

Electric Pigs and Railway Tunes

FADE IN:

EXT. THE WORLD - DAY

The camera SOARS over the landscape, revealing a rural countryside defined by dense forests, jagged mountains, and rolling meadows.

MUSIC: The recurring theme - "A HOBO LOVESONG" - plays.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Most people think that what they see is the only truth. They believe the world is exactly the way it works for them. Everything has its place and its purpose in their worldview, and nothing can shake that.

MONTAGE - CITY LIFE

- Cars roll down asphalt streets.
- A WOMAN enters a hair salon with a smile.
- Skyscrapers glisten behind rows of residential facades.
- People MOW their lawns in neat suburban gardens.

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

Cars drive on the right side of the road, simply because they do. Streets must be paved, and you smile politely at the hairdresser. Houses need doors, windows, satellite dishes, and so on... And these people think that because the world works this way for them, it is the only "right" way for a world to work at all.

We see stock tickers, soldiers in formation, and finally, a Sunday coffee table with apple pie.

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

They build financial markets and currency unions, they wage wars, they mow their lawns, and on Sundays, they eat apple pie - quite simply, because they feel it's the right thing to do.

END MONTAGE

The city fades. We GLIDE in a rapid low-altitude flight over a vibrant meadow of wildflowers.

THE IMAGE DISTORTS: Colors become unnaturally vivid, the perspective turns multifaceted.

POV - BEE

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

A bee doesn't need cars or satellite dishes. It perceives its world quite differently because it has different eyes and a different body than a human. To a bee, the world has an entirely different "rightness." A bee doesn't care about tax returns or the GDP of Kuala Lumpur. It might have to explain to the Queen why it drank most of the nectar it collected today, but the bee certainly doesn't care about... well... it probably doesn't even know where Kuala Lumpur is.

THE IMAGE SHIFTS AGAIN: Darkness falls. Outlines turn into pulsating waves.

POV - BAT

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

Bats, for example, experience their world differently yet again. They are nearly blind and "see" through ultrasound. They emit sound waves that reflect off their surroundings, creating images in their heads.

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

But who is to say which perspective is the "right" one? Is the bat's reality any less valid just because humans decided that only their way of seeing is correct?

NORMAL CAMERA OPTICS - RURAL COUNTRYSIDE

A vast, lush meadow appears, bordered by a forest. A small town sits at the edge of the field.

On the grass, MIKEY (10), a gentle, blonde boy with a kind, friendly face, sits with his dog, BONKERS. Mikey is reading a comic book.

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

Everyone perceives the world and life in their own way, simply because everyone is completely unique. A small person sees the world differently than a tall one; the old differently than the young. And even if many people experience things similarly, there will always be those with their own personal truths.

The camera CIRCLES Mikey. As it moves, the landscape transforms into MIKEY'S VIEW. The colors intensify, the sky turns a deeper blue, and everything seems soulful and alive. BONKERS becomes a "character." His red bandana sits a little straighter. His eyes reveal a deeper understanding.

POV - MIKEY

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

Mikey's world was always unique. Everything was full of life, breathed through by the warm feeling that everything was connected. Mikey himself would probably say his world was fairly normal. After all, he lived in it every day. But one thing was a fact: Mikey was happy in it.

Bonkers lies lazily in the grass next to him.

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

Mikey's best friend was his dog, Bonkers, with whom he often had long conversations. How? It just made sense. In Mikey's world, it made sense. And even if Bonkers' thoughts mostly revolved around food—which often made profound philosophical discussions quite difficult—the two were best friends and stuck together. Yes, that was Mikey's world.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He lived with his parents in a
 small house in a village somewhere
 in Idaho and he attended a school
 that was good for him.

The camera shows the small town and a small, cozy house on
 the outskirts with a garden in the back.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

The morning sun casts long shadows across the pavement. MIKEY
 stands with the other neighborhood kids at the bus stop. The
 kids are joking around, huddled in groups. Mikey stands
 among them, smiling, yet completely isolated. Nobody talks
 to him, and he doesn't talk to anyone.

He doesn't seem to mind. He doesn't feel left out; he's just
 in his own space.

Mikey spots a tiny BEETLE scurrying between the children's
 feet on the pavement. He kneels down.

CLOSE ON: Mikey's hand.

The beetle crawls onto his palm. Mikey stands up slowly,
 walks over to the patch of greenery behind the bus stop,
 and gently places the beetle into the tall grass.

ROBERT (12) — a typical alpha-kid with a mocking smirk —
 turns to Mikey. Next to him are his two sidekicks: SHAWN, a
 stocky boy who often looks at Mikey with a hint of sympathy
 but is too afraid to be nice, and GREG, a scrappy kid with a
 restless, aggressive look.

ROBERT
 Look at that... Mikey's on bug
 patrol again?

MIKEY
 Yes. Otherwise, he would have been
 stepped on.

ROBERT
 (ironically)
 Yeah. Cool.
 (grinning)
 Your dog tell ya anything cool
 today?

MIKEY
(friendly, guileless)
No, he's still sleeping. He doesn't
have to go to school.

ROBERT
(snickering)
Best thing would be calling Bonkers
'Mikey' and calling you 'Bonkers'
instead.

Mikey considers it for a beat, pictures it, and laughs

ROBERT (CONT'D)
You actually think that place they
send you is a real school?

Shawn and Greg snicker, nudging each other.

A GIRL
(to Robert)
Ugh, leave him alone, Robert.

MIKEY
(earnest)
Yeah, it is. We have real subjects.
We even have a real teacher.

ROBERT
(mocking)
Oh wow. A real teacher? Straight
out of the loony bin, right??

MIKEY
No, she's from Wisconsin.

The kids burst into laughter. Robert's face flushes — he
didn't expect to be outwitted by Mikey's literalness.

ROBERT
You're a moron, Mikey. That's why
you go to the idiot school and we
go to a real school for normal
kids.

MIKEY
I'm a normal kid, too.

ROBERT
Yeah. About as normal as a seal in
the middle of the desert.

A few kids laugh. Mikey just looks at Robert, silent,
processing the image.

A yellow school bus pulls up. Robert shoves Mikey aside and boards with his friends. Mikey stays behind alone, watching the bus pull away.

Then, a SECOND BUS arrives – a shorter one. A boy to Mikey from the window. The BUS DRIVER is a kind, middle-aged man. He smiles as Mikey approaches.

BUS DRIVER
Morning, Mikey. How's it going?

MIKEY
I was just wondering... what would
a seal even do in the desert?

The Bus Driver doesn't skip a beat.

BUS DRIVER
Who knows? Maybe he's visiting his
aunt?

Mikey laughs, a genuine, bright sound, and climbs aboard. The bus pulls away. We watch it disappear down the road.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
That was Mikey's world. But don't
go thinking he was miserable. Mikey
was a very happy kid. And since he
didn't understand that the others
were trying to be mean... in his
world, they weren't.

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Warm evening light. A fireplace hums with a cozy glow. From the kitchen: the rhythmic sound of Mikey's MOTHER, SARAH (35) preparing dinner. She's humming "Jenny Jenkins." The sounds are crisp, melodic, and immediate.

MIKEY and BONKERS sit on a colorful rug. Mikey is deep into a mission: assembling a scale model of an SATURN V ROCKET, launchpad and all.

FATHER (DAD) sits in an armchair. He is almost entirely hidden behind a newspaper. Occasionally, the paper rustles—a dry, distant sound Mikey barely registers.

MIKEY
The rocket is prepped for flight.

DAD
(from behind the paper)
Did you pack your homework for
tomorrow, Michael?

Mikey doesn't even look up. To him, the voice is just background static, unlike the vivid humming from the kitchen. Dad lowers the paper, looking at his son with a mix of affection and quiet frustration.

DAD (CONT'D)
Ground control to Mikey? Mikey, do
you read me?

BONKERS
(to Mikey)
Mikey, your Dad's talking to you.

Mikey looks at Bonkers, then turns toward the armchair, confused. Dad watches him with a "kind but firm" brow.

DAD
(amused)
Good evening, young man. I am your
father. I'm very interested in
hearing how your day went.

SARAH enters from the kitchen. She places a water carafe on the table. She leans down and kisses Mikey's cheek. He beams.

SARAH
Your father asked you something,
Mikey.

DAD
(play-acting
disappointment)
I wonder what I'm doing wrong.

Sarah goes to Dad and kisses him, laughing. Mikey watches them with pure curiosity, like an observer of a strange ritual.

SARAH
You just aren't me.
(to Mikey)
Help your father set the table,
honey. And answer his question.

She retreats to the kitchen. Mikey looks back at his Dad, who still has his eyebrows raised in expectation.

MIKEY
(whispering to Bonkers)
What did he say?

BONKERS
(calm, measured)
He said he found a huge bone today.

Mikey's eyes go wide. He looks at his Dad with newfound respect.

MIKEY
(to Dad)
Then you better be careful, Sir.
Bonkers is very greedy when it
comes to bones.

Mikey jumps up and starts setting the table. Dad stares at him, completely baffled. Sarah returns with a steaming pot of pot roastbeef. She catches Dad's look and laughs.

SARAH
(laughing)
One of "your" moments again?

DAD
(grinning)
Apparently, I need to keep a close
eye on my bone.

SARAH
So I guess you're skipping dinner
then? Since you have a bone to
pick?

They both laugh.

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE - MIKEY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Moonlight streams through the window. Space posters, comics, and stuffed animals crowd the room.

Mikey is burrowed deep into his blankets, cocooned against SARAH as she sits beside him. They share a soft, loving silence. Bonkers is curled up at the foot of the bed.

SARAH
...and so, the Prince married
Cinderella, and they lived happily
ever after.

SARAH (CONT'D)

(teasing)

Aren't you getting a little old for fairy tales? Maybe next time YOU can read to ME from one of your comics.

MIKEY

(laughing)

But you'll just fall asleep then.

SARAH

(laughing)

Well, because your bed is just so cozy.

MIKEY

(laughing)

But Bonkers snores.

BONKERS

I do not.

MIKEY

(thoughtful)

Mom? Where did the pigeons get the dress they gave to her?

SARAH

Probably from a Fairy Godmother.

MIKEY

Wow. Fairy Godmothers are great. Does she live in the hazel bush?

SARAH

Maybe. Or maybe she lives somewhere else and only came to the bush for Cinderella.

MIKEY

Yeah, could be. Otherwise, you'd be able to see her house, right?

SARAH

(smiling)

Maybe her house is invisible? Who knows?

MIKEY

(laughing)

Invisible houses... Then how does she find her way back home?

SARAH

Good question. Maybe she doesn't live in an invisible house after all.

MIKEY

If I ever meet a fairy, I'll ask her.

(pause)

Mom? Robert says I'm as dumb as a seal in the desert.

Sarah looks at him, a flicker of sadness crossing her face. Then her gaze turns tender, and she brushes the hair from his forehead.

SARAH

If a seal made it all the way to the desert, it must be the bravest seal in the world, sweetie. Just because other people don't get it, doesn't mean it's wrong. Somewhere, somehow, everything is exactly as it should be. Now get some sleep, Mikey.

MIKEY

But am I dumb, Mom?

SARAH

"Dumb" is just a word people use when they don't see the world like you do. What matters is that you like who you are. And I think you're perfect, just the way you are.

Mikey thinks about this for a moment.

MIKEY

Is my school a real school?

SARAH

(smiling)

Well, you get into real trouble if you don't do your real homework, don't you?

MIKEY

Or if Bonkers eats it.

SARAH

(laughs)

Exactly. Now go to sleep, honey.

MIKEY
Goodnight, Mom.

Sarah kisses him goodnight and slips out. The FULL MOON shines through the window. Pareidolia gently forms a smiling, a gentle, knowing face on the lunar surface shift, forming that only Mikey can see.

MIKEY (CONT'D)
Imagine that, Bonkers. A Fairy
Godmother in an invisible house,
right in your hazel bush.

BONKERS (V.O.)
I bet she could conjure up a lot
of treats.

MIKEY
(yawning)
Tons of 'em. Goodnight, Bonkers.
Goodnight, Mr. Moon.

MUSIC: MUSIC swells. A quiet folk tune on an acoustic guitar.

The music bleeds through the floorboards as we descend into
the KITCHEN

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

MUSIC: Folk tune CONTINUES.

The warm gold of the bedroom is gone, replaced by the cold, clinical hum of fluorescent lights.

Sarah is at the sink, drying a plate. Dad enters. He wraps his arms around her waist, kissing her cheek. A snapshot of perfect domesticity.

Then, Dad's face contorts. A sudden, violent short-circuit. He gasps, his hand clawing at his chest, grabbing Sarah's shoulder for support. He goes down. Not a cinematic slide, but a heavy, dead-weight collapse.

The plate slips from Sarah's hand.

CRACK.

Shards of porcelain spray across the linoleum. Sarah freezes for a heartbeat — a paralyzed shock etched on her face — before dropping to her knees.

Her hands hover over him, trembling, terrified to touch, terrified not to. She lunges for the phone.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The FOLK TUNE MUSIC CONTINUES, but it feels more vulnerable now. More fragile.

In the center of the kitchen, PARAMEDICS huddle over the FATHER, fighting for his life.

The outside world is silent; no sirens, only the music and the rhythmic THUMP of chest compressions. The high-pitched whine of a charging defibrillator.

Sarah stands frozen in the doorway, her face a mask of shock. The BLUE PULSE of the emergency lights outside strobes against the kitchen walls and the Hallway.

THROUGH THE DOORWAY - THE HALLWAY

Through a hallway window, the BLUE PULSE of the emergency lights strobes rhythmically.

MIKEY in his "ORKO (from Masters of the Universe)" pajamas, sleepy-eyed and rubbing his face, wanders down the stairs to see what's happening. He reaches the bottom, heading for the kitchen.

Sarah spots him out of the corner of her eye. She looks at him, startled, then glances back at the paramedics. A brief internal struggle. Then, she makes a choice.

She rushes into the hallway, blocking his view.

Sarah forces a smile — signaling "everything is okay" — and goes toward Mikey. She strokes his belly lovingly and kisses his forehead.

With a gentle but firm touch, she gently turns him around by his shoulders and signals for him to go back upstairs.

Mikey nods, turns around, and starts back up with the Sarah. As they reach the stairs, she looks back over her shoulder toward the kitchen —the boundary between Mikey's safe world and the tragedy below — with a look of deep concern.

They both go upstairs.

EXT. MIKEY'S HOUSE / DRIVEWAY - LATER

The folk tune CONTINUES, but the warmth is gone.

THE MOON. Cold. Pale. A dead rock hanging in a void. We look down from the Moon to the House. In the twitching blue light, we see the facade of Mikey's childhood home. An ambulance and a police car are parked out front. Upstairs, Mikey's bedroom window is dark. Only the faint glow of a nightlight can be glimpsed.

AMBULANCE LIGHTS pulse against the dark trees, red and blue rhythmic stabs. A police cruiser idles nearby.

PARAMEDICS slide a gurney into the back of the ambulance. A white sheet covers a long, motionless shape.

SARAH stands in the doorway, her silhouette trembling. She's sobbing, her face buried in her hands. A POLICE OFFICER rests a hand on her shoulder, his lips moving in silent, useless comfort.

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**TITLE CARD: THREE WEEKS LATER - SATURDAY**

The kitchen clock shows ten minutes past nine. To the right, the door leads to the hallway; to the left behind it, the room opens into the dining area and a cozy living room. An obituary for the father hangs on the refrigerator.

SARAH stands at the kitchen island and pours orange juice into two glasses. She looks tired, exhausted, worn out, and sad. She looks like someone who has hardly any strength left. Grief is gnawing at her.

DING-DONG - The doorbell rings.

Sarah sets the juice down, leaves the kitchen for the door, and opens it. A brief sob is heard, along with a muffled man's voice. Then a door closes.

A DELIVERY MAN from the funeral home, in a black suit with a black tie and white gloves, enters the kitchen. He gently carries a box lined with black velvet paper. Sarah follows him. Tears run from her eyes. She gestures for the delivery man to place the box on the kitchen island.

He nods and sets the box down, then steps aside and gives Sarah an encouraging nod as he sees how difficult it is for her to approach the box.

She steps closer hesitantly. The weight of the grief is palpable.

Sarah opens the box and takes out a lovingly crafted urn box. She looks at it. She closes her eyes. Her shoulders tremble. Then she takes a deep breath and forces a smile for the delivery man. The delivery man observes her briefly. Compassion lies in his gaze. Then he nods to her, takes the box, and leaves respectfully.

Sarah remains alone with the box. She opens it and allows herself a moment of weakness as she sees the urn inside. Then she wipes away her tears and carefully takes the urn out of the box, looks at it almost lovingly, and leaves the kitchen for the living room.

THROUGH THE DOORWAY

Sarah places the urn on the mantelpiece. She bows her head. Then it becomes too much for her. She sits down on the floor, leaning against the fireplace, and buries her face in her hands.

MIKEY enters the kitchen in a good mood. He wears a hoodie featuring a corn cob dressed as a unicorn. Above the cob: "Be smart." Below it: "Be a unique corn."

BONKERS follows him. He continues into the living room, where he sniffs at SARAH, who wipes away her tears and pets him.

Mikey glances briefly into the living room, sees his mother and Bonkers. Then he goes back to the kitchen island and sees the urn box. He examines it with interest. He runs his fingers along the edges of the inlay and admires the hinges. Once he has discovered everything about it, he opens the cabinet where the dishes are kept.

MIKEY

Morning, mom.

He begins to set the table. He sets out two plates and knives, and puts down a bowl with a spoon for himself. Then he takes another glass from the cabinet and pours orange juice. He places it at the spot at the table where the father always sat. Afterward, he gets milk from the refrigerator and puts it on the table.

SARAH comes into the kitchen. She struggles to smile, but her grief and her burden are visible. Mikey hugs her.

She looks at the table and sees the place setting for the father. She starts to say something, but then gives an imperceptible shake of her head and remains silent.

Mikey sits down at the table. Sarah opens the refrigerator and takes things out.

SARAH

Good morning, sweetie. Sleep well?

MIKEY

(laughs)

I don't know. I wasn't awake for it.

Mikey watches his mother. Usually, he perceives an almost invisible, golden aura around her. But now, it's different. Unnoticeable to others, just a faint suggestion, a dark aura clings to her head and chest.

He takes a sip of his juice. Sarah opens a kitchen cabinet.

SARAH

We're out of Fruity Puffs, Honey.
I'll fix you some toast instead.

Mikey looks at her, clearly struggling internally.

MIKEY

(evasive)

No, thanks. I'm not hungry.

SARAH

You have to eat something.

Mikey squirms. He doesn't want to tell an untruth. He decides to stay silent, shakes his head, and takes another sip of juice.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I know you, Mikey. Is it because of the Puffs? I'll get some today. I promise. Just this once... how about some toast?

Mikey is visibly uncomfortable.

MIKEY

But I'm really not hungry.

Sarah groans, her frustration bubbling up.

SARAH

Okay, and my dear son can't manage to just make an exception for once and eat a piece of toast because his inattentive mother forgot to shop ONE SINGLE TIME.

(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)
(vehement/annoyed)
Michael... Come on. Just today? As
an exception?

Mikey doesn't answer.

Sarah slams the cabinet door shut.

SARAH (CONT'D)
I can't keep up with all these
rules right now. I just forgot the
Puffs at the store. I am... "so...
sorry."

MIKEY
(hurt/sad)
I didn't even open my mouth.

Sarah looks at him. The weight of her grief is palpable. She
grabs a cup of coffee, sits down with him, and strokes his
hands. She forces another smile. It doesn't reach her eyes,
which glisten with a stray tear.

SARAH
(gentle)
I know. I'm sorry. I'll get the
Fruity Puffs today, okay? But
please, take an apple and eat it
later. Deal?

Mikey nods.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

The sky is a flat, bruised gray. MIKEY stands at the bus
stop, waiting. ROBERT, SHAWN, and GREG approach, snickering.
Robert spots Mikey and grins.

ROBERT
(mocking)
Hey Mikey. How's it hanging?

MIKEY
(thoughtful)
I don't know, actually.

ROBERT
(laughs)
How do you not even know how you
are?

The other two boys join in the laughter.

MIKEY
(dejected)
My Mom... she's so sad. She cries
all the time and I keep wondering
why.

ROBERT
(incredulous)
You really have no idea why?

MIKEY
No?

ROBERT
Seen your Dad lately, Mikey?

Mikey thinks for a moment, then shakes his head. Shawn and Greg look visibly uncomfortable. Shawn tentatively nudges Robert in the side.

SHAWN
(cautious, fearful)
Hey. Come on... leave him alone. He
doesn't get it.

Robert shoves Shawn aside roughly.

ROBERT
(angry)
Don't tell me what to do.

SHAWN
No, but...

ROBERT
(mocking him)
But... But... But WHAT???

Robert glares at the boy. Shawn cowers. Greg laughs at Shawn.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Like I said...
(conspiratorial)
You really don't know why, Mikey?
Didn't you see the Witch that was
in town a few nights ago?

MIKEY
(eyes wide)
A... a witch?

ROBERT
You really don't notice anything,
do you? You want the truth?

MIKEY
Yes.

ROBERT
Okay. Listen up, you moron. I'll
tell you. But you can't tell a
soul. Ever.

MIKEY
(nods)
Okay.

AS ROBERT SPEAKS, THE GRAY SKY BLEEDS INTO DARKNESS. THE
SOUND OF THE TRAFFIC FADES, REPLACED BY THE STEADY CHIRP OF
CICADAS.

MUSIC SETS IN.

EXT. THE SWAMP - NIGHT (MIKEY'S IMAGINATION)

The music is OMINOUS, DARK. Swampy. Bass, a somber rhythm. A
plaintive voice of an old person maybe, like a gospel lament.

A dreamlike, otherworldly, slightly surreal atmosphere. The
full moon casts a pale light over a swamp. Water teeming with
algae, wisps of mist drifting across it. The air is thick,
tasting of salt and decay. Ancient, enormous trees draped
with Spanish moss stand motionless.

We glide slowly toward a crooked, old, plank-built house,
raised on STILTS. Candlelight spills from the windows.

MIKEY and ROBERT stand on the porch. Robert is at the window,
hands against the glass, peering in. Mikey lingers by the
stairs. Robert beckons Mikey to come over.

WE LOOK THROUGH THE WINDOW.

INT. SWAMP HOUSE - NIGHT

A fire burns in the hearth. A large cauldron steams. Inside
the house: skulls, bones, and burning candles. Herbs,
talismans, and occult symbols hang on the walls. Two
ALLIGATORS rest on a rug.

ROBERT (V.O.)

In the South, in the great swamps,
lives a Voodoo Witch in a big, old
house. She keeps alligators as
pets... and every full moon, she
flies across the country to gather
ingredients for her potions.

THE SCENE SHIMMERS.

EXT. LAWN OUTSIDE MIKEY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The moon casts a silver glow. Stars sparkle. Unnaturally white, fluffy clouds obscure the blue-black sky. PAREIDOLIA transforms the moon's craters into a face. It gazes out in concern.

ROBERT (V.O.)

Two nights ago, I looked out my
window because I heard laughter...
and I saw the Witch flying over the
town.

A WITCH — dark, a shadow yet unnaturally illuminated — flies past the moon on a broomstick. She wears black-and-white striped socks. An eerie cackle pierces the air.

She circles above the small town, then flies toward Mikey's house. Mikey and Robert stand on the lawn, watching. Mikey is terrified but fascinated.

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

She flew straight to your house,
Mikey. I saw her land there.

MIKEY

Wow. A real witch. What did she
want from us?

THE SCENE SHIMMERS.

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE / SARAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room feels cozy and warm. Sarah lies in bed, asleep. A smile graces her face. The bedside lamp casts a golden glow. Mikey and Robert stand at the foot of the bed. A shadow grows across the sheets — it has human features and wears a witch's hat.

Outside the window stands the WITCH. Dark skin. A wart on her crooked nose. She peers in with an eerie grin. She pushes the window open.

ROBERT (V.O.)

Some potions need the laughter of others as an ingredient. The Witch went into your Mom's room and stole her smile. She's gonna use it to brew a potion on the next full moon. That's why your Mom is sad now.

The Witch swings a leg over the windowsill. She wears buckled witch shoes and striped socks. She creeps toward the sleeping Sarah, ignoring the boys.

She pulls a BLUE BOTTLE from her cloak, holds it in front of Sarah's face, and murmurs spells we don't hear.

A SPARKLING MIST flows from Sarah's face into the bottle.

The smile fades. The light in the room turns COLD and HARSH.

The Witch holds the bottle to her face and lets out an inaudible giggle. She creeps back to the window.

Sarah lies sadly in bed. A single tear escapes her eye.

MUSIC FADES OUT.

THE SCENE SHIMMERS.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

MIKEY

(horrificed)

On the next full moon?

ROBERT

(fake surprise)

Yeah, didn't you know? Witches always brew their potions on the full moon.

MIKEY

I didn't know. What should I do?

ROBERT

(shrugs)

Nothing you can do, Mikey.

(MORE)

ROBERT (CONT'D)
Your Mom might just stay sad
forever. Unless... someone were to
get that stolen smile back from the
Witch.

Robert laughs. His bus arrives. He stops at the door.

MIKEY
(guilt-ridden)
And I didn't even notice...

ROBERT
Because you're an idiot. I would've
noticed and kicked that Witch's
butt. But you're dumb, like a
little kid. Grow up, Mikey.

Robert boards, laughing. Shawn turns to Mikey. Regrets in his
eyes. Then he beards. The bus leaves. Mikey's bus arrives.
The friendly BUS DRIVER opens the door.

BUS DRIVER
Hey Mikey. How are you?

MIKEY
Robert says I'm dumb, like a little
kid.

BUS DRIVER
Do you think little kids are
dumb?

MIKEY
(thinks)
No. I think they know exactly as
much as little kids need to
know. Because they grow into
smart big kids.

BUS DRIVER
And you? Are you dumb?

MIKEY
Maybe Robert is smarter than me.
But I've learned what I needed to.

BUS DRIVER
The thing is, Mikey... a truly
smart person doesn't look down
on others. They're just happy to
see someone trying their best.

MIKEY

(nods)

yeah... If a witch stole your smile
to make a potion... what would you
do?

BUS DRIVER

A witch, huh? Well... I reckon I'd
go find her and take it back.
Simple as that.

MIKEY

(thoughtful)

Yeah. Simple as that.

The door closes. The bus pulls away.

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE / MIKEY'S ROOM - DAY

Mikey sits on his bed, lost in thought. He flips listlessly
through a Green Lantern comic, his mind elsewhere. BONKERS
lies at the foot of the bed, dozing.

Mikey decisively puts the comic down. He has the look of
someone who just had an epiphany. Bonkers whines, sits up,
and looks at Mikey.

MIKEY

(convinced)

Bonkers, I know now why Mom is so
sad.

BONKERS (V.O.)

Why is that, Mikey?

MIKEY

Robert told me.

BONKERS (V.O.)

I don't like Robert.

MIKEY

He said he saw a Witch who stole
Mom's smile.

BONKERS (V.O.)

Why would she do that?

MIKEY

To brew a potion with it during
the next full moon.

BONKERS (V.O.)
And when is the full moon?

MIKEY
(worried)
In five days.

BONKERS (V.O.)
That's bad, Mikey.

MIKEY
Frank, the bus driver, said he
would go there and take it back.

BONKERS (V.O.)
Yeah, I'd do that too.

MIKEY
Exactly. I don't want Mom to be
sad, Bonkers.

BONKERS (V.O.)
No. Me neither.

MIKEY
(determined)
I have to go to the Witch and get
back the smile she stole from
Mommy.

BONKERS (V.O.)
And then we'll eat her homework.

MIKEY
I don't eat homework.

BONKERS (V.O.)
Fine, then I'll eat her homework. I
once ate your math homework. It
was really good.

MIKEY
I got in so much trouble at
school for that.

BONKERS (V.O.)
Yeah... what a day.

MIKEY
Someday, I'm gonna eat your
homework. You go with me, Bonkers?

BONKERS (V.O.)
We could also go to the police.
And they can get it back.

MIKEY
And what if the Witch hexes them?

BONKERS (V.O.)
And what if the Witch hexes us?

MIKEY
Yeah, but WE know she's a witch.
The police might not. And
Presto-Chango—they're hexed.

BONKERS (V.O.)
That would be too dangerous if it
goes wrong.

MIKEY
Exactly. We have to do it
ourselves. We only have one
chance before the next full
moon. Are you coming?

BONKERS (V.O.)
(excited)
Of course, Mikey.

MIKEY
(jumps up resolutely)
I'll pack a few things, and then
we're off.

Mikey pulls a worn, brightly colored backpack from his closet. It's too big for him, but he shoulders it with determination.

BONKERS (V.O.)
Are you going to pack the
important stuff, Mikey?

MIKEY
(nodding)
Only the essentials.

He opens his comic book drawer. Pulls out his favorite GREEN LANTERN comic —the one with the glowing ring. He carefully places it inside. Next, some shirts, hoodies, and socks.

BONKERS (V.O.)
What about food?

Mikey grabs a handful of BUTTER COOKIES from a jar on his desk, stuffing them into a side pocket. He finds a small MINIATURE COMPASS from a Cracker Jack box. He spins the dial.

MIKEY

We'll probably be on the road for a few days. Do you know where the great swamps are?

BONKERS (V.O.)

No.

MIKEY

Oh well. We'll find them. We just have to head South. Mrs. Emmerich said this points North. So if I follow the moss, I just make sure this points the other way.

BONKERS (V.O.)

Clever. Don't forget my treats! And bones for us.

MIKEY

But Bonkers, I don't eat bones.

BONKERS (V.O.)

Then I'll take the extra bone. You take the human food.

Mikey adds a bag of DOG BISCUITS from under his bed to the pack. He pauses, looking around his room.

MIKEY

Ready, Bonkers?

BONKERS (V.O.)

Born ready, Mikey! Just remember what your Mom always said...

MIKEY

(whispering)

"Always leave a note."

MUSIC: NATALIE MERCHANT - MOTHERLAND.

He scribbles on a scrap of paper with a crayon.

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

MUSIC CONTINUES.

Mikey pins the note to the FRIDGE. It reads: "GOING TO FIND THE WITCH."

On the fridge hangs his father's OBITUARY and a photo of MAHALIA JACKSON.

EXT. MIKEY'S HOUSE - DAY

MUSIC: NATALIE MERCHANT - MOTHERLAND (CONTINUES).

Mikey emerges from the house with BONKERS. His backpack is stuffed. He leans it against the wall, heads to the shed, and wheels out his bicycle.

He hops on and pedals away.

He rides through the neighborhood toward the edge of town. As he exits, the CAMERA RISES SLOWLY, revealing the road winding through a vast rural landscape of forests and meadows.

MONTAGE:

Brief snapshots of the Idaho landscape: animals in the fields, distant mountains, people working the land. We immerse ourselves in the atmosphere of the journey.

As the song FADES, Mikey arrives at the edge of a dense wood and comes to a halt.

EXT. WOODLAND - TWILIGHT

Dusk is falling. Mikey and Bonkers arrive at a stretch of woods. Mikey dismounts and lays his bike in the grass by the road.

Exhausted, they both flop onto the grass. Mikey pulls a water bottle and a bowl from his pack. He pours some for Bonkers, who laps it up thirstily. Mikey takes a long swig himself.

BONKERS (V.O.)
It's getting dark, Mikey.

MIKEY
Yeah. I think so too.

BONKERS (V.O.)
Are we in the Great Swamp yet?

MIKEY

Don't think so, Bonkers. We might have to spend the night here.

BONKERS (V.O.)

It's gonna get real cold out here at night. Have you ever slept outside, Mikey?

MIKEY

I went camping once. Maybe we'll find a good spot. Then tomorrow, we'll head for the Great Swamp. I've got a sleeping bag.

Mikey looks around. A flicker of light glints through the trees. Bonkers pricks up his ears, sniffing the air.

BONKERS (V.O.)

Did you see that? Back there, between the trees. What is that? It's bright.

Mikey squints through the branches.

MIKEY

That's a fire, Bonkers. Bet it's nice and warm over there. Let's go see who it is.

BONKERS (V.O.)

I don't know, Mikey. I've got a bad feeling. Who knows who's lurking over there.

MIKEY

(laughing)

Oh, Bonkers, you scaredy-cat. Come on.

BONKERS (V.O.)

I'm just being careful, Mikey. I'm the one who has to look out for you.

MIKEY

(whispering)

I'll be careful too, I promise. Now come on.

Mikey creeps cautiously into the woods toward the glow. Bonkers lets out a worried sigh and trots after him.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Darkness has set in. Mikey and Bonkers approach the light stealthily.

BONKERS (V.O.)

(worried)

Mikey. Don't go there. You don't know them. Your mother always said: don't talk to strangers. What if they want to hurt you?

MIKEY

(whispering)

Why would they want to hurt me?

BONKERS (V.O.)

I don't know. But what if?

MIKEY

(whispering)

They don't even know I'm coming. How can they plan to hurt me if they don't know I'm here?

BONKERS (V.O.)

I don't like it, Mikey. Please. At least promise me you'll take a careful look at who they are before you walk in, okay?

MIKEY

(whispering)

Okay, Bonkers.

As they draw closer, two arguing voices become audible. Mikey hides behind a tree and watches.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

BOB (50s) and MEL (35s) are two hobos. Bob wears a permanent scowl that matches his stout, blocky frame. His clothes are patched, yet he carries himself with a certain groomed dignity.

Mel is tall and thin, wearing a battered top hat. Both their outfits are covered in patches. Mel has a permanent twinkle in his eyes but delivers his lines with a deadpan poker face.

They've set up camp around a fire. A small tent stands in the background. A pot bubbles over the flames. A third bedroll is laid out, but no one is sitting there.

Mikey and Bonkers watch from the shadows. Bob glares at Mel, gesturing angrily.

BOB

(agitated)

I'm telling you, all that junk you keep in that weird bag of yours doesn't belong in there. Most of it is just... whimsical. I keep wondering why you lug it around.

MEL

Name one whimsical thing I have EVER had in my bag.

BOB

You hid a pig in there. From me.

MEL

A piglet. And I wasn't hiding it, I was transporting it. That is the fundamental purpose of bags and pouches.

BOB

(gesturing)

And why, pray tell, does one transport a piglet in a bag?

MEL

There are numerous reasons why a piglet should be bagged rather than walked.

BOB

Yeah? Name ONE.

MEL

You're trapped in an elevator with the finalists of the National BBQ Championships.

Bob crosses his arms, fuming.

BOB

Oh, for Pete's sake, Mel.

MEL

You asked, I answered.

BOB

I just don't think pigs and other lunacies belong in bags and pouches.

MEL

The problem is, my dear Boooooob...
(stretching the name)
...that I don't care. Because you
are not the Presidential Bag-
Inspector. Therefore, I shall keep
in my bag whatever I please. If I
wish to raise a brood of ducklings
in there, I shall raise a brood of
ducklings.

BOB

In my bag, there are undies, socks,
and on rare occasions, a crust of
bread.

MEL

(ironic)
Exhilarating. Truly. Your life must
be a non-stop rain of confetti.
(firmly)
If you think your "Satchel-
Fundamentalism" has significantly
improved your life, please consider
that you aren't currently in Los
Angeles having a butler stir your
yogurt. You are a drifter, just
like me. Only my stuff is more
interesting.

BOB

Like a piglet.

MEL

An Electric piglet.

BOB

Whatever that's supposed to be.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Mikey creeps closer to the clearing. He peers through the
branches, then ducks behind a thick tree. There's a small
slope leading down to the camp.

Behind Mikey, something moves in the brush. Only BONKERS
notices. He lets out a low, vibrating growl.

MIKEY

(whispering)
They don't look particularly mean,
do they?

BONKERS (V.O.)

Mikey. Bad feeling. Let's go. We
can sleep by the road.

MIKEY

Just a second.

MEL (O.S.)

An Electric Pig generates power, as
the name suggests.

BOB (O.S.)

Forget it, Mel. Things are what
they are, and they aren't what they
aren't. Pigs don't make power. They
make sausages or pork chops. An
Electric Pig is about as likely as
a flying piano, a winning lottery
ticket, or a lost orphan landing at
our feet.

Something SNAPS behind Mikey.

He spins around, sees a SHADOWY FIGURE, and gasps. He loses
his footing and tumbles down the slope —straight into the
camp.

INT. CAMP - NIGHT

Mikey falls right into the center of the camp. BONKERS rushes
down, barking, positioning himself between the two hobos and
Mikey.

Mikey scrambles up, rubbing a bruised knee. The hobos remain
seated, staring at him with fascination.

Mel crosses his arms and grins. Bob crosses his arms too, his
face expressionless.

MEL

Well... Irony: one. Bob: zero.
I'm just glad it wasn't the
piano.

BOB

Just shut up, Mel.

MEL

Maybe stop obsessing over my bag
and look at the world for once.

(to Mikey)

And if you're smart, kid, never
tell Bob what's in your backpack.
He has an unhealthy, neurotic
fixation on the contents of other
people's luggage.

Mikey nods, though he clearly doesn't understand. He stands
up, wincing. Bonkers is still growling.

BOB

(to Mikey)

And where did you drop in from?

MIKEY

(pointing up)

From up there.

BOB

Oh, from up there, huh? Well. Good
to know. Did you hurt yourself?

MIKEY

I don't think so.

BOB

(raising an eyebrow)

What do you mean, "don't think so"?
You usually notice when...

(thinks for a moment)

Just sit down by the fire for now.

MIKEY

See, Bonkers?

BONKERS (V.O.)

I still don't like the look of
this.

Mikey sits down tentatively with Bonkers on the opposite side
of the fire.

MEL

(delighted)

Aww... you'd almost believe the
pooch is answering him.

MIKEY

He is.

MEL

Oh, I'm sure he is! What a little widdle-doggy-woggy-poo. Yes, you are! Such a good boy.

Bob rolls his eyes. Bonkers wags his tail.

BOB

If the dog is gone tomorrow, he's in Mel's bag.

BONKERS (V.O.)

If he puts me in his bag, I'm eating his undies. I don't care what color they are.

MEL

What'd he say?

MIKEY

He'll eat your undies if you try to bag him.

BOB

(laconic)

Bold.

MEL

Nobody's eating anything. And nobody's getting bagged. What's your name, kiddo?

MIKEY

I'm Mikey. And this is Bonkers. And you?

MEL

I'm Mel, and my grumpy associate here is Bob. We are genuine, certified road-rangers.

BOB

And what are you doing out here in the woods all by your lonesome in the middle of the night?

MIKEY

I'm on my way to the Great Swamp in the South. There's a witch there who stole my mother's smile. I have to get it back before the next full moon.

Bob and Mel exchange a long, meaningful look.

MEL

Well now... that's what I call a boy with a mission. I respect that. I was on a mission once myself. But that's a story for another time.

BOB

(grunts)

Yeah, your mission was to drive me to the brink of insanity.

Mel ignores Bob and puts on a professional, scholarly expression.

MEL

Witches, eh? Yeah... constant trouble, those ones. Always flying about on brooms, stirrin' up mischief. They've got the noses, the hats, the toads... yeah, I'm familiar with the breed.

MIKEY

She has alligators for pets.

BOB

(surprised)

Alligators? You mean the Bayou? New Orleans? You're planning on walking to New Orleans?

MIKEY

I have a bike. But it got dark, and I need a place to sleep.

MEL

I didn't even know they had witches in New Orleans.

MIKEY

Robert says she's a Voodoo witch.

BOB

Does he now? Sounds like a real connoisseur of the occult, this Robert.

MEL

Sounds a bit like Mrs. Gorghoula. She's got gators too, remember, Bob?

BOB

You can't ride a bicycle to New Orleans all by yourself, kid.

MEL

At least not tonight. Stay over. We were just about to fix some beans. You're welcome to a plate. We'll see about tomorrow, tomorrow.

BONKERS (V.O.)

Food!

Bob pulls Mel aside, speaking in a low, serious tone.

BOB

We can't let a strange kid spend the night. What are you thinking? You don't think they're out looking for him? Look at his threads—
(gesturing to Mikey)
—they're clean. He's missed by someone. And even you must notice that he's...
(taps his temple)
If the law catches us with him, it's lights out for us.

MEL

(dead serious)
What are you trying to say? That he's "special"?

BOB

(whispering)
You can hardly deny he's not exactly... "normal."

MEL

Why? 'Cause he's lookin' for a witch?

BOB

For starters.

MEL

So you're saying he's not as normal as two hobos arguing in the woods at night about satchel-inventory and electric pigs? Is that the gold standard now?

BOB

Mel, can you be serious for ONCE in your life?

MEL

Oh, Bob, I am. Truly. You don't believe in witches, you don't believe in electric pigs. I'd say the chance of being "not quite normal" in your worldview is significantly higher than the chance of being normal. That makes you a minority in your own reality.

MIKEY

What's an Electric Pig?

BOB

Yeah, Mel. What IS an Electric Pig?

Mel strikes a professorial pose, stroking an imaginary beard.

MEL

Now, hearken close, ye of little faith. It's a verifiable fact among the initiated that a hog is nothing but a fleshy battery with a curly tail. You stick a copper prong in the snout, and lordy, you got juice. The fine folks over at the Electric Pig Syndicate in Pigsburg-on-the-Wine... they've spent decades refining the breed. The P-3000 don't just oink, Bob. It glows with the fire of a thousand suns.

BOB

Even for YOUR standards, that is the single dumbest thing you have ever uttered.

MEL

Oh, I'm quite certain I've said dumber.

BOB

It's just plain stupid to buy a pig for power when there are electrical outlets.

MEL

(jovial)

Stupidity, my dear Bob, is rejecting a theory without testing it, simply because your own worldview feels safe.

MIKEY

Robert says I'm stupid.

MEL

And why does he say that?

MIKEY

(thinks)

I don't know. He thinks he knows more than me and that I'm like a seal in the desert.

Mel and Bob stare at Mikey in silence.

BOB

Whatever a seal is supposed to be doing in a desert.

MIKEY

(nods)

Frank says maybe he's just visiting his aunt.

MEL

Yes, that sounds plausible. Aunts often live far away. My Aunt Lizzzz-beeeeeeeeth...

(stretching the name)

... she's perched up in Ohio on a peak so jagged, you'd need the hooves of a mountain goat and the soul of an angel just to deliver her mail.

BOB

Yeah, probably 'cause she wanted some peace and quiet from you.

(to Mikey)

Listen, kid. Maybe you shouldn't listen so much to what others say. But you shouldn't run away from home either. Your mother is definitely looking for you, worried sick.

MIKEY

I left a note on the fridge.

BOB

Mikey. Look, we're being silly here and joking around. But there are no witches. Whatever your friend told you isn't true. If your mother is sad, it's not because of a hex. Go back home and everything will be fine.

MIKEY

(vehemently)

Imagine if I believe you and go home, and it turns out you were wrong. Then I've wasted the only chance to bring back Mama's smile.

(jumps up, grabs his pack)

I'm going to find Mrs. Gorghoula, no matter where she lives. Come on, Bonkers. We have to keep moving.

MEL

(approving)

What are you gonna do, Bob? Send him off? Let him wander through the woods alone in the dark so something actually happens to him?

BOB

(agitated)

What do you want to do, Mel? Explain to the sheriff that you're NOT some homeless creep who snatched a kid?

MEL

Let's decide tomorrow. We can always say he was just passing through and we took him in for the night.

Bob looks thoughtfully from Mikey to Mel. Mel winks at Mikey.

MEL (CONT'D)

Let's eat first and see where we are. Okay?

Bob grumbles, crosses his arms, and finally nods.

MIKEY

I saw someone else out there in the woods.

MEL

Ah, you mean Silent Ron. He's harmless. Doesn't talk. But he doesn't hurt a soul. He comes and goes as he pleases. They say he's been through something terrible.

MIKEY

(concerned)

I'm sorry to hear that.

MEL

Oh, he's happy enough with us. No need to feel sorry for him. He acts a bit peculiar from time to time, but he's a saint of a man. I tell you what, I'll get the Electric Pig from the tent now, and then we'll fix some dinner. Cooking is just better with music.

BOB

(sighs)

Why is it even IN the tent?

MEL

(shrugs)

Maybe it had a migraine and needed some privacy.

BOB

(resigned)

A pig with a migraine.

Mel disappears into the tent.

BOB (CONT'D)

Hey, kid. You know New Orleans is on the other side of the country, right? You'll never make it on a bicycle. And even if you did, how are you gonna find your witch?

MIKEY

(clueless but determined)

I don't know yet. It'll work out somehow. But I can't let Mama cry anymore.

BOB

And your father?

Mikey stares at Bob, blankly. He says nothing.

BOB (CONT'D)

And you really think it's because a witch stole her smile?

MIKEY

Robert saw her.

BOB

And who exactly is Robert?

MIKEY

He's the boy from next door.

BOB

And just because Robert says so, you believe him?

MIKEY

Why shouldn't I believe him? He goes to a "real" school.

BOB

Well. Maybe he lied? Maybe he just wanted to mess with you?

MIKEY

Then why has Mama been crying ever since?

BOB

How much you reckon she's cryin' right now, kid... with you gone and all?

MIKEY

I have to do this. I only have five days until the full moon. Robert says that's when the witch brews the potion, and then my mother will never be able to laugh again.

BOB

Mikey, there are no such things as witches.

Mel returns from the tent, cradling a PIGLET and a VINTAGE RADIO. The piglet looks around curiously.

MEL

But of course there are witches, Bob. Just because you've never spotted one doesn't mean they aren't there.

BOB

Mel, this isn't about our usual nonsense. We're talking about a boy who wants to bike to New Orleans because he thinks a witch lives there. He's a runaway.

MEL

HA! "Usual nonsense." Our usual nonsense consists of you saying, "That's impossible," and in the end, you stand there saying, "Alright, I was wrong." What if it really was a witch and she's brewing that potion? Then Mikey better get a move on.

BOB

(dismissive)

Pah. Witches...

MEL

You also don't believe this sweet little shoat here is an Electric Pig. So why would you believe in witches? But just because it can't be for you, doesn't mean it can't be that it can be, that it *can* be!!

BOB

I'm begging you, Mel. An Electric Pig?

MIKEY

(intrigued)

How does it work?

MEL

Bob, you ever notice a pig's snout is a dead ringer for a European plug?

BOB

Give it a rest, Mel.

MEL

It's science, Bob! German engineering and fancy-pants breeding. This little guy is the missing link between agriculture and high-end physics. A livestock upgrade for your daily power grid. And just look at that face...

(MORE)

MEL (CONT'D)
you're a sweet little sparky-
pluggy-wuggy, aren't you?

Mel scratches the pig. Bob stares into the fire, deadpan.

BOB
I'd have to dig a hole with a spade
just to reach your IQ, Mel.

MEL
Well, it's a fact: when you stick a
plug into its snout, it generates
power. Since it's still an Electric
Shoat, it hasn't reached its full
amperage yet... or "Amp-pigs," as
we call it in the trade.

MIKEY
Wow. That's totally cool.

BOB
Mel, how is a pig supposed to
generate electricity?

MEL
I don't know? Maybe it stores
solar energy? I'm a drifter,
not a physicist.

BOB
A Solar Pig? Mel, that'll never
work!

MEL
Just like there are no witches,
right? I still reckon old Mrs.
Jenkins was a witch.

BOB
Not every woman who chases you
with a broom is a witch, Mel.

MEL
There's an easy way to find out,
Bob! If the Electric Pig actually
generates power, then there's a
chance that witches exist. And then
there's a chance that Mikey's story
is true.

BOB
You aren't seriously going to stick
a plug into that poor pig's nose?

Mel hands Bob the radio plug and sets the pig down near the fire.

MEL
(slyly)
No, Bob. The honor belongs to
the doubter.

BOB
If it doesn't work, will you stop
talking the boy into believing in
hexes?

MEL
Sure, Bob. And if it works, you
admit the possibility that witches
exist.

BOB
Electric Pig... my foot.

MONTAGE - THE TEST - QUICK CUTS

- A) Mel hands Bob the plug. Bob takes it begrudgingly.
- B) The Electric Pig, sitting calm.
- C) Bob, looking deeply skeptical.

BOB (CONT'D)
Alright, I'll do it.

- D) Mel, grinning slyly.
- E) The whole group, tense.
- F) Bob staring at the pig, plug in hand.

BOB (CONT'D)
This is never going to work.

- G) The pig staring at Bob.
- H) Bob staring at the plug.
- I) The pig staring at the plug.
- J) Bob staring at the snout.
- K) CLOSE UP: The snout.
- L) CLOSE UP: The plug.

M) The pig staring at Bob.

N) Bob staring at the pig.

O) Mel watching them both.

BOB (CONT'D)
I'm gonna end up arrested for
animal cruelty.

P) Bob glaring at the pig.

Q) The pig glaring at Bob.

R) Bob lifts the plug.

SOUND: A sharp CRUNCH-like someone biting into a crisp
carrot.

BOB (CONT'D)
OUCH!

EXT. CAMP / CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

The radio plays softly: THE KASSOY SISTERS - "DOWN IN A
WILLOW GARDEN."

The pig, plug in its snout, eats peacefully from a bowl.
Bob nurses his bitten hand, staring grimly into the fire.

MEL
Yeah, forgot to mention. The pig
bites sometimes when you poke its
nose.

BOB
(stunned)
Unbelievable... it actually
works. Fine. I was wrong.

MEL
You say that so often, it's losing
its flair.

Bob, Mel, and Mikey listen to the song for a moment. Bob
stares at the radio, shaking his head in confusion.

BOB
Well... she sounds like a singer
who needs to talk to someone about
her problems, and fast.

MEL

Naaaaaw... sounds to me like she's cool with it.

LATER

The group is eating beans.

MIKEY

Who is Mrs. Gorghoula, anyway?

MEL

A most fascinating individual, I'll tell you that. Some say she's a witch for real. Lives in Louisiana, in a grand mansion right in the heart of the swamp. You know... Louisiana... Voodoo and all that. Her father was a famous bluesman. They say he struck a bargain with the Devil himself to find fame. Mrs. Gorghoula honors him by hosting a great "Cutting Contest" once a year. A real Singing War, if you will.

MIKEY

What's a Singing War?

MEL

Well, musicians and bands gather there to compete. Everyone gets to play one song, and the crowd decides who stays and who goes. If you make the next round, you play another, and the crowd votes again. The winner gets a prize. We were there once, weren't we, Bob?

BOB

Yeah. A lifetime ago.

MEL

And be honest, Bob — Mrs. Gorghoula is a bit "witchy," isn't she?

BOB

Maybe a little. Her Gators are creepy.

MIKEY

(excited)
She has crocodiles? That fits exactly what Robert said!

(MORE)

MIKEY (CONT'D)

Maybe she really is the one who
stole Mom's smile.

BOB

(ironic)

Sure. She flies all the way from
Louisiana to Idaho on a broom just
to rob your mother?

MEL

And what if she did?

BOB

(firmly)

There are no witches.

MEL

And no Electric Pigs, right?

Bob snorts angrily.

MIKEY

(pleading)

I have to go there.

BOB

You can't. You should go home first
thing in the morning.

MEL

You know, Bob... the next full moon
is the Singing War at Mrs.
Gorghoula's.

MIKEY

Next full moon? That's when she
brews the potion!

BOB

We can't drive across the country
with a runaway. We'd go to prison.

MEL

(grinning)

Madame Fiona and her famous singing
poodles are supposed to be there
this year, too.

BOB

What?? How do you know that?

MEL

She told me herself. Last time I
saw her.

BOB
(dreamily)
Ah... Madame Fiona.

MEL
(whispering to Mikey)
He's a bit in love with her, you
see.

BOB
(exploding)
I HEARD THAT!

MEL
What?

BOB
What you just whispered.

MEL
I didn't whisper a thing. Now don't
you go getting "whimsical" on me.

BOB
I'll give you "whimsical," you ...
you!

MIKEY
(pleading)
Bob, Mel, please.

MEL
It would be the ideal opportunity
to reunite with Madame Fiona,
wouldn't it, Bob?

BOB
I am not fond of this idea.

MEL
But her performances are always
a blast.

BOB
Unfortunately, I have to agree.

MEL
And you could try out your new
song at the Singing War.

MIKEY
You have a song?

MEL

Bob is actually a very fine singer.

MIKEY

Wow.

MEL

Come on, Bob. What have we got to lose?

BOB

Our freedom? We could get into huge trouble. We're hobos, Mel. Nobody's gonna believe us. Mikey's a runaway. His mother and the law will be scouring the state for him. And we'll be the drifters who snatched him.

MEL

Listen, Bob. Remember that boy who ran away from home because he couldn't stand it anymore? He wanted to be free, and nothing in the world could hold him back.

BOB

That was different, Mel. You know how my father was and why I left.

MEL

Was it? That boy felt he had something important to do, and to this day, he's never regretted it. And unlike Mikey, he had nobody looking out for him.

BOB

(nodding toward Mikey)
You do realize he's... "special," right?

MEL

Just as special as the rest of us. Come on, Bob. We'll bring him back safe and sound after the Singing War. And if we find a telephone, he can call his mother and tell her he's alright.

BOB

Wait... you don't have a phone on you?

MEL

A phone? Don't be absurd, Bob.
Who carries a phone?

BOB

You're a drifter with a radio, a
pig in a bag, and every kind of
ridiculous junk imaginable— but no
phone?

MEL

Name one ridiculous thing I have.

BOB

A pig in a backpack!

MEL

Trust me, Bob. That pig is going to
play its part for the greater good.

BOB

Ha!

MEL

Remember when you claimed I didn't
have an Electric Pig? You were
quite wrong about that, weren't we?

BOB

That was twenty minutes ago!

MEL

Yes, those were the days... Come
on, Bob. Have a heart.

BOB

I need to think about it. Mikey
should get some sleep soon anyway.
Give him a blanket, Mel.

MEL

Sure thing, Bob.

Mel stands up and disappears into the tent. Mikey stays by
the fire with Bob. Bob stares into the flames, then looks at
Mikey.

BOB

I'm not actually that "in love"
with Madame Fiona.

MIKEY

Okay.

BOB

Really.

MIKEY

Okay.

BOB

I find her... pleasant, at the very most.

MIKEY

Yeah, I understand.

BOB

Good. ... You sure you don't want to go back home, Mikey?

BONKERS (V.O.)

Maybe he's right, Mikey.

MIKEY

(whispers)

No, Bonkers. If they won't come, I'll go alone.

Mel returns and prepares a bedroll for Mikey by the fire. Mikey snuggles in. Bonkers curls up beside him.

MEL

And if he's really going to do this, he ought to have someone watching his back.

Mel places a bowl of beans at the far end of the fire.

MEL (CONT'D)

For Ron, when he shows up later.

MIKEY

Mom always reads to me at night.

MEL

Hold on.

Mel pulls out a guitar and hands it to Bob.

MEL (CONT'D)

You still remember "Jenny Jenkins"?

BOB

Oh, yeah. Should we play "Jenny Jenkins"? come on, Mikey?

MIKEY

Okay.

Mel pulls a small metal jaw harp from his pocket and begins to twang a rhythmic, bouncy tune. Bob takes the guitar, and they all sing "Jenny Jenkins" together. Above them, the stars shine; the fire crackles.

INTERCUT - CAMP / MIKEY'S HOME

A) Sarah sits at the table, comforted by neighbors. A policewoman sits at the table with a notepad. Sarah shows her Mikey's message, concerned.

B) A defiant Robert stands at his window, looking at Mikey's house. He looks guilty, scared, and stubborn all at once.

C) Shawn stands in front of Mikey's house, watching the commotion. Guilt is written all over his face.

BACK TO CAMP

As the song fades out, Mikey snuggles into the blanket.

MEL

Goodnight, Mikey.

BOB

Night.

MIKEY

Night Bob, night Mel, night Bonkers.

BONKERS (V.O.)

Night, Mikey.

MIKEY

(whispering)

Goodnight, Mister Moon. Even if you're hiding right now.

Mel and Bob stay by the fire, talking quietly.

RON—a silent, thin hobo with a long beard and a solemn face—slips into the camp. He sits by the fire and begins to eat the beans.

BOB

Hey, Ron.

EXT. CAMP - DAY

MIKEY wakes up. BONKERS is licking his face. A bright summer morning. The sun filters through the trees, warm and friendly.

MEL is at the fire, preparing breakfast. BOB is washing his face in a bucket. RON is curled up by the embers, still asleep. Next to him, a STRAY CAT is curled into a matching ball.

MEL

Morning, Mikey. Breakfast is almost served.

MIKEY

Good morning.

MEL

We have to move fast today if we want to catch the train.

MIKEY

What train?

BOB

(smiling)

Well, we're headed for Louisiana, aren't we?

MIKEY

(excited)

Oh! You're coming with me?

MEL

In truth, Bob just wants to see Madame Fiona again. It's a convenient excuse to keep an eye on you and have a proper adventure for once.

BOB

I do NOT... oh... forget it.

MEL

There's our grumpy old bear. Here, take your coffee. Mikey, would you like some fresh-squeezed orange juice?

MIKEY

Yes, please.

BOB

Where in the name of all that's
holy did you get fresh oranges?

Mel hands Mikey a glass of juice and Bob a mug of coffee. He sips his own with visible delight.

MEL

(as if obvious)

I looked in the bag, and there they
were.

BOB

We didn't buy any oranges, Mel.

MEL

(patiently)

Bob, if we didn't have oranges, how
could I have made orange juice?
Ergo, we must have had them.

Bob struggles to maintain his composure. His eye twitches.

BOB

Mel, I am constantly amazed by
the... whimsical nonsense you pull
out of thin air.

MEL

Says the man who plugged a pig's
snout into a radio. Don't overthink
it, Bob. Sometimes you just have to
accept things. If you find oranges
in your bag — treat yourself to
some juice.

BOB

But—

MEL

(reproachful)

Tut-tut. Are we being argumentative
again? Do you feel the need to sing
the "Just Accept It Song" once
more?

BOB

(horrified)

Oh no. Not the "Just Accept It
Song."

Mel steps out of frame. We hear the CLATTER of dishes. Ron is awake now, yawning and rummaging through his pack. Mikey sits with Bonkers, sipping his juice and enjoys the show. Mel returns and drops his backpack. He zips it open.

MEL

Then just be happy about the juice.
Want some fruit salad?

Bob glares as Mel calmly pulls an impossible amount of fresh fruit out of the bag.

BOB

Where on earth did you get a fruit
salad, Mel?!

MEL

(annoyed)
The bag, Bob. I told you.

BOB

You said there were oranges in it!

MEL

Yes, right next to the bananas,
apples, raisins, plums, and the
yogurt.

Bob groans, defeated. He opens his mouth to speak, thinks better of it, and just crosses his arms in resignation.

MEL (CONT'D)

Just accept it, Bob. Serenity.
Equanimity.

BOB

(shouting)
I AM SERENE!

MEL

Well, when I'm serene, I usually
look a lot less like I'm about to
explode.

BOB

Mel, it defies all reason! I
checked that bag last night. It was
full of beans. Beans, Mel! No
fruit.

MEL

Maybe we're drinking orange-
flavored bean juice then. It's a
possibility.

BOB

No. This is very clearly orange juice.

MEL

Then we must have had oranges. You're too rigid, Bob. Reason only leads to disappointment when things go differently.

Mel strikes a theatrical pose, gazing into the distance with grand gestures.

MEL (CONT'D)

Life is full of wonders. They're all around us, you know? They just happen. Here and now. Everywhere. Small wonders, big wonders, beautiful wonders, sad wonders, colorful wonders... and fruit salad wonders. And when they happen... just accept them, Bob.

Bob's eyes go wide. Pure fear crosses his face. He rushes over to Mikey and grabs his shoulders.

BOB

(whispering)

Oh no... Come on, Mikey, we have to get out of here. Fast. He's about to sing.

MIKEY

Why? What's wrong?

BOB

(watching Mel nervously)

He's having a Musical Breakdown. It's a severe psychiatric-medical emergency that usually ends in disaster. Last time, we woke up on a cargo ship in the Indian Ocean and it took three days to—

A DISTANT TRAIN WHISTLE pierces the air. Mel is snapped out of his trance. He looks toward the sound.

MEL

(snappy)

That's the train to Baton Rouge. Come on, everyone! Pack your things!

MIKEY

Can we still make it? We can
already hear it!

MEL

Plenty of time. It loops around
that mountain over there and comes
back close to the ridge. We've got
twenty minutes.

BOB

Alright then. Pack it up. To the
tracks!

They all scramble.

MUSIC: SONNY TERRY - "LOST JOHN" kicks in.

EXT. WOODS / RAILROAD TRACKS - DAY

MUSIC: SONNY TERRY - "LOST JOHN" .

The group stands by the tracks with their packs, waiting.
Mikey clutches Bonkers. Tension hangs in the air. In the
distance, the train whistle blows. A pig's snout pokes out of
a hole in Mel's backpack. It sniffs around.

MEL

(excited)

I'm really happy to be back on the
road again.

BOB

We're always on the road, Mel.

MEL

Listen, Mikey. When the train gets
here, we have to run fast and climb
into the car, okay? I'll jump on
first. You run alongside as fast as
you can, hand me Bonkers, and I'll
pull you in. Then the others
follow. Got it?

MIKEY

(nods)

Okay.

MEL

(smiling)

Are you scared?

Mikey nods. From behind, RON reaches out and gives Mikey's shoulder a steadying, silent pat. The whistle grows louder. The rhythmic clatter of wheels on the rails begins to vibrate through the ground.

MEL (CONT'D)
(shouting)
This is it, Mikey! This is the hobo
way of life!

BOB
Get ready. Ron, you too. It's in
sight.

The freight train rounds the bend — a massive, thundering mountain of steel. As it roars toward them, it blasts a sharp warning signal. Mikey flinches. Bob places his hands firmly on Mikey's shoulders.

MEL
Everyone ready? Then... GO!

The locomotive thunders past. The group starts sprinting alongside the cars. Mel spots an open boxcar, runs faster, tosses his gear in, and pulls himself up.

MEL (CONT'D)
(shouting over the roar)
Mikey! Now!

Mikey is running beside the car, breathing hard. He hands Bonkers up to Mel and throws his backpack in. He tries to hoist himself up, but he slips and falls back. Mel leans out, stretching his hands toward the boy.

MEL (CONT'D)
Faster, Mikey! You can do it!

MIKEY
(exhausted, desperate)
I can't... I can't do it!

Bob surges forward, grabs Mikey mid-stride, and lifts him toward Mel, who pulls him into the car.

BOB
Your turn, Ron!

Ron climbs in silently. Finally, Bob manages to pull himself up and collapses onto the floor of the car, gasping for breath.

INSERT - ROADSIDE

A police car at the edge of the woods. An OFFICER examines Mikey's bicycle while talking into his radio.

BACK TO SCENE**INT. BOXCAR - DAY**

The group has made it onto the train to Baton Rouge. Barrels and crates are scattered around. The back of the car is draped in deep shadows. MEL sits up, catching his breath, and grins.

MEL

Phew. That was a close one,
wasn't it?

Bluesy guitar music drifts from the back of the car. BOB cautiously slides the door open a bit more to let in some light, then makes his way toward the sound.

A HOBO—resembling Seasick Steve—sits on a crate. He's playing a three-string guitar, picking out a song about the road. Mel, Mikey, and Ron join them.

MUSIC: SEASICK STEVE - "HOBO LOW"

HOBO

(nodding to Bob)
Out on the big ride, are ya?

BOB

You play real well.

HOBO

Thanks. Where are you folks headed?

MEL

Oh, we're going to—

BOB

(whispering to Mel)
Mel, don't. Better if nobody knows
where we're going.
(to the Hobo)
Just seeing where the tracks take
us.

HOBO

This train goes all the way to
Baton Rouge.

(MORE)

HOBO (CONT'D)

You can ride 'er for a good long stretch. I'm taking it to the end of the line myself.

BOB

Baton Rouge, huh?

HOBO

Music and a restless heart keep me moving through the country. But every now and then, the blues calls me home. Once a year, my heart doesn't beat in my chest—it beats in Louisiana.

MEL

How long have you been drifting?

HOBO

My whole life. I guess we're all drifting, in our own way. Some of us drift like a piece of wood on a river, just passing through and maybe meeting for a brief moment in a boxcar. Others stay put and travel differently—by starting families and growing old. But in the end, we're all on a journey.

BOB

You've got a point there. Hey, You got a gift, friend.

HOBO

Thanks, man.

BOB

We're gonna go see if we can find another car further back. There's a lot of us, might get a bit crowded in here.

HOBO

Sure thing. Good luck on your travels.

MEL

You too.

The Hobo goes back to his guitar. The group turns to leave.

EXT. FREIGHT TRAIN (ROOF) - DAY

MUSIC: SEASICK STEVE - "HOBO LOW" (Continues/Swells)

A wide shot of the landscape rushing by—endless fields and distant treelines under a vast, open sky.

The camera PANS to the roof of a moving boxcar.

The group is crawling on all fours across the ribbed metal roof. The wind whips at their clothes and hair. MIKEY is in the middle, one arm hooked tightly around BONKERS, the other hand searching for grip. His face is pale with fear, but his jaw is set tight.

They reach the end of the car. A dangerous gap yawns between the wagons, revealing the rattling couplings and the tracks blurred by speed below.

MEL leads the way. With practiced ease, he reaches for the metal ladder of the next car and swings himself across. He climbs onto the next roof, turns around, and kneels at the edge.

Mel gestures calmly but firmly: Hand me the dog.

Mikey hesitates for a second, staring at the drop below, then heaves Bonkers across the gap with outstretched arms. Mel grabs the dog securely by his harness and sets him down safely behind him.

Now Mel reaches out both hands to Mikey. Mikey takes a deep breath, closes his eyes for a split second, and makes the leap. Mel catches him firmly by the forearms and pulls him up onto the roof with one powerful motion.

RON and BOB follow without hesitation. Ron moves with steady, focused precision. Bob curses silently against the wind but makes the jump with grim determination.

TIME JUMP / MONTAGE:

The group continues to crawl over several more roofs. The sun is lower now, bathing the world in a warm, golden light. They reach a specific car: It has a small, recessed platform with a railing at the end—a sort of open-air "terrace." Behind it is a heavy metal door leading into a closed compartment.

Mel looks at Bob. A short, knowing nod. This is their spot. They slide down onto the platform. The physical strain finally lifts. Mikey sets Bonkers down and leans back against the wall of the car, watching the world blur past.

The song "Hobo Low" fades out with the final, gritty guitar chords.

EXT. TRAIN / TERRACE - DAY

A sunny afternoon. Evening is starting to settle in. The train rumbles southward over the tracks. The boxcar door stands open. Inside, barrels, crates, and sacks are visible in the shadows.

BONKERS is curled up in the doorway, fast asleep. MIKEY and BOB sit to the right of the door, leaning against the metal wall, watching the landscape blur past. To the left, MEL and RON sit together. Mel is quietly telling Ron a story while Ron strokes the cat.

Bob watches Mel for a while, looking restless and thoughtful.

BOB

'Dunno, Mikey. Mel just... he takes everything so damn lightly. I wonder if he ever actually thinks about anything. I mean, he's gotta realize that whole fruit salad stunt and that electric pig aren't exactly... normal.

Mikey thinks about it for a beat.

MIKEY

Maybe it's only un-normal to you, Bob. Maybe for Mel, it's just how things are. And that's why it happens to him. Mom always says you're only dumb in other people's eyes. Maybe being normal is the same way.

BOB

(pensive)

So what's "normal" then?

MIKEY

(a bit sad)

I guess being normal means being like Robert and all those guys.

Bob looks at Mikey. The boy's brief sadness lingers for a second, then drifts away.

BOB

And would you want that? To be like Robert?

Mikey looks at Bob, clearly conflicted. He shrugs.

MIKEY

Sometimes. Sometimes not.

Bob nods, turning back to the passing world outside.

MIKEY (CONT'D)

When Mel finds oranges, he makes juice. And to him, that's just normal. For you, it's normal to not find oranges, but to buy 'em and know they're there. I think if you think too much about that stuff...

Mel steps over, holding out two glasses of juice for Mikey and Bob.

MEL

... then you end up with moldy oranges and no juice at all.

Everyone laughs. The tension breaks.

BOB

Getting late. Mikey, you got a toothbrush in that bag?

Mikey nods.

BOB (CONT'D)

Go on then, brush 'em. Get a rag and some water and wash up a bit, too. And you, Mel- maybe you could fire up that electric pig later. Make it a bit cozy in here. You got anything left for dinner?

Mikey gets up and heads into the dark of the boxcar. Mel nods, staring out at the horizon for a silent moment.

MEL

(philosophically)
You know, Bob...

BOB

Yeah?

MEL
Ever notice that in stories...
nobody ever has to go to the
bathroom?

Bob rolls his eyes and lets out a long sigh.

BOB
Thank you, Mel. Thank you for
ruining a perfectly good moment.

MEL
(grinning)
Hey, what are friends for?

INT. BOXCAR - NIGHT

The boxcar is filled with a cozy evening glow. Crates, sacks, and barrels are scattered around, but the group has made themselves at home.

The ELECTRIC PIG powers a single standing lamp. BOB plays his guitar softly. MEL is busy preparing some food. RON is playing with BONKERS and his cat, teaching Bonkers little tricks, which the dog clearly enjoys.

MIKEY sits close to Mel, watching him work. He looks troubled, weighed down.

MEL
What's up, Mikey? You're awfully
quiet.

MIKEY
I miss Mommy.

MEL
Have you ever been away from home
before?

MIKEY
(shrugs)
No.

MEL
It's a real lucky thing, having a
great relationship with your
parents. What about your dad?

Mikey looks at Mel, genuinely confused.

MIKEY

Dad?

MEL

Yeah. What's he like? What does he do for a living?

Mikey stares at Mel, blankly. He tries to process the question, but he can't quite grasp what Mel is looking for.

MIKEY

(shaking his head)

I don't really get what you mean. I haven't... I haven't seen him in a while.

Mel looks up, raising an eyebrow slightly, then softens his expression.

MEL

It's okay. Don't worry about it.

A question is eating at Mikey.

MIKEY

Mel?

MEL

Yeah?

MIKEY

Do you think we'll find the smile?

MEL

(gently)

Sure. Why not? Anything's possible.

MIKEY

Robert says I'm an idiot because I didn't notice her coming. He says he would've kicked the witch's butt.

MEL

Well, then ROBERT is the idiot. You can't just kick a witch's butt. She's a WITCH.

MIKEY

Hansel and Gretel pushed the witch into the oven.

MEL

Yeah, but I bet she just hexed her way right back out of that oven. Then she probably bought a house in Hawaii and enjoyed her retirement.

MIKEY

In Hawaii?

MEL

Sure, why not? That's what I'd do if I were a witch.

MIKEY

Wow.

MEL

You're not an idiot, Mikey. Definitely not. Now, food's almost ready, and then it's time for you to get some sleep.

MUSIC: Windhand - Sparrow

EXT. TRAIN / NIGHT - ONE-TAKE

MUSIC: WINDHAND - SPARROW (OR BURL IVES - LEATHERWINGED BAT)

The CAMERA starts INSIDE the boxcar, very close to MIKEY'S FACE. He is laughing at a silly gesture from MEL. The warm light from the standing lamp flickers across his skin.

WITHOUT A CUT, the camera pulls back, gliding over the EATING and CHATTING HOBOS, floating right out of the open boxcar door into the night.

The train rumbles beneath us.

The camera ACCELERATES, tilting up into the black sky, catching the NEAR-FULL MOON. In one fluid motion, the shadows on its surface shift-PAREIDOLIA sets in. We see a GENTLE, KIND FACE. The moon is smiling down at Mikey.

The camera follows the moon's gaze, and we see the TRAIN, with its illuminated window, rattling through the dark landscape.

The camera pans back to the moon; the pareidolia STOPS. The moon looks like a lifeless, cold hunk of rock again.

A SOLITARY SPARROW flits across the face of the pale, lifeless moon. The camera detaches from the train and follows the bird's erratic, lonely flight through the cold night air.

Below, the sleeping rooftops of MIKEY'S CITY emerge from the darkness. The entire town is swallowed by shadows, except for one single, warm glow: a kitchen window in MIKEY'S HOME.

The camera dives toward the light, gliding right through the CLOSED GLASS.

We are in the brightly lit kitchen.

We circle SARAH. She sits at the table, the world around her silent. We see the tear she wipes away, the brief, desperate look at her silent phone. In front of her lies a NEWSPAPER with MIKEY'S MISSING PERSON AD.

The camera lingers a second too long on her loneliness, then pulls us backward through the window. Back up to the moon.

As soon as we break through the clouds, the moon "AWAKENS" again. The face returns, looking in the other direction this time—toward where the train is heading.

The camera follows the moon's gaze down. We catch the distant glow of the boxcar again, moving like a tiny firefly through the dark. We dive back into the boxcar.

The mood has changed. MEL and BOB are talking in low whispers. The camera glides lower until it hovers directly over MIKEY.

He is fast asleep now, arm wrapped around BONKERS. The camera comes to rest, inches from his peaceful face, as the music slowly fades out.

INT. BOXCAR - DAY (TRANSITION)

The camera glides through the open sliding door and comes to a halt inches from MIKEY'S face. The Windhand song fades out.

MATCH CUT / CONTINUOUS ONE-SHOT:

Only the monotonous, hollow rhythmic clatter of the tracks remains. The camera holds the close-up on Mikey.

The light on his face shifts seamlessly: cold moonlight gives way to a warm, bright, golden morning glow.

Mikey opens his eyes. The camera slowly zooms out to a medium shot. MEL stands beside him, buzzing with excitement.

BONKERS is nowhere to be seen. Mikey sits up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Mel beckons him to follow and disappears outside. Mikey yawns, picks himself up, and follows.

EXT. BOXCAR TERRACE - DAY - CONTINUOUS ONE-TAKE

Mikey steps outside and stops dead. A massive, sun-drenched mountain vista unfolds before him. Brilliant sunlight everywhere.

BONKERS eats peacefully from a bowl. The ELECTRIC PIG stands on the deck, a plug stuck in its nose, wired to an old radio. BOB stands by the railing; he catches Mikey's eye and turns the volume knob.

SONG: THE BE GOOD TANYAS - "THE LITTLEST BIRDS" kicks in.

Mel grabs Mikey's shoulders, laughing. Mikey looks at Bob, who flashes a rare, genuine grin. An atmosphere of absolute freedom.

Mikey spreads his arms wide and lets out a primal, liberated scream. He and Mel break into a wild, uninhibited dance.

A MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD lands on the iron railing. At the sound of Mikey's shout, the bird takes flight. The camera detaches from the group, following the bluebird high into the sky.

Below us, the train shrinks. The camera continues to rise until the real landscape morphs into a living HYBRID MAP. The train now looks like a miniature, racing south across the USA in a high-speed time-lapse flow.

The camera begins its descent, plunging back toward the train. The light grows heavier, duskier. The lush, humid colors of the South take over.

As the camera lands back on the terrace, it is night. A dim light glows from inside the car. The Be Good Tanyas song fades out.

Silence. Only the now louder, more metallic clatter of the train.

Bob and Mikey stand side by side at the railing. In the distance, a massive sea of electric lights flickers on the horizon.

BOB
Baton Rouge is near.

EXT. TRAIN/TERRACE - NIGHT

Darkness blankets the land. In the distance, the lights of Baton Rouge glitter. MEL and RON join the others on the platform. They stare at the city lights in silence.

BOB

Hey folks, we're reaching Baton Rouge soon. The train's going to stop, and we have to get out of the car. They'll be inspecting the yard.

MEL

Packs are settled. We're ready.

MIKEY

(impressed by the city)
Wow. It looks amazing.

BOB

Impressive, isn't it? Feel how warm and heavy the air is? That's the big swamp. The Blues. The Voodoo.

MIKEY

(nods, pensive)
I wonder how many people live down there.

BOB

From a distance, it looks beautiful. And if you're just passing through, it's nice for a while. But imagine it - day in, day out. The same people, same streets, the same damn noises. Every day the same view from your window. Everything stays the same, forever. Sounds terrible, doesn't it?

MEL

I don't know. Plenty of them are happy down there.

BOB

I'd be scared to live like that.

MEL

Scared? Of what? Life on the road is just as dangerous.

BOB

Not that kind of scared. I think...
I'd be afraid of turning stiff and
motionless. Of not seeing the
things that actually matter
anymore.

MEL

And what's the important stuff for
you?

BOB

I don't know. Finding some
happiness, maybe?

MEL

Are you happy?

BOB

Hard to say. I guess I'm still
looking for it.

MEL

Everybody finds happiness their own
way. Some travel for it, others
find it inside themselves. Me? I'm
happy with a warm fire, a good
friend by my side, and an electric
pig that doesn't bite. I don't
think those people are any more
miserable than us. Maybe we just
think so because we would be
miserable in their shoes.

BOB

You know, Mel... sometimes you're
not as crazy as you look.

MEL

Don't get used to it.

The train crawls into the city, passing houses and
streetlamps. The group watches in silence. The train enters
the freight yard and hisses to a halt.

BOB

Alright, let's move. Baton Rouge—
everybody out. We should make it
through the city tonight and camp
on the outskirts.

MIKEY

Come on, Bonkers.

BONKERS

Are we at the big swamps now?

MIKEY

Yes. Almost.

BOB

Listen, Mikey. We are about to hit Baton Rouge. People are going to be looking for you, for sure. That makes it dangerous for us, traveling with a kid, and dangerous for you if you want to make it all the way to Mrs. Gorghoula's. Put your hood up when we go through the city, do you hear me? And do not say a word to anyone.

MIKEY

(nods)

Okay, Bob.

BOB

Mikey... you love your mother, don't you?

Mikey Nods, a shadow of sadness in his eyes.

BOB (CONT'D)

We should call her from the road. Tell her where you are. What do you say? She must b worried sick.

MIKEY

(thinking for a second)

Do you know my phone number?

BOB

(taken aback)

Do I--? What? How on earth am I supposed to--

MEL

Entrance of Mr. Grumpy-Bear in three, two, one... Action!

BOB

(sourly)

Dammit, Mel, be serious for once.

(MORE)

BOB (CONT'D)

Look, we did decide to go along with this because you were right — this is a "once in a lifetime" situation and someone has to watch his back. But we are heading into civilization now. And you don't seem to realize that our young drifter here doesn't grasp that people are probably dying of worry. And you don't realize that things are getting real dangerous for us from here on out. If the cops catch us, you're drifting straight into a precinct. Kidnappers, or worse. Is that what you want, Mel? Do you want to spend the next ten years in the slammer? Telling your tall tales about electric pigs and aunts on mountains to a cellmate? Huh? So act like you have some sense. One phone call would have made this a whole lot easier.

Mel kneels down to Bonkers, petting him. He fumbles with his bandana.

MEL

Well, if Mikey doesn't know the number, I guess a letter is all we have. At least Bonkers has his address on his collar.

BONKERS (V.O.)

Yeah, let's write a letter, Mikey.

MIKEY

(dead serious)

I don't want you guys getting into trouble because of me.

Mikey heaves his backpack on and starts walking toward the city lights. Bonkers follows. Bob watches him, crossing his arms. He lets out a long sigh. Mel stays silent.

BOB

(annoyed)

Is this one of those moments where the grumpy guy has to run after them and yell, "Stop, wait, we're going together"?

MEL
 (grinning)
 Your sense of theatrics is
 remarkable, my friend.

While Mel and Bob are still bickering, Ron grabs his pack, puts it on, catches up to Mikey, and places a hand on his shoulder. Mikey looks up at him. Ron gestures for him to pull his hood up. Mikey nods and adjusts the hood.

MEL (CONT'D)
 (surprised)
 Entrance of the silent, whimsical
 type.

Bob sighs. They both shoulder their packs and follow Mikey and Ron. The group disappears across the tracks into the dark.

EXT. BATON ROUGE - NIGHT

MUSIC: FRED MCDOWELL - KEEP YOUR LAMPS TRIMMED AND BURNING

The group walks through the city. BOB leads. MIKEY follows with BONKERS. RON is behind them, and MEL brings up the rear. All carry their heavy packs.

MONTAGE:

- They pass glowing storefronts.
- They trek past bars and city folk—modern, stylish, polished. The hobos are silent, moving like foreign objects through the crowd.
- Cars rush by; everything is fast, neon-bright, and frantic.
- In alleys and shadowed corners, junkies and the homeless huddle while party-goers in high spirits drift past them.
- Two LOCALS on a night out pass the group. They look at them with amusement. Bob feels their eyes. He instinctively tries to straighten his tattered clothes. He ducks his head, glances back at the group, and quickens his pace.
- In a window, a blue neon sign flickers: A SMILEY FACE. Mikey stops for a second, staring at it. A silent Mel gently nudges him, ushering him along.
- The camera holds on a street flooded with brilliant lights, lined with crowded pubs and glowing storefronts.

In a wide shot from behind, the hobos and Mikey move further into the distance. Their silhouettes grow smaller as they are slowly swallowed by the sea of people, eventually vanishing into the neon haze.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The group has left the city and approaches a highway via a dusty path. The surroundings are rural. From the distance, a rhythmic Call and Response chant drifts over to them along with the sound of picks.

CLANG. CLANG.

MUSIC: ED WILLIAMS - I BE SO GLAD WHEN THE SUN GO DOWN

They round a bend and stand before a highway they must follow.

A Chain Gang, consisting of Black and white inmates, works at the roadside, guarded by armed police officers on horseback. They are singing.

CLANG.

BONKERS

What is that, Mikey?

MIKEY

I don't know, Bonkers.

(to Bob)

Bob, why are they chained up?

One of the mounted police officers with mirrored sunglasses and a pump gun on his arm stares over at them.

BOB

That's a Chain Gang, Mikey. They're prisoners.

MIKEY

Why are they prisoners?

BOB

Come on, let's keep moving. We shouldn't be here. Here we're not the drivers, here we're the driven.

In silence, the group walks along the singing Chain Gang toward the intersection.

CLANG.

Not one of the inmates looks up. The police officers observe them in silence.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD / CROSSROADS - DAY

A sweltering summer day. Heat waves shimmer off the asphalt. The group stands at a crossroads in the middle of nowhere. BOB looks around, squinting against the sun.

MEL

We need to head that way.

BOB

And what makes you say that?

MEL

My internal clock tells me so.

BOB

The only thing your internal clock tells you is what time is is. Maybe.

MEL

My internal clock has a built-in compass.

BOB

The only thing your internal clock has built-in is a screw loose. It's a cuckoo clock, Mel. And the bird's already out.

MEL

My internal clock, my dear Bob, is a sophisticated, high- performance precision instrument.

BOB

Your internal clock is a... a thingamajig. A... uh... it. It ticks... and... uh...

MEL

(triumphant)

Winnnnnnner!

Mikey shields his eyes, looking down the road. An old, rattly pickup truck approaches through the dust.

MIKEY

There's a truck coming.

MEL

My internal clock tells me this truck is going to take us exactly where we want to go.

BOB

For a clock, it sure talks alot.

The truck screeches to a halt. In the back sits TRAVELLING WILLY. He is an older Black man in tattered clothes, wearing a sweat-stained hat. He holds an ancient, scarred acoustic guitar.

One of his eyes is milky white—blind but the other one is sharp.

The DRIVER, a woman in her 30s, rolls down the window.

DRIVER

Can I help you boys?

BOB

You wouldn't happen to know where Mrs. Gorghoula lives, would you?

DRIVER

(grins, nodding toward Willy)

Folks been pouring in for days looking for her. You aren't the first, fellas. Seems like she's the center of Louisiana right now.

WILLY

(leaning over the side, eyeing them)

Ahh... the Singing War, huh? You headed there too?

BOB

That's the one.

DRIVER

Hop in, boys.

(to Mikey)

Hey, kid.

Mikey looks uncertainly at Bob. Bob nods.

MIKEY

Yes, ma'am?

The Driver reaches next to her and hands Mikey a bottle of water. She smiles at him.

DRIVER

Drink up. It's a scorcher today.
And anyone headed to a festival as
wild as the Singing War needs to
stay hydrated.

MIKEY

(nods)
Thank you.

BOB

Much obliged.

They all climb into the truck bed and stow their packs.
BONKERS sniffs Willy with interest; Willy doesn't mind. After
deciding Willy is "safe," Bonkers settles in to enjoy the
ride. The truck pulls away.

Willy eyes the newcomers. He's perched on a wooden crate.
The others make themselves comfortable. Willy's blind eye
seems to catch the light as he looks at Mikey.

WILLY

Hi. I'm Travelling Willy. You guys
planning on competing in the
Singing War?

BOB

Oh, we've got plenty to keep us
busy. That's Mel over there. That's
Ron -he don't talk much. This
here's Mikey and his dog Bonkers,
and I'm-

MEL

(dead serious)
...and he is Bob-Bab-Bilua-A-
Whop-Bang-Boom.

Silence. Everyone just stares at Mel, speechless. Willy
doesn't blink.

BOB

(to Willy)
His internal clock ain't ticking
quite right.

Willy nods slowly, a rhythmic, knowing movement.

MEL

Touché.

EXT. TRUCK - DAY

A sweltering day. On the horizon, dark, solitary clouds are gathering. The truck rumbles over the asphalt. BONKERS is enjoying the breeze. RON has dozed off.

MIKEY sits across from WILLY. Willy stares at him piercingly for a moment, as if he knows a secret. Mikey shifts, uncomfortable. Willy finally looks away.

MIKEY

(to Mel) How do you actually defeat
a witch?

MEL

(thinking for a second)
Well, first you gotta find out if
she actually is a witch.

MIKEY

And how?

MEL

Simple. You toss her in a pond. If
she sinks, she's not anwitch. If
she comes back upnand she's pissed
off, you put her on a pyre.

MIKEY

Yesterday you said if she's a real
witch, she'd just hex herself out
of the oven and go to Hawaii.

Willy follows the discussion in silence.

MEL

Yeah, if she's smart, she does
that. What's the point of being a
witch otherwise?

WILLY

Long way to come just to hunt down
a fairytale witch, ain't it, kiddo?
Tell me, kid... you see any
fairytales out here in this dirt?

Willy leans forward. His milky, blind eye fixes on Mikey.
Mikey freezes. On the horizon, the storm is creeping closer.

WILLY (CONT'D)
 The kind that flies on a broom and
 has a wart on her nose?

Willy lets out a dark, low laugh. He picks up his guitar.

MUSIC: "DARK WAS THE NIGHT, COLD WAS THE GROUND" BY BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON.

Suddenly, Mel, Bob, and Ron seem miles away. For a moment, there is only Mikey and Willy. The atmosphere turns heavy, ominous. Willy begins to play a haunting blues riff.

WILLY (CONT'D)
 Folks say Mrs. Gorghoula is a
 witch. Word is, her daddynwent to
 sell his soul to the Devil. But...

Mikey stares, mesmerized and terrified. Willy wears a grim, not unkind smile. The truck bed and Willy begin to SHIMMER. The world changes.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD / CROSSROADS - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

MUSIC: Continues

The heat shimmer of the day transitions into a nightmare. This is MIKEY'S IMAGINATION. The characters in the flashback LIP-SYNC to WILLY'S VOICE.

A lonely crossroads in the Louisiana flatlands. A weathered signpost stands at the corner. One sign points right: "Baton Rouge." Another points left: "Bayou."

The center sign is broken, hanging downward, pointing to the dirt. It reads: DAMNATION.

Moonlight casts a cold, ominous glow. A storm rages in the distance.

FREDDY, a young Black man clutching a guitar case, stands in the wind. He checks his watch. It's seconds before midnight. Lightning flickers.

WILLY (V.O.)
 Mrs. Gorghoula's daddy had lost his
 heart to the blues. But he couldn't
 play a lick. Everyone called him
 "Caterwaul Freddy," 'cause his
 pickin' sounded like a cat
 screamin' outside a window.

Midnight strikes. From behind the signpost, an ELEGANT MAN steps out. He wears a sharp suit and a high-priced hat. His shoes are polished to a mirror shine. He walks with a rhythmic, almost dancing gait.

He smiles at Freddy—a look that is almost, but not quite, terrifying.

ELEGANT MAN

(Lip-syncing Willy's V.O.)

Go on home, Freddy. Back to your family. To your little girl. Find yourself a job at the mill. Be humble. Be happy.

Freddy opens his guitar case. He holds out a cheap, battered guitar like a prayer. His face is pleading.

FREDDY

(Lip-syncing Willy's V.O.)

Teach me how to play. I don't want no mill job. I got the blues inside me, and I need 'em out.

The Elegant Man smiles. He strokes the wood of the guitar.

ELEGANT MAN

(Lip-syncing Willy's V.O.)

Everything's got a price, Freddy.

FREDDY

(Lip-syncing Willy's V.O.)

I'll pay it. Any price.

The Elegant Man looks up. His eyes gleam in the moonlight.

ELEGANT MAN

(Lip-syncing Willy's V.O.)

Any?

Freddy nods. The Elegant Man pulls a scroll and a black quill from his jacket. He rolls it out. Freddy glances at it, nods.

The Elegant Man pricks Freddy's finger with the quill. Freddy winces. A drop of blood beads up. The Man dips the quill in the blood and hands it over. Freddy hesitates for a heartbeat, then signs the contract.

The Elegant Man takes the quill back and lets one single drop of blood fall onto the guitar. It sinks into the wood instantly.

FREDDY
 (Lip-syncing Willy's V.O.)
 So it's done? My soul for the
 blues?

The Elegant Man unrolls the scroll one last time. He points to the fine print. Freddy leans in. His eyes go wide. Horror washes over him.

ELEGANT MAN
 (Lip-syncing Willy's V.O.)
 "Any price." Those were your words,
 son. The price ain't your soul.
 It's your daughter's.

The Elegant Man laughs—a sound we don't hear, but see in his shaking shoulders. Freddy grabs his case and flees into the darkness.

The image FLICKERS and dissolves.

EXT. TRUCK - DAY

Back on the truck bed. Mikey stares at Willy, his eyes wide with terror. Mel, Bob, and Ron seem miles away. Willy smiles while he continues to pick a dark, rhythmic blues melody.

WILLY
 Mrs. Gorghoula's daddy became a
 rich and famous man. But whenever
 knew a day of peace, havin' sold
 his daughter's soul for his glory.
 And that daughter... she's the one
 waitin' for us tonight.

Willy stares piercingly at Mikey.

WILLY (CONT'D)
 They say she collects the happiness
 of others... seein' as her own was
 stolen by her daddy's deal.

Mikey gasps, looking toward Mel and Bob for safety. The atmosphere returns to normal, though a faint flash of lightning flickers in the far distance.

MEL
 Well, after that story, Mikey, I
 certainly wouldn't recommend
 throwing Mrs. Gorghoula into a pond
 to see if she floats.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The truck rumbles down the dusty road, getting smaller and smaller until it vanishes into the shimmering heat.

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE - DAY

MUSIC: "DARK WAS THE NIGHT, COLD WAS THE GROUND" CONTINUES from the previous scene.

SARAH stands in the kitchen, clutching the phone to her ear. She looks haggard, sleep-deprived. She gestures frantically, her voice unheard over the mournful slide guitar of the music.

She hangs up. Closes her eyes. Takes a long, shuddering breath. Something catches her attention—a sound at the door. She crosses the room and opens it.

Standing on the porch are ROBERT, SHAWN, and their PARENTS. Shawn looks riddled with guilt. Robert keeps his eyes glued to the floor, his shoulders hunched.

The parents look equally somber, though there is a clear sense of long-standing friendship and history between them and Mikey's Sarah.

Sarah looks at the parents, then Shawn, then finally settles on Robert.

Robert takes a breath. He forces himself to look her in the eye, though it clearly pains him. He opens his mouth to speak, the weight of his lie finally catching up to him.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. CROSSROADS / EDGE OF THE SWAMP - DUSK

MUSIC: "JESUS IS REAL TO ME" BY MARY LEE blares from a distance, clashing with the fading hum of the truck.

CLOSE ON: MIKEY.

His jaw is dropped. His eyes are wide, reflecting a world he never dreamed of.

The landscape has surrendered to the Bayou. Giant cypress

trees, draped in thick, grey Spanish moss like tattered ghosts, loom over the roadside. The sky is a bruised purple, with a heavy, black storm front rolling in from the horizon. Thunder rumbles—a low, warning growl.

The truck rumbles down the road. The area is teeming with life now. Cars and vans line the shoulders—some brightly painted, others rusted-out junkers. Old tractors with trailers crawl along.

Pedestrians flood the roadside: Musicians clutching instrument cases, bands in stage gear, bearded hobos, bluesmen, swing players, and bluegrass pickers. Young and old. Some lead dogs; a few are on horseback.

MIKEY watches, mesmerized.

At a crossroads, the truck slows. A GOSPEL CHOIR stands by the ditch, singing "Jesus is Real to Me." They hold signs: "TURN BACK," "REPENT," "FIND YOUR WAY HOME."

A SINGING PREACHER approaches the truck, thrusting Christian tracts at the group. Mel and Bob politely wave them off.

The DRIVER taps on the roof. Time to go.

The group scrambles down. Mel hands Bonkers to Mikey. WILLY climbs down last. The truck HONKS and pulls away. The driver waves; the group waves back.

Bob watches the chaos for a moment. He glances at Mikey, who is staring at the crowd, catatonic with wonder. Bob shakes his head, walks a few paces away, and beckons Mel.

CUT TO: BOB AND MEL

MEL

What's the word?

BOB

This is madness, Mel. Up until now,
it was a thrill. A grand adventure.
But we've hit a wall of reality
here. No more oranges in bags, Mel.

Mel senses the weight in Bob's voice. His usual smirk vanishes.

BOB (CONT'D)

What are we doing? We're gonna keep
him in this dream world where Mrs.
Gorghoula is a witch? Then what? We
encourage him to break into her
house?

(MORE)

BOB (CONT'D)

And even if he does - what follows?
The whole country is probably
looking for this kid. What's our
move? Hand him over and say, "Hey,
look what we found"?

Bob gestures to the horizon.

BOB (CONT'D)

Somewhere out there, his mother is
losing her mind with worry, and WE
are in deep, deep trouble. You know
he's not lying. He will tell what's
happened. He needs to go home.
There are no witches here, Mel.
Just blues, booze, and music.

MEL

(watching Mikey)

You're right. We should. It would
be the sensible thing to do. And
what we're doing is, by all
accounts, remarkably stupid, Bob.

Mel turns to him.

MEL (CONT'D)

But we aren't doing this for the
sake of sense. We're doing it
because sense isn't Mikey's
compass. He's guided by something
felt. He believes his mother is sad
because a witch stole her joy. He
wants to win it back. You think
sitting him down and saying, "Son,
that's not why she's crying," is
gonna stick?

BOB

It's the truth!

MEL

Reason is for people with polished
shoes and life insurance. It's just
one way to measure the world.
Willy's way is spiritual. You gonna
go tell him the Devil doesn't
exist? Tell him to put the guitar
down?

BOB

So what's your brilliant solution?

MEL

He needs to see it for himself. He needs the experience of finding out there's no witch. Or maybe she is one—who knows? But if he sees her for what she really is, he might finally understand the real reasons.

BOB

(intense)

What are you now? His shrink? Mel! This is insane. We don't have the RIGHT to make these calls for him. But we have the DUTY to make the right ones.

MEL

And which ones are those?

BOB

Call the cops and vanish.

MEL

Or let him realize he's barkin' up the wrong tree on his own terms.

BOB

That's crossing a line, Mel.

MEL

Then go ahead. Tell him. Tell him the whole thing is a pipe dream. Then call the law and send him packing. He'll be safe. He'll be fed, bathed, and loved. And he'll wake up every day for the rest of his life feeling like he got cheated out of his one big chance. Like he failed. Or worse... like he was betrayed.

They both look at Mikey. He's still standing there, awestruck by the passing crowd. Bob walks over and gives Mikey's shoulder a playful, grimy nudge.

MIKEY

We really here?

BOB

Yeah. The Singing War. We're almost at Mrs. Gorghoula's place.

MIKEY

(a whisper)

The witch. And we made it in time.
It's a full moon tonight.

Bob winks at him, though his eyes stay troubled.

BOB

Mikey, listen... you gotta start
getting used to the idea that Mrs.
Gorghoula might just be a regular
lady. No hexes, no brooms. Maybe
it's better if we just turn around
now and get you back home.

Mikey looks at him, totally uncomprehending. He pulls back
slightly. Mel steps up, placing a hand on Bob's shoulder.

MEL

Look around, Bob. This whole place
is a circus. Even for us. You got
Willy's stories about the Devil at
the crossroads... you really think
he's gonna believe a man telling
him none of this is magic?

Bob sighs, defeated.

BOB

(to Mel)

Fine. But we need a plan to get him
home. Fast.

MEL

We'll figure it out, friend. But
for now, there's nothing left to do
but enjoy the war.

BOB

(sternly)

No more witch-talk. And Mel... NO
NONSENSE. We keep an eye on him,
and the second he sees what's
really going on, we head for home.
Got it?

MEL

Crystal.

Suddenly, a high-pitched, gravelly YELP zips through the air.

VOICE (O.S.)
 Hog-tied and butter-baked! Bobby-
 Joe?! Is that your ugly mug or did
 a mule kick a pumpkin?!

From the crowd emerges EUSTACE. He is the platonic ideal of a hillbilly: Barefoot, filth-streaked toes, denim overalls with patched knees and one strap hanging loose.

His beard is a bird's nest. He has exactly two teeth. He clutches a banjo with strings like rusted barbed wire.

Bob freezes.

EUSTACE
 (slapping his knee)
 Lordy-loo! I ain't seen you since
 we was skinnin' possums in
 Poughkeepsie! You still got that
 rash on your hind-parts, ya ol'
 swamp-rat?!

Eustace whistles through his teeth—a dying steam engine sound.

EUSTACE (CONT'D)
 Ma! Pa! Cletus! Lookit here! It's
 'Sour-Milk-Bob'! He ain't dead yet!

A small army of CLONE-LIKE HILLBILLIES swarms them. MA in a sun-bonnet, PA with a "XXX" jug, and three grimy, stocky boys. They surround Bob, checking his teeth and hooting in a thick, muddy dialect.

MA
 (poking Bob's cheek)
 He looks peaked, Eustace. Needs a
 dose o' dandelion wine and a good
 floor-scrubbin'.

PA
 (deep rumble)
 Still wearin' shoes, Bob? Don't let
 the ground get lonesome, boy. It
 ain't natural.

Eustace cackles, picks a dissonant chord, and starts walking away.

EUSTACE
 Can't dally, Bobby! Moon's gettin'
 fat and the jug's gettin' thin!
 Watch out for them copperheads!
 HEE-HAW!

The clan vanishes like a fever dream. Silence. A single TUMBLEWEED rolls past Bob's boots.

Mikey's eyes are wide. Mel looks at Bob.

SILENCE.

MEL
(deadpan)
...Tumbleweeds, Bob? Seriously?

Bob stares straight ahead, jaw working.

Mel adjusts his hat and gestures toward the looming gates of the Gorghoula estate.

MEL (CONT'D)
Shall we?

Bob nods.

MEL (CONT'D)
Mikey, stay close.

The group moves out. Mel in the lead, then Ron, then Bob and Mikey. Willy brings up the rear.

Mikey reaches out and takes Bob's hand. He walks beside him, eyes darting everywhere. Bob looks down, surprised, and lets out a tiny, secret smile.

They follow the crowd and vanish.

EXT. GORGHOULA MANOR - DUSK

Dusk is settling in. The light is mystical, almost enchanted. A storm front crawls across the horizon, flickering with silent lightning.

The group stands before an ancient stone wall. Two massive pillars guard the entrance, topped with STONE HERONS staring down like frozen predators.

Beyond lies a world of Southern Gothic grandeur: a dirt path leads toward a massive Victorian manor. Ivy chokes the stone facade like dark veins. For now, the house remains dark and lifeless. Unlit fire-baskets line the path.

The grounds are a chaotic hive. Dozens of camps are nestled between moss-covered trees. Hundreds of travelers fill the air with anticipation—drinking, dancing, tuning instruments.

Mikey presses close to Bob as they pass through the gate.

BOB
(low, to Mikey)
Take a look, Mikey. The musical
heartbeat of America is thumping
right here in the mud. You scared?

Mikey doesn't answer. He's watching the firelight dancing in the trees. Bob lets out a short, dry laugh.

BOB (CONT'D)
Don't worry. They're just
musicians. They only look
dangerous. The real trouble comes
from folks who look mean but don't
know how to sing.

The HOBO from the train emerges from the crowd, tin cup in hand. He laughs, greeting them warmly.

HOBO
Knew you boys wouldn't miss the
party. Come on, I got a spot
cleared for us.

EXT. ESTATE / CAMP - NIGHT

Thunder rumbles, closer now. The campfire flickers. Mel, Bob, Willy, and the Hobo sit around it.

The camp is set up next to a LARGE PINK TENT. From inside comes the occasional, frantic yapping of small dogs.

MEL
Quite a vibe, isn't it?

MIKEY
Are all these people going to play?

BOB
Where's Ron?

MEL
Take a look. The place is crawling
with trucks. And you know him —
he's obsessed with 'em. Betting
he's hitched a ride or is climbing
all over one.

BOB

No. Most are just here for the show.

HOBO

When the cannon goes off, anyone who wants to compete heads to the manor. You pay your entry, draw a number, and then it's off to the races.

MEL

So, Bob... you going up?

BOB

(glancing at the pink tent)

Maybe. If the mood strikes.

MIKEY

(to Bonkers)

I hope they don't see us, Bonkers.

BONKERS

They won't. I got your back.

Bob nods toward the dog.

BOB

Bonkers stays here. It's amadhouse inside. Bonkers guards the tents.

BONKERS

Tent-guarding is my specialty.

Mel pulls the ELECTRIC PIG from his pack. He plugs the radio into its snout.

MUSIC: "A VISIT FROM THE DEVIL" - JACK LEONARD.

BOOM.

A CANNON BLAST shatters the air. A roar of cheers erupts from the manor.

Suddenly, the flap of the pink tent is whipped open with violent force.

MADAME FIONA stomps out. She thinks she's a delicate flower, but she's a punk-rock diva wrapped in layers of pink tulle and silk that look like they survived a hurricane. She is large, loud, and smells like hairspray and cheap gin. Four perfectly groomed POODLES swarm her feet.

MADAME FIONA

(a brassy, punk-rock rasp)
What in the hell-fire was that?!
Are we being invaded? Is this a
assassination attempt? Am I in
danger?

HOBO

(grinning)
The lists are open, Fiona!

Fiona adjusts her massive pink feather boa, which looks like
a dead flamingo.

MADAME FIONA

About damn time. I didn't trek
through this mosquito-infested
armpit of a state to miss my slot.

Bob leaps to his feet, smoothing his tattered coat, looking
suddenly very small.

BOB

(voice cracking slightly)
Madame Fiona... uh, hey.

Fiona squints, then beams, her face lighting up.

FIONA

Bob! You old grouch! What brings
you to the swamp? You still
strumming that toothpick you call a
guitar?

BOB

(staring at his boots)
Oh, you know... just passing
through.

MEL

(winking at Mikey)
"Passing through." He practically
ran the soles off his boots once he
heard you were on the bill.

Fiona lets out a laugh like a Harley starting up. She throws
a massive, pink-sleeved arm around Bob, nearly knocking him
into the fire. She spots Mikey.

FIONA

What's this? You boys finally start
a family?

BOB

This is Mikey. He's... with us.

Fiona leans down, her pink feathers tickling Mikey's nose.

FIONA

Well, Mikey. Stick with these two. They're idiots, but they're useful in a fistfight. But if things get rowdy—you better stick with me.

She turns toward the manor, her poodles yapping excitedly.

FIONA (CONT'D)

Let's go give Mrs. Gorghoula a heart attack!

The group starts moving. Along the path, the IRON FIRE-BASKETS are lit, creating a tunnel of flame toward the house. Mel and Bob grab their instruments —guitar and violin.

Mikey stops. His hands are shaking. He looks down at Bonkers, who is staying behind at the tent.

BONKERS

Don't be scared, Mikey. We didn't come all this way just for you to freeze up now. You can do this.

Mikey takes a deep breath. His face hardens. The fear is still there, but the determination is louder.

MIKEY

(whispering)

Okay, Bonkers. See you after.

He runs to catch up, slipping in next to Mel.

MEL

(leaning in, whispering)

While Bob is busy making a fool of himself with Fiona, we'll find a way into the inner house. To Mrs. Gorghoula.

MIKEY

Where she hides the smile?

MEL

Exactly. When the music starts, nobody looks at the shadows. We slip in, find the smile, and we're out before the first encore.

In the background, Bob walks next to Fiona, trying to look cool. He gives her a shy, friendly nudge on the shoulder. She nudges him back—hard—sending him stumbling into a bush.

MEL (CONT'D)

Ah... young love.

BOB / FIONA

(in perfect unison)

SHUT UP!

MIKEY

I hope it works.

MEL

Ah, come on, Mikey. There are worst things.

MIKEY

Like what?

MEL

Like stealing a magician's rabbit. I tried once. Tripped and fell right into his top hat. I wandered around inside that thing for three days until, during a show, he accidentally pulled me out instead of the rabbit.

BOB

That's not true, Mikey.

MEL

Oh, it is, Bob... and since I'd shrunk down to top-hat size, but the rabbit was still rabbit-sized, I was trapped with a giant bunny for three days.

BOB

You really got a carrot where your brain should be, Mel.

They reach the massive front steps. The crowd is streaming toward the performance hall. Mel looks at the house, then at Mikey. He gives an encouraging grin.

MEL

Ready to rob a witch?

Mikey nods. He's ready.

They reach the registration station—a small table draped in velvet. The Hobo, Bob, Mel, Fiona, and Willy pay their entry into a heavy iron cauldron. Each takes a BLACK CARD from a second cauldron.

BOB
(to the Hobo)
What's your number?

The Hobo flips his card: a white written, ornate "13".

HOBO
Thirteen. You?

BOB
Five.
(shows his card)

FIONA
I got Seven. Doesn't matter,
though. I'm winning anyway.

The first notes of "THE GHOST OF STEPHEN FOSTER" drift from inside—discordant, wild, and infectious.

BOB
(excited)
The War is on.

HOBO
Let's go.

They turn toward the door.

INT. GORGHOUULA MANSION - NIGHT

MUSIC: SQUIRREL NUT ZIPPERS - "GHOST OF STEPHEN FOSTER"

The storm begins to brew outside. Torches and iron fire-baskets illuminate the massive manor. A steady stream of people flows toward the entrance.

At the heavy oak double doors, SECURITY GUYS in black suits stand guard. Spectators pay their dues; musicians flash their entry numbers to pass through.

The HOBOS, MIKEY, and MADAME FIONA stand before the gate with their instruments and poodles. The group moves forward. The HOBO leads, shows his number, and is ushered in.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

A vast, rustic ballroom. High white walls. Torches and oil lamps cast a restless, feverish light. Pure Southern Gothic charm: worn-out but noble, dark and spooky. Colored spotlights swirl across a wild, thrashing audience.

A manic mix of BLUESMEN, FOLKERS, SWING KIDS, and HILLBILLIES dance to the Zippers.

STAGE RIGHT: A raised platform holds a carved wooden throne with deep red velvet. The carvings depict local swamp beasts and mythical folklore creatures. Above the throne, bathed in blue light, hangs a battered OLD GUITAR.

On stage, the SQUIRREL NUT ZIPPERS play like men possessed, whipping the crowd into a frenzy.

INTERCUT - THE HOBOS

BOB, MIKEY, MEL, FIONA, and the HOBO enter at the back of the hall. Two large windows overlook the scene. Bob hoists Mikey up onto a windowsill so he can see.

Mikey is mesmerized. He taps his foot, nodding to the rhythm, completely lost in the spectacle.

Mel catches Bob's eye, nods knowingly, and grins.

The HOBO returns with drinks. Mikey gets a Coke. They clink glasses, soaking in the end of the first song.

The song ends. Thunderous applause. The Zippers strike up "HELL." The crowd roars. Mikey's eyes are wide, glowing with wonder.

INTERCUT - STAGE

As the line "Until I heard the old man stomping his feet" hits, a man dances slowly, mysteriously onto the stage.

BARON SAMEDI. He is Black, wearing an elegant but frayed black suit. A top hat sits on his head, feathers tucked into the band. His face is painted as a skull. A silver cross is stitched onto the hat, topped by a silver death's head.

He is draped in chains—gold, bone, and feathers. Thick rings on his fingers. A pocket watch dangles from his vest. His shoes are polished but falling apart. He leans on a skull-topped cane.

Samedi dances with fluid, ghostly movements, a dark smile fixed on the crowd.

INTERCUT - MIKEY

Mikey's eyes bulge. A shiver runs down his spine. He feels like the Baron is looking right at him.

INTERCUT - STAGE

The band and Samedi finish the song. Extasy. The crowd screams. Instead of stopping, the band keeps the rhythm going, low and pulsing.

Samedi glides to the center mic. He dances a few beats longer, then flashes a mystical grin. The room goes dead silent.

SAMEDI

(smiling)

So... here y'all are again.

Cheers erupt.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)

Full moon's back. And once again,
y'all done trekked out to Mrs.
Gorghoula's little palace in the
mud. Comin' to measure
yourselves... seein' which of y'all
black souls burn hotter for the
music than the very fires of Hell.

The hall explodes. Samedi laughs, then raises a finger.
Silence.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)

Now, some of y'all... you're just
achin' to stand up here. To let
that fire bust outta your chest and
set this whole house ablaze!

Roars of approval.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)

And you down there... you want to
burn? You want this music to fill
your bones like molten lead 'til
you scream and dance like it's your
last night on God's green earth?

Deafening applause. Lightning flashes outside. The Zippers
kick it up a notch. Samedi dances, then returns to the mic.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)

You musicians... it's on you to
light the match. Make 'em boil.

(MORE)

SAMEDI (CONT'D)
 Make 'em sweat. Make 'em laugh 'til
 they cry. If you win the crowd...
 you move on.

Jubilation.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)
 But if you fail... and they find
 you wantin'... you walk outta here
 in shame and shadow.

More cheers. Samedi laughs over the noise.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)
 Don't matter what kind of music you
 play. Long as it comes from the
 gut, it's got the power to turn
 everything to ash.

Samedi raises his hand. The band stops. The crowd freezes.
 Tension thickens.

INTERCUT - MIKEY

Mel nudges Mikey.

MEL
 (whispering)
 Watch it, kid. Here she comes.

Mikey is hypnotized.

INTERCUT - STAGE

SAMEDI
 Now the time has come. Moon ishhigh.
 Are y'all ready... to receive HER?
 To pay the respect she's owed?

The crowd is vibrating with anticipation. The Zippers play a
 low, driving beat.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)
 (shouting)
 Show her your reverence!

The crowd screams "YES!"

SAMEDI (CONT'D)
 She is the heartbeat of the swamp.
 The Queen of the Night. She's got
 the bayou in her veins and the
 Blues in hersoul. Thumb up? You're
 in. Thumb down? You're out.
 (MORE)

SAMEDI (CONT'D)
 (extatic)
 Get down in the dust where you
 belong! Here is... MRS.
 GORGHOUAAAAA!

The band goes wild. Samedi bows toward a door stage left. A spotlight hits the opening door.

MRS. GORGHOUA steps out.

She is a Black woman, about 35, stunningly elegant. She breathes that New Orleans Voodoo flair. Her hair is wrapped in an intricate, colorful wrap. Her makeup is subtle, regal. She is the undisputed Queen.

The crowd loses its mind. Mrs. Gorghoula bows and walks with dignity to her throne. A servant brings her a drink. Another fans her.

She surveys the room. Her gaze seems to linger on Mikey for a heartbeat.

INTERCUT - MIKEY

Mikey grips Mel's arm, eyes wide. He's looking at the Witch he traveled across the country to find.

MIKEY
 (to Mel)
 Mel! Mel! There she is! That's her!
 Look!

MEL
 (breathless)
 Yeah, kid. Hell of an entrance.

The band finishes the song. Everyone celebrates.

SAMEDI
 The Squirrel Nut Zippers, ladies
 and gentlemen! Now, for you hopin'
 to play tonight- take notes. That's
 how you heat a room. Y'all ready
 for the first contender?

The crowd roars. Samedi turns to Mrs. Gorghoula. She smiles and gives a thumbs up.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)
 The War is officially open! Henry
 Fourfingers, get up here and show
 us what you got!

A large, middle-aged Black man in blue overalls takes the

stage with a ukulele. He sings "The Blood Stained Banders."
The crowd claps along.

INTERCUT - MIKEY

Bob walks over to Mel and Mikey, grinning.

BOB
Quite the show, huh?

Mikey nods, speechless.

BOB (CONT'D)
(to Mel)
We're up soon. You ready? You got
that second harmony and the fiddle
down?

MEL
Wouldn't miss it for the world,
brother.

BOB
(to the HOBO)
Mind keeping an eye on the kid
'til we're done?

HOBO
Sure thing.

INTERCUT - STAGE

Henry Fourfingers finishes. Mrs. Gorghoula asks the crowd
with gestures. Thumbs up.

SAMEDI
Henry Fourfingers! You're moving to
the next round!

Applause.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)
Next up: Oklahoma Two!

Two older white men in cowboy hats with a banjo and guitar
take the stage. They play "Have a Little Talk with Jesus."

The crowd BOOS. After a moment, they give up and leave.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)
What? Y'all don't want no talk
with Jesus tonight?
(laughing)
(MORE)

SAMEDI (CONT'D)
 Guess not. Alright... here comes
 Old Betty Dampson.

An old woman stomps a rhythm and sings "Poor Wayfaring
 Stranger." By the second verse, the whole hall is singing
 along. Huge applause. Gorghoula: Thumbs up.

INTERCUT - MIKEY

A bluegrass band takes over.

MEL
 (to Bob)
 What's that? Stage fright?

BOB
 Maybe a little, Mel.

MEL
 You'll be fine. Just remember who
 you wrote that song for.

Bob nods silently. Mikey, Fiona, and the Hobo wish them luck.
 Bob and Mel head for the stage.

INTERCUT - STAGE

The bluegrass band gets polite applause. Gorghoula thumbs
 down.

SAMEDI
 Well, that's a shame. Maybe our
 next guests can do better. Let's
 hear it for Bob and Mel with "A
 Hobo Lovesong."

Bob and Mel step into the light. Bob takes a deep breath.

Bob strikes a chord. Mel's fiddle joins in.

BOB & MEL
 My sweetheart... the train is
 coming ...

INTERCUT - MIKEY

Mikey watches, mesmerized. He sways to the music. Fiona
 stands beside him, smiling.

INTERCUT - STAGE

BOB & MEL (CONT'D)
 And when the autumn comes, I swear
 I'm coming home...

The crowd starts to clap. Bob and Mel are grinning now, truly feeling it. By the second chorus, people are singing along. By the third, the room is theirs.

Song ends. Pure extasy. Mrs. Gorghoula smiles and thumbs up.

SAMEDI

How 'bout that? Bob and Mel— you're moving on!

INTERCUT - MIKEY

Bob and Mel return, glowing. People clap their backs. Fiona throws her arms around Bob.

BOB

(smiling)

That was for you.

FIONA

(blushing)

Oh, stop it, you.

BOB

Your turn now. Go get 'em, Fiona.

FIONA

Folks gonna remember the day Madame Fiona and her Singing Poodles took the Bayous by storm.

Fiona and her dogs head for the stage.

MEL

You think she's got a shot?

BOB

(grinning)

Hell no. But it's gonna be one hell of a show.

INTERCUT - STAGE

Mrs. Gorghoula sips a cocktail, toasting the crowd.

SAMEDI

Y'all still with me? Then put your hands together for Madame Fiona and her Singing Poodles... performing "Hit Me Baby One More Time."

Fiona stomps out in her pink tulle. Expectant silence. She grabs the mic and belts out a gravelly, tone-deaf punk-rock version of Britney Spears. The poodles howl along.

The crowd BOOS. Fiona keeps screaming. The booing gets louder. Mrs. Gorghoula gives a decisive thumbs down.

Fiona stops, turns to her, and waves her off. Then she glares at the audience.

FIONA
(screaming)
AH, SCREW YOU! SCREW ALL OF YOU!

What follows is a flurry of profanity—all of it masked by loud CENSOR BEEPS. Fiona starts swinging her fists.

INTERCUT - MIKEY

The HOBO, BOB, and MEL watch, horrified.

MIKEY
Oh boy.

Mel covers Mikey's ears. The crowd is a mix of booing and laughing. Security and the Herald try to shove Fiona off stage. She's putting up a fight.

The SECURITY GUARD, GREGORY, guarding the side door — the one leading to the private quarters — rushes toward the stage to help.

The door is unguarded. Everyone is focused on the brawl on stage.

MEL
(nudging Mikey)
Our move. Let's go.

They slip toward the door. Bob turns back to the windowsill.

BOB
(grinning)
Hell of a show, right Mikey?
(realizing he's gone)
Mikey?

He looks around, sees Mel and Mikey disappearing through the side door.

BOB (CONT'D)
Oh, for the love of...

Mikey leads the way, Mel right on his heels. They reach the

side door. Mikey cracks it open just an inch and slips inside, disappearing into the shadows.

Mel moves to follow, but a hand like a meat hook slams against the doorframe, blocking his path. It's the SECURITY GUARD, GREGORY, returning to his post.

GREGORY
HOLD IT. This is private. Where do you think you're goin'?

Mel stops dead. He puts on his best "clueless musician" face.

MEL
Oh. My bad, man. I was just lookin' for the restrooms.

Gregory narrows his eyes, unimpressed. He points a thick finger across the crowded, chaotic ballroom.

GREGORY
Wrong way, buddy. This here is Mrs. Gorghoula's private wing. Restrooms are all the way on the other side. Past the stage.

MEL
Right. Gotcha. Thanks, officer.

Mel backs away slowly, throwing one last, worried glance at the door Mikey just went through. Then he went back to Bob.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

The singing war is at its peak. GREGORY leans down, whispering into MRS. GORGHOULA'S ear. Her eyes sharpen.

She raises a single finger toward BARON SAMEDI. He nods, grins, and signals the stage.

THE SQUIRREL NUT ZIPPERS are entering the stage and explode into "THE AXEMAN'S JAZZ". A frantic, feverish swing drumroll kicks it off. The crowd goes wild.

Gorghoula gives a final, royal nod and slips out the side door with Gregory.

INT. GORGHOULA'S PRIVATE HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

SILENCE, or at least a muffled version of the madness next

door. High walls. Peeling wallpaper.

MIKEY creeps forward. Every floorboard is a trap.

CRACK-BOOM! Lightning flashes.

Mikey jumps. In the strobe-light, a STUFFED ALLIGATOR snarls from the corner, jaws locked wide. Mikey gasps, clutching his chest. He realizes it's fake. He keeps moving, heart racing.

INT. PRIVATE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

More voodoo-vibe clutter. Music instruments. Old, dusty Furniture.

FLASH. Another bolt of lightning.

There it is. On a mahogany shelf. THE COBALT BLUE BOTTLE.

Mikey's heart stops. To him, the glass is glowing. He sees his mother's smile trapped in the blue depths.

CLOSE UP on Mikey's wide, wet eyes. He reaches out. His fingers touch the cold glass.

MRS. GORGHOULA (O.S.)
What you think you're doin', kiddo?

CUT TO:

THE DOORWAY - LOW ANGLE.

FLASH. Gorghoula stands there, hands on her hips. A silhouette of power. THUNDER roars. Mikey spins around, terrified, clutching the bottle like a shield.

MRS. GORGHOULA (CONT'D)
Put it back. It's mine.

MIKEY
(desperate/brave)
No! You stole it! It belongs to
Mommy! I'm takin' it back!

Gorghoula moves toward him. Mikey backs away, bumping into a shelf. FLASH. Another stuffed gator is right next to his head. He yelps, dodging sideways.

MRS. GORGHOULA
What are you talkin' about? Put it
down! NOW!

Gregory storms in behind her.

MIKEY
(screaming)
Robert saw you! On your broom! I
know what you are. You can't have
her smile anymore!

Before they can grab him, Mikey ducks. He's small, fast. He bolts past them, clutching the bottle, and disappears through the door.

Gregory looks at Gorghoula, guilty. She looks at the empty shelf, then at her guard. She sighs, hands on her hips.

MRS. GORGHOULA
You're goin' to Walmart tomorrow.
Get me a new blue deco-bottle.

LOW ANGLE: Another lightning strike. THUNDER!

MRS. GORGHOULA (CONT'D)
GRE-GO-RYYYY!

INTERCUTS - BALLROOM / MANSION GROUNDS

THE BAND: Turning it up to eleven. Total frenzy.

THE DOOR: Mikey bursts out, sprinting past MEL and BOB.

BOB'S FACE: He looks at Mel with a "you really, really screwed up" look.

MEL'S FACE: Shock. The weight of the lie finally hits him.

THE CAMP: Mikey grabs his pack and BONKERS, running into the rain.

THE BALLROOM: Gregory enters, scanning the crowd, locking eyes with Mel and Bob.

EXT. THE ROAD - NIGHT

An old FLATBED TRUCK rumbles away from the mansion. Mikey clambers onto the back, rain washing over his face. He watches the lights of the house disappear.

CLOSE UP: Mikey sits on the wooden boards. Behind him, at the end of the truck bed, a DIRTY CANVAS TARP covers some junk.

The camera ZOOMS in. pale fingers reaches out from under the tarp, then quickly disappears back into the shadows.

EXT. GORGHOUULA MANSION - NIGHT

The storm RAGES. Lightning fractures the sky, followed by a deafening CRACK of thunder. Rain sheets down like iron nails.

GREGORY, stone-faced and imposing, escorts BOB and MEL to the massive front doors.

GREGORY

(firm)

That's it for you two. This year's over. Go look after your boy. Mrs. Gorghoula's private quarters are off-limits, and EVERYBODY who comes here knows that. Be glad the kid only made off with a bottle and she's not pressing charges.

BOB

(sincere)

Tell her we're sorry. It wasn't planned. As crazy as it sounds... that bottle was the only reason he came here.

GREGORY

Look around you. This is Gorghoula's place. "Crazy" is the local currency. We can handle crazy. But we don't handle disrespect. You can come back next year. For now... be gone by sunrise.

Gregory retreats inside. The heavy doors SLAM shut.

Bob doesn't even look at Mel, who stands shivering on the steps. Bob starts walking toward the camp, shoulders hunched against the rain.

MEL

Bob, wait.

Bob stops. He stares at the muddy ground.

MEL (CONT'D)

It was important for Mikey.

Bob spins around. The disappointment in his eyes is sharper than the cold.

BOB

You thought it was important to let a special-needs kid break into a house and rob a woman, just so he could keep believing in some fairytale witch?

Bob marches toward him, closing the distance.

BOB (CONT'D)

You think it's important for a boy who functions differently than the rest of us to be out there alone? In a Louisiana storm? Surrounded by snakes and God knows what else? All because of his "special" view of the world?

Bob stands inches from a guilt-ridden Mel.

BOB (CONT'D)

Was it more important for him to be on the run, terrified of some witch's curse, than to just realize she's an eccentric lady who sings the blues?

Mel says nothing.

BOB (CONT'D)

Or was it just important for YOU, Mel? So you could keep up your "Hakuna Matata" bullshit?

Bob turns to leave.

BOB (CONT'D)

You really screwed the pooch this time, Mel.

(walking away)

You promised me, Mel.

Bob disappears into the dark. Mel watches him go, looking small and broken.

A voice drifts from the shadows beside the door. A dry, cynical CHUCKLE.

SAMEDI (O.S.)

One stares at the mud because he's afraid of sinking into the swamp. The other stares at the stars so he doesn't have to see his shoes are worn through.

A cigar glows in the darkness of a corner. It illuminates the painted face of BARON SAMEDI. For a moment, his eyes seem to eerily fluoresce.

BARON SAMEDI steps out of the gloom, moving with a ghost-like grace. He circles Mel, eyeing him like a curious specimen.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)

One has bread and wine and a fat belly, but a spirit that's starving to death. The other has a full spirit and a belly that won't stop growling. That is the rift of the bayou, my friend.

Samedi smiles, his teeth gleaming in the dark.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)

And instead of feeding each other, they both just get fatter and fatter while they wither away.

(laughs)

See, you and that grump... y'all got the luxury of the 'maybe.' Maybe you stay in the mud, maybe you climb for the moon. You choose your poison. But that boy?

He taps his cane rhythmically on the stone step. Click. Click.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)

He ain't got no 'maybe.' For him, the dream and the dirt... they're the same damn thing. He's walkin' a tightrope he can't even see, hopin' the stars catch him if he falls. It's a heavy thing, Mel... to let a blind heart lead the way, knowin' the swamp is always, always hungry.

He taps his cane against Mel's chest.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)

The Gravedigger don't care why one starved. Rotten is rotten.

Samedi stands beside Mel. They both look toward the path where Bob vanished.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)

You gotta pay the rent on the earth
to afford the luxury of dancing in
heaven, my friend. Ignore reality,
and you'll break your legs. Forget
the fantasy, and you've got no
place to limp toward.

CLOSE UP - MEL

He listens, devastated. A thick cloud of CIGAR SMOKE drifts
across his face.

SAMEDI (CONT'D)

(amused, half-singing)

Never laugh as a hearse goes by,
'cause you may be the next to
die...

Samedi laughs. Mel turns to him, but the man is GONE. Only
the heavy, sweet scent of cigar smoke remains, hanging
defiantly in the pouring rain.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT - NIGHT

The rain has slowed to a drizzle under a heavy, clouded sky.
A flatbed truck rumbles into the district and pulls over
beneath a streetlight that casts a restless, pale glow.

The DRIVER hops out, clutching a small parcel. He drops it
into a mailbox by a factory gate.

In the back, MIKEY sits up. He checks on the driver. He
tosses his backpack onto the asphalt, climbs down, and
carefully lifts BONKERS off the truck. He shoulders his pack
and slips out of the pool of light.

Behind him, unnoticed, a SHADOW slides off the truck bed. A
human figure. It vanishes into the darkness of a nearby
corner.

The Driver returns to his cab and pulls away.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Mikey and Bonkers turn a corner. The street is dimly lit and deserted. The blue bottle peeks out of Mikey's jacket pocket.

BONKERS
Now what, Mikey?

MIKEY
Let's go to the station. We're going home.

BONKERS
That's a good idea, Mikey. Do you know where we have to go?

MIKEY
Yeah. To Idaho.

BONKERS
I'm looking forward to being home.

Suddenly, THREE TEENAGERS in hoodies emerge from the gloom, surrounding them. Their hoods are pulled low. Rain starts to fall again. Bonkers GROWLS.

TEENAGER
What's in the bag, kid? Give it here.

MIKEY
(backing away)
It's my backpack. Leave me alone.

TEENAGER
No. I heard it's mine. Give it to me.

Bonkers barks and lunges in front of Mikey. The teenager kicks him hard. Bonkers YELPS, flying through the air and hitting a brick corner. He lies motionless.

MIKEY
(horrified)
BONKERS!!!

Mikey tries to run to him, but the teenagers swarm him. They rip the backpack away and begin to strike him.

MUSIC: "GOLDEN BOY" - NATALIE MERCHANT

With a sharp CLINK, the bottle falls from Mikey's jacket and rolls across the pavement toward Bonkers in a doorway.

The teenagers continue to beat Mikey.

CLOSE UP - MIKEY

A heavy blow catches him across the head. He falls. His head hits the curb with a sickening thud.

The last thing he sees before the darkness takes him is the blue bottle lying beside the motionless Bonkers. Then, his eyes close.

The teenagers bolt. Mikey lies still on the wet street.

A SHADOW detaches itself from the darkness behind the doorway where Bonkers lies. It's RON. He checks on Bonkers and starts toward Mikey, but a CAR screeches to a halt nearby. A CONCERNED COUPLE rushes toward the boy.

Ron stops. He carefully picks up Bonkers and the bottle and retreats back into the shadows.

INTERCUTS:

-- AT THE MANSION CAMP: MEL approaches BOB, head bowed, heavy with guilt. The HOBO and FIONA watch in silence. Everyone looks at him. Bob's expression is one of anger and hurt, but as he sees the depth of Mel's sadness, a trace of mercy softens his gaze.

-- ON A TRUCK BED: RON sits in the dark with Bonkers. The cobalt bottle is tucked safely against him.

-- IN THE STREET: Blue and red lights strobe against the brick. PARAMEDICS load Mikey into an ambulance. A POLICE OFFICER waves over his partner. On the patrol car's dashboard display, MIKEY'S FACE is visible: MISSING.

-- MIKEY'S HOUSE: SARAH answers the phone. Her eyes go wide. She lunges for her jacket, trembling.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

BLACKNESS.

A medical monitor BEEPS in a steady heartbeat rhythm. Hectic, metallic sounds echo in the distance.

MIKEY'S POV:

A sliver of blinding, artificial WHITE LIGHT. Everything is BLURRY.

STACCATO BLINKS. Dark again.

The eyes open wider. The blur sharpens into a sterile ceiling. The colors are pale, depthless. No "Mikey-Style." Everything is hard, bright, and restless.

Traffic noise, sharp beeps, and voices from the hallway bleed into a loud, aggressive cacophony.

The eyes scan the room. Medical equipment. An IV drip. Mikey follows the tube down to his own arm.

A soul-crushing electric HUM fills the room. Mikey's gaze follows the sound upward. A fluorescent tube flickers on the ceiling in a harsh, cold rhythm. It hurts to look at.

His gaze drifts to the nightstand. A blue plastic cup sits there. Mikey stares at it. He searches for the glow, the deep cobalt of his bottle—but there is nothing. Just cheap, dull plastic. A dead blue.

He looks toward the other side of the bed. An open window. Honking, engines, the dirty city soundscape. None of it sounds like adventure.

At the foot of the bed: DR. STONE (50s). He looks concerned but friendly. Stethoscope, name tag, a cold wall of white fabric.

DR. STONE
(smiling)
Welcome back, little guy. You gave
us quite a scare.

Mikey stares at his mouth. He sees the wrinkles, the pores of the skin. Just a tired man in a bright room.

A scream from the hallway:

SARAH (O.S.)
MIKEY!

Sarah bursts in. She's a wreck.

BACK TO SCENE

Sarah clings to Mikey, sobbing. He feels the coarse wool of her sweater. The golden queen is gone. In her place kneels an exhausted, grey woman.

Mikey wears a head bandage. Scratches map his face. A teddy bear sits on the nightstand next to the plastic cup—a lifeless substitute for everything he's lost.

Mikey says nothing. His gaze is empty, alienated. His Sarah strokes his hair, tenderly brushing a strand from his forehead. Mikey just watches her.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(whispering, relieved)
Where did you go, baby? I was
scared to death. God, I'm just so
glad you're okay.

The Doctor gently pulls her back.

DR. STONE
He's gonna be just fine. It's a
concussion, a nasty one, but
nothing life-threatening.

SARAH
What happened? What about the dog?
How did he get all the way down
here from Idaho?

At the word "dog," Mikey flinches. A single tear burns a trail down his cheek.

DR. STONE
He was alone when the ambulance got
there. Sheriff Lomax will talk to
you about the details later. Come
on now, he needs to rest. You can
take him home soon. We just have
some paperwork to finish up.

Sarah kisses Mikey's cheek. He lets it happen, like a doll. He recognizes her, but he doesn't "feel" her anymore.

SARAH
I'll be right back, Honey, okay?
We're gonna find Bonkers.

She follows the Doctor out. The door shuts with a heavy, final CLICK.

Mikey stares at the blue plastic cup again. He waits for a miracle, a spark, a sign. Nothing happens. The hum of the neon light is the only sound left.

He turns his face to the wall and weeps silently into the white pillow.

EXT. HOBO CAMP - NIGHT

The swamp is a wall of sound. Crickets, rustling leaves, and the deep, vibrating roar of a BULLFROG.

CRACK. A dusty, tasselled FLOOR LAMP flickers to life in the middle of the dirt. It's plugged into the snout of the electric Pig.

MEL sits upright in his sleeping bag, arms crossed, looking like a gargoyle in a bathrobe. BOB lies a few feet away, a frayed SLEEP MASK pushed up onto his forehead.

Between them, BONKERS rests by the embers of a fire, his ear and paw bandaged with scraps of flannel. RON is a motionless lump in the shadows.

MEL
(sharp)
BARNEBY!

Bob jolts awake, blinking against the yellow bulb of the floor lamp.

BOB
Wh--? What's caught fire?

MEL
(intense)
Listen! I will apologize to you right now, alright? I overstepped. I played God with that boy's head and I left him in the lurch when the bill came due. I was selfish, Bob. I was a common charlatan.

- QUACK -

The sound is deafeningly close. They both freeze. Mel doesn't break eye contact.

MEL (CONT'D)
I've learned my lesson. The road has humbled me. I'm thinking of selling the Statchel. Putting away childish things. No oranges. No Fruit Salads. Only undies and socks.

BOB
(softly)
Melvin. You're an enthusiast. Sometimes your enthusiasm just lacks a map. Ron got the dog.
(MORE)

BOB (CONT'D)

Mikey's probably eating pot roast with his mother right now. We're still brothers of the rail, Mel. Now, kill the juice. I want to dream about something that isn't mud. Tomorrow we have some juice and a doggo to bring home. Everything is fine. Sleep now.

Mel clicks the lamp off. Darkness swallows them.

- QUACK -

CLICK. The lamp is back on. Mel is staring at the back of Bob's head.

MEL

Is there a specimen of the genus Rana in this camp?

BOB

(without turning)
Go to sleep, Mel.

MEL

It sounded local, Bob. It sounded... internal. Do you have a swamp-dweller in your pack?

BOB

(sitting up, feigning outrage)
That is a preposterous accusation. Why would a man of my standing secrete a frog?

MEL

I know your lying face, Bob. It looks like your regular face, only shinier.

- QUACK -

It comes from Bob's lap. Mel just stares.

MEL (CONT'D)

You told me Bags were for "undies and socks"

BOB

(defiant)
They are. Usually. So why would I?

Mel stares at Bob without a word.

CLICK. Light off.

- QUACK -

CLICK. Light on. Bob is now holding a BULLFROG the size of a dinner plate. He glares at Mel, dead serious.

BOB (CONT'D)
(low, trembling voice)
I want an Electric Pig too, Mel.

MEL
You abducted an amphibian because
you're too proud to ask if I'll go
to Pigsburgh-on-the-wine with you?

BOB
... Do I have to ask?

MEL
(fuming)
Of course you don't, you big oaf!
Good night!

CLICK. Pitch black.

- QUACK -

A heavy painful sigh from Mel's direction

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE / MIKEY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

MUSIC: Distant, echoing acoustic notes—the foundation for a soulful folk/blues cover of "I SHALL BE RELEASED".

It's dark. A waning moon hangs outside the window, a cold, lifeless stone in the sky.

MIKEY lies in bed. A nightlight casts a dim glow. Streetnoise bleeds through the open window. Colors look wrong—too pale, yet painfully bright. Mikey's magical perception has vanished since the accident.

He stares at the wall. Silent. SARAH sits on the edge of the bed, stroking his hair. Mikey accepts it with numb indifference. He misses Bonkers. The mission failed. The world feels different—cold. Even his mother feels like a stranger. He still has scratches on his face, but the bandages are gone.

Sarah kisses his forehead.

SARAH

Goodnight, honey. Sleep tight. I'm so glad you're back. I have no idea what happened, but I promise you, everything will be okay.

Mikey doesn't answer. He keeps his eyes on the wall. Sarah exits.

He hears her footsteps creak down the stairs. The phone rings. Muffled voices drift up.

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

Hey Howard. Thanks for calling. Yeah, he's okay for now. He's okay... no, still not talking... maybe he just needs a few more days.

From outside, a distant GRUNT.

DING-DONG. The doorbell.

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

Can you hold on a second?

Mikey hears his mother walk to the door. It opens. A sharp BARK.

Mikey's eyes snap open. Then his gaze turns sad again, and he stares blankly ahead.

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE / HALLWAY - NIGHT

MUSIC: Distant, echoing acoustic notes—the foundation for a soulful folk/blues cover of "I SHALL BE RELEASED".

SARAH opens the door. MEL, BOB, and RON stand outside with their Backpacks on. Ron is holding BONKERS, who has a lovingly tended ear and a bandaged paw. Sarah stares at the hobos, aghast.

Bonkers jumps out of Ron's arms and greets Sarah boisterously. She looks at Bonkers with suspicion, pets him, and then looks skeptically at the hobos.

Bonkers runs into the house and up the stairs. He barks.

MIKEY (O.S.)

BONKERS!

Sarah hears Mikey coming down the stairs.

SARAH
(to the hobos)
Please, wait just a moment.

She closes the door and turns toward the stairs.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(firmly)
Michael. You stay upstairs with
Bonkers, please.

MIKEY (O.S.)
But...

SARAH
(energetically)
Don't argue. Go to your room until
I call you.

Sarah realizes she's still holding the phone.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Hello? ... No... three homeless
men, they have Bonkers with them.
... Yeah? ... Could you? ... It's
probably nothing, but I'd feel
safer... Thanks. See you in a bit.

She hangs up. Then she engages the door chain and opens the door.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Please understand. I don't know
you, Mikey had an accident. I have
no idea what's going on here. Who
are you?

BOB (O.S.)
Ma'am. We understand. We'll be
going now.

Sarah stands indecisively at the door.

SARAH
Wait. The neighbor is coming over.
Then we can talk.

BOB
We'll wait in front of the porch.

Sarah nods and takes a deep breath. The hobos move away.
Shortly after, she hears footsteps.

HOWARD (late 40s), Robert's father, an ordinary man, approaches looking concerned.

HOWARD (O.S.)

Sarah?

Sarah opens the door. Howard looks worried, nods his head toward the hobos standing in the dark in front of the porch, and looks at her inquisitively. She shrugs.

Mikey tries to come down the stairs again.

SARAH

Into your room, I said.

MIKEY

But Mom.

Mikey grumbles and leaves.

EXT. MIKEY'S HOUSE / VERANDA - NIGHT

MUSIC: Distant, echoing acoustic notes—the foundation for a soulful folk/blues cover of "I SHALL BE RELEASED".

SARAH and HOWARD stand by the door. Sarah closes the door behind her. She stands close to Howard, wrapping her arms protectively around herself. She looks at the HOBOS standing in front of the porch.

SARAH

Thank you for bringing Bonkers back. But who are you, What's your part in all this?

MUSIC: The soulful folk/blues cover of "I SHALL BE RELEASED" SWELLS.

Bob looks at Sarah, then at Mel, then back at Sarah. He smiles and begins to tell his story. We DO NOT HEAR his voice.

Mel accompanies the story with gestures—miming Mikey stumbling into the camp, onto the train, and beyond.

Sarah listens, her expression a shifting mosaic of suspicion, anger, confusion, and amazement. She keeps glancing at Howard, who is equally torn.

Suddenly, Sarah interrupts Bob with a sharp gesture. Her face is contorted with anger and disbelief.

She crosses her arms defiantly, then she snaps. She berates the hobos, tapping her forehead: *Are you crazy?* She pulls out her smartphone, gesturing to it. She is on the verge of calling the police.

Bob makes a placating gesture. Reluctantly, Sarah listens.

As Bob continues to speak, Sarah repeatedly wipes tears from her eyes. Howard puts a comforting arm around her while glaring angrily at the hobos.

Sarah shakes her head in disbelief and rejection.

The door opens behind Sarah. She spins around.

MIKEY stands in the doorway. Sarah starts to gesture for him to go back inside, her expression stern. But Mikey steps out, moving toward his mother. She wraps her arms protectively around him.

Mikey is silent. Since the accident, his world has been colorless—loud, harsh, and confusing. He barely recognizes the hobos. They look tired to him. Ragged. Broken.

He stares at them in silence. For a beat, no one moves.

Then, RON pulls a BLUE BOTTLE from his jacket and holds it out. Mikey's eyes go wide. It's THE blue bottle. The one he thought was lost forever.

He fidgets excitedly in his mother's grip. Finally, he wriggles free, grabs Sarah's hand, and pulls her toward Ron. She follows, reluctant but led by her son's urgency.

Ron holds the bottle out. A stray beam of light catches the glass, making it SPARKLE. Mikey watches, mesmerized. Is there something glittering inside?

He looks at Ron. Ron WINKS and smiles.

Mikey takes the bottle. Again, light refracts through the glass. It glows a deep, luminous blue. The color is unnaturally vibrant. Almost magical.

Mikey closes his eyes and inhales. His smile becomes free, easy. He opens his eyes.

THE CAMERA CIRCLES HIM.

The world shifts. Colors become SATURATED, more alive. Everything feels soul-stirring. He looks up at the sky.

The craters of the moon seem to shift—softly, almost imperceptibly forming a FACE that smiles down at him.

MIKEY
(a smiling whisper)
Hello, Mister Moon.

He looks back at the hobos. They no longer look like tired bums. They are the ADVENTURERS he first met by the fire.

Mikey turns to his mother. A faint, golden SHIMMER seems to cling to her. But a barely perceptible DARK CLOUD still lingers around her head and chest—the weight of her grief.

Mikey stares at her, then throws himself into her arms, hugging her tight. Sarah looks at Mikey, then at the hobos, stunned.

MIKEY (CONT'D)
(happy)
I thought I'd lost it.

SARAH
What?

Bob speaks up, his voice low, explaining it to her. We see the realization hit Sarah. Howard looks GUILTY, finally grasping the magnitude of what Mikey took upon himself because of his son's lie.

A tear of emotion escapes Sarah's eye. She looks at Mikey, understanding now that there is something she needs to explain to him.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Sweetie... come here. I need to show
you something.
(to the hobos)
Please wait here.

MUSIC: Becomes more intense, focusing on the theme of grief and understanding.

Sarah takes Mikeys Hand and goes inside the house.

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

She leads him to the fridge. She bypasses his note and takes down the OBITUARY.

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

She leads him to the old armchair. Mikey grips the blue bottle tight. She takes the URN from the mantelpiece and walks to the chair. She kneels before Mikey, taking his hand and placing the paper in it. Mikey looks down.

INSERT - OBITUARY PHOTO: A picture of his FATHER. Laughing. The date underneath is from two months ago.

Mikey looks up at the chair. Blinks. HIS PERCEPTION: For a heartbeat, his FATHER is sitting there. Holding a newspaper, smiling. The light is warm and golden.

Mikey blinks again. The chair is empty. The light is cold. The silence in the room is heavy.

Mikey runs his finger over the word "DECEASED." Sarah gently places the urn on the armchair. Mikey understands. The witch didn't steal anything. The smile wasn't taken—it passed away.

He lets the paper drop. He looks at his mother. Not as a cursed stranger, but as a woman who has been carrying this pain all alone. He gently strokes the armrest of the chair.

He looks at the obituary one last time. He walks to the fridge in the kitchen and hangs it back up—gently, with respect. He turns and hugs his mother. They both cry. Mikey finally knows why she's sad.

INT. MIKEY'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

In the hallway, Sarah gestures for the Hobos to take off their shoes and set down their backpacks.

Howard pulls Sarah aside.

HOWARD

(low, urgent))

Are you sure you want to do this?
This is crazy.

SARAH

Yeah, a little. But you know what else is crazy? Mikey going all the way to Louisiana for...

(gestures to the bottle))

...for this. Should I call the cops? Yeah, that would be the sensible thing to do. But what about any of this has been sensible?

(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)
I should've told him why I was so
down. All of this happened because
I didn't.

HOWARD
(whispering))
Then at least let me stay and keep
an eye on things.

Sarah gives him a grateful smile and nods.

The hobos are standing uncertainly in the hallway. MEL has a massive hole in his sock, a toe poking through. BOB wears one green sock and one red. RON is barefoot.

Mel sets his pack down. Sarah freezes as a PIG'S SNOUT pokes out of a hole in the bag, sniffing the air.

SARAH
(horrificed)
Is there a... pig in that bag?

MEL
Yeah, but it likes it in there.
It's cozy.

Sarah and Howard look at each other, horrified. Mikey laughs.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

MUSIC: "I SHALL BE RELEASED" (Full folk version).

A fire crackles in the fireplace. The Hobos, Howard Mikey and Sarah are sitting in the Living Room. Food is on the table. They sit on the floor and the sofa, laughing, telling stories of the road.

Mel sets the ELECTRIC PIG on the floor. It scurries around.

Mikey is curled up in the armchair with his mother. The weight of the world has lifted. The mission is over.

Outside, the moon shines through the window. For a second, the craters look like a faint, smiling face.

Bob gestures wildly, telling a silent story. Mikey laughs and explains a detail to his mother. He plays with the blue bottle in his hand. He knows there is no magic inside, but he won't let go.

His mother strokes his hair. He turns and hands her the bottle. She looks at the glass. The music swells.

Two month of repressed grief break through. For a short moment she cries — deep, ragged sobs. Mikey curls closer. She wraps her arm around him.

She takes a deep breath. Wipes her eyes. A spark of defiance enters her gaze.

She pulls the cork.

THE BOTTLE: In the moonlight and the glow of the fire, a tiny, shimmering mist seems to drift out. Just for a second. Only Mikey sees it.

The Sarah stares at the bottle. Then at Mikey. She realizes the sheer, beautiful insanity of what he did for her. A smile creeps onto her face. She looks at the Hobos. The smile becomes a grin. Then, a loud, liberating laugh.

Mikey joins in. The Hobos cheer.

THE CAMERA pulls back, out through the window, into the night.

MUSIC: The Song ends. Transitions into the "HOBO LOVESONG" theme — percussion, bass, and guitar.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. BUS STOP - DAY

MUSIC: "HOBO LOVESONG" continues.

The Hobos stand at the bus stop. Mel holds the Electric Pig.

BOB
So, where to?

MEL
(grinning)
We could check in on Madame Fiona.
See if she made it back okay after
her big performance.

BOB
That was legendary.

BOB (CONT'D)
You think we'll actually see
Mikey and his mom there next
year?

MEL

Why not? They said. Assuming our ban has been lifted by then. Besides, we still need to find you a pig of your own. I heard they just released the P- 4000 model. And Pigsburg-on-the-wine is a hell of a trip.

Bob nods. ROBERT, SHAWN, and GREG walk up. They eye the Hobos with smug curiosity. Robert stares at the pig. Mel grins.

ROBERT

Why do you carry a pig?

MEL

'Cause we're Hobos. Everything we own, we carry.

ROBERT

Yeah, but why a pig?

MEL

'Cause he's an Electric Pig.

ROBERT

(skeptical)

An electric pig? Shut up. You're lying.

MEL

Am I? You think? Well...

(slyly)

you could always test it out.

GREG

Yeah, Robert. Try it.

The Hobos hear the name "Robert" and exchange a knowing glance. Bob pulls the old radio out of Mel's bag.

ROBERT

And how's that supposed to work?

MEL

(grinning)

Easy. See the plug? Why do you think a pig's nose looks exactly like a socket?

ROBERT

Not our sockets.

MEL
European ones.

Robert hesitates. He's a bully, but he's curious. Greg nudges him.

GREG
Go on, Rob. Unless you're scared.

BOB
(unexpectedly)
Yeah, go for it, Robert.

ROBERT
Alright, I'll do it.

THE TEST - QUICK CUTS (Dramatic music)

Mel hands Robert the plug. Robert takes it begrudgingly.

- CUT TO: The Electric Pig.
- CUT TO: The skeptical Robert.
- CUT TO: Mel, grinning slyly.
- CUT TO: The whole group.
- CUT TO: ROBERT staring at the pig, plug in hand.
- CUT TO: The pig staring at Robert.
- CUT TO: Robert staring at the plug.
- CUT TO: The pig staring at the plug.
- CUT TO: Robert staring at the snout.
- CLOSE UP: The snout.
- CLOSE UP: The plug.
- CUT TO: The pig staring at Robert.
- CUT TO: Robert staring at the pig.
- CUT TO: Mel watching them both.
- CUT TO: Robert lifts the plug.

SOUND: A sharp CRUNCH-like someone biting into a crisp carrot.

CUT TO BLACK

We hear Robert scream and the Hobos laughing.

MUSIC: HOBO LOVESONG.

THE END

FADE OUT

CREDITS