

1 EXT. THE STAMPEDE TRAIL - DAY

1

SUPER:

Tuesday, April 28th 1992

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

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

DIRECTOR

Hey!

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

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

Come here.

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

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

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)

(referring to items we see
sitting on dashboard)

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

We STAY on the DRIVER as BACKPACK speaks:

BACKPACK

Keep it.

DIRECTOR

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

BACKPACK

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

BACKPACK (CONT'D)

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

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

DRIVER

(handing him the boots)

Take em.

There is a pause as Backpack considers accepting the boots.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

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

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

BACKPACK

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

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

CUT TO:

CU: driver

CLICK. He snaps the shot.

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

DRIVER

You gonna be alright?

BACKPACK

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

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

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

BACK TO:

ORIGINAL WIDE-SHOT:

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

DISSOLVE TO:

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

SUPER:

May 1990

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TIME CUT:

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

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

CHRIS (V.O.)

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

(MORE)

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

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

CUT TO:

3 INT. ATLANTA RESTAURANT - LATER

3

(Graduation ceremony wardrobe)

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

BILLIE
 Here they are.

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

4 INT. DATSUN

4

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

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

CARINE
 Who wrote that?

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

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

CHRIS (CONT'D)
 There's a lot of great poems in there.

CARINE
Thanks, big brother.

They exit the car and frame.

5 INT. ATLANTA RESTAURANT - SAME

5

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

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

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

WALT
Congratulations, son.

They all sit and pick up menus.

CHRIS
I'm starving.

TIME CUT:

6 INT. ATLANTA RESTAURANT - LATER

6

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

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

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

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

BILLIE
That's very specific.

CHRIS
I had to go to the bank this morning.

WALT

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

CHRIS

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

BILLIE

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

WALT

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

CHRIS

(reluctantly)

Sure, I will.

Carine's not so sure.

BILLIE

You promise?

CHRIS

(whining)

Mom.

BILLIE

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

WALT

We want to get you out of that junker.

CHRIS

What's a junker?

Walt points outside to the Datsun.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

The Datsun?

WALT

Yes. We want to get you a new car.

CHRIS

(appalled)

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

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)

(Mocking the Cadillac)

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

BILLIE

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

CHRIS

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

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

CHRIS (CONT'D)

But, thanks anyway.

WALT

Everything's gotta be difficult.

CHRIS

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

The group returns to some superficial calm.

CARINE

I wouldn't say no to a new car.

CHRIS

(mumbling a rib)

Ivana Trump McCandless.

CARINE

(laughing it off)

Shut up, Chris.

(to her parents, seriously)

Seriously, I'll pay you back.

CUT TO:

7

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

7

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

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

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

TIME CUT:

8

INT. OFF-CAMPUS ROOMING HOUSE - NIGHT

8

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

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

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

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

DISSOLVE TO:

9

EXT. ATLANTA HIGHWAY - SUNRISE'

9

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

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

PRESENTATION TITLES and MUSIC carry OVER:

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

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

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

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

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

END PRESENTATION TITLES. FADE MUSIC

11 EXT. DETRITAL WASH - TWILIGHT 11

ANGLE: WEST-FACING

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

ANGLE: EAST-FACING

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

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

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

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

12 INT. DATSUN - NIGHT 12

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