAL ZONE

TS dashes off, the patrolman chases him.
The patrolman, panting, is getting nearer and nearer.

We see that they are approaching a lock on a canal. The lock's giant doors start to open.

TS makes his way onto the lock's gangway. But he reaches the end of the section. Blocked, he stops and turns around and sees the angry, panting patrolman approaching.

As the officer gets ever nearer, TS takes a forceful leap.

He catches onto the opposing handrail while his body slams into the lock door.

The patrolman watches, powerless, as the doors open wider apart.

Finally the lock opens completely and TS is able to hoist himself onto the embankment, not without feeling intense pain.

TS keeps on walking, holding his ribs, wincing in the pain. The patrolman curses from the other side of the canal.

125 - EXT. DAY - BRICK PLATFORM ALONG A CANAL

His heart still beating hard, TS sits on the brick platform along a grim looking industrial canal. The water is so polluted, the wafts of gasoline make him nauseous.

To gather his wits, TS pulls out his compass from his bag. It broke during his fall, the needle is stuck on east-southeast. He shakes it, to no avail. It's now a useless object.

As for the sparrow skeleton in its little box, it is reduced to small pulverized pieces of bone.

A tear runs down TS' cheek.

In a burst of rage, TS throws the bones into the canal. Seagulls immediately appear and peck at them.

126 - EXT. DAY - HIGHWAY INTERCHANGE

TS, doubled up with pain, is approaching an entrance ramp.

An imposing semi-truck, all chrome and lights, passes him and stops a little further up in the emergency lane, breaking abruptly.

TS is stuck in the narrow space between the highway barrier and the truck.

Suddenly the cab door swings open. TS turns around, terrified. He moves back in a panic. A man with a wrestler's body jumps adroitly down, blocking TS' path.

The truck driver is Ricky. He wears a camouflage tank top and has muscular, hairy, tattooed arms. His bushy eyebrows give him a scary look.

RICKY

How ya doing man? You don't look so hot.

TS SPIVET (*petrified*)

I'm okay. Just fell down and hurt my self...

RICKY

And where d'you think you're headed like this, man?

TS SPIVET

To the Smithsonian.

RICKY

Where?

TS SPIVET

DC, as in Washington man.

Ricky notices the patrol car. He pushes TS up against the wall and steps toward the back of the truck, hiding the boy behind him.

RAILWAY POLICEMAN (*through the car window*)

You seen a boy in a plaid shirt and sweater vest?

RICKY

Sure did. He was in a field back there, wearing a straw hat, chasin' after sparrows.

The patrolman drives away.

Ricky helps TS up into the truck's cabin. The pain is so intense, the boy almost passes out.

Kneeling on the passenger seat, TS peeks up and sees the patrol car pass the truck and drive away.

Ricky climbs into the cab and settles in the driver's seat.

RICKY (CONT'D)

So what's he got on you?

TS SPIVET

He's crazy, he thinks I graffitied a train.

Ricky nods, as if this were not out so out of the ordinary.

The truck take off in a big diesel rumble.

127 - INT. DAY - SEMI TRUCK CAB

RICKY

You're safe here, man.

TS nods, with a hint of incredulity. A long silence.

RICKY (CONT'D)

Name's Ricky!

TS SPIVET

TS.

RICKY

Put your seat belt on TS.

TS reaches for the seat belt but winces in pain.

RICKY (CONT'D) (*pointing to TS' side*)

Show me.

TS pulls up his sweater vest. His rib cage is swollen and bruised with a nasty, black and blue injury. Ricky whistles slightly.

RICKY (CONT'D)

That's the real deal... It hurt when you breathe?

TS nods as he winces.

RICKY (CONT'D)

You got least one, maybe two broken ribs... you seriously need to see a medic.

TS SPIVET

No, no... I'll be okay.

RICKY (*impressed*)

Tough little bugger, aren't you.

TS manages a smile.

Suddenly a flash blinds the boy. Ricky just took a picture of TS with a small digital camera.

RICKY (CONT'D)

Cool!... I always take two pictures of hitchhikers. One when I pick'em up and one when I drop 'em off.

He points to the ceiling of the cab. It's covered in Polaroids. Ricky poses with all sorts of people, different ages, different skin colors.

RICKY (CONT'D)

Even in the Service, I was still taking my pictures.

He pulls the sun visor down. A Polaroid is stuck on its back, showing : a Vietcong, kneeling on a road in

the jungle.

Standing next to him is 20 years old Ricky, in military garb, wielding an M16 on his hip. Ricky pretends to piss on the guy, laughing.

TS SPIVET

Uh... and this guy was a hitchhiker too?

RICKY

Well... not by choice. But yeah, it was me driving the jeep.

TS

So this was already going on back then?

RICKY

What d'you think? "Join the army... see the world, meet interesting people... and kill them".

Ricky plants a straw into a little juice box, hands it to TS, hums along with a sappy song on the radio.

TS is completely drained, physically and emotionally. He starts nodding off and falls asleep. Ricky gently grabs the juice box from his hand.

FADE TO BLACK.

128 - EXT. EVENING & NIGHT - HIGHWAY

The truck disappears into the night.

Ricky turns his head to look at TS, who is feverish and fast asleep.

THE EAST

129 - INT. EARLY MORNING - SEMI-TRUCK CAB

A flash bursts.

TS blinks his eyes, not knowing where he is.

A SECOND FLASH. Ricky leans over with his camera and takes a picture of the two of them.

TS SPIVET

Where are we?

Ricky slides over back into his seat, looks outside.

RICKY

Not far from where you're headed.

(shaking his head) Not sure where you're looking for. But don't ever change. Steady in your boots!... Good luck man.

TS SPIVET *(trying to respond in kind)*

I'm not sure where you're headed either...but...I'm sure you'll find your pine tree, man.

This comes out wrong and sounds so fake that TS grimaces and feels ridiculous.

Feeling equally uncomfortable, Ricky holds TS' hand.

TS walks towards the Smithsonian's majestic shape.

130 - EXT. DAY - WASHINGTON DC

TS walks towards the Smithsonian's majestic shape.

131 - INT. DAY - SMITHSONIAN CORRIDOR AND LOBBY

A Foucault's pendulum swings. TS, mesmerized, stares at it.

TS turns round. He's standing in the lobby of the Smithsonian. It is a vast marble entrance hall decorated with dioramas, old photographs and a chronological display of the history of this great institution.

TS sees himself surrounded etchings and diagrams made by great and famous scientists, as well as images of their instruments:

Copernicus, Galileo, Einstein, Darwin, microscopes, spheres, Foucault's pendulum... everything gravitates around him like planets orbiting around the sun...

The soles of his shoes squeak on the polished floor, amplified by the echo from the cavernous ceiling.

People turn around and stare at this curious looking boy. He makes his way to the information counter.

TS stands in front of the receptionist, pulls his hood down and smiles painfully. The woman wears a large name tag that reads: "Cathy. Do you need information?"

After a moment, Cathy looks up and sees TS. She's taken aback.

CATHY

Say young man, are you alright? Are you injured?

TS SPIVET (*grimacing*)

Cathy, I need information.

CATHY

You look like you need medical assistance.

She picks up the telephone.

TS SPIVET

Thank you. But I would like to speak with Miss G.H. Jibsen.

CATHY (*stupefied*)

Where are your parents?

TS SPIVET (*after a pause*)

They're dead. Do you think you could ring Miss Jibsen, I'm supposed to give a speech tomorrow night.

Cathy gives her colleague a quick look, then dials a number on the phone.

CATHY

What's your name?

TS SPIVET

TS Spivet.

Cathy whispers into the phone, covering her mouth, never taking her eyes off of TS. Trying to act as normal as possible, TS grabs a pamphlet from the counter and looks through it.

CATHY

You are TS Spivet? Or your father is TS Spivet?

TS SPIVET

I am TS Spivet.

Cathy finishes up her conversation and hangs up.

CATHY

Miss Jibsen is on her way down.

TS finds a bench to rest on. He starts drifting into sleep...

TS turns his head and sees Layton sitting next to him. His legs are spread wide and he is spinning the lasso between his feet.

TS SPIVET

You're here!

LAYTON

Never too far away, y'know.

TS SPIVET

Yeah, I know. See? I made it to the Smithsonian.

LAYTON

Hmm... the worst is yet to come...

132 - INT. DAY - SMITHSONIAN LOBBY

WOMAN'S VOICE

Can I help you young man?

TS looks up. Miss Jibsen is bent in front of him.

TS SPIVET

Miss Jibsen? Hello. I am TS. I made it here.

JIBSEN

You're the one I spoke to on the phone last Friday?

TS SPIVET

Yes.

JIBSEN

Where is your father?

TS SPIVET

In fact, he's dead. I lied to you then...

After a while, Miss Jibsen looks up to the ceiling, mouth agape, as if she was trying to get her breath back.

JIBSEN

So who sent me the prototype of the magnetic wheel?

TS SPIVET

I did.

JIBSEN (*incredulous*)

And so you're going to tell me you invented it?

TS SPIVET

Not really. I didn't invent anything...

Miss Jibsen turns back to Cathy who shrugs her shoulders.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

I just transposed the principle of an electron gravitating around the nucleus... but as you know, to assimilate it to perpetual motion requires the creation of a negative entropy...

People around turn to look at TS.

JIBSEN

This can't-

Miss Jibsen abruptly turns around and walks to the middle of the lobby and pauses to think. She quickly stomps back.

JIBSEN (CONT'D)

This can't be. How old are you?

TS SPIVET

Ten.

Miss Jibsen grabs his hand and energetically shakes it. TS cries with pain.

FLASHBACK: Image of TS' screaming face with a dart planted in his skull.

133 - INT. DAY - HOSPITAL CONSULTATION ROOM

In the hallway, Miss Jibsen talks on her cell phone, pacing back and forth.

Through a glass window, we see TS, shirtless, sitting on a medical examining table. A bald doctor reads his chest X-rays against a fluorescent light-panel.

JIBSEN

...I doubt we'll turn him into a great communicator, but with the right clothes and some solid talking points... no problem... in his eyes, I'm the scientific authority, I'm everything he admires... yes... talk to you later.

Miss Jibsen hangs up and enters the consultation room.

JIBSEN (CONT'D) *(worried)*

So? You need to keep him here?

DOCTOR

Nope.

Miss Jibsen is relieved.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

But with multiple fractures, he needs to rest, avoid any abrupt movement... and not cough or laugh.

TS smiles.

The doctor shakes Miss Jibsen's hand, taps TS on the head, then exits the room. Miss Jibsen helps the boy get dressed again.

JIBSEN

So. How do you feel?

TS SPIVET

Like 'that mule done kicked me good.' That's my dad's expression...

Miss Jibsen nods compassionately, thinking of the deceased father.

JIBSEN

The receptionist told me... You must really miss your parents...

TS SPIVET (*uncomfortable*)

Uh. Yeah... of course.

Miss Jibsen kneels down to lace TS' shoes.

JIBSEN

I just spoke to several... colleagues at the Smithsonian. Everyone is ecstatic that you were chosen for this award.

TS SPIVET

You'll have to give me their names, I'll thank them in my speech...

Miss Jibsen looks up, worried.

JIBSEN

On that topic... We can cook something up for you...

TS SPIVET

I prefer to write my own speech. Thank you.

134 - INT. & EXT. DAY - TOWN CAR IN DC STREETS

Washington DC streets and landmarks are reflected in the windshield.

TS and Miss Jibsen sit side by side on the back seat of the town car.

TS grabs a notebook, reflects, and starts taking notes.

JIBSEN

You certainly don't waste any time, do you?

TS SPIVET

Oh no. This is a purple notebook. If I were writing my speech it would be in the red one.

JIBSEN

Yes. Of course... so the purple one is for...?

TS SPIVET

General observations.

JIBSEN

Aaaand?

TS SPIVET (*reading from his notes*)

When does a child become an adult?

Miss Jibsen motions him to continue, smiling.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

- when you don't get excited about Christmas
- when you wear reading glasses around your neck but can seem to find them anywhere
- when you pay income tax and enjoy getting angry discussing 'what the heck they're going to do with all your money'

JIBSEN *(laughing)*

Or when you look down upon children and whatever's going on in their little heads!

135 - INT. DAY - ENCEPHALOGRAPH ROOM

TS is in an encephalogram room.

Dr Ferrano is an austere-looking doctor.

DOCTOR FERRANO *(off-screen, through a microphone)*

Square root of 4 + square root of 4 - square root of 4 + square root of 4
- $X = 4$.

TS closes one eye and keeps the other one wide open.

DOCTOR FERRANO *(off)*

Keep perfectly still TS!

Layton appears suddenly and leans over TS.

LAYTON (O.S.)

Whatcha doin'?

TS SPIVET

Layton?

TS looks up with only one eye open. He sees Layton above him, facing down, as if he too were getting an MRI on the upper part of the machine.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

I'm like a dolphin, turning one side of my brain off and the other one on.

LAYTON

S'that what dolphins do?

TS SPIVET

Yeah. To sleep.

Suddenly the high pitched sound starts again. TS closes his eyes.

In the adjoining room, we see the IMAGE of TS' brain scan on the monitor.

LAYTON

You're funny...

TS SPIVET

Why ?

LAYTON

Ya travel by yourself half way cross the United States... t'end up like a lab rat?

A nurse comes near TS and starts to take off his equipment.

JIBSEN

So?

DOCTOR FERRANO

Now that's something I've never seen.

JIBSEN

? ? ?

DOCTOR FERRANO

It looks like the brain activity of a fish.

They stand up and go without looking at TS.

The gurney pulls back and TS comes out of the machine.

TS SPIVET (to the nurse, reading her name tag)

Anyhow, thank you for evaluating my brain Jodie. .

The nurse looks at him with a strange expression on her face.

136 - INT. EVENING - RECEPTION HALL

Tonight's the big night. White-gloved waiters carry trays full of appetizers through the well-heeled crowd.

The gala attendees gather in small groups, sipping champagne waiting to sit at their assigned tables around the stage.

As people chatter, they intermittently throw inquisitive or amused glances towards TS.

The boy sits alone at a round table wearing a tuxedo, looking worried. He turns to look at the podium with its microphone, waiting for him.

A waiter approaches him, holding a tray in one hand and the other hand behind his back.

WAITER

Would you like some Tuna Tartare on Grilled Asparagus sprinkled with a balsamic vinegar reduction?

TS SPIVET (*grabbing an appetizer*)

Why are you hiding your white glove behind your back?

WAITER (*lowering his voice*)

Well.. Uh.. This is how we're supposed to stand. Otherwise, my boss will fire me.

TS SPIVET

Right. Well, I like your white gloves. Congratulations.

The waiter leaves, looking perplexed.

A giant replica of TS' perpetual motion machine is on display in a corner of the reception hall. As the large magnetic wheel spins, it powers up a series of light bulbs. Next to it, a placard explains the principles at work and extols the energy saving potential of the invention.

From his vantage point, TS tries to gauge visitor's reactions to his creation.

Miss Jibsen walks up and places two pills in TS' hand.

JIBSEN

Here, take these. They'll get you up and running in no time. And if ever you feel overwhelmed, just tap my shoulder twice...

Miss Jibsen winks at TS and sticks a name tag on the boy's lapel.

JIBSEN (CONT'D)

Oh yes! I almost forgot this. In case someone mistakes you for a kid whose parents couldn't round up a baby-sitter.

Miss Jibsen notices someone important of the other side of the room and takes off into the crowd.

TS is alone again. He looks at the impressive number of forks and cutlery on his place setting. He pulls out a pen and begins to outline every fork and knife onto the tablecloth - just like he had done with his tools in his bedroom.

Little by little, people start approaching him.

BLONDE WOMAN

I want to be the first to congratulate you. We're so lucky to have a boy like you. So lucky.

TS smiles, not knowing what to answer but in an instant, the lady is gone.

Other guests start to crowd around TS. Miss Jibsen notices and comes to the rescue. Two waitresses glance at each other, as if they know what's about to happen.

JIBSEN (*answering the people's queries*)

Well, when I heard he was younger, I was skeptical. But we thought we'd give it a shot and the risk paid off...

Young women find the boy irresistible. More people, more questions.

JIBSEN (CONT'D)

I remember sitting in my office before I called him on the ranch. I said to myself, he's only ten, but let's do this!

TS feels more and more uncomfortable.

JIBSEN (CONT'D)

Secretary of Education? Listen, give me your card and we can talk on Monday.

JIBSEN (CONT'D) (*leaning toward TS*)

They're eating you up! They love you!

TS doesn't want to hear any more of it.

SLOW MOTION faces come and go before him. Lips are moving and smiling.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

In 1862 a Frenchman named Guillaume Duchenne discovered the difference between fake and genuine smiles.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

In a genuine smile, it's not just the zygomatic muscles at work, the muscles around the eyes also contract unconsciously. Tonight though, pretty much every adult around me had a 100% zygomatic smile.

TS remembers the secret signal Miss Jibsen had told him about, in case he needed help.

The boy taps her twice on the back, but Miss Jibsen brushes him off and continues talking with a woman who hangs on to her every word.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

I... I gotta get some fresh air.

Losing all semblance of kindness, Miss Jibsen grabs him by the arm. TS feels the pain return to his rib cage.

JIBSEN

Now's not the time. The ceremony is about to begin...

TS SPIVET (*tears in his eyes*)

Sorry... it's just...

JIBSEN (*letting go of his arm*)

Forgive me... I didn't mean to... I just want this to go well...

The lights in the room begin to dim. Guests file to their designated seats. One of the men, who had complimented TS, climbs up to the podium.

TS is happy to clap along with the other guests.

Silence slowly takes over the room.

SMITHSONIAN PRESIDENT

Thank you ladies and gentlemen, and thank you to our distinguished guest.

He looks straight at TS. The boy squirms with embarrassment.

I'd like to tell you a little story about our friend and colleague Dr. Mehtab Zahedi, a leading molecular biologist and someone whose contribution to science has saved countless lives.

TS watches with the appropriate degree of seriousness.

137 - FLASHBACK - FAKE NEWS REPORT - INT. DAY AIRPORT

SMITHSONIAN PRESIDENT

Just yesterday, Dr Zahedi was stopped by airport security for having fifty horseshoe crab specimens. It just so happens Dr Zahedi is Pakistani-American and was held on suspicion of terrorism and then questioned for seven hours before being released.

138 - INT. EVENING - RECEPTION HALL

A shiver ripples through the room

SMITHSONIAN PRESIDENT

His specimens, representing six years of work and nearly two million dollars in research money, were confiscated and 'accidentally' destroyed by the airport police.

139 - INT. DAY - AIRPORT RESTROOM

A hand drops the specimens in a toilet and flushes.

140 - INT. EVENING - RECEPTION HALL

SMITHSONIAN PRESIDENT

The next day, the local paper's headline read: 'Arab man stopped at the airport with 50 crabs in luggage.'

The audience chuckles uncomfortably.

SMITHSONIAN PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

I'm confident the Smithsonian and the entire scientific community can rally together to fight, as they have in the past, against the prejudice and ostracism that is part of the current prevailing climate.

The guests applaud loudly and approvingly.

SMITHSONIAN PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

This is why I look forward to meeting our guest of honor tonight. With a spirit of open-mindedness, I invite you to greet him with all the respect he deserves, in spite of his young age... Ladies and Gentleman, TS Spivet!

The entire room applauds as the president reaches his hand out toward TS. All eyes are on the boy.

Miss Jibsen slaps him on the shoulder for encouragement... TS tries his best to mask the pain.

He winds his way through the tables and climbs onto the stage.

He is barely tall enough to peer over the podium. A woman brings a footstool and TS steps onto it. The audience giggles.

The stage lights are so blinding that the room virtually disappears. The audience settles into 'listening mode.' TS is frozen still.

Time seems to be suspended and the many sounds of the room disassociate. TS hears the various sounds of the room one by one. We see IMAGES of:

- the buzz of the light projectors hanging from the ceiling
- the kitchen door that squeaks when a waiter pushes it open
- the tick tick tick of the stove igniter in the kitchen
- the air that whooshes out of an old man's nostrils
- the sound of a drop of water in a radiator
- the micro-clinking sound of cuff links against the edge of a plate from a man who has Parkinson's disease.

The SOUNDS then all add up, re-forming the regular ambient sound of the room. The boy finally emerges from his stupor.

TS SPIVET

Uh... Hello everybody. My name is TS Spivet, I'm ten years old and I'm actually in sixth grade. Is there anyone in this room who doesn't already have at least a PHD, anyone?

The crowd laughs good-heartedly. Nobody raises a hand.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

So.... I probably won't be teaching you much tonight... but I'd like to tell you three things.

He holds up his first finger.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

First. Thank you. Thank you for not canceling my award because I was younger than you expected. If a fortune teller had told me that I'd receive the Baird Award and become a member of the Smithsonian by the end of the year, I'd have asked to have her divination license revoked!

The audience is tickled pink. Miss Jibsen gives TS the thumbs-up.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

Second. The wheel, as you can see there, is powered by magnets. Yet as you know, they demagnetize within approximately four hundred years. On a human scale, it sounds like a lot. But in geological time, it's not even a fraction of a second. So we're actually far from having achieved perpetual motion...

He pauses, anticipating a reaction from the audience. Nothing happens.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

Three...

He stops, suspended, unable to think of anything. The third point cannot be found. He is perplexed.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

Uh... any questions?

There is a buzz in the audience.

A VOICE

Yes. What's the third point?

TS SPIVET *(falling apart)*

Oh yes... the third...

He stands there, bereft. He can hear whispering chatter, chairs changing positions, people clearing their throats. The audience gets restless.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

...uh... well I'm starting to lose my memory... that's how advanced I am for my age.

His answer flops. TS looks at Miss Jibsen for support. But Miss Jibsen returns the look with a mix of anxiety and hostility. TS waivers, blinded by the lights.

Long pause.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

My brother died this year...

Silence falls upon the room again.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

He shot himself in the barn... No one talked about it. No one ever said "Layton shot himself in the barn." No one.

Pin-drop silence.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

Layton and me, we were always very different... I'd be doing my science experiments and he'd be shooting empty bean cans and coyotes with his Winchester...

The guests watch him, transfixed.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

...So I came up with this idea to make sound-wave maps of the gun shots. That way we could play at something together, like brothers do... without one of us getting bored... he would shoot and I gathered data... and then, one of his Winchesters jammed...

TS' voice falters. The audience collectively holds its breath.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

...I held the bottom of the rifle to help out... I didn't even touch the trigger. There was an explosion. Layton flew across the room... blood dripped off the hay... he was there, but he wasn't my brother anymore... I was alone.

The boy remains silent at the podium for a long moment. People exchange looks in the audience, some are crying.

TS begins again.

141 - EXT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH HILLS

FLASHBACK:

TS SPIVET (O.S.)

I ran to the field to get my father. His face clenched up when I said Layton had hurt himself bad. He ran back and I stayed there, not knowing where to go.

The audience is frozen still.

142 - INT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / BATHROOM

FLASHBACK:

TS SPIVET (O.S.)

Then I ran to the house and hid in the bathroom. I could hear my father whispering on the phone. Then, through the window, I saw the ambulance pull up without the flashing lights.

Miss Jibsen watches, mouth agape.

FLASHBACK:

TS SPIVET (O.S.) (CONT'D)

After a while, Gracie showed up. She was crying too. She sat next to me and hugged me. We stayed a long time like that, lying on the floor without talking.

Pure silence from the room. A long pause.

TS SPIVET (CONT'D)

Well, I wanted you to know how proud I am to get this award... I will do my best to fulfill your trust in me and to be of service to science... even if I am only ten years old... That's all I have to say... Thank you.

143 - INT. EVENING - RECEPTION HALL

Thunderous applause erupts as people stand up to clap.

Miss Jibsen, excited and a bit teary-eyed, jumps on to the stage. Completely forgetting about the broken ribs, she bear-hugs TS. The pain is so sharp, the boy starts to cry.

Miss Jibsen helps TS off the stage and through the crowd towards the exit.

People reach out and try to touch them as they pass, trying to get them to stay. They whisper in Miss Jibsen's ears and hand her business cards. Numerous flashes from photo camera's go off as they pass.

144 - EXT. NIGHT - SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE – REMOVED

145 - EXT. NIGHT - INSIDE THE TOWN CAR

The town car drives through the city.

TS is pale and lies across the back seat. Miss Jibsen sits at his side.

The boy watches the motion of the windshield wipers. He follows the drops that roll along the windows and merge into each other.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

The amazing thing about water drops is that they always take the path of least resistance. For humans, it's exactly the opposite.

146 - EXT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / PORCH

FLASHBACK:

TS' dog Tapioca chews on a bucket on the porch.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

When Layton died, Tapioca started chewing metal buckets till his gums bled. Layton and Tapioca had been inseparable.

IMAGE of Layton playing 'wheelbarrow' with Tapioca's hind legs.

147 - EXT. DAY - LANDSCAPE

FLASHBACK:

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Then one day, Gracie took him for a long walk through the meadow. They sat for a while, facing the mountains.

The dog lays his head on Gracie's lap as she pets and whispers in his ear.

148 - EXT. EVENING - COPPERTOP RANCH

FLASHBACK:

Gracie and the dog return peacefully to the ranch. Tapioca wags his tail.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

The two returned with a new kind of understanding in their eyes. And Tapioca stopped chewing buckets.

The two return peacefully to the ranch. Tapioca wags his tail.

149 - EXT. NIGHT - COPPERTOP RANCH / BACKYARD

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

He went back to snapping at lightning bugs, just like before. As if he made peace with losing his master.

Tapioca jumps joyfully in the air, snapping at the flying insects that light-up against the starry sky.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Maybe some day, I'll go back to snapping at lightning bugs too...

150 - INT. DAY - PHOTO STUDIO

TS sits on a stool in front of a backdrop, surrounded by photographic lighting equipment. A make-up person puts finishing touches before the photo session.

In a corner of the studio, Miss Jibsen talks on the phone.

JIBSEN (*in a hushed voice*)

I swear to you, they loved, LOVED the kid! Granted, they're just a bunch of scientists but if their reaction is any indication of how the general public will respond, we got a gold mine on our hands here.

The photographer tests the flash bulbs. TS blinks as he strains to listen to Miss Jibsen.

JIBSEN (CONT'D)

Hah... people are so predictable, it's nuts. I should write a handbook on how to move the masses.

As TS overhears the conversation, he furrows his brow, much to the dismay of the photographer who is asking for smiles.

Miss Jibsen hangs up and returns to direct the boy.

JIBSEN (CONT'D)

TS... It'd look better if you were sketching in your notebook.

TS SPIVET

But I didn't bring one.

JIBSEN (*to an assistant*)

George, get him a notebook, will you?

TS SPIVET

But it's not the right color. I would never sketch in a green notebook.

JIBSEN

TS. It's for the photograph. No one cares.

151 - INT. DAY - INSIDE TOWN CAR

JIBSEN (*on the phone*)
Wonderful! Wonderful!

She hangs up, takes a deep breath and looks at TS.

JIBSEN (CONT'D)
CNN wants first crack. And, I don't want to get your hopes up... but listen to this... the White House is sniffing around.

TS SPIVET
The White House?

152 - INT. DAY - RADIO STATION

Miss Jibsen and TS are waiting to go 'on air'.

JIBSEN
The president's State of the Union speech is next week and they love having his talking points in the audience. I can hear him now: Look, the American education system is working!

TS SPIVET
The president... wow... that's no small potatoes.

153 - IN. & EXT. DAY - INSIDE TOWN CAR

The car drives through the streets of Washington DC.

JIBSEN
We're the 7th and 16th slots in his speech. National cameras will pan to us twice. Oh, it's sweet TS, it's sweet.

TS frowns more and more.

154 - INT. DAY - NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM

In the museum, Miss Jibsen and TS are posing for a swarm of photographers.

JIBSEN (*talking and smiling*)
What we'd really need are some photographs of your parents... especially one of your brother, preferably with a gun and you in the background. That'd be perfect.

TS doesn't answer.

155 - INT. DAY - SMITHSONIAN LOBBY

JIBSEN
Tomorrow, we're off to New York to do "Letterman" and possibly '60 Minutes'...

TS starts to walk slower, lagging behind Miss Jibsen.

JIBSEN (CONT'D)
...if they ever cut through the crap and make their minds up...

TS remains alone in the corridor, helpless.

JIBSEN (CONT'D)

I just don't have time to dilly dally when other programs are lining up to book us...

156 - INT. DAY - JIBSEN'S SMITHSONIAN OFFICE

Sitting in Miss Jibsen's armchair, TS is looking at the phone on the desk.

After a moment of hesitation, he picks up the receiver and calls the ranch. It rings once, twice, three times...

Images follow the rhythm of the phone rings:

The phone in the empty kitchen.

The stuffed cougar in the half-lit Sett'ng room.

The rocking horse in Layton's bedroom - RING...

The burned-out toaster on the kitchen shelf - RING...

Outside, the bucket with Tapioca's teeth marks, filled with water.

157 - INT. DAY - JIBSEN'S SMITHSONIAN OFFICE

TS hangs up the phone.

He grabs Dr Clair's notebook and leafs through it once again like a flip-book:

"Layton"... "Layton"... "Layton"... "Layton"... "Layton"...

158 - INT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO

CLOSE UP on a comb tracing furrows into well slicked hair.

TS is seated, wearing a blazer, tie and thick framed glasses.

A heavily pierced assistant is applying hairspray on his head, making sure he looks the part of the 'young genius.'

Miss Jibsen is super stressed out. She paces in circles, getting in the crew's way. She waits for the assistant to finish up with TS.

She holds the mirror up for the boy to take a look. He is horrified by what he sees.

MAKE-UP ARTIST

There you go honey... you look like a movie star!

The make-up artist disappears. Miss Jibsen approaches as TS removes the glasses and puts them away.

JIBSEN

...listen up TS. This show's ratings are through the roof... but they're going to want to ambush you... that's just the price you got to pay. Get it?

TS nods, disconcerted by Miss Jibsen's intense stress level.

Miss Jibsen stops for a second to let the audio technician fix TS's microphone.

She walks around TS, getting in the technician's way.

JIBSEN (CONT'D)

...he's going to ask you about Layton, for sure. You saw the accident, you didn't understand what happened, you ran for help... that's

it...Remember, do not express any kind of guilt, not until we consult with our lawyers.

A small group of people arrives. At the center of everyone's attention is the presenter. He points to Miss Jibsen with an annoyed look. An assistant is dispatched towards Miss Jibsen and TS.

ASSISTANT *(to Jibsen)*

We're live in five Miss. You're going to have to go back to the green room like we asked you.

JIBSEN *(offended)*

It just seems normal that a representative from the Smithso-

PRESENTER *(cutting him off)*

Miss Gibson... on behalf of CNN we'd like to thank you and the Smithsonian for bringing TS... now, our PA will kindly bring you to the green room where you can watch the show and sip some champagne courtesy of my personal collection.

Miss Jibsen is disarmed. She leaves the platform.

The presenter shakes TS' hand.

PRESENTER (CONT'D)

Hello TS, you can call me Roy.

TS SPIVET

Hello... Roy...

ROY

First time on live TV?

159 - INT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO

GIRL WITH HEADSET

Roy! Live in twenty seconds.

The crews clears the studio in a heartbeat. Roy takes his place on his chair. He leans his head down, rereads a few note cards. A technician brings a third "guest chair".

GIRL WITH HEADSET (CONT'D)

On-Air in 5... 4... 3... 2... 1...

The red camera light goes on.

160 - INT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO

Roy instantly gets into 'host mode' sitting upright, shiny smile, full of energy and looking like a good listener.

ROY

My guest tonight has grabbed headlines in all of this week's newspapers. He is to science what Mozart is to music!

A second camera rolls up and finds its position in front of TS, its red light is not yet on.

ROY (CONT'D)

TS Spivet!

The camera light flashes on.

ROY (CONT'D)

Only ten years old and dare I say, he's sprinted ahead of legions of scientists in the race to win the Baird Award!

TS awkwardly tries to adopt the host's cheery attitude.

ROY (CONT'D) *(after glancing at his note cards)*

TS, you are an orphan. You grew up in a remote ranch in Montana. Your father wanted you to be a cowboy... Am I right so far?

TS SPIVET

Uh. Yes, Coppertop Ranch. 4.73 Miles north of the Divide. 14.92-

ROY

Tell me TS. How does a ten years old win the Baird Award? Did the proverbial apple fall on your head then, 'lightbulb'... you invented the magnetic wheel?

TS SPIVET

It actually already existed. But what needed to be invented was a system to regulate the magnetic field, that way you can minimize the effect of...

ROY

Long story short, you invented the first perpetual motion machine in history!

TS SPIVET

No, not really... and anyhow, it's not-

ROY

At an age when small kids climb trees... what was it you were playing at? Trigonometry?

TS SPIVET

I like climbing trees.

Roy seems annoyed that TS is not answering in a satisfactory way. He nervously looks down to his note cards.

ROY

Since the age of four you've been conducting scientific experiments, and just last year, one of them ended tragically... With the death of your brother Layton.

TS is caught off guard, not knowing what to say. He suddenly remembers what Jibsen coached him.

TS SPIVET

...I didn't understand what happened. I ran to get help. That's all.

A message is communicated to Roy through his earpiece.

ROY

Ah, TS. We've got someone on the phone line who's always believed in you.
Hello? Mr Stenpock, you are on live television. Can you hear me?

STENPOCK

Loud and clear!

ROY

Mr Stenpock, you teach science class at Butte High School and TS was your student. How did you react when you heard about his Baird Award?

STENPOCK

I was so proud, of course. TS has amazing talents and I'm the first person with whom he discussed his magnetic wheel.

TS is flabbergasted, speechless.

ROY

TS, anything you'd like to say to Mr Stenpock?

TS SPIVET

...uh... hello Mr. Stenpock.

STENPOCK

Hello champ!

ROY

And now, let's take a look at this extraordinary invention !

A dramatic SOUND CUE. To the side of the set, a panel blinks with a multitude of lights. It slides open, revealing TS' magnetic wheel on a glass pedestal, under intense studio lights. The moving wheel is attached to a dynamo that powers a light bulb.

ROY (CONT'D) *(solemnly)*

This is the first perpetual motion machine in the history of mankind!
(turning to TS) TS, how did you come up with this idea and how does it work?

161 - INT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH - LIVING ROOM

Gracie watches television, sitting on the couch, talking on the phone with the long cord.

GRACIE

Liza! See him!? That's my brother. I can not believe this!

Over-excited, she grabs a large handful of microwave popcorn and brings it up to her mouth. Most of the kernels fall onto her chest.

TS SPIVET (ON TELEVISION)

...by pulling this lever, I fragment the magnetic field and thereby increase the turbine's rotational power...

Gracie stares at the television screen teary eyed, torn between pride and indignation.

TS SPIVET (ON TELEVISION) (CONT'D)

...from the moment I could regulate the flux of the magnetic field, I could vary the position of the magnets and either accelerate or diminish the speed of rotation...

GRACIE *(to Liza)*

TS on TV! The same spaz who wore velcro shoes till he was eight cause he couldn't tie his laces. He is on TV!

ROY (ON TELEVISION)

And how long can this wheel turn and produce energy without consuming any?

TS SPIVET (ON TELEVISION)

400 years. Then you have to recharge the magnets.

GRACIE (to Liza)

How 'bout the time he almost electrocuted me with the seismograph. Oh, lets not mention that on TV!

ROY (over excited)

400 years! Meaning, if this wheel were 100 times bigger, we could power all the lights in the CNN building for 400 years and not spend a dime on electricity!

TS SPIVET

Well, you'd still have to replace light bulbs and given the ratio of lighting to square footage, that's still a significant cost...

GRACIE (pretending to laugh)

Ha ha ha haha ha!... He so does not grasp how hilarious he is...

162 - INT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO

ROY

And now TS, it's time to welcome our surprise guest!

Spotlight on a door on the set.

ROY (CONT'D)

Here is... TS' mother, Dr Clair!

THE DIRECTOR

Attention please, camera 3...

3...2...1...

(snapping her fingers)

Top !

163 - INT. DAY - STUDIO GREEN ROOM

Watching on the monitor in the green room, Miss Jibsen spits out a mouthful of champagne...

164 - INT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO

TS is stupefied. His mother walks onto the set with confidence. She gracefully sits in the "guest chair," greets Roy with a little nod and smiles at TS.

DR CLAIR

Hello TS.

TS SPIVET

Hello, mom.

Roy is thrown off by how low-key and reserved their reunion is. He pauses, then picks up again.

ROY

Dr Clair, you've come here straight from Montana and you are TS' mother...

(turning to TS) Why then TS, did you state in the media that you were an orphan? Is this some kind of spin coming from the Smithsonian?

165 - INT. DAY - STUDIO GREEN ROOM

Miss Jibsen, mouth agape, makes a squeaking sound.

166 - INT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO

TS SPIVET *(confused)*

No... well. I don't know... I was scared that they'd send me home before I could receive the award...

ROY

Tell me Dr Clair, you've must have been worried sick, right?

DR CLAIR

When a child disappears like that, it's so unexpected, so painful, the world stops turning...

ROY

So you didn't hold it against him when you found ou-

DR CLAIR *(Cutting him off)*

With all due respect, you asked me a question and I'd like to finish my answer!

Roy stops in his tracks, not accustomed to being addressed this way on his show.

DR CLAIR (CONT'D)

When your child disappears, you lose your sanity. Some will channel their anger by kicking sheep entangled in barbed wire...

ROY

Sheep?

DR CLAIR

Others will search for caterpillars that don't exist...

TS stares at his mother hanging on to her every word.

DR CLAIR (CONT'D)

Those who disappear merely take a train that's never coming back. Sometime you just stop by the tracks and stare at the rails..

ROY

You thought he was gone for good...

DR CLAIR

...when the police called to say they had found his suitcase... For TS to leave his belongings in a train depot, meant he must have been in real trouble..

Roy hears a message in his earpiece. His gesture indicates that he's unable to steer the conversation.

DR CLAIR (CONT'D) (*pointing to Roy, but addressing TS*)

...You see TS, asking a question and not listening to the answer, that's just not right. So you read my journal?

TS SPIVET

I shouldn't have. I know, that's not right either... sorry.

DR CLAIR

And what about giving a firearm to a child as a gift? Or letting two kids play with a rifle in a barn unsupervised... You think that's right?

TS looks at his mom, wide-eyed.

ROY

So? What actually happened in that barn?!!!

Dr Clair ignores him completely.

DR CLAIR (*directly to TS*)

TS... It's not your fault. Tapioca was the first to understand that... Gracie too. Then your father. He may seem detached but actually, he perceives things in his own way... He knows that in our family, no one needs to forgive anyone... What happened, just happened.

ROY

Such a moving moment. And you must have been mortified. He is only 12, all sorts of things could have happened to him-

DR CLAIR

True. Most ten year-olds don't hitch a ride across the country on a freight train, but neither do they receive a Baird award.

ROY

You're so right. TS, Dr Clair, please. Forget the cameras, let yourself experience this emotional moment, go ahead... hug and cry if you need to!

Dr Clair gives him a gentle, but killer stare. Then, she looks around the studio for the first time, noticing the lights and artifice of the set.

DR CLAIR

I wanted to take this opportunity to ask you about beauty pageants. I know Miss USA and Miss America are different, but the criteria that they use to select these women are essentially based on a superficial...

RETURN TO SEQ. 161 - INT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH

GRACIE (*still on the phone*)

Noooooooooo!... Mom. Noooooo!

167 - INT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO

DR CLAIR

...why should the woman who gets the crown necessarily be a ravishing beauty with fungus on the brain? It is my impression that-

TS SPIVET

Mom!

DR CLAIR (*coming back to reality*)
Oh, yes.
(*to TS*) You want to stay here or go?

TS SPIVET (*without hesitation*)
Go.

They both step out of their chairs and meet up in the center of the set, in front of Roy, who's lost complete control of the situation.

As soon as they're face to face, Dr Clair messes up his hair to make him look like his old self.

She wraps TS in her arms and squeezes him tight.

No knowing what to do, Roy gets up and claps.

ROY
A river of tenderness held back by a damn of self control. But the dam is cracking... let it out guys, let it go! Open your hearts, for the audience at home... we all need love...

Dr Clair and TS look up at Roy. They turn their backs to him and walk off the set, toward the exit.

ROY (CONT'D):
But... please... stay with us...

Roy signals the cameraman to follow him.

168 - INT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO / BACKSTAGE AREA

TS and his mother walk into a hallway filled with equipment, past the crew that watches in astonishment.

ROY
The magic of live TV folks...!

Suddenly Miss Jibsen appears before them, furious. She blocks their passage.

JIBSEN
You told me your parents were dead, right?

Roy signals his cameraman to get a close up of Miss Jibsen.

TS SPIVET
Well... they're not.

JIBSEN
You're just a filthy little liar!

Dr Clair's hand abruptly slaps her in the face, shuts her up. Miss Jibsen's chin trembles, her eyes bulge out.

TS SPIVET
Let's go mom.

ROY
Unfolding live... the very heart of the scandal! This week's controversy!

Dr Clair and TS try to make their way past the technicians, but Roy and his assistants block them.

ROY (CONT'D)

Hey, hey... Where do you think you two are going?

Suddenly Father's booming cold and unforgiving voice is heard.

FATHER (v.o.)

To Coppertop Ranch.

Roy turns round and finds himself facing a cow-boy taller than him, with his hat on.

Nobody saw it coming. A punch from Father sends him into the arms of the cameraman who falls over. The camera hits the ground, knocking a projector over.

Then he turns toward TS.

FATHER (CONT'D)

You okay? Reckon' if you're okay, that's all that counts. My son... 's okay.

Father clicks his tongue and turns around crouching, inviting him to hop onto his back. TS climbs up, piggy-back style.

Dr Clair makes her way through the backstage area, clearing the way for Father and TS. The crew watches with big smiles, some even clap. They open doors to let them pass through.

TS SPIVET (*in Father's ears*)

Why didn't you stop that morning, when you saw me on the road?

FATHER

Rancher's honor. I never seen ya' on that road.

169 - INT. & EXT. NIGHT - COPPERTOP RANCH

FLASHBACK :

We see TS on the road leaving the ranch. He stops in his tracks as the pick-up goes around the bend.

INSIDE THE TRUCK: Just as the head lights illuminate the boy, Father looks down to fiddle with the tangled radio wires.

When he looks up again, the truck has passed the boy. In the background, we see TS watching the truck drive away.

170 - INT. DAY - TELEVISION STUDIO / BACKSTAGE AREA

The family walks through a narrow hallway.

Father takes off his Stetson and places on TS' head.

Both are moving forward the white light at the end of the hallway and then gradually disappear in the white and in the blurred.

FADE TO WHITE:

Several months later...

171 - INT. DAY - COPPERTOP RANCH / KITCHEN

Rain falls loudly on the kitchen windows.

Dr Clair is frying up eggs and bacon. TS draws at the table, while Gracie is making a peanut butter sandwich.

GRACIE

I need a box of biscuits, a box of mixed biscuits, and a biscuit mixer. I need a box of biscuits, a box...

TS SPIVET

Are you talking to me? Or are you talking to the peanut butter?

Gracie takes a seat at the table while Dr Clair walks towards the refrigerator.

GRACIE

It's a diction exercise moron! And you'd be better off trying some yourself, If you ever make it on TV again. In the public speaking department, you've got some work to do.

TS SPIVET

How about you just show us how it's done the day you're in a movie...

Dr Clair sticks her head out from behind the fridge door.

DR CLAIR (*ironic*)

Or in the running for Miss Montana...

Gracie reaches for a jar of jam on the shelf.

GRACIE

Or more like in a reality show about a normal person living with a bunch of insane hostile degenerates!

Dr Clair comes and sits at the edge of the table.

DR CLAIR (*to Gracie*)

Speaking of which, does anyone have any idea if or when father is showing up for breakfast?

Gracie gets up and grabs a large pair of binoculars. She walks up to the window.

GRACIE (*to Dr Clair*)

Hmm. You guys still haven't made-up?

DR CLAIR

I know goats eat everything including paper, I get it. But the fact that one them climbed through the kitchen window and ate all my notes on the female Ontophagus Sagittarius and how it copulates with her horns - that is inexcusable.

Dr Clair brings a plateful of toast to the table. We clearly see that she is at least eight months pregnant.

Suddenly she stops, feels a cramp and puts her hand on her stomach in pain.

Gracie and TS quickly help her sit down.

TS SPIVET

I thought you were going to give birth in the kitchen again.

DR CLAIR

Again? I never gave birth in the kitchen.

TS SPIVET

Really? Then why is my name Sparrow?

DR CLAIR

It's Gracie. She found a dead sparrow in the kitchen the day I had you at the hospital. She concluded that you were the reincarnation of the sparrow...

GRACIE

I know when I die, somewhere an elephant will be born!

At that instant, the sound of electric sparks emanates from the toaster. Flames start to burst.

TS SPIVET (V.O.)

Statistically speaking, there were better chances that the next newborn Spivet would be the reincarnation of a toaster.

TS picks up his drawing again.

TS SPIVET (V.O.) (CONT'D)

In the meantime, I had only one month left to finish my plans for a new perpetual motion machine.

The diagram becomes part of the reality of the film. We see two tiny feet protrude from the cradle and hear the gurgling voice of a newborn.

172 - END CREDITS BEGIN

A "Viewmaster" type of stereoscope is in TS' bedroom. The camera pushes into its lens.

Stereoscopic images flash by, accompanied by the familiar clang between each image, displaying a series of sequences. Each one is a scene from the movie with 3 dimensional and paper characters.

Next to the machine, a tape deck is connected to a speaker. An old song plays:

Sweet dreams, My lil' cowboy
Mama's in the kitchen and the cows'a sleepin'
Sweet dreams, My lil' cowboy
Hay's in the barn and the winter's a'comin'
Sweet dreams, My lil' cowboy
It's warm inside and the coyotes'a howlin'
Sweet dreams, My lil' cowboy
Tender night's a fallen' and nothin' can do us no harm.

THE END