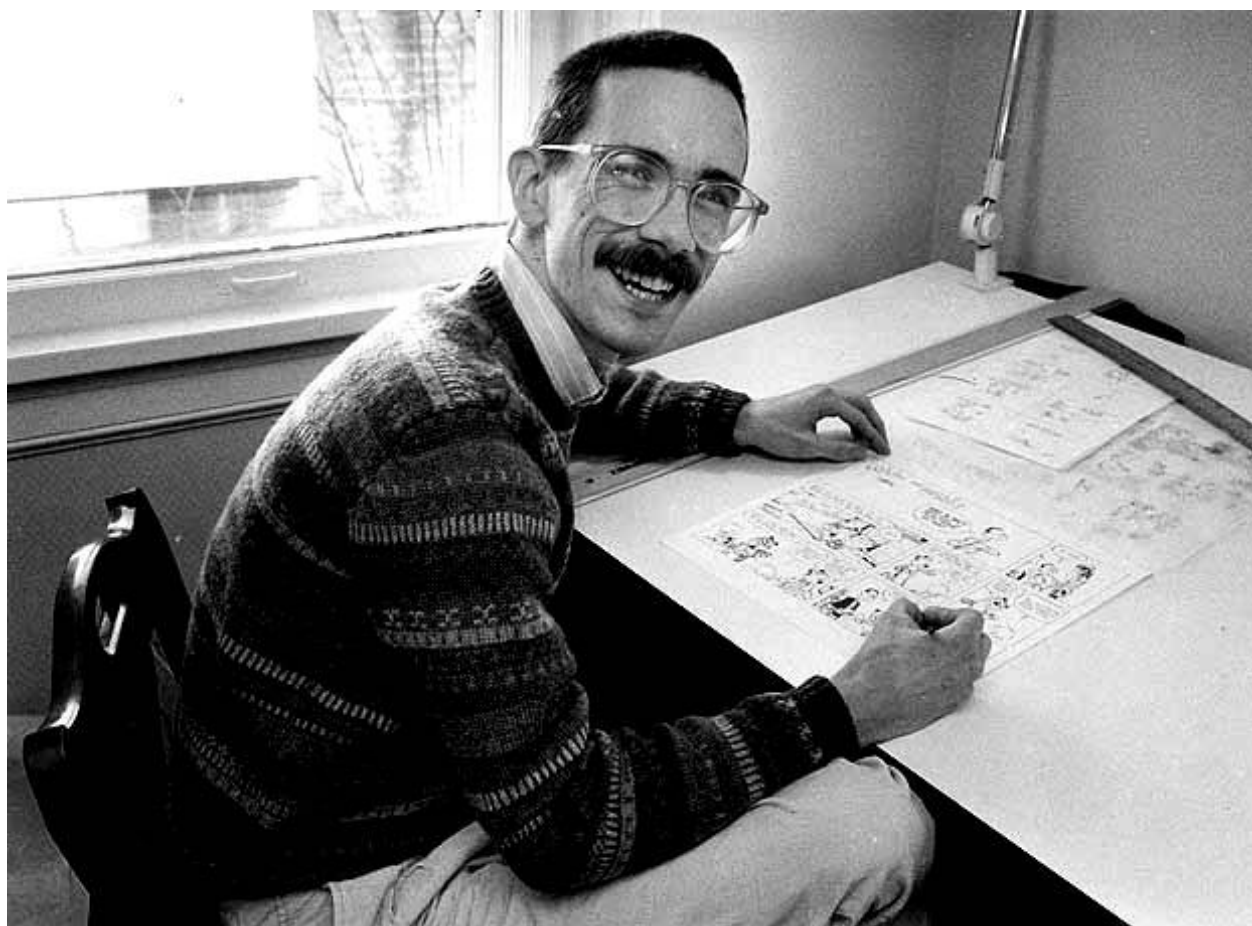


THE BOY AND HIS TIGER

by

Dan Dollar

dan.dollar@gmail.com





FADE IN:

INT. COACH - JET (FLYING), 1991 - DAY

An overhead announcement PLAYS: final approach to JFK.
Stewardesses walk TRASH BAGS up and down the aisles --

STEWARDESS

Trash? Trash? Thank you. Trash?

STEWARDESS comes upon...

BILL WATTERSON (30s), face framed by big glasses, a buzz cut, and a thick brown mustache.

He is DRAWING on his UNFOLDED NAPKIN with a pen.

STEWARDESS

Sir? Can I take your trash?

Bill looks up, taken aback -- but she's only reaching for his CUP. Bill lets her take it. The MAN IN THE MIDDLE SEAT leans over, tosses his trash, and the stewardess moves on.

STEWARDESS (O.S.)

Trash? Thank you. Trash? ...

We see Bill's drawing now:

It's a one-panel CALVIN & HOBBS COMIC STRIP. The boy Calvin and his stuffed tiger Hobbes are on a flight with Calvin's parents. Calvin gives orders to a stewardess with a cart...

The following is the dialogue written on the napkin --

CALVIN (ON THE PAGE)

*A tuna sandwich for my friend, and
a dry martini for myself.*

CALVIN'S MOM (ON THE PAGE)

He'll have a soda.

Bill scrunches his face. Not that good.

MIDDLE SEAT MAN (O.S.)

Hey. Calvin & Hobbes.

Bill looks over at his seat-mate, who CHUCKLES --

MIDDLE SEAT MAN

That's pretty good.

Bill sighs, shakes his head --

BILL
No. It's not...

-- SCRATCHES OUT HIS DRAWING...

BILL
It's garbage.

EXT. STREETS - NEW YORK CITY (NYC) - DAY

Bill frowns as he squeezes and BUMPS through CROWDS. We get a better look at him --

SUPER: *NEW YORK CITY, 1991*

Bill Watterson is a thin oddball. He wears Reeboks and a rainbow Swatch, which clash eccentrically with his sweater and slacks. In fact, Bill is a man of many paradoxes...

He is, all at once, an old man and a boy. A grouch, with a heart of gold. Prone to silence, but also lengthy rants. A shut-in who loves the outdoors.

A paradox. He's a very odd, brilliant, befuddling paradox.

EXT. UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE - NYC - DAY

Bill enters a gray building.

INT. LOBBY - UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE - DAY

Waits on a sofa.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
(hushed, on the phone)
Mr. Salem? Mr. Watterson is here...

Bill grins politely at the sweet-looking RECEPTIONIST (20s), a SIGN for UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE behind her.

Then, Bill's eyes wander to the --

Various FRAMED POSTERS hung on the walls. All classic comic strips: BALDO, CATHY, ZIGGY, THE FAR SIDE, DOONESBURY...

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)
Mr. Watterson?

Bill looks back.

RECEPTIONIST

I--I'd just like to say...I am a
huge fan of your work.

BILL

Thank you.

RECEPTIONIST

Could I--um...could I have your
autograph?

BILL

Uhhh...

RECEPTIONIST

I know you don't normally do them,
but I won't sell it or anything. It
would just be for my daughter. No,
I don't have a daughter, it would
just be for me. I'm sorry I lied.

The DOOR behind her OPENS, and Bill is saved from his
discomfort as --

LEE SALEM (40s), the syndicate's charming editor and vice
president, steps in. His arms wide open, a winning smile.

LEE

Bill.

Bill gets up...and leaves the expectant young woman behind.

BACK OFFICES

Bill follows Lee through an open working area.

LEE

How was your flight?

BILL

Fine.

LEE

Don't know how you do it out there.
Too hot. Nothing but desert. Can't
be worth it, man.

BILL

It's worth it.

LEE'S OFFICE

The door opens, Lee lets Bill enter. FOUR MEN wait inside:

-- JOHN MCMEEL (60s), the syndicate's stoic president,

-- FRANK THORNTON (40s), Bill's portly book publisher, and

-- Two new slick suits, KEVIN and MIKE (30s).

LEE

Bill, this is Kevin Darling and
Mike Russo. Gentlemen, this is Bill
Watterson. Our esteemed client, and
the genius behind Calvin & Hobbes.

MIKE

Mr. Watterson.

KEVIN

It's an honor to meet you, sir.

Bill shakes their hands warily.

LEE

Please, have a seat.

Bill sits. Lee settles in at his desk, gets out a BOX --

LEE

Now, I know some of us are strapped
for time, so I'll start with the
main dish. These little buggers...

Lee digs out five or so T-SHIRTS, lays them on the desk...

LEE

Are numero un on the agenda.

Look closer, and they are cheap, fake-looking CALVIN &
HOBBS T-SHIRTS.

LEE

These five bootleg shirts are just
a small sample of the kinds of
contraband going on across the
country. There are others, like the
bumper stickers, but the shirts are
the biggest problem. Now, this kind
of stuff isn't all that surprising,
given the high demand for Calvin,
but, nonetheless: *forgeries*...are
unacceptable. It's stealing money
which belongs to Bill, to Universal
Press, and that has to be stopped.
These shirts need to disappear. I

think we can all agree on that.

Lee pauses, looks at Bill.

LEE

Believe it or not...there is a solution. And it's quite simple. If we want to see these t-shirts go away...all we have to do is make--

MIKE

We have to make our own shirts.

Bill turns, squints at Mike: *what?*

LEE

Bill, Kevin and Mike are reps from a t-shirt company out in Delaware. Their idea is that if we hire them to make *official* Calvin & Hobbes clothing, their company will then have a *vested interest* in cracking down on the imitators.

MIKE

Exactly right. Mr. Watterson-- unfortunately, neither you nor your syndicate has the means or the know-how to conduct an inquiry, to work side by side with police in finding and stopping these perps. But as a licensed clothing company, we deal with this sort of thing all the time. We would do the fighting *for* you. Because, as your business partners--it would affect us just as much as it would affect you. And make no mistake--we would very much like to be your business partners.

It feels sleazy.

BILL

You want to make Calvin shirts.

LEE

They want to make *real* shirts, and: get rid of all these phonies.

Kevin chimes in --

KEVIN

Not just that, Mr. Watterson, but if you sign with Milford Clothes,

we will donate a portion of the profits to an international group that helps *save tigers* worldwide.

MIKE

Yes. That could be great for P.R.

LEE

Bill? What do you think?

Mike and Kevin flash their smiles. Lee and the others wait uncomfortably. Then --

Bill *stands, heads out*. John and Frank sigh in their seats. Like they knew it was coming. Mike and Kevin look confused.

LEE

Bill.

BACK OFFICES

Bill marches back down the hallway, Lee behind him.

LEE

Bill, hang on a sec.

EMPTY OFFICE

Lee finds Bill pacing in a vacant room. He enters, closes the door.

BILL

I thought we were discussing the new book.

LEE

We are.

BILL

Did you fly me here just for *that*?

LEE

No. No. We figured, as long as you're here--why not discuss this thing? We could put an end to the bootlegging, Bill, this could solve a big problem for us--

BILL

This is not solving a problem, this is creating a new one.

LEE

Creating a new one, what are you

talking abou--

BILL
You're making more shirts!

LEE
Okay, easy. *Official* shirts. Ones
we can make *money* off of--

BILL
I don't want shirts. Official or
unofficial. I don't want stickers.
I don't want dolls, I don't want
greeting cards, I don't want
Saturday morning cartoons. We have
been through this again and again,
I don't know why you continue to--

LEE
You're gonna lose your job, Bill.

Bill stops.

BILL
Excuse me?

LEE
You're gonna lose your job.
(beat)
The syndicate has reached a
decision. We're tired of this.
We're tired of begging. I'd keep
your wishes til the cows came home,
but--at the end of the day, you
know I gotta look out for number
one. We are still a business.

BILL
You're firing me?

LEE
You get a week. If you haven't
changed your mind on the shirts,
we're gonna hire a ghost to come in
and take over Calvin. Then, we'll
start licensing without your--

BILL
You can't do that--

LEE
We'll start licensing without your
consent. And we won't hold back. We
have five years of lost revenue to

catch up on.

Bill is speechless. Lee touches his shoulder.

LEE

Please...do the right thing here.
For your fans, for your wife...for
your career. Are you willing to
walk away from everything you've
built...just on principle?

Lee grins weakly, trudges to the door --

LEE

I'll see you in Ohio.

He steps out, shuts the door.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO - DAY

A plain ranch house sits among a row of homes in a desert neighborhood. Bill pulls into his drive in his '88 VOLVO SEDAN, gets out, wheels a small suitcase to the porch...

SUPER: *ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO*

INT. FOYER - BILL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bill enters -- and a GRAY CAT leaps, hangs onto his shirt.

BILL

Hey, Sprite.

Bill pets SPRITE as she dangles there, then the cat drops, runs off. Bill wheels through...

BILL

Melissa?

MELISSA'S STUDIO

He arrives and stands in the doorway to a room turned art studio. A window reveals the DESERT outside. In the center of the room,

MELISSA WATTERSON (30s) is painting a landscape. She's a small, warm brunette. To look at her is to feel at home.

Bill gazes at his wife as she strokes her brush: a pretty small Midwestern town is FORMING, a blue and red building called the POPCORN SHOP the main attraction.

More PAINTINGS rest against the wall.

Melissa stops, examines her work -- and not too fondly.

Bill approaches Melissa. She turns and smiles.

BILL
Looks nice.

MELISSA
How was your trip?

BILL
Fine.

Bill pecks her, heads back out.

MELISSA
Talk about the new book?

BILL
Yep.

Bill disappears into the HALLWAY --

MELISSA
Bill, don't put away your suitcase.
We'll have to pack again tomorrow.

INTERCUT WITH HALLWAY

as Bill wheels his luggage away --

-- and SPRITE dashes past Bill's MOVING FEET --

MELISSA (O.S.)
Is your speech finished?

-- and an orange cat JUNIPER BOOTS follows after --

BILL
No. I'm going to try and work for a
bit, Melissa. I'll be in my studio.

-- and brown PUMPERNICKEL crosses from one room to
another... *Three cats. One house.*

MELISSA
Okay--

Melissa pauses, *something's not right* -- but, she gives up,
returns to her painting.

BILL'S STUDIO - LATER

Bill enters, sits at a DRAFTING TABLE against the wall. He's made himself comfortable by undoing one button on his shirt.

The room is small with one window. Bare, apart from a stack of CALVIN & HOBBS STRIPS on the floor and a PEANUTS POSTER above the table. A bin of FAN MAIL resting near Bill's feet.

Bill goes through his PRE-DRAWING ROUTINE: he CRACKS his knuckles, he shakes his wrists. He GRINDS pencils with a sharpener. He gets out a Bristol board, lays it before him.

He sighs heavy and stares at the BLANK WHITE PAGE...

Brushes his mustache with his fingers.

LATER

Bill paces to and fro about the room, brainstorming, creating worlds and conversations in his head. He MUMBLES to himself, he curiously shapes the air with his hands.

He sketches briefly at his desk, then gets up again.

LATER

Bill stares out the window, a blank expression on his face.

Behind him, SPRITE tiptoes across the table, hops off.

LATER

Bill TAPS his pencil, stumped, then he tosses the pencil down, leans forward, smushing his face -- and we see his latest work...

...a single, solitary SKETCH OF CALVIN AND HOBBS in the center of the page. The two characters stare dumbly right back at Bill, but there's something unique, *organic* about this particular drawing. The lines seem to be pulsating, vibrating with life...*as if Calvin and Hobbes were alive.*

BILL
 (to the drawing)
 Do something.
 (beat)
 Do something.

Another beat. Then --

Calvin and Hobbes look at each other, and back at Bill.

They are alive.

BILL
Stop standing there, and do
something.

Calvin shrugs, looks up at Hobbes -- who scratches his furry head.

Bill fumes, then he snatches the board and FRISBEES it across the room, and it skids into the wall. Bill sags in despair -- and then, he finds himself looking up at...

...CHARLIE BROWN, looming above his desk in poster form...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BASEMENT - GROCERY STORE, 1985 - DAY

...and a SMALLER PEANUTS POSTER replaces it. Taped on the brick wall of a cramped, windowless basement over a desk.

BILL WATTERSON, early 20s and fresh out of college, is hunched over the desk, DESIGNING GROCERY STORE ADS. Dull, mindless work -- which barely pays the bills as it is.

SUPER: CHAGRIN FALLS, OHIO - 1985

Bill stops, brushes his mustache. Looks back, scans the empty basement. The only sign of life from inside his MANAGER'S OFFICE, where a country song PLAYS loudly.

Bill carefully slides out a SKETCH from under his work, DRAWS on it. Whatever it is, it's quite amusing to Bill --

The office door YANKS OPEN behind him. Bill hides his drawing --

HANKS (O.S.)
Watterson.

HANKS (50s), Bill's tie-choked, red-faced manager, has poked his head out his office.

HANKS
Where's that ad?

BILL
Almost finished.

HANKS
Hurry up. Printing company needs it by five. And none of that weird, creative stuff you like to do. Prices and products. That's it.

BILL

Yes sir.

Hanks loosens his tie, marches up the stairs.

HANKS

This is real life, Watterson. Get
your head out of the clouds.

Bill turns back to his desk, unearths his DRAWING again --
it's a sketch of HANKS, *raging and spitting like an ape.*

Bill sighs, DRAWS...

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Bill marches across the parking lot, away from his prison
(or the FOOD 'N' SAVE as it's called). He carries a brown
leather satchel with his drawing things in it.

He finds his '78 CHEVY IMPALA, hops in, fires it up --

EEE EEE EEE EEE -- and his car won't start.

EEE EEE EEE EEE. EEE EEE EEE EEE.

A beat.

Bill gets out, SLAMS his door, starts to walk.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CHAGRIN FALLS, OHIO - DAY

Bill moseys through a quaint, quiet, idyllic small-town. He
passes rows of charming storefronts, polite passers-by, old
lampposts...this is CHAGRIN FALLS: straight from the mind of
Norman Rockwell.

EXT. BACK ROAD - DUSK

Bill trudges down a road, just between the center of town
and the neighborhoods enclosing it.

An ORANGE VW BEETLE pulls up alongside him...

MELISSA (O.S.)

Bill.

Bill peeks inside --

MELISSA RICHMOND, Bill's future wife, gawks as she drives
alongside him. Melissa is as upbeat about life as Bill is

cynical -- and that's why he's secretly in love with her.

MELISSA
What are you doing?

BILL
Hello, Melissa.

MELISSA
Do you need a ride?

BILL
Um...yes. Thank you.

Melissa pulls over, opens the passenger door.

INT. BEETLE (MOVING) - LATER

Melissa can't stop glancing, smiling at Bill as she drives. She wears a uniform, maybe for a coffee shop or something.

MELISSA
Can't believe you're walking home.
Why didn't you call your folks?
(beat)
You should really just get a new car.

Bill is glaring at the GARFIELD ORNAMENT hung from Melissa's mirror.

MELISSA
What? You don't like Garfield?

BILL
Garfield...is everything that's wrong with comic strips today. It's predictable, it's repetitive, it's juvenile. And the artwork...is almost as uninspired as the jokes.

MELISSA
So, you don't like it.

BILL
No.

Melissa smiles as she hits her blinker, makes a turn.

MELISSA
Such a snob.

INT. FOYER - WATTERSON HOUSE - EVENING

Bill UNLOCKS, enters his PARENT'S HOME. Melissa behind him.

BILL
Mom? I'm home.

KATHRYN (O.S.)
(from the kitchen)
What?

BILL
Melissa's here, we'll be
downstairs.

KATHRYN (O.S.)
Are you guys hungry?

Bill and Melissa are already STOMPING into the BASEMENT.

KATHRYN (O.S.)
Wait, Bill--where have you been??

BILL'S BASEMENT BEDROOM - LATER

CLOSE ON: Bill's OLD CARTOON STRIPS AND SKETCHES, as Melissa FLIPS through them...

-- A GROUNDHOG and a FROG hang out in the woods, a la *POGO*.
-- A midget SPACEMAN SPIFF smokes a stogie on a far planet.
-- A YOUNG NEWS REPORTER is harassed by his CRAZY EDITOR.
-- Ant-like married bugs (CRITTERS) have a domestic dispute.
Melissa beams, she's loving them all...

MELISSA
God, Bill. These are so great.

Bill is rummaging through his closet. On the floor are more drawings and notebooks, plus a HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK -- with a TIGER as a mascot.

Bill finds the FOLDER he was looking for, sits on the bed beside Melissa, hands it over.

MELISSA
This is your new one?

BILL
I sent most of the originals in.
Saved these.

Melissa opens the folder -- a handful of NEWER STRIPS. This batch is even slicker and more professional than the others.

MELISSA
(reading title)
In the Dog House.

It's a strip about the goofy shenanigans of young adult friends, particularly straight-laced SAM and his slacker buddy FESTER. Melissa FLIPS through them, all giggles --

MELISSA
Who's this?

A small, loud-mouthed BOY is showing up every few pages -- sometimes dragging a STUFFED TIGER DOLL along with him.

BILL
That's Marvin. He's Sam's little brother.

Marvin looks *eerily similar to Calvin*, except he has bangs over his eyes instead of that trademark spiky blonde hair.

MELISSA
He's a trip. I like his tiger.
(more flipping)
Oh, you should do more with him,
Bill, he's funny.
(more flipping)
Except maybe the hair? Can't see
his eyes.

She stops on a DRAWING of Sam and Fester hanging out by a CAMPUS FOUNTAIN during summer. Little Marvin approaches the fountain in goggles and swim trunks, carrying a towel...

FESTER (ON THE PAGE)
*You know you can't swim in there,
right, Marvin?*

MARVIN (ON THE PAGE)
Beat it, ugly. I'm hot.

Melissa lingers on Marvin, grinning...

MELISSA
I'd give anything to be half as
good as you. You're going to be
famous, Bill.

A beat.

BILL
No. I'm not.

Melissa looks up.

BILL
I'm not going to be anything.

MELISSA
What are you talking about?

A beat.

BILL
I design pennysaver ads for a grocery store, Melissa. I live with my parents. I can barely afford pencils and pads, let alone a car. No one wants my strips, not that I blame them. They're mediocre at best--no, not even that...I am just as talentless as Jim Davis. The only difference is I know it.
(beat)
I'm a failure. That's all I'll ever be.

Melissa frowns. Places her hand on Bill's.

MELISSA
You are not a failure, don't be so hard on yourself. Just keep trying.

Bill looks at her.

MELISSA
Something will happen. I promise.

There is a moment between them, and Melissa waits for Bill to make a move...but he can't do it...

The TICK-TOCK of his SNOOPY CLOCK arises out of the silence. Melissa sees it --

MELISSA
I should go.

EXT. WATTERSON HOUSE - NIGHT

Bill watches Melissa back her car out from the PORCH. She waves good-bye. He waves back. Waits there until she goes.

INT. BILL'S BASEMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bill returns. Looks around, sees his DRAFTING TABLE in a corner: waiting, *calling to him...*

LATER

ALL AROUND THE HOUSE, the lights are out...except for BILL'S BEDROOM. Bill is still wide awake and working like a madman.

We FOLLOW A TRAIL of IN THE DOG HOUSE DRAWINGS on the floor. Heeding Melissa, Bill has included Marvin in every one, and fixed his hair. *Marvin looks almost identical to Calvin now.*

And as we track Bill's work, Marvin is becoming more and more the *central character* -- then, we CLIMB UP, see the CURRENT DRAWING on Bill's table...

In a treehouse, Sam, Fester, Marvin, and his tiger are hanging out. Marvin is dressed as a pirate and carries a wooden sword, but Sam and Fester aren't really into it.

Bill scrunches his face -- *the older kids just don't fit anymore*. He regretfully -- ERASES FESTER. Then -- ERASES SAM. He blows the eraser shavings, wipes --

Just the boy and his doll...*better*.

Bill's erased part of the TIGER on accident. He draws its ear and pirate's eyepatch back in. Studies the doll for a moment longer...cocks his head...

Something's not there yet.

Bill jots a note by the toy, his face scrunched --

"SOMETHING...MISSING...???"

He sighs, sets his pencil down. Done for the night.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CHAGRIN FALLS - DAY

CLOSE ON: WHEELS CYCLING...

Bill is riding his bike down the street. Helmet strapped, enjoying the air. Minding the pedestrians. Next to comic strips, cycling is Bill's passion in life.

He passes cozy little FIRESIDE BOOKSHOP, peeks inside --

Keeps riding, but now is *conflicted* about something. Then, he decides to *man up* this time, and -- brakes, SKIDS to a stop.

INT. FIRESIDE BOOKSHOP - LATER

Bill wanders through the AISLES, drawing satchel over his shoulder. Not shopping, but sneaking glances UP FRONT --

Where MELISSA is checking out a customer at the register -- *this is where she works.*

Melissa glances up, catches a FIGURE DISAPPEAR behind a shelf -- Bill of course. She smiles and shakes her head.

UPSTAIRS - LATER

Bill comes upon a shelf of COMIC STRIP BOOK COLLECTIONS. He runs his finger along the book spines (lifting to skip over the Garfield books) -- and stops on a PEANUTS COLLECTION.

He slides it out, flips through it. Charlie Brown, Snoopy. Grinning like a child, admiring the brilliance (even though it's likely he's read these strips many times before) --

MELISSA (O.S.)

Excuse me, sir.

Bill looks up.

MELISSA

(fake serious)

If you're not going to purchase that, I can't let you read it for free. This is not a library.

Bill puts the book back.

BILL

Sorry.

MELISSA

What are you doing here?

BILL

Just...shopping. Browsing.

MELISSA

Mm-hmm. You on your bike?

BILL

Yes.

MELISSA

Work tomorrow?

BILL

Yes.

Melissa sighs, squints at him.

MELISSA
Meet me outside.

She walks away --

MELISSA
I'll drive you home.

BILL
Oh, okay. Thank you.

EXT. FIRESIDE BOOKSHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Bill waits outside. Reads a SIGN on a stand by the door:

"QUARTERLY ART SHOW -- FRIDAY, 2 P.M. -- COME SEE TALENTED
LOCAL ELIZABETH WILSON DISPLAY HER EVOCATIVE ABSTRACTS!"

Modern art: interesting to some, but *stupid* to Bill.

INSIDE THE STORE

Melissa catches Bill's smirk through the window. Then --

A RED-HEADED BOY (6) BRUSHES past her, flying a STUFFED TOY
BUNNY -- and then, clumsily KNOCKS OVER a display of BOOKS.

The MOTHER is fast upon her wayward son --

MOTHER
What did I tell you? Come here.

MANAGER (O.S.)
Melissa. Can you get that please...

But Melissa is already sneaking out --

BACK OUTSIDE

She meets up with Bill, leads him away.

MELISSA
(re: the boy inside)
Awww, look at his rabbit. So cute.

Bill glances back at the spat THROUGH THE WINDOW...

MOTHER
I said no running.

BOY
It wasn't me.

MOTHER
What do you mean, it wasn't you?

SIDEWALK - LATER

Melissa eats a Ding-Dong. Bill is curiously monitoring the BOY and MOTHER, who now march down the sidewalk on the OTHER SIDE OF THE STREET -- *parallel to Bill and Melissa.*

Bill is taken with the boy's STUFFED BUNNY, which the boy is swinging around carelessly again, by the bunny's long ear.

MELISSA
 You know what I was thinking? You know why birds don't write their memoirs? Because birds don't lead epic lives, that's why. Who'd want to read about what a bird does?
 (beat)
 Nobody. That's who.

Bill eavesdrops on the conversation going on across the street...

(when the boy isn't talking with his mother, he HUMS the tune to the song "Jimmy Crack Corn")...

MOTHER
*Knocking over a whole bookstand
 like that...gotta be kidding me...*

BOY
It wasn't me.

MOTHER
Stop saying that.

MELISSA
 Ding-Dong?

BILL
 Uh, no, thank you.

BOY
Mr. Bun did it.

MOTHER
*It was not Mr. Bun. Mr. Bun did not
 run into a table like an imbecile.*

BOY

Yeah huh.

MELISSA

Know what your problem is, Bill.
You have an *American* car. Try a
Honda, those things never break.

But Bill is zeroed in now. *Trying to figure something out...*

MOTHER

*Thomas, Mr. Bun cannot run. He
doesn't know how.*

BOY

We were racing each'ofer.

MOTHER

*For God's sake, stop it. You know
very well that thing is just a toy.*

BOY

He's not a toy! He's real!

Bill's mouth drops. He stops.

MELISSA (O.S.)

Bill?

Bill takes another look across the street at the BOY, who is
now hopping his TOY BUNNY over newspaper vending machines --

And then, in SLOW-MO --

The BUNNY starts to HOP ON HIS OWN across the machine tops
-- a *living, breathing, stuffed* toy. Bill's creative mind,
coming to life.

BILL

That's it.

MELISSA

What's it?

BILL

He's real.

MELISSA

Who's real?

Bill hurries towards her, SNATCHES the aforementioned DING-
DONG. He takes a bite, digs into his satchel. Marching on...

BILL
Mr. Bun! HA!

MELISSA
Mr. what??

INT. BEETLE (MOVING) - LATER

Melissa drives as Bill, trembling with excitement, flips to a new page in his sketchpad, CLICKS lead from his mechanical pencil.

He explains as he quickly draws Marvin, with some difficulty due to the moving car --

BILL
I was having trouble figuring out what to do with Marvin's tiger. You were right, Marvin is great. He's funny, he's loud, he has no filter. He's a little like Dennis the Menace, it's very entertaining.

SNAP, Bill's lead breaks. He CLICKS more out, keeps drawing.

BILL
In fact, I want to base my whole strip around this character. But the idea of Marvin's tiger was incomplete. At first, I threw the doll in there kind of on a whim, you know? Kids like to carry toys around, it was more an aesthetic choice than anything else.

SNAP, CLICK-CLICK-CLICK. Bill finishes Marvin. He stares off only a moment, "picturing", then he starts a new character.

Melissa tries to get a glimpse, intrigued --

BILL
I wasn't seeing the full potential. I wasn't seeing the toy the way a child would see it. Children view the world an entirely different way than adults. Their imaginations are boundless. We see a cardboard box--they see a spaceship. We see a few trees--they see the Amazon. Marvin is no different from that boy just now. And, like that boy, he will have unparalleled creative powers...and the culmination of his

imaginative experience...will be
expressed --

SNAP, CLICK-CLICK-CLICK, but the pencil is empty. CLICK-CLICK-CLICK. Bill SHAKES the pencil, throws it aside --

BILL
-- in a toy doll, who comes to life
whenever Marvin is alone. The tiger
is *real*.

Bill shows Melissa his work: it's a crude but clear drawing of Marvin *walking and talking* with a SIX FOOT TALL TIGER. Because Bill couldn't finish, the tiger is missing some his stripes, but we can see that he is HOBBS in the making.

BILL
It's what I was missing.

Melissa goes from confused to charmed...

MELISSA
Wow. That's lovely, Bill.

Bill grins. He knows it's something. He sets his notebook on the dash, sighs -- a weight lifted from his shoulders...

BILL
This is going to be very good.

LATER

Melissa turns down a neighborhood street. Smiles at Bill... who is leaned back, gazing ahead. A rare grin on his face.

BILL
Thank you.

MELISSA
Thank me?

Bill nods.

MELISSA
I didn't do anything.

BILL
Yes, you did. You always do.

A pleasant moment of silence. Melissa pulls into BILL'S DRIVEWAY and parks.

MELISSA
So. Do you have to send samples to

the syndicates? I mean, first you
have to make them, of course,
but...I forget. What happens now?

Bill leans in, KISSES HER ON THE LIPS. They part...

BILL

This.

Melissa gawks at Bill.

BILL

Or, that. That happens. Now.

(beat)

I'm sorry.

But Bill's doubts are quickly assuaged as --

Melissa KISSES HIM BACK. And this time, they don't part...

HOTEL CLERK (V.O., PRELAP)

Mr. Watterson?

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - COLUMBUS, OHIO, 1991 - EVENING

BILL (OLDER), stares into space.

HOTEL CLERK (O.S.)

Mr. Watterson.

He snaps out of it, gives his attention back to the --

HOTEL CLERK (20s) behind the FRONT DESK.

HOTEL CLERK

Here is your receipt, and here is
your keycard. Room one-oh-seven.

Bill takes them, nods his thanks...

...and carries his bags across the lobby. Like everything
else he chooses, Bill has picked a sensible, plain hotel.

SUPER: *COLUMBUS, OHIO*

A MAN IN A BLUE BLAZER gets up from a couch, approaches
Bill.

BLUE BLAZER

Mr. Watterson?

Bill slows.

BLUE BLAZER
Bill Watterson?

BILL
Yes.

BLUE BLAZER
It's an honor to meet you, sir. I
am a huge, huge fan of your work.

The man extends his hand. Bill leaves it there.

BLUE BLAZER
Can't believe I'm standing in front
of you. I'd guess you're here for
the Festival, is that right?

Bill nods. This is weird.

BLUE BLAZER
Great. Great. Well, listen...

The man gets out a NOTEPAD and PEN.

BLUE BLAZER
I...am actually a reporter for the
Columbus Dispatch...and I was
wondering if you wouldn't mind
answering a few questions.

It dawns on Bill. The reporter throws a quick glance over
Bill's shoulder -- Bill catches it, looks back and spots --

The HOTEL CLERK, inconspicuously cleaning his work space...

And Bill puts two and two together -- *the hotel clerk may
have tipped this guy off.*

Bill brushes right past the reporter, who follows him.

BLUE BLAZER
Just five minutes of your time. The
state of Ohio is very proud of you,
Mr. Watterson. We'd all love to get
a glimpse behind the magic.

BILL
Hard work, and luck. There is no
magic.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bill carries his luggage in, shuts the door. The SHOWER RUNS

in the bathroom.

He plops on the bed. HUFFS on, cleans his glasses. Spots a PAMPHLET his wife left on the nightstand...

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESENTS -- FESTIVAL OF CARTOON ART! ... THIS YEAR'S GUEST SPEAKER ... BILL WATTERSON!

Bill slumps...

LATER - NIGHT

It's DARK apart from a desk lamp, where Bill is WRITING HIS SPEECH. He stops. Brushes his mustache.

MELISSA (O.S.)

You might as well tell me, Bill.

Bill looks at the faint outline of MELISSA (OLDER), in bed but not asleep.

MELISSA

What that meeting was about.

BILL

The new book.

Melissa CLICKS on her lamp.

MELISSA

Every time a book is planned, you come home, and you rave about it for days. You get giddy, those books are like Christmas for you. But you haven't said one word about this one since you got back. Something happened out there.

(beat)

Bill. What happened in New York.

BILL

They offered me a new deal. T-shirts.

MELISSA

Okay.

BILL

And I said no, of course.

(beat)

And then Lee said I have a week to say yes...or they're going to... replace me.

Melissa props herself up.

MELISSA
Replace you?? What do you mean?

Bill shrugs.

MELISSA
Can they do that?

BILL
They can do whatever they want.

Melissa tries to think.

MELISSA
Well--what are you gonna do?

BILL
I don't know. But I'm not letting
them do those *shirts*. That's for
darn sure.

MELISSA
But...they're going to fire you.

BILL
So be it.

Melissa is at a loss.

BILL
What do you think?

MELISSA
Um...yeah. Sure, whatever.

She slides out of bed, heads for the BATHROOM --

MELISSA
It's your strip. Not mine.

Enters, SHUTS the door -- leaving Bill to his thoughts.

EXT. CEMETERY - CHAGRIN FALLS, OHIO, 1985 - DAY

BILL (YOUNGER) sits on a stone bench, grazing on a PB & J
SANDWICH from a sack. He gazes at a FIELD OF HEADSTONES
before him...

Finishes eating, CRUMPLES his sack, strolls away.

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Hands in pockets, through the parking lot, back to work.

INT. BASEMENT - GROCERY STORE - DAY

Bill descends stairs as the PHONE RINGS in Hank's office.

HANKS (O.S.)
Watterson. Watterson.

HANKS' OFFICE

Bill enters, finds Hanks dangling the phone on his finger.
Curious, he takes it --

BILL
Hello?

VOICE (O.S.)
Is this Bill Watterson?

BILL
Yes.

INT. LEE SALEM'S OLD OFFICE - NYC - CONTINUOUS

LEE SALEM (YOUNGER) swivels around in his char. Same guy.
Smaller office.

LEE
Bill this is Lee Salem. I'm an
editor at Universal Press
Syndicate. Got a sec?

INTERCUT WITH HANKS' OFFICE

Bill glances at Hanks: he's thumbing through a FISHING
MAGAZINE, slopping up a GREASY MEAL.

BILL
Can I be alone?

HANKS
Excuse me?

BILL
This is a private call.

Hanks gawks. Bill does not flinch. Hanks grabs his things,
MUTTERS as he marches out.

LEE (O.S.)
Yello? Still there?

Bill puts the phone to his ear.

BILL
Yes. Sorry.

LEE
This *is* Bill Watterson, right? The
one who sent us these Marvin &
Hobbes samples?

BILL
Yes.

ON LEE'S DESK is Bill's submission: six four-panel black and
white MARVIN & HOBBS STRIPS.

LEE
(looking over them)
Well, I'll tell you what, Bill--
this is some good stuff. The little
kid, the tiger who comes to life--
it's a great little world you've
built here. Nice artwork, too.
We're all really impressed.

Bill covers his phone, takes a deep breath.

BILL
(back into phone)
Thank you.

LEE
Yeah, listen. How old are you?

BILL
Twenty-six.

LEE
I'm guessing you sent these to
everyone. Get any calls yet?

BILL
No...?

LEE
Good. I don't wanna beat around the
bush--we think this could be a very
big thing, and we'd like to be a
part of it. We'd like to hire you.

Lee stifles a yawn.

LEE

How's that sound, huh? You wanna write cartoons for the papers?

BILL

Uhhh...I'm interested.

LEE

My secretary will mail a contract. You can keep sending stuff in the meantime if you like.

BILL

Okay.

LEE

K buddy, good stuff--oh, hang on a sec. The boy's name...

(flips through papers)

King Features already has a strip called Marvin...and we don't wanna confuse our blessed readers anymore than we have to. Any ideas?

BILL

Uhhh...

LEE

How about--Jarvin? Darwin? Sssmarvin?

BILL

Calvin?

LEE

Eh, good enough. Calvin & Hobbes. Okay, Willy. Welcome to the club.

Bill holds onto the phone long after Lee hangs up. Silent, processing. Then...

Bill WEEPS.

OUTSIDE HANKS' OFFICE - LATER

He emerges, sniffing.

Hanks stares at him from the break table.

HANKS

What's with you?

Bill grabs some things from his desk, stores them in his satchel.

HANKS
What are you doing? It's two
o'clock, day's not over.

Bill marches right past him.

BILL
It is for me.

Bill marches up the stairs with a grin, not even stopping to
enjoy the dumb, stupefied expression on his manager's face.

EXT. DECK - MELISSA'S APARTMENT - DAY

MELISSA (YOUNGER) paints a LANDSCAPE of the NEIGHBORHOOD
behind her apartment building.

SPRITE, the gray kitten who we've only seen as a cat, rubs
against Melissa's leg.

MELISSA
Sprite...

In the apartment, a KNOCK-KNOCK --

MELISSA
It's open!

A moment, then --

Bill appears behind her, LILACS in hand. A big goofy smile.
He sets the flowers by Melissa --

MELISSA
Bill, what are you doing here--

-- and kisses her hard.

BILL
I love you.

MELISSA
I love you, too--

BILL
Gotta go.

MELISSA
Gotta go??

But he's already gone.

BILL (O.S.)
I have work to do!

INT. BILL'S BASEMENT BEDROOM - DAY

Bill sits at his table: CRACKS his knuckles, shakes wrists, SHARPENS pencils -- all while going over the following in his head...

(Bill's thoughts are often accompanied by SOUND EFFECTS in his head -- for instance, when Bill thinks about the jungle, a ROARING LION might be faintly heard in the distance) --

BILL (V.O.)
Now...start from the beginning. How do Marvin and--no, how do Calvin and Hobbes meet? Is Hobbes a Christmas gift? Does Calvin see Hobbes in a store? No--how would Calvin think he met Hobbes? Hobbes is a real tiger, so...probably in the jungle. Maybe Calvin caught Hobbes while on an expedition. Calvin the Safari Hunter. Sets a trap, finds his best friend: a tiger. Yes. That's how they meet.

Bill picks up a pencil, brushes his mustache -- and starts to draw the FIRST OFFICIAL CALVIN & HOBBS STRIP.

BILL (V.O.)
This is going to be very good.

Bill grins, keeps working.

MUSIC MONTAGE - CALVIN & HOBBS: THE BIRTH AND "RISE"

(The following sequence is a whirlwind of art magic. Bill and Melissa fall in love while Bill creates his comic for us to see. CALVIN COMIC STRIPS constantly SCROLL across the top of the screen while being self-drawn in real-time, and/or they slide through SPLIT-SCREENS so we can read them. It's a lot of fun, it feels like we're making the strip with Bill.)

BILL'S BEDROOM - SAME DAY

Bill paces to and fro, creating Calvin comic strips in his head, MUTTERING his character's dialogue...

-- Calvin captures Hobbes with a tuna sandwich as bait --

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)
*So long, pop! Off to check my tiger
 trap. Tigers will do anything for a
 tuna fish sandwich!*

HOBBS (BILL) (V.O.)
 (eating sandwich while
 trapped)
We're kind of stupid that way.

-- Calvin and Hobbes hang out under a tree, trying to look
 "cool". Calvin wears shades, Hobbes...*Mickey Mouse pants* --

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)
*Mickey Mouse pants?! You don't look
 "cool"! You look like an idiot!*

HOBBS (BILL) (V.O.)
 (hmpf!)
Maybe I'm new wave.

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)
 (grouchy)
Maybe you're just stupid.

-- Calvin and Hobbes go camping, get ready for sleep...

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)
Hobbes? Do you believe in ghosts?

-- and thus, the next morning: they stand outside, guarding
 their tent, as they have been all night. Frozen in terror.

Bill chuckles to himself, sits down, DRAWS...

NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Bill drives his clunker Chevy over to Melissa's apartment...

MELISSA'S APARTMENT - DAY

-- enters, and tiny SPRITE leaps, hangs onto his pant leg.

BILL
 (shaking his leg)
 Down, cat. Down.

-- Bill shares some of his NEW STRIPS with Melissa over
 takeout. He *watches how she responds to each one*, using her
 laughter as a gauge -- but, she pretty much loves them all.

BILL'S BASEMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bill works some more...

-- Hobbes teases Calvin about the new girl Susie Derkins --

CALVIN + HOBBS (BILL) (V.O.)
*There's a new girl in our class. Is
 she nice? Who cares? Do you like
 her? NO!!!*

-- Calvin and Hobbes have imaginary cowboy gunfights in the house, bouncing off furniture, driving Calvin's mother wild.

-- Calvin muses with Hobbes while on a walk...

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)
*...you know why birds don't write
 their memoirs? Because birds don't
 lead epic lives, that's why! Who'd
 wanna read about what a bird does?
 Nobody, that's who!*

-- Calvin and Hobbes SPEED DOWN A HILL in their red wagon, over a pond, and Calvin attempts to fly with an umbrella...

...but he fails, and SPLASHES straight down INTO THE WATER.

KITCHEN - WATTERSON'S HOUSE - DAY

Bill goes over his CONTRACT with Lee over the phone. He can barely hear over his mother's VACUUM from the LIVING ROOM...

UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - LATER

Bill finishes with Lee in his PARENT'S ROOM. He hesitates at the contract's last section: "...Syndicate owns the rights to all content and characters created by the artist..."

And then -- sitting on the floor beside Bill...

...are CALVIN and HOBBS, as life-sized, animated cartoons. Both looking bored, like they just want Bill to hurry up.

LEE
 Any questions?

Bill sighs -- SIGNS THE DOTTED LINE...

BILL
 No.

LEE
 Oka, buddy. Let's show you off to the world.

Calvin and Hobbes CHEER, race out and down the hall.

NEWS BUILDINGS

Everywhere, newspaper EDITORS open PACKAGES from Universal Press Syndicate. They look over Bill's CALVIN & HOBBS SUBMISSIONS -- and are slowly, but surely, intrigued...

PRINTING PRESSES

Thousands of NEWSPAPERS roll hot off the presses.

ALL OVER THE COUNTRY

In HOMES, in OFFICES, on the SUBWAY, on the SIDEWALK -- PEOPLE take notice of CALVIN & HOBBS in their papers.

NEIGHBORHOOD - AUTUMN - DAY

Bill clunkers back to Melissa's, ORANGE LEAVES everywhere.

MELISSA'S APARTMENT - DAY

He enters, SPRITE attacks him again --

BILL

Down, cat. Stop *pouncing* on me--

Bill stops. When Melissa appears, ready to go out, his mind is somewhere else -- *a new idea...*

POPCORN SHOP - MAIN STREET - DAY

Melissa grabs a NEWSPAPER as they emerge from the POPCORN SHOP -- (the same store we saw her painting in her New Mexico studio) -- while Bill DRAWS his idea on a napkin...

HOBBS pouncing on CALVIN when he opens the front door on his way home from school. *The idea he got from Sprite.*

They walk through town, eating popcorn, Melissa flipping through the paper --

Melissa stops, SHRIEKS -- shows her paper to Bill...

Calvin & Hobbes has debuted in their town! There it is, his very own STRIP in the COMICS SECTION... "*by Bill Watterson*".

Melissa lets Bill take the paper, she hugs and kisses him, and they stroll on, arm in arm...

As animated CALVIN and HOBBS race through the background. Calvin in a Zorro mask, carrying a white flag. Hobbes chasing him with a volleyball. It's CALVINBALL -- the game where the only rule is you can't play the same way twice --

And neither Melissa nor Bill seem to notice them.

ALL OVER THE COUNTRY

More NEWSPAPERS are pressed, delivered, read -- and this time, we see the STRIPS as they are consumed by PEOPLE --

-- Calvin and Hobbes dance to loud classical music in the middle of the night, waking and frustrating his parents.

-- SUSIE hugs Hobbes, and Hobbes enjoys it -- prompting an argument with Calvin, who is against all things female.

-- HOBBS POUNCES ON CALVIN as he returns home from school.

-- HANKS, Bill's old boss, reads the paper, chuckles at a Calvin strip -- then, he drops his jaw when he reads the AUTHOR'S NAME...

And everywhere, everyone is *falling in love* with the Boy and his Tiger...

NEIGHBORHOOD - WINTER - DAY

Bill pulls up to Melissa's in a new (well, used) '82 RED HONDA CIVIC. Gets out, CRUNCHES over SNOW to the building --

LIVING ROOM - MELISSA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Melissa lays by the FIREPLACE, going over more of BILL'S STRIPS. She takes a break, stretches, yawns. A little *feline quality* to her. Notices Bill on the couch, drawing her --

MELISSA

Let me see.

He shows: a dozen different SKETCHES OF HOBBS, curling and stretching the same way Melissa has been doing all night.

MELISSA

I thought I was Susie.

BILL

You are. You're all of them.

Melissa smiles, continues reading. Bill gazes at her.

BILL'S BASEMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bill works well into the night, COMIC STRIPS and ANIMATIONS *swirling all around him*. Calvin is SPACEMAN SPIFF, a rogue galaxy explorer. He's TRACER BULLET, a tough, cynical, P.I. He's STUPENDOUS MAN, the magnificent superhero, taking on evil babysitters and boring teachers. Calvin and Hobbes

explore back woods, they build snowmen, they go swimming --
 -- *it's a thrilling ride* --

Bill stops. Looks back over his shoulder at...

Animated CALVIN and HOBBS, on the floor behind him, with comic books and junk food. Calvin gives Bill a thumbs up, Hobbes smiles --

And Bill turns back to his desk, and keeps working.

END MONTAGE

EXT. JFK AIRPORT - NYC, 1986 - DAY

A commercial JET touches down, SCREECHES as it slows.

SUPER: 1986

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Bill waits as the elevator CHURNS upwards. Nervous.

He wears a WEDDING RING now.

Bill catches his REFLECTION in the ELEVATOR DOORS...

Sticks out his tongue at it. Slacked jaw. Lowered eyelids...
 making a *FUNNY OGRE FACE*.

Bill chuckles, tries more faces.

INT. LOBBY - UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE - DAY

The elevator DINGS OPEN. Bill steps up to the front desk, where an uglier, OLDER RECEPTIONIST waits. *She looks just like MS. WORMWOOD, Calvin's menacing first-grade teacher.*

BILL

I'm Bill Watterson. I'm here to see
 Lee Salem.

OLDER RECEPTIONIST

Have a seat.

Bill finds a sofa, sits. POSTER FRAMES are on the same wall -- the same classic comic strips, but the posters are older.

HANDSOME MAN (O.S.)

So you're Bill Watterson.

Next to Bill on the sofa is -- a suave, HANDSOME MAN (30s), sipping a glass of clear soda, reading the New York Times.

BILL
Yes. Hello.

The man doesn't look at Bill. Just sips and reads.

HANDSOME MAN
Making quite a name for yourself.

BILL
I don't know.

HANDSOME MAN
It's true. You're what, twenty-five? Don't know a single soul who doesn't love your shit. I'd say you're pretty much on your way.

BILL
On my way? ... To what?

The DOOR OPENS, LEE steps out, visibly enthused --

LEE
Bill.

He comes over, shakes Bill's hand.

LEE
So this is what a genius looks like. Good to finally meet you.

Lee nods to the man on the couch.

LEE
How you doing, Mr. Trudeau. Frank should be out here in a sec.

GARRY TRUDEAU
I'm in no rush.

Bill stares back stunned as Lee leads him away.

BACK OFFICES

Lee and Bill head towards his office.

BILL
That was Garry Trudeau?

LEE
Indeed, it was.

Lee smirks at Bill's starstruck face.

LEE
You like Doonesbury?

BILL
Of course.

LEE'S OLD OFFICE

Lee leads Bill in, passes him. Bill enters, *stops dead in his tracks* -- because the entire office is littered with...

...CALVIN & HOBBS MERCHANDISE.

Lee tries to clean up --

LEE
Welcome to my abode. As you can see, it's doubling as a storage room for all this junk from the sales teams. Not junk. You know what I mean.

Bill walks around, taking it all in...Calvin & Hobbes T-SHIRTS are slung over a chair. Framed POSTERS are leaned against the wall. COFFEE MUGS. GREETING CARDS. CALENDARS.

LEE
Was hoping the Hobbes dolls would be here, but I guess you'll have to wait to see those. Hey, want a mug? Take a mug. Give it to that new wife of yours, she'll love it.

It's like a *gift shop*. Bill is speechless.

BILL
What is this?

LEE
What do you mean?

BILL
This. These.

Lee stops.

LEE
This is your bounty, Bill. *These--* are the fruits of your labor. And it's just the beginning.

BILL
The beginning?

LEE
You are on your way.

BILL
To *what*?

LEE
To success! To fame. Fortune. You
are on your way...to the big time.

Lee approaches him.

LEE
You know this is why you're here,
right? To go over licensing deals?
I said that, I know I said that.

BILL
You said I had to sign papers.

LEE
Yes, contracts. For the deals.

Bill looks around...

LEE
I don't get it, what's the problem?

BILL
It's just...I don't know if I'm
interested in this sort of thing--

LEE
You don't know if you're *interest*--
what are you, nuts?

BILL
No.

LEE
Bill, do you have any idea what
you've created here? Calvin &
Hobbes is a *phenomenon*. It's
exceeded every expectation. In less
than a year, you've featured in two
hundred fifty plus papers. That's
the second biggest launch we've
had. Editors are calling *me*, asking
about the strip. Companies are
pounding at my door, and not just
this stuff, I'm talking, the big

kahounas. I'm speaking with Mattel.
I'm speaking with Kellogg's. Sears.
MasterCard. McDonald's. Bill, you
shouldn't be interested, you should
be foaming at the mouth right now.
This is what it's all about. TV
studios want you, animation--

BILL
Animation?

LEE
Know who called us the other day?

BILL
No.

LEE
Guess.

BILL
I don't know.

LEE
Guess.

BILL
I don't--

LEE
Steven Spielberg. He wants to work
with you. Can you believe that?

BILL
Why?

LEE
Your cartoon is the goddamn apex of
media entertainment. It's smart.
It's funny. It's insightful,
creative, charming. You've got the
elegant social commentary mixed in
with the burps and booger jokes. I
don't know how it works, but it
does. Adults love it, kids love
it...Bill, it's everything we could
hope for in a comic strip.

Lee settles in at his desk, sips coffee from a CALVIN MUG.

LEE
You know, Jim Davis ranked damn
near the top of the Forbes List
last year. Garfield's made him a

millionaire many times over. If you play your cards right...I don't see any reason why you shouldn't be up there with him soon. Hell, Calvin could be *bigger* than Garfield, maybe better. And I'm not just saying that to butter you up.

Lee gets out a STACK OF CONTRACTS, pats himself down.

BILL
What are those?

LEE
We need to get all this junk out of my office, and into stores across the country. Johnny Hancock is the only man standing in our way--

He finds a PEN in his jacket, CLICKS it, sets it on the edge of the table.

LEE
Come on. Let's start building your empire.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - HUDSON, OH - EVENING

Bill pulls into the driveway of his NEW HOUSE. A JUST SOLD SIGN is in the yard.

SUPER: HUDSON, OHIO - 30 MILES FROM CHAGRIN FALLS

IN THE CIVIC

Bill looks deep in thought. He gets out, trudges to the house...

MELISSA (O.S., PRELAP)
What do you mean, they weren't your characters?

INT. LIVING ROOM - BILL'S HOUSE - LATER

Melissa PAINTS a portrait of an OLD MAN'S FACE. Unpacked moving boxes sit against the wall behind her.

SPRITE, no longer a kitten, tiptoes around her feet.

MELISSA
They didn't draw them right?

INTERCUT WITH BILL'S STUDIO

Bill is also working.

BILL

No--well, yes, the drawings were a little off, but--those were not my characters regardless.

Bill draws his NEW SUNDAY STRIP. Each of the dozen or so tiny panels has CALVIN making a different FUNNY FACE -- *mimicking the ones Bill was doing in the elevator earlier --*

BILL

The Calvin and Hobbes on those products are not the Calvin and Hobbes I created. Can you imagine my Calvin, selling his image to a greeting card company? Selling his own soul, for a few dollars?

MELISSA

(actually)

Well...

Bill DRAWS the LAST PANEL: Calvin's parents flipping through Polaroids -- *Calvin used their camera to document his faces.*

BILL

It doesn't make sense. You put them on t-shirts, or in a commercial, and you suck the life right out of them. You turn them into shells. Puppets, instead of real people.

Melissa sighs at her dull PAINTING. She hates it.

MELISSA

Honey, they aren't real people.

She dabs some BRIGHT BLUE PAINT -- *paints a childish smiley face over the old man --* ruining all that time and effort.

BILL

The point remains. I don't want my characters living anywhere except in the world I created them for.

MELISSA

Come on, Sprite. Pumperknickel, Juniper Boots.

TWO NEW KITTENS on the couch fall in line with Sprite. They all march single file behind Melissa, into the KITCHEN.

BILL
Anything else is...blasphemy.

Melissa feeds the cats.

MELISSA
Blasphemy? God.

BILL
Or...I don't know, an insult.

MELISSA
Well, I wish you'd at least talked to me before you said no. A little extra cash would have been nice. We did just buy a *house*.

BILL
I make enough.

MELISSA
Okay, but that doesn't mean you just turn down free money.

BILL
The money's not free, there's a price. There's always a price.

Melissa shakes her head. Then, something comes to her...

MELISSA
Bill.

BILL'S STUDIO

Melissa wanders in...

MELISSA
How much money did you turn down?

BILL
When?

MELISSA
Today. In New York. How much did they offer you if you signed all the...contracts, or whatever.

BILL
It's not a "they". It's not one big team. And we didn't sit around and tally the offers up like Scrooges. I don't see why it matters anyhow--

MELISSA
It matters, Bill. If you are just
throwing away large sums of money--

BILL
I'm don't care about the money--

MELISSA
I'm your wife, this concerns me--

BILL
It's my strip. Not yours.

A beat.

MELISSA
Bill, how much--

BILL
Two million. At least, probably
more. And there are more offers
coming.

MELISSA
Two million dollars?? What are you,
nuts?!

BILL
I turned them all down...cause I
don't want any part of that.

Then --

Melissa doesn't look so good. She hurries out, into a

BATHROOM

and VOMITS into the toilet. Bill enters shortly.

BILL
Are you okay?

She waves him away, GROANS, BELCHES -- VOMITS again.

BILL'S STUDIO - LATER THAT NIGHT

Bill works again on the same STRIP...except now, the CALVIN
in each panel is making the FUNNY FACES in animated, real-
time...it looks a little like a cartoon *Hollywood Squares*.

Bill nods, bites into his dinner -- a PB & J SANDWICH.

A SHADOW appears in Bill's doorway --

MELISSA
I'm going to bed.

BILL
How're you feeling?

MELISSA
Just been a little sick lately.
Hey, a reporter called today. I
think he wants to interview you.

BILL
Why?

MELISSA
Dunno. Maybe cause you're famous.
(long beat)
Bill...think of what we could do
with that money. Or even a tenth of
that. We could pay off the house.
We could open a savings account.
Invest. Start a college fund--

BILL
We went to college.

MELISSA
Not for us, dummy. Our children.

BILL
Oh.

MELISSA
Think about our future, Bill.
There's nothing wrong with making
money. Nothing wrong with having
success, it's not selling out. I
mean--isn't this what you wanted?

A beat.

BILL
I have everything I want.

Bill goes back to work. Melissa lingers. Walks away.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - COLUMBUS, OHIO, 1991 - MORNING

...and then MELISSA (OLDER) is walking through the lobby
alone. BILL trails a few yards behind with their luggage.

The HOTEL CLERK (who may have tipped off that reporter)
smiles at Melissa from the FRONT DESK, waves at Bill --

HOTEL CLERK

Good day, Mr. Watterson. Hope
you'll see us again next time
you're in Columbus.

BILL

Thank you. I don't think we will.

EXT. OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY (OSU) CAMPUS - MORNING

Bill drives their RENTAL CAR through a campus entrance -- a red sign says THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY -- ESTABLISHED 1870.

INT. RENTAL CAR (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Bill motors them through the beautiful, expansive main OSU campus -- the largest campus in the nation. STUDENTS swarm all around in their red and white Buckeye shirts.

Bill stops at a CROSSWALK. A CAR idles in front of them. On its BACK WINDOW...

Is the iconic STICKER OF CALVIN PISSING AND SNICKERING.

Bill snarls at it.

EXT. WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS - OSU - MORNING

Bill and Melissa march towards a curious, modern BRICK BUILDING deep in the heart of the campus. A big banner reads OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY -- FESTIVAL OF CARTOON ART!

MELISSA

Did you finish your speech?

BILL

I have all day.

MELISSA

Just don't say anything stupid.

BILL

Like what?

MELISSA

You know what. Your boss is here.

BILL

I'm going to say exactly what I
want to say. If anyone is offended,
they can go soak their heads.

MELISSA

Yeah. Don't say stuff like that.

INT. ATRIUM - WEXNER CENTER - MOMENTS LATER

Bill and Melissa wander into a large open area. CROWDS mingle, chatter. STUDENTS are lined up at tables where famous COMIC STRIP ARTISTS are signing autographs...

-- JOHNNY HART (60), for *B.C.*

-- JIM BORGMAN (30s), for *ZITS*.

-- SCOTT ADAMS (30s), for *DILBERT*.

...and many others -- it's a convention for the comic strip world. Bill notices

LYNN JOHNSTON (40s), the author of *FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE*. Lynn sees Bill too, smiles, waves. Bill nods awkwardly back.

Bill moves on, takes in the POSTERS and MERCHANDISE for sale at every table, grumbling to himself over it, then he spots

GARRY TRUDEAU (40s), chatting up some female co-eds at his own *DOONESBURY* table, looking suave as ever. Garry salutes Bill with a flick of the fingers. Bill nods back again --

MELISSA (O.S.)

Who is that?

Melissa is looking at a TABLE SWARMED BY A CROWD, so thick we can't see through it, until the crowd parts slightly...

MELISSA

Oh.

It's the *GARFIELD* table. A bubbly, bald JIM DAVIS (40s) is signing autographs and talking with his fans magnanimously. He's surrounded by dozens of giant Garfield and Odie faces.

MELISSA

It's Jim.

Bill and Jim lock eyes. Sworn, mortal enemies. Or something.

MELISSA

Hey, there's your table.

At the end of the row is Bill's spot, identified only by a sheet taped to the table, which just says "BILL WATTERSON".

Bill takes a breath, creeps towards it...

And, one by one, people in the crowds start to notice. They whisper to each other, nod towards Bill, *their hero emerged from darkness*. Even the other artists peek over at him.

The crowds pool, converge quickly towards his table -- on track to get there even before him --

-- and Bill redirects himself to an EXIT.

MELISSA

Bill? Where are you going?

But he's already gone.

HUDSON REPORTER (O.S., PRELAP)

One....two....

INT. BILL'S STUDIO - HUDSON, OH, 1986 - DAY

HUDSON REPORTER

Three!

A CAMERA CLICKS a photo --

BILL (YOUNGER) is posed at his drafting table. A REPORTER is taking pictures of him for the interview they just finished.

HUDSON REPORTER

One more. Aaaaanndd...

He presses -- but it doesn't click this time. Press. Press.

HUDSON REPORTER

Wuh-oh. Hang on.

He tries to fix the camera. Bill rolls his eyes.

FOYER - SAME

MELISSA carries in a bag of groceries.

MELISSA

Bill? Is that reporter still here?

No answer.

KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

She sets the bag on the counter -- digs in, fishes out...a BABY BLUE ENVELOPE -- "MR. BILL WATTERSON" written on it.

Melissa smiles at it.

HALLWAY

She creeps through, throws a glance at BILL'S STUDIO, where the door is half open...

HUDSON REPORTER (O.S.)
 Alrigty, that should do it... Nope.
 Hang on.

BILL (O.S.)
 (just barely audible)
 Ugh...

Twirling the ENVELOPE with pinched fingers as she enters...

THE BEDROOM

...where Melissa delicately props it on Bill's nightstand.

BILL'S STUDIO

HUDSON REPORTER
 Okay. Sorry about that. Here we go,
 one...two...

CLICK.

HUDSON REPORTER
 Know what I was thinking? What if I
 actually got a couple of you
 drawing? Wouldn't that be great?

Bill glares at the man.

LIVING ROOM - SAME

Melissa cleans up the coffee table. Two mugs. The reporter's OPEN NOTEBOOK. PEN. TAPE RECORDER. SPRITE hops up, tiptoes over it all.

Some of Melissa's PAINTINGS are on stands in the background. One of them has a FATHER and MOTHER walking their CHILD down a forest trail.

Melissa admires the FIRST CALVIN & HOBBS BOOK on the table. The cover has Calvin flying with his umbrella over the pond.

Melissa starts to go, but *something else catches her eye*. She stops, comes back to the table...

Where a particular NOTE in the NOTEBOOK stands out to her...

Melissa picks up the notebook, *stares at a sentence*. Scans the rest of the page. FLIPS a couple, *nothing else related*.

Then...she sees the TAPE RECORDER.

BILL'S STUDIO

Bill holds his pencil over a CALVIN STRIP like he's drawing.

HUDSON REPORTER
Ummm...how about you look back at
the camera. Yeah, yeah look at me.

BILL
Am I drawing...or am I looking at
you?

HUDSON REPORTER
You're drawing *while* looking at me.

Bill faces him.

BILL
This has been a treat.

HUDSON REPORTER
Now smile.

Bill bares his teeth awkwardly -- CLICK.

HUDSON REPORTER
Perfect.

LIVING ROOM

Melissa is PLAYING BACK the interview, listening intently...

HUDSON REPORTER (O.S.)
...do you feel about Garfield?

BILL (O.S.)
How do I feel about Garfield. Well,
I'll tell you--

Melissa REWINDS, PLAYS...

HUDSON REPORTER (O.S.)
...book has sold over five hundred
thousand--

REWINDS, PLAYS...

HUDSON REPORTER (O.S.)
...amazed a guy like you doesn't
have any kids. Any plans for it?

Now, Melissa listens intently...

BILL (O.S.)
Nah, I don't think so. I mean, we
haven't talked, but...Calvin's
enough burden as it is. I don't
think I could stand another little
brat running around the house.

The REPORTER and BILL enter the living room. See Melissa.

HUDSON REPORTER (O.S.)
Are you saying Calvin runs around
your house?

BILL (O.S.)
Oh, I see. No, of course not--

HUDSON REPORTER
 Hello.

Melissa promptly HITS STOP.

MELISSA
 I'm sorry. I was just curious.

HUDSON REPORTER
 I could get you a copy...

MELISSA
 Excuse me.

She disappears into the kitchen.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE (ESTABLISHING) - EVENING

INT. BILL'S STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Bill is going through FAN MAIL. We catch glimpses of the letters people are writing: "DEAR MR. WATTERSON..." -- "I AM YOUR BIGGEST FAN..." -- "HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH..."

BILL
 (calling out)
 What is it with these people? Huh?
 Interviews, photos, autographs...
 who am I, Tom Cruise?

Bill tears open a new envelope.

BILL
 Just let me work.

He slides out a letter, and a PHOTO...

It's a COUPLE -- *dressed up as Calvin and Hobbes*. In front of a SEA GREEN VAN. The wife wears a red striped shirt and spiky blonde hair. The husband has an orange tiger suit on.

It's a little *creepy*.

BILL

Dear god...

HALLWAY

Bill storms out of his studio, PHOTO in hand.

BILL

Melissa. Come here, look at these nutjobs--

BEDROOM

He enters -- *stops*...

Because Melissa is packing a suitcase.

BILL

What are you doing?

She SNIFFS.

MELISSA

I'm going to my sister's. Max is out of town for a few days, she needs help around the house.

BILL

What? What is going on--

MELISSA

Bill, do you want kids?

Bill stares at her. Melissa stops packing.

MELISSA

Do you want to have kids?

BILL

Where is this coming from--

MELISSA

Tell me.

BILL

... Do you want kids--

MELISSA

YES!

BILL

Well...I don't know...we haven't--

MELISSA

Why not?

Bill searches...

MELISSA

Because they'd annoy you? Are children some kind of nuisance? A distraction from your comics?

BILL

Comic strips. Not comics.

Melissa ZIPS up her suitcase. Lugs it past Bill, stops --

MELISSA

You know, I think I've figured out why you can write Calvin so well. How you can just live inside the mind of a little boy.

(beat)

Maybe it's cause you are one.

And with that, she leaves.

Bill stands dumbly for a moment -- then, he spots the BLUE ENVELOPE on the nightstand addressed to him. He slides out the card -- it shows a FLYING STORK and a message:

"CONGRATULATIONS! ... YOU'RE GOING TO BE A PAPA BIRD!"

In the distance -- THUNDER BOOMS...

BILL'S STUDIO - NIGHT

HEAVY RAIN outside. Gray.

Bill sits at his table. Not working, but staring...

OUTSIDE, THROUGH THE WINDOW

Animated CALVIN appears, walking down the sidewalk with an UMBRELLA. He stops, feels the RAIN. OPENS his umbrella, props it upside down -- hops in, as the water fills up.

Calvin "TA-DAAS" his hands at Bill: a *pool*!

Bill watches the cartoon boy. With a blank face...

INT. RESTROOM STALL - WEXNER CENTER, 1991 - DAY

...and BILL (OLDER) is hunched on a toilet seat, working on his SPEECH. His scribbling HAND drifts left to right across the paper -- revealing, at the bottom of the page --

A small DOODLE of CALVIN.

Bill stops. Examines his dumb, lifeless character for a moment -- it's like Bill is just *pinning for inspiration*...

KNOCK-KNOCK.

MELISSA (O.S.)
(from outside)
Bill?

Melissa sneaks inside the restroom. Checks under the stall doors...

MELISSA
Are you in here?

BILL
No. Go away.

MELISSA
What are you doing, hiding?

She peeks through a CRACK in Bill's closed door.

MELISSA
I seeeee you.

Bill doesn't think it's funny.

MELISSA
They're starting in a few minutes,
Bill. You have to go out there.

BILL
Fine.

MELISSA
Are you okay? Nervous?

BILL
Nope.

Melissa squints at him. Bill musters a grin for her...

Then, a FLUSSSHHHH -- from the LAST STALL. Melissa *scurries* out as a FAT GUY emerges and washes his hands at the sink.

Bill sighs -- SCRATCHES OUT CALVIN, gets to his feet.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE, 1986 - MORNING

Bright and sunny again.

A UPS MAN stumbles out of a UPS TRUCK with a BIG BOX, marches to Bill's porch...

INT. BILL'S STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK. KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK.

BILL (YOUNGER) is asleep at his table, right where we left him. Head slung back. SPRITE has climbed onto Bill's shirt, and claws at his wide open, SNORING mouth.

KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK-KNOCK... DING-DONG!

Bill wakes.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

He opens the door.

UPS MAN
Sign here, please.

Signs.

UPS MAN
Hey, are you Bill Watterson?

Bill takes the box, shuts the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

He sets the box down. SLICES, opens it --

...and dozens of plush, orange HOBBS DOLLS smile up at him.

Bill stares at them. Checks the sender address: "DAKIN TOYS...WOODLAND HILLS, CALIFORNIA..."

And now, Bill is starting to look *angry*...

RIIIING. RIIIIING. (PRELAP)...

INT. LEE'S OLD OFFICE - NYC - LATER

Lee reads his CALLER ID. Picks up the phone --

LEE

Bill! How you doing, buddy? How's that wife, she still keeping you sane?

INTERCUT WITH BILL'S CARPORT

Bill paces about his driveway with a cordless phone.

BILL

Fine. We're fine, Lee, thanks.

LEE

Good news, good news--hey, kudos on the new book, man. Those things are selling like hotcakes. Hey, whaddya say about a book tour...

LYNN JOHNSTON and GARRY TRUDEAU are in Lee's office. Garry sips his soda, cool as ever. Lynn we recognize as the woman who waves at Bill at the Festival. A perky, bright-eyed blonde, her knees folded on top of her seat like a teen.

LYNN JOHNSTON

(hushed, no way)

Is that Bill Watterson?

Garry shrugs.

LYNN JOHNSTON

Have you met him yet?

Garry shrugs again.

BACK TO BILL AND LEE

BILL

Lee, did you give out my address? To a company called "Dakin Toys"?

LEE

Oh, you got the dolls. Oh, good.

The BOX of HOBBS DOLLS sit next to a pile of junk against the house, near Bill's feet.

BILL

I'd prefer if you didn't hand out my personal information like that.

LYNN JOHNSTON

Ask if he's going to San Francisco.

LEE

Hey Bill, you know you just won the Reuben Award? *Cartoonist of the Year*. Lynn Johnston's here, she's hoping to meet you at the ceremony.

BILL

Who?

LEE

Lynn Johnston. For Better or--come on, you don't know Lynn Johnston?

BILL

No.

LEE

No?

BILL

I'm not going to the ceremony.

LEE

Why not?

BILL

I don't care about awards.

LEE

Come out for drinks then. Meeting people, that's what it's all ab--

BILL

I DON'T CARE ABOUT MEETING PEOPLE!

Silence.

Lynn is stunned. Everyone heard that.

Bill KICKS the BOX OF DOLLS -- his foot goes *through the cardboard side*, and Bill struggles to pull it back out.

LEE

(to Lynn)

Give us a minute?

Lynn gets up. Taps Garry, who moseys up, follows her out.

LEE

Bill, is everything alright?

Bill *topples over*, spilling dozens of tiger dolls out onto the driveway. His phone lies stranded on the ground nearby.

LEE

I was trying to get you to have fun, man. Don't have to be an asshole. You should go bowling or something, methinks you're working too hard. Yello? Bill, you there?

Bill slides his foot out, grabs his phone. Starts picking up, slamming the dolls back into their box: SMACK! SMACK!

BILL

I thought I'd made it clear I am not interested in these things.

LEE

The awards?

BILL

These stupid things!

SMACK.

BILL

Merchandise. I want you to stop bugging me about merchandising.

LEE

Okay...

BILL

I said I didn't wanna do it, and I meant it. It's unethical. *Wrong*.

A beat.

LEE

Bill, are we gonna have a problem? You know, you signed a contract. Technically, we don't have to ask permission to do any of this.

BILL

Fine. Go ahead. Turn me into your money-making slave why don't you--

LEE

Hey, I'm not the bad guy here. I'm just looking out for number one--

BILL

Lee?

LEE

What.

BILL

Go soak your head.

LEE

Go soak my?--

CLICK, DIAL TONE...

Bill stares at the LAST HOBBS DOLL in his hand. Its plastic beaded eyes. Its tiny little whiskers. Such a cute little--

SLAM! Into the box. Bill marches inside.

MUSIC MONTAGE - BILL & HIS ANGRY, LONESOME SELF

(This sequence follows the same format as the first montage: split-screen drawings in real-time, comic strips sliding across the screen, Bill voicing his characters' dialogue --

*But the **feel** of it is different. This is not a blossoming artist creating magic for the first time. This is a grumpy man, whose anger does little to make us afraid -- and more often than not, it serves only to make us giggle.)*

BILL'S STUDIO - DAY

Bill goes through his PRE-ROUTINE...ANGRY STYLE. He WHIPS out a blank page -- SLAPS it on his desk. He CRACKS his knuckles, just by *curling his fingers*. He GRINDS pencils in a sharpener while gritting his teeth like Schwarzenegger.

We spin around Bill as he draws a NEW STRIP of Calvin and Hobbes talking under a tree...

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)

What do you think is the secret to happiness? Is it money, power, or fame? I'd choose money. If you have enough money, you can buy fame and power. Happiness is being famous for your financial ability to indulge in every kind of excess.

HOBBS (BILL) (V.O.)

I suppose that's one way to define it.

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)

The part I think I'd like best is crushing people who get in my way.

Bill snickers to himself...then -- RIIIIING. RIIIIING...

Bill perks up...

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The PHONE BEEPS, a MESSAGE is recorded --

LEE (O.S.)
*Hey Bill, it's Lee. Listen, man, I
 feel bad about the way things ended
 when we talked. Gimme a call when
 you get this, I've got some news--*

Bill's FINGER hits the DELETE BUTTON --

ANSWERING MACHINE
 Message erased.

BILL'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Bill works some more...

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)
*A lot of people don't have
 principles, but I do! I live
 according to one principle, and I
 never deviate from it.*

HOBBS (BILL) (V.O.)
What's your principle?

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)
Look out for number one.

Bill nods, drink his CHOCOLATE MILK, wipes his mouth --

SPRITE hops on the table, *knocks over the glass* -- it spills
 dangerously close to Bill's drawing before he saves it --

-- and the PHONE starts to RING again...

BILL
 (to the cat)
 What are you doing?!

Sprite HISSES back.

KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Bill enters, grabs handfuls of paper towels... BEEP!

LEE (O.S.)
 Hey, Bill. It's Lee again, I'm at

home. Just checking to see if you
got my message--

Bill picks up the phone, SLAMS it back down. Stops...
Considers. He picks it up again, dials... RIIIIING...

SOMEONE'S LIVING ROOM - SAME

The call gets through to a PHONE -- a HAND picks it up --

SOMEONE'S BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

...MELISSA is playing with her sister's CUTE TODDLERS.

Her sister JANET (30s) enters, holding the phone.

JANET

Bill.

Melissa stops. Thinks... *Shakes her head.* Janet leaves.

BILL'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Bill stands with a dead phone in his hand.

DIRT ROAD - THE NEXT MORNING

Bill bikes down a path, helmet strapped, spandex tight round
the thighs -- enjoying fresh air and nature for a change...

A PICK-UP TRUCK SPUTTERS by him, horn HONKING -- pulls in
front of Bill --

TRUCK DRIVER (O.S.)

Off the road, asshole!

The DRIVER tosses a BEER CAN out his window -- it floats on
the wind delicately...then it SMACKS Bill's shirt, leaving a
sticky mess --

Bill sneers...

BILL'S STUDIO - DAY

Bill draws, irate, still in his biker gear...

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)

*Hey dad, I'm doing a traffic safety
poster. Any ideas for a slogan?*

CALVIN'S DAD (BILL) (V.O.)

*Sure! "Cyclists have a right to the
road too, you noisy, polluting,
inconsiderate maniacs! I hope gas*

goes up to eight bucks a gal--

SNAP. Bill's PENCIL HAS BROKEN. He tosses it aside, grabs ANOTHER ONE from a neat line-up of PENCILS, keeps going...

CALVIN'S DAD (BILL) (V.O.)
*I hope gas goes up eight bucks a
 gallon...*

LEE'S OLD OFFICE - MORNING

Lee opens a PACKAGE FROM BILL -- slides out Bill's NEW STRIPS. Scans over bits we've just seen: "*I'd choose money*" -- "*crushing people...*" -- "*Look out for number one*", etc.

LEE
 Son of a bitch.

BILL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Bill is on the floor, SCRIBBLING DIALOGUE and SKETCHES in a NOTEBOOK...

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)
*I stand firm in my belief of what's
 right! I refuse to compromise my
 principles!*
 (next)
*In my opinion, we don't devote
 nearly enough scientific research
 to finding a cure for jerks.*
 (next)
*Why should I have to work for
 everything? It's like saying I
 don't deserve it!*
 (next)
*The secret to happiness is short-
 term, stupid self-interest!*

The PHONE starts to RING. Bill stops, shakes out his tired wrist. As he rolls his neck around his shoulders, his eyes fall upon something else in the room...

KITCHEN - SAME

BEEP! MESSAGE is RECORDED...

LEE (O.S.)
*Alright, buddy. Got your new stuff,
 point taken. I'm gonna ship this,
 but go easy on the jabs from now
 on, okay? Don't make this about us.*

BACK IN THE LIVING ROOM

Bill is now gazing solemnly at this mysterious object...

LEE (O.S.)
*You know, merchandising isn't
 "wrong". The problem is, you see
 everything in black and white.
 There are not two sides to every
 issue, Bill. There are hundreds.
 You're oversimplifying the issue.*

Bill stands. Marches off with purpose.

LEE (O.S.)
Bill? Okay, I'll try again later.

And the thing he was gazing at was...

Melissa's PAINTING of the PARENTS walking their CHILD.

LEE (O.S.)
Come on, man. Are you even there?

BILL'S STUDIO - LATER

Bill lugs in a big cardboard box, and starts FILLING IT UP with THINGS from his studio. He's what... *packing?*

LATER

The studio is empty now, except for the DRAFTING TABLE -- which Bill is trying in vain to push through the door --

BILL
How did you...even. fit. inhere?!

The CATS jump on top of the table, making it more awkward.

Bill stops. Sweaty. Pissed --

RIIIIIING... RIIIIING... Bill *climbs over the table*, shooing the cats --

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Picks up the RINGING PHONE, answers this time --

BILL
Why don't you go screw yourself!!

SLAMS the phone back down...

KITCHEN - JANET'S HOUSE - SAME

...and MELISSA, the one who called, holds a dead phone.

Janet's KIDS are eating a snack at the table beside her...

JANET
What'd he say?

Melissa is utterly baffled.

BILL'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Bill has set up a small workplace in his cramped, windowless basement. A carpenter's bench is his desk. The same PEANUTS POSTER from his grocery store days is taped onto the wall.

LIVING ROOM - SAME

All THREE CATS wait outside, by the SLIDING GLASS DOOR. *Bill has banished them.* Pumpernickel gives off a lonesome MEOW...

BACK IN THE BASEMENT

Bill works on a SUNDAY STRIP -- calm again...

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)
...Calvin suddenly realizes the world has no hue, value, or chroma! Have the photoreceptors in his eyes stopped working properly, or has the fundamental nature of light changed? Perhaps objects no longer reflect certain wavelengths! Whatever the cause, it's clear to Calvin there's no point in discussing anything with his dad!

Bill stops, sags. Tired. He dips an EGGO WAFFLE into a BOWL OF SYRUP, tears off a bite -- admires his work as he eats...

END MONTAGE

INT. LEE'S OLD OFFICE - NYC - MORNING

Lee opens a PACKAGE from Bill, slides out the strip we just saw him working on --

Calvin is exploring his house in wonder -- everything around him has turned BLACK AND WHITE. Lee scans to the LAST PANEL, which is back to COLOR and has Calvin arguing with his dad.

LEE
(reading Calvin's dad)
The problem is, you see everything in black and white...
(reading Calvin)

*Sometimes, that's just the way
things are...*

Lee shakes his head. Sighs. Picks up his PHONE...

INT. BILL'S STUDIO - DAY

A BRUSH strokes columns of SKY BLUE PAINT down a wall...

Bill is *painting his studio*. In fact, turning it into a BABY ROOM. A brand new CRIB is in the corner. Baby TOYS on the floor. His drafting table is now hidden under a bedsheet.

Bill looks back over his shoulder at...

Animated CALVIN and HOBBS, quietly painting another wall.

PULL BACK, and reveal the MAN-EATING ALIENS Calvin's been doodling on the wall in white paint....

Bill doesn't care. It's good to have them back.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Bill walks through, carrying a tray of dirty brushes.

BILL
(humming)
*Somewhere, over the rainbow...hmm
hmm flyyyy...*

All THREE CATS still wait outside by the SLIDING GLASS DOOR.

Bill KISSES at them.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He carries in the tray just as the PHONE starts to RING. Bill sighs, sets the tray down. Picks up the phone...

BILL
Hello?

INT. HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

JANET is on the phone. NURSES and PATIENTS stride down the hallway behind her.

JANET
Bill?

BILL (O.S.)
Yes?

JANET
It's Janet.

INTERCUT WITH BILL'S KITCHEN

BILL
Oh. Hello.

JANET
Melissa's in the hospital.

BILL
What? Where, what happened?

JANET
She had a miscarriage, Bill. She
lost her baby. I'm so sorry...

INT. LECTURE HALL - WEXNER CENTER, 1991 - DAY

An old lady COORDINATOR speaks from the podium.

COORDINATOR
First of all, I'd like to thank
everyone for attending the *fourth*
quadriannual Ohio Festival of
Cartoon Art. It's been a lot of
fun...and it's about to get even
better. I present to you now, our
guest speaker. The brilliant, the
talented, the uncanny, indisputable
icon of this generation of
cartoonists: Mr. Bill Watterson!

Bill takes the stage as the AUDIENCE CLAPS -- MELISSA, GARRY
TRUDEAU, and LYNN JOHNSTON included. JIM DAVIS...refrains.

COORDINATOR
Please, give a warm welcome, and
let him know how grateful we are
for his appearance--as they do seem
to come few and far between.

Bill stands at the podium, gets out his speech. The APPLAUSE
still going. Into the dead microphone --

BILL
(barely audible)
Thank you.

COORDINATOR

Oh.

The coordinator waddles back up. Turns the mic on, DOUBLE TAPS it.

BILL

(loud and clear)

Thank you.

Someone WOOS. Bill flattens his speech before him so he can read it...

BILL

When I was five years old, I copied a picture of Snoopy and turned it in as my own for a school project.

Some CHUCKLES.

BILL

It was hardly a competent tracing, let alone an actual drawing. But it was at least good enough to get my teacher's attention. She confronted me about my sham assignment, I confessed, and my parents found out later that evening. Needless to say, I learned a great lesson that day about the value of originality.

A DOOR in the BACK OPENS -- LEE SALEM and JOHN MCMEEL quietly step in. They settle in against the BACK WALL.

Bill's sees them, stops. His eyes wander from them, to

MELISSA in the CROWD. He shares a brief look with his wife...then continues...

BILL

...about respecting another artist's work. And, in a more general sense, I learned about the difference between right and wrong. I've tried to carry that lesson with me throughout my career, not just in drawing, but in life.

(beat, hesitates)

But now, I am sad to say...I find myself in the company of many artists, many business men, and many fans...who have yet to learn or else have completely forgotten these most basic of moral lessons.

Quiet CONFUSION falls on the CROWD.

JIM DAVIS grinds his teeth. GARRY TRUDEAU sips his soda.

LEE stares at Bill.

Bill CLEARS his throat, smooths out his page...as Melissa watches him with concern...

EXT. BACKYARD - BILL'S HOUSE, 1987 - DAY

The WOODS behind Bill's house extend for some distance...

MELISSA (YOUNGER) *stares vacantly* at them. She's in a basket chair on the patio, wrapped in a quilt. It is AUTUMN now...

JANET (O.S.)
She won't even talk to me.

INT. KITCHEN - BILL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

JANET and BILL (YOUNGER) do the DISHES. Janet washes, Bill dries.

JANET
Just sits around all day, staring.
You know, I don't even think she's
cried once?

Janet's not rinsing well, leaving SOAP on the dishes. It's testing Bill's patience to have to wipe it off each time.

JANET
It's not healthy, to bottle stuff
up like that. She lost her child...
she needs to express herself.

BILL
Mmm.

Janet BURPS.

JANET
Excuse me.

She throws the last dish on the rack, dries her hands.

JANET
Okay. I'm gonna run get her meds.

BILL
That's alright, I can do it.

JANET
Are you sure?

BILL
In fact, why don't you go home,
Janet. You've been enough help.

EXT. BACKYARD - LATER

Bill steps outside. Melissa has not budged.

BILL
I'm going to the pharmacy. Would
you like to come? ... Melissa?

She gazes ahead. Bill watches her. Retreats into the house.

EXT. PHARMACY - DOWNTOWN HUDSON - DAY

Bill parks his RED CIVIC in the lot. Strides into the store, throwing a curious glance at a SEA GREEN VAN sitting nearby.

INT. PHARMACY - DAY

Bill walks up to the pharmacy counter, slides over an RX to the PHARMACIST.

PHARMACIST
Hiya.

The pharmacist disappears into the back. Bill waits with his hands in his pockets, surveying the empty store. Then -- we hear a CASHIER SQUEAL with delight --

CASHIER (O.S.)
Well would you look at that! You
two are *adorable*.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
Thank you.

CASHIER (O.S.)
Are you supposed to be Calvin?

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
That's right.

Bill's eyes pop: *what*. He quickly and quietly snoops ACROSS THE STORE, creeping, sidestepping, like a budding Ethan Hunt -- until he finally stops...and peeks around a corner...

CASH REGISTER

and... it is... THE CREEPY COUPLE. The WOMAN with the treated blonde spikes. The HUSBAND with the tiger suit.

Bill spies on their conversation, in shock...

CASHIER

Gosh, I love your little whiskers.
What is this for, a costume party?

FEMALE CALVIN

No, actually, we read an interview with Bill Watterson, the author of Calvin & Hobbes, and it mentioned that he lived in Hudson, Ohio--

BILL

(whispers to self)
Nutjobs!

CASHIER

He does?? I didn't know that.

FEMALE CALVIN

Mm-hmm. So we decided, we're such big fans...why not just drive out here and see if we can find him?

CASHIER

Well, how bout that.

FEMALE CALVIN

No luck yet though...

Then, a LOUD VOICE from BACK ACROSS THE STORE --

PHARMACIST (O.S.)

Mr. Watterson?

Bill darts his eyes over his shoulder:

The PHARMACIST is holding up his PRESCRIPTION BAG.

The CREEPY COUPLE looks back, startled at hearing Bill's name -- but can't see anything. They make for the back...

Just in time to see BILL SNATCH the meds -- then *dash out the store* --

PHARMACIST

Hey! Hey!

EXT. PHARMACY - CONTINUOUS

Bill hurries to his Civic, unlocks, hops in. *Fires it up --*

IN THE CIVIC

-- EEE EEE EEE EEE. EEE EEE EEE EEE.

And his car won't start.

BILL
NOOOOO!!!

INTERCUT WITH PARKING LOT

The CREEPY COUPLE emerges, big fat smiles, scouring.

EEE EEE EEE EEE. EEE EEE EEE EEE.

Bill stops. He spots a BIKE leaned against the PHARMACY.

Looks back at the CREEPERS, coming close...

FEMALE CALVIN
Mr. Watterson! Mr. Watterson!

Back at the BIKE --

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Bill speeds down the sidewalk on his STOLEN BICYCLE.
Frantic, maneuvering around the strolling town folk...

The couple's SEA GREEN VAN trailing just yards behind.

FEMALE CALVIN
Mr. Watterson! Mr. Watterson, wait!

HOBBS GUY
We're your biggest fans!

FEMALE CALVIN
Mr. Watterson!

EXT. DIRT ROADS - DAY

Bill races his bike. Fast and steady. Flies SMACKING his face. He finally allows a look back over his shoulder...

-- and the coast is clear. *Whew.*

Bill returns his gaze ahead --

A CAR IS HEADING STRAIGHT FOR HIM! HORN BLARING --

Bill *swerves his bike, wheels off the gravel...*

-- INTO A DITCH...CRASH!

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - LATER

Bill pushes his bike down the street. Scuffed and scraped. Leaves and branches protruding from his hair and clothes.

What a lovely turn of events.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - DAY

As he nears his house, Bill peers curiously at a FANCY CADILLAC parked on the curb. He comes closer and sees, sitting there on his FRONT PORCH...

TWO MEN in suits. One carries a BLACK LEATHER FOLDER. They are DON and JOHN, and even though they're hot and sweating, they smile and stand when they spot Bill.

Bill dumps his bike in the yard as they walk up.

BILL

Who are you?

DON

Mr. Watterson. It's an honor to meet you, sir. I'm Don Wilder, President of Dakin Toys.

Don extends his hand. Bill leaves it.

DON

Mr. Salem gave us your address. Of course, you'd already know that. Lee said you love having guests.

JOHN

I hope it's not too much trouble, us coming here. We just have an exciting proposal for you, Bill.

John holds up the FOLDER.

JOHN

Still got those Hobbes dolls?

A beat.

Bill walks right past them, enters his house.

INT. FOYER - BILL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bill strips his shirt off, enters the KITCHEN --

...backpedals a second later, back into the FOYER...

THROUGH THE SLIDING GLASS DOOR

he can see MELISSA deep in the backyard. *Huddled over something...poking at it hypnotically with a stick...*

EXT. BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Bill steps out, bare-chested, drenched. Crunches over leaves, up to his wife...

BILL
Melissa?

Bill comes upon the OBJECT of Melissa's poking...

It's a DEAD BIRD.

BILL
What are you doing? Don't touch that.

Melissa looks up: her EYES are RED, FILLED WITH TEARS.

MELISSA
I think this bird died, Bill. He's hardly breathing. Can we help it?

BILL
No.

MELISSA
Can we help him?

BILL
No. We can't.

MELISSA
Why not?

BILL
Let me have that.

She drops the stick, hides her head -- SOBS and MOANS...

Bill crouches, tries to put her arms around Melissa -- she springs up, fights him off --

MELISSA
IS THIS WHAT YOU WANTED?! HUH?! YOU
SELFISH, PRETENTIOUS ASSHOLE!!!

BILL
Melissa--

MELISSA
GO DRAW YOUR FUCKING COMICS.

Melissa brushes right by him, into the house.

Then, DON and JOHN come around from the side.

JOHN
Everything alright? Say, I don't
suppose we could trouble you for a
glass of water--

Bill walks towards them.

BILL
(re: the folder)
Is that the offer?

JOHN
Well, as a matter of fact--

Bill snatches the FOLDER from John's hand, keeps going...

CARPORT

He drops the FOLDER into the BOX OF HOBBS DOLLS, which are still sitting in a pile of junk --

-- a GAS CAN and MATCHES go in next.

Bill lifts, marches on with the box now.

FRONT YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Don and John come back to the front of the house to find...

Bill, standing over the box in the middle of the lawn.

JOHN
Mr. Watterson...?

BILL
You can have my answer now.
Regarding your proposal...

He LIGHTS A MATCH --

DON
Is this some kind of--

-- drops it in -- WHOOSH!

The NOTEPAD and HOBBS DOLLS go UP IN FLAMES...

BILL
I respectfully decline.

Bill stands there, staring down the shocked men from California, all the while a FIRE BLAZING beside him...

INT. LECTURE HALL - WEXNER CENTER, 1991 - DAY

BILL (OLDER) sips water. Swallows. Finishes his speech...

BILL
Syndicates, you can do better. My fellow artists...you can do better. Stop selling out. Stop licensing. Stop the toys. The posters. The shows, the shirts, the bedsheets, the boxers, the ties. This is not what comic strips are about. This infatuation with money and fame and mass production. Stop all this foolishness...before you ruin our beloved industry forever.

The AUDIENCE is at a loss.

BILL
And, finally...stop pestering me. Leave me alone. Let me work. I don't think that's too much to ask.
(beat)
Thank you.

Bill returns to his seat amidst TOTAL SILENCE. The coordinator stands, walks to the podium...

COORDINATOR
Well, uh...yes. Yes. Let's all give him a warm round of a--

JIM DAVIS (O.S.)
You little twat.

GASPS. MURMURING.

JIM DAVIS glares across an aisle at Bill.

JIM DAVIS
You think you're better than us?
Think you're some kind of deity?

Jim *stands*, approaches Bill.

JIM DAVIS
You been turning your nose up at me for years, Watterson. Saying I stink. That I make garbage. Don't think I haven't caught wind of your little comments. "Garfield? Oh, I'll tell you what I think about *Garfield*". Well, I ain't gonna let that slide anymore, get up. I'm gonna teach you a--

GARRY TRUDEAU
Oh, shut up, Davis. Go sit down.

More GASPS. GARRY, sitting behind Bill, has had enough.

GARRY TRUDEAU
No one wants to hear your crap.

LYNN JOHNSTON
Yeah. Sit down, Davis. You big, bald...cat.

Jim gawks at Bill's defenders...then returns to Bill.

The CROWD waits. Horrified. Then...

Bill *gets up*. He looks Jim in the eyes. Unflinching.

Jim fumes in place, a big dumb bull...but then good sense takes over, and he waddles back to his seat.

IN THE BACK

LEE quietly slips out of the lecture hall. Door SHUTS.

Bill sees. He heads out, after Lee. All eyes upon him.

EXT. FOUNTAIN - OSU CAMPUS - DAY

LEE sits on a grassy hill, going through a bag of SUNFLOWER SEEDS. He stares at a big WATER FOUNTAIN -- *which looks strangely similar to the one from the earlier Marvin strip.*

Lee ogles young CO-EDS hanging out by the fountain, until...

BILL sits beside him. Lee offers Bill seeds. He declines.

For a moment, just the sound of CHEWING and SPITTING...

LEE

That was some speech. You certainly made an impression today. Don't know what kind, but...you sure made one.

(beat)

I take it you haven't changed your mind on the shirts.

BILL

I'm not gonna say yes, Lee. Not now. Not ever. You do what you want, but I won't be the one held responsible for Calvin's demise--

LEE

Calvin's demise? God. Bill, quit being so dramatic. One commercial product is not the end of days.

(beat)

You know, sometimes I wonder if you really believe all this stuff you're saying. Whether it's just *bullshit*. Principles, integrity, ethics, blah, blah. Maybe you just like to argue with people. Or maybe you just don't wanna have to *talk* to people, I don't know. I wish I could figure you out, but...guess it doesn't matter now.

Lee keeps eating, and doesn't notice the *change* in Bill.

...

BILL

Please don't fire me. Please.

Lee looks at Bill. It's a rare moment of vulnerability.

BILL

You are asking me to change Calvin into something else, or to give him up completely. To gut him or to leave him. Either way, I lose him.

LEE

Are you serious right now?

BILL

It's not just beliefs. It's not

just principles. I created these characters out of love and out of my life. Calvin and Hobbes aren't cartoons...they're my children.

LEE

Come on.

BILL

Don't replace me. Don't give my comic strip to someone else...I'm the only one who can draw them.

Lee scoffs. Even in this state, Bill can't help being...

LEE

Such a snob.

Lee thinks. He sighs, CRUMPLES his empty seed bag.

LEE

Well...you're in luck. We signed a new client this week, he'll bring in quite the payload. Just might make up for what you've lost us.

He staggers up.

BILL

You're not going to fire me?

LEE

Nah. It was wrong of me to put you in that position. Sorry. We do want you to be happy, believe it or not.
(beat, begrudgingly)
Plus...you're right. No one else can do Calvin. We'd have a riot on our hands if we tried to replace you. Scary fans. With costumes.

BILL

Thank you.

LEE

Doesn't mean I'm giving up. I may squeeze something out of you yet, Bill. A calendar. A pencil box... something. We're still a business, we need revenue, I gotta look out--

BILL

Gotta look out for number one.

LEE
Sometimes, that's just the way
things are.

Lee heads back up the hill.

BILL
Lee. Who did you sign?

Lee stops.

LEE
A big, bald...cat.

Bill's mouth opens.

LEE
Better learn how to make friends.

And with that, he goes.

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO - DAY

Bill's VOLVO pulls into the driveway. He and Melissa get out, lug their bags inside.

INT. FOYER - BILL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Melissa enters first, Bill trailing.

BILL
Would you like to go home?

Melissa stops, looks back.

MELISSA
We are home.

BILL
I hate the desert.

Melissa cracks a smile.

MELISSA
Okay...

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - ALBUQUERQUE, NM - CONTINUOUS

WIDE SHOT of Bill's desert home. And then...it *morphs* from a REAL picture into an ILLUSTRATED one, right before our eyes.

A GIANT PENCIL ERASER swoops down onto the SCREEN, erases the scenery -- Bill's house, the desert behind it, etc. The eraser edges its way round the WATTERSON CARS, leaving them in place...

Then, the PENCIL DRAWS a NEW SETTING around them: a quaint, recently sold RANCH HOUSE, in a familiar Midwestern town...

It happened so fast, but now it's unmistakable we are in

SUPER: CHAGRIN FALLS, OHIO - TWO MONTHS LATER

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - CHAGRIN FALLS, OH - DAY

BILL and MELISSA emerge, head for Bill's car...

EXT. MAIN STREET - CHAGRIN FALLS - DAY

Bill and Melissa stroll down the sidewalk on a bright and sunny day. Sharing a bag of caramel treats. Nodding to passers-by. The POPCORN SHOP FACTORY just behind them.

Melissa snags a paper from a stand. She reads BILL'S LATEST STRIP as they go on: Calvin displays his lunch to Susie...

MELISSA

(reading Calvin)

My lunch is peanut butter, what's so disgusting about that? It's my dessert that's gross. Look, a thermos full of--oh, Bill, ewww!

A thermos full of *phlegm*.

BILL

How about we stop at the bookshop?

MELISSA

(whining)

Unnh. We got colds in the car.

BILL

Just for a minute.

MELISSA

Why? Wait, are you trying to get out of unpacking again? Cause I gotta tell you, Watterson, that's going down either way tonight.

BILL

Come on.

He takes her hand, leads her across the street.

MELISSA
Fiiinnnnneee.

SIDEWALK (OTHER SIDE)

They walk. Bill checks his watch.

MELISSA
Know what I was thinking? I was thinking the more you think about things, the weirder they seem. Like milk. Why do we drink cow milk? Who was the first guy who looked at a cow and said, "I'm gonna drink whatever comes out of these things when I squeeze... their..."

But Melissa is too distracted to finish...

FIRESIDE BOOKSHOP

She has stopped in front of her old employer's shop. A very familiar SIGN is on the stand by the entrance. But the words are different...

"*QUARTERLY ART SHOW -- THURSDAY, 3 P.M. -- COME SEE LOCAL ARTIST MELISSA WATTERSON DISPLAY HER PRIVATE COLLECTION!*"

BILL
Looks like there's an art show.

Melissa gapes at him.

MELISSA
Did you do this?

Bill shrugs. Gestures her inside...

INT. FIRESIDE BOOKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

Dozens of MELISSA'S PAINTINGS wait on stands in the aisles. Landscapes, portraits. Abstracts. Even the one she splashed over with blue paint. *It's everything she's ever done.*

CUSTOMERS are sifting about already, appreciating them.

Melissa walks around, taking it in...

BILL
You're not half as good as me.
You're better. You should show

people your paintings.

Melissa smiles back at him.

MANAGER (O.S.)
Mr. Watterson? Think you said you
were bringing more in the trunk?

BILL
Oh, right...

Bill gets out his keys, follows the MANAGER outside.

DOWN AN AISLE - MOMENTS LATER

Melissa walks, observing her PIECES. Then, she comes upon...

The PAINTING of the PARENTS walking their CHILD down a
forest trail.

Melissa stops. Gazes at the little boy...

BILL (O.S.)
We could try again.

She turns around. Her and Bill are alone now.

MELISSA
Try what again?

BILL
We haven't tried in a long time. We
could. "Just keep trying", right?

MELISSA
Oh, Bill...

BILL
We could see more doctors. We could
do that, I think our ones now might
be bozos anyways--

MELISSA
I don't think it's meant to happen.

BILL
We could adopt. We could adopt a
baby. That could be good, right?

MELISSA
Bill. It's okay. Really.

A beat.

BILL
I don't want you to be sad.

MELISSA
I'm not sad.

BILL
I don't want you to hate me.

MELISSA
I don't hate you.

BILL
I am...I am a child, Melissa. You
deserve much better than you got.

Melissa takes Bill's hand.

MELISSA
That's not true. Don't be so hard
on yourself. You are not a child.
(beat)
You're Bill.

INT. UPSTAIRS - FIRESIDE BOOKSHOP - LATER

Bill strolls through the aisles, hands in his pockets.

DOWNSTAIRS

Melissa is chatting with PEOPLE about her PAINTINGS.

BACK UPSTAIRS

Bill comes upon the COMIC STRIP BOOKS again. Smirks. Runs his finger along the book spines (bypassing GARFIELD, of course) -- FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, PEANUTS, DOONESBURY...

...and then: every CALVIN & HOBBS COLLECTIONS in print.

Bill slides out his latest one: REVENGE OF THE BABY-SAT! He flips through it casually, and then...*gets a devilish idea.*

Looks left. Looks right. Pulls out a PEN, and...

...SIGNS HIS NAME on the inside of the cover. SNICKERS to himself. Loves it so much that he picks out another book, and SIGNS THAT ONE TOO. Gets another book, SIGNS THAT ONE --

RED-HEADED BOY (O.S.)
Excuse me, sir?

Bill stops, looks up -- a RED-HEADED EMPLOYEE (13) of the

bookshop is watching him.

RED-HEADED BOY
You can't do that.

BILL
Do what?

RED-HEADED BOY
You're writing in our books.

BILL
No, I'm not.

RED-HEADED BOY
I can see you doing it. You're
going to have to pay for those--

Bill raises his finger to his lips -- SSSHHH.

He puts the book back, then...disappears behind a shelf.

The boy shakes his head: *weirdo*. He turns and goes, back down the staircase.

Bill peeks out from behind his shelf...and then --

In SLOW-MO, once again...Bill curiously watches....

The boy, casually *dancing* a RABBIT'S FOOT down the STAIRWELL...HUMMING the tune to "Jimmy Crack Corn".

EXT. BILL'S HOUSE - CHAGRIN FALLS - DAY

Bright and sunny. Birds CHIRP.

A bronze COUPE putters into the driveway. A MAN gets out, walks to Bill's porch. Wears a familiar BLUE SPORTS COAT...

INT. BILL'S STUDIO - DAY

Bill's latest drawing room. Identical to the others.

Bill works on a NEW CALVIN STRIP. He's having trouble fitting his dialogue within the square panel outlines.

BILL
(calling out)
How am I supposed to make a comic strip if they don't even give me room to draw? Ridiculous. And do they expect the readers to use a

pair of magnifying goggles? Cause that's what they'll need now.

Bill erases a section, starts over.

BILL

First thing tomorrow morning, I'm calling Lee Salem about the new panel sizes. Don't let me forget--

MELISSA (O.S.)

Bill.

He looks up. She's standing in the doorway. Beside her is BLUE BLAZER MAN. *The reporter from the hotel in Columbus.*

MELISSA

You have a visitor.

BLUE BLAZER

Hi, Mr. Watterson. Thanks again for doing this. I really appreciate it.

Bill checks his watch.

BILL

Oh. Of course. Well, uhhh...to be perfectly honest, I think I'd like to fix myself some lunch before we do this, if that's alright--

Melissa holds up TWO PAPER LUNCH SACKS and smiles.

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

Bill and the reporter sit on the same bench from Bill's grocery store days. Bill eats his PB & J sandwich Melissa made him while the reporter prepares for the interview.

BLUE BLAZER

Okay, Mr. Watterson. I'd like to start with just a quick history. Your background, how you got into comic strips. That kind of stuff.

BILL

Are you eating your Ding-Dong?

BLUE BLAZER

Excuse me?

Bill points to the reporter's untouched paper sack.

BILL
Your Ding-Dong.

BLUE BLAZER
Oh. Uh, no.

Bill digs in, takes out the chocolate snack.

BLUE BLAZER
Anyways, some of these questions
might be familiar, so please bear
with me. My first thought was...

The reporter sets a TAPE RECORDER on the bench, HITS RECORD.

BLUE BLAZER
I'd like to go back to your college
years. Actually, just after that.
You held a job as a political
cartoonist at the Cincinnati Post
for a while. Isn't that right?

Bill eats his Ding-Dong, nods.

BILL
Before they fired me.

BLUE BLAZER
Why did they fire you?

Bill shrugs.

BILL
Said I wasn't opinionated enough.

The reporter jots notes.

BLUE BLAZER
Huh. Alright. Okay, how about this:
is it true you were mentored by Jim
Borgman, the artist behind Zits--

BILL
You want to know about the magic?

The reporter stops.

BLUE BLAZER
The magic?

BILL
It's what you asked me.

BLUE BLAZER

Ohhh...right. I mean, that wasn't really a specific question. It was more like, what is the process of--

BILL

Ask me why I draw.

BLUE BLAZER

Okay. Okay, yeah, that's good, let's save that one for later--

BILL

Ask me why. And then just listen.

A beat. The reporter grins, gives in.

REPORTER

Sure. What the hell.

He flips to a new page.

REPORTER

So, Mr. Watterson. Why do you draw?

Bill fixes his gaze on the horizon. He loses himself in it. And soon, it's clear that he's somewhere totally else now...

FINAL MUSIC MONTAGE - THE BOY AND THE TIGER

BILL'S STUDIO - NEX MEXICO - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The day Bill and Melissa returned from the Festival.

Bill checks in, dragging his suitcase.

A BRISTOL BOARD lies face down on the floor near the back wall. Bill comes over, picks it up...

BILL (V.O.)

I draw...because I have to.

He examines the white sheet: it is the simple DRAWING of Calvin and Hobbes standing in the center of the page. *The one he threw away in frustration at the start of the film.*

BILL (V.O.)

Because I must.

Bill sits at his table, lays the drawing before him.

Stares at it...

BILL (V.O.)
*I draw because it's like breathing
 air to me. Comic strips have always
 been my greatest passion in life. I
 didn't have many friends growing
 up. Comic strips were my friend.*

BILL
 (to the drawing)
 Do something.

Calvin and Hobbes look at each other... back at Bill...

BILL (V.O.)
*If you let them...comic strips can
take you away.*

THEN...

Four life-sized CARTOON ARMS -- REACH OUT OF THE PAGE -- and
GRAB BILL -- and PULL HIM IN...

CUT TO:

CALVIN'S BEDROOM (ANIMATED)

Animated CALVIN and HOBBS and a CARTOON BILL CRASH onto the
 floor. All three stagger up, dust themselves off, COUGHING.

BILL (V.O.)
*Take you away. To a different
 place, where time stands still.*

The trio of friends look at each other, then -- they dash
 out the room...

CALVIN'S BACKYARD (ANIMATED)

Calvin and Hobbes have a WATER BALLOON fight. Bill charges
 from the side of the house, attacking them with the HOSE.

BILL (V.O.)
*Where you can be anything you want
 to be. Do anything you want to do.*

Calvin cocks back, slings a BALLOON at Bill --

WINTER (ANIMATED)

...and a SNOWBALL replaces it, SMACKS Bill in the face.

Bill chases after Calvin, slipping and sliding. Hobbes
 howling in laughter.

BILL (V.O.)
*Comic strips are unlike any other
 entertainment medium that exists.*

CUT TO:

ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY

PEOPLE read CALVIN & HOBBS.

BILL (V.O.)
*In a space of four square panels
 and ten seconds of a person's day,
 an entire story can be told...*

Children. Adults. Families.

BILL (V.O.)
...a lesson can be taught...

-- GARRY TRUDEAU reads CALVIN & HOBBS in CENTRAL PARK.

BILL (V.O.)
*...you can make a person smile, or
 laugh...*

-- LYNN JOHNSTON smiles down on CALVIN in her APARTMENT:

CALVIN (ON THE PAGE)
*The more you think about things,
 the weirder they seem. Take this
 milk. Why do we drink cow milk?*

BILL (V.O.)
*...sometimes, you can make them
 cry...*

-- The CREEPY COUPLE read CALVIN & HOBBS over BREAKFAST:

CALVIN (ON THE PAGE)
*Hobbes, look! There's a little
 raccoon on the ground!*

HOBBS (ON THE PAGE)
Is it alive?

CALVIN (ON THE PAGE)
*I think so, but he's hurt. See,
 he's hardly breathing...*

BILL (V.O.)
*You can stir someone's heart. Or
 inspire them. Or breathe life into
 one's dull and rusted imagination.*

CUT TO:

BACK WOODS (ANIMATED)

Bill pushes Calvin and Hobbes in their RED WAGON, down a dirt path...

BILL (V.O.)
*I've experienced all these things
 for myself, many times before.*

He hops into the back, and the trio ROLLS DOWN A HILL together...

BILL (V.O.)
*And even if I prefer doing it from
 a distance, it brings me joy to
 share my work with others now.*

The wagon SPEEDS rapidly, downhill, towards a familiar WOODEN DOCK and POND...

BILL (V.O.)
Everyone should have what I have.

FASTER... FASTER... will they make it over the water??

BILL (V.O.)
*I suppose what I'm saying is
 that... I draw comic strips...*

The WAGON LAUNCHES OFF THE DOCK... *FLIES ACROSS THE POND*...

BILL (V.O.)
...because I love them so much.

THEN --

...IT KEEPS GOING. HIGHER and HIGHER. Through the SKY.

Calvin, Hobbes, and Bill CHEER and SCREAM as their flying wagon takes them on, on towards a glorious PINK HORIZON...

CUT TO:

BACK ROADS - DAY (CHAGRIN FALLS)

Bill rides his bike. Helmet strapped. Having a blast.

BILL
 (over his shoulder)
 Come on, slowpoke!

Melissa trails behind him, on a bike of her own.

MELISSA
I'm tiiiiirreeeddd...

BILL
There's a big bowl of plain oatmeal
just waiting for you back home!

Melissa groans, hangs her head, keeps pedaling.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Bill eats a big bowl of plain oatmeal. CATS prowling obnoxiously around his table. The PHONE RINGS in the KITCHEN...

Bill is doodling more CALVIN & HOBBS IDEAS in a notebook -- but now, the characters are *alive on the page*. Flowing out of Bill's pencil, telling mini-stories of their own...

MELISSA (O.S.)
Phone.

BILL
Who is it?

MELISSA (O.S.)
Lee Salem.

Bill stops, claps his hands, springs up.

CUT TO:

SCHOOL CAFETERIA (ANIMATED)

Calvin, Hobbes, and Bill settle in at a lunch table. No sooner do they dig in when an ICE CREAM SCOOP SAILS OVER, and PLOPS Calvin in the face.

MOE, the school bully who just threw it, HAR-HARS from across the cafeteria. Supported by his GOONISH FRIENDS.

Then -- another SCOOP PLOPS Bill in the head.

Calvin and Bill rage behind their sticky messes while the CAFETERIA HOWLS...

SCHOOL YARD - LATER (ANIMATED)

Moe and his chums pick on an unfortunate four-eyed student by the jungle gym...

Then, TWO HUMUNGOUS SHADOWS quietly fall over them all...

The gang stops, looks up at...

A PAIR OF TYRANNOSAURS REX'S, standing over them. Calvin and Hobbes are perched on one head. Bill's perched on the other.

Moe gawks in horror... RAAWWWWRRRRR!

MOMENTS LATER

Calvin, Hobbes, and Bill *RIDE THEIR DINOSAURS* through the yard, terrorizing the bullies, laughing their heads off.

CUT TO:

LEE'S OFFICE - DAY (NYC).

Lee and Bill are in the middle of an argument.

LEE

Bill, I don't know what you want.
We are not in charge of the panel
sizes, you know the papers are.

BILL

But you own a third of the strips
in syndication. You could use that
as leverage, I know you could--

LEE

What are you suggesting, that we
threaten to pull our strips out--

BILL

If that's what it takes, yes--

LEE

This is ridiculous, Bill, come on--

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

Mr. Salem?

They stop. The young RECEPTIONIST who talked to Bill at the start of the film stands in the doorway. A stack of MAIL in her arm.

Lee takes the mail, sifts through it. He stops on a PACKAGE, looks at it curiously. Glances back and presents it to Bill.

Bill nods: *yes, that's right.*

Lee hands the package back to the receptionist.

RECEPTIONIST

(reading the package)

Oh. Sorry.

MOMENTS LATER

The receptionist steps outside, closes the door, *confused*.
Bill and Lee's ARGUMENT ERUPTS AGAIN inside Lee's office.

As the receptionist walks away, we see the PACKAGE LABEL:

"FROM: BILL WATTERSON" ... "TO: LEE SALEM'S RECEPTIONIST"

CUT TO:

CALVIN'S BEDROOM (ANIMATED)

CLOSE ON: A CARDBOARD BOX, turned upside down. A paper ARROW is tacked on the side, encircled by WRITTEN ANIMAL NAMES: an eel, a baboon, a bug, dinosaur, polar bear, and more...

This is the TRANSMOGRIFIER: *Calvin's most famous invention*.

BILL'S HAND turns the ARROW to "BRAZILLIAN BLACK TARANTULA".

A BUTTON is PRESSED -- "BOINK!!"

PULL BACK

as Bill and Hobbes stand before the transmogrifier, waiting cautiously. Then -- the box is lifted, and *out crawls...*

TARANTULA CALVIN. A furry spider, still in his red striped shirt and wearing tennis shoes on its back legs. Calvin HISSES his fangs, rubs his front legs together happily.

As Calvin spider walks all over his room, Bill offers Hobbes a turn. Hobbes declines, gestures: *I'm happy with who I am*.

MOMENTS LATER

Calvin's furry spider peg HITS THE BUTTON -- "BOINK!!"

PULL BACK

as Bill SHRIEKS and spreads his WINGS, throwing the box off his back. He is a BALD WHITE EAGLE -- well, *partly* an eagle. The transmogrifier has made him kind of half man, half bird.

The trio race out the room again -- Bill flaps his wings, tries to *fly out* -- but he CRASHES through the doorway.

CUT TO:

PARKING LOT - GROCERY STORE - DAY (CHAGRIN FALLS)

Bill and Melissa walk back to their car with grocery bags. Bill stops, slows as he comes upon another PISSING CALVIN

STICKER, on the back of a PICKUP TRUCK window.

Bill grrrs, fishes through Melissa's bag...

MOMENTS LATER

He DRAWS a TRUCK DRIVER'S FACE with a BAR OF SOAP on the truck's window. Bill has positioned the drawing just under Calvin's stream of urine and has written "<-YOU" beside it.

Calvin now pees on the driver's imagined "face".

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hey! Whaddya think you're doing?

Bill stops, looks up -- it's HANKS, Bill's old manager.

HANKS

Watterson.

Bill freezes -- *throws the bar of soap at Hanks* -- it SMACKS Hanks in the chest with little force.

BILL

Run!

Bill grabs Melissa's hand, they sprint away, laughing.

LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bill and Melissa are on the floor by the fire place, having hot chocolate with marshmallows. Melissa reviews Bill's latest COMIC STRIPS. Bill draws a PENCIL SKETCH of MELISSA.

Melissa stops, looks up at Bill.

MELISSA

Let me see.

BILL

No.

They lock eyes, gaze at each other. Bill continues drawing, not even looking at his sketchpad now. He doesn't need to.

SPACE (ANIMATED).

Calvin, Hobbes, and Bill rocket through the galaxy in their flying wagon. EARTH millions of miles behind them. Stars glowing all around them, planets circling in the distance.

The trio WHOOSHES PAST US, laughing and cheering. They fly on, and fade, into a tiny speck somewhere in the universe...

CUT TO:

SUBWAY - DAY (NYC)

The RECEPTIONIST sits on a bench as her subway car travels through a dark underground tunnel. Staring at her PACKAGE from BILL WATTERSON. Finally, she opens it, pulls out...

A NOTE...it says: "FOR YOUR 'DAUGHTER' -- BILL WATTERSON".

The receptionist curiously reaches further into the package, fishes out...

A STUFFED HOBBS DOLL. *One of the Dakin Toys samples. Bill must have saved a few for himself before burning the rest.*

The receptionist's heart melts as she holds the tiny tiger.

END MONTAGE

INT. COACH - JET (FLYING), 1992 - DAY

CLOSE ON: A PAMPHLET, propped up on Melissa's lunch tray:
44th NATIONAL CARTOONIST'S SOCIETY ANNUAL REUBEN AWARDS!

An announcement PLAYS: today's flight to San Francisco...

Melissa has her head laid upon Bill's shoulder. Bill is drawing on his napkin again.

MELISSA

I'm glad you're doing this.

BILL

Doing what?

MELISSA

I know you don't like...*people*.
It's just nice you're making an effort.

BILL

I'm only going because I didn't win anything.

MELISSA

Does that make you happy cause you won't have to give a speech, or mad because you think you deserved one?

Bill ignores her.

MELISSA

Or, does it make you afraid that
Jim Davis might be there, and he
might try and pound you again?

BILL

Jim Davis...can go soak his head.

MELISSA

Bill.

Bill stops. Looks her in the eye.

BILL

I love you.

Melissa cocks her head, smiles.

MELISSA

I love you, too.

They kiss.

A STEWARDESS pushes up her FOOD CART --

STEWARDESS #2

Sir? What would you like to drink?

BILL

Uhhh...I'll have a dry martini, and
a tuna sandwich here for my friend.

STEWARDESS #2

Sorry?

BILL

Nothing.

The stewardess gives them their snacks and soda.

STEWARDESS #2

(re: Bill's napkin)

Hey...Calvin & Hobbes, right?

Bill nods.

STEWARDESS #2

That's pretty good.

She smiles, moves on.

Melissa eats her peanuts. Bill studies his sketch. He
brushes his mustache. Stares off into space for a bit...

BILL

Yes.

Bill DRAWS, once more...

EXT. SKY - CONTINUOUS

Their JET glides on, through the clouds...

BILL (V.O.)

This is going to be very good.

THEN...

Not too far behind the plane's tail, we see what looks almost like a TINY RED WAGON, flying through the air...

And a little BOY, and a TIGER, piloting it...

Staying close.

.....

EPILOGUE

-- Bill Watterson drew Calvin & Hobbes for three more years before retiring from comic strips in 1995.

-- Nearly 45 million copies of the 18 Calvin & Hobbes book collections have been sold. Only four licensed merchandise items have ever been released. Two of them are calendars.

-- Bill continued to anonymously sign his own books at Fireside Bookshop in his hometown of Chagrin Falls...but stopped when he found out they were being sold on eBay.

-- Today, Bill resides somewhere in Ohio.

-- He paints with his wife Melissa everyday.