

T H E P U R P O S E O F W I N T E R

by Brad Jayne

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INT. TESS'S BAR - NIGHT

A spotlight shines on a small stage. ELLIE (30's), lanky, bohemian, fiddles with tuners on a guitar.

ELLIE
How're y'all doing tonight?

The audience murmurs. A tepid response.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
That good?
(audience chuckles)
I know the feeling.

She laughs to FRANZ (30's) next to her, beard and crew-cut, also with guitar. He smiles and strums - background music for a story Ellie's about to tell.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
I used to live a little ways off the Green River, on the backside of Holbert Cove. Just me and the mountains and that long lanky creek. Was driving home one day and saw a pick-up truck sitting on the side of the road. The guy in his cab, staring out the windshield, not messing with the engine or a flat tire or anything like that. Nice truck too. Nothing like the piece of shit I got.

The audience laughs. Christmas lights soft behind them.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Its got like two hundred thousand miles on it, so it's alright.

They laugh again.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Next day, same truck was there. Day after that, same thing. Got to the point where he was there most every evening. So I gave my new neighbor a name. Billy Ray.

Franz plays a few notes.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
My mind, it got to spinning, that man all still and introspective.
(MORE)

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Thought maybe he's in mourning, his wife gone to cancer or just up and left him. Or maybe he lost a child in some gawdawful car crash. And that part of the mountain, where he sat in his truck and looked out at the river, that was where Billy Ray and his kid would skip rock to rock, in the prettiest little spot this side of Heaven. And when she was gone, that place was all he had. A strange sadness that seeped on through.

Ellie takes a sip from her beer.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Then one day, there was no truck. Figured I must of missed him. Had a few beers in me that day so who knows -

The audience laughs.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

- But the next day, still no Billy Ray. He was gone. Just like that. Maybe he met a new lady, a receptionist on a sales call or a waitress at one of his bars. Or maybe he moved to another road. On a different mountain.

The audience rapt.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

But that's the thing - you can't escape the sadness. Darkness waiting at our side. It's what we do inside that matters. The place we carry.

She positions her guitar -

ELLIE (CONT.) (CONT'D)

So this one's for you, Billy Ray. I pray you found your peace. That you found your river.

She sings, accompanied by Franz on guitar. *"The Water"* by *Johnny Flynn* or similar.

17 ELLIE

(singing)

*All that I have is a river
The river is always my home
Lord, take me away
For I just cannot stay
Or I'll sink in my skin and my
bones...*

Their melody grows -

1996 - FALL - SAVANNAH, GA

INT. COLLEGE HALLWAY - DAY

DAVID (27) adjusts a backpack on his shoulder. He carries a yellow tackle box, streaked with paint.

He is tall, thin. Unruly hair. Shabby clothes.

Soulful, handsome...which he hides from most.

A PRETTY STUDENT passes him, making eye contact. He looks down, smiling slightly.

INT. STUDIO CLASSROOM - DAY

Tall windows line a wall. David paints at an easel, oil paints and brushes spread about.

He's surrounded by other MFA STUDENTS. A professor, MEL (50's), walks among them.

David concentrates on a large canvas: A small hand drawn in light gray charcoal, floating in a dark void. Built with layers of oil paint.

He shapes yellow on the canvas. Mel stops, cocking his head at the painting.

He moves on. David watches. *Disappointed.*

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - AFTERNOON

David scurries through a run-down foyer. His gruff LANDLORD sits at a front desk.

LANDLORD

Hey -

DAVID
I know...You'll have it next week -

LANDLORD
You got a visitor.

He motions to a courtyard. A bearded man waits. He's gaunt. Weathered.

It's been years, but David instantly recognizes him: His brother LUKE (33).

INT. DAVID'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

David and Luke sit across from each other. A VACUUM runs in the next apartment.

It stops. A Mother's SHOUTS heard through the walls.

LUKE
When'd y'all sell the house?

DAVID
About a year ago. They tried to find you.

LUKE
Didn't try very hard.
(beat)
Where's his car?

DAVID
I have it.

LUKE
Hmmpf.

The VACUUM starts up again.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Luke lights a cigarette with a Zippo lighter. He sits back on the couch as David prepares a bed around him.

LUKE
You don't have to do all this.

DAVID
You gotta sleep. I have class in the morning but I'll be back right after.

David moves to the hallway.

DAVID (CONT'D)
You want the light out?

LUKE
Sure.

He switches it off. Beat.

DAVID
Luke...how are you?

Luke's cigarette burns red in the darkness, like an eye -

LUKE
Peachie.

INT. KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

Luke lumbers into the kitchen. He grabs a box of cereal from the counter, pouring it into a bowl.

Left for him by David.

INT. HALLWAY/BEDROOM

He walks with the bowl and spoon, coming upon David's bedroom. He nudges the door open with his foot.

It's messy. A small desk to the side, several large folders sitting atop it.

He opens one, revealing a stack of drawings. He sifts through, stopping at a charcoal sketch of a strange, four-legged creature with a crown of horns - the Beast.

The camera studies it. It's dark. Surreal. Almost a monster.

Luke picks up the drawing, staring down at it as he CHOMPS on his cereal.

Milk dribbles down his beard.

INT. STUDIO CLASSROOM - DAY

David waits, his painting on the easel, further along. Mel enters, wiping clay off his hands.

MEL

I can't believe how lazy some of these undergrads are. I'm gonna start using a cattle prod to make them clean up their mess. Zap! Right on the butt.

David laughs. Mel grabs a stool and sits.

MEL (CONT'D)

Thanks for sticking around.

DAVID

No problem. I just have the one class today.

MEL

Well really I wanted to tell you how impressed I've been with the work you're doing.

David's surprised. Mel rifles through his bag -

MEL (CONT'D)

Most students think they can decide to be a painter, a sculptor, what have you, and that's all it takes. With some there's something necessary about what they do. Something destined.

He finds a set of papers. Hands them to David -

MEL (CONT'D)

I see that in you.

- David takes it.

MEL (CONT'D)

The Aubrey Fellowship. The city's new thing, which would normally suggest a fundamental fuck up -

David laughs.

MEL (CONT'D)

- but they may have gotten this one right. Two grants a year for local artists. Twenty grand stipend for tuition, living space and supplies. Immediate networking opportunities with all the galleries. Really a great way to start a career.

David examines the application.

MEL (CONT'D)
 Mostly work samples.
 Recommendations, which you'd get a
 great one from me.
 (he studies him)
 You should apply.

DAVID
 Of course. Of course I will.
 Thank you.

EXT. TENEMENT BUILDING - DAY

David inserts his key in the main door. Luke appears.

LUKE
 Hey.

DAVID
 (suspiciously)
 Where've you been?

Luke smiles, pulls out a wad of cash.

DAVID (CONT'D)
 What's that?

LUKE
 Part of my cut on the house. Donna
 wired it to me.

DAVID
 You oughta save it.

He smirks.

LUKE
 Let's get drunk.

INT. SAVANNAH BAR - NIGHT

David sits at a bar. He glances over at Luke, talking to SOME GUY in the corner. Guy hands him something.

Luke rejoins David.

DAVID
 Who was that?

LUKE
Just being friendly.

The BARTENDER puts down two mojitos.

LUKE (CONT'D)
Thanks man.

He takes a deep gulp. David looks at his. Does the same.

EXT. STREET PARTY - NIGHT

Luke walks counter to a stream of revelers, plastic cup in his hand. MUSIC and LAUGHTER all around.

David follows, carrying a drink. Drunk and happy.

SHOUTS from above. Older couples toss beads from a balcony.

LUKE
Hey! Down here!

BEAD WOMAN, 50's, heavy make-up, locks eyes with David. She smiles and throws one down to him.

It lands in his hand.

INT. DAVID'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

David stumbles through the door, wearing beads. He collapses on the couch. Luke follows, both drunk.

DAVID
(slurring)
I need a beer.

LUKE
I think you've had enough.

DAVID
That's right. Listen to the big bro. He knows what he's talkin' about.

David kicks off his shoes -

DAVID (CONT'D)
I might puke.

- He tries to get up. Luke steadies him.

LUKE
Let's get you to the bathroom.

David shakes him off.

DAVID
(sharply)
I got it.

He stumbles away. Luke watches.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

David lies on his bed, fully clothed, passed out.

The door is cracked open. Soul MUSIC plays in the other room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC CONTINUES. A VINYL RECORD spins.

Luke cuts a line of white powder on the coffee table. An open beer in front of him.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - LATER

Luke locks the door to the apartment. He walks down the hallway, silhouetted by dingy light.

EXT. SEEDY SEX SHOP - LATER

The shadow of a rail yard. Luke stands across the street. He watches as a TALL MAN enters, in jeans and leather jacket.

INT. SEX SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Luke moves down a hallway, soft SOUNDS OF PORN coming from video booths.

There is compulsion to his movement, his heart THUMPING.

At the end is a cracked door. Tall Man waits.

INT. DAVID'S APARTMENT - NEXT MORNING

David stumbles into the living room, dressed for class, hung-over. The SHOWER runs in the bathroom.

DAVID
Yo, Luke!

He opens the bathroom door, yelling over the SHOWER -

DAVID (CONT'D)
You hungry? You want some eggs?

- moves into the adjacent kitchen.

DAVID (CONT'D)
There's potatoes you could fry up.

He looks for them in a cabinet, coming up empty handed.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Shit...

He steps into the bathroom -

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

- the SHOWER now loud.

DAVID
I must of used 'em.

No steam. *Something is off.*

He slowly approaches the shower curtain, pulling it open -

Revealing Luke, naked on the floor of the tub. Several thick, bloody slashes on his right wrist. A razor blade on the side of the tub.

David steps back. Insert shots of Luke's naked body. Blood on his hands, pooling around him.

David's frozen at the door. Luke looks up, barely conscious -

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

EMTs, NURSES, DR. GIVENS (40's, female) rush with Luke on a gurney. An oxygen mask covers his face.

David tries to keep up.

DR. GIVENS
How long was he like this?

DAVID
I don't know.

They reach a set of swinging doors.

NURSE
(sharply, to David)
Stay here please.

DR. GIVENS
I'll come out as soon as I can.

They disappear behind the doors.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

David waits. A phone RINGS. Typewriter CLACKS. The intercom CRACKLES with a PAGE.

Dr. Givens approaches. She sits.

DR. GIVENS
He'll be okay.

Her hair's tied up. Gentle, tired eyes.

DR. GIVENS (CONT'D)
I'm sorry you had to find him like that.

David looks away.

DR. GIVENS (CONT'D)
From what I can tell there's a history of depression. Probably bipolar.

DAVID
You think?

She rolls with the sarcasm.

DR. GIVENS
Did something trigger it?

DAVID
I don't know.
(beat)
It's been like this for a while.

She glances down at her clipboard.

DR. GIVENS
There's not much to his records.
Psych will come down for a consult.
(MORE)

DR. GIVENS (CONT'D)
He can recover here for another day
or two but they'll tell him he
needs to be treated.

She looks back up.

DR. GIVENS (CONT'D)
Would you talk to him?

Off David -

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Luke sits on a bed in hospital gown, his arm bandaged. David enters with a paper bag.

DAVID
I brought your stuff.

He takes a seat. Luke pulls out jeans and flannel shirt from the bag.

LUKE
Thanks.

DAVID
They want you to talk to some
people.

LUKE
I bet. I've been through this
racket before. I'm not getting
stuck here.

He pulls on the shirt, getting dressed.

LUKE (CONT'D)
I was drunk. It was stupid. It
won't happen again.

DAVID
You said that before.

LUKE
Is that right? Well aren't you the
little expert. Considering y'all
started this crap. You and Daddy.
Sending me away.

David looks away. Luke pounces.

LUKE (CONT'D)

You're so full of it. You think you're gonna be some big artist or something, but that ain't happening. Not from what I've seen. Anyone that says different is fucking with you.

DAVID

You're an asshole.

Luke stuffs his things into the bag.

LUKE

Yeah, well, we get what we deserve.

He walks out. David remains in the room. Framed by the threshold of the door.

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING - FOYER - DAY

David carries a grocery bag with cleaning supplies. The Landlord watches from the desk -

LANDLORD

(awkwardly)

Everything alright?

DAVID

(matter-of-factly)

He'll live.

He calls after him, trying to be helpful -

LANDLORD

Elevator's out again.

INT. TENEMENT BUILDING STAIRWELL - DAY

David trudges up concrete steps. A fluorescent light strobos.

INT. DAVID'S KITCHEN

He surveys the room. Dishes piled in the sink. Empty beer bottles on the table and counter.

INT. BATHROOM

He kneels at the side of the bloodied tub, in gloves, scrubbing hard with a bristle brush.

He takes a break, stretching his arm.

INT. SAVANNAH BAR - AFTERNOON

David takes a seat.

BARTENDER
What can I get you?

DAVID
Vodka.

BARTENDER
Straight up?

DAVID
Whatever.

Bartender steps away.

David notices two MEN IN SUITS talking to two MADE-UP WOMEN across the bar. Goodlooking, put together. Suit 1 raises his drink to David. Sarcastically.

The others laugh. David looks down.

Bartender returns, putting down a Screwdriver.

BARTENDER
(flatly)
House special.

David takes a drink.

EXT. SAVANNAH BAR - LATER

David stumbles out the door. The SUITS and WOMEN stand to the side, Suit 1 smoking a cigar.

David pulls out a cigarette. Tries to light it with Luke's Zippo. No flame. It's empty.

DAVID
Dammit.

He notices the Suits. Boldy, drunk -

DAVID (CONT'D)
Can I get a light.

Suit 1 puts out his cigar on a brick wall.

SUIT 1

Sorry man.

The others laugh as they move back toward the bar.

DAVID

No you're not.

SUIT 2

Dude, relax.

David gets angrier.

DAVID

What's that supposed to mean? You can't just say that.

Suit 2 knocks hard into David's shoulder as they move away.

SUIT 2

That better?

They laugh.

SUIT 1

What a loser.

David is livid. He grabs Suit 1 by the collar.

SUIT 1 (CONT'D)

Fucking A!

They tussle. The Bartender, a Waitress, several customers run out. Alarmed by the commotion.

The Bartender grabs David -

BARTENDER

You're outta here.

DAVID

It was that douchebag! It was his fault!!

He shoves the Bartender. Bartender falls into the wall, cracking his nose.

David stands alone, drunk, breathing heavily.

Everyone watches him. The Bartender touches his bloody nose.

BARTENDER

(to a Waitress)

Call the cops.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM - MORNING

David wakes up. Hung-over. The room way too bright. He looks at the clock - 10:09 AM.

DAVID

Fuck.

A DRONEY HUM rises. *The buzz of dragonflies.*

INT. STUDIO CLASSROOM - DAY

The HUM continues. David sits at his easel, zoning out on his painting, splashed by natural light.

It's further along. The charcoal hand barely visible under oil paint, now forming a mysterious floating nightscape - a poignant moon in a starry sky.

Striking.

He makes small brush strokes on the painting. Mel enters.

MEL

We missed you this morning.

DAVID

I overslept.

Mel takes a seat. Awkwardly -

MEL

The registrar's office had a couple of visitors. Two police officers, strangely enough.

(beat)

I told them they must have the wrong guy.

DAVID

Uh uh.

Mel watches him.

MEL

You know you can always come to me. I'll help anyway I can.

DAVID

Thanks. It'll be fine.

He returns to the painting. Turning his back on Mel.

EXT. TENEMENT BUILDING - DAY

Landlord walks out with two COPS. David watches from down the street. Scared.

INT. DAVID'S APARTMENT - LATER

David rushes through the door with a brown bag.

He grabs a juice glass from the counter. Pulls out a bottle of cheap vodka from the bag.

He pours a shot, splashing the liquor on the counter. Downs it. Then pours another.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

David carries a drink and a cardboard box. He packs the box, puts a couple of folders in it, throws others in the trash.

He opens another folder. On top is the charcoal sketch of the Beast. He freezes, then picks it up. Staring down at it...

Suddenly he rips it in half, dropping it in the trash. We stay on the torn sketch. The Beast's eyes drill into the camera.

INT. STUDIO CLASSROOM - DAY

Mel walks through as several Grad Students work. He reaches David's space.

It's empty. Mel stares at the vacant easel -

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

- The nightscape painting now shoved in the backseat of a beat-up Oldsmobile.

Next to the painting is a suitcase, other canvases, a couple of boxes from David's haphazard packing job.

David drives in a heavy winter jacket. The heat in the car not working.

Running away.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

ASHEVILLE, NC - WINTER MORNING

Stout mountains rise through a sea of smoky blue clouds.
Covered with forests of frosted pines. Muffling the valley.

A new landscape. Cold and still.

INT. SMALL HOUSE - MORNING

David (now 29) sits on his bed. Thinner, tired. He takes a nugget of pot from a baggie and wedges it into a glass bowl.

He hits it.

A PHONE RINGS. He doesn't move, exhaling with a cloud of smoke.

INT. KITCHEN/LIVING ROOM - MORNING

David stares at an answering machine. The red light blinks.
He presses the button -

VOICE

David, it's Jen McKay again. Please
give me a call when you can -

He quickly stops it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

David sits on the couch, staring dumbly at the television.
The phone RINGS again.

He turns to it. Slow creep into the phone. Unsettling.

RIIINNNG...RIIINNNG...RIIINNNG...

DAVID

Jesus Christ.

He moves to it, picking it up -

DAVID (CONT'D)

Hello?

BETTY (O.S.)

David. It's Betty at Azalea
Gardens.

He's relieved.

DAVID
Hey Betty, how are you?

BETTY (O.S.)
I'm doing okay, but we still have
these things of your aunt's.

DAVID
Her kids didn't get them?

BETTY (O.S.)
They said these are yours. We'll
have to throw them away if no one
wants to claim them.

DAVID
No...don't do that. Can you ship
it?

Ellie (*from the prologue*) barges through the kitchen door
with two bags of groceries. In vintage top and long skirt.

The house is divided into two apartments - Ellie on the top
floor, David on bottom.

ELLIE
Hey.

She tries to whisper but that's not her nature. She drops the
bags on the counter. A can falls to the floor.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
Shit.

David rushes off the phone.

DAVID
I'll pay for it...Yes, same
address...Thank you...Yep, thanks.

He hangs up. Ellie unloads the groceries.

ELLIE
Who was that?

DAVID
Something with my aunt.

ELLIE
Right. Sorry.

She returns to the bags. He sits back on the couch.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
 Strays made a mess again. Hope you
 aren't the one feeding 'em.

She grabs a pan and turns on a gas burner.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
 Mind if I use your stove?

DAVID
 Yours still isn't working?

ELLIE
 Sal says he's on it. If it's not
 fixed by next week may need yours
 to make pies for Thanksgiving.

DAVID
 That's fine.

ELLIE
 We've paid that man rent for two
 years and he's as unreliable as
 ever.

She approaches. Touches her pocket -

ELLIE (CONT'D)
 Almost forgot.

- pulls out a folded piece of paper and hands it to David.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
 Apparently they need bookkeeping
 help. Tess recommended you.

David reads the name and number. Ellie opens a can of
 tomatoes. Making stew.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
 It's the Art Museum.

Off David.

INT. ART MUSEUM OFFICE - BULLPEN - DAYS LATER

David sits at a computer in a beat-up cubicle, inputting
 numbers into a spreadsheet. Surrounded by storage boxes.

He notices a large poster on the wall: ASHEVILLE ART
 MUSEUM...SPRING GROUP SHOW...OPEN SUBMISSIONS.

'Rogue Gallery' is listed as a sponsor.

HANK (45), the Museum Director, speaks with SALLY (35), skinny, thick glasses, at a nearby desk.

He catches David staring at the poster.

HANK

Hey!

David looks back down at monitor.

HANK (CONT'D)

You're the new one?

DAVID

I guess.

HANK

No personal calls.

DAVID

Okay.

Hank leans into the computer monitor.

HANK

You haven't gotten very far with this. If you're not up for it we can find someone who is.

DAVID

I got it. I'll finish it today.

HANK

Good.

He exits. Beat.

SALLY

(kindly)

Don't worry about him. He can be an a-hole.

Sally's PHONE RINGS. She picks it up. David stares at the monitor. *Embarrassed.*

EXT. STREET - DAY

David drives his Oldsmobile through an industrial area, pocketed with vintage stores, bars, coffee shops.

He stops at a stop light. A converted warehouse is on the corner - ROGUE GALLERY. Large glass windows show off a metal sculpture on one side, a clunky painting on the other.

He watches as two PATRONS enter.

The light turns green. He presses the gas. The car SHAKES. He looks down at the dash, the 'check engine' light on.

DAVID

Fuck.

It leaps forward then stalls. Traffic barrels past him.

DAVID (CONT'D)

FUCK!

INT. SERVICE STATION LOBBY - DAY

David waits in a plastic chair, a CLERK at the counter.

A WOMAN enters. David looks up, then quickly back down. She approaches the counter.

WOMAN

I'm here for the Voyager.

CLERK

Didn't figure you for a mini-van.

WOMAN

What can I say...it does the trick.

They laugh.

CLERK

I bet. Hold tight. It's almost ready.

She sits. It's REBECCA (28), dark skin, long hair in braids. A biology grad student. Comfortably marching to her own drum. *She doesn't spend much time on what others think of her.*

She glances over at David -

REBECCA

Hey.

- realizing she recognizes him.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

You're Ellie's roommate.

DAVID

She lives above me.

REBECCA
That's right. You're like
neighbors. I knew that.

A MECHANIC enters.

MECHANIC
Come on back.

David follows him.

REBECCA
Good luck.

EXT. SERVICE STATION - DAY

David stands by a bay, the Oldsmobile on a lift behind him.

MECHANIC
Transmission's shot. Been barely
hanging on for a while now by the
looks of it.

DAVID
How much?

MECHANIC
At least a grand, and that's
rebuilt. Gonna be tough to source
it out over Thanksgiving. Maybe
next week.

DAVID
I don't have that.

MECHANIC
It's more than the whole car's
worth.

DAVID
Well that sucks.

MECHANIC
Yep.

David looks around. *Stuck.*

INT. MINI-VAN - DUSK

Lab rats circle a metal cage in the front seat of a mini-van.

REBECCA
(driving)
Sorry you gotta sit back there.
They can get car sick.

David's in the way back, the middle seat taken out and long forgotten.

DAVID
It's fine.

Awkward beat. Loudly, from the back -

DAVID (CONT'D)
Thanks for doing this.

REBECCA
Uh-huh. It's on my way.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rebecca's van drives off.

David walks up to the back of the house. A cardboard package sits on the stoop. Waiting for him.

INT. DAVID'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

David plops the package on a counter, 'Azalea Gardens Nursing Home' in the return address.

He pulls a beer out of the fridge. Pops the cap. Takes a deep swig.

Then another.

INT. DAVID'S KITCHEN - LATER

A bottle of cheap vodka on the counter, next to a juice glass with remnants of a drink.

David staggers from the fridge, dropping ice into the glass. Pouring vodka on top of it with a splash of OJ.

He takes a drink. Then picks up a butcher knife.

The large knife sways dangerously. He moves to the package. Takes another gulp -

Then stabs down.

Into the box. He pulls the flaps apart:

An accordion folder rests next to a faded black shoebox. Old composition books and sketch books bound together.

He lifts the lid off the shoe box. Revealing papers and a stack of photos:

*A pretty woman (26) at a picnic table. Watermelon rind in her hand. David's MOTHER.

*YOUNG DAVID (7) with a chubby older couple in front of a small house, AUNT DONNA and UNCLE CHARLES.

*Young David and YOUNG LUKE (13), their arms around each other in a field.

He picks up one of the composition books, a *sketch of a Crow* on the cover, loose drawings and watercolors placed between the pages.

He leafs through it. The DRONEY HUM returns. *The buzz of dragonflies.*

He unfolds a watercolor landscape: a winding marsh river, through the eyes of a child. He stares down at it -

CUT TO:

1975 - COASTAL NORTH CAROLINA - NEW BERN

EXT. MARSH RIVER - SUMMER AFTERNOON

The river from the painting. Marsh grass sways, backlit by summer sun. BIRD SONGS and GENTLE WIND join the soundscape.

A boy sits waterside - YOUNG DAVID (7).

(These flashbacks are not necessarily literal. This landscape is David's subconscious, shaped by memory.)

He holds a pencil and composition book in his lap, drawing a dragonfly.

A BUZZ darts across the river, revealing itself as a 2D *animated dragonfly*. David's drawing come to life, dancing around his head. David looks up at it, smiling as he draws.

He hears RUSTLING from the river - a COYOTE watches from the opposite bank.

David leans toward it, the dragonfly over his shoulder.

DAVID
Holy crap...

The Coyote stares back.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Look at you.

EXT. CANDLEWOOD FARM - FIELDS - DAY

Young David runs along a wooden fence - the Candlewood Farm, butting up to his family's small plot of land.

He's excited, on a mission, passing a large wooden shed on the far side of the field.

He approaches a gate -

DAVID
Luke! Luke!!

YOUNG LUKE (13) pets a horse, BELLE. Black with a stripe of white down her snout.

LUKE
Shhh. You'll spook her.

DAVID
(out of breath)
Guess what I saw...you won't believe it...

They hear a TRACTOR. Luke looks over. Their FATHER (38) stands on the side. Tall, strong, darker-haired like Luke.

FATHER
(shouting)
Evenin', boys!

The boys laugh.

LONNIE (25) sits in the driver's seat, the oldest Candlewood son and farmhand. Skinny, sweaty, overalls.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Y'all get on soon and get supper ready.

LUKE
We will.

LONNIE
You taking good care of her, Cap'n?

LUKE

You bet. Gave her some carrots and she's been catching shade over yonder.

LONNIE

Good man.

They drive off.

EXT. FIELDS - SUNSET

David and Luke sit in the branch of an oak tree. Father and Lonnie bale hay in the distance.

Luke amateurishly lights a cigarette with the Zippo lighter.

DAVID

Daddy know you took that?

Luke smirks.

LUKE

He gave it to me.

DAVID

Liar.

LUKE

You best watch it. He wouldn't look fondly on that name calling.

DAVID

He wouldn't like you stealing his cigarettes neither.

Luke laughs. David looks out over the fields.

Belle grazes with cattle. Crickets CHIRP as the day ends.

DAVID (CONT'D)

You ever think about momma?

LUKE

Sure.

DAVID

I can't hardly remember her.

Luke watches him, then stretches his hand out. His palm splashed by sunlight.

LUKE
You feel that?

He moves his hand down.

LUKE (CONT'D)
The sun. Right on your face.

David follows his lead, bright sun on his cheeks and chin.

LUKE (CONT'D)
That's momma.

Dozens of *2D animated dragonflies* appear, surrounding the tree. Magical specks from David's imagination.

Surreal -

CUT TO:

1998 - ASHEVILLE

INT. ADULT DAVID'S HOUSE - CLOSET - NIGHT

David stumbles through a long, cluttered closet. Drunk.

He stops at the back wall. Looking down at his nightscape painting. Abandoned in a corner.

INT. ROGUE GALLERY - DAY

David carries the large canvas wrapped in brown paper. A STAFFER is on the phone at a counter.

STAFFER
(into the phone)
I understand...

She nods to David. He holds back.

STAFFER (CONT'D)
I'm sure that's how the artist
intended it.
(pause)
Because that's how she made it.
Will you hold on one second?

She covers the mouthpiece -

STAFFER (CONT'D)
(to David)
I'm sorry. It's just me today.

DAVID
That's alright.

She glances at the canvas -

STAFFER
We don't take unsolicited pieces.

DAVID
Oh. Okay.

STAFFER
Plus with the holidays coming up.
Not a good time.

David nods.

STAFFER (CONT'D)
You can leave your info if you'd
like.

He backs away.

DAVID
That's okay.

Staffer returns to her call.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM - THANKSGIVING DAY

David lies in bed, watching a movie. Ellie appears at his door. Barging in -

ELLIE
Get dressed.

She pulls open the curtains. Letting in light.

DAVID
What the hell?

ELLIE
It's four o'clock.

DAVID
I am dressed.

Ellie grabs his glass bowl from the bedside table -

DAVID (CONT'D)
How was dinner?

ELLIE

Fantastic. Eric H. got drunk as hell and did his rendition of 'The End'.

- taking a hit.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

27 goddamn minutes. You don't know what you missed.

David smiles. Ellie moves to David's closet -

ELLIE (CONT'D)

I told Franz we'd meet him.

- pulling out clothes.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Him and Rebecca.

David watches. His interest piqued.

INT. TESS'S BAR - EVENING

Ellie leads David through a crowded bar, heading for Franz and Rebecca.

ELLIE

Happy Thanksgiving!

Franz lights up. Ellie grabs Rebecca in a big hug. Franz politely turns to David.

FRANZ

Good to see you.

DAVID

Thanks. You too.

Ellie and Franz draw into each other. A Bartender hangs Christmas lights behind them. David puts his jacket on the bar, ordering a drink.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Screwdriver please.

David stands by Rebecca. *Awkward beat.*

REBECCA

How's your car?

The bar is loud.

DAVID

What?

REBECCA

(louder)

Your car. Still fucked?

DAVID

Pretty much.

She sips her drink. *This is going nowhere. Fast.*

The Bartender puts David's drink down. He goes to grab it as Rebecca turns, knocking it onto his jacket.

REBECCA

Shit!

He tries to catch it. Misses it.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

He shakes off his jacket.

DAVID

It's fine. I spill two for every one I get down.

She laughs.

REBECCA

Vicious cycle.

DAVID

You got that right.

INT. REED'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

A small house party. Academics, artists, hippies crowd into a beat-up apartment. Franz and Ellie play guitars. A TATTOOED WOMAN plays along on mandolin.

David sits alone. Watching as REED (30's, white, heavysset) packs a bong.

He's Rebecca's fellow grad student, with a TRIO OF HIPSTERS, also grad students. Scraggly hair and beards.

They talk and laugh with a couple of PRETTY GIRLS (20's). David is quiet.

Rebecca chats in the kitchen with a COUPLE. She looks David's way, smiling. He looks down.

REED
(to David)
Want a hit?

DAVID
Sure.

Reed hands him the bong and a lighter.

REED
Start it up.

David lights it, pulling deeply -

REED (CONT'D)
(snarky)
Jesus...

- he coughs it out, embarrassed.

REED (CONT'D)
Save some for the rest of us.

The others laugh. David's POV: *They're laughing at him.*

CUT TO:

1975 - NEW BERN - INT. SHED - NIGHT

Young David stands in front of a planked door, in white undershirt and boxers.

Staring at a shape through cracks in the wall. The shadow of a four-legged creature. The Beast, come to life.

It POUNDS the wall. SNORTING. GROWLING. Scaring the boy.

The sounds climax -

1998 - ASHEVILLE - EXT. REED'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Adult David rushes away. Rebecca jogs up after him.

REBECCA
Hey!

He ignores her.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Hey!!

He stops.

 DAVID
What?

 REBECCA
You're leaving?

 DAVID
I gotta get home.

 REBECCA
I'll walk with you.

 DAVID
No. You should go back.

 REBECCA
I could use the fresh air.

Off David, considering.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

They walk along a sidewalk.

 REBECCA
Never lived in a place where it got below twenty. Could've been more of a bad-ass about it and gone to Nova Scotia or Antarctica or some cold as balls place like that, but baby steps, you know.

 DAVID
Baby steps?

 REBECCA
That's right. Plus I heard the weed here was good.

 DAVID
Sounds like you got your priorities straight.

Rebecca laughs. They stop. *She softens. Brings a wall down.*

 REBECCA
I'm finishing my dissertation. Chemical imbalances and brain function. This was pretty much the only program that would have me.

DAVID
(surprised)
Really?

REBECCA
Don't be a dick.
(beat)
I'm just trying to find my way.
Like the rest of us.

David motions to his house.

DAVID
This is me.

REBECCA
I know.

DAVID
Thanks for the company.

REBECCA
Sure.
(beat)
You know what, it's early. Let's go
somewhere.

DAVID
Where?

REBECCA
Show me something. Something cool.

EXT. WATERFALL - NIGHT

David comes out of a wooded path onto a small waterfall, lit by the moon. They're high in the mountains, snow on the trees and rocks.

Rebecca stumbles up behind him. Struck by the sight -

REBECCA
Damn.
(she turns to him)
Come here often?

He laughs. Surprising himself.

EXT. WATERFALL - LATER

They sit on a large rock. Rebecca puffs a joint.

REBECCA
How old you think these falls are?

DAVID
Old.

REBECCA
Very precise of you.

She passes him the joint -

REBECCA (CONT'D)
They have healing properties you
know.

He hits it.

DAVID
How's that?

REBECCA
The impact of the water creates
negatively ionized air. Increasing
brainwaves and serotonin in the
human brain.

Tranquil beat. He passes the joint back.

DAVID
Must be nice to know everything.

REBECCA
It has its drawbacks.

He laughs.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
What?

DAVID
You're funny.

Beat.

She places her hand on his. He looks down at it, then slowly
moves his hand away.

She's surprised. But cool about it.

REBECCA
Okay.

They watch the waterfall.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Sleet falls. Muffling the forest.

David leads Rebecca. A branch SNAPS. He peers into the darkness. Red eyes appear deep in the woods.

He steps back, scared.

REBECCA

What is it?

DAVID

Nothing.

She walks past him. David looks into the dark woods.
Something is there.

EXT. FURTHER IN THE WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Birds-eye view of the snowy forest. A large, gnarly creature gallops through the shadows - the Beast.

INT. REBECCA'S MINI-VAN - NIGHT

Rebecca drives. David sits in the passenger seat.

He stares down at the road as the yellow lines hypnotically pass by. A SPINNING sound rises -

1975 - NEW BERN

INT. YOUNG DAVID'S TENANT FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Young David rushes down a narrow hallway to a mud room.

DAVID

Luke!

A tub washer SPINS loudly. Young Luke rinses clothes in a utility sink, the faucet splashing in his face.

LUKE

What?

DAVID

That big ole crow is back. He's in the oak tree out front.

LUKE

Great.

(re: washer)

One of you better get this batch out on the line.

DAVID

I'm gonna paint it. I need paper.

LUKE

You got plenty up in your room.

David stretches his arms out.

DAVID

I wanna do something big.

LUKE

There's parcel paper in daddy's study.

DAVID

That'll work.

David runs toward the front of the house.

LUKE

Be quiet. He's sleeping.

INT. FRONT ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Young David enters cautiously. It's dark. Musty. Windows curtained off.

He opens a closet. Crammed with boxes, an old camera, faded wrapping paper.

He spies a roll of brown paper in a corner. Grabs it.

Then notices a shoebox on a high shelf. Black with white top. *The same box from the package.*

He takes it down. Opens the lid - old letters, cards, family photos.

He pulls out the photo of his Mother, eating watermelon.

FATHER (O.S.)

What are you doing?

Father glares from the back doorway. Stubble on his face. Eyes blood-shot.

He stomps toward him. Grabbing the box -

FATHER (CONT'D)
Put that back.

- thrusting it on the shelf.

DAVID
How come I've never seen those?

FATHER
Cause they're not for you to mess with.

DAVID
You're just gonna leave it up on some shelf?

Father turns to him. Eyes like daggers. Luke appears at the door, holding the basket of laundry.

FATHER
(harshly, to Luke)
You're supposed to be watching him.

LUKE
He wanted that paper. I told him you were sleeping.

Father notices the roll in David's hands.

FATHER
That's all you came in for?

He nods.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Get on then.

David steps away. Luke glares at his Father. He slams the basket to the floor.

LUKE
These need hangin'.

He storms out. Father remains. Alone in the dark room.

EXT. YOUNG DAVID'S PORCH - DAY

A *hand-drawn animated Crow* CAWS at the top of a tree. Another piece of Young David's artwork come to life.

He paints the same image on a cut of parcel paper on the floor of the porch, weighed down at each corner with books.

Similar in style to the dragonflies, but more sophisticated. *His talent is growing.*

He looks up as he paints. The *animated Crow* CAWS again, standing guard on a branch.

The screen door SLAMS. Luke runs out of the house.

DAVID
Be careful!

LUKE
Lonnie's shot him some'en.

Luke runs toward Candlewood Farm. David puts his brush down to follow.

EXT. CANDLEWOOD BARN - DAY

The Coyote hangs from a rafter, bloody.

Lonnie steps away from a winch, tee-shirt soaked with sweat. His little brother JIMMY (14) helps him.

Luke runs up, followed by David.

LUKE
Hot damn. What'd you get it with?

LONNIE
16 gauge.

David recognizes it from the river.

DAVID
What'd you do?

LONNIE
She's been messing around the cow fields. Already took out four chickens.

JIMMY
Not no more though.

Lonnie and Luke laugh.

DAVID
You didn't have to kill it.

LUKE
Don't be a baby.

JIMMY
Yeah, what you want, a funeral?

LONNIE
(to Jimmy)
Hush you.

David stares into the Coyote's glassy black eyes.

LONNIE (CONT'D)
I had no choice, Dave. There's no
point to a beast like this. You'll
see.
(to Luke)
Hold her for me.
(glancing at Jimmy)
Lord knows this one ain't for shit.

Jimmy glares. Luke hugs the Coyote from behind, holding
it in place.

LONNIE (CONT'D)
(to David)
Watch out now.

David moves out of the way. Lonnie approaches with a large
knife. He slices it across the Coyote's neck.

David watches as it bleeds onto Luke and the floor.

CLOSE-UP of Luke's bloody hands -

1998 - ASHEVILLE

INT. BIOLOGY LAB - DAY

- CU on a lab rat held tight. Firm but gentle.

Rebecca inspects its belly, injecting a needle into the
fleshy area. The rat twitches.

INT. BIOLOGY LAB - OFFICE - DAY

Rebecca works at a computer. Reed enters, hovering at the
edge of the frame.

REED
We're grabbing pitchers at
Gatsby's.

She glances through a window. Our Trio of Hipsters wait.

REBECCA
I gotta finish this up.

He didn't really invite her -

REED
Uh-uh.

She holds out a folder.

REBECCA
Here's that data analysis for
Chuck.

REED
He says he's got it.

He exits. Leaving her at the desk.

EXT. BIOLOGY BUILDING - ALLEY - DAY

Rebecca sits on a discarded lab stool, the day gray and cold.
She takes a deep drag off a cigarette, sucking in its warmth.

INT. DAVID'S KITCHEN - DAY

David stands at a window, holding a bag of trash.

He watches as Ellie and Franz move to Ellie's truck,
laughing, guitar slung over her shoulder.

He's avoiding them.

Ellie's truck pulls out. David moves toward the back door.

EXT. BACK OF DAVID'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

David dumps the trash in a garbage can.

He spots a STRAY DOG scrounging down the street, black with
white down her front.

David whistles. The Stray Dog's ears perk.

INT. KITCHEN

Two chicken breasts SIZZLE in a cast iron skillet. David
turns them over.

I/E DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT

David opens the door, revealing Rebecca. There's a cut on his face.

REBECCA
Jesus Christ.

DAVID
Nah. Just me.

REBECCA
What the hell happened?

DAVID
Nothing a bowl won't take care of.
You coming in?

She considers -

REBECCA
Yeah. Fine.

She follows him in. David moves to the kitchen, still drunk. Rebecca surveys his place.

DAVID
(opening the freezer)
You should have been at the jam.
Ellie and Franz were amazing.

Rebecca stops at the closet, the door open, David's nightscape painting back in place.

He returns, a bag of frozen peas on his face.

DAVID (CONT'D)
It kicked ass.

REBECCA
I see that.

DAVID
I fell.

REBECCA
I bet.
(re: closet)
What's this?

DAVID
Bunch of junk.

He tries to close the door. Rebecca moves through it before he can, passing his Aunt's cardboard package. She picks up the painting, noticing two others.

REBECCA
Who did these?

DAVID
Me.

REBECCA
You?

DAVID
In grad school.

REBECCA
No shit. You're like an artist.

She looks at the nightscape closely.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Where is this?

DAVID
I don't know. It just kinda came to me.

REBECCA
It's great. You should show these somewhere.

DAVID
It's not the kinda thing galleries want. The museum has a group show coming up but it's not a good fit.

REBECCA
How do you know?

DAVID
You hear it enough, you know.

REBECCA
You're not asking the right people. I bet you've got all sorts of crazy things rattling around in that head of yours.

She saunters toward him.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Just full of surprises.

DAVID
(quietly)
What are you doing?

She takes the peas from his face.

REBECCA
You called me.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rebecca and David stumble to the bed, kissing. She drops her jacket. He grabs at his shirt, pulling it over his head.

They land on the mattress. David takes her hand, noticing a black mark on the underside of her wrist.

DAVID
What's that?

REBECCA
You never saw my tat?

She presents her wrist. In small sans-serif font: It's=It Is.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
I can never keep that shit
straight.

DAVID
That's kinda brilliant.

REBECCA
I keep trying to tell ya.

DAVID
Good thing you got it right that
time.

She laughs. David kisses her.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Light streams in, waking Rebecca. She looks across the other side of the bed. It's empty.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Rebecca leans against the back of the couch, staring at David's painting propped against the wall.

Suddenly she jumps up, moving toward it.

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

David waits on a bench. On the other end is a dark-haired GIRL (8) in thrift-store jacket. With her GRANDMOTHER, big-boned and Latina.

The Girl peeks at David.

GRANDMOTHER
(sharply)
Deja en paz a ese pobre hombre!
(SUB: Leave that poor man alone!)

The Girl sits back, doing as she's told.

David watches.

INT. ART MUSEUM OFFICE - LOBBY - DAY

Rebecca's sits in a plastic chair, filling out a form on a clipboard.

The nightscape is at her side. CLOSE-UP of the image -

CUT TO:

1975 - NEW BERN

EXT. HORSE FIELDS - MORNING

It's quiet. Still. Sunlight reflects off shallow fog.

A figure appears in the sky. The *animated Crow*. Soaring with a bird's eye view of the pastoral farmland. The only sound the WISP of wind. A gentle presence...

It passes the horse fields and barns, across the dirt road to Young David's small house, gliding by a second story window -

INT. YOUNG DAVID'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Young David pins the painting of the *Crow* to the wall, with bed-head and in boxers and t-shirt (his pajamas). Next to other drawings and paintings - the dragonfly, the watercolor of the river, a sketch of Belle, others...

His own little world.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

David enters. Father tastes a batch of chow-chow stewing on the stove.

FATHER
Don't let this cook too long.

DAVID
Yes sir.

Father grabs his jacket from the table.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Where you going?

FATHER
Greenville to pick up fertilizer.
Should be back by 3.

DAVID
Where's Luke?

FATHER
He's helping Lonnie out. Pay them
mind now.

He leaves. David looks over, sweet pepper and green tomato scraps piled up by the sink.

EXT. FIELDS - DAY

Young David walks along the dirt road, carrying the scraps in a paper bag. Suddenly he hears frantic NAYING.

He runs toward the pasture. Jimmy and two FRIENDS chase Belle in the horse fields. Throwing rocks.

David rushes away.

EXT. FIELDS - MOMENTS LATER

Jimmy and Friends have Belle cornered against the fence. Jimmy holds a rock, about to heave it -

LUKE
Stop!

He runs through the gate, followed by David.

LUKE (CONT'D)
 What the hell are you doing!?

David offers the bag of scraps to Belle, relaxing her.

JIMMY
 Why don't you mind your own
 business.

FRIEND 1
 Yeah, this ain't your land.

DAVID
 Might as well be.

Luke pats Belle on the backside.

LUKE
 Get on now.

The horse runs off.

LUKE (CONT'D)
 (to Jimmy)
 Lonnie's gonna hear about this.

JIMMY
 Oh, I bet.

They laugh knowingly. Luke quiets.

DAVID
 What's that mean?

FRIEND 1
 Ask the freak.

DAVID
 (to Luke)
 Let's go.

FRIEND 1
 (mimicking)
 'Let's go...'

JIMMY
 You need your stupid little brother
 to protect you?

DAVID
 C'mon.

Young David reaches for Luke -

LUKE

No!

He shoves David to the rocky ground.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Get outta here!

David looks down at his knees, bloody and cut.

LUKE (CONT'D)

NOW!

Jimmy and his Friends laugh. David stands. He glares at Luke, then rushes away.

Luke turns to Jimmy, the rock still in Jimmy's hand.

JIMMY

This is what you get, you faggot.

Jimmy winds back -

EXT. FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

- A flock of birds SCATTER. Young David walks quickly, wiping his eyes. His knees bloody.

INT. YOUNG DAVID'S HOUSE - MUD ROOM - AFTERNOON

Young David cleans his knees by the sink. Father stands at the threshold.

FATHER

Luke did this?

DAVID

He didn't mean to.

FATHER

Go get your bath. I'll get some bandages.

David walks by him, his head down. Father watches him go.

I/E SHED - AFTERNOON

Lonnie moves toward the shed, the wood structure foreboding in the frame.

The door slides open with a SCRAPE.

LONNIE
Luke? You back here?

He comes upon Luke behind bags of feed, holding a bloody handkerchief to his cut eye. Luke sits up, wiping his nose.

LUKE
What do you want?

LONNIE
(he chuckles)
This is my shed, Luke.

He sits, taking Luke's face in his hand. Inspecting the cut.

LONNIE (CONT'D)
You get in a fight or something?

LUKE
No.

LONNIE
I bet you can hold your own.

He gets closer.

LUKE
Not right now.

We hear him UNZIP his work pants.

LONNIE
You're upset. It'll feel good.

INT. BATHROOM - DUSK

WATER POURS, filling the tub as steam rises.

MOMENTS LATER - Young David sinks into the water, dirt darkening the bath. A deep red slowly, subtly spreads.

It forms two small pools. Becoming red eyes.

The blackened water collects around it. David uses his finger to form a dark head. The shape of the Beast -

EXT. YOUNG DAVID'S HOUSE - DUSK

An EERIE WIND picks up. Sheets FLAP on the clothesline. Storm clouds hover.

Mythic HOOFBEATS are heard. Then GROWLING, a SNORT -

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP of the nightscape painting -

1998 - ASHEVILLE

INT. ART MUSEUM HALLWAY - DAY

- The painting rests in a stack of tagged entries for the group show. A form affixed to its side.

David walks by, holding a ledger and folders. He catches a glimpse of the painting.

He stops cold.

INT. ART MUSEUM - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

SALLY
Some lady dropped it off.

David and Sally stand by the tagged art pieces.

SALLY (CONT'D)
She paid the fee and filled out the form. It's an open submission. Anyone can enter.

DAVID
It wasn't hers to do that.

SALLY
Well I'm sorry. I had no idea.

David stares down at it.

SALLY (CONT'D)
Do you wanna at least think about it? I mean, it's good.

Off David. *What the hell do you know.*

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

David drinks a beer on his front steps, playing with the Zippo. The phone RINGS lightly in the background.

He watches a neighboring DAD (30's) hang Christmas lights. Dad yells something to TWO KIDS playing in the yard. They LAUGH.

The Stray Dog appears in front of David. He gets up.

DAVID
Got nothing for ya.

The storm door SLAMS behind him.

INT. DAVID'S LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

David stares down at the answering machine -

VOICE
Um, it's Jen again. I really need
to talk to you about your brother
Luke. Please call me back...

Off David -

INT. TESS'S BAR - AFTERNOON

David walks in, looking for a drink. Rebecca spies him from
the bar. She bee-lines his way.

DAVID
Jesus Christ.

He rushes to the bathrooms, trying to get away.

REBECCA
Wait!

He enters the men's room. Rebecca follows -

INT. MEN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A guy, EMMETT, stands at a dirty urinal.

DAVID
(to Rebecca)
What the hell are you doing?

REBECCA
Oh, it's fine. I've been in here
plenty.

Emmett chuckles.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Wanna wrap it up there Em?

EMMETT
Way ahead of ya.

He zips up and exits.

REBECCA
You're pissed.

DAVID
No shit.

REBECCA
I told them it was mine.

DAVID
Then you're a liar and an asshole.

REBECCA
That's fair.

David pauses. *At least she's admitting it.*

REBECCA (CONT'D)
You're so damn tense. About everything. I don't get it. Why don't you want people to see what you can do?

DAVID
That's my business.

REBECCA
Well it shouldn't go to waste.

DAVID
Is this an apology?

REBECCA
Yes. I'm sorry. I forced it. I know I shouldn't have. It's a bad habit. But that doesn't mean it wasn't worth doing.

MUSIC starts up from the bar -

REBECCA (CONT'D)
You're worth it.

INT. TESS'S BAR - NIGHT - LATER

Ellie and Franz sing on stage, the duet from the PROLOGUE -

ELLIE & FRANZ

(singing)

*Now the land that I knew is a dream
And the line on the
distance grows faint.
So wide is my river
The horizon a sliver
The artist has run out of paint.
The water sustains me
without even trying
The water can't drown me, I'm done
With my dying...*

Rebecca and David sit at the bar. The MUSIC continues in the background.

REBECCA

You know, part of our problem is I don't hardly know anything about you.

DAVID

You want a bio?

REBECCA

You can abridge it.

DAVID

To what?

REBECCA

Where's your family?

DAVID

My folks are dead.

Awkward beat. She laughs. He doesn't mind.

REBECCA

For real?

DAVID

My dad had a heart attack a few years back. My mom died when I was little.

REBECCA

What happened to her?

DAVID

She killed herself.

REBECCA

Jesus. You're just a barrel of laughs.

He laughs.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Brothers or sisters?

DAVID

A brother.

(beat)

Older.

REBECCA

Where's he?

He doesn't answer. Takes a drink. She does the same.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Let's call that a start.

A weather report plays on a TV behind the bar, a large mass of blue and pink on the radar -

WEATHERMAN

(on the TV)

...Up to eight inches of snow expected by tomorrow night...

- coming toward them.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Snow falls onto small, packed-in houses.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The old tackle box sits on the coffee table, streaked with paint. David stares at it, then unclips the latches.

It's packed with well-used brushes. He removes the top tray, exposing tubes of oil paint, mostly earth tones and dark colors. A bit of leaked linseed oil creates a sheen.

He picks up a large brush with tight bristles. One of his favorites.

We hear a strange WHINE. A guttural WHIMPER. He looks up -

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT

David wades through the falling snow with a flashlight, in boots and coat over sweatpants. Following the faint WHINE.

He peers under a row of hedges. The light lands on a dark body. The Stray Dog.

DAVID

Shit.

He stumbles back. He finds a stick, gently poking at the body. It doesn't move. Frozen to death.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

David stares out the window, light from a street lamp diffused by falling snow.

REBECCA

(from his bed)

It's nasty out there.

DAVID

Unh-unh.

He gets into the bed.

REBECCA

You okay?

DAVID

I'm fine.

Red eyes appear at the window. The Beast.

A PHONE RINGS off-camera -

INT. LIVING ROOM - NEXT MORNING

- David stares down at the RINGING PHONE.

REBECCA

You wanna get that?

She holds a cup of coffee. He picks it up and hangs it up in one motion.

DAVID

Nope.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

David closes the door behind him. He grabs his bowl, takes a deep hit, exhales with a puff of smoke -

CUT TO:

1975 - NEW BERN - DUSK

- Tall pines SWAY in the STRANGE WIND.

EXT. YOUNG DAVID'S HOUSE

Young David gathers sheets off the line, his knees bandaged. We hear RUSTLING, SNAPPING of branches.

He looks to the woods across the dirt road. Shocked to catch a quick glimpse of the Beast, standing at attention:

Its piercing red eyes watch the boy. Brambles weave through its fur and down its back like spikes. A snout and crown made of bone. Its lean body reminiscent of the Coyote.

A painting come to life. Surreal.

Suddenly - it's gone. As quick as it came. Disappearing into the woods with cascading HOOFBEATS.

Off Young David -

EXT. SHED - DAY

- a loud SCRAPE. The sliding door opens, revealing Young David. Lonnie stands inside, surprised to see him.

LONNIE

Hey.

DAVID

Where's Luke?

Luke appears from the back. Slightly disheveled.

LONNIE

It's a mess in here. We've been cleaning it out.

Young David glances at Luke. Luke looks away.

LONNIE (CONT'D)

(to David)

Found something you might like.

He grabs a crate, pulling out a kerosene lamp top.

LONNIE (CONT'D)

Don't got much use for 'em since we
wired up the barns.

David takes it, drawn to the curvatures of the glass.

LONNIE (CONT'D)

I know you're into art and stuff.
Thought maybe you could use 'em for
something.

LUKE

He doesn't need more junk.

Lonnie looks at Luke crossly.

DAVID

It's not junk.

LONNIE

(to Luke)

See.

(to David)

There's more back here.

David follows him further into the shed. Luke watches.

INT. YOUNG DAVID'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Young David sits at his desk in pajama pants and undershirt,
surrounded by acrylic paints on a layer of newspaper.

He adds brush strokes to one of the lamp tops, finishing a
360-degree landscape: *A starry sky and textured moon.*

He lights the base, placing the glass on top of it. It glows
proudly, projecting the scene on the wall.

WIND blows through an open window. He moves to it, spying
Lonnie across the road. Smoking a cigarette.

Lonnie looks up -

EXT. FIELDS - MOMENTS LATER

Young David walks down the dirt road. A ghostly figure leads
him. The camera loses focus, the memory growing hazy -

EXT. SHED - NIGHT

The door SCRAPES open. Young David emerges. There's a faint CALL from the forest. He turns toward it.

EXT. FIELDS - TREELINE - NIGHT

He stares into the mysterious black woods.

EXT. THE BEAST'S WOODS - NIGHT

Young David steps into a dank and misty forest. Strange noises surround him.

Eerie. Otherworldly.

A SNORT announces the Beast. Red eyes draw closer, its creepy face and body hidden by shadow.

It stops with a growl. Beat.

DAVID

Why are you doing this? What do you want with me?

The Beast speaks. Not by mouth but from within its bowels.

BEAST

(harshly)

These fields have housed you. Their trees have protected you. Yet you turn your back. On all of us.

DAVID

I would never do that.

BEAST

But you will, boy. You are changing. You're becoming lost. And that will only get in the way.

A CRY floats from the meadow. David turns toward it -

EXT. FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

TWO FARMHANDS run through the grass.

FARMHAND 1

Over here!

Their flashlights fall on a figure - Luke, collapsed in the damp grass. Crying.

LUKE

Please don't say anything...I'll leave...I'll go...

FARMHAND 2

What's the matter with him?

FARMHAND 1

Who the hell knows. Take him to his old man.

They grab him as he kicks. Pulling him up.

EXT. THE BEAST'S WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Young David turns back to the Beast.

BEAST

Night brings dawn. The cold brings truth.

It turns. David watches as it disappears in CASCADING HOOFBEATS.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Father sits in the dark with a bottle of bourbon and empty glass, passed out. Young David tiptoes past him.

He wakes -

FATHER

Where you been, David?

(beat)

Where's your brother?

Suddenly a KNOCKING on the back door. Father gets up. Young David hears CHATTER - the Farmhands.

He backs away. Into darkness.

CUT TO:

1998 - ASHEVILLE

CLOSE-UP of the frozen Stray Dog under the hedges -

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - MORNING

- Adult David on his knees, holding a shovel, staring at the dog. He stands, freaking out.

DAVID
Shit shit FUCK!

INT. KITCHEN -

Rebecca at the window, watching David pace in the snow.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE -

She comes up, David still spiraling.

REBECCA
Whatch ya doing, Dave?

He looks over at the bush. She crouches to look under it, then quickly back up.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Friend of yours?

DAVID
This is my fault -

REBECCA
Don't be dumb.

DAVID
- I let it happen!

REBECCA
David!

He quiets.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
You don't own this dog. You're not the pound. It sucks but there's nothing you could have done about it.

She looks to the shovel.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
We can't just leave her here though.

EXT. STREETS - DAY

Rebecca drives her mini-van. David looks out the passenger window, streets and yards covered in snow from the storm.

EXT. WOODED PARK - DIRT ROAD - MORNING

Rebecca's van is parked at a metal gate.

David and Rebecca walk down a snow-covered dirt road, guarded on both sides by walls of pine trees.

David carries the dead Dog in a garbage bag. Rebecca has the shovel. The only sound the CRUNCH of feet on snow.

DAVID

The ground is frozen.

REBECCA

She's small. You can break through.

Off David.

INT. ART MUSEUM OFFICE - DAY

David works in his cubicle. Sally slams down a clipboard. Smiling wide.

SALLY

Sign this.

DAVID

What is it?

SALLY

You're in the Spring show, kid.

DAVID

You're kidding?

SALLY

It was a no-brainer. No special favors.

David reads the release.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

David works on a newspaper crossword. Grandmother and Girl wait on the far end of the bench. Christmas bells and candy canes made of garland hang on streetlamps above them.

David sneaks a look at the Girl. His pencil moves to the margins of the newspaper, *drawing*. The DRONEY HUM returns.

A small, striking portrait appears on the paper. The Girl's large, narrow nose. Dark hair sticking out.

David draws intently. He looks up, catching the Girl watching him.

She smiles. He smiles back.

INT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Reed and Rebecca plow through the front door with a small tree, hacked out of the woods. David holds the back half, with members of the Hipster Trio.

REBECCA

Merry effin' Christmas!

ELLIE

What the hell is that?

She and Franz LAUGH on the couch. MUSIC plays, FRIENDS drink, an impromptu Christmas party. *A community.*

The Hipsters grab drinks. Reed and Rebecca hold up the tree.

REBECCA

Do you not understand the concept of a Christmas tree? We're gonna decorate it.

FRANZ

With what?

DAVID

We'll figure it out.
(to Rebecca)
There's a bucket in the closet.

She moves that way. It's HECTIC. JOYFUL. David grabs liquor bottles off the counter, making a drink for him and Rebecca.

Reed tries to grab one of the drinks -

REED
Thanks man.

David playfully shoves him away.

DAVID
No way.

Rebecca stands at the closet door, looking for a bucket.
Instead she spies an old wooden sled.

She grabs it, turning to the others.

REBECCA
Look at this.

REED
(snarky)
Put that thing back.

REBECCA
Why?

REED
Because you'll bust your head open
like a cantaloupe.

The Hipsters laugh. Rebecca looks to David.

DAVID
Y'all a bunch of pansies.

Reed scowls. The others laugh.

DAVID (CONT'D)
(to Rebecca)
Let's ride.

He and Rebecca move to the door. The others follow.

EXT. WOODED PARK - NIGHT

The group gathers at the top of a hill. Moonlight reflects
off the snow, painting them in blue light.

It is still, quiet. Rebecca mounts the sled, testing it.

REED
I'm gonna laugh my ass off when you
end up in a tree.

REBECCA

Reed honey, your ass could spare a few.

DAVID

You'll need more weight. I'll take back.

The others egg them on. Reed turns, *foiled again*.

David grabs the handles, folding Rebecca into his arms.

REBECCA

Hold on.

Ellie and Franz position to push.

ELLIE

Ready?

DAVID

Ready.

ELLIE

One...

David stares down the steep hill. The group is silent.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Two...

A GIGGLE. All anticipate the launch.

ELLIE (CONT'D)

Three!

Ellie and Franz push the sled, slipping on the snow as it jets away.

REBECCA

Yee haw!

They speed down the hill. The wind whips Rebecca's hair. David holds her tight.

He concentrates on the path ahead, shifting his body to keep balance. The trees approach. He pounces on the brake. The sled SLAMS to a stop, rolling them into the snow.

David shakes off his pants. Rebecca runs to him.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

That was amazing!

He picks her up. LAUGHTER echoes over the mountains.

The others run up. Reed grabs the sled - his turn.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NEXT MORNING

David staggers down the back steps. Hungover. He unzips his pants, taking a piss by a tree.

A snowball hits him.

DAVID
What the hell?

Rebecca stands at the side of the house.

REBECCA
You born in a barn?

She hurls another one. He zips up, charging her. She laughs, running toward the front door -

INT. LIVING ROOM

He catches her at the threshold. They stumble in, laughing, falling on the floor. The phone RINGS.

He tickles her. She's in stitches, barely able to talk.

RIIING RIIING -

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Get the phone.

DAVID
You get it.

REBECCA
I will.

She reaches toward it. He tickles her again -

DAVID
Nope.

He grabs it.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Hello?

Beat of silence. Then -

JEN (O.S.)

David?

He stiffens. Sits up.

DAVID

Yeah.

JEN (O.S.)

It's Jen. Jen McKay.

(beat)

I can't believe I finally got you.
I've been leaving messages.

The mood changes. Rebecca notices.

DAVID

I know. I'm sorry. I've been all
over the place.

JEN (O.S.)

I really think you should
come...He needs to see you.

DANIEL

I know...I know.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I don't have a way to get there.

Beat.

JEN (O.S.)

David...It's gonna be soon.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

David stands at the counter, drinking vodka/OJ from a juice
glass. Rebecca approaches.

REBECCA

Who was that?

DAVID

Don't worry about it.

She studies him.

REBECCA

You alright?

DAVID

I'm fine.

REBECCA

You want me to take off?

DAVID
Do what you want.

She turns to the door. Opens it. Pauses - then SLAMS it shut!

REBECCA
Fuck this!

He moves past her. Fuming.

DAVID
Don't be a bitch. You're leaving,
leave.

She follows him to the living room.

REBECCA
Right. Cause this is what you do.
You lash out. Like a dog in a
corner. And you do it to yourself
more than anyone else.

DAVID
Shut up! SHUT UP!! It's so easy for
you. It's so easy for all of you.
But I'm different.

REBECCA
How?

DAVID
There's something wrong with me.

She calms.

REBECCA
The world isn't divided into two
types of people, David. It's not
like there's one group that gets
all the bad things and the other
one has it easy. Everyone
struggles. But you've got your head
too far up your ass to see that.

DAVID
Fuck you.

Beat.

REBECCA
You're not alone.

She grabs her jacket from the table.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
 You have people who care about you.
 But you're blowing it.

She leaves, SLAMMING the front door.

Off David -

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - DAY

He takes a seat on the steps. Puts a cigarette to his mouth.
 Lights it with the Zippo.

He looks down at the lighter. CLINKING it shut -

CUT TO:

1975 - NEW BERN

INT. YOUNG DAVID'S FRONT PARLOR - MORNING

- The same Zippo CLINKS. Father holds it, cigarette in his
 mouth. Across from him is PASTOR MURRAY, white-haired.

PASTOR
 This was just the other night?

FATHER
 That's the latest. But there's been
 plenty of others. He beat up his
 brother last week.

PASTOR
 What do you propose to do about it?

FATHER
 I don't know. But Candlewoods
 looking at us like we're crazy.

PASTOR
 He's a young man. Hormones and all.
 This sort of thing happens.

Beat.

FATHER
 There's something else.

INT. YOUNG DAVID'S ROOM - LATER

Young David sits at his desk, toying with the painted lamp.

FOOTSTEPS on the stairs. Father approaches with a suitcase.

FATHER

Stay put.

He shuts the door, heading to Luke's room across the hall. David moves to his door, listening.

Muffled:

FATHER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Pack some things.

LUKE (O.S.)

Why?

FATHER (O.S.)

Pastor and I are driving you to Raleigh. You're gonna stay with his sister for a while...

EXT. FIELDS - DAY

Young David stands on the dirt road, looking across the fence to the woods. The DRONE of insects climaxes -

Suddenly the Beast appears in the distance. Watching David.

It makes a deafening, bloodcurling SCREECH. And then again. *Its call.*

FATHER

David.

He turns, Father further down the road.

FATHER (CONT'D)

Come say goodbye.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Young David stands on the porch next to the older couple from the photos - his great AUNT DONNA and UNCLE CHARLES.

Father puts Luke's suitcase in the trunk of a black sedan. He and Pastor Murray move to the front.

FATHER

Let's go.

Luke looks toward the Candlewood Farm. Lonnie's truck sits near the barn.

LUKE

No.

Luke steps away from the car. Aunt Donna puts a hand on Young David's shoulder.

LUKE (CONT'D)

It won't happen again, I promise.

FATHER

Luke, get in.

LUKE

No!

Father stomps towards him, grabbing him. Luke tries to kick away, breaking down.

LUKE (CONT'D)

(to the porch)

Don't let them do this! Don't let them take me!! This is your fault!!

Father forces him into the back seat, SLAMMING the door, out of breath.

FATHER

Take him inside.

Donna shoos Young David to the front door. More car doors SLAM. He turns as they drive away.

Luke watches him through the rear window. The car disappears into the setting sun.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - AFTERNOON

Young David walks home from school with backpack.

He sees Lonnie get in his truck. He steps into the trees, hiding as Lonnie's truck drives off.

EXT. CANDLEWOOD FIELDS - DUSK

David approaches the treeline. Several trees are cracked violently, forming a crude circle with red marks.

The Beast's gate.

He stares into it. Puts his backpack on the ground -

EXT. THE BEAST'S WOODS - DUSK/DARK

David stands in the crypt-like space. He looks around.

Slow CLIP-CLOP of hoofbeats. Red eyes move toward him.

BEAST
(staying in shadows)
You have come.

DAVID
Yes.

BEAST
Then it's time.

DAVID
For what?

BEAST
You must make the journey to know
the way.

Young David peers deeper into the woods. Dark and scary.

He turns to the Beast. With its red eyes...silhouette of a grotesque spiky back...a *monster*.

DAVID
I can't.

THUNDER CLAPS.

BEAST
(meanly)
Then you'll be forbidden from these
fields. To live in darkness.

DAVID
Please...don't.

It leans into Young David.

BEAST
This is your decision. Your curse
to bear.

The boy tears up. Wiping his eyes.

DAVID
It's not fair.

BEAST
 You're worthless. Pathetic. A
 scared little fool. Leave this
 place.

THUNDER grows louder. The Beast growls -

BEAST (CONT'D)
 (angry, terrifying)
 Now!!

Off Young David -

EXT. FIELDS - DUSK

Young David races through the field, storm clouds in the distance. Suddenly a loud CAW from the woods.

He looks back -

The *animated Crow* flies out of the top of the trees. It spreads its wings wide. Flying away.

CUT TO:

1998 - ASHEVILLE

INT. DAVID'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ELLIE
 David.

He's passed out on the couch, an old movie on the TV. He opens his eyes.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
 Merry Christmas.

DAVID
 What time is it?

ELLIE
 After midnight. Scotch over.

He sits up slightly, making room. Empty beer bottles and his bowl sit on the coffee table. Remnants of a vodka drink.

ELLIE (CONT'D)
 Where's Rebecca?

DAVID
 Don't ask.

Ellie chuckles, putting her arm around him.

She begins to sing and hum. Softly. *Silent Night* or similar as a lullaby. David lets it flow over him.

As it ends -

 DAVID (CONT'D)
I'm so messed up.

 ELLIE
Welcome to the party, pal.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

David stares at his answering machine's blinking light -

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

He holds the phone to his ear, listening, writing on a pad of paper.

INT. LIVING ROOM/CLOSET - MORNING

He walks through in his heavy jacket with a packed backpack. He puts the bag down, entering the closet.

EXT. ELLIE'S APARTMENT - MORNING

David waits at the door. Ellie opens it, just waking up.

 ELLIE
Hey.

 DAVID
Your sure about this?

He places her truck keys in his palm.

 ELLIE
Take it.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

David drives Ellie's truck. The cardboard package sits next to him. Folded shut.

INT. HOSPICE CENTER - NEW BERN - DAY

David waits in a lobby, decorated sparsely for Christmas. Visitor tag stuck to his sweater. A VOLUNTEER at a counter.

Jen (42) appears down the hallway. She's tall, thin hair, a little pudgy around the middle.

JEN

David! Finally, a face to fit that lovely voice of yours.

She hugs him. He's surprised.

JEN (CONT'D)

How was your drive?

DAVID

Not too bad.

JEN

Good, good.
Well, alright. Let's go on up.

INT. HOSPICE ROOM - DAY

Luke dozes, hooked to medical machines. White light beckons through a window.

Jen approaches, followed by David. Struck by his brother's frail appearance.

JEN

Luke...

He opens his eyes.

JEN (CONT'D)

Look at what the cat dragged in.

DAVID

I told her not to wake you.

He sits up. Happy to see him.

LUKE

I was just resting my eyes. Don't got much else to do.

JEN
Don't let him fool you. He's been
working hard. Sorting all sorts of
stuff out.

She moves magazines and books from a chair.

JEN (CONT'D)
(to David)
Sit, sit.

LUKE
Thanks Jen.

JEN
(to David)
Buy you a coffee?

DAVID
You got a beer?

Jen laughs.

JEN
Not on this campus.
(to Luke)
You want anything?

LUKE
Nah. I'm good.

JEN
I'll be back in a bit.

She exits.

DAVID
How are you?

LUKE
Ah, you know. There comes a point
where you just roll with it.

DAVID
I should have come sooner.

LUKE
It's okay.

DAVID
But I've been working. And I don't
have a car right now...

LUKE
David, really, it's alright. I'm
glad you're here now.

Beat.

DAVID
I brought you something.

INT. HOSPICE BREAK ROOM - DAY

They sit at a table with the shoebox, pictures scattered
about. Luke holds the photo of their Mother.

LUKE
This is crazy.

He picks up another - Young David and Young Luke in the
fields, their arms around each other.

LUKE (CONT'D)
How'd you get these?

DAVID
Donna had them.

Luke thumbs through one of the sketchbooks. David watches.

DAVID (CONT'D)
You seem different.

LUKE
Hard livin' will do that to you.

He feels David's stare.

LUKE (CONT'D)
Savannah was a low point. One of
many.
(re: sketchbook)
I forget how good you are.

DAVID
That was a long time ago.

Luke shuts the sketchbook, putting it in front of David.

LUKE
Not so long.

INT. HOSPICE ROOM - NIGHT

David sits on a window seat. Luke sleeps in the bed.

He looks through his sketchbook, drawings into high school and college, evolving with each page.

He stops at a series of Beast sketches, slightly different versions of the same creature. He studies them.

JEN

What's that?

He quickly turns the page, embarrassed, revealing gentler drawings. Jen looks over his shoulder.

JEN (CONT'D)

Are those yours?

DAVID

Yeah.

JENNY

Wow. They're great.

She begins to straighten the room.

JEN

(half-whisper)

I'm glad he's sleeping. He's not always able to. I bet you had something to do with that. I can't tell you how much it means to him that you came.

DAVID

Really?

JEN

Really.

DAVID

We grew up here, you know.

JEN

I did know that.

(she fluffs a pillow)

Welcome home.

EXT. HOSPICE CENTER - COURTYARD - NEXT DAY

Luke and David sit on a bench under a tall oak tree. Sunlight dapples through the branches.

LUKE
I'm so bored.

DAVID
Read a book.

LUKE
Have you met me?

David laughs. A NURSE wheels a PATIENT into the building. Leaving them alone.

Birds CHIRP. Insects BUZZ.

LUKE (CONT'D)
They ain't messin' around here.
Therapy twice a day. Part of the
deal they make you take. Procedures
and policies and all that shit.

He reaches into his pocket, slowly pulling out a handwritten letter.

DAVID
What's that?

Luke hands it to him.

LUKE
Jen says this is the best way.

DAVID
For what?

David unfolds the paper. Skims it.

LUKE
We never talked about what happened
when I left -

DAVID
Stop.

LUKE
I've done a lot of messed up
things -

DAVID
I'm sorry. I was just walking by.

Awkward beat.

DAVID (CONT'D)
I used to live here.

The Mother puts down the plant, wiping dirt off her hands.

MOTHER
(kindly)
You're kidding. When?

DAVID
A ways back.

MOTHER
I bet you have some stories.

David glances at the Boy, drawing.

DAVID
I do.
(beat)
Is the farm still next door?

MOTHER
Most of the land was razed and
sold. Developers put some houses on
it. Talked about building more but
nothing ever came of it.

She locks eyes with David.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
The old horse fields are still
there. Feel free to walk about.

EXT. FIELDS - AFTERNOON

David walks along the dirt road, the pastures overgrown. The
DRONEY HUM of insects returns, *dragonflies and such*.

He stops at the decrepit border fence. Looking to the shed on
the far side of the field.

EXT. SHED - MOMENTS LATER

David stares into a dark hole where the sliding door once
was. A rusty frame hangs freely.

Suddenly a trio of swallows flies out, FLAPPING their wings.

David covers his head. The birds disappear in the trees.

He recovers. Then crosses through the rotten door frame. Into blackness.

INT. SHED

He surveys the mess. Broken tools, old lumber, trash strewn about. He feels into his pocket. Pulling out Luke's letter.

He unfolds it...reads it -

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP of a small flame. The wick of a kerosene lamp.

1975 - INT. YOUNG DAVID'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

That strange summer night. Revisited.

The lamp sits on Young David's desk. He places the painted glass cover on its base, projecting the painted image onto the wall.

WIND blows through an open window. He moves to it.

He sees Lonnie across the way, smoking a cigarette. Lonnie puts it out with his foot, moving back toward the barn.

David's door CREAKS open. He turns -

EXT. FIELDS - DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

- Young David walks down a path. A figure leads him, guided by the painted kerosene lamp.

It is Luke. His white undershirt glowing in the light.

INT. SHED - MOMENTS LATER

Luke sets the lamp on the dirt floor, projecting the painted moon and stars onto wooden walls. David waits by the door.

Luke motions to the corner, a small bed of hay hidden by bags of feed and supplies.

LUKE
Go 'head and sit.

David does as he's told.

LUKE (CONT'D)
Didn't you like it last time?

No answer.

LUKE (CONT'D)
I told you it's okay. It's nothing bad. It's just stuff people do. But you don't need to tell no one about it.

We stay on Luke. He takes his pants off.

LUKE (CONT'D)
Take yours off too.

Sound of clothes RUSTLING.

LUKE (CONT'D)
Lie down.

Young David lays on his belly. We stay on his face. He feels Luke get on top of him. Luke begins to move about.

We do not see, but understand, what is happening.

Young David watches the projected crescent moon on the wall. A surreal nightscape. **His painting.**

The flame dances, moving the image about. It becomes animated, taking over the frame. Stars dance around Young David as he reaches for the glowing shapes.

A dome. Protecting the boy in some small way. As Luke finishes.

INT. SHED - LATER

Young David sits on the hay, alone. He pulls up his shorts.

SLOW HOOFBEATS. A shadow approaches the planked door. Seen through cracks in the wall. The Beast.

CLIP-CLOP. CLIP-CLOP. CLIP-CLOP.

Young David stands, frightened. The Beast stops.

It is quiet.

Young David leans in. We hear a slow GROWL.

Suddenly a loud HIT - the Beast POUNDS on the wall!

Young David steps back, terrified.

POUND -

POUND -

MATCH CUT:

1998 - INT. SHED - AFTERNOON

- POUND

We hear a deep SNORT. The Beast's shadow is now here.

Suddenly another POUND. The shadow races back and forth on the other side of the wall, HITTING the wood planks -

1975 -

Young David covers his ears, crouching, crying. The Beast gets LOUDER, PAWING at the dirt, POUNDING the wall, trying to get in -

1998 -

Adult David watches the shadow, moving LOUDLY.

ADULT DAVID
(whispering)
Leave him alone.

BUZZ and DRONE of insects grow in our ears. The Beast gets EVEN LOUDER.

ADULT DAVID (CONT'D)
Leave him alone!

He KICKS one of the planks. Hard. It loosens.

1975 -

The boy holds his ears tighter, *desperate*, the noises LOUDER -

1998 -

The shadow MOVES faster. The SNORTS grow louder.

ADULT DAVID
You want in?! You want in?!!

He kicks again -

ADULT DAVID (CONT'D)
You fucking asshole!

And again -

1975 -

Young David crouches tighter, in the dirt -

1998 -

Adult David cries, yells, breaking down, kicking the wall -

DAVID
Here you go, motherfucker! Here!!

The wood CRACKS, catching his foot. He kicks again, and again, and again, forcing the wall apart. The noise deafens, climaxes -

Suddenly...SILENCE.

The Beast is gone.

We see David through the hole in the wall, breathing heavy. Rays of light strike him through the porous roof.

EXT. MOTEL - DUSK

Rebecca sits outside David's motel with a bag, as the Carolina sun goes down.

David walks up. Worn down. She stands.

DAVID
What are you doing here?

REBECCA
I took the bus.
(beat)
Ellie told me about your brother.
We didn't want you to be alone.

She studies him. His face stained with tears.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
What happened?

She follows his gaze, to the letter in his hands.

EXT. MOTEL - LATER

David and Rebecca sit outside his second floor room, drinking beers. She holds the letter.

REBECCA
I feel like such an asshole.

DAVID
You didn't know.

REBECCA
You never do. That's the point.

DAVID
Don't make it a big deal.

Beat.

REBECCA
You were how old?

DAVID
Seven.

REBECCA
It was ongoing?

He nods.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
There's no way you would understand what was happening. It would do something to your head.

DAVID
(making light)
So that explains it.

She doesn't laugh.

REBECCA
It's nothing to be ashamed of. You can be mad, ya know. Or even hurt.
(beat)
But pretending it didn't happen ain't exactly working.

She takes a swig of her beer.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

David lies next to Rebecca. She's asleep. He's restless.

THUNDER CALLS -

EXT. MOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

David overlooks a patch of trees, storm clouds in the distance. Thunder CLAPS. Lightning STRIKES.

The CALL of the Beast heard faintly.

EXT. FIELDS - DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Headlights appear in the dark. David parks Ellie's truck along the fence, getting out.

EXT. FIELDS - NIGHT

WIND whips around Adult David. THUNDER, then another strobe of LIGHTNING.

He reaches the treeline. Stares into the woods.

Lightning FLASHES, revealing a quick glimpse of the Beast -

EXT. THE BEAST'S WOODS - NIGHT

Adult David approaches. The Beast watches, hidden by shadow.

DAVID

You said it was my fault. That I
was worthless.

BEAST

That's how you remember it. Not how
it was.

The STORM intensifies.

DAVID

No! You let it happen!!

The Beast drives toward him. David retreats, falling to the ground. The Beast in his face.

BEAST

It's not my place to make things.
It's yours to fight. I was brought
to protect you. And you denied me.

DAVID

That's a lie. You wanted to hurt
me!

BEAST

I am not a liar. I am the truth.
Whatever your world came to be, you
shaped it that way. That's the
power you have.

It lords over him. Threatening. Menacing. Thunder CLAPS.

BEAST (CONT'D)

Instead you rot these fields. With
your weakness.

The STORM grows louder.

DAVID

I am not weak!!

BEAST

Then rise. See me. And claim
yourself.

David looks up at the Beast, lit by moonlight -

For the first time, he fully sees it. *We see it*, in all its
glory. A crown of horns. Smoky snout. Brambles down its back.

Its red eyes are creased. Kind. Tufts of fur around the head
and neck like armor. Noble.

Not a monster. An ally.

David stands. Scared, but strong.

DAVID

You don't own me. You don't scare
me.

The wind quiets.

DAVID (CONT'D)

I am bigger. I am stronger. I am
lord of this land.

The Beast bows its head. David strokes its coarse neck.

DAVID (CONT'D)
And I will ride with you.

The Beast SNORTS GENTLY. The night QUIETS.

EXT. THE BEAST'S WOODS - NIGHT

STEADY HOOFBEATS. Young David rides the Beast's back, its body hidden by shadow. Passing trees form a tunnel of silhouette.

There's light in the far distance. Some sort of clearing.

They get closer. The light expands on the boy's face. Brighter and brighter...

Filling the frame -

EXT. FIELDS - DAWN

The sun rises over the meadow, remains of POUNDING HOOFBEATS taken over by the WISP of WIND.

Birds CHIRP. Insects DRONE.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - MORNING

Rebecca and David stand by Ellie's truck.

DAVID
Take the truck. Ellie needs it.

REBECCA
Ellie will kill me for leaving you here.

DAVID
You'll live. So will I.
(beat)
I'm glad you came. It means a lot.

REBECCA
I know.

DAVID
But I gotta do this on my own.

Beat. She throws her bag in the back of the truck.

INT. HOSPICE CENTER - JEN'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Jen sits at her cluttered desk. She places a bagel down, smudging jelly on her sleeve.

JEN

Crap.

She looks down, trying to clean it up -

JEN (CONT'D)

(to the front office)

Betsy, where are those towels?

She looks up. David's at the door.

DAVID

Buy you a coffee?

INT. BAR - DAY

Jen and David sit at a table. A beer in front of Jen, untouched screwdriver in front of David.

JEN

You're an impressive guy, David.

DAVID

(dubious)

How's that?

JEN

You just are.

(beat)

Did you know why Luke wanted you to come?

DAVID

I guess. I was probably pretending I didn't.

JEN

The imagination is a heckuva thing.

Beat.

DAVID

What do I do now?

JEN

I'm Luke's counselor, so I gotta be careful about all this, but I can talk to you as your friend.

DAVID

What does my friend say?

JEN

That you owe nothing to anyone. You might not see this yet, but you have fought and clawed and it's a testament to you that you've survived this far. These are things you never should have had to deal with, but you did. And on behalf of the world, I'm sorry for that.

He takes this in.

JEN (CONT'D)

But nothing worth a damn ever grows in the dark. It takes the light of day.

INT. HOSPICE ROOM - DAY

Luke lies in bed, hooked to machines, labored breathing. David sits next to him.

LUKE

They've got everything pretty set. Crematorium and all that.

DAVID

Jen told me. You don't have to worry about any of it.

Luke points to an envelope on a bedside table.

LUKE

Take that.

David picks it up. It's filled with cash.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Your inheritance. All I got.

DAVID

Luke -

LUKE

Just take it.

Beat.

LUKE (CONT'D)
You read the letter?

DAVID
I don't remember much.

LUKE
You were just a kid.

DAVID
So were you.

Luke looks out the window, overlooking the bench and oak tree where they sat. David watches him.

DAVID (CONT'D)
I think I knew what Lonnie was doing and I didn't say anything. I watched Daddy send you off and it was because of me. I wanted you to be gone.

LUKE
Who could blame you.

Deep truths boil up -

DAVID
That's just an excuse. I was there. I did it too. I don't care what you or anyone else says, there's something wrong with me. Something awful. I don't deserve to be here. I'm a loser. I'm useless. I'm scared all the time. It's like a pit in my stomach. But I can't break through. It's all I have.

LUKE
No.

They lock eyes.

LUKE (CONT'D)
That's not who you are. You're beautiful and talented and kind. You never hated me. You tried to help me. That's the type of heart most people will never know. And to think I did something to that -
(he chokes up)
- it kills me. And I'm sorry.
(MORE)

LUKE (CONT'D)

That's the thing - I'm sorry.

(beat)

We're all scared shitless. And I can't do anything with that except let it be. But you've got tomorrow. And the day after that. You've got a reason to take all this and do something different.

DAVID

I can't.

LUKE

You can.

(beat)

You always amazed me, what you could do with your art. Don't ever give it up. If you'll let me ask for one thing, that's it.

His breathing slows -

LUKE (CONT'D)

I was such a shitty brother.

He shuts his eyes, tired. David takes his hand.

BRIGHT SUN hits them through the window.

INT. HOSPICE CENTER - HALLWAY

David rushes down the hallway. A NURSE sits at a station.

DAVID

Can I use your phone?

The Nurse nods. David dials a number, his fingers shaking.

DAVID (CONT'D)

(into the phone)

Hey.

(beat)

No. I'm not alright. I'm not alright at all.

EXT. ASHEVILLE AIRPORT - NIGHT

An automatic door slides open. David emerges, his bag slung over his shoulder.

Rebecca and Ellie wait by Rebecca's mini-van.

DAVID
Now ain't y'all a sight for sore
eyes.

REBECCA
I'm blushing.

He saunters over.

DAVID
(quietly)
It's good to see you.

ELLIE
Ahhhh...

They hop over to him. Engulfing him in a huge hug.

INT. MINI-VAN - ROAD - NIGHT

David drives. Rebecca and Ellie crowd into the passenger seat. They glance at each other, then at David.

ELLIE
How was it?

DAVID
It was quiet.

Rebecca watches him.

EXT. DAVID'S HOUSE - NEXT DAY

Rebecca KNOCKS on the kitchen door with a bag of groceries.
No answer. She puts the bag down, leaving it for David.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

David lies in bed. Watching a movie. Ignoring the door.
Washed in white light from the window. Bathed in its solitude. Its reflection.

EXT. WOODED PARK - BENCH - DAY

Rebecca holds a coffee. David chomps on a sandwich. They sit together quietly. Comfortably.

He watches two MEN (30's) on a sidewalk down a hill, in beanies and puffy vests, joking around. The WIFE of one with a stroller.

DAVID

I don't know how people do that.

REBECCA

Do what?

DAVID

Act like everything's so perfect.

REBECCA

They're pretending.

David laughs.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Entitled little pricks, aren't they.

DAVID

I can't even imagine.

REBECCA

That's cause you're operating off some bullshit premise. That you don't deserve good things. Fuck that. Get out there and try. What's the worst that could happen? It either gets validated or you see that's not the case.

David watches the trio as they laugh.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Either way, you're free.

INT. ART MUSEUM - MAIN GALLERY - DAY

David walks through. A Worker applies lettering at the front - 'SPRING 1999 GROUP SHOW.' Other Staff hang artwork.

He stops at his nightscape painting, hung in the gallery. Striking on the white wall.

We see it for what it is - the projected moon and stars in the shed. A memory. Part of him.

(Perhaps quick cuts to Young David's POV from the shed.)

David studies the painting.

INT. ART STORE - DAY

David puts tubes of oil paint in a shopping basket. He spies large rolls of canvas. Moves toward them.

INT. ART STORE - CASH REGISTER - MOMENTS LATER

A CASHIER rings him up. David pulls out cash from the envelope Luke gave him.

INT. DAVID'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

David staples a corner of canvas onto a wall with a staple gun. He triggers staple after staple around the border - THWACK, THWACK, THWACK - until taut.

He unpacks brushes from his old tackle box onto the kitchen table. Squeezing mounds of new paint onto newspaper.

He dips his favorite brush into a pool of linseed oil, then into red paint and onto the canvas. Two dots.

He uses another brush to sketch with black paint around the red. A figure, with a thick neck and snout. A set of large eyes slowly emerging.

The Beast.

A lamp sits on the floor. Its shade removed. Shining on the canvas.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

THE FOLLOWING SPRING - ASHEVILLE - DUSK

Sunset over a blue-ridged valley, capped by flowering colors. Water drips off thick Mountain Laurel leaves, wetting the ground with thaw.

INT. ROGUE GALLERY - EVENING

The gallery owner, ROSE, is in mid-toast -

ROSE
 ...Struck by it the first time we
 saw his work.

(MORE)

ROSE (CONT'D)

So over the last year, as he was making his mark, we knew we better jump at this opportunity.

GUESTS laugh. Including Hank and Sally.

Above them is a large painting covered with a white sheet, 12' long and 6' tall. Staffer waits next to it.

ROSE (CONT'D)

And that this was just the beginning of great things to come.

David, in khakis and jacket, smiles. With Ellie, Franz, Rebecca in a dress.

ROSE (CONT'D)

We're so proud of you, David. And so honored to present this newest work...

Staffer pulls a rope. The sheet drops.

The crowd 'ooooo's' and claps, raising their glasses to the painting. Which we now see:

Layers of oil paint form a surreal landscape. A clearing bordered by shadowy trees, obscuring the edges of the frame.

Dark clouds hover. Shafts of moonlight break through. Lighting a boy in the foreground, dressed in white. Dwarfed by the clouds and the trees.

He holds a sword, valiant. The Beast towers over him. Out of David's mind and onto the canvas.

ROSE (CONT'D)

Beautiful, David. Just beautiful!

The Guests applaud. *David's heart full.*

INT. BASEMENT STUDIO - NIGHT

David locks the door behind him. It's cluttered but homey. A bed next to a kitchenette and a large studio space.

Scattered about are several oversized paintings, some works-in-progress. A painting of the Stray Dog among them.

He grabs the black shoebox from a shelf. Sits on a ratty love-seat, digging through the box.

He pull's out Luke's letter. He rereads the last bit of it, as we hear it in Luke's voice.

LUKE (O.S.)
I know I'm prone to ramble on.
Ramble through life like I've
always done.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPICE YARD - AFTERNOON (ONE YEAR EARLIER)

Luke works on the letter with pen and paper.

LUKE (O.S.)
But that road's now ending.

The oak tree towers over him.

LUKE (O.S.)
And if I wanna salvage it with any
sort of purpose, I need to face
things. Things I can't undo.

CUT TO:

INT. STUDIO - NIGHT

LUKE (O.S.)
That's the one thing I have to
give. The truth.

David holds the photo of him and Luke, their arms around each other. Then a picture we haven't seen before - Father, smiling, with his two sons.

LUKE (O.S.)
If I had known a way to do things
differently, I like to think I
would have.

EXT. MOUNTAIN MEADOW - NEXT DAY

Rebecca, Ellie and Franz stand in a carpet of wildflowers, laughing as FRANZ'S DOG chases after a ball.

LUKE (O.S.)
But you...Your spirit is stronger
than mine. Stronger than most.

David moves onto a trail through a tunnel of rhododendron. Rebecca watches him go.

LUKE (O.S.)
 Your world turned dark, but you
 refused it. You took your own path.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIVER - DAY

David tightropes across several rocks, crossing a river.

LUKE (O.S.)
 You never let it make you something
 you weren't.

CUT TO:

INT. ROGUE GALLERY - DAY

Two well-dressed patrons stand with Rose, admiring the painting of the boy and the Beast.

LUKE (O.S.)
 That strength still calls to you.

CU of the Beast, watching from the canvas.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPICE YARD - DUSK

Luke grips a branch of the oak tree, his foot wedged in another. Climbing it.

LUKE (O.S.)
 The way out is the way back. Back
 to tall oaks drenched in sun.
 Dragonflies that dance at dusk.

He rises, struggling, out of breath.

LUKE (O.S.)
 Those sprawling fields where we
 once played.

He moves toward the sun, dappling through the branches.

LUKE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Outspread like a tender palm.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIVER - DAY

David reaches a cluster of rocks -

LUKE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Waiting to be sown. To be made new.

- the river flows around him.

LUKE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
To be yours again.

David pulls a wooden urn out of his pack - Luke's ashes.

He moves to the edge of the rocks, gently sifting the ashes into the river.

They vanish in the white water.

EXT. MOUNTAIN WATERFALL - DAY

David stands at the shore of a small upriver waterfall.

He kicks his shoes off, down to his underwear. Wading into the pool with no modesty. The water is cold but he plunges forward, letting it overtake him.

He floats toward the waterfall. Sunlight warms his face.

High in the sky, he sees it. The *animated Crow*. It CAWS in the mountain air.

He quickly stands in the water. Looking up at the Crow as it flies closer.

Returning to him.

END