

Michael Bettencourt

Screenplays: Volume 1

Block & Tackle Productions Press



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Michael Bettencourt

**Ain't Ethiopia • The Sunlight Dialogues
By The River**

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Block & Tackle Productions Press



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To María Beatriz - always in all ways

Ain't Ethiopia

FADE IN:

SUPER: PLACARD: "HARLEM, 1936"

EXT. HARLEM STREET - AFTERNOON

A BLACK-SKINNED SPEAKER on a soapbox holds pamphlets and a megaphone. A hundred or so AFRICAN AMERICANS -- dirty, tired, hungry, restless -- gather around the SPEAKER.

POLICEMEN hang around the edge of the CROWD.

SPEAKER'S SOAPBOX

SPEAKER

Brothers and sisters, the fascists have taken over democratic Spain!

CROWD

JESSE COLTON, barely 21, African American, slinks through the crowd. A dirty gash cuts his left temple.

SPEAKER (O.S.)

Mussolini, who raped our people in Ethiopia --

Jesse's eyes dart everywhere, his hands twitch in his coat pockets -- a man at the end of his tether.

SPEAKER (O.S.)

And Hitler, with his ideas about the supremacy of white people --

A MAN next to Jesse pipes up.

MAN

Man, why should I give a fuck about Spain? About white people?

The WOMAN next to him slaps his arm.

BACK OF THE MAN

Jesse spies what looks like a dollar poking out of the man's back pocket -- but he can't tell for sure, his vision is so blurred.

MAN (O.C.)

Don't you be whacking me!

Jesse's eyes dart right, then left. He moves his hand towards the man's pocket, fingers twitching.

SPEAKER (O.S.)

If we don't stop the fascists in Spain --

WOMAN (O.C.)

(to man)

Just keep a clean tongue in --

Closer, closer, almost there --

MAN (O.C.)

Keep them ham-hocks in your own --

SPEAKER (O.S.)

Brother, sister -- please --

MAN'S POCKET

Jesse's just about to close in when another hand -- huge, tendoned, black -- clamps down over his.

SPEAKER (O.S.)

We need to fight the fascists, not between ourselves --

JESSE'S HAND

Jesse's hand is dragged away, and Jesse follows.

EDGE OF CROWD

Jesse follows the arm up to the face of OLIVER LUMET, 36, dark coffee complexion, a scar across his left cheek.

FROM JESSE'S POV

Around him Jesse can see the police start to wade into the crowd -- but they all look like a blue blur to him.

EDGE OF CROWD

Still holding onto the Jesse, Oliver lets out a shrill whistle. The speaker looks toward Oliver.

Oliver raises his arm and circles it, points to the police. The speaker notes the police, gives Oliver a thumbs-up.

SPEAKER'S SOAPBOX

SPEAKER

Watch your backs, my friends -- we got our own fascists coming in --

CROWD

The police, batons at chest-height, herd the crowd.

SPEAKER'S SOAPBOX

A policeman comes level to the speaker. The speaker hands him a pamphlet, then jumps off the soap box and melts into the crowd.

EDGE OF CROWD

Oliver sees the speaker run away. He turns his attention to Jesse, whose hand is still firmly in Oliver's grasp. Oliver pulls him away.

INT. GREASY SPOON - DAY

At their table, Oliver faces the window and watches Jesse wolf down the last of eggs and home fries, then finish mopping his plate with toast until it gleams.

JESSE

Thanks.

Jesse gets up, ready to flee.

JESSE

Gotta go.

OLIVER

I lied.

JESSE

What?

OLIVER

You do have to pay me something.

JESSE

I got no money. I got nothing.

OLIVER

You have a name?

JESSE

Everyone's got a name.

OLIVER

So tell me your name. And I'll tell you who just fed a brother.

JESSE

That's it?

Oliver leans forward.

OLIVER

Sit down.

Jesse sits down.

Oliver reaches into his back pocket, and he notices that Jesse winces at the sudden movement. More slowly, Oliver draws out a small blue booklet and slides it across.

Jesse picks it up, but as if it were a burning coal, he flings it onto table, his body suddenly racked with shivers.

JESSE

That says Communist Party!

OLIVER

(retrieving card)

Harlem Division.

JESSE

Shit shit shit shit --

Jesse's leg pumps so hard it rattles the flatware. Oliver lays a calm hand on his forearm, but Jesse snaps it away.

OLIVER

Tell me your name.

JESSE

(strained)

Jesse Colton.

OLIVER

Mississippi in that voice -- right?

JESSE

Maybe.

OLIVER

Texas myself. Jesse Colton, how'd you end up in New York city ready to steal from a brother?

Jesse hesitates, then pulls out an envelope and slams it down.

Oliver slides out the creased photo of Jesse and a dark-skinned YOUNG WOMAN.

Jesse stares hard at the white disk of his empty plate.

SUPER: PLACARD: "MISSISSIPPI, 1936"

EXT. TOWN SQUARE

A CROWD JEERS as a YOUNG WHITE MAN stands on the cab of his truck and cuts through a rope holding the hanged body of the young African American woman in the photo.

Her hands are tied behind her, her face swollen and beaten, her body riddled with bullets.

MAN IN CROWD

Cut that nigger Communist down!

The body falls to the ground like a stone.

SECOND MAN

Better dead than Red.

REAR BUMPER

The young man ties the rope to the bumper.

His thick leather workboots TROMP back to the cab. Then the ROAR of the truck's engine, the GRIND of the gears, the SQUEAL of rubber as he PEELS OUT, the body dragged behind.

EXT. BURNING HOUSE -- NIGHT

The crowd gathers around a burning house, the flame-light slashing their twisted faces.

People pass around bottles and food, like a picnic.

EXT. BLIND

Jesse cowers behind a blind of kudzu and creepers, watching the destruction, his face a mask of terror and pain.

EXT. ROAD

The young man pulls up in a pick-up truck, and a huge CHEER goes up from the crowd.

The young man jumps out of the cab, and his heavy workboots raise a cloud of dust.

He walks to the back of the truck.

FROM GROUND LEVEL

Each footfall raises a small cloud of dust until the workboots stop by the shattered body of the young woman.

REAR BUMPER

The young man unties the rope.

FROM GROUND LEVEL

The dragged body slices through the dust.

CROWD

The crowd CHEERS as the young man drags the body into view.

THE BLIND

Jesse sees the crushed woman and his body writhes as if flames are eating away at him. Tears streak his face.

He watches several MEN grab the body and fling into the flames. A CHEER goes up at the body catches fire.

Jesse flattens himself to the ground, gulps air, trembles, and stares at an almost-crumpled photo that shows him and a young woman. He stares and stares and stares at it.

FLAMES

The body is barely recognizable as a human body.

CROWD

In the heat-shimmering air, the crowd dances like devils.

FADE OUT TO WHITENESS

FADE IN:

They sit in SILENCE while the BANGING of the diner swirls around them. Oliver slides the picture across the table.

OLIVER

I'm sorry for your loss, Jesse.

A few more moments of silence between them.

OLIVER

If you're interested, I can give you a chance to fight the bastards.

Jesse doesn't answer because he stares at the picture. He picks it up, delicately slips it back into the envelope, slide the envelope into his coat. His body slumps.

OLIVER

But first things first. You need a place to stay.

(pointing to temple)

That needs to be cleaned. Let's go.

Oliver stands, but Jesse stays seated. He fumbles with the salt shaker.

OLIVER

(to Jesse)

Let's go.

JESSE

They said she was a Communist just because she asked for some work relief. I didn't do nothing to stop 'em. I just ran. I just ran and ran and ran and I end up here and --

Jesse's words run out. Oliver looks down at him.

OLIVER

At some point, Jesse, whether you gotta go pee or they shut the door on you, you are going to have to get up from this table and figure out something to do with the rest of your life.

Jesse still hesitates, his nervous hands spilling the salt. Oliver throws a pinch of it over Jesse's left shoulder.

OLIVER

Now you're protected. Come on.

EXT. BUILDING - LATE AFTERNOON

Oliver and Jesse stand outside a non-descript warehouse. Oliver knocks in a secret code on a small metal door.

The door opens, and Jesse stares into the ragged face of TOM MILOCSZ, white, 30s, a black eye-patch over his left eye. On the eye-patch is painted a red hammer-and-sickle.

Tom fixes his one eye on Oliver, then on Jesse, jerks his head for them to enter.

INT. FLOPHOUSE

Warehouse with rows of cots. Tom stands behind a desk with a single light bulb hanging over it. On the desk, pages face down, is an open copy of the Communist Manifesto.

OLIVER

This is Tom.

TOM

I'm the three-headed dog.

Tom looks down at a chart on the desk.

TOM

Fifth row, ninth one in --

He fixes his one eye on Jesse.

TOM

'Sgot your name on it, chum.

OLIVER

The name is Jesse Colton.

Oliver moves to the door.

JESSE

(suddenly fearful)

When am I gonna see you --

Oliver walks back to Jesse, takes out a card.

OLIVER

Tomorrow, 10 AM, if you want.

Oliver hands Jesse the card, turns to go.

JESSE

Wait! Wait!

Tom and Oliver look at him.

JESSE

None of you knows me from Adam's off ox.

Oliver flashes Tom a look, then focuses on Jesse.

OLIVER

We already know you.

JESSE

No you don't.

TOM

Know all about you and your kind.

OLIVER

Besides, why do we have to know you to do something for you?

JESSE

I wouldn't. I never did.

TOM

(harsh laugh)

Don't'cha just love 'em when they're raw and fresh?

Oliver, looking at Tom again, points to his own left temple, nods at Jesse, then flashes a smile as he leaves.

Jesse and Tom stare at each other in the sudden silence.

Tom points at the book on the desk.

TOM

Ever read the Communist Manifesto?

JESSE

No.

TOM

You can read, right?

JESSE

Yeah.

Tom reaches over to a bookcase filled with copies of the Communist Manifesto. He tosses one to Jesse, who catches it like it was hot metal. Tom points to his missing eye.

TOM

This is what reading the Manifesto got me.

JESSE

Why would I read it, then?

TOM

What's an eye for the truth? Sit down.

Jesse sits. Tom reaches into a drawer, pulls out gauze and a bottle of alcohol, gestures for Jesse to lean in.

Jesse leans in, and Tom cleans his temple. Jesse winces but says nothing. Tom closes the bottle and throws away the gauze.

He jerks his thumb over his shoulder.

TOM

Now leave me alone.

INT. FLOPHOUSE - JESSE'S COT - LATER

The air rings with SNORES, FARTS, CREAKINGS, SHUFFLINGS. Jesse lays on his cot, eyes wide-open, clutching the Manifesto.

He sits up, sees Tom at the desk. He looks at the horizontal shadows, all sleeping together peacefully. He lies back down and closes his eyes.

EXT. STREET - NEXT MORNING

Jesse moves through the Depression crowd. The Manifesto peeps out of the pocket of a new if second-hand coat.

EXT. BUILDING - MORNING

Somewhere on 125th Street. Jesse looks into the dark doorway, once to the left, once to the right, enters.

INT. BUILDING - STAIRWELL

Jesse slowly climbs. At each landing, behind the closed doors he hears SHOUTS, RADIOS, a heavy THUD, crockery BREAKING, a SLAP -- a full human symphony.

FIFTH FLOOR LANDING

The only door. He KNOCKS, waits. No response.

KNOCKS again -- no response.

KNOCKS once more, HEAVILY. The door swings open. There, like a guard dog, stands Oliver.

OLIVER

He has arrived. Come on in.

INT. OFFICE

Jesse comes into a small cluttered office, but cluttered in an organized way, with boxes of pamphlets, a mimeograph, typewriter, filing cabinets, desks, chairs. It is clearly the office of the Harlem Division of the Communist Party.

On the walls are posters, some in Spanish, about coming to fight for Spain against Franco and for the democratically elected government.

OLIVER

Grab a chair.

He goes over to a table that has an electric coffee pot and a paper bag with grease spots.

OLIVER

Coffee? All we got is black.

Jesse nods yes. Oliver pours him a cup.

OLIVER

Doughnuts are a day old, but I think you can still chew them.

JESSE

Yeah -- sure. Thanks.

Oliver brings Jesse coffee and a doughnut. Jesse tries not to wolf but he eats the entire doughnut in almost one gulp.

OLIVER

Another?

Jesse nods. Oliver brings him a second doughnut. This time Jesse eats it a bit more slowly.

Oliver grabs a chair, straddles it backwards.

OLIVER

That demonstration yesterday -- know what it was about?

JESSE

I couldn't hardly hear my own breathing yesterday.

Oliver gestures to the posters on the wall.

OLIVER

It was about Spain. We -- Communists -- organized it, to raise support. That word bother you -- Communists?

JESSE

No. You've been nice. Don't know Spain, neither -- never left Mississippi till now.

OLIVER

And the Mississippi's never left you, either, huh?

Oliver gets out of his chair and starts pacing.

OLIVER

The democratic government in Spain, a government elected by the people, has been attacked by a general named Franco.

JESSE

Can I have another doughnut?

OLIVER

Third one you get on your own.

Jesse goes to the bag, pulls out a doughnut, starts eating.

OLIVER

Franco's connected to the church and the big landowners, who want it the way it was in the middle ages.

Oliver taps the posters with his finger as he talks.

OLIVER

These "middle ages" have got everything to do with you.

JESSE

Don't even know where Spain is.

OLIVER

Yes you do.

Oliver perches on the edge of a table.

JESSE

No I don't. And why would I care --

OLIVER

Franco is the "massah" -- know that word?

JESSE

Course.

OLIVER

Franco and his fellow "massahs" want to keep the plantation just the way it's always been -- that sound familiar?

JESSE

As common as a cat.

Oliver straddles the chair again.

OLIVER

And what have you ever done about "massah"?

JESSE

Cain't do nothing about "massah."

OLIVER

You do, they hang you, right?

JESSE

Beat you, burn you, cut your balls off --

OLIVER

Make you less than a man.

JESSE

To them, you less than a man before you're born.

Oliver gives Jesse a sharp but affectionate look.

OLIVER

You're not stupid.

JESSE

I wasn't always like this.

OLIVER

If you could fight back -- you'd fight back?

Jesse looks into the bottom of his coffee cup.

JESSE

Like to think I would.

OLIVER

Me, too. That's why I went in the Army for six years -- thought I could fight my way up and out that way. But black buck private in comes a black buck private out.

Oliver gets out of his chair, and his powerful frame throws a long shadow across the room.

OLIVER

(suddenly fierce)

In my dream, Jesse, I take all the motherfuckin' "massahs" in the world, man and woman and even child, and wipe the place clean of 'em. Give the rest of us a goddamn break. You want to know me in a nutshell -- why "Communist" -- that's what I want.

Just as quickly, Oliver slides back into his genial self.

OLIVER

You up for some honest work today, now that you've had three of my doughnuts and coffee?

Jesse nods yes. Oliver goes to a table, picks up a bundle of pamphlets tied with string. He tosses it to Jesse. Jesse reads the cover.

JESSE

What's "fask" -- "faskism" --

OLIVER
(pronouncing correctly)

Fascism.

JESSE

Fascism.

Oliver picks up a bundle.

OLIVER
Just a fancy word for what happened to your wife. You got
any lungs on you?

JESSE
For what?

OLIVER
For yelling. Let me hear 'em loud.

JESSE
You crazy?

OLIVER
Don't work with light-weights out there. Yell it.

Jesse turns the bundle over and over.

OLIVER
Last chance.

JESSE
(not that strong)
Fascism.

OLIVER
Cat makes more noise spitting up a hairball.

JESSE
(a little louder)
Fascism.

OLIVER

The guy downstairs beats up his wife with more style. "Like to think I'd fight back," I heard you say. Then say the fucking word.

JESSE
(booming)

Fascism.

Then over and over and over again, as if the word opens up a floodgate in Jesse. Again and again and again until Jesse finds himself dissolved in tears.

Oliver comes to Jesse and simply holds him.

EXT. STREET - HARLEM

Jesse stands with Oliver, both of them with the folded pamphlets in their hands. Oliver's booming VOICE cuts through the street noise and hustle.

OLIVER

Fight against fascism! Couldn't do it in Ethiopia, but we can do it in Spain. Join us in our fight.

Oliver hands out pamphlets right and left, throwing out "Thank you, ma'am" and "Thank you, sir" as he does. Jesse hangs back.

OLIVER
(to Jesse)

Just jump, man!

Taking a deep breath, Jesse lets out a BELLOW that catches everyone on the street by surprise. Oliver LAUGHS.

OLIVER
Just don't break their ears.

Jesse, smiling, starts handing out the pamphlets and thanks people. He hands out a pamphlet to a MAN, who takes it and without reading it throws it away. Jesse runs up to him, another one held out to him.

JESSE
You dropped this.

MAN

Get that trash away from me.

JESSE

It's really important --

FROM OLIVER'S POV

Oliver watches Jesse while he still hands out pamphlets.

STREET

MAN

Get that trash away me, you fucking --

JESSE

Look, man, this is all about the plantation -- see, fascism, that's what it's all about -- all about the "massah" -- we know all about this, you and me --

Without warning the man roundhouses Jesse to the pavement. The crowd, with barely a pause, shifts around them.

MAN

Don't be calling me a nigger!

Jesse slowly gets up from sidewalk, nursing his face.

JESSE

(without rancor)

Mister, I been told -- and I'm telling you -- we'll all stay niggers if these guys win.

The man gives Jesse a shove back. Jesse calmly hands him a pamphlet. He grabs it out of Jesse's hands and walks down the street. Jesse looks at the people looking at him as he starts to hawk his wares.

JESSE

Help us fight fascism, just like him. Get the master off the plantation.

Jesse looks at Oliver, who smiles at him. Jesse smiles back, wiggles his jaw back and forth to show he's okay.

INT. FLOPHOUSE - NIGHT

Jesse lies on his back. Surrounding him are the BREATHS, FARTS, MURMURINGS, SNORES of common humanity. He gets up.

TOM'S DESK

Tom reads under the single lightbulb. He looks up as Jesse approaches. Jesse holds up his book.

JESSE

Mind? Can't sleep.

Tom nods yes. Jesse pulls up the chair, takes out his copy of the Manifesto, reads. They read together.

INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - HARLEM - 1936 - NIGHT

Oliver stands next to JOSE LUIS ALONSO, who wears a red bandana, and to the right of a hanging white sheet. The Minister stands on the other side of the sheet.

The room is jammed with black people of all ages, Jesse among them. Sidewalk-level windows are open for air.

Tom runs a projector that throws up gruesome pictures from Franco's attack on Spain.

JOSE LUIS

(narrating, Spanish accent)

Francisco Franco rapes our country -- has taken away our government, elected by the people. People like you. And Benito Mussolini is now doing in Spain what he did to your people in Ethiopia.

MURMURING in the audience. Footage of the Moors fighting with Franco come on the screen.

JOSE LUIS

And, like you can see, Franco uses Africans to kill our people -- the Army of Africa, it is called.

A few moments of silent images, MURMURS from the audience, then the film runs out. Tom switches off the projector, switches on the lights.

VOICE

Amen, brother.

Jose Luis gives a confused look to Oliver.

OLIVER

That's a good thing.

JOSE LUIS

Ah. Amen, comrade, to you, too. I am touched you listen to what is happening to my country. We need people who love freedom to fight for us.

OLIVER

Hundreds of volunteers, folks, from the world over, have been coming to Spain to fight the plantation mentality.

JOSE LUIS

Your government will not help us --

OLIVER

Our government actually supports Hitler and Mussolini --

JOSE LUIS

But we know the people are not the same as the government. I know your hearts love freedom -- that is why I am here -- to ask you to stand shoulder to shoulder with us.

VERNON, an old man, raises his hand.

VERNON

Oliver?

OLIVER

Brother Vernon?

VERNON

He means fight for white people?

OLIVER

He means fight for freedom -- bigger than white, bigger than black, bigger than any one of us.

Oliver shakes his hand.

OLIVER

Thank you, Jose Luis.

There is applause, polite but not enthusiastic.

OLIVER

This man's come a long stretch to talk to you -- and his cause is good. I love his cause. I truly do.

(points to Vernon)

But what you say is true, Vernon. Spain's a long way from 125th Street. Why fight there when we got our own battle out there?

VERNON

That's what I'm saying, Oliver.

Oliver gestures to the Minister.

OLIVER

Reverend, if you don't mind, I have one more to testify.

EXT. CHURCH

Police officers gather along with paddy wagons and cars.

INT. BASEMENT

OLIVER

(pointing)

Jesse Colton.

Jesse slowly stands, looking at the people looking at him.

EXT. CHURCH

The officers space themselves on the sidewalk.

INT. BASEMENT

Jesse makes his way to the front of the room.

OLIVER

This is Jesse Colton, newly come to us. He has a story to tell you. About his former life in Mississippi.

(to Jesse)

You got the lungs for this?

Jesse smiles, nods yes. His face seems to shine.

OLIVER

Any of you here from Mississippi?

Several hands go up.

OLIVER

Then you'll know his story.

Oliver steps back. Jesse scans the crowd.

MINISTER

Give him an amen.

They give him an amen.

JESSE

My name is Jesse Colton.

SEVERAL PEOPLE

Welcome, Jesse.

JESSE

My story, plain and simple. They hung my wife from a streetlamp in front of the town hall.

Jesse lets this image settle into the crowd.

JESSE

They shot her, dragged her behind a truck, threw her body into a fire -- a fire made from our house.

He lets these images settle into the crowd as well.

VERNON

I know what he speaks of.

JESSE

Not much different than the pictures our friend Jose Luis brought us.

MINISTER

Amen.

CROWD

Amen.

EXT. CHURCH

The light from the basement windows falls on pair after pair of the scuffed leather boots worn by the police.

The SOUND of "amen" floats up from the basement.

INT. BASEMENT

Oliver watches Jesse closely, how his breathing races, his body tenses, as he leans in to connect with the people.

JESSE

Just like the way Mussolini lynched Ethiopia. Just like this Franco --

Jesse's right arm shoots outward in a "Heil."

JESSE

"Il Duce" and the "Generalissimo" -- they ain't nothing but the masters on the plantation -- ain't they? They ain't nothing but "the boss."

Jesse breathes heavily, his eyes ablaze.

EXT. CHURCH

A POLICE CAPTAIN lights a cigarette, tosses the match.

The SOUND of "Say it" floats out the window.

INT. BASEMENT

JESSE

My old thinking? The white people killed my wife. But here's my new thinking. I don't think it's white or black, white against black. I think it's about those that got wanting those who ain't got to never get anything. And how's that gonna stop? Because it's gotta stop.

Jesse pauses to catch his breath.

JESSE

It's gonna stop when we say it's gonna stop. When "we" say it --

EXT. CHURCH

The Captain takes a few drags. His SERGEANT waits.

The Captain flicks away the butt, a disgusted look on his face. He gives a slight nod to the Sergeant, who raises his baton to signal everyone to move in.

CAPTAIN

(muttering)

I hate this shit.

INT. BASEMENT

A MAN looks up at the windows and notices the row of boots.

MAN

Don't mean to interrupt, but --

He points up to the windows. Everyone turns, and just as they do, they see the boots move.

The Minister rips down the white sheet. Tom grabs the projector and shoves it underneath the table.

MINISTER

(to Oliver, Tom, Jesse, Jose Luis)

Get in the back room!

Oliver and Tom guide Jose Luis to the back of the basement, where the man holds a door open. Tom and Jose Luis go inside the room. Jesse remains. Oliver remains.

MINISTER

(to them both)

You, too.

JESSE

I'm not sitting it out for no one.

OLIVER

(smiling)

Gotta protect my witness.

Several heavy THUDS on the basement door. The man closes the door to the back room.

MINISTER

(to Jesse)

Then you're my deacon. Shut up and look holy.

(to Oliver)

Get 'em singing. "Down By The Riverside."

(to man)

Open it.

The man opens the door. Oliver, in a deep baritone, begins singing as he walks to the front of the room.

OLIVER

(booming)

"Gonna lay down my sword and shield"

PEOPLE

"Down by the riverside -- "

The police pile into the room. The people continue singing, Jesse singing the loudest.

PEOPLE

"Down by the riverside, down by the riverside -- "

OLIVER

"Gonna lay down my sword and shield"

SERGEANT

Everyone shut up!

But the people don't shut up. Jesse shakes with anger.

PEOPLE

"Down by the riverside -- "

SERGEANT

I said shut up!

PEOPLE

"Ain't gonna study war no more -- "

The Minister holds up his hand, and the people fall silent.

MINISTER

Amen.

PEOPLE

Amen.

MINISTER

(all innocence)

Sergeant?

The tired Captain scans the crowd as the police fill the room.

CAPTAIN

Tell me where they are. The reds. The Communists. We know you have 'em here.

INT. BACK ROOM

Tom and Jose Luis huddle, scarcely breathing.

BASEMENT

MINISTER

In the Lord's house, nothing is hidden.

OLD MAN

Let's offer up Psalm 90.

The people speak as one.

PEOPLE

Who considers the power of your anger?

CAPTAIN

(to Minister, quietly)

Tell them to be quiet.

The Minister says nothing. The police look very nervous.

PEOPLE

So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

CAPTAIN

(with low menace)

Tell them to shut up.

JESSE

They just want to pray.

MINISTER

(warning)

Deacon --

PEOPLE

Turn, O LORD!

SERGEANT

(to Jesse)

Button it!

PEOPLE

How long?

JESSE

We're just praying for you!

The Minister puts a hand on Jesse, but Jesse leans forward.

PEOPLE

Have compassion on your servants!

SERGEANT

Back off!

JESSE

Just wasted on you, though --

Without hesitation the Sergeant cracks his baton against Jesse's head, and Jesse drops to the floor like a stone.

Immediate silence. No one moves. Oliver and the Minister exchange a quick look.

INT. BACK ROOM

In the sudden silence, Tom and Jose Luis breathe thinly.

BASEMENT

The Captain lets out a long disgusted sigh as he peers down at the bleeding unconscious Jesse.

He scans the black faces looking directly back at him. He sucks his teeth, then nods to the Sergeant. The Sergeant gestures, and the police THUNDER out the door.

The Captain gives the Minister a sharp direct look, then follows the Sergeant out.

Immediately Oliver goes to Jesse. The Minister nods, and the Man opens the door to the back room. They emerge.

TOM

(to Jose Luis)

Welcome to America.

INT. MINISTER'S OFFICE - SIDE ROOM - NIGHT

Jesse's eyes open, but he doesn't move. The room is dark, but a light shines from under the door.

He touches his forehead and feels the bandage.

In the next room ANGRY VOICES fill the air with arguments.

VOICE (O.S.)

Handing out those pamphlets is bullshit.

VOICE (O.S.)

You got an army you ain't telling us about, 'cause if you do --

VOICE (O.S.)

I'm so goddamn tired of --

Jesse finds that he has Jose Luis' red bandana in his hand.

VOICE (O.S.)

We got to keep the work going --

Jesse swings his legs off the sofa, sits up, grabs his head in pain, sways, but manages to stand up and stay up.

MINISTER (O.S.)

You cannot meet anger with anger --

Jesse walks to the door, opens it to a flood of light.

INT. MINISTER'S OFFICE

All VOICES fall silent. The Minister, Oliver, Tom, the Man, and several men and women from the congregation stare at Jesse. Jesse holds up the red bandana.

OLIVER

We took him back to his group. He gave you that and an amen.

MAN

He called you "el toro."

WOMAN

Yeah, the bull in the china shop. Leading with his head.

MAN

That's the part least likely to get hurt.

Small laughter. Jesse clutches the door jamb to steady himself. Then, with shaky but determined hands, he tries to tie the red bandana around his neck. Oliver helps him, pats it down flat. Jesse admires it around his neck.

JESSE

You told me once I had to figure out something good to do with my life.

(to others)

Spain ain't Ethiopia - but it'll do.

(to Oliver)

Can you get me there?

Oliver squeezes Jesse's shoulder, looks into Jesse's eyes.

OLIVER

Can't let you do that, Jesse.

JESSE

Why not? Why not?

OLIVER

Because with you gone I'd be stuck with the one-eyed jack over there.

TOM

I'm thinking I prefer being called "one-eyed jack."

OLIVER

You've wanted to run the show, right?

TOM

Yeah.

OLIVER

It's yours to run. We'll get the Committee to turn it over to you.

(to Jesse)

It ain't Ethiopia, like the young bull says -- but it'll do.

SUPER: PLACARD: "FEBRUARY 1937 - JARAMA VALLEY"

EXT. OUTSIDE CHINCHON - DAYBREAK

Forty-five trucks with headlights off drive along a narrow road under a sky tinged with the rising sun, then stop.

EXT. TRUCK BED

Fifteen men in thick woolen coats and blankets huddle together. Their warm breath condenses in the cold air. Jesse sits across from Oliver.

FROM JESSE'S POV

People's faces glow ghostly in the dark morning light. The only black face he sees is Oliver's. Everyone shivers. Everyone stares. No one talks.

TRUCK BED

A runner hammers the truck side, startling everyone.

RUNNER

Afuera! Afuera! [Out! Out!]

Jesse hears the retreating footsteps, the rap on the next truck, the voice shouting "Afuera!", and on down the line.

The men jump off the truck.

EXT. ROAD

Jesse can just make out the four hundred men of the convoy. Overhead, the sky bursts with stars, but the orange/red light in the east is already snuffing them out.

Coming down the line Jesse sees CAPTAIN MERRIMAN, a tall man wearing wire-rim glasses. At their truck, he gestures to Oliver.

OLIVER

Yes, Captain Merriman?

MERRIMAN

Bring them to the supply trucks. Make it quick -- keep 'em warm.

(to the group)

Stay quiet.

Merriman passes to the next truck. Oliver turns to his group.

OLIVER

Come on, folks -- hot time in the old town tonight.

Without hesitation, the dozen or so white men, commanded by a black man, move along in a quick trot. Jesse falls in.

EXT. SUPPLY TRUCKS

As they arrive, Jesse sees open crates and guns being handed out. Oliver brings them to one truck where the DRIVER, a SPANIARD wearing a black beret, hands out the guns with a terse "aquí." Oliver gives the driver a hand.

A gun appears in Jesse's hands.

JESSE

(to Oliver)

I ain't ever held a real gun.

OLIVER

Most here haven't. Grip it -- here, take this! -- like it's a very dangerous woman.

Jesse stares at the gun. Oliver keeps handing them out.

JESSE

That's crazy.

OLIVER

Exactly what you'll need, Jesse.

Jesse walks away, his gun upright, squeezed to his body as if embracing it.

EXT. FIELD - DAWN

Merriman stands on the hood of a truck, the 450 men of the battalion around him. The sky now glows bright enough for everyone to see him.

VOICES

Listen to the Captain. Listen up.

Everyone quiets. Somewhere, birds SING. Merriman's VOICE is clear in the cold air, the sun glinting off his glasses.

MERRIMAN

Here's how it lays out. Franco's troops -- about five to six miles that way. If they move forward, they will cut the Madrid-Valencia road -- and Madrid's gone. Your job? Stop Franco. That's it. That's why we're here.

Merriman waits. The birds SING.

MERRIMAN

I have permission from General Gal to test your guns -- five shots a man.

Merriman waits again. The birds SING.

MERRIMAN

No brave words. Just this: I am proud of you, very proud of this Abraham Lincoln Battalion -- I couldn't think of a better name for it.

(seems lost for words)

Group leaders -- organize your ranks.

SIDE OF THE HILL

The dirt kicks up as bullet after bullet rams the hillside.

JESSE'S RANK

Jesse fires, and the recoil almost levels him. He fires again -- the recoil less violent. By shot five, he stands firm.

EXT. SUICIDE HILL - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

The semi-darkness of a grey dawn. Rain clouds overhead.

EDGE OF TRENCH

In the bruised light a long row of soldiers' faces peer over the parapet of a trench.

IN THE TRENCH

A RUNNER scurries.

RUNNER

(hoarse whisper)

Get ready, get ready, get ready, get ready --

The runner disappears, his voice trailing off: "Get ready, get ready, get ready, get ready -- "

Up and down the line Jesse sees men crouching low, their breath rising in plumes in the cold air.

Oliver scuttles up to them, carrying a field telephone, followed by a runner keeping the phone line untangled.

Just as he reaches them, Franco's artillery begins its savage barrage. Planes fly low, strafing the ground.

Oliver waits for a brief lull, then quickly stands up.

FROM OLIVER'S POV

On the right he can just make out the Spanish 24th Brigade. Bullets jump around him.

TRENCH

Oliver drops, rings the phone. The artillery SLAMS.

OLIVER

(shouting)

Captain Merriman, the 24th hasn't moved a fucking inch!

Oliver listens, then jumps up again.

FROM OLIVER'S POINT OF VIEW

On the right, the 24th pours out of the trench and men are cut down almost immediately.

The ones not cut down advance at most 20 or 30 yards, then pull back to the trench.

TRENCH

Oliver grabs the phone from the runner.

OLIVER

I don't care what the colonel said, Captain, the 24th ain't moving up!

Oliver listens.

OLIVER

What about our artillery?

Oliver listens, a troubled look on his face.

OLIVER

And our planes?

His face is still troubled as he hears the answer.

OLIVER

All right, Captain -- yes. Understood.

Oliver hands the phone back to the runner, who coils the wire as he scuttles to the rear.

Oliver, crouching, moves down the line speaking to his men.

OLIVER

(pointing)

That's where we're headed. Pingarrón Hill. Say the word
-- Pingarrón -- get it in your mouth, guys. Pingarrón.

Oliver can hear Spanish vowels bastardized into a dozen different American accents.

OLIVER

We command that, we control the road. It's that simple.
That's our job.

Oliver checks his watch.

FROM OLIVER'S POV

The second hand sweeps the watch face.

TRENCH

Oliver looks up. Overhead, the clouds break and sun suddenly floods the land.

As if this were a sign...

OLIVER

(shouting)

Let's go!

With with a RAGGED SHOUT, the four hundred untrained men of the Battalion pour over the parapet into a hail of bullets.

EXT. PINGARRÓN HILL - THE BATTLE

From the account of the battle from Robert Rosenstone's Crusade of the Left:

"Elsewhere on the rolling hills of the battlefield, in the dips of earth and through groves of trees, the men of the Lincoln Battalion were slowly and painfully moving upon Pingarrón. They were going forward into a curtain of steel as the blue sky of Spain sang with death.

"As they went, hidden machine guns high on the right opened with a deadly crossfire.

"Still they blundered on, the enemy's guns piling up a heavy toll as man after man slumped to earth, some dead before they hit the ground, some almost sliced in two by the intense fire.

"Those with bodies shredded by machine gun bullets writhed on the ground and screamed for the first aid men who could not reach them through the barrage.

"Those who were still untouched deafened their ears to their comrades' cries as they pressed forward, advancing in little rushes from mound to olive tree to fold of earth, moving toward the enemy with an audacity later called 'insane.'

"The bravest and luckiest of them even reached the naked approaches to the crest of Pingarron."

Jesse and SEVERAL OTHERS, following Oliver, make for a clump of stunted trees. Right and left Jesse sees men sawn in half by machine-gun fire, limbs shattered by sniper bullets.

They make the shelter of the trees, even though the constant curtain of fire shreds their ragged bark and thin trunks.

OLIVER

(pointing)

We can't bunch up. Jesse, over there. You three, over there. Move it, move it, move it, move it!

Jesse bolts for a fold of ground. Several bullets rip through his coat. He sees the others make for a boulder. Oliver cuts between them towards another mound of dirt.

Jesse looks to his left, see another MAN pounding his gun with his fist, crying. Jesse crawls toward him.

MAN

(pounding it)

Fucking thing's jammed, fucking thing's --

Jesse goes to take the gun, but the man grabs it back.

MAN

Mine! Mine!

JESSE

Gonna help you --

MAN

Keep away from me, nigger!

The two glare at each other, the air around them shaking with the THUD of explosions and the CRACK of rifle fire.

The man, sudden realization in his face, hands Jesse the rifle. Jesse knocks the bolt loose and digs out the jammed shell. He hands it back.

JESSE

There you go, cracker.

The man, hyperventilating, takes the gun, cackles at Jesse's "cracker." Jesse laughs, too, barely able to breathe steadily.

JESSE

Gotta go.

MAN

Yeah, yeah --

Jesse rolls to his right, then scuttles forward, hugging the ground, jamming his face into the dirt as a fierce swarm of bullets cut the air just above him.

FROM JESSE'S POV

His breath kicks up a small puff of dust as he looks directly at a small, withered, yet definitely yellow flower, no larger than a dime. And crawling up a blade of dead grass is an ant calmly going about its business.

As he stares, the SCREAM of bullets and CRASH of artillery muffle into a distant roar, like waves on a beach.

JESSE

(to ant and flower)

Gotta go. Sorry. Gotta go.

Almost immediately, the air SNAPS back into focus with the SHRIEKS of dying men, the HOWLING WHINE of incoming shells.

JESSE

Gotta go, gotta go --

Jesse's face lifts from the dirt, leaving a small dent. The ant makes it way down into the impression.

APPROACH TO PINGARRÓN

Jesse dodges, zig-zags, rolls, dives, fires, scuttles, scampers, fires again. At one point, pitching himself to the ground, he finds that the only cover is a corpse -- the man whose gun had jammed.

He pulls it close to him, rests his gun on the unresisting shoulder, and fires.

BASE OF PINGARRÓN

Overhead, rain clouds cover the blue sky. A gray pall falls over everything.

Jesse looks up the hill. He spies the enemy. To his right and left he sees corpses played on their backs, cut into pieces. Those still alive fire again and again.

Off further to his left he can see Oliver lead five men along the base of a small cliff.

Without warning, the skies open and heavy rain spills down. For a moment the firing ceases and there is nothing but the RUSH of water turning the dry ground to mud.

Jesse sees the men pull back. He sees Oliver lead his men away from the cliff base back towards the trenches. Jesse pulls back. The bullets begin CUTTING the air again.

ON THE WAY TO THE TRENCH

Jesse, completely soaked, running low to the ground, comes across a WOUNDED MAN, his left leg a bloody pulp. Bullets kick up mud, but the density of the firing is much less. The wounded man holds out a hand for help.

Jesse drops to the ground.

JESSE

Get on my back.

The wounded man rolls himself on top of Jesse, and Jesse dragging his gun, slithers his way toward the trench.

EDGE OF THE TRENCH

Jesse, the wounded man on his back, can just see the heads of the FIRST AID MEN in the trench. He slithers up to the edge of the trench and rolls the wounded man off his back.

IN THE TRENCH

Two First Aid men catch the wounded man and hustle him away. Jesse's body follows, falling into the mud.

Jesse gets to his hands and knees, then rises stiffly. He pats himself all over to see that everything is intact.

He unbuttons his pants and pisses into the mud.

Then, with slow heavy steps, he makes his way to the rear.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD MEDICAL UNIT

A cluster of makeshift tents and shelters. Men lie everywhere SCREAMING, CURSING, CRYING, LAUGHING.

The DOCTORS work without anesthetic, the AIDES bandaging, splinting, carrying off body parts, piling up corpses.

FROM JESSE'S POV

Jesse's fatigue blur his eyes and ears so that everything looks and sounds as if he is in the middle of a nightmare.

REAR OF THE TENTS

Ambulances and trucks carry off the wounded to the hospitals.

Jesse sees Merriman being loaded into an ambulance, his left arm splinted, his undershirt bloody and torn. Jesse rushes up to him.

JESSE

Sir?

The aides continue loading the wounded into the ambulance, knocking Jesse out of the way to get past him.

JESSE

Sir?

Merriman, his glasses fogged, turns what look like blind eyes to Jesse. Jesse takes off the glasses, and using Merriman's tee-shirt, cleans them and puts them back on.

MERRIMAN

Sorry, I don't know your --

JESSE

Colton. Jesse. From Mississippi.

MERRIMAN

Mississippi to Madrid.

JESSE

Yes sir. Your arm --

MERRIMAN

Bullet in the left shoulder -- bone just pfft. You?

JESSE

Still one piece.

The aides finish loading the ambulance. They go to close the rear doors. Jesse stops them.

JESSE

Sir -- yes or no?

MERRIMAN

It's still our road, Jesse.

The doors close and the ambulance, belching blue smoke, pulls away. Jesse watches it pitch back and forth over the rough ground, then make the road and disappear.

From behind, Oliver's VOICE.

OLIVER (O.C.)

Jesse Colton.

Jesse spins around and sees Oliver. Jesse walks to him. Oliver hands him a rough cloth. Jesse wipes off his face, leaving a smear of blood and dirt.

Oliver fingers through the filthy ragged clothes Jesse wears and uncovers, under the tee-shirt, the red bandana stained with sweat. Oliver laughs.

OLIVER

Let's get you something to eat.

JESSE

How many dead?

OLIVER

Almost everybody's dead, Jesse. They almost wiped us out.

Jesse folds the cloth, hands it back to Oliver.

OLIVER

Come on.

Jesse, holding his gun, his coat soaked, his boots muddy, his breath steaming, simply starts to cry.

Oliver doesn't move, doesn't touch, doesn't urge Jesse along.

A man SCREAMS. The rain falls. The mayhem continues.

EXT. ALBACETE - A FEW DAYS LATER - DAY

Sunlight fills the plaza.

Jesse, wearing clean ragged clothes, sits on a fountain, soaks the red bandana, wipes his face, then ties it around his neck.

People crowd the plaza, vehicles of all kinds race through. Jesse sees new VOLUNTEERS wash through on their way to the training camps outside the city.

He gets up and walks. A small leather pouch hangs from his shoulder. Several OLD WOMEN point at him.

OLD WOMAN

Gracias, gracias, Señor. [Thank you, thank you.]

Jesse, smiling, nods, does a little bow. They LAUGH.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY

Jesse hears what sounds like a concert, with SHOUTS and WHISTLES and STOMPING. He follows the sound up the street.

EXT. THEATRE - DAY

Peeking through the front doors, Jesse sees PEOPLE of all ages, sizes, colors. They pass around food and drink, and the air HUMS with energy. He moves inside.

INT. THEATRE

On stage Jesse sees DANCERS and SINGERS, a GUITARIST. The dancers move in stylized, foot-stomping movements, the singers wail, and the guitarist's fingers fly.

EDGE OF STAGE

A very TALL LEAN WOMAN, head wound in a kerchief, wiry frame sheathed in a black dress, scans over the heads of the audience and sees Jesse standing in the doorway.

The lean woman whispers to her COMPANIONS, who also look and see Jesse. She says something to them. They say something back to her. She nods decisively.

ON THE STAGE

The performers comes to a crashing stop, and the CROWD erupts in APPLAUSE and WHISTLES and SHOUTS.

Immediately, the lean woman climbs onto the stage. She holds up her hands to speak, and everyone quiets down.

VOICE

Doña Ibárruri, hablemos [speak to us].

BY THE DOOR

Behind him Jesse hears a FEMALE VOICE in accented English.

VOICE

Do you know what she is going to say?

Jesse turns and stares into the high-cheekboned dark-eyed face of LUZ BAROJA Y NESSI, 20s, wearing a white cotton blouse, simple skirt, flat-heeled shoes, and a black shawl.

LUZ

I'll translate for you.

STAGE

Doña Ibárruri takes a stance, and the place hushes.

DOÑA IBÁRRURI

¡Madres! ¡Mujeres! ¡Hombres! ¡Niños! Cuando tengamos otra vez un presente de libertad, de paz y de bienestar, igualmente sentido por todos los españoles, entonces denle gracias. [Mothers! Women! Men! Children! When we have once again a present of freedom, love and well-being, felt equally by all Spaniards, then give thanks to him.]

With that, she points at Jesse, and as one the crowd turns to him. Doña Ibárruri motions for Jesse to come to her.

DOÑA IBÁRRURI

Venga, mi amigo -- por favor. [Come, friend -- please.]

BY THE DOOR

JESSE

(whispering)

You better come with me.

Luz takes him by the arm and laughs, leads him forward.

THROUGH THE CROWD

As they walk, the crowd APPLAUDS and CHEERS. The guitarist begins a wild piece, the singers wail. Jesse clings to Luz, who guides him onto the stage. Doña Ibárruri greets him and faces the AUDIENCE. Someone begins singing.

CROWD

Si los curas y fieles supieran la paliza que van a llevar,
estarían todo el día gritando:

"Libertad, libertad, libertad" [If the priests and the faithful
knew the beating they will get, they would be shouting all
day long, "Freedom, freedom, freedom"]

Si los reyes de España supieran lo poquito que iban a
durar, subirían al trono gritando:

"Libertad, libertad, libertad." [If the king and queen of Spain
knew how short they'd last, they would raise to the throne
shouting, "Freedom, freedom, freedom"]

Yo me cago en la manzanilla que bebió Queipo de Llano.

En la madre y el hermano de Franco y en Franco mismo.
[I shit on the manzanilla that Queipo de Llano drunk. And I
shit on the mother and the brother and on Franco himself.]

Yo me cago en el reinado de Juan Carlos de Borbón, en la
iglesia disoluta y en los cien mil hijos de puta que adoran
la religión. [I shit on the kingdom of Juan Carlos de Borbón,
on the dissipated Church and the one hundred thousand
sons of bitches that adore religion.]

Si los curas y fieles supieran la paliza que van a llevar,
estarían todo el día gritando:

"Libertad, libertad, libertad" [If the priests and the faithful
knew the beating they will get, they would be shouting all
day long, "Freedom, freedom, freedom"]

Si los reyes de España supieran lo poquito que iban a durar,
subirían al trono gritando:

"Libertad, libertad, libertad." [If the king and queen of Spain
knew how short they'd last, they would raise to the throne
shouting, "Freedom, freedom, freedom"]

After singing, the AUDIENCE, as one says to Jesse...

AUDIENCE

Gracias por todo. [Thank you for everything.]

EXT. OUTDOOR CAFE - DAY

Jesse and Luz sip coffee.

Luz stares off into the distance. Jesse gives her shy glances. His leg jitters.

JESSE

That was real nice what they did at the theatre --

LUZ

What are you doing here?

JESSE

(keeping it light)

Having coff[fee] --

LUZ

(with more force)

What are you doing here?

(jabs table with finger)

Here? In this God-forsaken --

JESSE

I'm fighting to keep your government alive.

Luz arches an eyebrow at him.

LUZ

Bad as all the others. Next you will say "fascism."

JESSE

I am fighting against fascism --

LUZ

See -- I told you. Fascism -- a noun. A word. A gobble-gobble-gobble like a turkey. And this "word" -- this is why you were put on this earth? To come save a government full of tired depressed old men, like my father, the diplomat --

She makes a dismissive gesture.

LUZ

You will go off and be killed for old bones and rusted nails --

Her eyes linger on Jesse, then look off, her face sour.

Jesse digs his Communist Party card and his picture of his wife out his pouch, slides both across the table.

JESSE

It's not just your "government," Luz Baroja y Nessi --

He taps the Party card with his finger.

JESSE

It's bigger than just "government" -- it's about a whole world --

Luz picks up the photo and studies it.

LUZ

(refers to photo)

And another whole world?

JESSE

My wife -- she's dead -- murdered -- by people where I come from --

PICTURE

Luz's finger traces the outline of Jesse and Marley.

JESSE (O.C.)

-- who don't have a dime's worth of difference between themselves and this Hitler or Mussolini --

TABLE

Luz puts the photo on top of the Party card and slides them back across the table to Jesse, her face mixed with tenderness and disgust.

LUZ

Sssh.

Jesse puts away the Party card and photo.

JESSE

Maybe why I'm on this earth is to ask you why you're on this earth.

LUZ

You know what we say about Communists?

She hawks up a gob of spit and expertly lobs it into the street. This takes Jesse completely by surprise. She smiles at him.

LUZ

Spit anywhere around here, you hit a Communist.

JESSE

(pointing to gob)

Glad it went there --

LUZ

Only the anarchists ever really know what's what.

Jesse looks at the gob of spit, still fascinated. Luz gives him a direct playful Cheshire Cat half-smile.

LUZ

I have many other such anarchist skills.

JESSE

And I'm supposed to hate anarchists.

LUZ

All anarchists?

JESSE

Maybe it's not a good idea to hate anarchists at all.

Luz puts her hand on his forearm, pats it, rests her hand there. Jesse looks at the hand, then at Luz.

Luz gestures to him to lean towards her. Hesitantly, Jesse leans toward her. She touches his hair.

LUZ

Hair -- the mind underneath it --

She winds a piece of Jesse's hair around her finger.

LUZ

It's so --

JESSE

Nappy -- it's called nappy --

LUZ

(laughing)

Nappy!

(softer)

Nappy.

Luz hesitates, then strokes his cheek, his nose.

LUZ

Not only about ideals, Jesse Colton.

Jesse leans into her touch, then pulls slowly away.

JESSE

Maybe the ideals come out as stupid to you --

LUZ

No --

JESSE

But in the time I been here -- I felt more like a man than ever. That, Luz Baroja y Nessi, is not nothing.

Luz lays her hand on the table, wiggles her fingers to get Jesse to give her his hand -- which he does.

LUZ

When do you have to leave?

JESSE

Soon -- we start our training --

LUZ

Can I show you something?

Luz gets up, holding on to Jesse's hand.

LUZ

Come with me.

EXT. NARROW STREET

A dozen PEOPLE ring a porch on which sits an OLD POET reciting.

On the porch, half a dozen OLD MEN sit nodding to the words.

END OF STREET

Jesse and Luz walk up the street. They can hear the THICK RESONANT VOICE of the old poet reciting.

Heads turn to look at them, then back to the old poet.

CROWD AT VERANDAH

They laugh at something the old poet says.

His VOICE continues behind their conversation.

LUZ

(whispering)

They call him El Caballero -- the Knight, the Gentleman.

ON THE VERANDAH

The old poet's face, glowing, though his eyes are white marbles, clouded over, blind.

CROWD

Jesse points to his own eyes, and Luz nods yes.

LUZ

(whispering)

He's reciting Don Quijote de la Mancha. Our Bible. By heart. When the fever comes upon him, he just has to speak it out to us -- Look around you --

Jesse scans the crowd and among them he not only sees other volunteer soldiers from other countries but a full mix of humanity, and everyone's face is fixed on the old poet.

LUZ

(whispering)

Isn't this beautiful? All at once listening to this beautiful old man -- at peace --

She pulls Jesse around to face her directly.

LUZ

(whispering)

This is why I was put on this earth. This is why.

INT. DARKENED ROOM - DAY

Sunlight shines through the slatted shutters. Luz slowly unties Jesse's red bandana, slides it off, lays it down.

She unbuttons Jesse's shirt, puts her hands on his chest. He touches her face. She leans forward to kiss him, but as her lips touch his, Jesse starts crying without restraint.

She sits. Jesse kneels and lays his head in her lap, his tears staining her skirt.

JESSE

I'm sorry.

LUZ

Sssh.

She strokes his back and lullabies him.

LUZ

Sssh. Sssh. Porque el del vicio de la virtud, angosto y
trabajoso, acaba en vida, y no en vida que se acaba, sino
en la que no tendrá fin...

Her voice SOOTHING him, her hand stroking his hair.

LUZ

For the narrow and exhausting road of virtue, Jesse Colton,
ends in life, and not momentary life, but in life which has no
end... Sssh, El Caballero.

She strokes his nappy hair.

EXT. PLAZA

A convoy truck waits, belching blue smoke. MEN climb in.

Oliver, by the truck, spies Jesse with Luz.

MAN IN TRUCK

Somebody got lucky.

Oliver starts out across the plaza.

SIDE OF THE PLAZA

Luz and Jesse stand close to each other. She takes something out of her own bag: a statue of Don Quixote made out of old house keys. She hands it to Jesse. She touches his hair, then puts her hand on his shoulder and, with soft pressure, turns him and gently pushes him toward the truck -- and right into Oliver. Luz LAUGHS.

LUZ
(to Jesse)

Your brother?

JESSE
(sheepish)

Oliver, Luz Baroja y Nessi.

Oliver shakes Luz's hand.

OLIVER
His Spanish is better already. But I have to steal him from you.

LUZ
Adios, Caballero.

Jesse reaches back to touch her cheek but hesitates. She grabs his hand and lays it against her face, then lets it go. She turns and leaves without looking back.

Oliver looks at Jesse watching the figure of Luz disappear.

EXT. TRAINING GROUND - NIGHT

The Battalion at dinner in a large barn. A rough hearty meal in front of each man.

Jesse sits next to DAVID SMITH, 20s, longshoreman. Smith shows him his Victorinox knife's multiple blades and tools.

SMITH
The wife sent me this.

Smith opens out the various tools.

SMITH
With this I can cut bandages, open wounds, dig out shrapnel without having to leave the patient --

JESSE
(to the others)
If I get plugged --

(to Smith)
-- you're coming to me.

From somewhere the RINGING OF A BELL.

FRONT OF BARN

A SOLDIER rings a school bell to get everyone's attention.

With Oliver's help, Merriman, his left arm plaster-casted, stands on the table. The light glints off his glasses. He gestures for Oliver to join him. The men quiet down.

MERRIMAN
Pardon my broken wing here.

Everyone LAUGHS, then quiets down.

MERRIMAN
First -- and always -- I am proud of you. No deep speeches
-- you each know your own private devils. I am just glad I'm
with you. Oliver --

Oliver steps forward.

MERRIMAN
Tonight I'm making official what most of you already know
-- I'm getting kicked upstairs as chief of staff. It bothers me
to leave you, but you're going to be in good hands.

Merriman turns to Oliver and shakes his hand.

MERRIMAN
Oliver, the command of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion is
now yours.

The men stand and cheer.

JESSE'S SEAT

Jesse climbs on the table and waves his arms for silence.

JESSE

Hold up! Hold up!

The men see Jesse and quiet down. Jesse gestures to Smith to hand him a bottle of wine. Jesse raises the bottle.

JESSE

Grab sumpin, y'all, and give up an "amen."

The men grab what is near and send up an "amen." They all raise up what's in their hands.

JESSE

To Oliver Lumet -- not just because he's a goddamn good solider who's saved our asses, which needed a lot of saving.

MAN

The fucking truth.

JESSE

Do y'all realize what is happening here? Captain Merriman, do you know?

(addressing Oliver)

Oliver Lumet, you are the first black man in our history who gets to tell white soldiers what to do -- and they gotta do it. We all gotta do it.

The barn fills with silence as the men ponder this.

JESSE

(indicating all of them)

We -- we -- are the real American army. As mongrel as mongrel can get.

(raises bottle)

To Oliver. Because of you, Franco is gonna kiss our saved asses and whatever else he finds down there.

Everyone LAUGHS, then downs whatever they're holding. Jesse and Oliver toast each other from across the room.

SUPER: PLACARD: "JULY 1937, BRUNETE"

EXT. MOSQUITO HILL - DAY

The Battalion spreads out at the base of the hill. Along the ridge enemy troops are dug in. Heinkels and Savoias strafe the Battalion and artillery shells SCREAM overhead. The grass is burned brown and anything moving raises a veil of dust. The sun blazes overhead.

Behind the Battalion, the MEDICS wait.

Oliver, behind a small tree, scans the line of his troops. At his feet Jesse, wearing his red bandana, and a RUNNER crouch, waiting. Oliver leans down to them and shouts.

OLIVER

Tell everyone to watch for when I move. When I move,
everyone moves. Go!

Oliver watches Jesse and the runner scuttle away, separate, and pass the word.

He checks his watch, looks overhead, picks off a piece of bark. A bullet slams into the tree, but he doesn't flinch.

He looks closely at the bark, fingers it, then sticks it in his shirt pocket.

He waves his arms to the right, and then to the left.

LINE OF TROOPS

The men grab their guns. Sweat streaks their filthy faces, their BREATHING rasps. All eyes forward, all mouths set.

TREE

Oliver turns, still shielding himself against the tree, then steps out of his cover and starts moving up the hill.

LINE OF TROOPS

As one, the men run.

Immediately, the air CRACKS with rifle fire. SCREAMS of pain, bodies ripped apart.

HILL

Jesse sprints to catch up with Oliver, who encourages his men to keep moving forward.

And they move, finding shelter in a fold of ground, behind a corpse or a sharp rock.

BY OLIVER

Jesse reaches Oliver, and Oliver gives him one of his big grins. Just as Oliver turns, a bullet slams into Oliver's chest, knocking him back into and over Jesse.

TREE

They both roll down the hill until Oliver slams into the tree he had just hidden behind. Jesse crawls up to Oliver, sees the gaping bubbling wound in his chest.

FROM NEARBY

Smith and a SECOND MAN attend a wounded man.

JESSE (O.S.)

Smith! Smith!

Smith sees Jesse shouting while cradling Oliver.

SMITH

(to second man)

Move him back.

BY OLIVER

Smith scuttles over. Using his knife, he cuts away the shirt. He inspects the wound, pulls a compress out of his bag, applies it to the chest.

Smith whistles two sharp blasts and then a long one, and two MEN appear carrying a stretcher. They scramble forward. Jesse and Smith roll Oliver onto the stretcher.

Crouched, they half-carry, half-drag Oliver to the rear.

SUNKEN ROAD

To get to the road, the four slide down a four-foot drop. As they do, a SNIPER opens up on them.

Jesse automatically drops his end of the stretcher, swings his gun up, and gets off several rounds.

In the momentary lull, Smith and the two men, lifting the stretcher, scamper away while Jesse covers them.

BATTLEFIELD MEDICAL UNIT

A butcher shop, full of blood and dust. Smith, Jesse, and the two men rush in, set the stretcher down.

SMITH

We gotta go back.

They run out.

JESSE

David! David!

Smith turns. Jesse tosses him his rifle and ammunition. Smith salutes Jesse, then turns and leaves.

A DOCTOR hustles over, his rubber apron blood-spattered, specks of blood on one lens of his glasses.

JESSE

(indicating stretcher)

It's the battalion commander.

The doctor and Jesse kneel. The doctor lifts the bandage, and they both see the blood pool and not bubble.

The doctor pulls out a piece of tree bark, throws it away.

Jesse looks at the doctor, then back at the lifeless Oliver.

The doctor signals to two aides, who come over and take Oliver off the stretcher.

FROM JESSE'S POV

The aides put Oliver's body with other corpses gathered under a tent, then move away.

A haze of flies already gathers over and onto the bodies.

ON OLIVER'S FACE

A fly walks across Oliver's cheek, just below his open eye.

BATTLEFIELD UNIT

Jesse turns back to the doctor.

DOCTOR
(apologetic)

I have to --

Jesse gestures to the doctor to wait. He unties the bandana, takes the doctor's glasses and wipes the glasses clean. He hands them back, re-ties the bandana.

Jesse turns to leave.

DOCTOR
We could use you here.

Jesse, not looking back, shakes his head no. He finds a SOLDIER lying on the ground, his gun by his side, smoking a cigarette. Jesse walks up to him, kneels.

JESSE
(indicating gun)

Needing that?

SOLIDER
(British accent)

Not with that shot off.

Jesse sees the soldier's shattered foot. He grabs the gun and the ammunition pack, then stands.

SOLDIER

Wait!

The soldier hands his bayonet to Jesse.

Jesse takes it, slips it into his belt loop, then turns and walks into the blazing sun.

EXT. WOODS BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

Jesse weaves through the trees, stops, then steps, stops, moves, stops, until he hears what he wants: a long EXHALE. He can just make out the sniper sitting in his perch.

Jesse moves to his right to get a clearer shot, then levels his rifle and pulls off a round.

The CRASH of the falling sniper SHATTERS the thick hot air.

BY THE SNIPER

Jesse stares into the terrified dark sweating face of a Moor from the Army of Africa. He wears the red and yellow of Franco's army pinned above his heart. His legs twist underneath him, his head cocked at a grotesque angle.

Nothing moves in the thick air. Then Jesse grips the bayonet, kneels by the sniper. The sniper's eyes widen.

SNIPER
(hoarsely)

Mi cuello! Está roto! [My neck. It's broken.]

Jesse touches the point of the bayonet to the palms of the sniper's hands -- no response. He touches the bayonet to the sniper's neck, moves the head just slightly, sees the swollen lump of the broken neck, lets the head roll back.

SNIPER

Negro. Negro. Hermano. [Black. Black. Brother.]

The insects BUZZ, the battle RUMBLES, the leaves RUSTLE as Jesse places the bayonet tip against the colors over the sniper's breast and rams the bayonet through the heart.

A look of utter surprise fills the sniper's face as he lets out a sharp EXHALE before the life flames out of his eyes.

Jesse stares at the open dead eyes. As he does, it seems the woods around him erupt with BUZZING and CHIRPING and SAWING, louder and louder and louder and louder.

Suddenly, frantically, he starts slapping all his pockets until he hits the leather pouch attached to his belt.

He rips it open, takes out the battered white envelope, takes out the picture of him with his wife, and stares and stares at it. As he does, his BREATHING slows down, his hands stop shaking, the HIGH-PITCHED SIZZLING fades away to the SILENCE of the hot windless woods.

He puts the picture away. He takes the sniper's knife, hooks it to his belt, walks off.

THROUGH THE WOODS

Jesse wanders through the woods, dragging the rifle by the barrel. His face is empty; his eyes hold no light.

EXT. TOWN OF BRUNETE

Jesse reaches a ridge that overlooks Brunete. Artillery and aerial bombing has leveled the town.

Jesse looks west, where the sun hovers just above the horizon. He looks east and can see the coming night. Making no effort to hide himself, he starts down the ridge.

EXT. STREETS OF BRUNETE - DUSK

Townspeople fleeing, troops running through, the incoming shells, the sniper fire -- none of this touches Jesse as he wanders through the town, his face empty and body slack, the butt of the rifle bumping behind him on the street.

CEMETERY

At the entrance to the cemetery, Jesse can see the blue/red/yellow flag of the Republic hanging motionless from a pole stuck into the dirt of a new grave.

All around him Republican troops hide themselves behind gravestones and mausoleums.

From the surrounding woods and hills Jesse catches sight of Franco's troops firing into the cemetery.

A bullet CRACKS into the wall next to him, and instinct drops Jesse to the ground. The SHRIEKS of incoming artillery cut the air, and almost at the same moment he hears them, the shells THUD into the grave-filled earth.

Bones, bodies, caskets, all fly through air, the dead showering the living.

FROM JESSE'S POV

As if looking through gauze, Jesse thinks he sees a grand waltz.

The soliders and corpses and skeletons dancing stately and macabre. The shells explode like shooting stars, and the bullets become butterflies.

Jesse slides low along the wall, batting away the butterflies, avoiding the dancers who invite him to join them. More and more they grab at him, and more and more he pushes them away until he throws himself into a corner made by the wall and fence and SCREAMS and SCREAMS and SCREAMS.

CEMETERY - EARLY EVENING

Jesse's SCREAMS blend with the incoming shells as the vision rips away. He rolls himself over the wall, then scuttles into the lee of the building away from the cemetery.

EXT. HILLSIDE - BRUNETE - DUSK

Jesse looks back at the town and the fighting, then turns and makes his way up the hillside.

Jesse never looks for the HOWL of the incoming shell and so takes no cover when it SLAMS home. The concussion pitches him into a tree, knocking him breathless.

Gasping for air, he touches his ribs.

JESSE'S RIB

Jesse's finger touches the sharp point of a piece of shrapnel. His hand comes away bloody.

COPSE OF TREES

Three Nationalist SOLDIERS step out, guns raised, and stop him. But they see his black face and lower their guns.

SOLDIER 1

¡Moro hijo de puta! [Fucking Moor.]

SOLDIER 2

La lucha es pro allá, follón. [The fighting's that way, coward.]

Jesse grins stupidly, shows them his bloody hand.

SOLDIER 3

Vale, que en mi vida he visto un mono sangrando. [I didn't know monkeys could bleed.]

Soldier 1 comes over, looks at Jesse's side, sees the tip of the shrapnel. He reaches into his bag and comes up with a pair of pliers. He grabs the tip of the shrapnel and pulls it out, then drops it into Jesse's hand.

SOLIDER 1

Cógela, mono, llévatela a tu aldea mugrienta. [Hey, monkey, take it back to your filthy little village.]

(to others)

Vamos. [Come on.]

They leave Jesse and move toward the battle.

Jesse takes the bandana and stuffs it into his shirt to cover the wound, puts the shrapnel in his pocket, moves away from the battle.

ROCKY HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Thirsty, completely lost, Jesse stumbles along. The EXPLOSIONS sound very far away.

REAR OF THE ENEMY LINES

Jesse sees a field flooded with light and hears the SHARP BARKS of commands.

TO HIS LEFT

A SENTRY scrambles toward him. Jesse drops to the dirt.

FROM JESSE'S POV

Less than a yard from Jesse's face, Jesse can see the sentry's boot heel touch the ground first, the foot rock forward, and then the toe kick dirt as the sentry pushes off.

BLIND OF ROCKS

Jesse pulls himself into a tumble of rocks. Between them he can see the field.

FIELD

Generators on the backs of trucks power arclights, and their white light illuminates 400 captured Republicans. Franco's soldiers surround them, all of this overseen by an OFFICER standing on the hood of a truck.

At the officer's signal, several dozen more soldiers come forward holding axes.

BLIND OF ROCKS

Jesse watches the soldiers with the axes proceed to hack off the legs of the Republicans until 400 mutilated men bleed their life away.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

Jesse wanders even farther away. His body sags, his mouth swells with thirst, everything appears in a fog.

TO HIS RIGHT

Jesse catches a glimpse of a moving shadow.

TO HIS LEFT

Another shadow slips through the darkness.

Ahead of him, an impossible sound: Jesse hears water.

A SPRING

Jesse's hand scoops water from a stone basin encased in a grotto, on top of which stands a statue of the Virgin Mary.

As soon as he drinks, Jesse is overcome by his exhaustion, his wound, his trauma, and he falls backward.

FROM JESSE'S POV

Overhead, the stars wheel. And then they congeal into one face, then another, then several more peering down at him. As if from some great distance Jesse hears VOICES.

SPRING

Shadowed figures holding guns hover over Jesse. RIFLE FIRE from the darkness suddenly disperses them.

FROM JESSE'S POV

The faces disappear, and then, an even wilder vision: a TALL THIN MAN with white hair on a horse looks down at him.

JESSE

Don Quijote?

The last thing Jesse hears before he blacks out is LAUGHTER and the CRACK of gunfire.

FADE TO BLACKNESS

FADE IN

INT. TENT - A DAY LATER

Jesse opens his eyes to the shadows of leaves on canvas.

He tries to rise, but the pain in his left side stops him. Outside he can hear VOICES LAUGHING and ARGUING.

An effort gets him onto an elbow. Another effort, and on his hands and knees, breathing deeply. He crawls to the opening and pops his head through. The stained red bandana hangs from his neck.

EXT. TENT - DAY

FIVE PEOPLE around a fire see the head pop through and immediately fall silent.

OPENING OF THE TENT

Jesse sees four white men and one black woman staring..

FROM THE FIRE

JAMES, 40s, rough-hewn, speaks in his thick Irish accent.

JAMES

Like a babe from his mama's twat.

LAUGHTER, then silence. Another VOICE, with a Spanish accent, from his right and out of his line of vision.

VOICE (O.C.)

A niño, yes -- he wants to fight to protect the government.

TENT

The five make a semi-circle facing Jesse. PIERRE, 20s, speaks.

PIERRE

You know him?

TENT OPENING

Jesse looks to his right, but the sun blinds him until the PERSON moves to block it. He sees LUZ.

LUZ

(to Jesse)

Hey, nappy. I told you it was a new world.

(to the others)

He's American.

The black woman, AWAGU, 20s, spits into the dust.

AWAGU

Another American?

Pierre looks around.

PIERRE

Where is our young Hemingway?

Pierre looks at ROMULO and REMO, twin brothers, 20s.

PIERRE

Donde está el Hemingway? [Where is our Hemingway?]

ROMULO AND REMO

(shrugging)

No sabemos. [We don't know.]

A SHOUT. Instantly, they grab their weapons and disperse.

Walking into view, a dead rabbit in each hand, a triumphant smile on his face is DEWEY MARLOWE, 20s, a rifle slung across his shoulder and a battered fedora on his head.

He looks completely and utterly happy.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - LATER

Rabbit meat on plates, boiled potato, bread. The trees around the eight throw down their shade.

Marlowe drops his plate, pulls a notebook and a pencil from his kit bag. He flips pages, looks at his notes, licks his pencil tip.

PIERRE

Oop, here he goes.

MARLOWE

(to Pierre)

Careful -- mind at work here. Now you guys save this black man's bacon from the Franco-ites -- Franco-ists --

JAMES

(smiling, to Jesse)

This white man just called you a pig part.

MARLOWE

Did not.

PIERRE

(enunciating)

He-ming-way.

MARLOWE

Told you, "Dewey Marlowe"'s gonna be bigger on Broadway.
Now --

LUZ

(to Marlowe)

Local Falange -- Carlistos --

MARLOWE

(writing)

Falange -- right --

LUZ

(to Jesse)

They wait for Franco the Savior.

ROMULO

(spitting)

Falange -- viboras. [Falange -- snakes.]

RAMO

(spitting)

Viboras, sí. [Snakes, yes.]

MARLOWE

(finishing writing)

Carlitos -- great. Now, Brunete --

Jesse meets the seven faces looking at him. As he speaks, Luz translates for Romulo and Remo.

JESSE

Brunete. My best friend Oliver Lumet had his heart blown open running up Mosquito Hill.

LUZ

The one I met.

JESSE

The one you met. For your government.

Jesse wipes his plate with the bread, chews the bread.

JESSE

(directly at Marlowe)

A sniper pinned us down when we took Oliver for medical help.

Jesse chews some more. Everyone waits for him to speak.

JESSE

I went back for him. I shot him, he fell -- broke his neck. No danger to anyone. But I took a bayonet and I shoved it through a defenseless man's heart.

Everyone stays silent. Marlowe scribbles in his pad.

JAMES

He was the enemy you came to fight.

AWAGU

The thing that was the right thing to do.

Jesse nods his head, finishes his bread.

JESSE

(looking at Luz)

Then why do I feel like an animal?

SOUND of a GALLOPING HORSE, and weapons leap into everyone's hands, including Jesse's. An OLD MAN, white hair streaming, rides up on his emaciated nag.

OLD MAN

Soldados. [Soldiers.]

PIERRE

Plan B, as you Americans say.

Almost instantly they break camp.

EXT. FIELD

Jesse finds himself moving off at a trot with the others across the open field. He grips his side in pain. Marlowe comes over, takes Jesse's gun off his shoulder and slings it over his own, takes the camp equipment Jesse carries.

MARLOWE

You can pay me like they pay me -- you can give me stories.

JESSE

(gasping)

I don't have to give you nothing.

MARLOWE

(hitching up his load)

Who said anything about "have to," man? We're all about liberty around here -- even if it kills us. Come on.

Jesse moves painfully forward. Marlowe follows, CLANKING like a tinker's wagon.

FROM JESSE'S POV

From a quick glance over his shoulder, Jesse sees the white-haired old man stay behind, keeping watch. Then he rides away in the opposite direction, waving his battered hat and yelling.

EXT. HILLTOP OVERLOOKING VILLAGE

They all skid to a stop in a cloud of dust.

Below them is a cluster of houses and fields, dominated by a church. In the distance they can hear GUNSHOTS. Luz points.

EXT. VILLAGE

Villagers, guns in hand, surround the church tower, from which a Nationalist sniper fires on the crowd.

EXT. HILLTOP

JAMES

Well, me hearties, what say you all?

Down the hill they go.

EXT. VILLAGE - BUILDING

An OLD MAN sees the ragtag group moving toward him. He shoulders an old Mauser and SHOUTS at them.

OLD MAN

Anarchista, comunista, o socialista? [Anarchist, communist, or socialist?]

Luz approaches with hand raised, black bandana in her hand.

LUZ

Somos anarquistas. [We are anarchists.]

MARLOWE

(whispering)

You sure you want to tell him --

The old man points at Jesse, at his bandana.

LUZ
(to Jesse)

Take it off.

She hands him her black bandana. Jesse takes off the red, stuffs it into his pocket, puts on the black. The old man lowers his gun.

OLD MAN
Buena respuesta. Necesitamos su ayuda. [Good answer.
We need your help.]

LUZ
La tiene, señor. [You have it, sir.]

Luz signals, and they neatly pile up all their equipment except their guns. Luz confers with the old man.

BY THE EQUIPMENT

Jesse sees Marlowe take out a Leica.

MARLOWE
(grinning)
I'm gunning for Robert Capa, too.

PIERRE
His huevos are bigger than his brain.

JAMES
That wouldn't be hard.

ROMULO AND REMO
(grabbing their crotches)
Huevos! [Balls!]

Luz walks up to the group.

LUZ
He's the mayor. Sniper up there. Soldiers in the bakery -- they have the baker's family. Other soldiers spread out in different houses.

AWAGU

They got cut off.

PIERRE

Nothing to lose.

JAMES

All right.

(to Romulo and Remo)

Sígame. Vamos a buscar el pan. [Follow me -- we are going to get some bread.]

(to the others)

See you for dinner.

James, Romulo, and Remo speak briefly to the Mayor, then move out. Luz turns to Jesse, and they survey the steeple. Marlowe hovers around them, camera in hand, camera bag slung over his shoulder.

JESSE

I'll have to get inside.

Jesse looks directly at Luz.

JESSE

And why am I going to do this?

Luz leans in to whisper in Jesse's ear.

LUZ'S MOUTH

LUZ

(smiling)

You have been re-born -- you have found me again -- you're fighting for something real now -- don't let Oliver die for nothing -- how much better do you want life to be?

BY THE EQUIPMENT

Luz and Jesse share a look. Then Jesse reaches into the equipment to get himself ready.

MARLOWE

I want in on this.

JESSE

You have a gun?

Marlowe holds up his camera.

MARLOWE

I have to go with you.

JESSE

(pointing to camera)

Got any dead bodies in it?

MARLOWE

Not up close.

JESSE

(shaking his head)

Christ.

(to Luz)

Tell the Alcalde -- on my signal, have everyone pour fire up there for cover.

Luz leaves to speak to the Mayor. Jesse watches, a soft look on his face he tries to hide. He turns to Marlowe.

JESSE

Get in my way, I will shoot you.

MARLOWE

No you won't -- you need me. You don't know it yet, but you need me.

JESSE

Just stay out of my way, white boy.

MARLOWE

You're so full of shit.

Jesse raises his hand and then drops it. Gunfire erupts.

EXT. BACK OF THE CHURCH - DAY

Jesse sprints along the wall, looking for an opening. Marlowe trots behind him.

He stops at a window with wooden shutters.

Across the seam he sees a wooden bar holding the shutters closed.

He slips out his knife and slides the blade into the crack.

EXT. BAKERY

James, Romulo, and Remo skirt the back of the building.

UNDER OPEN WINDOW

Romulo pops his head over the sill, then pops it down. He holds up four fingers.

ROMULO

Soldados. [Soldiers.]

Remo pops up and down. Five fingers.

REMO

La familia. [The family.]

James scuttles to the back door, tries the latch. To his surprise it lifts. He cracks the door. He grins at Romulo and Remo and cocks his head as if to say, "Let's go, mates."

EXT. FANCY HOUSE

Luz, Awagu, and Pierre, followed by three VILLAGERS carrying hand scythes, slip around the corner. Luz runs her hand over the fancy tile work on the outside.

They flatten along the wall as a SOLDIER'S STEPS move along the roof -- but because of the eave, he can't see them.

One villager flinches, and the scythe rattles against the wall. The FOOTSTEPS stop, then move toward the roof edge.

FROM LUZ'S POV

The soldier's face appears over the eave, upside-down. She quickly raises her gun and fires.

INT. CHURCH

Jesse and Marlowe creep towards the tower stairs.

TOP OF THE STAIRS

Jesse's eyes rise above the level of the top stair.

FROM JESSE'S POV

Dark sweat on the sniper's jacket runs the length of his spine, with dark wet half-moons under his arms.

A hail of bullets eat at the stone of the tower, and he drops to the floor for protection. As he does, his eyes catch Jesse's eyes, and he jerks his rifle up, fires.

TOWER

The shot misses. Jesse, his gun aimed, climbs the stairs, Marlowe behind, his camera up. Jesse shakes his head "no" at the sniper as he oozes forward. The sniper, his face twisted by terror, puts his gun down, raises his hands.

Without preamble, Jesse shoots him in the head.

MARLOWE

No!

A frozen moment between the two of them, their eyes locked. Marlowe looks at Jesse with a mixture of fear and disgust.

MARLOWE

(hoarsely)

You bastard...

Jesse, hard-faced, but also with a look of sudden doubt, nods toward the corpse.

Marlowe lifts his camera, takes four shots, each from a different angle.

Jesse steps to the parapet, waves.

EXT. VILLAGE

The Mayor and the people, seeing Jesse wave, CHEER.

INT. TOWER

Jesse puts his gun down, takes the sniper by the lapels of his uniform, and slides him up the wall.

MARLOWE

What're you doing?

Jesse now has the body almost over the parapet.

MARLOWE

You can't do that! You can't do that!

Jesse gives him a dead-eyed stare.

The effort of lifting the body causes Jesse's rib wound to open -- a flower of blood blooms on his shirt.

Marlowe caps the lens, then stuffs the camera into his bag. He walks over to the body and grabs it by the lapels, right next to Jesse's hands. He jerks it out of Jesse's hands and heaves the body over his shoulder.

MARLOWE

He was somebody's son. He's still a goddamn human being.

Marlowe TROMPS down the stairs, carrying the corpse.

FROM JESSE'S POV

Jesse watches Marlowe lug the body down the stairs.

MARLOWE

(muttering)

Fucking guys all talk about their fucking ideals --

Marlowe and the body disappear.

Nothing but dust motes dance in the sunlight.

EXT. TOWER

Marlowe appears with the sniper's body. The CROWD rushes forward and drags the body off Marlowe and away through the dust, hacking at it as they do.

Marlowe, breathing heavily, watches the butchery. Jesse comes up behind. Jesse lays a hand on Marlowe's shoulder, squeezes it, then walks toward the crowd. Marlowe follows.

EXT. BAKERY

James, Romulo, and Remo bring out the baker's family. The baker carries a cleaver and a soldier's severed head.

INT. BAKERY

The four Nationalist soldiers, one beheaded, lay on the bakery floor, their blood mixing with the white flour.

EXT. FANCY HOUSE - INTERIOR COURTYARD

Luz, Awagu, and Pierre hold several soldiers at bay.

The three villagers escort the oligarch, his wife, and their daughter out of the house. The soldiers then follow.

EXT. VILLAGE PLAZA

Jesse and Marlowe arrive at the plaza just as James, Romulo, and Remo arrive with the baker's family.

The baker holds up the severed head, and the CROWD cheers.

Luz, Awagu, and Pierre march the soldiers into the plaza along with the oligarch's family.

In a sudden frenzy, the villagers rush forward and grab the soliders and the family.

They put them up against a wall, and summarily execute them, the Mayor giving the order to fire.

Marlowe takes pictures of everything.

Jesse, Luz, and the others watch, exchange looks.

EXT. INTERIOR COURTYARD

The villagers crowd into the courtyard, some open-mouthed at the luxury they see. The Mayor commandeers a large table and its chairs from inside the house. The Mayor sits, the elders sit, and the rest gather around.

The baker puts the severed head in the middle of the table.

Jesse, Luz, Marlowe, and the others hang to the outside. Luz translates for Jesse. Marlowe takes his notes.

MAYOR

No más la cabeza de la Hidra. ¡La cortamos y así se queda!
[The head of the hydra is gone -- we cut it off, it stays off!]

Laughter and smiles all around.

MAYOR

¡Bótala! [Get rid of it!]

The baker grabs it by the hair and tosses it high over the roof. A stain of blood remains on the table. The Mayor BANGS the table to get everyone's attention.

MAYOR

¡Oigan todos! El cura está bien muerto, Don Valera está bien muerto, pero la tierra está aquí. ¿Qué quieren que hagamos con ella? [All right -- here are my words. The priest is gone, Don Valera is gone, but the land is still here. What do we do?]

Everyone falls silent, no one meeting anyone's eyes.

BY THE WALL

Jesse leans down to Luz to whisper. Marlowe leans into them both.

MARLOWE

(exaggerated Southern drawl)

They're breakin' up the plantation, boy.

Jesse looks at Marlowe, then Luz. Luz nods yes. Marlowe nods yes.

Jesse looks back at the villagers, his face softening for the first time in a long time.

TABLE

Finally, LARGO, wearing a vest, raises his hand.

MAYOR

Largo, ¡hombre, que no te quedas mudo! [Largo, don't hold your tongue.]

LARGO

La tierra del patrón...por qué no la dividimos... [The patrón's land -- we could divide it up --]

General MURMURS of agreement.

LARGO

(encouraged)

Le damos una parcela a Francisco, otra a Juan... [And give a piece to Francisco over there, and Juan --]

BELARMINO, 50s, eye-patch, grizzled, HISSES in disgust.

BELARMINO

(points to patch)

Este me lo gané en Asturias, en 1934, y me da derecho a llamarte follón. [I got this in Asturias, in 1934, and it gives me the right to call you a shit!]

The crowd is shocked and pleased by the confrontation.

LARGO

(appealing to Mayor)

Alcalde --

BELARMINO

(appealing to CROWD)

Por supuesto Largo quiere dividir la tierra y darsela a los que ya tienen campos porque lo que siempre ha querido es ser un señor siempre con esas ínfulas. [Of course Largo wants to chop it up and give it out to everyone who's already got land because he really wants to be a Don himself. Always with his airs --]

ISABEL, 50s, kerchiefed, stout, slams her hand down.

ISABEL

Joder, que ustedes nunca agotan sus querellas. [And always a goddamn pissing contest between you two.]

LARGO

¡Tengo derecho a mi tierra y ganarme más campos si puedes! [I have the right to keep my land and get more if it if I can!]

ISABEL

(pointing her finger)

¡Nunca más! [Not any more.]

(to the crowd)

Oiganlo ustedes, también. Nunca más se harán las cosas de esa manera. [And you all know it, too. Not doing it that way any more.]

The crowd settles down, thinking, nodding yes or no, whispering among themselves.

ISABEL

La decision es tan simple y evidente como los pelos de sus narices. [The choice is as plain as the hairs in your noses.]

LARGO

¿Qué decision? [What choice?]

ISABEL

O bien hacemos las cosas a la antigua o cambiamos el rumbo. [We either do it the old way or we don't.]

LARGO

Estoy de acuerdo...nuevos rumbos me seducen. [I don't disagree -- new ways are good.]

ISOBEL

¡Bórralo todo! [Wipe it all away.]

LARGO

Gente, como nosotros con lo que tenemos podríamos hacerlo más eficiente. [But people like me, owning what we own, we can be more efficient --]

ISABEL

Y ganar más dinero -- eso es todo lo que tu, y Francisco, y Juan... [And make more money -- that's all you and Francisco and Juan --]

LARGO

Que tiene de malo -- [What's wrong with --]

ISABEL

-- y los de vuestra calaña desean -- [-- and the ones like you want --]

LARGO

Que tiene de malo ganar -- [What's wrong with making --]

ISABEL

(saracastic)

"Ganar más dinero" -- hay cosas mejores en esta vida. Trabajar juntos por un ideal -- ["Make more money" -- there are better things in life. There is working together for the greater good --]

VOICE

¡Ya se subió al pùlpito! [Oop, now she's in her pulpit!]

ISABEL

¡Buen piropo para una atea! [A nasty thing to say to an atheist!]

Everyone LAUGHS.

BELARMINO

¡Oigan todos! [Pay attention!]

Belarmino points to beyond.

BELARMINO

¡Green que a la mierda de Franco y su caterva les preocupan los detalles? Lo que quieren es restauron el viejo orden y no les importaría aniquilarnos para conseguirlo. Yo digo que la tierra de patrón nos pertenece a todos. Siempre nos ha pertencido porque la hicimos rica con nuestro sudor y sangre. Y digo más -- [You think Franco's shifts care about fine points? They want the old ways, and they'll kill us to bring them back. I say this: the patrón's land belongs to all of us. It always belonged to all of us because it was our sweat that made it rich. And I say this, too --]

(pointing to Largo)

-- tu tierra también nos pertenece. [-- your land belongs to us.]

(to Juan and Francisco)

Y la tuya, también ¡No más propiedad privada -- collectivizar! [And yours, too. No more private property -- collectivize!]

LARGO

¡Eso no esta bien! [That's not right!]

(appealing to Mayor)

¡Eso no va! [That's not right!]

Everyone talks at once, Largo appealing, Isobel and Bellarmino also making their points.

The Mayor POUNDS on the table again and again until a tense silence falls.

The Mayor turns to Jesse, Luz, and the others. He points to Jesse as he speaks to the crowd.

MAYOR

Este hombre fue un esclavo en su patria y vino a luchar con nosotros, por nuestra causa. [This man was a slave in his own country and he comes to fight for us.]

(to Jesse)

¿Que opinas tu? [What you do think we should do?]

Luz translates the Mayor's words. Marlowe writes.

FROM JESSE'S POV

The rough faces of the villagers peer at him. He notes the richness of the house.

BY THE WALL

Jesse, sheepish, steps forward into the silence. Luz translates for him.

JESSE

I don't think I have the right to say anything here.

MAYOR

(to Luz)

Luchó por nosotros y eso lo hace uno de los nuestros. [He defended us -- that makes him one of us.]

JESSE

Let me tell you a story, then -- you can do what you want with it. Once I had four uncles -- cuatro tios -- with my father they owned land together. They shared everything -- good, bad, money, sorrow -- everything.

As Luz finishes translating the sentence, Jesse scans the experienced faces turned up to listen to him.

JESSE

All I can tell you is that it was the happiest time of my life. Not easy. They fought like dogs about everything. But nobody was at the mercy. Nobody was alone. Nobody went hungry.

BELARMINO

¿Qué les sucedió? [What happened to them?]

JESSE

Our own fascists took the land from them. It's an old story in my country.

The Mayor points to the rest of the crew.

MAYOR

¿Qué va con el resto de ustedes? [What about the rest of you?]

James, laughing, gives the anarchist salute, and Pierre, Romulo, Remo, and Awagu give the salute as well. Luz, looking at Jesse, also gives the salute.

Many in the crowd also give the salute. The Mayor, SLAMMING the table again, stands.

MAYOR

¡Vale! La hora ha llegado. Votamos, eh? ¿Tierra y libertad, o tierra y dinero? [All right -- the time has come. We vote, eh? Land and freedom, or land and money.]

LARGO

¡No eso justo! [That's not fair!]

MAYOR

(ignoring him)

¿Tierra y libertad? [Land and freedom?]

Almost all the hands shoot up.

MAYOR

¿Tierra y dinero? [Land and money?]

Largo and a few others raise their hands, defeated.

MAYOR

¡Colectivizar! [We collectivize!]

APPLAUSE, SHOUTS of approval. Jesse looks at Luz, and she smiles as if completely satisfied.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Jesse, James, Luz, Awagu, and Pierre stare into the fire. Romulo and Remo, curled around each other, sleep. A wineskin passes. Marlowe wears his fedora, scribbles in his notebook.

Overhead, at a great height, they hear planes.

JAMES

Heinkels. Not good.

(to Jesse)

So that's what your fellow communists, your comrade Stalinists, are doing.

LUZ

James --

JESSE

That's not true.

JAMES

The man does not even know himself.

LUZ

Leave him alone.

JAMES

They're killing off the anarchists, chum -- they're cutting the balls off the socialists, and even cannibalizing themselves --

JESSE

You're wrong.

JAMES

And they're killing off the revolution.

JESSE

That can't be true.

JAMES

Then let it not be true for you.

(to Marlowe)

Hey, Hemingway --

MARLOWE

(without looking up)

Marlowe --

JAMES

Who in the land of pig-faced capitalism is gonna want to read about a bunch of anarchists? They shoot anarchists there, too!

An embarrassed moment. James looks hard at Jesse.

JAMES

I got the wine in my tongue --

AWAGU

And your head.

JAMES

-- but it's still true. You watch --

(pointing to them all)

You know we're on the chopping block. We are all alone out here.

James takes the wineskin but doesn't drink.

JAMES

It's hard when you love something so much -- an idea you'll die for -- then to have these fucking "comrades" --

AWAGU

I just want to kill Italians for Ethiopia.

PIERRE

Germans for me.

JAMES

(laughing)

For me -- they're all Brit wankers from northern Ireland.

(to Jesse)

And you? Who are these guys to you?

Jesse stares into the fire, then looks at them all. Luz puts a gentle hand on his arm.

JESSE

White people hung my wife from a tree and burned her to ashes.

Marlowe closes his notebook.

MARLOWE

That's why they're not going to want to know about any of you suckers. A Negro whose wife was lynched fighting for freedom in a foreign land against white folks -- that is prime stuff.

Abruptly, Jesse gets up and walks off into the darkness.

JAMES

Your bedside manner's a fucking marvel.

MARLOWE

I learned everything from you.

The silence broken by the CRACKLING of the fire, the SNORES of Romulo and Remo.

Luz follows Jesse.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Jesse looks at the stars. He sees Luz approach but looks back to the stars. Luz stands next to him, puts her arm through his.

JESSE

Is James telling the truth?

She sits, pats the ground for Jesse to sit beside her.

LUZ

Yes. Jailing and killing all the anarchists they can get their hands on -- orders from Stalin -- militia units like ours either have to join the army or we get no weapons, ammunition, supplies -- I'm not supposed to even be carrying a gun -- yes, me! -- women are being turned back into maids --

Jesse stares into the darkness.

JESSE

I am so far from home.

They both look up as Marlowe comes up to them.

MARLOWE

Mind if I join you?

LUZ

You're already here.

Marlowe sits.

MARLOWE

The world out there thinks "the war for ideals." "The war of poets." There's no revolution here -- the Communists have choked that off.

LUZ

Not all of it.

MARLOWE

(pointing to village)

How long do you think they'll last, Luz? Franco could spit on us, he's so close. And the Communists will be coming from Valencia soon enough.

JESSE

Enough!

He turns an angry face to them. Luz puts a hand on him, then gets up, brushes off her pants, and walks back to the fire. Marlowe watches her walk back.

MARLOWE

I wrote about a lynching once --

Jesse does not look at him.

MARLOWE

Yeah. I am really sorry about your wife, Jesse. What a country, huh?

Marlowe gets up, starts to walk away, then turns back.

MARLOWE

Today -- up in the tower --

But he sees Jesse's shoulders shake. Marlowe squats in front of Jesse and sees that Jesse is crying.

Marlowe pulls down his shirt sleeve and uses the end of it to wipe Jesse's face. Jesse moves Marlowe's hand away.

Marlowe gets up to leave.

JESSE

You write all this down. Everything. All of it.

Marlowe squats back down in front of Jesse.

MARLOWE

I'm gonna write the truths that people tell me. I'm hoping that covers it.

Marlowe gets up.

MARLOWE

Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable -- that's me.

Marlowe walks away. Jesse's tears catch the firelight.

EXT. ROAD

A convoy of trucks GRUMBLES along.

EXT. FIELD

The GROWL of the trucks comes on the air. Jesse quickly stands.

FIRE

As they hear the trucks, everyone becomes instantly alert. Pierre shakes Romulo and Remo awake.

FIELD

Jesse races until he can see the line of trucks move inexorably toward the village.

FIRE

Jesse runs up just as James is dumping dirt on the embers. Already the lead trucks are moving into the village, and they can see the soldiers pour off the trucks.

JAMES

The fascists have arrived.

MARLOWE

But they're coming from Valencia.

EXT. VILLAGE

Under the harsh headlights, the SOLIDERS start moving through the village rousting people from their homes.

EXT. FIELD

They now hear GUNFIRE and SCREAMS.

JAMES

We can't stay here.

They move into the darkness. Jesse lingers, Marlowe by his side. They see the flames of the first house set on fire.

EXT. ROAD - DAWN

HOOFBEATS behind them. The white-haired old man comes flying down the road and disappears around the bend. Immediately on his heels they hear the convoy. They melt into the field.

FROM THE FIELD

From various trucks and tanks they see the flag of the Republic, not the flag of the Nationalists.

They rise up out of the field and walk toward the convoy. The convoy comes to a halt.

INT. LEAD TRUCK

A COLONEL, his military cap bearing a red star, sees the rag-tag group wearing their black bandanas moving through the field. He gets out of the truck.

EXT. ROAD

The colonel, now joined by his AIDE, watches them walk through the field. He gestures to the soldiers in the truck behind him. Half a dozen leap from the truck and seize the eight of them. All the soldiers sport the red star on their uniforms.

FIELD

The soldiers strip the eight of their weapons and frog-march them to the colonel.

ROAD

The eight stand in front of the colonel, who looks them over with a cold eye. He spits into the dust.

COLONEL

Anarquistas. [Anarchists.]

He looks back along the line of his trucks and tanks.

LUZ

(fierce whisper to Marlowe)

Say something or you'll die with us.

COLONEL

(to Luz)

Cállete. [Shut up.]

Luz steps forward.

LUZ

¿Qué piensas hacer con nosotros? [What are you going to do with us?]

Without hesitation, the colonel pulls his pistol and shoots Luz through the eye. Luz's body drops like a stone.

COLONEL

Mátalos a todos. [Kill them all.]

MARLOWE

I'm a journalist! Periodisto! I'm a journalist! From the United States! ¡Los Estados Unidos!

He holds up his camera bag and notebook. The colonel gives him a long slow look.

COLONEL

(in English)

You know Paul Robeson?

MARLOWE

Not personally. But I've heard him sing.

COLONEL

He sang to us -- he's a good Communist. You American, too?

JESSE

Yes.

COLONEL

You look just like Jesse Owen -- a very fast man -- I love jazz. Harlem.

The colonel's aide whispers in his ear. The colonel points to Marlowe and Jesse.

COLONEL

Put them in the truck.

Two soldiers wrestle Marlowe and Jesse toward a truck.

MARLOWE

(shouting)

Colonel, Colonel, they all work with me -- they're my assistants --

But before Marlowe finishes speaking, James, Pierre, Awagu, Romulo, and Remo have been executed.

FROM THE TRUCK

Marlowe and Jesse stare at the corpses of their friends.

The passing convoy covers them with dust.

EXT. ROAD - HOUR LATER

The convoy halts. A soldier indicates to Jesse and Marlowe to get off the truck and follow him.

BY THE LEAD TRUCK

The colonel leans out his window.

COLONEL

The base for the International Brigades -- that way. You should reach it without much trouble. Say hello to Paul Robeson for me.

The colonel's truck moves on, followed by the other trucks in the convoy, until they all pass out of sight.

In the heat and silence, Jesse and Marlowe stand very still.

Jesse takes off his black bandana, kneels, scoops a handful of rough rocky dirt into it, then ties it up and puts it in his pocket.

Jesse starts walking down the road.

Marlowe hitches up his gear and starts out after Jesse.

Jesse takes Marlowe's camera bag off Marlowe's shoulder and slings it over his own shoulder.

INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY

Jesse and Marlowe sit on hard benches, rocked by the rough travel, surrounded by Spaniards of all ages and classes.

EXT. CUSTOMS HOUSE - BORDER - DAY

French soldiers rifle through their belongings, frisk them. One opens the bandana of dirt. He looks at Jesse, then carefully reties the bandana and puts it in Jesse's hand.

INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY

The French countryside flows by. Jesse and Marlowe sit knee-to-knee, Jesse staring, Marlowe writing, occasionally looking up at Jesse's blank and impassive face.

EXT. DECK OF SHIP - DAY

Jesse at the rail, looking out over the Atlantic. Marlowe stands next to him, holding onto his fedora. The wind whips over them.

INT. STEERAGE CABIN - EVENING

A cramped space, with metal bunkbeds bolted to one wall and a small table and chair. A lightbulb glares. Jesse lies on the lower bunk while Marlowe sits at the desk and writes. Marlowe throws down his pencil, pounds his fist.

MARLOWE

I can't get it to work!

Rifles through papers.

MARLOWE

Notes, impressions, but it's like --

(rubbing his face)

Hemingway's just churning it out --

FROM JESSE'S POV

Jesse stares at the metal netting of the upper bunk, the dirty mattress ticking.

JESSE

You want a real story 'bout Spain?

CABIN

Jesse swings his legs over the side of the bunk, and he and Marlowe are barely a foot apart.

MARLOWE

I could use a real story.

JESSE

I'm going back.

MARLOWE

Back?

JESSE

To Mississippi.

MARLOWE

No you're not.

He searches Jesse's face.

MARLOWE

No you're not!

JESSE

I went all the way to there just to fight the people who live in my town.

MARLOWE

No you didn't! That's crazy! What -- bang bang? They ain't like the guy in the tower!

JESSE

No.

Marlowe and Jesse lock eyes. Marlowe searches Jesse's face.

MARLOWE

(realizing)

No, you're not.

JESSE

I'll need a friendly witness.

The words hang in the air. In the silence the ship CREAKS.

JESSE

Think about it --

MARLOWE

You're just using me.

JESSE

-- front page -- all American --

MARLOWE

You're just using me.

JESSE

-- yet strange, too, you know -- love and death -- you got it all --

Marlowe looks at him straight in the eye, then LAUGHS.

MARLOWE

You can't -- you can't -- it'd be like --

JESSE

They've killed, and I've killed, and it ain't done anything for either of us.

MARLOWE

You could go anywhere -- Paris -- the women'll love your
ass to death there.

JESSE

Uh-huh.

MARLOWE

Africa -- South America -- Caribbean --

JESSE

But I want to go home. I want to go home to Marley.

Jesse smiles.

JESSE

You said, afflict the comfortable, comfort the afflicted, not
me --

MARLOWE

I didn't say yes.

Marlowe turns back to his writing.

MARLOWE

I didn't say yes!

But Marlowe doesn't write. He stares at the paper.

EXT. TRAIN - DUSK

Jesse and Marlowe, wearing knapsacks, trot alongside a boxcar, then heave
themselves through the open door.

INT. BOXCAR

Faces look up at them when they crawl in, then look away.

JESSE

Bulls been here?

HOBO

Kicked a nigger off.

JESSE

I'm his replacement.

HOBOS

Dining car's closed for the night.

Jesse and Marlowe sit down. Jesse watches the HOBOS pitch back and forth as the train plows through the night.

EXT. TOWN LIMITS - DAY

A sign announces "Entering _____."

EXT. GROVE OF TREES

Jesse and Marlowe take cover.

JESSE

There's a boarding house near the town hall -- you can get a room there. Woman named Swanson runs it -- her son is the Mayor.

MARLOWE

And I'm just a young writer on a journey through the South.

JESSE

Wouldn't want to lie, would you?

Jesse reaches into his knapsack and pulls out a leather pouch that he opens. Inside is the envelope with the picture of Jesse and Marley, along with papers, clippings, a Mass card, and Luz's statue of Don Quixote. He hands it all to Marlowe.

Marlowe puts them away. They look at each other.

JESSE

Ten o'clock.

MARLOWE

And I don't know who you are.

They hold the look. Then Jesse gets up.

JESSE

Okay.

Marlowe gets up.

MARLOWE

This man of words ain't got any words.

Jesse walks away from Marlowe, then turns and comes back. He holds out his hand. Marlowe shakes it. Then Jesse leaves.

EXT. RUINS OF JESSE'S HOUSE - DAY

Kudzu has grown over the charred remains. Jesse unhitches his bedroll and tent, sets them up.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Marlowe knocks, and while waiting for a response, inspects the small dusty square in front of the town hall. He stares at the streetlight from which they had hung Marley.

DOOR

MRS. SWANSON, 50s, doughy, wall-eyed, stands in the doorway.

MARLOWE
(with great charm)

Good day.

SWANSON
(suspiciously)

Yeah?

MARLOWE
Mrs. Swanson?

SWANSON
You ain't got a voice from around here.

MARLOWE
I was told you have the nicest rooms in town.

SWANSON

That may be true.

MARLOWE

I'd like a chance to find out.

SWANSON

You a communist? You a "nigger-ist"?

MARLOWE

I'm not any kind of "ist." Just a writer. Working on a book.
A "writer-ist," I guess.

He flashes Swanson his biggest falsest smile.

SWANSON

I got a nice room for a writer.

EXT. JESSE'S PROPERTY - DAY

A YOUNG BOY, four or five years old, ragged, underfed, looks at Jesse. Jesse crouches to get to his eye-level, gestures for him to come over. The boy comes over.

JESSE

You have a name?

The boy shakes his head no. Jesse pulls the black bandana from his knapsack and opens it, picks a rock from the dirt.

JESSE

Then I'm going to call you Oliver.

(hands him the rock)

And this is a magic rock. It's got a name, too -- Spain. Can you say Spain?

The boy shakes his head no. Then he SPEAKS.

BOY

Spain.

Jesse puts his hand tenderly on the boy's head.

JESSE

Go home now.

The boy runs away. Jesse adds a handful of Mississippi dirt to the pile, re-ties the bandana, puts it away.

EXT. TENT - NIGHT

Jesse stares into a small fire. The barest breeze RUSTLES the leaves.

Suddenly, Jesse sits bolt upright -- PEOPLE move out of the darkness into the fire's glow.

FROM JESSE'S POV

The dark faces at first look like apparitions.

CAMPFIRE

Jesse's face hardens in fear.

But then his features soften as the faces become solid and recognizable -- the next-door-neighbor, the little boy again, the woman from across the road.

A DOZEN PEOPLE drift in to sit around the fire, their dark faces staring at Jesse.

VOICE 1

Really you, Jesse Colton?

VOICE 2

You really back?

Jesse nods yes.

VOICE 3

Where you been?

VOICE 4

You been a dead man, we heard.

The little boy walks up to Jesse and sits next to him. Jesse pulls him closer.

JESSE

I been dead, yeah.

The fire CRACKS and SNAPS.

JESSE

I also come a long way back to being alive.

VOICE 4

But you're a dead man here again if they see you.

JESSE

You all think that's so?

They all ponder this question.

VOICE 11

Yeah.

SEVERAL VOICES

Yeah.

VOICE 10

They got a hate longer than God's tapeworm.

JESSE

Where is my Marley?

They all share looks, except the little boy, who leans his head against Jesse's knee and closes his eyes.

VOICE 1

We don't know.

VOICE 5

No one knows.

Jesse nods slowly, rests his hand on the little boy's head.

JESSE

Doesn't matter.

VOICE 6

Jesse, we couldn't've --

Voice 9 puts a hand on Voice 6 to stop the words.

The fire CRACKLES in the silence.

FROM JESSE'S POV

Jesse stares at the boy's nappy hair, sees a louse crawling through the roots, picks it out, crushes it, tosses it.

CAMPFIRE

JESSE

I wanta tell you a story about "stopping."

VOICE 4

Nothing's stopped --

JESSE

(gently ignoring)

Anybody know where Spain is?

Silence as they think.

VOICE 7

Near Biloxi, maybe?

Jesse LAUGHS.

VOICE 8

(to Voice 7)

Ain't no Spain near Biloxi, knucklehead.

JESSE

Not so hard -- he ain't that far off. It's a country, not a county
--

Jesse's VOICE fills the air with tales of Spain.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT

Marlowe, edge of his bed, sweating. A CLANKING fan stirs the muggy air. Notebook open, covered in writing. Beside him is his camera and lenses, with a cleaning cloth and brushes and rolls of film.

EXT. TENT - MORNING

Jesse crawls out of the tent. A wind moves through the trees. He stretches, shakes some water out of his canteen, washes his face, arranges his clothes, shoulders his knapsack, and walks toward the town.

EXT. ROAD - MORNING

As Jesse walks down the road, the people from the night before plus others appear on their porches and stoops, in their yards, leaning out of windows. They all watch him. No one SPEAKS.

He sees the boy to whom he had given the rock. He sees that the boy holds the rock in his right hand.

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

Jesse stands at the foot of the town hall steps. White people with business in the town hall pass by him, give him a curious look: where have they seen him before?

Sweat beads on his face, stains his shirt. He keeps his vigil.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Marlowe watches Jesse. Swanson stands behind him.

SWANSON

You gonna need the room another night?

MARLOWE

I don't know just yet.

(pointing)

Who's that?

Swanson moves onto the porch, catches sight of Jesse. She casts her wall-eye at Marlowe.

SWANSON

He's supposed to be a dead man.

INT. TOWN HALL - MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The Mayor is at his desk. The Sheriff walks in.

SHERIFF

Might want to look out your front window.

The Mayor goes to the window, sees what is there, turns a troubled face back to the Sheriff.

EXT. TOWN HALL - DAY

A small crowd has gathered around Jesse, including Marlowe. The Mayor and the Sheriff come out to face him.

Marlowe makes his way slowly to the front of the crowd.

MAYOR

What the [fuck] --

He catches himself.

MAYOR

What are you doing here?

JESSE

I live here.

MAYOR

You lived here. Now get the f[uck] --
(catches himself again)
Just get out of here.

JESSE

I come to see my wife's grave. Where'd you bury her,
Mayor? Sheriff?

More white people have gathered. Marlowe is at the front.

JESSE

That's all right -- I'll save you the trouble of lying. I'll bet her bones've been buried by every dog in town. That's okay, too -- don't blame dogs for being dogs. But I won't be leaving until I find every bone.

He reaches into his back pocket.

JESSE

One more thing.

He pulls out his blue Communist Party membership card. He gestures to Marlowe.

JESSE

Sir -- help me out?

Marlowe steps forward. The eyes of everyone draw to him. Jesse hands him the card.

JESSE

Would you take that up so as the Mayor can read it?

Marlowe walks up the steps, hands the Mayor the card. The Mayor reads it, hands it to the Sheriff, who reads it, then rips it half and drops it. Marlowe picks it up, puts it into the leather pouch.

JESSE

Just so you know you have a real one this time.

Jesse turns to leave and begins SINGING the Internationale. As he does so, he does a little cake-walk dance, his smile wide and taunting.

JESSE

Arise ye workers from your slumbers
Arise ye prisoners of want
For reason in revolt now thunders
And at last ends the age of cant.

His voice trails away.

EXT. TENT - NIGHT

Jesse sits next to a small fire. Down the road he sees headlights in a boiling cloud of dust coming closer and closer. A truck pulls up in front of him. He stands.

FROM JESSE'S POV

He sees dark silhouettes get out of the trucks and cars.

FROM CROWD'S POV

Dust swirls. Headlights outline Jesse in a stark light.

TENT

Jesse can see Marlowe's terrified face bobbing in the crowd as the crowd moves toward him.

A lasso SNAPS out of the darkness and tightens around Jesse's throat, pulling him to his knees. A MAN behind Jesse plants a foot on his back and pushes Jesse forward.

At the same moment, other MEN take Jesse's hands off the rope around his neck and pull them behind Jesse's back.

A man hands Marlowe a short length of rope for hog-typing.

MAN
(to Marlowe)

Loop it around his wrist -- be good for that book of yours.

Marlowe loops it around one wrist, his face a mask of fear. He fumbles so badly that the man takes it out of his hands.

MAN
(to others)

S'got the twitches.

The man wraps Jesse's hands in a quick tight figure-eight.

MAN
(to Marlowe)
Proper way to tie a hog. You write that down.

BACK OF TRUCK

Marlowe sits among the sweaty men as the truck pulls out. He watches Jesse's body cut the dust as the truck drags him along the road, the lights of the truck behind them slicing through the dust and shadowing the dead Jesse.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

FROM DESK'S POV

A neatly typed manuscript lands with a THUD on a desk filled with papers, photos, food wrappers, and so on.

The creased photo of Jesse and Marley sits on top of an 8x10 photo of a hanged and burned corpse, both photos sitting on top of the manuscript.

Hands picks up the photos and manuscript.

CHAIR

Marlowe sits in a wooden chair, his hands nested in his lap. A worn leather knapsack leans against the chair leg.

Through the open window come blaring CAR HORNS and the SIZZLE of rubber tires on hot asphalt.

The RUSTLE of pages as the EDITOR reads it through.

MARLOWE
It's been rejected by some of the best. Polite, but --

EDITOR (O.C.)
You're pissing uphill on this one.

Marlowe looks down at his hands, then back at the editor.

EDITOR (O.C.)

Gavagan's anti-lynching bill's going nowhere -- Roosevelt needs the Southern Senators for his Court scheme, so --

Marlowe becomes increasingly agitated but manages to hold his tongue. The THUMP of the manuscript hitting the desk.

EDITOR (O.C.)

But I don't mind a piss or two uphill. I can't pay you -- much at least.

MARLOWE

Doesn't matter.

EDITOR (O.C.)

And we ain't among "some of the best."

MARLOWE

Doesn't matter.

Marlowe, close to tears, nods yes, looks relieved and sad.

EXT. UNION SQUARE - DAY

A rally for Spain.

Marlowe mixes with the crowd, peers at the people listening to a WOMAN ask for money to bring medicine and ambulances to the Republicans.

BENCH

Marlowe opens his knapsack and takes out Jesse's black bandana and unties it. The breeze comes along and the dry Spanish and Mississippi soil slowly blows across the park.

Marlowe dusts off the bandana. A VOICE barks behind him.

VOICE (O.C.)

Gonna use that?

Marlowe turns and catches the eyes of a BUM wearing a worn-out suit and vest, loafers without socks, a cock-eyed derby, and a grimy bow-tie.

BUM

You gonna use that?

He slips his fingers in and out of the breast pocket.

BUM

Could use it to complete my ensemble. What say?

MARLOWE

(half-smile)

You take this, you're going to have to fight for justice, you know.

BUM

Mister, just as soon as I get a meal.

Marlowe hands him the bandana. While the bum folds it neatly and puts it in his breast pocket, Marlowe digs out two dollar bills. He holds up one.

MARLOWE

Your meal.

The bum reaches, but Marlowe pulls it away. He holds the other dollar bill.

MARLOWE

Find someone as bad off or worse than you.

BUM

Give it away?

MARLOWE

Give it away.

The bum stares at the two bills, then holds out his two hands. Marlowe hands the bills over.

MARLOWE

Don't mess with your promise.

BUM

I wasn't always like this.

The bum leaves.

Marlowe watches the crowd listen to the speaker as the tears he has not shed all this time finally come.

FADE OUT

The Sunlight Dialogues

(Based on the novel by John Gardner. Permission granted.)

FADE IN:

SUPER: PLACARD: "The Watchdogs of Society"

SUPER: PLACARD: "August 23, 1968"

EXT. TWO-LANE CITY STREET

A hot August, 3 AM. A streetlight BUZZES. Bugs orbit the light, and a spider crawls in its web. On the light's housing is stamped "Spartan Power and Light."

INT. PAXTON DEN - SAME TIME

A breeze through an open window bellies a curtain.

The den is old and dense with trophies, pictures, stone fireplace, wood paneling. Name plaques and captions on photos show that this den belongs to CLIVE PAXTON.

The den is something else: a sickroom, with a hospital bed, table with pills, tank of oxygen, IV stand, and so on.

EXT. TWO-LANE STREET

Our eye travels down the length of the scarred wooden lightpole holding the streetlight. The metal footholds are rusty and bent.

INT. PAXTON DEN

Paxton, 76, wearing a ratty bathrobe, sits bolt upright at his desk surrounded by papers, books and an open notebook. On the page, a half-sentence, illegible. The fountain pen, fallen from his hand, bleeds into the page.

Paxton is dead and looks as if he could be made from stone.

EXT. TWO-LANE STREET

At the pole's base, trash and a flyer for the county fair.

INT. PAXTON DEN

The breeze blows a page over, covers the pen and sentence. Paxton's glass eyes stare at nothing.

EXT. TWO-LANE STREET

THE SUNLIGHT MAN stands in the circle thrown down by the streetlight. Scars from a burn twist his bearded face into a set half-grin. Thick blond hair halos his head.

He holds a bucket of white paint and a wallpapering brush.

Behind him, just visible, in precise 10-foot high letters, is the "L" and the "O" and part of the "V" of the interrupted word "love."

OFFICER FIGLOW, 30s, swarthy, hard-bitten face, approaches warily, gun raised.

Sunlight sweats and quivers -- but the half-grin makes him look like a demonic child.

FIGLOW

Put it down.

SUNLIGHT

(singing)

"All we need is love -- "

FIGLOW

Put it down!

SUNLIGHT

(singing)

"Ya-ta-da-da-dah"

FIGLOW

Last time.

A momentary stand-off -- then with a shrug and a grin, Sunlight puts down the bucket and brush and raises his hands.

SUNLIGHT

You're anti-love, officer. The Law is anti-love. I give in to anti-love.

FIGLOW

Now, slow --

SUNLIGHT

Slowly.

FIGLOW

Shut up. Your wallet -- on the ground.

Sunlight flaps his hands: they are still busy surrendering.

FIGLOW

The right one.

Sunlight reaches for his back pocket.

FIGLOW

Slow!

SUNLIGHT

Lee.

Sunlight holds up the wallet for Figlow.

FIGLOW

Drop it.

SUNLIGHT

I don't think so.

It bursts into flames and disintegrates.

SUNLIGHT

Now I am nobody to you.

FIGLOW

A fucking clown -- great.

Figlow forces Sunlight to the asphalt and quickly cuffs him, but as he does so, his face scrunches in disgust.

FIGLOW

Man, you stink!

With his face pressed into the asphalt, Sunlight begins reciting Latin. His breath stirs the ashes.

SUNLIGHT

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine --

FIGLOW

Shut. Up.

As Figlow pulls him up, the ashes also fly up, then settle.

SUNLIGHT

-- et lux perpetua luceat eis --

FIGLOW

Come on, clown-boy -- let's go.

EXT. SPARTAN POLICE STATION - EARLY MORNING

It resembles an old castle. The placard on the building reads "Spartan Police Department."

Figlow extracts Sunlight from the police cruiser.

INT. POLICE STATION

This place is worn-out. The walls are studded with certificates, wanted posters, unread memos, menus, etc.

A portrait in full-dress uniform of the current police chief, HANNAH CLUMLY, hangs just outside her office door. The picture shows a smiling woman, clearly proud of her accomplishments.

SERGEANT MILLER, mid-40s, stocky buzz-cut ex-Marine, waits arm-crossed in the front area. OFFICER KOZLOWSKI, 30s, holds court at the booking desk.

Miller cocks an eyebrow as Figlow moves Sunlight along.

MILLER

Looks like it takes all kinds.

FIGLOW

First mistake God made. Move!

Miller watches Figlow frog-march Sunlight to the cells.

MILLER

Sharp eye out here, okay?

KOZLOWSKI

Matches my sharp mind, Sarge.

Miller follows Figlow to the cell block.

THE STATION DOORWAY

Just as Miller leaves, BEN HODGE enters, a big beefy farmer in bib overalls, 60s, cherubic face, blond-white hair.

HODGE

Name's Ben Hodge --

KOZLOWSKI

Yes?

HODGE

Got a call from Chief Clumly yesterday.

Kozlowski rifles through files, pulls one out.

KOZLOWSKI

About Nick Slater -- the car jacker -- right? -- your boy --

HODGE

I'm not his legal guardian anymore --

Kozlowski opens the file.

KOZLOWSKI

Chief's not in --

HODGE

Had to come before chores --

KOZLOWSKI

Well, I'm authorized to tell you this, Mr. Hodge, same as the Chief'd tell you: Nick is in it deep.

HODGE

That's what Chief Clumly said --

KOZLOWSKI

I mean "electric chair" deep, Mr. Hodge.

(hands Hodge some 8x10s)

The woman, the driver? In worse shape than the car there, and the car's --

Hodge hands back the photos.

HODGE

Can I see him?

KOZLOWSKI

Sergeant Miller's call, and he's busy out back. Maybe you could come back --

Hodge lowers himself onto a bench, sits straight-backed.

HODGE

Chores can wait.

IN THE CELL BLOCK

To the right of the empty cell sits NICK SLATER, 19, Seneca Indian, slim and long-haired, brooding.

Fresh-faced MICKEY SALVADOR, 20, new recruit, sits at the desk reading a comic book.

SALVADOR

I'd say Tweety Bird here's got the raw deal 'cause of that frickin' Sylvester cat dude --

Figlow, Miller, and Sunlight enter. Salvador jumps up.

MILLER

Comic books'll stunt your growth.

Miller points to the cell. Salvador gets the keys, opens the cell next to Nick.

SALVADOR

Yes, sir. He got a name?

FIGLOW

He burned his wallet.

He shoves Sunlight forward.

NICK

Hey, man -- hose him down.

MILLER

(without heat)

Shut up.

Sunlight turns to all of them, posed like a professor. When he has their attention...

SUNLIGHT

"The past is the only dead thing that smells sweet."

Figlow uncuffs Sunlight.

FIGLOW

Yeah?

(another rough shove)

Maybe because you stink so much you ain't got no past.

Salvador locks the cell.

MILLER

Can't tell which one's the poet.

FIGLOW

Don't call me a poet -- they're the worst.

IN THE CELLS

Nick watches Sunlight as Sunlight retreats to the rear of the cell and settles himself on the bed.

Sunlight catches Nick's eye, then gives it back.

IN THE CELL BLOCK

SALVADOR

Boss -- we gonna hose him or something?

Suddenly everyone notices the same thing at the same time.

FIGLOW

Sarge?

MILLER

I know.

FIGLOW

What do you know?

Miller takes a deep sniff.

MILLER

Naw.

FIGLOW

What?

MILLER

Clover. It's clover.

Salvador sniffs.

SALVADOR

Naw -- cut hay, like on my old man's --

FIGLOW

I thought it was fresh laundry.

All stare at Sunlight. With a rush, Sunlight leaps onto the bars, like a gorilla. Everyone jerks back. Then, with a false laugh, Sunlight drops down and bows.

SUNLIGHT

You may all call me Sunlight.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET

A streetlight shines on a street sign: "LaCrosse Street."

EXT. HANNAH CLUMLY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A hulking Victorian among other worn but neat old houses. A mailbox on the porch bears a brass plaque: "CLUMLY"

In the driveway, a cruiser bearing "Spartan Police Department" and the logo, "To serve and protect."

BESIDE THE PORCH

A cat traps a mouse. The mouse almost escapes but doesn't.

INT. HANNAH CLUMLY'S BEDROOM

An asthmatic fan blows around the thick August air in a small, stuffy bedroom.

HANNAH CLUMLY, 65, police chief of Spartan, sleeps next to her husband, MICHAEL, also 65 and as scrawny as a chicken.

Clumly's skin and hair are almost as fair as an albino's, though her eyes, now jittering under her lids, are blue.

Whatever she dreams jolts her awake, her shirt sweat-soaked. Michael sleeps, making small WHEEZES.

The radium clock glows 4 AM, shadows on the wall like jaws.

AT THE DRESSER

Clumly eases her service revolver from its holster.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

She stands guard among the hulking furniture, listening to the house CREAK in the dark. A passing truck RUMBLES.

IN THE KITCHEN

Blue-white light glows from the open fridge. Clumly reaches for the cold water, then abruptly grabs a beer.

EXT. PORCH - DAWN

The front door opens with a SNAP. Clumly, in tee-shirt and shorts, holds a beer in one hand and her gun in the other.

For a moment, some calm and quiet in the dawn light. Then she hears the phone RING, and then hears it stop.

Clumly swigs and does not move.

THE SIDE OF THE PORCH - BUSHES

The cat shies away from the mouse carcass.

ON THE PORCH

A VOICE, paper-thin, comes from inside.

MICHAEL (O.S.)

Hannah?

AT THE DOOR

Michael appears: pale, bony, bathrobed.

The milkeness of his eyes give away that he is blind.

MICHAEL

Everything all right?

CLUMLY

It's fine. Just thought I heard something.

Michael sniffs.

MICHAEL

You're drinking a beer.

CLUMLY

Thirsty. Hot night.

MICHAEL

There's water.

CLUMLY

That's true.

MICHAEL

It's Officer Miller on the phone.

Clumly swigs again.

INT. HOUSE - PHONE TABLE

Michael gingerly takes the beer bottle into the kitchen as Clumly, masking a burp, picks up the phone.

INT. POLICE STATION

Miller calling from his office: desk neat, papers filed.

MILLER

Mornin', boss.

Through his office door he can see into Clumly's office: a rat's nest of papers, reports, books, etc.

INTERCUT BETWEEN THE TWO OF THEM

MILLER

Sorry to bother you so early in your last week --

CLUMLY

I'm not at the glue factory yet, Miller. What's wrong?

MILLER

Ever hear of a man named "Sunlight?"

CLUMLY

No.

MILLER

Me neither. But we got one in lock-up.

CLUMLY

For what?

MILLER

Painting "love" on Oak Street.

CLUMLY

He dangerous?

MILLER

Not by the dictionary, but -- odd. I don't know why, but I imagined when one of those old Bible prophets came in from the desert -- that'd be this guy. Figlow called him "dragon breath" -- not far off.

CLUMLY

"Sunlight" on his license?

MILLER

And therein lies another tale. I'll fill you in when you get here.

CLUMLY

Give me thirty.

MILLER

Oh, and one other thing, Chief. Clive Paxton died. Got it off the scanner.

INT. PAXTON DEN

Ambulance workers lay Paxton on the gurney. ELIZABETH PAXTON, his wife, 70s, gaunt and disheveled in a wheelchair, watches everything with a face half-discolored by a port-wine birthmark.

MILLER (V.O.)

Wife found him sitting stone-cold at his desk.

CLUMLY (V.O.)

End of an era.

MILLER (V.O.)

The end of something, for sure.

INT. CLUMLY HOUSE

CLUMLY

(hangs up phone)

End of something --

INT. MILLER'S OFFICE

Miller hangs up, steps to his doorway. Hodge sits large and patient on the bench.

MILLER

You sure you want to see him?

HODGE

I have to, even if I don't have to legally any more.

MILLER

It doesn't look good for him.

HODGE

All the more reason, then, ain't it?

IN THE CELL BLOCK

Hodge and Miller come in. Salvador stands. At the sight of Hodge, Sunlight also stands. Nick moves forward.

NICK

(quietly)

Get outta here, old man.

SALVADOR

Shut up -- he's here to --

HODGE

Nick --

AT THE BARS BETWEEN THE CELLS

Sunlight watches Nick's back. He speaks so that Nick can just hear him.

SUNLIGHT

This is your guardian angel?

HODGE (O.C.)

Look, I'm going to try to get you a lawyer --

SUNLIGHT

They're gonna fry you like fatback. Fzzzzt!

He steps away, half-smile in place.

Nick stares back at him with eyes like hard black beads, then looks back to Hodge.

NICK

Go home, old man. No lawyer, no nothing.

SUNLIGHT

(undervoice)

Fzzzzt!

SALVADOR

Shut up.

MILLER

C'mon, Ben. Ben --

Without a sound, Ben pivots and leaves, shoulders slumped. Miller leaves behind him. Salvador sits, reads his comic.

IN SUNLIGHT'S CELL

Sunlight drops to a lotus position and SINGS in a low-pitched voice.

SUNLIGHT

(to Old MacDonald)

"Old Ben Hodge, he had a farm, ee, eye, ee, eye, oh."

Nick is immediately at the bars between the cells.

NICK

How do you know that?

SUNLIGHT

"And on that farm he had Nick Slater, ee, eye, ee, eye, oh --

NICK

How do you know that?

SUNLIGHT

"Steal a car, smash it there, kill the driver, electric chair -- "

NICK

She's not dead.

Sunlight gives Nick a wink.

SUNLIGHT

You might want to make alternate plans. Om.

INT. CLUMLY'S BEDROOM

Clumly, in front of the mirror, tightens and smoothes her uniform.

Michael, still bathrobed, leans against the door jamb, staring vacantly.

Clumly puts on her hat, sets it, then holsters her gun.

MICHAEL

I'll make you a sandwich.

CLUMLY

I might be there all day.

MICHAEL

Then I'll make two.

He leaves. Clumly stares at herself in the mirror and then salutes herself. She derives no great pleasure from it.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Michael at the window pretends to watch the prowler car pull out and away. The house is densely QUIET.

IN THE KITCHEN

Michael pulls out a glass, then a bottle of wine. With a finger dipped in the glass to test the level, he pours. Then sips and stares.

EXT. OAK STREET - DAY

Clumly stands on the cruiser's hood to see the word "love." Police caution tape is strung on both sides of the street.

INT. CRUISER

The lunch bag sits next to her as she drives.

EXT. POLICE STATION - 5 AM

Miller stands squarely on the front steps, clipboard in hand. Clumly walks up the steps, carrying the lunch bag.

MILLER

Right on time. But before we go --

He points to a lone light in City Hall.

FROM MILLER'S POV

The lighted window, the shadow of a man pacing.

MILLER (O.C.)

Hizzoner the Mayor called --

CLUMLY (O.C.)

A call from the undead -- let's go --

ON THE STEPS OF THE POLICE STATION

MILLER

Your meeting with him today --

CLUMLY

I'm cognizant --

MILLER

-- his Time/Productivity Factor --

CLUMLY

A waste of my time. Show me this Sunlight.

MILLER

(lightly)

What got into your coffee this morning?

As they walk in, Clumly drops the bag into the trash can.

INT. HALLWAY - DAWN

Kozlowski sits at the booking desk.

KOZLOWSKI

Morning, Chief.

CLUMLY

Kozlowski.

(to Miller)

I saw the letters -- not how a drunk would paint 'em.

MILLER

What I thought, exactly.

(Clumly turns)

Before we go, one more thing -- actually, two.

(Clumly turns back)

Ben Hodge was here -- a bust.

CLUMLY

Told him it would be.

MILLER

And this Salvador told me. Sunlight in there -- after Hodge left -- was talking about things he shouldn't have known about. Names, situations --

Clumly absorbs what Miller says.

IN THE CELL BLOCK

Figlow lounges at the desk. Nick, laying on his bed brooding, sits up at Clumly's entrance. Sunlight is still in his lotus position.

FIGLOW

Morning, Chief -- our great unwashed.

Clumly walks up to Sunlight's cell. She looks closely at the ravaged face of Sunlight. Sunlight pops his eyes open and stares back. Their eyes lock.

MILLER (O.C.)

At the "crime scene," nothing but gum wrappers, Bible pamphlets, squirrel bones -- we got us a ghost, Chief.

Clumly steps back but still holds Sunlight's gaze.

Nick walks to the bars between the cells and watches Clumly and Sunlight.

Figlow gets up from the desk and walks over to Miller.

MILLER

Technically, he painted part of a state highway --

Figlow nudges Miller, points out how Clumly and Sunlight are staring at each other. Miller nods but keeps talking.

Figlow walks to Nick's cell, indicates for him to move away from the bars. Nick perches on his bed, still watching.

MILLER (O.C.)

-- so I gave a heads-up to the Staties -- be here tomorrow to take Señor Ghost to the VA for evaluation. Boss?

Clumly turns a hard face to Miller and Figlow.

CLUMLY

He is a sign. Aren't you?

Miller and Figlow stand there dumbfounded.

CLUMLY

Bring him to my office.

MILLER

State Police said we're not supposed to question --

But Clumly leaves before Miller finishes. Figlow looks at Miller, who nods. Figlow opens the cell, cuffs Sunlight.

SUNLIGHT

See, I am Captain Marvel.

FIGLOW

You're a cast of thousands.

IN CLUMLY'S OFFICE

A sty of unanswered mail, unread reports, unfiled papers -- a mirror of Clumly's soul. Clumly flips a switch on the intercom. Miller cuffs Sunlight to the chair.

CLUMLY

Go.

MILLER

That's not smart.

CLUMLY

I'm tired of smart this morning. Go monitor something else.

She gives Miller a "look." Miller nods, leaves.

IN MILLER'S OFFICE

He turns on the intercom and hears:

CLUMLY (O.S.)

What's your name?

IN CLUMLY'S OFFICE

SUNLIGHT

Puddin Tane.

CLUMLY

You've committed a serious crime. You cognizant of that?

SUNLIGHT

The Lord is my cognizant, I shall not want.

CLUMLY

Do you have a job?

SUNLIGHT

I am employed by metaphysics.

IN MILLER'S OFFICE

He leans in closer to the intercom. Waits.

IN CLUMLY'S OFFICE

She paces between the piled-up desk and over-stuffed files cabinet.

CLUMLY

Why "love"?

SUNLIGHT

You ask the wrong questions.

CLUMLY

What was your purpose --

IN MILLER'S OFFICE

SUNLIGHT (O.S.)

Why are you pacing? Sit down. You make me nervous.

CLUMLY (O.S.)

I'll decide when it's time to sit down.

IN CLUMLY'S OFFICE

SUNLIGHT

No, you won't. You'll put it off until the last minute and then you'll fall on your sixty-five year old ass.

CLUMLY

Where do you live?

SUNLIGHT

In a big old house on LaCrosse Street.

This stops Clumly in mid-step.

IN MILLER'S OFFICE

Miller sits up straight at the mention of Clumly's address, then gets out of his chair and leaves the office.

IN CLUMLY'S OFFICE

CLUMLY

How do you know that?

SUNLIGHT

It's because you are my friend.

They lock eyes.

SUNLIGHT

Metaphysics can ruin you for life.

With a knock on the door, Miller enters.

MILLER

Your meeting with the Mayor -- don't forget --

He is already uncuffing Sunlight from the chair and re-cuffing his hands.

MILLER

Let's go, bugle boy.

IN THE CELL BLOCK

Miller herds in Sunlight, followed by Clumly. Miller hands Sunlight off to Figlow.

Figlow puts Sunlight in the cell. As he turns, Sunlight whistles, and from seemingly nowhere a wallet appears in his hand. He waggles it in Miller's direction.

Embarrassed and angry, Miller strides to Sunlight's cell. He snaps the wallet out of Sunlight's hand and puts it in his back pocket.

As Miller does this, Sunlight produces a watch, cigarettes, a pencil, and a quarter. Miller angrily pockets each of them as they appear.

Clumly and Sunlight hold each other's glance for a moment. Then Clumly leaves.

Nick moves to the bars between the cells.

SUNLIGHT

I feel for her --

MILLER

Your hands were --

SUNLIGHT

Law and Order is very hard to do.

MILLER

Shut up. How did you --

SUNLIGHT

Such pressures --

(indicating Nick)

Murderers --

NICK

No one's dead.

MILLER

I want to know how --

SUNLIGHT

I did leave your gun in its holster.

(bows to Miller)

I respect the keepers of the Law.

Miller stares at Sunlight, his face tight with anxiety.

MILLER

I will figure it out.

(barks at Figlow)

Two eyes and two ears and two hands on him, all right?

Figlow fights back a grin.

FIGLOW

Think I want to get fucked like that?

Miller exits.

IN SUNLIGHT'S CELL

Sunlight pretends he has dice in his hand, then throws them, pretends to read them.

IN NICK'S CELL

Nick perches on the edge of his bed, body tense.

INTERCUT BETWEEN CELLS

SUNLIGHT

It's upsetting.

Throws again.

SUNLIGHT

The thought of one's own death.

NICK

No one's dead.

SUNLIGHT

Because life is like a jailhouse, and at the end, instead of justice for all suffering creatures -- fzzzt.

(looks at Nick)

Don't ever let them drag you back.

NICK

You are a mean, mean man.

SUNLIGHT

I am the Truth.

(pokes among the "dice")

Oop -- she's dead. The flames will rise.

He stares at the imagined patterns. Images flash.

INTERCUT BETWEEN IMAGE FLASHES AND SUNLIGHT IN CELL

A fire in a house.

Two children sleeping in the house.

Sunlight, a young man with no scars, tries to get into the house. Held back by fire fighters, breaks free.

The children awake. Bedroom explodes. They are lost.

Sunlight on fire, unable to get to them. Pulled out of the fire, doused, half his face seared.

IN SUNLIGHT'S CELL

NICK (O.C.)

Hey!

Sunlight looks toward Nick, but all he can see are flames.

INT. CLUMLY'S OFFICE

Miller paces, his face twisted in anger. Clumly stares at the towering mess on her desk.

MILLER

He knew your address, boss! How did a stranger know that? He's not from here -- how did he know that?

(slows down a little)

I appreciate you trying to grill him away from the cell -- good work -- but, boss, I want him out of here now. He is not in our league.

CLUMLY

That's because he is a sign.

Miller stops pacing, sadness and irritation in his face.

Clumly gets up, stares out the window. Miller, his body still jumpy, crosses his arms.

CLUMLY

You gotta admit, it's hell in a handbasket out there. The war, free love -- it's all going to smash. And then something like him arrives. It can't all be coincidence. He knows something.

A knock. Miller opens the door. Kozlowski pops in.

KOZLOWSKI

That was the hospital. Slater's woman? Gone to the other side.

MILLER

Thanks.

(shuts the door, to Clumly)

Now we got a murderer and a madman out there and I don't think they should be in the same room together.

He softens as he watches Clumly stare out the window.

MILLER

C'mon, boss. It's your last week. Get past the Mayor today, then four more days and you're free. Don't make it hard on yourself.

CLUMLY

(without turning)

The States'll be here when?

MILLER

Actually, they said if we can hump him up to the VA, they'd take him today.

Clumly turns.

CLUMLY

You're a good cop. Always have been. Probably the next chief. Go ahead. He belongs somewhere else.

Miller goes to the door.

MILLER

I'll call 'em now?

Clumly nods. Miller leaves.

CLUMLY

(whispering)

A sign -- a sign --

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - RECEPTION ROOM

Clumly, holding her hat, backs out a door marked "Mayor" in a big brass plaque, followed by a loud braying LAUGH. Clumly LAUGHS, too, though without any humor in it.

Clumly just barely keeps from slamming the door, and as soon as it's shut, her face skews with anger and disgust. The LAUGHTER can still be heard, but muffled.

The MAYOR'S RECEPTIONIST primly slices open letters.

RECEPTIONIST

Time/Productivity Factor?

CLUMLY

Yep.

RECEPTIONIST

Got the idea off a cereal box, probably.

Clumly puts on her hat, starts to leave.

RECEPTIONIST

(slicing an envelope)

I pretend this is his throat. A very productive use of my time factor.

Clumly LAUGHS a genuine laugh this time, then exits down the stairs.

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

Clumly climbs into her prowl car.

INT. PROWL CAR

Clumly, sweating, radios in.

CLUMLY

Ed, give me Miller.

INT. STATION

ED TANK, late 20s, dispatcher, hands Miller the mike.

MILLER

You survive?

INT. PROWL CAR

CLUMLY

Oughta declare him a health hazard. What's the deal with our Sunlight?

MILLER (V.O.)

2 PM.

CLUMLY

One-thirty now. I'll be right there.

INT. CELL BLOCK

Salvador at the desk, reading. Sunlight between the cells. He looks impassively at Nick seated on his bed.

SUNLIGHT

How does it feel? Numb? Joyous?

Nick responds to nothing.

SUNLIGHT

You may not feel it now, Nick -- but you are a free man. You have done what most would never dare to do.

NICK

Then why do I feel like shit?

SUNLIGHT

Because.

Figlow enters with Miller. Salvador unlocks Sunlight's cell. Figlow handcuffs Sunlight.

FIGLOW

This is one trip I'm going to like. Move, dragon breath.

INT. HALLWAY

Clumly enters just as Figlow herds Sunlight along from behind, with Miller and Kozlowski close on either side.

MILLER

Chief, you can stay here.

CLUMLY

He's my responsibility. Kozlowski, get the car. Miller, you stay here.

MILLER

(dubious)

Chief --

CLUMLY

I'm not slacking off. Not now.

MILLER

All right. Just get him out of here.

FIGLOW

Everyone check their wallets.

INT. PROWL CAR - DAY

Kozlowski driving, Clumly in the passenger seat, Figlow with his gun drawn and Sunlight in the back seat.

Up ahead, the high brick gates of the Veterans' Hospital, a 19th-century monstrosity.

EXT. CAR

Sunlight's face through the side window, dappled by the passing reflections of trees.

INT. PROWL CAR - HOSPITAL ENTRANCE

FIGLOW
(to Kozlowski)

Pop the trunk.

EXT. PROWL CAR

Figlow pops out and goes to the trunk, where he extracts a very efficient-looking shotgun. He SLAMS the trunk shut.

He then scuttles around and pops open Sunlight's door.

FIGLOW
Ok, buster. Out.

As Sunlight gets out, Clumly climbs out of the car, pulls her gun, looks around nervously.

CLUMLY
(to Kozlowski)
Stay with the car. Tell the Staties we'll be in the lobby.

FIGLOW
(to Sunlight)
Move it.

They go up the stairs. Sunlight galumphs.

SUNLIGHT
The ants go marching one by one --

Figlow raps him on the back of the head.

FIGLOW
(voice tight with fear)
Shut. Up.

INT. A ROOM OFF THE HOSPITAL LOBBY

A room with half-dead rubber plants, chairs, a coffee table, old magazines -- and one OLD MAN, toothless in a dingy bathrobe, hair uncombed.

Figlow, Clumly, and Sunlight sit. The old man stares.

FIGLOW

Chief? I gotta go.

CLUMLY

What?

FIGLOW

I gotta go -- you know --

Clumly hesitates, then takes Figlow's shotgun and aims it at Sunlight's head.

Figlow skitters for the bathroom. The old man looks from one to the other, not sure who is the lunatic.

OLD MAN

Crimnul?

CLUMLY

That's right.

OLD MAN

He stinks.

SUNLIGHT

Is it really necessary that I sit on my hands? They're numb.

Clumly glares at Sunlight, then tells him to stand.

Clumly uncuffs him, then re-cuffs him, hands in front. With a jab of the gun, Clumly forces Sunlight to sit down.

SUNLIGHT

Better.

CLUMLY

(to old man)

Don't you have someplace to be?

SUNLIGHT

Chief, I want to apologize for being hard on you.

CLUMLY

Shut up.

Sunlight leans forward, less than an arm's length away. Sweat beads on Clumly's face.

SUNLIGHT

I just wanted to tell you before we part that I have great respect for you. I wish you the best.

Clumly backs up to the doorway, gun trained on Sunlight.

CLUMLY

Figlow!

SUNLIGHT (O.S.)

I also want to give you something.

Clumly turns her head.

One by one Sunlight sets down on the table the shells from the shotgun, then Clumly's pistol, Figlow's pistol, and the handcuffs.

Then, with unbelievable smoothness, Sunlight glides past Clumly and into the hallway.

Clumly drops the shotgun and grabs the pistols.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY

CLUMLY

Stop!

She raises both pistols and fires -- and nothing but empty hammers on empty chambers.

Sunlight, his back to Clumly, dribbles the bullets from his hands to the floor.

Clumly drops the pistols, and in a burst of energy charges down the hallway and tackles Sunlight, punching him with violent fury until, as if from a great distance, she hears a VOICE crying out in pain and stops to find that she's pinned the old man to floor and pummeled him.

Clumly looks up. Sunlight is gone.

INT. CLUMLY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Clumly stares at the desk. Knock on the door.

CLUMLY

Yes?

Kozlowski sticks his head in.

KOZLOWSKI

Nothing new, Chief. You should go home to your husband.

Clumly gets up.

CLUMLY

You're right.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Clumly and Kozlowski, on the sidewalk, look reflexively to City Hall. The light in the Mayor's office is on.

CLUMLY

(pointing)

The Mayor -- We can't see the stars anymore because of light pollution -- another thing we've lost.

KOZLOWSKI

Chief --

A sudden stiff breeze rattles the dry leaves in the trees.

KOZLOWSKI

That's funny.

(hesitating)

It's August, right? But that smelled just like snow.

Behind them, a GUNSHOT inside the station that, in the stillness of the night, sounds like an ARTILLERY SHELL.

Clumly and Kozlowski pivot, run like madmen up the steps.

INT. CELL BLOCK

Clumly and Kozlowski notice two things immediately: Salvador's bloody body, face half-shot away, and Nick Slater's open cell door. Kozlowski kneels by Salvador.

KOZLOWSKI

Oh, Jesus Christ! Oh, Jesus Christ!

Clumly sags.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

SUPER: PLACARD: "Lion Emerging from Cage"

SUPER: PLACARD: "August 24, 1968"

INT. CLUMLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Clumly and Michael sleeping. Her eyes jitter in dreams, and the room is filled with a barrage of SOUNDS that ends in an explosive GUNSHOT.

CLumly bolts awake, Michael just behind her. Her face is bathed in sweat, and her breathing RASPS.

INT. CLUMLY HOUSE - DAY

Michael, at the window, "watches" the cruiser pull away.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

The door and the "Mayor" plaque seem to vibrate as the Mayor's muffled VOICE SCREAMS:

MAYOR (O.S.)

Christ, Clumly!

INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY

Clumly enters. Figlow, Miller, Kozlowski, Ed -- they all say hello but seem embarrassed to do so.

In the background, the cell block is cordoned off by police tape, the floor a congealed-blood red.

Clumly moves to her office without saying a word.

MILLER

Boss --a heads up. Mrs. Salvador -- Mickey's mom -- in your office. I can take her --

CLUMLY

No -- no.

INT. CLUMLY'S OFFICE

MRS. SALVADOR, 40s, Italian, sits stiff-backed. Clumly notices that her desk has been cleaned up. She hangs up her hat, takes a deep breath, and sits in her chair.

Clumly takes a breath to speak, but Mrs. Salvador holds up her hand.

MRS. SALVADOR

I been to the morgue. I had to sign papers.

CLUMLY

I'm truly sorry.

MRS. SALVADOR

You let a killer out of jail.

CLUMLY

No, we --

MRS. SALVADOR

It's all over the papers. You got my boy dead. He just wanted to be a cop, do a little good.

CLUMLY

He was a good --

MRS. SALVADOR

You know what? I pray to the Virgin you burn in hell.

CLUMLY

Mrs. Salvador --

But Mrs. Salvador is out of her chair.

MRS. SALVADOR

You catch this bastard hard.

With a quick turn, Mrs. Salvador is out of the office.

IN THE HALLWAY

Mrs. Salvador shoots past them and out the front door.

Miller goes into Clumly's office.

IN CLUMLY'S OFFICE

Clumly gives Miller a dead stare, then stands.

CLUMLY

Send Figlow and Ed to Ben Hodge's.

MILLER

Nick wouldn't go there. And Sunlight --

CLUMLY

You got any better ideas?

MILLER

I just don't think --

CLUMLY

You want to be chief right now?

MILLER

(voice tight)

No. We'll check it out right now, boss.

He leaves.

CLUMLY

Miller --

But Miller doesn't turn around. Clumly posts a thousand-yard stare out the window.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The prowl car pulls past two large stone pillars holding up a wrought-iron arch bearing the name "Stony Point."

INT. PROWL CAR

Figlow, driving, and Ed look out the windows at hay fields ready for harvest. Beyond them, some ruined outbuildings.

ED

In its day, man, the Hodge place here was the castle on the hill. Closest thing we had to royalty. The grand poobah of the family was a Congressman, big ol' fat Congressman Hodge.

FIGLOW

Before my time.

ED

Now Ben Hodge rents it all out -- can't run it himself.

FIGLOW

Should just sell it, move to Florida.

ED

(musing)

This is just like looking at dinosaurs.

EXT. HODGE HOUSE - DAY

A huge house, run-down, but not dilapidated: Hodge has kept up repairs. A quarter-ton pickup truck sits in front.

To one side, a quarter-acre garden, flush with harvest.

To the other side, a hen house, the first floor of which holds Ben's chickens for his chicken-and-egg business.

A barn with a Road Ranger, other machines. The barn, in better days, had been as huge and inspiring as a cathedral.

The prowl car pulls up, rocks to a halt. Figlow and Ed roll out of the car.

ED

Just a word of warning. Ben's okay, but he's a little -- I don't know -- like a hermit, I guess.

FIGLOW

Nuts?

ED

He lives all by himself. On Sundays he travels around preaching at churches --

FIGLOW

Like I said, nuts.

INT. BEN HODGE'S HOUSE - DAY

Figlow and Ed at the kitchen table. Ben carries mugs of tea to them.

BEN

(putting mugs down)

I had high hopes for the boy -- smart as a pistol -- sorry, that's not a good -- but he just couldn't seem to stay away from trouble.

ED

Hard enough raising one of your own, I'd imagine -- being a guardian --

BEN

We had a lot of them here, Vanessa and I -- tried to give 'em a home, you know.

FIGLOW

Sometimes, Mr. Hodge, some people just don't want a home.

BEN

I can't quite believe that.

ED

Do you mind if we look around?

BEN

He wouldn't come back here -- but suit yourselves.

INT. PROWL CAR - DAY

Ed radios in.

ED

Nothing here, Sarge. We searched the house top to bottom, the outbuildings -- clean. We're on our way back. 10-4.

(hangs up mike)

Shame to see it all gone. It was like paradise up here.

FIGLOW

(starting the car)

And look what happened to paradise.

The prowl car pulls away from the house.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Sunlight peers around the edge of the barn, watching the prowl car pull away. He's wearing a new set of clothes, including a panama hat with a red feather stuck in it.

Nick is to his side, squatting in the shade of the barn, disheveled and brooding.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ben stands at the sink, absent-mindedly rinsing the tea mugs, staring out the window. He talks to himself.

BEN

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?"

(wipes hands on towel)

A good one for a sermon -- have to work on that for Sunday.

(puts towel away)

All right, chores.

But Ben doesn't move as he hears a sharp noise.

BEN

Hello?

He listens: nothing. He sniffs several times, then pushes through the kitchen door into the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Casually seated in the overstuffed wing chair, panama hat and all: Sunlight.

Ben immediately pivots to go back into the kitchen but finds Nick planted in the doorway.

Ben turns slowly back to face Sunlight.

SUNLIGHT

Now you don't see it --

A flourish of hands -- and Mickey Salvador's gun appears.

SUNLIGHT

Now you do.

BEN

You're both insane.

SUNLIGHT

Not yet. These things take time.

INT. AGWAY STORE - DAY

Miller puts down the paint can used by Sunlight on the counter. Clumly speaks to NORTON, the clerk.

CLUMLY

Norton, you recognize this?

NORTON

It's a can of paint. Used.

CLUMLY

How about the brand?

Norton reads the can.

NORTON

Yup.

CLUMLY

Know it?

NORTON

I do.

CLUMLY

How about telling us?

NORTON

No need to get hard, Chief. It's aluminum paint.

CLUMLY

Anything unusual about it?

NORTON

This brand? Yeah. 'Tain't cheap.

CLUMLY

Who around here would buy it?

NORTON

These skinflints? Nobody. Because we'd have to special-order it -- don't carry it here.

The three look at each other.

CLUMLY

Are you going to tell us, or am I going to have to beat it out of you?

NORTON

Let me check the orders.

He goes through a door into the back office.

Miller and Clumly wait, Miller arms-crossed and stolid, Clumly tightly tapping the counter with her thumb, looking like a balloon one breath short of exploding.

Norton returns with an index card and hands it to Clumly. Clumly and Miller read it.

Clumly slides a photo of Sunlight across the counter.

CLUMLY

Recognize him?

NORTON

(looking at photo)

Sure that's human?

(pointing to card)

You can keep that.

EXT. PAXTON'S FUNERAL - DAY

Clumly and Kozlowski pull in to a cemetery parking lot jammed with cars. Even before the prowler stops rocking, Clumly barrels out, slamming the door behind her. Kozlowski rolls out of the car.

IN THE CEMETERY

Just past the entrance gate, a crowd gathers around a coffin poised over a six-foot-deep hole in the ground.

AT THE GATE

CLUMLY

Pay attention. Paxton's a big name around here, right up there with the Hodges.

KOZLOWSKI

I already know this.

CLUMLY

You just think you do.

They come to the gate and stop.

CLUMLY

(pointing)

Over there, in the wheelchair? Paxton's wife, Elizabeth. Next to her, the son. They have a daughter, Kathleen -- but she went nuts a while ago. Put in an asylum somewhere, last I heard -- married a Hodge, actually -- Taggart Hodge -- there was a lot of pain in that marriage.

KOZLOWSKI

Chief, this is a lay-out like we're going into battle.

EXT. EDGE OF CROWD

The crowd breaks up as the ceremony ends. Through the crowd comes Elizabeth Paxton, in black and veiled, her wheelchair guided by her SON. Clumly walks up to her, Kozlowski right behind.

CLUMLY

He'll be missed.

Elizabeth raises her hand and the wheelchair stops. She lifts her veil, exposing her birthmark.

ELIZABETH

Officer Clumly, he'll be hated more than ever.

Clumly notes that everyone has stopped to listen.

ELIZABETH

He left no will. The family'll be at each other's throats for years. I always thought he'd die violently -- from one of you during his black-market days, or Kathleen, when she went mad, or even me -- Lord knows I had cause enough.

SON

Mother --

ELIZABETH

(undeterred)

Instead, he dies in a filthy bathrobe writing memoirs no one would ever care to read.

CLUMLY

You discovered the body.

ELIZABETH

(operatic)

I felt like a person forced to be in a stage play -- disgusting -- reaching out, my knees weak, closing his eyes, the smell of death in the room, having to revive myself with the breeze through the window. And you know what? I finally felt alive, for the first time in years.

The hag looks around in triumph to the people assembled around her, her smile like a slash. She motions her Son to move the wheelchair, but Clumly intercepts them.

CLUMLY

After you did all that -- what did you do then?

Elizabeth's eyes go needle-sharp.

ELIZABETH

Then?

CLUMLY

After you closed his eyes.

ELIZABETH

I think you missed my point.

CLUMLY

(very aware of the crowd)

It's all very interesting, but what did you do then?

ELIZABETH

I have no idea.

(looking at Clumly directly)

Why are you interrogating me?

Clumly and Elizabeth hold eye-contact for a breath.

ELIZABETH

Fool.

She signals her Son to move her forward, and the crowd trails her. Clumly watches her disappear, but Kozlowski is watching Clumly.

Clumly turns and points to the crowd, to a panama hat with a red feather in it, bobbing among the bare heads and funereal clothes. And just as soon as she sees it, it disappears from view.

Clumly races through the crowd, politely elbowing people out of the way, Kozlowski trailing -- but, of course, the hat disappears, leaving them both sweating and frustrated.

INT. PROWL CAR - DAY

The cars stream past as Clumly barks into the radio.

CLUMLY

Tell Miller I want him to dig up where the Paxton boys were when he died -- and on the daughter -- where she is. I want it right down to their underwear.

ED (O.S)

Something up?

CLUMLY

I wanna sell 'em a bridge. 10-4.

Clumly hangs up the mike, glares out the window.

KOZLOWSKI

(more statement than question)

You have a theory.

Clumly stares for a moment more, then focuses tightly on the windshield wiper. She slides out of the car.

CLUMLY

I have a million of 'em.

EXT. PROWL CAR

Clumly lifts up the wiper and gingerly picks off a red feather. Kozlowski emerges from the driver's side.

KOZLOWSKI

Now you got a million and one.

INT. HODGE HOUSE - BASEMENT

Sunlight squats on the steps, looking at Ben and Nick. He's tied them up so that they hang, gagged, by their hands from the trusses overhead, crucified without the cross.

He slips down the stairs, stands in front of them. Ben's eyes shine bright with fear. Nick's eyes are hollow.

He unties and ungags Nick, who rubs his wrists to get back circulation.

SUNLIGHT

I need your help.

Nick's face looks murderous, but he climbs the stairs without a word. Sunlight pats Ben's cheek.

SUNLIGHT

Don't worry, brother. I'll be back.

EXT. BARN - DAY

As Nick walks in, he sees that Sunlight has prepared the workbench with wood, tools, and other materials.

SUNLIGHT

I need you to make me a small box, one foot square, two inches deep. Wood there, saw there.

NICK

We should get out of here.

Without seeing Sunlight make any move, the gun appears in Sunlight's hand.

SUNLIGHT

The first one you killed by accident. The second, less by accident. You are learning terrible, exhilarating truths about yourself. But don't expect me to be your third.

Nick measures the distance, then turns to the work bench and pops a board into the vice, marks, cuts.

THROUGH BARN DOOR

A dozen ravens strut through the dust, then gather around the feet of a young, fair-haired woman, KATHLEEN.

Sunlight, dumbstruck, stares at her, through her. Then, without warning, Kathleen bursts into flames, and her ashes become ravens and fly away.

AT THE WORKBENCH

Nick stares at Sunlight. Sunlight, sensing the stare, faces Nick. Apropos of nothing....

SUNLIGHT

A murder of crows.

Sunlight starts unrolling a length of wire.

INT. CLUMLY'S OFFICE - EVENING

Clumly and Miller seated, Miller holding the index card from the Agway clerk, Clumly twirling the red feather.

MILLER

Clive Paxton.

CLUMLY

Sunlight shows up with Clive Paxton's paint.

MILLER

We don't know if --

CLUMLY

No, we don't. But we do.

MILLER

Still have to check it out.

Clumly lifts the feather.

MILLER

Could be someone's joke.

Clumly shoots Miller a look.

CLUMLY

I'm three days from retirement. The mother of the youngest police officer ever on the force thinks I killed her son. The Mayor's worrying about votes, so he's worrying me like a bone. I got a red feather. I got some paint.

Clumly rocks out of her chair, stares out the window. She sees a raven walking along the curb across the street.

CLUMLY

It seems to me I have only one way out.

MILLER (O.C.)

Maybe we should both go home and rest.

The raven flies away.

CLUMLY

Maybe.

INT. CLUMLY HOUSE - EVENING

Clumly sees light spilling from the kitchen.

CLUMLY

I'm home.

No answer. Clumly, a worried look on her face, beelines for the kitchen.

IN THE KITCHEN

Michael stands at the stove, stirring something in a pot, an empty wine glass next to him.

CLUMLY

I'm home.

MICHAEL

There is something on the table for you.

Clumly sees an envelope. On the outside, in large precise letters, someone has inscribed the word "love."

CLUMLY

(too harsh)

Where did you get this?

MICHAEL

Someone delivered it.

Clumly rips it open and reads. The note says, "Come to the sanctuary of the Presbyterian church at midnight tonight. Be alone. It amuses me."

CLUMLY (O.C.)

Did he smell?

Michael pauses, as if thinking.

MICHAEL

Like funeral flowers.

Clumly lowers herself into a chair.

MICHAEL

(sitting)

He was at least seven feet tall.

Michael puts a bowl of stew more or less in front of her.

MICHAEL

His voice came from over my head. What does it say?

CLUMLY

Nothing. Just a practical joke.

MICHAEL

I thought he was very tall for a Jehovah's Witness.

Clumly digs into the stew, eating it mechanically. Michael sips wine.

INT. HODGE BASEMENT - NIGHT

Nick hangs again. Ben slumps, exhausted. Sunlight perches on the stairs, dressed in black, gazing at them, then stands and leaves. The light clicks off, and the darkness fills with their shallow BREATHING.

EXT. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - MIDNIGHT

SUPER: PLACARD: "The Dialogue of Robbers and Cops"

Clumly stands on the church steps, in uniform, with her holstered gun. She takes a small cassette recorder out of her pocket, checks it, clicks it on, puts it back.

The street is completely deserted.

Clumly tries the door, and it seems to swing open of its own accord. Hand on her pistol, she enters.

INT. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - FOYER

She steps into the cool darkness, and the door swings shut of its own accord.

Clumly waits for her eyes to adjust. To control her shallow anxious BREATHING, she inhales deeply and catches the smell: he is here. Ahead of her the pulpit looms like a dark jagged rock. Faint streetlight oozes through the stained-glass windows.

IN THE SANCTUARY

Barely two steps in, a RUSH of wind slices down toward Clumly, and she raises her hands to protect her face. WHOOSH! It's gone. A bat? A raven? She doesn't know. Clumly grabs at her holster, and her hand comes away empty.

CLUMLY

Damn!

Almost immediately, from the pulpit, a darkness shivers, darker than the darkness around it, and from it issues a resonant VOICE, full of anger and pride.

SUNLIGHT

So -- you have arrived.

Half voluntarily, half-involuntarily, Clumly slides into a pew, trying to adjust the recorder stuffed into her pocket.

SUNLIGHT

What are you fiddling with?

The darkness RESOUNDS with the CLICK of the recorder as Clumly mistakenly turns it off.

SUNLIGHT

Just put it on the seat next to you and pay attention!

Clumly turns it on, puts it down gently like an unexploded bomb.

SUNLIGHT

We have much to discuss.

CLUMLY

There's nothing to discuss.

SUNLIGHT

We share two murders.

CLUMLY

We don't share anything.

SUNLIGHT

Truth is always the first to suffer. Then why are you here?

CLUMLY

To arrest you.

SUNLIGHT

Then why not storm in with a SWAT team to "get your man"? Huh? What would Sergeant Miller think about doe-eyed you sitting here, with me, alone, in the dark? What is the truth?

CLUMLY

You're a murderer.

SUNLIGHT

Is that what fascinates you about me?

CLUMLY

I'm not fascinated, I'm just --

SUNLIGHT

(slight sarcasm)

Liar, liar, pants on fire.

CLUMLY

It's important to know the criminal mind --

SUNLIGHT

Especially when there's a thrill to be had for the knowing.
When the criminal may be the one wearing the uniform.

Clumly rockets into the aisle, anger (or is it excitement?) RINGING in her VOICE.

CLUMLY

That's stupid! You have Salvador's murder to answer for!

SUNLIGHT

A murder because a certain pig-headed and bored-with-her-life police chief didn't listen to her sergeant and decided to keep a freak around for her own entertainment.

Clumly moves assertively toward the pulpit stairs.

CLUMLY

I am not responsible --

Before she even takes two steps, a large black something launches itself from the pulpit. She drops to her knees, shielding her face. It WHIZZES past, grazing her knuckles.

When she shoots her eyes back to the pulpit, the brooding blackness that was Sunlight has disappeared.

Clumly spins when Sunlight's VOICE BOOMS from the rear of the church. She crouches like a fighter, heart POUNDING.

IN THE AISLE

SUNLIGHT

Pick up your recorder. You won't want to miss this.

Without dropping her stare, Clumly fumbles for the recorder and pockets it. As she slinks back, Sunlight SNAPS on a flashlight held under his chin, his face swathed in nylon. The upward light paints him a complete ghoul.

SUNLIGHT

Try your holster.

Clumly pulls out a flashlight.

SUNLIGHT

I constantly astound you, don't I?

CLUMLY

You sicken me.

SUNLIGHT

Pants on fire. Turn it on, hold it like mine -- and remember who has your gun.

Clumly does. Wreathed in darkness, they square off with the flashlights under their chins. Shadows leap to the vaulted ceiling. Timbers CREAK, walls CRACK and SETTLE.

CLUMLY

What do you want with me?

SUNLIGHT

To humiliate you.

CLUMLY

You've done a pretty good job of that.

Slowly, step by careful step, Sunlight moves toward Clumly.

SUNLIGHT

Soon you will lose everything -- and then you and I will be even closer.

CLUMLY

You broke the law.

SUNLIGHT

I don't care about the law. I care about justice.

CLUMLY

Justice! Tell that to Mickey Salvador's mother!

SUNLIGHT

That puzzles you. I watch a man I've talked with shot down, and I don't show one sign of remorse.

CLUMLY

You're a monster.

Sunlight stands close to Clumly.

SUNLIGHT

It's the monsters that make us pay attention.

Sunlight reaches out with his left hand to touch Clumly on the cheek, just hovers the fingertips without touching.

SUNLIGHT

I have nothing left to lose, and that gives me complete freedom. Doesn't Hannah Clumly ache for the same freedom from the law, from obligation, from "should" and "have to"?

Clumly's head inclines toward Sunlight's hand, as if to lay her cheek in his palm and give over to his offer.

SUNLIGHT

Aren't you feeling blood crash through parts of your body you thought had died?

With the same instinct that made her charge down the hall of the VA hospital, Clumly grabs Sunlight's wrist and pulls -- and out of the sleeve pops a fake hand.

SUNLIGHT

(laughing)

She's not free yet!

At the same instant, Sunlight POPS off his flashlight and the pulpit EXPLODES, geysering out a thick plume of smoke.

Clumly spins to look at the explosion, and when she whirls back, Sunlight has disappeared like the smoke from the pulpit. Clumly's stabbing flashlight beam finds nothing.

ON THE PULPIT

In the flashlight beam, the carpet still fumes. Clumly roots herself there and surveys the darkness.

CLUMLY

I know you're still here!

Nothing but ECHOES fall back into her ears.

On the pulpit, Clumly spies a wooden box wrapped with a small chain. She puts down the rubber hand, picks up the box, and shakes it: a loud CLUNK shivers through the dark.

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

Clumly, holding the box under her arm, takes out the recorder, shuts it off, and puts it back. The darkness vibrates with the HUM of electric transformers.

Clumly looks down at the steps, then scouts around, then stares back at the steps. A smile crosses her lips as she hops to the first step. Then another hop and another until Clumly finds herself hopping like a 10-year kid all the way down to the sidewalk, where she takes a right turn and heads for home.

INT. CLUMLY HOUSE - NIGHT

Clumly stands in an unfinished attic room, the moonlight falling through the shut windows. With a bolt-cutter she snaps the chain and opens the box. As suspected: her gun. She puts it back into the holster.

She takes out the cassette recorder, rewinds the tape a bit, then plays it. Sunlight's VOICE, resonant even through the tinny speakers, fills the dark room. Clumly quickly snaps it off and puts the tape in the wooden box, which she hides behind a section of loose lath.

INT. BOTTOM OF STAIRS

Silent and ghostly, Michael listens to Clumly in the room. Suddenly, the attic door opens, and Michael expertly glides away down the stairs back to the bedroom.

TOP OF STAIRS

Clumly stares down into the long tunnel of blackness.

INT. BATHROOM

Clumly runs cold water and bathes her face again and again. She peers in the mirror at the water-beaded 65-year old face, and as if from nowhere, a huge smile blooms.

She rips off the clip-on tie and dark blue uniform shirt, then takes a washcloth, soaks it, holds it overhead, and drizzles the water over her, soaking her brassiere, the sink basin, the floor, the bath mat. She repeats this.

Clumly turns the water off. Another long gaze in the mirror at the wet, elderly, smiling face.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

PEEPER (50s, bald, stout), UPHILL (60s, white-haired, red-faced, Fire Chief), and MOSS (40s, bad liver) sit at one end of a table, looking as if they have burrs in their underwear. CLUMLY sits composed at the other end. The Mayor is never seen full-figure but is a VOCAL presence.

MAYOR

What is going on in your department? The Presbyterian church was fire-bombed last night!

UPHILL

And don't forget that she refused to block off the street.

MAYOR

I haven't forgotten that.

UPHILL

My firemen couldn't get to --

MAYOR

What about that, Hannah?

CLUMLY

It's your Time/Productivity Factor. We had to have men -- somewhere else. Something probably more important --

UPHILL

(exploding)

More important!

MOSS

(to Uphill)

Calm down, Chief.

MAYOR

It's not just what Chief Uphill says. It's lotsa things. I'm not gonna bushwhack here. Hannah -- Chief Clumly -- I hate to do this -- but we are gonna investigate your department.

PEEPER

(slides papers across)

I've drawn up the papers.

Clumly does not take the papers -- does not move at all, and SILENCE fills up the room. The Mayor CLEARS his VOICE.

MAYOR

(nervously)

Take the papers, Hannah.

Still, Clumly does not move, just stares the papers down. Then, sliding one page to her, she quickly folds a paper airplane, stands, and launches it.

It hovers at the ceiling on some improbable updraft.

While the four men ponder it, Clumly walks to the door.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - RECEPTION ROOM

We watch the Receptionist's hands slice open an envelope.

Clumly comes through the door, closes it, nods to the Receptionist.

The Receptionist holds up another envelope, letter opener inserted, and easily slices open that one as well.

Clumly puts on her hat and exits.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The paper airplane lands gently on the table.

INT. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - DAY

Miller and Ed stand on the steps up to the pulpit. Ed, using a handkerchief, holds the rubber hand. A FIREMAN examines the singed carpet.

Miller looks out over the pews.

FIREMAN

(standing up)

Thought so. Fertilizer, packed just right so's not to set anythin' afire. Lotsa smoke, lotsa bang.

MILLER

(half to himself)

Somebody here talking to someone out there?

FIREMAN

(preparing to leave)

Ah'll drop my report off to the Chief --

MILLER

(sharply)

No, put it on my desk.

The SHARPNESS in Miller's VOICE makes Ed gives Miller a "what's up?" look.

MILLER

I'll make sure Chief Clumly gets it.

FIREMAN

You bet.

The fireman, lugging his equipment box, exits.

MILLER

Probably hooligans.

ED

Hooligans?

Miller shoots Ed a sharp look.

MILLER

World's going to hell in a handbasket these days, isn't it? C'mon.

AT THE BACK OF THE CHURCH

Miller, trailed by Ed holding the rubber hand, finds the cloth contraption that Clumly mistook for a bird.

FROM THE AISLE

He finds the second contraption that attacked Clumly. He traces a trajectory on the air with his finger, then prowls until he comes to the seat where Clumly sat.

And there he sees it: a long white hair stark against the aged velvet of the seat cushions.

MILLER

Ed, take that backscratcher to the car and radio we're coming in.

Grinning, Ed waves good-bye with the hand and exits.

Miller tugs free a small kraft evidence envelope from his breast pocket. He deposits the hair in the envelope and slides it back into his pocket.

He stares up at the pulpit.

INT. BEN HODGE'S KITCHEN - DAY

Ben and Nick, gaunt and defeated, sit at the kitchen table while a manic Sunlight cooks breakfast.

SUNLIGHT

Got to keep up your strength -- for life is a tier of veils --

Sunlight dishes out scrambled eggs, well-made and steaming.

SUNLIGHT

-- and "Whan that Aprill, with his shoures soote / The
droghte of March hath perced to the roote -- "

Nick picks up a fork, ready to eat, but Ben, barely turning his head, WHISPERS...

BEN

Don't.

Sunlight hears the hiss in Ben's voice and stands, like a crane, balanced on one leg, holding the frying pan.

SUNLIGHT

Nick?

Nick glares at the fork in his hand, then at Ben, then at the eggs. Sunlight switches his standing leg.

SUNLIGHT

Nick?

With a stab at the plate, Nick shovels a forkful of eggs into his mouth. Then another. Sunlight stares at Ben.

Ben eats one forkful of eggs, then puts the fork down precisely. With a leap, Sunlight goes back to the stove, dishes out pancakes, and brings them over as well.

SUNLIGHT

"And bathed every veyne in swich licour, / Of which vertu
engendred is the flour"

By this time, Nick ravens the food almost without pause. Ben does not touch it.

Sunlight appraises Ben sitting solid and straight-backed, then sits opposite him, his face pushed close to Ben's. Nick chews and watches with hooded eyes.

SUNLIGHT

It was the custom of the kings to hear a story while they ate
to pass the long dark hours. A story, preacher man.

Ben does not look away from Sunlight, who does not look away from Ben. Then Sunlight sinks back into his chair. He takes out a large silver coin and walks it along the backs of his fingers, makes it disappear and appear.

Ben closes his eyes, his hands steady on the table.

SUNLIGHT

Watch this.

A VOICE, dark and resonant, not unlike Sunlight's voice at the church, comes out of Ben.

BEN

Let us begin.

The coin walks back and forth across Sunlight's knuckles.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARN ROOF - YEARS EARLIER

Hodge's barn, but now in all its architectural glory.

A young Ben Hodge stands on the peak shouldering a bundle of new cedar shakes while staring up at two figures struggling to climb to the top of the barn's steeple.

EXT. BARN STEEPLE

Kathleen, 20, in a bright yellow dress, hangs off the trough that circles the steeple. She shines a smile, but clearly she doesn't have the strength to pull herself over.

ALONG THE PEAK

Ben YELLS.

BEN

Taggart! Taggart! She needs a hand!

THE BARN STEEPLE

A young Sunlight, unscarred, fits his shoulders underneath Kathleen's dangling feet, and Kathleen flings herself over the eave and onto the small pitched roof of the steeple.

Sunlight, with equal dexterity, heaves himself up next to her, and together they sit holding hands, feet braced, calm faces surveying the richness of the Hodge estate.

ALONG THE PEAK

Ben gazes at them perched in the sunlight like mythological lovers. He shakes his head, half-smiling, half-worried.

BEN

"And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

CUT TO:

INT. HODGE'S KITCHEN

Hodge crashes to the floor as an angry Sunlight slams him with the pistol butt. Ben's food goes flying, and Nick, eyes hooded and veiled, slides away. Sunlight breathes as heavily as a dragon.

On the counter toast burns in the toaster, geysering up smoke -- but no one moves. Finally, it pops up, charred.

NICK

You're sick.

SUNLIGHT

"Comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love."

Ben levers himself up to standing, a bloody welt on his cheek. Sunlight works to control himself.

SUNLIGHT

Enough of fairy tales.

A handkerchief emerges in Sunlight's other hand, which he hands to Ben. Then he points the gun at Nick.

SUNLIGHT

You -- downstairs. Now!

INT. CLUMLY HOUSE - ATTIC ROOM

Michael feels the wall until he comes to the loose lath.

MICHAEL

(with sad affection)

You are so predictable.

He takes out the recorder, rewinds the tape, stops it, then plays. His face clouds over as he hears his wife converse with an escaped criminal and possible murderer.

Michael hits "stop" and sits completely still in the heat. He pops out the tape, straightens his spine.

INT. CLUMLY'S OFFICE - DAY

Miller, with his inevitable clipboard, leafs through notes. Clumly sits rock-solid behind her desk.

MILLER

Your hunch paid off, boss. On 16 August, someone moved Kathleen Paxton Hodge from --

(checking)

-- Palo Alto to Pleasant Hills, over in Rochester.

CLUMLY

A week before.

MILLER

Right.

CLUMLY

So who moved her?

MILLER

They wouldn't give me --

CLUMLY

Elizabeth Paxton did it.

MILLER

Boss, you can't go accusing Elizabeth Paxton -- especially with the Mayor's investigation --

CLUMLY

So you know.

MILLER

And I know something else.

Miller takes out the evidence envelope, extracts the hair, and dangles it in the sunlight.

MILLER

I know for a fact you're not Presbyterian.

Clumly looks at the strand, then gets up from the desk. Miller puts the hair back in the envelope.

CLUMLY

Miller, I find as I get older and dumber that the rules just don't work anymore.

Clumly moves to the door, takes her hat off the hatrack.

MILLER

You ask me, that is a dangerous thing to find.

CLUMLY

If I ask you.

MILLER

You're going to have to do what you're going to have to do.
And me, too.

There's a KNOCK on the door. Clumly opens it.

IN THE DOOR

Figlow, sour-faced as usual, cradles a pigeon with bright candy-colored feathers. He raises it, and Clumly and Miller can see a message capsule clipped to one leg, block-lettered with one word: "Clumly."

IN THE HALLWAY

Behind Figlow cluster THREE MEN, each dressed in the same suit and hat, each with a briefcase. Behind them stand FIVE MEN, dressed exactly the same but without briefcases.

MAN 1 stands squarely, flanked by MAN 2 and MAN 3.

Clumly moves into the hallway, Figlow following, Miller following Figlow. She faces Man 1 directly, then turns to Figlow and takes the capsule off the pigeon.

MAN 1
(insistent)

Chief Clumly?

Ignoring Man 1, Clumly cracks the capsule, unfurls a scroll of paper three feet long and one-inch wide, and reads it. Everyone waits, the sullen air barely stirred by the overhead fans.

With deliberate slowness, Clumly folds the paper and slips it into her breast pocket while staring down Man 1.

MAN 1
(flipping a business card)

We're from the Mayor's office.

Clumly ignores the card, turns to Miller.

CLUMLY
Let the pigs have the run of the barn. Kozlowski!

Clumly heads out into the brash sunlight.

EXT. PAXTON HOUSE - DAY

Clumly and Kozlowski wait on the doorstep. Kozlowski fidgets, Clumly simply stares out at the landscape.

KOZLOWSKI
Maybe no one's home.

CLUMLY

Maybe.

From within they hear scuffling FOOTSTEPS. At last the door swings upon like a tomb.

A SERVANT, old and chalky, says nothing but gestures for them to come in.

INT. PAXTON HOUSE

The door swings closed with a THUD. The servant shuffles off. Clumly and Kozlowski follow with ECHOING footsteps.

INT. SUNPORCH - DAY

A bed occupies the sun-porch, with other furniture at odd angles, everything makeshift. A wheelchair waits.

In the bed lies Elizabeth, her birthmark even more livid in the morning light, the sheet pulled up but exposing bare bruised shoulders. Her clothes lay in a heap on the floor.

Perched on the bed next to his mother, dressed in a bathrobe, is the Son. His clothes lay next to hers.

The servant and police officers stand at the entrance.

ELIZABETH

(without embarrassment)

My son told me to expect you.

The servant disappears.

ELIZABETH

Because of all your impertinent questions at the funeral.

The Son slides his hand over his mother's hand, and they give Clumly and Kozlowski a direct unembarrassed look.

CLUMLY

(nervously)

I was wondering, if it wouldn't be too much trouble --

ELIZABETH

(to Son)

I'll need the wheelchair.

The Son brings it over, and Elizabeth, indifferent, whips back the sheet and shifts her naked body into the wheelchair, then grabs the sheet and recovers herself. Noticeable to everyone are the bruises on her arms and legs.

CLUMLY

Those bruises --

The Son wheels Elizabeth away, and she tosses over shoulder as she disappears down the hall....

ELIZABETH

Ah, love.

Clumly and Kozlowski trade a look.

KOZLOWSKI

(disgusted)

Ah, Christ, boss.

CLUMLY

Stay focused. And shut up.

They follow.

INT. PAXTON STUDY - DAY

Everything about the place has a grey dusty pallor to it.

ELIZABETH

(pointing to desk)

He was sitting there.

Clumly tries the rolltop desk and finds it locked.

ELIZABETH

I locked it afterwards. He always liked everything locked.

CLUMLY

Would you unlock it? Please.

The Son fishes out a key , unlocks the desk. Clumly clatters up the roll-top, gives the desktop a cursory exam.

CLUMLY

(moving to window)

But the window was open.

ELIZABETH

I believe that was locked, too.

CLUMLY

You said it was open. The breeze -- it revived you. From the smell of death.

ELIZABETH

How clever you are.

CLUMLY

You closed his eyes -- then what?

ELIZABETH

I called the ambulance and waited like a dutiful wife.

Clumly gives Elizabeth a square look before she speaks. A hint of a self-satisfied smile crosses Clumly's lips.

CLUMLY

Have you told your daughter -- Kathleen, isn't it? -- that her father is dead?

ELIZABETH

My daughter is 3000 miles away.

CLUMLY

Have you told her husband --

SON

You don't have any right --

CLUMLY

(hand up to stop him)

Well, ex-husband because your husband arranged to get that marriage annulled -- right?

ELIZABETH

I've not spoken with Taggart Hodge --

CLUMLY

(cutting her off)

Yes, of course.

Elizabeth suddenly grips the wheelchair and starts breathing heavily, her eyes rolling back. Kozlowski springs to her side, SHOUTS at the Son.

KOZLOWSKI

Call the hospital!

The Son, oddly, does not move. And neither does Clumly. Kozlowski lightly slaps Elizabeth's cheeks, and almost as quickly as she fell into the fit, she falls out of it, giving Clumly a defiant stare. Kozlowski turns to Clumly.

SON

Perhaps you should go.

The servant appears in the doorway, patient and hang-dog.

IN THE HALLWAY

Clumly walks so fast that Kozlowski has to trot to keep up. She reaches the front door.

KOZLOWSKI

You think it's a murder?

Clumly stops, stares at the wood grain of the door, then opens it and has to squint against the brassy sunlight. She rockets toward the prowl car.

KOZLOWSKI

(to himself)

I don't believe you.

Kozlowski trots after Clumly.

INT. HODGE'S BARN - DAY

As with Nick before, Ben works on contraptions: wood, rope, wire, tools and so on everywhere. The gun rests on the workbench, within easy reach. The welt burns on Ben's cheek. Without fuss, Ben stops working.

SUNLIGHT

Keep working.

But Ben doesn't.

BEN

What are you doing? What is your point?

Sunlight looks at Ben. The physical and emotional pain in Ben's face gives Sunlight pause.

SUNLIGHT

(false cynicism)

You mean the point of anything? So we move into philoso[phy] --

BEN

A falling rock will still fall down even if you command it to fall up.

Ben goes back to work. So does Sunlight.

BEN

You turned Nick into a killer.

SUNLIGHT

I freed him.

BEN

You freed him without knowing him.

SUNLIGHT

It was a whim.

BEN

Then it's just arrogance.

SUNLIGHT

"Why do sinners' ways prosper?" Is that your question?

BEN

No.

SUNLIGHT

Are you afraid of me?

Ben stops working again and gives Sunlight a sharp appraising look.

BEN

You have changed.

Sunlight picks up his work.

BEN

You have changed so much.

Sunlight throws down his tools.

SUNLIGHT

(viciously)

The universe is a great machine-gun -- bam bam bam bam
bam -- you build, build, build, but the cats eat the birds in
the birdhouses and the fires eat the cities and nothing is left
but bones and ashes, otherwise known as the soul.

BEN

You misunderstand.

SUNLIGHT

You're hunting for the dragon's belly.

BEN

You misunderstand. I am offering help.

Sunlight's fury fills the barn with THUNDER and lightning, and Sunlight
rages over the CRASHING around him.

SUNLIGHT

(snarling)

What help, preacher man? With love? Is love your weapon?
"Down pour'd the heavy rain / Over the new reap'd grain; /
And Misery's increase / Is Mercy, Pity, Peace"!

For all of Sunlight's opera, Ben keeps his cool, and the CRASHING subsides, leaving them back in the dusty barn. Ben calmly picks up a hammer and goes back to what he was doing. As does Sunlight.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Michael, cane in hand, moves along confidently, the streets clearly memorized. Slung from his shoulder is a canvas bag embroidered with a sunflower.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Michael marches up the steps and into the station.

INT. POLICE STATION

Miller, at the desk, sees Michael. The Mayor's Men almost bowl Michael over as they scavenge.

MILLER

(with false enthusiasm)

Mr. Clumly!

MICHAEL

What is going on here?

Michael walks to Clumly's office door, cocks his head to listen.

MICHAEL

Who is in my wife's office?

MILLER

(taking Michael's elbow)

It's a new cleaning crew.

(guiding him)

We can talk in my office.

INT. MILLER'S OFFICE

Miller guides Michael to a chair, then sits behind his desk.

MILLER
(false cheer)

The Chief isn't here -- she's out on some important business
--

Michael holds up his hand to stop Miller, and Miller, a grateful look in on his face, stops lying.

Several CRASHES from the hallway, but Miller calmly refuses to notice them.

Michael pulls from his bag the tape of the dialogue and hands it to Miller.

INT. HODGE BASEMENT

Nick and Ben tied. Sunlight stands in front of them. He touches the welt on Ben's cheek, then turns and leaves.

INT. MILLER'S OFFICE

A cassette recorder on Miller's desk. Miller presses "play," then hovers over the machine, waiting.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Clumly, sweating, checks the scroll of paper as she bushwacks her way through brush.

SUNLIGHT (V.O.)
I don't care about the law. I care about justice.

CLUMLY (V.O.)
Justice! Tell that to Mickey Salvador's mother!

INT. MILLER'S OFFICE

Miller and Michael stare at the cassette player.

SUNLIGHT
(from recorder)

That puzzles you. I watch a man I've talked with shot down
--

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS

Clumly stumbles from the woods to find a painted square canvas tent with a wooden floor and a peaked roof hanging by a heavy chain from the railroad trestle. The house gleams a sugar-white and the chain is bright yellow.

SUNLIGHT (V.O.)
-- and I don't show one sign of remorse.

CLUMLY (V.O.)
You're a monster.

SUNLIGHT (V.O.)
And it's the monsters that make us pay attention.

CUT TO:

INT. MILLER'S OFFICE

Miller punches it off. The commotion outside has gotten even LOUDER, with file drawers banging and heavy feet running back and forth.

MILLER
In about two seconds those investigators are gonna bang
on my door to see my files.

Miller pops out the tape.

MICHAEL
Investigators?

MILLER
From the Mayor.

Touching the corner of the tape to Michael's hand, Miller gets Michael to take it.

MILLER

This can't be here. I never heard it.

A heavy KNOCK on the door, and without waiting for permission, a Mayor's Man enters. He sees Michael slipping the cassette into his bag.

MAN

What's that?

MILLER

I was just giving back to the Chief's husband a self-help tape he loaned me -- did you know that stress from overwork is the biggest killer --

MAN

(interrupting)

Let me see it.

MILLER

(to Michael)

"Point Number Three: When you feel your heart race -- "

MICHAEL

(finishing off)

"-- time to slow down your pace."

MILLER

(to Man)

You should try it.

MAN

We need you out here -- right now.

MILLER

(with a false smile)

Duty calls.

MAN

Why are you smiling at a blind man?

MICHAEL

(rising)

I can find my own way out, thank you.

He whacks the Mayor's Man several times with his cane as he propels himself from the room. Miller just smiles as he gestures with mock politeness that the Man should leave first.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS

SUPER: PLACARD: "The Dialogue Of Leaping"

Clumly looks up at the tent. Just as she hears the sharp high WHISTLE of a distant freight train, a rope ladder uncoils downward like a snake.

INT. TENT

A sweating HUFFING Clumly heaves herself into the swaying tent. The train WHISTLE rips the air again.

Sunlight sits cross-legged, wearing a purple turban painted with gold zodiac signs. Holding together the cloth as a clasp is Clumly's badge. The gun, of course, is gone.

SUNLIGHT

Welcome to the house of leaping.

CLUMLY

(gasping)

The train --

SUNLIGHT

That is why we have to be on track! Recorder?

Clumly, still gasping, pulls it from her pocket.

SUNLIGHT

(tenting his fingers)

The question for today --

CLUMLY

The train --

SUNLIGHT

Pay attention! The question for today is: what drives a woman like you to a life of decency?

EXT. TRACKS - NOT FAR AWAY

The freight train heaves into view, CHUGGING along.

INT. TENT

Clumly, on her hands and knees, tries to catch her breath.

CLUMLY

I can't breathe in here! You stink!

SUNLIGHT

It's hard, isn't it, being cooped up with a dead man?

CLUMLY

Look, damn it, the train --

SUNLIGHT

Wrong! You think following rules is what makes people good. Wrong!

CLUMLY

Of course we have to follow rules -- it's so goddamn hot --

SUNLIGHT

What, or we'll become barbarians?

CLUMLY

Yes!

SUNLIGHT

But you don't believe that --

CLUMLY

I do!

SUNLIGHT

Maybe once, but not any more. A life of law and order, decency and duty to a blind husband, and what's your pension? You end your days speaking to lunatics.

INT. FREIGHT TRAIN ENGINE

The ENGINEER watches the dry and brittle scenery slide by.

SUNLIGHT (V.O.)

So listen to the lunatic.

INT. TENT

Sunlight points to his turban.

SUNLIGHT

The twelve houses of the zodiac. Astrology is not trash -- it's mind-reading the gods. Not to obey laws -- I hate laws, I hate the hooks that obligation stabs into your flesh --

CLUMLY

Stop it -- just stop it! -- and answer a simple question from the idiot: why did you go to so much trouble to paint the word "love"?

The TRAIN HORN blows, suddenly MUCH closer.

SUNLIGHT

(ignoring it)

Astrology is all about knowing when to jump when the gods say "jump."

CLUMLY

You painted "love" --

SUNLIGHT

The only obligation is to remain free -- free! -- so that when the universe says jump --

The TRAIN HORN blows again, this time even closer and much louder. Clumly gives a start.

CLUMLY

You want to blabber on while we get crushed -- fine! This much of the universe I know -- you painted "love" on a public street with Clive Paxton's paint.

A tense SILENCE at the mention of Paxton's name.

CLUMLY

What the hell kind of "jumping" is that?

SUNLIGHT

Do you wish I had painted it for you?

CLUMLY

You painted it for somebody.

SUNLIGHT

And you think that makes me not a monster?

The TRAIN HORN again, and really LOUD.

CLUMLY

Yes.

SUNLIGHT

You actually care.

CLUMLY

I think you have suffered a lot of pain. A lot.

SUNLIGHT

And that touches the policeman's law-abiding heart.

Clumly peers out of the tent.

INT. ENGINE

Through the leaves and haze the engineer can just make out something square and white hanging above the tracks ahead.

INT. TENT

SUNLIGHT

Go ahead -- jump. I'm fine.

CLUMLY

Come with me! Turn yourself in.

SUNLIGHT

Go -- I'm waiting.

Clumly, at the tent's door, looks down at the sharp gravel, the tent tilting wildly.

SUNLIGHT (O.C.)

(mock Scarlett O'Hara)

Go ahead -- save yourself. I'll be fine.

EXT. GRAVEL BED

Clumly lands with a THUMP. She looks up, and the train looms like a giant.

Clumly heaves herself up and runs toward it.

INT. ENGINE

The engineer sees a crazed police officer running towards him even as he leans all his weight against the brake, the SQUEAL of metal against metal shattering the thick hot air.

EXT. TRACKS

The train grinds to a heavy stop opposite a profusely sweating Clumly. Man and machine stare at each other like exhausted warriors.

The engineer clambers down.

ENGINEER

Get that thing out of my way!

CLUMLY

There's a fugitive --

ENGINEER

I don't care if it's the Lennon Sisters on crank, get that goddamn thing down! I got a schedule!

The TRAIN CREW comes running.

ENGINEER

(to YOUNG MAN)

Check if there's any idiot up there.

The young man runs to the rope ladder, followed by Clumly.

AT THE ROPE LADDER

The young man scrambles up.

CLUMLY

He may be dangerous --

But too late -- the young man flings himself into the tent, pops back out holding a wooden box wrapped in a chain.

YOUNG MAN

Like a goddamn outhouse in there.

Scurries down the ladder.

YOUNG MAN

(handing box to Clumly)

Found this.

Clumly turns and sees crew members climbing up the bank to the trestle, one with a bolt-cutter in his hand.

Behind her Clumly hears the CRASH of the tent as they cut the chain.

CLUMLY

Wait, that's evidence!

ENGINEER

Get it the fuck off my tracks.

The WHISTLE splinters the air.

FROM THE TRAIN

As the train passes the wreckage of the tent, several CREW MEMBERS see Clumly smash the wooden box with a heavy rock.

BY THE TRACKS

With sharp angry movements, Clumly pulls her gun and badge out of the box's wreckage, jams the gun into the holster, jabs the badge's pint through her shirt pocket. With a GROWL she heaves the chain into the brush.

CLUMLY

You son-of-a-bitch!

As if to mock her, the distant train WHISTLE drifts through the dry sluggish air.

EXT. HODGE HOUSE - LATER

Sunlight rockets up to the house in Ben's pickup.

INT. HODGE BASEMENT

Sunlight, agitated, clomps down the stairs and stares at the two men hanging there. Their eyes stare back at him, tired and frightened and, in Nick's case, full of anger.

Taking a knife from his pocket, Sunlight cuts them both down, and they collapse. Sunlight gently lifts each of them to their feet, then guides them up the stairs.

INT. HODGE KITCHEN

Nick and Ben sit at the table, their gags gone, Nick like a cornered animal. A light shines in Ben's eyes.

At the sink, Sunlight fills a bowl with water. He grabs dishtowels, picks up the bowl, and faces them.

Sunlight kneels in front of Ben, puts the bowl and cloths down, and carefully undoes the laces of Ben's boots.

NICK

What the fuck are you doing?

BEN

Taggart.

Sunlight does not stop unlacing the boots.

BEN

Taggart.

NICK

Who's Taggart? You know him?

Sunlight wrestles one boot off.

BEN

(ignoring Nick)

Taggart?

NICK

You know this shit?

BEN

(ignoring Nick)

Taggart -- you don't need to do this anymore.

Sunlight wrenches the other boot off. He pulls the bowl to him, dips a cloth into it, and gently washes Ben's right foot.

BEN

This is my brother.

Ben touches Sunlight's hair while Sunlight, head bowed, continues to wash Ben's feet.

Nick glares at Ben with a face twisted by confusion.

NICK

The lawyer? The one that fucked up?

Ben nods yes. Nick shoots out of his chair.

NICK

(to Sunlight)

You're the fucking angel this guy used to talk about all the time.

(to Ben)

Isn't he? The youngest. Taggart Hodge, the big boo-hoo tragedy with his wife and kids.

Sunlight finishes Ben's feet, stays kneeling, his head bowed.

NICK

(to Ben)

You knew, and you didn't do a fucking thing.

(to Sunlight)

You always said the next one, the third one, wouldn't be an accident. You're goddamn right it won't.

Without changing position, Sunlight flashes the gun at Nick.

BEN

Nick, sit down. It will be all right.

NICK

It's not going to be all right!

SUNLIGHT

Nick, sit.

Sunlight stands.

SUNLIGHT

It's almost over. We'll be gone soon. Then you'll be as free as a murder of crows -- they will never have you.

BEN

You and Kathleen on the roof of the barn steeple.

Sunlight turns a calculated face to Ben, gun pointed.

SUNLIGHT

(with a drawl)

Old preacher man, I don't know who yer talkin' about.

(to Nick)
Want yer feet washed, sonny?

NICK
You're worse than any fucking jail ever would've been.

SUNLIGHT
The young these days -- give you no gratitude at all.

Taking careful aim, Sunlight shoots at Nick, but out pops the standard magician's bouquet. He tosses what is now clearly a fake gun to Nick while pulling the real gun from his waistband.

SUNLIGHT
Let's eat.

INT. CLUMLY HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Michael perches on the coach in the dim living room, swaying slightly, the cassette tape in his left hand. In his right, a gun. On the coffee table in front of him is a half-empty bottle and a wine glass.

From outside he hears a car pull into the driveway.

MICHAEL
So they've come at last, those ungrateful sons-a-bitches.

EXT. HOUSE

Clumly pulls up in her prowler car, gets out. Her uniform is dirtied, her face sun-reddened. She walks stooped over.

ON THE PORCH

She shuffles up the stairs to the front door, pats her pockets for the house keys: nowhere.

INT. HOUSE

Michael grips the gun more tightly.

EXT. HOUSE PORCH

One last slap at the empty pockets.

CLUMLY

Damn, damn, damn!

She rings the doorbell.

INT. HOUSE

The doorbell ECHOES, but Michael does not move.

EXT. PORCH

Clumly waits, head tilted, listening. Nothing.

CLUMLY

Where the hell is he?

RINGS the doorbell again. She can hear the faint CHIME inside the house. She POUNDS on the door.

INT. HOUSE

Michael hears the POUNDING, does not move.

MICHAEL

(to himself)

You can pound like the hammers of hell, you bastards.

EXT. PORCH

Clumly walks down the porch steps and into the alley between the house and the garage.

IN THE ALLEYWAY

Clumly squeezes through towards the back yard.

IN THE BACK YARD

The back yard is rank and overgrown. Clumly appears on top of the fence and does an inelegant dismount onto the grass.

CLUMLY

Too old for this.

Clumly trudges up the steps, opens the unlatched screen door, then opens the unlocked back door.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Michael hears the back door open, hears FOOTSTEPS move heavily towards the living room. With an unsteady dignity, Michael stands, gun pointed at the ceiling.

MICHAEL

(loudly)

Whoever you are, I intend to protect --

Without quite meaning to, Michael squeezes the trigger, and the shot EXPLODES in the small room. Plaster rains down.

Clumly appears in the living room door.

MICHAEL

(slurred and loud)

'Smy duty to love, honor, and o[bey]--

Another BLAST, and this time the kick knocks Michael onto the couch as more plaster showers. The coffee table with the glass and bottle goes flying.

MICHAEL

Oh shit.

(liking the word)

Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit --

Clumly leaps to the couch, grabs Michael's gun-hand, and wrenches the gun free.

CLUMLY

Michael! Michael! It's me!

Clumly guides Michael's hand to her face, and Michael calms as his fingers explore the familiar face-scape.

MICHAEL

I thought it was the Mayor's thugs --

CLUMLY

Not by a long shot.

MICHAEL

Long shot. Bang!

He raises his other hand, the one holding the tape.

MICHAEL

Miller says they might relieve you --

CLUMLY

Sit up.

She sits Michael up straight, the plaster CRUNCHING. She puts the gun on the floor, takes the tape, puts it on the floor, and holds Michael's hands.

Gently, she kisses him on the cheek, leaving a negative of her lips on his plastered face.

CLUMLY

I will be relieved.

MICHAEL

I would've been just as happy if you'd sold insurance.

Michael leans into Clumly.

CLUMLY

Insurance?

MICHAEL

Any kind.

Clumly leans her cheek against the top of Michael's head.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - NEXT DAY

Peeper, Uphill, and Moss at one end of the conference table, Clumly at the other. In front of Peeper, a bound report. Peeper slides it towards Clumly.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE - RECEPTION ROOM

On the Receptionist's hands as she slits open a letter. From behind Mayor's door she hears muffled ROARS.

Another letter slit open. Then the door opens. Clumly, hat in hand, comes through, chased by the Mayor's VOICE.

MAYOR

Don't walk out on me!

Clumly calmly closes the door. Sllliittttt.

CLUMLY

(putting on hat)

Don't think I'll be getting the parade.

Clumly walks to the top of the stairs, then pauses.

A look over her shoulder at the Receptionist, who continues to slice, then back down the stairs.

A little leap to the first step, then another little leap to the second, and then all the way down to the landing.

FROM THE RECEPTIONIST'S DESK

With each small leap, the Receptionist watches more and more of Clumly disappear until there is just the hat, and then that disappears as well.

INT. POLICE STATION

Ed, Figlow, Miller, Kozlowski, and PIEMAN, 30s (Salvador's replacement), give Clumly a funereal stare as she enters. She walks to her portrait, unhooks it from the wall, tucks it under her arm, and heads back to the door.

At the door, she salutes everyone. They salute back.

EXT. CLUMLY BACK YARD - EVENING

From the steps Clumly surveys the rank state of nature.

She rips off her clip-on tie, drops it like a dead snake on the steps, unbuttons her shirt collar, then marches to the little shed at the back of the yard.

INT. SHED

Dry-rotted, cobwebbed, a rat's nest of tools. Clumly unhooks a scythe and wrestles it into the fading light.

IN THE YARD

Clumly scythes the tall thick grass and vines. She is clumsy at it but does not stop for anything. Tears stream down as the grass flies until, so blinded by tears and sweat, she stops, breathing heavily, her clothes flecked, her hair unpinned and flying, completely alone.

INT. CAR - NEXT DAY

Clumly, now dressed as a civilian, drives in her own car through parched countryside along the Interstate.

EXT. PLEASANT HILLS RESIDENTIAL AGENCY

Clumly pulls through a wrought-iron gate onto a well-maintained driveway. She passes a MAN raking the same spot on the front lawn over and over again, never varying his rhythm. The grass has been torn away.

IN THE PARKING LOT

She parks facing a huge many-gabled house in good repair.

ON THE PORCH

To the right of the huge double doors is a brass plaque: "Pleasant Hills Residential Agency." The stained glass panels gleam, the porch itself sanded and re-painted.

Clumly looks out over the green/gold landscape of the Genesee River, then opens the doors and disappears inside.

INT. PLEASANT HILLS - ROOM OF KATHLEEN PAXTON HODGE

DR. BURNS, 40s, bearded, glasses, with an Irish accent, stands with Clumly outside a wooden door. They peer through a window into a room with soothing blue walls, a set of high bright windows, comfortable furniture, carpeting -- and Kathleen.

A small white card to the left of the door states: "K. Paxton Hodge."

BURNS (O.C.)

There's no way to know.

Through the window Clumly sees the woman we have seen before, though she is much changed.

BURNS (CONT'D)

There's simply no way to know what's going on inside since she's completely catatonic.

IN THE ROOM

Wearing a bright yellow dress, Kathleen sits rigidly still, her back jammed against the wall, her eyes lifeless. Some of her short grey hair has fallen out over her temples. If anything, she looks like a breathing corpse.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

Clumly stares through the window.

BURNS

We feed her, we bathe her, we rub lotion into her skin, we play music, we give her physical therapy --

Clumly turns a stricken and saddened face to Burns.

BURNS

Let me escort you to your car.

IN THE ENTRANCE LOBBY

Clumly and Burns walk to the front door that had Clumly entered. A lone NURSE sits at a desk guarding the well-appointed lobby.

ON THE PORCH

The man raking is still there. The air fills with the SAWING of cicadas.

BURNS

There's more we could do -- various shock therapies, for instance -- and maybe in five years we could get her to wave hello. But what ails her --

(tapping his temple)

-- it's not in here --

(tapping his heart)

-- it's in here.

CLUMLY

That's not very scientific.

Burns pulls a handkerchief out his pocket, pulls off his glasses and polishes them.

BURNS

True, "deep tremendous sorrow" is not listed as a "scientific" diagnosis --

He puts his glasses back on.

BURNS (CONT'D)

But I think it's why Kathleen's all folded in on herself.

He methodically folds the handkerchief and puts it away.

BURNS (CONT'D)

I'm sure you know something of her story. Such as when she burned the house down with her two sons in it.

CLUMLY

I know she was married to a lawyer.

BURNS

Which her father annulled -- didn't approve of their elopement.

CLUMLY

Clive Paxton was a hard man.

BURNS

From what I've gathered, Clive Paxton was a monster.

CLUMLY

Most wouldn't disagree.

BURNS

And the husband -- he was here. Twice.

A troubled look passes over Burns' face.

CLUMLY

What?

BURNS

I thought he was going to kill me. But then he would stand at the window -- that little one we looked through -- and cry. And mutter. For hours.

CLUMLY

Who gave him permission to see Kathleen?

BURNS

I received a phone call from Elizabeth Paxton allowing it, just after Kathleen was transferred here. As if she wanted him to. As if she knew he was going to be here.

They both look up at the man raking because he SHOUTS and turns ninety degrees, then continues with the raking. Burns gives Clumly an embarrassed look.

BURNS

It is not easy being a human.

The man rakes with a vengeance.

EXT. PAXTON HOUSE - VERANDAH

Elizabeth, wheelchaired, dressed in a light summer dress, watches Clumly get out of her car. Clumly steps into the shade harbor cut by the verandah roof, comes to the verandah steps.

CLUMLY

The Paxtons and the Hodges -- like two big fish in one small pond. Taggart and Kathleen eloped with your help.

ELIZABETH

Someone had to get out alive.

CLUMLY

But they didn't.

Elizabeth pivots her wheelchair.

ELIZABETH

Chief Clumly -- let's finish this up.

INT. PAXTON STUDY

Clive Paxton in his chair. Sunlight slips in through the window.

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

The annulment drove his daughter crazy and killed the heart of a fine young man. Standard operating procedure for my husband.

Sunlight, crying, pleads with Paxton.

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

I left the window open for him --

Paxton gives Sunlight the finger, then meets Sunlight's livid eyes with his own dead eyes.

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

He said he wanted to patch things up with Clive, that the time for hate was over -- but Clive probably said something --

Sunlight's hands around Paxton's throat.

EXT. PAXTON VERANDAH

Clumly stands, simply looking at Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

You'll never prove any of it.

CLUMLY

Why should I? Sentences already been handed out. Love crushed, mothers sleeping with their sons -- and we think we're so civilized.

For a heartbeat Elizabeth loses her stone composure, and her face sags under a tremendous sadness.

Clumly moves down the steps back to her car.

CLUMLY

I don't know my jurisdictions anymore, and I don't know from hunger about rules and rights. Some would say that makes me a free man, so to speak. You should visit your daughter soon.

EXT. HODGE BARN

Sunlight stands in the yard staring at the ruined steeple. Behind him Ben's pick-up truck is loaded.

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

They were so beautiful. They were --

EXT. PAXTON VERANDAH

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

-- so, so beautiful.

Clumly, unmoved, watches Elizabeth regain her stone face, then turns to go to her car.

EXT. STONY POINT CEMETERY

Clumly stands in the Hodge family plot. The Congressman's granite tombstone dominates, and all the other tombstones orbit his, just as they had done when they were all alive.

Clumly faces two small engraved headstones. Both of them have been painted completely white. Clumly kneels, runs her hand along the incised letters of the names of Taggart and Kathleen's two sons, lays gentle hands on the stones.

EXT. CLUMLY HOUSE - DAY

Tucked in the mailbox Clumly finds what looks like a parking ticket. Pulling it, she reads the word "VIOLATION" scrawled in black crayon across the top, and under it, in child-like letters, the invitation to the third dialogue.

Clumly pockets the "ticket."

INT. HODGE'S BASEMENT

Ben and Nick hang, but without gags. Sunlight sits on the stairs.

SUNLIGHT

(to Nick)

We'll be gone soon, my pet. Our brother here will drive us far away to Neverland.

(to Ben)

Won't you?

BEN

I said I would help.

NICK

Why do you have to do this?

SUNLIGHT

(to Ben)

Always the Samaritan.

NICK
(more forceful)

Why?!

SUNLIGHT
Do you have a choice about breathing, boy? Opera singers
gotta sing.

(stands)
Stretch yer legs, me hearties. The time for leaping has
arrived.

Sunlight exits.

EXT. PAXTON BARN - EVENING

SUPER: PLACARD: "The Dialogue of Ends"

Clumly pulls up in her car, gets out. She walks toward the barn, and as she
does, a light inside the silo glows, shining through the window of a small
door. She veers toward the silo.

EXT. SILO

Through the dusty glass pane Clumly sees a flickering light. She opens the
door.

INT. SILO

A kerosene lamp glows from a chair suspended ten feet off the ground.
Sunlight's VOICE REVERBERATES from everywhere.

SUNLIGHT
You've come unarmed.

CLUMLY
And without the tape recorder.

SUNLIGHT
And no uniform. You are much changed.

CLUMLY

Not a bit.

A long red cloth begins to unroll from the chair, but Clumly SPEAKS loudly.

CLUMLY

I don't care anymore, Sunlight, truth be told. And I don't care about the tricks. I saw your wife today.

The cloth stops, skewed, and Clumly, in the warm kerosene light, can see the fishline.

CLUMLY

I saw the graves of your sons.

Sunlight steps out of the shadows, dropping the line that led up to the chair. In his hands, the gun.

CLUMLY

It's over.

SUNLIGHT

If only you knew.

His hand shaking, Sunlight BARKS out an order that carries no conviction.

SUNLIGHT

Move!

CLUMLY

Look, friend --

At the word "friend" the tremor in Sunlight's hand seems to take over his entire body. Only with great effort does he bring himself under control

CLUMLY

You need help.

SUNLIGHT

(laughing)

Who knew "leap" would mean Hannah Clumly?

Sunlight, still LAUGHING, waves the gun, pointing for Clumly to move. Clumly shrugs, moves toward the door. Sunlight follows.

SUNLIGHT

You're married, are you not?

CLUMLY

Yes.

SUNLIGHT

And how is the husband?

Clumly turns at the door.

CLUMLY

Too much duty.

SUNLIGHT

Just as bad as too much love. Go.

EXT. SILO

They step through and walk away from the silo, Sunlight behind Clumly, gun in her back.

SUNLIGHT

My last trick. Remember Lot's wife? If you look over your shoulder, the silo will burn.

CLUMLY

(looking over shoulder)

Don't be a fool.

But Clumly's look seems to make the silo burst into flames, and they stand there bathed in hot orange light.

Clumly can also see Elizabeth, her Son, and the servant come out and stand on the verandah.

Sunlight seems transfixed by the fire, and for the third time since she's known him, Clumly makes a move. She grabs the gun, and it easily slides out of his hand.

Sunlight turns a face to her showing as much pleasure as it does wildness.

SUNLIGHT

Even though you're out of your jurisdiction, I should never underestimate you.

Pointing to the silo...

SUNLIGHT

A demonstration. You see, your next move is to let me go. Otherwise, I will look at the house and --

CLUMLY

You wouldn't.

Clumly looks at the three yellowed figures on the verandah, then at Sunlight, and hands him the gun.

SUNLIGHT

And your car keys.

Which Clumly also gives him. Sunlight turns to go to the car, then turns back.

SUNLIGHT

Between acts of love and acts of hate there is only gloomy confusion.

CLUMLY

You think too much.

SUNLIGHT

That is my crime. Yours, too.

He gets into the car and drives off.

EXT. VERANDAH

CLUMLY

I need your phone.

SON

The line's been cut.

The four watch the flames from the silo leap to the barn.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

The bright headlights of three fire trucks pick out a figure walking alone toward Spartan as the trucks race to the Paxton property. In the distance, sparks rise up from the burning silo and barn.

Clumly watches the trucks' red lights recede, then keeps walking towards the faint glow of light on the horizon that is Spartan, the sky overhead crowded with stars.

INT. HODGE BARN - NIGHT

Ben sits in the old Road Ranger, the engine GROWL savage in the hollow barn. He flicks on the lights, puts the machine in gear, and moves out.

IN THE YARD

Ben opens the slide door in back and Nick, silent as a shadow, floats in. Sunlight hesitates.

NICK

Come on.

Sunlight nods, as if agreeing to something, and moves to the truck. He stands face to face with Ben, looking intently into Ben's eyes.

BEN

Come on, brother -- we need to move.

Sunlight continues to look into Ben's eyes, and Ben returns the gaze without effort. Ben cups his hands, and Sunlight, holding onto Ben's shoulder, steps into the hands and up into the truck.

Ben goes to slide the door shut, but Sunlight stops it.

SUNLIGHT

Leave it open -- for the air.

EXT. ROAD

The lights of the Road Ranger cut the darkness as Ben moves through the gears and picks up speed.

INT. TRUCK CAB

Ben peers out at the road ahead of him. The speedometer reads 60 miles per hour. Ben SINGS over the engine's HOWL.

On the other side of a crest Ben sees a small town, houselights off, a neon light glow in the general store, and a stop light that turns red as he looks at it.

He hits the brake and gears down, bringing the truck to a stop just as the light turns green.

At the intersection, a sign: "Bridge Ahead" with a right-hand arrow.

Taking a right, Ben goes up the gears, picking up speed.

EXT. ROAD

Sunlight and Nick stand at the intersection and watch Ben's truck disappear. Without a word, Nick melts away.

INT. TRUCK CAB

The HOWL of the engine is deafening.

BEN
(shouting)

"Where is thy brother? And he said, I know, for I am my brother's keeper."

ON THE BRIDGE

The truck speeds onto the bridge, then takes a sharp right.

ON THE ROAD

Sunlight watches the truck's tail lights veer right as Ben drives the truck through the guardrails. Several beats of silence, then Sunlight hears and sees the EXPLOSION as Ben's truck slams into the bottom of the gorge.

Tears course down Sunlight's face, flickering red from the neon light of the general store.

INT. CLUMLY HOUSE

As Clumly lets herself in, she finds all the lights in the house on -- and an unusual smell.

CLUMLY
(sniffing)

Michael?

INT. KITCHEN

On the counter is propped a Braille cookbook, and around Michael are cooking utensils he has not used in ages. Flour, bowls, spatulas -- a kitchen in full use. In the background, barely audible, is the TICKING of a timer.

CLUMLY
Bread?

MICHAEL
(smiling)
Look in the refrigerator.

Clumly looks: a six-pack of her favorite beer.

MICHAEL
I went for a little shopping today.

Clumly closes the refrigerator and looks at Michael. Tears course down her face. Michael walks to Clumly and touches her face with his floured fingers, leaving a white streak.

MICHAEL
What is it?

The phone RINGS, and they both jump.

CLUMLY
(wiping face)

I'll get it.

(into phone)

Clumly.

The way Clumly falls SILENT makes Michael take notice.

CLUMLY
Okay. Thanks.

Clumly hangs up.

CLUMLY
Ben Hodge -- drove off the Lancaster bridge. The Staties think it might be a suicide. Miller's going over to check it out.

Michael sits down, his face downhearted.

MICHAEL
I don't believe it. Ben Hodge had a heart as big as all outdoors -- I heard him preach once --

CLUMLY
(taking Michael's hands)
Michael, Sunlight was Taggart Hodge.

MICHAEL
(information sinks in)
Oh -- oh --

CLUMLY
I'll bet Sunlight was in the truck -- but they won't find him.

MICHAEL
Why would Ben try to kill his brother?

CLUMLY
Ben was too hungry to save his brother's soul.

The timer GOES OFF, but for a few seconds neither moves. Finally, Clumly grabs a pot holder, opens the stove, and slides out the bread.

MICHAEL

(sadly)

How does it look?

CLUMLY

(trying not to cry)

It looks absolutely wonderful.

Clumly takes it out, slides it out of the pan onto a wire rack. Without preamble, Clumly begins to cry without restraint.

Michael goes to Clumly, holds her hands and wipes her face.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Figlow at the front desk listens to the scanner, leaning in close. Its staticky VOICES ECHO off the hard walls. As he listens, he SLAMS the desk with an open hand.

FIGLOW

Ha! Fuckers.

He gets up and goes back to the cell block.

IN THE CELL BLOCK

Figlow nods hello to Pieman. Two of the cells have prisoners, each one asleep.

FIGLOW

They just got Nick Slater, the bastard.

PIEMAN

Well, good.

FIGLOW

Anything here?

PIEMAN

The firebug there's setting fires in his dreams, and the D&D
over there puked in his shoes and fell over snoring.

FIGLOW

Another perfect day in paradise. Buzz me if you need
anything.

AT THE DESK

Figlow riffles through some papers when his head jerks up and he sniffs.
His face loses its usual disgusted look.

AT FIGLOW'S HOLSTER

Figlow's right hand slides towards his gun, then wraps itself tightly around
the gun butt, finger on the trigger.

AT THE DESK

Figlow whips around, gun in hand, and sees Sunlight in front of the filing
cabinets, tilting crazily as if his shoes were nailed to the floor. He wears a
crazy smile and his face is slick with tears.

He does a funny wave with his hands to show they are empty, that he is
surrendering, but it comes too late. Figlow shoots him through the heart.

EXT. HOLLOW GROVE CEMETERY - SEVERAL DAYS LATER

SUPER: PLACARD: "Winged Figure Carrying Sacrificial Animal"

Clumly and Michael stand on a small hill in a grove of trees above a burial
party in the Hodge family plot. A gentle breeze RUSTLES the dry leaves.

Clumly hears a car PULL UP and STOP, the SLAM of the door, FOOTSTEPS
on the asphalt, then NOTHING as the approaching feet hit the well-tended
lawn.

Miller joins them.

MILLER

Afternoon.

MICHAEL

Officer Miller.

CLUMLY
(lightly)

Hello Dominic.

MILLER
(laughing)

No one but my mom has ever called me that!

MICHAEL

He was a good saint.

MILLER

Chief --

CLUMLY
(to Michael)

Nobody from the Paxtons came.

MILLER

Chief --

CLUMLY

I'm not chief any more.

MILLER

Chief --

MICHAEL

Hannah, answer the man.

(lightly)

You tell her, Dominic!

MILLER

Chief, talk to you for a minute?

Michael pats Clumly's arm, releasing her. Miller and Clumly move several steps away. Clumly stares down at the funeral party.

MILLER

I spoke with the Mayor, and the D.A.

Miller waits for a response from Clumly, gets none.

MILLER

They're not going to press anything. You'll keep your pension.

CLUMLY

Michael will be relieved.

(turns to Miller)

You didn't have to. Thanks.

MILLER

You're welcome. And yes I did.

Clumly looks back to the funeral.

CLUMLY

Nick Slater?

MILLER

Kind of becomes the fall guy, doesn't he? Salvador's death, escaping from prison, aiding a prisoner. Not to mention the woman in the car.

He points to the caskets.

MILLER

Not like we can lock him up again.

CLUMLY

(staring at caskets)

And Figlow?

MILLER

Gonna get cleared, too. Everything justified.

Clumly simply nods.

MILLER

It might even get a smile out of him.

CLUMLY

Don't hold your breath.

The MINISTER raises his arm and makes a sign of the cross.

MILLER

Well, I just wanted you to know.

CLUMLY

(not looking at Miller)

I appreciate it.

(looks at Miller)

I really appreciate it.

Michael joins them. A thin WHIRRING sound reaches them, and they can see the caskets being lowered by the winch.

AT THE GRAVESIDE

The caskets disappear bit by bit as the people graveside step up and throw in flowers and handfuls of dirt.

ON THE HILL

The three of them watch as the people file away.

MICHAEL

Blessed are the meek.

CLUMLY

We are gonna need it.

MILLER

Amen.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

SUPER: PLACARD: "All this, though some may consider it strange, mere fiction, is the truth."

FADE OUT

By The River

Based on the memoir *A Question of Color* by Sara Smith Beattie

FADE IN:

EXT. SUSAN MORGAN'S HOUSE - SPRING AFTERNOON 1977

A large house. Through the windows can be seen a CROWD of all ages and skin colors. Several BANNERS hang across the porch: "You Are 90 Years Young," "The Celebrated Author: Write On!", "There Should Be No Question Of Color."

VOICES sing "Happy Birthday."

EXT. BY AN OUTBUILDING

VOICES (V.O.)

"Happy birthday to you -- "

Three headstones: one unnamed, the others with "John Morgan" and "Preacher Rebecca Caldwell."

INT. SUSAN'S HOUSE

PEOPLE around SUSAN MORGAN, a 90-year old African American woman, finish SINGING "Happy Birthday." Susan sits in an ornate chair with three chairs to her left, two to her right, in a half-circle.

SUSAN'S BELT

Hanging from Susan's belt is a leather bag, stitched with a figure of a blazing sun.

TABLE

Several feet away from Susan is a table holding a cake with 90 candles. The CHILDREN all look at Susan

SUSAN'S CHAIR

SUSAN
(with a gesture)

Go ahead.

TABLE

The children, and a few adults, blow out the 90 candles on the cake to
CHEERING.

SUSAN'S CHAIR

Susan holds up her hand, and everyone falls silent.

SUSAN
For John.

Silence falls on the crowd as they bow their heads.

SUSAN
Okay, that's enough -- about all John would stand for
anyway.
(pointing to certain people)
C'mon, my family, come gather.

AUDIENCE

Several people move the table away while FIVE PEOPLE move toward Susan. They have books in their hands. Other people bring in more chairs so that everyone can sit.

SUSAN'S CHAIR

SUSAN
(slapping seat to her right)
Great-grandson John -- plant thyself here.

CHAIR TO SUSAN'S RIGHT

JOHN, Susan's great-grandson, sits to Susan's right, handsome light-skinned, 21, long hair held by a worn but vivid headband.

NOTE: This is the headband that JOHN MORGAN, Susan Morgan's husband, will wear when the story begins. In the story, great-grandson John, with shorter hair, plays JOHN MORGAN.

ADAM

Aw, I wanted to sit at God's right hand!

ADAM, Susan's son, 69, stout, good-natured, Caucasian, tries to sit before John does. Everyone LAUGHS at Adam.

SUSAN

Adam, my son, I hate to say this, but you're too fat to be an archangel anymore. Let my great-grandson sit.

Adam graciously sweeps John into the chair to general LAUGHTER. Susan slaps the chair to her left.

CHAIR TO SUSAN'S LEFT

Adam sits.

SUSAN'S CHAIR

SUSAN

Grandson Joseph, next to your father.

CHAIR TO ADAM'S LEFT

JOSEPH sits next to Adam. Joseph is dark-skinned, African American, 49. Adam bear-hugs Joseph. They grin stupidly at Adam's WIFE/Joseph's MOTHER seated in the crowd. She waves.

SUSAN'S CHAIR

SUSAN

Now -- the really important people - the women.

LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE.

SUSAN

Rebecca, my African goddess, my life-long friend, right here -- and Hannah, my daughter without compare, right there.

WHOOPIING as REBECCA (African American, 70 -- will play PREACHER REBECCA CALDWELL in the story) and HANNAH (light-skinned, 65) sit like royalty in the remaining chairs.

SUSAN

Okay. Let us begin: the reading of the memoirs of one Susan Morgan. That's me.

AUDIENCE

Everyone quiets down as people get comfortable.

SUSAN'S CHAIR

SUSAN

Not that I wanted to write them -- unmerciful twisting of an old lady's arm, Adam!

Adam shrugs his shoulders and smiles.

SUSAN

But I'm running out of time and breath --
(to the young children)
-- couldn't've done half those candles -- you're good! So,
be kind, everyone.

Susan opens her book.

SUSAN

This is for John.

HALF-CIRCLE OF CHAIRS

Everyone takes up his or her book. Susan nods to John. John reads.

JOHN

The Question of Color by Susan Morgan. Prologue.

SUSAN

Come gather and listen.

JOHN

Come listen and see.

HANNAH

In the year of our Lord 1875 --

JOSEPH

In the tar heel state of North Carolina -

ADAM

A law was passed --

BECKY

That stated the following.

THE WOMEN

Listen.

THE MEN

Closely.

ADAM

"All marriages."

ALL

All.

JOSEPH

"Between a white person."

ALL

White.

BECKY

"And a Negro."

ALL
(emphasizing "nee-grow")

Negro.

JOHN
"Or between a white person."

SUSAN
"And a person of 'nee-grow' descent"

HANNAH
"To the third generation inclusive."

ALL
In. Clusive.

ADAM
Shall be prohibited.

ALL
Prohibited.

SUSAN
In 1977 --

JOHN
North Carolina finally said --

BECKY
"All interracial marriages that were
declared null and void" --

ALL
Null. Void.

HANNAH
"Are hereby validated."

SUSAN
In 1907, Susan Morgan, with the ocher skin of her African
father and her Indian mother's angled cheekbones, married
one John Wicks off the mountains.

JOHN

John Wicks, a Piedmont mountain boy as white as white could be in those colored times. As a sign of his love, he took Susan's last name and became John Morgan.

SUSAN

All this was dangerous.

JOHN

All this was love.

SUSAN

This is the story of how they were "hereby validated" long before the law caught up with them.

SUSAN

And their journey is not yet finished.

JOHN

Act I, Scene 1 -- By The River.

EXT. BY THE RIVER - SUMMER AFTERNOON, 1907

John chops wood. Almost 12 cords lay around him. He sweats and sweats in the blinding light.

John hears a TRUMPET BLAST.

EXT. PORCH - SAME MOMENT

PETER GRIER, 69, Caucasian, grizzled, blows a battered trumpet, sun glinting off it like fire. Grier LAUGHS.

GRIER

Keep chopping my wood, boy! Chop, chop!

EXT. BY THE RIVER - SAME MOMENT

Another BLAST of the trumpet from a distance.

JOHN

Dog bastard Peter Grier -- off my back!

On "back," the log flies apart. John sets another log, pauses, looks towards Grier's house, then chucks the axe.

JOHN

Blow yourself, old cock -- it is time to gather myself to the river.

John undresses as he walks.

EXT. RIVER BANK

John suddenly sees SUSAN MORGAN.

Susan, now 20, is dark-sinned, wiry, on the opposite shore fishing. A rag doll sits beside her.

INTERCUT BOTH BANKS OF THE RIVER

JOHN

My God, she is -- beautiful. Fishing good?

Susan, startled, loses a fish she has hooked.

JOHN

Sorry -- sorry. Chopping wood for Grier -- know him?
Catfish got your tongue?

Susan stands to go -- but does not take her eyes off John.

JOHN

Don't --

John steps into the river, but Susan stops him cold.

SUSAN

What do you want, white man?

JOHN

I want to know.

SUSAN

Know what?

JOHN
Know you.

SUSAN
Know me?

JOHN
Know all.

SUSAN
No chance.

JOHN
No to your no.

SUSAN
Sun brained you, white man?

JOHN
"White man" -- like you're hawking to spit.

Susan spits deliberately.

SUSAN
Your wood's calling you.

JOHN
Got time to spare.

SUSAN
But not much brain.

A suspended moment. John does not leave. Susan does not leave.

SUSAN
That rock there?

Susan points to the middle of the river. There is no rock.

JOHN
What rock?

SUSAN

That rock, white man.

John looks again, astonished to see rocks out to the middle.

SUSAN

Go. Fearful?

JOHN

Afraid of nothing.

SUSAN

Little white lie -- let it pass. Pass on if you're going to pass on, white man!

MIDDLE OF RIVER

John finds himself on the rock in brash sunlight. The other rocks seem to disappear, isolating him. When John sees Susan again, she is perched on a rock in the river, too, much closer to him.

SUSAN

An orphan, aren't you?

JOHN

How'd you -- How do you know?

SUSAN

Can smell your loneliness.

JOHN

Grave dirt's still under my nails. How --

SUSAN

I know.

JOHN

That's why I came off the mountain.

SUSAN

And the sodomite Grier working you over.

JOHN

What's a sodomite?

SUSAN

Orphan white man, not many good prospects.

A RUSTLE of wind. John turns, sees nothing behind him. When he turns back, Susan is ten feet from him, on a shaded rock.

SUSAN

Give me your name.

JOHN

How'd do you do that?

SUSAN

First name first.

JOHN

How'd do --

SUSAN

What's it take for you to listen? First name! Please.

JOHN

John.

SUSAN

Last.

JOHN

Wicks.

SUSAN

John Wicks, white man, coming off the "moun-tan." And that's your true face?

JOHN

You don't like this face?

SUSAN

Not a pig's -- that's a plus.

JOHN

A little pity?

SUSAN

What you deserve, white man, is mockery -- squatting in a river, moaning to a black woman -- be quiet! -- like she has any interest in your fallen flesh --

Susan sniffs deeply.

SUSAN

-- and, phew, papa, it is fallen --

JOHN

But my face -- been told it ain't a pig's.

SUSAN

(to the doll)

And his flesh ain't that fallen, is it?

(holds doll to ear)

That's what I was thinking, too.

Susan has the doll look up. John follows, and he is suddenly shaded and Susan is in sunlight. Cool water splashes on him.

JOHN

What do they call you when they're not calling you devil?

SUSAN

Those with affection for me, orphan John Wicks, call me Susan Morgan.

The sun suddenly shifts off Susan back to John, blinding him. When he focuses, Susan has moved farther away from him.

JOHN

Wait! We were just getting to know --

SUSAN

Twelve cords.

JOHN

And how am I supposed to get back --

SUSAN

You crippled?

MIDDLE OF RIVER - JOHN'S ROCK

The rocks re-appear. John stands.

JOHN

Orphan boy John Wicks wants to see you again, Susan Morgan.

(showing his face)

Some fine angles, don't you think?

SUSAN

It's not a pig's face.

JOHN

Notice the arms?

SUSAN

I saw them clearly from the beginning.

JOHN

So -- an "again"?

Grier BLASTS his trumpet again.

SUSAN

Don't let him know when the twelve cords are done. Get your promised money up front. Keep your door locked at night.

JOHN

What do you know --

SUSAN

You got halfway this time.

(pointing off)

I'm over there if you can make it to here, white man. Open your hands.

Susan takes a flat rock out of her bag: greenish, with a hole worn through the middle. Susan skips the rock three times across the water. It jumps into John's hand.

SUSAN

For the other half. Go.

RIVER BANK - PATH

Susan turns down the path but quickly hides to watch John.

MIDDLE OF RIVER

John takes twine out of his pocket, ties the stone around his neck.

JOHN

(shouting)

Miss beautiful woman of the water, I will know you more than your name.

PATH

Susan watches John make his way to the opposite river bank.

OPPOSITE RIVER BANK

At John's feet in the shallow water, as if waiting, are three fish. He wraps them in his shirt and weights it down, then goes back to his chopping, in rhythm to his words.

PATH

Susan watches him chop wood.

OPPOSITE RIVER BANK

JOHN

For the money I'm owed. For Miss Susan Morgan. To get me out of here. For Miss Susan Morgan. And this. And -- this.

John looks to the opposite side of the river, but all he can see is brush and vines. He smiles.

INT. GRIER'S KITCHEN - LATE DUSK

PAN ON STOVE

Three gutted fish are thrown into a frying pan.

STOVE

John at the stove, smiling broadly.

TABLE

Grier seated.

KITCHEN

Candles, lanterns, etc.: the kitchen is filled with fire.

Stairs lead to the upstairs.

On the windowsill sits a metal lidded bucket of blackberries.

INTERCUT BETWEEN TABLE AND STOVE

GRIER

I give up. Why the grinning?

JOHN

I'm not grinning.

GRIER

You're a bad liar, boy.

JOHN

That big, huh?

GRIER

(indicating the stone)

Not there this morning. Why the grinning?

JOHN

As the Lord promises Paradise --

GRIER

What are you blathering about?

JOHN

-- I think I found Paradise today.

GRIER

Cutting my wood?

JOHN

By the river. A girl.

GRIER

No girls around here.

JOHN

Not so.

GRIER

You don't want a girl, anyway.

JOHN

Susan Morgan is definitely one to want.

GRIER

Susan Morgan.

JOHN

What?

GRIER

Why are you living in my house?

JOHN

What does that have to do --

GRIER

Why are you living in my house?

JOHN

You took me in.

GRIER

I took you in -- watch my dinner! -- believed you about your parents dying -- watch the dinner! Felt sorry for you, gave you shelter. And work, too, paid work --

JOHN

Haven't paid me yet --

GRIER

Food. A bed.

JOHN

I understand.

GRIER

No -- you don't.

TABLE

Grier rises and steps to John, carrying his chair.

GRIER

If you're seeing Susan Morgan, you are not seeing to your best advantage.

STOVE

Grier thrusts the chair against the back of John's knees. John sits. Grier looms over him. Grier moves the fish off the heat.

GRIER

(rapping his head)

"Advantage" is not with the colored bitch.

JOHN
(moving to rise)

I will not take --

Grier grabs John's hair, pushes his face close to the hot stove.

GRIER
Your ignorance could endanger your soul.

Grier lets him go. John remains seated.

GRIER
Susan Morgan's father was a nigger pig -- slave's son -- and
her mother a Cherokee sow. We purged these bastards.
Our one mistake? We didn't spit the piglet.

Grier puts his arm across John's chest and slides into the seat behind him,
in effect having John sit in his lap.

GRIER
Wouldn't want you to run yourself to the foul side, John
-- some laws we need for civilizing -- sooner learned, the
better.

Grier strokes John's hair and face gently.

GRIER
Now, wouldn't it be better to stay with me, the man paying
you your money?

Grier bucks John off his lap.

WINDOWSILL

He gets up, goes to the bucket and takes out a blackberry, eats it.

GRIER
Blackberries, John, fresh-picked -- sweet as an angel's
fingertip.

John bolts up the stairs, surprising Grier, who pursues him.

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM

Cot, table, chair. John jams the chair against the door.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE JOHN'S BEDROOM

Grier tries the door but is unable to open it.

GRIER

Won't give the bad little boy any supper!

INT. JOHN'S BEDROOM

John opens the window, then climbs out onto the porch roof.

INT. HALLWAY

Grier hears what John is doing.

GRIER

Oh, definitely no dinner tonight!

EXT. GRIER'S YARD

John jumps to the ground from the porch roof.

INT. STAIRS

Grier rushes down the stairs.

INT. KITCHEN

John runs into the kitchen and grabs the blackberries just as Grier comes down the stairs.

EXT. GRIER'S PORCH

John bolts into the darkness.

Grier, on the porch, watches John's vanishing figure.

EXT. FROM GRIER'S FIELD

John pauses to look at Grier's silhouette against the open door. He continues running to the river.

INT. GRIER'S KITCHEN

Grier re-enters the kitchen.

STOVE

Grier puts the fish back over the flame, where they SIZZLE. Grier spatulas the fish; they SPIT.

EXT. WOODPILE - NIGHT

Utter darkness.

John smacks into the woodpile but manages to hold on to the bucket.

EXT. BY THE RIVER - NIGHT

He washes himself in the river, then hunkers down to wait.

EXT. BY THE RIVER - DAWN

John at the river with his bucket. No rocks go across.

STONE AROUND NECK

His hand grabs the stone.

RIVER

John sees rocks go straight across.

OPPOSITE BANK

On the other side John finds Susan's path.

EXT. SUSAN'S PATH - DAWN

John follows the path until he sees a cabin and a yard up ahead.

JOHN

Susan? Susan?

As John walks, Susan suddenly appears and knocks him down, then kneels on his neck. She pushes his face into the dirt to shut him up, then scouts around to see if anyone has pursued him.

JOHN

John Wicks --

SUSAN

Quiet, fool!

No pursuit. Susan releases John and notices his bruise, rumpled clothing, dirty face.

SUSAN

You told him, didn't you? And then BAM! right to me.

JOHN

I had no other place.

SUSAN

(hitting him)

Dizzard -- lunkhead -- Danger! A mooncalf even to let myself taste --

John does not fight back, simply stands and listens. This confuses Susan. She points to the bucket.

SUSAN

Bring your lunch?

JOHN

Took all night to figure things out.

SUSAN

How to kill me?

JOHN

No, ma'am.

SUSAN

Ma'am? And that -- at the end of your manly arms.

JOHN

Blackberries.

SUSAN

You're flying your ass away and --

JOHN

Needed a gift for what I want to do. I'm not completely unchurched.

Susan gapes at him, then stalks away. John follows.

JOHN

Wait!

SUSAN

You can't do what you want to do!

JOHN

Why not? Why not? Answer me.

SUSAN

Orphan man, you don't know what you don't know. Leave!

EXT. SUSAN'S YARD - MORNING

John follows Susan into her yard. A woodpile. A porch with two rocking chairs. Susan pushes John away roughly.

SUSAN

I told you to leave!

John looks around, then moves onto the porch. Susan follows him.

PORCH

John puts the bucket down, sits in a rocking chair. Susan tries to tip him out.

John immediately re-seats himself.

Susan tries again -- but John holds on.

Susan changes tactics. She drags John's chair to the porch's edge to dump him off.

John gets up and snatches the chair from Susan. He fixes his eye on her as he slams the chair down, sits, picks up the bucket.

They glare. Without taking his eyes off Susan, John opens the bucket and slowly eats a blackberry. Offers her one.

JOHN

They have been known to settle the heart.

John slaps the chair next to him for Susan to sit. Susan, glaring, sits on the edge of the porch instead, her back to John, foot BANGING the porch.

INTERCUT BETWEEN CHAIR AND EDGE OF PORCH

JOHN

I have a cure for that twitching.

Susan makes an obscene gesture.

JOHN

A cure for that, too. A cure from my mother -- a sweet physic to ease one's pains.

John gets up.

PORCH'S EDGE

John sits next to Susan.

JOHN

She put it right on my tongue. Like this.

John sticks out his tongue, puts a blackberry on it, and folds it back into his mouth.

JOHN

Did your mama ever do that?

Susan forces a look as he sticks out his tongue, puts another berry on it, and draws it into his mouth.

JOHN

Didn't care for the molasses -- but the sweetness of her touch -- ah -- that was the real physic.

John offers Susan a berry. She hesitates, then reaches to take it.

John pulls it back, indicates for her to open her mouth and stick out her tongue.

Susan does so, and John puts the berry on her tongue like a wafer.

SUSAN

We can't --

JOHN

Works, doesn't it?

(gives one more)

Sweet.

(takes one more)

Physic.

Susan jumps off the porch and stalks around her yard.

INTERCUT BETWEEN YARD AND PORCH EDGE

SUSAN

You have to go.

John fingers the stone, dangles it for her to see.

JOHN

Skipped me across the water, and here I've landed.

SUSAN

I do not want to care about you, scarecrow.

JOHN

(arms out, a scarecrow)

Oh, well.

Suddenly, John grabs his head, in pain.

JOHN

Oh, man!

Susan does not go directly to him. John has blood on his hand and forehead. With a snort, Susan walks up the steps and into the house.

INT. SUSAN'S KITCHEN

She grabs a bowl, fills it with water from the pump, grabs a rough wash cloth and a strip of cloth, and goes back onto the porch.

EXT. SUSAN'S PORCH

SUSAN

How conveniently you bleed.

Susan washes John's wound.

SUSAN

How'd this happen?

JOHN

No moon, woodpile, running hard -- bam!

Susan wraps the cloth around his head, none too tenderly.

SUSAN

Should gag and drown you.

JOHN

(sticks out tongue)

Physic?

Susan balls up the wash cloth and drops it into the water for maximum splash. John sits there with his tongue stuck out.

Susan reaches into the bucket, takes a berry. She puts it on John's tongue and then slaps him not too hard on the cheek.

JOHN

Now I am completely healed.

SUSAN

(pointing)

That apple tree --

APPLE TREE

The tree hangs heavy with fruit. At the foot of the tree is a cross and an arranged pile of stones.

JOHN (O.S.)

Yeah.

SUSAN (O.S.)

Next to it.

JOHN (O.S.)

A cross.

PORCH

SUSAN

Next to that.

JOHN

A pile of stones.

SUSAN

The cross is Mama. When she died, Papa wood-cut for Grier, for money to school me. But when he went to collect --

JOHN

Grier wouldn't pay him.

SUSAN

And Papa, proud man in a black skin -- he beat Grier. Grier cried "Sheriff!" and they dogged my father into the river till he drowned. And Grier sold every cord.

(pointing to John's necklace)

Found it when I built that pile to mark a loved body gone missing.

JOHN

He won't be giving me the money.

SUSAN

You're just his newest nigger.

EXT. GRIER'S WOODPILE

Grier and the SHERIFF look at footprints and other signs, look across the river.

The sheriff is missing the little finger on his left hand.

JOHN (V.O.)

Yeah, well, maybe my money is gone, but he still owes me, and I will collect.

EXT. SUSAN'S PORCH

SUSAN

Righteous man trash -- just like Papa --

Susan jumps off the porch, goes to her own woodpile.

WOODPILE

Susan splits a log.

PORCH

John jumps off the porch, follows.

WOODPILE

Susan splits another. Then one more. John approaches.

JOHN

The money --

SUSAN

The money --

JOHN

The money is for me what it was for your papa -- for freedom
-- and I am thinking this, too: for us.

Susan faces him, axe in her hand.

SUSAN

You are stupid to the bone, white man.

John reaches out and turns away the axe-blade.

JOHN

For wanting my money, or for wanting you? Look, if "white
man" splits me from you, then I give it up.

SUSAN

You can't just give it up!

JOHN

I give up what I never asked for in the first place.

SUSAN

It stains you, just like mine does me --

JOHN

Susan -- Susan! -- if there is enough love --

The word stops them from saying anything. Their eyes lock.

JOHN

You meet a person, you cross the river, you sit on their porch with the smell of blackberries in the air, and you talk out the loneliness. "Color" in that? Do you feel it? Answer me -- do you feel it?

SUSAN

My mama's people gave up on her.

JOHN

Answer me!

SUSAN

You are too dangerous, Orphan John. Your heart is too dangerous....I fear the words will burn me.

John goes to kiss her, but Susan stops him.

SUSAN

These ghosts -- knives, whippings, old hard stories of Africa -- you -- not enough --

JOHN

Just one thing: would you like me to sit on your porch?

Susan fingers John's stone.

SUSAN

I would like to have you sit on my porch.

They hear Grier's TRUMPET and look up nervously.

JOHN

Well, I guess Gabriel knows when to call.

PORCH

John gets the bucket.

WOODPILE

John hands the bucket to Susan, and sticks out his tongue, which is blue. Susan puts a berry on his tongue.

Then John slips off the bandage and hands it to Susan -- by a trick of the light, the wound looks healed.

JOHN

Then go away no more.

John turns and leaves. Susan goes to the porch and waits.

EXT. GRIER'S PORCH - DAY

Grier BLOWS his trumpet as he sees John walk up the road.

GRIER

The prodigal son.

(over his shoulder)

You ready?

INT. GRIER'S HOUSE

The sheriff hides behind a large chair. He rums the nub of his missing little finger.

EXT. GRIER'S PORCH

John walks up to the porch.

GRIER

How were her thighs?

JOHN

You owe me some money.

GRIER

Got to sell the wood first.

JOHN

That wasn't the contract.

GRIER

Contracts change.

JOHN

I know you got money.

GRIER

What a handsome fire in you!

JOHN

Stop that.

GRIER

All defending what you're owed. And probably in love, too.

JOHN

I said --

GRIER

What a long night spent waiting can bring to the day, huh?

Grier goes into the house. John follows.

INT. GRIER'S HOUSE

On the table is a leather bag; stitched into it is the figure of a blazing sun. Grier points to it.

GRIER

You win -- can't beat you -- so strong and strapping! Got to play fair.

John takes the bag and goes to open it, but Grier stops him.

GRIER

Eh, eh, eh -- now it's different. Now you are in my house when I don't want you here. A "trespass" -- a body could get shot for a trespass. You had better go.

John pockets the bag and leaves. The sheriff steps out, rubbing the nub of his finger.

GRIER

The mongrel thief that wants nigger on his last breath -- you saw him steal, right? The law must be upheld.

EXT. SUSAN'S YARD

John runs up the path to Susan's yard.

JOHN

Susan! Susan! Susan!

Susan appears from the house.

JOHN

I got the money! I got the money! I got the money!

SUSAN

Did Grier give it to you?

JOHN

I got it!

SUSAN

Did he give it, or did you take it?

JOHN

What's the difference? He just put it --

SUSAN

Where? Where?

JOHN

Just -- out. Where I could take it!

SUSAN

And you took it.

JOHN

I took it!

SUSAN

So open it.

John opens the bag, but instead of money he takes out a piece of thick paper wrapping a ruby pendant and two gold rings.

JOHN

This isn't money!

Susan starts LAUGHING.

EXT. GRIER'S PROPERTY

Grier and the sheriff are mounted and ride towards the river.

EXT. SUSAN'S YARD

JOHN

It isn't money!

SUSAN

Something new added to you every minute, white man --
you are now a thief!

JOHN

I didn't [steal] -- No! He didn't!

SUSAN

(looking around)

It was never much of a home anyways.

JOHN

He --

SUSAN

What did you expect, mountain man? We have to go.

JOHN

I can't go.

SUSAN

The sheriff already rides us down.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Grier and the sheriff at the woodpile and the river. They try to go across, but the horses buck and rear. They have to force the horses to cross the water.

EXT. SUSAN'S YARD - DAY

JOHN

I can't go. He still owes me.

Susan clamps her hand around his throat.

JOHN

What are you --

SUSAN

Rope around your neck --

Susan tightens her grip.

SUSAN

Think!

Susan releases her grip when she sees John understand.

SUSAN

He has said it already. Time to go.

INT. SUSAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Susan enters to collect several items: a shawl, which she puts on, her bag, rag doll, and a headband. John follows.

JOHN

(fingering shawl)

That's all?

SUSAN

What else would I need?

JOHN

Gun would be nice --

SUSAN

Never had one --

JOHN

Matches, food --

SUSAN

I'm ready.

JOHN

Even the Israelites took food out of Egypt --

SUSAN

I am prepared where it matters most -- and I will not be taken like my father.

Susan tosses the headband to John. She walks out of the house.

EXT. RIVER

Grier and the sheriff are in the middle of the river.

Wind whips around them, and the horses are unsteady.

EXT. SUSAN'S YARD

Susan starts walking down a path leading away from the house into another part of the woods. John follows her.

JOHN

(holding the headband)

What am I supposed to --

SUSAN

Wear it -- my mother made it for my father. You now have to be what you aren't --

JOHN

I can't wear --

Susan stops, puts the headband on John's head.

SUSAN

If you want an us, you will be what you are not, or else we will bend a tree like Judas.

JOHN

All right!

SUSAN

Still willing to choose me?

John adjusts the headband.

JOHN

Say hello to the last living member of the johnwicks tribe --
known for being what is needed when it's needed.

Off in the distance they hear the NEIGH of horses.

SUSAN

They got across. Let's go.

EXT. RIVER, OPPOSITE BANK

Grier and the sheriff try to get down the path, but it changes shapes and fills up with branches that slow them down.

EXT. PATH

Susan and John hustle into the woods. Susan stops at a small hillock and brushes leaves and dirt away. She pulls open a trap-door into a root cellar, and she and John scuttle in as Grier and the sheriff ride into Susan's yard.

INT. ROOT CELLAR

They watch Grier and the sheriff go into the house, hear BREAKAGE, then see them exit and torch the cabin, which blazes immediately.

On their horses they trample the yard, including the graves of Susan's parents. Then Grier and the sheriff leave. Susan's face is hard. They wait.

EXT. SUSAN'S YARD - SUNSET

Susan stands at her mother and father's trampled graves. John kicks through the rubble for anything to salvage. He keeps casting anxious looks down the path.

Susan tries to re-arrange the graves, but John pulls her away.

They stumble out of the yard, leaving behind the embers and the ash, and start down a path into the darkness.

EXT. CLEARING - VERY LATE AT NIGHT

John and Susan stumble into a clearing lit by moonlight.

JOHN

Here?

Susan nods yes, and they sink to the ground.

Susan takes a canteen out of her bag, and they drink. Then she takes a can out of her bag, takes off the lid.

JOHN

(reacting to the smell)

What the hell is that?

SUSAN

So the bugs'll stay off.

The salve makes the skin look black in the moonlight: a kind of "blackface." John starts putting it on his own skin, but turns to Susan and starts smoothing it on her.

But she grabs the can out of his hand, gouges out a daub of salve, and slathers it on her own face. John does his own face and hands.

John lies down to sleep. He can see Susan in the moonlight, her shawl over her head, hugging her knees, right next to him and a thousand miles away.

EXT. CLEARING - MORNING

John wakes and snuggles up to Susan. They lay spooned for several moments, then Susan untangles herself and sits apart.

JOHN

Why did you move?

SUSAN

I liked it too much.

JOHN

Good reason to stay.

SUSAN

I do not want to get used to it.

Susan soaks a rag in water, wipes some of the salve off her face. She throws John the rag and the canteen, and he does the same, then hands the rag and canteen back. They look scorched.

Susan packs her things.

JOHN

Any idea where [we are] --

SUSAN

Old Indian trail to the other side of the mountain. Sheriff won't be here -- different county.

JOHN

The other side without going over -- you surely have magic, Susan Morgan.

SUSAN

All my magic is burned away, John Wicks. Now go. You heard me. I want you gone.

JOHN

"Go" means "go" with you --

John sidles closer to Susan, who gives him a shove strong enough to throw him on his back. She stands, and so does he.

JOHN

You're kicking me away.

SUSAN

We're out of danger. I am out of magic. No obligations. Who needs you?

JOHN

Look, I'm not going to go.

Susan stalks around the clearing, looking.

JOHN

What are you looking for?

Susan finds a stout piece of wood and threatens John with it.

SUSAN

Two days ago I had -- today I have not. And whose fault is that?

Susan jabs John with the wood. John tries to back off.

JOHN

I am so tired of being damaged by wood.

Susan jabs him again.

SUSAN

Oh, really?

JOHN

Put it down.

Susan jabs him again, and continues to jab him. John protests.

SUSAN

Should have done this two days ago!

JOHN

Stop it.

SUSAN

Then I'd still have a house! And a bed to sleep in -- alone!

JOHN

Ow!

SUSAN

And not look like a burnt biscuit! And no iron ball called
"johnwick" pulling out my leg!

JOHN

That hurts!

SUSAN

All because of a stranger from the river!

With a wind-up and a heave, Susan really whacks John.

SUSAN

No more strangers!

JOHN

After what we've been through --

Hits him again.

SUSAN

No more lies!

JOHN

I didn't cross the river to --

Hits him a third time, which knocks him to the ground.

SUSAN

No more riiivvveerrrrss!

Susan drops the stick, her breath WHEEZING. On the ground, John edges forward to grab the stick, then edges away when he has it.

SUSAN

I don't know who you are, johnwick. I have given my heart
to someone I do not know. Can you understand if I find that
a touch -- confusing?

John uses the stick to help himself get up.

JOHN

You said some hurtful things.

SUSAN

I intended them to hurt. I aimed deep.

JOHN

I don't know if I can come back.

SUSAN

What?

JOHN

I am a man with feelings, Susan --

SUSAN

Wait a minute --

JOHN

-- and they have been questioned.

SUSAN

What's with that hang-dog look?

JOHN

It's sorrow, Susan.

SUSAN

I am not going to feel sorry for you!

JOHN

Damaged, Susan -- what can I say? I am going to have to take your advice. I am going to have to leave.

This brings Susan up short.

SUSAN

What?

JOHN

I think you're right.

SUSAN

Never take advice given with a stick.

JOHN

Dried oak does not lie. I'll go north.

SUSAN

North?

JOHN

Going there anyway when Grier's money came through.

SUSAN

You would leave me now?

JOHN

We'll let things air out -- you know. See if maybe we can just be friends.

John readies himself and grabs what is now his walking stick.

JOHN

Well, I'm off! See you around, maybe.

John goes about twenty feet, then stops.

JOHN

(inhaling)

Ah -- Ah --

SUSAN

What are you doing?

JOHN

The air is better up north! Smell that --

SUSAN

That's as far as I get to get rid of you?

JOHN

Already my brain is clearing! Now, who was that colored gal --

SUSAN

Colored gal?

JOHN

-- who fancied herself so highly? Susan! I guess I was just too loooowww for her!

John moves slowly toward Susan as he speaks.

JOHN

Guess she couldn't have confidence in a "white man," especially one that wanted to earn her money and become a whole new Indian tribe just to have the pleasure of her company till the trump of doom. Almost lost my heart on her -- good thing I didn't. Now I can be an up-north orphan and free all by my airy lonesome self!

(looks directly at Susan)

Or maybe not.

Susan swoops her shawl in a wide circle, settling it back on her shoulders. A ruffle of wind passes through the clearing.

JOHN

I find it much warmer down south.

SUSAN

It is much warmer. Enough for the johnwick to stay?

JOHN

Yes.

SUSAN

He will stay?

JOHN

Yes.

SUSAN

He will not leave?

JOHN

Only in his coffin.

John moves to Susan.

JOHN

We've gone through an engagement of fire.

SUSAN

Yes.

JOHN

And bruises.

SUSAN

Deserved ones.

John throws away the walking stick.

JOHN

No more, then. Not "wife" yet --

SUSAN

Not "husband" yet --

JOHN

But it seems we could bend that way.

SUSAN

Johnwick --

JOHN

Ancient johnwick wisdom, yea verily: Safety in, danger out.
Big walls. Tall walls. Will that do?

Susan nods yes.

JOHN

What do we do now?

SUSAN

Hungry?

JOHN

(pointing to her bag)

Don't happen to have a full breakfast --

SUSAN

Out of magic, I told you. Smell.

JOHN

Chimney smoke. Cooking smoke.

SUSAN

Sending your belly a smoke signal.

JOHN

How proper for an Indian. Let's go.

EXT. CHURCHYARD - MORNING

John and Susan walk out of the clearing through a small grove of trees and find themselves facing a church -- in actuality, just a large cabin with a crude but large cross nailed to the roof peak. A small barn is off to one side; close by is a garden.

Someone unseen is SINGING, and they hear the SCRUNCH of a shovel. John and Susan exchange looks.

The SHOVELING stops, and for a moment again the air is filled with wind, trees, birds. Then FOOTSTEPS approach, and John and Susan hear a strong VOICE.

PREACHER (O.S.)

Grover Bolling -- if that's you, I am going to crack your skull into quarters.

CORNER OF CHURCH

From around the corner appears PREACHER REBECCA CALDWELL, an African American woman, older, holding a shovel raised, as if ready to strike. She wears a significant wooden cross around her neck, and from her waist hangs a leather pouch.

She sees two ragged young people. She lowers the shovel. A humorous look sits on her face as she sees their condition.

INTERCUT BETWEEN CHURCH AND YARD

JOHN

Who is Grover Bolling?

PREACHER

No matter. How can I help you -- besides offering some water and soap?

Susan and John share one more look at each other.

JOHN

Preacher?

PREACHER

That's how I'm known. Also known by Rebecca Caldwell.

JOHN

(to Susan)

It's possible.

SUSAN

Now.

JOHN

Now.

(to Preacher)

We want to get married.

Preacher does not move, does not respond, except to scrutinize them, the humorous look on her face now gone. Then she signals for them to follow her as she disappears around the building.

EXT. CHURCH CEMETERY

Behind the church is a small neat cemetery with perhaps a dozen graves marked by wooden crosses or piles of stone along with artifacts of African origin.

Next to a fresh grave is a small wooden box -- a child's coffin.

GRAVESIDE

Preacher hands John the shovel, then stoops to pick up the coffin. Susan rushes over, and they lift it and drop it into the grave.

Preacher reaches into her pouch, grabs a handful of dried herbs, and sprinkles them into the grave. Susan takes some of the herbs from her hand and does the same.

Preacher then gestures, and John fills the hole. Preacher takes back the shovel. Susan kneels and smoothes the dirt with her hand.

SUSAN

Who?

PREACHER

Orphan -- died of fever.

Preacher looks at John, touches her own forehead.

PREACHER

Headband doesn't fool me, white man.

(to Susan)

And you ain't full-colored -- Indian mama, looks like -- but colored nonetheless.

Preacher helps Susan rise and then smoothes the dirt of the new grave with her foot.

PREACHER

Now, my Eve and Adam, you still want to do this?

JOHN

The name is John Wicks.

SUSAN

Susan Morgan.

JOHN

And I got one thing to ask before we do.

PREACHER

It never hurts to ask.

JOHN

We are going to do this.

SUSAN

(looking at the grave)

Yes we are.

JOHN

It's Susan who gives me my life back by doing this. So, I want to honor her --

(to Susan)

-- you --

PREACHER

Yeah?

JOHN

-- with the taking of her name -- your name -- for mine.

SUSAN

That's not done.

JOHN

We got this far -- we can go farther.

PREACHER

John Morgan.

JOHN

Like the sound already.

PREACHER

Susan?

SUSAN

"So that he bringeth them into their desired haven."

JOHN

That's good, right?

PREACHER

John Morgan, you have a jewel here. "The lips of knowledge are a precious jewel."

JOHN

That's good, too, right?

PREACHER

Not much churched, is he?

SUSAN

He's teachable.

JOHN

I am very teachable.

The dirt at their feet suddenly stipples with raindrops.

They raise their faces into the sunshower, and they all suddenly find themselves smiling in the sun-filled rain.

PREACHER

July 19, 1907, is the date of your birth, then. Let's go.

Preacher motions for them to enter the church, and the rain continues to fall, washing the earth clean.

INT. BEDROOM, PREACHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The lantern lights up a rough but clean room as Preacher, John, and Susan stand at the doorway of the bedroom.

PREACHER

It's not much --

SUSAN

"Not much" will do just fine.

PREACHER

Tomorrow I'll take you to find some work. Over to Colonel Goforth's -- therein lies another whole story. Well, good night.

Preacher steps away as John and Susan enter the bedroom. But, after a moment's hesitation, Preacher steps back.

PREACHER

When I was sanctified, my eyes saw that all souls only got
the color of heaven in them.

Preacher stares at them directly.

PREACHER

But that will not make it easy.

JOHN

But it is going to happen.

PREACHER

I believe that it will. Tomorrow's coming -- good night.

Preacher leaves.

John and Susan, now completely alone, realize that they are completely
alone.

Susan notices a broom standing in the corner. She lays it on the floor.

JOHN

What?

SUSAN

Jump. Over.

JOHN

Over a broom?

SUSAN

Into a new life.

JOHN

That's how it work?

SUSAN

That's how it works where I come from.

JOHN

Well, that's where I want to come from, too. Okay.

They jump, LAUGHING, and fall onto the bed where they hungrily start taking each other's clothes off.

Susan stops them for a moment, then blows out the light.

In the dark the LAUGHTER and disrobing continue.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

Preacher makes breakfast: scrambled eggs in one skillet, bacon in another, coffee bubbling, bread sliced on a cutting board. In the corner is a large Bible on a stand. John and Susan, somewhat shyly, enter. Preacher smiles at them.

BECKY

Thought the smell of food would raise you up -- such raising
being my business, after all. Sit, please.

They sit as Preacher puts a board of bread and jam on the table. Preacher then pours them their coffee.

SUSAN

Preacher, you don't have to serve --

PREACHER

Enjoy the attention while you can.

Preacher adds milk and sugar as she recites the following poem. John puts jam on the bread for himself and Susan.

PREACHER

"In this wicked, sinful world / When trouble takes its shot / I
grind these beans and pour 'em out / Heat water good and
hot / I smell a smell like Africa / Black and strong and free /
Long as I got coffee / then I know my Lord loves me."

Preacher dishes out the rest of the food, then sits down, and there is an awkward but happy moment of silence.

PREACHER

I take it you two slept well.

JOHN

Like I've never slept before.

PREACHER

There is a pleasure in pleasure, is there not?

JOHN

Is that strictly biblical?

PREACHER

Strictly human, which is sometimes the same.

JOHN

Last night you said work.

PREACHER

I did -- I will find you work today -- with Colonel Goforth.

JOHN

And Colonel Goforth is --

PREACHER

The largest landowner around here -- though all the land and money is in his wife's name. But still -- the only cash on any barrelhead.

JOHN

Looks like you just bit into rhubarb.

PREACHER

He's also a drunkard.

SUSAN

With a wife.

PREACHER

She married the bottle, that's for sure. More?

JOHN

And he'll do you the favor of giving us both a job?

Preacher looks at them both hard and tender, then gets up.

CABINET

From behind Preacher lifts a large framed sepia-toned photograph of a young man and Preacher as a young woman.

TABLE

She props the picture up on the table.

PREACHER

I have had a thoughtful night, John and Susan Morgan. If I'm going to bring you to Goforth's, you have to know the knives of what you're walking into.

Preacher points to the figures in the picture.

PREACHER

That is me, if you haven't already guessed. At your age. And that is Jake. My husband. Saved many pennies to have this picture taken when we were married.

JOHN

Jake --

PREACHER

Jake is dead. Been long dead -- part of the story. Now let me ask you both a question.

EXT. GOFORTH'S PORCH - SAME MORNING

PREACHER (V.O.)

Everything you crossed over to get here yesterday -- Goforth's land. Except this. Used to be Goforth land, but I own this land. Jake and I owned it.

GOFORTH, older, Caucasian, dissipated but handsome, sits on his porch watching men come to work his property.

He drinks a long draught of liquor from a flask.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN

PREACHER

Poor slaves like Jake and me -- how would we end up owning this land outright, -- owning it, not just "share-crapping" it, like my Jake used to say? How would that happen?

(looking at SUSAN)

You suspect, don't you?

Susan takes Preacher's hand.

SUSAN

You don't have to tell.

EXT. GOFORTH'S PORCH

SUSAN (V.O.)

We can find something else -- there's got to be other work somewhere else --

DEACON BELL, Goforth's overseer (African American, 50s), consults with Goforth as Goforth explains something.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN

PREACHER

A test, Susan -- of my heart, of my grace. That's why you two were sent to me.

(kisses her hand, lets go)

Go with your husband. John, God rags us about pride, and I rag everybody else for Him, but I got my own wood in my own eye, and it goes by the name of wrath. John, here stands an angered woman.

JOHN

You?

EXT. GOFORTH'S LIVING ROOM

PREACHER (V.O.)

Anger, John -- prime and hot enough for murder.

MRS. GOFORTH (Caucasian, 55 years of age) looks through a window at Goforth speaking to Bell, her face haggard and tired.

GOFORTH'S PORCH

Goforth notices her. Their eyes lock for a moment. Then Goforth takes another deliberate swig from his flask.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN

SUSAN

Think "Grier," John -- remember "Grier."

BECKY

We were share-cropping it back then, for the young Goforths.

EXT. GOFORTH'S PORCH

PREACHER (V.O.)

Her land, her money -- and when we first met them you coulda been stone blind and still have seen how her owning everything made him burn with envy!

Goforth pulls a small pistol out of his coat and plays with it.

But it slips from his hands to the porch floor.

For a moment he stares at it, then picks it up and puts it back in his pocket.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN

PREACHER

A complete half a man, Jake called him. He'd do this little ban-tam rooster thing when we went to pay, strutting around drunk -- the complete half a man.

Preacher goes to the Bible on the stand, opens the back, and takes out a piece of paper: the deed to her property.

PREACHER

He drank himself into a debt, and one day, he shows up, right out there, asks if we'd like this land, asks again how much money we had, said it was enough, took the money, gave us this deed and -- owners.

JOHN

A good thing, right?

SUSAN

Except --

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN - 30 YEARS EARLIER

PREACHER (V.O.)

Except -- except he'd acquired a "taste."

A thirty-five year old Goforth stands in the doorway between the kitchen and the outside and looks at the twenty-year old Preacher -- the women in the picture. He grabs her wrist.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN - PRESENT DAY

PREACHER

-- he came back to "taste" what Jake already had the flavor of by right of being my husband.

John realizes what Preacher is saying.

PREACHER

Yes.

JOHN

Preacher --

SUSAN

Preacher, it's all right.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN - 30 YEARS EARLIER

Preacher struggles against Goforth's grip, but she cannot break it. He hits her, then bends her over the table.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN - PRESENT DAY

PREACHER

Nah-uh -- now -- because I am tired of carrying its sickness.
Here's the kind of man he was, John -- he is, John --

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN - 30 YEARS EARLIER

Goforth, behind Preacher, has Preacher pinned against the table, her face jammed into it, as he roughly lifts her dress to take her.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN - PRESENT DAY

PREACHER

-- he asked me if I loved Jake when he bent me over. He said --

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN - 30 YEARS EARLIER

GOFORTH

Your loving Jake makes this so much sweeter.

Goforth assaults her.

PREACHER (V.O.)

Everybody knew.

JOHN (V.O.)

Mrs. Goforth?

PREACHER (V.O.)

Everybody -- that is, except Jake. And then one day --

PREACHER (V.O.)

And he came back more than once?

SUSAN (V.O.)

What good is power if not more than once?

PREACHER (V.O.)

One day -- Jake home early --

JAKE (African American, same age as the young Preacher) walks in and sees what Goforth has done. Goforth, smiling, buttons his pants and exits, leaving Jake to look at his beaten wife.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN - PRESENT DAY

PREACHER

Little ban-tam Goforth --

JOHN

Goddamn Goforth --

A pause as they look at each other. Then Preacher moves out of the kitchen to the porch. John and Susan, hesitant, follow.

EXT. PREACHER'S PORCH - DAY

PREACHER

(pointing)

That rocking chair?

Jake is in the rocking chair -- but only Preacher can see him.

INTERCUT BETWEEN PREACHER AND JAKE

He drinks and drinks. They look at each other with great sadness.

PREACHER

Grover Bolling -- remember? Moonshiner -- Goforth's source.

Jake stands up, and as he does, the rocking chair moves.

PREACHER

Goforth got Bolling to give Jake a job doing sheriff look-out. Jake sat -- right there -- drinking himself to death -- like he'd done a crime, just waiting for the arrest.

Jake takes a length of rope, looped at one end, throws it over a beam in the porch roof, and ties it off. He stands on the rocking chair, puts the rope around his neck, and steps off the chair.

The rocking chair rocks.

PORCH

PREACHER

Bad as it was, the whiskey didn't work fast enough. So, one night, while I was asleep, Jake hanged himself. Suspended his life -- suspended my life.

Preacher looks back -- and nothing but the rocking chair.

PREACHER

Bolling's always thought I'd turn him in for Jake's death, so when he gets roundly liquored he comes to remind me about power. But when Jake died, words died. Broken heart broke my heart. So -- the knives.

JOHN

You would ask the man who --

PREACHER

Yes, the "man who."

JOHN

For a favor.

PREACHER

A job, to give bread to those who love like you.

JOHN

Why?

PREACHER

Because I don't need to love my own pain.

JOHN

But what he did to you, Jake -- what he did -- you said "murder"!

PREACHER

I did.

JOHN

But you're asking us to swallow --

PREACHER

(to SUSAN)

You jumped the broom, didn't you?

SUSAN

Yes ma'am.

PREACHER

That's why I left it there.

Preacher goes into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

She grabs a broom and exits.

EXT. PORCH

Preacher throws the broom onto the ground, then steps off the porch.

INTERCUT BETWEEN PORCH AND YARD

Preacher rears back and WAILS, a sharp KEENING sound.

PREACHER

I have made a show of my grieving --

Preacher pulls her hair and beats her breast.

PREACHER

I have wailed to Jake in my loneliness --

Preacher boxes with the air.

PREACHER

I have cursed that ban-tam damnation sucking down his bile! I am grief made flesh! I am vengeance made to flash! And you know what all that loving of my pain got me? Nothing. Nothing.

Preacher lets silence hang for a moment in the bright sunlight.

PREACHER

A whited sepulcher -- beautiful tomb full of bones -- me,
until you two walked out of the woods and jumped. Jumped
me right into a choice. C'mon. C'mon!

YARD

John and Susan join her, and the three of them jump over the broom
repeatedly until they are all laughing.

PREACHER

That's what changed it. Between old family and new.
Between dying and being bright.

Preacher grabs the broom and sweeps a circle around the three of them in
the dust.

BECKY

And I have made my choice. And I know Jake approves.

Preacher drops the broom and takes their hands. John takes Susan's hand,
and they stand in a circle.

SUSAN

Orphans no more.

PREACHER

None one left behind.

SOUNDS OF MACHINERY and work rise as Preacher takes a leather thong
from her pocket. She uses John's pen knife to cut the twine holding John's
stone and replaces it with the leather. Susan puts the headband on John,
and they are ready to go.

EXT. ROAD TO GOFORTH'S HOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

John, Susan, and Preacher walk the road up to the Goforths'. They can see
the men and hear the MACHINES at work.

EXT. GOFORTH'S PORCH

Goforth and Mrs. Goforth sit on the porch. Bell stands to Goforth's right. Mrs. Goforth embroiders the figure of a phoenix.

SIDE OF PORCH

GROVER BOLLING, 40s, disheveled and rat-like.

PORCH

Bell and Goforth are discussing something when Goforth sees the three of them coming up the road.

EXT. GOFORTH'S PORCH -- FOOT OF STAIRS

Preacher, Susan, and John stop, look up at the faces looking down at them.

INTERCUT BETWEEN YARD AND PORCH

GOFORTH

If it's not our African Eve.

PREACHER

Morning, Colonel Goforth.

GOFORTH

Cleopatra on her barge.

PREACHER

Mrs. Goforth.

GOFORTH

(to Mrs. Goforth)

Will you offer nothing, dearest chuck?

Mrs. Goforth looks up momentarily from her stitching, then just as studiously looks away without saying anything.

PREACHER

I hope I'm not disturbing you and Grover Bolling.

GOFORTH

No, no -- in fact, an excellent reason to pause for refreshment. Deacon Bell --

Goforth motions to Bell, who moves to bring Goforth a flask. Mrs. Goforth, without any hesitation, jabs her needle into the back of Bell's thigh.

When Bell stops in pain, she wipes the tip of the needle on her dress and continues stitching. Goforth pulls a flask out of his pocket, opens it.

GOFORTH

Good to have things in reserve. To my dearest partner of greatness -- the milk of human kindness to you all.

Everyone watches Goforth take a long painful draught.

GOFORTH

Now, Preacher -- them?

PREACHER

This is John and Susan Morgan.

GOFORTH

What relation to you that you bring them to me?

PREACHER

Kin.

GOFORTH

To you?

PREACHER

John's wife, Susan -- cousin.

GOFORTH

Wife?

PREACHER

From the other side of the mountain.

GOFORTH

Wife?

Goforth sits forward in his chair, a look of amused disbelief on his face. He points at John, gestures for him to approach.

GOFORTH

Come here. Come here!

John moves to the bottom step.

GOFORTH

(indicates headband)

The --

Preacher steps forward.

PREACHER

Indian.

GOFORTH

I assume you own a tongue.

JOHN

Like Preacher says --

GOFORTH

That your story?

JOHN

It's the truth.

GOFORTH

Eh?

PREACHER

(whispering)

Sir.

GOFORTH

Heed her.

JOHN

Sir.

GOFORTH

Indian of any species known by me?

JOHN

Some of all: Tuscarora, Catawba, Cherokee.

GOFORTH

And some white, it seems.

JOHN

Hard to escape that tribe -- I hear. Sir.

GOFORTH

Sure he's not your son, Becky? He's got your -- mouth.
The truth, Indian, is this: a drop of "other" in your blood turns
everything dark.

PREACHER

All got some dark in their blood, Colonel.

Mrs. Goforth stands.

MRS. GOFORTH

You won't be staying long.

GOFORTH

Preacher has her business.

MRS. GOFORTH

And then you go.

GOFORTH

Eventually she will go.

MRS. GOFORTH

"Eventually" is not acceptable.

PREACHER

It'll take no time, Mrs. Goforth.

MRS. GOFORTH

Make sure it takes no time at all.

Mrs. Goforth goes into the house.

GOFORTH

Management. Them, right?

PREACHER

They need work.

GOFORTH

You both need work?

JOHN

We need work.

GOFORTH

I got work. Would it be work an Indian and his wife like?

JOHN

We work hard at all kinds of work.

GOFORTH

Then it should work out fine.

JOHN

It will work out fine -- sir.

GOFORTH

I have a soft spot for Preacher -- family -- sort of. Right, Preacher?

PREACHER

You have a way with words, Colonel.

GOFORTH

Work this afternoon, John and Susan Morgan?

Susan and John both nod yes.

GOFORTH

Deacon Bell!

JOHN

Rest of the day'd be fine with us.

GOFORTH

Deacon Bell -- your new employees. My overseer -- my right hand at my right hand. What falls from his mouth are my words.

BELL

Don't need more hands, Mr. Goforth.

GOFORTH

However, not those words. Deacon --

BELL

Least not hands like theirs.

GOFORTH

Deacon. Are you saying -- no, that cannot be -- are you saying "no" to me?

BELL

Looking out for your best interests.

GOFORTH

Don't you want to care for your own kind?

BELL

Them?

GOFORTH

Preacher is. And the Indians's Negro wife.

BELL

Like I said -- I know my interests.

GOFORTH

Then do what I say. And I say, hands are hands when it comes to work, Deacon, and we have work. And I expect to see theirs employed for the rest of the day.

Goforth waves his flask back and forth like a bell.

GOFORTH

Clear as a bell, Deacon Bell?

BELL

I still don't like --

GOFORTH

Deacon -- shut up.

PREACHER

Thank you, Colonel Goforth.

GOFORTH

Those that have should share --

JOHN

We are ready to start.

GOFORTH

I'll take that as a thank you.

JOHN

Thank you. Sir.

GOFORTH

Susan?

SUSAN

Thank you. Sir.

GOFORTH

Call yourselves what you want. Earn me money -- we'll make it safe. Enough.

JOHN

Thank you.

Goforth opens the flask and drinks, holds it away from his mouth to show it's empty.

Goforth stands. He gestures to Bolling. They disappear into the house.

BELL

One of my kind.

PREACHER

There's only one of your kind, Deacon -- and a blessing it ain't had children!

BELL

You know why he gave you both a job?

JOHN

We know.

BELL

You told them?

PREACHER

Was only a handful of times with me. He's been having at you for years.

Preacher makes a masturbating gesture.

BECKY

"Right-hand man"!

BELL

You just bought him digging shit for the day.

BECKY

Digging your family history?

BELL

More insults, more digging -- the shit here runs on forever.
(pointing to John)

The barn -- five minutes.

(pointing to Susan)

And she gets to start boiling the water to wash Mrs. Goforth's clothes.

Bell leaves to go to work but turns back to Preacher.

BELL

It ain't good to see you. A snake'll have legs and walk man-like before it's ever good to see you again.

Bell stalks off. Preacher makes an "S" motion with her hand.

PREACHER

Sssss -- slithering back! His family in slave times was born with the Goforths -- he's been no, got no, other place.

JOHN

What Goforth does to him --

PREACHER

He's gonna practice on the both of you. Every low dog needs a lower dog to kick.

JOHN

A complete half a man.

SUSAN

Two of 'em.

PREACHER

The Siamesest of twins!

JOHN

(taking off headband)

Preacher -- Susan --

PREACHER

Yeah?

JOHN

I have a lot of work to do.

PREACHER

Don't fuss about Bell -- the Colonel will be watching both of you -- especially you, John. Just get through the day -- real family are waiting for you at home.

Preacher kisses them both lightly, then walks away.

INT. GOFORTH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Goforth, at the window, watches Preacher walk down the road, a distant look on his face. A movement, and Goforth turns to see Mrs. Goforth watch him from the doorway.

MRS. GOFORTH

Don't tell me you've had a feeling? How could your body
stand the shock?

Goforth looks back in time to see Preacher take the bend in the road. When
he looks back at the doorway, Mrs. Goforth is gone.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

SUPER: PLACARD: "THREE MONTHS LATER"

EXT. PREACHER'S YARD - DINNERTIME

Through the window can be seen John, Susan, and Preacher eating dinner.
Susan is clearly pregnant, and happily so.

Animated TALK and occasional LAUGHTER drift out through the window.

EXT. EDGE OF THE YARD

Bolling creeps into the yard, holding a gun. He stops to watch them. His
face twitches, and his body shivers with tics and jerks.

INTO THE YARD

Then he strides toward the house, making no effort to hide himself.

As he gets closer, he raises his gun and talks as he walks.

BOLLING

It is time again, Preacher, to be reminded -- you can't be
breeding new bastards.

Bolling fires, and the window explodes.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN

Bolling's bullet rips through the window, smashes crockery.

YARD

BOLLING

Bring your black Satan's ass out here!

Bolling shoots again.

KITCHEN

The second shot rips into the wall.

John grabs Susan roughly out of her chair and forces her to floor. In doing so, Susan hits her abdomen hard against the corner of the table as well as hitting the floor hard, face-first.

Preacher blows out the lamp, then dives to the floor.

SUSAN

Aaaahhhhhhh!

JOHN

Preacher!

PREACHER

Down as I can get.

BOLLING (O.S.)

I know you been talking me up to the sheriff. And those new bastards you got under your wing -- root them out!

PREACHER

It's Bolling!

YARD

Bolling approaches the house, gun raised.

BOLLING

Doing my numbers, Preacher -- add a couple, three niggers to the end-times, wouldn't mind. Up to you.

KITCHEN

JOHN

And all you got --

PREACHER

All I got is a broom.

YARD

Bolling fires again. He stops walking and lowers his gun. Then he HOWLS to the sky.

KITCHEN

Susan grabs her stomach, but John and Preacher do not see her.

PREACHER

Try nothing! He'll go away.

JOHN

No he won't. Stay here.

John grabs the broom and slides out of the kitchen into the front room. Preacher crawls to comfort Susan.

FRONT ROOM

John, broom in hand, slips out a window.

SIDE OF HOUSE

John peers around the corner. He sees Bolling HOWL at the sky, then put the gun down and move in a contorted way, as if doing an exorcism: stylized lunatic movements.

YARD

Bolling dances, muttering to himself, then bursting into words.

BOLLING

I am the angel of vengeance -- revenge -- aaahhhh!

As he does more movements, John rushes to circle behind him.

BOLLING

I am going to suck out the other demons in this house!

Bolling picks up his gun to fire again.

BOLLING

Harlot -- bastards -- the end-times is drawing near --
drawing nearer --

John, behind him, presses the broom-end against his neck.

JOHN

Put it down!

BOLLING

A voice. Hard voice.

JOHN

Down, now.

BOLLING

Very hard.

JOHN

Preacher!

KITCHEN

Preacher cradles Susan, now in obvious and extreme pain.

PREACHER

Problems here, John!

YARD

JOHN

Now! Now, now!

Bolling drops the gun. John picks it up and drops the broom.

BOLLING

Smart for a nigger.

JOHN

Go!

BOLLING

My gun.

JOHN

Go!

BOLLING

Gun.

JOHN

No! Straight -- out. Go!

Bolling pivots, and for a moment he and John face each other. Susan CRIES OUT, then another SCREAM from Susan.

Bolling moves toward John, but John pops the barrel-end against his forehead, knocking him back. John then runs into the house.

Bolling, listening to the screams, rubs his forehead and smiles, then does a little exorcistic dance, takes the broom, and leaves.

KITCHEN

John runs into the kitchen and goes to Susan on the floor. As he cradles her, Preacher lights several lamps.

SUSAN

Losing the baby, John!

JOHN

What can I do?

SUSAN

Losing the bay, losing the baby --

In her pain, Susan grabs John's stone necklace and rips it from his neck.

Preacher lifts Susan's dress, and blood flows everywhere. Susan's body contracts in pain.

While John clutches Susan, Preacher grabs rags and jams them under Susan's hips to catch the blood. Susan HOWLS.

YARD

Susan's SCREAMS echo across the yard as night falls completely.

INT. PREACHER'S BARN - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

John bangs together a rough box, a "coffin," into which he puts Susan's bloodied dress. Next to him is a small wooden cross. The gun rests near him.

INT. PREACHER'S KITCHEN - AT THE SAME MOMENT

Preacher burns the rags she had used to clean Susan. The firelight flickers over her anguished tear-filled face.

INT. JOHN AND SUSAN'S BEDROOM - AN HOUR LATER

Susan lies in bed, clutching her rag doll, staring. She fingers the stone of John's necklace.

FOOTSTEPS come down the hall, and John stands in the doorway.

SUSAN

It's a good thing.

John sits on the edge of the bed and takes her hand.

SUSAN

That -- child will not have to put up with murderers and drunkards and rapists and -- That child will not have to suffer for love. I am sick of love.

John goes to the dresser.

DRESSER

John takes out Grier's leather bag.

DOORWAY

Preacher comes to stand in the doorway, holding her Bible.

DRESSER

John takes out the ruby pendant, then brings the pendant to Susan.

BED

John puts the pendant around Susan's neck.

SUSAN

The color of blood.

PREACHER (O.C.)

Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies.

John rests his hand on the pendant, on Susan's breast bone.

PREACHER (O.C.)

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.

Susan rests her hand on his.

JOHN

We have to, Susan. We have to.

SUSAN

I feel so dark, John.

JOHN

Everything is still left for us to do.

Susan hands him back the stone for his necklace.

SUSAN

I don't know. I don't know. Got no more magic.

PREACHER (O.C)

Strength and honor are her clothing. In her tongue is the law of kindness.

Susan, in grief, turns her face away from both of them.

PREACHER

(in a faltering VOICE)

Her candle goeth not out by night.

John looks at Preacher, then abruptly leaves the room.

EXT. IN THE CEMETERY - NIGHT

By lantern, John digs a shallow hole for the "coffin." Preacher joins him, holding a lantern and her Bible. John RAPS his fist against the coffin, hard.

JOHN

This is us. Nailed shut. And full of bastards --

John throws down the shovel and puts the box in the hole. Preacher walks to the edge of the small hole.

GRAVESIDE

Preacher opens her Bible, but instead of reading from it, she struggles to tear it in half down the binding.

She looks at John, tears sparking.

Preacher jams the book against John's chest, indicating that she wants him to do it for her. She shoves it against him again and again until he takes the book and rips it cleanly down the binding.

He hands her the two halves, and Preacher tosses them into the hole along with the box.

PREACHER

Do it. Do it!

John fills the hole. He picks up the cross, but Preacher grabs it and the shovel out of his hand and pounds it into the ground so hard that after two strikes, John holds her and takes away the shovel.

Preacher stands staring at the cross, her breath RASPING. She takes her lantern and leaves. John watches Preacher's pool of light disappear.

He straightens the cross, gives it one more whack with the shovel.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

John stands in the doorway. Susan sleeps, breathing steadily, the rag doll cradled. He leaves.

EXT. PREACHER'S PORCH - NIGHT

John sees Preacher sitting in the rocking chair.

He goes to her and finds that she is not breathing.

In her hand is the deed to the land, wrapped in paper.

John tries to revive her, but nothing. He takes the papers out of her hand. He reads the letter.

The papers shake in his hands as John stares into a darkness filled with stars and emptiness.

EXT. CEMETERY - NEXT MORNING

A bright day, breeze blowing. John and Susan stand at a full-length grave lying next to the small grave. Around the base of the cross is a cairn of stones. John wears his necklace again.

As they stand there, a sunshower comes up and dapples the ground.

EXT. GOFORTH'S PORCH - AT THE SAME MOMENT

The sunshower spatters Goforth's flask as he paces the porch.

EXT. GOFORTH'S BARN - AT THE SAME MOMENT

The sunshower spots Bell's boots, crusted with dung and dirt, as he stands at the barn watching Goforth on the porch.

INT. GOFORTH'S HOUSE - AT THE SAME MOMENT

Mrs. Goforth, at her embroidery, is startled by the slap of the water against the window. The needle pricks her finger.

EXT. BOLLING'S HOUSE - AT THE SAME MOMENT

The sunshower hits the boiler on Bolling's still and evaporates.

EXT. BY PREACHER'S GRAVE - JUST AFTER SUNSHOWER

John takes from his pocket Grier's leather bag. From it he pulls the two gold rings. John takes the smaller one and puts it on Susan's finger.

Susan accepts it but without a smile. She goes back to the house. John puts the second ring on his own finger. He picks up Bolling's gun and stands looking around the property. He then goes to join Susan in the house.

INT. KITCHEN

As John enters, he sees Susan looking at the picture of Preacher and Jake, propped up on the table.

As Susan speaks, she speaks to the picture, not to John.

SUSAN

People will be here soon for their Sunday with Preacher.
Not any more. No more dead magic.

JOHN

Susan --

SUSAN

I will tell them to lose their faith and stop being idiots. The
gun -- you will teach me how to use it.

JOHN

Susan --

SUSAN

Remembering -- not losing or forgetting a thing -- that starts today.

Finally, Susan looks at John.

SUSAN

Now, I am going to cook us a meal. Then we go to Goforth's to settle the papers. A sign on that door will be good enough for everyone else.

Susan moves around the kitchen getting ready to cook. She grabs a heavy skillet and puts it on the stove.

JOHN

Susan, we can't --

Susan BANGS the skillet down so hard that all the stoveplates jump out of their holes. A moment -- then Susan does it again.

SUSAN

If you want to make yourself useful, find an honorable place to hang that picture. And leave the gun by the door -- from now on, it stays always by the door.

John stares at Susan.

SUSAN

The sign --

John leans the gun against the wall by the door. He takes the picture and leaves the kitchen.

Susan throws more wood on the fire, then continues to prepare the meal, her face hard, movements sharp. The gun leans against the wall by the door, ready.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

SUPER: PLACARD: "ONE YEAR LATER"

EXT. GOFORTH'S PORCH

Goforth's employees line up to get their pay, which Goforth dispenses from a table on the porch: Goforth pays out while Bell records the transaction. John and Susan step up to the table. Susan carries the gun.

BELL

Women get paid in the house.

SUSAN

For women's work. Field hands get paid here. I get paid here.

GOFORTH

I think she outworked you this week, Deacon. And besides, she's got the gun.

SUSAN

Earning a profit for you, Colonel, is our greatest pleasure in life.

GOFORTH

Next to your family, of course.

JOHN

I wouldn't take her too serious, Colonel.

Goforth starts paying out the money. John puts away the money as Goforth counts it out to them.

GOFORTH

Preacher's place is looking good.

JOHN

We make our ends meet.

GOFORTH

It's been a year --

SUSAN

Let's go.

BELL

In a hurry to get home because you just love washing the
stink out of other people's dirty linen on your free time.

JOHN

The extra money is honest and our hands are clean --
complete opposite of you.

(snaps fingers)

Shouldn't have said that, Colonel -- means more cow shit
for me on Monday.

GOFORTH

You two need anything?

JOHN

What?

BELL

We got the other men to pay.

GOFORTH

(ignoring Bell)

Do you two need anything?

John and Susan trade a suspicious look with each other.

JOHN

We prefer not to owe.

SUSAN

It's not a good idea to owe anything. To anyone.

JOHN

(to Bell)

We're square -- mark it down.

(to Goforth)

We will say thanks for the offer.

John and Susan leave.

EXT. ROAD

John and Susan walk down Goforth's road.

EXT. PORCH

BELL

Arrogant asses.

GOFORTH

Best workers I've got. I've had. And I'm not saying "present company excluded." They outwork you by time and a half, and if I had as many of them as I've got of them --

Bell seethes. Goforth watches John and Susan recede.

BELL

Those other them we need to pay, Colonel.

GOFORTH

Yes -- slop the food in the trough.

Goforth turns back to the role of paymaster and the next man steps up for his pay. Bell watches John and Susan.

FROM BELL'S POV

He sees them argue for a moment, then split up. Susan goes one way with the gun and John takes the road to home.

EXT. BOLLING'S PROPERTY - LATER

Bolling is busy working on his still when, suddenly, a brisk breeze comes up out of nowhere, swirling the dust. He looks around, sees nothing, goes back to work.

The breeze comes again, even stronger. Then his eye catches a flat stone skipping across his yard, as if it were skipping across water. As he watches it, another one skips behind him and CRASHES into his still, spinning him around abruptly. Several more strike his house. Then SILENCE.

He stares at the woods, trying to see who is throwing the stones. Then, with a CLATTER, dozens and dozens of stones skip across the yard, crashing into everything except Bolling himself. He hunkers down, arms over his head, to protect himself.

Then, just as abruptly, the stones stop and he hears, as if from every direction, a VOICE calling his name.

BOLLING

Who is it? WHO IS IT?

The voice stops, then almost immediately Bolling hears it right in his ear, no more than an inch away. He falls on his back and finds himself staring into the business end of a gun, the other end held, very steadily, by Susan.

SUSAN

Grover Bolling -- kneel up.

Bolling's smile twists his face as he gets to his knees.

BOLLING

I know you.

SUSAN

Yes you do.

BOLLING

I know you because you got no eyes.

Bolling goes to put his right index finger into the barrel.

BOLLING

You got dead eyes.

Susan rams the gun forward, knocking Bolling's hand back against his face.

But Bolling hardly reacts to the blow. He closes his eyes, licks the end of his finger, and wipes it down his eyelids, leaving a smudge in the dirt on this face.

BOLLING

(laughing)

Dead eyes for Susan Morgan --

Suddenly, Bolling flashes out his hand to grab the barrel, but Susan simply drops the barrel down and takes a large step backwards so that Bolling ends up falling onto his hands and knees.

SUSAN

Never watch the snake's eyes.

BOLLING

Takes a snake to know a snake -- takes dead eyes to see --

But before Bolling can finish his sentence, Susan straddles his back and drives the gunstock against the back of his skull with two short, sharp cracks. Bolling drops, stunned but still conscious.

SUSAN

No more will garbage like you waste my time.

First one, then, several, then dozens of stones bombard the still until it is completely destroyed, pummeled to nothing. Susan fires two shells into the pile, as if to kill it off. Bolling, still groggy, stands, looks at the smoldering wreckage.

SUSAN

A year ago today.

BOLLING

What?

SUSAN

A year ago today -- Preacher, my husband, me, and my child.

Bolling gathers his wits for a moment, then smiles and does a bit of the exorcistic dance he did in front of Preacher's house.

BOLLING

That? Heh. And now you think you got Grover Bolling in a barrel of fish.

SUSAN

Preacher --

BOLLING

I heard your four nigger names.

Bolling, still unsteady but with unmistakable purpose, strides toward Susan.

BOLLING

How do you think you are going to kill something already dead?

A stone slams into Bolling's ankle, pitching him to the ground.

SUSAN

Said to the rocks, fall on us.

Bolling gets up, with pain, and moves forward. Another stone slams into his knee, upending him.

SUSAN

Ankle bone's connected to the knee bone.

Bolling, in great pain, moves toward Susan again. Another stone blasts into his thigh, again knocking him to the ground, and this time Bolling CRIES OUT in pain.

SUSAN

A joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

Bolling scrambles to get up, but before he is fully erect, another stone slams into his chest, knocking him back.

SUSAN

With honey out of the rock.

Bolling scrabbles onto his hands and knees, but another stone slices into his forearm, toppling him down. Even as he makes one more effort, a stone smashes him in the cheekbone.

BOLLING'S FACE

Sprawled in the dust, conscious and in great pain, his labored BREATHING sends up small puffs of dust.

YARD

Susan stands over him, gun barrel pointed and unwavering.

SUSAN

Upon this rock I will build.

The wind picks up, swirling and dancing, then dies.

Susan squats down so that Bolling can see her but so that she is out of his reach. She stares at him steadily.

BOLLING

What do you want?

SUSAN

I cannot hear you.

BOLLING

What do you want?

SUSAN

What can an ass-up piece of moonshiner trash give me?

BOLLING

I have nothing.

SUSAN

That's not how I see it when I look around me.

Bolling crawls painfully onto his knees, then sits back on his heels. Susan stands. They stare at one another.

BOLLING

You can't take my land.

SUSAN

Not take it. Buy it.

Susan throws a dollar coin into the dirt.

COIN

The coin lays half-buried in the dust.

YARD

Bolling, exhausted and damaged, falls forward onto his hands. Susan circles around him as she SPEAKS. Bolling stares at the dust-covered dollar.

SUSAN (O.C.)

You will sign the land over to me and to my husband.

BOLLING

No I won't.

YARD

Susan, behind Bolling, jams the gun against the nape of his neck. The wind picks up again, and stones gather around Bolling in a clatter, as if getting ready to launch themselves.

SUSAN

I will leave here with either the deed in my pocket or your death on my hands.

In a quick move, Susan rests the gun on top of Bolling's head and fires, then just as quickly jams it back against his neck.

SUSAN

The idea is coming hard upon you, Grover Bolling -- either me, or your sack of bones gnawed on by crows. I have nothing to lose -- my dead eyes have nothing to lose. Squealer's choice.

Susan raps the gun against his skull.

SUSAN

Gavel once --

Susan raps it again.

SUSAN

Down twice --

EXT. GOFORTH'S PORCH - LATER THE SAME DAY

Bolling, a few bundles and boxes in the back, snaps the reins against his withered horse and drives his wagon down Goforth's road until he disappears.

Goforth watches him, then looks up at Susan and John. Susan cradles the gun in her arms, spine straight, face set.

GOFORTH

I'll file the papers on Monday.

SUSAN

That would be good.

GOFORTH

Come by later for your copies.

Susan moves toward the porch steps but stops when Goforth SPEAKS.

GOFORTH

Susan -- for a dollar?

SUSAN

It was going to be fifty cents -- but we felt generous.

Susan stares at Goforth for a breath or two. Three or four stones CLATTER against Goforth's porch.

SUSAN

Monday.

Susan then turns and walks down the steps. John follows. They move down the road. Goforth stares at their retreating figures.

EXT. MORGAN PORCH - LATE AFTERNOON

To one side is the framing for a new house. Susan puts her hand on the front door.

SUSAN

You ever going to talk to me again?

Susan does not move, her back to John. John hesitates, then grabs the gun. For a moment Susan does not let go of it, though she does not resist John, then she does let go of it, and John props the gun against the wall.

JOHN

Now maybe it's safe to talk to you.

Susan turns to face him.

SUSAN

You have something dangerous to say?

JOHN

Never felt the truth with you was dangerous -- until now.
Now -- now we have a warrior!

Susan crosses her arms and waits.

JOHN

You always, always, talk to me about "the box." The box, the box -- and then, bam!, I find my neck on the chopping block because of -- what? What was all that about?

SUSAN

It's simple -- so simple, even you said it once: if you ain't got color, you can always get money and land.

JOHN

Big, hard walls, huh?

SUSAN

I recall several promises of yours in that direction.

JOHN

And that means --

SUSAN

We now got more land.

JOHN

You telling me I can't measure up to the warrior? Well, I don't feel more protected. I feel like our walls just got a lot smaller. The box a lot tighter.

Susan looks at him, but her attention is not completely on him.

JOHN

Where are you?

SUSAN

I'm right here in front of you.

JOHN

No, you're somewhere I'm not.

SUSAN

I couldn't be more here than I am.

JOHN

But not with me.

SUSAN

Right here.

JOHN

This past year --

SUSAN

I am not dead to you.

John advances on Susan, and for a moment -- a flicker -- there is fear and sadness in her hardened face.

JOHN

Yes you are -- stone all in your face -- Grier all in your face.

SUSAN

Stay out of my face, then.

JOHN

What you did, on today this day, takes a mean, hard hunger. Like a white man.

SUSAN

Shut up.

JOHN

White man -- that gun --

SUSAN

Shut up!

JOHN

You love it more than me.

SUSAN

More dependable --

Susan bites off the word, but it's too late.

JOHN

I think I am going to go back to being an orphan.

John leaves the porch and strides toward the cemetery. Susan hesitates, pulled toward following. But instead, she grabs the gun and marches into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Susan leans the gun against the wall. Seeing dishes in the sink, she works the pump handle to get water to rinse them, but she just lets the water flow.

For a moment, as the water drains away, she leans against the sink, her head bent.

Then she slams her hands against the edge of the sink, causing a cup or plate to jump off and smash to the floor. She stares at the broken pieces, then stoops to pick them up.

EXT. BY THE GRAVES - AFTERNOON

John sits on the ground near the graves of Preacher and the unborn child. He hears FOOTSTEPS, and Susan comes into view. John gets up and goes to leave.

SUSAN

Tell me about your mother again.

JOHN

My mother? My mother died in sorrow.

SUSAN

Tell me again what made it so you had to come to the river.

John watches ravens swoop overhead and tumble.

JOHN

Come to the river.

SUSAN

Yes.

JOHN

Come to you.

SUSAN

Yes.

EXT. RUDE CABIN - DUSK, TWO YEARS BEFORE

A younger John, holding a shovel, stands by an open grave. On the ground next to the grave is a figure bundled in yellow cloth.

JOHN (V.O.)

My mother died of sorrow because she was lashed to my father who was nothing but a drunk, a moonshiner --

SUSAN

A Grover Bolling.

JOHN

Deserter. Child killer.

INT. ROOM OF RUDE CABIN - DUSK, TWO YEARS BEFORE

A battered man, JOHN'S FATHER, SNORES in a rocking chair, a lantern near his feet, an empty bottle on the floor.

A clock TICKS in the background.

His foot twitches and bumps the lantern but doesn't knock it over.

JOHN (V.O.)

I buried her wrapped in this cheap yellow cloth she liked.
And my father, drunk in his own misery because now he
had no one left to make suffer --

EXT. RUDE CABIN - DUSK, TWO YEARS BEFORE

A glow of fire. John sees the cabin on fire, and through the flames John sees his father in the chair, burning, SCREAMING. He makes no move toward the house.

JOHN (V.O.)

Accident or not, I don't know -- but he burned to death when
the house exploded -- kicked over a lantern probably. Or
maybe he just self-combusted from his dried-out life.

EXT. BY THE GRAVES - AFTERNOON

JOHN

I remember also telling you --

SUSAN

Telling me --

JOHN

That I'd make sure no fire would ever take us down. No one
would die in cheap yellow.

John looks up into the sky again. The ravens have gone. He turns and comes closer to Susan.

JOHN

I have not done well.

Susan, wanting to touch John, instead digs her toe into the dirt.

SUSAN

(without conviction)

If we are not hard, we are going to die.

JOHN

Our johnwick walls -- used to believe that --

SUSAN

Used to --

JOHN

I did -- but now -- your face. My face. How hard we have become.

John touches her face.

JOHN

Still beautiful, but -- Susan, we can't. Because that's just the thing that makes us just like them.

John lifts the stone hanging around his neck.

JOHN

The river --

SUSAN

I don't see --

JOHN

-- brought me to you.

SUSAN

-- any other way.

JOHN

Yes you do.

The air around them is suddenly filled with the SOUND of flowing water. John puts a soft hand on Susan's head.

JOHN

Forget this for right now.

John puts a hand on Susan's breastbone. John looks up.

JOHN

Look.

The sky is filled with scores of tumbling ravens. The hard mask of Susan's face breaks as she feels the pressure of John's hand against her chest.

SUSAN

There is something I must open to you.

Susan takes John's hand and puts it on her stomach.

SUSAN

I have been so afraid that hope would be a poison.

JOHN

No! No.

SUSAN

There is another --

JOHN

Another --

SUSAN

I am sure of it. River flows --

JOHN

We go.

SUSAN

River has always been good to us.

JOHN

River flows, we take it.

John looks up again to watch the ravens.

SUSAN

What, johnwick?

JOHN

You meet a person, you cross the river, you sit on their porch with the smell of blackberries in the air and you talk out the loneliness.

SUSAN

John Wicks, white man --

TOGETHER

Coming off the "moun-tan."

SUSAN

This box is so hard.

JOHN

But we are not alone.

EXT. BOLLING'S HOUSE - A FEW DAYS LATER - DAY

A light rain falls as John and Susan stand outside Bolling's house. They each carry two canisters filled with kerosene.

INT. BOLLING'S HOUSE - DAY

Inside the house they spread the kerosene around.

EXT. BOLLING'S HOUSE

John lights a torch, then throws it into the house.

They watch the exorcism as the rain streaks their smiling, tired faces.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

SUPER: PLACARD: "SEVEN YEARS LATER"

EXT. JOHN AND SUSAN'S PORCH

John and Susan sit on the porch of their new house, taking a mid-day break. A car sits next to the house. Susan embroiders.

In the old house, Preacher's house, the cross has been replaced by a school bell hanging from a frame.

SCHOOL

A TEACHER stands by the school pulling a rope to ring the bell. Coming into the yard are children of all skin colors going to the school.

PORCH

ADAM and HANNAH rush out.

JOHN

What'dya got today?

HANNAH

Sermon on the Mount.

ADAM

The Columbian Orator.

JOHN

Knock 'em dead.

Adam and Hannah pour down the porch steps and across the yard to the school, joining with the other children.

EXT. ROAD TO HOUSE

Bell drives along in Goforth's car.

PORCH

Bell pulls into John and Susan's yard. He gets out of the car and walks to the bottom of the porch. His hair has grayed and his body thickened.

INTERCUT BETWEEN PORCH AND STEPS

JOHN

Well, the right hand of the master still going forth into the world.

SUSAN

Hello, Deacon Bell.

BELL

No pleasure being at the Morgan "plantation."

JOHN

Like a tour? New car right there.

SUSAN

John --

JOHN

How's your new car?

SUSAN

Deacon --

JOHN

Did I just tell you I started an insurance business -- right next to the grocery store?

SUSAN

Deacon, why don't you just say what you're here to say.

Bell purses his lips as if he tastes something sour.

BELL

Don't know why -- but he wants to see you.

JOHN

Now?

BELL

He said "now" -- if it would be convenient.

JOHN

He said "convenient." About what?

BELL

He didn't say "what" to me.

JOHN

Though at his right hand for years.

BELL

It's not like we're friends.

John gets up and paces. Susan watches him.

BELL

Are you coming?

JOHN

The Goforth household?

BELL

I don't tell tales.

JOHN

As always?

SUSAN

John, stop picking at the man.

JOHN

I'm just trying to gauge the knives, Susan. Goforth's never had me over for tea and toast. Even worse than usual?

BELL

Not for me to say.

JOHN

You and he ain't friends, right.

BELL

And neither are we. Are you coming?

JOHN

Tell Mr. Goforth I will be there in an -- hour -- I would like to see my children when they break for recess. That would be "convenient."

BELL

An hour.

JOHN

Starting from the moment you "go forth"!

Bell starts to exit, then turns to speak.

BELL

Even brass balls melt if the fire's high enough.

JOHN

That what happen to you? The hour begins when you leave.

Bell glares for a moment, then turns and leaves.

CAR IN YARD

Bell gets in, slams the door, peels out.

PORCH

John paces, then stops to look at Susan.

JOHN

Don't --

SUSAN

Wouldn't think of it.

JOHN

Don't start.

SUSAN

Your manners -- or the gleam in your eye?

JOHN

It's probably nothing.

SUSAN

"Subtle" is not you. You have your ear to every ground around here --

JOHN

I heard at the bank the other day.

SUSAN

You tell me!

JOHN

I heard his bank notes are due -- "liquidated" -- and she doesn't know.

SUSAN

He drank her life away.

JOHN

Heard say.

SUSAN

I feel for her.

JOHN

And I feel possibilities --

Susan sniffs deeply.

SUSAN

I think --

JOHN

What?

SUSAN
(sniffing again)

Yep --

JOHN

What?

SUSAN

I think I smell "white man" --

JOHN

The only color Goforth sees in me is green.

Susan puts down her embroidery and fixes John with a wry look.

SUSAN

Want to think about those words a moment?

JOHN

That's not what I meant.

John makes a gesture as if fingering money.

JOHN

That kind of green.

SUSAN

Sometimes I think you are my fourth child.

JOHN

I am going to go there.

SUSAN

I know you are.

JOHN

No loss in talking to the man.

SUSAN

Never said not to.

JOHN

Then what?

SUSAN

Just don't be completely green.

JOHN

I'm not going to put us in danger --

SUSAN

Right "johnwick" of you.

JOHN

I hate it when you're sarcastic.

SUSAN

Only use it when I'm scared.

John stops, catches himself.

JOHN

I'm reaching past myself, aren't I? Again?

(sniffs)

Yep -- I'm all over the air.

SUSAN

Seems to run in this family. Just reach past yourself and hold me so that I can confess something, johnwick --

John embraces her.

SUSAN

I do forget, sometimes -- I do. I want to. There are moments when it feels like those first times at the river --

JOHN

Water washing everything away so that we could meet --

SUSAN

Baptized --

JOHN

Even the heathen!

SUSAN

-- into a kind of -- blindness.

JOHN

Out of sight.

SUSAN

Out of time -- no more fear.

JOHN

Just a secret Indian path to the other side of the mountain.

Susan steps away from him.

SUSAN

You should get ready to go.

JOHN

I am already ready.

SUSAN

Then --

They "clink" their two rings together and laugh.

INT. GOFORTH'S LIVING ROOM - LATER

Goforth is dissipated. Bell stands at his side. John stands waiting for Goforth to speak. Goforth taps his watch.

GOFORTH

Just as you said. Deacon, in the barn --

BELL

All the tasks have been assigned --

GOFORTH

I can just feel something needs attention.

BELL

If you need me --

GOFORTH

Always needed you. But right now -- no. Go.

Bell leaves the room.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR - SAME TIME

Bell closes the door but not completely -- he can see into the room. Bell listens.

GOFORTH'S LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

GOFORTH

Mrs. Goforth is not feeling well.

JOHN

I am sorry --

GOFORTH

I would not want anything to -- worsen --

JOHN

I can understand that.

A heavy SILENCE falls. John waits. Outside, THUNDER rumbles and rain BEATS on the windows.

GOFORTH

A remarkable man, you are, John. Remarkable. I've never known any one colored to be so --

(no response to flattery)

All right, then -- to the hunt. The bank has given me a week to pay off money I needed for -- If I default -- well, you know how this works --

Goforth scans John for a reaction, but John masks his face.

GOFORTH

We have done business before -- and I have never questioned your -- ways --

JOHN

My ways.

GOFORTH

Becky's land -- Grover Bolling -- who I hear is back -- I'd be careful --

JOHN

I never did dishonest.

GOFORTH

Let's say a good -- eye for business.

JOHN

Let's say.

GOFORTH

So I'm offering something for that good eye to look at.

The silence hangs in the room, punctured by the DRUM of the rain.
Somewhere a clock TICKS, boards CREAK.

GOFORTH

I want to sell you this land. Straight transaction between me and you.

JOHN

Does she know?

GOFORTH

The offer is not without -- conditions.

JOHN

I guess she doesn't.

GOFORTH

One of which is secrecy. Absolute and total. You will pay off my mortgages; I will deed the land to you. But Mrs. Goforth and I will continue to manage the land until our deaths. Keep up appearances. Only you and I and the bank will know -- the unholy trinity --

JOHN

I can't take possession until you both die -- deed in my hand?

GOFORTH

Mrs. Goforth should be allowed to go forth --

(laughs dryly)

-- secure that the land she walks on, until she's buried beneath it, is hers. A good offer -- you might not want to refuse.

JOHN

I can't do that --

GOFORTH

Thought you might say "can't" --

JOHN

I can't disadvantage my family -- I can't --

GOFORTH

Before you deny me the third time, John -- before you do that -- we will have a brief -- discussion -- of your prospects. Very brief -- in fact, a single word. Do you know what "miscegenation" means? In this glorious state, any white person married to a black person is a criminal. Jail, property, reputation -- pfft!

The rain BEATS, the clock TICKS. John stands completely still.

GOFORTH

Foolish. But a smart man does not want to run foul of this law. I mean, let's say it were you -- what would you do? What could you do?

A thin line of blood begins to ooze from Goforth's right temple and trickle down. Goforth pulls out a handkerchief and dabs it, looks at the blood pattern on the cloth.

GOFORTH

The bank needs an answer soon -- in fact, I told them I'd have one today. And I will.

Goforth dabs at his temple again.

GOFORTH

No hard feelings -- I have no feelings at all, hard or soft, according to Mrs. Goforth -- possibly true. This is just about necessity.

Goforth runs a hand through his hair, and a bunch comes out in his hand, which he discards with distaste but also bemusement.

GOFORTH

Some have a great talent to kill off what gives them life, what gives other people life, too. I am thus talented. Can you can tell me, John -- not that this will change your inevitable

"yes" -- but can you can tell me why some people end up being such beasts? Can you tell me that secret, John-tusca-tawba-erokee? John?

John stands frozen, as if Goforth is a cobra and John watches it ooze toward him, unable to escape.

GOFORTH

John -- an answer for the sake of conversation? No? Well, we should go --

John shakes himself, to break the spell.

JOHN

An answer.

GOFORTH

To --

JOHN

Why I'm not a killer like the killer you are.

GOFORTH

Which would be --

JOHN

Because I am Preacher Rebecca Caldwell's son.

Goforth whole body trembles. He stumbles back. John advances.

JOHN

I am the only son of the Preacher.

GOFORTH

You can't -- your age --

JOHN

I am.

GOFORTH

I won't let you --

The blood oozes again from Goforth's right temple. He smears it.

JOHN

Make more life out of life -- that's what Preacher taught me
--

GOFORTH

Talking circles --

JOHN

Not be a slave like you -- son of an owner of slaves, slave to
your whiskey, slave to sucking everybody dry.

GOFORTH

Circles and --

JOHN

I may be colored, but I am a good son.

GOFORTH

Circles.

JOHN

Are you a good son to anything, white as you are? A good
father to anything, powerful as you are?

GOFORTH

You're trying to --

JOHN

Look into your heart --

GOFORTH

Just circles! Just confusion! Saying anything is possible to
a dying man.

JOHN

Yes.

GOFORTH

It won't work -- it won't! -- you won't make it work! I will not
let you go. I cannot let you go, even if it is t[rue]-- even if
you were --

JOHN

Even if?

GOFORTH

Even if!

Bolling shakes with anger.

GOFORTH

Even if! You going to give me my "yes," or will I have to drill you --

JOHN

Do that, wouldn't you?

GOFORTH

Yes!

JOHN

And never think twice.

GOFORTH

Yes!

JOHN

Like with Rebecca --

GOFORTH

This is done! You are done! No! No! No!

Goforth paws at his own face; flakes of skin drop off, dusting his clothes, flecking the carpet.

GOFORTH

So -- so -- to prosperity and long life -- not too long, though, eh? The bank has already drawn up the papers -- It is not that hard -- We will go to the bank now. It is not that hard to kill off -- You can understand why haste is -- It is not that hard to kill off what sustains you! Some of us have done it every day of our lives.

JUST OUTSIDE THE DOOR

Bell stares at the door, a thin smile on his lips.

GOFORTH'S LIVING ROOM

GOFORTH

I am sure you will understand if I do not offer you transportation.

Goforth pivots and walks to the door, his body wracked with pain. He keeps his back to John.

GOFORTH

At the bank. You know the way out.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

Bell melts away down the corridor into the shadows.

Goforth comes through the door, closes it. He puts his fingertips to his temple, sees them tinted with blood. The rain BEATS down.

From the shadow Bell watches Goforth

They both hear the THUMP of the front door closing.

EXT. GOFORTH'S BACK PORCH - A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Bell stands on the back porch. Bolling stands in the rain.

BOLLING

I have been hearing things.

BELL

What's the dung beetle been hearing?

EXT. BANK - DAY

Goforth comes out. Bell pulls up in the car. Goforth gets in. The car pulls away.

INT. CAR

Goforth stares out the rain-streaked window.

DRIVER'S SEAT

Bell looks into the rear-view mirror and sees a curled-up old man staring out the window.

INT. GOFORTH'S LIVING ROOM

Goforth lays a sheaf of papers on his desk.

The rain continues to BEAT against the windows.

INT. A ROOM IN THE GOFORTH'S HOUSE

Mrs. Goforth does her embroidery, staring out at the rain, when a GUN SHOT rings out. She puts the embroidery down and smooths her dress, then stands.

INT. MORGAN LIVING ROOM - DAY

John paces. Susan watches him, her hands clasped between her knees.

JOHN

Susan, I couldn't do anything. He had me! If I didn't accept -- But Mrs. Goforth will never accept the deed. She'll fight it. She'll get it back. If he knew, then she knew -- all she has to do is threaten, and I'll tear up the deed on Main Street dancing a jig! Susan -- Susan --

A KNOCK at the door startles them. John opens it. Bell, water streaming down his mackinaw, stands there. Behind him Goforth's car sits in the yard.

BELL

Not bad being here this time. You should know: Goforth's killed himself.

SUSAN

That can't be true!

BELL

Bullet in what little brains he had left.

JOHN

Mrs. Goforth --

BELL

She's already had the body sent to the county morgue. Which means Mrs. Goforth has plenty of time on her hands right now. If I were you? Dig myself a storm cellar and not come up till God separates the goats from the sheep.

Bell LAUGHS, pivots, and leaves.

EXT. JOHN AND SUSAN'S YARD - DAY

Bell, LAUGHING, gets into the car.

INT. GOFORTH'S CAR

In the back seat sits Bolling, shivering, filthy.

BELL

You ready?

BOLLING

Gonna tell her on my own. Don't need --

Bell reaches into the back seat and grabs Bolling by the throat.

BELL

In case your rusted brain forgot, you came to me -- yes?

BOLLING

There was a time --

BELL

Time. Moves. On. Dead man. This nigger is your only ticket in. Are. You. Ready?

Bolling nods "yes." Bell does not release him but squeezes even harder, to make a point.

Then he lets Bolling go and starts the car. Bolling massages his neck.

BOLLING

Just get me what I said I need, like you said you could.

BELL

We'll see which gods answer which prayers today. Goats
from the sheep, yassuh!

Bell drives off, LAUGHING hard.

INT. JOHN AND SUSAN'S HOUSE - DAY

JOHN

I don't know what else to do!

SUSAN

We can't go to court, John.

JOHN

Gotta fight --

SUSAN

"Court" is the sheriff on us again!

JOHN

I don't know what else to do!

SUSAN

We will lose in court, John.

JOHN

Have to fight this --

SUSAN

John, John --

JOHN

It's mine!

SUSAN

We leave, John --

JOHN

Have to fight!

SUSAN

We leave like we always said we'd do.

John falls to his knees, breathing heavily.

JOHN

Susan, I can't breathe!

SUSAN

We leave now.

JOHN

I can't breathe!

Susan tries to calm him, but it appears that John is strangling, laboring heavily to breathe.

SUSAN

We leave now -- take what money we have and leave the rest behind -- listen -- it's only trash, John, just stuff rusting --

STAIRS

Adam and Hannah peer at Susan and John through the banisters. Susan sees them as she speaks to John.

LIVING ROOM

SUSAN

We'll take the children and go north -- easy, easy -- like we always said we'd do -- soft, soft -- start fresh, like we always wanted -- slowly, John, slowly -- we don't have to fight anymore --

John gets up roughly, staggers to the front door, opens it, and steps out onto the porch.

EXT. MORGAN PORCH

John bumps into the rocking chair and tumbles it into the mud. He sees Goforth's car pull away. Susan follows him.

JOHN

I can't breathe!

SUSAN

Listen to me!

YARD

John stumbles into the rain. Susan follows, trying to drag him back, but he pushes her away. Susan continues to pursue. Exhausted, John slumps to his knees, the rain clattering off him, muddled and bowed.

LIVING ROOM

Adam and Hannah stare at their parents in the yard, their faces scared.

YARD

Susan kneels next to John, but John indicates he wants to be left alone. Susan doesn't move. They both kneel in the rain.

INT. GOFORTH'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mrs. Goforth sits at Goforth's desk, looking through papers. Her husband's flask stands on the desk. Bell stands in the doorway. She does not look up.

MRS. GOFORTH

What is it?

Bell stands aside, and Bolling enters, cleaner but ravaged.

MRS. GOFORTH

I never thought I'd have to see you again.

BOLLING

I have something to sell.

BELL

He does.

MRS. GOFORTH

I don't need any rat poison. Get him out.

BOLLING

"John Morgan" is not his real name --

Mrs. Goforth snaps her head up.

BOLLING

What do I know about John Morgan, not-his-real-name?

MRS. GOFORTH

What do you know?

BOLLING

For a price.

MRS. GOFORTH

I have no money.

BOLLING

I don't want money.

Bell nods to Bolling, who points to a rifle on the wall.

BOLLING

That. John Morgan stole mine.

MRS. GOFORTH

For killing your brother rats for dinner?

BELL

Mrs. Goforth?

MRS. GOFORTH

What?!

BELL

He may have some -- other need for it.

(hissing, to Bolling)

Quickly!

BOLLING

On the mountain, I heard tell of a man who killed his mother and father -- named John Wicks. He ran away -- a white boy, not an Indian -- and they say he ran with a nigger woman.

Mrs. Goforth gives Bolling a steady look. She deliberately knocks over the flask, then stands it upright again.

BELL

Make the story work out true for you.

MRS. GOFORTH

Would you say John Morgan killed you?

BOLLING

Yes.

MRS. GOFORTH

How should a man protect his honor?

BELL

(sotto voce)

Exactly.

MRS. GOFORTH

I have never needed that gun.

Bell gets the gun.

BOLLING

And bullets.

Bell takes out a box of bullets from a drawer. He brings the gun and box to the door leading out of the living room. A moment as the three of them look at each other, then Bolling takes the items and leaves. Bell and Mrs. Goforth exchange looks.

MRS. GOFORTH

To think -- life has raised me high enough to be a eunuch
and a liar like you.

BELL

Don't it feel just grand?

With a look both defeated and sneering, Mrs. Goforth sweeps from the room.

BELL

Clang-clang, Mrs. Goforth.

INT. GOFORTH'S CAR

Bolling sits in the passenger seat, gun across his knees.

EXT. ROAD

The car stops.

INT. CAR

BELL

Get the fuck out.

Without warning, without even looking, Bell pops his right fist into Bolling's left cheek, knocking Bolling against the door.

BELL

Now.

EXT. ROAD

The passenger door opens, and Bolling stumbles out. Bell reaches across, closes the door, pulls away.

Bolling whips up the gun to his shoulder, and his whole body looks read to squeeze off a round at the retreating car.

Then he drops the gun, pivots, looks at the woods around him. Water drips off his hatbrim, water drops hang off the dirty stubble on his face.

EXT. YARD - DAY

From the woods, Susan sees Bolling appear, armed.

BOLLING

I will render vengeance to mine enemies.

John looks up and sees him as well.

BOLLING

I like the ring of that.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Adam and Hannah watch the scene unfold through the window.

EXT. YARD - DAY

Bolling continues to move forward.

BOLLING

Mine enemies.

John and Susan stand. John pushes Susan away.

JOHN

Go!

Susan struggles with John.

SUSAN

I am not going!

BOLLING

Tooth for tooth.

John pushes Susan hard toward the house.

JOHN

Watch the children!

Before Susan can get her feet under her, John turns and races toward Bolling.

Bolling raises his gun at the figure speeding toward him.

BOLLING

Dead eye for a dead eye.

Bolling fires.

The bullet hits the stone necklace, shattering the stone and smashing into John's heart. John sprawls into the mud, dead.

Susan reaches John, kneels beside him, then looks at Bolling, who still has his gun raised. Bolling and Susan lock eyes. Then Bolling runs into the forest and disappears.

The rain spatters away the blood as Susan cradles John's body.

INT. SUSAN'S HOUSE - PRESENT TIME

Everyone sits in rapt silence. Susan breaks the silence.

SUSAN

The lie won.

Susan holds up the book, opened to the dedicatory page. She points as she recites.

SUSAN

"Dedicated to John Morgan. 'And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as a crystal.'" The ironies -- Thinking I was doing right, I'd set up the man to come down the pike and kill John. That was a guilt that nearly crushed me.

Susan lowers the book, smiles at Adam and Hannah, her eyes twinkling.

SUSAN

Nearly.

ADAM

Nearly.

SUSAN

But that wasn't all, was it?

Adam and Hannah smile back at Susan.

SUSAN

We went after Mrs. Goforth -- the three of us. In court. And won. I let her stay -- but not out of kindness. I wanted her to die in misery, like I had. We were sisters in sadness -- no color line in that.

A VOICE

Bell?

HANNAH

We ran him off. All the way to Africa, I heard -- where he died from dysentery.

A VOICE

Bolling?

SUSAN

Found, convicted, hanged. Went after Grier, got my mama's grave back. And got John's family land back, too.

A VOICE

What about --

SUSAN

Enough, enough -- read! Besides --

(looking at the children)

-- I think I see some little people chomping for some cake!
Yes? Adam --

ADAM

Gotcha!

People APPLAUD loudly as Susan gets up and bows and motions for everyone else to take a bow, and people move to the cake and music and a general festive ROAR as the party continues.

EXT. BY THE GRAVES - TOWARDS SUNDOWN

Susan, wrapped in her shawl, stands by John Morgan's grave, rag doll in her hand. The VOICES of children and party SOUNDS float on the air. Great-grandson John walks up and stands next to her, his long hair held back by John Morgan's headband.

JOHN

Thank you.

Susan smiles at him, pats him gently on the arm, pulls the shawl more closely about her.

JOHN

I have one more question.

SUSAN

Shoot.

JOHN

What's in the pouch?

Susan opens it and empties into her hand the fragments of John's stone. She looks up at great-grandson John, but instead of him, John Morgan stands there, smiling. He closes her hand, holds it, then opens it. The stone is made whole. Susan looks up again, but now she sees great-grandson John, and the stone is still in pieces.

JOHN

May I?

Susan nods yes. Great-grandson John picks up the pieces and examines them. Susan hands him the leather pouch.

SUSAN

Keep it.

JOHN

It shall be kept.

They hold their silence, then great-grandson John gives Susan his hand. Overhead a raven wheels and tumbles.

JOHN (O.C.)

You meet a person, you cross the river, you sit on their porch with the smell of blackberries in the air, and you talk out the loneliness. I liked that part.

SUSAN (O.C.)

Amen.

JOHN (O.C.)

Amen.

FADE OUT

About Block & Tackle Productions

After more than a decade of projects together, Michael Bettencourt and Elfin Frederick Vogel joined forces to form Block & Tackle Productions. In addition to producing Michael's plays with Elfin directing, B&T Productions also looks to collaborate with other playwrights and directors and explore different media for dramatic narrative, such as live-streaming theatrical productions, recording radio-play podcasts, and creating short films.

Whichever project B&T Productions pursues, it will create theatre narratives focused on our present times and where every part of the production - design (set, lighting, sound, media), performance, script, the brand of beer sold in the lobby, and the pre-show music - relates to and nourishes every other part. As often as possible, B&T Productions will do this in collaboration or conjunction with like-minded theatre-makers.

Elfin Frederick Vogel (Producer/Director) -- Elfin has directed over thirty productions in New York City and regional theatres, from classical plays (among others, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*) to 20th-century plays (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *The Real Thing*, *Exit the King*) and new plays, among them *Only the Dead Know Brooklyn*, *Excerpts from the Lost Letters of Hester Prynne*, *No Great Loss*, *Four Plays*, *The Sin Eater* (all by Michael Bettencourt), and *Moral and Political Lessons on "Wyoming"* and *Reckless Abandon* (by Vincent Sessa).

Michael Bettencourt (Producer/Writer) -- Michael is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter. As always, special thanks to María Beatriz. All his work can be seen at www.m-bettencourt.com

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PRODUCTIONS

www.blockandtackleproductions.com

