

Damsel



"DAMSEL" (9/4/14) ZELLNER

FADE IN:

EXT. VAST PLAIN - DAY

The American Frontier, 1870.

A vast plain in the middle of nowhere, untamed nature as far as the eye can see.

Cutting through it is a poor excuse for a DIRT ROAD, stretching off into the horizon. A meager attempt at conquering the wild landscape.

TWO HAGGARD MEN, one 30's, one 70's, sit on a bench at a Dilapidated Way Station. Waiting in silence.

The older man dons "preacher" attire: black suit, string tie, flat-brimmed hat.

The younger man, Henry, is dressed in burlap tatters.

They're both unshaven and appear to be drunk. Not the fun kind of drunk.

Henry pulls from a bottle of booze, furrowed brow, lost in thought.

The old man removes a tarnished pocketwatch from his coat. He holds it away, squints until he can properly make out the time. Sighs.

He leans over, peers down the infinite stretch of road with a look of displeasure. He's slow, tired, rubs his craggy face. His demeanor conveys that of a broken man.

OLD MAN

...Where's that dammed stagecoach?

Henry looks-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY

...Won't it be from the other direction?

OLD MAN

...That depends. You coming or going?

HENRY

Well, I'm goin' West of course, just like everyone else. Are you not?

OLD MAN

No, I'm going back. I've had enough, done my time here...

HENRY

Why do you say that?

The Old Man sighs, reflects. The question weighs heavy on him.

OLD MAN

...Well, I guess I'm spent, the well's run dry. Came out to spoon-feed religion to the savages. Tried real hard, I really did, but they didn't want it...least not the ones I dealt with. I don't blame 'em. We got plenty of Christians as is, don't need no more.

Henry contemplates this for a moment.

HENRY

You ever seen an Apache?

OLD MAN

...No.

HENRY

Choctaw?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OLD MAN

Yeah,

HENRY

Comanche?

OLD MAN

Uh, yeah,

HENRY

Iroquois or Chickasaw?

OLD MAN

...No.

HENRY

What are they all like? I've yet to see a single one.

OLD MAN

...Dunno. Sometimes lousy, sometimes not, just like anyone else I reckon.

Henry ponders this, puts his head in his hands.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

...Why are you coming out here?

HENRY

...Eh, a fresh start. Trying to put my troubled past behind me.

OLD MAN

What's your troubled past?

HENRY

...Oh you know, just, just tough times. Tough times back home.

(beat)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

HENRY (CONT'D)

Among other things, my wife passed during childbirth.

OLD MAN

...That's unfortunate.

HENRY

Yeah, it's been plenty rough, that's why I need a fresh start.

OLD MAN

...Well, I hate to break it to you but things ain't gonna be any better out here. It'll just be shitty in new and fascinating ways. Not only am I going back East, I'm going back abroad.

(beat)

The hell with this, all of it.

The old man leans over and peers down the road again.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

...Where's that goddammed stagecoach?

He squints, searching, waits a beat... then snaps up.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

The hell with this.

The old man stands, begins to remove his clothing.

Henry watches, puzzled.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Here, it comes with its advantages.

He tosses the clothes over to Henry, piece by piece. Followed by a small bible with half the pages missing.

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CONTINUED: (4)

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Scripture's mostly gone, used up on kindlin', hygiene and rollin' papers. Good cloth though, right? High thread count, better than those raggedy digs of yours.

(beat)

I'm outta here. Adios amigo.

The old man, now disrobed, disregards the road altogether. He instead tromps off alone across the open plain, hellbent on reaching the horizon.

Henry, now with an arm-load of clothes, watches.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR - NIGHT

TITLE SEQUENCE:

An ornate parlor. A BAND plays in the corner, piano, banjo fiddle. The song is an instrumental, "Down Yonder".

A SERIES OF COUPLES dance in their Sunday Best.

We follow a particular couple: PENELOPE and SAMUEL. Both in their early 30's.

Penelope is attractive, graceful, charismatic. Samuel is stout, clean-cut, put together. Lovingly gazing into one another's eyes. All smiles.

They couldn't be happier as they dance about hand in hand.

CUT TO:

CU- HAND - LOCATION NOT IMPORTANT

CU, a TARNISHED SILVER LOCKET in the PALM OF SAMUEL'S HAND.

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CONTINUED:

It's flipped open. Inside the locket is a SEPIA-TINTED PHOTO OF PENELOPE:

Hair pinned up in a bonnet, stoic expression, dressed to the nines. She looks absolutely stunning.

Samuel's hand delicately cradles the locket.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN WATER - DAY

Late in the day. The Texas Coast.

Samuel rides the gentle rolling waves in his WEATHERED, PEELING ROWBOAT. He dons a brown three-piece suit and hat. He's earnest, focused; a far cry from his previously carefree, jovial demeanor.

Accompanying him on his journey, in the center of the boat is a MINIATURE HORSE. A gorgeous little animal, cute as can be.

EXT. COASTLINE/BEACH - DAY

As he nears the shore, Samuel hops out, drags the rowboat onto the beach.

He carefully helps the miniature horse out of the raft. He pets it, gently strokes its silken mane. He's clearly fond of the creature.

He unloads his gear- satchel, saddle bags, rifle and guitar, hoists it over his shoulders.

Samuel leads his horse over the dunes and through the beach grass.

CUT TO:

EXT. PIONEER TOWN - DAY

A dusty, ramshackle pioneer town on the edge of civilization.

It's late in the day as people go about their business along main street, bordered by a handful of storefronts. This is the fringe of society, populated with denizens who had nowhere else to go, people desperate for a new life. DIRTY PEOPLE IN PREVIOUSLY ORNATE ATTIRE.

A barefoot child with toothy grin pushes a smiling elderly man in a wheelbarrow, a cat perched in his lap.

A solemn one-legged man, clearly a veteran, shuffles along awkwardly in tattered confederate army regalia. His ill-fitting, makeshift peg-leg drags behind.

A scrappy dog happily trots about alone, sniffing randomly at trash. His snout stained fresh with blood.

Two women in large bonnets seated upon a bench; one consoles the other as she softly cries. With laced kerchief she wipes away the tears of the other women.

Samuel ambles along, the miniature horse at his side.

He ties his companion up to a post alongside some REGULAR-SIZED HORSES.

He scoops water from the trough. The miniature horse tries to get some as well, but the trough is too tall.

Samuel sees this, props the horse up reach the water. He pats its head as it drinks.

FAT DRUNK (OS)

-What in the shit is that? That is the stupidest dagblurn thing I ever did see.

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CONTINUED:

A FAT, SLOVENLY DRUNK MAN, propped against the rail, literally wearing a barrel. He cackles with glee at the sight of the miniature horse.

Samuel snaps. Tense, jaw clenched. He gently lowers the horse and approaches the drunkard, piercing him with his steely gaze.

The sunken-eyed drunkard instantly becomes uneasy, regretting his slip of the tongue.

Samuel pauses, breathing through his nose, keeping his rage in check. He chooses his words carefully:

SAMUEL

...I don't know who the hell you think you are, but I'll be goddamned if I'm gonna let you talk sass about that prized equine. You hear me? Another peep outta ya and I'll knock you so hard your teeth'll be marching out your backside two by two.

The drunk glances at Samuel's hand, delicately hovering over his holstered six-gun.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

You hear me?!

The drunk chortles out an answer:

FAT DRUNK

...Okay.

Samuel breathes a sigh of relief and backs off. He seems as relieved as the drunk that an altercation was avoided.

He wipes his mouth on his sleeve, composes himself, tucks in his shirt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAMUEL

I don't want any trouble.

CUT TO:

INT. SALOON - DAY

Your typical "western" saloon.

The smoky bar is occupied by its REGULARS: drunks, prostitutes, prospectors and others from the fringes of society.

The patrons are haggard but dedicated to their indulgences. They drink, gamble and make-out sloppily with one another. A RAGTAG BAND plays in the corner.

Samuel enters, takes a seat at the bar. Seated beside him is an OLD COWBOY.

Samuel is clearly still shaken from the confrontation outside. He sighs, motions to the BARTENDER.

SAMUEL

Pilsner please. Small.

BARTENDER

All's we got is whiskey.

SAMUEL

That'll do just fine then.

The bartender cleans out a glass and serves him up a double shot. Not what he wanted but he rolls with it.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

...Thank you.

Samuel takes a sip off the top of the glass, pauses, winces.

He sets the shot down, pushes it away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BARTENDER

...What's wrong, that's prime rotgut.

SAMUEL

No, it's not that, it's fine. It's just me.

OLD COWBOY

Is you a pussy?

SAMUEL

...No, but my stomach is from time to time.

OLD COWBOY

Your stomach's a pussy?

SAMUEL

Yeah, from time to time, guess that's what it boils down to.

He pats Samuel on the shoulder.

OLD COWBOY

I'm sorry, just messing with you, buddy.

(Gesturing the whiskey)

You mind?

SAMUEL

Have at it.

OLD COWBOY

Obliged.

The old man downs the shot. Lets it settle for a beat.

OLD COWBOY (CONT'D)

So...Whatareya in town for?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAMUEL

Just business.

OLD COWBOY

(to the bartender)

Uh-oh, another business-man.

SAMUEL

Yep.

OLD COWBOY

...Well, if you're interested, there's gonna be a gangbang social out back later. Matilda, buck a head. If you're new in town it's a great way to meet folks.

SAMUEL

Thanks, but I'm spoken for.

OLD COWBOY

Maybe your stomach's not the only thing that's a pussy.

SAMUEL

Maybe you're right.

The old man laughs, pats Samuel on the shoulder. Samuel collects his thoughts for a moment.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

...I'm actually here looking for a man by the name of Parson Henry.

BARTENDER

The preacher?

SAMUEL

Preacher-parson, whatever.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BARTENDER

He was here earlier. Circuit rider I reckon. Pretty sauced up.

OLD COWBOY

Is he the fella that was upchuckin' in the corner?

BARTENDER

-Yep.

OLD COWBOY

Jesus.

SAMUEL

...You sure that's Parson Henry?

BARTENDER

That's what he called himself. Didn't have that collar-thing though. What's that preacher collar-thing called?

OLD COWBOY

I dunno, whatever it's called it looks uncomfortable. My Adam's apple's too big for that shit.

(jutting out his chin)

Look how big it is.

BARTENDER

That is pretty big. Look at mine.

OLD COWBOY

Yeah, yours is pretty big too. I never liked the barber going in around there.

(to Samuel)

How big's yours?

Samuel self-consciously touches his Adam's apple.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

SAMUEL

It's uh, medium-big I guess...uh, do you know where he is now, Parson Henry?

BARTENDER

Probably down near the shore, that's where he's been endin' up since he got here.

SAMUEL

Ok.

Samuel sighs. He puts a coin on the bar, rises to leave.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Much obliged.

OLD COWBOY

Hope you're not lookin' to get saved, 'cause that's the wrong way to go about it.

Samuel exits the saloon.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACH - SUNSET

Leading the miniature horse by its bridle, Samuel is silhouetted as he walks the dunes overlooking the shore.

The beach grass rustles in the cool evening breeze.

Samuel pauses, looks out to the ocean: the choppy, hypnotic waves roll along.

He walks on a little further and suddenly comes across:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A DISHEVELED MAN sprawled face-down in the gully between a set of dunes. It's Henry from earlier, now donning the preacher attire that had been passed onto him.

SEVERAL LARGE CRABS pick at his filthy, ill-fitting clothes.

SAMUEL

...Parson Henry?

No response.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Parson Henry? Is that you?

(beat)

Are you dead?

Still no response.

Samuel climbs down, shoos away the crabs.

He hoists "Parson" Henry up, gives him a good shake, props him upright against the side of the dune.

Disheveled is an understatement; he looks like hell. Drunk and hungover at the same time, his face is scrunched up, eyes in a permanent squint, mouth agape...

PARSON HENRY

-Whua?..

SAMUEL

My name is Samuel Alabaster. Do you know who I am?

PARSON HENRY

...Yeah,

SAMUEL

Did you get my confirmation telegram?

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CONTINUED: (2)

PARSON HENRY

...Yeah. I'd got it,

Henry digs the now-soggy telegram out of his pocket. With full(albeit inebriated) attention he tries to unfold it, but the mushy pages stick together.

Samuel patiently waits a beat, then gets frustrated.

SAMUEL

-Well why you goin' and gettin' all tight when you know you got a job to do?

Parson Henry rubs his eyes.

PARSON HENRY

...I dunno, I dunno what happened. Sorry.

(beat)

I got sand in mah teeth.

Parson Henry tries to spit the sand out of his mouth, scrapes off his tongue against his teeth.

SAMUEL

I felt like the offer was a square wage.
Ain't I paying you enough?

PARSON HENRY

...Yeah. I guess I just got a little
tipsy while waitin'.

SAMUEL

That's bullshit. Pretty
ungoddamnedprofessional if you ask me.
Pardon my French.

Parson Henry has no response. He sheepishly tries to dig the grit out of his mouth.

Samuel sighs, glances over at Butterscotch:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The miniature horse, silhouetted, stands atop the dune munching beach grass.

Parson Henry squints hard at the horse in an attempt to clarify, confuses its size with its distance:

PARSON HENRY

...Man, that horse is far away.

SAMUEL

Well get up, this is preposterous. C'mon.

Samuel pulls Parson Henry to his feet, drags him down to the shore.

Samuel props Parson up so that the waves splash him in the face several times over.

Parson gasps for air, spits out a mouthful of saltwater.

PARSON HENRY

...I'm good.

CUT TO:

INT. GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

In the back room of a general store, a BURLY WOMAN works Parson Henry's black suit against a soapy, rusty washboard.

Parson Henry is propped up in a tub. Sudsy hot water.

Using a long brush, a DIRTY KID scrubs away at Parson's nappy head of hair.

CUT TO:

GENERAL STORE - LATER

Parson Henry is seated at a table, scraping the last bits of stew from his bowl.

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CONTINUED:

He's clean now, sobered up, but still haggard.

Samuel enters.

SAMUEL

All fixed up?

PARSON HENRY

I'm fine. Nice an' tidy I guess. Thanks.

SAMUEL

Don't mention it. I'm docking it from
your pay fifty cent.

He hands Henry a wad of cash.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Here's your twenty-nine dollar, fifty
cent. I got the other thirty for ya when
we get done. And that'll getcha to the
sixty as stated in the telegram.

Parson Henry sifts through the money, counting to himself. It
clearly pushes his math skills to the limit.

He gets flustered and has to start over. Samuel grows
impatient.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

...It's twenty-nine fifty flat. We
square?

Embarrassed, he gives up the count,

PARSON HENRY

-Alright, looks good. We're square.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. STOREFRONT - DAWN

Break of day. Parson Henry exits the building, groggy, squinting up at the light.

Before him is Samuel, having long since awoken. His miniature horse is tied up alongside A PAIR OF REGULAR HORSES that he's acquired, loaded with various gear.

Strapped upon the miniature horse's back is a rusty domed birdcage housing a CHICKEN.

Samuel crouches down beside the miniature horse and lovingly strokes its mane.

SAMUEL

Mornin'.

PARSON HENRY

Mornin'.

SAMUEL

This is "Butterscotch", it's for the misses. It's a special miniature horse, it's very rare, unique even. It's like a living conversation piece.

(beat)

The regular horses don't have a name, they're just, you know, regular.

Parson Henry watches on, confused. He glances at the gear loaded upon the horses.

PARSON HENRY

...You didn't say we were leaving town.

SAMUEL

...Well, I thought it was clear in the telegram.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARSON HENRY

No, I don't remember that being the case.

SAMUEL

Well, yeah. Why do you think I'm paying you so well?

Parson Henry is hesitant...

PARSON HENRY

Aw, I don't know, I figured it was just for here.

SAMUEL

Don't do this to me, I need your help, and a deal's a deal.

(beat)

With all due respect, the money's good, and it doesn't look like you got much better to do.

PARSON HENRY

...Fine. How far we gotta go?

SAMUEL

About two days I reckon, should be nice and easy. The weather's beautiful right now. It's the perfect time of year.

Parson sighs.

EXT. PIONEER TOWN - MORNING

Main street. A gathering of TOWNSFOLK surround a gallows. The main attraction is the fat barrel-wearing drunk from earlier, seated horseback under the gallows with noose in place. His glassy-eyed expression is understandably dour as a flour sack is placed over his head.

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A SHORT, ELDERLY SHERIFF leads the proceedings-

ELDERLY SHERIFF

...And with that, justice is served.

The horse is swatted from behind, darts out from beneath the fat drunk, who's left dangling to the sound of creaky wood and rope.

The horse trots past Parson Henry and Samuel, themselves on horseback exiting town. As they pass the hanging, they do their best to avert their eyes while compulsively stealing a glance or two.

They leave the town behind them, with Butterscotch bringing up the rear.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

The Wild Frontier. Various shots of the picturesque landscapes, a vast and infinite horizon surrounding them. The men and their horses ride along the trail, single file.

PRAIRIE - LATER

Parson and Samuel continue along.

In the distance, coming from the opposite direction on the trail is a MULE-DRAWN CART. The cart has a defective wheel which causes it to jerk and jolt with every rotation.

Riding in the cart are a MIDDLE-AGED CHINESE COUPLE. They wear traditional Chinese garb and appear dishevelled and distraught. The woman drives while the man clutches the top of his head, wrapped in a bloody rag.

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CONTINUED:

As they pass by, the couple shouts at Samuel and Parson in Chinese. They solemnly watch while maintaining their distance. A beat.

PARSON HENRY

...Technically speaking, are we in Injun Country?

SAMUEL

Technically everywhere is Injun Country I reckon.

PARSON HENRY

Yeah but do we have anything to worry about in these parts?

SAMUEL

No, we'll be fine.

EXT. WILDERNESS - DAY

Later in the day. Slightly different terrain.

The men continue riding onward with the horses. Presumably tired, Butterscotch is now cradled in Samuel's arms.

Parson Henry is now holding onto the birdcage and chicken.

SAMUEL

...What kind of parson are you?

PARSON HENRY

You know, just the regular kind.

(beat)

I reckon I'm still a neophyte.

SAMUEL

What's that, like a tenderfoot?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARSON HENRY

I don't know really, it's just a fancy word. Heard it being used in Baltimore.

SAMUEL

Is that where you're from?

PARSON HENRY

Yeah.

They ride in silence for a moment.

SAMUEL

Never been that far north. Is it any good?

PARSON HENRY

It's fine. Kinda like what this place'll be in twenty years I'm sure.

They continue onward.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTHILLS - DAY

The men and their animals work their way up into more hilly terrain.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

Parson and Samuel pull over for a break. They climb down from their horses.

Samuel takes a swig of water from his canteen. He pours some in his cupped hand and offers it to Butterscotch.

Parson opens up his whiskey flask and gestures it to Samuel.

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CONTINUED:

PARSON HENRY

Want some?

SAMUEL

No thanks, makes me too parched when I travel.

Parson takes a generous swig. Samuel watches.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

...Why are you such a drunk?

Parson is taken aback.

PARSON HENRY

...I dunno. None a yer business.

He wipes his mouth, sighs...

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

I'm not. I don't partake all everyday.

(beat)

Besides, it's medicinal.

SAMUEL

For what?

PARSON HENRY

Sadness pains mostly. In my head.

SAMUEL

Sadness is of our own invention. Besides, what about just prayin'?

PARSON HENRY

What about it?

SAMUEL

While you're on the job with me I don't want you touching the spirits, alright?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

As soon as we're done you can do whatever the hell you want, you can eat cow-chip mushrooms for all I care. But until then I want you clean and clear. Is that understood?

PARSON HENRY

...Yeah, that's fine. This is hardly enough to get me tight anyways, its just meant to tide me over, but whatever. You're the boss.

Parson walks off.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Parson Henry wanders into the woods, he looks for a spot to relieve himself.

As he finishes up, he notices something that catches his attention:

A RUSTY BEAR TRAP.

Still clenched between its corroded steel jaws are the skeletal remnants of an animal's paw.

EXT. CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

Parson returns to find Samuel gazing into the mountainous horizon through a set of binoculars. One of the lenses is cracked.

PARSON HENRY

What are ya looking at?

SAMUEL

Nothing. Just making sure we're on track.

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CONTINUED:

PARSON HENRY

Are we?

SAMUEL

....Yeah. This place looks safe enough, I think we should hole up for the night.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

Alongside a rolling river. Water tumbling over rocks.

Samuel picks berries from a large patch.

Parson hikes along the river. Once Samuel is out of sight, he sneaks a swig from his flask.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - LATER

The booze has loosened Parson up a bit, he casually skips some stones across the water.

While gathering skipping stones he finds an arrowhead on the ground. He examines it closely, runs his thumb along the edges.

He looks up:

In the distance, there's a WOLF, drinking from the river.

The wolf catches sight of Parson Henry, pauses, then carefully retreats back up the hill.

CUT TO:

CLEARING - LATER

Samuel plucks feathers from the deceased chicken.

Parson Henry tries to pry open the big rusty bear trap, Samuel helps. Together they carefully set the trap, then back away from it.

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CONTINUED:

From about ten feet away, Samuel heaves a chunk of wood through the air-

It smashes atop the trap, triggering the steel jaws to violently snap shut around the log.

CLEARING - NIGHT

Night has fallen, Parson Henry and Samuel sit around a campfire. The bear trap, and the log clenched within, have been piled upon the fire.

Butterscotch nibbles at a pile of berries.

Samuel finishes up a piece of chicken, tosses the bone in the fire. Parson uses a twig to pick his teeth.

Samuel gently brushes Butterscotch's hair.

It's cool and quiet, save the soft crackling sounds of the fire.

PARSON HENRY

...So is Butterscotch like a wedding present?

SAMUEL

Yeah. I think she'll really like him. She's wanted one for a long, long time.

(beat)

Wasn't easy to find.

PARSON HENRY

What's your fiancé's name?

SAMUEL

Penelope. Did I not say in the telegram?

PARSON HENRY

No, you just said bride-to-be.

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CONTINUED:

SAMUEL

Well, soon to be Mrs. Penelope Alabaster.

From around his neck Samuel removes the tarnished silver locket shown earlier.

He opens it up to reveal the photo of "Penelope".

He gazes at it longingly, sighs. Passes it over to Parson.

PARSON HENRY

...She's beautiful. You're a lucky man.

SAMUEL

She's the sweetest, most precious thing in the whole wide world. Guaranteed. Beautiful, loving, soft and supple skin, smart, good at cookin', sewin'- good at readin' words. Even good at kissin' and lovmakin'. What more could you ask for?

Parson returns the pendant.

PARSON HENRY

Sounds like you got a good thing going.

SAMUEL

Yeah...I just want everything to go well and go off without a hitch...

Samuel digs deep in his pocket, takes out a WEDDING RING, passes it over.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Pretty fancy, huh?

PARSON HENRY

Yeah, I'll say. You ever been married before?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAMUEL

Nope, it'll be the first, and last.

PARSON HENRY

Marriage is a big jump. It's hard. And things don't always go the way you want 'em to.

Parson returns the ring.

SAMUEL

Yep, but that's what she wants I reckon. It's what I want too. Brings it all together. Bigtime.

Samuel gazes up at the trees surrounding them, silhouetted by the moonlight.

Parson digs in his pocket, holds up the arrowhead.

PARSON HENRY

Look what I found.

SAMUEL

An arrowhead?

PARSON HENRY

Yeah, sharp one too.

Parson finishes looking at the arrowhead, offers it up:

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

If you want, you can have this to give to Penelope.

SAMUEL

Nah, those are pretty common. Obligated though.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Parson puts the arrowhead away. Samuel thinks before speaking:

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

...I appreciate you joining me. I uh, I apologize if there was any miscommunication regarding the travel part.

PARSON HENRY

That's fine. I kinda enjoy the peacefulness out here, good for a man's soul I guess.

SAMUEL

You're absolutely right. You know, I think I'd like to share something with you,

He reaches for his little guitar-

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

It's a sweet ballad I wrote for Penelope, I'll play it for her right after we tie the knot. It's called "Honeybun".

Samuel clears his throat and begins to play:

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

*You're my Honeybun/My only Honeybun
My Honeybun, I love you can't you see.
You're my Honeybun/My only Honeybun
My Honeybun, I want you just for me.
You're the horseshoe to my hoof,
And I need no further proof,
You're my Honeybun, the only one for me.*

Parson Henry is moved by his sincerity.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

PARSON HENRY

That's really pretty, and beautiful too.

FADE TO BLACK:

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAWN

The sun is just barely creeping over the mountains, through the trees. A crisp, beautiful morning. Calm, quiet.

The smoldering remnants of the fire.

A swarming network of ants scour the chicken bones for remnants.

Samuel gazes up at the hills through his cracked binoculars:

He's contemplative; whatever he's searching for, he doesn't find it.

Parson is huddled under a blanket beside the dying campfire.

He peeks out, squinting, disheveled.

PARSON HENRY

...Bit my tongue in my sleep.

Samuel gives up on scouring the horizon. Into his cupped palm he exhales, smells his breath.

Suddenly in the distance, at the edge of the woods, something catches Samuel's attention:

It's a BEARDED MAN, 30's, a burly trapper dressed head to toe in fringed buckskin and big fur hat. In each hand dangles a dead rabbit.

They both notice each other at the exact same instant-

Startled by each other's presence, struggling to recognize one another, they remain frozen for a beat, mouths agape...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Then in one swift motion Samuel DRAWS HIS PISTOL, FIRES, A CLOUD OF SMOKE-

He misses! A ricochet through the trees.

The bearded man is startled into action- he FLAILS, INSTANTLY DUCKS BACK INTO THE WOODS.

SAMUEL

(muttering)

-Oh no,

Parson Henry snaps up, confused.

Samuel throws down his coffee cup and TEARS OFF after the man!

Parson rubs his face in an attempt to fully wake-up.

PARSON HENRY

What's goin' on?!

In the distance, Samuel disappears into the woods.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WOODS - CONTINUOUS

The bearded man frantically shoves his way through the dense brush, rabbits in hand.

Samuel is hot on his trail, running full speed but barely able to keep up.

Branches snap back, leaves flutter about-

The bearded man keeps going, fast as he can.

Samuel is losing ground; the man suddenly flails, vanishes in the distance- followed by a GRUNT.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Samuel presses onward, desperately tries to catch up.

Suddenly Samuel pushes through dense overgrowth-

TO FIND HIMSELF STANDING BEFORE A SHARP LEDGE.

He stumbles back to safety, grasps a branch to stabilize himself.

He carefully leans over the ledge, peers below:

THE MAN IS FACED-DOWN, SPRAWLED ON THE ROCKS, LIFELESS, A GOOD TWENTY FEET BELOW.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - MOMENTS LATER

Parson Henry stares intently at the woods, squints his eyes, trying to make sense of what's happening.

He calls out:

PARSON HENRY

SAMUEL?! YOU OKAY?!

No response. Several moments go by, uncomfortably quiet. No sound save the wind softly rustling through the trees.

He glances back at Butterscotch and the horses; they appear unfazed.

Parson removes a tarnished pocketwatch from his waistcoat, checks the time. Taps it, listens for a tick; it's broken.

From a distance- Samuel exits the woods into the clearing. He's clearly exhausted, shaken, short of breath.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

-SAMUEL!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Samuel motions for Parson to keep quiet.

He stumbles back to the camp, flops down on his blanket.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

Are you ok?

SAMUEL

Yeah. Just let me catch my breath for a spell...

Samuel takes several long, deep breaths.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Toss me my canteen please.

Parson complies.

PARSON HENRY

...Was that a feller out there?

SAMUEL

...Yeah.

PARSON HENRY

What happened?

Samuel is slow to respond, in a bit of daze, stares out into space.

Parson tries again:

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

Samuel, what happened?

SAMUEL

...Penelope. She's been kidnapped.

Parson is dumbfounded.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PARSON HENRY

...Why? What do you mean, I'm confused...

Samuel props himself up.

SAMUEL

Because she's a prized possession. You saw her picture. And the guy that did it is an evil sonofabitch.

PARSON HENRY

Who?

SAMUEL

Anton Cornell. He's a no-good bastard.

Samuel rolls over on his side, his back to Parson.

PARSON HENRY

Was that who you went chasing after?

SAMUEL

No. That's Anton's brother, Rufus. He's a no-good sonofabitch as well. I had to catch 'em, before he could warn that ruthless jackleg.

A beat.

PARSON HENRY

Did you, um, did you catch him?

SAMUEL

Yeah, yeah I did.

Parson Henry is stunned. Samuel takes a quick glance at Parson, turns back.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

...Don't look at me like that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PARSON HENRY

Why uh, why didn't you just go get the sheriff right when it first happened?

Samuel sits up.

SAMUEL

What sheriff? It's the wilderness, there's no jurisdiction here. For better or worse this is no-man's land. I didn't want to tie things up with authorities anyway...

PARSON HENRY

Well, why not at least get a posse?

SAMUEL

Hired guns, they're goosey, unpredictable. I want this to be safe and low profile. That's why I couldn't let you be privy to all the details straight away, I hope you understand. I'm sorry they came to light in the manner which they did. I didn't know Rufus would be out here causing trouble.

Parson is still stumped, trying to process everything. Samuel sees this, tries to clarify further:

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

...Parson, you have no idea how precious she is to me, she means the world. I didn't want to go after Rufus, but I wasn't left with any choice either. This kidnapping is the most horrible thing I've ever been through and I can't take any chances, hurts deep down inside. Literally, I got ulcers.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

(beat)

All I want to do is rescue Penelope safe and sound, marry her proper under the eyes of the Lord, a quiet life. That's all I want. Not too much to ask for if you ask me. I just want things to be nice, I just don't want this turmoil. But that evil sonofabitch had to go mess it all up.

PARSON HENRY

I'm sorry to hear that, Samuel.

Samuel looks Parson Henry square in the eye-

SAMUEL

...Let me ask you a personal question. Do you believe in evil? Someone in the flesh who is pure goddamned scumlovin' evil? Huh?

PARSON HENRY

...I, I don't know.

SAMUEL

How could you not know, you're a parson.

PARSON HENRY

Well, it's a complicated question. If you're asking about someone I've known personally, then I, you know I,

SAMUEL

-Let me put it to you this way. Have you ever been in true pure love? You're able to get married, right? That's allowed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

PARSON HENRY

(sighs)

Yeah,

SAMUEL

Well have you ever been in true pure love, I'm not talkin' about some fly-by-night gangbang hostess, I'm talking about an undying attraction with someone that means more to you than anything.

Parson doesn't answer.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Well, have you?

PARSON HENRY

-Of course.

SAMUEL

Well now imagine having that plucked away from you by the scum of the earth, for no other reason than because of pure evil. I couldn't just sit there, let the world crumble around me, had to take fate into my own hands. Don't you understand that?

PARSON HENRY

I feel for you Samuel, I really do, but this is more than I signed up for. I agreed to join you two in Holy Matrimony, a ceremony and that's it. I'm sorry, I, I can't be a part of this.

SAMUEL

Why not?! Because of your vocation, or because you don't believe in love?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

PARSON HENRY

That's, that's just a stupid question.

SAMUEL

Do you believe in True Pure Love, or not?

PARSON HENRY

Of course I believe in Love- I love Love.

This is just more than I bargained for.

I'm sorry, I can't do this.

Parson gets up, dusts himself off, walks over towards the trail.

SAMUEL

Don't be lily-livered, where do you think you're going? You'll never find your way back alone.

Parson looks down the trail, back.

PARSON HENRY

Well, I'm no cartographer, but I figured I just go right back down the way we came...

Samuel searches for a rebuttal, stares at Parson until he comes up with one.

SAMUEL

...Okay, fine, I'll give you ninety more, make it a hundred-fifty. Don't you care about someone who's in trouble, who needs our help?

Parson doesn't answer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Please don't screw this up for me, I plead to you, Penelope is all I got left. I'm not a gunslinger, I don't like this. I'm just a man who believes in love, plain and simple. I don't want it to be complicated or messy, I just want to rescue her, take her into my arms and make sure she's safe and sound. All I want you to do is officiate the wedding, proper-like. Get us off to a good wholesome start. And you'll get a bonus for your trouble, got all the dough on me.

Parson sheepishly weighs his options.

PARSON HENRY

...A hundred-fifty U.S. tender cold hard cash?

SAMUEL

Yep.

PARSON HENRY

You got all of it?

SAMUEL

You have my word.

Parson sighs. Annoyed with himself for giving in.

PARSON HENRY

...My nerves are shot to hell. I'll have you know I'm gonna have me a drink if I goddamn well feel like it. And I goddamn well feel like it right now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

Parson takes out his flask and pulls a big dramatic swig from it, sighs.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

Parson Henry and Samuel ride along on horseback.

The tone of the journey has shifted. Parson is more somber, unsettled.

Samuel stares down at the pendant in his hand:

The photo of Penelope.

SAMUEL

...You ever been to a cake walk?

PARSON HENRY

No.

SAMUEL

Penelope and I met at a cakewalk. I landed on number six but I pretended I landed on number nine, because that was the number of her cake and I wanted to meet her. Love at first sight, for real.

Parson doesn't respond.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

You've at least had intercourse, right?
No oath of celibacy or nuthin'?

PARSON HENRY

I'm not a goddamned monk, ok? I'm just a stupid human bein' like you.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

Of course I've had intercourse, both supine and inverted-supine, even been friggin' married, ok?

SAMUEL

Are you no longer together?

PARSON HENRY

None of your goddamned beeswax.

SAMUEL

No need to get fussy, I'm just trying to be personable.

PARSON HENRY

I'm not here to be personable, I'm here to collect my due. And that's it.

They ride in silence for a moment, Parson Henry stews. Samuel starts up again:

SAMUEL

...She actually made a pecan pie and I joked that it was illegal, 'cause it was a cake walk, not a pie walk. She laughed, thought it was funny. Said I was a card.

(beat)

Best damn pecan pie I ever had...

Parson Henry glares at him from behind.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - LATER

Parson Henry and Samuel ride along in silence. It's quiet and beautiful. They've both zoned out on this long ride.

Samuel's attention is suddenly drawn to his surroundings. He gazes in the distance, stops.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAMUEL

-We're closer than I thought.

Samuel gestures ahead:

A soft plume of smoke drifts up in the distance.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Parson Henry and Samuel work their way up a small wooded hillside, leading the horses on foot.

They walk quietly, cautiously, remain focused on their surroundings.

Speaking in hushed tones:

SAMUEL

-I guess let's hold up here for a spell.

Samuel looks around, collects his thoughts.

Parson Henry takes out his flask and shakes the last couple of drops of booze into his mouth.

PARSON HENRY

...Man, my nerves are shot.

Samuel rubs his stomach, sighs.

SAMUEL

Mine too, doubly so. I also got me a case of the groom's spooks. It's a big commitment, a lifelong commitment. And there's no turning back now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARSON HENRY

You know, it's never too late to turn back, there's no shame in that if it's not right. You got to do what's best for you.

SAMUEL

It's completely right. Besides, she needs us. There's some things a man can't ride around.

Samuel sneaks a quick look at his locket.

PARSON HENRY

I don't want to be a pessimist, but have you considered the slight possibility that they, that you know...that she's deceased?

SAMUEL

That's not a possibility. Let's just leave it at that.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Samuel tends to Butterscotch, brushes its hair.

He polishes the wedding ring.

He neatly tucks in his shirt.

He spit-shines his boots,

He smooths back his hair.

Parson is increasingly uneasy, he nervously scans his surroundings.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAMUEL

How do I look Parson? Presentable?

PARSON HENRY

You look fine.

Parson fixes his collar.

Samuel pats the dust off of Parson's back.

SAMUEL

You ever wear one of those special
preacher collars?

PARSON HENRY

No. Can't say as that I have.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS/CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

Samuel and Parson Henry crawl up to the edge of the woods,
which opens into A CLEARING.

It's calm, quiet, a serene setting.

Crouched down, Samuel peers through his binoculars:

There's a tiny, one-room shack, smoke wafting from the stove
pipe on the roof.

An outhouse.

A small vegetable garden.

Chickens wandering about.

Clothes hanging on a clothesline. Gently flapping in the cool
mountain breeze.

No people are visible.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARSON HENRY

It doesn't look like anyone's there.

SAMUEL

I know, but they could be anywhere. For all we know Anton might've already seen us. He's a cunning bastard. We have to proceed with absolute caution.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS/CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

Parson and Samuel, back with the horses.

Samuel has made a mock-up map in the dirt to illustrate his plan; rocks and twigs represent the shack, outhouse, etc.

SAMUEL

Ok, here's the plan, we'll want the recon to be quick and easy. We leave the horses here and go to the edge of the woods with Butterscotch, where the two of you will wait. On the count of three, I make for the rear of the outhouse. From there I go to the hideout, preferably through the door but the window if need be. If Anton is inside I will deal with him. I'll cut Penelope loose, and help her escape. At that point, once the coast is clear and the area secure, on bended knee I'll ask her to be my wife. I'll give her the ring, and you will emerge from the woods with the guitar and Butterscotch in tow. And then you will do your, you know, your ceremony. Alright?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARSON HENRY

...Alright. So what if Anton is not inside?

Samuel sighs, thinks this over.

SAMUEL

...Just in case, we'll need to keep a watchful eye on the surroundings. We should be doing that right now anyway. Hopefully he's not set up an ambush.

(beat)

You're going to have to cover me.

PARSON HENRY

What do you mean?

Samuel removes a rifle from one of the packs. He checks the chamber and loads it with ammo.

SAMUEL

You cover me with the rifle, I'm gonna take the pistol.

Parson Henry guffaws,

PARSON HENRY

-What are you talking about? I told you I'm not a goddammed hired gun, I told you that!

SAMUEL

Keep your voice down! I'm not asking you to do anything other than cover me, it's for safety sake, that's all. Just a precaution.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PARSON HENRY

(through gritted teeth)

-I'm not a hired gun, that's not what I'm here for! I told you!

SAMUEL

I know, okay, I know you're not, and that's fine. I'm not either. Just please understand that a woman's life is at stake here. All's I'm asking you to do is sit there and cover me. Nothing else. Otherwise this'll all just be going to waste.

Samuel hands the rifle over to Parson Henry, who reluctantly takes it.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

The whole reason we're doing this is so we can *avoid* trouble, okay? I don't like it any more than you do. You won't have to shoot it, just cover me. Please. If not for me then for Penelope. It'll be over lickity-split.

(beat)

Do you know how to aim, use the crosshairs?

PARSON HENRY

Yeah, yeah I know, you line up this part in-between this part, I get it.

SAMUEL

Good, ok.

Samuel takes a deep breath. They're both nervous as hell.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

...Did you um, did you want to say a prayer to give us protection or good luck or something?

PARSON HENRY

No, let's just get it over with.

SAMUEL

Okay, let's go then.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS/CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

Samuel leads Butterscotch and Parson to the edge of the woods.

They check everything out again-

The shack

The outhouse

The garden

The clothesline

It's calm and quiet just as before. Not a person in sight.

SAMUEL

(whispering)

You ready?

PARSON HENRY

(begrudgingly)

Yeah,

Samuel hands over Butterscotch's reins, takes a deep breath.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAMUEL

Ok, here we go.

Hunched over, Samuel trots off into the clearing, his spurs jingling in time with every step-

He b-lines to the outhouse on the right, braces himself behind it.

Parson situates himself behind a fallen tree trunk.

He positions the rifle over the trunk, nervously scans the premises through the cross hairs:

Shack...garden...clothesline...

All clear, just as before.

He takes a deep breath, tries to remain calm.

Parson glances over at the outhouse...Samuel is behind it and out of view.

The distant CREAK of a door opening-

Parson glances back towards the SHACK:

A TALL, SLENDER MAN casually exits the shack. He's blonde, handsome with chiseled features.

Parson is all nerves. He follows the tall man in the distance through his cross hairs:

The tall man ambles left,

past the garden, past the clothesline,

He stops at the end of the clearing. He drops his suspenders and begins to urinate on the trees. He's seems calm and unaware of anyone intruding...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Samuel remains at the opposite end of the property, still out of view, hunkered down behind the outhouse.

Parson's fingers tremble, he's short of breath. He struggles to hold the rifle steady, remain calm and focused.

He glances at Butterscotch.

He wipes his sweaty palms against his pants, then raises his rifle to realign the tall man in his cross hairs:

The tall man urinates in the distance, his back to Parson Henry.

The sheets on the clothesline flap in the breeze, intermittently obstructing Parson's view.

Parson's hands continue to shake. Sweaty brow. He rubs his eyes, firmly grips the rifle, squints...tries to stabilize...

He glances back at the outhouse- Samuel still out of sight.

Index finger, trembling against the trigger-

The sheets flap back and forth...

He squints, blinks.

SUDDENLY - an abrupt CRACK of gunfire, followed by a GIANT PUFF OF SMOKE!

A tuft of hair flies off the tall man's head; he jolts to a start, stumbles back-

He collapses to the ground like a ton of bricks!

Even at a distance, blood is visible, pouring through his blonde hair. It's a horrible sight.

The man twitches; his legs flail erratically, repeatedly digging his heels into the moist earth. Then stop cold.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

The smoke dissipates. Parson Henry gasps- he's a total wreck. He throws the rifle down in disgust, bites his knuckle. He's shaking, hyperventilating.

He rubs his shoulder, bruised from the kickback.

PARSON HENRY

Oh geez, oh geez, oh geez...

Continuing from Parson's perspective:

Samuel suddenly pops out from behind the outhouse...

He sprints across the property, spurs jingling, to where the body of the tall man lies in a heap.

Samuel braces himself,

He extends his six-shooter and FIRES several rounds point blank into the tall man's back!

A cloud of smoke momentarily obscures the view.

SAMUEL

Die! Die you evil sonofabitch!!

The SHACK:

The door cracks open; the BARREL OF A RIFLE juts out, begins FIRING RANDOMLY into the clearing!

Parson Henry, completely frantic, crouches behind the fallen tree, in the fetal position.

Bullets ZIP through the trees. Parson clutches Butterscotch, holds her close.

The rifle barrel nudged through the doorway continues FIRING, pausing only to reload or adjust its random angle.

Samuel edges over to the side of the shack, reloads.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

He presses himself against the wall, cocks his pistol.

He leans around the corner: The rifle barrel is in plain sight.

Samuel SHOTS the barrel- SPARKS FLY WITH A RESOUNDING *CLANG!*
He SEIZES the rifle barrel, jerks it from the doorway in a single motion,

Bringing along with it its operator-

PENELOPE!

She's absolutely hysterical, a far cry from her elegant and demure photo in the locket.

The barrel's hot- Samuel tosses the rifle to the ground, clutches Penelope tightly against his chest, pats her head gently.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

-It's okay, it's okay, I got you, I got you, everything's safe now, everything's going to be okay. Just calm down now...

Unfortunately she's not about to calm down, she remains hysterical and frantic. Increasingly so, in fact.

Penelope thrashes about, struggles to get away. Samuel struggles to hold her close.

She SCREAMS and SHOUTS, but it's mostly unintelligible.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Calm down, calm down, I got you honey, it's going to be ok.

PENELOPE

LET GO OF ME!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

She finally forces herself free, flailing, stumbles back.
Samuel tries to embrace her but she'll have none of it.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

...HOW COULD YOU?!!

Penelope sees the corpse in the distance- SCREAMS.

She runs over, collapses beside the fallen man.

Penelope puts her ear to his chest in search of a
heartbeat...nothing.

She hikes his pants back up in an attempt to preserve his
dignity.

She SOBS UNCONTROLLABLY.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

NO...NO!!!

Samuel holsters his gun, gingerly approaches Penelope, her
back to him, hunched over, catching her breath.

He gently places his hands on her shoulders-

She cringes, backs away, stumbles to her feet.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

-What the hell are you doing here?!

SAMUEL

Penelope, listen,

PENELOPE

-Why are you doing this?!

SAMUEL

Penelope, just please listen to me.
You're hysterical and I just want you to
calm down and listen to me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

Samuel gets down on bended knee.

Having laid it all out on the line, Samuel, wide-eyed, earnest, withdraws the wedding ring from his pocket-

He holds it up for consideration.

Penelope, in a momentary lapse from the hysterics, is in utter disbelief.

As she stares at the ring she can barely suppress her rage. Wide-eyed, breathing through her nose, clutches her chest, steps back.

PENELOPE

(through her teeth)

Why did you have to come here, Samuel?

SAMUEL

Because I wanted to help you, to make things right. A clean slate.

(gesturing with the ring)

Penelope, I want you to be my, my lawfully-wedded wife.

Penelope grabs the ring and tosses it aside.

PENELOPE

HOW DARE YOU!

SAMUEL

-Penelope I love you, with all my heart I do,

Samuel desperately tries to embrace her, pulls her close.

PENELOPE

LET GO OF ME!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

SAMUEL

I swear it `till my dying day.

She hits him, struggles to break free.

PENELOPE

-YOUR BREATH SMELLS TERRIBLE!

He lets her go/she breaks free from his grasp, stumbles back.

Samuel sheepishly exhales into his cupped hand, takes a whiff.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

Why, why?!

SAMUEL

Because, I want you to be my lawfully-wedded wi--

PENELOPE

SHUTUP! Goddamn you I loved him...we were so happy together.

SAMUEL

No, WE were so happy together.

PENELOPE

(disgusted)

That was long ago, times have changed.

SAMUEL

-They don't have to. We've both had a lot of rough patches in our lives, but now it's time to heal, and it can heal if we let it.

PENELOPE

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

Penelope begins to once again sob uncontrollably.

Samuel tries to console her, leans in for an embrace-
Penelope backs away.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)
DON'T YOU FUCKING TOUCH ME!!

Penelope collapses on the ground in a heap.

Samuel tries to collect his thoughts, unsure of his next
move... he glances over towards the edge of the woods in the
distance:

Parson Henry stands there, staring right back at them, wide-
eyed, mouth agape, completely flummoxed.

Samuel motions for Parson to come over.

Parson remains frozen in place, nervously shakes his head
'NO'.

Samuel again motions, more forcefully this time-

SAMUEL
(low)
C'mere!

Parson stalls, unsure what to do.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)
-It's time!

Against his better judgment, Parson Henry reluctantly heads
over. Guitar in one hand, Butterscotch by the reins in the
other. He looks down to avoid eye contact.

Samuel, turning his attention back to Penelope:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Penelope, look, please, just hear me out here. I put a lot of thought and care into this, I wanted it to be special. This is Parson Henry, I brought him all the way out here at my own expense to officiate, so we could conduct things in a righteous and proper fashion.

Penelope looks up in disbelief. Her glare stops the sheepish Parson dead in his tracks.

PENELOPE

Oh my God, what do you think you're doing?!

Fuming, she scrambles to pick up her discarded rifle from the ground, its barrel warped from Samuel's bullet. She POINTS IT AT PARSON, its aim off from the bent barrel; she compensates.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

-Don't you come near me!

PARSON HENRY

(cowering)

I'm not, I'm not!

Parson Henry drops to his knees, covers his hands over his head. Penelope BLASTS THE GUITAR- IT SHATTERS INTO PIECES!

PENELOPE

Stay there!

PARSON HENRY

I am, I am.

SAMUEL

-Please Penelope, just listen please.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

Now she directs the rifle at Samuel.

PENELOPE
SHUT YOUR TRAP!!

Samuel puts up his hands, backs away.

Penelope glances over at Butterscotch, standing in place.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)
What the hell is that?!

SAMUEL
It's Butterscotch, a miniature horse. I named her after one of your favorite candies. I know horehound is your all-time favorite, but it didn't seem as suitable a pet name, and I wanted to pick the one that sounded the best. I put a whole lot of thought into it, it's a wedding gift for you.

PENELOPE
I don't want a wedding gift!

SAMUEL
But I wanted to pick something special, personalized to show you just how I feel. You said that miniature horses were about the cutest, most beautiful critters you've ever seen.

PENELOPE
I never said that!

SAMUEL
Yes you did, you said it when we were in St. Louie-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (11)

PENELOPE

I never said anything like that! At most I said they were interesting-looking! I never said they were my favorite, you're putting words in my mouth all over again!!

Still cowering, crouched down in a ball:

PARSON HENRY

Ma'am, ma'am, please listen to me! I'm not a part of this, I have absolutely no idea what's going on!

SAMUEL

-The hell you're not a part of this, I paid you good and plenty, don't you hang me out to dry! You told me you believe in love, you told me you believe in love all the way!

PENELOPE

-There is no love left, now let's make that loud and clear!

Penelope catches her breath. She's exhausted.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

...I thought I'd seen it all from you Samuel, and oh how I was wrong.

SAMUEL

You can't deny there's a powerful love between us, a true, pure love that goes all the way.

PENELOPE

The only love up here was between me and Anton- and you took that away from me!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (12)

SAMUEL

No, HE took it away from ME, he had it coming in spades!

PENELOPE

No one had anything coming! There is nothing left between us, do you hear me? What do I have to do to make that clear to you? I was happy up here Samuel, I was the happiest I've been in my entire life!

SAMUEL

Anton is a highfalutin' scumbag and you know it, he's clouded your judgment with his lecherous ways! It's *me* who's the victim here, *I'm* trying to save *you*!

Shaking the rifle at him:

PENELOPE

Don't you say another goddammed word you hear me?! I DON'T NEED SAVING!

SAMUEL

Penelope-

PENELOPE

SHUT YOUR TRAP!

She takes a deep breath. She sizes Samuel up, stares deep into his eyes with all her pent up fury:

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

...You are a worthless piece of trash, you're not even a human being. I could NEVER have loved you again, even without you doing this! Do you understand that?! Am I finally getting through to you?!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (13)

That cuts deep, knocks the wind out of his sails.

Samuel is crestfallen, can no longer look her in the eyes.

He searches hard for something to say:

SAMUEL

...You gave me mixed signals.

PENELOPE

I gave you no signals- we've been over with for years! You are poison! I should shoot your head off, right here and now!

SAMUEL

Fine, well why don't you then? Since I'm such a terrible person, the worst person in the whole entire world. Since I'm trash that's not even a human being...

(beat)

Go ahead then, just do it,

Samuel grabs the gun barrel, thumps it against his chest.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

...Right in my broken heart.

Penelope clutches the rifle firmly, adjusts her grip, presses the weight of the barrel into Samuel. He leans in against it, locks eyes with her.

She carefully considers her actions. She breathes through her nose, lips pursed, piercing gaze...

Her mind is racing with a flurry of emotions; she does her best to compose herself, be concise in what she's about to say and do-

PENELOPE

...You're not worth it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (14)

She exhales, lowers the rifle.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

I want you to live with what you've done,
what you've ruined, and what you'll never
have. I want it to rot deep inside you.
For all eternity.

Her painful words finally strike a nerve and soak in.

It's a standoff.

The two former lovers stare at each other in silence;
Penelope with a look of complete disdain, Samuel with sullen
emptiness.

The harsh reality crushes Samuel entirely, leaving him
deflated, lost. He's completely devoid of the confidence and
bravado previously on display.

Several moments go by. Her icy stare beats him down over and
over again.

His eyes glaze over, his will is gone... gives up the fight.

Samuel reaches in his shirt and digs out the locket baring
her image.

He dramatically tugs hard at the chain-

-But it doesn't break. Humiliating. He tugs again. The same.
He leaves it in place as though it were his intention.

Samuel stumbles back in silence, a hollow shell.

He turns around, shuffles over to the OUTHOUSE in the
distance.

Parson Henry looks up, watches.

Samuel climbs inside, carefully closes the door behind him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (15)

A beat of eerie silence. Then-

-BAM!-

The sound of a SINGLE GUNSHOT rings from within the outhouse. A split-second of muzzle flare flickers through the moon cutout in the door. The rickety building wobbles for a moment, stabilizes.

Dead silence. Both Penelope and Parson Henry are stunned.

PARSON HENRY

...Oh consarnit-

PENELOPE

(to Samuel)

-NO! YOU SONOFABITCH!!

Penelope runs over to the outhouse.

She readies herself with the rifle. Uses the barrel to pry the door open, keeping a safe distance.

She cracks it, arches her neck, just barely enough to peek inside-

Penelope stumbles back, mortified. The door SLAMS shut.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

(screaming)

Goddamn you Samuel, goddamn you!!

She repeatedly BEATS the stock of the rifle against the side of the outhouse.

Once she's exhausted herself, she TOSSES the rifle aside and collapses on the ground.

Penelope is completely spent.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (16)

Parson Henry watches on with a sheepish, worried look. He hasn't a clue what to do, and it shows.

She glances over at him with complete disgust:

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

What are you looking at?!

PARSON HENRY

I'm, I'm sorry.

PENELOPE

You're trampling my azaleas. Get the hell out of my azaleas.

Parson steps out of the flower bed.

PARSON HENRY

(pleading)

...He told me you were held for ransom, and that you were his fiancé. He wanted to rescue you and then have me marry the two of ya. That's all I knew, that's it, I swear to Christ infinity. I'm just a dumb neophyte preacher that was trying to help a guy out...

Parson pauses, Penelope remains unsatisfied with his response.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

-I ain't in cahoots with him or anything of the sort, I'm as blindsided as you. Just met him a couple of days ago and I trusted him-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (17)

PENELOPE

Shuttup. I don't want to hear another
goddamn word outta you unless I ask for
it.

Penelope takes a deep breath, rubs her face, collects her
thoughts.

She looks around her at the devastating aftermath...

Finally back at Parson Henry, sizing him up with a cold
steely gaze.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

Now...since you know how to officiate a
wedding, I assume you know how to
officiate a funeral...is that a realistic
assumption?

Parson struggles to speak.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

-Is it, or not?

PARSON HENRY

...I, I reckon it is ma'am.

EXT. WOODS/CLEARING - LATER

Penelope takes a sheet off the clothesline and hands one end
of it to Parson.

She's done crying, at this point she's just numb. All
business.

Positioned on either side of Anton's corpse, they drape the
sheet over him, carefully bundle him up tight. Bloodstains
quickly soak through the white linens.

EXT. WOODS/CLEARING - LATER

Parson is standing in a grave, digging it out.

Penelope watches over him in silence, warped rifle in hand.

Parson stops for a breather.

PARSON HENRY

Is this good enough, ma'am?

PENELOPE

We gotta go deep so animals don't dig him out.

PARSON HENRY

What about Samuel?

PENELOPE

...They can have him for all I care.

EXT. WOODS/CLEARING - LATER

Together Penelope and Parson Henry roll the bundled corpse into the grave.

They get their bearings, stand in silence for a moment, staring down at Anton.

PENELOPE

...How does this work, do I start or do you?

PARSON HENRY

Uh, you I think is fine. Whenever you're ready.

When ready, Penelope decides to speak.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PENELOPE

...Anton, you were a good man, and I
loved you so very much, in more ways than
I could possibly account for right now...

The proceedings are uncomfortable to Parson Henry, and only
add to his guilt about the circumstances.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

It tears me up inside to know we'll never
grow old together, share our lives
together another day. Start a family,
start a copper mine. I'll never forget
you, my sweet, precious love. And may you
find some solace that while you're up
there in heaven on a big fluffy cloud,
that Samuel is rotting in hell...

An uncomfortable silence. Penelope looks over to Parson. He
sheepishly flips open his butchered bible.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

Where's the rest of it?

PARSON HENRY

Well, uh, in my head, more devout that
way.

She's not sure what to make of this.

PENELOPE

Go on then,

Parson Henry takes a deep breath, collects his thoughts.

PARSON HENRY

Hear ye, hear ye. Here lies Anton...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PENELOPE

-Cornell.

PARSON HENRY

Here lies Anton Cornell. He was a good, noble man. And husband. Didn't deserve to go out that way. It was a big dumb goddammed stupid mess. And all Samuel's fault. In the name of all things holy, may he, Anton Cornell, rest in peace forever. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

Parson picks up a handful of dirt off the ground and sprinkles it over the body like he's spicing a rib roast.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

...In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

PENELOPE

Amen.

A beat of awkward silence as they stare down at the body.

Penelope takes the shovel from Parson Henry and begins filling in the grave.

INT/EXT. SHACK - LATER

Penelope alone inside the meager one-room shack.

She lights up a corncob pipe, takes a big drag, sizes up the room.

She picks up a chair, smashes it on the ground. Scatters the broken pieces around.

EXT. CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Parson Henry notices something on the ground, he crouches down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

It's the WEDDING RING. He bites the metal to determine its value, tucks it away.

He looks up at the outhouse in the distance, pauses for a beat, then approaches.

OUTHOUSE

Flies buzz about. With grimaced expression he cracks open the door just enough to slide his arm in. He looks away in disgust as he feels about. Eventually he finds what he's looking for.

He withdraws his arm and reveals a fistful of cash.

Across the way, Penelope carefully backs out of the shack, leading A SPOOL OF DYNAMITE FUSE behind her. She glances up at Parson, yells-

PENELOPE

What are you doing?!

Busted, he stalls momentarily. Embarrassed but desperate enough to not completely cease.

PARSON HENRY

He owed me this, he owed me this for officiating.

He buckles under her gaze.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

...You want half? I'll give you half, I also found the ring if you want it.

PENELOPE

-I don't want anything to do with any of it.

EXT. SHACK - SUNSET

The shack stands in the distance. We pull back to reveal Penelope and Parson Henry facing it from the edge of the woods.

With sober expressions they stare silently for a beat. In Penelope's possession is a dynamite igniter blasting machine.

She grips the wooden handle on top, raises the plunger. Henry winces, plugs his ears.

She purses her lips, forces the plunger down-

THE SHACK EXPLODES INTO A MILLION PIECES! Debris rains down in a cloud of smoke and dust, it's a fantastic sight.

Penelope and Parson Henry stare at the smoldering aftermath in pained, mournful silence. Each with their own brand of baggage that's lead them to this point.

After a beat they speak, continuing to stare ahead:

PARSON HENRY

What happens now?

PENELOPE

I'm done here, moving on.

PARSON HENRY

What about me?

PENELOPE

What about you?

PARSON HENRY

...Are you gonna do me in? Take me into town, get me strung up?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PENELOPE

I don't know yet, should I?

PARSON HENRY

I don't know ma'am.

PENELOPE

What for in particular?

PARSON HENRY

I don't know ma'am. Nothing I guess.
Since it's all on Samuel. We're all just
a bunch of victims.

An eternal sadness in her presence, Penelope mulls her options.

EXT. WOODS/CLEARING - DAWN

The sunrise creeps over the mountains, illuminating the clearing. The lonely outhouse sits in the distance.

Parson Henry is half-awake beneath a tree, upright with a noose around his neck. Arms tied behind his back. We pull back to reveal he's seated upon Butterscotch. But the horse's size is such that Parson's legs touch the ground; it's more ridiculous than perilous.

Penelope is asleep. She spoons the grave now marked by a makeshift wooden cross, inscribed with the name of her one true love "ANTON". She looks strangely peaceful there.

Parson watches, looking for an excuse to engage.

PARSON HENRY

...For every forty winks I get, at least
ten of 'em are bad dreams. Sometimes, I
bite my tongue in my sleep.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

When I'm under duress. Sides get jaggy
like the shape of my teeth.

She squints at him, confused.

PENELOPE

...What?

PARSON HENRY

Nothing.

Parson Henry looks around for a beat.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

Miss Penelope, I'm of the bashful sort.
In light of the, the outhouse being
occupied, I, I'm gonna go relieve myself
in the woods as tastefully and discreetly
as possible, alright?

Penelope looks back, sizes him up.

PENELOPE

...Don't do anything stupid.

PARSON HENRY

...Yes Ma'am.

Penelope unbinds his ropes.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Parson Henry enters the woods, glances over his shoulder to
make sure he's in the clear. He frantically looks around for
the rifle he'd discarded the day before.

He lifts a fallen branch, finds the gun below.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He glances up, something catches his eye; through the trees-
the tied-up horses he and Samuel rode in on...

WOODS/CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Penelope looks into a cracked hand mirror as she
frustratingly brushes the knots from her hair.

She glances down to see that Butterscotch has joined her,
gazing up with its big glossy eyes. She's suspicious, but
reluctantly warms up to the cute little critter. She pets the
horse, takes her brush to its silken mane.

For a brief moment, it soothes her.

She glances at the woods, holds a beat; Parson is taking too
long.

WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Parson frantically dusts off the rifle, examines it, clears
the chamber, blows into it.

PENELOPE (O.S.)

(shouting)

-Parson?!

He freezes for a beat to make up his mind, wheels turning,
what to do, what to do...he clutches the rifle firmly against
his chest...

Leave it.

Parson hurriedly covers the rifle with twigs and dirt. He
drags a log overtop, dusts off his hands.

WOODS/CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Penelope gazes at the edge of the woods, suspiciously.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In the distance Parson emerges, unarmed, waves halfheartedly.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

Parson Henry leads on horseback as he and Penelope make their way through the mountain pass. Penelope is on Samuel's horse, Butterscotch scuttles along at the rear.

Upon closer inspection we see that a bundle of dynamite is secured to Parson Henry's chest, the spiraling fuse dangles behind, connecting to the igniter box resting on Penelope's lap and saddle. Neither of them find comfort in this dynamic, though Parson is compliant with the hand he's been dealt.

After they ride for a while in silence, Parson chimes in:

PARSON HENRY

...Do you want to lead the pack?

PENELOPE

No.

PARSON HENRY

...Because you might know the way better,
we came up a different way.

PENELOPE

I prefer this way. I'll tell you if
you're doing anything wrong.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN STREAM - LATER

A brief stop. The horses, big and small, drink from the tumbling stream.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Parson Henry removes his boot and shakes some pebbles out.
From a hole in his sock his big toe juts out.

Penelope uncorks a tiny jug and takes a pull from it.

PARSON HENRY

If that's hooch may I have a nip? I'm
hurtin' for one.

She looks at him suspiciously.

PENELOPE

You're not a real preacher, are you?

PARSON HENRY

...It's for medicinal purposes.

She tosses the jug over.

PENELOPE

Don't backwash.

Parson takes a big exasperated gulp from it. Sighs.

PARSON HENRY

I'm as real as anything else out here.

(beat)

...Are we going back to town?

PENELOPE

I reckon so. Maybe I'll get you strung up
there.

PARSON HENRY

If that's the case get it over with. I
ain't putting up a fight.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - LATER

A picturesque view from a distance, as Samuel and Penelope traverse the expansive landscape.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - LATER

Penelope rides along in silence. With a somber disposition she gazes at the horizon before her- a BIRCH FOREST.

Gradually her eyes begin to well-up. She fights hard to hold back the tears but her emotions get the better of her.

This angers Penelope, her stone-cold veneer is showing some cracks. She pulls back on the horse's bridle.

PENELOPE

-Hold tight here.

Penelope climbs down, rifle in hand, runs to the woods.

Parson Henry stops, looks back, confused.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Penelope scuttles through a forest of birch. She pauses only to light up her corn-cob pipe, then continues. Her actions are hurried and intense.

She scans the trees for something, something specific. Tree after tree, to no avail.

Then, before a particular birch she stops and gazes, catches her breath.

Deep into the chalk-white birch bark, a jagged heart has been carved. Within it the following inscription:

"P + A = LUV"

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Penelope leans her forehead against the heart, clutches the tree. As tears stream down her face she grips the trunk angrily, beats it with her fists. She finds this vulnerability deplorable.

Between sobs she mutters through gritted teeth, eventually trailing off...

Suddenly Parson Henry approaches from behind.

PARSON HENRY

-Miss Penelope, are you ok?

She doesn't answer. He looks around, tries again.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

...I can feel your pain, and understand what you must be going through. I, I'm haunted by my own share of demons.

She keeps her back to him.

PENELOPE

-You don't understand a thing.

PARSON HENRY

...I want to be of help if I can.

Parson searches, desperately, for something to say...

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

For what it's worth, you're uh, you're a real beaut. As divine and delicate and pretty a flower as Samuel said you were.

Penelope pulls herself together, turns to him, incredulous.

PENELOPE

Is that a line?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PARSON HENRY

No, no.

She raises her rifle at him.

PENELOPE

-I don't need your foolhardy consolation.
You got that?!

She realizes the rifle's bent barrel is not directed at Parson; she compensates so it is.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

Now vamoose before I blow out your
fuckin' lamp.

PARSON HENRY

...Ok.

Parson backs off.

PENELOPE

And put your dynamite back on!

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - MOMENTS LATER

Parson Henry returns to the trail, defeated.

He starts to put the dynamite on, carefully draping the roped bundle over him- then stops in a big huff. He sets it back down, mutters in pissy, unintelligible conversation with himself.

PARSON HENRY

(under his breath)

I don't *wanna* wear the dynamite.

He glances back at the woods, then takes the tiny jug from the old grey mare's satchel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Pulls the cork, peers inside and shakes the few last drops into his gaping maw. He gazes at the horizon with pursed lips, stewing.

Then he addresses the old grey mare:

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

Do you know who Horace Greeley is? Now I didn't say "Horse" Greeley, I'm talking about *Hor-ace*. He was a very famous and important newspaper person, and he famously told everyone "Go West Young Man." That's a quote. "Go West Young Man." As though everything were going to be OK. And it's bullshit. Bull. Shit. And I don't *wanna* wear the dynamite.

Penelope emerges from the woods, composed as best she can. Looks around.

PENELOPE

-Where's Butterscotch?

Parson Henry glances around, confused.

PARSON HENRY

Uh, I don't know. I thought she was right here.

PENELOPE

There's predators out here.

Parson and Penelope trot off in different directions looking for Butterscotch, calling, whistling...

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

Butterscotch!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PARSON HENRY

Butterscotch!

PENELOPE

C'mere girl, c'mon, time to go!

They each whistle, wade through the tall grasses on their search...

PARSON HENRY

Butterscotch!

Parson pushes aside some grass, finds Butterscotch hunkered down, resting.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

She's over here!

Penelope hurries over.

PENELOPE

Is she all right?

PARSON HENRY

Yeah, I think she's just resting is all.

They both crouch beside Butterscotch. A moment of peace as they stroke her mane, scratch under her chin...

-Suddenly a man's shrill voice screams out from the distance:

MAN(OS)

PENELOPE!!

Penelope and Parson Henry exchange a nervous glance; they're caught off guard.

Penelope cautiously steps back out onto the trail.

TRAIL - CONTINUOUS

A silhouette on horseback approaches from the distance. Gun firmly in hand, raised to the sky.

As he nears we recognize him as Rufus, the buckskin-clad trapper whom Samuel had previously chased through the woods.

RUFUS

Penelope!

He's battered and bruised from his fall. Penelope is genuinely concerned, unsettled by his presence.

PENELOPE

Rufus! Oh my God!

Rufus hurriedly climbs down from his horse, haggard but intense. He limps towards her.

RUFUS

I saw you duck off into the bushes, you trying to avoid me?

PENELOPE

What are you talking about, of course not. What happened to you?

RUFUS

What the hell do you think happened?!

Baffled, Penelope considers for a beat.

PENELOPE

...Samuel?

RUFUS

Yep,

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PENELOPE

When?

RUFUS

-Threw me off a crevasse, left me for dead. My head was cracked open, ants were trying to eat my blood. Gawddamn ants, what'd I do to them, huh?!

PENELOPE

Rufus I'm so sorry, c'mere let me take a look.

She gently attempts to touch his head; Rufus pushes her hand away.

RUFUS

You knew what happened to me, didn't you?

Penelope stands her ground.

PENELOPE

-No of course not, how would I?

(beat)

Do you have any idea what hell I've been through?

Rufus stares at her for a beat, trying to read her.

RUFUS

...Anton's gone, isn't he?

PENELOPE

...I'm afraid so, it's truly horrible, I'm sorry. It was the worst thing ever.

Rufus is shattered. Simply mentioning it is too much. He wells up as he stares Penelope in the eye.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RUFUS

I saw the grave. I may not be able to read, but I know what the letter "A" looks like. It's the first letter in the alphabet.

PENELOPE

I'm so sorry Rufus. All I can say is that Samuel's gone as well. He's in hell. And your brother's in heaven. On a big white fluffy cloud.

Lips pursed, Rufus glances up at the clouds in the sky. Just regular clouds. He takes a beat to compose his thoughts, then:

RUFUS

...This is all your fault. You're a regular black widow, aren't you? Screw up everything you touch.

That stings.

PENELOPE

...Rufus, you're hurt, and angry, and I completely understand. There's a lot of pain going around right now. But you've got no right talking to me like that...

Rufus loses the staring contest, opts out of dignifying Penelope with a response.

He glances at the bushes beside the trail-

He sees Parson Henry's pathetic attempt at hiding amongst the vegetation: hunched over, peeking through the leaves.

Rufus cocks his gun, directs it at Parson-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RUFUS

Why don't you come out, you big dumb
yellow-bellied lily-livered pussy.

Parson Henry sheepishly steps out into the trail, his hands
raised.

PARSON HENRY

Neither of us knows anything sir.

RUFUS

Shut the fuck up. The hell you don't. I
saw you in cahoots with Samuel, I know
what's goin' on. Y'all are all in
cahoots!

PENELOPE

Rufus! Snap out of it and listen to
reason here!

RUFUS

-Do you have any idea how much my brother
loved you? I thought you two were the
real deal!

PENELOPE

We were! I'm the victim here Rufus, I've
lost everything!

RUFUS

Then why'd you tell Samuel where you guys
moved to?! Huh? Why'd you have to go and
do that? I thought that was the whole
point?

PENELOPE

-I didn't!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

RUFUS

-How else would he know?!

She reconsiders...

PENELOPE

...If I did, it was a long time ago and I mentioned it in passing's all...I don't remember though, I'd have never thought he'd come out and pull this- I hadn't even seen him in almost two years!

RUFUS

-Then why you hanging out with his posse?!

PENELOPE

There was no posse, just Samuel being a rat bastard on his own accord, and that's it!

PARSON HENRY

Sir, I swear I'm not his posse, I don't even know anything.

RUFUS

-Aw poppycock! What kind of reject preacher are you anyway, huh?!

PENELOPE

-Rufus you need to calm down and listen!

Rufus tears up.

RUFUS

My big brother is gone, and you're to blame. You're not who I thought you were, you've let me down, you've let Anton down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Penelope is distraught, frustrated.

PENELOPE

Goddammit Rufus hobble your lip! Now Anton and I had our occasional troubles, as any couple does, but I loved him very much, and was very happy.

(beat)

How do I get that through your thick skull?!

PARSON HENRY

She's telling the truth Rufus. It's all Samuel, and that's it-

Rufus snaps, PISTOL-WHIPS Parson Henry upside the head-sending him to the ground.

RUFUS

Shut your fuckin' trap preach!

PENELOPE

Rufus!

Penelope SMACKS Rufus across his face-

Rufus winces. He recovers, he looks her right in the eye, and is struck with a new thought. It settles in, and he addresses her with a sort of pathetic sincerity:

RUFUS

You know what we have to do now, don't you?

Penelope takes pause.

PENELOPE

...what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

RUFUS

You know, when a, a woman becomes widowed, it's customary for her to uh, you know, marry the sibling of the deceased.

PENELOPE

...Those ants did a number on you, 'cause you're out of your goddamned mind.

RUFUS

It's the Code of the Prairie.

PENELOPE

No it's not Rufus. There's no cahoots, no code, and there ain't gonna be any marriage.

RUFUS

Oh yeah well I got a six-gun that says otherwise. It's nature's way. And Preach here is gonna do the ceremony. Then I'm gonna hang him, for vengeance-style. Then we'll start anew and carry on the plans for the copper mine you and Anton had. Now both of you, over here reach for the sky.

PENELOPE

Rufus!

RUFUS

-I mean it!

Rufus directs them with his gun. Penelope and Parson Henry reluctantly comply. Penelope mad as hell, Parson battered and bruised.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

RUFUS (CONT'D)

Don't do anything stupid.

Keeping his pistol on them, Rufus pulls some rope from his saddle. He uncoils it and begins to fashion it into a noose. He shifts his attention back and forth between his task and the captives.

It quickly becomes clear that Rufus has no idea how to tie a noose. His frustration and embarrassment turns to anger.

RUFUS (CONT'D)

Goddammit. Either of you know how to do this?

PARSON HENRY

I'm terrible with knots.

PENELOPE

Quit now Rufus. This is madness and it ain't gonna happen.

In a fit Rufus spikes the half-assed noose to the ground and FIRES his pistol off in the air.

RUFUS

Well if it don't I'm gonna shoot the both of you and leave ya for dead! I've been through hell, I'm done!

PENELOPE

...I'm with child, did you know that?

Rufus, perplexed, takes a step back,

RUFUS

Wha,

He sneaks a glance at her stomach. So does Parson.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

RUFUS (CONT'D)

...No you're not.

PENELOPE

Am too. You kill me and you also kill your baby kinfolk. How's that settle with you?

Rufus doesn't answer, looks away.

RUFUS

...How do I even know it's my true kinfolk, huh?

PENELOPE

I'm not going to waste another minute trying to convince you how much I loved your brother, how much he meant to me. You know it, you saw it, and if you're going to go on challenging the validity of my feelings you can go to hell.

Rufus remains somber, quiet, as does Henry.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

...I'm going to town to see the doctor, I've been through a lot of stress and I want to make sure everything is all right. I don't wanna hurt you, but I'm not going to let you pin this all on me neither. This guy was just a goddamned tagalong stool-pigeon preacher and that's it.

Parson looks down.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

And if you actually think I'd do this you're the biggest moron of all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

Rufus sighs, defeated.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

Now you're going to let us go, with no hassle whatsoever. I'm going to the doctor, you're gonna go back up to your place and get some much needed rest. Milk your goat, get better, start anew by yourself. Is that clear? We're going to make the best we can out of this awful situation.

RUFUS

...You think it's a, you think it's a boy, or a girl?

PENELOPE

I don't know...

RUFUS

...I've always wanted to be an uncle...

BUTTERSCOTCH SAUNTERS INTO VIEW; Rufus glances curiously at the miniature horse.

WHATHUMP! - Suddenly Rufus JOLTS TO A HALT!

Rufus GROANS, WINCES. He looks down at his chest. There's a PROTRUSION from under his buckskin shirt, jutting outward without breaking through the fabric.

He glances at Penelope and Parson Henry, confused, as are they.

Rufus stumbles into a profile, revealing the other half of THE ARROW lodged deep in the center of his back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

He struggles to pull back and grab it, extending his fingers as far as they'll go, but the arrow's just barely out of reach.

RUFUS (CONT'D)

God-dammit!!

He loses his balance, collapses. Penelope rushes to his side as he falls to the ground.

Parson Henry crouches, glances around frantically at the surrounding woods.

Penelope cradles Rufus in her arms, distraught as ever. He gazes up at her, mouth agape, with a hollow, perplexed stare.

RUFUS (CONT'D)

How did you, why did you, do this to me?!

PENELOPE

I didn't do anything to you! You're my goddamned brother-in-law!

As Rufus stares deep into her eyes, his breathing becomes more labored,

RUFUS

...You always were so frickin' beautiful.
Like a peach.

He thoughtlessly reaches towards her breast, she pushes his hand away.

RUFUS (CONT'D)

Anton always got the peaches. All I got was pears, and rotten ones at that.

A subtle drip of blood trickles down from his nostril. Rufus pushes himself back, climbs up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (11)

One raspy breath after the next, he stumbles off into the distance. Wheezing, desperately trying to maintain balance.

In the distance is the pile of dynamite and ignitor box, plunger raised. Rufus carelessly stumbles in that direction, teetering back and forth, to and fro.

PENELOPE

-RUFUS!

Wobbling side to side, hunched over, as he slowly, inadvertently nears it in the distance. Then, sure enough, he slips and collapses against the dynamite plunger-

AN INSTANT EXPLOSION OF DUST AND SMOKE!

And then Rufus is no more.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

-NO!

What the hell. Parson watches pitifully, helplessly, biting down on his lower lip. Penelope once again struggles to compose herself. Both shell-shocked.

Also watching, standing over is AN AMERICAN INDIAN, wearing a mix of traditional and white man's garb(top hat, tails, loincloth). He approaches, bow in hand.

INDIAN

Are you alright ma'am?

They jump to a start. Penelope is petrified; Parson is in awe-finally a bona fide American Indian.

PENELOPE

Who the hell are you, why'd you do that?!

She grabs Rufus's gun, raises it. The Indian steps back, raises his hands to show he's not a threat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (12)

INDIAN

Zachariah Running Bear is my name. Why I did that is because you were in danger.

PENELOPE

I had it under control!

PARSON HENRY

He was just trying to save us Penelope,

PENELOPE

(screaming)

I don't need anybody's saving!

CUT TO:

WOODS - LATER

Using her foot, Penelope draws a line in the forest floor around her. She runs it back and forth creating a demarcation of sorts.

She rests beside a tree deep in thought, contemplating everything she's been through. Frazzled, wrecked from the course of events. Butterscotch stands nearby.

She strikes a match against the trunk and lights her corncob pipe. She takes a long pull; could be tobacco, could be something else. Either way she desperately needs it right now.

We hear the sound of CHOPPING. Penelope looks up- through the array of birch in the distance, Zachariah breaks up firewood with a hatchet.

Peering from behind a tree, Parson Henry gazes longingly at the Native American, following his every move.

He glances over at Penelope, gingerly approaches. Searches for something to say. She speaks without looking up-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PENELOPE

...I cheated on him once.

The tangent takes a beat to register.

PARSON HENRY

...Who? Anton?

PENELOPE

No, Samuel. I'd never cheat on Anton. It was at a quilting bee. Not that it justified any of this shit. Sam never knew anyway. He probably did it too. Wasn't a healthy union. It was with Anton though...

PARSON HENRY

...Did um, did you want me to do any kind of procession or fancy religious talk?

PENELOPE

For Rufus?

PARSON HENRY

Yeah,

PENELOPE

He's kablooey, Parson. You can't do a funeral for someone that's kablooey. There's nothing left to say anyway.

WOODS - NIGHT

It's nightfall. Parson Henry and Penelope watch as Zachariah tends to the fire. Everyone is tired, somber. They watch in silence as the flames crackle and build.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Penelope watches with an untrusting eye, keeps her distance. Parson, quite the opposite, gazes in humble awe. Zachariah serves them each a plate of beans.

Penelope takes Butterscotch to the other side of the camp and hunkers down for the night, rifle at her side, Rufus's pistol in her waistband.

With her foot she retraces her line in the dirt.

PENELOPE

This is my personal boundary. If either of you try anything off-kilter you'll regret it.

WOODS - LATER

Penelope is completely huddled with Butterscotch. She's spent but calmer. The animal she initially rejected now undeniably has a soothing affect on her.

Parson Henry and Zachariah sit side by side watching the fire.

PARSON HENRY

...Those were maybe the best beans I ever had.

ZACHARIAH

Thank you.

PARSON HENRY

...Say, you don't have any firewater, do you? I sure could use some,

ZACHARIAH

No.

Parson sighs. Zachariah glances at Penelope, sleeping across the way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ZACHARIAH (CONT'D)

...Is the white lady taken?

PARSON HENRY

Um, I guess so. So to speak. She has a personal boundary.

Parson contemplates what he'll next say...

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

I've never met a real Indian before, or noble savage of any kind.

Zachariah looks Parson Henry in the eye with a calm, patient but piercing stare.

ZACHARIAH

(droll)

It's your lucky day.

PARSON HENRY

Which tribe are you? Can I guess?

ZACHARIAH

No.

PARSON HENRY

I understand, it's probably more sacred that way.

Parson looks away, thinks for a beat. Then leans over, speaking in hushed tones and with the utmost sincerity:

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

...I'd like to make you a proposition.

Zachariah watches,

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

I sit here before you an empty vessel, a soulless neophyte of paleface proportions. With all my heart I beg of you to consider whisking me away to wherever it is you call home, be it your teepee, wigwam, cave or whatever, teaching me your native tongue and traditions, pemmican, showing me the way of your people. I'd be most grateful, and feel it's a win-win situation for everyone.

Parson Henry glances across the way at Penelope, fast asleep.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

We don't even have to tell the white lady, could just go now under the cover of darkness.

Zachariah is silent, contemplative, uncomfortable. Parson removes the arrowhead from his pocket.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

Here, this is for you. An arrowhead.

He passes it over.

Zachariah is genuinely weirded out by the desperation and sadness on display.

ZACHARIAH

...What's wrong with you?

PARSON HENRY

I need a fresh start.

(beat)

I'd even let you scalp me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

ZACHARIAH

...Why would I want to do that?

PARSON HENRY

I don't know, I'm just in desperate need
of a fresh start.

Zachariah stares right through him, in complete befuddlement.

ZACHARIAH

...Let's sleep on it.

PARSON HENRY

Okay. Good idea.

They turn in for the night, each lay on their side. Parson facing Zachariah's back, not too far off from a spooning configuration.

After a beat, Zachariah scoots a few feet away so as to keep a safe distance.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

Break of day.

In the distance, obscured by the array of birch, we see SEVERAL VULTURES picking at remains of what are presumably some portion of Rufus.

WOODS - CONTINUOUS

The fire's remnants smoldering.

Parson Henry is fast asleep.

Penelope long since awake, is on horseback, packed and ready to go. She stares at him for a beat, then raises her pistol in the air, FIRES!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Parson Henry wakes with a start!

PENELOPE

-Get up.

He rubs his eyes, stretches, groggy.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

The Injun left before dawn, took yours
and Rufus's horse.

PARSON HENRY

What? But he-

Parson looks around, squints. Zachariah is nowhere in sight.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

Damn. That's just no good at all, why'd
he do that?

Parson sighs. Penelope stares down at him with a piercing
gaze, thinks for a beat...

PENELOPE

Are you a preacher or not?

PARSON HENRY

...Well, not in the conventional sense,
but my heart's in the right place.

(beat)

Are you really with child?

Penelope hesitates, uncomfortable being on this end of the
questioning.

PENELOPE

...No, not that it's any of your
business.

(beat)

...I wish I was, but I'm not.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She flips the reins, the horse moves onward.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS/VARIOUS SHOTS - DAY

A series of shots. Penelope, Parson and Butterscotch work their way down the mountain.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER - DAY

A different part of the river from where Parson Henry crossed earlier.

A rickety wooden suspension bridge dangling over the water.

Penelope and company work their way across it.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRASSY PLAIN - DAY

A vast plain. Penelope, Henry and the horses traverse in single file. Henry is zoned out from the monotony of the ride.

Penelope is deep in a pensive state.

EXT. CREEKSIDE - DAY

Penelope dismounts her horse, walks it over to a creek to drink. Henry and Butterscotch replenish themselves as well.

Penelope looks around, gazes in the distance:

The feeble excuse for a town sits in the distant horizon.

Penelope pulls back on her reins, they all come to a stop.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PENELOPE

...This is where we part ways.

Parson bears a look of confusion, he's caught off guard, searches for something to say.

PARSON HENRY

...Now?

PENELOPE

Yep.

Befuddled, he tries to read her,

PARSON HENRY

...That's it?

PENELOPE

That's it. I'm done. Want me to change my mind?

PARSON HENRY

...No.

She takes a swing from her canteen, refills it in the creek.

Parson Henry looks around at the expansive nothingness around them. Even though his life is spared he almost seems disappointed. He glances over at Butterscotch.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

...Are you, are you gonna take Butterscotch?

She looks at the miniature horse, considers...

PENELOPE

No.

She thinks for a beat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

...I know I don't know everything, but I know as much as I can handle, and I'd just like to leave it at that.

Parson searches for something to say but has nothing. He's overcome with emotion. He impulsively wraps his arms around her with a firm embrace, holds her close for a beat.

With chin nestled against her shoulder he mutters softly:

PARSON HENRY

-I'm sorry.

She shoves him back with a combined look of fear and disgust.

With a piercing stare she mounts her horse and trots off.

Parson Henry watches with a pathetic hangdog expression, Butterscotch at his side. He is a broken man...

He removes the wedding ring from his pocket, looks it over. Looks back at her.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

(shouting)

PENELOPE!

He snaps into action, runs after her-

Penelope pulls back on her horse's reins, turns around, reticent.

Parson catches up, exhausted and delirious.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

Penelope. Hold on for a minute, please. I'm standing here thinking, what am I supposed to do next? Where am I supposed to go from here?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PENELOPE

-That's not my problem,

PARSON HENRY

-But I look at you and I wonder the same thing. I mean I came out here for a fresh start, but it's just so dagblurn tough, so dagblurn uninviting, so dagblurn lonely. I mean look at this wasteland, how the hell is anyone supposed to meet anyone out here, let alone someone you can trust, huh? So, so badly I miss having someone to love me. But even moreso, I miss having someone to give my love to.

Parson Henry gestures with the ring.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

...In light of the harsh and unsavory circumstances that bind us, is it so unreasonable to suggest we make a go of it together in this here hostile environment?

Penelope watches in silence, lips pursed, breathing through her nose. Collected but too stunned to respond. She climbs off her horse.

She peers through him with an icy stare. Her eyes well-up.

She picks up a ROCK, HURLS it at Parson, STRIKING HIS NOSE WITH A RESOUNDING 'THUNK'.

He drops the ring, falls to the ground in a heap, groans, clutching his busted bloody nose.

Penelope picks up the ring. She bites it to determine its value. It's the real deal. She tucks it away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

She stares down at Parson, a flurry of emotions pour through her- pity, contempt, confusion. She begins to speak, then stops herself.

Parson props himself up, looks up at her, searches for something to say, then spits it out:

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

...My wife died during childbirth.

She ignores him, has had enough. Glances at Butterscotch.

Parson watches as she takes the tiny beaut by its reins. She climbs back upon her horse, shaken, fuming.

PARSON HENRY (CONT'D)

All I want is love, love and survival's
all I want.

PENELOPE

You're not exclusive in that notion.

Parson Henry watches longingly as Penelope rides off into the horizon, Butterscotch in tow.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Parson Henry shuffles along, infinitely more haggard than when he left the town. His nose broken, crusted with blood.

He stops at the saloon from the beginning.

INT/EXT. SALOON - MOMENTS LATER

Parson Henry flops down at the bar.

PARSON HENRY

Rotgut please.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The bartender serves him up.

The band strikes up a lonesome ballad: "Ribbon of Darkness". At first the OLD COWBOY takes the vocals, then the bar's patrons join in.

After a few shots of booze, Parson Henry reluctantly joins in as well.

In his hand he cradles the LOCKET WITH PENELOPE'S PHOTO.

CUT TO:

EXT. COASTLINE/BEACH - DAY

The music from the previous scene continues.

Penelope carefully loads up Butterscotch into the beached rowboat from the beginning.

She pushes it out into the water, climbs aboard.

EXT. OPEN WATER - DAY

Penelope, tired but focused as ever, pulls the rowboat's oars over rolling waves.

Butterscotch rests in the bottom of the boat.

FADE TO BLACK.