

By The River

Based on the memoir *A Question of Color* by Sara Smith Beattie

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SUSAN MORGAN'S HOUSE - SPRING AFTERNOON 1977

A large house on a large plot of land.

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.

WHOOPING 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

(chopping)

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—

Food. A bed. GRIER

I understand. JOHN

No—you don't. GRIER

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 washcloth 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 washcloth 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 rugs 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.

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 riiiiivveerrrrsss!

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 looooo 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 lower 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 smooths 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 smooths 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, 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.

The 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 on the opposite wall.

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

Aaaahhhhhh!

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—aaahhhhh!

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!

My gun. BOLLING

Go! JOHN

Gun. BOLLING

No! Straight—out. Go! JOHN

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.

Losing the baby, John! SUSAN

What can I do? JOHN

Losing the bay, losing the baby— SUSAN

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.

GOFORTH

Preacher's place is looking good.

John puts away the money as Goforth counts it out to them.

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, then reloads. 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 anyone 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—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. 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 oozes 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 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!

Goforth shakes with anger.

GOFORTH
Even if! Are 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 smoothes 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 rises up, staggers to the front door, opens it, and steps 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, muddied 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, 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