

THE SNOW ELK

Written by

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White Lion Pictograph

Registered with the WGAw

Writer's note:

This was an early screenplay of mine, designed to be a Christmas TV movie and Christian allegory about redemption.

The screenplay was started sometime in the mid to late 1980's. This draft seems to be from January 1990. This script is adapted from a version written on an obsolete word processing software.

We scouted locations in Colorado and found a perfect small town in the mountains west of Denver. (Possibly Silver Plume, CO) Funding was never secured for the project.

The form of the screenplay, with lots of screen direction, is no longer in fashion.

JFRobinson

THE SNOW ELK

EXT. THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS IN WINTER - DAWN

The rugged outline of a magnificent mountain range fills the screen. The peaks appear as a jagged outline, set against the deep violet hue of the pre-dawn sky.

EXT. A SMALL GROVE OF TREES - DAWN

As the first glow of sunlight spills onto the hillside. A small grove of trees stand quietly -- heavily laden with snow. A mysterious MELODY tells us that there is something magical here.

EXT. MONTAGE, MOUNTAINSIDE SCENES - DAWN

CAMERA touches on images of the white-laced countryside:

- A rushing winter stream, gurgling beneath an icy sheet.
- CLOSE ON the small ridges of snow delicately built up on an aspen branch.
- WIDE UPWARD VIEW of tall ponderosa pines gently creaking in the breeze.

THE FOREST - A majestic BULL ELK is wandering at the edge of a glade, foraging for food amid the pines. He's an amazing animal, a huge rack of antlers topping a magnificent head. He stops suddenly and tilts his head, as if he senses something off in the distance.

A RANCH IN THE VALLEY BELOW - DAY

Nestled in the shadow of the mountains lies a neatly organized ranch house -- a wisp of smoke drifts from the chimney.

THE RANCH HOUSE DOOR

A RANCHER steps out of the house into the cold. His face is hard and sharp-edged. His breath hangs in the air as he pulls a woolen scarf over his mouth. He walks across the yard towards the barn.

EXT. THE FOOTHILLS- DAY

CAMERA FOLLOWS the Rancher as he rides a dappled mare along a snowy ridge. The valley stretches off in the distance behind him.

CLOSER

The mare is working hard as the Rancher spurs her through the deep snow. Her struggle is a striking contrast to the early morning calm.

EXT. A FOREST GLADE - DAY

CAMERA FOLLOWS as the Rancher rides into the same tree-lined glade we saw earlier. Stopping his horse, he dismounts -- removes an axe from his saddle and walks towards the CAMERA as it PULLS BACK to reveal a small, perfectly formed y .

The Rancher kneels next to the tree. He brushes the snow away from the base of the tree, exposing the tree's tiny trunk. Standing back a step, he raises the axe and sends it deep into the trunk. Quivering from the blow, the small limbs release their bundles of snow, letting them fall in clumps to the ground.

EXT. A LONELY STRETCH OF ROAD - DAY

The blur of a passing car crosses the SCREEN and we see an old man -- most people would call him a Homeless Man -- hitchhiking. He is MILES SHERMAN, late 60's, with a grizzled face and the eyes of a child. He wears multiple layers of ratty clothing and his beard is stubbled and grey. He carries a knapsack over one shoulder.

As another car passes, he turns and begins walking along the road. At the SOUND of another CAR, he turns, but it too passes. TITLES and MUSIC OVER.

ANOTHER STRETCH OF ROAD - Miles stops to sit on a roadside barrier. He removes his knapsack and opens it. He is distracted by an approaching car, but as it passes, he sits back down and continues digging through the pack. He eventually produces an object, a statuette wrapped in paper.

CLOSE, THE OBJECT

As he unwraps it. The statuette is a delicate crystal likeness of a bull elk.

CLOSE, MILES - as he looks at the statuette. A million thoughts seem to be running through his head..He reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a folded map. It seems to be a page torn from an old atlas: The name of a small town is underlined and circled. It reads: CROSSCREEK.

WIDER, MILES as he studies the map. The sound of an approaching CAR jars him once again into his hitchhiking stance.

This time a dented CHEVY pulls to the side of the road -- Miles waves, gathers his possessions up and hurries over to the car.

INT. THE CAR - DAY

The driver of the car is LOUISE, a woman in her mid-thirties. Under a thick coat, a white waitress uniform is visible. Louise has the look of a survivor, but one who has survived with her sense of humor intact. She rolls down the passenger window a crack.

LOUISE
Where are you going?

MILES
Crosscreek.

LOUISE
I don't usually pick up hitch-
hikers but it is Christmas-time.

MILES
I do understand...

LOUISE
I don't take any crap and I carry a
gun.

MILES
I see.

LOUISE
Just so you know.

She unlocks the door and Miles climbs in. Miles closes the door. In doing so he accidentally dumps the contents of his knapsack all over the car seat and floor.

MILES
(picking up the things)
Look here! Two seconds in your car
and I've already made a mess...

CLOSE on Miles' things. Some are the obvious, a pair of socks, a wadded-up shirt. Others are more unusual. Small white balls, colorful handkerchiefs, carved wooden pipe-like objects. The first object seen, however, is the partially-wrapped elk statuette.

LOUISE
Oh, don't worry about it.

MILES

Thank you. You are an angel of mercy. Ten more minutes and I would have been frozen. I've been told that frozen old men by the road are quite a nuisance. Someone has to go out each month and pick them all up. You may have just saved the taxpayers some money.

LOUISE

(laughs)

Well you're a different change of pace. Where are you going?

MILES

Do you know Crosscreek?

LOUISE

Well yes... I

MILES

I used to live there.

LOUISE

... I work there. That's where I'm going now. I waitress at the cafe.

MILES

I didn't know you had a cafe.

LOUISE

You have been away awhile. That place has been there forever.

Miles turns, looks out of the window.

MILES

Thirty-six years.

LOUISE

That's some vacation.

MILES

(looks at her)

Yeah, I hope my job is still waiting.

LOUISE

What job was that?

MILES

Town bum.

CUT TO:

EXT. WIDE SHOT, THE ROAD - DAY

As the car passes.

CUT TO:

EXT. A SNOWY RIDGE - DAY

CAMERA FOLLOWS the RANCHER riding his horse down the mountainside. The small tree is tied sideways behind his saddle. He stops the horse for a moment and lights a cigarette, shielding the flame with his hands. As he looks up he seems to notice something in the distance.

CLOSER ANGLE, RANCHER as he leans forward in his saddle, looking.

RANCHER'S POV - TELEPHOTO

A large bull elk, the same one seen in the opening scenes, is caught in a snow drift. The bull is struggling to free itself.

MED. SHOT - RANCHER

Cautiously the Rancher dismounts and ties his horse to a nearby bush. He removes a rifle from a saddle holster. CAMERA FOLLOWS, TIGHTENS as he takes a few steps forward. With a calm deliberation he loads the rifle and raises it to his shoulder.

CLOSE-UP, ELK - He has stopped struggling now and is standing quietly, watching the man.

CLOSE-UP, RANCHER - one eye closed, carefully sighting his target. He pauses, stretching the moment into an eternity.

Finally he lowers the gun and stands watching the animal. He seems to be analyzing his options, his face showing no visible sign of emotion.

The Rancher turns and walks back to his horse. Returning his rifle to its holster he unties a coiled rope next to it. He turns and starts back towards the elk, EXITING the frame.

INT. LOUISE'S CAR, TWO SHOT - DAY

Miles is wrapped up in the telling of his tales.

MILES

...and so in Missouri, all through Missouri, I had to sleep under picnic tables or under old houses.

LOUISE

Did you find out who stole your sleeping bag?

MILES

No, never did.

LOUISE

So you slept under houses all the way to Colorado?

MILES

No, in Kansas City, I made enough to get a bus to Denver.

LOUISE

What did you do, get a job?

MILES

Good heavens, no. My main career is washing dishes and mopping floors. But my true calling is a third-rate magician. I perform occasionally astounding illusions for the gullible and feeble minded.

With a flourish, Miles pulls a wrinkled white handkerchief from his coat pocket and proceeds to stuff it into his fist. After a series of magic words and gestures, he pulls a series of multi-colored small hankies from the same fist.

Louise is appropriately impressed. She claps.

LOUISE

Well done, Mandrake.

MILES

Cheap tricks dear.. The real magic is getting the quarters out of the audience.

LOUISE

So this is how you make a living?

MILES

Oh yeah... I do some magic, or do some music. I've also been known to wash dishes.

LOUISE

So why in the world are you coming back to Crosscreek in the dead of winter?

MILES

Christmas. I've been looking forward to coming home for a long time.

LOUISE

You have family there?

MILES

I don't know. I ran out on them thirty six Christmases ago.

Louise is silent for the moment. She doesn't seem to know what to say. Eventually she speaks.

LOUISE

You don't know if anyone is there?

MILES

I'm an optimist.

Miles as he turns towards the window. The frozen countryside is rushing by.

EXT. THE MAIN STREET OF A SMALL TOWN - DAY

A HIGH CRANE SHOT that slowly lowers as Louise's Chevy rumbles into view.

The once booming town is now mainly an overflow ski town in winter and not much of anything in summer. It's main street, almost deserted due to the still early hour, is lined with a modest assortment of weathered Victorian store fronts. The town is decorated for the Christmas season. Plastic garland adorns the street lamps and colored lights glow in the store windows. A big banner is strung across the street and reads:

WELCOME SANTA CLAUS

and in smaller letters,

COURTESY VALLEY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

INT. CAR, TWO SHOT

MILES

Here is fine. I think I'd like to walk around.

LOUISE
 (pulling over)
 OK, Now come and see me, alright?
 The restaurant is right up the
 street just a little bit.

 MILES
 (seeming preoccupied)
 I will.. Thanks Louise.. Thanks
 again.

INT. CAR, ANOTHER ANGLE

As Miles gets out of the car. He taps against the window and waves goodbye.

EXT. STREET, MED WIDE SHOT

As the Chevy pulls away. CAMERA MOVES IN to a dramatic CLOSE SHOT of Miles as he surveys the town. His face registers a mixture of tension and nostalgia.

WIDE SHOT, POV

A slow PAN across the quiet street. Colored lights silently blink on and off in the windows, the only sign of life. Snow is piled into miniature mountains along both sides of the street.

MED. SHOT - MILES

He stands reverently in the middle of the street taking it all in until a car, HONKING its HORN, nearly runs over him. Miles moves out of the way, CAMERA FOLLOWING, and steps up on the wooden sidewalk.

VARIOUS SHOTS, MILES

As the old man walks along the sidewalk, looking in the store windows. The SOUND of his BOOTS on the wooden planks are all we hear in the still morning. Eventually a nostalgic MELODY plays underneath. Miles looks in decorated window after decorated window, each crammed full of knickknacks and price tags. He suddenly stops catching his reflection in a window pane.

CU, MILE'S REFLECTION

As he stares, transfixed. It seems as if this is the first time he has really seen himself in years. He touches his face, delicately, as if touching a fragile antique. Miles' eyes shift and we notice a small form approaching, reflected in the glass of the store window.

WIDER ANGLE, MILES

As he turns to look. SHOT WIDENS to reveal the padded bundle of a little boy. From inside the bundle peeks the face of NATHAN, a curious five year old. He is pulling a small sled behind him. Nathan continues walking past Miles, looking back at the strange old man.

WIDE ANGLE

As Miles smiles and turns to make his way down the street.

MCU, NATHAN

As the boy watches the old man. After a moment, the small boy turns his sled around and begins following the old man.

WIDE ANGLE, STREET

MOVING SHOT of the two making their way down the snow clad street. Miles seems to be moving at a more deliberate pace than before. The boy, Nathan, chugs determinedly along behind him. He passes behind high drifts of snow in the street that almost obscure him. ALTERNATING CLOSE SHOTS of both as they walk.

LS, SIDE STREET

As Miles turns down a residential street. Nathan is still behind him, his sled following.

ANOTHER ANGLE

As Miles comes to stop in front of a dilapidated old house. Nathan stops a few feet behind the old man. The boy seems confused by Miles' interest in the old house.

POV, MILES

The house is deserted. The paint is peeling and the windows have long since been broken out. Snow has drifted against the house, reaching up to the window sills and blockading the door.

CLOSE-UP, MILES

As he gazes at the house. His eyes touch each niche and corner as if remembering a dream.

MILES
"Merry Christmas."

TWO SHOT

As Miles notices the boy looking at the house.

MILES (CONT'D)
Well, hello young man. I didn't
know you were there.

NATHAN
Hello

MILES
(motioning to the house)
I guess no one lives here any more
do they?

NATHAN
There's no windows.

MILES
Yes, you're right. No windows.

WIDER SHOT

As Miles steps towards the boy.

MILES (CONT'D)
Hey, you've got something behind
your ear.

Miles reaches behind Nathan's ear and produces a white ball
which he gives to the astonished boy. MILES (cont) You'd
better watch that, those things can plug up your hearing.

ANOTHER ANGLE, WIDE

As Miles steps out into the deep new snow towards the old
house. Nathan looks at the ball in amazement, then
instinctively starts to step out in the snow, following
Miles. Although he is carefully following the old man's
footsteps, the snow is up to his waist.

REVERSE ANGLE, HOUSE

Miles approaches a window and looks inside. Nathan stands
beside him, standing on tiptoe at the window.

TWO SHOT, FROM HOUSE

As Miles and Nathan are looking inside.

NATHAN
(worried)
You better not go in there. It's
haunted.

MILES

You know an awful lot for a young man.

(Nathan nods)

Don't you have any friends to play with or chores to do or something?

NATHAN

No.

CLOSE-UP, MILES1

MILES

When I was your age, I had chores coming out of my ears. I didn't have time to go following beatdown old men like me all over town. Are your chores done by computer these days?

NATHAN

Are you a bum?

MILES

You ask a lot of questions.

NATHAN

Why are you looking in the haunted house?

Miles turns to the porch of the house and sits down. CAMERA ADJUSTING, WIDENING.

MILES

Who says it's haunted.

NATHAN

(moving to stand by him)

Joey.

MILES

Oh, Joey says it's haunted does he?

CLOSE-UP, NATHAN

MILES

Hmmmm.

(he contemplates)

I ain't afraid of them.

(Nathan is impressed)

Did you know that people used to live here?

WIDE SHOT

NATHAN
Ghosts?

MILES
No, no... I lived here. A long
time ago.

Nathan looks back towards the dark windows.

NATHAN
Without windows?

MILES
(amused)
No... no we had windows. Come
here, come sit down next to me.

Nathan does so, watching the old man as if he were a kind of flamboyant cartoon character.

MILES (CONT) (CONT'D)
What's your name?

NATHAN
Nathan.

CLOSER, TWO SHOT

MILES
OK, Nathan... tell me do you
believe in magic?

NATHAN
Can I ask Joey?

MILES
No, you can't ask Joey. I want to
know if you believe in magic.

NATHAN
I guess so.

ANOTHER ANGLE

As Miles performs a little slight of hand trick for the boy, producing three little round balls from his pocket. He makes them disappear and re-appear from Nathan's ear.

CLOSE-UP, NATHAN

NATHAN (CONT'D)
How do you do that?

MILES

Do what?

NATHAN

That! Make those balls come in my ears!

CLOSE-UP, MILES

MILES

Oh, just a little trick I learned in the Army.

TWO SHOT

MILES (CONT) (CONT'D)

Do you believe in magic now?

NATHAN

Maybe.

Miles laughs. He likes the kid. Nathan laughs too, delighted by the old man's laughter. The two deteriorate into a howling, laughing fit on the front porch of the dilapidated house. Each is trying to outdo the other in outrageousness. Finally Miles abruptly stops and in solemn straight-face asks;

MILES

What's so funny boy?

NATHAN

(slowing down, still giggling)

I don't know.

This sets off another set of laughing which is cut short by a VOICE O.S.. It is Nathan's mom calling him home.

WIDER SHOT

As Nathan gets up to leave.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

That's Mom.

MILES

Bye, boy.

Nathan scurries off. Retracing his steps in the snow and retrieving his sled.

CLOSE, MILES

As he watches the boy leave. He is still chuckling.

EXT. MOBILE HOME DAY

A young mother, PAT, stands impatiently in the doorway of a dull colored mobile home, buried in snow. She is in her late twenties and has the perpetually harried look of a single parent. Nathan comes running into the frame and comes to a stop in front of his mother.

PAT
Where were you?

MED. CLOSE-UP, NATHAN

NATHAN
Just talking to an old man by the
haunted house.

REVERSE ANGLE, PAT

PAT
Well, that's twice as bad. You
should never talk to people you
don't know, Nathan. I've told you
that before.

TWO SHOT

NATHAN
Yes, ma'am.

PAT
Mother loves you Nathan. You're
all I've got remember?

NATHAN
I wasn't doing nothing...

PAT
"I wasn't doing anything..." Now be
good and play inside. I'm going to
the store at Dillon.

NATHAN
But, I just got out here! It took
me an hour to put on all my
clothes!

PAT
Yes, I know, life is tough, turn
around. March up those stairs.
(Nathan slowly complies)
That's it. Keep going.
(MORE)

PAT (CONT'D)

Don't stop you've almost got it.
OK, Mom will see you later.

Nathan enters the trailer as Pat turns and gets into a small car nearby. CAMERA FOLLOWS.

INT. PAT'S CAR - DAY

As she starts the engine and pulls away. She drives down the street aways, then slows down suddenly, looking out of the window.

EXT. WIDE SHOT, STREET AND DESERTED HOUSE

As Pat looks towards the deserted house. Miles is still seen wandering around, looking in windows.

CLOSE-UP, PAT

As a flash of fear crosses her face. MUSIC accents the moment.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

A man in uniform EXITS a store and stands on the sidewalk putting on his hat. He is PETER, the local constable in his early thirties. Rather laid-back, he is well suited for his job in a tourist-oriented town. He wears dark sunglasses and a neatly trimmed mustache.

WIDER ANGLE - STREET

As Pat drives into the frame.

MED. SHOT - PAT

As she rolls down the window.

PAT

Peter.. There's an old bum over at that deserted house. He's been bothering Nathan.

BACK TO WIDE
SHOT

PETER

(approaching the car)
What?

PAT

An old man, he looks like a bum. I think he's been bothering my son, Nathan.

MED. CLOSE SHOT - PETER

As he is now leaning on the car window next to Pat.

PETER

What did he do to him?

PAT

(calming)

Well, maybe nothing. I would just feel better if you took care of it.

PETER

(sensing her fear)

OK, OK, I'll check into it.

TILT UP with him as he stands upright.

PAT (O.S.)

Thank you Peter.

She drives off and Peter stands for a moment, looking down the street. HOLD on his reaction.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CORNER STORE - DAY

As Pat's car drives quickly past the store, a MAN standing on the step watches her go by. He is wearing a shop apron and has a broom in his hand.

CLOSE-UP, MAN

Who is SAUNDERS, the owner of Crosscreek's only general store. Saunders is a tall man in his mid-sixties. He has a strong-willed determination about him.

Something seems to catch his eye and he turns his attention up the street.

POINT OF VIEW - SAUNDERS

A lone figure is walking at the other end of the street. We recognize it as Miles.

BACK TO SAUNDERS

Who seems unable to recognize the figure. Finally he turns and enters his store.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL CAFE DAY

The cafe is a modest hybrid of linoleum and beer signs. It is quite noisy despite the fact that it is only about half full. LOUISE, is the only waitress. She is behind the counter loading her arms up with plates.

The PHONE RINGS and Louise puts enough plates down to answer the phone. She has to yell above the noise.

LOUISE
Hello, Diner...
(calling back to the
kitchen)
Tommy... for you.

Louise quickly re-loads her arms with plates and heads around the counter.

MED. SHOT DOOR

As Miles enters. He takes off his hat and waves to Louise as he sits at an empty table. He sets his pack on the floor beside him.

ANGLE, LOUISE

As she sets the plates down to a table of people.

LOUISE
(to the diners)
Anything else? OK, have a good
breakfast.

MED. SHOT, MILES AT TABLE

As Louise joins him.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
Hi, stranger, you wanna trade a
magic trick for some coffee?

MILES
How about if I pay for the coffee
and do a trick for your tip?

LOUISE
(laughing)
Cream and sugar?

MILES
Black, please.

Louise EXITS.

Louise is pouring a cup of coffee. The cook, TOMMY is standing in the doorway.

TOMMY
Who is that old geezer?

LOUISE
A friend of mine.

TOMMY
Oh, I thought he might have been like, uh, your first date or something.

LOUISE
(leaving)
Funny boy. Don't you have some hash to fling?

Louise sits with the coffee.

MILES
(picking up the cup,
smelling it)
Ah... man's singular most important discovery... caffeine.

LOUISE
You're funny. Are you always like this?

MILES
No, I was clean shaven 3 days ago.

LOUISE
You know what I mean, joking and stuff.

MILES
(he has taken the question as more than small talk)
No. Most of the time I'm just lonely.
(Miles looks around, continues)
You know I think I remember this place. It used to be a feed store didn't it?

LOUISE
 (twinkling)
 Still is.

MILES, MCU

As he catches the joke and chuckles.

MILES
 Maybe, young lady, you're pretty
 funny yourself.

LOUISE/ OVER THE SHOULDER

LOUISE
 Well, if I can't have a pretty
 face, I might as well have a pretty
 funny.

BACK TO MILES

MILES
 Oh, you want to crack jokes eh...
 well you've come up
 against the master.
 (drawing himself up)
 Tell me, what was the asparagus
 doing in the garden?

TWO SHOT

LOUISE
 Now wait a minute... aren't you
 gonna say, "no, Louise, you've got
 a beautiful face?"

MILES
 (smiling, defending
 himself)
 I've been around long enough to
 know when a female is fishing for
 compliments. You know you're
 pretty, you don't need an old bum
 like me to tell you.

LOUISE
 But... I didn't...

MILES
 Now hush and listen... why... I
 mean what was the asparagus doing
 in the garden?

LOUISE
The back stroke?

MILES
No, he was "stalking" around.

LOUISE
(laughing)
Oh, that's awful, awful. This
isn't even funny.

MILES
OK, OK, here's another one. Why did
the newlyweds drive with their
lights on?

CUT TO:

MS - THE KITCHEN COUNTER

Tommy, the cook is ringing a bell for Louise. A couple of
plates of food are sitting on the counter.

BACK TO LOUISE

LOUISE
Oh... wait... stop. I've gotta get
this order.

She exits.

MCU - MILES

As he takes a sip of his coffee. He is quite satisfied with
himself.

CU - THE TABLE OF PEOPLE NEARBY

A small CHILD has been watching Miles in his antics with
Louise. She stares at the old man as she eats her pancakes.

BACK TO MILES

As she catches his eye. (Intercut with her through this
scene.) He begins to do a magic trick for the little girl.
Slowly he reaches in his mouth and begins to pull out a
brightly colored handkerchief. The girl's eyes widen as she
watches.

CUT TO:

EXT. NATHAN'S MOBILE HOME - DAY

As NATHAN peers out of the window. He is bored. A wind has picked up and it's snowing lightly.

EXT. THE RANCH HOUSE SEEN EARLIER - DAY

A RANCH HAND is sitting in a pickup behind the steering wheels, idly staring off into space. A RADIO STATION is playing in the background. The Ranch Hand sits up at the SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS and the opening of the TRUCK DOOR. SHOT WIDENS to reveal the Rancher getting in next to the Ranch Hand. He motions to leave.

EXT. WIDE SHOT

As the truck pulls away from the yard. A large horse trailer is attached to the back of the truck.

CUT TO:

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

CAMERA TRAVELS through the cluttered store following a rummaging MR. SAUNDERS, the elderly proprietor. He is searching for something amid the multitude of boxes and cubby holes. He holds a bolt in one hand and is wearing a worn cardigan and reading glasses. Finally he stands upright and returns to the counter. He hands the bolt to a waiting CUSTOMER.

SAUNDERS

Sorry, I don't have any locking nuts in this size.

CUSTOMER (O.S.)

Thanks anyway.

WIDE ANGLE - STORE

As the customer exits. The door opens again and Miles enters the store. He has a smile on his face as he makes his way to the counter.

MED CLOSE SHOT - SAUNDERS

SAUNDERS

Can I help you?

REVERSE ANGLE - MILES

MILES

Hello, Saunders. Remember me?

MED. SHOT - SAUNDERS

As he stares hard at Miles.

SAUNDERS

I sorts remember the face. Do you live around here?

TWO SHOT

MILES

Saunders... you don't remember/ I thought you would.

A flash of recognition has crossed Saunder's face.

SAUNDERS

Geoffrey Miles... I can't believe you're back.

MILES

I was hoping you'd be around here still. And you're running the same store. How's your wife, Saunders?

Saunders pauses.

SAUNDERS

Well, she broke her hip a week and a half ago and is in the hospital at Dillon.

MILES

I'm sorry to hear that.

BACK TO SAUNDERS

SAUNDERS

(turning towards Miles)

Because if you were, I wouldn't give you any. You see... I couldn't. I couldn't after what you done to Esther.

REACTION, CU - MILES

SAUNDERS (CONT. O.S.) (CONT'D)

I think you should know some of the trouble you've caused. After you took outa here, you left Esther with nothing. She had to rely on the charity of her neighbors.

I say it broke her spirit.

(MORE)

SAUNDERS (CONT. O.S.) (CONT'D)

Jonathan turned into a wild kid,
running all over the town getting
into trouble.

It took her twelve years to get
over you and find someone who would
marry her. The whole town told her
you was no good and you'd never
come back.

MS - MILES

MILES

I've come home for Christmas, Bill.
I've come back looking for
Jonathan.

WIDE SHOT - STORE

As Saunders resumes his busy work. He talks as he works,

SAUNDERS

Well, your son ain't here. He did
live here for awhile but he don't
no more.

It's a pretty big change to see you
come home for Christmas. If I
remember, you took off at Christmas
time... Christmas Eve.

MED. CU - MILES

MILES

Bill... I need to find my son.

MCU - SAUNDERS

He has stopped working. He is watching Miles.

SAUNDERS

Jonathan settled down for awhile.
I guess he found himself getting to
be almost respectable. So he did a
very good impression of his old man
and just took off. No one knows
where he is.

BACK TO MILES - CAMERA ZOOMS SLOWLY IN

SAUNDERS (CONT. O.S.) (CONT'D)

I feel sorry for you Jeff. You go
your whole life not giving a damn
about what's right or wrong.

(MORE)

SAUNDERS (CONT. O.S.) (CONT'D)

Then you get scared and come running back here, worried that you're gonna die an old man without a clean conscience.

MED. SHOT - SAUNDERS

He pauses as he goes back to his work.

SAUNDERS (CONT.) (CONT'D)

Why don't you ask Esther where Jonathan is? Isn't she in Cheyenne now?

BACK TO MILES

MILES

I called. Esther died nine months ago.

BACK TO SAUNDERS.

He is stunned, then angers.

SAUNDERS

Miles... you wasted her life. A human life... talented and sweet and wonderful and you wasted it. She married this car salesman from Cheyenne because she was afraid no one else wanted her. All she wanted was you.

WIDE SHOT - STORE

As Saunders falls silent. The SOUND OF CHILDREN PLAYING is heard dimly outside.

MCU MILES

MILES

Uh... her husband didn't know where Jonathan was. I... I guess I'll keep looking.

BACK TO WIDE SHOT - STORE

As Miles exits. Saunders stands there, alone, then angrily pushes a whole shelf full of canned goods onto the floor.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - MILES DAY

It is late afternoon. Miles sits on a bench, watching the passing crowds of skiers returning from the slopes. He seems emotionally numb, lost in thought. CAMERA WIDENS as a tricycle pokes into the frame. Nathan is smiling up at Miles, tightly bundled as before.

MILES
(studying the boy)
Hitting the road, eh!

NATHAN
No, I'm just riding around.

He hops off his bike and climbs up on the bench next to Miles.

NATHAN (CONT.) (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

ANOTHER ANGLE - TWO SHOT

MILES
Just sitting. What is your name anyway?

NATHAN
Nathan Rockweiller.

MILES
Well, Nathan Rockweiller, if that is indeed your name, tell me about yourself. Are you married? Any kids?

NATHAN
(making a face)
No. I'm in kindergarten.

MILES
A likely story. And why are you not in this alleged kindergarten today?

NATHAN
It's Christmas vacation.

MILES
And so it is.
(looking thoughtfully at the boy)
Tell me, Nathan, do you believe in magic?

NATHAN

No, I'm too old.

MILES

Well, I'm not. In fact, I'm too old not to believe in magic. And believe me, I've got a little built-in magic indicator that is buzzing to beat the band. Something good is going to happen alright. Something magical. The old man's manner has caught Nathan's interest.

MILES (CONT.) (CONT'D)

It's shame you don't believe in magic.

NATHAN

I do... I do believe in magic.

MILES

(in mock surprise)

You do! Oh, well, I thought there was something admirable about you. Right from the start I thought that.

NATHAN

What's a magic indicator!

MILES

It's something that has always been inside me. Something that let's me know some kind of magic is going to happen. "Bzzzz... Bzzzz". It buzzes just like that.

Nathan sits quietly for a moment, thinking it over. He shyly touches his chest, as if checking his magic indicator.

CLOSE SHOT - NATHAN

NATHAN

Why did you go way, if you used to live here?

CLOSEUP - MILES

Who does not answer immediately.

MILES

I thought I wanted to do what I
wanted to do and be what I wanted
to be.

It took a long time to realize that freedom wasn't a place
you could go to.

BACK TO NATHAN

Who turns back to the street, nodding.

NATHAN

I knew that.

CLOSER - MILES

As he smiles, watching the boy.

WIDE SHOT - ACROSS THE STREET DAY

A pickup has arrived pulling a horse trailer behind it. It
stops in front of Saunder's general store.

The Rancher, seen earlier, gets out of the cab with TWO RANCH
HANDS. They enter the store.

INSERT - NATHAN AND MILES

As the activity across the street catches their attention.

CUT TO:

INT. SAUNDER'S STORE - WIDE SHOT

As the Rancher and both ranch hands enter.

MEDIUM SHOT - SAUNDERS

Saunders smiles, standing behind the counter.

SAUNDERS

Good to see you, Mr. Kestler.

MEDIUM SHOT - RANCHER

RANCHER

Hi, Bill... brought that elk in I
called you about. You think you
can sell him?

BACK TO SAUNDERS

SAUNDERS

I'll give it a try. I've been known to sell stranger things.

He chuckles.

TWO SHOT - STORE

RANCHER

Well, I had a hell of a time getting that elk down the mountain. Probably more work than this is all going to be worth.

SAUNDERS

I'll call around Mr. Kestler. I'll see what I can do.

RANCHER

Good.

(to the ranch hands)

Eddie, Ken, get started unloading that thing.

CUT TO:

BACK TO WIDE SHOT - STREET

As the men emerge from the store. Mr. Saunders and the Rancher follow behind. They walk to the back of the horse trailer and look inside.

*They open the gate and begin to carefully remove the elk.

TIGHT ANGLE - VARIOUS SHOTS

As the men struggle to remove the animal. Ropes are tied to its antlers with the men pulling from both directions. There is a dramatic struggle as the elk rages against the ropes. It takes the effort of all five men to keep the animal under control and maneuver it into a nearby corral. There the elk is ignobly tied, like Gulliver, to keep him from jumping the fence. Mr. Saunders produces a small hand-written sign that hangs on the gate of the corral.

INSERT SIGN

It reads,

LIVE ELK FOR SALE

INQUIRE AT STORE

BACK TO NATHAN AND MILES

As the two have been watching the drama unfolding across the street. CAMERA MOVES IN slowly stopping on an extreme CLOSEUP of Miles. He looks over at the boy, who seems near tears.

MILES
(putting his arm around
Nathan)
I know, son, it's awful. Nothing
that beautiful should be kept
penned up like that. God made that
animal to be free.

TWO SHOT

NATHAN
Why did they tie him up?

BACK TO THE ELK, STRUGGLING

MILES
Because some men can't stand for
things to be free.

BACK TO MILES - CLOSE UP

Of his reaction.

SLOW DOLLY IN, HOLD.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HIGH SHOT, CORRAL DAY

It is late afternoon. Miles is seen standing alone by the corral, watching the elk.

MEDIUM SHOT STREET LEVEL - MILES

He is lost in thought as he watches the elk.

CLOSE INSERT - ELK

Exhausted, he is still firmly tied.

EXTREME CLOSEUP - MILES

The old man and elk seem to be sharing a secret, something misty and hidden.

EXT. SAUNDER'S STORE - THE DOORWAY

As Saunders emerges to shake a throw rug on the steps. He gives Miles a long, hard look but says nothing. He turns and re-enters the store.

ANOTHER ANGLE - STREET

As the town police car approaches.

INT. CAR - PETER

As he notices the old man standing by the corral. Dutifully, he pulls the car over. He is wearing dark glasses.

ANOTHER ANGLE - CAR WINDOW

As Peter leans out.

PETER
Sir. Could I speak to you?

MEDIUM SHOT - MILES

As he turns. He resolutely walks towards the car. He's seen all of this before.

BACK TO PETER

PETER (CONT'D)
(motioning to the front
seat)
Get in.

WIDER ANGLE - POLICE CAR

As Miles walks around and gets in.

INT. POLICE CAR - TWO SHOT

As Peter pulls out on the main street. Miles sits quietly, brooding.

PETER
(fairly pleasant, this is
just part of the job)
Where are you from?

MILES
Around here. I used to live here.

PETER
Staying long?

MILES

No.

Peter drives silently for a few seconds.

PETER

Why is a guy like you here in the middle of the winter? Why aren't you down south?

MILES

I'm training for the Olympics.

MEDIUM CLOSEUP - PETER

He looks at Miles. He smiles

PETER

I've gotten some complaints about you.

MILES

What complaints?

PETER

I talked to a lady today. She complains that you've been bothering her kid.

MEDIUM CLOSEUP - MILES

MILES

(exasperated)

That kid has been following me all day. I'm the only one who'll pay attention to him.

(looking at Peter)

Ask him yourself, his name is Nathan.

BACK TO TWO SHOT

PETER

OK, fine. But I know his mother, she's had a rough go. Some guy left her with the kid awhile back and she's scared of everything. She calls me out two or three times a week for this or the other thing. But she pays my salary, you don't.

EXT. STREET, THE EDGE OF TOWN

As Peter turns the car around. He heads back towards town.

INT. CAR, MCU PETER

PETER

Listen, I'm not going to kick you outa town, not if you used to live here. But I'd better not see you begging for money...

MCU - MILES

MILES

I don't beg.

BACK TO PETER

PETER

(continuing)

I'd better not see you drunk either. Do you hear me?

TWO SHOT

Miles turns away, looks out of the window.

MILES

Yeah.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

As the car pulls to a stop. Miles gets out and closes the door behind him, not bothering to look back.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE OLD HOUSE -DAY

We are inside the musty old house. Miles is heard TALKING O.S. to Nathan. The CAMERA IS FOCUSED on a broken-out window and an expanse of peeling wallpaper. Outside TWO CHILDREN are throwing snowballs at one another. Inside Miles continues;

MILES (O.S.)

... And the radio used to sit over here in the corner. It was a big RCA with a knob right in the middle of the thing. If you were the radio, I figure the knob would be about here in your tummy.

(Nathan laughs)

Yeah, now back then you know, we didn't have no television... didn't have no cartoon shows or those wrestling shows.

(MORE)

MILES (O.S.) (CONT'D)

We had Bob Hope and Fred Allen. You know who Fred Allen is? You don't know Fred Allen...

CAMERA PULLS BACK SLOWLY ADJUSTING to show Miles and the boy. Miles has a genuine twinkle in his eyes.

MCU - MILES

MILES (CONT.) (CONT'D)

... Well, anyway, I would sit here. I had this old easy chair... even then it was old and I was young. It must be dust by now. Anyway, I sat there and my wife, Esther, sat there. My little boy Jonathan was usually running around getting in trouble. But in my perfect memory of this room, he was about where you are now, sitting on the floor playing with his red toy firetruck. I'll always think of this picture... I'll always remember her sitting there and you sitting there.

TWO SHOT

NATHAN

You had a boy?

MILES

Yes, his name was Jonathan. He was about as old as you when I say him last.

NATHAN

Did he die?

MILES

(pausing)
No, his daddy just left.

CLOSEUP - NATHAN

NATHAN

My daddy just left too. He divorced us.

CLOSEUP - MILES

His reaction. The realization of his own son's hurt haunts the old man's face.

MILES

I'm sorry.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - LATER

We see the print of a newspaper in CLOSEUP and the SOUND of HAMMERING over. CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal Miles and Nathan tacking a newspaper covering over the open window. CAMERA CONTINUES to DOLLY BACK, showing the door and other windows in the room, covered with newspaper also. Most of the debris seen on the floor earlier has been removed. The place almost seems livable.

MILES

(finishing)

There. Now the heat will stay in,
and I've got a little flap here in
the door to get in and out. All
the comforts of home.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - THE FIRE PLACE - DAY

It is now holding a small fire. CAMERA ADJUSTS to show Miles and Nathan sitting on newspaper in front of it, hands outstretched. Nathan is watching Miles intently.

MILES

Ahh... this old fireplace hasn't
seen a fire in years I'll bet.
(noticing the boy's stare)
You wanna ask me something or are
you just watching my whiskers turn
white?

NATHAN

Why did you go away?

MILES

Oh... I had a lot of reasons.
(he pauses as he looks
towards the fire)
I've learned a lot of things since
then.

NATHAN

Like what?

CLOSEUP - MILES

MILES

Like how bad good reasons can be after thirty-six years. And how when a day or even a moment is gone, you can never have it again. All the powers in the world can't let you have that moment over again.

(he quiets for a moment, thinking)

OK, enough philosophy. Young man, would you bring me my rucksack over there?

Nathan does so, sitting again next to the old man.

TWO SHOT

As Miles opens the bag and begins to remove the wooden pieces of a musical instrument.

MILES (CONT'D)

I just feel like playing this thing. This was given to me by my grandfather many years ago. He was a Scot, that means a man from Scotland. He came over on a big ship and settled in Texas.

Miles is piecing together an ancient looking bagpipe. He stands and arranges the contraption under his arm, begins to play a traditional Scottish march, "Highland Ladee". At its conclusion, Nathan applauds wildly, stamping his feet with delight.

MILES (CONT'D)

(in Scottish brogue)

OK folks, thanks... well, I wasn't going to do an encore tonight... but you've been such a lovely audience.

(whispering to Nathan)

Here comes the big finale.

(full voice)

Well... here's an old Scottish song I know you'll recognize.

The old man straightens up and begins to play the tune of Auld Lang Syne. Nathan watches, entranced as Miles plays.

CU - MILES

As he plays.

EXT. A VARIETY OF SHOTS OF THE TOWN - DAY

As the MUSIC continues under. Sequence closes with a WIDE CRANE SHOT of the street, busy with late afternoon traffic.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. WIDE SHOT - STREET MORNING

Matching the previous shot. It is early morning and the town is once again seemingly deserted. A fresh snow has fallen, covering the cars and sidewalk.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WINDOW OF THE CAFE - DAY

Louise approaches the window from the outside. She is tying on a fresh apron. She turns the window's "CLOSED" sign over to read "OPEN".

CUT TO:

INT. THE OLD HOUSE - DAY

Miles lies asleep on the floor, covered head to toe with a blanket of old newspapers. He starts to stir and removes a section of newspaper from his face. He rubs his face and sits up.

CUT TO:

EXT. WIDE SHOT - THE CAFE - DAY

People are inside, it is full with the breakfast crowd. In the f.g., a large Mercedes pulls up and parks. A man in an expensive looking trench coat, KEVIN, emerges and enters the cafe.

INT. CAFE - THE DOORWAY - DAY

As Kevin enters. He stops, looking for someone. He is handsome, in his mid-thirties.

MEDIUM SHOT - ONE OF THE TABLES

Louise is serving. She looks towards the door. Her face lights up as she sees Kevin.

TWO SHOT - DOORWAY

As she joins Kevin and gives him a peck. She is excited, he seems oddly unemotional.

 LOUISE
Kevin, what are you doing up here?
Did you take off work?

 KEVIN
Just for the morning. Can we talk?

 LOUISE
 (to the cook)
Tommy... Tommy, I'll be right back.

EXT. CAFE - WIDE SHOT

Louise and Kevin walk next to the Mercedes. She, arms folded without a coat, leans against the car. Louise is no longer smiling, she can guess at what is coming.

 KEVIN
Gee... I don't know how to say
this. I really wish...

MEDIUM CLOSEUP - LOUISE

Cold, shivering.

 LOUISE
I know what's coming... Don't
bother, Kevin...

MEDIUM SHOT - KEVIN

 KEVIN
I'm sorry, Louise. It's just time
for it to be over.

It was really a lot of laughs though.

BACK TO LOUISE

She is brushing the new snow off the car.

 LOUISE
I really thought you liked me.

BACK TO KEVIN

Not responding for awhile, looking at her.

KEVIN

Louise, it's Christmas for God's sake. I've got my kids. I can't do this this time of the year.

TWO SHOT

LOUISE

So do you want your Christmas present or do I send it back? I got it inside.

MEDIUM SHOT KEVIN

KEVIN

Well I... I don't think it would be fair. I didn't get you one. And I...

(pause)

Maybe later, Louise. Maybe this summer.

CLOSEUP - LOUISE

Taking a breath.

LOUISE

I don't think so.

WIDE SHOT - THE CAFE AND THE CAR

Kevin walks towards Louise, gives her a stiffly executed hug and gets into the Mercedes. He starts the car, pulls back and drives off. Louise stands in the snow for a moment then turns back to the cafe. On the doorstep, she knocks the snow off her feet before entering.

CUT TO:

EXT. A QUIANT BANDSTAND IN THE CENTER OF TOWN - DAY

Miles and Nathan are walking towards the bandstand. Miles has his bagpipes under one arm and is holding Nathan's hand with the other, helping him through the deep snow.

MILES

Now this old bandstand is from my days, Nathan. They had a little community band with the Mayor's kid playing the trumpet. What was his name? Elle.... Elliot? Eddie?... Oh, what the hell... this kid would play in this band... "La de da dee.. La de da dee...

(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)

And most of the citizens of this
berg would have their behinds
parked out here on the grass...
Now in summer, of course, we
weren't so stupid as to come out
here in winter like today.

NATHAN

Did you have coats then?

MILES

(smiling)

Sure we had coats, we had big old
wool coats... kept you real warm.

ANOTHER ANGLE

As the two climb the stairs to the bandstand.

MILES (CONT.) (CONT'D)

And we had scarfs and hats and
gloves. Everything you needed.

NATHAN

Were you in the band?

MILES

No, I was too busy.

ANGLE - THE TOP OF THE BANDSTAND

The two walk over to the railing and look over the town. As
Miles talks, he is adjusting and warming up his pipes.

MILES (CONT.) (CONT'D)

See that old store over there...
the one boarded up?

NATHAN

(shaking his head)

Is it haunted?

MILES

No, it isn't haunted, you've got
haunted on the brain, young man...
That's where I used to work. It
was a garage and I fixed tires. I
hated it. It was hard work and it
was dirty and people treated you
like you were a piece of machinery.
After that was when I ran away from
home... just like a little kid. ü

NATHAN
Did you come back?

MILES
Yeah.. I finally came back.

STREET LEVEL - LOUISE

She is walking along bundled up, her thoughts to herself.

BACK TO THE BANDSTAND - MILES

Who notices her.

MILES (CONT'D)
(calling out)
Hey, Louise, over here. Merry
Christmas.

LOUISE - CLOSEUP

Her reaction as she looks up.

MILES (CONT.) (CONT'D)
Come on, you're just in time for
the concert.

Louise seems undecided, she'd rather not, but decides to go.

WIDE SHOT - LOUISE

As she crosses to the band stand.

MEDIUM SHOT - MILES AND NATHAN

As Miles begins to play. Louise joins them and listens until Miles stops.

LOUISE
(clapping)
Very impressive. Bravo!

MILES
Thank you loyal fans. You're about
to see me in action, Louise. I
know the excitement must be nearly
unbearable for you. Please excuse
me as I must now address my
business partner.
(bending to Nathan)
Now, Nathan, I want you to go down
there and when people come by...
(MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)

here, take your hat, hold it like this... and go up to people when I'm playing and they'll put money in it. After the concert, we'll split the money. OK, off you go...

Nathan exits as Miles stands and reaches to play.

WIDE SHOT - STREET AND BANDSTAND

As Nathan is wading through the snow. A few skiers are on the street. An occasional car passes.

MILES (CONT'D)

(orating from the bandstand)

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for coming to the First Annual Cross Creek Invitational Bagpiping Conference and Nose Flute Extravaganza. As you undoubtedly know, the bagpipes or "pipes" as we insiders chose to affectionately call them, are among the world's oldest instruments and may be successfully played only outdoors in sub-freezing temperatures. And now, Act One, Scene One...

Miles begins to play. A few people have stopped to listen.

MEDIUM SHOT - LISTENING PEOPLE, NATHAN

As Nathan approaches them with outstretched hat.

MEDIUM CLOSEUP - MILES

As he plays and watches the action below.

MEDIUM SHOT - LOUISE

Watching it all She seems to be enjoying all the hoopla. Suddenly she quickly exits the bandstand.

BACK TO WIDE SHOT

Louise is now on the street with Nathan, working the crowd. A van has stopped and a full load of skiers has exited. About a dozen people total are standing around.

BACK TO MILES

As he plays with a twinkle in his eyes.

ANOTHER ANGLE - THE STREET

As Peter pulls up in the police car. He takes off his sunglasses to watch.

BACK TO MILES

As he sees Peter. He quickly ends the number.

MILES (CONT'D)

Thank you very much. I'd like to announce that this entertainment has been brought to you courtesy of the Crosscreek Police Dept. All the donations will be applied towards a brand spanking new radar gun which Crosscreek's finest so desperately need.

WIDE SHOT - STREET

As there is a polite applause from the crowd. They turn and smile towards Peter.

MEDIUM CLOSEUP - PETER

As he smiles and nods to the crowd.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE TOWN'S OLD RED BRICK SCHOOLHOUSE DAY

It is later in the day. Louise and Miles are walking together towards the school.

INT. WIDE SHOT - A SCHOOL ROOM, MILES AND LOUISE

Louise is sitting on the teacher's desk as Miles is searching from school desk to school desk, looking for something. The room is all decorated for Christmas with construction paper stars and Christmas trees. The nearby window is supplying the only light.

LOUISE

What makes you think you're going to find it?

MILES

Faith. I'm going to find it. These are the same type desks. I know it.

Miles continues going from desk to desk as Louise slumps back and looks out of the window.

MILES (CONT.) (CONT'D)
 Aha! Here. I told you. Here it
 is.

Miles is pointing to a desktop. Louise joins him.

CLOSEUP - INSERT THE DESKTOP

Miles is pointing to an old, worn carving in the desk top.
 It is a carving of an elk with a full rack of antlers.
 Beneath the carving are the initials "J.M. 1957".

MILES (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Look... "Jonathan Miles, 1957" My
 boy did that. He was eight years
 old. That's good for an eight year
 old.

MCU - LOUISE

She isn't looking at the desk but is watching Miles.

LOUISE
 It is... very good.

MEDIUM SHOT - MILES

As he sits on a nearby desk.

MILES
 1957. That was the year that I ran
 out on my family. I left
 Crosscreek. I left my wife with an
 eight year old rowdy kid.
 (pause)
 That kid was a juvenile delinquent.
 Just like his old man. Imagine,
 carving up a school desk like that.

Boy, did that kid get into trouble. I had to come down here
 and talk to the principle. They told me, "You should take
 your job as a father a little more seriously."

(he laughs)
 I'll never forget that.

CLOSEUP - LOUISE

She is sitting in a desk a few desks away from Miles.

LOUISE
Miles, do you think you have wasted
your life?

 BACK TO MILES

He is slightly taken back by the directness of her question.

 MILES
Worse. I feel like I wasted
someone else's life.

MEDIUM CLOSEUP - LOUISE

 LOUISE
Well, I ask because I feel like I'm
wasting my life. I'm thirty-three
years old. I've never been married
but I've lived with two different
guys, both of whom eventually got
tired of me. I don't want to just
wait tables forever.

WIDE SHOT - THE DARKENED SCHOOL ROOM - MILES AND LOUISE

 MILES
Do you believe in magic, Louise?

 LOUISE
Yeah, I've seen you do magic.

MEDIUM CLOSEUP - MILES

 MILES
Not those tricks I do. Those are
just tricks. I mean "Magic, Magic".
The magic that can change men's
hearts.

CLOSEUP - LOUISE

 LOUISE
I don't know what you're talking
about.

 BACK TO MILES

 MILES
Well, I'll tell you. I didn't used
to believe in anything.
 (MORE)

MILES (CONT'D)

And doing magic tricks can make you cynical because you figure everything has an angle, everything is a trick.

BACK TO LOUISE

Her reaction.

MILES (CONT. O.S.) (CONT'D)

But between coming home for Christmas and sleeping under those picnic tables, I figured something out. And that was that there must be some kind of "Magic-Magic".

BACK TO MILES

MILES (CONT.) (CONT'D)

I've seen it. "Magic-Magic" is when a man is good-for-nothing all of his life and can be forgiven when he is old. It's when people can love people they don't even like. And it's when God can become a little baby out of love. That's Christmas. I call all of that "Magic-Magic".

You can never waste your life if you believe.

(getting up to leave)

Remember that an old bum told you that once.

CLOSEUP - LOUISE

Reaction, as she smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. THE CAFE NIGHT

The CLINK of a coffee cup extended over the previous scene brings us sharply to a CLOSE SHOT of Miles. He sits alone, drinking a cup of coffee. The cafe is quite busy. The crowd is mostly skiers. LAUGHTER is heard amid the b.g. NOISE.

HIGH ANGLE - MILES

As he sits looking like a lonely patch of grey amid the sea of brightly colored ski jackets.

MEDIUM SHOT - MILES' POV

Of a SMALL BOY clad in new jacket, hat, mittens and scarf. He is making his way through the crowd, laughing. CAMERA FOLLOWS the child to his PARENT'S table.

CLOSE SHOT - MILES

As he watches the young family.

ANGLE - DOOR CAFE

As the Rancher and THREE FRIENDS enter. CAMERA FOLLOWS as they make their way to an empty table.

BACK TO MILES

As his eyes follow the men.

BACK TO THE MEN'S TABLE

The Rancher is smiling and laughing with a WAITRESS.

INSERTS, MEN AT TABLE POV

Laughing mouths, cigarettes lit, etc.

BACK TO MILES

As he suddenly rises. He heads for the door, pushing his way through the crowd. CAMERA FOLLOWS as he exits.

EXT. CAFE, MILES NIGHT

As he stands outside. It is nearly silent except for the MUFFLED NOISE escaping from the cafe. Miles looks up the street. Something in the distance seems to catch his attention.

MILES' POV - STREET

Down the street the corral is visible, and in it the silhouette of the captive elk.

EXT. THE TOWN CHURCH, LS NIGHT

The church is bathed in moonlight. The windows are brightly lit. CHRISTMAS CAROLS can be heard coming from inside. A LATE PARISHIONER quickly approaches the church and enters.

INT. CHURCH, MCU - LOUISE

As she is singing. The late parishioner squeezes past her in the pew as the last chorus comes to an end.

MEDIUM SHOT - PULPIT

as the PASTOR steps up to speak;

PASTOR

Welcome everyone. This is such a special night. Tonight we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. God making himself into a humble, human baby, born in a stable...

MCU - SAUNDERS

Sitting in the pew, listening.

PASTOR (CONT. O.S.) (CONT'D)

...destined to bring the human race what it never deserved. Forgiveness.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE NIGHT

The Rancher and his friends are drinking, swapping stories. The waitress passes by again and they order another round. One of them asks what time it is. It's 11:35 (AD LIB)

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - MS NIGHT

Of Miles as he leans against an old building. The various Christmas lights are illuminating him in a multi-colored light. The DISTANT SOUND OF CHRISTMAS CAROLS can be heard coming from the church. Miles is watching something. We see it to be

CLOSEUP ELK

The elk, placidly standing in its bonds.

WIDE SHOT, HIGH ANGLE

Of the deserted street. Miles starts to walk towards the corral. MUSIC UP, strong, purposeful.

MOVING SHOT - MILES

As he walks.

LOW, WIDE ANGLE

From behind the corral towards Miles. The elk is in f.g. as the old man approaches the corral. He leans his head against the bars of the corral, peering at the elk.

MILES' POV - ELK

Who is now struggling against the ropes.

BACK TO MILES, CLOSEUP

MILES

Are you OK, fella? Are you
alright?

(his eyes are moist)

Did they feed you? I bet they
didn't even feed you. Why doesn't
someone do something about...

Miles quickly turns to see if anyone is watching. Silently he climbs into the corral.

EXTREME CLOSEUP - MILES

As he inches towards the animal.

BACK TO THE ELK, CLOSEUP

Frightened, pulling against the ropes.

BACK TO MILES

CAMERA PANS DOWN to see his hand slowly edging into his pocket and producing an old pocket knife. He pulls out the blade which glistens in the moonlight.

EXTREME CLOSEUP - ELK

Breathing quickly.

MEDIUM SHOT - MILES

As he stops, watching the animal for a moment, his heart pounding. With a sudden movement, he reaches for a rope and begins to cut through it. Systematically, he cuts through one rope after another.

MILES (CONT'D)

Go.

CUT TO:

INT. CAFE NIGHT

The Rancher and his friends are rising, laying money on the table for the check. They are fairly drunk. They exit.

EXT. CAFE NIGHT

As they close the door behind them. They are AD LIBBING loudly and crudely. The rancher starts to tell a joke, stopping suddenly as he sees a movement in the corral down the street.

RANCHER'S POV, LONG SHOT - CORRAL

As the gate is flung open and the elk bounds off into the night.

BACK TO THE MEN

The rancher shouts and runs towards the corral, his friends following closely.

MEDIUM SHOT - CORRAL

Miles sees them coming. He takes off through the back of the corral and runs down an alley behind the row of shops.

THE CORRAL GATE

As the men arrive. The Rancher is furious.

POV - HILLSIDE

As the elk is disappearing into a distant grove of trees.

BACK TO THE RANCHER

RANCHER
Dammit! Get him!

WIDER SHOT

As two men take off down the alley. The third runs down the front of the street. There is a good deal of angry AD LIB SHOUTING. The Rancher turns and heads towards his parked truck.

MEDIUM SHOT - TRUCK

The Rancher opens the door and removes a hunting rifle from the gun rack.

INT. CHURCH NIGHT

WIDE ANGLE MOVING SHOT of the congregation. They are standing, SINGING LOUDLY. A wide assortment of PEOPLE make up the crowd; tourist, locals, nearby ranchers and family, transient workers, etc.

CLOSEUP - LOUISE

Singing.

CUT TO:

EXT. A SIDE STREET NIGHT

One of the Rancher's FRIENDS is running. He stops and yells out;

MAN #1
Did you get him? Dan! Did you get
him?

EXT. NATHAN'S MOBILE HOME, MS WINDOW NIGHT

A curtain pulls aside and the face of Nathan appears. He looks curiously to see what the noise is about.

ANGLE - BACK ALLEY - MILES

As he runs for his life. He scrambles over a wooden fence and drops to the other side. The two men are only twenty-five yards behind him. They reach the fence and quickly climb it. On the other side, the old man is nowhere to be seen.

MEDIUM SHOT - BENEATH HOUSE - MILES

Who is crouching in the darkness amid the wooden post supports of the old deserted house. SOUND of the men searching the area frantically is heard.

MAN #1 (O.S.)
Quick, get some flashlights.

SOUND of a man's running FOOTSTEPS as the third man arrives on the scene.

MAN #3 (O.S.)
Where is he? Where could he go?

EXT. DOORWAY OF THE MOBILE HOME NIGHT

The door opens and the small figure of Nathan exits. He is wearing a stocking cap and galoshes and is wrapped in a blanket over his pajamas. CAMERA FOLLOWS as he wanders wide-eyed down the street towards the noise.

EXT. HOUSE

Coming to the deserted house, Nathan stops to watch the men. Now with the flashlights, they search throughout the house. Occasionally the glow of their lights is seen in the dark structure. The Rancher is now on the scene shouting orders.

MEDIUM SHOT - NATHAN

Nathan stands in the snow, pulling the blanket tighter as he watches the men.

ANOTHER ANGLE - SIDE OF THE HOUSE

Nathan wanders along the side of the house. On instinct, he bends down and looks through an opening in the siding.

MEDIUM SHOT - UNDER THE HOUSE - MILES

Who looks at the boy with a frightened, helpless look.

WIDER ANGLE - SIDE OF THE HOUSE

One of the searching men rounds a corner and sees the boy looking under the house. He runs over bends down and shines the flashlight underneath.

MAN #2
Hey, I got him!

BACK TO MILES

As he quickly scrambles to the other end of the house and out a hole on the other side.

MAN #2 (O.S.) (CONT'D)
He's getting out on the other side,
quick!

MEDIUM SHOT - RANCHER

As he runs towards the back of the house, gun in hand.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHURCH NIGHT

The service is over. People are leaving the church, laughing and occasionally hugging each other as light spills out the church's open doors. ORGAN MUSIC can be heard, coming from inside.

MEDIUM SHOT - LOUISE

As she hugs a friend. She is drying tears from her eyes.

LOUISE
(laughing)
I always cry on Christmas Eve.

MEDIUM SHOT

As Saunders is shaking someone's hand. He is smiling and laughing. The CHURCH BELLS suddenly begin to ring. Saunders reaches for his pocket watch.

INSERT - WATCH

It reads: 12:00

BACK TO SAUNDERS

SAUNDERS
(to a friend)
Hey, it's Christmas!

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE - MILES NIGHT

The old man is frantically running up the steep hill behind the house. The moon is full now, illuminated the white hillside. BELLS are heard distantly.

BACK TO RANCHER

As he arrives at the base of the hill, seeing the struggling figure on the hillside. Calmly, he raises the gun to his shoulder. ù ÷

MEDIUM SHOT - SIDE OF HOUSE

As the men round the house, followed by Nathan. Seeing what the Rancher is doing, the men retreat back around the corner, out of sight. Nathan, however, is left obviously bewildered.
THE HILLSIDE - MILES

Who is about twenty yards from a small grove of trees. He is wheezing, gasping for air.

CLOSEUP - NATHAN

Screams.

CLOSEUP - RANCHER

Who simultaneously fires. The CRACKING SOUND obscenely rips through the cold calm night.

CLOSEUP - MILES

As the bullet tears through his chest. He shudders and stumbles into the grove.

CLOSEUP - SAUNDERS AND LOUISE

Reacting to the shot.

WIDE SHOT - INSIDE GROVE OF TREES

Miles takes a few more steps before falling to his knees. Softly, he lowers himself in the snow. The moonlight and trees cast a dark shadow over his now still form.

MEDIUM SHOT - RANCHER

Who lowers the rifle. Man #3 runs up to him and grabs the rifle.

MAN #3

Hell, Cooper, you're gonna kill someone.

(looking)

You didn't hit him did ya!

RANCHER

I... I couldn't see.

MEDIUM SHOT - NATHAN

He knows something awful has happened and is now crying. He starts for the hill but one of the men grabs him and carries him back towards the street.

WIDE SHOT - MAIN STREET

As the man carries the boy. There stands Pat -- she's frantic. She clutches the boy and hurries him home. Saunders arrives, looking uneasy. He asks,

SAUNDERS

What happened? Was that a shot?

MAN #2
Nothing, forget it.

HIGH WIDE SHOT - MAIN STREET

As the men pile into the waiting pickup and drive away. Saunders stands looking after them for a moment, then turns and walks back towards the church. CAMERA RISES to see the pickup truck disappearing in the distance. We notice the banner which reads"

WELCOME, SANTA CLAUS

And the blinking of the colored lights. After a moment all is silent. Finally the police car arrives, its lights flashing. Peter gets out of the car and stands, looking around at the now empty street. Seeing nothing, he gets back in the car and drives off.

DISSOLVE TO:

ANOTHER WIDE SHOT - MAIN STREET - DAY

The town is just waking up. A car or two passes by, but mostly the street are empty.

MEDIUM SHOT - NATHAN'S MOBILE HOME

The door opens and Nathan quietly sneaks out. He is sufficiently bundled up this time in coat, hat, mittens, etc. He closes the door and heads down the street. CAMERA FOLLOWING.

CUT TO;

ANGLE - HILLSIDE, NATHAN - DAY

Who is struggling up the hill, waist deep in snow. He must stop frequently to catch his breath. Gentle, haunting MELODY UNDER.

MEDIUM SHOT - DOORWAY OF SAUNDER'S STORE - DAY

As the door opens and Saunders steps out.

TRAVELING SHOT - MAIN STREET, SAUNDERS

He makes his way down the sidewalk. He is serious, thinking about something.

THE DOOR OF NATHAN'S MOBILE HOME

As Saunders steps up to it and knocks. After a few moments a sleepy Pat appears.

CAMERA ADJUSTS TO TWO SHOT.

SAUNDERS

I'm sorry to bother you, Pat. I just wanted to check up on Nathan. Is he OK?

PAT

He's fine, he's still asleep. I don't know what on earth he was doing with those men last night. They were shooting guns around. Can you believe that?

MEDIUM CLOSEUP - SAUNDERS

SAUNDERS

(hesitating)

Pat, there's something I think you should know about. I heard from Jonathan's father yesterday. He's looking for Jonathan. Do you know where he is? I wouldn't bother you with it... it's just that I told him I would try to find out.

MEDIUM SHOT - PAT

PAT

I really could care less where he is. I think he's in Oklahoma somewhere. Oklahoma City, I think. That's all I know. Listen, I don't want no father of Jonathan coming around. I want to protect my boy.

BACK TO TWO SHOT

SAUNDERS

Don't worry. He doesn't even know anything about you or a son. I'll just tell him I heard Jonathan was in Oklahoma City. Thanks, Pat.

PAT

Yeah, thanks Mr. Saunders. I appreciate your help... really.

Pat smiles and closes the door. Saunders turns, CAMERA HOLDING momentarily on his reaction.

HIGH ANGLE - NATHAN

Nathan is still struggling through the snow. The hill is now quite steep. From the angle we can see that Nathan is following the faint tracks of the old man from the night before.

CUT TO:

THE GROVE OF TREES - DAY

Just the edge of the grove is visible, including the tracks in the snow that lead into the glade. Nathan wearily enters the shot, steps into the ring of trees and stops.

CLOSEUP - NATHAN

Reaction.

REVERSE LOW ANGLE - NATHAN

There in the middle of the glade, where the tracks end, stands a small, perfectly formed Christmas tree, neatly adorned with red trim and tiny burning candles.

BACK TO NATHAN

As he slowly approaches the tree. He kneels next to it. There in the snow lies a package, carefully wrapped in green paper with a red bow. CAMERA TIGHTENS as the boy is drawn irresistibly towards the package.

CLOSEUP - NATHAN'S HANDS

As he unwraps the green paper and opens the box. Wrapped in tissue is a delicate crystal figure of an elk.

CLOSEUP - NATHAN

NATHAN
(in a whisper)
Magic...

Nathan looks up to see

POV - HILLSIDE, THE ELK

The Bull Elk stands majestically on the crest of a nearby ridge. He looks at the boy with a special, secret wisdom, then turns and bounds over the crest into the deep forest.

THE END