



FRESH BLOOD SELECT

- THE STRICKEN -

By: Robert Pilkington

WGAW# 1401371
rwpilkington@gmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. DESERT LANDSCAPE - DAY

THE SUN. Massive. Relentless. So intense it buzzes. It hangs in the sky, burning, blinding, constant. And then... a faint SCREECH. Animal? Human? It echoes from far away...

...Off towering mesas, heat radiating off the rock.

...Through shallow canyons casting black shadows.

The echoes die on the stillness of the bleached, almost martian landscape. In the sand, reaching towards the horizon... there is dark metal. TRAIN TRACKS.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

TITLE CARD: 1887

Dusty and wooden. A blonde GIRL, 6, stands beside her MOTHER, holding a doll. She looks down the tracks, eager.

And, distant, where the tracks nearly vanish... a black dot.

The girl gasps. Waiting TRAVELERS pick up their bags.

A black train chugs closer. Getting louder. It's coming fast.

The MANAGER checks his pocket watch. Murmurs of confusion...

And the train roars by, blowing wind across the platform. The girl flinches at the noise and looks up.

THE TRAIN. Windows are smashed, cracked with bullet holes.

The girl looks at her mother, confused. The train passes and becomes a dot again. The girl leans to watch it.

Angry eyes fall on the station manager. Complaints.

The train chugs on, wheels screeching, white sun flashing off its black windows, again and again...

INT. LITTLE HOMESTEAD, BEDROOM - DAWN

ETHAN LITTLE wakes with a start. Late 20s, thin, blonde. He bolts up, covered in sweat, out of breath.

He looks beside him where his wife, GRACE LITTLE, 20s, warm and kind, lays asleep. His hand still rests in hers. He catches his breath... and gets up.

INT. LITTLE HOMESTEAD - DAWN

Ethan slides on a shirt and does its buttons.

He checks his revolver, holsters it on his belt.

He pours a glass of milk, bites an apple. He turns, looking out a kitchen window.

ETHAN POV. Almost a mile out from his house is a small smattering of buildings that barely form a street on the arid landscape. This is WAYWARD, AZ. Ethan sighs.

ETHAN
Ari-fuckin'-zona.

He searches the counter. There are pans, a few books. He opens a drawer... and stops. He pulls out brown envelopes.

THE ENVELOPES. Addressed to Ethan. Return address: Virginia City, Nevada. Ethan tosses them back, slams shut the drawer.

INT. LITTLE HOMESTEAD, BEDROOM - DAWN

Grace is still asleep. Ethan leans in over her.

ETHAN (O.S.)
Gracie? ...Grace? The grocery list.
Milk. Coffee. And what else?

GRACE
Mmm? Oh-- no. Salt. I'll go, Ethan.

ETHAN
I'll just go. It's fine.

Her eyes flutter open at him. She smiles, taking him in.

GRACE
Careful out there.

He half smiles back, sad. They kiss.

EXT. WAYWARD TOWN STRETCH - DAY

A dusty road between the rows of rickety wood buildings. People are out, all noticing something pass...

The BARBER sitting in a rocking chair on his porch...

A few dirt-smearred KIDS playing by some barrels...

A SHOP WOMAN beating a rug over a porch railing...

They all watch Ethan arrive on his horse. Ethan turns to the barber and tips his hat, friendly.

The barber looks away, shaking his head.

CODY (O.S.)
Deputy! Deputy Little!

Ethan's smile straightens as a young man jogs up. Blonde and scrawny, this is CODY, 16. He carries paperback serial books.

CODY (CONT'D)
Mornin' Deputy!... Deputy Little?

ETHAN
How many deputies in our highly significant little town, Cody?

CODY
Um... one? Just one.

ETHAN
So "Deputy" will suffice. Or just "Ethan". We can drop the surname.

CODY
Oh sure, Deputy Li-- Ethan. Deputy Ethan. Now, I was reading this here last night, "The Heinous Heist of Saxon Lazar?" You know him?

ETHAN
Not personally.

CODY
Oh-- well, in this one, um, Lazar carries a... "French dueling pistol?" But in the Fallon shoot-out, in this here book, it says he carries Walker Dragoons? Now, why--

ETHAN
I've told you, Cody, they're stories, okay? Folks 'round here, they ain't got much, so they trump 'em all the hell up to be more... romantic. But they don't matter.

Cody takes that in, his steps slowing down.

CODY
Well, all right... but, they could still matter some, right?

Ethan stops his horse and looks down at a squinting Cody.

CODY (CONT'D)

On account of folks not havin'
much? Stories, I mean?

Ethan catches an ELDERLY MAN eyeing him as he passes by with his DAUGHTER. The man pulls his daughter back, making sure he stands between Ethan and her. They move past in a hurry.

ETHAN

Lazar's an old-timer. You're asking
the wrong man.

CODY

Who should I ask then?

INT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

STAR on his vest, a weathered man sits, 50s, with a salt and pepper handlebar mustache. This is SHERIFF LANGSTON BANKS.

TIP TOP (O.S.)

Now, ain't no reason we can't be
all cordial about this, Sheriff...

Before the sheriff's desk are two dirty, worn men. The lead man is the greasy TIP TOP, his companion, a stoic Mexican, THE AMIGO. Bounty hunters. Armed. Tip Top smirks.

TIP TOP (CONT'D)

When's the last time you even had a
warm body back in that hole?

SHERIFF BANKS

Don't know if we got the room. Even
now, I contemplate the possibility
of squeezing three or so in there.

Smiling with black teeth, Tip Top leans on the desk.

TIP TOP

Ohhh, I forgot. Wayward holds their
jails in a, uh, po-ticklar esteem.

Tip Top leers over to a LINE OF PLAQUES on the wall. All the past sheriffs and deputies. The last one: ETHAN LITTLE.

TIP TOP (CONT'D)

...Ever since its own deputy was
probably, uh, conceived in one.

He laughs, even gets a smile from the Amigo. Banks is quiet.

Banks kicks up the lid of the desk. Tip Top's leaning hand slides off and he CRACKS HIS HEAD on the edge as he falls.

EXT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

A MAN'S HANDS. One healthy, the other made of BRASS. Screws. All the fingers on one hinge. Both hands are bound with rope.

LEFTY (O.S.)

Water. Hey. You hear me?

Bound with the rope is "LEFTY" HASTINGS, early 40s, bald, scraggly beard. He addresses a third, baby-faced bounty hunter, JENNINGS, 20s. He spits brown, real sympathetic.

LEFTY (CONT'D)

Fuckin' bastards... Water!

There's a commotion on the office porch. They look. The Amigo backs out, alarmed. Banks drags Tip Top out by his hair.

Trotting up with Cody, Ethan pauses, hand on his holster.

Banks takes a boot to Tip Top's throat. Tip Top catches it.

TIP TOP

Guh! I-I've killed men for less...

SHERIFF BANKS

And I'm all a-quiver.

Tip Top riles, but Banks pushes him down. Silence. Hands on their guns, The Amigo and Jennings trade a nervous glance.

SHERIFF BANKS (CONT'D)

Deputy Little, if you'd be so kind as to show Mr. Hastings to our striped room?

Lefty looks at Ethan, eyes flashing. Recognition.

Ethan dismounts and hands the reins to a shell-shocked Cody.

SHERIFF BANKS (CONT'D)

As for our guests, they're welcome to stay in Wayward a spell. Provided they surrender their firearms for the duration?

The bounty hunters eye each other... and put down their guns.

Banks smiles and steps off Tip Top. The bounty hunter coughs.

EXT. BEHIND THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Ethan follows the bound Lefty towards an iron barred shack: Wayward's only jail cell. Lefty glances back.

LEFTY

I-- I know you. Little. Like Tommy Little. The Tommy Little.

ETHAN

Keep walkin'.

LEFTY

Jesus... You're his spittin' image! How in God's name are you some old geezer's deputy? Fuckin' hell!

SLAM. Ethan locks Lefty in and goes to leave.

LEFTY (CONT'D)

Hey, now. Wait! You can tell them I hit ya. Tell them I hit ya and ran.

Ethan turns, cocks an eyebrow.

LEFTY (CONT'D)

For your pa! For old times sake!

Ethan leaves. Lefty can't believe it.

LEFTY (CONT'D)

(hitting bars with brass hand)

Hey! Then at least some water! Some water, you fucking brat!

Jaw clenched, Ethan leaves. The metal meets metal. CLANG!

INT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Back behind the desk, Banks plays SOLITAIRE with a worn deck.

CODY (O.S.)

Yeah. Yeah. Right here, Sheriff.
"Ryan 'Lefty' Hastings..."

Cody stands before the desk, reciting from a nickel book.

CODY (CONT'D)

"...named for his vicious preference for beating his victims to death with his cast iron fist." Now there-- there you see, Sheriff? That hand didn't look like no cast iron to me. Looked like brass.

The slightest smile curves under Banks' mustache.

Behind Cody, Ethan stares out the window. He shakes his head.

SHERIFF BANKS

Better go out there, then-- keepin' your distance of course, and see if that sharp eye of yours can get to the bottom of it.

CODY

Honest, Sheriff?

SHERIFF BANKS

Leave nothin' to speculation. As many inquiries as you can muster.

Cody trips over his own legs bolting out of there. Gone.

SHERIFF BANKS (CONT'D)

(calling after Cody)

After you tend the horses!

ETHAN

You encourage that nonsense.

SHERIFF BANKS

Tall tales need no encouragin'. Whole world's built upon them.

ETHAN

Speakin' of that, you did it again.

Ethan turns. Banks doesn't look up from the yellowed cards.

SHERIFF BANKS

Well, it is your last name, Deputy.

Hands on his hips, Ethan paces to the plaques on the wall.

SHERIFF BANKS (CONT'D)

And the only way to make it your own... is to make it your own.

ETHAN

You assume I want it.

Ethan rubs his thumb over the "Little" on his PLAQUE.

SHERIFF BANKS

Oh, here. I got another one for ya.
"On hoof, on wheel, on rail/ Too
fast I flee from home./ Carrying no
lantern/ Toward setting sun I roam.

Ethan turns to Banks. The old man plays an ACE.

SHERIFF BANKS (CONT'D)

...What am I?"

INT. WAYWARD HOTEL, MOLLY'S ROOM - DAY

A WOMAN'S HAND pushes a pencil against rough paper, carefully drawing. A knock at the door. And another. The pencil stops.

ETHAN (O.S.)
C'mon, Molly. You know it's me.

Someone unchains the door for Ethan, but coldly walks away. Ethan steps into the quaint little room, already annoyed.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
I'm stopping by the market.

Nearly silhouetted on a claw foot sofa by the window is the drawing woman. Naive, but haunted, this is MOLLY, 20s, Ethan's sister. She places a cigarette in an ORNATE HOLDER.

He waits... and sighs.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
So, what do you need, Molly?

MOLLY
I'm capable my own damn self. I ain't ashamed. Like you.

She sparks a match, lights the cigarette.

ETHAN
Don't-- why do you do that? Why do ya have to... remind people?

She purses her lips and blows a stream of smoke at him.

Ethan smiles and nods. So be it. He goes for the door.

MOLLY
What do ya think of daddy lettin' yankees dig on his land like that?

Ethan freezes at the doorway.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
I know he writes you. He says so--

SLAM. Ethan's gone. She shakes her head, exhaling more smoke.

INT. WAYWARD MARKET - DAY

Coffee. Sugar. Milk. All are placed on the front counter. An older female hand starts to collect them for a sack.

Ethan stands, sheepish. He takes his hat off. Clears throat.

ETHAN
 ...Evenin', ladies.

Behind the counter, a SHOP WOMAN and her DAUGHTER stay quiet.
 Ethan stops waiting for an answer and keeps his eyes down.

EXT. LITTLE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT

Establishing. The sun sinks beneath the desert.

ETHAN (V.O.)
 I know you save them.

INT. LITTLE HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS

THE ENVELOPES. They're slapped down on the counter. Beyond them, wiping down plates, Grace stiffens, but doesn't turn.

GRACE
 Well... it felt wrong to just throw
 them away. I didn't do it to hurt
 you, you know that.

Ethan leans by the kitchen counter. Toothpick in his mouth. Grace keeps the chores in stride, moving back to the table, but pausing before her husband, looking him in the eye.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 We want a family someday. How can
 we reject the family we have now?

Ethan shakes his head as she moves away.

GRACE (CONT'D)
 C'mon, Ethan. I've heard the
 campfire stories. So what?

ETHAN
 Those stories are why we have to
 live like goddamn lepers.

He collapses in a rocking chair and sighs.

Grace turns, facing her husband. Stalemate. The table lantern flickers. She wrings her towel, voice quieter.

GRACE
 We could... pull up stakes. Maybe?

ETHAN
 I ain't lettin' these stupid hicks
 chase us outta here.

Grace's eyes fall shut. She turns away, disappointed.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
We're just so goddamn far from
everything.

Knocking at the door. Frantic. Ethan and Grace both startle.

Ethan throws open the door and looks down. Cody leans on his knees, sweating, so out of breath he can only point down the hill... back to Wayward.

Ethan and Grace trade a concerned look.

SHERIFF BANKS (V.O.)
Here?

INT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

ARIZONA MAP. Lit by lantern light. A man points down at it.

SILVA (O.S.)
That's how it came over. Runaway on
the Atlantic Pacific, stalled just
northeast of us. All they said.

Ethan, Sheriff Banks, Cody, and SILVA, 50s, the town telegraph operator, stand examining the map. Hands on hips.

ETHAN
No word on passengers? Anything?

Banks shakes his head, hums a "no," and paces away from the map. Ethan turns and watches the old man. Waiting.

Banks turns to Cody. Anxious, Cody straightens his posture.

SHERIFF BANKS
Them boys. See if they want to earn
their guns back.

CODY
You think maybe, I can come--

SHERIFF BANKS
Then tend to the horses.

Swallowing his disappointment, Cody goes. Banks looks over to Ethan.

SHERIFF BANKS (CONT'D)
What do you think?

Jaw firm, Ethan looks back at the map. And is stumped.

EXT. DESERT TRAIN TRACK - DAY

THE TRAIN. Black. Silent. Still. The sun beats down on it.

Banks, Ethan, Silva, and the bounty hunters take the train in, a cautious distance from the tracks. A hawk's screech echoes. Ethan looks...

There's nothing in the windows. Only dark.

ETHAN

Could have all... abandoned, maybe?

Banks is locked on the train. Uneasy. His horse jitters.

TIP TOP

Hello in there!

BLAM! Jennings fires into the air. They all startle. Banks throws a hard look at Tip Top as the shot echoes.

Smirking, Tip Top shrugs. Worth a try.

They dismount and head to different parts of the train. Ethan heads to the back, trading a look with Banks.

SHERIFF BANKS

Got it?

Not very convincingly, Ethan nods. Banks goes with Silva.

Ethan looks up at the back car. BULLET HOLES are shot through a window. Ethan takes out his revolver... and moves forward.

INT. TRAIN, REFRESHMENT CAR - CONTINUOUS

GLASSES. Still filled with booze. Beyond them, Ethan comes to the ajar door, casting a shadow in the harsh sunlight. He pauses, wincing, a stench hitting him in the face. He looks.

There's no one in the car. The counter, the tables, the seats. Everything a mess... left vacant in a hurry.

Pressing a handkerchief to his face, Ethan takes a creaking step forward... DING! He startles, looking down.

He's kicked a SERVICE BELL knocked to the floor. It seems to resonate forever...

Chest heaving, Ethan scans again. Plates overturned. Windows shattered. An open book's pages flap with the wind.

The bell dies... and Ethan backs out of there... not seeing one GLASS with a cloud of BLOOD suspended in the alcohol.

EXT. TRAIN, CONNECTING PLATFORM - CONTINUOUS

Ethan backs out and turns to the car behind him. The door is shut, its window covered in dust.

Eyes narrowing, Ethan gets closer...

He leans in, trying to spy inside the car.

ETHAN POV. Through some of the dust, you can see seats... and PEOPLE still in them. What the hell?

Breathing faster, he wipes the window with his handkerchief.

ETHAN POV. The dust is wiped away... revealing a HORRIBLE FACE just on the other side of the glass! Yellow skin, hollow sockets, mouth gaping!

Ethan cries out, jumping back, catching himself on the platform railing.

WINDOW. The person is dead, a woman, her face petrified and pressed against the door, face decayed and eaten away.

Ethan catches his breath, eyes fixed on the face.

INT. TRAIN, LAST PASSENGER CAR - CONTINUOUS

From the outside, Ethan pushes against the door and the body pressed against it falls away. Wiping more... he peers in...

All the PASSENGERS are rotting skeletons. Melted eye sockets. Bloody spindles for hands. Thrown over one another, clawing to escape. Corroded faces frozen in silent screams.

Ethan can't believe it. He does a double take...

He sees Banks entering the opposite end of the car, handkerchief to his face, shocked and revolted.

Movement. Lying in the aisle is the TICKET MASTER's body... and it begins to LIFT ITSELF UP on shaking, knobby arms.

Its eyes swivel up at Banks, its grotesque mouth opening...

ARRRRRRRRRGHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

The ticket master is up. His intestines spill with his first step, swinging out in front of him. Banks backs up.

ETHAN

Get out! Get outta there! Langston!

Ethan pushes the door, but it's blocked by fallen bodies.

The ticket master's lipless jaw falls open, roar gurgling, arms stretched towards Banks. The sheriff's gun comes out.

Bang! Bang! The shots pass through the ticket master, rocking his gait, but he still staggers towards Banks, cornering him.

Ethan gets through the door, revolver drawn. BANG!

The back of the ticket master's skull explodes. The corpse falls forward, his husk of a hand SCRATCHING BANKS' FOREARM. Banks jumps back. The corpse lays still, leaking foulness.

Banks and Ethan share a surprised look. Banks' face tenses...

He looks at his scratched arm.

EXT. DESERT TRAIN TRACK - DAY

Amid Banks' screams, Ethan and Silva pull the sheriff out of the train and lie him down. The bounty hunters approach.

TIP TOP

The fuck's going on!?

Ethan watches as Banks' arm ROTS BEFORE HIS EYES. Revealing muscle and bone. SIZZLING.

TIP TOP (CONT'D)

Holy Christ, look at that!

ETHAN

Get back! It's catchin'!

Ethan looks and spots a hunting knife on Tip Top's boot. He reaches and yanks it free.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Hold him down! Help me hold him!

Dumbstruck, they all do. Ethan puts the large blade to the crook of Banks' elbow. And grits his teeth.

EXT. ARIZONA LANDSCAPE - DAY

Banks' scream is distant, echoing on the landscape. The company explodes onto the rock and sand, riding full speed.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE BANKS RESIDENCE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

LANTERN. The flame flickers, weak. WHEEZING can be heard.

Ethan, drenched with sweat, sits vigil by a bed.

Banks lies on the bed, arm amputated, feverish. A TOWN WOMAN, 40s, gathers bloody rags. Her harsh eyes flash over to Ethan.

Ethan leans forward to say something. Words fail him.

She storms out, stepping hard. Ethan sits back, at a loss.

SHERIFF BANKS

They-- they'll remember the rotten
deeds... but need good ones.

Ethan leans in, urgent. Banks' points with his only hand.

SHERIFF BANKS (CONT'D)

Whether they know it or-- or not.

His hand drops, weak, right into Ethan's palm...

Leaving the SHERIFF'S STAR in Ethan's hand.

Ethan stares down at the badge. Banks' breathing rattles.

EXT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Hot. Bright. Ethan sits on the porch, Cody nearby. They watch the road. Silva stand before them, hands on his hips.

SILVA

You know the whole town is waiting
for some kind of answer on this...

Ethan just keeps his eye on the town stretch.

SILVA (CONT'D)

So, are you gonna do a single damn--

Ethan leaves. Cody follows. Silva can't believe it.

A carriage pulls up. After a lanky man, ELLIS, 20s, exits carrying medical bags, another man steps out. Stiff. Well-dressed. NATIVE AMERICAN. This is DR. JOHN HOUSTON, 30s.

Ethan sees this and slows his steps. Houston spots him.

HOUSTON

Sheriff.

ETHAN

...Doctor?

Ethan's handshake awkwardly dies mid-offer. Houston briskly blows by him. Holding his hat, Ethan rushes to keep up.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, but we... uh,
telegraphed for a doctor?

HOUSTON
And here I am.

Ethan and Cody trade a confounded look.

ETHAN
...Are you sure?

INT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE, BACK ROOM - DAY

Ethan sits on a table, a tongue depressor in his mouth.

HOUSTON (O.S.)
"All men, created equal." I trust
that's been at least heard of in
this neck of the woods?

Ethan makes a confused sound. Houston removes the depressor.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)
Back east, it has inspired many a
missionary to take pity on orphaned
savages of the "Wild West." Even
put a few of them through school.

Eyes on the floor, Ethan nods, getting it.

ETHAN
I reckon you have to tell that tale
a lot.

HOUSTON
(applying stethoscope)
Only to dispel others. Deep breath.

Ethan does. And again. Again. Houston steps away.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)
Sorry to disappoint you, Sheriff...
but you're fine.

Ethan blows air from his cheeks. Relief.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)
Lucky you caught me just west of
Texas. Now, let's see this train.

ETHAN
No. Banks. We fix him up first.

HOUSTON
I'm afraid Mr. Banks' wound is
mortal, Sheriff. I'm sorry.

Ethan blinks, trying to wrap his head around that.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)
Time is likely a factor.

EXT. DESERT TRAIN TRACK - NIGHT

In darkness, a cluster of lanterns bob up to the train.

INT. TRAIN, LAST PASSENGER CAR - CONTINUOUS

The door bangs open. Ethan enters, surgical mask on. Slow.
Tense. Gun drawn. Houston follows, EYES WIDE above his mask.

All the bodies are still there. The ticket master lies dead.

HOUSTON
Lord... My God! No-- nobody touch
anything in here! Anything!

TIP TOP (O.S.)
Well, thank goodness we got
ourselves a bona fide expert here,
all advisin' like.

Ethan looks back at the bounty hunters. They're all masked
and waiting. Not amused, Ethan gestures "come with me."

INT. THE TRAIN, SECOND PASSENGER/CARGO CAR - NIGHT

Another car. The back is lined with roped up crates and
luggage. Ethan and the bounty hunters enter and search.

All bodies. All rotted out. All chaos. All the same.

ETHAN
All right, boys. What do you see?

They spread out. Ethan lifts his lantern, eyes narrowing.
There are bullet holes in some windows. One in the ceiling.

JENNINGS
This one... he ain't all eaten up.

They look. One dead man lies on the ground, flesh healthy,
shot through the chest. They kneel down to him.

TIP TOP

If I had to put money on it, I'd
say that's Fortunate Dan. The mick.

DAN'S GLOVE. Ethan turns it over. The palm: a CLOVER symbol.

ETHAN

Not so fortunate.

He lifts the lantern and spots a large, prominent crate in the cargo. A medical insignia. Blasted open by a shotgun blast, stained by some kind of liquid that leaked out of it.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

What in God's name happened here?

INT. TRAIN, REFRESHMENT CAR - NIGHT

SERVICE BELL. DIIIIIIING. A boot has tapped it. Houston's boot. He looks around, lantern high, eyes narrow.

The broken glass. The mess. The silence. He turns to leave.

A NOISE. He spins around. Quiet again.

He cranes his neck, leaning at the door... and takes a step inside... and another. CREEEEK.

A rustle behind the COUNTER.

Houston locks on it. Moving closer... closer...

Not daring to breathe, he gets there... and looks over it.

A CORPSE. A barman. Dead. Gray and wet. The bell dies out...

Houston breathes again and... WHOOSH. A FIGURE leaps up, racing out of the car. The doctor goes rigid, gasping.

EXT. DESERT TRAIN TRACK - CONTINUOUS

The figure races into the dark as Ethan exits the train.

HOUSTON (O.S.)

Sheriff! Grab him!

Ethan is after it, lantern bobbing, Houston not far behind. Ethan dives and grabs, he and the figure sliding in the sand.

Houston raises his lantern to see. Ethan rolls over: it's just a CHILD, a boy, 5. He whimpers.

Houston and Ethan look at one another, alarmed.

EXT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The town dark behind it. Only one window is lit.

ETHAN (V.O.)
Can you tell us what happened, son?

INT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE, BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The child lays down on the table, scared, feverish. Houston has his stethoscope on him, Ellis helping, masks on.

HOUSTON
The sheriff asked you a question,
young man.

Houston shines a lantern closer: the boy's VEINS are just pronounced enough to be faintly seen on his throat and neck.

ETHAN
Why isn't he sick?

Ethan leans in the corner, arms crossed, mask on.

HOUSTON
He is. He's feverish.

Houston gently sits the child up. Ellis readies more instruments, his mask bumping his eye as he looks down.

ETHAN
But he-- he ain't all eaten up like
the others. He's still breathin'.

HOUSTON
(to the child)
Can you at least say "ahhh"?

Houston offers a palm to Ellis. Ellis hands over a tongue depressor, but blinks hard. He starts to ADJUST HIS MASK.

Houston goes in with the depressor just as the boy makes a sharp inhale. Houston stands up straight. Another sharp breath in... and the boy SNEEZES, head jerking towards Ellis.

Ethan scoffs. Houston looks at Ellis. HIS MASK IS OFF.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)
Ellis! Mask on!

Ellis breathes in and stops. He shudders. Chokes. Gags.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)
Sheriff... out of the room! Now!

Ellis screams, strangled. His FACE ROTS like Banks' arm.

The child hides behind the table, going under it. Houston grabs Ethan and pushes him out of the room.

INT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ethan stumbles out of the room. Houston follows, frantic.

Houston turns just as Ellis' TERRIBLE FACE lunging at the door, teeth bared. EEEOOARRGH-- SLAM! Houston gets it shut.

Houston puts his back to the door. Ellis throws his weight on the other side, frantic, screaming. BANG. BANG! Ferocious.

ETHAN

What are you doing? Help him! Get out of the fuckin' way!

Houston pushes Ethan back. The banging slows. Weakens.

HOUSTON

No! Nothing can be done now.

Ethan's chest heaves. The banging stops.

ETHAN

The boy... What about the boy!?

Houston makes the sign of the cross. Ethan rips his mask off.

EXT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

NIGHT SKY. The moon and a few lonely stars. Crickets.

HOUSTON (O.S.)

Whatever germ we came across on the train, the boy has it. He's carrying it. And it's contagious.

On the porch, Ethan looks up at the sky. Behind him, Houston addresses the sheriff and bounty hunters.

TIP TOP

"Courageous?"

ETHAN

He means it's catchin'.

HOUSTON

And fast. Like nothing I've ever even read about. My hospital needs to know this. The Surgeon General.

ETHAN

And why would they give a damn about anything way the hell out here? They won't even know where here is.

HOUSTON

What do you think would happen if this was in a populated area? We don't know what spreads it... it could be latent. On our clothes or hair. We need to burn everything we're wearing. Everything that came off the train. To be sure.

ETHAN

(beat, scoffs)

To be sure?

Houston nods. Ethan turns away. Tip Top cackles to himself.

TIP TOP

Then you have a bit of a problem, doc.

Houston turns back to the bounty hunters, eyebrow cocked.

TIP TOP (CONT'D)

Oh, you ain't noticed? All them fancy folk on that train? Not a drop of jewelry on them, not a red cent in their pockets?

Houston frowns, not getting it.

TIP TOP (CONT'D)

That there train... was robbed.

That sinks in for Houston. His mouth hangs open.

ETHAN

Lucky Dan. Who'd he ride with?

Tip top whistles. Jennings curses, slapping his hat.

HISSSSS. The Amigo puts a cigar out ON HIS OWN PALM, the glow of the embers dying out on his solemn face.

THE AMIGO

El Cuervo Loco.

Ethan scoffs. He nods... and kicks a vacant chair and sends it CRASHING. The men are startled. Ethan leaves.

Houston's eyes dart. He's lost.

INT. WAYWARD HOTEL, MOLLY'S ROOM - DAY

PENCIL DRAWINGS. From Molly. Dark birds. Desert settings.

MOLLY (O.S.)
Don't go after him.

Ethan and Molly sit on the bed. Backs to each other.

ETHAN
Everything this doctor is saying...
The things on that damned train...

Silence between them. Molly shakes her head, brow taut.

MOLLY
How are you going to find him?

ETHAN
Considerin' this bastard had you
playin' his whore not two years
back, I was hoping you'd tell me.

Fast footsteps on the hardwood. He looks up and SMACK! His sister slaps him. Hard. He looks away, swallowing the sting.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
It's important, Molly.

Molly stares at him, shoulders heaving.

EXT. WAYWARD TOWN STRETCH - DAY

Ethan climbs up a roofless wagon. In front of him, the RESIDENTS of Wayward stand. No smiles. A lot of crossed arms.

Ethan screws his courage and clears his throat.

ETHAN
I... I don't have to tell you that
Langston Banks was a great man.
Maybe the greatest we're gonna find
'round these parts. And now...
because of the actions of
criminals, we've lost that man.

INSERT CUT: EXT. WAYWARD GRAVESITE - DUSK, crooked crosses and stones. The WHOLE TOWN is there as men lower Banks' coffin. Ethan takes a deep breath. Grace squeezes his hand.

ETHAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And before he passed, despite how
he knew you felt... he made me your
sheriff. And I accepted the charge.

INSERT CUT: EXT. DESERT TRAIN TRACK - NIGHT, The train vomits smoke and flame. With torches, Ethan and Houston watch.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
 And as my first pledge, I aim to
 bring these criminals that took
 away a great man, to justice... And
 I ask now for volunteers. To help--

They're already walking away from Ethan.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
 He'd expect it from you! Expect
 you... to muster some civility...
 And say that this can't stand!

One of the last to leave is Silva. He spits and walks away.

Ethan seethes and watches them go. His eyes fall on one lone man standing in the crowd. It's Cody. He kicks a pebble.

CODY
 I'll help you, Sheriff Little.

Defeated, Ethan nods.

EXT. LITTLE HOMESTEAD - NIGHT

Establishing. Crickets. The dead of night.

GRACE (V.O.)
 It's a long way, Ethan...

INT. LITTLE HOMESTEAD, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ethan and Grace in each others arms, unsmiling.

GRACE
 Chasing a terrible thing.

ETHAN
 This "Mad Crow" has as many yarns
 tangling him up as my father. When
 I bring him in... people will
 notice. It'll wipe our name clean.
 And we get on with life.

GRACE
 But... you don't gotta prove
 nothing, Ethan. You don't have to
 show no one. Please, you don't...

She turns and clings to him. Steely-eyed, he holds her tight.

EXT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Cody stuffs some of his SERIAL BOOKS in his saddle bag.

ETHAN (O.S.)
Y'all are welcome along. Under two conditions.

Ethan paces before the bounty hunters. He gestures, stern.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
One. You do as I say, when I say it. I head this excursion.

Tip Top picks his teeth, barely hearing any of this.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Two. If we even find this Mad Crow, the priority is the germ. Not any "dead or alive" bullshit. Got me?

TIP TOP
Not to worry, Sheriff. I ain't exactly opt'mistic about this here "cursion" with a company of women.

Ethan glances at Molly, who stoically readies her horse. Tip Top notices something behind Ethan. His face drops more.

TIP TOP (CONT'D)
...And children.

Ethan turns and sees Houston approaching... with the child.

ETHAN
What in the hell is this?

HOUSTON
He can't be treated here.

ETHAN
This ain't gonna be no pony ride.

HOUSTON
Under my supervision, the boy's progress will give us an indication of your criminals prognosis if they're also carrying the germ.

Ethan huffs, but the doctor stands his ground. Ethan looks.

The child LOOKS UP AT HIM and squinting in the sun. Cute.

ETHAN
Jesus... Cody! Get the wagon.

Cody goes off. Houston follows the fuming sheriff.

HOUSTON
So where are we heading exactly?

ETHAN
Ask her. My sister, Molly.

Houston and Molly shake. She flashes a smile to the boy.

The boy sidesteps behind Houston, shy.

MOLLY
Good to meet you... But 'fraid I
can't answer that.

ETHAN
Bisbee. You said Bisbee.

MOLLY
A year ago. Adrian keeps moving.

Ethan shoots her a look. She mugs a face back. Siblings.

HOUSTON
Well, who would know?

Jaw set, Ethan puts his hands on his hips.

EXT. BEHIND THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Someone places a CHAIR a few feet from the cell, facing it.

LEFTY (O.S.)
I was uh... sorry to hear about
your sheriff. He was a... straight
shooter, as they say.

The cell. Lefty sits on the one bench, alert.

Ethan sits in the chair. He has a RING OF KEYS.

LEFTY (CONT'D)
Hard to do what a man wants with a
straight shooter hangin' around...

Ethan smiles. Lefty slaps his knee, grabs his boots.

LEFTY (CONT'D)
I knew it! I knew no son of Thomas
Little would be wearin' no star.

ETHAN
The Mad Crow, Lefty. Where is he?

LEFTY

Harper? Ha! Best to let that lie.

Ethan taps the keys on his thigh. They jingle.

LEFTY (CONT'D)

Aw c'mon, now. If he ever heard I--

Ethan gets up to leave.

LEFTY (CONT'D)

No, no, no, wait, wait, wait--
c'mon now. Jesus. All right. Last I
heard he was between Sunshine and
Iron Hook, okay? Now, c'mon.

Lefty gestures. Ethan tosses the keys through the bars.

ETHAN

Mail post. Knock yourself out.

Ethan starts to get up. Lefty's face reddens.

LEFTY

Shoulda known! Cheatin' son of a
bitch! Apple don't fall far from
the fuckin' tree now, DO IT!?

Ethan turns, face hard. He steps up and punches Lefty through the bars... grabs his collar, and pulls him back INTO THE IRON BARS. PANG! Lefty falls... and stays down, groaning.

Breathing hard, Ethan storms off.

EXT. WAYWARD TOWN STRETCH - DAY

The party: Ethan, Cody, and the bounty hunters on horseback, Molly, Houston and the child in a wagon.

Residents look on. They frown. Smirk. There's even a laugh.

Ethan rides on. Cold. Hard. Looking back at no one.

EXT. LITTLE HOMESTEAD - DAY

Ethan's party heads over the land, dark on the desert expanse. Ethan's horse is stopped. He stares back at his HOUSE... and turns his horse away and joins the party.

ON THE PORCH, Grace watches the company become a dot on the horizon. She rests her head on a house post, eyes shutting.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. GRAND CANYON - NIGHT

With no sun, its majesty becomes heavy gloom. The stillness is cut with the distant sound of COUGHING. Weak, it echoes off towering walls, through the gaping abyss...

SPRAK. A match is struck and lights a lantern, revealing the grizzled face of MCGREEVES, 40s. Short black beard. Red handkerchief around his neck. Head tilted, he tries to hear.

MCGREEVES

HARPER!

His call echoes. Lantern over his head, McGreeves steers his horse on the craggy shore of the slow, murmuring river.

MCGREEVES (CONT'D)

Harper! Where are ya!? Ya getting' on all right? ...HARPER!

The coughing stops. McGreeves pauses his horse. A voice sounds. Hoarse. Hissing. Slithering from all directions.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.)

Just famously.

The horse startles. Still not locating the echo's source, McGreeves urges the animal forward.

MCGREEVES

Boys are camped out just a stone's throw. Thought I'd check in on ya--

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.)

No, no, no. No one rests. They ride. Tonight. Get word out.

McGreeves scoffs.

MCGREEVES

Tonight? Why? What are we doing?

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.)

...Gambling.

McGreeves looks up, the light not quite reaching tall pillars of rock hunching down at him, like gargoyles...

WHOOSH! A BLACK HORSE, Harper's horse, explodes from the dark, almost crashing into McGreeves. It dashes away and snuffs McGreeves lantern. He curses and feels his pockets.

MCGREEVES

Well, I don't know, now. Boys are pretty spooked. Those goddamn cars--

The coughing explodes again, closer. McGreeves looks up, but it's just too goddamn dark. He fumbles for his matches.

McGreeves and his horse descend from some rocks into rustling brush... the coughing even louder. It's wet and resonant.

MCGREEVES (CONT'D)

Hey-- Harper. Where are you? C'mon.

And there's gagging. By the water, McGreeves hears splashes.

He hops off his growling horse and heads to the river. He tries another match. SCRATCH... SCRATCH.

MCGREEVES (CONT'D)

'Cause you ain't soundin' so good--

SPRAK! McGreeves lifts the lantern... and startles.

There's a man catching his breath, hands and knees in the river... SURROUNDED BY BUZZARDS. DOZENS OF THEM. Huge, black, they squawk and flap in the light. THEY WAIT.

The man turns to McGreeves. Under the dripping tendrils of his hair, there are no eyes, but circles of opaque goggles. This is ADRIAN "MAD CROW" HARPER, 30s... And his veins are starting to show, JUST LIKE THE CHILD. Still, he smiles.

MAD CROW HARPER

Never better!

McGreeves can only stare. His horse rears and wails.

ETHAN (V.O.)

This "Mad Crow," you've faced him?

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - NIGHT

The company camps out, fire aglow and crackling. Wagon at rest, horses tied up. Darkness all around.

Ethan looks over to the bounty hunters. They drink and smoke.

TIP TOP

Hmm? Uh, no, not exactly. Harper's never had to worry about the law much. Other outlaws though, that's always been, uh... what's the word? "Tempra-dental?"

Ethan starts to correct him, but thinks better of it.

Near the fire, Houston tucks in the shivering child.

Ethan turns to Molly, who sits on the edge of their circle.

ETHAN
Describe him.

Glaring back, she bites her cigarette holder and lights up.

CODY
(going for nickel books)
Sheriff Little? I, uh, brought some
of these here--

ETHAN
Put those away. I want accounts.

Molly flicks some ash, but can feel Ethan's eyes on her.

MOLLY
He's... your size. Maybe a smidgen
shorter. Black hair.

ETHAN
That's it? What kind of horse? What
color is his hat? How many men--

MOLLY
No hat. He wears goggles to keep
the sun out.

TIP TOP
Ten to sixteen men in his outfit.
All of them, ahhhh... manageable.

Tip Top smiles. It's ugly.

ETHAN
Weapons.

JENNINGS
Heard he's got a colt and a sawed-
off under that stately cape of his.
You know, so he can draw with no
one the wiser.

Molly looks away and exhales a stream of smoke.

Ethan goes for her shoulder pack. He pulls out a pad and pencil and offers them to Molly. She looks up at him.

ETHAN
Let's have a look at him.

She stares up at him, stung.

Ethan waits.

Molly grinds her cigarette out and storms away from camp.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Molly-- Molly!

IN THE BRUSH, Ethan catches up with her and spins her around. Her eyes shimmer.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
I brought you along to help!

MOLLY
So you can kill him?

He lets go of her. Crickets. Ethan can't believe it.

ETHAN
Jesus. You-- you're still sweet on him, aren't you? On a murderer.

Her eyes flash, defiant.

MOLLY
He's more than just that.

Ethan scoffs, shaking his head. He storms off.

ETHAN
Yeah. That's what I'm afraid of.

Left alone in the dark, Molly crosses her arms.

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

CLACK! Cody slaps together a Remington PISTOL. Loaded.

ETHAN (O.S.)
And there you go.

On his horse, Cody weighs the gun in his hand, unsure.

Riding beside him, Ethan checks the company traveling behind. Beyond the wagon, the bounty hunters pull up the rear. Tip Top is animated, pointing in the air. Too far to hear.

Ethan squints, suspicious.

CODY (O.S.)
Heavy-- I mean, heavier than--

ETHAN
Than a picture in some book?

Bashful, Cody turns to Ethan, but they trade a smirk.

INSIDE THE WAGON. Molly, with mask and gloves, sits with the child. She sketches. He's despondent, feverish. She notices.

MOLLY

You like to draw, sweetheart?

She turns her paper: a sketch of a horse disturbing a flock of black birds. It's rough, but stark, visceral.

The boy smiles. Molly smiles back.

HOUSTON (O.S.)

Are we being followed, Sheriff?

OUTSIDE. At the wagon reins, Houston points upwards. Ethan turns and extends a TELESCOPE. He gazes into it.

TELESCOPE POV. ON A RIDGE, silhouetted by the sun, are men on horseback. With headdresses. They are THE NAVAJO.

ETHAN

Nah, we're fine. Just Navajo.

Houston looks back up to the ridge, brow knitted. Alarmed.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Probably just makin' sure we ain't moseyin' too close to their neck of woods.

Houston keeps looking up, fear in his face.

THE RIDGE. The Navajo watch. Placid against the sky.

Houston looks down: Ethan offers the telescope. The doctor opens his mouth, but words fail him. He doesn't touch it.

Ethan's confused. A noise. The child coughs and whimpers.

The company slows to a stop. Ethan and Cody wait while Houston and Molly exit the wagon. They look worried.

HOUSTON

The boy's fever is worsening.

ETHAN

Ain't that a damn shock.

HOUSTON

If we're near the Colorado, we should take the opportunity to replenish our water rations...

ETHAN

You know where we are? The river
ain't exactly a cinch to get to.

HOUSTON

And what the human body needs isn't
exactly common in the desert.

Ethan presses his lips together, angry. Houston holds.

Ethan curses and moves away, scanning the terrain. Not far
off the ground opens up and falls hundreds of feet to...

THE GRAND CANYON. Now in the sun, it's impossibly vast,
majestic. Water sparkles at its floor. The horses quicken,
wooden wheels turn.

ETHAN (O.S.)

All right! Let's pick up it up!

EXT. COLORADO RIVER BANK - DAY

A cluster of men and horses by the water. The sun FLASHES
white on something among them. And again.

CHARVEL (O.S.)

Now, I know what yer thinkin' boys.

A MAN'S HAND. Grease smudged. Adorned with vibrant jewelry.
The sun catches a diamond. FLASH.

CHARVEL (CONT'D)

But y'all gonna have to be
gentlemanly about this...

It's CHARVEL's hand, a dirty, spindly man, 20s. Top hat. Full
of women's jewelry, clowning around.

CHARVEL (CONT'D)

If yer fixin' to dance with
purdies belle at this here ball.

He puts out his hand, dainty. Some of the dark, dirty POSSE
laugh on their horses. A hearty bellow from SLEDGE TURNER, a
mountain in overalls, massive hammer strapped to his horse.

MCGREEVES (O.S.)

All right! Let's haul some ass!

McGreeves trots over on his horse as the company gets ready
to leave. Charvel turns and squints.

THE RIVER. A small man, wrapped tightly in black, a dark cape draped over half his body, walks head down, arms limp, through ankle-deep water. Harper. There's sway in his gait.

CHARVEL

It just me or has the boss man been
a bit of an odd stick since A&P?

McGreeves trots over and snatches a large BLACK SACK from Charvel. The contents sparkle. THE TRAIN LOOT.

MCGREEVES

Shut yer fuckin' mouth and mount
up.

Charvel doesn't hear it, staring, with others, at the river.

THE RIVER. Harper stumbles, his steps splashing.

INTERCUT WITH: EXT. COLORADO RIVER RIDGE - CONTINUOUS

The company reaches a ridge. Far below, a steep incline of sand and stone, where THE RIVER begins to cleave the desert.

Pausing, Ethan and the bounty hunters look down.

JENNINGS

Still pretty steep, Sheriff.

Annoyed, Ethan nods... and spots something. He leans.

RIVER BANK. Harper mounts his horse, arms out for balance. SAMPSON, 30s, black, eye-patched, hands him a telescope.

SAMPSON

Wanna gander at this?

TELESCOPE POV. Ethan's company on the ridge. Harper does a shaky scan, but stops. Light catches Ethan's STAR.

MAD CROW HARPER

Sampson, Sampson, Sampson. Where's
my favorite cyclops?

RIVER RIDGE. Cody points. Ethan lifts the telescope.

CODY

Who are they?

They all halt. At the wagon reins, Molly stretches to see.

RIVER BANK. The posse looks up, watching the company...

RIVER RIDGE. ...and Ethan's company stare back. SILENCE.

ETHAN

Wait, that can't be--

RIVER BANK. An echoing CRACK! A puff of smoke.

RIVER RIDGE. ZIP! A bullet rips through the wagon canvas.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Get back! Everyone back!

But they bump into one another. More shots.

A horse is hit in the rump. It rears up, yanking the reins, tipping back the wagon. Molly wraps the reins around her arm.

Houston falls out the back and hits the sand hard.

IN THE WAGON. The child gasps, rocked around inside.

The horses go wild and break their holdings. They push the wheels closer to THE EDGE of the ridge.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Molly... Molly!

Molly strains at the reins. One horse snaps its tugs, bucking and thrashing away from the wagon.

The wheels tilt CLOSER.

BANG! Blood sprays as the other horse is hit in the head...

It falls off the lip of the ridge, PULLING THE WAGON WITH IT.

Ethan and the bounty hunters pull their horses out of the way as momentum takes the wagon OVER THE EDGE!

RIVER BANK. Harper pulls down Sampson's rifle.

Distant, the wagon rolls toward them, kicking up dust.

Harper watches and hums, curious.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Hold on!

RIVER RIDGE. Ethan's horse dives into the incline. Guns out, the bounty hunters follow.

THE WAGON. Molly tumbles inside and reaches for the terrified boy, but they're jostled around too hard. They cry out.

In the wake of dust, Ethan and the bounty hunters are in white-knuckled pursuit, horses sprinting down the incline.

Below, more smoke plumes. Bullets zip by them as they nearly plummet. The lead tears wood and canvas away from the wagon.

Tip Top and the Amigo fire back. They aim through the wagon.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

What are you doing!?

Tip Top veers his horse right against Ethan's.

TIP TOP

Sorry, Sheriff! There's money in
bringin' in criminal bastards,
but... not their sons!

Tip Top aims for Ethan. Ethan pulls back and he and his horse fall and slide to the sand and rock, out of the chase.

Tip Top laughs. Jennings whoops.

A wagon wheel breaks up. Molly and the boy are thrown about.

RIVER BANK. The posse dodges. The wagon hits water. SPLASH!

IN THE WAGON. WATER ROARS and slams into Molly and the child.

Harper tilts on his horse and looks for anyone in the wreckage. Gun shots. Charvel's horse goes wild.

The bounty hunters charge in, guns blazing. The posse swarms and it's a melee. Hooves pound, smoke billows.

McGreeves throws one end of his lasso to Sampson. TWANG! The Amigo and Jennings get clothes-lined. They hit the ground.

Tip Top rides low, keyed up, aiming for the black cape...

Mad Crow trots calmly along. He combs his hair, uninvolved.

Tip Top sweats, steadying his aim. But a SHADOW falls on him.

It's Sledge Turner. A giant swing of his HAMMER crushes into Tip Top's horse. The force brings the animal up... and down.

The bounty hunter falls and scrambles, but McGreeves' lasso catches his neck. He's yanked, choking. Caught.

The chaos ends, the posse trots to a stop. Seething, Tip Top looks. On his horse, Mad Crow looks down at him.

MAD CROW HARPER

Mr. Tip Top, I presume? I wondered
what happened to Mr. Hastings.

One hand on the lasso, Tip Top can't speak.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

Who's gonna wonder what happened to
you?

BANG! Sampson winces as a rip flutters his long coat. He
cries out, the posse becoming alert and look out. More shots.

Up the slope, Ethan ducks behind a rock, revolver smoking.

The posse fires back. Harper shades his goggles to look.

Ethan peeks out, safe. The high ground.

Harper whistles. The posse takes off, the bounty hunters
dragged along with them. Shots echo. And they're gone.

Ethan walks down to the bank, dusty and pissed. Only a few
dead bandits and a stray horse left. He looks to the river.

Molly and the child wade away from the wagon wreckage. She
locks eyes with her brother, stunned.

The child takes her hand. Surprised, she holds it.

Ethan looks along the river bank, a cloud of dust the only
thing left of Harper's posse. The Sheriff holsters his gun.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MESA SPREAD - DAY

ROPES are tied to a man's wrists and ankles.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.)

Now, don't get the impression that
I enjoy doin' this sorta thing...

Ropes are tied around a horse's saddle. The horse jitters.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Truth be told, it's a chore. Doing
dishes is basically what it is.

McGreeves mounts his horse, the ropes secured to it. Not far
off, Sledge Turner does the same, checking his own ropes.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

But what can I say?

Tip Top is on the desert floor. He sweats, panicked. The
ropes are tied to HIS WRISTS AND ANKLES, two ropes secured to
each horse. Harper crouches down to Tip Top.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
I like a clean kitchen.

TIP TOP
C'mon, man! Just shoot me! C'mon!
YOU'VE DONE IT A THOUSAND TIMES!

MAD CROW HARPER
Precisely. Folk have already heard
that one. It's a bore.

Desperate, Tip Top lunges forward, but the ropes go taut and hold him back. McGreeves and Sledge steady their horses.

Harper stands. Hands on his hips.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
Be glad, Mr. Tip Top. Think of all
the schoolyards and campfires and
saloons that your name will be
whispered in now. So very many.

Harper coughs. Tip Top struggles and yells at Harper's feet.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
What more could a man want?

Harper walks away. The rest of his posse wait in the distance. An old bandit stitches up a wincing Sampson...

And Jennings and The Amigo are stripped to their long underwear, hog-tied. Forced to watch, screams muffled.

McGreeves calls out, urging his horse. Sledge does the same.

As Harper leaves, Tip Top's body is jerked stiff behind him.

McGreeves and Sledge drive their horses in opposite directions. The ropes shiver with tension.

Tip Top's screams climax and in a ripping, red-misted SNAP, he's PULLED APART between the horses' tug of war. SPLAT!

Harper never looks back. He reaches his posse and leans against his horse. He spits.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
All right. They got yarns to spin.

Jennings and The Amigo look at each other, terrified, but knives comes down and free their bindings.

On their own, the hunters scramble toward the setting sun.

Harper unscrews a canteen and goes to pour it on his face...

EXT. COLORADO RIVER BRUSH - NIGHT

SPLASH! Shirtless, Ethan wades waist-deep, washes his face.

HOUSTON (O.S.)
What the hell were they thinking!?

Houston stands on shore, hands on his hips. Beyond him, Molly helps the child with a canteen. Cody pokes the fire.

ETHAN
Math, I figure. Countin' coins.

HOUSTON
Math? Here's the math now, Sheriff.
We're chasing a band of murderers
and are now down to only one man
who can even operate a firearm.
(to Cody)
No offense.

Smoldering, Ethan wrings out his shirt.

ETHAN
Sorry our numbers ain't ticklin'
your fancy, Doctor. I ain't exactly
a popular face 'round these parts.

HOUSTON
These bandits have to be examined.
All their possessions burned--

ETHAN
I remember!

Hard stares. Molly and Cody watch, nervous.

HOUSTON
Then let's pray we get an
opportunity to best these men
outside of gunplay.

ETHAN
I'll let you know if I see one.

A distant scream. A man. They stop and listen.

MOLLY
What was that?

CODY
It was that way.

Cody points. Another cry. He's right.

EXT. COLORADO RIVER BANK - CONTINUOUS

A TOP HAT lies in the sand. Not far away, a man struggles to breath, scraping his limbs against the sand. It's Charvel. Shot. Bloody. Dying. He crawls.

ETHAN (O.S.)
Hold it! Hold it there!

Charvel turns to see Ethan, Houston, and Molly approach.

CHARVEL
Aw, shit...

Ethan, Molly, and Houston appear at a careful distance, Ethan with his gun drawn. Molly whispers to her brother.

ETHAN
Your name Charvel?

Charvel signals for one moment as he pulls his pinky from his mouth. He SWALLOWS audibly and catches his breath.

CHARVEL
No-- No, sir! Grover's the name!
World class upholstery... er--
(to Molly)
Hey... don't-- don't I know you?

She turns away and hides from Charvel's sight.

ETHAN
Where's he headed, Charvel? Hey!
Look at me! Where's he headed?

CHARVEL
Or what? Gonna shoot me? Again?

HOUSTON
Are you sick? Are members of your posse sick?

CHARVEL
Well, go on and fuckin' shoot me--

BLAM! Ethan fires over his head. Charvel flinches.

ETHAN
You gonna make me ask again?

CHARVEL
N-north... He p-put the word out...

ETHAN
Word? What word? North where?

Charvel breaks into coughs.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
The doc will fix you up good as
new, Charvel. Just tell us where.

Houston sees Charvel's HANDS: stained with his own blood...
there are clean marks from where JEWELRY was.

HOUSTON
Wait... what was he swallowing?

ETHAN
Talk!

Charvel's head goes back, air rattles out of his throat.

CHARVEL
Gold-Goldstove. Now--now help me...

ETHAN
Goldstove?

CHARVEL
HEEEELLLLLLLLPPPPPPPPP!!!

Eyes bleeding, face decaying, Charvel lurches up and lets out
a horrible SCREECH. The men jump back, Molly screams.

Ethan fires. BANG! Blood sprays. Charvel's body goes limp...
and lies still. The men look at each other.

Gloves on, Houston checks the body, reaching up one sleeve.
He yanks down a stray, blood smeared bracelet and shows it to
Ethan. A woman's bracelet. They look at one another. Bingo.

SPRAK! A MATCH is struck, the FLAME sparks and dances.

MOLLY (O.S.)
What-- what in hell was that!?

Houston tosses the match and the corpse catches fire.
Satisfied, he leaves. Ethan watches. Molly's at a loss.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
Ethan, what was wrong with him!?

Ethan follows the doctor. Molly hesitates, still shocked.

MOLLY (CONT'D)
...Was that what was on the train!?

Charvel's corroded face blackens and blisters. FLAMES.

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE:

MAP. Ethan's hand traces a line to "Goldstove."

MOLLY (V.O.)
We shouldn't push it further,
Ethan. This is a mistake.

THE GOLDSTOVE SALOON. Huge and rustic, with lodging. Behind a bar, below an American flag, an ELDERLY BARTENDER turns to see Harper slowly leading his gang to the counter.

Under the bar, the bartender edges for a SHOTGUN.

MOLLY (V.O.)
I know Adrian.

Sweating, the bartender draws the long barrel.

MOLLY (V.O.)
He ain't just gonna put his hands
in the air. He won't.

But Harper doesn't react, doesn't draw back. Steady, he just brings a HANDKERCHIEF to his mouth.

ETHAN (V.O.)
Ain't countin' on that. But the doc
says we gotta snuff this germ out.

THE WAGON. NIGHT. The child has a HANDKERCHIEF pressed to his own face by Houston as a coughing fit rocks his tiny frame.

MOLLY (V.O.)
And then what? We snuff out the
little one, too?

Houston shoots a worried look over the Molly.

ETHAN (V.O.)
Jesus, Molly-- I don't know!

THE SALOON. Confused, the bartender's eyes dart. Why won't Harper draw? RED MIST bursts. The bartender's shot. He falls.

But where's the gun? When Harper throws off his cape, there's a puff of smoke from the PISTOL he's had drawn the whole time. Behind him, the posse's amused.

ETHAN (V.O.)
Only certain thing right now is
that Harper's days are numbered...

PRAIRIE. DAY. Ethan shows Cody how to aim at some cans sitting on a weathered fence. The gun flashes. Misses.

ETHAN (V.O.)
 And I'm draggin' his sorry ass to
 Wayward, where everyone can see...

TELESCOPE POV. Front of a SALOON. Sledge Turner tosses out the bartender tied up with the US flag. Harper saunters after them, gun dangling in his hand. The posse circles, excited.

ETHAN (V.O.)
 And I'm gonna hang him. Whether you
 like it or not.

PRAIRIE. Gun report and CLANG! Cody hits a target.

TELESCOPE POV. Harper kills the bartender. BLAM! It echoes.

On a ROCKY RIDGE, Molly pulls the TELESCOPE down and looks to her brother beside her. She's scared. Ethan isn't.

EXT. GOLDSTOVE TOWN STRETCH - DAY

Every door, every window is shut. Not a person in sight, a well-to-do town scared silent. Off their horses, the company keeps low. They duck between buildings and sneak closer to THE SALOON: Huge and looming, the town's centerpiece.

Ethan leads the way, gun out, rest of the company following. The sheriff rests behind some barrels and signals to stop. He turns to them. There's a noise. They all hear it.

They peek up, seeing a large group of weathered, dirty MEN ride down the stretch, almost three dozen strong.

Molly's eyes squint, Cody's go wide. He sees a fat, black-bearded man, his skin flecked with scars, monocle deep in a cavernous eye. This is SAXON LAZAR, 40s, notorious bandit.

CODY
 Saxon Lazar!

Ethan pulls Cody down, finger to his lips.

CODY (CONT'D)
 Big as life! Swore I seen James
 Redcoat, too! Whole mess of 'em!

MOLLY
 That doesn't make sense. Lazar
 hates Adrian. Adrian gave 'em those
 scars. None of them like Adrian.

Ethan's eyes narrow. What the hell is going on?

Full of leers and scowls, criminal gangs arrive at...

EXT. GOLDSTOVE SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Lazar and the gangs stop, taking in Harper's bandits and Sledge Turner. No one speaks, no one backs down.

SAXON LAZAR

Well, well, Mr. Sledge Turner.
Pleasure's mine, I'm sure. May I be
as bold as to wager your man
McGreeves is yonder?

Sledge smirks.

HIDDEN NEARBY. Only two buildings off, the company presses against the side of a general store. At the end of their line, the child looks around and sees a RAVEN land by a nearby porch... and then fly off.

ETHAN

Cody, you come with me.

MOLLY

What are you going to do?

ETHAN

Get a closer look. Molly, stay back
with the doc and--

Ethan shuts up and looks past all of them. They all turn.

The child is gone.

INT. GOLDSTOVE SALOON - CONTINUOUS

DARTBOARD. One dart just misses the bullseye. Then another.

MCGREEVES (O.S.)

Harper? Harper.

Harper pauses with the final dart, eyes still on the board.

MCGREEVES (CONT'D)

They're all about to come in. Your
"guest of honor"? He ain't shown.

Harper waits... and overhands the last dart. THUNK. Bullseye.

Lazar and all the gangs filter in. Lazar freezes, hand on his gun at the sight of Harper.

SAXON LAZAR

I knew it! A goddamn setup!

He glares at McGreeves, who has a gun out and a smug smile.

MAD CROW HARPER

Come one, come all. Welcome to the world famous Goldstove Saloon. The bar is open, the rooms are vacant, and the skirt is hot to trot.

A rugged Brit with a bandaged face, JAMES REDCOAT, speaks up.

JAMES REDCOAT

If you'd be so kind, Adrian, to tell us what the bloody hell is going on? McGreeves, he spreads the word there's a score to split... and that you're dead?

MAD CROW HARPER

Oh, that's true. Both true.

Lazar seethes, fist white-knuckled around his pistol.

EXT. BEHIND THE GOLDSTOVE SALOON - CONTINUOUS

The child follows the raven to the back of the building. There are muffled voices from inside. The child hears them.

The crow flies off. The boy stares at an ajar door.

INT. GOLDSTOVE SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Harper with Lazar and the gangs.

MAD CROW HARPER

I'm sure word's reached you that I recently profited on the A&P. And I thought what a sportin' opportunity to bury the hatchet with some of my distinguished contemporaries...

BEHIND THE BAR, the child crawls to the edge and listens.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

...and spread the wealth.

Some of the bandits look around, suspicious.

SAXON LAZAR

And I'm Jesus of fuckin' Nazareth.

MAD CROW HARPER

Well, it ain't exactly a handout.
(knocks on card table)
Everyone gets the same deal.

Another posse leader, Leadface, wears a metal mask and rifles strapped to his back. With a raspy voice, he speaks up.

LEADFACE

Don't fuck with us, Harper...

SAXON LAZAR

Do you really expect us to believe your hootenanny bullshit? Poker!?

Smiling, Harper reaches over the bar and grabs a bottle. The boy peeks over the counter as Harper steps away.

MAD CROW HARPER

Gentlemen! Are we not professionals here? We all only stand to profit. And besides...

From the rafters, Harper's bandits rise up, guns out. Ambush.

McGreeves smiles, gun still at his side. Sledge Turner appears at the door. The gangs are caught. Trapped.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

I really do insist.

The bandits swap unsure, resigned looks. Guns go away... and Lazar LAUGHS. Chuckles. Guffaws. Cackles with impotent rage.

THE BAR. Harper reaches for more bottles. Unseen below, flush against the bar, Ethan holds the boy, rag over the boy's mouth, neither daring to move an inch. Lazar's laugh carries.

INT. GOLDSTOVE INN ROOM - DAY

Small and modest. Houston checks the child on the bed.

ETHAN (O.S.)

You snuck away from us, young man. You can't do that, you hear?

Ethan crouches down beside Houston.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

But you need to tell us what you heard. Okay, little buddy? C'mon.

HOUSTON

Do you hear the sheriff, young man?

The thermometer trembles in the boy's mouth.

ETHAN

C'mon now, goddammit. Talk!

Frightened, the boy's eyes find Molly.

Molly sighs, grabs her shoulder pack, and pushes the men aside. She kneels to the boy and puts the pad in his lap.

MOLLY

Can you draw for me, sweetheart?

She puts a bit of charcoal in his hand, gentle. Sniffling, he hesitates, but takes it. The adults stand over him, riveted.

THE PAPER. Little fingers push the charcoal. Rectangles.

ETHAN

Houses... are they houses?

Hearts are drawn in one rectangle. Spades in another.

MOLLY

Cards. Are they cards, honey?

The boy looks up and pokes the drawing. Correct.

ETHAN

Cards. Poker? Does he gamble?

MOLLY

Darts maybe. But he hates poker.

ETHAN

Why?

Molly smiles, a memory hitting her.

MOLLY

Because he's terrible at it.

They're all stumped. The clock ticks. Ethan throws his hat.

ETHAN

Then fuckin' WHY!?

Houston's eyes sharpen.

HOUSTON

He wants to lose.

(beat)

The money. The jewelry. Everything contaminated from the train. He wants to spread the germ.

They take that in. Molly's covers her mouth. Houston's right.

ETHAN

Quite an eye for suitors, Mol.

HOUSTON

We have to stop him. Right now!

ETHAN

Well be my guest, Doctor. I'm sure they're all dyin' down there to turn their head and cough for ya.

(scoffs)

Poker. I ain't never even played.

CODY (O.S.)

I have... a mite.

They all look at Cody. He shrinks in his seat.

CODY (CONT'D)

Sheriff-- Sheriff Banks taught me.

Houston gestures to Cody. Ethan laughs.

ETHAN

So what? He can ask 'em all for an autograph? I ain't sittin' Cody down to play cards with a bunch of murderers.

HOUSTON

Maybe... somehow you could sit in? And win the train valuables back.

MOLLY

Ethan! If you told them who daddy is, I bet they'd let you!

Ethan shoots a glare at Molly. That'd be a "no."

HOUSTON

Sheriff, we agreed we needed a chance to beat these man outside of gunfire. Play cards with them.

They all arch their eyebrows at Ethan, hopeful.

Ethan shuts his eyes. Goddammit.

ETHAN

All right. Any of these bastards hide their face?

INT. GOLDSTOVE SALOON, LEADFACE'S LODGE - DAY

METAL MASK. Tarnished steel. A cigar burns in its mouth before smoke drifts out of the dark, crooked recesses of the eyes and nose. This is the bandit LEADFACE. A woman giggles.

REDHEAD PROSTITUTE (O.S.)
Time to lose the disguise, bronco.

He lies face up in bed as tangled sheets shift around him. More laughing as two barely clothed PROSTITUTES appear. A brunette lies beside him, finger grazing his chest, and a redhead straddles his stomach. They're all smiles.

REDHEAD PROSTITUTE (CONT'D)
It's high time we girls got paid.

Irregular eyes narrow at her beneath the jagged metal. His hand comes up and grabs the redhead's hair. She gasps.

LEADFACE
You wanna keep your lunch down...
you'll deal with it, buttercup.

There's a soft knock at the door. They look.

LEADFACE (CONT'D)
Who is it!?

Leadface opens the door. A PISTOL points at his face. CLICK.

ETHAN (O.S.)
Slow.

Leadface steps back and reveals Ethan pointing the gun. He enters, hat low, face smudged with dirt. The women jump back.

Cody and Houston enter, disguised the same way, both with guns. Houston shuts the door.

LEADFACE
What in the hell--

ETHAN
Shut up. Don't move. Ladies?

The women put their hands up. Rope in hand, Houston moves towards them.

Leadface scoffs and sits in a rocking chair.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Cody. Cover me.

Ethan goes in to search the jacket hanging on the back of Leadface's chair. Cody is awe-struck. Leadface notices.

LEADFACE
See something you like, hayseed?

Ethan looks back at Cody, who doesn't have his gun raised.

ETHAN

Cody! Point the goddamn--

HOUSTON

Sheriff!

Leadface reaches for his jacket and produces a pistol. Ethan spins and connects the butt of his gun to the mask just in time. Metal meets metal...

BONG! Leadface crumples to the floor. The brunette gasps.

They all breathe heavy. Leadface is out cold. Close call.

Ethan turns to the shocked Cody... and pins him to the wall.

ETHAN

How many times!? How many times do I have to tell you that this ain't one of your goddamn sissy fairy tales! DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME!?

Cody is scared stiff. Furious, Ethan lets go. Cody tumbles to the floor, shaken. He can't bear to lift his head, ashamed.

INT. GOLDSTOVE INN ROOM - DAY

DECK OF CARDS. By lantern light, yellowed and worn. Cody's hands shuffle. In the distance, thunder booms.

HOUSTON (O.S.)

You said you know Morse Code?

Ethan puts on Leadface's heavy coat. Molly helps him. Houston and Cody sit and watch at a desk.

ETHAN

Mostly.

HOUSTON

Good. I can sit with Cody at the bar and translate for both of you. That way, you hold the cards... but Cody plays. You'll just have to signal us. Tap your glass?

ETHAN

No. No, too obvious.

HOUSTON

Your foot, then. "Q" for queen, "S" for spades, and so on? Blunt taps for numerals. But quick.

ETHAN

All right, Jesus. Slow down.

MOLLY

This ain't gonna work. Ethan. Just tell them who daddy is and--

ETHAN

I said NO, GODDAMMIT!

Everyone's jolted. The boy's courage fails. He cries.

Molly scowls at Ethan and goes to the boy.

Ethan sighs, regretful, and looks down at the mask.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

It'll have to work this way. This is our best shot.

He presses the mask to his face. Jagged, it hurts. Grunting, he gets it on, the first breath a wheeze. He's a dead ringer.

They all take him in. Lightning FLASHES on the metal face.

ETHAN (AS LEADFACE) (CONT'D)

We have to win.

They stare at Ethan's costume. BONG! A clock tolls.

INT. GOLDSTOVE SALOON - NIGHT

GRANDFATHER CLOCK. It strikes ten. BONG!

The doors swing open and a disguised Ethan enters, mask on. Houston and Cody shuffle in, dirty with hats down.

They push through a packed, hushed crowd of filthy criminals and prostitutes, all of them staring, leering. BONG!

Cody can't help but look up, wide-eyed. Sampson and Sledge smile at him. Frightened, he looks back down.

Ethan reaches the center of the crowd. There, at a table, Harper waits, hacking into a handkerchief as McGreeves shuffles next to him. Harper looks up and sees Ethan. BONG!

Ethan holds a stare, testing the disguise...

Under the table, Harper kicks out a chair for "Leadface."

Ethan flinches... but breathes again. He takes the seat.

James Redcoat sits, tea saucer in hand. Beside him is THE HUN, a tiny Asian, pipe lit, his bandits seated close.

Looming high, Lazar downs another shot. BONG!

Silence. The clock is still. Five players. Six chairs.

SAXON LAZAR

Whaddya say, Harper? Wanna slit our throats now... or after you've emptied our pockets?

Harper smiles, big black lenses over his face... and drops the BLACK SACK to the table. WHUMP! The train loot.

MAD CROW HARPER

The game, gentlemen, is five card.

Ethan steps his boot out, showing it to THE BAR, where Houston can see it. The doctor nods. He takes a stool, ready.

McGreeves stands as Harper deals. Cards slide on wood.

ETHAN'S POV. In the mask, his breath is loud through the face slits. He catches his cards with his clumsy, gloved hands. He looks at them: Pair of 7s and garbage.

UNDER THE TABLE, Ethan's foot taps.

The first round of betting. Redcoat folds and groans.

JAMES REDCOAT

Rubbish. Leady, you remember the last time we played? That dealer?

Dropping his bet, Ethan tenses. His eyes shift to the bar.

THE BAR. Cody speaks softly to Houston... and the Doctor discreetly taps the top of this glass. Instructions.

JAMES REDCOAT (CONT'D)

Jesus, what was his name? "Anton?"

Harper points to Ethan: How many cards?

ETHAN'S POV. His eyes dart: His hand. Houston's signals. The pot. Redcoat. Harper. His breath rattles... and he folds.

THE BAR. Houston sighs. Cody can't believe it.

CODY

Wait-- he folded after he bet?

THE TABLE. Ethan slumps, failure already creeping in.

JAMES REDCOAT
Leadface, you remember it! Christ--

Ethan is suddenly up over the table. He leans on the barrel of his pistol. The entire saloon jumps. Guns click.

ETHAN (AS LEADFACE)
WOULD YOU SHUT YOUR FUCKIN' MOUTH,
YOU GODDAMN LIMEY PIECE OF SHIT!?

Ethan freezes, realizing there are two dozen guns on him.

ETHAN (AS LEADFACE) (CONT'D)
I-I am trying. To win. Some money.

Houston and Cody watch, mouths agape. The whole saloon waits. Leaning back, Redcoat offers his palm, unruffled.

JAMES REDCOAT
Fair enough, mate.

Silence... and Ethan sinks back in his chair. Guns go away.

MAD CROW HARPER
Sure do appreciate us all comin'
together like this. To relax.

Ethan settles in, breathless... and waits for the next hand.

INT. GOLDSTOVE SALOON - LATER

THE GAME. Lazar reveals his hand. Catcalls in the crowd.

Ethan throws his cards down. Lazar pulls in his winnings.

THE BAR. Houston and Cody turn back to their drinks, sullen.

The game goes on. Harper collects cards. The Hun packs his pipe. James Redcoat motions for more drinks.

JAMES REDCOAT
I'd offer ta sell ya a halfway
decent hand, Leadface... if I
thought you could afford it.

There are laughs and giggles in the crowd. Ethan looks to his cash. Barely enough for one more hand.

Harper deals and bets go in. Ethan takes his cards...

And taps his boot UNDER THE TABLE.

THE BAR. Houston whispers. Cody counts on his fingers.

THE TABLE. Lazar folds, his hateful eyes fall on Harper.

SAXON LAZAR
Havin' fun yet, Harper? Smilin'
there with your sarsaparilla?

James' tongue clicks. And he goes ALL IN.

JAMES REDCOAT
Sorry to do this, gents...

THE BAR. Houston grabs his hair. Cody bites his lip.

HOUSTON
It's not worth chasing the
straight. Let's fold.

CODY
No, drop the queen and the deuce.

THE TABLE. Hesitating, Ethan GOES ALL IN. Harper smiles and MEETS THE BET. More train loot is pushed in.

Leaning towards Harper, Saxon pulls down his collar and reveals half a neck full of speckled SCARS. Bird shot.

SAXON LAZAR
You remember these, Harper? Huh?
You think I'm just gonna forget
about 'em? And what you did?

Ethan drops two, draws two. His hands shake.

THE BAR. Houston waits... and slaps his hat against the bar.

HOUSTON
Two and Jack. No straight. We're
done.

THE TABLE. The Hun folds. James Redcoat checks. As does Ethan, helpless, already slumped in defeat.

Harper checks his cards: FULL HOUSE. He whistles and FOLDS.

With a confident smile, Redcoat shows: THREE ACES.

THE BAR. Cody leans to the doctor, his whisper urgent.

CODY
I wasn't goin' for no straight.
What are the suits?

THE TABLE. Disgusted, Ethan shows his hand... and the crowd GOES NUTS. Ethan has a DIAMOND FLUSH. He's won!

JAMES REDCOAT
Hell and damnation!

Dumbfounded, Ethan takes in his winnings. He's all thumbs.

THE BAR. Houston slaps Cody on the back. Cody smiles.

THE TABLE. Lazar leans towards Harper's ear, grinning.

SAXON LAZAR
Cards don't change what happened. I
know it. And you know it.

Harper doesn't look at Lazar... but reaches out and snatches
Ethan's wrist. Ethan freezes.

ETHAN'S POV. Harper looks into the mask, clammy skin showing
veins. A slow SMILE bends on his face.

MAD CROW HARPER
Congrats. On the luck turning.

Ethan breathes heavy. He manages a nod. Harper lets go. Ethan
pulls in the last of his winnings.

Locked on Harper, Lazar seethes and downs another shot.

INT. GOLDSTOVE SALOON - LATER/NIGHT

Ethan lays out his hand. Up over the table, the Hun bangs his
fist and curses in Chinese. The crowd groans and hollers.

THE BAR. Houston pumps his fist and hides it from a BARKEEP.

Ethan, now with a PILE OF LOOT in front of him, reaches for
the winnings. He's WINNING. He looks and does a double take.

Harper's stares right at him, totally still. CLUNK. McGreeves
sets a stool behind Ethan and sits, arms crossed.

Ethan slowly pulls the winnings in, eyes down... Guns cock
again. Weapons are drawn. People jump, shuffle, yell.

MCGREEVES (O.S.)
You don't want to do that, partner.

Bracing himself... Ethan looks up.

A Chinese bandit has his hand on the only EMPTY CHAIR at the
card table. He's frozen, all of Harper's posse's guns on him.

MCGREEVES (CONT'D)
Someone tell this monkey that
seat's taken.

JAMES REDCOAT

Are we not all accounted for?

The Chinese bandit backs away. The CHAIR stays empty.

MCGREEVES (O.S.)

Saved for guest of honor. And if he shows his ass, we don't want him to think there ain't no place for it.

Glances around the table. Murmurs in the crowd.

MCGREEVES (CONT'D)

...Thomas Little.

Ethan FREEZES. Under the mask, his eyes bulge.

Slamming another shot, Saxon almost spit-takes and bursts out laughing. All eyes go to him as he tries to catch his breath.

SAXON LAZAR

You-- you think that Tommy fuckin' Little is gonna show up for your pissant little score!? You-- you--

Lazar can't even finish.

Harper just keeps shuffling cards.

SAXON LAZAR (CONT'D)

I rode with that bastard while the lot of ya were suckin' ya momma's tits! Play cards with you? He'd skin y'all alive for even askin'!

MCGREEVES

What are you going to do, Saxon? Tell us a bunch a big ol' scary Thomas Little stories?

Ethan's startled by the cards dealt to him. He picks them up.

SAXON LAZAR

Then I'll tell you all one ya ain't never heard! I betcha didn't even know that his last name wasn't even "Little," did ya?

Harper bets big. Distracted, Ethan looks and MEETS THE BET.

THE BAR. Watching, Houston and Cody become concerned.

THE TABLE. The Hun folds. Harper and Ethan trade stares...

It's a face off.

SAXON LAZAR (CONT'D)

We got wind of this Wyoming preacher who took Ole Blackie Smith's last confession.

(shows length with hands)

And Tommy, he-- he always had that humdinger of a knife. He got that thing hot, so hot it was glowin'! And he steer branded that padre until he spat where Blackie stowed away his final score. Some pissant little rancher's place...

Sweat pouring under the mask, Ethan grabs his new cards.

SAXON LAZAR (CONT'D)

...And Tommy burned it. The house, everything, until he found the loot. And then he shot the rancher and his wife, leaving this one little boy, not yea high...

INSERT CUT: EXT. BURNING HOUSE - Against the flames a silhouette of a SMALL BOY stands.

Ethan shakes away the vision. He checks.

Harper goes ALL IN.

SAXON LAZAR (CONT'D)

So the padre's all "You'll leave this child haunted with this memory of his slain family? Don't you have any compassion!? Any at all!?"

Ethan sees Harper's stare on him. Harper points a gloved finger at "Leadface". Ethan's turn. Bet or fold.

Rattled, Ethan checks his hand and the pot. He goes ALL IN.

THE BAR. Cody's mouth falls open. Houston sits up.

HOUSTON

Whoa, what are you doing, Sheriff?

THE TABLE. Lazar milks every word, proud of himself.

INSERT CUT: EXT. BURNING HOUSE - The monstrous, shadowy frame of THOMAS LITTLE turns his gun on the SMALL BOY... bang!

SAXON LAZAR (V.O.)

Tommy turns and BLAM, pops the kid. Like he was nothing...

(beat)

And he goes: "A little."

Ethan is paralyzed, horrified. Impatient, Harper pulls at Ethan's hand and reveals the cards: two 8s.

SAXON LAZAR

(laughing)

A little! So-- so that's what we called him! Bet ya never heard that one! Never!

MAD CROW HARPER

One of my very favorite yarns. And Mr. Leadface... I believe I'll have all of that back now.

Harper reveals his hand: THREE DEUCES. The crowd gasps.

Ethan holds his breath, stunned. He's lost.

THE BAR. Houston covers his eyes. Cody is frozen. Harper's won all his contaminated loot back.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

Tall tales... still bringin' worthy men low.

Coughing, Harper reaches for the pot.

SAXON LAZAR

You hold it right the fuck there.

A hush falls. All eyes on the red-eyed, slouched Lazar.

SAXON LAZAR (CONT'D)

I've been watching you sittin' there, smilin', and foldin' winning hands all night. And now you win everything back in one hand?

Inside the mask, Ethan's eyes dart back and forth. Uh oh.

SAXON LAZAR (CONT'D)

I can't make heads or tails about how you're going about it... but I know a swindle when I see it.

MCGREEVES

And how in fuck would you know that if you weren't cheatin' yourself?

Lazar reaches and grabs the cards in front of Harper. The whole saloon jumps. McGreeves stands.

Lazar moves the cards to where Harper's been holding his all night. They're all clearly MIRRORRED IN HIS GOGGLES. There are whistles and murmurs in the crowd.

Lazar's bandits are up, guns drawn. Other guns come out, metal rattling. McGreeves snarls, hand on his holster.

Lazar stands and puts FRENCH DUELING PISTOL in Harper's face.

At THE BAR, Cody is starstruck.

CODY

It is a dueling pistol...

THE TABLE.

SAXON LAZAR

Now, I been carryin' this one
bullet. One. For you, you
slitherin', spineless cheat. I
don't care how many die here. Don't
care if I do! But I will be God
damned if you fuckin' don't.

Harper doesn't flinch. A prostitute screams bloody murder...

All heads turn the to bottom of the stairs where a shirtless, unmasked LEADFACE appears. Mangled, caved-in face drooling with rage, a rifle in each hand, severed ropes hanging.

LEADFACE

Where's that son of a bitch!?

THE BAR. Houston and Cody look at each other. Oh shit.

All eyes fall on Ethan, and more guns come out.

Harper pounces and grabs Lazar's pistol, blocking the hammer.

He opens wide and puts the barrel to the back of his throat... and VOMITS across the table, all over Lazar's face.

Lazar reels backwards and screams.

BANG! Leadface fires.

Ethan dives to the floor. Redcoat topples, shot. Pop pop pop! More gunfire. People dive, scramble. Lazar screams.

Harper watches, black liquid leaking out of his mouth. Happy.

INT. GOLDSTOVE INN ROOM - NIGHT

The child lies peaceful in bed. Molly paces and smokes. A distant CRACK. She spins around.

She rushes to the window and looks across the Goldstove stretch to the saloon. More noise. Gunfire.

INT. GOLDSTOVE SALOON - NIGHT

Prostitutes' shrill screams are drowned by gunshots as the saloon fills with smoke, blood, and cries. Pure mayhem.

Ethan pushes the poker table on its side for cover.

Leadface charges and fires into the table.

Harper tips back in his chair and shoots Leadface down... and casts an interested eye on Ethan.

Saxon Lazar claws at himself and rips off his own blistering face, infected. After a wounded howl from his bloody mouth, he thrashes, taking out two bandits. Wild, rabid.

Houston pulls Cody down to the floor and searches.

The BLACK SACK. Spilled to the floor. Twenty feet off.

Houston crawls towards it, leaving Cody plugging his ears.

Fuming, the Hun yanks the darts from the dartboard above his head and lunges at Harper, plunging the fist full of metal into Harper's shoulder. Harper is bent over.

McGreeves aims, pulls, and blows a hole in the Hun's throat.

Wincing, Harper pulls the darts from his shoulder, the tips DRIPPING WITH BLOOD. And his wince arcs into a smile.

Crouched not far from Harper's feet, Ethan sees this.

ETHAN

No!

Ethan lunges, but is intercepted by someone else and driven hard into THE BAR. Ethan looks to see the snarling, eye-patched face of Sampson. He gets his hands on Ethan's throat.

SAMPSON

Let me guess. You're the one who
shot me, aren't ya?

Ethan writhes and gasps for air. Sampson grips tighter.

SAMPSON (CONT'D)

I got an eye for these things...

Ethan crashes a bottle in Sampson's face, sending the bandit backwards, soaked. Ethan gets back on his feet.

IN THE CROWD, Harper throws, sticking men with the darts...

The third lands in the jugular of one gun-toter. He winces, holds his neck... and opens bleeding, animal eyes. RAAAA!!!

More stricken begin to thrash and scream as the germ spreads in the crowd. Blood splashes, smoke billows.

Houston crawls and grabs the black sack just as WHAM! a SLEDGEHAMMER caves in the floor where it rested.

Houston looks up to see Sledge Turner leaning into his hammer, teeth gritted. With a growl, he backhands the doctor, sending him flying, and pries the hammer from the floor.

THE BAR. Reeling back, Sampson draws as Ethan does. Both fire, frantic. In twin plumes of smoke, they both miss.

Sampson fires more. Ethan dodges and dives behind the bar.

All smiles, Sampson slides a LONG BAYONET from his belt.

THE CROWD. Houston is thrown hard against the wall.

Sledge looms over him and brings his hammer high. BANG! A chair breaks over his back. He doesn't flinch, but turns...

A sheepish Cody stands, splintered chair in his hands. Sledge steps once and prods Cody down with the hammer's handle.

Sledge turns back to Houston just in time to see the doctor dive through a window, black sack in hand. Glass crashes.

EXT. GOLDSTOVE SALOON, SIDE ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Houston crumbles to the ground and rolls to a stop. Already crossing the town stretch, Molly sees him.

MOLLY

Doctor!

She helps him up, glass shards fall from his coat. He grunts.

HOUSTON

(re: sack)

Keep away from this...

MOLLY

Where's Ethan? Did he kill Adrian!?

SMASH! The piano comes through the side of the saloon. The music tones tinkle and groan. Molly and Houston turn and see Sledge Turner come through after the piano. He searches.

Houston and Molly scramble away. Sledge stomps after them.

INT. GOLDSTOVE SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Sampson charges THE BAR, rifle and bayonet out, firing.

Behind the bar, Ethan ducks. Bullets ricochet around him.

Sampson storms over the bar, blade out. Ethan leaps up and pulls the bayonet past him, throwing his weight...

BONG! Headbutt. Ethan's mask crushes into Sampson's. The criminal flies backwards, face squirting blood.

Sampson falls into a cluster of stricken bandits. Ethan watches as they claw and bite, tearing Sampson apart. Sampson screams. BLOOD ERUPTS from his body. AAAHHHHH!!!

On the bar, Ethan tears off the mask and gasps for air. He grabs a lantern at the end of the bar and hurls it.

It shatters on Sampson's liquor-soaked body. He and the infected bandits go up in FLAMES.

The fire spreads body to body. Ethan watches the whole saloon in horror. A flaming, stricken bandit crashes to his feet!

It reaches for Ethan and shrieks "help!" Its jaw falls off.

Blam! Ethan shoots it back. He scans, panicked.

Harper climbs over a railing toward a broken window. He throws his cape and looks back, pistol out.

Saxon Lazar turns to Harper, his face skeletal, eyes melting. His rotting larynx vibrates with a hateful bellow. BLAM! Harper fires and blows Lazar in half.

Satisfied, Harper waves away the smoke from his barrel and escapes.

Ethan leaps after him, table to table, dodging thrashing hands and kicking over more lanterns. Fire roars.

The chaos wanes and the saloon goes up in smoke and flame.

INT. GOLDSTOVE UNFINISHED BUILDING - NIGHT

Sledge Turner chases Houston and Molly into some carpentry framework, a maze of fresh, pale lumber. Houston and Molly crouch and hop over diagonal supports.

Houston trips and falls. Sledge brings down the hammer and smashes a support. Houston throws the sack to Molly.

Molly catches the bad and sidesteps, ready for Sledge's approach.

Turner kicks Houston down and turns to Molly. He swipes with the hammer. More lumber splinters.

Molly tosses the sack over Sledge and into Houston's hands.

Growling, Sledge turns and swings again. More wood SNAPS!

EXT. BEHIND THE GOLDSTOVE SALOON - NIGHT

Harper staggers, handkerchief to his mouth as he makes his way from the smoke and screams of the saloon.

CODY (O.S.)
Hold it right there! And-and drop
your guns!

Harper stops and turns to see...

CODY. Pistol pointed. He shakes.

Harper scoffs and waves his white handkerchief. Dainty. He wobbles his knees, mocking, and, pinky up, drops his black revolver to the sand. THUNK.

CODY (CONT'D)
All of them. I-- I know you have
more. In your cape. I know the
stories.

Harper leans to loosen his hidden shotgun strap, but stops... and lifts his goggled eyes to the nervous boy.

MAD CROW HARPER
Oh? That a fact?

EXT. GOLDSTOVE UNFINISHED BUILDING - NIGHT

Houston's knocked down as broken planks hit him, the sack falling by his side. Sledge leans for it.

MOLLY
Hey!

Behind Sledge, Molly throws her hip and pulls a seam of buttons down the length of her riding skirt, revealing her stockinged leg... all the way up her BARE HIP.

Sledge pauses to ogle her.

Even Houston cocks an eyebrow.

Her hand shoots up from her stocking. A flash of moonlight catches metal in MID AIR.

Thunk! A KNIFE plunges into Sledge's neck. Blood squirts.

Yelling, Sledge steps forward and grips Molly's throat. He lifts her into the air, a sneer on his face. Her feet kick.

Molly's eyes bulge. She gasps for air, face darkening.

Houston bounds up and grabs the hammer. He takes out a vertical support. Crash! Toppling wood descends on them all.

Sledge looks up, just in time to see a wooden beam drive into his face, bending him backwards. He's pinned him to the ground. CRUNCH.

Molly and Houston flinch at the mist of blood. And it's over.

HOUSTON

Dear God... don't-- don't get any on you.

ETHAN (O.S.)

Molly! Doctor!

Ethan trots up, gun out, keyed up.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Where's Harper?

Molly's eyes flash. She scans around, worried.

EXT. BEHIND THE GOLDSTOVE SALOON - NIGHT

Harper moves sideways again. Cody's aim shakes.

MAD CROW HARPER

So, you know my stories, do you?

CODY

No... I mean-- don't--! Just...

Harper clicks his tongue... and takes another sidestep.

MAD CROW HARPER

And how do you think this one ends?

Harper's hand slips UNDER HIS CAPE. Cody startles.

EXT. GOLDSTOVE UNFINISHED BUILDING - NIGHT

Ethan lights a lantern by a tool box, frantic.

ETHAN

Get the boy. Our horses. All our packs. And get ready to leave. Now.

Houston and Molly watch. Both look skeptical.

HOUSTON

Sheriff, Harper's carrying it, just like the boy! The germ was active in the saloon!

ETHAN

And it's burning down! So, if you please, Doctor, take my sister and get our goddamn stuff together!

Ethan holds the lantern up and is already off, a mad man.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

We're taking Harper tonight!

They watch Ethan go... as does a spying McGreeves. He ducks behind some barrels, unseen. Eyes wide, his mind turns.

EXT. BEHIND THE GOLDSTOVE SALOON - NIGHT

Another sidestep from Harper. Cody has both hands on the gun, terrified, soaked with sweat. He looks for someone to help.

MAD CROW HARPER

Not even the slightest inclination of what comes next?

CODY

I said stop! Please--!

MAD CROW HARPER

Well, let me tell you. This one ends like the rest of them do.

CODY

I'll shoot you! I will! I SWEAR!

MAD CROW HARPER

With liberty and justice for--

BLAM! BLAM! Cody fires first. A second shot sounds from nowhere. Cody falls. Harper's leg buckles, a bullet grazing his calf.

Cody lies face up. He gasps. Blood blossoms on his chest, flooding his mouth. Harper hobbles over to him. He pulls a smoking pistol out of HIS CAPE.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
I do hate it when people spoil an ending.

ETHAN (O.S.)
(distant)
Cody!

BANG! Harper shoots Cody once more and limps away. Gone.

Lantern up, Ethan dashes to the scene, nearly sliding to Cody's side. Blood is everywhere. Cody gasps.

CODY
Sh-sheriff...

ETHAN
Cody. Jesus.

CODY
Did I do good? Did-- did I--

ETHAN
Yeah... yeah, Cody. Real good. All according to Hoyle. All the way.

Ethan blinks back tears, speechless.

CODY
I'm-- I'm sorry...

ETHAN
No. You did me proud. You done Sheriff Banks proud. You-- you're going up on the wall. All deputies go up on the wall...

Cody's eyes grow larger for a moment.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
So everyone will know what you did.

Cody fades away, rattles, and DIES.

Ethan dips his head and holds Cody close, overwhelmed. He looks up, shimmering eyes falling on...

A nearby shack. Door ajar.

INT. GOLDSTOVE SALOON LIQUOR SHACK - NIGHT

Ethan kicks open the old door, lantern up, gun pointed.

It's pitch black. As he shifts the lantern, light gleams back on dozens of different surfaces. The sunken shack is storage for racks and racks of BOTTLES, all forming narrow aisles.

Ethan searches. It's dead silent.

ETHAN

I know you're here, you spineless son of a bitch! Show yourself!

Nothing.

Ethan takes the rickety steps down the floor. He moves slow and keeps the light up.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

I'm the sheriff from Wayward! We know you annexed that train and I'm placing you under arrest!

Silence. Then, the gentle hiss...

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.)

The sheriff. From Wayward.

Ethan swings the lantern around, barrel out. Still no Harper.

The sheriff catches his breath... and keeps moving.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

You were at the river. With the high ground. That was clever.

Ethan moves down an aisle, the light on the bottles shifts, swirls, the dark corridor yawning at him.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And are you too a fan of my many sordid adventures?

ETHAN

Ain't no one gonna know you from Adam when I'm done with you. Not after I put your hangin' in the damn books.

Ethan follows the voice, zeroing in on far corner. He inches his way to it. Silent steps...

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.)

Hmm. Well... I ain't never worried about "books," Mr. Sheriff. Books are gonna get us all wrong. Books are gonna call us mean. Crude. Uncivilized. You and me both.

Pressed against the rack, breath held, Ethan spins and aims, throwing light on the aisle.

Harper's not there, either.

ETHAN

So says the thief. The murderer.

A small zipping sound. Ethan perks up. What is that?

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.)

Tell me something, what exactly
does a sheriff even do around here?
Have you seen the sights lately?
This look like a nation of laws to
you? Like a nation of anything?

In the dark, Harper's hands spin the opened chamber of his REVOLVER. Empty shells fall to the dirt. He reloads.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The sun sets on this side of the
world. We're all just howlin' in
the dark.

Ethan does a double take. He looks at the ground.

He lowers the lantern to a trail of BLOOD in the dirt.

ETHAN

Keep talkin', Harper. I think you
just solved a riddle for me.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.)

Point is Mr. Sheriff, there ain't
no law here. Folks can't stomach
it. They're... stricken, really.
Sick with meanness and sorrow from
bein' left out in a big ol'
nothin'.

Lantern low, Ethan follows the snaking trail of blood down another corridor. His face is damp with sweat.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

But blessed is this moment... for
we finally have a cure.
(coughing, gagging)
Me.

ETHAN

No. You're just a sick bastard who
wants to go out with one more bang.

Ethan turns another corner. He cocks his gun. KA-CLICK.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

But that ain't happenin'. I'm taking you back to Wayward and I'm going to hang you. And people are going to celebrate. And then... they're gonna celebrate me.

Harper bursts out laughing, but it quickly turns into wet wheezing and coughing. Breathless, he's still amused.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.)

What an odd thing to want!

Trail of blood suddenly ENDS. Ethan turns around... shit.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Golly Mr. Sheriff, by-- by your count... we're just gnawin' on different ends of the same bone...

Ethan stands straight up, alert. Just beside him, on the other side of a rack, is the DARK FIGURE of Harper, distorted by the many glass bottles.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

Ain't we?

BANG BANG BANG! The two men fire at each other through the bottles. Glass and liquid explode all around them.

Both run out of ammo. Harper pushes the rack. It crashes down on Ethan and pins him. SMASH!

Ethan grunts and sees his LANTERN. It's overturned and the flame catches the spilled booze. Fire exhales and spreads.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

Sorry, Mr. Sheriff! But your tale ain't obscene enough to pass on!

Up on the stairs, Harper salutes... and leaves.

Ethan groans under the rack. The flames dance.

EXT. BEHIND THE GOLDSTOVE SALOON - NIGHT

Harper staggers away from the glowing shack. He heads down an alley, back to the main drag. He gags and spits.

MOLLY (O.S.)

Adrian.

He spins. Behind him, Molly points a rifle at him, breathless, lips parted... but aim steady.

Harper freezes. He can't believe it either.

MAD CROW HARPER
What are you--

Wham! Ethan pistol whips Harper from behind. Molly gasps.

Harper crumples, out cold. Out of breath, smudged with soot, Ethan looks at his shocked sister.

ETHAN
We're leaving.

EXT. GOLDSTOVE TOWN STRETCH - NIGHT

Flames roar out of the saloon, bathing the town in RED LIGHT.

Ethan and his company trot on to the main stretch, Harper unconscious and laid out on the back of Ethan's horse.

Residents have started to come out of their buildings. Old men. Young couples. Business owners. They spot the company.

MCGREEVES (O.S.)
There he is! That's him!

It's McGreeves. On a black horse, he stomps around, yelling.

MCGREEVES (CONT'D)
That's the man who brought this
wrath to your town! To your homes!

Ethan slows up his horse more eyes fall on the company.

MOLLY
Freddie! What are you doing!?

MCGREEVES
THAT IS THE SON OF THOMAS LITTLE!
Big as life! He did this! He
brought this vileness to your town!
The same as his ol' man!

The residents group together, a MOB. Angry faces from every angle. Ethan musters courage and holds up his star.

ETHAN
I am the Sheriff of Wayward! I have
apprehended Mad Crow Harper! The--

MCGREEVES
The son of Thomas Little! Are you
gonna let this son of a bitch just
waltz outta here!?

MOLLY

Freddie!

Angry calls from the mob. The company's surrounded.

The child hangs on to Molly for dear life. She holds him.

McGreeves fires his gun in the air, riling the madness. One man hurls a torch at them. A bottle. A pitchfork.

MOB

(various characters,
continuous)

You son of a bitch! Look what you
did! Your daddy killed my uncle! My
sister! Ima kill you, you bastard!

Angry faces, stretched and horrible. They reach for Ethan,
pull at his horse. He tries his gun in the air. Empty.

ETHAN

No, get back!

His horse rears back, Harper's body FALLS TO THE SAND.

Ethan pulls away from gnashing faces, but there are too many.

He looks back to Molly and Houston. They're trapped.

In the distance, McGreeves smirks.

Ethan yanks at a pitchfork and prods a woman back. A rock
hits him in the face. He spits blood, pulls his horse back.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Get back, you goddamn animals!

A broom breaks over his back. SNAP! Ethan arcs in pain.

MOLLY

Ethan!

The boy starts to cry. Ethan makes a desperate swing with the
butt of his gun, his horse going wild. Blood in his face.

ETHAN

Animals--!

Smash! A bottle hits Ethan's face. He crashes to the ground.
Feet stomp all around him. Triumphant yells. The boy cries.
Molly calls out...

Face bleeding, Ethan manages to turn over...

Red, roaring FACES, fire in their EYES. Hands twisted in rage, all reaching for Ethan. He can't fight them off. He's struck in the face. Sound echoes away...

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. RANCH HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Ethan gasps, eyes bolting open. His face is marred with bruises and cuts, but he's cleaned up, tended to. He winces and looks around. Gentle sun pours in through a window.

He's in a bedroom. Simple, handsomely furnished. There's a framed etching of a train on the wall. At a desk there are train diagrams, maps, a magnifying glass.

Ethan's hat, gun, star, and fresh clothes rest neat on a cushioned bench. He swallows. Where the hell is he?

Suddenly there are screams. A child's. Agony. Ethan leaps up and grabs his gun. He limps to the door and kicks it open.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, DEN - CONTINUOUS

SLAM! Ethan points his gun.

In an open den, an old man is on all fours on a bearskin rug, surgical mask and gloves on, tickling the child. They stop and turn to Ethan.

The old man pulls down the mask, revealing his earthy face with deep lines, blue eyes wide. This is THOMAS LITTLE, 60s, Ethan and Molly's father, man of vile myth and legend.

THOMAS

Son. You're up!

Ethan's mouth hangs open... and he lowers his gun.

MONTAGE OF RANCH PROPERTY:

IN THE SKY clouds begin to move in above the rolling ranch grounds. The distant rumble of thunder.

ON THE PORCH, the child sits quiet in corner, mask on. Content, gentle breeze blowing, he draws... until the sun goes in. He looks up.

TELESCOPE POV. Still at a great distance, the Navajo remain still on a hillside, watching. Thunder echoes. Wind growls.

IN A FIELD, Houston pulls down THE TELESCOPE, out of breath. He's stunned, shaking. Unable to help himself, he points the telescope... and looks at the Navajo again. More wind.

THE OIL RIG. The walking beam rises and dips. Workers yell.

THOMAS (V.O.)
 Guess they all did it up in
 Pennsylvania to some great acclaim.
 Big money. Big stories.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE PORCH - DAY

Wrapped in a blanket, mug of coffee in hand, Ethan watches the rig half a mile off beneath a gray, overcast sky.

Behind him, Thomas Little sits in a rocking chair with a mug of his own. He eyes his son, hesitant.

THOMAS
 You and ya misses been gettin' my
 letters at all? Gracie was it?

ETHAN
 She gets them. I don't read them.

THOMAS
 Well... y'all are welcome to hole
 up here while you--

ETHAN
 We ain't stayin' long.

THOMAS
 Are you sure? You got worked over
 to all hell--

Ethan tosses his coffee out onto the lawn and plunks his mug down hard on the porch railing.

Thomas chooses his words.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
 I... understand. You bein' on a...
 important mission an' all.
 (beat)
 Ya sister told me about y'all
 riggin' that game a' five card.
 Jesus, you got some balls on you.
 Ya shoulda mentioned my name, they
 probably would have let you deal!

ETHAN

I mention your name and I wake up
looking like this.

Ethan finally turns to his father, steely eyes cutting
through the cuts and bruises.

Thomas stays unruffled. He nods, sips his coffee.

Ethan nods, all of this familiar. He starts to leave.

THOMAS

Your sister, I think she's fixin'
to stay a while, bless her heart.

ETHAN

Then she can stay behind.

THOMAS

She and that injun doc ya got with
ya say it might not be safe to move
that scoundrel y'all apprehended.

That stops Ethan at the threshold and grips the door frame.

INT. QUARANTINE WAGON - DAY

Houston's gloved hands press gray skin, checking a pulse. The
torso heaves, wheezing. It's HARPER, laid out, unconscious.

HOUSTON

He's very ill. Carrying it, like
the boy, but... worse.

Masked and gloved, Molly sits with the lantern, stunned eyes
on the body. Rain patters on the canvas over her.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)

I don't know if it's because he's
older... or what. But he's
deteriorating much faster.

MOLLY

He's dying.

Houston looks at her, hearing the quiver in her soft voice.

She keeps her eyes on Harper, numb. Lightning. CRACK!

HOUSTON

He's stable now. But I'm not even
sure if he'll become conscious aga--

Overwhelmed, Molly exits the wagon.

EXT. RANCH GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

Houston follows, but Molly has already stopped, looking out.

Beyond a fire where the child stands, the dark figure of Ethan storms toward them. The child looks up from something he's holding and watches Ethan pass by.

Not breaking his stride, Ethan snatches a GOLD POCKET WATCH from the boy's hands...

And tosses it into the fire, where the BLACK SACK burns.

MOLLY

Ethan...

He charges past them and opens the flap on the back of the wagon. He looks in. Harper still lies inside. Ethan freezes.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

I... was able to grab my rifle back after you were coldcocked. We got him back--

Ethan reaches into the wagon and grabs Harper's ankles. He pulls the body out. Lifeless, it slaps down into the mud.

MOLLY

What are you doing!?

HOUSTON

Sheriff!

ETHAN

What we set out to do.

Ethan backs away and draws his revolver.

HOUSTON

Sheriff, the man's unarmed! He's not even conscious!

Ethan ignores him and prepares to load the weapon.

MOLLY

You said you were going to hang him! In front of the town!

ETHAN

The town? Like Goldstove?

Ethan scoffs and looks up at her, eyes cold. Thunder rolls.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

What the hell's the difference?

CLACK! Reloaded. Ethan spins the cylinder. Ready to aim, Ethan looks up... Houston stands in the way.

HOUSTON

This man is sick with the germ.

ETHAN

Then he belongs on the fire. With
the rest of the filth.

HOUSTON

We don't know anything about it!

ETHAN

You don't know nothin' about it!
You ain't helped it! Ain't cured
it! When are you gonna get off your
ass? After the boy's already in the
ground!?

HOUSTON

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO!

Ethan and Molly are taken aback by the outburst.

Not comprehending, the boy looks back and forth between the
adults. Arm up, he shields himself from the rain.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)

In a proper facility, I could treat
it! I could consult! Give a
prognosis! But we're in this
godforsaken desert!

Houston catches his breath, at a loss. Rain soaks them all.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)

Out here... I don't know what
anyone could do.

ETHAN

(aiming)
All the more reason--

HOUSTON

No!

Houston rushes Ethan and the men grapple. Houston slips in
the mud and Ethan lands a pistol whip. The Doctor falls.

Molly charges her brother.

MOLLY

You can't--

Ethan grabs her face and pushes her to the mud.

He aims at Harper. Rain pelts the gun metal. Hand steady.

Harper lies, rain hitting him. He groans. Stirs.

Ethan cocks the hammer... and spots the child.

The boy, using Ethan's big hat to block the rain, watches.

They lock eyes. But Ethan tears away and aims again.

Harper moans. It sounds like "Haaaaa."

Ethan curses and storms off, leaving all of them stunned and mud-splattered. Thunder crashes again, loud.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. QUARANTINE WAGON - NIGHT

Dark. Coughing. Harper sits hunched over in the dark, spitting, struggling to breathe. There is a light. Someone comes to the blanket draped over the back of the wagon.

It's Molly. Lantern. Gloves. Mask. And scared eyes.

He looks at her. His ragged voice gains breath again.

MAD CROW HARPER

Where... are we?

She considers... and climbs in, sitting across from him.

MOLLY

Nevada. Here. Hold still.

She unscrews a canteen for him. With her help, he manages to get some water down. He looks up at her, the goggles on.

Molly gently takes the goggles off him. The light reveals eyes full of bright red burst capillaries. She gasps.

He waves it away, hands tied with rope. She becomes stern.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Tell me what happened.

MAD CROW HARPER

What are you, the law now?

MOLLY

Adrian.

His head falls forward, his sigh nearly a wheeze.

MAD CROW HARPER

It was... a train.

INT. THE TRAIN, SECOND PASSENGER/CARGO CAR - DAY/FLASHBACK

BLAM! A gun fires at the ceiling, a whole car of expensively dressed PASSENGERS jump. In the center aisle is the mangy FORTUNATE DAN, Irish, 30s. Gun in the air.

FORTUNATE DAN

All righty right, ladies and gents!
No real mystery here, is it? Let's
do this and get on with our lives,
shall we?

THE BLACK SACK is passed around. Frantic hands dump in jewelry and cash.

It reaches a YOUNG MOTHER, who turns to her boy in the seat next to her. THE CHILD. He keeps the POCKET WATCH.

FORTUNATE DAN (CONT'D)

Are we hard of hearin', then?

Dan sticks the gun in the mother's face. But a gloved hand brings the gun down. Dan looks...

It's HARPER. Healthy. Dashing, even.

He kneels down to the mother's seat, eye level with the boy. Harper holds out his hand.

The child looks at the watch... and gives it to Harper.

Harper smiles, stands, and musses the boy's hair.

The sack is passed on, Dan watches it go.

At the back of the car, Harper throws a canvas off a stack of crates. One is chained, marked with the MEDICAL INSIGNIA.

FORTUNATE DAN (CONT'D)

Whatcha got back there, Harper?

Harper tests the chain and cocks his head at it.

MAD CROW HARPER

Just more presents to unwrap...

He swings his cape off and points his sawed-off. BOOM!

The bird shot shreds into the wood and the blow back is WET, a white mist is sent into the air. People wave it away.

Condensation on his goggle lenses, Harper spits. It's everywhere. Behind him, the boy rubs his eyes, blinking.

Gags. Coughs. Screams. Passengers jump up and hold their faces, backs arching.

Dan pulls a woman down. She reveals a MELTING FACE and wails.

CHAOS breaks out. More and more passengers writhe, spasm, and rise from their seats. Retching. Bleeding. Clawing.

Harper fires, misses, and hits Dan. The Irishman spits blood and falls.

The boy leaps down under the seat and covers his ears, terrified. He looks up...

His own mother shrieks and claws at him. He crawls away.

More and more horrible faces scream and hiss. Bodies frantic, lunging over each other.

Cornered, Harper pulls both guns. FLASH! FLASH! FLASH! FLASH!

RETURN TO QUARANTINE WAGON - NIGHT

Harper shrugs.

MAD CROW HARPER
Just a train.

She shakes her head, and looks away, trying to fathom. Harper's wheezes are the only noise.

MOLLY
Back in Texas... you left me. Like
I was nothing to you--

MAD CROW HARPER
Wasn't like that--

MOLLY
Then what was it!?

He swallows, eyes on the floor.

MAD CROW HARPER
You know that I've always had to do
the one thing.

MOLLY
Kill that man. Blackie Smith. For
killin' your ma and pa. I remember.

Eyes still down, Harper shakes his head.

MAD CROW HARPER

I had always heard it was Smith.
But stories can get crooked. And
that night in Texas... I finally
heard it straight.

(beat)

And knew we'd have to be apart.

MOLLY

What do you mean?

He can't look at her.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Adrian, what does it have to do
with me?

His eyes find her shoulder pack. He reaches for her sketch
pad and as he pulls it out... ENVELOPES fall to the floor.
Harper bends and picks one up.

THE ENVELOPE. On the back is a pencil portrait of Harper.

Molly scoffs, embarrassed.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

I used to test myself. See if I
could still remember what you
looked like. It's foolish.

He tries to laugh, but coughs more.

MAD CROW HARPER

Good to know that somewhere I'll
always look this good.

Molly smiles, her anger melting. Her eyes well up.

MOLLY

It's not fair...

She rubs his back as he evens out and brings him closer.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

When you left, I wanted to just lay
down and die. Now, I get you back
just in time to lose you again.

He looks up, eyes human in the lantern light.

MAD CROW HARPER

Everyone will remember me as one
thing. Only you'll know different.
You ain't losin' anything.

Molly loses it and sobs. She hesitates to touch him... but puts a gloved hand to his face and pulls him close.

Their foreheads touch and come apart. Frightened eyes stare at each other. Her hand comes up and slides down her mask...

Molly shivers. Faces get closer, lips coming closer...

Parted mouths, yielding, about to touch... CLICK.

Ethan has his head through the blanket, pistol pointed.

ETHAN

You're gonna wanna back the hell
away from my sister. Right now.

Molly and Harper separate.

MOLLY

Jesus, Ethan!

MAD CROW HARPER

...Sister?

ETHAN

Get outta the damn wagon, Molly!

Harper's eyes dart. He flips over the envelope.

ENVELOPE, RIGHT SIDE: Addressed to Molly. Return address, T. Little. Nevada post office. NEVADA.

Exiting, Molly glares at Ethan. He keeps his gun on Harper.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Settle in. Next stop Wayward.

Harper looks over to him, dumbfounded.

Ethan holsters and pulls the blanket down. WHOOSH.

A smile bends on Harper's face. He falls back, gleeful on his blankets. And laughs.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - NIGHT

Ethan and the company ready their horses and a new wagon in front of the house. They're prepping to leave.

THOMAS

You sure y'all don't want to wait
for sun up?

Thomas, with coffee, watches over from the porch. At his feet, the child sits on the step, examining a toy train.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

You wanna at least get some coffee
in you, boy?

Stone-faced, Ethan doesn't turn to the porch.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

...Well, all right. You rascals
comin' 'round again soon?

MOLLY

As soon as I can, daddy. I'll write
you when we get back.

She goes up to her father. They smile and hug.

THOMAS

There's my girl. How 'bout you,
boy? You gonna finally come show
off that bride of yours?

ETHAN

Let's go, Molly.

Thomas stands up straighter.

THOMAS

Is that any way to treat yer kin?
Yer sister has a heart to forgive
her pa. Why don't you?

ETHAN

Well, she's been known to keep
mixed company.

Molly's eyes narrow.

THOMAS

You look at me, boy. You look at me
and tell me what you see that
confounds you so. A warm bed when
you needed it. Bandages. Food.

MOLLY

Daddy was the one who sat with you
all night, Ethan--

Ethan steps to Thomas, eyes ablaze.

ETHAN

What I see? I see a pathetic old man tucked away on a pile of dirty money, while everyone far and wide still trembles at the mention of his name.

THOMAS

Half of them stories with my name in 'em... they ain't even true.

ETHAN

And half of them are!

With no retort, Thomas shakes his head.

Sullen, the child puts the train aside. Familiar. Ethan storms over and picks him up.

THOMAS

Every time... every time I dropped in on yer ma, you always begged me-- "can I come wit' ya, pa? Can I come wit' ya?" And now--

ETHAN

And now I can't take a goddamn step without haulin' you with me!

Thomas is shaken.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

The only reason I'm hangin' this bastard is so when I have my own son, he won't ever have no reason to be ashamed of his pa. He'll know his father did the right thing.

He puts the boy on the horse with Houston and places his hat on the boy's tiny head, patting down the brim.

THOMAS

I-I want you to see that people can change, that a man can. That-- that you can ask me one more time.

Ethan finally turns to Thomas, surprised by the tremble in his father's voice.

Thomas takes a step forward.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Son...

Ethan spins around, eyes shimmering.

ETHAN
Molly! Now, goddammit!

Dejected, Thomas shares another hug with Molly.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Harper, we--

Ethan looks into the quarantine wagon...

HARPER IS GONE. Severed ropes where he used to lie.

Ethan spins around. He looks at Molly.

Molly reads him. She touches her skirt. Two buttons along her thigh are undone. Her look says it all: Her KNIFE is gone.

HOUSTON
What is it, Sheriff?

Ethan scans the dark horizon. In the moonlight, he can just make out the oil rig and its WORKERS' BARRACKS beside it.

ETHAN
Everyone get in the house.

Molly helps the boy down from Houston's horse.

THOMAS
What's wrong?

HOUSTON
Sheriff--?

Ethan looks at his confused father.

ETHAN
And start boarding up as many doors
and windows you can.

Thomas is flustered.

EXT. RIG WORKERS' BARRACKS - NIGHT

Establishing, beside the rig. Moonlight.

INT. RIG WORKERS' BARRACKS - CONTINUOUS

CREAK... Lantern and gun up, Ethan pushes open the door, keyed up. Once again, he searches for Harper in the dark.

Beyond a makeshift forum, through a screen door, three dozen RIG WORKERS lie in rows of cots, asleep. Undisturbed.

Ethan breathes easier, relieved.

He puts down the lantern and moves closer to make sure.

Ethan pushes open the screen door and peers in, getting a closer look. Behind him, the wooden door slowly, silently closes behind him.

THE LANTERN. A boot comes down on it. SMASH! Darkness.

Ethan turns around. It's too late. Black fabric flaps. Darkness rushes over him.

MOMENTS LATER. MOLLY'S KNIFE glints in the moonlight, held by a gloved hand. The blade slices the hand opposite and draws BLOOD.

It trickles into a snoring mouth of a worker...

A closed eye...

A resting ear...

...Again and again.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, DEN - NIGHT

Tables are flipped over. Chairs go under door knobs. Nails are hammered into door and window frames.

THOMAS

I'm not sure what y'all are drivin'
at here...

Thomas stands dumbfounded, watching Molly work in the dark.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

But if yer man is on the run, he
ain't about to just stick around.

Houston lays the child on a sofa. The boy is nearly limp. He moans, irritable.

MOLLY

The germ, daddy. It gets you sick
in a real hurry. Remember?

The boy squirms, languid, skin clammy and glistening. Stethoscope out, Houston furrows his brow.

THOMAS

But that don't rightly explain who
the hell we're tyin' to keep outta
here, do it?

HOUSTON

Mr. Little, the germ seems to trigger a... kind of mania--

THOMAS

I ain't askin' you, red corn.

The den goes quiet. Thomas' face is suddenly hard.

MOLLY

Daddy, he's a doctor. Bona fide.

Thomas stares Houston down.

Houston stands and locks eyes, unafraid.

Molly almost laughs. Tension is suddenly thick, until...

ROAAAAAARR!!! Distant.

THOMAS

What in the hell...

Molly and Houston share a panicked look.

INTERCUT WITH: EXT. RIG WORKERS' BARRACKS/ RANCH GROUNDS

The barracks' door is jammed shut with a long shovel handle. Growls and screams. Something presses against it, hard. Again. The handle cracks. SLAM! The door swings open.

Molly, Thomas, and Houston rush to the window and look out, bathed in cold blue moonlight.

In the distance, on a gentle slope above the house, they watch tiny dark figures spill out of the barracks. Fast.

Stricken rig workers sprint towards the Little house. Spitting. Hissing. Teeth bared. Backs arched back. Desperate, ferocious AGONY! RRRWAAHHH!!! It echoes.

At the window, they flinch.

THOMAS

What's gotten into them?

Houston is already waking the boy up. He wakes, coughing.

MOLLY

Daddy, we have to keep them out.

Thomas sees the fear in her eyes and starts to get it.

SMASH! They all turn. Glass breaks somewhere in the house.

HOUSTON

Mr. Little, any chance--

THOMAS

Cellar's this way.

From a cabinet FULL OF RIFLES, Thomas grabs one, throws another to Houston. The doctor barely catches it, shocked.

Thomas leads the way, lantern in hand.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Thomas leads Molly, Houston, and the child down the hall. Three lanterns bob and illuminate Thomas' hard, determined face. Thuds and scratching can already be heard from outside.

Nose running, the boy hugs Molly's hip. He leaps, startled at a distant shriek for help.

THOMAS

Here we go...

Thomas reaches for the cellar door.

Molly and Houston look at the moonlit window at the end of the hallway. Broken glass smashed beneath it.

The cellar door opens... and HARPER is there. Molly gasps.

He pulls Thomas in and throws him down the stairs. Into darkness. He reaches for the door handle.

MOLLY

Adrian-- NO!

SLAM!

INT. RANCH HOUSE, CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

Thomas tumbles down the stairs, grunting.

At the bottom, he looks up, forehead cut, lantern fallen beside him. He looks, seeing something...

Not far off, Ethan is face down on the dirt floor, hogtied in the dark, head bleeding, exhausted.

THOMAS

Son of a bitch!

Thomas pulls a revolver from his belt and lets it rip. BAM!

Harper descends the stairs and staggers in a zig-zag, flourishing his cape. The bullets miss and hit the stairs.

Thomas can't hit him. Click, click. Empty.

MAD CROW HARPER

Yeah, bang, bang, bang. Haven't learned any new tricks, Thomas Little?

Harper crouches to Thomas.

He's a living corpse, the flickering light revealing all his teeth visible through his slimy, transparent flesh.

Thomas is revolted.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

I have.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

With her free hand, Molly tries the knob. Pounds the door.

MOLLY

Adrian! Adrian, open the door!

No use. She stops, collecting herself.

She turns, lantern high. An ELDERLY RIG WORKER, eyes black, blood pouring out his mouth, is in mid lunge at her. RRAAHH!

BLAM! A rifle shot knocks it back.

Houston is blown crooked by the rifle kickback. Breathless, Molly turns to him. His hands shake on the rifle.

HOUSTON

If-- if there's an upstairs--

CRASH! More glass shatters behind him as two more rig workers plow through the broken window, mouths bloody, eyes yellow.

Houston and Molly grab the child and move fast, escaping.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, CELLAR - NIGHT

A bloody, gloved hand brings a match down to a lantern

At an old round table, lantern in the center, Ethan and Thomas sit. Bloody. Beaten. Trapped. Walls of stone and dusty storage crates surrounding them.

MAD CROW HARPER
And here we all finally are...

Harper comes at them, rattling the box of MATCHES before tucking them away under his cape.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
Father. Son...

He lifts his shirt and vest, dim light just showing an old, circular scar on his gray, veiny stomach.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
And the holy ghost. Literally.

Ethan and Thomas stare, perplexed.

Harper slams down a wooden chair across from them. It wobbles, but he sits, revolver in hand.

THOMAS
What in hell do you want, you loony
son of a bitch?

Harper looks at Thomas and sighs. A pleasant sigh.

MAD CROW HARPER
Guess it ain't no shocker you don't
remember me, but I have to admit...
it sure woulda been swell.

Thomas' eyes search, confused. Ethan turns to his father.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, STAIRWAY - NIGHT

MEDICAL BAG. Lantern light on it, Houston grabs it.

He leads the way, Molly and the child not far behind. The whole house shudders...

Houston reaches the foot of the small stairway and waves Molly and the boy by. He hands his bag to Molly.

HOUSTON
Go ahead. I'll cover you.

Molly grabs the bag and ushers the boy up. They step fast.

SMASH! RARRROWWRR! Houston checks the gun.

He dashes up the stairs, two at a time. A pale, bloody claw reaches through the railing and grabs Houston's ankle! He falls. OOF!

At the top stairs, Molly turns back.

A stricken worker presses its face against the bars, horrible teeth gnashing.

Houston tries to kick the arms back. The railing starts to splinter.

Molly thrusts her lantern out and sees two more WORKERS snarling. They crawl at the bottom of the stairs.

Light in their eyes, they arch their backs and SHRIEK.

Houston lands a kick through the railing and crushes the first worker's face. SQUISH. Blood.

Panicked, the doctor tries to get back up... but the others already yank his shirt from behind.

He's pulled down more steps. The workers climb and pin him.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)

No!

One worker pulls itself right up to Houston's face...

Its eroded, gaunt face right in Houston's... teeth bared, mouth open, full of black, roiling blood!

BLAM! A shot knocks it back. More shots. The third worker is gunned down...

It's Molly rifle in hand. She turns to the railing... BLAM!

And blows a final shot through the first worker's forehead.

She stops, aim steady, face calm. She's an ace.

Houston looks up, chest heaving. Molly tilts her head.

MOLLY

We'll cover each other?

Houston nods... but his glance goes past her. She turns.

The boy lies at the top of the stairs, seizing.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, CELLAR - NIGHT

Ethan, Thomas, and Harper at the table. Thomas still searches Harper's face.

MAD CROW HARPER

Not ringin' any bells yet?

ETHAN
What is this, Harper?

MAD CROW HARPER
(to Thomas)
C'mon, old man. You can do it...

Thomas is stone-faced. Ready to boil over.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
Wyoming.

A long beat. Ethan watches. And Thomas' eyes flinch.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
Atta' boy! The rancher's kid? The
little one you left for dead?

INSERT CUT: EXT. BURNING HOUSE - Against the flames a silhouette of a SMALL BOY stands from Saxon Lazar's story. SILENT. Faceless. The SMALL BOY was Harper!

Thomas keeps up a stoic face, but knows.

Ethan does too, eyes growing wider.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
Surprise ending, Thomas. Dead never
did quite show up.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Molly bursts into the dark little room, rifle and lantern in hand. Behind her, Houston drags the child inside and lies him on the floor beside the bed. The boy is lifeless.

MOLLY
What's wrong with him?

HOUSTON
It's the germ. He's had a seizure.

Molly slams the door shut and slides her hand down the door jam edge. No lock.

Houston sweats. He listens for heartbeat and checks vitals.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)
He's swallowed his tongue... He's
not getting any air.

Molly jams the door with a chair and rushes over.

The boy's face is pale, a clicking sound in his throat.

Molly looks to Houston... who's making the sign of the cross.

MOLLY

What are you doing? Help him!

Molly grabs Houston's bag and slides it over to him.

HOUSTON

You have to understand. We'd only
prolong-- the germ, it's beyond my--

SLAP! Molly lands one square on the doctor's jaw.

MOLLY

You listen to me. I don't care
about what your books say, or-- or
your schoolin', or if you were a
goddamn medicine man.

Houston recovers, looking at her, stunned.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

You're helping him. You're the only
one who can.

Molly's eyes burn into him.

Slack-jawed, Houston snaps out of it... and goes for his bag.

RAWWRROWWW!!! Vicious bangs against the door. They turn.

The thumping is already shifting the chair out of place.

They both rush to the door and throw their weight against it.
More screams. More banging. More scratching.

With another surge, Molly and Houston are knocked back and
then secure the door again. Houston looks.

The boy lies there, suffocating.

HOUSTON

I have to hold the door!

MOLLY

What!?

Another surge. The door is pried open and gray, mangled faces
screech to get in. BOOM!

Molly is thrown to the floor.

Houston grunts and pushes the door back.

HOUSTON
 Help him! Go!

Mind racing, Molly looks to the boy, medical bag beside him.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, CELLAR - NIGHT

HARPER'S BLOODY REVOLVER is perched on the table edge.

MAD CROW HARPER (O.S.)
 It's funny. I had always heard of
 Thomas Little.

Ethan watches the gun and looks up.

Harper has the gun pointed at Thomas. The old man is still rigid with rage.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
 The blood. The horror. The goddamn
 adventure. My god, I reckon I even
 wanted to be you at one time. At
 least shake your hand.

Harper leans to Thomas, the goggle lenses like black mirrors.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
 But you're a hard man to pin down.
 'Specially now. All retired and
 such. But when push came to shove,
 your kin, they lead me right to
 you. Like goddamn destiny.

Ethan's hand flexes on the table edge, ready to pounce.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
 And so here we are, burying the
 hatchet...

Harper lifts his cape from the table and reveals a shot glass.

THE SHOT GLASS. Filled with BLOOD. Harper's blood.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
 Among other things.

Keyed up, Ethan eyes the glass.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - NIGHT

THE SCALPEL. It shines in the moonlight, pinched between a silk-gloved hand. Molly holds it, panic in her eyes.

HOUSTON

Did you hear me, Miss Little!?

BOOM! Roaring stricken workers batter the door, wood frame splintering. Houston pushes back, legs sprawled out, the rifle lying useless ten feet from the door.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)

Make an incision an inch above the notch at the bottom of his throat!

She looks down, the child beneath her.

He's gray. Writhing. Choking. Her hand shakes.

MOLLY

I can't do this!

Another surge against the door, an infected hand reaches. Houston cries out, slamming it back.

HOUSTON

Arrgh! NOW!

Molly pulls her mask on and squeezes her eyes shut, screwing her courage. She opens them. And reaches.

The blade goes to the boy's throat. She pushes, the boy thrashes. Blood wells up at the end of the knife.

Molly's eyes bulge above the mask...

INT. RANCH HOUSE, CELLAR - NIGHT

Harper slides the shot glass of his blood to Ethan. And sticks the gun in his face.

MAD CROW HARPER

Bottoms up.

Ethan doesn't move.

Harper looks at the old man.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

And you. You're gonna watch.

(beat)

Sound familiar?

Thomas remains inert, his face a steady shade of RED.

ETHAN

You'll have to shoot me first.

Harper fakes a BIG YAWN and looks back at Ethan. A stare down. The lantern light wavers on their faces. Silence.

MAD CROW HARPER

All right...

He turns the gun on Thomas.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

For daddy, then.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Insane, infected workers heave themselves against the door. Houston heaves back and the door warps. Guttural screams. Sweat pouring, teeth gritted, Houston strains against them.

Molly is over the child, who's barely conscious now, his blood everywhere, soaking her silk gloves. She coos to him, but is shaking herself.

MOLLY

It's okay... it's okay, baby.
(louder, to Houston)
All right! Now what!?

HOUSTON

We need a tube! Like... a reed.
Something hollow!

Molly's hands go up, lost. Something hollow?

More workers against the door. The hinges rattle and bend.

Houston's boots slide on the floor. He's losing.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)

ARRRGH! Hurry!

Molly's hands are frantic. She checks the medical bag, her shoulder pack... when it dawns on her.

She reaches and pulls out a CIGARETTE. It sits handsomely in her ornate HOLDER. Carved wood and ivory.

Houston moans and pushes with all his might. An arm reaches, grasping for his face. The hand burns to its bones right before the doctor's eyes. RAAAAAAWWWWRRRRRR!!!

Molly pulls the cigarette from the holder.

A worker's head pushes through. It bites and thrashes. Another one. A door hinge is pried from the wall.

Hand trembling, Molly reaches down to the boy's bloody mess of a throat... and pushes the cigarette holder in. Nothing.

MOLLY

C'mon!

Gnarled, bloody faces snarl for Houston. Multiple hands grab hold of him, pull at him. He's done for.

The boy suddenly arches. He rattles, inhales... and EXHALES.

SPLAT! Blood dots Molly's mask. She staggers away from him and rips the mask off.

Houston screams, the door falling away...

Molly rolls to the rifle...

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM! Houston dives away from the spray of blood and shrapnel as Molly fires into the bottleneck.

The workers shriek and fall, finally dead. Quiet.

She and the fallen doctor trade a look, both out of breath.

The boy's eyes gently blink open, still pale, but steady wheezing coming from the tube in his throat. Inhale. Exhale.

INT. RANCH HOUSE CELLAR - NIGHT

THE SHOT GLASS rests in front of Ethan. Across from him, Harper's hand shakes as he points the gun at Thomas.

MAD CROW HARPER

C'mon, Little junior. Either you buy it, or you both do. So down the hatch for Daddy.

ETHAN

Don't hardly know the man. Don't care to. So you can go ahead--

CLICK! Harper hammers down the firing pin of his pistol.

Ethan jumps, terrified.

MAD CROW HARPER

Good thing you wore that mask. That poker face needs some work.

With his free hand, Harper motions to the drink.

Ethan takes a deep breath and his eyes fall on the shot glass. He looks over to his father...

But Thomas doesn't look back. His old, sunken eyes are fixed on Harper, burning a hateful hole through his goggled face.

Breathing hard, Ethan brings his hands back up to the table.

Harper smirks and perks up.

Ethan looks at the glass, face tight. Throat choked, he shakes his head... and grabs the glass.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

Uh huh...

Harper watches, riveted.

Thomas watches Harper.

Ethan's throat contracts, eyes on the glass. He looks over to Thomas one last time, shoulders heaving.

Thomas finally looks at his son, face steady. Sure.

Ethan squeezes his eyes shut, red-faced, and brings the glass closer to his lips. His breaths are sharp, fast.

Beside the table, Thomas brings up a knee...

Muffling his own scream, Ethan shoots the shot of blood to his mouth...

Thomas kicks Harper's chair and breaks it. Harper falls, his pistol swinging towards Ethan and going off, BLAM!

The gun explodes by Ethan's face and the shot spills harmlessly to his shirt. He falls backwards.

Thomas is up and over Harper and yanks the gun from his hand.

Harper rolls under the table and springs up, driving the tabletop into Thomas. BOOM!

The old man is pushed into the stone wall and crumples.

Before Ethan can recover, his hair is grabbed by Harper. The criminal produces a second pistol and presses it against Ethan's cheek. Presses very hard.

Fallen in the corner, Thomas has a pistol fixed on Harper.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

Uh uh, Thomas. Drop it. Or baby boy gets it.

Thomas pulls down the hammer.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)
Perhaps your hearing's going...

THOMAS
Heard ya clear as day, you son of a bitch. It'd be worth the chore of guttin' you alive fifty times over just for the goddamn satisfaction.

MAD CROW HARPER
Ah ha! Now there's the Thomas Little I remember! Almost had me fooled here in your cozy little house. Your locomotive pictures. Your welcome mat.

Ethan squirms and reaches back. It's no use. Harper has him.

ETHAN
(whisper)
T-Thomas...

MAD CROW HARPER
Yeah, sorry Thomas, but I already know the story that ends with you just shooting me. Put that down so Little junior here can go back to shooing big, scary characters away from the rest of his boring life.

THOMAS
You think I give a shit, don't ya, you sad bastard? Holy fuckin' hell. They don't make outlaws like they used to, I'll tell ya. Go on ahead. Shoot him.

Ethan pauses, stunned at the new tone in Thomas' voice.

Harper opens his mouth, but nothing comes out.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Spawn of a rotten, two bit whore. Left him where she squatted him out thirty years ago and never looked back. And you think I give a shit now? You poor sumbitch. Go on, shoot him!

ETHAN
(whisper, tears)
Please...

Harper can't believe it. He almost stammers.

THOMAS

Fuckin' hell. Guess no one ever
schooled ya in bein' a fuckin' man,
did they?

Harper tilts his head, Ethan squeezes his eyes shut. Both
feel the sting on that one.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Guess I hafta do it my goddamn
self!

ETHAN

Pa...

Thomas adjusts his aim and BLAM fires...

SHOOTING ETHAN.

The bullet sends Ethan spinning to the ground. Harper jumps
back, horrified.

Thomas fires on Harper. BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

Harper stumbles and races away. He disappears up the stairs.

Face down in the dirt, Ethan he rolls over and blood flows
out of his shoulder. He holds the wound as he comes to.

Thomas yanks himself to his feet, an old fire in his eyes.

THOMAS

Hit that damn bastard! Hit 'em!
Still got it! Hot fuckin' damn!

Ethan looks up at his father. Absolutely astonished.

INT. RANCH HOUSE, DEN - NIGHT

Harper exits the hallway, and collapses by the table.

Not in pain. In shock. He covers his mouth.

He collects himself and goes to the door.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Harper stops in the porch doorway. Just beyond the house, by
a horse, Houston freezes, child in his arms, eyes on Harper.

CLICK. Harper turns. Molly has the rifle on him. Her eyes are
piercing. Aim steady.

Harper needs the doorway for support. He wheezes.

In the dark, her jaw trembles. He waits.

MAD CROW HARPER

That ain't ever suited you, Mol.

She stares into his face and stifles tears...

He keeps his eyes on her, meaning it.

And her aim wavers, falls.

He turns away and leaves.

The barrel dips to the floor. Molly leans on the rifle and catches her breath, bitterness on her face.

EXT. RANCH GROUNDS - NIGHT

Harper lumbers up the hill. He bleeds, his steps erratic.

Ethan emerges from the house and spots Harper up on a hill. He hobbles after him, his calls echo.

ETHAN

Harper!

Rifle in hand, he can only aim his one healthy arm. He swings up the gun and fires angry. BANG!

Even when earth tears up beside him by a rifle shot, Harper doesn't turn back. He makes a crooked path towards...

EXT. THE OIL RIG - CONTINUOUS

It reaches up at the stars, tall and stark. Menacing.

Harper collapses at the platform ladder and spits, out of breath. He goes to move past the rig, but stops.

Beyond the rig, MORE STRICKEN lumber out of the barracks, dazed and growling. Stragglers. They spot Harper.

Harper swings back around and grabs the platform ladder.

Ethan limps and swings the rifle up again. BLAM!

ETHAN

Harper!

Drooling, Harper climbs the rig. First the ladder to the rig floor and then the rig tower itself.

Reaching the ladder, Ethan looks up.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
It's over, Harper!

Harper ignores and slowly climbs. His movements languid, but relentless. A sick animal.

With his one good arm, Ethan tosses the rifle on his back and pulls himself up. He climbs after Harper, clearing the rig floor and hoisting himself up on the tower beams.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Hold it there!

Breeze in his greasy hair, Harper hooks his arm around a beam and clings.

Ethan sees this and keeps climbing. But halts.

Harper shudders, but not with sickness... with laughter.

Brow taut, Ethan hears something below him and looks down...

Nearly a dozen stricken are CLIMBING UP AFTER HIM. Gnashing, hissing, biting. Yellowed eyes gleaming in the moonlight.

Three stories up, ETHAN IS TRAPPED.

MAD CROW HARPER
Who has the high ground now, Mr.
Sheriff?

The stricken already graze Ethan's boots. He tries to kick one away but loses his footing.

He slips down a rung and catches himself. Another stricken roars RIGHT IN HIS FACE. Ethan pushes its throat... and it tumbles down the beams, bouncing off the rungs. THWAK-THWAK!

The others grab at his feet. Yank his clothes. Bear their teeth. There are too many, all desperate to rip Ethan apart.

Doom washing over him, Ethan looks down at the mass of them... his eye catching something.

Harper watches, curious.

Ethan kicks off another worker and tests his balance on his rung, sharp breaths in and out... AND HE LEAPS.

Harper pivots to see Ethan plummet off the tower, towards...

The WALKING BEAM, the weighted see-saw arm that drives the drill. Ethan reaches and grabs the outside end, crying out.

The arm squeals and dips with the weight of his fall. Legs swinging wild, Ethan loses his grip...

He falls to the ground and loses his rifle. He turns over, eyes squeezed shut, wind knocked out of him.

The arm peaks... and comes down, pushing the drill into the ground. One giant thrust. The whole mechanism GROANS.

The ground rumbles.

Up high, Harper feels it. He looks down.

Ethan looks...

The well is silent. Then...

ROOOOAAARRRR! A GEYSER OF OIL erupts up from the earth. It rockets up the rig tower and blows the peak apart. BOOM!

Wood splinters, the force blowing Harper and most of the stricken off the rig.

Ethan shields himself from the black rain, drenched. He gets to his feet and backs away from the rig. Behind him, Molly rushes up the hill, rifle in hand.

MOANING. Oil hammering him, Harper stirs. He pulls his face up from the ground. Alive. He slips, but gets upright.

Around him, more fallen stricken stir, stunned and hobbled.

Harper spits black, disoriented. He finds Ethan, Molly not too far in the distance. Thomas even further behind her.

Molly stops at a careful distance, breathless, rifle in her hands. She blinks the black drops away from her eyes.

Harper raises his arms and arches his head back. He takes a shaky step towards Ethan, wrists out.

MAD CROW HARPER (CONT'D)

All right. All right, Mr. Sheriff.
You can show 'em, now... Show
everyone...

Harper gestures with his wrists. A surrender.

Both men look as Thomas arrives, stomping, his eyes wild.

By his side, a GIANT HUNTING KNIFE. Just like the stories.

Blood splattered, he shakes with rage. A man possessed.

Calm, Ethan shakes his head. He realizes.

ETHAN

Ain't nothing to show nobody.

Thomas pushes a concerned Molly away, fixed on Harper, completely unreachable.

Harper watches. His hands fall to his side.

MAD CROW HARPER

Right... right. My-- my mistake.

No one moves. They get drenched. Harper coughs. It bends him over, getting violent. He's at the end.

Harper looks at Molly and, unable to catch his breath, WAVES HER AWAY. Again and again.

She starts to lower her rifle...

MOLLY

Adrian...?

AND HARPER REACHES UNDER HIS CAPE.

Every muscle clenches. Molly brings the rifle to eye level.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

No. Don't!

Harper's rocked by more coughs. He staggers and side-steps. But his hand stays under his cape.

Ethan hasn't moved. His eyes shift...

HIS RIFLE lies in the grass, not ten feet away.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Stay away from him!

Brow low, Thomas watches, mouthing words to himself.

Harper continues circle Ethan, wracked with sickness.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

Damn you, Adrian! Don't do this!

He shakes his head, waving again with his free hand.

Ethan looks holds his look on Harper. His hand flexes...

Harper looks to Ethan, second hand going under the cape...

MOLLY (CONT'D)

NO!

Molly fires. Once. Twice.

Harper's body twitches as the shots rip into him.

Ethan slides on the black grass and grabs the fallen rifle. He SWINGS IT AROUND HIS HEAD, steadying his aim on the crook of his neck. Fluid, quick...

BLAM!

Harper's head jerks. Black mist. Between the eyes. He tips...

Harper falls limp and splashes to the grass. He lies still.

Molly collapses, all fours, unable to hold in a scream.

Keyed up, Ethan looks at Harper's fallen body, making sure it stays down this time. Satisfied, Ethan gets to his feet.

Harper lies twisted. Pale. DEAD.

Over Harper, Ethan stares at the body, stone-faced. He reaches down and rips the cape off him...

A tiny FLAME dances in Harper's hidden hand. THE MATCHES.

ETHAN

Get back!

A deep inhale of oxygen. Ethan scrambles away from the body as it BURSTS INTO FLAMES.

The fire light on his face stirs Thomas. He snaps out of it.

Molly looks up and sees. She grabs her father's shirt.

MOLLY

Ethan!

A blue lip of flame glides over the ground...

Over the bodies...

Over growling, hobbled stricken...

And closer to the rig, the surging oil.

The Littles sprint away from the scene. Ethan straggles behind. The flames chase them.

ETHAN

Go go go go go!

Fire licks at Ethan's heels. He can feel the heat...

More of it slithers and snakes through the rig...

ETHAN (CONT'D)

GO!

It EXPLODES! BOOM! Wood, debris, flames fly.

The Littles are knocked flat by the force, but hit dry ground. They brace themselves as splinters fall around them.

The rig is completely blown away. Ablaze, the geyser ROARS, a SIX STORY STREAM OF FIRE. But under the roar...

The last stricken crawl and shriek, consumed in the fire.

The Littles recover and watch, hearing it. Affected.

The blistering faces. The shaking limbs. The howls of agony.

THOMAS

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

Tearful, Molly stares at a flaming heap: Harper's body.

Ethan finds it, too. His face becomes pained. He storms away.

Thomas reaches for him.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Son, I didn't--

Ethan pulls away. And walks.

They watch him go. Ethan never looks back, the fire a massive red lantern behind him.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WAYWARD SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Along the row of PLAQUES of past sheriffs. Banks. Ethan. And the last one: "Cody Jameson, Valiant Deputy in the Apprehension of Adrian Harper and his Posse of Outlaws". On mounted hooks, someone places a revolver. It's handsome.

It's Ethan. Wounds almost healed over, arm in a sling. Alone, examines the names. He takes a deep breath... and leaves.

Left behind on the desk is the SHERIFF'S STAR.

INT. WAYWARD TOWN STRETCH - DAY

TOWNS PEOPLE, women, men, children. They all look up at the sound of a horse passing. Some quickly look away. Some glare. Some whisper to each other. There are no smiles.

Ethan passes them on horseback. He doesn't look to them. He rides on, brim down. They're not even there.

EXT. LITTLE HOMESTEAD - DAY

The small house in the big desert. A wagon out front.

ETHAN (O.S.)
We didn't finish it. It could still
be out there.

Not too far from the house Ethan stands by a woodpile. Leg up. Hat on. Straw in his mouth. Looking over the landscape.

Houston holds the reins of a horse. The child sits in the saddle, squinting in the sun, bandage around his neck.

HOUSTON
It's true. There could be survivors
we missed. We'll never really know
unless it rears its head again.

Ethan doesn't look away from the horizon. Houston notices.

HOUSTON (CONT'D)
But we did a good job.

He means it, but Ethan doesn't respond. He shuts his eyes.

ETHAN
I noticed you haven't packed.
What's a big city doc stayin'
'round these parts for?

Houston looks to the ground and nods.

HOUSTON
I've telegraphed some colleagues
and they're coming out to examine
the boy.
(beat)
But in the meantime... there's
someone else I'd like to consult.

Ethan looks at the doctor, confused, and spots Houston's glance. Ethan turns to catch the doctor's line of sight.

Waiting in the distance are THE NAVAJO. Majestic on a hill.

ETHAN

You... think they'll do any good?

Houston looks out at the Indians.

HOUSTON

I believe... we can't stop trying.
Even out here.

Ethan catches a sight over Houston's shoulder. In front of the house, Molly and Ethan's wife, Grace, load up a wagon.

Ethan stands up straight offers his hand.

ETHAN

Doctor.

Houston looks to Ethan's face. They shake hands.

HOUSTON

Sheriff.

Ethan reaches up and slaps his big hat on the child's head. The boy smiles and LAUGHS. Finally.

FRONT OF THE HOUSE. Ethan approaches the wagon packed with all of the Littles' things. Grace and Molly hug. It's long and sad. Molly turns to see her brother.

MOLLY

Well, you're all set to scamper.

Ethan takes in the wagon, hands on his hips. He nods.

MOLLY (CONT'D)

You better get fixin' to read once you get East. I'm gonna write you every day. Twice.

ETHAN

That don't mean I have to, does it?

Molly rushes her brother and ferociously hugs him, almost knocking him back. He holds her tight.

In the wagon, Grace is touched.

MOLLY

I gave you such a rough time...

ETHAN

I don't reckon that'll change now.

Buried in his shoulder, she laughs and sniffles. She looks up at him, face streaked with tears.

MOLLY

You're always the one who knows better. What am I gonna do without you around?

ETHAN

Hey. You were always the tougher one.

(beat)

Better never counted for much 'round these parts, anyway.

A sob wells up in her again. She pauses to get the words out.

MOLLY

Ethan. It counted.

Eyes red-rimmed, Ethan smiles. They hug again.

Up on the wagon, Grace has the reins, all their possessions tied up behind her. Ethan boards, taking the horses and meeting his wife's warm eyes. They kiss. Relief.

Ethan looks back at Molly. Houston leads the child on the horse only few steps behind her.

Ethan looks at them, but can't help but focus on...

THE WASTELAND behind them. Stretching out forever, distorted by incessant heat. A distant SHRIEK. He looks up.

Against the blinding, massive SUN, a lone BLACK BIRD circles above them. A buzzard? A crow? Ethan can't tell.

He doesn't care. He slaps the reins. Off they go.

Molly, Houston and the boy watch them as they become smaller... and smaller...

Until they're a black dot on the horizon.

FADE OUT.

THE END.