

LIAR
COWARD
JUDGE

Written by

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TITLE CARD. WHITE ON A BLACK SCREEN

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword - Matthew 10.34

New screen.

... he took one step to my three and I knew we could not outrun him. And I knew we could not outthink him and when I saw him I knew we could not outfight him. That terrible ape... - Excerpt from journal. Found Missouri 1993. Author unknown.

New screen.

Missouri 1870. Winter.

INT. THE CAPTAIN'S TENT - NIGHT

The tent is candle lit with a warm orange glow. Outside it's deep night.

Voices can be heard from elsewhere in the camp, drunken, indecipherable.

There are only two men inside. They are sat separated by a ornate table, with a map spread across it.

On the one side the CAPTAIN, identifiable as such by his uniform. He sits queasily with wine in hand, drunk but not half as much as his men outside.

On the other a ragged, uninformed man. Sober as a judge - The ASSASSIN.

CAPTAIN

You will have to tell me again how it came to be that you rode in here unseen.

ASSASSIN

I'll keep my trade to myself Hendricks. It wasn't too difficult a task anyway. Your men are fucking drunk.

CAPTAIN

With right to be. Despite our small victory here, the decision is to retreat.

The Captain studies his map groggily.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
... Not that I mind myself.

He grins a wide self-satisfied wine stained grin.

The Assassin pulls his pack onto his lap, and retrieves a curled letter. He spreads it on the table. A wanted note.

ASSASSIN
This is the last of them?

The Captain glances it over.

CAPTAIN
The last but one. I will pay you
for this one you brought in today,
and one more. In advance.

ASSASSIN
Advance? You drink too much.

CAPTAIN
This one is of special interest.
His name is Matthew Jefferson, a
local boy.

ASSASSIN
War criminal?

The Captain produces a curled note and places it between the two men.

CAPTAIN
No, nothing of the sort. By all
accounts he's an accomplished
officer, only two weeks last
Wednesday he raped a woman and
killed another. A petty matter
given his record, under normal
circumstances.

The Assassin looks down at the paper.

ASSASSIN
Why do you offering an advance for
what should be a local justice? And
what do you mind anyway if you're
retreating?

CAPTAIN
Ah you see, these are not normal
circumstances. See one of these
girls is...

The Captain takes another long swig of the blood red wine.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
 ... Was the daughter of an
 authority here. And he wants me to
 bring a man in who can find this
 "renegade" and bring him in.

The Assassin only takes half a second to consider before taking the note.

ASSASSIN
 I accept, he'll be dead within the
 month.

He makes to stand.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 This Jefferson, Confederate?

CAPTAIN
 Does it matter?

ASSASSIN
 Not if you pay me.

The captain grins again.

EXT. FARMER FIELDS - DAY

A man, dressed in mud coated Union uniform, runs head-long through snow dusted farmer fields. Tears water his eyes in panic.

As he careers through hedges and ditches he checks behind him. Fleeing - this is the DESERTER.

DESERTER
 (to himself, or God)
 Oh forgive my sins, Jesus fucking
 Christ. I'm sorry I swear.

He reaches the end of a field ringed by a large hedge way. He plunges through.

EXT. ICE TRACK - DAY

He lands on all fours in a dirt road, scrambles back to his feet and is confronted by a young child. Standing with bundled grocery.

For a moment there is a stand-off as neither speaks.

Eventually the Deserter pulls a pistol.

DESERTER

Halt, er, stay! I am a man, who is
in authority in this area.

CHILD

Where are your company sir?

DESERTER

My company?

CHILD

Your men. The battle is some way
that way.

The child points down the track.

DESERTER

I'm a scout. A scout sent to scope
for any villains who fled the
battle.

CHILD

You should look closer to home.

This riles the Deserter, who cocks his pistol.

DESERTER

You will guard your mouth if you
don't want to taste this led
justice. I *am* scouting. For, for a
church. I heard it is near?

CHILD

What do you have on offer?

DESERTER

On offer?

CHILD

For the directions, and my not
speaking upon my return home.

The Deserter struggles, stumped by a infant, the pathetic
nature of his situation is not lost on him.

Eventually he pulls a small medallion and offers it.

DESERTER

My badge of officer and rank. I
have no need for it. Take it. And
someone asks, you say you found it
on a corpse. You found it you hear?

EXT. THE CHURCH - NIGHT

The Deserter skulks through an overgrown graveyard, approaching a looming wooded chapel.

Light glows out from the inside. Like a beacon.

He winds through the stones closer still, until the door is visible.

He's stopped in his tracks though, by something he did not expect to see; a horse, tied up outside.

DESERTER
(to himself)
Someone here?! Is there no rest?

He pulls out his pistol, looks down at his shaking hand.

As he approaches he hears voices from the inside, two men conversing. He can't make out their conversation.

Slowly he cracks the door.

INT. THE CHURCH NAVE - NIGHT

Two men stand opposite each other in mid conversation.

A PRIEST and a SOLDIER, albeit a muddy soldier, dressed in Confederate uniform. The Priest is the shorter of the two, clothed in robes.

The Deserter eyes them, unseen as of yet he approaches in the background.

PRIEST
... That there are *rules* to those staying here.

SOLDIER
A horse shits on your rules.
Sanctuary to all men, it's written in the fucking bible.

The Deserter is caught in two minds, he must announce his presence at some point, but in what way?

Eventually, in a quivering voice...

DESERTER
OK. OK!

The two men spin to him. The Priest smiles through his beard.

PRIEST
Hello good sir.

SOLDIER
What in hell is this?

The Soldier is quick to notice the Deserters pistol.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)
Oh, hold on Mr. What is that you
have there?

DESERTER
My authority, my authority in this
conversation. Though I need not use
it.

SOLDIER
Then lower it, this is a holy
building, right Father?

The Deserter scans to the Priest for guidance.

DESERTER
I would, if it were just the priest
I found here, as I was told it
would be...

Then he swings his eyes back to the Soldier

DESERTER (CONT'D)
... I did not expect you...

The Priest approaches the Deserter.

PRIEST
(calmly)
Please, lower your weapon down.

SOLDIER
That's right put it away or risk a
kind of damnation. To shoot a man
in the house of the fucking Lord.

DESERTER
What is your name and rank? Speak.

SOLDIER
My name? My name is Jefferson. I no
longer have any rank.

DESERTER

"No longer have rank", I do not believe it. I can see the clothes you wear. You are Confederate.

JEFFERSON

I am not your enemy son.

DESERTER

Then speak, what is your business here?

PRIEST

(to Jefferson)

You needn't answer that.

JEFFERSON

It's OK. You are here to hide from your captains right? Running? Correct?

DESERTER

(lying, badly)

Nothing of the sort.

JEFFERSON

I'm not judging. I too am here, fleeing from my reckoning. Although it is no man I fear.

PRIEST

He, like you, is here for the protection of the Lord. And the cover his house provides for those -

DESERTER

No, no, no, no. I won't lower my weapon, the moment I do, you will shoot me dead. Do not mistake me for a fool.

JEFFERSON

I am unarmed.

Jefferson opens his overcoat. He is telling the truth.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

There is no weapon that can defend me what I'm hiding from I'll tell you that.

DESERTER

Then it is you who is the fool.

The Deserter cocks his pistol.

PRIEST

This is needless. In this house
their are no enemies amongst men. I
do not wear a uniform nor do I see
yours. Lay your weapons down, I
will keep you both from what seeks
you.

He yields.

INT. THE CHURCH CRYPT - NIGHT

The three men sit by candle light. The Priest has provided
shelter, and bedding, he's well set for harbouring fugitives.

The host moves to a stove, stirring broth for a supper.

DESERTER

You lost your rank? I'm still an
officer, although I lost my
identification. Did the same happen
to you?

JEFFERSON

Something like that.

Jefferson leans back on his bedding closing his eyes with the
weariness of a man stricken from a enormous workload.

DESERTER

(guessing, prying)
Oh I know the sort. You, you were
stripped of your rank in combat.
And now you have stole away to
here. I see you.

JEFFERSON

You see fuck all.

PRIEST

Please, can we not forget the past?
It is not important now.

The Deserter turns to their host.

DESERTER

You mean you don't know? You don't
ask the deeds of those you bring
in? I heard you offered sanctuary,
that this is an open invitation, if
you know the right people.

PRIEST

I will take them all in, regardless of their history, their deeds are already paid for.

The Priest motions to a Crucifix hanging on the wall.

DESERTER

Any scoundrel could come in. You are naive Father. Naive indeed.

PRIEST

I let you in. You think that naive?

Jefferson rolls to his side.

JEFFERSON

It's alright Father, no quarrel here. You want to know the truth do you? Well, technically I still hold a rank, and no doubt my men are out looking for me. I still have rank, that is not to say I deserve to hold the fucking thing...

The Priest takes a seat now, hearing Jefferson's circumstance for the first time.

JEFFERSON (CONT'D)

... Yes I have done deeds that would warrant me being brought to justice I guess, and I know of at least one bounty on my head because of them. But it is not the justice of law or any fucking bounty hunter I am hiding from. I am no coward.

DESERTER

If not law, then God?

JEFFERSON

If I told you the whole of it, you would think me a madman. But your precious God has judged me, and judged me ill. There is a devil in these woods here, and it has been hunting me for six days.

The Priest takes notice of this.

PRIEST

A devil?

The fear in Jefferson's eyes is palpable. Even in this darkness.

JEFFERSON

A beast of some kind, or some kind of man. Whatever it is it is hunting me. It is as if it knows me and my sins. It demands I pay for what I have done.

DESERTER

In these woods?

JEFFERSON

Somewhere, there are acres here uncharted. It followed me and a scouting party on route to some town I can't even remember the fucking name of. It was blind luck I found this place before that monster found me.

The Deserter continues his meal, apparently convinced of Jefferson's lunacy.

DESERTER

A tall tale.

JEFFERSON

A tall tale... Priest I have killed, and I'm afraid of no man believe that. But since I saw this demon, I've thought of nothing else.

PRIEST

That's OK son. You are safe in God's house.

Jefferson rocks back onto his back.

JEFFERSON

What is it you say? "God's protection is divine", I wonder if it is for a sinner like me. I doubt it.

INT. THE CHURCH CRYPT - DAY

The morning breaks. The Deserter struggles from his sleep. Groggily he rolls onto his side. To his surprise Jefferson has left in the night.

DESERTER
Jefferson?!

INT. THE CHURCH NAVE - DAY

The Deserter enters the main body of the church. Searching for the missing man.

DESERTER
Jefferson? Father?!

The Priest emerges from the Vestry.

PRIEST
What is this calling in aid of?

DESERTER
Jefferson has left. In the night apparently.

PRIEST
What? What do you mean left?

DESERTER
He has gone.

The Priest is shocked, he did not expect this. He moves quickly back into the side room.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

Again the Priest emerges - only this time with his overcoat.

PRIEST
To retrieve our good friend.

The Deserter steps into his path.

DESERTER
Hold on. Hold on a moment. To what end? He's gone. Fled.

PRIEST
I need to find him, and bring him back.

DESERTER
Why? The man is mad. You heard his gibberish last night.

PRIEST

I understand that much. And maybe there is a madness on him. But suppose in his madness he finds his comrades. Suppose in his madness he tells them of this here, of you. I told you there was no war in this building, he is now outside it...

The Priest is cut off by a sound from outside the church door. A rider approaches.

The old man moves to the door.

DESERTER

Do not open that. You hear me? We do not know who it is

PRIEST

It could be Jefferson, returned.

DESERTER

On horse back? Jefferson, who last night told of devils in the forest, has left in the night and retrieved a horse? What does he bring with him? His fucking sanity?!

PRIEST

Be that what it may. You said yourself, on select few know of this place. It could be him.

DESERTER

It most definitely is not. What of your oath to me? You, you swore to protect...

RIDER (O.S.)

Hello. Father?

DESERTER

(whispering)
Do not answer.

PRIEST

Hello?

RIDER (O.S.)

I am a weary traveller. I seek refuge. And food if you'd be so kind?

PRIEST
 (to the Deserter)
 You see? We are in luck. We have
 nothing to fear.

The Priest moves to the door. Before he opens it he turns to
 the Deserter.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
 It is man in need of our help. The
 Lord will protect.

DESERTER
 This will be the death of me
 Father, you can be sure of that.
 (to himself)
 I have no luck.

The Priest swings the door open.

In front of him in the sleet stands the Assassin.

He stands for a moment. Then strikes the Priest hard with his
 forearm.

The blow makes a ruin of the Priest's nose. He drops back
 whimpering.

The Assassin strides into the church. Shrugging off the cold
 as he goes.

Meanwhile the Deserter fumbles for something, anything. He's
 in his bedclothes, no weapon. Nothing.

The Assassin coolly pulls out his own pistol.

ASSASSIN
 Tell me. What is your name?

The Priest mops the blood from his face.

PRIEST
 (miserably)
 This is the second time in two days
 a man has pulled a gun in this
 church. Are you all heathens?!

ASSASSIN
 This man here, this man shaking in
 his bed clothes. He pulled a gun?

DESERTER
 I did no such thing!

ASSASSIN

Quiet.
 (To the Priest)
 Speak up.

PRIEST

Only God commands me.

The Assassin walks over to the Deserter. Stands in front of him.

The Deserter winces, expecting some kind of violence.

Instead the Assassin pulls out a coil of paper. He unrolls it and studies the page.

Jefferson's wanted note. He compares the crude drawing to the Deserter. Clearly they are not the same man.

ASSASSIN

I am looking for this man. Have you seen him?

The Priest and Deserter answer at the same time. They answer in opposite.

DESERTER

Yes.

PRIEST

No.

ASSASSIN

Yes or no, which is it?

DESERTER

No.

PRIEST

Yes, he means yes. We have seen this man. He stayed here, but now he is gone. Truth be told we were to go looking for him.

ASSASSIN

And did you know of his crimes?

PRIEST

It is not the business of the Lord to judge a man who truly repents. I did not ask, and he had not yet confessed.

The Assassin smirks.

ASSASSIN
(To the Deserter)
Hold out your arms.

The Deserter obeys meekly.

The Assassin snaps a cuff around his hands, bidding him.

DESERTER
What is this!?! I am not the man you
seek!

ASSASSIN
I do not buy your story. I believe
you know more of this man. My
estimation is that you killed him,
in cold murder.

PRIEST
We did no such thing!

ASSASSIN
We will see. Now move.

DESERTER
Move?

ASSASSIN
You said you were to go look for
him. Well, let's go.

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

The three men head through thick forest as a slow grey sleet
falls.

The Deserter stumbles along, looking comical in his
bedclothes, hands shackled together.

DESERTER
Why are we heading this way. The
road...

ASSASSIN
No word from you.

DESERTER
The road, is that way.

PRIEST
He's speaking the truth.

ASSASSIN

I know he is.

The Deserter does his best to struggle, it's useless though.

DESERTER

Then why are you so mistrusting of me? My hands are bind, you have your pistol on me, I don't even have the clothes for my back. And anyway you are not a lawman as far as I can see. Still you make me wade through the muck in my underclothes like a village thief. I know your story sir. You are a bounty hunter.

ASSASSIN

And you are a deserter, fled from your post. Which makes you a criminal by any measure.

DESERTER

I am no deserter!

ASSASSIN

You are a poor liar to boot.

PRIEST

Please. This man's business is his own, once we locate our friend Jefferson -

ASSASSIN

(threatening)
Friend?

PRIEST

Our, guest, Jefferson. You will let him go.

ASSASSIN

Fine. You keep odd company Priest. And you, *Deserter*, we are heading this way because he did. I am tracking him.

EXT. WOODLAND CLEARING - DAY

The group stand with their eyes raised. Spying something in the tall dead trees.

The Priest crosses himself.

DESERTER

Does this still mean I go free?

Above them, swinging half frozen from a great oak, Jefferson has hung himself.

ASSASSIN

Help me cut him down.

PRIEST

Yes. Yes quite right. To bury him.

ASSASSIN

No. He's my bounty. He'll head back with me.

The Assassin turns to the Deserter.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

I'll pay you a cut you help me transport him. You found him same as me the way I see it.

PRIEST

What? No. This man deserves a burial.

ASSASSIN

Maybe you're mad enough to believe he does. But it won't be in your church. Now. Come on.

EXT. IN THE CANOPY - JEFFERSON'S FACE

His face is bulged blue. The sound of rope being cut with a blunt blade sings out.

He sways softly and eventually the rope snaps, sending Jefferson plummeting to the woodland floor.

His frozen limbs snap and twist on impact.

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

The group struggle to retrace their steps towards the church.

The last of the day's sunlight webs through the trees - night is closing.

The Assassin and Deserter carry their macabre bounty. The Deserter clearly having more difficulty than his new business partner.

At least his hands are cut free.

ASSASSIN
Wait. Drop him.

With relief the Deserter puts the dead weight down.

DESERTER
(panting)
Tiring friend?

ASSASSIN
Shut up. Wait here the both of you.

The Assassin disappears into the thicket. Leaving the two men.

DESERTER
He's a prick this man.

PRIEST
You're right about that.

Eventually the Assassin returns. He looks visibly stressed.

ASSASSIN
Right. We need to head off the other way.

DESERTER
Who is it?

ASSASSIN
Confederates. I am not completely sure, but my estimation is that they are Jefferson's men come looking for him.

The Deserter looks at the great hump of Jefferson's body.

DESERTER
What? We can't let them find us with this.

ASSASSIN
You're right about that, we need to hide.

PRIEST
Wait just a moment. Forgive my bluntness but what worry is this of mine? I have no part in this business of yours.

ASSASSIN

Well as a man of God. You're welcome to explain that to them how you came across their captain's corpse with a known Assassin and a Union Deserter.

The Priest is stuck on that point.

EXT. WOODLAND UNDERGROWTH - NIGHT

The three men sit huddled in almost complete blackness. Like three destitutes hidden amongst the black frozen bramble.

If the Priest and the Assassin are cold the Deserter is on the point of freezing - shivering in his underclothes.

PRIEST

We need a fire.

ASSASSIN

Are you a Priest or a simpleton. A fire will be a beacon to those men.

The Priest nods solemnly.

DESERTER

Can I at least take the man's clothing? It's OK for you two, one a seasoned traveller, the other wrapped in his holy clothes. I needn't remind you I'm in nothing but linen.

ASSASSIN

Fine. It will help our cause if we are caught anyway.

The Deserter shuffles over to the stiff cold body and starts stripping it, with some difficulty.

DESERTER

He has a foul sent.

The Assassin doesn't even pretend to help. The Priest is more charitable, eventually he assists.

INT. WOODLAND SHELTER - NIGHT

The Deserter wakes in the dead of night.

He looks at Jefferson's frozen naked body, unceremoniously laid strewn in the dirt. The corpse's eyeballs are like frosted glass.

The Deserter shudders and blows into his hands.

He then rolls to look at the Assassin, who is fast asleep.

DESERTER

I hope you are in a nightmare of
being buggered good sir.

He gathers himself up, and makes off into the nearby trees, ostensibly to piss.

EXT. AWAY FROM THE CAMP - NIGHT

The Deserter pisses, steam rising from the stream. He struggles with his aim in the near pitch darkness.

In his pocket, formerly Jefferson's pocket, he thumbs something.

He pulls it out. A small glass bottle, with handwritten labelling, it reads "OPIUM".

In the dark, he grins.

The smile drops suddenly though.

There is a sound nearby.

It's a rustling, something in the trees nearby. Out there in the darkness.

The Deserter ties his breaches. Nervously he peers about himself, acutely aware of his vulnerability.

For a long time there's no sound save his breathing.

Then again.

It sounds like heavy footsteps emanating somewhere behind the vale of darkness.

They grow louder, heading towards him.

He turns and moves quickly back towards the camp in fright.

EXT. AWAY FROM THE CAMP - NIGHT

The Deserter steps back into camp, his breaches wet with piss.

He scans the darkness behind him. It looks like a great empty void.

ASSASSIN

You can't even piss right.

DESERTER

What? Er shit, yeah I see.

ASSASSIN

What bothers you?

DESERTER

The night, the woods, there is something ill at work out there. A man, I think there is a man in the trees.

ASSASSIN

Let me ask you a question Deserter, you are not seasoned in these conditions are you?

DESERTER

I am seasoned enough.

The Assassin pushes himself onto his elbows.

ASSASSIN

The darkness is what you make of it, and right now the only thing ill at work is you.

DESERTER

I suppose you're right.

Then a sound causes the Assassin to sit up.

Footsteps, and something else... Breathing.

It doesn't sound like a man, it's more guttural.

Slowly the sounds circle their camp whilst the two men watch the blackness.

The Priest stirs now too.

ASSASSIN

Get up Father.

PRIEST

What?

DESERTER

They've tracked us?

ASSASSIN

I do not see how, no torches.
Nothing.

The footsteps grow closer now.

PRIEST

It has to be them.

DESERTER

We have to flee.

ASSASSIN

Which way. No, we need to wait for
them to come to us. We have an
advantage anyway.

DESERTER

Advantage?

The Assassin retrieves his pistol from his pack.

ASSASSIN

Me.

The night goes silent.

The Assassin stares out into the night. The night stares
back.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

You two sleep, I will keep watch
until we can be sure of our safety.

EXT. THE UNDERGROWTH - DAY

A bright icy morning has broken across the wilderness.

ASSASSIN

This isn't possible.

The Assassin stands over the grass where Jefferson's body
lay. In the darkness it has been taken.

He looks into the woodland, a trail of dirt and blood leads
out into the overgrowth.

DESERTER

And you kept watch all night?

The Deserter makes his way over to a broken branch hanging by its bark, he snaps it off.

ASSASSIN

All night.

DESERTER

Are you certain?

ASSASSIN

Are you questioning me again son?

The Assassin turns to the Deserter

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

You know you are proving more trouble to me than I care to accept. And now with my bounty gone, I'm starting to think there may be someone, someone somewhere...

The Assassin steps closer to him

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

That may lace my pockets with gold for you. But you know what the funny part is.

DESERTER

I don't believe you a humourous man.

ASSASSIN

If I find you had some part in this, either of you. I'll do it for free.

The Assassin stares him straight in the eye. The Deserter tries to smile, he begins to sweat.

PRIEST

Are you done posturing?

ASSASSIN

Pardon me?

PRIEST

Well, your intention is to intimidate.

(MORE)

PRIEST (CONT'D)

And for now assume we are duly intimidated. But, what exactly do you plan to do now?

The Priest begins gathering his things.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

You've lost your bounty, you have no authority of me, nor this man. The way I see it our business is done. All that remains is to head back to my church. Though I will not lie, I do not know the way through this thicket.

The Assassin scans the forest. He eyes the trail leading away into the frozen forest.

ASSASSIN

And you want me to lead you there?

PRIEST

I will pay you. Upon our return.

DESERTER

That seems like a fair bargain?

PRIEST

Well, what do you say? We can negotiat -

ASSASSIN

Five hundred dollars.

PRIEST

Five? Hundred?!

The Deserter is speechless, this is a vast sum of money.

ASSASSIN

That is the payment I am due for your friend Mr Jefferson. You square that with me, I will lead you back. Otherwise, we follow this trail.

No answer.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

Well? Are we negotiating?

DESERTER

In all the days I've lived I have not come close to that sum.

(MORE)

DESERTER (CONT'D)

How about you Priest? Does the Lord provide? Or is he as frigid as his nuns.

The Priest just stares at the Assassin.

PRIEST

Fine. Lead on.

EXT. DEEPER INTO THE FOREST - DAY

The group push through, following the trail.

Up ahead the skeletal trees give way to a small clearing.

EXT. DEEP FOREST CLEARING - DAY

They move out.

DESERTER

I do not believe it.

PRIEST

Good lord. Every time we discover Mr Jefferson his disposition worsens.

ASSASSIN

At least it cannot get worst than this.

In front of them, strewn across the grass, in several places, and several more parts. The dismembered body of what, by all accounts, used to be Jefferson.

Gore and viscera stain the grass.

DESERTER

A wild animal.

PRIEST

Of what kind?

DESERTER

Bear.

ASSASSIN

There are no bears in these woods.

PRIEST

Being the last man to whom he spoke we should bur-

The Assassin moves towards the remains, he begins to search through them. The Priest watches in disbelief.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

What in the Lords name are you doing?

ASSASSIN

I need some form of identification, this will do.

The Assassin picks up a bloodied severed hand from the strewn carcass that was Jefferson. The Priest covers his mouth.

Then the group are interrupted.

MAN (O.S.)

Good morning!

They spin and are confronted by two Union men with the rifles drawn emerging into the clearing.

One is small, wirey, with blackened teeth. The other is a bulk of a man.

SMALLER MAN

Oh, you are a sight for sore eyes indeed.

The Assassin reaches for his pistol.

SMALLER MAN (CONT'D)

Hold it. Hold your arm sir. Jacob, watch this one. Watch him good.

JACOB

I got him. I got you boy.

The wirey man moves in closely to the Assassin. His yellow eyes register recognition - he knows him.

SMALLER MAN

Oh. Oh truly I do not believe my eyes. Jacob. Oh a coincidence. A coincidence indeed.

PRIEST

You know this man?

JACOB

Quiet Man of God if you would please.

Eventually the wirey man reaches the Assassin.

ASSASSIN

Acton.

ACTON

Oh yes I know this man. Though not by name.

DESERTER

You two are friends? Then surely there...

ACTON

Quiet Confederate. We are far from friends. This man here. This associate of yours. He killed my brother not two months ago. Yes. He. Did.

PRIEST

Oh my.

DESERTER

I did not know him before this week. And these clothes, they are not mine. If you would but realise I am not of his ilk. Perhaps we could...

ASSASSIN

Don't waste your breath. Acton here is a law man. He won't be reasoned with.

ACTON

You know me.

Acton flashes a rusted badge to the group.

ACTON (CONT'D)

I am the only law in these woods. Jacob and I are the last of our deputation. These are my woods now. But I don't need a investigation of any kind to see your business here.

He surveys the carnage.

ACTON (CONT'D)

You have murdered this man, in the worst of all ways. Luck has had it, justice has had it, that we have happened on you red handed.

DESERTER

That simply is not true.

The sheriff points to the Assassin who is still holding the dead black hand of Jefferson.

ACTON

Save your objections. We will take you by jail cart. And you, and your boys here will have a day in court.

He spits a yellow gob of phlegm.

EXT. ICED ROAD - DAY

The jail car is a cart pulled by two emaciated horses. It heaves and sways down a dirt track, the mud frozen into stiff ridges.

Acton flanks on a horse whilst Jacob sits atop the stirrup wrapped up against the cold.

INT. JAIL CART - DAY

The three men are bound together. The inside of the cart is filthy. Jefferson's hand lies in the corner, the blood turned to ice.

The Deserter searches his pocket, he still has the small Opium bottle. He stares at it.

DESERTER

(miserably)

This is your fault the both of you.
I am beset by constant cruelty of
which I do not deserve.

The Assassin sits silently.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

You do not deny it?

PRIEST

Is it all you do to bemoan your
circumstances?

DESERTER

What do you care what I bemoan.

PRIEST

If it makes you feel better, I'm sure once we explain our situation we will soon free this predicament. As for you sir, well I'm not sure.

The Assassin nods as the cart moves on.

EXT. ICED ROAD - NIGHT

Acton sits lazily, drinking from a flask.

Jacob sleeps atop the cart.

INT. THE CART - NIGHT

The Priest tries to sleep, the Assassin calm as a coiled spring, the Deserter, as is his way, complains.

DESERTER

I am so hungry. And cold. I'm sick of being cold.

The Deserter scoots to the bars.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

Good sir? Good sir?

Acton sways drunkenly into view.

ACTON

What do you want. *Slave supporter.*

He swigs his flask.

DESERTER

Please sir. I am not a felon nor am I confederate. You will discover that once we arrive at our destination. The priest, who sleeps there. He has done naught to. I am not sure of your quarrel with our other traveller. But I am no friend of his.

Acton takes another swig.

ACTON

Make a point quickly.

DESERTER

I only ask for some food, or drink.
Or clothing. Please.

ACTON

We've got no food, *slaver*
sympathizer. The only clothing is
on my back, and Jacobs.

DESERTER

Then drink? Please sir I should
like a sip from that flask?

ACTON

You'd like a drink eh?

DESERTER

Please. It would be a mercy.

ACTON

Of this wine?

DESERTER

Wine is good.

Acton pulls up his breeches, and pisses through the bar.

ACTON

Then drink up!

He bursts into a fit of drunken laughter as The Deserter
recoils to the back of the cage.

DESERTER

You!

ACTON

You what?!

Acton draws his pistol.

DESERTER

Nothing.

He smiles and turns away.

The Deserter slumps back onto his backside.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

If his brother was like him, then
you have done no wrong.

ASSASSIN

Don't you worry. His judgement is coming sooner than he thinks.

The Deserter looks down, the Assassin has picked his shackles.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

(calling out)

Acton? Acton?

ACTON

Now what do you have to say?

ASSASSIN

Since I am to be judged. I thought I would confess to you, my method of dispatch for your brother.

Acton is riled by this. He storms toward the cart in drunken rage. The Assassin readies himself.

But then something happens that neither man expected.

Out of the blackness, unseen, unheard, a massive dark shape careers into Acton.

It smashes him off his feet into the cart.

The colossal force of the blow knocks the cart with such impact that it rocks, before smashing onto it's side.

The door smacks open in the crash.

EXT. JAIL CART - NIGHT

Jacob gathers himself, bloodied, confused. He scrambles around in the dirt for a weapon.

JACOB

Sheriff! Acton we are under attack.

Then suddenly something catches his eye. Moving towards him.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Help me, I've lost my pistol.

As it nears, he realises it is well taller than Acton. It must be 8 feet.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Oh god, oh god. Oh lord have mercy.

INT. JAIL CART - NIGHT

The Assassin, scurries around the cage, grabs Jefferson's hand and scrambles toward the exit.

PRIEST

Wait, please release us. I am a man
of God, my work is not done here!

He shows his shackles to the Assassin.

DESERTER

You can't leave us here like this.

Outside they can hear the yelps of Jacob. Being attacked by some unseen force.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

What is that? Christ what is that
out there?

The Assassin scoots over to the men, places the dead hand in his teeth, and uses his free hands to unhook their shackles.

EXT. JAIL CART - NIGHT

They crawl out of the wreckage and regain their footing.

ACTON (O.S.)

Help me. God alive help me.

Acton is still alive, though his leg is terribly broken. He has his rifle drawn.

The group freeze.

Then there are pounding feet toward Acton.

He spins, attempts to pull the rifle, but it's on him before he can.

It's impossible to make out in this darkness, but it looks like a great ape. A huge subhuman mass.

Deserter sprints off into the darkness yelping.

Meanwhile the Assassin searches the floor.

All the while Acton screams in mortal agony. Being bludgeoned.

The Priest implores the Assassin.

PRIEST
Please, lets flee. This is ungodly.

ASSASSIN
A moment. A moment!

He finds what he was looking for, his pack.

He stuffs the hand inside and in an instant draws his pistol out and fires at the blackness.

The demon looks to him. And for one moment, in the glint of the firing pistol, the Priest, and the Assassin can make out two white eyes.

PRIEST
This weapon has no effect. We should flee now.

Eventually the Priest practically drags him away. The two men run off into the forest beyond.

EXT. WOODLAND - NIGHT

The Deserter stands bent over, breathing deeply. His breath showing in the moonlight. He hears footsteps and turns to look into the darkness.

The Assassin and the Priest appear running in the moonlight.

PRIEST
Flee! Run!

The Assassin sprints past first, then the Priest. Then behind them the branches buckle and snap as the creature, the unknown, chases them.

DESERTER
What is it!?

The Priest turns back to face the Deserter.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
What is it?!

PRIEST
A devil!

EXT. RIVERSIDE - NIGHT

The group sprint down a deep slope. Struggling for breath.

The Assassin is the first to spot it, a large river cutting through the woodland, its black water hissing in the night.

ASSASSIN

A river, do you see?

PRIEST

A gift from the Lord!

They make it down to the bank. They scurry to the water's edge and skid to a stop.

Immediately the Priest drops to his knees and drinks long gulps from the icy torrent.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Thank you heavenly father.

The Assassin yanks him back onto his feet.

ASSASSIN

This is not a gift, it is an enclosure. We need to get across the water, and quickly.

The Deserter turns and looks back up the steep bank, into the darkness.

From out there, somewhere beyond the dark veil they hear a drawn-out howl.

PRIEST

The Devil has spawned something in the night.

DESERTER

Could it be of Jefferson spoke? I don't know what I saw.

Another howl carries across the night. The Deserter turns to the Assassin.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

There must be a way across, there simply must.

The Assassin continues looking. There is nothing.

Then up from up beyond the trees buckle and snap. Grunts and snarls getting closer.

The creature approaches.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

Well?!

ASSASSIN

I am fucking looking.

Eventually the Assassin spots a tree, looming out over the water.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

I see a way.

PRIEST

Ask and you shall receive.

EXT. AT THE TREE - NIGHT

The group arrive at the tree. The Assassin assess it, it's core is rotten. Small mercies.

He checks the number of bullets left in his gun, 4. The Priest watches him do this.

PRIEST

You cannot fight it.

ASSASSIN

Never suppose to tell me what I can and cannot do.

The Assassin clicks the bullet chamber closed.

DESERTER

It's almost on us.

ASSASSIN

Then help me.

The Assassin pulls out a knife from his belt and starts hacking away at the bark.

The Deserter shoulders it, hurting himself as much as the tree.

The Priest meanwhile, drops to his knees and begins to pray out loud.

DESERTER

It is right upon us.

Sweat drips from the Assassins face as he frantically hacks at the tree.

He places the knife back within his belt. Takes a few steps back and shoulders the tree in unison with the Deserter.

The Priest closes his eyes, still muttering his prayer.

Again the two of them launch themselves into the tree.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
We're going to die out here.

ASSASSIN
We're not.

Again.

Finally this time it cracks under the force and leans. The Deserter is sent sprawling onto the floor.

The Priest gathers himself to his feet.

PRIEST
Thank you lord.

EXT. ON THE TREE - NIGHT

The group tentatively shimmy across the fallen tree, it moves with the current. Skidding in the black water.

In the darkness they hear the creature careering down towards the water.

The Priest tries to turn back to see, almost losing his footing.

DESERTER
Keep your eyes on where you are going.

They are around half way to the other shore when the log suddenly upends.

It sends them tumbling over into the freezing water. The Assassin and the Priest manage to hold on, the Deserter is nowhere to be seen.

The pure instant cold of the water takes their breath away.

Both men struggle to keep their grip. Then the Priest spots something.

PRIEST
What? There, the devil! At the shore.

The Assassin pulls out his pistol. He aims down the tree where they came from.

BANG!

The gun shot illuminates a hulking figure, features indistinguishable.

BANG!

Another shot. This time is greeted with a pained groan.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
It is madness.

DESERTER (O.S.)
SWIM.

The Assassin lines up another shot.

EXT. OTHER SHORE - NIGHT

The Deserter stands on the other shore drenched through, shivering.

DESERTER
(Calling out)
There is a lull in the current,
move fast!

EXT. ON THE TREE - NIGHT

The Priest grabs the Assassin as he is about to shoot and pulls him away from the log. Into the black torrent.

The two men swim for their lives.

EXT. OTHER SHORE - NIGHT

Eventually they make it to the shore, exhausted and freezing they clamber onto the bank.

Once he's regained his footing the Assassin turns to the Priest. All three men panting, shivering.

ASSASSIN
Th-th-that is the, the second time
you have come between me an-and
that beast. I had, had it. It was
mine!

The Priest splutters, not fit for this exertion.

PRIEST

Thank G-God I saved you.

ASSASSIN

I could. Fucking hell. I-I c-could have killed it

DESERTER

It could have killed you

ASSASSIN

And what-wh what do you know of it coward, you fled as quick as your legs would carry you.

DESERTER

Whilst you scrambled in the dirt carrying a dead man's hand. Yes I did, and I would again.

PRIEST

The hand?

DESERTER

He has it. Still.

The Priest pulls at the Assassin's pack, causing the Assassin to push him back, a little too protective.

ASSASSIN

That'll also be the last time you touch my pack.

PRIEST

Give it up. It will draw the creature on us.

ASSASSIN

Across this river?!

Again the Priest tries to grab at the pack, again the Assassin takes a step back.

This time through he pulls Jefferson's hand from the pack, a couple of fingers are missing now from the escape.

The Deserter looks and it and holds back his nausea.

PRIEST

You must give that up.

The Assassin pushes the dead flesh into the Priest's hand.

ASSASSIN

Looks like it is of little use now,
here man of God, bury this as you
see fit.

The Priest looks down at the appendage.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

Right now we need a fire, we need
to dry out.

DESERTER

Let's make away first. There could
be a crossing. I do not want that
thing upon us again.

EXT. ON THE RIVERSIDE - NIGHT

It's an impossibly still night - eerily quiet now. Impossibly
cold. Even the black air seems to freeze.

The group push on, three frozen nomads.

EXT. ON THE RIVERSIDE - LATER

The group huddle around a small fire, desperately attempting
to dry their clothes. The Assassin eyes the Deserter, who's
pathetically rubbing the cold from his filthy feet.

ASSASSIN

You want to cover those if you want
to keep them. Frostbite is a
bastard.

DESERTER

You know, you've said a lot. I know
you seek to bully me. Seeing that
monster, it made me realise there
are worse things than you sir.

The Deserter smiles, pulling his courage around him.

ASSASSIN

Like frostbite?

DESERTER

For one.

ASSASSIN

Tell me, what do you run from?

DESERTER

What do you mean?

ASSASSIN

You are running. What from? The war? Tell me, you went to this church for sanctuary, what after that? You have it all mapped out?

DESERTER

I wouldn't tell you if I did.

ASSASSIN

I think you are pathetic, truly, fumbling from something you feared, like a child in the dark. Helpless.

This wounds the Deserter as deeply as any blow.

PRIEST

His business is his own.

(to the Deserter)

You need only answer to God, only he will judge you.

The Assassin turns to the Priest, who is ceremonially burning Jefferson's final remains.

ASSASSIN

I'll judge him if I wish. You, I understand, believe in something - even if it some kind of mysticism. It is a mantra to live your life.

He turns back to the Deserter.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

You? Well, one despairs.

The Deserter sinks back into himself.

The Assassin, satisfied with his small victory, leans back onto the ground.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

Try to get some sleep boys. Tomorrow we have a hike.

PRIEST

What is our plan?

ASSASSIN

My plan is to follow this
downstream. There will be a town, a
village.

DESERTER

Or a crossing...

ASSASSIN

Yes. Or a crossing.

EXT. RIVERSIDE CAMP - LATER

The Assassin sleeps. The Deserter sits up awake. The night is
impossibly still, but every movement, every sound seems
amplified.

He stares out into the darkness. In this light he can't even
make out the far shore. For all he knows the creature is
there, staring right back.

He shuffles further away from the shoreline. Putting his
companions between him and the water.

Then he pulls out the small opium bottle.

PRIEST

What do you have there son?

The Deserter pushes the bottle into his pocket.

DESERTER

Nothing. Truth be told, I cannot
sleep. You?

PRIEST

I am having some difficulty.

DESERTER

Not like our friend...

The Assassin sleeps soundly in the darkness.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

You know, I can't help but feel
that creature is across there. In
that darkness.

PRIEST

It cannot cross the river. It would
have if it could.

DESERTER

Even still, I detest the thought of
it over there, watching me.

PRIEST

It cannot cross son.

DESERTER

What do you think it is? I know he
claims it is a bear, I do not
believe him.

PRIEST

Nor I.

DESERTER

Then?

PRIEST

A demon.

The Deserter smiles, the Priest is deadly serious.

DESERTER

You are a fucking superstitious
man.

The Priest nods.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

Is that why you burned the hand?

PRIEST

It is.

The Deserter looks at the charred remains, still smouldering
dully in the night.

DESERTER

Tell me, Priest. Do you know any
words of comfort, from that book of
yours?

PRIEST

I do.

DESERTER

Tell.

EXT. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER

The other side of the river is oblique.

PRIEST

A young fawn was once at piece with
it's mother. In the dusk of the day
it turn to its mother and spoke:
"You are larger than a dog."

In the darkness the black morass seems to shift and move with
the trees.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

You are faster too, more accustomed
to running, and you have your horns
to boot, for defending yourself"

In and amongst the shifting foliage a shape moves, more
deliberate than the rest.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Then why O Mother do the hounds put
fear in your heart.

Then, for a fleeting moment, two eyes. Reflected in the fire.
Watching, from the other side of the bank. The same eyes of
the beast.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

The mother replied clearly: "All of
what you speak may well be true, I
do have the advantages of which you
speak but even when I hear the bark
of a single dog"

Those eyes disappear into the darkness.

EXT. RIVERSIDE CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The Deserter looks out across the river, nothing is visible
from this vantage point.

PRIEST

"I feel ready to faint, and fly
away as fast as I can"

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The Assassin wades shirtless out into the flowing water, it
gets deeper and deeper until it's at his waste. A freezing
mist clings to him.

After a moment pauses and takes a knife out from his pocket.
He looks down into the water.

The Deserter follows behind him, visibly struggling. He stumbles against the current, watching the frosted trees on the far shore.

Eventually the Deserter reaches the Assassin.

ASSASSIN

Don't move.

DESERTER

I'm doing all I can not to.
Where'd you learn this? I don't
have skill comparable.

He looks at the Assassin expecting a reaction.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

I guess you're right, only thing I
can do is run, best to keep to what
you know.

The Assassin lunges into the water and emerges with a fish. He slaps it in the Deserters hands.

It wriggles and he struggles to keep a hold of it.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

The Priest stands arms stretched. Praying.

In the background the Deserter gathers himself to his feet, whilst the Assassin stamps out a fire.

Tiny flakes of snow spiral down the from the sky. One lands upon the Priest's outstretched hand.

He consults the flake as it perishes slowly.

PRIEST

Such beauty.

He turns and trudges over to the other two.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Such beauty. Even here. Even in
these circumstances. The Lord
blesses us.

The Deserter scans the woodland. It does look magical now. With the soft snow filtering down.

The Assassin is less convinced.

ASSASSIN

It is the start of a storm.

DESERTER

How can you know that? You are a fucking pessimistic one.

The Assassin gathers the rest of his things.

ASSASSIN

It is the start of a storm, and out here, a storm could be the death of us.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

The icy river looks like a single shard of dull glass cut across the white landscape.

The day darkens. Deep bruised clouds hang heavy in a leaden sky. The snow builds.

The river, the forest, everything dies slowly out of view, as the snowfall builds.

The Assassin's prediction is slowly realised.

EXT. IN THE SNOW STORM - DAY

The three men push through the snow, everything around them turning a white grey.

There is no direction to the thickening layers, they seem to fall downwards, left, right, upwards. Impenetrable.

The Deserter and the Priest are lagging behind the Assassin.

DESERTER

This is fucking ridiculous.

PRIEST

I can't see the river... Can you?

DESERTER

No.

The Assassin points up ahead... In the folding whiteness there is a dull shape.

A skeletal building. A boathouse hugging the riverbank.

A moment it is visible, the next it is lost behind the curtain.

PRIEST
Thank you Lord.

The Priest makes to move forward, only to be stopped as the Deserter grasps his coat.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
What?

The Deserter peers into the snow, nervously checking the surroundings.

The Assassin nods in mute agreement and pulls his pistol.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE BOATHOUSE - DAY

The Assassin leads the approach as they move through the density.

Finally they reach the door.

Up this close the extent of decay upon the boathouse is clear. It is one step away from ruin.

There are holes through the outside walls where the snow is packed in hard. Ten inch icicles hang down from the roof.

PRIEST
Noone can persevere here.

In the river there is an old rowing boat, half submerged - protruding out of the ice like a knife from a wound.

ASSASSIN
All the same, let's not announce ourselves here.

Before the Priest can offer his objections the Assassin shoulders in through the door.

INT. THE BOATHOUSE SITTING ROOM - DAY

The Priest follows the other two men in. He quickly realises his concerns were not needed. The house is long since abandoned.

Inside there are belongings strewn across the shell of a building.

There are accumulations of snow from the myriad holes in the roof, there are iced spider webs in the dark recesses.

DESERTER

Fucking hell it is colder in here
than out there.

The Priest examines the fireplace, the wood rotted away, consumed by the cold. He prods the wood with his foot.

PRIEST

Abandoned. We should leave this
place.

The Assassin searches the room for anything of use.

He takes as much care of the former occupants possession as he does for anything that is not of his immediate use, which is to say he takes none at all.

ASSASSIN

Once the storm passes, there isn't
much of use here.

The Priest watches him clear a bookshelf, pushing the books onto the floor.

The old man bends down and retrieves one, dusting it down.

PRIEST

You should take more care. These do
not belong to you.

ASSASSIN

Then who do they belong to?

The Deserter. Sensing another argument makes his way to a room at the rear of the room.

DESERTER

I'm going to check the other room.

He pushes through.

INT. THE BOATHOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

The Deserter struggles into a kitchen at the rear of the building. The damage and degradation is worse here.

He's not here to search for supplies. Instead he unscrews the Opium bottle.

He gazes out at the door, frost biting its way through. He contemplates the bottle and takes a long drink.

INT. THE BOATHOUSE SITTING ROOM - DAY

The Assassin peers through one of the holes, out into the wilderness beyond. The storm is easing.

ASSASSIN
We should move soon.

He turns to the Priest, who has installed himself in a chair, with one of the books in hand, a journal.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
Where is he?

PRIEST
Searching the other room. This man here, the previous occupant. He was of your ilk, a hunter.

He turns the pages of the book.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
This is his journal. A bear hunter and a ferryman. Then on this day, September 1869, he left.

The Assassin looks around the room, there are hints to the occupant. A lightened patch on the wall marks where his rifle once belonged.

And amongst the books, amongst all the other innumerable possessions there is a photograph of a dead deer. It's face blown open has been blown open by a bullet. Like a flower.

INT. BOATHOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

The Deserter sits on the floor in the kitchen, the Opium bottle in his hand, half empty.

He rubs the cold from his hand and inspects a single frostbitten finger.

DESERTER
(to himself)
I have a Priest with me. Surely that counts for something.

He takes a swig from the bottle.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Get me out of this. Get me out of
this and I will do right...

He groggily stands and stares out into a yard. The snow looks perfect, perfect in it's smoothness.

There's a single outhouse standing out, a tool shed.

The Deserter's eyes settle on it when he sees something.

He rubs his eyes, squints at the shed.

A shadow moves inside the shed.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
What...

He moves closer to the hole, knocking a few pieces of broken shelving over.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
Shit.

He regains his footing and regains his line of sight. Nothing at first, but then again the same shadow.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
You two. Come in here. Quickly.

The Priest and the Assassin pace into the kitchen.

ASSASSIN
Are you ready? We are leaving.

The Priest spots the bottle in the Deserter's hand.

PRIEST
Sick?

DESERTER
What? No. Look, out there. There's
something outside.

He points across the yard to the shed.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
In that shed.

The Assassin and the Priest look out, the shed stands lonely in the wintery field.

The storm has settled, the shed stands puncturing the white.

PRIEST
I don't see anything.

DESERTER
Keep looking.

Nothing.

Then the shadow shifts again.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
What? What *is* that Priest?

PRIEST
I dread to think.

The Assassin boots open the door and wades out into the snow towards the shed.

EXT. OUTHOUSE YARD - DAY

The Assassin paces out into the snow, breaking the crisp purity of the field. The other two men follow.

DESERTER
Wait, wait. We could just leave? I mean, nobody saw us.

PRIEST
It could be the occupant. It could be our savior.

DESERTER
I have a bad feeling about this.

They reach the outhouse door.

ASSASSIN
Your life is a bad feeling.

They pause, waiting, listening.

Inside there is a sound - breathing. Panting.

PRIEST
I am in agreement with him. We should not open this.

The Assassin measures the two men. In his eyes they are both cowards.

ASSASSIN
No, no we are going to take a look.

He takes a step back.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
I would make a count to three, but
I know it would be for my sole
benefit.

The Deserter and the Priest look at each other.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
So I will just say three. Three.

He kicks the door through with explosive violence.

INT. OUTHOUSE - DAY

The tool shed is a grim sight, not for the first time the boathouse offers surprise.

There is a pool of what, by best guess, used to be blood. It's now turned to jet black ice. It leads to the carcass of some unidentifiable organic mass.

A little way away a second, this one more easy to decipher through the entrails and bone. A dead dog. Half eaten apparently.

Then finally, in the corner, the source of the noise. Growling lowly, with a madness in each eye. A third dog.

DESERTER
Christ. Christ. What happened in
here.

ASSASSIN
It's just a dog.

PRIEST
He ate the other two.

ASSASSIN
My guess is the hunter left. He
forgot his friends here.

He moves a little closer

ASSASIN
Hunger drove him to this.

The dog shuffles and shivers.

It's skeletal, half starved. It has all the looks of a creature that has been to the other side and back.

As if it has crossed some precipice and was subsequently forever changed. Barely alive.

PRIEST
We can't leave it here.

The Assassin stifles a laugh.

ASSASSIN
What is your suggestion? Take it with us?

The Deserter reaches a tentative hand towards it, to which it replies with a low sickly growl.

DESERTER
No chance of that.

ASSASSIN
The solution is plain. If you think we cannot leave it here, then we should kill it dead.

The Priest is taken aback by this conclusion. That this would come so quickly to mind is unfathomable to him.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
You said yourself.

DESERTER
He's right. It's the Christian thing.

The Assassin turns to the Deserter.

ASSASSIN
Well volunteered, you will be the one to do it.

The Deserter turns back to the dog. It pitches forward and backwards queezily.

DESERTER
I? Er?

ASSASSIN
Lack the fortitude?

The Priest interjects.

PRIEST
I cannot believe we are discussing this.

ASSASSIN

There is no discussion to have.

DESERTER

Fine, fine. Give me your pistol.

The dog appears to register this, it moves backwards deeper into the building, as if trying to dissolve into the walls.

The men continue to discuss it's fate.

ASSASSIN

We are not wasting a pistol bullet
in this rabid. Here.

He retrieves his knife and offers it to the Deserter.

The Priest watches in horror.

The dog does not even make to escape, there is no intelligence behind those eyes. It's like some machine now, acting on a mechanical impulse.

The Deserter takes the knife, and turns to the dog.

The dog lets out it's low bloody growl again. It's whole body shakes with the force of it.

He pulls the knife, stifles his breath.

He eases tentatively closer

But he cannot do it. He hesitates.

The Assassin steps in and snatches the blade.

PRIEST

I cannot watch this.

The Priest steps back out into the snow.

EXT. OUTHOUSE YARD - DAY

The Priest stands in the snow, the storm has finally ceased. He winces as the dog yelps - once, twice, and then lets out a low curdle.

Then nothing. The wind howls across the Priest's face.

The Deserter is the first to emerge out from the shed. The Priest watches him with judging eyes. Then the Assassin.

He relishes the Priest's glare and makes a point of cleaning the deep red blood in the pristine snow.

The Priest cannot hold his tongue.

PRIEST
Heathen.

ASSASSIN
I'm sorry?

PRIEST
It is what you are...

He checks around himself.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
A *fucking* heathen.

If the swearing was a major moment for the Priest, it barely registered with the Assassin.

ASSASSIN
We are done here.

He places the blade back into his pack.

PRIEST
No. We will have this out here now.
Damn you!

The Priest kicks the blood stained snow towards the Assassin.

The Deserter is a poor peacekeeper.

DESERTER
Please. The dog is dead.

PRIEST
Yes, and you're to thank. You are to thank as much as this... This putrid is. Jesus weeps no doubt.

ASSASSIN
And why is he?

The Assassin straightens up. Places the pack on his back.

PRIEST
What?

ASSASSIN
Why is he to blame, Priest?

PRIEST
I don't understand.

ASSASSIN
I have heard your condescension
throughout this ordeal. And your
condescension is an ordeal in
itself.

The Deserter has heard enough.

DESERTER
I'm leaving. You two can bicker it
out.

He walks off into the snow.

The Priest watches him go, and then turns back to the
Assassin.

PRIEST
An ordeal? What of those you've
murdered, bounty hunter. This
business in corpses. It sickens me.

ASSASSIN
It sickens you?

WITH THE DESERTER - DAY

The Deserter has made his way out of earshot. Though he can
still see the two men.

He turns and looks out into the wilderness beyond.

WITH THE ASSASSIN AND THE PRIEST

The Priest is in full sermon now.

PRIEST
You think that...

The Priest gestures towards the Assassins coin pouch.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
... that the coins you've been paid
are a good price for your eternity?
At the gates we all go penniless,
your bounty will count for nought
to Saint Peter.

The Assassin takes a long time to answer this. He considers his words slowly.

ASSASSIN

Well. Priest. I for one would love to be at those gates when you arrive. When they explain all the detail of the mischief Jefferson carried out in his final days...

He takes a step closer, the Priest backs away. Expecting not violence, but some horrible truth to unfurl itself onto him.

PRIEST

I do not make it my business. Do not twist this on me.

ASSASSIN

... When you have to explain why you kept him from facing any kind of justice, and didn't even ask what darkness dwelled within him. I would love to be at those gates with you. Because willful blindness, that is for nought there too.

The Priest has no answer to this.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

But that will come later. For now, we are getting the fuck out of this forest.

INT. RIVERBANK - DAY

The group have refound the river. They sit around in the midday sun. It's calm. The storm has well and truly passed.

Eerie stillness has refound the forest.

The Deserter pulls the fabric of his boot back. The Priest watches him do this, revealing the black skin beneath.

DESERTER

He told me... Frostbite. We are dying here aren't we Priest?

The Priest nods solemnly.

PRIEST

Where is he?

The Deserter looks about himself.

DESERTER

Fishing. I'm going to take a piss.

The Deserter struggles to his feet and leaves into the nearby woodland.

The Priest stands alone for a moment. He then checks around that nobody is near. There's nothing. No sound.

All at once he drops to his knees by the Assassin's pack. He plunges through the belongings, doing his best to keep from making too much noise.

PRIEST

(to himself)

Where is it? Where are you
Jefferson?...

He pulls out a scroll, a wanted note like that for Jefferson. He unrolls it, it's another man, another crime.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Not him.

He pulls out a second note, a stenciled face stares back - not Jefferson.

Then another.

And another.

The sheer number of bounties is astounding. The dates spread over years, their crimes wide-ranging; from murder to petty theft.

A roll call of the deceased and the hunted.

The Priest fingers open another, this time what he sees stops him in his business.

A note unfurls in his shaking hands, on it the picture of a family. 1000 dollars for them all, alive or dead.

The Priest stares in horror for a while. And then quickly packs the notes back into the pack.

He's just in time before the Assassin reappears.

ASSASSIN

Where is he? Weeping I take it?

PRIEST

He went to the latrine.

ASSASSIN

Is it all that man does?

The Assassin's tone changes, it's hard to judge if he suspicious or if it is paranoid to assume so.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

What are you up to holy man?

PRIEST

Praying, violent man.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

The Deserter and the Priest kneel by the water, it's iced over. They're both miserable from that potent mix of hunger and deep gnawing cold.

The Assassin is off ahead. Trying to break the surface ice up with the heel of his boot.

PRIEST

There are no fish in this water.

DESERTER

No fish in the water?

PRIEST

No, though it's odd I'll grant you that.

The Priest taps the ice with his frost-bitten finger.

DESERTER

Can't you conjure some up. Isn't that a string to your bow?

The Deserter tries to crack a smile.

PRIEST

No.

The Deserter eyes the Priest, who is preoccupied - watching the Assassin at his work.

DESERTER

What troubles you friend?

No answer.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

At least he is trying...

With this the Priest checks he is out of earshot from the Assassin. He is. He scoots over to the Deserter.

PRIEST

(quietly)

You know nothing of that man.

The Deserter looks to the Assassin.

DESERTER

That dog had to die. It was a mercy.

PRIEST

You think? That man. He.. He...

DESERTER

He what? No, that's what he did. He may not share your religion but he -

The Priest cuts him off.

PRIEST

Violence is his religion. Dollar bills are his water and his wine. I tell you, I searched his pack -

DESERTER

You searched his pack?

The Priest motions for the Deserter to quieten himself. And whispers...

PRIEST

For food. I searched his pack, thinking I'd find food. What I found... This business... his killing... He's killed families for payment. There were *hundreds*.

The Deserter wrestles with an answer to this.

DESERTER

I do not believe you. And if I did, what do you expect from me?

PRIEST

What do I expect from you?

DESERTER

Yes? Listen, if you are hoping we will overwhelm him, you and I, then you are an imbecile.

The Priest looks up at the Assassin, now on his knees plunging his hands into the icy water, foraging.

PRIEST

At least I'm trying.

EXT. ALONG THE RIVER - DAY

A low mist hangs across the river. Obscuring the far bank.

DESERTER

How long until we are clear of this wood? It seems to stretch on forever.

PRIEST

That is true, almost as if it is consuming us.

Something stirs the men. A sound. On the other side of the bank.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

What was that?

DESERTER

The beast?

Another sound. The men strain to see across the water through the grey fog.

ASSASSIN

No. No, that's a man.

THE MAN IN THE FOG (O.S.)

Hello?

PRIEST

A man?

DESERTER

Yes, yes it is. We do not know him. I vote we -

PRIEST

(calling out)
Hello!

The Assassin grasps the Priest's arm.

ASSASSIN

Silence yourself. When did I say we were taking a vote? Need I remind you we are outlaws.

PRIEST

You may be. I am not.
(calling out)
Hello sir!

ASSASSIN

I will not warn you again.

THE MAN IN THE FOG (O.S.)

Please! I am injured. I am, in some difficulty.

The Deserter makes his way down to the waters edge.

DESERTER

I cannot make him out through this.

THE MAN IN THE FOG (O.S.)

Please. Do not abandon me in this cold, I fear...

There is a moment of silence.

THE MAN IN THE FOG (CONT'D)

I fear that I may perish.

ASSASSIN

There is no question in this. We continue on. If he is injured he is no use to us. If he is not then he is lying.

PRIEST

How can that be your decision? No, we must assist him.

The Priest turns to where the Deserter was, he has already began moving down the river.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

You too?

The Deserter stops and turns.

DESERTER

I'm with our friend here on this. I can't move, with my... My injuries.

The Priest approaches the water's edge.

PRIEST

You two do nothing but think of yourselves.

He edges out onto the ice.

THE MAN IN THE FOG (O.S.)

Please!

PRIEST

I'm coming.

EXT. THE RIVER - DAY

The Priest makes his way across the black ice. It cracks and creaks. He stumbles, uneasy.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

The Deserter squints into the mist.

DESERTER

I do not see him. Wait, no wait.

The blanket clears. Revealing first the Priest, a silhouette moving across the ice.

Then it clears further to reveal the other bank - to reveal a man, trapped beneath an injured horse.

EXT. THE RIVER - DAY

PRIEST

My Lord.

Spotting the man's situation he walks more quickly across the ice now, and eventually makes it to solid ground.

He approaches the fallen man and horse.

INJURED SOLDIER

Oh sir, sir thank God you came. My horse, it gave up on me. The cold I think. My leg is gone I know that.

The Priest winces as he looks at the mans twisted leg.

INJURED SOLDIER (CONT'D)

You can't leave me here.

The Priest searches the man's belongings, his holds his shirt up - it's Union.

INJURED SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Please sir.

The Priest looks back across to the others before his places his hand on the man's head.

PRIEST

Shh son, be at peace, are you alone my son?

INJURED SOLDIER

What? Help this off me.

For his part the Priest stoops and tries to move the horse, too heavy.

PRIEST

Are you alone out here? Where is your company?

INJURED SOLDIER

I, I don't know. I lost them in the storm.

PRIEST

Listen to me...

EXT. RIVERSIDE - WITH THE DESERTER AND THE ASSASSIN - DAY

The Deserter turns to the Assassin.

DESERTER

What are they talking about?

ASSASSIN

I don't know...

EXT. RIVERSIDE - WITH THE PRIEST - DAY

The Priest kneels down next to the stricken man.

PRIEST

Those men are wanted men, one confederate deserter the other an assassin of some kind. A bounty is on both their heads.

INJURED SOLDIER

What?

PRIEST

Your captains, they would be pleased to happen upon them I suspect?

INJURED SOLDIER

What kind of priest are you?

PRIEST

I'm a man, a Sheppard, a man of the Lord. All I wish for, is to get back to my flock.

The Priest regains his feet, and straightens up proudly.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

My church.

INJURED SOLDIER

I, I do not know where they are. I already told you that.

The Priest makes to turn.

INJURED SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Wait! Wait! I do not know, but I could travel with you, we could, share the spoils?

PRIEST

Perhaps, perhaps. Is there a bridge further down?

INJURED SOLDIER

There is. A day's walk down there is a stone bridge.

The Priest looks down considering.

His thoughts are cut off though. A sound punctures out from the forest.

It's no man. It is a bellowing awful howl.

INJURED SOLDIER (CONT'D)

What is that?

PRIEST

Oh. Oh my.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - THE ASSASSIN AND DESERTER - DAY

The raw animalistic power of the howling carries across the icy lake.

DESERTER

Shit.

ASSASSIN

You're about to see a priest ascend
to heaven boy.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - THE PRIEST

The injured man grows desperate, he tries to twist to the origin of the sound.

The Priest too stares at the source. There's nothing but crystal white trees.

INJURED SOLDIER

What *is* that? Help me out, help me
the hell out!

Beyond, somewhere unseen, with all the inevitable force of death, the creature approaches.

The Priest moves back to the bank.

MAN 2

Wait! You're a man of the cloth.
You said yourself. You have to help
me.

The Priest takes one lack look at the man, as branches bend and fold.

PRIEST

The Lord works in mysterious ways.

He makes for the water. Whilst the man clutches at his ankles.

EXT. THE RIVER - DAY

The Priest makes his way across the ice gingerly, all the while checking back over his shoulder.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

The Priest makes it to the shoreline and heaves himself onto the sanctuary of solid ground.

The Assassin eyes him.

ASSASSIN

Where is your injured companion?
Your crusade appears to have been
for nothing. And now you've left
him to your devil.

The Priest doesn't answer him.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

What did you talk about over there?
With your friend?

PRIEST

What does it matter? He's a deadman
thanks to you two evil, evil men.

ASSASSIN

One more time Priest. What did you
say to the man over there?

The Deserter interrupts the interrogation.

DESERTER

Wait! Wait.

The Assassin and Priest turn their attention to him.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

It does not attack.

The Assassin makes his way to the water edge.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

Look. It stays, in the trees.

True to his word the beast stays just out of sight, beyond the white curtain. The injured man meanwhile remains pinned by the horse carcass. Sobbing.

ASSASSIN

I see.

DESERTER

Why? Why won't it attack?

ASSASSIN

I do not know. But it will be it's undoing.

He pulls his pistol, and aims across the river.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

The moment this animal emerges from the trees I will shoot him dead.

The Assassin waits, waits for it to emerge, waits to shoot.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - DAY

The three men sit watching, snowflakes slowly fall - settling a fresh covering on the ice.

The Deserter shivers. Cries of pain drift across the ice from the man trapped.

DESERTER

I don't know how much long I can hear this. That man, I will hear him in my sleep.

The Deserter covers his ears. It seems to last for an age.

ASSASSIN

It will be soon. The beast or the cold, it will be soon.

More snow falls, the Assassin waits like a statue through it all as the day winds on.

DESERTER

It won't.

The Assassin adjusts his position, his arm aching from the strain of holding the gun trained.

The man under the horse whimpers pathetically.

PRIEST

It is as if it knows...

ASSASSIN

A half year ago I tracked a man in New England. He held up in a stone house hiding, he was armed. We tried to smoke him out, but he wouldn't leave.

DESERTER

What did you do?

ASSASSIN

One of my companions tried to go in after him, and got three fingers shot off for his troubles. You know what brought him out in the end?

DESERTER

What?

PRIEST

Educate us.

ASSASSIN

Boredom and pride. On the sixth day he just wandered out, thinking he'd outlasted us. He hadn't. I shot him there and then.

The Assassin again adjusts his grip.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

Boredom and pride. It's boredom and pride that will bring this creature to me now.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - LATER

The men still sit waiting. The Deserter and Priest huddled from the cold. The wind blows the snowflakes sideways. The sun is going down.

The man doesn't cry loudly anymore. Defeated, he just moans quietly.

PRIEST

This is no man. It feels not pride.
Nor boredom.

The wind blows a bluster of snow obscuring their view.

Ice eats at the edges of the Assassin's gun. He flexes his fingers from the cold steel.

DESERTER

Any later and you won't see it even if it does appear.

ASSASSIN

I know that.

The wind blows more fully now.

The snow blocks their view.

INJURED SOLDIER (O.S.)
Help! Help! Jesus Christ Lord help
me! One of you please!

They squint through the blizzard, the dull grey snow is a blanket.

The Assassin adjusts his grip.

ASSASSIN
I don't see him.

DESERTER
I can't see it. It's out of the
trees?

A shadow looms in the snow, but it's too difficult to make out. The only clue is the cries of the fallen man.

INJURED SOLDIER (O.S.)
What are you?! What is this!

DESERTER
Take the shot. Shoot at it.

PRIEST
He only has one cartridge.

DESERTER
So? It's right there.

ASSASSIN
So I waste these. There will be
nothing left. There's no shot.

He holsters the pistol.

Nothing now.

And then the terrible screaming of the injured man.

It begins with cries mixed with curses but quickly devolves into sickening yelping - all traces of humanity devolved to base animalistic death.

EXT. RIVERSIDE - LATER - DAY

The Assassin stands wide eyed. His arm shield his face from the snow.

The Priest sits by the Deserter and stokes the fire with a stick, to no use, snow dips off it.

The snow begins to ease.

ASSASSIN
Son of a bitch.

The Priest looks up.

EXT. OTHER SHORE - DAY

Bloody stains the snow. A horrific sight, the man is simply no more.

All that remains are shredded clothes.

Even the horse is taken.

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

The group sit amongst on the forest floor. They've packed their clothes with ferns now, anything to stave off the biting cold.

DESERTER
It knows this game better than you.
We are going to die out here.
Either from that creature, or from
this cold. This is our end.

PRIEST
Quiet.

DESERTER
Tell me I'm wrong. Tell me
anything. You had it. You had it
and you never took the shot! Now we
are finished.

PRIEST
We cannot give up hope.

DESERTER
Hope? For what? Where are we even
heading? No food, no Opium, no
direction. We are dying.

He looks down at his two companions, both shivering.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
Well?

The Priest is first to answer.

PRIEST

We must head into the forest. Away from the shoreline. We cannot continue down to the crossing. That's suicide.

DESERTER

They are both suicide.

PRIEST

Then what do you suggest?!

ASSASSIN

We kill it.

DESERTER

What?

PRIEST

I'm sorry?

ASSASSIN

We need to face it. If what our Godly friend here tells is true, of a bridge downstream. Then it will hunt us out.

The Assassin gets to his feet, and begins to walk on. The Priest follows furiously and finally, with complaint, the Deserter

DESERTER

Christ alive.

The Priest catches up with the Assassin and forcibly pulls him around.

PRIEST

Something will arrive, I have prayed for it, I believe it to be true, we will find salvation. A village, sanctuary.

ASSASSIN

There is blind faith, and then there is willful blindness.

The Assassin shrugs him off and begins walking away.

PRIEST

This creature. It is something unnatural.

(MORE)

PRIEST (CONT'D)

You've seen the way it stalks, the cunning it holds. We cannot kill this. You cannot solve every challenge with violence.

Finally the Assassin halts and turns.

ASSASSIN

Why?

PRIEST

Because it is violence that brought us here in the first place!

The Assassin waits a moment before offering his case.

ASSASSIN

Look. I have made my decision. You can sit and pray. Or you can flee. But I tell you this, neither will work. No, I do not wish for salvation to be handed down to me.

He pulls out his gun...

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

I will fucking take it.

...and continues on.

EXT. WOODED AREA - DAY

The Assassin assesses the trees before snapping off a branch. The Deserter watches the him, he then snaps off a branch of his own.

The Priest inspects some bushes. There isn't much there, only a few red berries. He picks one and smells it before tossing it aside.

PRIEST

Trepidation has spread to the land itself. This is a sign.

The Assassin doesn't take much notice, instead he pulls his knife and begins to fashion a spear. He takes long strokes to make a sharp edge.

ASSASSIN

You have something you want to say to me, man of the cloth?

PRIEST

I do. Though words appear to have no effect. I've been thinking, and praying.

The Deserter looks at his branch and up at the Assassin's knife. He sighs.

ASSASSIN

Well speak up.

PRIEST

I understand now this, what we are enduring, it is punishment.

DESERTER

How do you figure that?
(to the Assassin)
Could I borrow that?

He points to the Assassin's knife, the Assassin continues to hack at the branch but his eyes are locked on the Priest.

PRIEST

We all must pay for our sins. One way or the other.

ASSASSIN

And what is it you claim to know about my sins?

DESERTER

Your knife?

ASSASSIN

Give me a minute.

PRIEST

The way I see it you both have sinned and I guess as the voice of God I am obliged to tell you so.

ASSASIN

What makes you think we want to listen?

DESERTER

That's the beauty of being a man of God, it means you can tell people anyway.

PRIEST

(sarcastically)
Very good.

The Priest continues foraging for food.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
Desertion is one thing I can understand. I'm a pacifist. This killing for money though you...

He turns to the Assassin

PRIEST (CONT'D)
...You have brought this here, your sin.

The Assassin doesn't answer to this.

DESERTER
Well, what would you have us do?

The Priest relents from his foraging, dusts his hands, and begins his address.

He talks as if taking a sermon.

PRIEST
This is my final plea. We must turn from this path of confrontation. We must seek to make it back to the civilization we have left behind. We must ask for forgiveness. Repent my companions, repent.

ASSASSIN
What you are suggesting, is cowardice dressed in the clothing of madness.

PRIEST
It is our only hope. We will not survive a battle with this creature.

EXT. WOODLAND - NIGHT

There is no fire tonight, only the still moonlight lighting them. It is impossibly cold.

The Assassin and the Deserter sleep. The Priest is awake.

He looks at his companions, specifically and particularly the Assassin, checking he is not stirring.

Then slowly, he crawls over to the Assassin's overcoat, which is covering him like a blanket.

The Deserter stirs, and groggily wakes up. He notices the Priest rifling through the Assassin's pockets.

DESERTER
(whispering)
A thief too now?

The Priest doesn't even pay attention to the Deserter, he continues searching.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
What are you up to?

PRIEST
Quiet.

DESERTER
Our company must be corrupting you.

PRIEST
There, found it.

The Priest retrieves the Assassin's pistol slowly from his coat.

The Deserter's eyes widen.

DESERTER
Wait, wait think about this.

PRIEST
I have. I told you we should change our path. Now it is my responsibility to change it.

He raises his voice.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
You. Wake up.

He nudges the Assassin.

The Assassin wakes to find the barrel of the gun pointing straight at his forehead.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
I, I tried to tell you both. Our direction must change. Now I am in charge. We cannot cross this river.

DESERTER
Hold on a moment.

Calmly the Assassin backs away.

PRIEST
Stop moving.

The Assassin glances to the Deserter.

ASSASSIN
Are you in agreement with this?

The Deserter doesn't know how to reply.

PRIEST
Look at me. Not him. Look. At me.

The Assassin turns back to the Priest.

ASSASSIN
I thought you were against
violence?

PRIEST
This is an exception. When we
return to the church I shall
repent.

The Assassin smiles.

ASSASSIN
We are not going back to the
church.

He stands up, the Priest holding the gun on him the whole
way.

PRIEST
Sit back down! You both have drawn
a gun on me now it is my turn.

The Priest closes the gap on the two men, practically pushing
the barrel into the Assassin's head.

DESERTER
This is wrong.

PRIEST
Quiet coward. You - I said sit
down.

The Assassin takes a step back. Puts his hands into his
pockets.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
Get your hands out. Your hands,
everything. I won't ask you again.
I wont -

The Assassin pulls his hands out, and drops three bullets to the floor.

The Priest watches them fall and then looks to the gun. The chamber. It's empty.

The Assassin reacts quickly, he smacks the gun from the Priest's hand and then delivers a sickening straight punch to the his nose. Busting it all over again.

The Priest falls backwards, tries to scramble away. The Assassin kicks him across the face.

Blood webs across the white snow in the moonlight.

The Deserter tries to intervene, but the Assassin stamps down hard on his injured foot. Sending him to the floor in agony.

The Assassin then turns back to the Priest, who is on his knees.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
(through broken teeth)
I had! I had no choice!

Another blow.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
(nursing a broken nose)
This, I had to change what we were
doing.

Another.

This time the Priest tries to crawl to the Deserter.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
Please, please help me.

The Assassin grabs him by the collar.

ASSASSIN
He will not help you, "It is not
his place to place judgement".

He yanks the Priest back, choking him. And then lets him go.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
I think he'll stand by and do
nothing, like you have for so long.
In your church.

PRIEST
 (coughing)
 Please.

ASSASSIN
 In fact. I think he'll turn around.
 He won't even see.

The Deserter starts turning around. Sobbing.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
 And now Priest. I will show you the
 reason why turning a blind eye is
 wrong.

PRIEST
 Please, he's going to hurt me.

DESERTER
 Are you going to kill him?

The Deserter has his back to them now.

ASSASSIN
 It is bad enough with that creature
 out there, without you too.

DESERTER
 Are you going to kill him?!

ASSASSIN
 No. No, I will need him.

The Assassin lands another blow across the bloodied mess of
 the Priest face.

CLOSE ON THE DESERTER'S FACE

The Deserter winces as he hears the sickening smacks from
 strike after strike. The Priest whimpers with each blow.

It goes on for an uncomfortably long time.

WOODLAND - DAY

The Priest's face is a ruin. An unrecognisable shape coloured
 in deep red and black bruising.

The Assassin binds his hands behind his back while the
 Deserter watches.

The Assassin pushes him forward.

ASSASSIN
Now boys. To the bridge.

ALONG THE RIVER - DAY

The Assassin marches the Priest along. The Deserter walks glumly ahead.

ASSASSIN
So, Jefferson. Do you want to know
what he sought shelter from?
Besides this beast I mean.

The Priest doesn't answer.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
Not a priest's business to ask?
Right. Fine. And you think that
masks you of any wrong doing, even
now.

PRIEST
I know it does.

ASSASSIN
Well, what if I told you this man
Jefferson was an outlaw, a man who
killed a young girl no less. She
was a young girl right, but he
still raped her like she was of
age.

The Priest gives nothing away, still trudging along.

PRIEST
I do not compromise my beliefs. Not
for anything.

The Assassin holds him up with a yank.

ASSASSIN
And if I was sent to kill this
Jefferson. Albeit for money, as you
rightly point out. Would that make
me unjust? Or, would it make you
unjust for holding him? If he had
escaped, and repeated his atrocity
elsewhere, would that make you
complicit?

PRIEST
No.

ASSASSIN
Is ignorance your absolution?

WITH THE DESERTER - DAY

The Deserter trudges solemnly ahead, doing his absolute best to ignore the conflict behind him. He watches the white forest as it passes.

WITH THE PRIEST AND THE ASSASSIN - DAY

ASSASSIN
See, you claim that this creature has been brought on by us. You suppose that our deeds, evil as they may be, have wrought this. Well, it seems to me.

The Assassin pulls the Priest in close.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
... That it is your judgement too.

DESERTER (O.S.)
Hey. Hey!

PRIEST
I am not like you. Nor him...

DESERTER (O.S.)
Hey both of you. Come up here.

ASSASSIN
That does not matter.

PRIEST
It will matter to the lord, you will see...

DESERTER (O.S.)
Come up here! I've found something.

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

The Assassin catches up with the Deserter, the Priest dragged behind.

The Deserter is standing over a small wooden box, it's contents spilled and partially submerged by snowfall. A little way away there is a dead horse, it's body frozen stiff.

Further along there are other boxes, and various instruments.

A red cross mark these out - medical supplies. Left by someone, for some reason as yet unknown.

DESERTER

Truly a horde, wouldn't you say?

PRIEST

Is there food?

DESERTER

Not that I can see

PRIEST

Then the Devil is tricking us,
there is nothing here.

ASSASSIN

Shut your mouth. The horse there is
plenty food for us all.

PRIEST

Horse? Good lord.

ASSASSIN

As for the rest, perhaps there is
something for your frost bite. But
I don't see much else.

DESERTER

It's getting dark.

The Priest looks up at the tall pines above, mouths a prayer.

The Assassin leaves him and makes his way over to the horse,
pulls out his knife.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

Wait, wait. Something else... What
do we have here.

The Deserter uncovers another crate, pushes some loose fabric
back, inside there are three bottles.

On their side a parchment - Ethanol.

The Deserter smiles widely, gathers the bottle with all the
excitement of a child.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

A bounty! Liquor. Our luck is
turning.

ASSASSIN
Drink that and you'll go blind.

DESERTER
I've drank worse.

PRIEST
It's useless.

The Assassin crouches by the case of bottles, picks one up.

ASSASSIN
No, not useless. We can ignite
them. These, these are our weapon.

EXT. WOODLAND - NIGHT

The group have fashioned a low burning fire. The Deserter
prods it, the Priest sits near by, half in darkness.

DESERTER
We should quell this. It will give
us away.

The Assassin sits a little way away, studying the horse
carcass.

The Deserter looks to the Priest.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
What do you think?

PRIEST
What does it matter. He wants it to
come to us.

DESERTER
(louder)
I said, we should quel -

The Assassin cuts him off.

ASSASSIN
I heard what you said.

The Deserter gets himself to his feet, walks to the Assassin.
There, the Assassin has his knife drawn, he's eying the horse
- apparently deciding on his first incision.

DESERTER
Where to begin...

ASSASSIN

Where to begin indeed.

He finally makes up his mind, draws the blade across the carcass's gut.

Black blood spills out onto the white snow. The Deserter holds his nose.

DESERTER

Christ. It must be bad.

ASSASSIN

(whilst skinning the
animal)

No, no the cold will have preserved
it.

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

*

The Priest sits watching the gold flames overlap each other.

PRIEST

(to himself)

This land is all bad. This side of
the water. His side of the water.

His eyes move to the dark still trees surrounding them.

WITH THE ASSASSIN AND THE DESERTER - NIGHT

*

The Assassin continues skinning the animal, pulling some fur free.

More blood pools.

DESERTER

The creature, it will surely smell
this right?

The Assassin yanks at the torn flesh.

ASSASSIN

What choice do we have? We are
going to face it. This way we can
face it wrapped in fur, and well
fed at least.

The Deserter looks at his frost bitten leg.

DESERTER

Warmth.

ASSASSIN

Warmth.

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

*

The Priest watches the forest. He listens intently to the silence of the night.

Then he hears a shuffling.

WITH THE ASSASSIN AND THE DESERTER - NIGHT

*

PRIEST (O.S.)

Not now. Not now I am not ready. We are not -

ASSASSIN

We need to cut this. Then we'll blood it, and cook it -

PRIEST (O.S.)

Not now I beset you!

ASSASSIN

What is he bellyaching about now?

The Assassin turns to see...

The Priest is standing. Facing away. Into the darkness.

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

The two men arrive by the Priest's side.

ASSASSIN

Tell me what you looking at? What do you see?

PRIEST

He's here.

The Assassin looks into the darkness, it's hard to make anything out. No sign.

DESERTER

I don't see him.

The Assassin wipes the bloodied blade on his breaches.

ASSASSIN

I don't either.

The forest is still, only the low crackle of the fire.

PRIEST

He is there. He is close. Watching.

The Priest turns to the Assassin.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

He's watching you.

The Assassin takes a step forward - a step into the darkness - a step away from the island of light that is the fire.

He scans the blackness, impenetrable.

He raises his blade, takes his gun slowly from his holster. He calls out...

ASSASSIN

Know this, I will be the death of you. I hunt you!

Nothing. No sound. No movement. No features.

The Deserter squints into the darkness too.

DESERTER

We should move.

Then there is a sound, out there somewhere ahead. A shuffling. Breathing.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

We should fucking move.

ASSASSIN

Wait.

The darkness shifts, there is something concealed. A shape. Layers of black overlap each other.

DESERTER

Christ.

The Assassin turns around.

ASSASSIN

Wait -

Just as he speaks the Priest springs into life.

He clumsily smashes the Assassin to the ground with all his weight, and struggles back to his feet.

Then he runs off, off into the darkness.

Footsteps bound towards the two remaining men. The Beast. Careering through the inky blackness.

The Deserter turns and sprints for his life. Leaving the Assassin behind.

WITH THE DESERTER - NIGHT

The Deserter careers through the darkness. There's no way to see in this.

The obstacles of the forest trip him, he runs full pelt into them, they wind him, dig into his injured leg.

The Priest is a few yards ahead, running with his hands bound. Focused.

The Deserter musters all his energy to catch up with him.

DESERTER

Wait. Stop! Stop or I'll...

PRIEST

You won't. You don't have anything to convince me with.

BANG - a shot rings out across the forest.

The Deserter jumps at this.

BANG - another shot punctuates the night.

DESERTER

Wait. God. Fucking wait!

Eventually the Priest slows, and the Deserter slows too.

They stand out of breath, panting. Listening.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

I can't hear anything. Can you?

PRIEST

It's devoured him.

DESERTER

And it's your fucking fault.

PRIEST

Justice. No fault here, except for his own.

They stand again for a moment, no sound, nothing but the sound of their breath.

The Deserter scans the forest.

DESERTER

Now what?

PRIEST

God will light a way.

DESERTER

Exceptional. In the darkness, hunted by an ape-man, with a fucking lunatic for company.

PRIEST

I'm not mad.

DESERTER

You are. Christ, listen to yourself. You think this is for the best? You think something is going to just appear to save us both. At least he, at least he did something -

PRIEST

And we now know where it got him.
(Spotting something)
Hold on. Hold on look -

Out there, webbing through the trees. Creating pale shafts against the pitch black. Fire. A light.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

A way. Ask and the Lord will provide.

The Deserter squints into the darkness.

DESERTER

It's him.

PRIEST

I know, it's the Lord. My Lord. My saviour has come to me.

DESERTER

No you fucking naive fool, it's the Assassin. Alive.

PRIEST

No. Not it cannot be.

The figure can be seen now, it is him. Making his way through the forest, carrying a torch ablaze.

DESERTER

We must get his attention.

PRIEST

No, no. Why? What use is he?

DESERTER

He survived. We need him here.

PRIEST

He is a survivor I know that. But so are you. You must know, on some plain, you must comprehend what is clear. He will kill us the moment we are of use to him.

DESERTER

You don't know that.

The light moves on. Heading away.

PRIEST

The wanted notes I found. My situation here. *Him* assaulting *me* - a man of the cloth!

DESERTER

No. I don't.

PRIEST

This is your only chance. This is our only chance.

The Deserter watches the fire moving away.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

God will provide for us now.

DESERTER

No... No.

The Deserter calls out.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

(calling out)

Wait! We are here!

PRIEST

Stop. Quieten yourself.

DESERTER

No. I won't die here. I won't.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

(calling out)

We are here!

PRIEST

Stop!

The Priest grabs at the Deserter, trying to cover his mouth, anything to stop him from alerting his nemesis. The Deserter struggles free and forces him back into the snow.

DESERTER

I won't die here. You think I'm like you? You think I care what he's done? He could have killed them all, burned them alive for all I care. I won't die here.

PRIEST

You.. I... Please

DESERTER

Help! We are here!

The flame stops moving away. Starts moving towards them.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

(calling out)

Yes. Yes we are here!

The Priest's head drops. Defeated.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I am. But I've been on a long road away from this war. I've come too far...

The Priest looks up and watches the ball of light move closer through the trees. All hope of escape draining from him.

Finally the Assassin arrives. He's bloodied, but he's alive.

He eyes the both of them.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

I found him. He tried to flee.

The Priest doesn't even contest this lie.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
He was trying to run away. I
stopped him.

PRIEST
How did you survive? Where is it?

DESERTER
Is it dead?

Finally the Assassin speaks.

ASSASSIN
No. It is alive. But now I know
something about it. Now I know
something that it fears.

PRIEST
Really? And tell us. What is that?

The Assassin brings the flame down to view.

EXT. DEEP FOREST - DAY

The Assassin hunches over a track on the floor, whilst the
Assassin huddles from the cold. The Priest is nearby, slumped
by a tree.

DESERTER
Well?

ASSASSIN
It's a track.

DESERTER
I can see that.

The Deserter approaches the Assassin, crouches next to him.

DESERTER (CONT'D)
But what kind of track. Is this our
man?

ASSASSIN
No, no it's not.

WITH THE PRIEST - DAY

The Priest sits, listening.

With his bound hands he gathers two small twigs and bends
them into a crucifix.

WITH THE ASSASSIN AND THE DESERTER - DAY

DESERTER

Then lets move. It's easier when we move. This cold, it closes on you when you stay idle.

ASSASSIN

It is a horse, and a cart down there. Our medical supplier, the dead horse.

The Deserter looks down at the furs he's wrapped in.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

They came from this side. They were moving, at a gallop.

PRIEST

They were running away.

The Assassin straightens up.

ASSASSIN

We don't know that. But at the moment, this is all we have. We follow the trail. On your feet.

WITH THE PRIEST - DAY

The Priest shoves the wooden cross into his pocket and stands up. His face red and blue.

EXT. DEEPER INTO THE FOREST - DAY

The group push on, following the trail. The snow has died down again, the forest has returned to white stillness.

PRIEST

Can I at least ask about the plan?

ASSASSIN

The plan?

PRIEST

Your plan.

ASSASSIN

I have four bullets in my pistol

PRIEST

They had no effect.

The Assassin flashes him a look, The Priest retreats back within himself.

ASSASSIN

... Four bullets, and my knife. And there are three of us.

DESERTER

That's got to count in our favour.

The Priest smirks.

ASSASSIN

It will. We will find it, we'll find where it sleeps. We'll hide there. We will wait for it. And when it comes. We'll be ready.

PRIEST

It could well be watching us now, in this forest, the Devil is sly and cunning, as is his demons

ASSASSIN

If it was, it would of attacked us by now.

EXT. DEEP FOREST - FOLLOWING THE TRACKS - DAY

The Deserter heads up the group, trudging through the snow with difficulty.

The tracks grow more and more faint as snow shifts on top of them.

The tracks lead out into an vast yawning white opening.

EXT. MEDICAL CAMP - DAY

A clearing, the trees giving way to an expanse of white.

There, stark against the crisp snow - red tents. They're flanked on one side by a cliff side rising up. Up into the thick white fog above.

The tents sit in orderly rows, blowing in the wind, the snow around them looks untouched. Their fabrics flap and snap in the breeze.

A single flag bends and ripples, baring a deep red medical cross.

The Deserter starts to move forward into the clearing but the Assassin stops him.

ASSASSIN

This isn't what it seems.

DESERTER

What choice do we have? This place, it's shelter from the cold. This god fucking-cunting awful cold.

ASSASSIN

If we are thinking that, so will others.

DESERTER

The snow is virgin. No one is here.

PRIEST

You may not be completely correct there.

The Priest points towards a cave thirty feet or so from the tents with his bound hands.

In front of the cave, the thick snow has been disturbed. Large chunks tossed aside.

DESERTER

What possible choice do we have?

ASSASSIN

None. We'll move inside. If this is where our prey has made it's home, then this is where we will make it's death.

The Assassin pushes out into the clearing.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

The three men wade out into the snow. Their silhouettes are easily spottable, a stark contrast from the white.

They near the cave. The Priest peers down into it's lonely darkness, swallowing the light. Endless.

PRIEST

The Devil dwells in a place like this.

They move on.

EXT. CLOSER TO THE TENTS - DAY

DESERTER

What if there is someone still
here?

ASSASSIN

Do you want to call out to check?

DESERTER

I do not.

EXT. MEDICAL CAMP - DAY

They enter the camp, moving in and amongst the red flapping tents.

There's no one to be seen, the tents are empty, but left open - as if someone left in haste.

Belongings are strewn across the floor, up turned. A few dark patches remain in the white snow, where fires once were.

The Assassin turns to the others.

ASSASSIN

This is the place. This is as close
to perfect as we're like to find.

The Priest spots a larger tent, with a crucifix at it's head. His eyes light up, and for a moment he forgets his sorry circumstance.

PRIEST

A church.

DESERTER

That? You're stretching yourself
there sir.

PRIEST

A place of worship, a Chapel. Holy
land!

He struggles free of the Assassin and heads over hurriedly to the edge of the tent.

The Deserter follows behind whilst the Assassin scopes the rest of the camp.

OUTSIDE THE TENT CHAPLE - DAY

The Priest arrives first. The wind blows at it's flaps.

The church is conspicuous in that it is the only tent with it's "doors" fastened. The only place which isn't open to the whiteness.

He fumbles with the clasps. The Deserter joining him as he does.

PRIEST

We should take communion, or
evening prayer. Please, Lord...

The Deserter looks to the floor at the entrance, something catches his eye, the snow there, it's red

DESERTER

Strange.

The tent door opens. The Priest freezes, a look of horror riddled over his face.

PRIEST

No.

WITH THE ASSASSIN

The Assassin spots the other two, standing like statues in the "church" door. He approaches to see what has froze them.

DESERTER

This is no church. This is a
morgue.

Inside the tent, there are bodies, in various states of destruction. It's hard to tell them apart, hard to make sense of their twisted limbs, the concave faces.

ASSASSIN

Is this the work of your God?

PRIEST

No, no. Not mine.

The Deserter holds his hand over his mouth, trying not to wretch.

ASSASSIN

These injuries, these are not from
the war. They are from our friend
out their in the woods.

PRIEST
(distressed)
That heathen.

He falls to his knees.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
Oh Lord. What is this sign? What
does this mean to me now here?

The Assassin closes the tent door. Leaving the dead eyes in
the dead darkness.

ASSASSIN
They must have been storing them
here. They probably didn't realise
the stench would bring the beast
back to them.

The Priest grabs the Assassin by the wrists, imploring him.

PRIEST
Please. I beg of you. This is
ungodly. This is a sign for all of
us three now.

ASSASSIN
Let go of me you mad fool.

The Deserter watches, concerned.

The Priest begins to weep.

PRIEST
This will be the death of us. I
know I have done wrong. My hands
are not clean. We must repent. We
cannot stop this.

The Assassin pays not attention, he's fixated on his task
now.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

The group huddle in one of the tents, outside the howling
wind almost sounds like a wail, some distant screaming in the
enormity of the wilderness outside. Separated by thin fabric.

The group struggle with the cold. Their frost bitten fingers,
their frozen hair. They are on the precipice now.

The Priest sits a little way away from the others fumbling
with his wooden cross. He mutters to himself. Half crazed.

The Deserter watches him, and finally turns to the Assassin.

DESERTER

What do we do. Tell me something
that will fly in the face of what
he just told me.

ASSASSIN

Find a spade. We dig a hole.

The Assassin traces a circle with a frost bitten black
finger.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

We will dig a hole. Deep enough. A
deadfall. You see I still have
this.

He pulls a bottle of liquor from his pack.

DESERTER

I see, for courage?

The Assassin flashes him a look.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

Warmth?

ASSASSIN

A weapon, we dig this hole, we
bring it here. We burn it.

The Priest just continues to mumble in the background.

DESERTER

We need a way to bring it in.
Right? This is a trap right.
I will not be live bait, I will not
be left out while you see me
perish! Since we first met you have
thought me expendable. No no no.

ASSASSIN

Calm yourself before you have
yourself a shit. No, I have that
task reserved...

The Assassin turns to the Priest, whose continues babbling
unaware.

EXT. MEDICAL CLEARING - LATER

The sun hangs low in the sky, the Deserter smashes at the packed snow with a rusty spade. Sweat drips from his brow.

Around 10 metres away there is a branch protruding from the snow. The Assassin is tying the Priest to it.

WITH THE ASSASSIN AND THE PRIEST - DAY

The Assassin hooks the Priest on to the wood. The Priest accuses him with his eyes.

PRIEST

This, you, we. We are all going to hell. You will burn -

The Assassin smacks him across the face.

WITH THE DESERTER - DAY

The Deserter winces at the blow. Shakes his head.

WITH THE ASSASSIN AND THE PRIEST - DAY

The blow has reopened the Priest's busted lip.

PRIEST

You've taken everything from us.
You will not take my faith.

ASSASSIN

Our friend doesn't seem too angry about this arrangement. Who knows, you may even live.

The Priest smirks.

PRIEST

Even if this worked. You wouldn't keep me nor him alive.

The Assassin finishes the final knot. Comes around to the Priest eyeball to eyeball.

ASSASSIN

Well you will go to the grave having learned one thing then. You are right - I will kill you both, regardless of the outcome.

The Priest struggles against his binds.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)

Once I've made a hide from that creature I will shoot you both dead out here. You know why? Because that's who I am.

PRIEST

I'll tell him

The Assassin begins to walk off.

ASSASSIN

You go ahead. He won't believe you. You see? You were wrong. I am death, not this creature.

EXT. MEDICAL CAMP - NIGHT

The moon sits proud in the sky. A cloudless night. The Assassin passes the Deserter a bottle of Ethanol.

ASSASSIN

We will only have one chance at this. That pit, it won't contain him for long.

DESERTER

I know that. Are you...

ASSASSIN

Am I what?

The Deserter looks to the Priest still standing against his pole.

DESERTER

Are you sure this will work? That it won't notice the pit. It's, there's a lot of room for error here.

ASSASSIN

It will work because it has to. Now, hide.

EXT. MEDICAL CAMP - NIGHT

The Deserter hides down low in the snow. His hands shake from the cold. His eyebrows are frosted. Frozen down to his insides.

The night is still quiet. Except for the shuffling of the Priest.

He stands now alone, his breath fogging out.

There's still no sign of the beast.

PRIEST
He's left you know.

DESERTER
Quiet.

PRIEST
Your partner, the Assassin amongst us. He's up and left us here. For our judgement. Where is yours?

DESERTER
Shut your fucking mouth.

PRIEST
That creature. That demon. He's worse. He meant to kill you. He told me so.

DESERTER
Quiet you old fucking fool!

Then there is a sound, a loud howl bellowing out across the icy night. From somewhere out there, in the inky blankness.

CLOSE ON THE PRIEST - NIGHT

The Priest shuffles.

PRIEST
It's not too late.

No answer.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
Hello?

Another guttural howl. Closer this time.

The Priest is suddenly painfully aware of how alone he is. He's an island in the darkness.

He tries to keep his composure. The fear shows though.

Then there are footsteps. And branches snapping and giving way.

Closer.

The Priest struggles to make anything out in the darkness.

Closer still. It seems to be on top of him.

And then it becomes visible. Hurtling itself across the opening from the treeline, ravenous.

The Priest freezes in terror. And then struggles frantically trying to get lose of his binds.

It gets closer and closer - a juggernaut of death.

Then it disappears out of sight.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Now. Now. Somebody! One of you
bloody idiots. Now!

Then a streak of yellow flame from the right. The Assassin.

WITH THE ASSASSIN - NIGHT

The Assassin sprints out towards the hole, fire in-hand.
Inside the beast is in a rage.

PRIEST (O.S.)

Now!

The Assassin launches the bottle down into the pit. Where it
explodes into flame.

He stands hands on knees panting.

The creature is still alive, the fire has failed to catch.

The Assassin looks to the other side. Looking for the
Deserter.

ASSASSIN

(to himself)

Where is he?

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

The Priest looks to the side, there's no sign of the
Deserter.

He smiles.

PRIEST (O.S.)
He's left you. He's ran. You are
what you are. And so is he!

WITH THE ASSASSIN - NIGHT

The Assassin shouts back.

ASSASSIN
Then he's left you too!

Ahead, the creature begins to crawl from the pit. Escaping.

ASSASSIN (CONT'D)
(to himself)
OK.

He approaches the edge of the pit and pulls his pistol.

The creature is basically out when he let's a volley of
bullets go. His whole cartridge.

The creature wails and falls back, back into the pit.

The Assassin affords himself a smile, a glimmer of hope.

He approaches the edge of the pit.

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

The Priest watches intently. Madness in his eyes now.

PRIEST
You cannot kill it!

WITH THE ASSASSIN - NIGHT

The Assassin edges closer. He checks his pistol, no rounds
left.

He picks up a flaming branch, alight from the ethanol strewn
across the white snow.

He moves closer still, cautiously.

He readies himself - but before he reaches the edge the Beast
explodes out of the pit.

It's on him in a flash, all muscular blows and savage bites.

The Assassin reacts though, jamming the flaming log into the creature's stomach.

It catches fire, and the monster relents.

Now it turns and careers into the nearest tent, which likewise goes up in a blaze.

The Assassin struggles to his feet, bleeding from a horrible gash across his chest.

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

The Priest continues to wrestle with the rope. It frays, he's escaping.

PRIEST

You can't kill it. I won't let you.
I WON'T LET YOU!

WITH THE ASSASSIN - NIGHT

The Assassin struggles forward, towards the burning tent.

He shields the blaze with his hand. Limping. One eye closed from blood streaming down his face.

He pulls his small knife from his pocket.

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

The rope is but a thread now. And then it gives.

He falls to his knees, free.

WITH THE ASSASSIN - NIGHT

The Assassin rounds the flaming tent. The smoke blows across his face.

Then, as it dissipates, it reveals the beast. Standing not a metre away. And now we see it close up. The ape, the man, the monster, the Sasquatch.

It's cold eyes stare down at him.

ASSASSIN

OK you cunt. OK.

The creature launches itself at him.

It's not even a fight. Not even close. The creature mauls him to death in sickening violence.

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

The Priest follows the path. He can see the burning tent, the burst deadfall.

He runs walks slowly around the flaming tent.

He is there just there in time to see the creature, standing over it's victim. Blood soaked.

For a brief time they share a moment, staring at each other.

PRIEST

Truly. You are a devil.

Then the Beast fades back into the forest.

EXT. WOODLAND - NIGHT

The Priest wades through the snow in the woodland, the air is still. He follows the creatures footprints, pushing on. He holds his wooden cross now, clings to it.

EXT. WOODLAND - NIGHT

The Deserter stands around a tree, hidden from view. He can hear the Priest approaching, unsure as to whether it is the creature. He closes his eyes, he braces himself.

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

The Priest walks further, and is then jumped upon by the Deserter.

DESERTER

NO! NO!

At first the Deserter thinks it's the creature. When he realises it's not, he calms.

DESERTER (CONT'D)

It's you.

PRIEST

You coward.

The Priest smacks the Deserter. The force of the hit hurting his own hand as much as the Deserter's face.

The two wrestle pathetically in the snow, neither of them are fighters.

Eventually they tire.

EXT. WOODLAND - NIGHT

The two men sit opposite each other, all but defeated.

Somewhere behind the trees a pale blue dawn is breaking.

DESERTER

You think I'm going to hell. Don't you.

PRIEST

Yes. Yes I do.

DESERTER

Then you are too. You, you think you're above everyone. You're not. What he did to you, what we did was wrong. But your hands are not clean either.

PRIEST

I know that. I have sheltered evil, I have turned away. Most of all I have been guilty of pride. But no more...

The Priest looks down to the cross, his griping it so hard it has dug into his frost bitten hands.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

The Lord gives and the Lord takes away.

In the distance smashing and the wailing of the sasquatch rings out. The two men barely react.

DESERTER

I'm going to keep running. There has to be something. There has to.

PRIEST

There won't be. It's gone now.

DESERTER

Then what do you suggest?

PRIEST
Accept it. Repent.

The Deserter's eyes fill with tears.

DESERTER
I will not. That's madness. You're mad.

PRIEST
You can't fight it now. We must welcome it. All the choices you have made have lead you to this point, as have mine. As did his.

The Deserter shakes his head.

PRIEST (CONT'D)
If we repent, we will be saved. In this life, or in the life up there.

He looks up to the white sky above. Pregnant with more snow.

The Deserter gathers himself up.

In the distance another howl.

He looks to the Priest, who is still sat in the snow.

DESERTER
Come with me.

The Priest doesn't answer. The Deserter leaves.

WITH THE DESERTER - NIGHT

The Deserter stumbles into a slow jog, moving through the snow.

He bounces off iced trees, struggles through bramble.

He desperately scans for something, anything.

He is now, as he was when we first saw him - running. Fleeing.

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

The Priest kneels, praying.

Eventually he straightens up, as another piercing howl rings out across the forest.

WITH THE DESERTER - NIGHT

The commotion sounds closer now, too close. The Deserter freezes.

He spins around himself, weeping.

DESERTER

Please. Please.

He looks one way, and then another.

His eyes light up, he spots something.

Ahead, through the trees, in the distance, a small house.

He breaks into a run.

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

The Priest stands up and opens his arms up. Accepting whatever will come.

PRIEST

I am ready.

WITH THE DESERTER - NIGHT

The Deserter nears in on the house, he stumbles, falls flat on his face. He scrambles back to his feet and resumes his run.

He's closing in, he's going to make it.

Then he drops, plummets down out of view.

He's fallen, trapped, in a deadfall. Like that which the Assassin made.

Down there, in the dark. He looks at his leg, it's horribly broken.

DESERTER

Christ no. No, no, no! Fuck you!
Fuck you!

He thumps the floor in frustration.

The Opium bottle is there too, smashed open by the fall.

He claws the dirt and screams out for all the ills that he believes have befallen him from his first day to this one.

Then finally he calms as a shadow covers the top of the fall. He looks up, resigned, knowing full well what he will see.

At the top, the sasquatch peers down at him. Drooling. Insatiable.

WITH THE PRIEST - NIGHT

The Priest flinches as he hears the screams of the Deserter carry through the trees. He winces.

They seem to go on for ages. Walling. They start out human, but then descend into an animalistic yelping.

Then silence.

He stands there alone.

He waits.

Eventually the trees snap up ahead, the Sasquatch approaches with all the inevitability of death.

The Priest steadies himself.

PRIEST

Whatever comes. It is my judgement.
I accept it Lord. I am ready for
it. I have done wrong, I sheltered
those who did awful things, I...

His eyes well up. The trees begin to part.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

... I was a coward. I have closed
my eyes to the ill of this world. I
have thought myself, my religion,
your word, above others.

He calms himself.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

But I repent, so I am absolved.
Whatever comes, I will not scream.
I will not cry out.

The Sasquatch emerges. It's deep eyes bore down. Down into his soul.

The Priest closes his eyes. Closes his eyes and waits for his judgement.

DARKNESS

No sound, no light.

And then the Priest screams.

THE END.