

FADE IN:

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- AFTERNOON

A sunny, gorgeous Seattle afternoon.

BROM WIKSTROM, 24, flowing shoulder length hair, lean but muscular upper body, atrophied legs, sits in a hand-powered wheelchair, perched at the top of a sloped driveway. He gazes absently at the quiet street below.

A few children play in a yard across the street.

A vast railroad yard looms in the distance. The sounds of BOXCARS CONNECTING competes with the children's PLAYFUL LAUGHTER.

A car turns the corner, proceeds down the street toward Brom's driveway. Brom bows his head, murmurs quietly.

BROM

I beg of you Lord to accept at the
moment of my death my sincere remorse
and sorrow for my sins.

Brom lurches his body forward causing the wheelchair to begin rolling down the driveway. As the chair careens down the pavement the car speeds up, moving closer to the driveway.

The wheelchair, wobbling wildly, hits the street just as the car arrives. The driver makes a last minute maneuver as the wheel chair hits a pot hole and flips over, catapulting Brom into the side of the now stopped car.

The horrified driver leaps out of his car to find a crumpled, motionless Brom, GROANING in extreme pain.

The curious children dash over, stop dead in their tracks, stare at Brom.

DRIVER

Go have your mom call an ambulance!

The children scamper off as Brom stares at the driver, his eyes filled with deep sorrow. A railroad horn BLARES.

INT. OPEN BOXCAR -- LATE AFTERNOON

A continuation of the same railroad horn, louder than before.

Brom, cigarette hanging out of his mouth, scrunched against the wall, near the open door of the boxcar, knees pulled into his chest, bundled in an army surplus coat, shivering cold. To the side of him sits a tattered backpack and a large artists portfolio.

To Brom's left, PAUL HARPER, long hair framing a round, red cheeked, pleasant face, struggles to light his smoke. Each match extinguished immediately in the bitter, cold wind. The unlit cigarette hangs from Paul's lips.

PAUL

Brom.

Brom lazily turns his head toward Paul.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Out of matches.

Brom, arms bundled, leans over to Paul, moving his face close enough so that the two cigarettes come together, successfully lighting Paul's.

Paul leans back, takes a satisfying drag off of the smoke.

PAUL (CONT'D)

New Orleans gotta be a whole lot fuckin' hotter than this.

BROM

If we don't get our asses bumped we'll be there by Mardi Gras.

Paul takes another hit off of his smoke, eyeballs Brom's backpack.

PAUL

Gimme some more of the ham.

BROM

C'mon Paul, we've got to make it last. We could be out here for days.

PAUL

I'm hungry. I just want my half.

Brom grabs the backpack, slides it over within Paul's reach. Paul grabs a hunk of ham out of a bag, chows down on it.

PAUL (CONT'D)

You think we'll get bumped?

EXT. RAILWAY YARD -- MORNING

Brom and Paul lean against a weathered shack, barren snow-covered landscape in the distance. A small bonfire CRACKLES in front of them.

Paul fidgets, tries to sleep. Brom, sketch pad in hand, skillfully draws the scenery in front of him. In the near distance the BLAST of a railroad horn sets them in motion.

Brom stuffs the pad into the portfolio, grabs his backpack, while Paul gathers his belongings.

As the train slows down they toss their stuff into a box car, deftly jump aboard.

INT. BOXCAR -- MORNING

A SCREECHING of the boxcar wheels jar Brom and Paul, waking them from a sound sleep. The train sits still, perched on a bridge crossing the Mississippi River, with the New Orleans skyline filling the background.

Paul looks in awe as Brom excitedly whips out his sketch pad, captures the majestic scene in pencil. Brom grins from ear to ear, truly excited.

PAUL

Where we gonna stay tonight?

BROM

Wherever the music leads us man.

Paul smiles, nods.

PAUL

Far fucking out.

INT. FLOPHOUSE HOTEL LOBBY -- AFTERNOON

Dingy, shabby lobby. CLAYTON, 60's, slumped behind the counter either asleep or passed out. Paul hesitates, then hits the bell, startling Clayton.

Clayton stares at the boys, his face displays profound disapproval.

CLAYTON

I'm not overly fond of hippies.

BROM

I'm an artist not a hippie.

CLAYTON

That particular nuance is a little subtle for me.

Brom reaches into his pocket, pulls out a small wad of bills.

BROM

I have enough bucks for two weeks.

Clayton slaps a room key down on the counter.

CLAYTON

Come to think of it I am fond of hippies... excuse me, artists.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Paul jams the two beds together, making enough room for them to put their belongings on the floor. Brom notices a small picture frame near the window, grabs it.

INSERT: PICTURE FRAME

An image of Jesus Christ holding His Sacred Heart. At the bottom it reads: "Whatsoever is prayed for in My name shall be granted."

Brom blows the dust off of the frame, finds a nail sticking out, carefully hangs it on the otherwise empty and tattered wall.

Paul glances at the frame, frowns.

PAUL

Man, chicks are gonna think we're
"Jesus Freaks" with that thing hangin'
there.

Brom cracks up laughing.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What?

BROM

If I'm lucky enough to get a girl up
here I'll worry about the picture.

PAUL

This is New Orleans man. Babes are
fuckin' waitin' for us man.

EXT. BOURBON STREET -- NIGHT

No place like this on the planet. Narrow street jam-packed with inebriated revelers, lined with two and three story buildings with wrought-iron balconies, dangerously over-loaded with party animals.

Live jazz music flows from every drinking establishment on the street, producing an odd discord that seems to please everyone.

Brom and Paul, two kids in a candy store, plastic cups in hand, make their way through the crowd. They work their way over to a group of long-hairs, seamlessly joining in.

Within moments Paul has made friends with a lovely young woman who gives him a hit off of her joint.

Brom stares toward Paul with a look of mild jealousy.

Out of nowhere appears CELIA, a gorgeous hippie princess with perfect skin, wavy blonde hair, and the wry smile of a smart aleck.

She strolls over to Brom as if he is the only person on Bourbon Street. She speaks with a refined, Southern accent.

CELIA
What town will you be headin' off to
when all this debauchery ends?

BROM
Who says it has to end?

CELIA
Everything ends.

BROM
Art doesn't end.

Celia flashes a faintly puzzled look.

BROM (CONT'D)
Picasso died two years ago but his
paintings will love on for eternity.

CELIA
The Nazi's destroyed dozens of
Picassos. What about those?

Brom laughs, a hearty laugh.

BROM
Are we the only people on Bourbon
Street discussing Picasso and Nazi's?

Celia smiles, sizes up the crowd.

CELIA
We're the only ones not dancing.

With that Celia takes Brom's hand and they blend in with the others, swaying to the music, slopping liquor out of their cups, gazing into each others eyes, falling in love.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- MORNING

Brom and Celia lie asleep, scrunched together on the small bed, completely naked. Paul nowhere to be found. The framed picture of Christ hangs over them.

EXT. SIDEWALK CAFE -- MORNING

Brom and Celia sip coffee, munch on beignets, bask in the intense New Orleans heat.

CELIA

Brom Wikstrom, you are a naughty boy.

Brom flashes a sheepish grin.

BROM

I'm working on overcoming that.

CELIA

Don't work too hard.

A ruckus in the near distance. A group of late-night stragglers stumble arm-in-arm, blaring out bar songs. Paul leads the group, stops when he spots Brom at table. He looks at Celia then back to Brom.

PAUL

Man, she's cute.

Paul extends his hand to Celia.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'm Paul Harper and you're the best looking chick Brom's ever been with.

CELIA

I'm Celia and I bet you say that to all of his... chicks.

The group starts to leave without Paul.

PAUL

Hey c'mon, the party's just starting.

BROM

We're going to the Art Museum. Gauguin exhibit.

Paul rolls his eyes.

PAUL

Plenty of time for Gauguin. Catch ya all later.

Paul trots off to catch up with the group.

CELIA

We're going to a Gauguin exhibit?

BROM

I knew it would scare him off. Are you my girlfriend?

CELIA

Am I really the cutest chick ever?

BROM

I haven't had a lot of experience
but if I'd had a hundred you'd be
the cutest... by far.

INT. NEW ORLEANS ART MUSEUM -- AFTERNOON

Brom and Celia stroll past painting after painting. Brom stops at one titled, "STREET SHADOWS", by Jacob Lawrence. This colorful, abstract painting depicting life in Harlem captivates Brom.

BROM

Hey look, Jacob Lawrence. He's a
professor at the U.W. Cool.

EXT. CITY PARK -- AFTERNOON

Brom and Celia stroll hand in hand, through City Park, surrounded by oak trees with limbs that reach the ground, ponds, and lush, green, well manicured lawns.

BROM

I had a job painting signs for a
drug store. That was cool. Now I
wanna get any kind of commercial art
job that will make me some bucks
while I paint.

CELIA

Do you want to paint like Gauguin?

BROM

Or Jacob Lawrence. If I could create
one painting in my life that even
slightly measured up to "Street
Shadows" I would never have the need
to paint again.

CELIA

But you would.

Brom smiles, nods.

CELIA (CONT'D)

What would you do if you couldn't
paint? Sell life insurance maybe?

BROM

My dad taught me that art can be a
profession... can be your professional
life. I have no Plan B.

EXT. CITY PARK -- LATER

Celia leans against an oak tree, the sun flattering her nearly flawless beauty.

Brom, one pencil in his hand and a thicker one in his mouth, painstakingly transfers her radiance to the sketch pad.

INSERT: SKETCH PAD

The drawing looks remarkably like Celia, beautifully drawn. He turns it toward her.

She breaks into a smile, blushes a bit.

EXT. BUSY CITY STREET -- MORNING

Brom, wearing a clean, thrift-store suit, portfolio in hand, walks into the "INDUSTRIAL ELECTRIC" building.

EXT. BUSY CITY STREET -- LATER

Brom exits the building, looks toward the sky, huge smile on his face.

BROM

Thank you.

EXT. CITY PARK -- AFTERNOON

Brom and Celia lie on their backs on a tattered blanket, her head on his chest.

BROM

I'll be transferring designs onto large sheets of asbestos but after a few months I can switch to the art department.

CELIA

Oh, I can't go to the Maple Leaf tonight. I have to baby sit my sister.

BROM

Bummer. The Meters are so groovy. Totally funky.

CELIA

Guess you'll have to go with Paul.

BROM

He's not as good of a kisser.

CELIA

You better not find a better kisser than me.

BROM

I'm never gonna look.

They kiss, gently at first, then with intense passion.

INT. FLOPHOUSE HOTEL LOBBY -- EVENING

Brom leans over the counter, chats with Clayton.

BROM

You wanna go have some brews with us?

CLAYTON

Going on three months without tipping the ale and while I enjoy your company immensely, I'm afraid that my will power is no match for the decadent lure of Bourbon Street.

BROM

More for us then.

Paul bounds down the stairs, into the lobby.

PAUL

I'm broke ass broke. Can you spot me til Friday?

EXT. BOURBON STREET -- NIGHT

Music, crowds, neon lights. Brom and Paul stagger down the street, drinks in hand.

PAUL

That chick in there wanted you man.

BROM

I have a girlfriend.

PAUL

So where is she?

Brom ignores the question, dashes to a phone booth. He puts a couple of coins in the phone, dials a number... busy signal.

As he turns and heads back he sees Paul walking into a club with a young woman. He smiles, wanders off into the crowd.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- MORNING

Brom wakes up, glances at a clock which reads 11:10. He groans in obvious pain as he stumbles out of bed. The door swings open, Paul thunders into the room.

PAUL

I'm goin' to catch some rays. Wanna come?

BROM

Don't think it's gonna help.

Brom walks into the bathroom, closes the door. In a moment the awful sounds of RETCHING AND PUKING filter through the door.

Brom comes through the door, drenched in sweat, towel wrapped around his face. He spots the framed picture of Christ and stops for a moment to contemplate it. He clasps his hands.

BROM (CONT'D)

Give me the strength to trust you,
and put the present and future in
your hands. Amen.

Brom performs a "Sign of the Cross", pulls on a pair of shorts, bolts out the door.

EXT. MISSISSIPPI RIVER BANK -- LATER

Paul lounges on a towel, reading a magazine. Brom runs past him, peeling off his shirt as he goes. Just as he reaches the river's edge he leaps forward in a graceful, athletic dive into the murky water.

Paul looks up just as the water splashes.

PAUL

(yells)

How is it man? How's the water?

Brom has not resurfaced. Paul waits a moment, concern washes over his face. Paul charges down to the river, sees nothing in the murky water.

He spots a motionless Brom just beneath the surface, reaches in and pulls Brom out of the river. When Brom's face breaks the plane he gasps, fighting for air, spitting water, coughing, choking, gagging. Paul drags Brom onto the beach.

PAUL (CONT'D)

What's wrong man?

BROM

I couldn't move. Nothing works.

Paul looks around, frantic, no one on the beach to help.

PAUL

Stay here. I'll go get help.

Paul tears out of there, runs up the bank toward a road.

Brom lies motionless, boyish, innocent, sweet, handsome face filled with fear and anguish. He tries to move his arms, his legs. He can't wiggle an inch.