

THE REAL HOWARD FINSTER
BY
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MUSIC BEGINS: BIG BAND, LOUD AND UPBEAT.

FADE IN:

INT. THE TONIGHT SHOW GREEN ROOM - DAY (1983)

We hear "The Tonight Show Theme Song." HOWARD FINSTER, in his late 60's, sits in a chair watching a television monitor. "The Tonight Show" is just starting.

A FLY is BUZZING around the room. We see and hear ED MCMAHON announcing the guest on the monitor. Howard watches the TV. The fly BUZZES around his face.

Ed introduces JOHNNY CARSON. Johnny enters through the multicolored curtain, and begins his monologue.

The fly lands on Howard's cheek. Howard gently picks the fly off his cheek, and let's it go. It flies off. We hear the studio audience LAUGH. Howard sits and smiles. Johnny laughs.

INT. TONIGHT SHOW BACKSTAGE - LATER

Howard is standing alone in darkness.

INT. THE TONIGHT SHOW SET - CONTINUOUS

Johnny sits behind his desk.

JOHNNY

My first guest is Howard Finster from Pennville, Georgia. He's a retired preacher and a part-time bicycle repairman.

The STUDIO AUDIENCE CHUCKLES, and so does Johnny. Johnny gets serious.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

He's a sought-after folk artist. He began creating outsider art more than twenty years ago, and some of his art is in the Library of Congress. Please welcome Howard Finster.

We hear the studio audience APPLAUD.

INT. THE TONIGHT SHOW BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

The STAGE MANAGER walks up to Howard, and opens the curtain for him.

STAGE MANAGER

Mr. Finster, take three steps and turn
to the right.

HOWARD

Thank you, sir.

Howard steps through the curtain as the APPLAUSE grows
louder.

INT. THE TONIGHT SHOW SET - CONTINUOUS

Howard shakes Johnny's hand as he walks on the set.
Howard shakes Ed's hand, and he takes a seat between the
two.

JOHNNY

How are you, Howard?

HOWARD

How old am I?

We hear the studio audience LAUGH.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I'm fine, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Well, how old are you, Howard?

HOWARD

My mother says I was born in 1916, but
when I retired the government papers
didn't have no number like that. They
said it was a year earlier. Mama says
it was December the second, 1916.

Howard nods his head, and we...

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. FINSTER BEDROOM - DAY (1915)

A DOCTOR, mid-50's, helps LULA FINSTER, mid-30's, give
birth. A MID-WIFE, in her early 60's, stands by ready to
assist. We hear the rain SPLATTER against the tin roof,
and then a clap of thunder RING OUT.

A BABY BOY is born. The doctor holds the baby by the
ankles and spansks it. The baby begins CRY. The doctor
starts to give the baby an extra whack.

MID-WIFE

Don't you hit that kid another lick!

The mid-wife takes the baby and wraps him in a little blanket.

INT. FINSTER LIVING ROOM - DAY

BERNICE, 17, JACK, 13, ABBIE, 11, ORA, 8, TILLIE, 6, and their father, SAMUEL, in his early 40's, are sitting and waiting patiently.

Samuel smokes a corncob pipe, while petting TRIXIE, the family dog. There is a burn scar on the back of Ora's neck, the result of an injury which caused him to be mentally retarded.

The mid-wife walks in carrying the baby in a blanket. She hands him to Samuel.

Samuel holds Howard up so all the children can see the baby. The pipe is in his mouth between his teeth.

SAMUEL

This is your new brother, Howard.

ABBIE

Daddy, can I hold him?

Samuel hands the Howard to Abbie. Abbie kisses Howard. Tillie puts her hands on the baby.

ABBIE (CONT'D)

Hey, wait your turn.

JACK

What do you think, Trixie?

Trixie wags her tail.

EXT. FINSTER SAWMILL - DAY (1918)

Samuel chews tobacco. He spits tobacco juice on the ground. A little juice runs down his chin.

He unloads the last of the logs from his truck at the sawmill on the farm next to the creek.

Samuel picks up the lumber next to the saw, and places it in the back of his truck. He spits again.

INT. FINSTER LIVING ROOM - DAY

Howard, now three years old, and Abbie, 14, are on the floor playing checkers. Abbie is wearing a white shirt with a red checked skirt. She gets up and leaves.

HOWARD

Hey, Abbie, you're skirt looks like this checkers board.

Abbie walks back into the room carrying a little box.

ABBIE

(smiling)

Howard, I have a gift for you.

Abbie hands Howard the box.

HOWARD

You are my favorite one, Abbie.

ABBIE

You are the special one, Howard. I want you to have this.

Howard opens the box and pulls out a little toy glass goblet.

HOWARD

That's the most beautifulest glass goblet I've ever laid my eyes on.

Lula enters.

LULA

Howard, I need your help in the potato field.

Lula leaves. Howard gently places the goblet on the end table.

HOWARD

Thank you, Abbie.

He leaves. Abbie smiles.

EXT. FINSTER POTATO PATCH - DAY

Lula stands. Howard kneels and pets Trixie.

LULA

I want you to pick up the potatoes as I dig 'em up.

HOWARD

Yes ma'am.

Lula gets on her knees and starts digging the ground up with her potato fork. Howard picks up the potatoes. His mind starts wandering and he begins to horse play. Howard kicks a potato.

LULA

Stop that horsin' 'round.

Lula has the potato fork in the ground. Howard jumps over Trixie, and accidentally kicks his mother's fork. Dirt flies in her face. Without thinking, Lula picks up the fork and hits Howard in the head. Howard starts bleeding.

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - NIGHT

Samuel takes the chewing tobacco out of his mouth with his fingers, and places it on top of the potbelly stove. He picks up some dried tobacco off the stove, and exits.

INT. FINSTER LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Howard sits on the sofa with a bandage on his head. Lula is next to him. Samuel enters, picks up his corncob pipe, and shoves the tobacco in it. Samuel sits down, and lights the pipe with a wooden match. He puffs on it.

SAMUEL

Howard, you know you shouldn't have done that. Your mamma needs help in them fields.

HOWARD

Yes sir, Daddy.

Samuel smokes, as Howard touches his bandage.

LULA

I didn't mean to hurt you, honey.

EXT. FINSTER FRONT PORCH - DAY (1919)

It is a beautiful spring Sunday. Samuel and Lula are drinking coffee, while rocking on the front porch. Howard sits in Abbie's lap. Abbie and Howard are thumb wrestling. Howard laughs as he wins. Jack walks out the door.

JACK

Abbie, let's check on Trixie's pups.

ABBIE

Howard, I want a rematch. I'm going to get you next time.

Abbie and Howard stand up. He sits back down. Abbie and Jack leave the front porch.

EXT. FINSTER YARD - CONTINUOUS

Abbie and Jack walk up to Trixie at the side of the house. The dog growls, and runs under the house.

JACK

Abbie, it's your turn to climb under and get 'em.

ABBIE

Okay.

Abbie gets on her stomach and crawls under the house, where the pups are located. We hear Trixie BARK.

JACK

What goin' on?

Abbie crawls out fast.

ABBIE

Trixie bit me.

Jack and Abbie run away. Trixie chases them.

EXT. FINSTER FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Abbie and Jack run up on the porch with their parents and Howard.

JACK

Trixie bit Abbie.

Samuel and Lula get up and run to Trixie in the front yard. Abbie and Jack go inside the house. Howard stands alone on the porch watching the commotion.

EXT. FINSTER FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Trixie barks at Samuel and Lula.

SAMUEL

Now Trixie, you know better than that.

He bends over to pick up the dog. Trixie bites him, then runs over to Lula and bites her on the leg under her dress. She screams.

EXT. FINSTER FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Trixie runs on the porch and licks Howard on the leg. She sniffs his shoes and licks him some more. She runs away. Samuel and Lula enter the porch.

SAMUEL

That's strange. Trixie has never bitten anybody before. Somethin' wrong.

LULA

You know, now that I think about it she was actin' all up the other day, too.

SAMUEL

We goin' to have to send her to Birmingham for a test. It might be rabies.

LULA

Lordy mercy.

SAMUEL

I don't want to take a chance.

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - DAY

Lula finishes reading a letter, and hands it to Samuel. Howard stands next to them.

LULA

Trixie had rabies. Do you have any scratches Howard?

She examines him closely for any open wounds.

SAMUEL

Me, you, and Abbie are goin' to Birmingham to get shots.

Lula is satisfied with Howard.

LULA

You are all right, honey.

Howard smiles with relief.

INT. BIRMINGHAM HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Abbie is lying on a bed. Samuel and Lula are sitting in chairs. The DOCTOR walks in the room.

DOCTOR

Getting rabies shots is a long process. Y'all will receive twenty-one shots in as many days. There are rules to follow after you get back home, also. One of them being absolutely no sweets. No candy. No cake. No cookies. No sugar. The medicine won't work right.

He picks up a shot with a long needle on it and medicine in it. He walks over to Abbie and lifts her shirt up enough to expose her stomach. He smiles at her. She smiles back.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Did you hear me Abbie? No sugar at all.

Abbie nods "yes." The doctor sticks the needle deep into her stomach. Abbie grimaces.

INT. FINSTER LIVING ROOM - DAY

Howard sits on the floor. Abbie enters with her red checked skirt on, and gives Howard a piece of candy.

ABBIE

Howard, here's a treat for you.

He takes the candy and puts it in his mouth.

HOWARD

Abbie, I love you.

He runs out of the room. Abbie gets another piece of candy out of her pocket and eats it.

INT. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Abbie is sick in the bed. Lula sits bedside. Abbie is in pain.

ABBIE

Mama, my stomach hurts.

Lula rubs her stomach.

LULA
Lord, help this child.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

A casket is lowered into the ground. The people at the funeral watch. Lula and Samuel stand together. Howard is not there.

LULA
We have to wait awhile before we tell Howard. He loved Abbie so much.

SAMUEL
Yeah, he won't understand about death. We'll wait till he gets older.

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - DAY

Lula washes dishes in the sink. Howard enters.

HOWARD
Mama, where's Abbie?

LULA
She's gone to live in another place, son.

HOWARD
I hope she comes to visit soon. I already miss her.

Howard leaves. Lula gets tears in her eyes.

EXT. FINSTER FRONT YARD - DAY

Howard is by himself playing marbles on the ground. Howard gets up and walks into the house.

INT. FINSTER LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jack and Tillie are on the sofa. We hear the door SLAM shut. Howard enters.

HOWARD
Where's Mama?

JACK
She's gone to the tomater patch.

TILLIE

Howard, do you want to play cards?

HOWARD

I got to find Mama.

Howard leaves.

EXT. FINSTER SAWMILL ROAD - LATER

Howard walks down the dirt road leading to his Daddy's sawmill. He stops at the tomato patch. He looks all around, and sees no one.

HOWARD

Mama!

There is no answer. Howard gets frightened.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Mama! Mama!

Howard looks up in the sky. He sees a fifteen foot tall girl in a white gown.

The tall girl walks down some steps out of the sky. There are three steps in front of her and three steps behind her. Every time she takes a step down a new step appears, while the last step behind her disappears. The steps look to be white concrete which turn to neon, while they appear and disappear. She continues down the steps until she gets to about three feet up off the dirt road.

The tall girl stops. Then she turns a forty-five degree angle and walks up a new set of steps. The white gown sweeps from her leg, and shows a familiar red checked skirt. It's Abbie!

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Abbie! Abbie, where's Mama?

Abbie looks over her shoulder at Howard as she continues to walk upward.

ABBIE

(softly)

Howard, you are going to be a man of visions.

HOWARD

Abbie! What?

ABBIE
(softly)
A man of visions.

Abbie disappears in the sky. Howard is all alone again.
He gets frightened and runs away.

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - LATER

Howard runs through the door. Lula is washing some
tomatoes in the sink. Howard is excited, and out of
breath.

HOWARD
Mama, I went looking for you at the
tomater patch and I couldn't find you.
I seen Abbie down at the sawmill road,
but I lost her, too.

LULA
Oh, Lord.

Lula hugs him.

LULA (CONT'D)
Howard, you couldn't have seen Abbie.

HOWARD
Yeah Mama, she said somethin'.

LULA
Honey, Abbie's dead. We didn't want to
tell you, because we know how much you
loved her.

Howard does not understand.

HOWARD
I seen Abbie.

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Howard is in bed asleep. Howard's head jerks to the
right, and then to the left. He dreams.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FINSTER ROOF TOP - DAY [DREAM]

Howard is in the middle of the tin roof on his hands and
knees. He holds on tight, but every time he moves his
hand his whole body slides closer to the edge.

Howard inches toward the gable end. He is afraid of falling. The tighter he holds on, the closer he gets to the edge.

Howard is at the gable end. He takes a deep breath and falls off. Howard starts to fly.

He flies over the house, the yard, and the farm. Howard smiles as he enjoys the flight.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - DAWN (1923)

Howard, seven years old, is asleep in bed. Samuel walks in and wakes him.

SAMUEL

Howard, it's time to slop the hogs.

HOWARD

(mumbling)

Yes sir, Daddy.

Samuel leaves. Howard opens his eyes and stares at the ceiling as if he is still dreaming.

Howard gets up, and picks up an orange from his night stand. He peels half the orange, and puts it and the peeling back on the night stand.

EXT. FINSTER BACKYARD - MORNING

Ora, Jack, Tillie, and Fred are playing a daredevil game. Jack puts his finger on an iron last. Fred takes a swing at it with a big butcher knife. Jack pulls his finger away. The knife misses and hits the iron last. Fred hands the knife to Jack.

FRED

It's your turn Tillie.

Tillie puts her finger down. Howard walks up carrying the slop bucket. Howard stops at the pig trough.

HOWARD

Y'all are supposed to be doin' your chores.

Howard dumps the food scraps in the trough. Jack looks at Howard.

JACK
Come over here and put your finger
down.

HOWARD
No.

JACK
I dare you.

Howard shakes his head "no."

JACK (CONT'D)
I double-dog dare you!

Howard walks over to the iron last. Tillie moves her
finger. Howard places his right index finger down.

Jack swings. Howard freezes, so the knife hits his
finger. Howard picks up his hand, and the tip of his
finger is dangling on a little piece of skin.

TILLIE
Wait here!

Tillie runs away.

JACK
You done did it now, boy!

Tillie comes back with some white flour-sack cloth. She
rips off a piece of cloth, and ties it tight around
Howard's finger.

TILLIE
That should do it.

ORA
Will it grow back?

INT. VIOLET HILL SCHOOL - DAY

MR. PHILLIPS is the teacher at the one-room schoolhouse.
Mr. Phillips always opens school with a gospel song. The
CHILDREN of the school room, ranging in age from six
years to 15, are singing, "When the Roll is Called Up
Yonder."

Howard, and J.B. WHITE, his best friend, sit next to each
other. The flour sack-cloth is on his finger. The song
comes to an end.

J.B.
(whispering)
How's your finger?

HOWARD
It's been two weeks.

He holds up the finger.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
That thing's almost grewed back.

J.B.
Got any yellerjing?

Howard reaches in his back pocket, and pulls out some dried orange peelings. He gives half to J.B. They put the yellerjing in their mouth, and chew on it as if it were chewing tobacco.

MR. PHILLIPS
As y'all know our school is home to a church, and sometimes revivals. Today, unfortunately, we will be witness to a funeral. A baby has died unexpectedly.

Howard raises his hand.

MR. PHILLIPS (CONT'D)
Yes, Howard.

HOWARD
Mr. Phillips, this will be my first funeral to witness. I was wondering, what happens when you die?

MR. PHILLIPS
That's for God to say. In this case, I would think the baby has gone to heaven.

Howard smiles.

EXT. VIOLET HILL SCHOOL - LATER

The class is lined up on both sides of the steps. The baby's casket is carried out, while the FAMILY follows. They leave to go to the graveyard. The class goes in the school.

INT. VIOLET HILL SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

The children of the class return to their seats. Mr. Phillips stands.

MR. PHILLIPS

Who cares to get the water today?

Half the class raise their hands, including Howard and J.B.

MR. PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

J.B. and Howard, please.

Howard and J.B. each pick up a ten-quart bucket.

MR. PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Return quickly, and no playin' around.

Howard and J.B. leave.

EXT. MEADOW - LATER

Howard and J.B. walk to the spring to get the water.

HOWARD

It sure is sad a baby had to die.

J.B.

Yeah, I wish I knew when I was goin' to die. Hey Howard, will you tell my fortune?

HOWARD

No.

J.B.

Oh come on. You haven't done it in awhile.

They arrive at the spring, and put down their buckets. Howard picks a crab apple off a nearby tree, and looks J.B. in the eyes.

HOWARD

Well J.B., you're goin' to be successful and marry a girl from this county. And you're not goin' to die till you get old.

Howard takes a bite of the crab apple. J.B. gets excited.

J.B.
Successful? Am I goin' to be rich?

HOWARD
This here crab apple sure is sour.
It needs some salt.

He takes another bite.

J.B.
Howard, am I goin' to be rich?

HOWARD
You'll be comfortable.

Howard fills his bucket up with water from the spring.
J.B. follows.

J.B.
I want to be rich!

Howard reaches into his back pocket, and pulls out some
dried orange peelings.

HOWARD
This is the last little bit of
yellerjing. Do you want it?

J.B. takes it from Howard, and chews it. Howard takes
another bite of the crab apple. They pick up their
buckets full of water and leave.

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - DAY

Lula puts a few nickels in a mason jar full of change.
Howard walks in.

LULA
I almost have enough for my new dress.

HOWARD
Mama, you got any biscuits?

LULA
Yeah, right over there on the stove.

Howard picks up two biscuits.

LULA (CONT'D)
How was school?

HOWARD
Okay. We had a baby's funeral today.

He leaves, and then comes back in the back door.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
The peddler's here.

LULA
Oh good, I got to get your daddy some
coffee and sugar.

She picks up two dozen eggs in a carton, and walks out the door. Howard walks over to her money jar, and picks out a nickel with his bandaged finger. Howard looks out the window at Lula.

EXT. FINSTER BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Lula gives the PEDDLER the carton of eggs, and gets coffee and sugar. Howard comes out the back door.

HOWARD
I found a nickel! I'm goin' to get me
a stick of that candy.

PEDDLER
Which one? The coconut candy?

HOWARD
Yes, sir.

He gives the nickel to the peddler.

EXT. TOMATO PATCH - DAY

Howard walks up pulling a red wagon. He stops and picks a tomato. Howard pulls out a little knife from his pocket, and slices the tomato. He pulls a biscuit apart and puts a slice of tomato in it. He eats it.

EXT. COTTON PATCH - LATER

Howard pulls the red wagon up next to the cotton plants. He starts picking the cotton as fast as he can, and puts it in the wagon.

EXT. FINSTER BACKYARD - DAY

Ora is holding four rabbit traps. Lula stacks more traps in his arms. Howard walks up with the empty red wagon. Ora carries them away. He trips and falls. The traps fall to the ground.

LULA

Howard, can you help Ora set the rabbit
gums?

HOWARD

Yes, ma'am.

Howard picks up the traps, and puts them in his wagon.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Come on, Oje.

Ora gets up and helps him.

EXT. FINSTER FIELD - LATER

Howard and Ora place the traps on the edge of the field
next to the woods.

ORA

Howard, what's my fortune?

HOWARD

Ora, you're goin' to be loved your
whole life.

Ora smiles. Howard picks up another trap.

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Howard is asleep.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FINSTER ROOF TOP - DAY [DREAM]

Howard is walking in the center of the roof. He walks
over to the edge at the gable end. Howard takes a deep
breath, and walks off the edge. He flies away.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY [DREAM]

Howard flies through the valley, and over the trees. He
smiles as he goes. It starts to RAIN. He flies over the
schoolhouse and the meadow. He floats over the crab
apple tree, and picks a crab apple at the very top. He
takes a bite. His lips pucker from the sour taste.

HOWARD

It needs some salt.

Howard flies away with a laugh.

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - DAWN (1926)

Howard, now 10, is asleep with a smile on his face. He laughs. Howard wakes up, and gets out of bed.

EXT. COTTON MILL - DAY

Samuel, Howard, and Ora are in a horse drawn wagon full of cotton, waiting their turn in a long line at the mill.

ORA

Daddy, how much longer?

SAMUEL

I don't rightly know, Oje. I expect near about all day.

HOWARD

When we get back, I'm goin' to pick some wild blackberries. I can get twenty cents a gallon for 'em in town.

SAMUEL

That's good money, Howard.

HOWARD

Yeah. Wert says I can chop wood for him at twelve-and-a-half cents an hour.

SAMUEL

I'd do it.

DOC WHITE, a middle-aged man, owner of the cotton mill and part-time preacher, walks up.

DOC

We got a line today. I just wanted to let y'all know about the revival Saturday at the schoolhouse. We'd love to have you.

HOWARD

Okay.

SAMUEL

I don't think we'll be able to make it. I'm supposed to get a load of wood off the mountain.

Doc looks at Howard.

DOC

All right. Son, can I count on you?

HOWARD

Yes, sir.

Doc walks off. A long beat.

ORA

Daddy, how much longer?

SAMUEL

It's goin' to be awhile! Why don't
y'all go play with them kids.

He points to THREE BOYS next to a ditch. Howard and Ora
leave. Samuel eats some parched peanuts.

EXT. COTTON MILL DITCH - LATER

Howard and Ora walk up to the three boys.

HOWARD

What are y'all doin'?

FIRST BOY

Playing daredevil.

HOWARD

Can we play?

FIRST BOY

Yeah, I dare you to do this.

The boy jumps ten feet over the ditch. Howard tries, but
fails. He falls in the ditch. They all laugh at Howard,
including Ora. Howard dusts himself off, and gets mad.

FIRST BOY (CONT'D)

I'm champion!

Howard walks past the boy.

HOWARD

I dare you to do this!

Without thinking, Howard walks over to a hundred pound
bag of fertilizer, picks it up and walks forty feet to
the mill. He puts it down.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Somethin' doesn't feel right.

He lifts up his shirt. A rupture is poking out of his
belly.

INT. FINSTER LIVING ROOM - DAY

Howard is sitting on the sofa with Lula. Samuel is standing with a truss in his hand. The truss is leather, with a buckle, iron knobs, and a sponge ball to push the rupture in.

SAMUEL

The doctor said Howard had a ruptured spleen. I can't afford no operation, but this here truss will help keep it in your belly. You can still do your chores, and even play. Now stand up.

Howard stands. Samuel helps him put the truss on.

INT. SAM'S TRUCK - DAY

Samuel and Howard are riding down the mountain in first gear, with a truck load of logs for the saw mill. The transmission GROWLS.

Howard is wearing the truss. Samuel drives slowly on the narrow logging road, because of the steep drop off the side of the mountain.

HOWARD

Watch your toe, Daddy.

SAMUEL

Yeah, I sure would hate to loose three hundred foot of timber.

HOWARD

How 'bout us?

Samuel laughs. They approach a big square rock, the size of a casket, on top of a bigger rock along side of the road.

SAMUEL

Son, that poor man dead in his casket been stuck up there on that rock ever since it fell off the wagon bringin' it down the mountain for his funeral.

HOWARD

Well, let's get it down.

SAMUEL

People's tried to get it down for years. They've thrown ropes out there and put grapevines on it and everything else, but they just can't pull that casket down.

Howard is astonished. Samuel gets tickled. He turns left at the fork in the road. There is a canopy of trees covering this section of the road, as if they were driving through a tunnel.

Samuel stops the truck in front of a shack, and gets out. Howard waits a minute. Samuel comes back with a gallon of moonshine, and gets in the truck.

They drive off down the road. Samuel points out the window at a hill.

HOWARD

Puddin' Ridge.

SAMUEL

You know how it got it's name?

HOWARD

No, sir.

SAMUEL

Son, Puddin' Ridge has caves in it, and it grows mushrooms like puddin' in there. The poor people goes in them caves and eats that puddin'.

HOWARD

I want some puddin'. I'm hungry.

Samuel laughs.

SAMUEL

Howard, we'll stop by Carl's restaurant in Valley Head for his ten cent chili, before we go to the timber mill. The best chili in the world.

HOWARD

Daddy, are you goin' to the revival tonight with me and Mama?

SAMUEL

Naw.

EXT. VIOLET HILL SCHOOL - NIGHT

Howard, with the truss, and Lula walk down the driveway of the school.

HOWARD

Mama, why don't Daddy come to revivals?

LULA

I don't rightly know, honey. We'll ask him when we get home.

We hear the song "Amazing Grace," as they reach the front door. Howard sees there is also a CROWD outside having their own kind of fellowship.

HOWARD

Mama, I'll come in shortly.

LULA

Don't be too long. The revival has already started.

Lula enters the schoolhouse. Howard wanders through the wagons and buggies.

He walks up to a LITTLE BOY wearing a cute hat. Howard jerks the hat off his head and throws it on the ground. The boy cries.

Howard moves on. He sees a COUPLE kissing in a buggy. He stops, and watches awhile. They look at him, so he leaves.

Howard stops at a wagon full of FOUR MEN playing poker with nickels and pennies. The DEALER puts down the cards, and picks up a jug of moonshine.

DEALER

Hey, Howard. Care for some moonshine tonight?

HOWARD

Aw, I'll take a slug.

He hands Howard the jug. Howard takes a big gulp, chokes, and coughs.

INT. VIOLET HILL SCHOOL - LATER

Doc White is preaching at the podium. Howard enters and stands in the back.

DOC

So people, this is why I say prepare to
meet God before it's too late!

Howard smiles.

INT. FINSTER LIVING ROOM - LATER

Samuel is smoking his pipe, while sitting in a chair.
Howard and Lula enter. Samuel stands up. Lula is
whooping and hollering.

LULA

Hallelujah! I love them revivals.

She laughs and hugs Samuel's neck.

LULA (CONT'D)

I'm prayin' for you, Samuel.

SAMUEL

I don't need your prayers.

HOWARD

We was wonderin' why you don't go to
church?

SAMUEL

I know some of them people in church.
They ain't as good as me.

LULA

We're all sinners. That's why you go!

SAMUEL

Some say one thing, and then do
another. I ain't studyin' that.

HOWARD

Daddy, try and go to church tomorrow.

SAMUEL

No! I ain't goin' to church! Now go
to bed. It's late.

Howard leaves dejected.

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Howard sleeps.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY [DREAM]

Howard flies through the clouds. Howard joyfully smiles.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - DAWN (1929)

Howard, 13, wakes up, gets out of bed, and puts on the truss.

EXT. FISHING POND - DAY

Ora is standing on the bank with his clothes on playing with a "mosneoms", which is a little metal slick wheel with a rod attached to it and a handle. Ora is holding the rod while turning the handle, which makes the wheel spin. He spins it around and around in a mud hole. The mud flies. Howard, Fred, and J.B. are skinny dipping.

FRED

Oje loves his new mosneoms.

J.B.

Did he make it?

HOWARD

No, J.B., I did. And gave it to him for his birthday.

J.B.

Go, Ora. You get it.

Ora spins it faster, and laughs. They whoop and holler.

HOWARD

Fred, are you goin' to the revival tonight?

FRED

No, I'm goin' to stay with my Daddy.

HOWARD

I guess I'll have to go by myself. Mama ain't goin', neither.

J.B.

Hey that reminds me, I'm supposed to be helpin' my Daddy with our roof.

HOWARD

You ain't got to go.

J.B.

Yeah.

J.B. climbs up on the bank. Howard picks up a wad of mud.

J.B. (CONT'D)

Howard, what's my fortune?

HOWARD

Your 'bout to get in this pond.

J.B.

No. I'm leavin'.

A mud ball hits J.B. in the butt. They laugh. J.B. gets back into the pond to rinse off.

J.B. (CONT'D)

That ain't funny. My Daddy's goin' to kill me if I don't show up! Howard, promise me you won't do that again.

HOWARD

I promise.

Howard winks at Fred. J.B. gets out of the pond. Howard nails J.B. in the back of the head with the mud. J.B. jumps in the water, and goes after Howard. Howard points to Fred.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

It was him!

J.B. dunks Fred under the water. They laugh.

INT. VIOLET HILL SCHOOL - NIGHT

BUD WHITE, early 40's, a tall, skinny, and ugly man, is finishing the sermon. Howard, in the truss, is there without any family members.

BUD

Now I invite you to come down to the altar and accept Jesus Christ as your savior. Please stand and sing.

The CONGREGATION stands and sings, "Bringing in the Sheaves." A few people go forward. Howard follows. He arrives at the altar.

HOWARD

Oh, God, save me! Oh, God, save me!

A new and different feeling comes over Howard. He gets up on the benches, and walks up and down shouting as loud as he can.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Lord, save me!

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - LATER

Howard burst through the back door, and hugs Samuel.

HOWARD
(excited)
Daddy, I got saved tonight! I love you, Daddy.

He stops hugging him.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
The Holy Ghost is in me. The stars outside are so beautiful. I've never seen anything like 'em before.

Samuel, with a pipe in his mouth, says nothing, but looks at him in a strange way as if to say "you are insane."
Lula enters.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Mama, I got saved! I'm supposed to get baptized soon. Life is wonderful!

SAMUEL
(sarcastic)
Lord, help us.

INT. BOY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Howard kneels next to his bed, and says his prayers.

HOWARD
God, thank you for everything, and bless my family. It's been three years of wearin' the truss, if you can heal me of this old rupture I sure would appreciate it. Amen.

INT. FINSTER UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - MORNING

Howard opens the door to his bedroom, and runs down the hall.

HOWARD

Daddy! Mama, I'm cured! It's God's
miracle, Daddy! My rupture is healed.

EXT. GIFFORD SPRING BRANCH - DAY

Lula, Jack, Fred, Tillie, Ora, and Doc are at the creek
to witness Howard's baptism.

BUD

In the name of the Father, the Son, and
the Holy Ghost; I now baptize you,
Howard.

Bud dunks Howard under the water, and brings him back up.
He is baptized.

INT. VIOLET HILL SCHOOL - DAY

Mr. Phillips is teaching the class the four note scale.
They practice.

MR. PHILLIPS

Repeat after me; la, fa, so, mi.

The class sings in unison.

EVERYBODY

La, fa, so, mi.

Howard raises his hand.

MR. PHILLIPS

Yes, Howard.

HOWARD

Mr. Phillips, I like to sing. I think
I'm goin' to sing on the radio someday.

The class laughs.

MR. PHILLIPS

Oh, really?

HOWARD

Yes, sir. Or, uh, somethin' like that.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TONIGHT SHOW SET - DAY (1983)

Howard sits between Johnny and Ed.

HOWARD

You know, I've always said, when will I get to meet the real Johnny Carson?

JOHNNY

I've said the same thing. When will I get to meet the real Howard Finster?

The audience GIGGLES.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Now, you have some place...

HOWARD

Paradise Garden in Summerville, Georgia.

JOHNNY

How did it get started?

HOWARD

I always save everything people give me. Listen, we got a President's Day, Labor Day, and what not, but there ain't no Inventor's Day. So, I started Paradise Garden to show the inventors.

JOHNNY

I see you brought something.

Howard reaches behind the sofa, and pulls out his banjo. He stands and puts the banjo around his neck.

HOWARD

I got a little song I want to play you on my banjer.

He starts a song on his banjo, and plays about ten seconds. He stops.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Now this song I want to play you...

The audience LAUGHS.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

This song I want to play you, I wrote when I was younger.

Howard picks on his banjo. Howard is a hit. The audience CLAPS along.

EXT. FINSTER FRONT YARD - DAY (1930)

Lula CLAPS along to the song.

BUNK PAYNE, 40, is picking "She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain" on his banjo.

Samuel, Tillie, Howard, now 14, SUE, 10, and BETTY, 9, Howard's younger sisters, are singing and CLAPPING along. Ora is scratching and banging on the screen door, as if it were an instrument.

Bunk finishes the song. Ora stops, also.

LULA

Bunk, you sure are good with that banjer.

BUNK

Thank you, but I don't know what I'd do without Ora. That was good, son!

HOWARD

He's gettin' better, but he should 'cause he's been playin' it fer ten years.

Ora smiles with pride. Bernice, and FORD, her husband, walk up. Ford is carrying a beat up, stringless banjo.

FORD

Look, y'all, what I got you. It needs some work, but it should play.

Ora runs over and grabs it. He pretends to play the banjo. Everyone laughs.

EXT. FINSTER COTTON FIELD - DAWN

Dew covers the ground as Howard hunts rabbits, while carrying his .22 rifle. He stops and looks around.

Howard sees two rabbits sitting in a wagon row at the end of a cotton patch. He slowly gets on his knees, lines them up, and pulls the trigger. The rifle fires with a BANG. Both rabbits fall over dead.

Howard stands up.

HOWARD

Yaaaaaaa! I done killed me both of 'em with one shot.

Howard runs over to the rabbits and picks them up.

INT. FINSTER LIVING ROOM - DAY

Samuel is smoking. Lula is knitting. Howard and Betty are playing cards. Samuel gets up and bumps into the wall.

SAMUEL

If I ever build another one, I'll never build it like this.

LULA

What?

SAMUEL

A house. That wall needs to be over a foot or two.

Samuel leaves through the front door. Lula watches him through the window as he sits in a rocking chair on the front porch. Lula whispers to Howard.

LULA

Doc White is comin' over to talk to your Daddy about the Lord. Go outside and keep him busy until he gets here.

Howard leaves.

EXT. FINSTER FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Howard sits down next to Samuel.

SAMUEL

You know, son, I sure am proud of you.

HOWARD

For what, Daddy?

SAMUEL

Graduating from school. You finished up all the way to the sixth grade. You know, I never got to go to school.

HOWARD

Yes, sir.

SAMUEL

Now you can help me around the farm all the time. If we don't get some rain, we may not have a crop. The soil is as dry as a hot tin roof.

HOWARD

It'll come. We can ask God for rain.

Dark clouds come up on the next ridge over, as it begins to rain on the mountain. Doc White drives up.

SAMUEL

These are some hard times we're living in. Eleven-cent cotton and forty-cent meat, how in the world can a poor man eat?

Howard points to the rain in the distance. Doc gets out of his car.

HOWARD

Look yonder.

Samuel looks as the clouds sit stationary and dump water on the rocky mountain.

SAMUEL

Yeah, Doc, look over yonder where God's puttin' that water on that mountain! On them rocks, where it doesn't even need to be! And our crops over here just burnin' up!

Doc walks up on the porch.

HOWARD

Things will get better.

SAMUEL

Lula's inside, Doc.

DOC

All right, how y'all doin' today?

SAMUEL

Fine, and you?

DOC

Can't complain.

Doc enters the front door. Samuel and Howard look at the dark clouds.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Doc, Lula, and Betty are sitting on the sofa. Howard enters.

HOWARD

Daddy went down to the cotton patch.
He's not studyin' no Bible.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Samuel is chopping down a big hickory tree. Howard stands out of the way. The tree is close to falling. Samuel stops and hands Howard the ax.

SAMUEL

This will make some good burnin' wood
for this winter. Finish up, son.

Howard gives the tree four or five good whacks. The tree falls and CRASHES to the ground. They are tired and sit on the fallen tree to rest. Samuel smokes his pipe.

HOWARD

Daddy, There's a revival comin' up. Me
and Ethel Dean are goin'. You need ta
find the Lord. Would you like to go
with us?

SAMUEL

Naw. You been seein' a lot of that
girl lately.

HOWARD

You know how our bull gets on the backs
of them heifers and jerks around?

Samuel looks away.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

What's that all about?

SAMUEL

Well, son, that's how they reproduce.

HOWARD

Yes, sir, but how?

SAMUEL

They do the act, and awhile later the
calves are born.

HOWARD

When they do the act, just what makes
them babies grow?

SAMUEL

Howard, them's questions a grown man would ask. God did it that way.

Howard realizes he forgot his morning prayers.

HOWARD

Oh! Daddy, I forgot to pray this mornin'. Do you mind if I pray my prayer?

SAMUEL

Naw.

Howard kneels on the ground next to the tree, and prays. A sad countenance comes over Samuel.

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - LATER

Lula washes the dishes. Samuel takes a chew.

SAMUEL

Lula, I'm afraid Howard's losin' his mind.

LULA

Samuel, there ain't nothin' to it. He just wants you to come to the Lord.

SAMUEL

I'm tellin' you, Howard's goin' insane.

Howard enters the kitchen.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Howard, you're goin' insane! With Lord this, and Lord that.

HOWARD

No, I ain't!

SAMUEL

You are!

HOWARD

I ain't!

SAMUEL

Oh, shit fire!

Samuel leaves through the back door.

HOWARD
(calling to Samuel)
Daddy, you're goin' to have to
find Jesus!

SAMUEL (O.S.)
I ain't lookin' for him!

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

Howard, ETHEL, and her GRANDMOTHER are walking home from
the revival. The Grandmother leads the way.

GRANDMOTHER
It was another lovely revival tonight.

HOWARD
Yes ma'am. I felt the Holy Ghost.

GRANDMOTHER
He was all around tonight.

They continue to walk. Ethel is next to Howard.

ETHEL
Howard, are you goin' to kiss me good
night?

HOWARD
Yeah, Ethel, if your Grandmother ever
gets far enough ahead.

Grandmother stays close by. They approach the gate at
their house. Ethel and Grandmother enter the gate.

GRANDMOTHER
Good night.

ETHEL
Good night, Howard.

HOWARD
Good night y'all, I sure had fun.

Howard leaves without a kiss. He kicks a rock on the
ground in disgust.

EXT. CORN FIELD - DAY (1931)

Howard, 15, and Ora throw the last of the corn in the
back of the mule-drawn wagon made out of old model T car
axles, and wheels.

HOWARD

Come on, Oje, get in the back. Let's go for a ride.

ORA

Howard, make it fast.

Ora climbs in back, and lays on top of the corn. Howard stands in front of the wagon to drive.

Howard gets the mules galloping across the field, and running over the humps. Each time the wagon hits a hump, Ora flies in the air and lands back on the corn. They die laughing. Ora flies up and lands. Ora laughs. Howard stops laughing.

Howard stops the mules, sits down, and shouts to the heavens.

HOWARD

(to God)

I can't preach! I don't have a suit of clothes, and I don't even have no education.

Ora is confused, and looks to the sky.

ORA

Howard, what's wrong?

HOWARD

I have a feelin' God wants me to minister.

Howard looks to the sky.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

(to God)

Would you just put it off for another year?

Howard is at peace, and slowly drives off. Ora climbs up front, and sits on the seat next to Howard.

EXT. FINSTER HOUSE - LATER

Howard and Ora pull up in the wagon. They get out. Suddenly, Ora points to the roof. The wood shingles on the back of the house are on fire.

HOWARD

Fire! Fire!

Howard runs inside, and brings out Samuel, Lula, Betty, and Sue.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
The roof is on fire!

LULA
Lord, help!

EXT. FINSTER HOUSE - LATER

Ashes burn where the house used to sit. Howard walks over to Samuel sitting in the shade of an apple tree. Samuel is sweating.

SAMUEL
Son, we have near 'bout lost everything.

HOWARD
What are we to do?

SAMUEL
What can we do? We'll have to live here in the cotton house for awhile, and rebuild.

EXT. NEW FINSTER HOUSE - DAY (1932)

The NEIGHBORS help Samuel rebuild the house. The construction is almost complete. Samuel nails the last of the wood siding on the house.

Lula brings out a tray of glasses with water. Bunk and Doc each take a glass of water and drink.

EXT. FISHING POND - DAY

Howard, 16, and J.B. are skinny dipping.

J.B.
How's your new house lookin'?

HOWARD
Good, Daddy's goin' to finish up today.

J.B.
Howard, why don't you tell my fortune.

HOWARD

I ain't doin' that no more. People don't need to know their future. If I tell somebody their goin' to marry a redhead, then they go around lookin' for somebody with red hair.

J.B.

Oh, come on.

HOWARD

No, if you live right, then God will treat you right.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - LATER

Howard walks home alone. He stops, and looks to the heavens.

HOWARD

(to God)

Okay, Lord, I'll preach.

Howard continues down the road.

EXT. FINSTER FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Samuel and Lula are rocking on the porch. Howard walks out the front door.

HOWARD

I'm goin' to the revival tonight.
Y'all want to come?

SAMUEL

Naw. Me and your mamma are gettin' old, Howard. You should stay here, and keep an eye on us.

HOWARD

Daddy, you got to get right with the Lord. God will watch over you. I got work to do.

SAMUEL

Your son has gone plum crazy.

Howard grows incensed.

HOWARD

Daddy, I'm not crazy, or insane! I got work to do, especially on you.

Howard leaves.

SAMUEL

No, you ain't. I am fine.

INT. LEA'S CHAPEL BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

There is a big revival meeting. Mr. Phillips, Howard's old school teacher, is sitting in the choir.

Howard walks up, sits down next to Mr. Phillips, and whispers in his ear.

HOWARD

Mr. Phillips, you're the first one I ever told this to.

MR. PHILLIPS

Yes, Howard?

HOWARD

I was called to preach by the Lord.

MR. PHILLIPS

Well, you'll get a chance to say somethin' right here tonight.

Howard is unsure of himself.

HOWARD

I don't rightly know what to say.

Mr. Phillips gets up and walks to the podium.

MR. PHILLIPS

Howard Finster's called to preach. We want to hear from him.

Mr. Phillips sits down. Howard walks to the podium, and clears his throat.

HOWARD

I was called to preach. I have a job now that I have to do, and I'm goin' to have to get out there with it. It says in the Bible, "God will destroy those who destroy the Earth."

He continues preaching, and we...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COTTON FIELD - DAY (1933)

Howard, now 17, is plowing the field with a mule drawn plow. He stops, gets up on a stump, and practices preaching to the ragweed.

HOWARD
God loves all people!

The mule cocks its head to the side, and listens.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
He so loved the world, that He sent his
only begotten Son, so whoever believes
in Him shall be saved.

We hear the mule WHINNY.

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - DAY

Howard is at the table writing a story about salvation with a pencil on a piece of paper. We see the title reads: THERE'S A BROAD WAY THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION, AND MANY BE IN THREAT, AND A NARROW WAY THAT LEADS TO SALVATION, AND IT'S HARD TO FIND.

Lula walks into the kitchen.

LULA
Howard, what are you doin'?

HOWARD
I'm writin' a story about salvation.
It's goin' to be in the Fort Payne
Journal.

LULA
(excited)
I swunny! That's good, Howard.

A beat.

HOWARD
Mama, when I was younger I stole a
nickel from you.

LULA
Oh, really.

Howard reaches in his pocket, and gets a nickel.

HOWARD

I'm sorry, Mama. I took it so I could get some candy from the peddler.

Howard puts the nickel on the table.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

This is yours.

LULA

Okay, Howard, thank you.

Lula picks it up, and puts it in her money jar. Howard continues to write.

INT. FINSTER LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Samuel is reading Howard's article in the "Fort Payne Journal." Howard enters the room. Samuel finishes reading.

SAMUEL

Son, that's beautiful. It just makes me think.

HOWARD

What, Daddy?

SAMUEL

It makes me think I need God. I've tried to be a good man.

HOWARD

Uh huh.

SAMUEL

Lord, I'm askin' you now. Won't you save me?

Howard gets excited with his daddy's salvation.

HOWARD

Mama! Mama!

Lula runs into the room.

LULA

What?

HOWARD

Daddy got saved!

Lula hugs Samuel's neck.

EXT. FINSTER BACKYARD - DAY

Howard and Samuel are building a little log cabin. They cut up old telephone wire for nails, and take little logs and nail them together.

SAMUEL

Howard, what makes you want to build this thing?

HOWARD

I want a bunk house. Something I can call my own.

Howard hammers a nail.

SAMUEL

What are you goin' to do with it?

HOWARD

I'm goin' to put things in it, like Indian arrowheads, and stuff. I'm goin' to make me a turnin' lathe, like the one we saw in Chattanooga. I'm goin' to turn our wooden jugs and bottles, and put them in here. And it's a place to meditate.

SAMUEL

I see.

Samuel hammers a nail.

HOWARD

Daddy, do you ever pray?

SAMUEL

I pray every day.

HOWARD

Do you ever read the Bible?

SAMUEL

I've read it plum through.

HOWARD

Good, Daddy. That makes me feel good.

Howard smiles, and hammers another nail.

EXT. FINSTER FRONT PORCH - DAY (1934)

Samuel, Lula, Ora, Howard, now 18, and Betty are standing and saying their good-bye's.

LULA

Now, Betty, you be careful at the mill.

BETTY

I will. It's safe, and besides it's good money.

HOWARD

It should be me leavin', and gettin' a good job.

SAMUEL

Son, I need you on the farm.

ORA

Yeah, Howard, we need you on the farm.

HOWARD

Okay, me and Oje will hold down the fort.

Howard puts his arm around Ora.

BETTY

Bye. Y'all take care.

ORA

Bye, Betty.

Betty leaves, and gets into a 1930 Ford next to the porch. Betty sees some new people moving in next door, and rolls down the window.

BETTY

Y'all got some new neighbors. Bye.

Betty waves, and drives off.

HOWARD

Mama, you still shouldn't have sold the truck, so Betty could buy that car.

LULA

Honey, she needs the car for the mill job.

HOWARD

I need the truck for the farm job.

Lula giggles, and lovingly taps him on the shoulder.
They walk inside the house.

INT. LITTLE LOG CABIN - DAY

Howard unpacks a box of arrowheads. He has all sorts of things, such as: Indian relics, wooden bottles, cannons, lamps, walnut jug powder shakers, a footstool and a bed. Howard sits on the bed, puts his feet on the footstool, and reads the Bible.

EXT. SAWMILL - LATER

Samuel, Howard, and Ora are running timber through the sawmill. The sawdust flies down the bank into the creek. They produce long boxcar lumber.

Howard and Ora load the lumber into the wagon. Samuel turns the saw off.

SAMUEL

Your brother, Arthur, before he died of appendicitis, could saw three thousand foot of boxcar timber a day out of this sawmill. And he was just sixteen.

HOWARD

Three thousand foot? A day! I sure would've like to seen that, and known him.

Ora loads the last of the lumber in the wagon.

SAMUEL

He sure was a good boy. Let's go deliver this timber. But first I want to stop by and meet our new neighbors.

EXT. FREEMAN FRONT PORCH - LATER

Samuel, Howard, and Ora are at the front door. The door is open. Samuel knocks on the screen door. PAULINE, 14, comes to the screen.

SAMUEL

Hello, I'm Samuel Finster.

Samuel points to his sons.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

This here is Howard and Ora, we're your neighbors.

PAULINE
Hello, I'm Pauline Freeman. My
parents' names are Horace and Gladys.
We moved here from Chattanooga.

SAMUEL
Is your daddy home?

PAULINE
Yes, sir.

Pauline leaves and returns with her parents, GLADYS and
HORACE FREEMAN. Horace notices the wagon.

HORACE
I see you got a load of good timber.
I'm a sawmiller, too.

SAMUEL
We got to go deliver this load. I was
just goin' to stop by, and invite y'all
to supper tonight.

HORACE
We'd love to come.

GLADYS
With this move and all, we weren't sure
what to have to eat.

Samuel points to their house across the field.

SAMUEL
Come on by about seven, we'll fill
y'all up.

INT. SAMUEL KITCHEN - NIGHT

Samuel, Lula, Howard, Ora, Horace, Gladys, Pauline, and
VERA,10, Pauline's little sister, finish up supper. The
plates are empty.

LULA
Horace, did you get enough?

HORACE
Yes, ma'am. Two helpin's is enough.

SAMUEL
Thank you for the bread, Gladys. It
sure was good.

GLADYS

I baked it after y'all invited us to eat. Glad you liked it.

HOWARD

We're goin' to church Sunday, Lea's Chapel Baptist, just up the road 'bout a mile. Ya'll want to walk and go with us?

HORACE

Sounds good ta me. Pauline, would you like to go to church with the Finster's?

PAULINE

Yes, sir.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Howard is picking blackberries. Ora is watching, while playing his banjo. Howard places the last of the blackberries in a five gallon bucket.

Howard puts two buckets full of blackberries on the front of his bicycle, and two on back.

HOWARD

Oje, I'm goin' up town to sell these here blackberries. Go on back to the house. Keep playin' that banjer, you're gettin' good at it.

Howard rides off on his bicycle. Ora continues to pick his banjo as he walks off.

EXT. DOWNTOWN VALLEY HEAD - LATER

The town square is full of shoppers at the market. Howard sells the last of his blackberries to a CUSTOMER.

HOWARD

This is my last gallon of berries.

Howard puts them in a brown paper bag, and hands the bag to the customer.

CUSTOMER

What do I owe you?

HOWARD

Twenty cents.

The customer pays him and leaves.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Love you.

Howard looks at all the people, and turns a bucket upside-down. He stands on it, and begins to preach.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You know, the Bible says to love your neighbor.

INT. LITTLE LOG CABIN - DAY

Howard sits on the bed reading the Bible. He puts it down, picks up a pencil, and writes on a piece of paper. Howard looks at the Bible again, and writes some more.

Howard takes time out to meditate. He stands up and leaves the cabin.

EXT. FINSTER BACKYARD - DAY

Howard walks up to some tall ragweeds next to the field, and begins to preach.

HOWARD

God created the earth in seven days.
That ain't it. God created the heavens
and the earth in six days, and rested
on the seventh.

The ragweeds sway in the wind.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Samuel, Lula, Horace, Gladys, Ora, Vera, Howard, and Pauline walk to church together. Ora runs in a big circle around everyone else as they walk.

Howard and Pauline lag behind the others.

HOWARD

Pauline, don't pay no mind to Oje. He
was in an accident when he was little.

PAULINE

What happened?

HOWARD

He fell in the fireplace, and got burned on the back of his head and neck. It stunted his growth, and made him hard to learn. Retarded.

There is a pause in the conversation as they continue to walk. Pauline changes the subject.

PAULINE

Where's there a swimmin' hole 'round here?

HOWARD

Down on the other side of our farm. Me and the boys go skinny dippin', but that may not be for a lady like you. It's a good pond for fishin' though. Do you like to fish?

PAULINE

No. I like to eat fish.

HOWARD

Let's go down to the pond. I'll catch the fish, and you can eat 'em.

PAULINE

Okay, but I'd rather go swimmin'.

Howard smiles.

EXT. FISHING POND - DAY

Howard and Pauline sit on the bank, while he fishes with a reed pole.

PAULINE

Tell me more about your callin'.

HOWARD

God wants me to preach His word. I'm jest learnin', but maybe one day I can make a difference. I write an article in the Fort Payne Journal.

PAULINE

I've never met a reporter before.

HOWARD

I'm not a reporter. Well. yeah, maybe a reporter for God.

They laugh.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I use the newspaper to preach.

PAULINE
That's great. You must reach a lot of people.

Howard pulls back on the pole.

HOWARD
I done caught another one.

EXT. FREEMAN FRONT PORCH - LATER

Howard and Pauline walk up on the porch. He is carrying a string full of fish.

PAULINE
Mommy!

Gladys walks to the screen door, and opens it.

PAULINE (CONT'D)
Mommy, look at the mess of fish Howard caught.

GLADYS
My goodness!

HOWARD
If I catch some more, I hope it won't be this many.

Howard hands the string of fish to Gladys.

GLADYS
Thank you, Howard. Why don't you take some.

HOWARD
No ma'am. I told Pauline I'd catch 'em, and she could eat 'em.

GLADYS
Well, okay.

Gladys walks into the house with the fish.

PAULINE
Wait here.

Pauline goes into the house and returns.

PAULINE (CONT'D)
I want you to have this.

Pauline hands him a school picture of herself.

PAULINE (CONT'D)
Bye, Howard. I had a good time.

HOWARD
Bye, Pauline.

Pauline goes into the house. Howard looks at the picture, and puts it in his billfold.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
You're a pretty girl, just like all the rest of 'em.

He leaves.

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - NIGHT

Howard is at the table writing on a note pad. Lula enters.

LULA
Howard, what are you doin'?

HOWARD
Writin' a sermon. There's a little church on the other side of the ridge wantin' me to preach.

LULA
I swunny to my gracious!

HOWARD
The mother of the regular preacher died so he's goin' to be out of town Sunday.

LULA
How do they know you?

HOWARD
The elder of the church reads my articles in the paper, and he invited me to preach. They're Methodist! But God loves them, too.

EXT. METHODIST CHURCH - DAY

Howard is at the front door saying his good-byes to the members. An ELDERLY LADY approaches him.

ELDERLY LADY
Fine sermon, preacher. The number one thing is love.

HOWARD
Yes, ma'am.

EXT. FISHING POND - DAY

Howard, J.B., and Ora finish dressing. Their hair is still wet from swimming. Howard pulls out his billfold, and Pauline's picture. Howard shows it to them.

HOWARD
Here's my girlfriend.

J.B. and Ora look at it in his hand.

J.B.
Ora, I'll race you to the road.

J.B. and Ora take off running. Howard looks at the picture, takes a deep breath, and falls in love.

HOWARD
That's my woman. If I don't never get her, there ain't nary another. She's my wife!

EXT. FREEMAN FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Howard and Pauline sit in the porch swing. He puts his arm around her, leans over and kisses her. She smiles bashfully. Vera walks out. Howard jerks his arm from around Pauline.

PAULINE
Vera, go back inside.

VERA
No.

PAULINE
Yes, we want to be alone. Go inside.

VERA
No.

HOWARD
Vera, I tell you what.

Howard pulls out a box of Gold Tip chewing gum.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I'll give you a piece of chewin' gum if
you go inside.

He opens the box, and pulls out a piece of gum.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Chewin' gum and leave.

Vera thinks about it for a moment.

VERA
Okay.

Vera takes the gum, and goes inside.

Howard puts his hand on Pauline's leg. Pauline slaps his
hand, and Howard jerks it away. She smiles at him.

INT. LITTLE LOG CABIN - DAY

Howard is making little walnut jugs. Ora enters.

ORA
Howard, what are you doin'?

HOWARD
I sell these walnut jugs as fast as I
can make 'em. People put baby powder
in 'em, and stuff.

ORA
Can I help?

HOWARD
Yeah.

Howard hands Ora a walnut.

EXT. FREEMAN FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Howard and Pauline are in the swing. Vera walks up, and
puts out her hand. Howard gives her a piece of gum.
Vera leaves.

Howard kisses Pauline, and she responds. They finish,
and Pauline smiles. Howard points to the heavens.

HOWARD

Pauline, do you ever think about other worlds?

PAULINE

You mean, Mars and Jupiter?

HOWARD

Yeah, but even other worlds?

PAULINE

What do you mean, Howard?

HOWARD

I'm talkin' 'bout places with other people. I mean, other planets, and their inhabitants.

Pauline has a blank look on her face. Howard stops talking, and puts his hand on her leg. Pauline moves his hand. Vera walks out, and puts her hand out.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I'm all out of chewin' gum, Vera.

Vera sits down in a rocking chair. Howard takes a deep breath, and rolls his eyes as if to say, "This is not going as planned." Vera smacks her chewing gum.

INT. LITTLE LOG CABIN - DAY

Howard finishes drawing a picture of a horse with a blue crayon on a page inside a notebook.

Howard flips through the notebook. We see SEVERAL DRAWINGS. Howard stops at a picture of a landscape. He colors in the sky with the same blue crayon.

EXT. TOMATO PATCH - DAY (1935)

Howard, now 19, and Samuel pick tomatoes, and put them in the wagon.

SAMUEL

Boy, look at the size of this one.

HOWARD

Daddy, I'm thinkin' 'bout marryin' Pauline.

SAMUEL

Howard, do you think you're ready for a wife?

HOWARD

Yes, sir. I love her.

SAMUEL

All right then, I wish y'all the best.

HOWARD

Where should we go to get married?

SAMUEL

Doc White at the cotton gin is your best bet.

EXT. FREEMAN FRONT PORCH - NIGHT

Pauline sits in the swing. Howard is kneeling on one knee. We hear the rain as it SPLATTERS the ground, and the tin roof.

HOWARD

You know, Pauline, we've been courtin' for several months now, and I do love you. I wanted to ask you. Will you marry me?

Pauline thinks a moment, and smiles.

INT. FREEMAN LIVINGROOM - LATER

Horace is reading the newspaper in his chair. Howard enters, and clear his throat. Howard is hesitant.

HOWARD

How you doin', Mr. Freeman?

HORACE

Oh, fine, Howard, and you?

HOWARD

Good. Mr. Freeman, the more I court Pauline, the more I love her. I'd like to marry her.

Horace puts the paper down. We hear the CLAP of thunder.

HORACE

If y'all thank y'all ought to get married, I suppose it's all right.

HOWARD

Yes, sir.

Howard leaves smiling.

EXT. FREEMAN FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Pauline stands as Howard quickly exits the house, while it rains.

HOWARD
He says it's okay!

They hug.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I'll buy you a weddin' dress, and get the license. I can't afford no ring yet though.

PAULINE
That's all right, we can get one later. I just want to get together, and live with you.

INT. CLOTHING STORE - DAY

Howard looks at dresses with a SALESLADY. Howard picks up a turquoise-blue wedding dress.

HOWARD
Isn't this the beautifullest thing you've ever laid your eyes on?

She nods with approval.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
How much is this wedding dress?

SALESLADY
Two dollars and ninety-eight cents.

HOWARD
I'll take it.

INT. COTTON MILL OFFICE - DAY

Howard, Pauline, and Gladys are sitting on a wooden bench. Doc White walks up. They stand.

DOC
I'm sorry to keep y'all waitin', but the cotton just keeps on rollin' in. I have a few minutes now. Y'all ready to get hitched?

HOWARD
Yes, sir.

INT. COTTON MILL OFFICE - LATER

Doc stands in front of Howard and Pauline. Gladys stands next to Pauline.

DOC

I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride.

Howard kisses Pauline. Gladys softly claps.

INT. FINSTER HALLWAY - LATER

Howard, Pauline, and Lula are walking.

LULA

Me and your daddy have decided to give y'all the girl's room till you can get on yore own two feet. It's a little bigger. Hope y'all have a happy life together.

Lula leaves. Howard picks up Pauline, and carries her over the threshold.

INT. GIRL BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Howard closes the door, and dives on the bed. Pauline laughs.

PAULINE

Howard, we can sleep together now and all, but let's not have any children for five or ten years.

HOWARD

Pauline, I agree; at least five years.

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - DAY (1936)

Pauline is pregnant, and carries a cup of coffee from the stove over to Howard, 20, sitting at the table. Lula sits next to him.

LULA

The doctor just left. He says your daddy's cancer is worse. There's no hope.

Howard stands.

HOWARD

Let's keep prayin'.

Howard leaves the room.

INT. SAMUEL'S BEDROOM - LATER

Samuel is thin, very sick and lying in bed. Howard enters.

HOWARD
Good mornin', Daddy.

SAMUEL
Good mornin', son.

HOWARD
Daddy, do you need anything?

Samuel shakes his head "no."

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Are you sure? How 'bout some puddin'?
Daddy, I'll go to Puddin' Ridge, and
get you some puddin'.

Samuel laughs, and then coughs badly. Howard is unsure about his comment.

SAMUEL
Howard, you can read me the Bible.

Howard picks up the Bible from the night stand. It falls open at the book of Matthew.

HOWARD
Well, I guess I'll just read this.
Jesus spoke these words, Daddy.
Blessed are the poor in spirit: for
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn: for they
shall be comforted. Blessed are the
meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are they which do hunger and
thirst for righteousness: for they
shall be filled. Blessed are the
merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart: for they
shall see God. Blessed are the
peacemakers: for they shall be called
the children of God. Blessed are they
which are persecuted for righteousness'
sake: for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven.

SAMUEL

Son, that's the sweetest verses I ever heard.

Samuel tilts his head back, closes his eyes, and takes his last breath. Howard holds his hand.

HOWARD

I'm so thankful you're saved Daddy. With us pickin' that cotton and sawin' the timber, I couldn't bear the thought of you bein' damned after all we been through. Your pain is over. Go to God, Daddy.

INT. GIRL BEDROOM - DAY

Howard is standing holding a BABY GIRL as she CRIES loudly. Pauline is in bed with the Doctor standing next to her. Howard walks to the door with the baby, and opens it.

HOWARD

Mama! Mama! You have another granddaughter. Earlene.

The baby CRIES louder. Pauline and the Doctor smile.

EXT. FINSTER BACKYARD - DAY

Howard is working on the motor of a 1931 Chevrolet, which he just bought. He took the block and pistons out, cylinder head off, and oil pan off. Pauline and Lula stand and watch.

HOWARD

Mama, I sure am thankful you loaned me that hundred and thirty dollars to buy this thing.

LULA

You're welcome, Howard. I hope it works out for you.

Lula goes inside the house.

HOWARD

That motor is wore slap out. I ain't never done nothin' like this before.

PAULINE

It won't never run no more.

HOWARD
It will, too.

PAULINE
It ain't. It won't run another bit.

Pauline leaves.

HOWARD
Have faith. I'll have it runnin' for
the revival tomorrow night.

Howard continues to work.

EXT. FINSTER BACKYARD - DAY

Howard, Pauline, Lula, and Ora stand in front of the Chevrolet. The motor is in. Howard bends over and pulls on the crank. It starts right up. Howard winks at Pauline.

HOWARD
Come on, Pauline. Let's go for a ride.

Howard and Pauline get in the car, and ride off. Lula and Ora watch the car drive down the road.

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - LATER

Lula and Ora are sitting at the table. Howard and Pauline walk in the door.

LULA
How did it go?

HOWARD
That thing won't do nothin'.

Ora looks at Howard. Pauline smiles at Lula.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
But just run like a lizard.

They laugh.

LULA
Good. We can ride in it to the
revival.

PAULINE
Yes ma'am, we got a whole mess of
people to pick up tonight.

ORA

Oh, boy.

PAULINE

Howard stopped at half the houses in the county, and offered 'em a ride.

HOWARD

I'd like to see a lot of souls out there tonight.

EXT. REVIVAL TENT - NIGHT

Howard pulls up in the Chevrolet. The car is loaded with Pauline, Lula, Ora and TEN OTHER PEOPLE. Everyone piles out of the car.

INT. REVIVAL TENT - LATER

Howard is at the pulpit preaching. There is not one empty seat.

HOWARD

As some of you know I just overhauled the motor in my Chevrolet. Sometimes our souls need overhaulin', and there's no better mechanic for that than God Almighty.

A few people giggle.

EXT. FINSTER BACKYARD - DAY (1937)

Lula strikes a match, and puts it to some dried moody grass to burn it off. Ora watches. The fire grows big as the grass burns.

EXT. TOMATO PATCH - CONTINUOUS

Howard, 21, digs the soil and plants tomatoes. He notices the smoke from the burning grass.

EXT. FINSTER BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Lula is working in her flower bed. Ora is running around in the grass as the fire grows larger.

EXT. TOMATO PATCH - CONTINUOUS

Howard waters the tomato plants.

EXT. FINSTER BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Ora's pants are on fire. He SCREAMS as he runs. Lula chases after him. The flame engulfs him.

LULA
Ora, lay down! Howard! Howard!

EXT. TOMATO PATCH - CONTINUOUS

Howard drops everything, and runs to the house.

EXT. FINSTER BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Lula chases Ora, and the flame grows larger.

LULA
Ora, lay down! Fall down!

Ora falls down on the ground. Lula takes her apron and smothers the fire over his clothes.

Howard runs up. Pauline comes out the back door. Ora is badly burned over seventy percent of his body.

HOWARD
Come on, we got to get him to the hospital.

Howard gets his car.

INT. FINSTER KITCHEN - DAY

Howard, Lula, and Pauline are sitting at the table. Pauline is breast feeding Earlene.

HOWARD
It's hard to believe Oje is gone.

LULA
He was a good boy.

PAULINE
I'll miss Ora.

Howard stands up and leaves the room.

INT. LITTLE LOG CABIN - LATER

Howard enters the cabin and sits down on the bed. He sits back and stares straight ahead. Howard has a vision.

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY [VISION]

Howard flies through the air as he looks at the mountains and trees below him. He sees letters on the side of a mountain. Howard cannot make out what it says, but there are white letters painted on big boulders.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. BETTY'S TRION RENTAL HOUSE FRONT PORCH - DAY (1941)

Howard, now 25, sits at a table. He is typing an article on an old Olivetti typewriter.

Earlene, 4, and GLADYS, 3, run out the door, and slam it. They pass Howard. Howard stops typing.

HOWARD

Earlene, stop slammin' that door!
Gladys!

Earlene, and Gladys don't stop. Pauline walks out the door carrying ROY, a year old son.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Good mornin', Roy. How's my baby boy
doin'?

Roy smiles and tries to wave. Howard continues typing.

PAULINE

Oh, you got it workin'.

HOWARD

Yeah, I got all the rust out of it, and
loosened it up to where it can write.

PAULINE

Howard, your sister says she's goin' to
come by tonight for the rent money.

Howard stops typing.

HOWARD

Pauline, I don't have it. I don't even
know how we're goin' to eat next week.
Betty is just goin' to have to wait
'til I get paid tomorrow from the
cotton mill. I bought a war bond
yesterday. Our soldiers over in Europe
need it worse than she does.

PAULINE

She says she's comin' by this evenin'.

HOWARD

That's alright, let her come by. I still won't have the money.

Pauline and Roy go inside. Howard types.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BETTY'S TRION RENTAL HOUSE FRONT PORCH - LATER

Howard finishes typing the article. He has five pages, and proof-reads them.

A car pulls up next to the front porch. An elderly man, CHARLES JORDAN, walks up the steps.

Howard puts the pages down, and stands to greet the man. They shake hands.

HOWARD

Hello, I'm Howard Finster.

CHARLES

I've heard of you, Howard. I read your writings in the newspaper. My name is Charles Jordan. How you doin'?

HOWARD

Fine, and you?

CHARLES

Good. Howard, I'm the elder of Rock Bridge Baptist Church on Lookout Mountain. We need a preacher. I was wonderin' if you'd be interested in the job.

HOWARD

Yes, sir. Why me?

CHARLES

Well, some of our members have seen you at one of your revivals. I like to read your articles myself.

HOWARD

Thank you. This will be my first church to pastor full-time.

CHARLES

There's quite a bit of people who enjoy your preachin'. We can't pay you much. Are you interested?

HOWARD

Yes, sir. I've been waitin' a while for my own church. Yes, sir, I'm interested.

They shake hands again.

CHARLES

Come on by Wednesday night, and we'll have a meetin' with the deacons after services. We'll finalize everything. Nice to meet you.

Charles leaves.

HOWARD

Nice to meet you, Mr. Jordan.

Howard waits till Charles drive off to get excited.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Pauline!

Howard grabs his banjo next to the chair, and plays the song "Foggy Mountain Breakdown." Howard dances as he picks.

INT. ROCK BRIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Howard and Pauline stand in front of the congregation. There are about FORTY PEOPLE, along with Charles Jordan, sitting in the pews.

Howard has Pauline's hand in his, while he whispers in her ear. Howard faces the members as the two of them part.

HOWARD

My wife, Pauline, has come forward this mornin' to get baptized. Let's all leave now, and meet back up at the Little River.

The congregation stands and leaves.

EXT. LITTLE RIVER - LATER

Howard dunks Pauline under the water of the river, as he baptizes her. The congregation watches.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Howard is holding a paint brush, and a bucket of white paint. He looks at a big boulder on the side of the road. Howard walks up to the boulder, and paints on it the letter: P.

A car drives up and stops. LOFTON STROUD, 22, gets out of the car.

LOFTON
What you doin'?

HOWARD
Paintin' a message. I'm the new preacher over at Rock Bridge Baptist Church.

They shake hands.

LOFTON (CONT'D)
Do you mind if I watch?

HOWARD
No.

Howard continues to paint more letters. Lofton climbs up on top of the boulder, and lies down.

LOFTON
It sure is a beautiful day.

HOWARD
Yeah. What do you do for a livin'?

Howard continues to paint.

LOFTON
I work on cars. I run the garage in town. How 'bout you?

HOWARD
I preach, and do odd jobs at the mill for a livin'.

LOFTON
I ain't never been to church.

HOWARD

We have a good time with God.

He finishes the message on the boulder.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Take a look. What do you think?

Lofton gets off the boulder, and reads Howard's work aloud.

LOFTON

Prepare to meet God before it's too late.

Lofton looks at Howard with big eyes.

LOFTON (CONT'D)

Howard, will you come to my house, and eat dinner with me?

HOWARD

Yes, sir.

INT. RIEGEL'S TRION COTTON MILL - DAY

Howard is sweeping the floor. The manager, MR. JONES, walks up to Howard, and hands him an envelope with his pay inside.

MR. JONES

Howard, you're a good worker. We gave you a raise in pay.

HOWARD

Thank you, Mr. Jones. Come visit us Sunday at the Rock Bridge Church.

Mr. Jones declines the invitation as he walks away.

MR. JONES

I have plans, Howard. Thank you, anyway.

Howard puts the envelope in his pocket, and continues to sweep the floor.

EXT. LITTLE RIVER - DAY

Howard is baptizing someone in the river as the congregation is watching. Howard lifts the person up out of the water.

It's Lofton. Lofton walks over to the bank. Howard follows him. They receive hugs from the members.

LOFTON

Howard, my great-aunt says they need a church on the other side of the mountain. Do you think you could help me build one?

HOWARD

Yes, sir. We can build a new church.

INT. RIEGEL'S TRION COTTON MILL - DAY

Howard is on his knees oiling the machinery. Mr. Jones walks up. Howard stands.

MR. JONES

Howard, we have to start producing more cotton here, because of the war in Europe. We're going to start running shifts here on Sundays. We need your help.

HOWARD

I can't. I got preachin' and teachin' in Sunday school I got to do.

MR. JONES

Howard, you know how hard it is to get a job. You don't want to lose your job. You better come in on this Sunday, else you don't need to come in on Monday.

HOWARD

Well, I got a church to pastor on Sunday. Everybody ain't preachers in this mill. I don't mind workin' on Sunday if you can arrange for me to work a different shift. I got a lot of bills to pay, and mouths to feed. Put me on graveyard shift!

MR. JONES

We can't do that.

HOWARD

I need the money, but I think I ought to be let off for my services. I can't just run off and leave my worship services for a day of work at the mill.

MR. JONES

I'll let the boss man know.

Mr. Jones leaves. Howard goes back to work.

INT. RIEGEL'S TRION COTTON MILL OFFICE - LATER

MR. COOPER is sitting behind a desk. Mr. Jones is in a chair next to the desk. Howard enters.

MR. JONES

Are you comin' in Sunday on your regular shift?

HOWARD

I need the job, but I can't do that.

MR. COOPER

A real minister should be supported by the people at his church. He shouldn't have to work in a mill.

HOWARD

Well, Paul the Apostle was a preacher. He was one of the greatest apostles in the New Testament. He ministered for his needs, and for the needs of those that was with him. And he was a tent-maker! He worked for a livin'!

MR. COOPER

You're fired!

Howard leaves.

EXT. BETTY'S TRION RENTAL HOUSE - LATER

Howard is unloading wood, screen, and tools from the trunk of his car. His black Chevy has a message painted in white on it which reads: THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH - DON'T PUT GOD OFF. Pauline walks up.

PAULINE

Howard, your Mama and Betty are comin' over for supper tonight.

HOWARD

Okay.

PAULINE

What in the world are you doin'?

HOWARD

I'm startin' me a business. I'm goin' to screen in porches, and screen windows for a livin'.

PAULINE

Why?

HOWARD

I got fired. The mill said I had to start workin' Sunday mornings instead of preachin'. I told 'em God's work is more important. They didn't believe me.

INT. BETTY'S TRION RENTAL HOUSE LIVINGROOM - NIGHT

Howard sits in a chair. Pauline, Betty, and Lula are on the sofa. Earlene hugs Lula's neck.

EARLENE

Good night, Big Maw.

LULA

Good night, honey.

HOWARD

Earlene, now run on to sleep like your brother and sister.

EARLENE

Yes, sir.

Earlene leaves.

LULA

Pauline, thank you for the good supper.

PAULINE

You're welcome, I'm glad you liked it.

Howard picks up a hand-written letter, and hands it to Betty.

HOWARD

Here, Betty, I want you to read this to Mama.

BETTY

What is it?

HOWARD

They sent some of my articles overseas to the soldiers. So I get to preach to them boys on the battlefields. One of them wrote me this letter.

Betty looks at the letter.

BETTY

Okay. Mama, it's by a boy named Glen Rush.

Howard nods his head.

LULA

That's nice of him to write.

Betty reads the letter aloud.

BETTY

Dear Howard, how are the peanuts in Georgia?

They all laugh.

BETTY (CONT'D)

I sure do miss it. You help me get through the day. I read your newspaper every chance I get. It helps a lot. I thank God for spiritual writin' like yours because it caused me to come to the Lord. Howard, if I don't catch you when I get out of this war, if I don't meet you here, I'll meet you in heaven. Your friend, Glen.

Betty puts down the letter.

LULA

That's so beautiful.

BETTY

What a good man.

HOWARD

Yeah, but the manager at the Summerville News told me he died. He got killed goin' over shell holes.

LULA

Lord, have mercy!

HOWARD

I believe I saw him in a vision. It was a young man in a uniform. I bet it was him.

Lula nods her head.

LULA

Honey, when you seen Abbie down by the sawmill road you was three years old. That's just after I hit you in the head with that 'tater fork.

HOWARD

Yeah, Mama, like to have knock me for a loop.

PAULINE

You probably deserved it.

Pauline taps Howard on the shoulder, and giggles.

LULA

No, I didn't mean to do it. But sure 'nough that 'tater fork did it to you. It gave you them visions.

INT. BETTY'S TRION RENTAL HOUSE HOWARD BEDROOM - NIGHT

Howard and Pauline are asleep in bed.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY [DREAM]

Howard flies over a garden. We see flowers, bushes, plants, trees, buildings, paintings, and sculptures. Howard smiles, while he hovers. He looks at the beautiful place.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HOWARD HOUSE LIVINGROOM - NIGHT (1963)

Howard, in his late 40's, is sleeping in a chair. The hair on Howard's temples are graying. THE TONIGHT SHOW with Johnny Carson is showing on his black and white television.

Howard wakes up. He notices the clock on the wall says it is past midnight. Howard turns the page of a '63 day calender on the end table.

HOWARD

I got to get back to work.

Howard stands up, and walks out the door to the back porch.

EXT. HOWARD HOUSE BACK PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Howard takes a deep breath of the fresh air, and walks down the steps. Howard sees a FIFTEEN FOOT TALL MAN standing next to the gate of the yard. Howard stops.

HOWARD

You look familiar, but I've never met a man fifteen foot tall 'fore. What can I do for you, sir?

TALL MAN

Get on the altar.

HOWARD

What do you mean? I've been preachin' all my life. I've lived a good Christian life. Did you say, "Get on the altar?"

TALL MAN

Yeah. Get on the altar.

Suddenly, the tall man reduces to normal size. His head is barely over the gate, and then he disappears. Howard walks to his shop building, and opens the door.

INT. HOWARD SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Howard enters the four-by-eight foot building. There are bicycle parts, lawn mower engines, hand-made wooden clocks and jugs, three television sets, and two completed bicycles.

Howard picks up a brush out of the paint bucket, and paints on one of the bicycles. He dips the brush in the paint, and shrugs his shoulders about the giant.

INT. HOWARD HOUSE CRAWL SPACE - DAY

Howard shovels a load of dirt into a wheelbarrow. Pauline walks up, and gets on her knees at the door.

PAULINE

Howard, what are you doin'?

HOWARD

Takin' this dirt and fillin' in the low part of the yard, the swamp, so I can plant more trees, vegetables, and what not.

PAULINE

Ain't there an easier way to get dirt?

HOWARD

I imagine so, but after I get this dirt out from under this house I going to build us a basement. I need a place to go and play my banjer, and have friends over to play.

PAULINE

Well, alright.

Pauline leaves. Howard digs some more.

EXT. HOWARD BACKYARD - LATER

Howard dumps a load of dirt from the wheelbarrow at a low section in the yard. THELMA, 16, and BEVERLY, 8, walk up.

BEVERLY

Daddy, some man is here to see you.

HOWARD

Okay, Beverly.

Howard stops working.

THELMA

Daddy, we're goin' up to the store. Do you need somethin'?

HOWARD

No, thank you.

The girls leave. Howard walks to the house. He stops and turns.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

(shouting to the girls)
Get some Co-Cola's!

THELMA (O.S.)

Yes, sir.

Howard continues walking to the front porch.

EXT. HOWARD HOUSE FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Howard walks up on the porch. JIMMY, 35, stands up. They shake hands.

JIMMY

Mr. Finster, my daddy has died. You knew him... Tom Black. He wanted you to preach at his funeral.

HOWARD

I don't remember the name. If you'll bring a picture by here, I'll tell you if I remember him.

Jimmy pulls out his wallet, and the photograph of his father.

JIMMY

Here's one.

Howard looks at the photograph.

HOWARD

My God!

EXT. CHURCH CEMETERY - DAY

Howard is conducting the ceremony at Tom Black's grave. Jimmy, his MOTHER and SISTER, and THEIR FAMILIES are sitting down. There are other PEOPLE standing and listening to him.

HOWARD

Then I had a vision. Tom Black was a giant, and he told me to get on the altar. He shrunk to normal size, and disappeared. I studied on it for awhile. God has a plan for me. He was tellin' me, "If you want to be big in the world, get on the altar." And when Tom went to normal size, that was like sayin' to me that if I didn't get on the altar, I wouldn't be big in the world. God's sayin', "If you want to be bigger, like that man was when you first seen him, get on the altar, like he told you. If you want to just go on in bicycle work and be little, okay."

EXT. HOWARD HOUSE STREET - DAY

Howard helps MR. THORNBURG load the last two of his wooden clocks in a truck next to the house.

MR. THORNBURG
Well, Howard, that's one hundred of your hand made clocks. What do I owe you?

HOWARD
Fifteen hundred dollars.

MR. THORNBURG
That's what I thought.

Mr. Thornburg hands Howard a check.

HOWARD
Thank you.

MR. THORNBURG
I must be going. Indiana is a long drive. See you next year, Howard.

A pickup truck pulls up.

HOWARD
It's good seein' you again, Mr. Thornburg.

Mr. Thornburg gets in the truck and drives off. Howard walks over to a pickup truck. BRIAN gets out of the truck.

BRIAN
Mr. Finster, I heard you can fix a lawn mower engine better than anybody else.

HOWARD
Yes, sir. I'm pretty good at it, but these days I'm real busy with my garden. I build sculptures, plant fruit trees and vines, and now I'm building a pretty sidewalk. So I don't know when I can get around to it.

BRIAN
That's alright. There's no hurry.

Brian unloads the lawn mower.

HOWARD
Okay, then I'll fix it.

BRIAN
I'll come by in a couple of weeks.

Brian gets in the pickup truck.

HOWARD
It might be a little longer.

BRIAN
That's fine.

Brian drives off. Howard pushes the lawn mower to the shop, with the check in hand.

INT. HOWARD SHOP - LATER

Howard pushes the lawn mower in, and sets it off to the side. He gets a mason jar full of money down from a shelf, puts the check in it, and returns the jar.

HOWARD
Now, I got to get to God's work.

EXT. HOWARD BACKYARD - LATER

Howard finishes building a small cement sculpture of the Madonna. He taps the last little mirror into the wet cement with the tip of his closed pocketknife.

EXT. HOWARD SHOP - LATER

Howard hangs a white sign with black letters, which he painted. It reads: EPH-6-8 KNOWING THAT WHATSOEVER GOOD THING ANY MAN DOETH THE SAME SHALL HE RECEIVE OF THE LORD. He puts it next to another white sign with red letters, which reads: FINSTER'S TV SALES AND SERVICE.

INT. HOWARD SHOP - NIGHT

Howard works on the guts of a television set. It is late. He rubs his eyes, and decides to take a break to rest them. He grabs his banjo, and starts to pick it.

EXT. HOWARD BACKYARD - DAY

Howard plants another fruit tree. He picks a couple of blackberries off a bush, and eats them. He grabs a potted shrub ready for planting.

EXT. HOWARD SHOP - LATER

Howard mixes up cement in a wheelbarrow. As he mixes he says a little prayer.

HOWARD

If there's anything else out there that
You want me to do, God, just open up
the door and I'll be there.

EXT. YARD - LATER

Howard walks up pushing the wheelbarrow. He is building a sidewalk. Howard pours the cement in two-by-two foot sections marked off with one-by-four lumber. He levels off the wet cement, and taps in broken glass, mirrors, and tile with the end of his pocketknife for decoration.

INT. HOWARD HOUSE DINING ROOM - DAY (1965)

Howard, Pauline, Thelma, and Beverly are at the table eating tomato sandwiches and potato chips for lunch.

PAULINE

These tomaters sure are good, Howard.

HOWARD

Yeah, the soil down there where that
swamp used to be sure is fertile.

BEVERLY

I like the potater chips.

Beverly eats a chip.

HOWARD

I'm preachin' at a revival tonight down
in Rome. Y'all want to come?

No one answers.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Thelma, is Daniel still courtin' you?

THELMA

Daddy, courtin' is old-fashioned. This
is 1965. I have a date with Daniel
tonight.

HOWARD

Nobody wants to go to the revival?

PAULINE
I'm goin' to stay here and clean the house.

BEVERLY
Daddy, I'll go.

EXT. HOWARD HOUSE FRONT PORCH - LATER

Howard is staring at the clouds in the sky. Beverly walks out the front door.

HOWARD
Lord, that's Russia and the United States!

BEVERLY
Where, Daddy?

Howard points to the sky.

HOWARD
Up there. See it?

BEVERLY
Yes, sir, that black cloud.

INT. CHELSEA BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

Howard gets excited in the pulpit preaching to the CONGREGATION about his new vision.

HOWARD
Let me tell y'all 'bout a vision I had yesterday. I was settin' on my porch, and I looked up at the sky. I seen Uncle Sam's hat form in the clouds, and I seen him up there wearin' that hat.

A few members are skeptical.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
My daughter Beverly seen it, too. Right then a black cloud come just rollin' at his feet, goin' right up his legs. And that black cloud turned into a bear. When it got up to Uncle Sam's breast, I said, "Lord, that's Russia and the United States!" I first thought that Russia was overcomin' our nation, 'cause it looked like that bear was goin' right on up over Uncle Sam.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

But when he got up there, he just rared up and laid them two paws out on Uncle Sam's breast. I believe that Russia and the United States to some degree are going to consolidate. We're goin' to become friends, or somethin'.

A CHURCH LADY rolls her eyes in disbelief.

EXT. HOWARD BACKYARD - DAY

Howard hangs a sign on a dried cement mound of snakes. The sign reads: SERPENTS OF THE WILDERNESS. He smiles.

INT. CHELSEA BAPTIST CHURCH - NIGHT

The congregation SINGS a gospel song. They finish the song. Howard walks up to the pulpit.

HOWARD

I have a question for y'all. I'm wondering if any of y'all can remember what I preached on in the message this mornin'?

There is no response.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Does anybody remember today's lesson?

ONE MAN raises his hand.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

One of you! Well, I figure if none of you can even remember what I was preachin' on for one day, then I'm not doin' y'all no good. I've been in the pulpit for close to thirty-five years, but now I'm just goin' to have to preach through my garden and art. I must resign from this church today. God bless you.

Howard leaves the pulpit, and walks down the aisle. Pauline, Thelma, and Beverly follow him. They exit the church.

EXT. HOWARD BACKYARD - DAY

Howard dumps a load of dirt from the wheelbarrow in the swamp. He wipes the sweat from his brow.

Howard sits in the shade of a tree to rest. He leans against the trunk of the tree, takes a deep breath, and stares into the distance.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ANOTHER WORLD - DAY [VISION]

Howard stands at a tree stump as tall as himself. There is a brass metal band around the top of the stump. A maze of hedges surrounds him. Howard looks around.

Suddenly, a snake rolls up as if it were a wheel. It stops, and lies out flat. The snake is a seven foot long python. Howard looks at it, and the snake slithers toward him.

Howard runs. The huge snake gives chase. Howard turns down an aisle of the maze. The snake is gone. Howard walks through the maze. Howard looks back. The snake is right on his tail.

Howard starts to run. The snake takes a bite, barely missing Howard's foot. He turns down another path, and loses the snake again. Howard walks toward a clearing. He looks back again, and there is the snake.

Howard runs, and the snake chases him. Howard reaches the clearing where the tree stump is located. Howard runs in a big circle around the stump, as the snake follows him. Howard moves faster than the large snake, and catches up with it.

Howard reaches down while he runs, and grabs the tail of the serpent. Howard slings it around his head a couple of times, and then slams its head into the stump. The snake falls to the ground dead, and disappears. Howard jumps on top of the stump, and raises his hands to the heavens.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HOWARD LIVING ROOM - DAY (1974)

Howard, in his late 50's with eyeglasses on, is reading the newspaper. The front page headline reads: NIXON RESIGNS. Beverly walks up.

HOWARD

Beverly, can you help me in the garden?

Howard puts the newspaper down.

BEVERLY
Yeah, Daddy, with what?

HOWARD
I need to do somethin' with those old
bicycle frames and parts. I thought
I'd build some sort of sculpture.

EXT. HOWARD BACKYARD - LATER

Howard and Beverly walk down a beautiful sidewalk. There is beautiful vegetation everywhere, truly a Garden of Eden. They stop just past the shop, where there is a very tall pile of junk.

HOWARD
See, I'm goin' to take all this junk,
and turn it into somethin' beautiful.

Howard picks up a bicycle frame, and hands it to Beverly.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Let's take 'em down to that clearin'.

BEVERLY
Okay, Daddy, but I'm supposed to run
and buy some groceries for mommy.

HOWARD
Just help me as long as you can.

Howard picks up another frame, and looks to the sky.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
It looks like rain.

EXT. BACKYARD - LATER

Howard has the foundation of the sculpture ready. He picks up a bicycle frame, and connects it to the bottom of the sculpture. It begins to RAIN. Howard continues to work as if it were a sunny day.

EXT. GARDEN GATE - DAY

Beverly hands Howard a box with the painted word of: DONATIONS. Howard nails the box to a post with a sign which reads: PLANT FARM MUSEUM. Howard finishes nailing.

HOWARD

See, Beverly, I want this to be a place where people can come to relax and be free. A place where you can get away from the nerve-breakin' highway traffic, or office work, and come down here to eat God's fruit, and look at all the inventions of mankind.

BEVERLY

Yes, sir.

HOWARD

If people want to donate money that will be fine. Besides, all the money goes to the crippled children's hospital, you know.

EXT. HOWARD ROAD - CONTINUOUS

TWO LOCAL STUDENTS, each 15, are walking down the road next to the garden. They walk up to Howard and Beverly at the gate.

FIRST STUDENT

What's all that stuff hangin' up all over here?

HOWARD

I'm tryin' to get me one of everything in the world.

The two students look at Howard as if he is crazy.

SECOND STUDENT

They pick up all the garbage in the city of Pennville, except for the Finster's.

The two students laugh as they walk off. Beverly is embarrassed. Howard looks at her.

FIRST STUDENT (O.S.)

The Finsters are vegetarians!

HOWARD

Don't pay them no mind, Beverly.

He puts his arm around her as they walk to the house.

INT. HOWARD SHOP - DAY

Howard is sawing a piece of wood with an electric saw. He sees a bicycle lock move across the table. Howard turns off the saw, and picks up the lock. There is a hole in it. He sees broken glass on the floor. Howard looks at a nearby window, and there is a bullet hole in it.

HOWARD

Lord, somebody done shot at me.

Howard grows angry, and puts the lock down. He gets a marker and writes on a piece of paper, which reads: YOU ARE CURSED. YOU WILL DIE! Howard puts the paper in the window over the bullet hole.

EXT. PLANT FARM MUSEUM - DAY

Howard is standing on a ladder, and puts the last bicycle frame on the sculpture. The sculpture is twelve feet tall, and looks as if it were a thousand snakes mingled together. Howard climbs off the ladder, looks at his work, and smiles.

INT. HOWARD BASEMENT - NIGHT

Howard shows FLOYD, a friend, his new recording studio. Floyd points to the equipment.

FLOYD

These microphones are nice, too.

HOWARD

Thank you. Some of them preachers have been comin' over here, and recordin' their Sunday services for the radio.

FLOYD

Is that right? Well it's a great set-up.

HOWARD

It beats all the dirt that used to be under here.

Howard turns on the recorder. The tape rolls. Howard picks up his banjo, as Floyd gets his banjo.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Now, let's pick a little.

They play the song "Orange Blossom Special."

EXT. PLANT FARM MUSEUM - DAY

Howard and his grandson, ALLEN, 12, are walking down a beautiful sidewalk past the pump house made of Coke bottles and cement.

ALLEN

Pap Paw, how many more of these little houses are you goin' to build?

HOWARD

Oh, I reckon a couple of 'em. I'm 'bout through with the Mirror House, but today I want to finish up the Bible House.

ALLEN

What's the Bible House for?

HOWARD

A place where people can read the Bible, and think.

They stop at the Bible house, a building eight-by-twelve feet with a red tin roof, two doors, and wood siding painted white.

ALLEN

Pap Paw, what can I help you with?

HOWARD

Allen, if you can, finish the tin cap on the roof. I need to work on the paintin'.

ALLEN

Yes, sir.

Allen picks up the ladder, leans it against the roof, climbs up it, and gets on the roof. Howard dips a paint brush in some black paint, and writes a phrase on the white wood siding. Allen BANGS the tin as he nails on the cap of the roof. Howard paints more letters. Pauline walks up quickly. Howard stops and looks at her.

PAULINE

Howard, I just got a phone call from New York! It seems Esquire wants to interview you, and take pictures of the Plant Farm Museum.

Howard paints more letters.

HOWARD
What's Esquire?

PAULINE
A national magazine!

Howard finishes the letters.

HOWARD
Maybe they will take a picture of this.

He points to the phrase on the wood siding he just completed which reads: WELCOME TO THE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST.

INT. HOWARD KITCHEN - DAY

Howard is sitting at the table drinking coffee. Pauline walks in with the mail.

PAULINE
Here it is, Howard.

Pauline holds up the Esquire magazine, and hands it to him. Howard thumbs through the magazine, and finds the article on the Plant Farm Museum, which is titled: GARDEN OF PARADISE.

HOWARD
My God, that's it!

PAULINE
What's it?!

Howard puts down the magazine, and leaves without answering.

EXT. GARDEN GATE - DAY

Howard is hanging a new painted sign over the old one, which reads: PARADISE GARDEN.

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY [VISION]

Howard flies around. Suddenly, he dives to the earth, and then travels through the ground.

INT. CENTER OF EARTH - LATER [VISION]

Howard journeys through the different layers of earth, as if he were flying through the air. We see fresh water, sulfur water, uranium, oil, and other things separated by different ledges of rock.

Howard flies on. We see veins of molten lava running through the rock. And then, oceans of lava in the center of the earth.

Howard flies on to the other side of the earth virtually seeing the same things as when the trip started. He exits the center of the earth.

EXT. SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA - LATER [VISION]

Howard flies past the Sydney Opera House.

HOWARD

My God! I'm on the other side of the world.

He flies away.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HOWARD HOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (1976)

Howard, in his early 60's, and Pauline are hosting a New Year's Eve party. There are about TWENTY PEOPLE counting down to midnight, including Beverly, Roy, Allen, Floyd, and the BAND.

TWENTY PEOPLE

Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five,
four, three, two, one, Happy New Year!

Howard kisses Pauline. Everyone hugs, kisses, and shouts some more. He puts his arm around Floyd, and speaks in his ear.

HOWARD

Get the boys together.

Floyd has the band get in their positions, as Howard speaks in front of the drum set.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

If I can have y'all's attention there's
a little somethin' I'd like to say
'fore we get to playin' some music.

Everyone quiets down.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I thank God for this time with my friends, and family. As y'all know, this summer on July the fourth will be our nation's bicentennial, two hundred years of freedom. That's somethin' else to be thankful for.

Howard nods to Floyd. The band starts to play the song "Auld Lang Syne." Everyone sings.

INT. HOWARD SHOP - DAY

Howard is touching up the white paint on a bicycle. He dips the tip of his finger in the paint, and rubs it on a scratch on the bicycle. He looks at his finger tip. There is a face on it, with two eyes and a smiling mouth. A warm feeling comes over his body. The face talks to him.

FACE

Paint sacred art.

HOWARD

I know it's you, Lord, but I can't. Others can do it, but not me.

FACE

How do you know?

HOWARD

How do I know? I never have before.

FACE

How do you know? Paint sacred art!

Howard takes out his wallet, pulls out a dollar bill, picks up a piece of plywood, and tapes the dollar bill to the plywood. He leaves the shop carrying the plywood.

EXT. HOWARD SHOP - CONTINUOUS

It is a sunny, warm winter day. Howard sits in a chair, places the piece of plywood in his lap, and pulls out an ink pen from his shirt pocket. He draws a picture of George Washington.

EXT. HOWARD SHOP - LATER

Howard is now painting George Washington on the plywood. It is now late afternoon, so his grandsons, Allen, and ANDY, 8, are standing behind the chair, watching him paint.

HOWARD

Earlier today, God called me to paint sacred art. But I said, "Not me."

ALLEN

Why, Pap Paw?

HOWARD

'Cause I didn't think I could, but guess what?

ANDY

You can.

Howard looks at the painting.

HOWARD

I reckon I'm better than I thought.

INT. TONIGHT SHOW SET - DAY (1983)

Howard, Johnny, and Ed are sitting on the set. The FLOOR MANAGER is standing off to the side.

JOHNNY

We'll take a break, and be back for more.

The audience applauds.

FLOOR MANAGER

And we're out.

JOHNNY

Fascinating stuff, Howard.

Johnny lights a cigarette.

HOWARD

Thank you. You know, the Lord has called me to paint five thousand pictures.

ED

It sounds like a lot.

HOWARD

God sent me here to preach His Word in the Last Days, and to be a Man of Visions. And to tell the world 'bout my visions through my sacred art, and my garden.

Johnny listens. Ed smiles.

ED

Oh, I see.

HOWARD

I feel responsible for this world,
'cause it's livin' out its Last Days.
I'm here as a red light to warn this
world about all of that.

FLOOR MANAGER

We're back in ten seconds.

HOWARD

I'm fulfillin' the Almighty's plan for
me on Earth's Planet. You know, my
brain is computerized from God...

Ed chuckles.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

...and feeds down to my right hand that
holds the brush, and my visions are put
down on wood.

FLOOR MANAGER

Five, four, three.

The Floor Manager holds up two fingers, then one finger,
and points to Johnny.

JOHNNY

We're back with Howard Finster, Man of
Visions.

The audience laughs, and so does Johnny. Howard smiles.

EXT. PARADISE GARDEN - DAY (1977)

Howard walks through the garden placing different pieces
of his artwork all around. There are paintings of such
things as Noah and his Ark, Jonah and the big fish,
Abraham and Isaac, Jesus and the apostles, and different
scriptures from the Bible. Andy walks up whining.

ANDY

Pap Paw, Allen drank my Co-Cola.

HOWARD

Andy, it'll be all right. We've got ourselves a Georgia peanut farmer in the White House, things have to be all right. Go on in there and get you another one.

Andy leaves. Howard puts a painting on top of an old TV set next to a peach tree.

EXT. PARADISE GARDEN - DAY

Howard is trimming a shrub. A lady in her early 40's, RUTH, walks up carrying a camera.

RUTH

Howard, I absolutely love Paradise Garden.

HOWARD

Thank you.

RUTH

My name is Ruth. I'm from New York, and I saw your garden in Esquire. I took some time to plan a trip here, but I finally came to Georgia just to see your place.

HOWARD

Glad to have you, Ruth.

RUTH

I'd like to buy one of your paintings. Noah's Ark.

HOWARD

Ma'am, you can take a picture of it with your camera. I'm not doin' paintings to sell. I'm doin' 'em to go in my garden.

RUTH

Well, I've already taken a picture of it. I want the real thing.

HOWARD

You can go down there and pick some fruit to eat. Take some tomaters with you.

RUTH

Okay, but I really would like the little painting of Noah's Ark.

HOWARD

Well, I guess I could draw another one.

RUTH

What will you take for it?

Howard scratches his head in thought.

HOWARD

I don't know. What would you give?

RUTH

I'll give twenty-five dollars for it.

HOWARD

Well, okay, just go ahead. I'll do another one.

Ruth hands Howard the money.

INT. HOWARD HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Pauline is cleaning the sink. Howard enters.

HOWARD

I know one thing, I'm goin' to have to get rid of my tools, and stop working on engines and bicycles so I can spend more time on my artwork.

PAULINE

Howard, it's goin' to be a little bit 'fore I'm ready to go to the store.

HOWARD

All right, I'm goin' to take a cat nap. Let me know when you're ready.

He leaves.

INT. HOWARD BEDROOM - LATER

Howard lies down on the bed, and closes his eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ANOTHER WORLD - DAY [VISION]

Howard is standing and looking around. We see the surface of a planet which, instead of being gravel and grass, is polished black-gold and red-gold mingled together. There are big pearl piers two hundred feet high, which are connected to many silos coming up from the inside of the planet.

ANGELS come from the silos with linen sandals, and skate on the black-gold and red-gold, polishing it slick as a button as they go. They skate around the pearl piers moving very fast. Howard smiles.

HOWARD

I'd like to put on a pair of linen sandals, and skate on that.

Howard sees an angel walk down one of the silos. Howard follows, and walks down many stairs to the bottom of the silo. We see there are streets at the bottom, which are twenty-five thousand miles long with golden chandeliers overhead for as far as the eye can see.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOWARD BEDROOM - LATER

Howard is still asleep. We hear a VOICE.

VOICE (O.S.)

Howard, you are from another world.

Pauline walks in the room.

PAULINE

Howard, it's time to go.

Howard opens his eyes.

INT. 1973 FORD LTD - LATER

Howard drives, while Pauline sits in the passenger seat. It is raining, so the windshield wipers are on.

HOWARD

Pauline, I need to tell you somethin'.

PAULINE

What, Howard?

HOWARD

There are other places. Other planets.

PAULINE
Yes, I know dear.

HOWARD
There are other worlds.

She gives him a strange look.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
I mean to say, I come from another world. Pauline, I'm a stranger from a world two hundred light years from earth. Nineveh.

PAULINE
My Gracious! Don't repeat that to nobody! They already think you're crazy. They'll know you're crazy if you ever mention anything like that!

HOWARD
Well, that's it. You don't understand either. Just like Job's wife in the Bible didn't understand.

PAULINE
I don't understand what?

HOWARD
I'm from the planet Nineveh.

PAULINE
Oh, please! Not another word about it!

HOWARD
I am.

PAULINE
Howard, please!

They say nothing as Howard drives.

EXT. PARADISE GARDEN - DAY

Howard dumps out his tools from the tool box on the ground. Allen and Andy help him sort them out.

ANDY
Pap Paw, I don't see why you have to do this.

HOWARD

If I don't have my tools, then I can't work on televisions and lawn mower engines. If I can't work on televisions and lawn mower engines, then I'll have more time to work on my sacred art. God has called me to paint five thousand pieces, and I don't plan on disappointin' Him.

ALLEN

Pap Paw, when you finish number five thousand, can I buy it?

HOWARD

It goin' to be awhile, Allen. I number each one, but yeah, you can buy it.

Howard picks up a wrench, and taps it into the wet cement of a new sidewalk. He picks up a screwdriver, and taps it in with his finger. Howard taps in a hammer, and some pliers.

INT. HOWARD HOUSE LIVING ROOM - DAY

Howard is reading the newspaper in his chair. Pauline is knitting in her chair. There is a KNOCK at the door. Pauline gets up to answer it. She opens the door. Gladys is standing there.

PAULINE

Mommy!

They look at each other. Howard peaks over the newspaper. Pauline closes the door knowing her mother is dead. Pauline is as white as a ghost as she sit down.

PAULINE (CONT'D)

It was mommy, Howard. She's been dead for years.

HOWARD

Yeah, I know.

PAULINE

I promise you one thing. Howard, I'll never mess with you no more.

Howard smiles.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. PARADISE GARDEN - DAY

Howard places a new bigger painting of Noah's Ark on the wall of the Bible House. He looks at his watch.

HOWARD
It's gettin' late.

He walks toward the house.

INT. HOWARD HOUSE BEDROOM - LATER

Pauline is touching up her makeup. Howard enters.

HOWARD
Pauline, are you ready yet? I don't want to be late. The Governor is goin' to be there, and everything.

PAULINE
Howard, this is so excitin'. Your first art show, and at the Atlanta Historical Society.

They leave together.

EXT. ATLANTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY - NIGHT

Automobiles pull up, as people enter the building.

INT. ATLANTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY - LATER

The building is large with a dome in the center of it sixty feet high. There are TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY PEOPLE to see the art show of many different ARTISTS. A BAND on stage is playing, but everyone is talking, and no one is paying attention to the music.

GOVERNOR GEORGE BUSBEE, early 40's, and MRS. BUSBEE, late 30'S, are in attendance. An artist, EDDIE MARTIN, mid-60'S, with a gray beard and dressed as an Indian Chief, is sitting at a small table telling fortunes.

Howard, holding his harmonica, and Pauline are standing next to the buffet table, which has roast beef, chicken, a huge ham, and all kinds of vegetables.

PAULINE
Look at the big ham.

HOWARD

Yeah, I'd liked to seen the size of that sow. I bet she was a blue ribbon.

Pauline giggles.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I bet you.

The Governor and Mrs. Busbee approach Howard and Pauline.

GOVERNOR

Hello, Howard.

HOWARD

Nice to see you, Governor Busbee.

They shake hands. Howard looks at Pauline.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

This is my wife, Pauline.

PAULINE

Hello, Governor.

Pauline shakes the Governor's hand.

GOVERNOR

This is my misses, too.

The two ladies shake hands, and then Mrs. Busbee shakes Howard's hand.

MRS. BUSBEE

Nice to meet you two.

HOWARD

Same here, Mrs. Busbee.

MRS. BUSBEE

Howard, we saw "Missing Pieces", the documentary about you. I just love your place in Pennville. What's it called?

HOWARD

Paradise Garden.

MRS. BUSBEE

Yes. Well, it's beautiful.

HOWARD

Come out and visit us sometime, Mrs. Busbee.

MRS. BUSBEE

We'll have to, because it's lovely.

GOVERNOR

Howard, do you play the harmonica?

HOWARD

Yes, sir.

GOVERNOR

Well, you're going to have to get up on stage, and play it for us tonight.

HOWARD

Instead of playin' music, I'd like to make a talk.

GOVERNOR

That's fine.

The Governor looks across the floor.

GOVERNOR (CONT'D)

If y'all will excuse us, I see someone we need to talk to.

HOWARD

Yes, sir.

The Governor and his wife leave.

PAULINE

I'm goin' to get me somethin' to eat.

HOWARD

Okay.

Pauline leaves. Howard looks at Eddie Martin in his Indian dress, and walks over to his table.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Hi, I'm Howard Finster. Are you an artist?

EDDIE

Yeah, I'm Eddie Martin.

They shake hands.

HOWARD
Me too. Why are you dressed like that?

EDDIE
Because I have Cherokee ancestors.

HOWARD
Me too. Do you tell fortunes?

EDDIE
Yes. You too?

Howard nods.

HOWARD
I used to, but I quit. I got tired of
tellin' people things they didn't want
to hear in the first place.

EDDIE
Sometimes that happens.

A WOMAN walks up to the table.

WOMAN
Hello, Eddie.

EDDIE
Hi, how are you?

HOWARD
Nice to meet you.

EDDIE
Same here.

Howard leaves.

INT. ATLANTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY STAGE - CONTINUOUS

Howard walks up to the STAGE MANAGER next to the stage.

HOWARD
I'm one of the artists, Howard Finster.
The Governor said I could give a talk.

STAGE MANGER
All right, let me see if I can get the
people's attention.

HOWARD
Thank you.

The stage manager walks up on stage.

STAGE MANGER
May I have your attention please?

The crowd RUMBLES as they continue to talk.

STAGE MANGER (CONT'D)
May I have your attention?

No one stops talking.

STAGE MANGER (CONT'D)
Attention, please?

No one notices him, as they continue talking. The Stage Manager steps off the stage, and goes to Howard.

STAGE MANGER (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, Howard. I can't get them quiet enough for you to make a speech.

HOWARD
I know it.

Howard leaves, and returns to Eddie.

The crowd RUMBLES more as the people talk.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Eddie, do you mind if I make a talk?

EDDIE
No, I don't mind.

Howard pulls out his harmonica, squats next to Eddie, and begins to play the instrument. SEVEN PEOPLE stop talking and listen to Howard play, but that is all.

Howard stops playing the harmonica, looks to the heavens, stands, and yells as if he were a boy again back on the farm.

HOWARD
Yaaaaaaa!

It echoes to the top of the dome, and throughout the building. Everyone stops talking, and looks at Howard.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
This buildin' is not on fire.

There are a few chuckles. Howard has everyone's attention.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I'm fixin' to leave here, and I just got a word to say 'fore I go. This is a wonderful night here. You people have brought out the Hidden Man in yourself. Like Columbus when he come here from Europe. He discovered everything we've got, our automobiles and everything. They was hidden. When he come here he brought out the Hidden Man of the Heart, and what he discovered after he brought it out, it was 'frigerators, it was washin' machines, it was automobiles. Columbus discovered all these things! And we put 'em together! They was hid in the earth! That's what you all have done here tonight. You've brought out your art, you've put it on the wall. You've brought out the Hidden Man of the Heart! There it is on the wall!

Howard pauses. He has everyone's attention.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Everyone slowly goes back to their conversations. A man, ALAN JABBOUR, in his mid-40'S, walks up to Howard.

ALAN J

Howard, would you pose with me for a picture?

HOWARD

Yeah.

ALAN J

Then I'd like to hear you play your harmonica.

Alan hands his camera to Eddie.

EDDIE

That was something else, Howard.

Howard and Alan pose as Eddie takes their picture.

EXT. PARADISE GARDEN - DAY

Howard and ANDY NASISSE, mid-30's, are walking through the garden.

HOWARD

And over there, Andy, is the Mirror House.

ANDY N

It's beautiful.

Andy sees a fifty-five gallon steel drum next to the sidewalk. It's painted with churches, trees, clouds, angels, Satan, and scriptures on it. Andy points to it.

ANDY N (CONT'D)

Howard, I'd like to have that trash can. What will you take for it?

HOWARD

Well, I hadn't planned on selling that trash can. That's the trash can a 'possum raised her young'uns in.

ANDY N

I'll give you fifty dollars.

HOWARD

Well, I had seventy-five in mind.

ANDY N

I'll buy it.

Andy gives Howard the money.

ANDY N (CONT'D)

Howard, I don't think I've ever told you this, but I'm the director of art at the University of Georgia.

HOWARD

You're an artist, too? I never knew that.

ANDY N

We'd love to have you come visit us, and have a show for you. You can teach some of the art students.

HOWARD

Oh, I don't know. I don't have no education. I never even studied art, and I just been paintin' a couple of years. I don't know nothin' 'bout teachin' art. I'm afraid I might embarrass the teachers.

ANDY N

It's the teachers who want you to come, Howard. You are a very good artist. You can teach them your technique.

HOWARD

I need to get caught up around here first. Maybe sometime next year.

ANDY N

We'll look forward to it.

Andy picks up the trash can. They walk to the gate.

INT. HOWARD HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Howard pours a cup of coffee, and sips it.

HOWARD

Oh, that's hot.

The telephone RINGS. Howard answers it.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Hello.

CHURCH LADY (V.O.)

Is this Howard Finster?

HOWARD

Yes, it is.

CHURCH LADY (V.O.)

Don't you know it's a sin to sell paintin's with verses of the Bible on 'em?

The lady upsets Howard. Howard puts down the cup of coffee.

HOWARD

Lady, do you have a Bible in your house?

CHURCH LADY (V.O.)

Yeah.

HOWARD

Where did you get it?

CHURCH LADY (V.O.)

I bought it at the store.

HOWARD

Well, there you go. If it ain't a sin to buy a Bible with Bible verses in it, how could it be a sin to buy or sell a paintin' with Bible verses in it?

CHURCH LADY (V.O.)

I don't know.

HOWARD

Good-bye.

He hangs up, and takes another sip of coffee. The phone RINGS again.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Now what! If it's that lady I'm...

Howard answers it.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Hello!

ALAN J (V.O.)

Howard, this is Alan Jabbour. I'm the person who had you pose with me, and play your harmonica for me that night in Atlanta.

HOWARD

Yes, sir, I remember.

ALAN J (V.O.)

I was just wondering if I could get you to do some paintings for us up here.

HOWARD

Well, I don't do artwork for other people. I just do it for my garden. I do what's in my heart. I just turned down an opportunity to do a fifty dollar sign for a dentist.

INT. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Alan Jabbour is talking with Howard. We see a name plaque on his desk, and a Library of Congress emblem on the wall.

ALAN J

Howard, we'd sure like to get you to do some art for us at the Library of Congress.

HOWARD (V.O.)

Did you say the Library of Congress?

ALAN J

Yes.

HOWARD (V.O.)

Oh, well, I might consider somethin' to do with them.

ALAN J

That's who I am. I'm Alan Jabbour with the Library of Congress. We're interested in getting you to sign a contract, and do some paintings for us here.

HOWARD (V.O.)

I might try and do that.

ALAN J

Good, I'll send you a contract. We'll be in touch.

INT. HOWARD HOUSE BASEMENT - DAY

Howard is working on two paintings, one vertical and the other horizontal. There are two finished signs, which read: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. Andy enters the room.

ANDY

Pap Paw, what you workin' on?

HOWARD

Two paintings for the Library of Congress. Those two signs there go to 'em, also.

ANDY

They wanted you to paint four of 'em?

HOWARD

Yeah.

ANDY

Did they give you any money for 'em?

HOWARD

Two hundred and twenty-five dollars.

Howard picks up one of the two completed signs. Howard numbers, dates, and signs it.

EXT. HELL PLANET - DAY [VISION]

Howard lands on a ledge half-way down a hill.

We see smoky black hills and dirty land covered in dingy soot. A very unpleasant place.

Howard slowly walks down a steep bank to an area where HELL'S PEOPLE are located. HELL MAN walks up to Howard.

HOWARD

Where am I?

HELL MAN

You are in Hell, man! I was sentenced here for murder. Can you help me?

Howard moves on, and sees HELL LADY.

HELL LADY

Do you have some water?

HOWARD

No, ma'am, I sure don't. Why are you here?

HELL LADY

I robbed a bank, and killed a police officer.

HOWARD

My Lord!

HELL LADY

Can you help?

Howard moves on, and walks up to ADOLF HITLER sitting on a rock. Hitler looks up at Howard with a pitiful face, says nothing, and looks back down at the ground.

Howard continues walking. Howard walks up another hill, and sees HELL TEENAGER.

HELL TEENAGER
I miss Earth. I wish I could go back there, and get another chance.

Howard reaches the top of the hill, and flies off.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HOWARD HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Pauline is cooking bacon and eggs at the stove. Howard enters the room.

HOWARD
Mmm, the bacon smells good this mornin'.

PAULINE
It smells good every mornin'.

HOWARD
Well, I painted all night again, smellin' the paint, and I know what I'm talkin' 'bout.

The telephone RINGS.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
It smells good this mornin'.

Howard answers the phone.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
Hello.

ALAN J (V.O.)
Good morning, Howard, this is Alan Jabbour with the Library of Congress.

HOWARD
Good mornin', Alan, how do you like those paintings I sent you?

Howard doodles on some paper, and draws a picture of Satan.

ALAN J (V.O.)

They're wonderful! That's why I'm calling. We're going to have a show with some of your work, and we want you to come to the opening.

HOWARD

I haven't ever flown before and I never will, unless it is really necessary.

Howard continues to doodle, and in capital letters he writes: HELL IS A HELL OF A PLACE.

ALAN J (V.O.)

Howard, we'd love to have you. Besides, we already have the plane reserved, and the Governor's wife will be on the same flight, with several other artists.

HOWARD

Alan, remember that old Indian, Eddie Martin?

ALAN J (V.O.)

Yes.

HOWARD

I tell you what, if you let Brother Martin come, I'll go.

Pauline places a breakfast plate on the table.

ALAN J (V.O.)

That's fine. It's scheduled for the end of January next year. We'll send you all the information.

HOWARD

Okay, but don't forget Brother Martin. Bye.

ALAN J (V.O.)

Good-bye.

Howard hangs up the phone, puts the paper with doodles on it in his pocket, and sips his coffee.

Howard walks over to the table, sits down with his plate of bacon and eggs, bows his head, and says a short, silent prayer. He eats.

INT. ATLANTA HARTSFIELD AIRPORT - DAY (1978)

Howard enters the airport carrying a small suitcase. He walks over to the group of ARTISTS, with Eddie Martin wearing his Indian dress, and Mrs. Busbee wearing a mink coat.

HOWARD

I like to have never gotten here, with the ice storm and the ice on the roads. There was car skids all the way down from Pennville.

MRS. BUSBEE

It is bad weather.

HOWARD

How you doin', Mrs. Busbee. That sure is a pretty mink coat.

MRS. BUSBEE

Thank you, Howard.

INT. DELTA JET - LATER

Howard is sitting next to Eddie. The jet is full of PASSENGERS. The pilot comes over the loud-speaker.

PILOT (V.O.)

Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm sorry for any inconvenience, but we are going to have to circle Washington for a little while before we land.

The passengers cheer.

EDDIE

Ya-hoo!

HOWARD

Why is everybody so excited?

Eddie points out the window.

EDDIE

Look!

They look out the window. We see Washington D.C.: the Capitol, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and the White House, covered in snow. It is beautiful.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

It's not every day you get to circle
over Washington.

HOWARD

Isn't that somethin'?

PILOT (V.O.)

We are sorry, ladies and gentlemen, the
wind levels will not allow us to land
in Washington. We have been rerouted
to Baltimore, Maryland. We will be
landing shortly. We are sorry for any
inconvenience.

Howard sits back in his chair.

INT. BALTIMORE AIRPORT - LATER

Mrs. Busbee walks between Howard and Eddie. Eddie is
beating a little drum, which he is carrying.

HOWARD

Mrs. Busbee, that sure is a pretty
coat. Can I trade you some art for it?

MRS. BUSBEE

No, thank you.

HOWARD

Well, how 'bout a seventy-three Ford
LTD?

Mrs. Busbee is overtly puzzled. Howard pulls out his
harmonica, and plays music along with Eddie beating the
drum, as they walk to baggage claim.

EXT. BALTIMORE AIRPORT - LATER

It is very cold, with snow on the ground, and snow
falling. A van pulls away with Mrs. Busbee, a couple of
TEACHERS, and a few artists. Howard, Eddie, and THREE
LADY ARTISTS, all mid-30's, wait for another taxi. There
are none in sight.

EDDIE

It's cold enough to freeze the balls
off a brass monkey.

One of the artists walks over to Howard and Eddie.

LADY ARTIST

Y'all go back in there where it's warm.
You're liable to get sick out here.
Y'all can get the next taxi.

Howard turns to walk away. He looks back at Eddie.

HOWARD

Come on, Eddie.

Howard and Eddie walk inside the airport.

INT. BALTIMORE AIRPORT - CONTINUOUS

Howard and Eddie enter the front entrance. The feathers on Eddie's headdress have gotten tangled. Eddie tries to untangle them, and gets frustrated. Eddie reaches around his head to work on the feathers some more. A few of the seashells on his outfit fall off, and hit the floor.

EDDIE

Damn! When I was younger and a hobo, I
came through this town. It wasn't
nothin' then, and it still ain't
nothin'.

Howard gets tickled.

HOWARD

Yeah.

EDDIE

Damn! If they let me out there I'll
get a damn taxi.

Howard picks up the seashells off the floor for him.

EXT. BALTIMORE AIRPORT - DUSK

Howard and the three lady artists stand on the curb waiting for a taxi. Eddie is doing an Indian dance, while beating his drum. Suddenly, through the snow, a pea green VW Beetle taxi pulls up.

INT. VW BEETLE - LATER

Howard and the DRIVER, a Native American in his early 20's, sit up front. Eddie is in the middle of the back seat with a lady on both sides of him, and one lying across all three of them.

EDDIE

Are you sure we don't know each other?

DRIVER
I don't think so.

EDDIE
What tribe are you?

DRIVER
Cherokee.

EDDIE
I'm Cherokee, also. Howard, I told you
I could get a taxi. I do the "get a
taxi" dance, and my native brother
picks us up.

HOWARD
Lord, Brother Martin, I wish you
wouldn't bother the driver. It's hard
enough gettin' through the snow like it
is.

Eddie grabs the driver's shoulder.

EDDIE
Do you have any kin down in Georgia?
Howard rolls his eyes back contemplating an accident.

DRIVER
Not that I know of.
They enter Washington D.C.

EDDIE
I bet you we're related. Do you know
Running Bear in North Carolina?

DRIVER
No.
We see the Capitol building in the distance.

HOWARD
Look yonder! Is that a sort of a
replica of the Capitol?

They all laugh.

DRIVER
This is the Capitol.

EDDIE
Howard, it is the Capitol!

Eddie laughs.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

That's a good one. Is that a sort of a replica?

They all laugh, including Howard. The driver cuts down alleys through old brick buildings.

HOWARD

This looks like my home town. This can't be the Washington I've knowed all my life!

EDDIE

Well, it is, Howard. It is.

EXT. NEW LIBRARY OF CONGRESS - NIGHT

The VW Beetle taxi drives off. Howard, Eddie, and the three lady artists walk to the front door. It is locked. A MAN walks by them.

EDDIE

Hey man, we're here for an art show at the Library of Congress. Is this it?

MAN

This is the new Library.
(pointing across the street)
You want the old one.

HOWARD

Thank you, sir.

We see a very long set of steps leading to the old Library of Congress.

MAN (O.S.)

That's where you're supposed to go.

INT. OLD LIBRARY OF CONGRESS - LATER

Howard, Eddie, and the three ladies enter the building. There are FOUR HUNDRED PEOPLE at the art show. A big sign at the show reads "Folk Art and Folk Life." The ladies walk off together. Eddie sits at the first bench that comes along. Howard rubs his hands together to warm them.

EDDIE

Those steps wore me out.

HOWARD

I'm goin' to get somethin' to warm me up.

Howard walks over to the bar. A BARTENDER waits on Howard.

BARTENDER

What can I get you?

HOWARD

I want a shot of scotch whiskey.

The bartender pours a shot, and hands it to him. Howard walks back over to Eddie carrying the shot.

EDDIE

(excited)

Where'd you get that? Where'd you get that?

HOWARD

(pointing)

Right over there at the bar.

Eddie jumps up, and runs to the bar. Howard takes a sip.

Eddie is at the bar motioning the bartender to pour more whiskey.

EDDIE

A little more, a little more.

The bartender hands him a big glass of whiskey. Eddie drinks it all with three gulps.

INT. OLD LIBRARY OF CONGRESS - LATER

Howard is sipping his whiskey, and looks at the art.

We hear the BEATING echo of a drum. Howard looks up to the ceiling of the atrium where the sound is coming from. He snickers.

Eddie straddles the third floor balcony rail, and beats his drum.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

(chanting)

Wah-ya-mama! Wah-ya-mama! Wah-ya-mama!

Eddie beats his drum, and does not care what other people may think.

EDDIE (CONT'D)
Wah-ya-mama! Wah-ya-mama! Wah-ya-
mama!

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HOWARD HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Howard watches "The Tonight Show" on the television. There is a KNOCK at the door. He opens the door.

Eddie stands there half-drunk, still with the Indian headdress on.

HOWARD
Hello, Brother Eddie.

EDDIE
(slightly slurring his words)
May I come in, Howard? I can't sleep.

HOWARD
Sure, come on in. I'm just watching
Johnny.

He closes the door. They sit on the bed.

HOWARD (CONT'D)
He had on them animals earlier, and one
of them took a pee on Johnny's head.
That was the funniest thing I've ever
seen.

They both laugh at the story.

EDDIE
I'm about half-looped.

HOWARD
Yeah, we had us a good old time
tonight.

EDDIE
Howard, there's something I have to
say.

HOWARD
All right.

EDDIE

Well, Howard, I don't guess I would ever have a chance with you.

HOWARD

What?

EDDIE

You know, a chance to love you.

HOWARD

No, Brother Eddie, you wouldn't.

EDDIE

Oh, come on. Just this once.

HOWARD

I'm different than you are, Brother Eddie. I like girls' legs.

EDDIE

Well, okay. But I'll make it feel good!

HOWARD

I don't fault you for being like you are, you know, gay. Some people are born like that, but I ain't.

EDDIE

Yeah.

HOWARD

It would be like pouring cold ice water on me to have anything to do with a man.

EDDIE

I guess I'll go then.

HOWARD

I love you anyway, Brother Eddie. You can stay, and watch the television with me though. I don't mind.

They watch the television together. A long beat.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I wish you could have seen them animals. That was the funniest thing.

EXT. PENNVILLE VILLAGE - DAY [VISION]

Howard walks down the street. He waves to a FAMILY as he passes by them.

Howard looks to the heavens. Unexpectedly, our enemies are dropping in by parachute, but they are not men. There are thousands of parachutes carrying all sorts of wild animals, such as; PANTHERS, LIONS, TIGERS, WILD BOARS, PYTHONS, WOLVES, and many others.

A FEW PEOPLE lock their doors, and pull down their shades. Howard watches the invasion.

We see the animals attack the family. A wolf mauls the DADDY. A panther kills the MOTHER. And a python squeezes the life out of the TODDLER.

Howard shakes his head in disgust. There is nothing he can do to help.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA ART CLASSROOM - DAY (1982)

Howard, in his late 60's, is standing in front of the class full of STUDENTS. Howard holds up his left index finger with a little face drawn on it. Andy Nasisse and another PROFESSOR sit in the front row of chairs.

HOWARD

And I saw this when I was called to paint.

Howard wiggles his finger.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

A voice said, "Paint sacred art." And I said, "I can't." That's the way the world is, not me. Not me. It can be Abraham, but not me. It can be Edison, but not me. It can be Elvis, but not me. I've even had visions of Elvis.

A few students laugh.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You know, Elvis Presley was a rock-n-roll, but he didn't hurt nobody. He was just a good, moral sinner. I went to visit his home in Memphis.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Three days after I got back, I was stooped down workin' in the flower bed, and all of a sudden I felt like somebody was behind me. I turned to look and there he stood! He was wearing dark blue pants and a light blue shirt with an open collar. And I said to myself, "Am I seein' things, or am I havin' a vision, or what?" So I just turned back and started workin' on the flowers, and said to Elvis, "What about stayin' awhile?" And I heard him say, "I have a tight schedule, Howard." I turned back around, and he was gone.

A few students chuckle. Howard holds up a self-published book.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Some of you may want to get a copy of this book, "Howard Finster's Vision of 1982: Vision of 200 Light Years Away. Space Born of Three Generations. From Earth to the Heaven of Heavens." 'Fore I have to go I want to thank Andy for invitin' me to the University, and thank him for helpin' me get a grant from the National Arts Endowment in Washington. They give me five thousand dollars for a down payment on a little church behind my house. I'm goin' to turn it into the World's Folk Art Church.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CAMPUS - LATER

Howard is walking across campus. A male student, in his early 20's, MICHAEL STIPE, walks up.

MICHAEL

Excuse me, Mr. Finster?

Howard stops walking, and they shake hands.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

My name is Michael Stipe, and we have a new band.

HOWARD

Oh, you're a rock-n-roll like Elvis. What's the name of the band?

MICHAEL

R.E.M.

Howard looks at him strangely.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

It's short for rapid eye movement.

HOWARD

Oh, I know all about rapid eye movement. Sometimes my eyes move so fast I lose 'em.

MICHAEL

We're going to release our first album soon, and we were wondering if we could shoot a music video at Paradise Gardens.

HOWARD

What's the name of the song?

MICHAEL

"Radio Free Europe."

HOWARD

That's a good title, "Radio Free Europe." That sounds like a good song. You know, y'all are goin' to have to come visit me, and make a video.

INT. WORLD'S FOLK ART CHURCH - NIGHT (1984)

Howard sees a sheet of plywood in half. The construction on the church is still going on. There is a KNOCK at the door. Howard opens it, and standing in the dark is Michael.

HOWARD

Hey, Michael, come on in.

Michael enters.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Do you want to make another video?

MICHAEL

No, Howard, I just came by to visit and talk.

HOWARD

Would you like some coffee?

MICHAEL

No, thank you. I saw you on the
"Tonight Show."

HOWARD

Yeah, they flew me out there, put me up
in a hotel room, and everything.

Howard picks up an open jar of Maxwell House freeze-dried
coffee with a spoon in it. Howard scoops up the coffee,
puts it straight into his mouth, and chases it with a
half glass of water.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

It's easier that way. It helps keep me
up at night, so I can work on this
church. I'm just too busy in the day
with all that art.

MICHAEL

Howard, I was wanting to talk to you
about art. The band is coming out with
its second album. I was wondering if
you and I could collaborate on a piece
of artwork, which could go on the cover
of the album.

HOWARD

What's the name of the album?

MICHAEL

"Reckoning."

HOWARD

That's a good title. How do you come
up with all these names? That's a good
one.

Howard picks up a sheet of plywood, and leans it against
the studs of the wall.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Michael, can you hold this while I
hammer? Just long enough for me to get
it started.

Michael holds the plywood in place while Howard hammers
in a nail.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

You should plan on stayin' a few days,
so we can work on it. You want to
sleep here in the church?

Howard hammers another nail, and puts down the hammer.

MICHAEL

Yes, I'd love to stay here.

HOWARD

Are you sure you don't want some coffee?

MICHAEL

I'm sure.

HOWARD

It's a good idea. I'd like to make an album cover for R.E.M.

EXT. TWO HUNDRED LIGHT YEARS AWAY PLANET - DAY [VISION]

Howard stands on this different world looking at the native LITTLE PEOPLE move across the ground without walking normally.

A strange spacecraft flies overhead. Then another spacecraft which is different from the first one.

HOWARD

Ohhh, isn't that fancy.

Howard likes this world.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. HOWARD LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS DAY (1985)

The tree is trimmed and standing in the corner. Howard is on the telephone. Pauline, Beverly, Roy, Thelma, Allen, and Andy are enjoying each other's company.

HOWARD

(on the phone)

It is good to hear from you, Brother Eddie... Merry Christmas to you, too... I'll talk to you later... Bye.

He hangs up. Howard picks up a little self-portrait painting from the end table.

Howard walks over to Allen with the self-portrait, and hands it to him.

HOWARD

I told you when I finished it you could buy it. Number five thousand.

ALLEN
All right, how much?

HOWARD
Twenty-five dollars.

ALLEN
Pap Paw, your art gets more than that.

HOWARD
Twenty-five. Take it or leave it.

ALLEN
I'll take it! Thank you, Pap Paw.

Beverly walks over, and hands Howard a thin square present.

HOWARD
What's this?

BEVERLY
Daddy, open it, and you'll find out.

HOWARD
I hope it's some paintbrushes.

BEVERLY
Now, you know it ain't no paintbrushes.

HOWARD
Yeah, but I need some paintbrushes.

BEVERLY
Oh, Daddy, open it!

Howard opens it. The gift is the Talking Heads' latest album, entitled: LITTLE CREATURES. The cover created by Howard.

BEVERLY (CONT'D)
First R.E.M. and now the Talkin' Heads.
I never imagined my daddy would be in
rock-n-roll.

They all laugh.

ALLEN
You did a good job on that cover, Pap
Paw.

EXT. PENNVILLE VILLAGE - DAY [VISION]

Giant termites and roaches run through the streets destroying everything. The giant termites eat up the houses and buildings. The giant roaches eat the people.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. WORLD FOLK ART CHURCH - DAY (1988)

Howard's studio is now in the church. Howard is finishing a piece of art, which is on a sheet of plywood four feet by eight feet. It contains a little bit of every type of art he does: painting, carving, pictures of the garden, and imbedded jewelry. Allen is assisting him.

The telephone RINGS. Allen answers it.

ALLEN

(on the phone)

Hello... Just a minute.

(turns to Howard)

Pap Paw, it's for you. It's some lady from New Jersey.

Allen hands Howard the phone.

HOWARD

(on the phone)

This is Howard... I'm all out of art now. I work all the time, but as soon as I finish 'em there they go out the door... I got one big piece that has all kinds of my artwork on it. I call it my "Travelin' Show." It's for an art show at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta.

(a long beat)

Ma'am, it's not for sale. The paint is still wet. I've worked on it for months. I don't reckon I ought to sell this one. I just finished the World Folk Art Church. I was intendin' to bring it back here, and hang it in the chapel after that show come down.

Howard covers the mouthpiece.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

(whispering to Allen)

Twenty thousand. That'll get rid of her.

He winks at Allen.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

(on the phone again)

Well, as much work as I got in that piece, and seein' as how I'd like to keep it here. I don't see how I could let it go for less than twenty thousand dollars.

(a long beat)

Thank you, bye.

Howard hangs up the phone.

ALLEN

What did she say?

HOWARD

She's mailing me a check.

ALLEN

(excited)

Wow! Pap Paw!

EXT. BLUE SKY - DAY [DREAM]

Howard flies through the air as an UNKNOWN VOICE praises him.

VOICE (O.S.)

Job well done, Howard.

Howard gives a big smile as he flies.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Job well done!

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. PARADISE GARDEN - DAY (2000)

The tenth annual art show, Finster Fest 2000, is being held in the garden. We see SIXTY ARTISTS on display, and HUNDREDS OF PATRONS visiting Paradise Garden.

INT. WILLIE'S ART BOOTH - LATER

Four artists, ERIC, in his late 20's, DANNY, in his early 40's, and WILLIE, in his mid-40's, are standing, and JOE, in his early 50's, is sitting in a chair.

WILLIE

This is my first Finster Fest. It looks like a good crowd, don't it Eric?

ERIC

Yeah.

WILLIE

Do y'all know how long this has been goin' on?

DANNY

Well, Willie, this is Finster Fest two thousand, so that would be ten years. Right, Eric?

ERIC

Yeah.

We hear a siren BLARING in the distance.

WILLIE

Danny, how many years have you been comin' here?

DANNY

This is my fifth year, but Eric's been here since the start.

ERIC

Yeah.

We hear the siren BLARE grow louder, as it gets closer.

JOE

What is that? Is there a fire?

ERIC

Naw, it's the man.

JOE

What? That's Howard? In a hearse? Man!

They laugh. We see the hearse pull up.

EXT. PARADISE GARDEN BACK GATE - CONTINUOUS

A black hearse art car pulls up with two deer heads, and two metal dogs mounted on it. The siren BLARES. It also has faces and flowers painted white on the sides, and misspelled white lettering painted on the back door which reads: DONT WORRY BE HAPPY - YOUR GUNA DIE ANYWAY. The siren is turned off.

Howard is in the front passenger seat. Beverly parks the hearse, and gets out.

BUTCH and LES get out of the back seat. Les is video-taping Howard with a Sony DV camera.

Andy walks up to Howard's door and opens it.

ANDY

Pap Paw, there's more than two or three wantin' to see you.

Andy chuckles, and turns to Beverly.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Does he got his banjo, or anything with him?

BEVERLY

Not today.

HOWARD

That banjer is probably down in the studio.

Howard slowly stands with a walking cane. Howard is thin and elderly. Beverly turns to the crowd of PEOPLE.

BEVERLY

Everybody give him a hand for bein' here today.

The people clap and cheer. Howard walks down the sidewalk.

HOWARD

There must be a lot of my relatives here today.

The people stop clapping. Howard continues to walk.

BOY FAN

What's going on, Howard?

HOWARD

I've been in the hospital with double pneumonia.

WOMAN FAN

I'm sorry. I'm glad you're feelin' better.

MAN FAN

I didn't tell them any of your stories, Howard, so you can start from the top.

Howard smiles.

HOWARD

Yeah.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Howard walks up the steps, and past CLOCK LADY. The clock lady is holding a forty-year-old handmade Howard Finster clock.

CLOCK LADY

You look so good, Reverend Finster.
You look good.

Howard turns around on the porch, and faces the crowd.

HOWARD

Thank you. I've been waitin' eighty somethin' years for my wife to say that.

The people laugh.

CLOCK LADY

Oh, come on now.

Howard slowly sits down at a table with the aid of the walking cane. The people line up to get his autograph.

Les gets into position next to Howard to videotape him. The clock lady is first in line.

CLOCK LADY (CONT'D)

My daddy got this clock from you forty years ago.

HOWARD

Ohhhhh.

CLOCK LADY

And I would like for you to sign it.

HOWARD

Yeah. Well, I'd be glad to sign it.

CLOCK LADY

Sam Little John. You don't remember daddy do you?

HOWARD

When I made this clock I didn't live here. This was 'fore I started numberin' 'em.

Howard autographs it.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

Is there anything else you need me to sign?

CLOCK LADY

No, thank you.

She leaves with the clock. Howard turns to the crowd of people gathered around him. Some of the people are carrying on private CONVERSATIONS.

HOWARD

Listen, I got somethin' to tell you, 'cause it may be the last chance I get.

The MUMBLE continues from the conversations.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

It's pretty important what I got to tell you!

YOUNG LADY

Shhh! Y'all, please! He's got something to say. Shhh!

The people quiet down, gather closer, and listen.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I've been here eighty-three years, and I've been the pastor of ten different churches through forty years. And, uh... I was at the house one day and thinkin' 'bout, you know... the end of my life is goin' to come pretty soon. I just was wonderin' is everything all right for me? I think it is.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

I feel like I've done the best I could. And then I got to studyin' 'bout myself, I'm goin' to meet God after awhile. I've been listenin' to all the preachers, and there's somethin' they haven't told me. They haven't told me there ain't no such thing as famous people. They haven't told me that. And I got to readin' what Jesus says in the Bible about it.

Howard gets emotional and choked up.

HOWARD (CONT'D)

He's the one that told me! Not the preachers. I can't quote it just exactly, but I'm goin' to tell you sort of how it was that made it plain to me. 'Cause I don't want nothin' to be in my way. Nothin'! He said that it's a sin to love one person better than another. That's what Jesus taught me. He said, "If you have respect of a person, to you it is a sin." God loves the poor person just as good as He loves the richest person on earth. I believe in God. I pray to Him for a lot of things that I can't get no other way, but to ask Him. He finally does what I ask Him.

INT. WILLIE'S ART BOOTH - LATER

Willie is hanging up a piece of his art. RUSSELL, in his mid-30's, walks up.

RUSSELL

Hey, Howard says it's a sin to be famous.

WILLIE

It's a little late for that, isn't it?

They laugh, and we...

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. TONIGHT SHOW SET - DAY (1983)

Howard, Johnny, and Ed are seated.

JOHNNY

Well, Howard, thank you for being with us.

HOWARD

Uh, yeah, it's healthy to laugh at least once a week.

The audience laughs, and so does Johnny. Howard stands. The audience claps loudly. Johnny and Ed stand.

Howard shakes Johnny's hand, and turns to Ed. Howard shakes his hand, while hugging Ed's neck with his left hand as if he were his brother.

Howard smiles, waves good-bye, and walks off stage behind the curtain.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD APPEARS...

Howard Finster passed away to another world on October 22, 2001. He left behind over 47,000 pieces of art. God shrugged.

FADE OUT.

THE END