

DAMNATION

Pilot: "Sam Riley's Body"

Written by Tony Tost

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FADE IN:

EXT. DIRT ROAD, IOWA - DAY

Summer, 1931. A thin, weary farmer named PETE COLLINGSWORTH (40s) drives a 1929 REO FARM TRUCK down a dirt road. The payload is covered by a TARP in the large bed. In the cab, Pete is nervous, chain-smoking. We hear a VOICE-OVER.

PREACHER'S VOICE (V.O.)

Our bodies are not dust. They are no mere vessels. And neither are they lonely temples for us to dote upon in vanity. No, our earthly bodies are instruments for the Lord's aggrieved love.

Pete drives around a bend. A quarter mile in front of him, down the road, are about TWENTY PEOPLE blocking his way. These are gaunt, angry farming men and women. They are ARMED.

EXT. SMALL CHAPEL - DAY

SETH DAVENPORT preaches before his small but attentive CONGREGATION of older women and worn down farmers. Seth's dress and manner make him appear to be the troubled younger brother of the great 18th century New England preacher and theologian Jonathan Edwards.

SETH DAVENPORT

But so, I say, is our town such a body. The closer we band together, the greater we feel the miracle of our Father's divine love. And His anger.

Seth glances at his gorgeous wife, AMELIA DAVENPORT, for reassurance. Silently, she gives it. Seth is emboldened.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

When I close my eyes and picture the glory of God, do you know what I see? I do not see a man. I see no mere trinity. No sinless babe.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Pete stops his farm truck about five hundred yards from the swarm. He takes in these people. He's known them all his life. They hold BILLY JACKS, PIPES, CLUBS. Some have SHOTGUNS.

SETH DAVENPORT (V.O.)

When I picture God, I see your
beloved town of Holden. I see
neighbor defending neighbor. I see
sisters carrying brothers, children
lifting parents. I see each man,
woman and child exalting in the
freedoms and the burdens of the
collective whole.

Pete takes a moment to compose himself, then begins driving slowly toward the swarm.

SETH DAVENPORT (V.O.)

And I see righteous blood shed for
a righteous cause.

The swarm attacks Pete's slow moving truck. The blockade leader, named SAM RILEY (40s), leaps onto the farm truck's running board.

A petrified Pete keeps driving. Sam takes out his BILLY CLUB and strikes the driver's side window, shattering it.

The truck comes to a stop. Sam pulls out Pete and shoves him against the truck.

SAM

Goddamnit, Pete. What'd I say? Do
not sell this milk in town.

PETE

Pam's real sick, Sam. I'm broke.

SAM

That's why we're on strike.

PETE

(emotional)

Please. Just let me go. Tell
everyone to turn back. I'm begging
you.

SAM

Too late for that.

He pushes Pete to some of the other striking farmers.

SAM (CONT'D)

Hold him.

Sam goes around to the back of the farm truck.

SAM (CONT'D)
 (calling out)
 Toss me that Winchester.

A farmer tosses a WINCHESTER .410 SHOTGUN. A couple of the gathered hands start untying the truck's tarp.

PETE
 Sam, don't!

SAM
 (raising shotgun)
 Pull back the tarp, boys. I'm gonna fuck this load of milk with both barrels.

Sam aims his gun as the men pull back the tarp.

But just as he's about to pull the trigger...

SAM (CONT'D)
 (to himself, amazed)
 By God.

GUNSHOT!

Sam stands there a moment, stunned.

Blood dribbles down from beneath his hat. Then gushes down his face.

Sam Riley drops dead onto the dirt road, his Winchester still gripped in his hand.

Blood mingles with dust.

A man named CREELEY, swaggering cowboy cool, steps down from the back of the farm truck. He wipes the dust from his shirt, then grabs his Stetson hat from the bed of the truck and puts it on.

The stunned swarm collects around Sam's body. Calls go out: murder! animal!

But when Creeley lifts and fires his REVOLVER into the air, the crowd goes silent.

CREELEY
 I shot this man in self-defense. Or am I incorrect to say that he aimed his Winchester right at my person?

No answer.

Creeley walks over to Sam's body. The swarm instinctively steps back from him.

Only an intense, tall teenage boy (SAM JR., 15) with a TOOTHPICK clenched in his teeth doesn't budge. The boy stares at his father's corpse.

Creeley picks up Sam's body and carries it to the bed of the farm truck. He turns to the farmers who still hold Pete.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

Let him go, boys. He's got milk to sell.

They reluctantly let go of Pete, who gets back into the truck's cab.

Sam Jr. glares at the Winchester, laying there in the dirt road next to the puddle of his father's blood.

Creeley has his back turned to the strapping teen boy as he places his father the farm truck.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

Unless you wish to join your father up yonder, I suggest you remove your gaze from that weapon.

Sam Jr stares a beat, then averts his gaze. He stares with hatred at Creeley, who picks up the shotgun.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

(to all)

Go home. Eat. Rest. The strike is over. Tomorrow, you take your goods to town.

Creeley climbs into the bed of the farm truck and pounds the side. Pete puts it into gear.

The swarm of striking farmers part to let the truck drive past them and towards town.

As the farm truck drives away from the disbanding swarm, Creeley sits in the back of the truck.

He turns away from Sam's body and takes in the stark beauty of the Iowa countryside passing him by.

Behind him, the swarm now disperses.

All other than Sam Jr., who stands alone in the middle of the dirt road, watching his father's body being driven away.

EXT. CHAPEL - DAY

Preacher Seth and his wife Amelia are serving food in modest portions outside the chapel.

A line of MEN AND WOMEN await their portion.

A HARD SCRABBLE MAN has just had his plate filled.

HARD SCRABBLE MAN

Bless you.

SETH DAVENPORT

Likewise.

Seth and Amelia keep the food coming.

An OLDER COUPLE in church clothes are next in line for food.

OLDER WOMAN

(quietly)

Those vagrants didn't even come to the service.

She points: at a nearby table, a few HOBOS are downing food.

SETH DAVENPORT

Smart fellas.

OLDER MAN

Huh?

SETH DAVENPORT

Goulash for an empty stomach. It's the oldest gospel there is.

OLDER MAN

Huh?

AMELIA DAVENPORT

What my husband is saying is that this food says more about God's grace than words ever could.

SETH DAVENPORT

We're blessed to be able to feed those men.

OLDER WOMAN

(to husband)

New preacher.

The older couple take their plates and go toward the tables.

Seth and Amelia watch. As they do, Amelia picks at and eats some of the prepared food.

AMELIA DAVENPORT

Did we spook them?

The older couple hesitates. The only free spots are near the hobos. Where to sit? Though old and arthritic, the older couple decides to sit on the grass instead of near the hobos.

SETH DAVENPORT

Not nearly enough.

Seth and Amelia continue serving food.

A PACKARD CAR flies up the dirt road leading to the chapel.

Seth and Amelia watch it drive up onto the lawn and slide to a stop.

AMELIA DAVENPORT

Who's that?

SETH DAVENPORT

I don't know.

Seth grabs a LARGE KNIFE from the serving table.

With surprising facility, Seth tucks it into the long sleeve of his shirt. We now see: Seth has TATTOOS on his forearm.

Preacher Seth walks toward the strong, athletic-looking driver (COLBY, 40s), who was among the blockading farmers.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

Good afternoon, brother. How may I be of assistance?

COLBY

Are you that new preacher man Sam Riley's been talking to?

SETH DAVENPORT

My name's Seth Davenport. Me and Sam have become confidantes of sorts, yes.

COLBY

I just came from Osage Road. Pete Collingsworth tried to break our blockade and take his milk to town.

Seeing the men talk, Amelia begins walking up to join them.

COLBY (CONT'D)

Sam Riley stopped Pete's truck and pulled him from it.

AMELIA DAVENPORT

That's good news.

COLBY

No, ma'am, it's not. Sam grabbed a Winchester and was gonna shoot up Pete's milk. A strike buster was hiding in the back of the truck, under a tarp. He shot Sam, in front of God and everyone. Claimed self-defense. Shot Sam right in front of his boy...

This hits Seth like a freight train.

EXT. HOLDEN TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Creeley rides in the back of the truck as it pulls into the town square.

Sam Riley's corpse jostles as the truck comes to a stop.

Nearby, CITIZENS stay clear.

Creeley hops out the back of the truck and flings Sam Riley's corpse onto his shoulder.

Corpse perched, Creeley walks up to the cab, where Pete sits behind the wheel.

CREELEY

Here, buy yourself a shot.

Creeley reaches into his pocket and pulls out some coins.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

Wash those stains off your pretty conscience.

Farmer Pete looks at the money, then spits out the window.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

When these vermin come after your blood, you'll kiss the ass bottoms of my boots. Remember that.

Farmer Pete puts the truck into gear and drives off.

Creeley watches him a beat, then turns to walk toward the Holden town square with Sam Riley's corpse still on his shoulder.

INT. HOLDEN DRY GOODS STORE - DAY

Creeley enters the Holden Dry Goods Store while still carrying Sam Riley's corpse.

He carries Sam through until he reaches a back door. Creeley opens it and enters...

INT. SPEAKEASY - CONTINUOUS

...a hidden SPEAKEASY. This is still Prohibition era America, so drinking and carousing must be hidden.

When Creeley enters with the dead Sam Riley perched on his shoulder, the DRINKERS get hushed.

Creeley sets Sam Riley's corpse down in a chair at an empty table.

Blood dribbles to the floor.

Creeley takes a seat at the same table. He stretches out and looks around the place.

He's met by the blank, silent faces of MEN whose lives reside in that dull spot on the other side of fear: despair.

Creeley's gaze goes from man to man, measuring each.

CREELEY

Let's all have a drink.

Creeley turns to PEP ADEN, the friendly-looking bartender.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

Whiskeys for all my friends. On me.

PEP ADEN

You bet.

Pep starts pouring whiskey shots in a line on the bar.

The patrons all stand still and silent.

CREELEY

My pa always claimed I was high-strung and easily offended.

(MORE)

CREELEY (CONT'D)

But if any of you feel that you're too good to swallow my hard earned whiskey, we can settle matters in the traditional Wyoming fashion...

The men hesitantly start moving to the bar to pick up their shots.

Creeley eyes each of the men as they go to the bar. He stands.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

I propose a toast.

Creeley gestures to Sam Riley's corpse, now slack-jawed and bloodied in its chair.

The gathered men don't risk showing any reaction.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

To the life of Sam Riley. A vermin brave enough to step forth from his silent, suffering vermin herd. A vermin courageous enough to organize his fellow vermin in brave opposition.

Creeley raises his shot glass.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

To the great vermin, Sam Riley. He was too good, truly, for this goddamn dump.

Creeley downs his shot and eyes the other men. There's a sense that this statement (that Sam Riley was too good for the world) was not, in fact, made in jest.

Under Creeley's gaze, the other men drink.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

Now, who among you can also speak to Sam Riley's character?

No response from the blank-faced men. Creeley studies them as he speaks.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

Surely there must be a brother among you. Or a father. Holden, Iowa is a small, lonely town. Little to do, I imagine, but farm, fart, and fuck. So Sam must have at least a cousin.

One of the men subtly looks toward another man, a drunk named PRESTON RILEY. Creeley catches this.

CREELEY (CONT'D)
What's your name, friend?

PRESTON RILEY
Preston.

CREELEY
Preston what?

PRESTON RILEY
Riley.

Creeley smiles.

CREELEY
(to all)
Another round on me.

Pep starts lining up another round of whiskeys.

Creeley eyes the nervous Preston, then pulls out an empty chair between himself and Sam Riley's seated corpse.

CREELEY (CONT'D)
(to Preston)
Here, cousin Preston. Let's have ourselves a little talk.

Terrified, Preston heads that way.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Seth and Amelia are inside the empty chapel. Through the doorway, they can see that some people still linger on the lawn, finishing their meals and talking.

AMELIA DAVENPORT
What are you going to do?

Seth paces, gripping an old Bible.

AMELIA DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
We came here to help these people.

SETH DAVENPORT
Love is the joining of the I with the they, the here with the there, the then with the now, the holy with the profane...

AMELIA DAVENPORT

Yes.

Seth paces, thinking.

SETH DAVENPORT

What this means...is that God's
love is either collective or...

AMELIA DAVENPORT

Or what?

SETH DAVENPORT

Or it is not love at all...

Amelia moves closer.

AMELIA DAVENPORT

So are we going to do something
about it, dear husband, or are we
going to walk in circles and
paraphrase Alfred North Whitehead
all afternoon?

Seth stops pacing.

SETH DAVENPORT

You would have me step onto the
front lines of this farmer's
rebellion?

AMELIA DAVENPORT

So I can stand beside you. In life
or in death.

Seth regards his beautiful, unwavering bride.

SETH DAVENPORT

I would prefer life.

AMELIA DAVENPORT

(reciting)

'Life springs from Death, like
water from a stone. We must carry
that stone -- our own Death --
within us like it were our greatest
weapon. For Christ and his apostles
knew: that's precisely what it is.'

Seth considers this.

SETH DAVENPORT

William James, Varieties of
Religious Experience?

CREELEY

Is it true what they say? That all
the Iowa Rileys bleed communist
red?

Creeley gestures to the dead Sam Riley, now on the floor
beside them, his blood staining the floor.

Preston holds his full shot glass and considers the
implications of aligning himself with his agitator cousin in
front of a murderous strike buster.

PRESTON RILEY

Sam's my second cousin.

CREELEY

I see.

PRESTON RILEY

We weren't that close.

CREELEY

So you're saying your cousin Sam
here is a dirty commie agitator who
deserved to be shot dead in the
road like a stray dog...

A flash of instinctual anger from Preston.

PRESTON RILEY

I didn't say that...

He pauses, reconsidering his approach.

PRESTON RILEY (CONT'D)

...not exactly.

CREELEY

No, not exactly.

Creeley downs his shot and gazes at Preston's shot, awaiting
him on the table.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

So, as you were saying, family and
loyalty are of utmost importance
here in Holden.

Preston stares at the full shot, unsure how to answer. He
grabs the shot and drinks it.

PRESTON RILEY

Family and loyalty...are among our
desired virtues.

Creeley nods at this, a little impressed by Preston's verbal tightrope walk.

CREELEY

Which leads to my final question.

The word "final" hangs heavy before Preston.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

Preston, I can see that you are a reasonable man. So you must realize, as a reasonable man would, that under unfortunate circumstances this morning, I was forced to fire upon Sam Riley in an act of self defense.

PRESTON RILEY

Yes...that sounds...

CREELEY

Reasonable.

PRESTON RILEY

Rather reasonable.

CREELEY

So what I want to know now are the names of anyone who might react to these unfortunate events in an unreasonable manner. And here I'm thinking, primarily, of family.

Preston, torn, stares at his empty shot glass. Keeps his silence.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

It's a big moment. Take your time.

Preston's inner battle -- to name names or not -- externalizes in a cold sweat.

Creeley turns to the bar.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

(calling)

Again!

Pep comes back with two more whiskeys.

PEP ADEN

You bet.

Pep gives a half nod and returns to the bar.

Creeley pushes a final shot to Preston and raises his own glass for a toast.

Preston, shaky and drunk, does likewise.

CREELEY
To family and loyalty.

PRESTON RILEY
To family and loyalty.

Creeley holds Preston's unsteady gaze. He gives a wink.

CREELEY
In moderation.

PRESTON RILEY
(beat)
In moderation.

Creeley downs his shot. Preston does likewise.

CREELEY
Now, tell me, who in your family
would seek revenge for Sam Riley's
death?

A beat of silence.

Preston holds his reserve.

Creeley nods at this.

CREELEY (CONT'D)
Preston, you held out longer than
any of these other vermin would.

At this, Preston fights tears. After a long beat...

PRESTON RILEY
Sam Jr.

CREELEY
The son.

PRESTON RILEY
...yes...

Creeley takes his revolver from his holster and sets it on the table.

CREELEY
Who else?

Preston stares at the gun.

PRESTON RILEY

(crying)

That's it. The rest of us are
all...

CREELEY

Yes?

PRESTON RILEY

...afraid...

Creeley takes his gun, stands, and goes to the door now that he has the desired information.

Preston watches him, then...

PRESTON RILEY (CONT'D)

What about Sam?

Creeley looks back at the corpse of Sam Riley, still laying out on the tavern floor near his cousin's feet.

CREELEY

He's your family, not mine. I'm
sure you'll do right by him.

Creeley exits, leaving a devastated Preston Riley.

INT. SETH'S STUDY - DAY

Seth stands before an empty bookshelf. Around him, wooden fruit crates are packed with the books of theologians, poets and philosophers: Emerson, AN Whitehead, Bergson, Vico, Swedenborg, Blake, Shelley.

But Seth has his open Bible in his hands. A light knock at his open door.

Seth turns to look at Amelia, who smiles patiently. She holds a newspaper.

SETH DAVENPORT

If I commit fully to this revolt...

Seth takes a moment.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

...you know my nature...my appetite
for...certain extremes...

AMELIA DAVENPORT
Have you read this week's paper?

Seth takes her copy and looks through it.

SETH DAVENPORT
Are they finally giving the revolt
its proper attention?

AMELIA DAVENPORT
No. But on page one, there is a
report on an ice cream vendor
opening shop just off the square.

Seth looks at Amelia: my dear, who gives a shit?

AMELIA DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
Written by a D.L. Sullivan.

SETH DAVENPORT
Yes?

AMELIA DAVENPORT
Consider the caption.

Seth turns the paper to its opening page. There's a
photograph of an obese ice cream VENDOR.

SETH DAVENPORT
(reading)
'Here stands the proud proprietor
Archibald Weems. As we can see, the
only emperor is...'

Seth looks up to Amelia, fairly stunned.

AMELIA DAVENPORT
(excited)
'...the emperor of ice cream.'

Seth stares at the newspaper in disbelief. He knows these
words.

SETH DAVENPORT
Who would imagine a poetry man here
in the middle of Iowa?

AMELIA DAVENPORT
You told me these farmer's need a
voice.

She points at the paper.

AMELIA DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 You may have found it.

EXT. FIELD NEAR DIRT ROAD - DAY

TWO CHILDREN, ages 7 and 9, fight in the middle of a field. The two boys look to be brothers. They're really going at it, with full on punches.

Suddenly, they see Preacher Seth Davenport walking on the dirt road toward town. In his old fashioned preacher suit, Seth cuts a dashing figure on these barren plains.

The two boys stop fighting out of fear of Seth's authority. Seth doesn't break stride.

SETH DAVENPORT
 (calling to them)
 Go for the eyes first, then the
 throat.

The two boys stare at Seth. Whoa, preacher dude.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 (calling to them as he
 walks)
 It's called commitment, boys.

He keeps striding toward town.

The two brothers stare at each other, unsure how to react.

EXT. HOLDEN TOWN SQUARE - DAY

Preacher Seth walks into the town square. He approaches the HOLDEN TRIBUNE office building.

INT. HOLDEN TRIBUNE OFFICE - DAY

Preacher Seth sits across from D.L. SULLIVAN (20s), an Orson Welles-ian figure: dapper and pretentious with his suit and pipe. Like both Seth and Creeley, he's an outlier among the simple farm folk of Holden. He's clearly unimpressed with Seth, whom he assumes to be a Christian simpleton. D.L. doesn't look up from his typewriter.

D.L. SULLIVAN
 Yes...you come to spread the holy
 word...

They are in a small newspaper office. Three or four other ELDERLY REPORTERS and EDITORS work at their desks.

Seth has a weirdly knowing smile.

SETH DAVENPORT

Yes, the word. Some of us find ourselves to be among its astonished devotees.

D.L. continues to be distracted, going through his notes as he types.

D.L. DAVENPORT

Some of us do indeed...and why did you want to speak with me, Preacher?

SETH DAVENPORT

I'm a new arrival to this town. My sense of the landscape here is limited.

D.L. SULLIVAN

Well, I can help you on that one. The landscape is predominantly flat.

SETH DAVENPORT

(smiling)

Yup, I noticed that. Pretty fucking flat.

This startles D.L. to attention. He looks up. For the first time, he really takes in this preacher.

D.L. SULLIVAN

Yes, it is.

SETH DAVENPORT

But it's not the physical landscape I'm concerned with, D.L. My eye is on the metaphysical one.

D.L. SULLIVAN

All right...

SETH DAVENPORT

A man was shot in cold blood today. Will you report on it?

D.L. SULLIVAN

I'm sure the appropriate words will be found.

SETH DAVENPORT

A man's language is a map of his soul. Would you agree with that?

D.L. DAVENPORT

I'd consider the possibility of agreement.

SETH DAVENPORT

His contours and contradictions.
His capacities and abysses. All traced out in his words.

D.L. SULLIVAN

Perhaps.

SETH DAVENPORT

The Holden Tribune is the word of public record here, yes?

D.L. looks around: the other reporters and editors are dead-eyed men in their 60s and 70s.

D.L. SULLIVAN

For better or worse.

SETH DAVENPORT

So, for better or worse, it's also the map of this town's soul. And yet, it refuses to report on the nascent collective revolt of its desperate farmers.

D.L. looks around and makes sure his bosses aren't listening in.

D.L. SULLIVAN

(quietly)

Be careful, Preacher man.
Collective action. Agitation. Those are dirty words around here.

SETH DAVENPORT

Yes, I understand.

(whispering)

Dirty little cocksucking words.

D.L. doesn't know what to make of Seth.

Seth takes out the paper that Amelia gave him and lays it out for D.L.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

Which must be why you spend your
God given linguistic talents doting
on ice cream vendors and weather
reports.

D.L. SULLIVAN

It's a living.

SETH DAVENPORT

It's your soul, D.L. Sentence by
sentence. Word by word. To write
banal thoughts is to construct a
banal spirit. Are you a banal man?

D.L. SULLIVAN

(pointed)

No.

SETH DAVENPORT

And yet this is your mind's domain.

D.L. SULLIVAN

This isn't all I am.

SETH DAVENPORT

Right now, it is.

(reciting)

'Let be be the finale of seem. The
only emperor is the emperor of ice
cream.'

D.L. is amazed. This is a quotation from Wallace Stevens' (at
this time) obscure poem "The Emperor of Ice Cream," which
D.L. himself alluded to in his ice cream vendor caption.

D.L. DAVENPORT

You've read Wallace Stevens'
poetry?

SETH DAVENPORT

You attend to the word. I do as
well. It means nothing if we don't
make ourselves worthy of it.

Seth stands and exits.

INT. SHERIFF STATION - DAY

SHERIFF DON TANEY (60s, avuncular) and a drunken Preston
Riley look down. They are staring at Sam Riley's bloodied
corpse, which lays on a table.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
You say it was self-defense?

PRESTON RILEY
That's what the man claimed.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
What man?

PRESTON RILEY
The cowboy.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
Did the cowboy have a name?

PRESTON RILEY
Never gave it.

MAN'S VOICE
Uncle Sheriff Don?

Sheriff Taney turns his attention to DEPUTY RAYMOND TANEY (30s, gawky good ol' boy), his nephew, who stands near the cell holding a plate of food.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
Yes, Raymond?

DEPUTY RAYMOND TANEY
Your negro boy's still refusing to eat.

Deputy Raymond gestures to prisoner GUY HAVELOCK (30s, black). Havelock sits on a cot.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
Not even your mama's mashed taters and sausage?

DEPUTY RAYMOND TANEY
(can't believe it)
No.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
His loss. Give it to me.

Deputy Raymond brings over the plate of food. Sheriff Taney begins eating at the food as they converse.

SHERIFF DON TANEY (CONT'D)
Can you describe this cowboy?

PRESTON RILEY
 He...he was tall. Wore a Stetson.
 He mentioned Wyoming.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
 This is troubling news, Preston. My
 condolences to your family.

PRESTON RILEY
 Yeah...

SHERIFF DON TANEY
 I'll make sure Sam's body is
 delivered to his house right away.

Preston nods and exits.

When he does, Sheriff Taney turns to his deputy nephew.

SHERIFF DON TANEY (CONT'D)
 Find the cowboy.

DEPUTY RAYMOND TANEY
 Sure thing, Uncle Sheriff Don.

INT. 1927 INDIANA TRUCK - DAY

Creeley rides in the back of a farm truck. The DRIVER (60s),
 a simple farmer, drives.

The driver glances over his shoulder at the intimidating,
 mysterious Creeley riding in the back.

The driver notes the revolver hanging from Creeley's waist.

Nervous, he drives.

Creeley takes in the landscape, deep in thought.

EXT. LARGE HOUSE JUST OUTSIDE OF TOWN - DAY

Outside of town, Creeley climbs down from the back of the
 truck. He offers coins to the driver.

CREELEY
 For your trouble.

DRIVER
 (waving it off)
 Pleasure to help.

CREELEY

So is every rube in this town too
goddamn good to take my money?

DRIVER

No, no, no. It would be a honor to
take your money. Sir.

Creeley stares at the frightened older man.

CREELEY

C'mon Pops, have some dignity.

DRIVER

Of course. Whatever you say.

Disgusted, Creeley takes a coin and flings it into the cab.

The man drives off.

Creeley turns and goes toward a LARGE HOUSE, its porch
overrun with CATS.

INT. OFFICE, DELLA'S BROTHEL - DAY

Another CAT goes through a small, plainly decorated office.

Madame DELLA (50s) sits on a stool, just inches from the
floor. Her head is at a male CUSTOMER'S waist.

Della dresses and behaves a bit like a man. A lit cigarette
dangles from her lips. She looks up.

DELLA

Okay, handsome, drop 'em.

CUSTOMER

Is this necessary?

DELLA

Strict rules make for a clean
cootch. If the great humanitarian
Herbert Hoover himself walked
through these doors, I'd be
checking his cock and balls for
sores also. Drop 'em.

The customer undoes his belt and pants, which fall to his
feet. He's just in his underwear now.

DELLA (CONT'D)

Don't be bashful. Let's see what
you got.

The man pulls down his underwear.

Della continues puffing her cigarette as she lifts and prods at the man's privates.

She speaks flatly, reciting elements of a well-worn routine.

DELLA (CONT'D)
 (as she inspects)
 Oh yes, very intimidating.
 Impressive girth and length.
 Reminds me of my girlish stable
 days. A bit tumescent at the tip
 and base...but no obvious signs of
 infection...ah, and I see that
 we're a bit of a grower...

Della pauses her inspection and looks up.

DELLA (CONT'D)
 Try to slow down your excitement,
 Valentino. I know I'm a pretty
 little flower, but you'll need to
 save something for the girls.

Della grabs a decanter of bourbon-colored liquid. She takes off the top of the canter, gives a sniff, then pours some on the man's privates.

CUSTOMER
 What was that?

DELLA
 Did it burn?

CUSTOMER
 No.

DELLA
 Then you can saddle up.

She glances at the decanter.

DELLA (CONT'D)
 (re: decanter)
 Lysol.

The door opens. A WOMAN pokes her head in and speaks to Della.

BROTHEL WOMAN
 Della, you're gonna want to come
 out here.

The woman rubs her fingers together, signifying: money.

INT. PARLOR ROOM, DELLA'S BROTHEL - DAY

A line of SIX PLAIN, WHITE PROSTITUTES sit around in night gowns. They are joined by a LIGHT-SKINNED BLACK WOMAN.

Della introduces them to Creeley, who cuts a striking figure with his Stetson, boots and Colt.

DELLA

We've got every type of girl here.
We've got your farmer's daughter,
your farmer's wife, your farmer's
sister, your farmer's half-breed
bastard girl, and your farmer's
widow. You pay for the girl and for
the room.

Creeley studies the girls.

CREELEY

Charge by the act or by the hour?

DELLA

What did you have in mind?

CREELEY

I pay so I don't have to talk about
it.

DELLA

Seven dollars an hour.

CREELEY

And how much for a week?

DELLA

A week? Will she still be able to
walk right by the end of it?

CREELEY

If she stays on my good side.

The girls sit and pose with more energy now, intrigued by the money and mystery.

Della considers.

DELLA

Five hundred for a week.

CREELEY
Four hundred. Room included.

DELLA
That is a deal.

Creeley reaches into his pants and takes out a stack of hundred dollar bills.

He gives four of them to Della.

He takes out four more and shows them to the prostitutes.

CREELEY
This is four hundred US dollars,
ladies. Your preemptive tip.

BOLD PROSTITUTE
(suggestive)
For what?

CREELEY
First off, for not asking stupid
fucking questions.

The bold prostitute recoils from this. The other prostitutes push their best assets forward.

Creeley studies them, then pulls out a sheet of paper. He unfolds it and holds it before the prostitutes. We don't yet see what it says.

CREELEY (CONT'D)
Take a look at this and tell me
what you think.

The first prostitutes look at the sheet of paper and smile blankly at Creeley.

We now see what the paper says:

"Can't you even read, you rancid cunt?"

Creeley holds out the paper before the next prostitutes. They also smile and pose blankly for Creeley. So far, all the prostitutes clearly cannot read the revolting misogyny scrawled before them.

Creeley keeps moving through the illiterate girls until, finally, he reaches the last and most attractive prostitute, BESSIE (mixed race).

When Bessie reads the sentence, her face contorts with disgust.

At this, Creeley smiles.

He holds out the four hundred dollar bills.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

Yours.

Bessie takes a moment to consider.

BESSIE

No.

CREELEY

What?

BESSIE

I want eight hundred.

CREELEY

And why would I pay you eight hundred dollars to be my whore?

BESSIE

Looks like you're looking for a reader.

She glances over the other girls.

BESSIE (CONT'D)

And I'm the only one you're gonna find in this place.

Creeley considers. Bessie smiles.

BESSIE (CONT'D)

Supply and demand, motherfucker.

Creeley smirks, intrigued by this young, intelligent, bi-racial hooker in the middle of Iowa.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - EVENING

Seth walks down a dirt road toward a FARMHOUSE.

INT. RILEY FARMHOUSE - AT SAME TIME

Inside that farmhouse, a resolute, unexpressive MARTHA RILEY cleans the corpse of her husband Sam Riley.

Near her stands the silently enraged Sam Jr, gnawing on his toothpick.

Other FAMILY MEMBERS surround them for support.

Preston Riley is among the family members. He's trying to hide his drunken shame from his earlier encounter with Creeley.

PRESTON RILEY
Sam was a good man, Martha.

Martha nods politely as she matter-of-factly wipes the blood from her husband's face.

But Preston's pained conscience isn't adequately satisfied yet.

PRESTON RILEY (CONT'D)
Strong. Steady. He rose up when we needed him.

MARTHA RILEY
(still working)
That's plenty, Preston.

PRESTON RILEY
(a little desperate)
I mean, we won't let this go.
Never.

Sam Jr has little patience for such empty talk.

SAM JR
So are you going to get revenge for my dad?

Preston is taken aback by Sam Jr calling his bluff.

PRESTON RILEY
Sam's family. Family and loyalty.

Preston wanders into a different room, muttering to himself.

PRESTON RILEY (CONT'D)
Nothing more important.

Martha keeps working.

MARTHA RILEY
Get Preston some coffee and put him outside.

An OLDER WOMAN gets up to do that.

A KNOCK at the door.

RILEY FAMILY MEMBER
 (glancing out window)
 It's that new preacher. Should I
 turn him away?

MARTHA RILEY
 It's my house. I'll do it.

Martha gets up goes to the door and opens it.

Preacher Seth stands humbly before her.

SETH DAVENPORT
 I'm very sorry for your loss.

MARTHA RILEY
 I appreciate your words of comfort.

Martha goes to close the door.

But Seth gets his foot in, blocking it.

SETH DAVENPORT
 Mrs. Riley, I'm not here to comfort
 you. I'm here to make sure you're
 angry enough to do something.

Martha is surprised by this.

INT. ROOM 3, DELLA'S BROTHEL - NIGHT

Inside one of the brothel rooms, Bessie sits on a bed with a
 puzzled expression. She has an ENVELOPE in her grip.

BESSIE
 So this is all you want me to do?

Creeley sits in a chair across from her.

CREELEY
 For now.

BESSIE
 Why don't you just read it
 yourself?

CREELEY
 Do you know why I hire whores to be
 my secretaries?

BESSIE
 No.

CREELEY
Because they can be very easily
discarded.

Bessie immediately understands that Creeley is both
illiterate and deadly.

BESSIE
I see.

Bessie stands and goes to a nearby record player. She takes
out a 78 record and puts it on. Skip James' "Devil Got My
Woman" begins to play.

Creeley gives her a look: what are you doing?

Bessie nods at the door.

BESSIE (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Privacy.

Bessie opens the envelope and takes out a letter.

BESSIE (CONT'D)
(reading quietly)
The fat man in Washington concurs.

CREELEY
Anything else?

BESSIE
No.

Creeley takes a moment, digesting this cryptic message.

The Skip James song continues to play.

A KNOCK at the door.

INT. HALLWAY, DELLA'S BROTHEL - INTERCUT

On the other side of the door stand Sheriff Don Taney with
madame Della. They have their ears pressed to the door,
trying to listen.

IN THE ROOM

Creeley takes out his gun and points it at the door.

CREELEY
(calling)
Private room.

IN THE HALLWAY

Sheriff Taney likewise has his gun drawn.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
(calling)
I need to talk to a cowboy from
Wyoming. Are you him?

CREELEY
Who wants to know?

SHERIFF DON TANEY
Sheriff Don Taney.

IN THE ROOM

Creeley cocks his gun.

CREELEY
(quietly to Bessie)
Get down.

But Bessie boldly steps toward the door.

BESSIE
(calling)
Hello, Sheriff.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
(calling)
Hello, Bess. I just need to talk to
your cowboy friend.

Creeley looks at her: be careful.

BESSIE
My cowboy friend's presently balls
deep in luscious quadron muff.
Give us just a minute to finish up.

IN THE HALLWAY

Sheriff Taney looks to Della, who shrugs.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
(calling)
Okay, one minute.

IN THE ROOM

Bessie starts undressing. Creeley watches.

BESSIE

(quiet)

So are you gonna fuck me with your clothes on?

CREELEY

(quiet)

What?

She gestures to the door.

BESSIE

(quiet)

Tick tock, law's waiting.

Creeley considers this.

Bessie gets under the sheets. Creeley begins unbuckling.

IN THE HALLWAY

Sheriff Taney listens with obvious discomfort as Creeley's escalating, astonished MOANS cry out for about thirty seconds from behind the door.

Then suddenly stop.

Sheriff Taney gives Della a look.

DELLA

She's a natural.

She takes a key and opens the door for the sheriff.

Sheriff Taney walks into the room to find Creeley and Bessie under the covers.

Creeley is sitting up on the headboard. He has a look of post-coital stunned pleasure.

Creeley's Stetson sits on the bedside table.

SHERIFF DON TANEY

You're new to town?

Creeley, stunned by the last sixty seconds, takes a moment to respond.

CREELEY

I am.

SHERIFF DON TANEY

(to Bessie)

Give us a few minutes.

CREELEY

Ask.

SHERIFF DON TANEY

Ask what?

CREELEY

You told her to leave. You should have asked.

Sheriff Taney studies Creeley.

Bessie lays there, naked and waiting.

SHERIFF DON TANEY

(to Bessie)

Could you give us a few minutes?

BESSIE

Of course, Sheriff. So gentle of you to ask.

Bessie gathers her clothes and exits, leaving Creeley and Sheriff Taney alone in the room.

Sheriff Taney goes to a chair.

SHERIFF DON TANEY

May I sit?

CREELEY

Free country.

Sheriff Taney sits, facing Creeley, who sits less than an arm's length from his Stetson.

SHERIFF DON TANEY

There was a shooting today, in my county.

CREELEY

Uh huh.

SHERIFF DON TANEY

This is a quiet corner of the earth. We argue. We fight. But we don't kill.

CREELEY

Because you're civilized.

SHERIFF DON TANEY

We're humble people who know how to resolve our differences with words.

CREELEY

I see.

Creeley gets out of the bed.

He's naked. He stands and stretches in an alpha manner.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

You know, there's this buddy of mine. He says we're all just a spit and a shine away from being monkeys. You believe that?

SHERIFF DON TANEY

No.

CREELEY

The funny thing is, I do. I think every second of every day we're about an ant's dick away from all out warfare.

SHERIFF DON TANEY

Is that so.

CREELEY

A war to end all wars. It's coming. Weapons unlike those you and I could ever dream of are being devised by well-behaved men in suits and ties even as we speak.

Creeley reaches down and pulls on a long pubic hair.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

Only the thinnest of threads saves us from extinction.

Sheriff Taney sits stone-faced in his chair.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

Besides, that farmer pointed his Winchester right at me. I shot that cowfucker in self-defense.

Creeley steps over to the bedside table where his Stetson sits. Creeley puts his hand on the hat...

..but when he does...a CLICK.

Sheriff Taney has his gun drawn and cocked.

CREELEY (CONT'D)

So suspicious?

SHERIFF DON TANEY
I've been around.

Creeley slowly lifts his Stetson, revealing his revolver hidden beneath it on the bedside table.

CREELEY
Yes, you have.

Creeley sets the hat back over the revolver.

He picks up his underwear and pants from the floor and starts casually putting them on.

CREELEY (CONT'D)
Even though I was perfectly within my legal right to defend myself on that dirt road, I do fear that some local citizen will seek revenge.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
Then leave.

CREELEY
Holden?

SHERIFF DON TANEY
Yes.

CREELEY
First take out my wallet.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
For what?

CREELEY
Illumination.

Sheriff Taney keeps his gun aimed at Creeley as he reaches into the man's back pocket and pulls out a wallet.

CREELEY (CONT'D)
Open it.

Sheriff Taney does so, revealing a BADGE.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
(reading)
Pinkerton National Detective
Agency.

Sheriff Taney looks up, stunned.

SHERIFF DON TANEY (CONT'D)
You're a Pinkerton?

CREELEY
Call me Creeley.

Creeley buttons up his shirt.

CREELEY (CONT'D)
You have friends in Washington,
Sheriff. Serious men with serious
concerns who do not want to see
this farmer's revolt grow any more
in size or stature.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
Which I can take care of myself.

CREELEY
If you could, I wouldn't be here.
So just continue tending to your
usual business. Throw Dutch
Gonzalez into holding each Sunday
afternoon so he can sober up before
going back to work on Monday. Keep
an eye that the Clantons and the
Booths don't start shooting each
other over that well again.

Sheriff Taney is astounded by this.

CREELEY (CONT'D)
And continue taking your share from
the speakeasy and this brothel, per
usual.

Sheriff Taney regards the stranger with immediate loathing.
Creeley, unaffected, grabs his Stetson and puts it on.

CREELEY (CONT'D)
You shouldn't be so surprised. I'm
a Pinkerton, Sheriff. We never
sleep.

Creeley grabs his revolver and exits the room, leaving a
reeling Sheriff Taney.

INT. RILEY FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Seth sits with the mourning Riley family. Guilt-ridden cousin
Preston Riley sits apart, getting drunker.

MARTHA RILEY

Sam believed that if we cut off produce, milk and meat products to the surrounding grocers, that would raise prices.

OLDER RILEY RELATIVE

And if we could raise prices, then we could meet the costs of production. And keep our farms. So better prices are the goal.

SETH DAVENPORT

I see. But leverage should be the goal. Not prices.

SAM JR

What do you mean?

SETH DAVENPORT

You need to climb inside the minds of others so you can leverage their wills to yours. Imprint your laws on others' spirits.

Seth looks around: the Rileys aren't exactly sold on his esoteric pitch.

OLDER RILEY RELATIVE

We just want better prices.

SETH DAVENPORT

Then you need to think less like Sam and more like the man who killed him.

SAM JR

You mean we should become murderers?

PRESTON RILEY

You should be ashamed...

SETH DAVENPORT

The truth is never shameful, my friend. I suspect that the man who shot Sam Riley works for the Pinkertons.

YOUNGER RILEY MAN

The Pinkertons? Then that's it. They'll pick us off one by one.

SETH DAVENPORT

Not while I'm here. Did you see the man?

SAM JR

He wore a cowboy hat. Boots.

SETH DAVENPORT

Did he shoot a Colt?

SAM JR

Yeah.

Seth takes this in.

SETH DAVENPORT

His name is Creeley. He can smell weakness. He works on it, makes it spread.

Preston Riley reacts to this.

PRESTON RILEY

What can we do?

SETH DAVENPORT

Use the power you possess.

Martha has had enough of this intellectual debate. She rises.

MARTHA RILEY

I don't understand what all this talk has to do with Sam or this farm.

SETH DAVENPORT

We are made in God's image, Mrs. Riley. And we must therefore make of ourselves an image of God.

Seth points to Sam Riley's body.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

Your husband has taken the first step on that road.

INT. COLLINGSWORTH FARMHOUSE - MORNING (DAY 2)

Pete Collingsworth, the farmer who drove the original shipment of milk that Sam Riley was killed trying to block, is in his kitchen. He arranges food on a plate.

He carries the plate into a nearby bedroom. Here, his sickly wife PAM COLLINGSWORTH rests in bed. She's barely conscious.

PETE

I brought you lamb and cornbread.
Okra. All your favorites.

PAM

I'm not hungry.

PETE

You need to eat. Here, I got some
red velvet cake with cream cheese
frosting.

Pam's nearly out of it. Her husband's generosity and desperation aren't registering.

PAM

Maybe later.

She starts coughing, then rolls over and falls back asleep.

Pete takes the food back out and into the kitchen.

Frustrated, he drops the full plate back into the sink. All the compromises and sacrifices made on the road to selling his goods in order to provide for his sickly wife...it feels like it meant nothing.

Shaken, Pete takes out a cigarette and lights it. He goes out the front door...

EXT. FRONT PORCH, COLLINGSWORTH FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

...and steps onto his front porch. He takes in the sky and takes a deep drag on his smoke.

Then...

CRACK!

...a bullet hole opens in Pete's forehead.

He drops, dead.

In the nearby distance, perched behind Pete's truck, Creeley lowers a RIFLE.

He locates a nearby CASING. He reaches into his pocket and drops something on the ground, then turns and walks away.

On the ground, next to that spent casing, now lays a TOOTHPICK just like Sam Jr's.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - DAY

A DOZEN FARM TRUCKS are lined around the Holden town square. FARMERS and WOMEN and CHILDREN are packed into the backs of the trucks.

Other TOWNSPEOPLE come out of BARBERSHOPS and the DRY FOODS STORE and climb into the trucks.

D.L. Sullivan, the pipe-smoking reporter, exits the Herald's offices to take in the sight. He stops a THIN MAN who's about to get into the back of one of the trucks.

D.L. SULLIVAN
Hey, what's the commotion?

THIN MAN
That new preacher's putting on a wake for Sam Riley.

The Thin Man is pulled up into the truck.

D.L. watches as the trucks pull out of the square.

EXT. UNDER A TREE - DAY

Preacher Seth stands near a lone tree, deep in thought.

In the distance, there is a line of CARS and TRUCKS arriving to the chapel.

Seth looks up and sees an PRAIRIE HAWK perched on a limb.

SETH DAVENPORT
(to prairie hawk)
You know, I didn't ask to be here.
I didn't put me in this world. You did. Is that why you're here? To remind me of what I really am?

AMELIA'S VOICE
Actually...

Seth turns to see that Amelia has walked from the nearby CHAPEL to his location under the tree.

AMELIA DAVENPORT
 ...that hawk's probably here
 because he thinks there might be
 mice in the weeds.

Seth takes in the chapel in the near distance.

SETH DAVENPORT
 They've come.

AMELIA DAVENPORT
 They may only come once.

Seth nods, recognizing the importance of the moment.

Amelia turns and walks back to the chapel.

Seth looks up. The prairie hawk flies off.

EXT. DIRT ROAD NEAR CHAPEL - DAY

D.L. Sullivan drives down the dirt road leading to the chapel. FARM TRUCKS are parked up and down it.

D.L. parks his car and gets out. The lawn around the chapel is packed with HUNDREDS of MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN, all facing the chapel entrance.

Puffing his pipe, D.L. goes that way.

As D.L. heads into the crowd, he hears Seth confidently addressing the multitude from the top of the chapel steps.

SETH DAVENPORT
 My name is Seth Davenport. I am a
 wicked discredit to the species.

D.L. takes this in. He looks at the surrounding citizens. They're immediately unsettled by Seth's idiosyncratic approach to self-identification.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 I am also a man of God. While
 traveling through Kansas, my wife
 and I were told of your troubles
 here. And your resistance. You are
 good, brave, righteous men and
 women.

Seth steps forward.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 You are also failures.

The crowd murmurs with unhappy confusion.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 You put your faith in the hands of
 Sam Riley. But he has revealed his
 true self. He is, like you, a mere
 man. You truly were fools to have
 followed him.

Confusion is turning to anger. Colby, the muscular pro strike
 farmer, steps forward.

COLBY
 Watch what you say about Sam,
 preacher man.

Seth steps closer to Colby.

SETH DAVENPORT
 I will try, my friend of failure.

He returns his attention to the gathered throng.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 But today I celebrate, for Sam
 Riley is now more than a good,
 failed man. He has become a martyr
 for a holy cause.

Seth looks back into the chapel.

Martha Riley and Sam Jr come to the doorway to be seen.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 You did not deserve Sam Riley. And
 you still do not. Though I do
 suppose it's thoughtful of you all
 to gather together this afternoon
 to let him down one last time.

One angry farmer steps up to Seth.

ANGRY FARMER
 Who the fuck are you to talk like
 this to us?!

Reporter D.L. is clearly enjoying the theatricality on view.
 He takes in Seth's performance eagerly.

SETH DAVENPORT
 I am an instrument of the Lord.
 Like Sam Riley. And if you don't
 believe me...

(MORE)

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 (gesturing into chapel)
 ...go inside and ask him yourself.

Seth nods to Martha and Sam Jr, who head inside. Seth goes inside. Then Amelia.

The farmers look to one another.

D.L. Sullivan makes his way through the crowd.

D.L. SULLIVAN
 I know I'm pretty damn curious.

The reporter goes inside. Colby and the others slowly begin heading in after him.

INT. CHAPEL - MOMENTS LATER

Most of the farmers are now gathered inside the small chapel. Others are at the doorways. They are skeptical, distant.

Seth stands at the pulpit and faces them. Behind him is a WHITE SHEET that hangs from the ceiling.

SETH DAVENPORT
 Whatever I want men to do unto me,
 I should do unto them. The Golden
 Rule. It is the simplest divine
 command. And also, the most
 complex. As children, we were
 taught that the Golden Rule means
 to be kind. To gather harmony from
 the fields of unrest. But we are
 not children anymore. And the
 Golden Rule is not, in fact, an
 invitation to compliance. It is, in
 truth, a call to arms.

Seth looks over to Amelia. She gives him a nod.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 If I were, for instance, to
 collude, as our banks, businesses
 and government have colluded, to
 defraud the very farmers who feed
 our families and keep our nation
 strong in times of peace and in
 times of war, what should I want my
 fellow man to do unto me?
 (beat)
 I'll tell you.

Seth looks around.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

I would want him to break my
fucking back.

Some farmers recoil at the language. Some women and children find their way out of the chapel. But some of the attendees are pleasantly surprised by the preacher's rough candor.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

And if I were to intimidate and
threaten those who tried to halt my
unholy collusion, what should I
want my fellow man to do to me?

Seth pauses. Looks out to the crowd and awaits a response. There is seemingly none, but then...

A MAN'S VOICE

(calling back)

I would want him to break my
fucking back.

Seth looks to discover the speaker, then catches sight of D.L. Sullivan, the reporter, at the back of the chapel.

Colby, a leader among the townspeople, nods his head in agreement to this turn in the sermon. Seeing this, some of the other farmers begin trading murmurs of assent.

SETH DAVENPORT

And if I were to maim those who
tried to halt my unholy collusion,
what should I want my fellow man to
do to me.

COLBY AND OTHER FARMERS

I would want him to break my
fucking back!

The energy level and investment are quickly rising amongst the throng.

SETH DAVENPORT

(gesturing to sheet behind
him)

And if I were to murder in cold
blood a man who stood strong to
halt my unholy collusion, what
should I want my fellow man to do
to me?

MORE OF THE FARMERS

I would want him to break my
fucking back!

SETH DAVENPORT

And if I were Sam Riley himself,
and I was in this chapel, what
would I want my fellow brothers and
sisters to do?

Seth looks out upon the crowd. No answer.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

(quietly)

I would want them to listen.

Seth dramatically pulls back the sheet that had up to now
been a background to his pulpit.

Behind him on a table is THE BODY OF SAM RILEY.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

Listen, now, to Sam.

A long beat of silence throughout the chapel.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

What is it Sam's silence is saying
about how we have lived our lives
up to this moment? What is it he is
saying about what we must do with
our lives from this moment on?

Many are moved by the image of Sam and Seth's questioning.

Some of the gathered begin to fight back tears.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

I have been a thief, a sinner, and
even a killer. But then Christ won
my heart and drew me to my dear
wife. After I was married and
ordained, I preached to the men
building a dam near Bull Shoals.
Some of the men died in its
construction. None received enough
money for his labors.

As Seth recounts, we CUT TO--

EXT. OLD DANCE HALL -- NIGHT -- FLASHBACK

*A FLASHBACK to the recent past. Seth and Amelia greet dozens
of BLACK and WHITE WORKERS and their FAMILIES at an old dance
hall.*

Snow falls.

Warmth and happiness and optimism abound.

WHITE AND BLACK CHILDREN race into the dance hall.

SETH DAVENPORT (V.O.)

One winter, they sought strength in numbers. So they began to strike. Amelia and I supported them however we could. That Christmas Eve, we threw a potluck for the families at an old dance hall.

INT. OLD DANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS - FLASHBACK

The children jump and clap when they see a large CHRISTMAS TREE surrounded by piles of CHRISTMAS PRESENTS.

SETH DAVENPORT (V.O.)

Some of the town came together to give gifts to the striker's children.

Seeing this, Seth and Amelia share a look of joy.

INT. OLD DANCE HALL - HOURS LATER - FLASHBACK

Later that night, older children play with unwrapped toys. Younger children sleep on the floor, gripping their treasures. Meanwhile, the adults drink and laugh and dance.

SETH DAVENPORT (V.O.)

There were about two hundred of us in the building. We sang and danced and drank.

Then an OLDER GIRL sees smoke spilling from between the dance hall's floorboards.

SETH DAVENPORT (V.O.)

Then we smelled smoke...

Everyone runs to the doors...

INT. CHAPEL - BACK TO PRESENT

Seth continues his story to the gathered.

SETH DAVENPORT

Later, the sheriff's department and newspaper would claim that the fire was a terrible accident.

(MORE)

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 But in truth, strikebusters had set fire to the building and barred the doors. We were all trapped. So we started lifting each other up and out of the windows. The children first. Then the women.

INT. BURNING DANCE HALL - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Amelia and Seth help an ELDERLY BLACK WOMAN through a window and to waiting arms of the younger women on the outside. After the older woman is safely out, Seth turns to a couple nearby MEN -- again, both black and white.

The men run over. With a look, all three start lifting Amelia through the window. They lift her up and out.

SETH DAVENPORT (V.O.)
 The fire kept spreading.

An OLDER WHITE MAN collapses from the smoke. Seth starts to go to help...but the men instead grab Seth and lift him up...

SETH DAVENPORT (V.O.)
 Against my will, some of the men grabbed me and lifted me out of the window and to safety.

Angered, Seth tries kicking and hitting them. But they subdue Seth and lift him up and out, through the window.

INT. CHAPEL - BACK TO PRESENT

Seth continues.

SETH DAVENPORT
 You might think it was horrible to have heard the screams of those men still caught inside the building as they burned to death. It was horrible. But it was nothing compared to what followed those screams.

EXT. BURNED DOWN DANCE HALL - DAWN - FLASHBACK

Seth and Amelia stand before the same building, hours later, after it has finished burning. People watch in horrified silence as charred bodies are carried out.

SETH DAVENPORT (V.O.)
 Silence. A roaring, furious,
 deafening silence.

Seth and Amelia exchange a look, unable to speak their grief.

INT. CHAPEL - BACK TO PRESENT

Seth addresses the gathered farmers in Holden.

SETH DAVENPORT
 And to this day, when I bow my head
 in prayer to converse with my Lord,
that is the silence that I hear. It
 is a holy silence. It's the silence
 that Sam Riley is screaming at us
 right now. Can you hear it?

Preacher Seth falls silent as he examines those who have come
 to hear his words about Sam Riley's death.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 I do. The Lord does. And I truly
 hope that you do as well.

He looks at the silent, furious, grief-stricken faces
 surrounding him. They hear it.

EXT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

A crowd on the lawn. They all gather around Seth. Amelia
 stands to the side, beaming a little. There's a sense of
 collective purpose and focus...

Seth notes reporter D.L. Sullivan standing nearby but apart
 from the throng.

SETH DAVENPORT
 What do you think?

D.L. SULLIVAN
 I think you gave the people a fine
 performance.

SETH DAVENPORT
 Does that mean you're going to take
 out that reporter's pad and finally
 give voice to these farmers'
 concerns?

D.L. takes in the farmers who surround him with expectant
 faces.

Though a large part of him is swayed by their plight and by Seth's advocacy, the remaining portion of him wants to protect his career as an ambitious writer.

D.L. SULLIVAN

(reluctant)

Preachers give sermons and farmers
lose their farms every day. It's
not exactly front page news.

D.L. turns and walks away. Seth follows him.

SETH DAVENPORT

(calling after him)

'What is divinity if it can come /
only in silent shadows and in
dreams?'

D.L. stops, recognizing the Wallace Stevens quotation. He smiles sadly and conjures up his own brand of poetry.

D.L. SULLIVAN

Words alight with swift beauty. And
then they just as swiftly die.

D.L. walks off in a different direction, out of sight.

Seth shifts his gaze. Amelia walks up to join her husband.

They notice a PACKARD speeding up the dirt road toward the chapel.

It's Sheriff Don Taney's car. It comes to a sudden stop.

They watch as Sheriff Taney exits his vehicle with his nephew Deputy Raymond Taney. They come toward the gathered crowd with their weapons drawn.

SETH DAVENPORT

This is a peaceful assembly,
Sheriff.

SHERIFF DON TANEY

Where in the hell is he?

SETH DAVENPORT

Who?

SHERIFF DON TANEY

Sam Jr.

SETH DAVENPORT

What do you want Sam Jr for?

Sheriff Taney holds out his hand: a casing and a toothpick.

SHERIFF DON TANEY
He shot and killed Pete
Collingsworth in cold blood.

Seth and Amelia stand in shock as Sheriff Taney and his deputy go toward the chapel.

The two officers enter the chapel with their guns drawn...

Seth and Amelia look to each other, once again helpless.

A beat later, Sheriff Taney drags out Sam Jr (toothpick in mouth) while the widowed Martha screams and cries at the doorway, restrained by the deputy.

MARTHA RILEY
No! No! Not him too! No!

Seth watches as the sheriff takes Sam Jr to his car.

Amelia turns to him.

AMELIA DAVENPORT
Go.

Seth nods and begins to stride away.

INT. CAR - DAY

Seth drives a MODEL A down a dirt road. He's driving recklessly, at top speed.

He pulls up to Della's brothel and gets out.

INT. DELLA'S BROTHEL - DAY

A furious Preacher Seth Davenport enters the brothel.

He strides through the place until he sees madam Della, who is smoking and playing poker with a couple of her girls in the parlor.

Seth approaches in his preacher suit.

SETH DAVENPORT
Stetson. Colt. Tell me where he is.

Della sighs and returns to her cards.

DELLA
 Open legs and shut lips. Store
 policy.
 (to partner)
 Deal.

Seth grabs Della by the neck and puts her against the nearby wall. Della looks at him, trembling.

SETH DAVENPORT
 Look me in the eyes.

She does.

SETH DAVENPORT (CONT'D)
 Do you want me to have to ask again
 where this man is at?

She studies Seth's eyes a beat. She sees the capacity for brutality and darkness within him.

DELLA
 Room 3.

Seth heads toward the stairs.

INT. ROOM 3, DELLA'S BROTHEL - AT SAME TIME

Bessie is astride Creeley in the bed.

They're grinding away, immersed in the visceral, soulful communication of pretty awesome sex.

But when the door is kicked open, Creeley instinctively tosses Bessie aside and reaches for his nearby gun.

In a split second, Creeley has it cocked and aimed at the intruder, whom he immediately recognizes: Seth.

Creeley takes in Seth's preacher suit. Grins.

CREELEY
 You look a little different from
 the last time I saw you.

Seth takes in the naked, post-coital Creeley and Bessie.

SETH DAVENPORT
 You don't.

Creeley eyes Seth as the preacher crosses the room.

Even though Creeley has a gun and Seth appears to be unarmed, Creeley seems to be the more hesitant one.

Bessie is amazed to see this.

CREELEY
(pointed)
So am I next on your list?

Seth doesn't answer Creeley's question. He simply sits down across from the cowboy, who keeps his gun aimed.

The two men stare at each other. Years of bad history fill the air between them.

SETH DAVENPORT
You've killed two men today.

CREELEY
They say the Lord works in mysterious ways.

SETH DAVENPORT
Wanna try to make it three?

Creeley is matter-of-fact here -- not afraid, but cautious.

CREELEY
I know my limits.

Seth glances at the cowering Bessie.

SETH DAVENPORT
And your appetites.

CREELEY
I guess some of us don't go around pretending to be something we're not.

A long beat of silence. They hold each other's gaze.

CREELEY (CONT'D)
You never answered my question. Did you come to finish me off too?

SETH DAVENPORT
Not before I save your soul.

And with that, Seth stands and exits the room.

Creeley sits there, eyeing the door.

After a beat, Bessie moves closer.

BESSIE
Who was that?

Creeley keeps his eyes on the doorway.

CREELEY
My little brother.

Creeley gets up, closes the door, then bars it with a chair.

MUSIC CUE: Mark Lanegan's cover of Bob Dylan's "Man in the Long Black Coat."

It plays on until the end of the episode.

INT. SHERIFF STATION - DAY - MONTAGE

Sheriff Taney and Deputy Taney toss Sam Jr into the holding cell at the sheriff's station.

Sam Jr makes eye contact with Guy Havelock, the black prisoner who refuses to eat.

Guy looks over at the younger man and gives him a strange grin.

INT. SETH AND AMELIA'S HOME - NIGHT - MONTAGE

Seth paces restlessly from room to room in his home, open Bible in hand.

Amelia sits up in bed in her nightgown, sharpening a SMALL KNIFE with a wet stone and snacking on pieces of ice.

INT. ROOM 3, DELLA'S BROTHEL - DAWN (DAY 3) - MONTAGE

Creeley and Bessie lay in bed together. Bessie is asleep.

But Creeley is wide awake. He glances at the barred door, the revolver gripped in his hand.

EXT. NEAR HOLDEN TOWN SQUARE - MORNING - MONTAGE

Sunrise. D.L. Sullivan, the reporter, walks to work while puffing on his ever-present pipe.

He reads a copy of Wallace Stevens' Harmonium as he goes.

He walks onto the town square, on his way to the newspaper's office.

He looks up from his book to notice an unusually large and agitated crowd on the square. A strange sight this early in the morning.

Ever curious, D.L. pushes his way through the crowd, which seems to be shocked silent by some revelatory image.

As D.L. pushes and makes his way toward the nearby BANK BUILDING, he catches sight of that image.

It stops him in his tracks.

What D.L. and the stunned crowd see...

SAM RILEY'S BODY IS CRUCIFIED ACROSS THE DOORWAY OF THE BANK.

Someone has propped up the dead farmer's body and driven nails through his hands, leaving him to dangle there Christ-like across the entryway to the local bank.

Around Sam's neck hangs a sign:

"I died so you could save
three cents on a loaf of bread."

D.L. takes this in with a look of horror and awe.

He puts the poetry book under his arm, then reaches into his back pocket and takes out his reporter's pad.

D.L. begins writing madly upon its pages.

INT. SETH AND AMELIA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Amelia startles awake in bed, as if from a dream. She turns to speak to Seth, but he's not beside her.

Sleepy, she gets up and walks out of the bedroom in her nightgown. She walks, searching, until she sees Seth standing in the middle of their kitchen.

When he turns to face her, she sees that he has blood splatters on his face. A hammer in his hand.

SETH DAVENPORT

It is begun.

Seth's eyes are wild, crazed, divine.

END OF PILOT