

FADE IN:

EXT. ROADSIDE REST STOP - MAGIC HOUR

Three AMERICAN CROWS sit in a wild Chapman apple tree overlooking a roadside rest stop along a two-lane secondary highway. There are roadside washrooms and a 200' international orange and white radio tower.

Behind the washrooms are a recently logged lot of large stumps and in the distance bathed in the morning light, the eves of the WILD WOOD, a 640-acre remnant of the hardwood forests that covered Eastern North America. It is a place of immense age, beauty, and quiet. Hidden no more.

EXT. SECONDARY HWY - MORNING

In the distance, the crows watch as a 1960 Divco 135 delivery van comes into view.

The van slows and turns into the rest stop. The crows look at each other in hopeful anticipation as the van parks in the center of two parking spaces and blocks a third nearest the exit and public bathrooms.

Stenciled on the side of the van is a sign. The original sign, professionally done many years ago, says Nick's New & Used. Whatever the slogan had said below had been roller brushed over and a hand brushed PETS takes its place.

As the driver's door opens. Gas station sandwich ends fall out and litters the ground. The crows lean in to bob and look.

EXT. REST STOP PARKING LOT - MORNING

NICK(65) gets out of and kicks the litter under the van. Nick goes to the shady passenger side. Over his bald pate is a train engineer's hat. On his feet are rubber boots cut down to slippers. He wears old jeans, a stained bright yellow WORLD WILDLIFE FEDERATION tee shirt, and suspenders.

He scratches his ass and looks around. Nick goes to the side of the van undoes an awning and sets it up quickly.

Satisfied, undoes a couple of latches on the van. The side panel of the Divco van drops down and bumps down on its chains. Cages swing cleverly down into place. The counter is replete with exotic pets in a hodgepodge of cages and containers. The exotic pets react to the sudden light.

Nick brushes off the bits of food off the counter, straightens water bottles.

The crows look amazed by all the various exotic pets. Nick moves around to the other side of the van, lowers the awning on this side. Nick pulls the latches and the panel bumps down onto its chains to reveal a replete reptile counter, and does a quick tidy of their cages.

Nick goes to the back of the van and opens the latch. He reaches in and slides out a child's plastic turtle pool to the ground. Nick drags the pool under an awning.

Inside, several different types of TURTLES roll about. Nick drags out old milk cans and fills the pond with water. The turtles find buoyancy and come upright as Nick takes out a big flat rock and places it into the center. The turtles move to and cling to the rock like it is a lifebuoy. Nick comes back and puts fresh lettuce on the rock. The turtles start to munch.

Nick reaches into the back, pulls out, and assembles a clothes trolley. He climbs into the back of the van, reappears with birdcages, and hooks them onto the rail.

As Nick places the birdcages, we see a different kind of pet in quick succession; GALAH COCKATOO, TOUCAN, LOVEBIRDS, MAGPIE, SPENCER(20), a Carolina squirrel. On the end of the trolley a KEA PARROT blinks.

Nick steps back, looks at his work, and is satisfied. Grabs a sign that says HERE and a hammer walks to the road edge, and plants the sign. He looks up and down the deserted road.

He goes back to the van and sits in the driver's seat, pulls out his phone and opens his webpage. He toggles the 'I am here' icon. Nick plugs the phone in and puts his head back, and begins to snore.

The critters look amazingly nonplussed. It's business as usual.

EXT. DIVCO VAN - MORNING

Crow 1 sails down and lands on the end of the trolley. He examines the Kea inquisitively.

CROW 1

Who in the name of the Goddess's
feathers, are you?

Abruptly, Kea style.

KEA

Kea!!

The crow has to flap its wings to steady itself. Crow 2 & 3
CAW in laughter.

The parrot blinks at the sun. The other exotic pets look in
Nicks direction and SUSHES Kea.

KEA

Yeah Nah, I'll be right!

Crow 1 looks over to the other crows. They shrug their
shoulders.

KEA

Chur cuz!

Crow 1 examines the Kakapo closely.

CROW 1

Does Polly wanna cracker?

KEA

You brought her. You crack her.

The crows CAW loudly together in laughter.

Kakapo looks to Spencer.

KEA

He's right dag!

Crow 1 looks around the parrot and sees Spencer for the first
time.

CROW 1

Do you understand what he says?

SPENCER

He says he is pleased to meet you.

Kea Laughs out loud. Crow 1 looks to Kea and then back at
Spencer suspiciously.

Crow 1 hops down the rail to Spencer's gilded cage.

Spencer moves to the opposite end of the cage from the crow.

CROW 1

This is quite the traveling
menagerie. What is a squirrel doing
in this company?

SPENCER

I am the setup. Its a joke to break
the ice with the guests.

Crow 1 turns his head, reassess Spencer.

Spencer's nose twitches as the wind picks up, and he looks to
the Wild Wood.

SPENCER

What wood is that?

CROW 3

You are safer here. The Wild Wood
is no place for pets.

SPENCER

I am no pet.

Crow 2 looks him up and down.

CROW 2

You may have been a critter, but
now you smell like a pet, and we
don't need any pets in the Wild
Wood.

Crow 3 turns his head to Crow 2 with a look of incongruity.

A MEDIUM BLUE FORD AROSTAR pulls into the rest stop and
scares Crow 1, who flies back to the tree with his fellows.

EXT. ROADSIDE REST STOP - MORNING

Nick looks over as the minivan pulls into the furthest
parking space.

A boy(8) and a girl(7) exit from out of the van's side door
and rambunctiously race for the bathrooms as mom and dad
collapse in the vehicle, exhausted by their children.

Nick looks out at the children as they go by and smiles.

Nick gets out and bangs on the van.

It is a signal, and all the exotic pets perk up and do a
quick groom. The exotic pets attitudes scream Stockholm
Syndrome. Only Spencer looks uninterested.

Nick opens the cage with a chipmunk inside.

NICK

Your on.

The chipmunk climbs all over Nick, looks for peanuts he has hidden in his clothes. The chipmunk works diligently to fill its cheeks.

The manic children come back out of the bathrooms, they see the chipmunk on Nick, they stop and are unusually silent in childhood awe. Then they spot the other exotic pets and explode with noise and excitement.

They run around and look at the exotic pets.

CHILDREN CHORUS

Can we buy one? Can we buy two?!

The children's parents exit the van doors with an oh-no look on their faces.

EXT. ROADSIDE REST STOP - MORNING

The crows watch with fascination.

The children are loud and obnoxious to the exotic pets. The three crows cringe.

The girl sees the birdcages. She examines each quickly until she gets to Spencer's cage. Spencer acts nonchalantly. The girl walks up and grabs Spencer's cage, and shakes it vigorously.

GIRL

Wake up Mr. Squirrel!

Spencer is shaken around in the cage like a die in a cup. The girl's fingers are in the cage, and Spencer bites her. The girl howls in pain and fright and drops the cage.

CROW 3

The squirrel is a critter.

The 3 crows look at each other.

As Spencer's cage hits the ground, a small door opens. The birdcage rolls to a stop. The door faces the ground.

Spencer is dazed. He sees Nick, the girl and her parents come back, intercepting Nick and begin to argue.

Spencer looks back and forth from Nick to the Wild Wood in the distance. Spencer rolls the cage until the door opening comes up and he jumps through.

CROW 2

You best stay put.

Spencer stops and looks back sees the other exotic pets, Kea turns his head toward the radio tower. All the exotic pets look, all have hopeful looks. Even the turtles peek over their pool edge.

CROW 3

You're safer here. The Wild Wood is filled with foxes, and their bellies are full of heroes.

Spencer looks up at crow 3 looks back to Nick, then to the children.

Nick pushes past the family and reaches into the Divco cab to pull out a telescopic snare.

Spencer starts to run. The snare barely misses and knocks him sideways. He scrambles to his feet even as the loop comes by for a second practiced swing.

Spencer unexpectedly jumps on the snare pole and runs directly at Nick, who drops the snare.

The exotic pets CHATTER. Nick shoots them a look, and they go silent.

Spencer dekes under the van. He stops to look around and sees the crows.

SPENCER

You could help here!

CROW 2

Too bad you do not have wings.

Flaps his to demonstrate. The Crows start to CAW with laughter.

Nick comes around the van, and the children join in on the fun to recapture Spencer.

CROW 3

You might as well give up now before someone steps on your tail.

Spencer's tail jumps into his arms. He holds it protectively. He looks to the crow and is about to say something when he makes a decision and heads for the tower.

The girl is in front of Spencer. He dekes and goes to the left, as the girl defends to the right, SLOW MOTION highlight reel , skilled soccer goalie move, and misses him. Renaldo could not have beaten her to the right.

The boy is in front of him. Spencer changes his angle and runs directly at him. The boy SCREAMS, and holds his testicles with both hands as Spencer races between his legs.

CROW 2

Now you're dinner. Squirrel pot pie
for supper for sure.

With no hesitation Spencer runs in zig zag circles between all the legs, then breaks for the radio tower. Squeezes easily through the locked chain-link gate. Stops and vibrates as he CHATTERS at Nick before he climbs the metal structure ever higher.

The crows CAW hysterically in laughter.

EXT. RADIO TOWER - MORNING

Spencer climbs to the top of the radio tower. There is nowhere left to go.

SPENCER

Well, I made it to the big top at
last.

Spencer takes a long look beyond the field to the eaves of the distant Wild Wood. Spencer's nose twitches. He feels the wind in his face.

Spencer can smell the Wild Wood as the wind freshens. Looks into the Wild Wood and sees a critter.

Half of the critter's face can be seen and other half is hidden by foliage. The feel is magic like sunlight threw the leaves. The critter turns and walks behind a branch and never comes out the other side.

Spencer looks down as Nick stares up the tower after him.

NICK

Come on, Spencer, come to daddy.

Spencer looks back to his friends in the van. Kea is manically swinging his cage back and forth so he can see the top of the tower and SCREECHING to his heart's contentment.

Spencer flexes his legs, his tail twitches, he smiles.

SPENCER

Can the understudy step up to the
big top and do the grand finale
Long Glide?

EXT. ROADSIDE REST STOP - MORNING

The crows stop their laughter and look dumbfounded as Spencer rocks back and forth at the precipice.

The crowd goes silent. All eyes are on Spencer.

Spencer does a hawk check and leaps off the tower.

Crow 1 turns his head. He can not look at Spencer's demise.

Suddenly Spencer's skin goes taut, and we see for the first time Spencer is a Carolina flying squirrel. He sails away across the logged field to the Wild Wood and disappears into the canopy.

The crows sit with their mouths hanging open.

The children CRY in dismay as their parents herd them back toward their minivan. The exotic pets CHATTER and no look from Nick can stop them.

Nick yells at the family as he starts to walk faster to catch them. Nick stops, out of breath, shakes his fist as the mini van pulls around him out the exit. The children are live streaming to their friends as the van turns onto the highway and speeds away.

Nick takes off his hat and waves it at the car before throwing it down on the ground in anger.

NICK

You owe me 200 dollars for my flying squirrel!

CROW 1

Flying squirrel?

CROW 2

By the Goddess's feathers.

They both look to Crow 3.

CROW 3

Indeed, and by the Goddess, we are called to witness.

The crows lift off and fly for the Wild Wood.

EXT. WILD WOOD EVES - AFTERNOON

Wanda(20), a Red Squirrel, Looks out over the field to the radio tower and the road beyond. As she looks out, she is

frozen in motion by the sight as Spencer flies across the stump field.

As she watches, Spencer uses his tail as a rudder and veers directly toward Wanda. Spencer runs headlong into Wanda, and they are rolled over twice together along a branch until they stop at the tree trunk and land with Wanda sitting astride of Spencer.

WANDA

What in the name of the Goddesses whiskers, are you?

SPENCER

My name is Spencer, I saw the Goddess of the Wood. I tried to follow her and ran into you.

Spencer lays back, relieved and happy.

WANDA

I think the polite greeting is, What is the news?

Wanda looks at him again. There is a twinkle in his eye.

WANDA

What is news?

SPENCER

I just escaped Nick's New & Used Pets. And you and this wood smell amazing.

Wanda springs away from Spencer in a single leap.

WANDA

Eww, you're a pet.

SPENCER

Not a pet, I remember the Goddess's kiss.

Wanda looks directly at Spencer.

WANDA

Do not even think it.

Above three crows silently alight upon some higher branches.

CROW 3

He also remembers how to bite.

Wanda looks crow 3 in the eye and holds it.

WANDA

You call him a critter?

CROW 3

Indeed, no. Most likely, it is an ill-mannered pet, and ill-mannered pets are the worst type of trouble.

SPENCER

Hold on right there. I am not an ill-mannered pet.

WANDA

No, you're a flying squirrel. When we are kits, our mothers would tell us stories of the flying squirrels...

CROW 2

We have no time for squirrel stories. Shall we call out the foxes and make a quick end of it?

WANDA AND SPENCER

No, don't do that!

There is a moment of awkward silence.

CROW 3

For the Goddess's feathers. Fine, trial by deed.

WANDA

A journey to the One Tree and be named critter?

CROW 2

Don't be a fool. It is hand-fed, drinks bottled water, and shits in its own nest. The pet is too soft.

Spencer chatters loudly. All eyes turn to Spencer

SPENCER

I can smell every truffle in this wood. The dew is still sweet off the leaf.

With speed, Spencer bounces up, off the tree trunk, onto the higher branch. He has a surprised Crow 2 stretched out on the limb and a hind leg ready to rip him apart in a moment. The other crows lift off and hover above. Spencer has Crow 2's full attention...