

THE ROAD BETWEEN US

(A SCREENPLAY)

By

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Bachelor of Arts

East Central Oklahoma State University

Ada, Oklahoma

1985

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
December, 1987



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Leonard Leff for his careful, earnest direction of this project from start to finish. The Road Between Us would have been a much weaker screenplay without his astute criticisms. I would also like to thank Dr. Gordon Weaver and Dr. Ed Walkiewicz for their prompt and insightful responses. Also worthy of thanks is my wife Brenda, who had to listen to me talk about this script for "at least a thousand hours" while I endeavored to complete it.

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INTRODUCTION

When I began this project in January of this year, I saw the road to a successful screenplay lying before me as clearly and unswervingly as a railroad track across the quiet plains of West Texas. My creative throttle was at the ready. For fuel I had a story whose subject matter was both contemporary and unique. It was hip because it focused on the lives of an established rock-n-roll artist and the teenage boy who idolizes him. The script distinguished itself from many other filmed treatments of rock musicians and teenagers because it offered a serious examination of the spiritual and psychological lives of its characters. All I had to do was reveal this story dramatically and wait for Siskel and Ebert to heap praises on the film that would soon be made from my script.

But, as the reader may have already surmised, the path to success did not run as smoothly or evenly as I imagined. Subjected to the persuasive commentary of my thesis adviser, Dr. Leonard Leff, and a few books of film criticism, I slowly came to see that my understanding of films as works of art had been lacking. I had always considered film to be an artistic medium but without knowing

why. Since this gradual transformation, my screenwriting intentions have shifted. For the past several months I have been trying to forge my own line to success by turning a screenplay that tells its story dramatically into one that shows it visually.

A screenplay needs to present its story visually for several reasons. For one, films are a collaborative effort, involving various professionals such as a director, editor, and cinematographer. Thus if any of these people determines whether a script is produced, their interest must be piqued by the script. And since they are all involved in the filmmaking process, a script that presents a compelling visual texture would more likely attract their professional interests, than a screenplay that does not significantly utilize visual images to reveal its story. Many directors, for example, select the scripts for their films and almost certainly want to do more to exercise their professional abilities than just establishing a few central positions for the camera and directing the flow of dramatic, verbose characters before it for long uninterrupted periods of time. Screenplays that provide a rich visual content allow the director a greater freedom in determining how this visual material will be presented to the audience.

Allowing a director a greater number of opportunities to move the camera in turn allows the filmmaker to consciously exploit film's most distinctive aesthetic quality -- the camera's point of view. (Which is another

excellent reason screenwriters should strive to make their work visually compelling.) Much like Wayne Booth's fictional "narrative persona", the director's camera, instead of the narrator's voice, controls what we see, and determines the degree of distance -- intellectual, emotional, and moral -- from which we will view the characters. As the camera is manipulated so are these distances. And when skillfully done, the manipulation of the camera can then communicate artistically to the audience through the presentation and juxtaposition of images -- without a word being spoken.

In fact, when words are not spoken by the film's characters, the director creates meaning through the style and order with which he or she presents the material. Through the use of close-up, for example, a technique used extensively in The Road Between Us, the audience can be brought into immediate personal and emotional contact with a character, a position so close that the slightest facial expression can visually convey the character's sudden change in thought or mood and help generate degrees of sympathy and understanding in the audience for that character.

There are two notable instances in The Road Between Us where this technique is used to portray the thoughts of Danny. In the opening scene Danny watches a hawk float casually in the sky after he has smashed his thumb with a hammer. We then move into a tight shot of Danny sighing,

a close-up which attempts to reveal his disappointment with his work and help establish early in the script his dismay with his situation. Another similarly significant close-up occurs at the end of the screenplay as Jay Raines and Danny are driving home from the concert. After Jay informs Danny that Jonny Nation picked up the folded note Danny tossed at him, Danny informs the inquiring Jay that "it was just a letter." Then he smiles. From Danny's remark we know only his purpose for tossing the paper to Nation; but from the smile we also know how he views Nation's receiving it. The close-up indicates that this is an important moment for Danny and for the story.

The narrator in The Road Between Us, however, maintains a slight emotional distance from the characters and events, a distance revealed to some degree by the camera's flexibility of movement. Rather than fixing the audience's attention only on Danny and presenting the world solely through his eyes, the camera moves around and shows the world from Jonny Nation's perspective as well as that of Danny's parents, particularly his father. I used such a narrator because even though Danny is clearly the central character -- most scenes do involve him -- I wanted to establish a slight emotional distance from him to help the audience maintain a critical perspective and prepare them for an ending that attempts to strike an intellectual and emotional balance.

Such distance was necessary to show the audience that this is primarily a story about a teenager with a

teenager's problem. Many recent films about teens or young adults, such as St. Elmo's Fire, fail because they forfeit this distance and attempt to make their stories seem more important by trying to convince the audience that the problems of their young characters are, in fact, not adolescent but serious and adult. Films that maintain this emotional and intellectual distance, The Breakfast Club for example, are generally more effective because they are admittedly concerned with their characters as teenagers and bolster themselves only through the skill with which they render their stories, not through some trumped-up sentiment. I also chose a slightly detached narrator because I feared that tying the audience solely to Danny might ultimately backfire and, rather than generate sympathy, eventually cause boredom, resentment and finally antagonism for this character who waits so long before taking any action to remedy his problem.

George Bluestone has said that while novels achieve the illusion of space by moving through time, films achieve the illusion of time by moving through space (61). And though this is certainly true, I think the biggest concern with either space or time for beginning screenwriters is the number of pages they have to work with and how this number increases the demand for significant visual details. Whereas at times novelists can have their narrators content themselves with as much of the peripheral surroundings as they like (eh, Melville?),

screenwriters, particularly beginners, are forced to respect the physical framework of their craft, which has a length of approximately 120 pages. Such confines thrust a strict economy on the screenwriter's tale much like standard poetic form affects the poet, though the screenplay is undoubtedly more flexible than a sonnet. This need for economy prevents the screenwriter from simply allowing his characters to say as much as he would like them to say in certain places. In two scenes with Jay, Danny's views toward himself, his family, his community, and his future had to be cut to sustain a visual progression to the story. The kitchen scene involving Danny and his parents, in which Bill and Sue express their concerns toward Danny's situation, was trimmed for the same reason.

This demand for economy also requires the screenwriter to employ brief scenes, which make their point quickly and visually, to serve as interstitial scenes that both forward the story's progression and offer the audience a nonverbal relief from scenes marked by lengthy dialogue. The Road Between Us does not contain such scenes in abundance; however, a few successful efforts do exist. Most notable are Jonny's arrival in Boston where his car strikes a bird to visually indicate his emotional depression at having to perform before another unappreciative audience, and Danny's unsuccessful attempts at herding cattle to show his frustration with his work.

A concern for visual details affected many other

decisions made to help the story work as a screenplay. The Oklahoma wheat farm setting was selected to reflect Danny's feelings of spiritual isolation. Giving Danny three siblings instead of one or even none was designed to create a cramped atmosphere inside the house which would emphasize Danny's increasing sense of familial suffocation. The enclosed staircase, where Danny and older brother Doug converse, and narrow kitchen, which serves as a battleground for Danny and his father, were also employed to help achieve this claustrophobic effect.

These contrasting images of the crowded house and the open field were paired to create a visual tension which would reflect Danny's rising and ebbing emotional and spiritual status. I wanted to create in both Danny and the audience a real urge to bust loose from the mass of the house into the abundant space of the fields and sky. Yet an attendant hopelessness that diminishes and nearly paralyzes Danny's fragile creative energy also lurks within this open space because it does not offer a specific road or direction for him to follow. So he returns to the haven of the house and the cycle begins again. Visually, then, the intent here was to help the audience better understand Danny's repeated emotional fluctuations and sustained frustration.

Some aspects of The Road Between Us, however, were more difficult to visualize primarily because of the story's discursive nature, which is more rooted in contem-

plation than action. The screenplay shows a much greater concern for the focal characters' perceptions than their actions. The purpose of the story then is to show how their experiences change these perceptions. But whereas Jonny Nation's realization was not hard to show, Danny Barton's was.

Throughout the play Danny wants to escape from his determined track of farm life to a place governed not by physical reality but by what he believes to be the more significant reality of thoughts and ideas. Since his insights are almost entirely fueled by truths revealed to him in the songs of Jonny Nation, songs which focus primarily on the need to maintain a search for spiritual fulfillment in spite of the numerous frustrations and dead-ends the physical world inflicts, Danny connects his desire to escape with Nation and begins to see him as something of a modern Christ figure. He believes he and Nation share a common understanding of the world that goes beyond the conventional wisdom of the general public, which for Danny is the "world" as he knows it, comprised of his parents, teachers, classmates, and other members of the Warren community.

Though the insights Danny receives from Nation's songs would certainly not be profound to any sophisticated thinker, they do indicate the beginning of an aggressive, aware mind and inspire Danny to establish a similar understanding with first Jay and then Darrel Raines, the only two people he knows who might appreciate such insights.

But his attempts fail. Jay and Darrel have insights of their own but they don't see "reality" in the same way Danny sees it, in the way he believes Nation would have them to view it. Though developing, Danny's mind is still locked into an "us and them" mentality, so he is forced to dismiss Jay and Darrel's views completely and return the focus of his attention to Nation.

Feeling a sense of complete isolation -- Danny does not know of poets or novelists or other artists besides Nation who are in touch with such a reality -- Danny comes to believe that this privately shared understanding between himself and Nation can literally "save" him from his current way of life. This belief not only makes him see Nation as unique but also causes him to view himself as one of a select few who have such awareness. Thus he believes that all he needs to do is contact Nation and speak briefly with him, and the singer will immediately recognize Danny's specialness and take him into his company to show him how to better understand and devote himself to this reality.

Danny is not so naive, however, that he cannot see the extreme nature of this dream. In fact, it is this extremity that causes him to write the song lyrics which he tosses to Nation at the end of the concert. But as the pool room scene with Danny, Jay and Darrel reveals, Danny sees no other viable alternative to his situation. So when Nation comes to Norman, Danny takes a chance and

tries to contact him.

In the process Danny comes to see that his dream has been simply that, a dream, and he cannot possibly change his way of life by simply contacting Nation. But I didn't want to end the story by only showing the sudden return to earth of a young Icarus because I believed then and still believe that despite Danny's imagined misgivings his quest, which was fueled simply by a natural, intellectual curiosity and perhaps an overactive imagination, is in the end a positive search not a negative one. And since his search is more intellectual than physical, I believe Danny would not be entirely disillusioned by what he at first perceives as failure. In the end he is left with something.

This something is the realization that even though he and Nation are not part of some special mystical league, they do share a connection through the avenue of words and thoughts. Such a connection cannot provide the type of actual, physical transcendence Danny was seeking, but he sees that through it he can leave himself and his situation at times for another, imaginary realm and in this way exercise a "real" control over his physical environment. The close-up on Danny's smile after Jay tells him Nation received the "letter" indicates a change in his mood as he listens to this news. The quick cut into his imagination where he stands on stage with Jonny, watching as the letter transforms into a hawk, the symbol of spiritual flight in the screenplay, and then flies in an actual sky above Danny who rides a combine, is designed

to show his realization.

This set of images is certainly the most effective combination I've used to reveal Danny's changed perception of himself and his relationship with Jonny Nation and his family. But I'm still slightly dissatisfied with this conclusion because I'm afraid many viewers, even sophisticated film goers, will be annoyed rather than pleased by this apparently "deep", faintly ambiguous ending. And this is not the final impression I want the film to make on the audience because I do not believe the story is particularly deep or ambiguous but simply sincere and contemplative. Thus I would like to reveal Danny's realization more concretely. But the only way I know of achieving such a definite conclusion would be to have Danny articulate his realization verbally to Jay following the concert. But such an imagined response sounds ludicrous each time I seriously listen to it within the context of the screenplay. So I finally opted for the predominantly visual ending.

Despite the problematic conclusion, I am pleased with much of The Road Between Us. I think many of the scenes and characterizations are engaging and the story itself is genuine and sincere in its attempts to explore the most pressing moral problems of its characters. And I think my skills as a screenwriter were greatly improved by this experience. In short, despite its flaws, I think The Road Between Us offers enough credible moments to

motivate me toward another screenwriting effort in the future.

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THE TEXT OF THE ROAD BETWEEN US

FADE IN: accompanied by a man playing an acoustic guitar and singing a song much like Neil Young's "Thrasher." The singer for each song mentioned is JONNY NATION, one of the screen-play's characters.*

EXT. WHEAT FIELDS -- LATE AFTERNOON

Flat northwestern Oklahoma terrain. It's early spring. The green wheat is not quite knee high. A farm pickup zips past hauling a trailer full of cattle. It drives away down a blacktop two-lane highway toward a small farming community collected around two massive grain silos. As it nears the town, the truck passes a green, state-issued sign that simply reads "Warren." There are no welcome signs. The truck slows as the highway becomes Main Street, which is flanked by a school, now empty, a grocery, an impoverished bar and pool hall, and a post office. The truck stops at the intersection then moves on, passing a bank, the First Baptist Church and some houses. It resumes speed as Main Street becomes the highway again near the edge of town, which is also marked by a "Warren" sign.

A sequence of shots begins which shows the surrounding area, a place not marked by any pastoral gaiety. There are vast stretches of wheat fields, isolated farms, men working cattle in holding pens, two farmers in pickups stopped on a dirt road, talking.

Then a combine rolls down a dirt road toward the sunset, passing a teenage boy who is hammering a strand of barbed wire to a wooden fence post.

FENCE LINE

DANNY BARTON is the boy working. He is a raw, lean seventeen-year-old, wearing a red t-shirt, tennis shoes and cotton gloves. His hair is long, but not too long. A wire stretcher lies on the ground near his feet. Behind him is a rough but greening pasture, which contains a few scattered trees and a herd of cattle. It's the only field in view that's not growing wheat.

* The fictional Jonny Nation is modeled after the contemporary singer/songwriter Neil Young. Nation is not a biographical replica of Young; his work and life simply resemble Young's. Like Young, Nation is a serious artist who is a part of mainstream pop culture, but a distant part.

Danny mouths the words to the song as he works. Sweat is visible on his face, but the strain of the work is not evident. The song seems to have taken his mind away from it for the moment. Then, accidentally, he strikes his thumb with the hammer and the MUSIC STOPS.

Danny drops the hammer and slips the glove off quickly. A deep purple under the nail and very sore from an earlier injury -- the thumb quivers slightly.

Danny is in obvious pain. He picks up the hammer and slams it to the ground. Offscreen, a hawk SCREECHES.

TREE IN PASTURE

A hawk sits perched on a high limb. It SCREECHES again, then flies away. We watch it climb, drift in the air, then head west into the path of the sun. Offscreen, we hear a cow MOO.

COW

It stands close to the tree but at some distance from the rest of the herd. It MOOS again.

DANNY

smiles slightly, but from disgust not joy. He believes this scene to be telling about himself and his situation. He wipes his brow on his shirt sleeve, then picks up the glove. Before he puts it on, he touches his injured thumb gently and winces.

VOICE O.S.

(from a slight distance)

The hammer bite ya?

FENCE LINE

BILL BARTON, Danny's father, is walking down the fence line toward him. A wheat and cattle farmer, Bill is a rough, weathered man in his mid-40's. Danny quickly slips on the glove, acting as if he has been caught doing something wrong. He starts hammering.

Bill walks up beside Danny, stops, and pulling a handkerchief from his back pocket, wipes his brow.

BILL

(smiling)

The hammer get ya again?

DANNY

No.

BILL
Why were ya lookin' at it then?

DANNY
Oh, I just knicked it.

BILL
Them gloves don't protect too well
against hammers, do they?

Danny stops hammering, then strikes the fence twice more.

BILL
God dang, it got hot today. I bet it
got over ninety and we ain't even into May
yet. Well, we better go ahead and knock
off for today. I think we got enough done to
keep them cattle in. For tonight, anyway.

DANNY
Whaddya think's causin' them to get out?

BILL
I don't know. Somethin's gotta be
spookin' 'em for them to break out three
nights in a row.

DANNY
Think it could be a coyote?

BILL
No. Hell, no. Coyotes don't hunt in packs
and one of 'em ain't big enough to even
bring down a heifer by itself. You oughta
know that.

Danny gives him a 'Sorry I asked' look.

BILL
No, I'magine it's probably just a pack
of stray dogs, but I can't say for sure.
No one's spotted any roaming out here.
I just know soon as I find the son-of-a-
bitch I'm gonna introduce him to that
.22 real quickly. Whatever it is, maybe
it'll lay low tonight. I'm gettin' tired
of coming out here and messin' with this fence.

DANNY
(looking down)
I bet we could've got it finished if Doug
had been here to help us.

BILL
I wondered when that was comin'. (Laughs

to himself) I can't believe you waited this long to start gripin' about it. You know he's got a lot of work to do on his steer before that state show this weekend. And don't be givin' me that 'it ain't fair' look. I'd let you off if you ever had anything more important to do than drag Main Street. But you don't, do ya?

DANNY

(sarcastically)

No, huh-uh. There ain't, I can't think. . .

BILL

(after a pause)

Do what?

DANNY

Nothin'.

Bill looks at Danny bitterly, then looks away. He reaches down and grabs the middle strand of barbed wire.

BILL

D'you get this pulled up tight?

DANNY

Yeah.

BILL

You call that tight?

There is some play in the wire.

DANNY

It's tight enough. If them stupid cows decide to keep running through it, it's not gonna matter anyway.

BILL

Oh, so you don't want to be out here workin' but still you're an authority on how it should be done. (Laughs in disbelief)

DANNY

(defiant but cautious)

You only want it tighter because you think it looks better. It'll hold just the same.

BILL

It ain't for you to worry about why I want it tighter. I'll string the son-of-a-bitch till it pulls down every damn fence post if I want. I make the decisions here. It'll be me that has to pay for it if one of

them heifers gets out in the road and gets run over. Not you. And I just decided that after you get back from church tomorrow you're gonna come back out here and restring this fence till I say it's tight. You got that?

Danny looks away and quietly cusses his father.

BILL

Huh?

DANNY

(bitterly)

Yeah, I got it.

Bill bends over so he can climb through the barbed wire fence. As he does, his shirt snags on one of the barbs. Danny sees this but quickly looks away. Bill tries to free himself and catches another barb.

Danny coughs, spits, and becomes suddenly interested in the wire stretcher at his feet. Bill struggles, trying to free himself carefully, then jerks himself free, slightly tearing his shirt.

Without looking at Danny, Bill steps from the grassy bank into the ditch, and starts walking down the dirt road toward an older, worn pickup parked by the side of the road.

BILL

When you get through, come on.

Danny sneers at his father. He hears a cow MOO and turns to look at it. He picks up the hammer and wire stretcher and drops into the ditch.

He then steps onto the road, but before he walks toward the truck, he picks up a rock, checking to see that his father isn't watching, and throws it at the cow. The rock hits the startled cow, which bolts away from Danny.

The OPENING SONG resumes. Pulling back, we watch Danny join his father in the pickup, and the truck drive off down the road.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD -- DUSK

The truck turns off a dirt road onto a narrow driveway that leads to the BARTON house, an old two-story white frame behind which stand an old wooden barn, a small network of cattle pens, and farm machinery, including two cabless combines and a newer, cabbed tractor. Wheat land

surrounds the house. Neighboring houses can only be seen at some distance.

EXT. HOUSE -- DUSK

Bill stops the truck in front of the house beside the Barton's three other cars: an older, red Camaro, a used family car, and a newer pickup. He and Danny get out of the truck, and Danny follows him to the house. They look tired, especially Danny.

INT. HOUSE -- DUSK

Danny walks behind his father through the front door into the living room where Danny's mother, SUE BARTON, and sister DARLA BARTON, age 13, are seated on a divan, eating supper.

Danny's older brother DOUG, age 18, is on a love seat, and DAVID, age 8, is lying on the floor, belly-down, in front of the television. They too are eating. The television is tuned to the news.

BILL

(with mild contempt)

Anything left?

Danny doesn't react. He and his father keep walking through the room.

SUE

Of course there is dear. You and Danny wash up and I'll get it for you.

INT. DINING ROOM -- DUSK

Bill and Danny enter a small dining room which connects the living room and kitchen and contains a large, but seldom-used, dining table, sparsely cluttered with mail and school books. Bill goes into a bathroom. Danny turns, opens what looks like a closet door, and mounts an enclosed staircase.

INT. STAIRCASE -- DUSK

Danny trudges slowly up the stairs and enters a bedroom he shares with his younger brother David.

INT. BEDROOM -- DUSK

Danny moves to one of the room's identical twin beds and sits down, feeling the stiffness and aching in his back. He moves his injured thumb, then touches it lightly until he feels the hurt.

The room's walls are bare. Danny's old stereo, which has a turntable, radio, and eight-track cassette player, sits on a wobbly stand in the corner. Danny slides off the bed onto the floor, sighs, and reaching forward, pulls the top album off a small stack of records beside the stand.

ALBUM COVER. DANNY'S POV

Across the top of the cover are the words "Jonny Nation" and beneath them "Across the Water," both scrawled by a loose hand. Below, we see a folk singer poised at the edge of a lake, looking at the shadowy figure of a man standing on a sunbeam in the water, one hand extended toward shore. A fleshless skull and a broken cross lie on the shore. Human limbs float in the lake beside the sunbeam.

DANNY

slides the inner sleeve containing the record out of the cover.

INNER SLEEVE. DANNY'S POV

On one side are song lyrics printed in columns; on the other side is a photograph of Jonny Nation in concert. He has shoulder-length hair and is dressed like a folk hero. He sits on a wooden stool, playing harmonica and acoustic guitar.

DANNY

smiles, looking at the photograph.

SUE O.S.

Danny! Supper's ready!

DANNY

(sighs)

I'll be down in a minute.

Quickly, he slides the record out of the inner sleeve and puts it on the turntable. He turns on the stereo, but before he starts the turntable, a voice comes from the speakers.

VOICE (disc jockey)

You got it where it belongs. This is KRQZ, FM 99. Woodward, Oklahoma's only source for rock-n-roll with a hot one from Loverboy's latest release. . .

Laughing to himself, Danny cuts off the radio. He starts the album. A song much like Neil Young's "Out of the Blue" from the Rust Never Sleeps album begins. Danny sits down on the bed and picks up the album's inner

sleeve so he can follow along with the words.

INNER SLEEVE. FAVORING THIS SONG

DANNY

reads, then sings along, softly, seriously. He comes to a passage that seems to describe his own situation. If the Neil Young song were used, those lines would be "And once you're gone, you can never come back. When you're out of the blue, and into the black." He continues singing but not as earnestly. He then stops singing and turns his head to look out a nearby window.

EXT. BACKYARD. DANNY'S POV -- DUSK

The barn stands below and beyond it, the wide spread of wheat.

SUE O.S.

Danny!

INT. BEDROOM -- DUSK

DANNY
(irritably)

What?!

SUE O.S.

I'm not going to keep supper warm for an hour just for you like I did last night! If you want to eat, I suggest you come down here and do it with the rest of us.

Danny looks at the photograph of Jonny Nation, but Jonny doesn't respond. Danny shakes his head.

SUE O.S.

You hear me, Danny?

DANNY

Yeah, all right. I'm comin'.

He looks again at the Nation photograph, then sighs.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN -- DUSK

Danny enters and slowly fills a glass with ice and tea. Doug is at the table, reloading his plate, wearing a Warren, Oklahoma, CO-OP cap. He's a big farm boy, a good deal bigger than Danny. Danny watches him heap on the food and smiles.

DANNY

You must've really worked up an appetite brushing that steer for the big stock show. Did you find time to trim its toenails too?

DOUG

Yeah, I'm sure you really broke a sweat today.

DANNY

Oh, yeah, me and Dad didn't do nothin' after you left but fix fence all day. Man, I'm gonna have to get into FFA next year. I didn't realize how much work you could get out of by just showing one steer.

DOUG

Shoot, you wouldn't know how to raise one. Dad would have to do it all for ya, just like everything else.

DANNY

Well, maybe you could show me all there is to it. Like how you get 'em behind the ag barn when no one's looking. All them sheep going, "Oh baaaaby."

DOUG

(stepping away from the table)
Eat me.

DANNY

Oh, God! What a comeback!

Danny moves to the table and begins filling a plate. Doug starts for the living room, then stops in the kitchen doorway.

DOUG

(quietly)

You better watch your fuckin' mouth if you don't want Mom or Dad to know you skipped school yesterday.

Danny looks up surprised.

DOUG

You didn't think anybody knew, did ya? That shows how stupid you are. You don't know shit about shit.

DANNY

Why should I? If I ever need to know anything

about it, all I have to do is ask you.

DOUG

Oh, another good one by the smart ass. Well, you better watch it, Bub, cause I also know why you been runnin' around with Jay Raines so much. (He bobs his head and drops his eyelids) Hey, man, let's get stoned, let's get high. Smoke some grass, man. Do some pills. You been sitting around over at Jay's house smoking the peace pipe with his brother Darrel? Is that why you're always going over there?

DANNY

(defensively)

You're stupid man, you don't know nothin'. You better get back in there and get to eating before you start losing weight.

DOUG

Just remember what I said.

Doug leaves. Danny looks up at the empty doorway, then down at his plate. He carelessly slops the food on his plate and mutters to himself.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DUSK

Danny enters the room carrying a plate and a glass of tea. He walks a few steps into the room and stops. All are seated.

DANNY

Let's see. Where am I going to sit tonight? Looks like everyone's in their usual places.

DANNY'S POV

There are two places Danny can sit: beside Doug on the love seat or beside Darla on the couch.

DOUG

wolfs his food down. He takes up a good portion of the love seat.

SUE

Danny, sit down somewhere and be quiet so we can hear the tv.

Danny moves to the couch and squeezes in between Darla and the armrest.

DANNY

You mind?

Darla huffs and scoots over.

DARLA

Is that far enough for you?

DANNY

Outside would be better.

DARLA

You're the one who needs to move outside.

SUE

Darla, Danny.

Danny starts eating slowly.

BILL

What'd the weatherman have to say?

SUE

It's supposed to be up in the nineties again tomorrow.

BILL

Well, you boys might oughta start lookin' for a summer job. We may not be havin' a harvest this year if this heat keeps up. Course we ain't gonna make nothin' off of it anyway. (Laughs sardonically). Doug, you know anyone that's lookin' to buy a pair of forty-year-old combines?

SUE

Now, Bill, you know those weathermen are wrong as often as they are right.

DOUG

Don't worry about it, Mom. Dad's probably just feelin' a little nervous cause I ain't out there to help him, and all he's got to work with is Danny. Once I finish up with these stock shows, I'll be able to get out there full time and that'll ease his mind.

BILL

Yeah, I'm just countin' the days.

The conversation ebbs as the sports news comes on. All continue eating, shifting their attentions between the tv and their plates except Danny whose gaze remains downcast. Slowly, he becomes the sole focus of the shot. ACOUSTIC

GUIAR MUSIC from the Nation song he was listening to in his room can be heard. No words, just the music, which is soft, distant.

DANNY

continues to stare blankly at his plate. He chews his food slowly, as if he is working something over in his mind. He has suddenly turned strangely calm. The music continues, a little louder. He looks up.

DANNY'S POV.

Bill, then Doug, then Sue and Darla in a slow scan. Their chewing jaws are the dominant image.

BILL

grips, not holds, the fork as he stabs the food and hurries it to his mouth.

DOUG

is less precise with his actions. He shovels it in.

SUE AND DARLA

are more careful and delicate with their instruments but utilize vigorous jaws nonetheless.

DANNY

smiles then nearly laughs. He begins to mimic the long jaw motions of his family as they chew their food.

No one notices him. Softly, Danny snorts like a pig. The GUIAR MUSIC stops. Then Danny snorts twice. Darla looks at him. He works his jaws then snorts at her. She rolls her eyes and looks away. He snorts again, louder, and continues moving his jaws.

David looks up at him from the floor, already half-smiling. Danny leans toward him, chewing, and snorts twice. David laughs and lifting his legs in the air behind him, claps his feet.

BILL

David, put your feet down.

He does and after Danny snorts, he tries to make the noise.

DARLA

Mom, make Danny shut up.

Danny offers a series of snorts. David laughs and tries the same.

SUE

Danny, what in the world are you doing?

DANNY

Nothin', Mom. Just eating. Aren't we, David.

David snorts.

SUE

David, stop that. And Danny you stop encouraging him.

Danny looks at David and smiles. David smiles back. The game show Wheel of Fortune comes on.

DANNY

(to himself)

Oh, God.

DOUG

Turn it up, David.

David moves toward the set.

DANNY

Turn the channel, David.

TELEVISION

The host introduces Vanna White. Doug whistles.

DANNY

(standing)

I'm not gonna watch this.

SUE

What is wrong with you?

DANNY

Nothing's wrong. I just don't want to watch it.

SUE

Why not? You used to like it.

DANNY

Well, I'm tired of it now. We watch it every night. I never really liked it before anyway.

SUE

Well, you just sit down. There's

no reason why you can't sit in here and eat with the rest of us. You act like anything we want to do is suddenly not good enough for you anymore.

DANNY

Mom, that's not it. I just don't want to watch it. All right?

SUE

Sit down and eat, Danny.

DANNY

I don't want to.

SUE

Did you hear me?

BILL

Let him go if he don't want to eat in here. He's gotten too damn smart to want to be around any of us. We don't want to be holding him back none.

DANNY

Dad, that's not. . .(Sighs) Forget it. Think what you want. (Turns to walk out of room)

DOUG

(looking out window)

Hey, somebody's here.

Danny stops. All look at Doug except David.

BILL

Who is it?

DOUG

I don't know. Somebody in an old yellow Ford.

Danny looks surprised and quickly leaves the room. A car door SHUTS.

EXT. FRONT YARD. DOUG'S POV -- DUSK

JAY RAINES, a seventeen-year-old Cherokee Indian, walks toward the house, carrying a book. He wears a bright tank top, jeans, and thongs. His brother DARREL, who's in his mid-20's and has long hair and wears sunglasses, remains in the car behind the wheel.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DUSK

DOUG
(surprised)
It's Jay Raines.

SUE
Who?

DOUG
Jay Raines.

BILL
What's he doing here?

DOUG
I'magine to see Danny. His older brother
Darrel's with him too.

Bill and Sue look at each other, concerned. Bill looks away and sucks his front teeth sharply.

Jay KNOCKS on the screen door -- the front door is open. No one looks up except David. All wait for another to go to the door. Then, setting her plate aside, Sue stands, clears her throat, wipes the edges of her mouth, and opens the door.

SUE
Well hello, Jay.

JAY
Hi. Is Danny here?

SUE
Yeah, just a minute.
(Turning to room) Danny!

Danny enters without his plate, walking quickly.

SUE
He's coming. (Pause) You want to come in?

JAY
All right. Thanks.

Jay enters at the same time Danny arrives, causing some slight congestion at the door. Jay is a good-looking kid with a pleasant face and black, collar-length hair, neatly parted in the middle and combed back. He is not as tall as Danny but has a better build. He sports a gold stud earring in his left ear.

DANNY
Jay. What's going on?

JAY

Nothing, man. I just wanted to bring you this.

He hands the book, a thick English literature text, to Danny. Startled, Danny grabs it quickly and dangles it at his side.

DANNY

(nonchalantly)

Oh, yeah. Thanks. Hey, can you come upstairs for a second? I got something I want to ask ya. About, about history.

Jay looks puzzled for a second, but then goes along.

JAY

Okay. Sure.

The boys walk toward the dining room. Danny moves nervously, head down. Bill watches them suspiciously.

INT. DINING ROOM -- DUSK

Danny opens the staircase door and they mount the stairs.

INT. STAIRCASE -- DUSK

DANNY

Man, what's the deal? You trying to get me in trouble?

JAY

What are you talking about? Darrel had to see somebody who lived out this way so I thought I'd bring you your homework. Why weren't you at school yesterday? I thought you stayed home cause you were sick.

DANNY

No, man, I skipped. Shit, I don't know what I'm gonna tell my parents when they ask me why you came out. You really didn't need to do this, man.

They enter Danny's bedroom.

BEDROOM

Danny moves to the chest of drawers, drops the book on it, and leans against the chest. Jay sits on a bed.

JAY

Just tell 'em I had your book by mistake. It's no big deal. How come you skipped

anyway? We didn't have a test in anything.

DANNY

I'm just tired of messin' with it. It's boring, that's why.

JAY

What'd you do all day?

DANNY

I cruised to Woodward. Stayed there til I had to come back for work. I was gonna buy an album, but I couldn't find the one I was looking for.

JAY

Which one?

DANNY

Death Drag by Jonny Nation.

JAY

You still on this Jonny Nation kick? God, I wish Darrel had never loaned you that one album.

DANNY

You should've spent more time listening to it yourself instead of worrying so much about school. You might really know something by now.

JAY

Yeah, right. Hey, you got your study sheet done for Mrs. Phillips' class?

DANNY

Yeah, sure. I took it with me to Woodward yesterday and worked on it all day.

JAY

You keep blowin' this shit off and your old man's gonna start kickin' your ass.

DANNY

Yeah, he's kicked it before.

JAY

All right. Do what you want. (Moves toward door) Well, I gotta go. Darrel's waitin' on me.

DANNY

Hey, when's he gonna get some more smoke?

JAY

I think that's what he's gonna do right now. You need some?

Danny pulls out a thin plastic bag from his crotch, looks at it.

DANNY

Yeah, I do.

JAY

You keep your shit there even when you're home?

DANNY

I can't take any chances. They look through everything I own.

JAY

Even your car?

DANNY

Hell, yeah.

JAY

That's fucked, man. Hey, you coming into town tonight? Darrel told me there's gonna be a party over at Tony and Mike's.

DANNY

I don't know. I might.

JAY

Shit, you're just getting too weird. You don't want to do anything anymore.

DANNY

I said I might, Jay.

JAY

Yeah, that's what you've said every weekend for the last month.

They leave the room.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DUSK

Danny and Jay walk toward the front door. Bill watches them coldly.

DARLA

The man on the moon!

DOUG
That ain't it!

DARLA
Sure is.

JAY
(passing Sue)
Boy, that sure smells good, Mrs. Barton.

SUE
Well, thank you, Jay.

JAY
(at the door)
See ya later, man. Thanks for letting me borrow your book.

DANNY
Do what? Oh, yeah, sure. Take it easy.

Jay leaves. Danny stands at the door for a moment and watches Jay walk to the car, wishing he could follow him. Then he walks toward the dining room, head down.

BILL
What'd he want?

DANNY
Nothin'. He just wanted to know what we did at school yesterday. He had to stay home cause he was sick.

Doug looks at Danny and LAUGHS, then COUGHS to cover it up. Danny gives him a quick, hard look.

BILL
He doesn't look sick now.

DANNY
Well, he said he still wasn't feeling too well but that he was feeling better than he was before.

BILL
Yeah, I bet it being Saturday is pretty good medicine. You doin' his school work for him?

DANNY
(defensively)
No.

BILL

Well, you better not be. Just cause he's an Indian don't mean he deserves a free ride at school too. (Pause) You hear me?

DANNY
(coldly)

Yeah, I hear ya. I'm gonna take a shower.

Once gone, Bill looks at Sue until she sees him. They linger, Sue shrugs, and Bill looks away. Doug regards their actions.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Having showered, Danny enters the room, shirtless, carrying shoes. He drops the shoes near a closet and moves to his bed, which he falls on. He lays quietly for a moment, then slides toward the stereo and flips on the turntable. The same Nation album begins.

Danny sits down on his bed, shoulders slumped. He runs his hands through his hair, tired of life, of this life anyway. He picks up the Nation album cover and stares at the image on the front.

ALBUM COVER. DANNY'S POV

DANNY

sets the cover aside and, lifting his mattress, pulls out a recent Rolling Stone magazine. Dropping to his knees, Danny lays the magazine on the bed and begins reading.

MAGAZINE

Danny flips a few pages and quickly finds the page he is looking for. At the top of the page is the headline, "Jonny Nation's Self-Fulfilling Prophecy." Beneath is an article reviewing Nation's Across the Water album and a caricature of Nation. Danny turns the page and notices an excerpt from the review, in much larger type, blocked off on the page.

EXCERPT

It reads: Of all the significant rock artists who started in the Sixties (Dylan, the Rolling Stones, et al.) Jonny Nation is the only one who's consistently better now than he was then.

DANNY

smiles. Then he turns a few pages forward then returns to the first page of the review.

CARICATURE

A side view of Nation playing guitar that pays particular attention to the face and eyes to suggest a piercing moral vision.

DANNY

The smile widens.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE -- NIGHT

Wary but curious, Danny stands looking through an open doorway into a long, rectangular room. The light in the scene is soft and dim with darkness at the edges -- a sort of tunnel effect.

ROOM. DANNY'S POV

It's half-filled with loud, milling people, who move around tables with food and drinks on them. The group consists of a few young band members, attention-seeking girls, some rock-n-roll business types, stagehands, and maybe reporters and photographers.

JONNY NATION O.S.

Hey, man. Want a beer?

NATION. DANNY'S POV

Nation walks up beside Danny. He is wearing the same clothes he had on in the caricature.

NATION-DANNY

Nation hands Danny an unopened can of beer. The light from the room illuminates them both. Danny is astonished but relaxed because such a scene is plausible to him. He opens the beer. Nation looks into the room. He is amused by what he sees. He takes a drink of beer. Danny looks in, smiles, and takes a drink too. Nation looks at Danny.

NATION

(sarcastically)

Party, party, party. (He drinks, looks into the room) So, I hear you play a little harmonica.

DANNY
 (surprised)
 Yeah. Yeah, I do.

NATION
 Well, why don't you come on the road
 with us? I could use you.

DANNY
 I, I can't play that well. Really, I
 can hardly play at all.

NATION
 (looks at him; reassuringly)
 I know.

Nation turns and takes a step away from the room.

NATION
 Come on. Let's get out of here.

Danny is thrilled but too confused to move. Nation looks
 back at him.

NATION
 I thought you were ready to leave home.
 Come on. I can teach you how to play.
 That's the easy part. It's what you know
 that's important. Come on. Let's go.

Nation's voice trails off as he steps into the darkness.
 Danny pauses then there is a SOUND of a bedroom door
 opening.

CUT TO:

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The bedroom door opens and Bill peers in. Startled, Danny
 tries to close and shield the magazine from view
 nonchalantly as he turns to see who it is.

BILL
 Come on. We got cows out.

Bill walks out of the room, leaving the door open. Danny
 slumps down to the floor, leaning back against the bed.
 He considers what has just happened and shaking his head,
 laughs at the irony, knowing he is not outside but a part
 of it. Bill sticks his head back in the doorway.

BILL
 You comin'?

DANNY

Yeah.

He stands slowly, using the bed as an aide, and Bill leaves the room. Danny lifts the magazine off the bed, but before he puts it under the mattress, he opens it to the Jonny Nation page again.

CARICATURE

DANNY

CUT TO:

INT. DARK HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Danny runs down the hallway, calling after Jonny. BRUSQUE SOUND of a door opened forcefully.

CUT TO:

INT. DRESSING ROOM -- NIGHT

JONNY NATION walks into the room, which is backstage at the Capital Centre in Landover, Maryland, following a lackluster concert performance.

MAN O.S.

Jonny! Jonny!

A reporter from a local paper sticks his head through the doorway.

REPORTER

Hey, Jonny, mind if I ask you a few questions?

No response, so he enters. Two others follow.

JONNY

is already seated, has a beer in his hand, and is obviously not interested.

REPORTER ONE

(cautiously)

You cut it off kinda short tonight, didn't you?

JONNY

I thought I'd do them a favor. They didn't seem too pleased with the selections.

REPORTER ONE

Really? What made you think that?

JONNY

Oh, I don't know. The constant screaming, "Play something else!" could've been it. But then again, it could've been just me. Look, I'm not in much of a mood for this.

REPORTER ONE

(overlapping)

Why did you decide to start your tour in Maryland, anyway?

Jonny takes a drink and looks down before answering. He laughs to himself.

JONNY

Well, you see I've got roots here. My father came to Maryland on the Mayflower when I was just a young boy. So, naturally, when I decided to go on tour. . .

Reporter one writes then stops, puzzled. Reporter Two, a pseudo-sophisticated rock expert, cuts in. He looks at his notes as he asks his questions. As he does, ELLIOTT GASS, Jonny's production manager, comes in. His dress is casual but suggests an expensive, hip-international style.

REPORTER TWO

Lets cut the chit chat, Jonny. We all know you were born in Tulsa. What we don't know though is how you feel about your declining record sales. Though they've received a great deal of critical acclaim, your last two albums, well let's face it, they just haven't sold and now it looks like your latest release is destined for the same type reception. Could this be why you were so, how should I say it, distraught with your audience tonight?

JONNY

(leaning forward)

Could you repeat the question please?

REPORTER TWO

Are you aware that Bob Dylan experienced a similar decline at nearly the same point in his career?

JONNY

Oh, I'll take 'Rock Trivia' for five hundred please, Jack.

REPORTER THREE

Jonny, is it true that the real reason you are no longer playing or touring with your former

band the Black Hawks is that you were caught fooling around with some of the band members' wives?

REPORTER TWO

Really?

JONNY

(standing)

Oh, God. Yeah, but they didn't mind till they heard about the handcuffs.

ELLIOTT

That's not true!

Jonny walks past the reporters toward the door.

JONNY

Hey, could one of you guys give me directions to the nearest police station? I need some tools for tonight.

ELLIOTT

All right, that's enough.

Jonny opens the door and walks out. Before it closes, Elliott turns to the reporters.

ELLIOTT

Those comments are, of course, not true. Jonny's been under a lot of stress lately.

The dressing room door closes.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY -- NIGHT

A metal door opens. Jonny enters and walks down the hallway. Elliott soon follows. He runs to catch him. When he does, the continue walking. The two have been together a long time, so the friction does not completely erase the understanding they have of the other's position.

ELLIOTT

Jonny, what in the hell are you doing? Blowing off the reporters is nothing new, but shit, you only played about thirty-five minutes tonight. For Christ's sake, it's the opening night of the tour.

JONNY

So.

ELLIOTT

Oh, now that's a hell of an answer.

(Pause) Look, man, I know you weren't pleased with what went on out there tonight but this is just the first of a long string of shows we've got to do.

JONNY
(after a pause)

So.

ELLIOTT
(more forcefully)
So you're gonna have to play for them, Jonny. That's what you're gettin' paid to do.

JONNY
It always goes back to money with you, doesn't it, Elliott?

ELLIOTT
Oh, yeah, and like you've really bitched about playing in front of 10,000 people at 15 bucks a pop.

JONNY
No, but I'll damn sure bitch when they won't quit screaming and yelling long enough for me to tune a goddamn guitar.

They walk through another doorway and head toward a private parking area. Elliott considers his words.

ELLIOTT
Look, I can understand your frustration. And I think it's great that you keep doing new things on your albums instead of just relying on the same stuff over and over. Shit, that's why I like working with you so much. You know that. But you gotta realize that most of your fans would still much rather hear you and the Black Hawks crank on some electric guitars and scream out Reagan than come watch you stand off by yourself with no band and just a guitar and a harmonica and sing about God and death.

JONNY
Well, that's their problem. I'll play with the Black Hawks if I want to play with them not because it'll sell more tickets.

ELLIOTT
Yeah, but, I don't know. I don't know what you can expect from them. You want them to appreciate and understand everything you do

and then you don't give them a damn thing in return. You won't do interviews, you haven't toured in five years, you won't even make a fuckin' video. And then out of the blue you start making albums that are completely different from anything else you've ever done, and you get pissed off when they don't love you for it. I don't know what you're thinking about. You can't control everything, Jonny.

JONNY

I don't expect shit from them, Elliott. Except that they sit there and shut up while I'm singing. And don't tell me I don't give anything to them. I give them a voice, a real voice, not a manufactured one -- if they'd shut up long enough to hear it.

ELLIOTT

All I know, Jonny, is that if you tell the people in Boston tomorrow night to 'Wake up' like you did tonight, we're gonna get such bad press you won't have to worry about people screaming while you sing because there's not gonna be anybody there to hear ya.

JONNY

(stops walking)

Don't tell me how to act, Elliott. All right? Don't tell me how to behave on stage while you sit over there and count the goddamned ticket receipts. (Pause. Jonny wishes he hadn't said this.) At least not until you know what it's like to sing in front of 10,000 people who are screaming at you to sing something else.

They continue walking. As Elliott speaks, they arrive at Jonny's car, a rented Mercedes. Jonny takes the keys out of his front pocket and unlocks the driver's side door.

ELLIOTT

All right. All right. But still, man. Hey!

Elliott touches Jonny on the shoulder to keep him from getting into the car. Jonny stops, turns and looks at Elliott, and in so doing reaffirms control. Elliott withdraws his hand.

ELLIOTT

(more politely)

Jonny, we've got a long tour scheduled. One you planned and approved. And what worries me most is not only are you already bummed but you're not even travelling with

the rest of us. You're driving around like this was some kind of 'Discover America by Car' vacation. In a week you'll be sick of the whole fuckin' thing. You know you will. And if you skip out on this tour, Jonny, it's gonna be your ass.

JONNY

(stepping into the car)

Financially speaking. Right, Elliott?

Jonny shuts the door, backs out the car, and pulls away quickly but without squealing the tires.

ELLIOTT

He says as he pulls away in a rented Mercedes.

(Laughs) Shit.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

The Mercedes drives ahead on a busy four-lane.

INT. MERCEDES

Nation is restless and edgy. He desires a place, a state of mind, that will be peaceful, but doesn't know where or how to find it. He is cautious but impatient as he drives.

His moves inside the car are the same. He opens the glove box, pulls out a clear, plastic bag, retrieves a joint from several lying in the bag, and returns it to the glove box. He fishes a lighter out of his front pocket and lights the joint. He turns the radio on, scans the FM band, then turns the radio off.

He removes his wallet from his back pocket and takes out a folded piece of paper, which he unfolds and reads.

PAPER

Handwritten directions.

EXT. CAR

makes a few turns and enters a lighted downtown area.

SIDEWALK. NATION'S POV

As the car moves slowly down the street, we examine the night life: neon bar signs, a few porno theaters, young women looking for work. Nation spots two working women ahead of him.

He slows almost to a stop when he pulls up beside them. They look at him, smile. A car behind Nation HONKS. He drives on.

CAR

Comes to a stop light. A teenage working girl is crossing the street in front of him. They make eye contact. She leaves the crosswalk and walks to the car. Nation rolls his window down.

GIRL

leans on the car door. She is street-wise but attractive and still looks faintly innocent.

GIRL

Hey, Mr. Big. I like your car. (She looks in.) Oooh. Nice interior, too. Take me for a ride?

INT. NATION

He looks her over. Then changes his mind.

NATION

No, sorry. I'm in a hurry.

GIRL

Too bad.

NATION

Yeah. Smoke?

Jonny shows her the joint.

GIRL

No thanks. I'm not into drugs.

NATION

(Laughs) Yeah. Stay clean, sweetheart.

He pulls slowly away, folds the directions and tosses the paper onto the passenger seat.

CLOSE ON DIRECTIONS

Sound of paper TORN from spiral notebook.

CUT TO:

INT. SHEET OF SPIRAL PAPER -- MORNING

Held by two hands, the paper contains handwritten lyrics from a Jonny Nation song, one much like Neil Young's

"Soldier." The song title and "By Jonny Nation" are written at the top of the page.

DANNY

sits on his bed, reading the lyrics. Dressed in shirt and slacks for church, he looks uncomfortable. He finishes reading and looks up, puzzled. Setting the paper on the bed, he picks up a printed lyric sheet beside him and slides it into the Across the Water album cover.

SUE O.S.

Danny, if you don't come one, we're going to be late!

Danny quickly places the album beside the stereo and picks up an ink pen and the paper, which he folds, from the bed.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM -- MORNING

All the Bartons are present and all are dressed for church except Bill. A coffee cup in hand, he's on the phone, dressed in work clothes. Sue tries to comb David's hair.

DOUG

Mom, I'm gonna go on.

SUE

All right.

DARLA

Can I ride with you?

DOUG

Yeah, all right. Come on.

They leave.

SUE

(to David)

This is hopeless. I'm not gonna be able to get it to lie down.

Hurried, she drops the comb on the table. Bill hangs up the phone.

SUE

Where is Danny?

She moves toward the staircase door, which opens before she reaches it. Danny enters. Sue moves back to the table.

SUE

It's about time. What have you been doing up there?

Danny doesn't answer and Sue doesn't wait for one. She lifts her purse and a few Sunday school books from the table.

SUE

Bill, if you come in for lunch before we get back, there's some roast beef in the refrigerator for sandwiches.

BILL

All right.

He walks into the kitchen. The others move toward the living room.

EXT. HOUSE

They get into the front seat of the family car and head for church, Danny driving.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH -- MORNING

The First Baptist Church of Warren is a small but new brick building, built in the last five years. The small parking lot is full.

INT. CHURCH -- MORNING

The auditorium is comfortably furnished but dull and simple in its decorations. A wooden cross hangs on the wall above the curtained baptismal. A woman in her late-20's, who looks crimped by her dress and make-up, stands before the congregation SINGING "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" with a piano accompaniment. Her pace is slow but her voice is surprisingly passionate.

PEW

The Bartons, except for Doug, sit near the end and listen. Sue follows along in her hymnal with David beside her. Darla sits with a friend and pretends to do the same. Danny also has his hymnal open, but a closer look shows he has placed the notebook paper he was reading earlier in his room over the lyrics in the hymnal.

As he reads the lyrics, this Nation song begins to play in the background and slowly overcomes the fading church hymn. Again, this song is much like Neil Young's "Soldier" in that it challenges Christ's spiritual

validity. When the song reaches a line that reveals this challenge, Danny looks up at the bare cross on the wall.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHRIST ON THE CROSS -- DUSK

A live Christ hangs dying on the cross. The sky is grey; the light from the sun, which is cloaked by clouds in the background, casts long shadows. A few people, kneeling at the base of the cross, mourn the death. Farther below, Roman guards form a loose, ringed barrier that no one challenges. Some hurl verbal taunts, some weep, some just watch. The crowd is massive as people continue to join it.

EXT. BACK OF CROWD -- DUSK

Those gathered here are members of the Warren community, including the Bartons. No one in biblical dress is present, and the cross can only vaguely be seen in the distance. The sun is shining here; the sky is blue. All stand and watch, quietly. Bill is near his family but not with them. Not interested in the cross, he talks with another farmer. Danny stands anxiously, looking around.

He sees Jonny Nation nearby, walking away from the crowd. He hesitates, then runs after Nation. The SONG STOPS.

DANNY

Don't you believe in this?

JONNY

What do you think?

DANNY

I don't know. I mean, this sounds like you don't. (He holds up the notebook paper from church) But in other songs it sounds like you still believe in something. You seem like you're really in touch with something.

JONNY

Does that bother you?

DANNY

Well, no.

JONNY

What do you believe in?

DANNY

I don't know. I guess I believe like you do.

JONNY

And what do you think I believe in?

DANNY

Well. . .

SUE O.S.

Danny! Danny!

Danny turns and sees her waving him back.

DANNY

Can't you tell me any more than that?

JONNY

I don't know what to tell you, man. You just have to figure it out for yourself.

SUE O.S.

Danny!

Danny turns and sees Sue and some of the other community members running toward him.

DANNY

Oh, shit. Come on, Jonny, please. Can't you do any more. . .

Danny turns but Jonny's gone. He looks up and sees a hawk flying toward the horizon.

DANNY

Goddamnit, Jonny! Don't leave me here!

Sue hugs Danny from behind and the others swarm around. He tries to break the hug but can't.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH -- MORNING

Danny sits, glassy eyed, depressed.

PREACHER O.S.

And in the book of John we see Christ respond on this subject. .

The preacher is an older man, simply dressed.

PREACHER

In chapter 4 verse 48, he says "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe." The older I get, brethren, the more I believe this to be true. We cannot measure Christ's love the way we measure everything else in this world,

in inches and yards. We cannot expect His works to always meet our notions of common sense. If we truly believe Christ is our saviour, then we must believe that all things are possible through Him.

Danny looks up, more confused than enlightened.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM -- DAY

Danny sits at his desk, near the back of the class, reading the same Nation song lyrics. A woman's voice, Danny's English teacher MRS. PHILLIPS, can be heard offscreen conducting a question-answer session. The students in Danny's row are answering the questions. His turn quickly approaches, but he's not paying attention. Then a student across the aisle hands him a note:

"Wake up, Danny Nation. Number four is intuition."

MRS. PHILLIPS O.S.

Danny, you're next. What do you have for number four?

CLASSROOM

DANNY

Uh, intuition?

MRS. PHILLIPS

That's right. Did everyone get that?

Danny looks across the room at Jay, who's wearing a "Rolling Stones" t-shirt and army fatigue pants. Jay points to his head, nods and smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL CAFETERIA -- DAY

Inside a portable building filled with rows of long fold-up cafeteria tables. Students ranging from elementary to high school age are seated or standing in line, having their plates filled.

Tray in hand, Danny takes a seat across from Jay at the end of a table. Several boys wearing caps with rounded bills are seated beside them, including Danny's brother Doug.

JAY

Hey, Hereford, how do things look for the big cow show comin' up?

DOUG
 (acting modest)
 Uh, I dunno. I think I got a good chance.

JAY
 Now this is what? County show? State?
 National? What?

DOUG
 This is state. District was last week.

JAY
 And you finished first, right?

DOUG
 Yeah, I had the grand champion steer.

JAY
 (turning to Danny)
 Ooooh, grand champion. See what you've
 been missing out on by being a lazy, no-
 account, good-for-nothing long hair.
 Daniel, Daniel, Daniel. If only you had
 committed yourself, then you could be the
 one getting all the glory for having
 raised the fattest cow in the county.
 Damn it, son! (Bangs the table gently; smiles)
 Now what have you got to show for
 yourself? Huh? Tell me. What? You're
 just a grand champion. . .(Pauses to
 consider how he wants to finish the sentence)

STUDENT
 Druggie.

This gets a laugh out of the boys seated nearby, including
 Doug. Angered, Danny looks quickly at the boy, a friend
 of Doug's, and then at the others.

DANNY
 (slapping his inner thigh)
 I got your drugs right here, Robert.

Jay laughs.

ROBERT
 I'd need a microscope to find it.

LAUGHTER from the others.

DANNY
 (to Jay)
 Huh, huh, huh. The cowboys liked that one.

VOICE O.S.
Whaddya say, boys?

The voice belongs to RAY CANTRELL, the school's FFA instructor. He enters walking down the aisle behind Jay, carrying a food tray. He stops when he reaches Doug.

CANTRELL
Herf, you gonna stay after school and work on your steer today or does your dad need ya to help him?

DOUG
No, he's gone to a sale in Woodward. I'll be down after school's over.

CANTRELL
Good. We need to start talkin' about what all we're gonna take with us to the show. I reckon we'll be leaving Friday morning.

DOUG
All right.

Cantrell continues walking down the aisle.

DANNY-JAY

Danny looks mad.

JAY
(leaning forward)
You shoulda said, 'Hey, Mr. Cantrell, if Doug's a Hereford, what does that make you?'

Danny smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE CAFETERIA -- DAY

Danny and Jay come out of the cafeteria together and walk slowly across the parking lot toward the main school building, which houses the junior high and high school classes.

JAY
You know, Dan, as well as you get along with them old boys, I think you ought to start thinking about running for FFA president for next year. You need to keep it in the family since Doug's gonna be graduating.

DANNY
Yeah, I'd make a good one, wouldn't I?

JAY
 (pointing across the lot)
 No, now that's who you really owe your
 responsibility to.

GROUP OF STUDENTS

Several junior high students are gathered around a parked
 car from which some loud heavy metal music is blaring.

DANNY-JAY

JAY
 Ooh, yes. Check it out. Mary Fielding.

MARY

In the same group of students, a girl, MARY FIELDING,
 walks from the back of a car to the front. She is wearing
 a heavy metal t-shirt and is very mature, physically. She
 walks to the driver's side door and bends over so she can
 talk to a boy in the car.

JAY O.S.
 A fuckin' freshman. Can you believe it?

DANNY-JAY

JAY
 Jesus, child, what's your momma putting
 in your cereal bowl? I know what I'd like
 to put in it. Let's go over there.

DANNY
 Hell, no.

JAY
 Why not?

DANNY
 Why in the hell would I want to?

JAY
 Well, if I have to answer that. . .

They keep walking until they reach Danny's car, which he
 doesn't spend much money on. They sit on the hood. Danny
 watches a hawk in the sky. He then reaches toward his
 back pocket, hesitates, then pulls out a folded piece of
 paper.

DANNY
 (nervously)
 Hey. (Coughs) Hey, would you do me a favor?

JAY

What?

DANNY

(handing paper to Jay)

Would you read that and tell me what you think it means?

JAY

What the hell is it?

DANNY

It's the words to one of the songs on Jonny Nation's new album.

Jay looks at him askance, then down at the paper.

JAY

What do you want me to do?

DANNY

Just read it. Tell me what you think it means.

JAY

Why?

DANNY

I just want to know what you think it means. That's all.

Suspiciously, Jay reads a few lines, looks at Danny who's not watching him, reads a few more, looks at Danny again, smiles.

JAY

Hmm. (Strokes his chin repeatedly) I think I'm beginning to see something here. Uh-huh, uh-huh. Yeah, I'd say we were into some serious deepness here. In fact we might even be getting close to ultimate meaning.

DANNY

Shit, I knew better. Give it here.

JAY

No, now. I'm trying to be serious. What do you think it means?

Danny looks at Jay skeptically, then tries anyway.

DANNY

I don't know. I mean, I think he's really saying something about death and, and God, and is asking why Jesus doesn't go ahead

and do something now if he's got all this power, but I don't know. I'm not sure. And he keeps talking about 'burning eyes' and I think that's supposed to stand for something, but I don't know for sure.

JAY

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. (Strokes his chin) I'm picking up on that. I see where you're coming from. That's a, that's, yeah that's where I think the first real serious deepness begins and then it just goes on from there. I mean, after that deepness, then there comes all these other deepnesses, (starts to loose his straight face) and they just sort of, they just sort of keep coming at ya, and the whole thing then just starts building toward this one really huge-ass deepness at the end.

DANNY

(overlapping)

Give me the son-of-a-bitch back.

JAY

(steps back, laughing)

No, hell, no. I think we're on to something here. I didn't know you were into stuff this deep.

DANNY

(pursues him)

Give it here, Jay.

JAY

(backpeddling)

But how do we know we're really seeing how deep it is? We could just still be on the surface and we'd never know. We better get somebody else to look at it just to be sure. Hey, Julie's smart. We'll get her to read it and if she sees the same thing we saw. . .

DANNY

(rushing him)

Goddammit, Jay! Give it here!

Jay eludes him. Then Danny grabs him, but Jay keeps the paper away from him.

JAY

Don't stop me now, Danny. I'm acting in the name of ultimate truth!

DANNY

Give me the son-of-a. . .

Danny gets a hand on it, pulls, and tears the paper in two.

JAY
 (handing him the other half)
 All right. You can have it.

Danny grabs it from him, stuffs both halves into a front pocket, returns to the car hood. Jay follows him.

JAY
 (to sky)
 See what you caused, Jonny Nation. It's all your fault. If you'd quit trying to find God this kind of thing wouldn't happen. Isn't that right, Danny?

DANNY
 Fuck off. Go play with the freshmen.

JAY
 (to sky)
 See?

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- DAY

Jonny Nation is sitting up in bed, partly dressed, smoking a cigarette. A game show plays on the television. Jonny flicks ashes from the cigarette into an ashtray on a nearby dresser. A bottle of tequila, three-fourths full, is beside the ashtray.

Jonny opens the dresser drawer, reaches in, pulls out a joint. He considers lighting it, but doesn't, and drops it back into the drawer.

He gets out of bed, shuts off the tv, paces the room. He picks up a guitar near the bed, sits down, extinguishes the cigarette. He strums the guitar then whips off something that shows his easy skill with the instrument.

JONNY
 (strumming the guitar;
 in mock seriousness)
 I'd like to play for you now one of my favorite little numbers. It's a silly little ditty. Or I guess you could call it a dilly little silly. Or maybe a little dilly silly. Anyway, it's about, well, it's about a lot of things really. And then again I guess you could say it's about nothing at all. But let's say it is, just for the sake

of entertainment. What do you say?

Accepts imagined applause.

Thank you, thank you. Why don't we say it's about. . .well, let's say it's about life. Oh, you've already heard that one. All right, then, let's say it's about death. Oh, I see. You've already heard that one too. Well then I don't know what to say except that 'frankly, my dear, I don't give a fuck.'

Points the guitar at the imagined spectator.

BOOM! All right, all right. Sorry for the disturbance, folks. (Strumming again) Let's calm down now. (Leaning forward) It's just a dead person, dear. That's right, that's right, sweetheart. Okay, everyone, let's calm down now. Please, stay in your seats. (To the side) Uh, excuse me, could we get an usher over here. Yeah, and maybe a body bag? What? Hefty bag? Yeah, that'll work. Anything to get this stinking corpse out of here. (Laughs) Okay, now we'll get this mess cleaned up in no time, folks. Just calm yourselves down now. (Pause) You people who happened to catch a few blood stains over there just send the dry cleaning bill to me and I'll see that it gets taken care of. That's right, that's right. That's cause Jonny Nation loves you. Don't forget that, you wonderful people. (To imagined applause) Thank you. Thank you very much. You're too kind. Now let's get the show started, what do you say? Okay. . .(Starts singing, "My Way") You've heard this one? I thought you had, sweetheart. I love you, too.

He sings a few lines, then stops and tries to create something original on the guitar. He gets something going, struggles, stops. Repeats this. Finding something he likes, he closes his eyes.

JONNY

(singing)

That's cause I'm right back now where I started before. . .that's cause I'm. . . that's cause. . .shit. I haven't left. . . I ain't. . .I'm on the same road. . . (Speaking) and there ain't no leaving it. (Strums the guitar hard once and stops) Not at least until you die.

He pauses, then begins playing softly again; speaking in the same mock serious tone.

JONNY

I know that's not the one you want to hear, darling. And so I'm thinking about not playing it, because when you really think about it, just where would I be without all you wonderful people. (Goes into "As Time Goes By")

CUT TO:

INT. POOL HALL -- DAY

Inside a small game room which has a few booths, pool tables, video games, and a jukebox, now playing "Main Street" by Bob Seger. Danny, Jay, and Darrel are shooting pool--cutthroat. Cigarette dangling from his mouth, Darrel shoots, misses, leaves an easy shot.

DARREL

Goddammit!

JAY

That's what you get for shooting at mine. Now I'm gonna make you pay.

Darrel moves near a booth, picks up an open beer from the seat, takes a long drink. Jay makes three or four straight shots while Darrel and Danny talk.

DARREL

Hey, Danny, has Doug finished showing this year?

DANNY

No, they still got the state show to go this weekend.

DARREL

He graduates this year, don't he?

DANNY

Yeah.

DARREL

What's he gonna do when he gets out?

DANNY

I don't know. I haven't heard him say. Work for the old man I guess.

DARREL

What are you gonna do?

DANNY

I have no fuckin' idea. I'm just glad I've got another year to put it off. Probably be a bum. That sounds pretty good to me right now. I just know I ain't gonna spend my whole life working every day like my old man just so I can come home and pay bills and then go back to work. No fuckin' way.

DARREL

You find some way to get out of having to do that and you let me know. I been looking for it all my life.

DANNY

Shit, I don't see how you can do it. I can't hardly stand the amount of work I gotta do right now.

DARREL

You think it's bad now, wait til you gotta do it every day, all day long. And you better enjoy your fun times now, boys, cause that first real working day ain't that far off.

JAY

(misses a shot)

Ohhh!

DANNY

(stepping in to shoot)

What are you gonna do, Cool Ray?

JAY

I don't know. I'm thinking about going to college.

DANNY

College?

JAY

Yeah. What's there better to do? I ain't gonna end up like dumb fuck there, having to scrounge around for jobs my whole life.

DARREL

Dream while you can, little brother.

Danny shoots, misses. Darrel shoots for a while.

JAY

Shit, I ain't dreaming. That's why I'm busting ass now in school.

DANNY

God, I don't know. Four more years of school. And you have to pay for it then. Shit. How are you gonna do that?

JAY

I don't know. I think I can get some Indian grants. And I'll probably have to get a job.

DANNY

What are you gonna do when you get out?

JAY

I'm gonna be wherever the money's at. I want to get on at some bank and say 'All right, I'm gonna take care of the money. Ya'll handle the rest of it.'

DANNY

Shit, you are dreaming. You go to college you'll just be able to keep from having to work full-time for four more years. When you get through you'll have spent all that money and still have to get a boring job like everyone else.

JAY

Yeah, but at least mine'll be air-conditioned.

DANNY

Yeah, and you'll have to be wearing a fuckin' monkey suit too. But you'd probably like that. (Pause) Hey, Darrel, did old man McFarland say how long he and my old man were gonna be gone today?

DARREL

Huh-uh. Or he may have but I don't remember. After he told me I could have the day off, I didn't listen to nothing else he said. Didn't your old man tell you?

DANNY

No, he never tells me nothing. Except when I screw up.

DARREL

You worried he's gonna come back and put you to work?

DANNY

I'm supposed to be out there right now. We spent all day Saturday fixin' fence, and when

we were through, he told me I didn't get it strung tight enough.

DARREL

So he wants you to do it over?

DANNY

Hell, yes. I was supposed to finish it yesterday, but I didn't.

DARREL

So what are you gonna do when he gets in tonight and asks you about that fence?

DANNY

I don't know. It's gettin' hard for me to care anymore about anything he wants me to do. What's he gonna do, make me work longer hours? (Laughs)

JAY

He's gonna make life hell for you is what he's gonna do.

DANNY

Yeah, so what. He's doing a good job of that right now. Hey, Darrel, what time d'you say they were gonna be back?

DARREL

I don't know for sure, Danny.

DANNY

I better get off Main Street pretty soon then. I don't want him to come in early and find me down here.

DARREL

Let's finish this game and go back to our house and burn one.

DANNY

All right.

Darrel shoots, misses. Jay's shot.

DARREL

Shit.

Bob Seger's song concludes and one like Neil Young's "The Needle and the Damage Done" begins.

DANNY

Yes!

He uses pool cue as a guitar.

JAY

All right! Another one by Jonny Nasal.
(Holds his nose and sings a line) Gee,
I wonder who played that one? Really,
man, don't you ever get tired of
listening to him?

DANNY

(Sings a line of the song) It's hard to
get tired of the best.

JAY

(laughing)
The best!? Yeah, right. The best what?

DANNY

Who's better?

JAY

(making a shot)
I can think of a lot of people that are
better.

DANNY

Who?

JAY

The Beatles. The Who.

Danny taps the pool cue on the ground out of nervousness,

DANNY

No, they're not. And anyway they're both
broke up. I'm talking about right now.
Who's the best?

JAY

All right. What about the Rolling Stones?

DANNY

Yeah, but what are they doing? Just
cranking out albums to make money. They
don't give a shit about anything anymore.
(Jumps and swings his head from side to side)
'You can start me up. Whee! You can start
me up I never stop.' Boy, now that's some
heavy shit.

JAY

That's just one song.

DANNY

Hell, that's what all their songs are
about now. Sex or parties. That's all

that matters to anyone anymore.

JAY

Hell, they're just playing to their audience. What's wrong with that. And besides, what's more important than sex and parties? 'Fact, I think it shows some improvement on their part. Getting away from the God and devil shit to things that really matter.

DANNY

Yeah, right. I guess we'll have to stop running around together so you can start hanging out with the freshman.

JAY

Oh, yeah, you and Jonny Nation are so much better than the rest of us. Jonny, yeah boy, he's really deep. Shit. (Holds his nose and sings a line with Nation) Now that's some deep shit.

Danny wants to reply but can't think of anything to say.

DANNY

He just don't know, does he, Darrel?

DARREL

I don't know. I've kinda gotten bummed on old Nation since he stopped playing with the Black Hawks. I'm not much into this spiritual thing or whatever the fuck it is that he's on. I want to listen to him jam and sing about how fucked Reagan is. Not about this Jesus shit.

DANNY

(moves closer to Darrel)

Yeah, I know what you mean, but, but I don't know. I mean, I don't think he's lost it or anything. I think he still knows what he's doing. I like to listen to him play with the Black Hawks too, but I think he's just gotten more concerned with the words. You know what I mean?

DARREL

(only partly listening)

Yeah. Well, he's always had some cool things to say.

DANNY

No, I mean, it's like. When I listen to some of the songs on Across the Water, I

mean, I know he's always had something to say in his songs, but. I don't know. The songs he writes now are different. It's like their looking inside rather than outside. No, that's not it exactly. I don't know. I mean, sometimes I feel like what he's saying is exactly what I'm thinking. You know what I mean?

DARREL

Yeah, I know. He can get pretty weird sometimes.

DANNY

No, it's not that it's just weird. Anything can be weird. This is different.

Jay shoots, misses.

JAY

Damn! I could've put you out with that one, Danny boy. Now try and forget about Jonny Nation for a minute and sink one of Darrel's balls. He's got four left.

Danny steps up, shoots quickly, misses. Darrel's shot.

JAY

Wonderful. That's what I get for depending on a Jonny Nation freak. Hey, what makes you think he's so fuckin' different from everyone else.

DANNY

It's obvious all that studying you do hasn't done you a damn bit of good.

JAY

Shit.

Jay listens to a line of the Nation song playing; eyes and mouth open as if he in awe.

Oh my God. Oh shit, you were right.
(Changes to voice of TV evangelist) I have seen the light! Jonny Nation has shown me the way! He has reached out and healed me!

DANNY

You're not gonna piss me off, man. I don't care what you say. You're just making fun of yourself, not me. Just cause someone's trying to get at the truth.

JAY

The truth? What truth? What the hell is deep about (Sings a line from the chorus of the song that's playing)

DANNY

Say what you want, Jay. I don't care. I thought you were really different, but you're not. You're just like everyone else.

JAY

Hell, explain it to me then! Show me what he's really talking about! I want to know.

DANNY

No, I tried once. If you're too stupid to figure it out on your own then I can't help you. You'll just have to go on back to your Rolling Stones.

JAY

You're just copping out cause you know. . . .

DANNY

(overlapping)
Go back to them mindless freshman and talk about sex and parties. . . .

JAY

(overlapping)
. . .there's not really anything to explain. It's no different than anything else.

Danny does his impression of an airhead, bouncing from side to side, his eyes and mouth wide open.

DANNY

Hi, girls! Hi, Jay! Hey, where's the party? Wherever you are, Jay! Whee!

JAY

(overlapping)
You think Jonny Nation's fuckin' Jesus Christ reincarnated. He's got some direct hookup to God.

DANNY

Hey, pop in a Stones' tape! They're the coolest, aren't they, Jay? Oh, yeah, Mick's the hippest. (Singing with same mannerisms and voice) You can start me up, whee! You can start me up I never stop. (Stops) Yeah, boy. Hey, that song's on the jukebox. We gotta hear that masterpiece.

He moves toward jukebox, fishing his pocket for a quarter.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET -- DAY

Bill Barton's truck drives slowly down Main Street.

INT. PICKUP -- DAY

FRED MCFARLAND, wheat and cattle farmer, rides with Bill.

FRED

You want to stop in at the cafe and have
a glass of tea?

BILL

No, I'm gonna take you on down to the Co-op
so you can get your pickup. I need to
check and see how Danny's comin' along with
that fence.

FRED

Is he workin' on it today?

BILL

Yeah. I guess you could call it workin'.

He sees Danny's car parked in front of the pool hall

BILL

Least that's what he's supposed to be doin'.

Bill whips the truck into a parking place; the sharp turn
throws Fred toward the middle of the seat. He looks
mildly surprised and even wary of Bill's sudden
fierceness.

BILL

(ramming the gear shift into park)
This'll just take a second.

He gets out of the pickup.

INT. POOL HALL -- DAY

Danny is jumping wildly, like he was before, yelling to be
heard over Jay. "Start Me Up" by the Rolling Stones
plays.

EXT. POOL HALL -- DAY

Bill opens the door.

INT. POOL HALL. BILL'S POV -- DAY

Immediately, he sees Danny gyrating. The jukebox music is too loud for Danny to hear the door open.

BILL

walks in, lets the door close behind him, stops, watches, equally angered and stunned.

POOL HALL

Jay sees Bill first and tries to get Danny's attention unsuspectingly.

JAY

(whispering)

Danny! Danny! (louder) Danny, it's your dad.

Danny stops, sees his father. His initial reaction is a weak smile which disappears faster than it came. He looks at the pool table, but no one is playing. Bill approaches. Some in the hall stop playing and listen.

BILL

(visibly restrained)

What are you doing? How come you ain't working on that fence?

DANNY

I don't know. I was about to head out there. I just stopped in here before I went, that's all.

BILL

School's been out nearly an hour. Exactly when was you plannin' on going out there?

DANNY

I told ya, soon as this game was over.

BILL

Mm-hmm. I bet.

Bill looks at Jay, then at Darrel. He notices the cigarette in Darrel's hand and the beer on the seat.

BILL

(to Danny)

This the way you always act when you're not home?

DANNY

What do ya mean? I was just goofin'

around.

BILL

Yeah, I know. I saw ya goofin' around, and I'd say you was right. It looked pretty goddamned goofy to me. Give me that stick.

Danny hesitates.

Give it here before I use it to beat some sense into ya.

Danny leans it toward him; Bill grabs it.

DANNY

But, Dad. . .

BILL

(grabbing his arm)

Don't backtalk me, boy. Get your butt out that door and go to work. I'll be out to check on ya in a little while.

Bill pushes him towards the door. Danny stops, looks back, then leaves. Bill looks coldly at Darrel and Jay, then tosses the pool cue on the table, scattering the balls. He moves toward the door.

EXT. POOL HALL -- DAY

Cursing to himself, Danny walks hurriedly toward his parked car. Bill follows and walks toward his truck.

INT. DANNY'S CAR -- DAY

Danny slams the door shut. He should leave before Bill, but he drops his keys as he anxiously pulls them from his pocket, and then drops them again as he tries to force one into the ignition.

EXT. CARS -- DAY

Bill looks at Danny, then backs his truck out first and heads down Main Street.

INT. DANNY'S CAR -- DAY

Danny watches cautiously in his rear view mirror. After the truck has pulled away, he takes a deep breath, then slowly inserts the key into the ignition. He sees Jay come out of the pool hall and approach the car.

EXT. CAR -- DAY

Jay hurries to the driver's door.

JAY

Hey, man, you all right.

DANNY

Yeah, man, I'm all right.

Danny backs the car out and speeds off, tires squealing.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY -- DAY

The car speeds ahead, Warren in the background.

INT. CAR -- DAY

Danny stares at the road, angry and confused. He slams the steering wheel with his hand, then sighs heavily. He pulls an eight-track tape out of the car's player and looks at it.

TAPE

Same scene as the album cover of Nation's Across the Water.

DANNY O.S.

They just don't understand, Jonny. None of 'em.

CUT TO:

EXT. CIVIC CENTER -- DAY

Danny and Jonny Nation walk at a brisk pace down a vacant sidewalk.

JONNY

Not everyone can, Danny. That's just the way it is.

DANNY

But shit, I know my old man never will. That doesn't bother me. He's just like everyone else. But hell, Jay and Darrel don't understand either and they're different. They seem more like one of us.

JONNY

Maybe they need someone to explain it to them.

DANNY

But I've tried. They won't listen.

JONNY

Maybe you didn't try hard enough.

DANNY

I did try, Jonny. I did.

JONNY

Did ya? How hard? How much did it mean to you to explain it to them? Hmm? Why did you give up so easily?

DANNY

I didn't give up. I tried til they wouldn't listen anymore.

JONNY

You had Darrel listening for a while. Why did you quit when Jay got into it?

DANNY

I don't know. I just, I just. I've tried talking to him before about it and it hasn't ever worked. I don't know.

JONNY

You weren't afraid he was gonna make fun of you, were ya?

DANNY

No! No, I wasn't.

JONNY

Why did you stop then and start jumping around like you did? You think that's the best way to explain it to them? To try and make fun of them the same way they're trying to make fun of you?

DANNY

(reeling)

No, no. I don't know. I don't know why I did it. I just choked, I guess.

JONNY

Yeah, I should say so. In fact, I think you were lucky your dad came in when he did. Look, Danny, I don't know how seriously you're taking this, but you gotta know this is it. This is life. The real thing. This ain't no game. You get one chance and that's it. Rust never sleeps, you know what I mean? And this is your test. This decides

whether you go on or play slave to them
cattle for the rest of your life. Then
you'll die and they'll bury you out there
in one of them pastures and that'll be it.

Nearly spent, Danny nods in affirmation.

JONNY

Now you know I ain't knocking that way of
life. It's probably not bad as far as jobs
go. But there comes a time, I don't care if
you're a farmer or a bricklayer or the
goddamned president, there comes a time when
you gotta decide who you're gonna follow.
Whether you're gonna stay tied up to where
you're at or move on to something better.

DANNY

I know, Jonny. I know.

JONNY

I hope so, man. I really do. Well,
I gotta split.

They come to a corner where a limousine is parked. Jonny
opens a back seat door and gets in.

JONNY

Good luck, man.

Defeated, Danny watches Jonny close the door and the car
drive away. A song like Neil Young's "Expecting to Fly"
begins.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY -- DUSK

The song continues. Jonny drives in his Mercedes on the
outskirts of Boston.

INT. CAR -- DUSK

Jonny is smoking a joint and drinking from a tequila
bottle. He is relaxed and happy. He takes a long drag
off the joint and unknowingly taps the ashes into the
tequila bottle. He looks out the window.

EXT. BIRD IN SKY. JONNY'S POV -- DUSK

It floats in the air. A loud THUD is heard.

INT. CAR HOOD. JONNY'S POV -- DUSK

A crumpled bird lies on the hood. The song continues but softer. The bird looks at Nation, opens its mouth to call but makes no sound. It slides pathetically off the hood.

JONNY

looks almost sick.

EXT. BOSTON. NATION'S POV -- DUSK

The car tops a small crest and the expanse of Boston spreads out before Jonny. His mood descends. Another show approaches.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- DUSK

The song continues. The sun is nearly down. Danny is sitting on the hood of his car, which is parked on the road, lazily throwing rocks and looking up at the sky.

DANNY

looks calm but it is apparent that he is still disturbed by some troubling thoughts and emotions. For the moment, the struggle has stopped but from mental fatigue, not resolution. At any time he could break into a fit of laughter or uncontrolled weeping and not know why.

PASTURE. DANNY'S POV

A herd of cattle grazes.

SKY. FEATURING SUNSET

DANNY

throws another rock. A shotgun BLAST is heard, but at some distance. Danny turns but sees nothing.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARTON'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Danny's car pulls into the driveway and parks in front of the house. He gets out and walks in.

INT. HOUSE -- NIGHT

The Bartons have finished eating and are seated in their usual places watching TV. Darla is talking but stops abruptly when Danny enters.

Sue looks quickly at Danny then glances down. Bill never looks at him. He just checks his watch, but his clenched jaw reveals his anger. Danny pauses, notices they are looking at him, then walks through the room.

DAVID

Hi, Danny.

DANNY

Davey.

Sue looks at Bill, waiting for him to make a move. He doesn't look at her. Doug and Darla try to read their parents' actions. Finally, Bill turns toward Doug.

BILL

(quietly)

Doug, why don't you take David upstairs for a while.

DOUG

All right, Dad.

SUE

Bill, let's at least let him eat his supper.

BILL

He can eat when we're through talking to him. Hell, it's already 7:30. It hasn't bothered him to wait this long. I don't think he'll mind waiting a little bit longer.

Doug crosses over to David and nudges him with his foot.

DOUG

Come on. Let's go upstairs.

DAVID

I don't want to go.

SUE

David, go with your brother.

DAVID

But I don't want to go upstairs. I wanna watch TV.

BILL

David.

DAVID

Yes sir.

He follows Doug out of the room.

DAVID

Hey, we can play with my new airplane.

DOUG

No, we're not gonna play any stupid games.

Bill stands and walks toward the kitchen. Sue sighs gently and follows him.

SUE

Stay in here for a while, Darla.

Once they are almost in the kitchen, Darla hurries down the hall behind them and turns into her bedroom.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Danny stands in front of the stove, adjusting the heat under a pot of beans. Sue and Bill enter.

SUE

You're going to have to heat everything up.
Here, let me do it for you.

Danny steps back as Sue moves in. With smooth celerity, she ignites the oven, pops a half-pan of cornbread into it, and stirs the beans.

SUE

Why, don't you sit down, Danny,
and I'll get you something to drink.

DANNY

I'm gonna go wash my hands.

BILL

Sit down, Danny. You can wash up later.
We're gonna have a little talk.

INT. DARLA'S ROOM -- NIGHT

She sits on the floor, talking quietly on the phone. She leans forward and opens her door a little wider.

DARLA

(whispering)

Just a minute, just a minute! I think
they're fixin' to get into it.

INT. STAIRCASE -- NIGHT

With David behind him, Doug opens the staircase door slightly.

DOUG

Now don't you open your mouth.

David nods.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Danny sits at the table. Sue fills a glass with ice and tea. Bill eyes Danny as he takes a seat at the table. He is so puzzled and angered by his son's actions that he can't quite decide how to reproach him.

BILL

(seating himself)

I came out looking for ya after I let Fred off, but I couldn't seem to find ya. D'you get lost on your way out there or something?

DANNY

No.

BILL

(after a pause)

Why didn't you do like I told ya?

DANNY

I don't know.

BILL

(leaning forward)

What have you been doing?

DANNY

Just driving around.

BILL

By yourself?

DANNY

Yeah.

Bill laughs, shakes his head.

BILL

You been ridin' around for nearly two and a half hours by yourself.

Danny nods.

SUE

Bill, I don't think he's lying.

BILL

Oh, I don't either. Not anymore. He's startin' to reach the point where he don't need to lie to us. He's just gonna do whatever feels good to him at the time, and if that ain't what we want him to be doing, then so what. That ain't for him to worry about. Now I'm only gonna ask you this one more time. How come you didn't go out there and finish tightening that fence like I told ya to do?

Danny looks directly at his father for a moment, then looks elsewhere.

DANNY

I don't know. I guess I just didn't see the point to it.

BILL

Didn't see the point to it. (Laughs again in disbelief; harshly) Well, maybe I don't see the point in letting you eat here tonight. Or sleeping under this roof. I damn sure don't see the point in letting you skip work so you can go down to the pool hall and act like a goddamned idiot!

SUE

Bill! That's not gonna get us anywhere. Danny, you know why your father works so hard, and it never bothered you to do what he asked before. Why does it bother you now all of a sudden?

Danny casually shrugs his shoulders.

SUE

Yes, you do.

BILL

He don't have the slightest idea. . .

SUE

Yes, he does, Bill. And it's not just the work. He doesn't want to do anything that's associated with this family in any way. Do you, Danny?

Danny looks at her, surprised.

SUE

Now what's causing it?

DANNY

I don't know.

SUE

I think you do know. Now what is it?

DANNY

I don't know!

Danny looks at his mother, then his father, mulling over an answer in his mind. Then he simply looks away.

BILL

(after a pause)

Well, I don't know what's causin' it, but I know he's only been acting this way since he started spending so much time with that Jay Raines.

DANNY

Oh, God.

BILL

Don't you 'Oh, God' me. I'll shove that. . .

Bill stands and walks away from the table, fist clenched. He turns and walks back quickly.

BILL

Ever since you been running around with him and his brother Darrel, you haven't wanted to do nothing but sit upstairs listening to that goofy music and cruise Main Street, doing who knows what else.

DANNY

Darrel and Jay ain't causing me to do anything I don't want to do. I don't know what's making me not want to work. I guess I just. . .

Danny sighs, then considers whether he really wants to go into this or not.

DANNY

I'm just tired of doing things that don't make any sense. I mean, I just don't see the point in spending your whole life working on something that's not ever gonna count for anything. It just seems pointless.

BILL

Ain't ever gonna count for anything? You call eating pointless? How about having a house to go to instead of sleeping out in the ditch in the winter time? Is that pointless, too? Now

I know wheat and cattle prices ain't been too good lately, but still.

Danny turns in his chair and lowers his head.

DANNY

That's not what I'm talking about, Dad. It doesn't matter how much money you make off it. You're just staying alive so you can go back to work and do the same thing again. And then in 70 years you die and that's it. So what's been the point to working? There's gotta be something else.

BILL

What in the world have you been smoking?

Danny laughs; he gives up. Sue just looks at him. She's trying to understand him, but he just seems too far away.

BILL

Well, I still don't know what your problem is but I think it's time we set down some new rules until you get yourself straightened out. First thing is I don't want you going anywhere but school and work not even on weekends.

Head lowered, Danny doesn't react.

BILL

And the second thing is I don't want you running around with Jay Raines anymore, and I sure don't want to see you around his brother Darrel.

DANNY

(not looking up)

Dad, how many times have I got to tell you they're not making me do things I don't want to do.

BILL

I don't care, Danny. I've heard all the stories about Darrel getting drunk and raising hell on the weekends and if you're around him or Jay it won't be long till you're doing the same kind of thing. And I'm still not convinced that they're not causing you to say the kind of things you've just been saying. You understand me?

DANNY

(rising)

Yeah, Dad. I understand you.

Danny stands and walks out of the room. When he passes Sue, she tries to hug him.

SUE

Danny, you know we love you.

DANNY

Mom.

He breaks the hug and leaves the room. Sue looks at Bill and they both look away.

INT. STAIRCASE -- NIGHT

Doug and David are still at the base of the stairs. Danny opens the door.

DOUG

Boy, you really told 'em.

DANNY

Fuck you.

Doug laughs and nudges David, who smiles weakly at first but then shows a genuine concern for Danny.

INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Danny slams the door then sits down on his bed. He is more distraught than angry. Looking down, he runs his hands through his hair, sighs, and looks up again. He pulls his shoes off and tosses them into a closet. He thinks, then pounds the bed with his fist.

He runs his hands through his hair again, trying to piece his thoughts together. He looks out the window, then drops his head, and shakes it. He looks up and sees Jonny Nation's Across the Water leaning against the stereo stand. Sighing heavily, he slumps to the floor. He reaches into his front pocket and pulls out both halves of the torn paper that contains the Nation lyrics.

PAPER

Pieced together, the title and first couple of lines are visible. This song begins playing. (Neil Young's "Soldier")

CUT TO:

INT. CONCERT HALL -- NIGHT

Jonny Nation is alone, onstage, under spotlight, seated at a piano, playing the same song, which is slow and contemplative. Random SCREAMS and WHISTLES rise from the audience. Jonny leans toward the microphone but just before he begins to sing, a distinct voice from the crowd is heard.

VOICE O.S.

Rock-n-roll!

Jonny's rhythm is disturbed. He hesitates, but then begins the song. Most of the audience is not in the mood for this one, however, and the clamor continues. Jonny gets through the brief first verse. Then:

DIFFERENT VOICE O.S.

(wailing)

Rock-n-roll!

Jonny smiles slightly and continues playing. He has trouble maintaining the song's slow rhythm smoothly but plows through the second verse which should sound much like "Soldier's." ("Jesus, I saw you, walking on the river. I don't believe you. You can't deliver right away. I wonder why.")

Once this verse is finished, the clamor increases. After a moment, Jonny leans toward the microphone.

JONNY

You know, if you people down here near the front would quiet down a little bit every one might be able to hear a little better.

AUDIENCE

The people on the floor, all standing, either SCREAM louder or tell others to shut up.

JONNY

Hello? Hello? Did you not hear me?
Maybe I didn't make myself clear. What I was trying to say was to SHUT UP!

ELLIOTT GASS

looks up, startled, from his offstage position.

AUDIENCE

They too are startled; quiet for a moment.

ONSTAGE

JONNY

Gee, that wasn't so hard, now was it? (To himself) I should have thought of it earlier. (Begins playing softly) No, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scream like that. I just thought, well, I mean, you paid quite a bit of money to get in here and I

just thought we all might enjoy it more if we could keep it quiet enough so everyone could hear. But maybe I was wrong, I don't know. Anyway, I appreciate your cooperation.

He waits for a response he doesn't get. The audience is still fairly mute and puzzled.

JONNY

(still playing softly)

Well, why don't we go on with the show. All right? Hey, I got an idea, why don't we do something a little different. (Goes into "As Time Goes By")

ELLIOTT

More startled. Looks to man beside him, smiles apologetically.

AUDIENCE

Stunned momentarily. Then many become angry, begin to BOO and SCREAM.

JONNY

Still plays and sings but the calls from the audience become too numerous and insulting to ignore.

JONNY

Well, tell me, people, you didn't like what I was playing before and you don't seem too thrilled with this little number, so what is it exactly that you want to hear?

VOICE O.S.

Rock-n-roll!

Other less distinct voices utter the same cry.

JONNY

Oh, I see. I get it. It seems that the general consensus is that you would rather hear something a little more lively. Is that it? Maybe a little bit louder too, huh? Maybe you'd like me to come out here with an electric guitar and maybe bang around on it for a while. Is that it? And then maybe I could turn the amps up so loud you wouldn't even be able to tell if I was playing the right notes or not. It wouldn't even matter then, would it? Well, hell, why don't we just pretend I've

got one and see if we can't have us some
real fun. All right?

Leaving the piano, Jonny grabs an acoustic guitar and
walks to the middle of the stage.

ELLIOTT

Concerned, afraid, furious.

ONSTAGE

JONNY
(into microphone)
Okay, here we go, now. Ready? 1, 2, 3,
and. . .

He begins banging aimlessly on the guitar, bouncing from
side to side, a wide grin on his face.

JONNY
(singing)
da, da, da, da. . .

AUDIENCE

Some are laughing, some bewildered, some enraged. A few
BOOS and other CRIES of disapproval begin. Soon, others
join them until the majority of the audience is BOOING
Nation.

ELLIOTT

Walks toward the stage.

JONNY

Continues to sing, play, dance.

JONNY
Are ya having fun? (More boos) Okay,
hold on. Here comes the big finale.

He strums the instrument frantically then stops and throws
his hands triumphantly in the air. More BOOS. He
acknowledges the crowd, then lifts the guitar above his
head, pauses, and slams it to the stage floor, repeating
this until the guitar is shattered. Many BOOS turn to
CHEERS.

JONNY
Oh, you like that? Well, here.

He kicks the guitar remnants off the stage and hurls the
instrument's neck into the crowd. CHEERS.

JONNY

(bitterly)

Yeah, thank you, thank you. I like to call that one, 'Wake up, Boston.' Good night.

He walks off the stage.

ELLIOTT

approaches Jonny, furious.

ELLIOTT

What the fuck do you think you're doing?

JONNY

Hell, I'm a hit. Didn't you hear them? But I think we're gonna need some more guitars.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL PARKING LOT -- DAY

Lunch break. Danny sits alone on his car.

JAY O.S.

Hey, man. How come you skipped lunch?

He walks up, stands opposite Danny.

DANNY

I wasn't hungry.

JAY

You get stoned?

DANNY

(sarcastically)

Now why would you think I'd go and do something like that?

JAY

Man, I still can't believe your old man came into the pool hall like that. What did he say to ya when ya got home last night?

DANNY

Oh, he said a lot. Yeah, he had a lot to tell me. I quit listening after he told me I was grounded.

JAY

Oh, man. Just for skipping work once?

DANNY

Yeah. He thinks I'm really weirding out.

Jay lifts his eyebrows as if to suggest Danny's father may have a point there.

JAY

So you're grounded? For how long?

DANNY

I don't know. He didn't say. But that's not the worst of it. He told me I couldn't run around with you or Darrel anymore.

JAY

Do what?

DANNY

Yeah. Can you believe it? He thinks you two are part of the reason I'm becoming so corrupted.

Jay is stunned.

JAY

Does he think we're slipping pills into your milk at lunch? (He walks away) Goddammit, that pisses me off! Whenever you fuckin' white people need an excuse, you just point to an Indian, don't ya?

DANNY

Shit, man, don't yell at me. I'm not the one doing it.

JAY

What did he say about us?

DANNY

Nothing about you, really. He just thinks I must be on drugs or something to be acting so weird, and that I'm probably getting them from Darrel. And hell, it was hard for me to argue with him. Darrel doesn't go to any real extremes to cover it up.

JAY

But shit, that doesn't mean he should tell you you can't run around with me.

DANNY

Well hell, man. I mean, I'm not gonna stop. We're just gonna have to be sneakier about it.

JAY

Well you can tell your old man he can just fuck off! I'm sick of hearing that shit! It's not fair, man. Everyone thinks just cause Darrel gets drunk and tears up shit and gets thrown in jail that I'm gonna be just like him. Did you tell your old man who had been keeping you from flunking out of every class you got this year? Is that some more of my bad influence rubbing off on ya? Shit, man, he's just like all the rest of these backward, red-neck, country fucks.

Danny looks surprised and concerned. He has never been fully aware of Jay's situation until now.

JAY

Shit, man. It fuckin' sucks.

DANNY

I know, man. I know.

JAY

Yeah, you know.

DANNY

What do you want me to do about it? Hell, I'm the one who's gotta live with the son-of-a-bitch. You want me to go up to him and say, 'Yeah, Dad, you're right. Darrel gets drunk a lot and smokes a lot of dope, but Jay doesn't, so you don't have anything to worry about.' Is that what you want? Hell, I can't help it cause he's a dumb fuck.

JAY

You could tell him who the hell's keeping you from flunking out of school.

DANNY

I don't see how that would change things. He probably wouldn't believe me anyway.

JAY

No, but at least you would have told him.

They look at one another, having reached an impasse.

DANNY

He's just a stupid ass, like everyone else, man. That's all there is to it. And I imagine if I had a brother who was as wild as Darrel, your folks would be kinda

concerned too.

JAY

You taking up for your old man now?

DANNY

Well, no, but I mean. Let's just forget it, man. Fuck 'em. We'll just have to find ways around him. Hell, it won't be hard. We'll just let things cool off for a while.

JAY

No, Danny. I'm not gonna go sneaking around, hoping your old man doesn't catch you running around with this low-life Indian who's corrupting their son.

DANNY

Well, I don't know what the hell else we're gonna do.

JAY

Well, I don't either.

DANNY

Well.

JAY

Well?

Danny shrugs. Jay turns and walks away.

JAY

See you later.

Danny acts like Jay's leaving is no big deal. But after a moment, his expression reveals that it is. Sound of a SHRILL WHISTLE then a MAN'S VOICE calling cattle.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARTON'S CORRAL -- DAY

Danny and his father are herding cattle into a trailer. Both are working at the edges of the small herd, but Danny tries to push them too quickly and gets caught in the middle where he can only try to keep from getting knocked down.

BILL

Don't get swallowed up in there, boy. Am I gonna have to go get Darla to help get these things loaded?

Danny glares back at him, gets bumped by a cow.

Later, Danny is having trouble herding one of the few remaining cows. He finally traps it in a corner and moves in slowly, but it bolts away from him. He kicks at it as it passes, slips, falls to the ground. He looks around quickly but Bill is not watching him. He picks up a clod of dirt and starts to throw it at something but then stops, breathes heavily, and slowly rises to his feet, tossing the clod aside.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP CAB -- DAY

Danny sits alone listening to the radio, thinking. Bill opens the door, gets in, and reflexively turns the radio off. Danny looks at him contemptuously, then stares out the window.

CUT TO:

INT. BARTON'S LIVING ROOM -- DUSK

The family is eating dinner, watching television.

BILL

(to Doug)

Well, have you got your steer ready for this weekend?

DOUG

Ready as he's gonna get.

BILL

I should hope so as much time as you've been spendin' on him. I'magine Danny's gettin' tired of having to do your part and his both.

Danny hears but doesn't react.

BILL

What time ya'll leaving tomorrow?

DOUG

Noon.

SUE

I want you to get everything packed tonight. And I want to see your suitcase when you get through.

DOUG

(whining)

Mom.

SUE

I mean it. Since you're staying two nights, you'll run off and forget something you'll need sure as the world. And I don't want Mr. Cantrell to think you've only got one pair of underwear to your name. And you're to do everything he says and not give him any trouble while ya'll are in Oklahoma City. You understand me?

DOUG

Yes, Mom.

BILL

When you get back there ain't gonna be no time to celebrate either. We start getting them combines ready. See if we can get them to run another year. I know we're gonna have to put a new drive belt on that G model. I'm gonna go into Woodward Saturday morning and get a new one for it.

Danny stares ahead and eats, his mind elsewhere.

CUT TO:

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Arms folded across his knees, Danny sits on the floor, leaning back against his bed, and thinks. David comes across his bed, a toy airplane in his hand.

DAVID

You wanna play with my airplanes?

DANNY

No, man. I got some stuff to do.

DAVID

Come on.

DANNY

I said 'No,' dammit!

DAVID

All right.

He zooms the plane off the bed and leaves the room. Danny stands, pulls a school book off the dresser and sits down. He turns to a page and starts reading but can't keep his mind on it. He tries again without success. Then, setting the book aside, he walks to a window.

EXT. BARN-FIELDS. DANNY'S POV -- NIGHT

INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Danny returns to the bed and sits down. Then he drops to the floor, breathes heavily, and picks the schoolbook up. Leaning forward, he turns the radio on.

STEREO

The end of a commercial plays. Then a prerecorded advertisement for a Jonny Nation concert begins. The voice pauses occasionally to allow clips from several Nation songs to be heard. At the beginning, a slow, recent song from Across the Water plays in the background.

VOICE

He's coming. A rock legend. Through the 60's, 70's, and now the 80's. JONNY NATION.

Danny looks up.

A common thread. JONNY NATION. A true music experience. In rare form. JONNY NATION in concert.

Danny shocked, eyes wild with thought.

His first return to Oklahoma in almost ten years. JONNY NATION. (Music stops)
Don't miss Jonny Nation in concert, June first, at eight o'clock at the Lloyd Noble Center. Tickets go on sale Saturday, April thirtieth at eight a. m. at the Lloyd Noble Box Office and various Lloyd Noble ticket outlets. Jonny Nation, sponsored by Hawklime productions.

Danny smiles, smiles wider. Shuts the book sharply.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY -- DAY

Jay stands at a locker taking out books. Danny walks up.

DANNY

(excited)

Hey, man, guess what?

Jay looks at him coldly, returns his attention to the locker.

JAY

You better watch it. Somebody might

see you talking to me and go report it to your old man.

DANNY

Oh, come on. Don't tell me you're still pissed off about that.

JAY

Still pissed off? Yeah, it happened so long ago. Your memory's fried.

DANNY

Shit, man. Come on. Besides, I decided last night to just blow 'em off. I'm gonna do what I want and they can just boot me out if they don't like it. They're not gonna tell me who I can run around with and who I can't.

JAY

(knowing Danny only thinks he's solved the problem)
Listen, man, I know. . .

DANNY

Just forget about 'em, Jay. I'll handle it, all right? Now, guess what?

JAY

(calmly)
Jonny Nation's coming in concert.

DANNY

(surprised)
Yeah, you heard? That's what I was gonna tell you.

Jay acts as if this was surprising news.

How'd you find out?

Jay

(closing his locker)
Darrel told me.

They walk down the hall.

DANNY

We're going aren't we?

JAY

I don't know.

DANNY

Are you serious?

JAY

Why wouldn't I be? You think just cause you want to go, I'd want to go too?

DANNY

Well, no, but. . .I just thought you'd want to go, that's all. I mean, hell, we've seen a lot worse concerts.

JAY

Yeah, well, I haven't decided yet. Hell, it's a month away.

DANNY

Tickets go on sale tomorrow!

JAY

So what. They're not gonna sell out in one day. There can't be that many Jonny Nation freaks in Oklahoma.

DANNY

Yeah, but. . .I want to get front row seats.

JAY

(laughs)

Yeah, well who doesn't? Only they're a little harder to come by when you live in the fuckin' Panhandle.

DANNY

We could camp out at the Lloyd Noble Center.

JAY

(continues walking)

Camp out?! God, I didn't think, I was really hoping you weren't this far gone already.

Jay shakes his head, laughs. Then his expression turns serious. He stops in front of a classroom.

JAY

You think you can pull it off?

DANNY

I got it all planned out, man. I know we can do it.

JAY

Well then do it. I'll just give ya some money and you can pick me up a ticket.

DANNY

Well yeah, man, but. . .

JAY

But what?

DANNY

I need some help. I don't think
I can do it alone.

JAY

I see.

DANNY

But, man, it wouldn't be hard. I even got
the perfect excuse for being out of the
house on Saturday morning. I'm just gonna
make my dad think I'm gonna go out huntin'
for some stray dogs that have been
botherin' the cattle. And you could just
tell your mom you're spending the night with
someone and then have Darrel drive you out
to my house, say about midnight, and I'll
meet ya out in the yard and we'll push my
car out of the driveway.

JAY

Are you out of your fuckin' mind? You
think I'm gonna lie to my mom and spend
the night sleeping on some fuckin'
sidewalk just so I can help you push your
car out of your driveway? Hell, that's
it. That's the only reason you want me to
go. You need me because you're afraid
your parents will hear ya start it up if
it's in the driveway and you can't push it
out by yourself.

DANNY

That's not it.

JAY

Bullshit! You know I'm beginning to think
your old man did me a favor by tellin' ya
not to run around with me anymore. You
don't give a shit about nothin' but
yourself and that stupid Jonny Nation.

DANNY

Come on, Jay.

JAY

You come on, Danny. You don't care if I
go with ya. You just need somebody to
help ya with this fuckin' camp out.

DANNY

I don't know where you're getting this shit.

JAY

I'm getting it from you! You know it really bothers you that I don't like to talk about the meaning of Jonny Nation's songs, doesn't it? You could like me so much more if only I'd really listen to him and try to understand whatever the hell it is he's saying that's so goddamned important. Cause if I did, then I'd be like one of you guys and you could accept me then. Well I say fuck you. And fuck Jonny Nation and your stupid plan.

He walks toward classroom, stops.

Hell, if Jonny Nation's so goddamned concerned about everything, get him to help ya.

The bell RINGS. Jay walks into the classroom. Stunned, Danny stands for a moment then starts rejecting what Jay has said. He moves toward the classroom then realizes he doesn't have his books and hurries back down the hall.

DANNY

(to himself)

Fuck him. Fuck him. I don't need him.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP -- DAY

Bill and Danny are driving slowly down a dirt road, pulling an empty cattle trailer. Danny looks out the window anxiously.

DANNY

Stop a second, Dad.

BILL

Why?

DANNY

I think I saw something caught in the fence.

BILL

What? I didn't see nothing.

DANNY

Just something caught in one of the barbs. Looked like hair or something.

BILL

You sure?

Danny
Yeah, I'm sure. Just stop for a second
and I'll check it out.

BILL
Well, hurry it up.

EXT. PICKUP -- DAY

Danny gets out and runs to the fence. He can't find it at first, then smiles when he does. It's a gray piece of fur. He pulls it out of the barb and runs back to the pickup.

INT. PICKUP -- DAY

Danny hands it to Bill.

DANNY
Well, what do you think?

BILL
Well, I'll be damned. I thought you spent
all your time sitting over there daydreaming.

DANNY
What do you think it is?

BILL
I don't know. Piece of fur off something.
You get it off the bottom or middle strand?

Danny thinks for a moment.

BILL
Huh?

DANNY
Uh, middle.

BILL
Middle? Well, it's either a dog or coyote
or a damn big rabbit. I never have paid
enough attention to furs to tell them apart.
I always thought people who hunted or trapped
just for furs were low-lives anyway.

DANNY
Yeah, me too.

Bill looks at him.

BILL
But this is damn sure something. May have
come from whatever's been botherin' them

cows. I'd almost quit worrying about it since no cows have been out the last two nights. But the son-of-a-bitches may still be out there. Gotta be a pack of 'em. One dog alone couldn't drive them cows out. And it ain't likely they'll leave til we give 'em a reason to.

Danny looks out the window and smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. BARTON'S LIVING ROOM -- DUSK

All are seated, except Doug, eating, watching the tv news.

SUE

Well, good, maybe some of that rain'll make it up here.

DANNY

Dad, you still going to Woodward in the morning?

BILL

Yeah.

DANNY

What do you want me to do til you get back?

BILL

Ah, I don't think there's anything that has to be done. Why don't you just sleep in tomorrow.

DANNY

(after a pause)

Well, if there ain't nothing that just has to be done, I was thinking about going out and seeing if I could spot them stray dogs.

Bill is surprised.

SUE

What stray dogs?

BILL

Danny found a piece of fur in the fence line today near that pasture across from Fred's. We think it come off whatever's been spookin' them cattle cause that's where it looks like they've been gettin' out. (Pause) Well, I don't know, Danny, I guess if you want to you can. The morning would probably be as good as any time to spot 'em.

You can just use your own gun. But you probaly oughta get out there pretty early. And I don't mean no eight o'clock.

DANNY

I know.

SUE

Danny, why don't you wait until your father can go with you.

DANNY

Mom.

BILL

No, now Sue, if he wants to go then let him go. He can handle himself. All you gotta do is make sure you don't hit no cattle. If you spot one, then wait til it gets well clear of the herd or drive out in the pickup and try to drive it off some. Then shoot it. Other than that, there ain't nothin' to worry about. I'll be gettin' up about six in the morning, so I'll just get ya up then. That'll give you enough time to get out there.

DANNY

(smiling)

Unless, I'm already gone when you get up.

BILL

(laughs)

Yeah, that'll be the day.

CUT TO:

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Danny lies in bed, covers pulled up, wide awake but still dreaming.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE -- NIGHT

A reporter hurries after Danny, who is walking alone. The light in the scene is dim because of the setting, and so the "tunnel" effect present in the first fantasy scene is not evident here.

REPORTER

Hi. Danny Barton?

DANNY
(walking at a quick pace)
Yeah.

REPORTER
Mind if I ask you a few questions? I'm
with Rolling Stone.

DANNY
No, go ahead.

REPORTER
What are your and Jonny's plans after this
concert tour wraps up?

DANNY
We're gonna get back in the studio.

Suddenly, a few other reporters and photographers have
joined the party.

REPORTER
Can you give us a hint of what the next
album will be like?

DANNY
No, just wait and see.

REPORTER TWO
You look pretty excited about it.

DANNY
Well, I am. We've been writing songs for
it while we've been on the road.

REPORTER TWO
So you don't think it should take long to
get the next one out?

DANNY
No, not at all. In fact, by the time we
get in the studio we should have enough
stuff written for at least two albums,
maybe three.

REPORTER TWO
(taking notes)
My God.

More reporters appear. Together, they slowly create a
commotion in their efforts to get this scoop. The view of
the scene then is often that of a reporter or a photo-
grapher's moving camera, which are both jostled and un-
steady.

REPORTER THREE

What got you guys so motivated?

DANNY

I don't know. I guess we both felt that too many people were only concerned with sex and parties. We wanted to try and wake people up and show them that there was more to life than just that.

REPORTER FOUR

Do you feel like you've been successful?

DANNY

It's hard to say. All we can do is write the songs. They decide if they want to listen or not. At least they're coming to the shows.

REPORTER FIVE

How long have you been with Jonny now?

DANNY

I don't know. Couple of years.

REPORTER FIVE

Will you try to do more things on stage in the future?

DANNY

No, I doubt it. I like to get up there and play sometimes. But really, I just want to write songs and let Jonny sing them.

REPORTER SIX

So you and Jonny both write lyrics and he writes the music.

DANNY

Yeah, mostly. I'll make suggestions about the music on some songs, but mostly I just worry about the words.

REPORTER SEVEN

How is it that you guys seem to work so well together? I mean, you've already put out two albums in less than two years and now you're talking about two, maybe three more in the future.

DANNY

(with a sly smile)

I'll let you try and figure that one out.

Danny opens a door and walks into a private room.

CUT TO:

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Still in bed, Danny checks a clock: twelve-thirty. He breathes deeply, believing this could be the most crucial event of his life. He gets out of bed. He's fully clothed, dressed warmly. He pulls a sleeping bag rolled around a rifle from beneath the bed and moves to the window. He checks David who is sleeping soundly, opens the window, and crawls onto the roof.

EXT. ROOFTOP -- NIGHT

After he closes the window, Danny walks gingerly across the roof to the side, where he drops the sleeping bag to the ground, hesitates, then follows it.

YARD

Danny picks up the sleeping bag and hurries to his car, which is parked closer to the road than usual. He lays the rifle into the trunk and, tossing the sleeping bag into the back seat, gets into the driver's seat.

Quietly, he puts the car in neutral, then steps out and pushes but the car won't budge. He pushes again -- still nothing. Panicking, he pushes harder, then stepping back, gets a run at it. Finally, the car gives and slowly begins to roll. As it gains momentum, Danny jumps into the driver's seat.

He steers the car out of the driveway and onto the dirt road. Then he gets out, pushes the car down the road until it is a safe distance from the house, jumps in and starts it.

INT. CAR -- NIGHT

Nervously, Danny turns to look at the house as he drives away. He breathes deeply, then looks back again.

DANNY
(clenching fist)

Yes!

EXT. CAR -- NIGHT

It picks up speed, then turns onto another dirt road.

INT. CAR -- NIGHT

Danny lights a joint and takes a long drag. He turns the radio on. The Jonny Nation concert advertisement is playing.

DANNY

Yes! Yes! I can't believe it. It's
all coming together.

Speeding the car up, Danny strums the steering wheel in time to one of the Nation songs on the ad and sings with it. As the concert particulars are given, he takes another drag off the joint and drops it onto the seat. He has trouble finding it. When he finally gets hold of it, he looks up and sees a cow standing broadside in the road, staring at him dumbly.

EXT. CAR -- NIGHT

It swerves off the road to avoid the cow, dipping into a shallow ditch, then plowing through a barbed wire fence. It comes to an abrupt halt in a wheat field soon after hitting the fence.

Danny jumps out. He has a mild cut high on his forehead which will require a few stitches but is not seriously hurt. He checks the front of the car: part of the fence is strewn across the grill and hood, a tire is flat, and the car has high-centered on the loose ground. He jumps back into the car.

INT. CAR -- NIGHT

Danny starts the car and tries to back it out to no avail. He checks the cut on his head in the rear view mirror and dabs at the blood with his shirt. He gets out.

EXT. CAR -- NIGHT

Danny slams the door then sees the cow still in the road. Frantically, he runs toward it, picks up a rock, and fires it at the cow.

DANNY

Stupid son-of-a-bitch!

The rock strikes the cow, which then turns and sluggishly trots down the road. Danny throws another rock that hits the cow, causing it to break into a brief gallop. He looks at the car, then down the road. In disbelief, he walks to the bank of the ditch and sits down -- arms across knees, head down. He shakes his head slowly, a dumb smile on his face. For Danny, this is too tragic to believe.

DANNY

There's no way. There's no way this is
happening. (He picks up a rock and throws it
down) There's just no way!

THUNDER is heard in the distance. Danny looks up at the sky. A rain drop splatters on his face, then another. As a light rain begins to fall, Danny lowers his gaze to the road, shaking his head and laughing sadly to himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARTON HOUSE -- DAY

The Raines' Torino pulls into the driveway. Only the family car and Danny's Camaro, which shows no signs of the accident, are present. Alone, Jay gets out of the car, regards the Camaro briefly, apparently surprised by the lack of damage, and approaches the house. He KNOCKS. Sue opens the door and is surprised to see Jay.

JAY
Hello, Mrs. Barton.

SUE
Hi, Jay.

JAY
Is Danny here?

SUE
Yes, he is.

Jay waits for her to let him in.

JAY
Can I see him?

SUE
(after a pause; approvingly)
Yes, you can. Come on in.
(Jay enters) He's upstairs.

INT. HOUSE -- DAY

Jay walks through the living room, turns and opens the staircase door.

BEDROOM

Danny lies on his bed, staring at the ceiling. He has a bandage on his forehead. Jay TAPS on the door and sticks his head in.

JAY
Danny?

DANNY
Yeah? Jay? Hey, man, come on in.

JAY
What's going on?

DANNY
Just sitting here thinking. Taking it easy.

JAY
You all right? You don't look too bad.

DANNY
No, hell, I ain't hurt. Just got a couple of stitches. I told Mom I had a headache when I got up this morning so she let me stay home from school.

JAY
That's a hell of a lot of trouble to go to just to get out of school.

DANNY
(smiling)
Yeah.

JAY
Shit, I heard you was all banged up. Had like fifteen stitches in your head. That's why I came out.

DANNY
Sorry, man.

JAY
How'd your old man take it? Is he pretty pissed off?

DANNY
No, not really. Before I went to bed Friday night I told him I was gonna get up early and go looking for these stray dogs we think have been bothering the cattle. So he thinks that was what I was doing when I went off the road.

JAY
What about your car? Was he pissed off about that?

DANNY
No. Hell, I didn't hardly hurt it all. 'Fact, I probably could have driven it on to Norman if it hadn't high-centered.

JAY
I wondered if that's what you were trying to do, going after Jonny Nation tickets.

DANNY

Yeah. (Laughs) And ended up getting run off the road by a fuckin' cow. Shit. The worst part, though, was that after I went off the road I had to sit out there for about four hours cause it was only around one o'clock, and if I'd have walked home then, they would have known something was up. (Pause) When did ya hear about it?

JAY

It's all over school by now. But I heard about it the day after it happened, on Saturday, cause Darrel helped pull your car out of the field. I was gonna come out yesterday, but I decided to go to Woodward with Darrel. (Pulls wallet out, opens it) And I didn't think you'd mind too much.

He hands Danny a Jonny Nation concert ticket.

DANNY

Hey, where'd you get this? Is this for me?

JAY

I got it at Kickapoo Sam's. They were selling some, and I figured it might be hard for you to get one now so I got it for ya. I don't think they're very good seats, but at least it's a ticket.

DANNY

Hell, yeah. I didn't know what I was gonna do. Thanks a lot, man. Did you get one too? (Jay nods) Well, all right. I knew deep down you wanted to go.

He looks at Jay and they both smile.

I don't have the money on me right now, but I'll pay you for it this week. How much was it?

JAY

Twelve-fifty.

DANNY

Shit. Oh well, it'll be worth it.

JAY

You better hope so, man. (Pause) You know, in a way you're kinda lucky you didn't make the trip all the way to Norman the other night. I heard on the radio that they sold all the good seats on

Saturday. So I doubt if you'd have got floor seats much less one on the front row.

DANNY

(genuinely surprised)

Really? They sold that many in one day? I can't hardly believe it. I didn't think there were that many people who liked him.

JAY

I know. I think it's pretty goddamned frightening.

DANNY

(still in disbelief)

Man. . . I mean, shit, no one around here likes him. And when we go to Woodward I never hear anybody listening to him. And they hardly ever play his songs on the radio.

JAY

Yeah, but he's been around a long time. There's probably a lot of people in their thirties and forties who still get into him. He's not as popular as a lot of rock stars but he's still big. I mean, hell, he's playing at Lloyd Noble. If hardly anybody liked him, he'd be playing at some dump in Woodward.

DANNY

Yeah.

JAY

Fact, I wish he was. Then it wouldn't cost near as much to go see him.

Danny's thinking, not listening.

Well, man, I guess I better go. You gonna be at school tomorrow?

DANNY

Yeah, I'll probably show up.

JAY

All right. I'll see ya later.

He heads for the door.

DANNY

Sure. Hey, thanks for the ticket, man. I really appreciate it.

JAY

No problem. You'll just have to promise to explain to me what some of the songs mean when he gets really deep.

They both smile. Jay leaves the room. Danny looks down at the ticket for a moment. Then he crosses to the stereo and picks up Nation's Across the Water.

DANNY

What in the hell have I been thinking about? I'm never gonna meet Jonny Nation.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- DAY

Jonny sits on a bed watching The Kids Are Alright by the Who on the television. Pete Townshend is telling a reporter that more people come to see him smash guitars than to listen to his songs. Jonny smiles. Elliott enters.

ELLIOTT

Well, it's set. (He turns off the tv) The Black Hawks are going to join us in Kansas City for the June third show and finish out the tour. That's two days after you play in Oklahoma, so they said they'd get there on the second. That'll give you a day or two to rehearse. That's enough time, isn't it?

JONNY

Yeah, sure. I'm surprised they agreed to come.

ELLIOTT

Well, I think they were surprised you didn't call, but they decided to anyway.

JONNY

Yeah, I should've talked to them. Maybe I'll call them later. (Runs his hand through his hair) I don't know. It's just anymore I don't feel like I can communicate with anyone.

ELLIOTT

Yeah. Hell, don't worry about it. It'll pass.

JONNY

(moving to the side of the bed)
Yeah, sure.

ELLIOTT

Hey, things didn't go so bad last night.

JONNY

Yeah. You know, I think I actually heard some kid yell the name of one of the songs off the new album.

ELLIOTT

(smiling)

Yeah, I paid him to do that.

Jonny laughs.

JONNY

And there for a minute I thought someone was actually listening.

ELLIOTT

Oh, this kid was listening. He must've been. Because I paid him to request "As Time Goes By."

They both laugh.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARTON'S BACKYARD -- DAY

Bill is putting a new drive belt on a combine. Danny is sitting up on the machine's seat, tired, bored.

BILL

All right. Try it again.

Danny engages the thresher.

BILL

Whoa. Shut it off.

Bill starts making more adjustments. Danny stares ahead.

CUT TO:

INT. BARTON'S HOUSE -- DUSK

The men, including Doug, are coming in from work, washing up for supper. Sue is on the phone. Behind her on the bookcase is a new, large trophy Doug won at the State FFA Show and a new 8 x 10 picture of him with his steer on the wall.

SUE

Yes, we're all very proud of him. Well, that's what we told him, too. There's just not very many who finish as high as third place. (Laughing) That's right.

That's right. Only two can say they did better. No, Danny's fine. He just had to have a few stitches for a cut on his forehead. Well, I hear the men coming in so I better get their supper ready. It was nice of you to call. Bye, now.

SUE
(to Bill)
How did it go?

BILL
(mildly pleased)
I don't know. We still got some work to do, but I think they're gonna go for another year. Good thing too. The way the wheat's lookin' I imagine that we'll be cuttin' by the first of June.

Sue moves to staircase.

SUE
David! Supper's ready!

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DUSK

The family sits in the usual places, eating, watching Wheel of Fortune. Danny's still bored.

DOUG
Well, looks like I'm gonna be Wheel of Fortune champ again tonight. That's two for me.

DARLA
You didn't get that last one. Dad did.

DOUG
I said it first.

DARLA
No, you didn't.

SUE
Doug, Betty McFarland called to congratulate you today.

DOUG
Oh yeah?

SUE
Did you ever thank Mr. Cantrell for all he did for you this year?

DOUG
Yeah. I think so.

SUE
Doug?

DOUG
Well, Mom, it's not an easy thing to do.
I never have found the right time to do it.

SUE
Well, you've only got a week of school left.

DOUG
I know, Mom.

SUE
You know what would be nice would be for
you to write him a letter, thanking him.

DOUG
A letter?

BILL
Sue, I don't think that's necessary.

Danny gets an idea.

SUE
Well, I think it would be a nice gesture.

DARLA
Who would he get to write it for him?

SUE
Darla.

Danny leaves room.

SUE
Danny, where are you going?

DANNY
I'm finished.

CUT TO:

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM -- DUSK

Danny enters, possessed by a new idea. Feverishly, he seeks a piece of paper. He finds one in a textbook and keeps looking until he finds a pen. He then kneels beside his bed, using a textbook as a desk top.

DANNY

(smiling)

Let's see now. . . (Writing) 'Dear Jonny.'
 (Pulls back) Dear Jonny? No, hell no.
 (Marks it out; writing) 'Hey Jonny.' No,
 fuck that. (Marks it out) How about just
 'Jonny.' (Writes it) Yeah, that'll work.
 But now look at the paper. Fuckin'
 scribbles all over it. All right, no
 problem. We get it all out, then make a
 new copy. Let's see. (Thinks; taps pen
 on book, chin; scratches head, chest)
 Okay. Is that the way he spells 'Jonny?'

He crawls to the stereo, looks at the album cover and
 crawls back.

Yeah, that's right. No 'h.' Okay.
 (Breathes deeply) All right, come on now.
 It shouldn't be this hard. I know you got
 plenty to say. Let's just do it.
 (Writes) 'Dear Jonny.' No, fuck, you've
 already said that. (Scribbles it out
 nervously; writing) 'Jonny.' Gee, I sure
 like your music. If you're ever near Warren
 just drop on by sometime. Jesus Christ!
 I thought you had all this stuff you
 wanted to say to him.

Danny drops the pen and leans back against the other bed.
 He breathes deeply, trying to calm himself.

Now, come on, man. Just relax. Let it
 come out. (Concentrates) Dear Jonny.
 (Thinks, sighs) How have you been?
 Things are just swell in Oklahoma. Nice
 talking to ya. God damn. Shit! (Hits
 floor, stands, moves to window) You can't
 do shit! (Mocking; effeminately) Oh,
 you've got all these things you want to
 say to him. All these deep ideas. Oh,
 Jonny, Jonny. Jesus Christ. (Pacing
 floor) You don't know anything, man. You
 don't know a fucking thing! You're just
 like the rest of them. You're no fuckin'
 different. (Stops, acts brain dead,
 laughs) Shit. (Walks, stops. Looks at
 wall mirror, looks away, returns) This is
 it, man. This is fuckin' it if you don't
 come up with something.

(Moves determinedly to bed; writing)
 'Dear Jonny, I just wanted to let you know
 that I think you're one of the best.' No.
 'the best.' No, that's no good.

(Scratches it out, thinks) 'Dear Jonny, I just wanted to let you know that I think. . .that I think. . .what? I don't know. I don't have any idea what I think. Can't you just write it down? Can it be this hard? (Calmly) 'Dear Jonny, I just wanted to let you know that I think.'
(Sighs) Shit!

He slams the book down, throws the pen against a wall and slumps against the bed, head in hands. Pause. He crawls to the stereo, retrieves Nation's Across the Water album, and looks at Nation's photograph.

DANNY

How do you do it so easily? Huh? Just tell me how to do it.

He stares at the picture which remains mute. He then turns the sleeve over and reads some song lyrics aloud. In need of a voice, he puts the album on the turntable, placing needle on a song like Neil Young's "Old Man." As it plays, Danny gets an idea. Inspired, He moves to the paper on the bed, looks for the pen, finds it, then thinks for a moment. With the song giving rhythm to his thoughts, Danny starts writing.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN -- DUSK

Bill enters, carrying an empty plate and glass. He sets them on the counter beside Sue who's washing dishes. He looks at her, sees she's thinking.

BILL

That was a fine supper.

SUE

Oh, thank you. (Forces a smile)

BILL

What's wrong, honey?

SUE

Oh, nothing. (Sighs) I'm just worried about Danny.

BILL

What'd he do? Has he been sneakin' around with Jay without us knowin' it?

SUE

Oh, no. It's nothing like that.

BILL

Well, then, what's the matter?

SUE

I don't know.

BILL

We have to make him follow some rules, dear.
If we don't do it now, we'll regret it later.

SUE

I know, honey, I know. You're right. I
just wish we didn't have to make him stop
running around with Jay completely,
because I still think Jay's a nice boy.
And I'm not sure Danny's got any other friends.

BILL

We've been over this before, Sue. We both
know what that Darrel's like.

SUE

Well, I know, but that doesn't mean Jay's
gonna be just like him.

BILL

Do you want to take that chance? Just turn
Danny loose with 'em and see what happens?

SUE

No, no. (Sighs)

BILL

There's nothing else we can do about it.

SUE

I know, I know. It's funny, though. I
think I was almost happier when Danny was
arguing and complaining about everything.
I mean, even though he seemed to be growing
away from us then, now he seems to be further
away than ever. He seems almost lifeless.

CUT TO:

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Danny's rocking out to a fast-paced, electric song like
Neil Young's "Sedan Delivery."

CUT TO:

INT. CONCERT HALL -- NIGHT

Danny's playing same song on stage. Jay's on bass guitar

and Darrel's on drums. Danny sings, but with Nation's voice. The large concert audience contains Danny's family, classmates, and teachers, who are all awed by the response Danny's receiving.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Danny ends song with a downward flourish of arms and body, then gives soft voice to imagined APPLAUSE. Turning the stereo down, he moves to the bed, picks up the paper and scans what he has written. He smiles, kisses the paper and lays it aside in favor of the Nation album cover.

DANNY

All right, let's see, all we need is an address for this little jewel. (Looks at both sides of cover, reads fine print) Well, shit, that's just the address of the record company. It wouldn't get to him if I just sent it there, would it?

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY -- DAY

Danny and Jay in between classes.

JAY

Hell if I know. I doubt it, man. That's a pretty big company. You thinking of sending Jonny Nation a tape?

DANNY

Yeah, Jay, sure. And I play all of the instruments on the songs, too. No, I was just wondering if you recorded some songs on a tape and you wanted Jonny Nation to hear it, I was just wondering if he'd get it if you sent it to his record company.

JAY

I don't know, man. I wouldn't think it'd be that easy.

DANNY

Yeah. I wonder how else you could get it to him?

JAY

You could kidnap him. Make him listen to it. That's probably the only way. Why would you want to send it to him anyway?

DANNY

I just thought that'd be a way to get noticed.

JAY

Yeah, maybe. I'd think your best bet would be to get someone from the record company to listen to it. Why are we talking about this?

DANNY

I don't know.

Danny laughs but can't disguise his disappointment.

JAY

You decided how you're gonna get past your parents and go to the concert?

DANNY

I'm just gonna go. Fuck 'em. It's their problem, not mine.

JAY

You want me to try and get Darrel to loan me his car?

DANNY

No, we'll take mine.

JAY

How are you gonna get past 'em?

DANNY

I'm just gonna walk out the door, start up the car and take off. There won't be anything they can do. (Laughs) They won't have time to set up a road block.

JAY

Yeah but, man, the show starts at eight. That means we'll have to leave here by at least four.

DANNY

Yeah, so?

JAY

Won't you be working?

DANNY

Oh, yeah. Well, I'll get out of it somehow. I figure we'll be working pretty close to the house. (Pause) Oh fuck.

JAY

What is it?

DANNY

We may be cutting wheat by then. Shit!

JAY

Is that a problem?

DANNY

Yeah, you could say that. Oh, man, I just didn't realize it until now. The concert's when? June first? Fuck yes. Hell, the old man's been saying we'd probably start around the first all week, and I just never realized that was when the concert was. Shit! Wouldn't you fuckin' know it. Of all the years for harvest to come early. Goddammit!

Jay doesn't know what to say.

DANNY

Well, I'll just to have to pray that harvest doesn't start until after the first. Either that or see to it myself that it doesn't. (Looks at Jay) You know anyone who knows how to fuck up a combine?

Jay smiles in the hope that Danny's kidding.

CUT TO:

SEQUENCE OF SHOTS

His car parked on the road, Danny stands at a fence, checking a wheat field that is mostly green but shows several golden patches.

Danny looks at a calendar in the kitchen, then acts like he's not when Bill walks in.

Danny, Bill, Doug working on combines. Danny looks at a hawk in the sky.

Family at dinner, having fun with "Wheel of Fortune" except Danny.

Danny in his room, listening to Nation, reading letter he's written him. He moves to the window, looks out-- wheat's half green, half gold.

Danny at Doug's graduation ceremony, bored.

Carrying rifle, Bill drags dead stray dog down dirt road

to parked pickup where Doug and Danny stand. Doug looks at dog, at Bill, smiles. Danny looks at dog, looks away. Bill flings dog into bed of pickup. He and Doug get in cab. Danny gets in back, looks at dog, at wheat field--mostly gold--at sunset.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DUSK

Family's eating.

DANNY

Dad, you sure, um. We're gonna start cuttin' tomorrow for sure? It wouldn't be better to wait a couple of days?

BILL

Yeah, we're gonna start tomorrow. The wheat tested out, it's ready to go. Why do you want to wait? You got something better to do tomorrow?

DANNY

(defensively)

No. I was just wondering.

DOUG

Mr. McFarland's already started cuttin', hasn't he?

BILL

Yeah, he started today. We probably could've got going today, too, but I think tomorrow's plenty soon enough. Right now it looks like we may have a decent crop as long as nothing drastic happens between now and the time we get it all cut.

SUE

I have a good feeling it's all gonna work out well this year.

BILL

Yeah, that's what we thought last year.

CUT TO:

INT. DANNY'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Danny and David are in bed. Danny looks at the clock: ten-thirty. He gets out of bed and leaves the room quietly.

INT. STAIRCASE

He walks down the steps carefully.

INT. DINING ROOM

Danny opens the staircase door, moves cautiously to the phone, and dials, continually checking his parents' bedroom door.

DANNY

Is Jay there? (Whispering) Jay? It's Danny. We still on for the concert tomorrow night? No, don't worry about it. I'll be there. You just be ready. I don't know what time exactly. Just be ready by four o'clock, and I'll get there as soon as I can. No, man, I haven't been fuckin' with the combines. I've got another idea. I can't tell you now. Just be ready tomorrow when I get there. All right. See ya.

He hangs the phone up and walks into the kitchen, where he gets a drink of water and considers his plan. He sees his reflection in the kitchen window. Outside, a cow MOOS. Danny looks down. He then takes a drink and pours the water out.

He returns to the dining room, where he stops to notice Doug's trophy from the state FFA Show. He then looks at pictures on the wall: Doug, Darla, parents, self (lingers), David (smiles). He scans them all, then turns away from the wall and considers his situation, which still troubles him.

CUT TO:

EXT. WHEAT FIELD -- DAY

Danny drives a cabless combine, face and arms caked with dirt and chaff. He looks anxiously across the large field at a farm truck parked in the field near the road. Across the field, Bill drives the other combine. They have been cutting around the field for several hours, yet most of the wheat remains uncut.

Danny sees the family car driving down the dirt road. It slows and pulls into the field beside the truck. Danny checks the combine's bin, sees it's nearly full, and heads toward the truck.

He approaches the car and truck. Bill's combine is emptying its wheat into the truck's bed. Bill and Doug stand beside the car, a plate of covered sandwiches on the hood. Sue pours tea from a jug into plastic cups.

David's beside her.

Danny parks beside the truck, looking nervous. He starts the wheat-jetting process and gets off the combine. Blocked from the family's view, he takes a handkerchief from his back pocket, anxiously wipes his face, and looks across the field -- Warren's grain elevators can be seen in the distance. He breathes deeply, wipes his right hand clean, and sticks two fingers down his throat.

CAR

DOUG

(downs his tea)

Ah, that tastes good. (Hands cup to Sue)
Give me another shot, Ma.

SUE

What's Danny doing? Danny?! Come get
some iced tea!

BILL

(wipes face with washcloth)

I thought by cutting this early it might
not be so hot. But damn if it don't seem
like a hundred out here.

SUE

The radio said it was 92 just before I came
out. David, honey, go see what Danny's doing.

BILL

What's the forecast?

SUE

Just more of the same. You want some more, Bill?

BILL

(handing her his cup)

Yeah.

Sue fills his cup. David comes running toward the car.

DAVID

Mom! Mom! Danny's sick!

SUE

What?!

DAVID

He's throwing up!

SUE

Bill, here, take this.

She hands him the cup, gets another washcloth out of the car, and hurries toward Danny, David following.

DANNY

is on all fours. He hears Sue coming and starts coughing and wretching.

SUE

Danny? Danny? Oh my. What's the matter, sweetheart?

DANNY

(weakly)

I'm sick.

SUE

Well, for goodness sake. (Starts wiping his face) When did this happen?

DANNY

Just now.

SUE

Well, I wonder what could have caused it. Did you get something caught in your throat?

DANNY

No, I'm just sick. I've been sick all day. This is the second time I've thrown up.

SUE

Well, sugar. I hope it wasn't that bacon we had for breakfast. No one else has complained. Why didn't you tell someone if you've been feeling sick all day?

DANNY

Cause harvest has started.

SUE

Well for crying out loud, Danny, that hardly matters when you're sick. Let's see if we can get you up so we can take you home. Can you walk?

DANNY

Yeah, I think so.

He struggles to his feet. Sue holds his arm as they walk to the car. David runs ahead.

DAVID

Danny's sick, Dad.

BILL
(to Sue)
What's wrong with him?

SUE
I don't know. He says he's thrown up twice today. I don't think it's anything he's eaten. I know that bacon we had this morning couldn't have caused it. Do either of you feel sick?

Bill and Doug shake their heads.

BILL
Well let him sit in the car for a while and cool off. Maybe the heat's gotten to him.

SUE
I'm taking him home.

BILL
Home? We got wheat to cut. Just let him cool off awhile and see if that don't help him.

SUE
He can't be expected to ride a combine when he's throwing up. And if I don't take him home now and start trying to get him well, it's only going to get worse on him and take longer to finish harvest.

Sue helps Danny into the car. David gets in the back.

BILL
(resignedly)
All right. If it ain't one thing it's another. At least we got a half a day out of him. He's gonna have to get well, though, that's all there is to it. If it's gonna stay this hot, we're gonna have to get this wheat cut as fast as we can before it all burns up.

SUE
Now just calm down, Bill. I'll take Danny home and put him to bed, then I'll come back out and drive the truck for you so Doug can drive Danny's combine.

Danny looks at his mother, surprised that she will have to take over for him. Then he looks down, holds his stomach, and winces slightly.

BILL
No, now, huh-uh. That ain't gonna work.

SUE

Well, it's gonna have to work cause we don't have any other choices. I can drive that truck just as well as these boys can.

BILL

Now listen here. . .

SUE

Keep the tea and the sandwiches. I'll take Danny home and be right back out.

Sue closes the door and drives off.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARTON'S HOUSE -- DAY

The car pulls up. All get out. Sue helps Danny into the house.

INT. HOUSE -- DAY

Darla's watching tv. They enter.

DARLA

What's wrong?

SUE

Danny's not feeling well.

DAVID

He threw up out in the wheat field.

DARLA

Gross!

SUE

Just sit tight, young lady. You're in charge of supper tonight.

Sue and Danny leave the room and start upstairs.

BEDROOM

They enter. Danny lies down on his bed. Sue wipes his face.

SUE

You just lie down now. Try to go to sleep if you can. (Takes his shoes off) When you start feeling a little better, you might try to make it downstairs and take a quick shower. Or you might try a bath.

DANNY

Yeah, okay.

SUE

All right, honey. (Kisses him on cheek) I'd like to stay here and take care of you, but I need to go help your father.

DANNY

I know, Mom.

SUE

Maybe you'll feel better after a good night's sleep. Come on, David, let's go downstairs. (Pause. To David) Now I want you to stay down there. I don't want you up here bothering Danny.

They leave. Danny checks the clock: almost five. He gets out of bed, feels lightheaded. He picks the Nation album up, then sighs. He walks to the window and looks out, worried, confused. A cow MOOS. He walks quickly back to the bed, retrieves his letter to Nation from beneath the mattress, and gathers some clean clothes.

KITCHEN

SUE

(to Darla; tying bandana around her neck)

Now, you know where everything's at, and you know how to make it. You've made spaghetti before. I'd start cooking about eight-thirty. We'll be in by nine-thirty, ten at the latest. And, Darla, please be nice to Danny. If he wants something to eat or drink, make it for him, okay?

DARLA

All right, Mom.

SUE

David, you be good, sweetheart. (Kisses him) All right? Do what Darla tells you to do. I'll be back later.

She leaves.

DANNY'S BEDROOM

Clothes and letter in hand, Danny watches Sue drive off from his window. He leaves the room.

DINING ROOM

The phone RINGS.

DARLA

(running into bedroom)
I'll get it in my room, David. It's for me.

She moves into her room. Danny enters and quickly heads for the bathroom.

BATHROOM

Undressing hurriedly, he sees himself in the mirror and stops. A look of doubt comes over his face. He pauses then continues undressing.

DINING ROOM

David is seated at the table, playing with a toy airplane. Danny comes out of the bathroom, dressed.

DANNY

Where's Darla?

DAVID

She's in her room, talking on the phone.
You still sick?

DANNY

No, I'm feeling better.

He pauses, nervously looks around the room, scratches his head, then checks his back pocket for his wallet and the letter.

DANNY

I'm gonna go check the cattle.

DAVID

Why? Can I go with ya?

DANNY

No. (Walks toward David) I may not be back for a while. Take care of things while I'm gone, all right?

DAVID

I never get to do anything.

DANNY

Your day's coming. But I gotta do this alone.
All right? (Brushes David's head) See ya later.

He leaves the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE -- DAY

Danny gets into his car and drives off.

HIGHWAY

The Camaro speeds down it. Combines cutting wheat in the distance.

STREET IN WARREN

The Camaro stops in front of Jay's house, a plain, generic, government home. Danny hops out and starts toward the house but stops when he sees Jay come running out, shouldering an athletic bag. Both move toward the car.

DANNY

Sorry I'm late. If we hurry I think we can still make most of it.

JAY

How'd you get away? I was beginning to think you were stuck out in the middle of some wheat field and couldn't make it into town.

They get into the car.

INT. CAR -- DAY

Danny makes a turn or two before he reaches Main Street.

JAY

You didn't do anything stupid did ya?

DANNY

(smiling)

Depends on how you look at it.

JAY

Come on, man. Don't tell me. . .

DANNY

(overlapping)

I didn't do anything dumb. I just borrowed one of Darrel's old tricks. Remember how he told us he used to get sent home from school?

JAY

Did you stick your fingers down your throat?

Danny nods, smiling.

Oh, man. I don't think I could ever actually make myself puke.

DANNY

Neither did I.

Danny pauses briefly at a stop sign then turns onto Main.

EXT. CAR -- DAY

It speeds ahead.

INT. CAR -- DAY

JAY

You got your ticket, right?

DANNY

Yep. In my wallet.

He touches the letter in his back pocket.

JAY

I sure hope this show's good for your sake, cause when we get back your old man's gonna fuckin' kill you.

DANNY

Yeah, well maybe he'll never get the chance. Maybe I won't ever be comin' back.

Jay smiles, puzzled. Danny sees a hawk in the sky. He rolls the window down and sticks his head out to watch the bird. Then returning to the car, he sees Warren in his rear view mirror.

DANNY

(waving arm that's
out of window)

Adios, Warren fuckin' Oklahoma!

JAY

(pointing ahead)

Hey, man, you better slow down.

COMBINE ON HIGHWAY. DANNY'S POV

DANNY

Fuck!

He speeds up and tries to pass, but a car approaches in the other lane. Caught behind the combine, Danny slows to 15 mph.

DANNY

Come on, come on. (Tries to pass,
can't) Shit! Come on!

JAY

Take it easy, man.

Danny tries to pass again but still can't.

DANNY

Jesus Christ! (Beats horn) Get out of the fuckin' way! (Looks to pass but cars are still coming) Well, fuck this.

He moves to the road's grassy shoulder, accelerates, passes. Danny's determined; Jay's petrified. He braces himself against the dash.

JAY

Holy shit!

Danny cuts back to the highway right in front of the combine, narrowly missing a mail box on the shoulder. But he angles too far and crosses into the wrong lane. A car's coming. He jerks back in time.

JAY

(exhaling)

God damn.

DANNY

(flipping combine driver off)
Fuck you, combine!

Jay turns to look out the back window.

JAY

Oh, shit. (Laughs) You know who that was? Goddamn old man McFarland. They're gonna have a posse out after your ass, man.

DANNY

Fuck you, old man McFarland! Fuck all you bastards! (Laughs) You got a beer in that bag of yours, man?

JAY

(unzipping it)

Yeah. Smokes too.

DANNY

All right. Shit, man, I forgot to tell you last night, but I don't have any dope.

Jay opens a beer, hands it to him.

JAY

Well, you're damn sure on something. Here,

maybe this'll mellow you out.

Jay pulls a hidden joint from behind his ear.

DANNY
Excellent! Now we're groovin'.

JAY
Groovin'?

DANNY
Let's have some fuckin' music.

JAY
What do you want to listen to? Never mind,
never mind. I'm not even gonna ask that
question.

Jay starts looking for the tape case. Danny smiles broadly, takes a long drink of the beer, then snorts and spits out the window.

DANNY
Everything's clickin' now.

EXT. CAR -- DAY

It moves down the highway. Song like Neil Young's "Heart of Gold" plays.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY. SEQUENCE OF SHOTS

(The sun is lower in the sky in each shot)

As the song continues, Danny's Camaro slows at an intersection as it turns onto another two-lane highway.

The Camaro passes a car on a hill; a combine is in the distance.

Danny meets a highway patrol, tenses, then looks relieved when the patrol doesn't stop him.

The Camaro speeds along a four-lane interstate, approaching Norman.

CUT TO:

INT. LLOYD NOBLE CENTER -- DUSK

Jonny Nation is onstage with a guitar, sitting on a stool, singing the same song that has been playing. He sings the last verse and concludes it. Mild CHEERS. A large woman

in her late twenties, dressed in loose 60's garb, climbs onto the stage and runs toward Jonny. He sees her coming and looks to the side of the stage for help. Arms open, she hugs Jonny, who accepts politely. But her momentum tips the stool, and she tackles Jonny to the floor.

GIRL

Oh, Jonny! Jonny! I just love your music! It just touches me in some, in some mysterious way. If only everyone would just open their eyes and listen to your songs and let themselves be free.

JONNY

(trying to get out from beneath her)
Yeah.

Non-uniformed security men pull her off Jonny.

GIRL

Would you play "Blackbird" by the Beatles, Jonny? Tell everyone here not to be afraid. Just let themselves be free.

Security men direct her off stage; she doesn't resist. Crowd CHEERS. She waves to them. Then pulling away from the security men momentarily, she calls indistinctly to the crowd and flaps her arms. The security men grab her and haul her off.

Jonny stands and laughs. He rights the stool, sits, and checks his guitar and harmonica. He starts to speak, but turns away to laugh.

JONNY

That was a little unrehearsed break in the action, sports fans. Uh. . .(Laughs; to person in audience) Do what? (Laughs) Yeah, yeah. Uh, Barry? Barry Switzer? You out there? I think we've got a prospect for you, guy.

Audience LAUGHS, some call out indistinct jokes.

Okay. (Strums guitar) Maybe I should announce that this is not football tryouts. No, those are over at the stadium. (Tests harmonica) Seriously, though, I would like to thank you for coming out tonight. I really appreciate it. It's been a while since I've been in Oklahoma. (CHEERS) It's great to be back. Really, though, making records can be satisfying, but there's nothing like playing songs live in front of real people.

A few CHEERS; a few "Rock-n-rolls!".

Um, the last couple of years I've been doing things a little bit, well, I mean I've been writing songs that are a little different from the kind I've written in the past. I think it's important to try new things no matter what it is you like to do, cause if you don't then, I mean, if you don't, then I don't think you give yourself a chance to grow. (To self) Good God. (To crowd) All right, all right, I think I've said enough. (Nervously) I imagine some of you might be disappointed by some of the, well, let's just get on with it. Thanks again for coming out.

He goes into a song like Neil Young's "Comes a Time," singing intently. He plays a few verses.

CUT TO:

EXT. LLOYD NOBLE CENTER -- DUSK

Danny parks the car some distance from the building and hops out. He walks, almost runs toward the building.

JAY

Shit, slow down.

He runs to catch Danny. When he does, Danny speeds up.

FLIGHT OF STEPS

They run up them.

LLOYD NOBLE ENTRANCE

Danny is first up the stairs. He moves quickly to the entrance doors and enters without waiting for Jay.

INT. LLOYD NOBLE CENTER -- DUSK

Danny gives his ticket to a ticket taker, who tears off and returns the stub, which Danny pockets. Nation can be heard singing. Some ticket holders are wandering around on the dim walkway that circles the arena. Danny crosses the walkway to the back row of seats, looks down, and sees Nation on the other side of the arena. The sight pleases and frightens him. Jay walks up.

JAY

That dude said he's only been playing for about ten minutes. Let's go find our seats.

They move on the walkway, Danny looking down at the stage whenever possible. Nation concludes the song and begins another like Neil Young's "Campaigner." They find their seats in a row well up from the arena floor and a good distance from the stage. Danny sits and watches, almost in disbelief.

JAY

I don't think I've ever heard this song.

DANNY

It's off his new album. God, man, it's really him singing it.

JAY

Yeah, but how can we really be sure?
(Danny doesn't react) You want to smoke another joint?

DANNY

Not now, man. In a little while maybe.

JAY

(surprised)

All right.

JONNY. DANNY'S POV

sings, intent.

DANNY

leans forward, watches.

JONNY

concludes the song. Nods to mild CHEERS.

DANNY

claps a few times softly. A guy a few rows down stands.

GUY

Rock-n-roll! Fuck this mellow shit!

Danny looks mad, then laughs. Nation starts another song, like Neil Young's "Thrasher." Danny sees an older man in his 30's, a liberal university professor, with a pair of binoculars in one hand, a silver flask in the other.

DANNY

(to man)

You think I could, uh, excuse me. (Taps man on leg) Could I look through those

for just a second? I promise I'll only use them for a minute.

MAN

Sure.

He hands them to Danny.

JONNY. DANNY'S POV THROUGH BINOCULARS

He sings.

SEQUENCE OF SHOTS

The song continues then fades out and another begins. The pattern extends for several songs.

Suddenly, Danny is backstage talking with Jonny, then leaving the building with him.

In a hotel room, Danny writes at a table while Jonny plays guitar.

Standing backstage, Danny watches Jonny perform.

Danny and Jonny sit in an airplane, talking.

In a hotel room, Jonny helps Danny play the guitar.

Danny and Jonny walk down a city sidewalk -- Jonny tries to remain unrecognized.

Photograph in Rolling Stone of Danny and Jonny together backstage.

Printed song lyrics to song titled "The Loner" beneath which reads: Written by Jonny Nation and Danny Barton.

Danny looks down at these lyrics and smiles. The music continues.

INT. LLOYD NOBLE CENTER -- NIGHT

Jonny concludes the song.

DANNY

(to man behind him)

What time is it?

MAN

Almost nine-thirty.

DANNY

(to Jay; fearfully)

I bet that was his last song. He's

been playing almost an hour and a half.

JAY

Yeah, you want to go ahead and head for the exit. Beat the crowd.

DANNY

Hell no! Come on, Jonny, just play one more song.

JONNY. DANNY'S POV

JONNY

You've been a great audience. It's been a pleasure.

DANNY

is panic-stricken.

DANNY

Oh no.

JONNY

JONNY

I've got one more I'd like to do for you before we leave tonight.

He starts a song like Neil Young's "Out of the Blue."

DANNY

DANNY

(clenches fist)

Yes! (To Jay) I'm going to the floor. You want to come with me?

JAY

Yeah, right.

DANNY

All right. I'll meet you back at the car after the show.

Danny leaves his seat and moves to the aisle. Jay looks on in disbelief. When he sees Danny head down the stairs toward the floor, he shakes his head then follows.

Danny moves down the steps purposefully. As he nears the floor, he sees an usher in formal attire, holding a flashlight, checking ticket stubs. Danny slows as he nears the man, who is now talking to three teenage girls. One takes off running toward the crowd; the usher follows.

Danny runs to the floor and heads for the stage. He works his way into the middle of the packed, standing, floor crowd before he turns to see if anyone is following. Jay is right behind him.

DANNY

Jay! All right, man! You came with me!
Let's head for the stage!

JAY

Right here's all right.

DANNY

No! Come on!

Jay follows Danny, who frantically works his way through the crowd toward the stage. He makes it to the front but closer to the side of the stage than the center where Jonny is.

Jay stands behind Danny, who watches Nation intently. People near them SCREAM at Nation, sensing the show is nearly over. All are jostled together, positioning for space. The music is LOUD.

JONNY. DANNY'S POV

He nears end of the song. Danny gets bumped; a person steps in, blocking his view. He struggles and regains his position.

AUDIENCE. NATION'S POV

People stand in front of Jonny: some screaming, some listening, some as mesmerized as Danny. Nation looks toward the side of the stage; Danny and Jay struggle for space.

DANNY

watches Nation, looks afraid.

RAPID SEQUENCE OF SHOTS

Shots of Danny and Jonny from earlier SEQUENCE flash past quickly.

NATION. DANNY'S POV

He concludes the song. Nods to CHEERS.

JONNY

Thank you. Thank you very much, Oklahoma.
Good night. (Waves to crowd)

DANNY

gets bumped again. Shouldering the guy off, he regains his view of Jonny. Panic wells up; he swallows. Sound of SCREAMING PEOPLE fades to background noise as SOUND of HEARTBEAT begins slowly and intensifies.

RAPID SEQUENCE

Shots of Danny working cattle, repairing combines, cutting wheat, sitting in living room with his family, dead dog in pickup, hawk in sky flash past. HEARTBEAT continues. Screaming people background noise subsides replaced by the sound of CATTLE MOOING.

DANNY

watches Jonny. The HEARTBEAT gets louder, faster.

JONNY. DANNY'S POV.

He crosses the stage toward Danny. He slows, waves to the crowd.

DANNY

acts. He leaps over a wooden rail and scrabbles onto the stage, where he walks toward Jonny. The HEARTBEAT is frantic.

STAGE

Jonny stops, seeing Danny approach. Danny stops a few feet from Jonny. The HEARTBEAT stops replaced by the crowd's CHEERS which are faint by comparison.

Jonny looks at Danny warily. Realizing what he has done, Danny looks down, almost in shame. He looks at the crowd quickly, then at Jonny.

DANNY

(somberly)

(Swallows, moves hand toward pocket holding letter) I just wanted to talk to. . .

Danny's bearhugged forcefully from behind by a non-uniformed security man. Jonny reflexively steps forward out of concern, then stops. Danny wants to speak but can't find the words. He struggles for the letter, misses, then gets it, and flips it at Jonny. Startled, Jonny misses it with his hands and the letter hits him softly in the chest. Danny is taken off the stage.

Jonny watches, considers leaving the letter on stage, then picks it up. He walks toward the back of the stage.

OFFSTAGE

A security man walks with Danny, holding his arm.

DANNY
(pleading)

Man, don't arrest me. I didn't mean nothing. I can't go to jail.

SECURITY

Shut up, kid. I ain't gonna bust ya. I'm just gonna throw your ass out of here.

They start up the stairs toward the exits. Jay sees, follows. The audience CHEERS for Nation, holding cigarette lighters aloft.

BACKSTAGE

Elliott approaches Jonny.

ELLIOTT

It's a good thing the Black Hawks will be with you on stage from now on. At least you'll have somebody up there to help you fight off the weirdos. Maybe you oughta start packing when you perform. (Laughs) What did that kid throw at you?

JONNY

(shows him folded letter)

This.

ELLIOTT

What the hell is it?

JONNY

I don't know. I haven't looked at it yet.

ELLIOTT

Probably a death threat. (Laughs)

STAIRS

The security man directs Danny to the top of the stairs, across the walkway, and out the door.

EXT. LLOYD NOBLE -- NIGHT

The wind is blowing. It feels good to Danny. He sits down, runs his hands through his hair, and breathes deeply. He hears the door open behind him; it's Jay. Danny stands quickly and starts walking.

Jay walks up beside him. They walk quickly. Danny's ashamed, angered. He looks at Jay nervously, sees Jay watching him -- both look away.

CUT TO:

INT. DRESSING ROOM -- NIGHT

Jonny sits, drinking a beer, reading Danny's letter. Elliott opens the door.

ELLIOTT

(to stagehand outside)

I don't care. We're going to follow the same schedule, and that's the way it's going to be. (Closes door) Fucking hired hands. What's that?

JONNY

It's the letter that kid threw at me.

ELLIOTT

(laughs)

What's he have to say? Is he giving you some career advice?

JONNY

(smiling)

No.

ELLIOTT

Really? Something original?

JONNY

No, not exactly. It's a poem. Or maybe song lyrics.

ELLIOTT

Oh, God. Even worse.

JONNY

No, I kinda like it.

ELLIOTT

Is it any good?

JONNY

(laughs)

No.

ELLIOTT

Then why do you like it?

JONNY

It reminds me of one of the first songs
I ever wrote.

ELLIOTT

Yeah? Which one?

JONNY

I called it "The Loner." It never made it
on an album. It wasn't very good; it got
bumped off my first solo album. I don't
know why I picked that one, they were all
pretty sorry.

ELLIOTT

Well, of course. That was before you met me.

Jonny scans the letter again, smiles. He hands Elliott
the beer.

JONNY

Finish this for me, will ya?

ELLIOTT

Why, what's the deal?

JONNY

(stands; folding letter)
I'm doing an encore.

ELLIOTT

Do what?

Jonny puts the letter in his pocket and opens the door.

JONNY

I'm going back out. An encore. You know.
You've heard of it. I used to do them all
the time.

ELLIOTT

Now come on, man. You don't have to go
overboard here. You played for quite a while.

JONNY

Yeah, I know.

ELLIOTT

(sighs)
From one extreme to the other.

CUT TO:

EXT. DANNY'S CAR -- NIGHT

It pulls out of the parking lot onto the street.

INT. CAR -- NIGHT

Jay's driving. He looks at Danny, who's staring ahead, trying to ignore what has happened. There is a nervous tension between them. Jay looks away and then looks at Danny again. Finally, Jay breaks the silence, selecting his words carefully. The conversation is slow-paced.

JAY

There's some cigarettes in my bag in the back seat.

DANNY

Hmm? Oh, okay? (Reaches into back seat for bag) You want one?

JAY

No, huh-uh. (Pause) You want to stop and get something to drink?

DANNY

No. You can if you want.

EXT. CAR -- NIGHT

It pulls onto a busy four-lane.

INT. CAR -- NIGHT

Jay glances at Danny again, then looks ahead.

JAY

(cautiously)

Well, you know, while we're here I guess we could go cruise the main drag. Maybe pick up on some big city chicks.

Danny smiles briefly. He looks down, thinking, then shakes his head and laughs to himself. Then, almost as quickly, the same thought disappoints and disturbs him.

DANNY

(more to himself than Jay)
God. (Sighs) What the hell have I been doing?

Concerned, Jay watches him out of the corner of his eye. Danny looks at Jay then looks down quickly.

JAY

(clears his throat)

Fuck it, man. Let's just go cruising.

Danny lights a cigarette, cracks the window.

DANNY

We could go try to find out where Jonny Nation is staying the night. I could go up to him and say, 'Hey, Jonny. Remember me? I'm the one who ran up to you on stage tonight. I'm your biggest fan.'

JAY

So that's why you ran up there. I thought you probably had a good reason for doing it. The guy standing beside me said, 'Look at that dumb fuck.' But I said, 'No, that's my good friend, Danny. And I'll bet you anything he's got a good reason we don't know about for running up there.' (They both laugh softly) You should've seen Nation's face, man.

DANNY

What was he doing?

JAY

He was pretty freaked by it, I think. I bet he thought he was gonna have to club you with his guitar or something. I know it surprised the hell out of him when you just went up there and stood. And then when you tossed that piece of paper it scared the shit out of him.

Danny laughs aloud, a nervous release.

He probably thought it was a knife or something cause he jumped when he saw it coming and didn't even catch it. It went right through his hands and hit him in the chest. He's probably backstage right now going, 'I don't care who lost him, I want the little son-of-a-bitch found and brought to me. Nobody does that shit to Jonny Nation and gets away with it.'

They laugh. Pause.

DANNY

(tentatively)

Did he just leave it on stage?

JAY

What.

DANNY

What I threw.

JAY

No, he picked it up.

DANNY

Really?

JAY

Yeah, he probably wanted the evidence so he could sue ya. What was it anyway?

DANNY

Nothing, man. Nothing. (He looks ahead, smiles) It was just a letter.

Jay looks at Danny, waiting for an explanation he never gets. Danny looks down at the floor then ahead; the slight smile lingers on his face.

CUT TO:

INT. LLOYD NOBLE CENTER -- NIGHT

The crowd CHEERS as Jonny crosses the stage and waves to them. Picking up the guitar, he moves to the microphone.

JONNY

You're not in a hurry to go home, are ya?

CROWD

No!

JONNY

Hell, we may be here all night. My manager's given me the okay. (Laughs, strums guitar) Even though I don't have a band up here with me I thought I'd play some of my earlier songs if you don't mind.

More CHEERS. Jonny goes into a song like Neil Young's "Motor City." Louder CHEERS. He stops after the song's second line.

JONNY

No, wait a minute. I got another song I want to play for you first.

The crowd stops cheering. They offer indistinct CRIES of displeasure.

JONNY

(sarcastically)

There's just no pleasing you people. No, now seriously, I want to play another one first then I'll play that one. I got a newer song I want to play.

He plays one like Neil Young's "Sail Away." Little crowd response. He sings the first verse, then the chorus. The words should mirror Young's as closely as possible, particularly the lines: "There's a road stretched out between us, like a ribbon on the high plain."

Nation sings another verse, then the chorus. He tries to get the crowd to sing along. Some do. He tries again. More do. He's enjoying it regardless.

CUT TO:

INT. DANNY'S CAR -- NIGHT

The song plays. Danny stares ahead, smoking, reflecting.

CUT TO:

INT. CONCERT STAGE -- NIGHT

At a slower speed, Danny is being drawn from Jonny by the security man. The only sound is that of a deep, peaceful breathing. Danny tosses the letter at Jonny. In mid-air it turns into a hawk.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAWK IN SKY -- DAY

The bird coasts in the blue air.

DANNY

rides a combine, watching the bird, expressionless.

WIDER ANGLE

The combine becomes slowly distant until the wheat field and sky are in equal parts.

FADE OUT:

Credits run to song like Neil Young's "Get Back On It."

VITA ²

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