

Bison Man

by

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FADE IN:

INT. WORKING CLASS BEDROOM, AUSTIN TEXAS - DAY

WILLIE JOHNSON (60s), African-American with sad eyes revealing a childlike innocence, watches a small television from bed. He wears a t-shirt and pajama bottoms.

SALLY JOHNSON (60s), cute African-American with hip, short hair, lies alongside him, scheming. She wears a pretty nightgown.

Willie pulls the blanket up over his shoulders.

ON THE TV

The NEWS ANNOUNCER (50), a dignified Latinx, grows solemn.

NEWS ANNOUNCER  
Minority employment will remain  
down. The City Council voted today  
to continue current hiring levels.

BACK TO SCENE

Willie makes a perceptible wince.

Sally seductively leans over Willie to reach the clicker on the night stand, and turns off the television.

She eases back the blanket to admire his body.

SALLY  
My, my!

Sally gently strokes the side of his body, then pinches a small roll of fat at his waist.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
Lovely, prime marbling.

Willie attempts to ignore her humorous efforts.

She gently caresses his buttocks. Sally grunts in a provocative manner.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
Powerful, toned loins.

Willie suppresses a chuckle, then looks at her with feigned annoyance.

Big mistake. A mischievous expression slowly spreads across Sally's face.

She pokes his buttocks until she locates a suitable spot, then playfully bites him.

WILLIE

Hey!

Willie grabs Sally and tickles her until she squeals.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Do you have any idea how old I am?

SALLY

You're still a vigorous young man.

WILLIE

I'm old. I need my sleep.

SALLY

You need love.

WILLIE

I'm losing my hair, my eyesight, my firm stomach, my....

Sally interrupts him with a seductive kiss.

SALLY

Your children are grown. It's time to play.

The ALARM goes off, and Sally pounces to turn it off.

SALLY (CONT'D)

That wasn't the alarm.

WILLIE

I can't be late for my retirement party.

Willie gets up and starts for the bathroom.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I'm telling your mother what kind of a daughter she raised.

Sally smiles, then almost immediately registers her disappointment at his rejection.

SALLY

Willie? What's wrong?

The FAUCET (O.S.) turns ON, then OFF. Willie wipes his face with a towel in the doorway.

WILLIE

Nothing.

Willie takes his wristwatch from the sink and puts it on.

SALLY

Was it the letter?

WILLY

Nothing's wrong.

SALLY

Maybe it's time for you to go see your dad.

Willie firmly closes the bathroom door between them.

Sally looks at the television with disdain, then unplugs it.

INT. CAR - DAY

Willie and Sally drive with a fishing rod case between them.

WILLIE

Thirty years. They meet me in the parking lot with a fishing pole.

SALLY

On the bright side - full pension soon, social security in a few years, the house paid off, and me.

Willie nods without conviction.

SALLY (CONT'D)

Maya's family's coming tomorrow afternoon.

WILLIE

Is her dad still pissed-off about the wedding?

SALLY

Seems like.

WILLIE

He doesn't want James in the family because he's too handsome? Too intelligent? Too tall?

SALLY

We're going to get along just fine.

Willie stops at a red light, and looks out the window.

A GIANT STUFFED BISON

stands on the corner in front of a taxidermy shop along with a variety of other stuffed animals, furniture, and rugs.

BACK TO SCENE

Willie's eyes remain glued to the bison.

Sally pats his hand.

SALLY

Honey. The light.

WILLIE

I've got some ideas for the house.

SALLY

Joy.

INT. DOUBLE GARAGE - DAY

Willie enters carrying the small TV from the bedroom.

He clears a space on a shelf, and sets it down.

Willie surveys the piled-up mess. A small motorboat on a trailer sits in the opposite half of the garage.

He opens several boxes, then holds up a team sweater.

Willie clears a spot on a ratty chair, takes out a children's cowboy hat, a holster, and toy pistols. He twirls the pistols.

WILLIE

Oh, man!

Willie takes out a photograph and stares at it.

INSERT: PHOTOGRAPH

JOSEPH JOHNSON (20s), Willie's debonair father, sporting a classy Italian cap, dazzles with his smile.

BACK TO SCENE

Willie sets the photo down on the shelf in front of him and takes an envelope out of his pocket.

He removes the letter, reads it, then emits a deep sigh.

INT. BRONX, NEW YORK KITCHEN - NIGHT - FLASHBACK (1964)

Joseph Johnson, slightly tipsy and wearing the same cap as the photograph, splashes hot chocolate as he sets it down in front of WILLIE (at 6), adorable with big eyes.

Willie attempts to drink, but it burns his lip.

Joseph sits down, takes a spoonful of hot chocolate, blows on it, then feeds it lovingly to his son.

JOSEPH

Hot and thick! That's how we like it.

MARTHA JOHNSON (20s), disheveled, tired, and frowning enters the room carrying a baby.

MARTHA

What happened at work?

JOSEPH

I was fired.

MARTHA

What this time?

JOSEPH

They hired a Puerto Rican 'cause they can pay him less, then they accused me of stealing.

MARTHA

Did you?

Joseph looks at her in disbelief. He starts to angrily respond, then sighs in despair.

Willie observes in fear. END FLASHBACK.

BACK TO SCENE

Willie stares at the photo with tears in his eyes.

WILLIE

You just left. Never wrote. Never called.

JAMES JOHNSON (30s), an athletic, outgoing replica of his grandfather, cautiously enters the garage.

Startled, Willie wipes the tears from his eyes.

James notices the picture of Joseph.

JAMES

Grandpa?

WILLIE

Yes.

JAMES

When was the last time you talked to him?

WILLIE

He called before my wedding. Drunk. Ranting. I hung up on him. He never called again.

James awkwardly waits for his father to elaborate.

JAMES

Mom says he's in Denver.

WILLIE

A retirement home. He contacted my cousin.

JAMES

Maybe he wants to get in touch.

Taken aback, Willie doesn't respond.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I need your advice. I'm not sure who to invite to keep it small.

James hands Willie a list. Willie recoils at a smell.

WILLIE

Have you been drinking?

JAMES

Beer. Pizza. It's okay, Dad. We can do this later.

Willie blankly stares at the list without speaking.

James awkwardly waits for a response.

Willie tries to form words, but can't find any.

WILLIE

I ... um ... what ... ?

Willie seems to be having a full-blown panic attack.

JAMES

Are you okay?

WILLIE

I'll be alright.

James observes his father for a moment, then exits.

Willie sees something in the box that draws his attention.

He reaches down, reverentially lifts his father's Italian cap, then places it near his heart.

INT. DOUBLE GARAGE - DAY

Old trophies stand neatly on the shelves. Family pictures, travel posters of Roy Rogers, Sitting Bull, the Tetons, and Old Faithful cover the walls.

Willie royally sits in an easy chair with the gigantic bison (six feet tall and ten feet long) behind him.

Sally jauntily enters, then immediately recoils at the bison.

SALLY

Shit.

WILLIE

Only fifty dollars. I've loved them since I was a kid watching Westerns.

SALLY

Who are you? No. Hell, no.

WILLIE

I can feel my powers returning.

Willie pats the bison and some hair sticks to his hand. He amorously advances toward Sally.

SALLY

Willie!



Concerned, Sally considers the beast, then Willie. She's distracted by a picture of James and Willie.

SALLY (CONT'D)

My guys.

She sets down the picture.

SALLY (CONT'D)

You should spend more time with him.

WILLIE

He's busy.

SALLY

No. He's worried about you. You hassled him about a beer?

(she studies him)

Are you...?

WILLIE

No!

Willie's eyes wander to the photo of his father on the shelf.

Sally notices the photo and frowns.

SALLY

This is James' time, Willie.

(looks at bison)

This goes.

WILLIE

How about a dog?

SALLY

Dog's good.

Sally frowns and exits.

Suddenly annoyed, Willie sets the photo onto the shelf with a jarring CLINK. The picture falls over, but doesn't break.

He sets the photo upright, and begins to cry.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sally hears Willie CRY (O.S.), and starts toward the open doorway to the garage.

She changes her mind, leans against the wall, registering her concern.

INT. HUMANE SOCIETY - DAY

JILL (20), a lanky, kindly soul, escorts Willie into the kennel. They walk slowly down the aisle of barking dogs.

Most seem desperately needy, several snarl at him. At the end of the aisle a mutt with a soulful sadness quietly watches Willie.

Willie squats down to talk to him.

WILLIE  
You're a handsome guy.

The mutt responds with a quiet woof.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
You talk!

Willie turns to Jill.

JILL  
He's a sweet old guy. Don't know his name. His owner just died.

WILLIE  
I like him.

EXT. HUMANE SOCIETY PLAY AREA - DAY

Willie pets the mutt, then looks around for something to throw.

The mutt lies on the grass depressed.

Willie throws a stick.

WILLIE  
There you go!

The mutt ignores Willie.

Willie tries again with more enthusiasm.

The mutt still ignores him.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry that your owner died.

Willie squats down to pet the indifferent mutt.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

My friend Kevin just died. He and I  
always wanted to be cowboys. None  
of that robot or space shit for us.

Willie stands, and does an imaginary fast draw.

The dog looks concerned.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Kevin was always the Lone Ranger  
and I was always Roy Rogers. We  
didn't know about Buffalo Soldiers  
then.

(sighs)

Roy Rogers. I always wanted a dog  
named Roy.

The mutt subtly glances up.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Roy?

The mutt stares at Willie, then makes a slight GRUNT.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Good. Roy was always singing. I  
liked that about him.

As Willie sings Happy Trails he becomes progressively sadder.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

"Happy trails to you. Until we meet  
again. Happy trails to you. Keep  
smiling until then."

Roy looks away depressed.

INT. DOUBLE GARAGE - NIGHT

Willie sits in the small motorboat on a trailer. Roy,  
ignoring his full bowl of food, watches the bison and  
intermittently growls at it.

The small TV above the workbench plays "The Long, Long  
Trailer", a film starring Desi and Lucy, but muted.

Sally gingerly steps into the garage.

SALLY

How are my boys doing?

Roy and Willie both turn toward her in despair.

SALLY (CONT'D)

Great.

Sally retreats. Willie, thoroughly depressed, casts a fishing line with a bauble against the wall with a THUMP.

WILLIE

Kevin, James and I used to fish.

Willie reels in the line and casts again. THUMP. He glances over at Roy but doesn't reel in the line.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

James hates fishing.

Roy watches Willie with concern.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I'm disappearing. Soon I won't be here.

Willie drops the pole into the boat, then buries his face in his hands.

Roy whimpers, walks across the garage, then cautiously climbs up the trailer hitch.

He steps into the boat, sits alongside Willie, then nuzzles him in sympathy.

Willie smiles in surprise, then lifts Roy to pet him.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Hey, Roy. We're a couple of sad souls aren't we?

Willie takes a handful of treats from a bowl, and offers some to Roy, who gulps them down.

Willie uses the TV remote to turn on the volume.

ON THE TV

Lucy explains to Desi in the "Long, Long Trailer" film why they need a motor home.

LUCY

Can't you just imagine what it would be like? You know, some of the most beautiful country in the world is between here and Colorado. The whole trip would be just like a dream.

BACK TO SCENE

Willie becomes totally engrossed in the film.

WILLIE

We saw this a hundred times. Lucy  
and Ricky get a trailer and drive  
across the country.

Roy appears interested in the discussion.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Kevin and I were going to get a  
trailer and go out West.

ON THE TV

Lucy and Ricky leave a crowded trailer at a motor home  
exhibit. Lucy appears depressed.

RICKY (V.O)

And then we saw it.

A beautiful yellow trailer comes into view.

Lucy appears smitten.

BACK TO SCENE

Willie looks as if he's been struck by a revelation on the  
road to Damascus.

He scans the Western posters on the wall, abruptly sets Roy  
down, then springs out of the boat.

WILLIE

Sally!

INT. WILLIE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Willie rushes in, and startles Sally at the sink.

WILLIE

I want to get an RV and go to  
Wyoming.

SALLY

What?

WILLIE

I'll see my dad, fish in Montana,  
then go to Yellowstone. I've wanted  
to go my whole life.

SALLY

I don't remember any of this in our  
wedding vows.

WILLIE

It was right under -- "Will live in  
Texas for thirty years without  
protest."

SALLY

"Without protest?"

(considers)

If you behave with the Morales  
family, I'll look at RVs with you,  
but lose the bison.

EXT. WILLIE'S DINING ROOM - DAY

Willie, Sally, James, MAYA MORALES (20s), OSCAR MORALES (60s)  
and ELENA MORALES (60s) quietly finish coffee and cake.

Sally valiantly attempts to perk up the group.

SALLY

I'm so glad we finally got to meet  
you. How long have you lived in  
Austin?

ELENA

Almost thirty years. We love it  
here. But none of our children live  
here anymore. Except Maya.

Maya quickly changes the subject.

MAYA

(to Willie)

Dad's a big Texas fan. He  
tailgates.

WILLIE

Is that right?

Strained silence.

JAMES

Mr. Morales also rebuilds old cars.  
He owns a repair shop.

WILLIE

Really?

James points out the window.

JAMES

They drove one today.

Willie peers out the window.

A SLEEK ROADSTER

sits out on the street.

BACK TO SCENE

Oscar abruptly stands up.

OSCAR

Would you like to have a look?

WILLIE

Yes.

Willie jumps up, obviously relieved to be leaving.

Elena flashes a look of annoyance at Oscar.

Sally notices the exchange, and catches Willie's eye.

INT. CAR - DAY

Oscar and Willie rocket down the street.

They SCREECH to a stop at a red light.

OSCAR

I need to ask you something.

WILLIE

Sure.

OSCAR

Are you happy about all this?

WILLIE

Yes. And you?

OSCAR

Can I be blunt?

WILLIE

Sure.

OSCAR

It's nothing against Black people.  
Or in the case of my other kids --  
Anglos. It's just -- she's my last.

The light changes to green and a car HONKS behind them.

Annoyed, Oscar looks in the mirror, then ignores the car.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

What's wrong with me? With my wife  
and me?

The car HONKS again.

Oscar peels through the intersection, pulls over to the side  
of the street, and puts his car in neutral.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Does it seem like too much to ask  
for just one of my grandchildren to  
share my culture?

Willie appears perplexed about how to respond.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

None of my children married a  
Catholic, and God forbid any of  
them would marry a Mexican.

Willie grins at Oscar's unintentionally funny plea.

Oscar watches Willie a moment, then shakes his head in  
humorous exasperation.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Damned kids!

Willie slaps Oscar's hand in sympathy, and they both LAUGH.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

You teach them to stand on their  
own two feet, then they walk away.  
It's not right.

WILLIE

We love Maya. You did a great job.

Oscar appears very moved by Willie's response. He clasps  
Willie's hand affectionately.



OSCAR  
Could I buy you a beer, Willie?

WILLIE  
I don't drink, but I'd like a ride  
in this fine car.

OSCAR  
Bueno.

Oscar puts the car in gear, then leans toward Willie with a great secret.

OSCAR (CONT'D)  
My wife says I build hot rods  
because I'm a pathetic, middle-  
aged, macho Mexican afraid of  
growing old and dying.

WILLIE  
(in Spanish)  
What would she say if you bought a  
stuffed bison?

Oscar looks surprised that Willie speaks Spanish. He laughs.

OSCAR  
(in Spanish)  
That I was crazy.

The two middle-aged guys share a look of recognition, then laugh until tears come to their eyes.

OSCAR (CONT'D)  
(in Spanish)  
A stuffed bison! Fabulous!

Oscar peels out from the curb and they rocket down the street.

INT. WILLIE'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sally, in her bathrobe, haltingly plays a melancholy song at the piano while Willie lounges on the couch. She frowns and mumbles "shit" when she stumbles on a note.

Sally finishes the song, walks over and sits at Willie's feet on the floor.

Willie strokes her hair.

WILLIE  
That was a sad song.

SALLY

Yes.

WILLIE

What's up?

SALLY

Peter left Denise and the kids last week.

WILLIE

Who are Peter and Denise?

SALLY

I've told you a hundred times. Denise works with me. Twenty years of marriage. He walked in out of the blue, and said he wanted a divorce.

WILLIE

Is there someone else?

SALLY

Who knows. He just said he didn't love her anymore.

WILLIE

Sounds suspicious.

SALLY

You wouldn't do that to me, would you?

WILLIE

No. I need you to nurse me in my old age.

SALLY

Hey, I might die first, you know.

WILLIE

No, I'm going first.

SALLY

So I get all the grief and bills and shit?

WILLIE

I'll just mosey up to heaven and check out the angels.

Sally jumps on top of him.

SALLY  
No, you won't, Buster!

Willie kisses her, then attempts to bury his head under the pillow. She detains him.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
So what happened?

WILLIE  
Nothing. I've got a lot in common with....

SALLY  
... Oscar.

WILLIE  
Oscar. Nice guy.

SALLY  
Did you talk?

WILLIE  
Everything's fine.

SALLY  
Then you did good.

She kisses him.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
Maybe you guys will be friends.

Willie rolls his eyes in exasperation.

INT. AUSTIN CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

Hundreds of new motor homes gleam in the auditorium. A smallish crowd circulates with few people of color.

Sally and Willie humorously scan all directions with disappointed expressions.

SALLY  
There are no brown people here.

An African-American man in a suit walks by and disappears around a vehicle.

WILLIE  
There's a brother.

Sally and Willie follow him. They peek around a corner.

The man sits down at a table below an insurance sign, and starts to restock the piles of brochures on the table.

SALLY

Hah!

Sally, in a smart-ass tone, points in a different direction, then waves.

SALLY (CONT'D)

There's a brother.

Several aisles over an African-American janitor mops the floor. He looks over at them, then returns Sally's wave.

WILLIE

I can see the headline - "Bold Blacks Claim America!"

SALLY

My family's been here for three hundred years. I don't need to claim shit.

WILLIE

"Bold Blacks Ride West!"

SALLY

We live in Texas.

WILLIE

Texas is not the West. They joined the Confederacy.

SALLY

Whatever.

WILLIE

I hear you. I'm on my own with this project. You're not going.

SALLY

Go? I can't miss planning for the wedding. The kids need me.

WILLIE

For twenty people. In two months.

SALLY

Honey, that's practically tomorrow. I have to work. You go have an adventure.

WILLIE  
It's okay with you?

SALLY  
If it cheers you up -- I'm for it.  
After the hospital gives me the  
raise.

WILLIE  
I've got the money I saved for a  
truck. I'll sell the boat, and take  
back the bison.

Sally gives him a suspicious look. Willie quickly checks a  
price tag.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Damn! We don't have this kind of  
money. And gas prices!

SALLY  
Maybe there are used RVs.

WILLIE  
You really want me to leave.

SALLY  
It might be good for you.

Willie starts to dissent, then nods agreement.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
Then you'll come home and be your  
old self. Find a new job to keep  
you out of my hair.

EXT. USED MOTOR HOME LOT - DAY

Willie and Roy stare at a baby Winnebago RV isolated in the  
back corner -- a twenty-foot-long, beat-up old wreck.

Sally and a salesman stand over near some nicer models. The  
salesman frowns. Sally appears skeptical.

WILLIE  
Look at that!

Roy enthusiastically wags his tail.

SALLY  
What about gas prices?

WILLIE  
Oscar will fix it.

SALLY  
A week ago you didn't know his  
name.

The ravaged old RV glows, and ROMANTIC MUSIC SWELLS.

INT. OSCAR'S CAR GARAGE - DAY

Oscar and Willie stare down in awe at something that's  
ungodly fascinating.

The customized Winnebago dazzles with strange pipes, and  
gleaming, newfangled contraptions.

Oscar and Willie gape at the magnificent piece of motoring  
history.

OSCAR  
She is my first hybrid retrofit.  
Three times the mileage.  
(recalibrates)  
Maybe two times.

They both look up at the recycled solar screen above the  
windshield.

WILLIE  
If I stay under sixty and plug in  
every night.

OSCAR  
Are you sure you don't want me to  
paint it?

WILLIE  
I don't want it to look too  
valuable.

OSCAR  
Call me every half hour.

Willie laughs. He and Oscar both pat the Winnebago.

OSCAR (CONT'D)  
They have to go out into the world.  
(in Spanish)  
Goodbye, my beauty.

The two new friends affectionately hug.

EXT. WILLIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Sally adjusts her camera as Willie exits the house carrying a large first aid kit. Roy sits in the doorway of the RV.

In the distance two men struggle to load the stuffed bison in the back of a truck, then look at their hands in disgust.

They slam the door shut, get in and drive away.

WILLIE

(to Roy)

It's okay, we'll see the real deal soon.

SALLY

Did you get your booster shot?

WILLIE

Yes.

SALLY

Where's your new phone?

WILLIE

Real men don't use cell phones.

Sally raises her eyebrows.

Willie lifts the kit.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

It's in here.

SALLY

It was nice of the kids to give us their old ones. I can watch you when you call.

WILLIE

Like Dick Tracy?

SALLY

Just like Dick Tracy. Are you sure you don't want to stay and help with the wedding? Invitations? Flowers?

They both LAUGH and kiss.

SARAH JOHNSON (30s), pretty like her mom, but serious like her dad, exits the house and joins them in the yard.

She hands her father a small, weathered, stuffed bison.

SARAH

He wants to go with you.

Willie affectionately touches the bison.

WILLIE

I remember when I gave this to you.

He hugs and kisses Sarah.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

He'll ride up front with us.

Willie turns and climbs over Roy with difficulty.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I'm not going to leave you, Roy.

Willie disappears into the RV.

SALLY

You have one month.

Willie briefly reappears in the doorway with a map.

WILLIE

One month. I'll see the bison in  
Montana, fish, then end up in  
Yellowstone.

Sally stares at him.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

And ... at some point ....

Sally sympathetically nods.

SALLY

Did you drop off the clothes at  
Goodwill?

WILLIE

On our way.

James pulls up in his car, and rushes over for a bear hug.

Willie smiles in relief.

Sally gestures for Willie to pose with Roy.

SALLY

Let's have a smile.



INSERT: PHOTOGRAPHS

The Black explorer and his noble dog make a series of heroic poses in front of the RV.

Willie has an enigmatic smile in the final still shot.

EXT. GOODWILL STORE - DAY

Willie's RV takes up several parking spots.

Roy watches nervously out the window.

Willie hands a stack of used clothes to a clerk.

The clerk returns a moment later with a receipt.

WILLIE

Thank you.

Willie starts toward the RV.

BOBBY JACKSON (50s), a small, nervous African-American, sees Willie and attempts to avoid him by turning away.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Hey, Bobby. How're things?

BOBBY

Good, man. Just lookin' for some bargains.

WILLIE

Did you get the invite?

BOBBY

Yeh. We'll be there.

Willie apparently realizes Bobby's financial dilemma.

WILLIE

We've been tellin' people to just come. Don't worry about presents. Times are tough.

BOBBY

That's the truth.

WILLIE

Not sure where the reception is yet. It'll be small. Outdoors.

Both refrain from shaking hands or hugging.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Take care, Bobby. Hope you can make it.

Willie awkwardly retreats. Conscious now of other people he knows in the parking lot. He nods to several.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie, wearing a baseball cap, drives out of town with Roy riding shotgun. The stuffed bison is on a shelf nearby.

They drive past an employment center for day laborers. A line of men and women stand outside at a noticeable distance from one another.

Willie grimaces.

WILLIE

This is a mistake.

Willie looks back in the mirror.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Can I tell you a secret?

Roy listens attentively.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I've never gone anywhere on my own.  
I had to go in the army or jail.  
Pretty sorry isn't it?

Willie changes gears, and pulls out into traffic.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Want to know another secret? I've never owned anything of my own before. Except the bison. Kevin's wife gave me the boat.

Willie plugs an Ipod into his radio, selects a song, and turns it on. "King of the Road" by Roger Miller begins to play.

Roy looks at the radio with a puzzled expression.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

You thought I was going to play the Chi-Lites didn't you? Admit it.

Roy leans toward Willie to be patted on the forehead.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 Roger Miller is the patron saint of  
 travelers.

They both look out the window.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 I'm a deep dude, Roy.

EXT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie SINGS and Roy sits tall in the window as they drive on  
 down the road with the MUSIC BLARING.

EXT. CAMPSITE IN OKLAHOMA - NIGHT

Willie and Roy sit near the campfire having dinner.

WILLIE  
 This is the life. A couple of guys  
 out on the trail.

Roy finishes his dinner and curls up at Willie's feet.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 In the old days we'd been great  
 hunters. Haul in big game and the  
 village'd cheer. Sally'd be waitin'  
 in some furry little number. You'd  
 be big dog in the village.

Roy looks up and GRUNTS.

Willie immediately starts to fret.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 Thirty years. Job no one wanted.  
 Safety inspector. Guys hated me.

Willie fastidiously stacks wood on the fire.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 Every year I'd try to be a  
 supervisor. I'd be the most  
 qualified.  
 (White supervisor voice)  
 "Willie, it's not that you're not  
 qualified. We just think we have a  
 better fit for the position."

Willie looks to Roy for validation.

Roy looks serious.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 It pissed me off, but what could I  
 do? I was afraid I'd lose my job.  
 Like my Dad.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie talks on the phone in a Walmart parking lot. Roy looks concerned at Willie's rising anger.

WILLIE  
 What do you mean, "No visitors?"  
 I'm his son.  
 (long pause)  
 I understand.  
 (sighs)  
 I'll call back in two weeks.

Willie looks over at Roy.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 He's on new meds. He doesn't want  
 to see anyone now. Let's go see the  
 bison.

Roy looks down at an unopened whiskey bottle in a brown paper bag on the floor.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 Impulse. I haven't had a drink  
 since James was born.

Roy watches Willie with concern.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
 Did your last guy drink?

Roy looks out the window.

Willie considers Roy, then buries the bottle under the seat.

EXT. AMERICAN PRAIRIE PRESERVE MONTANA - DAY

Willie's RV comes to a halt on a dirt road.

A herd of bison grazes serenely in the distance.

Willie and Roy get out of the RV, and walk towards the bison.

They stop short of three enormous beasts grazing about fifty yards away.

JOHN LITTLE WOLF (late 60s), a Crow Indian, stands about twenty yards away under a small tree.

Willie waves hello, but doesn't approach him.

John returns his wave.

Willie and John both watch the bison.

Three teenage motorcyclists suddenly ROAR in back of Willie, and also past John.

The bison startle and jump in alarm at the noise.

John runs out from under the tree and waves to the motorcyclists to turn down their motors.

He tries to explain in gestures that the noise bothers the animals.

The motorcyclists laugh at John, then ROAR toward the bison.

Roy takes out after the motorcyclists barking.

The motorcyclists drive toward the bison on the road.

As they approach the bison, they GUN their motors.

Willie runs toward Roy.

WILLIE

Roy!

Roy turns, and reluctantly starts back toward Willie.

The three bison leap in fear, and run away from the cycles.

One bull suddenly whirls around to face the cyclists.

The cyclists GUN their motors again to taunt the bison.

John suddenly grabs his backpack from under the tree, and runs toward Willie.

JOHN

Get in! Now!

Willie scoops up Roy just as John joins them, and they jump in the front seats.

The bison lurches at a cyclist, and almost hits him.

All three of the cyclists suddenly whirl around and scramble toward the RV with the bison after them.

The cyclists race past the RV, laughing at John and Willie as they pass.

The enraged bison explodes up to the bumper of the RV, then turns on a dime, and SMASHES into the tree and shatters it.

The bison SLAMS the tree a second time for emphasis.

The bison glares at the RV, then turns and walks back toward the herd.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie and John watch the bison move away.

JOHN

My ancestors hunted them on foot.  
Damn!

WILLIE

Thanks. Willie Johnson.

They start to shake hands, then laugh, and bow politely instead.

JOHN

John Little Wolf.

WILLIE

Can I offer you a drink? I've got  
some coffee in my thermos or cold  
water or milk.

JOHN

Coffee would be good.

Willie pours him a cup, and gives Roy a treat. They sit and observe the bison for a moment.

John appears as if he's about to say something, then he just nods to himself.

WILLIE

Can I give you a ride somewhere?

JOHN

Crow Agency?

WILLIE

Sure. We drove past it. You got any gear?

JOHN

Just this pack. Where you guys headed?

WILLIE

Bozeman to fish. Yellowstone. Denver.

JOHN

I know some fishing spots.

John opens his arms for Roy to come up onto his lap.

Roy jumps up. Together they watch the bison as Willie slowly turns around the RV.

EXT. MONTANA CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Willie, John and Roy sit near a roaring fire. John admires the fishing pole, and makes a few pretend casts.

JOHN

I've got some ideas. Build a small factory, and a recreation center.

WILLIE

Good sized projects.

John feeds Roy some leftovers.

JOHN

We've got natural gas, wind, water. Everyone needs water in the West. Keep the revenue on the Rez. Stop giving it away.

(milder)

I visit the bison for inspiration every year.

WILLIE

I've loved them since I was a kid.

JOHN

Do you have a big yard? Maybe we can get you a couple.

WILLIE

No, but I just bought a stuffed bison.

JOHN

Really?

WILLIE

It was pretty silly I guess.

JOHN

No.

But on reflection John can't let the subject drop.

JOHN (CONT'D)

A real, big, stuffed bison?

WILLIE

Six feet high and ten feet long.

JOHN

No shit!

WILLIE

I sold it to buy the RV. Part of the deal with my wife.

John laughs, sets the fishing pole down, then stirs the fire.

JOHN

I wanted to be a guide when I was young.

WILLIE

What happened?

JOHN

They made that movie, "Little Big Man," up here. Me and every Indian in the West decided we'd be actors.

WILLIE

Were you in the movie?

JOHN

Yep. I was a scout for Custer just like my ancestors.

Willie looks puzzled.

JOHN (CONT'D)

My tribe, the Crow, hated the White man, but they hated the Sioux more -  
- at the time.

WILLIE

They sure found them.



John bursts out laughing.

JOHN  
They sure did.

John puts on another log.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Oddly enough, Hollywood never called again, so I joined the Army. After the war I became an English teacher. How about you?

WILLIE  
I went in the Army. Got out. Got married. Got a job. Put my head down, and didn't look up for thirty years.

JOHN  
But look at you now.

EXT. THE RV - DAY

The RV drives through the high plains of Montana. The overcast sky RUMBLES.

John makes a sweeping gesture out toward the fields as if entertaining Willie with a story.

Rain suddenly pelts the windshield.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie, John and Roy sit at the table playing an intense game of poker. The storm rages outside. They use corn chips for betting.

JOHN  
I hate casinos on the Rez. But my wife had a dream and said it's all okay. She's always having dreams.

John eats several chips from a bag.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
She said Indians will return to the Rez, have lots of babies, then use the White man's money to buy back our tribal lands.  
(he forms a fist)  
Crow Nation.

WILLIE

I like it.

Willie begins to deal five-card stud.

Roy has two kings face up.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Roy will bid two.

Willie takes two chips from Roy's pile to put in the pot.

Roy HARUMPHS suspiciously at Willie for taking his chips.

John and Willie LAUGH.

EXT. CROW RESERVATION MONTANA - DAY

Willie sits along the bank of a little river and watches John elegantly cast out into a pool. Roy explores nearby.

John jerks the pole several times to set the hook, but doesn't catch anything.

JOHN

I'm a little rusty. You want to cast a few?

WILLIE

No thanks. I'm enjoying the scenery.

They watch a blackbird settle in some reeds across the river.

JOHN

I grew up just over that hill. My brothers and sisters and I used to come down here all the time.

WILLIE

Looks like a great place to play.

JOHN

It was, but mostly it was to hide from my dad when he got drunk.

WILLIE

Sounds like my dad. Except he left when I was six.

JOHN

Did you ever see him again?

WILLIE

Once. At my mom's funeral. We  
didn't talk. He'd been drinking.  
Needed money.

They walk along the beautiful river. A meadowlark lands  
nearby and CHIRPS.

John gestures toward the bird and smiles.

JOHN

My sister always visits me here and  
comforts me.

(in Crow)

Thank you, little one.

The little bird flies off.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I've learned to listen to animals.  
I had a dog who'd growl at me if I  
tried to drive after one beer. One  
beer.

WILLIE

No shit.

JOHN

No shit. It got to the point where  
I either had to get rid of the dog  
or give up drinking. So I stopped  
drinking.

Laughing, they both squat down, and listen to the river.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Come on, I'll show you our old  
homestead.

John leads them through a thicket towards a hill.

EXT. DESERTED HOMESTEAD - DAY

Willie, Roy and John walk slowly around a windswept shanty  
and outbuildings.

JOHN

We kept our ponies out in that  
field. We rode everywhere. In the  
spring these hills were covered  
with flowers.

John starts to walk up the steps to go into the house, then abruptly stops.

He stares in the open front door as if overwhelmed by a painful memory.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
I can still feel him in there.

He sighs, then backs down the steps.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
He died while I was in the service.  
I never talked to him again after  
our last fight. Right here on this  
porch.

John sits down on the steps.

WILLIE  
What would you say to him now?

Willie expresses a particular interest in the question.

JOHN  
I like being an Indian. I didn't  
back then, and ....

John looks back at the front door, then flinches as if hit by a blow. He forcefully exhales. He attempts to smile as if not wanting pity.

Willie waits to hear what happened, but John doesn't say.

Roy walks over and sits at John's feet. John lifts him onto his lap, and recites Yeats' poetry to him.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
(slight brogue)  
"Come away, Oh human child! To the  
waters and the wild. With a fairy,  
hand in hand. For the world's more  
full of weeping than you can  
understand."

EXT. CROW RESERVATION - NIGHT

The RV drives through the reservation. Run-down shacks and abandoned cars line the road.

Willie's expression subtly registers his concern at the level of poverty.

JOHN  
 (notices)  
 It's been hard here but things are  
 changing. We have a new Wellness  
 Center and a nice college.

John suddenly points.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
 Turn in here.

Willie pulls onto a dirt road that ends at a small, weather-  
 beaten old house.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
 Home on the range.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Willie, John and Roy enter a funky living room filled with  
 plants, Indian crafts and bold, modern quilts.

MARY LITTLE WOLF (60s) rushes to shake Willie's hand.

MARY  
 Hi, I'm Mary.

WILLIE  
 Willie. Thank you for letting me  
 stay.

MARY  
 Thank you for calling.  
 (to John)  
 A first! We love company. Stay as  
 long as you want.

WILLIE  
 I've only got a few days, my son's  
 getting married.

MARY  
 That's wonderful. Did your wife  
 send you away?

WILLIE  
 Yes.

Mary stoops down to pet Roy.

MARY  
 And who are you?

JOHN  
That's Roy.

MARY  
As in, Roy Rogers?

WILLIE  
Yes.

MARY  
I love Roy Rogers! I tried to teach  
my pony to rear up like Trigger,  
but he never would. I'd just fall  
on my butt.

JOHN  
Mary's people are horse people.  
(points to quilts)  
And artists.

WILLIE  
They're beautiful.

MARY  
My Sioux cousin gets all the  
credit. Do you ride?

WILLIE  
No, but I've always wanted to.

MARY  
Our son Thomas is breaking some  
horses over at my cousin Joey's  
tomorrow. I'll teach you.

Willie looks over at John, who nods his approval.

WILLIE  
Sounds good.

MARY  
Do you like cake?

WILLIE  
Yes, Ma'am.

MARY  
Come out in the kitchen.

Mary gives John a coy smile, and starts into the kitchen.

John catches up with her. Mary playfully bumps him with her  
hip.

Willie notices the sexy gesture and smiles.

EXT. DIRT ROAD ON THE RESERVATION - DAY

A beat-up old car races down the road. The scenery's beautiful out away from the settlements.

Every now and then the car flies over a big bump, then BANGS when it hits the road.

INT. OLD CAR - DAY

John drives, Mary sits in the middle, and Willie sits at her side. They sing with gusto, and laugh as they bounce around.

ALL

(singing)

"Oh give me a home where the  
buffalo roam and the deer and  
antelope play. Where seldom is  
heard, a discouraging word and the  
skies are not cloudy all day."

They hit a particularly nasty bump and all three bounce up and BONK their heads on the ceiling. They all laugh.

ALL (CONT'D)

(louder)

"Home, home on the range! Where the  
deer and the antelope play. Where  
seldom is heard, a discouraging  
word and the skies are not cloudy  
all day!"

John takes a sharp turn into a ranch.

MARY

There's Thomas.

EXT. HORSE RANCH - DAY

Wild horses majestically cascade down a steep hill toward a corral with several fabulous Crow riders chasing them at full tilt. These guys can ride.

THOMAS LITTLE WOLF (30s), a charismatic, long-haired wrangler, whirls his horse around the flank of the herd, and waves to his parents.

The car drives up to the ranch house in the distance.

EXT. PASTURE - DAY

Willie bounces up and down on a horse as he gallops recklessly across the field, a look of joy and fear on his face.

He quickly glances over to his side.

Roy rides in front of Mary on her horse. Roy also vacillates between exhilaration and fear.

John rides off to the side, waving and hooting.

MARY

That's it, Willie.

They slow to a trot, riding toward a paddock.

All three dismount. Mary lifts Roy down. Now on solid ground Roy wags and struts.

JOEY LITTLE BEAR (50s) helps them tether their horses.

JOEY

Willie, you're a natural.

WILLIE

I love it here.

All of the Crow Indians note Willie's innocent comment, spoken without irony.

JOEY

Mary, bring Willie tomorrow. We're fixing up Bobby's old house for his mother, then we're having a barbecue.

(to Willie)

I'll bring some horses.

MARY

(to Willie)

What do you think?

WILLIE

I'd like that.

Thomas gallops into view.

A carload of Thomas' FRIENDS drive into the ranch HONKING their horn and shouting at Thomas in Crow and English.



FRIENDS

Hey, Thomas! Come on, man! Let's go!

Thomas gestures to them that he'll only be a minute. He rides over to his parents, gracefully dismounts, then gives Mary a bear hug.

THOMAS

I hope you saved some cake.

Thomas turns and gives John a hug.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Did you bring me a bison?

He turns and nods at Willie.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Thomas.

WILLIE

Willie.

THOMAS

You never rode before?

WILLIE

No.

THOMAS

You looked good.

WILLIE

Thanks.

Thomas' friends HONK impatiently. They're waving beer cans.

FRIENDS

Come on, Thomas!

John looks anxiously over at the car. He puts his hand on Thomas' shoulder.

JOHN

Why don't you come with us tonight?  
We'll grill up some chicken and  
play cards.

THOMAS

Thanks, but I've got plans.

Thomas gives his mom a quick hug, nods to Willie, then walks over to the car and gets in. The car NOISILY PEELS OUT.

John's eyes follow the car in despair.

Willie notices John's pain.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - NIGHT

Willie talks on the cell phone while Roy chews on a bone.

WILLIE

Roy and I both rode. We love it here.

(playful)

Do you think we could move the wedding up here?

(listens, then laughs)

Okay, not a great idea.

(nods)

I know, three weeks.

(considers)

A couple more days.

(listens)

John.

(getting impatient)

We have a lot in common.

(rolls his eyes)

Of course we talk.

(exasperated)

You know, I am actually a man.

Roy walks to the door and wags his tail.

Willie glances out the window.

John opens the door to his car.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Let me call you back. John needs some help.

(interrupts her)

Soon. Love you, too. 'Bye.

EXT. WILLIE'S RV - NIGHT

Willie waves to John before he can pull out. John rolls down the window.

WILLIE

Where you off to?

JOHN

The casino. Thomas....

WILLIE  
I'll keep you company.

JOHN  
You might not....

WILLIE  
It's okay. You might need help.

Willie and Roy climb into the car, and they drive off.

EXT. RESERVATION CASINO, MONTANA - NIGHT

John and Willie get out of the RV in front of a small casino with very few cars in the parking lot.

JOHN  
I hate this place.

John turns to Willie.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
Are you sure?

Willie nods.

They walk toward the door.

INT. CASINO - NIGHT

Willie and John enter the garish establishment.

The few patrons eye them incoherently.

ROBERT (50s), the Crow bartender, comes around the bar.

ROBERT  
Hi, John. Sorry.

John shrugs.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
He's back here.

Willie and John follow Robert into a small office.

Thomas sprawls drunk and dissolute on the couch.

ROBERT (CONT'D)  
You need some help?

JOHN  
No, thanks.

John gently shakes Thomas, but that doesn't wake him.  
He lifts Thomas to an upright position. That wakes him.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
You remember Willie. Let him help  
you.

Thomas looks at Willie with suspicion, but allows him to help  
lift.

Thomas glares with hatred at Robert.

THOMAS  
(slurs)  
You..., you... !

Thomas passes out.

INT. JOHN'S CAR - NIGHT

Driving, John looks back at his son, sprawled in the back  
seat. Willie holds Roy in his lap.

JOHN  
The only thing that gives me any  
hope is I used to be worse.

They stop in front of a small convenience store.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Willie, John and Roy get out of the car. Roy goes off to  
explore.

JOHN  
I need some bread.

Willie takes some money from his wallet, and hands it to  
John.

WILLIE  
Let me contribute.

JOHN  
Thanks.

John takes the money, and enters the store.

Willie walks toward the crossroad.

Thomas noisily bangs open the back door of the car, and struggles out.

Willie turns around.

THOMAS

It's pathetic isn't it? Hard to believe people live like this in America the beautiful.

Thomas waits for Willie's reaction. When it doesn't come, he takes an alarming step toward Willie.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

But you know what my grandfather used to say?

WILLIE

No.

John emerges from the store with a small bag.

THOMAS

He'd say, "Life on the Rez may be awful but thank God ... "

John realizes what Thomas is about to say and rushes forward to confront him.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

" ... we aren't nig ... "

Thomas sees his father and stops short of saying the n-word.

He laughs malignantly, then stumbles off, coughing and gagging.

Willie stares after Thomas until he disappears into the weeds and VOMITS (O.S.).

John lowers his clenched fist, then turns toward Willie.

JOHN

I'm sorry.

WILLIE

It's nothing I haven't heard before.

They both sit on the stoop. Willie stares at the weeds.

INT. BRONX KITCHEN - NIGHT - FLASHBACK (1960)

Joseph, cap askew, stands near the back door carrying a pillowcase crudely stuffed with clothes. He barely manages to stay erect in his drunken, slobbering stupor.

MARTHA

Baby, please don't go! We'll find something.

Young Willie steps cautiously into the kitchen. Broken glass covers the floor.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Watch your step!

Martha rushes to stop Willie. She squats to embrace him.

Joseph falls against the cabinet, hits his head, then struggles to open the back door.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

You're not even going to say goodbye to your son?

Joseph stares at Willie for a moment as if only vaguely comprehending their relationship. In a blind rage he staggers out the door.

Martha clutches Willie in desperation. END FLASHBACK.

BACK TO SCENE

John takes a bag of cookies out of the sack, opens it, and offers it to Willie.

Willie takes several cookies, then sympathetically smiles at John.

John shrugs, and takes several also.

They silently eat their cookies, looking up at the night sky.

EXT. RESERVATION STREET - DAY

Only a few dilapidated houses line the street. One house has trucks, cars and Willie's RV in front of it.

Several Crow men and women walk in and out, carrying supplies and debris.

Joey unloads horses from a trailer nearby.

INT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE - DAY

Willie, John, Mary, and other Crow Indians enter laughing.

Everyone leaves for other rooms except Mary, Willie and John.

ALL

Later.

John pats Willie on the back.

JOHN

I'm sorry about last night.

WILLIE

No problem.

MARY

Thomas is in that phase of life where he blames all his problems on race.

WILLIE

I know that phase.

They all laugh.

MARY

I had a dream the other night.

John catches Willie's eye with a "What did I tell you" look.

MARY (CONT'D)

My uncle White Feather visited. I asked him how things were going in the Happy Hunting Ground.

(in White Feather voice)

"Oh, it's wonderful. Lots of game. Beautiful streams."

(in her own voice)

What are the people like, Uncle?

(in White Feather voice)

"The first thing you notice as an Indian is there's none of that racial shit up here."

(in her own voice)

How is that possible, Uncle?

(in White Feather voice)

"There are no White people here!"

They all laugh.

JOHN

Someday soon they'll be a minority.  
I'm not the kind of guy to hold a  
grudge.

John picks up a hammer and whacks the old sheetrock to dislodge it. He feigns surprise at the vehemence of his assault.

Mary and Willie laugh, and join in the demolition.

LOUD GREETINGS (O.S.) in the adjacent room cause them to stop and look up.

Thomas suddenly appears in the doorway, disheveled and obviously hung-over.

Willie braces himself.

THOMAS

Indian warriors at work and play.

When no one responds Thomas retreats to another room.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Mary measures the wall.

John and Willie haul out a load of debris.

Mary puts on some goggles, turns on the saw, and cut a piece of sheetrock.

Willie and John enter. John brushes the dust out of Mary's hair.

They take the sheetrock from her, and hold it up to the wall.

Willie nails his side, then John his.

Mary measures for the next cut as they all laugh and jostle one another.

A CRASH (O.S.) precedes a curse from Thomas.

THOMAS (O.S.)

Shit!

They all look up as a moment later Thomas appears in the doorway, forehead bleeding.

Mary grabs a shirt off the table, and rushes over to apply pressure to the wound.



MARY  
Are you all right?

THOMAS  
I just need a band-aid.

Willie reluctantly volunteers.

WILLIE  
I've got a first-aid kit.

Willie gestures to Thomas to follow him.

John registers concern.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Thomas and Willie enter the RV.

He gestures for Thomas to take a seat.

Willie pulls a first-aid kit out of a drawer, opens it, and puts on gloves.

THOMAS  
Wow. Pro treatment.

Thomas starts to thumb through the kit to see what's there.

Willie abruptly moves the kit away from him. He takes out cleanser, gauze, antibiotic cream and surgical band-aids.

Willie cleans the wound and applies cream. He becomes progressively more annoyed with Thomas as they talk.

Thomas lifts a photo of James and Willie off the counter. James is in uniform.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
Your son?

WILLIE  
Yes.

THOMAS  
Are you a vet too?

WILLIE  
Yes. Why?

THOMAS  
No reason. My dad just seems to hang out with vets.

Thomas sets the picture down.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
Where'd you meet him?

WILLIE  
At the bison ranch.

THOMAS  
He's something isn't he? Wants all  
us Indians working. A factory.  
Everyone thinks he's nuts.

In annoyance Willie daubs the wound with gauze extra firmly.

Thomas flinches.

WILLIE  
You're lucky to have a father like  
him.

Surprised by Willie's angry tone, Thomas turns and stares.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Not everybody has one.

Willie finishes patching Thomas, and sets down the surgical  
tape.

THOMAS  
Thanks.

Thomas stands and prepares to leave.

WILLIE  
Your father doesn't have a problem.

Thomas gives him a questioning look.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
You do. I helped him pick you up  
last night.

Thomas nervously glances away.

Willie speaks with a cool, righteous anger.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
You started to share your  
grandfather's wisdom about Black  
people with me.

Thomas appears mortified.

THOMAS

Oh, man! I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything by it. I was plastered.

WILLIE

Then you have two problems.

EXT. JOHN'S HOUSE - DAY

John and Willie watch a group of ponies run across a field on the other side of a fence.

JOHN

This is where we'll build the recreation center.

WILLIE

Call me, I'll come and help you.

JOHN

It's a deal. You're pretty handy.

WILLIE

That's the first time I've enjoyed working in forty years.

Mary comes out of the house with a plate of Indian bread and a quilt. She hands them to Willie.

MARY

The mountains will be cold.

Willie starts to protest.

MARY (CONT'D)

The more we give away the more life will bring us.

WILLIE

In that case, thank you.

A car loaded with rowdy PEOPLE roars up to the house and SCREECHES to a halt. They HONK the horn and call out.

PEOPLE

Thomas! Let's go!

Thomas bursts out the front door in party garb toward the car. He stops when he sees his parents and Willie.

John anxiously looks at Willie, then at his son.

The HORN BLARES.

PEOPLE (CONT'D)  
Thomas! Come on, man!

Thomas ferociously turns and shouts at the NOISY car.

THOMAS  
(in Crow)  
Shut the fuck up!

He turns back toward Willie and his parents. He considerably steps forward.

THOMAS (CONT'D)  
Next time you come I'll take you  
and your wife to Crow Fair.

WILLIE  
I'd like that.

Thomas walks over to the car, climbs in, and ROARS away.

John subtly smiles in relief.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Thank you, John.

Willie hugs John and Mary, then turns and walks to the RV.

John bends down and gives a treat to Roy.

JOHN  
We'll miss you, Roy.

Roy gulps down his treat, then jumps in the RV.

Willie waves goodbye one last time, gets in, and drives away.

John and Mary start toward the house. John stops when he sees Willie's fishing pole and gear leaning against the porch.

He picks them up and smiles.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

The RV parks in a rest area on a Montana highway.

WILLIE  
Can I tell you something, Roy?

Roy looks up from coveting the bread between them.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I never liked fishing. My dad did.  
James was being nice to me all  
those years.

(glances at a map)

Would you mind if we drive on down  
to Wyoming tonight? I worry. I like  
to be ahead of schedule just in  
case.

Willie opens the Indian bread and tears them each a hunk.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Three weeks left. We're doin' good.  
Bison. New friends. Now Wyoming,  
the Wild West.

Willie selects a song on his Ipod and turns up the volume.  
"Should've Been A Cowboy" by Toby Keith begins to play.

Willie joyfully sings along. He lip-syncs the lyrics for  
comic effect.

Roy seems puzzled by Willie's euphoria.

Willie encourages Roy to sing by making silly dog sounds.

He cranks the volume up to concussive levels.

Roy begins to howl.

Together the cowboys drive on down the road - wailing their  
freedom anthem with unbridled joy.

EXT. TOURIST CENTER, SHERIDAN, WYOMING - DAY

The center looks out over the town, the snow-capped Big Horn  
Mountains rising in the background.

Willie sits on a log railing having a cup of coffee while Roy  
explores a field nearby.

A tall, gaunt COWBOY (40) pulls up in an old pickup truck,  
gets out with a severe limp, and stretches.

WILLIE

Hi.

COWBOY

Howdy.

WILLIE

Howdy. Would you like some coffee?

COWBOY  
Thanks, just a swallow.

Willie pours the cowboy a paper cupful.

WILLIE  
You work around here?

COWBOY  
Yep.

Willie gives him a moment to expand on the subject to no avail.

WILLIE  
This is beautiful country.

COWBOY  
Hard winters.

WILLIE  
I'll bet. You probably get a lot of  
snow up here.

COWBOY  
Yep.

The cowboy looks at Willie's license plates, then slowly sizes Willie up.

COWBOY (CONT'D)  
Texas.

WILLIE  
Austin. You ever been there?

COWBOY  
Yep. Rodeo.

The cowboy gulps down the hot coffee, and tosses the empty into a trash can.

WILLIE  
What event?

COWBOY  
Bull riding.

WILLIE  
Wow. You coming this year?

COWBOY  
Nope. Got to recover. Got gored at  
Cheyenne last year.

WILLIE  
I don't know how you do it.

COWBOY  
I like it. Make a little money.

WILLIE  
You're going back?

COWBOY  
Yep. "I have to confront my worst fears."  
(laughs)  
I heard that on ESPN. Thanks.

The cowboy tips his hat, gets in his truck and drives away.

Roy wanders over for discussion.

WILLIE  
He's riding off alone into the sunset.

Willie and Roy start toward the RV.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Roy Rogers had a girl friend.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie and Roy drive down the hill toward Sheridan.

WILLIE  
Cowboys. Indians. Yellowstone. The Tetons. Not bad, Roy.

Willie abruptly sighs.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
"My worst fears."

Roy whimpers, and moves closer him.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
I need a hat, and some treats.

EXT. DOWNTOWN, SHERIDAN, WYOMING - DAY

As Willie walks down the street people curiously stare.

Willie nods hello to several.

He stops in front of King Ropes, a Western store, and admires the gear in the window.

INT. KING ROPES - DAY

Willie saunters into the Western store. A pony-tailed, freckled CLERK (20) in western garb looks up from her magazine.

CLERK  
Howdy. Can I help you?

WILLIE  
Howdy. Hat.

She points to a wall of cowboy and baseball hats.

CLERK  
We've got a few.

Willie walks over to a stack of cowboy hats, tries one on, then poses in the mirror.

The clerk gives him a "thumbs up" sign.

Willie's CELL PHONE RINGS. It takes him a moment to dig it out of his pants pocket.

WILLIE  
Hello?

INT. SALLY'S KITCHEN, AUSTIN, TEXAS - DAY

Sally sits on a stool in her nurse's uniform.

SALLY  
How's your lonesome brown self up there in White man's land?

INTERCUT BETWEEN SALLY AND WILLIE

WILLIE  
Not bad.

Willie turns so as not to be heard.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
But if I wanted to see any brown people I'd have to bring them with me.



As Willie tries on a hard-rimmed cowboy hat it makes a slight clunk as it hits his head.

SALLY  
What are you doing?

WILLIE  
Trying on cowboy hats.

Willie admires himself in the mirror.

SALLY  
Show me.

Willie hits several buttons to switch to Facetime, then holds the phone away from himself to smile into the camera.

Sally admires Willie on her phone.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
You look happy.

WILLIE  
I am. We like it here. How's the wedding coming along?

SALLY  
Like you care.

Willie laughs, and tries on a ten-gallon hat.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
You know when I told you this separation might be a good idea?

Sally waits a moment for Willie's reply.

Willie is preoccupied with his hat. He turns to the clerk for her opinion.

The clerk gestures that he should tilt it to the side a little.

He adjusts the hat cowboy style, then touches the brim of his hat to acknowledge her.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
Willie?

WILLIE  
Yes.

SALLY  
Am I still your girl?

WILLIE  
Baby! You know you are.

SALLY  
Two weeks. I can't wait to see you.

WILLIE  
Closer to three weeks. This is  
quite the life.  
(quick save)  
I miss you too!

SALLY  
Have you called your dad?

WILLIE  
Twice. Still no visitors. I'll stop  
on our way home. I don't know what  
else to do.

Willie reaches for a King Ropes baseball cap, then puts it on  
and poses for Sally.

Sally doesn't respond.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Can I call you back?

SALLY  
Sure.

WILLIE  
Bye. I love you.

SALLY  
I love you, too.

Willie hangs up the phone, then walks toward the clerk with  
his new hat.

EXT. YELLOWSTONE PARK GATE - DAY

Willie's RV waits in line to enter the Park.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie and Roy both watch out the windows.

WILLIE  
I wonder why all those cars are  
stopped up ahead. Maybe there's a  
bear.

Willie rolls down his window, and puts his head out to see what's up ahead.

Roy suddenly leaps into Willie's lap.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
What ... ?

Willie looks up.

A giant moose looks in the front window of the RV. The moose drifts on over the road.

Roy belatedly growls at the intruder.

Willie laughs at Roy's bravery.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Wow!

Willie and Roy watch the moose walk away.

EXT. OLD FAITHFUL - DAY

Willie and Roy wait with a crowd for the geyser to erupt. He checks his wristwatch.

No geyser eruption.

Several people near Willie lose their patience and start to leave. Willie looks at his watch again.

Still no eruption.

Willie gets up to leave. The CROWD suddenly CHEERS behind him.

Old faithful magnificently erupts.

Willie observes the eruption in awe.

When it's over he looks down at his watch, takes it off, then throws it in a trash can.

EXT. JENNY LAKE, WYOMING - DAY

A duck zigzags across the water. Other ducks swim and quack nearby as mist rises off the water in the cool air.

A small, drifting rowboat comes into view. Willie's feet appear propped on the seat.

The ducks suddenly startle, and flap into the air.

Willie and Roy nap in the bottom of the boat with Willie's feet up on the seat.

They both look up to watch the departing ducks, then sigh contentedly in unison.

The Teton Mountains rise majestically above them.

Willie slowly sits up in the boat. He looks out over the beautiful lake.

WILLIE

I'm claiming all of this.

Roy stands up and stretches.

Willie pours himself a cup of hot chocolate, sets it down, and watches the steam rise.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

You've never tasted anything until you've had hot chocolate on a freezing day when you're out ice-skating. Oh, man!

Willie takes out a dog treat and hands it to Roy.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Back in the Bronx I met a girl skating. She was so fine! The ice rink was all lit up and they were playing a waltz.

Willie begins to HUM a waltz, then he lifts Roy's paws and dances with him. Roy sways his head like he enjoys it.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

When her dad saw her skating with me he grabbed her, and ran for the gate.

A trout rises, and Roy alertly watches the spot.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I used to dream I'd become a lawyer and marry her.

Willie takes a long critical sip of cocoa.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

My dad made the best hot chocolate in the world.

EXT. JACKSON HOLE CAMPGROUND - DAY

Willie, now in a jacket, and Roy approach the RV from a nearby trail. A light snow dusts the foothills.

The CELL PHONE RINGS (O.S.) as Willie opens the door.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie enters the RV, and searches for the RINGING PHONE.

After a moment he finds it buried under some clothes.

WILLIE

Hey, Baby.

(breathless)

I'm sorry. We've been out hiking.

Willie looks out the window.

Outside, Roy jumps up and down like a pup after an insect.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

(laughs)

Nothing. It's Roy. He's like a pup.

(frowns)

Don't worry. We'll be there. We still have two weeks.

(smiles)

I miss you too.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - NIGHT

Willie and Roy sit on the bank of a burbling river eating hot dogs. The campfire glows faintly before them.

WILLIE

Roy, do you believe in God?

Roy looks as if he's actually considering the question.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I never believed in that God they talked about at church. There was just too much suffering in the world.

Willie hands Roy the rest of his hot dog to finish.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

All day I've had this wonderful feeling - - all of the people I love and I will always be together. You too, of course.

Roy crawls up into Willie's lap.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

We'll all sit at a big table. You, me, Sally, the kids, mom, my brother ... everyone.

Willie's expression changes to that of a sweet, world-embracing six-year-old.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I'll make one of those big volcanoes with mashed potatoes and fill it with gravy, then I'll eat fast and repair the sides or the gravy will flood the village - that's the green beans and corn-on-the-cob.

Willie smiles like a happy, hungry child lost in memory.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Dad will bring in my very own t-bone steak right off the grill.

(in confidence)

I only got a t-bone one time when I was little. I ordered it medium-rare.

Willie stirs the fire.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I wanted it well done, but I knew my dad ate his medium-rare. I wanted him to notice that I was just like him.

Willie's eyes suddenly swell with tears as if his child's heart will break all over again.

Roy nudges closer, and whimpers in sympathy.

Willie picks up Roy and kisses him, then stares into the dark waters.

NIGHT SOUNDS envelope them.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
It's time to see him.

EXT. OVERLOOKING GOLDEN, COLORADO - DAY

The spectacular mountains gleam in the background.  
Willie's RV pulls off the road at a rest stop.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie and Roy both admire the scenery.

WILLIE  
Man!

Willie shrugs nervously.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
What do you think? A sweet old man  
or one of those mountain trolls?

Roy looks away.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
I'm afraid, Roy.

EXT. RETIREMENT HOME, GOLDEN, COLORADO - DAY

Willie walks around the RV. Roy watches through the window.  
Willie gathers his courage, then enters the building.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - DAY

Willie speaks with SUSAN (20s), a friendly receptionist.

SUSAN  
Hello, can I help you?

WILLIE  
I'm here to see my father, Joseph  
Johnson.

Susan glances down at her log as if puzzled to hear this news.

SUSAN

The doctor said he can have visitors for only a few minutes today. He's had a very difficult week.

(points)

Please wait in the reception room down the hall.

WILLIE

Thank you.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Willie walks down the hall.

He passes ROSE FRANKLIN (80), a reserved, African-American woman with glasses, reading quietly in the hall.

WILLIE

Hello.

Rose cautiously acknowledges him.

Willie walks into room number three.

INT. WAITING ROOM NUMBER THREE - DAY

Willie sits on a couch, and looks nervously around the room.

After a moment he stands and walks to the window.

CLAIRE (50s), a sympathetic, white-haired nurse, wheels JOSEPH JOHNSON (80s), an old, frail, once-debonair invalid, into the room with his oxygen tank.

Willie and Joseph study each other for an eternity.

Joseph begins to cough violently. He struggles to breathe, and puts a mask on briefly.

He removes it to speak.

JOSEPH

What do you want?

WILLIE

I wanted to see you.

JOSEPH

My old man came to see me before he died. He wanted money.



WILLIE

I'm not your old man. I'm your son,  
and I don't need money. I wanted to  
see you. See how you're doing.

JOSEPH

Not much to see. Pathetic, dying  
old drunk.

Joseph gasps for breath, and chokes on the air from the mask.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

You ....

Joseph can't finish his sentence, and his right hand shakes  
violently.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry, I'm going to have to  
take him back for medication.

Claire starts to turn the wheelchair around.

Joseph waves his hand to stop her. He removes the mask, and  
speaks in a hurt, childlike voice.

JOSEPH

When your mother passed ...  
nineteen ... seventy something, you  
wouldn't see me.

WILLIE

I was mad at you. You abandoned us.

JOSEPH

She abandoned me! Just like my  
mother! Like my father!  
(coughs)  
Like you! She poisoned you against  
me. I could tell. You never called  
me.

WILLIE

What?

Joseph gasps for air.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry. We have to go.

She turns the wheelchair around, and they start toward the  
door.

Willie regains his composure, and calls out after them.

WILLIE

I'll come back tomorrow.

The nurse and Joseph turn in the doorway.

Joseph removes the mask and mumbles something.

She bends down and Joseph repeats his mumbled words.

CLAIRE

He said, "Call first."

The nurse removes Joseph from the room then returns a moment later.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. It's the medication.  
Maybe he'll be better tomorrow.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Willie stares down the hallway in exasperation.

Claire wheels Joseph past Rose and into a room down the hall.

Rose gets up and follows them into the room.

EXT. RETIREMENT HOME - DAY

Willie stomps toward the RV, clenching his fists.

Roy watches him intently from the window.

WILLIE

Call first! He's angry at me!

Willie looks back at the home, then slams his arm against the side of the RV in anger.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

We abandoned him! He's lost his  
mind. I never called him!

Roy winces and retreats from the window.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - DAY

Willie stands at the reception desk.

Susan shakes her head 'no' in sympathy.

Willie looks around in exasperation, then exits.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Willie fidgets. He lifts a magazine, then puts it down.

Rose enters the room. When she sees Willie she grows rigid, and turns away.

Willie rises to introduce himself.

WILLIE

Hi, I'm Willie. Joseph's son.

ROSE

I know who you are. All those years he tried to reach out to you.

WILLIE

What?

BARBARA (60s), an officious nurse, enters the room.

BARBARA

You can go in now, Ms. Franklin.

Rose gets up to leave the room.

WILLIE

Excuse me, but I don't know what you're talking about.

ROSE

All those years. You wonder why he doesn't want to see you.

Rose leaves, quivering with rage.

Willie appears baffled by her outburst. He stops Barbara before she can exit.

WILLIE

Is that his wife?

BARBARA

No.

WILLIE

Do you think he'll see me?

BARBARA

I don't know. You need to call.

Willie shakes his head in anger and frustration.

Barbara abruptly exits.

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - DAY

Willie hands Claire, the nurse, a box of chocolates with a ribbon on it.

He finishes writing a note, and gives it to her.

She tapes the note to the top of the present, then she picks up the phone.

CLAIRE

Marge, is Mr. Johnson seeing visitors today?

(kind)

It's his son.

(frowns)

Thank you.

She sets down the phone.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I know he likes chocolate, maybe that will help.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie listens to his cell phone with growing frustration.

Roy sits opposite. Wary.

Willie grimaces, then throws the phone into the first aid kit with a thump.

Frightened, Roy moves toward the window.

Willie bangs his hands on the steering wheel.

WILLIE

The wedding's next week. The roads are getting bad. One last try.

That's it!

INT. RETIREMENT HOME - DAY

Willie backs away from Claire with a look of disappointment.

WILLIE

You have my number. Please call me  
if there's any change.

He looks down the hallway.

At the far end Barbara pushes Joseph between two rooms.

Joseph suddenly turns and sees Willie.

Willie starts toward him.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Wait! Please!

Without a word Joseph gestures to the nurse to take him away.  
Willie stops in the hallway in disbelief, and profound  
disappointment.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie GRINDS the RV into gear. Roy moves toward the window  
at the sound.

WILLIE

We're going home.

Willie recklessly wheels the RV out into traffic to the  
annoyed HONK of another vehicle.

INT. WILLIE'S RV, NEAR AUSTIN, TX - DAY

Willie drives and talks to Roy.

WILLIE

Forty years. He hasn't changed. And  
he was sober.

He opens a bag of treats and gives one to Roy.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Forget about him. We had a good  
trip, didn't we?

Willie pats the dash of the RV.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Next time we won't mess with him.  
Where should we go?

They pass a sign for Austin, Texas.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
We're almost home.

Many cars flow in the opposite direction.

A strong WIND buffets the side of the RV and RATTLES it.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Wow!

A car HONKS behind the RV. Willie looks into the rear view mirror.

A pickup truck attempts to pass.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Boy, is he in a hurry. There's  
nowhere to pull over, Buddy.

EXT. HIGHWAY 183 - DAY

The pickup recklessly passes to the HONKS of oncoming cars.

In attempting to negotiate a curve the pickup suddenly goes off the road.

It BANGS as it flips several times on the steep slope, then lands on its roof with a THUD.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie swerves the RV toward the side of the road.

WILLIE  
Oh my God!

He parks on the narrow shoulder of the road.

EXT. TEXAS ROADSIDE - DAY

Smoke rises up from the pickup truck.

Many cars and a railroad crew truck stop on the opposite side of the highway.

People emerge from their cars to gawk or assist.

Five railroad workers run across the highway.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie looks at the smoking pickup truck, then back at Roy.  
He grabs his emergency bag and opens the door.

WILLIE  
His neck might be broken. Stay  
here, Roy.

Willie slams the door, leaving Roy looking alarmed at the window.

EXT. TEXAS ROADSIDE - DAY

Willie runs down the steep incline toward the overturned pickup truck.

WORKER ONE  
Flip it over.

The workers get on one side and prepare to flip the truck.

WILLIE  
Stop! Stop!

The workers all look up and pause.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Don't flip it. His neck or back  
could be broken. Let me look.

Willie drops his bag on the ground.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Call 911. There's a phone in the  
bag.

Willie gets on his back, scoots through the window of the overturned truck, and turns off the ENGINE.

MARIA HERNANDEZ (30), a frantic Mexican-American woman, nine months pregnant, remains attached upside down. She struggles to get free.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Relax. I'll free you. Are you all  
right?

MARIA  
(in Spanish)  
Help me.

Willie unfastens her seat belt, and cautiously eases her down flat on the inside roof of the truck. The rest of his conversation with her is in Spanish.

WILLIE

Can you move your toes?

MARIA

Yes. I'm having contractions.

WILLIE

How often?

MARIA

Every five or ten minutes.

Willie yells to the men.

WILLIE

(in English)

Get a board or a blanket to slide her out. She's in labor.

The workers move away from the truck.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

You'll be fine.

The woman suddenly grimaces with a contraction.

MARIA

Please hurry!

One of the workers throws his jacket through the window.

Willie spreads out the jacket, and carefully slides it underneath Maria.

He slowly backs out through the truck window, pulling Maria carefully behind him.

Several workers help Willie move Maria clear from the truck.

Immediately the other men all start rocking the truck. It flips upright with a loud bang.

Several HORNS sound up on the highway.

Willie looks up concerned, and starts to get up.

WILLIE

I better move my RV.

Maria suddenly contorts with another contraction.



MARIA

Please don't leave me! What is your name?

She squeezes Willie's hand. Willie kneels back down and strokes her forehead.

WILLIE

Willie. Help coming. You're going to be fine.

ON THE HIGHWAY

An eighteen wheeler honks at a smaller truck that's attempting to rush by the accident site.

The smaller truck SLAMS into the driver's side of Willie's RV.

The RV tilts and CRASHES against a small car, then remains precariously propped up.

BACK TO WILLIE

He looks up in alarm at the sound, gasps and lets go of Maria's hand.

WILLIE

Roy!

Maria desperately grabs his hand back, and groans.

Willie yells at a nearby worker.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Here! Help her.

(to Maria)

I'll be right back.

Willie extricates his hand and races to the RV.

ON THE HIGHWAY

Willie climbs on top of the RV and forces the door open.

WILLIE

Roy!

Roy BARKS FAINTLY.

Willie reaches in and pulls out Roy, who quivers violently.

EXT. TEXAS ROADSIDE - DAY

Willie moves Roy to safety, carefully checks him for injuries, then embraces him.

WILLIE

Are you okay? I thought you'd be safer here. I'm sorry.

Willie carries Roy over toward Maria just as a highway patrol car pulls up nearby with its lights flashing.

An emergency vehicle also pulls up, turns off it's SIREN.

Willie comforts Maria. Roy shakes uncontrollably.

The Highway Patrolman gives Willie a look of suspicion.

EXT. ACCIDENT SITE - DAY

Willie watches as a wrecking truck finishes hooking up his upright, battered RV.

Willie tries to console Roy, but Roy moves away from him.

WILLIE

Fine. Be pissed-off at me.

The wrecking truck HONKS as it tows away the RV.

Willie looks down at the clothing and other items rescued from the RV on the ground nearby.

In utter despair he lifts the bottle from the pile. He opens it and smells the whiskey. His hand shakes.

He notices the quilt and the stuffed bison on the ground nearby.

He sighs, raises the bottle, then empties it out on the ground.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sarah and Sally fuss with dresses as Willie enters the room.

SALLY

Oh, that's cute.

Roy sits at Sally's feet. He glances up when Willie enters, then quickly turns away.

Willie looks at him and frowns.

SARAH  
I've got to scoot. 'Bye, Daddy.

WILLIE  
'Bye.

Willie walks through the room, and exits into the garage.  
Sarah notices her mother's anger.

SARAH  
Daddy will be okay. His father's  
confused. He'll come 'round. It  
takes time.  
(frowns)  
I've never called him grandpa.

SALLY  
For good reason! Look what he did.

Sarah looks toward the garage with concern.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
There're goin' to be some serious  
changes around here.

Sarah starts to respond, but instead hugs her mother and  
exits.

INT. THE GARAGE - DAY

Willie enters the garage and stops in front of his dad's  
picture. The study looks empty without the bison.

With one furious gesture Willie slaps the picture off the  
shelf. It smashes against the wall.

Willie collapses to the floor sobbing with his back to the  
door.

Sally rushes in and sees Willie and the broken picture on the  
floor.

SALLY  
What ... ?

She rushes to console him.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
Willie, what is it?

WILLIE

All those years I told myself it was alcohol or drugs. He'd never leave me.

Willie lifts his head and reveals a face ravaged by pain.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I couldn't face the truth. He never loved me.

Sally attempts to console him.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I'm such a coward. I didn't have the nerve to ask him. Why did you leave?

Willie pulls away from Sally and leans against the wall.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I let my brother get into trouble. I stayed away when my mom got sick. Made her suffer. Her last days!

SALLY

They loved you, Willie. Maybe they didn't do a good job of it. You were young. It's okay.

Sally reaches into her pocket and takes out a check.

SALLY (CONT'D)

Baby, look what came in the mail. It's the insurance check. Let's go look at RVs.

Willie doesn't react to the news.

WILLIE

He's right. I gave up on him. Never tried to find him. Give him a second chance.

Sally seems exasperated with his response.

SALLY

Willie, he's the father, you're the son.

A CELL PHONE RINGS (O.S.) in the kitchen.

They both startle, then stare in dread toward the kitchen door.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Willie rushes into the kitchen and grabs his cell phone off the table. Sally follows, then hovers anxiously nearby.

WILLIE  
(alarmed)  
I understand. Thank you.

He turns off the phone, and leaves it on the table.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
He's been moved to the hospital.  
He's failing.

Willie sighs in anguish.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
He's dying.

Willie frantically paces the room.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
I don't know what to do.

Sally starts to say something, then frowns and bites her tongue.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
I have to go.

SALLY  
The wedding's Sunday.

WILLIE  
He might not live that long.

SALLY  
They'll stabilize him. I'll take  
you to the airport right after the  
wedding.

WILLIE  
I don't think ....

SALLY  
People don't have death bed  
conversions. He'll be the same.

WILLIE  
What if he dies?

SALLY

You'd miss your son's wedding for a man who never gave a shit about you or your family?

(softer)

Please, Willie. It's not even two days.

Willie stares at the phone in anguish.

SALLY (CONT'D)

What?

WILLIE

He tried to call me.

SALLY

When?

WILLIE

After he left. I'd forgotten.

(gasps)

Kevin and I saw him at a phone booth, across a busy street. I couldn't get to him.

SALLY

When?

WILLIE

Right after he left. He wasn't drunk. He looked so sad. Disoriented. I wanted to run to him and tell him everything would be alright, but cars honked at me.

(deep sigh)

By the time we crossed the street he was gone. The phone was hanging down. His cap was on the ground.

Willie bursts into tears.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

He tried to call me! I should have looked for him. Helped him. All those years. He was in despair, and I failed him.

Willie stares blankly at the kitchen phone.

SALLY

Please, Willy. You were a little boy.

WILLIE  
I can't leave him.

James stands in the doorway, having entered without being noticed.

Willie looks as if he wants to plead his case.

Sally unconsciously raises and lowers a stack of wedding envelopes and bills in front of her on the table in frustration. She glares at Willy.

James appears alarmed and baffled by his parents' behavior.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
I have to go, James.

INT. RECEPTION DESK DENVER HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Willie hurries to the reception desk. He carries a small thermos with him.

The HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST (50s) glances up.

WILLIE  
Which room is Joseph Johnson in?

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST  
He's in room three-twelve, but you can't ....

WILLIE  
I'm his son.

Willie rushes down the hall.

INT. INTENSIVE CARE ROOM - NIGHT

Joseph rants, cries out and thrashes helplessly as he struggles with an ORDERLY and HOSPITAL NURSE who are trying to give him a shot. He's like a frightened, disoriented animal snagged in a net.

Willie enters the room carrying his thermos.

Joseph orients himself, stops struggling and stares at Willie with a complex mixture of relief, fear, curiosity and pain.

Willie gestures to the hospital nurse and orderly to give him a minute.

They back away from the bed.

WILLIE

I brought you some hot chocolate.  
You used to make it for me.

Joseph doesn't fully comprehend what Willie said, but he watches Willie's every movement intently.

Willie raises Joseph's head slightly with pillows.

He opens the thermos and pours some hot chocolate into the cup. He takes a spoon from a nearby tray and dips it into the hot chocolate.

Joseph comprehends and lets out a childlike squeal of recognition. He opens his mouth and waits to be spoon-fed.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Hot and thick. That's how we like  
it.

Willie blows on the chocolate, then very delicately gives his father a sip.

Joseph SHUDDERS with pleasure as if he is experiencing not just the cocoa, but also a profound memory. He opens his mouth again.

Willie lovingly serves his father several more spoonfuls.

After a moment of silence Willie takes some pictures out of his pocket.

He shows them one by one to his father.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

This is my wife, Sally.

Joseph has trouble talking so he smiles and nods his approval.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

These are my children. Sarah and  
James. And this is James with his  
fiancee, Maya. James looks like  
you.

Joseph begins to cough.

Willie hands him his breathing mask.

After a moment Joseph removes the mask, and speaks haltingly.

JOSEPH

You look like your mother.



Willie bows his head slightly as if flattered by the compliment.

Joseph begins to shudder as if greatly moved by this whole experience. He begins to gasp for breath and cough again.

The orderly and nurse rush to Joseph, give him some oxygen, and insert a needle as Willie anxiously watches.

HOSPITAL NURSE  
(to the orderly)  
Get the doctor!  
(to Willie)  
You need to wait outside.

The hospital nurse escorts Willie toward the door.

Joseph appears terrified. He frantically attempts to gesture to Willie.

Impulsively, Willie shakes off the nurse, rushes to his father's side and takes his hand.

Joseph looks up at him in gratitude.

WILLIE  
I love you Papa. Everything's going  
to be okay.

Joseph's eyes fill with tears.

As a doctor rushes in Joseph squeezes Willie's hand.

Willie kisses his father on the forehead, then allows himself to be escorted from the room.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Willie paces the room. Every time someone passes the door he looks up in anticipation.

Rose enters the room with a small packet of letters. She hands it to Willie.

ROSE  
I'm sorry the way I spoke to you.

WILLIE  
What's this?

ROSE  
Your father's letters to you.

WILLIE

Letters?

ROSE

All those years. I thought he'd sent them. He talked about it. Especially after he quit drinking.

WILLIE

When was that?

ROSE

Five years ago.

Willie unties the packet, opens one of the letters, and starts to read it.

WILLIE

Oh my God! Nineteen seventy-eight.

He looks at another.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Nineteen ninety-six. He knew about the kids.

As Willie reads he gets tears in his eyes.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Why didn't he ... ?

ROSE

He was too ashamed. He thought you hated him and would reject him again. He grew up in foster homes. He didn't know what to do.

Willie sighs, and shakes his head in comprehension.

ROSE (CONT'D)

He was only seventeen when you were born. I know he loves you. He talks about you all the time.

Willie cries.

DOCTOR ROBERT JONES (35), an intense resident, enters the room with a serious expression.

Both Willie and Rose look up in alarm.

DOCTOR JONES

There was nothing we could do  
except keep him comfortable. I'm  
sorry for your loss.

Willie embraces Rose.

INT. HOSPITAL BUSINESS OFFICE - NIGHT

Willie makes final arrangements with a MORTICIAN and signs  
several papers.

He walks over to Rose and gently takes her hands.

WILLIE

I'm so sorry. I have to leave. My  
son's getting married tomorrow  
afternoon.

ROSE

I understand.

WILLIE

Sally and I will be back for the  
service.

Willie kisses Rose and makes a dash for the door.

INT. DENVER AIRPORT TERMINAL - NIGHT

The AIRLINE EMPLOYEE (50s), a harried clerk with maroon  
highlights in her hair, checks the computer at the counter.

AIRLINE EMPLOYEE

I'm sorry, but with the snow  
cancellations the earliest we can  
get you on a flight is tomorrow  
afternoon.

WILLIE

My son's getting married tomorrow.  
There must be something ....

AIRLINE EMPLOYEE

I'm sorry, Sir. You can be on our  
standby list. That's the best we  
can do.

Willie looks desperately around the terminal.

INT. WESTERN RENT-A-CAR COUNTER - NIGHT

Willie pays for a car. A cowboy poster decorates the wall in back of the CLERK (20s), a slim hipster in a western shirt, vest, and bolo tie. The clock behind him reads "eight o'clock."

Willie glances up at the clock.

WILLIE

The wedding's at four.

The clerk looks down at his map.

CLERK

A thousand miles. Blizzard. You need all-wheel drive.

The clerk hands Willie some final papers to sign, then speaks sympathetically as if to a fellow cowboy.

CLERK (CONT'D)

That's a hard ride.

Willie looks up at the poster.

On the poster a mounted cowboy stoically watches his herd.

Willie picks up his keys, then nods to the clerk with a quiet resolve befitting his hero, Roy Rogers.

WILLIE

Yep.

INT. WILLIE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sally talks on her cell phone with a map spread in front of her. Roy sits anxiously nearby.

SALLY

Baby, I'll postpone the wedding.  
It's only a few people.

(listens)

They can change their reservations.

(listens)

Alright, but don't take any chances. I love you. You're all that matters.

(listens)

Get some more coffee.

She closes the phone, and sets it down.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
(to Roy)  
New Mexico. The road is terrible.

Sally checks the map, measures the distance to Austin, then frowns.

Roy appears very concerned.

INT. WILLIE'S CAR - NIGHT

Willie leans on the wheel for support as snow pummels the windows.

His eyes appear swollen from crying and lack of sleep. He starts to nod off, but catches himself.

Desperate, he slaps his face hard several times.

He takes a swig of coffee, then shakes himself.

Willie turns up the RADIO, but hears mostly STATIC in the storm so he shuts it off.

He reaches for his backpack, then feels around in it as if hunting for something.

Successful, he smiles, removes his father's old cap from the pack, and puts it on.

He looks in the mirror and adjusts it to his father's rakish tilt.

WILLIE  
Ride with me, Papa.

Tears stream down Willie's face as he bears down on the wheel with a ferocious new focus.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

James meticulously shaves for the big event.

Sally looks in the room.

SALLY  
He called from Abilene. Don't worry.

JAMES  
I'm not worried. Did Dad ever miss one of my games or school events?

SALLY

No.

JAMES

He won't miss my wedding.

SALLY

Did you just talk to him?

JAMES

I don't need to talk to him.

SALLY

But ....

JAMES

No buts.

Sally appears surprised by his optimism.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm not starting without him.

James resumes shaving.

Sally starts to say something, then reconsiders, and smiles as if impressed.

INT. EPISCOPALIAN CHURCH - DAY

TWENTY MEXICAN-AMERICANS, including Maya's mother, sit dispersed on the bride's side. TWENTY AFRICAN-AMERICANS, including Sarah, and FOUR ANGLOS sit dispersed on the groom's side.

James approaches the altar in his tuxedo, says something to the PRIEST (50), a dignified, gray-haired Mexican-American, then goes out the side door.

The priest checks his watch, then turns on the microphone.

PRIEST

Cedar Park. Any minute now.

The CROWD buzzes with approval.

EXT. EPISCOPALIAN CHURCH - DAY

Willie's rental car swerves up over the curb, then comes to a halt in front of the church.

Haggard and unshaven, Willie rushes to a side entrance, wearing the same clothes he had on in Denver.

INT. CHURCH DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Willie rushes into the room, and Sally leaps up to greet him.

SALLY

Baby!

In a frantic scramble Sally assaults Willie with kisses as she simultaneously undresses, then dresses him.

SALLY (CONT'D)

Lift your leg! Down! Now that one!

James enters, gives Willie a bear hug, almost knocking the three of them over.

James kisses Willie on the cheek, then with a big grin on his face he points at his dad.

JAMES

You're the man!

Willie frees up a hand to point right back at James.

WILLIE

No, you're the man!

Clearly this is some old father-son game.

JAMES

No, you're the man!

Sally looks at her two grown children in feigned exasperation. She points to the door.

SALLY

Get in there!

James laughs and exits.

Willie attempts to kiss her, but she won't have any of it.

SALLY (CONT'D)

None of that, Mister!

She hands him an electric razor.

SALLY (CONT'D)

Here.

He begins to shave.

SALLY (CONT'D)

What am I going to do with you?

She puts the finishing touches on Willie's outfit, then steps back to admire her work.

Willie finishes, and sets down the razor. He looks stunning in his tuxedo.

SALLY (CONT'D)

Damn!

Sally starts towards him with a naughty grin.

Willie beams in anticipation of a kiss.

She grabs his arm and pushes him towards the door.

SALLY (CONT'D)

We've got a wedding.

INT. EPISCOPALIAN CHURCH " DAY

James stands on the altar with the priest, his best man, and the maids of honor.

Willie and Sally enter the side door.

Audience members leave their pews to walk over and quietly give their condolences to Willie and Sally.

Bobby Jackson, from the Goodwill store, is one of the last to nod to Willie.

Willie appears overwhelmed by the support as he and Sally move toward their pew.

Sarah joins them, and gives her father a tearful kiss.

The priest gestures to the organist. Everyone returns to his or her proper place as the ORGAN MUSIC begins to play.

Maya and Oscar slowly walk up the aisle. She abruptly stops the procession to give Willie a hug.

Oscar shakes then pats Willie's hand, then the procession continues. Maya joins James on the altar, while Oscar goes to his pew.

Sally leans her head on Willie's shoulder in total joy and relief.



Willie kisses her on the forehead, then stares up at his son with love and pride.

EXT. RECEPTION HALL - DAY

Willie and Sally stand out front as James' wedding car pulls away. Other family members and friends congregate nearby.

SALLY

What do you say? Let's go pick out a new RV.

WILLIE

We can't.

SALLY

Why not?

WILLIE

I had to pay for the funeral and our plane tickets.

SALLY

I'm sorry.

WILLIE

It's okay.

Willie gives Sally a passionate kiss.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I have everything I want.

They kiss again.

Roy and Sarah come into view with Roy desperately tugging on his leash to get to Willie.

Sally sees them before Willie does.

SALLY

Somebody's been worried sick about you.

Willie turns just as Sarah releases Roy.

Roy races to Willie, leaps in his lap, and knocks him over with frantic kisses.

WILLIE

My man!

EXT. DENVER CEMETERY - DAY

Willie and Sally stand on both sides of Ruth as the minister finishes his service on the snow-covered ground.

Willie, with tears in his eyes, looks up at the sky and smiles.

A tearful Sally looks over at Willie with love and a newfound respect.

EXT. HOUSING PROJECT, AUSTIN, TEXAS - DAY

Workers walk in and out of a small fixer-upper house with a "Community Housing" sign in front.

Willie finishes pounding his last shingle on the roof.

CINDY (50s), a pretty Black carpenter in bib, waves to Willie on her way down the ladder.

CINDY

See you in two weeks, Willie.

WILLIE

You bet.

WALT (70), a crusty old Anglo, packs his tools and departs.

WALT

Take care, Willie.

WILLIE

You too, Walt.

Roy barks as children chase him in the yard.

A small black bird settles on the roof near Willie. The bird takes several hops, then stares up at him.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Hi.

The bird seems curious about what Willie has to say.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

I've found something I love to do.

The bird CHIRPS, then takes a hop and flies away.

Willie watches the bird depart, then puts away his tools and admires his handiwork on the house.

An ANGRY HORN sounds in the distance.

An RV swerves in and out of traffic several blocks away.

Willie notices the RV, then picks up his tool bag and moves to the top of the ladder.

SCREECHING BRAKES precede a second ANGRY HORN.

The RV halts at a stop sign about a block away.

Willie glances out at the RV again. With a puzzled look on his face, he starts down the ladder.

The OWNER (35) of the house, a robust Mexican-American woman, greets Willie with a flutter of joyful gestures the moment he steps off the ladder. Her two children stand nearby.

OWNER

I was getting worried about you up there.

She stops herself from hugging Willie.

OWNER (CONT'D)

Thank you so much! We love our house.

The reckless RV clunks to a halt in front of him. Remarkably, it appears to be Willie's old RV, but painted in a bold red and green.

Fascinated, Willie stares in disbelief at the refurbished, but battered jewel before him.

Roy wags his tail and barks.

The door opens and out steps Sally, dressed for the road and sporting a baseball cap.

Willie's face explodes with joy.

Sally gives him a beautiful smile.

Willie rushes over to her, lifts, and kisses her.

WILLIE

How ... ?

SALLY

Oscar helped me.

(gestures to paint job)  
The Mexican flag.

WILLIE

It's beautiful. But how ... ?

SALLY

Don't look too close. Oscar says  
its not safe over sixty.

WILLIE

You didn't sell the house? I need a  
place for my grandkids.

SALLY

Our grandkids! No, I got my  
promotion.

WILLIE

That's my girl!

Willie gives her a bear hug.

Sally steps back and gestures toward the door.

SALLY

What are you waiting for? Check it  
out, Cowboy.

Willie climbs inside and Sally follows, closing the door  
behind her.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie walks toward the back and peeks into the bedroom.

Mary's quilt covers the bed. Sarah's bison is on a shelf. He  
touches it.

Roy sniffs out the familiar RV, then promptly goes and sits  
in the front seat, ready for action.

Sally puts Roy in her lap, and sits down.

SALLY

You have to share, Roy.

Willie wanders toward the front in a daze.

SALLY (CONT'D)

I think we're ready to go.

Willie sits behind the wheel, amazed and wildly amused. He  
looks over at Sally in astonishment and admiration.

She gestures for him to start the motor.

Willie turns on the MOTOR and listens, beaming with joy.  
He puts the RV into gear, then suddenly hesitates.

SALLY (CONT'D)  
What...?

WILLIE  
I want to enjoy this feeling for a  
moment.

INT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Willie and Sally, with Roy on her lap, drive on the  
interstate.

Roy jumps down and goes to the back of the RV.

WILLIE  
Where are we going?

SALLY  
I took two weeks off. Let's visit  
my sister in St. Louis, then John,  
Mary, and your bison.

WILLIE  
All right!

Sally begins to seductively undress in the front seat.

Willie swerves the RV in his excitement.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
What are you doing?

SALLY  
I'm going to try out our new bed.  
Pull over at the next rest stop if  
you'd like to join me.

WILLIE  
Woman!

As she speaks Sally slowly finishes unbuttoning her blouse,  
and unzips her skirt.

SALLY  
We're married, we have curtains and  
I've heard many things about Bison  
Man's powers.

Sally gets up, lets her blouse fall open, and her skirt fall to the floor as she moves toward the back of the RV.

WILLIE

Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy!

EXT. WILLIE'S RV - DAY

Roy Rogers sings "Happy Trails" (O.S.) as the RV drives down the highway in the middle lane.

The right blinker suddenly comes on, and the RV swerves into the right lane.

The RV hurriedly exits from the interstate, then races along the frontage road.

The RV dashes into a rest stop, and THUMPS to a halt.

A moment later Roy sits in the front seat looking out the window. He rolls his eyes in disgust, and grunts.

FADE OUT.

**THE END**