

## Salem and the Train

FADE IN:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

SALEM SCHOFIELD sits on a motel bed loading the clip of a 9mm pistol. Spread about on the bed are several steno notebooks, the covers of all of them filled with bits of poetry and thoughts.

Salem is in his mid thirties, slightly overweight. Once a handsome man, his features are now hard, timeworn. His face is full of anxiety, tension.

His long dirty-blond hair is dyed seaweed green and sits limp on the shoulders of his raggedy brown corduroy jacket.

The TV is on. An old western is playing. A gunfight breaks out. Salem lifts the remote and turns the VOLUME ALL THE WAY UP.

He fits the clip into the gun, sits back against the headboard of the bed, lifts the gun to his temple, and closes his eyes.

BEGIN 5-SECOND MONTAGE

1. Cigarette smoke billows IN SLOW MOTION past a cigarette-holding hand
2. Over the HOWL of a LOCOMOTIVE we HEAR A SOFT "No," followed by a LOUD SLAMMING SOUND.
3. We HEAR a locomotive's brakes SCREAM.
4. The wheels of the locomotive seize and grind metal to metal, throwing sparks everywhere.
5. BLOOD splatters the fresh winter snow.

BACK TO SCENE

Salem pulls back the hammer to cock the gun. He WHIMPERS.

ANGLE ON THE TV as the gunfight ends. A commercial comes on advertising a new housing development.

Salem opens his eyes, lowers the gun and FIRES at the TV set. The TV screen explodes.

EXT. TELEPHONE BOOTH - DAY

Salem speaks into the phone.

SALEM

Yes I'd like to book a reservation for the soonest possible departure. Where to? Anywhere. As far as I can go in one shot. I'm in Seattle. What? Christmas? No, I'm not going home for the holidays! If I even had a home, why would I have asked you to send me anywhere?

Salem rolls his eyes as he waits.

SALEM

Boston, huh?

Salem pauses to think.

SALEM

Let's make it Connecticut. Killingsworth, Connecticut. You don't go through there anymore? Small wonder.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

1. A passenger train is stopped in the woods. We HEAR POLICE SIRENS.
2. Salem stands wrapped in a gray wool blanket. The blanket partially shrouds his face.
3. There is a wallet-sized patch of blood in the snow before him. We HEAR POLICE RADIOS.
4. High shot as dozens of police walk the tracks.

END FLASHBACK

SALEM

Huh? Old Saybrook? Never heard of it.  
Ten miles away? Sounds fine.

INT. COACH CAR - NIGHT

We hear a constant CLICKITY-CLACK SONG OF THE TRAIN in the background.

Salem sits slumped in a coach seat in sunglasses and his raggedy brown corduroy jacket, a steno notebook open in his lap, pen in his hand.

At his feet sit a narrow white box and a small backpack.

His seaweed green hair falls across his face. He blows it away from his face, and it falls back. He repeats this little game. Though it is dark outside, the train is moving fast.

He reaches into his jacket, pulls out a PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE, and pours its contents into his hand.

CLOSE ON handful of pills.

A COLORFUL ARRAY OF PILLS of various shapes and sizes.

BACK TO SCENE

Salem plucks two yellow pills, pops them in his mouth, returns the others to his jacket.

Salem returns to a slumped position as the train vibrates and sings through the night.

SALEM (V.O.)

In the fairy tale, if you choose to grow up, you can't come back to Never Never Land. For me, however, the fairy tale had reversed itself. I had grown up, but Never Never Land had never let me go. I had done a lot of my growing up on trains, and somehow, perhaps for that reason, the train and Never Never Land had become one and the same. The question was why? What string of events

had led me to this day, to this journey?  
A journey at whose end I see only  
blackness.

Salem leans his head back, closes his eyes and rocks to  
sleep.

FADE TO:

INT. SUBURBAN LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK - DAY

The year is 1978.

Salem, age 11, sits FROWNING in a high rocking chair  
staring out a picture window at a storm-darkened sky. His  
feet dangle from the chair.

Across from him sits his FATHER. Outside, lightening  
strikes somewhere. The boy Salem smiles at the sight of  
it. The smile fades as his father speaks.

FATHER

You see, son, sometimes mommies and  
daddies have to go live in different  
houses so that they can.. be happy  
again, uh, for themselves. Mommy and  
Daddy have a special love for you that  
will never go away, no matter what.  
But sadly, the love between mommies and  
daddies isn't always forever.

A roll of THUNDER RUMBLES in the distance. The boy Salem's  
eyes light up and he smiles again. Rain begins pouring  
down outside the window.

FATHER

Son? Do you understand what I'm saying?

The boy Salem never takes his eyes from the storm.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - FLASHBACK - DAY

The year is still 1978.

Eleven-year old Salem stands watching a man bend copper wire into the form of an old steam engine train. Salem smiles at the finished result.

Salem's MOTHER sits smoking on a bench nearby. She half-watches Salem, her eyes darting down the tracks in search of an approaching train.

MOTHER

Salem! Get back here. Your father's train is almost here.

Salem returns to the bench at a snail's pace.

MOTHER

Now, Honey, listen to Mommy. This is very important. You know how much I love you, and because I love you I know what's best for you. Your father put this idea in your head, I know he did. So I don't blame you, okay? But listen to me very carefully.

As the train pulls into the station, Salem's mother grabs his jaw and pulls his face close to hers.

MOTHER

Salem? If you decide to go and live with your father, that's it. There's no coming home again.

This last sentence is YELLED over the din of the locomotive.

INT. COMMUTER TRAIN COACH CAR - FLASHBACK - DAY

Young Salem's father sits staring at Salem from the seat directly across from him. He nervously strokes his mustache.

Salem sits on his hands. His legs are crossed as he swings his feet. He stares out the window of the train at big, puffy white clouds.

FATHER

She said that? She actually said that?

Salem lowers his head, nods.

Beat.

FATHER

Salem, your mother is a very sick woman.

Salem stares out at the clouds.

SALEM'S P.O.V. as the clouds morph into white islands in an ocean sky. An old Spanish galleon sails between them.

Salem smiles at his fantasy vision.

Salem's father bites his lower lip as he fights back tears.

FADE TO:

INT. CROSS CONTINENTAL TRAIN CAR - FLASHBACK - EVENING

The year is 1980.

A 13-year old Salem sits alone in a coach seat. He has grown a lot in two years. His handsome features and fair complexion are beautiful in a feminine way.

A CONDUCTOR in his early 20's stops to take Salem's ticket. The conductor has a very friendly, disarming face, round soft features and straight brown hair.

CONDUCTOR

Traveling all by yourself, Little Buddy?

SALEM AT 13

Yes, Sir.

CONDUCTOR

Well now, if there's anything I can do for you, you just holler for Johnny, okay?

The conductor moves on, pushing the door open to enter the next car. When Salem's head is turned away, he stops and looks long at Salem.

INT. CROSS CONTINENTAL TRAIN LOWER LEVEL - NIGHT

We HEAR a TOILET FLUSH. A bathroom stall door opens and Salem walks out.

As Salem is starting up the staircase to return to his seat in coach, Johnny the conductor steps out of a sleeper room a few feet away.

JOHNNY

Hey there, Little Buddy. Getting any sleep up there in those coach seats?

Weary from lack of sleep, Salem rubs his eyes.

SALEM AT 13

No.

Johnny WINKS at Salem and waves him over.

JOHNNY

(whispering)

Come here. Now, I'm not supposed to do this, cuz ya know, ya gotta pay big bucks for a sleeper on the train. But um, you look like a nice kid and I got an extra bunk, so... oh, I dunno. You're not gonna rob me or anything, are ya kid?

SALEM AT 13

No!

JOHNNY

Well, all right then! Come on in.

INT. SLEEPER ROOM - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

The sleeper room is dimly lit. There are two bunks, one directly above the other. Johnny is in the top bunk, peering over the edge and down at Salem below.

JOHNNY

You've never had a wet dream?

SALEM AT 13

Ah, I don't know. Maybe.

JOHNNY

Well, if you had, you'd know it. It's the best thing ever.

SALEM AT 13

Really? I dunno. It sounds kinda strange.

JOHNNY

I could show you how?

SALEM AT 13

(nervously)

Um, that's okay, really. I think maybe I should sleep.

JOHNNY

Okay. But don't blame old Johnny when your friends make fun of you cuz they've all been doing it for years and you're the last one.

ECU ON young Salem's face. His face shows exhaustion and confusion.

SALEM AT 13

(resigned)

Okay, Johnny.

Johnny climbs down from his bunk and slides in bed beside Salem.

A long silence ensues broken only by Salem's heavy breathing and Johnny's occasional chuckling. The CLICKITY-CLACK SONG of the train on the tracks is always in the background.

SALEM AT 13

Are you sure this is right, Johnny? It feels strange.

JOHNNY

It's gonna be great. It's gonna feel real good.

MOONLIGHT coming in the window and the occasional passing light of a streetlight illuminate the blanket beneath which we see the rhythmic motions of Johnny's hand on Salem.

BEGIN MONTAGE

1. The train moves fast through a moonlit night.
2. Salem's eyes slowly close and he sleeps.
3. Johnny sitting up still stroking Salem.
4. Johnny jostling Salem awake, getting him on his feet.
5. Johnny peering left and right down the hall, then shuffling the sleep-walking Salem to the toilet.

END MONTAGE

The light in the bathroom is bright and garish and Salem shields his eyes.

JOHNNY

I can't believe you don't cum!

SALEM AT 13

(sleepily)

I'm sorry.

SALEM'S P.O.V. as puffy cumulous clouds shift in a remembered bright blue sky.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - FLASHBACK - DAY

It is the next day.

Thirteen-year-old Salem sits on a baggage cart on an empty train platform in the middle of nowhere. He is CRYING quietly to himself.

SALEM(V.O.)

For some people, the romance with the rails would have ended right there. But not me. I was still a resident of Never Never Land, a Lost Boy, a dreamer, and when the time came for me

to grow up and out of it, it would  
already be too late.

FADE TO:

EXT. PRIVATE UNIVERSITY - FLASHBACK - DAY - ESTABLISHING

The year is 1988.

WE OPEN on the ivy-laced entryway of a university building.  
Students come and go, books under their arms.

INT. ENGLISH BUILDING - FLASHBACK - DAY

A sign on a door reads "Office of the Dean of Letters."

WE PASS INSIDE where a 21-year old Salem sits across a  
large oak desk from the DEAN. At this stage, Salem has  
spiked, bleach blonde hair, an earring and Elton John  
glasses.

DEAN

You want to do your thesis on what?

SALEM AT 21

Train travel.

DEAN

No.

SALEM AT 21

(stuttering slightly)

But sir, the romance of train travel!  
It's what I love. I love writing first  
and foremost, so what better way to  
foster that love and talent by writing  
on a subject that fascinates me? Isn't  
that your job? To encourage us to  
succeed at what we love?

DEAN

No and no again. Two reasons. One,  
our goal is to produce published  
writers, and no one would want to read  
a book about train travel. I'm bored  
already. And two... and two, I'm giving

it to you straight, Schofield. You're a lousy writer. You have no concept of character or structure. I suggest you pursue a career in journalism, they're a lot looser over there. Either that or mortuary science. Now go smoke dope or whatever you non-conformist shits do nowadays and leave me alone!

FADE TO:

EXT. TRAIN - PRESENT - NIGHT

P.O.V. of the train moving fast down the tracks at night.

WIDE SHOT of the train passing in the distance.

INT. COACH CAR - NIGHT

CLOSE SHOT of two OLD PEOPLE sleeping sitting up, her head on his shoulder as they sway with the sideways motion of the train.

PAN ACROSS THE AISLE TO..

Salem in his green-tinted hair and sunglasses sits talking to Agnes, a lumberjack-sized girl in blue jeans overalls, a beautiful face and eyes that reveal hard years endured with good humor.

SALEM

And that was that.

AGNES

What did you do then?

Salem smiles.

SALEM

I went behind his back and published a small run of the book through the university. I knew he was pissed, cuz he did everything he could to bust me for using school computers and shit. I graduated a year later and know what? Neither he nor any of my other

professors ever congratulated me or recognized my achievement.

AGNES

Those fuckers!

SALEM

Yeah.

AGNES

So can I buy the book somewhere?

SALEM

No. It was never published commercially. Drag, huh? I lost the courage, whatever. I tried, but I couldn't take the rejection.

AGNES

I hear that.

SALEM

What's your passion, Agnes?

AGNES

My passion? I think that's the first time anyone's asked me that. My job, now I get that all the time. I'm a trainer for sled dogs.

SALEM

No way? That's your job?

AGNES

That's my passion. I got a whole sled team, beautiful creatures.

SALEM

Wow. That's very cool. I won't even ask what you do for work, cuz I can tell you'd rather not talk about it. You wanna hear one of my train travel stories?

AGNES

Yeah!

SALEM

(excitedly)

Cool! I was in Switzerland at the time. I had been traveling on trains for months and was finally at the end of my savings. I had to get to Portugal where an old friend owned a hacienda and had invited me to stay out the summer. But first I planned on seeing a friend from the states who was staying in Madrid.

BEGIN MONTAGE

1. A younger Salem, his hair in a red bandanna, a ragged old army backpack on his back, purchases a train ticket at a Swiss station. CLOSE ON TICKET.
2. Salem on a German train, then a French train, then a Spanish train.
3. Salem on a boat.
4. Salem boarding a bus.
5. Salem crushed into a dark subway train moving fast, the lights flickering.

END MONTAGE

SALEM(V.O.)

They had given me one ticket for the trip, but before it was over I had changed trains seven times, crossed a channel on a boat, some mountain pass on a bus, and Madrid on a subway from Hell.

It was a progressively worsening nightmare that spanned more than three days. I was broke and totally relying on the promised hospitality of friends in Madrid and Portugal.

INT. MADRID TRAIN STATION - FLASHBACK - DAY

Salem stands at a pay phone talking at first excitedly, his expression then changing to disappointment.

SALEM

Carl? It's Salem! Hey, I made it to Madrid! I'm here! Huh? What do you mean already? You've been inviting me for months. What's that? You have house guests? Call you from my hotel. Uhuh. In a few days. Okay. Sure, Carl. Yeah, we'll have lunch. See ya.

Salem hangs up the phone very slowly. He digs in his pocket, opens his hand to reveal a few Spanish pesetas, nothing else.

Salem looks at a SPANISH WOMAN standing near the phone.

SALEM

That was my buddy Carl. He's from Hollywood. He wants to do lunch. Can you beat that? Lunch. The guy knows perfectly well I'm broke and 5000 miles from home. So why did he invite me? Hollywood.

The Spanish woman looks at first confused, then smiles.

SPANISH WOMAN

Hollywood!

EXT. MADRID TRAIN PLATFORM - FLASHBACK - DAY

Salem stands looking up at a sign in Spanish. Beneath the Spanish there are translations of the phrase "Surcharge: 20 Pesetas" in several languages.

He recounts his handful of small change, shakes his head. He looks at the train. A look of panic crosses his face.

INT. SPANISH TRAIN - FLASHBACK - EVENING

Salem steps aboard an overfilled train. There are three passengers to every seat. People fill the aisles, sit on

their backpacks, stand in the halls, sleep against the bathroom doors.

There are people of every color and variety of dress and nationality.

WE HEAR conversations in several languages, none of them English.

The sun is setting as the train pulls out of Madrid.

Salem finds a corner to squeeze into and sits on his pack.

Salem leans his head to the side, affording him a view of the hallway. The conductor is making his way through the hoards of passengers collecting tickets and the surcharge.

He lays his head back and closes his eyes. He squints as though fighting off tears.

THROUGH A SERIES OF FADES we see the conductor get closer and closer. With every shot, Salem's expression becomes more strained.

Salem looks again and the conductor is only a few feet away.

Salem looks at the open door. The train has been moving very slowly for an hour.

Salem squints into the darkness outside and notices something.

The train is stopped.

Salem eyes the conductor, grabs his backpack and gingerly steps off the train without paying.

EXT. TRAIN - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Salem walks quickly alongside the train in the opposite direction of the conductor's rounds.

SALEM  
(panting)  
Please God.

Two cars up he comes to an open door and steps inside just as the train jolts into motion again.

Salem stands against a free spot on the wall and EXHALES DEEPLY. There are half a dozen other people in the tiny doorway area with him. A couple of them smile at him.

Salem smiles sheepishly back.

INT. TRAIN - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Salem has slumped down onto his backpack and now SLEEPS sitting up.

CLOSE ON SALEM as his head lolls back and forth with the motion of the train.

A hand reaches into the frame and lightly smacks him on the cheek. The blue cuff of the sleeve is that of a uniform.

The SPANISH CONDUCTOR stands over Salem with a disapproving look on his face.

SPANISH CONDUCTOR  
Has pagado el impuesto?

A SPANIARD sitting across from Salem takes notice.

SPANIARD  
Sí, él lo pagó.

The Spanish Conductor looks doubtfully at Salem, turns and walks away. Wide-eyed and shaken, Salem looks at the Spaniard quizzically.

SALEM  
What did you say to him?

SPANIARD  
I told him you paid.

FADE TO:

INT. COACH CAR - PRESENT - DAY

Salem awakens slowly, the morning sun in his face. On his lap, his steno notebook in one hand, his sunglasses in the other.

Remembering something, he turns and looks to the seat beside him. Agnes is gone.

His expression says he is not surprised. He looks back to the window.

The train is passing through some town in America, paralleling the town's main commercial avenue. Salem watches as a string of corporate brands floats by: Wal-Mart, Taco Bell, Blockbuster Video, Motel 6, Subway.

Salem reaches into his jacket, pulls out the PRESCRIPTION BOTTLE, drops out two more yellow pills, pops them in his mouth, returns the others to his jacket.

Reaching into a breast pocket, he pulls out headphones and puts them on. Back inside the jacket, he fumbles for the power button of his portable CD player.

As the music of Tom Waits begins, Salem slumps in his seat, opens his notebook and begins to write.

TOM WAITS' LYRICS (V.O.)

I just want you to be happy, that's my only little wish..

The music FADES TO BACKGROUND but CONTINUES.

SALEM(V.O.)

That's my father talking. Well, it's really Tom Waits. But it's my father, too. He's really saying "I just want you.. to get a job!" Thanks to him, I've grown to hate that word "happy."

In big BOLD letters, Salem scrawls the phrase "FUCK HAPPY!" across a page of his steno.

BEGIN MONTAGE

1. A younger Salem sitting in waiting room, a big sign on the wall reads "The Daily Herald: Award winning journalism since 1925."

2. A younger Salem filling out job application, he flips a page to reveal the phrase "We drug test" stamped in red.
3. A younger Salem setting down the application and walking out.
4. A younger Salem waiting tables in a restaurant, spills coffee on a CUSTOMER, customer becomes irate and punches Salem in the gut.
5. A younger Salem loading packages onto a UPS truck, a MAN standing by timing him with a stop watch.
6. MAN shakes his head, younger Salem leans wearily onto stack of boxes, ECU on Salem's face as he fights off tears.

END MONTAGE

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSING DEVELOPMENT - FLASHBACK - DAY

The year is 1990.

A wildly painted, toy-encrusted early model American car pulls into the driveway of a beige 3-bedroom family home that looks every bit the clone of its neighbor.

In this neighborhood, the multi-colored car looks very out of place with its deer antlers, baby doll heads, electronic circuit boards and thousands of small, colorful toys.

Salem steps out of the car. His hair is now died blue and sticks out all over the place. He smiles at his car and walks into the house.

INT. SALEM'S MOTHER'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK - CONTINUOUS

Everything in the house is white or beige. Table-tops are glass. There are faux Grecian urns, woven baskets and other similar décor.

SALEM

Yo, Mom? You here? Anybody home?

The PHONE RINGS.

Salem runs into the kitchen and answers it.

SALEM

Oh, hi Dad. Yeah, I'm all right. No. Dad, I quit that sucky job weeks ago. I had to kiss yuppie ass all day long, Dad. Yeah, I've interviewed elsewhere. No, it wasn't my hair. Everybody wants to piss test, Dad. No, I don't smoke pot, I just think it's dead wrong to go prying into someone's piss. It's an invasion of privacy.

While still on the phone, Salem picks up a pile of opened mail on the kitchen table, sorts through it, pulls one out addressed to his mother. Boldly scrawled over the address label in his mother's handwriting are the words: "Salem's problem."

SALEM

No, whoa, whoa, hold it. Dad, I gotta job. I'm a writer, remember? No, I can't write in my spare time, it just doesn't work like that. Look, I gotta go. Yeah, you too. Bye.

Salem takes out the letter and reads.

ECU ON LETTER. The letterhead reads: Serenity Village Homeowners Association

An AUTHORITATIVE VOICE reads the letter aloud.

AUTHORITATIVE VOICE(V.O.)

Recently the Homeowners Association has received numerous complaints regarding an "eye-sore" in the neighborhood. These complaints concern your "graffiti car." While the Association appreciates your individuality and freedom of expression, we suggest you consult your Association Rules and Regulations where you will see that such a violation of neighborhood

aesthetics is punishable by fines and litigation...

SALEM

Fuck me! You appreciate nothing but your fucking conformity. Where's Adolf Hitler when you need him to snap his fingers and make you fuckers goose step and sieg heil and drop the facade so everyone can see your true colors!

Salem LEAPS up from the table and stomps the few short steps to the back door patio. He opens the screen door, walks out and SCREAMS at the top of his lungs.

All around him, as far as the eye can see in any direction, is a sea of beige stucco clone houses.

SALEM

Fuck you, people! Leave me the fuck alone!

EXT. HIGHWAY SHOULDER - FLASHBACK - DAY

Salem's car sits sandwiched between two parked cop cars, their lights flashing.

TWO HIGHWAY PATROLMAN walk around Salem's graffiti car. One points at various things on the car, the other makes notes in his notebook.

EXT. HIGHWAY SHOULDER - FLASHBACK - DAY

A tow-truck drives away with Salem's car. Salem watches it go, a mix of sadness and bitterness on his face.

FADE TO:

INT. COACH CAR - PRESENT - DAY

CLOSE ON SALEM

SALEM

And that was that.

PULL BACK to reveal a lean redheaded man named BUZZ in his mid-20s in a light blue V-neck sweater, freckles and glasses.

Salem reaches down between his legs and slides out the white box. He reaches into his bag and produces a Styrofoam cup. He lifts the box to his lap and pours a cup full of wine from the 5-liter box of cabernet.

He eats a few more pills and drinks the wine.

BUZZ

That's it?

Salem looks out the window and thinks.

SALEM

No, that isn't it. But that was it for me and cars. That sad beauty was my first and last. Then it was back to trains with a vengeance. Want some wine?

BUZZ

Yes, I'd love some. So you never got your car out of impound?

Salem produces another cup and pours Buzz a helping.

SALEM

Actually, I did.

BEGIN MONTAGE

1. Salem paying an UGLY MAN at an impound yard and being handed his keys.
2. Salem driving on a lonesome desert dirt road.
3. Salem pouring gas all over his graffiti car.
4. Salem blowing it a kiss and tossing a match.
5. Salem walking away down the empty road as the car burns in the background.
6. In the distance, a long freight train rolls by.

BACK TO SCENE

BUZZ

Jesus. That was some statement, man.

SALEM

Statement? That was no statement. I'm just not a fighter. I've been hammered on by so-called normal society and normal people my whole life. Most people think growing up means surrendering to the nine to five, the cubicle prison. But that's just never worked for me.

And every time I open my mouth in opposition of this norm I get called judgmental, egotistical, an asshole. Between that and the constant criticism my writing evokes, I'm very tired.

Lost in his thoughts, Salem is looking out the window. We are passing through another town.

Though the arrangement is different, the brand names are the same. Pizza Hut, McDonalds, Burger King, Applebees, Hollywood Video.

Buzz is looking down the hall for an excuse to escape.

BUZZ

Well, thanks for the wine. I'm gonna get back to my seat, make sure my stuff is all there. See you later in the bar maybe?

SALEM

Sure. See ya.

Salem watches him go. He turns back, facing forward.

SALEM

I have happy stories, too. A few, anyway.

Salem pours himself some more wine. He leans back, sips his wine.

A TEAR escapes from behind his sunglasses and streams down his face.

SALEM

Hold it together, man. Enough bad memories for one day.

More tears stream down his face. He grits his teeth, slams his head sideways against the window.

SALEM

Happy thoughts. Happy thoughts.

He pulls out his pill stash and, being more selective this time, picks out a red capsule, and eats it.

He throws his head back and shuts his eyes.

INT. COACH CAR - CONTINUOUS

BEGIN FANTASY SEQUENCE

Salem's eyes SNAP OPEN.

No longer in his seat, he is now standing at the front of the coach car, such that the seats are facing him.

Every seat in the car is occupied by a unique member of society, each dressed according to their occupation. It is like a Noah's Ark of careers.

As he speaks, Salem walks down the aisle TAPPING people on the shoulder as he identifies them by occupation.

SALEM

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Never Never Land! They don't call it a train of thought for nothing. The train is steady! A straight-shooting lullaby! A poet's dream. The only way to fly! It's what I was born for, just like you were born to sell tools, tires, real estate and pills. Just like you were meant to nurse, you to build, you to broker, and you to breed. Just like

you were born to plot, to plumb, to  
preach, to fight, to fish, to fuck...

Walking down the aisle, Salem taps a TOOL SALESMAN, A TIRE SALESMAN, A REAL ESTATE AGENT, A PHARMACIST, A NURSE, A CARPENTER, A INSURANCE SALESMAN, A PREGNANT WOMAN, AN SURVEYOR, A PLUMBER, A PREACHER, A BOXER, A FISHERMAN, A PORN STAR.

At the end of the car, Salem spins around and throws up his hands facing the crowd, now turned in their seats to see him go.

SALEM

Whatever, people! Just known this! Be  
you a porn star or a pulpit-pounding  
instrument of God, you are not me!

END FANTASY SEQUENCE

CUT TO:

INT. COACH CAR - CONTINUOUS

Salem's eyes OPEN. He is BACK IN HIS SEAT. He looks around groggily. The career people are gone. Across the aisle, the two old people sleep. The old man SNORES.

Salem's eyes flutter and close.

INT. COACH CAR - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

The year is 1985.

The train travels through the forest wilderness of the Rocky Mountains. Outside a swollen and icy river GLIMMERS in the moonlight.

The car's interior lights are dimmed for sleep. WE HEAR the soft COOS AND KISSING SOUNDS of lovers.

PULL BACK to reveal a TEENAGE GIRL and a teenage Salem sprawled out on the two seats together.

TEENAGE SALEM

You smell like Christmas and sweet sexy sweat. Like angels and babies and rain.

TEENAGE GIRL

Mmm, you're really hard.

TEENAGE SALEM

(groaning)

No wonder.. with you.. squeezing it like that. Ughnn. Look at those women.. I think they can see what your doing. Maybe we should go downstairs?

Salem has noticed that the ladies across the aisle are taking notice of their all-but-fourth base love play.

TEENAGE SALEM

Come on. Follow me.

Salem takes the girl by the hand and they walk down the hall.

INT. LADIES CHANGING ROOM - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

The two teenagers ENTER and close and lock the door behind them. In the changing room, there is twice the space of a toilet closet.

There is a long counter with two sinks and an array of makeup lights. On the back wall is a cushioned bench.

The two embrace violently, intensely. While kissing, the girl unbuttons Salem's jeans, drops his pants, sits him back on the bench and goes down on him.

She is a petite girl with long, dark straight hair down to her ass.

TEENAGE SALEM

(breathless)

This.. is my.. first time.

The girl looks up at him and smiles.

Salem's P.O.V. as he closes his eyes. Into the darkness, visions appear.

We are astride a giant cobra snake as it zooms down the track through dense wet forests of evergreens and into a tunnel.

In the tunnel, the snake glows fiery red. It begins to buck and heave like a bull with rider.

Suddenly the snake shrinks, we exit the tunnel into light and it is the light of the changing room.

Salem is astride the girl who is bent over the counter, her hands pressed against the glass as she MOANS and bucks beneath him.

Her whimpers fall in rhythm with the ever-audible CLICKITY-CLACK of the train on the tracks. Salem pulls her long hair back and she stares back at him hard in the mirror, her intense blue eyes burning bright.

INT. CHANGING ROOM - FLASHBACK - CONTINUOUS

The girl is now up on counter, seated, her back against the mirror, her legs in the air. Salem heaves into her again and again until he CRIES OUT, his whole body rigid.

Salem's P.O.V. as he collapses on the girl, his head against the mirror, his eyes closing.

In the dark, someone kisses him on the cheek.

FADE TO:

INT. COACH CAR - PRESENT - EVENING

CLOSE ON SALEM

A GIRL leans in and kisses a tear from his cheek.

PULL BACK to take in JACKIE in the seat beside him.

Jackie wears full-body flower print long john underwear, leather jacket and no pants. A Jewish star hangs on a

chain around her neck. She has jet black hair and a nose ring. A copy of BREAKFAST AT TIFFANYS sits in her lap.

The CLICKITY-CLACK sound of the train is the only sound as Salem slowly awakens from his drug stupor.

SALEM

(slurring)

What didja do that for?

JACKIE

You looked like you could use it.

SALEM

Wow. Every time I open my eyes there's somebody new sitting next to me.

JACKIE

That's train travel. People get on, people get off. I'm Jackie.

Salem lifts his sunglasses and takes a peak at Jackie.

SALEM

Salem. I think I'm glad you got on, Jackie.

Jackie puts something in her mouth, washes it down with water.

SALEM

What was that?

JACKIE

(faking it)

What was what?

SALEM

That pill. You just popped a pill.

Jackie sticks out her tongue, upon which rests a red tablet.

JACKIE

Er-co-an.

SALEM

Percodan? Ooh, now I know I'm glad you got on. I hope you brought enough to share, young lady.

Jackie SWALLOWS.

JACKIE

From the sound of your voice and as passed out as you were, I'd say you got something of your own, maybe something better!

SALEM

It's always nicer to eat someone else's.

Jackie hands him a pill. He pops it down without water, returns his attention to the window.

SALEM

Are you feeling in the Christmas spirit?

JACKIE

You're kidding, right?

SALEM

No.

JACKIE

I'm Jewish, as if you hadn't guessed.

Salem gives her the once over.

SALEM

You're the damnedest lookin' Jew I've ever seen. Do all good Jewish girls travel in their underwear?

JACKIE

(sexy tone)

You like my undies?

SALEM

I do.

Beat. Jackie has the kind of personality that toggles back and forth between flirty airhead and dead serious. She becomes suddenly serious.

JACKIE

Do you have a girlfriend?

SALEM

I don't.

JACKIE

Family?

SALEM

Yeah.

JACKIE

Where at?

SALEM

My father and my half-brother Pierre are in Paris. My mother lives in Arizona.

JACKIE

Who are you closest to?

SALEM

None of them.

JACKIE

Oh, come on.

SALEM

My brother, I guess. He's great. But he was raised in France, so we're a lot different. He calls our coffee "American sock juice." Nobody can hurl insults like the French.

JACKIE

Why aren't you spending Christmas with him?

SALEM

Who says I'm not?

JACKIE

Just a feeling. Something about you. Something dark. Something says you're

not going to be spending Christmas with anyone... anymore.

Salem turns and faces her, a blank look on his face.

There is a long silence.

SALEM

Ever witnessed death, Jackie?

Like flicking a switch, Jackie returns to flighty.

JACKIE

There was this thing I saw on one of those true death videos, about this woman who went swimming in this lake right next to a nuclear plant. She came out of the water screaming, and she had this giant leach on her arm.

Jackie GESTURES, measuring out a basketball-sized leach, her big eyes grow all the wider.

JACKIE

They couldn't get it off her, so they had to cut off her arm and she ended up dying anyway cuz the leach was all toxic!

SALEM

Thrilling. Jesus, I'm getting sober. Join me in some wine?

Salem reaches down and pours out two glasses of boxed cabernet.

JACKIE

Fine! You got a better story?

CLOSE SHOT of Salem looking out the window. Beat.

SALEM

I do.

FADE TO:

INT. PASSENGER TRAIN CAFE CAR - FLASHBACK - DAY

The year is 1992.

LONG SHOT of cafe car.

Salem, age 25, confers with a CONDUCTOR at the far end. The conductor shakes his head, speaks a few words unheard over the DIN of the full car, POINTS at a booth.

Salem approaches the booth. He is fresh-faced, handsome in an olive green wool sweater with short blonde hair.

In the booth sit two uniformed CONDUCTORS and DOUGIE SOUZA, an engineer. Dougie is 47, jovial, a rugged Marlboro Man-type in dark glasses. Salem interrupts boisterous laughter, addressing Dougie directly.

SALEM

Hi. Name's Salem. I've been on the train since L.A. I'm writing about train travel and was hoping to get to ride shotgun before we hit Boston.

Beat.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAFE CAR - FLASHBACK - TEN MINUTES LATER - DAY

Dougie holds court, LAUGHING and slapping Salem on the back as he regales the three with the graveyard humor of a man who has driven trains for twenty years. Salem jots notes in a steno.

DOUGIE

(thick New York accent)  
You bet. Couple of cows, a truck, a bus, both empty mind you... bunch of shopping carts, railroad ties, a refrigerator.

CONDUCTOR #1

(thick New York accent)  
A refrigerator? Jesus!

CONDUCTOR #2

(mock female voice)

No suppa tonight, Hon. Little Barry and his buddies fed the Frigidaire to the train.

DOUGIE

This one woman passenger, she's drunk, right. She detrains at a fuel stop. When the conductor whistles our departure, she comes runnin' outa the bar, finds herself on the wrong side of the train and decides to crawl under.

CONDUCTOR #1

(excitedly)

Oh, I don't wanna hear this!

Salem stops writing in his steno. His face turns a bit green.

DOUGIE

I start rolling not knowing she's there. Well... she lost both her left arm and her left leg.

Dougie pauses for effect.

DOUGIE

She's all right now.

SALEM/CONDUCTORS 1 and 2

Ohhhwww!

DOUGIE

In twenty years, I've never killed anyone. But we've seen it plenty, ha guys? It's never pretty. You know what they say happens to people hit by a train going forty or better? People shatter.

Dougie turns to face Salem, pats him on the shoulder and looks him straight in the eye.

DOUGIE

I'm a crippler, not a killer.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRACKSIDE - FLASHBACK - LATER - DAY

Trademark silver train with red, white and blue stripes shudders to a stop before us.

WE PULL BACK to reveal Salem and Dougie walking alongside the train toward the engine. They walk past four engines to reach the front of the first engine before climbing in.

CUT TO:

INT. ENGINE ROOM - FLASHBACK - CONTINUOUS

The engine room is stark and cramped. Everything is painted pea green except for the red cushion on the engineer's chair.

Salem takes a seat in the remaining high chair by the left side window. Before him, he sees a flat window, the tracks ahead and the snub nose of the train.

DOUGIE

Here we go!

Dougie pushes a green button and the train begins to move.

SALEM

Yee-hah!

BEGIN SERIES OF SHOTS

1. Overhead shot of the train moving at speed through pasture land.
2. Side shot of train traveling through small town.
3. Train coming straight at us through the forest.
4. Dougie and Salem converse and gesture happily, their words inaudible over the engine's roar and the wind.
5. Their laughter is cut short as Dougie's face goes white.
6. Salem turns his attention back to the tracks ahead.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. ENGINE ROOM - FLASHBACK - DAY

Salem squints and cocks his head slightly.

SALEM  
Hey, what the..?

DOUGIE  
Fuck.

SALEM'S P.O.V. as the train, its nose seeming to float off the track at this speed, bears down fast on a WOMAN IN A LIGHT BLUE DRESS STANDING IN ITS PATH.

As Salem sees the woman, the ROAR OF THE ENGINE GOES SILENT.

BEGIN SLOW-MOTION

The SOUND OF WIND blowing through a tunnel.

In slow motion, the woman strikes a match, touches it to a CIGARETTE clenched between her lips, takes one long drag, and exhales as she TURNS TO FACE HER DEATH.

SALEM  
(softly)  
No.

REAL TIME snaps back. THE ROAR OF THE LOCOMOTIVE RETURNS.

The WOMAN IN BLUE disappears beneath the hollow steel snout of the train. A horrible SLAMMING THUD accompanied by the SCREECH OF BRAKES and Dougie's voice screaming..

DOUGIE  
Fuuuuuuuukkkk!

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. COACH CAR - PRESENT - NIGHT

Salem and Jackie are jostled as the train SLAMS sideways, its breaks SCREECHING into a curve.

Salem's head whacks the window. He clenches his teeth and throws his arms out as though bracing for impact.

Salem leaps up from his seat spilling his wine and dropping his steno on the floor. He climbs over Jackie and heads down the aisle.

SALEM

Excuse me! Gotta get some air.

Jackie sits looking perplexed and startled.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Salem stands by the open window on the lower level breathing deeply. Behind his head is a sign which reads: DO NOT OPEN WINDOW!

He stares out into the pitch darkness and thinks.

SALEM (V.O.)

Even the moon is in on the dream.  
Aware. It knows where I'm headed and  
hides its face in fear. I'd swear it  
was out there... when was it,  
yesterday? Now only black.

Salem walks the length of the dark train lost in thought. His steps are careful, his strut somewhat uneven owing to the sway of the train. The floor is lit like a runway.

SALEM (V.O.)

And we cut through this blackness with  
terrific speed, wrapped in a thousand  
tons of steel. Such power. Such  
frailty.

The ENGINEER sits in the dark cockpit, HIS FACE ILLUMINATED only by instruments. His EYES CLOSE, his head nods. He awakens, only to have his eyes begin to close again.

SALEM (V.O.)

Seventeen-hundred asses on the line at  
90 mph screaming across the world and

surrendered, all of us, to the train.  
Blindly faithful, we rely on one man to  
get us to Christmas alive..

END MONTAGE

Salem continues walking the length of one car, through a  
double set of doors, then down the aisle of another car,  
and so on. The holiday train is dozens of cars long.

TRAIN NOISES occupy the background beneath Salem's INTERIOR  
DIALOGUE.

SALEM (V.O.)

I knew such a man. A competent man.  
But chaos is merciless. It respects no  
man.

Beat.

SALEM (V.O.)

Did I tell Jackie my story? No. She  
struck me as the type who would freak  
at the introduction of such harsh  
realities into her pill-popping world.  
I understood this all too well and so  
spared her my hell. My own pill habit  
actually began the day the woman in  
blue met her death and threw my growing  
sense of unease and alienation with the  
world into mad, psychic overdrive.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Salem wrapped in a wool blanket sits track-side being  
comforted by an EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIAN following the  
death. The technician pops open a bottle, hands Salem two  
large pills and pats him on the back as Salem swallows them  
down.

SALEM (V.O.)

First, it's counseling and tell me  
about your parents' divorce and you  
drink how much?

A COUNSELOR nods and frowns as Salem sits slumped in a  
high-back chair talking.

SALEM (V.O.)

Then they start throwing the drugs at you. The inhibitors, monoamine oxidase and selective serotonin reuptake, Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft, Wellbutrin, Norpramine, Prednizone, you name it.

A PSYCHIATRIST leans into a medicine cabinet and pulls out bottles of drugs, tossing them at us one by one. ECU on each one as they go by.

SALEM (V.O.)

Tell them you have anxiety attacks and they'll dope you up on Klonopin, Valium. Anxiety gives you migraines? Have some codeine, Percodan, Darvocet. Real bad one? Go to the hospital for a shot of Demoral. Pretty soon, you don't know if you're transparent or thick as a brick.

Salem walks into an emergency room, his head in his hands.

Salem bent over getting a shot in the ass.

Salem walks out stumbling, stoned from a shot of Demoral.

BACK TO SCENE

Salem rounds a corner and descends a staircase returning to lower level. He walks down the short hall to the bathrooms, opens a door and goes in.

Salem produces his pill bottle from his jacket, sets it down on the counter. He splashes his face with water, then opens the bottle, tips it to his mouth and eats the first thing that comes out.

He replaces the bottle in his jacket and gives the mirror a Cheshire Cat smile.

SALEM (V.O.)

But you know one thing well. Long as you got your stash, everything's gonna be just fine. Sit back, relax. Take your shoes off. Take your head off.

One pill makes you larger, one pill  
makes you small. Down the rabbit hole.  
Welcome to Never Never Land.

INT. LOWER LEVEL - CONTINUOUS

Salem exits the bathroom to find a CONDUCTOR standing by  
the open door.

Salem sees that the train is stopped.

SALEM  
Where the hell are we?

CONDUCTOR  
Minot. We'll be here for an hour. But  
be careful. Stray too far from the  
train and you might not make it back.

Salem looks at the conductor like he's not right in the  
head.

SALEM  
Hmm. Very funny.

Buzz appears from the stairwell. Salem visibly brightens.

SALEM  
Hey, what's the buzz, Buzz? Looks like  
we got an open door into another  
dimension! Up for some adventure? Mr.  
Conductor here says if we venture too  
far we might not make it back! Ooooh!

EXT. EMPTY URBAN LOT - NIGHT

The train is a dark silhouette in the distance behind Salem  
and Buzz as they cross a barren urban landscape of the  
streets and vacant lots of Minot, North Dakota.

They are WARMLY DRESSED against the cold of the winter  
night, lit from above by bright orange streetlights.

SALEM  
So what's your story, Buzz? Where you  
from? Where you going? What's your

passion? I hope I didn't spook you too much earlier.

BUZZ

That's a lot of questions. I'm from Canada. I'm going to New York to see my daughter. She's my passion. After which, there's my sculpture. And yes, you did spook me earlier.

SALEM

No! I'm sorry, why?

BUZZ

I dunno. You just seemed really blue, and I'm too on edge myself lately to deal well with that. All the time, I live in fear of losing my daughter since her mother took her so far away.

SALEM

I'm sorry to hear that. Point taken. I shall resist the dark side of the force, at least tonight! You have my word.

Salem and Buzz walk on in silence as they approach a convenience store.

SALEM(V.O.)

Trouble was, the dark side of the force had crept into my veins years ago and all I could do to keep from crying was pop pills and hope no one noticed the shadow. Like everyone, I wanted to be free to talk about my fears. But I could see that with Jackie and Buzz, as with so many other people my age, fear was rampant, and all that people have to keep themselves from melting down in the presence of someone else's dark voodoo is pretend happy thoughts and good old denial. I made up my mind then to raise the spirits of everyone I met on the train in a last if far-too-late effort to save myself.

INT. STOP BY-N-BUY GAS MART - NIGHT

HELEN the cashier stands behind the counter in coke bottle glasses and a blank expression.

Salem and Buzz peruse the slim pickings in the horrific fluorescent light of the store. Salem opens the lid on a POT OF SOUP, SNIFFS and smiles.

SALEM  
Is this homemade?

SALEM (V.O.)  
I figured a North Dakota mini-mart with pheasants on the walls could reasonably have a couple of moonlighting grandmothers holed up in the back whipping up homemade soup for the patrons of Dinosaur Gas.

HELEN  
No. It comes from a baeag.

SALEM  
A what?

HELEN  
A baeaeaeag!

BUZZ  
A bag. She said it comes from a bag.  
Bagged soup.

SALEM (V.O.)  
Apparently being from Canada, Buzz had some insider knowledge on North Dakota vernacular and bagged soup. It tasted like grandma had made it, and that was good enough for me.

EXT. STOP BY-N-BUY GAS MART - NIGHT

Salem exits the store eating his soup as he walks. Buzz leaves empty handed.

SALEM

Nothing for you, huh?

BUZZ

Nah. Not hungry.

EXT. MINOT, NORTH DAKOTA - NIGHT

WIDE SHOT OF NORTH DAKOTA WINTER SKY, Buzz and Salem far below in the orange halo of a streetlight.

Buzz and Salem amble across a barren lot, down a set of stairs, and across another lot on a more direct route back to the train.

SALEM (V.O.)

Minot. What a weird place. What a weird reality. The quantum physics parallel world theory isn't some element of fantasy like unicorns or trolls. It derives from our everyday life and the plausibility of concurrent experiences through the looking glass, so to speak. Example. You stumble off a train, another reality unto itself, and out into the chilly night and some bizzaro mini-mart out on the perimeter of the twilight zone where a local newspaper tells you you're in Minot and ding! a bell goes off in your brain and you remember a conductor in a dream telling you that you might not get back to the train if you get off in Minot. And suddenly it's clear. You have stepped off an opiate train and into a reality of your own creation.

FAST ZOOM DOWN to ground level and Buzz and Salem walking past the Minot Municipal Auditorium, not a soul in sight.

BUZZ

Wouldn't it be strange if we did miss the train?

SALEM

Yeah. Too strange. Maybe Helen would take us in, feed us baeaeagged soup.

Both men laugh. The Minot Sheriff Station comes into view.

SALEM

(feigning North Dakota accent)  
So, I moved to Minot. I set up house,  
got myself a little Minot woman and  
knocked her up. I lived on soup from a  
bag, got me a job at the bagged soup  
factory. Worked my way up and  
eventually bought Bagged Soup,  
Incorporated. Through proper money  
management and a little luck, I  
eventually bought up most of the town.  
I became sheriff, too, to vindicate  
Hunter Thompson, and later mayor.

Thirty feet from the entrance to the Minot Sheriff Station  
is a 20-foot tall retaining wall, one of many, as though  
the town were built on a man-made mountain. The wall is a  
rock climber's dream, a perfect practice wall. On the wall  
is a sign that reads, CLIMBING ON THIS WALL STRICTLY  
PROHIBITED.

SALEM

I bet they don't get many challengers.

BUZZ

When you become mayor, I'll take over  
as sheriff and climb that wall whenever  
I damn well please!

SALEM

Naturally, you would have to shoot any  
punks who tried to climb it without  
paying you protection money though,  
huh?

BUZZ

(shouting in German accent)  
Ya-voll! Das ist mein fucking vall!

Both men laugh.

BUZZ

That's what happens when you give an  
artist a gun and a little authority.

SALEM

Look what it did for Hitler.

INT. COACH CAR - NIGHT

Salem and Buzz mount the stairs to the second level as the train begins to move again.

SALEM

Goodnight, Buzz.

BUZZ

Hey, that was fun. See you in the morning.

We follow Salem back to his seat where Jackie sleeps. Salem gingerly steps over her legs and settles into his window seat.

Salem puts on his headphones and begins listening to TOM WAITS. He peers out the window at the outskirts of Minot rolling by in the dark.

TOM WAITS' LYRICS(V.O.)

Blow wind blow, wherever you may go,  
put on your overcoat, take me away.  
You gotta take me on into the night,  
take me on into the night, blow me  
away, blow me away...

Out the window, the stars are bright against the dark, moonless night. The outlines of MOUNTAINS OF SAND and gravel and tall INDUSTRIAL ELEVATORS come into view and then disappear into darkness.

A giant BLUE STAR appears advertising the sand and gravel company. The star is outlined in Christmas lights.

INT. ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The ENGINEER is sound ASLEEP in his chair. His mouth is open and he is SNORING.

He begins to tilt sideways, very slowly at first, then a little faster, a little faster, until he TOPPLES out of the chair and onto the floor.

CROSS CUT

ECU ON PRESSURE MECHANISM BENEATH ENGINEER'S CHAIR

ECU ON INSTRUMENT PANEL SHOWING INSTANT SPEED LOSS

BACK TO SCENE

The absence of the engineer's weight on his chair immediately TRIGGERS A LOCAL ALARM and cuts the engine's acceleration.

The engineer LEAPS up off the floor and back into the seat. Shaken but wide awake, he resumes control of the train and brings it back up to speed.

The engineer breathes HEAVY SIGH of relief. He pulls a prescription bottle from his pockets, drops out a pill, and pops it in his mouth.

EXT. THE GREAT PLAINS - DAY

Cows mill around by the tracks. The red & white gate is down over a rural road.

A few early model American cars sit idling on the utterly flat landscape, their EXHAUST STEAM DANCING in the cold wind.

The train approaches going about 30 mph and begins to pass. It is a very long double-decker passenger train trailing freight.

After five engines and 12 cars pass, we SEE and HEAR Salem, Jackie, Buzz and AGNES all squeezed out the open boarding door window SCREAMING merrily as they pass.

The idling cars are inanimate, as though without drivers.

INT. LOWER LEVEL OF COACH CAR - DAY

Salem, Agnes, Jackie and Buzz pull out of the window and close it behind them. Jackie and Agnes are GIGGLING.

JACKIE

Hey sister, I'm Jackie.

AGNES

Agnes. Pleased to meet cha!

Salem gestures to Buzz who is crouched over with his ear to a bathroom door.

SALEM

Jackie, Agnes, the peeping tom over here is Buzz.

BUZZ

(whispering)

Hey, girls, Salem. Come here. Listen to this.

Buzz hand signals for everyone to BE QUIET and POINTS in the direction of the bathrooms.

There are four toilet/sink closets and, at the end of the hall, a changing room with a FEMALE symbol on the door.

The two girls and Salem TIP-TOE DOWN THE HALL.

From behind the changing room door can be heard the masculine GRUNTS and hi-pitched feminine COOING of lovemaking.

Jackie and Agnes lead the group in stifled GIGGLES, covering their mouths with their hands.

All four back up down the hall and around the corner where Agnes and Jackie begin PANTOMIMING DOGGIE-STYLE SEX together with big Agnes mounting little Jackie.

JACKIE

I'm your Bunny burning hot coal furnace steam locomotive of love!

AGNES

Yeah? Well get ready for my caboose, Baby! Ungh! Ungh! Ungh!

JACKIE

Ooh! Ooh! Caboose me, caboose me!

A conductor's VOICE comes CRACKLING over the train's p.a.

CONDUCTOR

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen.  
The Dining Car is now open. Those of  
you who would like to join us for  
lunch, please come to the Dining Car  
now. We are presently crossing the  
Great Plains. The dwellings you see  
out your window are all part of the  
Blackfoot Indian Reservation. The  
Blackfoot are the..

The conductor's voice FADES TO BACKGROUND.

SALEM

How come you can say Indian Reservation  
but now you have to call the people  
Native Americans?

JACKIE

Who knows. Anyone for lunch? I'm  
starved. Euuw! Who cut one?

LYNSIE

That would be me. Sorry. Still  
hungry?

SALEM

Buzz?

Buzz has opened the window again and is daydreaming.

BUZZ

In a minute.

SALEM

You two girls go get a table and get  
acquainted. We'll be right behind ya.

AGNES

(nodding toward changing room)  
You boys be good.

Jackie and Agnes EXIT. CLOSE ON BUZZ, his head out the window, the scenery beyond.

BUZZ

I love American women.

SALEM

Yeah? What's wrong with Canadian women?

BUZZ

Nothin. Just.. crazy girls like Jackie and Agnes, they're so.. uniquely American.

A UPS truck ZOOMS BY, a familiar sight in the otherwise bleak and foreign flatness.

Several 70s model white trailer homes are bunched together in a small, ad hoc cul-de-sac, their rooftops covered in old tires to keep them from blowing off in fierce plains winds.

SALEM

I dunno. My first girlfriend in college was from British Columbia, and she was totally whacked. She told me I was going to be the first man to ever give birth. She was convinced. At 17, that sure blew my mind.

BUZZ

Did she try and get you pregnant?

SALEM

No, Buzz, as a matter of fact she didn't. I was still a virgin at 18, thanks to her. On my birthday, right, she gets me naked and rides me to her own orgasm with her panties on. Awful tease.

BUZZ

Awful.

CLICKITY-CLACK sounds of train to FADE.

INT. CAFÉ CAR - DAY

Buzz and Salem are walking through the café car en route to the dining car. Salem now carries his box of cabernet beneath his arm.

Salem stops at the sight of LYNSIE.

Entranced, he sits a moment and regards Lynsie, a lovely, petite woman dressed like a librarian who is coloring for the entertainment of a few children in the cafe car.

Using a butter knife, she carves at a Cray-Pas black wax overlayer to reveal rainbow colors on the paper beneath. She carves tiny cave-art like designs: a fish, a sun, a stick figure man, a lizard.

CLOSE ON Lynsie's hands as she draws. They are tiny translucent hands, very pretty.

SALEM(V.O.)

Those ethereal hands, with pretty blue veins shining through. I'd never felt hands so soft, never seen skin so nearly transparent. Watching those hands pull rainbow designs from the blackness like magic riveted me. It was like cave art drawn by an angel and in a setting no caveman could have imagined in his wildest dreams. Dreams of the hunt, of fire, of sex, of bigger and better caves. Could a caveman have ever dreamed of this?

A freight train begins passing, going the other direction. Lynsie grabs the children and PLACES THEIR HANDS AGAINST THE VIBRATING GLASS. Salem gestures to Buzz and the two men follow suit.

SALEM(V.O.)

Flying across land in a glass and steel cave. Feeling the violent bursting corridor of turbulent air through the water-like transparent surface of glass as an indecipherable mash of steel shapes and color flash before your eyes. Never, say I. Never never. To

the primitive man, this is Never Never Land.

INT. DINING CAR - DAY

Jackie, Agnes and ERIC occupy a booth.

Eric is Agnes' boyfriend, a skinny youth in a tie-dyed shirt and dreadlocked hair. He appears uncomfortable with the group.

Salem, Buzz and Lynsie walk in and join the others in the booth.

BUZZ

MMM. I smell turkey!

JACKIE

(sarcastically)

Really? I smell Target. This whole train stinks of Target.

SALEM

Everybody, this is Lynsie.

AGNES/ERIC/JACKIE

Hi, Lynsie.

AGNES

Lynsie, I'm Agnes and this is Eric.

LYNSIE

Hey guys.

SALEM

Eric, I'm Salem and this is Buzz.

Eric nods.

Salem plops his box of wine up on the table.

SALEM

Vino anyone?

Jackie, Agnes, Lynsie and Buzz all nod. Eric shakes his head. Using Amtrak's water glasses, Salem distributes the wine.

A sign riveted to the wall above the table reads, "Consumption of private alcohol prohibited."

Outside their window stretches an endless expanse of brown, butterscotch and deep purple scrub grasses. The plains are pancake flat except for occasional little hillocks. The sky is a flawless blue. Cows graze not far from the train.

SALEM

Look out the window. What do you see?  
I see a buncha hamburgers walking around. What are cows anyway but a buncha latent hamburgers? Strip away the hides, de-bone `em, throw some pickles on `em, a bun above and below and pow! You got a hundred four-legged Quarter Pounders. Throw in some elevator music, a dash of Terry Gilliam, and you've got cheeseburgers. Haha. Get it? Cheese-burgers?

Outside the window, 100 four-legged cheeseburgers graze. We HEAR ELEVATOR MUSIC in the background.

JACKIE

Salem, you need help.

LYNSIE

I knew a guy who wouldn't eat vegetables cuz he had once heard a carrot scream. The only thing he'd eat were plain hamburgers without the pickle, and he'd apologize to the ketchup.

AGNES

Well I'm a super-size order of fries, myself. A greasy, salty-sweet, ruddy rail-ridin' Van Gogh potato eater. Anybody hungry?

Agnes pulls at her neckline to reveal her cleavage and suddenly realizes the DINING CAR STEWARD IS STANDING OVER HER.

DINING CAR STEWARD

I'm sorry, but you all can't sit in one booth. Only four passengers to a booth.

Jackie puts on her sweetest face and flirts with the Steward.

JACKIE

Pleeeeeeeaaase? We're all family, you just can't break us up!

AGNES

Yeah, pleeeeeaaase?

DINING CAR STEWARD

(tired)

What'll it be?

JACKIE

Turkey for me.

AGNES

Yeah, turkey for me, too!

SALEM

Turkey three.

LYNSIE

What the hell, turkey please.

ERIC

I'll have the vegetarian sandwich.

DINING CAR STEWARD

And for you, sir?

BUZZ

Nothing for me, thanks.

Salem eyes Buzz with a look of concern.

DINING CAR STEWARD

Drinks?

Minus Eric, the group smiles sheepishly.

The Steward eyes the water glasses full of wine, rolls his eyes and walks away.

SALEM

Rules. Always stupid rules and regulations. And do you think it has anything to do with our safety? No.

AGNES

Insurance.

SALEM

Exactly. Like if this train crashed right now we'd have any more chance of survival being four to a booth.

JACKIE

At least on trains there's none of that illusion of security bullshit. I mean, have you ever seen a seatbelt on a train?

ERIC

Gosh, can you imagine getting stuck out here in the middle of nowhere?

BUZZ

I think I'd kinda like it out here.

AGNES

Eric means a place without Nintendo or movie theaters. Eric has a phobia of empty spaces, what most people call nature. Some hippie, huh?

Everyone looks at Eric. He says nothing, turns his head and pouts. Salem raises a cup of wine.

SALEM

Here's to emptiness! If a little scary emptiness is what it takes to save some of the Earth from man's ceaseless mini-mall and sub-division conquest, I say

hooray. God bless the Great Plains,  
then. God bless the empty flat lands.  
Let no man have the courage or desire  
to live here, to screw it up with  
manufactured "beauty."

BUZZ

Think how quiet it is out there.

LYNSIE

Blissful. No car alarms, street  
sweepers, garbage trucks, howling  
drunks..

SALEM

No howling drunks??

AGNES

To howling drunks!

Everyone but Eric LAUGHS and raises a glass.

JACKIE/BUZZ/LYNSIE/SALEM/AGNES

To howling drunks!!

They drink.

The waiter arrives with lunch. He hands Salem an open-  
faced turkey sandwich smothered in gravy, mashed potatoes,  
and mixed vegetables. Salem INHALES DEEPLY through his  
nose.

SALEM

Ahh! Turkey!

Salem nudges his plate toward Buzz.

SALEM

Eat. No arguments.

For a second, Buzz looks embarrassed. He takes a deep  
breath, nods at Salem and picks up his fork to partake.

FADE TO:

INT. DINING CAR - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

The year is 1987.

A skinny college-age Salem sits in a booth across from DICK and PETE, both roughly his age. A steno sits on the table in front of Salem.

Dick is arrogant and manipulative. He wears a prep school shirt and a ball cap with the word "Vail" on it.

Pete is large, not too bright and overly loud. He wears a football jersey and his high school ring.

Dick and Pete are sharing a large pizza and drinking beers. Salem watches them eat, his face a mix of disgust and envy.

SALEM

Can I please have a piece?

DICK

Do you have any money?

Pete CHUCKLES.

PETE

Yeah, you gonna pay up, writer boy?

Salem shoots Pete an angry look.

SALEM

Dick, you know how little money I had for this trip. Come on. No? This is how you thank me for inviting you on this trip, for sharing my sleeper room with you both, a room I got as payment for writing up this trip for the Tribune? One lousy slice of pizza?

Dick shakes his head.

DICK

You need to get a real job, boyo. One that pays!

FADE ON SALEM'S BEWILDERED FACE.

INT. CAFE CAR - PRESENT - DAY

Salem, Agnes, Eric, Jackie, Buzz and Lynsie sit cramped in a booth. Salem's box of cabernet is out and everyone is drinking from it except Eric, who drinks orange juice.

Salem has his steno out and occasionally scribbles notes.

JACKIE

...so the car's half empty, I dunno, it was March or something, and this creepy guy gets on the train, walks down, sits right next to me and starts beating off!

CROSS CUT

Jackie in her seat squirming away from CREEPY GUY who sits beside her. We see his arm moving up and down rhythmically.

BUZZ/LYNSIE/SALEM/ERIC/AGNES

Eeeeeuuuwww!

LYNSIE

What did you do?

Jackie notices, looks repulsed, SLUGS him in the arm.

JACKIE

I smacked him.

BACK TO SCENE

ERIC

Well, I heard about this guy who got shot with a .22 when someone accidentally shot a gun off on Greyhound.

SALEM

Sounds like Greyhound.

AGNES

(sarcastically)  
Or urban legend.

Agnes slams down a full cup of wine in one gulp.

SALEM

Okay, guys. Top ten rail-riding tips for Amtrak newcomers! I say number one, find a good seat mate if you can't have a double to yourself. Otherwise, a scuzmo beat woman, or man, with three heads, halitosis and a bad speed habit will seek you out and make your trip a living hell.

JACKIE

Ugh! Be ready with the mace!

Jackie produces a mace dispenser from her jacket, holds it up threateningly.

AGNES

Sit far from the doors.

BUZZ

And not directly upstairs from the shitters.

AGNES

Open bathroom doors real slowly. Those lock mechanisms, definitely designed by a pervert.

INTERCUT

Hand on a bathroom door turns the latch, the door opens and WE SEE an OLD MAN squatting on the john. HE LOOKS UP at us, caught like a deer in headlights.

BACK TO SCENE

Everyone nods agreement at that one.

ERIC

Take off your shoes and stay awhile.

AGNES

Build yourself a fort by hanging a blanket down from the luggage rack to shroud your seat area.

JACKIE

Worse case scenario, puke on the seat  
beside you to ensure no creeps sit  
beside you.

LYNSIE

Eat lunch, not dinner if you're on a  
one meal/day budget. It's the same  
food at half the price.

SALEM

Okay. And how about supplies? Booze?  
Food?

AGNES

(slurring)

Don't eat yellow snow.

SALEM

I say at least two liters of boxed wine  
per day of travel, allowing you room to  
share.

LYNSIE

Packaged smoke salmon, water crackers,  
Swiss cheese!

JACKIE

Eeeeeuuuwww!

Everyone but Agnes and Eric simultaneously wave off the bad  
odor of a fart. Agnes raises her hand and grins.

JACKIE/BUZZ/LYNSIE/SALEM

Agnes!

Lynsie swigs her wine. Bringing her hand down she spills  
Buzz's wine across the table and onto Salem's steno. Agnes  
and Salem dive forward to slurp it up off the table and  
everyone CHEERS.

THEIR LAUGHTER AND DRUNKEN BANTER FADES TO BACKGROUND of  
Salem's interior dialogue.

SALEM (V.O.)

Now these are my people. Five modern day rail riding hobos, drunks every one of `em. Well, almost all of them.

ANGLE ON Eric looking out of place.

SALEM(V.O.)

I looked around at all of them...

STILL SHOT of each character as Salem focuses on them.

SALEM(V.O.)

..Agnes the bull, Lynsie the waif, Jackie the pill-popping flirt, Buzz the normal guy and even Eric the milquetoast, and I was glad to know them, even though in reality, I didn't know them at all. That's the beauty of train travel for a guy like me. You make friends fast and nobody judges you. There isn't time. If only everybody treated life like a two day train ride. Bing! Bang! Live it up. Tomorrow.. who knows?

BEGIN 4-SECOND MONTAGE

P.O.V. of woman in the blue dress as she steps onto tracks in front of approaching train. We see the cigarette come up, the flame, the red glow, the exhale, the locomotive huge now.

SOUND OF THE TRAINS HORN, THE SCREECHING BRAKES TO BLACK.

END MONTAGE

INT. DELUXE SLEEPER ROOM - DAY

Salem holds the door while Jackie, Agnes, Lynsie and Buzz rush into the small room.

SALEM

Come on in, hurry!

Salem CLOSES the door behind them and draws the curtain.

LYNSIE

(slurring)  
What are we doing? We can't be in here!

AGNES  
This is great! But how do we know no  
one's staying in this room?

SALEM  
Don't worry. I stole a look at the  
conductor's schedule and this room is  
empty until our next stop in about  
three hours.

Glassy-eyed, Lynsie leans over and kisses Buzz on the  
cheek. Buzz looks surprised but pleased.

JACKIE  
Ooh. What was that? Me thinks I smell  
romance in the air?

Salem grabs the clean glasses that come with the room and  
fills them with wine, passes one to Buzz.

SALEM  
Only two glasses, so here's one for the  
lovebirds. My harem and I shall share  
the other.

Salem puts his arm around Jackie, and Agnes throws an arm  
around him. Jackie pulls out a pipe, a bag of pot, and her  
paperback copy of *Breakfast at Tiffanys*. She sorts through  
the buds atop the book, packs the pipe and lights up.

SALEM  
To lovebirds!

Salem and Buzz clink glasses. Jackie, after holding it a  
moment, exhales smoke LAUGHING.

JACKIE  
To staying buzzed!

There's NO DIALOGUE while the pipe makes the rounds.  
Shortly the tiny room is filled with smoke. Each character  
takes turns GIGGLING.

From this point on, the five all speak with SLURRED SPEECH.

JACKIE

Who's up for roller-blading down the  
aisles?

AGNES

Can we do it naked?

JACKIE

Absolutely.

LYNSIE

Wait! I think I hear a conductor!

Everyone FREEZES a moment. The only sound is the  
omnipresent CLICKITY-CLACK rhythm of the rails. They  
relax.

Buzz, now giddy with smoke, wine and Lysie's affection  
tickles Lysie.

BUZZ

Paranoid!

SALEM

Speaking of which, where's Eric?

AGNES

Abandoned shit.. er, ship.

BUZZ

Paranoid!

AGNES

More or less.

LYNSIE

I feel like an outlaw!

AGNES

I was an outlaw once. Stole a cop car.

LYNSIE/BUZZ/SALEM/JACKIE

Whoa!

JACKIE

Go cowgirl! Do tell!

LYNSIE/SALEM/BUZZ

Yeah! Tell us.

AGNES

Awright. But don't fault me cuz you asked.

Agnes takes the full glass of wine from Jackie and KNOCKS IT BACK in one gulp.

Previously slurred, her speech becomes suddenly clear.

PAN BETWEEN CHARACTERS AS AGNES BEGINS HER STORY

AGNES

Bout six years ago, long before Eric, I had another boyfriend named Jack. The nightmare began when Jack joined the army and moved us to Fort Hood, Texas. Jack was great, a real outgoing, fun-loving guy who treated me like an angel. Unfortunately, I was all fucked up.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

A solemn Agnes seated in a barren doctor's office being lectured by two WOMEN DOCTORS.

AGNES(V.0.)

When the doctors finally got a hold of me awhile later, they told me I was suffering from aggravated chronic depression due to chemical imbalance.

Agnes peers through the pinhole lens on the door of her trailer home. She flips around and closes her eyes, her back to the door.

AGNES(V.0.)

But at the time, all I knew was I hated myself and I was scared to leave the house. Which was odd, cuz looking back my life had been going really good up to then.

SERIES OF SHOTS of a businesswoman, a lawyer, a waitress, a computer operator, each of them discreetly popping pills from prescription bottles marked Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft.

AGNES(V.0.)

Nowadays, half the people I know are depressed. They say it's all the steroids in the food we eat, in the preservatives.

Agnes staring at a pile of aspirin and a bottle of tequila, looking in the mirror and touching her terrified face.

AGNES(V.0.)

Anyway, when you're losing your mind, you feel like a ghost. And that's what I started thinking a lot about. Dying. And Fort Hood didn't help.

ECU OF fire ants swarming over a road kill dog as a pickup truck drives by. There are three good old boys inside, a rifle rack on the rear window, and a sticker on the bumper that reads: "Cook a coon for Jesus."

AGNES(V.0.)

Fire ants that would swarm up your legs biting you with an awful poison that itched for days. People about as redneck and scary as you can imagine.

The night lights up with explosion and the lightening traces of heavy artillery flying about.

AGNES(V.0.)

And the bombs. I'd lay in bed awake at night while Jack was out on maneuvers and listen to the army shelling the shit out of the Earth.

HIGH SHOT of Agnes lying in a shaking bed, the THUNDER OF BOMBS IN THE DISTANCE, a look of terror in her eyes.

AGNES(V.0.)

Some of the bombs were so big our trailer home would shake like a vibrating dildo, and I'd think, that

one was Jack. Jack's been blown to bits.

BACK TO SCENE

Salem POURS Agnes another wine. This one she SIPS.

AGNES

One thing kept me from hanging myself alongside the dead coyote in the neighbor's willow tree that summer. And that was an act of God that visited us that August. A tornado.

RESUME FLASHBACK

A tornado races across a prairie beneath a dark sky.

AGNES

A visit from Mother Nature's most whimsical weapon, a drive-by Texas-sized salad shooter and can-crusher in one.

BACK TO SCENE

Everybody STARES as Agnes pauses for effect.

LYNSIE

How did a tornado save you?

AGNES

By giving me a purpose, a purpose in keeping with my completely twisted frame of mind.

SALEM

What did you do?

AGNES

I chased it.

RESUME FLASHBACK

Series of shots of tornadoes shredding houses and tossing cars.

AGNES(V.O.)

I guess I figured if I was going to die, what better exit than a tornado? Imploded by air pressure 100 times greater than the Earth's gravity and shot up into the sky in a zillion pieces. People felt bad for those space shuttle people who died. Not me. We all gotta go sometime. May as well go out on a rocket, and what better rocket than one cooked up by Mother Earth herself? I saw my chance and I took it.

Agnes stands peering out the window at a dark purple sky. She turns and looks at the stereo and WE HEAR THE EMERGENCY BROADCAST TONE in the background of her dialogue.

AGNES(V.O.)

Tornado warnings were all over the radio. It was exciting! Something really insane going on in the outside world, not inside my head. That was the first time I heard that emergency broadcast beeeeeeeep! where it wasn't just a drill. It gave me chills. Then a cop came to the door telling me to evacuate. Where the hell could I go?

A COP at the door warns Agnes to seek shelter.

AGNES(V.O.)

When I came out of the trailer a few minutes later, his car was idling right out front, and he was down the street knocking on more doors. I made up my mind in a second.

Agnes steps out of a trailer home. Shot of cop several houses down. Shot of cop car idling on street.

AGNES(V.O.)

I took off in his car and headed straight for the tornado, following radio reports of its location. There were roadblocks, but I was doing about eighty with the lights and sirens on

and they just waved me on through. It was hands-down the most exhilarating experience of my life. In that moment, the veil of my illness lifted from me and I was truly alive.

Agnes steps calmly into cop car, shuts the door and drives off. Agnes adjusting car radio. Agnes blowing through roadblocks as cops move barriers.

BACK TO SCENE

BUZZ

Did you see it?

AGNES

Oh, yeah.

RESUME FLASHBACK

AGNES(V.O.)

A news van passed me going the other way and I heard them on the radio saying they were right in front of it. I pulled over and stepped out into the deadest silence you could imagine. Nothing moved, but the air was thick with something.

A news van passes going the other direction. Agnes pulls over, steps out of car into stillness. Agnes waits.

AGNES(V.O.)

I got back in the car, shut the door, and voop! It dropped out of the sky and danced away to the south. I was so stunned I couldn't move. I just watched it go.

Agnes gets back in car, shuts door. Shot of tornado's funnel dropping out of the sky right in front of the car, moving away.

BACK TO SCENE

AGNES

As it turned out, that tornado grew and grew and wound up killing everything in its path, including some three dozen people in one town.

Beat.

SALEM

What happened with the cop car?

Agnes STARES out the window, a far away look in her eyes.

JACKIE

Yeah, Agnes. What didja do with the cop car?

AGNES

Huh? Oh, nothin. I just left it there and walked home.

LYNSIE

Did you get in trouble?

AGNES

No. Well, not really. They came and got me, but I never got charged with anything. Guess they figured I was insane. That's how the doctors got a hold of me. Yep.

Salem, Lysie, Jackie and Buzz all breathe a heavy SIGH OF RELIEF.

BUZZ

What do they have you on, if you don't mind my asking?

AGNES

Zoloft.

BUZZ

No kiddin? Me, too.

Lysie SQUEEZES Buzz's hand and shrugs.

LYNSIE

I've been on Paxil for two years myself.

Jackie looks stunned.

JACKIE

No way. No way!

LYNSIE

I resisted the idea for a long time. I didn't want to be a slave to drugs. But it's true, it's rampant now, and it's not because it's trendy to be depressed or because we're lazy and don't want to feel...

AGNES

...but because we're being poisoned daily from the water, the air, our food. Sure, the meds were hard at first, but then you're suddenly feeling alive and good again, and you're like, I can get used to this.

Jackie HUFFS and folds her arms across her chest, her paperback copy of *Breakfast At Tiffanys* cradled at her breast.

JACKIE

Yeah, well I'm with Holly Golightly. I say never allow yourself to get used to anything! Anybody who does, they might as well be dead. If anything sucks bad enough that it requires getting used to, you shouldn't be doing it.

AGNES

I was dead without the meds, Jackie.

BUZZ

Until you've been there, you just don't know.

Jackie's eyes widen with surprise and ANGER. She looks to Salem for support.

JACKIE

Jesus, am I the only one who's sane around here? Salem? Salem?

SALEM

You take drugs, too, Jackie.

JACKIE

To get high! That's different. I don't need to take them!

Beat. Salem WAVES his hand as if to throw out the subject.

SALEM

Everything's fine, come on! This is ridiculous. Let's get outa here. Let's go drink.

FREEZE ON SALEM

SALEM(V.O)

I was lying, of course. Nothing was fine. Agnes' story had shaken me badly, and I just didn't wanna go there. But I was there. It had made me angry, angry at a world of poisoned food and a soulless corporate culture that was chemically, aesthetically and socially whittling away our individuality and strength. Suddenly, I wanted to scream.

INT. CAFE CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

Jackie and Salem sit across from one another in a booth.

SALEM

They're not insane, Jackie. Believe me, I know. You want insane? People who live in suburbia in prefab stucco fucking birdcages, work at jobs they hate and retire to TV all night, that's insane.

JACKIE

They chose to live quiet lives and work at boring jobs. So what?

SALEM

No. I said hate. Jobs that they hate. If someone's truly content at a mundane job, super. We should all be so easily contented. But a life shaped around a fear of consequences is just plain wrong. It's insane. You stay at a job you hate because you fear the consequences of quitting. Bingo! Insane. You stay in an unhealthy relationship because of the risk of being alone. Whammo. Psycho. Given the endless alternatives in life and the imperative of living each day as though it were your last, anything but the dogged pursuit of one's most outrageous and wonderful dreams is... you guess it, insane!

JACKIE

Fine. Let's change the subject.

SALEM

Okay. Imagination! Why don't people use their imaginations a little? Why do the majority of people live in stucco shoe box houses and never conceive of something different, something unique? An oval shaped house with beer bottle walls and tube-slide exits for that zippy morning rush? Or a shark-shaped car with radiator teeth and factory fins? Imagination!

JACKIE

Yeah? How often do you use your imagination? How imaginative is boxed wine?

SALEM

Hmm. You sure enjoyed drinking my unimaginative wine, thank you. That's why we're now resorting to canned train beer at \$3.50 a pop.

Agnes arrives with a cardboard drink carrier and three beers.

SALEM

Agnes, you are the best. We were just discussing imagination and how seldom people use theirs. I bet you use yours all the time. Probably more than most people use their ATM cards, or their turn signals, or their Juicemaster, Stairmaster, Masters & Johnson, synthetic electric quivering dildos and handcuffs. Haha!

Two 30-ish MEN in cowboy hats in one of the adjoining booths turn their attention to Salem's rant. Agnes drinks her beer and WINKS at Salem.

As occurred earlier with Agnes, the excitement of talking openly to the crowd all but erases Salem's drunken slur. And by now, Salem is talking to the crowd.

SALEM

Well, maybe not as much as their dildos. What with daddy zonked out on Coors and bored flaccid with his castrated life and his haggish wife and his Internet porn maintenance release of twenty millennia of obsessive instinctual seed-planting big boner procreational mojo, the kind of pumped up go-getter jizm juice that gets flowing with every tight blouse, big-tit-spilling, sex-selling advert that smacks him in the face from billboards to sitcoms to glossy lingerie catalogues reminding him again and again that his life sucks and it always will.

Two middle aged WOMEN have risen from the other adjoining booth and left the cafe in disgust. A BLACK COUPLE take their place in the booth and begin listening to Salem.

Several OTHER PEOPLE in the cafe car have stopped chatting and are listening in.

Salem notices this and rises up to sit on the seat back.

SALEM

And speaking of things that suck and the slow insidious castration of the spirit, what is happening to this country when you can lose an hour of your life comparison-shopping through the umpteen brands of shampoo, deodorant, breakfast cereal and prepackaged microwave meals at the local Megamart, but come time to vote for leader of the Western world, we're given two choices only, a coin toss between two evils?

Several people including Agnes applaud lightly. A college STUDENT in the crowd speaks up.

STUDENT

Yeah! What's up with that?

Jackie rolls her eyes. Salem, spurred on by the audience, continues.

BEGIN MONTAGE

SALEM(V.O.)

And whatever happened to mom and pop stores and the curmudgeonly waitress at Stan's Diner and Uncle Tony's neighborhood pizzeria? Everywhere you go now it's a small world, the same world...

Out the window of the train we see a highway from the past, an Old Route 66 scene with diners and non-brand name home town shops, everything unique unto itself.

SALEM(V.O.)

Anytown USA with all the comfy corporate mega-brands you've come to expect and that are draining the soul out of the world. Now it's an always Wal-Mart Doc Marten Starbucks Motel 6 Billion served Hollywood Video Subway world.

The image changes now as we see what's really outside the window of the train, the usual fare: Wal-Mart, Starbucks,

Motel 6, McDonalds, Hollywood Video and Subway. We continue to watch the string of corporate giants float by.

SALEM(V.O.)

I don't know about you but I miss the character and innocuous aesthetics of the world where a store's name was the name of the guy behind the counter, the owner, the individual, a kind of world found now only in far rural America or the heart of crowded cities, places either too tight for a Safeway Supermarket to fit, too remote for Denny's to profit, or so scary backwards and full of hicks that they'd no sooner patronize Starbucks than pour cappuccino in their carburetor.

BACK TO SCENE

COWBOY

That would be me.

The cowboy raises his hat as he speaks. Salem pauses briefly to sip his beer as everyone LAUGHS and CLAPS.

SALEM

It's a mixed up, sick up port wine and marshmallow mediocre..

BEGIN MONTAGE

SALEM(V.O.)

Barry Barbra Madonna Manilow Milli Vanilli, sitcom, dotcom, rot in calm, shop til you drop, suck off a cop, lump in your throat, why bother vote, cubicle cage road rage minimum wage WTO media snow job corn cob up the tear gas ass wipe TV tripe clear-cutting, tree-huggin hurtin for certain Thurston burstin packin and smackin and crackin consumption corrupted soul-abducted, two party oligarchic debtor nation under dog unconstitutional with shopping malls and suburban sprawls for all.

FLASH ON celebrity faces, the characters of Married w/Children, an IMac computer, holiday shoppers fighting over a popular toy, a cop tearing up a ticket as a woman unzips his fly, a man's Adam's apple rising and falling as he stares at a ballot held in his hand, footage of an office shooting spree, a drive-by shooting, kid flipping burgers, WTO riots, tree-sitter in lone tree surrounded by clear cut, high school shooter Kip Kinkel, crack pipe being fired up, the White House, to rising shot of shopping mall complex surrounded by endless suburban development.

END MONTAGE

Wild APPLAUSE from the Amtrak cafe car peanut gallery.  
Salem raises his beer.

SALEM  
God bless America!

Even Jackie, who has sat through most of Salem's rant with a look of embarrassment and boredom, claps a little.

SALEM  
And God bless Amtrak! Paired down and  
subsidized, losing steam to the  
Teamsters and the friendly skies, but  
still tryin!

EVERYONE PRESENT  
To Amtrak!!

INT. COACH CAR - TWILIGHT

Salem stands in the aisle with Jackie and Agnes. Jackie pops a pill and steadies herself, her arms folded across her chest.

Agnes BURPS LOUDLY attracting the attention of people in the surrounding seats.

Both Jackie and Agnes are slurring heavily.

JACKIE  
(slurring)  
What now?

SALEM

No more ranting. I promise. Now are you ready girls?

AGNES

(slurring)

Mommy, are we there yet? Ready for what?

SALEM

You're gonna like this. This is good stuff, a free high, like kid drugs.

AGNES

Ooh! Like spinning around in circles! I love that!

Big Agnes starts spinning. Given her size, her drunkenness and the natural sway of the train, she is immediately a liability. Salem grabs her.

SALEM

Okay. Don't do that. You're gonna need your balance for this. Now, quickly before the sun sets and we lose all light outside.

Outside the train is passing through a rural hamlet. The sun is TEN MINUTES from setting on the horizon.

Salem moves Jackie around in front of him and points her up the empty aisle in the direction of the locomotive.

SALEM

Okay. Agnes, listen up cuz you're going next. When I tell you, Jackie, start walking. Instead of watching where you're stepping, let go your focus, pull back and concentrate on seeing mostly peripherally out the window, so that you trick your mind into flying against the outside world. Ready? If you do it right, it's suddenly like you're unhinged from the train and ripping through the space while standing upright. It's groovy. Now go.

Jackie begins walking. Salem and Agnes follow a little behind. As her focus changes, she stumbles a bit, but then begins walking faster and LAUGHING as she goes.

SALEM(V.O.)

When it comes to sobriety versus insobriety, the train is a great equalizer. No one can see you stumble and accuse you of excess, for the consistent swagger of the train makes drunks of us all.

JACKIE'S P.O.V. as she discovers the trick of flying against the outside world.

JACKIE

Haha! This is great! Whatta trip.

SALEM

Isn't it great? Simple, but it works.

At the far end of the car, Jackie begins jumping up and down and CLAPPING.

JACKIE

Let's do it again!

SALEM

Okay. But it's different going the other way. Maybe even more trippy. You're essentially walking against the train and with the world outside. If you perceive it correctly, it will feel like a slight leap off the floor would suddenly indenture you to the fixed space outside the train, thus sending you smashing against the back wall of the coach in a matter of a microsecond. You would essentially be hit by the train from the inside, which would be far less polite than throwing yourself in front of the train on the outside, thus limiting the gruesome spectacle of your death to the bloodshot eyes of the over-caffeinated engineer, rather than

all of us passengers. But, that's another story.

JACKIE/AGNES

Huh?

SALEM

Forget it. Just rambling. Go ahead.

Jackie proceeds down the aisle, skipping as she goes.

JACKIE

Weeeeeee!

EXT. OUTSIDE COACH CAR - CONTINUOUS

TOM WAITS INSTRUMENTALS play as we watch Salem guide Agnes through the same motions. Jackie, Agnes and Salem laugh and push each other.

WE PULL AWAY as they run up down the length of the car.

CAMERA SAILS SKYWARD for a high shot of the train at sunset

TIME-LAPSE SHOT of train roaring beneath the winter sky, the sunset PINK clouds darkening to a BLOOD RED then GRAY then BLACK as night falls and the train slips ever eastward in the dark.

INT. COACH SEATS - NIGHT

WE TRACK SLOWLY down aisle of coach car for duration of Salem's voice over. Passengers are seated in the direction facing the camera.

We come to rest on Jackie and Salem seated together. A woman across the aisle knits contentedly. Salem sips a beer, writes in his steno.

SALEM(V.O.)

It's 8 p.m. and we are steadily approaching the Mt. Everest of Cocked-dome. So why are Jackie and I planted in coach like two suburban stuffed monkey couch potatoes and not out

haunting the bowels of Amtrak's train  
#1027 with our crazed rail companions?  
Good question.

Salem turns his attention from the window to Jackie, her  
head on his shoulder, eyes closed.

SALEM

Jackie. Why aren't we out haunting the  
bowels of the snake with our hammerhead  
compadres?

Jackie doesn't move, drunkenly speaks with EYES CLOSED.

JACKIE

Because we're hammered.

SALEM

Oh yeah.

Salem returns his attention to the dark window and his  
writing.

SALEM(V.O.)

I see phantom trees all a blur in a  
dark sky dappled on the glass with  
reflections of the lights inside the  
train. There is a town of some sort,  
the whistle of the locomotive far, far  
ahead like a thousand coach cars away,  
Christmas lights and stars, then  
nothing again. Such a shame that the  
greater scenery like Glacier National  
Park and this that I imagine  
spectacular passes us at night unseen.  
For such reasons do we drink to pass  
the time. On this never-ending train,  
nothing is in our control but the  
drink.

Jackie speaks, her eyes still closed.

JACKIE

If you could be the sole confidante of  
just one person in the whole world but  
absolutely never tell their secrets,  
who would you choose?

Salem assumes a contemplative expression.

SALEM

Hmm. That's a tough one. You're not as drunk as you sound. I would have to say.. Kurt Cobain.

JACKIE

He's dead, no fair.

SALEM

Yeah, well he could have used me as a friend. A confidante. Somebody other than that skank wife of his. Well, who would you pick?

Beat.

JACKIE

Madonna. Hands down.

SALEM

Oh-ho!

Buzz and Lynsie walk down the aisle and into view. Buzz has his arm around Lynsie. They are intoxicated with one another.

BUZZ

Hey, Salem. Jackie sleeping?

Jackie opens her eyes and sits up.

JACKIE

I was molting, thank you. Now, thanks to you people, my feathers will never come in.

SALEM

Soooo.. where have you two been all even-innnnggg?

BUZZ

Well, sure enough somebody claimed that room right after we all cleared out. Lynsie and I lingered a while in the

hall and wouldn't you know another room opened up. The steward was nowhere to be seen, never even came to change the sheets. So..

LYNSIE  
(excitedly)  
We made love on somebody's dirty sheets!

JACKIE  
Eeeuuwww! That's sick.

SALEM  
Sounds nice to me.

Jackie reaches into her purse, pulls out a compact, opens it to reveal a nest of red pills and pops one in her mouth.

JACKIE  
I gotta pee.

Jackie rises, EXITS.

BUZZ  
Well Salem, we're heading back to Lynsie's car. She's getting off tomorrow morning and I guess we're all pretty much dispersing in Chicago, eh? So, if you wanna have a kind of a farewell party tonight, come grab us and we'll hit the cafe car.

SALEM  
Yeah, yeah. Okay. See ya later.

Lynsie and Buzz exit. Salem across the aisle at the pair of old people sleeping sitting up, her head on his shoulder as they sway with the sideways motion of the train.

SALEM  
(talking aloud to himself)  
Another of God's cruel jokes, like dog-ugly faces on hot bodies and goddesses with bad gas. God lets old people sleep sitting up. What a crime. What bliss. I wish I could sleep like that.

An idea strikes Salem's face. He reaches into his jacket for the bottle of pills.

SALEM

Eenie, meenie, mynie, moe. Down the hatch!

Salem washes down the pill with the last of his beer and slumps low in his seat.

SALEM (V.O.)

People who fly and complain of jet lag are pussies. Ride cross-country on a train hardly sleeping for three days, and you'll experience a true physical and temporal lag like none other. Time becomes one long strange melange of yesterday and today, today and tomorrow. A day without end, a night..

ANGLE ON window above Salem's head. Shadowy figures of industry and houses flash by in the pitch black night.

Without a moon and given the reflected light from inside the coach car, it is difficult to see out at all.

SALEM (V.O.)

..that lasts forever. A night of crazed rambling clickity-clack thoughts and oddities from the subconscious cellar of the stupefied, insomniac mind. Anything can happen.

PRESENT: INT. COACH SEATS - NIGHT

Salem opens his eyes and sees Agnes leaning over him.

AGNES

How's the weather in Never Never Land?

SALEM

Huh? Oh, I wasn't sleeping. I never sleep.

AGNES

Uhuh. You were mumbling some strange  
shit.

SALEM

Did I say something about Never Never  
Land?

Agnes takes Jackie's seat.

AGNES

(seductively)

Maybe. You were moaning mostly.  
Sounded nice.

SALEM

Where's Eric?

AGNES

Probably pouting in a toilet somewhere.  
He's not speaking to me right now  
because I called him by your name  
accidentally. Forget him. It's only  
nine o'clock and I know a warrior like  
you doesn't need sleep. It's our last  
night.

Agnes reveals two airplane BOTTLES OF TEQUILA she had  
hidden behind her back.

AGNES

Here. We'll knock these back and get  
going. We have a mission. We must  
derail this train with our drunken  
debauchery before the sunrise scatters  
us to the four winds!

Salem smiles and fights off tears. One escapes and rolls  
down the cheek facing Agnes. She leans in and kisses it.

SALEM

You know, you haven't farted in like,  
hours.

AGNES

Yeah, so? What did you think I was  
like the sister in Like Water for  
Chocolate, the one who farts to death?

SALEM  
I dunno. Maybe.

AGNES  
(sarcastically)  
I bet you've never farted before, huh?

SALEM  
Never!! No, I'm guilty. I hate my own farts. I hate having to go to the bathroom. I hate having ear wax. I don't even like ejaculating. Too messy. If I had my way, I'd be a cyborg, maybe a locomotive. Machines I understand. But the human body, ugh. Too messy.

Agnes cracks the bottles open, hands one to Salem.

AGNES  
To our imperfect, oozing and slobbering selves! God's finest creation!

SALEM  
To oozing.

They toast and drink.

AGNES  
My best friend's name is Bitchface.  
This is her favorite tequila.

SALEM  
To Bitchface!

INT. LOWER LEVEL BATHROOM AREA - NIGHT

WE HEAR Agnes cackling and Salem singing as they descend the stairs and come into view. Salem sings a Tom Waits lyric, imitating his raspy voice.

SALEM  
That's where old George found himself out there at the crossroads... You think you can take them bullets and

leave em, do you? Just save a few for your bad days. Well.. pretty soon all your days are bad without the bullets. You're hooked. Heavy as lead.

Agnes throws an arm around Salem and they stumble toward the bathrooms. Fresh from one last party with friends in the cafe car, they are both sloshed.

AGNES  
(slurring heavily)  
You.. are.. insane.

SALEM  
(slurring)  
Why thank you. Didja like my Tom Waits impression?

AGNES  
I did. And now I must pee before I pee on you.

Agnes darts for the john.

SALEM  
Wait! Come back. That could be fun.

Salem turns to the exit door window, OPENS it, and STICKS HIS HEAD OUT. The train is moving at a moderate speed. The sound of the train's HORN sifts through the HOWLING WIND like the lonely call of a wild animal in the distance.

Salem's P.O.V. as the train rounds a corner, cutting toward us so that the chain of locomotives comes into view. The headlights illuminate haystacks, the occasional cow, a farm in the distance.

A large warning sign on the door reads, OPENING WINDOW STRICTLY PROHIBITED!

ANGLE ON Salem from behind as a signal pole whips by and Salem JERKS HIS HEAD INSIDE.

SALEM  
Whew! That was close.

He looks down and touches a bulge in the groin of his jeans. He looks somewhat surprised. His attention is still on his erection as Agnes walks around the corner.

AGNES

Hmm? Whatcha got there? Well, I'm happy to see you, too.

Salem LAUGHS nervously.

SALEM(V.O.)

How could I tell her it had little to do with her and everything to do with the morbid specter of my own decapitation?

AGNES

Come. Let Aggie help you out with that.

Agnes takes Salem by a belt loop just above his crotch and leads him to a bathroom. Once inside, she locks the door and unbuttons his pants.

SALEM(V.O.)

Agnes. Oh, Agnes. This can't be good for you and Eric. Oh well. This is the slipping of the gears, the loose and chipped-tooth meandering between first and third degree infidelity, between good and the so-called evil existent in the animal man, in all of us, if only more pronounced in the boxed wine hearts of women and men for whom chaos is a familiar friend.

INT. LOWER LEVEL BATHROOM AREA - NIGHT

A bathroom door opens and Agnes stumbles out. The door closes behind her. She saunters down the hall and disappears up the stairwell.

FADE TO:

INT. TRAIN BATHROOM - NIGHT

Salem is seated on the TOILET, his head in his hands. The motion of the train causes him to ROCK SIDE TO SIDE.

SALEM

(mumbling to himself)

Agnes. Hmmm. Agnes, Agnes, Agnes.  
Who would have thought.. Aaaaaaaag-  
nessssssssss.

His head slumps forward. He has fallen asleep.

INT. ENGINE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

WIDE ANGLE SHOT of the engine room. We see the engineer, the windshield, the tracks ahead illuminated in the train's bright headlights.

The ENGINEER sleeps. NO ONE IS DRIVING THE TRAIN.

This time, however, he sleeps straight up, in no danger of falling out of his chair.

Several RED SIGNALS flash by the window and then another set of HEADLIGHTS appear dead ahead.

The approaching headlights grow larger and larger.

SUDDENLY THE OTHER TRAIN APPEARS IN OUR HEADLIGHTS. WE HEAR ITS HORN BLARING.

The engineer snaps awake, HORROR STRIKES HIS FACE. It's too late. The engine room disintegrates.

In the coach cars, people snap awake in time to see the fiery horror tearing down on them down the aisles.

EXT. BARREN STRETCH OF TRACK - NIGHT

The two engines COLLIDE and devour one another in a fiery head-on. Coach cars mash into one another and fold up like accordions.

THE EXPLOSIONS LIGHT UP THE DARK NIGHT LIKE THE SUN.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN BATHROOM - NIGHT

Salem snaps awake from a nightmare SCREAMING.

INT. LOWER LEVEL BATHROOM AREA - NIGHT

Salem stands staring out the open exit door window, letting the wind wipe clean the slate of his mind.

SERIES OF SHOTS AS NIGHT BECOMES DAY

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LOWER LEVEL BATHROOM AREA - DAY

Salem SMOKING a cigarette, still in the window. His hand SHAKES. His face looks haggard, horrible. He hasn't slept all night.

A large warning sign on the door reads, OPENING WINDOW STRICTLY PROHIBITED!

The SOUNDS of a 2-way radio and a conductor's HEAVY FOOTFALLS can be heard coming down the stairs.

Salem recognizes the sounds immediately, tosses his cigarette, closes the window and resumes staring out of it.

We DO NOT YET SEE the conductor's FACE.

CONDUCTOR

Is that you smoking down here?

Salem peers out the window.

SALEM

No.

CONDUCTOR

Because you know, the smoking room is in the next car. May I see your ticket?

Salem, his back still to the conductor, reaches into his breast pocket and turns just enough to thrust his ticket and some sort of I.D. at the conductor.

CONDUCTOR

A reporter? Very well then, if there's anything I can do for you, you just ask for Johnny, okay?

CLOSE ON Salem's face. He is suddenly terror-stricken.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

A dimly lit sleeper room. Lower bunk P.O.V. as Johnny peers down from the top bunk and grins.

JOHNNY

You've never had a wet dream?

END FLASHBACK

Salem SWOONS, nearly falls over.

CONDUCTOR

Are you all right? Do you want to lie down?

Salem whirls around, blinks dizzily.

NOW WE SEE that the Conductor is not the Johnny from Salem's past. He has black hair, and angular face and is far too young.

SALEM

Holy Fuck.

INT. COACH SEATS - DAY

Salem appears in the glass behind a door, the door slides open, Salem walks hurriedly down the aisle to his seat. Neither Jackie, Agnes or Buzz are anywhere to be seen.

SALEM

Shit!

Salem picks up the pace. He passes through another car, two more sets of doors, and descends the stairs to the cafe.

He looks. They're not there. The snack bar steward shoots him a curious look.

Salem mounts the stairs, RUNS back the way he came, past his seat, then down another set of stairs to his car's bathroom area.

The exit area is empty.

SALEM

Shit!

Salem opens the window as the train comes to a complete stop. He sticks his head out.

Several cars down Lynsie and Buzz STEP OFF. Buzz is carrying Lynsie's bag. Jackie steps off behind them.

SALEM

Hey! Hey, Buzz!

Unheard, Salem SLAMS the window shut. His hand moves to the door latch, hesitates.

FREEZE SHOT

SALEM(V.O.)

I had always wanted to open one of these doors. Preferably at 70 miles and hour with a freight train passing in the other direction in a mad, screaming steel Technicolor blur just inches away, but this would have to do.

BACK TO SCENE

Salem opens the door, leaps out and RUNS down the platform.

JACKIE

Well, if it isn't Mr. Disappear in the Night!

BUZZ

Hey, Salem! Glad you could make it.

LYNSIE

Hi Salem.

Salem leans down to hug the petite Lynsie.

SALEM

Hey Lynsie. I just remembered a few minutes ago that this was your stop. But where are you guys going?

BUZZ

They said over the train's p.a. that we'd be delayed here for an hour.

JACKIE

We thought we'd see Lynsie off in style. She said she knows of a place nearby that makes great Bloody Marys.

SALEM

Now that's the best news I've heard all morning. Hey, anybody seen Agnes?

Everyone shrugs, shakes their heads.

SALEM

Hmm. She musta got off last night. Her and Eric, I mean.

Jackie shoots him a knowing glance.

JACKIE

Uhuh.

INT. AL & VIC'S TAVERN - DAY

Jackie, Salem, Lynsie and Buzz are seated along the bar. Aside from the 12-stool bar, there are half a dozen tables in the narrow, 60-year old bar.

There are two VERY OLD MEN tending bar. Dust covers an overwhelming array of knickknacks and decor.

On the bar sit giant jars of pickled pigs feet and pickled eggs. A sign on the wall reads, "GIZZARDS FOR SALE, \$5 A POUND, \$3 A HALF POUND."

A middle-aged DRUNK COUPLE are arguing at a table right behind Salem and Jackie. The clock on the wall says it's 7:45.

DRUNK MAN

(slurring)

I'm telling you the truth, Baby. You know I wouldn't lie to you, Baby.

DRUNK WOMAN

(slurring)

Is that so? God, you're a piece of work. Bartender, another whiskey.

DRUNK MAN

What about me, Baby?

DRUNK WOMAN

What about you?

DRUNK MAN

Okay. You win. Let's go home and have grudge sex.

ANGLE ON Jackie, Salem, Lynsie and Buzz.

BUZZ

I've decided to detrain here, spend Christmas with Lynsie.

SALEM

No shit! Well all right, Buzz. Got yourself an American woman.

JACKIE

You go, girl.

LYNSIE

I guess that leaves just you two.

JACKIE

(to Salem)

Yep. You're stuck with little ole me  
all the way to Boston.

Salem purses his lips and raises his eyebrows.

SALEM

Oooh, noooo!

Jackie elbows him affectionately. Salem pulls out his pill  
stash, pours out six blue capsules, slides three to Jackie  
and eats the others.

SALEM

Here's to the sole survivors. Um, you  
might wanna eat just one of those now  
and save the others. Eat them all now  
and I might have to carry you back to  
the train.

JACKIE

What about you? You just ate all  
three!

SALEM

Yeah, I did, didn't I?

Jackie eyes the bartender warily, pops one capsule.

Salem looks nervously at the last two blue pills on the  
counter.

SALEM

Honestly, I thought these were  
something else.

JACKIE

What are they?

SALEM

Demoral. It's a little like heroin.  
Very strong.

JACKIE

Ooh-wee. Here we go!

CUT TO:

INT. AL & VIC'S TAVERN - DAY

The clock on the wall now reads 8:30. Everyone's drinks are drained.

JACKIE

Um, I hate to break it up, kids, but we should be heading back. Love to spend the holidays with you Lynsie, but...

Salem is chewing on a pickled green bean from his drink, making loud SUCKING SOUNDS with his straw as he attempts to drain a last drop from his glass. His head is practically in the glass.

SALEM

(slurring strongly)  
Man those were good bloodies.

Jackie is also very high but nowhere near as gone as Salem.

JACKIE

Oh, shit.

The four RISE and amble toward the exit.

JACKIE/LYNSIE

Thanks, Al! Thanks Vic!

The two old bartenders turn and WAVE.

AL/VIC

Thank you, kids! Merry Christmas!

SALEM

Dynamite bloodies. You guys rock!

Al gives a thumbs-up as the four EXIT.

EXT. SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Jackie, Lynsie, Buzz and Salem stand on the street in the awkward moment of parting. Salem is leaning on Jackie. Buzz pulls himself away from Lynsie just long enough to allow the others to say goodbye.

JACKIE

Buzz, hold him will ya. Bye, Lynsie.  
It was nice getting to know ya.

Buzz supports Salem while Jackie and Lynsie embrace.

LYNSIE

Bye, Jackie.

SALEM

Bye you guys. It's been beautiful!  
Good bye sweet Lynsie. Thank you for  
putting up with a bunch of drunk  
crazies.

LYNSIE

Hey! Don't leave me out of that.

SALEM

All right, you drunk crazy. Don't  
break Buzz's heart.

BUZZ

Take care of him!

JACKIE

I'll try!

Salem waves goodbye as Jackie helps him cross the street.

They come up to a liquor store.

JACKIE

Ooh! Supplies!

Jackie and Salem enter the liquor store.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - DAY

Jackie exits the liquor store holding a jug of wine in one  
hand and a swaggering Salem in the other.

They round a corner, and the train comes into view.

JACKIE

Wait! I want clove cigarettes. I gotta go back.

Salem looks warily at the train.

JACKIE

Can you stand right here with the wine? Promise not to go anywhere? I'll be right back.

SALEM

What about the train? We might miss the train.

Jackie places the wine at Salem's feet and runs back.

Oblivious, Salem swaggers off toward the train.

Salem approaches the train from the front. He sees the engineer is not in his seat, and that there are still people standing outside the doors smoking.

SALEM

Phew! That was close! Jackie?

Salem looks over his shoulder a second, then returns his attention to the giant, idling engine before him.

Checking that no one is watching, he steps off the platform onto the tracks directly in front of the engine. It is a big step and he almost falls.

Regaining his balance, he assumes an authoritative stance and holds out an arm as if commanding the train to halt.

He LAUGHS to himself. Then, either realizing what he's doing is not funny or suddenly hit with a chill, his LAUGH stops short, he frowns and quickly stumbles back up on the platform.

As he starts to pass the front of the engine to walk down alongside it, something in the corner of vision stops him cold.

THE BLOOD DRAINS FROM HIS FACE.

Salem's P.O.V. as he turns to see the WOMAN IN THE BLUE DRESS whose suicide he witnessed a decade before. She is smoking a cigarette and staring right at him.

The world tilts on its axis as SALEM BLACKS OUT AND HITS THE PLATFORM.

FADE TO:

EXT. TRAIN IN MOTION - DAY AND NIGHT

High speed time-lapse sequence of train's journey through a day and a night as TOM WAITS MUSIC PLAYS.

TOM WAITS' LYRICS(V.O.)

Well I'm going to New York City, and  
I'm leaving on a train, if you want to  
stay behind and wait til I get back  
again, today's gray skies, tomorrow is  
tears, you'll have to wait til  
yesterday is here. If you wanna go  
where the rainbows end, you'll have to  
say goodbye. All our dreams come true  
baby, up ahead, and it's out where your  
memories lie. Well the road is out  
before me, the moon is shining bright.  
What I want you to remember as I  
disappear tonight, today's gray skies,  
tomorrow is tears, you'll have to wait  
til yesterday is here.

INT. BOSTON'S SOUTH STATION - DAWN

Salem's P.O.V. as his eyes open and slowly focus on the world around him.

As the haze clears, the first thing we see is a black & white photo of a young Amelia Earhart. It so completely fills the frame that it's as though it was being thrust in his face.

ANGLE ON Salem sprawled out on a huge, throne-like curved oak bench, elegant for a train station. He rubs his eyes.

Suspended from the ceiling four stories above him is the massive portrait of Earhart and two others of Einstein and Edison with the words THINK DIFFERENT.

SALEM

Think different. Huh. Lotta good that's done me.

Salem looks around him at his surroundings. A quizzical look is on his face.

SALEM(V.O.)

Where was I? I had no idea. I had no recollection of getting here. And as I thought about it longer, I had no memory of anything since Agnes and the bathroom.

Still lying down, Salem grabs the shirtsleeve of a MAN ROLLING by in a wheelchair.

SALEM

Excuse me. Can you tell me, uh.. where I am?

ROLLING MAN

You're kidding? You Able Bodied people make me laugh. Especially a dink like you who don't know how lucky you are cuz you're too damn busy trying to kill yourself. What was it? Acid? Cocaine? Night Train?

Salem sits up, adjusts his sunglasses.

SALEM

(mumbled)

Pain killers. Doctor's orders.

ROLLING MAN

Pain! You don't know dick about pain.

SALEM

Look, Buddy. I didn't ask you to role play my father. I just..

ROLLING MAN

Fine!

The man pushes himself off.

ROLLING MAN

(yelling as he goes)

Boston! USA! Earth! Finest fucking  
clams in the Universe! Ahahaha! And  
here they come!

Just then a tide of commuters, predominantly women in office attire, warm jackets and sneakers, rushes into the station from an arriving commuter train.

Salem sits dumbfounded as a tide of humanity speed-walks past him.

Salem's P.O.V. as he watches the tide come and go, his focus eventually shifting to the giant portrait of Amelia Earhart.

SALEM(V.O.)

My God. Look at them. Where are they going? Granted, I didn't exactly know where I was headed, but I was pretty sure I'd had fun getting here. Had they had fun? Waking up to an alarm clock in the dark for twenty years, answering to people they hated all day, returning home in the dark half the year, ingesting corporate messages to think for themselves when in fact the corporations wanted nothing of the kind from them. And in the end, watering down their dreams repeatedly until there was nothing left but water, the water of puddles, the water of toilets, the water of tears.

RISING SHOT of Salem seated on bench growing smaller and smaller amidst the sea of commuters as WE RISE SLOWLY to the 4-story high ceiling, then out into the cold, gray Boston winter morning, the dense falling snow, AND CONTINUE SKYWARD.

SALEM(V.O.)

Suddenly being me doesn't seem so bad. Suddenly I'm almost giddy as I peer skyward and interpret Amelia's message as written directly to me, an affirmation of my every breath scrawled across the station sky. Sometimes you just forget, like the guy in the wheelchair said. When you've lived like I have, always on the fringe, the edge, the outer limits, you forget sometimes that it's okay to be different because your whole life is such an exaggeration, such a Mad Hatter morph on the word different, and all the messages coming in from the so-called real world chant freak, uncool, wrong, aberration. Enough of that and pretty soon you either surrender to their side, you learn to tune it out, or you freak out and wanna die.

INT. TRAIN COACH CAR - MORNING

The weather outside the train window is grim, gray, SNOWING.

We see Salem seated by the window, a stout mid-30s Bostoner named Bob seated beside him.

BOB gestures wildly, telling Salem stories of his life, career. Salem occasionally scribbles in his notebook, NODS acknowledgment.

BOB

(thick Boston accent)

So we finish the project, and it's a real big tadoo. I'm the foreman on the thing, so the whole thing rests on my shoulders, right. So all the big wigs and my boss and I pile into the chopper and go for a test run and thwack! wouldn't you know it the damn thing's not been built to spec. The chopper gets hung up on a cable, snaps the cable, towers start falling..

SALEM(V.O.)

I was straining to remember something about yesterday. I had remembered the Demoral by now. Demon Demoral. But where had I lost Jackie? Had she deposited me on the bench in South Station? I just couldn't remember. Chances were good I never would.

BOB

..Anyway, the chopper pilot barely got us outa there alive, but as soon as we land, bamm! I'm fired.

SALEM(V.O.)

Fired. It had an almost erotic ring to it. I'd never been fired from a job. Suddenly I wanted to run right and get one just so I could then get fired.

BOB

But heh! I'm a hearty New Englander, bro, I don't give up easy. I do a little searching and come up with proof that it was the client's fault, not mine. Then the shit really hit the fan. My company sues the client, wins megabucks, and I got my job back.

The train parallels a major freeway CHOKED WITH TRAFFIC.

Through the falling snow, a giant sign atop a factory clearly announces GILLETTE WORLD SHAVING HEADQUARTERS.

A sign on a truck reads, G.O.D., translated in smaller letters as GUARANTEED OVERNIGHT DELIVERY. Salem LAUGHS and shakes his head when he sees it.

BOB

I like you, Salem. Anybody who would ride a train for three and a half days to go where flying would get you in six hours has gotta be half crazy, and I like that. And you've been writing the whole time?

Bob leans in and tries to read Salem's handwriting.

SALEM

Well, I partied a bit.

BOB

Fuck! That's some crazy handwriting!  
And you can read that?

SALEM

I can.

BOB

Is that shorthand?

SALEM

No. It's my own invention, Bob. An illegible combination of wine-pressed vowels and outrageous consonants.

Beat. He thinks about that for a second and then bursts out LAUGHING.

BOB

You're a fucking riot!

SALEM

Thanks.

SALEM(V.O)

And then he was gone.

Bob FADES AWAY leaving an empty seat beside Salem. Salem continues writing in his steno.

SALEM(V.O)

Just like that. Before he detrained, however, he related one of the more gonzo tales of drunken, spirited revelry I'd ever heard. It seems he and his buddies stole the goal post after their team's victory and paraded it through the streets and straight into a high tension power line, electrocuting all of them. I wasn't sure if that was funny or not, but I admired his embrace of chaos, just as he admired mine. Rail excursions are

like that, allowing instant intimacy  
with strangers, then snatching them  
away with equal velocity.

Outside the scenery is post-apocalyptic. Dozens of boarded  
up warehouses pass by. A few which are not boarded up are  
full of broken windows. Smoke stacks steam in the cold  
air.

Salem watches in silence.

There is rusted metal refuse everywhere. The rusty hulk of  
an old garbage truck without its cab leans into the earth  
like a slaughtered elephant.

INT. COACH SEATS - DAY

Salem peers nervously out the window as the train pulls  
into a station. The platform is packed with people waiting  
to board.

The weather outside remains gray and snowing.

SALEM(V.O.)

Suddenly I was stricken with panic,  
terrified of the scuzmo beast woman who  
was sure to nab the empty seat beside  
me. Think quick! Should I feign  
sleep? Puke? Fart? Remove my shoes  
and socks, setting them out to air  
beside me? Oh, you whimsical prankster  
God, you! I know just what you're  
thinking!

INT. COACH SEATS - DAY

OVERHEAD SHOT of Salem prepared for the worst as passengers  
fill the seats.

A lovely YOUNG MOTHER, hippyish, mid-20's, cradling a baby,  
sits down next to Salem. Immediately the baby starts to  
CRY. The mother begins rocking him, but to no avail.

CLOSE ON Salem's face tight to the window, his arm up  
shielding himself from the cries, his face cringing. He

reaches into his pants pocket, pulls out a lone BLUE CAPSULE, lifts it to his mouth and..

The CRYING CEASES.

Curious, Salem peeks around at baby and mother.

Salem's P.O.V. The woman is breast-feeding the baby. Salem watches as a wet spot grows on the woman's blouse directly over the unoccupied breast.

The woman turns. She catches him looking, but only smiles.

Salem quickly stashes the uneaten pill.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm so sorry. He's normally real good. We're probably the last people you wanted sitting next to you, huh?

SALEM

Oh, no! It's fine. Really. I love babies, really.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm Miyanna. Think cave woman. Me, Anna! And this little guy.. is Salem.

SALEM

What?

MIYANNA

Salem. What's your name?

SALEM

Yes! I mean, Salem.

MIYANNA

What?

SALEM

That's my name! Salem is my name, too.

Miyanna looks at him warily, questioning.

SALEM

Yeah. Really!

Beat.

MIYANNA

(slowly)

Wow. I knew there was something about you. I felt it the moment I looked at you.

SALEM

You did?

MIYANNA

I did.

Beat. Miyanna smiles warmly and extends a finger of her baby-cradling hands.

CLOSE ON FINGER

It is her RING finger, sans the ring. Salem reaches out and shakes it.

MIYANNA

Hi, Big Salem.

Salem's P.O.V. As Miyanna returns her attention to her baby, she suddenly, slowly begins to GLOW with a warm light like summer sun shimmering through clear water.

SHOT FROM ABOVE as Salem, stunned and giddy, throws his head back smiling. The divine glow around Miyanna and baby continues to grow and brighten.

Salem opens his eyes and looks back at her.

SALEM(V.O.)

Wow. Miyanna. A goddess. A mother! Suddenly, I forget where I was headed and I didn't give a rats ass about recalling the events of my day lost to Demoral. Suddenly, there was just Miyanna and Salem and me.

The divine glow now spreads to engulf Salem as well. Miyanna looks to him and smiles.

SALEM(V.O.)

There was no America, no United Corporations thereof. There was no Amtrak, no train, no death, no fear of growing up or growing old. There was no forever, and no never-never. If this was a dream, I thought, I could get used to this.

EXT. TRAIN MOVING DOWN TRACKS - DAY

The dark and stoic face of the train moves toward us in the blowing snow. The sky is ashen, somber.

RISING SHOT as engine passes beneath and to the side of us.

As the many dark windows of the many passenger cars come into view, one window stands out, its warm, orange glow spilling out of the rear of Salem's car. It is like a lone, healthy pulse in a corpse-strewn winter battlefield.

INT. COACH SEATS - DAY

Little Salem now sleeps peacefully in Miyanna's lap.

MIYANNA

..and your brother Pierre is an airline steward.

SALEM

That's right.

MIYANNA

A real globe-trotting family. So, what's your girlfriend think of you wandering the Earth on trains?

SALEM

No girlfriend. No wife. And what about you? You, uh, on your way to meet up with Salem's daddy in New York or something?

MIYANNA

No. We're going to Connecticut.  
Salem's daddy is dead.

SALEM  
Oh, Jesus! I'm so sorry.

MIYANNA  
Yeah. Well, I'm sorry that Salem won't  
have a father. Other than that...

SALEM  
Yikes.

MIYANNA  
He was a bad man.

SALEM  
The dad, was he.. was his name..

MIYANNA  
Salem? No. I named the baby.

SALEM  
It's a rare name. How did you..

MIYANNA  
It came to me in a dream a long time  
ago. Hmm.

SALEM  
Hmm. Hmm what?

MIYANNA  
Aw, it's nothing.

Salem shifts in his seat, touches Miyanna's shoulder and  
looks her right in the eye.

SALEM  
No, please. Please tell me.

MIYANNA  
Well, it's just that..

SALEM  
Yes?

MIYANNA

I.. I was riding a train in the dream.

FADE TO:

INT. COACH CAR - DAY

MIYANNA

In the dream, I was going somewhere special. I don't remember where. But I was happy. Really happy.

BEGIN MONTAGE

MIYANNA(V.O.)

It was a brilliant, beautiful sunny day. Outside my window, there were miles and miles of pure white sand dunes in a long narrow strip of land, beyond which an azure blue sea stretched forever. The sand dunes were out the other side window as well. It was as if the train were sailing on the sand. Anyway, suddenly I just knew I had arrived. I looked out the window again and we were stopped. I reached for my suitcase but it was gone. In its place was a package elegantly wrapped in silver and gold foil paper.

Miyanna on train smiling. Sugar sand dunes and ocean going by. Miyanna regarding the package on the seat beside her.

MIYANNA(V.O.)

I took the package and stepped off the train into the sand. I climbed a dune, sat down with the package in my lap and smiled out at the sea.

Miyanna carrying the package off the train, walking off into the dunes. Miyanna seated Indian-style atop dune, package in her lap.

MIYANNA(V.O.)

When it got dark, I laid down and slept. Oh! If I could only describe

that sleep. It was the most sensual  
sleep I've never had, dream  
sleep. Amazing.

Miyanna sleeping contentedly.

MIYANNA(V.O.)

In the morning, I awoke to the warmth  
of the sun on my naked skin. Now my  
clothes were gone, too! But the  
package remained. At last I opened it  
and what do you think was inside? The  
name Salem. Just like that. It was  
just the word, just floating there like  
smoke.

Miyanna awaking naked. Miyanna opening package, seeing the  
name SALEM floating in air.

END MONTAGE

Salem sits, his head facing Miyanna, his eyes closed.

MIYANNA

That's it. That's how Salem got his  
name.

Salem smiles, opens his eyes.

SALEM

That's the most beautiful thing I've  
ever heard.

MIYANNA

How did you get the name Salem?

SALEM

I was born there. Salem, Massachusetts.

MIYANNA

Oh.

Just then Little Salem wakes up and begins COOING quietly.  
Salem reaches over to touch his head.

SALEM

May I?

MIYANNA

(excitedly)

Yes!

Miyanna hands Salem the baby. Salem is smiling so hard his face hurts.

SALEM

Hello there little buddy! My name is Salem, too. Gosh, he's beautiful.

CLOSE ON Miyanna, her head tilted to the side taking in the scene of the two Salems with obvious great pleasure.

MIYANNA

Tomorrow is Christmas, Salem. Are you going to be with family?

Salem hands back the baby. Miyanna sees in his eyes the anxiety that has suddenly pushed out the joy. Beat.

MIYANNA

I'm sorry. It's none of my business.

SALEM

No. It's okay. I'm not well, Miyanna. And you.. you're radiant, so fresh and young and alive. I can't.. you, I mean..

Miyanna touches a finger to Salem's lips.

MIYANNA

Ssshhhh. It's all right. You don't have to explain.

Beat. Salem turns to the window, his ragged, tired face returned.

SALEM

I'm not going home for Christmas. I don't have a home. But I do have something that I have to take care of, something I have to finish.

Beat.

MIYANNA

Salem, I want you to come home with us.  
Whatever it is, it can wait. Christmas  
is a time to be with family, with..  
loved ones. Salem?

CLOSE ON Salem, tears streaming down his face.

MIYANNA

Salem? Whatever it..

Salem turns fast to face Miyanna. The sight of him  
frightens her.

SALEM

(shouting through tears)  
NO! It can't wait! You don't  
understand. It can't wait.

Baby Salem STARTS TO CRY. Miyanna gives him a nipple and  
quickly moves to comfort Big Salem. She scoots over, takes  
his hand and leans into him.

SALEM

(sobbing)  
I'm sorry.

MIYANNA

It's okay. He's okay. I think he's  
worried about you.

Salem LAUGHS lightly through his tears.

SALEM

Something terrible happened ten years  
ago on Christmas Day. I was there.  
God, all I want to do is go home, but I  
can't. I have to go back. I have to..

Miyanna turns Salem's face and KISSES HIM, lightly as  
first, then harder.

SERIES OF SHORT CUTS of them kissing passionately,  
continuously over a short time.

FADE TO:

INT. COACH SEATS - LATE AFTERNOON

Salem, Miyanna and the baby sleep all leaned together.

A jolt of the train SNAPS SALEM AWAKE.

Salem looks around groggily, smiles when he realizes where he is and with whom.

He looks out the window and realizes the train has stopped. It is getting dark out.

Salem's P.O.V. We peer through the blowing snow for signs of the station name and FREEZE ON THE FIGURE IN LIGHT BLUE.

THE WOMAN IN THE BLUE DRESS STARES BACK.

We HEAR Salem's HEART BEATING HARD.

He turns his gaze away from the window, stares straight ahead.

Beat.

SALEM  
Miyanna. Wake up.

Miyanna stirs awake. Her eyes search his.

MIYANNA  
You're going, aren't you?

SALEM  
Yes. I have to go now.

Miyanna embraces Salem. He pulls away, steps in front of her and is in the aisle. Salem grabs his bag and takes one last look at Miyanna and Baby Salem.

Miyanna is a strong woman, but a few tears squeeze out. She speaks without looking at Salem.

MIYANNA  
My dream. It was you, Salem, all along. I know it now. I.. gave him

your name because.. I didn't believe  
you existed. I'm glad you exist,  
Salem.

Salem is too choked with emotion to speak. He turns, walks  
down the aisle and disappears down the stairs.

ANGLE ON Miyanna watching Salem exit the train, cross the  
platform and disappear again in the snow.

CONDUCTOR

All aboard!

The CONDUCTOR picks up a yellow foot stool, places it back  
inside train, closes the door and the train begins to move  
away.

We see Miyanna in the window holding Baby Salem up lest  
Salem appear through the snow. He doesn't.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

A cab pulls up. Salem gets out, pulls his bag out behind  
him, and closes the door.

CLOSE ON Salem as he scans the barren winter-scape, his  
breath clouding in the cold air.

INT. MOTEL LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

There are yard sale paintings on the wall of covered  
bridges, farm houses, cows.

A plastic palm tree sits dusty in the corner by the door.

An OLD MAN appears at the counter.

OLD MAN

Heck of a night to be out traveling.

SALEM

Yeah. Single room, please. Cash.

OLD MAN

Not expecting anyone else? That's a shame, Christmas Eve and all.

Salem says nothing, hands the man a hundred dollar bill and his I.D.

OLD MAN

New Mexico? My, you really are a long way from home.

SALEM

Someplace around here I can get a drink?

The Old Man sizes Salem up. He beckons Salem to lean forward, as though he has a secret.

OLD MAN

It'd be an awful shame for a nice young man like you to be alone on Christmas Eve. This old gal from my bingo group, she has a couple of young ladies that do odd jobs for her. Real good looking. I could call her up. Be real discreet.

Salem stares at the Old Man.

SALEM

No. Thank you though. Bar?

OLD MAN

Suit ya-self. Killingworth Tavern. Out of the door of your room, left, one block down, left again, can't miss it. You're in room 27. Welcome to Killingworth.

Salem turns and heads to the door. At the door, he stops.

CLOSE ON Salem's face, his eyes closed. His face is a blank slate. He turns and says..

SALEM

How much for uh..

OLD MAN

The change from your hundred would do.

SALEM

Great. Well, um.. Merry Christmas then.

OLD MAN

Uh!

The Old Man gestures for Salem to give him the money. Salem walks back and opens his hand. The Old Man takes all of it.

OLD MAN

I'll have her meet you at the bar.

INT. KILLINGWORTH TAVERN - CHRISTMAS EVE

The tavern's decor is a cross between a taxidermy shop and a ship's quarters. It is homey and dark and Salem smiles a tired smile as he looks around.

The place is conspicuously EMPTY. We never see the bartender.

The only other life in the bar is Jimmy Stewart in black and white on the television.

Salem is hunkered over a pint of stout sipping at it and watching Jimmy Stewart stumble around the streets of Potterville in an anxious stupor.

FADE TO:

INT. KILLINGWORTH TAVERN - HALF HOUR LATER

Salem's head rests upon his hands, which are folded atop his EMPTY PINT GLASS. He watches the TV when his eyes aren't closed.

WE HEAR the triumphant sounds of Jimmy Stewart yelling Merry Christmas through the streets at the end of the movie.

A VOICE speaks to Salem from behind him.

VOICE

Every year, I look forward to Christmas  
just so I can see this movie.

Salem turns around to see DANIELLE, an attractive woman in  
her late twenties.

SALEM

Why don't you just buy the video?

DANIELLE

It's only magic at Christmas.

INT. ROOM 27 - CHRISTMAS EVE

Salem lies on his back on the motel bed in only his black  
thermal long john pants. Danielle lies beside him on her  
side in a red silk slip. She draws parabolas on his bare  
belly with her long fingers.

DANIELLE

What would you like for Christmas  
first?

Beat.

SALEM

You know, Danielle, I don't want  
anything. I wasn't gonna do this..  
I've never done this. But I.. I didn't  
want to be alone tonight. Do you  
understand? I just want you to stay  
with me tonight, long as you can,  
that's all.

DANIELLE

I understand. I'm not going anywhere.  
I promise. If you change your mind...

We HEAR only the sounds of their breathing.

FADE TO:

INT. ROOM 27 - AN HOUR LATER

They are beneath the covers now. The light is out. Salem sleeps soundly in Danielle's capable embrace.

FADE TO:

INT. ROOM 27 - EARLY CHRISTMAS MORNING

A dressed and ready Salem stands by the side of the bed watching Danielle sleep. He smiles and blows her a kiss, MOUTHING the words THANK YOU.

Salem goes to his bag on the dresser, pulls out a yellowed newspaper clipping, unfolds it.

The headline reads: A GRIM CHRISTMAS FOR KILLINGWORTH AS AMTRAK CLAIMS ANOTHER LIFE.

Salem folds the article, replaces it in his bag, zips it up and stands staring at it a moment.

WITHOUT TAKING HIS BAG, he turns and quietly exits the room.

PAN TO bedside table on which Salem has left a gift for Danielle.

ECU ON NOTE atop pile of Salem's steno notebook journals.

The note reads: MERRY CHRISTMAS DANIELLE. HERE'S A STORY TO TELL YOUR GRANDCHILDREN.

EXT. MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Salem steps into a taxi, closes the door. The taxi drives off. It is a sunny Christmas morning.

EXT. ROADSIDE - LATER

The taxi drives down a rural stretch of road, pulls over and stops. Salem gets out, shuts the door. The taxi drives off leaving him, essentially, in the middle of nowhere.

Salem starts walking across a snow-covered field.

HIGH SHOT of countryside as Salem walks and walks and walks, leaving a trail of his footsteps in the not-too deep snow.

Salem comes to a copse of trees. HE STOPS TO GET HIS BEARING, then continues walking. It is a small wood that runs alongside a river.

Across from the river running parallel to it is a set of railroad tracks.

ANGLE ON Salem as he stares at the tracks.

A hundred yards downstream there is a narrow wooden footbridge. Salem sets out for it.

TOM WAITS MUSIC PLAYS AS SALEM WALKS.

TOM WAITS LYRICS(V.O.)

When you walk through the garden, you gotta watch your back. Well I beg your pardon, walk the straight and narrow track. If you walk with Jesus, he's gonna save your soul. You gotta keep the Devil way down in the hole. He's got the fire and the fury at his command. Well you don't have to worry if you hold on to Jesus' hand. We'll all be safe from Satan when the thunder rolls. We just gotta keep the Devil way down in the hole.

As he walks he never takes his eyes off the tracks across the river. The snow crunches beneath his feet.

At the bridge he slowly crosses. Across the tracks in the distance stands a small abandoned house in a field surrounded by woods.

Salem begins to walk up the tracks in the direction from whence he's come. Now as he walks, he stares at the house.

SALEM(V.O.)

Could that have been her house? I didn't know. Ten years had passed and I had never bothered to learn anything about the woman we'd killed. And

suddenly I realized I didn't even know her name. How many times had I read that article? Terrible. Merry Christmas, Mrs. So-n-so, anonymous dead citizen of Killingworth, Connecticut. God, what a waste of synapses I am. What an evolutionary joke.

Here Salem's internal dialogue SWITCHES to external. Now he talks to himself as he walks the tracks.

SALEM

(loudly)

Yes! That's right, God. We're better than you now! We've figured out ways to cheat death.. well, no, okay we're not quite that far yet. But boy jolly gee whiz watch us prolong the inevitable ad infinitum! Yes, here we have several examples of human genetic mutations who would never stand a chance in the wild but who are now living happy and productive synaptic lives inside the prison of their own heads thanks to our genius. And You know the dribbly people will likely be rewriting the science books and making Star Trek fiction reality in no time thanks to the fact that they are not burdened by the distractions and sinful temptations of copulation and massive drug and alcohol consumption that lead to the type of brain degradation and evolutionary treason exhibited in this sorry human specimen over here!

Salem pauses to look skyward, points at himself and confides in Heaven quietly before continuing his rant.

SALEM

(whispering)

That would be me, Lord.

Salem resumes walking.

SALEM

Yes, here we have a man, a shameful excuse for a man, who for reasons unknown to any of us, can't quite cut the sociological mustard and so seeks constantly to lose himself in alcohol and drugs and in so doing has so polluted, diluted and convoluted his God-given brain that he can't remember jack-doodly-squat about what he did a week ago or ten years ago or who he was with yesterday or..

Salem stops, squats on the tracks and begins crying.

Salem's P.O.V. of the river as he wipes the tears from his eyes and sobs some more.

A VOICE interrupts his sobbing.

VOICE

What are you doing?

Startled, Salem stumbles sideways on the tracks. Looking up, he sees the WOMAN IN THE BLUE DRESS standing a few feet away on the tracks. He SCREAMS. She smokes.

WOMAN IN BLUE

Why are you here?

Salem is back-pedaling on his ass in the snow.

WOMAN IN BLUE

What? Are you afraid of me?

SALEM

I came here to..

WOMAN IN BLUE

What? To what?

SALEM

To see this place. To try and understand.

WOMAN IN BLUE

Understand? Right. Jumping in front of a fucking train? That's understanding?

SALEM

I don't know. I'm lost. I'm tired. I  
drink too much. You name it.

The WOMAN IN BLUE blows smoke rings. Her cigarette never  
smokes down.

WOMAN IN BLUE

Look, being dead ain't fun. You think  
it's all bad, being drunk and crazy all  
the time, huh? Being dead, you don't  
get to get drunk. You don't have the  
option to get cancer from smoking or  
fry your brain with drugs. You don't  
get to choose. You don't get to make  
love here. You don't get to smell  
little babies. You don't get to howl  
into the wind and feel it in your hair.  
You don't get to do shit. All you get  
to do is watch. Big whoop.

Salem sits on the tracks stunned.

BEGIN FLASHBACK MONTAGE

1. The baby Salem in his arms.
2. Lysie's hands drawing rainbow figures from the black.
3. Agnes grinning as she leads him into the bathroom.
4. Buzz's face, his hair blowing in the wind as they lean  
out the window of the train.
5. Miyanna's face, her expression full of love.

MIYANNA(V.O.)

I'm glad you exist, Salem.

BACK TO SCENE

Salem crumbles to the earth sobbing. His cheek rests  
against a rail.

Salem's CRIES RISE up into the trees. It is the kind of  
purging of emotions that comes with great grieving.

RISING SHOT of Salem on the tracks wailing, the woman in blue standing nearby.

We climb higher and higher until our perspective allows us to see a freight train approaching far off in the distance.

We HEAR the train's HORN in the distance.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS IN WOODS - CONTINUOUS

WOMAN IN BLUE

So, what's it gonna be? Life? Death?  
Life? Death? Hmm. Tough one.

Making a scale of her arms, the woman in blue weighs the options.

SALEM

(sobbing)  
Leave me alone.

WOMAN IN BLUE

Train's coming. Cigarette?

SALEM

Go away.

WOMAN IN BLUE

I can't. I'm dead, remember? I've got  
a date here everyday at this time.

Salem sits up, looks dumbfounded. He reaches up and takes a lit cigarette from the woman in blue.

EXT. FREIGHT TRAIN ON TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

A freight train ROARS through the forest.

We see the train approach us and pass at speed.

INT. ENGINE ROOM OF FREIGHT TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

The ENGINEER HUMS to himself as he watches the tracks ahead. It is a beautiful day in the countryside.

EXT. SALEM ON TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

Salem smokes and stares at the tracks.

WOMAN IN BLUE

Look, if you're expecting some kind of divine intervention or thinking maybe ghosts can stop trains or do magic spells, you're dead wrong. Ha! Get it?

Salem raises his head, then drops it again.

SALEM

I'm so tired. So tired.

BEGIN CROSS CUT BETWEEN FREIGHT ENGINE AND SALEM ON TRACKS

The train's engine rounds a last curve in the river before the tracks open up into the straight stretch where Salem sits.

This train is moving much slower than the passenger train that killed the woman. Even at its moderate speed, however, it would not be able to stop in time.

The engineer squints. HIS EYES BULGE as he sees Salem on the tracks. He does not see the woman in blue.

HE HITS THE TRAIN'S BRAKES AND HORN SIMULTANEOUSLY.

ENGINEER

Dammit! Come on, get up, you dumb fuck!

WOMAN IN BLUE

(yelling)

Here we go!

Salem sits up, looks dumbfounded.

WOMAN IN BLUE

(yelling)

Don't worry about that guy driving the train! He'll get over it... eventually! Just like you did, huh?!

Salem takes a hit off the cigarette. His face takes on a confused look as he notices the cigarette HAS NOT BURNED DOWN at all.

THE TRAIN'S BRAKES ARE A CONSTANT SCREECH NOW.

SALEM'S P.O.V. of the cigarette smoke billowing past his hand, the approaching engine now filling the background beyond the woman in blue.

ENGINEER

Shit! Shit! Shit! Get up! Get up!  
I don't need this for Christmas! Oh!  
I can't look.

The train is only a few meters away now.

The woman in blue disappears as the train cuts through the space where she stands.

IN SLOW MOTION Salem stands, flicks the cigarette at the locomotive, and dives out of the path of the train in the very last second before impact. His foot clears the steel hull by an inch.

We see him sail through the air and land with a splash in the icy river as the train THUNDERS AND SCREAMS overhead.

Salem SCREAMS from the cold and quickly clambers out of the river. At last, the screeching of the brakes dies as the train comes to a stop. The engine is several cars ahead.

We hear a loud KAA-CHUNK as the boxcars come to a stop. Salem SCREAMS and SCREAMS, but thankfully only from the cold.

FADE TO:

EXT. RURAL TRAIN DEPOT - CHRISTMAS DAY

The same train slowly comes into view as it slows and stops at the depot.

After a pause, the door to the engine opens and out steps Salem, wrapped in a gray wool blanket. He climbs down the ladder and onto the platform, waves goodbye to the engineer hanging in the door, and walks toward the depot.

There is a pay phone outside the depot.

Salem digs in his pocket, produces a piece of paper, dials and waits.

SALEM

Hello? Miyanna, it's Salem.

Salem smiles.

RECEDING SHOT OF DEPOT AS WE MOVE SKYWARD AND TRACK THE TRAINS PROGRESS TO FADE.

SALEM(V.O.)

You know it's funny. But for the sleeping people, the ones who aren't really living life, death is scary. But to those of us for whom life is scary, so intensely wonderful and painful at the same time all the time, death starts to look like a trusted friend who will rescue us when we can't take it anymore. We carry death around in our pocket like an emergency plane ticket or a get out of jail free card. Luckily, life is full of stories of sleeping people who wake up and learn to live, and of suicidal maniacs like me who, just in the nick of time, find the help they need. Be it medicine, counseling, meditation, art, or love. I say, whatever works.

THE END