THE BOY AND HIS TIGER

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FADE IN:

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

Stewardesses walk trash bags up and down the aisles. An OVERHEARD ANNOUNCEMENT details a final approach to JFK.

STEWARDESS
Trash? Trash? Thank you. Trash?

A steady HAND DRAWS something on a NAPKIN with a PEN...

STEWARDESS
Sir? Can I take your trash?

The pen is CLICKED: *done*.

BILL WATTERSON (30s) looks up. His face is framed by BIG GLASSES, a BUZZ CUT, and a THICK BROWN MUSTACHE.

Stewardess points, Bill hands over his cup and wrapper.

STEWARDESS
Hey...

Stewardess cocks her head, examining the artwork on Bill's napkin (which we can't see).

STEWARDESS
That's a really good drawing.

BILL
Thank you.

STEWARDESS
Are you an artist?

Bill grins.

BILL
I'm a cartoonist.

Stewardess "ahhs", *of course*, then she motions for Bill to put his tray up and moves on...

STEWARDESS (O.S.)
Trash? Thank you. Trash? ...

Bill sighs. Grabs his NAPKIN DRAWING, SHUTS his tray and --

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

Squeezes and BUMPS through CROWDS on a cold winter day...

SUPER: *NEW YORK CITY, 1991*

Bill Watterson is a thin oddball. He wears neon Reebooks and a Swatch, which clash with his sweater and BEIGE JACKET and gives us a picture of the sort of eccentric match between traditionalist and the artist he is. Bill's somewhat awkward physical appearance can be confusing as well; when he speaks he is actually very intelligent, articulate, and confident.

EXT. UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE - NYC - DAY

Bill enters a gray building.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Stares at his REFLECTION in the METAL DOORS as he RIDES UP.

INT. RECEPTION - DAY

The doors DING OPEN and Bill steps out. Up to the

FRONT DESK

where a BLONDE RECEPTIONIST (20s) puts her caller on hold. A sign for *UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE* is on the wall behind her, along with POSTERS for various <u>CLASSIC COMIC STRIPS</u>.

BILL
Hello.

BLONDE RECEPTIONIST
Hello, Mr. Watterson. Mr. Salem is expecting you, hold on one moment-

LEE (O.S.)
Bill.

Bill turns to find

LEE SALEM (40s), his editor, already standing by a doorway. On another day a fun guy like Lee might come over with open arms and a big smile, but here he just <u>*nods curtly*</u> at Bill.

We feel a <u>tension</u> between these two we don't understand yet.

INT. LEE'S OFFICE - LATER

Bill is in a chair (and looking impatient now), Lee is behind his desk. TWO OTHER MEN are in the room: JOHN MCMEEL (60s), the syndicate's stoic white-haired president, and...

ARNOLD ARNDT (40s), a mild-mannered businessman, who is laying items onto Lee's desk out of a travel bag...

ARNOLD ARNDT
This... and this... aaaanndd done.

Arnold turns, claps and steps aside, revealing...

A row of <u>FIVE *CALVIN & HOBBES T-SHIRTS*</u>.

ARNOLD ARNDT
Okay, Mr. Watterson. Let me start off with a question. Do you recognize these items?

BILL
No.

ARNOLD ARNDT
No? You haven't seen any of 'em?
(no answer from Bill)
Okay. It's possible. Well, I'll just tell you: these are five *bootleg* Calvin & Hobbes t-shirts. And what I mean by that is these t-shirts are unlicensed, unofficial, and illegal. You can buy them off street vendors, and unfortunately it's becoming more common with your comic strip in particular. Now, I am actually a little aware of your opinions when it comes to this issue, let me ask you Mr. Watterson, how does it make you feel when you see these kinds of-

BILL
Could you get to the point please?

Arnold stops.

ARNOLD ARNDT
Sorry?

BILL
Could you get to the point.

Arnold looks over at Lee and John: John is stewing. But Lee

nods Arnold on, and so he clear his throat and continues...

ARNOLD ARNDT
We can uh, help you. If you sign a contract with Kenyon Clothing, we will put an end to these bootleg t-shirts. We have all the resources to do so, and we'd hoped that-

LEE
They wanna make shirts, Bill. Real ones. If we let them do that, they can make the knock offs go away.

BILL
You want to make Calvin shirts.

ARNOLD ARNDT
Real ones. And yes, very much so. Our company is a huge fan of Calvin & Hobbes, Mr. Watterson. We'd love to share it with the world through our clothing. But we want to do it the right way. With your blessing.

And now, they wait...

BILL
Is that it?

ARNOLD ARNDT
I suppose it is.

Bill stands, extends his hand. Arnold gladly shakes it...

BILL
I appreciate your time. But I'm sorry. I'm not interested in any Calvin & Hobbes products.

Arnold's face falls. Bill looks at Lee as he heads out...

JOHN MCMEEL
You're an asshole. You know that?

He stops briefly at that. But then continues down the hall.

INT. EMPTY OFFICE - LATER

Lee KNOCKS, enters.

Bill is standing with his hands in his pockets, looking out tall windows over the city. We're in an old, vacant office.

LEE
Hey. You alright?

BILL
Please tell me that wasn't it. Tell me I didn't just fly here for that.

LEE
No, no... there's more.

Bill comes over.

BILL
(re: Lee's chin)
Lee, I'd like to, uh, apologize for the... thing...

LEE
It's okay. I deserved it, it was-

BILL
It was wrong of me. And I'm sorry.

Lee nods in appreciation.

BILL
So.

LEE
(hesitates)
Bill, you have to sign with Kenyon Clothing.

Bill's blood starts to quietly boil...

BILL
What are you talking about.

LEE
This is actually a good one. This deal would solve a big problem-

BILL
No, it would *create* a problem-

LEE
It would not "create a"-

BILL
<u>You'd be making more shirts!</u>

Bill pants in anger. Their tension has come rushing back.

LEE
Bill, say yes-

BILL
No-

LEE
I'm not kidding, you *have* to-

BILL
Don't tell me what to do, Lee-

LEE
We're gonna fire you.

Bill stops.

LEE
We're gonna let you go. We reached a decision, Bill. That's what I wanted to talk about. If you don't let us work with Arnold's company, or any company for that matter, we're gonna hire a ghost artist to come in and take over Calvin-

BILL
You can't do that-

LEE
Then we're gonna go back and do everything else. All of it, you know we can. We've pushed enough, Bill. Now we're just tired.

Bill is utterly shocked.

Lee stops at the door on his way out.

LEE
I'll give you a week. If I don't see you at the Festival, I'll see you here Monday with a decision. Do the right thing, this is your career now. And no offense, but... what else do you have left?

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

A plain ranch house sits among a row of homes in a DESERT NEIGHBORHOOD. A TAXI pulls up and Bill gets out, trudges to the front porch dragging a small suitcase behind him...

SUPER: *7 DAYS REMAINING*

INT. FOYER - BILL'S DESERT HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

He UNLOCKS, enters his house --

KITCHEN

Throws his keys on the counter and searches the pantry. The kitchen is a MESS. Dishes are piled and dirty in the sink.

LIVING ROOM

A CAN OF TUNA is set down on the table. Bill's lunch. As he eats, Bill stares out back through his SLIDING GLASS DOORS.

BILL'S STUDIO

Bill enters, sits at a DRAFTING TABLE against the wall.

And for a moment, he just STARES BLANKLY into space...

His studio is small with one window. Cluttered and comfy, full. Like this isn't just an office, but a LITTLE HOME.

Then Bill goes through his PRE-DRAWING ROUTINE: he CRACKS his knuckles, shakes his wrists out. He GRINDS pencils with a SHARPENER. Gets out a WHITE SHEET, lays it before him.

Bill *brushes his mustache,* thinking, then -- quickly and skillfully DRAWS, his PENCIL TIP at work...

He finishes, and we see a small, simple drawing of **CALVIN and HOBBES -- the loud-mouthed lovable little boy and his tall tiger friend** -- just standing there smack dab in the center of Bill's page, staring dumbly back up at him.

Bill admires his two characters for a long moment...

BILL
Ready?

THEN...

CALVIN and HOBBES *look at each other*. Back at Bill. And NOD.

They are ALIVE ON THE PAGE.

Bill smiles and DRAWS, and we CLOSE IN ON HIS FACE then --

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT - GROCERY STORE, 1985 - DAY

where YOUNG BILL WATTERSON, mid 20s, is hunched over his desk in a small windowless basement -- designing GROCERY STORE ADS...

SUPER: *CHAGRIN FALLS, OHIO - 1985*

**(The look and feel of these flashbacks is more COLORFUL and VIBRANT, signifying a happier time. This contrasts with the scenes set in 1991 in which the tones are generally duller.)*

Bill takes a break, brushes a THINNER MUSTACHE. Looks back at the MANAGER'S OFFICE, where someone is SINGING COUNTRY.

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

The office door YANKS OPEN, and Bill hides his drawing --

HANKS (O.S.)
Watterson.

HANKS (40s), Bill's red-faced manager, pokes his head out.

HANKS
Where's that ad?

BILL
Almost finished.

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

BILL
Yes sir.

Hanks tugs at his too-tight tie as he STOMPS up the stairs.

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

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

Bill sighs, TOUCHES UP the drawing...

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY (AFTER WORK)

Bill marches across the parking lot, away from his "prison". Carrying a brown satchel with all his drawing things inside.

He finds his '70s CHEVY IMPALA, hops in and fires it up --

EEE EEE EEE EEE -- *and the old car won't start*.

EEE EEE EEE EEE. EEE EEE EEE EEE.

Beat.

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

EXT. MAIN STREET - CHAGRIN FALLS, OHIO - DAY

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

EXT. BACK ROAD - DUSK

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

He breathes in deep, gazing around, *enjoying a moment of peace and isolation...*

And then an ORANGE VW BEETLE pulls up slowly beside him...

MELISSA RICHMOND (20s), gawks as she drives alongside Bill.

Melissa is the girl you grew up next door to. Full of life, charm, and just a pinch of lovable quirkiness. And, for a long time now, she has been one of Bill's best friends.

MELISSA
What are you doing?

BILL
Building character.

MELISSA
Do you want a ride?

Bill slows, thinks: *yeah, why not*. And Melissa pulls over.

INT. BEETLE (MOVING) - LATER

Melissa can't stop glancing, smiling at Bill as she drives.

She wears a cute work uniform, a lilac ornament hangs from her mirror, and CLASSICAL MUSIC plays from her tape deck...

MELISSA
Why didn't you call your folks? You should really just get a new car, that Chevy is a piece a junk-

Melissa's car BACKFIRES. Bill doesn't even notice, as he's staring gloomily out his window...

MELISSA
Hey. How about a smile, huh? *Bill*.

He looks over, smiles... then makes it *BIG* and *CREEPY...*

MELISSA
You're so weird.

He breaks into a more comical, slack-jawed CAVEMAN GRIN --

BILL
Durrrrrr...

Melissa laughs.

INT. FOYER - WATTERSON HOUSE - EVENING

Bill UNLOCKS, enters his parent's home, Melissa trailing behind.

BILL
Mom? I'm home.

BILL'S MOM (O.S.)
(from the kitchen)
Bill?

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

BILL'S MOM (O.S.)
Oh, okay. Bill, I made cookies...

INT. BILL'S ROOM - BASEMENT - LATER

CLOSE ON: Some of Bill's OLD CARTOON STRIPS and SKETCHES, as MELISSA flips through them, eating a cookie, brushing crumbs off the pages...

-- A GROUNDHOG and a FROG hang out in the woods, a la *POGO*.

-- A midget SPACEMAN SPIFF smokes a stogie on a far planet.

-- A YOUNG NEWS REPORTER is harassed by his CRAZY EDITOR.

-- Ant-like married bugs (CRITTERS) have a funny argument.

Melissa grins, shakes her head.

Bill sits beside her on the bed, hands over a FOLDER.

MELISSA
This the one?

BILL
Yep.

Melissa opens the folder, pulls out a stack of NEW COMIC STRIPS. These are even slicker looking than the others.

MELISSA
(reading title)
"In the Dog House".

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

MELISSA
Who's this?

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

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

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

MELISSA
He's a trip. I like his tiger.
(more flipping)
Oh, you should do more with him, Bill. He's funny.

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

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

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

Melissa lingers on Marvin, grinning...

MELISSA
You just keep getting better.

Then hands the drawings back.

MELISSA
It ticks me off.

She FLOPS back on Bill's bed, looks around his room. Bill has a SHELF above his bed, stocked with COMIC STRIP BOOKS.

BILL
What do you mean? Is it good?

MELISSA
Look at all these. When are you gonna start reading real books?

BILL
(reviewing drawings)
It's not good, I knew it. Dammit.

MELISSA
Is that what I said?

BILL
But do you like it?

Melissa grabs another cookie off Bill's nightstand.

MELISSA
Yes, Bill. I like it.

She hops up, starts to leave --

MELISSA
You know what we need? Some *milk*-

But Bill GRABS HER HAND. And then there's an awkward pause. Melissa finds herself oddly *taken aback by Bill's touch...*

BILL
You're being nice. I need you to be honest.

She yanks her hand away --

MELISSA
I'm not "being nice", what's with

you today? Is this about your car?

Bill scratches his head. Gets up, grabs a LETTER off his desk, holds it out. Melissa takes, unfolds, skims it...

BILL
Sorry. It's from the Post...

She looks up.

BILL
They passed on Critters.

MELISSA
Oh, Bill...

BILL
That makes seven for seven. It was my fourth submission. Which means I've now been rejected *twenty eight times* by every major newspaper syndicate in the country-

Bill KICKS his desk, and Melissa can only watch as he paces and lets off some steam...

BILL
You know, I don't mind having no money. I don't mind my crummy job or my crummy car. Or that I live in my parent's basement. But I really can't do this much longer, Melissa. I wanna draw comic strips, it's my one dream in life. Comic strips are what I love most in this world.

Bill bites into one of his mother's COOKIES, looks at it, throws it away in disgust...

BILL
Just don't know if I'm good enough.

Melissa looks on a frustrated, dejected Bill with sympathy. She takes the drawings, sits back down and re-reads them...

MELISSA
Okay. Here's the thing. I do like it. I like the characters, I like the humor. And the artwork is good, Bill, I'm not just saying that. You are so incredibly talented...

BILL
But.

MELISSA
But, I don't know, it's just... missing something.

BILL
"Missing something".

MELISSA
You know, like a... a "thing".

BILL
It's missing a "thing"?

MELISSA
Yeah. Or, I don't know. Ugh. Maybe if you did more stuff with the boy? Except change the hair, can't see his eyes. That's not what you're looking for, is it...

Bill takes the drawings, sits back down and studies...

BILL
A "thing"... a "thing"...

MELISSA
Anyway. I should go.

BILL
'Kay. Thanks.

Melissa lingers by the door a moment, watching him...

MELISSA
It's gonna happen Bill. I know it. Don't ever give up on your dreams.

EXT. WATTERSON HOUSE - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

INT. WATTERSON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

ALL AROUND THE HOUSE the LIGHTS ARE OUT. Except for in...

INT. BILL'S ROOM - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Where we FOLLOW A TRAIL of IN THE DOG HOUSE DRAWINGS Bill has thrown on the floor and see that Marvin is becoming more and more the *central character,* just as Melissa suggested...

BILL (O.S.)
A "thing"... A "thing"...

We MOVE UP TO BILL, who's still wide awake, working hard...

BILL
A "thing"...

Then, we see the CURRENT DRAWING on Bill's desk...

In a TREEHOUSE, Sam, Fester, Marvin, and his tiger are hanging out. Marvin is dressed as a pirate, waving a wooden sword while Sam and Fester slouch around disinterestedly.

Bill scrunches his face -- the older kids *just don't fit anymore*. Bill regretfully ERASES FESTER. Then ERASES SAM.

He blows, wipes the shavings...

BILL
A "thing"...

Bill has accidentally erased part of the tiger. He draws its EAR and EYEPATCH back in. He LOOKS AT THE DOLL for a second, TAPPING his PENCIL TIP on it mindlessly...

Then throws the pencil down: *done*.

Bill leans back. Sees his REJECTION LETTER on his desk. Bill takes it, OPENS A DRAWER and throws it in with a large stash of MORE REJECTION LETTERS. Then, *he stops*...

Reaches in the drawer, pulls out a recent BIRTHDAY CARD.

Inside the card is a POLAROID of TWO CHILDREN, not more than six or seven. They're in a backyard, both smiling. The boy wears glasses, and is clearly a young Bill. The girl has her arm around Bill, and it's pretty obvious who she is too.

Bill reads the card's inscription:

"*HAPPY TWENTY-FIFTH, TO MY GOOD OLD, OLD FRIEND BILL...*"

Below that is a FLOWERY SIGNING of the card giver's name...

"*MELISSA S. RICHMOND*".

Bill grins. Returns to the YOUNG MELISSA in the polaroid: peers at her for a moment, feeling something odd. Then, Bill throws the card back in the drawer, CLICKS off his lamp --

EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

INT. BASEMENT - GROCERY STORE - DAY

Bill is back at his desk, and in a way he's "working"...

He's DRAWING DOODLES of MARVIN in a loose leaf notebook. Marvin EXPLORES BACKWOODS, PLAYS IN THE SNOW, PULLS HIS RED WAGON. Taking the tiger doll sometimes, sometimes not. Marvin's hair has also been fixed per Melissa's suggestion: *he's looking more and more like CALVIN every time...*

But the drawings are indeed, still: *missing something*...

BILL
A "thing". A "thing". What are you talking about, you stupid girl...

Bill's NOTEBOOK IS SNATCHED AWAY --

And he turns to find his boss HANKS LOOMING OVER HIM.

Hanks plucks away Bill's PENCIL next, struts off...

HANKS
Real life, Watterson. Real life.

Hanks enters his office, SLAMS his door and

THROUGH THE OFFICE WINDOW

we see him toss Bill's NOTEBOOK and PENCIL into the TRASH, then a KETCHUP SMEARED BURGER BAG and DRINK go in on top --

Bill sours his face as the COUNTRY MUSIC BLASTS BACK ON...

EXT. MAIN STREET - DOWNTOWN - DAY

CLOSE ON: WHEELS CYCLING...

...belonging to BILL. Riding his BIKE down the street, helmet strapped, satchel over his shoulder. Next to comic strips, *cycling* is one of Bill's great passions in life.

BILL
A "thing"... a "thing"...

Bill passes a charming little bookstore: *FIRESIDE BOOKSHOP*.

BILL
A "thing"...

For some reason, seeing the bookstore gets Bill *curious about something* again. He rides a moment longer, then --

-- BRAKES HARD, SKIDS to a stop.

INT. BOOKSHOP - DAY

Bill casually wanders DOWN AN AISLE. Sneaking glances

UP AT THE FRONT COUNTER

where *MELISSA,* an employee here, is checking out customers.

MELISSA
Three fifty eight is your change...

Melissa looks up, spots Bill wandering around. Peers at him strangely. Bill sees that he's been "caught", BUMPS a table of books as he sneaks away. Melissa smirks, confused...

UPSTAIRS

Bill comes upon a shelf of COMIC BOOK COLLECTIONS. He stops and admires them. Runs his fingers across the book spines -- CATHY... DOONESBURY... THE FAR SIDE... *lifting his finger to skip over GARFIELD*... and eventually, Bill finds the PEANUTS BOOKS. He slides one out, flips through it, grinning...

Then *sighs*, perhaps a little *longing* overtaking him now...

MELISSA (O.S.)
Excuse me, sir?

He turns to find Melissa there.

MELISSA
I'm sorry, but you can't just read for free. This isn't a library.

Puts the book back as she approaches.

MELISSA
What are you doing?

BILL
I don't know. Looking around.

MELISSA
How'd you get here?

BILL
Well, I was riding my bike home. Figured I'd stop in, say hello...

Melissa squints: weirdness *confirmed*...

MELISSA
Hello.

BILL
Hello.

Another awkward moment.

A RED-HEADED BOY (6) squeezes between them, breaking the silence...

BOY (O.S.)
Boing... boing...

MOTHER (O.S.)
Stephen, come here please.

And then he's gone, and Melissa turns back and waits for more from Bill. But Bill just stands and bobs his head...

MELISSA
Okay... see ya.

BILL
Bye.

Melissa heads for the stairs...

BILL
You want a popcorn?

She turns back.

MELISSA
A popcorn?

Bill shrugs.

MELISSA
Why?

BILL
I just feel like a popcorn.

Melissa thinks.

MELISSA
Yeah, okay.

EXT. POPCORN SHOP - DAY

Bill and Melissa emerge from the POPCORN SHOP, Chagrin Fall's famous blue and red candy store. Both Bill and

Melissa each have a bag. Bill holds the door for her.

Then they walk, Melissa staring at Bill suspiciously...

BILL
What?

MELISSA
Nothing.

LATER

They stroll down a SIDEWALK, munching their popcorn. Melissa looks comfortable again, in a pretty good mood actually --

MELISSA
Know what I was just thinking?

BILL
What's that?

MELISSA
I was thinking. Ever wonder why birds don't write their memoirs?

BILL
Is this a real question?

MELISSA
Of course.

BILL
Then I don't know.

MELISSA
I was thinking, birds don't write their memoirs... because birds don't lead epic lives. You know?

BOY (O.S.)
Boing... boing...

Bill perks up, notices, ACROSS THE STREET --

The LITTLE RED-HEADED BOY from the bookstore, now walking with his MOTHER, *bouncing a RABBIT DOLL through the air...*

BOY
Boing...

MELISSA
Who'd want to read about what a bird does? Nobody, that's who.

MOTHER
Stephen, put that away now.

For some reason, Bill finds himself kind of *interested* in the boy across the street...

BILL
(not really listening)
Uh-huh. That does make sense...

MELISSA
Yeah, well.

BOY
Boing...

And the boy's *LITTLE BUNNY...*

MOTHER
Stephen, put it away.

MELISSA
Thanks for the popcorn.

Bill looks back over at Melissa.

BILL
You're welcome.

Then a strange, pleasant moment as they walk in silence...

Bill looks at MELISSA'S HAND. Like he maybe wants to *hold it* for some reason. Melissa senses this, tenses just a bit...

MOTHER (O.S.)
I said, stop playing with your toy-

BOY (O.S.)
He's not a toy.

MOTHER (O.S.)
What are you talking about?

Bill starts to reach...

BOY (O.S.)
He's Mr. Bun. Mr. Bun's my best buddy in the wide world...

BUT THEN, JUST LIKE THAT...

Bill's ***MIND IS BLOWN***. He slows to a stop, turns back...

BOY (O.S.)
...not a toy. Mr. Bun is real...

MELISSA
Bill?

Bill is looking over his shoulder, and ACROSS THE STREET...

FROM BILL'S POV

we see the RABBIT DOLL start to *HOP BY ITSELF* in SLOW-MO, as the boy leads it across the tops of news vending machines...

The doll has come to life for Bill!

BILL
Ahhh...

MELISSA
What? What is it?

Bill checks his pockets...

BILL
AHHH!

MELISSA
Bill, what?

BILL
The "thing"! That's the thing!

MELISSA
The "thing"?

BILL
I need a pencil. I need a pencil, where's my bag. Where's my bag-

MELISSA
It's at the shop, what is going on?

Bill looks BACK DOWN THE STREET at the bookshop: *too far.* Looks straight ahead, in the direction they were going --

There are NEIGHBORHOODS AHEAD: *parent's house is this way.*

Bill is torn between going back to get his BIKE, what to do about MELISSA, and his HOUSE where he will be able to draw.

BILL
Ahhh... ahhh...

MELISSA
Bill. Calm down. Explain-

Bill takes Melissa, KISSES HER ON THE MOUTH. Quick and hard. Lets go, looks her in the eyes for a single moment --

Then he takes off. Running, sprinting, *racing* down the sidewalk, for the homes resting but a mile away...

As Melissa stands in UTTER SHOCK...

BILL
I'm sorry! I'll explain later!

And as he runs, Bill has a smile from ear to ear...

INT. FOYER - WATTERSON HOUSE - DAY

Bill bursts in, sweating, panting, then detours into the KITCHEN...

BILL'S MOM (O.S.)
Bill, you're soaked! Where is your bike? Did you run home??

Re-emerges chugging a water glass, heads down the STAIRS.

BILL
I'll be in my room. Please don't bother me.

BILL'S MOM (O.S.)
James, I think Bill ran home.

We hear a newspaper page FLIPPED --

BILL'S DAD (O.S.)
Good. Builds character.

INT. BILL'S ROOM - BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Bill plops down in his chair, still catching his breath. He grabs a PENCIL, GRINDS it sharpened. He CRACKS his knuckles. Shakes his wrists. And quickly DRAWS...

Finishes, and we see MARVIN on the page, looking up as if *walking beside and talking with someone*...

Bill brushes his mustache, picturing that "someone" in his head, keeps going...

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

BILL'S MOM (O.S.)
Bill? You okay?

BILL
Fantastic.

BILL'S MOM (O.S.)
Hey, I made more cookies.

BILL
I'm... not... hungry...

Bill is in the zone, and it's going to be a long night.

EXT. DECK - MELISSA'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON: a PAINTBRUSH painting on a CANVAS...

MELISSA is out on her deck in the crisp morning, working on a LANDSCAPE of the woods behind her building. She is a skilled artist herself, though not a "creative" like Bill.

A grey kitten SPRITE brushes against her leg and PURRS...

MELISSA
(affectionate)
Sprite, what are you doing...

From INSIDE HER APARTMENT come a STRING OF LOUD KNOCKS --

Melissa takes a calming breath. *Something weighs heavy on her*. She rinses her brush, sets it down and heads inside --

INT. FOYER - MELISSA'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

And opens her front door to find

BILL. Out of breath again. Soaked. *But happy as a clam.*

MELISSA
Oh my god.

BILL
I did it.

MELISSA
Did you run here?

BILL
I did it. Oh god I'm tired.

Melissa lets him in, shuts the door.

BILL
Who would've thought, that little brat was the kick I needed-

MELISSA
Bill, we have to talk-

BILL
Here.

Bill holds out a STACK OF DAMP PAPERS. Melissa eyes them: a series of NEW DRAWINGS...

BILL
Go ahead. Read.

She takes them, reads. Bill can hardly contain himself...

BILL
You were right. In the Dog House was missing something. First off, Marvin is a great character. You were right about that too. He's funny, he's loud, he has no filter. He's a little like Dennis the Menace, it's very entertaining.

SPRITE claws annoyingly at Bill's foot. Bill shakes him off.

BILL
I want to base my whole strip around Marvin. But that wasn't enough. There are a lot of "Marvins", in comic strips, in books, movies. I needed a fresh take, a concept: a "thing". That's where Marvin's doll came in, I can't believe I missed this.

We start to catch GLIMPSES of Bill's drawings. They look similar to the ones Bill was working on at work before Hanks threw them out. Marvin EXPLORES BACKWOODS, PLAYS IN THE SNOW, GOES FISHING, etc. *But now*, he appears to have some sort of companion -- A <u>TALL</u>, <u>FUZZY</u>, <u>FELINE</u> COMPANION...

BILL
I wasn't seeing the potential. I wasn't seeing Marvin's doll the way <u>Marvin</u> would see it. Children view the world a different way than adults. Mr. Bun is proof of that.

MELISSA
Mr. Bun?

More GLIMPSES, and Melissa is starting to *fall in love* with what she's seeing...

BILL
Just like that kid, just like you and me at six years old, just like every child who's lived and breathed on this planet, my Marvin will have unparalleled *creative powers*, expressed perfectly...

AND FINALLY...

Bill taps on the DRAWING Melissa is currently looking at, the final one, which is the one we saw him starting last night: MARVIN, walking and talking with his NEW FRIEND...

A SIX FOOT TALL TIGER.

BILL
...in a toy doll, who comes to life whenever Marvin is alone.

Melissa looks up at Bill, who smiles, bursting with pride.

BILL
The tiger is *real*. He's Marvin's best buddy in the wide world.

Melissa tries to put her thoughts together, as she goes through the DRAWINGS again and WE SEE THEM CLEARLY now...

MELISSA
This is... this is amazing, Bill. I'm not kidding, this isn't just good, it's... magical.

A wave of emotion overtakes Melissa. Whatever was on her mind before, she can't hold it in any longer...

BILL
Thanks. And, well, *thanks*. I couldn't have done it without-

She steps in, gets close to Bill. Until they're inches apart. Bill freezes in place, and then Melissa stands taller and gently KISSES HIM. A little awkward, a little sweet...

Then they part...

MELISSA
I have to tell you something... I don't mind that you kissed me.

BILL
Oh god, me neither-

Bill takes the lead now, and this kiss is longer, more passionate, and we feel the years of good friendship blossoming into something new before our very eyes...

HOTEL CLERK (V.O., PRELAP)
Mr. Watterson?

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

We now return to BILL (OLDER), staring blankly into space.

HOTEL CLERK (O.S.)
Mr. Watterson.

Bill snaps out of it --

A HOTEL CLERK (20s) is waiting from behind a front desk.

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

Bill takes them, nods his thanks...

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

SUPER: *COLUMBUS, OHIO - 4 DAYS REMAINING*

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bill drags his luggage in, closes the door.

He tosses a PAMPHLET onto the NIGHTSTAND...

"OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESENTS -- 1991 FESTIVAL OF CARTOON ART! ... THIS YEAR'S GUEST SPEAKER ... BILL WATTERSON!"

Bill slumps onto his bed, exhausted from the trip.

LATER

He rests as he works on his SPEECH, writing in a notebook. The TV PLAYS quietly.

BILL
(mumbling as he writes)
When I was five, I received a Peanuts book for Christmas. It was

the first time I'd ever laid eyes on a comic strip...

Bill stops, chews on his eraser.

BILL
...and it didn't take long... for me to fall in love...

LATER

Bill eats his dinner: a pack of DING-DONGS, as he flips through TV channels. He stops on GARFIELD'S ANIMATED CARTOON SHOW for a moment, *rolls his eyes*, then keeps flipping...

ON THE BED BESIDE BILL

is his SPEECH. It looks like he only wrote a half page before he got bored and started drawing. He's added a

DOODLE OF CALVIN

at a podium, giving a speech in a TOP HAT and FAKE BEARD --

CALVIN (ON THE PAGE)
E pluribus unum! Four score and seven years! I am not a crook!

Bill sighs, CLICKS OFF the TV. Then, glances over at...

THE PHONE

on his nightstand. Bill looks at it for just a moment --

Then he TURNS THE TV BACK ON, starts surfing again...

INT. HANK'S OFFICE - BASEMENT - GROCERY STORE, 1984 - DAY

A PHONE RINGS over Hank's crooning COUNTRY MUSIC STATION.

HANKS answers with a mouthful of food.

HANKS
Yello.

<u>BASEMENT</u>

Bill comes down the stairs, tossing an empty lunch bag in the trash.

HANKS (O.S.)
Watterson. *Watterson*.

HANK'S OFFICE

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

BILL
Hello?

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

BILL
Yes.

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

LEE SALEM (YOUNGER) swivels around in his chair. Bill's editor from the opening scenes, here in a junior office.

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

INTERCUT WITH HANKS' OFFICE

Bill looks at Hanks, who is thumbing through a fishing magazine and licking his french fry greased fingers.

BILL
Can I be alone?

Hanks looks up.

BILL
This is a private call.

Hanks frowns, Bill does not flinch. Hanks grabs his things, grumbles as he marches out...

LEE (O.S.)
Still there?

BILL
Yes. Sorry.

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

BILL
Yes.

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

LEE
(looking over them)
Well, I'll tell you what, Bill--
this is some good stuff. The little kid, the tiger who comes to life--
it's a great little world you've built here. Cool artwork too, I don't think I've seen anyone who can draw quite like you do.

Bill covers his phone, takes a deep breath.

BILL
(back into phone)
Thank you.

LEE
Yeah, listen. How old are you?

BILL
Twenty-six.

LEE
I'm guessing you sent these to all the syndicates. Get any calls yet?

BILL
No...

LEE
Good. Don't talk to those other chumps. Not worth your time. I don't wanna beat around the bush, Bill, we think this could be a big thing, and we'd like to be a part of it. We'd like to hire you.

Lee stifles a yawn.

LEE
How's that sound, huh? You wanna draw comic strips for the papers?

BILL
Okay.

LEE
Cool. My secretary'll mail a contract. You keep sending us stuff in the meantime if you want.

BILL
Okay.

LEE
'Kay buddy, good stuff--oh, hang on. The boy's name...
(flips through papers)
King Features already has a strip called Marvin... and we don't wanna be confusing anyone. Any ideas?

BILL
Uhhh...

LEE
How about--Jarvin? Sssssmarvin?

BILL
Calvin?

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

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

He WEEPS.

OUTSIDE HANK'S OFFICE - LATER

Bill emerges, sniffling. Hanks gawks from the break table.

HANKS
What's with you?

Bill grabs some things from his desk, fills his satchel.

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

Bill DROPS his last stack of WORK on the table before Hanks on his way out: GROCERY STORE ADS, with a *creative flair*...

BILL
It is for me.

INT. BOOKSHOP - DAY

MELISSA is stocking the shelves with books, HUMMING a waltzy tune. The doorbell CHIMES, then a FIGURE appears...

It's BILL, holding a bouquet of LILACS with a big smile.

MELISSA
What are you doing here?

Bill sets down the flowers, *digs Melissa like a sailor would,* kisses her good and long...

...as OLDER CUSTOMERS take notice, watch with grins...

Bill finally lets go, and Melissa catches her breath...

BILL
How is your day?

MELISSA
Uhhh... fine.

Bill grabs the lilacs, hands them to her.

MELISSA
Thank you.

BILL
I gotta go.

MELISSA
Wha... where you going?

Bill turns and smiles.

BILL
Twenty-ninth time's the charm.

The doorbell CHIMES again, and Melissa's face turns from confusion to joy for Bill as she realizes what he meant.

She smells her flowers, breathing deep.

INT. BILL'S ROOM - BASEMENT - DAY

Bill sits at his desk. Goes through his pre-drawing routine, all the while going over the following in his head...

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

BILL (V.O.)
Okay, start from the beginning. How do Marvin and--no, how do Calvin and Hobbes meet? Is Hobbes a Christmas gift? Does Calvin see

Hobbes in a store? No--how would Calvin think he met Hobbes? Hobbes is a real tiger, so...probably in the jungle. Maybe Calvin caught Hobbes while on an expedition. Calvin the Safari Hunter. Sets a trap, finds his best friend: a tiger. Yes. That's how they meet.

Bill picks a pencil and RULER, and DRAWS FOUR SQUARE PANELS in the center of his page. Brushes his mustache as he stares at them, *four empty boxes just brimming with possibility...*

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

And Bill begins the FIRST OFFICIAL CALVIN & HOBBES STRIP...

MONTAGE - BILL AND COMIC STRIPS, BILL AND MELISSA

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

BILL'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

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

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

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

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

-- Calvin and Hobbes hang out under a tree, trying to look cool. Calvin wears shades. Hobbes wears...

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

HOBBES (BILL) (V.O.)
Maybe I'm new wave.

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

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

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

...the next morning they're outside, guarding their tent as they have been all night. Both frozen in terror of ghosts.

Bill chuckles, sits down and DRAWS...

MELISSA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

He rides his bike over to Melissa's...

MELISSA'S APARTMENT

Enters, and SPRITE leaps, hangs onto his pant leg.

BILL
(shaking leg)
Down, cat. Down.

-- Bill shares some of his NEW STRIPS with Melissa over takeout. He watches how she responds to each one, whether it's laughing or admiring or offering Bill suggestions.

-- LATER, they just make out. Getting better at it.

BILL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Bill works some more...

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

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

-- Calvin and Hobbes have imaginary cowboy gunfights in the house, bouncing off furniture, driving Calvin's mother wild (*as Bill acts this out, as we'll sometimes see him do*).

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

CALVIN (BILL) (V.O.)
...you know why birds don't write their memoirs? Because birds don't lead epic lives, that's why! Who'd wanna read about what a bird does?

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

...but he falls and SPLASHES straight down INTO THE WATER.

KITCHEN - WATTERSON HOUSE - DAY

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

BEDROOM - LATER

Bill finishes with Lee in his PARENT'S ROOM. He skims over the contract's final section: "...*Syndicate will own rights to all content and characters created by the artist*..."

We PULL BACK, and sitting there on the floor beside Bill...

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

LEE
Any questions?

Bill SIGNS ON THE DOTTED LINE...

BILL
Nope.

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

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

NEWS BUILDINGS

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

PRINTING PRESSES

Thousands of NEWSPAPERS roll hot off the presses.

ALL OVER THE COUNTRY

In HOMES, in OFFICES, on the SUBWAY, on the SIDEWALK --

PEOPLE take notice of CALVIN & HOBBES in their papers.

MELISSA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY (FALL)

Bill rides back over to Melissa's, AUTUMN LEAVES everywhere.

MELISSA'S APARTMENT

He enters, SPRITE attacks him again --

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

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

ART SHOW

Melissa walks through a local indoor art show, admiring the PAINTINGS. Bill trails behind, DRAWING on the handout...

It's a sketch of *HOBBES, pouncing on CALVIN* as Calvin opens the front door coming home from school.

Melissa passes by a MAN reading a PAPER as he walks. She looks back, *sees something she recognizes in the paper*, runs up to the man and looks over his shoulder intrusively --

MAIN STREET - CHAGRIN FALLS - MOMENTS LATER

She and Bill burst out of the art show building, FLIPPING through a NEWSPAPER of their own now...

Melissa SHRIEKS, spotting it first --

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

Melissa lets Bill take the paper, she hugs and kisses him, and they stroll on together, Bill beaming as he reads...

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

And neither Bill nor Melissa noticing...

ALL OVER THE COUNTRY

More NEWSPAPERS are pressed and delivered -- and this time, we SPLIT-SCREEN with Bill's NEW FANS as they read...

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

-- Hobbes pounces on Calvin coming home from school.

-- Calvin forms a new club with Hobbes --

CALVIN (READER'S VOICES) (V.O.)
We'll call our club G.R.O.S.S. -
Get Rid Of Slimy Girls! That way,
Susie Derkins can't join!

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

HANKS
Watterson?

And everywhere, everyone is falling in love with The Boy and His Tiger...

MELISSA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY (WINTER)

Bill pulls up to Melissa's in a used '82 HONDA CIVIC. Gets out, CRUNCHES over SNOW...

BEHIND THE APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

Bill and Melissa PLAY IN THE SNOW. Snowball fights, snowmen, snow angels. Lots of frosted-breath laughs and rosy cheeks.

LIVING ROOM - MELISSA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

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

MELISSA
Let me see.

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

MELISSA
I thought I was Susie.

Bill just keeps drawing. Melissa smiles, resumes reading.

BILL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Bill works well into the night, COMIC STRIPS and ANIMATIONS *swirling all around him*. Calvin is SPACEMAN SPIFF, a rogue galaxy explorer. He's TRACER BULLET, a tough, cynical, P.I. Calvin and Hobbes explore back woods, they build snowmen, they go swimming, it's a complete and utter *thrill* --

And then, Bill stops. Taking a break. He looks back at...

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

Bill grins, turns back, and keeps working.

END MONTAGE

EXT. JFK AIRPORT - NYC, 1986 - DAY

A commercial JET touches down, SCREECHES as it slows.

SUPER: *1986*

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Bill waits as his elevator CHURNS upwards.

He wears a WEDDING RING now.

Bill catches his REFLECTION in the ELEVATOR DOORS...

Sticks out his tongue at it. Slacks his jaw, lowers his eyelids... makes the CAVEMAN GRIN from Melissa's car...

BILL
Durrrrr...

Bill chuckles, tries more faces.

INT. LOBBY - UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE - DAY

Bill steps up to the front desk, to the same yet baby-faced BLONDE RECEPTIONIST (18).

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

BLONDE RECEPTIONIST
Please, have a seat.

Bill sits on a sofa.

HANDSOME MAN (O.S.)
So you're Bill Watterson.

Sitting next to Bill is a suave, HANDSOME MAN (40s). He's sipping a glass of clear soda, reading the New Yorker.

BILL
Yes. Hello.

The man eyes Bill up and down.

HANDSOME MAN
You're young.

BILL
I guess so.

HANDSOME MAN
God. I already hate you.

LEE SALEM steps out into the lobby, visibly enthused --

LEE
Bill.

He comes over, grips Bill's hand.

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

Lee nods to the man on the couch.

LEE
How you doing, Mr. Trudeau. John should be out here in a minute.

GARRY TRUDEAU
No rush.

Bill stares back stunned as Lee leads him on.

INT. BACK OFFICES - CONTINUOUS

Bill follows Lee towards his office.

BILL
That was Garry Trudeau?

LEE
Of course.

Lee smirks at Bill's starstruck face.

LEE
You like Doonesbury?

BILL
Of course.

INT. LEE'S OLD OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Lee leads Bill in, passes him. Bill enters, *stops dead in*

his tracks -- because the entire office is littered with...

...*CALVIN & HOBBES MERCHANDISE*.

Lee tries to clean up...

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

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

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

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

BILL
What is this?

LEE
What do you mean?

BILL
This. These.

Lee stops.

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

BILL
The beginning?

LEE
You're on your way.

BILL
To what?

LEE
To success! To fame. Fortune. You are on your way...to the big time. *Merchandising*, Bill. <u>This</u> is how

you know you've hit the jackpot.

Lee approaches him.

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

BILL
You said I had to sign papers.

LEE
Yes, contracts. For the deals.

Bill looks around...

The merchandise just kind of ***strikes him in the wrong way***...

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

BILL
Well, it's just... I guess I hadn't really thought about this. Do people really want this stuff?

LEE
Do people really *want*--what, are you kidding me?

Bill is not kidding.

LEE
Bill, do you have any idea what you've created here? *Everyone* wants Calvin & Hobbes. It's a phenomenon, exceeded every expectation, even my own. In less than a year, your comic strip has been featured in two hundred fifty plus papers. That's the second biggest launch we've *had*. Editors are calling *me*, asking about Calvin & Hobbes. Companies are pounding at my door, and not just this stuff, I'm talking, the big kahounas. I'm speaking with Mattel. I'm speaking with Kellogg's. Sears. MasterCard. Bill, this is what it's all about. TV studios want you, animation-

BILL
Animation?

LEE
Know who called us the other day?

BILL
No.

LEE
Guess.

BILL
I don't know.

LEE
Guess.

BILL
I don't-

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

BILL
Why?

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

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

LEE
You know, Jim Davis ranked damn near the top of the Forbes List last year. Garfield's made him a millionaire many times over. If you play your cards right... I don't see any reason why you shouldn't be up there with him soon. Hell, Calvin could be *bigger* than Garfield, maybe better. You've stumbled upon a gold mine, Bill.

Lee SLAPS some CONTRACTS on his desk, pats himself down...

LEE
Now I wanna get all this junk out of my office, and into stores across the country. Come on-

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

LEE
Let's start building your empire.

EXT. BILL'S FIRST HOUSE - CHAGRIN FALLS, OH - EVENING

Bill pulls into the driveway of his FIRST HOUSE on the other side of Chagrin Falls. A "JUST SOLD" SIGN is in the yard.

IN HIS CIVIC

Bill looks deep in thought. He gets out, trudges inside...

MELISSA (O.S., PRELAP)
What do you mean, "it didn't feel right"?

INT. LIVING ROOM - BILL'S FIRST HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Melissa is working on a PAINTING of an OLD MAN ON A BENCH, FEEDING PIGEONS. She is also wearing a WEDDING RING now.

MELISSA
The characters didn't look right?

BILL'S DESK is against a wall, he's working too. *They've turned their entire living room into one big ART STUDIO.*

BILL
No, no... well, that too.

Melissa frowns: something about her own PAINTING is "off".

BILL'S NEW STRIP

is a SUNDAY STRIP. We see a grid of about a DOZEN SQUARE PANELS, each with CALVIN making an UGLY OR SILLY FACE: *the same exact ones Bill was miming in the elevator earlier*.

BILL
It was just strange. Seeing Calvin and Hobbes on those... products. I don't know, it just felt wrong.

SPRITE brushes against Melissa's leg...

MELISSA
Hey, Sprite...

TWO MORE KITTENS tiptoe around as well: PUMPERNICKEL and JUNIPER BOOTS. The newest additions to Melissa's "clan".

MELISSA
Hey, Pumpernickel. Juniper Boots.

BILL
I love the strip. I love my characters. I don't want to see them on greetings cards or mugs, that's not why I made them.

MELISSA
(agreeing)
Okay.

BILL
I'm not trying to be ungrateful to Universal, and it sounds like they're counting on a cut of the money the deals would make, but... I think I have to turn them down.

Melissa stops, turns around.

BILL
Does that sound nuts?

MELISSA
No.

BILL
Do you mind?

She rinses her brush out, comes over...

MELISSA
Bill, that's not nuts. You don't wanna commercialize your art. That's normal for an artist.

Melissa leans in, pecks him. Still a bit awkward, but nice.

BILL
I think comic strips should just be comic strips. You know what I mean?

MELISSA
Of course.
(re: his new strip)
Oh, I love that.

She heads into the

KITCHEN,

gets out a can of CAT FOOD. WHIRRS it open with a MACHINE...

MELISSA
Don't worry, Bill. It's your strip. You shouldn't be pressured to do anything you don't want to do.

Then scoops it all out into THREE DIFFERENT CAT BOWLS, petting JUNIPER BOOTS as all three felines congregate.

MELISSA
Tell 'em to take their greeting cards and shove 'em up their butts. Who needs their products, huh?

LIVING ROOM

Comes back out, and Bill *SNATCHES HER in surprise*, sets her on his lap. They kiss again, and Bill gazes at her fondly...

MELISSA
... What? Do I have paint?

BILL
I was just wondering how your day was... "*Mrs. Watterson*".

Melissa smiles.

MELISSA
You know, I don't mind that either.

They start KISSING yet again, this time getting into it...

MELISSA
Careful, Bill. I'm Susie, I'm a "slimy girl"...

BILL
"Slimy" is just how I like it...

Melissa giggles. They swivel slowly around in Bill's chair, kissing, then Bill stops and gazes at Melissa once more...

BILL
Thank you.

Melissa smiles, then notices a WHITE BOX on Bill's desk...

MELISSA
Hey. What is that?

BILL
Oh.

Bill opens it, pulls out: the CALVIN MUG Lee offered to him.

MELISSA
Awwwww! I want it. Gimmegimmegimme.

BILL
What? No! Whose side are you on??

Bill holds the mug away from her as she reaches for it, they both lean too far and their chair topples over and CRASHES.

EXT. BILL'S FIRST HOUSE - MORNING (ESTABLISHING)

Bright and sunny.

LEE (O.S.)
You know, this doesn't have to be an "all-or-nothing", Bill.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bill is working again while on the PHONE, as we hear Melissa in the kitchen and her CLASSICAL MUSIC accompanying her...

LEE (O.S.)
You don't have to turn everything down. We can pick and choose from the deals you're comfortable with.

BILL'S SUNDAY STRIP

of the FUNNY CALVIN FACES is coming along nicely. Bill has moved on to COLORING THEM IN with felt-tip markers...

BILL
To be honest, I don't know if I'm comfortable with any of what I saw. It's kind of hard to explain...

LEE (O.S.)
No, no. I get it.

INTERCUT WITH LEE'S OLD OFFICE IN NEW YORK

Lee is CHEWING GUM as he talks.

LEE
Commercialism vs. art. Making a statement. Don't sell out, etcetera, yada yada...

BILL (O.S.)
Well, not exactly...

LEE
We just wanna make sure we don't do anything rash here, Bill. I don't have to tell you again the kind of money that's on the table, for you *and* the syndicate. Fifty-fifty, man. It's a pretty good deal.

Bill caps his marker closed, gives Lee his full attention.

BILL
I'm sorry, I really am. I wish I felt differently. I just don't.

BILL'S SUNDAY STRIP

is now complete. EVERY PANEL OF CALVIN has now become an *ANIMATED TALKING HEAD* on the page! A dozen different Calvins, making silly ugly faces in *actual, real-time*.

LEE looks OUT HIS OFFICE WINDOW

and sees JOHN MCMEEL, the president who snapped at Bill in the opener, now chatting with some important-looking SUITS.

LEE
Well, you're the client. We want you to be happy.

BILL (O.S.)
Thank you.

LEE
Yeah, alright. For now.

Lee sifts through some papers...

LEE
By the way, how do you feel about book collections.

BILL
Book collections?

Lee POPS a gum bubble, chews.

LEE
You know. For reading.

Bill perks up.

LEE
I'd assume you're familiar with comic strip collections. You've seen a Peanuts book, haven't you?

BILL
Yes.

LEE
Got a message from our publishing arm this week, wanting to know if you'd work with them in putting together the first year of Calvin & Hobbes strips into a paperback volume. How does that sound?

BILL
Uhhh...

LEE
(frowns)
Got something against books too?

But Bill's face is practically *beaming*...

BILL
Not at all.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Bill is working at his desk again, on a NEW CALVIN STRIP:

Calvin has blown a CHEWING GUM BUBBLE so big, it's EXPLODED and covered his entire head. Bill snickers to himself...

MELISSA (O.S.)
Coming to bed?

He stops, looks up. MELISSA is there, in some adorable PJs.

BILL
I think I'm gonna stay up a bit.

MELISSA
I think you should come to bed.

BILL
I will.

Melissa looks offended.

BILL
Few minutes, that's all.

MELISSA
Fine.

Bill grins, goes back to work...

MELISSA (O.S.)
I love you.

Looks up again, and sees Melissa isn't flirting anymore...

MELISSA
You don't have to say it back. I know this is still kind of new. And maybe a little strange. I still have no idea how it happened. But I think... I think I've loved you since we were kids, Bill.

Melissa hesitates...

MELISSA
You are my Hobbes.

Bill puts down his pencil. Takes MELISSA'S HAND, holds it. Kisses it.

BILL
I love you.

INT. FOYER - MORNING

A CARDBOARD BOX is THUMPED onto the floor. We hear the front door SHUT, then a delivery truck PULLING AWAY --

BILL kneels, SLICES OPEN the box...

INSIDE

are dozens of the FIRST CALVIN & HOBBES BOOK. The paperback cover is a take on a strip we've already seen: Calvin and Hobbes sailing mid-air over a pond after launching from a dock in their red wagon. *A very iconic illustration.*

Melissa, nearby in her art smock, enjoys watching Bill's CHILD-LIKE WONDER. She drinks coffee from her CALVIN MUG.

Bill hands Melissa a COPY. She smiles, sits down with it...

As Bill reads a NOTE from Lee, then gets a copy of his own and spreads out right there on the floor...

Melissa opens her book, and her *heart fills with joy...*

She's seeing the DEDICATION PAGE, where there are two things: a DRAWING of HOBBES lifting a party hat in romantic gesture, and Bill's dedication itself, which just says...

"*TO MELISSA*".

LATER

Bill and Melissa have formed a little POW-WOW in the foyer. They're surrounded by snacks, tiptoeing cats, and stacks of the Calvin & Hobbes copies. Bill and Melissa are both sitting against a wall, both going through the new book.

The soles of their FEET are aligned flat with each other's, and they're playfully pushing back and forth as they read.

BILL
See, this is what comic strips are about... *comic strips.*

Bill FLIPS a page...

BILL
Nothing more, nothing less.

And Melissa CRUNCHES into an apple...

MELISSA
Mmmmmm-hm...

It's a happy little picture you could almost just *frame*...

INT. ATRIUM - WEXNER CENTER - OSU, 1991 - DAY

OLDER BILL'S HAND signs his NAME in the bottom right corner of a book page. He DRAWS a quick little MISCHIEVOUS CALVIN underneath, then lets the book close and we see the COVER:

It's another Calvin & Hobbes book entitled "*SOMETHING UNDER THE BED IS DROOLING*": Calvin and Hobbes hide on top of their bed as a monster's big yellow eyes are seen under their bed.

BILL (OLDER) slides the book back to its owner, a YOUNG FAN.

SUPER: *OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY - 1991 FESTIVAL OF CARTOON ART*

SUPER: *3 DAYS REMAINING*

We're in the midst of something like a *convention for comic strip fans*. Tables are set up around an atrium, a cartoonist behind each one. JIM DAVIS is at a GARFIELD table beside a register, JIM BORGMAN is at a ZITS table, there are tables for FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, BALDO, CATHY, DILBERT, etc.

Bill is signing autographs at a table of his own. He has the longest line of fans (Garfield is in second), but unlike his colleagues, Bill has no Calvin & Hobbes products for sale.

LITTLE GIRL
Thank you, Mr. Watterson.

BILL
You're very welcome.

Little Girl is led away with her newly autographed book, then another one is PLOPPED onto Bill's table --

But this one is a DOONESBURY BOOK: "*WELCOME TO CLUB SCUD!*".

And it's not a fan, but GARRY TRUDEAU standing before Bill.

GARRY TRUDEAU
Make it out to, "The One Who Inspired Me to Even Draw".

BILL
How about, "Garry, grandfather to the new generation"?

GARRY TRUDEAU
Come on. I'm thirsty.

EXT. OSU - DAY

Bill and Garry walk through Ohio State's beautiful, expansive MAIN CAMPUS as Garry drinks out of a mug. COLLEGE STUDENTS wearing the BUCKEYE RED roam all around them.

GARRY TRUDEAU
How's that speech coming?

BILL
Fine.

GARRY TRUDEAU
You gonna be nice?

BILL
I'm gonna be honest.

GARRY TRUDEAU
Well now I'm excited.

They sit on a BENCH. Garry offers Bill a sip, Bill declines.

Garry gazes at all the STUDENTS. Taking interest in a group of BLONDE CO-EDS...

GARRY TRUDEAU
Jesus, I am old. ... Bill, you ever wish you did something else? Besides cartoons. Ever wish you were a banker, or a lawyer, or a dentist? Sometimes, swear to god... I wish I was a sexy movie star.

Bill shakes his head.

BILL
I've only ever wanted to draw.

GARRY TRUDEAU
Talked to John McMeel the other day. He mentioned an interesting meeting you had, and how you still won't budge on the "l-word".

Bill nods.

GARRY TRUDEAU
Want some advice?

BILL
Nah.

Garry shifts in his seat.

GARRY TRUDEAU
Here's what I would say about licensing. You've been great from the start about standing up for the integrity of the medium, Bill. For defending comic strips to the higher ups and the businesses. You've stuck to your guns and haven't cashed in like the rest of us. No one else wants to do that, and I think it's noble that you've kind of been this spokesperson for keeping comic strips as pure as possible. But, with all due respect... you're fighting a losing battle. It's pointless to attack others for trying to make money off

comic strips. Did you know that comic strips are *designed* to make money? It's why they even *exist*. It's why we put them in newspapers, because they help sell newspapers. No matter how much you want them to be, comic strips are not an art form. They're a means to an end. Always have been, always will be. Selling newspapers, and now, selling merchandise. And sooner or later, you're gonna have to realize that when you can't beat something just based on the definition of that thing, you have to consider the only option you have left.
(beat)
Giving in, man. Give up on this. *Compromise,* just a bit.

Garry stands, empties his mug out on the grass.

GARRY TRUDEAU
Take it from grandpa. And who knows? You might still be happy in the end.

Bill doesn't even nod this time, and after an awkward moment Garry spots some more YOUNG FEMALE STUDENTS going his way...

GARRY TRUDEAU
Well, hey now...

Garry falls in line with them, disappears...

GARRY TRUDEAU (O.S.)
Howdy. You girls like Doonesbury?

GIRL (O.S.)
Dune Berries?

Bill continues, *and has been this whole time*, watching...

A GIRL sitting against a FOUNTAIN. *Drawing on a sketchpad.* With her brown hair and eyes, she looks a bit like Melissa.

EXT. LAKE - OHIO, 1987 - DAY

FEET SLAP as they race down a DOCK, then they LEAP and --

SPLASH!

Into a silver lake MELISSA goes. She surfaces, treads water.

We're at a private CAMPSITE somewhere in the Upper Midwest, enclosed by thick green forest on all sides. *This is the place Bill gets inspiration for Calvin's family vacations.*

MELISSA
Bill! Come on!

BILL (YOUNGER) is SITTING ON A ROCK near the edge of the water, drawing on his sketchpad. Satchel at his side.

He shakes his head in answer to Melissa.

MELISSA
C'monnnn... C'monnnn...

BILL
Nah.

He's working on a bunch of different, charming CALVIN & HOBBES IDEAS, most of them inspired by being outdoors.

MELISSA
You pooper.

Bill stops, takes a break. As Melissa swims on, he enjoys the ORANGE SUNSET before him. The trees, the lake. It's all so beautiful, colorful, quiet. It's almost *surreal*.

IN THE REFLECTION OF BILL'S SUNGLASSES

we see the animated silhouette of CALVIN come swinging from a rope, then it SPLASHES down into the lake with a TAR-ZAAN CRY. Animated HOBBES follows after with a HUGE CANNONBALL.

Bill breathes deep. Enjoying everything about this moment.

INT. CIVIC (MOVING) - DAY

Bill drives down a FLAT HIGHWAY on their way back. Melissa's window is down, her HAND floating like a wave on the wind...

BILL
Let's move.

MELISSA
What?

BILL
We should move.

Melissa rolls up her window.

MELISSA
Like, "move away"?

Bill nods.

MELISSA
To where?

BILL
I don't know. Somewhere...
isolated. Quiet.

MELISSA
We just bought a house, Bill.

BILL
It'll be good for the strip.

Melissa is agape.

MELISSA
But I don't wanna move.

BILL
C'monnnn...

MELISSA
Oh no, don't even try that buster.

BILL
C'monnnn...

Melissa scoffs. Thinks. Then, shrugs...

MELISSA
Okay...

Bill grins, HOLDS HER HAND. Melissa smiles, a bit baffled...

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

As their "CAMPING GEAR TOPPED" CIVIC WHOOSHES past us...

INT. BILL'S STUDIO - NEW MEXICO, 1988 - DAY

A NEW DRAWING SHEET is SLID off a stack --

Gently laid onto Bill's desk, CLIPPED into place --

KNUCKLES are CRACKED. WRISTS shaken. PENCILS GRINDED.

Then FOUR SQUARE PANELS are DRAWN IN with a ruler...

SUPER: *ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO - 1988*

As we get a look around the room: a SNOOPY CLOCK hangs on the wall. Stacks of FAN MAIL rest at Bill's feet. *This is the same studio from the beginning of the movie, although at this stage in Bill's life it's much emptier and cleaner.*

BILL sits back, thinks. Brushes a now <u>THICK MUSTACHE</u>...

BILL
... Hm.

MOMENTS LATER

A package of DING-DONGS are set down on Bill's desk, followed by a CAN OF COKE, which is CRACKED open...

Bill spins around in his chair, SLURPING, thinking...

BILL
What to do... what to do...

LATER

Bill eats a Ding-Dong as he stares at his <u>STILL BLANK PAGE</u>. He stuffs in the last of the treat, swallows. Sighs, then --

Grabs the *second* Ding-Dong, starts on that one...

LATE IN THE AFTERNOON

Bill holds his head in his hands, gazing slack-jawed at...

The <u>SAME</u> <u>FOUR</u> <u>EMPTY</u> <u>PANELS</u>.

Bill is completely <u>stumped</u>.

MELISSA (O.S.)
Bill? How about a break, huh?
Dinner's soon.

Bill sobers. Then, reluctantly... throws down his pencil.

INT. DINING AREA - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Bill and MELISSA have a LASAGNA dinner. Bill is eating fast.

We see that their NEW LIVING ROOM is more traditional. It's properly furnished, no longer really a studio apart from a corner set aside for Melissa's art stand. During the day, the DESERT will be seen through their living room windows.

MELISSA
How's it coming? Any luck?

Bill shakes his head.

MELISSA
Do you want any help? Bill slow down, you'll get fat.

BILL
What kind of help?

Melissa doesn't know. They both eat in silence for a beat...

MELISSA
So Lee Salem called again. About the you know whats...

Bill looks up at Melissa, glances

INTO THE KITCHEN where a CARDBOARD BOX is on the counter.

MELISSA
He said "make sure Bill is awake and ready, eight o'clock *sharp*".

BILL
(frowns)
You know, I should just call and cancel. I have too much work to do-

MELISSA
Call and cancel? No, Bill, hear them out at least. I thought you said you liked the-

BILL
Said I didn't hate them. Doesn't mean I've changed my mind. And I've heard the syndicate plenty of times the past two years. "You'll like this deal, Bill". "This deal is right up your alley". As if any of them know what goes up my alley.

Melissa hides a grin. Bill stuffs in his last bite, gets up.

BILL
To be honest, all these "business calls" are becoming very annoying.

MELISSA
Hey, where are you going?

BILL
Gotta work.

MELISSA
Oh, no Bill. Un-uh. You promised, I am going to teach you how to paint-

BILL
Can we do it tomorrow?

MELISSA
Take a night off. You have writer's block, it's what you need anyways-

BILL
I'm not a writer.

Bill pecks her on the cheek --

BILL
I'm a cartoonist.

Takes his dishes into the kitchen.

Melissa bites into a BABY CARROT. Then throws it DOWN AT HER FEET where SPRITE, PUMPERNICKEL, and JUNIPER BOOTS, now THREE GROWN CATS, sniff at it and walk off with disdain.

MELISSA
Shucks.

INT. BILL'S STUDIO - EVENING

Bill sits back down at his desk, CLAPS and rubs his hands together. A newly determined, optimistic look on his face.

He checks back over his shoulder, sees animated CALVIN & HOBBES, playing a quiet game of checkers in the corner...

Then Bill picks up his PENCIL, squints and stares off...

BILL
Ooh.

An idea.

And, just like that, he happily GOES BACK TO WORK...

EXT. BILL'S DESERT HOUSE - MORNING (ESTABLISHING)

The SUN RISES over a developing DESERT NEIGHBORHOOD...

INT. BILL'S STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

We TRACK dozens of WHITE SHEETS on the floor Bill worked on during the night. Most of them have little or nothing at all on them. Random sketches, half-baked ideas, things crossed out. A few depict a very strange idea of *making Hobbes fat*.

Then, we MOVE UP BILL'S DESK and find him there, SNORING.

A PHONE RINGS. Bill snaps up, smacking his mouth, and we hear Melissa TALKING in the kitchen...

Bill blinks, then looks down at the DRAWING on his desk...

It's a lazy GARFIELD and HOBBES *HYBRID CHARACTER*, or, a "tiger Garfield". At the BOTTOM OF THE PAGE is a message...

"TIGER GARFIELD" (ON THE PAGE)
Hey, fatty. Pass the carrots?

It makes no sense. Below, Bill has just scrawled angrily...

"*YOU SUCK, BILL. YOU SUCK, YOU SUCK, YOU SUCK, YOU SUCK.*".

Bill MOANS...

MELISSA (O.S.)
(from kitchen)
Bill.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

He takes the phone from Melissa, who is cooking breakfast.

BILL
Hello?

INTERCUT WITH LEE'S OLD OFFICE IN NEW YORK

LEE swivels around his chair, a smile to beat all others.

LEE
Well howdy pardner! How's that desert sun, you got a tan yet?

BILL
No, no tan Lee, thanks.

Melissa looks out the kitchen window as she fills a pot...

LEE
Hey, everything alright? You know you're a little late this quarter,

deadline's the twentieth, man.

BILL
I know. I'll have something soon.

LEE
No worries, I trust your genius.
Hang on a sec, 'kay?

Now we see that TWO MEN are sitting across from Lee --

JOHN MCMEEL, the ever stoic president, and MELVIN WEEKS (50s), a balding businessman with a narrow crooked face.

Lee hangs up, putting the phone on SPEAKER.

LEE
Bill, say hello to John and a Mr. Melvin Weeks from Andrews McMeel.

BILL
Hello.

MELVIN WEEKS
Hello, Mr. Watterson.

LEE
Melissa told me you got our package, Bill. That right?

BILL
Yes.

LEE
And whatchya thinking, man?

Bill hovers over the OPEN CARDBOARD BOX we saw last night during dinner, and this time we get to see what's inside...

Dozens of CALVIN & HOBBES CALENDARS. 16-month, 1989-1990. The cover art has Calvin and Hobbes napping under a tree.

LEE
Sixteen Calvin & Hobbes Sunday comic strips and one original cover by Bill Watterson. All assembled into a classy, tasteful calendar. I think this is the one, Bill. I think this is right up your alley.

Bill flips through one of the calendars, and we see some of his own CALVIN SUNDAY STRIPS going along with each month...

BILL
Well...

LEE
Tell me you love 'em. Tell me those calendars make your heart full and happy. I wanna hear you say, "these things make me *comfortable*"...

Bill is annoyed he can't find anything off-putting here...

BILL
Well... I guess I don't hate them.

LEE
(pumped)
Unh! That's what I like to *hear*!

BILL
Now wait, I didn't say-

LEE
Finally, a hit! Uh, let's talk fun stuff, huh Bill? Listen, I got a check on my desk from the company-

BILL
No, I don't wanna do that now-

LEE
Now bear in mind that a calendar isn't gonna bring in the big bucks like the other deals, but I think you'll find this a very respectable offer. And it's a start, thank god.

BILL
Lee-

LEE
Guess how much they're offering.

BILL
I'm not gonna guess.

LEE
Guess. Guess how much. Guess Bill-

BILL
Lee, I'm sorry. But I think I'm gonna have to cut our call a little short. I know I agreed to do this-

Lee quickly picks up the phone, listens.

BILL
-but I'm just tired right now, and I still have a lot of work to do.

He spins around, his back to John and Melvin.

LEE
What are you talking about?

BILL
You're being too pushy again. Now I *may* be willing to agree on this calendar. But all that stuff is going to have to wait at least until after the quarter is over.

Lee smiles back at John and Melvin...

LEE
Bill, are you kidding me-

BILL
I'm gonna hang up now. Please tell the others I apologize-

LEE
No wait, hang on-

BILL
And I'd appreciate it if just in general, we started talking a little less from now on.

CLICK, DIAL TONE...

Lee hangs up, turns and faces his guests...

LEE
I'm very sorry. Bill has the flu.

BACK IN THE KITCHEN

Bill stands there, scratching his head.

MELISSA
What happened?

BILL
Hm? Oh, nothing.

Bill *unplugs the phone cord*. Then heads out in a daze.

MELISSA
Have breakfast with me.

BILL
Uh, no. Thank you.

Melissa watches him leave, then sighs and grabs some saran wrap and wraps up Bill's HOT BREAKFAST PLATE --

EXT. BILL'S DESERT HOUSE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

INT. BILL'S STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

BILL stares blankly and dumbly at something... THE WALL.

LATER

He lies flat on his back, mechanically slinging PENCILS --

-- INTO THE CEILING, where they *THWICK* and stay in place...

BILL
What to do... what to do...

While ON THE WINDOWSILL animated CALVIN and HOBBES now sit slumped forward, cheeks in their hands, looking bored...

LATER

We see QUICK CUTS of BILL as he paces fast back and forth, MUTTERING things, clearly stressed. He sits and draws. He erases, starts over. Gets back up. He paces. Sits and draws. CRUMPLES. Gets back up. Paces. Draws. CRUMPLES. Gets up --

BILL
Come on, Bill. You suck. You suck
Bill, come on. Come on. Come on...

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

A PAINTBRUSH is now at work...

MELISSA is in her smock, working on the OLD MAN ON A BENCH FEEDING PIGEONS again. It's in a different style and medium, but it appears Melissa can't seem to leave this idea behind: the old man painting is like a *puzzle* she can't solve...

Melissa stops, shakes her head. She DABS a little more paint, as we see a NEW ART STAND and SUPPLIES she purchased for Bill, resting against a wall, still untouched...

Melissa sighs, clucks her tongue, keeps working...

INT. BILL'S STUDIO - LATER

TICK, TOCK, TICK, TOCK...

The SNOOPY CLOCK shows the time: 3 PM.

BILL is back at his desk, his BLOODSHOT EYES staring at...

...a BLANK DRAWING SHEET.

BILL
C'monnnn... C'monnnn...

Still, a BLANK DRAWING SHEET.

Bill checks the WINDOWSILL... where there is *no one* now.

BILL
Please... Pleeeeease...

Still, a BLANK WHITE SHEET.

Finally, Bill sits back, and is quiet for a long moment.

Then --

He YANKS the sheet out from its clip, TEARS IT IN HALF! TEARS AGAIN, and AGAIN, and AGAIN, and then Bill crumples it all up and throws a big paper ball across the room...

BILL
Dammit! Dammit!

He grabs the OTHER DRAWINGS off the floor, RIPS them up as well, but soon they're too many and too thick and Bill --

SLICES his finger, giving himself a NASTY PAPER CUT --

BILL
Ow!

Bill looks at his BLEEDING FINGER. He stuffs it in his mouth and sucks, then Bill KICKS HIS DESK, *STUBBING HIS TOE* --

BILL
Ow, dammit! Ow! Dammit, goddammit-

MELISSA (O.S.)
Bill.

BILL
What!

Melissa is standing by his open door. Bill paces and fumes.

MELISSA
I'm going for a walk. And I want you to come with me.

BILL
No.

MELISSA
Bill, you can't stay in here, it's making you miserable. If you don't wanna go outside, do something else, anything else. Why don't you come out here and paint with me-

BILL
CAUSE I DON'T WANNA PAINT WITH YOU!

Melissa's body *shakes,* and Bill is instantly remorseful --

BILL
Oh god, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to yell-

MELISSA
It's fine.

BILL
I'm just stuck is all-

Melissa backs out, closes the door, and is gone.

Bill sags as he stands there. Sucks on his finger...

EXT. BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Melissa steps onto the back patio in a light jacket, slides the door shut. She takes a breath, looking out at

A VAST DESERT before her. *Acres of undeveloped dirt and a mountain range*, where there would normally be a backyard.

Their new home is, without a doubt**: isolated.**

Melissa wipes a tear. The door behind her OPENS, SHUTS...

It's BILL coming out. An apologetic look on his face.

LATER

They walk side by side. It's getting dark out.

MELISSA
Know what I was thinking?

BILL
What's that?

MELISSA
I was just thinking... why do we drink cow's milk?

BILL
This is what's on your mind?

MELISSA
I mean, who was the first guy who looked at a cow and thought, "I'm gonna drink whatever comes out of those things when I squeeze 'em"?

BILL
A very adventurous man.

They continue in silence.

MELISSA
... I'm lonely.

Bill slows.

BILL
What?

Melissa stops, turns around...

MELISSA
I've been kind of lonely here.

BILL
What are you talking about?

MELISSA
Well it's not so much that it's *here*. Although it is the desert Bill, there's *nothing* in this place. But you've been working so much, and I'm not saying I need attention or whatever, but... you know, we were having so much *fun*. The first couple years of this, whatever this is, have been great, Bill. Unexpectedly, impossibly, weirdly great. And I mean that in the best way. But lately... lately, I've been feeling like a ghost.

Bill is genuinely surprised...

MELISSA
You're in that room all day, it's like you can't even help yourself. It's becoming very *annoying*.

BILL
I'm sorry. That changes right now.

He comes close and hugs Melissa.

BILL
Anything else?

MELISSA
Yeah.

They part.

MELISSA
Tell me you love me.

Bill laughs. But sees Melissa is clearly not joking...

BILL
I love you.

MELISSA
You love me more than comic strips.

BILL
(taken aback)
I love you more than comic strips.

MELISSA
Tonight is TV night only.

BILL
Sure, of course. No more work.

Melissa studies Bill's eyes, then once satisfied she carries on and after a moment takes Bill's BAND-AID treated HAND...

BILL
... I'm so sorry for yelling.

MELISSA
Thank you. So how stuck are you?

BILL
I am as stuck as I've ever been.

MELISSA
Thought that's why we moved here.

BILL
Huh. Me too.

LATER, RETURNING TO THE HOUSE

Melissa gasps, spotting something.

MELISSA
Bill, look.

She comes over, squats beside...

A small RACCOON. Just lying filthy and still in the dirt.

MELISSA
It's a raccoon.

BILL
Don't touch that.

MELISSA
Oh, he's hurt. Oh, we should help him, Bill. Let's bring him inside.

BILL
He's a wild animal.

MELISSA
But we gotta do *something*... aww... don't die, little raccoon...

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The TV PLAYS quietly.

They're on the couch, Melissa sleeping on Bill's shoulder...

Bill is still wide awake though. He's staring...

OUTSIDE, THROUGH THE SLIDING GLASS DOOR

where a SHOEBOX with a soft blanket inside sits on the patio. Presumably the little raccoon is sleeping inside.

Bill *bites his nails*, staring at that box. Something on his mind. He looks over at Melissa, thinks for a moment then...

BILL'S STUDIO

Sits down at his desk. Stares off. And then, very simply

-- Slides off a NEW DRAWING SHEET.

-- CLIPS it in.

-- SHARPENS a pencil.

-- BLOWS on it.

And Bill starts to DRAW...

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Melissa wakes. Inhales, stretches, sits up. Looks around.

MELISSA
Bill?

She slides off the couch, goes over to the sliding glass door, looks at the SHOEBOX. TAPS on the window sadly...

HALLWAY

And is trudging sleepily to their bedroom when she hears --

BILL (O.S.)
(whisper)
Yes!

Melissa stops.

BILL (O.S.)
Yes. Yes. Haha.

She looks back at the LIGHT coming from Bill's studio...

BILL (O.S.)
This is very good...

BILL'S STUDIO

Back with BILL as he works, now *DRAWING fervently*, his PENCIL unable to keep up with his rapid-firing brain...

BILL
(as he writes)
"Don't die... wouldn't be grateful... break my heart..."

THROUGH THE CRACK IN HIS DOOR

we see MELISSA, PEERING IN, a *hardened look on her face*...

As Bill hops up, paces back and forth and ACTS OUT A SAD SCENE where Calvin's dad brings Calvin some awful news...

BILL
"Dad, did you check on the raccoon?
Yes, Calvin. I'm afraid he died..."

Bill gleefully sits down and DRAWS, and we gently MOVE IN on the FIRST PANEL of a NEW STRIP next to Bill, which starts off with CALVIN *spotting a little raccoon on the ground*...

Then BLACKNESS closes around the first panel, and it becomes just the panel on a BLACK SCREEN, then the panel transforms into its finished ink product, and we slowly SHUFFLE THROUGH EACH PANEL of the famous *CALVIN & HOBBES RACCOON STORY*, faster, *faster*, *faster*, like a flip-book until we finally --

CUT TO:

INT. LECTURE HALL - WEXNER CENTER, 1991 - DAY

A HAND DOUBLE TAPS a MICROPHONE --

An elderly female COORDINATOR (60s) leans in, talks --

COORDINATOR
Is this on?

A SEA of STUDENTS, FANS, and CARTOONISTS are seated in the auditorium before her.

COORDINATOR
Okay. Our guest speaker this year is a man whom, while we may know little about his persona, we still love and cherish very much in our world of comic strips, whether it's due to his inspiring artwork, or brilliant imagination, or his ability to touch us on a deeper level, like with his beloved story about a little boy who learns about death after caring for an injured animal. These are just some of the many ways in which our speaker has proven himself to be a breath of light in our industry these last five years, and I hope he will continue to do so for many to come. I give you now the man of the afternoon, a genius of this generation: Mr. Bill Watterson!

BILL (OLDER) takes the stage as the AUDIENCE CLAPS...

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

Bill stands at the podium, the APPLAUSE still going...

BILL
(waits for it to die)
Thank you.

He FLATTENS his SPEECH out before him...

BILL
I received a letter from a ten year old fan of mine. He wrote, "Mr. Watterson, I've been reading Calvin & Hobbes for a long time and I'd like to know a few things. Do you like my drawing of Calvin and Hobbes? Are you married? Have you ever been convicted of a felony?"

LAUGHTER sounds throughout the auditorium.

BILL
Now, what interested me about the last question was there were a couple of assumptions going on. First, in order to be convicted I would've already been arrested for something, and second, that something would have been a felony and not a minor crime. I've often thought some cartoonists were in need of judgment for poor work, but this is quite different.

As the laughter dies,

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

Bill sees them. He and Lee make eye contact. Then, Bill continues...

BILL
And now, for a bit of truthfulness. I've entitled this speech... "*The Cheapening of the Comic Strips*".

CONFUSION falls on some in the CROWD. JIM DAVIS shakes his head discretely. GARRY TRUDEAU sips from his mystery glass.

And LEE just glares at BILL,

Who CLEARS his throat, and SMOOTHS out his page...

LEE (O.S., PRELAP)
Bill, I don't know how you did it.

INT. BILL'S STUDIO - NEW MEXICO, 1988 (FALL) - DAY

CLOSE ON: A MARKER, carefully COLORING IN a SMALL CALVIN, as we hear RAIN FALLING on the roof above...

LEE (O.S.)
Last we talked I was worried you might not have any material, now I've got enough Calvin & Hobbes strips to last me through spring.

BILL sits cross-legged as he works, surrounded by NEW CALVIN STRIPS ALL OVER THE FLOOR, a massive art collage encircling his tiny campout in the middle of the room. Accompanying the rain is a cold grey sky seen outside through Bill's window.

LEE (O.S.)
And they're all brilliant, this raccoon story, buddy... I'm a genuine fan, I hope you know that.

BILL
Thank you.

Bill sets aside a just-finished, glorious multi-panel SUNDAY STRIP, showcasing twenty different FUN THINGS Calvin and Hobbes do in a typical summer: catching fireflies, swimming, climbing trees, etc. Not only that, but the IMAGE in each PANEL is *moving in real-time*, and we can hear the faint SOUNDS of summer too: LAUGHING, SPLASHING, CRICKETS, etc...

Bill now looks down at a NEW BLANK SHEET with pride...

BILL
Sometimes, a little kick is all you need...

Which has LITTLE CALVIN & HOBBES standing in the center of the page. *Just like the pair from the first drawing scene.*

VOICE (O.S.)
(distant)
Dinner's ready...

Bill winks at little Calvin and Hobbes, goes to work...

INTERCUT WITH LEE'S OFFICE IN NEW YORK

Lee is in his NEW, BIGGER OFFICE overlooking New York. It's dark on the east coast, but Lee is still downtown, eating a TV DINNER, looking over BILL'S NEWEST SUBMISSIONS...

LEE
Well, thank god for little kicks.

Lee smirks over a satirical FOUR PANEL of Calvin sacrificing his brain (a bowl of pudding) to his family's television...

Then he sets the strips aside, gets out some PAPERS and an ENVELOPE to mail them in.

LEE
Bill, tomorrow I am going to send you something. Now that the calendar stuff is all squared away, I've got some new ideas for our next project. Take a look at these, get back to me as soon as possible.

Bill stops drawing. He looks at the CORDLESS PHONE nearby on the floor, which is how he's been listening to the call...

BILL
I don't understand.

Lee tosses the now sealed package into his outgoing bin.

LEE
I gotta say, now that you've seen the light I could not be any more excited. This is the beginning of something great, I can just feel it Bill. Hey what did you think about those greeting cards by the way? Cause I was just kinda picturing-

Bill stands --

BILL
Lee, this was a one time thing. I don't expect to be doing any more "projects" for a very long time.

LEE
... What do you mean?

BILL
I have not "seen the light". This calendar was the *end* of something, not the beginning. I mainly just

agreed to the calendar so you'd all stop *bothering* me, it's frustrating you can't seem to take that hint-

Lee SLAMS HIS TABLE --

LEE
DAMMIT, BILL!

Bill stops, stunned by Lee's sudden outburst...

LEE
You signed a contract. Remember that? "Universal Press owns rights to all content and characters created by the artist". We are doing you a *favor*, we have *never* had to ask your *permission* to license Calvin. We do it as a courtesy to our artists, it's just you're the first one to say no on such a continual goddamn basis.

BILL
Uhhh...

LEE
You want this to get ugly? I have no problem with that. You're not the only one who's been frustrated the past two years. The calendar was a *start*. A stepping stone. We deserve more, and I will push and bother you until we are paid our dues in full Bill, I don't care what high horse you wanna keep riding you pretentious dick.
(leans forward)
Oh, and by the way. If you ever embarrass me like that in front of a business partner, or in front of my boss, if you ever hang up on me again when I'm still talking, I will personally fly out to New Mexico and *smack you upside the head*. I'm sending these deals. And you're gonna start saying "yes".

For a moment, it's nothing but the RAIN and BREATHING...

BILL
Are you finished?

LEE
Yeah, I'm finished.

BILL
You have my address?

LEE
What?

BILL
Do you have my address.

LEE
Yes, Bill, I have your address-

BILL
Good, have a nice flight here-

CLICK, *Bill hangs up*, then a DIAL TONE rings in Lee's ear...

Lee glares at his phone. Nostrils flaring. Then -- he SLAMS the phone back in its set! SLAM, SLAM, SLAM! Leaves it now.

Lee paces, spots his CALVIN MUG on his desk. He grabs that, SLAMS it on his desk, SLAMS again: *SHATTERING IT TO PIECES!*

And then he stands there with a mug handle in his fingers...

IN BILL'S KITCHEN

Bill grabs JUNK FOOD and a SODA from the pantry.

BILL
(grumbling)
"Pretentious", who's he calling pretentious. That's ludicrous.

LIVING ROOM

He marches back through the living room with "dinner"...

...as CLASSICAL MUSIC is heard under the RAIN...

BILL
I'll smack him upside the head...

Bill BUMPS his SHIN against a BOX. He looks down, at

The CALVIN & HOBBES CALENDARS, staring up at him.

Bill angrily KICKS the box, *his foot goes through the side*, and when he tries to pull it back out he falls awkwardly on his back, spilling the calendars onto the floor.

BILL
Dammit!

BILL' STUDIO

Bill TIPTOES around his FLOOR OF MANY DRAWINGS, sits back down in the center of the studio, TEARS into his snacks...

BILL (V.O.)
Lee Salem is a bully. A jerk. Why can't all the jerks die out?

A pencil falls from above and Bill flicks it aside, along with his new barely started four panel strip (which causes little Calvin and Hobbes to slide off the page), then Bill grabs a NEW BLANK SHEET and starts on something else...

BILL
Yes... in my opinion, we don't devote nearly enough research into finding a cure... for *jerks*...

SPRITE appears, creeping over Bill's floor of drawings. Bill gets up, "shoos" her back outside....

BILL
Go. Get outta here, go.

Then he SLAMS his door closed...

AND OUT IN THE HALLWAY

...we still hear him...

BILL (O.S.)
We'll see who "wins". Bill Watterson does not compromise...

Then, we PULL BACK from Bill's door...

...into the LIVING ROOM, where SPRITE is licking her paw...

...and then we PULL EVEN FURTHER BACK...

to find

MELISSA, alone at the table. Eating her dinner quietly.

MELISSA
Bill. Do you want some dinner?

BILL (O.S.)
What?

MELISSA
I said, "do you want some"-

Bill's DOOR OPENS. He comes out, and we and Melissa think he might be sitting at the table. But instead, he goes for the record player, and *turns down Melissa's classical music*...

Then kisses Melissa's head on his way back to his room.

BILL
Smells good. I'll be done soon.

The door SHUTS again, and Melissa is quiet and still for a long moment. Then, she picks up her fork and keeps eating...

BILL (O.S.)
Few minutes, that's all...

And then, channeling a bit of Welles, we PULL BACK *even further*, THROUGH THE SLIDING GLASS DOOR, until we settle outside in the backyard, looking INTO THE LIVING ROOM...

BRIEF MONTAGE - BILL AND MELISSA: 1988-1990 (POV BACKYARD)

Now, in a series of SLOW DISSOLVES, we see seasons pass before our eyes. First, the RAIN turns into LIGHT SNOW...

DISSOLVE TO WINTER

and MELISSA is still at the dinner table, eating alone...

DISSOLVE TO SPRING

and the SUN COMES out, BIRDS CHIRP and

MELISSA now paints by herself, CLASSICAL MUSIC playing softer, as we hear the PHONE RINGING in Bill's room...

DISSOLVE TO SUMMER

and it's HOT and DRY again, and

MELISSA is at the table again, eating her lunch alone. An OPENED BOX is on the couch containing Calvin & Hobbes PENCILS, Calvin & Hobbes NOTEBOOKS, PENCIL BOXES, RULERS...

BILL (O.S.)
I don't care if they're school supplies or vitamins, the principle is the same! No, Lee. No. You don't need cartoons to sell a pencil!

Melissa gets up, *marches for Bill's studio with purpose*...

BILL (O.S.)
Yeah well... go soak your head!

DISSOLVE TO AUTUMN

and then it's dreary again, and

BILL and MELISSA have dinner together. Bill is eating fast, his mind somewhere else. Melissa looks quietly humiliated...

DISSOLVE TO WINTER

and the SNOW has returned, and

MELISSA is back to alone again, reading a book at the table.

BILL (O.S.)
No, I would not like to do a cartoon show. Because I hate them! Lee, I have to get back to work. What do you mean? What "bootlegs"?

DISSOLVE TO SPRING

and the SUN COMES OUT, BIRDS CHIRP and

MELISSA is still at the table: now *staring emptily into space*. Not even noticing her CATS, pawing at her feet...

...as we hear BILL CHUCKLING as he draws in his studio...

DISSOLVE TO SUMMER

and it's HOT again, and

MELISSA is now *putting her art supplies into a box*. She sniffs and wipes her eyes, taking down her art stand...

SUPER: *1990*

END MONTAGE and CUT TO --

EXT. HIGHWAY - NEW MEXICO, 1990 - MORNING

WHEELS CYCLING...

belonging to BILL. Helmet strapped, spandex tight on his body. Bill breathes deep, enjoying the air and isolation...

WIDE SHOT

of the vast and breathtaking NEW MEXICAN DESERT. A HIGHWAY cutting through the middle. Bill comes riding up along it...

He looks right, spots...

Animated CALVIN and HOBBES exploring the red rocky terrain in the distance. A LITTLE GREEN ALIEN pops out from behind a boulder and SHRIEKS. Calvin and Hobbes SHRIEK, the alien SHRIEKS again, and all three run away from each other.

Bill smiles, and has barely turned back to the road when --

A GROUP OF CARTOON SCHOOL CHILDREN RACE across the highway before Bill -- SCREAMING their heads off, escaping from --

A GIANT CARTOON T. REX! whose CLAWED FEET STOMP after the kids. Bill *swerves* to avoid the dinosaur, then looks back to see another CALVIN and HOBBES *on top of the REX's ROARING HEAD*, steering the beast, Calvin laughing maniacally...

Bill grins and rides on, and as we SLOWLY PULL BACK we see his whole world is now *consumed by animated Calvin & Hobbes characters*: A STUPENDOUS MAN flies up fast alongside Bill, disappears on the horizon. A SPACEMAN SPIFF BLASTS OFF in a ship in the distance. A Calvin and Hobbes play with a MAGIC CARDBOARD BOX which can turn them into any animal creature imaginable. Dozens of other recognizable cartoon images parade about, *filling the desert with Calvin & Hobbes*...

EXT. BILL'S DESERT HOUSE - LATER

Bill comes coasting back to his Albuquerque home. He gracefully hops off, pushes his bike UP THE DRIVEWAY...

...not noticing that Melissa's old ORANGE VW BEETLE is packed full of all her things...

INT. FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

Then Bill comes inside, sucking water from a bottle.

BILL
Melissa? I'm back.

He flaps his shirt and walks through, not seeing the FIGURE standing in the living room either...

BILL'S STUDIO

Bill hits PLAY on an ANSWERING MACHINE now installed on his desk, sits and UNLACES HIS SHOES...

LEE (O.S.)
(voicemail playing)
Hey what's up, Bill. Listen, I was

wondering if you're gonna be home today. I've got quite a surprise for you, and I wanna make sure-

Bill throws his shoes in a corner, HITS DELETE: BEEEEP! --

MACHINE
Message erased.

He grabs a POST-IT NOTE, JOTS SOMETHING DOWN...

BILL
Wanna surprise me, stop calling...

As we get a look around Bill's studio and see that it's now more like BILL'S SECOND HOME, like it was at start of the film. The room is full of drawings, notes, shelves, papers, boxes, etc. There's even a SMALL FRIDGE in a corner...

Bill sticks his NOTE on the wall, next to dozens of other ones with CALVIN & HOBBES IDEAS. His new one just says...

"*LITTLE GREEN ALIENS... 'WEIRDOS'?*"

LIVING ROOM

Bill comes back through, heading for the kitchen, now topless and wiping his face down with his damp shirt --

MELISSA (O.S.)
Bill.

He stops...

And finally sees MELISSA in the middle of the living room.

BILL
Hey. What's going on, Miss Saigon?

MEOW.

Bill looks down, sees

A THREE STORY TRAVEL PET CAGE, with SPRITE, PUMPERNICKEL, and JUNIPER BOOTS all laying safe and sluggish inside...

BILL
(smirks)
When'd we get that?

MELISSA
... I'm leaving you.

BILL
... What?

We see more clearly now that Melissa has been crying.

MELISSA
I'm going home. I'm gonna stay with my parents until I can find a place to live. Then I'm gonna try and get my old job back at the bookshop.

BILL
... What?

MELISSA
I can't live here anymore. I can't be your wife.

Bill's face falls.

MELISSA
I love you, Bill. So much. It has taken me this long to realize... you don't love me back.

BILL
Of course I do, what's going on-

MELISSA
No, I don't wanna argue-

BILL
Is this about work? I know, I've been overdoing it again. But I swear Melissa, once this quarter is done things are gonna change-

MELISSA
<u>Nothing</u> will change, Bill! <u>You</u> will not change. And that's okay, I'm not blaming you. It's my fault. You told me, plain as day, and I've known it since we were six years old. You have one dream in life, and that's to draw. Drawing is your passion. And that's fine. It's one of the things I love about you. But the thing about passions is, you get so much of it for one thing, there's none left for anyone else. And I deserve for you to be passionate about me. I deserve for you to fight for me, the way you-

BILL
I am passionate about you, of course I'm passionate-

MELISSA
No, I don't wanna argue. Like I said, it's my fault. Not yours.

DING-DONG: *doorbell*.

BILL
Melissa, I-

MELISSA
You have no idea what it's like to be second to a comic strip, Bill. Calvin and Hobbes are cartoons, and I am real, and you can't even tell the difference. You want honesty?

BILL
I know the-

MELISSA
We are always going to be friends. You are one of my *best* friends... You're just not a good husband.

Bill is completely speechless...

DING-DONG.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

LEE (O.S.)
Bill! You in there, buddy?

BILL
Who is it!

LEE (O.S.)
It's Lee, man. Surpriiiise!

Bill squints at the front door. He starts after it, then halfway there looks back over his shoulder and sees that

MELISSA is heading for the back sliding glass door...

BILL
No, Melissa. Wait. No no no.

Then she slips outside, and SLIDES THE GLASS DOOR SHUT.

BILL
Hang on.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Bill hustles after Melissa, who's still lugging her cage.

BILL
Melissa, stop. Don't go.

SIDE OF THE HOUSE

Bill is right behind her.

BILL
I love you. I love you, I mean it-

MELISSA
You don't love me, Bill. You just like having me around.

Bill reaches for her cage --

BILL
I said, *hang on*-

MELISSA
GET OFF OF ME!

Melissa turns, STOMPS ON BILL'S BARE FOOT!

BILL
Ow!

MELISSA
GET OFF!

She STOMPS ON HIS OTHER FOOT!

MELISSA
Go away, you jerk!

BILL
Ow! Dammit!

Bill falls on the ground, clutching his toes.

FRONT YARD

LEE and a good-looking BUSINESSMAN (30s) carrying a BOX step off the front porch to see

MELISSA, storming their way with a cage full of kitties.

LEE
Melissa? Everything alright?

She brushes past them as

BILL comes into the front yard now, limping after her...

LEE
Bill, what's going on man?

BILL
Move.

Bill BUMPS shoulders with Lee as Melissa, now in her VW BEETLE with her cats in the passenger seat, FIRES UP, REVVS her engine, throwing it into gear while GLARING AT BILL...

BILL
Please, don't do this, Melissa-

BUSINESSMAN
Lee, I don't think she sees your-

Melissa REVERSES full-blown back down the driveway -- *CRASHING into LEE'S RENTAL CAR!*

LEE
Hey! What the hell, man?!

She pulls forward, revealing the rental's CRUSHED FRONT BUMPER, then Melissa BACKS INTO THEIR YARD, narrowly missing the three shocked men who have to duck out of her way --

Melissa throws it in drive, pulls onto the street, SCRAPING her UNDERCARRIAGE on the curb...

Drives away, her exhaust pipe BACKFIRING once...

And then she is gone. Leaving everyone in utter silence.

The THREE MEN just stand there dumbly in the yard, until...

LEE
What was that? Did you see what she did? *That crazy bitch*...

Bill walks right over to Lee, and *SOCKS HIM IN THE FACE!* --

BILL
This is my HOUSE!

Bill storms off back inside, SLAPPING the businessman's BOX which drops to the ground and spills, out onto the grass...

Dozens of adorable PLUSH TOY CALVIN DOLLS and HOBBES DOLLS.

INT. LECTURE HALL - WEXNER CENTER, 1991 - DAY

BILL (OLDER) takes a sip of water, finishes his speech...

BILL
Newspapers, you can do better.
Syndicates, you can do better.
Cartoonists, you can do better.
Stop compromising. Stop selling
out. By wanting nothing else but
profit, profit, and more profit,
you are hurting comic strips.

The AUDIENCE ranges from still-confused to *resentment*...

BILL
By continuing to pursue mass
marketability, efficiency, and
business interests year after year,
without shame, you are cheapening
our beloved art form. You insult
what we do and the thing I love
most. I will not apologize for
taking this stand. I will not stop
until this battle has been won.
(beat)
Thank you.

Bill steps down, as the audience CLAPS awkwardly...

He returns to his seat, looks back and sees

LEE and JOHN slipping out, neither of them smiling.

And Bill faces forward.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

The door SHUTS and Bill comes trudging in. He PLOPS dead onto his bed, stares up at the ceiling for a long moment...

LATER

He makes a call...

BILL
Hi, I'd like to reserve a taxi...
Tomorrow morning. Seven thirty.

BATHROOM - LATER

-- Bill takes a HOT SHOWER...

-- And SHAVES...

-- And TRIMS his MUSTACHE...

He finishes, RINSES his face, then gives himself a good hard look in the mirror...

Lee's ultimatum is weighing on Bill of course, but we feel now like maybe there's more to it than just the *licensing*...

SUPER: *2 DAYS REMAINING*

Bill storms out of the bathroom, SLAMS THE DOOR, *HARD* --

INT. BILL'S DESERT HOUSE - NEW MEXICO, 1990 - DAY (FALL)

And we're in an EMPTY, QUIET HOUSE. Which we MOVE THROUGH slowly, noticing the CALVIN AND HOBBES DOLLS in a TRASH BAG, and then the silence is soon broken by a call coming in...

(The COLORS and TONES of the flashback timeline are now also DULL, and will stay that way until otherwise noted)

RIIIIING. *THWICK.*

RIIIIING. *THWICK.*

RIIIIING. *THWICK.*

IN BILL'S STUDIO

His ANSWERING MACHINE finally *BEEEEEEPS* --

LEE (O.S.)
(voice message)
Hey. It's Lee. Listen... don't worry about it. I took care of the car stuff. It was wrong of me to show up uninvited like that, so... I am sorry. Hope you're working things out with your wife.

We find BILL (YOUNGER) on his back, staring at the CEILING, *SLINGING PENCILS* into it again... *THWICK... THWICK...*

LEE (O.S.)
You know what, why don't you come up to New York when you get a chance? I won't lie, John may ask me to pitch a deal or two... but we need to have a talk anyways.

Bill stops, turns his head on its side, and *looks out*

INTO THE LIVING ROOM

Where some UNFINISHED PAINTINGS Melissa has left are against the wall, including...

Yet another version of Melissa's OLD MAN FEEDING PIGEONS.

LEE (O.S.)
Okay. Call me back, Bill. Bye.

Then the CEILING PENCILS *all fall from above*, PLINKING Bill in the eyes and face --

BILL
Augh, dammit!

KITCHEN - LATER

Bill paces, talking to Melissa on the phone.

BILL
What do you want me to do? Tell me what to do, and I'll do it.

MELISSA (O.S.)
Bill, it's not that simple.

BILL
You want me to give up drawing? Is that what you want?

INTERCUT WITH MELISSA'S PARENT'S HOUSE

where MELISSA is on the phone in her parent's living room.

MELISSA
No, of course not. I would never ask you to give up drawing.

BILL
Because I will. I'll do it, if that's what it takes.

MELISSA
(smiles)
Bill... do you really know what you're saying?

Bill stops, thinks.

BILL
If I give up drawing. Say I give up

Calvin. Would you believe me then?

A sadness comes over Melissa, as she thinks about how she *knows* Bill could never do that...

MELISSA
I don't know. Bill, I'm sorry. I have to go now-

BILL
When you are coming back?

MELISSA
I'm not.

THAT NIGHT

Bill wanders back in, hungry. Checks the FRIDGE. SHUTS it.

Searches the PANTRIES, comes upon a stack of CANNED TUNAS...

Bill smirks: it's *Hobbes' favorite food...*

LIVING ROOM

Bill sits down with his tuna dinner. Gets out a NEWSPAPER, heads straight for the COMIC STRIP SECTION. And then starts on a nice, peaceful meal... *enjoying some isolation...*

And the CAN OF TUNA SLOWLY DISSOLVES INTO...

INT. LIVING ROOM - 1991 - MORNING

Another CAN OF TUNA, but this one is EMPTY and laying next to a PLANE TICKET on the table: *round-trip to New York...*

...BILL (OLDER) stares down at the ticket. All dressed, ready to go.

SUPER: *0 DAYS REMAINING*

Bill's hand is absently *feeling something in the pocket of his BEIGE JACKET*. He realizes this, curiously pulls out...

THE NAPKIN from the opening scene, from the plane ride. And now, we finally see what Bill was working on then...

It was a CARTOON DRAWING of the *old Polaroid* from Melissa Bill found in his drawer the night she picked him up. There's the two six-year olds: BILL with his big glasses, and MELISSA with her arm around his shoulder. But here, they've been drawn by Bill like *comic strip characters*...

Bill looks at LITTLE MELISSA. He takes a deep breath. And then, when he's finally ready, Bill trades the NAPKIN DRAWING for the PLANE TICKET, SCOOTS OUT his chair and --

INT. UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE - NYC - DAY

Walks briskly through the BACK OFFICES at Universal Press...

LEE is a few yards ahead of Bill, leading him...

LEE
That was some speech.

BILL
Thanks.

LEE
You're a real charmer, Bill.

INT. LEE'S OFFICE - LATER

A BACK is turned to us once again in front of Lee's desk...

ARNOLD ARNDT
This... this... ohhhhhkay.

ARNOLD ARNDT, Kenyon Clothing rep, steps aside, revealing...

THREE *NEW, OFFICIAL* CALVIN & HOBBES SHIRTS.

ARNOLD ARNDT
Mr. Watterson, I present to you... Kenyon Clothing's three original Calvin & Hobbes t-shirt designs.

BILL, in his same spot, eyes the shirts, which truthfully don't look all that different from the earlier bootlegs.

ARNOLD ARNDT
Better, right? Can't beat quality, Mr. Watterson. You of all people should be able to appreciate that.

LEE and JOHN MCMEEL watch Bill closely.

ARNOLD ARNDT
Ring-spun cotton. Very soft.

BILL
I see.

Arnold clears his throat nervously. He looks at Lee, then

digs out a BLACK LEATHER FOLDER from his bag.

He opens the folder, revealing a CONTRACT clipped inside. Hands it to Lee. Lee signs at the bottom. Then hands it to JOHN MCMEEL, in a chair beside him. John signs too.

Arnold takes the folder back, swallows.

Now, holding it out to Bill...

ARNOLD ARNDT
Mr. Watterson, this is a licensing agreement between you, Kenyon, and Universal Press Syndicate. It gives us permission to manufacture and sell variations of these three shirts with the allowance for more in the future once approved.

Bill is brushing his mustache, gazing at the floor...

ARNOLD ARNDT
It's fairly standard. If you'd like to look it over-

JOHN MCMEEL
He doesn't need to look it over. We've done this before... once.
(to Bill)
What are you waiting for, huh? Sign the damn thing.

Bill still brushes his stache, staring down...

LEE
John, come on.

JOHN MCMEEL
What? You know how long we've been waiting for something like this? You know how much money we've lost just sitting here, twiddling our thumbs while you went on with your garbage, "oh, but it just doesn't *feel* right"? When we all could have been *millionaires* instead?

LEE
Just let him think-

JOHN MCMEEL
He's had five years to think!

LEE
Why don't you step out for a bit-

JOHN MCMEEL
Why don't you shut your mouth-

Bill finally looks up --

BILL
I need a pen.

Lee and John stop cold.

BILL
I'll sign. Gimme a pen.

Arnold searches his pockets, produces one. Hands it to Bill along with the folder and contract. Bill looks it over...

BILL
Here?

Arnold nods. Bill SIGNS, as Lee and John stare, shocked...

BILL
Do the shirts. Do the dolls. The greeting cards, the mugs. Do whatever the hell you want.

He hands back the contract: signed by "*BILL WATTERSON*".

BILL
I don't care anymore.

John snatches the folder, verifies it...

As Bill stands, and puts on his coat --

BILL
I quit.

With that, Bill heads out. *John immediately looks up*, his EYES SAUCERS. Then over at Lee, whose jaw has dropped too.

INT. BACK OFFICES - MOMENTS LATER

Bill is walking away when Lee comes out.

LEE
Bill, wait. Hang on, Bill.

He stops.

LEE
What are you doing?

BILL
I'm leaving Calvin & Hobbes. You can get that ghost artist now.

LEE
You can't quit.

BILL
Stop telling me what to do, Lee.

Bill turns, goes again...

LEE
It was a bluff.

Then stops again, but this time keeps his back to Lee.

LEE
It was a bluff, Bill. We were never gonna fire you. No one else can draw like you, we can't hire a ghost. Don't quit man. We need you.

Bill glances back, thinking. And then, *keeps on walking*...

LEE
Why are you doing this?

BILL
Because I have to.

INT. TAXI - DAY

Bill gets into a cab just outside the building.

BILL
Airport, please.

TAXI DRIVER (O.S.)
Which one?

BILL
JFK.

The taxi pulls out, merges with traffic, and DRIVES ON...

And then, for the second time we've seen: *as the noise of the city and everything else in the world quiets down*...

Bill stares out the window, and WEEPS.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. BOOKSHOP - CHAGRIN FALLS, OH (TWO WEEKS LATER) - DAY

A BOOKCART is SQUEAKED along...

MELISSA (OLDER) is UPSTAIRS, donning the Fireside apron once again, putting books on shelves, organizing the ones there.

This present-day Melissa has cut her hair short, and seems to have lost some of her "spark". But otherwise she looks the same, except for no longer wearing her wedding ring.

OWNER (O.S.)
(from downstairs)
Melissa? I'm going to lunch.

MELISSA
Okay.

OWNER (O.S.)
Lock up if you need to go anywhere.

MELISSA
Okay, Tom. Thank you.

She comes upon...

The COMIC STRIP BOOKS. Melissa stops, looks at them for a moment. Fingers the spines, all the way right, until she gets to the CALVIN & HOBBES BOOKS. There are ***NINE*** TITLES now. Melissa slides out the latest one, scans the cover:

"*REVENGE OF THE BABY-SAT!*"

Melissa flips through it, a familiar wondrous grin...

Then the DOOR CHIMES downstairs. As Melissa puts the book back, she notices something out of the corner of her eye...

A PURPLE FLOWER, at the TOP OF THE STAIR STEPS.

Strange.

Melissa cocks her head. Creeps slowly towards the flower...

And sees that it's a *LILAC*. Melissa peers further DOWN THE STAIRS...

Seeing that the steps are decorated with more LILAC PETALS.

Melissa looks around. Utterly baffled. Then, she tiptoes...

DOWNSTAIRS

And follows the TRAIL OF PETALS ACROSS THE FLOOR. Not realizing the shop has grown totally *empty* and *quiet*.

Melissa's face drops as she finally looks up...

THROUGH THE GLASS DOOR, LEADING OUT TO THE STREET

and sees

BILL, standing in the middle of the sidewalk, waiting for her. He is surrounded by *bouquets* and *bouquets* of these beautiful LILACS. A small CROWD has gathered behind him.

Melissa just scoffs. But finds herself continuing on...

EXT. BOOKSHOP - CONTINUOUS

She steps outside, shuts the door, and approaches Bill...

And for a moment, neither of them say anything.

MELISSA
What are you doing here?

BILL
I was in town. I figured I'd stop by, say hello.

MELISSA
Hello.

BILL
And I was wondering, well, if you're not too busy after work...

Bill steps aside, revealing...

A WHITE BOARD on an art stand, with a PENCIL DRAWING on it.

BILL
If you could teach me how to paint.

The drawing is a new version of Melissa's OLD MAN FEEDING BIRDS FROM A BENCH. *Except now*, an OLD WOMAN has joined the man, and they're feeding birds together. There's no color yet, it's basically just a black and white pencil outline.

A ribbon-pinned NOTE on the big board says, "TO MELISSA".

Melissa sighs.

BILL
I hope you don't mind. I think it's better this way.

She wipes a tear.

MELISSA
I think you're right. God, that ticks me off.

Bill comes close.

BILL
It was your hand.

MELISSA
What was?

BILL
It was your hand. That's how it happened. I grabbed it that night you picked me up by the road. Obviously we'd touched before that, but when I did it then, somehow, it was all new. I felt your kindness, your love, your spirit. Your strangeness. I think it's amazing how you can know a person for so long but then know them all over again and better in a single moment like that. It's how it happened for me, and I think it's how it happened for you. It was our hands.

Bill gets on his knees.

BILL
You are more important to me than any comic strip, or drawing, or any character I've ever made. I love you and I never want to lose you. You're my Susie, you're my Hobbes, you're my Calvin. You're my dream and my passion. You have always been everything to me, and I'm sorry it took me this long to realize it. I've been a terrible husband Melissa, but I swear if you come back to me now you will never be lonely or in second place again. Just please... come back to me.

Melissa is crying.

BILL
You're not just my friend. You're my best buddy in the wide world.

She sniffs, wipes her eyes.

MELISSA
Bill, this is all very lovely... but it's just not meant to be-

BILL
I quit the strip.

Melissa gawks.

BILL
I quit Calvin & Hobbes. I told Lee and them I'm never coming back.

MELISSA
Why would you do that??

BILL
I told you. I'd give up anything for my wife. It just took me a little longer than I thought.

Melissa is speechless. She tries to process it all...

BILL
Please... please-

She nods, *okay*, and then Bill gets up and she *pulls him in, KISSES HIM with passion*, as the TOWNS PEOPLE CLAP and smile.

Melissa parts with Bill, takes his hand --

MELISSA
Come on.

And leads him down the sidewalk...

BILL
What are you doing?

MELISSA
We're going.

BILL
Going? Going where?

MELISSA
We're gonna fix this.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

INT. LEE'S OFFICE - NYC - DAY

LEE is on the phone, listening to the other line RING as he paces...

LEE
C'monnnn... C'monnnn...

BILL (O.S.)
(voicemail)
Hello, this is Bill Watterson. If you would please leave a message --

LEE
Dammit!

Lee SLAMS the phone down, as there is a KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK --

LEE
Yes.

The door opens and the BLONDE RECEPTIONIST pops in --

BLONDE RECEPTIONIST
Mr. Salem? Mr. McMeel wants to talk to you.

LEE
Do I have any messages? From Bill?

BLONDE RECEPTIONIST
(searching notes)
Um, yes. Mr. Watterson called in regards to you calling him yesterday. And you calling him the day before that. And you calling the three days before that.

LEE
What'd he say?

BLONDE RECEPTIONIST
He said... "stop calling".

LEE
Thanks.

She starts to go --

LEE
Wait. How does John look?

BLONDE RECEPTIONIST
Mr. McMeel? He looks really angry.

Blonde Receptionist leaves. Lee stews, picks up his phone, hits REDIAL, and is waiting when there's another KNOCKING --

LEE
What?!

This time, BILL and MELISSA are standing in his doorway.

Lee just sags in relief --

LEE
Oh, thank god.

LATER

Bill and Melissa are gathered around Lee's desk. Lee is going over what appears to be a NEW CONTRACT for Bill...

LEE
Right here is where it says Bill will now be the sole owner of all Calvin & Hobbes content and characters. That means he doesn't have to license anything ever again if he does not wish to. We're also granting you a six month sabbatical Bill, if you will agree to return to Universal Press Syndicate...

Melissa has only been caught up halfway by Bill...

MELISSA
Wha... why? I thought you guys...

LEE
Yes, well, at the end of the day, it's too hard to predict what kind of effect Bill's leaving would have on Calvin's demand, and we'd rather have Bill here and forgo the big sales, than to not have him and maybe fizzle out if the strip went south. Not to mention Bill's fans who'd probably burn us down if they knew we'd tried to fire him.
(beat)
We really just have no cards here.

MELISSA
So, does this mean...

BILL
It means I don't have to worry about licensing again... and I probably never had to.

Lee offers Bill a PEN. Bill takes it, and looks at Melissa one last time: *<u>are you sure</u>?* But Melissa nods firmly, so:

Bill *SIGNS ON THE DOTTED LINE*...

LEE
Well... looks like you won Bill.

BILL
King of the Stubborn Old Men.

Bill hands the contract back, stands with Melissa...

BILL
(to Lee)
Thank you.

Lee barely nods, avoiding Bill's honest and direct look.

LEE
I still don't get you. But I guess that's why you're the artist, and I'm just the guy who reads.

And now, Lee looks up and they finally share a moment.

LEE
Oh, also.

Lee gets out a BLACK LEATHER FOLDER, slips out Arnold Arndt's LICENSING CONTRACT.

LEE
This is the contract you signed with Kenyon Clothing.

Lee holds the contract out to Bill...

LEE
Do whatever the hell you want.

Bill takes, looks over it. *Breathes a sigh of relief*. Then, with a small mischievous grin, he glances over at Melissa...

BILL
Ready?

MELISSA
For what?

BILL
Some long, and very overdue...

Bill holds the PIECE OF PAPER up...

BILL
Change...

And *TEARS IT DOWN THE MIDDLE, REVEALING* --

**(and we're about to move into COLORFUL and VIBRANT again)*

EXT. BILL'S LAST HOUSE - CHAGRIN FALLS, 1993 - DAY

A bright and sunny, BIRDS CHIRPING kind of day.

SUPER: *CHAGRIN FALLS, OH - 1993*

INT. A ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON: BILL'S FOCUSED EYES as he works, and CLASSICAL MUSIC plays nearby...

RANDOM SHOTS

of a NEW CALVIN & HOBBES STRIP being DRAWN. We zero in on Bill's PENCIL TIP. CALVIN'S SHIRT LINES. DIALOGUE. ERASE, BLOW, WIPE. Nothing alive, no magic here either now: just a steady evolution of a plain, black and white four panel.

MELISSA (O.S.)
Is it too loud?

BILL stops drawing, looks over his shoulder...

And now we see we're in the LIVING ROOM of Bill and Melissa's home of the past two years. It's a hybrid of their first and second one. An art studio, but with furnishings.

MELISSA is on the couch in her smock, taking a break from painting. Drinking coffee. Her THREE CATS climb about her.

BILL
It's not bad. Vivaldi, right?

Melissa raises an impressed eyebrow. She takes a sip from an OLD FADING CALVIN MUG as Bill grins and goes back to work...

RIIIIIINGGGGG!!!! -- an ALARM CLOCK on BILL'S DESK goes off: *4:30 P.M.* Bill slaps it quiet again, then routinely files away his papers, cleans his workspace, throws his pencil into a box next to an ART HISTORY NOVEL, SHUTS the box...

MOMENTS LATER

And then walks out with Melissa, now waiting in her regular clothes; and as they leave the living room they pass by and we reveal BILL'S PENCIL DRAWING OF THE OLD MAN AND WOMAN, now hanging on a wall and *PAINTED IN by Melissa and himself*.

We hear the front door OPEN and CLOSE --

EXT. PARK - CHAGRIN FALLS - DAY

And later, Bill and Melissa stroll side by side through a local park, eating from their own small bags of popcorn.

MELISSA
How's it coming?

BILL
Pretty good.

They're throwing kernels at each other as they talk.

MELISSA
Stuck at all?

BILL
Nope.

MELISSA
Too many ideas?

BILL
Nope, not too many. Just enough.

They walk in silence...

MELISSA
You know what I was thinking Bill? I was just thinking... you know you've been painting with me a lot more lately. You've been getting into music. You've been reading books, I mean real books finally-

BILL
I only read your books when I need help falling asleep.

Melissa slows as she says this...

MELISSA
And I'm not complaining. Believe me. But... I also don't want you to

get so much into other things that you lose interest in comic strips.

Bill stops, looks back.

BILL
What are you talking about?

MELISSA
I know you're still drawing, but sometimes I get the feeling it's not the same for you lately. That your heart's not in it as much.

Bill comes back to her.

MELISSA
And I don't want you to someday down the road walk away from Calvin all over again on my account. You gave up your dream once. You shouldn't have to do it again.

He stops before her.

BILL
How did you come to this?

MELISSA
I'm Susie. I'm a smart girl.

Bill tosses back small handfuls of popcorn, munches on them.

BILL
If, or when, but more like "if", I ever give up Calvin & Hobbes again. It'll be because it's *time* to give it up. It'll be because I have no more good stories to tell, and because my characters deserve better than to be churned out on autopilot for the next thirty years, unlike some shallow, Italian food grazing contemporaries of theirs, I won't name names.

MELISSA
So you've thought about it.

BILL
Thought about what?

MELISSA
The end of Calvin & Hobbes.

Retiring from comic strips.

BILL
What, come on. I'm a cartoonist. That's not something you quit.

Melissa looks skeptical. Bill throws a popcorn at her, she catches it in her mouth and chews as she stares him down...

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Melissa!

Then turns to see a pair of old GIRLFRIENDS calling her.

Melissa waves, GIRLFRIEND (30s) beckons her over. Melissa frowns at Bill, but he nods her on, *you should go say hi...*

So they kiss lovingly, and part, and Melissa walks away...

BILL (O.S.)
What's your dream, Melissa?

She stops, turns back. Bill is standing, gazing at her.

BILL
Is this anywhere close?

She thinks for a long moment. Then smiles, and nods, *yes*...

MELISSA
What's yours?

Bill takes a breath, has to think as well...

BILL
To keep learning. To explore. To grow and stay the same. And to love you. Above everything, to love you.

Melissa nods as her eyes well.

MELISSA
Thank you. Bill Watterson.

ON A GRASSY HILL

Bill PLOPS down on his back, sighs. He crosses his hands behind his head and looks up at the sky, breathing deep...

Enjoying a moment of peace and isolation...

And then, we SLOWLY PULL UP TOWARDS THE SKY, getting an

AERIAL VIEW

of Bill laying there, and we soon see that animated CALVIN and HOBBES are laying there too. If their three bodies were lines, they'd altogether form the the shape of a big "Y"...

And we linger here quietly. Bill relaxing. Calvin and Hobbes pointing to each other funny shapes in the clouds above...

And then a VOICE breaks the silence...

FATHER (O.S.)
(reading out loud)
"So long, pop! Off to check my tiger trap!"

Bill turns on his side, looks down the hill, where

ON A PARK BENCH NEARBY

A YOUNG FATHER has his YOUNG SON on his knee, reading to him the FIRST CALVIN & HOBBES BOOK.

FATHER
"Tigers will do anything for a tuna fish sandwich".

The son giggles, points.

FATHER
(tiger voice, "eating")
"We're kind of stupid that way".

Bill smirks. And then, as he keeps watching, animated CALVIN and HOBBES notice the father and son too, and get up from the grass and walk curiously down the hill towards them...

And then Calvin and Hobbes will sit a few feet away from the father and son, and rest on their elbows, and just listen...

FATHER
(reading Calvin)
"I wonder why we dream when we sleep. Do our brains get bored? I wonder why we don't just sleep".

Calvin looks back up at Bill. Hobbes turns, looks back too.

Bill offers a small wave down at them.

They smile, wave back.

And then they share a moment. Bill, and his characters.

And then Calvin and Hobbes turn back, keep listening...

FATHER (O.S.)
(reading Hobbes)
"I think we dream so we don't have to be apart so long. If we're in each other's dreams, we can play together all night." "Hey, yeah..."

And we stay on BILL'S FACE, as TEXT APPEARS ON THE SCREEN...

.....

EPILOGUE

-- Bill Watterson retired from Calvin & Hobbes and comic strips in 1995. After ending his feud and signing a new contract with Universal Press Syndicate in 1991, he was never pressured to license Calvin & Hobbes again.

-- Bill began secretly signing his own books on shelves at Fireside Bookshop in Chagrin Falls, Ohio... but stopped when he found out the books were being bought and sold on eBay.

-- Lee Salem became President of Universal Press Syndicate in 2006, and will retire from the company in March of 2014.

-- Today, Bill lives in Ohio with his wife Melissa. Among other things, he has become an avid painter like his wife.

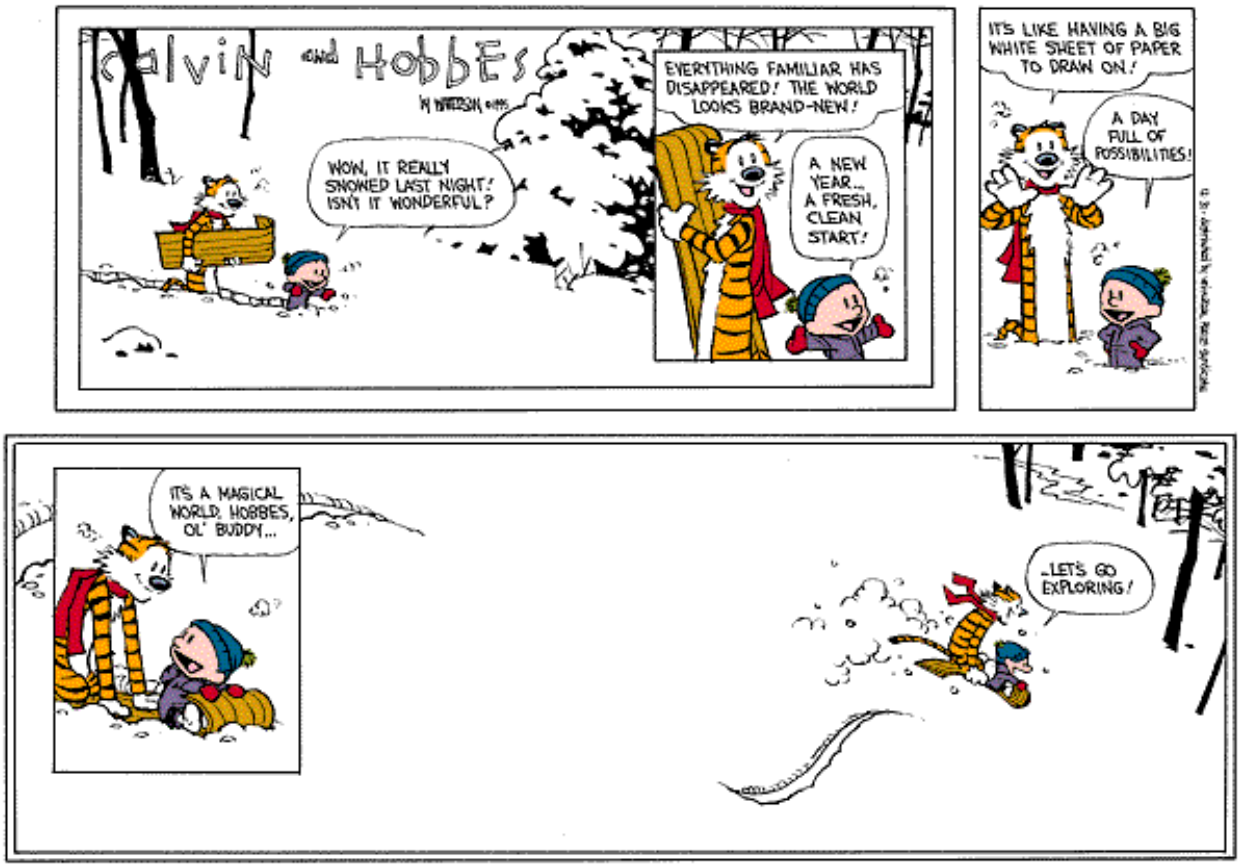
-- Nearly 45 million copies of the 18 beloved Calvin & Hobbes books have sold to date. Calvin & Hobbes has inspired an entire generation of children, young people, and adults alike, and will continue to do so for generations to come.

.....

The EPILOGUE DISAPPEARS, and the SOUNDS of the PARK grow distant, and finally, BILL'S SERENE and HAPPY FACE will...

FADE TO WHITE.

(scroll down for a smile)


Calvin and Hobbes
WOW, IT REALLY SNOWED LAST NIGHT! ISN'T IT WONDERFUL?
EVERYTHING FAMILIAR HAS DISAPPEARED! THE WORLD LOOKS BRAND-NEW!
A NEW YEAR... A FRESH, CLEAN START!
IT'S LIKE HAVING A BIG WHITE SHEET OF PAPER TO DRAW ON!
A DAY FULL OF POSSIBILITIES!
IT'S A MAGICAL WORLD, HOBBES, OL' BUDDY...
...LET'S GO EXPLORING!