

FADE IN:

INT. TRUCK - MORNING - TRAVELING

SUPER TITLE: "UPSTATE NEW YORK, 1968"

Through the front window we SEE the rolling hills of upstate New York: forests and fields, green in the cold morning air of the Indian summer. The truck passes a road sign which reads: "DEER CROSSING".

CLOSE ON

TIMMY DECHTER, eighteen years old, tall and thin, wholesome and energetic. His eyes dart across the landscape as he thinks.

TIMMY (V.O.)

I know some families who get along -- so I'm sure it can be done. Mom and Pop just avoid each other. It works for them. "No greater love than giving your life one for another." That's what the Bible says. You'd have to be in war to do that -- Do that with a girl and she'd walk all over you.

Driving the truck is JOHN DECHTER, forty-eight, Timmy's father, forthright and unshaven. An individualist.

Timmy's brother BRAD, a rugged and boyishly handsome young man of twenty-two, sits next to his father. In the distance he sees a smokestack sticking up from behind a hill.

BRAD

You can see the top of that factory they're building. Word is they'll pay well.

Ahead, he sees the turn.

BRAD

That's it, Dad.

POV - WHITTIER NAMEPLATE

On a brick wall hangs a wrought-iron, white nameplate in the shape of a horse. On it is written "WHITTIER".

BACK TO SCENE

John turns the truck sharp left.

The truck ENTERS an estate through a brick archway. On the far side of the immaculate grounds is a large white ranch house.

A moving van is being loaded with furniture, cardboard boxes... and more. John's truck stops next to the white picket fence that surrounds the house.

Walking across the lawn is MR. WHITTIER, pipe in hand, the picture of the country gentleman.

MR. WHITTIER

(brusk)

Mr. Dechter? They're in the third field down the road. Make it quick, okay?

John opens the truck door and dangles his left leg out. An easy, infectious smile crosses his face.

JOHN

(inquisitive)

Looks like you're moving.

MR. WHITTIER

Be out of here by tomorrow. We're going to sell it all and divide the money. No use trying to decide who owns what.

JOHN

Going back to the city?

MR. WHITTIER

(bitter)

Yes -- even this -- everything Margot said she wanted, wasn't enough -- it's the isolation. I have my work... Say, make it quick...

JOHN

Mr. Whittier -- I pick up lightning struck livestock to feed my mink -- only thing is there was no lightning last night. So what am I doing here?

MR. WHITTIER

These horses are alive. If you don't have the stomach for it I'll call somebody else. They were our children... too personal for someone else... too perfect to be separated.

JOHN

Sure thing, Mr. Whittier. Nice to have met you.

John swings his leg back inside and shutting the door...

INT. TRUCK - MORNING

... starts the engine and drives.

JOHN

They stuck it out longer than most -- I lost a bet with Shell... thought they'd only last a year.

Outside, we SEE the morning light reflecting off the fields of dew. John lowers his shade as he turns the truck into the direct sun.

Brad squints to keep the reflection down, and then a look of amazement crosses his face.

BRAD'S POV - HORSES - TRAVELING

In a field stand two matched black mares. An exceptional pair of horses.

BRAD (O.S.)

They're beauties, Dad.

JOHN (O.S.)

Christ... I wasn't expecting...

BACK TO SCENE

JOHN

... anything like that. I bet they're worth a pretty penny.

TIMMY

We should keep them, Dad. Just tell him we did it.

JOHN

I know just who could use them too.

John brings the truck to a stop at the field gate.

EXT. FIELD - MORNING

The two black mares stick their heads over the gate to see who's come. John gets out of the vehicle, walks over to their gentle faces and strokes their noses.

The brothers EXIT the truck.

BRAD

We could sell them for more.

JOHN

(to horses)
Hey girl... Hey girl.

TIMMY

He wouldn't know the difference.

JOHN

I gave my word, Timmy. Besides...
There's no way we could sneak them
past his house.

John looks up the hill and sees Mr. Whittier watching their every move.

JOHN

You heard him... he'd just get
somebody else if we don't do it.

TIMMY

Dad!

JOHN

Son, these horses are dead already.
You heard the man. To live on this
land in these times you have to be
tough. Our family, by not playing
the game the way the government tells
us to -- stayed fed.

TIMMY

He thinks animals are possessions.
I've seen enough animals to know they
love life too.

BRAD

Dad's never taught you different. He
always tells you -- shoot for the
head so the animal won't suffer.

TIMMY

I know... you taught me. But these
animals aren't game for us to eat.

JOHN

They'll keep our mink fed for two
weeks.

(MORE)

JOHN (CONT'D)

Our mink are our livelihood -- they starve to death -- you won't have those new clothes you wear to school.

BRAD

You won't have that allowance you take your dates to movies on.

TIMMY

Don't kill these horses and I'll do without.

JOHN

We'd all be without, Timmy. It's not fair what you're asking me to do.

BRAD

Timmy... you've seen Dad kill ugly animals and never complained. Just because these are beautiful doesn't make them any different.

TIMMY

These aren't sick or injured like the others were -- Just because this guy has money doesn't mean he has the right to treat animals like objects to throw away.

Timmy looks at his dad and his brother and realizes they won't hear him.

BRAD

Dad's a mink farmer. A mink farmer got to feed his mink.

TIMMY

(disgusted)

Pretty ladies and their fuzzy coats!

JOHN

Food on your table -- gas in your car.

Timmy runs off through the unfenced field behind them.

BRAD

I'll run after him.

JOHN

Let him go -- His head's in the clouds. We're only fifty miles from home... he'll get back.

John walks back to the truck. Reaching in by his seat he removes a rifle. It's in two pieces but is quickly assembled. John lifts it to chest level and shoots twice.

LONG SHOT

John disassembles the rifle and puts it back into the truck. Brad opens up the gate. The glare of sunlight glistening off the moisture on the field behind makes it hard to see the dead horses.

DISSOLVE TO

INT. MATTHEW'S CAR - MORNING - TRAVELING

MATTHEW, twenty-eight, drives an old rusty station wagon. Originally from the city, he wears a well-worn cap over his long hair.

STAR, five, and ROVER, four are wrestling in the back seat. Star is busy exploring properness, a quality he is sure will make him more grownup. Rover is a plump and cute rascal filled with answers that seem to always work.

SIENNA, six, sits in the passenger seat. She is an intelligent, imaginative, and adorable pixie.

SIENNA

... What if I was to take all the rats to my secret hiding place and tell them, "Rats, you have a choice... you can either go to the mountains and live... happily ever after... or come back to my house and get dead!" Do you think that's a good idea?

MATTHEW

You can certainly try it, Sienna. I feel I'm cheating you... I have all these ideas in my head. I'd much rather talk when I can give you full attention.

SIENNA

You know I don't like to see them dead -- you shouldn't poison them.

MATTHEW

I wish I didn't have to... but they carry diseases.

{self-absorbed}

I'm thinking of a little guy I want to draw -- you know, for my toons.

(MORE)

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I always wanted a character that could flow from my hand to the paper whenever I want him. I kinda even know what he looks like.

SIENNA

Does he look like you?

MATTHEW

(touching his cap)
Well he has a hat like this that's for sure -- but I hope he's cuter than me.

SIENNA

What are you going to do with him?

MATTHEW

Well, I think he'll be able to do lots of neat things. What do you think he should do?

SIENNA

I don't know... silly!

Matthew sees a hitchhiker. He pulls over to the side of the road and stops.

MATTHEW

Where to?

WILLIAM

If you can I'd like to go as far as Middleburg.

MATTHEW

Well, I'm going pretty close... yeah, get in...

{thinking out loud}

... I could even go to the bank there, after I drop the kids off.

WILLIAM, twenty-four, gets in. Affecting an English accent, he is a white male with a not too carefully combed Afro and a scraggly attempt at a beard. He sprawls across the passenger seat, settling into the most comfortable position he can find.

The three children are suddenly quiet: Star and Rover stop wrestling and stare at him. Sienna moves closer to her father, looking uncomfortable.

WILLIAM

Wow -- this is really good -- thanks.
We're down at that vegetable farm.

MATTHEW

I kinda figured you were. They seem
to have a fast turnover.

Star hands something to Matthew who puts it into his pocket

WILLIAM

What was that?

Matthew shakes his coat pocket full of toys.

MATTHEW

One of Star's toys. He gives me
stuff to keep -- might be for a
minute or two days. A trust game we
have.

WILLIAM

My girlfriend and I are trying out
this gardening trip... my girlfriend,
she's from England, wanted to try it.
It's very experimental -- this
lady...

MATTHEW

Yes I know... I've picked up
hitchhikers from there before.

WILLIAM

... is experimenting with magnetic
forces and vegetables. You live up
that hill?

MATTHEW

Yeah... up the right fork. About
seven miles -- a little bitty town of
eleven people.

STAR

My dad is an illustrator.

ROVER

Yeah -- he draws pictures.

SIENNA

Daddy -- Would you like to hear my
dream? It had all the kids -- but
not the baby -- just you and me and
Star and Rover -- it was really nice --

WILLIAM

(interrupting)

They stick in this pole -- wrapped with copper wire in the ground and grow the crops in a circle around the pole. It looks pretty, all these circles.

DISSOLVE TO

INT. CAR - MORNING - TRAVELING

Matthew and the children, bored by William's nonstop conversation.

WILLIAM

... The carrots taste good. But the cauliflower tastes the same to me. I think it's the earth that gives the carrots the taste -- And I'm not against copper... remember I told you the bracelet I wear really works -- So why shouldn't it work on veggies...

Matthew stops the car in front of a blue house. Over the door there is a sign, "HOME SCHOOL".

MATTHEW

Terrific! Middleburg's right down this road. I won't be going to the bank.

EXT. CAR - DAY

The boys get out. Matthew reaches over and closes the door. William steps out, lets Sienna by, and closes the car door.

MATTHEW

(to kids)

You guys are such slowpokes.

ROVER

I'm fast pokes.

MATTHEW

You're a fast poke?

ROVER

(correcting Matthew)

Fast pokes. What's a slowpoke?

MATTHEW

Someone who moves real slow.

Oh!

The three children kiss their father and run to join their friends.

WILLIAM

You know -- I was an orphan.

Matthew smiles politely as he backs up the car.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOME SCHOOL - MORNING

A converted family home. Painted bright blue with colorful jungle gyms and outdoor toys distributed across the lawn. Sienna races the boys up the stairs where JEREMY has been waiting. Jeremy is Timmy's 8-year-old nephew -- a sweet kid.

INT. HOME SCHOOL - MORNING

The children pile through the door into their classroom. The interior is fitted out with bookshelves and blackboards. The kids all know each other well and the younger children all mingle easily with the older ones.

Sienna and Jeremy walk through the room and EXIT to the backyard playground.

EXT. HOME SCHOOL - PLAYGROUND - MORNING

Sienna goes right for the bunny cage and starts to clean it.

SIENNA

He was thinking of his cartoon character.

JEREMY

He's going to kill the rats... right?

SIENNA

He said I could take them to my hiding place... but they have diseases!

JEREMY

My dad says that too... What did your mom say?

SIENNA

Ow -- she's always busy with the baby.