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THE STORM
(a stream of consciousness document)

Even a prophet can lose his way. The bible is full of stories of those who did. And they often felt the wrath of their Lord.

Maybe the first scene isn't with Johnny...

Maybe it's at Faith Heritage... and it's raining... a summer storm, nothing unusual... as Bruce makes his way across the quad toward the administration building...

And as he enters Purdy's office, he finds Dana and Sarah, mmm, maybe Walt too, not sure... and Purdy of course... and there's a throwaway comment about the weather... but it soon becomes clear why they're all there.

Purdy has gathered them all to discuss an intervention.

Johnny's in trouble. No, not alcohol or drugs. Not that kind of intervention. (Hmmm... on the other hand, has Johnny been drinking too much?) But he has withdrawn into himself. Cut himself off from his friends. From the world. Sarah mentions Ally Sheedy's death as a continuity touchstone but not much backstory is required here. It is often recommended that the target of the intervention be

lured to a locale that is unfamiliar, and refreshing, to separate them from the psychological underpinnings of their problem. Purdy suggests the rustic Faith Heritage retreat at Lake Cobbosseecontee (*note: a huge mysterious tornado hit this lake in real life about five years ago and was not picked up on weather warning systems*). Bruce loves the idea, says we've got to get Johnny out of that house...

We find Johnny in seclusion... and it's dark... but we might play it against expectations... he's not brooding... he's reading a book... gardening... no, painting... really bad art...

And he's letting his beard grow. (Any time I felt like I was really lost in my life, I grew a beard as a mask to hide behind. Maybe that's how Johnny is - but don't worry, I see losing the beard early in the story.)

Bruce comes over to lure Johnny away - and the scene is actually played for humor - but it's clear Johnny doesn't want to go. And eventually it may be the closest thing we've ever seen to Johnny and Bruce having a fight... but in the end, Johnny agrees to go with him to a lake or the shore, whatever we want our setting to be.

[Do we need some parallel to Ninevah? Some specific mission that Johnny has shunned? An alternative is to go with something akin to the kidnapping in Valley except

Johnny refuses to get involved though he's desperately needed... and somehow through the 'intervention' of the storm, he comes back to that at the end. Or is it too on the Jonah nose. Might play too biblical. This story might work better if we keep Jonah in the back of our minds, not the front, and we begin to look at the storm through the eyes of Stephen King not the bible. It is a weird fucking storm - and we'll have to come up with ways to make it Kingish. On the surface, this can still be a Twister kind of story that deepens as it becomes about Johnny versus the storm.

Obviously, I chose the intervention route to try to include the family of characters in the opening episode... but I'm not going to use them much until act four.]

The teaser could end with Johnny having a vision of a tornado. Or it could end with Johnny and Bruce in the car on the road... and they have their first real encounter with a tornado.

In version one, if Johnny gets a vision of a tornado, what does he do? Doesn't he tell Bruce? We can't go because the weather's going to be bad, he says. It doesn't matter, says Bruce, we'll play cards. No, says Johnny, you don't understand - I mean, bad. Like a tornado. Omigod, says Bruce, we have to warn them. J: Warn who?

B: Sarah, Dana, Purdy... J: what are you talking about? B: Your best friends are waiting to tell you how you're screwing up, man. They're waiting for me to bring you to the lake. Johnny tries to call them... and his vision takes him through the phone lines to see the wind ripping through the wires, disconnecting all phones... end of tease as they rush out to the car...

In version two, Bruce doesn't tell Johnny about the impending intervention... Johnny doesn't see a tornado vision, he just sees a bad storm... says they can't go because the weather will be bad... B: it doesn't matter, we'll play cards. And drags him to the car. They are on the road and the weather is turning bad when they are confronted by an awesome sight - a tornado swirling ahead... moving toward them... end of tease...

Act One in this scenario is a full blown action set piece with Bruce and Johnny and the car and the tornado... Johnny having a vision of the car being wiped out... Bruce being killed, whatever... using his visions to anticipate the moves of the tornado... but the tornado changes course unexpectedly. J: But that's not possible. I saw it going left. It can't be going right. B: Yeah, well tell that to the tornado. J: You don't understand. It means my vision was wrong. B: Or something we did just by moving in

a different direction affected the wind currents or something who knows. The butterfly effect. All I know, says Bruce, is that there's a big ass tornado coming at us...

Johnny isn't even sure he can trust his visions now... but he makes the best guesses he can... and the tornado rumbles by... sparing them...

But maybe in some mystical fashion, it touches Johnny as it passes... and he sees a vision... of Purdy, Sarah, Jason, Walt, Dana...

He confronts Bruce - what the hell is he seeing?

Bruce tells him the truth about the intervention...

Johnny shakes his head in dismay -- they're in danger -- terrible, terrible danger... they try to call on the cell phone -- Johnny has a vision of the phone lines being ripped down by the wind. End of act one.

It occurs to me that the structure of the show might be about Johnny trying to get to his friends... while 'there's still time'... and some offbeat, roadshow set pieces and people Bruce and Johnny meet along the way... which somehow illuminate Johnny's personal dilemmas - like they are sent by God to remind Johnny who he is...

That would make it a Wizard of Oz approach... not a bad idea... and there was a tornado in that by the way...

(No, I'm not going to use Purdy as the cowardly lion, Walt as the tin man, and Bruce as the scarecrow... unless someone wants to try and talk me into it. You damn well know Buffy would do it. It would be fun to write but I can see Herzog's face now... Hmm, Sonny Elliman on the back of a bicycle taking a little girl's dog away from her...)

But taking the structure as an inspiration, Johnny and Bruce might not actually reach the others until act four...

As Act two opens, Bruce's car is gone - let's say we really wreck the Cruiser in the opening action... and Johnny and Bruce have to flag down a car...

And we meet our first guest character who's driving it...

If we go this way, we need to discuss what kinds of characters would service the franchise... what kind of set pieces...

For example, this driver and his wife might be members of the Johnny Smith fan club... just the kind of people Johnny's been trying to get away from... or give them a snotty kid like Bill Daniels and his wife in Two For The Road... I'm just riffing here now, but what I'm going for is that - maybe they're only in the show for a few minutes (or this might be the adventure of their lives and fills their mundane existence with something they'll tell their

grandchildren about) - but somehow Johnny changes their lives in a dead zone kind of way... like he sees they're going to be divorced at the start and by the time they go on their way, they're healed, you know what I mean? But it's only a small piece of a mosaic of stories.

Maybe another piece of the mosaic is a tiny rural town they come to... the main road is blocked by storm damage... and the car is forced to take back roads... until they get to this town...

We can make it as a typical or strange as we want to... Hitchcock did a great set piece with a circus troupe in *Saboteur*... maybe instead of a town, they come across a stranded carnival from the storm... which brings Johnny back face to face with the freak show metaphor from the pilot... and there are midgets and bearded ladies and the tattooed man... and all the while, it's about trying to get through the forest, trying to reach the others... everybody on the road of life with appointments to keep, contracts to fill... and the storm is diverting them...

And maybe there's one fortune teller at the carnival... and it isn't Johnny's mom, that's too much... but she saying the same stuff from "Quality of Life" and the book: *Heed the still, small voice when it comes. It*

came to Jeremiah and Daniel and Amos and Abraham. It'll come to you. And when it does, do your duty.

And, oh yeah, Johnny is aware of how weird this is... but there's little time for analysis... because Johnny has a vision of the carnival being destroyed... and the bearded lady and the midget being swept up by the funnel... and though he warns them, the storm rolls in suddenly... and we do another major tornado set piece... which Johnny helps them all to escape from... and when it passes... the way through the woods has been miraculously cleared...

Maybe the next piece of the mosaic is a character from another episode - choose your favorite - the runaway girl from *Enemy Mind*... or the couple from *Outsider* and new baby... Jason and his wife (who could be coming to join Johnny's intervention)... anyone... and yes, it's a chance meeting, maybe at an emergency rescue station the county has set up for stranded travelers in the storm... but it is Maine and not heavily populated and Johnny has touched a couple dozen lives... but the point is that it's someone who is better off now thanks to Johnny...

The first couple might go on their way and now Johnny and Bruce travel with the old guest star(s)... or not... Johnny seeing the danger from the storms has not passed...

And it feels like too much but I'm just putting down whatever comes into my head now... yes, they could even come across the Stillson campaign bus... and do a cameo by Stillson... or a set piece in which Johnny rescues Sonny Elliman from being swept up by the tornado that seems to be every where Johnny goes...

And finally they get to the lake... to the rustic Faith Heritage retreat and the 'intervention'... and the weather here has been lovely... and Purdy, Sarah, Walt and Dana wonder what's taken them so long... (the retreat eschews all technology like TV and radio and the phones haven't been working)...

And we might play a few undercurrents of our family tensions to add them to the mosaic... but Johnny's visions tell him there's no time for spiritual guidance now... but before they can escape the storm is upon them... and it is literally taking the cabin apart around them...

And by now, Johnny realizes this storm seems to have a mind of its own... and somehow it seems to want him... and he realizes, to the dismay of the others, except perhaps Purdy - who begins to see a meaning to all this - that he must give himself to this storm to save the others.

He goes outside... and in an incredible shot... he stands on the shore as the funnel moves calmly toward him

across the lake... his face whipped with rain... the wind nearly blowing him over...

What do you want from me?, he screams to the heavens.

And then the unimaginable happens... as our family of characters watch from inside... Johnny is scooped up by the big black whale of a tornado...

And there are other biblical metaphors that Purdy might quote here... Elijah transported upward in a whirlwind - 2 Kings 2:1-11... God answered Job in a whirlwind - Job 38:1 Job 40:6....

And we may go inside the tornado with Johnny... the audience would want to see it... and we could do one of our trademark montages of Johnny's life passing before his eyes...

But it may also be hokey as hell...

So, instead of going into the tornado with Johnny, we may want to stay with the others as the storm seems to dissipate immediately... shaken, fearful he's dead... they come outside... the sun breaks through the clouds...

And they find Johnny... dazed, puzzled, calm... standing on the shore...

Or maybe he swings down from a tree like he did in the pilot...

There are no easy explanations, no quick conclusions,
no 'I've seen the Lord and I know what I have to do now'
kind of speeches... and yet we might be able to surmise
that Johnny's had a reawakening, a startling reawakening...

Which of course was the purpose of this remarkable
trip... as Purdy may remind us...

As they leave... we fade out....

The End