

SIDETRACKED

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD - DAY

MARI, 21, freckles, athletic build, sits on a gynecological treatment table.

She reads a poster on the wall - 1981 MISSION STATEMENT -
"Since the landmark 1973 Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court Decision,
we are committed to providing women with a safe choice in the
event of pregnancy."

An African American doctor, WAXEN, in shirt sleeves and
slacks comes in. She looks at the dark freckles across his
nose as he shakes her hand.

DR. WAXEN

How are you feeling today, Mari? I
want to know more about your
genetics. Your chart indicates a
family history of schizophrenia.

Mari looks down at her twisted hands.

DR. WAXEN (CONT'D)

(with gentleness)
Can you tell me about it?

Mari pulls knees up to her chest, wraps her arms around them,
shrinks to the back wall.

MARI

I want to...

Dr. Waxen sits down.

DR. WAXEN

You can close your eyes and tell
me. I could pull that curtain and
stand behind it.

MARI

You can stay there.
(looks down at knees)
My father is crazy. His mother was
crazy. That's a long story.

MARI (CONT'D)

My older brother, Chad, has
schizophrenia. He suffers terribly,
homeless, psych hospitals,
hallucinations.

Dr. Waxen makes a note.

MARI (CONT'D)

He cried at night when he was in high school. I used to kneel at his bedside and ask what was the matter. He couldn't tell me.

DR. WAXEN

That must have been hard.

MARI

My mother stayed in bed with depression, since I was eight. She still gets it. I've had anxiety since college. My sister too.

DR. WAXEN

That's a lot of family history.

Mari looks at him, wraps her sweater tightly around herself.

MARI

Even if I feel guilty about this for the rest of my life, I don't want any child of mine suffering like my brother. Or like me.

DR. WAXEN

Sometimes people do feel some guilt. Often not. We can help you with that if you need it.

MARI

Jack doesn't know I'm here.

DR. WAXEN

Your husband?

MARI

My boyfriend. We're leaving for Colorado this week.

DR. WAXEN

You can't tell him?

MARI

No, that would complicate things. My sister is in the waiting room.

DR. WAXEN

So you're feeling sure about your decision to have the abortion?

Mari's eyes go wide. She lets the sweater loosen around her and straightens up.

MARI

Yes.

EXT. COLORADO HIGHWAY - DAY

Mari stands hitchhiking with Jack. She wiggles in her heavy pack to ease it off her hips. As her shirt comes up a bit, we see large red marks around her middle from the chafing pack.

Castle Rock emerges like a flat top haircut dusted with snow in early spring. At the lower elevation where they stand, there's no town or houses in sight and the ground is bare in the late spring sunshine.

MARI

How much money do you have?

JACK

A few dollars.

MARI

Seems kinda risky to be out here, on our way to who knows where for who knows what with no money.

JACK

That's hitchhiking. What happens is what's supposed to happen.

Mari frowns, grabs her pack straps and heaves the pack higher on her shoulders.

MARI

My hips hurt. I gotta pee.

JACK

You're such a girl.

MARI

Well, ex-cuuuse me!

She leaves the road, descends the bank to a drainpipe.

INT. METAL DRAINPIPE - DAY

It's a dried up, runoff bed under the road. Mari removes the backpack, squats, rests in the shade, wipes her brow with a kerchief. Drops of blood hit the ground between her feet.

JACK (O.S.)
Honey, we got a ride!

She scrambles back into her shorts, hustles to the highway.

INT. DODGE PICKUP - DAY

All in the front seat, Blond RICK, the driver, 40, sits next to Jack in the middle with Mari at the passenger window.

RICK
Are you sure you want to go to
Aspen? A tough job market.

JACK
We're looking for a town where we
can ski, hike, have some fun.

Jack pulls up a Canon SLR camera from around his shoulder, takes it out of the case, raises it to the window to get a picture of Castle Rock.

The radio plays news.

ANNOUNCER
President Ronald Reagan announced
today he is nominating Arizona
Judge Sandra Day O'Connor to become
the first female justice on the
U.S. Supreme Court.

Mari leans in.

MARI
Wow, a woman on the Supreme--

Rick snaps off the radio.

RICK
(to Jack)
What's your f-stop and film speed?

JACK
F14. ASA 100.

RICK
Depending on focal length, open it
up and shorten shutter speed.

JACK
You a professional photographer?

RICK

I own a camera sales and photo
development business in Aspen.

Mari opens her mouth to say something, shuts it, folds her
arms, stares out the window.

JACK

I'll be in to apply for a job.

RICK

What's your experience?

JACK

Commission sales, waiting tables.
B.A. in French.

RICK

Not many Frenchmen around.

MARI

Jack is good with people. He can
get anyone to trust him.
(turns to Jack)
Tell him about Nebraska.

EXT. INTERSTATE RAMP - DAY - FLASHBACK

Jack, five years younger, with a bruised lip, stands
hitchhiking. A road sign, featuring a buck with antlers,
reads: LEAVING NORTH PLATTE, NEBRASKA. A U-haul truck stops.
Jack jogs up to the driver's window.

Both look like they dressed out of a Salvation Army bin,
MATT, 14, skinny, innocent-looking drives and ANNA, 13, sits
in the passenger seat.

A radio, turned loud, blares the DJ voice.

DJ

Presidential hopeful Jimmy
Carter....

MATT

Get in.

DJ

..1976 Billboard list single "Silly
Love Songs".

Wings song starts to play.

JACK
Where?

MATT
In the back.

Jack walks to the back of the truck, opens the door, hops in.

Inside he sees three more kids who sit on hundreds of CASES OF COORS BEER.

JACOB (13) is husky and confident. EMILY (12) is plump with a developed chest. RYAN (8) is pale, thin, anxious-looking.

U-HAUL CARGO AREA

Jack closes the sliding back door from the inside.

The U-haul engine whines. The back of the cab sways as the truck pulls back onto the highway. Jack motions toward the beer, looks at Jacob.

JACK
Can I have one?

Jacob hands Jack a beer, passes one to each kid. They pop them open, drink.

JACK (CONT'D)
Name's Jack.

JACOB
I'm Jacob. This is Emily and Ryan.

BILL
Where are your parents?

Jacob freezes, speaks cautiously.

JACOB
Back home.

The U-haul lurches. Ryan falls off his case, spills his beer. The other kids laugh. Tears come to Ryan's eyes.

Jack looks around, back at Ryan. He reaches into his pack, pulls out a pouch, pulls a miniature chess piece out, starts zooming around the air with it.

JACK
Nrrrrr. Kings can fly!

Ryan snuffles, hiccoughs, but notices.

JACK (CONT'D)
I got knights too. They do magic.

RYAN
(calms down)
I know how to play chess.

JACK
We'll play sometime.

Ryan looks at Jack's bruised face, his dirty clothes.

RYAN
You're face is busted. And dirty.

Jack shifts uncomfortably.

JACK
Heard of hopping trains?

RYAN
No.

JACK
I just rode a freight train from
Salt Lake City to Nebraska. Free.

RYAN
How long did that take?

JACK
Three days. The engine smoke got
all over me.

Ryan reaches toward the bruise. Jack pulls away.

JACK (CONT'D)
Don't get caught in a freight yard.
Flics punch hard.

RYAN
What's a flic?

JACK
Never mind.

EXT. HIGHWAY BREAKDOWN LANE - DAY

Emily, stumbling with crossed legs, and Anna descend the embankment next to the highway, go behind one of the scrubby bushes that don't quite hide them as they squat, pee.

The boys turn their backs to the highway, piss.

Emily and Anna come back to the truck.

JACOB
 (to Emily)
 You hit your sneakers!

The kids all giggle, look at the wet spots.

EMILY
 Shut up! Tell him to shut up Anna!

ANNA
 Jacob, cut it out.
 (to Emily)
 Those are the only shoes you got.
 Be careful.

Emily stomps to the back of the truck, stumbles as she tries to climb in. She scrapes her elbow, blood drips down.

EMILY
 (winces)
 Ouch.

Jack, stands next to her, helps her off the ground.

JACK
 (examines the cut)
 I got something for that.

Jack brings out his first aid kit, pulls out gauze and Calamine lotion, reads the label.

JACK (CONT'D)
 For itching. Damn.

He sets it aside. He shrugs his shoulders, spits on his kerchief, reaches for Emily.

She pulls away. He shows her the gauze. He reaches toward her again. She lets him wipe up the blood with the kerchief, wrap her elbow with the gauze.

INT. DODGE PICKUP - NIGHT - BACK TO 1980S

Mari is awed as she looks out the window at snowy, jagged Rocky Mountain peaks.

MARI
 I can't believe we're here. I wanna
 work in a bookstore.

RICK
Explore Bookshop is the best, owned
by the daughter of a movie magnate.

JACK
Any good places to camp near town?

RICK
You can stay with me. My wife just
left. Plenty of room.

JACK
Appreciate it.

Mari looks at Jack questioningly. He nods that it's OK.

Mari swoons a bit in her seat.

MARI
I feel funny.

RICK
It's the elevation. Drink water.

Mari reaches for her water bottle, takes a few gulps.

EXT. ASPEN MOUNTAIN SLOPE - DAY

Jack and Mari climb on a 200-inch spring snow base. Lifts are closed; slopes are empty. It gets steep. They reach the top of the first chair lift, turn to look down on Aspen.

Jack sweats, takes off his shirt, starts to hike again, bare-chested. Mari wipes her brow.

MARI
Wait a minute! I need a rest.

She takes off her pack, gets the water bottle out of the side pocket, takes a few gulps.

MARI (CONT'D)
What good is a closed chair lift.

JACK
Come on. We missed the season. I
just want to ski once from the top.

He looks around at the lowering sunlight.

JACK (CONT'D)

We can't be out here after dark.
This is taking longer than I
thought. Keep going.

They hike again. Sweat pours off Jack's back and down Mari's face. Her T-shirt is soaked. She lags behind him. One foot catches on an exposed rock. She grimaces, massages her leg.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE - UPPER CHAIR LIFT - DAY

Jack waits for Mari to catch up. She limps.

MARI

I pulled my thigh muscle.

Jack looks concerned.

JACK

We're almost there.

MARI

(sways slightly, bucks up)
I can do it. I'm just gonna stop
for a few minutes.

She pauses, catches her breath. She sees the Rocky Mountains around her start to shine with the setting sun.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PEAK - DAY

The rosy glow all around is luminescent with a 360-degree view of the Continental Divide. Jack stands, looks at the view. Mari catches up, puffing breath. She takes out her water bottle.

MARI

Wow! We're on top of the world.

A pink setting sun shines around the mountains.

JACK

We better start down.

MARI

We just got here.

JACK

We're gonna lose the light.

They take their skis from the sides of their packs, strap the telemark ski bindings to their hiking boots.

JACK (CONT'D)

I wish we had skis with edges.

Jack drops off the precipitous slope. His skis scrape loudly on ice. He descends the first pitch, makes a few sliding telemark turns, stops to look straight back up at Mari.

Mari looks over the slope edge. The front of her skis hang in mid-air because the slope is so steep. She wavers, dizzy.

MARI

When the sun set, it turned to ice.
How do I get started?

JACK

You're gonna have to jump. It's
tricky. Don't mess up.

She looks over the tip of her skis straight down.

MARI

Thanks. That's so supportive.

INT. U-HAUL CARGO - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Jack opens another beer. Sleepy, the kids' heads nod.

Emily, next to Jack, falls asleep, sinks down on his shoulder. He pushes her away. She sinks down again.

He pushes her away. She sinks down further, almost into his lap. He lets her stay, sleep. Jacob notices.

INT. U-HAUL CAB - NIGHT

Matt holds the steering wheel. His head nods to his chest. He jerks it back up. He nods again. The truck veers over the right. The headlights show guardrails but Matt pulls up.

ANNA

Matt! God, keep it together!

INT. U-HAUL CARGO - NIGHT

When the truck lurches suddenly to the right, Ryan, Emily and Jacob fall off their cases of beer, wake up. Jack bangs on the cab window.

JACK

What's happening?

ANNA (O.S.)
 Matt fell asleep. We're getting off
 for the night.

EXT. SIDE OF MINOR ROAD - NIGHT

The headlights show a clearing hidden by an embankment.

Jack takes his gear and sleeping bag, settles a distance from the kids. Emily takes her Mickey Mouse sleeping bag, brings it next to his. Jack shifts away, uneasily.

The kids grab Snoopy and Road Runner sleeping bags from plastic garbage bags, spread them on a tarp.

EMILY
 (to Jack)
 Nite, nite.

JACK
 (gruffly)
 Nite.

EMILY
 Why are you here with us?

Jack looks at the stars, turns his back to Emily.

JACK
 I finished two years of college. I
 might go back. But I gotta see
 things. The sky is the limit.

He rolls to see Emily, almost dozing. He rolls away again.

JACK (CONT'D)
 (to himself)
 You kids are a bunch of limits.

EMILY
 (rouses, sleepily)
 Nite, nite, everybody.

A chorus of "nite nite" comes back to her, echos in the dark.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE - DAY - BACK TO 1980S

Mari takes a jump off the edge of the slope, hits the ice, slides. She makes two awkward turns, loses control, falls.

She slides past Jack, her skis in front of her. She revolves to head first down the mountain.

JACK
Get your skis downhill!

She slides 500 feet, revolves from head up to head down. Her side scrapes over an exposed rock that rips her pants. She yells in pain and her voice echoes off the mountains. The bare skin on her hip bleeds, leaves streaks on the icy snow.

She slides, stops, heaves breath. Jack skis to her.

JACK (CONT'D)
Honey! Oh my God.

He gets out a kerchief, reaches to her bleeding side, grimaces, gently blots the scrapes.

Jack looks at the darkening sky around them.

JACK (CONT'D)
We have to get down before dark.

MARI
How the hell am I going to get off
this mountain?

He pulls out a whiskey flask, hands it to her.

JACK
Take a slug.

She grasps it, gulps, coughs.

JACK (CONT'D)
(in survival mode)
The toll road is just ahead. We'll
get off the slope.

With his skis pointed across the hill, he takes his poles in one hand, places them between his legs, sits on them so they drag under his seat. He points his skis downhill to demonstrate how the poles function as brakes.

JACK (CONT'D)
Do this.

Mari swivels her skis sideways to the mountain, gathers up her poles, gets into position with poles between her legs, sits on them, turns downhill.

She skis in control on the icy snow as the poles slow her down. Jack follows her with cautious telemark turns.

She negotiates a turn with the braking poles onto the toll road, goes a little faster. She smiles.

EXT. BOTTOM OF MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

It's pitch dark. Mari and Jack see the lights of the town.

JACK
We made it.

MARI
(slides, brakes)
The town is beautiful.

Rick comes out the door of the hotel bar at the base of the mountain, comes toward them.

RICK
Figured I'd better check on you. I
told you when you left it was late
to set out.

MARI
Jack has to find out things the
hard way.

RICK
You're lucky you didn't set off an
avalanche.

Rick goes over to Mari, who sits on the snow. Rick sees her bloody side, her edgeless skis.

RICK (CONT'D)
Jesus! I'm taking you to the
hospital. You don't even have edges
on your skis! Are you crazy?

MARI
(toughens up)
I don't have money for a doctor.

Rick reaches a hand to help Mari up. Mari touches her scraped, bruised thigh.

INT. WALNUT HOUSE FILM, ASPEN - DAY

Mari walks in, brushes flakes from her thick sweater. She gazes at the stretched out zebra skin on the wall, grimaces.

She looks for Jack, who makes a sales pitch for a Leica camera to a CUSTOMER who wears Gucci jeans, alligator skin boots, Rolex watch, holds a Gold American Express Black Centurion card.

JACK
(to customer)
It's a range-finder. There's no
mirror to flip, blur the image.

Mari goes over to Rick.

RICK
Hey, Mari. I'll introduce you to an
Aspen tradition.

Rick takes Mari over to the far corner of the store, sets up
cocaine lines on the counter.

Mari watches with wide eyes. Rick takes a snort.

RICK (CONT'D)
Your turn?

Mari backs up, puts up her hands.

MARI
Really, no thanks, Rick.

RICK
Never done coke?

MARI
Not exactly.

RICK
Buck up, Mari. This is the town of
stars and snow.

JACK NICOLSON saunters into the store, picks up a pack of
prints from the counter, smiles at Rick, steps out.

Mari squirms.

MARI
Ah, geez, Rick, maybe next time.

She backs up toward the door.

MARI (CONT'D)
Hey, tell Jack I'll meet him at the
top of the first chairlift.

She backs up more, turns, hurries out the door.

Rick snorts the other line. Jack finishes the sale, customer
leaves. Rick locks the door with a big flourish, rushes over
to slap Jack on the back.

RICK
(lets out a whoop)
Nice sale! Rolling in dough today.

Rick knocks into the Zebra skin on the wall, breaks out in crazed laughter.

RICK (CONT'D)
My ex-wife.
(laughs more)
She's an animal rights activist.
There more skin and fur on people's
backs per square mile in Aspen than
anywhere in the world.

EXT. ASPEN MOUNTAIN - DAY

Mari and Jack sit in a motionless chair above the town of Aspen on the lift platform, their legs hang over the edge of the seat. They munch on sandwiches, look down onto the Valley across to Red Mountain.

Wetness glistens on new tree leaves, remnants of snow patches dot the ground. An elk in the woods lifts his rack to stare at Jack and Mari.

JACK
I've got a plan.

MARI
Why doesn't this surprise me?

JACK
Figure we could live in a tent in
the woods. Save the rent. With two
week's pay, I'll buy a motorcycle.

MARI
Oh no, Jack. That's crazy.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - DAY - FLASHBACK

Jack stands at the vending machines, arms crossed on his chest, watches the band of kids go into action.

Emily goes through the trash cans, looks for scraps of food.

Matt takes a box of cookies from a partially laden picnic table. A mother, father, and two young kids don't notice, back at their car to fetch the rest of the picnic.

Anna, with Ryan, buys soda from machines. Matt comes over.

MATT
A whole bag!

Anna admires his take. Emily comes over.

EMILY
Half a tuna sandwich.

She distributes chunks of the sandwich. Matt hands out cookies, offers one to Jack. He refuses, arms still crossed.

MATT
Have some.

Matt pushes the cookie into Jack's hand. Jack relaxes his crossed arms, munches on the cookie.

INT. UHAUL CARGO - DAY

Jack, Jacob, Emily, and Ryan sit on beer cases, sip from cans. Jacob throws an empty beer can. It bounces off the inside of the truck with a clink. He catches it.

Emily and Ryan laugh at the clinking sound, start to throw beer cans that clink, bounce back so they catch them, sometimes they miss the cans that veer off the walls.

A bouncing beer can comes near Jack. He catches it, throws it back at the truck. The kids giggle wildly. They all throw cans that clink, fly around.

A police siren sounds in the near distance. Everyone freezes. Jack bangs on the cab window.

JACK
(yells to Matt driving)
Matt! Put down your beer. Go the speed limit. Not too slow.

JACOB
What do we do?

JACK
Sit tight.

The siren sound comes closer, louder. It pulls up behind them. Ryan cries softly. Jack puts a hand on Ryan's shoulder.

The police cruiser lights careen through the back of the truck. The siren gets distorted, louder.

Emily and Jacob hold their ears, hide their heads. Ryan dives for Jack who holds him in his arms.

The siren screams.

EXT. NATIONAL FOREST - NIGHT - BACK TO 1980S

Mari and Jack ride a motorcycle up the valley, stop at a bend, get off, hide the motorcycle in a gully, in a small clearing behind a large boulder. They start up the hill.

Jack turns on a flashlight, leads the way up the mountain.

MARI

Here, skunky skunky skunky.

Jack's light shines on a mamma skunk who waddles with five kits close behind her across their trail.

Jack and Mari continue up the hill, arrive at a clearing where a wall tent is set up.

INT. WALL TENT - NIGHT

Jack shines a flash light. They pull off their T-shirts.

MARI

Tick check.

Jack nods, starts to go over his body with the light. Mari takes a flashlight, does the same on hers.

JACK

Do my back.

Mari shines the flashlight on Jack's back to show six ticks.

MARI

Got a bunch here.

She takes the matchbook, lights the match, blows it out. She applies the hot head to Jack's skin. He flinches. The tick backs out. She squeezes it between two fingernails.

Mari brushes her hand over Jack's back, sits back.

MARI (CONT'D)

Now me.

Jack takes the flashlight and matches. Mari turns her bare back to him.

JACK

Only one.

He removes the tick, using the match. She flinches. They lay down together. Jack holds her, her bare back shines.

JACK (CONT'D)
I got an idea.

MARI
Why doesn't this surprise me?

JACK
I'll start a photo business next season, take pictures of kids in ski classes.

MARI
That'll work. Great idea.

He caresses her lower back.

JACK
I love the two dimples down here.

They melt into each other's arms in embrace, crawl into one sleeping bag, her on top.

Soon the sleeping bag rocks with their rhythm.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

A bare chested, burly HUNTER with wild black hair and a knife strapped to his calf, carries a bow over one shoulder and a quiver of arrows over the other. He comes quietly up to Jack and Mari's tent at dawn.

He pulls an arrow from the quiver, fits it to the bow, draws the bow, points it toward the tent entrance.

HUNTER
Hey, come out of there!

Jack pushes open the tent flap, glances at the hunter's drawn bow, turns back to put his fingers to his lips to shush Mari.

Jack comes slowly out of the tent, bare chested, wearing jeans with his hands up.

HUNTER (CONT'D)
Your scent is driving my bear out of this draw. I've been tracking him for months.

JACK
We'll move. This morning.

The Hunter draws the bow tighter.

HUNTER

You better be gone or I'll shred
the tent. And you.

JACK

No problem. We're outta here.

The Hunter lets down his bow, grunts, turns, strides away.

Mari peeks out, crawls out in her jeans and T-shirt.

MARI

He's illegal hunting on National
Forest land.

JACK

We're illegal camping on National
Forest Land. We go. Pack up.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Mari and Jack come through the brush, arrive at the clearing
where the motorcycle is parked behind the boulder. Jack has
the folded tent under his arm. They both carry heavy packs.

JACK

We'll leave our stuff here today.

MARI

Where will we go tonight?

JACK

I don't know.

He sees something in the grass next to the boulder, goes over
to inspect it.

JACK (CONT'D)

(pulls on something)

It's a mattress, pretty good shape.
Somebody camped here recently.

Jack looks around the clearing with satisfaction.

JACK (CONT'D)

We stay here. It saves us a mile
hiking up the hill. And we got a
mattress! He can't hunt this close
to the road.

They drop their stuff.

JACK (CONT'D)
Hurry up. We'll be late for work.

MARI
I'm hungry. I'm sick of cleaning at that gym to pay for a shower. I didn't go to college to clean gyms.

JACK
Who put a silver spoon in your mouth?

MARI
I'm just sayin' living in a tent isn't what I expected after waiting tables to pay tuition. Or cleaning dirty showers.

Mari warms up to her argument.

MARI (CONT'D)
Or groveling to the rich and famous. That bear hunter was creepy. Jeessum, what next?

INT. ASPEN BAR - NIGHT

Mari enters, blows on her chilly fingers. She settles at a table. A WAITRESS with a raccoon-eye tan comes over.

MARI
I'll have a strawberry Daiquiri.

The waitress nods, drops a cocktail napkin, turns to the bar.

A sign set on the stage says - OPEN MIKE.

The crowd sports fur boots, cowboy hats, lots of gold jewelry. A customer at the bar cuts a line of coke, snorts it up. Jack on stage, sings an original pop tune, plays open tuned guitar.

JACK
(singing)
You can run and run and run as fast
as you can! But you can't catch,
you can't catch me,
I live in Asp-an!

The crowd laughs. Jack finishes, joins Mari at her table, lays the guitar against the table.

Waitress brings Mari's drink, and a shot and beer for Jack.

WAITRESS

On the house. Great song.

Jack smiles. Mari beams proudly.

JACK

Thanks. Burgers, rare, please.

The waitress leaves. He turns to Mari.

JACK (CONT'D)

I'm getting itchy for a road trip.

MARI

We've just got off the road.

JACK

I know, but there's so much to see around here. A customer had pictures of the Black Canyon. Looks so cool. Let's go this weekend.

MARI

How far?

JACK

110 miles.

MARI

(shivers)

That's three hours after work on Friday. I'll freeze my sore butt.

JACK

We'll get to the desert. Warm.

EXT. BACKROAD - DAY

Jack rides the motorcycle as Mari clings on the back. It's dark, on a flat desert road with jagged snowy mountains behind them. Their backpacks are strapped to the backrest. They don't wear helmets.

They pass an isolated gas station.

MARI

(yells into the wind)

We need water.

JACK

(back over his shoulder)

Too late. At the campsite.

Jack turns the motorcycle onto a dirt road past a scummy cattle pond.

EXT. CANYON - DAY

Jack leads the way down a steep scree shoot full of boulders on a beautiful sunny day. The river roars down below.

Mari stumbles on a boulder, stops to enjoy the view.

JACK
Come on, honey. Don't stop.

MARI
I'm thirsty. The campsite spigots weren't on yet.

JACK
You can drink from the river when we get to the bottom.

Mari stumbles forward again.

EXT. CAMPING SITE - DAY

It's raining lightly. The camping gear is loaded onto the motorcycle. Jack and Mari wear rain jackets and jeans. They stand next to the bike.

JACK
(looks west at the sky)
I don't like what's coming at us.

MARI
My boss said it was too early to go through the pass on a motorcycle.

She reaches over to touch her toes, groans.

MARI (CONT'D)
My legs are sore from break-neck boulder ballet yesterday.

JACK
You were the one who had to fool around and made a late start.

MARI
I didn't hear you complaining.

Mari reaches to scratch the back of her neck, grimaces, pulls a fat, black, 1/4 inch bug from her hairline. She throws it on the ground where it waddles lazily.

MARI (CONT'D)
What the hell is that?

JACK
A tick.

MARI
Gross. I've never seen one so big.

JACK
He's been in there awhile.

Mari makes an "ick" grimace.

Jack climbs on the bike, starts the engine. Mari gets on.

MARI
(speaks over his shoulder)
We should have helmets.

JACK
No helmet law in Colorado. Don't need 'em.

Jack kicks up the stand, takes off down the park dirt road. A sign says. "Thank you for Visiting COLORADO BLACK CANYON GUNNISON NATIONAL PARK."

It starts to sleet. Mari ducks her head between Jack's shoulder blades to avoid the cutting ice needles.

She peeks out to see the sleet fly past Jack's ears. She puts her hands up and over his forehead to protect him from the icy, stinging stabs. She leans her forehead back into his back. Her hands turn raw and red.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

On the steep mountain pass dirt road, Jack drives slowly over muddy ruts in heavy sleet. High snowy mountain peaks are all around. Mari has her arms around his waist.

The bike front tire catches in a deep mud rut, follows the rut wildly from side to side.

JACK
Hang on! We're going down!

The front bike tire jerks to a stop. Jack's chest slams into the right handlebar. He goes down onto the road under the bucking bike.

Mari flies through the air over Jack's head. She lands in a puddle on her knee in the middle of the road, rolls onto her back. Rain and sleet come down onto her face.

Jack wiggles out from under the bike, sees the handlebar, bent from the force of his chest. He holds his ribs in pain.

He rushes over to Mari.

JACK (CONT'D)
Honey, please get up!

Mari groans, opens her eyes.

JACK (CONT'D)
Honey. Please. There's traffic.

A car approaches as Jack, Mari and the bike block the road. Another car comes, stops from the other direction. A pickup truck drives up, stops behind one of the cars.

A COWBOY gets out of the pickup, walks slowly toward Mari lying in the road. Jack kneels at her side.

CHUCK gets out of a stopped car. ED comes from the car to the other side. Both walk toward Mari and Jack.

Mari turns her head on the road, sees a pair of cowboy boots next to her ear.

She looks past the boots, up to a skinny pair of legs in jeans, up to a leather belt with a silver buckle, up to a jean jacket. At the top is a scruffy face and cowboy hat.

The Cowboy looks down at her, spits chew near her head.

COWBOY
Geez. Y'all want a beer?

JACK
(stands up)
I'll take one.

CHUCK
Me too.

ED
Don't mind if I do.

Mari is oblivious. The Cowboy goes back to his truck, opens the door, reaches in, pulls out a six-pack, heads back toward the group.

Jack shakes hands with Ed and Chuck.

CHUCK
Name's Chuck.

ED
Ed.

JACK
Jack. We're headed to Aspen.

ED
I live in Aspen! Wait tables at the
Steakhouse.

The cowboy hands out beers. The men pop them open, all look down at Mari.

JACK
This is Mari.

She smiles up at them, dazed.

ED
Probably in shock.

JACK
(gets on his knees)
Honey, you gotta get up.

MARI
Oh, all right!

She gingerly rolls over onto her side. At the side of the road, she sees a dead elk hit by a car.

MARI (CONT'D)
Crap!

She struggles onto all fours, grimaces. Jack reaches out a hand to help her stand. She's avoids weight on her right leg.

A cheer rises from the Cowboy, Ed and Chuck.

JACK
Can you walk?

She takes a few steps.

MARI
My knee feels all warm.

CHUCK
Blood clot?

ED
I'm going the other direction to
Crawford. Otherwise, I'd take her.

JACK
We'll be OK, fellas.

Chuck and Ed walk over to the bike, pick it up off the road.

Jack takes a pint bottle of bourbon out of the motorcycle saddle bag, hands it to Mari.

Mari downs a few gulps. Jack takes several gulps, puts the bottle back in the bag, gets on, starts the bike.

She picks up her right leg, winces, swings it stiffly over the motorcycle seat.

Another cheer goes up from Cowboy, Ed and Chuck.

Jack starts the motorcycle. The right handlebar is bent way forward so he reaches out for it, takes off down the other side of the pass in the rain and sleet.

INT. TENT - DAY

Jack and Mari doze side by side in sleeping bags.

Jack's eyes open. He twists to his side, grimaces, crawls naked out of the bag. Seated, he looks at Mari.

Mari opens her eyes, shifts uneasily.

MARI
I can't move.

JACK
Honey, try.

Mari rolls to one side stiffly, rests.

JACK (CONT'D)
Keep going.

Mari pushes the bag back, gets her legs out. She crawls onto all fours. Naked, she is bruised widely from her right ribs down to her hip and thigh. Her knee is blue, swollen.

JACK (CONT'D)
Can you bend your knee?

Mari slowly bends her right knee. She looks surprised. She stoops to pick up a T-shirt from the tent floor, pulls it stiffly over her head.

Jack hugs her. He winces as her arm comes around his ribs.

JACK (CONT'D)
I think I cracked a rib.

MARI
I got cracked brains hanging out with you. But I guess you'll get me home safe.

JACK
I'll always protect you.

MARI
I know that. In your own way.

The sun makes tree branch shadows on the tent canvas.

They gaze at each other, hold each other lightly, their foreheads come together. Radiant light shines between them.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY - FLASHBACK

Jack ducks into the gas station.

In the parking lot, Matt, Anna, Jacob, Emily and Ryan sit on the truck tailgate, swing their legs, finish sodas and packages of crackers and cheese, start to get off tailgate.

JED, 24, greasy black hair, creeping looking, no gear, approaches them.

JED
Whoa! Is this the Waltons?

EMILY
Hi, Mister.

JED
I need a ride.

MATT
We got room.

Jack leaves the gas station, sees Jed, runs toward the kids.

JACK
Hey! You! Stop!

Jed climbs in the back of the truck. Matt and Anna start for the cab, Ryan, Jacob and Emily settle inside. Jack runs up.

JACK (CONT'D)
What's going on here?
(to Jed)
Hey, you..

RYAN (O.S.)
Jack, I got a splinter...

MATT (OS)
Close the door. We're going.

The truck moves as Jack jumps in, Jacob closes door.

INT. U-HAUL CARGO - DAY

With one hand, Jack holds Ryan's hand, uses a jackknife to remove splinter. Jed eyes Emily's developed chest. Jed lights a joint.

JED
Anyone want a hit?

Jacob reaches a hand to take the joint. Jack brushes it back.

JACK
No, they don't.

JED
(to Jack)
I could sell you some good stuff.

JACK
No. Put that away.

Jed shrugs, puts out the joint on the truck floor.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - DAY

The U-Haul parks in front of a sign that says - LAUDROMAT.

Jack helps the kids out of the truck. They each have a garbage bag of dirty clothes.

Anna takes a small wad of one dollar bills from her front pants pocket, approaches Matt. Jed eyes the wad of money. Jack notices.

ANNA
(counts the few bills)
We've got \$3 for laundry.

Matt takes \$5 for gas.

MATT
(to the group)
Get your stuff washed.

Matt goes into nearby gas station.

Anna goes to the vending machines to buy food and soda for the kids. Sign on the building reads: CLARKSVILLE TENNESSEE.

Jack watches the kids like a border collie around sheep.

INT. TRUCK STOP LAUNDROMAT - DAY

Jack opens his pack. His clothes are neat, organized.

A sound system with speakers by the front door plays 70s background music. Matt, Anna, Jacob, Emily and Ryan empty clothes from the garbage bags into washers.

Emily dumps her clothes on the table. A large bra falls on the floor. Jacob grabs it, pitches it to Ryan, who pitches it back to Jacob.

Red-faced Emily tries to get her bra back.

EMILY
(to Anna)
Make them stop! Anna!

Anna catches the flying bra, gives it back to Emily.

Emily, Anna and Matt turn on washers. Jed stands at the back doorway, smokes a cigarette.

Jacob and Ryan toss dirty socks to one another, pitch them in the washers like basketballs.

INT. TRUCK STOP LAUDROMAT - DAY

Jack dumps his wet clothes in a dryer, goes over to his pack on the table, takes a pouch from the front pocket. He removes chess pieces and a small board from the bag.

JACK
Hey, Ryan.

Ryan comes over. Jack holds up the board.

JACK (CONT'D)
Let's play.

Jack sets up the board. Ryan picks up the Queen, starts zooming the figure around in the air.

RYAN
Queens have magic powers too.

JACK
Absolutely. Know where she goes?

Ryan places the Queen. Jack sets up the knights, pawns.

JACK (CONT'D)
You first.

Ryan shrugs, moves a knight.

JACK (CONT'D)
That's pretty good. But you got to protect the Queen. Try this.

Jack moves the piece.

JACK (CONT'D)
If I go here, you move here...

Ryan stares at Jack.

RYAN
Why are you hitchhiking?

JACK
It's like - we're the younger generation. We can be free. From convention.

RYAN
What's convention?

JACK
The ordinary, boring thing everybody does.

Jack moves his knight. Ryan hovers his hand over his queen.

JACK (CONT'D)
Nope.

Ryan takes his hand from his queen, moves a knight.

JACK (CONT'D)
Better.

INT. TRUCK STOP LAUDROMAT - LATER

Washers rinse, spin through their cycles.

Jack and Ryan sit over the chess board.

JACK
You can win! Don't mess up.

Jack sees Emily take his clothes from the dryer.

JACK (CONT'D)
Hey, I'll do that.

EMILY
I'll fold 'em. You helped us.

JACK
(scurms)
Uh, Ok. But roll the socks and
flatten the wrinkles OK?

Jack turns back to the game.

JACK (CONT'D)
Good job. You got Check.

EXT. ASPEN BAR - NIGHT - BACK TO 1980S

Mari sits on a split rail fence, swings her legs. People stream in, all holding tickets. She sees NANCY, tall, dark-haired, trim, 25.

NANCY
Hey, Mari! I just cashed out the bookstore. Hurry in. I heard Nick Brignola is playing one set.

MARI
Jack has the tickets.

NANCY
See ya in there.

Nancy flows in with the crowd.

It gets darker. Mari sits on the railing. The quarter moon rises above the mountain.

EXT. ASPEN BAR - LATER

Mari sits on the ground. The moon is higher. The crowd inside cheers loudly at the end of a music set.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Let's hear it again for Nick
Brignola, before he jets out.

The crowd cheers. Jack roars up on the motorcycle by the fence. Mari doesn't look at him. He parks, swings his leg off the seat, hurries over to Mari.

JACK

Honey, Stephanie showed me a
special film technique. I went to
the darkroom, forgot...

MARI

You promised! We planned to see
Brignola for weeks.

Jack looks at his boots.

MARI (CONT'D)

You always stay late at work.
Stephanie is after you.

JACK

Don't be ridiculous. She's the
manager. I do what she says.

He kneels in the grass by the fence.

JACK (CONT'D)

I promise I'll make it up to you.
We'll hear the second set.

He reaches for her hand.

MARI

(pulls away from him)
He's gone to the airport. A cover
band is next.

JACK

Oh God. I promise I'll take you to
see Nick next time around. Let's
get a drink. You'll feel better.

He reaches to her shoulder. She pushes it away, gets up without looking at him.

EXT. POST OFFICE- DAY

Mari sits on the bench, backpack by her. She gazes at the Explore Bookshop across the street.

She opens a letter from the STATE UNIVERISTY OF ALBANY, reads. Nancy walks by.

MARI

(looks down at letter)
Oh my God!

NANCY

What's up?

MARI

(reads the letter)
"Congratulations on your acceptance to the French Department Master's Degree Program. You've been awarded a full teaching scholarship."

NANCY

Whoa!? Are you leaving Jack?

MARI

I don't want to. But he won't live in Albany.

NANCY

Why not?

MARI

When he was 16 living in North Carolina, his mother kicked him out. Sent him to be with his drunk father in Albany. He pulled his Dad out of every bar in the city.

Mari chews her lip. Nancy sits down.

MARI (CONT'D)

I'm sick of bruises, ticks, the tent. We're going nowhere.

NANCY

When it's dangerous or dumb, you could say no.

MARI

Yah, so much is wrong. But so much is right. My curves fit his bumps, like puzzle pieces. He's got more stamina. I've got more intellect.

(MORE)

MARI (CONT'D)

He's got survival smarts. I've got vision. He's more adaptable. I make change happen. Why do we drive each other crazy?

NANCY

Age old question. Are you better off with him or without him?

MARI

(impish)

The sex is out of this world.

NANCY

Can't argue with that.

MARI

I have to mail the contract today.

Nancy puts her arms around Mari, sees a customer who waits at the bookstore entrance across the street. Nancy gets up.

NANCY

Gotta open the store. Jeez, sorry.

Nancy lets go of Mari's hand, walks away. Mari looks at the contract. Her tears fall on the paper. She takes a pen from her pack, signs the contract, folds it, puts it in the return postage envelope.

She gets up, walks to the post box, pulls the drop handle, puts the envelope inside, lets go of the handle.

INT. STEAKHOUSE - NIGHT

Mari sits at a table alone, in front of a half glass of beer. Ed comes by.

ED

Do you want to wait at the bar? I hate to say but we need the table.

MARI

No, he'll get here. I'll have a shot of bourbon, please.

Jack hurries in the front door wears his daypack, rushes to the table.

JACK

Lots of accounts to tie up, honey bunny. I've got exciting news.

She looks at him, annoyed. Ed comes by with her shot.

JACK (CONT'D)
Hey Ed! A shot and a beer, please.
We've got to celebrate.

MARI
I'll have another shot, please. And
a separate check.

ED
Whoa! Should I leave you two alone?

Mari glares at Jack.

JACK
(to Ed)
Two shots!
(conciliatory to Mari)
Honey, Rick is expanding the store.
He wants me to head up the work.

Ed brings the shots.

ED
Hope these lighten the mood.

Mari downs her shot.

MARI
So you'll be manager?

JACK
Sort of. It's not clear. Rick wants
me to team up with Stephanie.

Mari takes a sip of beer.

MARI
I've got news too.

JACK
Yah? What?

MARI
I accepted a graduate assistant
teaching position back in Albany.

Jack, stunned, leans forward, takes her shoulders.

JACK
But why? We're together. It's good.

MARI
 We're working retail, going
 nowhere. The graduate offer is too
 good to refuse.

Jack looks desperate, face wrenched with pain.

JACK
 Are you breaking up with me?

MARI
 No!

JACK
 I won't live in Albany.

MARI
 I won't stay here.

JACK
 You're giving up that easily?

MARI
 Just taking a break.

Mari leans toward Jack, insistent.

MARI (CONT'D)
 We're low class in a high class
 place. It's not for me.

JACK
 But the new store?

MARI
 The old store takes all your time.
 A new store will be an obsession.
 There's no room for me. I gotta
 make a life of my own.

JACK
 But I love you.
 (in sing-song rhythm)
 And I hope you love me too...

MARI
 (in sing-song rhythm)
 I do. I do. And I hope you love me
 too...

JACK
 I do. I do.

MARI

I do....

Jack reaches his hand out to hers. His eyes brim with tears as he turns to look at mountains outside the windows. The green Aspen leaves turns yellow and fall. Snow falls, melts away, new leaves appear on trees, deepen to dark green.

EXT. WALNUT HOUSE FILMS - DAY

The store front is twice as big with a new sign. Customers hurry in and out the front door.

INT. WALNUT HOUSE FILM - NIGHT

In the expanded sales room, opposite the zebra skin on a new wall, a rhino head stands out. Two cash registers are side-by-side. Two doors are marked- DARKROOM.

Jack wears a green wool button-down shirt and jeans. He stands at the one cash register, closes for the day..
STEPHANIE, 35, trim, blond, stands at the counter.

STEPHANIE

That's such a cool shirt. I've never seen one like that before.

JACK

Mari made it for me. It's Pendleton wool. She said I could wash it in streams, dry it on sunny rocks.

STEPHANIE

She's not out of your head, is she?

JACK

She's part of me.

STEPHANIE

You know I've tried to make you forget her?

JACK

I didn't mean to hurt you.

STEPHANIE

What is it about her that you like?

Jack leans back against the counter, smiles.

JACK

My mother used to say to me - you can't marry some piece of fluff.

He smiles.

JACK (CONT'D)

Mari's the only woman I've ever known who can keep up with me. Not only that, but she beats my ass in the smart department.

Jack plays with his shirt sleeve cuff.

JACK (CONT'D)

She's kind. She thinks about other people. I don't do that. I'd be mostly alone. She drags me into the middle of life.

STEPHANIE

What will you do?

Jack brings himself upright.

JACK

Guess I have to go after her.

Jack walks over to Stephanie.

JACK (CONT'D)

Thanks for teaching me the ropes.

STEPHANIE

Yeah, the business is a success. I failed at something else though.

INT. MARI'S STUDENT APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mari and her sister MARGARET, 19, shorter, dark hair, plump, pretty, sit at a cheap dining table, drink glasses of wine.

Mari tips back in her chair, plays with falling over.

MARGARET

Be careful.

MARI

I know the limits. If I just stay this side of...

She crashes over backwards. Margaret laughs so hard the wine comes up her nose. Mari laughs from the floor, gets up, settles back at the table.

MARGARET

You daredevil!

MARI

I'm so glad school is over for summer. One more year.

MARGARET

Have you talked to Mom this week?

MARI

Yeah. I took a turn to visit Chad yesterday. Mom gets tired of going to the psych ward every day.

MARGARET

Mom is like a cockroach. You can't kill her. If she survived life with Dad, she can deal with our schizophrenic brother.

MARI

Remember Christmas when Dad was yelling and paranoid. He would never turn on the heat so we all had on three sweaters.

Mari reaches for a small pile of stones and feather on the table, takes a few into her fist, hangs onto them tightly.

MARGARET

(warms up)

...and Mom was crying into her turkey dinner while Dad shovelled all the stuff off the desk and emptied the drawers because he thought somebody stole his mother's silver coins.

MARI

...and Chad was on pass from the psych ward, smoking cigarettes in the corner. You asked him if he wanted to go back to the lockup.

Mari starts laughing. Margaret laughs, take a sip of wine.

MARGARET

I asked if I could go with him.

Mari laughs, tips back in her chair, about to fall over. Margaret grabs her hand to pull her back up.

Mari drops the pebbles from her hand, reaches for the floor, picks them up.

MARGARET (CONT'D)
What are those?

MARI
Nature stuff Jack sends me.

MARGARET
He's so different from Dad.

Mari stares at the pebbles and feathers.

MARI
Sometimes I think I ruined my life,
leaving him in Aspen.

MARGARET
You two will be OK.

MARI
Ya think? A blond was after him.

MARGARET
He doesn't like dumb blonds. He
likes your flippy hair. And how
smart you are.

MARI
The best thing about Jack is that
he loves me so much. I know he
tries to protect me...

Mari leans back in her chair again, plays the edge, balances perfectly in mid-air.

INT. RESTAURANT ALBANY NY - DAY

Mari wipes the last of 15 tables in a shotgun style bar with Boston ferns hanging from the ceiling.

The bartender, GINO, 45, pale, black hair, skinny, wipes down the bar. Gino tries not to look at Mari's chest. Her nipples stand up against her bra and white silk blouse. She reaches an arm across to shield herself, wipes a table.

Her knee-length black skirt slit, front and back, opens to reveal her thigh. She snatches at the skirt edges to coverup.

GINO
 Busy lunch shift today. You got
 your bike? It's raining.

MARI
 I'll get wet. Not the first time.

A radio plays music in the bar. A radio announcer speaks:

RADIO ANNOUNCER
 Experts debate what Reaganomics
 will mean for the 1980s as
 President Reagan signed major tax
 cut legislation today...

SUE, 50s, the only customer left in the restaurant, slumps at
 a table, a large empty wine glass in her hands, stares
 morosely at glass, dark hair, glasses, wears a black pencil
 skirt and pink blouse, cut medium low, HUGE shoulder pads.

GINO
 (to Mari)
 Good haul?

MARI
 Gotta pull in \$100 a week.

GINO.
 That covers tuition?

MARI
 I got a teaching assistantship.

Sue perks up, listens to their conversation, gets up.

GINO
 Smart kid. Still with the mystery
 boyfriend in Colorado?

MARI
 Jack -- hates being tied down.
 Hates Albany.

Sue staggers to the bar, her ankle turns on her heels, the
 shoulder pads are lopsided.

GINO
 (to Mari)
 What's not to like?

Sue bellys up to the bar.

SUE

(slurs)

Albany is one of the ten bottom places on earth. Blighted neighborhoods, boarded up buildings, eviscer..

(stumbles on word)

Evicerrrr-a-ted downtown, muggers in every alley. A political machine sheister mayor for forty years.

Gino comes around the bar while she talks, takes her elbow, guides her toward the door. Sue waggles her finger at Mari.

SUE (CONT'D)

Your boyfriend is right, dearie...

MARI

Mari...

SUE

Stay away from this town. It's dis... diss.. .ease.

She stumbles. Gino catches her. Sue looks into Gino's eyes.

SUE (CONT'D)

You're cute. How about you and me blow this popsicle stand?

GINO

I said no yesterday, Sue. And it's no today. Back to the office now.

Sue tries to straighten up, bumps her HUGE shoulder pads against Gino. She grabs the pads, straightens them.

SUE

(loudly)

I look like a goddamn football player. The great 1980s, time of women's liberation..ss, my ass.

Sue warms and starts girating her hips to a 1982 jingle from an Enjoili perfume commercial.

SUE (CONT'D)

I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan...

Gino opens the door, ushers Sue out.

OUTSIDE

Sue appears in the front three pane window, open on both sides, cups her hands, peers in as big glasses.

SUE (CONT'D)

(yells)

...and never, never let you forget
you're a man.

Sue pushes her chest against the middle glass, cleavage shows.

INSIDE

GINO

See ya Monday, Sue.

Gino grins at Mari, whips the dish towel from his shoulder, holds it in front of Sue's chest in the window. Mari laughs, shakes her head. Gino drops the towel. Sue is gone.

Gino comes back to the bar. The radio plays Between the Sheets, the Isely Brothers.

MARI

Jack's mother in North Carolina
kicked him out when he was 16, sent
him here to be with his drunk
father.

Gino pulls out a pouch, lines up white powder on the bar.

MARI (CONT'D)

Jack worked his way through
community college, pulled his
father out of every bar in town.

GINO

We all got a story.

Gino snorts a line. Mari puts a dollar bill on her pile, stops, looks dreamy.

MARI

He's amazing. He jumped through an
open window into French class,
dropped a violet on my desk.

GINO

Give me a break.

MARI

We hitchhiked to Aspen, lived in a
tent.

GINO
Very responsible.

MARI
He's an entrepreneur. Started a
business taking ski photos of kids.
I worked in a book store.

GINO
Why did the happy couple break up?

MARI
I came back east for graduate
school. He stayed.

GINO
That works for you?

MARI
I don't know.

Mari counts the last one dollar into a pile, stacks quarters.

MARI (CONT'D)
Made it.

She grabs her jean jacket from a coat hook.

Gino lays out another line.

GINO
Want some?

MARI
(pulls jacket tight)
Nah. See ya next week, Gino. Don't
party too hard this weekend.

Gino gives her a wave, stoops over to snort up his snow. She
takes off out the back door.

EXT. MARI'S STUDENT APARTMENT - DAY

In the rain, Mari peddles hard down the street. She's soaked.
She hears guitar playing and singing. She approaches her
dumpy apartment building that sags to the right with a
covered front porch that sags to the left.

JACK, sits on the steps. He's 24, trim hair cut, lithe strong
body. A full pack and soft guitar case sit next to him.

JACK

You've got me movin', a weavin' a groovin'. I'm flipping just like a flop. You've got me goin, a whirlin' around now. I'm giddy just like a top. Mari, I love you so, if you could only know.

She dumps her bike at the foot of the stairs of a dumpy apartment building, charges up the steps. Jack drops the guitar.

She throws herself into his arms. He catches her, kisses her.

Mari pulls away. She wrinkles her nose.

MARI

Did you bring a skunk with you?

JACK

My pack.

(kisses Mari)

Got sprayed.

(kisses her again)

When I got out after my last hitch.

He kicks the pack away from them, grabs Mari again.

EXT. ALBANY PARK - NIGHT

Jack and Mari lie on a blanket, look at bright stars. Mari shivers. Jack wraps the blanket tightly around her, holds her to warm her up.

JACK

Where could we go together?

MARI

My Master's Degree is here.

JACK

I won't live in upstate New York.

MARI

Just a year for my school?

JACK

There's someplace better. Aspen or Cannes. France was amazing.

MARI

We know what happened in Aspen. And I interned in Cannes for a year and you visited. Big deal. It wasn't settled, secure.

JACK

But so cool. We windsurfed the Mediterranean. We went to the film festival.

He sighs with pleasure. His arm is under Mari's head. He strokes her hair.

JACK (CONT'D)

We could go to Burlington, Vermont.

MARI

Why?

JACK

It's beautiful, happening, like the West, like the coast of France.

MARI

What about my scholarship?

JACK

You can transfer to the University of Vermont.

Mari draws away.

MARI

What normal thing would you do?

JACK

I got an idea.

MARI

Why doesn't this surprise me?

JACK

I'd start a windsurfing school on Lake Champlain. It could catch on.

MARI

You took one lesson. How can you teach?

JACK

I'll get a book from the library.

MARI

And the wolf carries you on his back to the lake and teaches you to sail. When you get tossed from the board in high winds and drown because you don't know what you are doing, the wolf brings the water of life to restore you.

JACK

What are you talking about?

MARI

Tsarevich Ivan in a Russian fairytale I read as a kid. Ivan captures the golden firebird and wins the princess.

JACK

You are the princess and your name is Arwen, half-elfin daughter of Elrond, and Evening Star, the most beautiful of the high elves of Middle Earth and you give up immortality to be with me.

Jack strokes Mari's face. Mari snuggles in again.

MARI

I don't want to be away from you.

JACK

Me either you.

MARI

If only I knew what to do.

JACK

Follow your heart.
(chants sing-song rhyme)
I love you and I hope you love me too...

MARI

(chants back)
I do. I do. And I hope you love me too...

JACK

(continues the chant)
I do. I do. And I hope you...

INT. PROFESSOR'S OFFICE - SUNY ALBANY - DAY

DR. KANE, 60s, bald, slight-build, academic, stoops over papers. Mari walks in.

DR. KANE
Mari, all registered for fall?
Second year students get a raise.

Mari steps back, twists her hands.

MARI
I, uh, I'm not staying, Dr. Kane...

Kane jerks upright, anger flushes his face.

DR. KANE
Young lady, it's too late to pull
out. We'll lose your stipend.

MARI
I'm in love. I have dreams. I..

DR. KANE
(throws up his hands)
Love! Dreams! Education lasts.

Mari slowly steps backward toward the door.

MARI
I'm sorry, Dr. Kane. I apologize...

DR. KANE
You're throwing away a chance. You
could be a professor.

MARI
I don't want to be a professor. I
want an exciting life, and a
beautiful place to live.

She slams the door on the way out.

EXT. CONNECTOR HWY 279 - VERMONT - DAY

Jack and Mari stand at the base of the interstate ramp where cars pass. A road sign reads, LEAVING THE EMPIRE STATE.

She wears a large back pack, jean shorts, t-shirt, bandana, hiking boots. Jack has the same gear and his guitar. They look alike. Dark green leaves of summer shine in the hot sun.

JACK
We're good. Great traffic.

Jack drops his pack on the roadside. Mari does the same. Jack sticks out his thumb. Mari does too.

JACK (CONT'D)
Stay behind me a little. We don't want any crazy guy picking us up because he's looking for a girl.

Mari steps behind him, sticks her thumb high above his.

MARI
I feel like a second class citizen.

JACK
I know more about hitchhiking than you do, so just go along, OK?

A state trooper cruiser approaches, pulls over into the breakdown lane near the couple.

JACK (CONT'D)
Uh oh. Let me handle this.

An OFFICER gets out, approaches.

MARI
Are we illegal?

JACK
Not now, Mari.

MARI
I wish I could say not now...

JACK
Be quiet. Please.

Jack steps in front of Mari. Mari peeks out from behind.

MARI
(mumbles)
..and somebody would listen.

OFFICER
Where are you kids going?

JACK
Burlington, Vermont, Officer.

The officer takes his sunglasses off, stares at them through beady eyes.

OFFICER
You can't hitchhike on the highway.

Mari peaks out from behind Jack, stares at the officer's handcuffs and gun that hang from his belt.

MARI
Will we get arrested?

Jack gives her a shush motion.

JACK
Officer, we just finished college
and want to get jobs.

OFFICER
Get in the car.

Mari's eyes fly wide. She nudges Jack with her elbow. Jack reaches his arms wide to shield her.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
I'll take you over to Route 7. You
can hitch from there.

Jack heaves a sigh of relief. Mari brightens.

EXT. ROUTE 7 - DAY

Jack and Mari get out of the trooper's car onto the two lane road. A road sign reads - WELCOME TO VERMONT. Jack comes to the driver's window.

JACK
Thanks, Officer.

OFFICER
(smiling)
I got a kid your age. Good luck.

The officer takes off. Jack and Mari set their packs at the side of the road. A car approaches, they stick out their thumbs. The car passes.

MARI
Tell me story.

JACK
Not that again.

MARI
Come on.

JACK

I don't want you to get bored with my repertoire.

MARI

I'll never get bored.

JACK

You've heard all my stuff.

MARI

I like that you took care of the young kids driving the Uhaul full of beer. Shows your soft side.

JACK

No soft side.

MARI

Can't fool me. Did you ever find out where they got the beer?

JACK

No.

MARI

You never asked them?

JACK

You don't question things on the road. You just go along.

INT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY - FLASHBACK

A RADIO ANNOUNCER reports news from the sound system playing in the Laundromat. The dryers are loud as Matt, Anna, Ryan and Emily fold clothes near the dryer drums. Jack and Jacob, away from the dryers, hear the news.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Ethan Rhodes wanted for robbery, sexual assault, drug dealing, violated parole this morning 50 miles north of Clarksville. 5'10". Black hair, thin, pale, anchor tattoo. Officers patrol the interstate between....

Jacob stares at Jack, scared.

EXT. LAUDROMAT BACK DOOR- MOMENTS LATER

Jack gathers his pack and guitar, comes out the back door.

EMILY (O.S.)
 (from inside)
 Look, I'm a zombie.

ANNA (O.S.)
 For real.

Jacob follows Jack outside.

Jack shoulders his pack. In the distance, a police cruiser lights flash. The cruiser parks. A police officer gets out, carries a wanted poster, goes into the gas station.

Jacob reaches a hand to Jack.

JACOB
 Where 'r you going?

JACK
 Time for me to split.

JACOB
 You can't leave us now. That guy,
 he's dangerous...

JACK
 What am I supposed to do about it?

JACOB
 I don't know. Call the police!

Jack fingers his healing lip.

JACK
 Right. You're a legal bunch of
 underage kids. I'm an upstanding
 hitchhiker.

JACOB
 Think of something else.

Jacob squares his small self up to Jack, won't let him pass.

Jack stares at Jacob.

JACK
 Oh for Christ's sake.
 (to Jacob)
 I'll take care of it.

JACOB
What 'r ya gonna do?

JACK
(irritated)
I don't know yet!

INT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

Jack comes back in, followed by Jacob. Emily looks toward Jack, holds Ryan's hand. Ryan clutches a chess piece.

Jed nervously eyes the police cruiser. The officer exits the gas station. Jed's eyes dart to Jack.

Jack stares down Jed.

JACK
I'll turn you in.

Kids all freeze. Jed looks at kids. The police cruiser siren blurts out, draws everyone's attention out the window.

Ryan, still clutching chess pices, looks back at Jack. Back door is open. Jed is dissapeared. Jack looks at Ryan, winks.

JACK (CONT'D)
Checkmate.

INT. LAUDROMAT - MOMENTS LATER

Jack goes over to Matt and Anna who look at a map. Jacob, Ryan and Emily fold the last of the clothes from the dryer.

JACK
It's 500 miles to Greensboro.
You'll make it. I gotta go.

A chorus of "no's" come from the kids.

Emily throws herself at Jack for a hug. He awkwardly takes her partially in his arms. Jack puts his hand on Jacob's shoulder.

JACK (CONT'D)
Be the man.

JACOB
You turned out OK.

Jack squats down in front of Ryan who fights back tears. Jack pulls the chess set bag from his pocket.

JACK
This is for you.

Ryan's eyes light up, he takes the gift, speechless.

JACK (CONT'D)
(to Matt and Anna)
Be careful driving. Don't pick up
any hitchhikers.

Matt reaches his hand out to shake Jack's. Jack leaves.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - DAY

Jack jogs across a series of roads to find the north bound ramp. A field that gives way to deep woods is beside the ramp. A small baby rabbit shoots out into the road, nearly gets squished by a tire, runs back toward Jack.

JACK
(to the rabbit)
Watch yourself, little fella!

EXT. ROUTE 7 - DAY - BACK TO 1980S

Mari sits on the side of the road, listens, pulls apart a daisy. Pulled apart daisies are piled at her feet.

MARI
You're amazing.

JACK
Just average.

MARI
How many miles?

JACK
No idea.

MARI
How many times across the U.S.?

JACK
You ask too many questions.

MARI
Humor me.

JACK
Oh, six or so.

MARI
Down and back to Florida and New
Orleans, right?

She counts on her fingers.

MARI (CONT'D)
(mumbles, calculates)
Six times across U.S. Florida, New
Orleans...
(brightly looks up)
35,000 miles. That's amazing.

JACK
Just average.

MARI
Have you read Kerouac?

JACK
Of course. He had it easy, drove a
car. He tripped out, thought men
were all good. I've seen a lot on
the road that didn't look so good.

MARI
Does that make you cynical?

JACK
More questions.

MARI
Just tell me.

JACK
I relate more to Steinbeck
characters. They set out from a bad
situation to find something better.

MARI
Did you find something better?

JACK
I must have. I'm with you.

MARI
You just love life, no matter how
desperate it is.

JACK
Ok. Enough. How about your hitch
trips?

MARI
You're like Lazarus Long.

JACK
You read Heinlein? Enough already.
How many miles?

MARI
(counts fingers, mumbles)
To Virginia and back, across New
York state, around Europe, out west
with you.
(looks unimpressed)
Maybe 3,000. Nothing.

JACK
No, you so smart. And you
hitchhike.

He reaches out to touch her cheek.

JACK (CONT'D)
You come like a man.

MARI
I go after what I want.

JACK
You make great campfire meals.

MARI
I get hungry.

They kiss. Mari sits on the road, leans against her pack,
draws her knees to her chin.

MARI (CONT'D)
Someday I'll write a book about
your hitchhiking stories.

JACK
You'll meet your editor in New
York City. I'll dock my sailboat in
the harbor after a world trip.

MARI
I'll buy a hotel room for us, get
you a suit for my press conference.

JACK
No hotel! No suit!

They laugh. Jack takes his guitar out of the soft case,
tunes, strums, starts a tune, sings an original song.

JACK (CONT'D)
 You've got me movin', a weavin' a
 groovin'. I'm flippin, just like a
 flop.

Mari starts dancing, her hair flying.

JACK (CONT'D)
 You've got me goin', a whirlin'
 around now. I'm giddy just like a
 top. Mari, I love you so.
 If you could ever know.

He stops playing, looks down the road at a oncoming van.

JACK (CONT'D)
 Give' em the vibe.

He sets down the guitar, sticks out his thumb. Mari sticks
 out her thumb.

RALPH, 42, stops. A sign on his van says STATEWIDE
 ELECTRICIANS. Jack walks up to the driver's side window as it
 rolls down.

JACK (CONT'D)
 We're headed to Burlington.

INT. VAN - DAY

They crowd three in front; Jack is in the middle. A beagle,
 SPIKE, sits on Mari's lap. The van is full of electrical
 equipment.

RALPH
 Sorry about the mess. Spike!

He snaps his fingers toward the floorboards. Spike gets down.
 Ralph eyes Mari's bare legs in jean shorts.

RALPH (CONT'D)
 Summer is crazy with construction.

JACK
 Where are they building?

RALPH
 Up by the border. Montrealers want
 vacation homes. The problem is
 finding an employee to speak Frog.

Spike leans against Mari's bare legs. She rubs his ears. The
 dog sticks his nose in Mari's crotch.

MARI
I took business French.

Ralph glances at Mari and Spike, nudges Jack with his elbow.

RALPH
Sometimes it pays to be a dog, huh?

Ralph laughs. Jack takes off the blue bandana from around his neck, covers Mari's legs.

MARI
(butts in)
I could translate for Canadians.

Jack puts his fingers to his lips to shush Mari.

RALPH
(ignores Mari)
What's your job experience, kid?

Mari leans forward, pushes Jack back against the seat.

MARI
(loudly)
I've taught high school, waited tables, and worked in a book store. Besides cleaning houses, babysitting and grocery store cashier since I was ten. And you're a male chau...

JACK
(desperate to stop her)
...shoving aside the competition, good job...

Ralph slams on the brakes, veers to the side of the road.

RALPH
If you're so independent, lit'l lady, you can walk to Burlington.

Jack looks astonished at Mari, pushes her out the door.

JACK
No problem, Ralph...

They scramble out the door, hold their gear, as Ralph roars off.

JACK (CONT'D)
I told you to stop. You were annoying him.

MARI
He's a male chauvinist...

JACK
...so what. It was a ride. You're supposed to get along with the driver no matter what.

MARI
...pig!

Mari struggles to get her pack on. A car approaches. Jack sticks out his thumb. The car passes.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Mari, with a Strawberry Daiquiri, picks up her straw wrapped in paper. Jack has a shot of bourbon and a beer. A speaker pours out Fleetwood Mac.

STEVIE NICKS VOICE
Oh, mirror in the sky, what is
love? Can the child within my heart
rise above? Can I sail through the
changin' ocean tides? Can I handle
the seasons of my life?

JACK
I earned this.

MARI
We got another ride.

JACK
Yah, after we walked five miles.

MARI
It wasn't my fault he wouldn't
listen to me.

JACK
The dog liked your attention.

Mari blows her straw paper, hits him in the face.

MARI
Jack, that's a terrible thing to
say. It's such a man's world.

JACK
Never stopped you.

MARI
I want times to change.

JACK
Change 'em.

MARI
Not 'til I get some food and sleep.

JACK
Tomorrow, we get waiter jobs and
eat on shift. Now we find a place
to camp.

Jack gets up. Mari digs in her pcket, dumps a crumpled dollar
on the table.

JACK (CONT'D)
We need that for coffee.

Mari scoops it back up, drops a quarter, walks next to Jack
toward the door.

JACK (CONT'D)
You still got that \$400 tax return
check?

MARI
I'm saving it.

JACK
We can buy a used Jap truck, live
in it at the beach for the summer.

MARI
That's not normal, Jack. We can use
the \$400 for rent.

JACK
If we buy the truck, we have wheels
and a place to live.

EXT. WATERFRONT - NIGHT

The Lake Champlain lakeshore is deserted with railroad tracks
snaking between rundown industrial buildings. Old tires and
junk cars litter the area.

Jack and Mari arrive at an open patch of grass, spread out
their sleeping bags. Jack strips down to a T-shirt. Mari
pulls off her jeans and top, stands in a tight black tank.

Jack takes Mari gently in his arms. She wraps her arms around his lower waist.

Jack lays Mari lovingly on the sleeping bags, strips off his T-shirt, kisses her. She removes her tank. The moon and starlight shine on their bodies, arms and legs wrapped around each other. They move together in lovemaking.

EXT. WATERFRONT - NIGHT

Jack and Mari lie together in one sleeping bag. The moon shows on their faces. Waves lap at the shore.

Mari looks wide-eyed at the stars. Jack, sleepy eyed, gently strokes Mari's face.

JACK
(drowsy)
My girl.

His fingers slip down off her face. As he rolls away, he pulls the sleeping bag off Mari's bare body. She pulls back at the edges, shivers, looks worriedly at a star.

MARI
I'm hungry.

Jack snuffles, falling asleep.

MARI (CONT'D)
(mimics)
Not now, Mari.

She taps her fingers on the sleeping bag over her chest.

MARI (CONT'D)
Love is easier in books. Jane Austen characters didn't put up with this stuff.

She nudges Jack. He groans.

MARI (CONT'D)
I can't stop thinking about my master's program.

Jack's breath is even and light.

MARI (CONT'D)
My credits might not transfer.

He doesn't answer.

MARI (CONT'D)
Is this my life I'm
living? Or yours?

FADE OUT.