

"WILD HEART"

An original screenplay

by

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WGAW-registered

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FADE IN:

EXT. COLORADO WILDERNESS - DAY (1880'S) - HAWK'S EYE VIEW

MOVING above snowy forests, streams, rocks, train tracks.
Exquisite, desolate, late winter.

MUTTERING THAT SLOWLY BECOMES DISTINGUISHABLE AS WORDS

MAN'S VOICE

...I burn, I burn, I sizzle, I fry.

(whimpering)

I fly, I soar, no heights, no
bounds, I AM THAT I AM, ah hah, hah
hah, above it all, no loss, no one.

MOVING lower, through woods, heading toward voice.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

(Latin)

"Quisque suos patimer Manis; exinde
per amplum/Miltimur Elysium, et
pauci laeta arva tenemus;/Donc
longa dies, perfecto temporis
orbe"...orbe, orbe.

(stifled CRY)

MOVING toward large tree, with leather thongs tied around it.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)

(child-like)

"Tis the voice of the lobster;/I
heard him declare,/You have baked
me too brown,/I must sugar my
hair."

(giddy laughter)

No, no, 'tis I/No, no, I'm late/Off
with his head/Open his throat.

CIRCLING tree, past a wild-eyed, half-naked MAN ("O.T."), in
his early 30s. He has tangled hair and beard, a bearskin tied
across his belly by thongs that bind him to the tree.

An old UTE INDIAN WOMAN squats by a small fire, cooking.
Drops of snow SIZZLE as they hit the flames.

O.T.

(rapid)

"Sir Eglamour, that worthy knight/He took his sword and went to fight./And as he rode both hill and dale/Armed upon his shirt of mail/A dragon came out of his den/Who'd slain, God knows how many men."

(startled)

And boys? Slain boys, as well?

WE FACE the man. O.T. stops speaking, madly "pondering" his question.

As the answer rises up in his eyes, he resumes frantically:

O.T. (CONT'D)

"Til, many a length of ages past/
The inherent taint is cleansed at last,
cleansed at last, the inherent taint is cleansed at last/
And nought remains but ether bright"--Oh, God...I fry, in Thy light.

WE MOVE INTO HIS EYES, INTO O.T.'S INNER VISION:

DIFFUSE LIGHT, creatures from various tales come in and out of focus--NURSERY RHYME CHARACTERS, KNIGHTS, PIRATES--interspersed with real CHILDREN in classrooms (circa late-1850s).

FINAL IMAGE: two YOUNG BOYS (age 5 and 7) wrestle on an elegant lawn. A coldly REGAL WOMAN in dark satin approaches and morphs into a large, diffuse DRAGON. The boys cower.

As the DRAGON'S SHADOW engulfs them...

O.T. SCREAMS (OVER)

RETURN TO SCENE -- THE SCREAM ECHOING

A MAN (AARON, 30) sits on horseback in the woods nearby, watching O.T. He turns and rides away.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOSTON TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT - SAME

Elegant residence, windows lit, guests within. LAUGHTER/TALK float out onto the night air. A light SNOW falls.

SUPER: BOSTON - 1880s

INT. TOWNHOUSE KITCHEN - SAME

CHLOE CAVENDISH (25), lovely, poised, arranges canapés on a plate held by a MAID.

DANIEL MCALLISTER (28), an elegant dandy, lounges restlessly nearby.

Satisfied, Chloe nods to the maid.

CHLOE
Off you go, Millicent. And make
sure father has some.

The maid curtsies, exits. Chloe turns her attention to the next tray.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
He'd rather talk than eat any day.

Suddenly, Daniel pulls her into his arms and kisses her. She pulls back.

CHLOE (CONT'D)
Daniel.

DANIEL
(Irish accent)
What?

CHLOE
Father's guests.

DANIEL
It's always one thing or another
with you, Chloe. Guests and fathers
be damned.

He pulls her hard against his body. She slaps him hard.

At the moment of the SLAP, the BUTLER enters. His eyebrows raise, he looks at Chloe.

She shakes her head. Daniel releases her.

BUTLER
(courteous)
Mr. Daniel.

DANIEL
Samuel.

The butler picks up a bottle of wine in an ice bucket, exits.

SOUNDS/sights of the party filter in before the door closes.

Chloe and Daniel glare at each other.

CHLOE

I have not agreed to any--

DANIEL

"Formal arrangement," yes, I know.
Do you think I can wait forever?

CHLOE

Do as you see fit.

She takes the tray, turns to leave. Daniel grabs her wrist, causing some canapés to spill.

DANIEL

Chloe, you torment me!

Chloe twists in his grasp. He won't release it.

CHLOE

You are behaving like a boy.

DANIEL

I have loved you since I was a boy!

This stops her. They exchange glances.

CHLOE

(gently)
Danny, my wrist...

He releases her. She turns to repair the platter.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

Father still needs me, you know
that. Perhaps when he is...when he
has...

DANIEL

Your father is as hale as any man
of sixty and is lionized by half of
Boston. He will not die soon and he
does not need you.

CHLOE

Danny, that's just not true. He may
seem a sophisticate on the lecture
circuit or in writing circles, but
he's absolutely helpless since
Mother died.

DANIEL
Your mother died fifteen years ago,
Chloe. He has forgotten her.

Chloe turns to him, eyes ablaze.

CHLOE
What a cruel and unjust--

DANIEL
Your father has needs, Chloe, like
any other man. Needs you cannot
fulfill. Where are yours?

She turns on her heel and opens the door.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
He uses whores.

A PASSING GUEST looks up, startled.

Chloe shuts the door, slams the platter on the counter.

CHLOE
How dare you accuse my father of
your own petty tricks. Put him in
the same mold as you, Daniel
McAllister.

DANIEL
I am his solicitor. I pay all of
his bills, including several from
one of the finest brothels in
Boston.

CHLOE
Get out.

Daniel hesitates, then tries to reach out to her.

DANIEL
Chloe, please.

CHLOE
Get out of my father's house, you
bastard.

His face goes firm.

DANIEL
You have chided me for my just
appetites for the last time, Chloe
Cavendish.

Daniel storms out of the kitchen. Chloe sags.

INT. TOWNHOUSE SALON - SAME

REGINALD CONSTABLE (60s), dignified, pot-belly, relaxes in a chair. He is in conversation with HANSEN, a muscular young man with a cheerful face.

On the table between them are TWO STACKS OF BOOKS:

One leather-bound tome: ERASMUS AND THE DEMISE OF RELIGIOUS SUPERSTITION by Dr. Reginald Cavendish.

And a cheaply bound book, with a lurid drawing on front: WOLVES, AVALANCHES, AND OTHER PERILS OF THE ADVENTURING LIFE by S.S. Hansen.

The men are surrounded by attentive, well-dressed GUESTS.

REGINALD

I for one cannot see how careening
down a river protected only by a
thin layer of wood or perching
precariously on an icy ledge
several hundred feet above *terra*
firma is a test of a man's
intelligence. It seems like brute
stupidity to me. Surely you did not
learn that in my classes, Hansen,
though I take some credit for your
vivid writing style.

Hansen laughs, as do those listening to the conversation.

In the background, Daniel can be seen collecting his coat and hat from the hallway.

Reginald glances at Daniel, surprise on his face.

HANSEN (O.S.)

I cannot agree, Professor. Any man
who has not pitted himself against
Mother Nature...

Daniel SLAMS out the door. Reginald frowns.

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

To triumph or to die, in my opinion
cannot call himself a real man...

A subdued Chloe comes into the salon.

HANSEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
A full man.

Chloe sits on an ottoman next to her father.

REGINALD
(to Hansen)
Pardon me, Hansen.
(to Chloe, softly)
Daniel left rather abruptly.

Chloe nods.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
Will you promise to make it up with
him tomorrow, Chloe? You are far
too hard on that good young man.

She nods again. He strokes her hair. She smiles.

Reginald turns back to Hansen.

REGINALD (CONT'D)
Now, sir, I consider myself a "full
man," tested not as you suggest by
some irrational beast or unthinking
weather, but rather in the greatest
realm of all: That of the mind, the
intellect, the divine realm of
reason. THERE is a man's -- or a
woman's--
(winking at Chloe)
True testing place. To read, to
ponder, to understand the greatest
thinkers of each generation,
perhaps even to add to the thoughts
of the finest minds the world has
produced, that is courage, Hansen,
that is the true life, that is MY
life.

APPLAUSE, including Chloe's.

HANSEN
No, Professor, the life of the mind
without the life of the body is
sterile, it is incomplete, it lacks
--

REGINALD
Oh, I agree.

HANSEN

But, you just said--

REGINALD

That the life of the mind is above all else, yes. But that does not make me an ascetic, I assure you. I can appreciate the "civilized life" of the body, just as well as the next man. I'll take a blood-rare steak, a Napoleon brandy, a Cuban cigar, and a fine-looking woman --

Reginald looks roguishly at a MATURE WOMAN nearby. She grins appreciatively back.

Chloe is momentarily troubled, thinking of Daniel.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Over wet socks, a dinner of salt-pork, and a bedroll festooned with mosquitoes, any day of the week.

Chloe and the guests laugh again, applaud.

EXT. BOSTON SHOPS - DAY

Chloe walks down the street with PACKAGES in her arms, checking items off a list.

She notices a toy store's window display, a rocking horse.

FLASHBACK - INT. ELEGANT NURSERY - DAY

CHILD CHLOE (5) is riding a rocking horse, with CHILD DANNY (8) pushing it up and down. She is breathless with pleasure.

LITTLE CHLOE

Danny, too fast. Oh, Danny, I'll fall.

BACK TO SCENE

Chloe laughs, and spins around, bumping into Daniel.

Her face lights up.

CHLOE

Oh, Danny, I was just remembering --

Daniel tips his hat and attempts to step around her.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

Danny, wait.

He waits. Chloe is at a loss. OTHERS must walk around them. She pulls him aside.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

Let's not fight. Not right before Father's and my big trip. It's the culmination of all my studies, years of research, Danny. You know I'm to give a speech, my first.

DANIEL

Yes, I wish you well with it.

CHLOE

Oh, Danny, don't let me leave thinking you angry at me. You are my oldest and dearest friend.

DANIEL

No, Chloe, I am your ONLY friend. You have no life but that which your father creates, and whatever you find between the covers of your damned books.

(pause, recovers himself)

Besides, I am not angry, Chloe. I am defeated. Now if you will excuse me.

Daniel walks away. Chloe remains, looking lost.

INT. TOWNHOUSE - FATHER'S BEDROOM - DAY

Chloe lays her purchases on the bed: handkerchiefs, gloves, hat, YELLOW-BROCADE VEST.

She strokes the vest in pensive admiration, then pulls a suitcase out from under the bed.

She goes to the bureau to take some things out, and stops to look at two silver-framed PHOTOGRAPHS on top.

INSERT

A photograph of Reginal (15 years younger) with his arm around a lovely dark-haired WOMAN. CHLOE (9) looks up admiringly as she leans against her mother's hip.

The second photograph is of Chloe and Danny as TEENAGERS. She is seated beneath a tree reading a book, Danny lies with his head in her lap, chewing a grass stem.

Chloe touches the second photo a moment, then takes both to the bed and begins to wrap them in the handkerchiefs.

INT. TOWNHOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Reginald reads the newspaper over a coffee and cigar. Chloe picks at her dessert.

The maid offers her more coffee. Chloe shakes her head.

CHLOE

Father?

He looks up, sees her concerned face, sets down his paper.

REGINALD

I'm sorry, my dear. Have I been ignoring you again?

She shakes her head.

CHLOE

No, it's just...I'm afraid.

REGINALD

Of what? Haven't you and Danny made up?

Chloe shakes her head.

CHLOE

Not yet. That's not it. When we go to San Francisco--

REGINALD

Oh, that again. You'll do fine. I've read your paper, it's excellent. Don't give it another thought.

He resumes reading.

CHLOE

Papa.

He sighs and folds the paper next to his plate.

REGINALD

Unlike Hansen and his serio-comic "adventure" novels, your research has weight, Chloe, clout, clarity. When your name is called at the convention, you simply stand up and read your paper.

CHLOE

But you've done it so many times and this is--

REGINALD

Your first, yes. But not your last. Once the convention has heard your ideas, they shall regard you the way I do. Not as my daughter, but as my protege.

Chloe has a decidedly mixed response to this. Reginald rises, kisses her on the head.

REGINALD (CONT'D)

Now, Chloe, you must come to grips with your nerves. I dare say that Father and Daughter shall be the hit of the convention.

He leaves. Chloe sits, still worried.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Chloe and her father are surrounded by his ADMIRERS, as a PORTER puts their luggage aboard.

Chloe looks for Daniel, who is nowhere to be seen.

INT. TRAIN - CABOOSE - NIGHT

Chloe and her father read in their elegantly appointed car.

EXT. CHICAGO TRAIN STATION - DAY

Chloe clambers out, stretches her limbs. She is followed "arthritically" by her father.

CHLOE

Three whole days in a hotel, with a bath, and decent food. I can hardly wait.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

Posh, fancy clientele, horse-and-carriage bustle in front.

INT. HOTEL - BATH

Chloe soaks in a deep tub, steam rising

KNOCK ON DOOR

REGINALD (O.S.)

I bought you a postcard to write to
Danny.

She looks troubled.

CHLOE

All right, Father. Thank you.

His STEPS RECEDE.

MONTAGE - EXT. TRAIN - DAY/NIGHT

The train CHUGS through farmland, prairie, climbs up
mountains, crosses low bridges. Signs of early spring.

INT. CABOOSE - NIGHT

The compartment is more "lived in" now, messy with books,
papers, tea cups.

Chloe pores over her speech, changing it, changing it back:
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ATHENS AND SPARTA.

Her father sleeps in his chair, glasses still on his nose,
book in his lap. He wears his bright yellow vest.

Chloe looks up, smiles fondly at him. Puts down her
manuscript and covers him with a train blanket.

She looks at her waiting papers and sighs, resisting.

EXT. CABOOSE - SAME

Chloe comes out onto the swaying platform.

CHLOE'S POV:

Dark landscape rushing past at a frightening pace.

She collapses onto a wrought-iron bench, hugging it tight.

The peach-hues of a RISING SUN peep over the horizon. She smiles at the sight.

Gathering courage, Chloe steps up to the railing, braces herself. Enjoys the wind in her hair. Watches the sun rise.

EXT. TRAIN - SAME

The train chugs toward a trestle over a steep gorge.

EXT. UP-RIVER - SAME

Aaron Lazare (the WATCHER in the first scene) bends over a beaver trap. Nearby stand a mule piled with pelts and a horse with saddle and provision bags. A dog noses in the brush.

Aaron looks up at the SOUND of the distant train, then returns to his work.

EXT. TRESTLE - SAME

A rock slide lies on the tracks, which are splintered.

EXT. CABOOSE - SAME

Chloe, eyes alight, sways on the platform.

A SHRIEKING WHISTLE, A SCREECH OF BRAKES

Fear crosses her face.

CHLOE

Father!

She turns.

EXT. UP RIVER - SAME

Aaron looks up at the sound of the SHRILL WHISTLE, the SCREECHING BRAKES.

The train, small and dark in the distance, hits the boulders and plunges toward the gorge far below.

Aaron is horrified.

EXT. CRASH SITE - DAY

Afternoon, shadows long, quiet scene: METAL DEVASTATION.

Some PASSENGERS and TRAIN WORKERS are crushed -- half-out of the train. Many are still inside the wreckage, bounced and pressed by the rushing water.

Aaron picks his way along the wreckage, looking desperately for survivors, at risk of being swept away himself.

It becomes apparent that there are none.

The LAST VICTIM he sees is a man in a bright yellow vest, pressed by the water against the caboose window, eyes staring, one arm flapping outside, as if in greeting.

Aaron shudders at the sight. Then, he sits on the bank, wet and shivering. His dog JASPER nuzzles him.

A WOMAN'S CRY

Aaron darts around, but can't see anything he hasn't seen before.

Jasper heads down-river. Aaron follows.

Thirty yards from the crash site, Aaron finds a delirious Chloe wedged between two boulders in the fast-flowing river.

AARON
(shouting to his horse)
Rufus, come!

The animal obeys. Aaron grabs a rope from his saddle, ties it to the saddle horn and around his waist, and wades out to get her. Jasper barks on the shore.

Aaron manages to free Chloe with effort. Shouts to his horse.

AARON (CONT'D)
Back up, Rufus! Back up, boy!

With the horse's help, Aaron gets Chloe to the bank. He stretches her out on the ground, opening her dress.

He immediately begins to inspect her for wounds, his manner that of a doctor, working quickly from her head down.

Chloe WHIMPERS more at some touches than others.

AARON (CONT'D)

(muttering)

Eyes clear, no apparent fractures
to the skull or neck, thank God,
abrasions of both shoulders,
bruising of chest area, suspect
fracture of the third rib left
side, abdomen seems free of trauma,
a blessing, hips appear sound, legs

--

When he lifts her skirt to inspect her legs, he suddenly stops speaking. Stops breathing.

Chloe's right leg, from the knee down, is MANGLED, SHATTERED.

EXT. CRASH SITE - LATER

Chloe, covered by blankets, lies unconscious near a fire.

On it, a PAN OF WATER boils. Several HUNTING KNIVES of various sizes lie with their blade-edges in the fire.

Aaron works rapidly nearby, removing items from his pack and laying them neatly on a clean cloth:

Lengths of FISHING LINE, NEEDLES of varying sizes (used for leather and cloth), a BOTTLE OF DISINFECTANT (with a horse on the label), STRIPS OF CLOTH.

When everything is ready, he looks at his equipment -- mentally checking it. Then out over the crash site -- mentally preparing himself.

When he moves, it is with DECISION:

He folds the blanket back from the shattered limb, with its tourniquet on the thigh, pours disinfectant over his hands -- staining them yellow -- and selects one of the knives from the fire.

He bends to his work to REMOVE CHLOE'S LEG JUST BELOW THE KNEE...