

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD'S
THE WILLOWS

Screenplay
by
Wayne K. Spitzer

Based Upon "The Willows"
and Other Works by
Algernon Blackwood

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(un-formatted)
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ACT 1, SCENE 1

EXT. A MIGHTY RIVER. DAY.

Opening Image / Titles sequence. Aerial view rushing headlong over a winding Canadian river. Camera flies at dizzying speed over rapids, through sunlit mist. We hear an ecstatic, almost painful shriek which seems to tear through Nature itself. We hear the hum of some region beyond, which becomes a roar! Camera dips and climbs, swooping around river boulders, spiraling between crags, diving into the current and out again, like a dolphin. A base hum builds, inexorably, as we see a triangle-shaped spit of land appear—the point of which divides the river—draw near. The small island is crowded with willow bushes. We rush to a halt on a FIGURE IN A HOODED PARKA, standing immobile before the bushes with its back turned toward us. The figure begins to turn around....

SLAM-CUT TO:

ACT 1, SCENE 2

INT. NEW YORK SUBWAY. DAY.

The L-train rushes past. Cut briefly to conductor's POV as the train roars down the track. ABRAHAM O'MALLY, 39, thin, pale, and clean-shaven, awakens as if from dream, still gripping the pole. He is wedged between other commuters. A subway beggar is pleading...

SUBWAY BEGGAR:

Ladies and gentlemen, please, anything would help.

I am a victim of identity theft and starving. Also I
have difficulty breathing due to emphysema...

ABE looks past the man at a beautiful young woman in a long, black coat, seated at the front of the car. She swipes the hair out of her eyes as she reads her magazine. A small flower is tucked above her ear. Another train swoops close outside the window, mesmerizing ABE with its blur of fluorescent faces. He looks at his watch as the conductor calls the next stop. As he gathers his briefcase and disembarks, we hear the beggar continue...

SUBWAY BEGGAR:

Ladies and gentlemen, please. I am both starving
and suffocating...

Out on the platform ABE pauses before a street musician, who is sitting cross-legged on a small rug, playing Pan Pipes. ABE looks down at him almost

adoringly, pale-blue eyes sparkling. He lays a bill in the basket and hustles off. As the L-train leaves yet another train blasts past on the opposite side of the platform.

ACT 1, SCENE 3

EXT. NEW YORK CITY. DAY.

ABE moves down the packed sidewalk, turning his shoulders to part the crowd. He glimpses the woman in black, ahead of him, about to cross the street, and is so compelled by her that he steps right in front of a NYC bus—is drawn back by a stranger.

STRANGER:

Jesus, man! Pay attention!

He glimpses her once more after the bus passes, then she is swallowed by the crowd.

ABE emerges from the rotating glass door into the lobby of *Macmillan's New York Register* and hustles for the elevator, but misses it. He glances at his watch. He notices a large figure standing in front of the gas fireplace by the waterfall; the figure is wearing a parka with the hood down and has his back to him. There is a briefcase by his feet. The figure also looks at his watch.

The elevator chimes and its doors roll open. ABE steps in, not realizing how crowded it is. He bumbles into a co-worker who spills piping hot coffee on him. Nursing the burn, he sees the figure by the fire turn—as the elevator doors close.

Squeezed amongst his co-workers, ABE watches the glowing numbers. A woman talks into her cell phone.

WOMAN WITH CELL-PHONE:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well it was the wrong color and the wrong brand. We had to drive all the way back—huh? Yeah, we got lost. Isn't that awful? All that effort in precisely the wrong direction!

ABE nearly leaps from the elevator as its doors open, and quickly shuffles to the men's room. He rolls up his sleeves and pours cold water on the burn. He lingers a moment over the sink, grateful for the solitude. The face in the mirror is gaunt, white, almost sickly.

He hurries to his cubicle. His editor, a stern African-American named T.S. JOSHI, rolls back in his chair as he passes.

JOSHI:

That you, O'Malley?

ABE settles into his cubicle, which is crowded with potted plants as well as stacks of paperwork. The plants don't seem to be doing very well. The cubicle's walls are covered in journalism awards, as well as photos from various canoeing trips. Abraham is much younger in the pictures, 17 in some, 22 in others. There is another man in the pictures as well, scarcely older. He has scarcely had a chance to sit down when a co-worker brings in another stack of paperwork.

CO-WORKER:

I'll just...put these on the floor.

ABE logs onto his computer and gets the "You've got mail" alert. There is a picture of himself, about 18, at the Senior Prom; standing next to him is a stunning woman of Asian heritage. His editor is at the door before he can check his email.

JOSHI:

Sorry about the title change. And the quote cut. Had to fit a sidebar.

ABE:

It's okay. Your paper.

JOSHI:

It's Time-Warner's paper. I just work here,
like you.

(looks at his watch)

15 minutes. Shall we say...my place?

JOSHI turns to go, pauses, holds up some copy.

JOSHI:

'Spirals We Cannot Make?'

(throws up his hands)

ABE opens his email, finds a message waiting from a canoe2@yahoo-dot-com. He freezes. When at last he clicks on it, it reads: "Go with the flow. Silence is golden."

ACT 1, SCENE 4

INT. JOSHI'S OFFICE. DAY.

ABE enters JOSHI's office, and immediately freezes. There is someone in the room besides them: a biggish man, wearing boots, blue-jeans, and a flannel

shirt. He is seated half on the window sill, looking out, so that we cannot see his face. ABE notices that the chair in front of JOSHI's desk has a nylon parka with fur-lined hood thrown over it. He also notices that JOSHI has a file out, a *thick* one, and is thumbing through it. There are forms and brochures lying out on his desk.

JOSHI:

Come in and have a seat, Abe.

ABE looks at the free chair, alone against the wall. He sits down, tentatively. He is white as a wraith. JOSHI begins reading from ABE's employee file: his tardies, the no-shows, the missed deadlines, the length over-runs, etc. His overall assessment is grim.

JOSHI:

Abe, you're a brilliant writer, and a prolific reporter.

But, and it beats me how else to say this...

Outside the window, sky-scrapers loom.

JOSHI:

Look...Abe. See those skyscrapers out there?

ABE:

(altering his voice)

Why, yessuh, I do. Faith holds those buildings
up, don't it? And straight lines and rules and
structural steel.

(reverts to normal)

Look, if I'm canned then *can* me, just spare me
the Richard Wright grandiloquence....

JOSHI flashes him a stern look. The stranger at the window tries to suppress a chuckle. ABE looks at him angrily.

ABE:

This is funny to you?

The big man turns around. ABE does a double-take before recognizing him.

BIG MAN:

A little, I confess. If I were you...I'd go with the
flow. Silence is golden, you know. Even in labor
relations.

ABE can only look on, stunned.

JOSHI seems at once alarmed and charmed by the big man's gravitas.

JOSHI:

Abraham, meet SWEDEN MURDOCH. He runs

Centaur Excursions, out of Canada.

ABE and SWEDEN shake hands; the hand of the latter easily dwarfs the former. The men's eyes say much that isn't verbalized. Once everyone is seated JOSHI explains that SWEDEN conducts corporate challenge excursions out of his headquarters in Alberta, and that the *Register* has contracted with him to offer teamwork and motivational training for its employees, "...all of whom need it. Some more than others." He then asks SWEDEN to go into more detail, which the man does, with gusto, explaining how the excursions operate.

SWEDEN:

(wrapping up)

...designed to build confidence and encourage hyper-focus. To inspire teamwork, basically.

ABE:

Sounds swell! When do we go? And who are my team-mates?

JOSHI:

No team-mates, not on this first one. It'll be just you...and SWEDEN.

ABE:

Because I'm in that bad of shape?

JOSHI:

Because you're not a team-player—no bloody river-run's going to change that. Because my thankless job is to still sell newspapers to people who can get everything off the Internet for free. Because the corporate guys want better productivity and the health insurance discount. *Because I want a story—a big one*—that will have to be published in installments because you write in *big, looping spirals* (spins his arms wildly), which people seem to like, especially those people who hand out the little gold bowling trophy things. This ultimately

means I get to spend more time on the golf course, and
fuck the circulation. *And* because you're in that bad of
shape. I mean, look at you.

ABE:

And...if I turn it down?

JOSHI takes the thick file and tosses it into an entire box labeled 'AB.'

JOSHI:

Then I will give it to your replacement. One who
knows how to write...horizontally? Between the
little blue lines?

ABE looks at JOSHI, then at SWEDEN, who merely shrugs.

ACT 1, SCENE 5

EXT. NEW YORK CITY. DAY.

A double-decker tourist bus passes as ABE, SWEDEN and JOSHI emerge
from the front doors of the *Macmillan's New York Register*, talking. JOSHI is
putting on his overcoat. It's lunch hour.

JOSHI:

Samantha's?

ABE:

Not in the mood for sushi, really. Think I'll just
hit the—the Hudson place.

JOSHI:

(puts on hat, claps ABE on the shoulder)

Hell. Take the rest of the day. Buy Mr. Murdoch
a beer—put it on the account. Get to know each other.

ABE says something *typical*.

JOSH:

(to SWEDEN)

Straighten him out...

He tips his hat to them, heads off into the crowd. ABE and SWEDEN look
at each other amidst the bustle; a breeze blows. Their cheeks flush in the frigid
air.

ABE:

(clasps SWEDEN'S shoulder)

It's *good* to see you.

SWEDEN:

(returns the gesture)

Aye.

ABE:

You look well.

SWEDEN looks at ABE as though in deep thought. He doesn't say anything.

ABE:

How is she?

SWEDEN:

(shakes head)

I'll tell you all about it. Including how I pulled
off getting you out of New York!

ACT 1, SCENE 6

INT. A PUB. DAY.

A new frosted pitcher of beer is sat down by an equally frosty New York waitress. ABE and SWEDEN are drinking beer at a little bar on the Hudson, a few blocks from Ground Zero. The men are laughing and seem to be "well on their way." They talk about their youthful adventures: camping in the Canadian wilds, canoeing down the Danube, graduating from Princeton University. They talk about their Canadian canoe, "The Centaur," and "Jumbo," the enormous supply bag....

ABE:

(wistfully)

Adventures before thirty....

SWEDEN:

Thirty! Before 20!

ABE:

Whatever became of her, anyway—my Canadian
canoe? I don't....

There is an awkward silence.

ABE:

(beat)

What happened?

SWEDEN tells the tale; how they left for the Northwest after the confrontation with ABE, and how he came into money when his grandfather passed and bought a home and some acreage in the mountains of Alberta. How Lillith and he founded Centaur Excursions and had a daughter, Manya. That he fell desperately in love with that daughter as well as “his own private Eden.” That the two were similar spirits who spent their days traipsing the wilderness while Lillith and he grew apart. How she left, eventually.

SWEDEN:

Faded away rather.

ABE:

You—haven’t seen her? Nor heard from her?

SWEDEN:

(beat)

No.

There’s a bittersweet lull in the conversation.

ABE:

You might have known. That was the way with her, always. Silent as a river, and as brutal.

SWEDEN:

(appears distant)

Aye.

ABE:

(takes his hand)

But we remain, old friend.

ABE goes on to say how happy he is that SWEDEN has made contact, and how bitterly alone he is in New York City. He expresses his delight at canoeing together once again, and how perhaps it heralds a whole new era for them.

ABE:

A toast! To canoeing comrades, reunited. And
to more incredible adventures!

SWEDEN clinks his mug, but appears suddenly distant.

SWEDEN:

Aye.

He glances at his watch, which gives ABE pause. ABE sees him take a pill from a bottle—swallow it back with a shot of beer.

ABE:

Heartburn?

SWEDEN:

(holds a fist to his chest, stares into the fireplace)

Yuh.

ACT 1, SCENE 7

INT. NEW YORK SUBWAY. NIGHT.

ABE and SWEDEN ride the subway to Brooklyn. The train clamors and rocks. ABE appears about as happy as when we last saw him on the train.

ABE:

We're flying, yes? Were the tickets costly?

SWEDEN looks sidelong at him, grins mischievously.

CUT TO:

SWEDEN spreads a map over ABE'S kitchen table, taps it decisively. They are standing. ABE'S cat winds between their legs.

SWEDEN:

Here...

SWEDEN tells him where the homestead is, which will be their jumping-off point. It is near Edson, Alberta—remote but not entirely cut-off from rail and other services. He announces his plan to shoot Tiroga Falls, which consists of Class IV rapids—a *very* dangerous endeavor without pre-scouting.

SWEDEN:

This isn't the usual tour, as you might have guessed.
It's the run I moved up here for; a run I'd only attempt
with you in the boat. Not even Manyá's up to it, much
as she's willing...

(laughs)

ABE is probably beginning to hesitate at this point. They sit down. Much of the trip will take place in the valleys and marshlands of the Athabaskan and Whirlpool Rivers, in the approximate geographical range from *Great Slave Lake* in the north to *Lesser Slave Lake* in the south—David Thompson's country, brutal, godforsaken, and rich in the history of the fur trade and the Iro-

quois; a stark, haunted land. After seven days, SWEDEN'S DAUGHTER, MANYA, will drive to the town of Athabasca, and pick them up.

ABE immediately voices concern about the extremity of the undertaking. It's far more ambitious than their youthful adventures and they're not exactly young men, anymore (SWEDEN, older than ABE, has just turned 40). SWEDEN counters with a passionate argument for living in the moment, "because that's all we have, you know." When ABE enquires about supplies and so forth, he is told:

SWEDEN:

It's all planned out. I've taken care of everything...

(details)

ABE:

You could have said something. I'd have been glad to
help—

SWEDEN:

Not on your life, old man. I owed you this.

ABE:

(beat)

I don't know what to say.

SWEDEN:

You don't have to say anything. We've been friends
for 20 years. The pleasure's mine.

ABE:

(stares at the map in
awe, shakes his head)

Little early for a mid-life crisis, isn't it?

SWEDEN:

(looks at him, eyes glinting)

Hmmph.

(beat)

No such thing, 'too early.'

(gets up with a grunt)

Only 'too late.'

He pauses in the entrance to the hallway.

SWEDEN:

Where's the head around here?

ABE tells him end of the hall, to the left. He watches SWEDEN as the big man moves down the hall and vanishes around the corner. ABE sits straight, arms at his sides. The clock ticks. ABE watches for him to return over the table and the spread out map; over the back of his empty chair...onto which ABE'S cat hops.

ACT 1, SCENE 8

EXT. ANTRAK TRAIN. DAY.

Viewed from the air, an Amtrak train arcs across West Virginia's acres of Maple forests, whistle blowing. Inside, ABE and SWEDEN sit squeezed amongst each other, ABE by the window. He seems to be enjoying the experience compared the New York subway!

ABE:

(marveling out the window)

What a landscape!

SWEDEN:

(looks out across him)

Yuh. Not like from the air, is it?

(smiles mischievously)

Down here you can roll about with her a bit!

The train continues on through Indiana, past Lake Michigan and into Chicago, where there's a humorous bit, perhaps, as the men struggle to change trains. At last they settle aboard the good old Empire Builder, which carries them further west, through Wisconsin and Minnesota, and finally across the barrens of North Dakota by night. The train's head-lamp cuts through the darkness, like a canoe's prow through water. Inside, SWEDEN is sleeping heavily, while ABE reads by the overhead light. Perhaps he is reading a book about Northwest folklore and its indigenous peoples. Perhaps there's a cut-away to the conductor's POV as the train races down the tracks, visible only so far as the train's head-lamp extends.

The world rolls over to day again. The train thunders north from Seattle, Washington. There is yet another change over, this time to a Canadian line. The train streams under and past the camera as they push northeast through British Columbia, climb the Canadian Rockies, and descend into Alberta's majestic pine forests.

ABE awakens against the window, notices SWEDEN is not there. He looks out the window, craning his neck at the towering evergreens; the sun flickers over his face. He starts at a heavy, grating sound as the entire train shifts noticeably; he sits upright. Another train whooshes past in the opposite direction, thundering past in a blur, only a few feet away. It is loaded with logs. ABE presses a cheek to the glass, watches as the trains roar past each other.

ABE finds SWEDEN in the view car, sitting in one of those seats which face sideways against the window. He's brought him a cup of coffee. SWEDEN appears lost in thought, gazing up at the evergreens, which are huge! ABE touches his shoulder, which brings him around. ABE hands him the coffee.

SWEDEN:

This is why I chose the train. ... I've always flown.
This time I wanted to *see*. That snow-cruised peak?
I've never seen that before. It's a facet of reality I
would have missed; now, having seen it, I see better—
see life better, I mean. I'm more alive because of it.

ABE:

(marvels at the sweep of his thoughts)
Oh, Sweden. We're young! You'll see it again,
I'm sure. Lots of times!

There's a shift as before, and as before, a log train blurs past in the opposite direction, rumbling, roaring, screaming. The conductor announces the next stop—Edson, Alberta.

SWEDEN:

This is our stop.

They gather their bags and disembark, only to find themselves the only living beings in what passes for a train station. ABE looks around, at the lonely, desolate mountains, at the evergreens which tower like sentinels. The train hisses steam and rumbles off down the tracks. ABE seems utterly flabbergasted.

SWEDEN:

What?

ABE:

(shakes head)

I don't know. I expected something—an inn,
maybe. Or....

SWEDEN:

(gazes off down the valley)

An inn?

(chuckles).

No, not here.

ABE:

Indeed! ... Is there a 'here' here, at all?

We hear the sound of an engine far off, a humming roar which seems to emanate from the trees themselves. We catch glimpses of a dark shape between the trunks, a vehicle of some sort, though it is masked by the evergreens. There is a road back there, evidently.

SWEDEN:

Ah. Ah!

A big pick-up bounces into view at last, grinds to a halt beside them. We cannot as yet see the driver. ABE is not pleased as he throws his bags into the payload, follows SWEDEN to the passenger-side door. SWEDEN holds the door open; ABE climbs in. The truck is being driven by a shortish, olive-skinned woman with high cheek bones and dark, cow-brown eyes. Long, black hair spills from beneath her woolen cap. She smiles.

MANYA:

O'Malley, I presume?

ABE looks at SWEDEN, who shrugs, then back at the woman.

SWEDEN:

Abe, meet my daughter. Manya.

MANYA:

Hello. Come on, we're losing all the heat—and hang on. This can get a little rough.

They pile in, slam the door. A logo on the door reads: CENTAUR EXCURSIONS LLC. The truck bounces out of the lot and back onto the dirt road. Exposition needing dealt with may be dealt with here, as they rumble through the trees down winding mountain passes.

They pull into a circular drive at Sweden's home base, a spectacular country estate at the base of the Canadian Rockies, and squeak to a stop. A large dog runs out to greet them, barking, tail wagging. MANYA hops up the steps to the wide porch, is greeted by a man her own age (about 18). He is NICK COL-

LIER, her fiancé. They embrace. MANYA says she'll make a pot of coffee; they go in. ABE watches as they vanish into the house. ABE and SWEDEN stand in the drive, breathing in the mountain air. ABE can do little but gawk at their surroundings; it is an incredible place. There is a waterfall nearby.

ABE:

(stares, stumbles)

My God...you did it. All those conversations. All those dreams.... You actually went and did it.

SWEDEN looks around, admiring the scene himself.

ABE:

Good Lord...what else?

SWEDEN only looks at him. His eyes glitter; his cheeks are red and jovial. The morning sun is dazzling.

ACT 1, SCENE 9

INT. SWEDEN'S GARAGE. DAY.

A garage door is rolled up; sunlight spills into a room. SWEDEN hits the lights, which flicker on in banks. We see a large room whose metal walls are outfitted with tiers of canoe racks. The canoes are draped with plastic drop clothes.

ABE:

The inventory....

ABE marvels at their quantity as they walk among the boats. They approach the back of the building.

SWEDEN:

(takes hold of one of the canoes)

Here. Give me a hand.

They lift one of the boats from its rack, carry it to a pair of saw horses in the middle of the room.

SWEDEN:

(turns it over)

Easy now...

They position the canoe on the saw horses, right side up. It is wrapped in plastic like the others. They begin freeing it from the plastic, ABE at the prow, SWEDEN at the keel.

ABE freezes as the prow is exposed; it is wooden, unlike the others, and finely crafted.

Then, almost sensually, they pull the plastic the rest of the way from the hull. ABE swoons. The prow depicts a naked woman whose body from the waist down is that of a leaping horse. Next to the image are the words: "*The Centaurita*."

ABE:

Is it...?

SWEDEN:

(nods, eyes glinting)

Aye. It's she.

ABE:

(walks around it)

The same genuine Canadian canoe?

She must be 30 years old!

SWEDEN:

Forty, actually. Rapidly becoming an antique.

She's completely restored; I've...

(canoeist shop talk)

She'll glide like a swan, old man.

He goes to the wall, takes down an enormous supply bag, and throws it into the boat. The bag reads: "JUMBO."

SWEDEN:

And she's ready to fly. Today.

ACT 1, SCENE 10

They carry the boat down to the dock between them. MANYA'S fiancée follows, carrying "Jumbo." MANYA brings up the rear with some smaller bags; the dog runs alongside. They ease the boat into the water, climb in.

SWEDEN:

Be a dear and hand Mr. O'Malley 'Jumbo,'

Manya.

She does so, not appreciating being talked to like a child. ABE takes the bag, watching her eyes rather than his feet—puts too much weight on the edge of the boat just as the wind gusts and there is a sudden surge in the current. The

boat topples, rushing down-river with ABE after it. SWEDEN grabs hold of the dock, hangs on.

MANYA:

Are you okay?!

SWEDEN:

Yes, yes, get after him!

NICK stands dumbfounded as MANYA leaps into the 4x4 and takes off, bouncing along the bank, crunching over logs and driftwood, crashing through tree willow branches, keeping pace with ABE and the overturned canoe which are bobbing up and down, up and down, on the river. MANYA shouts to ABE, long, black hair blowing sidelong across her face, threatening to blind her.

MANYA:

Don't fight it! Float on your back!

Cut to ABE'S POV as he is carried along and carried under by the current. The willow trees flash past like a ghostly crowd of dispassionate onlookers. MANYA maneuvers the truck under a bridge and into a side-channel toward which ABE and the boat appear to be heading. She ditches the truck nose-down in the channel and the boat smashes up against it, sticks. She leaps out, scans the river for ABE. SWEDEN and NICK can be seen winding toward her on dirt-bikes, the engines of which rev and whine. ABE appears at last; he is caught in the middle of the river, clinging to a broken off tree trunk, losing his battle with the current. He goes under—does not resurface.

MANYA:

The current's knocked him down—he's pinned!

She sheds her parka and shoes, stripping down to her jeans and a white tank-top, dives in.

SWEDEN:

Manya! No!

She swims for ABE against the current, manages to reach him. SWEDEN and NICK meanwhile have gained the top of the bridge, and dangle down a rope. ABE and MANYA grab hold of it, are maneuvered back to the river's bank, but are still neck-deep in the current. SWEDEN and NICK clamor down from the bridge, pull MANYA from the water. They turn their attention to ABE, grabbing hold of one arm—it's a struggle, as if he's caught up on something. Then he's out, finally, and with him, in an iron grip, the muscles of his

arm rippling, is the bag, “Jumbo.” MANYA practically swoons. They all stand but ABE.

SWEDEN and NICK examine the boat, which is wedged beneath the truck.

SWEDEN:

That’s why it didn’t need lifted any higher.

NICK, a pimply kid, smirks. They continue to examine the boat as, nearby, ABE stands, dripping, his arms muscular and rippling from the struggle. He seems tanner than he was in New York somehow, bigger, his eyes a more piercing blue; his beard has started growing out. He looks at MANYA in her wet, white tank-top; her hair hangs in her eyes, her large, dark nipples are clearly visible and excited from the cold. The electricity between them is palatable.

ABE:

Little out of practice, I fear.

She picks up “Jumbo” with a grunt. She does not break eye contact.

MANYA:

I’ll dry this out.

ABE watches her as she walks back toward the house. She glances back at him over her shoulder, flicks the hair away from her face. ABE’S sky-blue eyes positively dance. For the first time in years, perhaps, he feels *alive*.

SWEDEN:

(calls from off-screen)

She’s busted up pretty bad.

ABE looks down at them, hair dripping, sopped but resolved. He is etched in golden light from the sun.

ABE:

We’ll fix her.

(nods, smiles)

We’ll fix her.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

INT. SWEDEN’S GARAGE. EARLY EVENING.

ABE and SWEDEN are in the garage, repairing the canoe. SWEDEN is doing most of the work, though ABE, also knowledgeable, is helping out, offering cues, handing him tools, etc. There is some discussion of *The Centauri-ta’s* origin; how ABE had initially found it behind a barn in Alaska and offered

to buy it from the landowner; how he had restored it to the best of his ability—how SWEDEN had made his own improvements over the years, and “sunk a lot of money into her.”

ABE:

(sands)

How'd you end up with her, anyway? The canoe,

I mean?

Naturally, this leads to another awkward silence. Again, the conversation turns toward Lillith. “Bit of a Plain Jane, as I recall,” says SWEDEN. “When she were younger.” We learn more about the “triangle” in their younger days; how ABE, the “hopeless romantic,” had wooed and courted LILITH, only to lose her to the more practical SWEDEN.... The key is that old tensions and rivalries, however jocularly expressed, resurface as they work on the boat together. The radio is on: talk of climate change and global warming. They are nearly finished. Enter MANYA, who has brought sandwiches and beer.

SWEDEN:

(stands)

She's a new boat!

ABE watches MANYA as she sets down the tray.

ABE:

Aye.

They lift the boat, hanging it up to dry. MANYA hands them each a bottle and frosted mug. ABE watches MANYA as he pours his beer, pours it too fast so that it froths over onto the concrete. MANYA wipes the rim of his mug with her towel, then crouches, dabs the spilt beer from the floor. She looks up at ABE briefly.

SWEDEN:

Manya could have helped you with that, you know. She used to work at the Ole Cafe, in Magito. Put herself through college.... A fine little hostess she made!

MANYA:

(beat)

I put myself through a year of pre-college courses, while you were out chasing Lillith. But I did make a ‘fine little hostess....’

She looks from SWEDEN to ABE, who is much taller than she. Looking him in the eye, she takes the bottle from his hands, puts it to her lips, bolts back what remains, and, not even looking at him, hands the bottle to her father.

SWEDEN:

Yes, well. Ah...

He turns, admiring the canoe. ABE does likewise. MANYA is standing behind and between them.

SWEDEN:

Well! She's hung! *The Centaurita!*

MANYA:

Aye. Like a horse!

The men turn to look at her slowly.

SWEDEN:

Ah!

(claps hands nervously)

Well, I'm certain we're all hungry enough
to eat one...! How about supper?

ACT 2, SCENE 2

INT. / EXT. SWEDEN'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

L-cut laughter over exterior of the house. Cut to interior: we see the aftermath of a large meal spread over the dining room table. Everyone is finishing up. MANYA starts in on the dishes.

ABE:

(gets up)

I'll help you with that...

SWEDEN, stuffed, starts to rise—clutches his chest. MANYA rushes to him with a flurry of questions: "Are you...? Does it...? Where...?" She fetches his medication and a glass of water. He takes it, flushed...moves over to the fire, sits down. ABE is clearly rattled, has a few questions about what is going on. SWEDEN and MANYA downplay the event's significance. ABE joins SWEDEN by the fire. The big man stares into the flames, appears to recover.

SWEDEN:

Tomorrow we'll shove off. Sound good?

ABE:

Are you sure you're up to it?

SWEDEN:

Yes, yes....

ABE glances into the kitchen at MANYA; she is white with worry—terror, really. She notices him looking at her, does not retreat from his gaze. When he returns his attention to SWEDEN, he sees that he has fallen asleep. MANYA approaches, takes the glass from her father's hands. She lays a blanket over him.

MANYA:

(to ABE, softly)

Come. I'll show you to your room.

ABE:

(stands)

Is he all right? Really?

MANYA:

(moves toward stairs)

He'll be fine now.

She walks up the stairs, hips moving gracefully, like the flanks of a horse. ABE follows. He looks at the family pictures which cover the walls.

MANYA:

(glances over shoulder at him)

She was beautiful, wasn't she?

ABE:

Oh, yes.

MANYA:

It was a good life...

They are upstairs. She fetches fresh linen from a cabinet in the hall, opens the door to the guest room. They go in. MANYA opens the windows and tears down the bed. ABE approaches the window, gazes out. A wind ruffles the curtains. MANYA steps up beside him.

MANYA:

She never stopped loving you, you know.

But she was a practical woman—

ABE:

I know, I know...

Outside the willows shake and swoon. They look out at the forest; the far horizon seems to glow.

MANYA:

(gazes out over the trees)

There's a grimness in these Northern woods,
as if the shadow of winter hangs somewhere
in the air, even in summer. It seems unnatural
that the whole country should be so silent,
when the woods are so full of life—

moving life, too.

The wind blows her hair. She tilts her head, listens.

MANYA:

The wind—it blows something in from
the trees. Do you hear it?

ABE shakes his head.

MANYA:

(looks at him)

I think you do. Like calls to like, always.

(beat)

There's a roar in the heart of this forest,
Abraham. My father's voice is in it. So is
yours.

ABE stares at her.

MANYA:

(turning back to the window)

He loves this place, as I do. More than he ever
could a mere woman. He is *Urmensh*, like us.
My mother had hoped he would be...less so.
He was, I think...until we moved here.

ABE:

(beat)

Urmensh? Is that a Pagan concept?

MANYA:

Older, by far.

(laughs)

You know it's ironic.... You in New York while my father
ends here; precisely what she sought to avoid! ... It means

you are one with this place, and with us. We are...home to
one another.

She is wearing a light, thin, whitish shirt with long sleeves. ABE notices a pattern beneath the gauzy material, over which the shadows of the willows dance.

MANYA:

Do you want to see it?

He nods, once. She pushes up the sleeve slowly. Her arm is covered with a tattoo: it depicts golden, vaguely human beings flowing in and out of each other, like water; the beings form a chain which spirals up the length of her arm. Their faces we cannot see.

ABE:

The *Urmensh*?

MANYA nods.

MANYA:

A form of them, anyway. They can manifest as many
things: men, women, undines, centaurs...and be more
than one place at once.

This is the form they take near water.

ABE:

It's exquisite.

MANYA:

There's more, if you'd like to see...

The two look at each other. ABE gives virtually no indication one way or the other, only stares at her intensely. Truth is, he seems rather frightened. MANYA puts a hand on his arm, speaks as though she were addressing a child.

MANYA:

It's what I believe, is all.

At last she moves toward the door, then pauses in the hallway, a darkened outline.

MANYA:

Look after him, okay?

ABE:

Of course.

She closes the door gently. ABE goes to the bed and lays down, gazes up at the ceiling and the shadows of the willows. The curtains rustle. He closes his eyes.

FADE TO BLACK.

...We hear the wind, and branches scraping a window sill.

FADE IN:

INT. SWEDEN'S GUEST ROOM. NIGHT.

The wind moans and there's a smash! Glass breaks. ABE sits up with a start; a shutter bangs against the wall. A base-hum builds, as does a heartbeat, perhaps, which beats stronger throughout the scene.

MANYA:

(whispers off-screen)

Abraham...

ABE looks at his bedroom door, which has also blown open. MANYA'S lithe shadow, absolutely still, can be seen on the wall in the hallway. The wind blasts. The shadow slides sideways out of view. ABE puts something on and follows. There is no one in the hall. He eases the door to her bedroom open...she isn't there. Her window is open; the curtains blow.

MANYA-VOICE:

Abraham....

He runs to the window and looks out. She is walking across the lawn, her nightgown blowing out behind her.

EXT. SWEDEN'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

The front door hangs open, banging back and forth in the wind. ABE emerges through it, crosses the lawn to the edge of the willow trees. He pauses, finding MANYA'S gown caught in the branches, flapping in the night-wind. He follows her into the willows. As he moves through the shadows he hears something huge moving through the trees opposite, snapping off branches, its footfalls sounding little thuds, like the wendigo of legend. Indeed some of those branches suddenly move, turning toward us. It is a great stag, interrupted during its nocturnal forage.

There is a tremendous splash. ABE emerges onto the far side of the willows to see a wide, lazy river in the moonlight. He scans the river and its banks for MANYA, finds nothing.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

INT. SWEDEN'S HOUSE. MORNING.

ABE'S flutter open.

CUT TO:

ECU: Eggs frying in a pan; MANYA is cooking breakfast. A series of shots follows which highlight the gloriousness of the morning: the sun pouring over the horizon, a breeze blowing through leaves, the world awakening. *The Centaurita* rocks against her tether by the dock.

A breeze lifts the curtains as the sun streams through ABE'S window. We hear birds chirping; a dog barking. There is a rap at the door.

ABE:

Yes, come on!

SWEDEN opens the door; he is "decked-out" ala the old days. He throws a bag of clothing onto the bed.

SWEDEN:

The elements are for us. It's time, old man.

CUT TO:

SWEDEN sets his coffee cup down, Tells MANYA "thanks." He heads out, calling after the dog. MANYA goes to the bottom of the stair, calls after ABRAHAM. He emerges at the top, dressed in Kaki and wearing a wide-brimmed hat, looking for all the world like some bonny English adventurer. She greets him at the bottom of the stair.

MANYA:

You're only half-tanned.

ABE:

I awoke in the sun.

MANYA adjusts his hat, canting it sideways.

MANYA:

There. Now you have a bit of the rogue about you.

SWEDEN:

(off-screen)

Come on, old girl! See your daddy off!

ABE:

Is he talking to you or the dog?

They laugh.

EXT. SWEDEN'S HOUSE. DAY.

The screen-door bangs as the dog runs out. ABE follows, then MANYA—in a white summer dress—across the green, sloping yard of the estate. NICK pulls into the drive in the background. They all join together at the dock as SWEDEN and ABE board the canoe. SWEDEN says to MANYA and NICK, “Be sure to shut the north gates.”

“We will,” they say.

“And also...”

“We will.”

“And don’t forget—“

“Yes, yes, yes!”

ABE is in position: there is a little moment when he holds the oar for the first time in 17 years, runs his hand along it, gives it a snap. SWEDEN pauses before shoving off; looks at the house with its wisp of chimney smoke and the pastoral but lovingly maintained grounds, at the mountains and the trees, at ABE and *The Centaurita*. At last he looks down-river, and finally, at his beautiful daughter. MANYA’S eyes are moist; NICK has his arm around her. SWEDEN mists up, noting the twirling of the leaves, the swinging of the weather vane, the sheer vibrancy and hidden pulse of the day.

SWEDEN:

The garden is here, if it is anywhere in the world.

And here the flowers, the long, clean open fields,

the nymphs, the sunshine and the gods!

He turns to ABE.

SWEDEN:

Well, then, old friend. Once more unto the breach.

To the gates of horn and ivory!

They shove off; everyone waves. The oars dip in and out of the water. They maneuver the canoe out toward the current, struggling as MANYA and NICK look on, before the current catches the prow—and they are off! As though they have caught the wind itself...

ACT 2, SCENE 4

EXT. THE RIVER. DAY.

The estate shrinks rapidly away as the canoe leaps and charges down-river, like a racehorse. ABE and SWEDEN are exhilarated! Salmon leap and dive as the prow cuts the foam.

ABE:

(points toward the bank)

Look! Three of them!

A doe and two stags are leaping and bounding through the willows alongside, weaving amongst the trunks. ABE gets his hat blown off as the canoe shoots a modest set of rapids—it bounces off SWEDEN'S face, spirals upriver on the wind. The men laugh. They swoosh past a red fox as it closes in upon two ducks but their passage frightens it off. The ducks quack their thanks.

We move into the afternoon—aerial shots of canoe on river, etc. They hit a prolonged stretch of white water, the first of the trip. Things get a little intense, but they whip it. Then the river spreads, the current slows, and they are able to catch their breath.

SWEDEN:

That's the smallest foretaste...of what is to come.

ABE is in awe. SWEDEN is feeling happy, nostalgic.

SWEDEN:

Remember how we used to bring our tuxedos in water-proof bags? And wear 'em into little hamlets along the way?

ABE:

Pretending to be Englishmen, yes! As I recall we used to enquire of the villagers as to what time they took tea....

SWEDEN:

Yes, yes. And received the most unusual looks.

(chuckles, picks something up off the floor)

Not to mention free whiskey.

He tosses ABE a water-proofed bag.

SWEDEN:

I don't know about you, old man. But I could use some whiskey now. I know a place.

Cut to them rowing past, the late afternoon sun flaring off the lens, perhaps, sitting straight and proper in their Sunday best, with black bow-ties and everything crisply-ironed. They pass signs of a village: sheds, then cottages, then larg-

er houses, whole buildings, etc. The town is silent, lazy, as if asleep. They pass a queer little imp of a boy who appears almost feral, fishing among the reeds. He looks up, disbelieving, as they float by; ABE and SWEDEN wave.

ABE:

Good day, young sir!

The boy drops his pole and disappears into the reeds. Moments later a red-headed girl appears beside them, squealing, and is joined by other children, all shouting; they run alongside, chickens scattering before them. Villagers start opening shutters, looking out. ABE and SWEDEN'S arrival has stirred the place into activity!

They maneuver the boat alongside a dock and moor her, are instantly surrounded by people: mothers and children, old men, etc. The villagers examine their suits and boat, their various supplies, curious about everything. ABE and SWEDEN step from the canoe.

The impish boy and the red-headed girl look on, expectantly. "Are you from New York City?" asks the girl.

"Or London?" says the boy.

"You're so tall!" cries another.

The children are, likely, only humoring them for a hand-out.

ABE:

We are from both those places, respectively.

(crouches before them)

There are many tall men in those places. And many tall buildings. But none, I assure you, so tall you!

(hands each a coin)

Will you keep our boat safe while we are gone?

The children jump up and down. "Oh, yes, yes, Mr. New Yorker!" They show the other kids their coins. "They're from New York City!"

An older boy compares them to his own. "They look the same to me...."

ABE and SWEDEN start up the path. SWEDEN puts a hand on ABE'S shoulder, pauses.

SWEDEN:

This is a welcoming place, overall, filled with welcoming people. But mind your step. There are *others*....

ABE nods, understanding. They continue on while two women huddle conspiratorially, examining the boat. They speak in a language other than English.

Sub-titled:

WOMAN 1:

Going to try and shoot Tiroga Falls, the fools. Like the
last city-men.

WOMAN 2:

Nay. In *that*?

ACT 2, SCENE 5

INT. A SALOON. DAY.

Saloon-style doors swing open onto a crowded, loud, smoky room, into which ABE and SWEDEN enter—bringing everything, it seems, to a halt. The place is packed with rough-looking wilderness-types: loggers, hunters, miners, whatever, all of whom stop and stare, including their women. We can hear the billiard balls click as ABE and SWEDEN approach the bar: order food, pints, and shots. A throng of children gathers outside the window.

BARMAID:

(gruffly)

It's cash only.

ABE:

My dear, how are we to leave a spectacular tip if we
had none?

She glowers at him, fetches their pints and shots.

SWEDEN:

(picks up his shot, looks at ABE)

To *The Centaurita*.

ABE:

Aye. *The Centaurita*.

They bolt back their shots. ABE makes eye-contact with a sultry-eyed woman across the room; her man pulls her against him, glares at him menacingly. ABE and SWEDEN drink their pints and receive their food, manage to befriend the man next to them. They really hit it off until ABE mentions Tiroga Falls, and the marshes beyond, at which the inebriated man cries, "The willow marshes?! You don't want to be caught trespassing there! Why—"

MAN PLAYING POOL:

Hush yourself!

The room falls silent. A billiard ball clicks against another with finality. The man who made the shot stands erect, stares at ABE and SWEDEN.

MAN:

There's evil thinking in those marshes...how come you to speak of them here? Do not mention them more than you can help. Do not refer to them by name. To name is to reveal; it is the inevitable clue.

Our only hope lies in ignoring them...in order that they may ignore us.

ABE:

(cheerfully, his face flushed)

Evil? How can any force be evil?
That's merely a matter of direction!

MAN:

(approaches them)

You're wrong. God is in those willow marshes.
God in a very subtle aspect and sometimes—
that which is *not* God.

ABE:

But of course! All created things contain some
breath of His life Who made them. It's only
beautiful to hold that He created nothing dead!
I like to think that even in decay there's life.
Take an inert stone...what holds its particles
together? We understand it as little as gravity
or why a needle always turns to the 'North.'
Both things may be a mode of life.

MAN:

You think a compass has a soul, city-dweller?
The crowd laughs.

SWEDEN:

(puts hand on ABE'S shoulder,
turns him around)

Our friend merely suggests that the mysterious
agencies you speak of may be due to some kind
of life we cannot understand.

(to bartender)

A round on me.

Drink up, everyone!

The man glares at them a moment longer before returning to his game.

MAN:

The '*breath* of life.' These things do not breathe.

SWEDEN:

(to ABE)

We've stayed too long.

They pay their bill and leave, even as a surly-looking bunch in the far corner eyes them. The man they were drinking with calls after them, "The only safe channel lies exactly in the middle!"

ABE and SWEDEN stumble from the tavern, buzzed and giddy. There's a slight drizzle. Thunder rumbles in the distance.

ABE:

I suppose they think Bigfoot will get us!

SWEDEN:

Hush....

The camera tilts up to the tavern's signboard, which reads: LAST STOP STATION.

EXT. THE DOCK. TWILIGHT.

ABE and SWEDEN tramp down the hill. There are no children guarding the boat.

ABE:

The rain's picking up....

SWEDEN:

It's all right. I know a place.

They climb in the boat and get underway. On the way out of town they approach a bridge over the water; it is crowded with people. They stand in silent,

solemn rows: dark amidst the looming, like a Black Mass. ABE and SWEDEN notice savage whirlpools about the bridge's pylons.

SWEDEN:

(looks up at them)

They're waiting for a spectacle.

SOMEONE IN THE CROWD:

You'll never get through that! And you'll be arrested!

ABE notices a warning posted on one of the pylons: STOP! DANGEROUS WHIRLPOOLS! MANDATORY PORTAGE. The men grip their oars and gird themselves as the bridge and whirlpools draw closer. ABE looks at the crowd as the storm breaks and the rain comes—up go their dark umbrellas, clattering! There is a murmur of laughter.

ABE and SWEDEN successfully navigate beneath the bridge, but because they are tipsy with alcohol, it is close. They nearly capsize before recovering almost miraculously. ABE calls out to the crowd as they leave the bridge and the town behind.

ABE:

Bon-voyage! We love you! God save the Queen!

ACT 2, SCENE 6

EXT. A CAVE OVER-LOOKING THE RIVER. DUSK.

ABE and SWEDEN sit at the edge of a small cave as the rain pours down, talking, smoking their pipes. They've tied the canoe up at the bank, brought their beds up to the cave. They watch as cattle ranchers maneuver animals in the distant twilight. They watch the river, and the sun as it vanishes below the horizon. The moon is rising. ABE is watching the poplar trees sway, roaring, in the wind, when he notices shapes moving amongst them, between the trunks. Three or four figures, mere silhouettes, emerge from the shadows. They are carrying rifles. A dog flits out ahead of them.

ABE and SWEDEN inch backward into the cave as the figures approach, up the slope. We can now see that they are men wearing hooded rain-ponchos, carrying shotguns. ABE and SWEDEN scrunch down in the dark as the dog sniffs about the front of their shelter, erupts into a flurry of barks and growls.

SWEDEN:

Act scared.

ABE:

Act...?

The riflemen pause at the mouth of the cave, silhouetted against the rain, and the swaying of the poplars. They are aiming their rifles. One of them also aims a flash-light, picks them out.

RIFLEMAN 1:

Who goes there?

SWEDEN:

(shields his eyes)

Just canoeists.

Are we trespassing?

RIFLEMAN 1:

That depends.

Come on out here...

Let's have a look at you.

ABE and SWEDEN emerge from the cave, hands in the air. The dog sniffs about their feet and legs.

RIFLEMAN 1:

What are you doing here?

SWEDEN:

Preparing to camp for the night.

RIFLEMAN 1:

When are you going on?

SWEDEN:

We intended to leave in the morning.

RIFLEMAN 2:

Where do you come from; are you Americans?

SWEDEN:

My friend is from New York. I own land up-river.

RIFLEMAN 1:

And where are you going to?

SWEDEN:

Athabaska. After we shoot the falls.

RIFLEMAN 1:

(nods toward river):

Mah! In *that* egg-shell?

SWEDEN:

Certainly.

The riflemen look at each other in the dark. The rain patters and splashes.

RIFLEMAN 1:

Do you know these are private preserves?

SWEDEN:

No.

RIFLEMAN 2:

(indicates their bundles)

What are those?

SWEDEN:

Beds.

Two of the riflemen go in to examine, while the dog sniffs about everywhere. ABE and SWEDEN'S beds are not yet untied; the riflemen untie them: find only blankets and cork mattresses.

RIFLEMAN 1:

You have no guns, or dogs, or fishing-rods?

SWEDEN:

We've rods.

RIFLEMAN 1:

And you are only traveling peacefully, for pleasure?

SWEDEN:

(meekly)

We are trying to.

RIFLEMAN 1:

Then you may sleep here if you go on again tomorrow; but don't trouble the livestock or go into the woods after game, or any further into the woods at all.

SWEDEN:

We won't, and thank you.

The riflemen move off, speaking amongst themselves in French.

RIFLEMAN 2:

(sub-titled)

They're no Americans.

ABE:

(to SWEDEN)

They must have seen us on the hill
and thought we were poachers. Our
weather-worn appearances and un-
shaved faces probably made us look
more than a little doubtful.

SWEDEN:

(watches them return to the trees)

Meh, we're obviously travelers.

I'd try and sleep lightly.

ABE and SWEDEN climb into their beds, try to sleep. The cave is filled with funnel-shaped bores and rocks strangely eaten; there are vaguely spiraled openings in the roof. The wind howls and whistles as it whips through the holes. ABE and SWEDEN find themselves inching further and further back. They hear movements, etc—whether from within or without is impossible to say due to the wind. ABE moves yet deeper into the cave, puts his hand in something wet and foul. Thunder cracks; lightning flashes—the roof of the cave is covered in bats!

Cut to exterior: ABE and SWEDEN pile out of the cave, bats streaming out behind them, squeaking—pouring out of the mouth, out of the spirals.

ACT 2, SCENE 7

EXT. A FIELD BY THE RIVER. NIGHT.

The moon is high. ABE and SWEDEN'S gypsy tent has been set up in the field below, is being buffeted by the wind. Inside, the men are sleeping. ABE is awakened by sounds outside, twigs snapping, etc, which seem to come closer and closer. It sounds like someone is creeping about their tent. ABE wakes SWEDEN and they listen together.

ABE:

(whispers)

It's those riflemen!

SWEDEN:

Shhh...don't move. They're armed.

Let them take what they may...

There is a pattering, which becomes a thumping. It is still raining and the wind is quite intense. The thumping grows louder; it is difficult to identify because the wind masks the sound, which doubles and redoubles and triples! Something bashes against their tent, something else shoves. ABE and SWEDEN scrunch up in fetal positions, terrified. At last something tramples right over the top of them, smashing in the fabric, knocking the tent over, wounding SWEDEN in the arm. They scramble to their feet, disentangling themselves from the shambles, as the camera cranes—revealing a giant herd of steer!

The men look this way and that, disorientated and awe-stricken (and in SWEDEN'S case, bloodied), as the vast assemblage flows past on both sides, as though it were a thundering black river with white caps in moonlight! One of the beasts heads right for ABE; he twists out its way, narrowly avoids being gored, only to be knocked aside by another. His pajamas are snagged by the tip of an antler, ripped clean off. ABE watches *in nudis* as the beast runs off, his jimmies flying from its horns, like a flag. SWEDEN laughs while ABE pursues the thief through the herd.

The sun is starting to rise purple in the sky as ABE zigzags through the animals, leaps atop the culprit. It bucks and snorts, running faster. ABE grabs hold of his jimmies, holds them over its eyes, blinds the animal. It stumbles upon an outcropping and crashes upon its side. ABE covers up desperately, scrunching into a ball, as the rest of the herd thunders past. He rises into frame as they disappear in the distance, shoves on his pajamas.

ABE:

See?! Ah?! Not so helpless after all, ah?!

He hears distant laughter—not SWEDEN'S. He turns, sees a man in a punt paddling toward them across the river. Dim lights are visible on the opposite bank. SWEDEN, nearly caught up, stops and stares.

SWEDEN:

Now what?

ABE:

Never mind him. How's the tent?

Cut to: the tent, which has seen better days. They pick it up off the ground and examine it. It is getting lighter out. The little MAN IN THE BOAT comes ashore as they discuss the damage, which is not so hopeless as they thought.

ABE:

(to the newcomer, irritably)

Yes? Are we trespassing?

MAN WITH BOAT:

No; the field's usually under water.

ABE:

(impatiently)

When the river is in flood?

The MAN WITH BOAT nods.

ABE:

But the river *is* in flood!

MAN WITH BOAT:

Hmmph. This no flood. You know if flood.

Bad place in flood. Something rises.

ABE:

(dismisses him,

picks up their gear)

Water, perhaps.

The little MAN WITH BOAT smiles; he is nearly toothless. He looks to be about 80. He stands like a chieftain nonetheless; arms folded atop his oar, which he has poked into the sand, legs apart. He watches them as they fold up the tent and prepare for breakfast, but says nothing more for a time. He seems to be judging them upon every little move they make, which makes ABE crazy.

ABE:

Yes, yes?

MAN WITH BOAT:

I not say anything.

ABE grumbles and continues about his business.

MAN WITH BOAT:

Do you plan to shoot the falls at Tiroga?

ABE:

Yes, we do. Yes, in that.

MAN WITH BOAT:

Hmm. Have you wives and children?

ABE and SWEDEN:

Had.

MAN WITH BOAT:

Hmm.

(beat)

It ain't the rain, y'know.

ABE:

What?

MAN WITH BOAT:

Ain't the rain that makes the river dangerous.

It's the run-off.

ABE and SWEDEN realize that what eggs they had were destroyed by the herd. SWEDEN removes two cigars from a bag and hands them to the man.

SWEDEN:

Our eggs have been ruined by the herd.

Have you any across the reach?

The man thinks, nods agreeably.

SWEDEN:

Will you bring us some? Two eggs for two cigars?

The man nods, then climbs into his flat-bottomed boat. ABE and SWEDEN watch as he paddles toward the opposite bank on his knees. In the increasing light they see a tarpaper shack hidden among the willows, and other structures deeper in.

ABE:

Was that a good idea?

SWEDEN:

It'll be all right.

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT 2, SCENE 8

EXT. CAMPFIRE BY RIVER. DAWN.

We see a campfire licking and crackling in foreground while the man in the punt paddles toward us. He has changed clothes and cleaned up dramatically, and is now wearing his Sunday best suit and a tall, black hat. ABE and SWEDEN rise from their seats (crates) at opposite ends of the fire. Naturally, they are shocked.

The little man climbs out of his boat and stands, takes his hat off to them. SWEDEN does the same, removing his hat (if he is wearing one) or simply

bowing. He elbows ABE, prompting him to do likewise. ABE does so, rolling his eyes. The little man hands them his hat—it is full of eggs.

SWEDEN hands him the cigars. The man closes SWEDEN'S fingers on them gently, pushes them back.

MAN WITH BOAT:

Don't smoke.

They all sit down together and begin cooking the eggs. The stranger looks at each man carefully, scrutinizing them.

ABE:

(a bit condescending)

Is that your shack, across the river?

The MAN WITH BOAT looks at him calmly. There's a breeze, which blows wisps of gray hair across his face.

MAN WITH BOAT:

That was my native village.

ABE:

You mean your home now, surely?

SWEDEN hands the man coffee in a tin cup. The man sips it.

MAN IN BOAT:

I was born and raised there, but 60 years ago I ran away. I went to the United States and joined the Army, then fought in Korea, and later, Vietnam. I settled finally in Alabama. Had a shop in Mobile, down South in what they used to call a nigger town. Soon as I was ready I wrote to the girl I left here to come down to me. She came and we were married. I've had two wives since down there. Now they're all buried in a little churchyard outside Mobile.

ABE looks on, astonished, while SWEDEN merely nods. The breeze tosses his hair.

MAN IN BOAT:

This is the first time I've been back in sixty years.

The village ain't changed one single bit. I feel as though I've been sleepin' and sort of dreamin' all the while. The shop's sold and I'm takin' a last look

around at the old place. There's only one or two that remembers me, but I was born and raised here, and this is where I had my first love, and the place is full of memories, just chock full.

The camera closes on SWEDEN.

MAN IN BOAT:

No, I ain't gonna live here.

I'm goin' back to the States next month, so I can die, and lie beside the others in the cemetery at Mobile.

SWEDEN turns away from the man. They both stare into the flames.

SWEDEN:

It's no small good-bye, is it?

MAN WITH BOAT:

No.

ABE stares at them, perplexed and awed by the interchange. SWEDEN mists up; he holds out his hand to the stranger...the stranger takes it. Then the stranger offers a hand to ABE. ABE stares down at it, completely at a loss. He takes it finally, feeling a little silly. A moment later SWEDEN'S other hand touches ABE'S side. ABE takes it, rolling his eyes.

They sit in a circle about the fire, holding hands, as the camera cranes up and away, over the field and the rows of hoof-prints, thousands of them, which extend out of sight along the river, hazily a little, in the golden dawn.

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT 2, SCENE 9

EXT. THE RIVER. DAY.

We see an aerial view of the canoe as it continues down-river, past an abandoned Army post, and later, an old bridge lined with crucifixes. They pass Indian ruins of some sort. Later the camera cranes past an old Indian shrine made of sticks, which protrudes from a mound of rocks on a bare island in the middle of the river. They land there briefly, staring down-river where there is a tumult of gray and a rumble: Tiroga Falls, at last. The wind gusts, tossing their hair; they squint in the glare. Both men have full beards now and are bronzed from the sun. ABE'S bright blue eyes are paler than ever, having been bleached by the glare.

SWEDEN:

It's down to this, then. She's a new river from here, all grown up and diabolical. And she's not alone... she's joined by the Madrinar before the falls, which means they'll be fighting each other as well as us.

ABE:

Is this the farthest you've ever come?

SWEDEN:

Aye.

They get ready to shoot the falls, checking their life vests and paddles, inspecting the canoe for cracks, winding tethers about ankles. At last they are ready and make a crude little crucifix of their own by banding a knife and fork together and sticking it between the rocks.

SWEDEN:

Urmensh, perhaps, as Manya likes to say.

We are not pantheists for all that!

ABE:

(crosses himself)

Ready, old friend?

SWEDEN:

As I'll ever be.

And they shove off. We see them close upon the falls via a sweeping aerial view, which shows how a new river, a narrower, faster river, flows into the one they're navigating, right before the falls. The camera overtakes them and shoots the falls in advance, revealing a haunted world splendid in its gray isolation—the Land of the Willows.

Cut to: The canoe, camera by its side, directly over the rushing water.

SWEDEN:

Look! The one is higher than the other, see?

ABE glances down and sees that it is indeed so; the rivers run parallel but do not in fact merge.

ABE:

That'll change at the falls!

We thunder toward the rapids and toward big, black, jagged breakers. In the midst of the tumult ABE hears a splash and gazes starboard, at the new river, sees what he at first takes to be some sort of undine, rolling on the waves,

golden-bronzed in the sun-light, betraying a glint of yellow as of an eye, suggestive in a way of something with a flowing black mane. The apparition resolves itself into an otter as they bear down upon the rocks.

ABE and SWEDEN muster all their skills to avoid the breakers, working together, drawing upon 15 years of shared experience, as they angle between the cliffs, pierce the barrier, and behold the crest of the edge!

And they're *over*, dashing and splashing and leaping down the rapids. We at last get to see what phenomenal sportsmen these two really are, and what an incredible team they must have made in their prime. And we at last get to see, via mini-flashbacks, the incredible chain of events which led them here: earlier trips when they were little more than boys; ABE meeting LILITH for the very first time, and their whirlwind romance; ABE losing her to SWEDEN and SWEDEN losing her in turn; MANYA'S birth; ABE suffering New York while SWEDEN and MANYA flitted through their wilderness... SWEDEN collapsing amidst the pines...MANYA running to him...all inter-cut with close-ups of the men's faces in the present, as they fight the rapids. And finally, they hit the waters below, and come careening, bounding, soaring into the Land of the Willows, probably hooting and hollering and "Whoo-hooing!" like damned fools.

SWEDEN:

There! That willow-island! Do you see it?

ABE:

Yes!

They steer for it: a triangle-shaped spit of land which has the effect of re-splitting the rivers after their tempestuous union at the falls. But this is a new land, and a new river, one not entirely at peace with itself, a mature, grave river, and it fights them.

Cut to: The willow bushes, shaking in the wind. We see the canoe approaching through their branches and silvery leaves, hear the men shouting. The camera cranes up, clearing the bushes, rack-focuses to where the two men are struggling to land their canoe amidst the torrent.

Cut to: Men's POV, from the bucking canoe. The willow-island draws near and is gone—off to the side. Then it's in front of them again, as they fight the current, which seems to be pushing them away from the island.

ABE and SWEDEN seize at the willow branches to stop the canoe, tearing their hands. They pull many a yard of sandy bank into the water before a powerful current drives them into a backwater, beaching the bows in a cloud of spray.

They pull the boat ashore and collapse, panting and laughing, upon the wind-blown sand. The sky is clear; the blazing sun glares down at them like a pagan god. Their dark green ponchos, shiny with river water a moment before, have already begun to dry. The rustling willow bushes surround them on all sides like an army.

ABE:

(exhausted)

What a river!

SWEDEN:

Won't stand much nonsense, will it? You were fighting it too much. You have to let it lead...you know that.

ABE:

At times I thought it would lead me right out of the boat!

SWEDEN:

(laughs)

If that ever happens again, don't try to stand up; the current's liable to knock you down like last time—and keep you there. Don't panic. Don't try to resist. Go with the flow, try to float on your back. And pray it doesn't take you too far before I can get to you!

ABE:

Or I, to you?

SWEDEN:

Hmph. I haven't been a New York desk jockey for 17 years....

ABE looks on. The willow bushes rattle in the wind. The sound of the river is hypnotizing: the roar of its shallows and swift rapids; its constant steady thundering, its faint, sweet whisperings. SWEDEN brushes at his sandy ear, scoops a finger through the opening, as though brushing away a mosquito or trying to unplug it.

SWEDEN:

(chuckles)

Abraham, my friend...that was the last,

best hurrah. It's all down hill from here.

Nearby, a section of sand is dislodged from the bank by a gurgling eddy...and spirals away.

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT 2, SCENE 10

EXT. WILLOW-ISLAND. LATE AFTERNOON MOVING TOWARD DUSK.

We see the boat turned over in the middle of the sand, drying, as well as "Jumbo's" contents, also laid out to dry. The parts of the tent are laid out and ready; "Jumbo" itself and the men's spare clothes have been hung from willow branches and are flapping in the wind. Some stones have been placed in a circle, providing a crude hearth. We see the men's footprints in the swirling sand, each going off in opposite directions. Everything is painted reddened-gold by the setting sun. A series of shots show the men searching for firewood, getting to know the island. ABE approaches the island's apex.

EXT. WILLOW-ISLAND APEX. LATE AFTERNOON MOVING TOWARD DUSK.

ABE gazes out at where the two rivers run side by side down from the falls: they bleed into and overlap one another, flowing now together, now apart, touching but never quite merging, until divided again by the island's apex. He shields his eyes from the sun's glare in spite of his sunglasses, takes a deep breath. He looks around, delighting in nature's beauty. A series of cut-ways suggest the utter loneliness of the place, while at the same time emphasizing the overpowering number of willows, and the queer suggestion of their branches. ABE'S expression slowly changes from delight, and elation—to disquietude.

As the red-orange disk of the sun creeps toward the horizon, so the undulating shadows of the willows lengthen across the rocks. Their shadows suggest a wholly different aspect to their nature. ABE looks at the wiggling wall of willows nearest him: the camera rack-focuses to the ranks behind them, and the ranks behind them. They seem to be waiting—impatiently, perhaps. A bird cries out from somewhere above.

ABE gazes skyward, cupping a hand over his eyes, sees a crow hovering, fighting the wind. He reaches into his coat's pocket quickly and takes out a disposable camera, aims. A largish chunk of the bank suddenly gives way underfoot; he sidesteps it, watches as the piece is whisked downstream, sweeping

sticks and twigs along. The water appears dark and angry. The river is on the rise. The sticks and twigs rustle and click.

ABE glances back at the willows. They stand, vibrating, dark against the dusk. They seem closer, denser. As if walling him off. ABE'S face betrays a hint of fear, even alarm.

SWEDEN:

(from somewhere on the other side of the willows)

Abe! Get over here!

ABE stares at the willows. He starts heading back the way he came, along the bank.

SWEDEN:

(urgently)

Hurry up!

ABE pauses. He looks in the direction of the voice. He follows it into the willows, cursing.

EXT. THE CLUMPS OF WILLOW BUSHES. LATE AFTERNOON
MOVING TOWARD DUSK.

ABE fingers his ears as he shoves through the willow bushes. It is like wading through a dense cornfield, and yet, we feel a strange sensation of foreboding, an indescribable uneasiness. There is a *pressure* in here; and a static pattering which becomes a rumbling, which multiplies somehow, accelerates, becomes a whirring and then a humming and then a whining—a shrieking!—before ABE tears the skin of his hand on a particularly ragged branch. The aural onslaught ends as he pauses to examine the wound, wind lashing the hair across his face. There is blood, but not from the wound. It is dripping from his nose.

SWEDEN:

(invisible through the willows)

Abe!

ABE swipes at his nose, begins moving again. We emerge onto the opposite bank, find SWEDEN standing at the edge. He has one foot submerged in the water, is pointing at something in the river with a piece of willow stem.

SWEDEN:

It's a man's body! Look!

It's caught up on that stump!

ABE:

(dabs his nose with the back of a hand)

What?

We follow his gaze to where a black-bronze thing, anchored to a stump by the slimmest margin, is trailing in the water, turning over and over in the foaming waves, disappearing and coming to the surface again. It is about twenty feet from the shore. While the camera has not yet come into perfect focus, it does appear to be a HUMAN BODY, a very large one, or perhaps just bloated.

ABE:

Are you sure that's not a woman?

Whatever it is, it is suddenly released by the current. Just as it is opposite them it lurches round and looks straight at us. The camera swims into perfect focus: It is an OTTER. We see its eyes reflecting the sunset, gleaming an odd yellow, as the body turns over. It gives a swift, gulping plunge, and dives out of sight.

ABE and SWEDEN are relieved, even euphoric.

ABE:

It's an otter!

SWEDEN:

(puts hands on knees, exhales)

By gad!

They watch as the OTTER comes to the surface again below; we see its black-bronze skin, wet and shining in the sunlight. It again resembles a HUMAN BODY.

ABE:

I should have guessed. I saw one just above....

(trails off, suddenly troubled)

SWEDEN:

By the falls, you say?

(laughs)

Well, we shouldn't

be surprised...they love the whitewater.

ABE doesn't say anything. Then, just as they turn back, another thing happens to recall them to the bank. This time it really is a man: a MAN IN A BOAT. ABE and SWEDEN stand and stare.

Due to the sunlight slanting through the mist, or the refraction from the illuminated water, we find it difficult to focus our sight properly on the flying apparition. It seems to be a MAN in a MOTOR BOAT. He is zooming upriver at a tremendous pace, hair flying wildly, his boat skipping over the water. He apparently is looking across in our direction, but the distance is too great and the light too obscure for us to be certain. It seems that he is gesticulating and making signs at us; his voice comes across the water shouting something furiously, but the river drowns it so that no single word is audible. There is something curious about the whole appearance—man, boat, signs, voice—which makes an impression out of all proportion to its cause.

ABE and SWEDEN watch the MAN IN THE BOAT pass.

ABE:

He's crossing himself! Look, he's making
the sign of the Cross!

The MAN IN THE BOAT seems to be gone in a moment, melting away up-river, to the right of the falls, into a sea of willows. The sun catches the bushes in the bend of the river, turns them into a great crimson wall. Mist, too, has begun to rise, so that the air is hazy.

ABE:

(laughing incredulously)

You see that?!

SWEDEN:

(shades his eyes as he
peers up-river, nods)

I think so.

ABE:

That a side-channel of some sort?

SWEDEN:

Yuh. The water spreads out on all sides there.

ABE:

Maybe trying to warn us about the river?

(looks around)

At the rate it's rising, the island won't last long.

Two days, perhaps. It's already smaller than
when we landed.

SWEDEN:
 (still shading his eyes,
 peering up-river)
 Yuh. Maybe.

ACT 2, SCENE 11

EXT. WILLOW-ISLAND BANK. DUSK.

ABE and SWEDEN continue their search, each canvassing an opposite bank so that they're moving parallel to, but out of sight of, the other. The tip of the sun glowers at them as it sinks below the horizon, like an angry red eye. Another chunk of bank is swept away.

EXT. WILLOW-ISLAND. DUSK.

As the shadow of night moves over the sea of willows, so does a new wind, a sudden, fierce wind, which enflames the willows' ranks as it passes over and through them. We get the sense of something awakening. It may only be the sound of the wind in the willows, and yet.... The men are closer together now, canvassing the island at where it begins to taper, and so are able to catch glimpses of each other through the willows.

ABE:

Hey, Sweden!

SWEDEN:

Yuh!

ABE:

What the hell was he doing out here at this hour, alone? In a flood?

SWEDEN:

Same as us, I guess.

ABE:

Trespassing? Trying to escape the existential vacuum
 of city life by fancying himself in tune with Nature?

SWEDEN:

Yuh.

He was driving a fancy boat.

Maybe.

ABE:

Yuh! Yuh! Come out of that shell, old man. I was
 standing next to you the other day and I'd swear

to all the gods I could hear the ocean.
The winds seem to calm a moment, but only a moment.

SWEDEN:

(very distant)

You hear that?

ABE pauses, looks around; he doesn't appear to hear anything, only SWEDEN threshing some willow branches out of his way. He looks toward him, sees only the tops of the trees vibrating. The wind blows his hair about wildly. He leans down and picks up a small piece of driftwood—sees a glint of gold in the sand. He picks it up, fingers it. It is a shell casing. The wind moans and he looks up—is startled by how right on top of him the willow bushes suddenly seem, how twisted and monstrous in the encroaching dark, how muscular. He stands erect, slowly, staring at them as he adds the piece to his pile. There is a sudden crunch, crash, and gurgle nearby—another section of bank, perhaps. The wind blows harder. The atmospheric pressure from before begins building, inexorably, as the willows rustle and shake.

ABE:

(looks around nervously)

Swede...?

He looks for SWEDEN again, and again sees only the tops of the bushes, roaring in the wind. A beat later there is another crack! Another splash! ABE whips around. He sees, a few feet out, what at first appears to be a human arm reaching up from a gurgling eddy—deaden spidery fingers groping. He focuses his eyes upon it: the pressure stops cold as we see it is merely a gnarled branch. ABE exhales. Then, as driftwood is proving scarce on the island, he breaks off some willow stems and tries to fish the branch closer. The current dislodges it as he looks on and it floats down stream, bobbing and turning on the waves. ABE watches it go; it looks rather like a hand again; gesturing to him, summon-ing. A real hand suddenly lands on his shoulder. He spins around. It is SWEDEN; he is shining a Coleman lantern directly into his eyes.

SWEDEN:

It's gone now. There was a sound. Like....

ABE squints in the glare, which obscures SWEDEN'S face.

ABE:

(breathes hard, listens)

It's this awful wind. It roars such
that I didn't even hear you approach!

SWEDEN hands ABE a flashlight.

SWEDEN:

Here.

ABE:

Where were they?

SWEDEN:

In the stern. Under the ballast.

ABE:

(exhales)

I wish this wind would go down....

SWEDEN doesn't say anything. There's clearly something very wrong.

ABE:

What?

SWEDEN:

We're not alone here.

ACT 2, SCENE 12

EXT. THE FAR BANK. TWILIGHT.

SWEDEN is standing with his back to us, facing the river. ABE approaches—he has taken the long way around the willows. SWEDEN turns slowly; the men look at each other. It is nearly dark.

ABE:

Sweden...?

SWEDEN steps aside as the camera dollies past him and in on A CORPSE, a real one. It is caught up in the roots of the willows, several feet from the crumbling bank, chest-deep in the water, vertically positioned, bobbing up and down in a violent whirlpool. The corpse is wearing an Army-green or dark blue nylon parka, slick from the river, with a sopping fur-lined hood. The hood droops, obscuring the face from the top of the mouth up, the mouth which is stretched, contorted, whose chin is far too long. The whole body is stiff like a statue, its flesh an ashen gray-blue. Its hands are twisted and groping, like tree branches—willow branches. One is frozen with Rigor Mortis in such a way that it appears to be reaching out, its fingers gnarled, misshapen; they are too-

long, really, to seem entirely human. The bony, branch-like index finger seems almost to be pointing, indicting the sky.

ABE:

My God, Sweden....

(turns to his friend)

What happened here?

SWEDEN only shakes his head, gravely.

ABE:

May explain the man in the motor boat. He saw this poor chap and was trying to warn us.

SWEDEN:

But how did he *get* here?

ABE:

(shrugs)

By boat, of course. He probably lost it to the current, as I nearly lost ours.

SWEDEN:

But—look at him.

ABE:

Rig'a and the elements can do strange things to a corpse, surely. Have you not seen cattle dead on an open range? By the time nature's done...

(laughs bitterly)

you'd think aliens themselves had been at them, harvesting their organs, I suppose!

(stares at the body)

But what on earth do we do? We don't dare touch it...this could be a crime-scene, for all we know.

SWEDEN cocks his head, listening. He rubs at his ear, slaps it.

ABE:

Are those mosquitoes?

SWEDEN:

In this wind, and with all this moving water?

(chuckles mirthlessly)

Not likely.

The camera dollies in on SWEDEN.

SWEDEN:

But you're right about one thing.

We dare not touch it.

DISSOLVE TO:

We see ABE and SWEDEN battening down an opaque plastic tarp over the corpse, which they secure to nearby willow trees.

ABE:

There, there. That'll protect him a bit until someone
can have a look at him.

(wags his finger at the corpse)

The authorities in Jasper are going to want to have
a word with you, dead man...!

SWEDEN:

(beat)

You shouldn't speak that way here, Abraham.

More as if you were in a church, or a temple.

(looks out over the water)

River's still rising.

(heads off)

Lucky if *we* get away without disaster.

ABE, following, pauses at these words.

EXT. WILLOW-ISLAND CAMP. NIGHT.

SWEDEN, *not* a happy camper, kicks the hearth. The wind blows formidably.

SWEDEN:

We'll never get a camp-fire started in this.

(looks around)

A poor camp. No good stones and precious
little firewood. We'll move on at first

light. These sands and bushes won't
hold anything...except our friend there.

ABE:

Not so long as this wind has it all its own way...

SWEDEN:

(looks at the swaying willows)

Aye. It's about and walking. And diabolical. What did
the villager at Magito say? 'There's evil thinking in—'

ABE:

(interrupts)

He was a piece of work, that one!

What rubbish! The wind's only
enjoying itself—at our expense.

SWEDEN:

You may be right.

Hell with it. I'm for setting up the tent
and calling it a day.

ABE:

(looks around the island)

Where, you think?

SWEDEN:

Close to the willows, they'll damper the wind.

ABE stares at the willows uncomfortably.

SWEDEN:

(watches him)

What?

ABE:

Don't you think they'll tear it?

SWEDEN:

The tent? Dude, it's canvas. Willow stems aren't gonna hurt that.

ABE:

It's too close to the edge. How about over there? In that hollow?

SWEDEN:

We'll have to move the canoe; with the
river in flood we'll want it close.

ABE looks at the island's sandy surface as they move toward the canoe. The wind swirls the granulates about, eroding the edges of their prints.

SWEDEN:

(takes hold of the canoe)

Try not to drop it this time, Anakin.

This canoe is our life!

They grunt as they lift.

ABE:

Hurry up. They're on the move....

ABE and SWEDEN exit the frame, leaving only the willows, which rustle and shake.

Another chunk of the bank falls away; water gurgles and foams.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT 2, SCENE 13

We hear a crash, as though a box of supplies has toppled over.

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

ABE is awakened by the crashing sound. Lying in his sleeping bag, he listens intently as the wind blows mightily outside, buffeting their little tent. A light rain is pattering against the canvas. A moment later, something else goes bump in the night; it sounds for all the world as though someone is poking around their campsite. He looks through the tent's open door at the blackness beyond. The flap, though pinned back, ruffles in the wind. There is the sound of multitudinous little patterings, a sound nearly identical to the sound of the rain on the canvas, yet—different. ABE finds his flashlight, points it outside.

EXT. THE WILLOWS. NIGHT.

The flashlight's beam finds the willow bushes huddled in the dark, about 50 ft. away.

They are swaying and vibrating in the wind and rain. ABE stares at them sleepily. Their delicate stems increasingly hypnotize him as they whip back and forth against the backdrop of the raging river. There is something askew and appalling about the way they move; indeed, they gyrate so fast and cross each other's paths so confusingly that we sense the presence of a fourth pattern—an alien configuration amongst the tracery of branches. And this configuration does not confuse; it moves through the branches of its own volition, smoothly, uniformly, spiraling up through the smothering chaos of the willows. We can

just make out a strange humming amongst the roar of wind and water. There is another subtle crash.

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

ABE unzips his sleeping bag and sits up, reaches for the Coleman lantern that is hanging from the roof beam. He takes it down.

ABE:

Sweden...

SWEDEN doesn't stir. His fitful movements suggest troubled sleep.

ABE:

Sweden, hey—!

There is no response. Cautiously, he crawls from the tent. As he leaves frame the camera moves over to SWEDEN, who is shaking his head back and forth as though having a nightmare.

EXT. WILLOW-ISLAND CAMP. NIGHT.

ABE stands, switching on the lantern. Holding it aloft, he scans the wind-blown campsite. A subjective POV shot pans left to right, revealing the canoe lying turned over beside the tent, with both yellow paddles beneath her, and their provision sack hanging from a willow-stem. The sack has shifted in the tumult, perhaps, and is partially open; a few stray items have fallen to the sand, along with a length of bathroom tissue, which has lighted upon the wind. There's a sudden sound from the right—that weird pattering again, like little footsteps—the camera whips toward it. It is like seeing a shadow out of the corner of one's eye.

ABE swings the lantern toward the commotion. The shadows of a hundred trees shift their places quickly as he does so.

EXT. THE WILLOWS. NIGHT.

We glimpse a strange ripple running through the willows.

ABE:

(alarmed)

Who's there?

EXT. FROM WITHIN THE WILLOWS. NIGHT.

ABE extends his lantern towards the tangle of branches, which are shaking as though alive in the powerful wind. The humming/rumbling is intense. A cut-away highlights the river itself as it pounds past.

EXT. WILLOW-ISLAND CAMP. NIGHT.

ABE is nudged forward by a mighty blast of wind, closer to the willows. His hat is blown off and becomes entangled in the branches.

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

SWEDEN is talking in his sleep, shaking his head back and forth.

SWEDEN:

The wind... the water...

EXT. WILLOWS-ISLAND CAMP. NIGHT.

ABE moves slowly toward the willows. The humming/atmospheric pressure builds, as do the sounds of wind and water. Kneeling at the willows' edge, he collects their things and puts them back into the sack—drops a pouch he has scooped up with everything else. Two or three bottles of pills spill out onto the sand. He picks one up, reads its label: it isn't anything he recognizes. He gathers the bottles together and puts them back in the pouch, puts the pouch in 'Jumbo,' cinches it tight.

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

SWEDEN:

The way....

EXT. THE WILLOWS. NIGHT.

ABE wades into the willows just enough to retrieve his hat. He gets to within a few inches of it before it is blown yet further, blown away—but caught again, by stems. He moves closer even as it lights still again—catches it. He half-smiles while putting it back on, forces it down tight around his ears. He turns to head back...

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

SWEDEN:

The wind...

EXT. THE WILLOWS. NIGHT.

ABE hears a loud splash, as though someone has jumped into the water, and pauses. He hears the pattering again, which becomes a flapping, then a ruffling. He aims his flashlight through the bushes—at the corpse, barely visible on the far bank. The wind has caught the edge of the tarp so that it has come un-tethered and lighted on the wind. He stares at it, mesmerized. There are splashing noises, for all the world as though someone were swimming nearby. He creeps toward the corpse and the sounds.

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

SWEDE:

The water...

EXT. THE WILLOWS. NIGHT.

ABE draws nearer the corpse, peers out at it through the willows. It floats, bobbing, as though staring, pointing at the sky. We can hear it splashing gently. The rough water is jostling the body so that its limbs appear to be moving, like a rag-doll's.

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

SWEDEN:

The Way....

EXT. THE WILLOWS. NIGHT.

ABE gazes at the corpse, his eyes blank as though hypnotized. A rivulet of dark blood courses down from his nostril. There, beyond the corpse, something is swimming. Some-thing vaguely human, though much larger than human. Something darkly bronze with a black mane, of hair or fin it is impossible to say. Something female, whose breast glistens as it rolls round in the water; whose enormous eye catches the moonlight and glints yellow. Something which seems to whisper in ABE'S mind: *Come with me...*

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

SWEDEN:

Going...

EXT. THE WILLOWS. NIGHT.

ABE takes a step forward, his boot landing in soft sand, which spirals about it. The corpse bobs and sways, its hidden hand, the fingers of which are curved in, breaking the surface, as if beckoning. *Come with me*, repeats the voice. It sounds rather like MANYA'S voice. ABE takes another step.

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

SWEDEN:

Going...

EXT. THE WILLOWS. NIGHT.

ABE is about to emerge from the willows when something even stranger happens: the willows seem to stretch out before him (achieved, of course, by zooming the lens while dollying backwards). He begins running, dashing madly toward the water, which only seems to grow farther away.

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

SWEDEN:

Going...

EXT. THE FAR BANK. NIGHT.

ABE bursts from the willows at last, runs toward the water.

MANYA-VOICE:

(urgently)

Come with me!

ABE trips over a protruding root and falls, twisting, as broken knife-like brambles rush at us via cut-away. He lands hard, narrowly missing the spikes, bangs his head on a large rock.

CUT TO BLACK.

ACT 2, SCENE 14

FADE IN:

EXT. THE FAR BANK. EARLY, EARLY DAWN.

ABE awakens in the darkly purple light of early, early dawn. He is lying curled up on the sand near the bank. The corpse rocks and bobs; the plastic flaps. ABE has a bruise on his forehead. He rolls on his side, sees a river otter foraging not 7 feet away. It sees him, startled, then retreats into the water with a splash. He stands, with a groan. He looks around as though waking from a dream, trembles. There is nothing but the willow stems wiggling in the wind, the pattering of the rain—the roar of the river under all. He walks into the willow bushes, toward camp.

There is a blur at the corner of his eye. He whips toward it as something whips the willows into a frenzy, something which seems to corkscrew right through him, shoving him back, something cold, powerful. The ground rumbles as the hat is torn from his head, spirals into the dark. The overall effect suggests a kind of dust devil. There is a brief buzzing, a humming; a shrieking which becomes a howl! Its passing jolts ABE, leaves him shaken. The intense rumbling/humming stops. ABE peers skyward. The hat is nowhere to be seen.

The camera moves with him as he scrambles for the tent through the willows. Again, we hear that methodical pattering. He bursts from the willows at last, glancing about frantically.

EXT. WILLOW-ISLAND CAMP. EARLY, EARLY DAWN.

A series of shaky cut-aways suggests the malevolent design of the island and its surrounding shores: deaden tree tops stab at the sky like bony fingers, rock

formations appear geometrically insane, the waning moon glowers through a scud of cloud. He scrambles to his feet and rushes toward the tent, whirling to look back on occasion, stumbling. The wavering light of his lantern causes the shadows of the trees to whip about like willow stems. The camera races after him as he clambers into the tent, shuts the flap—all goes black.

INT. THE TENT. EARLY, EARLY DAWN.

ABE climbs into his sleeping bag while SWEDEN sleeps—deeply, by the sound of it. He extinguishes the lantern, hangs it up. He lies upon his side, closes his eyes. The wind jostles the tent; rain patters the canvas. ABE shivers.

ABE:

Some fucking place to camp, Swede.

He curls up in a little ball, trying to ignore his surroundings. He tries to sleep.

FADE TO BLACK.

...We hear the wind, and branches scraping a window sill.

FADE IN:

SWEDEN'S GUEST ROOM.

The wind moans and there's a smash! Glass breaks. ABE sits up with a start; a shutter bangs against the wall. A base-hum builds, as does a heartbeat, perhaps, which beats stronger throughout the scene.

MANYA:

(whispers off-screen)

Abraham...

ABE looks at his bedroom door, which has also blown open. MANYA'S lithe shadow, absolutely still, can be seen on the wall in the hallway. The wind blasts. The shadow slides sideways out of view. ABE puts something on and follows. There is no one in the hall. He hears water splash somewhere near. He eases the door to her bedroom open...

The door swings open onto the FAR BANK of the WILLOW-ISLAND. The dead man is there, bobbing on the current, and beyond him, something in the water. ABE takes a few steps into the room. MANYA can be seen swimming nude by moon-light, rolling in the water, back-stroking with long, elegant strokes, diving and re-surfacing, sweeping back her long, black hair. She beckons him with a languid hand, whose fingers appear far too long. There is a hint of webbing between them, which catches the moonlight and glows.

MANYA-VOICE:
(watery, disembodied)

Come with me...

ABE, terrified by her seeming mutation, turns toward the door—but it is gone, replaced by stands of willows, walling him off. He hears water splash, turns.... MANYA emerges dripping from the river and stands, fully nude, with one hand covering her pubis. She has grown somehow, bigger, taller. Her long, wet, shining black hair hangs over her breasts. The two stare at each other; MANYA'S pupils are a weird golden-yellow.

She moves forward, continuing to cover herself. She moves to within a foot of his face, pauses. She is taller than he. He reaches into a lock of her hair and runs his fingers through it. The wet, shining hair flows between his fingers like river water; a cut-away shows black currents coursing between flooded willow trunks. She puts her hands on his shoulders, her large, long fingers curling about their blades. She leans close to his ear, blows upon his cheek. Her breath leaves a white spiral, which quickly fades. ABE'S pale blue eyes glint, alive with something we have not yet seen. Something hungry and dangerous. Something which has been starving and suffocating for far too long, perhaps! He grabs her head in both his hands and closes his lips about her own. They kiss passionately, even violently, as the wind cyclones, lashing their hair, as though a dust-devil has formed at their feet! The camera creeps in on her arm, in the foreground. We see the blended bodies of the Ur-mensch, golden, faceless, spiraling up it. We are focusing on this as the muscles beneath the tattoo suddenly constrict, bulge.

Cut to: A wider angle, looking at them from behind, as MANYA forces ABE to his knees in the sand. He looks up at her, moonlight casting swaying shadows of willows across his face. We see her from his POV: a mere silhouette, her watery hair hanging, her oily eyes glinting. Above her, storm clouds race beneath the sky. The wind gusts again as her black hair whips about her head and face, in a spiral, almost. ABE takes her belly in his hands, kisses it all over. Again, she covers her pubis with one of her hands, while wrapping his hair in the fingers of her other. Then, suddenly, she removes the hand from between her legs, shoves his face in. Her head lolls back from her shoulders as she turns her face to the storm-black sky. She sighs, moans, as the wind cyclones and the base-hum builds. She lets go of his hair, holds her arms above her head.

Close-up of ABE as his face emerges from the shadows, gazing up at her. Her hands and long fingers contort and sway, like a belly dancer's possessed! Heat-lightning flickers silently across the sky, and in the flicker we see—shapes. Golden, giant, funneling into the sky—the Urmensh. ABE'S eyes mist over and it appears as though he might clasp his hands together and worship, positively worship!

There's a flashing glint in the dark; ABE'S eyes dart to it. It is MANYA'S engagement ring—

Then there is black; the beings are gone. The base-hum subsides. The heart-beat slows. There are little atmospheric aftershocks, as after an orgasm. MANYA lowers her chin, slowly, a string of drool dangling from her chin. The hair hangs in her eyes, wet and stringy, obscuring most her features. The storm has passed, the wind subsided. All is calm.

ABE squints into the blackness, looking for the beings still. Dry lightning flickers; there is nothing. ABE appears as though he will break down and cry.

ABE:

They are gone.... Gone.

(a tear rolls down his cheek)

They are gone from me....

MANYA pulls the hair from one eye, which is the same deep brown as before. Her lips part in a mischievous smile. Her teeth are slightly crooked, lending her a carnivorous air.

MANYA:

They have found another.

Yet they remain in different form.

There...don't you hear it?

(beat)

Listen...

ABE gazes at the sky, dazed and confused. He neither sees nor hears anything. Wait: there is a sound—a faint pattering, a sizzling, almost, as of bacon.

MANYA:

(giggles)

They are right in front of you!

Look closer.

ABE:

(racked with confusion)

I'm afraid I don't—

MANYA:

(voice angry, distorted)

Look—closer!

She grabs his head and forces his chin down. Her pubic hair is wild and untamed, appearing brutal and cruel as the willow bushes themselves. Long, golden worms are wending between the hairs, which are wiry and stem-like. Wending and weaving like wind through the willows, or undines through water. The sizzling sound intensifies...

SLAM CUT TO:

ACT 2, SCENE 15

INT. THE TENT. DAY.

ABE awakens with a start, blinks. There is the sound of birds chirping and frying bacon. Smoke wafts into the tent carrying with it a pleasing aroma as ABE rubs the sleep from his eyes. He rolls his head to look at SWEDEN; his friend is not there.

EXT. THE CAMPSITE. DAY.

Bacon sizzles in a large frying pan as ABE emerges from the tent, through the smoke.

The camera pans to SWEDEN, sitting close by the fire. He has shaved his face. He is leaning on a machete, absently twisting it in the sand, gazing skyward. A spatula sits forgotten at the pan's edge. Lengths of chopped driftwood have been neatly stacked nearby; a secondary pot of pitch bubbles.

ABE approaches, groggily. He kneels beside SWEDEN, who appears oblivious to his presence. ABE pours coffee into a tin cup, sips it. The river rumbles and chatters. He follows SWEDEN'S gaze.

EXT. MEN'S POV. DAY.

Smoke twists languidly away into a cloudless blue sky.

EXT. THE CAMPSITE. DAY.

ABE:

It's a wonderful thing, to awaken.

(happy, but in a nervous,
covering-up sort of way)

To get up one more time and do it all
again...in a world solid as you or

I. Isn't it, old friend?

If he is expecting another warm and fuzzy moment with SWEDEN, he is mistaken.

SWEDEN:

(oddly detached)

Aye...I suppose it is.

ABE lowers his gaze to the sand, where the tip of the machete twirls. He takes up the spatula and flips the bacon. The loud sizzle draws SWEDEN from his reverie; he looks at ABE.

SWEDEN:

River still rising.

Several islands out in mid-stream
have disappeared altogether.

They peer out over the gray water.

EXT. THE RIVER. DAY.

A pair of jagged, rocky outcroppings stands against the foaming current, one tall and thinish, the other thicker, more robust. The latter is more submerged than the former.

EXT. THE CAMPSITE. DAY.

ABE:

(glances about, indicates the pile)

Any good wood besides this?

SWEDEN:

The wood and the island should finish tomorrow
in a dead heat...

(laughs)

But there's enough to last us till then.

ABE:

(sips coffee)

I don't know about you—but tomorrow I'll
be in Athabaska. In a tavern. With a big TV.

SWEDEN chuckles as he stirs the bacon, which hisses and pops. Only now do we realize what a hallow and mirthless sound he makes.

ABE:

Seriously, Swede. We'd better get off

sharp in an hour.

SWEDEN:

(stares into the fry-pan,
mumbles)

Hmph. If they'll let us.

ABE turns and stares at him. SWEDEN only gazes into the fry-pan.

SWEDEN:

Lucky if we get away without further disaster....

ABE:

If they'll let us? Further disaster!

Why, what's happened?

A nearby bank crumbles with a heavy splash. SWEDEN cocks his head, listening. The river chatters busily in an alien tongue. SWEDEN slaps his ear, then rolls something between his thumb and forefinger, examining it.

SWEDEN:

Sand.

(flicks the granulate away)

For one thing...the steering paddle's gone.

ABE:

The steering paddle gone!

ABE begins searching about for it.

ABE:

That's our rudder. Taming a flooded
river without it is suicide—

SWEDEN:

There's only one.

He gets up, hands ABE the other paddle. The machete is in his free hand.

SWEDEN:

(points to the paddle blade)

And then there's this to explain, too.

A new and curious emotion spreads freezingly over ABE'S face as he examines it. The blade has been scraped down all over, beautifully scraped, as though someone has sand-papered it with care, making it so thin that the first vigorous stroke must have snapped it off at the elbow.

ABE:

One of us walked in his sleep and did this thing....
Or—or it has been filed by the constant stream of
sand particles blown against it by the wind, perhaps.

SWEDEN:

(turns away, chuckling)

Ah! You can explain everything.

ABE:

(determined)

...the same wind that caught the steering paddle
and flung it so near the bank that it fell in with
the next lump that crumbled.

SWEDEN:

I see!

SWEDEN re-seats himself, watching the fry-pan, twirling the machete in the sand. ABE approaches “Jumbo,” stoops down to—there are foot-prints in the sand. *His* foot-prints. He stands, disorientated, recalling the night before. He follows the prints to the willows, and here’s another strange thing; a channel has been cleared through their ranks, hacked through with a machete. His own boot prints mixed with SWEDEN’S extend the length of the corridor. At the end of this tube the corpse rocks and bobs in silence. The plastic has been re-secured. ABE turns toward SWEDEN.

ABE:

You’ve re-covered our friend, good.

But this corridor...

(he is genuinely confused and
perhaps a little paranoid)

Why would you do such a thing?

SWEDEN:

It’s like you said. Could be evidence of
foul play. We don’t want him getting
away from us, do we? Some buzzard’s
been at him already, clearly. This way
we can keep an eye on him.

ABE tilts his chin, finding the remark exceedingly strange, but can’t quite put his finger on it. He stumbles about the camp in a wide circle, processing

this information, appearing to question his own thoughts. He pauses to examine their tent from a distance: the willows seem closer. He cocks his head. The willows *are* closer. He begins noticing deep hollows formed in the sand, basin-shaped and of various depths and sizes, varying from that of a tea-cup to a large bowl.

ABE:

What on earth are these prints?

SWEDEN:

I'm sure I've no idea. They're all over the island.

But you can explain them, no doubt!

ABE:

Wind, of course.... Have you never watched those
little whirlwinds in the street that twist and twirl
everything into a circle?

SWEDEN looks at him with a slight smile and furrowed brow. It is a look that says, "Nice try." ABE notices the tip of the machete swirling in the sand, hesitates.

ABE:

...the sand's loose enough to yield, is all.

The wind caught the edges of our boot-
prints and torqued them beyond recognition.

He bumbles against the tent, transfixed by the spirals. He again looks at the tip of the machete, spiraling in the sand.

ABE:

Did— Sweden, did you...?

SWEDEN looks at him rather evilly, mischievously, even as ABE circles round the side of the tent—sees his missing hat from the night before sitting atop the overturned canoe.

SWEDEN:

(off-screen, barely audible)

There, you see an attempt to prepare a
victim for the sacrifice...two victims,

rather.

ABE stares at the hat, uncomprehending, as SWEDEN steps up behind him, machete in hand. At last ABE begins to grasp the full implication of the

evidence. He spins around, narrowly missing the machete's blade, which SWEDEN quickly moves out of the way.

ABE:

(horrified, dumb)

You don't think that I...?

SWEDEN stares at him as the breeze blows.

SWEDEN:

I confess...I did wonder. As you are
wondering about me even now.

ABE tries to shake his head—both men know it is true.

SWEDEN:

But there's more...

The camera dollies past SWEDEN as he approaches the canoe and lifts the hat—comes to a rest on a tiny hole in EXTREME CLOSE-UP; a hole that penetrates clean through the hull—a hole shaped like a tiny, beautifully-formed spiral. SWEDEN looks at ABE; ABE looks back.

ABE:

Dear heavens...had we launched out in her
without observing it we would have
floundered...

The camera looks down on the hole, slowly rotating, as they speak...

SWEDEN:

...and not right away, either. At first the water would have
made the wood swell, closing the hole. Then, once out in
mid-stream, in the rapids, perhaps...the canoe would
have filled—and sunk rapidly.

View returns to traditional two-shots, close-ups.

ABE:

(glances at SWEDEN'S machete)

We must have scratched her in landing, of course.
Impaled her, rather, somehow. The stones near the
bank were very sharp...

SWEDEN:

It wasn't there last night.

ABE:

Did you do a post run?

SWEDEN:

Pure habit to glance it over.

If that's what you mean.

ABE:

That's not what I meant.

SWEDEN:

I didn't do a full inspection, no. Figured it could wait until morning. But a hole that size, and of that depth—pretty hard to miss. Even in twilight.

ABE:

I'm not the Canoeing Commission, Swede—it's okay by me. I'm just saying, we missed it.

SWEDEN:

(stamps back to the
camp-fire, mumbling)

Evil thinking. But by heavens it's alive; it's proactive, ambitious....

ABE:

(squinting at his strange
talk, remaining by the boat)

So are we stranded, or what?

SWEDEN turns around. There's a splash as another section of bank falls away. He glances out over the river, sees the current assaulting the two rocks.

SWEDEN:

Aye. For another night, at least.

I've got the pitch simmering.

ABE stares at him. The sun and breeze redden his cheeks, buffet his hair. The light glances off SWEDEN'S machete, stings his eyes.

We cut to an extreme close-up of the spiral-shaped hole.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT 2, SCENE 16

FADE IN:

EXT. CAMPSITE. AFTERNOON.

ABE and SWEDEN sit across from each other with the fire between them, applying hot pitch to the hole in the boat. The willow corridor and plastic-covered corpse can be seen in the distance, through the flames. A stew pot simmers, awaiting potatoes. The weather has calmed; there is but the thinnest breeze, which moves the willows slightly. The river sings its song, made by pebbles being scraped along its bottom by the current. The men work in silence, ABE watching SWEDEN surreptitiously the whole time; it seems, too, that SWEDEN is watching him. It seems also that SWEDEN is listening attentively to something ABE cannot hear, or for something that he expects to hear, for he keeps turning about and staring into the bushes, and up into the sky, and out across the water, wherever it is visible through the openings among the willows, which crowd closer than ever. Sometimes he puts his hand to his ear and holds it there for several minutes. Whenever this happens, or when he stares at the bushes a moment too long, ABE nervously urges him forward with the work. At length, after a long pause, they begin to talk. Because of the day's calm ambience, perhaps, the men's voices sound richer, cleaner than before.

SWEDEN:

Queer thing.... Queer thing, I mean,
about that otter last night.

ABE:

Shows how lonely this place is.
Otters are awfully shy things—

SWEDEN:

I don't mean that, of course. I mean—

do you think...did you think it really was an otter?

ABE:

What else, in the name of Heaven, what else?

SWEDEN:

You know, I saw it before you did, and at
first it seemed—so much bigger than an otter.

ABE:

The sunset as you looked up-stream magnified
it, or something.

The breeze picks up markedly.

SWEDEN:

(looks at him absently but
speaks more to himself)

It had such extraordinary yellow eyes....

ABE:

(laughs boisterously)

That was the sun, too. I suppose you'll
wonder next if that fellow in the boat—

ABE trails off, watching SWEDEN listen, turning his head to the wind. The subject dropped, they go on about their caulking. The wind drops, as well. Then, suddenly, SWEDEN looks at him across the canoe, smoking pitch in hand, his face exceedingly grave.

SWEDEN:

I did rather wonder, if you want to know...
what that thing in the boat was. I remember
thinking at the time it was not a man. The
whole business seemed to rise quite suddenly
out of the water.

ABE:

(laughs boisterously
again, but also a
little impatiently,
even angrily)

Look here now...this place is quite queer enough
without going out of our way to imagine things!
That boat was an ordinary boat, and the man in it
was an ordinary man, and they were both going
up-river as fast as they could lick. And that otter
was an otter, so don't let's play the fool about it!

SWEDEN only looks steadily at him with the same grave expression. ABE seems to take courage from his silence. The wind increases. The stew-pot begins to bubble.

ABE:

And, for Heaven's sake...stop pretending
you hear things, because it only gives me the
jumps, and there's nothing to hear but the river

and this cursed old brooding wind!

The wind gusts violently as if in response, shaking the willow corridor, lifting the plastic from the corpse once again.

SWEDEN:

(gets up abruptly,
sneers)

You fool! Utter fool. That's just the way all victims talk. As if you didn't understand just as well as I....

(there is scorn in his voice, and a sort of resignation)

The best thing you can do is to keep quiet and try to hold your mind as firm as possible. This feeble attempt at self-deception only makes the truth harder when you're forced to meet it.

ABE looks on, clearly rattled but also humbled by SWEDEN'S words. He tends to the stew-pot.

SWEDEN approaches the willow corridor, gazes down it at the corpse. The willows rustle; the plastic tarp flaps and crackles in the wind...then subsides. He looks at ABE.

SWEDEN:

But you're quite right about one thing....

ABE looks up at him over the pot, through the steam.

SWEDEN:

And that is that we're wiser not to talk about it, or even to think about it. Because what one thinks, one says, and what one says...happens.

The sun moves behind a cloud, lighting it from behind so that it becomes nearly black, and setting the other clouds to shine almost silver. There is the slightest rumble as the gaseous masses pass one another, like great personages. An eerie stillness seems to set-

tle down upon the island. The withdrawal of bright sunlight seems to take everything out of the landscape which could make for cheerfulness, bleeds it, rather, of all but its bare bones. SWEDEN pauses, holding his hand cup-wise to his ear.

SWEDEN:

Come and listen...and see what you make of it.

ABE gets up, joins him at the entrance to the willow corridor. SWEDEN watches him curiously as he listens.

SWEDEN:

Now do you hear anything?

They stand there, listening attentively together. At first ABE hears only the deep note of the water and the hissings rising from its turbulent surface. The willows, for once, are motionless and silent. Then a sound begins to reach his ears faintly, a peculiar sound— something like the humming of a distant gong. It seems to come across to us in the grayness from the waste of swamps and willows opposite. It is repeated at regular intervals, but is certainly neither the sound of a bell nor the hooting of a distant steamer. It can be likened to nothing so much as to the sound of an immense gong, suspended far up in the sky, repeating incessantly its muffled metallic note, soft and musical, as it is repeatedly struck.

SWEDEN:

I've heard it all day.... While you slept this afternoon it came all round the island. I hunted it down, but could never get near enough to see—to localize it correctly. Sometimes it was overhead, and sometimes it seemed under the water. Once or twice, too, I could have sworn it was not outside at all, but within myself—you know—the way a sound in the fourth dimension is supposed to come.

ABE hardly pays attention but rather listens intently to the sound, utterly puzzled. It changes direction, too, coming nearer, and then sinking utterly away into the remote distance. The sound, oddly musical, is not so much ominous in quality as it is...dist-resssing. A cut-away of the stew-pot shows it bubbling close to the rim.

ABE:

(determined)

The wind blowing in those sand-funnels...or the bushes rubbing together after the storm perhaps.

SWEDEN:

(ignores him)

It comes off the whole swamp.... It comes from
everywhere at once. It comes from the willow
bushes somehow—

ABE:

But now the wind has dropped. The willows can
hardly make a noise by themselves, can they?

SWEDEN:

It is because the wind has dropped we now hear it.

It was drowned before. It is the cry, I believe, of the—

The stew-pot boils over with a hiss. ABE dashes back to the fire, determined
at the same time to escape further conversation.

ABE:

(stirs vigorously)

Come and cut up potatoes for the pot....

ABE laughs nervously—at his own squeamishness, surely—as SWEDEN
comes over slowly and takes the provision sack from the tree, fumbles in its
mysterious depths. At last he empties the entire contents upon the ground-
sheet at his feet.

ABE:

Hurry up! It's boiling.

ABE jumps, startled, as SWEDEN bursts out into a roar of laughter. It is
forced laughter, not artificial exactly, but mirthless.

SWEDEN:

There's nothing here!

(holds his sides)

Potatoes, I mean. They're gone.

There are no potatoes. They've
taken them!

ABE drops his long spoon and runs up. Everything the sack had contained
lay upon the ground-sheet, but there are no potatoes. The camera begins to cir-
cle as the whole dead weight of his growing fear falls upon him and shakes him.
Then he bursts out laughing too—a temporary safety-valve. With both of them
it ceases quite suddenly.

ABE:

(relentless in his

determination to
find an explanation)

How criminally stupid of me! I clean forgot to fetch
them at your place. That lovely daughter of yours put
everything out of my head, and I must have left them
lying on the counter or—

SWEDEN:

(interrupts)

The oatmeal, too, is much less than it was this morning.

ABE moves away from him, stumbling in the sand, clearly irritated.

ABE:

(whispers angrily)

Why in the world need you draw attention to it?

(whirls around)

There's enough for tomorrow! And we can get
lots more at....

He trails off, reeling from the implications. The willows rattle and shake as
the wind gusts and the ground itself seems to rumble. ABE swoons. SWEDEN
leaps forward, grabs hold of his arm.

SWEDEN:

Easy does it. Don't fight it. Don't resist.

Go with the flow.

ABE sobers, slowly, starts to speak—

SWEDEN:

(covers his mouth)

Not here. The willows....

They listen.

Though the tempest has passed the willows continue to rustle and whisper.

SWEDEN:

First things first. You're right, of course, about
the stew-pot. Famine isn't going to help our state
of mind, now is it?

ABE can only look at him, white as a sheet.

SWEDEN:

I suggest we do something about that.

What we need right now...is a distraction.

ACT 2, SCENE 17

EXT. WILLOW-ISLAND APEX. LATE AFTERNOON.

A tackle box is sat down hard on the rocks, opened. ABE and SWEDEN fly-fish from the shallow water near the bank. We can just make out the plastic-covered corpse far behind, the edge of its tarp flapping. The willows seem to vibrate in the breeze; the gong-like humming persists. Clouds have begun to mass all over the sky so that no trace of direct sunlight peers through. Very still, too, everything is, so that the river and the frogs have things all their own way.

ABE and SWEDEN re-cast their lines, which whip like willow stems in the air; the lines plop into the water, making ripples. Little orange-white balls bob upon the surface. They reel in and re-cast, searching blindly for Steelhead. When they at last speak, they do so in subdued tones.

SWEDEN:

We've strayed out of a safe line somewhere.

The gong sound swoops near, directly over their heads, ringing much louder than before.

SWEDEN:

(to himself as much
as to ABE)

I don't think a microphone would show any record of that.

The sound doesn't come to me by the ears at all. The vibrations reach me in another manner completely. They seem to be *...within* me, as a sound from the fourth-dimension might be heard.

ABE doesn't say anything, only reels in and re-casts. His seems as frightened by his friend's canny grasp of the situation as of the situation itself.

SWEDEN:

It has that about it...which is utterly out of common experience. It is unknown. Only one thing describes it really; it is a non-human sound; I mean a sound outside humanity.

ABE:

It's the deliberate, calculating purpose that reduces one's courage to zero. Otherwise imagination might count for much. But the paddle, the canoe, the lessening food....

SWEDEN:

It's their plain determination to provide a victim.

A stray puff of wind sets the willows shivering about them, but apart from this not very welcome sound a deep and depressing silence reigns, broken only by the gurgling of the river and the humming in the air overhead.

ABE:

I'd rather the shouting company of the winds
to this damnable silence. It covered our foot-
falls, at least.

At length, at a moment when a stray puff prolongs itself as though the wind were about to rise again, ABE appears to reach the point of saturation, the point where it is absolutely necessary to find relief in plain speech, or else betray himself by some hysterical out-burst. He turns to SWEDEN abruptly, who looks up with a start.

ABE:

I can't disguise it any longer—I don't like this place.
The barrenness, the noises, the awful feelings I get.
There's something here that beats me utterly. I'm in
a blue funk, that's the plain truth. If the other shore
was...different, I swear I'd try to swim for it!

SWEDEN'S face turns yet darker beneath the deep tan of sun and wind. He stares straight at ABE.

SWEDEN:

This isn't something we can escape from by running away. We must sit tight and wait. There are forces here that could kill a herd of elephants—
just as you or I might swat a fly. Our only chance is to keep perfectly still. It's our insignificance that may save us.

ABE looks on, stupefied, finding no words but with a face full questions—a patient listening to a doctor describe the puzzling symptoms of a grave disease. SWEDEN re-casts his line; it undulates in the air, plops into the water. Makes ripples. The little orange-white ball bobs upon the surface.

SWEDEN:

I mean that so far, although aware of our disturbing

presence, they have not found us—not 'located' us. They're blundering about like men hunting for a leak of gas. The paddle and canoe and provisions prove that. I think they feel us, but cannot actually see us. We must keep our minds quiet—it's our minds they feel. We must control our thoughts, or it's all up with us.

ABE:

(stammers,

icy with horror)

Death, you mean?

SWEDEN:

Worse—by far. Death, according to one's belief, means either annihilation or release from the limitations of the senses, but it involves no change of character. You don't suddenly alter just because the body's gone. But this means a radical alteration, a complete change, a horrible loss of oneself by substitution—far worse than death, and not even annihilation. We happen to have camped in a spot where their region touches ours, where the veil between has worn thin—so that they are aware of our being in their neighborhood.

ABE:

(utterly bewildered)

But *who* are aware?

He tries to ignore the shaking of the willows in the windless calm, and the humming overhead, while awaiting an answer he clearly dreads. SWEDEN leans toward him;

He seems bigger, darker all of a sudden, the golden sunlight firing his eyes with an indefinable change. ABE avoids his eyes, looks down upon the water, as tiny bubbles burst upon its surface.

SWEDEN:

[inter-cut with a view of the men from beneath the water, as of rippling giants / with a view of racing

waters alongside becalmed; of whitecaps and eddies / with a view of two massive clouds, one golden, one black, passing each other and rumbling]
 All my life...I have been strangely, vividly conscious ...of another region—not far removed from our own, yet wholly different in kind. Where great things go on unceasingly. Where immense and terrible personalities hurry by...intent on vast purposes, compared to which earthly affairs, the rise and fall of nations, the destinies of empires, the fate of armies and continents—are all as dust in the balance. Vast purposes, I mean, that deal directly with the soul, not indirectly with mere expressions of the soul—

ABE:

(shrinks away from him slowly—as though he were facing either a prophet or a madman)

I suggest just now—

SWEDEN:

(raises his voice,
 overbearing him)

*You think...*it is the spirit of the elements. And I thought, perhaps, it was the old gods. But I tell you—it is neither. These would be comprehensible entities, for they have relations with men, depending upon them for worship or for sacrifice. Whereas these beings who are now about us... they have *nothing* to do with men. It is mere chance that their space at this very spot happens to touch our own.

ABE begins shaking all over in the lonely stillness, twitching, as though he can no longer control his movements.

ABE:

What do you propose?

SWEDEN:

(watches bubbles as they move closer to his line)
 A sacrifice, a victim, might save us by distracting them until we could get away...just as the wolves

stop to devour the dogs, and give the sleigh another
start...

He yanks on the pole, starts reeling in. A moment later the hook comes up empty. He re-casts.

SWEDEN:

But—I see no chance of another victim now.

ABE stares blankly at him. The gleam in his friend's eye is dreadful.

SWEDEN:

It's the willows, of course. The willows mask the others,
but the others are feeling about for us. If we let our minds
betray our fear, we're lost, lost utterly.

He turns and looks at ABE with an expression so calm, so determined, so sincere, that ABE appears to dispel any doubts over his sanity.

SWEDEN:

If we can hold out through the night...we may
get off in the daylight unnoticed, or rather, un-
discovered.

ABE:

But you really think a sacrifice would—

The gong-like humming comes down very close over their heads, but it is SWEDEN'S scared face that really stops ABE'S mouth.

SWEDEN:

(holds up hand,
whispers)

Shhh! Do not mention them more than you can help.
Do not refer to them by name. To name is to reveal;
it is the inevitable clue. Our only hope lies in ignor-
ing them, so that they might ignore us.

(laughs bitterly)

Not such a 'piece of work' as we thought, that bil-
liard player....

ABE:

Even in *thought*?

ABE'S bobber suddenly vanishes, dipping below the surface.

SWEDEN:

You've got one!

The ball bounces up and down.

SWEDEN:

Hurry up, man. Reel it in!

ABE does so, ratcheting the handle, tugging on the pole, which bends and vibrates even as the willows vibrate. He reels it in—a big, glistening Steelhead, which flips and fights savagely. ABE twists the hook from its mouth, throws it into the bucket.

SWEDEN:

(watches the fish
flop in the bucket)

Especially in thought. Our thoughts make spirals in
their world.

(looks at ABE)

We must keep them out of our minds at all costs.

ACT 2, SCENE 18

EXT. CAMPSITE. DUSK.

A knife bangs down upon the Steelhead's neck, severing its head, which is quickly scooped from the cutting board. The men have stoked the fire into a roaring blaze, besides which the canoe lies overturned, drying. The wind has picked up markedly and is coursing through the willows, causing them to stir. There is a drizzle of rain. Thunder rumbles somewhere distant. The camera circles the campsite lazily. ABE rakes the fire together to prevent the darkness having everything its own way.

SWEDEN:

(guts and cleans
the fish)

Were you awake all last night?

ABE:

(evasively, watching
him clean the fish)

I slept badly a little after dawn.

But the wind, of course—

SWEDEN:

I know.

(wrenches on something out of frame,
ripping out the fish's spine, probably,
causing black-red fish blood to spatter his lips)
But the wind won't account for all the noises.

(spits)

ABE:

(notes his bloodied hands)

Then you heard it too?

SWEDEN:

The multiplying countless little footsteps I heard....

(hesitates)

And that other sound—

ABE:

You mean above the tent, and the pressing down
upon us of something tremendous, gigantic?

(SWEDEN nods significantly)

Like the beginning of a sort of inner suffocation?

SWEDEN:

Partly, yes. It seemed to me that the weight of the
atmosphere had been altered—had increased enor-
mously, so that we should have been crushed.

ABE:

(determined to have it all out)

And that...

(points upwards where the gong-like
note hums ceaselessly, rising and falling
like wind)

What do you make of that?

SWEDEN:

(looks up and around)

It's *their* sound.... The sound of their world...
the humming in their region. The division here
is so thin it leaks through somehow. But, if
you listen, you'll find it's not so much above
us as around us. It's in the willows. It's the wil-

lows themselves humming...because here the
willows have been made symbols of that...

(his eyes flicker yellow in the firelight)

—which is against us.

ABE stares at him fearfully. The ground begins trembling with an awful rumble; the wind gusts suddenly. ABE appears to be on the verge of another mini-breakdown. SWEDEN

throws the cleaned fish into the fry-pan, which hisses and pops, leans close over the fire. The rumbling fades.

SWEDEN:

Now listen...the only thing for us to do is to go on as though nothing had happened, follow our usual habits, go to bed, and so forth; pretend we feel nothing and notice nothing. It is a question wholly of the mind, and the less we think about them the better our chance of escape. Above all, don't think, for what you think happens!

ABE:

(rather breathless)

All right ... all right, I'll try, but tell me one more thing first. Tell me what you make of those hollows in the ground all about us—
those sand-funnels?

SWEDEN:

(forgets to whisper in his excitement)

No!

The wind roars and the ground rumbles as SWEDEN jumps up—then clutches his chest. ABE starts, rushes to him. He helps fumble the pills from SWEDEN'S pocket, who holds a fist to his chest, gasping. ABE fetches his canteen, watches as SWEDEN swallows the pills, takes a swig. ABE helps him to sit back down again, the symptoms subsiding. The gall subsides as well.

SWEDEN:

(catches his breath at last)

I dare not, simply dare not, put the thought into words. If you have not guessed I am glad.

(lowers his voice to a near whisper)

Don't try to. They have put it into my mind; try your hardest to prevent them putting it into yours.

ABE:

(after a long pause)

Then perhaps we can talk of something else.
Like what those chest pains are you've been experiencing since New York. Like the suddenness of this whole trip, and its grandiosity.

Like all those pill bottles in your bag...
(glances at the willows, which are rattling)

Maybe we should talk about that.

SWEDEN stares at him for what seems a long time. It is now his turn to be speechless. At last he exhales and puts down the spatula, places his hands upon his knees.

SWEDEN:

(resigns)

It comes down to this at last, then.... Aye, why not. I had dreaded telling you for the ill effect it was sure to have. You were so *frail* when I first saw you in New York; I feared it would effect your own health. Now it seems, it might save you.

ABE:

Us, Sweden. It might save 'us.'

SWEDEN:

(shakes his head)

There isn't going to be an 'us,' Abe. Not after this trip. I would have thought you'd guessed by now. This has, indeed, been the 'Last Hurrah.' I wasn't joking when I said it was all down hill from here. It is, for me.

ABE:

(gravely, angrily, almost)

What is this?

SWEDEN:

(smiles warmly, sadly,
laughing a little at the
anticlimactic banality
of the moment)

This, my friend, is *good-bye*. I had hoped to tell
you...under better circumstances. Meh, there is
no such thing, of course—

ABE:

What are you talking about?

SWEDEN:

Esophageal cancer. Late stage. I—there are no
good options. I'm refusing chemo...

The camera begins to circle as SWEDEN explains, which has the effect of
focusing our attention on ABE'S stupefied, sagging face.

SWEDEN:

(continues)

...a life without adventure, of hospitals and clinics
which will in no way effect the outcome...

Refuse, old man. God has asked too much of me.

Manya knows. She understands. I can only—

ABE stands abruptly—paces briskly.

ABE:

Gads, what nonsense! We're just getting started...!

We've 18 years to catch up on. Why, after this
there's Saranac Falls, in Ottawa...

(looks at SWEDEN determinedly while pacing)
not to mention the Danube, which we promised to
return to one day.

(stops, glares)

This is a brand new era for us, Sweden. Don't
talk to *me* of death and good-byes....

SWEDEN looks down, fumbles for the spatula. He flips the fish which sizzles and pops.

ABE wanders to a place where the willows meet the bank, supports himself against a trunk. He looks out over the surging current, to where the two rocky crags appear to be making their final stand.

SWEDEN:

(doggedly, looking at him)

This has never been about starting something new, old man. It's about amends. It's about giving something back, something I took from you long ago. It *is* about 'good-bye;'

I'm sorry but that's just the way it is...

He stands, struggling a bit, approaches ABE.

SWEDEN:

...and honoring a friendship.

He places a hand upon ABE'S shoulder. ABE turns around, his eyes misted over.

SWEDEN:

A friendship, old man.

(shakes ABE'S shoulder)

ABE face reddens; the wind tosses their hair. He extends a hand meekly, rests it upon SWEDEN'S shoulder.

ABE:

(tries to look optimistic)

To last the ages?

SWEDEN:

Aye.

I suppose that will have to do.

ABE doesn't say anything as tears roll suddenly down his cheeks. SWEDEN pulls him against himself, holds him tightly, pats his back.

SWEDEN:

There, there, old man. Now, now...

He pushes ABE back, holds him at arms' length. He nods once, gives him a decisive shake. ABE'S moist eyes follow him as he turns and makes his way back toward the fire.

SWEDEN:

It's all in hand, old friend. I want to be cremated—

Manya knows where and how—and have my ashes

spread upon this river....

ABE:

Sweden, stop for a moment.

SWEDEN:

(turns to face him)

Yes, old friend?

ABE:

(beat)

How.... How long?

SWEDEN:

(plaintively, after pause)

Three months.

ABE can only look on, in shock, as SWEDEN goes about cooking the fish. His knees buckle quite suddenly; he finds a large rock and sits down. The rain comes as the clouds rumble and the wind gusts powerfully, shaking the willows. He scans their surroundings, not merely the campsite but the entire marshes, which are utterly desolate. The gong-like humming is everywhere. He watches SWEDEN preparing their dinner, then looks down at his own boots, which rest in the mud. Rain water wends between them. A close-up

highlights a hole in the toe of one of those boots, which seems to trigger a montage of random thoughts and images as the hole at the toe recalls the New York shop where he bought them and the difficulty the man had in fitting him. This is followed by a whole-some view of the modern skeptical world he is accustomed to move in at home: He thinks of pizza, and Starbucks coffee, yellow cabs and the New York sub-way system, and a dozen other things that proclaim the soul of ordinariness or utility. Then, as if physical proof of his positivity, he spies a potato in the sand.

The effect upon his emotions is immediate and astonishing. He leaps to his feet, holding the potato aloft.

ABE:

Gloomy old bull! And myself—imaginative idiot!

It all makes sense! You're defeatism and my over-sensitivity have made superstitious fools of us both!

He tosses the potato to SWEDEN, who fumbles it.

As if a drowned man and some missing objects

were the end of the world As if we lived in
the 1900s rather than 2008. My God, man—
you'll beat it! You'll go with no such flow!

Manya and I, we'll *force* you!

(extends his arms to the sky, rain pattering his face,
shouts mockingly)

Oh, do drown us! *Nature spirits....!* Take
us away!

He laughs boisterously...before noticing the nature of the sky. The clouds have twisted into an enormous spiral. His mirth fades quickly away as he watches the clouds racing.

There is a sudden, horrendous shrieking overhead, as though the universe itself were being ripped into two—and a sudden drop in the air as though something has come nearer. ABE and SWEDEN clap their hands over their ears, drop to their knees in the sand—within which spirals form before their very eyes! The wind blasts and the rain in- creases; the willows swell, seem to *grow*.

At length the sky grumbles—gives way to an unnatural calm. It is the eye of the storm.

ABE and SWEDEN look all about confusedly, still holding their heads. Dark blood is running from their noses. There follows a weird thudding sound, something they have not heard before. The thuds multiply in volume and succession so quickly that it seems for all the world as though a leviathan were charging at them from somewhere beyond....

At last there is silence. ABE turns to look at SWEDEN, utterly sobered, newly terrified.

SWEDEN has turned ashen white under the tan. He stands bolt upright in front of the fire, stiff as a rod, glaring at ABE.

SWEDEN:

(helpless, frantic; the
terror has caught him at last)

After that...we must go! We can't stay now;
we must strike camp this very instant and go
on—down the river.

ABE:

(shakes with fear)

In the dark? Sheer madness! The river's in flood
and we've only got a single paddle. Besides, we'll
only go deeper into their country! There's nothing
ahead for fifty miles but...

He trails off, looking around. A succession of cut-aways betrays the serried
ranks of willows closest, rustling in the wind—also the ranks behind them, and
the ranks be-

hind *them*.

SWEDEN sits down again in a state of semi-collapse. He is nearly un-done.
There is a loud splash as a massive chunk of bank falls away.

SWEDEN:

(whispers in awe and terror,
head in hands)

What on earth possessed you to do such a thing?

ABE rocks upon his feet. He reaches for a willow branch, steadies himself
as he stares out over the river. He stares at the two rocks; the squatter, more ro-
bust rock has nearly

vanished amidst the current, betraying only a pointy scalp, a tuft of reeds.
He hears a splash—sees something large loll in the water, something black and
golden-bronze, vaguely human, having eyes but no face, which catch the flick-
ering lightning and glint
a jaundiced yellow.

"Look after him," a watery voice seems to whisper...as the thing rolls around
again—shows itself to be an otter. It dives beneath the surface even as the more
robust rock goes down with a gurgle. Only the taller, thinnest rock remains.

The wind picks up again. There's a loud *flap!* which directs ABE'S attention
to the wil- low-corridor, and the plastic-covered corpse beyond. There is a
buzzing about his ear. He bats at it, looks at his fingers. There is nothing there.
We see and hear his thoughts as he recalls an earlier exchange with SWEDEN:

ABE:

You've re-covered our friend, good.

But this corridor...

Why would you do such a thing?

SWEDEN:

*It's like you said. Could be evidence of
foul play. We don't want him getting
away from us, do we? Some buzzard's
been at him already, clearly. This way
we can keep an eye on him.*

ABE turns around, sees the new funnels in the sand, which are larger and deeper than the ones previous, and beyond them—SWEDEN, leaning on his knees by the fire, shaking, small. He crosses round to his side of the fire, takes both his hands in his own, and kneels down beside him. He looks straight into his friend's frightened eyes.

ABE:
(firmly)

Whatever is about us, it did not take our food.
Nor, I believe, did it take our steering paddle.
Let us look for it. We'll make one more search
of the island—then turn in for the night. At sun-
rise we'll be off full speed for Athabaska. Now
pull yourself together, and remember your own
advice about not thinking fear!

SWEDEN tries to regain his composure. He seems physically smaller than before, helpless, drained of vitality, a vegetable. He nods meekly.

SWEDEN:

Okay. Okay. Have some fish...it's done.

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT 2, SCENE 19

EXT. WILLOW-ISLAND BANK. NIGHT.

The camera cranes in on ABE and SWEDEN as they search for the steering paddle, keep-ing close together, almost touching, groping among the bushes and along the bank. The humming overhead never ceases, but seems to grow louder as they increase their distance from the fire. The wind is savage; the rain, torrential. It is wet, muddy, shivery work!

ABE is grubbing away in the middle of a thickish clump of willows—where some drift-wood from a former flood has caught low among the branches—when lightning strikes a willow bush near their camp, splitting the tree down the middle, and causing it to fall in flaming halves over their hearth.

SWEDEN, whom has narrowly missed being struck, loses his balance, slides groping down the mud bank, into ABE. He seizes ABE'S shoulder in a grip that makes him half drop upon the sand, hard enough to break bone, even; his thick fingers gleam deaden white in the rain and lightning. He falls against ABE bodily, clutching him for support. We hear his breath coming and going in short gasps.

SWEDEN:

(whispers, terrified,
tears streaming from
the corners of his eyes)

Look! By my soul!

He points to the fire, some fifty feet away. A shaky, hand-held camera whips to what he is seeing—there, in front of the burning willow bush, the flames of which spiral in the wind, *something* is moving. We see it through a veil that hangs like the gauze drop-

curtain used at the back of a theatre—hazily a little. It is neither a human figure nor an animal, but gives the strange impression of being as large as several animals grouped together, like horses, two or three, moving slowly. It is rounded at the top, and moves all over upon its surface—coiling upon itself like smoke. And from one angle, it *is* smoke; smoke and nothing more. From another it is something else—something akin to an enormous shadowy spider, scuttling at them upon a thousand stem-like legs. Something

black-green and brown-red with silvery cilia all upon its surface; which both floats and crawls and is not alone.

SWEDEN tries to scramble away as it settles downwards through the bushes, but is stop-ped by ABE, who holds him like a vise. Their faces are but inches from the other, rain coursing in great rivulets down their cheeks, pouring off the tips of their noses; their hair is sopped, clinging to their foreheads.

SWEDEN:

(sobs)

Look, by God! It's coming this way!

Oh, oh! They've found us.

ABE:

(shakes him violently)

There is nothing there! It is smoke and fire that

you see! It is burning branches—your own fear!

SWEDEN calms down somewhat, still staring at the flames, twitching. He is clearly in some form of shock. The blackened branches crumble to pieces while ashes and embers scatter upon the wind.

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

ABE and SWEDEN clamber in, zipper the door shut against the elements. They climb into their bed rolls. ABE extinguishes the lantern, hangs it from the beam.

SWEDEN pauses while settling in, holds absolutely still.

SWEDEN:

Did you hear that? The river...it's risen over
the point of the island!

ABE listens, shakes his head.

ABE:

No, Sweden. It hasn't. The island will last until
morning.

Neither speak as they lay in their beds. It is strangely quiet in spite of the storm; meaning there are no unusual sounds either within or without it. Even the humming has dwindled to near nothing. The instants pass uneventfully, then—

SWEDEN:

(screams, sits up)

The tent's moving!

The tent's moving!

ABE:

The tent is not moving. It is swaying in the
wind, that is all. Remember, old friend—
she's a Gypsy tent. And a Gypsy tent never
comes down. Now lay down....

SWEDEN listens intently. He lies down again, tossing about on his cork mattress. At last he grows calmer and lays still. His breathing becomes regular and he might almost be sleeping. He rolls over abruptly.

SWEDEN:

What was that?

Nothing has sounded beyond the wind and the rain.

ABE:

It's nothing. You're in shock, perhaps. Try
to sleep.

SWEDEN:

But....

He trails off, then rolls onto his side, puffs up his pillow, slams his head upon it. ABE stares at the ceiling, at the shadows of the willows, which seems to arch and undulate over the billowing canvas.

ABE:

We'll look for the steering paddle again in the
morning. I tell you it is here.

The extinguished lantern sways from the beam. Everything is dark as the storm ravages their tent.

SWEDEN:

(near whispers)

And I tell you, it is not.

FADE TO BLACK.

Storm sounds carry over to next scene...

ACT 2, SCENE 20

Amidst the blackness and storm, we hear MANYA'S voice—watery, windy, distorted. She is moaning and sighing.

MANYA-VOICE:

Come with me...

The moaning and sighing continues amidst the elements, becomes harsher, more guttural.

MANYA-VOICE:

Come with me...

FADE IN:

ABE awakens, or thinks he awakens. His eyes flutter open to see MANYA sitting atop him, straddling him, grinding against him, her back arched, the black hair hanging in her face. Lightning flashes as she throws her head back and forward, as though making love to the storm. SWEDEN sleeps soundly, surreally, nearby, snoring, perhaps. The shadows of the willow branches flicker over the tent's walls and over MANYA'S skin, which is a blackened bronze.

MANYA-THING:

Come with me...!

She rocks back and forth violently, massaging her breasts with inhumanly-long fingers, fingers with hints of webbing between them.

MANYA-THING:

Come with me—!

ABE looks up at her, groggily a little: she appears to have grown somehow, her body become longer, thicker, more robust—her head presses into the roof of the tent, stretching the canvas. Lightning flashes white and harsh as a huge, extraordinarily-yellow

eye glints through sweaty, stringy locks of hair—rolls back in her head. ABE jolts—

grips her buttocks.

MANYA-THING:

Ah! Ah!

ABE awakens for true, with a start!—his eyes are wide and he is covered in sweat. His breath comes and goes in ragged gasps. He glances at SWEDEN, who is sleeping soundly. ABE throws off his blankets, climbs out of his bedroll.

EXT. THE WILLOW-CORRIDOR. NIGHT.

ABE emerges from the tent, sees what appears to be a dust-devil skipping and swirling across the sand. He turns on his flashlight and aims it at the disturbance—it is already gone, vanished into the channel cut through the willows. He walks slowly to the channel's opening—pauses. The willows shake and vibrate in the storm. The channel seems narrower than the day before; as if the bushes have inched closer to one another yet again. There is a splashing sound as ABE stares down their length at the corpse, the covering tarp of which rattles in the wind. He walks toward it. The willows murmur, seeming to watch him. The wind and rain are relentless.

The humming sound builds as he moves down their ranks, the ground rumbles. Reality it-

self seems to bend and warp as he walks, drawing the willows closer together, narrowing the corridor. He begins running—squeezes between the willows onto the opposite bank. His nose bleeds; he takes a piece of bathroom tissue from his pocket, stuffs it in his nose-

ril. He stares at the plastic-covered body, which bobs in the black current. The water all about it tumbles and roars, swirls and eddies. He steps out onto

the rocks, which are quite slippery, gets as close to the corpse as he can—slips suddenly. He crashes into the water, which gurgles and surges—grabs hold of a low-hanging willow branch. The flashlight bobs into the middle of the channel, is swept away by the mighty current. He muscles closer to the corpse, struggling to within 3 or 4 feet of it. But he can get no closer; the roots are too dense, the current too swift.

He grabs hold of the flapping tarp, tears it from the body. The corpse rocks and sways, appearing, as before, though we can't see its eyes, to gaze skyward. Its mouth hangs agape ala Munch's *The Scream*. What features are visible remain stretched and withered; a skeletal arm remains outreached—knotted, too-long fingers groping. The parka's sop-

ping, fur-lined hood remains drooped over the eyes and nose. ABE reaches for the hood, stretching and straining, but in vain. The willows shimmy and chatter, seeming almost to laugh. He glares at them angrily.

He grabs hold of a thickish branch and breaks it off at the elbow—the willows seem to shriek. He scowls at them, stripping the branch of its twigs. He points the branch at the hood's fur-lining, begins to push it back. The branch slips off almost immediately. He re-aligns the tip against the fur, resumes pushing. There is flash of white light and a sizzling whistle...

EXT. UP-RIVER. NIGHT.

A distress flare rockets crackling into the sky, burning orange-white, throwing off sparks. The gong-like humming stops dead.

EXT. THE RIVER'S EDGE. NIGHT.

ABE'S face is lit with harsh light as he watches the flare reach its crescendo and burn out—then fall, sparkling. He hears distant gunshots: three reports, one after the other—

Pop! Pop! Pop! There is a shrill, omniscient shrieking as something seems to scream at him over the water; the humming resumes, with a vengeance! The willows clamor as a massive gust of wind blasts back ABE'S hair, blasts the hood from the corpse's face—which isn't a face, but a *funnel*. The wind whips into its spiral, howls!

ABE stares at the corpse in horror: at the bowl-sized hole from its upper lip on; at the red-black mottling, which glistens like the insides of an abalone shell. There is a buzzing and a whirring; he bats at his ear. The elements seem to settle as he stares at the gory funnel, but the buzzing continues a moment longer.

ABE cocks his head, listening intently. The sound dies away at last. The river gurgles and whispers. The face which is not a face star-

es back at him, the funnel above its twisted mouth and brown teeth looking for all the world like an enormous ear.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

INT. THE TENT. NIGHT.

SWEDEN sleeps, but it is no ordinary sleep. Because his lids are partially open we can see that his eyes are rolled back in his skull, and his breath comes and goes in such long, rattling gasps that he appears almost to be dying. It's odd, too, how the skin of his cheeks seems so papery, and how an invisible something appears to be tugging at it, *stressing* it.

We notice, too, that his ears have been stopped up with little wads of toilet tissue. His arms meanwhile are resting *above* his head; as the camera widens out we can see why—

his wrists have been lashed to a tent pole. The camera tilts down as a determined-looking ABE ties a knot in the rope which secures SWEDEN'S feet, cinches it tight. He stares at SWEDEN gravely, twisting wads of tissue, wedging them into his own ears. He picks up their kerosene can, which he has fastened to a length of rope, swings it over his shoulder. He picks up SWEDEN'S machete and takes the Coleman lantern from the beam, exits the tent.

EXT. THE CAMPSITE FROM ABE'S POV. NIGHT.

We move over the sand which is riddled with funnels of all shapes and sizes. The wind stirs the granules into little vortices as we pass. The camera tilts up as we approach the willow corridor: narrowed now to the slimmest margin. It seems to *breath* as we close upon it; the machete enters the frame, flashing, as ABE hacks his way through the bush. There is a high-pitched shrieking...

EXT. THE RIVER'S EDGE. NIGHT.

ABE half-circles the bobbing corpse, mindful but sure-footed upon the rocks and the ragged bank, pumping the metal canister's plunger, extending its hose as far as posib-

le, soaking the body with kerosene. The lantern sits upon a boulder, providing light. When he has finished he hacks off a longish branch and tosses it upon the sand; he un-screws the canisters cap, pours the last of the kerosene along the wood. He positions the stick so that it bridges the bank and the

corpse, anchors its tip in the face's red-black funnel. He kneels close to the sand, touches a lighter to the end of the branch, ignites it.

Flames race along the branch and into the funnel—the corpse erupts into an inferno. As it does so there is a horrendous scream, a howling and a humming, a *buzzing*, as though he has ignited a nest of wasps. The flames whip upward in the pitchy dark, licking and lash-ing, spiraling in the wind. ABE stands back, watching the body burn, watches as it crumbles like spent wood, spitting and popping. The screeching becomes a squealing, which is drowned in the roar of the river, as the fire burns flat upon the water. ABE turns toward the willows, scowls.

ABE:

What the fuck are you looking at!

He kicks the canister into their ranks, picks up the lantern. He heads back toward the camp, shoving his way through the bushes. They are oddly silent.

EXT. THE CAMPSITE. NIGHT.

ABE crouches by the canoe, examining it by lantern-light, runs his fingers over the mend. He nods to himself, standing—flips the boat over onto its bottom. He drags it to the bank.

He stands, exhaling, gazes down-river. The relentless waters continue to rise. There is the faintest hint of dawn on the horizon. He glances at his watch, but its glass is broken ... its seconds-hand stands still.

He strides to where “Jumbo” lays spread out on the sand, starts picking up its contents, shoving them in. The willows stir ever slightly.

INT. THE TENT. DARK BEFORE DAWN.

SWEDEN'S face appears gravely contorted as ABE climbs into the tent, hangs the lantern from the beam. He crouches at his friend's side, noting the jaundiced hue of the skin, the twist and stretch of the mouth. Each inhalation is now a prolonged, moaning gasp....

ABE slaps his face, causing him to stir only slightly. It is as though he is struggling to return from a million miles away; his eyes lolling in their sockets, his body constricting. Then he is gone—again, dragging the air in and out as though dying, eyes rolled round white, tongue lolling. ABE slaps him again, harder, shakes him.

ABE:

Sweden!

ABE pounds on his chest, shakes him again.

Sweden!

SWEDEN stirs, coming out of it a moment. He focuses on ABE, appearing almost no-

rmal. The transformation is striking, impossible, even. Rain pounds against the canvas.

SWEDEN:

(groggily)

What is it, old man?

ABE:

It's *you*.... It's your breathing. There's something terribly wrong with you! You had better sit up a bit—

SWEDEN:

Gah! Let me be ... damned fool. Go to sleep....

ABE:

Not on your life, old man! We're getting out of here—
the canoe is ready. We have only to wait for the light.

Do you hear me? Sweden?

And he is gone again, like that!

ABE sits back abruptly, scrunching into a ball on his bedroll, the machete balanced against his knees. He glances at his watch, looks through a netted portal at the night.

He reaches up and turns up the lantern, watches SWEDEN intently. Every so often he kicks him in the legs—is answered by a mumble.

SWEDEN:

Sleep....

ABE rocks back and forth on his haunches, grips the machete.

ABE:

Not now, old man. Not *here*.

He readjusts his position, settles in for the push toward dawn. We hear several sections of the bank fall away in succession. The storm jostles the tent. The wind and the rain pour on relentlessly.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

Now amidst the blackness, the fall of rain becomes increasingly suspect, increasingly purposeful. We glimpse a vignette from earlier: SWEDEN sitting upon his crate, utterly un-done.

SWEDEN:

*(whispers in awe and terror,
head in hands)*

What on earth possessed you to do such a thing?

And another, as SWEDEN stands bolt upright in front of the fire, stiff as a rod, glaring at ABE.

SWEDEN:

*After that...we must go! We can't stay now;
we must strike camp this very instant and go
on—down the river.*

FADE IN:

Lightning flickers as ABE opens his eyes, sits up with a start. The lantern has gone out.

He looks at the tent wall.

INT. TENT WALL. NIGHT.

The cruel shadows of the willow branches dance in the lightning's flash. Though threatening in appearance they are nonetheless mere branches, casting appropriate shadows for bushes 50 feet away.

ABE squeezes his eyes shut, tries to ignore his surroundings. Lightning flashes an instant later, accompanied by a flurry of patterings. Again he looks to the tent wall.

INT. TENT WALL. NIGHT.

We see the whipping shadows of the willow branches, bigger, closer. Their aspect seems to have changed somewhat; they appear almost to be stretching, reaching.

ABE glances toward SWEDEN, who breathes in and out laboriously, as before. ABE sits up straight, struggling to remain alert—kicks SWEDEN'S legs. But SWEDEN does not stir. There is a sudden, powerful gust of wind.

INT. TENT WALL. NIGHT.

The wind moans as the canvas is pushed in. ABE reaches up, tries to steady it. A kinetic burst of lightning highlights the willow branches: they are flailing, twisting, groping—huge!

ABE sits bolt upright, breathing hard, reaches for the lantern, but is unable to ignite it automatically. He fumbles for his matchbook with trembling hands, strikes a match several times—re-lights the lantern. It flares to life, white and harsh. He shakes SWE-DEN violently.

ABE:

Dammit, man! Wake up!

SWEDEN still does not respond, which seems impossible. ABE picks up his friend's flashlight. He reaches for the tent-flap's zipper, starts to unzip—there is a snapping as

of bonds being broken; a hand grips his arm, squeezes. The hand is SWE-DEN'S. It has been transformed into willow-wood; its fingers are willow stems. ABE looks him, un-believing.

SWEDEN chokes and gasps. The whites of his eyes aren't white but are a dead-en gray,

his pupils are yellow. His flushed face looks as though it has been snared by many fish hooks and is being reeled in from all directions. ABE tries to free himself frantically— SWEDEN will not let go.

SWEDEN:

(gurgles blackish ichors)

Don't panic. Don't try to resist.

(his words do not come to us by way of his lips at all!)

Go with the—

There is a sickening crunch as his face implodes from the upper-lip on, swirling in like a whirlpool, gargling.

ABE screams and rips away from him, seizes desperately at the tent-flap's zipper. He un-zips it rapidly, turning on his flashlight, yanks the flap open—

INT. TENT DOOR. NIGHT.

The willows are right there—green-black in the flashlight's beam. They are crowded about the door.

ABE gasps, yells. There is a sound of tearing canvas. His eyes dart to the wall.

INT. TENT WALL. NIGHT.

A groping, jagged willow branch tears through the canvas. A series of like shots follow in rapid succession—the tent is under attack, it is being torn to shreds. The lantern swings wildly to and fro.

ABE tries to protect himself with his hands, which are quickly slashed to ribbons. The tent appears to collapse as though crushed beneath the willows' weight. Rain, too, is

gushing in, as though the river itself were on the attack. ABE'S screams are rapidly muffled by a phantasmagoria of willow branches, piling in through the shorn canvas, multiplying impossibly, goring his cheeks, slithering from the funnel in SWEDEN'S face—burying ABE alive as he shrieks and flails and kicks, smothering him.

ACT 3, SCENE 3

INT. THE TENT. GOLDEN DAWN.

ABE awakens suddenly, leaning against a tent pole, gasping for breath. The collapsing canvas glows with burnt-umber light as he hacks in the smoke, which is filling the tent—the floor is on fire! We hear the sound of multitudinous soft patterings all around us, as if the tent were being surrounded. SWEDEN is gone. ABE notices what remains of his bonds among the flames; they are burning, blackening—curling upon themselves. The gong-like humming is intense. ABE scrambles for the door, which hangs open, bursts out of the tent's shambles...

He stands, the camera spinning wildly about him. There is no rain, no wind, only a torrent of humming that surrounds him completely and seems to come out of every quarter of the heavens at once. It is that same familiar humming—gone mad! A swarm of great invisible bees might just as well be above and about him. He claps his hands over his ears as the sound seems to thicken the very atmosphere...

ABE looks about confusedly: all round the tent and about the hearth (where they had seen the moving shadows the night before) there are deep funnel-shaped hollows in the sand, exactly similar to the ones found over the island previously, only far bigger and deeper, beautifully formed, and wide enough in some instances to admit the whole of a man's foot and leg. Indeed, some are large as or larger than manholes! It is stunning, too, how each seems to have its own cant and character. A rapid series of cut-aways connects the humming to the funnels in the viewers' mind.

ABE gasps for air as the atmosphere seems to crush down, hears a clatter as the last remaining tent pole collapses.

He looks down at the sand again, notices SWEDEN'S bare footprints for the first time. They lead to the willows with an incredible stride; both the prints and the stride grow longer as they extend out from the camp, vanishing altogether before they reach the willows.

The dawn is just breaking; a faint golden light spreads upwards over the clouds from a thin strip of clear horizon. No wind stirs. ABE can just make out the bushes and river beyond, and the pale sandy patches. He spies the canoe, loaded up and ready to go at the bank.

He begins running frantically to and fro about the island, calling SWEDEN by name, shouting at the top of his voice, whatever words come into his head. But the willows smother his voice, and the humming muffles it, so that the sound only travels a few feet round.

ABE plunges amongst the bushes, tripping headlong, tumbling over roots, and scraping his face as he tears this way and that among the preventing branches. Then, quite unexpectedly, he comes out upon the island's end, sees a large, dark figure outlined between the water and the sky.

It is SWEDEN. He is standing thigh-deep in the current, completely naked. He is much bigger than he was, the skin of his back a golden, blackened bronze. He is so large that his wide shoulders appear to actually curve from the bulk, nor is his new size consistent with that of a man, for it seems to push out from *within*; stretching the skin, bringing his musculature and spinal column into sharp relief, emanating beyond his physical body to form a kind of shimmering aura, as though we were seeing him through the convection waves of a great forest fire. We notice for the first time that he no longer has any hair upon his head; he has shaved himself completely bald.

ABE looks at the bank, sees what appears to be some form of altar. A blanket has been spread upon the sand, atop which sit SWEDEN'S boots, and his clothes neatly folded; a shaving pot sits nearby, along with a bloodied straight razor. A crude but immense spiral has been drawn in the sand.

ABE calls out to him among the humming and the buzzing, moves closer, sees that SWEDEN he has already stepped further into the current, up to his waist. ABE pauses at the edge of the bank, still calling after him. SWEDEN does not turn around. ABE begins picking up small stones, throwing them, yelling. The rocks *plop!* and *plunk!* in the water—

one bounces off SWEDEN'S broad shoulder; another bounces off his head. At last SWE- DEN turns around...

A close-up reveals his face to be the same golden, blackened bronze as his back, but the most obvious change is his too-large eyes, the whites of which have become a blood-shot blue-gray; the pupils of which glint a mucous egg yolk-yellow. Nor are his irises round but rather black, spidery spirals. He has shaved off all his facial hair, including his eye-brows, and we see, too, that he has cut himself—and drawn bloody spirals all about his face and body. He doesn't look at ABE directly but rather in his general direction. His head is canted queerly; he is looking up slightly. He acts and looks as though he were blind.

SWEDEN-THING:

(voice watery, distorted)

The river. It eats your eyes.

ABE steps out onto the slippery rocks, stunned, horrified, but refusing to yield to his fear.

ABE:

(furious)

What have *you done*?

What are you doing!

SWEDEN-THING:

(as though confused

by his own thoughts)

I'm taking the way of the wind and the water.

I'm going in—to Them.

He cants his head still further, listening, appearing, in his fugue state, to be experiencing some sort of feedback—from his own voice. Indeed, the humming sounds like feedback, whining whenever he speaks. He turns back around, continues walking into the current...

ABE steps farther out upon the rocks, tries to talk him down, begging him...

ABE:

(pleads)

For the love of Heaven, old man! Resist it!

I promised her! Promised Manya! I promised I
would look after you!

SWEDEN pauses as the current rages around him. The water is nearly to his chest. When he speaks his voice is echoed and distorted, more so even than before.

SWEDEN-THING:

Is she so important to him? Is *he* so important to you? These bundles of sensory organs; wrapped in... skeins of decaying matter? Are their temporary little individual *husks* that important?

ABE:

Yes! Oh, yes!

SWEDEN-THING:

(beat)

Do you have any idea how limited and temporal their little individual husks are?

ABE:

(nods, tears welling in his eyes,
streaming down his cheeks)

Yes.

SWEDEN-THING:

And they're still worth preserving? Even in pain—
even in decay?

ABE:

(steps closer)

Yes, old friend. Yes.

SWEDEN stares at him, uncomprehending, and yet—he tilts his ear, hearing something only he can hear. He looks off blindly; his eyes have changed even as they've talked, be-

coming less clearly-defined, fogging over. He starts to smile, as though beholding some-thing magnificently beautiful; the look of wonder instantly becomes one of terror, of ut-

ter, withering epiphany. He screams to curdle one's blood. It is not a human scream so much as the scream we have heard previously, the scream associated

with the willows, the souls of willows. He continues walking into the water—is already up to his chest.

SWEDEN-THING:

Oh my God! God!—it's beautiful! Lapithae!

ABE leaps onto a rock still further out, nearly slips.

ABE:

No, no—! Come back, Sweden, dear God!

Please! Do it for Manya!

SWEDEN keeps going.

ABE:

For Manya, Sweden! For Manya!

SWEDEN pauses again, looks back in ABE'S general direction. He stares at him across the water.

SWEDEN-THING:

(bitterly)

Her mortal life, you mean? Hear genetic pedigree?
How can you think it *worth* preserving? This life
which isn't Life—this chaos of parts, each thinking
itself whole! This childish battling to the death
for external things? A necropolis of personal agency
is what it is—of disease, of pain, of separateness.
Sweep aside the trash and rubbish men seek outside
themselves and the wings of their smothered souls
might stir again!

He takes a step toward ABE.

SWEDEN:

(grows more and more intense)

Fame, wealth, position...the sham and emptiness
of modern life; its drab vulgarity, the worthlessness
of individual human aims—the vanity! I *loathe*
this prison of darkness, this suffocating loneliness,
this body which has betrayed me. Cities and crowds,
poverty and strife, competition and bickering... It's
so amazing and perplexing to me now; how could
they ever have devised such wild and childish ef-

forts—all in the wrong direction? How could any thinking man hold up his head and walk along the street with dignity if that was what he believed? Is a man satisfied with it worth keeping alive at all?

What bigger scheme could ever use him?

He closes to within about 50 feet of ABE, holds. The current froths and gurgles about his abdomen. His eyes have fogged almost completely over.

SWEDEN-THING:

Their dreary make-believe has all my life oppressed me. Now I know why. They have lost their way so utterly. I can no longer quite understand how such feverish strife is possible for intelligent beings; no part of me knows sympathy with it. The thrill-seekers and week-end warriors, the milquetoast tourists; the soccer moms and their neutered, nervous husbands. All of them with pain in their hearts and weariness in their eyes, rushing furiously to catch a little pleasure, which they call happiness. I find it difficult now to endow them with any sense of life; but see them groping in darkness, snatching with hands of shadow at still thinner shadows! SUVs, Hummers, pension plans, McMansions—while just beyond, beneath their very noses! Blazes this great, living thing, this *Urwelt*, this Gaia, this Over-soul which encompasses everything.... If you dream you can move among them and not become like them, well, dream on! Dream on but dream alone.

His head jerks up suddenly, as though he were being puppeteered, as though he were being pulled, forcibly—back into Them.

SWEDEN-THING:

I'm coming! Coming home, at last! Take me!

He turns and strides, with supernatural sure-footedness, into the raging current.

ABE:

(pursues over the rocks)

No, no!

A foot slides out from under him and he falls, hard. His head cracks against a boulder. He

sprawls across the stones unconscious as an underwater view shows his face breaking the ceiling, turn blue-white in the icy current. His hair floats about him like freshwater reeds.

SWEDEN pauses, hearing the splash. He turns to look at back, neck-deep in the current, sees ABE laid out upon the rocks, his head beneath the water. He looks on, his face at an

angle, his eyes foggy-yellow. There's a powerful *swoosh!* nearby. SWEDEN glances to

where the two distinctive outcroppings formerly stood—sees that the surviving thin one has gone under as well. He continues to stare at the spot as the water gurgles and eddies.

ACT 3, SCENE 4

EXT. UNDER THE WATER. GOLDEN-DAWN.

ABE'S eyes spring open amidst the haze and small, flowing debris—they are golden-yellow, their pupils are spirals. The camera whips sideways through the depths, turns forward, races along the river's bottom as the pebbles scatter before it. It swings wildly around boulders, leaps over stumps, weaves between willow roots, going faster and faster.... Ahead of us we see the legs, or the fins, of the MANYA-THING, swift as an undine, darting away into the dark. Or it is only the swishing tails of the salmon, per-haps!

They break the surface even as we do, leaping to the sides, but while they return to the water—we do not! We skim its surface, dipping in and out as we care, splashing in the

torrents, playing, leaping, cantering! From the spaces between trees others come to join us—great, ephemeral beings, invisible as the wind itself, and as mighty. Only sometimes do we catch a hint—in the way a mass of fog undulates, assuming for an instant a new character, a fourth configuration; in a surging spray of river-water, or something reflected in an eddying pool—of the luster of their glorious bodies, golden bronze in the sunlight; or of the flash of their awful eyes.

Together we swoop into the racing air above the river, penetrating its hazy mists. We race like sky-wraiths over the water and then arc away—out over the

forests, turning and circulating as by a common consent, wheeling suddenly together as if a single desire actuates our entire mass. One instinct spread, as it were, among the lot, shared instantly, conveying to each at once the general impulse. Our movements in this are like those of birds—whose flight in coveys obeys the order of a collective consciousness of which each single

one is an item—expressions of one single Bird-Idea behind, distributed through all.

Below a certain level, though, we never go; the willows and other trees know us not. But how we love the open, windy heights! We tear along the mountains in the dawn, the awful speed distorting everything. A living Earth goes with us everywhere. Until we crest at

last a snow-cruised summit, and see spread about the valley a thundering herd—a herd not of bulls or of centaurs but both! For as we sweep amongst it the forms keep changing; seeming one instant mere bulls, but turning and growing into centaurs, male and female, whenever the light seems right. Their thousands of hooves kick up a purple-golden haze as we soar above and beyond them.

At length we come upon the haunts of men: roads and bridges, rails and electrical lines. Over the cities of the world we hear the demon Civilization sing its song of terror and desolation. Its music of destruction shakes the nations, drowning the little Pipes of Pan.

It is here that some of us break off, peeling away to wind among the towers, until those

remaining climb for the clouds, which race it seems impossibly fast, *spiraling* as to create an opening—a Gateway. The moon-blanchd Gate of horn and ivory swings open; and we, the *Urwelt*, are admitted. The consciousness of the Earth possesses us. We pass *within*.

It is here—while skipping over the curvature of the world, while soaring like phant-

oms through a higher realm entirely, a realm which would set our feet afire were we still to claim them—that we sense the presence of still others. Everywhere we fringe them; they haunt this entire region. They spin, looming and splendid, beyond the hazy ephemera; one blushes red, with war-some thoughts, perhaps; another promises seduction, hidden among her vales.

And beyond these, separated by a band of ice and rock all broken, lie still greater person-ages, awesome and alone. They brood hugely with a kind of deep magnificence, one bearing an icy scythe while another looms as a tempestuous juggernaut: Jovian moods racing savagely over his face, struggling with himself always, his great red eye swirling. And beyond these lie still more—gas giants and nebulae, suns and quasars, gods and goddesses, all of them brooding in the darkness, proud, strong, and tragic. For, standing aloof from all the rest, in isolation, too potent for expression, they know loneliness.

Yet we are not alone. For sometimes, with two of our kind, one appearing male, the other distinctly female, we fly away from the others, on little journeys of our own, for the Gar-den is hear as it is below. It is everywhere at once, and its frontiers are not less than the horizons of the world! These two seem nearer to us than the rest—indeed, we feel we know them and have been with them before. Their big golden brown eyes continually seek our own with pleasure. It almost seems as if we had all three been separated long away from one another, and have at last returned. These two keep close to us; we run and dance together.

If this is death—how exquisite! To race thus over the world, keeping pace with an eternal dawn, it seems as simple as for the Earth herself to spin through space. All frontiers crossed, all barriers behind. The awful speed explained. Flowing together like water, filling chamber after chamber, melting down walls and ceilings, eating away divisions softly and irresistibly—we climb into silence ... and in that silence know ourselves One—the Earth, merging all moods and disunion of our separate Selves into a single thing ... that sees itself whole, knows itself divine.

We look down at her loveliness, having consummated our union with her. In every item of her being lay the wonder of her perfect form—a sphere. A cloud-spiraled circle, complete, as our deliverance into ecstasy is complete. The sun comes peeking over her bosom

—its golden-white rays lancing past her, temporarily blinding us, and setting her outline on fire.

In this flashing moment, when a second seems a thousand years, we understand the splendor of the heavens beyond. Earth in her turn is but a mood in the Consciousness of the Universe; that Universe again is mothered by another vaster one...and the total that includes them all is not the gods—but God.

ACT 3, SCENE 5

EXT. THE RIVER'S EDGE. GOLDEN DAY.

SWEDEN pulls ABE choking and gasping, drowning, his skin blue, from the current, into the sun. He drags him to the sandy bank, to safety, where he begins administering

whatever moves are necessary to resuscitate a drowning victim. At last ABE coughs up

what seems gallons of river water, his color returning, and they both collapse, exhausted, upon the sand. They breath in and out harshly, catching their breaths. SWEDEN has returned to normal, as has ABE—save that his wild hair and beard now bear touches of gray. They are bathed in the golden light of dawn. There is a long silence.

ABE:

(comes around
to reality slowly)

It's my life I owe you, old man....

SWEDEN stands, helps ABE up also.

SWEDEN:

(pulls on his
trousers)

I had nothing to do with it. They—

ABE:

(eyes dancing in the sun,
his hair hanging sopping)
They've found another victim?

SWEDEN:

Aye. That's all.
(exhales, smiles)

I feel quite safe, I mean.

He looks around the island and out over the river. Its waters have calmed considerably, its overall level gone down.

SWEDEN:

It'll be a clear day, I can tell. We'll brunch
while the boat dries her last...and then, God
willing, be away from this awful place.

ABE:

(appears lost
in thought)

Back to the Big Apple, indeed.

He looks around, gazes down-river. SWEDEN does the same. They stand side by side, framed in golden light. Perhaps not so oddly, the place seems quite beautiful now. A reverent silence sets in. The men look like they have aged 10 years since they set out.

ABE:

(near whispers)

My God, Swede. What have we done?

SWEDEN appears to think about it, gazing down-river. At length he clasps ABE'S shoulder.

SWEDEN:

Let us not speak of it.

(beat)

Whatever it was.... It was not of—
or for—ourselves.

ABE:

(sees an otter flop in
the current, roll over
upon its back)

Aye.

Something *thunks* at their feet, then, something which has come to them on the current and now bobs, caught, by the willow roots. It appears to be their steering paddle. ABE snatches it up, laughing incredulously, hands it to SWEDEN.

ABE:

See? Told you so, you damned old Pagan!

SWEDEN examines it carefully, shakes his head.

SWEDEN:

It's a steering paddle, all right.

But it's not ours.

He peers up-river. ABE follows his gaze, each of them spying something upon the water's surface, a black shape of some kind, sweeping down toward them from the falls.

We quickly realize that it is the LITTLE OLD MAN FROM ALABAMA'S punt, empty, and behind it, bobbing and swaying, the LITTLE OLD MAN himself, dead upon the waves. ABE and SWEDEN stand and stare as first the boat, then the body, drift pass them. Yet, before either of them have had time properly to recover from the unexpected shock, we see that a stump in mid-stream has caught the cadaver and that a movement of the current is turning the corpse round so that its deaden face is uppermost, staring at the sky. In another moment it will be swept away.

SWEDEN begins immediately to move toward it, mumbling something we do not catch about a "proper burial"—then abruptly drops upon his knees on the sand, covering his eyes with his hands. ABE is beside him in an instant, consoling him.

For, just as the body swung round to the current and the face turned full towards us, he saw what SWEDEN saw—how the LITTLE OLD MAN'S face, from the upper lip on, is not in fact a face at all—but rather a funnel; red-black and glistening, beautifully formed, and exactly similar in shape and kind to the sand-funnels they have found all over the island.

ABE:

(mutters under his breath)

It is nothing to fear, old friend. It is
only their mark. Their awful mark.

And when they have turned their eyes again from his ghastly face to the river, the current has done its work, and the body has been swept away into mid-stream and is already beyond their reach and almost out of sight, turning over and over on the waves like an otter.

DISSOLVE TO:

ACT 3, SCENE 6

EXT. THE RIVER. DAY.

We see *The Centaurita* moving gracefully down-river through beautiful scenery. A series of cut-aways shows banks teeming with life; we see a majestic stag with a massive spread of antlers; catch a fleeting glimpse of a gray wolf, peering at us through the brush;

observe every manner of flying and creeping thing. ABE takes it all in, tosses a bit of bread

ad to an otter swimming alongside. It rolls upon its back, tearing the bread into smaller bits, gulps them down. ABE rows, and as he rows he watches his friend, too; watches the great arms move the oar, watches the humble smile when the man looks back at him over his shoulder—just to make sure he's there, just to make sure he's okay. Soon they begin passing more settled areas, then outright houses and buildings and modern infrastructure,

and finally a small, steel bridge, atop which sits a 4x4 Jeep, and at whose rail stands MA-

NYA, smiling down at them, alone.

ABE looks up at her as SWEDEN disembarks, rocking the boat. MANYA looks down at ABE, the smile cutting the corners of her mouth, her black hair seeming to re-shape her ears and face, so that she looks for all the world like an elf. She is wearing a parka with a fur-lined hood. ABE looks forward into the prow, forgetting for a moment that SWEDEN

has already gotten out.

A close-up dwells upon the empty prow.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRANSITION TO CENTRAL PARK. DAY.

The camera circles ABE slowly, dissolving seamlessly to ABE against a blurred-out backdrop of green and gray. His gray-flecked hair is cut so short that he appears almost bald; he is clean-shaven. He is wearing a gray flannel suit and a bow-tie. The camera completes its circle having widened out; the ambient sounds of New York City come up slowly. ABE sits upon a bench in Central Park, a Styrofoam container and a cup of Starbucks coffee at his side. The container hangs open; he is feeding the ducks what is left of his lunch. We hear horns and busses, the hustle and bustle of the city. But we hear, too, the ducks quacking—the water splashing. ABE glances at his new watch. He gets up, gathering his trash and his briefcase, and heads back across the lawn, back to the bus stop. Thunder rumbles somewhere in the distance. It is a gray day.

INT. ELEVATOR. DAY.

A bell *dings* as ABE steps into the elevator, packed as always with everyone returning from their lunch break. This group thins, however, as the elevator

ascends, until only ABE and one other remain; ironically, it is the same WOMAN WITH CELL-PHONE as before.

WOMAN WITH CELL PHONE:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well he doesn't know!

(laughs)

Well, not yet, anyway. Oh, I know, I know!

My life is *so* screwed up...

The elevator reaches ABE'S floor; the bell *dings*. ABE leans close to the woman.

ABE:

It's a marvel you think it worth living!

They look at each other practically nose to nose as the doors slide open; ABE exits. As the doors roll shut we see the woman shrinking back, face flushed, appearing as though she could fly into a rage or burst into tears.

JOSHI rolls back in his chair, a telephone cradled against his shoulder, as ABE passes his office.

JOSHI:

Atta boy, Abraham! Go get 'em!

ABE enters his cubicle, tosses his briefcase onto a spare chair. He has barely had time to sit down when an intern is at the door.

INTERN:

Final installment of "The Centaur" needs faxed to press by midnight. Don't forget.

ABE:

(looks up, nods)

Mmmm.

His chair squeaks as he settles in; his fingers hover over the keyboard. The oppression of the city looms all about his cubicle and outside the window: straight lines and towers, box

-es, suffocation. ABE sits back in his chair, clearly troubled. A series of cut-aways shows

the pictures on his walls and over his keyboard: all those river-runs with SWEDEN; hap-py moments with LILITH—wild, young beloved faces in a wild, young beloved environ-

ment. ABE'S potted plants meanwhile are wilting. He gets up and fetches the water pitc-her, proceeds to water them, but only a few scant drops fall out. He sets it on the sill slow

-ly, leans close to the glass. Through his pale refection we see the city extending toward the horizon, hazily a little, boxes within boxes, gridlock without end. His computer *dings*:

"You've got mail..."

He sits down at his station, opens his email. The newest message is from a MadeInManya @yahoodotcom. He stares at it gravely, a hundred potentialities racing through his mind, over his face. He opens it at last. The message reads: "Dad and I are in New York. I'm in the lobby of *The Register* now. Come on down?—Manny."

ABE freezes a moment, again, processing all the potentialities. At last he gathers up his coat and briefcase, heads out. JOSHI rolls back in his chair as he re-passes, phone still stuck to his head. He appears utterly confused, as though ABE were some alien life form

he simply cannot comprehend.

The elevator doors roll open in the lobby. ABE sees a short, lithe figure standing before the fireplace—MANYA, wearing a long, black coat. She has cut her hair so that it ext-

ends no further than her neckline. She turns to face ABE as he approaches, and both he and we immediately notice her extended stomach. They embrace rather awkwardly. She has a tiny flower tucked above her ear, which ABE deliberately avoids. Gray, hazy light

slants through the tall, thin windows.

ABE:

(glances her up
and down)

You look well.

(his expression is
one of delight mix-
ed with disappoint-
ment)

And congratulations.

MANYA:

It's good to see you, Abraham.
And thank you. I see you shaved
this...

(waves her hand over
her chin)

ABE:

Aye. What do you think?

MANYA:

(nods)

I think you're very handsome either
way. But that you should re-grow it.
It is a good thing for a man to have,
a beard. It is how he is born. And for
an *Urmench*...

(smiles playfully)

It is a must.

ABE looks at her as a little of the old attraction stirs. Then his expression changes and he puts a hand on her shoulder.

ABE:

Where is Sweden?

MANYA doesn't say anything, only stares up at him. Her dark eyes are impossible to read.

ACT 3, SCENE 7

INT. A YELLOW CAB. LATE AFTERNOON.

ABE and MANYA sit in the backseat of a yellow-cab, which is slowly inching its way through traffic. MANYA tells him that SWEDEN is at the Wilshire Clinic; that they

had a choice where this "last ditch" procedure would be performed, and that they chose NYC because SWEDEN wanted to see ABE one last time.

MANYA:

I think it's time...

She loses control quite suddenly, cries a little on his shoulder.

ABE holds her head, squeezes his eyes tightly shut. He tries not to breathe in the scent of her hair nor the flower tucked behind her ear. It is as though the effort causes him phys-

ical pain. The cab's windows are dappled with beads of water; there's been a light rain.

MANYA composes herself, sits up straight. Her shining black hair runs away from his fingers. She looks out her window as the city passes; at the millions of people and their

manic activity, at the towering buildings which block out the sky. But rather than being

horrified she is filled with wonder.

MANYA:

(looks up in awe)

Your city is amazing, Abraham. It's
statue becomes you.

ABE appears hurt by this, rejects it.

ABE:

It is not 'my city,' Manya. And it
belongs to, nor becomes, no one.

MANYA:

But you live here. You don't see the
forest through the trees, as they say.
It wears a mask for you—while I, a
new-comer, see it naked and complete.

(beat)

The gates of horn and ivory are here,
Abraham. You just don't see them.

ABE looks at her, saying nothing, then turns his attention out the window.

MANYA:

You came to us in the woods, unmanned,
I think, by your isolation and loneliness.
And you saw things, perhaps, as a child.
But I come *here* as a child, and I tell you,
those same things are here.

ABE stares out his rain-drizzled window, at the hurrying pedestrians and the smoke-belching buses, at the Manhattanites with their umbrellas and their dogs, at the poli-

cemen and panhandlers. The SWEDEN-THING'S words come back to him in frag-

ments: *They have lost their way so utterly...all of them with pain in their hearts and weariness in their eyes, rushing furiously...groping in darkness, snatching with hands*

of shadow at still thinner shadows...if you dream you can move among them and not become like them, well, dream on! Dream on but dream alone.

ACT 3, SCENE 8

EXT. THE WILSHIRE CLINIC. LATE AFTERNOON.

The cab pulls into the clinic's circular drive, squeaks to a halt. ABE and MANYA get out, approach the entrance. ABE escorts her with a hand placed gently on the small

of her back. They climb the steps and go in.

INT. SWEDEN'S HOSPITAL ROOM. LATE AFTERNOON.

ABE and MANYA approach up the corridor.

MANYA:

(indicating the room)

It's here...

She pauses in the doorway. ABE looks past her into the room: it is, of course,

just a white, sterile box. SWEDEN'S bed is surrounded by a white plastic curtain.

There is a smallish window the shutters of which are open; a plethora of flowers and cards crowd its sill while a cool breeze blows in, ruffling the petals, rattling the paper.

A variety of medical apparatuses gleam coldly in the dim light. The plastic tent flaps

a little.

MANYA:

Father? Abraham's here.

There is no response. MANYA turns to go; ABE touches her arm.

ABE:

Stay. Please.

MANYA places a hand over his.

MANYA:

This is for the two of you.
I'll be in the Green Room.

She leaves. ABE stares at the plastic curtain, which ruffles in the breeze.

ABE:
(approaches
the window)
I'll shut these...

He pauses at the sill, looking at the buildings which encroach on all sides. They are on the second floor.

SWEDEN:
(from behind
the curtain)

Please—leave them open.

ABE seems to shrink at the sound of his voice, no longer the booming, jovial base to which he is accustomed, but something little, thin. He moves around the white plastic

tent until he locates its opening. He steps inside gingerly, looking at his own feet. He

holds like that a moment, then looks up at last, sees a hardly-recognizable SWEDEN.

He is sickly pale and jaundiced, and has lost maybe a hundred pounds. His cheeks are

sunk in; his hazy eyes stare up at the ceiling from deep hollows. All of his hair has fal-

len out from the chemo. He has multiple IVs in his arms, the insertion points of which

are purple and swollen. He is hooked up to an array of computers and plastic saline bags. His breath comes and goes in ragged gasps. There is a book by Feschner turned over upon his stomach, like a little Gypsy tent. ABE starts to well up immediately, and a

choking gasp escapes him. He squeezes at his eyes abruptly, wipes away the tears. He

gathers himself together.

ABE pulls up a stool, which grates across the floor in the silence, and sits by his head.

SWEDEN rolls his eyes round to look at him, lifts his hand—the wrist of which bears

a yellow band and is burdened with IVs—places it on the cold, greasy, chromed hand-rail, the effort causing him much pain. ABE lays his hand over it.

ABE:

Hello old friend.

SWEDEN:

Hello, Abraham.

It is clear that though his voice is thin, his intellect is sharp as ever, and this in spite of whatever powerful medications he must be on. There are books stacked all along the near-by shelf: tomes on theosophy, sheaves of papers, maps and charts, a Holy Bible.

ABE makes an attempt at small talk, about the weather and about work, about the frosty waitress at the pub on the Hudson; trying to keep things light, trying to avoid the inevitable. He fails miserably. He exhales loudly, giving up all pretense.

ABE:

I have nothing to say, Sweden. Nothing adequate. Nothing that doesn't sound... absurd. Seeing you like this, in this sterile room, in this suffocating city, so far from the *Urwelt*.... It's like being on that lonely willow island again. Where every word must be spoken with reverence. Every syllable vital, precious, primal. Because there's so little time. So little time...

He breaks down crying.

SWEDEN:

But...don't you see? That's what the trip was about. There's *never* been any time; a brief flicker, perhaps, among clouds. I tell you, old friend, it is briefer than you know.

ABE:

(teary-eyed)

But what of the Call, and the herd? What if we were
 invited...and turned ourselves out? What of that?
 That we missed our last chance for pronouncement.
 That we could be so driven by our petty fears and ego.
 Driven...and driven out. Know we nothing?

SWEDEN:

You forget the willows.

ABE:

I forget nothing!

SWEDEN:

They were against us. It was not our time. That reverence
 you speak of, it is the only way to speak...at all times and
 places. It is because of the stain of mortality, in every ut-
 terance, every moment, since birth. It is in Manya now....

ABE:

In the midst of life...

SWEDEN:

We are in death.

(beat)

The ride is brief and often terrifying. It must
 be so. Brief because it wants us to know love;
 terrifying because it wants us to pay attention.

We rise like rivulets on the ocean and are as
 Feschner's tastebuds, perhaps, sensory organs
 only. It is our sole responsibility to see, and to
 experience; to feel. The rest is beyond our ken.

ABE:

(beat)

To worship?

SWEDEN:

Yes, yes. To worship.

(winding down,
 fading off)

The garden's everywhere, Abraham. Not just on
 that hoary stretch of forsaken marshland. And

always, always, it is guarded. But it waits for
all of us...

(his eyes go blank; not dead, just blank)

And we are all here.

SWEDEN sleeps, heavily, the intervals between breaths growing further and further apart. ABE watches his chest rise and fall—studies his face, which he knows he will never see again. He stares at his ear, suddenly fascinated by its curves and its sym-

etry. The plastic curtain rattles. He lowers his head.

ACT 3, SCENE 9

INT. THE GREEN ROOM. LATE AFTERNOON HEADING TOWARD DUSK.

ABE finds MANYA in the Green Room. Both of them look exhausted. She pours him a cup of coffee and hands it to him. They stand before a long, large window, looking at the
office buildings across the street.

ABE:

(sips his coffee)

I think you better go in there.

MANYA nods, moves toward the door. She pauses in the hallway.

MANYA:

My dad—you and I. We have never...
not been connected. You understand
that, don't you?

ABE:

(nods, after a
long pause)

Aye.

MANYA re-enters the room, walks to within a foot or two of his face. She looks up at him, flicks the hair from her forehead. Her eyes are bloodshot; her face crusted with tears.

MANYA:

(laughs)

I've had dreams about you, do you know
that?

She runs her fingertips along his ear. His face is drawn and pale, his own cheeks are crusted. He smiles sweetly.

ABE:

Nor do you dream alone, Manny.

She leans close, kisses him on the cheek. She returns to the door— pauses again.

MANYA:

(pats her stomach)

Now you're a *great* godfather.

(she grins—
almost evilly)

Stay in touch.

Exit MANYA, as ABE looks on. With something new to think about, perhaps!

EXT. SIDEWALK OUTSIDE CLINIC. EARLY DUSK.

ABE exits the clinic, but instead of hailing a cab, walks along the side of the building, toward the subway. It's getting cold; he walks with his head down, hands stuffed into

his coat pockets. Rainwater runs down the drainpipes, courses down the gutters. A pos-

se of sewer rats scampers alongside. He pauses suddenly as something *swooshes* above

—feels as though something passes *through* him. He stops—cold, and looks about.

The wind scoops up loose newspapers and swirls them in the air. He peers up to where SWEDEN'S window would be, sees the curtains blowing...outward. The wind picks up as he looks all around; at the looming, gray towers and the plumes of steam, at the roof-top reservoirs and chaotically-angled chimney-pots. It seems almost as if something is dancing high up in the air; as though something were racing amongst the buildings and bouncing off of them playfully—as a balloon full of helium will zip about a room when released.

A close-up of ABE shows him reacting to this, his gaze flitting about as though tracking something only he can see. His pale blue eyes, which have gained new wrinkles and folds

since his emersion in the river, positively dance. He laughs quite suddenly—it is a deeply

resonate sound; it is, like MANYA'S smile, both startlingly sweet and deliciously mischievous. And as to whether it is evil or not, well, that's merely a matter of direction.

Then he descends into the subway terminal, and as he does so we first hear and then see the STREET MUSICIAN, the very same from the beginning, playing his Pan Pipes. ABE goes to him as the train approaches and drops several bills into his basket. At this the tra-

in doors open, and he boards; and the train starts moving even as another roars past in the opposite direction.

The STREET MUSICIAN continues to play his pipes, which transition into the actual motion picture soundtrack, as the camera cranes out of the terminal and up the steps—

where there is a dissolve to suggest a lapse of time, and we see a newspaper machine, contained in it a copy of *MacMillan's New York Register*, with the headline: "The Cen-taur: Part, the Last" by Abraham O'Malley.

Then the camera cranes up, becoming, in effect, an aerial view, as we are taken on a soaring tour of Manhattan, which dissolves to other cities, which dissolves to breath-

taking nature vistas, which dissolves to the soaring POV over the river as at the begin-

ing; which comes finally upon the willow island and through the bushes, and out the

other end—racing headlong over the water, diving in and out, arcing across the mountains and over fields; over a heard of stampeding centaurs into a sun-flared sky, unto space itself, showing the earth complete, and the heavens beyond, and the mighty white light—which shines upon them all.

ABE narrates throughout from the last paragraphs of his final installment:

Was thus the thrill of beauty then explained? Was loveliness, as men know it, a revelation of the Earth-Soul behind? And were the blinding flash, the dazzling wonder, and the dream men seek to render permanent in music, color, line and language, a vision of her nakedness? Down there, the poets and those simple enough of heart to stand close to Nature, could catch these whispered fragments of the enormous message, told as in secret; but now, against her very heart he heard the thun-

der of the thing complete. Now, in the glory of all naked bodily forms—of women, men and children, of swift animals, of flowers, trees, and running water, of mountains and of seas—he understood these partial revelations of the great Earth-Soul that bore them, gave them life. For one and all were channels for her loveliness. He saw the beauty of the natural instincts, the passion of motherhood and fatherhood—Earth's seeking to project herself in endless forms and variety. He understood why love increased the heart and made it feel at one with all the world.

If you have stayed with me this far my Readers, I thank you. Further I encourage you to make a similar journey for yourselves; to step sideways from your busy lives for even a day, or whatever time is needed to hear the Pipes of Pan. To unchain yourselves from your laptops and your I-pods and your cell-phones—these, though wonderful, hold no wonder of the spirit. The wonder of the spirit is not the wonder of information. Their purchaser gains enormous powers of knowledge and communication, but he does not tremble with delicious and unearthly awe. Today our winds seem thin of voices, our woods and forests emptying, our glens feed streams where dance no flashing feet. The haunting music of that older world is stilled and no wings dart across the moonlight that once was populated with haunting glory. It may be, however, that the glamour is but changing and that the poet's creative heart will extract a more stimulating Wonder from the newer facts of life. Mystery, of course, there must always be.

Of the precise nature of the willows we did not speak, nor will I speak of them here. To name is to reveal; it is the inevitable clue. My friend I will always miss. It is no small good-bye because it is no small thing, friendship. 'The Garden is everywhere,' he told me in his last moments, and with this I agree. You needn't go to the Northwest wilds to find it. It's all about this very city, and in these crowded streets and dingy pavements. It was in his white, sterile hospital room, and it is here, in this cramped, undusted Brooklyn flat. Now at this moment, while that street light blinks and the millions go to sleep. The gates of horn and ivory are here. And here the flowers, the long, clean open hills, the giant herd, the nymphs, the sunshine and the gods.

THE END