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OLD MAN YOUNG MAN SNAKE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty in the Department of English
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

By
Bradley Hathaway

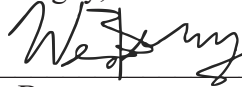
May 2020

OLD MAN YOUNG MAN SNAKE


Date Recommended July 23, 2020



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Hathaway

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Bibliography.....	10
Old Man Young Man Snake.....	11

OLD MAN YOUNG MAN SNAKE

Bradley Hathaway

May 2020

75 Pages

Directed by: Dr. Dale Rigby, Dr. Wes Berry, Jessica Folk

Department of English

Western Kentucky University

A young man in rural and frigid North Dakota is on the run for committing a crime. He finds refuge at a secluded bible camp from a mysterious old man that may or may not have his best interests in mind, and the young man must decide if the old man's protection is worth the cost. Exploring ideas of free will, God, nature, and visions, *Old Man Young Man Snake*, a screenplay, quietly tells their story.

INTRODUCTION

“His vision of the world was sane, full of balance, full of veneration for structure, for the relations of masses and for all the circumstances that impress an individual identity on each created thing. His vision was religious and clean, and therefore his paintings were without decoration or superfluous comment, since a religious man respects the power of God’s creation to bear witness for itself.” – Thomas Merton, *The Seven Story Mountain*

Ten years ago I was at a used bookstore in Seattle at the counter purchasing *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* when I first saw her on a promotional flyer. She had red hair and braids, blue eyes, a wool turtleneck. In an imaginative sense, it was a bit of love at first sight, at least a strange and strong crush, a reckoning sense of wonder and connection. I made a mental note of the painter’s name but would forget that name shortly thereafter. I assumed I would never remember the painter, to never see the woman again, and would from time to time think about that *feeling* of awe I had when I saw her.

I am no fine art connoisseur, but I do enjoy the arts, and a few years later I was at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Surrounded by foreign tourists, frustrated with the long lines, fanny packs galore and cellphone cameras, I ascended an escalator, turned left, and there, in the corner, hung an unassuming and enigmatic painting: *Christina’s World* by Andrew Wyeth. A black barn, a black house with black birds flying from it on the top of a brown grassed hill, with a woman in a pink dress—crawling? seated?—looking up toward the house from below. I was mesmerized for no discernible reason, stood two feet from it (and even had people walk between me and the painting as I marveled), and vowed to learn more about the painting and the artist. When I went home, I ordered a few Wyeth books and, in the mystery of art, saw her—the woman from

the postcard years earlier at the Seattle bookshop. She was Wyeth's secret muse, her name was Helga. As it turns out, the same painter of the real-life Christina Olson in *Christina's World* also painted Helga in *Braids*.

The mystery deepened as I read Richard Meryman's *Andrew Wyeth: A Secret Life*. In it, he devotes considerable time discussing *Christina's World*, the painter's most famous painting and a genuine American icon I would come to learn. The painting itself is one of tension and stark beauty, but not apparent on its surface was something deeper that I unconsciously communed with: anger. Meryman quotes Wyeth: "*Christina's World* was painted in a rage...[I] put all my heat into that picture" (5). This emotion of the painter was significant to me at the time. I was beginning to understand my own personal issues with anger and the realization that my favorite music, films, art, and entertainment in general had a streak of fury to them. Unbeknownst to me, the inner anger of my subconscious was expressing itself.

Helga, *Christina's World*, and Wyeth altered my perspective on both life and art—that it is possible for a person to randomly encounter a single painter's artwork on two opposite ends of a country years apart, to be deeply moved by these two paintings separately (with no obvious context linking them), and to discover a deep kinship of an invisible connectivity of some sort. This mysterious mysticism is one of the pillars of my philosophical views of my own artistic process—that despite our best intellectual explanations, art is alive with some-*thing* brewing beneath its form. Some of us are blind to it, some of us can find it if we look for it, and others of us are blinded by it in the way that Paul of Tarsus was struck down on the road to Damascus. I have written *Old Man Young Man Snake* with such an intention and hope that, in some way, it too has such

mystical underpinnings that I have found in my favorite artists and works of art.

Nothing necessarily comes from nothing. Wyeth's father was a professional painter and through time, teaching, and experimentation the younger Wyeth would eventually discover his own style. Prior to my screenwriting class at Western Kentucky University, I had never read a complete screenplay. Beyond a few screenwriting books that I had read on my own, Syd Field's *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* being the most influential, screenwriting was a foreign genre to me. I had the *OMYMS* story and an amateur draft, but beyond some good ideas there was little for any serious film buff to consider noteworthy. I believed in those ideas, though, and the later structuring and fulfillment of those ideas would come from my teachers and mentors' efforts—both locally and more broadly—influences I have had for years, that were shaping *Old Man Young Man Snake* before it was.

Cormac McCarthy and *No Country for Old Men*

The influence of McCarthy on my work will be obvious to anyone who has read the great American fiction writer. It was *All the Pretty Horses* that first captivated me with its often stark but occasional Faulknerian like prose. Neverminding the poor film adaptation starring Matt Damon and Selma Hyeck, *All the Pretty Horses* would lead me to nearly everything McCarthy has written, most significantly *No Country for Old Men*. I watched the Cohen brother's film before reading the novel. Tommy Lee Jones is the sheriff and Josh Brolin as Llewelyn Moss, the cowboy turned criminal whose actions drive the narrative forward. I watched the movie lying on the floor and did not feel like getting up for three days after. In a sense, I was depressed by what I had seen, but more accurately I was weighed down by the burden of watching such a film. The film *felt*

heavy. It was the bleak landscape, the lack of musical score, the stretches of silence, the violence, and the struggle of the aging sheriff to understand both the modern world and his place in it. I would later go on to read the novel and find it to be a perfect companion to the movie. It seemed as if McCarthy's prose was the script, and the Cohen brothers hardly veered from it.

While McCarthy's novel was not in the literal sense a script, it was easy for me to imagine it as one, to believe that such a way of writing could be an official script with the appropriate screenplay formatting expectations met. In the novel, McCarthy introduces Llewelyn Moss: "Moss sat with the heels of his boots dug into the volcanic gravel of the ridge and glassed the desert below him with a pair of twelve power German binoculars. His hat pushed back on his head. Elbows propped on his knees" (8). A few sentences later: "He spat dryly and wiped his mouth on the shoulder of his cotton workshirt" (8). It is simple, descriptive, a bit fragmented, and easy to imagine as a character introduction in a screenplay. Considering my attraction to McCarthy, it is little wonder why I felt the liberty to write and structure my screenplay as I did. The spirit and kinship are there, though admittedly the obvious skill level is far skewed in McCarthy's favor. *No Country for Old Men* planted two questions in me: what if I wrote a screenplay like a novel? Or a novel as if it were a screenplay? *OMYMS* is my answer. "The Deputy fake smiles in return, looks to the house, the barn, the lake. He mulls things over in his mind. A few crows caw. The wind blows. The Old Man's glare burns into him" (Hathaway 38).

Wordless Beginnings: *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *There Will be Blood*

An early draft of *OMYMS* had an offscreen narrative telling a parable of a boy being tricked and killed by a snake. By opening the film in this way, I was parabolically

telling the film's story before it unfolded. In revision, I felt the visuals were telling the story fine on their own and the narrative was too crowding and not needed. After the Adam and Eve like section ends, the Old Man's silent activities and actions are telling in their own wordless way, and the quiet tension of the characters' movements sets the pace for the slow vibe of the story unfolding. "He sits at the small table and looks out a large window. The morning light has yet to show on the horizon, so he stares at his own reflection in the black window. He takes a single bite of an egg, then toast, then a swallow of his coffee" (Hathaway 15). Coming to this decision was organic, but in retrospect there was precedent in film that gave me the idea to start absent of dialogue: *2001: A Space Odyssey* by Stanley Kubrick and *There Will be Blood* by Paul Thomas Anderson.

Kubrick opens his sci-fi masterpiece with nearly 10 minutes on Earth with ape like creatures warring over a watering hole. With no dialogue, Kubrick signals to the viewer that *2001: A Space Odyssey* will be a nontraditional movie-watching experience. Additionally, the ancient apes firmly root the film in something grander than just being another flick about outer space—it grounds the film in a mythological aura. There was something mesmerizing in my first watching of *2001: A Space Odyssey* in that I was expecting to watch a film set in outer space, but was forced to indulge in the earth-muck and violence of what Kubrick portrays as our early ancestors, beginning a cycle of tool-wielding conflict that follows us into our modern technological age. The first outer space scenes, then, are more poignant and beautiful, more meaningful, and quite literally, bigger.

For Kubrick it is the vastness of the twinkling heavens, and for *OMYMS* it is the

frozen North Dakota prairie contrasted with an earlier vibrant and warm weather water world. Readers may recognize *OMYMS*'s opening as a nod to the Genesis temptation of Adam and Eve by the serpent in the Garden of Eden. In fact, the early idea for *OMYMS* was to focus on a singular story mirroring the Judaic myth: a teenage boy is apprenticed by an older man and told that he can do anything he desires but one thing—drive the older man's tractor. Of course, the boy would borrow and break the tractor. In writing and revision, my initial vision was given more color as the tractor became a dog sled and etc., but there still remains only one fundamental command the Young Man is given by the Old Man: "You may wander around as you'd like. Only thing I ask is that you stay away from the dogs. Understand?" (26). The Young Man kills his brother before meeting the Old Man, but the elder shows next to no concern over this. Instead, he uses the act of stealing the dogs as the doomed temptation and fall that the Young Man cannot undo. As the script shows, the Young Man's eventual rebellion leads to his near death, but paradoxically prepares him for his new life of fulfilling the Old Man's role as caretaker of the bible camp (or Snake?). In the same way, Adam and Eve's sin opened them up into an entirely new way of living, one of knowing good and evil, and life and death.

Uniquely his own kind, Paul Thomas Anderson's films are characterized by literal, or appearing so, single shots of long scenes. For *There Will be Blood*, Anderson plays not with a single long shot, but an almost awkwardly long opening sequence of roughly 15 minutes with only a handful of words spoken. Reflecting the harsh and arid landscape of the western United States, Anderson uses only the sounds of clanking tools, exploding oil rigs, and disturbing, clanky percussive drums and strings to accompany the unfolding drama. I could feel the tense minutes tick away in watching the film for the

first time and felt a liberation at Anderson's rule-breaking approach to filmmaking. Both Kubrick's and Anderson's films' unorthodox beginnings set my viewing expectations in a new direction and excited me in a way that allowed the depth of their films to pour into me. I hope *OMYMS*'s opening does the same for readers. "Silky white smoke rises from the remnants of a burned log. The Woman is there...lying dead on her back. Her chest has a spider-like web of black veins protruding from two dots. The Man sits cross legged at her feet, facing away from her. His eyes stare off into some great distance...some dark place. The Snake is coiled up sleeping on his lap" (Hathaway 14).

Jim Jarmusch: "I used my imagination."

A good friend and fellow collaborator, musician, and director Jason Morant, introduced me to Jim Jarmusch to show me that there are no real rules in filmmaking and that anything is possible. I was not artsy enough for my first foray with *Dead Man*, the black and white avant-garde trip featuring Johnny Depp. *Only Lovers Left Alive*, a modern vampire Adam and Eve reimagining set in Detroit, however, is to this day a film that I would characterize as the epitome of *cool*, but it is was a single scene in 2009's *The Limits of Control* that continues to inspire and inform my process. Toward the end of the film, the anonymous protagonist, The Lone Man, stands outside of a fortified complex with armed guards and high fencing topped with barbed wire. As he surveys the complex, viewers are convinced there is no obvious way in. Jarmusch cuts to the next scene and the protagonist is standing inside the complex at the desk of his target, the American, played by Bill Murray. Perplexed, Murray's character asks, "How did you get in here?" The Lone Man dryly responds, "I used my imagination." The scene unfolds, but never is the problem of how The Lone Man got into the fortified complex addressed again. Jarmusch

makes no effort at answering this obvious dilemma. In a sense, this is a bad way to fill a plot problem and some viewers can certainly be put off by it but considering the quirky nature of the director and film itself, it works. This moment of imagination affirmed what my friend wanted me to know—there are no rules. Of course, there are *some*, but such an imaginative take inspired me to write and not write *OMYMS* in the manner I did.

Nicolas Winding Refn: Valhalla Rising and Drive

My relationship with Dutch writer and director Nicolas Winding Refn is a bit more complicated than with my other influences. His early film *Valhalla Rising* is a difficult film to watch and one that I have only watched once, yet the film's influence on me has proven indelible. Its strange and morose colorings, sparse dialogue, brutal violence, and quite simply, its mere existence at all left me both befuddled and inspired. How could such a movie even be funded and made? What was it even about? It is presumably a tale about evil and some sort of redemptive violence, but it was far too intellectual and artsy for me to grasp. Yet the questions it inspired in me moved me to this conclusion: anything is possible in film. His most famous movie, *Drive*, starring Ryan Gosling and Carey Mulligan, however, would show me the right balance between artsy-fartsy highbrow and palpable good old-fashioned storytelling.

Drive has it all: killer soundtrack, love, violence, interesting characters, and even a sense of hope by the film's end. Refn was able to meld his tone and ideas from *Valhalla Rising* in a more contained structure. With *OMYMS*, I wanted to combine my desire for making a nontraditional Hollywood script with certain elements that make the story enjoyable to watch on multiple levels, both deep and shallow. For example, *OMYMS* does not strictly follow a standard Hollywood formatting in that certain beats are not met in

the typical rhythm of most popular films. Such out-of-synchness might be too much for an audience with strict expectations to suffer through, but by rooting the film in the mythological vision that I did, along with a sense of traditional crime/thriller/who-dunnit type of trope, I hoped to strike the similar balance that Refn did with *Drive*. If the Sheriff is not looking for the Young Man, then what sense of excitement or anticipation can an audience have? It seems a small thing, but in such a slow burning script as *OMYMS*, it naturally becomes one of the most important parts of the script.

Conclusion

There is an often repeated maxim that says if you sleep with dogs you will wake up with fleas. In the same way, an artist's influences can and will permeate through the art he or she creates. A reader of *Old Man Young Man Snake* who is not familiar with any of its earlier mentioned influences may not see the line connecting each of them together, but others may recognize the influences straight away. It is this level of kinship and association, this unashamed ode to the greats, that in some ways gives *OMYMS* not a sense of credibility necessarily, but perhaps even a sense of meaning, by which I mean a way for readers to understand its intentions. As a script, *OMYMS* aspires to be a great one, albeit a difficult or impossible one for some, but for a reader who loves the Kubricks or McCarthys of the world, I hope to have fashioned a script that has weight, depth, and a hidden some-*thing* comparable to that of my experience with Helga and *Christina's World*.

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OLD MAN YOUNG MAN SNAKE

Written by

Bradley Hathaway

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Moving along the ground of an ancient forest. Short grass, long grass. Tree roots, dead leaves. Startled little birds fly away. The sun is big and high up in the middle of the blue sky.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

Over the rocks of a small creek bed and into clear, running water. A deer laps up the water and runs off startled. Atop smooth rocks and floating algae, rapids small and big.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The water is muddy and brown. A large river with a plethora of growing flora and fauna on each side.

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

Through waves and bubbles. Nothing but blue water and a cloudless sky. There is land on the horizon, an eminent destination.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

The dark brown legs of a naked WOMAN, 20s, standing in the water. Between and around her legs and waist, the tail end of a SNAKE. The Woman is not afraid but curious and awe struck. She turns around and a MAN, 20s, approaches.

The Snake swims among them. An uncircumcised penis, pubic hair, breasts. Their hands stroke and feel the Snake as they smile.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

The shadows of the Man and Woman move on a rock wall. They are tenderly making love, their bodies glowing in the light of a Fire. The Snake is coiled next to the Fire, watching the lovers.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Silky white smoke rises from the remnants of a burned log.

The Woman is there...lying dead on her back. Her chest has a spider-like web of black veins protruding from two dots.

The Man sits cross legged at her feet, facing away from her. His eyes stare off into some great distance...some dark place.

The Snake is coiled up sleeping on his lap.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE: OLD MAN YOUNG MAN SNAKE

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - STAIRWELL - DAWN

The OLD MAN, 70s, rises from the dark stairwell of his basement.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAWN

The Old Man's kitchen is entirely white, pristine, and empty of all adornments. A small wooden table with one chair sits in front of a large window. He reaches into a cabinet and takes out a stove top coffee pot. He unscrews the bottom and fills it with water from the sink. He pours some out to get the amount just right.

He takes an aluminum can from a cabinet. Takes off the lid and scoops out coffee grinds and places them into the coffee pot filter. He slides a finger across the tops of the grounds so they lay perfectly smooth. He screws the coffee pot back together and places it on a burner on the stove, then turns the temperature knob that clicks three times before the burner bursts into a into a small flame. He adjusts it.

He gets a spotless cast iron skillet from beneath the stove and places it on another burner. He gets a butter knife and cuts a small square of butter that has been sitting in a container on the counter. He scrapes the butter knife on the inside of the skillet.

He pulls the metal handle and the refrigerator clanks open. Inside are mason jars filled with some strange, cloudy, yellow liquid. Mint green and pastel yellow plastic containers neatly stacked on top of and beside one another. A paper milk carton.

He takes out a carton of eggs and loaf of homemade bread, cracks open two eggs and places them in the skillet barely sizzling with melted butter.

He takes a serrated knife and cuts two perfect pieces of toast and places them in the toaster.

The coffee barely boils and the lid of the pot rattles with steam rising from it. He turns off the burner and the coffee quiets.

He takes a white coffee mug from inside a now empty cabinet and pours his coffee.

He sits at the small table and looks out a large window. The morning light has yet to show on the horizon, so he stares at his own reflection in the black window. He takes a single bite of an egg, then toast, then a swallow of his coffee.

His living room, like the rest of the upstairs, is empty and white.

The hallway.

A bathroom.

A room.

EXT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - DOOR - DAWN

The Old Man is dressed head to toe in protective winter gear. A fringed leather bag and hunting rifle are slung over his shoulder and across his chest. Two wooden snow shoes in one hand. He shuts the door behind him.

EXT. BARN - DAWN

The first hint of morning light shows in the sky. Snow crunches beneath the Old Man's boots. His stride is confident and unburdened. He comes upon a large wooden barn with dogs in pens attached to the side of it. A single red light bulb illuminates his hand reaching for the doorknob. He turns it.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

A wooden dogsled moves fast over the snow covered prairie. It's being pulled by five large dogs - four white with an even larger black one in the lead. The Old Man holds the ropes and says nothing as he and the dogs seem to not need to communicate verbally. Each of them know their role.

The infinite white landscape is broken up only here and there by the occasional cluster of trees in the distance.

They stop near some. He puts on his snowshoes and walks toward the trees as the dogs silently watch and wait, breath clouds rise from their mouth.

He comes upon an empty metal snare, pulls out a mason jar from his bag and pours some of the yellowish liquid around the area.

He's back on the sled and the dogs stop at another stand of trees. In a snare he finds the remnants of a trapped rabbit that has been mauled by some other beast. Blood all over the snow. He releases what's left of the rabbit and throws it nearby for whatever started it to finish the rest later.

The dogs don't respond, but he startles a panicked pheasant and stoically watches it fly up from some brush.

At another trap a living coyote is captured by its front leg. The quiet coyote raises his head up to look at him and then lies it back down on the snow. It makes no movement or sound, seemingly willing to accept both its fate and the authority of the Old Man.

Showing no hesitation or pity, the Old Man straddles the coyote. With a disturbing ease, he cracks its neck. POP.

EXT. BIBLE CAMP - DAY

MONTAGE - VARIOUS LOCATIONS WITHIN BIBLE CAMP

--Bright light pours in from tall windows while the Old Man mops a gym floor. The windows are protected by prison like bars. On one of the walls are colorful foot and hand pegs for climbing. Three red crosses are painted high up on the wall.

--He mops the floor of a large dining room. Tables and chairs are stacked along the walls. A painting of Jesus holding a baby lamb hangs over a piano in the corner. The light coming through the windows cast the Old Man's long shadow along the glossy floor.

--He sits in a chair behind a large wooden desk with nothing but a traditional lawyers lamp and rotary phone on top of it. He runs the palm of his hand over the top of the desk and rubs his fingers together afterward.

--A squeegee in one hand and a small towel in the other, he reaches high on a wet window and pulls the squeegee down in a perfect straight line. He wipes the tool dry then reaches up again.

--He dusts around a window, on top of a desk, around the books filling up a bookshelf.

--He stands on a ladder and takes the globe off of a light post that lines a walking path. He unscrews the lightbulb.

END MONTAGE

EXT. CHAPEL - DUSK

The Old Man carries a small box and opens a giant wooden door and flips a light switch just inside. The sun has just set behind him and the sky is purple.

INT. CHAPEL - DUSK

The chapel's warm lights glow. Everything is made of wood - the walls, ceiling, altar. The pews are lined up along the sides. An upright piano on the corner of the stage.

One of the light bulbs is out in a ceiling light fixture. The Old Man looks up - too high for him to change so he keeps moving through the room and walks up to a door.

INT. CHAPEL - STORAGE ROOM - DUSK

The door opens and light reveals a mouse caught in a mousetrap just inside the door. The Old Man removes the rodent and places it inside of the small box.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - ENTRYWAY - DUSK

The Old Man takes off his shoes and jacket. Walks down the stairwell to his basement, carrying the box with the mouse in it.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DUSK

The Old Man's basement is dark, but bright light emanates around the gaps of a closed door near the bottom of the stairs. Something important must be behind it. The Old Man opens the door and it's blindingly bright, nothing inside can be made out. He crosses the threshold, disappearing into the light.

FADE TO WHITE.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

A strange song is being played on an organ. Droning, moody dissonant.

Wooden floors and walls. A single lamp in the corner gives just enough warm light to see a haunting buffalo head hanging on the wall. Other dressed animals and parts adorn the walls and floor - coyotes, a pheasant, a mallard duck, bear skin, a bobcat, deer antlers.

Some candles burning.

Some books on a shelf: Hebrew Bible, New Testament, The Vedas, Tripitaka, Black Elk Speaks.

The Old Man's shadow slides over the wall as he rocks to the music he's making on the organ. A microphone is set up in front of the organ's speaker and is plugged into a vintage Ham radio on the Old Man's wooden desk. The input meter fluctuates.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - FIREPLACE - NIGHT

The Black Dog lies near the feet of the Old Man as he sits in a rocking chair in front of the Fire smoking his smooth, jet black tobacco pipe. He takes a puff and white smoke slowly rises out of his mouth, around his face, and the bowl of the pipe.

His intense eyes reflect the burning and crackling Fire.

His face lights up yellow and red. There's something slightly sinister about him, something dark and secret.

INT. OLD MAN'S BASEMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the pitch dark the Old Man lies on top of a traditional Lakota blanket with black and red geometric patterns. His hands are crossed behind his head. His eyes are open and slowly search the dark above. It looks like he might not ever sleep.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

The YOUNG MAN'S, 17, eyes nervously look around. He's walking through an aisle in the grocery store, looking one way and then other like he's about to do something he shouldn't.

He's wearing a heavy winter jacket, boots, and a toboggan on his head. Bright red cheeks, chapped lips.

He sneaks a few granola bars into his jacket pocket.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

The Young Man is walking fast through a town not big enough for a single stoplight. He's got on a large camping backpack and a sleeping bag dangles from it. He keeps looking over his shoulder. Grain silos tower above the "downtown."

He rips open the wrapper of a granola bar and nearly stuffs it whole into his mouth like he's not eaten for days. A few old timers drinking coffee in the only dingy diner in town stare at him through the window as walks by. He turns his head away from them so they can't see his face.

EXT. ROAD 1 - DAY

The Young Man walks along a frozen dirt road with not a single tire track on it. If he doesn't want to be found, he's in the right place.

The wind blows hard against him. Snow flies up from the ground, hitting him the face. He adjusts his scarf to cover his nose and mouth.

EXT. ROAD 2 - DUSK

It's getting dark and it's cold. The Young Man sees a shelterbelt of trees up ahead.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DUSK

Tucked inside the ragged shelterbelt is a two story dilapidated old farmhouse. The Young Man walks around and looks inside each of the miserable windows - empty, dusty, unused for years except maybe by a hunter here and there.

He opens the storm door and kicks at the back door until it bursts open.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DUSK

The Young Man steps inside, closing the broken door behind him the best he can. He tries to lock it but the trim to hold the door in place is broken apart.

He lets out a deep sigh of relief anyway, happy to have shelter for the night.

INT. FARMHOUSE - CLOSET - NIGHT

The Young Man is crammed inside a dark closet with the door closed. Still wearing his jacket and toboggan, he's tightly wrapped inside his sleeping bag, leaning against his backpack.

He reads from a worn leather Bible.

He takes out a harmonica from his pocket and plays a sad, beautiful song.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS - INT./EXT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

--The dirty closet door protecting the Young Man. The harmonica sounds a bit muffled.

--Peeling, neglected wallpaper and a lopsided, tarnished brass wall sconce.

--The dirty, beaten, and warped wood floor.

--The broken handrail of the stairwell.

--Through the dusty windows is what was likely once a welcoming living room, but now only three wires stick out of a hole in the ceiling where a light once hanged. Less harmonica and the sound of wind against the house, against the trees.

--The front of the farmhouse in the darkness. Stars and a nearly whole moon shine above. The sound of a rattling, hanging gutter. Even less harmonica. More wind.

--The bright moon and its dark craters. Barely any harmonica.

--The moonlit trunks of large cottonwood trees. No harmonica now, only the wind.

--A pack of running coyotes.

--A large wolf in the woods sitting on its hind legs, watching...waiting?

--The still and frozen prairie. The howling wind.

END MONTAGE

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. ROAD 3 - DAY

The next day - maybe a few days - the Young Man looks more worn out than before. The desolate landscape looks the same. He sees a RABBIT and stops walking to watch it. He remembers...

FLASHBACK - EXT. - BADLANDS - DAY

The YOUNG MAN is eleven years old and his older BROTHER, 12, is looking down the long barrel of a bb gun pointed at a rabbit nibbling on a scraggly patch of grass. The rabbit is small and unassuming against the harsh, multicolored hills of the western North Dakota badlands.

BROTHER

Bet I can hit it.

YOUNG MAN

But why would you?

BROTHER

Because I want to.

POP. The shot echoes off the rocky caverns. The rabbit plops over and the Young Man runs up to it. His Brother walks with his gun leaned against his shoulder like a murderous villain in an old western, but he doesn't look funny doing it - he looks natural.

The boys stand over the rabbit. Its eyes are closed. If it wasn't for the small and shiny bb sized drop of red blood on its brown fur, it could just be sleeping.

YOUNG MAN

(softly)

It's dead. You killed it.

After a quiet moment, the rabbit's eyes open and it starts spinning in a circle like he's stuck in an invisible hamster wheel, propelling his body with his paws scratching at the dirt. His back might be broken so he can't get up - he just spins. The pebble of blood grows and smears across its delicate fur.

Its breathing is panicked. It convulses. Spits blood. And dies.

The Young Man fights back tears and sniffs. His Brother looks down with a mean pleasure smile beyond his years. The Young Man walks away, head down.

BROTHER
You know you're a real pussy!

The Young Man doesn't turn around, just keeps walking.

EXT. BOYHOOD HOME - FRONT PORCH - DAY

The Young Man sits on the front porch swing and has clearly been crying. His eyes are red and puffy, still swelling with tears as his FATHER, late 30s, opens the screen door. Wearing khaki trousers and a dress shirt, he looks a bit more city than one might expect for the surroundings.

He sits down next to his son.

FATHER
What's wrong, buddy?

The Young Man wipes his eyes.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Where's your brother?

YOUNG MAN
Out there shootin' stuff.

FATHER
Hm. Like what?

YOUNG MAN
...stuff.

The Father sighs with disappointment. He grabs and kisses the top of the Young Man's head, then tussles his hair playfully.

FATHER
Let's go.

EXT. BADLANDS - DAY

The father carries a shovel and the Young Man walks beside him as they walk toward the Brother off in the distance.

The sky is big and blue and pretty. The hills a rocky red.

The Brother is shooting at a random bush.

FATHER
Give it here.
(takes the gun)
What have I told you about shooting animals?

BROTHER
Not to do it.

FATHER
Then why are you?

The Brother thinks.

BROTHER
I just like doin' it I guess.

FATHER
We don't just kill things for no reason. God made that rabbit for a purpose...a bigger one than just getting shot by you.

The Father looks away like he's trying find something else to say. He either can't find it or finds it and doesn't want to share it. So he just looks down and lets out a loud breath, kicks a pebble on the ground. He hands the shovel to the Brother.

FATHER (CONT'D)
Here. You two bury it.

YOUNG MAN
I didn't kill it though. He did.

FATHER
Did you tell him not to?

The Young Man looks down at the ground, ashamed.

YOUNG MAN
No, sir.

The two boys watch their Father walk away.

BROTHER
Way to go, *asshole*.

The Brother pushes the shovel into the Young Man's chest so hard he nearly falls over.

YOUNG MAN
Ow.

The Young Man looks down at the dead rabbit and steps on the shovel and pierces the hard, flaky ground. Dust rises like brown smoke. His Brother watches.

From up above, looking down, the Boys look tiny in the great big landscape.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. ROAD 3 - BACK TO PRESENT DAY

The rabbit hops away. The Young Man keeps walking...and walking.

EXT. ROAD 4 - SIGNPOST - DAY

He comes upon a small wooden post sticking up in the ground on the side of the road at an intersection. It looks to lead to a cluster of trees a long way off on the horizon. A black Christogram is branded into each side of the post.

He looks toward the new road. Then ahead. Behind him. He's hungry and cold, but he doesn't want to get caught either. He wipes snot from his nose on the back of his glove.

EXT. FISH HOUSE - DAY

On the middle of a frozen lake stands a small wooden fish house. The Old Man's dogs are just outside of it, lying down, relaxed. The sled sits empty nearby.

INT. FISH HOUSE - DAY

The Old Man bobs his fishing pole up and down inside a hole in the ice in the middle of the shelter. Three walleye fish lie dead near the hole. He smokes his pipe and looks thoughtfully into the water.

Suddenly his eyes dart up and pierce through the walls of the fish house.

EXT. BIBLE CAMP - ENTRANCE - DAY

The Young Man stands in front of a sign that has a Christogram painted on it. The words "BIBLE CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER" beneath it. He looks to the cabins, chapel, and around.

There's a pickup truck in front of the Old Man's house covered in a foot or so of snow. Maybe no one is there.

He hesitates, looks around some more, and walks onto the property.

EXT. RETREAT CENTER - DAY

The Young Man peers through the front windows of the retreat center into the foyer. A few couches, a coffee table, a chair. A summer painting of a green prairie and calm lake hangs on the wall. No lights are on inside.

He tries the door. It's unlocked.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - PANTRY - DAY

He stuffs his face full of potato chips while sitting in the doorway of a pantry. Two empty bags lie crinkled up next to him. He washes them down with bubbling soda from a green glass bottle.

He looks up and is startled to see the Old Man standing in front of him, holding a string with three dead fish on the end of it. The Young Man freezes.

OLD MAN
(calmly)
You like fish?

The Young Man hesitates and nods yes and the Old Man gives a small and eerie smile.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Good.

The Old Man walks into the kitchen and the Young Man watches silently.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Get one of the tables and two chairs set up there in the dining room. I'll be out shortly.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - DINING ROOM - DAY

The gray daylight coming in through the windows lights up the room just enough. The two sit opposite one another. The Young Man chomps down bites of fish, a chunk of bread, a slosh of milk.

The Old Man carefully eats his meal and sips red wine.

OLD MAN
So, what do you want?

The Young Man ignores him. Takes another bite of food.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
What do you want?

No answer. No look.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Should I expect the crow of a
rooster if I ask a third time?

YOUNG MAN
What?

OLD MAN
What do you *want*?

The Young Man chews and thinks. Shrugs his shoulders.

YOUNG MAN
I don't know.

A sliver of a smile on the Old Man's lips. He appreciates the honesty.

The two finish their meal in silence. The Old Man rises.

OLD MAN
Now then. Get your bag and follow
me.

INT. CABIN - DAY

With a pillow and blanket beneath his arm, the Old Man opens the door and steps inside. The Young Man follows behind. There are a dozen undressed bunk beds, a nightstand with a lamp on it. No adornments.

OLD MAN
You will sleep in here for now.
There's a toilet in the building we
had dinner in.

He lays the pillow and blanket down on a bunkbed.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
You may wander around as you'd
like. Only thing I ask is that you
stay away from the dogs.
Understand?

YOUNG MAN
Yes, sir.

The Old Man turns to exit.

OLD MAN

I'm going out for a bit, but I'll
be back later tonight. See you in
the morning.

Peering through the window, the Young Man watches him clear the snow off his truck and drive away.

EXT. BIBLE CAMP - DAY

The Young Man explores the property. An outdoor basketball court and swimming pool are covered in a thick blanket of snow. He makes his way to the frozen lake's edge and walks out onto the ice and stops, looks around and thinks.

INT. BARN - DAY

Tools are everywhere, hooks and rope hang from the rafters. A large, rusty tractor. A big metal barrel converted into a wood stove burns in the corner. A neatly stacked pile of wood.

The Young Man pulls a dusty tarp off something - a snowmobile. He smiles like he has a good idea and sits on the seat. He turns the key and nothing happens. He moves the handlebars left and right.

He opens the engine hood and sees a mess of twigs and nuts and trash left behind by a rat, dead and dry and splayed out on top of it. Chewed up wires and hoses fray every which way. He closes the hood.

He hears something move in the corner.

He looks over as one of the dogs walk through a flap in the wall of the barn, joining the three other white dogs that have been silently watching him behind the chain linked fence containing them. They show no normal signs of expected behavior - no excitement, no concern. Nothing.

He stares back at them a moment, then hurries to put the tarp back on the snowmobile.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - OFFICE - DAY

The Young Man hesitantly dials a number on a rotary phone, pausing before hitting the last number. It rings. A GIRL, 17, answers.

GIRL (O.S.)
Hello...hello?

A longer silence. He wants to say something but can't, won't. He looks pained.

GIRL (CONT'D)
Is that you?...where are you?
They...they're lookin' for you.

No response.

GIRL (CONT'D)
He's dead.

He hangs up the phone.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - RESTROOM - DAY

The Young Man is bent over on his knees throwing up in the toilet. He gags and coughs, spits, moans a little, and flushes the toilet.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DUSK

The big sun disappears on the horizon. Orange, yellow, purple sky. The wind howls.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The Young Man lies inside his sleeping bag and blanket with his arms behind his head just as the Old Man did before. He hears a vehicle approaching and through the window sees its bright lights in the distance.

He gets up to look out the window and sees a POLICE CAR and jumps away in a hurry.

He peeks through the window with just one eye. The car pauses in front of the Old Man's house. No lights on inside, no truck in the driveway. The car moves on and slowly exits the camp.

He lets out a sigh of relief and sits down on his bed, puts his elbows on his knees and his hands on his head.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. CABIN - DAWN

The Old Man knocks on the wall inside the door and flips on the light switch.

OLD MAN

The room and board come with responsibility. There's a snow shovel by the door of the retreat center. Shovel all around the building. After that, vacuum the rooms with carpet. Vacuum is in the storage room near the foyer. Food's in the kitchen.

The Old Man leaves and the Young Man rises. He wipes the sleep from his eyes and looks out the window to see the Old Man and his dogs slide away on the prairie.

EXT. RETREAT CENTER - DAY

The Young Man shovels snow away from entrance to the building. He looks and sees a firepit with log benches around it in a circle on the shore of the lake.

He squints his eyes and opens his mouth just a bit, drops his shovel, and walks toward the firepit. He's seen this before.

FLASHBACK - EXT. FIREPIT - SUMMER - DAY

A group of KIDS, 10 - 12, wearing colorful t-shirts and shorts, are gathered around a huge Fire burning in the firepit. They stand and dance enthusiastically as they sing Christian songs.

EXT. PRAIRIE - SAME TIME

Through the eyes of the Snake, we slowly slither across a bright green field, side to side. Wildflowers, tall and thick grass start to pass by faster and faster.

The singing children get louder and closer, and the Snake slides out of the tall grass and slows down.

EXT. FIREPIT - SAME TIME

The Snake makes a long, slow circle around the children, unseen, inching its way closer.

A KID, 10, sits on a bench and sways his legs to the beat of a song. He looks down and sees the Snake as it strikes him. He lifts his leg to avoid being bitten and screams.

YOUNG MAN (O.S.)

No!

INT. BOYHOOD HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Young Man, 11, suddenly props up in bed, yelling in terror. He's breathing heavy and covered in sweat. His Brother, lies quietly in his own bed, watching him. His MOTHER, 30s, and Father rush into the room and turn on the light.

MOTHER
Sweetie, what is it?!

The parents sit next to him on the bed and the Young Man says nothing and buries his tearful face into his Mother's chest. She rocks back and forth and rubs his back and casts a concerned glance toward her husband, then to the Brother, and closes her eyes.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Shhh. It's okay, honey.

The Father pats the Young Man on his head.

FATHER
It was just a dream. It wasn't real. You'll be alright.

The Brother watches in silence. Jealousy in his eyes, tension in his mouth. His father looks at him.

FATHER (CONT'D)
You okay?

BROTHER
Yeah.

LATER.

The brothers lie in their beds. The Young Man looks up at the ceiling and his Brother lies on his side and stares at him.

The glow of the moon lights up the bedroom, and the shadows cast from the open blinds create what look like prison bars covering them.

BROTHER (CONT'D)
You think you're so good, don't you? But I'm your brother. I know what they don't.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - KITCHEN - BACK TO PRESENT DAY

The Young Man is stuffing food into his backpack in a hurry. He's getting out of there.

EXT. ROAD 4 - DAY

He walks as fast as he can without running. He turns to look back, confusion and fear on his face.

EXT. ROAD - SIGNPOST - DAY

The Young Man stands at the Christogram that guided him to the bible camp the day before. His breathing has slowed, and it shows in the frozen air. The wind blows. Some fat robins hop around atop the snow. He looks at the symbol. Back toward the camp. Up at the gray sky. Back to the camp.

He is torn. Should he go back? What does his dream mean? He looks in the direction of the camp. Lets out a sigh, and starts walking back toward it.

The Old Man's truck comes into view in the distance. The Young Man keeps walking toward him. The truck pulls up beside him and the Old Man flashes a soft smile of pity and understanding as he leans over and opens the door.

The Young Man throws his backpack in the bed of the truck and gets inside the cab. The Old Man says nothing and turns the truck around.

The Young Man stares out the passenger window at the still prairie.

YOUNG MAN

I saw something today...at the camp...the firepit...I've...I've seen it before...in a dream I've had since I was little.

He turns to look at the Old Man.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

This place is in that dream.

OLD MAN

The poet of Proverbs says that people perish without vision.

The Old Man looks to the Young Man.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Trust your vision.

YOUNG MAN
It's dark though...my vision.

OLD MAN
So it is.

The truck drives down the road, getting smaller and smaller, out of sight. The frozen prairie bigger.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

The Young Man is holding a long pole that is made for changing lightbulbs in high places. He lets out little grunt noises in frustration as he tries to line the end of it just right to screw in a lightbulb.

The Old Man stands next to him and watches.

OLD MAN
Changing these is one of the most challenging things to do out here.

YOUNG MAN
Where did you go this morning?

OLD MAN
To get some coyotes.

YOUNG MAN
On a dog sled?

OLD MAN
On a dog sled.

YOUNG MAN
Why use a dogsled when you have a snowmobile in the barn?

OLD MAN
Because it's broken and I've not fixed it.

YOUNG MAN
If I fix it can I use it?

OLD MAN
If it takes you as long as it does to change a lightbulb, I might not even be around long enough to see it fixed.

YOUNG MAN
I can get it going.

The Young Man turns the lightbulb into place and lowers the pole. The Old Man pats him on the shoulder and walks away.

OLD MAN
Tools are in the barn. Clean them
and put them back where you found
them when you're done.

INT. BARN - DAY

The Young Man leans over the engine of the snowmobile. A look of deep concentration on his face and black grease on his fingers and hands.

A weatherman's voice from a radio fills the barn.

WEATHERMAN (O.S.)
Gonna be cool out rest of the day.
5 above for a high in Griggs
county. Low tonight of 20 below.
Temperatures next few days are to
hover around zero but later this
week we expect a big winter
snowstorm across the state.

The four white dogs all sit on their hind legs and silently watch the Young Man from their pen.

INT. OLD MAN'S BASEMENT - DESK - DAY

The Old Man sits at his desk working on a small clock, much in the same manner as the Young Man was on the snowmobile. He hears a knock on the upstairs door.

OLD MAN
Come in.

The door opens.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Down here.

The Young Man descends the stairs.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Have a seat.

The Young Man sits in a chair near the Old Man's desk. The Black Dog lies nearby and watches the Young Man.

The Young Man looks around the room and notices a large collection of small clocks hanging on the wall. Each is set to a different time.

YOUNG MAN
What's with all the clocks?

The Old Man doesn't look up.

OLD MAN
Suppose a guy wants to know what time it is.

YOUNG MAN
But they're all different.

OLD MAN
Are they? What time do you think God the Father thinks it is?

YOUNG MAN
What?

OLD MAN
If you were to ask God what time it is, right now, what do you think he would say?

YOUNG MAN
I don't know.

The Old Man focuses on his repair. The Young Man watches him and quietly looks around the room.

OLD MAN
There are at least 39 different places on Earth who think the time is what one of those clocks says it is. What time do you think it is?

YOUNG MAN
Where?

OLD MAN
From your perspective, right now.

The Young Man surveys the clocks and thinks. Says nothing.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Just as you look at those clocks, so does the Father look at His creation. It's not that events have happened or will have happened, it's that all events are happening.

The Old Man puts down his tools and turns to the Young Man and looks him in the eyes.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Do you understand?

Beat.

YOUNG MAN
Starting to.

OLD MAN
Good. Now help me with these skins.

EXT. OLD MAN'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

The Young Man places an armful of coyote skins in the back of the Old Man's truck. Suddenly the Old Man looks toward the road.

Nothing is there.

OLD MAN
Get inside. Now.

YOUNG MAN
What? Why?

The Old Man looks up the road. Still nothing.

OLD MAN
We have a visitor.

A police car just barely comes into view. The Young Man runs inside and the storm door slams behind him. The Old Man stands and waits, watches the police car get closer.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The Young Man looks out the window and sees the police car enter camp. He ducks and darts down the stairs to the basement.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

At the bottom of the stairs the Young Man has his back pressed against the wall. His eyes are closed and he's breathing deeply to not panic.

He opens his eyes and sees the door with bright light glowing around it. Now the light is red. The whole basement has the hue of red.

He can't resist the glowing room. He peels himself from the wall and walks toward the light. He reaches for the doorknob and as he does parts of his vision flash quickly in his mind.

FLASHBACK - EXT. FIREPIT - SUMMER - DAY

The kids singing songs.

The Snake slithering on the green grass.

The look of fear on a kid's face just before being bitten.

END FLASHBACK.

UNKNOWN - DAY

The skin of the Snake up real close, but it's hard to tell what it is, except creepy. It's covered in a red light.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

Just at the Young Man nearly touches the door handle he hears a growl from behind him. He freezes for a moment, then slowly turns to see the snarling Black Dog ready to pounce on him.

He slowly moves away from the door and walks backwards up the stairs, not taking his eyes off the Black Dog, and the Black Dog not taking his eyes off him.

EXT. OLD MAN'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

The DEPUTY, mid 20's and of Native American descent, closes his car door as he casually walks toward the waiting Old Man.

DEPUTY
Hello there.

OLD MAN
Hello.

DEPUTY
Not too cold out, hey?

OLD MAN
No, suppose not. And you are the new Deputy.

It's not a question. It's a statement.

DEPUTY

Yes, sir. Gettin' to know my way
around yet.

OLD MAN

That's good.

The Deputy offers his hand and the Old Man shakes it.

EXT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

The Young Man quietly opens the backdoor and sneaks around the back of the house to listen. His face winces with each step. The snow crunches beneath his feet.

DEPUTY (O.S.)

I don't mean to keep ya. A few
farmers around have reported their
old homesteads bein' broken into.
Just wonderin' if ya noticed
anything unusual lately.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

No. Not much unexpected happens out
here.

The Young Man makes it to the edge of the house but accidentally hits the gutter with his foot, making a loud crashing sound. He shuts his eyes and holds his breath.

EXT. OLD MAN'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

The Deputy hears the noise and looks in that direction but the Old Man doesn't take his eyes off the Deputy. The Deputy notices.

DEPUTY

What was that?

OLD MAN

Could be anything. The wind, a
dog...raccoon.

The Deputy looks deeply into the Old Man's cold eyes. He doesn't trust him. The Deputy taps his fingers on his thigh.

He looks down at the snow. Is that two sets of footprints? Might be. The Deputy isn't sure.

DEPUTY
You alone out here?

The Old Man gives a slight nod.

OLD MAN
I am.

The Deputy fake smiles in return, looks to the house, the barn, the lake. He mulls things over in his mind.

A few crows caw. The wind blows. The Old Man's glare burns into him.

DEPUTY
Well. I'll let you be. Let me know
if anything pops up.

OLD MAN
Certainly.

The Deputy gets in his car and the Old Man watches him drive off.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

The Deputy looks in the rearview mirror and sees the Old Man watching him. The Old Man's stare says the two of them will be seeing each other again and it won't be good for the Deputy when they do.

EXT. OLD MAN'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

The Deputy is out of sight and the Young Man appears from behind the house and walks up to the Old Man as he fidgets with the coyote skins in his truck.

OLD MAN
Well.

YOUNG MAN
What did he want?

OLD MAN
Seems there's been some break-ins.
You wouldn't know anything about
that, though, would you?

YOUNG MAN
No, sir.

OLD MAN
Hm...help me with the rest of these
skins.

YOUNG MAN
You think he's going to come back?

OLD MAN
Yes.

The Old Man closes the tailgate of his truck and walks around to the driver's side door. The Young Man stands at the rear of the truck and watches him.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
I'll be back later. Do as you will.

He starts the truck and begins to drive off.

YOUNG MAN
Hey! Wait!

The Old Man stops, rolls down his window as the Young Man jogs up to him.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
I never told you what part I
needed...for the snowmobile.

The Old Man smirks.

OLD MAN
Didn't I tell you it was broken?

The Young Man says nothing in response. The Old Man rolls up the window and drives away, leaving the confused Young Man behind.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER - DAY

Laid out on the counter is a corn cob pipe, a box of matches, and a small tin of tobacco.

The Young Man makes a sloppy peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Drinks a glass of milk.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

The Young Man meanders on top of the frozen lake. The sun is descending but the sky has yet to change into bright colors. He stops to look at the horizon. His warm breath meets the cold air and he swipes his hands through it.

He walks to the bank of the lake and swings at a frozen cattail, knocking the snow and ice off it. He swings at another one. And another one. He kicks. He remembers.

FLASHBACK - INT. BOYHOOD HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Young Man, 17, is on top of his Brother, 18, punching him in the face. His Brother laughs. The Girl, 17, yells for them to stop.

BACK TO PRESENT.

He swings and punches at the cattails.

FLASHBACK - INT. BOYHOOD HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Young Man punches his Brother harder. And harder. Years of anger manifest itself with each punch.

BACK TO PRESENT.

He kicks at the cattails. Snow and ice fly everywhere. He groans and grunts. He rips up the cattails and throws them across the ice.

FLASHBACK - INT. BOYHOOD HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Girl screams. Blood bursts from his Brother's nose, his mouth. The Young Man has a wild look in his eyes. He raises a bloody fist and he slams it right onto his Brother's mouth. Blood squirts from it.

He can see the terror in his Brother's eyes.

BACK TO PRESENT.

He is breathing harder and hitting the cattails as hard as he can. No holding back.

FLASHBACK - INT. BOYHOOD HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Brother fights for his life now. He clenches his blood stained teeth and punches the Young Man but the Young Man isn't fazed. The Girl has her hands on the side of her head and screams.

The Young Man lets out a guttural moan as he holds his Brother down by the neck with one hand and punches and pounds him with the other.

The Brother's eyes roll back into his head. His body goes limp and the Young Man hits him with both fists. The Girl is crying and screaming.

The Young Man stops.

All is quiet but the THUMPING of his heart and heavy breathing. He looks at his blood stained hands, spreading his fingers wide. The backs, the palms.

He looks at the sobbing Girl, down at his Brother. His brother isn't breathing.

END FLASHBACK.

BACK TO PRESENT.

The Young Man lies on his back on the ice and cries. Broken pieces of cattails and shards of ice are splayed around him. He rolls over onto his side, pulls his knees to his chest, and sobs like a little baby boy.

EXT. LAKE - DUSK

The Young Man sits cross legged on the middle of the frozen lake. The sun is disappearing on the horizon and the sky and clouds are purple and orange and blue and beautiful.

He packs the corn cob pipe, puts the stem into his mouth, and lights a match but the wind blows it out.

He tries again. And again.

He throws a match in frustration and it bounces on the ice. He lights another one and brings it to the bowl of the pipe. He puffs and a bit of tobacco catches Fire and he coughs and spits. The Fire goes out. He tries again. More coughing and spit, a little gagging as he hits his chest.

It catches and he sits and puffs, watching the sky change colors.

The sky is reflected in the Young Man's eyes.

Tobacco glows and burns in his pipe. White smoke rises from it.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS - CONTINUOUS

--Snow blows across the surface of the frozen lake. Ice cracks and pops.

--A V of geese fly across the sky.

--Thousands of blackbirds swirl in the sky like a dark cloud. Left then right, together each time in tiny seconds, up and down.

--The sad eye of a bison. One blink.

--An owl hoots from a naked elm tree.

--Two cold squirrels cuddle in their nest.

--The side of an elk's face. It's battered rack.

--A hawk rips out the guts of a small rodent.

--A pack of coyotes devour a deer carcass.

--A wolf. Two wolves. Three.

--A worn out tumbleweed bounces across the snow, going nowhere but where the wind pushes it.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. PRAIRIE - NIGHT

The sky is black and the big moon glows. The Young Man sits at a burning, crackling Fire. He hovers his naked hands over it and turns them over, examining them, just like he did over his dead brother. Small scrapes and cuts on his knuckles are scabbed over.

He puffs on his pipe.

His eyes glow with Fire orange and red and blue. A log breaks apart and falls over, sending white smoke and floating burning embers into the black sky. Coyotes howl all around him.

From above, the Young Man and Fire are a small, glowing speck in a big, white, empty space.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - RESTROOM - MORNING

The Young Man splashes his face and wets his hair with cold water from a sink, then pats it dry with a towel. He stares at his face in the mirror. Naked from the waist up, he turns his head from one side to the other.

He feels his face with his hands and leans close into the mirror and looks for facial hair but finds none. He pushes the hair on his head down to see how long it is and turns his head side to side again.

He puts some hair between his fingers and takes a pair of scissors and begins cutting.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - KITCHEN - DAY

Eggs cook on the stove as the Young Man tries to make coffee. His hair is short and butchered. There's a note from the Old Man that reads "2 SCOOPS GROUNDS AND WATER. MOP WHAT'S NOT CARPET."

The coffee boils out of the rattling pot, running down its sides and all over the stove.

YOUNG MAN

Dangit.

He takes the pot off the stove and wipes it down with a rag.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - DINING ROOM - DAY

The new morning light covers him as he sits and eats his breakfast in the lonely dining room. He takes a drink of coffee and makes a bitter face. Struggles to swallow.

INT. OLD MAN'S CHURCH - DAY

A couple dozen somber church members sway and sing to music in a small rural church with hard wooden pews and carpeted floor. A CONGREGANT, 40's, stands next to his wife and teenage daughter.

The Old Man plays the organ. He is dressed in black slacks and a black buttoned up shirt. Above him is a painting of Jesus praying in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, a few drops of blood on Jesus' forehead.

CONGREGATION

*Jesus be near us our enemy's close
/ Jesus our savior the one we love
most / anointed from heaven the
holy ghost dove / father reflected
united in love*

INT. RETREAT CENTER - FURNACE ROOM - DAY

CONGREGATION (O.S.)

*Jesus the victor triumphant over
death / Jesus the one who's no
beginning or end*

The Young Man watches the mop bucket fill up. Hot steam rises from the scalding water falling. Tiny soap bubbles multiply and swell. In the dank room are giant water heaters and the building's heating furnace. Shiny copper pipes snake along on the walls and ceilings.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - SUPPLY CLOSET - DAY

CONGREGATION (O.S.)

*Our life is your life do as you may
/ one thing we ask is that near us
you'd stay*

The Young Man bends over to get a bucket with restroom cleaning supplies in it: a toilet brush, bleach, rags.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - STAIRWELL - DAY

The Young Man picks up the mop and bucket with one hand, and the bucket with supplies in the other. He struggles to walk up the stairs and carry it all.

Soapy water splashes and spills out of the mop bucket and onto the stairs.

The Old Man's organ music stops.

FLASHBACK - INT. YOUNG MAN'S CHURCH - STAIRWELL - DAY

The Young Man ascends a carpeted stairwell.

FATHER (O.S.)

There is good and there is evil.
There is black and there is white.
(MORE)

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

There is a lion prowling who seeks
to devour, and there is a slain
lamb who seeks to restore. Both
want our attention. It's our choice
to give it to one or the other.

INT. YOUNG MAN'S CHURCH - BALCONY - DAY

The Young Man sits down at a large organ in the balcony of a small church during a Sunday morning service. His father is dressed in a black robe and stands in front of wooden cross that reaches from the floor and nearly to the ceiling.

The choir stands up and the Young Man starts playing the organ. It's the same song the Old Man was playing at church. He plays softly at first, then passionately with an almost look of anger and violence. He presses into the keys as the choir sings. From below, the Young Man looks trapped behind the balcony railing like prison bars.

On stage, the Girl sings with the choir.

CHOIR

*Jesus the teacher our highest
priest / Jesus may your words bring
our troubled minds peace*

The Young Man looks over and makes eye contact with her as he plays. She looks away and then to his Brother sitting in the crowd. He opens his eyes big and wild and flashes his clenched teeth like someone does when they play growl and she smiles at him and keeps singing.

INT. YOUNG MAN'S CHURCH - BASEMENT - DAY

The congregation shares a potluck lunch. Seated at one round table is the Young Man and his parents, along with the Girl and a few members of the church.

The Young Man picks around his food and looks toward the Girl. Various conversations are happening around the table at once. The Young Man addresses the Girl.

YOUNG MAN

You sounded really good today.
Singing I mean.

GIRL

Thanks. Your playing was good too.
The new song is really good.

YOUNG MAN

Oh. Yeah? Thanks. I try.

The Father overhears their conversation and interjects.

FATHER

Yes, son. The new song is lovely.
God is going to use you in a mighty
way. You've a gift.

The Father makes eye contact with the Brother. The Brother
laughs and raises his glass as if to make a toast.

BROTHER

Yes, Brother! But that I were so
talented as thee!

FATHER

(to Brother)

Don't make a scene. Not here.

BROTHER

But if not in the Lord's house then
in whose house, Father, may I be
seen at all?

The Father takes a drink of red wine. A church member speaks
to break the tension.

MEMBER #1

Oh this roast is really somethin'
isn't it?

MOTHER

It is. Just right.

The Father looks to the Brother.

MEMBER #2

And these potatoes. *My my*. Who made
these?

FATHER

You've a lot of nerve.

BROTHER

I've a lot of things, and I don't
hide them.

The Brother looks to the Young Man.

BROTHER (CONT'D)

At least there's that, and that's
something. Isn't it, Brother?

The Young Man looks away and moves the food around on his plate with a fork.

FATHER
Go home. I've had enough.

BROTHER
As you wish, *Father*.

He rises from his seat and tosses his napkin onto the table. He looks to the Girl.

BROTHER (CONT'D)
Let's go.

She takes a drink of water and sighs and rises from her seat, gently folding the napkin from her lap onto the table. She makes sad eye contact with the Young Man.

The brother's give each other a mean look and everyone at the table watches them walk away. They look embarrassed. The Father and Mother look disappointed.

FATHER
Sorry about that everyone. Let's get back to our fellowship.

Everyone starts to eat again, not saying anything and just staring at their plates.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. OLD MAN'S CHURCH - PRESENT DAY - DAY

The church service is over and the members exchange pleasantries. The Old Man's demeanor is friendly and open. He is shaking hands with the Congregant that was standing next to his wife and daughter earlier.

The Old Man is just about to leave as the Pastor catches him at the entryway.

PASTOR
Hold on there, now. Will you not be joining us for potluck downstairs?

OLD MAN
No, not today. I've a group coming out to camp this afternoon.

PASTOR

Well, okay then. I suppose I can't blame you if you want to stay away from Vernice's famous knoephla soup again.

OLD MAN

It is famous.

The Pastor laughs and puts his hand on the shoulder of the Old Man in a gentle sign of affection.

PASTOR

Hey now. That was a beautiful song today during communion. The new one.

OLD MAN

Thank you.

PASTOR

I envy your creativity. I've been telling the same sermons for years. No one seems to notice.

OLD MAN

I do.

The Pastor smiles and the Old Man gives a little smile and nod of his head. He opens the door and walks out to the cold air and wind outside.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Good day to you, Pastor.

EXT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

The Young Man walks around the back of the Old Man's house and sees the Old Man spreading corn kernels.

A few does nibble where the Old Man threw some kernels earlier. Without turning around, the Old Man acknowledges the Young Man.

OLD MAN

Good afternoon.

YOUNG MAN

Same.

The Young Man watches the Old Man gently spread kernels on the snow covered soil.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
You know giving them corn can kill
them if they eat enough of it. It
expands their stomach.

OLD MAN
Is that so?

YOUNG MAN
Guess you already know that.

The Old Man throws a few more kernels of corn and turns
around. He notices the Young Man's awful haircut.

OLD MAN
Hm.

YOUNG MAN
What?

OLD MAN
You didn't break the mirror did
you?

YOUNG MAN
It ain't that bad.

OLD MAN
Afraid it is. Either wear a hat or
let me give you a proper buzzing.
You're going to make me look bad
walking around here.

YOUNG MAN
No one to see it is there?

OLD MAN
We've some visitors coming today.

YOUNG MAN
You think that's a good idea?

OLD MAN
Nothing to worry about.

The Old Man walks toward his house and the Young Man follows.

EXT. RETREAT CENTER - DAY

A beat up white twelve passenger van with the faded words
"FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE DAKOTAS" parks just outside of
the retreat center. The dogs bark friendly from the barn.

Five CHILDREN, 8-12 years old, jump out of the van and run down the steps to the front of the retreat center. A YOUTH PASTOR, 30's and of Native American descent, and her HUSBAND follow them.

YOUTH PASTOR

Hey! You kids slow down or you're gonna fall.

The children pay him no mind and continue running and laughing, some gather up snow and throw snowballs.

The Old Man is smiling from ear to ear as he bends down to greet one of the children, picking her up in his arms.

LITTLE GIRL

Hey, Mister!

OLD MAN

Why, hello, pretty girl. And how have you been since I last saw you?

LITTLE GIRL

Gooooood.

He sets her down. The Young Man watches confused at the Old Man's changed demeanor.

OLD MAN

Now wait a minute. What is that behind your ear?

She reaches behind her ears and looks puzzled.

LITTLE GIRL

Huh? Nothin'.

OLD MAN

Yes there is.

He reaches behind one of her ears and reveals a piece of candy in his hand. A silly magic trick. Her little eyes widen and the Old Man smiles. An OLDER BOY speaks up.

OLDER BOY

That ain't a real trick. You just had the candy in your hand first.

OLD MAN

Oh, it's not always as simple as it appears to be.

The Old Man turns and winks at the Young Man who has been leaning against the wall. The Young Man looks nervous and confused.

The Youth Pastor greets the Old Man with a hug and a smile, speaks with a thick North Dakota accent.

YOUTH PASTOR

Great to see ya, Old Man. How've ya been?

OLD MAN

As good as God allows I suppose.

YOUTH PASTOR

Well, if it weren't for his grace where would any of us be, right?

OLD MAN

Somewhere warmer.

The Youth Pastor laughs. The Husband shakes the Old Man's hand.

HUSBAND

Hey there. The kids are so excited to see you and the dogs again. It's all they've been talking about for days.

OLD MAN

And we're excited to see them too. Just listen to them up there barking away now.

The Youth Pastor notices the Young Man silently standing by the door. The two make eye contact and she looks at him hard, like she recognizes him but can't make out from where.

YOUTH PASTOR

And who's this?

The Old Man turns to the Young Man.

OLD MAN

This is my friend. He will be joining us today.

The Youth Pastor examines the Young Man, trying to put a name or occasion to the Young Man's face. She walks over to him and firmly shakes his hand.

YOUTH PASTOR

Good to meet ya.

The Young Man nods in agreement, saying nothing.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The Old Man and children are gathered around the dogs. Like their master, they have changed their behavior. Where they have been emotionless, they now have playful energy. Their tails wag and their tongues flap outside of their mouth.

The Old Man tries to show the children how to harness the dogs to the ropes and sled but is feigning control over them now. One of the dogs tenderly jumps on a Small Boy, knocking him over and licking his face. The Small Boy laughs hysterically.

Another child hugs and squeezes one of the dogs.

Another picks up a stick and throws it far away from everyone else. The Older Boy chases after the stick and trips and falls, grabbing the stick just before the Black Dog does. It clamps its sharp teeth down on the Older Boy's wrist, just hard enough to scare him. It growls. Its eyes are dark and terrifying. The Older Boy's eyes get wide and fill with tears and he's scared to death now, unable to utter a sound. The Black Dog lets go, gets the stick, and trots back to the group.

Only the Old Man sees the interaction. He watches the Older Boy stand up and wipe his eyes, then gives him an even more intense stare down than the Black Dog did. The kid looks away, humbled and scared.

Eventually, the Old Man settles the dogs and shows the children how to set up the dogs for sledding. He goes through each step, showing and telling them how to do it just right. He looks over at the Young Man and gives a slight smile.

The Youth Pastor is happily engaged with the children and the dogs, but her smile fades as she glances over at the Young Man who stands distant and unengaged. Her brow wrinkles a bit like cracks in the ice.

The two make eye contact and the Young Man quickly looks away.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Both the Old Man and Young Man sit in front of the Fire and their faces glow similar. The Young Man's hair is buzzed short and neat. Thick tobacco smoke rises from their pipes.

They are silent. The Fire crackles. Without taking his eyes off the Fire, the Young Man addresses the Old Man.

YOUNG MAN

Why were you so different around those people today?

OLD MAN

Never an answer have I sought that the Fire didn't give.

They take a few more puffs in silence.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

We can't show everyone who we are. Even the Father wouldn't let Moses see him, and the Son's whole life was one of restraint. This whole world moves on secrets. The trick is learning which ones to keep.

More puffs. More silence.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. POLICE STATION - THE NEXT DAY - DAY

The Deputy is sitting in a chair behind his desk. He leans his elbow on an armrest and his chin rests in his hand. He's thinking hard.

The Sheriff, who was the congregant shaking hands with the Old Man at church, sits at the only other desk in the room filling out paperwork.

DEPUTY

What do you know about the Old Man out at that Bible Camp?

SHERIFF

Which one?

DEPUTY

The one south of Lakota there about an hour.

The Sheriff doesn't look up from his paperwork.

SHERIFF

Not much. Keeps to himself mostly. Been there since he was a boy. Plays organ at church.

DEPUTY

I met him the other day...
somethin' seemed off about him.

SHERIFF

You spend ten months out of the
year all alone and see how off you
get.

The Sheriff keeps writing with his head down, but looks suspiciously up and toward the Deputy with only his eyes. The Deputy looks down at his desk for an answer to his lingering premonition but can't find one.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - KITCHEN - DAY

The Young Man is making breakfast and the Old Man walks in carrying something white.

OLD MAN

I don't have any other white
hunting clothes so you'll have to
wear these.

He plops down a white towel and bathrobe down on the table. The Young Man holds up the bathrobe.

YOUNG MAN

Serious?

OLD MAN

You need to be wearing white. Just
slip on the robe and wrap the towel
around your head.

EXT. HUNTING SPOT - DAY

The Old Man and Young Man sit next to one another beneath a gray sky on top of the snow of the vast prairie. They each wear white and have their respective rifles laid across their laps.

The Young Man looks silly in his bathrobe and towel on his head.

OLD MAN

I'm going to start calling you the
Abominable Robeman.

YOUNG MAN

Funny.

They sit in silence and look to the horizon.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)
You ever see wolves out here?

OLD MAN
Yes.

YOUNG MAN
You kill them?

OLD MAN
No.

They stare across the field some more. The wind blows some snow, just a little.

YOUNG MAN
Why not?

The Old Man thinks about it.

OLD MAN
Coyotes used to mean something to people. Some natives thought him like a God. Now he's a nuisance or a cartoon character. Not the wolf. A wolf doesn't play with you and you don't play with it.

They eye a coyote trotting in the distance. The Old Man looks to the Young Man and nods to the beast. The Young Man raises his rifle.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
The world needs the wolf because the world needs to be afraid. Without it, man wouldn't know how to behave. Fear brings balance to an otherwise embarrassingly optimistic people.

The Young Man looks down the barrel of his rifle. The coyote stops and turns, looks in their direction and sniffs the air. The Young Man relaxes his finger off the trigger. The coyote stares right at him, like he's daring him to shoot.

The Young Man's trigger finger tenses.

POP. The gunshot shatters the silence and he lowers his rifle. He looks proud.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Go get it.

EXT. TREE - DAY

The Old Man sharpens his knife while standing over two dead coyotes lying in the snow. Small smears of blood splay across their chest where bullets pierced them.

OLD MAN

Many only embrace one side of a thing, but there are always two sides. Beauty and ugliness. Obedience and rebellion. *Life and death*. These concepts only have meaning in relationship to one another. Nothing is alive without the necessary death happening all around it to make it so. There is so much death at any given moment that one must ask what life even is.

He cuts through tendons on the back of each knee and sticks a rope through the two legs.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Only the Son of Man knows what life really is because he died and kept on living. Understand him and you begin to understand everything.

The Old Man throws the rope over a branch of a tree and pulls the coyote up so that it's hanging by its hind legs.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Watch me and learn.

He cuts the hide around each rear knee in a single circular stroke for each knee. He grabs the skin and begins pulling down on it, ripping the skin off each leg.

He goes through the whole process - from the tail to the face.

The Young Man skins the other one. Whereas the Old Man drew no blood during the process, the Young Man cuts too deep here and there and blood covers his hands and drips from the nose and chin of the upside down coyote, leaving little red divots on the white snow.

The Young Man picks up some white snow and tries to clean the blood off of his hands.

They roll up the skins into two separate bundles and place them next to the gutted coyotes on the sled.

Red and white marbled flesh, a bit of purple. Without their fur they look fetal and paltry.

EXT. BARN - DAY

The Old Man and Young Man place the dogs back in their pen. The Old Man picks up the two gutted coyotes, one in each hand, and throws them over the fence into the pen with the dogs. The dogs casually bite into them.

YOUNG MAN

You feed them to your dogs?

OLD MAN

Even the God of Israel let his children eat from the sacrifice.

INT. BARN - DAY

A large battery charges on a workbench. On the ground next to the snowmobile are new hoses and wires. The Young man is bent over the engine.

LATER.

He closes the hood of the snowmobile and sits on the seat and clicks a switch on the handlebars and turns the key. The engine won't turn over. It sputters and stops a few times.

He looks inside the gas tank and rocks the snowmobile back and forth and hears no splashing, sees no fuel.

He walks over to a group gas tanks of various conditions and sizes on a shelf, picking them each up and looking for gasoline. They're all empty. He tosses one onto the ground in a reserved frustration. He stands with his hands on his hips and looks down at them.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. FISH HOUSE - DAY

A hand auger and wooden handled ice saw lean against the wall of the fish house. The Old Man cuts a round hole in the ice with another saw. He holds it in front of him, pulling up and pushing down with ease. With each piercing push, slivers of wet ice form along the surface and leave an outline of the saw's path.

He slices to the end where he began, then cuts the circle in half twice, leaving four separate triangular pieces of ice.

He turns the ice saw upside down and pushes the handle onto one chunk of ice until it sinks and floats away from view.

The loose ice bumps underneath the great ice sheet away from the hole. He does this for each remaining piece.

The gaping hole is now large enough for an average sized man to dive into. It looks black.

EXT. BARN - WOODPILE - DAY

A splitting maul CRACKS and slides through a piece of hard wood.

The Young Man tosses the split pieces into a nearby pile next to the barn and takes another log and sits it upright on a broader stump. He raises the splitting maul above his head and lets it fall and crash into the log.

Small pieces of bark burst off in different directions. He does this several times.

He stabs the heavy maul into the stump. Nearby, a shelter houses an already neatly stacked woodpile. He picks up an armful of wood and walks to the shelter, stacks them left to right.

Suddenly, he winces and drops the wood and falls to his knees.

UNKNOWN - DAY

The skin of a Snake up close as it moves. Covered in red light.

EXT. BARN - WOODPILE - DAY

The Young Man puts his hands to his head as if he can feel and see the presence of the Snake. He looks up to the road. Around the camp. No one is around.

UNKNOWN - DAY

Again, the skin of a Snake up close as it moves. Covered in red light.

EXT. BARN - WOODPILE - DAY

The Young Man stands to his feet and the presence of the Snake feels stronger and nearly overwhelms him. He looks to the road again. He stares and just barely, far off is the police car.

He falls to the earth and crawls behind the woodpile.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

The Deputy nibbles on one of his fingernails, picks his nose. Snow dusts the road and the sky is gray. The white dashes in the middle of the road stutter by.

EXT. BIBLE CAMP ENTRANCE - DAY

The Deputy pulls into the camp.

EXT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - DAY

The Old Man's truck is parked at his house. The Deputy stops there and gets out of his car and knocks on the door. No answer.

He knocks harder, gives up and starts walking toward the retreat center.

INT. RETREAT CENTER - FOYER - DAY

The Deputy stands inside the foyer.

DEPUTY
Hello? Anybody here?

INT. RETREAT CENTER - RANDOM ROOMS - DAY

The Deputy searches inside various rooms and closets.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

The Deputy looks in the window of the Young Man's cabin and sees a backpack and sleeping bag in the farthest corner.

INT. CABIN - DAY

The Deputy looks through the backpack and finds a photo of the Young Man and his family. The two Brothers stand with their parents between them. The Young Man looks shy and the Brother smiles big and fake.

DEPUTY
Well I'll be damned.

He puts the photo in his pocket.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

Sitting in the driver's seat, the Deputy calls into the station.

DEPUTY
Dispatch come in.

No response from the station.

DEPUTY (CONT'D)
Dispatch come in.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

The light on a dispatch radio is lighting up. A hockey game plays loudly on the television. The Deputy's voice is too low to be heard above the game.

DEPUTY (O.S.)
(loudly)
Dispatch. Come. In.

The Sheriff has his feet up on his desk watching the game. Wayne Gretzky scores a goal.

SHERIFF
Whoo hoo! Yeah!

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

The Deputy sighs and hangs up the receiver. He gets out of the cruiser and starts walking.

EXT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - DAY

The Deputy looks down at the snow. He follows a set of footprints.

EXT. BARN - WOODPILE - DAY

The Deputy stands where the Young Man was chopping wood. He looks down at the snow and walks to the shelter housing the chopped wood and sees nothing of note.

INT. BARN - DAY

The Deputy opens the barn door. Just in the entryway on the ground are chunks of snow from someone stomping their boots clean. The leading footprints dissipate farther from the door.

He flips the switch and the lights BUZZ on.

The Young Man sees nothing but darkness beneath the tarp covering both him and the snowmobile. He is draped over the seat and tightly embracing it like a scared cat on a high tree branch. He tries to breath quietly in and out through his mouth.

The footsteps of the Deputy move across the floor through the barn, getting closer to the Young Man with each step. He can see the Deputy's feet. Then he doesn't. The Deputy looks behind some plywood leaning up against the wall then circles back to the dusty tarp.

The Young Man holds his breath and his heart THUMPS loud. The Deputy lifts a corner of the tarp but stops when he sees it's just the front section of a snowmobile. If he'd lift it a little higher, he would see the Young Man clenching his seat, but he doesn't.

He lets go of the tarp and takes quick steps across the barn and flips off the light and walks out and leaves the door open behind him.

The Young Man listens to the crunch of the Deputy's boots in the snow until he can hear them no more. He relaxes and takes big, deep and panicked breaths, then throws the tarp off.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

The Deputy follows the smooth path of the dogsled out onto the prairie. Snow drifts line the latent fields in no discernible pattern. Dark clouds threaten from the West and the wind picks up.

He puts his gloved hands in the front pockets of his jacket. The cold air stings. He stays on the path.

Eventually, he sees the Old Man's lone fish house. The Old Man stands outside the door and smokes his pipe. Even this far away the Deputy can see that the Old Man's eyes are dead set on him.

DEPUTY
What the hell?

EXT. FISH HOUSE - DAY

The dogs lie or stand, whichever their preference, on the ice and track the lawman. The Old Man goes inside the fish house and leaves the door open.

INT. FISH HOUSE - DAY

From his view from his seat, the Old Man sees no more than what he needs to see - the ice, the snow, the Deputy walking toward him.

He deeply inhales the Fire from his pipe and bites down on the stem. He patiently waits.

The Deputy gets closer.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

The Young Man followed just far enough behind the Deputy that he is less likely to be seen. He watches the Deputy walking on the frozen water.

EXT. FISH HOUSE - DAY

The Deputy walks cautiously with his eyes on the dogs and pauses just outside the door of the fish house.

OLD MAN (O.S.)
Come on in and close the door. It's getting cold in here.

The Deputy looks to the dogs, then at the Old Man. A tense stare down. He crosses the threshold and closes the door.

DEPUTY
I knew somethin' wasn't right about you.

OLD MAN
Suppose you did.

DEPUTY
Why are you hiding that boy?

OLD MAN
Wouldn't say I'm hiding him.

DEPUTY
What would you say then?

The Old Man puffs on his pipe and raises a single eyebrow.

OLD MAN
That there's something inside of
him that wants to come out and it
can only come out here.

Another puff. The Deputy searches his thoughts.

DEPUTY
Where is he?

OLD MAN
Just outside. He followed you.

The Deputy turns and opens the door. Cold air whistles in. In the distance, the Young Man falls flat on the ground to hide from the Deputy.

All five dogs stand just outside the door and block the Deputy from leaving. They are growling and showing their teeth and the hair is standing on the backs of their necks. Only the Black Dog is barking.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
Wouldn't if I were you.

The Deputy puts his hand on his holster and closes the door and turns around.

DEPUTY
What's goin' on here?

OLD MAN
Nothing that isn't going on
everywhere in one way or another.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

The Young Man watches the fish house and the dogs. They bark angry and mean at the fish house. They surround it. They jump. They scratch at the ice. They growl.

A gunshot goes off from inside the fish house and the dogs act even more agitated.

INT. FISH HOUSE - DAY

The Old Man is bent over on his knees pushing the Deputy beneath the water through the hole in the ice. He clenches his teeth and looks down with absolute determination. The Old Man holds him down with one hand gripping a fistful of the Deputy's hair.

The Deputy claws at that hand and the other that the Old Man braces himself with from falling in.

Water splashes, the Deputy's arms flail wildly and punch and reach and grab, but it doesn't matter.

EXT. UNDERWATER - DAY

From below the ice, looking up, the water is clear and the ice a cloudy baby blue. The light pouring through the hole in the ice looks like a spotlight above an underwater stage revealing the Deputy's panicked arms and legs. The sound of splashing and the barking dogs are muted in this underworld.

The Deputy yells but the gargled words are inaudible. Big empty bubbles shoot out of the Deputy's mouth and he coughs. The frigid water pours into his lungs. His arms punch softer, slower. His legs stop kicking.

His arms delicately float above his head as if he's raising them in praise or attention or just floating deadness. The dogs stop barking.

The Old Man lets go of the Deputy's hair. It sways pretty in the water as hair in water does and in death the Deputy looks happy and calm.

The Old Man leaves his arm in the water just long enough for one of the Deputy's curling hands to slink past his own. It looks a wet reflection of Michelangelo's God and Adam reaching for one another.

The Deputy's body slowly sinks and disappears into the darkness.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

The Young Man is still lying on his belly and looking toward the fish house. He sees the unflustered Old Man exit the fish house, alone.

The Old Man begins to attach the dogs to the sled. The Young Man hops up and starts running back toward camp.

He runs as fast as he can. Snow sprays behind him and bounces off his back and legs. He slips and falls, gets up and runs even faster.

Behind him the Old Man slides into view.

The Old Man and his dogs overcome the Young Man. The Young Man stops running. He's breathing hard and spits out the cold onto the snow. The dogs pant and the cold air shows their breath.

YOUNG MAN
Did you kill him?

OLD MAN
Yes.

YOUNG MAN
I don't understand. I don't understand any of this.

OLD MAN
Would you rather him have taken you?

YOUNG MAN
No. Of course not.

OLD MAN
Then get on. We need to get his car.

The Young Man looks back toward the fish house.

YOUNG MAN
I don't want this. I don't want any of this.

OLD MAN
Neither did the Son of Man in the garden, yet there he was. And here we are.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

From way up in the sky like a bird looking down, the police car makes its way across snow. It reaches the frozen lake and rolls onto the ice and stops in the middle near the fish house. The Old Man and Young Man get out and close the doors behind them.

EXT. FISH HOUSE - DAY

The car engine idles and the Old Man and Young Man are each cutting into the ice with an ice saw. They cut an outline around the car. The ice starts to crack from the weight of the car before they can finish.

The ice pops, and the front end of the car starts to sink. Then the rear. It barely splashes and disappears into the water, leaving behind a giant rectangular hole in the ice.

OLD MAN

The hole will be frozen by morning.

The Old Man starts walking. The Young Man stares down into the water.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

The Old Man and Young Man descend the dark stairs into the Old Man's basement. They stop at the door with the bright light emanating from around it.

OLD MAN

Open it.

The Young Man does.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - GLOWING ROOM

UNKNOWN POV from behind a plant. The door slowly opens. The Old Man walks in but the Young Man doesn't cross the threshold.

END POV.

Shelves line the walls filled with an assortment of fruits and vegetable, herbs, and exotic flowers.

There's a tree limb lying on the top of a patch of sand. The room looks a cross between a garden and an atrium for a living reptile, but more garden than atrium.

A sink in the corner. A small table with various garden tools laid out on it. Red fluorescent lights hang from the ceiling and are turned off. A humidifier hums.

The Young Man stands at the doorway. He doesn't want to go in. The Old Man takes a pair of clippers and begins trimming dying blooms off a yellow orchid. He preaches.

OLD MAN

You think I should not have killed the Deputy? What then of your vision? It brought you here for what - to be taken by that man? No. God the Father has brought you here, as he did me, as he did that Deputy. And everything is as it should be. It will always be that way.

UNKNOWN POV moving behind another plant. The Old Man fills a stainless steel water bucket with water and briefly looks toward what's behind the plant.

END POV.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

These plants. Have they choice? No. They are made to be what they are. Their nature makes it so. I provide the proper conditions for them to thrive and they do. If I don't, they won't. They have no choice. God is the gardener. We are his plants.

He pours water on some plants.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

You killed your brother so you ran. In your running you ended up here. While here you saw a place that you have seen since you were a boy. You want to leave but you won't. And still you believe in choice?

He hands the Young Man a tomato.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

You think I am protecting you? You think I am doing so by choice? No, I am only doing what I am doing because I am doing it. He made me a protector. So I protect. You will see.

The Young Man looks at the tomato, barely squeezes it.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

The uneaten tomato sits on the Young Man's nightstand.

The sun has yet to rise and the morning is still like night. The Young Man stands in the dark of his cabin at a window and watches the Old Man eat breakfast at his table in front of the large window.

The red light over the barn door glows and the snow looks red.

INT. CABIN - DAY

The Young Man has not moved. The sky is lighting up behind the gray clouds. The Old Man brushes the evenings snow off his trucks windows.

He drives out of the camp. The Young Man stands at the window and doesn't move until the engine can't be heard.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

The Young Man walks fast across the camp toward the barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

The Young Man gathers the sled and harnesses and lays them out just as the Old Man did for the children. He takes a red gas canister and places it on the sled. He tries to stand tall at the dog's gate.

YOUNG MAN

I saw you with those kids.

He waits a moment and opens the gate and one by one each of them calmly walk out and stand in front of the sled at the spot they know to be their place.

The Black Dog sits defiantly on his hind legs inside the pen. The Young Man looks it in its dark eyes and senses that it isn't going anywhere so he closes the gate and hooks the other dogs into the harness.

EXT. ROAD 5 - SHELTERBELT - DAY

It is snowing, softly at first and then harder. The sky is getting darker. A storm is brewing. The sled slides across a frozen road and the Young Man and dogs are as one already. He doesn't know where they're going.

They stop near a healthy shelterbelt of evergreen trees insulating an isolated farmhouse and shop. The Young Man takes the gas canister and sneaks through the trees.

EXT. ELDERLY COUPLE'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

The Young Man sneaks his up to a large pick up truck in the just snowplowed driveway. He looks through the passenger window. No keys. To the side of the shop he sees two above ground storage tanks that likely have unleaded gasoline and diesel in them. The lights are on in the house and he looks over the hood of truck to see two people through the window and he ducks down.

INT. ELDERLY COUPLE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

An elderly married couple sits at a round table each across from one another and read the newspaper and drink coffee. The ELDERLY HUSBAND spreads his paper wide with his gruff hands, holding it close to his aging eyes. The ELDERLY WIFE lays hers on the table and holds one corner up with one hand while the fingers of her other circle the coffee mugs handle.

A smooth slow waltz emanates from the stereo on the side table beneath a glass frame full of neatly arranged arrowheads hanging on the wall.

He grunts and turns the page. She snuffles and has a drink.

A brown cat jumps on the kitchen counter near the sink to look out the window.

ELDERLY WIFE
You get off that counter!

The cat doesn't move. It stares toward the truck where the Young Man is hunkered down and shielding himself from the window's view. Its tail flickers.

The Elderly Wife rolls up the paper and rises, waving the paper wad at the cat. Her reading glasses dangle from a beaded chain and bounce around on her chest.

ELDERLY WIFE (CONT'D)
I said *GIT!*

Before she can swat it, the cat meows annoyed and leaps from the counter to the floor and trots into the living room.

ELDERLY WIFE (CONT'D)
Damn cat.

Her husband keeps his eyes on the paper.

ELDERLY HUSBAND
You wanted it.

ELDERLY WIFE

I don't want its *ass* on my kitchen counter.

ELDERLY HUSBAND

I want your *ass* on the kitchen counter.

ELDERLY WIFE

I would if you could.

ELDERLY HUSBAND

Wish I could.

They laugh and peck kiss each other and go back to their coffee. If they would look up and out the window, they would see the Young Man running to the storage containers, but they never do.

EXT. FUEL STORAGE CONTAINERS - DAY

The snow is falling heavier. The Young Man reaches up for a handle and squeezes the lever until a clear liquid squirts out and he puts his nose close and smells it. Diesel - not what he wants. He does the same for the other one and fills up the container and runs back to the sled.

EXT. ROAD 6 - DAY

The Young Man and dogs take off back toward camp. It is snowing so hard now that he can't see where they are going, or if they are even on the road. He can hardly see the dogs in front.

They go fast and the sled starts to sway and he struggles to keep his balance. The gas canister falls over and he reaches down for it and the front of his foot catches the road and he falls. He holds onto the sled and is dragged as the dogs don't slow much less stop and he tries to not let go. □

One side of his face grinds against the frozen ground and he groans. His head slams against a protruding rock and he is knocked unconscious. His hands let go of the sled and he lays there not moving.

Red blood quietly spreads from his scraped face across the white snow and ice. Falling snow falls on top of the fresh blood and melts away.

The dogs slide on, faster now without him, and all is quiet but the wind and the Young Man's breathing.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The Old Man sits at his table and looks out the window. It's nearly a white out. Nothing can be seen but sideways snow. The Black Dog is crouched at his side and waits with him. A harness lies nearby on the ground.

EXT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - DAY

The Old Man and the Black Dog walk out into the blizzard. The dogs and sled appear out of the white nothing. He looks over the sled and adjusts the harnesses attached to the beasts. He puts the Black Dog in the front and gets on the sled and without hearing anything the dogs begin running again.

He disappears into the white wall of snow.

EXT. ROAD 6 - DAY

The Old Man and his dogs slide on the familiar road, retracing the same path from before, now not visible from the pounding snow. The dogs stop in what looks like nowhere in particular but the Old Man gets off the sled and walks to the Young Man, lying in the road unconscious and covered in snow.

The Old Man picks him up with ease and places him in the sled, leaning him against the wall of it.

One side of the Young Man's face is scraped up badly and frostbite has set in on his cheek. Blood, dirt, and snow coalesce together into one swollen ugly thing.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

The Old Man rings out a bloody rag into a bowl and wipes the Young Man's face clear of blood and debris. He is unconscious and laid out naked in a hot steaming bath.

The Old Man shaves around the long gash on the Young Man's head and then stitches the skin back together. With his fingertips he places a homemade looking green paste over the wounds and on his face. He does so matter of factly with such precision that any need for gentleness is unnecessary.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - FIREPLACE - DAY

The Young Man lies on a soft pallet of blankets on the floor by the Fire. His hair is combed and dry. His face is clean but badly swollen and turning colors like a late sunset. He will likely have permanent scars on both his head and face.

The Old Man sits in his rocking chair, cups his warm pipe with one hand, and looks down thoughtfully at the sleeping Young Man. A coal pops out of the Fire and hits against the protective iron Fire screen, falling onto the stone, glowing at first, then not.

The Young Man's eyes are closed but moving fast and worried beneath his eyelids.

EXT. MONTAGE - VARIOUS - DAY AND NIGHT

--In the night, snow rages in front of the red light over the barn door.

--Kneeling on one knee, the Old Man pushes and pulls a cross cut saw through the trunk of a dead standing cottonwood tree. The tree creaks and cracks, falling over and denting the winter hardened ground.

--The Sheriff talks with the Old Man in his driveway. They shake hands and the Sheriff drives away.

--Cold wild horses gather in a tight circle, shielding themselves from wind and snow.

--A white owl with yellow eyes perches on a snow covered branch and takes a big breath and exhales.

--Two beavers sleep in their den.

--Foxes in theirs.

--Morose buffalos with puffy snow covering their coats and the apricot colored sun behind them.

--The Old Man plays the organ in his basement. A restrained song. Dark.

--The bright blue sky with a single flat white cloud that looks like nothing.

--The sun sparkles off some icy snow.

--The Old Man picks up the fish house with a tractor.

--Green northern lights oscillate inside the black sky.

--A shifty mink skirts along a frozen bank of a slough.

--A coyote caught by the leg lays in a trap, laying on its side and breathing heavily.

--A northern pike fish nibbles on the sunken dead Deputy's eyeballs.

END MONTAGE

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

The marred Young Man opens his eyes and sees the Old Man looking down over him.

OLD MAN

There we are.

The Young Man hurts. He winces and touches his face and winces again. He gently presses his palm to his bruised chin and jaw and forehead.

YOUNG MAN

How-
(coughs)

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

How long have I been out?

OLD MAN

Three days. Shall I point out the obvious?

The Young Man sits up.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

What I envy most about the Son is that he had more than just ideas - he was a man of action and his death proved it. People undervalue the person who chooses to die so that someone else can live, but he said there's no greater love than to *sacrifice* yourself for others. I believe he meant it, because he did it himself. And the way he did it...so quietly. Before his executioners, he said practically nothing to defend himself. In all of history, there was never a moment of more *power* on display than that silent sacrifice.

The Old Man raises a hand up and looks at his palm. He spreads his fingers wide and slowly clenches his hand into a fist.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
I know you're confused, but clarity
is coming. Go back to your cabin,
rest some more. Come here in the
morning. You will see.

He releases his fist. The Young Man says nothing.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - DESK - NIGHT

The Old Man sits at his desk. He clicks the Ham radio on. Static and strange electrical noises come and go. He picks up the microphone.

OLD MAN
The boy is ready.

More static. He waits. Breaking out of the static, like from some far away place, a VOICE responds.

VOICE (O.S.)
Let it be done.

More static. The Old Man clicks off the radio and all is silent. He reaches for his tobacco pipe and tin. He opens the tin and like a patient artist perfectly packs the bowl. He rises, grabbing a box of matches on the way up.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

He walks to the glowing room, red light beaming around the door. He opens the door and leaves it cracked open just a few inches. As he does so, half of his body is covered in red light.

He puts more wood into the Fire, stirring the coals. He sits in his rocking chair, puts the stem of his tobacco pipe into his mouth, and strikes a match.

The Flame hovers over the black tobacco and burns upside down as the Old Man sucks in a deep breath. The tobacco catches Fire and glows like hot lava. It barely pops and whistles. When he stops his inhale, white smoke slowly creeps up and out of the tobacco like it's in no hurry. Like it's been a long time coming.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

A lamp on the dresser is on. The Young Man sits atop his bed, leans his back and head against the wall. He taps the tips of his big toes together and looks toward the door. Next to it, just beneath the light switch, sits the full gas canister that fell off the sled.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - DOOR - DAY

The sky is blue, the snow soft and new. The Young Man finds the loyal Black Dog waiting outside the door of the Old Man's house. He hesitates and the Dog's tail wags as it approaches him. It licks his hands.

The Young Man reluctantly pats it on the head and then knocks on the door. No answer.

He opens the door.

YOUNG MAN

Hello?

No response.

INT. OLD MAN'S BASEMENT - DAY

The Young Man descends the stairs and the Black Dog follows behind him. The glowing room door is cracked open. Red light floods the room. He doesn't see it, but on the floor just near his stepping feet is the Snake's shed skin. He closes the door.

He turns to walk toward the Fire burning big and loud, like it was just made or has and always will be burning so bright.

The Old Man is slumped over in his rocking chair in front of it. His head is leaning onto one of his shoulders. The Young Man is some steps behind him when he stops. He pauses near more Snake skin on the ground, but again he doesn't see it.

YOUNG MAN

I'm here.

No movement from the Old Man. He slowly walks in front of him and sees his eyes are wide open and unmoving. Black veins flare angrily across his pale neck, beneath his chin and up his cheeks. He is not breathing and his mouth is open.

The Snake is coiled up on his lap and looks at the Young Man. It sticks its tongue out and in as snakes do. The Young Man shows no fear or anything resembling shock.

The Young Man kneels on both knees in front of the Old Man and smiles a devilish grin. The same kind of smile often on the face of the Old Man. He inhales deep and his chest and chin rise as he reaches out to embrace the familiar Snake.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY - MONTHS LATER

A mouse creeps along the baseboard of the floor of the Old Man's house until it reaches a trap with peanut butter spread across it. The mouse licks it and sets off the trap and it POPS and captures the mouse and shoots into the air and spins around and lands on the floor. Above the trap is a window.

Just outside sits the Young Man puffing on the Old Man's pipe. The sky is blue and the grass is green.

EXT. OLD MAN'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

The Young Man's hair is slicked back and he's wearing all black and his face is healed but scarred on one side. There are what look like thousands of little moving mirrors floating on top of the lake reflecting the sun.

Children in the distance sing a song.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Through the POV of the Snake, the bright green field rushes by, faster and faster, closer to the children singing at the firepit.

EXT. FIREPIT - DAY

The Snake circles around the children, unseen, inching its way closer...closer to the children.

A kid sits on a bench and sways his legs to the beat of a song. He looks down and sees the Snake as it strikes him. He lifts his leg to avoid being bitten and screams.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.