

THE FRONTIER

"PILOT"

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"I was almost blinded by it - this concept of Choice - that on Earth I could have left this place I had known... that I could have taken any day and made my life different... chosen another way... and I realize now that all of it, everywhere, is about navigating the unknown."

--- "The Lovely Bones" by Alice Sebold

★ ★ ★

In the spring of 1840, seventy-five men, women, and children left Missouri to begin an epic journey. With the hopes of building new lives for themselves on the Pacific coast, they fought hunger, disease, and fierce human opposition, traversing a mysterious and breathtaking land devoid of roads or towns. Because their motivations were surprisingly analogous to those of Americans today - a search for reinvention and a better life, an escape from economic hardship - our story should feel current and be free of the many dime store novel clichés that infect so many "Westerns." The language, clothing, music, and filmmaking style will also transcend period, as this is a timeless adventure story set in a timeless world.

★ ★ ★

For those who have never experienced the terror of a dust storm, here are two links to videos that were recorded just last year in Phoenix:

[Time Lapse video](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrcVqtmugj8&feature=relmfu>

[For size and perspective](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8W4Cx44XKZ4&feature=related>

THE FRONTIER

ACT ONE

BLEEDING OUT OF WHITE we HEAR the SOUND of FIERCE WIND. Granules of dust and sand begin materializing in our FRAME, swirling all around us. From out of this maelstrom

A HAND

appears, pushing forward, fighting for survival.

COOPER HALE

34, strong, driven, is crawling on his hands and knees. He's soaking wet, wind and dirt pounding at his face. Though it's mid-day, it might as well be night. The sun's completely blocked by a massive cloud of dust and it's hard to see more than a few feet in any direction. As LIGHTNING STRIKES --

A TOWERING BLACK MAN

is revealed in Cooper's path. He has piercing blue eyes, a nightingale tattoo on his chest, and multiple ropes hanging from his torso. This is a haunting image, and just as quickly as Cooper registers it, the man is gone.

Getting his bearings, Cooper pulls himself to his feet and opens his fist to reveal

A WEDDING RING

A tiny diamond encased in platinum filigree. With renewed purpose, Cooper screams --

COOPER

JOANNA! SAMUEL! JOANNA!!

All too soon, Cooper finds himself at the edge of a river -- and here we REVEAL a scene of mass devastation.

EXT. RIVERBANK - IN THE MIDDLE OF A DUST STORM - DAY

NINE CONESTOGA WAGONS are scattered in every direction. Horses, oxen, and cattle are running wild. Perhaps sixty people, many wet and bloodied, are seeking cover while calling for their loved ones. *(Though we'll only get brief glimpses of our main characters here, they'll all be revealed in greater detail shortly.)*

As Cooper continues his desperate search, he'll pass:

-- A STRIKING WOMAN WEARING NOTHING BUT A RED SILK ROBE --
PEYTON -- who is screaming for a woman named **CLAIRE**.

-- AN OLDER SWEDISH WOMAN WITH LONG BLONDE HAIR -- **MAGDA** --
clinging to her **TEENAGED DAUGHTER**.

-- A HEAVYSET GUY in his early thirties -- **BEN** -- working
frantically to dig a young woman, **EMILY**, from a collapsed sand
bank.

Here, Cooper intervenes, helping to pull Emily to safety. As
she coughs up black sand, Cooper turns to Ben.

COOPER
HAVE YOU SEEN MY FAMILY?!

BEN
I CAN'T SEE ANYTHING!

Suddenly, we HEAR a loud wail:

DJ (O.S.)
DON'T LET ME BURN!

Cooper spins to see FLAMES shooting up ahead of him. As he
runs forward, he discovers **DJ JACKSON** (late thirties,
bittersweet, sardonic) trapped beneath a burning wagon.
Another man in his twenties, **NICO**, earnest and Raphaelian, is
desperately trying to pull DJ from the path of the fire. As
Nico's fragile and more complicated sister, **LUISA**, looks on,
DJ turns to her, pleading --

DJ (CONT'D)
PLEASE DON'T LET ME BURN! SHOOT ME
IF YOU HAVE TO, BUT PLEASE --

LUISA
(totally freaked out)
OH, MY GOD --

COOPER (O.S.)
NICO?!

Nico spins to see Cooper moving toward him dragging a large
tree limb. Nico's immediately on his feet, helping Cooper to
push it beneath the wagon. Using it as a wedge, the men free
DJ at the last possible moment. Cooper then grabs Nico.

COOPER (CONT'D)
HAVE YOU SEEN MY WIFE? MY SON?!

Nico shakes his head, pointing --

NICO

IN THERE?!

As Cooper turns, he sees **SGT. PARKER**, 40, second in command of this party, fighting to keep a group of people inside one of the toppled Conestogas. A **YOUNG MOTHER** with an infant in her arms is trying to get out, but Parker won't let her.

YOUNG MOTHER

MY BABY CAN'T BREATHE!

PARKER

STAY INSIDE!

YOUNG MOTHER

SHE CAN'T -- THERE'S TOO MANY PEOPLE!
WILL YOU TAKE HER?!

PARKER

DO I LOOK LIKE A DAMN WET NURSE?!

Parker brutally SLAMS this woman back, and if you hate him for this, good. Almost instantly

A BOLT OF LIGHTNING

hits a massive cottonwood tree, sending half the trunk crashing down right where Parker stood.

As the young mother reacts in horror, Cooper runs to check on Parker -- dead -- then, after scanning the faces of the people inside the wagon, he hears a voice that stops him cold:

SAMUEL (O.S.)

DAD!

Cooper turns to discover a group of people just down river. They're all in the water, clinging to a logjam. Among them, fighting to keep his head above water, is Cooper's nine year old son --

COOPER

SAMUEL!

As Cooper starts to run, he sees that one of the wagons is half submerged in the river. It's slamming up against the fragile dam and it's only a matter of time before the logjam breaks and everyone is swept away.

COOPER (CONT'D)

HOLD ON, SON!

As Cooper continues racing toward his boy

A MAN ON HORSEBACK

suddenly cuts him off. This is **JACK RAMSAY**, 50, British, enigmatic, secretive, the wagon Captain. (*We should immediately read the tension between he and Cooper.*)

Ramsay throws Cooper one end of a rope --

RAMSAY

TIE IT DOWN!

-- then, wrapping the other end around his saddle horn, Ramsay takes his horse into the rushing water.

His eyes never leaving Samuel, Cooper secures the rope to a large elm as Ramsay maneuvers his horse through the river to the front of the dam. Drawing the rope taut over the stranded people's heads, many grab hold and start pulling themselves toward shore. But for Samuel, the rope is too high. He can't reach. Seeing this --

COOPER

I'M COMING, SAMUEL!

-- Cooper dives into the water. As he swims toward his son, he notices that someone is actually inside the wagon that's butting up against the dam. Here, a beautiful woman in her late twenties, **HANNAH**, is soaked to the bone, half in shock, fighting to hang on to a wooden trunk.

Reaching the rope, Cooper throws his body around it then reaches for Samuel, pulling the boy across the logjam and into his arms.

SAMUEL

WHERE'S MOM?

COOPER

WE'LL FIND HER.

Seeing that Samuel is bleeding, Cooper's eager to get him back to shore, but Hannah is still pulling on that trunk, and Cooper's concerned for her.

COOPER (CONT'D)

YOU HAVE TO GET OUT OF THERE, MA'AM!

THE DAM WON'T HOLD!

HANNAH

I NEED THIS --

Ramsay, now on the opposite side of the river, is watching this encounter with concern. He screams at Cooper and Hannah.

RAMSAY
GET OUT OF THE WATER!

By now, most of the other people have reached shore.

COOPER
PLEASE, MA'AM...

HANNAH
I NEED THIS FOR MY CHILD!

With fierce determination, Hannah hurls the trunk into the water and leaps in after it. Cooper lunges for her and -- BOOM! The dam breaks.

As Hannah disappears beneath the current, Cooper fights to hang on to Samuel, watching as the wagon plows through the logjam and races down river, blowing apart as it hits a wall of rocks.

After a tense beat, the trunk bobs to the surface, followed by a gasping Hannah. She's got hold of the trunk -- and Cooper's got hold of her.

As Hannah and Cooper lock eyes, we

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVERBANK - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

As the dust storm begins to dissipate, a drenched Cooper runs with Samuel in his arms. Finding cover, he lays the boy on the ground. There's a deep wound in his side, evidence of impalement from one of the logs. Cooper's heart is pounding.

COOPER
You're gonna be okay, Samuel --
You're gonna be okay --

Cooper rips off his shirt and presses it into Samuel's mid-section as Hannah appears. Seeing the boy's condition, she pulls some buds off the fallen cottonwood tree, squeezes their sap into her fingers, then kneels at Samuel's side. Cooper looks at her.

HANNAH
It'll help him heal.

Cooper reluctantly lets her apply the salve to Samuel's wound, then ties his shirt around the boy's mid-section like a bandage.

Samuel looks up at his father with haunted eyes.

SAMUEL

You don't know where Mom is, do you?

Cooper holds, staring down Ramsay who's just riding back across the river. We should sense that Cooper somehow holds Ramsay responsible for this situation.

HANNAH

My husband and daughter are missing
as well.

Cooper looks at Hannah who's trying to contain her emotions.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

What happened to us?

As Cooper reacts, LIGHT begins to creep over his face. He looks skyward to see the dust cloud finally beginning to clear the sun. Off this surreal image, we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRAIL - TWO HOURS EARLIER - MORNING - FLASHBACK

Under bright sunshine, twelve wagons move through some of the most glorious country imaginable. The vastly overused "awesome" actually applies here. This is a land of breathtaking grandeur and terrifying mystery. (*As a template, check out the paintings of Albert Bierstadt.*)

As our group approaches the river that will soon swallow them whole, they are at their hopeful, optimistic best. Less than two weeks into this trip, people are already comfortable with each other and a surprising complacency has set in. Hey, this overland journey stuff isn't so tough after all!

COOPER is leading two horses alongside his wagon, following the oxen that pull it. He's playfully sparring with SAMUEL who's seated next to his mother, **JOANNA**. Joanna is 30, lovely, auburn-haired, every inch her husband's equal when it comes to fearlessly embracing life. Samuel is dragging a long stick across the ground.

SAMUEL

Are we there yet?

COOPER

Only two to three hundred more days.
(dry)
Would you like a snack?

The boy shoots his mother a look.

SAMUEL

You see how he is?

JOANNA

Don't know why I ever married him.

SAMUEL

Agreed on that.

COOPER

Hey, you'd better be grateful she *did* marry me ankle pants, or you wouldn't be here.

Samuel laughs. As Cooper and Joanna exchange knowing smiles, the boy grabs a handful of dried mulberries from an open tin, jumps off the wagon, and begins walking at his father's side.

SAMUEL

Dad?

COOPER

What?

SAMUEL

At our new house, can we have a dog?

COOPER

Five dogs.

SAMUEL

Can we have a cat?

COOPER

Ten cats.

SAMUEL

Can we have an elephant?

COOPER

Whole herd.

SAMUEL

Liar.

COOPER

(to Joanna)

You see how he is?

Joanna throws a mulberry at her husband.

SAMUEL

I still like our old house better.

JOANNA

We didn't have any neighbors, Samuel.
Or fruit trees, or an ocean view --

Cooper puts his arm around his son.

COOPER

This is our chance to start over.
Clean slate.

SAMUEL

But why do we *need* to start over? My
teacher said that when people move,
they're either runnin' from somethin'
or runnin' to it. And since we don't
know what we're runnin' to, we must
be runnin' from.

As Cooper glances at Joanna -- a telling moment between them --
we hear:

HANNAH (O.S.)

Samuel?

PICK UP HANNAH, who's traveling in the next wagon with her
husband, **DR. WILLIAM STRONG**, and their young daughter, **JEM**.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

We're runnin' to the beach. Wanna
come?

JEM

Gonna run barefoot!

STRONG

Like savages?

This comment is less about Indians and more about Strong's
weighty life-view. Jem, who's eight, calls to Samuel.

JEM

And we don't care about no sea
monsters, neither!

Samuel shakes his head. Eight year olds are so dumb.

STRONG

The only monsters we have to worry
about are right here on land.

As Hannah reacts, Strong pointedly waves a Bible at DJ JACKSON
who's directly behind them in the next wagon. DJ smiles,
offering a toast from a flask, then starts singing:

DJ

*She'll be cummin' 'round the mountain
when she cums. She'll be cummin'
round the mountain when she cums...*

(then; calling)

Darling? You and your "sister" happy
up there?

PEYTON (O.S.)

Happy as clams, sweet pea.

PAN UP TO REVEAL **PEYTON** and her "sister," **CLAIRE**, both lying
topless on a makeshift "balcony" on the wagon top. Each is
wearing an open silk robe. Peyton, a Georgia girl, half
Scarlett O'Hara, half Tallulah Bankhead, is slowly running her
fingernails up and down Claire's supple thigh.

PEYTON (CONT'D)

I just adore braving the elements,
don't you?

As Claire giggles, DJ pops his head over the bonnet and looks
right into Claire's face.

DJ

(teasingly)

May I have the next dance?

CLAIRE

Wrong verb.

DJ smiles. Peyton sits up, snapping at him.

PEYTON

Get back to your station, DJ!
There's nothing you'd be interested
in up here.

DJ

Oh, come on, "dear." I'm sure I
could find some way to entertain
myself with Miss Claire. Perhaps a
blindfold and some mint jelly?

Claire laughs, but Peyton pushes DJ off.

PEYTON

Go bother one of the bulls.

As DJ drops away, Peyton rolls on top of Claire who giggles
once more, then we PAN DOWN to the slogan painted on the back
of their wagon: *HELL'S BELLES.*

Continuing on, we find

BEN

driving another Conestoga. He's hauling a large family, including the woman with the baby. EMILY, a no-nonsense, independent sort, is walking alongside him. Ben, sweet and awkward, is obviously attracted to her.

BEN

You sure you don't want a ride, miss?

EMILY

Still sure.

BEN

Quite a feat to walk the whole way.
(beat; explaining)
Feat like... accomplishment, not...

EMILY

I know what you meant.

Ben shakes his head. Why is he such a dork?

BEN

You say you're, uh... rendezvousing
with a man at Fort William?

EMILY

My fiancé. Mr. Rossignol.

BEN

Right. Mr. Rossignol. And may I ask
where you met? I mean, it's kind of
a big continent.

EMILY

We haven't.

BEN

Haven't what?

EMILY

Met. We've just exchanged letters.

BEN

Wait -- You're marrying a guy you
don't even know?

EMILY

I know him through his words.

Ben reacts in surprise.

BEN

Well, heck. I got thousands of
those.

As Emily reacts, we MOVE toward the front of the wagon train, passing MAGDA and HER DAUGHTER (who are pulling cattle and arguing in Swedish) to find NICO and LUISA in the first Conestoga. They're driving right behind CAPTAIN RAMSAY and SGT. PARKER. Both men are carrying rifles and riding on horseback.

Luisa's cleaning pots as Nico, a buoyant fellow (and the resident cook), calls to the men.

NICO

What can we interest you in for
supper tonight, Captain?

RAMSAY

No preference.

NICO

Sergeant?

PARKER

Long as I don't have to bury anyone,
I'll be happy.

As Nico reacts, Parker turns to Ramsay.

PARKER (CONT'D)

When I was dragging those typhoid-
infested Potawtomis to Kansas, every
time one keeled I'd have to bury 'em
at meal time. I could never get the
stench of dead Injun off my palms.

In an intimidating turn, Ramsay looks off at the horizon.

RAMSAY

You know I'm half-Chinook.

Parker reacts. Shit. He'd forgotten.

RAMSAY (CONT'D)

So, the good news is, you'd only have
to smell me on one hand.

As Parker gulps --

COOPER (O.S.)

Captain Ramsay?

Ramsay turns to discover Cooper riding up to him.

COOPER (CONT'D)

We have a problem.

Understatement of the year. As Cooper nods over his shoulder, Ramsay turns, pulling up his horse. In the far distance, growing in their wake, is the biggest, meanest dust cloud imaginable. As everyone reacts -- holy shit -- we

SMASH BACK TO:

EXT. RIVERBANK - SUNSET - *IN THE PRESENT*

Parker's dead visage is being covered by a blanket. As his body is lowered into a makeshift grave, a tense Ramsay, surrounded by some lieutenants, looks on. Pick up

PEYTON

covered in dust and trying to comb the crap out of her hair. A shaken DJ's at her side. Though they are off by themselves, they still speak in hushed tones.

PEYTON

Let's take a trip, you said! Let's have an adventure, you said!

DJ takes a long hit off his flask.

PEYTON (CONT'D)

John Jacob Astor's paying families two hundred dollars to move to Oregon. Free wagon! Free land! We'll be the most famous actors in Astoria! Now, there's a distinction.

DJ

Would you rather be starving in New York, giving private "performances" on your kneecaps?

PEYTON

The woman I love is missing!

DJ

Oh, please. This month's folly.

Peyton suddenly slaps him.

DJ (CONT'D)

OW!

PEYTON

You don't deserve to play my husband.

DJ

Hey, I'm the one who almost fried!
If it hadn't been for that strapping
Italian boy --

PEYTON

I thought the tall one saved you.

DJ indignantly takes another shot of courage.

DJ

I'd prefer to think it was the
strapping Italian boy.

And as Peyton reacts, DJ looks off at

NICO AND LUISA

who are gathering their dirty cookware. Luisa is tense and
paranoid.

LUISA

We're only nine days out. We can
still turn back.

NICO

We're not turning back.

LUISA

But they lied to us, Nico. They said
the weather would be "mild." What
else are they hiding?! What else is
out here?! You're my brother!
You're supposed to care about these
things!

Nico sighs, a veteran of the high drama wars.

NICO

Have you taken your medication?

LUISA

I don't need any medication!

NICO

Well, we're not going back. We
signed on to feed these people and
that's what we're going to do.

LUISA

And if you end up like him?

Luisa points at the very dead Parker.

LUISA (CONT'D)

What will I do then?

Nico shrugs.

NICO

Cook?

And off Luisa, we pick up

BEN AND EMILY

pouring through the remains of Ben's wagon. It capsized in the river and is badly damaged. As the family Ben's driving collects their possessions in the b.g., Ben and Emily gather a number of wet, leather-bound volumes.

EMILY

Why are you are lugging all these books around?

BEN

I'm a writer.

(off her reaction)

And thank you for that crushing look of disbelief.

EMILY

What do you write about?

BEN

Normally I cover politics for the New York Herald, but Mr. Astor's asked me to chronicle this trip. He thinks the first overland crossing with women and children could sell a few books.

EMILY

Does he want the truth?

Ben reacts.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Or just some great romantic adventure?

BEN

You don't think this will be a great romantic adventure?

Emily takes a long look at the devastation all around her.

EMILY

If you say so.

And off Ben, we

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COOPER'S WAGON - NIGHT

Cooper is laying the wounded Samuel on his bedroll. Compared to most of the other Conestogas, theirs is relatively intact. As he gathers blankets --

COOPER

I want you to rest now. I'm just going to have a word with the Captain.

SAMUEL

I knew this was going to happen.

Cooper holds. Looks back at his son.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Two nights ago, I had a dream that we were in a storm. And we lost Mom. And the next day, I saw this man... On the water... And there was all this blood...

COOPER

Everyone has bad dreams sometimes, Samuel. It doesn't mean they come true.

SAMUEL

I don't think we're supposed to be here, Dad.

Cooper reacts.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

I'm afraid the thing that took Mom is gonna come for us all.

With these chilling words, Samuel turns and stares into space. Tension building, Cooper looks off to see

HANNAH

crouched by her open trunk at the river's edge. She is laying out some of her daughter's wet clothes and looks as broken as Samuel sounds. This is all Cooper can take. He purposefully exits the wagon.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Ramsay is in midst of checking out Ben's damaged wagon when Cooper approaches and spins him around.

COOPER

If you hadn't insisted we cross that river, my wife would still be here.

RAMSAY

Two wagons are missing, Mr. Hale. Your wife may be on one of them.

COOPER

But we didn't have to put ourselves in this situation! You knew that storm was coming. Why were you in such a hurry to get to this side?

Ramsay suddenly raises a finger to his lips. He hears something.

Cooper reacts. Hears it as well. FOOTSTEPS? HOOFS?

The SOUND is coming from the trees.

As the men turn, other people begin to grow silent.

SAMUEL sits up in the wagon.

HANNAH rises by the riverbank.

NICO and LUISA put down their cookware.

EMILY grabs hold of BEN's shoulder. He likes this.

PEYTON and DJ look out into the darkness.

MAGDA takes one step closer to Ramsay, leaving her daughter for just the briefest moment, when suddenly --

WHAP! MAGDA'S DAUGHTER is suddenly thrown off her feet and whipped into the dense foliage. As she vanishes, MAGDA SCREAMS --

MAGDA
(in Swedish)
Oh my God -- MY GOD!

Everyone reacts, horrified, having just witnessed a girl literally vanish into thin air.

As Magda runs toward the edge of the treeline --

MAGDA (CONT'D)
GUNILLA!

RAMSAY
No -- Wait!

WHAP! MAGDA herself is suddenly WHIPPED to the ground, only this time, we travel *with her*.

MAGDA'S BODY is violently catapulted across the landscape, fingernails digging into the Earth, SCREAMING bloody murder. As her eyes WIDEN in horror, she mercifully disappears.

Silence. No one in our group dares breathe. After quick POPS of all our leads, we land on the terrified face of Luisa who says what many are now thinking:

LUISA
(terrified whisper)
I want to go home.

And off Cooper, we

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. CAMPSITE - EDGE OF THE TREELINE - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

Our terrified group are right where we left them, some by the fire, others in their wagons. Luisa is visibly shaking, her brother attempting to calm her. Cooper is alternately watching Samuel, who's peering out from their Conestoga, and Ramsay, who is down on one knee, examining the spot where both Magda and her daughter disappeared.

No one dares move.

COOPER

(to Ramsay; tense whisper)
See anything?

RAMSAY

No.

COOPER

Indians?

Ramsay shakes his head.

HANNAH (O.S.)

We should never have crossed that river.

Everyone turns to discover Hannah, still at the river's edge. She's now facing the water, holding a tiny doll in her hand. As we PUSH IN on her deep, soulful eyes, we

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. RIVERBANK - EARLIER THAT DAY - ON HANNAH - FLASHBACK

Hannah is seated next to her husband up on the jockey box of their wagon. Though they have stopped moving, Hannah's arm is wrapped tightly around her daughter, Jem. Jem is clutching the same doll we just saw Hannah holding.

Hannah is focused on

RAMSAY, PARKER, AND COOPER

still out front on horseback, right where we left them in our last flashback. The wagon train has reached the river's edge and the dust storm is fast approaching.

PARKER

I thought the Indians were meeting us
with a barge.

As Ramsay looks off with concern, Cooper glances over his
shoulder, taking in the growing storm.

COOPER

That thing is coming fast.

PARKER

What do you say, Captain? Secure the
wagons and cross in the morning?

RAMSAY

We can't wait that long.

PARKER

Come back?

RAMSAY

We're two days behind schedule
already. We're going to cross now.

COOPER

But if we get hit while we're in the
water...

RAMSAY

Won't be in the water if we move.
(calling back to everyone)
Ladies and gentleman, I suggest you
gather all your essentials and
prepare to release your livestock.
We are going to make a crossing.

COOPER

Captain --

RAMSAY

Those are my orders, Mr. Hale, and as
you so astutely pointed out, we have
little time for debate.

Ramsay turns to Parker, pointing at the third wagon in the
convoy. It's painted blue and heavily fortified by riflemen.

RAMSAY (CONT'D)

The supply wagon will cross first and
I'll cross with her.

As Cooper reacts, we pick up

LUISA

who has observed this exchange from her wagon immediately behind them. She looks back at Nico who's gathering sacks of flour and stuffing them into canisters.

LUISA

They're taking the blue one to the front. What are they keeping in there?

NICO

He said supplies.

LUISA

The way those men are guarding it, you'd think it was gold bullion.

As Nico considers this, obviously concerned about his sister's growing paranoia, we go

INT./EXT. COOPER'S WAGON - DAY

Cooper approaches to discover Joanna and Samuel watching the oncoming storm with trepidation.

COOPER

We need to get everything inside.

JOANNA

Why are we crossing now?

As Ben passes, overhearing, he calls out --

BEN

Ramsay must think we're all as indestructible as he is.

COOPER

What do you mean?

BEN

Nothing.

Ben starts off again, but Cooper stops him.

COOPER

Ben?

Ben holds, looks around nervously, then ---

BEN

You ever heard of the Tonquin?

COOPER

Sailing ship?

BEN

Thirty years ago, Ramsay traveled on it to Oregon to help set up Astor's first fur trading post.

COOPER

But the Tonquin... I thought the entire crew --

BEN

Was massacred? They were. Everyone was killed except one guy: A half-Native interpreter named Lamazu.

(with weight)

Goes by Jack Ramsay now.

(looking at Ramsay)

Think he knows something we don't?

As Ben holds, leaving this disturbing tidbit hanging in the air, Samuel looks at his mother with concern and we

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. RIVERBANK - NIGHT - *IN THE PRESENT*

Eight wagons are circled. Most have yet to be repaired from the damage of the storm, but at least they're creating some kind of security for the group now. As armed men roam the perimeter, people move toward a center campfire.

Ben emerges from his wagon (which is missing two of its wheels) and is startled to find a pale Samuel waiting for him.

SAMUEL

I want to know more about Captain Ramsay.

BEN

Samuel, I don't think you should be out here.

SAMUEL

How did he survive when no one else could?

BEN

(studying him)

You asking because of your mother?

Samuel shrugs. Seeing that the boy is obviously distraught --

BEN (CONT'D)

Hold on.

Samuel nods. Ben then ducks back into his wagon. After a beat he returns carrying a leather-bound volume.

BEN (CONT'D)

Here. "*Astoria*" by Washington Irving. There's all kinds of stuff in there about Ramsay and the Tonquin.

SAMUEL

Is it true?

BEN

As true as any great storyteller would allow.

COOPER (O.S.)

Samuel?!

Samuel spins to discover Cooper moving up to him.

COOPER (CONT'D)

I've been looking all over for you.
Please don't run off like that.
(re; the book)
What's this?

BEN

He wanted to know more about where we're going, Cooper.
(off Cooper's look)
Might help to keep his mind occupied, you know?

Off Cooper, reading Ben's intent, we HEAR:

PEYTON (PRE-LAP)

Why haven't you sent out a search party?

EXT. CAMPSITE - AROUND THE FIRE - NIGHT

All the adults are gathered around the fire. Peyton's in the midst of going off on Ramsay and tensions are extremely high.

PEYTON

My sister...
(re; Cooper)
His wife...

(MORE)

PEYTON (CONT'D)

(re; Hannah)

Her husband and child...

DJ

And those two women? The Swedes?! I mean, what the hell was THAT?!

DJ's obviously three sheets to the wind. Ramsay, though quietly shaken himself, is trying to maintain his cool.

RAMSAY

I understand everyone's concern, but as I told Mr. Hale, two of our Conestogas are missing. The Indians in this area are very friendly and could easily have picked up our people...

COOPER

There were more than Indians here.

Ramsay reacts.

COOPER (CONT'D)

During the storm, I saw a man with dark skin and a nightingale tattoo on his chest. He had all kinds of ropes hanging from his body.

LUISA

An escaped slave?

COOPER

I don't think so. He looked more like... like an ancient warrior.

Ben reacts.

BEN

(dead serious)

Did he have a sword?

Before Cooper can respond, Ramsay immediately nips this conversation at the bud.

RAMSAY

He may well have been an Indian, Mr. Hale. Through all that madness, it was impossible to see anything clearly. First thing tomorrow I'll take two men and go to the village --

COOPER

I'm going with you.

HANNAH (O.S.)

Me too.

Everyone turns to discover

HANNAH

She has changed clothes and is now wearing a long, dark coat.

RAMSAY

Mrs. Strong. I know you're eager to find your family, but I can't endorse...

Hannah lifts a rifle from beneath her jacket.

HANNAH

I'm going.

As Ramsay reacts, Cooper looks at this woman with growing respect, and we

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COOPER'S WAGON - DAWN

Samuel's on his bedroll, reading "Astoria." From the looks of the candle burned to a nub at his side, he's been here all night. Cooper is all soldiered up, rifle in each hand, knives on his belt.

COOPER

If you need anything, check in with Ben or Nico. They'll look after you while I'm gone.

SAMUEL

Did you know Lewis and Clarke took almost this same trip?

COOPER

Of course.

SAMUEL

Did you know Lewis was never the same afterward?

Cooper holds, concerned about where this is leading.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

He died soon after he got home. Some said it was murder, but most believed it was suicide.

Cooper shakes his head. Moves to his son's side.

COOPER

I don't think you should be reading
that anymore, Samuel.

Samuel looks up at his father, clearly in pain. Cooper
crouches at his side and takes his son's hand.

COOPER (CONT'D)

I'm going to find your mom. And
we're ALL going to run on that beach.
You understand me?

Off Samuel, desperately wanting to believe, we

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Five horses are racing against the WIND, framed by a lush
panorama. Ramsay, Cooper, Hannah, and two riflemen are riding
toward the edge of a forest. Once they've reached the trees,
Ramsay raises his hand for them to stop.

RAMSAY

We'll walk in from here.

As Ramsay hops off his mount, we go

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Ramsay is leading the group through a large, open field. In
the distance is forest, and at the top of the peak above, we
see that all of the trees are gone. It's almost as though the
peak was shaved off.

HANNAH

Why is that mountain like that?

RAMSAY

There used to be a settlement up
there. A city. There was a time
when thousands of Indians lived in
these hills.

HANNAH

What happened to them?

RAMSAY

Progress.

As our group continues moving, we REVEAL THE MAN WITH THE NIGHTINGALE TATTOO watching all from a nearby ridge.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

Emily is washing her clothes in the river. A skittish Luisa approaches with a load of cookware.

 LUIZA
You mind if I join you?

 EMILY
Not at all.

 LUIZA
I'm Luisa.

 EMILY
Emily.

 LUIZA
You're the one who's getting married,
right? At Fort William?

 EMILY
Guess my secret's out.

Luisa forces a smile, glancing over her shoulder.

 LUIZA
That'll be nice. The illusion of
security.

Emily reacts. Luisa's fragile psyche is palpable.

 LUIZA (CONT'D)
Does your fiancé know this area well?

 EMILY
He should. He's a fur trapper. He's
been living out here for years.

 LUIZA
So, you're not concerned.

 EMILY
About what?

 LUIZA
About... the unknown?

Emily holds, studying her.

EMILY

Everything's unknown until it's experienced. When my parents came to this country they had no idea what to expect, but they thrived.

LUISA

My parents were immigrants too. They were dead two months off the boat.

Emily reacts. Luisa looks skyward, holds for a beat, then --

LUISA (CONT'D)

What if that storm wasn't as crazy as everyone's saying? What if it was normal -- and we're the ones who are crazy?

Off Emily, seriously unnerved by this chick, we

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. LOWER RIDGE - DAY

Ramsay, Cooper, Hannah, and Ramsay's two lieutenants are leading their horses up a steep hill.

RAMSAY

Since the Indians didn't show, I want to make sure there wasn't a misunderstanding. I'll go in alone --

COOPER

(distrustful)
Alone?

RAMSAY

(pointed)
Unless you speak Otoe, Mr. Hale?

Cooper holds. Hannah reads the tension between them.

HANNAH

Shouldn't you have something to offer them? Blankets? Beads?

RAMSAY

Beads don't really cut it anymore, ma'am.

HANNAH

Then what do you trade with?

If Ramsay was going to answer that question, we'll never know, for what he sees stops him cold.

From the crest of the ridge, our group looks down to discover

THE ENTIRE INDIAN VILLAGE

decimated. Strewn among the Earthen lodges are multiple bodies, men and women, all Native American.

Prominent amongst the carnage, dead center, is THE BLUE WAGON.

Hannah reacts. Cooper looks at Ramsay intently.

COOPER

Still going in alone?

Off Ramsay, shaken, we

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. INDIAN VILLAGE - DAY

Rifles at the ready, our group slowly makes their way through the village. As he walks amongst the dead, Cooper notes that there are no signs of bullets or arrows. Only deep cuts and stab wounds in the bodies. This leads him to consider the question Ben asked after Cooper mentioned seeing the man with the nightingale tattoo.

Did he have a sword?

Cooper glances at Hannah who's braving the situation as well as could be expected.

COOPER
(whispers)
Are you alright?

HANNAH
(whispers)
Not remotely.

Hannah's eyes remain locked on the blue wagon. Suddenly, we see A SHADOW against the canvas. Everyone freezes.

Something is *moving* in there.

Ramsay signals one of his men to cover him as he reaches for the tarp. As everyone holds their breath, Ramsay whips back the canvas and

A GIANT BLACK VULTURE

suddenly flies into Ramsay's face.

BANG! Ramsay's lieutenant drops the bird with a single shot.

As it lands at Ramsay's feet, everyone takes a wary look around -- then Ramsay peers into the wagon.

INSIDE THE WAGON - RAMSAY'S POV

Lying side by side are MAGDA AND HER DAUGHTER. Both have been scalped, their long blonde tresses cut clean away.

Ramsay reacts, clearly affected, and takes a step backward.

Cooper and Hannah now move forward, taking in the terrible sight.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Oh, my God...

Suddenly

MAGDA BOLTS UP

right into Hannah's face. Hannah SCREAMS, flailing back. Though Magda is clearly dead, Cooper sees that *something* is very much alive behind her.

Cooper eases Magda's body aside and AN OPEN TRAP DOOR is revealed. Wrenching himself up through the floorboards is none other than Hannah's husband.

COOPER

Dr. Strong --

HANNAH

William?!

Covered in blood and dust, Strong looks like a man who's been to hell and back. Cooper helps him out and he falls into his wife's arms.

STRONG

(in shock; off the
carnage)

They didn't obey -- they did not hear
His word --

HANNAH

William?

STRONG

Hell -- is the cup of fury -- the
wrath of God --

There is a manic look in his eyes. The look of a man who has danced with the devil and lived to tell the tale. Hannah tries to get her husband to focus.

HANNAH

William, have you seen Jem?!

STRONG

I have seen His righteous acts. I
have born witness --

HANNAH

(yelling)
How did you get here?!

Strong holds. As PUSH IN on his haunted face, we HEAR THE SOUND OF GROWING WIND, then --

STRONG

I was chosen.

As everyone reacts, we suddenly

SMASH BACK TO:

EXT. RIVERBANK - DUST STORM - DAY - FLASHBACK

We're TIGHT on Strong, battling the elements, separated from his family.

STRONG

HANNAH?! JEM?!

In the distance, we'll SEE FLASHES OF OUR OTHER CHARACTERS, only now from a different POV: Ben digging for Emily, DJ screaming "DON'T LET ME BURN!" This entire sequence is concurrent with our opening, though now from Strong's POV.

STRONG (V.O.)

I was lost... like all of you... lost
in the storm...

Suddenly, almost like a mirage, Strong discovers

THE BLUE WAGON

sitting alone a few feet ahead of him. Surprised to find it unguarded, he pulls himself toward it and WHAM! A tree limb hits Strong in the forehead. As he falls inside the Conestoga, we go

INT. BLUE WAGON - DUST STORM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Wounded above his eye, Strong puts his hand to his head and looks for something to stop the bleeding. He reaches for a piece of torn canvas, rips it off, and in so doing, exposes a hole that reveals

THE MAN WITH THE NIGHTINGALE TATTOO

Standing just outside, looking right at him.

STRONG (V.O.)

There I was, looking straight into
the eyes of the devil himself.

As Strong reacts, the man -- who we may now notice is carrying a *machete* -- starts to move forward.

STRONG (V.O.)

I was sure I was going to die. Until
the Lord offered me sanctuary.

As Strong begins to panic, he discovers a loose piece of wood on the floor. Pulling it up like a trap door he finds a secret compartment. Strong scrambles to get in and pull the lid over his head, as the man with the machete appears.

INT. BLUE WAGON - COMPARTMENT - DUST STORM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Strong can feel his heart pounding. Through a crack in the wood he sees the man. The machete. The tattoo.

STRONG (V.O.)

I knew in that moment that if I were
to survive, it would be because His
hand was now on my shoulder.

As Strong reaches into his breast pocket and withdraws his Bible, LIGHTNING FLASHES and we

CUT TO:

INT. BLUE WAGON - MOVING - LATER - DAY - FLASHBACK

The dust storm has passed and Strong is right where we left him in the compartment.

STRONG (V.O.)

Moments later, I was moving. I could
hear men's voices, but there were too
many to count.

Blood has dried on Strong's forehead and he is reciting faint, mumbled Biblical passages to himself as the wagon rolls over harsh terrain that we cannot see.

STRONG

(sotto)

The Lord is my light and my
salvation; whom shall I fear?

STRONG (V.O.)

By the time we stopped, it was night.
That's when the bodies came.

INT. BLUE WAGON - LATER - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Strong is frozen in the compartment. As we HOLD on his face, sweat gathering on his brow, we hear the SOUND OF TWO HORSES riding up. After a beat --

THUMP.

THUMP.

Inches above Strong's face, two bodies are dumped on the floorboards. Strong can't see who they are, but he can just make out a few lone strands of blonde hair...

Then blood begins to drip on his face.

Fuck.

After a beat, the horses take off and the wagon begins moving again. As that blood continues tortuously dripping on Strong's cheeks, eyes, and mouth...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. INDIAN VILLAGE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Strong stares out the crack in the side of the wagon, getting quick glimpses of DEAD INDIANS as he continues to move. With all the blood droplets on his face, he looks like he's got measles.

STRONG (V.O.)

When we arrived at the village, all of the natives were dead. Well, almost all. One poor savage had managed to hang on...

The wagon stops. We stay TIGHT on

STRONG'S EYE

as it peers out from the crack in the wagon's side.

Suddenly

A BLOODY HAND

slams up against the hole, blocking Strong's view. As Strong reacts, repressing a scream, A SWORD comes crashing down, replacing the hand in Strong's eye line with the blinding flash of a silver blade.

STRONG (V.O.)

And then he was finished as well.

Off a horrifying WAIL we

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. INDIAN VILLAGE - DAY - *IN THE PRESENT*

Where our group is right where we left them. Strong is now focused on a dead Indian lying at the foot of the wagon.

He's missing his right hand.

STRONG

(to Ramsay)

These people didn't know the Lord, did they, Captain? They hadn't accepted Him as their --

RAMSAY

(disgusted)

That's not why they're dead.

Ramsay turns as Cooper moves in on Strong.

COOPER

You have any idea who brought you here?

STRONG

I'm sorry.

HANNAH

And you don't know what happened to Jem? Or Cooper's wife?

STRONG

No. But if these men took me, perhaps they took others as well?

HANNAH

The men didn't "take you," William. You were hiding.

Strong picks up on the judgment in her voice.

Cooper is about to implode.

COOPER

What men are we talking about? Who did this?!

Ramsay sighs.

RAMSAY

White Coat.

Everyone reacts.

Cooper turns toward Ramsay who's staring dead-eyed into the wilderness.

COOPER

Who?

Ramsay doesn't respond. Cooper grabs him.

COOPER (CONT'D)

Who the hell is White Coat and why
did he kill these people?!

Ramsay takes a deep breath, darkening.

RAMSAY

I'll show you.

That almost sounded like a threat. As Hannah looks at Cooper with trepidation, we

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. INDIAN VILLAGE - MAIN LODGE - DAY

A deerskin is pulled back and A SHAFT OF LIGHT hits us head on. Ramsay, followed by Cooper, Hannah, and Strong, enters what appears to be a central gathering hall. But there are no baskets or blankets in evidence -- nothing that reads as traditionally Native American. Instead, covering the dirt floor, are CHINESE MATS. Visible on some wooden benches is an array of ORNATE PIPES AND BOWLS, many made of rich wood adorned with cloisonne.

At the back of the room, a number of men lay dead, cut down where they sat. Most are clutching pipes. Cooper picks one up, smells it, then looks back at Ramsay.

COOPER

Opium?

Ramsay holds, seriously unnerved. The storm was one thing, but with this, the rules have changed.

RAMSAY

Astor made his fortune in a number of businesses. Fur, real estate --

HANNAH

-- Opium.

RAMSAY

When we were building our trading posts, we found it to be very effective in appeasing the natives.

COOPER

You bastards. You kept these people drugged while you stole their --

RAMSAY

We didn't steal anything. We "traded."

COOPER

And now they're dead. And my wife and their daughter are missing. WHY?

RAMSAY

Because White Coat didn't get his cut.

HANNAH

His "cut?"

Ramsay holds, turns --

RAMSAY

We should go. We don't want to be here if his people come back.

Cooper suddenly has his rifle cocked at Ramsay's face.

COOPER

We're not going anywhere until you tell us what's going on.

RAMSAY

I think I've said enough.

COOPER

I'll kill you. I don't care how indestructible you think you are.

Ramsay reacts. Cooper looks like he would put a bullet in Ramsay's brain right now. Finally, Ramsay relents.

RAMSAY

For years, White Coat's taken a share of all our transactions. The Indians were never a problem, but he was vicious. He's an outlaw and a mercenary and in the early days, when we were building the trading posts, he killed hundreds of our men.

COOPER

So, you started paying him off.

RAMSAY

Yes. But Astor's old now, and he knows that if he's ever going to see his dream of an empire on the Pacific realized, White Coat can no longer be part of the equation.

Hannah is wrestling with her emotions.

HANNAH

Does this man have my child?

RAMSAY

I'm fairly certain.

HANNAH

Will he kill her?

RAMSAY

If it serves him.

Hannah begins to tremble. Strong takes her arm.

STRONG

Why haven't you had him eliminated?
I'm sure Astor has the means.

RAMSAY

It's not that simple. To many of the natives, White Coat's more than a man. He's like a God -- and he's connected to the land in ways you can't possibly imagine. He sees himself as the protector of everything out here --

COOPER

He murdered these people!

RAMSAY

Which is a *first*, Mr. Hale. Our people, yes. But the Indians? Never. He reveres them, so the fact that he's done this...

(darkly)

I'm afraid it's only the beginning.

As Cooper and Hannah react, we hear a ROLL OF THUNDER, then go

EXT. TRAIL - RAIN - DAY

It's now pouring RAIN. Our people are all back on horses, traversing a densely forested trail. Dr. Strong is riding one of the Indians' stallions, and the bodies of Magda and her daughter, wrapped in blankets, are being carried on another horse at Ramsay's side.

COOPER

Was White Coat the reason you were so eager to cross that river?

RAMSAY

When the Indians didn't show, I knew something had happened. I thought if I could get the supply wagon emptied out, I could leave it as a decoy, hoping White Coat might take it while we went to the village.

COOPER

And his people *did* take it. But when
the opium wasn't in there --

RAMSAY

He retaliated.

Ramsay nods toward the bodies of the two dead women, then
looks back at Cooper.

RAMSAY (CONT'D)

I'm sure that man you saw was one of
his lieutenants. He may even have
set the traps that carried those
women away.

Hannah's head is spinning.

HANNAH

Why is he called White Coat?

Ramsay holds, looks off.

RAMSAY

Because he wears a jacket made
entirely of blonde scalps.

Everyone reacts. Hannah looks at Cooper. Their exchange of
mutual support does not go unnoticed by Strong. He may wonder
how close these two have become in his absence, but won't have
long to think about this, for as the group rounds a turn

WHAP!

ONE OF RAMSAY'S MEN suddenly falls off his horse, the
recipient of a flying dagger to the back. Hearing this, THE
MAN IN FRONT of him turns, and --

LIEUTENANT

Captain?!

WHAP! This man too is suddenly impaled. Seeing this, Ramsay
SCREAMS:

RAMSAY

MOVE!

Everyone reacts, slamming their heels into their horses.
Riding fast, Cooper shoots occasional glances back over his
shoulder, checking on Hannah and Strong, when suddenly, we
HEAR a little girl's voice echoing through the trees:

GIRL (O.S.)

MAMA!

HANNAH pulls up her horse.

GIRL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
MAMA?!

HANNAH
JEM!

Without hesitation, Hannah whips her horse off the trail and starts galloping toward the sound of Jem's voice. Fearing a trick, Strong calls after her --

STRONG
HANNAH, WAIT!

COOPER
I'LL GET HER! KEEP MOVING!

EXT. FOREST - MOVING WITH HANNAH ON HORSEBACK - RAIN - DAY

Hannah's racing through the trees, RAIN pounding on her face.

HANNAH
JEM?! JEM, WHERE ARE YOU?!

Not far behind, coming up fast, is Cooper.

COOPER
MA'AM!

Hannah goes over a rise and disappears. Moments later, Cooper moves up this same rise, but just as he reaches the top, he pulls back hard on the reins.

EXT. FOREST - RISE - COOPER'S POV - RAIN - DAY

Halfway down the rain-soaked hill, barely conscious, is Hannah. Her horse is lingering nearby. As Cooper reacts --

COOPER
Ma'am?

-- he starts to move forward and -- BAM! A GUN STOCK WAR CLUB connects with Cooper's head and he hits the ground hard. Dazed, Cooper looks up to see

A MAN ON HORSEBACK

circling, preparing to come at him again. The man is shirtless with numerous piercings on his face and body.

He's got a boatload of knives strapped to his chest and looks like something out of "Mad Max." As Cooper scrambles for one of his fallen rifles, the man hits him a second time, sending Cooper tumbling down the muddy hill, past Hannah, who's just getting to her feet.

HANNAH

Cooper?!

Hannah starts moving for her rifle, when suddenly, the earth gives way and Hannah begins to slide. As she passes Cooper, he grabs hold of her and now both of them are tumbling down the embankment. But just as they hit some brush that might slow them down --

-- they find themselves airborne.

EXT. CLIFF SIDE - RAIN - CONTINUOUS

Cooper and Hannah are now mid-air, falling hundreds of feet off a cliff. Below them is a lake, and as they hit the water, we go down with them.

INT. LAKE - UNDERWATER - CONTINUOUS

Cooper and Hannah's bodies plummet deep into the lake. Cooper is still moving, but Hannah seems lifeless. We watch as he swims to her, grabs hold of her body, and begins pulling her to the surface.

EXT. LAKE - RAIN - CONTINUOUS

Cooper emerges, Hannah in his arms. He swims her to shore, lifting her onto the bank. As he falls to his knees, she begins coughing up water. Then Cooper collapses on his back. As they both lie there, cut, spent, exhausted, they look up at the cliff from whence they fell. Hannah, still half in shock, offers a complete non sequitur:

HANNAH

So... what did you do? You know...
back in... wherever?

COOPER

Farmer.

HANNAH

A farmer?

COOPER

Yeah.

Hannah considers this.

HANNAH

I was a teacher.

(beat)

How come we're not dead?

Beat.

COOPER

There's still time.

As Hannah reacts

THE MAN ON HORSEBACK

appears on the cliff. He's far enough away that they may not be seen, but --

COOPER (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Don't. Move.

The horseman holds for a tense beat, then turns and disappears. Whew. That was close. Unfortunately, two seconds later, THE GUY AND HIS HORSE are both leaping off the cliff.

WHAT THE FUCK? As man and animal hit the water, Cooper pulls Hannah to her feet --

COOPER (CONT'D)

COME ON!

-- and they begin to run. Within seconds, the horse has taken off but the man is on shore and upon them. A deadly fight ensues, the attacker flailing his club, Cooper doing his best to fend him off. Ultimately, Cooper is too fast, and surprisingly, too experienced. After Hannah gets hold of the club, Cooper barrels the man to the ground, impaling him on his own massive cutlery set. Ouch.

Completely out of breath, Cooper gets up, turns, and looks at the astonished Hannah who can't believe what she's just witnessed.

HANNAH

You're a FARMER?

Off Cooper, we

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

The rain has cleared and much of the dust that blanketed the landscape is gone. With a long TRACKING SHOT, we REVEAL BEN (with help from some of Ramsay's men) just finishing repairing the tarp that covers his wagon. NICO and LUISA are working over a large fire, serving lunch, while armed men continue to patrol the perimeter. DJ and PEYTON are up in Nico's Conestoga, just finishing their meal.

This is a picture of our community momentarily at rest, and (if they survive) it will be a picture we'll see many times in the days and months to come.

DJ

Appreciate you letting us bunk with you tonight, Nico. With any luck, the search party will find our people as well as our wagon.

NICO

We're all praying, DJ.

DJ

Praying. Right.

(then)

Can I interest you in a cigar?

NICO

No thanks.

DJ

Might take some weight off those big, broad shoulders.

Peyton shoots DJ a look and pulls him back into the wagon.

INT. NICO AND LUISA'S WAGON - DAY

Peyton turns to DJ, speaking in a taut whisper.

PEYTON

You've got to stop fawning over that boy. We signed on for this trip as a happily married couple, not a couple of swingboats.

DJ

Well, I'd "happily" take your hand if
I thought I could get it off your
girlfriend's --

WHAP! Peyton hauls off and slaps him again.

DJ (CONT'D)

OW! WILL YOU STOP DOING THAT?

PEYTON

I'm tired of you damning Claire.

DJ

I'm not "damning" anybody, I was
just...

PEYTON

I love her. Get it through your
thick skull. I love her!

DJ holds, suddenly noticing tears in Peyton's eyes.

DJ

Hey...

PEYTON

I know you don't believe it, but it's
true. She's missing and I'm scared
and I'm angry and I really don't
appreciate you --

DJ

(genuine)

I'm sorry, Peyton.

Peyton reacts, wipes her eyes.

DJ (CONT'D)

And I'm sorry I didn't go with the
group to look for her. But that's
always been my problem, hasn't it?
Brave when the champagne is flowing,
a coward when the bottle is dry.

Peyton holds, trying to keep her emotions in check.

PEYTON

If you're such a coward, why did you
insist we take this trip?

DJ sighs.

DJ

Because all my mother ever talked about was seeing the West. And right before she died, she made me promise to see it for her.

PEYTON

Well. Just for the record, I *would* marry you. If for no other reason than to see you in your wedding dress.

As DJ reacts, Peyton reaches down to his crotch while through the back of the wagon, we pick up

BEN

carrying an armful of books. As he turns toward Cooper's Conestoga, he suddenly sees

EMILY

just emerging from the river with soap in her hand. She's wearing nothing but a short, white chemise, and since it's completely wet, you can pretty much see *everything*.

Holy shit is she beautiful.

As a stunned Ben almost drops his books, Emily reacts -- was that a smile? -- and we go

INT. COOPER'S WAGON - A SHORT WHILE LATER - DAY

Ben enters to find Samuel still on his bed roll. Emily's at his side, reading to him. They have finished "*Astoria*" and are on to "*Frankenstein*."

EMILY

So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein -- more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.

Samuel sits up.

SAMUEL

Did Mary Shelly really dream this?

EMILY

Yup. The whole story.

SAMUEL

But none of it came true, right? I mean, you can't really make dead people come back to life...

EMILY

Not in my experience.

SAMUEL

Well -- that's good.
(smiles; relieved)
That's good.

Emily looks at Ben. He lowers his eyes. He's still nervous after basically seeing her naked.

EMILY

Ben? Did Samuel tell you about his dream?

Ben shakes his head.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Tell him, Samuel.

Samuel suddenly looks distracted. He rises, moves to the rear of the wagon, and looks out. Emily and Ben both react with concern.

BEN

Samuel? What was your dream about?

In a tense whisper, the boy answers:

SAMUEL

Him.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

Samuel, Ben, and Emily emerge from the back of the wagon to discover everyone on the riverbank now focused on the same surreal image:

A STRIKING MAN OF SEVENTY

is floating down river on a barge. He's bald -- in fact there's a massive scar running from his forehead to the back of his ears -- and he's wearing a long white coat that appears to be made of human hair. He's holding a sword above his head and is engaged in a series of slow, ritualistic movements. These movements are seductive and terrifying all at once, and Samuel is riveted.

As Samuel exits the wagon and begins moving toward the water, the man -- who we may now assume to be **WHITE COAT** -- continues to mesmerize. The guy is hypnotic. As Samuel reaches the water's edge, Ben stops him in his tracks.

BEN

You dreamt about this man?

Samuel nods, terrified and awestruck all at once.

SAMUEL

He's the one... who took my mother.

Ben reacts. Shoring up his courage, he moves to a nearby horse, pulls a rifle from the saddle, and aims it at the stranger.

In this instant, White Coat freezes and opens his eyes for the first time. As Ben locks eyes with him, feeling the weight of this man's intense gaze, we hear:

RAMSAY (O.S.)

STOP!

Everyone turns to discover Ramsay and Dr. Strong riding toward them. Reaching Ben, Ramsay leaps off his horse and pulls the rifle from his hand.

Then Ramsay turns to face White Coat. White Coat obviously recognizes Ramsay and offers a small nod -- a bow to his enemy.

Then White Coat looks at Samuel. As Samuel reacts, White Coat slowly raises his arms in the air --

-- and the entire river begins to turn *red*. Blood red.

But is this really happening? Or are we suddenly in Samuel's mind? In his *dream*?

To everyone else on shore, the river may appear as it was. But to Samuel...

As we PUSH IN ON DARK EYES, we

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Cooper and Hannah are moving up a steep incline, hurrying to get back to camp.

HANNAH

I know I heard Jem's voice. I'm just not sure where it came from.

(suddenly)

JEM! JEM!

COOPER

Probably shouldn't be calling for her now, ma'am. There may be more horsemen out here.

HANNAH

Hannah.

COOPER

Excuse me?

HANNAH

You don't have to call me "ma'am." My name's Hannah.

Cooper holds. Nods.

COOPER

Cooper.

HANNAH

The farmer.

COOPER

Right.

Beat.

HANNAH

What else?

COOPER

Excuse me?

HANNAH

What else are you? I've never seen a farmer who could fight like that. If that's really what you are, why'd you leave your farm?

COOPER

It left me.

As Hannah reacts, Cooper continues moving.

COOPER (CONT'D)

After the crash, our property wasn't worth anything.

(MORE)

COOPER (CONT'D)

And with folks not having money, we couldn't sell any crops, so the bank foreclosed.

(beat)

My wife saw the ad in the paper asking for families who might be willing to move to Oregon. We thought it was a chance to give our son a better life. An escape from the past.

HANNAH

What past? He's a little boy.

Cooper realizes he may have said too much.

COOPER

I meant... our family's past.

Hannah studies him. She senses there's a lot more to Cooper than he's telling, but she doesn't push.

As they continue moving, they reach the top of the grade and the LARGE, OPEN FIELD we may remember from when Ramsay led everyone to the Indian village.

COOPER (CONT'D)

What about you? Why'd you sign up for this?

HANNAH

Paris was booked.

He looks at her. She's kidding. But the fact that even under these dire circumstances she can maintain a sense of humor...

HANNAH (CONT'D)

It was my husband's idea. William's obviously very religious and he felt like the temptations of the city were becoming too great. Especially for Jem.

COOPER

He a good father?

HANNAH

He's actually her step-father. My first husband died. Cholera. Jem got sick as well, but William saved her.

(beat)

Irony is, I told her this trip was her reward. For surviving, you know?

(MORE)

HANNAH (CONT'D)

Since God had given her a second chance...

Hannah stops herself. She was fine until she started talking about her daughter, but --

HANNAH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

As the tears come, Cooper reacts. Uncertain of how to respond, he awkwardly puts his arm around her.

They hold for a moment.

Then Cooper SEES something.

Ten yards ahead, imprinted in the mud, are TRACKS. FRESH WAGON TRACKS, filled with rain water, leading toward the horizon.

COOPER

Hannah --

Now, she sees them as well.

HANNAH

Wagon tracks?

COOPER

No guarantee they're ours, but --

HANNAH

Who's else could they be? Come on!

Hannah starts to run, but Cooper stops her.

COOPER

Wait -- We'll never catch up. We have to go back and get horses.

As Hannah nods, buoyed by this discovery, she and Cooper take off on a run, leaving the field and heading back toward the trail and their camp.

We hold for a beat, then PAN to discover that flattened mountaintop, surrounded by dense forest, looming ominously in the distance.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

Having completed its restoration, Ramsay's men move Ben's wagon into place. REVEAL that the entire wagon train is now in formation. The oxen yoked, horses saddled, cows tied.

RAMSAY

is on horseback at the front of the line, ready to lead everyone out. An emotionally-charged Ben is confronting him.

BEN

We can't leave yet! Cooper and Hannah are still out there, and we have to find --

RAMSAY

(intense)

If we stay here we'll die.

As Ben reacts, he locks eyes with a shaken Emily, then a very concerned Nico, then

DOCTOR STRONG

down by the river, on his knees.

STRONG

God of mercy, know that I have heard your call and will respond in kind. No obstacle will be too great to deter me --

HANNAH (O.S.)

William?!

Strong turns around to discover

COOPER AND HANNAH

running into camp. Everyone reacts, surprised and grateful to see them alive, but as Strong takes in the sight of his wife gripping Cooper's arm, his expression changes.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

(to Strong; exhilarated)

We think we've found the wagon! And it's moving, William! It's moving!

As Peyton reacts, thrilled at the possibility that Claire may be alive, she hugs DJ as Cooper approaches Ramsay.

COOPER

It's not far from here. I can go on my own or you can give me men. But either way, I'm going.

(looking around)

Samuel?!

Cooper starts running toward his Conestoga, eager to share the good news with his son. But Ben cuts him off.

BEN

Cooper --

COOPER

Ben -- You believe it? We may have found my wife.

Ben doesn't react. As Cooper takes note, his expression changes.

COOPER (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

BEN

He's not here, Cooper.

All of the blood suddenly leaves Cooper's face.

BEN (CONT'D)

Samuel's gone.

(beat)

He's gone.

Off Cooper, looking like his heart has just been ripped from his chest, we

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

FADE IN:

EXT. RIVERBANK - DUSK

Cooper is feverishly running down the line of wagons, searching for his son. Ben is right on his tail, trying to explain what happened.

BEN

I just turned away for a minute, I swear --

COOPER

Tell me EXACTLY what happened.

BEN

After the man on the barge disappeared, Samuel got really upset. He started talking crazy, saying he'd seen blood in the water --

COOPER

Blood?

BEN

Just like in his dream. And unless he could find this man again, he was sure his mother would die.

Cooper continues searching, whipping back tarps, praying Samuel is hiding someplace.

COOPER

Did he know who the man was?

BEN

I know who he was.

Cooper turns and looks at Ben intently.

BEN (CONT'D)

The other night when I asked if that guy you'd seen had a sword? You know why I asked? Because for years I've heard stories about this mythic band of warriors...

COOPER

White Coat.

BEN

Yeah. But I never believed he was real. I thought he was like the Chindi, you know? Those Navaho ghosts the old trappers talk about? But he was here, Cooper. With his damn coat of scalps, waving his sword around like a shaman.

Cooper is trying to keep calm.

COOPER

Did Samuel give you any idea where he was going?

BEN

No. But in his dream, he said he'd seen his mother near a lost city. A city on a mountaintop...

COOPER

What?

BEN

I had no idea what he was talking about, but...

Suddenly, Cooper knows exactly what Samuel was talking about. He runs up to Ramsay, as Ben and Nico fill in alongside him.

COOPER

I know where my son is headed. If you can get everyone moving, Hannah can show you where the tracks are and I'll meet you there.

BEN

I'll go with him.

NICO

Me, too.

As Ramsay and Cooper react --

DJ (O.S.)

Me as well.

The men turn to discover DJ. Surprise. Maybe he's not such a coward after all. As Peyton gives DJ a supportive nod, Cooper looks at the men, truly grateful.

Then he looks at Hannah determinedly, his face saying it all: He's not stopping until he finds his wife and her child.

As Hannah gives Cooper a tacit nod -- good luck -- Strong takes note, and we go

EXT. TRAIL - DUSK

Samuel is running for his life. He doesn't know where he is. He's not even sure what he's looking for. All he can think about is finding his mom. As he continues racing down the trail that Ramsay led Cooper and Hannah on this morning, we go

EXT. TRAIL - ELSEWHERE - DUSK

Cooper, Ben, Nico, and DJ are all on horseback, blasting across the landscape like the cavalry. This image may be our one big nod to the classic Western, and as re-imagined in our show, it will be thrilling to witness.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DUSK

Ramsay kicks his heels into his stallion and the entire wagon train begins moving. This is a breathtaking sight, a visual promise of hope for the future. Having survived their first trial, we should sense the forging of a greater family here -- united we stand, divided we fall.

As he rides, Ramsay looks off to see the freshly dug graves marked by three wooden crosses and considers the price of this journey so far.

HANNAH AND STRONG

are directly behind him.

HANNAH

Captain?

Ramsay looks back.

HANNAH (CONT'D)

If you'd like me to lead, I will.

Ramsay holds.

RAMSAY

Just let me know when we're close,
ma'am.

Hannah defers to Ramsay's position, but as her eyes look ahead, clear and determined, Strong senses a change in her -- a new found security -- and it threatens him.

STRONG

You don't seem too worried about what we might find.

HANNAH

I'm not.

STRONG

Because you know God is watching over us? Because you know He sees all?

Hannah looks at Strong, reading his slightly accusatory tone.

HANNAH

Because *I'm* not going to hide.

Touché. As Strong reacts, realizing his relationship with his wife is about to get a lot more complicated, we pick up

LUISA

in the back of her wagon, downing a handful of pills. She takes a deep breath, wipes her mouth, then moves outside to join

PEYTON

who's driving. Though still suspicious of everyone and everything, Luisa is actually impressed.

LUISA

Where'd you learn to handle a Conestoga?

Peyton shrugs.

PEYTON

Just have to marry the right man.

As Luisa reacts, we MOVE back to find

EMILY

walking as usual. The family with the baby's at her side, the father driving Ben's wagon. Taking one last look back at camp, Emily sees that some of Ben's journals have been left behind. She runs for them, picks them up, then hops on the backboard of the Conestoga.

INT. BEN'S WAGON - MOVING - DAY

As Emily sets Ben's books on the floor, she notices that the lining above her head is bulging. Something is inside here. As she reaches for it, A HAND suddenly grabs her arm.

RAMSAY is revealed, still on horseback, right behind her.

RAMSAY

You'd best leave that alone, miss.

EMILY

What is it?

RAMSAY

Just something to trade with. A little barter to help us reach Fort William and your beloved Mr. Rossignol.

Emily holds, nods, and Ramsay moves off. After studying the small, brick-shaped forms buried in the tarp, Emily looks back at Ramsay and we

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Cooper, still on horseback, is racing into the open field. He is flanked by Ben, Nico, and DJ.

COOPER

(calling)

SAMUEL!

Cooper pulls up his horse, and the others fall in with him. In the distance we can SEE the flattened mountaintop. Cooper looks at the men, nodding toward the ground and the wagon tracks.

COOPER (CONT'D)

This is where we're going to meet Ramsay...

(nodding toward the mountaintop)

-- and that's where Samuel's going. He's probably already in those trees. We'll split up. Meet back here at sunset?

As the men nod, Cooper pulls his wife's wedding ring from his pocket, takes a long look at it, then squeezes it tightly and rides off toward the treeline, calling once more --

COOPER (CONT'D)

SAMUEL?!

And we

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - ON SAMUEL - DUSK

Deep in the woods, Samuel is running on his last legs. Completely spent, his body aching, the boy stops, attempting to catch his breath. It's getting dark, and after all he's been through, it's just become too much.

He drops to his knees --

SAMUEL

Mom?!

(screaming)

MOM!

Samuel starts to cry. As he falls on his hands, all but certain that he'll never see his mother again

A SWORD

suddenly splits the Earth in front of him. Samuel looks up to see

WHITE COAT

hovering above. Up close, the guy is really scary looking. All scar and sinew, and his head... That's not just a scar up there, it's what's left of a scalping.

Seems White Coat knows of what he practices.

Samuel recoils, staggering backward.

White Coat doesn't move.

Wiping his eyes, Samuel pulls himself to his feet and works up his courage.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Where's my mother?

White Coat doesn't respond.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

WHERE'S MY MOTHER?!!

White Coat holds for a tense beat, then slowly lifts his head. At his throat, we reveal another huge scar. Samuel reacts.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)
You can't talk?

White Coat holds.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)
Did you kill my mother?

White Coat slowly shakes his head. Negative.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)
In my dream, you did.

White Coat nods. He *knows*.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)
Where is she?

White Coat suddenly pulls the sword from the ground and takes a step forward. Samuel moves back, but White Coat holds up his hand -- it's alright.

Samuel hesitates.

White Coat takes a step closer, reaching out his palm above Samuel's head. And then --

He touches him.

Gently, benignly, White Coat lowers his hand on top of Samuel's soft, *blonde hair*.

Jesus.

Or Manson.

You decide.

In this moment, White Coat closes his eyes, and after a beat, Samuel does the same thing. Yeah, it's a weird moment, but it's also weirdly kind of cool. As boy and man hold, we PUSH IN on Samuel's face, then --

Samuel's eyes open. White Coat is gone.

But the sword is now in his hand.

As Samuel looks down at it in astonishment, we HEAR:

COOPER (O.S.)
Samuel?!

Samuel turns to discover Cooper riding toward him. As Cooper leaps off his horse, he runs up to his son and takes him in his arms.

SAMUEL

Dad...

Cooper squeezes his son for all he's worth.

COOPER

I thought I'd lost you too...

After holding his son for a powerful beat, Cooper pulls back.

COOPER (CONT'D)

(re; the sword)

Where did you get this?

Samuel looks at his father with uncertainty.

SAMUEL

My... dream?

With the sun going down, Cooper's eager to get Samuel back to meet the wagon train. But before he does --

COOPER

I have something to show you.

Putting the sword in the holster on his saddle, Cooper lifts Samuel up onto the horse and we go

EXT. TOP OF THE FLATTENED MOUNTAIN - SUNSET

Clearing the ridge on horseback, father and son find themselves looking out at what will one day be known as the glorious Missouri River Valley. Its majesty is *awesome*. And far off in the distance, just disappearing into the sunset, is

A WAGON

Samuel looks up at his father expectantly.

SAMUEL

Is it, Mom?

COOPER

I don't know.

Cooper pulls Joanna's wedding ring from his pocket. Samuel reacts.

COOPER (CONT'D)

She asked me to hold this for her
during the storm...

Samuel looks up at his Dad. Cooper turns to him.

COOPER (CONT'D)

But I want you to hold it now. And
when we find your mother, I want you
to give this back to her.

Tears well in Samuel's eyes as Cooper hands him the ring. The
boy stares at it for a long moment, then reverently slips it
in his pocket. Cooper holds his son tightly, then kicks his
horse, and they take off.

As our MUSIC SWELLS, we stay with that wagon, then

CUT TO:

EXT. WAGON - MOVING - SUNSET

On the back is a familiar slogan: *Hell's Belles*.

INT. WAGON - MOVING - SUNSET

Nestled on some bedrolls, dirty, but otherwise not much worse
for wear, are **JOANNA**, **CLAIRE**, and **JEM**. Though grateful to be
alive, they are all still very much on edge.

JOANNA

How many days 'til we reach Fort
William?

DRIVER (O.S.)

I would guess three.

We now REVEAL the driver. It's

THE MAN WITH THE NIGHTINGALE TATTOO

up on the jockey box. He's wearing an overcoat and has a
thick, French accent.

CLAIRE

You're certain the wagon train is
ahead of us?

DRIVER

Yes, ma'am.

JEM

And you're sure my mommy is there?

DRIVER

I don't see why she wouldn't be,
miss.

Claire squeezes Jem's hand. See? They're all going to be okay.

As the women settle in, Joanna leans forward once more.

JOANNA

We're very grateful that you found
us, sir.

DRIVER

I was trapping in the area. It was
no problem.

JOANNA

Well, thank you just the same, Mr.
Rossignol.

ROSSIGNOL smiles.

As Joanna leans back and our wagon continues on its fateful
journey, we PULL OUT TO REVEAL the vast and unknowable
landscape ahead and

GO BLACK.

THE END

*