

VERVE

Happy Little Trees

by

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VERVE

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Based on the true story of Bill Alexander and Bob Ross...
...and on imagination.

East Prussia. 1927.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - DAY

Half-muddy and trampled grass of a field that was once a farm, but no more. A broken fence stretches out toward a clump of trees and the shell of a long-abandoned farmhouse.

Over this we hear LAUGHTER.

A group of five BOYS chase each other with sticks in hand.

Bringing up the rear is WILLIAM "BILL" ALEXANDER (12), short and stout with a joyous smile. He runs as fast as his stubby body can, chasing after his older brother PAUL (14).

Everyone speaks German with English subtitles.

WILLIAM
I'm gonna get you!

PAUL
(laughing)
You're too slow, Wim. You'll never catch me!

William pumps his arms faster trying to reach Paul, who's a few feet ahead. He starts to gain on him, or maybe his brother is letting him to catch up--

Oops! William trips and crashes hard to the ground. Paul stops running, out of breath.

The other boys notice and also stop. William gets up slowly from the fall.

PAUL
You okay? What happened?

Knees and palms muddy, William shakes it off.

WILLIAM
I'm fine.

He looks down to see what caused him to trip.

WILLIAM
Look at this.

Paul comes over to see what he's found. Sticking out of the mud are the rusted interlocking slats of old tread.

Fascinated, William tries to pull it out of the ground. Paul tries to help, but it's no use. The tread is stuck.

PAUL
Must be from an old tractor.

OTHER BOY (O.S.)
Over here!

They all turn to see a BOY holding a rusted HELMET. Another BOY finds a decaying RIFLE.

Now William knows what he's found.

WILLIAM
*It's a tank! There was a big battle
 here in the war.*

The boys are excited now and hunt for more refuse. One finds a bayonet, another finds a second helmet.

William and Paul pull on the tread like they're going to unearth the entire tank.

Several yards away, another boy, FREDRICK (10), finds something that makes his eyes light up. He reaches down and picks up an old HAND GRENADE. He turns to show the others.

FREDRICK
Look what I found!

They all see Fredrick rearing back to throw the grenade. Everyone laughs, as Fredrick really makes a show of it--

BOOM! The grenade explodes in Fredrick's hand, killing him instantly. The boys drop to the ground.

But not William. He stands there, blood sprayed across his face, in complete shock.

INT. KOCE STUDIO - DAY

Costa Mesa, California. 1982.

A small, functional studio with minimal lighting and years-old equipment. Welcome to PBS affiliate KOCE. If it looks like something from a college campus, that's because it is.

An older WILLIAM ALEXANDER (60s, passionate, enthusiastic, wearing a blue smock) has the same wide-eyed look. He's in the middle of reliving the horrible memory.

Which at this moment is a problem, because he's also in the middle of taping an episode of his PBS show, *The Magic of Oil Painting*.

William stands before an easel with a painting of a lush green field with a long fence and tidy farmhouse. An idealized replica of the scene we just saw.

William continues to stare, not saying a word.

Off-screen, the DIRECTOR desperately gestures for him to snap out of it.

Behind him is William's producer, DON GERDTS (30s), whose mustache and goatee make him look like an Errol Flynn villain. But he has a friendly face.

The Director turns to Don and swipes his hand across his neck, asking if he should cut. Don looks worried, but gestures to keep rolling.

William's wife, MARGARETE (50s, hard-nosed, pragmatic, often wears a red kerchief), has seen enough. She stamps out a cigarette and gets up from her chair.

Margarete gets in William's eyeline and gives him a calming look. Her presence snaps him back to reality. He chuckles to cover up his lapse.

WILLIAM

(slight German accent)

Ha, I spaced out there for a minute.
But that's okay, because when we
create we go deep into our
subconscious to find ideas. And when
we do, we grab hold of them-- and we
FIRE IN and put them on the canvas.

Don sighs relief. The Director shakes his head. They're back. Margarete crosses her arms, her concern evident.

On camera, William taps the brush on the canvas to create arcing green shapes on a black line that rises from the ground in the spot where Fredrick was killed.

WILLIAM

We put some sap green on our one-inch
brush and we tap-tap-tap it like
this. *Pitter-pat, pitter-pat*-- like
so. Go ahead, say it out loud. It's
okay. *Pitter-pat, pitter-pat*. And now
we see... rising from the ashes... a
great, *Almighty Tree*.

William does a few more pitter-pats and like magic creates a beautiful, almighty tree.

WILLIAM

Just a few more happy branches like so. There. Now we clean the brush and mix some Alizarin crimson and cadmium yellow for a nice orange, and we *pitter-pat* some more. Isn't that wonderful? The world can be such an ugly place sometimes, but we can make it beautiful and happy. All we need is our imagination and some paint, and we make it all go away.

William finishes the tree with a flourish. He turns to the director, who's gesturing that time is up.

William goes to put finishing touches on the canvas, but realizes he's out of time and throws up his hands.

WILLIAM

And there is our beautiful painting.
Thank you for watching me. Bye bye.

The Director holds for a beat.

DIRECTOR

And... we're out.

Williams slumps, as the lights go dark.

The Director turns to Don.

DIRECTOR

(low)
Why didn't we cut? We can't air that.

DON

It's okay. We'll do what we can in post.

The Director moves off. Don tries to approach William, but gets stopped by Margarete.

MARGARETE

(also a German accent)
I'll handle it, Don.

DON

Is he okay? He hasn't been himself lately.

MARGARETE

He's just tired. It's okay, don't worry. It's the end of the season. He always gets like this.

DON

Okay, but if we can't fix that, we'll have to retape. The network's already on me for being over budget.

MARGARETE

I said I'll handle it. It won't happen again.

DON

Let me know if he needs anything.

Margarete nods her appreciation, as Don moves off. She turns, but sees William has already left the set.

INT. WILLIAM'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Not really a dressing room. It's more of a converted supply room with a table and mirror set up in the corner. Racks of clothes and props occupy most of the space.

William is in front of the mirror wiping off makeup.

There's a QUICK KNOCK at the door and Margarete enters. We catch a glimpse of a gold star with *Bill Alexander* written in cursive on the door.

She sits next to him, worried. William puts on a good face.

WILLIAM

We do a good show today. One more and we can finally take a break.

MARGARETE

Are you okay? What happened out there? People are getting worried.

WILLIAM

Who, Don? He worries about everything. That's his job.

MARGARETE

You were off in some dark place again. What's going on?

WILLIAM

It's nothing. Really.

William gives her a reassuring smile and wipes off the remaining makeup.

MARGARETE

You can talk to me. Not as your manager, but as your wife and friend.

WILLIAM

What's to talk about? The show is good. Lots of people watch and send letters from all over the world. They want to be happy painters like me.

William faces himself in the mirror, but what he sees prompts him to quickly get up.

MARGARETE

Where are you going?

WILLIAM

I'll see you at home.

William leaves.

INT. HALLWAY - TV STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

William lumbers toward the exit, passing a cheery GRIP wearing a T-shirt that says *I [Heart] PBS*.

PBS GRIP

Great show today, Bill!

William smiles, again putting on a good face, but he says nothing in response and pushes through a door to leave.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

Turning on the light, William enters carrying a bottle of whiskey and a glass. He pours and downs his drink, heading over to a vehicle covered with a large tarp.

William grabs hold of the tarp and rips it down, revealing an old 1960 VOLKSWAGEN BUS in sad shape. It's covered in dirt, rusted in parts, and the windshield is cracked.

Running a hand along the front edge, William stops at the passenger side door, which has the words *The Ol' Magic from Faraway* hand-painted on it.

He smiles, his mind flooded with warm memories. He goes around the front and climbs into the driver's side.

INSIDE THE BUS

Cobwebs and dust. William sees the keys are still in the ignition. He takes a deep breath, coughs breathing in the dust, turns the key-- and *nothing*.

BACK IN THE GARAGE

William climbs out and lifts the hood, looking inside-- *there's no battery!*

WILLIAM

Shit!

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAYS LATER

At a desk stacked with paper, Margarete crunches numbers on an adding machine with roll paper.

Margarete looks at the numbers, not happy.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

William has his head buried in the hood of the van trying to replace the battery, referring to a book nearby. He has no idea what he's doing.

Margarete comes outside with a sheet of paper in hand and sees what he's up to.

MARGARETE

What in God's name are you doing?

WILLIAM

Putting in a new battery.

MARGARETE

You don't know how to do that.

WILLIAM

I'm learning how.

He checks the book one more time, as Margarete looks on, and goes to attach one of the cables to a fresh battery-- *sparks fly!* William jumps back. Margarete shakes her head.

MARGARETE

Here.

She hands him an accounting sheet.

MARGARETE

This month's supply orders. Our numbers are down again.

WILLIAM

It's okay, they pick up in summer.

MARGARETE

They started going down last year and haven't picked up since. Almost seven months in row. We keep going, we'll be in the red in a couple months.

WILLIAM

We'll be fine. Lots of people buy our supplies. Give it another month.

Margarete sees there's no getting through to him.

MARGARETE

What's the point of fixing this old thing anyway?

WILLIAM

I miss this old hunk of junk. You remember that time we couldn't pay to fix the damn thing when it broke down in Arizona?

Margarete rolls her eyes, but smiles at the memory.

MARGARETE

That crazy tow truck driver nearly killed us with his driving. But he bought all your paintings.

WILLIAM

Twenty five bucks a pop. Everything was simpler then, wasn't it?

MARGARETE

Simple, but harder.

WILLIAM

Why don't we go on the road, have some happy times like the old days.

Margarete looks down at their cracked driveway, which teems with numerous weeds.

MARGARETE

Maybe we should keep focused on the road we're on instead.

She goes back into the house.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - WILLIAM'S STUDIO - LATE NIGHT

A cozy studio stuffed with various landscapes piled everywhere. Several candles provide light.

William sits in front of his easel drinking whiskey. On the canvas is an unfinished scene of a farmhouse near a field. Half the canvas remains blank.

He stares at the picture deep in dark thoughts, his eyes fixated on the farmhouse.

There's a spot of yellow paint in the window, indicating light inside. As we move in closer, the light seems to come alive, and we TRANSITION TO:

INT. FARMHOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

East Prussia. 1931.

A fire FLICKERING in the fireplace of a damp one-room cabin.

Young William, now 16, sits next to his MOTHER (40s), who lies in bed COUGHING BLOOD. She's dying of tuberculosis.

William wipes the blood from her mouth with a rag. He's distraught and desperate for her to get better.

His mother lifts a hand and pushes the rag away, not wanting his care. Off William's confusion, we TRANSITION BACK TO:

INT. WILLIAM'S STUDIO - LATE NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

With shaking hand, William puts the brush to the canvas. But the lingering memory causes him to freeze, and he lowers it back down. He can't finish.

INT. KOCE STUDIO - NEXT DAY

William is taping another episode. This time he paints a cabin in the woods. He loads his palette knife with a mix of red and brown paint.

This time, however, his enthusiasm is muted and any effort he makes feels forced.

WILLIAM

Now we paint a roof over here like so. A happy little roof... happy little hunting lodge. Now we can do a happy little window there if you want to. Just put some white paint on the palette knife-- but don't make it perfect. Leave something for the imagination.

William does a few emphatic downstrokes with the white paint, creating a window on the side of the cabin.

As he continues, Don walks on set with a woman in a sharp suit, FAYE ANDERSON (late 30s, buttoned up, distant). She's a PBS executive, which we'll learn soon enough.

Both stand near the director. Heads turn. Faye watches William perform with arms crossed, closely studying him.

But William doesn't notice, as he leans in to put various touches on the cabin and starts to ramble.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

There. Now we can peek inside. I wonder what goes on in there? Who's inside? A hunter? Yes, he's all alone in there... Now we build a second roof for him. He likes to hide things up there. Keep them nice and safe so no one finds them. What could he hide in there? A bottle?

Margarete stamps out her cigarette, growing concerned. She knows where William is going, but can't stop him.

WILLIAM

And then we put a shadow underneath there-- pull it down like so. Now let's give him a happy chimney up there. A long chimney. He used to be a chimney builder and likes a high chimney so he can fry his ham and eggs-- but he doesn't have any. He doesn't work anymore and has no money for food. He's a drunk and spends all his money on the bottle!

Margarete looks on in quiet horror. Don cringes. Faye continues to watch, unreadable.

The set is thick with tension. William still doesn't notice.

WILLIAM

Such a nice home. Now we give him a little shed. He keeps his lawnmower in there. He used to clean his lawn, but he doesn't do it anymore. He's not there. He just got up and left-- we don't know where he went...

William looks up as he cleans his brush, finally noticing Don and Faye. It's enough to snap him back to reality.

William quickly turns to his palette and presses the brush in yellow paint, getting flustered.

WILLIAM

Now we use a one inch brush... take a good look how I do that, see-- the yellow, and-- lots of paint, always use lots of-- you want to highlight this thing-- but it's got to have so much paint or it won't work, you see?

Faye gives Don a look. She's seen enough and leaves the studio. Margarete lights another cigarette.

INT. DON'S OFFICE - DAY

A messy office with a good view of a strip mall across the street. Behind his desk on a shelf is a DAYTIME EMMY AWARD.

A sheepish Don sits with Faye, as William enters the room in good spirits. Margarete follows him in.

WILLIAM

What a show! You see that? Such a wonderful painting we do today.

(to Faye)

Hi, Bill Alexander. And my wife, Margarete.

Faye stands, giving a thin smile as she extends her hand.

FAYE

Faye Anderson. I'm the new VP of programming in Arlington.

WILLIAM

You came all the way from Virginia? Isn't that wonderful.

An uncomfortable beat.

DON

Have a seat, Bill.

William sits next to Faye. Margarete takes a seat on the couch behind her.

WILLIAM

So what's this all about?

DON

Well, I just wanted to say thank you for another great season at KOCE. Seven years. I can't believe it's been that long, can you?

Faye shifts, growing impatient. Don picks up the signal.

DON (CONT'D)

Okay, so. The reason we're all here. I've been told-- and I'm learning this today... the network wants to make a few changes to the show.

MARGARETE

What changes?

FAYE
We're canceling The Magic of Oil
Painting.

William is in shock. The news renders him speechless,
forcing Margarete to step in.

MARGARETE
What do you mean canceled? Why?

DON
Do you remember our conversations
about ratings and how they don't
matter with PBS, but actually they
really do?

MARGARETE
This is bullshit. You can't do this.

FAYE
We own the show, so we can. And I am
sorry. However, if you would just--

MARGARETE
After all we've done for the network.
The hard work, free demonstrations--
we won an Emmy two years ago.

FAYE
Ratings do matter. Yes, we're
publicly owned, but we have sponsors
and some haven't been happy lately.
And with Reagan, anything with the
word 'public' is facing budget cuts.

MARGARETE
But we thought PBS is committed to a
painting series. It's always been one
of the most popular shows. I'm not
buying this *scheisse* about sponsors
and Reagan.

FAYE
You're right. We are committed to
doing a painting series, and we'll
continue to have one. Unfortunately,
just not with Bill.

That knocks William out of his state of shock.

WILLIAM
...You're replacing me?

FAYE

We found someone else to do the show.

WILLIAM

Someone else?

FAYE

An artist who's... an inspiration. He has this vibe that makes you feel like everything's going to be okay. I can't describe it. When I first saw him I was in a--

(catches herself)

Look, it doesn't matter. I knew right away I had to put him on TV.

DON

Not to mention he's younger and more relatable to the audience-- not that you aren't relatable, Bill.

FAYE

We understand you've given a lot to PBS and that's appreciated. But the network has made it's decision.

Margarete and William share a look. They're uncertain what to do, but in this together.

DON

But there's good news.

FAYE

Yes. As I've been trying to say, we're prepared to make you an offer in exchange for your help.

MARGARETE

What kind of help?

William gives her a look. Margarete wants to hear them out.

FAYE

We want Bill to mentor our new talent. Help him out with being on TV. And in return we'll give you another book series.

William jumps up from his chair.

WILLIAM

Mentor? Book series? *Schiesse drauf!*

William leaves. Margarete gets up to follow. Don and Faye share a look, confused.

MARGARETE
He'll think about it.

She leaves.

EXT. STREET - DAY

William pushes his way out of the front door near a busy intersection. Margarete is on his heels, equally as upset.

WILLIAM
Can you believe that? A book series!
What are we going to do?

MARGARETE
Take it.

WILLIAM
Are you joking? Why?

MARGARETE
We can't make it on art supplies and seminars alone.

WILLIAM
Forget it, I won't do it.

MARGARETE
What choice do we have? Go back on the road and hawk paintings out of the back of that old van? Like the good old days? I'm not doing that again. We have it good now.

William paces, his mind starting to clear a little.

WILLIAM
So we do another show then. Go to another network, do a local series--

MARGARETE
Who else is going to put you on TV?

WILLIAM
What's wrong with seminars? We were a good team. And it will be different this time. People will come from miles around. I have a name. Bill Alexander is a name.

MARGARETE
But for how much longer?
(MORE)

MARGARETE (cont'd)
(off William)
If you're not on TV anymore, people
will start to forget. At least the
book will help remind them.

William stops pacing. That struck a chord.

WILLIAM
I'll think of something.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

A modest space with a Bohemian flair. Hung on one wall is a series of gold pans with painted landscapes, mainly snow covered mountains and forests.

West coast jazz plays quietly in the background. Over that, someone happily HUMS along.

Then a MAN enters the living room, but we only see him from behind. Just a large AFRO and a freckled hand reaching for the phone.

Oh, and he's also completely naked.

The man keeps HUMMING as he dials, bare ass prominent.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Margarete is crunching numbers again, this time her stress really shows.

The phone RINGS. She reaches behind her to answer.

MARGARETE
Hello?

MELLOW VOICE (OVER PHONE)
Hello, is Bill Alexander there?

INT. GARAGE - DAY

William works on the van again. Now he has a battery in place and the cables hooked up. He steps back wiping his hands and gets in.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN BUS - SAME

William inserts the keys and takes a breath. He turns it over-- *and success!* The van starts up. William is exuberant.

WILLIAM
Look at that. Wonderful!

MARGARETE (O.S.)

Bill!

William looks through the windshield and sees Margarete holding up the phone. He sticks his head out the window.

WILLIAM

Who is it?

MARGARETE

Bob someone. Says he's one of your old students.

She turns back inside. William turns off the van, happy with his accomplishment.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

William takes the phone from Margarete. She lights up and stands nearby to listen.

Throughout the conversation, we don't see BOB ROSS, but only hear him over the phone. His voice is impossibly mellow.

WILLIAM

Hello?

BOB ROSS (OVER PHONE)

Hi, Bill. It's Bob Ross. How have you been?

WILLIAM

I'm sorry, who is this again?

BOB ROSS (OVER PHONE)

Bob Ross. I was one of your students years ago in Orlando... must've been in '75, I believe.

WILLIAM

It was '74, my only year there. I love Orlando.

BOB ROSS

You're right. Still sharp as a tack.

WILLIAM

Well, I always like to hear from old students. What can I do for you, Bob?

BOB ROSS (OVER PHONE)

I wanted to call and thank you personally for everything you've done. I really appreciate it.

WILLIAM
Of course. What I do?

BOB ROSS (OVER PHONE)
Oh, how you've been handling
everything in what I imagine must be
a very difficult time.

WILLIAM
What do you mean handle? Handle what?

BOB ROSS (OVER PHONE)
The transition with the show. Faye
told me you might be a little upset,
but I said, heck, let's get crazy.
Why not give ol' Bill a call and see
if we can't work things out?

William's good cheer instantly takes a turn for the worse.

WILLIAM
You-- you're the one taking my show
from me?

Margarete straightens up. Oh, shit, here we go--

BOB ROSS (OVER PHONE)
I'd rather see it as a natural
transition from teacher to student. A
passing of the torch, or in our case
a passing of the paint brush.

WILLIAM
I wouldn't pass you a pile of shit
for you to eat it.

BOB ROSS (OVER PHONE)
I'm sorry, I don't understand--

William HANGS UP the phone, and lumbers past Margarete
without even a glance. She watches him go.

INT. WILLIAM'S STUDIO - LATE NIGHT

Candle light again. And William is drunk. He paces in front
of an easel with a blank canvas, bottle in hand.

Frustrated, William sits down and looks to the shelf, where
he sees a framed photo of his FATHER (40s), a hard man,
standing next to a cowed 10-year-old WILLIAM.

William drinks and picks up the photo. Off that, we
TRANSITION TO:

INT. BARN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

East Prussia. 1927.

A quick, violent image looking up at William's FATHER viciously throwing punch after punch, his face twisted in fury and anguish--

EXT. ALEXANDER FARM - NIGHT

Wearing fresh bruises on his face, William sneaks away with a sack over his shoulder. He's running away.

INT. WILLIAM'S STUDIO - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

William flips the photo face down and slugs down the bottle.

INT. KOCE - DAY

Daylight floods the otherwise dim studio, as William enters through a side door. It's quiet. No one else there. The cameras are covered and pushed off to the side.

Across the way, he sees his old dressing room. His star has been removed. Only the faded outline from years of hanging on the door remains.

DON (O.S.)

Bill?

William turns to see Don down the hallway. He smiles, as always trying to put a good face on a bad situation.

WILLIAM

Don. I thought I forgot some things.
But then I realize I got everything
before, so...

DON

Okay, good. Great.

(then)

Listen, I'm glad you stopped by. I
wanted you to know that I did
everything I could. I tried.

WILLIAM

Yeah, I know you did.

(then)

But what did I do wrong? It's okay,
we're friends a long time. You can
tell me.

DON

You didn't do anything wrong. It's a
network thing. You understand.

WILLIAM

(beat)

I love teaching, Don. It's all I've ever done. And here I had the biggest classroom in the world.

DON

You can do public access. Have you thought about that?

WILLIAM

Nobody watches public access. This was the only place for me.

DON

I'm sorry, Bill. I really wish there was more I could do.

Don holds out his hand and they shake. William turns to leave the studio.

INT. GARAGE - DAY

The van is up on jack stands and Margarete is underneath on a roller. Smoke rises up through the engine from underneath.

William lumbers up the driveway and sees what Margarete is doing. He's not surprised.

WILLIAM

I thought you didn't care about this old thing.

Margarete abruptly rolls out from underneath, grease on her face and hands, cutting him off. She flicks her cigarette.

MARGARETE

I got a call when you were sleeping. Leewards wants to drop our supplies.

WILLIAM

What? Why?

Margarete gets to her feet and wipes sweat with her sleeve.

MARGARETE

I told you sales were dropping. Now you're not on TV and they're afraid they'll drop more. I got them to hold off for now, but we have to do something.

WILLIAM

Then we go with someone else. Aaron Brothers or some regional store.

MARGARETE

Why would someone else pick us up if there's no show to advertise?

(then)

This could be a big hit on our money. We need to go back to Faye.

WILLIAM

Not that again.

Margarete SLAMS the hood. William winces from the noise.

MARGARETE

We're going to Virginia. They want us to come out to discuss everything... and to meet with this Bob Ross.

WILLIAM

I don't have a say in this?

MARGARETE

We don't have a choice.

William paces, his mind reeling.

WILLIAM

There has to be another way.

MARGARETE

Unless you can convince them to give you another show, I don't see one.

Margarete moves to William and gets him to stop.

MARGARETE

I have always believed in you and your talent. And you still have much to give the world. But you are the most stubborn son a bitch I've ever known.

A beat, then he nods.

WILLIAM

Okay, we hear them out-- but no promises.

Margarete sighs. It's the best she's going to get right now.

MARGARETE

We have some time. At least we can hit the road like you want to.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN BUS - THE NEXT DAY

In the driveway, Margarete sits behind the wheel, Volkswagen bus idling and packed with their things.

William exits the house and climbs in. A beat.

Then he turns and gives her a nod. He's ready. Margarete puts the van in drive and they're off.

STAR ON THE ROAD MONTAGE

William and Margarete cross the country past various familiar landmarks as they head east: PALM SPRINGS... LAS VEGAS... MONUMENT VALLEY...

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

While Margarete pumps gas, William sells paintings to customers and even the STATION ATTENDANT.

He turns to her, holding up cash with a smile.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - EVENING

William paints a desert scene outside the open door. Inside, Margarete does the accounting.

He turns to her. A happy smile. Margarete obliges, but drops the pretense when he goes back to painting.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY/NIGHT

Now driving through the south. JACKSON... BIRMINGHAM... ATLANTA...

EXT. REST STOP - DAY

Margarete and William sell paintings to anyone they can. There's a sizable crowd, as they haggle for money.

They share a quick look. Even Margarete can't help enjoying herself.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The van drives past a sign that reads *Welcome to Virginia*.

EXT. MOTEL 6 - NIGHT

And finally they pull into the lot to park.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Dark because of the shades. William is up bright and early. Margarete is still asleep.

He makes his way to the window in T-shirt and tighty whities, and pulls open the heavy shades, flooding the room with harsh light that wakes her up.

MARGARETE
(groggy)
What are you doing?

WILLIAM
Look at this beautiful morning.

Margarete gives him a look.

MARGARETE
Why are you so happy all of a sudden?
William puts on his pants.

WILLIAM
Can't a man enjoy a brand new day
with his beautiful young wife?

MARGARETE
You're acting like we did something
more than sleep last night. What's
come over you?

William sits on the edge of the bed.

WILLIAM
I have a plan.

Margarete throws the covers off and gets out of bed.

WILLIAM
You don't want to hear it? We need
one for tonight.

Margarete grabs her cigarettes off the table and lights up.
She gestures-- *Go ahead, let's hear it.*

WILLIAM
Competing shows. PBS puts *The Magic
of Oil Painting* back on and we go up
against Bob. Let's have the public
decide who stays and who goes.

MARGARETE
They won't go for that. It's too
expensive. We're here to accept the
book and meet Bob. That's it.

WILLIAM
Who cares about the book? I can't
teach people that way.

MARGARETE

Be happy they offered this much.

William plops onto the bed. Margarete sits next to him.

MARGARETE

If there was a way to get you back,
I'd fight like hell to get it.

WILLIAM

I know that.

She takes his hand in both of hers and gives him a kiss on the cheek. He smiles, appreciating the gesture.

INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A no frills ristorante with latticed walls, checkered tablecloths, and an old world vibe.

William and Margarete enter dressed nicely for dinner. Both look on edge.

Across the way, they spot Faye with a MAN wearing tinted glasses and a denim shirt with the top unbuttoned, revealing a medallion on a gold chain.

Meet BOB ROSS (30s, afro, always happy, maybe stoned), the man we saw in silhouette before.

William turns to Margarete, not impressed. Margarete puts on a good face, as Bob smiles and waves them over. Bob and Faye stand as they arrive.

FAYE

Thank you for coming all this way.

Bob beams a beatific smile, but now that we're closer, we see a little more calculation behind the tinted glasses.

BOB ROSS

Hello, Bill. So wonderful to see you.
We really appreciate you making the
trip out.

WILLIAM

Well, I guess we wouldn't be here
without you.

As they sit, Margarete gives William a discreet kick. Nobody notices. Then she lights up a cigarette.

BOB ROSS

Would you mind? I'm sensitive to the
smoke.

Margarete holds a beat and puts out the cigarette on the ground without a word.

A beat. Faye tries to break the ice.

FAYE

So, how was the drive out?

WILLIAM

It was good. Listen, we have an idea we'd like to share. It's a good one, if you give it a chance--

FAYE

If it has anything to do with putting you back on TV, the answer's no.

(off William sinking)

I understand this isn't easy. Believe me, we're as uncomfortable about it as you are--

BOB ROSS

(steps in)

Would you mind?

(she doesn't)

I want to say from the bottom of my heart how much I appreciate this.

WILLIAM

I heard this on the phone already.

BOB ROSS

It's more than that. When I took your class, you opened up whole new worlds I never knew before. All my life I was trapped inside a box, but thanks to you I was able to break free.

William eyes Bob skeptically, but he's listening. Margarete keeps a wary eye on both.

WILLIAM

How many classes you take? I remember lots of students, but I don't remember you.

BOB ROSS

Only the one. But when I was stationed in Alaska, I never missed your show. I used to rush home on breaks to catch it. When I pick up that brush now, I can still remember the thrill I'd get watching you.

Bob is entirely convincing. His affability is infectious and starts to break down William's defenses.

BOB ROSS (CONT'D)

To be honest, Bill, if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be here today.

William wavers. Margarete sees this, her mood changing.

FAYE

You had a great run, Bill. Seven incredible years. I hope we did as much for you as you have for us.

BOB ROSS

I only hope I can accomplish half of what you did, God willing.

FAYE

So, we didn't have you come all this way for us to sit here and tell you how great you are--

MARGARETE

We don't want the book series.

Heads turn. Faye is taken aback. Even William is surprised, but manages to hide a smile.

FAYE

We think it's more than fair.

MARGARETE

Well, you said yourself we gave seven years. Bill deserves more than some book nobody will read.

FAYE

If you're asking we put Bill back on TV, I'm afraid that's not possible.

MARGARETE

We want a video series.

WILLIAM

We do?

MARGARETE

(ignoring)

It will sell better and be cheap to produce. And our fans get what they want.

(MORE)

MARGARETE (cont'd)

Lots of people will be unhappy not to see Bill on screen again, which I'm sure the network is worried about. Does the audience want Bob in his place? I don't know. Do you?

FAYE

I know you're doing your job as his manager, but let's be realistic. PBS is not going to agree to that.

MARGARETE

(leaning in)

What I don't understand is why you need Bill to help Bob in the first place. Any director can help him be on TV. Why Bill?

BOB ROSS

This was my condition for taking the show. After all, he's my mentor. But really it's my way of thanking him for what he's done. It's important to me, and really the least I can do.

MARGARETE

Well, if it's so important-- video series or nothing. Tell us now. Otherwise we have a long drive back.

Bob and Faye share a look. Bob gives her a nod.

FAYE

Give me a minute.

AT THE BAR - MOMENTS LATER

William and Margarete talk while Faye is on a pay phone near the entrance in the background.

At the table, Bob eats his linguine, happy as a clam.

WILLIAM

What was with all that bluffing?

MARGARETE

I wasn't bluffing. They don't give us the video, we go home. You agree?

WILLIAM

I thought you wanted me to take the book. What's come over with you?

MARGARETE
(glancing at Bob)
What do you think of him?

WILLIAM
He's a little spaced out, but we saw
worse living in Long Beach.

MARGARETE
That's not what I'm talking about.
It's something in the eyes.
(then)
Maybe I'm tired of the run around. I
want to know where our lives go next.
If they say no, maybe we take the
book and be done with it.

WILLIAM
It doesn't matter to me. Where you go
I go. That's all that's important.

Faye hangs up and walks over to the bar. William and
Margarete put their game faces on.

FAYE
You're in luck. The brass agreed a
video would sell better. But it's our
final offer.

She holds out her hand. William looks at Margarete one more
time. She gives him a slight nod.

William reaches out and shakes, sealing the deal.

INT. PBS STUDIO - ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA - WEEKS LATER

Much bigger than the one we saw in Costa Mesa. Large open
space, newer equipment, even sizable dressing rooms. Still,
it's PBS and not NBC in New York.

William enters carrying his supplies. Bob is waiting in the
same denim shirt and jeans. He beams and waves William over.

BOB ROSS
I'm so glad you made it. I can't wait
to get started. I've got everything
all set up over here.

Bob has an easel with a blank canvas set up with paints and
brushes in the corner. He's chomping at the bit.

WILLIAM
So how do you want do this?

BOB ROSS
I've got it all figured out. You take
a seat right here...

Bob pulls a director's chair over.

BOB ROSS (CONT'D)
Now, I'll go through how I might do
an episode and you give me pointers
on how I can do things better. Don't
be afraid to interrupt. And please,
be tough. I can handle it.

William takes a seat and folds his arms. Bob turns as if
he's looking at the camera and, impossibly, starts speaking
in an even mellower voice than he has.

BOB ROSS
Hello there, and welcome. I'm so glad
that you could join us today...

Bob's soothing voice lulls William and he starts to nod off.
His lids droop, and--

From his POV, we see the image of Bob turn fuzzy, his voice
murky. He's nothing more than a blurry afro--

And William's chin hits his chest. He's out.

TWENTY MINUTES LATER

William snorts awake to see Bob standing before a completed
painting: a snow-covered cabin next to a mountain with
fluffy clouds floating in the sky.

Bob sees William awake.

BOB ROSS
Looks like you dozed off for a
minute. I have that effect on people.
And good timing. I was about to do my
sign off. Ready?
(turns to "camera")
There's so much that you can do with
this canvas. You can paint anything
in the world you want.
(points to his heart)
All you need is a dream in here that
you want to put on there. So Happy
Painting and we'll see you next time.

William's lids start to droop again, but he catches himself
this time. Bob smiles, and he's "out."

BOB ROSS

I'm not terribly happy with that last line, are you? Think I need to work on it a bit more.

But William acts like he didn't hear Bob. That's because he's eyeing the painting. It's okay, but something is off about it and William doesn't like it.

WILLIAM

What is that?

BOB ROSS

A cabin the woods. I used to go hiking outside Fairbanks--

WILLIAM

A cabin? It looks like a cartoon.

William jumps to his feet and goes to the painting, pointing at it as he fires off a withering critique--

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

Look at this. Your edges-- they're round, not straight. And your colors are off. Did you mix them right? And what is this... a mountain? A giant sponge sprouting from the ground?

Bob lowers his palette, upset, but he doesn't raise his voice. In fact, Bob never talks above conversation tone.

BOB ROSS

Well, that's disappointing to hear.

WILLIAM

I thought you were my student? I don't teach that.

BOB ROSS

But how was I on camera? I think that part is okay.

WILLIAM

Who cares if you can't paint?

Bob looks around and leans in to talk in private.

BOB ROSS

Listen, I admit I might need help with that. My first episode tapes in a few weeks and I don't want to let Faye down. It means so much to her for me to be on TV teaching others the joy of painting.

(MORE)

BOB ROSS (cont'd)
 (realizing)
 That's a nice name for the show.
 (then)
 Will you help me?

William is floored, but Bob's earnest plea has an effect.

WILLIAM
 I'll think about it. Just don't say
 'happy'. That's my word.

INT. RENTAL HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A furnished rental home that serves as William and
 Margarete's temporary residence. Boxes of supplies and
 canvas are piled in a corner.

Margarete is on the phone mid-conversation.

MARGARETE
 Bill Alexander... The Magic of Oil
 Painting... no, it's not on PBS
 anymore. But he has a VHS series
 coming... Okay, yes. I understand.
 Thank you.

Deflated, she hangs up right as William lumbers inside.

MARGARETE
 What happened?

WILLIAM
 He can't paint! He should be drawing
 Mickey Mouse, not painting mountains.
 I'm being replaced by an amateur.

MARGARETE
 Slow down. What does the network
 think?

WILLIAM
 Who knows? They probably can't tell
 the difference.

MARGARETE
 What did you say to Bob?

William looks away. Margarete senses something is up.

WILLIAM
 He asked me to help fine tune his
 technique.

MARGARETE
 And you said yes?

WILLIAM
I didn't say yes.

Margarete relaxes a little.

MARGARETE
Tomorrow you march into Faye's office
and tell her. They need to know
you're the better painter. Maybe they
come to their senses and put you back
on the air.

Margarete's pep talk gets William worked up.

WILLIAM
You're right.

William kisses her and leaves. Margarete watches him go.

INT. FAYE'S OFFICE - DAY

Sitting at her desk, Faye watches BOB'S AUDITION TAPE on a
TV/VCR combo. Even though the tape is low-quality, it's easy
to see how Bob radiates on screen.

Faye is mesmerized, as ONSCREEN Bob calmly paints a log
cabin in the woods. The same thing he painted for William.

There's a KNOCK at the door. Faye looks up and sees William
poking his head in.

FAYE
Come in.

William enters and stands in front of her desk. Faye shuts
off the TV, and doesn't offer a seat.

FAYE
What can I do for you?

WILLIAM
It's about Bob.

Faye leans back and gives him an incredulous look, waiting
for William to get to the point.

WILLIAM
He can't paint.

Faye sits on that a beat. She's unreadable, which makes
William a little nervous. Then:

FAYE

You're right. He's not an artist like you. But Bob has something you don't. He has presence.

WILLIAM

Presence? What's that mean? All I see is hair and a dopey smile.

FAYE

You think that's all there is?

(then)

Did I ever tell you how I found him?

William folds his arms. Faye's mood darkens.

FAYE

Three years ago I lost my husband. Leukemia. He was young and vibrant... and then he wasn't. It happened so fast. We got the diagnosis in March, and by April he was gone.

William sinks into his seat. He wasn't expecting this.

FAYE (CONT'D)

Some days I couldn't even get out of bed. But a friend told me about this painter who was giving art classes nearby, and I should go to take my mind off everything. I don't know why I bothered. I'm not an artist. Maybe I needed to get out of the house. And that's when it all changed. Bob was a revelation. He had this spirit that lifted me out of a really dark place.

(then)

Bob's more than a painter-- he's a healer. The world needs that more than ever.

Faye goes back to work, indicating it's time to go. He turns, but then he stops--

WILLIAM

Faye.

(she looks up)

I'm sorry about your husband.

She smiles thinly and William leaves.

INT. PBS HEADQUARTERS - STUDIO - DAY

Bob is at his easel painting another cabin, this one in front of a lake. William hurries in. Bob turns around.

BOB ROSS

There you are.

WILLIAM

We need to talk.

William looks around to make sure no one's around to listen.

WILLIAM

Way I see it, you need something and I need something. So I help you to paint and you help me sell supplies on your show. It's win-win.

Bob thinks a moment, unreadable behind those shaded glasses.

BOB ROSS

And everything stays between us?

William nods.

BOB ROSS

(smiling)

I think it's a marvelous idea.

INT. RENTAL HOME - DINING AREA - EVENING

Margarete sits in front of an easel painting a winter scene: a snow-covered bridge going over a small icy creek. In the background is majestic mountain.

She's a better painter than Bob and may even rival William.

The door opens and William enters in a good mood. Margarete keeps painting, as he looks at her work.

WILLIAM

You were always a great artist. Why don't we get you a show instead?

MARGARETE

Because they don't put old chain-smoking German women on TV.

(then)

So what happened?

WILLIAM

I have the solution to all our problems.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (cont'd)
Bob agreed to sell our products on
his show. Isn't that wonderful?

Margarete is not surprised to hear this.

MARGARETE
You didn't talk to Faye.

WILLIAM
Forget Faye. She won't budge.

Margarete puts down her brush.

MARGARETE
He agreed because you're teaching him
to paint.

WILLIAM
It's a little fine-tuning. We come
out better in the end, I promise.

MARGARETE
Don't you see what he's doing?

WILLIAM
I won't teach him everything. I'll
give him enough so he does okay and
we get a boost in sales. But he'll
start running out of ideas, and
people will demand that PBS put the
old German guy back on. They cancel
Bob, and our show is back.

Margarete glares at him before going back to painting.

EXT. STREET - DAY

A boxy, brown PLYMOUTH RELIANT pulls to the curb outside
William's rental home. BEEP-BEEP!

INT. RENTAL CAR - PARKED - SAME

Bob is behind the wheel of the clutter-free car. One of
those green Little Trees fresheners hangs from the mirror.

He watches William exit the front door with an art bag slung
over his shoulder. On the stereo, Captain & Tennille's "Love
Will Keep Us Together" plays.

He waves and reaches over to open the passenger side door.
William gets in and immediately grimaces at the music.

WILLIAM
This is still on the radio?

BOB ROSS
It's a tape. You don't like it?

William gives Bob a look. Bob stops the tape.

WILLIAM
Can you stop at Leewards on the way?
We need more paints.

BOB ROSS
You're the boss.

Bob shifts into drive and pulls away.

INT. LEEWARDS - DAY

An arts and crafts chain typical of the time. Florescent lights, cheap prices, and plain sheet rock walls.

William enters with Bob and heads for the painting supplies, moving past a STOCK BOY sweeping the floor. The Stock Boy stops, recognizing William as they pass--

STOCK BOY
Hey, aren't you the guy on aisle 5?
From that show, right?

WILLIAM
That's right. What's your name?

STOCK BOY
Steven.

WILLIAM
(warmly)
Well, thank you Steven for watching.

He pats Steven n the shoulder. Steven smiles, as William moves down the aisle with Bob.

WILLIAM
I love all my fans. They're going to
be very unhappy when they find out
I'm canceled.
(then)
Ah, here we are.

They reach the paint aisle. Bob's eyes light up when he spots a cardboard cutout of William holding a can of his *Magic White* paint.

The cutout stands next to an entire section of Bill Alexander brand art supplies, which dominate the aisle.

BOB ROSS
(whistles)
Would you look at that.

William proudly watches Bob take it all in.

WILLIAM
Took years of struggle and hard work
to get here.

Bob puts his arm around the cutout of William and chuckles.
Even William can't help but smile.

Bob scans the shelves and finds a can of William's *Magic White*. He picks one up and looks at the back.

WILLIAM
Can I give you some advice?
(off Bob, nodding)
Presence is bullshit. If you don't
have strong craft, people will see
right through you.

BOB ROSS
(smiling)
That's why I wanted your help.

William nods, as he grabs some paint and heads for the counter. Bob watches him go, the wheels spinning behind his tinted rims.

INT. BOB'S APARTMENT - DAY

A furnished one-bedroom that serves as a temporary residence for Bob to stay while he's taping.

William stands before an easel, palette and brush in hand, waiting impatiently.

Bob enters tying off his kimono.

BOB ROSS
Let's get started.

Bob readies his palette. William turns to his easel, wondering what the hell he's gotten into.

START HAPPY PAINTING MONTAGE

Bob and William start with painting various landscapes. Bob still wears his kimono.

First is a mountain and woods without a cabin.

William points at something Bob's doing wrong and demonstrates on his own canvas, pitter-patting the brush to create a large tree.

Bob tries to copy him, but gets it wrong again. William gets irritated and pitter-pats harder. There!

Bob tries again and gets it wrong again. William throws up his hands in frustration.

ANOTHER DAY

Both wear different clothing. This time Bob has on jeans and a shirt.

Bob shows William his pitter-pat technique. William nods and smiles. It's getting better!

ANOTHER DAY

Now William make X-strokes across the canvas. Sharp and fast. Bob tries, but his strokes are soft and gentle.

William grabs his hand and forces Bob to do it the right way. *There!* Bob is taken aback.

LATER

Now William shows Bob the correct way to use the palette knife, emphatically pulling down paint to create a rocky cliff overlooking crashing waves.

But Bob gently pulls the paint down, irritating William again! William pulls down hard. Bob does it gently. William throws down his palette knife.

ANOTHER DAY

William and Bob paint a woodland scene with tall trees and a lake. Bob's looks as realistic and life-like as William's. They're almost identical.

William looks over and sees that Bob has gotten better. Bob turns to William, the proud student showing off his work.

William smiles, putting on a good face, but deep down he's not happy.

END MONTAGE

INT. PBS STUDIO, ARLINGTON - DAY

William and Margarete arrive at the studio, where there's a ton of activity. GRIPS set up C-stands, GAFFERS hang lights, a two CAMERA OPERATORS make adjustments.

A DIRECTOR is talking to Don. Don notices William and Margarete, and comes over to greet them with open arms.

DON
Bill, Margarete. How wonderful.

WILLIAM
What are you doing here?

DON
Ah, well. You see, Bob-- he asked me
to, you know... He needed a producer.

Before William can say anything, Margarete jumps in.

MARGARETE
It's okay. We understand.
(to Bill)
Don't we?

Off William, not wanting to say anything, his feelings hurt.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Sitting before a vanity mirror, Bob wears his denim shirt and quietly repeats lines to himself.

BOB ROSS
Happy Painting, and see you next
time.
(that was no good)
Happy Painting, and hope to see you
real soon.
(also no good)
Happy Painting, and have a wonderful
day.

Frustrated, Bob closes his eyes to focus deep within himself. And then, inspiration.

Bob opens his eyes and looks into the mirror with a smile.

BOB ROSS
Happy Painting and God bless, my
friends.

Bob lets out a sigh of satisfaction. He's found it.

INT. BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - DAY

William ambles down the narrow hallway, taking a deep swig from a flask.

A door opens and Bob comes out. He sees William right away.

BOB ROSS

Bill! I'm so happy you made it.

(re: flask)

Little early in the day, isn't it?

WILLIAM

(holds out flask)

Have some for the taping. It'll help.

BOB ROSS

That's okay. Listen, I know I've thanked you a hundred times, but I don't think I ever showed you my appreciation. I hope you don't mind, I have something for you...

Curious, William watches as Bob reaches into his bag and produces a check and hands it to him.

William takes the check and marvels at the amount.

WILLIAM

What is this-- five thousand?

BOB ROSS

It's for the lessons you gave me over the past couple weeks.

(off Bill)

Is it not enough?

WILLIAM

No, I mean... it's very thoughtful. Thank you.

BOB ROSS

Advertising your products on the show isn't enough. Of course this takes a big chunk out of the old savings, but it's worth it. I really believe my time with you is going to pay huge dividends in the future.

Bob smiles and moves toward set.

INT. PBS STUDIO, ARLINGTON - DAY

Bob is talking to Don and the director prior to taping.

William joins Margarete, who waits nearby. They see Faye come onto the set and sit in a chair across the way.

A beat, then William turns to Margarete.

WILLIAM

Maybe I was wrong about Bob.

MARGARETE
Have you been drinking?

WILLIAM
(ignoring)
He's not such a bad guy. Maybe I'm
okay with him taking over the show.

He smiles at Margarete. Meanwhile, there's activity on set.
They're ready to shoot.

BOB'S DIRECTOR
Places everyone.

Don moves behind the cameras. Faye takes a breath. This is a
big day for her, too.

Bob picks up his palette and looks to William, who gives him
a nod and a smile.

BOB'S DIRECTOR
Camera's ready. And... *action*.

Bob turns to the camera with a smile.

BOB ROSS
(a little stiff)
Hi, I'm Bob Ross, and for the next 13
weeks I'll be your host as we
experience The Joy of Painting.
(slight beat)
I think each of us sometime during
our life has wanted to paint a
picture. I think there's an artist
hidden at the bottom of every single
one of us...

Bob is stiff as a board. He stumbles over words and pauses
at the wrong moments, closes his eyes, takes breaths between
words. He's struggling on camera.

Faye shifts in her chair, growing concerned. Don looks on
nervous. This is not what anybody expected.

Margarete turns to William, who looks sympathetic to Bob's
struggle.

BOB ROSS (CONT'D)
(tries to get into it)
And here we will show you how to
bring that artist out. To put it on
canvas. Because you, too, can paint
almighty pictures.

Wait a minute. William looks at Margarete. Did he just say *almighty*?

BOB ROSS

You know, most of us have avoided painting because I think we've been told you have to go to school half your life, or maybe even be blessed by Michelangelo at birth to ever be able to paint a picture. And here we want to show you that's not true. You can paint an almighty picture right along with us.

There it is again. *He did say it.*

BOB ROSS

Let's go over some of the equipment we're going to use.

As Bob goes over his equipment and paints, William goes to Don and speaks in hushed tones.

WILLIAM

What is he doing? He sounds like me.

DON

He doesn't sound like you at all.

WILLIAM

He's doing my show!

Don gestures for William to keep quiet. William grows more upset as Bob gets comfortable on camera.

BOB ROSS

So let's do it. Let's paint a picture right here.

Bob grabs a brush and dips it in white paint.

BOB ROSS

We're gonna start with a big brush and we'll cover the canvas in a thin layer of magic white. We call this a wet-on-wet technique. Cover it nice and even. You also need an almighty easel when you're doing this to hold your canvas very firm. There.

Bob dips his brush in yellow paint and starts making little X-strokes, sharp and fast, like William taught him.

BOB ROSS

Now we mix some cadmium yellow and phthalo green, and make little X's like this. There. We're making little crisscross strokes with our almighty brush.

William needs to get the hell out of there and backs away, accidentally knocking over a C-stand and sending it CRASHING to the floor. Heads turn.

But Bob doesn't skip a beat. He continues to paint and stays as calm as can be.

BOB ROSS

By now maybe you've recognized some of the equipment we're using as something you've seen before. And I learned this fantastic technique from a wonderful man that all of us have enjoyed for many, many years on TV, Bill Alexander. Bill taught me this, and it's the most fantastic way to paint that you've ever seen. And now I'm happy to share it with you.

William hurries off the set.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

William is pacing back and forth, red-faced and agitated. Don comes in and sees William's state.

DON

What's wrong with you? Why are you so upset?

WILLIAM

He stole my technique, Don. I invented wet-on-wet!

DON

Let's talk this through, okay? Nice and calm. Big breaths.

Don starts to breathe, as the door opens again. It's Faye.

FAYE

What hell is going on? He almost ruined the shoot.

(to William)

What are you even doing on set?

DON
It's okay, I've got this.

WILLIAM
Bob ripped me off. That's my show
he's doing!

FAYE
That's ridiculous.

Now Bob comes in with a warm smile.

BOB ROSS
Well, I think that went better than
expected. Started a little rough, but
once I got to painting, I felt real
good. What did you think, Bill?

WILLIAM
You son of a bitch!

BOB ROSS
(confused)
I'm sorry, did I do something wrong?
It was the X's again, wasn't it. I
knew I wasn't doing them right.

WILLIAM
The X's are mine. Almighty brushes
are mine. Pitter-pat, happy trees,
wet-on-wet is *mine*.

BOB ROSS
Oh. I thought it was a nice homage to
your show.

WILLIAM
Homage? I trained you and now you're
copying me. You think you can do it
better?

BOB ROSS
Well, I did give you full credit for
teaching me.

WILLIAM
That's right, *I* taught *you*. And now
you betray me.

William looks to Faye.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
You hear that? I taught Bob Ross how
to paint. So why is *he* on TV teaching
my technique?!

FAYE

Because you were wrong. He does do it better.

William turns to Don for help.

DON

I have to admit, it was a nice pass the torch kind of episode.

It's clear that no one is on his side.

WILLIAM

You think you can cast the old man aside and hope he'll go away. But I won't do it!

William takes Bob's check and rips it up, throwing the pieces to the ground. He grabs his coat and leaves.

EXT. PBS HEADQUARTERS - TOP FLOOR - DAY

William gets off the elevator and heads for a pair of double doors marked *Rod Harris, President*.

He moves past the confused SECRETARY, who stares as he pushes through the doors--

INT. HARRIS' OFFICE - SAME

William enters to find ROD HARRIS (50s) at his desk going over paperwork. Rod is a thoughtful looking man who peers over his reading glasses--

WILLIAM

You think I'm going to take this lying down? I struggled too long to let some frizzy-haired jerk steal my show. You hear what I'm saying?

A beat. There's no response. Frustrated, William turns around and storms out.

Harris' secretary comes in.

ROD HARRIS

Who was that?

She shrugs. So does he, and goes back to his paperwork.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN BUS - DRIVING - DAY

William weaves through traffic, still very angry.

Margarete, in the passenger seat, holds on for dear life--

WILLIAM
Hurensohn! After all I've done. I'm
 going to-- I don't know, something!

MARGARETE
 Pull over so I can drive and not get
 us killed!

A beat, as William settles down.

WILLIAM
 I'm okay.

MARGARETE
 (also settling down)
 I agree with you, he was doing your
 show. It was almost the same. But
 what can you really do?

A beat, as William thinks.

WILLIAM
 I know-- I'm going to sue for...
 whatever they call it.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Williams sits before an ATTORNEY in an upscale office.

ATTORNEY
 Copyright infringement is complex.
 There's no cut-and-dry type of case.
 But generally you need to show two
 things: one, you have ownership of a
 valid copyright and two, the work
 being copied is original.

WILLIAM
 I can do that.

ATTORNEY
 So this painting technique is
 original, and you own the copyright?

WILLIAM
 Of course. He used the same words and
 everything.

ATTORNEY
 (not getting it)
 Okay. But you did agree to teach him
 this technique, correct?

WILLIAM

I teach lots of people over the years. Thousands. Maybe millions. It's the most important thing I've done.

ATTORNEY

Have you ever filed paperwork with the U.S. Copyright Office?

WILLIAM

(beat)

I don't know.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

William leaves the office dejected. But one lawyer's not going to stop him.

START MONTAGE

INT. ANOTHER LAW OFFICE - DAY

Another ATTORNEY sits with William, only this one laughs in his face. We can even see him mouth, "No dice."

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

A poster on the wall shows an ad for accident attorney "EDDIE" EDWARDS with *KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!!* in bold letters.

William sits among other potential clients, many of whom are in various states of injury recovery.

A CLIENT on crutches gets called in by a RECEPTIONIST. William folds his arms and digs in for a long wait.

INT. RENTAL HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

William is on the phone pleading his case. He hangs up in frustration and crosses out another name and number in the yellow pages.

On the porch, Margarete paints a forest scene, refusing to take part in William's quixotic quest.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

Back to the ambulance chaser's office, which has thinned out. A few clients, including William, are still there.

The door to the office opens. William perks up.

Holding a file, the RECEPTIONIST calls out another name. It's not William. He crosses his arms and sits back.

INT. RENTAL HOME - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

William is on the phone still pleading his case. Then he goes silent, and gently hangs up the phone, dejected.

William crosses out a number in the phone book. He's gone through dozens with the same result. He closes the book.

INT. WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

And back to the waiting room again. William is alone. "EDDIE" himself exits the office, briefcase in hand.

William stands, but "Eddie" moves right past without giving him a look.

The lights go out.

END MONTAGE

INT. COURTHOUSE - CLERK WINDOW - DAY

William waits in line, and judging from all the people behind him, he's been there a while.

COURTHOUSE CLERK

Next.

William steps up to the counter.

WILLIAM

I want to file a lawsuit.

COURTHOUSE CLERK

Small claims is on the third floor.

WILLIAM

It's for a lot of money.

COURTHOUSE CLERK

(fine)

Did you fill out a warrant in debt?

(off William)

A civil claim for money.

WILLIAM

No, I haven't.

The clerk finds the form and slides it to William.

COURTHOUSE CLERK

Next.

SEVERAL MINUTES LATER

Off to the side, William struggles to fill out the form. Lots blank spaces and he has no clue how to fill them in.

Frustrated, William does what he can, leaves other spaces blank and steps up to the counter.

COURTHOUSE CLERK
You have to get back in line.

WILLIAM
Please, just take it.

William leaves the form on the counter and moves off.

The clerk gives it a quick glance before crumpling it up and tossing it in the trash.

INT. RENTAL HOME - STUDIO - NIGHT

Alone, William drinks whiskey by candlelight while sitting in front of his easel. The canvas reveals a half-painted CITY STREET that comes alive, as we TRANSITION TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Konigsberg, East Prussia. 1931.

William, now 16, is on a street corner in front of an easel painting for a small crowd. His clothes are threadbare, his face and body thin.

The crowd hangs on his every word, as he exuberantly demonstrates how to paint a vase of flowers.

Then a YOUNG MAN (18), out of breath, runs up to him and urgently tells him something. William's mood takes a downward turn, as we CUT TO:

William running down the street with his art supplies on his back. Pushing through a CROWD, he enters a post office--

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

At the counter, a POSTAL WORKER hands William a letter. He eagerly opens it. His face goes pale. Not good news.

EXT. ALEXANDER FARM - DAY

Days later. William runs down a dirt road as fast as he can. The fields are overgrown and unworked, barn falling apart, his father's shed filled with rusted unused tools.

INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

William bursts in, heart pounding. His brother Paul, now 18, is nursing their sick mother in bed. They lock eyes.

Paul gets up to leave. He stops next to William. A heavy beat, then he puts a comforting hand on William's shoulder and moves away.

William sees his mother in poor health and sits next to her. She's barely there, but opens her eyes enough to see him. We're back to the flashback from page 9.

She coughs. Blood trickles from her mouth. William takes a rag to wipe it, but she pushes his hand and turns away. William is confused. In German with English subtitles.

WILLIAM

Please, mamma.

His mother turns back, her eyes suddenly sharp.

WILLIAM'S MOTHER

(weakly)

My only wish... was to die before you came.

And she turns her head to face the wall again. William is devastated, as we TRANSITION BACK TO:

INT. WILLIAM'S STUDIO - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

William snaps back, and suddenly grabs an opened can of Magic White and splashes paint on the canvas.

He drops the can, picks up his bottle and drinks. Eyes fixated on the thick glops of white paint running down the canvas to the floor.

EXT. RENTAL HOME - STREET - DAY

A green '76 Ford Pinto pulls to a stop out front. The door pops open and GERTRUDE OLSEN (30s, black) exits the car.

Gertrude wears a bright late-70s style blazer and slacks, and has the nervous energy of someone desperate to make a good impression.

Gertrude fumbles for her purse, smooths out her jacket and heads for the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - RENTAL HOME - DAY

DING-DONG.

William is passed out on the couch from the night before and barely moves or makes a sound.

Margarete moves past him without so much as a glance to answer the door--

And Gertrude is there on the stoop beaming wide.

GERTRUDE

Hi, is there a Bill Alexander here?

MARGARETE

Yes. Who are you?

GERTRUDE

Gertrude Olsen, attorney at law.

William hears the word attorney and pops awake. Margarete is not pleased.

MARGARETE

I'm sorry, we're not interested.

WILLIAM

No, wait.

William jumps to his feet, but he's woozy and knocks over a lamp, sending it CRASHING to the floor.

Margarete and Gertrude react, as William staggers to the door looking like death warmed over, if death were a hungover 60-something in tighty whities.

WILLIAM

You're an attorney?

GERTRUDE

That's right. And I heard that you've been looking for one. Here I am.

WILLIAM

Where did you hear that?

GERTRUDE

You reached out to someone I went to law school with and they referred you over. Happens all the time.

Margarete gives her a look. William gets excited and steps aside for her to come.

WILLIAM

Please, come in.

Gertrude finally notices his state of undress. Oblivious, William grabs a robe off a chair and covers up. Gertrude tries to hide her embarrassment.

WILLIAM

I'm so happy you're here. I was rejected by every lawyer in town. They tell me I don't have a case.

GERTRUDE

Well, yeah. Copyright infringement is tough. Really tough. But hey, tough doesn't mean impossible, and I've handled some pretty hard cases.

MARGARETE

Like what?

GERTRUDE

Let's see... DUI, criminal defense, little divorce here and there. Whatever I can get my hands on.

WILLIAM

Great, you're hired.

MARGARETE

We should talk about this.

GERTRUDE

Please, talk. Go ahead.

WILLIAM

Why shouldn't we hire her?

Margarete lights up and levels her gaze on Gertrude, making clear that she's the one who needs to be convinced.

MARGARETE

Why do you want this case? Like he said, every lawyer rejected him.

GERTRUDE

Everyone deserves representation.

Margarete gives Gertrude a look: *don't bullshit me.*

GERTRUDE

Okay, I'm a big fan. I used to watch the show all the time back when I was, uh--

(flailing)

You know, I tried like hell to paint, but I was terrible. Like really bad.

Gertrude chuckles to cover up her anxiety. Margarete catches onto something she said.

MARGARETE

Back when you were in where?

A beat. Gertrude knows she has to come clean.

GERTRUDE

Recovery. But I'm sober 19 months now. Honestly, the show got me through some really hard times. I don't think I'd be here without it.

Margarete seems to soften. Gertrude is breaking through.

GERTRUDE

I know I screwed things up. But I'm trying to get back and rebuild my business-- and I don't have any other clients right now. Bill will get my undivided attention.

William turns to Margarete.

WILLIAM

You see? All those times we needed help, money for gas or a bite to eat, there was always somebody to help. Now the universe is saying we have to give some payback.

Gertrude waits with anticipation, and Margarete's defenses fall. She can't say no.

WILLIAM

Wonderful. You're hired.

INT. TV STUDIO - WEEKS LATER

A local station in Arlington, where a HOST for a live talk show brings out her next guest.

LOCAL TV HOST

Welcome back. We now have with us a brand new face on PBS, Bob Ross.

We see Bob standing before an easel holding a blank canvas. The audience APPLAUDS. Bob smiles and waves. He looks a touch uncomfortable being in the limelight.

LOCAL TV HOST

Bob has a new show on the air called The Joy of Painting.

INT. RENTAL HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Sitting in front of the TV, William watches Bob do the show with pen and paper on his lap.

LOCAL TV HOST (ON TV)
Tells us about it.

BOB ROSS (ON TV)
Well, we hope the show is way for people to discover talents that they never knew they had. And we do that by showing them how to paint with a simple technique that will allow even the most self-doubting artist to create wonderful pictures in less than an hour.

William is annoyed, but focuses on writing something down.

LOCAL TV HOST (ON TV)
What about other artists who dismiss this style of painting?

BOB ROSS (ON TV)
Well, I don't know about you, but when I paint something--

WILLIAM
--I don't want to explain what it is.

BOB ROSS (ON TV)
--I don't want to explain what it is.

The audience LAUGHS. They're hooked by Bob's easygoing nature. William grips his pen tightly.

LOCAL TV HOST (ON TV)
Will you give us a demonstration?

BOB ROSS (ON TV)
I'd love to. Now I'm going to cover the canvas with something I call Liquid White.

Bob reaches for a can of white paint and holds it up for the audience and viewers to see.

BOB ROSS (ON TV)
This is a new formula I'm trying that keeps the canvas wet longer, which is essential to my technique, The Bob Ross Method. It's not for sale yet, but we'll get it out real soon.

William SNAPS his pen in half, ink exploding everywhere, as his phone RINGS. William jumps up, pants stained with ink.

WILLIAM

Verdammt!

(answering)

Yeah? Hello?

INT. GERTRUDE'S OFFICE - SAME

A small, cramped space that looks like it's in the back of a storage facility.

Gertrude is at a desk cluttered with papers and Diet Coke cans. On the wall is a framed quote: *One Day at a Time*.

GERTRUDE

Bill, it's Gertrude. Couple things for you. So, I checked with the copyright office. You never filed paperwork with them.

INTERCUT WILLIAM AND GERTRUDE

William dabs his stained paints with a wet paper towel, making a bad situation worse.

WILLIAM

Scheisse-- yeah, I know that. That's not a problem, right?

Gertrude rifles through some papers.

GERTRUDE

It doesn't make things easy, but we can get around it. Also I've been going over your business filings-- why haven't you set up an LLC yet?

WILLIAM

Margarete handles that stuff.

GERTRUDE

I gotta be honest, this is a mess. We need to show a clear example of infringement, otherwise we'll get laughed out of court. It's hard enough with everything in order.

William stops and thinks a moment, his eyes falling on the TV, where Bob finishes covering his canvas with white paint and picks up his palette. An idea strikes--

WILLIAM

Liquid White.

GERTRUDE

Come again?

WILLIAM

His new paint. Remember I told you about our agreement to sell my products on his show?

GERTRUDE

There's no contract for that either.

WILLIAM

He said on TV that he had a new formula for white paint. It took me 20 years to perfect Magic White. He was using my paint, now all of a sudden he has his own? No way.

Gertrude doesn't quite get it.

GERTRUDE

Are saying he stole your formula?

WILLIAM

What do you think?

GERTRUDE

(thinks on it)

We have to know for sure. Do you have have any?

WILLIAM

He said it's not for sale yet.

GERTRUDE

Just get it. I know a lab we can use. We need to test the formula to see if it's the same. And if it is, we're gonna sue the shit out of him.

William lets out a big smile and hangs up, leaving ink on the receiver. William takes a moment to watch Bob smile and paint for the audience.

CLICK! Bob disappears from the TV.

INT. PBS STUDIO HEADQUARTERS - DAY

William walks through the studio past CREW MEMBER milling about. Nobody seems to notice he's there.

Which is good considering how he left last time.

William keeps an eye out for Faye or Don or anyone else, while finding his way into--

INT. BOB'S DRESSING ROOM - DAY

There's nobody there. William immediately starts rifling drawers and supplies, looking for Bob's paint--

BOB ROSS (O.S.)

Bill? Is that you?

William's eyes light up and he quickly turns around.

WILLIAM

Oh-- I just wanted a few brushes to borrow. I thought you were still taping... I hope you don't mind.

BOB ROSS

We finished the season and I leave for Florida tomorrow. What a wonderful experience. And the ratings are fantastic. We had a 1.5 our third show. People are really responding.

William's mood darkens, but stays quiet. Tough to tell if Bob is needling him or not.

BOB ROSS

(sourcing)

Forgive me, I can't help still being a little angry about what happened. You hurt my feelings when you said I betrayed you.

WILLIAM

Well, that's why I'm really here. I came to apologize.

Bob takes that at face value and relaxes.

BOB ROSS

I appreciate that. But you didn't have to come all the way down here.

WILLIAM

I like to do these things in person.

(an idea)

Why don't we get a drink, mend fences over some whiskey?

BOB ROSS

I gave that up in the Air Force. But I think spending time together would be splendid.

(then, smiling)

I know the perfect thing.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Bob and William hike down a path. It's a beautiful day.
Perfect for a walk in the woods.

Bob leads the way with a warm smile. He's really glad to be
alive. William follows, but not so sure why.

WILLIAM
Where are we going?

BOB ROSS
Wherever the path takes us. I used to
hike in the woods quite a lot when I
was stationed in Alaska.

WILLIAM
Air Force, right?

BOB ROSS
I was in for life until I realized
I'd rather paint. Leaving was the
best decision I ever made.

WILLIAM
Getting captured by you guys in the
war was mine.

Bob smiles, enjoying the camaraderie, but notices something
and stops near a large tree. He goes up to it and puts his
hand on the trunk.

BOB ROSS
Look at this incredible white ash.
Amazing what Mother Nature can do.
(then)
What's your name, mighty tree?

William gives Bob a strange look. This has taken a weird
turn. Bob notices and chuckles.

BOB ROSS
Oh, I know it's strange, but how else
am I supposed to make friends with
it? I always say, there's nothing
wrong with having a tree as a friend.

WILLIAM
It's getting late. Let's head back.

BOB ROSS
We just started. Nature has so many
friends to offer. Squirrels, deer,
trees.

(MORE)

BOB ROSS (cont'd)
We get so lost in the bustle of life,
we forget what's important. Coming
out here reminds me what is.

Then a RUSTLING NOISE in the leaves. Bob turns and spots a squirrel hunting for food. His eyes light up.

BOB ROSS
Look at this little guy.
(bends down, to
squirrel)
You're looking for your lunch, aren't
you little fella?

Bob chuckles as he digs into his pocket for a carrot and holds it out.

BOB ROSS
I've got something for you right
here. Come on. I won't bite. That's
it, don't be afraid.

Bob's soothing voice seems to draw the squirrel in, as it skitters across the ground sniffing out the carrot.

Then the squirrel decides that it's okay and starts nibbling on the carrot. Bob smiles.

BOB ROSS
There, that's it. It's all yours.

William is transfixed on Bob's strange behavior, unable to move or say a word. He's trapped with no way out.

BOB ROSS
Now the hard part. We ready?

Bob reaches with his other hand and very carefully scoops up the squirrel while still holding onto the carrot.

And the squirrel lets him! Bob smiles, as he hands the carrot off to the squirrel and props him on his shoulder.

The squirrel sits calmly on Bob's shoulder nibbling away at the carrot.

BOB ROSS
See? Cute little devil, isn't he? I
think he could use a name. Let's call
him Peekaboo. Nice to meet you,
Peekaboo.

Bob gently pets the squirrel's head.

BOB ROSS
 (to William)
 Would you like to make friends with
 him, too?

WILLIAM
 Maybe another time.

BOB ROSS
 Go on, what do you have to lose? New
 friends bring such joy, and it looks
 like you could use a little of that.

William sighs. He has no choice.

WILLIAM
 Fine, give me the carrot.

Bob gives him a carrot and puts Peekaboo down.

BOB ROSS
 Go ahead.

William feels like an idiot, but stoops down and holds out
 the carrot anyway, wiggling it to attract him.

BOB ROSS
 You have to talk to him. But be
 gentle. He's frightened and you're
 trying to make a good impression.

WILLIAM
 (feeling stupider)
 Here, friend.
 (to Bob)
 How's that?

Bob gestures for more. William plays along.

WILLIAM
 I got a nice juicy carrot for you.
 Let's eat together, okay?

William pretends to nibble on the carrot. Bob beams.

WILLIAM
 See, it's good for you.

Peekaboo sniffs out the carrot and makes a careful approach.
 Bob's anticipation grows.

BOB ROSS
 That's it, little fella.
 (to William)
 He's almost there.

William jiggles the carrot, his eyes lighting up a little.
He's actually doing it!

Peekaboo is right there-- and he starts nibbling the carrot.
William can't believe what's he's accomplishing.

BOB ROSS

Now, while still holding the carrot,
use your other hand and scoop him up.

William nods and carefully reaches out with his other hand--

And he scoops him up! Bob beams widely. William also smiles.
The two men share a moment, a bond perhaps starting to form

But Peekaboo suddenly jolts and BITES William's hand!

WILLIAM

Ow-- shit!

Peekaboo jumps off and skitters away. William holds his
hand, a slight trickle of blood forming.

BOB ROSS

(chuckling)

Well, guess he didn't really want to
be your friend.

INT. RENTAL HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

William sits on the toilet lid, as Margarete uses a Q-tip
dipped in peroxide to clean the cut.

WILLIAM

What if I have rabies? I might start
foaming at the mouth!

MARGARETE

You do that every day. How can I tell
the difference?

Margarete touches the cut with the Q-tip-- William pulls
away, wincing in pain!

MARGARETE

Sit still!

(keeps cleaning)

What were you doing out there anyway?

William doesn't answer. Margarete gives him a look.

WILLIAM

He's using my formula for Magic
White. Gertrude told me to get a
sample. I'm undercover, like a spy.

MARGARETE

You know how ridiculous that sounds?

WILLIAM

How else am I supposed to get it? It doesn't go to market for months.

MARGARETE

You're turning into a lunatic.

WILLIAM

Everything we worked for all our lives has *poof*-- gone because of him. What else am I supposed to do?

MARGARETE

I suppose you have to do something. And so do I.

Margarete finishes cleaning his hand.

WILLIAM

What's that mean?

MARGARETE

I'm going back to teaching. I've been practicing to get back into shape, in case you haven't noticed.

WILLIAM

But the business...

MARGARETE

What business? There's no show. Fans hardly write. Supplies are down. Even the video series is in doubt.

(then)

Maybe it's time to move on.

Margarete tosses the bloodied Q-tips and bandage wrappers away, and leaves William alone on the toilet.

INT. BOB'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Clearwater, Florida.

Wearing his Kimono, Bob is cooking shrimp gumbo with light jazz playing in the background.

As he sips tea, the phone RINGS. Bob goes to answer.

BOB ROSS

Hello?

WILLIAM
Hi, it's Bill.

INT. RENTAL HOME - STUDIO - DAY

William sits before the canvas with dried paint covering the photo of Bob.

BOB ROSS (OVER PHONE)
Good to hear from you. How's your hand doing? I've never seen someone run from a squirrel so fast before.

INTERCUT - BOB AND WILLIAM

William lets out a sigh. He doesn't want to talk about that.

WILLIAM
I'm okay. Listen, I'm calling to ask a favor?

BOB ROSS
Of course. Anything for you.

WILLIAM
It's for the video series. I'm thinking of having guest painters and I want you to be the first one. What do you say? We can finally have our pass the paint brush moment.

BOB ROSS
(smiling)
That would mean so much to me. I can make a trip up there--

WILLIAM
No, I'll come to you.

BOB ROSS
Well, the closest studio is in Tampa. With traffic, that's a good 30 minutes both ways. It's best I come to you.

WILLIAM
But I've got it all figured out. We do it in your backyard. Mother nature will be our studio. Let me take care of everything. All you do is get ready to paint.

(then)
It would make me happy if you say yes.

BOB ROSS
If that's the case, anything I can do
to make you happy.

INT. RENTAL HOME - BEDROOM - DAY

William has an open suitcase on the bed and slowly packs for
his trip. Margarete comes in from the hallway--

MARGARETE
I'm going to the store. Do you need--
(notices)
Where you going?

William looks up and puts on a good face, suddenly as bright
as he can be.

WILLIAM
Great news! I found somebody to sell
our supplies. A new retailer. Isn't
that fantastic?

Margarete is surprised.

MARGARETE
When? How did this happen?

WILLIAM
Things always fall out of the sky. I
got a call from somebody who
remembered the show and heard our
line was available. You see? They
haven't forgotten me yet.

MARGARETE
That's great. Who's the retailer?

WILLIAM
Some place in Florida. I can't
remember the name right now. But I
have to go and meet them in person.
Soon as possible.

MARGARETE
(growing wary)
Okay, I'll pack my bag.

WILLIAM
I want to go alone. Let me take care
of these things for once.

MARGARETE
It's my job because you have no mind
for business. I'm going.

William grows desperate.

WILLIAM

It'll be okay. I want to do this.

Now Margarete knows something is wrong, but she doesn't want to fight. She stares at him a beat and then leaves.

William lowers his head, feeling awful about lying to her.

EXT. SINGLE LEVEL HOME - DAY

A cab pulls out front and William gets out. He removes several bags, including cameras, from the trunk.

The cab drives off. William turns to the house.

INT. BOB'S HOME - DAY

DING-DONG.

Bob answers the door and sees William.

BOB ROSS

Bill, how was the trip down? The flight okay?

WILLIAM

Good. Do you mind?

Bob sees the equipment by his feet and reaches for it, notices no one else is with him.

BOB ROSS

Where's the crew?

WILLIAM

I got everything we need right here.

BOB ROSS

Shouldn't we have some help?

WILLIAM

The network is being cheap. They said there's no money for crew. So I say, why not do it ourselves? We set up the cameras and let it roll.

BOB ROSS

Well, if you think that can work.

Bob opens the door for William, helping him with the bags.

BOB ROSS

Margarete didn't come? I was hoping to take you guys out for crab and key lime pie. There's a wonderful place up the road.

WILLIAM

She's not not feeling so good. We should get started.

William grabs a couple bags and follows Bob.

As they move through, William looks around to get a sense of the place. He sees the gold pans on the wall, the Bohemian decor, the '70s-style shag rug--

He also sees framed photos on various surfaces. Some are of BOB'S SON at various ages. But a few frames are face down.

Bob disappears into the kitchen. William stops and quickly flips one of the photos. It's a recent one of Bob and his teenage son with arms around a BLONDE WOMAN between them.

William puts the photo back before he gets caught.

He moves into a SHORT HALLWAY, where he sees a door cracked open a little. Curious, he goes to peak inside--

BOB ROSS (O.S.)

Oops, wrong way.

William turns.

BOB ROSS

It goes down to my studio.

WILLIAM

Wonderful! I'd love to see where the magic happens.

BOB ROSS

We should probably get in a few takes before we lose the light.

Bob leads him away from the door. William eyes it, as he moves away.

EXT. BOB'S BACKYARD - DAY

It's late afternoon. There's an easel with a blank canvas set up underneath a large tree.

William fiddles with a camera on a tripod with a tilted viewfinder and built-in microphone.

He's trying to connect various cables. Bob waits off to the side, arms folded and impatient.

BOB ROSS

Need help?

William waves him off and connects the power cord. He looks into the camera bag and feigns surprise.

WILLIAM

Oh, can you believe this? I forgot the video tapes in the house. I'll be right back.

William starts to move away--

BOB ROSS

Don't bother.

He stops. Bob goes over to his own bag and brings it over.

BOB ROSS

I have some right here.

He reaches in and produces a VHS tape. Annoyed, William grabs it and puts it into the camera.

Bob readies his palette and gets in front of the camera. William hits record, grabs his palette and stands next to him. Both look at the camera, all smiles.

A beat.

BOB ROSS

Do you want me to start?

WILLIAM

It's okay, I'll do it. Ready?
Three... two... one...

(to camera)

Hello and welcome to my new video series, The Art of Bill Alexander. I'm so happy that you can join us. Today we have a wonderful guest, Bob Ross, and we're going to paint with him a beautiful woodland scene--

BOB ROSS

I'm sorry. Do you think you should say the name of my show? "Bob Ross from The Joy of Painting?" We can do a little cross promotion.

WILLIAM

(beat)

Fine. Three... two... one...

(then)

Hello, and welcome to my new video series, The Art of Bill Alexander--

BOB ROSS

I'm sorry again. But maybe I should introduce myself. You do you, like you just did, and I'll come right in after. Does that work?

William throws up his hands.

BOB ROSS

I'm sorry. Let's do it one more time.

WILLIAM

You know, I have an idea. We write down our lines so we know exactly what to say.

BOB ROSS

I can wing it. Let's keep going.

WILLIAM

I'd really feel more comfortable knowing the words. Maybe we get something to write on?

BOB ROSS

Stay right here.

Bob pauses the camera and goes inside the house.

William makes sure Bob's gone and starts to snoop around. He sees the basement window and heads right for it.

Getting down on all fours, he presses his face against the grimy glass and shields out the sun--

WILLIAM'S POV - A messy studio with snapshots and postcards of various landscapes everywhere. Taped to walls, tacked to cork boards, strewn about the floor...

There's also a lot of paintings. Dozens lined in rows against one wall.

And then a stack of boxes covered by a tarp in the corner. Part of the tarp is pulled back, revealing a box with *Caution - Hazardous Materials* written on it.

CRACK! The sound of a screen door closing.

BACK TO WILLIAM

Who jumps to his feet, his suspicions confirmed.

He sees Bob looking around for him, pad and pen in hand, and spots him in the driveway.

BOB ROSS

There you are. I don't have cue cards to write on, but then again we don't have anyone to hold them.

WILLIAM

You know what? I'm thirsty. Why don't we go inside for a drink?

BOB ROSS

What about the light? The sun will set real soon.

WILLIAM

One drink. We'll be fine.

BOB ROSS

Okay, I have coffee, juice, water--

WILLIAM

Nothing stronger?

BOB ROSS

(thinking)

No, I-- wait, I did receive a bottle of Scotch one year for Christmas. It's sort of been hanging around the house ever since.

WILLIAM

Perfect.

William heads into the house. Bob follows.

INT. BOB'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

William cracks open the Scotch and pours two glasses. He hands one off to Bob, who refuses.

BOB ROSS

You're forgetting I gave that up.

WILLIAM

Come on. We toast our renewed friendship. It won't kill you.

William holds up his glass. Bob lets out a sigh.

BOB ROSS
(takes the glass)
To art and friendship.

They toast, as Bob takes the smallest of sips.

BOB ROSS
That's strong... and actually pretty
darn good. Heck, I've forgotten how
much I like this.

He takes another sip. William smiles and downs his in one
gulp, before pouring another.

William watches Bob drink. A thought comes over him.
Something that's been bothering him ever since the two met.

Bob notices.

BOB ROSS
What?

WILLIAM
This whole time I can't figure out
what the devil's wrong with you.

BOB ROSS
I don't understand.

WILLIAM
You're always smiling, never raise
your voice. You talk to trees. Why
are you so happy all the time?

BOB ROSS
To be honest, I'm not always happy. I
just don't show it. Lately, though,
some things have made it hard for me
to be happy at all.

WILLIAM
That's crazy. Your life is great.
You're on TV, you paint for millions
of people. What's not be happy about?

Bob finishes his glass. William pours him another.

BOB ROSS
There's more to life than some TV
show. Don't get me wrong, I
appreciate every moment, and I owe a
lot to you. But-- no, I can't. I
don't much like talking about myself.

WILLIAM

I thought we were friends. What good is that if we don't share?

BOB ROSS

You're right... I went through a divorce. Real bad one. There was a lot of anger and yelling, if you can believe it.

WILLIAM

That why all the frames are down?

BOB ROSS

I'm just glad we got through it in one piece, and our son doesn't hate either one of us.

(shrugs, then)

But it helped me realize something: Always appreciate every day that you're alive.

WILLIAM

Sounds like fortune cookie bullshit.

BOB ROSS

Well, why are you so unhappy all the time? I know I've poked fun at you about it, but boy, you really are a miserable son of a bitch.

(chuckling)

Sorry, that's the Scotch talking.

Bob drinks more. William glares at him.

WILLIAM

You have no I idea what I've gone through. Growing up poor. Almost killed in that godforsaken war. I struggled for years selling my art. And I got divorced, too. But that's not the worst-- forget it.

William drinks.

BOB ROSS

What good is being friends if we don't share?

Bob puts a gentle hand on his shoulder. It's a calming gesture that's also a little unnerving, like he's reaching into a place William really doesn't want to go.

WILLIAM

My father.

BOB ROSS

We all have issues with our fathers.

WILLIAM

Mine was a bastard. He left our
mother as she died of consumption.
The son of a bitch killed her!

William SLAMS his glass down. He grips the counter to steady himself. Bob looks on, sympathetic.

A beat, as William calms himself enough to speak.

WILLIAM

He made me leave home when I was 14,
and I never saw my family again.
Everything changed.

William looks away, like he doesn't completely believe that last part. Bob gets a plastic cup and pours another for him. William looks at before drinking.

BOB ROSS

Have you ever thought, what if things
were different?

WILLIAM

I wouldn't be here, that's for sure.

BOB ROSS

Just listen!

William clams up. Did Bob just yell at him?

BOB ROSS

What if you weren't thrown into to
the world so fast-- what could've
happened? You probably stay in
Germany, marry some girl, have a
family. Then the war comes and you're
drafted into a another unit... and
you get killed. Or maybe you survive
and go back home instead of getting
captured and coming here.

WILLIAM

I know what you're doing.

BOB ROSS

Let me finish! That means you never
go on the road and paint, and The
Magic of Oil Painting never exists.

(MORE)

BOB ROSS (cont'd)
And then I never take your class or
watch the show, and The Joy of
Painting never exists, either.

WILLIAM
Imagine that.

BOB ROSS
I'm serious. Because of what happened
with your father, you went down a
certain path that allowed you touch
so many lives-- and in ways you might
not ever understand.

William crosses his arms.

WILLIAM
You know nothing about my father.

BOB ROSS
"Without the darkness, there can be
no light."

WILLIAM
More fortune cookie bullshit.

BOB ROSS
You said that. On your show.
(off William)
You were talking about how to use
dark colors to make lighter ones
stand out. But I always thought it
meant that without life's bad moments
we might never see the good ones. We
appreciate the good moments when they
come around, and they do more a lot
more than we realize. All we have to
do is look.
(then)
Go ahead, try it.

WILLIAM
What?

BOB ROSS
Look around you. Start with the show.
So what if you're not on TV anymore?
You had seven wonderful years. If I
can have half that, I'd be grateful.

WILLIAM
This is ridiculous.

BOB ROSS

Try it. Think about all the people
you've touched over the years and how
their lives might've been different
if you didn't.

Bob's soothing tone gets William to shut up and listen.

BOB ROSS

And what about your home? For a long
time you and Margarete never had one.
Now you have a beautiful place to
call your own.

(then)

And Margarete. Think about how
wonderful she is. She's not just your
wife, she's your best friend, a
talented artist, and a tough cookie
in business. Believe me, I know.

(then)

Where would she be without you? Where
would you be without her?

William's face starts to quiver. Bob is breaking him down
before our eyes.

BOB ROSS

She's been with you through all your
ups and downs. Never once wavered or
gave up on you. That's love. Think
about all the people who've never had
such great love in their lives.

That's it! William rushes out the room. Bob watches him go.

INT. BATHROOM - BOB'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

William bursts through the door, locks himself inside and
loses it. He breaks down and SOBS-- big drunken German sobs
that sound more like the wail of dying seal.

William takes a few deep breaths and looks at himself in the
mirror. His mind drifts, and we TRANSITION TO:

INT. CABIN - DAY

East Prussia. 1931.

*Young William looks at himself in a mirror, eyes filled with
regret. He wears a hat and coat, like he's ready to leave.*

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

*Bag slung over his shoulder, William looks down at a grave.
The headstone reads: MARTHA ALEXANDER 1893-1931.*

Hesitant, William turns his heavy gaze toward another headstone: FREDRICK ALEXANDER 1917-1927.

William can't look anymore and turns, but right behind him is a disheveled OLD MAN, drunk and in tattered clothes.

William recognizes him. And so do we. It's his father.

William glares at the old bastard, a twisted mix of emotion. His father, shattered and alone, moves past William like he wasn't there and kneels down before the graves.

William can feel nothing but contempt watching his father weep and turns his back to leave, as we TRANSITION BACK TO:

INT. BATHROOM - BOB'S HOME - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

William looks at himself again the mirror, sad and broken.

INT. HALLWAY - BOB'S HOME - MINUTES LATER

William exits the bathroom having composed himself enough and heads back toward the kitchen.

For a moment, he walks like he's move across a shaky bridge stretched across a long chasm, his mind flooded with Scotch and torn emotions.

INT. BOB'S HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Bob is at the coffeemaker scooping in grounds. He turns when William comes back in.

BOB ROSS
How about something to wake us up?

WILLIAM
It's late. I should go.

BOB ROSS
Oh, sure. I'll call you a cab.

WILLIAM
I'll wait outside.

SHORT HALLWAY

William passes the basement door. Now it's closed all the way. He looks at it a moment, and moves heavily away.

INT. GERTRUDE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A small one-bedroom somewhere in D.C. Pictures of Martin Luther King and Shirley Chisholm on the walls.

Gertrude has the phone to her ear and is sitting behind an easel with brush in hand, face and smock smudged with paint.

GERTRUDE
You get the paint?

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

William sits on the bed, phone to his ear.

INTERCUT - WILLIAM AND GERTRUDE

WILLIAM (INTO PHONE)
It was in the basement and-- never
mind, I didn't get it yet.

GERTRUDE
What's wrong? You sound different.

WILLIAM
Why is everybody so concerned with
how I feel? I'm fine.

GERTRUDE
Hey, you'll never guess what I'm
doing right now.
(before he can answer)
I'm *painting*.

William is taken aback.

WILLIAM
Really? That's wonderful. But I
thought you gave that up?

Gertrude looks at her attempt to paint a cabin in the woods.
There are a couple of other finished canvases against the
wall. All can charitably be described as awful.

GERTRUDE
Well, yeah. I did. But I went back
and started watching tapes of your
show to, you know, familiarize myself
a little more. And then I remembered
how much the show got me through my
recovery.
(then)
Those first few months were the
hardest of my life. All I thought
about was having just one drink. But
the only time I didn't was when I was
watching the show.

William is genuinely touched.

WILLIAM

I don't know what to say.

GERTRUDE

I know it's hard, but we're gonna do this. When I got sober, I didn't think I'd last a day. But I took it one day at a time, and here I am.

(then)

We are gonna take Bob to the cleaners whether he likes it or not. Just get the paint and I'll do the rest.

Gertrude hangs up and goes back to painting, brimming with confidence.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

William sags on the bed looking at a photo he brought of him and Margarete next to their van.

He ponders the photo and picks up the phone. But he can't bring himself to call and cradles the receiver.

EXT. BOB'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

There's a light on in the far bedroom. Otherwise, it's quiet and dark.

Which is good, because William is sneaking around the other side of the house armed with a flashlight and crowbar.

Looking around, he moves in front of the garage-- and the FLOOD LIGHTS turn on!

Shit! William ducks into the shadows next a tall fence.

He eyes the house, waiting for more lights to turn on inside. But they never do.

And the flood lights TURN OFF.

William sighs in relief. He moves carefully for the basement window and stoops down.

He checks the window, but it's latched from the inside.

William wedges the crowbar between the jam and frame, and pries it open-- CRACK!

INT. BOB'S BASEMENT STUDIO - SAME

It's dark, but we can see William's shape struggling to squeeze through feet first. William grunts and groans, his feet dangling as he gives it one last hard push--

And he falls onto the floor out of breath.

A beat, as he makes sure nobody heard him.

Then William turns on his flashlight, keeps his beam low, and heads for the boxes.

He pulls back the tarp and reaches into one of the open boxes, and finds exactly what he's looking for-- a can of *Bob Ross Liquid White*.

He's got it! But now he has to get back out.

William goes to the window to get out, but he can't squeeze back through and gives up.

WILLIAM
(whispering)
Shit!

He shines the light on the stairs, and realizes he has no choice but to go up to get out.

Taking a breath, William puts a foot on the first step--

CREAK! William jumps back. A beat. Nothing stirs above.

He tries again, this time going onto the second step. That one's better.

William makes his way up the stairs and reaches the top.

He puts an ear to the door and hears a SOFT VOICE talking continuously. It sounds far enough away to open the door--

INT. BOB'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - SAME

William slowly pokes his head out. No one there. The soft voice is coming from the bedroom. It's repeating something over and over again, like a mantra...

William sees his avenue for escape, but the cracked open door beckons him to look--

He can't resist. William quietly heads over. Now we can hear that the soft voice is Bob...

BOB ROSS (O.S.)
The secret to doing anything is to
believe... Anything that you believe
in strongly... As long as you
believe, you can do anything you put
your mind to...

William gets to the door and peaks inside--

WILLIAM'S POV -- Bob is sitting in front of a vanity mirror naked from tip to toe, as he twists thin curlers into his long straight hair.

He drops one on the floor and leans over to pick it up. Turning his head, Bob appears to see something behind him--

ON WILLIAM

Pressing against the wall. Holy shit, did Bob see him? He's freaking out, as we're--

BACK TO BOB

A beat, then he smiles, as a warm thought comes over him. He straightens up and looks into the mirror.

BOB ROSS

There are no mistakes. Only happy accidents.

Bob chuckles and grabs a pen to write that one down.

INT. BOB'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - SAME

William slowly backs away and makes it down the hallway. He goes through the kitchen and slips out the back door.

EXT. BOB'S HOUSE - SAME

William hurries down the driveway, paint can in hand, as the FLOOD LIGHT turns on--

William presses against the fence. A beat, then the flood lights go out. William breathes a sigh of relief--

But then he hears SQUEAKING SOUND next to him--

Terrified, William turns and sees a SQUIRREL on the fence next to his head. It gets up on its hind legs, front arms out like it's ready to strike--

William freaks out and trips over the garbage cans as he tries to run away--

Now a light goes on inside Bob's kitchen.

William gets to his feet and waddle-runs as fast as he can--

He makes it to the end of the driveway and onto the street. There aren't many places to hide--

So he ducks behind a parked car and waits, sweating and out of breath--

EXT. BOB'S HOME - BACK DOOR - SAME

Bob exits in his kimono, looks around, and sees the basement window broken open. And the crowbar on the ground.

He lets out a sigh.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Gripping the crowbar, Bob emerges from down his driveway, looks up and down the street.

BEHIND THE PARKED CAR

William leans against the back, eyes wide with panic.

From that vantage point, we see Bob step onto the street in the background. He's little more than a blurry afro.

Bob turns to look in William's direction and holds a moment. Does he see him? It's not clear.

William stays frozen, breathing through his mouth and trying to stay quiet, as Bob holds his gaze--

And then he moves toward William!

William panics, as Bob's bare feet SLAPPING on the concrete grows louder--

Now Bob comes into focus, passes the driver's side door of the car William's hiding behind--

And stops right at the rear quarter panel.

Sweat pours down William's face, and he stops breathing, not wanting to make any sound--

Both stay like that for what feels like forever. William's cheeks puff, as he struggles not to breathe--

And Bob sighs again, turns and heads back to his driveway.

William lets out the air and breathes heavily, then peaks around the side of the car and sees Bob is gone.

He cradles the paint can and runs for it.

INT. DINER - DAY

William sits with Gertrude in a back booth, a suitcase on the floor and carry-on next to him.

GERTRUDE
You have something for me?

He reaches into the carry-on, takes out the can of Bob's LIQUID WHITE and slides it across the table.

GERTRUDE

Great! I'll get it tested right away.

(then)

So tell me about the trip.

WILLIAM

(beat)

I'm exhausted. I want to go home.

Gertrude watches William get up and leave.

INT. RENTAL HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

William drags himself in through the front door and drops his suitcase.

WILLIAM

Hello? Anyone home?

A beat, then Margarete enters dressed to leave.

MARGARETE

Hello.

She goes to the hall closet for her coat. Uncomfortable silence. William struggles for something to say.

WILLIAM

You're not going to ask me how was the trip?

She closes the door and puts on her coat.

MARGARETE

Do I really need to?

A beat.

WILLIAM

Where you off to?

Margarete doesn't answer. She goes back to the other room and emerges with a small suitcase. William is devastated.

WILLIAM

You're leaving me?

MARGARETE

You can't be serious.

(then)

I'm teaching a class at the senior center.

WILLIAM

(relieved)

That's great. See, I told you. Bill Alexander is a name. People never forget.

Margarete heads for the door and then stops. She can't leave without speaking her mind, and turns to face him.

MARGARETE

You lied to me. You didn't go to Florida to talk to a retailer. You went there because of him.

WILLIAM

I can explain.

MARGARETE

What would be the point?

(then)

This feud with Bob is out of hand. I have felt many things for you over the years, but never disappointment.

WILLIAM

You can't mean that.

MARGARETE

Yes, I do! You've been acting exactly like-- never mind.

William glares at her.

WILLIAM

Like what?

Margarete glares.

MARGARETE

You can't see? The lying, the heavy drinking, the *anger*-- you're acting exactly like him.

Her words plunge in like a dagger. Margarete picks up her things again and heads out.

INT. RENTAL HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT

On the sofa, William is curled up under a blanket, tossing and turning, but not really sleeping.

He struggles to keep his eyes closed, as we CUT TO:

EXT. ALEXANDER FARM - DAY

East Prussia. 1927.

William staggers back to the farm, face etched in shock and covered with Fredrick's blood. It's a continuation of the opening scene.

From the barn, his father, drunk, sees the blood. Eyes wide, he charges up to William, demanding to know what happened--

And that's when older brother Paul arrives, carrying Fredrick's limp and bloodied body.

William shakes in fear. Anguished, his father runs up to Paul and takes Fredrick from him. Their mother runs out of the cabin and crumbles to her knees.

His father gently lays Fredrick on the ground, brushes back blonde hair matted with blood. And he looks at William.

William is frozen. The world blurs. All he can see is the distorted image of his father rushing toward him--

Now the world turns upside down, as William is dragged into the barn and thrown to the ground--

William's father, his face twisted in anguish, savagely beats his son. And the world TURNS BLACK.

INT. RENTAL HOME - LIVING ROOM - LATE NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

William jolts awake, sweating profusely from the terrifying memory. He quickly turns on a light.

A beat. Then he looks up at the staircase--

Where Margarete is standing. Soon as he sees her, she heads back up the stairs.

William turns back and stares off into the void.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN BUS - DRIVING - DAY

William is behind the wheel, lost in thought and in life. Disheveled and unshaven. A complete wreck.

He's passes by the Leewards he and Bob visited months ago. William glances at the store-- and SLAMS the brakes--

Cars HONK as they pass. But William doesn't care. He's fixated on something. And he's stunned.

INT. LEEWARDS - DAY

William enters and looks around. Instantly he's greeted by his worst fucking nightmare:

A cardboard cutout of BOB ROSS front and center. Smiling with that weird afro and holding a can of Liquid White. *Bob Ross' original Liquid White paint only sold here!*

Bob's section dominates the front of the store. It's a better placement than William had.

William looks for his supplies, but his section is gone. He finds the same Stock Boy from before and approaches, only now he's looked at like a complete stranger.

WILLIAM

Steven, what happened to my supplies?

(off Stock Boy)

It's *Bill Alexander*. You don't remember?

STOCK BOY

Oh, yeah-- I'm sorry. They're in the back. If we even have them anymore.

William hurriedly heads that way.

BACK AISLE

William looks high and low, and finally finds his supplies on the bottom shelf all the way in back. *And his cut out is gone.* He's devastated.

FRONT OF THE STORE

William moves past Bob's display. He turns and PUNCHES Cardboard Bob's smiling face, leaving a nice dent.

Heads turn, as he pushes out the front door.

INT. RENTAL HOME - STUDIO - NIGHT

William stares at a blank canvas again. Then he looks over at a full bottle of whiskey on a shelf.

Ignoring the bottle, he turns back to the canvas and tries to focus with a few deep breaths, the photo of his dad looming nearby.

William opens his eyes and lifts his brush with a trembling hand-- but he can't do it!

He puts the brush down, as a thought comes over him. William makes a decision.

EXT. RENTAL HOME - STREET - NIGHT

Carrying the easel and art supplies, William tosses it all in the trash cans next to the house.

He slams home the metal lid, knocking over one of the cans and spilling its contents everywhere.

William kicks it for good measure, hurts his foot, and limps back inside.

INT. RENTAL HOME - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Still in pain, William stumbles inside, where Margarete is there waiting for him.

William stops and meets her eyes. A long moment between them. Something unspoken. William finally understands.

WILLIAM
Okay. Let's go home.

Margarete smiles, glad William has come to his senses.

EXT. RENTAL HOME - DRIVEWAY - NEXT DAY

William closes the back of the van, having packed the last of their things.

He climbs into the passenger side, where Margarete waits behind the wheel.

Margarete gives him a sad smile and drives away.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Costa Mesa, California.

Time has passed. William is building a small man-made pond. He already has the hole dug and is laying down the liner.

But William looks healthier. More tan and robust.

Margarete comes outside with two lemonades. She's smudged with dirt and sweat.

MARGARETE
Here, drink something before you keel over and die of dehydration.

WILLIAM
Put it there. I'll drink in a minute.

Margarete puts the glass down next to him and drinks hers. She watches as William is laser-focused on his work.

MARGARETE

So, I was thinking you could come to the rec center and do one of the classes. I have lots of new students and could use the help.

William keeps working and doesn't look up.

WILLIAM

You doing great without me. I'll stay here, it's fine.

MARGARETE

Bill. *BILL*.

William finally stops and looks up.

MARGARETE

You haven't picked up a brush in months.

WILLIAM

And I'm fine. Lots of things to do around here. After the pond, I'll build a chicken coop. I've always wanted chickens running around.

Margarete is about to say something else, but the phone RINGS inside the house.

WILLIAM

I'll get it.

William clamors out of the hole and heads inside.

INT. ALEXANDER HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

William wipes his hands and brow on a paper towel, as the phone continues to RING.

WILLIAM

(answering)

Yes, hello?

INT. GERTRUDE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Gertrude is on the phone surrounded by boxes piled in the corner. All her stuff is packed away. She's moving out.

GERTRUDE

It's your favorite attorney.

INTERCUT - WILLIAM AND GERTRUDE AS NEEDED

WILLIAM
Hello, Gertrude. Good to hear from
you again. What's up?

GERTRUDE
I have *great* news.

Margarete appears in the doorway and leans against the
frame, arms crossed.

MARGARETE
Who is it?

William cups the receiver.

WILLIAM
Gertrude.
(into phone)
Sorry about that. What's the news?

GERTRUDE
The paint is a match. Except for a
minor ingredient, it's identical to
yours.

No reaction, as William matches eyes with Margarete. But she
can tell he's conflicted. And so can we.

WILLIAM
So, what do we do?

GERTRUDE
We file suit.

WILLIAM
(beat)
I don't think we should do that.

Gertrude is incredulous.

GERTRUDE
It's your formula and he's selling it
under his name. This is what you
hired me to do. But now you're gonna
let him make money off your work?

WILLIAM
I don't know, Gertrude.

GERTRUDE
Listen, I understand... You're afraid
of failing.

WILLIAM
That's not it.

GERTRUDE

Can I tell you a secret? I almost didn't show up that day I came to your house. I was terrified of you rejecting me.

(then)

But I went through it anyway and realized you *wanted* me to be your lawyer. You have no idea how much I needed that. Now I have other clients and I'm moving into a real office. All because you told me yes when everyone else said no.

WILLIAM

What do you want me to say?

GERTRUDE

If you say no, you'll regret it forever. This isn't about paint-- it's your *life*. All those years of struggle and that little bit of success you finally earned. It's about your legacy. Who remembers Bill Alexander. If they even do.

A long beat. William looks at Margarete, feeling the weight of the moment. A silent pull coming from both women.

EXT. BOB'S BACKYARD - DAY

Bob is underneath a large tree holding a BABY SQUIRREL and feeding it from a tiny bottle, smiling warmly. [*Bob really did this-- Google it!*]

It's a very touching Bob Ross moment that gets suddenly interrupted.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. Ross?

Bob turns around and sees a MAN in a Hawaiian shirt and sunglasses standing in his drive way.

BOB ROSS

Yes?

Hawaiian Shirt Man drops papers on the ground.

HAWAIIAN SHIRT MAN

You've been served.

INT. DON'S OFFICE - KOCE STUDIOS - DAY

William and Margarete sit with Don, who's leaning over his phone. There are boxes piled in the corner. Don is moving.

Everyone looks tense, as we hear FAYE yell at them over the loudspeaker.

FAYE (ON SPEAKER)
Unbelievable. Do you any idea what
this means to the network?

William is back on his heels.

WILLIAM
But he stole from me.

FAYE (ON SPEAKER)
He says he didn't-- and you know
what? I believe him. But now he's
moving to another affiliate.

MARGARETE
What does Bill's lawsuit have to do
with PBS?

FAYE (ON SPEAKER)
He's one of our stars. You might as
well be suing Big Bird.

WILLIAM
But what about the video series...
and the books...

FAYE (ON SPEAKER)
You breached your contract after
walking out on the pilot.
(then, intensely)
The world needs Bob Ross, not Bill
Alexander.

Faye hangs up. Don turns off the speaker with a sheepish look on his face.

DON
I'm sorry, Bill.

William gets up and leaves. Margarete glares at Don.

MARGARETE
You could've said something on his
behalf.

Margarete goes after William.

INT. VOLKSWAGEN BUS - DAY

William is already in the passenger seat when Margarete gets in behind the wheel. He's devastated.

WILLIAM

I ruined everything. I should have listened to you.

MARGARETE

It doesn't matter. Right now we need to worry about what happens with the rest of our lives.

William has nothing to say. He's a shell of his former self. Margarete turns away, thinking, and gets an idea.

MARGARETE

I know what will help.

WILLIAM

What?

William looks at Margarete for an answer, but he doesn't get one. She just smiles and starts the van to drive away.

EXT. PUBLIC PARK - DAY

Margarete pulls the van to the curb and gets out. She rounds the back and starts pulling out art supplies: canvas, easel, paints, the works.

William stays in van looking out of the window.

Margarete sets everything up, takes a breath, and turns to address various PARK GOERS and PASSERS-BY.

MARGARETE

Excuse me, can I have your attention?

Maybe a couple of heads turn, but mostly she's ignored.

Margarete puts her fingers in her mouth and WHISTLES. Now people are listening.

William rolls down the window to hear what she says.

MARGARETE

Right here in this van I have one of the world's most famous painters.

William rolls the window back up halfway, as a CROWD starts to gather. All kinds of people, young and old alike.

MARGARETE
And he will paint some of the most
beautiful landscapes you've ever seen
in under 30 minutes.

A YOUNG MOM with her DAUGHTER looks skeptical.

YOUNG MOM
Yeah? Who is it?

MARGARETE
Bill Alexander.

Deafening silence. Nobody recognizes it. A STONER GUY (20s)
raises his hand.

STONER GUY
Is that the guy with the afro?

Now the crowd knows who it is. Nods of recognition, and
murmurs of *I love that guy*.

William hears this and pushes his way out of the van--

WILLIAM
I taught afro guy how to paint!

Heads turn. Some chuckles from the crowd.

WILLIAM
If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't
know who he is. And I'll prove it.

Arms cross, all eyes on William. Lots of expectant looks.
William starts to feel the pressure.

He grabs his palette and a large brush. Margarete steps
back, as William goes up to the canvas.

But he's nervous. It's been so long since he's done this.

YOUNG MOM
So... go on.

William takes a few short breaths and turns to look at the
faces in the crowd, all of them stern and unforgiving--

As he scans them, they all MORPH into some hideous mutation
of his father. Male, female, child-- doesn't matter, they
all look like him--

William shakes it off. He grabs hold of himself, opens a can
of white paint and wets his brush--

WILLIAM
We start by filling the canvas with
Magic White.

Then he glides the wet brush across the canvas. And in an instant, he's back.

His strokes grow more emphatic, more confident, as he wets the canvas with white paint.

WILLIAM
We make sure to cover the whole
thing. Do it many times. Get it nice
and wet-- that's the key to my
technique.

The crowd draws closer, as William switches brushes.

WILLIAM
Now, what do we want to paint? Name
it, I'll do it for you right now. And
better than afro guy ever could.

More LAUGHS. He's winning the crowd over.

The young mom's daughter comes up to him. William bends down with a smile.

WILLIAM
You have an idea?

YOUNG MOM'S DAUGHTER
A mountain with lots of trees.

WILLIAM
Perfect, let's do that.

William switches brushes and dips his paint in blue paint.

WILLIAM
We put some Prussian blue on our
brush like so. Make sure to fill it
up with lots of paint-- and then we
FIRE IN to paint a happy blue sky.

William spreads blue paint across the canvas, and like magic there's a bright blue sky up top. William comes alive for the first time in months. Maybe even years.

As he loses himself in his work, Margarete watches, a warm smile on her face.

EXT. VOLKSWAGEN BUS - EVENING

It's later in the day and William is packing his things into the back of the van.

Margarete sells an OLDER MAN the last of the paintings, waves goodbye and heads over.

William watches her with a big smile on his face. Margarete flashes the money on the sly.

MARGARETE

We did some good business today.
Almost felt like the old days.
(noticing)
What is it?

WILLIAM

Nothing. Just looking.

MARGARETE

At what?

WILLIAM

One of the good moments.

Smiling, William opens the passenger side door for her.

WILLIAM

I'll drive.

She climbs in, as he rounds the front.

INT. RENTAL HOME - NIGHT

William and Margarete enter after the demonstration, tired but satisfied with the day's work.

Margarete sees the answering machine blinking, hits play. After the BEEP:

FAYE (ON MACHINE)

Bill, it's Faye. Listen, we want you
to come out for a meeting.

Off William and Margarete exchanging a look.

INT. FAYE'S OFFICE - PBS HEADQUARTERS - DAY

There's a KNOCK on the door. We don't see who's in the room yet, but Faye's voice calls out--

FAYE (O.S.)

Come in.

Her ASSISTANT opens the door and lets William inside. He stops cold when he sees--

Bob sitting on the couch against the wall. Faye is behind her desk. Neither looks happy to be there.

And now neither does William. He's red hot off the bat.

WILLIAM

What's this?

FAYE

(beat, gets up)

I'll leave you two alone.

William is incredulous, as Faye leaves the room. Now it's just the two of them. William folds his arms, not looking at Bob. An uncomfortable beat.

BOB ROSS

My attorney told me I shouldn't talk to you.

WILLIAM

Then why are you?

BOB ROSS

We have some things left to say, and I wanted to do that on neutral ground. You know, despite everything I hope that we're still friends.

WILLIAM

Friends don't steal.

Bob reaches into his pocket and produces the Polaroid that was dropped in his basement. William sits on the couch.

Bob gets up and sits across from him. He leans forward, removing his glasses. There's a hint of malice in his eyes.

BOB ROSS

You broke into my house. There are consequences for that. And I can use it to get your lawsuit thrown out. All I need to do is say the word. But I want to give you chance to do the right thing, and *drop it*.

WILLIAM

All I wanted was to teach others how to paint. Its the purest joy I've ever known. Their faces light up when they *fire in* and see what they can do on that canvas.

(MORE)

WILLIAM (cont'd)
I was able to bring that joy to lots
of people all over the world, and you
took that from me.

A beat. Bob leans back, putting his glasses back on.

BOB ROSS
I want you to think about what you're
doing. Really think. You won't win.
So what do you hope to get from all
this? Certainly not happiness.

That strikes a chord, but William isn't ready to give up.

WILLIAM
You don't deserve to enjoy what I
struggled to build.

Bob sees he's not getting through and gets up. It's time to
give it to him straight.

BOB ROSS
Let it go, Bill. Your time has come.
And some day mine will, too. But you
won't get to see it, because I plan
on being around a long, long time.
(then, smiling)
After all, people like me.

Bob goes to the door, but realizes he can't leave on a sour
note and stops.

BOB ROSS
I hope someday you find a way to be
happy. But I don't know if you will.

And he leaves. William doesn't move, frozen in his defeat.

INT. DINER - DAY

William is waiting in booth by himself, nervously twisting a
straw wrapper. Thoughts plagued by his meeting with Bob.

The front bell JINGLES. William looks up, sees Gertrude
enter and look around.

Gertrude looks great. She wears a brand new suit, her hair
is shorter and more professional, and her face radiates with
confidence.

William holds up a hand. She gives him a quick wave and
heads over, all smiles.

GERTRUDE
There's my favorite client.

Gertrude gives him a kiss on the cheek. She sits down. A WAITRESS comes over.

GERTRUDE

Coffee to start. Thank you.
(the waitress leaves,
to William)
You didn't have to come here for
this. We could've talked on the
phone.

WILLIAM

And not see my favorite attorney
again?

Gertrude smiles. She can barely contain herself.

GERTRUDE

So, great news, my friend. Bob agreed
to settle. He called up out of the
blue and-- boom! He said he felt bad,
but keeps talking bullshit that he
didn't steal your formula... I mean,
why settle if you're not guilty?

(cuts off William)

No need to say it. You're welcome.
Now, he's only agreeing to ten
thousand, but I know I can squeeze
him for more. Give me the word and
I'll get the furry freak to cough up
six figures.

William holds up his hands.

WILLIAM

I can't accept.

GERTRUDE

No shit. It's a low-ball offer.

WILLIAM

I'm dropping the case.

GERTRUDE

Not this again. Come on, Bill. This
is what we've been fighting for all
this time. Now you want to give up?
He's giving you his money.

WILLIAM

It's not about money. I just want to
be happy.

GERTRUDE

And how does turning down what's rightfully yours get you that?

WILLIAM

I don't know. But I know taking it won't change anything.

GERTRUDE

Okay, fine. What will? Naming rights? A credit on the show? Just tell me.

WILLIAM

(beat, then)

I can't paint over my mistakes anymore.

GERTRUDE

What do you mean?

Gertrude looks at William, not sure what that meant. He stares down at the table, off in that dark place again.

Gertrude reaches out and takes his hand, a friendly gesture that opens him up.

GERTRUDE

It's okay.

WILLIAM

When I was 12 years old, I lost my brother, and--

(pulls away)

I'm sorry, I can't.

William gets up. Gertrude stops him.

GERTRUDE

I'll walk you out.

EXT. DINER - PARKING LOT - DAY

William and Gertrude leave the diner.

Gertrude gives him a hug, which surprises him. She gets in a brand new Mustang convertible, top already down.

WILLIAM

Nice wheels. You've done good for yourself.

GERTRUDE

That's because someone helped me believe in myself. Even if they didn't always believe in themselves.

She gets in and starts it up. William watches her drive off.

INT. AUDITORIUM - RECREATION CENTER - DAY

A small group of people sit behind easels, all painting variations of the same seascape. Some good, some not so good, and some, well, who knows what they are.

Leading the class is Margarete, who wears a blue smock and kerchief on her head.

MARGARETE

Now we mix Prussian blue and cadmium
yellow for a nice aqua green. And
let's spread it across where the
waves break on the beach. It's always
going to be greener closer to shore.

Everyone keeps rapt attention as they follow her lead.

In the back of the room, the door opens and William enters.
He stays in back to avoid attention.

One student nearby looks over and doesn't recognize him. She
turns back and continues painting.

William smiles, but can't help feeling a bit of a sting.

Margarete finally notices him and smiling, gestures for him
to come over. But he waves her off.

Margarete puts down her brush.

MARGARETE

Everybody keep spreading that green
across, blend it in really nice.

She goes over to William.

MARGARETE

How'd it go?

William nods, but doesn't say anything.

MARGARETE

You don't look happy about it.

WILLIAM

I don't know what to feel. Maybe it
was the right choice, maybe not. Time
will tell.

MARGARETE

Well, I know which one it is.

William smiles, though he's still uncertain. Margarete turns to look at her students.

MARGARETE

Look at it. This is all your doing,
you know. They're all here because of
you, whether they realize it or not.

(then)

Why not get up there and show off
some of the old magic?

WILLIAM

No, you're doing fine.

(leans in)

You were always better at it than me.

MARGARETE

You know it.

She smiles and heads back to the easel.

William hangs back. Margarete gives him a final look, before turning back to her class.

MARGARETE

Okay. Let's take out our palette
knives and make some *almighty rocks*
near our shore.

William smiles and slips out. Margarete turns right when the door closes, and we CUT TO:

BLACK

A beat. And then a TELEVISION turns on.

START MONTAGE

On TV is the iconic opening of *The Joy of Painting*, where Bob, dressed in white overalls, "paints" a large canvas with a giant brush, revealing a closeup of a mountain lake.

Once he's done, he heaves the brush off-screen.

Then a second Bob walks into frame with the same brush. He paints over the first Bob, arms waving *No, no!*, and makes him disappear.

And then a WIPE reveals Bob standing before an easel with a white canvas. Open collar shirt and jeans. Afro and a beaming smile. Comfortable and easygoing.

This is the Bob Ross we've always known.

BOB ROSS

(smooth)

Welcome back. Certainly glad could join me today. It's a fantastic day here and I hope it is, too, where you're at. You ready to do a little painting? Good, let's get started.

He turns to the easel, and we CUT TO:

EXT. ALEXANDER HOME - DAY

There's a MOVING VAN out front and a small crew of MOVERS doing all the heavy lifting.

Standing in the driveway, William watches the movers do their work looking forlorn.

Margarete exits from the back carrying a box. She's a out of breath and coughing.

Concerned, William takes the box from her and carries it the rest of the way.

INT. NEW YORK TV STUDIO - DAY

We're on set for an episode of *The Joan Rivers Show*, starring JOAN RIVERS (50s, annoying). Bob is Joan's guest, who as always, stands in front of an easel ready to paint.

JOAN RIVERS

My next quest has been creating his magic for the past several years on his PBS show *The Joy of Painting*, which I watch all the time. Please welcome America's favorite art instructor, Bob Ross.

She shakes his hand. The crowd CHEERS loudly. Bob smiles and waves, really soaking in the adulation.

JOAN RIVERS

Why are you so popular? Most people can't paint, yet I find myself fascinated to sit and watch.

BOB ROSS

Well, I think it's because magic really does happen on the show. The secret to doing anything is to believe you can do it, and I try my best to help people with that.

The crowd CHEERS, as Bob's smile widens. MATCH CUT TO:

INT. MOM-AND-POP BOOK STORE - DAY

William sitting and smiling at a small table stacked with copies of his book, *The Art of Bill Alexander*. It's a book signing, but there aren't many takers.

Margarete is with him looking pale and thin. He glances over at her and takes her hand, happy to be there with her. And she with him.

Then finally someone comes up and asks William to sign her book. He obliges, trying to make the best of it. CUT TO:

A TELEVISION

And the CHANNEL CHANGING.

Now we see Bob before his easel doing a commercial.

He puts the finishing touches on a mountain surrounded by pine trees. The canvas framed by the MTV LOGO.

Bob turns to the camera with a beatific smile.

BOB ROSS

MTV, the land of happy little trees.

The CHANNEL CHANGES into static, and CUT TO:

INT. MALL - DAY

William teaches an art class at the mall. He's older and has a head of white hair.

He has more curious on-lookers than students, and instead of Margarete, there's an ASSISTANT handling business.

William again makes the best of his situation, but there's a sadness now about him. CUT TO:

INT. ANOTHER TV STUDIO - DAY

Now Bob is on PHIL DONAHUE (50s, white hair), who introduces him to his audience.

Bob is older with more gray in his beard and his eyes are puffy around the edges. He looks tired, but he's still in great spirits.

PHIL DONAHUE

(over the top)

Bob Ross-- this is the most famous painter in the history of the universe!

Bob smiles and waves. The adulation is infectious. But his smile isn't as bright, like there's something off about him.

INT. TV STUDIO - DAY

Now we're back to Bob's studio, where he stands before an easel holding a painting of another woodland scene.

He loads a thin brush with red paint. There's a bit of sadness in his voice.

BOB ROSS
Think I'll sign this one. The ol'
clock on the wall tells me it's time
to bring this show and this series to
a close. I really enjoyed being with
you for the past 13 shows and I hope
to see you again very soon.

He finishes signing and turns to the camera.

BOB ROSS (CON'TD)
Until next time, I'd like to wish
each and everyone of you Happy
Painting, and God bless.

Bob does his Happy Painting wave to the camera and forces a smile. And we FADE OUT.

A moment of silence in black.

And then FADE BACK IN ON:

EXT. ALEXANDER HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Powell River, British Columbia. 1995.

A sprawling yard with a man-made pond and chicken coop. There's also a large cottage and barn with a connecting greenhouse.

Now we see William, older with white hair, but still possessing lots of energy.

He's in front of an easel holding a palette next to another painter, DIANE ANDRE (40s, red hair).

A camera on a tripod is operated by a YOUNG MAN in a flannel shirt and ripped jeans. It's a low-rent production.

WILLIAM
(to camera)
It's been a while since we do one of
these. And I'm happy to have our old
friend Diane here to help us.
(MORE)

WILLIAM (cont'd)
 She has done a wonderful job of going
 around teaching our method, and I'm
 always glad to see--

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
 Bill!

WILLIAM
Shit-- okay, cut!

William turns to the house, upset. A woman, HEATHER (30s),
 his assistant from the mall, is holding up a cordless phone.

HEATHER
 I'm sorry. It's Don. He says it's
 important.

WILLIAM
 (beat)
 It's okay. I'll take it in the
 studio. Thank you.

INT. WILLIAM'S STUDIO - DAY

Basically the same setup he had in Costa Mesa, only there's
 more room for all his paintings and supplies.

William enters and takes the cordless off the base, but
 pauses when he sees a photo of MARGARETE in her smock and
 kerchief standing in front of a window.

William picks up the photo to ponder it, smiling sadly. It
 has taken the place of the one with his father.

Then he puts it down to answer the call.

WILLIAM (INTO PHONE)
 Hi, Don. Good to hear from you.

INT. DON'S OFFICE - PBS HEADQUARTERS - DAY

A larger space with a nice view of a busy downtown area in
 Arlington, Virginia. There are tons of photos of Don with
 Bob Ross, along with three EMMY AWARDS on a shelf.

Don, graying hair but still with a youthful face, is seated
 behind his desk.

INTERCUT - DON AND WILLIAM

DON
 Hey, Bill. Same here. Glad to see
 you've been busy. The videos look
 great.

WILLIAM
Yeah, it's been okay. Not as good as
you over there, but we manage.

An uncomfortable beat. Obvious tension between the two.

DON
Listen, Bill. I have something to
tell you.

Now we stay on William, who listens to Don. His face is
blank at first, but then his eyes grow concerned and he
starts to collapse inside.

Don is giving him bad news, and William is having trouble
processing it.

EXT. BOB'S HOUSE - DAY

New Smyrna Beach, Florida. 1995.

A large Spanish-style house on a quiet tree-lined street.

A cab pulls out front and William gets out. He hesitates a
moment, before heading for the door.

INT. BOB'S HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

The doorbell RINGS. A woman in a nurse's uniform, KAY (40s),
answers. She smiles warmly.

KAY
You must be Bill. Come in.

Bill nods and warily enters. Kay closes the door.

KAY
He's in back. I'll take you to him.

WILLIAM
(hesitating)
How's he doing?

KAY
(beat)
You should prepare yourself.

Kay walks out. William takes a breath before following.

EXT. BOB'S BACKYARD - DAY

An idyllic space with lots of greenery and shade.

There's a spot beneath a palm tree perfect for sitting, and that's where we find Bob back turned, in a deck chair wrapped in a blanket despite the 80-degree heat.

There's an easel set up nearby with a half-finished painting. A snowy mountain with a lake and cabin.

Kay is giving the man a drink from a cup and straw. She goes back in the house when William comes over.

William goes around to face him. Bob looks thin and frail. He's dying of lymphoma.

WILLIAM

(in shock)

Bob. I don't know what to say.

Bob turns his head and smiles as best he can. He's happy to see William.

BOB ROSS

How about hello?

(then)

I'm glad you could come. Honestly, I didn't think you would.

WILLIAM

Neither did I.

An uncomfortable beat. William sits in a chair next to him and can't help staring. Bob's smile drops.

BOB ROSS

I know, it's the chemo. We're not meant to have all these drugs and radiation in our bodies.

WILLIAM

That's okay, it makes you better. Soon you'll be back on your feet and doing the show.

Bob lowers his head and looks at the ground. There's a long pause, as a gentle breeze comes through that makes Bob shiver. He gestures to a folded blanket on the table.

BOB ROSS

Would you mind?

WILLIAM

Sure.

William takes the blanket and spreads it across Bob.

BOB ROSS

I'm sorry about Margarete passing.
When I heard, I was so busy-- I
should've called.

WILLIAM

Don't worry about it. I should have
done the same with Jane. Wish I could
have met her.

Bob smiles and nods. William is at a loss again. But then he
sees the unfinished painting.

WILLIAM

You're still painting. That's good.

BOB ROSS

I stopped about a month ago. I can't
hold the ol' brush anymore.

Another beat. William's discomfort is matched only by Bob's
inability to be himself.

WILLIAM

Why did you ask me here?

BOB ROSS

I didn't like the way we ended things
last time... I don't want to leave
knowing you're angry with me.

WILLIAM

I'm not anymore.

Bob smiles.

BOB ROSS

That's a relief to hear.

(then)

But I still can't help wondering, why
didn't you take the settlement?

A beat, as William considers it.

WILLIAM

If I did... I might not be here now.

(then)

But I'm glad I am.

Both share a warm smile, the last of the ice between them
finally melting away. Bob goes to scratch his head, only his
hand moves underneath his hair.

William realizes Bob's wearing an AFRO WIG, unsettling him.
Bob pretends not to notice.

BOB ROSS
I wonder if anything we've done will
make a difference. Will people even
remember us ten years from now?

WILLIAM
They'll remember you. But not me.
They forget already.

Bob eyes the painting heavily.

BOB ROSS
Listen, I know this might be a lot to
ask, but would you...

Bob indicates the brush nearby. William gets it.

WILLIAM
Sure. We finish it together.

MINUTES LATER

William has the easel closer to them and a palette ready
with paints. They both look at the woodland scene, pondering
what to do. Bob talks like he's doing his show.

BOB ROSS
We're about done with this one, but
something's missing. What can we add
to make it complete?
(struggling)
My mind isn't what it used to be.

Then CHATTERING BARKS among the CHIRPING birds from the
trees. Bob gets an idea.

BOB ROSS
How about a squirrel?

WILLIAM
No squirrels!

Bob chuckles, appreciating the memory, as William stares at
the woodland scene on Bob's canvas. There's something oddly
familiar about it to him.

WILLIAM
Sometimes when I paint, I try to take
an old memory and make it new again.
Turn darkness into light.

BOB ROSS
Like what happened with your father?

WILLIAM
That's the only one I could never do.

BOB ROSS
Well, maybe now you can.
(off William)
You never told me why you had to
leave home.

William looks at Bob a moment before gathering himself.

WILLIAM
They blamed me for what happened.

We push in on the half-painted woodland scene on Bob's
canvas and finds ourselves transported to:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

East Prussia. 1927.

*We're back to the opening scene, where William, Paul,
Fredrick and the other boys are playing, only it's a few
moments before tragedy strikes.*

*The boys are huddled near a long wire fence. A weathered
sign ominously screams, Achtung! Fredrick is scared. Again,
they speak in German with English subtitles.*

FREDRICK
Father said never cross here.

WILLIAM
Watch me!

Defiant, William slips through the barbed wire.

PAUL
Are you crazy? You know the beating
you'll get?

William LAUGHS and continues running through the woods. Paul
slips through next, followed by the others. They all start
to laugh at defying the rules.

Fredrick hesitates, but not wanting to be left behind, he
climbs through and chases after them.

As their LAUGHTER vanishes in the woods, we drift away until
we find a large, odd-looking OAK TREE standing by itself and
bathed in golden sunlight.

A beat, as we hold on the angelic tree. And that's when we
hear the EXPLOSION from field. Off that, we're BACK TO:

EXT. BOB'S BACKYARD - DAY (PRESENT DAY)

Bob looks at William still staring blankly at the canvas.

WILLIAM

We were told not to go past the
fence. Mother and father never
forgave me.

BOB ROSS

Let's show them it wasn't your fault.
We'll turn darkness into light.

Bob gestures for the brush. William smiles, a tear in his
eye. But William doesn't pick it up just yet, something
still nagging at him.

WILLIAM

Listen, I have to know... the paint.
How did you come up with yours?

BOB ROSS

(beat)

To tell the truth, I did what any
artist does. I took what their
teacher did and made it better.

WILLIAM

How?

BOB ROSS

I used dimethylformamide instead of
mineral turpentine. Lower evaporation
rate. Made all the difference.

WILLIAM

(beat)

That is better.

William and Bob turn back to the canvas.

BOB ROSS

I think we both know what we can do.

WILLIAM

(smiling)

We do what we do best. We *FIRE IN* and
paint a great, *almighty*--

But William stops and decides to tone it down. Now he sounds
a little gentler and more like Bob.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

We paint a happy little tree.

Bob smiles. William does, too. He puts a fan brush in Bob's hand, helps load it with paint and lifts it to the canvas.

Bob fights back the tears, as William guides his hand across the canvas, and we CUT TO:

INT. BACK STAGE - DAY

Chicago, Illinois. 1995.

William nervously waits backstage. His assistant, Heather, is with him. It's oddly quiet.

WILLIAM
How many are out there-- Don't tell
me. I don't want to know.

A STAGE MANAGER enters.

STAGE MANAGER
We're ready.

William grows more nervous.

HEATHER
Remember, they're here for you.

William nods and gets to his feet.

CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

William moves down the corridor toward the stage. He mops his brow with a kerchief, as he moves up the steps onto--

A STAGE

An easel with a blank canvas is set up front and center. It's still weirdly quiet--

But as he cross to center stage, a crowd of about a thousand immediately stands and applauds LOUDLY.

William is overwhelmed. He waves and nods, soaking in the applause. Several people shout, *We love you, Bill!*

William grabs his palette and a brush. The crowd settles in for him to paint, as William turns to the canvas. But he pauses and turns back around.

WILLIAM
Everyone knows I taught Bob Ross how
to paint. Before he was a star,
bigger than me.
(MORE)

WILLIAM (cont'd)
 (off the laughter)
 But Bob was also a teacher, and he
 taught me a thing or two.

William hesitates to say what exactly.

WILLIAM
 Bob once told me that without me
 there would be no Bob Ross. But I
 know that I wouldn't be standing here
 today if it wasn't for him.

The crowd applauds.

WILLIAM
 Okay, then. We ready to paint? Good.
 Let's *FIRE IN!*

The crowd cheers. William turns to the canvas, and--

WE FADE OUT.

POSTSCRIPT:

Bob Ross died of lymphoma on July 4, 1995. True to his nature, Bob kept his battle secret from the public.

Bill Alexander died on January 24, 1997 and fell into obscurity soon after.

Years later, Bill later found new life online when *The Magic of Oil Painting* was rediscovered by new generations of fans on YouTube. Episodes get hundreds of thousands of views.



Bill Alexander



Bob Ross

