

Deliver Me From Nowhere

written by

Scott Cooper

Based on the book, "Deliver Me From Nowhere," by Warren Zanes

IN BLACK, the rising sound of Orff instruments, such as those featured in Terrence Malick's, "Badlands." Warm, wooden notes of the xylophone mix with a glockenspiel's bell-like tones, evoking a whimsical, but somewhat haunted playfulness.

UP ON:

CARD: **Freehold, New Jersey, 1957**

1 EXT. 87 RANDOLPH ST. - FREEHOLD, NJ - FALL - DAY 1

Eight-year-old BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN pedals his Columbia tank bicycle with the carefree enthusiasm of youth. Dressed in worn blue jeans and a faded jacket, a soft sunset bathes the boy in golden light.

As the ethereal and playful theme continues, we FOLLOW BRUCE down RANDOLPH ST., where he pedals a long stretch, the instruments accentuating the innocent nature of childhood.

Bruce coasts to a stop, in a mostly barren front yard, a dilapidated house looming in the background.

Bruce's mom, ADELE, exits the house at a swift clip. She masks a hint of agitation with a tight smile.

ADELE

We need to pick up your father.

Bruce grimaces and leans his bike against a GRAND COPPER BEECH TREE.

YOUNG BRUCE

Again?

Adele offers a reassuring hand. Bruce takes it and follows her to a car obviously tired from use.

2 INT. ADELE'S CAR - DAY - LATER 2

ADELE drives in tense silence. RACK FOCUS from ADELE to YOUNG BRUCE, looking at his mom, trying his best to read her.

3 EXT. ADELE'S CAR - FREEHOLD - DAY - MOMENTS LATER 3

The car moves through Freehold, Americana New Jersey.

4 EXT./INT. CAR - BAR - FREEHOLD - DAY - LATER 4

ADELE'S car pulls to a stop in front of a windowless

building. A stark, single light burns above the door. Young Bruce turns to her as if to plead, "can't you get him?"

ADELE

Go on. And don't forget to go
through the back door.

Adele lovingly squeezes his hand. BRUCE braces himself, and reaches for the door handle.

5

INT. BAR - FREEHOLD - MOMENTS LATER

5

Our CAMERA TRACKS with BRUCE, becoming HIS P.O.V., as he moves through a throng of hard, callused drinkers -- broken men whose dreams end in a glass of Pabst Blue Ribbon.

As Bruce passes waist-high through the men, his journey ends at the bar stool of his father, DOUG. Short, but powerfully built, Doug's hunched over a beer, in a cloud of smoke.

Bruce apprehensively approaches his father, who turns to the boy, his face flush from drinking.

YOUNG BRUCE

Mom says it's time to go home.

Peering through smoke and devoid of emotion...

DOUG

Wait outside. I'll be out.

6

INT. 87 RANDOLPH ST. - BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

6

Shadows of tree branches dance on the walls as a dim bulb casts eerie shapes across the room and a ROCKING HORSE in the corner. A baseball bat leans against a wall behind it.

YOUNG BRUCE sits on his bed, flipping through a SUPERMAN COMIC, while his parents argue downstairs. At first, its muffled, then the arguing becomes clearer, more intense.

Suddenly, the house falls silent, with only the sound of WIND CHIMES. Then, the creaking of the stairs.

PUSH IN on Young Bruce as he looks up, staring at his closed door, tensing for what's next. As the FOOTSTEPS draw nearer, rising, manic CHEERING swells, leading us to...

CARD: Riverfront Stadium, Cincinnati, 1981.

7

INT. RIVERFRONT ARENA - CINCINNATI - NIGHT

7

We start WIDE, capturing the full arena as BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN and the E STREET BAND launch into the anthemic "Born to Run." The energy is electric, the crowd pulsing in rhythm.

As the camera gradually moves in on Bruce, the focus tightens, drawing us into the intensity of his performance.

Every line and shadow on his face is captured, his eyes revealing a vulnerability that suggests a deeper, untold story. His voice, raw and powerful, carries an unspoken weight, hinting at a man grappling with something beneath the surface.

The CAMERA lingers on Bruce's face, each lyric a piece of his soul laid bare, a glimpse into the struggle hidden behind the spotlight. As Bruce reaches the apex of the chorus...

HARD CUT TO:

8

INT. BRUCE'S DRESSING ROOM - RIVERFRONT - CONTINUOUS

8

BRUCE sits on a fold-out chair, his head hanging low, utterly spent. His shirt clings to his body, soaked through with sweat, the remnants of his adrenaline-fueled performance still faintly pulsing beneath the exhaustion.

The door creaks open, and JON LANDAU cautiously pokes his head in. Landau -- smart, loyal, and possessed of an endearing, no-nonsense quality -- takes in the scene. Bruce, a man who just electrified an entire arena, now sits in solitude, the weight of the moment pressing down on him.

Landau steps inside, his presence a quiet contrast to the earlier chaos.

LANDAU

Fantastic show! Helluva way to end the tour. Need anything? Another beer? water?

BRUCE

I'm good, pal, thanks.

LANDAU

Local radio's here. They'd love a minute. And a writer from Creem.

Laughter and music emanates from down the hall.

BRUCE

Alright. Give me 5.

LANDAU

You bet. Just crack the door when you're ready.

Landau moves for the door but turns back to Bruce...

LANDAU (CONT'D)

Oh, the keys to the new rental are behind the woodpile, just outside the front door. Power's been turned on and your phone should be working.

Bruce softly nods his thanks, leans forward, his head resting just above his knees. Noticing, Landau hangs in the doorway.

LANDAU (CONT'D)

I still think it's worth considering a change of scenery. Maybe a place in the city or something.

BRUCE

(tired smile)

Still trying to talk me into New York?

LANDAU

Just thought it might clear your head, free you in some way.

BRUCE

Hard to pry me out of my small town, Jonny. You know the city scares me... But maybe L.A. I still think about that little cottage up in the hills.

LANDAU

(smiles)

That little cottage is still available.

Understanding Jon is up to something...

BRUCE

You dog.

Caught, Landau's smile widens.

LANDAU

Alright, crack the door when you're ready.

Bruce nods. Just as Jon is about to close the door...

BRUCE
Hey... Thanks for everything.
(a warm smile)
You and me, buddy.

LANDAU
(touched)
You and me.

Jon closes the door, but we remain inside with Bruce. He strips his shirt, reaches for a towel. He empties a glass of water onto the towel and places the towel over his face, pressing it, as if to block out the world.

FADE TO:

CARD: Colts Neck, New Jersey

9

EXT./INT. '67 CHEVELLE - COLTS NECK ROAD - MORNING

9

The HOT ROD cruises down a long drive, MATT DELIA at the wheel. The landscape is quiet, a modest ranch house coming into view, set against a reservoir. BRUCE checks a scrap of paper and nods.

BRUCE
This is it, Matty. Home sweet home.

DELIA
Looks nice and private.

The car rolls to a stop at the bottom of the driveway.

DELIA (CONT'D)
Once you're settled, stop by the garage. Your bike's almost done.

BRUCE
Deal.

They share a quick hug. Bruce grabs his bags and guitar.

DELIA
Need a hand?

BRUCE
I'm good, thanks for the lift.

Bruce steps out, heading for the front door.

10 INT. RENTAL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 10

The door creaks open, revealing a stark, quiet interior. The sparsely furnished rooms contrast sharply with the energy of Bruce's concert life.

BRUCE steps inside, the air is still, as if the house itself is holding its breath. He moves into the living room, taking in the view of the water spreading beyond the lawn.

11 INT. KITCHEN/HALLWAY/BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER 11

The CAMERA stays in the KITCHEN as BRUCE disappears down a HALLWAY, entering a BEDROOM with garish orange shag carpeting.

He pauses, taking in the carpet, his bed, and the child's ROCKING HORSE seen earlier in the flashback. Then:

VOICE O.S.

Yo.

BRUCE

Back here.

DELIA steps into the room, carrying a BOX of old photos, albums, and books under his arm. Flannery O'Connor's, *Selected Shorts* and Robert Frank's, *The Americans* peek out, along with several Woody Guthrie, Chuck Berry, the Kingsmen, and Hank Williams albums.

DELIA

Almost forgot these.

BRUCE

Thanks, man.

Delia places the box next to Bruce's rocking horse and does a double-take.

DELIA

What's with the horse?

BRUCE

(slight smile)

Oh, he's been with me a long time.

Delia raises an eyebrow.

DELIA

But why still hang on to it?

BRUCE
My folks left it when they moved to
California. I kept it.

DELIA
All these years?

BRUCE
(grins)
Yessir. I don't part with much.

DELIA
(half-smirking)
I'm gettin' that.

Delia glances down to the orange carpeting.

DELIA (CONT'D)
That carpet though, that's
something else.

BRUCE
I know, right? Sinatra's favorite
color.

DELIA
If it's good enough for Frank...

They share a quiet laugh, and Delia heads for the door.

DELIA (CONT'D)
Alright, brother. You know where to
find me.

Delia pauses, sensing Bruce's disquiet...

DELIA (CONT'D)
Don't forget: let's take the bikes
out. A little wind in our faces
might do us both some good.

BRUCE
I'm in.

Delia exits, leaving Bruce to look out at the reservoir.

wearing an Irish driving cap, BRUCE walks the shoulder of a
two-lane country road, the bite of winter against his skin.

13

EXT. NEW CAR LOT - FREEHOLD, NJ - LATER THAT DAY

13

BRUCE sits tentatively behind the wheel of a midnight blue, 1982 CHEVY Z-28 Camaro.

BRUCE

Never owned a new car before.

Bruce turns to the DEALER -- face like a blade, wide grin.

DEALER

Less than 200 miles on her. Old boy from Bay Head bought it for his wife as a birthday present, but she wanted something newer and more topless.

(laughs at his own joke)

Get a load of this...

The Dealer hands Bruce the keys. Bruce turns the ignition and the Camaro roars to life.

DEALER (CONT'D)

(leans into the window)

That's a 305 V8, and 145 horses.

Updated Lear seats...

(best salesman pitch)

Positraction rear end, T-tops, and

top of the line cassette player.

Pure class.

Bruce fingers the radio and offers a grin...

BRUCE

Got one with a record player?

The men share a laugh. Bruce then envisions himself driving and his demeanor changes...

BRUCE (CONT'D)

A little flashier than I'm used to.

DEALER

But awfully fitting for a handsome devil rock star.

(a smile)

I *do* know who you are.

Bruce offers a self-conscious laugh...

BRUCE

That makes one of us.

Bruce catches a glimpse of himself in the rearview and looks away. Nonetheless, he grapples with the decision and...

14 EXT./INT. CAMARO - MAIN STREET - FREEHOLD, NJ - DAY - LATER

Bruce's CAMARO moves down a Main Street lined with weathered storefronts. The places of small-town New Jersey. The familiar streets stir a mix of wistful memories and a sharp pang of pain.

15 OMITTED 15

16 EXT./INT. COUNTRY ROAD - LATE DAY - MOMENTS LATER 16

BRUCE drives through broad countryside. He takes the curves with a satisfied, but tentative feeling of someone driving his first new car. Foreigner's "Urgent" plays from the radio.

Bruce turns the dial, skips past NEWS, landing on a DJ...

RADIO DJ
... And hot off a world tour, our
hometown boy -- the great white
hope of Rock 'n Roll himself...

Bruce's "Hungry Heart" begins. He sighs, turns the radio off. As Bruce hugs a corner that well exceeds the speed limit...

17 EXT. MID-TOWN - BLACK ROCK - NEW YORK CITY - LATE DAY 17

The city's iconic skyline is both majestic and weathered, but our focus is on BLACK ROCK, Eero Saarinen's only skyscraper.

18 EXT. BLACK ROCK - CONTINUOUS 18

As we PUSH IN on the entrance, JON LANDAU enters frame...

19 INT. BLACK ROCK - LOBBY - LATE DAY - MOMENTS LATER 19

CAMERA follows LANDAU through a bustling lobby. It exudes modernist elegance -- sweeping, organic lines and expansive glass walls, flooding the space with natural light.

As LANDAU moves past a sign reading CBS RECORDS, toward a bank of elevators, a VOICE calls out...

VOICE O.S.

Jon!

Landau turns to find a well-dressed and coiffed AL TELLER. Teller is president of CBS RECORDS and a serious, career music executive. He approaches Jon, holding out a hand.

TELLER

My man, we have a meeting I've forgotten about?

LANDAU

No, I'm popping up to see Yetnikoff.

TELLER

Ah, the big guy still trying to convince Bruce to release his outtakes, huh?

The men share a laugh.

LANDAU

He can try all he wants, but it ain't gonna happen. No, I imagine he wants to know what's next, and we've only been off tour, what... a week now?

TELLER

Five days, but who's counting.
(wide smile)
So, what *is* next?

LANDAU

C'mon, Al.

Landau moves for the bank of elevators, when...

TELLER

Jon, wait.

Landau stops, turning back to Teller, who looks more serious.

TELLER (CONT'D)

I don't have to tell you, but we've got momentum like never before. We did one top ten on the "The River" and we think that's just the beginning. We think he can hit it out of the park with the next one.

Landau steadies himself, smiles.

LANDAU
You're right: you don't have to
tell me.

As Jon pivots off...

TELLER
Just saying, the iron's hot. Our
man's on a rocket ship and we don't
want to miss that window.

LANDAU
(forced smile)
I'll tell him you send regards.

As Landau moves off, it's clear the pressure is palpable.

20 EXT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - TWILIGHT 20

Bruce's CAMARO is parked out front. Light fog drifts across
the reservoir we see off in the distance.

21 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - KITCHEN - SAME TIME 21

We're TIGHT on a blinking ANSWERING MACHINE. BRUCE enters
frame and presses PLAY. He then moves off, down the hallway.

VOICE #1
*My, man. Clarence here. I'm back
from my honeymoon. Happy to drive
out if you wanna grab a drink or
just hang. Let me know.*

VOICE #2
*Bruce, it's Jon. Had a good meeting
with Yetnikoff. Let's connect when
you have a moment. No rush.*

VOICE #3
(soft, female, uncertain)
*Hey... It's Maggie, again. I want
to... I need to talk to you.*

Bruce RE-ENTERS frame, staring at the ANSWERING MACHINE.

#3 MAGGIE (CONT'D)
Please don't do this. Call me...

ON BRUCE, pained. Then another message.

#4 MAGGIE AGAIN

Don't make me call Jon and leave a message. I'll feel like an asshole calling him just to hear from you. I just want to know you're okay...

Bruce grimaces and moves off.

22 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT 22

BRUCE lies awake, guitar resting on his stomach. The house is so still he can hear the blood coursing through his veins.

He looks to the TV, which, at this hour, has turned to snow. He glances at a clock: 1:17 AM. He looks off, mind racing.

Bruce then reaches for a stack of books on his coffee table. James M. Cain's, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*.

Not in the mood. He then grabs Flannery O'Connor's, *Selected Shorts*. He turns to a dog-eared page, begins to read.

PUSH IN ON BRUCE, too amped to concentrate. He places Flannery back and lets out a frustrated, guttural NEAR-YELL, like some nameless agitation stuck in his ribcage.

Suddenly, the room fills with a crude, rock-and-roll guitar. It's almost punk in its feel.

23 INT. THE STONE PONY - ASBURY PARK - LATER THAT MORNING 23

The stage is small, with a well-trodden wooden floor. Amps, a tangle of cords, a keyboard, and a drum kit crowd the space, the basics behind the raw sound of club rock and roll.

BRUCE has joined the house band -- *Cats on a Smooth Surface*. Instead of *leading* the band, Bruce embeds himself *in* it, without the burden of leadership. He's along for the ride and loving it, a star off the clock.

Mid-song on Little Richard's, *LUCILLE*, where Bruce, borrowing the band's backup guitar, beats on the thing like he's back in a garage band. His shouted delivery captivates the room.

The scene plays with the Cats delivering high-energy, raw rock, leaving the audience in a state of restless joy.

ANGLE ON: a MAN around 30, and a WOMAN (mid-20s) next to him, dancing with sexy abandon.

The man unsuccessfully tries for Bruce's attention, but Bruce can't help but notice the woman. Their eyes meet.

24

EXT. STONE PONY - PARKING LOT - EARLY MORNING

24

The energy of the show lingering, BRUCE pushes thru the door, saying goodbye to the *CATS*. As he crosses to his Z-28...

VOICE O.S.

Bruce!

Bruce turns to find the MAN we recognize from earlier and his dancing companion, FAYE. She has a warm and relaxed vibe.

JOEY

Hey, man. It's Joey!

Bruce isn't so sure...

JOEY (CONT'D)

Romano. We had gym class together.

BRUCE

(finally recognizing)

Joey, hey, man. Of course. Been a long time. How've you been?

JOEY

Good. I mean, not as good as you, but, c'mon, who is?!

(shakes his head)

who'd a thunk our Freehold boy was gonna be a superstar.

Bruce performs a half bow.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Hey, how're your folks?

BRUCE

Seem to be getting by. Moved out to California just after we graduated.

Wanting to move on, Bruce directs his attention to...

JOEY

You remember Faye? My sister?

BRUCE

(warm)

No. No, not really. Sorry.

Bruce extends a hand. Sweet, but nervous, Faye shakes it.

JOEY

Faye was a few years behind us.

BRUCE

Ah, yeah. Well, high school was all a blur.

JOEY

Sure, I mean, you meet so many people now-a-days.

Before Bruce can respond, a FRIEND calls out for Joey from across the parking lot. Joey holds up a hand to his friend.

JOEY (CONT'D)

Can't wait for the next record, man. Next thing you know, it's "Elvis's in the building!"

Joey moves off, leaving Bruce alone with Faye.

FAYE

Sorry. He's been saying he'd introduce us for a while. Like, since I graduated. I didn't believe he really knew you.

Bruce laughs, watches Joey move across the lot.

FAYE (CONT'D)

Loved your version of "Lucille."
You let all the stops out.

BRUCE

(really beginning to see
how beautiful she is)
You like Little Richard?

FAYE

Who doesn't? He's the *real* king of rock 'n' roll.

Impressed, Bruce smiles at her musical tastes.

FAYE (CONT'D)

Look, I know this is kinda weird. I told Joey, you know, that he probably shouldn't bother you... But, I mean, if you'd ever like to... you know... hang out, grab a coffee.

BRUCE

It's not weird at all. Believe me, I've met a few sisters.

(laughs)

But look, I'll be honest.

(MORE)

BRUCE (CONT'D)

(he says, lying)

I'm kinda seeing somebody. *Kinda.*
(MORE)

BRUCE (CONT'D)

And I bet you and me could have a lot of fun. I'm just not sure *I'll* be a lot of fun. I'm sorry.

FAYE

I get it. I'm just a big fan. But I know you have a lot of those. Just... well, if you change your mind or you'd like to meet up.

Faye extends a hand. Bruce takes it to find a scrap of PAPER.

BRUCE

Maybe some day.

FAYE

That'd be great.

Just then a FAN drives by in a TRUCK and yells:

FAN

Bruce, you suck!!

BRUCE

(smiling)

Another satisfied customer.

FAYE

And clearly not a Little Richard fan.

They burst with laughter and Faye moves off. Bruce watches her go, then she turns, smiles. It's electric. Bruce opens the folded paper: Faye's number in red ink.

25

EXT./INT. CAMARO - COUNTRY ROAD - LATER THAT NIGHT

25

Bruce cruises, the night shrouded in a heavy darkness. His only company the expanse of open road.

ON BRUCE, eyes still reflecting the adrenaline boost of a performer who has just gotten off stage. Though finished, he's not yet ready to let the night slip away. He's in the in-between, uneasy place.

26 EXT. 87 RANDOLPH ST. - VACANT LOT - BEFORE DAWN - LATER 26

BRUCE'S face is lit by the dash's glow. He pulls to a stop.

His childhood home has been razed, leaving behind nothing but a weed-choked empty lot. But amidst the desolation, the grand TREE from his youth still stands sentinel, a silent witness to the passage of time.

ON BRUCE, his mind wandering to...

27 INT. 87 RANDOLPH ST. - BEDROOM - NIGHT - **THE PAST** 27

YOUNG BRUCE is on his bed, where we left him, staring at a HAUNTING SHADOW approaching his door. The boy braces as his father moves through the doorway, holding a fresh beer. Swaying slightly...

 DOUG
C'mon, let's go. Put 'em up.

 YOUNG BRUCE
I'm tired.

 DOUG
 (grabs for Bruce's arm)
You're too young to be tired. I've
been at the factory all day.

 YOUNG BRUCE
Daddy, you know I don't like to
fight.

 DOUG
Yeah, well sometimes you have to.

Resigned, Bruce stands and puts up his small fists. Doug roughly moves Bruce into a fighting stance.

 DOUG (CONT'D)
Turn to your side, left hand up,
coverin' your face.

Bruce does so.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Now, bring your chin down or it'll
be too easy to hit.

Doug begins to circle Bruce, his hands raised in a playful boxing stance. The atmosphere is charged with a mix of menace and uncertainty as the father moves around the room.

Doug throws a few soft punches, lightly tapping Bruce. Bruce smiles, "this isn't so bad."

Then Doug's movements become more erratic. His playful punches become harder, and a competitive edge creeps into his demeanor. Young Bruce doesn't realize the shift.

Suddenly, with surprising force, Doug swings his arm and SLAPS young Bruce *hard* across the cheek. The boy is stunned as the room falls silent.

ADELE (O.S.)

DOUGLAS!! Enough!

A furious Adele pulls Doug away, leaving Bruce rubbing his cheek in a room heavy with tension and heartbreak.

28

INT. 87 RANDOLPH - STAIRWAY/KITCHEN - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Fueled by anger and frustration, ADELE and DOUG argue loudly.

Fearing for his mother's safety, we FOLLOW a terrified Bruce as he creeps down the stairway, holding a baseball BAT.

As the argument escalates, Bruce slowly moves past a PORTRAIT of a young GIRL hanging prominently in the LIVING ROOM.

He approaches his father, and *swings* the bat, the sickening thud reverberating, as it strikes his father's back. The blow hardly moves Doug, but as he drops his beer bottle to the floor, beer pooling, Adele's eyes widen in shock.

The reality of the situation sinking in, Bruce stands frozen. Doug turns, grim-faced, and Bruce drops the bat. Suddenly, Doug LAUGHS.

DOUG

That's right, don't ever let anyone
touch your mother.

Adele moves to embrace her son as Doug exits the kitchen.

29 EXT. RANDOLPH ST. - DAWN - THE NEXT DAY - **THE PAST** 29

YOUNG BRUCE trudges wearily along the frost-covered street, as the RUMBLE of an approaching engine shatters the quiet. Bruce turns as his father's TRUCK pulls up beside him.

Doug swings open the door. His face etched with remorse...

 DOUG
Get in.

Bruce hesitates, uncertainty in his eyes, but something in his father's vulnerable expression softens his resolve.

 YOUNG BRUCE
What about school?

 DOUG
No school today. You're coming with me.

Bruce climbs in, sinking into the leather box-spring seats.

30 EXT. STRAND MOVIE THEATRE - FREEHOLD - DAY 30

Above the entrance, the marquee announces: "**THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER**" in bold letters.

31 INT. STRAND MOVIE THEATRE - DAY 31

The theater is bathed in shadows. The screen's flickering light casts eerie shapes across the rows of seats.

YOUNG BRUCE sits beside his FATHER in the center of the sparsely populated theater. The seats around them are empty, the silence filled only with the ominous music of the film.

The scene on-screen is tense. *REVEREND HARRY POWELL, portrayed by Robert Mitchum, is stalking the children, his menacing figure looming large. The chilling score heightens the sense of dread.*

Bruce's small hands grip the armrests, his legs pulled up to his chest.

He glances sideways at his father, seeking some sign of reassurance. But Doug's face is a stone mask, his eyes fixed on the screen, emotionally distant.

32 INT. CAMARO - RANDOLPH ST. - BEFORE DAWN - MOMENTS LATER 32

We MATCH-CUT TIGHT to an uneasy BRUCE, his breath quick.

33 EXT. DINER - W. 53RD ST. - NYC - NIGHT

33

The small diner beckons with neon allure. Its exterior adorned with flickering signs promising a haven for New York's fringes, no matter the hour.

 LANDAU O.S.
 Reports on the European leg are
 still coming in.

34 INT. DINER - W. 53RD ST. - NYC - NIGHT - SAME

34

BRUCE and LANDAU sit in a corner booth. The atmosphere buzzes with chatter, sizzle, and the clinking of dishes, but their corner feels isolated, a microcosm of Bruce's current emotional state.

 LANDAU
 Something changed on that tour and
 still seems to be changing.

 BRUCE
 Oh, yeah?

 LANDAU
 Oh, yeah. Promoters would have you
 back tomorrow if they could. We're
 very well set up over there.

As Bruce focuses on his meal...

 LANDAU (CONT'D)
 But it's the *next* record that
 situates all of it. You know how it
 goes, once you have your first top
 ten, they want three for the next.

 BRUCE
 (slightly amused)
 That's not us, Jonny. We've never
 been about singles, but albums. The
 whole story.

 LANDAU
 (soft laugh)
 They're not thinking about albums.
 They're thinking about momentum.

Bruce looks up, sensing something beneath Jon's words.

 LANDAU (CONT'D)
 They're just excited. Want to make
 sure we don't lose steam.

Bruce looks off and his gaze falls to an older MAN sitting alone on a stool at the counter. The man has a feeling in his eyes Bruce can understand.

BRUCE
It's hard coming home.

LANDAU
I know. Transitions have never been easy for you.

BRUCE
Yeah, but I'm really feeling it this time. Like there's a... an emptiness.

Landau holds Bruce's look, taking in Bruce's muted state...

LANDAU
It'll pass. Just need give it some time.

Bruce isn't so sure. He shifts uncomfortably, gestures "check" to GLADYS, the waitress, signaling a change in the conversation.

BRUCE
How's Barbara? I haven't seen her since your wedding.

LANDAU
Busier than ever. But doing great.

GLADYS
(beams at Bruce)
It's already been taken care of.

BRUCE
You didn't have to do that, but thank you. Very kind.

Bruce pulls two \$20's and drops them as a tip.

35

EXT. 8TH AVE. -- NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT - LATER

35

The streets bustle. BRUCE and JON walk down 8th Ave., the city alive with the rhythm of daily life.

BRUCE
Thank Barbara for the Flannery O'Connor book. Really lovin' it.
(MORE)

BRUCE (CONT'D)

Especially "A Good Man is Hard to Find." Those characters burrow under your skin, man.

LANDAU

Flannery has a real flair for the grotesque. I wasn't sure the devil existed until I read her.

They share a laugh and walk a bit farther, when...

BRUCE

I've been thinking about what you said: Next time we go into the studio, don't spend all that time and money *writing* in there. Be ready with the material.

LANDAU

Smart. You finished the River with only 20k in the bank. For two years, you spent all your money in the studio finishing that record. You don't want to do that again.

BRUCE

I've read about these new machines where you can multi-track at home, for cheap.

LANDAU

They record on quarter inch?

BRUCE

No. Cassettes.

LANDAU

Cassettes??

(laughs)

How many tracks?

BRUCE

Four. You can get a basic arrangement down. A little more than a guitar/vocal demo. They don't sound great, but, you know, it isn't about capturing sounds so much as ideas.

LANDAU

Look into it.

BRUCE

I am.

From a passing taxi, a FAN leans out the window...

FAN
Love ya, Bruce! Hungry Heart!!

Bruce waves to the fan.

LANDAU
See? Hit singles aren't so bad.

The friends share another laugh. Bruce looks to the towering cityscape. The city buzzes, a reminder of its constant flow.

A36 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A36

Guitar resting in his hands, BRUCE sits on the floor, staring at a MEAD notebook with a blank page, waiting to be filled.

He strums a few uneven, half-hearted chords. Nothing comes.

36 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

36

ALL MY CHILDREN plays quietly on the TV, the soap's overblown emotions and bright lights a stark contrast to the lifeless, dim room Bruce sits in.

BRUCE slouches against the wall, bouncing a rubber ball against the wall, the repetitive thud echoing when...

A RINGING PHONE startles him. It's picked up by the machine:

ADELE V.O.
Honey, everything okay? Been trying you for a few days... We're good out here, just not sure I'll ever get used to California. I miss the seasons. And your dad, well, he's, you know, your dad. But at least he's trying. He's coaching Pam's basketball team. Ok. I'll try you later.

Bruce's expression doesn't change as Adele's voice fades. PRE-LAP the thud of a bouncing ball...

37 INT. 87 RANDOLPH ST. - BEDROOM - NIGHT - THE PAST

37

YOUNG BRUCE slumps against the wall, lazily tossing a rubber ball and catching it.

ADELE O.S.
Bruce! Come downstairs! Hurry!

38

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

38

ADELE is standing near the radio, a smile on her face as the soft, silky smooth voice of FRANK SINATRA's "Angel Eyes" fills the room.

YOUNG BRUCE enters, curious.

ADELE

Listen to this. It's Frank Sinatra.

Bruce listens, intrigued as Adele sways to the music.

ADELE (CONT'D)

You know, Frank is from New Jersey,
too. Just like us.

Bruce's eyes widen a bit, a spark of interest igniting.

YOUNG BRUCE

Really?

ADELE

He sure is.

Adele crosses to Bruce, takes his hand, and they begin a slow dance. As she pulls her son close...

ADELE (CONT'D)

Promise you'll always save a dance
for your mom.

40 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS 40

The memory recedes, leaving a smile on Bruce's face.

41 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - EVEN LATER THAT NIGHT 41

Numbed by further boredom, BRUCE watches television.

He presses the remote's buttons and images flicker as he cycles through *Jane Fonda's Workout*, *Family Feud*, *MTV NEWS*. The relentless buzz plays like constant white noise when... Bruce's thumb finally stops, RESTING on the remote.

ON TV: Terrence Malick's "Badlands," where a shirtless Martin Sheen, as "Kit," rises slowly from a hole in the ground, brandishes a shotgun and shoots three hunters in the back, killing them. His partner, "Holly," reacts in horror.

ANGLE ON Bruce, sitting up, drawn in like a siren's call...

42 EXT./INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - COLTS NECK - MORNING - LATER 42

ECU on a VHS rental copy of "Badlands," with a sticker that reads "*Ted's Video Rentals*," resting near Bruce's elbow.

Hat pulled low, BRUCE sits in a hushed corner of the library. He's engrossed in a MICROFICHE machine, scrolling newspaper articles and archives from the CHARLES STARKWEATHER murders.

CLOSE ON MICROFICHE -- From the *Scottsbluff Star-Herald*:

ECU on BOLD... "**CHARLES STARKWEATHER'S KILLING SPREE**"

CLOSE on BRUCE'S EYES: Narrowing in growing interest.

CLOSE ON MICROFICHE: "**Murdered his girlfriend's mother, stepfather, and baby sister.**"

"Killed seven more people."

"He and 14-year-old Caril Ann Fugate roamed Nebraska."

"Starkweather confessed to murdering a gas station attendant."

"Ten of the 11 victims were Nebraskans."

ANGLE ON BRUCE: His jaw tightens. He scrolls to another article, eyes blinking in deep concentration.

IMAGE FROM *THE CHEYENNE TIMES*: A swaggering Starkweather leaving jail in handcuffs, in blue jeans and a black motorcycle jacket.

CLOSE ON BRUCE'S FACE: His unease deepening.

CLOSE ON MICROFICHE: "The role of Starkweather's companion, Caril Fugate, was more controversial. Fugate maintains that, after dating Starkweather for several months, she had broken up with him.

"Fugate's stepfather, her mother, and Caril's 2-year-old half sister Betty Jean Bartlett were probably already dead and their bodies stowed in outbuildings on the property."

EXTREMELY CLOSE ON BRUCE: His eyes lock on a particularly unsettling **IMAGE** of **CARIL** -- her face hard and unnerving, a chilling contrast to her youthful age. The look in her eyes pierces through time, unsettling Bruce.

CLOSE ON MICROFICHE: "STARKWEATHER STORY TO BE BASIS FOR MOVIE, 'Badlands'..."

PUSH IN on Bruce's NOTEPAD, where he writes "Starkweather" and "Caril."

ON BRUCE: The brutal, aimless violence and the entangled fate of Starkweather and Fugate stir something deep within him.

43

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - COLTS NECK - LATER THAT MORNING

43

BRUCE approaches a mid-30's librarian, seated behind a desk. Sensing his approach, she looks up, flustered.

LIBRARIAN
Oh... My God. It's you.
(oddly, she blurts out)
I'm Evelyn.

Evelyn can hardly take her eyes off Bruce. It's not clear if she's even breathing.

BRUCE
(charmed by her anxiety)
Hi, Evelyn. I'd like to check this
out.

Bruce hands her *CARIL*, by Ninette Beaver. Still flustered:

EVELYN

Hold on, was that *you* at the card catalogue? I mean, you found this yourself?

BRUCE

(smiles)

I've become a master in a very short time.

Suddenly, as if she'd forgotten how to facilitate check-out:

EVELYN

Wow. Um... Excuse me, I'm just...

Still quite nervous, she attempts a joke.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Don't suppose you have a library card.

BRUCE

(a sweet laugh)

No. Been a while since I've been in a library.

She reaches for a TEMPORARY card.

EVELYN

Then I'll just, uh...

(somewhat awkwardly)

You want your *actual* name on it? I mean... I could add something else.

BRUCE

(stings a bit, but...)

No, my name is more than fine.

EVELYN

(hurriedly fills it out)

Alright, you're all set... Bruce.

She hands Bruce his card. He takes it and offers a smile.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

By the way, regardless of what you may think...

(gestures: her hair up in a sort of prim bun)

(MORE)

EVELYN (CONT'D)

I've seen you a few times at the Pony.
(slightly saucy)
Even librarians let their hair down.

BRUCE

You've just made my day.

Bruce moves for the exit...

44 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - EVENING 44

BRUCE ejects his *personal* recording of ALL MY CHILDREN and inserts the rental copy of "Badlands." The machine whirs to life.

45 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 45

The OPENING CREDITS roll and the evocative strains of the film's soundtrack begin, the very same notes in our opening.

Sitting in a chair very close to the TV, and holding the copy of *CARIL*, BRUCE is immediately transported into the world of Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate...

46 INT. RENTAL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT 46

BRUCE is riveted as... *Holly's dog bounds through a stand of cattails. Holly speaks angrily to her father, who walks toward the dog with a gun. We do not hear their voices, only music.*

Holly's father then shoots the dog and Holly, her face a mask of shock, runs off in horror.

ON Bruce, the on-screen violence stirring unsettling emotions.

47 INT. RENTAL HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT 47

His fingers mindlessly shuffling the pages of *CARIL*, BRUCE is lost in the film's narrative as... *Kit is rifling through Holly's dresser, throwing her things into a suitcase. A pistol is visible in his back pocket.*

As Kit's scenes play out, Bruce begins to hear lines, in his own voice, from "*CARIL*," overlapping with the movie's audio.

BRUCE V.O.

"Starkweather's rampage was fueled by an insatiable desire for notoriety. He relished the chaos and fear he inflicted..."

Suddenly, Holly's father appears in the dresser mirror. Kit walks forward and draws the pistol. Kit then looks at Holly,, uncertain what her reaction to all this will be.

ANGLE ON the book, *CARIL*, and a PHOTOGRAPH of CARIL ANN FUGATE. Her face is cold and unnervingly detached, reflecting a haunting blend of innocence and malevolence.

Bruce's eyes lock onto the photo. The starkness of her expression further unsettles him. Back to the TV and:

Kit steps forward as Holly's father starts down the stairs. The conversation between Kit and the Father leads to... GUNSHOTS piercing the stillness of the room.

BRUCE V.O. (CONT'D)

"He manipulated Caril, drawing her into his violent fantasies, turning her into an accomplice to his heinous acts..."

As the shots ring out, Bruce looks off...

48 INT. 87 RANDOLPH - BEDROOM- EARLY EVENING - THE PAST 48

Young BRUCE peers out through sheer curtains, as DOUG's car pulls to a stop. Bruce's heart pounds in anticipation.

49 INT. STAIRWAY - EARLY EVENING - MOMENTS LATER 49

Young BRUCE sits on the landing, awaiting his father.

DOUG moves through the door and stops at the staircase, sensing young Bruce. He looks up at the boy.

DOUG

Finish your homework?

Bruce nods, his eyes searching for any hint of affection or approval. But Doug's gaze remains stony, unyielding.

Without another word, Doug turns away, moving towards the kitchen. The weight of missed connection hangs heavy. Pre-LAP

BRUCE V.O.

"Their bond was a toxic mix of dominance and submission, fueled by a perverse sense of love and loyalty..."

50 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS 50

ON TV: *Holly rushes to her bleeding father's side.*

HOLLY

Daddy... This is Holly. Are you going to be okay?

Her father does not respond. She looks back at Kit, who avoids her gaze.

The disturbing scene from the movie and the lines from the book MERGE, creating a phantasmagoric moment for Bruce as we see his REFLECTION in the television's screen.

Bruce's gaze lingers on the TV screen, but his mind is elsewhere, tangled in memories that resurface with every violent act he watches.

BRUCE V.O.

"The public's morbid fascination only served to heighten his infamy..."

A moment, then we FOLLOW Bruce to his BUREAU. He rifles through a mess of papers and detritus. Old bills, photographs, and discarded lyrics, until his fingers close around... a worn SNOOPY notebook.

Bruce opens it, writes: *Holly - Caril. Kit - Starkweather*. He then plays a few chords. They sound different than before, more musical, as though a song is forming.

51 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - KITCHEN - MORNING - MOMENTS LATER

Guitar laying beside him on the table, BRUCE sits before a cup of tea and half-eaten toast. "*CARIL*" rests open before him. He stares at an IMAGE of Starkweather's ELECTRIC CHAIR.

ECU on BRUCE, his expression reflecting the disturbing content he's absorbing. He picks up the phone, dialing a number with a sense of urgency...

VOICE O.S

(groggy)

Hello?

BRUCE
Mikey? Bruce. Can you track down
our glockenspiel?

52

EXT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - MORNING

52

MIKE BATLAN, Bruce's trusted roadie, hands BRUCE the
cumbersome glockenspiel.

BATLAN
Careful with this. Last guy I
handed it to started a one-man
polka band.

BRUCE
(small laugh)
No polka coming out of this house.

Bruce grins as Batlan moves for his DODGE VAN.

BATLAN
Holler if you need anything else.
You know, your grass cut or
whatever.

BRUCE
It's winter, Mikey. Grass is dead.

BATLAN
Yeah, well, I'm dying, cooped up in
mom's basement, looking for any
excuse to get the hell out.

BRUCE
I hear ya.

Bruce nods a wave and turns for the door. On his back...

BATLAN
Write some songs, man. So I can get
out and back on the road.

BRUCE
Wish it was that easy, Mikey. They
come when they come.

A distracted Bruce pushes through the front door. PRE-LAP the
crystalline and ethereal notes of a glockenspiel playing the
opening of "Badlands."

53 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - DAY - LATER 53

BRUCE sits on the chair before the TV, notepad on his lap, glockenspiel and guitar close by. ANGLE ON TV as: *KIT culls through a trash can, looking for valuables. He strips off his apron.*

KIT
I threw enough trash for today,
Cato. I'll see you in the morning.

Bruce is transfixed as the MAIN THEME, featuring the glockenspiel, begins. He hums along with the melody.

CLOSE ON BRUCE: Reveal a man caught between his creative drive and the weight of his recent discoveries. He hums a melody, his eyes reflecting a deep, unresolved tension. He reaches for his guitar.

54 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER 54

BRUCE sits at his desk, fingers gently tapping the glockenspiel's keys, producing soft, melodic notes that imperfectly mirror the movie's THEME.

He looks to the TV and the PAUSED image of: *Kit balancing a stolen mop on his finger. He mumble-hums lyrics.*

55 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER 55

As the iconic THEME from "Badlands" plays, BRUCE leans over his desk, writing. The J-200 resting on his lap. ON TV: *Kit sees Holly twirling a baton on her front lawn.*

ANGLE ON THE NOTEPAD: Bruce's pen hovers over the word "Starkweather," scribbling it once, twice, until the letters blur into one another, mirroring the confusion in his mind. He begins, using the THIRD-PERSON.

BRUCE
He saw her standin' on her front
lawn...

Bruce then hums under his breath, searching for more lyrics...

56 INT. COLTS NECK - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER 56

BRUCE strums his guitar, humming, absorbed in the music.

57

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

57

BRUCE plays the harmonica, creating a mournful wail.

58 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER 58

BRUCE talks verses through, half-singing the bare bones of a melody. Desperately hoping a song will emerge, he adds another line...

BRUCE
*He saw her standing on her front
lawn... Just a twirlin' her baton*

59 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - EVEN LATER THAT NIGHT 59

BRUCE sits at his desk, revising lines with intense focus. He strums his guitar, still searching for the magic.

BRUCE
*He saw her standin' on her front
lawn/just a twirlin' her baton/Him
and her went for a ride, sir/And
ten innocent people died...*

60 EXT. COLTS NECK RENTAL HOUSE - DOCK - DAWN - THE NEXT MORNING

Bruce stands on the dock, looking out over the water, a story emerging, the birth of a narrative anchored in violence.

61 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - NIGHT 61

ON TV: KIT, shackled in a leather transfer vest, and HOLLY, in handcuffs, are escorted across the tarmac by a mass of Montana State Troopers and National Guardsmen.

Bruce is fixated on Kit, PAUSING the image in CLOSE UP, where Kit looks like a charismatic James Dean.

Bruce then looks at his notepad, eyes bleary, and as if propelled by instinct, Bruce crosses out the third-person HE, replacing it with I.

He marks through HIM, replacing it with ME... the song has, very suddenly, begun to make a deeper kind of sense to him.

ON BRUCE, the realization sinking in -- he is no longer writing about Charles Starkweather. He is now the man facing the electric chair. The weight of this change is chilling, but Bruce knows this is where the song had to go.

He CIRCLES the word Starkweather and begins to sing...

BRUCE

*I saw her standin' on her front
lawn/just a twirlin' her baton/**Me**
and her went for a ride, sir/And
ten innocent people died...*

Somewhat satisfied, a hint of a smile from Bruce as the song begins to form. He looks to a CLOCK that strikes midnight.

62

EXT. FAYE'S HOUSE - WORKING CLASS TOWN, NJ - NIGHT

62

BRUCE stands outside a small, weather-beaten row house, its facade bearing the scars of many seasons. His eyes are fixed on the address scribbled on a scrap of paper in his hand.

BRUCE O.S.

*From the town of Lincoln, Nebraska
With a sawed off .410 on my lap
Through to the badlands of Wyoming
I killed everything in my path*

A quiet knock on the door.

63

EXT./INT. FAYE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

63

The door creaks opens, revealing a 3-year old girl, HALEY.

HALEY

Hi. Happy New Year.

Bruce looks at the scrap of paper in his hands, then back at Haley. He kneels to her eye level.

BRUCE

Happy New Year to you, too. Does
Faye live here?

HALEY

Who are you?

BRUCE

I'm Bruce. And who are you?

HALEY

Haley. I just had a hotdog.

BRUCE

I love hot dogs. Did it have
mustard or ketchup?

HALEY

Mustard.

FAYE appears behind Haley, kneeling beside her, a warm but weary smile on her face.

FAYE
(to Haley)
We weren't sure you were gonna show
up, were we, baby?

BRUCE
Sorry I'm so late, I was-

FAYE
(cutting him off, with a
wry smile)
It's okay, we're used to men not
keeping their word.
(laughs lightly)
Joking. *Sort of.*

Faye's MOM appears and takes Haley by the hand, leading her away.

<p>FAYE'S MOM Come on, Haley. Let's get you to bed. How late you-</p>	<p>FAYE (CONT'D) (pulling Bruce away) Don't wait up.</p>
---	--

Faye quickly closes the door behind them. Apologetically:

FAYE (CONT'D)
We're only staying here 'til I get
another job and my own place. But
I'm really glad you came.

BRUCE
(a smile)
Me, too. Let's go have some fun.

64	<u>EXT. CAMARO - COUNTRY ROADS - LATER THAT NIGHT</u>	64
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BRUCE drives through the dark countryside, the road winding beneath his wheels.

65	<u>INT. CAMARO - COUNTRY ROAD - SAME TIME</u>	65
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The engine hums with power as BRUCE grips the wheel, fully in control of the car. He glances over at FAYE, her hand resting on the edge of the window.

Faye slowly lowers the window, the rush of air filling the car, tousling her hair. She closes her eyes, a smile playing on her lips.

Faye leans into the breeze, not looking at Bruce, but her presence, the way she basks in the moment, draws his full attention.

Bruce steals glances, his eyes flicking between the road and her. Unable to pull his gaze away for long, her carefree aura transfixes him. The corners of his mouth twitch into a subtle smile as he watches her, captivated by her sexy allure.

66

INT./EXT. ASBURY PARK - CAROUSEL - LATE NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

FAYE looks concerned as BRUCE pries open the door to the striking 1929 copper-clad, beaux arts structure.

FAYE
You sure this is okay?

BRUCE
(sly smile)
It's definitely not okay. But a
buddy used to work here, so it
feels ok.

Bruce moves to a switch, FLIPS IT ON, and the carousel lights up.

As it begins to turn, Faye steps up onto the moving carousel platform, moving playfully among the vividly designed horses, the lights casting a warm, alluring hue.

Faye mounts a horse, feeling a mix of excitement and nervousness. Bruce then steps up and approaches her...

FAYE
(smiles)
You bring all your dates here?

BRUCE
Not at 2 AM.

FAYE
Well, I don't care what time it is,
it's one of my favorite places.

Faye's smile widens, infectious.

BRUCE
You smile a lot.

FAYE
Is smiling illegal?

BRUCE
Not in Asbury.

Bruce moves beside Faye's horse, the tension between them undeniable and crackling.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

What does Faye do in her free time?

FAYE

Faye doesn't have free time. Faye has Haley. But when she does, she plays chess.

BRUCE

Chess??

FAYE

Yeah. What's wrong with that?

BRUCE

Nothing. I think it's cool as hell.

FAYE

I also listen to a lot of music.

BRUCE

Oh yeah? Who's in Faye's rotation?

FAYE

Besides you? Lou Reed. Debbie Harry. Patti Smith, of course.

BRUCE

Great taste. Was the other night your first time at the Pony?

FAYE

C'mon! Like my tenth. But if I'm being honest, I'm not sure I've been there when *you* haven't.

Bruce smiles, the connection between them growing deeper.

BRUCE

And if *I'm* being honest, I can't believe I ever forgot you. Happy New Year.

He leans in, and they share a deep, lingering kiss, both looking like they've found something they didn't know they were missing.

FAYE

I hope I'm not making a mistake.

Faye takes a moment, then kisses him again, this time with more certainty. Under her breath...

FAYE (CONT'D)
I'm definitely making a mistake.

67 EXT. BEACH - DAYBREAK

67

BRUCE and FAYE walk an empty beach at first light. There's much left unsaid, but for now, they simply enjoy the quiet, the moment feeling timeless. A RINGING PHONE...

68 INT. KITCHEN - COLTS NECK - EARLY MORNING

68

The clock on the wall reads 7:43 AM. BRUCE holds the phone to his ear as the line rings...

BRUCE
Batlan?

BATLAN O.S.
(groggy)
Dear God, it's New Year's morning.

BRUCE
Figured you'd still be out. Hey,
you free? Need my grass cut.

Silence from Batlan.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
I'm joking, pal.

BATLAN
Haha, says the guy who feels like
he's been run over by a truck.

BRUCE
(a small laugh)
Hey, I'm thinking I may want to
demo some songs over here.

BATLAN O.S.
Right now? You mean *today, today?*

BRUCE
As soon as you can drag yourself
out of bed. Remember the multi-
track set-up we talked about?

69

EXT. RENTAL HOUSE - COLTS NECK - DAY

69

Carrying a TEAC 144 PORTASTUDIO, BATLAN follows BRUCE thru the door to the kitchen, where Bruce places a tea mug on the counter and turns toward the living room. As they move off...

BATLAN
(chuckling)
Susie Jenkins kept me busy till
midnight, then slick Billy
McCluster swooped in, and well, you
know how he is, little asshole...
Let's just say, I still can't
close.

BRUCE
You gotta close, Mikey!

BATLAN
well, not closing meant I met Pete
at the record shop. And he
suggested this -- the Teac 144
Portastudio. The manual says it's
pro-quality, but Pete says it's
bullshit. Says you can use it as a
multi-track, but that it isn't
studio-quality, by any means. That
you might not even want anyone to
hear it.
(laughs)
where do you want it?

70

INT. HOUSE - COLTS NECK - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

70

BRUCE leads BATLAN through the Living Room...

BRUCE
My bedroom.

BATLAN
How are the rest of the guys gonna
fit in there?

BRUCE
They're not. Just me. I'm not
making a record. Just roughing some
ideas.

BATLAN
But sounds like you've got some
songs.

BRUCE
(turns, smiling)
I don't know what I've got. But if
they're any good, we'll re-cut them
in the studio.

Bruce leads Batlan DOWN THE HALLWAY...

BATLAN
what else you need?

BRUCE
Couple of mics. I've got my J-200
acoustic, so bring an electric. And
my harmonica.

BATLAN
Gonna use your glockenspiel?

BRUCE
(smiling)
Definitely the glock.

71

INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - DAY - CONTINUOUS

71

BATLAN looks to the bed.

BATLAN
Aren't you going to be, you know?

BRUCE
Mikey.

BATLAN
I meant sleep. But hey, I don't
judge.

BRUCE
Think you just did.

They share a laugh. Batlan takes in the sparse, unwelcoming
room, noticing the orange carpet.

BATLAN
Nice carpet, man. Some candles or
bourbon might take the sting off.

Bruce smiles.

BATLAN (CONT'D)
At least, let me hang a poster.

BRUCE
No, man, this is just singing in
the shower.

Batlan crosses to place the TEAC 144 on a dresser.

BATLAN
You know I'm not a mixer, right?

BRUCE
Of course, I know.

BATLAN
And you know I don't know shit
about recording.

BRUCE
Mike, I'm not making a record. I
don't want an engineer, a producer,
or anyone who's gonna judge this
stuff. I just want to feel like I'm
in the room by myself.

BATLAN
Then you've found your man.

A72

INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A72

BRUCE rifles through the BOX of books and albums, when he
discovers an old PHOTO of himself as a young boy, with his
SISTER. They stand in front of their car, and we see a
cornfield and distant mansion rising behind them.

The image sparks a wave of nostalgia as we HEAR: the
sputtering cough and rattle of a 1940s jalopy.

FADE TO:

72

EXT./INT. 1940S JALOPY - COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK - THE PAST

72

DOUG drives along a winding country road. A wide-eyed YOUNG
BRUCE sits in front, with his sister VIRGINIA in the back.
They spot a grand mansion on a hill, protected by gates.

Doug parks, and they gaze at the mansion -- a symbol of
something distant, unattainable.

DOUG
Live in something like that and all
your problems'll disappear.
\$100,000 for that sucker.

73

INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - DUSK - LATER

73

BRUCE sits in his desk chair, holding his J-200. He strums a few melancholic chords, then glances at his SNOOPY notebook, open to a page that reads "Mansion on a Hill" at top. Many lines are crossed out and rewritten. We SEE, written:

*There's a place out on the edge of
town, sir, rising above the
factories and the fields*

Under his breath, Bruce sings it:

BRUCE

There's a place out on the edge of town, sir, rising above the factories and the fields, Now ever since I was just a child, I can remember that mansion on the hill.

74 EXT. CORNFIELD - DUSK - THE PAST

74

with a sense of freedom, YOUNG BRUCE and VIRGINIA race through endless rows of corn, their laughter echoing. DOUG exits the car, leaning against it, smoking, face unreadable.

75 INT. CAMARO - COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK

75

BRUCE is parked in the same spot his father once parked, fixated on the grand house at the top of the hill, the field now fallow, marked by patches of drifting snow.

BRUCE O.S.

There's a place out on... (hums a few bars, then) the edge of town, sir...

AS WE PUSH IN ON BRUCE, something stirs within him.

BRUCE

*In the day, you can see the children playing
On the road that leads to those gates of hardened steel
Steel gates that completely surround the mansion on the hill.*

The mansion looms large, its grandeur a stark contrast to the humble beginnings of the Springsteen family.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

*At night, my daddy'd take me and we'd ride
Through streets of a town so silent and still/park on a backroad along the highwayside/lookup at that mansion on a hill*

76 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

76

strums a few chords, hums a few bars, marking through written lyrics, writing new ones, singing them as he finds the song.

BRUCE

*In the summer, all lights would
shine/there'd be music playing,
people laughing all the time.*

Bruce reaches for his harmonica, bringing it to his lips and inhaling deeply, ready to breathe life into its notes.

77 INT. CAMARO - COUNTRY ROADS - DUSK

77

As the HARMONICA plays O.S. emerging like a mournful, soulful cry, BRUCE remains fixated on the mansion.

BRUCE

*Me and my sister we'd hide out, in
the tall cornfields, sitting
listening to the mansion on the hill.*

78 EXT./INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Hunched over his desk, BRUCE sleeps, head on his arms. One hand grips a pen, the other rests on scattered pages of lyrics. Suddenly, a RINGING PHONE snaps Bruce awake...

LANDAU O.S.

Morning, bud.

79 INT. LANDAU'S OFFICE - NEW YORK CITY - SAME

79

JON sits in an Eames chair, New York City spreading behind him. There's no desk, only albums and paperwork neatly stacked in corners and on a bookshelf. A small, 19th century landscape painting hangs on the wall.

LANDAU

Got a pile of messages here. Max,
Stevie, your sister. And a few
from... Maggie. More than a few.

80 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - KITCHEN - MORNING - CONTINUOUS

80

BRUCE stands by the counter, phone pressed to his ear. A few dishes are scattered, evidence of late-night writing sessions.

BRUCE

what'd she say?

LANDAU O.S.

"where's Bruce? He won't call me back." She did say she wasn't in a great place.

BRUCE

oh... ok.

LANDAU O.S.
She also said she found some
furniture you might want.

Bruce looks around his living room.

BRUCE
Just tell 'em I'm into something.

LANDAU O.S.
Okay, but *you* call Maggie. You were
together a while. And seemed happy.

BRUCE
We were when things were good, and
when they weren't, well, we weren't
anything. Not her fault.

81

INT. JON LANDAU'S OFFICE - MORNING - CONTINUOUS

81

LANDAU'S brow furrows with a hint of worry.

LANDAU
You okay?

BRUCE O.S.
(slight pause)
Yeah, why?

LANDAU
Just something in your voice.

Bruce hesitates, then forces a chuckle.

BRUCE O.S.
I'm okay enough, Jonny. But
something's happening, just not
sure what. Guess it's why
California's been on my mind. Feels
like I might need a change.

LANDAU
Oh yeah? what's bringing that on?

BRUCE O.S.
I don't know. Guess I'm looking for
something different. Something that
feels... right, you know? Feels
like a pull I can't really ignore
anymore.

LANDAU

Is this about music or something else?

BRUCE O.S.

(pauses, thoughtful)

I think both. A change of scenery might shake things up... you know, musically, personally. And since my folks and sister have moved out there, thought it might be time to... you know...

LANDAU

I get it. Sometimes a new environment is what you need. I'll take care of it.

BRUCE O.S.

Appreciate it, Jon. By the way,
some songs are coming together.

LANDAU

Really? How do they feel?

BRUCE O.S.

Hard to say. I mean, I think they
feel good. But they're definitely
different. And coming kinda fast
now.

LANDAU

That's a good sign. Right?

BRUCE O.S.

(unconvincingly)
Yeah, I hope so.

LANDAU

Alright. Sounds like you're onto
something. Just go with it.

They hang up. Landau leans back in his chair, staring at the
phone for a moment longer, his expression unreadable.

82

INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

82

BRUCE stares at the phone with a mix of hesitation and
resolve. He lifts the receiver, fingers dialing a familiar
number. The phone rings, echoing in the room.

MAGGIE O.S.

(voice mail)

*It's Maggie. Please leave a
message.*

Bruce listens to the silence that follows, the weight of
unsaid words pressing on him. He opens his mouth to speak but
hesitates, his thoughts tangled.

With a heavy sigh, he slowly hangs up the phone, the moment
slipping away.

83

EXT. COLTS. NECK RENTAL - RESERVOIR - DUSK

83

A hushed stillness envelops the scene. The moon casts an
ethereal glow over the water as BRUCE paddles the canoe
toward the center. Each dip of the paddle seems to drag him
deeper into his thoughts.

He pauses, letting the paddle rest across the canoe. In this profound solitude, Bruce feels the weight of his past, the stories he's yet to tell, pressing against him.

BRUCE O.S.
Batlan? I'm ready.

84 INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT 84

BATLAN adjusts the settings on the TEAC 144. ANGLE ON BRUCE in a chair at the edge of his bed. Two SHURE 57 microphones are aimed directly at him: one positioned for vocals/harmonica, the other for a guitar.

He hums a few bars, strums a few chords, then nods to BATLAN. A somber moment hangs in the air as BATLAN hits "record."

85 INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER 85

BRUCE and BATLAN listen to PLAYBACK of Bruce's humming. The sound is raw, unfinished.

BRUCE
Good enough for demos. Let's go.

Bruce takes a steadying breath, gaze fixed on the blank canvas of the recording equipment before him.

A86

INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT

A86

CLOSE on BRUCE as he blows into the harmonica hanging from a brace around his neck, producing a haunting, mournful wail.

86

EXT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - NIGHT - SAME

86

The house stands sentinel, its exterior veiled in deep shadow. As the harmonica continues, the exterior of Bruce's house becomes softly illuminated by an evocative, flickering glow of an OLD-FASHIONED PROJECTOR.

The harmonica's lament continues, and a somber acoustic guitar joins in -- its chords like the slow, steady footsteps of a weary traveler, echoing across a deserted highway.

IMAGES from "Badlands" are then projected upon walls, windows, and the surrounding foliage. We SEE:

A FLICKER of HOLLY SARGIS twirling her baton in the street.

The guitar's resonance merges with the harmonica, creating a deep, haunting atmosphere. BRUCE'S VOICE enters, raw and unrefined, as though he's channeling a hidden part of himself. This is a storyteller, laying his soul bare.

BRUCE
*I saw her standin' on her front
lawn, Just a-twirlin' her baton
Me and her went for a ride, sir,
And ten innocent people died.*

His lyrics are delivered with a piercing clarity, drawing the listener into the stark, tragic narrative.

CUT INSIDE TO:

87

INT. COLTS NECK HOUSE - KITCHEN/LR/HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

87

The CAMERA glides with a deliberate, almost reverent pace, capturing the unfolding projections on the walls. The haunting images create a vivid narrative where...

Holly's FATHER turns and enters the living room. KIT races down the stairs. Holly voice rings out, calling his name.

Kit FIRES two shots into Holly's father, who slowly collapses to the floor. Holly rushes down the stairs to her father's side, but he does not respond. She looks back at Kit, who avoids her gaze as a chilling silence envelops them.

BRUCE

*From the town of Lincoln, Nebraska
With a sawed off .410 on my lap
Through to the badlands of Wyoming
I killed everything in my path*

The juxtaposition of Bruce's song with the film's violent imagery weaves a powerful tapestry, blending his personal struggle with the narrative of "Badlands." The hallway seems to narrow, reflecting the growing tension and confinement in the film's story.

The projection *SHIFTS* to Kit and Holly driving through vast, open landscapes, their love story taking a fateful turn.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

*I can't say that I'm sorry For the
things that we done
At least for a little while, sir,
Me and her we had us some fun*

The CAMERA continues to creep down the hallway, amplifying the sense of claustrophobic tension, mirroring the film's escalating suspense. *The flickering vast, open landscapes slowly morph into the scene where Kit and Holly are confronted by law enforcement.*

The tense images smoothly TRANSITION us to...

88

INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

88

CLOSE ON Bruce's FINGERS moving over the frets. Each note resonates with the weight of the story he's telling. The HARMONICA'S reeds vibrate with an intensity that mirrors his breath.

CLOSE ON BRUCE'S FACE, reflecting a hint of sorrow. He is fully immersed in the narrative he's creating, embodying the pain and tragedy of real-life events.

BRUCE

*Now the jury brought in a guilty
verdict And the judge he sentenced
me to death*

(MORE)

BRUCE (CONT'D)
*Midnight in a prison storeroom
With leather straps across my chest*

He's not just performing a song...

BRUCE (CONT'D)
*Sheriff, when the man pulls that
switch, sir, And snaps my poor head
back
You make sure my pretty baby
Is sitting right there on my lap*

He's channeling the anguish of a man facing his end.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
*They declared me unfit to live Said
into that great void my soul'd be
hurled
They wanted to know why I did what
I did
Well sir I guess there's just a
meanness in this world*

As Bruce finishes, the projections around him transition to images of his PARENTS, transcending the physical boundaries of the recording space and merging the world of the song with his own reality.

ANGLE ON BATLAN, sitting in stunned silence.

BRUCE O.S.
You there?

BATLAN
(voice constricted)
... yeah.

BRUCE O.S.
I think we got that.

Batlan presses STOP, still processing what he's just heard.

BATLAN
Oh, we got it.

Batlan clears his throat, takes Bruce's guitar, and places it gently on a stand.

BRUCE
Don't think I'm going to lay
anything down on the other two.

Still visibly affected, Batlan nods...

BATLAN

So what are you calling that one?

BRUCE

It was "Starkweather." But that's when it was his story. Now I'm thinking...

CLOSE ON BRUCE striking thru ~~Starkweather~~ and saying...

BRUCE (CONT'D)

Nebraska.

He looks up, the song settling in the room.

89

INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

89

Close-up on BRUCE's felt-tip pen, moving with determination as it slashes through words and phrases, refining his thoughts. The ink flows decisively, mirroring Bruce's internal battle to find clarity in the chaos.

90

EXT./INT. HOUSE - DAY

90

FAYE opens the door, her eyes widening in surprise as she sees BRUCE standing there, the weathered ROCKING HORSE cradled in his arms.

FAYE

Oh my God. What is this?

Bruce kneels to Haley.

BRUCE

It's for you.

Haley's eyes alight as she unsteadily tries to climb on it. Faye kisses Bruce gently on the cheek.

FAYE

You didn't have to do that.

BRUCE

Something I've run out of use for. Hope she can have some fun with it.

Bruce takes Haley's hand and they step outside. Faye's FATHER then approaches...

FATHER

(under his breath)

Is that that guitar playing fella?

FAYE
Daddy, yes, that's Bruce
Springsteen.

FATHER
Careful. Your Uncle Dave played
guitar.

FAYE
(rolling her eyes)
But he didn't sing. Not like Bruce,
anyway.

As Faye and Haley move through the door... INTERCUT:

91 EXT. BOARDWALK - ASBURY PARK, NJ - LATE DAY - LATER 91

BRUCE, FAYE, and HALEY stroll the deserted Boardwalk.

92 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - BEDROOM/STUDIO - LATE DAY 92

BRUCE sits amidst a growing collection of instruments (12-string guitar, mandolin, tambourine), his guitar resting on his lap as he hums a tentative melody. The room is cluttered with empty string packs, harmonicas, and half-finished ideas, all reflecting his internal disarray.

93 INT. CAROUSEL - ASBURY PARK - DAY - LATER 93

BRUCE, FAYE, and HALEY share a joyful moment, riding the carousel's painted horses.

As the world spins around them, Bruce catches a fleeting glimpse of a young GIRL standing off to the side, her resemblance to CARIL FUGATE unsettling him.

Faye remains blissfully unaware as Bruce's joy is tainted by the ghostly vision, his grip on Faye's hand loosening as his mind spirals.

94 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - BEDROOM - DUSK - LATER 94

BRUCE, slumped against the wall, scribbles furiously in his notebook, lost in his thoughts. The room is dim, the fading daylight casting long shadows.

TIGHT ON a page in BRUCE's NOTEBOOK -- His "SONG LIST:
"Nebraska," "Mansion on a Hill..."

95 INT. CAROUSEL - ARCADE - ASBURY PARK - LATE DAY 95

BRUCE lifts HALEY up to the skee-ball table as they compete against FAYE. Haley's laughter fills the arcade, but Bruce's smile falters, betraying the cracks in his facade. He's here, but his thoughts drift elsewhere.

96 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - BEDROOM - ANOTHER NIGHT 96

BRUCE lies on the orange carpet, hunched over his notebook.

ECU on the SONG LIST: "*Johnny 99*," "*Highway Patrolman*," "*Atlantic City...*" appear as his hand writes with increasing urgency. The growing list mirrors Bruce's mounting anxiety and struggle to maintain focus.

97 INT. ARCADE - ASBURY PARK - DAY - LATER 97

FAYE and HALEY throw balls at stuffed animals, with FAYE taking the lead. She knocks them down effortlessly, winning a bear and giving it to Haley with a triumphant grin.

Disengaged, BRUCE looks on, the shadow of unease never leaving his eyes.

98 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - BEDROOM - YET ANOTHER NIGHT 98

ECU on SONG LIST: "*Glory Days*," "*Darlington County*," "*The Child Bride*." Bruce hesitates, then strikes through *Child Bride*, with a decisive line, replacing it with: "*Working on the Highway*."

ANGLE ON BRUCE: A flicker of uncertainty flashes.

ANGLE ON SONG LIST: WIDER we see, on the left side of the page, Bruce write *Nebraska* at the top of the column. On the right side of the same page, at the top of the column, he writes "??". The list reflects his struggle to find coherence and purpose.

On the page, above the "??", he writes *DOUBLE ALBUM??* Then turns the page to a page of doodles, where we see a stick figure with a beating heart. Then under his breath:

BRUCE

*Hey little girl is your daddy home
Did he go away and leave you all
alone... I got a bad desire*

Then he writes on the page, "*I'm on Fire*".

99

INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - ASBURY PARK - NIGHT

99

BRUCE sits quietly in a booth, across from FAYE and a sleeping HALEY. The tension in his expression and the distant look in his eyes suggest that the sighting of CARIL, from the Carousel, still weighs heavily on him.

VIV, an older, kind-eyed woman quietly approaches the booth. She pauses, a gentle smile.

VIV
(whispering, re: Haley)
She looks so peaceful.

FAYE
She's out cold. Poor thing's been
running around all day.

VIV
I could take her to the office,
it's quiet back there.

FAYE
It's okay, but thank you.

VIV
Alright. Well, let me know if you
need anything.

Viv gives a small nod and quietly walks away.

FAYE
That's Viv, my manager. She's the
sweetest.

BRUCE
How long have you worked here?

FAYE
Hmm. A little over a year now. It's
a paycheck but they make me feel at
home.

BRUCE
I can tell.

FAYE
(beat, then...)
We've had a really nice time. She
needed this. Honestly, so did I.

Bruce smiles.

FAYE (CONT'D)

And thank you for the rocking horse. She's going to wear it out.

Bruce smiles, looks to Haley. The transition from his intense focus on his song list and to this moment underscores his need for connection and normalcy.

BRUCE

Heard from her father lately?

FAYE

(a tight smile)

Hardly ever. Turns out we weren't his first rodeo.

(gently rubs Haley's arm)

But that's okay, I no longer have to worry about what I should eat, what I should wear, or care whether my neck is long enough for hoop earrings.

(burst of laughter, then she lowers her voice)

But it'll be great to get a better job and get the hell out of my parents' place, though, even if they've been life-savers.

Bruce really takes her in.

BRUCE

It's a hard thing, realizing people aren't who you want them to be.

Faye studies him as Bruce smiles, almost apologetically. He then takes both of Faye's hands in his.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
If you could be anything, what
would it be?

FAYE
Easy. A circus showgirl again.

BRUCE
I still don't believe that story.
(laughs)
I mean, *c'mon*.

FAYE
(poking him)
For about three years, dude. Loved
every minute of it. But it became
very clear you can't follow the big
show when you have a little one.

Bruce is charmed by her honesty, sincerity.

BRUCE
You're the first circus girl I've
ever met.

They share a moment of genuine connection, a brief respite
from Bruce's inner conflict..

A100 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - BEDROOM/REC. STUDIO - NIGHT A100

Dressed now in her tank top and jeans, FAYE moves among
Bruce's instruments, picks up the mallet, and strikes the
glockenspiel, giggling as she hits a few notes *very* off-key.

FAYE
(playfully)
I'd say I'm a natural, wouldn't
you?

BRUCE approaches, a warm smile spreading as he watches her.

BRUCE
(teasing)
You're definitely a natural.

FAYE
(laughing)
Maybe I've found my true calling.

Bruce steps closer, Faye's laughter infectious.

He leans in, brushing a soft kiss against her lips. Faye responds, their kiss deepening with tender passion.

Faye smiles against his lips, their kiss turning more passionate. They make their way to the bed, their movements fluid and charged with desire. The scene FADES as they lower themselves onto the bed.

100 INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER 100

Shadows dance across walls as BRUCE and FAYE are entwined in a passionate embrace, bodies moving with a fluid, electrifying rhythm. Their intensity is palpable.

Their kiss deepens, the space between them charged with an sensual connection. As their movements become a harmonious dance, each touch accentuating their bond, the scene FADES.

A101 INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER A101

BRUCE'S fingers trace delicate patterns on FAYE'S skin, his eyes locked onto her with an intense, searching softness. He brushes a lock of hair from her face, his touch tender.

BRUCE
(softly)
You okay?

FAYE
(with a smile)
Yeah. I'm exactly where I want to be.

Faye then removes a St. Christopher MEDAL from around her neck and gently places it around Bruce's.

FAYE (CONT'D)
(whispers)
Trust in where you're meant to go.

She kisses him softly, touches his nose with hers.

B101 EXT. DOCK - RESERVOIR - THE NEXT MORNING B101

Fog and mist hover above the water's glassy surface.

101 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - KITCHEN - MORNING - SAME 101

CLOSE UP on a page of Flannery O'Connor's short-stories, heavily marked-up. The book lies amid Bruce's capo,

harmonicas, and scattered pages of his own writing. BRUCE'S fingers linger over the book, almost as if he's seeking comfort in its familiarity.

FAYE enters quietly, her presence a gentle disruption. She grabs her bag and softly kisses him tenderly on top his head.

FAYE
Don't lose yourself in those pages.
Call me.

She lifts Bruce's chin with a soft touch, her eyes searching his for a sign of certainty, but all she finds is a conflicted look. Still trying to connect...

FAYE (CONT'D)
You talk in your sleep. It's cute.

She offers a small, hopeful smile before turning to leave. Bruce watches her departure, his expression uncertain.

102 INT. DINER - 48TH/LEX. AVE - MORNING - LATER 102

BRUCE and JON sit side-by-side at a window counter.

LANDAU
Got a call from Jann. He wants to do a feature on you. Plus, Carson's team reached out again. They're pushing for you to come on the show.

BRUCE
(faint smile)
It's all piling up, huh?

LANDAU
Yeah, it's a lot. Speaking of which, Paul Schrader sent this over.

From his envelope case, Landau removes a SCREENPLAY, its title page reading: "Born in the U.S.A".

LANDAU (CONT'D)
He thought you might like it.

BRUCE
To what, write a song for?

LANDAU
And star in.

BRUCE
No shit?

LANDAU
That's what he says.

BRUCE
Huh. I'll give it a read. Ok...

Landau drops a few \$20's and they exit through the door...

BRUCE (CONT'D)
Alright, Jonny, good seeing you.

LANDAU
Thanks for coming in. Oh, don't forget, we're scheduled to record "Cover Me," around January 25. Feeling good about it? Because Geffen keeps calling and I assure him it's happening.

BRUCE
Honestly, I haven't given it much thought. Think I have something to work from, but I'm on that other wave, those other songs.

LANDAU
Well, David's telling Quincy they'll have something by February. So we have a little time, just not a lot.

As Landau moves off, he hesitates, turning back...

LANDAU (CONT'D)
If this is all too much, let's just pull back.

BRUCE
(pauses, a faint smile)
I'm okay. Just trying to find something real in all this noise.

LANDAU
You always do. But don't rush it. Focus on you and I'll do the rest.

Bruce nods his thanks, pushes through a revolving door, and disappears. We hang on Jon as he processes the weight of expectations clearly pressing on Bruce.

103

INT. MATT DELIA'S GARAGE - NIGHT

103

In his element, MATT DELIA works on the final touches of Bruce's beautiful vintage Triumph as BRUCE looks on, sitting on a stool, sipping a beer.

BRUCE

Man, what a beauty. Like the one you've waited your whole life for.

DELIA

Thanks, brother. I'm really happy with how it's turned out... Speaking of beauties, how's it going with Maggie?

BRUCE

It's not.

Delia wipes his hands on a rag, glancing over at Bruce.

DELIA

Oh, no. Don't tell me she's another drive-by.

BRUCE

I didn't make it easy on her. Seems like I'm always running from something, even when it's right in front of me.

DELIA

A gift and a curse. Being with you can be painful business.

BRUCE

(smirking)

Thanks for the morale boost.

DELIA

You know it's not an easy road.

BRUCE

(laughs)

You saying I can't change?

DELIA

I'm saying, I'd like to see it.

BRUCE

Well, I'm seeing someone new now. And she's also a great gal.

DELIA

Oh, yeah? Let's see the ring.

BRUCE
(grinning)
I'm not sure about the ring, but at
least we're not breaking up on a
weekly basis like you and Theresa.

Bruce grabs a wrench from Delia, pretends to tighten a bolt.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
So, when's this beauty gonna be
done?

DELIA
How about on your wedding day?

Bruce laughs. Delia swipes the wrench back, tightens the bolt, and they share a moment of camaraderie.

104 EXT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - MORNING 104

A dusting of snow now covers the ground. Bare trees silhouette against gray skies, branches reaching out like skeletal fingers. ANGLE ON Batlan's VAN parked out front. Pre-lap the "Colts Neck version" of *Nebraska*.

105 INT. HALLWAY/BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - DAY - CONTINUOUS 105

BRUCE enters carrying a GIBSON ECHOPLEX. BATLAN holds the line from the TEAC 144, staring at a banged-up BOOM BOX.

BATLAN
This little bastard's wonky. Can we even mix-down on it?

BRUCE
We'll see. Gary and I took it boating, hit some rough waters, and a wave got it. It was dead for months, then one night, it just dried out and started working again. Scared the hell out of me.

BATLAN
I believe it. That's some weird shit.

BRUCE
But let's run everything through this Echoplex as we mix the tracks.

BATLAN
(skeptically)
Mmm. Not sure the manual says you should do that.

BRUCE
I don't care what the manual says. I want it with an echo on everything. Like Elvis's early Sun records.

Bruce slides the ECHOPLEX next to the TEAC and BOOM BOX, and begins MIXING the tracks down. As the clean, non-echo, version of *Nebraska* continues...

106

INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - DAY - LATER THAT DAY

106

BATLAN inspects a Maxell CASSETTE TAPE spinning with a hypnotic rhythm inside the corroded Boom Box.

BATLAN

Tape's running fast. We might need to slow it down when we play it on a proper deck.

BRUCE

I don't know, Mikey. Whatever's off about it sounds just right to me.

CLOSE ON: The ECHOPLEX, its tape-loop system adding a distinct "ECHO SLAP" as *NEBRASKA'S* opening sounds emanate

through a pair of speakers. The sound is transformed, filling the room with an otherworldly quality that catches BRUCE and BATLAN off guard.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

I love it.

The TEAC and the BOOM BOX function within their mechanical limits, but it's clear that Bruce is hearing something more profound, something of *NEBRASKA'S* soul.

Bruce's vocals, guitar and limited overdubs, all going through the Echoplex, sound like music from across time.

107

INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - EVEN LATER THAT DAY

107

We now hear "State Trooper." BRUCE is lying on the floor, BATLAN splayed in the chair.

BATLAN

Yeah, it's good. Honest.

Lost in thought, Bruce doesn't respond immediately, as he intently listens to the few powerful moments of the song, enough to convey its raw intensity:

BRUCE

Mister State Trooper, please don't stop me, please don't stop me...

108

INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - DAY - EVEN LATER THAT DAY

108

As "Reason to Believe" plays, we hear a poignant segment. BRUCE is standing on the balcony, looking to the RESERVOIR, while BATLAN is on the bed.

BRUCE

*Seen a man standin' over a dead dog
lyin' by the highway in a ditch
He's looking down kinda puzzled
Pokin' that dog with a stick*

Bruce has never heard himself like this. His reaction tells us so.

109

INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - MOMENTS LATER

109

The last strains of "Reason to Believe" ring out. We linger on the TEAC, the ECHOPLEX, and the BOOM BOX -- silent, as BATLAN stops the TAPE. He turns to BRUCE...

BATLAN

There's no hiding in that, man.

Bruce nods introspectively.

BATLAN (CONT'D)

We get everything?

Bruce refers to his "song list."

BRUCE

Yeah, think we did.

(looks up)

Man, I love that short echo. Not sure what Jon's gonna think, but there's something here I can't quite grasp, that I'm really liking.

BATLAN

It's definitely different. And'll sound very different with the band.

Not thinking about the Band so much as what they just made...

BRUCE

It's the distance we're hearing.

Like the past or something.

(mumbles)

Hell, I dunno.

Bruce crosses to the BOOM BOX and ejects the cassette. CLOSE ON BRUCE, now holding a finished version of THE TAPE, the light catching it just right.

110 INT. JON LANDAU'S OFFICE - NEW YORK CITY - MORNING 110

MIKE BATLAN delicately hands the case-less TAPE to LANDAU.

BATLAN
He didn't trust a delivery service.

LANDAU
Where's the case?

BATLAN
No case. But here's a letter.

Batlan hands Bruce's letter to Jon. Jon unfolds it, revealing Bruce's handwriting.

BRUCE V.O.
Jon, I know this is a first, but
there's all sorts of stuff here. A
lot of ideas, just not sure where
they're going. So, I put anything
on I thought would be good for you
to hear.

As Landau begins to read...

111 INT. JON LANDAU'S OFFICE - LATER THAT MORNING 111

ECU on THE TAPE looping through the playback heads of a
MARANTZ cassette player. Playing "Atlantic City," its
strangeness and rawness strikes Landau immediately.

The sound is stark, just Bruce and his guitar, the desperate
edge of the song cutting through the office. Landau is
transfixed, but his face is tense as he processes the raw
emotion and darkness conveyed...

BRUCE
*Well, they blew up the Chicken Man
in Philly last night
And they blew up his house, too
Down on the boardwalk they're ready
for a fight Gonna see what them
racket boys can do*

112 EXT. BOARDWALK - ASBURY PARK - MORNING 112

Long Lens on BRUCE strolling the nearly deserted boardwalk.

BRUCE V.O.
Many might need editing, some lines
changed, arrangements changed...

113 INT. JON LANDAU'S OFFICE - EVEN LATER THAT MORNING 113

LANDAU holds Bruce's letter, while listening to the COLTS NECK recording of "Born in the U.S.A".

BRUCE V.O.
This little diddy's from the
Schrader script. Never got around
to reading it, just liked the
title.

We hear Bruce's gritty voice over a bare, percussive rhythm:

BRUCE
*Born down in a dead man's town
The first kick I took was when I
hit the ground...*

This interpretation of "U.S.A." is *different*, stripped down, intimate, charged with a raw energy. There's no anthemic chorus, only the growl of a bitter story.

BRUCE V.O.
If we even record this number, it
should be done hard rockin'.

Landau absorbs the weight of the song, his face reflecting the powerful truth Bruce has laid bare. Nonetheless, he leans back in his chair, troubled.

114 EXT. CAROUSEL - ASBURY PARK - LATER THAT DAY 114

"HIGHWAY PATROLMAN" is now featured. It's stirring, a short-story in song form, a complex and complete narrative.

BRUCE watches from afar as families and children enjoy the painted horses.

BRUCE V.O.
I worked a long time on this one.
Always had the feeling I was coming
up short, though. Not really
finished, but is as good as I can
get it. Don't think the ending is
quite strong enough yet.

115 INT. JON LANDAU'S OFFICE - LATER THAT MORNING 115

THE TAPE continues to spin. Landau paces the room, the tension evident in his every step.

BRUCE

*My name's Joe Roberts, I work for
the state / I'm a sergeant out of
Perrineville, barracks number 8*

BRUCE V.O.

Just trying to break a little new
ground. I dug deep, but I think
they have potential.

The camera lingers on the MARANTZ cassette player. Then PANS
TO LANDAU, unsettled, wrestling with the potent, unvarnished
storytelling in Bruce's latest work.

116

INT. STONE PONY - ASBURY PARK - LATE DAY

116

Standing alone on stage, BRUCE is bathed in a single RED

SPOTLIGHT. The ghosts of concerts past echo as a conversation
between LANDAU and his wife, BARBARA, begins...

LANDAU O.S.

If I'm being honest, it's not what
I was expecting.

BARBARA O.S.

So? He told you it's just a demo.

117

INT. LANDAU APARTMENT - STUDY - EVENING - LATER

117

A growing art collection on his walls, JON sits pensively on
a sofa as his wife, BARBARA, enters carrying a cup of tea.

LANDAU

It's not just that. It's the songs
that concern me, Barbara. They're
a... cry for help and concern me.

(looks off, troubled)

It's like he's... channeling
something deeply personal, and
quite frankly, dark. And given how
he's been acting lately...

Barbara sits down next to Jon, her expression thoughtful.

BARBARA

You're not only just his manager or
producer, Jon, but his friend. Most
importantly, his friend. And right
now, he's pushing boundaries you
need to acknowledge. You can't just
focus on the business side of
things.

(MORE)

BARBARA (CONT'D)

So do what you always do, tell him
the truth. He'll understand.

Knowing she's right, Landau nods slowly.

LANDAU

I won't say anything now. I'll see
what the songs become when we cut
them with the band. That's always
been the way.

BARBARA

And if you still feel that way,
then, you know...

LANDAU

Then I'll talk to him. For now,
I'll just see where they go.

BARBARA

As long as you address your
concerns as a friend first. It's
not just about the music.

Landau nods uncertainly.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

Just be there for him.

Jon places a soft hand on Barbara's.

118 INT. STONE PONY - LATER THAT NIGHT

118

BRUCE and the *CATS* cover John Lee Hooker's, "Boom Boom." It brings the house down, the crowd surging with energy. FAYE watches from back, swallowed by the energetic crowd.

119 EXT. STONE PONY - PARKING LOT - EVEN LATER THAT NIGHT

119

BRUCE approaches his car, to find FAYE leaning against it, softly clapping. She's as radiant as ever.

FAYE

Bra-vo. Loved that John Lee Hooker number you've played for me. Really cool.

BRUCE

Yeah, the boys always dig jamming on that one.

(can't make eye contact)

Didn't know you were here. Didn't see you.

FAYE

(soft smile)

Sometimes you miss what's right in front of you.

Stung, Bruce looks off.

FAYE (CONT'D)

Been trying to reach you. Thought
maybe you'd gone out on the road
and forgot to tell me.

Bruce laughs small, then his gaze falters, eyes searching the ground as if looking for answers there.

BRUCE
No. I've just-

FAYE
(softly interrupting)
I don't need to know. I just didn't
know where you'd disappeared to.

For the first time, Bruce really looks at her.

BRUCE
Faye, I... I don't want this to be
more than I can live up to.

Faye holds a finger up to Bruce's lip, gently silencing him.

FAYE
I knew what the risks were with
you. But sometimes... I just wish
you'd let me in.

Bruce draws her near, softly rubs a finger against her cheek.
The intimacy of the moment thick with unspoken emotions.

FAYE (CONT'D)
I don't want to be like all the
other people in your life who want
something from you. But...
(smile betraying her pain)
I do want a ride home.

Bruce's laugh is soft, a mix of relief and sadness.

120

INT. CAMARO - NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

120

Bruce and Faye sit inside the car, parked outside her house.
The interior is dimly lit, the glow of the dashboard lights
illuminating their faces.

Faye turns towards him, her concern evident. She reaches
over, wrapping her arms around him in a tender embrace. Bruce
holds her, but there's a slight tension in his grip, a
reluctance she can feel.

FAYE
(stroking his back)
I wish you didn't have to go. You
could stay, you know.

Bruce buries his face in her hair, inhaling deeply. He wants to lose himself in this moment, but his mind is elsewhere.

BRUCE
(whispering)
Me too. But... I can't.

Faye pulls back slightly, looking into his eyes. She brushes a strand of hair from his forehead, her touch lingering.

FAYE
Is everything okay?

Bruce forces a smile, but it doesn't reach his eyes. He cups her face gently, his thumb tracing the curve of her cheek. Faye searches his eyes, sensing the walls he's putting up.

She leans in, pressing her lips to his in a slow, searching kiss. Bruce responds, but there's a hesitation, a distance that wasn't there before.

BRUCE
I'll be back soon.

Faye sighs, her concern deepening. She looks at him, her eyes pleading for some reassurance. Bruce kisses her forehead, a bittersweet gesture that feels like a goodbye.

Faye reluctantly opens the car door, her hand slipping from his. She steps out, her heart heavy.

Before closing the door, she looks back and gives him a small wave. Bruce returns it, his hand heavy, his expression pained.

As the door closes, he exhales deeply, mumbling to himself. He starts the car, the engine's rumble breaking the silence.

121 EXT./INT. CAMARO - COUNTRY ROADS - EARLY MORNING - LATER 121

The roads are empty, sky a soft gradient of pre-dawn hue.

Blasting from Bruce's stereo is Suicide's "Frankie Teardrop," its haunting rhythm and Alan Vega's desperate voice matching Bruce's internal turmoil. The song will rise and fall under the next several scenes.

Bruce's grip on the wheel tightens, knuckles white. His face is a storm of anger and frustration.

He SLAMS THE GAS PEDAL, the Camaro lurching forward, speed climbing rapidly. The road ahead blurs into a chaotic smear of darkness and fleeting headlights.

The intensity of "Frankie Teardrop" builds, the music a dangerous temptress, egging Bruce on. His foot presses harder on the accelerator, pushing the car to its limits, daring fate with each reckless surge.

The song reaches its zenith, a cacophony of desperation and chaos. The world outside the Camaro spins into a frenzy of motion, a dizzying vortex of speed and darkness. Bruce's eyes are wild, his heart pounding in his chest, each beat an echo of the car's roaring engine.

Suddenly, Bruce SLAMS ON THE BRAKES, the car fishtailing wildly, spinning out of control. The violent motion throws him against his seat, the force pressing him into the leather.

The car comes to a jarring stop, the world outside settling into an unnerving silence.

Bruce's breathing is ragged, his chest heaving as he fights to catch his breath. The only sound is the echoes of "Frankie Teardrop," the dissonance lingering like a ghost in the air.

122

INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM- MORNING - LATER

122

A sleepless and weary BRUCE lies on the floor, the song having ensnared him. Suddenly, the front door OPENS and MIKE BATLAN enters, carrying two manila envelopes.

BATLAN
The hell you listening to?

BRUCE
"Frankie Teardrop," one of the most amazing records I've ever heard.

BATLAN
Why? Lose a bet or something?

Bruce laughs as Batlan hands him the first manila envelope.

BATLAN (CONT'D)
These are from Landau.

Bruce takes it. Opens and pulls out the case-less, only copy of "*Nebraska*," carefully wrapped in bubble-wrap.

BATLAN (CONT'D)
So all your gear to Power Station?

BRUCE
Except the recording gear, and, yeah, normal set-up. I'll come in the next day or so.

BATLAN
You got it.

Batlan moves for Bruce's J-200 Guitar.

BRUCE
My guitar can stay, too.

As Batlan leaves, Bruce opens the second envelope, revealing a smaller one from Beverly Hills. On Tiffany's stationery, it reads: "*I hope you find what you're looking for. Best, Maggie.*" Stung by this, Bruce folds the letter, lies back, and closes his eyes. Pre-lap: a ringing phone.

123 OMITTED 123

124 INT. KITCHEN - LATER THAT NIGHT 124

CAMERA looks through the empty kitchen to the living room, the shrill RING breaking the stillness. The phone is then picked up by the answering machine.

ADELE O.S.
*Bruce, he's gone! We can't find
him! Three days, now!*

BRUCE races to the phone, picks up, his MOTHER'S panicked voice crackling through the receiver...

BRUCE	ADELE O.S. (CONT'D)
What are you talking about??	Your father. He's been
Mom-	arrested! Out in the desert.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
Arrested? Mom-

125 EXT. CHINATOWN - STREETS - LOS ANGELES - LATE DAY 125

Two CHINESE MEN in aprons are smoking outside a restaurant. BRUCE approaches them.

They converse, but we don't hear what they say. The men then shake their heads 'no.'

ADELE V.O.
(one stream-of-thought)
Over a traffic ticket. He resisted -
something, I don't know, Bruce.
They took him to the LA County
Jail, let him out, and now... now
he's at some bar in Chinatown.

126

EXT. CHINATOWN - RESTAURANT - EARLY EVENING

126

BRUCE exits the restaurant, looking for any sign of his father. As he steps off the stoop, we FOLLOW him...

ADELE V.O.

Bruce, I didn't want to have to tell you this... It's too awful just thinking about what your father has been dealing with, and for such a long time...

127

EXT. CHINATOWN BAR - NIGHT - LATER

127

TIGHT ON BRUCE, his heart pounding in his chest. He looks around frantically, spotting a CHINESE MAN at the entrance to a restaurant, tucked in a shadowy alley, its neon LIGHT casting a glow. Bruce approaches him...

ADELE V.O.

But he lost his job at the airport. He's been hearing voices...

(crying)

I don't know what to do. He's not taking his medication. And I can't control him anymore. He won't listen!

128

INT. BAR - CHINATOWN - NIGHT/EARLY AM - MOMENTS LATER

128

BRUCE stands in the doorway, staring at DOUG. Other than a kindly BARTENDER, Doug is the only patron in at such an early hour. As Bruce moves for his father...

BRUCE

Hey, pops.

DOUG turns, eyes dulled by exhaustion. He's a man put through the ringer by life's unforgiving hand.

DOUG

Hey, bud. Did I miss my shift? You know, I'm driving a bus these days.

BRUCE

I know you are. But not today. No work today.

His heart aching, Bruce takes his father's hand in his own.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

Are you hungry? Wanna get some breakfast?

Bruce pulls a few bills, lays them on the bar. The Bartender slides them back to Bruce.

BARTENDER

My treat. He's a very nice man.

Bruce smiles and gently guides his father off his stool.

DOUG

An egg McMuffin sounds real good.

BRUCE

Then that's what we'll get.

Bruce carefully guides his father to the door and we FADE TO:

129

EXT. POWER STATION - W. 53 ST. - EVENING

129

The facade is unassuming, with a classic, unadorned industrial look that blends into the surrounding cityscape. LANDAU paces out front as a weary BRUCE approaches.

LANDAU

Jesus, is he alright?

BRUCE

I don't know if he'll ever be alright. But I got him to the hospital and he's back on his meds.

LANDAU

I'm so sorry. We can push the session if you're not up for it.

BRUCE

No, no. I'm good.

Landau pauses, and gestures up to the building. Then softly:

LANDAU

Do you remember us, up there on the floor of this place, our heads full of dreams? I swear, sometimes it feels like we're still there, just trying to make sense of it all.

BRUCE

Sure as hell does... Are the boys upstairs?

Landau nods.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

(a warm smile)

Then let's burn this place down, Jonny.

PRE-LAP the opening SYNTHESIZER AND SNARE DRUM of "Born in the U.S.A.," reverberating as a seismic pulse. What follows will become the legendary recording of "Born in the U.S.A."

130 INT. POWER STATION - TRACKING ROOM - STUDIO A - DAY - LATER

The TRACKING ROOM is a far cry from Bruce's bedroom studio. It's filled with vintage equipment, mic stands, and, now, The E STREET BAND.

Though there is isolation and baffling for drums and amps, it looks and feels like a band set up to record LIVE -- its members in the room together, connected by sight-lines.

Positioned behind his drum kit, the powerhouse MAX WEINBERG sets the tempo, propelling the song forward. His gated snare gives the song its signature heartbeat.

131 INT. CONTROL ROOM - POWER STATION - SAME

131

The CONTROL ROOM, the nerve center, is on the other side of the glass: all state-of-the-art recording equipment. The atmosphere is full of motion and charged with energy.

LANDAU, BATLAN, engineer/producer, CHUCK PLOTKIN, and 2nd engineer, TOBY SCOTT, look on as ROY BITTAN's synthesizer, like Weinberg's snare, is a sound new to the E Street Band.

The guitars hold back, the drums and keyboards set the stage.

Bruce's VOICE enters, even before the rest of the band, a full-on rallying cry, delivering an unvarnished take on the American experience. For a full verse and chorus, the rest of the band holds back. This is not rock and roll as we know it.

And then, the guitar – the iconic, biting snarl of BRUCE'S Telecaster cuts through the air like a call to arms.

When the band *does* kick in, it remains a sound driven by the snare and synthesizer. STEVIE VAN ZANDT plays elemental rhythm parts, GARRY TALLENT locks in with Weinberg, who starts playing fills only after the first chorus.

It's an unexpected sound, striking in its power, different from anything the band has recorded.

And no one steps out for a solo. Without a word passing between them, the musicians know something special is happening, especially CLARENCE CLEMONS on tambourine.

The strength of both the power of the arrangement and performance is unmistakable. It's a leap ahead.

The band feeds off each other's energy, and the music flows with an infectious enthusiasm. It's a collaborative effort, with each musician contributing to the power of the song.

LANDAU looks around the CONTROL ROOM to the others, as if to see if they are experiencing what he is. They are. It's transcendent.

132

INT. CONTROL ROOM - POWER STATION - LATER THAT DAY

132

The BAND listens to playback. BRUCE and LANDAU behind the sound board, the band and others standing behind them, listening at a LOUD volume. Everyone is engrossed.

STEVIE VAN ZANDT

Holy shit, brother! what the hell
is that?!

BRUCE

(grinning ear to ear)
I don't know, but it sounds like we
caught lightning in a bottle!

Everyone then begins talking at once, over one another. It's a scene of unequivocal success.

STEVIE VAN ZANDT

Can we trust it? It came so
fast!

MAX WEINBERG

So easy. *Too* easy! And Roy's
synth!! Home run, man!

STEVIE VAN ZANDT (CONT'D)

At least we have a single before
the rest of the album's even
recorded!

The room explodes with laughter. On Bruce, elated, but something is gnawing at the corners of his psyche.

133

INT./EXT. CONTROL ROOM/TRACKING ROOM - LATER

133

The BAND can be seen through the glass, grabbing jackets and bags, preparing to leave on a high. LANDAU notices BRUCE lingering at the console, struggling with his conflicting emotions. He approaches the Control Room door, leans in...

LANDAU
Helluva day, boss.

BRUCE
Helluva day, Jonny. You felt it too, huh?

LANDAU
You kidding? We tapped into something incredibly powerful. Excited to see where it takes us.

BRUCE
(a conflicted look)
Never would've guessed that would've come out of that demo. Two chords, Jonny. Just two chords.

LANDAU
You know what, Jimmy's in town with Stevie Nicks. Said he wanted to drop by. You okay if I play it for him?

BRUCE
Iovine?

Landau nods.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
Sure, let's see what he thinks. But tomorrow, let's try "Nebraska" with the boys. I want to see what happens when we put the band on... That song's essential to what I want this record to be. We gotta get it right.

LANDAU
And we will.

Bruce looks off for a long beat. He nods uncertainly, then moves thru tracking room as Landau watches him go.

A134 EXT. 8TH AVE. -- NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

A134

Bruce stands at a crosswalk, waiting for the light to change, his thoughts distant, barely noticing the bustling city as it swirls around him.

B134 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

B134

Barefoot, in jeans and a tank-top, in **QUICK CUTS**, we see:

****Bruce, drenched in sweat, jumps rope with rapid, relentless precision, his breath coming in quick bursts.**

****Bruce cranks out push-ups with fierce determination, his muscles straining and sweat dripping onto the carpet.**

****Bruce transitions to sit-ups, each movement more intense than the last, his face a mask of focused intensity as he powers through the reps.**

C134 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - KITCHEN - LATER THAT NIGHT

C134

BRUCE leans against the wall, phone pressed to his ear.

 BRUCE
How's he doing?

 ADELE O.S.
He's sleeping... But some days are
harder than others.

Bruce closes his eyes for a moment.

 BRUCE
Tell him I said hello, will you?

 ADELE O.S.
I sure will. He always perks up
when he hears from you.

 BRUCE
(moved)
Thanks, mom. And take care of
yourself too, okay?

 ADELE O.S.
I will. Goodnight, sweetheart.

 BRUCE

Goodnight.

Bruce hangs up, staring at the phone for a moment.

134

INT. CONTROL ROOM - POWER STATION - THE NEXT DAY

134

BRUCE and LANDAU sit at the console, as PLOTKIN plays back an ELECTRIC, FULL BAND version of "*Nebraska*." Bruce shakes his head, his expression troubled. Plotkin stops the music.

BRUCE

No, it's all wrong -- the synth,
mandolin, electric guitar. What I
liked about the demo is all drowned
out, buried under... these layers.

Bruce falls silent, considering. Landau remains quiet.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

No. It's not the song I had in my
head or the one on this tape.

As the Electric Version continues, Bruce pulls the case-less TAPE from his jacket pocket, holding it like a life-line.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

There's something about this. The
atmosphere. Rawness. The echo.
(points to the speakers)
This doesn't have it. The band's
overpowering the material and I'm
losing what made it special to me.
(with certainty)
Yeah, I gotta strip it back, just
let it breathe.

LANDAU

(calmly but determined)
Then let's move on. We got
something great yesterday, really
powerful. We just didn't get
"Nebraska," but we'll get there...
Maybe we try it with just you on
acoustic, Roy on piano. We just
keep at it, like we always do.

Landau's voice carries a steady, reassuring tone. ANGLE ON a microphone standing tall, ready for its next voice.

CARD: a week later

135

EXT. POWER STATION - EVENING

135

An agitated BRUCE pushes through the doors, face set with frustration. He paces back and forth, struggling to calm himself.

LANDAU then exits and approaches cautiously, sensing the volatility.

BRUCE

I could barely stand to listen to that. Almost made me nauseous.

LANDAU

(gently, carefully)

It's a process. We're getting a lot of what we're after. Maybe not everything, but a lot. Let's just-

Bruce interrupts, his voice tense.

BRUCE

I know we've got some good stuff, Jon. But these songs -- "Nebraska," "Mansion," what I just heard on "Atlantic City" -- are not working. And you know they matter to me.

Realizing Bruce is more troubled than usual, Landau remains calm...

LANDAU

Hear me out.

Landau points to THE TAPE he knows is in Bruce's pocket.

LANDAU (CONT'D)

Let's put that tape aside for now. Revisit it. It ain't going anywhere and neither are we.

Bruce's agitations mounts as he squats down. Landau squats, too, mirroring Bruce, trying to ground him.

LANDAU (CONT'D)

We've got an incredible take on "Cover Me," which, *thankfully*, we didn't give to Donna Summer. We have "Glory Days," "I'm Goin' Down," and a knockout "I'm on Fire." And don't forget, we've got "Born in the U.S.A."

Bruce looks off, the internal ringing relentless.

LANDAU (CONT'D)

Did I tell you what Iovine said about "Born in the U.S.A."? He was blown away, said the album's done, that it could be "Born in the U.S.A." and ten other tracks, and no one would care. Said with that song leading, nothing else matters.

Landau softens his voice.

LANDAU (CONT'D)

At this rate, we'll have an album mixed and mastered in no time -- maybe even a month. It's a record for us, and this stuff... it's an evolution, Bruce.

Bruce stands, still deeply unsure. Landau stands, too, his eyes never leaving Bruce.

LANDAU (CONT'D)

God knows you don't chase trends, and I don't want you to, but this might just be the version that gets you there, your biggest audience, without any compromise whatsoever. There's a power in that, that's worth pursuing.

Bruce looks to his friend, mentor, considering. The ringing in his ear momentarily subsides as clarity dawns. Bruce then pulls THE TAPE from his jacket.

BRUCE

(a reluctant)

Maybe you're right, maybe it's solo material. I'll try it alone.

LANDAU

I think it's the right call.

136

INT. POWER STATION - RECORDING BOOTH - LATER THAT NIGHT

136

Visibly anxious, LANDAU paces in the tracking room. PLOTKIN makes final adjustments and, before closing the door to the recording booth...

PLOTKIN

(softly)

Toby's rolling, so whenever you're ready.

ANGLE on BRUCE sitting on a stool, his harmonica hanging heavily around his neck. His posture is tense, almost defensive, as if bracing for an impact. He takes a deep breath, and begins delivering "Nebraska."

137

INT. POWER STATION - STUDIO A - CONTROL ROOM - LATER

137

BRUCE and LANDAU are next to PLOTKIN at the console,
listening to PLAYBACK of his *solo* recording of "*Nebraska*."
Bruce's frustration boils over. He turns to PLOTKIN.

BRUCE
Goddammit, Chuck! Kill it.

PLOTKIN, caught off guard, abruptly cuts the playback.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
It's not working. It's too clean.

Landau offers a calming hand.

LANDAU
There's no rush, Boss. We're ahead
of the game. Please try to ke-

BRUCE
(cutting him off)
It's not working, Jon!

Bruce grabs the case-less TAPE off the console. Without another word, he storms out, the door SLAMMING behind him.

Landau stares at the console, for once uncertain of the path forward. Softly, the Colts Neck version of "Highway Patrolman" begins.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
*My name is Joe Roberts I work for
the state I'm a sergeant out of
Perrineville Barracks number 8*

138 EXT. ASBURY PARK - ARCADE - NIGHT

138

FAYE and HALEY stand by a video game. Haley's eyes sparkle with anticipation as Faye looks around, searching for Bruce.

BRUCE
*I always done an honest job As
honest as I could
I got a brother named Franky
And Franky ain't no good*

Visibly concerned, Faye glances at her watch. She takes a deep breath and leads Haley off, glancing back one last time.

139 INT. CAMARO - RANDOLPH ST. - FREEHOLD, NJ - NIGHT

139

BRUCE cruises the familiar streets, "Highway Patrolman" continuing, his voice a ghostly presence haunting the night.

BRUCE
*Now ever since we was young kids
It's been the same come down I get
a call on the short-wave Franky's
in trouble downtown
(MORE)*

BRUCE (CONT'D)

*Well if it was any other man I'd
put him straight away
But when it's your brother
Sometimes you look the other way*

The car's headlight cut through the darkness, illuminating the quiet, desolate streets.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

*Me and Franky laughin' and drinkin'
Nothin' feels better than blood on
blood Takin' turns dancin' with
Maria As the band played "Night of
the Johnstown Flood" I catch him
when he's strayin' Like any brother
would
Man turns his back on his family
Well he just ain't no good*

Suddenly, the figure of a SEVEN-YEAR-OLD BRUCE appears in the headlights, riding his bicycle, as though racing against time. The connection between past and present is electric.

TIME SLOWS as Bruce draws even with his younger self, their eyes LOCKING for a brief, intense moment. Bruce reflects on the years that have passed, his eyes filling with emotion.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

*Well Franky went in the army, back
in 1965 I got a farm deferment
Settled down, took Maria for my
wife But them wheat prices kept on
droppin' 'Til it was like we were
gettin' robbed
Franky came home in '68
And me, I took this job*

Bruce pulls ahead, leaving his younger self behind, swallowed by the darkness. The past recedes, but it leaves an indelible mark, a weight that Bruce can't shake as he drives on.

140

INT. HOUSE/BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - LATER THAT NIGHT

140

The room is dim, shadows creeping in the corners. BRUCE sits on the floor, guitar in hand, back pressed against the wall, his eyes unfocused, and distant.

BRUCE

*Yeah we're laughin' and drinkin'
Nothin' feels better than blood on
blood Takin' turns dancin' with
Maria As the band played "Night of
the Johnstown Flood"*

Suddenly, the PHONE RINGS. Bruce remains motionless, eyes closed, as if the call is a distant memory he can't escape.

The phone RINGS again. And again. Finally, the ringing stops as it's picked up by the ANSWERING MACHINE.

141 INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - ASBURY PARK - NIGHT

141

In the back of the restaurant, an anxious FAYE leans against the wall in her uniform, phone pressed to her ear.

FAYE
Bruce? Pick up.. Where were you?

Faye turns her back to the restaurant, pleads...

FAYE (CONT'D)
Bruce? I know you're there. Pick up.

142 INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT - SAME TIME

142

Bruce stares into the void, his disconnection palpable.

BRUCE
*I catch him when he's strayin'
Teach him how to walk that line
Man turns his back on his family
He ain't no friend of mine*

143 INT. POWER STATION - CONTROL ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

143

BRUCE is back at the console, the tension from the previous night still hanging over him. LANDAU is beside him, listening to the raw BEDROOM DEMO of "Highway Patrolman."

CLOSE on THE TAPE as it spins in a cassette player, the lo-fi quality clashing with the high-end studio equipment. There's something in it that grabs hold of Bruce.

Bruce stands abruptly, shaking his head. He points to the spinning cassette.

BRUCE
This is what I want. Get Batlan in here. We're transferring everything over, exactly as it is. No changes.

He walks out before Landau or Plotkin can respond, leaving them in a thick, uneasy silence.

144

INT. POWER STATION - CONTROL ROOM - EVENING

144

BATLAN watches PLOTKIN and TOBY SCOTT meticulously run the LINES OUT from the TEAC 144 to the Neve console. The TEAC looks absurdly out of place among the high-end equipment.

TOBY
(whispering)
We're really doing this?

LANDAU O.S.
Yes, you're really doing it.

ON a visibly concerned LANDAU, watching from the doorway.

145

INT. POWER STATION - CONTROL ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

145

BRUCE and LANDAU listen to PLAYBACK of his bedroom version of "*Nebraska*," now transferred to two-inch, professional-grade tape. The echo, that intangible quality Bruce had captured at home, is gone. Bruce's frustration boils over.

BRUCE
No! It's not the same! Not with the
band, or me alone or on this.
(gestures to the mixing
board)
We're in one of the best studios in
the world and everything we've been
doing to try and make it better is
making it worse. I don't want
better.
(frustrated beat)
I want to get back to whatever
happened in the bedroom.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
Put the others on the shelf. "Born
in the U.S.A," "I'm on Fire,"
"Glory Days..." *This* is what I'm
putting out. These songs, just as
they are. I don't care if they're
unfinished, if they're flawed. It's
how I want people to hear this
music.

Bruce makes for the door, turning one last time...

BRUCE (CONT'D)
Chuck, master *directly* from that
tape.

Bruce exits, leaving Plotkin visibly unsettled and Landau in
stunned silence.

146 INT. LANDAU OFFICE - DAY - LATER

146

Alone, LANDAU speaks on the phone to JIMMY IOVINE.

LANDAU
No, Jimmy, this is what I'm telling
you, he's putting "Born in the
U.S.A." on the shelf.

JIMMY IOVINE O.S.
But that's insane, Jon. He's making
a terrible choice.

Iovine is talking so loudly, we can hear him thru the phone.

LANDAU
I'm not going there, Jimmy, but I
can't understand putting this stuff
aside. Bruce knows how good it is.
As his former engineer, *you*
understand how good it is-

Iovine interrupts. We hear "*other stuff.*"

LANDAU (CONT'D)
well, the other stuff is acoustic.
Songs he recorded in his bedroom...
Yes, his bedroom! And they're scary
dark. Have a... folk quality.

JIMMY IOVINE O.S.
(loud enough to be heard)
Fucking folk music?!

LANDAU
Jimmy, jesus.

JIMMY IOVINE O.S.
(very loudly)
He's sitting on a goldmine and he
wants to play *folk* music??

147

INT. LANDAU APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

147

visibly exhausted, LANDAU exits the bathroom and sits on the bed next to BARBARA, her concern evident.

LANDAU
He's in a place I just can't reach.

BARBARA
Then forget Jimmy, the label, and
forget delivering hits. Right now,
this is about Bruce, and he needs
someone who really understands him.

LANDAU
I'm not thinking about the label.
But they want hits, not a
breakdown.

BARBARA
Then remember why you believed in
him in the first place. It wasn't
about the charts, Jon, but the
truth he brought.

Landau's silence is heavy, weighted down by his thoughts.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
You've always been the one who
believed in Bruce's vision, no
matter what. Stay true to that,
even if it's hard.

Landau remains silent, unable to meet her gaze.

BARBARA (CONT'D)
You're not alone in this. But
you've got to make the decision
that feels right, not just for you,
but for him. Trust your instincts.

Barbara places a comforting hand on his, grounding him.

CARD: two weeks later

148

INT. POWER STATION - RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT

148

PLOTKIN stares at an ACETATE of the mastered BEDROOM-RECORDINGS as "Atlantic City" spins on a turntable.

Eyes closed, BRUCE listens thru the studio's speaker-system. He motions for TOBY SCOTT to shut it off, his face reflecting frustration.

PLOTKIN

I know. The distortion's still
there. I can't get rid of it.

Seething, Bruce's eyes remain fixed on the floor.

PLOTKIN (CONT'D)
(deferential, delicate)
No offense, Bruce, but you cut this
on equipment that doesn't...
doesn't exactly meet our usual
standards. I'll keep trying, but
this is a very unconventional
situation.

BRUCE
I don't give a shit how
unconventional it is, Chuck.

Plotkin glances nervously to Toby.

PLOTKIN
(treading carefully)
But it wasn't recorded properly,
and the distortion is a result of
that.

Bruce GLARES at Plotkin. Sensing an eruption, Landau stands.

LANDAU
Alright, we're done for the night,
guys... Everybody out.

Plotkin and the others slowly disperse, leaving Bruce and
Landau alone in the studio. Calmly, but firmly...

LANDAU (CONT'D)
You want these songs to be heard,
don't you?

Bruce nods.

LANDAU (CONT'D)
Then trust that we'll figure it
out.

Bruce nods, slightly mollified by Landau's assurance.

CARD: two weeks later

149

EXT. L.A. LACQUER - LOS ANGELES - DAY

149

A low-slung building in Hollywood bakes in the mid-day sun.

SLIM O.S.
Even though it's state-of-the-art,
cutting-edge equipment, it's pretty
straightforward.

150 INT. L.A. LACQUER - LOS ANGELES - DAY - LATER 150

PLOTKIN looks on as Engineer SLIM MARTINSON prepares a Neumann VMS 70 disc-cutting lathe.

 SLIM
 The machine lowers and lifts the
 cutter-head, and automatically
 handles cutting the lead-in and
 lead-out -- plus the concentric and
 grooves. It takes care of most of
 it for you.

Plotkin offers a half-smile, a glimmer of humor breaking through the tension.

A151 INT. L.A. LACQUER - NIGHT - LATER A151

The NEUMANN LATHE is situated amidst a sophisticated, high-tech room. Pre-lap a RINGING PHONE...

151 INT. JON LANDAU'S OFFICE - NEW YORK CITY - DAY 151

The ringing phone continues as LANDAU picks up.

 LANDAU

 Landau.

 PLOTKIN O.S.
 It's Chuck. We got it!

 LANDAU
 For real this time?

 PLOTKIN O.S.
 For real.

PRE-LAP the latest attempt at "*Nebraska*"....

152 INT. POWER STATION - THE NEXT DAY 152

TIGHT ON a MARANTZ TURNTABLE. BRUCE listens intently, shaking his head vigorously.

 BRUCE
 You don't hear that?!

He scans the room, eyes filled with frustration and disbelief. The team exchanges uneasy glances.

PLOTKIN

(hangs his head)

We listened to it back on a
goddamned seventeen-thousand dollar
turntable, and there was no
distortion. We didn't think to test
it on regular equipment. I'm sorry,
Boss.

Bruce's face falls, his hope visibly crumbling. He glances
around, his eyes pleading for a solution.

The engineers share embarrassed looks. Bruce, near tears,
exits the room slowly, defeated.

153

INT. DINER - W. 53RD ST. - NYC - LATER THAT NIGHT

153

The diner is quiet, a stark contrast to the turmoil of the
studio. BRUCE and LANDAU sit in their usual booth, the
tension lingering. A long beat of silence, then...

LANDAU

This isn't just about the record,
is it? There's something deeper
here.

Bruce meet's Landau's eyes, his vulnerability laid bare.

BRUCE

It's more than the sound, Jon. It's
the only thing I have that's making
any sense right now. The only thing
I can still believe in.

Bruce's head drops again. Landau places a soft hand on
Bruce's. They sit for a beat, then...

LANDAU

I'm out of my depth on this one,
but we'll get it. A step at a
time... but we'll get it.

Though Bruce's eyes remains fixed on his plate, Landau is at
a loss, betraying a rare, anxious uncertainty.

CARD: Atlantic Studios - New York City

154

EXT. ATLANTIC STUDIOS - BROOKLYN - NIGHT

154

An industrial building lies sandwiched on a tight block.

155 INT. ATLANTIC STUDIOS - BROOKLYN - NEW YORK 155

Standing next to CHUCK PLOTKIN is master Engineer, DENNIS KING. He holds THE TAPE as if he'd never seen one before.

DENNIS KING
(considering)
I'll have to adjust the depth and distance between the grooves by hand, the old way. And cut it at an incredibly low level so the needle doesn't dig too deeply into the vinyl. But people have knobs, right? They can turn it up themselves.

PLOTKIN
I'd rather they didn't, Dennis, but we don't have a choice.

DENNIS KING
As long as Bruce knows I only have old gear, let's give it a shot.

Dennis looks to the tape as if he'd never seen one before.

DENNIS KING (CONT'D)
Where's the case for this thing?

Off Plotkin, the following sequence is CROSS-CUT...

156 INT. ATLANTIC STUDIOS - NEW YORK - NIGHT 156

DENNIS KING meticulously sets up a LATHE, the only one PLOTKIN has seen still adjusted by hand.

157 EXT. NYC DINER - SIDEWALK - NIGHT 157

LANDAU watches a dejected BRUCE fade into a sea of FACES... raw, distorted chords cutting through the din like a knife.

158 INT. ATLANTIC STUDIOS - NIGHT 158

The LATHE's needle descends with precision, a surgeon's incision onto pristine vinyl. DENNIS'S hands adjust the depth and distance between the grooves, his fingers working with the delicacy of an artist.

159

INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - BEDROOM - DAY

159

Blinds drawn, BRUCE stands alone, his Telecaster's anguished wail reverberating loudly throughout the house.

Drenched in despair, and influenced by SUICIDE, the guitar's jagged tones create a sense of unease, tension.

It all becomes a grotesque lead-in to -- "I'm on Fire," which plays over the following sequence...

160 INT. ATLANTIC STUDIOS - DAY 160

DENNIS meticulously guides the lathe, cutting the grooves at an incredibly low level. The acetate responds, shavings spiraling to the floor in a delicate dance.

161 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - DOCK - DUSK 161

Barefoot, BRUCE stands at the end of the dock, trapped in a loop of sleeplessness and restless thoughts.

162 INT. ATLANTIC STUDIOS - NIGHT 162

The room vibrates with the sound of metal against vinyl. Each revolution a part of Bruce's narrative.

163 INT. STONE PONY - ASBURY PARK - NIGHT 163

Cats on a Smooth Surface cover Screamin' Jay Hawkins's "I Put a Spell on You." In the throngs of fans, FAYE stands, heavy with worry, feeling Bruce's absence.

164 INT. ATLANTIC STUDIOS - MORNING 164

ECU as concentric rings form on the acetate, a visual representation of sound. The pattern appears uniform only from afar, but up close, it reveals the intricate handiwork of Dennis's adjustments.

165 OMITTED 165

166 EXT. STONE PONY - PARKING LOT - EVEN LATER THAT NIGHT 166

The last stragglers drift away and the night grows still. No sign of Bruce. ON FAYE as FIREWORKS explode overhead...

167 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - BEDROOM - DAWN 167

First light filters through the room. BRUCE, on the floor, is trapped in a cycle of sleepless despair.

The phone RINGS, piercing the silence, each shrill tone a jarring reminder of his isolation.

LANDAU O.S.
Bruce? where are you, man?
(forcing a light tone)
(MORE)

LANDAU O.S. (CONT'D)
I'm getting a bit worried here.
Give me a call when you can.

But Bruce remains motionless, his body rooted to the floor.

168 INT. ATLANTIC STUDIOS - CONTINUOUS 168

The lathe's ARM carves the final notes into the acetate, now bearing the scars and beauty of its creation.

169 INT./EXT. CAR - STRAND THEATER - FREEHOLD - DUSK 169

Parked across from the theater, BRUCE watches an EMPLOYEE place letters on the marquee: "REVIVAL SHOWING: THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER."

Bruce's eyes reflect deep, unsettling memories.

170 INT. ATLANTIC STUDIOS - NIGHT - LATER 170

The acetate's first test on a turntable aligns with Bruce's gaze on the Marquee. The NEEDLE DROPS but no sound is heard.

171 INT. POWER STATION - TRACKING ROOM - NIGHT 171

Our CAMERA peers into the CONTROL ROOM where LANDAU, PLOTKIN, and TOBY SCOTT gather around the console. We don't hear it, but it worked. They embrace, a mix of relief and triumph.

172 INT. DINER - W. 53RD ST. - NYC - LATE NIGHT 172

BRUCE and LANDAU sit across from one another, only a few others in at such a late/early hour.

BRUCE
It's everything I wanted.

LANDAU
The echo. Every imperfection. It's the cassette, ready for vinyl. And it's the story you wanted to tell.

A moment of shared silence, their victory settling in.

BRUCE
So now what?

LANDAU
I take it to the label.

BRUCE

Make sure they don't try to turn it into something it's not. No singles. No tour. No press. This record needs to breathe on its own.

LANDAU

This'll be your first record without a tour to support it. Not even any press? We need to give the label something to work with.

BRUCE

No, I don't even want to be on the cover. I don't want to explain it. I'm not sure I even can.
(places his hand on Jon's)
But I'm happy, Jonny. Really happy. Thank you. There's one more I want to lay down, though...

173

INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - BEDROOM - LATER THAT MORNING

173

The clock reads: 4:14 AM. Holding his J-200, BRUCE sits on the edge of his bed, humming a melody. Pages are spread out, lines crossed and rewritten.

He plays a few chords, then takes a deep breath and...

BRUCE

*Last night I dreamed that I was a
child Out where the pines grow wild
and tall
I was trying to make it home
through the forest
Before the darkness falls*

174

INT. STRAND MOVIE THEATER - FREEHOLD - DAY - THE PAST

174

ANGLE ON THE SCREEN: **The Night of the Hunter** plays, where the children, hearts pounding with fear, scramble into the small wooden boat.

As the current carries them away from shore, they glance back at the looming figure of Harry Powell, his eyes filled with a terrifying intensity.

As we PUSH IN, the unresolved echoes of Bruce's painful past stir memories he's struggled to bury.

BRUCE

*I heard the wind rustling through
the trees And ghostly voices rose
from the fields
I ran with my heart pounding down
that broken path
With the devil snapping at my heels*

175

INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

175

ON BRUCE, as the room breathes with longing and loss as the story of "My Father's House" connects the dreams of a boy to the realities faced by a grown man coming up against all that he knows.

BRUCE

*I broke through the trees and there
in the night My father's house
stood shining hard and bright
The branches and brambles tore my
clothes and scratched my arms
But I ran till I fell shaking in
his arms*

176

INT. STRAND MOVIE THEATER - FREEHOLD - DAY

176

The screen flickers with the haunting scenes of *The Night of the Hunter*. YOUNG BRUCE sits beside his father, DOUG, his small frame tense with fear as... Reverend Harry Powell moves menacingly through a dimly lit house. The children, John and Pearl, hide under the stairs, holding their breath, eyes wide with terror.

Every creak of the floorboards and shadowy figure on the screen sends a shiver down the boy's spine.

Doug sits stern and silent, his eyes on the screen. Young Bruce glances at his father, hoping for reassurance, but only sees a stoic expression, deepening the sense of abandonment.

PAN TO: OLDER BRUCE, now sitting a few rows back, watching his younger self with sorrow. The movie plays on, unchanged, but for Older Bruce, every shadow in the theater holds a ghost.

ON SCREEN: Reverend Powell's shadow stretches across the theater, monstrous and looming.

Younger Bruce shudders, gripping his father's arm, seeking comfort. Doug remains rigid, his expression hard to read, as if he's guarding something within.

Older Bruce watches this moment unfold, his heart heavy with the realization that it wasn't just Powell's shadow that haunted him, it was the shadow of his father's silence, the unspoken fears that hung between them.

The past and present collide in a single frame, Older Bruce sitting alone, seeing both his younger self and his father in a moment frozen in time, yet still painfully alive.

177

INT. 87 RANDOLPH - DINING ROOM - NIGHT - THE PAST

177

YOUNG BRUCE peers through a partially open door, tense with apprehension as he catches a glimpse of DOUG, alone at the table, under a bare bulb hanging above. Shrouded in darkness, a cigarette dangles between his fingers like a lifeline.

Doug's broad shoulders are slumped, casting a long, foreboding shadow across the table of empty Schlitz's.

Young Bruce's eyes are filled with fear and longing as he watches his father, who seems lost in his own world, staring blankly at his hands. The silence is heavy.

Young Bruce takes a hesitant step forward, but the creak of the floor makes his father shift slightly, and Bruce freezes.

DOUG

... What do you want?

As the camera REVERSES ANGLE, we're now on OLDER BRUCE, his gaze fixed on the empty space where his father once sat.

BRUCE

Just to hear your voice...

As "My Father's House" continues...

BRUCE (CONT'D)

*I awoke and I imagined the hard
things that pulled us apart Will
never again, sir, tear us from each
other's hearts
I got dressed and to that house I
did ride
From out on the road I could see
its windows shining in light*

The house feels cold and unwelcoming, each shadow a reminder of the emotional distance between father and son.

178

INT. BEDROOM/RECORDING STUDIO - EARLY MORNING

178

TIGHT on the TEAC 144 and the BOOM BOX, side-by-side on Bruce's dresser. The ECHOPLEX is in the chain, too.

BRUCE

*I walked up the steps and stood on
the porch A woman I didn't
recognize came and spoke to me
through a chained door*

The song a testament to the indelible mark left by a humble home, the troubled relationship between a father and his son.

179

INT. JON LANDAU'S OFFICE - DAY

179

ECU on a MAXELL cassette spinning in a cassette player, where "My Father's House" continues...

BRUCE

*I told her my story and who I'd
come for
She said "I'm sorry son but no one
by that name lives here anymore"*

ANGLE ON LANDAU reclining in his EAMES chair. Across from Landau is AL TELLER, sitting uncomfortably on a mid-century sofa, holding a notepad and pen.

TELLER

Is it like this the whole way
through?

Landau nods.

TELLER (CONT'D)

And is it the final master?

Landau nods. Awkward silence. Teller gestures for Jon to stop the cassette.

TELLER (CONT'D)

You recognize this is a highly
unorthodox career move, Jon.

LANDAU moves to the tape deck and STOPS the cassette. He crosses back to his chair and sits. The following silence is tense.

TELLER (CONT'D)

I'm going to be honest with you,
Jon. I don't understand it. I don't
understand why an artist would even
make this record.

Landau nods, keeping his composure.

TELLER (CONT'D)

I mean, there's something there,
don't get me wrong. I hear it.
(MORE)

TELLER (CONT'D)

I'm just not going to tell you I understand it.

LANDAU

It's a departure, Al.

TELLER

Departure?? I'm surprised Bruce even played it for you. It sounds like an accident, unfinished.

LANDAU

It is unfinished. But that's the point. I'll spare you the details of how far we went to preserve this sound.

Teller paces, grappling with the reality of the situation.

TELLER

well, it's bold, and, I appreciate it, but it's just not for me. Actually, I don't know who it's for... what I'd *like* to say is take this back and bring me another record, one with some goddamn hits on it.

(laughs)

But I know you guys, and I know that's not going to happen, so...

Teller gathers his thoughts, sits across from Landau.

TELLER (CONT'D)

Look, here's the thing: we're grateful to have any new Bruce Springsteen record, because nobody but Bruce can tell stories like these. But we prefer to have something we can market, take to radio. Radio can't play this, Jon.

LANDAU

Understood. But whether or not you believe in this particular album, in *this* office, *my* office, we believe in Bruce.

TELLER

And make no mistake, I do, too. No mistake... Look, we'll handle it best we can. Do everything we can to protect it. Release it, give it all it deserves.

LANDAU

And we thank you. But you should know... no singles, no tour, no press.

TELLER

what?

Landau shakes his head, firm and resolute.

TELLER (CONT'D)

So what is he doing?

LANDAU

Apart from a scheduled benefit show in L.A., nothing. He's not even putting his face on the album cover.

The blood drains from Teller's face.

TELLER

But we could build a solo tour around this.

LANDAU

He won't tour.

TELLER

But, he's a critic's darling. We could set up a few exclusives. Esquire. Rolling Stone. The *Times*. Build a story.

LANDAU

He's not doing press. He's not doing anything.

TELLER

Then how do we handle this, Jon? This is not going to be good for either one of us.

Landau leans forward, his eyes locked with Teller's.

LANDAU

There's no "us" in this, Al. I'm not asking for your understanding and I'm not here to explain Bruce's thinking. I'm here to make sure it's released precisely the way he wants.

Landau's unwavering stance leaves Teller silent.

180 OMITTED 180

181 EXT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - MORNING 181

A newer CADILLAC is parked next to Bruce's Camaro.

182 INT. BEDROOM - COLTS NECK - MORNING - SAME TIME 182

visibly concerned, LANDAU stands in the doorway as BRUCE sits on the edge of his bed, shirtless, barefoot, his shoulders heavy with weariness.

Landau approaches slowly and sits next to him, their silence heavy but comforting.

LANDAU
Let's just sit here.

As they sit, the light plays off the wall, birdsong drifts inside. Gentle, soothing, familiar.

BRUCE
It runs in my blood, Jon... my
pops, aunts, cousins. Sickness,
like poison.

Bruce trails off for a beat. Then:

BRUCE (CONT'D)
I've been trying to face it,
whatever I'm running from. Maybe
this record... maybe it was more
than just music.

Jon listens intently, sensing the depth of Bruce's reflection.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
Maybe I've come out the other side.
(hopeful smile)
Maybe that's what I'm feeling.

LANDAU
Sometimes, just facing it is
enough.
(MORE)

LANDAU (CONT'D)
(reflective beat)
This trip to California... it's a
fresh start. The road's always
centered you, and your new house --
it's yours. It's the fresh start
you need.
(lightly taps Bruce's leg)
Let me buy you breakfast.

BRUCE
Think I'll just hang here.

LANDAU
You sure? You look like you could
use some pancakes.

Bruce nods.

LANDAU (CONT'D)
Your loss. They're better than my
pep talks.

Bruce offers a warm smile, and Landau moves off, leaving
Bruce on the bed, his troubles momentarily eased.

183 EXT./INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - ASBURY PARK - EVENING 183

An anxious BRUCE peers through a window and sees a harried
FAYE taking a customer's dinner order.

184 INT. FRANK'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT - LATER 184

VIV counts the day's tally at the cash register as a LINE
COOK methodically scrubs down the stove. A lone DINER eats in
silence, oblivious to the rest of the world.
FAYE and BRUCE sit across from one another at a table near
the entrance. The pain in her eyes is evident.

FAYE
We waited for two hours.
(her expression hardens)
Do you know how much that hurt?

Bruce's gaze is fixed downward.

FAYE (CONT'D)
why are you doing this?

BRUCE

I don't... I'm sorry.

(looks up)

I didn't know how to face you.

FAYE

It's not about *facing* me... Look,
we both knew this was... casual at
first. But things changed. I
thought maybe... *we* had changed.

Bruce looks to Faye, his face etched with regret.

BRUCE

We did, but I can't love you better
or more than I do right now. I
don't know how, but I know it's not
enough. And there are things around
here that... are no good for me.
I'm lost here. That's why... I'm
heading to California for awhile.

This takes Faye's breath away.

FAYE

what?

BRUCE

I've bought a house... out in L.A.
It's the first thing I've had
that's mine, that I own. And I need
to go out there... on my own.

FAYE

You're moving to Los Angeles? And
you wait until *now* to tell me?

Bruce's discomfort grows as Faye looks off, thunderstruck.

BRUCE

I didn't know... I've been trying
to find the right time to tell you.
But there never seemed to be a
right time.

Faye's smile is bittersweet, a fragile mask over heartbreak.

FAYE

You think this is about timing?
This isn't about California, Bruce.
This is about you running away from
everything that scares you. From
us. From what we could be.

Bruce tries to speak, but Faye holds up a hand.

FAYE (CONT'D)

Don't give me that "it's not you,
it's me" crap. I know you're
scared.

(MORE)

FAYE (CONT'D)

I've seen it every time you look at Haley, every time you look at me. You think you're protecting us by pushing us away, but you're just hiding.

Bruce's eyes fill with a mix of shame and helplessness.

BRUCE

I don't want to hurt you, Faye. I don't want to hurt anyone. I've done that too much already.

FAYE

And what about facing it? What about actually dealing with your... shit instead of running from it?

Bruce looks away, struggling.

FAYE (CONT'D)

You say you can't love me like I deserve, but the truth is you won't even try. Because trying means facing yourself, and that terrifies you.

The only sound is the soft hitch in Faye's breath as she struggles to hold back her tears.

FAYE (CONT'D)

I believed in you. I believed you could be the man you pretend to be. But maybe you're right. Maybe you should go. Because until you can be honest with yourself, you'll never be honest with me.

Faye starts to stand, then pauses, her eyes filled with sorrow.

FAYE (CONT'D)

You know, I thought I could handle this, the casualness, the uncertainty. But I can't handle lies. And I can't handle watching you destroy yourself.

She looks at him one last time, her voice breaking.

FAYE (CONT'D)

I hope you find what you're looking for in California. I really do.

Faye moves off, toward the back, Viv noticing Faye's pain. Bruce remains seated, the weight of her words pressing on him as he realizes the depth of what he's losing.

185 INT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - LIVING ROOM - MORNING 185

ANGLE ON Bruce's packed bags, sitting near the front door.

186 EXT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - PORCH - MORNING - LATER 186

BRUCE wearily exits the house to find the ROCKING HORSE on the front stoop. He exhales and looks up the drive.

187 EXT. COLTS NECK RENTAL - DRIVEWAY - LATER THAT MORNING 187

Carrying the last of his bags, a somber BRUCE approaches a sea-green, 1969 FORD GALAXY XLGT, with the hood up. Under it is MATT DELIA, throttling the accelerator.

BRUCE
What are you doing, Matty?

DELIA
Making sure she's ready, man!

Bruce reaches for a large stuffed BUNNY that sits in front.

BRUCE
The hell is this?

DELIA
It's a rabbit.

BRUCE
I know it's a rabbit. Why is it in the car?

DELIA
It's my comfort animal. Theresa and I split up.

Bruce looks at the bunny, then at Delia, a flicker of empathy in his eyes.

BRUCE
(quietly)
Yeah, well... guess we all need something.

Bruce tosses the bunny in back. Pulls a quarter from his jeans.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
who's driving?

DELIA
Tails.

Bruce flips the quarter. It's Tails.

188 EXT. GALAXY XLGT - DELAWARE - DAY 188

The GALAXY barrels across the DELAWARE MEMORIAL BRIDGE.

189 EXT. GALAXY XLGT - BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAIN PARKWAY - LATE DAY 189

The sky shifts from the purples of late day to the deepening blues of night as they wind through the serpentine Blue Ridge Mountains.

190 EXT. MEMPHIS - GRACELAND - EVENING 190

BRUCE and DELIA lean against the car, across from the gates of the property. Bruce looks hesitant, as if the grandeur is too much to bear.

DELIA
Aren't we gonna go in?

BRUCE
I don't know, man. Feels like we'd be stepping into Elvis's dreams. Feels like a... an intrusion.

DELIA
(laughs)
You did jump the wall last time you were here, so maybe it's safer from here.

Delia joins Bruce in looking at the mansion, sharing the moment of awe.

191 EXT. PARKING LOT - **VILLAGE GRILLE** - **TEXARKANA** - NIGHT 191 *

A flickering neon sign casts a dim, erratic glow over the GALAXY. The parking lot is a haven for weary late-night travelers, their cars huddled under the stars.

192 INT. VILLAGE GRILLE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

192 *

BRUCE and DELIA share a plate of fried chicken. Delia's greasy fingers clutch a TEXACO ROADMAP of TEXAS, while Bruce, distracted, tears at a chicken wing, his mind clearly elsewhere. A moment, then...

*

*

BRUCE
(to himself)
I think she's right.
(mutters intelligibly)
Goddamnit, she's right.

His voice catches DELIA's attention. He looks to Bruce, Bruce's eyes locked on something distant, lost in a memory that stings.

DELIA
who's running circles in your head?

Bruce blinks, the present snapping back into focus. He looks to Delia, forces a weak smile, trying to shrug it off.

DELIA (CONT'D)
Huh? who you talking to?

BRUCE
(playing it off)
Nobody. I'm just... It's nothing.

Delia doesn't press, but his eyes linger on Bruce, recognizing the lie.

193 EXT./INT. GALAXY - TEXAS PANHANDLE - LATE DAY

193

The sun sets over the plains. Inside, DELIA drives while BRUCE sits in back, staring blankly at the roof, his suppressed feelings surfacing.

DELIA
(through the rearview)
You sure you don't need a break?

Bruce shakes his head, not meeting Delia's eyes.

194 EXT. ARCHER COUNTY FAIR - ARCHER CITY, TEXAS - DUSK

194

The street fair is bustling with families enjoying themselves. BRUCE and DELIA wander through the vibrant scene and animal pens featuring LONGHORNS, pigs, and ponies.

A195 EXT. ARCHER COUNTY FAIR - ARCHER CITY, TEXAS - LATER A195

Bruce's demeanor is detached, contrasting with the joyous surroundings, as DELIA tosses balls at stuffed animals.

B195 EXT. ARCHER COUNTY FAIR - LATER THAT NIGHT B195

DELIA has a hotdog in one hand, cotton-candy in another as they continue to stroll among wholesome families.

Delia says something to Bruce we don't hear and he laughs. Bruce, however, remains distant.

195

EXT. COUNTY FAIR - STAGE - NIGHT

195

BRUCE and DELIA linger at back, drawn to a local band

terrifically covering Marshall Tucker Band's "Can't You See." Bruce's attention drifts as he watches a MOTHER wipe ice-cream off her baby's face.

His attention then locks on a family enjoying the music. The father's weathered face and physique, so like his own father's, stirs something deep within him.

As the band hits the chorus, the father reaches down to his son, and puts his arm around the boy, drawing him close. As the father whispers something playful in the boy's ear...

Bruce's vision narrows, the fairground warping, becoming claustrophobic. The man and his son then blur, and suddenly, Bruce is staring at his younger self, standing next to his own father, Doug.

As YOUNG BRUCE turns, locking eyes with Bruce, everything distorts, reality slipping away, and the world spins. As if summoned by the dark recesses of Bruce's mind, CARIL ANN FUGATE suddenly appears, her face hard and unnerving, a ghost from his nightmares.

The edges of Bruce's vision darken, and the pressure in his chest mounts, his breath coming in rapid, shallow gasps, as if he's drowning.

He tries to ground himself, bringing a trembling hand to his heart. But the memories keep flooding in -- FAYE's fingers slipping from his grasp on the carousel, her face now appearing just behind Caril, full of disappointment and hurt. Her voice echoing, the word "why" repeating over and over like a cruel mantra.

DELIA notices Bruce's distress...

DELIA
Hey, hey, you okay?

Bruce can only shake his head, his world spiraling out of control. The boy -- young Bruce -- begins to MORPH, his face shifting between CARIL and FAYE, both staring at him with eyes that pierce his soul, accusing him, holding him accountable for all his perceived failures.

The weight of guilt and panic becomes unbearable, his legs starting to give way beneath him.

Delia reacts quickly, catching Bruce before he collapses, wrapping his arms around his shoulders, his voice a steady anchor amidst the storm.

DELIA (CONT'D)
Just breathe with me. In and out,
nice and slow.

Delia's calm, steady breaths guide Bruce back from the edge, but the hallucinations don't fade entirely. The faces of Faye and Caril flicker, refusing to let go.

DELIA (CONT'D)
I'm here.

His own fear palpable, Delia half-carries Bruce, guiding him from the throng of fair-goers, as the ghosts of Bruce's past, now awakened, loom in the recesses of his mind.

HARD CUT TO:

196 INT./EXT. GALAXY XLGT - DESERT HIGHWAY - NIGHT - LATER 196

Headlights pierce the inky blackness. RACK from a concerned DELIA to BRUCE, a shadow of his usual self. Suddenly...

BRUCE
Turn around.

DELIA
What?

BRUCE
Gotta go back to the fair.

DELIA
But that's an hour back.

Delia looks at Bruce.

BRUCE
I don't care. I have to go.
Something's not... I need to...

Delia pulls to the shoulder and begins a wide U-Turn.

197 EXT. COUNTY FAIR - TEXAS - DAWN 197

The once vibrant fairgrounds lay shrouded in an eerie silence, devoid of the laughter and excitement from earlier.

BRUCE and DELIA stand amidst the silence, a STRAY DOG wandering through pools of light, hesitant and cautious.

BRUCE
Alright. Let's go.

Delia places a soft hand on Bruce's shoulder and leads him back to the car.

198 INT./EXT. GAS STATION - TWO-LANE ROAD - MORNING 198

The GALAXY is parked in front of a small convenience store. DELIA talks on a PAY PHONE, face etched with deep concern, as BRUCE sits up front, eyes still distant.

 DELIA
 This didn't just come out of the
 blue, Jon. It's been building. I
 mean, I've never seen him like this

199 INT. LANDAU'S APARTMENT - NEW YORK CITY - DAY 199

LANDAU's intense eyes are lit by an overcast light.

 LANDAU
 I know. I was hoping it wouldn't
 come to this. How close are you to
 L.A.?

 DELIA O.S.
 we're in Arizona. Maybe... a day?

A200 INT. LANDAU'S APARTMENT - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT A200

LANDAU sits by the phone, staring off. The room is quiet, shadows cast by the dim light.

BARBARA enters, looking to Jon with concern.

 BARBARA
 Any update?

Jon shakes his head 'no.' Barbara squeezes Jon's hand.

 BARBARA (CONT'D)
 He'll call.

200 EXT. GALAXY XLGT - ARIZONA DESERT - LATE DAY 200

The sun bakes as the Galaxy blasts through harsh terrain.

HARD CUT TO:

*

*

A 201 EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

A 201 *

BRUCE paces anxiously just off the roadside, the vast expanse of the desert stretching out around him, dotted with towering saguaro cacti. *

His face etched with frustration and uncertainty, he mutters under his breath. By the door of the driver's side, DELIA watches with concern, eyes tracking Bruce's every move. *

CLOSE on BRUCE's eyes as he stops -- they're filled with a profound sadness. He stares into the distance, the weight of his thoughts dragging him deeper into a somber introspection. *

CUT TO: *

201 EXT. LOS ANGELES - DAWN 201

The first light of dawn bathes the GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY and DOWNTOWN Los Angeles in a golden glow, but the brightness feels hollow, like a promise unfulfilled.

202 EXT./INT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOUSE - LATER THAT MORNING 202

The GALAXY pulls to a cottage nestled amid lush greenery and tranquil surroundings. It looks quietly down upon Hollywood.

203 INT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING - LATER

BRUCE stands in the center of the largely unfurnished room, with only the essentials and a piano.

He looks to a large window, the city of Los Angeles spreading as far as the eye can see.

DELIA enters, carrying the last of Bruce's travel bags, and some HAND WEIGHTS.

DELIA
(quietly empathetic)
Alright, bud. That's the last of
it. I'll head over to Eddie's and
let you settle in.

Delia moves to Bruce, embracing him. Quietly, in his ear...

BRUCE
Thank you, brother. For everything.

DELIA
I'm a phone call away.

A last squeeze, but before they part, Delia curls the weights, grunting like he's at the gym.

BRUCE
Matty, take it to the Y, please.

The men share a laugh. As Delia disappears, HOLD ON BRUCE, his impending isolation weighing on him.

204 INT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 204

Shadows dance on unfamiliar walls as BRUCE lies on the sofa, the blanket a tangled mess. He's sleepless, restless. The lights of the city sparkle at a distance, like another world.

He moans and pushes off the sofa, then paces, his footsteps conspicuous in the emptiness, his J-200 lying in wait.

205 OMITTED 205

206 INT. LIVING ROOM - HOLLYWOOD HILLS - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Sitting in a chair he's pulled before the large window, BRUCE holds a phone that RINGS on the other end. Landau picks up.

A207 INT. LANDAU'S APARTMENT - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

LANDAU sits alone on his sofa, in a bathrobe. It should be clear that Bruce's call awoke him.

LANDAU
(masking his concern)
You made it.

BRUCE O.S.
(his voice raw)
Barely. Forgot how different L.A.
can be.

LANDAU
(light chuckle)
I know that one. How's the new
place?

BRUCE O.S.
Strange. Like something out of the
Twilight Zone.

They share a brief laugh.

B207 INT. HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

B207

Bruce's expression quickly turns serious.

BRUCE
(voice faltering)
The nights are getting longer, Jon.
Blacker.

LANDAU O.S.
I know.

BRUCE
(hint of desperation)
Feel like a ghost, like I'm
drifting... and something's
breathing down my neck.
(somerly)
I've been trying. God, I've been
trying, but I'm not sure I can
outrun it this time. Maybe that's
okay. Maybe running is the problem.

C207 INT. LANDAU'S APARTMENT - NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT - SAME

C207

LANDAU
I know I've helped you through some
very difficult times, Bruce, but
this time it's different. I'm no
longer equipped for this. You need
professional help.

BRUCE O.S.

(conflicted)

But I don't think I need to see
a... I mean, you're not saying...

(deeply vulnerable)

I just want my life to make sense
again. want to stop feeling like...
I'm slipping away.

LANDAU
You're not just slipping. You're
falling. And I'm getting you the
support you need. Ok?

D207 IN. HOLLYWOOD HILLS HOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

D207

His look vacant, Bruce falls silent for a long pause.

LANDAU O.S.
Bruce?... *Bruce??*

BRUCE
(a whisper)
... yeah.

LANDAU O.S.
Promise me you won't do anything
until you hear from me. Ok? Hold on
just a little longer.

The quiet desperation of the night lingers as Bruce stares
blankly at the blurred city lights.

207 EXT. MID-CENTURY RANCH HOUSE - LOS ANGELES - DAY

207

The house stands under a clear, bright sky, its modern design
gleaming in the sunlight. Pre-Lap:

DR. COHEN V.O.
You can return to where it all
started as many times as you like,
but the past won't ever change.

208 INT. MID-CENTURY RANCH HOUSE - LOS ANGELES - SAME

208

The softly lit room, with its neutral tones, exudes warmth
and calm. DR. FRANK COHEN, a psychiatrist in a shirt and tie,
holds a pad and pen, sitting across from BRUCE, who sits
tensely on a sofa, his gaze wandering.

DR. COHEN
Perhaps that's why, in many ways, a
father will always remain unknown
to his son.

Dr. Cohen observes Bruce calmly as Bruce remains silent, his
eyes reflecting vulnerability and introspection. He takes a
deep breath, his face revealing the weight of his turmoil.

Bruce looks away, unfocused as he wrestles with his thoughts. The room's quiet intensity allows Bruce's feelings to surface, even without words.

As Dr. Cohen watches him patiently, providing a space for Bruce to confront his emotions, Bruce begins to cry...

FADE TO BLACK.

IN BLACK, cheers and applause RISE. It's nothing short of a crowd's adoration as "Ramrod" rings out...

209

INT. L.A. SPORTS ARENA - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

209

A towel wrapped around his neck, we FOLLOW a drenched BRUCE through a buzz of crew members and enthusiastic well-wishers.

He navigates the crowd with the ease of a seasoned performer, his stride confident, his demeanor relaxed.

He hands his Telecaster off to MIKE BATLAN, exchanging a brief but appreciative nod. As he turns a corner, he spots LANDAU waiting for him.

Landau's face lights up with a broad smile.

LANDAU

Fantastic, Boss. Really electric.

They embrace warmly, then part. Landau's eyes linger on Bruce, searching for something unspoken. The joy of the performance is evident, but there's a deeper, more subtle acknowledgment between them.

BRUCE

Baby steps, but nice to be back out there, if just for a night.

LANDAU

To new beginnings.

Landau pulls Bruce into a tight embrace, sweat and all, the gesture both celebratory and supportive.

He gives Bruce's shoulder a firm squeeze, a silent acknowledgment of the journey they've shared and the progress Bruce has made.

LANDAU (CONT'D)

Proud of you.

Bruce, visibly lighter, nods with a quiet, appreciative smile. As Landau watches him walk away, there's a flicker of relief and pride in his eyes. Bruce moves off, his posture more assured, his presence more grounded.

210

INT. HALLWAY/DRESSING ROOM - BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

210

At the dressing room entrance, BRUCE is met by his mother. ADELE is graced with age, and still her son's biggest fan. She exudes warmth and radiance, as they embrace.

ADELE

I never tire of dancing to my boy.

Bruce takes his towel, wipes his sweat off his mom's cheek.

BRUCE

Thanks, mom. Where's pops?

ADELE

(gestures to the door)

He's waiting for you.

BRUCE

Oh. Ok. Come on.

Adele lightly touches Bruce's chest.

ADELE

He wants a moment with you. Alone.

Bruce holds his mom's look, then... Opens his dressing room door, to see his FATHER sitting on a flimsy folding chair that barely holds his weight.

211

INT. DRESSING ROOM - LA SPORTS ARENA - CONTINUOUS

211

Bruce stands at the threshold, looking at his father with apprehension. Doug notices him and smiles warmly.

BRUCE

There he is.

Bruce takes a deep breath and steps inside. His father's presence feels heavier than the air around them.

DOUG

Hey, son.

There's a pause, the weight of years of strained emotions hanging between them. Doug's gaze holds a quiet solemnity, tempered with pride and a touch of vulnerability.

DOUG (CONT'D)

Come here. Sit on my lap.

Bruce hesitates, a hint of resistance in his tone...

BRUCE

I'm soaked, pops! And I'm 32 years old!

Doug's laughter breaks the tension, a rare moment of lightness.

DOUG
(softly, yet insistentlly)
Come on, sit on my lap.

Bruce relents, moving closer and sitting down awkwardly on his father's lap, feeling the warmth of his presence enveloping him, his father's arms hanging at his side.

DOUG (CONT'D)
You've been very good to your mom
and me. The money, the house, all
of it. I just want to thank you and
tell you how proud I am of you. But
also... that...
(voice falters, revealing
a depth of emotion)
I know I wasn't very good to you.

Bruce feels the weight of his father's words, the years of estrangement palpable in the air.

BRUCE
But it's done. You did the best you
could. You had your own battles to
fight, pop. It's ok.

Father and son share a fragile embrace, the silence between them speaking volumes.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
I've never sat on your lap before.

DOUG
Sure you have.

BRUCE
No, dad, I haven't.

Doug's eyes soften, regret and relief washing over him.

As reality begins to reclaim itself, the starkness of their surroundings contrasts with the intimacy of the moment.

Two grown men, reconciling years of misunderstanding and pain in a cold, impersonal dressing room.

FADE TO:

212	OMITTED	212
213	OMITTED	213

A214 OMITTED A214

B214 OMITTED B214

214 OMITTED 214

215 OMITTED 215

216 OMITTED 216

217 OMITTED 217

218 OMITTED 218

219 EXT. ASBURY PARK - OCEAN/CONVENTION HALL - LATE DAY 219

Our CAMERA finds BRUCE kneeling at water's edge, his hands submerged in the surf, sifting sand through his fingers.

As the waves crash around him, we TILT up to reveal the Convention Hall standing majestically in the distance behind him, a backdrop to his moment of reflection.

BRUCE V.O.
Songwriting's a funny thing.

220 EXT. BOARDWALK - ASBURY PARK - EARLY EVENING 220

The deserted boardwalk stretches out, accepting the weight of Bruce's memories...

BRUCE V.O.
Sometimes the songs write themselves. Just pour out of you.
Other times, well, *most* of the time, they don't.
(laughs)
They're a struggle... But then sometimes...

221 EXT. CAROUSEL - ASBURY PARK - TWILIGHT 221

The carousel stands still, its vibrant horses frozen mid-gallop...

BRUCE V.O.

They become something unexpected.
This next song is one of those
songs and is on our new record.

222 EXT. THE STONE PONY - ASBURY PARK - NIGHT

222

The Pony buzzes with energy, its parking lot packed with cars and alive with anticipation as fans hurry inside...

BRUCE V.O.

It's about the feeling of being
lost, of being alone, and of
searching for something...

223 INT. THE STONE PONY - CONTINUOUS

223

BRUCE stands center-stage, under the glare of spotlights, fronting the E STREET BAND. He looks healthier and more vibrant than ever.

BRUCE V.O.

Searching for something that's
going to give your life meaning.
And it goes something like this.

MAX WEINBERG'S crisp, rhythmic snare sets a driving, infectious tempo as "Dancing in the Dark" begins. A bright, punchy synthesizer kicks in, infusing the room with an energetic, electrifying melody.

ON BRUCE, his impassioned vocals filling the room, his eyes scanning the packed audience, each note a testament to his resilience and rebirth.

BRUCE

*I get up in the evenin' And I ain't
got nothin' to say
I come home in the mornin'
I go to bed feelin' the same way*

The song pulses with life, the spotlight casting Bruce in a warm glow that merges his presence seamlessly with the music. As the song unfolds, he spots her.

ANGLE ON: a striking REDHEAD leaning against the bar. Her hair catches the light just right as she watches him intently, a soft smile playing on her lips.

Their eyes lock across the room. In that electric moment, the world around them blurs into insignificance.

For Bruce, it's as if he can see the full spectrum of his journey -- his past struggles, his current triumphs, and his hopes for the future -- reflected in her gaze.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

*You can't start a fire
Sittin' 'round cryin' over a broken
heart
This gun's for hire
Even if we're just dancing in the
dark*

As the song reaches its uplifting crescendo, Bruce's voice resonates with a profound sense of hope and acceptance. The energy in the room is palpable, a celebration of new beginnings.

The image slowly FADES TO CARDS:

Bruce Springsteen would continue to struggle with depression throughout his life.

But never again alone.