

**Name:**

## **Chapter 5 of *Into the Wild***

### **“Slabs” Passage**

**Task:** Reread the passage below and annotate (summary/function/devices).

When McCandless arrived at the Slabs, a huge flea market-swap meet was in full swing out in the desert. Burres, as one of the vendors, had set up some folding tables displaying cheap, mostly second hand goods for sale, and McCandless volunteered to oversee her large inventory of used paperback books.

“He helped me a lot,” Burres acknowledges. “He watched the table when I needed to leave, categorized all the books, made a lot of sales. He seemed to get a real kick out of it. Alex was big on the classics: Dickens, H. G. Wells, Mark Twain, Jack London.

London was his favorite. He’d try to convince every snowbird who walked by that they should read *Call of the Wild*.”

McCandless had been infatuated with London since childhood. London’s fervent condemnation of capitalist society, his glorification of the primordial world, his championing of the great unwashed—all of it mirrored McCandless’s passions. Mesmerized by London’s turgid portrayal of life in Alaska and the Yukon, McCandless read and reread *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, “To Build a Fire,” “An Odyssey of the North,” “The Wit of Porportuk.” He was so enthralled by these tales, however, that he seemed to forget they were works of fiction, constructions of the imagination that had more to do with London’s romantic sensibilities than with the actualities of life in the subarctic wilderness. McCandless conveniently overlooked the fact that London himself had spent just a single winter in the North and that he’d died by his own hand on his California estate at the age of forty, a fatuous drunk, obese and pathetic, maintaining a sedentary existence that bore scant resemblance to the ideals he espoused in print.

Among the residents of the Niland Slabs was a seventeen-year-old named Tracy, and she fell in love with McCandless during his week-long visit. “She was this sweet little thing,” says Burres, “the daughter of a couple of tramps who parked their rig four vehicles down from us. And poor Tracy developed a hopeless crush on Alex. The whole time he was in Niland, she hung around making goo-goo eyes at him, bugging me to convince him to go on walks with her. Alex was nice to her, but she was too young for him. He couldn’t take her seriously. Probably left her brokenhearted for a whole week at least.”

Even though McCandless rebuffed Tracy’s advances, Burres makes it clear that he was no recluse: “He had a good time when he was around people, a real good time. At the swap meet he’d talk and talk and talk to everybody who came by. He must have met six or seven dozen people in Niland, and he was friendly with every one of them. He needed his solitude at times, but he wasn’t a hermit. He did a lot of socializing. Sometimes I think it was like he was storing up company for the times when he knew nobody would be around.”

McCandless was especially attentive to Burres, flirting and clowning with her at every opportunity. “He liked to tease me and torment me,” she recalls. “I’d go out back to hang clothes on the line behind the trailer, and he’d attach clothespins all over me. He was playful, like a little kid. I had puppies, and he was always putting them under laundry baskets to watch them bounce around and yelp. He’d do it till I’d get mad and have to yell at him to stop. But in truth he was real good with the dogs. They’d follow him around, cry after him, want to sleep with him. Alex just had a way with animals.”

One afternoon while McCandless was tending the book table at the Niland swap meet, somebody left a portable electric organ with Burres to sell on consignment. “Alex took it over and entertained everybody all day playing it,” she says. “He had an amazing voice. He drew quite a crowd. Until then I never knew he was musical.”

**Questions:**

1. What is the **purpose** of this passage? (Write out a SOAPStone thesis.)

**2. What is/are the dominant mode(s) of composition (mode of discourse)?** (Definition, Classification, Compare/Contrast, Process Analysis, Claim w. Argument/Examples, Cause & Effect, Narration, Description)

3. What are the dominant literary devices Krakauer uses to develop his purpose? What are the effects of these devices? Choose 3 to discuss.