



Bloodlist 14

THE HORSE KILLERS

Story by

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FADE IN:

EXT. EXPANSIVE PRAIRIE - ESTABLISHING - DAWN

God's Country -- A land of sweeping plains and sage; of stone spires that puncture sky. Majestic, even in the cold grey.

In ten years, this will be the Wyoming Territory. But now, it's a merciless kind of wild. Magnificent and perilous and unknown. A wild that breaks men. Swaddled in silence, until--

The sound of CREAKING WOOD echoes across the expanse...

DRAWING US to the quaint HOMESTEAD nestled in the frontier. And to the FIGURE stepping out in men's work clothes...

A TEENAGE GIRL, it happens. Her breath FOGS the morning air as she sets off down the porch steps.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS

We get the unofficial tour as she crosses the property--

A disassembled WAGON is slumped out front, in mid-repair. An empty CORRAL extends a good fifty yards just beyond, ending at a large STONE MILL.

As for the girl... There's something you can't help but notice as she walks... Her walk *itself*, actually. It's a clumsy gait. Gimped. As though one leg won't *quite* listen.

She arrives at the mill all the same. ROTATES a rusted crank, and a large SLIDING DOOR slowly lurches open... Peeling back the darkness inside--

INT. MILL - CONTINUOUS

Glimpses of EQUINE TOOLS in the spilling light... Bridles and saddles and such things.

And in the CUSTOM STALLS along the side -- WAITING HORSES. Mustangs. Half a dozen or so, heads propped lazily on their gates. SNORTING... Excited by this prospect of breakfast.

A shaft of daylight catches the girl's smile as she greets her companions. A proper introduction to AMELIA WHITMAN (17).

AMELIA
Mornin', fellas.

INT. MILL STABLES - MOMENTS LATER

Amelia gets to work -- Wading through the ropes dangling from the loft above. She finds one with a twin-tethered HOOK and stabs it into a FEED BAG atop a large stack.

Then goes to an APPARATUS on the wall, with knotted ropes and spoked gears and pulleys... A frontier mechanism of her own design, which she operates with practiced confidence--

TURNING the CRANK... Hoisting the BAG up using the overhead pulleys, retracting it toward a corner of the mill...

It locks there -- CLICK! Suspended, like a pendulum before the swing. Inches from a secured SCYTHE BLADE in its path.

Amelia WHISTLES and the horses step back in unison.

She clutches a ROPE knotted to a wall peg -- Yanks it free, and SWOOSH-! The BAG swings... SLICES OPEN on the blade... And spills its CORN into the horse feeding buckets below!

Just like that, the bag is empty and the horses are fed.

Amelia looks to the horses, pleased... Then spots the one that didn't move -- Corn matted in its mane. She laughs.

AMELIA

You are so dumb, Marcel.

INT. THIRD STALL - MINUTES LATER

Amelia SCRAPES dried clay from the hoof of a sleek black steed, PUZZLE. The Horse FLAPS its lips. Amelia counters--

AMELIA

Fine, gallop twenty miles with shit
in your hoof, see if I care.

She shakes her head with a smile.

INT. FOURTH STALL - MINUTES LATER

Amelia bandages the leg of a spotted horse, GYPSY, who keeps shoving his head in the way. Amelia gently brushes him aside.

AMELIA

This'll never get better if you
keep picking at it.

INT. MILL STABLES -- MINUTES LATER

Amelia strains to depress a WATER PUMP by the troughs, but its not budging, despite her outlandish GRUNTS. She looks to the chestnut horse, SUMMER, watching with disapproval.

AMELIA

I am strong, you ninny! Rusted.

As an OBNOXIOUS METAL SQUEAKING pulls us to--

EXT. MILL STABLES - MORNING

Amelia drags a large BUCKET, following along a METAL IRRIGATION PIPE that runs from the mill behind her...

To the WELL just ahead... Or basically a large hole in the ground with a basic pulley rigged above it.

She ties off the bucket and drops it over the edge... Down into the depths... Finally hits water with a PLOONK-!

She goes to draw it up, when--

A PAINED SQUEAL erupts from nearby-! It JOLTS Amelia-- Foot SLIPPING over the watery abyss -- Kicking dirt --

But she catches a wooden post in the nick of time-!

Amelia hugs it a moment. Steadies herself. *Breathes*. Then-- Casts her gaze to the nearby TREE LINE.

But there's nothing. Silence.

AMELIA

Hello..?!

She peers into the foliage. And it comes again...

The SQUEAL. Then a RAPPORT of HOOVES. Growing louder as FLICKERS appear through the brush...

Just glimpses, but... It's a HORSE. Saddled but riderless. Erratic -- Like it's trying to buck an invisible cowboy.

Then it's gone. Like a specter. *Was it ever there?* Amelia loiters a moment. Trying to process this...

Then she hobbles off in steadfast pursuit.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Amelia clammers across fallen trees and ditches.

Following the SOUNDS... Labored breathing...
CRUNCHING of leaves... Growing louder. *Closer.*

Then-- GLIMPSES of the horse. Just beyond a wall of brush.
Amelia gathers her resolve... And SHOVES THROUGH--

EXT. GROTTO - CONTINUOUS

The horse has cornered itself against a rocky escarpment,
shrouded in shadow. Haunting WHINNIES echo off the stone.

Amelia creeps toward it, her eyes fighting to adjust...

AMELIA

It's okay... It's okay...

The words barely leave her mouth when--

An ABSOLUTE HELLBEAST propels from the darkness--!

Amelia TUMBLES backward -- Cowering, hands raised --
Glimpsing the terror between her fingers--

CHAMPING TEETH and RAGING EYES and BLOOD-SPECKED MADNESS.

The great horse REARS -- Amelia rolls to safety *just* as its
HOOVES CRASH, cratering the earth inches from her face.

It canters away, mouth foamy. Amelia watches...
And now she sees something very different--

Just an animal. Panicked. *Hurting.*

And she's done cowering. Just like that.
Steeling as she rises to meet its next advance--

AMELIA (CONT'D)

No.

The horse doesn't seem to know what to make of that.
It just... freezes. Then STAMPS back in retreat.

It starts another LUNGE -- A sort of territorial dance...
But Amelia plays a trump card -- Pulling a PEPPERMINT STICK
from a RED LEATHER POUCH. She extends it and the horse stops.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Come on.

Not pleading or commanding, more... a foregone conclusion.

It takes a moment... But *something* is happening.
The horse jerks its head, BRAYING... And the panic wanes.

He approaches Amelia slowly. Leans in to lick the candy...

And Amelia glides instantly to his side, hand on his crest.
The horse twitches, skittish... But it doesn't reject her.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Where did you come from, friend?

She runs a hand through his mane. Examines his battered form.
But something stops her cold--

LINES of DRIED BLOOD running down from beneath the saddle.

INT. SEVENTH STALL - DAY

Amelia walks the horse into the empty stall. No reins, just
leading him by touch of hand. We'll christen this boy FERAL.

Amelia latches his SADDLE to a hanging mount, then uses a
pulley to PEEL it free, Feral SQUEALING as it comes off.

Amelia PLUNKS the saddle to the ground.

She examines Feral's back -- Several small PUNCTURE WOUNDS
glisten with fresh blood. Her eyes narrow, pondering.

AMELIA

These aren't from bullets...

She wedges her good foot under the saddle. FLIPS IT--

BLOODY SPIKES line the underside. Like little talons.
Engineered this way. Built to inflict pain.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

What is this..?

Her eyes survey the saddle... The deep stains in its crudely-
stitched leather... The twisted architecture of the horn...
A hellish thing. An embodiment of cruelty and malice...

ON AMELIA -- Entranced with dread... Paralyzed as her mind
spins on terrible possibilities. And *right* as her fear peaks--

A VOICE (O.C.)

'MELIA!

She SCREAMS, tumbling back.

And immediately WHIRLS on SAMUEL WHITMAN (10), who CACKLES from atop the stall gate.

AMELIA
Samuel, you little weasel!

She HURLS the water bucket. He dodges with ease.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
Don't you have chores?

SAMUEL
I'll do 'em later.

AMELIA
Do 'em now. Get that bucket.

Samuel didn't hear that -- He's already locked onto their new guest, hopping from the gate with Christmastime fervor.

SAMUEL
Whoa! Look at all that blood!

Amelia SNATCHES Samuel in a flash, fingernails in his arm.

AMELIA
Shh! You wanna get Pa worked up?

He shoots her a look, like -- *Do I look like an idiot?*
She volleys back a sisterly eyebrow -- *I dunno, DO you?*

She releases him all the same.

SAMUEL
Is he an express horse?

AMELIA
No... Some kind of old breed.
He's fine-pointed.

SAMUEL
What happened to him?

AMELIA
Someone... hurt him. Like they
meant to hurt him.

SAMUEL
What for?

AMELIA
I really couldn't say.

SAMUEL

I'll bet you it was Crow. Wally Trimble at the Fort says the Crow scalp kids and cows alike.

AMELIA

Wally Trimble tried to pull a wagon with sheepdogs.

SAMUEL

And it *almost* worked.

AMELIA

Crow are great horsemen. They'd know better than to treat an animal like this.

(pause)

This is something else.

Samuel finds the upturned saddle on the ground. Pokes a finger at the BLOODY SPIKES--

SAMUEL

Holy smokes!

And Feral REARS at the sight--
Stumbling back, eyes wide, SNORTING-!

Sam retreats behind Amelia, who looks on the horse with pity. Musing aloud as we PUSH IN on the terrified steed...

AMELIA

It's alright, Sam. Just bad memories, I reckon...

(beat)

You know, Ma used to say,
"A horse is a mirror to your soul."
That it's a reflection of you.

SAMUEL

Then... whose reflection is that?

And as the horse's TERROR-STRICKEN EYES fill the screen...

CUT TO:

EXT. HOMESTEAD - NIGHT

The cabin windows GLOW beneath a pitch black sky.

As if the cabin were floating alone in an inky abyss...
And the only sound is a TAPPING coming from inside...

INT. CABIN DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Samuel BANGS his FORK in rapid, successive beats.

His FATHER watches from across the table. WILL WHITMAN (44).
Beardy, stoic... A disheveled, sleepless energy about him.

Amelia sits between them, gnawing at hardened corn bread.
Samuel TAPS his final beat and looks expectantly to Will,
who scribbles something on paper before reciting it aloud--

WILL
"Fort has fay-len. Send help."
(looks up)
Fal-len. Two "L's" next time.

SAMUEL
No time for spelling when the
Indians are attacking, Pa.

WILL
There won't be Indians in La Senta.
Now eat.

Samuel glowers at his plate. Thinks a beat, then TAPS again--

And this time, with every short DIT and long DAH...
The letters spell out onscreen. And so we get:

"Food awful. Send help."

Will looks from his paper, unamused.

SAMUEL
It just needs salt. Or anything
that helps me not taste it.

AMELIA
(offers a lifeline)
Pretend it's your army rations-

WILL
Be thankful for what's provided.

The table goes quiet. Samuel spoons beans down his gullet.

A SOFT RATTLING draws Amelia's attention... Her TIN MUG on
the table, shaking... The whole table is quaking, actually.
Amelia traces it to the source--

WILL'S HAND. Scarred, trembling on the tabletop. A tick,
perhaps..? Will notices her gaze and tucks his hand below.

The silence lingers. A choking sort of quiet.
A family isolated together for too long. Finally--

AMELIA
How's the wagon coming?

WILL
It'll be ready.

She hesitates, swallowing some chow. Then finds courage--

AMELIA
It needs a new axle. If the weight
shifts on the trail, it's gonna
crack clean in two.
(pause)
I could make a dash to the Fort
tomorrow. If I took Marcel, I could
be back before nightfall.

Will seems to mull it as he chews. Doesn't look at her.

WILL
We still got riders coming through.
You're needed here.

AMELIA
Samuel can tend to the horses--

WILL
Samuel's got his duties. We've
still got a contract to honor.

AMELIA
But we haven't had a rider in
weeks. What are the chances tha--

A RAPPING at the door cuts her short. Will cocks his head.

SAMUEL
I didn't hear a bugle...

Will rises and walks to the door. Peers out the window.

WILL
Finish your supper.

He unbars the door as the kids watch...
Samuel slides suddenly to his sister, wrapping his arms tight
around her as he WHISPER-PANICS in her ear--

SAMUEL
What if it's him-?!

AMELIA

Who?

SAMUEL

(gulps)

The reflection!

Amelia's eyes go wide -- RIGHT AS Will opens the door--!

WILL

Can I help you somehow?

Will steps out with a lantern, closing the door after.

Amelia and Samuel SPRING to the window -- Where Will converses with -- not a monster -- but an OLD FELLA. Leathery skin, in a faded military coat... Seems harmless enough.

Amelia lets out a long SIGH.

AMELIA

He's just old cavalry. Probably retiring out west.

(beat)

And look. A nice, normal horse.

She points to a clean-kept CAVALRY HORSE tied to a post.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Don't get wound up like that. That horse in the mill... Might as well be dead to whoever's it was. No one's coming for him now.

Samuel presses his face to the glass, already distracted. The old man points to the hills as Samuel ogles his weapon.

SAMUEL

Is that a repeater on his saddle?

AMELIA

Dunno.

Will shakes hands with the man, pivoting to the house.

SAMUEL

Retreat, retreat!

The kids scramble to the table, settling *just* as Will enters.

Amelia peers at him, trying to read his poker face, but he simply returns to his supper.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

Is it trouble, Pa? Should I close the shutters?

WILL

Just an old man passing through. I thought he might be with the detachment that's due past.

SAMUEL

... What detachment?

Will goes silent -- He wasn't quite ready to share that. But now's as good a time as any. So he presses on, coldly.

WILL

An army detachment is coming any time now to collect the horses.

Amelia's fork CLATTERS to the floor.

AMELIA

And why would a detachment be collecting the horses?

WILL

... They're not all coming with us.

AMELIA

What?!

WILL

You know very well those horses belong to the Express. They wanted 'em sold, so I sold 'em. Even earned us a commission.

(pause)

We'll keep two for the wagon. The army already owns the rest.

AMELIA

To do what with, exactly?

WILL

Going east. There's a war stirring. Ain't our fight or our business.

Amelia sits shell-shocked a moment. Then, finally--

AMELIA

I could take them east.

WILL

What?

AMELIA

I could take them east. Tend to 'em
on the trail, train 'em to ride
into battle...

WILL

This is not a discussion.

AMELIA

We don't have discussions!

Amelia composes herself. Stands, poised, as if ready to deliver a speech she's been rehearsing for months.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

I am seventeen now and-

Will SLAMS the table, cuts her down before it even starts--

WILL

You got no business out east!
Seventeen-year-old girls don't make
no difference in a damn war -- They
just get themselves killed.

AMELIA

(tears up)

I don't... I mean, I could...

It's obvious she hasn't thought this through beyond the "leaving" part. Samuel averts his eyes as Will dictates.

WILL

We'll offload the horses, close
this post, and be on our way.
There's a future for us at the
telegraph station. For our family.

Amelia grits her teeth. Unleashes that special teenage venom, the kind that cuts to the bone--

AMELIA

Well then don't forget to dig up Ma
and Charlie on the way out...

She bolts from the room without another word.

Will is left in stunned silence. Samuel creeps away from the table with his empty plate. Will sips from his tin cup, RATTLING again in his quaking hand.

EXT. GROVE - NIGHT

Countless stars, cold and calm. WINKING above the distant cabin as the HOWLS of coyotes overlap in the night.

WILL stands alone, lit by the pale starlight. Hovering by two WOODEN CROSSES in the ground, one larger than the other.

He holds his gaze on his nearby homestead. Rubs at his eyes. If there are tears, they are lost to the darkness.

EXT. EXPANSIVE PRAIRIE - ESTABLISHING - DAWN

Fingers of light scrape through a creeping mist. Our view is a *bit* wider than before... More wilderness sprawling out... More *isolation* creeping in.

An ant-sized Amelia makes her morning trek to the mill.

INT. MILL STABLES - MORNING

WHOOSH-SLICE-SWOOP-! Her feedbag pendulum does its thing.

INT. MILL STABLES - LATER

Amelia pops her head into Feral's stall.

AMELIA
Feeling better, friend?

But it isn't the bloodied beast from yesterday -- A BATHED STEED stands tall in its place, with a shiny roan coat. Still emaciated, mangy, but feeling like a million bucks.

She rubs Feral's handsome forehead. Plucks a PEPPERMINT STICK from her red pouch and lets him CHOMP it from her hand.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
Well, maybe I can keep you...

She glances to Marcel -- Corn in his mane *yet again*.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
You're a goner for sure.

She steps over to him. Plucks out a few kernels.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
How bout it, Marcel? One last ride?

INT. STALL - MOMENTS LATER

A saddle PLUNKS onto Marcel, using the same mechanism that removed Feral's torturous rig the day before.

Amelia mounts him from a stool and takes the reins. Locks her gimp leg in a stirrup. Then reaches with her good foot...

And KICKS a lever -- WOOMP! -- Causing the spring-loaded stall gate to SHOOT OPEN-! She trots Marcel out the gate... And canters him into the blinding sunlight outside.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - MORNING

Amelia gives a quick lookout to the cabin -- Coast is clear. And so they gallop off toward the horizon.

EXT. OPEN PLAINS - MORNING

Amelia and Marcel enjoy a leisurely ride, nestled in the grand nature around them.

They canter through an alfalfa field, breast-high to the horse, carving a neat path through it. Cloud shadows drift just ahead, painting the field like spots on a cow.

EXT. CREEKBED - MORNING

Amelia and Marcel drink from BABBLING waters in a sun-flecked grove. Marcel SPLASHES through playfully, sending frontier critters scattering.

AMELIA (PRELAP)

"Two years had now nearly elapsed since the night on which he first received life."

EXT. OVERLOOK - LATER

Amelia perches on an overlook with a hundred foot drop. Rolling plains as far as you can see. Into forever it seems.

Her feet dangle casually as she reads aloud from a BOOK--

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley

AMELIA

"Alas! I had turned loose into the world a depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery."

She turns to a grazing Marcel, her face twisted in horror.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

BOO!

Marcel JOLTS as Amelia CHUCKLES. He scampers away but soon finds a patch of sweet grass and gnaws it contentedly.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

I know. And a gal wrote it, too.

A DISTANT RATTLING starts up... Echoing from somewhere far...

Amelia scans the horizon...

HONES IN on the small DUST CLOUD traversing a winding trail.

She yanks up a LOOKING GLASS.

THROUGH THE GLASS -- The dust cloud becomes a STAGECOACH. Ornate. *Wealthy*, with a CHINESE SERVANT at the reins. And something in the back, STROBING us with BLUE...

The BLUE BONNET of a SMALL GIRL (7). Catching the sunlight, casting cerulean shades across the cracked earth.

Amelia smiles... Then -- Through the glass...

A FLICKER -- Something ZOOMS past the wagon, overtaking it... Amelia's POV SWOOPS to find it--

A PONY EXPRESS RIDER -- barreling her way at full speed!

AMELIA (CONT'D)

A rider..? Unbelievable.

Amelia shoves to her feet as the Rider's THROATY HORN sounds. She HOBBLE-SPRINTS to Marcel... And it's clearest now, in the urgency, just how disadvantaged she is on foot. Clumsy. A slow prey to be picked off, pushing her body by sheer will.

She WHISTLES and Marcel bows onto his front legs... Allowing Amelia to mount from the ground.

And the moment she hits the leather -- The change is instant. Amelia is in full command, SPURRING her steed into action-!

EXT. WOODS - DAY

ASTRIDE THE HORSE -- Dodging foliage, whipping past trees... Ever on the edge of wiping out, but she never does. Instinctual. *Balletic*.

Marcel's mane LASHES her wrists as the pair THUNDER onward. On the ground, Amelia is vulnerable. But here, on horseback... You can see it in her eyes -- She is invincible.

With a surge of speed, Amelia SPURS HARD to intercept--

EXT. PLAINS - CONTINUOUS

WITH THE RIDER -- As Amelia BURSTS from the nearby tree line.

AMELIA

Hey! Thomas!

THOMAS (19), our red-necked rider, glances back... And LIGHTS UP at the sight of her.

She pulls beside him, neck-and-neck.

THOMAS

Hah! Ain't you supposed to be waiting for me with a fresh mustang..?

AMELIA

Who says I won't be?

She ROCKETS past him, gaining speed.

EXT. PLAINS - MOMENTS LATER

Amelia and Thomas jockey for position across the plains. And Thomas is *good*. Clearly a skilled rider, holding well.

But the thing is... Amelia is better. Better than the Pony Express, the best of the west.

At a THUNDEROUS GALLOP now... She looks so... *effortless*.

The gap widens until it's clear now he'll never catch her. And soon she crests the hill and vanishes altogether.

INT. MILL STABLES - MORNING

Amelia SWOOPS through the doors with a wide grin--

Nearly careening into WILL as Marcel STUTTERS to a STOP-! Will doesn't flinch, currently embattled with the loft ropes.

WILL

Where have you been?!

Amelia guides the horse into the open stall and retracts the lever with her boot, WHIPPING the gate closed.

AMELIA

Just... keeping the horses limber.

WILL

You have one duty, Amelia. One.
Have the mounts ready. And-

He jerks the ropes to no avail, seething.

WILL (CONT'D)

What the hell do these even do?! I
just want to lower the damn saddle!

She gazes to a SADDLE suspended overhead like a chandelier.

AMELIA

Let me do it.

She struts to a crank and KICKS the latch -- The handle WHIRLING freely as the saddle PLUMMETS, THUNKING into hay.

Will looks to the useless ropes in his hands. Discards them. But before he can scold further, Thomas enters on horseback.

WILL

She's sorry for the delay, Thomas.

Thomas dismounts mid-trot with a twinkle in his eye, snatching his SHORT RIFLE off the side of the saddle.

THOMAS

No harm, sir.

Will marches out, leaving Amelia to it as she rolls her eyes.

Thomas steps to her as she re-hoists the saddle, picking up some ongoing conversation as if they'd never stopped.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

You don't look too sorry.

AMELIA

I'm not. How was civilization?

THOMAS

If you mean Carson City, they still
take their baths in barber shops,
so... very civilized.

(laughs)

Oh, got you a new one.

He SLAPS a NEW BOOK onto the stall rail--

Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque by Edgar Allen Poe

Amelia plucks it up -- Adds it to a small "library" shelf, with a dozen or so other weatherworn BOOKS.

AMELIA

I'm still finishing the last one.
The *Monster* just killed a boy.

THOMAS

Well, you'll just have to tell me
how it ends... Once I'm done with
my o-fficial government business.

He waits for her to inquire... But she doesn't even look up, diligently securing the saddle now. So his boast continues.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Yessir, I'm to personally deliver
my cargo straight to Saint Joseph
station. No handoffs and few
breaks.

AMELIA

Long ride, that.

Thomas pats his EXPRESS SATCHEL exaggeratedly.

THOMAS

Wanna wager what's in it?

AMELIA

A love letter for the President?

Thomas CHORTLES. Hangs his head. Amelia finally relents.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

It sounds important. I'm sorry I've
slowed you down.

She offers the reins -- He reaches for them...
And their hands touch. Thomas hovers awkwardly close.

THOMAS

I dunno. I always felt like you
were worth slowing down for.

Amelia smiles at that. Hands off the reins to him.

AMELIA

Better hurry back, then. Else
you'll have to chase me west.

Amelia grimaces as she turns away. Thomas tips his hat.

THOMAS

Then I'll become the wind.

Thomas climbs atop Puzzle with newfound vigor. But--

Amelia's gaze falls on FERAL'S CRUEL SADDLE. She blurts--

AMELIA

Thomas--?

THOMAS

Ma'am?

She tries to warn him. But doesn't know what to warn him of.

AMELIA

Just... be watchful out there.
There are... Y'know. *Monsters*.

Thomas laughs it off.

THOMAS

From now on, it's only romance
novels for you.

(settles in saddle)

I ain't never seen no *Monsters* out
there. Just men. And there ain't a
man alive that can catch me.

He pats his now-strapped RIFLE. Then, with a wink and a SPUR,
he's out the gate. Amelia watches him go with a wistful
smile... His rhythmic GALLOP slowly MORPHING INTO--

EXT. RIDGE - DAY

Spanish long spurs CLINKING along a cliff edge.

Belonging to a SUN-BRONZED BANDIT in a short-cut jacket.
An Onyx-butted COLT REVOLVER glimmers in his holster as he
gazes out. It's a good look, all this. And he wears it well.

This is PALOMINO (30). His few friends call him "Pal."

He saunters over to FOUR UNKEMPT BANDITS setting up an ambush
position on the ridge. He surveys their work... SIGHS.
The leader notices him. That's EDDY (40s).

EDDY

How was the scout, Palomino? Learn
anything?

PAL
 Out there, Eddy? Not really.
 (pause)
 But here, now? I think I just
 learned your secret.

EDDY
 Well, I wasn't aware I had one.

Pal flashes a wolfish grin.

PAL
 Hoo boy, do you. And you must've
 said some sweet words to be made
 boss of this little operation.

Eddy cranes his neck toward him. Pats his pistol butt.

EDDY
 Keep talking like that, Palomino,
 and secrets won't be the only thing
 I bury out here.

Pal mulls it aloud, as if to himself--

PAL
 Four split the money... One sleeps
 in the dirt. In Cincinnati, they'd
 call that *personnel management*.

Eddy grins. But Pal wags a finger.

PAL (CONT'D)
 But, see, Eddy... That's precisely
 what you're not good at.

Eddy's grin morphs to a glower.

PAL (CONT'D)
 'Cause you've clustered all your
 men at the same vantage point,
 where they can't see diddly-shit in
 more than one direction.

Eddy's looks to their limited view -- Obscured by trees and
 rocky outcroppings -- As Pal moves steps close.

PAL (CONT'D)
 And if that rider gets around us,
 it won't matter how many of us you
 put in the dirt. Shares of nothing
 divide equally between the living
 and the dead alike.

Eddy looks ready to erupt on Pal, but instead--
Whirls and rage-delegates to his other minions--!

EDDY

Get your asses up! Smithy -- On
that ridge. Dan -- Cover the ravine
down there. And Russel, just... Go
that way!

DAN, RUSSEL, and SMITHY scramble to oblige. Pal struts away,
but Eddy calls out--

EDDY (CONT'D)

Hey... what was this "secret" of
mine?

Pal pivots back with that damn grin. Obvious as the sky:

PAL

That you're an idiot.

He pivots away, WHISTLING, leaving Eddy to seethe.

Pal returns to a waiting cream-colored HORSE and hops on.
This is GOLDSMITH. She WHINNIES her disapproval of all this.

PAL (CONT'D)

I know. But we take the jobs that
need takin'.

EXT. CREST - LATER

Pal waits atop Goldsmith, hiding in the shade of an oak.
He digs out a pair of BINOCULARS from his jacket, gazes out.

THROUGH THE BINOS--

SMITHY waits on the crest of another hill on horseback.
DAN lies in the prone, surveying a ravine we can't see.

And RUSSEL is... Unbuckling trousers near a briar patch.

PAL

Top notch.

Goldsmith stirs suddenly. Pal leans down to her.

PAL (CONT'D)

Whatcha got, Goldie?

She SNORTS a bit. Shifts her weight. Pal watches her
intently. Honing in on something...

Her EARS -- Roving about like primitive satellite dishes.
This way and that... Sourcing a directional sound.

PAL (CONT'D)
Come on, girl... Show me...

Suddenly the ears lock--! Pal's eyes follow their direction--
To a WOODED GROVE a mile out, obscured by its lush canopy.

Again, he WHIPS up the BINOS--

Just as the RIDER BURSTS through the brush on horseback--

It's THOMAS--! Pushing Puzzle hard at a dead-sprint...
As though hell itself were chasing him.

PAL (CONT'D)
Here comes our payday!

Pal SPURS Goldsmith into action and Smithy follows suit on
the nearby hill, both horses slipping down the rocky slopes.

EXT. OVERLOOK - DAY

Pal and Smithy scramble to a stop on a lower ridge...
Just as the Thomas ZIPS past them in the tight canyon below.

SMITHY
We never had a chance... That's a
pure-bred mustang he's got.

PAL
Do you know the real trick to
chasing a bounty?

Pal slides to the ground. Grabs something off his back.

PAL (CONT'D)
Not having to chase it.

He hefts a piece of sculpted maple -- an ornamented SHOULDER
STOCK, as on a rifle... Except he CLICKS it onto his COLT.

He tucks the range-modded pistol to his shoulder, cool-like.
Leads Thomas with the iron sight... COCKS the hammer...

SMITHY
You really think you can-

BLAM! -- The single shot CRACKS across the expanse.

And it takes a moment, distance-delayed... But finally...

A COUGH of DUST erupts from Thomas' side-!
A few more seconds... And the Rider TUMBLES from his horse.

Pal lowers his weapon, finally answering Smithy--

PAL

I do, yes.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Pal is first on the scene, sliding off Goldsmith.
He makes his way to the body, leveling the modded pistol.

He puts a toe under Thomas... FLIPS him--

And Thomas, it turns out, is very much alive. *Disoriented...*
But alive. Thomas holds the wound on his side, looks at the
blood on his fingertips. Warily--

THOMAS

You shot me, you son of a bitch!

Thomas steals a glance to his pistol, cast off in the dirt.
Pal COCKS the hammer of his own.

PAL

Now, you'll survive that first one.
But the second? *No guaran-tees.*

THOMAS

(gasping)
They're coming.

Pal follows Thomas' gaze to the empty canyon behind them.

PAL

Who's coming?

THOMAS

I don't know who they are...
I don't even know what they are...
But they're after me.

Pal searches Thomas' fear-stricken eyes. Shakes his head.

PAL

Then sounds like you best tell me
where the satchel is right-quick.

EDDY (O.C.)

Jackpot!

Pal glances over his shoulder--

Eddy and his gang are corralled around Puzzle now. They pull the EXPRESS SATCHEL from beneath the saddle with a cacophony of WHOOPS and CHEERS. Pal SIGHS. Back to the kid.

PAL

Now, about these *friends* of yours-

BLAM-! BLAM-! -- Bullets PUNCH Thomas' chest. He goes limp.

Pal doesn't flinch -- Just cranes his neck back, perturbed.

PAL (CONT'D)

The hell'd you do that for?

Eddy holsters his smoking pistol with a smirk.

EDDY

Personnel management.

He saunters off. Pal kneels to the glossy-eyed corpse. SIGHS.

PAL

No guaran-tees.

He pulls Thomas' hat down over his lifeless gaze. Goes to leave... But something catches Pal's eye...

The GLEAM of METAL. Something in Thomas' curled fingers--

A FORGED SPEARHEAD. With a wooden handle snapped off.

Pal plucks it from the dead hand. Hefts it... Twisted metal, rusty. With a bloody tip... presumably from the BLOOD STAIN on Thomas' leg where he seems to have pulled it.

A *strange* thing. Well, to him... We've seen this before. The scavenged design... Just like Feral's sadistic saddle.

EDDY

You comin', Palomino?!

Pal gazes down the canyon. Then to the metal. Pockets it.

PAL

What about the kid?

EDDY

That's why God made coyotes.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The bandit gang is scattered about, made all the merrier now with whiskey and chow.

Pal sits alone near the popping fire. He turns the METAL in his hands. An inscription -- **Elias & Co Railroad.**

PAL
A railroad spike...
What was chasing you..?

Across the way, Russel and Smithy have started a drunken tug-of-war with the EXPRESS SATCHEL.

EDDY
Knock it off, dumb shits! You break that seal, you blow our payday!

RUSSEL
But don't you wanna know what's in there, Boss?

EDDY
What I know... is that the money it's worth wouldn't fit inside.

Eddy SNATCHES it away. Secures it to Puzzle's saddle, who grazes with the other horses.

He notices Pal, lost in thought, and prowls over.

EDDY (CONT'D)
Whatcha playin' with, Pal?

PAL
Just a trinket. Y'know, from that boy you killed.

He slips the spearhead into his pocket.

EDDY
You shot him first.

Eddy studies Pal. A smile curls across his rotting teeth.

EDDY (CONT'D)
What? You think 'cause you didn't deliver the kill-shot, that your hands are clean?

Eddy leans down, rasping with hot whiskey breath.

EDDY (CONT'D)
The order was "no witnesses." So don't go foolin' yourself. You killed that boy same as me, the moment you signed on for the job.

Eddy rises, grinning. Gives a mirthless LAUGH.

EDDY (CONT'D)

Wait... I think I just discovered
your secret, Palomino. You're an
asshole. A secret asshole.

He wanders off to find his bottle. Pal mulls things over.
Knows he should let it go, but... Can't.

He casually slips the pistol from his holster and levels it.
Eddy is too drunk to take it seriously just yet.

PAL

Well, now, Eddy, I was gonna wait
'til you were sleeping, but now
you've gone and agitated me.
(faux burdensome)
So now I gotta go and make a show
of double-crossin' ya cause I've
just got to see the look on your
face.

Everyone goes silent, watching. The fire ROARING...
And Eddy's expression drops. Pal points at Eddy's frown--

PAL (CONT'D)

And... Bingo.

Eddy creeps a hand to his gun belt. The other bandits inch
toward their rifles, strewn about. Pal COCKS his pistol.

PAL (CONT'D)

A proposal -- No one gets brave...
And we all walk outta here. Or -- I
kill the lot of you here and now.

The Bandits glance among themselves. Pal hams it up.

PAL (CONT'D)

Now, *really* think about it, cause I
don't wanna sway ya either way.
This should be your decision. Here,
I'll even add some chance to it.

He tosses his pistol from his right hand... to his LEFT.

PAL (CONT'D)

Let's try lefty.

The men look to Eddy. He looks to them nervously...

SMITHY

(slurring)

I... I'd listen to him, Eddy.

Eddy finally nods -- *Stand down.*

Pal UNCOCKS his pistol but keeps it raised. He grins.

PAL

Whew. Aren't we all relieved-?

A RATTLING interrupts him... Like a rattle snake, but...
A whole NEST of them. Out in the dark.

SMITHY

The hell is that..?

Then-- The SNORTING of HORSES ERUPTS-! Close.

The Bandits gaze out, their confusion and fear contagious.

EDDY

That your posse, Palomino?

PAL

It assuredly ain't.

Eddy taps his pistol... Looks to Pal -- *Ya want help or not?*
Pal nods his capitulation, turning his own colt to the
lurking darkness as Eddy and his men take up arms.

EDDY

It's a real mannerless son of an
Injun that intrudes on another
man's camp!

PAL

Ain't Indians. Something *else.*

Pal digs into his pocket -- Grips the SPEARHEAD tight.
RASPY MURMURS from the dark. GROWLS.

EDDY

Show yourselves!

Eddy snatches a LOG from the fire, embers burning bright as
he HURLS it into the darkness-!

And as it PLUNKS to the ground--
We get the *briefest* glimpses of RIDERS in the dark--

Men on horseback. Scarred flesh, tangled beards. Outlines of
jagged attire. The firelight flirts at their edges, at vague
details, but... Even it seems afraid to touch them.

Eddy stumbles back, COCKING his pistol.

EDDY (CONT'D)
 I... I-I'm gonna count to three!
 (beat)
 One!

A RIDER slides down from his horse, catching enough light to make out beady black eyes... and a severely BURNED FACE.

EDDY (CONT'D)
 T-two!

The Burned Rider raises his arm. Points to Smithy. *Smiles.*

EDDY (CONT'D)
 Thre-!

WHOOMP! -- A SPEAR IMPALES SMITHY through the gut!

Then it *really* goes to shit.

SOUND and FURY -- The panicked BLIND FIRE of the Bandits -- The GUTTURAL SHRIEKS and THUNDERING HOOVES of the Riders. They swoop in to hunt, only to vanish like vengeful ghosts.

Pal OPENS FIRE on a lurking silhouette...
 But the bullets "bounce" off the Rider with BURSTS of spark-!

PAL
 What the hell-?!

The Bandit horses SCATTER -- Running past this way and that as Dan tries to catch them.

PUZZLE trots past Eddy as his gun CLICKS empty-!
 He runs after the horse, eyes locked firmly on the SATCHEL.

The Riders take passes at him -- Almost teasingly.

BLIPS of the attackers as he runs... Knotted hair and gnarled faces... A strobe-like procession of lunacy.

Eddy reaches Puzzle. Gets one fat foot in a stirrup...
 When Russel CRIES OUT from the darkness-!

Eddy glances back, mortal fear in his eyes...

EDDY
 Russel..?!

FWOOMP! A LONG HOOK snags Eddy's shoulder-!
 JERKS him off his feet, reels him SCREAMING into the dark.

EXT. CAMP'S EDGE - MOMENTS LATER

PAL -- Sprinting into the darkness, FINGER-WHISTLING...
And Goldsmith is suddenly at his side!

But Pal has only just mounted, when-- The SPEAR strikes--!

It hits Goldsmith in the shoulder -- FLOONK! -- Pitching the
horse forward, feet-over-head, skipping Pal across the dirt.

He scrambles back to his BRAYING STEED.

PAL

No-no-no-no-no... C'mon, girl!
Get up! You've gotta get up!

He knows she can't, but he says it anyway.
Goldsmith is blood-slick, fighting for each breath.

Pal pops out his colt cylinder. Dumps cartridges in his palm--
ONE ROUND amongst empty shells. He reloads the single bullet.

A RIDER gallops past, silhouetted by the campfire behind...
Pal levels the pistol for a kill-shot...
But his gaze creeps to his suffering companion...

Pal grits his teeth... Lowers his gun... And uses his final
bullet to deliver a mercy shot to his friend -- BLAM--!

Goldsmith goes quiet. And Pal runs for his life.

EXT. WILDERNESS - NIGHT

SOUNDS in the dark. PULSING BREATHS. POUNDING FOOTFALLS.

Glints of Pal in the dim moonlight, in a heated sprint.
The sounds of the massacre fade behind him.

Then, a single PATTERN of HOOVES. Closing fast.

Pal scans the landscape ahead -- Open plains. Not a shred of
cover. And so he stops. Pivots back to face his fate.

He drops to a knee as his pursuer approaches... A TALL FORM
emerging from the darkness, as inevitable as Death Himself...

Except it's not a Rider that appears -- But PUZZLE the horse!

Pal snags the saddle as she runs past...
Hoists himself atop her as a pursuing RIDER appears behind.

EXT. PLAINS - NIGHT

Pal pushes hard, weaving through brush by moonlight. He digs his spurs in. *Faster*. The Rider right on him.

And then a new SOUND comes, slow and rhythmic... WHOOMP-WHOOMP-WHOOMP... Pal glancing back--

The pursuer whirls a CHAINED GRAPPLING HOOK overhead, catching moonlight with each swing. That's what got Eddy.

Puzzle gives a burst of panicked speed... WHOOMP-WHOOMP-WHOOMP... And then-- Silence.

Pal looks back as -- FRINK-! The HOOK BITES into his right shoulder! He screams, the chain nearly JERKING him down -- And forcing Puzzle to a complete stop-!

The Rider pulls hard... Forcing Puzzle backwards, reeling in the whole damn horse! Pal pulling, digging at the HOOK...

Then he sees it -- Thomas' saddle-strapped SHORT RIFLE.

He reaches for it, the hook chain taut -- Pal's fingers scraping at the rifle stock. The Rider feet away now...

Raising a BLADE for the killing stroke, when-- Pal LURCHES-!

SNATCHES the rifle -- Flips it one-handed, jutting it backwards out his armpit -- BARREL to the Rider's face--

BLAM! -- Point-blank propulsion. Sends the Rider to the dirt.

MORE RIDERS rally in the distance at the NOISE... Pal spurs Puzzle, the hooked chain dragging as they run.

Pal glances back... The other Riders are dismounting at their dead comrade. Except the burned one. Beady eyes catching moonlight as he stares at Pal. Points. SHRIEKS.

Pal crests a hill and the wicked things disappear.

Pal's eyes flutter... Fatigue and delirium taking hold. Blood tricking down his shoulder... Dribbling onto the still-attached EXPRESS SATCHEL. And as Pal's eyes close, we--

FADE TO BLACK.

WADING IN DARKNESS. But soon, Samuel's voice comes over...

SAMUEL (PRELAP)

"I beheld the w-wretch...the mis-er-able monster whom I had created."

INT. CABIN - MORNING

Samuel looks up from reading FRANKENSTEIN at the table.

SAMUEL
A girl wrote this?!

AMELIA
Just keep going.

A HAMMERING erupts from outside.
Amelia leans to peek OUT THE WINDOW--

WILL battles the still-broken WAGON. He SMASHES his thumb,
immediately drops the hammer and curses under his breath.

Amelia SIGHS and nudges Samuel to keep reading.

SAMUEL
*"He held up the cur-tain of the bed
and his eyes, if eyes they may be
called, were fixed on me."*

Amelia pats him on the shoulder.

AMELIA
I wasn't reading like that at ten.

SAMUEL
Really?

AMELIA
I was seven.

Amelia gives a mocking smile, then... Pauses. *Too quiet now.*
She walks over to the window this time. GAZES OUT--

SAMUEL (O.C.)
*"His jaws opened, and he mut-
tered..."*

The wagon lies abandoned. And Will is nowhere in sight.

WHOOMPF--! -- Will KICKS the door open as the kids JUMP--!

He pushes past with a BLOODIED FORM in his arms -- PAL.

WILL
Samuel -- Water and whiskey! Amelia
-- Stitching and linens! Now!

Will disappears into a bedroom. The kids stand dumbfounded.
Amelia finally tugs Samuel's sleeve.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - MORNING

Samuel sprints for the well as Amelia moves to the wagon...
And for the first time, we can actually see a LEG BRACE on
her gimp leg, hidden before beneath her work pants.

Amelia freezes at the sight of Pal's BLOODY HORSE.

AMELIA
Puzzle..?!

INT. CABIN BEDROOM - MORNING

Will TEARS open Pal's shirt, the infected wound oozing.

Amelia and Samuel loiter in the doorway, unsure.

WILL
Get in here, dammit!

Amelia trips over something as she enters--
The dislodged HOOK CHAIN. Before she can get a good look--

WILL (CONT'D)
Amelia, hold pressure on him!

She nods emphatically and moves in.

Dips a cloth in Samuel's bucket and swaps places with Will,
then PLUGS the festering tear in Pal's shoulder.

She watches Pal's face -- Eyes rolled back, lips going blue.
Amelia prattles as thoughts and adrenaline collide--

AMELIA
Pa... Thomas took that horse.
Is Thomas okay..?

WILL
(ignores)
Samuel, give him some whiskey.

Samuel pours from a JUG into Pal's sputtering mouth.

AMELIA
Is he going to be all right?

WILL
Just hold firm.

Will takes the whiskey from Samuel. Then POURS it directly
onto the wound as Pal CRIES OUT-!

INT. CABIN BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

Calm after the storm. Will PLUNGES his hands in a basin, blood clouding the water. Amelia perches in the doorway.

PAL -- Alive. Bandaged and sedated. Torso rising and falling.

WILL
He needs a doctor.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Samuel places Pal's things on a chair as Will and Amelia enter. Will grabs a DOUBLE-BARRELED SHOTGUN from the mantle.

WILL
Samuel, lower the shutters. Amelia, ready a horse. I'm riding for the Fort.

AMELIA
Okay.

She sets off with purpose.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - DAY

Amelia hobble-strides toward the corral with Puzzle in tow.

AMELIA
What happened out there, girl..?

Something catching her eye... THE BLOODY EXPRESS SACHEL on the saddle. Amelia grabs it. Throws it over her shoulder.

And suddenly -- The horse SPOOKS. STAMPING the ground, strafing. Amelia holds onto Puzzle's crest, cooing to her.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
It's okay... Hey, it's okay...

Amelia holds a moment. Scans the area... Quiet nothingness. Dread growing in the pit of her stomach as we JUMP OUT TO--

EXT. EXPANSIVE PRAIRIE - ESTABLISHING - CONTINUOUS

One last time at this grand view. Miles from anywhere. If trouble finds you here... You're on your own.

INT. MILL STABLES - MORNING

QUICK BEATS-- The SHINK of the STABBED feed bag --
GROANING ROPES as it's hoisted -- A CLICK as it locks.

AMELIA

Can't have you ridin' on empty.

Marcel waits, saddled and ready, as Amelia reaches for the KNOTTED ROPE. She CLICKS her TONGUE... And this time -- Wouldn't you know it? -- Marcel actually steps back.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Well, I'll be.

But it's short-lived joy... Because Marcel isn't obeying. He's retreating... All the way to the back of his stall.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Marcel...? What's wrong?

It's contagious -- All the horses WHINNYING and STOMPING now. Their panic swelling into a terrible chorus...

WHAM-! Amelia JOLTS as Feral RAMS his stall gate.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Just calm down now... There's nothing to be afraid-

In that instant -- COLOR washes across the mill. The room suddenly TINTED BLUE, like it were blasted with blue light.

Amelia can feel it before she turns -- The PRESENCE.

SILHOUETTED in the open door -- A HULKING FIGURE, unwavering. And the source of the blue? The sunlight CASTING through the blood-crusts BLUE BONNET on his scraggly head.

Amelia sucks in a breath when she sees it... Eyes flashing with recognition -- The bonnet of the little wagon girl.

A frozen beat... Horses' cries growing to a PIERCING PITCH...

Then-- Amelia LURCHES for the stalls-!

BLUEBONNET gives chase, PANTING like a dog. Somehow, even with some daylight, his features find refuge in shadow.

He LUNGES -- But Amelia DIVES -- BlueBonnet skidding past as she burrows behind the stack of feed bags.

BlueBonnet CLAWS at her with long, jagged nails... But she's *just* out of reach, between the bags and wall.

He shifts strategies -- Starts grabbing individual bags...

And single-handedly PITCHES the damn things over his shoulder like they're nothing. Ripping away Amelia's cover piecemeal.

Not much time... Amelia hobble-climbs the stone wall behind her... Gimp foot SLIPPING as she scales the rocks...

Tippy-toeing, fingers grazing the DANGLING FEED BAG--
Just as BlueBonnet discards his last bag, leaping for her-!

She grabs the bag -- JERKS it free-! Holding tight as it SWOOPS across the room -- Over BlueBonnet's head -- Amelia swinging away like a regular Errol Flynn...

SHINK! The suspended SCYTHE BLADE catches her arm-!
Amelia YELPS -- Loses her grip at the upswing...

She lets go -- SOARS toward the loft landing...

And SMACKS into it chest-first-! Damn near bounces off, but she digs her nails in... Dangling precariously...

BlueBonnet pulls a CAVALRY SWORD... SWINGS HIGH-!

But Amelia hoists herself to the loft in the nick of time. She rolls onto her back, sweat-slick and SPUTTERING.

BELOW -- BLUEBONNET paces like a waiting lion.

Amelia drags herself to the LOFT WINDOW. Peers at the CABIN.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Pa! Help! Samuel!

But the cabin might as well be in France.

Amelia's gaze falls back to her attacker--
BlueBonnet pacing up and down the stalls...

Her eyes flash. She turns her attention to the guts of her PULLEY APPARATUS -- This is where all the ropes dangle from. She runs her hands across pulleys and gears, traces their paths and purposes with her eyes... Searching...

She finds the rope she wants. Nods. Then faces down the man.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

You're him, ain't ya? The horseman.

He GROWLS... It might be words, or maybe used to be. But he never takes his eyes off her. And just as he passes Feral...

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Let me return him to you!

She YANKS the rope--

And Feral's stall door ROCKETS OPEN--! NAILING BlueBonnet -- Sends him rag-dolling with spring-loaded FORCE--!

Feral TRAMPLES him on the way out. Amelia hops down into hay and runs out of the mill as BlueBonnet GROANS in the dirt.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - DAY

Amelia bolts for the cabin, clutching her bleeding arm. She's only halfway across the corral when she stops.

Feeling their gaze, like with BlueBonnet -- LURKERS. She cranes her neck slowly to them... Fifty meters out--

FOUR HORSEMEN. Perched like patient wolves.

Amelia can only stare. Their appearance is, well... *Surreal*.

Behind the matted beards and hair -- Expressionless faces and MURKY eyes... Almost LIFELESS. Like soldiers conjured up from an old daguerreotype.

There's a certain rugged uniformity to them... Dark blue uniforms, stitched with animal hides and stained from blood. Still, each has a few own accents all their own--

THE EAGLE -- With a frock of feathers -- Remnants of a Native American headdress -- And a quiver of ATLATL SPEARS.

THE RATTLER -- Layered in snakeskins and dried RATTLES.

THE STAG -- A GARGANTUAN MAN, nearly dwarfing his own horse, with rusted armor and ANTLERS coming off his shoulders.

And the burned one... Face forever melted into a lipless sneer. Sunken, BLACK EYES. He's their leader -- **BURNFACE**.

Amelia loiters. Mired in the terror and spectacle. Staring down the FRONTIER MARAUDERS. Will's CRIES break the spell--

WILL (O.C.)

Amelia!

Amelia shoots her gaze to the cabin-- Where Will steps off the porch with the shotgun in-hand.

WILL (CONT'D)

Get inside!

Amelia crosses the grounds to him. The Marauders don't budge.
She makes it to her father. Collapses into his arms, dazed.

AMELIA
In the stables...

WILL
Go.

She finds a second wind. Scurries up the steps.

Will eyes the distant men. Waiting like vultures.
He yells across the corral--

WILL (CONT'D)
What do you want?!
(pause)
There's nothing for you here!

The distant men linger.

Will steps forward, brandishing the shotgun...
And the Marauders counter with an advance of their own.

Riding toward the cabin. Steadily picking up speed...

WA-BOOM-! Will fires in their direction. They hold course.

WILL (CONT'D)
What do you want?!

He retreats to the cabin--
FIRES OFF a second round as he backpedals through the door--

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Samuel steps to his father, visibly shaken --
Boyish heroic fantasy replaced with gut-wrenching fear.

SAMUEL
Sh-shutters are down, Pa...

WILL
Barricade the door.

Samuel locks down the bar and starts sliding over chairs.
Will POPS IN fresh shotgun shells with shaky hands.

It's dark in here with the shutters drawn, though sunlight
sneaks in where it can through gaps in the boards.
Amelia takes refuge at the table, sweat-beaded and shocked.

AMELIA

It's my fault... I kept the
horse... It's my fault-

Will puts a hand on her shoulder. She looks to him
absentmindedly.

WILL

How many were in the stable?

AMELIA

Just one. Four in the field.
(breaks)

I'm so sorry, I never meant-

Will moves to the door, slides open a small SNIPING HOLE...

WILL

That old man who came through... He
said something was out there. He
warned me about... Things.

PEERING OUT-- Two Marauder horses loiter outside with custom
TWISTED SADDLES, like Feral... But no men in sight.

SAMUEL

(whispers)

What are they..?

A SUDDEN RATTLING -- As at the campfire -- Like a DEN of
SNAKES, prowling to *this* window, then *that*, coiled to strike.

The family goes quiet. Holding their breath.
Will swings his shotgun to each successive noise...

There are FOOTSTEPS on the ROOF... Then-- WHAM-!
Something STRIKES a window, SHUTTERS BUCKLING--

Will crosses the room -- RAMS his body weight against it.

SHADOWS SWIPE across the room -- Marauders stalking past the
inlets of sunlight with CREAKING footsteps.

The kitchen shutters PULSE. Then the FRONT DOOR.
Circling their prey. Testing the defenses.

Everything RATTLING at once... Like a poltergeist.

FWOONK-! An AXE BLADE comes through one of the shutters!
BLUE LIGHT casting in -- BLUEBONNET, surely.

Will charges over, plugs his shotgun into the hole--
And gives a double-barreled retort -- WA-BOOM-!

The BLUE LIGHT tints RED -- bonnet catching blood-!
A SHRIEK erupts, then RECEDING STEPS as the colors vanish.

Will pulls the children into the center of the room.

His eyes and barrel move as one... But there's nothing.

Just the unbearable silence.

Will slides back to the port in the front door.

PEERING OUT -- The Marauder horses are gone.

WILL
Samuel, get the long rifle.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - DAY

Will steps out onto the porch. RIFLE raised. Hands shaking.
But there's no one. *These things are good at vanishing.*

He spies the DRIBLETS of BLOOD -- Tracks them down the steps.

He patrols across the grounds.
Barely to the corral gate when the sounds come--

The HORRID SQUEALS from the mill.

Suddenly-- A horse BURSTS free from inside -- GYPSY!

The huge Marauder, The Stag, lumbers after in pursuit.

Will pulls the rifle taut... Gazes down the iron site...
Unsteady... Aim wavering onto The Stag--

He FIRES a VOLLEY-! CRACKLING the air, but... All misses.

In that time, The Stag overtakes Gypsy -- Wraps a powerful
arm around her neck and BODYSLAMS the beast to the earth-!
It flops there a moment, dazed...

The Stag grabs a hind leg, and with inhuman strength...

He drags the animal back into the dark innards of the mill as
the SQUEALS continue from inside.

AMELIA (O.C.)
No-!

Will cranes back as Amelia joins him.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Stop them! They're hurting the
horses! They're... killing them!

She starts off to help, but Will grabs her arm.

WILL

We can't- I'm- ... It's done.

An ECHO of HOOVES pulls their attention to the plains--

Way out... Two SHAPES chasing each other--

Amelia scoops out her LOOKING GLASS--

The Eagle, on horseback -- Chasing Feral in a dead sprint.

Amelia roots for the horse under her breath--

AMELIA

Come on, boy... Come on...

And as if heeding her words, Feral puts on a burst of speed.
Taking a growing lead on his pursuer... Until--

The horse clears the hill.

The Eagle stops at the crest. Amelia can't help but smile.
Until The Eagle whips around... And gallops right for them.

Father and daughter scramble back inside, Will half-dragging
her as they SLAM the door to safety.

INT. CABIN - MINUTES LATER

A moment of reprieve. Will CHUGS from a water jug. Tries to
wipe away sweat but spreads chalked gunpowder instead.

Amelia sobs softly. Samuel can't comprehend it.

SAMUEL

Why'd they do that, Pa? Why'd they
kill the horses?

WILL

Siege tactics. Cuts off our escape.

A silent, dreadful beat. Then--

SAMUEL

B-but we ain't done nothin' to
them! What are we gonna do?

Amelia wipes away tears. Looks up with cold eyes.

AMELIA

We don't have to do anything. A detachment is due any time now, right? And they won't be too happy that their horses are all dead.

Will slumps into a chair. Looks to Amelia... And finally notices the SATCHEL dangling from her shoulder.

WILL

Where did you get that?

She flicks her eyes up. Remembering he existed at all--

AMELIA

The stranger.

INT. CABIN BEDROOM - DAY

Pal sleeps like an angel... Until--

A HAND SLAPS him clean across the face-! He JOLTS up, scrambling against the headboard, disoriented.

PAL

Get offa me, I'll-! You'll, wha-
... W-where am I?!

Amelia and Samuel loiter behind an angry Will.

WILL

You're in trouble.

PAL

(delirious)
Trouble..? Is that in Texas-?

WHACK-! Will SLAPS him again.

WILL

Where'd you get this?

He tosses the SATCHEL at Pal's feet. Raises a ready backhand. Pal cowers, still a bit loopy. Teary-eyed--

PAL

I'll talk- Please just-
Don't slap me anymore. Gawd.

Pal notices his bandaged arm. Prods it with a grimace as he gets his bearings.

Amelia takes the lead. Pal notices her for the first time.

AMELIA

You're at Miller's Rock Station.
Twenty miles from Fort Smith. You
showed up like this on one of our
courier horses.

(beat)

It belonged to a rider. Where is
he? Did he... *They-*

She can't finish the thought. Pal focuses, recounting...
Mostly truthful.

PAL

I was on the western trail. Came
across him... Your rider, I guess.
He'd been hurt. Real bad.

Pal looks into her eyes. Seems to consider telling the truth.
And then lies with all his heart.

PAL (CONT'D)

There was nothin' I could do. Brave
kid... He made me promise I'd
deliver his cargo for him.

Amelia nods. Turns away. Will notices her pain but...
Keeps his distance. He moves to Pal, more reserved now.

WILL

Those killers. Who are they?

Pal tries to bend his wounded arm, but it's swollen stiff.

PAL

Killers...? Oh... *Them.* I dunno.
Butchered my posse and-

He stops. Recalling it now, vividly... A sobering memory--

PAL (CONT'D)

... Killed my horse.
She didn't deserve that.

Amelia locks eyes with him. Feeling his shared grief.

PAL (CONT'D)

I'm just lucky I got away...

SAMUEL

'Cept you didn't.

PAL
What'd you mean? What's he mean?

WILL
Seems you brought 'em right to our
doorstep.

PAL
I don't recall inviting 'em. Your
horse must've known the way here.
Maybe they tracked it... I killed
one of them, shot his face clean
off. And then it... Gets fuzzy.

Will's eyes twitch at that. But he says nothing.

AMELIA
Seems they're smarter than they
look. They've cut us off -- killed
our horses.

Pal looks to Samuel, who parrots with authority--

SAMUEL
Siege tactics.

Then back to Amelia, stabilizing.

PAL
Where are they now?

AMELIA
Holed up in our stables.

Pal climbs to his feet. Woozy, leaning against the wall.

PAL
Where's my piece?

INT. CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

PORT HOLE VIEW-- Eagle plays lookout on the mill roof like a
gargoyle. BlueBonnet loiters a ways off in the thicket.

PAL (O.S.)
Why ain't they carrying guns?
(beat)
Look at 'em... Just sittin'
there... Like predators.

Amelia steps beside Pal, slouched at the window.

AMELIA
What do you mean?

PAL
Ya know, like wolves. Wait you out.
Tire you, bleed you... Then-

Will interrupts, entering with Pal's GUN BELT.

WILL
You're loaded and ready.

Amelia looks between them, exasperated.

AMELIA
You're in no condition! Can barely
stand as is. Those things will kill
you.

Pal attempts to fasten the belt around his waist, but his
bandaged arm won't cooperate.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
Pa... You've gotta stop him...
He can't even do up his belt!

Will steps in closer to Pal as if to intervene...
Then fastens the belt for him instead.

WILL
He's just gotta pull a trigger.

PAL
It'll be fast.

Pal steadies himself. Strikes a gunfighter's pose. Goes for
the draw... But his SWOLLEN FINGERS slip off the hilt-!

Pal fumbles, wincing in pain. He glances to Amelia,
embarrassed.

He SHIFTS the gun belt around -- Putting the pistol just
beneath his left hand instead.

PAL (CONT'D)
Looks like I'll have to go lefty.

He puts on his hat. Tips it cooly to Samuel, who obliges with
a tip of his own invisible hat.

PAL (CONT'D)
I won't need it but wish me luck.

And with that he steps out into the blinding sunlight.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

As soon as the door LOCKS, Pal's regrets come.
He turns back to the door, goes to knock...

PAL

Um...

But he swallows his fear instead. Musters some courage.

PAL (CONT'D)

(nervously)

Burnin' daylight, Palomino...

INT. CABIN - DAY

The family has gathered at a single OPEN WINDOW.

WATCHING -- As the lone gunman sets off to save the day.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - DAY

Pal wipes the sweat from his brow. He glances back toward the window, sees his audience watching, gives them a nod.

BlueBonnet and Eagle watch from afar, necks craning with him as he approaches...

Pal settles just outside the mill stables.

PAL

Come on outta there so we can get
this over with!

Only silence in response. Then...

LOW GROWLS from the mill. And soon, a FORM emerges...
Like a nightmare willed into reality...

BURNFACE. Sauntering out. Hefting a chunk of bloody HORSE
FLESH.

He stops twenty feet from Pal. Takes a BITE of meat, blood
dribbling from his gnarled mouth. Pal stifles a gag.

PAL (CONT'D)

(whispers to himself)

Holy shit.

Pal examines BurnFace's attire -- Animal furs, human bones...
Likes dead things, I guess. Pal stares at his face, gestures
at his own as he goads.

PAL (CONT'D)

What happened here? Sleep a little too close to the campfire, did we?

BurnFace doesn't budge. Just holds that eternal sneer.

PAL (CONT'D)

See, now I can't tell if you're smiling to oblige my joke... or just being an outright ass.

Nuthin'. It unnerves Pal. So he switches tactics.

PAL (CONT'D)

Look, uh, why don't y'all just pack up and leave now. Just... Go on, git. I don't want to have to kill you today.

BurnFace seems to weigh it... Then steps defiantly forward. Pal straightens up quick.

PAL (CONT'D)

Think about this. Left's twice as fast as my right. Final warning.

Pal grazes the butt of the colt. BurnFace watching...

Again he steps forward -- And Pal, quick-as-lightning -- DRAWS and FIRES--!

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The family watch, breathless as the SHOT RINGS OUT.

EXT. MILL STABLES

An awkward, hanging quiet. Pal's BARREL SMOKING...

Finally -- BurnFace cranes his head to a HISSING behind... A FEED BAG SPEWING its contents from the fresh bullet hole.

BurnFace looks back to Pal. Smile widening. Another step--

And Pal UNLEASHES a VOLLEY -- BANG-BANG-BANG--!

CLICK... Empty.

BurnFace just cocks his head.

Not a scratch.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Amelia's eyes go wide as the realization dawns--

AMELIA

Oh no. He can't shoot left-handed.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS

Pal LAUGHS, ready for the hammer to drop--

PAL

That bluff *usually* works.

BurnFace croaks out a SOUND... Something between a gurgled laugh and a donkey's HEE-HAW... Then raises his arm...

As a TOMAHAWK comes WHOOSHING from the rooftop--!

Pal sees it last-second -- tries to side step, but it snags his left shoulder with a SPLASH of blood--!

PAL (CONT'D)

Shit!

The Marauders descend -- Drawn to Pal's fear like dogs. Eagle leaping down, BlueBonnet flanking from the thicket...

Pal struggles with his colt as BurnFace advances... Tries to reload, but bullets fall through swollen fingers...

As BurnFace LUNGES -- Pal just HURLS the whole damn pistol--! BEAMS him straight in his crispy face!

Pal sprints for the cabin. He dives over the WAGON -- Just as a SPEAR WHISTLES PAST -- Then trips up the steps before careening into the closed cabin door.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

DOOR POUNDING as Amelia rushes over to unbar it... But Will steps in to block her.

AMELIA

What are you doing?!

EXT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Pal BEATS his fists against the wood.

PAL
Let me in! Please!

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

As the front door THUMPS--

SAMUEL
They'll kill him, Pa!

Will's eyes are cold.

WILL
He killed one of them and they
followed him here! I'm giving them
what they want.

EXT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

BEHIND PAL -- BlueBonnet and BurnFace pincer from the sides
as Eagle grabs his spear. A slow pursuit, but there's
something inevitable to it... Like creeping death.

PAL
Shit-shit-shit-shit-!

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Amelia tries to push past her father.

AMELIA
You can't do this! Please, Pa!

WILL
That's enough, Amelia! I'm only
thinking of my family.

AMELIA
No, you're not! Because Ma would
never leave a man out there to die!

EXT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Eagle takes aim right for Pal. And this bit happens fast--
Eagle LOBS the SPEAR -- Pal pleading at the door --

PAL
Let me in for the love of-

And the door GIVES in the nick of time, Pal falling inward --
As the SPEAR sticks into the doorframe where he just stood-!

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Pal face-plants the floor. HUFFING, as Samuel bars the door.

PAL
I thought you were gonna leave me
out there!

He looks to Will and Amelia, the pair in an icy stare-down.
Will trods off without a word. Pal lets that sink in.

PAL (CONT'D)
Wait...

INT. CABIN - LATER

Pal sits shirtless at the table, sloppily patching his
tomahawk gash. Amelia approaches with a clean shirt.

AMELIA
Here. It's my brother's.

Pal eyes it as she drapes it over the chair.

PAL
Bit big for him, isn't it?

AMELIA
Wrong brother.

Pal starts to ask, but swallows it for now.

PAL
So... when's this cavalry of yours
coming?

AMELIA
Soon.
(beat)
That was brave, back there. Stupid
but brave.

PAL
Been called worse.

She smiles. He laughs in return. Then she grows somber.

AMELIA
Your horse... what was his name?

PAL
He was a she -- Goldsmith.

AMELIA
I'm sorry.
(beat)
And what about you? You got a name?

PAL
Oh. Well... People call me
Palomino. Pal for short.

AMELIA
You have a nickname... For your
nickname?

PAL
Guess so. Never liked my birth
name. What do they call you?

AMELIA
Amelia. Amelia Whitman.

PAL
Well, nice to meet you, Miss
Whitman. Thanks for the shirt.

He pulls on the new duds. Amelia gathers his stitching materials, blood smudging her hands as she heads off.

But we stick with Pal -- Taking in this family...
Watching their ticks unfold from his perspective.

His gaze finds Amelia's LIMP... Then moves to Will, who stands at the port hole... And finally finds Samuel, who approaches his father. Pal watches them chat from afar.

SAMUEL
Anything I can do, Pa?

WILL
Just rest now.

SAMUEL
Is this like fighting Indians?

WILL
Indians would've burned us out by
now. So... not quite.

SAMUEL
Are we going to be okay?

WILL

Rest.

Pal watches WILL'S SCARRED HAND... It's trembling.
Then Pal slumps into his chair and closes his eyes.

PAL

And now we wait...

Amelia plunges her bloody hands into a washing bowl...
RED BILLOWING into the water as we CROSSFADE TO--

EXT. HOMESTEAD - SUNSET

A FIERY HORIZON of sun-scorched CLOUDS.
The cabin waits beneath... With the door WIDE OPEN.

Will scavenges supplies from the wagon carriage. A nervous
Samuel plays support with the shotgun. He watches the lurking
MARAUDERS, still as scarecrows against the melting sun.

Will hefts a SACK of goods as they shuffle back inside.

INT. CABIN - SUNSET

Will lays out provisions on the lantern-lit table.
Jerky, bandages, bullets. He assesses aloud--

WILL

Well, they ain't gonna starve us
just yet, but ammo's tight. We've
got twelve rounds for the shotgun,
and another ten for the Henry...

Pal SLAPS his AMMO BANDOLIER onto the table.

PAL

Plus sixteen for the Colt.

WILL

... And sixteen rounds for a gun we
no longer possess.

Pal glowers at him.

PAL

What exactly are you suggesting?

WILL

The bullets -- Are useless --
Because we don't have -- The gun.

(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

Or were *you* suggesting we *throw* the bullets at them?

PAL

Here's what I'm suggestin'...

Pal SWEEPS the bullets off the table--!

PAL (CONT'D)

All these bullets are useless because my shooting arm's gimped, and you? You couldn't hit a barn with them war tremors.

Will glances instinctively to his hand, ever SHAKING.

PAL (CONT'D)

Those powder burns on your palm... You've done your share of killin'. Maybe more. But the thing is...
(leans in)
If you coulda killed those things out there yourself, then you wouldn't have needed me.

As Will steps heatedly toward Pal--

AMELIA

That's enough!

The men freeze. Amelia glares from her post at the port hole.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

You've settled it -- You're both useless. How incredibly helpful. Now we all feel better.

Will grumbles. Then trudges to the bedroom without a word.

Samuel scoops up the scattered bullets as tension dissipates. Amelia speaks somberly. A bit fatalistic, even--

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Samuel... Once it's dark, ya'll should head for the Fort. I'll never make it on foot, but- Ya'll could get there well before dawn.
(beat)
At this point, who knows when that detachment will-

And as if on cue -- A DISTANT HORN SOUNDS...

AMELIA (CONT'D)

... Come.

Amelia freezes. Puts her ear to the port... Eyes widening...

AMELIA (CONT'D)

It's an army bugle!

Everyone scrambles to a window as Pal opens the shutters--

The OPEN HORIZON of a CRIMSON SUNDOWN... Where the CALL of an approaching BUGLE echoes from just over a nearby hilltop!

Everyone watches. Counting every second... Until, finally-- A CAVALRY SCOUT crests the hill, instrument to his lips--!

SAMUEL

They're really here! Those guys are in some trouble, now!

He grins wide to Amelia. She SIGHS with much-needed relief.

Will rejoins them. Cautiously optimistic. *Hoping.*

Pal stays locked on the horizon... And soon his eyes narrow with grave concern.

PAL

So... Where are the rest?

Amelia's smile slowly melts. She turns to her father.

AMELIA

They're... Sending a detachment... To fetch the horses... Right?

PAL

Do they send entire *units* for that?

And the Scout looks less impressive with every closing gait. Scrawny, even, in an oversized uniform. Pal shakes his head.

PAL (CONT'D)

Well, that sure ain't no detachment. It's barely a *man*. And he's tootin' his own death horn!

And as if smelling blood in the water-- The Rattler and Stag PROPEL from the mill in mounted pursuit!

AMELIA

No-no-no-no-!

The Scout spots his aggressors--
BLASTS a shocked SOUR NOTE and cuts away in fast retreat...

Amelia loses sight as he rounds the cabin.

She scurries to the next window, flinging open the shutters--
Catching a quick snippet of the chase before again losing it.

And this continues for a few beats -- The family RUSHING
window-to-window -- Catching STROBING GLIMPSES of the chase--

Each time, the Marauders gain ground on the poor Scout...

He finally hooks away toward the horizon...
Allowing Amelia to stop and spectate at a single OPEN WINDOW--

The Rattler and Stag RUSH -- Forcing the Scout towards an
overgrown thicket. He draws a SWORD as all three disappear
behind the foliage... Due out the other side any second...

But no one emerges... All we hear is the GUTTURAL CRY.

SAMUEL

Did they... get him?

Everyone watches. Honed in on the thicket...
As the THUMPING of HOOVES returns...

The Cavalry HORSE emerges... Blood-striped and riderless.

Will crumbles down into a chair at the table.

WILL

Son of a bitch...

Samuel and Pal slump against furniture, crestfallen.
But Amelia... She just keeps her eyes on that horse...

And suddenly-- She BOLTS-! Right for the door -- ?
Just flips up the barricade, opens it and scurries out-!

WILL (CONT'D)

Amelia, stop!

She yells back over her shoulder, hopping down the porch--

AMELIA

We've gotta get that horse!

EXT. HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS

SHARP, SHALLOW BREATHS -- As Amelia hobble-sprints...
Moving to intercept the runaway CAVALRY HORSE.

Will comes alongside her in a mad dash.

WILL
I'll get the horse!

AMELIA
It'll come to me!

Amelia CALLS OUT, to no avail. She sucks in a huge breath... And gives the loudest two-fingered WHISTLE you've ever heard.

As if ready to oblige -- The horse turns straight for her!

Amelia picks up the pace... She's closed half the gap when--

The Rattler and Stag remerge from the thicket on horseback--!

Will pulls up his rifle and unleashes a VOLLEY of SHOTS from the hip -- CRACK-CRACK-CRACK-CRACK! -- Whipping the lever, SPEWING cartridges... No precision, just raw show-of-force...

Most rounds pock the dirt -- But one ZINGS Rattler's arm--! He veers off, leaving The Stag in sole, thunderous pursuit.

And in that opening -- Amelia reaches the Horse--! Catches it mid-lope and latches onto the side of the saddle.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Samuel and Pal watch, jaws agape, as Amelia dangles from the side of the steed... Then somehow steers it right for them.

PAL
What is she gonna--?

Samuel spots his father, who's almost back to the porch... And dashes to intercept him at the door.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS

Will makes it to the door right as Samuel yanks it open. Amelia only seconds behind him... And now, so is The Stag.

Amelia grips the saddle horn, knuckles clenched white as she presses herself against the horse...

She's gonna ride it straight into the cabin!

Will perches at the door, ready... as The Stag pulls within arms reach of Amelia -- On a collision course for the porch.

It all happens in the blink of an eye--

Amelia VAULTING the steps -- The Stag LAUNCHING himself off his steed right for her -- COLLIDING--

A GRAND CRASH-!

CLOSE-UP CHAOS -- Limbs and forms, tangling, TUMBLING--
The Marauder Horse TRIPPING, ROLLING off the porch--
As the wreck blows through the doorway like a tornado-!

INT. CABIN - SUNSET - CONTINUOUS

Will dives from its path as the STORM ROLLS IN--
Hooves skidding, furniture SHATTERING...

The tangled forms SMASHING to a stop against the back wall,
hazing the cabin in sawdust and splintered wood.

WILL pulls himself up. Stumbles to the door and SLAMS it.

A breath-catching beat as debris settles.

Will bars the door, COUGHING.

Pal and Samuel clamber to their feet, dirty and disoriented.

And soon... From the dusty fog... Amelia emerges...
Triumphant -- Leading the horse by the reins!

SAMUEL

You did it!

A GROWL.

Everyone turns. To the massive ANTLERED FORM rising from the rubble... Like a long-dormant demon, back for blood.

THE STAG made it inside, too.

And there's the most pregnant of pauses. Everyone waiting for the peace to break but not wanting to be the one to break it.

Finally, relenting--

AMELIA

Well, shit.

And it all goes to hell.

An ABSOLUTE FREE-FOR-ALL -- As the Stag RUSHES-!

Amelia right in his path, but WILL shoves her aside--
Intercepting the blow as both men CASCADE into a wall-!

The Stag puts his ugly face to Will's...
 SQUEEZES his throat with a hand the size of a bear paw...

Pal comes in quick, SMASHING a chair across The Stag's back-!

The Stag releases Will... BUCKS suddenly backwards--

And PINS Pal with an ANTLER through his fresh shoulder wound!

Pal HOWLS-! Punches wildly to no avail...

Samuel CHARGES with a rifle... But The Stag just SWATS him --
 Sends the boy pinwheeling across the room-!

In that opening -- Amelia ascends the dining room table --
 And SMASHES the whisky jug on The Stag's head-!

The Stag SPINS -- TWIRLING PAL off his antlers -- Then--

UPPERCUTS the table-! Upends the damn thing, Amelia and all-!

The family keeps coming -- Hurling debris, GRAPPLING --
 But it does little more than momentarily distract The Stag.

All the while -- The Cavalry Horse SCURRIES around in a
 panic, TRAMPLING furniture.

Amelia recovers as The Stag starts for her again... When--

A POUNDING erupts at the door. BurnFace SHRIEKING outside.
 So the Stag stops fighting. And heads for the door instead!

He only gets a few steps when-- WOOSH-SHINK-!

The CHAINED CLAW -- The one that got Pal the night before --
 Nabs The Stag's shoulder -- Will at the other end-!

WILL

Nope!

The Stag glances to it. Then just keeps walking -- *What's a
 little extra baggage?* -- As Will's feet slide beneath him...

Samuel DIVES onto the chain, then Amelia...
 The whole family pulling... DRAGGED, as The Stag slows...

Just ahead -- Pal puts himself between The Stag and the door.

He RAMS the The Stag -- Tries desperately to push him back,
 mere feet from the door...

The Stag SNATCHES Pal one-handedly, like a toy...
 Then repeatedly SLAMS him against the door!

WHACK-WHACK-WHACK-! It's painful, but... also kinda funny?

The Stag pins Pal to the door. Raises his fist for a sure deathblow. Pal glances down. The Stag's gaze follows...

To the TRAIN SPIKE in Pal's palm.
The one pocketed from Thomas.

PAL
 How 'bout that?

He SLAMS it straight into The Stag's eye-!

The STAG ROARS. Brings his FIST down...

As Will LEAPS onto his back -- SWOOPING the loose chain around The Stag's neck -- COILING and cinching it tight-!

Will JERKS as Pal SHOVES...
 FELLING The Stag like a mighty tree!

The Stag CRASHES to his knees. CLAWING at the CHOKING CHAIN. Will pulls with all his strength as the links GROAN...

The Stag is losing color... He looks again to the door... So close... Help POUNDING outside... One last reach--

WILL braces a knee against his back... YELLS-!

The Stag's eyes bulge. One last GURGLING RATTLE...

Then he SLAPS face-first to the ground. STONE-COLD DEAD.

Will holds the chain tight. SQUEEZING. A man possessed.

After a long silence--

PAL (CONT'D)
 Hey... You can only kill him once.

Will comes-to. Drops the chain. Takes a deep breath.

WILL
 Yeah.

Everyone decompresses. Exhausted from their hard-won victory.

INT. CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

The family and Pal encircle THE STAG'S CRUMPLED BODY.

SAMUEL
 What are they, Pa?

Pal leans down to him. Pulls the tangled hair aside...
To see a rotted CAVALRY UNIFORM beneath.

PAL
Army blues... Soldiers?

Will rolls him face-up. The good eye glossy but wild. Samuel turns away. But Amelia is transfixed. The Stag is chilling, even in death. As though he could spring to life any moment.

AMELIA
Look at him. It's like there's...
No humanity at all.

PAL
Well, he is dead.

AMELIA
No, I mean... He's just-

WILL
An animal.

PAL
How long before the Fort comes
looking for their man?

WILL
Not before we're dead.

PAL
Well, one down, four to go. Maybe
we just need to get them in here
one at a time?

Pal shrugs. Samuel looks over the corpse in fear.

SAMUEL
What do we do with him, Pa?

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Pal and Will drag the body by its boots unceremoniously down the front stairs. The head SMACKS each step as it descends.

The men dust off their hands. Will looks over to the mill. Pal follows. It's eerily silent.

The Eagle stands motionless on the roof, watching.

PAL
Think they'll retaliate?

Will doesn't answer. Just looks between the waiting darkness and the light spilling from the front door.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

CLOSE ON -- The CAV HORSE. Samuel's hand comes in with a biscuit. The horse sniffs at it... Then CHOMPS it whole-!

WIDENING OUT -- Amelia and Samuel sit at the re-set table, slurping something resembling stew, the horse just behind.

Will ladles the watery slop by the stove. Walks a bowl over to Pal, who stands at the port hole on watch.

WILL
Here. Eat something.

PAL
Thank you.
(beat)
So... What are we gonna do?

Will looks back at the children at the table, makes sure they can't hear what he's about to say. He turns back to Pal...

WILL
I'll ride for the fort tonight.
Once I've rested... And the kids
are asleep.
(beat)
You outran 'em in darkness, maybe I
can, too... If they follow me. If
I'm not back by sundown tomorrow,
gather the kids and take your
chances south.
(beat)
There's a mining camp some forty
miles out. Might can lose 'em at
the river halfway between.

Pal gives a curt nod. He starts to leave but Will grabs his arm. Looks him square in the eye, man to man. Talks hushed.

WILL (CONT'D)
I don't know you. But I don't have
a choice but to trust you. They're
all I have.

PAL
(nods)
They'll be safe. You have my word.

Will finally releases him. Pal heads for the table.
Will just watches with weary eyes.

INT. CABIN DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Pal eases into a chair at the table. Samuel tips his imaginary hat again.

Amelia looks him over... Pal is a sight for sore eyes.

PAL

Howdy.

He SLURPS his stew.

SAMUEL

How'd you know about the tremors?

PAL

(with mouth full)

The what?

SAMUEL

Pa's shakes. You called 'em war tremors. How'd you know?

PAL

Pretty common amongst fighting men.

AMELIA

Are you a fighting man? Is that how you learned to shoot so well?

She gives a playful smirk. Pal just shrugs.

PAL

Well, I'd put my shootin' against your runnin' any day.

Amelia takes the jest on the chin. Then grows somber.

AMELIA

I... had the pox.

Pal stops eating. Flicks his eyes to her.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Don't worry, it's not contagious. I mean, it was, at first. I got it from my brother.

Pal's gaze drifts to Samuel. She corrects, as before--

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Wrong brother.

(beat)

Charlie. He got it first. He gave it to me. I gave it to Ma.

Will keeps watch, pretending not to hear, swallowing any reaction. Amelia raises her gimp leg as best she can.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

When it was past, it took the strength out of my leg.

PAL

And Charlie and Ma... ?

AMELIA

It took... everything.

PAL

Oh. I'm... I'm real sorry.

She gives a polite smile. Pal quickly changes the subject.

PAL (CONT'D)

Legs or no, I ain't never seen no one ride a horse through a door. You're like a... *wunder-kind*.

(off her look)

It's German.

AMELIA

Don't know German.

PAL

Means you're the best.

AMELIA

Prote-gee. That's french.

(pause)

When I'm on a horse... I feel whole again. That probably sounds stupid.

PAL

Least stupid thing I've heard all week. Let's drink to horses.

He raises his tin mug towards her. She just stares back.

PAL (CONT'D)

Now you tap your cup to mine. That's German, too. *Probst*.

She CLANKS her mug to his. They laugh.

Pal downs his cup... But as he drinks... Something catches his eye across the room -- Something forgotten until now:

THE EXPRESS SATCHEL.

By pure serendipity, his payday has followed him here. And he plays it cool... But his mind turns...

And soon his eyes flicker with a formed plan.

INT. CABIN - LATER

Quietly cast in shadow now, half the lanterns extinguished. Amelia and Will doze on bundled pallets on the floor.

Samuel stands watch as he fights off sleep. His fingers uncurl from the shotgun... SLIPPING from his hands...

CAUGHT mid-air by Pal as Samuel JOLTS back awake.

PAL
Careful, kiddo.

Samuel snaps-to as Pal perches beside him.

PAL (CONT'D)
What are they up to?

SAMUEL
Hard to tell. When the clouds move,
I can make out the one on the roof.
I wonder if they ever sleep.

PAL
Everything needs sleep...

He grips his wounded shoulder dramatically.

PAL (CONT'D)
Speaking of... this pain is keeping
me awake something awful. And you
look tuckered. How 'bout I just
take a double-watch?

SAMUEL
You sure?

PAL
Damn sure. This is what they
call... Personnel management.

Samuel nods, impressed with this well-to-do phrase.

Another fake-hat tip and Samuel heads for an empty pallet.
Pal peers out the SNIPING HOLE--

The mill looms out there. The faintest outline of the Eagle
on the roof. Then the clouds shift and darkness cloaks him.

INT. CABIN - LATER

Samuel is fast asleep. Will and Amelia, too.
And the window port hole is untended...

Because Pal is across the room...
Leading the CAVALRY HORSE by the reins.

He looks over the family. Strife etched on his face...
But he gazes to the satchel in his hands...
Makes his call... And shoulders his prize.

Pal sneaks to the door, wincing at the horse's heavy hooves.
He unbars the door as gingerly as possible.

Locks one foot in a stirrup. One last glance back--

To Amelia... Then Samuel... And Will's now-empty pallet.

Pal's eyes go wide, craning back just in time to see--

A BROKEN CHAIR LEG -- CRACKING him in face --
And taking us to BLACK.

FLOATING IN DARKNESS.

The sounds come first. ANGRY, MUFFLED VOICES. Then...

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

PAL's FACE fades into view as a hand SMACKS HIM AWAKE--

He SPUTTERS, drooling. Bruises on every inch of his face now.
He tries to move... Finds himself TIED to a chair instead.

LOOKING UP -- The WHITMAN FAMILY surrounding him...
Will, Samuel, Amelia... THE HORSE. Even it looks betrayed.
Pal tries an off-the-cuff lie--

PAL

I was gonna... Go for help...

WILL

And you were just taking this for
what? Safe keeping?

Will brandishes the SATCHEL.

WILL (CONT'D)
You would've killed us for it.

PAL
I wasn't gonna kill you-

AMELIA
Just abandon us to die, then?

Pal stops cold. Echoes of Thomas's death in his mind...
And something new in his eyes... *Shame?*

Will inspects the SATCHEL.

WILL
Well... Might as well see what our
lives were worth.

PAL
No, wait, it's no good if you-

Will RIPS OPEN the seal.

PAL (CONT'D)
... Open it.

Will unfolds a crisp LETTER. Reads it to himself.

SAMUEL
What's it say, Pa?

WILL
It's... for President Lincoln.

Amelia cocks her head, recalling her chat with Thomas.

AMELIA
How 'bout that...

Will reads a snippet aloud.

WILL
*"I advise the immediate removal of
General Johnston from his post. If
not, he will secede within the
fortnite and take the forces of
southern California with him."*

SAMUEL
What's it mean?

WILL

Means this outlaw may have just won
somebody a war.

A long beat as everyone processes that.

Pal looks between them.

PAL

My employer might still take it.
We could... split the reward...

Will SNATCHES the chair-! DRAGS it -- Passenger included --
Right for the door.

PAL (CONT'D)

No... Please-!

Amelia happens to be in his path. Will hesitates.

PAL (CONT'D)

Miss Whitman. Amelia. Please...

Will stares her down. But this time... She doesn't plead.
She just steps from her father's path with averted eyes.

PAL (CONT'D)

No, wait! I can still help! Don't-!

Will drags him to the door -- FLINGS it open--

And FREEZES.

Because in the doorway... Looms a MAN with a rifle.

A familiar face -- The OLD FELLA from the night before...
Except most people call him COLONEL. He looks over the
family. At the bound man. Then, deadpan--

COLONEL

Is this a bad time?

INT. CABIN - MINUTES LATER

The family circles the Colonel as he lights up a PIPE near
the mantle. He eyes Pal, still tied to the chair.

COLONEL

I take it you were disagreeable?

Pal nods shamefully. The Colonel moves to the port hole.
Gazes out, pensive.

SAMUEL

You know those men?

COLONEL

When they were *men*, yes.

(beat)

The worst men, to be sure. But in war, it's often best to make sure the worst are on your side.

He goes quiet a moment. Perhaps lost in terrible memories. And it seems like the story is about to continue, but then--

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Wagon out there broke?

WILL

It's under repair.

The Colonel nods. Then jumps back to his wistful tale--

COLONEL

They were recruited. From various *Insti-tutions*. Did their job well. Killed every Indian we ever asked 'em to, and then some. Their brutality was... breathtaking. But you can't bring men like that back to civilization.

(pause)

So I stationed 'em up in the mountains... And left 'em to die in the coldest winter I ever seen.

(pause)

They were just young men... Eight of 'em, then. So maybe the frost got a few after all.

He sits. Takes a long drag from his pipe.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

A year ago, I started hearing things. Killings with a certain cruelty about them... And I knew. They weren't done.

SAMUEL

What do they want?

COLONEL

It's not as logical as all that.

The Colonel laughs to himself. At the craziness of it.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

The frontier can give a man great purpose. Or it can push him over the precipice. But what happens when it drives the worst men mad?

(beat)

Theirs is a primal sort of fury. The kind that never really dies... Just festers up now and again. And now it's at your doorstep.

WILL

So why are you here?

A long pause.

COLONEL

To right old wrongs.

SAMUEL

Doctor Frankenstein.

COLONEL

What's that, son?

Amelia comes in with the assist--

AMELIA

Chasing your monster.

COLONEL

Sounds about right.

(pause)

Listen folks, my horse is hidden nearby. Now, two horses won't carry five, but they *might* pull that wagon out front.

PAL

And if we wait them out instead?

COLONEL

You can run now or run later. But they're gonna make you run.

AMELIA (O.C.)

(spits it out)

I can fix it-!

The Colonel turns, surprised. Studies Amelia. Like he can see that potential in her Will seems to miss. She pushes on--

AMELIA (CONT'D)

But the parts I need are in the stables. If we could get the wagon in there... I could do it fast.

PAL

You do realize they're still in there, right?

COLONEL

Well then, I'll have to draw 'em out.

The Colonel removes his coat. Tugs at his beard, pondering.

SAMUEL

How'd you sneak past them anyhow?

COLONEL

Sneak past them? No, no... Make no mistake, they let me into their trap. Won't be as kind to leaving.

(pause)

I can lure them away but I'll need to borrow your bronco.

INT. CABIN - LATER

The Colonel prepares the cavalry horse as he dictates.

COLONEL

I'll lead 'em into the east canyon and buttonhook back. As soon as they're gone, grab my horse from the thicket to the north and get that wagon into the stables. I'll keep 'em away as long as I can.

(turns to Will)

For what it's worth, I'm sorry. For all this bad business.

WILL

You sure they'll follow you?

THE COLONEL

They'll follow. You just be fast.

Will moves over to Pal. Then, reluctantly SLICES Pal's bonds. The ropes fall to the floor.

WILL

Any reason to kill you and I will.

Will turns without another word. Pal massages his wrist.

AMELIA (O.C.)
Did you shoot Thomas?

He turns to Amelia, a bit melancholy now.

PAL
Who?

AMELIA
The Rider with the satchel.

PAL
I didn't shoot him. Well- Actually,
I did shoot him, but I didn't *kill*
him. I mean, it's complicated-
(straightens up)
He's dead. And I'm... As much to
blame as anyone. And I'm sorry.

AMELIA
You're a coward.

PAL
More of an *asshole* I've been told.

WILL
Shut him up. Bad enough he lives. I
don't need to hear him speak.

AMELIA
Fine by me.

She steps away. The Colonel pulls himself onto the horse.

COLONEL
Let's go.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The Colonel LAUNCHES from the cabin...
Gallopig straight for the mill stables.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The family watches from the windows--

The Colonel SWOOPS past the stables, WHOOPING and COUGHING
SHOTS into the air. Shadows stir in its open door...

And soon -- THE MOUNTED MARAUDERS SWARM from the stables... Just shapes in the clouded moonlight, with SHIMMERS of their reflective attire. At least three of them... *Maybe* all four?

The Colonel SPURS hard and the chase begins... And soon they're all just fuzzy specs on the dark horizon.

The family scoops up what supplies they can, Amelia hefting Pal's AMMO BANDOLIER. Will squints into the night--

WILL
Did they all take the bait?

SAMUEL
I counted three for sure, Pa.

Will shakes his head. Cradles the shotgun.

WILL
No choice now. Stay alert. C'mon!

EXT. HOMESTEAD - MOMENTS LATER

The family and Pal rush down the porch. Samuel peels from the rest and heads for the distant trees.

WILL
Fetch that horse quick!

SAMUEL
Yessir!

Amelia and Pal move to the patched axle and start dragging it to the wagon cart. Will moves past with gun and lantern.

WILL
I'll clear the stables.

He crosses through the corral, eyes locked on the mill.

INT. MILL STABLES - NIGHT

Will creeps inside the open sliding door. The SMELL grabs his attention before he can see it--

Just glimpses in lantern light, but it's enough... HORSE CARCASSES. Open and half-eaten, flies BUZZING noisily.

WILL
Like a damn wolves' den...

He pushes past, shotgun raised as he clears each stall.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - NIGHT

Amelia and Pal STRAIN as they lift the axle...
And soon it LOCKS into the open wagon socket.

They put shoulders to it... And the wagon LURCHES to life-!

Pal bears the brunt, but it's moving nonetheless...
Wheels GROANING in protest as it putters along.

WILL REAPPEARS -- And hooks back to join in behind the cart.
They HEAVE in unison... And the cart picks up speed.

It's an uncooperative thing, wheels pivoting every direction
except straight... But it generally heads for the mill.

And soon the sweaty trio have the cart well into the corral.

Then... A SOUND on the wind... The RATTLING of SNAKES.

AMELIA

Wait-!

They stop dead. Peer into the darkness...

NOTHING.

Then, another SOUND from another direction -- INBOUND HOOVES.
And soon the boy appears, bobbing in the moonlight...

SAMUEL -- Astride the Colonel's horse!

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Hurry Samuel, to the front!

Amelia takes the reins as Samuel dismounts at the yoke.
She quickly secures the horse to the cart.

Samuel looks over to Will and Pal with a proud grin.

PAL

Way to go, kid.

AMELIA

(to Samuel)

Water. For the horses.

Samuel nods and hustles off.

WILL

Let's go!

With the last strap buckled, Amelia smacks the horse, and it
starts a slow pull... New to this, it seems...

But Amelia tugs the reins and soon the horse picks up, Will and Pal pushing from behind.

EXT. WELL -- CONTINUOUS

Samuel arrives and promptly lobs the roped bucket into the abyss. He reels it up as fast as he can.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS

Amelia is almost to the mill door now...
And while the tension remains, there's victory in the air.

AMELIA
C'mon, just a few more steps!

Then she hears it... The SOUND again -- RATTLESNAKES.

Dread washes over Amelia as she gazes to Sam...
Everything SLOWING... Amelia's realization dawning too late
as she WHISPERS to herself--

AMELIA (CONT'D)
One's still here...

EXT. WELL -- CONTINUOUS

THE RATTLER -- Emerging from the shadows--!

SNATCHING SAMUEL, bucket plummeting back to the water--!

WILL
No!

Will levels the shotgun but can't get a clean shot...
The Rattler pulls a knife, ready to gut his prey, when--

A SHADOWY FORM rushes in behind them...

The Colonel--!

Leaping from his horse, TACKLING the Rattler--

And SMASHING clean through the pulley systems of the well--!
The three combatants tangle in the ropes as they tumble.

The Colonel SLAMS a fist into the Rattler's face, freeing Samuel from his grasp.

COLONEL
Get the horse!

EXT. HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS

Will steps out to intercept the steed, yelling to Amelia--

WILL
I'll get the horse, get your
brother!

Pal is left pushing the wagon as the two sprint off.

PAL
 And I'll... Steer the wagon...

Samuel CRIES OUT, trying to free himself from the ropes but only ensnaring himself further. Amelia SPRINTS his way, when--

A GLINT of moonlight catches her eye. In the dirt-- Pal's PISTOL-! Discarded here earlier.

She mulls it. Looks to the AMMO BANDOLIER on her shoulder... Then scoops up the weapon and flips open the cylinder.

EXT. WELL - CONTINUOUS

A RAGING FIST FIGHT -- The Colonel and Ratter clobbering each other. Ever on the attack, GRAPPLING, SPITTING BLOOD -- Only further TANGLING themselves in the well's ropey guts.

The Rattler looks up as Amelia approaches... Plugging rounds into the colt...

So he RUSHES for Amelia instead -- Just as she pops the cylinder shut -- And YANKS THE TRIGGER-!

BLAM-!

The Rattler's shoulder EXPLODES with blood -- The force TWIRLS him around fast... Stumbling over a chunk of wood -- And PLUMMETING straight down the well-!

A short satisfaction... Before the slack quickly goes out of the ropes... The same ones still twisted around the Colonel-!

COLONEL
 Son of a bitch-!

In an instant, he's YANKED down the well, too-- Rope HISSING though the pulley as they careen down!

Amelia watches as the remaining rope goes taut... Following it along the ground as it uncoils... And powerless to stop it as the tension finally reaches it's end -- TETHERED SAMUEL-!

WHOOMPF-! He's pulled off his feet, dragged...
As the ROPE REELS HIM right for the well-!

AMELIA

Samuel!

INT. WELL -- CONTINUOUS

Too bulky for a free fall, the Colonel and Rattler tumble clumsily down the chasm, bouncing off the stone walls.

EXT. WELL - CONTINUOUS

Samuel ZIPS right past Amelia before she can grab him...
So she throws out her RED SACHEL--

He catches it -- Dangling precariously over the well-!

INT. WELL -- CONTINUOUS

The men JERK to a stop just above the water line-!
Suspended upside down. It takes a beat for them to come-to...
Then they immediately return to violence--

SWATTING and BASHING the other into the cramped walls.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS

Will leads the uncooperative Cavalry horse by the reins,
fighting him every step to the open mill.

WILL

Move, you stubborn ox!

EXT. WELL -- CONTINUOUS

The satchel is already tearing...
PEPPERMINT STICKS tumbling out as the leather GROANS.

AMELIA

It's not gonna hold! You've gotta
get loose, Samuel!

SAMUEL

It's too tight!

INT. WELL - CONTINUOUS

The Colonel fends off blows as he grips the Rattler's neck.

COLONEL

I'm -- Sorry -- Son.

He PLUNGES his head underwater... And holds it firm.

EXT. WELL -- CONTINUOUS

Samuel pries at the ropes around his legs, but they only seem to squeeze harder... Amelia straining with all her might to hold him... But her satchel is tearing clean down the middle.

SAMUEL

Amelia... I can't-

AMELIA

Just -- hang -- on --

INT. WELL -- CONTINUOUS

The Rattler THRASHES in the water like a blood-mad shark.

Comes out suddenly with a KNIFE--
And STABS the Colonel in the chest-!

EXT. MILL STABLES - CONTINUOUS

Will clears the open doors a split-second after Pal.

A shared look of exhaustion...
Before both immediately bolt back outside--

EXT. HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS

Will JOLTS as he sees it -- Amelia and Samuel, in danger near the well's edge. But before he can take a single step--

That ominous RAPPORT of HOOVES... *They're coming back-!*
Will tosses the shotgun to Pal and dead-sprints to the well.

INT. WELL - CONTINUOUS

The Colonel holds firm as the Rattler's splashing quiets...

The Colonel's eyes flutter... Task complete. And so he lets himself go -- SLUMPING DEAD... DEAD WEIGHT, too, as--

EXT. WELL - CONTINUOUS

The satchel SNAPS in two!

In an instant, Samuel is SUCKED into the well--
YELLING as he vanishes into the abyss--!

SAMUEL
Amelia..!

AMELIA
Nooo!

She crawls for the well... But HANDS SNATCH HER--

WILL.

She fights him. Tries to go for her brother, but Will holds firm, pulling her towards safety.

WILL
They're coming back! We gotta go!

And everything SLOWS. A shell-shocked fragmentation...
BLIPS of sound and image--

Will dragging a defiant Amelia --

The MOUNTED MARAUDERS returning -- Bearing down on them --

Pal BLASTING the shotgun -- Retreats -- Dodges a SPEAR --

The three survivors clear the mill door in the nick of time--

INT. MILL STABLES - CONTINUOUS

Time THROTTLES back to normal -- As the men pull the sliding door closed. Pal wedges a spade in its chain mechanism.

Will deflates against the wall. Amelia in the dirt, crying.

Only the most basic SOUNDS echoing around the stone.
GULPING BREATHS and MESSY BAWLING. And for now, we--

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - NIGHT - LATER

SHADOWS DANCE in the cabin as the Marauders ransack it.
MUFFLED CRASHES and BurnFace's horrid CACKLE fill the air.

INT. MILL STABLES - CONTINUOUS

Pal watches the fiends from a hole in the stone wall.

AMELIA is curled in a back stall... Every second of the last twelve hours etched on her tear-streaked face.

Will steps quietly inside the stall with her.

WILL

Amelia.

She just stares, numb. He crouches down.

WILL (CONT'D)

Amelia... Listen to me.

(pause)

You're gonna take a horse and ride as fast as you can. And don't look back until you reach the Fort. Understand?

She speaks without looking up.

AMELIA

You... Want me to leave..?

WILL

I want you to live.

Amelia turns her head slowly. Her words are ice.

AMELIA

No.

(self-hating)

That's all I've ever done...
I'm the one who lives.

She digs her nails into the dirt.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

After mom died... And Charlie... I tried to tell myself there was a reason... Why that sickness didn't take me instead of them.

Fresh tears well in her eyes.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Maybe you can tell me? Cause I still don't know.

WILL

Amelia...

AMELIA

No. Not this time. This time, I'll die here with my family, thank you very much.

Will grabs her gently by the shoulders.

WILL

Millie.

Her eyes find his.

WILL (CONT'D)

I lost them, too.

Tears well up in his eyes. He glances to his SCARRED HAND. Ever quaking.

WILL (CONT'D)

But that, out there... That ain't for you. That's my retribution.

(beat)

I've been foolish for thinking I could have peace after the things I've done. Deep down, I knew I didn't deserve your Ma or Charlie or Samuel... Or you.

Will wipes tears from his eyes.

WILL (CONT'D)

Millie, please. If there's *any* chance at all... you have to go.

Amelia stares into her father's battle-worn face. And she finally understands.

She falls into his arms and the dam breaks. She lets herself go, SOBBING into his chest as Will holds her tight.

WILL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

They linger there.

Pal watches them. And maybe it's the emotional contrast, but he looks more battered than ever, inside and out. Sad. Alone.

Will finally pulls away.

WILL (CONT'D)

It's up to you now.

She takes a long breath. Wipes away the tears.

INT. MILL STABLES - DAWN

Amelia readies the Colonel's horse as Pal limps over.

PAL
You should hold onto this.

He holds up the EXPRESS SATCHEL.

PAL (CONT'D)
Probably ain't worth much now but
seems a shame to let it die here
with a good-for-nothin' like me.

AMELIA
You ain't dying, yet.

PAL
On a day like this? No guaran-tees.

She takes the satchel. Turns it in her hands.

AMELIA
Curious -- What's your birth name?

He laughs, shakes his head. After a few beats...

PAL
It's Virgil. Virgil Catlett.

AMELIA
Has a ring to it. Thank you,
Virgil.

He tries his wolfish grin, but his face aches so it's a
pained, awkward sneer now. Amelia grimaces back.

But his smile fades... As he focuses on something...

Amelia follows his gaze... Over to her horse... Honing in...

On the HORSE'S EARS--
Canted to the side, roving this way and that...

PAL
Whatcha got, boy?

The ears LOCK -- And Pal wanders off in their direction...
Listening for whatever the horse hears...
Background sounds fading, something else growing louder...

A quiet TAPPING... Like rhythmic rain on a tin roof.

He walks to the HORSE TROUGH. Puts his ear to the RUSTY PUMP. There's some kind of CLINKING... Vibrating through the pipe.

PAL (CONT'D)

Where does that go?

Amelia puts her ear to it. Her eyes widen with realization.

AMELIA

To the well... It's Samuel!

WILL

What?!

Will puts his ear to the pump. Then SNATCHES a pencil from his pocket and SCRIBBLES LETTERS on a stable gate.

We don't see it at first, but it brings a huge smile to everyone's faces. Then, when it's done--

Samuel has fallen. Into well.

WILL (CONT'D)

That boy and his "Ls."

Will grabs a HORSESHOE, and TAPS a message back. And now, as before, the message spells out onscreen--

Stay put. Coming for you.

WILL (CONT'D)

He's alive!

The three of them burst into a jubilant celebration. Raw joy on Will's face -- That's a first.

They collect themselves. And Amelia steels to the task--

AMELIA

I'm not going.

(beat)

It's like you said. We leave this station together. As a family.

PAL

What are you thinking?

AMELIA

They want us to run? Fine. Then we rig the wagon and make our stand on the trail. We fight.

WILL

How do you reckon we get Samuel?

AMELIA

I've... got something for that.

Will stands quiet a moment, mulling it over.

WILL

What do you need?

She stands. Surveys the mill. Sees what's available to her.

AMELIA

Help.

INT. MILL STABLES - DAWN - **MONTAGE**

Will and Pal navigate the overhead loft, grabbing at suspended mechanisms as a flustered Amelia directs below.

AMELIA

No, that one. The one on your right... Your other right.

LATER

Will and Amelia daisy-chain rope around the CRACKED AXLE.

Will shoots her a grimace. *Pray for the best.*

LATER

Amelia notices her small "library" on the shelf. Gives a wistful smile as she SCOOPS her treasures into a SMALL PACK.

LATER

Pal pulls the EXTENDED STOCK from his back pouch. Demonstrates to Amelia as he CLICKS it onto the COLT. He pulls it to his shoulder... Still a bit wobbly for him.

PAL

It's something.

She eyeballs it. Mind whirring... Then--

AMELIA

I think... We can do better.

LATER

BINK-! Amelia whacks the final NAIL into an obscure wagon-top device. Thinks a beat -- *Lightbulb!*

She hoists her bad leg onto a hay bale and unlatches her LEATHER-STRAPPED BRACE... And gets to work...

As our MONTAGE comes to a close--

INT. MILL STABLES - MORNING

Will looks over the COVERED CARCASSES of the horses... Notices something odd -- A BRANDING on an exposed hide. Amelia walks up, way ahead of him--

AMELIA

They're not ours.

(beat)

They... Ate their own horses. And then just traded them. Means ours are still out there with them.

Will can only shake his head at the absurdity.

PAL (O.C.)

Hey, he's, uh... *tapping* again.

They step to the trough. Will puts his ear to the metal.

AMELIA

What's he saying?

Will cocks his head.

WILL

Go look outside.

Amelia rises, brow furrowed. She hobbles quickly to their peephole and gazes out... And her jaw drops.

Because out there, in the warm LIGHT of DAWN... Loitering near the well's edge, gnawing on the spilled PEPPERMINT STICKS from the torn satchel... Is a familiar steed--

FERAL!

Amelia scans for the Marauders, but none are in sight.

WILL (CONT'D)

Where did it come from?

Amelia smiles. Almost proud.

AMELIA

He's *mine*.

(beat)

He can help us.

She darts to the wagon and yanks out a COILED ROPE TIED TO A STIRRUP... Talks without looking up--

AMELIA (CONT'D)
Gotta go now. Before they see him.

She kicks a lever, a small express saddle ZIPPING DOWN from above. She shoulders it and moves to the sliding door.

AMELIA (CONT'D)
Tell Samuel I'm coming.

WILL
(trying to keep up)
Amelia- Just- Be smart out there.

Will shakes his head, moves to the trough and begins a new MORSE CODE MESSAGE. Pal escorts Amelia to the DOOR CRANK.

PAL
I'll get it.

AMELIA
You're starting to walk like me.

PAL
What can I say? It's in fashion.
We'll be right behind you.

Amelia shuts her eyes, psyches herself up. Deep breaths. She opens her eyes -- Pal is staring at her.

AMELIA
What?

PAL
Nothin'. I mean, it's just...
You're...

AMELIA
(butchering the German)
I know. A *wonder-kid*.

PAL
Close enough.

They share a smile. It's nice.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - MORNING

The mill door opens *just* enough. Amelia peeks out. Gazes to the CABIN...

Still as the grave -- Not a Marauder in sight.

She darts out -- Skulking along the corral fence as far as she can, then shuffling across the pasture to the well...

She's halfway there when--

A CRASH ERUPTS from inside the cabin-!

She FREEZES... Pulse THUMPING in her ears...
But nothing stirs from the cabin...
And Feral remains content to devour his treats.

Amelia pushes on to him.

Feral pops his head up. Watches as Amelia extends a hand.
Amelia whispers, as before, like a forgone conclusion--

AMELIA

Come on.

She places her palm to his cheek and he nudges her back --
There's already trust here. She slips the saddle on his back.
Fastens it quickly and pulls the bridle over his head.

She hefts the COILED ROPE... Then tosses the slack with the
TIED STIRRUP down the well and gives a soft WHISTLE--

INT. WELL BOTTOM - MORNING

A soaked Samuel -- Sporting the COLONEL'S COAT for warmth --
Waits at the bottom, moving aside as the roped stirrup PLUNKS
into the waist-deep water beside him.

Samuel scoops it up. Slips a foot into the stirrup.

Glances across the well -- To the two half-submerged CORPSES.
Then looks skyward and gives a relieved WHISTLE back.

The rope soon pulls TAUT...

And Samuel is lifted from the water at a steady ascent...

EXT. WELL - MORNING

Amelia slow-walks Feral away from the well -- Rope looped on his saddle horn -- Reeling up her brother, nice and easy...

INT. WELL - CONTINUOUS

Samuel lets a smile creep across his face. Holding on tight. *Shivering...* He's halfway up the chasm...

When the lift comes to a DEAD STOP.

EXT. WELL - CONTINUOUS

Feral and Amelia -- FROZEN at the sight--

BLUEBONNET -- Looming on the cabin porch. WATCHING.

A pensive pause. Amelia steels herself. This is it.

The sunrise showdown.

AMELIA

Okay.

THE PEACE SHATTERS--

AMELIA clambering atop Feral...

Burning precious seconds as BLUEBONNET sprints for her.

She cries out as she SPURS Feral into action--

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Hold on tight, Samuel!

INT. WELL - DAY

The rope JERKS -- And suddenly Samuel is ROCKETING upwards--! Teeth gritted as he gains momentum toward the light...

SAMUEL

Ameeeeeliiaaaa--!

EXT. WELL - CONTINUOUS

Samuel ERUPTS from the well--!

SAMUEL

Ahhhhhhh!

He SOARS -- Legs flailing in mid-flight...

LANDING -- Hard -- Releasing the rope -- Skipping across the earth...

And bouncing to a dusty stop with a GRUNT.

Barely a moment to recover...
As the SHRIEKING gets Samuel's attention quick--

BLUEBONNET -- Charging with sword drawn--!

Amelia hooks Feral back to help... But she'll never make it.

BlueBonnet closing fast... Samuel braces for the worst. When--

The WAGON BURSTS from the mill--!

Will at the reins, Pal in back --
Nearly trampling BlueBonnet as it cuts him off--!

The wagon slows at Samuel as Pal throws out an arm--

PAL
Get on, kid!

Samuel clambers up a wagon wheel...
The AXLE GROANING at the new weight, but it holds.

Will WHIPS the reins as Samuel plops down beside him.

WILL
You okay, Samuel?

Samuel gives a frazzled look. Something like, *I was just launched out of a well.*

Amelia pulls up beside them as the wagon picks up speed.

AMELIA
Here they come!

Samuel glances back--

BurnFace and The Eagle are already mounted as BlueBonnet climbs on his horse beside them.

BurnFace points at their prey -- Lets out that horrid, GURGLE-SHRIEK... And the hunt begins.

EXT. WAGON, IN-TRANSIT - DAY

HORSES GALLOPING at full-throttle... WAGON RATTLING...
Plains WHIRRING past in the distance...

And the TRIO of MARAUDERS, closing the gap behind--!

Amelia watches them... Thinks a beat... Then--
YANKS Feral's reins -- And suddenly DROPS BACK--!

SAMUEL

'Melia!

But she's already too far back to hear.

EXT. OPEN PLAINS - MOUNTED MARAUDERS - DAY

Amelia slows to within ranged striking distance...

Then SPURS back into action, buzzing just ahead of their pursuers. The Marauders sneer, readying their blades.

AMELIA

Come and get me!

She THROTTLES off to the side.

Glancing back... Hoping someone takes the bait...
Doesn't seem like they have, until, finally--

BlueBonnet can't resist. He peels from the pack.

Amelia grins as she leads him away from her family.

EXT. WAGON, IN-TRANSIT - DAY

Pal watches Amelia and BlueBonnet disappear over a hill.

PAL

There's one! Two to go!

And as if on cue, BurnFace and The Eagle LAUNCH forward-!

Pal scrambles to the back. Kneels down and slides his shooting arm into a curious apparatus--

A FLAT GEAR with the PISTOL MOUNTED TO IT, Amelia's leg brace serving as the arm support. Pal quickly buckles himself in, before turning a CRANK with his free arm...

ROTATING the gear -- And his aim along with it!
Amelia transformed his PISTOL into a MINI MOUNTED TURRET!

He puts the two attackers down-barrel -- BLAM-!

ZIPS a round between them as the Marauders split off!

EXT. OPEN PLAINS - DAY

Amelia and BlueBonnet -- Coasting over the hills.

Amelia grips the reins tight, leans down against Feral.

AMELIA
Come on, boy...

But Amelia can feel it... Even with her skill, Feral is maxed out... And BlueBonnet is gaining ground.

She searches her limited supplies. The saddle. Anything. Then remembers. The SMALL PACK. She unshoulders it. Opens--

HER BOOK COLLECTION.

BlueBonnet RUSHES to strike as Amelia LOBS a book--

It BEAMS BlueBonnet in the face -- PAGES EXPLODING on IMPACT, debris fluttering in the wind-!

BlueBonnet falls back, FURIOUS...
Amelia holds course, palming her next book projectile.

EXT. WAGON, IN-TRANSIT - DAY

Pal's trigger-finger a blur -- BLAM-BLAM-BLAM-POW-!

A round ZINGS BurnFace in the shoulder-!

He drops back. CROAKING LOUDLY -- Eagle pulls in front.
A pawn to protect the king.

Pal puts The Eagle right in his sights. Yanks the trigger...

CLICK-! Empty!

Pal uses his untethered hand to empty the cylinder.
Tries to plug in fresh bullets as the wagon HITS a bump-!

AXLE CREAKING -- Bullets falling from Pal's hand...

ROLLING across the wagon cart-!

He looks up, helpless, as Eagle readies a fresh TOMAHAWK--

PAL
Shit-shit-shit-!

A WHOOSHING as the tomahawk sails...

Pal ROLLING in the nick of time, arm still in brace--
Tomahawk THUNKING *right* where Pal lied a split-second before.

PAL (CONT'D)
Ha!

He rolls to face his enemy -- Heart nearly-stopping--
Because the Eagle is about to LEAP ABOARD-!

PAL (CONT'D)

Will!

WILL (O.S.)

I'm here.

NOW WE SEE -- Samuel is at the reins. Will has already stepped to the back -- Leveling the SHOTGUN right at Eagle-!

He FIRES-!

CLICK! A POOF of smoke and light -- But it FIZZLES!

WILL (CONT'D)

... Shit.

It's all the delay The Eagle needs--
LEAPING from his horse, crashing onto the wagon!

Again the AXLE BUCKLES... But holds.

Eagle scrambles for balance -- Goes for Pal with a knife --
But Will INTERCEPTS him, rolling both across the wagon-!

EXT. OPEN PLAINS - DAY

Amelia and BlueBonnet weave through brush and rock.

Amelia HURLING BOOKS like a madman -- BlueBonnet trying to fend them off, slicing wildly with his sword.

Some slip past, PEG his face. It's effective if ridiculous, and more than a little funny. Slowing and infuriating him.

Amelia peers into her pack -- One book left.

She glances back to her pursuer... Down to his horse...
And her eyes shimmer with recognition--

AMELIA

Marcel..?!

The wild-eyed steed rides hard for its new master.
Amelia weighs the revelation... And makes her plan.

EXT. WAGON, IN-TRANSIT - DAY

Will delivers PUNISHING BLOWS atop The Eagle...
Samuel doing his best to steer the careening WAGON...

As Pal reloads the COLT, glancing nervously at--

BURNFACE -- Back in play, RIDING IN with the defenses down-!

The Eagle sees him... Finds a second wind -- Finds leverage --
And HEAD BUTTS Will-!

Rolling free-!

Grabbing his KNIFE... Moving quickly on Will...
And easing the blade to his throat-!

Samuel glances back -- The Eagle grins through bloody teeth
as Will barely holds off the blade...

SAMUEL

Pa!

Samuel JERKS the reins to the side-!

Sending The Eagle WOBBLING BACKWARDS-!

Will takes the opening -- Plants a firm boot on his chest --
And KICKS him off the back-!

Except -- The Eagle CATCHES himself last-second. CLINGING,
feet dragging dirt... Holding on by pure hatred.

He pulls himself up with a sneer...

Right into the POINT-BLANK SIGHTS of Pal's LOADED PISTOL.
Pal turns the aim-crank *just so*, with a satisfying CLICK-!

The Eagle stares down the barrel. Then to Pal. Pal grins.

PAL

Yep.

BLAM-! Eagle tumbles off the wagon. Very dead.

EXT. OPEN PLAINS - DAY

BlueBonnet is close now. He'll overtake Amelia in matter of
strides. And so he raises his sword...

And STABS Marcel in the rear haunch-!

Marcel LURCHES into top speed, SQUEALING...

Amelia tucks to Feral. Crouched low, eyes forward...
Determined. Eying the brush ahead. Death rushing from behind.

BlueBonnet raises his blade. Savors this final moment.

Just as Amelia JERKS Feral's reins--!

Skidding past the brush -- SCRAMBLING out to--

EXT. OVERLOOK - CONTINUOUS

Yeah. Remember that massive drop-off from earlier?
Amelia's led BlueBonnet right to it.

She stutter-stops way before the ledge.
 DUCKING the SWORD as--

BlueBonnet SLINGSHOTS past... Marcel bracing, SLIPPING...
 Finding traction *right* at the edge, but--

BlueBonnet is pure momentum -- PITCHING forward--
 LAUNCHING off the horse--

And right over the cliff's edge--!

EXT. OVERLOOK DROPOFF - MOMENTS LATER

Amelia, on foot now, peeks over the edge--

BlueBonnet -- Hanging onto the cliff some distance down...

Not out yet. GRUNTING as he begins a very long climb back.

Amelia stares. Holds the LAST BOOK over the drop--
Frankenstein. She takes careful aim... And lets it go--

The BOOK falls... Perfect alignment...
 And PINGS BlueBonnet on his hideous face--!

PEELING HIM from the cliff -- BlueBonnet plummeting --
 His SHRILL HOWL fading as he falls to the earth below.

Amelia shuts her eyes at the THUD.

She gives herself a moment. Lets the adrenaline taper off.
 The sudden decompression is overwhelming.

She turns to Marcel. Unbuckles the horrible saddle.
 Lets the damn thing fall to the dirt.

She strokes his mane lovingly.

AMELIA
Not so dumb after all.

EXT. WAGON, IN-TRANSIT - DAY

Pal puts his sights on BurnFace, ready to shoot him down.
But, without warning...

BurnFace slows to a trot. Falling back... Stopping.

PAL
The hell's he doin'?

WILL
Maybe he's giving up.

With BURNFACE. Watching his prey escape with gritted teeth.
Emitting loud, labored BREATHS... You can hear the FURY...
See it in what remains of those glossy, hate-filled eyes.

With WILL -- He takes the reins back from Samuel.

SAMUEL
Did we win-?

AND SUDDENLY -- The makeshift axle SNAPS-!
Yoke breaking, wheels flying off--

The WAGON UPENDS-!

Horses CRASHING -- Bodies CATAPULTING-!

And everything landing in a grand HEAP of DUST.

It's over as quick as it began.

The wagon in splintered shambles.

It's quiet, too.

Only the wind.

WILL -- Flat on his back. Slowly pulling himself up...
To see Samuel nearby... LIFELESS.

WILL
Samuel..?

He's not moving.

WILL (CONT'D)

Samuel!

SAMUEL

(sputters)

... Ouch.

WILL

Thank God.

Will starts to walk, but clutches his ribs suddenly.

WILL (CONT'D)

Pal!

Samuel scans the horizon. Sees the two wagon horses-- Safe, stopped ahead in the distance. He keeps searching...

Will looks over the wreckage. Spots Pal buried beneath the shattered wood... Still. But before he can help--

SAMUEL (O.S.)

Pa...

Will turns to his son. Then follows Samuel's horrified gaze--

In the near distance... BURNFACE. Sitting atop his horse. The lone wolf now. And this is his moment.

SAMUEL (CONT'D)

He's never gonna stop, is he, Pa?

BurnFace nudges his horse... And begins his advance.

WILL

Samuel. Run.

SAMUEL

But Pa...

Will SHOVES him away.

WILL

Go! It'll be okay. Get to a horse!

Samuel finally sets off, tears in his eyes.

Will snatches a piece of wood. Puts himself between Samuel and the incoming horseman.

But BurnFace hooks wide instead. Eyes on the boy.

WILL (CONT'D)

No! NO, here!

Bearing down fast... Will powerless to help now...
BurnFace grinning that lipless sneer, when he hears it--

The THUNDER of HOOVES -- But he turns too late...

AMELIA -- GALLOPING right for him--
SWINGING THE TETHERED STIRRUP that rescued Samuel--

And WHIPPING it around BurnFace's neck like a lasso!

She CAREENS PAST -- Full gallop, rope pulling taut--

YANKING BurnFace right off his horse-!

He drags a moment, clawing at the noose...

But -- He finds footing -- Draws strength from his hate --
Digs in his heels and PULLS with all his might--

And JERKS Amelia straight off her horse-!

She CRASHES to the earth in a COUGH of dust.

Burnface LAUGHS. That awful laugh... *Relishing* this.

Starts his advance for the downed girl... When--

A WHISTLE cries out.

PAL (O.C.)

Whoa there, crispy critter.

Burnface stops. Pivots back to the wagon...

Pal pulls himself from the wreckage. Stands tall...

Weighed down by his arm still strapped to the gun wheel,
disconnected from the wagon and terribly heavy.

In that opening -- Will reaches Amelia. Puts himself between
her and BurnFace as they watch the brewing showdown.

Pal launches into his bravado, like with the bandits.
Echoes his earlier words--

PAL (CONT'D)

Now you know, I just had to see the
look on your face when you realized
I was gonna be the one to kill ya.

BurnFace stares that horrible deadpan stare. Pal points.

PAL (CONT'D)

And... Bingo.

(beat)

Now, a proposal -- You kill that girl and I'm gonna have all the time in the world to shoot you down. But you come for me? Well... That'll certainly add some chance.

(beat)

Now, *really* think about it, cause I don't wanna sway ya either way. This should be your decision.

BurnFace stares a moment...

Then CHARGES Pal-!

Pal fights to lift the wheel apparatus...
Every muscle straining, gun barrel inching higher...

BurnFace in range -- THRUSTING his sword--

Pal CRYING OUT for the final rise--

BLAM-!

BurnFace's head JERKS backward. He takes a few extra steps...
Then collapses just past Pal.

He was dead before he hit the ground.

AMELIA can't suppress her SQUEAL of joy.

She looks to Pal.

Who stands in the same spot... With the CAVALRY SWORD stabbed clean through him. He pokes at the handle in disbelief.

PAL (CONT'D)

Well, shit.

Then slumps into the dirt.

AMELIA

Pal!

She runs to him.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

Pa, help! He's hurt!

Pal leans against the remnants of the wagon.
Coughs blood as Will limps up, surveying the JUTTING HANDLE.

PAL
It's a... nice handle.

Amelia leans down to him.

AMELIA
What do we do?

He grimaces, lets out a pained breath.

PAL
Hey. You did alright out there,
"wonder-kid." I think we won.

He laughs, sputtering blood.

AMELIA
I think we did.

He looks to Will, pathetic and sincere. Tears in his eyes.

PAL
I'm sorry, Mr. Whitman.

Will gives a curt nod.

Amelia smiles. Looks to the horizon.

AMELIA
Just save your strength.
(beat)
We'll get you to the Fort, there's
a good doctor there, and-

She turns back to PAL -- Slumped. Staring lifeless into the distance, grin etched on his face.

He's gone.

Samuel walks up leading the cavalry horse...
SNIFFLING as he sees the aftermath.

Amelia sits quietly with him. It takes a moment to set in.

Samuel steps beside Will, dirty face streaked with tears.
Will pulls his son close as his daughter looks to them--

AMELIA (CONT'D)
No guarantees...

EXT. CRASHED WAGON - LATER

Amelia throws the EXPRESS SATCHEL over a properly-saddled and stocked Feral.

Will and Samuel step beside her.

AMELIA

Ain't many riders left now...
Thomas said it may need to go all
the way to Saint Joseph...

WILL

Take it as far as it needs to go.
We'll wait for you in La Senta.

She glances to Pal, lying beneath a blanket.

WILL (CONT'D)

We'll give him a proper burial.

AMELIA

He deserves that.

Samuel smiles, bittersweet.

SAMUEL

I'll send you a telegraph!

AMELIA

Keep practicing those Ls.

She musses his hair. Then scoops up a hat -- PAL'S HAT --
And sets it on her brow.

She climbs Feral. Leans down to her new steed.

AMELIA (CONT'D)

You ready, boy?

She runs a hand through his mane. Then SPURS him to action-!

Amelia sets off. Galloping across the plains.

Will and Sam standing together, watching her go...
As we slowly PULL OUT on the grand wilderness around us...
Dwarfing the family in its magnificence...

Amelia smiles as she rides. She is invincible.

CUT TO BLACK.