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EXT. COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN, NORTH CAROLINA. DAY. 1861

ON A BLACK SCREEN: Credits.

A RAUCOUS VOICE (SWIMMER'S) CHANTING IN THE CHEROKEE LANGUAGE.

A RANGE OF MOUNTAINS SLOWLY EMERGES: shrouded in a blue mist like a Chinese water color. Below them, close to a small town, YOUNG MEN, armed with vicious sticks and stripped to the waist, come charging in a muscular, steaming pack.

Their opponents, also swinging sticks, attack the pack. A ball, barely round, made of leather, emerges, smacked forwards by INMAN, who hurtles after it and collides with a stick swung by SWIMMER, a young and lithe American Indian. Inman falls, clutching his nose. The ball bobbles on the ground in front of him. He grabs it and gets to his feet, the blood pouring from his nose. His team form a phalanx around him and he continues to charge.

A PRISTINE CABRIOLET pulled by an impressive horse, comes down towards the town. It has to pass across the temporary field of play, parting the teams. Some of the contestants grab their shirts to restore propriety as the Cabriolet and its two exotic passengers pass by. The driver is a man in his early fifties, dressed in the severe garb of a minister, MONROE. And next to him, a self-conscious in the spotless elaborate, architectural skirts of the period, is his daughter, ADA. Inman, using his shirt to staunch his battered nose, looks at Ada, astonished by her. An angel in this wild place. Now Swimmer stops chanting and begins, more hesitantly, to translate into English:

SWIMMER'S VOICE (V.O.)
*You will be lonely. You will howl
like a dog as you walk alone. You
will carry dog shit cupped in your
hands. You will be smeared with
dog shit. Your spirit will wane
and dwindle to blue, the colour of
despair...*

As the Cabriolet passes, SWIMMER takes the ball and with a whoop starts to run towards the opposing goal. The game resumes. Ada looks back as the men swarm into each other, sticks and fists flailing.

EXT. COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. NIGHT.

A SIDE OF BEEF turns on a huge barbecue. The battered teams eating, drinking hard liquor, rehearsing victory and defeat, illuminated by a roaring bonfire. Swimmer is sewing up a gash in Inman's cheek as he continues to translate:

SWIMMER
*...This is your path. There is no other.
That's a curse you can use on the Yankee
before battle.*

INMAN

And that works?

SWIMMER

You have to say it in Cherokee.

INMAN

You said it to me in Cherokee.

During this, Monroe and Ada have arrived, escorted by SALLY SWANGER, a local woman, middle-aged, kindly, and her husband, ESCO, a glorious curmudgeon. The Monroes are introduced to various locals. Inman watches them, on the other side of the crowd. *The Reverend Monroe, his daughter Ada. Up from Charleston, bringing God's word to you heathens!* Is Esco's preferred introduction. *Building a church.* Inman watches Ada, moves his head to keep her in view as Swimmer stitches, and winces with pain.

SWIMMER

So keep your head still.

Sally collects plates for the Monroes. Hands them to Ada and her father, who wait, patiently, for silverware. Esco takes a plate, picks up a skewer of meat, bites on it. Monroe pluckily follows suit.

INMAN

(to Swimmer)

Anyway, there won't be any war. And if there is, they say it won't last a week.

END OF CREDITS AND FADE TO:

EXT. CONFEDERATE LINES. PREDAWN.

CAPTION: PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA. JULY 30TH, 1864. IN THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE CIVIL WAR.

A STAND OF TREES. The pastoral lush green Virginia. A RABBIT surfaces from its hole. Peace and beauty.

A second RABBIT shakes itself from the ground, darts into open ground to confront the FORBIDDING TRENCHES OF THE CONFEDERATE AND UNION ARMIES, RANGED AGAINST EACH OTHER ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF PETERSBURG. Massive wooden barricades in the shape of crosses, rows of X's, define the two lines. The Federals have been laying siege for months. So early and it's already hot. The trees are an oasis of green in a world of mud between the two stark and ugly scars of the trenches.

IN THE CONFEDERATE LINES, the men are rousing, boiling water for coffee or to shave, smoking, stiff from night. There's a large gun emplacement and some men still sleep against the stub-nosed cannon. Another RABBIT is disturbed from its hole. Ears pricked up to a distant rumbling.

INT. TUNNEL. PREDAWN.

A dark hole. Some evil place. A scraping sound. Shapes burrowing forwards at a crouch. A silent purpose.

EXT. CONFEDERATE LINES. PREDAWN.

Young OAKLEY, freshly recruited, approaches a group of men, like him Highlanders from Company F of the 25th North Carolina Regiment. He doles out breakfast. Inman, loading his heavy LeMats pistol, its nine rounds, is not hungry. Oakley serves another, ROURKE, last seen in the scrum at Cold Mountain. Oakley keeps his head low as he serves.

ROURKE

Don't worry, son. Those Yankee boys keep store hours. They ain't open yet.

INT. TUNNEL. PREDAWN.

Shadows and shapes. A BARREL rumbles along the tunnel. It reaches a kneeling figure, who rolls it forwards. A relay team. At the end of the tunnel, where it widens, a man, naked to the waist, crouches, stacking the barrels.

EXT. CONFEDERATE LINES. PREDAWN.

A RABBIT, scared up, darts along the trench. Rourke sees it, beckons to another Cold Mountain boy, Butcher.

BUTCHER

That's fresh breakfast. Shoot him!

ROURKE

I'm not firing, start the damn war off.

Butcher chases after the rabbit, Rourke in raucous support.

INT. TUNNEL. PREDAWN.

The crouching man has wrapped FUZE WIRE around the last barrel, and now retreats, paying out the wire as he does so, as each man in the tunnel crawls backwards behind him.

EXT. CONFEDERATE LINES. DAWN.

Rourke weaves through the gun emplacements, laughing.

ROURKE

That's my rabbit!

Great sport. Inman, fifty yards away, looks over, amused, goes back to his gun.

INT. TUNNEL. DAWN.

The fuze wire is lit. It fizzes towards the barrels.

EXT. CONFEDERATE LINES. DAWN.

Rourke is running BUT NOW THE GROUND BUCKLES UNDER HIM AND HE'S BEING LIFTED SLOWLY INTO THE AIR, the earth swelling.

AN APOCALYPTIC EXPLOSION. FOUR TONS OF DYNAMITE RIP THE GROUND OPEN IN A CRATER 135 FEET LONG, 90 FEET ACROSS, 30 FEET DEEP. HORSES, GUNS, MEN ARE BLOWN TO PIECES AND THROWN UP INTO THE AIR. INMAN DISAPPEARS UNDER DIRT AND DEBRIS.

Pandemonium. The Confederates are in complete disarray. The Federals pour forwards across NO MANS LAND, through the peaceful oasis of trees, roaring the roar of attack. They flood towards the crater, hundreds of them, charging into a dense and impenetrable WALL OF SMOKE.

THEN THEY'RE INSIDE THE GREAT GASH OF CRATER AND CAN'T GET OUT AGAIN, arriving at an insurmountable wall of mud.

The Confederates regroup. Orders are yelled. Chaos developing into battle.

The Confederates begin firing into the crater. Guns and mortar wheel round and empty into what is becoming a terrible death trap.

Inman gets to his feet. Oakley with him, and rushes through the smoke to the pit, emptying his LeMats into the crater.

LATER: A BLACK REGIMENT from the Union join the attack. Bodies falling on bodies as the Federals charge in and pack their comrades even tighter. The Confederates make a pincer movement outside the Crater, forcing all the Federals in. It's Medieval. No escape.

THE CONFEDERATES jump into the pit to engage the Federals. Hand to hand fighting. Too close for rifles, just bayonets, and guns swung like clubs and Inman sliding down into that hell, tiring the nine rounds, then the shotgun charge, which does a terrible damage. Primitive. Unutterable carnage. Men killing each other in embraces, soldier crushed against soldier, desperate to survive, to kill, to live. An oozing layer cake of bodies, dead and frantically alive, drowning in slick.

YOUNG OAKLEY loses his rifle and picks up a magazine case, clubbing his opponent, then slips onto him and is stuck with a bayonet, the pain of which makes him squeal.

INMAN GOES AT IT. He's a warrior, punching and stabbing and firing. A coldly efficient killer. He's grabbed from behind and crushed, a hand gouging at his face, an almighty struggle.

He falls and lands on top of Oakley, and he and his Federal opponent fight to the death with the wounded boy as their pillow. The slaughter continues over and around them, the sound, the sound of hell and madness. The boy has his arm around Inman, like lovers.

LATER: The Confederates run after the retreating Union soldiers, firing, cavalry riding them down. Inman stands, the boy's blood all over him, exhausted and appalled. The crater, behind him, an abattoir of men. The victors are yelling, pumped mad with adrenaline. Butcher comes alongside Inman.

BUTCHER

That was something! That's hell and we've been there! Kicked old Nick's asshole.

A WOUNDED BLACK SOLDIER sits up as Butcher celebrates. Butcher runs over, but can't find a charge for his musket. He looks around in the stack of corpses, pulling out weapons, tries one: not loaded, throws it down, tries another: not loaded. The wounded man can't get up, tries to drag himself like a crab away from Butcher. Inman yells at him, appalled.

BUTCHER (CONT'D)

You got a charge?

He picks up another musket. It fires. The wounded Federal slumps back, dead.

EXT. CONFEDERATE LINES. DUSK.

THE AFTERMATH. The dead being piled up for burial, divided into allegiance. Wounded prisoners able to walk are led away. A great deal of casual looting. Of boots, of equipment, of personal items. Inman sees a soldier in the crater, lining up wounded Federals, putting their heads in a row. THE MAN EXTRACTS A HAMMER FROM HIS BELT AND, SATISFIED HE HAS AN ECONOMIC ARRANGEMENT, PROCEEDS DOWN THE LINE, SMASHING EACH SKULL.

Inman turns away, sees another Rebel, extravagantly costumed, a strange FIDDLE head protruding from his knapsack. This is STOBROD THEWES. He's bent over a dead Federal, examining his mouth. He reaches behind his back and roots around in the knapsack, producing A PAIR OF PLIERS, WHICH HE INSERTS INTO THE CORPSE'S MOUTH. He's yanking away when A SWINGING BOOT connects with his head and knocks him to the ground. Startled, he looks up to see Inman hovering over him.

STOBROD

That's gold in his mouth he got no need for.
(shrugs))
We take his boots.

He examines his fiddle for damage. Some orderlies pass, lifting OAKLEY away on a gurney.

Oakley's pale as a maiden, the life leaking from him. Inman walks a way with him. Oakley looks up, desperate to be brave.

OAKLEY

I got a few. You saw?

INMAN

I saw.

OAKLEY

I know you don't recognise me. I'm
Mo Oakley's boy.

(Inman finds this incredible)

It's okay. I was thirteen when you
all left. Am I going to die?

Inman flicks his eyes to the Orderly, whose look confirms the boy's wounds are certainly mortal.

INT. FIELD HOSPITAL. NIGHT.

Inman sits on the ground beside Oakley's cot. Around them, the wounded are certainly dying, makeshift care, oil lights, groans.

OAKLEY

I'd like to hear some music while I go.

EXT. CONFEDERATE LINES. NIGHT.

Inman walks around the campfires. He hears some fiddle music. It's Stobrod.

Stobrod sees Inman. Inman stares, his expression an instruction, the turns and walks away.

INT. FIELD HOSPITAL. NIGHT.

Stobrod stands over Oakley. Consults with Inman.

STOBROD

What about *Bonaparte's Retreat* ?
That's one I play.

OAKLEY

Play me something sweet. Like a
girl's waiting for me.

Stobrod looks at Inman, confused.

OAKLEY (CONT'D)

Play me something like there's nothing to
fear from a merciful Lord.

INMAN

(to Stobrod)
You heard him.

STOBROD

(nervous)

I only know a couple of tunes.

OAKLEY

Like when you're thirsty up at
Bishop's Creek and the water is so
cool.

Inman glares at Stobrod. And Stobrod starts to play. Hesitant, then with gathering confidence, improvising, increasingly expansive, as if he's as surprised as everyone else. Oakley's lips move. A whisper. Inman leans in.

OAKLEY (CONT'D)

I'm reaching Cold Mountain before you.

Stobrod plays. It's wrenching. Oakley stills. Inman abruptly puts his hand on the neck of the fiddle, stopping Stobrod. The boy is dead. Inman gets to his feet and walks away.

INT. CONFEDERATE TENT. NIGHT.

A dozen men in the tent. Inman has a BOOK, its cover gone, rolled up and tied with a leather strap. His bookmark is A FADED TINTYPE PHOTOGRAPH of a solemn young woman. He unwraps the book carefully and reads a page by the sickly light next to his bedroll. An OFFICER comes into the tent, approaches Inman, who makes a stand.

OFFICER

Don't get up, soldier. You are
mentioned tonight in my report.
You are a credit to the Highlands,
to North Carolina and to the Cause.

INMAN

(tight)

Do you have news, sir, on my
application for transfer?

OFFICER

I know. A bloody day. It's what
our General said: *Good thing war is
so terrible else a man might end up
liking it too much.*

INMAN

Sir. It was my understanding the
medical corps was desperate for
volunteers.

OFFICER

Right now, soldier, it's me who is
in need of volunteers. There's a
dozen Yankees in that stand of
trees between us. Stuck there from
the retreat. Come daylight they can
shoot us down for sport.

EXT. CONFEDERATE LINES. NIGHT.

A beautiful night. Lots of stars. Inman and three others, including Butcher, slide over the top of the trench, far to one side of the stand of trees. The plan is to cast a wide arc that will bring them around back of the trees, closer to the enemy side than their own. The four men slither over the ground. They pause. Inman has arrived at a tangle of corpses. He slithers over them.

They work their way towards the trees. THERE ARE A HALF DOZEN FEDERALS CROUCHING IN THE COVER OF THE TREES. They are dozing. Only one of them sits with a rifle surveying the Confederate lines, the others have their backs to the enemy, sitting against the trunks, grabbing a few minute's sleep.

As the four rebels approach, still crawling, one of the Federals opens his eyes, sees the attack, shifts for his rifle. INMAN IMMEDIATELY STANDS UP, FIRING INSTANTLY, killing him and two others, while Butcher throws himself at another. The exchanges are brief and savage and one of Inman's party and all of the Federals lay dead. Then the rebels break from the trees.

A FLARE goes up, then another, both from the Confederate trenches. INMAN AND HIS ACCOMPLICES ARE PICKED OUT IN A BRILLIANT GREEN LIGHT. Shots follow, from both sides, aimed at the three returning men as they zigzag towards their own lines. As they get close, voices cry out, rippling down the trench, joining their own admonitions: Don't shoot, Hold your fire, they're our boys, Hold your fire!!! They're almost home. Butcher is laughing, whooping. Then just as suddenly he falls, wounded. Inman stops, turns back, runs to him.

Inman collects Butcher, drags him, carries him. They're fifty yards from their lines. A BULLET CATCHES INMAN IN THE NECK. He goes down like a tree, blood pouring from his neck. Lying on the ground, he watches the phosphorescent lights slowly fade to black, all sound fading with them.

EXT. CHAPEL, COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. 3 YEARS EARLIER. DAY.

A WOODEN JOIST swings across the view of the Blue Ridge. Men are swarming over the roof of an unfinished CHAPEL, below which appears the small town of COLD MOUNTAIN. Among the workers, armed with nails and hammer, knees clutching a rafter, is Inman, fresh and a whole lifetime younger. Rourke and Butcher are also there hammering, building, kidding around and Oakley, barely a teenager.

Below them, women are setting up a lunch for the workers, ADA amongst them. She has the circumspect air of the blue stocking, uncomfortably aware of the dirt beneath her hem, the men's radar for her every move. Inman watches her as Sally Swanger approaches.

SALLY
(to Ada, as Monroe moves off)
Ada, how are you settling in? Are you
liking the farm?

ADA
Very much. It's beautiful country.

SALLY
So listen - if you would say hello to one
of these fools, I'll get a field cleared
this weekend.

ADA
Anyone? Like a forfeit?

SALLY
(pointing at Inman who
immediately looks away)
No. Him in particular, up in the rafters.
Been pressing me all morning.

UP ON THE ROOFBEAMS OF THE CHAPEL, the men are preoccupied
with talk of secession from the Union.

ROURKE
(hammering)
I call this nail: Northern Aggression.
(hammering)
I call this nail: a free nigger.

BUTCHER
Show some respect - these nails are
making a church.

ROURKE
(hammering)
I call this nail: respect the church.

Ada comes over, carrying a tray of lemonade glasses. Calls up
to Inman.

ADA
Hello.

Inman swings down. He feels the other men staring, burning a
hole in his head.

ADA (CONT'D)
I'm Ada Monroe.

INMAN
I'm Inman.

ADA
Inman?

INMAN

W. P. Inman.

ADA

W. P. Inman.

INMAN

Repeating a thing doesn't improve it.
(shrugs)
People call me Inman.

ADA

If you were to take a glass of lemonade
your friends might stop staring. Inman.

INMAN

They're not my friends.

He drops down to ground level, takes the lemonade, scowls at the other guys. They're breaking for lunch and - as they make their way to the trestle tables - they enjoy jostling Inman.

INMAN (CONT' D)

Thank you.

ADA

And what do you do?

INMAN

I work wood. Got a piece of land.
Mostly work wood.

ADA

Clear fields?

INMAN

(uncomfortable)
I can clear a field.

ADA

So, was there something in particular you
wished to say to me?

INMAN

(thinks about it)
Not that comes to me.
(hands back the glass)
I'll say thank you for the lemonade.

And he turns and joins the other men gathering round the tables for lunch. Ada watches him, intrigued. Rourke and co. approach ESCO SWANGER, a known sympathizer with the North, to give him a bad time.

ROURKE

Esco loves the Yankees.

ESCO
I prefer a Yankee to a halfwit.

Inman arrives just as Rourke points a warning finger at Esco. He pushes the finger down to get by. Esco continues:

ESCO (CONT' D)
What is it you think you'd be fighting for?

ROURKE
The South.

ESCO
And what's that when it's at home?

Esco's sons, ELLIS AND ACTON, who're working at the other end of the building, have now arrived at the table.

ACTON
Pop, you causing trouble?

ESCO
No.

ELLIS
That means yes.

ESCO
You cut the wood, you carry the water for good old King Cotton. Now you want to fight for him. Somebody has to explain it to me.

ACTON
(to Rourke and the others)
Don't even try.

The others are desperate to tease Inman.

BUTCHER
How's the lemonade? Sweet?

Ada, at the lemonade stand again, watches them laughing at Inman, who keeps his head fixed on the table.

EXT. CONFEDERATE LINES. NIGHT.

INMAN, ON A GURNEY, carried, someone with a cloth to his neck, which is soaked through with blood. They start to run with him, heading for the field hospital, worried that he will die before the wound can be- staunched, cauterized.

Throughout, A STRANGE MUSIC PLAYS, discordant notes jangling:

EXT. SWANGER FARM. COLD MOUNTAIN. DAY

- from A PIANO, lashed to a cart, as it bounces along the lane, passing the Swanger Farm. Sally comes out to look. It's Ada riding next to one of the farmhands, a second boy keeping watch over the piano. Sally goes over.

SALLY
That's a fine looking thing.

ADA
I've been missing it.

SALLY
Thank you, by the way.
(from Ada's quizzical look)
Inman's down in the bottom field,
clearing his debt.

ADA
Oh dear. And then he had nothing to say.

SALLY
He was happy.

ADA
Really?

SALLY
Are men so different in Charleston?

ADA
Men? I don't know. I don't even know what a woman should be like. In Charleston I was called a thistle, twice, by two different men. Both of them - they were hunting for a simile, what was I like - and thistle came right to them.

SALLY
If you're saying you might like him, why not go down and say hello.

EXT. BOTTOM FIELD, SWANGER FARM. DAY

Inman's working in the field, stripped to his undershirt, hot work, wielding a scythe. He hears something and looks up at the edge of the lane, ADA IS PLAYING THE PIANO, which is still strapped to the cart. She briefly raises a hand to Inman, then nods to the farmhand who sets them on their way again. Inman smiles, waves back, watching as the cart rumbles off down the track.

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. NIGHT

It's pouting with rain. INSIDE THE FARMHOUSE, ADA IS PLAYING THE PIANO.

Men and women crowd into the parlour, in best clothes, celebrating the completion of the Chapel. Inman is outside on the porch, his coat soaked, water pouring off his hat. He looks at Ada. She finishes. Monroe steps in front of the applause, smiling. His words of thanks leak through the window to Inman, who stands, watching, listening.

INT. PARLOUR, BLACK COVE FARM. NIGHT.

Monroe circulates, with Ada. He nods at a group of men, who congregate in one part, not mingling. Their leader, TEAGUE, might be a minister himself, favouring a black dress coat, a black crown in the corner, eyes flashing. Ada doesn't know them. Esco comes by. Monroe puts a hand on his arm.

MONROE

Esco, our friends there -
(indicating Teague and co)
- they helped build the Chapel?

ESCO

That's Teague and his boys. I'd recommend you kick them out except a man don't kick a snake. One time the Teague family owned the whole of Cold Mountain. My farm, your farm, all belonged to his grand-daddy. Teague wanted this place bad. You got it. He's here sniffing out an advantage.

MONROE

There's no advantage here, but to celebrate a job well done. Cheers -
(he raises his glass)
- and thank you.

And Teague raises his glass across the room.

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. NIGHT.

Ada appears at the door opening it onto the porch. She's carrying a tray with drinks. Acknowledges Inman.

ADA

Were you planning to come inside?

INMAN

I'm wetter than a fish.

ADA

There's a good fire going.

INMAN

I'm all right.

ADA
Somebody said you were enlisting.
(no response)
Are you?

INMAN
If there's a war we'll all fight.

ADA
(unimpressed)
If there's a mountain we'll all climb, if
there's an ocean we'll all drown.

INMAN
Call a thing a war makes it a challenge
to some men.

ADA
Did you get a picture made?

INMAN
Say again.

ADA
A tintype, with your gun and your courage
on display.

INMAN
You're laughing at me.

ADA
I don' t know you.

INMAN
You're always carrying a tray.

ADA
I'm taking a drink over to the negroes in
the barn.

INMAN
(takes the tray)
I'll do that. I can't get much wetter.

He goes into the night rain. She watches him.

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. DAY.

A beautiful day, the farm peaceful. Inman walks up the path
to the farmhouse, its borders flowering and pretty, a slave
woman weeding. He knocks on the door. Monroe answers.

MONROE
Mr. Inman.

INMAN
Reverend.

MONROE

What can I do for you?

Inman hovers, awkward. Ada appears, awkward.

INMAN

I have some sheet music. Belonged to my father. No use to me.

Ada comes forward, takes the package.

MONROE

You must come in.

INMAN

I should probably get along.

ADA

Mr. Inman is more comfortable outdoors. Perhaps we might take a walk.

MONROE

A splendid idea.

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. DAY.

Monroe and Inman and Ada touring the farm. It's a biggish property, over three hundred acres. And well-tended by the dozen slave farmhands who work it, some of whom are dotted about in the landscape. 'Rolling mountains dominate the view.

MONROE

(expansive)

I want to get sheep into this field. A big field doesn't look right without sheep. You're a lucky fellow, Mr. Inman, you've had this view all your life.

INMAN

I think so.

MONROE

It's a special view. I dragged my poor daughter to Cold Mountain from Charleston because of my Doctors - they say my heart is weak - so the air's meant to do me good. But it's the view I think heals.

Ada walking behind, 'comes alongside the two men, threading her arm into her father's but, by so doing, also arriving next to Inman.

MONROE (CONT'D)

I have to get on my visits. Can I offer you a ride back into town?

Inman looks at Ada. No word.

INT. PARLOUR, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY

From the window Ada watches the Cabriolet head towards town. At the piano, she unwraps the leather lace from the package of music. Inside the first book of music, there's a DAGUERREOTYPE OF INMAN with his LeMats, a typical Confederate pose. Some of the music has left its imprint on the picture, the notes like a melody over Inman's face. Ada picks them out on the piano.

The ebullient sound of Shape Singing. A noisy choir letting rip -

INT. CHAPEL, COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN, MAY 20TH, 1861. DAY.

- THE WHOLE CHURCH IS SINGING, MEN TO ONE SIDE: WOMEN TO THE OTHER. Monroe conducts, sings. Inman is there, as is Ada. He fixes on her neck, the way the hair falls.

The door bursts open. Young OAKLEY, apologetic nod to Monroe, sits at the back, then leans forward, as the singing continues, to say something to Rourke, who says something to Butcher, the news spreading like wildfire. Rourke gets up, leaves. Butcher gets up next, follows. Another man. Another. Depleting the male voices, until only women and some of the older men are singing and one side of the church is practically empty.

Inman, remains, fixed on Ada. Who does not look round.

EXT. CHAPEL, COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. DAY

Those left in the congregation now spill out into what has become a melee as the NEWS OF SECESSION goes up. Enormous excitement, particularly among the boys, who now seem curiously attractive to the girls. Inman blinks out into the sun, Ada finds him. They're awkward as they watch other sweethearts embracing.

ADA

Well, you have your war.

TEAGUE AND HIS MEN COME RIDING UP THE STREET, their horses clearing a path amongst the celebrating crowd. Teague reins in his horse and rides it up against Esco Swanger.

TEAGUE

Those who follow Lincoln, or preach abolition,
best keep one eye open when they're sleeping,
Old Bogey Man might get you!

Inman steps between Esco and Teague, holding the reins of Teague's horse, easy and dangerous.

INMAN

Are you the law all of a sudden?

Teague produces a document, which he waves in the air.

TEAGUE

That's right, son. Home Guard for Haywood County. I'm the law from today. You all go fight now. We'll watch your sweethearts.

And he spurs on his horse, his fellow Home Guard falling in behind, riding on over the ridge. Inman walks to Ada.

INMAN

You might be safer back in Charleston.

ADA

But then who'll be waiting for you?

She puts a hand on "his arm for a second. They both want to get to the point of declaration but don't know how. They stand, people noisy around them, those about to leave, those about to be left.

INMAN

I'm going to walk back inside the Chapel.

And he does so, making his meaning clear for her to follow.

INT. CHAPEL, COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. DAY

Inman walks inside. Stands with his back to the door. It opens and closes. Inman turns. It's Monroe.

MONROE

Did you want a quiet word?

Now the door opens again and it's Ada. She's dismayed to see her father.

INMAN

Just some quiet.

MONROE

Of course...Ada.

He indicates they should both leave. Inman sits at a bench.

EXT. COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. DAY

Monroe and Ada come into town in their cabriolet. They pass under banners proclaiming the Confederate cause: *Old Rip's Awake! Watch out Yankees!* The trap draws up by the Cold Mountain General Store. Monroe lets Ada down.

MONROE

(of his appointment)

I'll daresay Dr. O'Brien'll want to do a test or two.

ADA

And then there'll be a coffee or
two, a brandy or two...

Monroe smiles in acknowledgement, gets back in the trap. Ada heads into the store.

INT - BEDROOM. ROOMING HOUSE .COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. DAY.

INMAN SITS ON HIS BED, wearing pants and a vest. His room is like a monk's cell. Nothing in it. Inman's trunk is packed. He's polishing his boots, in his bare feet. One hand inside the boot, the other blacking it. There's a knock at the door. He opens it. It's Ada. He abruptly closes the door on her.

INT. HALLWAY, ROOMING HOUSE. COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. DAY

Ada waits outside. She's not sure what's happening. Then Inman opens the door. He's buttoning his shirt. His boots are on, one conspicuously dirty, one highly polished. Somebody walks up the stairs, carrying a jug and bowl. They separate as the man passes them. They're tender, awkward.

ADA

I found you this book. William Bartram.
They tell me it's good. I think he writes
about these parts, the author, so...

Inman takes it.

She has something else. Wrapped in paper.

ADA (CONT' D)

And this...

(hands it to him)

I'm not smiling in it. I don't know how
to do that, hold a smile, so now I'm
solemn. .

INMAN

Ada...

ADA

What?

HE KISSES HER, pressing into her, his arm circling her waist.

Below them the sound of a MARCHING BAND. It's the RECRUITMENT PARADE and brings Rourke and Butcher racing down the stairs. Inman pulls away from Ada as the boys hurtle for the front door.

ROURKE

Let's go!

EXT. COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. DAY.

Rourke, Butcher, and then Inman appear in the doorway of the Rooming House, and then fall in with the motley crew of "Volunteers AS THEY MARCH BY WITH THE BAND AND THE ENLISTED SOLDIERS. The town is out to wish them well, parents, younger brothers, sweethearts walking alongside their brave men. Ada comes to the door of the Rooming House. Inman looks back and sees her, but almost immediately loses her in the crowd. THE DRUMMERS DRUM, THE CROWD CHEERS, THE RECRUITS MARCH UP THE HILL

EXT. BEHIND CONFEDERATE LINES, VIRGINIA. DAY.

AND THE WOUNDED AND THE WRETCHED STRAGGLE ALONG THE RAILROAD. A TRAIN with the seriously injured snakes past the back of the Confederate lines - its suburbs of supplies, arriving and departing troops - and into peaceful country. FIDDLE PLAYS, THEN A BANJO.

INT. BOX CAR. DAY. 1864

A CROWDED WAGON. It's a cauldron, and those able smash through the wooden walls to make a breathing hole. Some have their heads thrust out like crated poultry. INMAN IS IN THERE, neck bandaged, its ugly seepage making a bloody necklace. The light plays black and white through the boarded sides of the boxcar, flashing on Inman's face as he drifts in and out of consciousness. He focuses and sees the strange head of STOBROD'S FIDDLE. Stobrod is serenading him, accompanied by an angel-faced and extremely heavy child-man, PANGLE, whose grin of delight seems permanent even in this claustrophobic, grim world. Inman is panicked, puts a hand to push the fiddle away. His voice is a croak, spoiled.

INMAN
I'm not dying.

STOBROD
(to Pangle)
What'd he say?

PANGLE
Says he ain't about to die.

STOBROD
(to Inman)
Truth to tell they say you are,
Soldier. We'll meet again, in the
better world.

He changes his tune, and the tempo, finding a foot-slapping rhythm, the two musicians grinning at each other. Inman lapses back into unconsciousness. The rhythm becomes a hammering sound...

EXT. CHAPEL, COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. DAY

- AS A MAN HAMMERS A TINTYPE OF, HIS SON'S FACE into the wooden porch of the Chapel, where it joins many other portraits of those lost to the war. Monroe presides. One of the slaves from Black Cove holds the ladder for the bereaved father. Other families wait, with their own daguerreotype to mount. It's a memorial service without bodies.

Riders approach. Home Guard. Teague brings his horse up alongside Monroe at the Chapel door, tips his hat in condolence to the bereaved families. With him is a young, intensely beautiful and flamboyant rider, BOSIE, his hair long, a single fingernail bizarrely overgrown. Somehow sinister.

TEAGUE

My condolences to you all.
(he considers the slave)
Keep an eye on the negro. They want what the white man got - all of you watch out your brave boys give their lives to war and meantime your slaves carry murder, rape and arson to your firesides.

MONROE

The only slaves within twenty miles labor on my farm. They're good Christians and I'll vouchsafe for them.

EXT. APPROACH TO BLACK COVE FARM. DAY

Cold Mountain at its loveliest. The CABRIOLET with Monroe and his daughter heads towards the farm. At a bend they meet a couple of riders, TWINS, from Teague's Home Guard, riding furiously past them. Monroe reins in the trap and lets them thunder past before continuing on their way home. Monroe is intrigued by Ada, as if he's never looked at her before.

ADA

What?

MONROE

You're looking - at this moment, I don't know why - you're looking exactly like your mother.

ADA

Every time you see the doctor you get melancholy.

MONROE

He listens to my heart and I get emotional.

ADA

He gives you alcohol and you get emotional.

She squeezes his arm.

MONROE

We commiserate about the folly of this terrible war.

(they ride in silence)

Do you worry when there's no word from him?

(no response)

From Mr. Inman?

ADA

Yes. But then I've tried counting the number of words which passed between Mr. Inman and me.

(looking ahead, seeing smoke)

Is that a bonfire? So close to the barns.

Then they see THE FAMILY OF SLAVES turn off the road as their cabriolet approaches, running away into the fields.

ADA (CONT' D)

What's going on?

MONROE

(shouting at the disappearing slaves)

Hey! Stop there! Hey!

Monroe gets out of the cabriolet and runs into the fields after the retreating family, who are carrying bundles, chairs, personal items, all loaded up. Ada has already taken the reins and has driven up to the house. THE BARN IN WHICH THE SLAVE FAMILY HAD LIVED IS ON FIRE. Monroe catches one of the women, remonstrates with her. She's upset, distressed, one of her sons comes back, pushes Monroe to the ground. They hurry away. Monroe gets up, hurries to the fire.

A FIGURE SWINGS IN THE HEAT OF THE FLAMES, HANGING FROM A BEAM. Monroe spies it as he catches up with Ada.

MONROE (CONT'D)

Dear God.

ADA

No, Daddy, it's not real.

The figure swings round. IT'S AN EFFIGY, A GROTESQUE CARICATURE OF A BLACK MAN.

MONROE

(appalled)

What is wrong with us all?

Ada turns and runs off.

ADA
I'll get help.
(shouting over her shoulder)
Keep away from the flames.

Monroe stands and considers the flames. Ada turns back once more to see him - a small man silhouetted against the blaze.

INT. HOSPITAL, CHARLESTON. DAY

INMAN lies; bandaged, eyes closed, in THE BALLROOM OF A COLONIAL MANSION, co-opted as one ward of a Confederate hospital. Rows of beds, the wounded and the dying, are lodged between some vestiges of the room's former glory.

SOME LOCAL WOMEN, conscious of their duty to the cause, are brought through by an exhausted doctor, who's lost all his grace. The windows are open, but it's still insufferably hot, the muslin curtains barely moving.

DOCTOR
Most of these men will be dead by the morning or, if they're stubborn, by nightfall. I have other men outside in the quadrangle waiting for the beds.

The women try to process this, the attitude.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
So, any kind word will be a blessing.

One woman is overpowered by the stench, gags.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
It's the heat. I'm sorry. They rot.

The women begin to approach the beds.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Don't pray. If they're not God fearing you can stir up a hornet's nest.

MRS. MORGAN, nervous, decent, sits next to INMAN. His mouth is moving. She doesn't know what he's saying.

MRS. MORGAN
I'm sorry, you want water?

She bends to him again. His voice is a faint croak.

INMAN
Pigeon River. Little East Fork.

The Doctor is on his exit, stops at the bed.

MRS. MORGAN

I'm sorry. I don't know what he's saying.

DOCTOR

They ramble. Names of loved ones.

MRS. MORGAN

(listening to Inman)

Pigeon River. Is that a place? *Cold Mountain* ?

The Doctor shrugs, not a detective, moves on, stops at the man in the next bed. Has a brief look, calls to a nurse.

DOCTOR

This man is dead.

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. LATE AFTERNOON.

Monroe and Ada are outside, a picnic at the summer table, autumn leaves blowing up around them. Nearby the charred skeleton of the barn. Ada gets up, clears away.

MONROE

Thank you.

(staying her for grace)

For your Providence, Oh lord, we thank you.

ADA

Amen. That was the last of the ham.

MONROE

It was delicious.

ADA

I have to learn how to cook.

MONROE

I was going to say something in Chapel. Perhaps some of the womenfolk will volunteer.

ADA

I can't have people coming here and cooking for me!

MONROE

It's my fault. I should have raised you less like a companion and more like a young woman. I'm sorry.

ADA

I'm not sorry, but I don't know how we'll get through another winter.

MONROE

Will you play me something? Something peaceful while I look over my sermon..

Ada takes the dishes away. He gets out his papers, his pen and ink.

INT. PARLOUR, BLACK COVE FARM. DUSK

ADA PLAYS THE PIANO. *Chopin' 5 Prelude in E Minor*. Outside in the garden, Monroe has adjourned to his striped campaign chair, and is hunched over his notes. The door of the parlour is open and the music floats over to him as he works.

Ada plays. A FEW SPOTS OF RAIN appear at the window. Then the steady drumming of a summer shower.

ADA

(still playing)

Daddy, bring the tablecloth in with you!

She plays some more. Monroe hasn't come in. The rain splashes on to the window..

ADA (CONT.'D)

Daddy, come inside before you drown!

After a few more bars, she stops playing and, curious, goes to the door. She stands at the doorway. MONROE'S SERMON IS CAUGHT IN THE WIND AND BLOWS AROUND HIM, THE INK RUN TO ABSTRACTIONS, his hand dropped and visible to Ada as, with dread, she approaches. SHE CATCHES THE SODDEN PAPERS, CHASING AFTER THEM, THEN REACHES HER DEAD FATHER.

He's like a fish, his face shining with the rain, and glass eyed. She leans in to him, her head to his heart, then runs, oblivious to the rain, her dress already drenched, runs down the lane.

ADA (V.O.) (CONT' D)

Dear Mr. Inman...

INT. HOSPITAL, CHARLESTON. NIGHT

INMAN'S FACE as he drifts in and out of consciousness. Mrs. Morgan, the hospital volunteer, sits by Inman's bed. She holds ADA'S UNOPENED LETTER, badly weather damaged, the pages stuck together, the writing blurred where the ink has run.

MRS. MORGAN

It's come to you by way of Virginia.

There are various dates, which she decodes.

MRS. MORGAN (CONT' D)

It's not too recent - written this past winter. I'm afraid I can't read who it's from. *Dear Mr. Inman,*

INT. BLACK COVE FARM. NIGHT.

Ada is writing at her father's desk. A lonely room.

ADA (V.O.)

*- I'm still waiting, as I promised
I would, but I find myself alone
and at the end of my wits -*

INT. HOSPITAL, CHARLESTON. NIGHT

Mrs. Morgan reads to Inman, trying to decipher the letter:

MRS. MORGAN

*- at the end of my wits, so now I say to
you, plain as I can, come back to me.
Come back to me is my request .
(can't read the next bit)
Then something I can't read, something,
Come back to me.*

Inman is very still. Then, eyes glinting with determination, gives a TINY NOD.

OFFICIAL (O.S.)

*By order of Zebulon Vance, Governor of
this great state of North Carolina: any
soldier turned deserter is guilty of
treason and shall be hunted down like a
dog.*

EXT. COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. DAY

Ada walks down the hill from the Chapel. There is an absence of young people, but the older folk are gathered round the General Store where a UNIFORMED OFFICIAL is reading from a document.

OFFICIAL

*- Any man takes in a deserter is likewise
guilty of treason.*

The Official is flanked by Teague, Bosey and the twins, puffed up with self-importance. Ada has to walk around him to enter the store.

OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

The Home Guard is powered to enter any place it sees, fit, without notice or constraint. Names of all deserters will be posted in every town, published in every newspaper.

INT. GENERAL STORE, COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. DAY

The Official continues outside as Ada enters. Ada approaches Mrs Castlereagh, the owner.

ADA

Is there a letter for me?

MRS. CASTLEREAGH

Nothing - we're getting no post through at all - although if you slip out back the material you ordered has arrived.

They go to the back of the store, to a screened-off area. Mrs. Castlereagh hands her over a packet of material. There's another, more furtive, transaction to take place. Mrs Castlereagh hands over a second parcel as if it were narcotics. Ada tears-at the wrapping. It's a parcel of books.

MRS. CASTLEREAGH (CONT'D)

If folks knew I was taking deliveries from the North.

ADA

I know. Thank you so much.

MRS. CASTLEREAGH

The sooner we lose this war the better. Already one boy gone, another with his leg took off at the knee. That's enough.

ADA

What do you hear?

MRS. CASTLEREAGH

All I know is they say not one boy in ten from these mountains is coming home again and most of them are deserters.

EXT. GENERAL STORE, COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. DAY

Ada emerges, almost collides with Teague. She wriggles past him, tries to make her package invisible.

EXT. APPROACH TO BLACK COVE FARM - DAY

IT'S WINTER. A solitary RIDER jogs his horse through the frost, towards Black Cove farm.

Ada is working at a handpump, failing to coax water from the well. She's wrapped in blankets. The farm is somewhat unkempt and so is she. The hem of her skirt is frayed. She rips at it tearing off a strip of material, which she binds around the handle in an attempt to thaw the mechanism. Then she looks up to see the horseman approaching. It's Teague. Ada immediately heads inside the house.

Teague arrives at the house, takes a brace of RABBITS from his saddlebag. He beads for the gate. The gate needs oiling, the path is overgrown, he looks at the pump handle, the abandoned pitcher. Ada opens the door, pinning her hair.

TEAGUE

It's taken me too long, but I've come to pay my respects.

ADA

Thank you.

TEAGUE

(hands over the rabbits)

I reckoned you might need fattening up.

Ada takes them. She is very queasy with these dead animals.

TEAGUE (CONT'D)

This house must bring bad luck. Killed my grand-daddy to lose it, then my daddy died on account of not having it, then your daddy died on account of getting it. We should burn it down.

ADA

Didn't somebody try?

TEAGUE

Lot to manage without help. Need a hand with that pump?

ADA

No.

TEAGUE

I'm happy to volunteer.

ADA

But not to volunteer for the war?

TEAGUE

The war? I wanted to go. But you know: too old, too literate. Plus I got no spleen. Loot it from a horse's kick.

ADA

You've got no spleen.

TEAGUE

That's the thing about an organ. You don't know you need it till you lost it.

(suddenly busy with a bayonet)

I want to clear this path. I can just as soon do it and talk as stand around and talk. Then you can say men beat a path to your door.

ADA

I'd really prefer it if you didn't do that.

TEAGUE

Would you rather I did my job?
(scything at the path)
see if there's any material I should confiscate. For the war effort.

ADA

I was raised in the good manners of the South where a gentleman doesn't enter a house with a woman alone.

TEAGUE

(now he's at the pump)
Good manners didn't quite make it to these mountains. If it don't yield meat, or you can't sit on it, or suck on it...
(he gets the pump going, water pours out)
And you're sleeping all right? These cold dark nights?

ADA

I'm sleeping fine.

TEAGUE

It's going to be a long hard winter.

He turns and stops at the gate, runs his hands through his hair and uses the grease to ease the hinge. Then steps up onto his horse, and rides away. Ada watches him. Shudders.

INT. BLACK COVE FARM. NIGHT.

Ada comes into the kitchen. A weak oil-lamp reveals THE TWO RABBITS, partially covered on a plate, flies buzzing around them, a little liquid leaking from them. Ada takes a knife and contemplates skinning gutting them. Suddenly she gathers them up and runs out.

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. NIGHT.

ADA BURIES THE TWO RABBITS. The wind howls. She covers the little hole with soil and stones. Pumps out water to wash her hands. Thinks she hears a noise, listens, alert to any unfamiliar sounds, then hurries back to the house.

INT. BLACK COVE FARM. NIGHT.

Ada comes inside, she closes the door. Locks it. Puts a chair against it. Goes upstairs, to her bedroom.

INT. BLACK COVE FARM. NIGHT.

Ada enters her bedroom. It's a chaos of books, clothes, dishes. She closes the door, sets another chair against it. Then drags her armchair up against that, books and papers spilling onto the floor. She props up Inman's portrait, on the chair, as if he were guarding her. Sits on the bed and, desolate, begins to write:

EXT. THE OCEAN BY THE HOSPITAL, CHARLESTON. DAY

ADA (V/O)

*Should I imagine you are dead and, that
it is to your spirit I am writing? No
word from you in all this time. If you
receive this please know I am here and
warring, too, with a faint heart.*

THERAPY FOR WOUNDED SOLDIERS. Some of those convalescing swim or are helped to paddle in the healing sea. There are rudimentary wheelchairs. Inman, a long way from home, is amongst those sitting in one of these, very still, grey and sick - but alive. He pulls at the dressing on his neck, exposing the still raw and livid wound to the sea air.

Inman has his Bartram, his bookmark is the battered and foxed picture of Ada, which he considers, before continuing to read.

Behind him A HUNDRED SLAVES AT WORK IN THE FIELDS, and behind them the Mansion which has become the hospital. A series of bells, of shouts, and the slaves stop working, prepare for the long walk home, congregating, then forming a line, herded by the foremen.

Inman eases his position to bend over and dip his bandage in the seawater. He brings the wet bandage to his neck, considers the ocean, his fellow ragtag of wounded, the slaves, the great fields, the Mansion. The whole meaning of this war around him. A GRAVEL VOICE STARTS TO SING THE BLUES, CONTINUES AS -

EXT. HOSPITAL, CHARLESTON. DUSK.

The men return to the Hospital. A BLIND MAN IS SELLING PEANUTS which he roasts over a small fire. HE'S SINGING AS -

EXT. CHAPEL, COLD MOUNTAIN TOWN. DAY

- A tintype of OAKLEY is added to the Chapel's votives, hammered in alongside Rourke and Butcher. There are fifty or more images now, the paint flaking around them. The exterior of the Chapel, three years on, has taken on the burden of recording history. There is no minister, no services, just the votives, daguerreotypes or simply the names of those missing in action, accompanied by tiny vases of wildflowers. The town shrouded in mist, and quiet.

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. SPRING. DAY.

EVERYWHERE SIGNS OF PROFOUND NEGLECT, like a Grimm's fairy tale of a deserted house. The fields are overgrown with weeds, the gardens abandoned. The chickens have deserted the henhouse and are wandering around the outbuildings, scuffing at the packed dirt.

Sally and Esco come up the overgrown path, avoiding the chickens, and knock at the door.

SALLY

Ada! Ada, It's Sally.

They're seen from ground level, through a boxwood, as their feet patrol the ground, turn away from the door, and then retreat, their voices drifting away. Ada is there, crouching in her hidey-hole, a blanket on the ground, her book. She wants to reveal herself, but is too embarrassed.

ESCO

Will you look at the state of this place!

SALLY

Poor soul. She's got nobody and nothing and three hundred acres of misery.

During this a ROOSTER, black and gold, struts into the boxwood. As the rooster approaches, Ada shudders, tries to shoo it away without alerting her presence. Ada peers through the boxwood as Sally and Esco close the gate and recede. The rooster comes at her again. She rises up, kicking out at it, while he flares his wings, spurs flaying at her. Ada runs from the boxwood, tormented by the triumphant rooster, which continues to fly and scratch, driving her into the house.

INT. ADA'S BEDROOM BLACK COVE FARM. DAY

Ada dabs at the scratches, her dress rolled down to the waist to reveal her arms and shoulders. Now she shucks off the dress completely and tries to find a clean replacement. There isn't one, so she hunts through the overflowing laundry basket for something less dirty.

INT. MONROE'S BEDROOM, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY

Ada enters her father's room, wearing undergarments. Everything as he left it and, in contrast to the rest of the house, extremely tidy. She opens a wardrobe, finds one of his coats, puts it on. It's much too big, and she rolls up the sleeves, catches her pinched face and dishevelled face in a swivel mirror. She turns the mirror away and the image swings into -

EXT. GATES OF HOSPITAL, CHARLESTON. DAY.

- the figure of Inman walking, frail, grey. A kind of lurching walk, as if his balance isn't guaranteed. He gets close to the gate and interests a Guard, on the lookout for would-be deserters. A BLIND MAN IS SELLING PEANUTS which he roasts over a small fire. He's always singing. Inman approaches. When Inman speaks, his voice is a croak.

BLIND MAN
Getting better all the time.

INMAN
Seems that way.

BLIND MAN
I wouldn't hurry. War's almost done.

INMAN
Where'd you take your wound?

BLIND MAN
Before I was born. Never saw a thing in this world, not a tree a gun or a woman. Though I put my hand on all three. Couple of things I felt back there I'd sure liked to have had a long look at.

He's shovelling some peanuts into a twist of paper.

INMAN
What would you give for that? To have your eyeballs back for ten minutes?

BLIND MAN
Ten minutes! Wouldn't give an Indian head cent. I fear it might turn me hateful.

INMAN
That's sure what seeing's done to me.

BLIND MAN
That ain't the way I meant it. You said ten minutes. It's having a thing and then the loss I'm talking about.

INMAN
Then we don't agree. There's not much I wouldn't give for ten minutes of someplace.

BLIND MAN
Someplace or someone.

INMAN
Same difference.

BLIND MAN

You watch yourself. They're
shooting men who take themselves a
walk.

EXT. TREE PROMENADE, CHARLESTON. DAY

Inman and a bunch of other walking wounded make their way,
under supervision, towards the town. The grandeur of the
approach, the carriages. The sorry state of the soldiers.

INT. COURTHOUSE, CHARLESTON. DAY.

TWO GREAT TRESTLE TABLES, LOADED WITH CLOTHES. Underneath the
tables, boots - laced together, origins various. The
charitable womenfolk are helping match clothes to recovering
soldiers, some of whom are still on crutches, or in
wheelchairs. Inman finds a black dresscoat, some pants, a
pair of boots. He accumulates a little pile. On his way out,
AN ELDERLY AND STAUNCH CONFEDERATE GENTLEMAN shakes his hand
and gives him an apple from the barrel.

EXT. TEMPORARY BARBERSHOP, CHARLESTON. DAY.

Inman emerges from the Courthouse and joins the line for a
shave at the makeshift barbershop set up outside the
Courthouse. Two barbers, two chairs. A VERY ELEGANT SQUARE,
SOME STUCCO-FRONTED BUILDINGS, A GLIMPSE OF THE MONEYED SOUTH
IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THE MODEST TOWN OF COLD MOUNTAIN. AN
AUCTION HOUSE OPPOSITE ADVERTISES SLAVES, CATTLE, LAND. . .

BARBER

Next.

Inman settles in the seat. The Barber contemplates his
scraggy beard, the livid, scabbed wound on his neck.

BARBER (CONT ' D)

(nervous)

I'll cut your hair, but I ain't about to
shave you. That thing opens up, your
head's liable to falloff.

INT. HOSPITAL, CHARLESTON. PREDAWN.

It is almost dawn. The window by Inman's bed is a frame
giving onto the still dark world. The Night Guard passes by
on its patrol of the perimeter. A CLEAN-SHAVEN INMAN IS FULLY
DRESSED UNDER THE COVERS. He gets his hat, pushes his book
into his knapsack and, with one step up, WALKS OUT OF THE
WINDOW AND INTO THE WORLD.

EXT. THE OCEAN BY THE HOSPITAL, CHARLESTON. DAWN.

Inman, his footprints in the sand, as he hurries along by the
edge of the ocean, away from the hospital...

EXT. SWANGER FARM. DAY

- as Ada walks, the wind kicking up around her, past the Swanger place. She's bent and curiously dressed in her' father's coat.

SALLY (V.O.)

Ada....

Sally Swanger calls out from the field. She's concerned at Ada's gaunt, ragged appearance. Ada waits for her approach.

SALLY (CONT'D)

You're skinny as a whippet, girl - you're earning indoors with me.

ADA

I can't. I'm not - I need to clean some clothes.

SALLY

Great God, you ever looked at my husband!
I can't get him to wear decent Church
clothes Christmas morning. Hang on to me,
the wind'll blow you over.

And she folds her arm into Ada's. They walk up the lane.

INT. SWANGER FARM. AFTERNOON.

Ada eats. Escro across from her contemplating her evident appetite, the oversized man's jacket. Sally ladles more food onto Ada's plate.

SALLY

Don't go back to that dark house. There's
a bed here, least till our boys get home.

ESCO

That your daddy's coat?

ADA

I was saying to Sally, I wasn't expecting
to be visiting, so

ESCO

Don't suit you.

He starts to chuckle, then Ada, too, then Sally.

ESCO (CONT' D)

I can't get up to your place this week.
(of Sally)
She's mad at me -

ADA

I don't expect -

ESCO

- more than I can do to keep this place half-managed. I'm ready-to stop, I tell you. I just want to sit on my porch with Sa I, watch my boys in the field, holler Good job! every hour or so.

SALLY

What about your people in Charleston?

ADA

There are no people. And no money. My father had some bonds and investments. They're worthless now, of course, the war has... they're not worth anything.
(they look at each other)
I love it here. In spite of everything.

ESCO

And waiting on a feller.

A look from Sally.

ESCO (CONT' D)

Look down our well.
(Sally's disgusted with him)
She should! Look down our well with a mirror, you'll see the future. S'what they say.
(to Sally)
You do it! Don't make that face.

SALLY

I know it ain't rightly Christian, but it's what folks do, like when they dangle a needle over the belly to see if you're carrying a boy or a girl.

ADA

What kind of mirror?

EXT. YARD, SWANGER FARM. LATE DAY.

AN IMAGE - DISTORTED, WATERY. IT'S HARD TO RESOLVE BUT COULD BE A CORRIDOR OF TREES. THE SUN LOW AT ONE END, THE SILHOUETTE OF A FIGURE WALKING SLOWLY FORWARDS, A SUDDEN DISTURBANCE OF CROWS.

Ada is bent backwards over the well, a hand mirror glinting down into the blackness. The reflection is elusive against the bright evening sky, the sun almost set, and low.

ESCO

See anything?

ADA

I don' t know.

SALLY

I tried many a time, never saw a dicky-bird.

The image is clearer. The trees sharpen, the figure walking, the steep incline of the corridor, all fiercely black and white as if it were a carpet of snow and black hieroglyphs of trees, and crows flying. The trick of the glass and the watery disc of the well surface. A buzzing in Ada's ears, something like a distant music. Then the figure seems to suddenly pitch forwards, but at that moment, Ada - canted over, getting dizzy has to move and the image flies away, replaced with the sky, the flash of the setting sun.

SALLY(CONT'D)

You all right?

Ada's faint. She sits up, blank, a little shaken.

ADA (V.O.)

Yesterday I found myself crouched over a well like a mad woman, which I suppose I have become

EXT. PLANTATION. DAY

Inman walks along an expanse of marshland. Great cranes fly heavily over him.

ADA (V.O.)

- and staring down into its secrets, I thought I saw you there, walking back to me -

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. LATE AFTERNOON.

Ada is writing in her father's campaign chair, a blanket wrapped around her, a rake propped next to her.

ADA (V.O.)

- or wished I did.

RUBY (O.S.)

That cow wants milking.

Ada looks up from her writing with a start. She covers her letter, guiltily, instinctively. In front of her, at the gate, is A YOUNG RAWBONED, FERAL WOMAN, OF INDETERMINATE ORIGINS. She is barefoot, and dressed in a hand-dye_ shift of blue. Her name is RUBY.

RUBY (CONT'D)

If that letter ain't urgent, the cow is - is what I'm saying.

ADA

I don't know you.

RUBY

Old Lady Swanger says you need some help. Here I am.

Ada is instantly defensive, intimidated.

ADA

I need help, I need, I do need help, but I need a laborer - there's plowing and rough work and - I think there's been a misunderstanding.

RUBY

What's the rake for?

ADA

The rake?

RUBY

Ain't for gardening, that's for sure. Number one - you got a horse I can plow all day. I'm a worker. Number two there's no man better than me cause there's no man around who ain't old or full of mischief. I know your plight.

ADA

My plight?

RUBY

Am I hard to hear cause you keep repeating everything. I'm not looking for money, never cared for it and now it ain't worth nothing. I expect to board and eat at the same table. I'm not a servant. Do you get my meaning?

ADA

You're not a servant.

RUBY

People'll have to empty their own night jars, that's my point.

ADA

Right.

RUBY

And I'm not planning to work while you watch neither.

ADA

Right.

RUBY

Is that a yes or a no?

ADA
(looks at Ruby)
Yes.

RUBY
There's half the day yet. Let's make a
start. My name's Ruby. I know your name.

ADA
The rake: there's a rooster devil, I'm
sure of it. He's Lucifer himself. I go
near him he's at me with his spurs.

RUBY
I despise a flogging rooster. Where is
he?

Ada gets up, nods to the corner of the yard. Ruby goes over.
The Rooster gathers himself up for a new opponent.

IN ONE MOVEMENT SHE PICKS UP THE BIRD AND TWISTS OFF ITS
HEAD.

RUBY (CONT'D)
Let's put him in a pot.

EXT. CORNFIELDS. DAWN.

Inman's walking on a track which passes through cornfields,
the crop high and thick around him. He stops, hearing
something. Riders. He wades into the field, seeking cover in
the tall crop, lying in the dirt. Horses appear. HOME GUARD
MEN ON PATROL, A CHAIN GANG OF PRISONERS: SLAVES, DESERTERS
IN TOW, A COUPLE OF FEDERAL SOLDIERS. They have dogs, which
sniff and growl, intrigued by the-fields, called back by the
Home Guard.

Inman waits until they're well out of sight. AS HE GETS TO
HIS FEET IN THE GREAT FIELDS, ANOTHER BODY APPEARS, THEN
ANOTHER, THEN ANOTHER, THEN ANOTHER, ALL SLAVES ON THE RUN
DOTTED AROUND THE FIELD. He walks to the road, paying no heed
to them. They assemble, paying no heed to him and move off in
the opposite direction. Inman turns, looks at them.

INMAN
Hey!
(they stop, turn)
I'd pay a dollar for an egg. A piece of
cheese.

They look at him, then continue on their way.

INT. ADA'S BEDROOM, BLACK COVE FARM. PREDAWN.

Ada wakes up to persistent knocking.

RUBY
Ada? Ada? You up?

ADA
Yes.
(opening her eyes)
It's still dark.

RUBY
Tell the cows that. It's late.

INT. KITCHEN, BLACK COVE FARM. PREDAWN.

Ada enters blearily, clutching her novel. Ruby already busy.

ADA
I have to eat something.

RUBY
Then you have to get up earlier.
(at Ada's book)
What's that?

ADA
A novel.

RUBY
(heading outside)
You want to carry a book carry one
you can write in -

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. DAWN.

Ruby emerges, followed by Ada, chewing on a tomato.

RUBY
- we got our own story. Called
Black Cove Farm: a catastrophe.

She looks back at Ada for a reaction.

RUBY (CONT'D)
I can spell it, too. C-a-t-a-s-t-r-o-p-
he. Learned the same place you did, in
the schoolroom. That's one of the first
words they taught me. Ruby Thewes, you
are a ca-t-a-s-t-r-o-p-h-e. .

They're heading for the stable.

INT. STABLE, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY

Ruby's already pitching hay. Turns to Ada.

RUBY
You mucking out?

Ada half-asleep, obedient, stunned by this energy.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Three years I was in school before my daddy - saying God rest his soul is like wishing him what he had in life, cause he lived to rest, he was born tired - before my daddy decided there was better use for my backside than have it sat all day in front of a blackboard.

EXT. A FIELD OF WEEDS, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY

Ruby dictates a list to Ada as they bustle along.

RUBY

Number One - layout a winter garden for cool season crops: turnips, onions, cabbage, greens.

Ada scribbles, walks, scribbles.

EXT. BARN, BLACK COVE FARM.

Ruby up a ladder, inspecting the roof.

RUBY

Number Two: patch the shingles on the barn roof. Do we have a maul and froe?

ADA

(writing, holding the ladder)
Maul?

RUBY

M-a-u-l.

ADA

I have no idea.

INT. COLD HOUSE, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY

Ruby cleans out leaves and detritus from the stone channel, allowing the stream to flow free and cool.

RUBY

Number three: clay crocks for preserves.
Tomatoes. Beans. Jams.

EXT. BOTTOM FIELD, BLACK COVE FARM. DUSK.

Ruby doing her version of soil analysis, scrunching the earth, tasting it, spitting it out. Ada makes a face.

RUBY

Clear and turn this field. No harm done letting it go fallow, now we'll do well.

EXT. OUTBUILDINGS, BLACK COVE FARM. AFTERNOON.

Ruby looks up. Ada catches up with her.

RUBY
Number fifteen

ADA
Sixteen.

RUBY
Number sixteen: let's get a martin colony
going in the Gourd House. Keep away
crows. You got one thing in abundance on
this farm and that's crows.

ADA
What's a Gourd House?

EXT . APPLE ORCHARD, BLACK COVE FARM. DUSK.

Ruby, delighted, contemplates the bounty of apples.

RUBY
There's survival. On them trees.
(turns to an exhausted Ada)
You got a cider press or would that be
wishing on a blessing?

ADA
Actually, yes, I think we do.

Ruby whoops, jogs away. Ada, exhausted takes a bite of an apple,
watches her.

EXT. A BLUFF. NIGHT

INMAN WALKS A ROCKY TRACK, FALLING AWAY TO THE RIVER AT ONE SIDE,
A STEEP CLIFF TO THE OTHER, the way itself broken and precarious,
bad country to meet an enemy.

Inman sees A LIGHT in the distance, a torch flicking in and out
of view, like a star to follow. He stops, narrows his eyes to
focus on the view, listening hard. He pulls out the Lemats.

A MAN, ALL IN BLACK, A HORSE IN TOW, IS AT THE EDGE OF THE GORGE.
The horse has a burden - a sack or wrapped bundle draped over
either side of the saddle. The attempts to heave the bundle onto
his shoulders. He can't, and the bundle slips to the ground, cover
falling enough to glimpse an arm, a head. IT IS THE BODY OF A
BLACK GIRL. The man tries again to lift her. He's clearly upset,
despairing, his hat comes off to reveal long, dandy's hair, all
extravagant curls. He staggers with the weight of the girl,
heading for the lip of the deep gorge.

He kisses the girl again and again, cheeks, mouth, mumbling to her. He's at the edge now and can just let her go. THEN INMAN'S GUN IS AT HIS TEMPLE.

INMAN

Don't let go. Just back up, nice and steady, do this all in reverse, you're going to end up with her draped back over your animal.

VEASEY

Don't pull that trigger. I am a man of God.

INMAN

I've killed several of them.

VEASEY

I mean I am God's minister.

INMAN

What part of God's business is throwing a woman down a gorge.

VEASEY

A slave woman, can you see that in this light? She's black as a bucket of tar.

He's retreating, on his way back to the horse.

INMAN

Is she dead?

VEASEY

Drugged her. Like you would a butterfly. And I care for her, that's the heartbreak of it.

He has the girl back on the horse. Inman brings the torch up to his face. It's tear-stained.

VEASEY (CONT'D)

She's got my bastard in her belly. What kind of pistol is that I never saw the like of it?

EXT. VEASEY TOWN. NIGHT.

Inman leads the horse, with Veasey ahead of him, hands tied behind his back, desperate for a reprieve.

VEASEY

I'm begging you. It's better you blowout my brains than return me to this place.

INMAN

Where does she live?

VEASEY

In our house. She sleeps in our kitchen.
You don' t know me, friend, but the good
Lord punished me with want. I am all
appetite. That's all I do all day is
want: food, the female parts...

INMAN

Shut your mouth. I don't want a
sermon every time I ask a question.

They're in the town's main drag now. There's a Chapel and next to
it, a small house.

INMAN (CONT'D)

This your place?

VEASEY

Dear God of misery.

INMAN

You're going to put her back where she
sleeps.

VEASEY

I do that the Members will lynch me.
Consorting with a nigger, adultery,
siring a bastard while serving as their
preacher. We're a strict congregation
we've churched men for picking up a
fiddle on the sabbath.

INMAN

So you reckoned to kill her.

Disgusted, Inman approaches the front door of the house.

VEASEY

There's a back door. Hove pity.

And he leads Inman down a side path.

INT. VEASEY HOUSE. NIGHT.

Veasey comes in, now carrying the girl. Inman comes behind,
the gun trained on Veasey as he sets her down by the fire.

VEASEY

(whispering)

Thank you. I was going to do a grievous
wrong.

He looks longing at the girl as he puts the blanket around
her shoulders. He turns to Inman.

VESEY (CONT'D)

You tasted dark meat? Sweet as liquorice.
I think I should go back up to my wife.
She wakes at the slightest noise.

Inman is incredulous that he thinks he can just go to bed...

INMAN

You find me some paper and a pen.

EXT. CHAPEL, VEASEY TOWN. DAWN

INMAN HAS TIED A VERY DISTRAUGHT VEASEY TO A TREE IN FRONT OF HIS CHAPEL. Inman is pinning a sheet of paper above Veasey's head. It's covered in handwriting. A dog barks.

VEASEY

You're not entitled to judge me!
You're nothing but an outlier,
plain as daylight!

Inman has pulled a handkerchief from Veasey's jacket. He stuffs it into his mouth, cutting this diatribe short. And then he walks away leaving Veasey tied to the tree, cursing through the handkerchief.

INT. ADA'S BEDROOM, BLACK COVE FARM. PREDAWN.

Ada asleep. Ruby enters, shattering the calm.

RUBY

Morning. Pigs: you have any loose in the woods?

ADA

No. What? No. We bought our hams.

RUBY

There's a world more to a hog than the two hams! Lard, for example, we'll need plenty -

She picks up some discarded laundry, contemplates the overflowing laundry basket.

RUBY (CONT' D)

The catastrophe of Ada Monroe's laundry.
(marching out)
I can feel you shutting your eyes.

EXT. BOTTOM FIELD. BLACK COVE FARM. DAY

Ada and Ruby working with the horse to make the beginnings of

A SPLIT RAIL FENCE. As they struggle with a heavy rail, Ruby is testing Ada.

RUBY
What's this wood?

ADA
I don't know. Locust?

RUBY
Where' s North?

ADA
North is, north is -

RUBY
Name me three herbs growing wild on this farm.

ADA
(frustrated with Ruby and with herself)
I can't! I can't! All right? I can talk about farming in Latin. Will that do? I can read French. I know Harmony and Counterpoint. I know my Bible. I can name the principal rivers of Europe, but don't ask me to name one stream in this county. I can embroider, but I can't darn, I can

arrange cut flowers, but I can't grow them. If a thing has a function, if I might do something with it, it wasn't considered suitable.

RUBY
Why?

ADA
Ruby, you could ask why? about pretty much everything to do with me.

They manage to get the first line of rail set down.

ADA (CONT' D)
This fence is about the first thing I've ever done that'll produce an actual result.

RUBY
So you never wrapped your legs around this Inman?

An old-fashioned look from Ada...

EXT. SUNKEN FOREST. DAY

Inman finds himself in A SUNKEN FOREST OF PINE. He moves warily, his beard longer, his figure gaunt, his clothes weathering to a uniform smudge of charcoal.

He hears DOGS BARKING IN THE DISTANCE, FAINT SHOUTS. He picks up his pace, skirts round the swampy lake.

EXT. CAPE FEAR RIVER. DUSK.

Inman comes to the bank of a HUGE RIVER. The water, as the light begins to go, is the color of mud, with bubbles .. belching to the surface, full of ugly prominent. Inman is almost jogging now, an ear tracking his still distant pursuers. The river is too wide to contemplate swimming and now it begins to curve left, forcing him - against his judgment, to circle back. He approaches A SMALL JETTY.

A sign. : Ferry \$5. Yell Loud.

On the far bank there's A CABIN ON STILTS above the highwater mark. Inman calls out, reluctantly, his voice still a kind of growl. Then again.

A TINY FIGURE steps out of the cabin and waves before jumping into a small canoe. The canoe heads against the current, the rower's back bent with the effort. As the canoe approaches, Inman sees that the ferryman is, in fact, A YOUNG GIRL, not eighteen. She doesn't look at him. He produces five dollars. She eyes the bill with contempt.

FERRYGIRL

For five dollars I wouldn't give a parched man a dipper of this riverwater.

INMAN

Sign says ferry, five dollars.

FERRYGIRL

This look like a ferry? My Daddy's dead, or gone off to the Federals, don't matter which. I'm the way across now.

INMAN

What's the name of this thing?

FERRYGIRL

Nothing but the mighty Cape Fear River, is all.

A dog barks in the distance. Getting closer. Inman turns to the sound. The Ferrygirl is well aware of her leverage.

FERRYGIRL (CONT' D)

Nobody crosses this water unless they're running from someplace. Same cross one way, some the other: makes no difference, they're all running. You want to wait for your friends?

INMAN

I can give you thirty dollars script.

FERRYGIRL

Let's go.

VOICE (O.S.)

Hey! Hey! Wait!

Inman is astonished to see VEASEY stumble out of the trees. His head is shaved, his face bruised and swollen, his clothes castoffs and ill-fitting, cinched at the waist with rope. He stumbles towards Inman, urging him to get on with the journey.

VEASEY

Keep going. We're both in trouble.

He gets straight into the canoe.

INMAN

No. Get out.

VEASEY

It's Homeguard. Made me tell them all about you.

INMAN

I should have shot you when I had the chance.

Shouts, more barking. Inman jumps in the canoe, and they're off. The Ferrygirl turns the boat around, rows them away from the jetty with the grace of someone doing something for the thousandth time.

VEASEY

I'm not looking for revenge, by the way. For what you did to me. No, I'm a Pilgram now, like you, travelling the road, paying our dues, relying on the kindness of strangers.

INMAN

You're nothing like me and the last thing I want right now is a conversation.

VEASEY

(to Ferrygirl)

You recall Job in the scriptures? I will give free utterance to my complaint. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. That's our friend here..

(to Inman)

They cut off my hair. Which was hard. I was vain about my hair.

(to Ferrygirl)

I had good curls. But I deserved it. I'm the Reverend Veasey. Have I seen you in church?

Inman sits, scouring the bank for sign of his pursuers. The sun is sinking fast.

FERRYGIRL .

I'm saving for a cowhide, and when I get it I aim to get a saddle made, and when I get me a saddle I'll save for a horse, and when I got a horse I'll throw on the saddle, and then you won't see my sorry ass round this swamp again.

She has no love for the river. Another gurgle of viscous bubbles around the canoe.

VEASEY

What's that?

FERRYGIRL

Catfish. 'gator. Keep your hand in the boat. Already looks like some critter chewed his neck.

(she looks at Inman)

Thirty more dollars, we can go to the cabin. I'll pull this dress over my head.

VEASEY

(excited)

Have we got thirty dollars?

A sharp sound, a tiny thwack of ball on meat. The Ferrygirl SUDDENLY SLUMPS BACK and falls into the water.

Veasey grabs out at the oar, but it goes, too. The girl sinks quickly, A BLOODY GAP to the side of her head. Inman, on his knees and stretching, can't help her. Then a second noise as A HOLE THE SIZE OF A FIST appears in the canoe, just at waterlevel. Water pours into the canoe. Dogs bark, and now FIGURES are visible at the jetty. HOME GUARD. One of them has a sniper's rifle and is loading for a third shot. Inman can see him sighting the rifle. They lie flat in the canoe. ANOTHER GREAT FIST OF WOOD is gouged out. Now the boat is almost full of water. Veasey spits out a foul mouthful. INMAN ROCKS THE CANOE AND LETS IT TURN OVER ONTO THEM, Veasey surfaces from under it, clutching the wood as a raft, but the canoe CATCHES INMAN A BLOW TO HIS HEAD and he sinks. Veasey hauls him to the surface and, surprisingly strong, holds him with one fist, the boat with the other, lets the current take them, pulling them under, then up, under, then up, but clinging on, as the rifle continues to deliver its assault, another shot into the boat, another into the water near to Veasey's arm.

THE GIRL'S BODY comes by them, carried by the river, the dress billowing out almost covering her head. The sun has gone, the light fading, the canoe sliding downriver away from their aggressors.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE CAPE FEAR. NIGHT.

In the moonlight, the canoe drifts into the muddy bank and Veasey drags a half-drowned Inman to land, both of them retching with the vile river water. AN ALLIGATOR eases into the river not ten feet from where they lie, lungs heaving. They get up. Veasey to his feet, Inman to his knees.

VEASEY

You okay?

Inman nods, coughs. And Veasey AIMS A KICK at Inman's head, knocking him back into the mud.

INMAN

Jesus, god!

VEASEY

I figure that righteous, given our history.
Otherwise I'd bear a grudge on our journey.

INMAN

There's nowhere I'm going with you except
to Hellfire!

INT. ADA'S BEDROOM. BLACK COVE FARM. NIGHT

Ada, her hair plaited in a new and simpler configuration, is working on Ruby's hair, while Ruby experiments with some earrings. A pile of Ada's jewelry on the bed beside them.

ADA

Agricola poetis viam non monstrat.

RUBY

Which means?

ADA

The farmer does not point out the road to a poet.

RUBY

Which means? Should be the other way
round

ADA

Which means, I suppose, which means the
poet should know where he's going.

RUBY

(of Ada's hairdressing)
It's no wonder you're helpless and
hopeless if it takes this long to fix
your hair.

(of the Latin)

Say some more.

ADA

Terra mutata non mutat mores.
(can't believe she knows all
these phrases by heart)
It's appalling what's in my head.

RUBY

It's appalling what's in my head?

ADA

No, it means: A change of place does not
change a character.

RUBY

Well that's surely true even in English.

ADA

You can keep those earrings.

RUBY

We can't keep anything.

ADA

I have to keep the bangles. They were my
mother's.

RUBY

Well that's all. The rest is for trading.
Else they can bury you in your finery.

ADA

(of her hair)
You're done.

There's a small mirror on a stand. It has Inman's picture
stuck in it. She picks it up, removing the tintype, and
holding it up for Ruby to see her hairstyle.

RUBY

Good God! Okay.

She takes the mirror and shows Ada her simple plait.

ADA

I like it.

RUBY

Takes two minutes. That's what I like.

She puts the earrings back in the pile.

RUBY (CONT' D)

How much do you love that piano?

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. DUSK.

THE PIANO jangles down the rutted lane on the back of Mr. Roy's cart. Ada watches, A SMALL FLOCK of sheep milling around her in the path. Ruby is dragging a big sow towards the yard. Ada picks up one of two sacks and staggers towards the house.

INT. KITCHEN, BLACK COVE FARM. DUSK.

Ada arrives in the kitchen. They've got it under control now, scrubbed and orderly. She puts the sack down next to another one. Her hands are calloused, the finger nails cracked and ruined, stripes of earth under them. Ruby comes in, struggling with the last sack, pleased.

RUBY

We're careful we'll get through the winter now. I made old man Roy give me ten of those sheep on account of I said they were so small put together they were ,no bigger than six proper sheep.

ADA

My father always wanted sheep, on this ram.

RUBY

I'm sorry you had to lose your piano. I cut off my hair once, for money. My daddy got two dollars for it. Made a wig for a rich feller in Raleigh.

They're working as they talk, taking the sacks into the larder, putting out stuff for the evening meal.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Stobrod called himself a musician - my daddy - he could play six tune on a fiddle. Got himself shot dead at Petersburg. I was like his goat or some creature tethered to a post. He left me once, up the mountains. I was eight. He was gone over two weeks.

ADA

Oh Ruby.

RUBY

(defiant)

I was all right! He'd walk forty miles for liquor and not forty inches for kindness.

ADA

And your mother?

RUBY

Never met her. We're the same in that regard. He said she was - he told me a thousand stories - she was a wolf or an indian or a donkey. Don't say much for him, except you know he'd be fast to work up a sweat on a tree if he thought there was pleasure in it.

There's a pause. Ruby not easy with her emotions. Abruptly she jumps up.

RUBY (CONT'D)

There's cows to milk.

EXT. RIVER, EN ROUTE TO SALISBURY. DAY.

Inman stands in the river, hoping to catch a fish, trying to concentrate. Veasey presides, complaining...

VEASEY

Used to be as regular as morning prayers. Matter of fact I could set my watch by my bowels. That beeswax you fed me, day before yesterday, it stops a man up. Open my gut now they'd find turds stacked up like little black twigs.

On a parallel track across the river, RIDERS... impossible to say whether Home Guard or a Federal Raiding Party. Inman splashes out of the water, pushes Veasey down, silencing him. The riders pass. Veasey spots something shining in the grass, picks it up. IT'S A LONG TWO-HANDED SAW.

VEASEY (CONT'D)

Hey! Look at this!
(flexing it)
This is a good saw.

INMAN

(getting up)
It's not yours. You take it, you make us another enemy. You're a Christian - don't you know your commandments?

VEASEY

You'll find the good Lord very flexible on the subject of property. We could do a lot with this saw...

Inman is vexed, walks away. Veasey follows, experimenting with the saw's music when flexed. Inman stalks on.

EXT. NEAR A FORD. DAY.

Inman way ahead, full of purpose. Veasey still has the saw, trots to catch up.

VEASEY

Why you in such a hurry the whole time?
(no answer)

Hurry or slow the destination is always
the same. It's only the journey that is
different. That's either in the Good Book
or I made it up.

Inman suddenly stops, scowling, puts up a hand, listens.
Inman carefully scouts the track then, with great caution,
edges towards the river bank.

A HEAVY SET MAN labours in the water. He's contemplating THE
HUGE BLACK CARCASS OF A BULL which has slipped into the ford
and died. The man is wet and exasperated.

VEASEY (CONT'D)

Good day to you!

The man turns, his spirit evidently lifted by the prospect of
help. His name is JUNIOR. He's working on roping the animal.

JUNIOR

My old bull, wandered off and died in
this here creek. Fouled up our water is
how I found it.

Veasey is immediately an authority on bull removal.

VEASEY

This is a tricky one.

The three men contemplate the carcass, swatting away the
swarms of flies. Junior offers a swig from a jug of liquor.
Inman refuses, Veasey takes a long pull, shudders happily.

VEASEY (CONT'D)

The name for the Bull's member is a tassel.
I learned that and never forgot it.

JUNIOR

Reckon I need a train of mules.

VEASEY

(walking away)
I'm getting an idea. My saw is the
remedy. Let's saw up some wood and make
levers.

INMAN

Then what?

VEASEY

Lever him out. This'll work!

He walks into the wood.

JUNIOR
Where you two sports heading?

INMAN
(inscrutable)
I don't know where he's heading. I'm going
down the road. And I got a good way to go
before nightfall.

JUNIOR
(acknowledging his attitude)
Charitable of you to make a stop. Ain't for me
to be curious.

VEASEY
(emerges from the woods)
How do you work this damn thing?

INMAN
(to Veasey)
Give me that saw.
(to Junior)
Come on.

He takes the saw, walks to the bull, gets on one side,
indicates Junior should go to the other.

INMAN (CONT'D)
Let's do this in chapters.

And they begin to SAW OFF THE BULL'S NECK.

LATER, and they're in A VILE STEW OF BLOOD AND INNARDS. The
stomach opens and its contents gush into the creek. Veasey is
disgusted, draws back. The two other men haul up the rest of the
animal onto the banks. They're exhausted.

INMAN (CONT'D)
You might want to leave off that water
for a day or two.

JUNIOR
There'll be a tang, I'd imagine.

EXT. TRACK APPROACHING JUNIOR'S CABIN. EVENING.

Junior, Inman and Veasey come around a bend and there's A BIG
CABIN LOOMING. It's in such poor repair that one end has slipped
from the stones which serve as it's foundation and STANDS BADLY
TILTED OVER. Junior roots up another hidden jug of liquor, which
he drinks from, then hands to Veasey.

JUNIOR
There's my place. Hope you can stomach a yard
chock-full of females. Brought my woman home,
she showed up with her three so-called sisters
and their brats.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

The noise in that place is something awful. It's why I go hunting.

VEASEY

(considering the wild camber)
Looks a bit crooked.

JUNIOR

It is on a bit of a tilt. Them females. They all roll down one end each night!

VEASEY

- Roll me over!

JUNIOR

-In the clover

VEASEY

One good fart - that'll tip over!

They guffaw, delighted in the alcohol haze. Veasey suddenly exclaims, hand in the air, rushes into the bushes.

VEASEY (CONT'D)

Oh God of my God! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah!

JUNIOR

What's up?

VEASEY

The Israelites! The tribes of Israel are about to flee from the banks of Egypt!
Hallelujah!

INMAN

(explaining to Junior)
He's got a shit coming on. It's overdue.

JUNIOR

(bewildered)
And he's a Preacher? Like a Christian?

INMAN

Like a Christian.

JUNIOR

Good God.

EXT. JUNIOR'S CABIN. DUSK.

The three men arrive at the yard. DOGS AND CHILDREN MILL AROUND THE VISITORS. FOUR WOMEN COME OUT, one after the other each of them in simple shifts which seem to emphasize their voluptuousness, or so it seems to Veasey. They freely stare.

JUNIOR

These two boys is stopping for
supper. They're on the road to
Atonement.

The women consider the men, then disappear back inside.

VEASEY

Atonement is not a place.

JUNIOR

So what is it when it's at home?

VEASEY

Those are fine examples of the female.

JUNIOR

Take them all and leave the saw. Be a
sight more use.

SHYLA

(reappearing)

If they want to get in a tub there's an
hour before food.

JUNIOR

They love to scrub a man.

(to Shyla)

Put the water on the boil.

(back to the men)

It's my liquor, gets their titties swinging.

VEASEY

(excited)

They damn!

(to Inman)

I was right about sheep droppings those
stools - like rock hard. Quite
astonishing.

INT. SMOKEHOUSE AT JUNIOR'S CABIN. DUSK.

No real furniture. Veasey is shaving. Inman stows his knapsack
behind the woodburning stove, on which a big kettle of boiling
water steams away. Then he gets in the tub, his back to the door.
Shyla comes in, brings the kettle over to the tub, pours in the
steaming water. She appraises Inman. It's intensely sexual.

SHYLA

That's battered flesh.

(of his neck wound)

I could work a finger in there.

VEASEY

He's a hero. Took that wound at
petersburg.

INMAN

He doesn't know what I am.
(uncomfortable with her stare)
Thanks.

SHYLA

(to Veasey)
He's shy, ain't he?

VEASEY

Wait up a few minutes, I'll be in that
tub, then we'll see who's a shy one.

SHYLA

I want to poke my thumb in his holes.

A second woman comes to the door. Dolly.

DOLLY

Lila says supper's up.

INT. JUNIOR'S CABIN, NIGHT.

LILA, JUNIOR'S WIFE, spoons out stew from a vast pot. The table crammed with customers - her three sisters, the three men, the herd of dogs and filthy children. Nobody speaks. Each time Lila bends over to spoon out of the pot, her cleavage strains against the flimsy fabric of her dress. Veasey's mesmerized. Inman is also getting drunk, his eyes increasingly glazed. When Lila makes to sit down next to Junior, he slides a hand up her dress, exposing a naked buttock, which he strokes and pinches as he pulls away.

LILA

Hey!

Junior grins, looks over at Inman, then nudges Veasey.

JUNIOR

He's gone now. Look! His eyes have gone.

INMAN

(vaguely, drunk)
What?

VEASEY

Dolly?

DOLLY

S'me.

VEASEY

Dolly, Lila, Shyla and Mae. That's
a poem. That's a poem.

He begins to recite, has a verse in his mind.

VEASEY (CONT' D)
Dolly, Lila, Shyla and Mae
(but he can't summon it)
Da-da da-da da-da dae. . .
(vague)
...there's a poem there.

JUNIOR
I'm leaving soon as I'm full.

VEASEY
Really. Goodbye.

JUNIOR
Got a bunch of traps needs visiting.
I'll be back tomorrow, before dark.
You'll still be here?

VEASEY
That's my fervent prayer.

JUNIOR
My house is your house.

INMAN
(suddenly)
Like to wash their hands and pray.

VEASEY
Say again?

INMAN
Dolly, Lila, Shyla and Mae.

VEASEY
That's Job. Don't say much but even
liquored up there's a preacher in him.

Inman gets up suddenly, sways.

INMAN
I'll say my goodbyes, got miles and miles
to go before sunset.
(head spinning)
I'll just quickly lie down.

And he stumbles over to the fire where he instantly curls up.

VEASEY
I'm heading for that smokehouse and I'm
ready to be washed clean of my dirt.

He gets up, wanders out of the door. Junior's eyes glint. He jerks his head towards the girls then in the direction of the smokehouse.

JUNIOR
You go tend to him.
(to Lila)
I'll be seeing you.

He picks up his gun and leaves Dolly gathering up the children and herding them out.

DOLLY
Come on you - get!

Shyla stays, Mae having gone off after Veasey. Lila waits until the children have gone. They consider Inman supine by the fire.

LILA
He's mine. You can go rub yourself off on the Preacher.
(of Inman)
Gonna make him hug me till I grunt.

Lila shepherds Shyla out, shuts the door, swigs from the jug, walks over to Inman, then turns to the big table and pushes pots and plates way down to one end to make a playing field. Then she bends over the prostrate Inman.

LILA (CONT'D)
Hey!

Inman stirs, glazed.

LILA (CONT'D)
(kneeling down to him)
You want to see what Mamma's got for you?

SHE SLIPS A SLEEVE OF HER DRESS TO REVEAL A FULL BREAST. Inman is drunk, doesn't think he's awake. She takes her breast to his mouth, and Inman suckles. Then she puts his hands under the dress which rides up as his hands move between her legs. She's naked.

LILA (CONT' D)
That's good. Ain't that sweet?

SHE PULLS INMAN TO HIS FEET, KISSES HIM, THEN TURNS HER BACK AND LIES FACE DOWN ON THE TABLE, HER BARE ASS UNDULATING IN THE AIR.

LILA (CONT'D)
You just get on and ride me all the way to China.

He doesn't move, except to sway, eyes glazed. She turns.

LILA (CONT'D)

You shy? You need a hand?

(goes to his buttons)

Let's have a look see what we can muster.

She's kneeling now, her dress hunched up around her middle, working the front of Inman's pants. He's in a swoon, surrendering to her, getting aroused, his hand cupping her head. ON CUE, THE DOOR CRASHES OPEN AND HE'S STARING DOWN THE BARREL OF JUNIOR'S SHOTGUN.

As Lila turns, Junior KICKS HER violently in the head, knocking her over.

JUNIOR

You little bitch! Look at you! Cover yourself up!

NEXT HE SWINGS THE SHOTGUN BARREL AGAINST THE SIDE OF INMAN'S HEAD. Inman falls back. Junior goes to the door and whistles.

AND WITH THAT THE ROOM FILLS UP WITH A GROUP OF HOME GUARD BRISTLING WITH WEAPONS AND PURPOSE. THEY SEIZE INMAN, DRAG HIM OUT AS JUNIOR SPITS AND KICKS AT HIM.

INT. SMOKEHOUSE AT JUNIOR'S CABIN. NIGHT.

Lila enters the smokehouse, hand to her bruised head. VEASEY'S ON THE FLOOR, WITH DOLLY ASTRIDE HIM, HIS ARM CRUSHING A NAKED MAE INTO AN EMBRACE. He considers Lila, beams:

VEASEY

I had a special prayer you'd come visit.

THREE MEN BURST IN BEHIND HER, RIFLES RAISED.

EXT. JUNIOR'S CABIN. NIGHT.

Veasey led out, a CHAIN GANG waiting - a bedraggled collection of prisoners, slaves, deserters - and now INMAN. Veasey is joined to the line. It starts to rain.

EXT. SWANGER FARM. DAY

Ruby and Ada at the door of the Swanger house. They both wear Monroe's clothes by now, like two little men. THEY'RE CARRYING A SMALL SACK, A PIE UNDER A CLOTH. Ruby hammers at the door, a little impatient. Sally Swanger opens it, has to decode who it is under the clothes, the hats.

SALLY

Ada Monroe and Ruby Thewes! Look at you both!

RUBY

Look at us both what?

SALLY

Like a coupla scarecrows after a
thunderstorm.

RUBY

We need a scarecrow, birds eating up half
our winter garden.

ADA

Sally's right. We should both stop
toiling and stand a while with our arms
stretch out. I'll volunteer.

RUBY

We got something for you.

ADA

For all your kindness. Coffee. And a pie.

RUBY

That's real coffee. It ain't hickory and dirt.

SALLY

(taking the gifts)

Thank you both.

(of the pie)

Ruby, I look forward to this. We all do.
Esco and me.

RUBY

(grinning at Ada)

She made it.

ADA

I made it.

SALLY

Good God in Heaven.

RUBY

(by way of recommendation)

I'm still alive.

Sally's strangely awkward, lingering at the door, staring at
the gifts...

RUBY (CONT'D)

We'll be getting along.

SALLY

(nodding)

I know Esco's going to be real sorry he
missed you. You all take care.

They all kiss, then the girls walk back down the path. Ruby
is vexed.

RUBY
That strike you as odd?

ADA
What?

RUBY
Stood at her front door?

ADA
Sally?

RUBY
Number one - I know that woman all my
life. I never stood outside her house -
she'd invite a wolf inside if it knocked
on the door.

ADA
Perhaps, I don't know, perhaps she was
busy.

RUBY
Number two - Old Man Swanger was inside
that house: I could smell his pipe
burning. Number three - look at these
fields.

ADA
What about them?

She contemplated the stubble fields they're passing.

RUBY
We came by here a week ago, they were
waist high in hay.

EXT. A PATH. DRIVING RAIN. NIGHT.

The Home Guard ride, bent under their oilskins, as the rain
tips down. Between the horses, unprotected and drenched,
their prisoners trudge along the muddy path. Inman and Veasey
among them. Veasey has grown some beard.

AN OLDER MAN COLLAPSES, lies where he falls, not moving.
There's a domino effect and so Inman falls on top of him. He
picks himself up, then tries to pull up the older man. He
doesn't move.

INMAN
He's dead.

The horses plough on. Inman shouts to BROWN, the leader.

INMAN (CONT'D)
This man's dead!

Nobody pays any attention. He has to drag the body.

EXT. VEASEY TOWN. DAY.

THE HOME GUARD ESCORT THE PRISONERS PAST VEASEY'S OLD CHURCH. More days have gone by and taken their toll on the prisoners, Veasey and Inman are haggard and filthy and reduced. The Home Guards stop for food, a wash, a break, chain the prisoners to a horse rail.

Citizens go by, Veasey knows them all. Some of them spit contemptuously at the Deserters. None of them recognise Veasey.

VEASEY

Am I so altered that they don't see me?

Somebody walks by with a young child.

Veasey looks at Inman.

VEASEY (CONT'D)

I christened that child.

The child stops, looks without recognizing, is tugged away from the chain gang by his mother. One of the other prisoners, SHEFFIELD, leans in to Inman, his voice low.

SHEFFIELD

I'm looking to get out of this. They drag us back to fight - we're just target practice for the Federal boys.

INMAN

You run, we're all running with you, the lame and the stupid, of which we number both.

SHEFFIELD

Either way we're fucked. Run or don't run.

INMAN

Just give me some warning so I can tell the guard - I'm not getting shot again for some cause I don't believe in.

A GROUP OF SLAVES ARE WALKING BY, CARRYING SACKS. One of the women is pregnant. Veasey studies the group, sees the pregnant woman, recognizes her.

VEASEY

(mesmerized)

That's Rebecca. That's Rebecca.

(he hisses)

Rebecca!

In daylight it's apparent that Rebecca is a real beauty. She turns at the sound of her name, stops, is confused. She sees Veasey and approaches, appalled at his condition.

REBECCA

Mas?

VEASEY

Is it well with you?

(Rebecca nods)

I've been repenting for what I did. I've walked the road of atonement.

REBECCA

Your curls is all gone.

THE GUARD KICKS HIM.

GUARD

Hey!

VEASEY

(holding his head, to Rebecca)

God Bless you.

Rebecca, reluctant, rejoins the other slaves, walks away with them, but then turns back to look at Veasey. She clearly cares about him. And seeing her has somehow broken his heart. He turns away from Inman, towards Sheffield.

VEASEY (CONT'D)

I'm with you. I got a baby coming.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACK. DAY.

THE CHAIN GANG TRUDGES DOWN THE TRACK, horses on either side of them, steep banks forming a V for the railroad. A TRAIN IS COMING. Brown rides up to the 'prisoners, herds them off the track. The train approaches quite slowly - the boxcars full of wounded soldiers. Some of the Home Guard dismount, take out pipes. The prisoners wait, one of them sits down. Sheffield says something to Veasey, who casually yanks up the sitting' prisoner. Inman suddenly understands what's going to happen. The train is almost on them.

INMAN

No!

But it's too late. SHEFFIELD JERKS FORWARD IN FRONT OF THE TRAIN, PULLING ALL THE OTHERS WITH HIM, their reluctance tempered by the possibility of being crushed by the oncoming train.

SOMEHOW THE CHAIN GANG GETS ACROSS THE TRACK, stumbling and chaotic, the chains yanking tight, then loose, the tight causing a collapse, the loose a recovery.

They run alongside the train, blocking themselves from the fire of the Guard, Sheffield screaming tactics - and then, as the train starts to pull past them, they run up the bank, now all as a unit scrambling to the steep summit.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TRAIN THE HOME GUARD HAVE REMOUNTED THEIR HORSES AND ARE RIDING HARD ALONGSIDE IT. Then they have sight of the escaping prisoners silhouetted at the top of the bank like a line of paper dolls stretched out along the ridge. Shetfield's yelling with adrenaline, Veasey joins in, elated. One of the guards raises a rifle, steadies himself on his horse, FIRES. He catches Veasey, who crumples, spinning round and falling down the bank, until Inman uses all his strength and practically lifts him in the air. The chain recovers and works back up the bank.

But then A SECOND BULLET catches another prisoner and this time the effect is catastrophic - THE WHOLE GANG JUST FLIPS OVER AND PLUMMETS DOWN THE BANK. The Horne Guard approach, firing randomly at the bodies as they tumble into the ditch by the side of the track. Until all movement ceases. Inman has a wound to his head which bleeds profusely, almost completely covering his face. Brown arrives, considers the carnage.

BROWN

Get these sacks of shit under the ground.

INT. BARN, BLACK COVE FARM. DAWN.

Ada's milking. It's barely daylight. She's slowly becoming a country girl. Ruby appears in the doorway.

RUBY

Someone's been in the corncrib.

ADA

You sure?

RUBY

It's a coon or possum. Scratched out a fist hole in the side. This place! - I'm telling you - we grow, others eat. I'll go into town, take the last of the cider and trade for a trap.

INT. MONROE'S BEDROOM, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY.

Ada is in Monroe's bedroom, looks out as Ruby goes off to town, jugs of cider swung either side of the horse. Ada goes over to Monroe's closet, pulls out some clothes.

EXT. THE WINTER GARDEN, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY.

Ada buttons Monroe's dress coat and completes the SCARECROW she's spent the day making, save for the hat, which she now fixes on, pushing in a hat pin to secure it. She's made a stern black thing and steps back to consider it.

Horsemen come riding along the lane. It's Teague and his men. He doesn't stop but raises his hat to Ada.

INT. KITCHEN, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY.

Ada looks out at the Winter Garden. From that distance it really does look like her father out in the field, arms outstretched as if waiting for her to run to him. She finds it unbearable, her tears coming, runs out into the fields, attacks the scarecrow, pulling off the hat, the clothes...

EXT. RAILROAD TRACK. MORNING.

THE SOUND OF TINY BELLS. A misty drizzle. A GOAT snuffles around in the freshly turned dirt. A hand, pale and wet, protrudes from the thin layer of earth covering the bodies of the murdered Chain Gang.

SOMETHING SHIFTS UNDER THE DIRT, breaking the surface. Inman wedged under three or four corpses - their limbs and chains wrapped around him, has regained consciousness. He coughs, can't breathe properly, tries to work himself some air, spitting out dirt. He makes a noise to distract the goat, rattling the chains. Inman rears up, the bodies slithering off him, but even then the animal only retreats a yard or two. VEASEY SLIDES FACE UP, A BULLET IN HIS FOREHEAD LIKE A MYSTICAL THIRD EYE. Inman feels a surprising loss and tenderness. He heaves again, groaning with the pain of new and old wounds.

EXT. OLD MILL, COLD MOUNTAIN. DAY.

Ruby rides back from town along the river. An ugly looking trap tied over the horses and three or four bulging sacks. By an abandoned mill she sees the Home Guard under the trees. She slows up.

TEAGUE

What you looking to catch?

RUBY

What?

TEAGUE

With that trap.

RUBY

We got some critter stealing our corn.

TEAGUE

Still but the two of you up there, is it?

RUBY

You know it.

TEAGUE

When we get a cold night, camped out,
trying to keep the rule of law,
protecting girls like you from Federals
and deserters, that's a thought warms us

(to his men)

ain't it? - the two of you up there on my
Grand-daddy's farm, dressed in men's
clothes. Warms us right up. What you got
in the sacks?

(to the men)

Looks like human heads! Eh? Looks like a
bunch of heads. We got competition!

Ruby rides on. She rides around the bend - she's not far from
the Swanger farm.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACK. DAY.

Goats, their bells tinkling, munch around the tracks. One of them
turns at a noise - a GROTESQUE VISION - A MOVING, SEETHING MOUND
OF DIRT. It's Inman, inching along the embankment, the chain of
dead bodies in tow, a macabre tug of war. He considers the goats,
they consider him. He rears up and finds himself STARING DOWN THE
BARREL OF A SHOTGUN.

EXT. SWANGER FARM. DAY.

Sally is pinning out white sheets, they're filling out like
sails in the afternoon wind. Ruby rides up. Sally seems a
little vexed to see her. She walks down to the gate.

SALLY

Ruby

RUBY

I'm not stopping, Sally. I'm not snooping
neither. Just you should know Teague and
his boys are lurking down by Pigeon
River, the old mill.

SALLY

(after a beat)

You tell Ada that was a good pie.

Ruby rides off. Sally watches, then goes inside the house, her
energy changing immediately, as if she might faint.

EXT. MADDY'S CARAVAN. AFTERNOON.

HARSH WHISTLES. A secret place, in the heart of a forest. There's
the answering sound of SMALL BELLS, a chorus of them. Inman is
dragged into view on a makeshift litter. Goats appear, they herd
around the figure dragging the litter. IT'S AN OLD WOMAN, silver
haired, her face a leather map, her clothes leather, everything
about her like old leather. HER NAME IS MADDY.

She and Inman round a bend and there's Maddy's house - AN OLD CARAVAN, long grown into the ground and plaited with vines and creepers. Inman tries to sit up. An old whiskered BILLYGOAT butts up against Inman, knocks him down. Maddy pays no attention to the struggle, heads inside her caravan.

MADDY

Mind that Billy, he's the jealous kind.

She emerges, with a bowl of water, rags, washes his face, pushing back his hair to look at his wound, puts a finger to the gash on his neck professional in her appraisal. Inman is barely conscious, he groans, trying to defend himself.

MADDY (CONT'D)

Pay no attention to me. What happened to your head?

INMAN

Fighting.

MADDY

And your neck?

INMAN

Different fighting.

MADDY

You're the color of a cadaver. I'll fix you. I can fix you up.

INMAN

(speaking of his spirit)

Mister - you could fix me I'd be in your everlasting debt.

MADDY

Debts, fighting - them words don' t mean much round here. For the record, I'm a female of the species.

EXT. BOTTOM FIELD, BLACK COVE FARM . DAY.

Ruby rides up to the farm. She rides past the winter garden, admires THE SCARECROW - WHICH NOW PARODIES ADA, the same outfit she once wore to visit Inman, the same dress, same hat. Ruby grins as Ada comes over from the field.

RUBY

The hat's a nice touch.

Ruby gets off the horse, and they start unloading sacks.

RUBY (CONT'D)

You're quiet.

ADA

I cried for my Daddy. I dressed up the scarecrow in his suit and he came back, his arms out, said you never cried enough, you never cried enough.

RUBY

Well now you did.

ADA

Then I thought, it's not my Daddy, it's my sweetheart. I saw him once that way, when I looked down Sally's well. So I dressed the scarecrow in the dress I wore the day he left. In case his spirit flies over looking out for me.

(of the vicious looking trap)

That looks terrible.

Ruby opens the sacks.

ADA (CONT'D)

Cabbages.

RUBY

I bargained like Lucifer. We can make all kinds of good eating.

ADA

Such as?

RUBY

Cabbage. slaw, sauerkraut, cabbage soup, fried cabbage, stuffed cabbage...

EXT. SWANGER FARM. DAY.

TEAGUE'S MEN RIDE UP TO THE FARM. Esco's out in the field, labouring away, but with his shotgun by him. Teague stops alongside the field, the rail between him and Esco. Esco stops working, picks up his shotgun and goes over. Teague has four men with him. MO and JO, the twins, huge, and with the appearance of having less than one brain between the two of them, GRAYLING, a reluctant-looking man, funereal in his bearing, and BOSIE.

TEAGUE

Afternoon.

The riders slowly fan out, almost as if choreographed.

ESCO

Don't spread out. Why they spreading out?

TEAGUE

I'm not spreading out. I'm sitting here.

Esco comes over the rail fence, his gun loose in his hands.

TEAGUE (CONT' D)

Never knew a man worked in his field with
a shotgun.

ESCO

There's a war on.

TEAGUE

Got to watch out for the Bogey Man.

He starts to fish out a tobacco pouch. Esco's gun swings up. Teague shows him the leather pouch, shrugs, starts to make a cigarette.

INT. SWANGER FARM. DAY.

From inside the house, Sally watches everything. Her view impaired by the sheets.

EXT. SWANGER FARM. DAY.

Mo dismounts. Ambles past Esco, looks behind the sheets. ESCO KICKS OUT AT HIM, the shotgun rigid and pointing.

ESCO

Get off my land.

Mo examines his breeches for a dust mark, wipes it off, retreating in a turkey walk of examining and dusting.

TEAGUE

Your boys come back.

ESCO

Ain't seen my boys in four years. They're
fighting other boys, not old men and
women.

TEAGUE

(to his men)

He means us. He's referring there to us.

(to Esco)

So you won't care if we take a look
around?

ESCO

What I gotta give you? A chicken? A lamb?

TEAGUE

(shrugs)

Sure.

ESCO

Right then.

TEAGUE

Thing is - you got one barrel and there's five of us. Not a fair fight.

BOSIE SUDDENLY DROPS OFF HIS HORSE, ROLLS ON THE GROUND.

BOSIE

Bogey Man! Bogey Man!

Esco is momentarily distracted and, in that instant, Mo kicks out at him, knocking the gun from his hands, which fires into the air, a shocking sound. .

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. DAY.

Ruby and Ada digging a trench by the smokehouse, laying in the pale heads of cabbage. They hear the distant shot.

RUBY

What's that?

They stop. Listen. Look at each other, start running.

EXT. SWANGER FARM. DAY.

Jo sets on Esco, knocking him-backwards into a sheet, where it gets twisted, while Jo kicks and punches, little spots of blood" staining the sheet with each blow. MO PULLS OUT HIS SABRE AND RUNS ESCO THROUGH, LEAVES THE SABRE IN DEEP, PINNING ESCO TO THE SHEET, THEN SPINNING HIM ROUND IN THE SHEET SO THAT IT TIGHTENS. A stain grows out from the blade, huge and spreading. Teague walks to Esco.

TEAGUE

You're harbouring deserters. I can confiscate every animal on this farm, every plate, every sheet, every little pellet of chicken shit - I can confiscate your old lady's asshole, so don't offer me a bird.

Sally runs out, screaming. She tries to pull out the sabre. MO REVERSES HIS RIFLE AND CLUBS HER TO THE GROUND.

TEAGUE(CONT'D)

(sharply)

Hey!

Mo backs away. Sally is screaming. She watches, helpless, as Esco dies in front of her, the sheet growing a darker red.

TEAGUE(CONT'D)

You got your bait. Set it on the hook.

BOSIE, SMILING, FETCHES A ROPE FROM HIS HORSE, ALREADY NOOSED AT ONE END. HE FLIPS THE LOOP OVER SALLY'S HEAD.

INT. BARN, SWANGER FARM. DAY.

ELLIS AND ACTON SWANGER emerge from their hiding places, unable to bear the sound of their mother's screams. They're carrying an axe, a pitchfork, mad for revenge.

EXT. SWANGER FARM. DAY.

BOSIE IS DOING SOME SORT OF DANCE ALONG THE FENCE RAIL. He's very graceful, his hair flying, his hands out, one finger nail extremely long, his boots stamping down on the fence.

UNDER HIS STOMPING FEET, THE RAIL POST IS PRESSED ON SALLY SWANGER'S THUMBS. She can't scream any longer, because the noose has practically strangled her. The rope's tied off to Bosie's horse, which yanks on the noose with every slight movement. Sally is prostrate in the dirt.

Her two boys come running from the barn. TEAGUE CASUALLY, SHOOTS ELLIS WITH HIS RIFLE. BOSIE LETS ACTON GET ALL THE WAY TOWARDS HIM AND THEN SHOOTS HIM FROM A YARD AWAY, THE GUN SUDDENLY SPRINGING INTO HIS HAND. AS ACTON FALLS, BOSIE DOES A FLIP TO DIVE OFF THE POST AND LAND ON HIS FEET NEXT TO ACTON'S BODY.

EXT. SWANGER FARM. DUSK.

Ada and Ruby, riding together on the horse, arrive at the Swangers.

SALLY IS STILL PINNED UNDER THE FENCE POST. The noose around her neck has been tied off to the post so that she can't move. There's a bloody sheet draped over the edge of the well. Blood on the ground. Ruby heaves at the fence.

RUBY

I can't get this damn thing off her.

ADA

(at the well, looking down)

Dear Lord in heaven.

RUBY

Ada, I can't get this off her!

Ada runs over. They struggle, can't lift it. Sally's lips are moving.

RUBY (CONT'D)

What darling? What?

She bends down, listens to her. Looks up at Ada.

RUBY (CONT'D)

She's saying don't bother.

ADA

Wait !

She grabs a thick log off the stack, staggers back and in a second they've inserted it into the fence and levered it up and away from Sally's hands. They fall back onto the dirt. Ruby cradles Sally. Ada nods towards the well.

ADA (CONT'D)

There's someone down there. I think it's Escó.

Ruby looks over at the well, then at Ada.

RUBY

This world won't stand long. God won't let it stand this way long.

INT. MADDY'S, CARAVAN. DAY.

An exotic interior, many crocks and jars, bunches of herbs, wrapped papers of dried things, like a woodland apothecary store. Inman wakes up. He finds himself in a small cot, wrapped in blankets, a poultice at his neck. He doesn't know where he is or how long he's been there.

EXT. MADDY'S CARAVAN. DAY.

Maddy's sitting on a stool. There's a circle of stones where her fire lives and she sets the tinder to it. Inman emerges from the caravan. He's pale and unsteady.

INMAN

How long have I been sleeping?

MADDY

Not long enough.

INMAN

I can't stop here. I'm a deserter. They find me here things could be bad for you.

MADDY

What they going to do? Cut short my young life? Sit down before you fall down.

She calls over a little goat. It ambles over affectionately and nuzzles into her hand. She strokes it and scratches under the chin. The creature gets increasingly tranquil.

INMAN

How long you been up here?

MADDY

What year are we? '63?

INMAN

Last time I checked it was '64.

MADDY

I'd say twenty six years.

INMAN

Twenty six years!

MADDY

I could move on anytime. I've seen most of the world anyway, Richmond in the North, south almost to Charleston. You're going somewhere or you are somewhere, what's the difference?

She's still stroking the goat. It looks as if it's asleep.

MADDY (CONT'D)

I've learned a person can survive off pretty much of a goat. I can't abide a chicken, but a goat gives you company and milk and cheese and then, when you need it, good meat.

In a single motion she has a knife in her hand and has SLIT THE THROAT OF THE GOAT, putting the bowl underneath its neck to catch the blood, still stroking the goat, which blinks as if it were only surprised and not dying.

MADDY (CONT'D)

So you've been fighting?

INMAN

(as if he might break)

I could be at killing for days sometimes, in the hand to hand, my feet against the feet of my enemy and I always killed him and he never killed me.

MADDY

He gave it a try, to look at you.

INMAN

I guess he did.

MADDY

See I think there's a plan. There's a design. For each and every one of us.

During this she's shucked the skin off the goat with the authority of someone who's done this a thousand times.

MADDY (CONT'D)

You look at nature, a bird flies
somewhere, picks up a seed, shits the
seed out, a plant grows. Bird's got a
job, seed's got a job.

And the goat is now thin and pink, eyes bulging, a piece of meat.

INT. MADDY'S CARAVAN. EVENING.

A woodburning stove with a single cooking plate - on which pieces
of the goat meat, sprinkled with herbs, are sizzling in a pan.
INMAN IS EATING LIKE A MAN POSSESSED, WRAPPING THE MEAT IN CORN
FRITTERS AND PUSHING THEM INTO HIS MOUTH. Maddy watches him, adds
another mound of meat to his plate. Inman nods in thanks, but -
doesn't look up.

She opens a jar and takes out a handful of dried poppy heads,
puts them near the stove, then dips' into another jar and
pulls out what look like old cheroot stubs.

MADDY

Take one of these now with your food.

Inman is circumspect, views the stub lozenge with suspicion.

MADDY (CONT'D)

Swallow it. If you die I'll give you your
money back.

Inman puts it in his mouth, gags at the taste of it. She
hands him a beaker with milk to wash it down.

MADDY (CONT' D)

Our minds aren't made to hold on to the
particulars of pain, the way we do bliss.

She starts steaming the poppies.

INMAN

It's true..

MADDY

What is?

INMAN

What you remember.

MADDY

What's her name?

INMAN

Ada

(at the food.)

- Sometimes I think I'm crazy when
I'm just hungry -

INMAN (CONT'D)
(another mouthful)
Ada Monroe.

MADDY
And is she waiting for you?

INMAN
She was. I don't know. Or if she'd know me. I'm
like the boy who goes out in winter for firewood
comes back in the spring with a whistle.

Maddy pricks open the poppies and collects their opium, then hands
Inman the liquid.

MADDY
Now drink this. It visits the pain. And
you'll sleep.

He drinks the laudanum she's made.

INMAN
I've had to put myself in the way of
people's kindness.

MADDY
I hope you found it.

She dips a cloth in the steaming water, unbuttons his shirt. She
has a crock of what looks like treacle and vaseline. She smears
this salve over the neck wound and into his scalp. Inman
surrenders to the drug.

INMAN
The passenger pigeons fly south, the
berries ripen. Whether I see them or not,
whether a man dies, or a war is won.

MADDY
That's the laudanum getting to you.
That's good. Say something more.
(she kneels to his leg)
Raise that up for me.

He obliges. She grimaces at the state of it, where the chain has
chewed into the flesh. Gets to work.

INMAN
She gave me a book. Ada Monroe. Man by
the name of Bartram. Wrote about his
travels. I carried that book through
every battle. I left it someplace, got to
get it back. Sometimes just reading the
name of a place near home - Sorell Cove,
Fire Scale Ridge - was enough to bring me
to tears.

INMAN(cont'd)

Thing is I've been thinking - those places belonged to people before us, to the Indian - and he had a different name. What did he call Sorell Cove? How can a name not even the real name break your heart? It's her, she's the place I'm heading. And I hardly know her. So how can a person who's maybe not even a real person - I don't know what I'm talking about - I have to close my eyes...

He slides off the stool and lays on the floor. Maddy goes over to her cot and pulls off a blanket which she drapes over him.

EXT. YARD, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY.

Ada in the henhouse, collecting eggs, is confident now among the birds. She emerges to find Ruby walking out of the backdoor with the shotgun and a determined look.

RUBY

It's a man.

ADA

What is?

RUBY

Raiding our corn. Got him in the trap. That's him yelping.

ADA

You're not going to shoot him!

RUBY

I don't want him to shoot me.
(of the gun)
Can you fire this thing?

ADA

(making it clear she can't)
Yes.

They head towards the corn crib, bundled up against the cold. A MAN IS KNEELING AT THE CORN CRIB, perfectly caught in the art of stealing, his head forced away from view. Ruby hands Ada the gun and approaches, warily.

RUBY

Listen up - you got a barrel trained on your rear-end.

STOBROD

Get me out of this dang thing. My fist's about to drop off.

RUBY

You got a weapon?

STOBROD

No ma'am. I'm begging you. I'm already on my knees, otherwise I'd get down on them

.

RUBY

(suddenly recognises the voice)
Unbelievable! Stobrod Thewes.

STOBROD

Ruby? They damn!

ADA

What?

RUBY

(to Ada, disgusted)
That's my daddy...

She walks up to him and KICKS HIM HARD AS SHE CAN ON HIS BACKSIDE.

INT. KITCHEN, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY.

A strip of fabric, homemade bandage, being wrapped around Stobrod's badly gashed hand. Ada is tending to him. Ruby is cooking at the range, not remotely warm towards her prodigal father, who looks rather comfortable. Stobrod looks at her.

STOBROD

Just so's you know - I can eat while she's doing this - in case you're holding off.

RUBY

Just so's you know - you're not eating inside. Number One - they hang people round here for taking in deserters. Number two - even if they gave out prizes - you'd still eat outside.

STOBROD

You're scarred.

RUBY

I'm what ?

STOBROD

Your heart. Scarred. I did wrong to you.

RUBY

You'd be scarred. You'd be really scarred if I hadn't wrapped them trap teeth in sacking.

RUBY
Which was her idea.

STOBROD
I hurt you.

RUBY
Good God!

STOBROD
I wrote fifty tunes with you in mind. Ruby this,
Ruby that, Ruby with the eyes that sparkle.

RUBY
Hey! Let's agree: you beat me, you
abandoned me, you ignored me, you beat me
some more - all of that is better than
Ruby with the eyes that sparkle!

STOBROD
I'm changed. People change. War changes
people something terrible.
(to Ada)
Ruby's told you - I've no doubt - I
wasn't always the best...

RUBY
You were an asshole.

STOBROD
I can't disagree with that. I was.

RUBY
Get him out of here!

STOBROD
Music's changed me. I'm full of music,
darling. I wish I'd brung my fiddle Hey
Ruby! got a new fiddle - it's got a
little snake's rattle in the body - took
it off a dead federal in Virginia. That's
a beautiful fiddle. It's full of tunes,
Ruby. Don't know if it's from that little
rattle locked up in it, or from something
untied my heart.

Ruby walks over with a crock, wrapped in a cloth.

RUBY
You're all set.

STOBROD
(sincerely)
Bless you both.

He goes to the door.

RUBY

Ain't you got a proper coat?

STOBROD

Darling, I'm fine. And you just say the word, I won't come back neither. I don't want to put either you or your mistress here in any bother.

ADA

I'm not Ruby's employer.

STOBROD

Oh, okay, who is?

RUBY

Nobody.

(Stobrod digests this)

I'll make up food for you, you come Sundays before it's light, I'll leave it behind the Old Frazier Mill.

STOBROD

DO you know who really needs a coat, darling, is my partner, fat boy name of Pangle. We're hiding up in the caves and he feels the cold like a thin man, but ain't no coat'll fit him.

(leaving)

I love you. Ruby. In case the sky falls on our head. You're a good girl.

And he's gone. Ruby scowls. FIDDLE MUSIC BEGINS.

RUBY

He is so full of manure, that man, we could lay him on the dirt and grow another one just like him.

ADA

So that's Stobrod Thewes.

RUBY

It is and that's the last you'll see of him.

EXT. MADDY'S CARAVAN. DUSK.

THE FIDDLE CONTINUES, A BANJO JOINS IN.

Maddy is loading up Inman for his journey. She hands him a bulging goatskin satchel.

MADDY

That's medicine and goatmeat. You're sick of both.

INMAN

I have a deal to thank you for.

She hands him an ancient flintlock pistol.

MADDY

And that's just for show, or - if you can
get close enough - a wild turkey.

She turns, abruptly, mingles in with her goats. Inman nods, knows that she doesn't want a fuss, although he wants to make one, and turns himself, heads away from the caravan.

EXT. WOODS. DAY.

THE MUSIC CONTINUES. A TURKEY calls. And again.

JUNIOR is hunting. He creeps through this clearing, eyes peeled for the turkey, gun at the ready. His dog growls, and he puts a hand over its mouth. He listens. Another call. Junior moves, without sound, in its direction, stops for several seconds under a tree, listening. He looks up. INMAN IS PERCHED IN THE TREE. THE PISTOL FLASHES IN HIS HAND.

EXT. JUNIOR'S CABIN. DAY.

THE MUSIC CONTINUES. Inman drags Junior's corpse in to the yard. The dogs whine and slobber over the body. Inman goes straight into the Smoke House.

INT. SMOKE HOUSE AT JUNIOR'S CABIN. DAY.

THE MUSIC CONTINUES. Inman reaches behind the stove and retrieves his bag. He checks for the LeMats, for the Bartram, opens it, locating the tintype of Ada, which he considers, as the dogs howl outside, joined with another wailing.

EXT. JUNIOR'S CABIN. DAY.

THE MUSIC CONTINUES. Inman emerges with his bag, LeMats at the ready. The women are all keening over the corpse, as if a saint had passed away. Dogs, women all howling. A chicken bobs in, investigates the glob of blood on Junior's skull. Inman walks away, doesn't look at the women, who don't look at him.

INT. RUBY'S ROOM, BLACK COVE FARM. DAWN

THE MUSIC CONTINUES. Ruby wakes up. Looks out of the window. Ada, also woken, comes into Ruby's room. STOBROD IS OUTSIDE. WITH PANGLE, VIOLIN AND BANJO. Ruby opens the window, scowling. Stobrod beams, stops playing, holds up the food, points at Pangle in his new coat. Pangle waves.

RUBY

Get on back where you came from!

Stobrod and Pangle smile and hurry away.

EXT. PATH IN HILL COUNTRY. DAY

WINTER SETTING IN. Inman, increasingly a stick figure in the landscape, wasted and fragile, trudges along through fallen leaves. He still limps from the leg irons. No shelter anywhere. He unwraps a paper containing some scraps of goat meat and corn bread. He walks and eats, fishes out a

lozenge, tries to swallow it, washes it down with a drink from his flask. Opens the crock of salve and rubs the treacly grease into his neck and ankle. The path splits. He doesn't know which way to go, A CROW repeatedly caws off to the left and, taking it as a sign, Inman goes in that direction.

ADA(V.O.)

My love for Heathcliff resembles the
eternal rocks beneath

INT. ADA'S BEDROOM, BLACK COVE FARM. NIGHT.

Ada in the bed, reading to Ruby from Wuthering Heights.

ADA

- a source of little visible delight, But
necessary.

RUBY

She ain't gonna marry Linton, is she? She
said - whatever our souls are made of his
and mine are the same. You can't say that
and then marry Linton.

ADA

We'll find out.

RUBY

Okay.

ADA

Tomorrow.

RUBY

I'm not waiting until tomorrow.

ADA

Ruby, I'm falling asleep.

She lies back in her bed. Ruby takes the book, lies across the bottom of the bed, as Ada goes to sleep.

RUBY

Little visible delight, but necessary. I
like that....

EXT. SMALL WOOD. NIGHT.

DRIVING RAIN. Inman shelters under a huge tree, whose split trunk provides a mean shelter. He inserts himself into the cleft of it, a black thing in a black tree, like a troll. He stands, shivers, sodden, desolate.

EXT. SARA'S CABIN. NIGHT.

A LITTLE CABIN. Its lights coming through square windows like a chinese lantern. Inman considers it, the risk versus the shelter. The sleet still pelts down on him and he decides to approach. Closer he can hear a sound coming from the house. IT'S A BABY'S INCESSANT CRY. HE SEES A YOUNG WOMAN WALKING ROUND AND ROUND IN THE ROOM, CLUTCHING THE BABY WRAPPED UP IN A QUILT.

Inman knocks hard on the door. The light from the lamp goes out, although the fire still gives the room a clear glow.

INMAN

I'm one man alone. I'm a Confederate soldier on furlough. I have no bad intention. I need shelter and food.

THE TINY SOUND OF THE DOOR BEING BOLTED.

INMAN (CONT'D)

Can I at least sleep in the corn crib - just for some shelter? I'll be on my way come morning.

No answer. Inman accepts this as a rebuttal, and trudges back towards the road.

SARA (V.O.)

I've got a rifle.

Inman turns. A gap in the door appears, the figure barely seen.

INMAN

Fair enough.

The baby's crying behind her.

SARA

There's some beans and corn pone, all I got. You better come in.

INT. SARA'S CABIN. NIGHT.

Inman enters the cabin. It's a single room. A big fire. The baby on the bed, a rudimentary crib unoccupied next to it. The woman is already at the little stove. She turns to him. She's painfully beautiful. But sad and fragile. Inman, despite himself, is mesmerized.

INMAN

Thank you.

SARA

I'm alone here, as you can see, with my baby. I need to believe you mean no harm.

Inman takes out his gun. She starts, terrified.

INMAN

No, I mean to give it to you.

He turns it handle forwards and offers it to her.

SARA

I don't want it. I had my way they'd take metal altogether out of this world. Every blade, every gun.

INMAN

Is your baby sick?

SARA

He cries. I don't know. He cries a lot. My man is dead. He took his wound at Frederiksberg. Never saw his boy.

She never once looks at him. Her eyes on the floor or the food or the baby.

INMAN

I'm sorry.

SARA

It's pretty much what you'll get if you knock on any door of this war. Man dead, woman left.

She hands him a plate of steaming beans. An onion perched on top.

SARA (CONT'D)

It's mean food but it's hot.

She goes over to the bed and picks up her baby and starts the same business of walking him, singing the while, an odd lament. Inman eats, looks at her, at the child and the fire. He picks up the onion, bites into it. Sara looks across.

INMAN

(ashamed of his hunger)
There's no hunting on the road,
just cress and -

He takes another bite. Sara picks up the baby.

SARA

I need to feed this man, if you could
look away.

Inman, embarrassed, turns his back to her. He sits finishing
the food while she puts the baby to her breast, slipping the
shoulder from her dress. While the baby feeds.

SARA(CONT'D)

Used to have a cow, few goats. Raiders
took them. Made me kill our own dog on
the porch That poor creature watched over
me. Nothing left now save a hog and
couple of chickens to live off till
spring. I'll have to kill that hog and
make sense of the flesh and divisions'
which is something I never did.

INMAN

I could do that for you in the morning.

SARA

I'm not asking.

INMAN

It's what I'd gladly do for you for
what you're gladly doing for me.
I'm Inman by the way. That's my
name.

SARA

I'm Sara. My baby' s Ethan.

INMAN

Glad to know you both.

EXT. SARA'S CABIN. NIGHT.

Sara walks ahead of Inman. She carries a pile of clothing, a
pair of boots. It's still wretched outside, she hugs the
house, the porch barely offering shelter. INMAN FOLLOWS, with
a bowl of steaming water and a small towel over his arm. She
hands him the clothes.

SARA

You look about his size. He was
another man straight up and down.

There's a palpable attraction between them, so that every
exchange seems to contain a promise, a sexual charge.

SARA (CONT'D)

I don't even have a blanket.

INMAN

I got a blanket.

SARA
I'll leave you the lamp.

By the dim light, Inman peels off his clothes, sets to work with the bar of soap and the cloth to scrub himself clean. He can be seen from the window and finds himself turning away to pull off his pants.

INT. SARA'S CABIN. NIGHT.

Sara sits at the cot, still singing to the baby, then gets up, goes to the window, sees Inman dressing, walks to the door, lets it open a little, but not so as she can be seen.

SARA
They fit?

INMAN (O.S.)
Pretty much. These boots are good boots.

SARA
I'll say good night.

INMAN (O.S.)
Good night.

EXT. SARA'S CABIN. NIGHT.

Inman settles down into the corncrib. He's cold and everything is damp and lumpy and uncomfortable. He pulls his thin blanket around him. The wind is howling. He levers himself up, looks at the house with its warm invitation, can almost feel Sara in there. He reluctantly settles down again.

HE HEARS A NOISE, STEPS APPROACHING. HE REACHES FOR THE LEMATS UNDER THE BLANKETS.

SARA
Will you come inside?

She stands in a shift, a blanket over her shoulders. Her body under the cotton very clear to him. She turns and goes back inside.

INT. SARA'S CABIN. NIGHT

Inman comes in. Sara is sitting on her bed. Long silence.

SARA
Could you do something for me? Do you think you could lie here, next to me, and not need to go further?

INMAN
I don't know. I'll try.

He sits on the bed as she slips under the covers, and then removes the boots, his shirt, gets under the covers. There's an electric space between them. Then Sara begins to cry, pulls his arm to open up so that she can be folded into him. SHE SOBS, SHUDDERING IN THE BED.

INMAN (CONT'D)

I'll go. I'll go, shall I?

SARA

I don't want you to.

They lie, staring up at the ceiling, her tears falling. A FIDDLE PLAYS HEAVY WITH YEARNING...

INT. OLD MILL, COLD MOUNTAIN. CHRISTMAS DAY. NIGHT.

THE MUSIC CONTINUES. Stobrod is playing the fiddle, his bowing hand still lightly taped and a fingerless mitten covering it. They're in the abandoned Mill, a derelict space, which has been cheered up with some rudimentary Christmas decorations. Ada, Ruby and Sally Swanger, her hair now almost completely white. Some token presents. Pangle is picking at a banjo, his grin infectious, and a third player, GEORGIA, with a harmonica. As they play:

PANGLE

(of Sally)

She don't speak.

STOBROD

She can't speak. I told you.

PANGLE

(smiles at Sally)

Is she feeble then?

STOBROD

No.

(to Sally)

Don' t mind him .

(to Ruby)

Hey Ruby: what about this?

He starts the tune of Wayfaring Stranger. Ruby groans.

STOBROD (CONT'D)

Don't make that face - you listen: c'mon Georgia...

And he starts up again, but this time GEORGIA BEGINS TO SING. He's like a pale angel and sings with a soft, true voice. Ruby finds herself taken by this boy's voice and by Stobrod's extraordinary invention as he takes the tune off on a wild journey. Ruby sits next to Ada, fiddles with her bracelets, slips one from Ada's wrist and slides it over her own.

EXT. OLD MILL, COLD MOUNTAIN. EVENING.

They're all outside now, shaking hands.

GEORGIA
There's snow in the air.

RUBY
Don't sleep here.

STOBROD
We won't.

ADA
It's bitter, they could stop one night.

RUBY
They stop one night, they'll want to stop two.

PANGLE
This coat's warm.

STOBROD
What about next Sunday? That'll be the New Year. It's gonna be a better one.

RUBY
Maybe.

GEORGIA
The war's over in a month.

RUBY
He said that a month ago.

ADA
(shaking Stobrod's hand in
goodnight)
It started off being over in a month.

STOBROD
Miss Ada. Merry Christmas.

ADA
Merry Christmas. Pangle. Georgia.

GEORGIA
'Night.

PANGLE
'Night now.

The three women walk down the lane, the three men watch.

STOBROD
That's my Ruby.

GEORGIA
She's an original.

STOBROD
You think the Good Lord would forgive an old cold fool if he changed his mind? Ada said it herself it was bitter...

EXT. SWANGER FARM. NIGHT.

The three women head towards Sally's house.

RUBY
What kind of name's Georgia?

ADA
It's where he comes from, it's not his name.

RUBY
I know that's meant to be the ugliest state under the heavens.

ADA
Why do you care what his name is?

RUBY
(a funny look, then)
What's that cluster of Stars?

ADA
Orion.

RUBY
What about them shaped like a wishbone?

ADA
That's Taurus the bull, and that's Gemini and that's Orion's big dog, Canis Major.

RUBY
Listen to her, Sal. She's turned into a highland girl.

ADA
I could always name the stars, Ruby, that was never my problem.

They all three have linked arms. Ada imitates Stobrod.

ADA (CONT'D)
I love you darling. In case that big old sky falls on our heads. And I love you, too. Sal.

RUBY

It's sad, Sal. It's a c-a-t-a-s-t-r-o-p-h-e.

INT. ADA'S BEDROOM, BLACK COVE FARM. MORNING.

Ada at the window as, outside, SNOW FLAKES BEGIN TO FALL.

EXT. OLD MILL, COLD MOUNTAIN. MORNING.

Stobrod opens the door of the Mill. The SNOW FLAKES dissuade him from venturing further. He goes back inside.

STOBROD (OFF)

No sense setting off in snow.

THE DOOR SHUTS, FIDDLE MUSIC LEAKS THROUGH THE DOOR, FOLLOWED BY BANJO AND HARMONICA.

INT. SARA'S CABIN. EARLY.

Sara, dressed, agitated - the baby already complaining -is urgently shaking Inman. hissing at him:

SARA

Get out of here, quick!

Inman surfaces from deep sleep.

SARA (CONT'D)

Federals are coming. They find you here it'll go bad on all of us.

Inman is up, grabbing clothes, boots, his gun.

INMAN

I can try and fight them.

SARA

No, my baby. Please no! Just get.

She pulls up the window in back of the cabin. Inman throws things out into the freezing morning. He .has his pants on, but is otherwise naked. He swings over the window and down onto the frosty ground.

EXT. SARA'S CABIN. EARLY

Inman picks up his stuff and, at a crouch, runs for cover to the wood which borders the property. He can hear horses and a commotion at the front of Sara's cabin, but doesn't look round until he's sheltered by the trees.

FEDERAL SOLDIERS, a raiding party, have dismounted and are already wrangling with Sara. Inman watches, pulling on his shirt, shivering, then his boots.

Sara is standing in front of the hogpen, as if to protect the animal, but one of the soldiers, PISTOL, barges her to one side, toppling her, and opens the gate, starts herding the hog out into the yard. A second soldier, NYM, emerges from the cabin, carrying Ethan. Sara starts up, struggles with him, is again knocked down. INMAN HAS TO WATCH AS THEY DRAG HER OVER TO A FENCE POST AND ROPE HER TO IT I THEN SLIP THE BLANKET OFF THE BABY AND LAY IT ON THE GROUND IN THE MIDDLE OF THE YARD.

Then Sara starts to scream.

Inman is dressed. Boots on. He looks back at the yard. The men sitting, smoking, prepared to wait, their breath coming out in gusts in the freezing air. Flakes of snow fall.

PISTOL
We got all day.

SARA
My baby's sick! Cover him up! He's shaking! Have some pity.

A third Federal, BARDOLPH, chases after the chickens, gathers them up.

SARA (CONT'D)
I got nothing. I swear.

Nym gets close to her, putting his rifle to her chest.

NYM
That ain't necessarily so.

SARA
Yes! Take me inside! let's all go inside! Take my baby inside and then we'll do whatever you want .

Nym unties her. Pistol has a rope around the hog and now leads it towards the horses.

SARA (CONT'D)
(screaming)
There's nothing! You take that hog I'm as good as dead. Cover up my boy!

She's wailing, an unbearable ululation. NYM SLAPS HER, TWICE, HARD.

INT. SARA'S CABIN. DAY.

The door is kicked open. Nym pushes Sara inside, kicks the door shut, REVEALING INMAN STANDING BEHIND IT.

EXT. SARA'S CABIN. DAY.

Bardolph, a chicken in his arms, goes over to the baby.

BARDOLPH

This is ready to get a fit going. It's shuddering. It's gone blue.

PISTOL

(to Nym)

How long does he want? Hey! Leave some for the rest of us.

Pistol heads towards the cabin. As he approaches the door, Bardolph rearranges the blankets to, cover the baby. Pistol opens the door. Nym is on top of Sara. Pistol laughs, enters, and is clubbed down by Inman, who steps out onto the porch, while SARA SHRUGS OFF THE BODY OF NYM, HIS THROAT CUT.

Bardolph looks up to see Inman walking towards him. Bardolph has left his weapon by the fence.

INMAN

Move away from the baby.

Bardolph obeys, terrified. Sara runs out, collects Ethan, gives a little moan of anguish, runs back inside the cabin.

BARDOLPH

Don't shoot.

INMAN

Take off your boots.

(Bardolph does so)

Take off your pants, and your shirt.

BARDOLPH

Don't shoot me, please. We're starving. We haven't eaten.

INMAN

You'd better get running before you catch your death of cold.

BARDOLPH

(nods, terrified)

Thanks, thank you. I will.

AND THEN A SHOT RINGS OUT AND HE CRASHES TO THE GROUND, DEAD. Behind Inman, Sara stands with a rifle.

EXT. SARA'S CABIN. LATE DAY.

THERE'S A HUGE FIRE GOING, WITH A CAULDRON HUNG OVER IT. THE HOG HANGS UPSIDE DOWN FROM A TREE, BLOOD DRIPPING INTO. BOWL. There's a sense of ritual and order: the chapters of transforming the hog into food.

Sara is inside the cabin, the door open onto the yard. She holds the baby by the fireplace, swaddled up tight.

She tries to put him to her breast, but he won't feed. She puts Ethan back in his crib, comes outside.

Now Inman is butchering the hog, chopping down either side of the spine to make two sides of meat. Now Sara is holding up a sheet of caul fat, as if it were a lace shawl. Now she's rendering the fat into lard. Now Inman's salting the two hams. Now Sara's washing the intestine. She sings all the while - I dreamed that my bower was full of red swine and my bride bed full of blood - they don't really converse. Inman continues to work.

Sara goes back inside to Ethan's crib. Inman glances back, but can hardly bear to, her anxiety so palpable. THE BABY IS DEAD. She looks at it. She takes it up in her arms. Kisses its forehead. Makes a strange stifling noise. Inman doesn't look at her.

She comes out again, shovels some of the food into a plate, serves it up to Inman, gently touching him as she does so. Then serves out food for herself. Inman starts to eat.

SARA

Good?

Inman nods. She collects up the knapsacks, including Inman's, and goes back inside the house with them. Inman squats, eating, glancing back towards the cabin. There's the sudden shocking report of a revolver.

Inman, knowing what it is, goes slowly towards the house and its two dead bodies. His own face is a rictus, the eyes thin slits. If he gave into his grief it would never cease.

INT. SARA'S CABIN. DUSK.

From the house, the silhouette of Inman working outside in the day's dying light, snow falling around him. He's digging a grave. Inside the house, TWO BUNDLES, the small body wrapped in a blanket, the other wrapped in the bed's patchwork quilt.

EXT. CABBAGE PATCH, BLACK COVE FARM. DUSK.

Still snowing. Ruby trudges past Ada who is digging out a couple of heads of the buried cabbages.

ADA

Do you think he's dead?

RUBY

Who?

ADA

(shrugs)

This snow. Isn't it supposed to fall with bad news?

RUBY

Bad news is girls get working. I'm going
to round up the animals.

(squints up at the snow)

This'll settle.

She walks past. Ada stares into the distance where

EXT. WILD COUNTRY. LAST LIGHT.

- the snow falls down on Inman. He's hardly visible in its
gusting waves. Just a thin black question mark, hunched over
the elements, moving slowly forwards...

EXT . OLD MILL, COLD MOUNTAIN. DAY.

THE SNOW HAS STOPPED. It's left a carpet on the ground.
Stobrod, Pangle and Georgia emerge from the Old Mill. THEY
MAKE HEAVY FOOTPRINTS as they set off up the hill towards the
mountain.

EXT. PATH IN THE MOUNTAINS. DAY.

Inman comes sliding down a crumbling slate hill and onto the
path. He cornea to a place where the path suddenly drops away
to reveal a view of the geography. And there, finally, in the
distance, Inman can see the blue ridge. Somewhere in there is
home, is Ada. He goes on.

EXT. SLOPES OF COLD MOUNTAIN. DAY.

Pangle walks too close to Stobrod and steps on the back of
his boot which promptly detaches itself from Stobrod's foot.
Stobrod turns - and with a raised finger - pushes Pangle.
PANGLE FALLS IN THE SNOW, ARMS SPREADEAGLED, AND SMILES.

EXT. PIGEON RIVER BEHIND THE OLD MILL. DAY.

SOME HORSES CLUSTER around the Stobrod party's footprints.
Bosie swings acrobatically over his horse, to hang over the
tracks, then up again into his saddle, looks at Teague. The
Home Guard plod slowly forward in the direction of the
tracks.

EXT. THE KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. EVENING.

A CLEARING, fringed by poplars. Stobrod is making a fire.
Pangle appears with an armful of firewood, his big grin a
fixture. Then Georgia appears. He's carrying A SMALL BUCK,
frozen and covered with snow.

GEORGIA

What d'you reckon? Think we could
eat this?

STOBROD
You cook something long enough you
can eat anything.

PANGLE
(prodding it)
It's frozen. How long it been there for?

STOBROD
You hungry?

PANGLE
Yeah.

STOBROD
Not very long.

EXT. SLOPES OF COLD MOUNTAIN. EVENING.

Teague examines the snow's imprinted silhouette of Pangle.

EXT. THE KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. NIGHT.

STOBROD SINGS AND COOKS. PANGLE ACCOMPANIES HIM ON BANJO, Georgia joins in the chorus. Stobrod pulls one of the hickory stick skewers out of the fire, blows on the ,meat, smells, smells again, looks at Georgia, takes a bite. Chews.

STOBROD
Edible.

Pangle takes another stick, burns his fingers.

PANGLE
Ow!

GEORGIA
(takes a bite from his skewer)
Don't taste much like venison.

PANGLE
It's good. I think it's good.

EXT. THE KILLING GROUND. COLD MOUNTAIN. NIGHT.

The three men are asleep. The fire still burning. They're lying like petals of a flower around it. Suddenly Georgia sits bolt upright, grimaces, gets up stumbles away from the fire, toward a stand of trees, from which come the vivid sounds of violent nausea.

EXT. TREES NEAR THE KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. NIGHT.

GEORGIA IS KNEELING IN THE SNOW, his head in the snow, when he A HALF DOZEN RIDERS TROT PAST approaching the sleeping Stobrod and Pangle. Georgia has to vomit again.

EXT. THE KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. NIGHT.

Teague rides up to the fire, the other riders with him - Mo, Jo, Bosie, Grayling. Stobrod wakes, sits up, Pangle sleeps.

TEAGUE
Evening. Hope we didn't disturb you.

STOBROD
You're all right.

TEAGUE
Name's Teague. Do I know you?

STOBROD
Thewes.

Teague slides off his horse, approaches the fire.

TEAGUE
You a deserter? - don't mind if I
just warm up at your fire.
(of the sleeping Pangle)
That your wife?

STOBROD
Who? That's a he!

TEAGUE
He your wife?

STOBROD
We're musicians. He picks the banjo, I
got a fiddle.

TEAGUE
(to his men)
Look pretty romantic by the fire. Don't they?
(to Stobrod)
Your boyfriend's got a nice bit of flesh
on him. Close your eyes slip inside that
shirt get two good handfuls - dark enough
I'd be willing. I'm just kidding.
(to his men)
Tell him, I'm just kidding.

BOSIE
He's just kidding.

EXT. TREES NEAR KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. NIGHT.

Georgia squints through the trees. Doesn't know what to do.

EXT. THE KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. NIGHT.

TEAGUE

Did you answer my question - about your military status?

STOBROD

Discharged. Took a wound at Petersburg.

TEAGUE

Oh, so like a hero's discharge.

STOBROD

I guess.

TEAGUE

And your boyfriend?

STOBROD

The military wouldn't take him. He can't fight. He's simple. He's got a mind no bigger'n a pickled walnut.

TEAGUE

I'm sorry - he's fat, he's simple and got titties - but you're insisting he ain't a woman. They damn! Don't that sausage smell outstanding.

STOBROD

(he's very nervous)
Mighty outstanding.

TEAGUE

Mighty outstanding! There's a new phrase. Mighty outstanding. Listen, don't tell me - you left your papers somewhere.

STOBROD

Which papers?

TEAGUE

Your hero's discharge. For mighty outstanding valour.

STOBROD

They're, they're, they're at my house.

TEAGUE

(enjoying himself)
And where, where, where is your house?

STOBROD

Down the mountain.

TEAGUE

But you're up the mountain.

STOBROD
Hunting. Drinking.

TEAGUE
On honeymoon.
(to his men)
I'm pretty fucking funny tonight.

BOSIE
Is he going to play?
(to Stobrod)
You gonna play that fiddle?

STOBROD
Sure. Sure.
(kicks Pangle)
Hey, wake up!

Pangle surfaces, blinks, grins at everybody.

TEAGUE
Evening, Mrs.

PANGLE
(looking around)
Where's Georgia?

TEAGUE
(interested)
Where's Georgia?

In the trees, Georgia ducks, retches.

STOBROD
He don't know what he's saying. We were
talking about Georgia early on - maybe
heading down there.

TEAGUE
Georgia's like my armpit. Worse, it's like
yours.
(to Pangle)
Want some sausage?

PANGLE
Thanks. You is Home Guard?

TEAGUE
Yes, ma'am.

PANGLE
You is Teague?

TEAGUE
I'm known!
(to the others)

STOBROD
He don't know what he's saying.

PANGLE
(quoting)
That bastard Teague.

TEAGUE
Really.

PANGLE
Bad words. Folk always put the curse
words in front of your name.

STOBROD
Mr. Teague wants us to play.

PANGLE
Okay.

TEAGUE
We heard there were deserters in
these parts. Hiding out in a big
cave.

STOBROD
Not come to my ears.

TEAGUE
You don't know where this cave is?

STOBROD
No, sir.

PANGLE
You do, Stobes! He means -

STOBROD
Right, right! he means, there is a cave,
right, it's up over the other side, big
cave, we played some music up there, never
occurred to me they were deserters. Near
Bearpen Branch.

PANGLE
Ain't nowhere near Bearpen Branch! It's this
side! He's always getting lost. That cave - we
live there! - it's over on Big Stomp. Tell you
how I always find it. There's a big old locust
tree fell down across the path, that points
straight at it, like a finger, always a dozen
squirrels round that tree. You gets to the
tree, sit on it, and there's your entrance,
straight in front of you, tree points at it.
Come right to your hand, them squirrels -

PANGLE (CONT' D)
(makes a chirping sound)
-Chrrrrpppp! Chrrrrpppp!

TEAGUE
Sounds good. Okay, let's eat, let's hear
some music.

EXT. TREES NEAR KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. NIGHT

Georgia watches as the music starts, Stobrod playing and singing, Pangle joining in at the chorus. Their improvising is wild, profound, Stobrod chording the fiddle, Pangle following him, then, finishing with another verse and ending with the title declaimed by Stobrod.

STOBROD
I call this tune: Ruby's Lament.

EXT. THE KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. NIGHT.

Something like compassion has flickered over Teague's face. Mo and Jo nod to the music's secret rhythms. Only Bosie seems detached, contemplating his long fingernail. The music finishes. The Home Guard applaud.

PANGLE
What'd you make of that?

BOSIE
Heartbreaking.

TEAGUE
Stand over by that tree.

STOBROD
Me?

TEAGUE
Over by that tree. Over there. Take your boyfriend.

Stobrod gets up, carrying his fiddle, heads over to a big old poplar. Nods at Pangle.

STOBROD
Come on.

Pangle gets up, banjo in his hand. Puts his arm around Stobrod as if they were about to be photographed. The Home Guard gather around them. From the trees Georgia watches, helpless. Pangle grins at Teague.

TEAGUE
Don't smile.

PANGLE
What?

TEAGUE

Quit smiling.

STOBROD

He always smiles. He don't mean nothing by it. I told him this world's got nothing worth a smile.

TEAGUE

Put your hat over your face.

PANGLE

What do you mean?

TEAGUE

Cover your face with your hat.

PANGLE TAKES OFF HIS HAT, HOLDS IT OVER HIS FACE. THE MOMENT HE OBLIGIES, TEAGUE'S CARBINE SPRINGS UP IN HIS HAND AND BLOWS THE HAT AWAY SEVERAL OTHER SHOTS FOLLOW. STOBROD FALLS UNDER PANGLE, THE BULLETS FLYING.

EXT. TREES NEAR THE KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. NIGHT.

Georgia lies prostrate in the snow, shuddering under the report of each bullet.

EXT. BOTTOM FIELD, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY

Ruby working in the snow, in the field, clipping a sheep's feet, the animal on its back between Ruby's knees. She looks up to see GEORGIA RUNNING ACROSS THE FIELD TOWARDS HER, calling out her name. From the kitchen window, Ada looks on as he reaches Ruby, the story pouring from him. Ada emerges from the house, walks towards the bad news.

INT. STOREROOM, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY.

Ruby sorting out a kit of shovels, blankets. Ada comes in doesn't know how to help her friend, who shows no emotion.

ADA

I told Georgia he can stop here, sleep in the barn. He's got nothing inside him. He'd walk out of here and die in the snow.

RUBY

He can milk the cows. I was worrying about that. It'll be dark in a couple of hours. It's ten hours climb from here. He's drawn a map.

ADA

Okay.

RUBY

(boiling)

You know these fools stayed the night in the Mill? That's Stobrod - he can't do one good thing without adding the bad. Left tracks in the snow all the way up for them Home Guards to follow. That's a sign says shoot me!

ADA

Ruby, I'm so sorry.

Ada moves towards her, puts her arms around her. Ruby is rigid. Ada stops embracing her.

RUBY

We should get going.

She's tying up the kit. She doesn't know how to grieve.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Every piece of this is a man's bullshit. They call this a war a cloud over the land, but they made the weather. Then they stand in the rain and say: shit! It's raining!

(tears welling)

If I cry one tear for my Daddy I stole it off a crocodile.

EXT. COLD MOUNTAIN. EVENING.

THE SNOW IS FALLING HEAVILY. RUBY AND ADA TRUDGE UP THE MOUNTAIN, dressed in Monroe's clothes, hats pulled down, leading the horse, which is loaded up with tools and supplies. A choice of paths. They start up one, then Ruby decides against it, consults the map, and they reverse, pulling the horse back and then yanking it up the other path.

EXT. II STRUCTURE, COLD MOUNTAIN. NIGHT.

Ruby and Ada have made a fire. They sleep under a stone structure, which forms a natural pi shape, the fire in the entrance, the snow caught in its light.

EXT. THE KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. MORNING.

Ada and Ruby arrive at the scene of murder.

Pangle is keeled over at the old Poplar, snow covering him. Only his girth and a glimpse of coat identify him. Ada brushes some of the snow from his face, revealing the death wound, then lays a hand in blessing on his head.

ADA

I don't understand.

RUBY

Maybe Teague's took him. They did that with the Swanger boys - didn't, they? - dragged them into town, then strung them up as warning... it's snowed since, so I can't read the story on the ground.

Ada fishes out Pangle's banjo from the snow. It's broken and the strings hang slack.

RUBY (CONT'D)

Let's dig.

LATER - and RUBY FINISHES OFF THE GRAVE, hammering in a stone to mark the place. Ada walks away towards the creek, to wash her hands. She bends and rinses her face. As she looks up SHE SEES STOBROD ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CREEK; half-in, half out of the water, slumped against a tree, blood everywhere, staining the crust of snow which covers him.

ADA

Ruby! Ruby!

Ruby arrives at Ada, looks to where she's looking, walks straight into the creek, all her love contained in the urgency with which she hurtles to her father, oblivious to the freezing water. She puts a head to his chest, seeks out a pulse at his wrist. Calls back to Ada.

RUBY

He's still breathing!
(to Stobrod)
They damn! Daddy; Daddy - it's
Ruby. Don't you die on me again.
(to Ada)
He's still breathing!

EXT. THE KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. AFTERNOON.

A mean fire burns by the creek. RUBY TURNS A KNIFE IN THE FLAMES. Stobrod's back is exposed. Just by the shoulder blade is an ugly grey and purple bulge the size of a crabapple. Ruby turns to Ada, who is helping.

RUBY

Pack a pan full of snow. I need good clean water, boiled up.

She cuts the skin and prises out a slug which she drops in the snow and rolls around to clean. Stobrod doesn't move. He could be dead. Ada loads the pan with snow.

ADA
Let's get him home. We have herbs
there and it's warm.

RUBY
He'll die first. He's got hardly no
blood left in him.

ADA
He'll die lying here.

RUBY
There's a place further on up. Used
to be. Old Cherokee place. There's
good water right by it.

Ada puts the snow-packed pan on the fire.

EXT. BY THE OUTLIER'S CAVE, COLD MOUNTAIN. AFTERNOON.

Squirrels frolic. Teague sits on the trunk of a fallen tree.
He feeds the squirrels, looking straight ahead where the
mouth of a cave winks back at him.

EXT. TREE TUNNEL NEAR CHEROKEE VILLAGE. AFTERNOON.

THE TWO WOMEN EMERGE FROM A STEEP TUNNEL OF TREES IN A
CHESTNUT GROVE. There's a stream and, up on the bank, A
CLUSTER OF BLACK CONICAL HUTS, made up of chestnut logs,
abandoned and slightly sinister looking. They approach one of
the huts, its door long lost. The snow has drifted in. A
second hut has a door which they pry open. It's dark and
cold, but apparently still weatherproof. They get Stobrod off
the horse and carry him inside, then come out again to unload
the horse of its remaining load.

ADA
This horse is weary. He's ready to
give up the ghost.

Ruby picks up the blankets and provisions and goes back
inside to her father. Ada takes the horse to another hut and,
despite his great reluctance, pushes him inside.

ADA (CONT'D)
Good boy.
(she blows into his nostrils,
calming him)
That's warmer, isn't it.

Ada wouldn't even recognize this practical, hardy woman she's
become. Stringy and of few words. She sets off towards the
tree tunnel, passing Stobrod's hut.

ADA (CONT'D)
I'm getting firewood.

EXT. THE KILLING GROUND, COLD MOUNTAIN. DUSK.

Inman approaches the Killing Ground. He studies the ground, finds Pangle's grave. Blood has left its black writing in the snow and he finds first where Stobrod has been, where the bullet had been removed, then the journey away, still tiny, telltale spatters of blood, and the hoof prints and boot prints of two walkers and one loaded horse. He puts his hand into the ashes of Ruby's fire, can't feel any warmth. It's getting dark. He takes a drink from the stream, shudders at the cold.

INT. STOBROD'S HUT, CHEROKEE VILLAGE. NIGHT.

The fire burns, a pall of smoke. Stobrod lies on the ground, swathed in blankets. Coughs. Ruby sits next to him, wipes the hair from his forehead. Ada opens her eyes, looks, closes them, listens to the fire, a strange squeaking as it burns.

ADA

That wood - that sound when it burns that mean more snow?

RUBY

Yes, it do, country girl.

EXT. TRACK, COLD MOUNTAIN. DAWN.

First light. The sun creeps up, a red streak of dawn. Inman walking, his head bent to the tracks. He walks quickly, even as the terrain gets more steep. As he bends to the snow - where a spot of blood has fallen into a hoof print - A FLAKE OF SNOW LANDS ON HIS HAND. Then a second. He looks up. The snow falls.

He starts to move more quickly, racing the snow as it seeks to erase the tracks. The snow thickens.

EXT. TREE TUNNEL NEAR CHEROKEE VILLAGE. MORNING.

In the Chestnut Grovel A DOZEN WILD TURKEYS pick their way across the snow. A shotgun lines up its sight at one of them. The trigger is squeezed. An explosion of feathers.

EXT. THREE WAY CROSSING, COLD MOUNTAIN. MORNING.

Inman hears the shot. Then a second, the sound ricocheting around him. He can't quite identify its source I but he runs again, heading for the Chestnut trees he can see above him.

EXT. TREE TUNNEL NEAR CHEROKEE VILLAGE. MORNING.

Ada collects the two turkeys, the first creatures she's ever shot. Doesn't quite know how to hold them. She straightens up and sees, at the other end of the tree tunnel, backlit by the morning sun, THE SILHOUETTE OF A MAN. She drops the turkeys tires to reload the shotgun.

Inman comes down the tunnel, approaching the hunter he sees through the snow at the other end of it.

ADA

Turn round and go back where you came from.

Inman is bewildered by this woman's voice in a man's outfit, keeps walking, peering through the snow. Ada fires a warning shot. Inman, still some distance, suddenly understands.

INMAN

Ada? Ada Monroe?

ADA

I do not know you.

After all this time, all this way, Inman could give up the ghost.

INMAN

Then I believe I made a mistake.

He turns, walks heavily away from her. Then he turns again, completely lost, without compass.

INMAN (CONT'D)

If I knew where to go I'd go there.

ADA

(finally recognising him)

Inman ?

He nods. They don't know how to speak to each other, just stand awkwardly, some distance apart, the emotion stones in their throats. Eventually -

ADA (CONT'D)

You'd better come with me.

And with that, she starts to sob, and sob.

VERY HIGH ANGLE: Inman walks towards Ada. They embrace.

INT. STOBROD'S HUT, CHEROKEE VILLAGE. MORNING.

Ada enters, Inman behind her. Ruby looks up from Stobrod.

ADA

Ruby, this is Inman.

Ruby digests this. Considers this ghost of a man.

RUBY

Congratulations, I should send you out with a shotgun more often. He looks as he needs sleep.

INMAN

I may need to.

RUBY

Be my guest. You shot or something?

INMAN

Not lately.

RUBY

Hungry?

(Inman nods, Ruby to Ada)

He woke up.

ADA

Stobrod?

RUBY

Said - your mommy's name was Grace then
closed his eyes again.

EXT. CHEROKEE VILLAGE. DAY.

Ada comes out of Stobrod's hut, a glimpse of Inman sleeping on the floor, heads for another hut which Ruby is sweeping out. The snow has stopped. Ada stands in the door, watches Ruby. Ruby's resistance to Inman is palpable.

ADA

He's asleep. They both are.

RUBY

I'm not surprised. Your man looks played out.

ADA

I saw him. I realize now.

RUBY

Saw him when?

ADA

In Sally Swanger's well. A tunnel of trees. The man like a black smudge in the snow, the sun behind him.

RUBY

Well there you are.

ADA

Funny thing is it wasn't the same. The image. It wasn't snowing. And in the well, he was, as if he were falling.

RUBY

You probably don't remember it right.

ADA

I remember it exactly. There were crows, these black crows flying towards me. I thought I was seeing him fall. Instead I was seeing him come back to me. All this while I've been packing ice around my heart. How will I make it melt?

RUBY

Better get a fire going.
(goes to the fireplace)
I've got big plans for that farm. Got a vision in my mind of how that Cove needs to be.

ADA

I know you have.

RUBY

There's not a thing we can't do ourselves.

INT. ADA AND RUBY HUT, CHEROKEE VILLAGE. NIGHT.

THE FIRE BURNS. Ada lies awake. Ruby sleeping. Ada gets up, steps out into the snow, her blanket around her.

EXT. ADA AND RUBY HUT, CHEROKEE VILLAGE. NIGHT.

Inman is outside his cabin. Only the light escaping from the cabin, fire lights them, almost silhouettes.

INMAN

I'm sorry. I was trying to be quiet.

ADA

I couldn't sleep.

INMAN

- I got no appetite left to be in a room with wounded men.

ADA

I can't see your face.

INMAN

It's not a face you recognised.

ADA

Did you get my letters?

INMAN

I got three letters. Carried them in that book you gave me. The Bertram.

ADA

I must have sent 100. Did you write to me?

INMAN

Whenever I could. If you never got them I can summarize.

ADA

No, it' s -

INMAN

I pray you're well. I pray I'm in your thoughts. You are all that keeps me from sliding into some dark place.

ADA

But how did I keep you? We barely knew each other. A few moments.

INMAN

A thousand moments. They're like a bag of tiny diamonds glittering in a black heart. Don't matter if they're real or things I made up. The shape of your neck. The way you felt under my hands when I pulled you to me.

ADA

Your boots, one polished, one not yet polished.

INMAN

You're playing a piano and I'm standing outside.

ADA

I'm playing a piano and you're standing outside.

INMAN

That kiss - which I've kissed again every day of my walking.

ADA

Every day of my waiting.

INMAN

Maybe you can't see my face, but if you could see my inside, my whatever you want to name it, my spirit, that's the fear I have deeper than any gash on my neck. I think I' In ruined. They kept trying to put me in the ground, but I wasn't ready, no ma'am, no more ready than that scoundrel in there's not ready to die on us. But if I had goodness, I lost it. If I had anything tender in me I shot it dead.

Ruby stomps out of the hut.

RUBY

Number one - shut this door, it's freezing.
(goes over to Stobrod's hut)

Number two - shut that door, it's freezing.

(turns to them)

I'm laying on my back, with my fingers poked in my ears trying to shut out who's got a bag of diamonds and who's got boots needs polishing, If you want to get three feet up a bull's ass listen to what sweethearts whisper to each other.

She's at the door to Stobrod's hut. She contemplates them.

RUBY (CONT' D)

In fact, if you're going to wimble all night I'm going to sleep in with him.

And with that she enters Stobrod's hut, slamming the door.

ADA

Now I can't see anything.

A long pause.

INMAN

I'll say goodnight.

ADA

I don't think Ruby's vacating my hut so that you can sleep in a different one.

INT. ADA AND RUBY HUT, CHEROKEE VILLAGE. NIGHT.

Ada puts logs onto the fire. After a few moments a knock.

ADA

Come in.

Inman enters. They don't know the rules for this.

ADA (CONT'D)

Whatever comes to pass between you and me, I want Ruby to stay in Black Cove.

INMAN

Right.

ADA

As long as she wants. And if she never leaves I'll be glad.

INMAN

More a question could she put up with me.

ADA

And you understand she's my friend, she's not a hired hand and she doesn't empty a night jar unless it's her own.

INMAN

Sure.

ADA

This war's made some things pointless. It's hard to imagine a wedding. I think even my father would recognize that.

INMAN

Ada, I want to marry you. If you'll have me.

ADA

Isn't there's some religion where you just have to say I marry you, three times, and then you're man and wife.

INMAN

I marry you. I marry you. I marry you.

Ada laughs, unsettling Inman.

INMAN (CONT'D)

Why's that funny?

ADA

No, I think it's I divorce you three times and then you're not married anymore.

INMAN

I can wait for you.

ADA

You waited enough. I certainly did. I marry you. I marry you. I marry you.

And they kiss, tentative, then more urgent.

ADA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about the way I look. In these clothes.
(Inman shakes his head)
And there are so many buttons.
(starts to undress)
Will you turn your back?

INMAN

Not for all the gold dollars in the Federal Bank.

She stands holding her clothes in front of her to cover herself. He takes them from her, drops them to the floor.

EXT. CHEROKEE VILLAGE. MORNING.

A crisp, cold beautiful morning. They're packing up, all their clothes in layers. Inman prepares the horse. Ruby and Ada carrying bundles out of the huts. Inman approaches Ruby.

INMAN

You go ahead. I'll follow with the horse at a pace, your daddy can tolerate.

ADA

We can all go together.

INMAN

It's safer this way. No-one has quarrel with you.

RUBY

He's right.

INMAN

(to Ruby)

I gather I need permission if I reckon on living at Black Cove.

Ruby gives a curt nod, goes over to Stobrod's hut. Inman gets close to Ada.

INMAN (CONT'D)

We'll get to you by nightfall.

ADA

You be safe.

She puts her hand to his mouth which creases into a smile.

INMAN

Your Mr Bartram speaks about some category of fly born on the hide of a cow. It flies up into a tree and waits and waits until it smells cow. It can wait a year, two years, I don't know, maybe longer. Then a cow comes along and it wakes up, flies down, lays its eggs on the cow. There's purpose for you.

ADA

And am I the fly in this story, or the cow?

INT. STOBROD'S HUT, CHEROKEE VILLAGE. DAY.

Ruby is wrapping a fragile Stobrod for the journey.

STOBROD

You come up the mountain for me, darling,
I'd be dead otherwise, dead and gone.

RUBY

You'd have found some other fool to
rescue you.

STOBROD

He's sweet on you, that Georgia boy.

He coughs for a long time.

RUBY

If you say a thing and then cough it's a
lie. Daddy, stay on that horse, and don't
lose him or sell him. We'll need him on
the farm.

EXT. CHEROKEE VILLAGE. MORNING.

And then the two women are off, little men in their outfits,
tramping off in the snow. Inman watches.

EXT. TRACK NEAR THREE WAY CROSSING, COLD MOUNTAIN. DAY

Ruby and Ada walk.

RUBY

I hope that Georgia boy's been seeing to
the animals.

ADA

I thought you were thinking on him!

RUBY

I was not. I was thinking on swollen
udders - and before you say same
difference. . !

ADA

I'm saying nothing.

Ruby elbows her.

RUBY

Miss lovey-dovey!

Ada elbows her back.

EXT. THREE WAY CROSSING, COLD MOUNTAIN. DAY.

Inman has roped Stobrod to the horse which he pulls down a
steep slope. Behind him, their hooves. muffled by the snow, A
GROUP OF RIDERS JOIN THE TRAIL, IN SLOW BUT STEADY PURSUIT.

Inman walks on, apparently oblivious to who's behind him. He and Stobrod are some distance from broken ground, a fringe of trees.

INMAN
(quietly to Stobrod)
Don't look round.

STOBROD
Got it.

INMAN
How many men does he have?

STOBROD
There were five. You can't reason with that man.

INMAN
(takes off his gloves)
I got a conversation stopper.
(they're getting closer)
Closer we get to that broken ground the better.

Inman opens his coat. Stobrod looks at the Lemats. They're at the edge of the trees.

INMAN (CONT'D)
You hold on tight, do you hear? When I say three, look round, nice and slow.

STOBROD
Okay.

INMAN
One, two, three.

Stobrod looks round. Inman doesn't. Teague has some new bodies in his entourage but they're all dead. A SPARE HORSE HAS THREE CORPSES HUNG OVER IT, ANOTHER HORSE DRAGS A MAKESHIFT LITTER WITH A COUPLE MORE, SOUVENIRS OF THEIR CAVE VISIT. Teague waves.

TEAGUE
They damn! You're a hard fucker to put down.
(they approach)

TEAGUE (CONT'D)
Goon directions to that cave from the fat boy - saw the squirrels, sat on the tree made some friends, brought some back with me.

His riders begin, quite casually, to fan out.

IN ONE MOVEMENT, INMAN SLAPS THE FLANK OF THE HORSE. WHICH CAREERS DOWN THE TRACK, THEN TURNS AND FIRES, TWICE, BEFORE PITCHING HIMSELF INTO A ROLL TOWARDS THE TREES. HIS FIRST SHOT KNOCKS JO FROM HIS HORSE, THE SECOND MO, WHO FALLS INTO THE SNOW, BLEEDING FROM THE GROIN AND SCREAMING. The riderless horse gets tangled up with the others. Inman is in the trees, shots around him. He doesn't move away from, but towards the riders inside the line of trees. Grayling charges him, riding into the trees. INMAN SHOOTS HIM, THEN RUSHES FROM THE TREES, FIRING, MISSING BOSIE, WHO RIDES AWAY, EVIDENTLY NOT RELISHING THE FIGHT, AND THROWS HIMSELF AT TEAGUE, WHOSE HORSE IS BUCKING WILDLY. Teague's carbine fires an involuntary shot into the air. Inman yanks the gun from his hand with his own left hand and lets go the shotgun barrel of the Lemats with the other, the big pistol almost leaping from his hand with the recoil. TEAGUE'S CHEST OPENS OUT AS HE'S THROWN OFF THE HORSE. Mo is still screaming. Inman walks over and shoots him in the head, then walks to Teague, who is saying something, the blood blotting the snow under him.

Inman studies him, picks up the Spencer carbine, turns to look where Bosie has gone, steps up onto Teague's horse, reins the horse in, and trots it over to the prostrate Teague, LEANS OVER AND SHOOTS HIM DEAD. He turns the horse in the direction Bosie had headed. He can't see horse or rider, but in the stand of Hickory Trees ahead, THE GUSTS OF STEAMING BREATH betray them both. He rides slowly towards the stand of trees.

EXT. COLD MOUNTAIN. DAY.

Ada and Ruby walking. They hear the shots. Ada turns and starts to run through the snow, her hat flying from her head.

EXT. STAND OF HICKORY TREES, COLD MOUNTAIN. DAY.

Inman's horse is parallel to Bosie, who is deep inside the trees but also riding, slowly. It's like a dance.

INMAN
Come out of there.

BOSIE
No, sir. Here's fine.

INMAN
I just have to shoot the horse from under you.

BOSIE
Shoot her. She's not mine. You riding Mr Teague's mare?

INMAN
I am.

BOSIE
He dead?

INMAN
I hope so.
(wearily, as he brings his
horse inside the trees)
Look, how old are you? Give me your gun
and ride home, I'm done fighting. I'm
sick of it.

BOSIE
I give you my gun you'll shoot me dead.

INMAN
I will not shoot you, but nor am I
walking down that mountain looking over
my shoulder for you.

BOSIE
That's what they call a conundrum. I tell
you what I've got on my side.

INMAN
What have you got on your side?

BOSIE
The confidence of youth.

And in that second HE PRODUCES HIS GUN AND FIRES. INMAN HAS
ALREADY FIRED THE LEMATS AND THE BOY, SHOT IN THE HEAD,
FALLS. CAUGHT BY ONE STIRRUP THE HORSE BOLTING. INMAN
WATCHES, STOCK STILL, THEN MAKES A COUGH, AS IF CLEARING HIS
THROAT, AND A THIN MI ST OF BLOOD S PRAY S FROM HI S MOUTH.

EXT. RIDGE, COLD MOUNTAIN. DAY.

Ada and Ruby running. THEY REACH STOBROD, HIS HORSE STOPPED,
DRINKING FROM THE CREEK. Stobrod, barely conscious, hanging
halfway down its flank, held on by the ropes.

Ada hurries on, taking the shotgun from Ruby, who tends to
her father.

EXT. A GROVE OF TREES, COLD MOUNTAIN. DAY.

Ada runs past the horse dragging the cave corpses. She hardly
stops to look at the bodies, just rushes on.

THE GROUND SIMPLIFIES AND SHE'S AT THE BOTTOM OF A GROVE. A
STEEP INCLINE, THE SUN LOW AND IN FRONT OF HER. SHE SEES A
BRILLIANT FRAME OF BLACK TREES, AND THEN A SUDDEN FLURRY OF
ANGRY CROWS FLYING TOWARDS HER. AT THE TOP OF THE HILL IS A
SMALL HIEROGLYPH OF A MAN.

FINALLY, THE IMAGE FROM THE SWANGER WELL EXACTLY AS SHE FIRST SAW IT.

THE FIGURE RAISES A HAND, BRIEFLY, THEN PITCHES FORWARD INTO THE SNOW.

She runs, her heart broken, towards the body of Inman. He's dead, the red flag of his life ebbed, away in the snow. Ada falls to her knees and pulls him over, the snow crusted on his face, which she wipes away with great tenderness, then sits, his head in her lap, as Ruby slowly comes up the hill towards them.

A VIOLIN PLAYS, quite raucous.

INT. KITCHEN, BLACK COVE FARM, EASTER. DAY.

A GIRL, about five or six, with Ada's curls, sits at the table cradling a tiny lamb, which won't feed from the nipples bottle she offers it. She tries again. Ada comes in suddenly, takes a knife from the kitchen, and hurries out.

ADA

You bring that lamb outside.

The girl gets up, carries the lamb out into the field.

EXT. FIELD, BLACK COVE FARM. DAY.

THE SOUND OF THE FIDDLE CONTINUING, JOINED BY A BANJO, It's a glorious spring morning, Black Cove Farm at its most luxuriant, the path edged with brilliant flowers. There are more animals in evidence. The girl emerges from the house and sees Ada in the field, surrounded by sheep. She hurries over.

ADA IS EXPERTLY SKINNING A STILLBORN LAMB. The little girl is horrified.

GRACE

What are you doing!

ADA

He came out dead, love.

She has the skin off the lamb, which lies like a little pink cat on the ground. She approaches Grace, takes the live lamb from her arms, the girl resistant, frightened.

GRACE

Don't kill him!

ADA

I'm not going to kill him. But we have to try something or else he's going to die.

She takes the skin and wraps it round Grace's lamb. Then puts the covered lamb into the pen with the dead lamb's mother.

It goes to the sheep and, after a few false starts, starts to feed, accepted as a surrogate.

ADA (CONT'D)

Isn't that a small mercy.

And A VOICE joins in with the fiddle and banjo.

EXT. BLACK COVE FARM. DAY.

STOBROD is playing, on his repaired fiddle. His hair is now completely grey. GEORGIA is playing the banjo and singing, although. A SMALL CHILD with Georgia's reddish coloring keeps invading his picking hand trying to join in. RUBY HAS ANOTHER GEORGIA CHILD IN HER ARMS, but is also trying to serve food. She passes Georgia and touches the top of his head. SALLY

SWANGER is pouring water from a jug, Ada emerges from the kitchen, with a big pie, racing to the table.

ADA

(laughing)

Hot hot hot hot hot!!!

From behind her, Grace appears, carrying a jug of milk, puts it on the groaning board of the table. Grace has a full plate in front of her, picks up a fork to spear some meat.

ADA (CONT'D)

Grace Inman, nobody said eat.
(then to Stobrod) .)

Mr. Thewes...

The music stops. And there's quiet except for the sound of animals: lowing, barking, braying, bleating.

ADA (CONT'D)

For good friends, good food, good family:
for all our blessings - Oh Lord we thank
thee. Amen.

ALL

Amen !

And they eat.

THE END.