

PALE RIDER

GABRIEL

an untitled western by Michael Butler & Dennis Shryack

RECEIVED

JAN 13 1993

STORY LIBRARY

FADE IN:

HIGH ANGLE ESTABLISHING SHOT - CARBON CANYON - DAY

Carbon Canyon meanders among the lower peaks of a dark, fir-clad cordillera. Winding along the floor of the Canyon, which varies in width from ten to fifty yards, Carbon Creek reflects the mid-morning sun. From this HIGH POV the scene suggests the 19th Century canvases of Keith and Bierstadt; tranquil, pastoral, pristine.

Abruptly --

SHOCK CUTAWAY - MOVING CAMERA - LOW ANGLE

Pounding hooves ring deafeningly against a granite outcrop; the SOUND resembles a salvo of gunfire; explosive, insistent.

But in a moment --

RETURN TO:

EXT. CARBON CANYON - ANOTHER ANGLE - DAY.

Here, where the creek becomes wider and the slopes less precipitous, a colony of placer miners have established themselves. ANGLE encompasses a rustic assortment of one- and two-room shanties, some of board and batten, others thrown together with lath and tarpaper. Smoke drifts upward from several stovepipes, but most of the colony's inhabitants are standing or squatting at their work along the 100-yard stretch of Carbon Creek which comprises their claims. The air is soft and warm and silent but for the melodic flow of the creek and the chirp of a mockingbird.

Abruptly --

SHOCK CUTAWAY - MOVING CAMERA - LOW ANGLE

Like thunder before an approaching storm, the air reverberates with the SOUND of horses galloping across a flat grassy meadow, pounding hooves HUGE IN F.G.

But in a moment --

RETURN TO:

EXT. CARBON CANYON - VARIOUS SHOTS - THE MINERS - DAY

Prospectors, really. Most are men, raw-boned and bearded;

most of them engaged in the time-honored process of panning. Others work "long toms" -- six-foot sluices in which shovelful of gravel are washed across a series of riffles by the downstream course of the creek. Overall, with its serenity of pace, its gentle sounds, the earth-tones of its dwellings, the colony imparts a sense of being integral to its surroundings -- an extension of nature itself.

Abruptly --

SHOCK CUTAWAY - MOVING CAMERA - LOW ANGLE

Spray dranches LENS as the galloping hooves ford a shallow spillway. We HEAR the riders' voices urging speed to their horses.

But in a moment --

RETURN TO:

EXT. CARBON CANYON - MEGAN WHEELER - DAY

Fifteen, poised on the awkward cusp of womanhood, MEGAN turns away from the creek and starts up the slope with a bucket of water, a small spotted dog trotting at her heels. She has taken only a half-dozen steps, however, when she pauses. Her eyes dart fearfully upstream as we HEAR a swelling, thundering NOISE above the musical sound of the creek.

HULL BARRET

He, too, hears the SOUND. Working his sluice in the shade of a huge, obstructive boulder, HULL pivots. Thirty-five, his honest features are scoured with sudden concern.

SPIDER CONWAY

Fifty, a wiry sourdough whose eyes glow brightly with a shrewd disdain for all mankind, SPIDER plucks a tiny gleaming nugget from the bottom of his pan -- pockets it hurriedly and rises, turning apprehensively toward the SOUND.

VARIOUS SHOTS - THE MINERS

as, one by one, they whirl toward the approaching O.S. SOUND.

LONG SHOT - TOWARD THE UPSTREAM END OF CARBON CANYON

as a dozen HORSEMEN gallop INTO VIEW around a bend in the

canyon, bear down on LENS. The stillness of the mining colony explodes with SHOUTS, the POUNDING of hooves.

WHIP PAN to Megan as her dog bolts away from her side -- races toward the O.S. horsemen, barking shrilly.

MEGAN

Linsey!

Dropping her bucket she gives chase.

HIGH ANGLE - CARBON CANYON

The miners scatter in all directions as the marauding horsemen reach the outskirts of the colony, fanning out. Their pistols, fired skyward, echo from the slopes.

EXT. WHEELER SHANTY - DAY

as SARAH WHEELER, Megan's mother, dashes INTO VIEW from within. The pallor of fear drains the bloom from her attractive thirty-year-old face as her eyes rake the terrain.

SARAH

Megan??!!

FULL SHOT - THE HORSEMEN - THE MINING CAMP

The invaders have not come to kill, merely to harass and humiliate. Some pursue the fleeing miners up the rugged slope while others trample the equipment left behind at the creek. Throughout, Megan's dog harangues them in a small valiant show of defiance.

AT THE CREEK - HULL BARRET

Standing between his sluice-box and the onrushing horde, he grips his shovel like a scythe, swings futilely at a horseman bearing down on him from the right as, simultaneously, a second rider sweeps past from the left -- demolishing the sluice-box in transit.

AT A SHANTY

as one of the marauders swiftly ties one end of his lariat to a supporting upright, secures the other end to his saddle-horn, wheels his horse and spurs the animal away. The rope pulls taut -- the shanty collapses in a pile of splintered laths.

PANNING SHOT - MEGAN

Headless of personal harm she dashes through the center of the fray in the direction of the O.S. barking dog.

SARAH

-- as she sees Megan, screams in terror --

SARAH

Megan! NO!

NOISE and confusion crowding her senses, she bolts from the porch of her shanty -- directly into the path of an oncoming horseman. At the last possible moment she pivots, throws herself protectively against the wall of the shanty as the horseman gallops through her clothesline. Freshly laundered shirts and pinafores scatter like bright autumn leaves...

...even as the O.S. dog's defiant yapping abruptly changes pitch: becomes an agonized, ear-chilling lament.

FULL SHOT - THE HORSEMAN - THE MINING CAMP

The riders' foray has carried them through the colony. Now, their path of depredation behind them, they convene at the downstream end of the canyon without breaking stride. The SOUND of the wailing dog continues OVER SHOT as CAMERA PANS the marauders down the creek and away.

HOLD until they are OUT OF VIEW; then --

FULL PANNING SHOT - THE SLOPES ABOVE THE CREEK

as the dazed inhabitants of Carbon Canyon emerge from hiding or pick themselves up from the dirt, recover scattered tools and hats. ZOOM IN to a particular point on the bank of the creek where Megan kneels beside the silent, crumpled body of her dog.

ON MEGAN

Staring down at the lifeless animal her child's anguish battles with a woman's rage. Slowly rising with the limp and bloodied form in her arms, her gaze beseeches some kind of solace, some particle of recognition from the other colonists...

HER POV - PANNING SHOT

...but her plight goes unnoticed; her friends and acquaintances have their own shattered lives to collect. A sense of defeat hangs heavy in the air as the men stare hollow-eyed at ruined shanties, at the broken equipment which lies scattered along the muddied banks of the creek.

RESUME MEGAN

-- as it comes to her that no one is able or willing to help. The dog in her arms is a metaphor of the larger tragedy. CAMERA TRACKS as she starts methodically toward the slope. As she goes, Sarah ENTERS SHOT, B.G. -- moves quickly forward to comfort her grieving daughter, and then pulls up. There is no comfort she can give.

NEW ANGLE

CAMERA SHOOTS through the front line of trees toward Megan as she ascends the slope, gains the shelter of the forest. Beneath a spruce in F.G. she kneels, places the tiny corpse on the ground and commences the excavation of a dog-sized grave in the soft, yielding mulch. In a moment her feelings find expression: sorrow and angry bitterness commingled in a prayer:

MEGAN

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall  
not want...but I do want...

LENS SLOWLY WITHDRAWS from the pathetic funeral and its youthful orator, TILTING SKYWARD through the green cathedral of the trees...

MEGAN O.S.

(continuing)

He leadeth me beside the still  
waters. He restoreth my soul.  
...but they killed my dog.

DISSOLVE THROUGH TO:

FULL PANORAMA - THE HIGH SIERRAS - DAY

Vast snow-clad peaks assault the atmosphere of time, majestic, awesome...

MEGAN V.O.

(continuing)

Yea, though I walk through the  
valley of the shadow of death,  
I shall fear no evil...but I am  
afraid...

ANOTHER ANGLE - THE SIERRAS

CAMERA PANS the dazzling summits where the very doors of heaven stand ajar to the spirit.

MEGAN V.O.

(continuing)

...For Thou art with me. Thy  
rod and Thy staff comfort me...  
but we need a miracle...

Even as she utters the word -- "miracle" -- the apparition of a solitary horseman materializes; a moving silhouette against the luminescent mist that shrouds the peaks.

MEGAN V.O.

(continuing)

Thy loving kindness and mercy  
shall follow me all the days  
of my life...if You exist...

NEW ANGLE - THE HORSEMAN

-- a vision of unimaginable strangeness in this grand and inhospitable juncture of snow and sky, the man wears a mackinaw and hat to both of which the frost clings whitely like the icy residue of a celestial birth.

MEGAN V.O.

(continuing)

...and I shall dwell in the  
house of the Lord forever...

CLOSE SHOT - THE HORSEMAN

From what plateau he has arisen or from what heights fallen, we cannot tell. He is here. His angular face is stubbled with a two-days' growth of beard; his eyes impart the glint of sparks struck from stone with a cold-steel chisel.

MEGAN V.O.

(continuing)

But I'd like to get more of  
this life first -- and if You  
don't help us, we're all going  
to die.

(a beat)

Please? Just one miracle?

(a beat)

Amen.

Silence.

The horseman pauses in immediate F.G., takes the world beneath the Sierras with a gaze that seems to seek a particular destination -- a particular destiny.

Call him GABRIEL.

ANOTHER ANGLE

He flicks the reins, guides his mount off the summit, beginning the long descent to the canyons below.

TITLES AND CREDITS ROLL as IN A SERIES OF SHOTS, LENS PURSUES his arduous journey from the upper pinnacles of the Sierras to their lesser slopes...through gusts of snow...past the tree line...into the depths of the autumnal forest...

...where he disappears from VIEW. And as LAST CREDIT GOES, we --

RETURN TO:

EXT. CARBON CANYON - DAY

CAMERA PANS the aftermath of the marauders' invasion: menfolk attempting to patch up the damage to their shanties and gear while women pick up sullied laundry, and kids chase errant chickens back toward busted coops. PICK UP Hull as, perched on a lurching buckboard, he guides it TOWARD LENS.

EDDIE CONWAY O.S.

Quittin', Mr. Barret?

A big-boned youth of twenty with a 12-year-old mind, Spider Conway's son EDDIE lopes INTO FRAME.

HULL

(grim)

Not quitting, Eddie. Just going into town.

EDDIE

Ain't that awful dumb, Mr. Barret?  
'Member what happened to ya last time?

He looks up at Hull with a benign froglike grin. Hull turns from the youth and flicks the reins. His horse advances down the bank of the creek leaving Eddie behind and O.S.

NEW ANGLE - TRAVELING WITH HULL

as Eddie's identical twin brother, TEDDY CONWAY, looks up from

his fishing-pole with the wagon's passage. For a moment the impression is of a visual replay of the preceding SHOT: Teddy looks up at Hull with a benign froglike grin.

TEDDY

Quittin', Mr. Barret?

HULL

(darkly)

Just going to town, teddy.

TEDDY

Ain't that kinda dumb, Mr. Barret?

Hull shoots him a look; the wagon rolls on.

EXT. WHEELER SHACK - ON SARAH - DAY

CAMERA CLOSE as Sarah stoops to gather a torn and dirtied blouse from the earth. Adding it to the soiled armload with which she is already burdened she rises, reacts with alarm at the sight of Hull's buckboard traveling downstream, B.C.

SARAH

Hull?!

Though her voice is loud enough to carry to him, Hull does not turn. Picking up her hem, she runs downslope in his direction -- her laundry scatters in the breeze.

SARAH

Hull Barret! You stop that wagon!

WITH HULL - TRAVELING SHOT

Ignoring her plea, Hull determinedly keeps his eyes on the path of his buckboard as Sarah ENTERS FRAME beside him, keeping pace.

SARAH

Hull, you're not going into town.  
I won't let you!

HULL

(mildly)

'Preciate your concern, Sarah.

SARAH

Lahood's men will be there!

HULL  
Somebody's got to do something.

SARAH  
(fervently)  
But why you?

HULL  
(quietly)  
Guess I'm the only fool who wants  
to stick it out, here, Sarah.  
Looks like everyone else is ready  
to quit.

SARAH  
Then let them! We should all  
quit -- give Lahood what he wants.  
This patch of mud's not worth your  
getting hurt again!

HULL  
This patch of mud's all we got.

SARAH  
(emphatically)  
I swear, if anything happens to  
you in town, I'll never speak to  
you again!

He pulls back on the reins; the buckboard stops.

HULL  
(simply)  
That's a pretty strong promise for  
someone who hasn't agreed to marry  
a man yet.

He shoots her a significant look; she holds her tongue -- the  
barb has hit home.

HULL  
Anything you want from the store?

SARAH  
No.  
(subdued)  
It's not that I don't appreciate  
all you've done for Megan and me,  
Hull. I just --

HULL  
(a gentle interruption)  
Appreciation's a fine thing. It  
just never did much to keep a man  
warm on a long winter night, is all.

He clucks to his horse, the wagon lurches forward. With the burden of her own indecision thus thrust upon her, Sarah hangs back. TRAVELING LENS STRAYS WITH HER as the buckboard keeps going, HOLDS on her motionless figure as CAMERA RE-TREATS, then --

CUT AWAY TO:

DAY INTERIOR

Eight years old, condemned by breeding to a life of velvet knickers and plush bow ties, EBENEZER PIPKIN furtively gropes in a tall glass jar and steals one of the myriad candy canes within. Whirling to escape with his ill-gotten gains he runs smack into a buffalo mackinaw.

ANGLE WIDENS as Ebenezer stares guiltily up at the man in the mackinaw. -- Gabriel.

We sense the elements of defiance and shame in the boy until, beneath Gabriel's solemn look, he thrusts a hand in a velvet pocket, plunks a copper penny on the counter near the candy jar, and scurries CUT OF SHOT. We are --

INT. A CAFE - DAY

With its low trestle counter and handful of hand-hewn stools, the place is part of a larger emporium which we cannot SEE. His mackinaw still buttoned tight around his neck, Gabriel eases himself down on a stool. Behind the counter, MA BLANKENSHIP turns from her breadboard, sees him. Fifty, a plump pink-cheeked samaritan, she removes her hands from a mound of bread dough and towels them as:

MA BLANKENSHIP  
Mornin', stranger. Welcome to  
Lahood, California -- only place  
on earth they cut the seasons  
down to three: Winter, July, and  
August. -- What'll it be?

GABRIEL  
Just coffee, thanks.

CUT AWAY TO:

ESTABLISHING SHOT - LAHOOD MAIN STREET - DAY

The "town" consists of half a dozen buildings on a single muddy stretch of earth: Main Street. A mile off begin the foothills; shrouded in mist beyond them are the towering white battlements from which Gabriel descended.

Several horses and freighting drays are SEEN, a couple of citizens glimpsed along the duckboard planks outside the buildings. LENS ZOOMS down the length of Main Street toward an approaching buckboard.

INT. DENTIST'S OFFICE - DAY

The town's dentist is also its BARBER. A mouse-hearted fellow of forty, he bends over the PATIENT in his chair -- applies a pliers to a rotten tooth, pulls mightily. The Patient YOWLS as the bloody tooth is withdrawn, and with a metallic CLANG the dentist drops it in a metal bucket, glances toward the window.

DENTIST

...Barret.

His pain forgotten, the Patient sits up in the chair, stares outside as FOCUS THROWS through the window toward Main Street. There, advancing with a jingle of rusty harness, we SEE Hull on his buckboard.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

Tight-lipped, virginal, forty-four, the town's bespectacled POSTMISTRESS extracts letters from a sheaf in one hand and, one by one, jabs them into their appropriate pigeon-holes.

Abruptly she pauses, ANGLE SHIFTING TO SHOOT through the rectangular grid of the pigeon-holes. In B.G., through the window of the tiny office, we SEE Hull's wagon proceeding down the street.

INT. UNDERTAKER'S PARLOR - DAY

With watery, disenchanted eyes, a fifty-year-old UNDERTAKER applies a careless coat of paint to a new pine casket, hesitating with brush in hand as we HEAR the passing sound of Hull's buckboard, outside and O.S.

On the wall behind the Undertaker is a mirror flanked by twin vases of crepe gladioli. Therein we SEE the reflected image of the wagon as it rolls down Main Street.

Ruminating briefly on the buckboard, O.S., the Undertaker resumes his task with a morbidly cheerful tune.

EXT. MAIN STREET - TRAVELING - WITH HULL

The image of tense determination, he guides his horse toward

the hitching rail outside a particular building whose false front bears the inscription: Blankenship Mercantile. A lone gelding already stands tethered there.

HOLD as Hull brings his rig to a stop, gets down from it and nitches the reins to the rail with an apprehensive glance --

ACROSS THE STREET

-- where we SEE the town's largest structure, a two-story office-warehouse surmounted by a sign that reads:

J. K. LAHOOD & SON

Mining & Smelting

On the porch beneath it three ROUSTABOUTS idly lounge. Lahood's employees, they stare openly TOWARD LENS, mutter to each other conspiratorily. We may or may not recognize them as members of the band that invaded Carbon Canyon earlier.

RESUME HULL

His face a grim mask, he adds a protective clove hitch to the reins as we HEAR a chorus of sniggers from the men across the street. We NOTE a watering trough immediately adjacent to the hitching rail -- a bucket hanging from a peg at its side.

INT. BLANKENSHIP'S MERCANTILE - DAY

Seated on a stool behind the hardware counter, JED BLANKENSHIP watches Hull's approach through the window of his store. Sixty, wearing shirtsleeve garters and an accountant's visor, his hushed reprimand belies a man of basic Christian decencies:

BLANKENSHIP

(with Hull's entrance)

Damn fool. Couldn't you wait 'til the smoke cleared away?

HULL

(a forced nonchalance)

Afternoon, Mr. B. We seem to need a few supplies.

BLANKENSHIP

A whole new camp, the way I hear it.

(shakes his head)

You got sand, boy, but you ain't got the sense God gave a sack of beans.

HULL

Don't have much choice. They ruined the McPherson shack, busted up a couple others. If it rained, the children would catch their deaths.

He begins assembling the items for which he made the trip, a process which continues as they speak. First, a roll of tarry construction paper...

BLANKENSHIP

I 'spect you're gonna pay for all of this in gold, right?

HULL

Yup. Soon's I put together a couple ounces, I'll bring 'em in.

Blankenship yanks a hard-back ledger from a shelf behind him, flips it open.

BLANKENSHIP

It'll take a damn sight more'n a couple ounces. Last payment you folks made was...

(turns a page)

...eight months ago, when ol' Linguist brought in his dust.

(looks up)

Ever occur to you there ain't no color left in Carbon Creek?

HULL

If there wasn't, why's Lahood set on drivin' us out?

BLANKENSHIP

Maybe he just ain't used to bein' said 'no' to.

HULL

Well, there's color. Nuggets, too. Spider panned one out this mornin' -- big as your thumbnail.

BLANKENSHIP

Spider Conway?

(quickly refers to his ledger)

You tell that son of a bitch I've got him down for eighty-five dollars and thirty-three cents.

HULL

(adding a tiny bottle  
to his supplies)

Forty-three cents. He wanted  
some arsenic to bleach his dust.

BLANKENSHIP

That tears it! You tell Spider  
and the rest of 'em that this is  
the end of the line. The teat's  
gone dry. No more credit, y'hear?

Hull grins, adds a roll of oil-cloth, two small panes of glass  
and several 2 x 4's to the pile. Now, picking up as much as  
he can handle, he starts for the door.

HULL

You're a decent man, Mr. B. You  
know that I -- we all appreciate --

BLANKENSHIP

(waves a hand)

Don't coddle me, son. I ain't  
doin' this for you. Hell, I'm  
the only merchant in town that  
Lahood doesn't own. Does my soul  
good to see a few other thorns in  
his hide.

HULL

Well, one day we'll hit it big,  
and when that happens I'll pay  
you off myself. With interest.

He opens the door to leave.

BLANKENSHIP

Barret --

(as Hull turns  
- a warning)

You get your goods in the wagon  
and skedaddle. Just keep movin',  
no matter what they say.

He nods toward the window -- toward Lahood's men outside and  
O.S. Hull meets his gaze, nods understanding -- then pushes  
through the door. CAMERA HOLDS BRIEFLY on Blankenship, then  
PANS to reveal -- hitherto hidden from the front of the  
store -- Ma Blankenship's kitchen...

...and Gabriel seated at the counter: an inadvertent observer  
to the scene just concluded.

JUMP TO:

OUTSIDE THE STORE - DAY

CAMERA CLOSE on the bed of the wagon as the last of the supplies drop INTO FRAME, ANGLE WIDENING as Hull quickly covers his goods with a tarp -- begins to tie the bundle down with rope.

NEW ANGLE - MOVING CAMERA - HULL & ROUSTABOUTS

CAMERA SHOOTS PAST the shoulders of the three men as they stride across Main Street toward the buckboard. Glancing up, seeing the approaching men, Hull redoubles the speed of his work.

MC GILL

(a challenge)

We got a beef with you, Barret.

MC GILL -- Lahood's foreman, a burly man of forty -- wears a broad-faced grin of derision. His companions are JAGOU and TYSON. -- Hull says nothing.

BRIEF CUTAWAY - BLANKENSHIP'S DOOR

SHOOTING FROM WITHIN, the door is darkened by Gabriel's shoulders as he moves INTO SHOT there, pausing.

BACK TO SCENE

Hull methodically unhitches his horse, silently climbs onto the seat of the buckboard. As the three men arrive alongside:

MC GILL

When we rode through the Canyon this morning, you plumb forgot to say hello.

JAGOU

We told you to stay out of town a while back, too.

TYSON

(when Hull says nothing)

I remember that. Last time he come through. 'Stay outa town,' you said. Then you kicked his head. Must've popped his memory.

JAGOU

Maybe we kicked him again, it'd all come back.

Tight-lipped, Hull stifles the urge to whip the reins. With the trough and hissing rail directly in front of him, two men on one side and McGill on the other, there is no escape. Jagou leers up at him, close enough to grab the reins in any case.

JAGOU

How about them Wheeler women, Barret? You hump the growed one, or you hump 'em both?

Hull's fist tightens on the reins -- his face goes hard with real fury. Seeing his reaction, Jagou chuckles.

JAGOU

That little one's just out o' knickers, ain't she? -- Bet she's juicy as a fresh-water clam, huh?

Hull remains rigid, fighting to control a rising rage that all but makes him tremble.

MC GILL

What's it take to get you down off that seat and fight like a man, Barret? -- We have to bust your goods again?

He motions the supplies.

HULL

(barely controlled)

I didn't come here to fight.

MC GILL

That's what's wrong with you -- you and the rest of them tin-pan squatters. You got no balls, none of you.

With that he grasps the tarpaulin, throwing it back.

HULL

Leave 'em be!

Seeing the supplies, McGill grins.

MC GILL

Not much here but tarpaper and wood -- good makin's for a fire, right, boys?

Jagou and Tyson AD LIB agreement. McGill withdraws a sulphur match from a pocket, strikes it on the side of the buckboard. As it flares:

MC GILL

Better get down from the seat now,  
Barret -- it might get hot.

So saying, he flips the match onto the oil-cloth. Instantaneously Hull scrambles over the buckboard's seat to extinguish the flame, but as he does, McGill grasps his ankles and pulls.

LOW ANGLE - HULL

as, powerless to break his fall, the full weight of his body slams onto the side of the wagon and tumbles to the dirt of Main Street.

Instantly the men are upon him.

FLASH CUT - BLANKENSHIP'S DOORWAY

Empty. Simultaneously --

A HAND

seizes the heavy wooden bucket hanging at the trough.

IN THE WAGON BED

Water from the bucket douses the incipient fire with a HISS.

THE MEN ON THE GROUND

Pinning Hull down, they savagely beat him with their fists.

Then with a sickening C-R-A-C-K! the bucket swings down INTO FRAME against the back of Jagou's neck.

Whirling, Tyson and McGill stare upward in surprise as --

THE BUCKET

arcs through the air -- CAMERA FOLLOWING IT DOWN -- and smashes Tyson's hat down on his skull. The bucket splinters with impact, and --

MC GILL

raises a hand to ward off the subsequent blow to his head. But the splintered remains of the bucket swing upward INTO SHOT and -- like a brutal uppercut -- crash into his jaw -- sends him sprawling backward in the dust.

FULL SHOT

Gabriel towers over the men. Jagou is out cold. Tyson and McGill roll meaning in the street. Only the wire handle of the bucket remains in Gabriel's hand and he gives it a look.

GABRIEL

Don't make 'em like they used to.

Flipping it away he hoists a stunned Hull to his feet, helps him onto the buckboard. This done -- mounting his gelding -- he slaps Hull's horse. The buckboard lurches into motion, Gabriel riding beside it.

WIDE GABRIEL & HULL - TRACKING

The fight has taken hardly longer than a heartbeat: the MCANS of the roustabouts fade in B.G. as Hull and Gabriel ride down Main Street -- head for open country.

Wiping the blood from lacerations on his face, Hull looks with unadulterated awe at the stranger who rides alongside.

HULL

(dazed)

Obliged.

Gabriel's smile, like his motion, is quick and easy.

GABRIEL

Those men hold some kind of grudge against you?

HULL

(a backward glance)

Feud's more like it.

(turning to Gabriel)

Name's Barret. -- Hull Barret.

Gabriel nods by way of introduction. In a moment:

HULL

You from hereabouts?

GABRIEL

Nope.

This laconic answer coupled with the stranger's failure to divulge his name causes Hull to shoot him a quizzical look.

HULL  
(persistently)  
Just passing through?

GABRIEL  
(a shrug)  
Guess I hadn't thought about it.

An inspired scrutiny flickers in Hull's eyes.

HULL  
After what you did back there, I wouldn't stay in town, if I was you. My cabin's got two rooms. You're welcome to one of 'em.

GABRIEL  
Thanks, but I wouldn't want to be a burden on your family.

HULL  
Got a fiancée, is all. But she and her daughter have a place of their own. It'd be a pleasure, not a burden. Three hots and a cot is the least I owe you.

Gabriel deliberates briefly, shrugs.

GABRIEL  
Sounds good.

Delighted, Hull grins.

CUT TO:

EXT. CARBON CANYON - DAY

PANNING LENS encompasses the length of Carbon Canyon...

HULL O.S.  
That's my place, there -- uphill from that damned cussed boulder. You'll find water and shaving gear inside. I'll tell Sarah -- my fiancée -- there's an extra mouth to feed. Just make yourself at home.

CAMERA TILTS DOWN, PICKING UP the progress of Hull's buck-board, Gabriel riding alongside, as they come abreast of a

man on foot who leads his heavily-laden mule downstream.  
His name is:

ULRIK LINDQUIST  
So long, Hull.

HULL  
(a frown)  
Where you going, Ulrik?

Fifty, Lindquist's accent is rich with the tones of his native Scandinavia.

LINDQUIST  
Just goin'. Gettin' out.

ANGLE HOLDS, Hull bringing his wagon to a stop; and as they pass --

HULL  
Where the hell to?

LINDQUIST  
Away. Can't fight no more. I  
ain't the only one, neither.

And without another word he proceeds with his mule OUT OF SHOT.  
Hull stares after the departing Swede.

HULL  
Ulrik...?!

LINDQUIST O.S.  
Good luck, Hull Barret. You'll  
quit, too, if you're smart.

Following the man's retreating O.S. figure with his eyes,  
Hull shakes his head in silent disappointment, the LENS PUSHING  
IN on Gabriel, quietly watching him until we:

CUT TO:

INT. HULL'S CABIN - BEDROOM - ON GABRIEL - DAY

CAMERA STARTS CLOSE on Gabriel's shirtless back: we SEE a circular pattern of five individual scars. Long healed, the wounds are round, each a half-inch in breadth and evenly spaced one from another. The circle they form is roughly eight inches in diameter, and though it seems uncanny that a man should have survived such mutilation, they are -- unquestionably -- bullet-holes.

CAMERA SLOWLY WITHDRAWS. Sunlight through the dusty pane of the tiny room's only window falls across Gabriel's face as

he shaves in front of a small broken mirror, plying the razor with long, sure strokes that strip the lathered whiskers from the planes and angles of his face.

With the muted O.S. SOUND of a feminine voice, his eyes move to the window, ANGLE SHIFTING TO SHOOT through the dusty glass. Thus filtered, we SEE the approaching figures of Sarah and Megan; they carry a black iron kettle between them. Twin images of appealing innocence, they are unaware of Gabriel's and CAMERA'S scrutiny.

ANGLE SHIFTS BACK to Gabriel. His gaze lingers briefly on the O.S. women before returning to his own reflected image in the scrap of mirror. Blade poised to resume shaving, he remains motionless, staring...a distant sadness in his eyes.

HOLD a long beat, then --

JUMP TO:

INT. HULL'S CABIN - MAIN ROOM - DAY

CAMERA CLOSE on Megan as she places forks and plates around the split-board table, arranging them just so. Beyond, we SEE the door that leads to the adjacent room: it is presently shut. As ANGLE WIDENS Sarah is revealed tending the kettle which simmers on Hull's wood-burning stove, while Hull himself is pacing and effusive --

HULL

(mid sentence)

...the way he waded into McGill and his men -- you should have seen him.

SARAH

He sounds no different than McGill or Tyson -- or any of Lahood's roughnecks.

She lifts the kettle from the stove to the table, begins ladling stew into bowls as --

HULL

At least he wasn't afraid of them. What we need up here is someone they can't scare.

MEGAN

Are you scared of them, Hull?

SARAH

He should be, but he's too all-fired stubborn.

HULL

But I was -- that's the point. They had me scared, and they knew it. Lahood's got us all scared.

(slight beat)

On my way in from town I passed Ulrik Lindquist, riding out. He didn't even know where he was going -- 'just going', he said.

SARAH

(soberly)

The colony's beaten, Hull. The only one who doesn't know it is you.

MEGAN

(a small manifesto)

And me. I'm not leaving until Lahood's men are whipped -- every last one of them.

SARAH

Hush, Megan.

(to Hull)

See what you're doing, Hull Barret? She talks more like your daughter than mine. Tell her it's nonsense -- this business of fighting Lahood.

HULL

Who said anything about fighting?

SARAH

You did, talking about this --

(waves the spoon at  
the closed bedroom door)

-- this stranger. What is he, a gunslinger?

Exasperated, Hull takes down a bottle of whiskey from a shelf, finds a pair of shot-glasses. As he pours:

HULL

I half hope he is. I'd sure as hell chip in an ounce of dust for a little protection.

SARAH

(contentiously)

From a hired killer?

Mind whirling with this leap of logic, Hull stands open-mouthed as --

SARAH

Come on, Megan. We're going home.

She furiously begins to empty the bowls of stew back into the kettle while Hull sets down the bottle and the untouched drinks on the table, puts his arms around her in a conciliatory embrace. The words fly thick and fast:

HULL

Sarah, I never said --

SARAH

(fiercely)

Then get rid of him!

HULL

I will. I promise. I --

SARAH

-- today!

HULL

Sure, right after supper, I'll --

SARAH

-- Now. Not after supper. Now!

Their heads turn quickly toward the SOUND of --

THE BEDROOM DOOR

as it opens from within. Gabriel, minus his mackinaw, is a tall silhouette in the shadowy doorway.

GABRIEL

(mildly)

Hope I'm not the cause of all the excitement, here.

He takes a step forward, into the room. His glance falls on the liquor which reposes on the table, and with a nod of gratitude:

GABRIEL

Don't mind if I do.

He lifts the shot-glass, drains the whiskey at a gulp.

He wears no gun -- but the dark wool shirt and turned-around white collar of a preacher.

BRIEF CUT - MEGAN

Stunned.

BRIEF CUT - SARAH AND HULL

Mortified. And stunned.

GROUP SHOT

as Gabriel lowers the shot-glass onto the table beneath the galvanized, wide-open stare of his hosts.

GABRIEL

Nothing like a shot of whiskey  
to whet a man's appetite.

(indicates kettle)

Fine-looking fricassee you've  
cooked up there, ma'am. Don't  
want to let it get cold.

Acutely self-conscious with her recent outburst, Sarah detaches herself from Hull and struggles for composure.

SARAH

I apologize. I guess I...I  
mean I didn't realize...

HULL

(humbly)

I'll be damn----

He catches himself, clears his throat of the blasphemy. Both adults are non-plussed: embarrassment prevails like a ground fog. Except for--

MEGAN

who, regaining her wits, almost falls over herself in reaching for the ladle -- hastily spooning stew back into the bowls, conveying one of them to Gabriel with the breathless speed of an urchin at the service of a rajah.

MEGAN

There...and here's some biscuits  
...salt...honey for the biscuits  
...and...and...you want anything  
else?

ANGLE WIDENS as she stands aside with praise-hungry eyes. Gabriel rewards her with a grin.

GABRIEL

Well, maybe some company. Been  
a month since I shared my supper  
with anything but a horse.

(to Hull and Sarah)

You folks join us?

MEGAN

Ma? Hull?

All energy and willingness, she ladles stew. Gabriel takes  
a seat, his movement affectively breaking the trance of cha-  
grin and astonishment that paralyzes Hull and Sarah.

SARAH

Why...of course.

(nervously)

How do you do? And thank you for  
your help on Hull's behalf this  
morning. I'm Sarah Wheeler. --  
My daughter, Megan.

GABRIEL

Pleased to meet you.

HULL

(choked)

Guess I kind of got carried away,  
there. The way you handled those  
men in town... I never would've  
thought you'd be a --

MEGAN

(interrupting - to Gabriel)

Will you say Grace?

She possessively takes a seat beside him in an attitude of  
prayer. An awkward beat. Gabriel looks inquiringly at  
Sarah and Hull who -- beneath his gaze -- sit into their  
chairs and lower their eyes respectfully.

GABRIEL

(simply)

For what we are about to receive  
may we be truly thankful.

ON MEGAN

She knows a miracle when she meets one.

MEGAN

Amen.

DIRECT CUT TO:

DAY EXTERIOR

A four-inch jet of water hammers at a raw cliff face with devastating force. The very air THROBS with flying gravel, SINGS with spray. The SOUND is deafening. We are:

EXT. COBALT CANYON - LAHOOD'S "DIGS"

-- a place that no more resembles Carbon Canyon than the moon resembles the Garden of Eden. The creek originally coursing through the bottom of this canyon has been partially diverted along the upper cliffs, O.S., providing the hydraulic pressure for the awesome "monitor" -- a device resembling an iron cannon which spews its deadly continuous charge of water against the face of the scarp from its central position atop a wooden platform.

That mining operations have been in progress here for some time is evidenced by the naked, blasted, corroded aspect of the hillsides up and down the canyon for a quarter-mile...by the gravelly drifts of "tailings" which litter the canyon floor...by the endless and infernal laborings of two-dozen WORKERS whose job it is to shovel the newly-dislodged gravel into a vast iron forty-foot sluice.

AT THE SLUICE

CAMERA PANS the length of the sluice as the weary, spray-drenched crew shovels loads of gravel into its gaping iron maw. The portion of the creek's flow not diverted to the monitor washes the rocky mulch along a series of riffles to the downstream end of the sluice, through iron grids of diminishing size. Here, where much of the gold is separated from the dross, stands JOSE LAHOOD.

Twenty-five, fate has endowed him with a nickel's worth of arrogance for every dollar in his daddy's bank account -- with a dividend in immature good looks. The ROAR of the monitor is compounded by the RUSH AND CLATTER of gravel through the iron sluice: an unearthly symphony that shakes a man to the bone.

In distant B.C. we note a bunkhouse and, some yards away, a tool shed -- as, glancing PAST CAMERA, Josh's face constricts with an oath and he abandons the sluice.

NEW ANGLE - THREE HORSEMEN

As they approach the sluice we recognize McGill, Jagou and Tyson. The latter two are hatless, with vast white-plaster bandages adorning their heads where Gabriel's bucket had

torn their scalp. McGill's bandage covers his jaw. They rein in as they arrive in F.G., Josh ENTERING FRAME beside them, raising his voice above the DIN of operations.

JOSH

(angrily)

Your shift began an hour ago!

MC GILL

(uneasily)

'Pologize, Josh. We'd've been here on time but we got tied up at the sawbones.

JOSH

What the hell happened?

He assesses their assortment of bandages; it is Tyson who breaks the sheepish pause.

TYSON

Well, we had a little set-to with Barret, boss. We was in town, there, and --

JOSE

You got yourselves whipped? In Lahood, California? By a tin-pan?!

JAGOU

Well, there was this stranger kinda gave him a hand, see --

JOSE

What stranger? Who are you talking about?

MC GILL

(lacklustre)

He left with Barret -- didn't stick around to chat.

Josh Lahood rakes their downcast faces with contemptuous eyes, turns on his heel -- the gun on his hip hung low.

JOSH

(disgustedly)

McGill, take over the sluice. Tyson, Jagou -- you work the monitor.

Exchanging a look of shared misery, the three men dismount. McGill slinks over toward the sluice while Tyson and Jagou follow their employer's son.

NEW ANGLE - THE MONITOR

LENS STARTS CLOSE on the roaring jet of water as it emerges from the nozzle of the iron cannon, ANGLE WIDENING SLOWLY to include the whole massive instrument and the man who operates it. He stands behind it like a tree, his full mammoth size revealed as Josh, with Tyson and Jacou in tow, arrives atop the platform, taps him on the shoulder.

CLUB is seven feet six inches tall.

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. HULL'S CABIN - DAY

— as Gabriel and Hull emerge, Hull automatically picking up the sledge-hammer leaning against the outer wall.

GABRIEL

This man Lahood -- I take it he's the one you folks've been feuding with?

HULL

(a nod)

Him and his son. Old Coy Lahood's a powerful man. I guess he come up here in '54, '55 -- the first man here to strike it rich.

He starts purposively down the slope with Gabriel beside him, CAMERA TRACKING. As they go, we SEE in B.G. various members of the colony engaged in repairing those shanties damaged earlier, while others -- having made the decision to quit -- carry their belongings from their shacks and load them onto flimsy wagons, sway-backed mules.

HULL

(continuing)

He'd save himself a poke, then stake new claims. He'd mine them out and buy some more. Last couple years, he uses them big hydraulic monitors. They blast the place to hell -- excuse my French -- and they've made him richer than ever. Carbon Canyon's the only part of these hills his crew hasn't ruined yet.

MEGAN'S VOICE O. S.

He's greedy for it, too.

Gabriel glances behind them, ANGLE WIDENING to include Megan

tagging along a couple of yards behind. AS CAMERA CONTINUES TRACKING...

GABRIEL

(to Hull)

Does he have any lawful rights to the Canyon?

HULL

(shakes his head)

My claim's filed in Sacramento, same as everybody else's, here. Only way Lahood can legally take this land is if we leave.

GABRIEL

(wry)

I guess he's been kind of persuasive, hasn't he.

He nods toward those amongst the colony who are busily packing.

MEGAN

(as she follows them)

I don't care if all of them leave. I'm staying. Lahood killed my dog. And my grandpa, too.

GABRIEL

(frowns - to Hull)

No lawman in town? No one you can take your case to?

HULL

If there was, Lahood'd own him like he owns everything else. -- Not much a lawman could do, even if we had one. Lahood ain't really killed anyone yet. Dad Wheeler's heart gave out after one of the raids a while back. I've been sort of taking care of Sarah and Megan ever since.

CAMERA HOLDS as he pauses. Megan saunters past, heading for the stream. When she is properly out of earshot:

HULL

(confidentially)

It ain't that we're living in sin, and it ain't as if I don't want to marry the woman.

(MORE)

HULL (CONT'D)

One day, a few years back, her husband -- Megan's father -- he just lit out. Left her with a half-grown child. Since then, getting her trustful of a man has been...well, it plain ain't been easy.

(a beat)

When we do get hitched, how about you doing the hitching?

GABRIEL

If you're waiting on a woman to make up her mind, it might be awhile.

He takes the 16-pound sledge from Hull's grasp.

GABRIEL

Meantime, why don't you put me to work.

HULL

(quickly)

Oh, I wouldn't ask you to -- I mean, maybe if there was something spiritual, then --

GABRIEL

The spirit ain't worth spit without good exercise. Where do we start?

Hull glances at the massive boulder which marks his claim as they come to a stop beside it.

HULL

(hesitantly)

I always thought, if I could split this rock, get to the gravel underneath...there's gold been waiting since the beginning of time.

Gabriel stares at the thing -- it squats there in its majestic granite glory -- as Hull continues:

HULL

Every day for two years, now, usually after dinner, I'll come out here with the sledge. See -- ?

He indicates a pitifully small portion of the boulder which has been chipped away; continues --

HULL

It's like this rock and me have a kind of agreement: it's gonna do me in or I'm gonna do it in.

GABRIEL

(wry)

I'd be willing to lay odds on who's going to win.

HULL

(grins)

Yeah, well, I thought of drilling it and blasting the sonofabitch --

GABRIEL

(a glance overhead)

-- but you were afraid the dynamite would bring down the rimrock, right?

HULL

Yep, and dam up the stream. That'd be the end of everything.

Men bending their minds to a common task, they circle the rock intently for a moment. Then, with a shrug:

GABRIEL

Well, there's plain few problems can't be solved by sweat and hard work.

CLANG!!! The sledge in his hand descends against the rock.

OUTSIDE A SHANTY

Loading their burro with worldly goods, a pair of grizzled sourdoughs, BOSSY AND BIGGS, turn downslope at the sound of the sledge.

OUTSIDE A SECOND SHANTY

CLANG!!! The sledge rings out again. JAKE AND HILDA HENDERSON pause in the process of strapping a washtub and rocking-chair to their rickety wagon to stare O.S. in the direction of the sound. ...CLANG!!!

IN A DIFFERENT SHANTY

A young married couple, EV AND BESS GOSSAGE, turn away from

an open steamer trunk and, leaving it half-packed, swing open their wax-paper window, looking out. CLANG!!!

RESUME THE BOULDER - GABRIEL & HULL

-- as Hull, infected by the spirit of things, picks up a second sledge from the wreckage of his placer cradle, takes a stance near Gabriel and attacks the boulder. The sledges ring in ragged syncopation: CLANG-CLANG! CLANG! CLANG-CLANG!

Abruptly:

MEGAN

looks O.S. -- alarm flooding her face.

MEGAN

Hull! Mr. -- Mr. -- Preacher!

GROUP SHOT

The two men pivot toward her, wheel in the direction she points.

NEW ANGLE

No more than twenty yards downstream and riding toward them we SEE Josh Lahood...and Club. Of average height, the young Lahood is positively dwarfed beside his henchman.

RESUME GABRIEL, HULL, MEGAN

as Megan moves closer to the men, clutches Gabriel's arm as if for protection.

GABRIEL

Anyone you know?

HULL

(grim)

The one on the left is Lahood's boy, Josh. The other one...

(awed)

...I've never seen him before.

NEW ANGLE - GROUP SHOT

as Josh and Club bring their horses to a stop.

JOSH  
(flatly)  
Afternoon, Barret. -- Megan.

Aware of his charms, he sheds them in Megan's direction like a skin. At once attracted and repelled, her adolescent cheeks flush -- she nods a response.

Josh now turns his eyes on Gabriel.

JOSH  
Friend of yours, Barret?

HULL  
(staunchly)  
Yes. He's our new preacher.

GABRIEL  
Afternoon, boys.

An aspirated SOUND escapes Club's lips, like swamp gas from the carcass of a bloated cow.

JOSH  
Preacher, huh.

Gabriel says nothing, smiles benignly at him.

BRIEF CUT - EXT. SOURDOUGHS' SHANTY

The two old sourdoughs stare apprehensively downslope where, B.G., we SEE the confrontation.

BRIEF CUT - EXT. HENDERSON SHANTY

Jake Henderson turns decisively away and resumes securing his rocker to his wagon.

BACK TO SCENE

JOSH  
(uninflected)  
Hear you messed up some of my men this morning, Preach.

GABRIEL  
It was nothing personal.

Club permits himself a second effusion of contempt.

JOSH

Then maybe you won't take it personal if we tell you to leave Carbon Canyon, huh?

GABRIEL

There's a lot of sinners hereabouts. You wouldn't want me to leave before I finished my work, now, would you?

Club glances at Josh. Josh reflects for a moment, then nods at Club.

Club gets down from his horse.

BRIEF CUT - EXT. WHEELER SHANTY

Staring downslope toward the O.S. group, Sarah's face drains of color.

BRIEF CUT - EXT. SPIDER'S SHANTY

Spider spits a stream of tobacco at the dust, looks down and off at the men near the boulder. Sadly shakes his head.

BACK TO SCENE

Club. -- Club merely stares at Hull and Gabriel, as if to crush them with the very image of his vastness. Gabriel remains motionless -- and to his credit so does Hull. We HEAR only the melodic trickle of Carbon Creek.

Then with a single mighty sweep of his arm Club snatches Hull's sledge from his grasp and swings it overhead. The iron describes an arc through the air -- eleven feet high -- and whirls down fiercely --

INSERT

-- against the boulder which, with an explosive CRAAAACCCKKK!! splits wide...

BACK TO SCENE

...its two halves falling open like an immense granite fruit. Recoiling from the titanic blow, Club grips the sledge in

both hands and turns with infinite disdain toward Gabriel: an unspoken challenge. Seated lazily in the saddle, Josh drawls his query --

JOSH  
Your work done now, Preach?

GABRIEL  
(pleasantly)  
Part of it, leastways.

Silence. Then, as if resigned, Josh nods again to Club.

Club's hands tighten around his sledge.

With a gesture so casual as to resemble a caress, Gabriel pushes Megan away from him. Like Club, he holds his sledge in both hands.

Well..

BRIEF CUT - EXT. SPIDER'S SHANTY

Spider grimaces as if in pain, knowing what must now happen.

SPIDER  
Jeeeeesus...

BACK TO SCENE

Club ROARS, raising the sledge like a shillelagh as he charges --

CLOSE SHOT

-- TWOMP!!! directly into the outstretched head of Gabriel's sledge which flattens his face like a bootheel flattens cow-shit.

TWO SHOT - GABRIEL - CLUB

Club stands rooted to the ground, blood oozing from his nose as Gabriel almost casually swings his sledge in an underhand arc which --

CLOSE SHOT

-- catches Club between the legs and all but lifts him off the ground.

BRIEF CUT - MEGAN

Beside herself with joy.

GROUP SHOT

Club folds double, paralysed with pain. Dropping his sledge, Gabriel hooks a hand beneath Club's arm and helps him toward his horse.

GABRIEL

A little ice'll help ease the  
pain...you'll be fine by morning  
...here...up in the stirrup...  
attaboy...

With a heave he deposits Club astride his horse, side-saddle. Then, turning to Josh, Gabriel bestows upon him a properly ecclesiastical gesture of farewell.

GABRIEL

Thanks for stopping by, son.

The young man's face twists into a florid mask. His hand drops toward his gun...

CLOSE SHOT - GABRIEL

Eyes narrowed, he just looks at him.

TIGHT TWO SHOT - JOSH & GABRIEL

-- as Josh sees something in Gabriel's look that causes his hand to freeze an inch from his pistol. A beat. And then he wheels his horse away from the group at the boulder, starts at a canter AWAY FROM LENS, downstream. Club's horse follows instinctively, Club's huge form slumped inertly in the saddle.

EXT. WHEELER SHANTY - ON SARAH

She releases a pent-up breath, steadies herself against a strut of her porch.

RESUME HULL, MEGAN, GABRIEL

The man and the girl are staring at him, transfixed, as he picks up the sledge again and turns to the two vast cloven halves of the boulder.

GABRIEL

Well, now. -- The Lord does work  
in mysterious ways.

CLANG!!! The sledge rings, bell-like, against a half of the  
stone. It breaks in two.

ON HULL

Grimacing, he hurries to grasp the sledge which Club had taken  
from him, joining Gabriel. CLANG-CLANG!!!

EXT. SPIDER'S SHANTY - CLOSE ON SPIDER - DAY

Squinting down toward the O.S. men at the creek, he spits  
another lozenge of tobacco juice.

SPIDER

(half to himself)

Preacher my ass.

(a beat)

Then, Christ didn't look like no  
carpenter, neither.

On impulse he reaches down -- lifts a sledge of his own from  
its place by his door, and moves toward the men and the  
boulder, O.S.

CLANG-CLANG!!!

VARIOUS SHOTS - CARBON CANYON - DAY

We SEE Hull and Gabriel swinging away at the pieces of rock;  
SEE Spider ambling down to join them. CLANG-CLANG!!!

And now -- from their porches and shanties -- the forms of  
other miners emerge...singly at first, and then in pairs and  
trios, striding down the slope toward the men already at work.  
CAMERA ISOLATES those members of the colony who only moments  
ago were packing to leave. Now, sledges in hand -- their  
half-loaded wagons forgotten -- they join the rest.

ON MEGAN

As if in a dream, the girl's eyes shift from one approaching  
figure to the next. A new expression -- an inner sort of  
smile -- asserts itself on her face as she sits on the bank  
of the creek, stares worshipfully across the distance at --

GABRIEL

-- one of three men swinging at the rock...now one of five...  
now one of seven. CLANG-CLANG!!! CLANGCLANGCLANGCLANG!!!  
The hammers ring a carillon against the yielding stone, and  
no one's sledge swings higher, or hits the rock harder, than  
that in the hands of the man in the turned-around collar.

Preacher.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. MOUNTAIN CANYON - DAY

With a SHRIEK of its whistle echoing off the canyon walls, a  
locomotive wheezes INTO VIEW TOWARD LENS along a track cut  
into the forested slope. PAN, as it decelerates, to include  
a tiny "station" -- a telegrapher's shack with an overhead  
shingle that bears the legend, Lahood, Pop. 139.

Beside the shack we SEE a pair of waiting horsemen: McGill,  
and Josh Lahood. Saddled but riderless an extra horse stands  
between them; Josh holds its reins.

CLOSER ANGLE - THE HORSE

A gleaming black Arabian, high-strung, the animal tosses its  
head as we HEAR the train stop with a burst of steam. Atop  
its crimson saddle-blanket rests an empty, exquisitely-tooled  
Mexican saddle, with chasings of polished silver.

AT THE "STATION"

as the "Stationmaster" -- a feisty fifty-five -- emerges from  
his shack to receive the canvas bag of mail thrown to him  
from the mail-car door by a uniformed TRAINMAN.

TRAINMAN

Morning, Whitey. Any mail goin'  
East?

WHITEY

Not today, Jake. Unless you want  
to tell the President what I think  
of him.

ANOTHER ANGLE - PASSENGER CAR

A black PORTER hustles off with a valise, extends an arm to  
a departing passenger:

PORTER

Watch de step, Mr. Lahood.

COY LAHOOD'S VOICE

Why? Has the damned thing moved  
since we left Sacramento?

Pressing a folded bill on the man, COY LAHOOD steps down INTO VIEW, retrieves his bag. A stalwart sixty-two, he is a regal apparition with his silver hair, a three-piece suit.

PORTER

Thanks, Mr. Lahood.

He waves up the line: the O.S. engine WHISTLES.

NEW ANGLE - MC GILL & JOSH - LAHOOD - TRAIN B.G.

Dismounting, Josh advances toward his father.

JOSH

I'll take your bag, Papa.

LAHOOD

Morning, son. McGill.

MC GILL

(touches his hat)

Boss. -- How was Sacramento?

LAHOOD

Paradise. Two politicians for every Chinese laundry, two whores for every politician. If there was gold in the delta, I'd go there.

B.G. the train begins to move; F.G. Lahood swings onto the Arabian's saddle. Without missing a beat --

LAHOOD

How's business?

He slaps the reins. MOVING CAMERA precedes the trio away from the whistle-stop, Lahood in front. We HEAR the sound of the retreating train as --

MC GILL

Still pulling low-grade ore out of number five shaft, but the vein's about played out.

LAHOOD

(a nod)

Uh-huh.

MC GILL

(continuing)

We went another twenty feet in the twelve-shaft, pulled out nothing but magnetite, and shut her down. The placer vein in Cobalt Canyon's wearing thin, too.

LAHOOD

(significantly)

What about Carbon?

JOSE

(a beat - hesitantly)

Well, we ran another raid through Carbon, couple days back. Threw a real good scare into 'em, didn't we, McGill?

MC GILL

(uncomfortably)

Yep. Almost drove 'em out this time. Lock, stock and barrel.

LAHOOD

Uh-huh -- ?

CAMERA CONTINUES TRACKING as he rides without a backward glance. He knows they're hedging, waits for the other shoe to fall. When it does not:

LAHOOD

Uh-huh?

JOSE

(effortfully)

It seems this stranger came by. Sort of pulled them together, kind of. -- That the way you see it, McGill?

MC GILL

(eating shit)

Yep, he sort of...pulled 'em together...

LAHOOD

This one stranger did that? Hell, I expect you boys didn't explain to him just who we are. I expect that once you -- explain things to him, he'll decide to move on.

JOSH

(a brittle laugh)

Sure. -- Ain't much for a preacher to do around these parts, after all.

Lahood's face darkens as he pivots in the saddle, reins up.

LAHOOD

Preacher?!

NEW ANGLE - GROUP SHOT

Sunlight falling through the pines casts mottled patterns on their faces as Lahood bores into them with troubled eyes.

LAHOOD

You let a preacher into Carbon Canyon?

JOSH

(helplessly)

Hell, we didn't invite him, Papa. He took up with Barret, is all. What's wrong with a preacher?

LAHOOD

(gravely)

When I left for Sacramento, those tin-pans had all but given up. Their spirit was nearly broken -- and a man without spirit is whipped. But a preacher, he could give 'em faith. Shit, one ounce of faith and they'll be dug in deeper than ticks on a hound.

He ponders the problem momentarily, then flicks the reins, his voice descending to a lazy command.

LAHOOD

You boys go throw a rope around that man and bring him to me.

CAMERA TRACKS as he starts forward, oblivious to the anxious look that passes between McGill and Josh. Both have already suffered embarrassment at Gabriel's hands. Mercifully --

LAHOOD

(on afterthought)

-- No. If we get too rough, we'll make a martyr out of him. Don't want to give 'em a martyr.

MC GILL

(hesitantly)

Didn't you get any help from  
Sacramento, Boss?

LAHOOD

(derisively)

Sacramento ain't worth moose-piss!

JOSH

They didn't sign the writ?

LAHOOD

Nope. Not only that, but some of  
those bastard politicians want to  
do away with hydraulic mining al-  
together. 'Raping the land' they  
call it.

(darkly)

We've got to move on Carbon and  
dig deep and dig fast, 'cause the  
way the smoke's blowing, in another  
couple years we may be out of busi-  
ness.

He rides in silence for a moment, Josh and McGill digesting  
his information. At length:

LAHOOD

Those tin-pans have got to go.

(a beat)

That preacher -- we'll have to  
figure out a way to handle him.

The CAMERA HOLDS; Lahood advances OUT OF FRAME. We --

CUT TO:

INT. WHEELER SHANTY - CLOSE ON MEGAN - DAY

The Wheelers' prized possession is an oaken bureau surmounted  
by a large oval mirror. Megan stands before the mirror wear-  
ing only a shirtwaist which she tightens around her torso in  
an attempt to enhance her adolescent breasts.

MEGAN

(idly)

Were Granpa and Grandma happy  
when you got married, Ma?

From the shanty's main room we HEAR the voice of:

SARAH O.S.

I'm afraid they didn't have a  
thimbleful of choice in the  
matter.

Studying her appearance in the mirror, Megan frowns, unable  
to produce the desired effect with the equipment at hand.

MEGAN

Well, were they surprised?

SARAH O.S.

Your Granpa took the measles and  
your Grandma got drunk. I sup-  
pose you could say it surprised  
'em some.

Turning to the quilt-covered bed behind her Megan picks up  
a gingham pinafore, slips it over the shirtwaist.

MEGAN

Was it 'cause they thought you  
weren't old enough?

SARAH O.S.

Your Grandma was only fifteen  
when she was married. No, I  
think what riled them was who  
I married.

The pinafore adjusted to its unsatisfactory best, Megan sighs,  
picks up a brush -- applies it to her waist-length hair.

MEGAN

Do you think you'll be happy  
married to Hull?

SARAH O.S.

Who says we're getting married?

MEGAN

Hull's nice enough, isn't he?

SARAH O.S.

(uninflected)

Yes, he's nice.

All of it is small talk, leading up to what she really wants  
to know:

MEGAN

Do preachers get married?

SARAH O.S.  
I don't see why not.

Megan smiles -- this, at least, is to her liking. Abandoning the brush on the bureau she turns to enter the shanty's main room.

MEGAN  
Is my hem long enough?

INT. MAIN ROOM - ON SARAH - DAY

With Megan's entrance, B.G., Sarah snaps shut the mirrored compact by means of which she has arranged her own coiffure. Her blond hair is piled in an elegant knot and held with tortoise-shell pins -- a fashion which reveals the graceful sweep of her neck, and accents her fine-boned face.

SARAH  
(turning)  
Why, yes. You look lovely.

She plants a kiss on Megan's forehead.

SARAH  
You're the prettiest daughter I  
could ever have.

Megan grins, all fidgety with this display of maternal love. ...And her eyes fix enviously on her mother's upswept hair.

AWAY TO:

EXT. THE CREEK - CLOSE ON HULL - DAY

as he plunges his hand into the swirling debris of his long-tom and extracts his closed fist with a WHOOP. ANGLE WIDENS as Gabriel, plying his shovel at the upstream end of the sluice-box, pauses in his work.

GABRIEL  
(a grin)  
You break your hand, there, Barret?

HULL  
(beside himself)  
It's a nugget! The biggest damn  
nugget I've ever seen! Look here!

With a second WHOOP he sprints toward Gabriel.

EXTREME LONG SHOT - POV - HULL & GABRIEL

In F.G. Spider Conway looks up from the rocking gold pan in his hands, peers in the direction of Hull's claim, downstream. We SEE Hull and Gabriel convene to examine their find as Spider, squatting by the creek, directs a thin stream of tobacco juice into the mud at his feet.

SPIDER  
(to himself)  
It figgers.

EXT. WHEELER SHACK - DAY

Alerted by the sound of Hull's voice, Sarah and Megan dash INTO VIEW from within.

PANNING WITH HULL

as he half runs, half-clambers upslope toward the cabin...

HULL  
Sarah?! Megan?! Look!

AT THE SHANTY - GROUP SHOT

Out of breath, Hull arrives where mother and daughter stand, exhibiting his nugget in an outstretched hand.

HULL  
Came from beneath where that boulder was. I was right! Must weigh all of four ounces -- a quarter pound of gold! Look!

INSERT - THE NUGGET

Roughly the size of a bantam's egg, smooth-worn with time and the effects of abrasion, it gleams with a seductive lustre in his hand.

RESUME GROUP SHOT

Sarah and Megan AD LIB expressions of delight, and Hull, impetuously, embraces one and then the other:

HULL  
How about it, Sarah? Want to celebrate?

MEGAN

Oh, Hull -- can we go into town?

SARAH

(uneasily)

I'm not sure that's a --

GABRIEL O.S.

It'd sure go a ways toward clearing your credit, wouldn't it?

He eases INTO FRAME as he speaks. Megan does not observe the quickness with which her mother detaches herself from Hull's embrace as:

HULL

(thoughtfully)

It would. It would at that. And then some.

MEGAN

Can we? Please???

Hull deliberates, turning to Gabriel.

HULL

What do you think?

GABRIEL

(easily)

I expect we've got as much right to go to town as anybody else.

JUMP TO:

EXT. CARBON CANYON - PANNING SHOT - HULL'S WAGON - DAY

The buckboard, carrying Gabriel, Hull and the women, rattles along the creek -- passes Eddy and Teddy Conway loiling on the bank nearby, whittling.

TEDDY

Goin' into town again, Mr Barret?

HULL

That's right. You want to join us?

EDDY

(wistfully)

Our Daddy wouldn't let us, Mr. Barret.

(the froglike grin)

Sure is a nice day for it, though.

DIRECT CUT TO:

EXT. LAHOOD MAIN STREET - LONG SHOT - THE WAGON - DAY

The buckboard advances TOWARD LENS along the sparsely populated street. The women sit in back; Hull holds the reins. Gabriel -- in his dark wool shirt and turned-around collar -- is tall on the seat beside him.

TRACKING CAMERA

passes the tiny U.S. Post Office, through whose window we SEE the dour Postmistress at her counter. The passing wagon is reflected by the window and as she sees its occupants the woman pauses in her work to stare.

ANOTHER ANGLE - TRACKING CAMERA

as the wagon (and CAMERA) pass the barber shop, the town's Barber/Dentist lounging in his doorway. Following the wagon's progress with his eyes, the man's lips move in a decipherable expostulation: I'll be damned!

EXT. LAHOOD'S OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

CAMERA CLOSE on a ground-floor window, its chenille curtain parted by Josh Lahood as he looks out. Reflected in the glass we SEE the O.S. buckboard. Turning in profile to address a person unseen within, Josh abandons the window.

EXT. BLANKENSHIP MERCANTILE - THE GROUP IN THE WAGON

as Hull brings the rig to a stop in the street outside the store. Dismounting --

HULL

I'll square things up with Blankenship, then maybe we'll get you an ice-cream, Meg.

(to Gabriel)

You watch the women, Preacher?

GABRIEL

(nods)

Shouldn't be too hard.

HULL

(a grin)

I'll hurry.

He moves with businesslike speed toward Blankenship's door. CAMERA PUSHES IN as Megan, staring across the street, taps Gabriel urgently on the arm.

MEGAN

(sotto - a warning)

Look!

FULL SHOT - LAHOOD BLDG. - JOSH - ROUGHNECKS

Josh and five or six of his father's employees have emerged from the building. The roughnecks pause on the boardwalk while Josh -- alone -- traverses the street, toward the wagon. As always, he wears a gun.

RESUME GABRIEL & WHEELER WOMEN

Megan's eyes dart anxiously from the approaching man to the door of Blankenship's emporium -- then to Gabriel.

MEGAN

(a fierce whisper)

I'll get Hull.

GABRIEL

(casually)

No need. He's got important business. -- Reckon I may as well hitch the horse to the rail.

He moves unhurriedly to get down from the seat. Instantly --

ACROSS THE STREET - THE ROUGHNECKS

Simultaneous with Gabriel's movement the roughnecks' hands drop toward their guns -- ready for anything.

ORIGINAL ANGLE - AT THE WAGON

as Gabriel smoothly ties the horse to the hitching-rail, turns in time to interpose himself between the women and Josh, who comes to a stop a discreet ten feet away.

JOSH

(stiffly)

Mrs. Wheeler. -- Megan.

His eyes linger a moment too long on Megan, who makes a show of ignoring him. Then:

JOSH

(to Gabriel)

My father wants to see you.

He gestures the building behind him, his eyes locked on Gabriel's. A beat. Then Gabriel smiles.

GABRIEL

I've looked forward to meeting him.

(to Sarah & Megan)

Hope you ladies'll pardon me for a minute or two.

SARAH

(hushed)

Don't -- ! It's a trick -- !

He gives her hand a reassuring pat, starts toward Lahood's building. Josh accompanies him -- not too closely -- across the street.

TWO SHOT - MEGAN & SARAH

Apprehensive, they watch the Preacher and his escort retreat.

MEGAN

(sotto - urgently)

What if they hurt him? What if they --

SARAH

Shut up, Megan.

Uttered in heedless panic, it is not a mere rebuke but an adamant negation of her own worst fears, and Megan suddenly stares at her mother; at the upswept hair, the pallor on the finely-chiseled features...the breasts that rise and fall with...

...the same desire that Megan herself feels for Gabriel.

SARAH

(too quickly)

I'm sorry, Megan. I --

MEGAN

(a small voice)

It's all right.

But it's not. She averts her eyes lest Sarah see in them the realization that they are rivals; looks toward --

LAHOOD'S BUILDING

as Gabriel disappears inside, followed by Josh Lahood and the

swarm of roughnecks, who close in like jackals.

INT. LAHOOD BLDG. - DAY

CAMERA CLOSE on Coy Lahood as he rises from the chair behind his desk and smiles with the informality of a friendly emperor.

LAHOOD

Morning, Reverend. My name is  
Coy Lahood.

THE ANGLE WIDENS, revealing the man's magisterial office. The sheen of his mahogany desk is subtly enhanced by burgundy drapes, brass Rochester lamps. Gabriel faces him across a vast Persian carpet, Josh and the roughnecks behind him.

GABRIEL

(a nod)

I know.

LAHOOD

Do you imbibe, Reverend?

GABRIEL

(a smile)

Only after nine in the morning.

Lahood, with a chuckle, produces a bottle and glasses from his desk; and as he pours two drinks --

LAHOOD

When I heard a parson had arrived in town, I had an image of a pale, scrawny, Bible-thumping easterner, with a linen handkerchief and bad lungs.

GABRIEL

That's me.

LAHOOD

(another chuckle)

Hardly. -- Your health, sir.

He extends a glass containing six full ounces of whiskey. Gabriel gives it an appreciative look as he accepts it.

LAHOOD

(continuing - cunningly)

It also occurred to me that it must be difficult for a man of faith to carry the message on an empty stomach, so to speak.

(MORE)

LAHOOD (CONT'D)

(a beat - grandly)

So I thought: why not invite this devout and humble man to preach in town? Why not let the town be his parish? In fact, why not build him a brand new church!

He sips his drink with a glance to see how his bribe has been received. His own drink as yet untouched, Gabriel nods.

GABRIEL

I can see how a preacher could be mighty tempted by an offer like that.

LAHOOD

Indeed.

GABRIEL

First thing you know, he'd set his mind on a new batch of clothes.

LAHOOD

Why, we'd have them tailor-made!

GABRIEL

Mm-hm. Then, of course, he'd get to thinking about the Sunday collection.

LAHOOD

Hell, in a town as rich as Lahood, that preacher'd be a wealthy man!

He sips from his drink, convinced the bait is irresistible. Gabriel, however, studies his glass of whiskey with a sigh.

GABRIEL

I'm afraid that's why it wouldn't work. As the saying goes, you can't serve God and Mammon both.

(at Lahood's look)

Mammon represents money.

His fantasy shattered, Lahood's eyes narrow to hog-like slits.

QUICK CUT - THE ROUGHNECKS

Uneasy. Restive. Nobody stands up to Lahood.

BACK TO SCENE

Perceiving that it is to be a battle of wits, of will, Lahood swills his drink. Refilling his glass, he stifles his hair-trigger fury and affects a manner of deep philosophical sorrows.

LAHOOD

I opened this country. I made the town what it is. I brought jobs, and industry. I've built an empire with my own two hands, and I've never asked help of anyone. Those squatters, Reverend, are standing in the way of Progress.

GABRIEL

(mildly)

Whose progress? Yours or theirs?

His affectation shattered, Lahood explosively extracts a folded paper from his coat and scales it across the desk --

LAHOOD

Look at that! That's a writ -- comes hot from Sacramento! It tells me I've got mineral rights to the whole damn Canyon!

Gabriel ignores the paper which sails off the desk to the floor.

GABRIEL

Hardly seems likely. If you had those rights, you'd have exercised them. Besides, those folks have legally registered claims. You can't touch the Canyon until after they've gone.

LAHOOD

(booming)

Damn it, pick up that writ! Read it!

GABRIEL

(softly)

If it was worth the paper it's printed on, you wouldn't have tried to bribe me first.

His bluff called, Lahood sinks into his chair and slowly, significantly pushes his unfinished drink away. A calculating drawl suffuses his voice...

LAHOOD

What's your business with those tin-pans, Reverend?

GABRIEL

No business. They're my friends.

LAHOOD

(low)

Well, you and your 'friends' got twenty-four hours to pack up and leave, or my men'll ride through the canyon and run you out. I've been a law-abiding man, but now I'm out of patience. Any blood gets split will be on your hands.

CLOSE ON GABRIEL

He directs at Lahood the identical look he turned on Josh; a look of silent, searing menace.

RESUME TWO SHOT

Whatever Lahood perceives in the look, it gives him pause. After a moment:

LAHOOD

You're a trouble-maker, stranger.  
You spell bad cess in letters that stretch from here to Seattle.

Gabriel calmly knocks back half his drink -- then the other half; then places his glass on the desk.

GABRIEL

Thanks for the drink.

He turns on his heel. As he crosses the carpet toward the door, the roughnecks fan away from it like rats before a lion.

LAHOOD

(quietly)  
preacher...

Gabriel turns slowly back.

LAHOOD

(subdued)  
I've reasoned with you and I've bargained with you and I've come up short.

(MORE)

LAHOOD (CONT'D)

But what's mine is mine, and if  
you make me fight for it, I will.

(a beat)

There's a man -- a U.S. Marshal.  
He keeps the peace, if you take  
my meaning.

(a beat)

His name is Stockburn...and he  
won't be as patient as me.

Gabriel does not respond, but in the silence that descends  
upon the mention of the marshal's name, the CAMERA SLOWLY  
DOLLIES CLEAR ACROSS THE ROOM...

...TO A CLOSE SHOT OF GABRIEL.

His eyes hold on Lahood. And then, in a tone we've never  
heard before --

GABRIEL

Those people in Carbon Canyon,  
would you be willing to offer  
them cash for their claims? --  
Buy them out?

FAVORING LAHOOD

Sensing he has somehow gained the upper hand, he gestures  
expansively --

LAHOOD

Why, I'd do anything to avoid  
bloodshed. How about one hundred  
dollars a head?

GABRIEL

How about a thousand?

Lahood's phlegmy laughter resounds in the opulent office;  
the roughnecks chuckle with him, a chorus of flunkies.

LAHOOD

(condescendingly)

Tell you what. I'll come up to  
a hundred twenty-five.

Gabriel's eyes bore into him. A beat. Then:

GABRIEL

Stockburn...and his deputies...  
will cost you a lot more than  
that.

Lahood just stares at him.

LAHOOD  
(hushed)  
How would you know?

GABRIEL  
(ignoring the query)  
How much is a clear conscience  
worth to you, Lahood?

BRIEF CUT - JOSH, MC GILL, OTHERS

A communal look of puzzlement passes between them: Gabriel and Lahood possess a piece of knowledge they do not.

RESUME TWO SHOT

In the silence that has descended, Lahood's gaze holds on Gabriel. And finally --

LAHOOD  
(flat)  
A thousand dollars per claim, then.

In B.G., a murmur of disbelief runs through the roughnecks, the AD LIBBED utterance: "A thousand dollars per claim???"

LAHOOD  
(continuing - fiercely)  
But I want them out of there in  
twenty-four hours.

GABRIEL  
I'll tell them.

As he turns to the door --

AWAY TO:

EXT. BLANKENSHIP'S MERCANTILE - WITH HULL

as, carrying an armload of supplies he exits, approaches the buckboard;

HULL  
-- Paid off both accounts in  
full, Sarah, and even had enough  
to pay for Spider's --

ANGLE SNAPS WIDE as he sees the women in the wagon -- rigid, unaccompanied.

HULL  
(sharply)  
Where is he?

SARAH  
In there...

The small, fearful movement of her head directs Hull's gaze toward Lahood's building.

Staring at it, he slowly drops his armload of purchases into the buckboard -- all but a brand new axe handle which he retains in his grasp.

EXT. LAHOOD BLDG.

as the roughnecks begin to file out, INTO VIEW.

ON HULL

Stolidly...fearfully...he advances toward them with the axe handle held like a bludgeon...

ORIGINAL ANGLE - LAHOOD BLDG.

-- as Gabriel appears, pushes past the roughnecks without incident, waves a friendly hand.

ON HULL

infinitely relieved.

ON MEGAN & SARAH

Sarah sags visibly with relief while Megan does her best to suppress a victorious grin.

TWO SHOT - GABRIEL & HULL

They meet in mid-street, Hull changing direction at Gabriel's side -- heading toward the wagon.

HULL  
(with a backward glance)  
What were you doing in there?

GABRIEL

(easily)

Lahood invited me in for a drink.

With a smile he indicates the axe handle in Hull's hand.

GABRIEL

Thanks for the thought.

DIRECT CUT TO:

EXT. CARBON CANYON - GROUP SHOT - NIGHT

The flames of a blazing camp-fire illuminate the faces of twenty or thirty miners -- virtually the canyon's entire population -- who sit or stand at its perimeter, their arms upraised.

MINERS AD LIB

Aye!

Aye!

I vote yes!

HULL O.S.

All opposed?

SPIDER

Me, dang it!

He rises to his feet at the edge of the throng, the ANGLE SHIFTING to include -- across the fire from the canyon's other citizens -- Hull, on foot, and Gabriel who sits on a log a few feet away.

SPIDER

(continuing)

Me and Coy Lahood seen a lot of ground together, startin' back in '55. He may be greedy, but he ain't no fool. If he's willin' to cough up a thousand dollars a claim, it's cause he knows it's worth five times that much!

ON GABRIEL

Silent, his eyes encompass the O.S. group as a ripple of agreement travels through it.

JAKE HENDERSON O.S.

The way Lahood works, maybe it is. The way we work, we're lucky to see a thousand dollars a year. I say we take his offer.

GROUP SHOT

Henderson's remark is echoed by a chorus of assenting voices.

SPIDER

(tenaciously)

Suppose you struck a thousand bucks  
in nuggets. Would you quit, 'n  
blow town -- or keep diggin'?

MINERS AD LIB

It's a decent offer.  
I'd keep diggin'.  
Hell, let's take the money.

Spider swivels toward Gabriel.

SPIDER

What do you think, Preacher?

Several voices AD LIB similar questions; the miners fall silent  
awaiting his answer.

GABRIEL

What I think doesn't count. It's  
your sweat he's buying.

There is a general grumbling from the group. They don't want  
honesty, they want The Answer.

GABRIEL

(continuing)

Maybe you should sleep on it --  
decide in the morning.

A few of the miners AD LIB agreement, but:

SPIDER

What if we don't decide in the  
morning? What happens if we  
can't decide?

GABRIEL

I expect Lahood would take that  
as the same as saying 'no'.

EV GOSSAGE

And then what?

GABRIEL

(a beat - quietly)

He said he'd call in a U.S. Marshal.

HULL

What kind of threat is that?  
We don't have anything to fear  
from the law.

As it did in Lahood's office, the CAMERA BEGINS TO DOLLY IN  
ON GABRIEL...

GABRIEL

This man's not just any Marshal.

As he continues, his voice descends to barely a whisper:

GABRIEL

His name's Stockburn. He's got  
six deputies -- and they'll  
uphold whatever law pays them  
the most. Killing's their way  
of life.

(a beat)

I want you all to know that,  
because unless you accept La-  
hood's offer, you'll be meeting  
them.

PANNING SHOT - THE MINERS

Moments earlier they were uncertain, confused. Now Gabriel's  
words have introduced a third element: fear. PANNING CAMERA  
HOLDS on Spider as the grizzled old miner stares across the  
camp-fire at Gabriel, eyes narrowed.

SPIDER

You know this...Stockburn...?

FAVORING GABRIEL

All eyes are on him. Spider's words encroach on the glow of  
the fire like shadows. Ultimately:

GABRIEL

(quietly)  
I've heard of him.

FAVORING HULL

as, breaking the silence --

HULL

All right -- we all know what we're  
up against. Lahood ain't just say-  
ing 'take my offer'. He's saying  
'take my offer, or else!'

MINERS AD LIB

Shit!  
We're family men, Hull!  
We ain't no match for seven guns!

HULL

How many of us are there? Twenty!  
Now, I heard the Preacher...I know  
these men are -- professionals.  
But hell, it's still twenty against  
seven, ain't it? And we know how  
to pull a damned trigger, don't we?

Challenged, the men demur or reluctantly nod. Ev Gossage stands.

EV GOSSAGE

If it comes down to it, I'm willin'  
to fight before I'll quit my claim.  
But dammit, Lahood's offer is fair.  
I still vote we take his money --  
start afresh somewhere else.

The statement is greeted by a din of confirmation, forcing Hull  
to shout in order to be heard:

HULL

Hey, startin' fresh always sounds  
good when folks get in trouble!  
But before we vote to pack it in,  
we ought to ask ourselves what  
we're all about -- 'cause if it's  
no more'n money, well then, hell,  
we're no better than Lahood himself.

CAMERA MOVES WITH HIM to Spider, who sits hunkered down by the  
fire.

HULL

Spider, here, asked a question:  
If any one of us turned up a  
thousand dollars' worth of nug-  
gets, would he quit? Hell, no!  
He'd build his family a better  
house -- buy his kids better  
clothes -- maybe build a school --  
(a glance at Gabriel)  
-- or a church. If we were farmers,  
we'd be plantin' crops. If we  
raised cattle, we'd be tendin' 'em.  
But we're miners -- so we pan and  
dig and break our backs for gold.  
But, hell, gold ain't what we're  
about!

FAVORING GABRIEL

who, seated apart from the throng, silently listens to Hull's impassioned plea.

HULL

(continuing)

This canyon is our home. Our dream. We came out here to raise our families. We've sunk roots here. God knows it ain't much, but it's a start. We've buried members of our families in this ground. This was their dream, too. They died for it. Are we gonna take a thousand dollars and leave their graves untended? We owe them more than that, don't we? We owe ourselves more. If we sell out here, what price do we fix on our dignity next time? Two thousand? Less? -- Or just the best offer?

He pauses.

GROUP SHOT

Utter stillness prevails. The campfire illuminates his face, the upturned faces of the men -- faces lined and creased by lives of hard work and sacrifice.

Hull glances around with a self-conscious shrug. Normally a quiet, timid man, he now -- having spoken his mind -- seems vaguely embarrassed at having become the center of attention.

Silence.

Then, standing to address the group at large:

SPIDER

I say to hell with Lahood!

His eyes rake his fellow miners, seeking support. For a long moment nobody moves. Then, rising to stand at Spider's side:

EV GOSSAGE

I...uh...ain't a brave man...but I ain't no coward, neither. We took out chances this far. I vote we keep it up.

And now, one by one, like fire kindling in an abandoned attic,

the miners spring to their feet.

MINERS AD LIB

Hell with Coy Lahood's money!  
I ain't givin' up my home!  
T'hell with Lahood and his gunnies!  
I got a rifle -- let 'em come!

The tide has turned, becoming a vehement groundswell of opposition as the CAMERA PUSHES IN on Gabriel. The only man still seated, his eyes flick from face to O.S. face as angry rejections of Lahood's cash offer echo boisterously around the fire...

...and in EXTREME CLOSE-UP we see the shadow of concern and sorrow erase the embers of the camp-fire from his eyes as he dwells on what will now most certainly come to pass...

...and what he must do to prevent it.

And as FOCUS BLURS --

CUT TO:

A FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

Here, on the slopes, the pines encircle a small open space. At its center, illuminated by moonlight, Gabriel stands lost in thought.

At some small O.S. SOUND, he turns.

NEW ANGLE - A WOMAN'S FIGURE

GLIMPSED in dark profile against the trees at the edge of the clearing, all we can discern is the silvery trace of light upon a graceful neck, the backlit sheen of upswept hair. ...Sarah?

In a moment the figure moves fully INTO VIEW, revealing Megan, with her hair arranged as her mother's had been, earlier.

ANGLE SHIFTS to include Gabriel, looking at her as she pauses, ten feet away. A beat.

MEGAN

(hesitantly)

I buried my dog over there.

She points to the base of a tree where a tiny white cross can be SEEN against the darkness of the tree-trunk.

GABRIEL

That makes this hallowed ground,  
then, doesn't it.

She approaches slowly with the half-prideful, half-embarrassed  
trepidation of a bride-to-be.

MEGAN

I said a prayer for him. It was  
after the raid. I prayed for a  
miracle.

GABRIEL

(a beat)

Well, maybe some day you'll get  
what you asked for.

MEGAN

(significantly)

That was the day you arrived.

Gabriel's chuckle is low and fleeting. Blushing, she averts  
her eyes.

MEGAN

(continuing)

I think I love you.

The revelation does not surprise him.

GABRIEL

Nothing wrong with that. If there  
was more love in the world, there'd  
be a lot less dying.

MEGAN

(the great risk)

Then...there can't be anything  
wrong with making love, either...

That gives him pause. He ruminates on it. Finally:

GABRIEL

I think it's better to practice  
just loving for a while before  
you start the other. Lots of  
people don't understand that, and  
it gets 'em awfully confused.

MEGAN

Then...if I practice just loving  
for a while...would you teach me  
...the other...?

GABRIEL

Most folks don't get around to that until after they're married.

MEGAN

But I'll be fifteen next month. Mama was married when she was fifteen.

(a long beat)

Will you...teach me then...?

GABRIEL

(quietly)

I won't be here next month.

She stares at him as if she didn't hear him right.

MEGAN

What?

GABRIEL

(gently)

I'll be leaving soon, Megan.

She shakes her head; her eyes brim with tears.

MEGAN

(wretchedly)

But...you can't. I...I don't want you to...!

GABRIEL

I don't want to, either. ...It's just the way it is.

Sobbing, she throws her arms around him -- clings to him --

MEGAN

You can't -- !

GABRIEL

(a smile)

Hey, now -- this is no way to pass the test.

MEGAN

(a tiny voice)

What test?

GABRIEL

(softly)

If you love something, set it free. If it comes back, it's yours. If it doesn't...it never was.

Gently pulling back from her embrace, he looks into her tear-filled eyes.

GABRIEL

(continuing)

There'll be many things you love  
that you'll have to set free.  
Sometimes, it's the greatest  
test that your love is real.

MEGAN

(through her tears)

But I want you to be with me for-  
ever...

GABRIEL

I know. It may be painful now,  
but one of these days the right  
man will come along...then none  
of this will matter any more.

(brighter)

Now if I was your Mama, I'd be  
starting to worry where you went.

He plants an avuncular kiss on her forehead -- but she backs  
angrily away. Hell, as we all know too well, has no fury like  
a woman scorned -- or a woman who imagines she's been scorned.

MEGAN

(fiercely)

It's my Mama you love, isn't it?

GABRIEL

(simply)

Your Mama's a fine woman, and so  
are you.

MEGAN

The way you look at her -- the way  
she looks at you -- ! It's true!  
Well, I don't care!

GABRIEL

(grieved)

Megan...!

MEGAN

(torrentially)

You can have her! I never want to  
see you again, ever!!! I hope you  
go to hell!!! I hope you die!!!

Moonlight reflects off gingham in a flurry of skirts as she  
whirls, dashing into the trees.

CAMERA PUSHES IN on Gabriel as he stands motionless, watching her retreating form, constrained by the painful knowledge he is helpless to relieve her anguish.

HOLD AS DESIRED, then --

CUT TO:

EXT. COBALT CANYON - SUNRISE

The sun crests the eastern slope of the canyon like a gaping red wound in the sky. We HEAR a roaring noise -- tumultuous, familiar -- as the silhouette of a single horseman rides INTO VIEW along the ridge against the rising sun.

CLOSE ON GABRIEL

as he reins up, looks down and O.S. toward the deafening SOUND.

HIS ANGLE - LAHOOD'S DIGS

Work is already in progress; the air is dense with spray as the crew at the monitor directs its blast of water at the raw cliff face.

Even as we watch, the merciless hydraulic jet eats away the subsoil beneath a stand of pine atop the cliff. Earth and trees topple, falling toward the bottom of the canyon.

RESUME GABRIEL

Watching the heedless devastation of the land, a cloud of grief and anger darkens his face. And then he guides his horse OUT OF FRAME toward the canyon floor.

FULL SHOT - AT THE MONITOR - JOSH LAHOOD

He relinquishes control of the iron water-cannon to Club, and turns away from it, flexing his arms to ease the strain from tired muscles.

Abruptly he pauses -- gaze riveted toward what he sees, O.S. -- and his hand drops slowly toward his gun.

NEW ANGLE - GABRIEL

CAMERA TRACKS with him as he approaches the monitor and its crew: unhurried, unafraid. Josh, revealed as Gabriel passes him, arrests the movement of his hand when it becomes apparent Gabriel does not intend to stop.

GABRIEL

(as he passes)

Tell your father they turned him  
down.

The message thus delivered, the CAMERA HOLDS and Gabriel rides  
on and OUT OF FRAME. Josh glares sullenly after him for a  
beat and then pivots --

JOSH

(a shout)

McGill??!

The ROAR of the hydraulic rig is punctuated by the SHRIEK of  
a train-whistle as we --

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN CANYON - DAY

We SEE the tiny whistle-stop where Lahood had arrived on his  
return from Sacramento. The telegraph shack is in MED. F.G.  
as Gabriel rides INTO VIEW from the woods on the opposite  
side of the tracks.

As we WATCH, the train heaves INTO SHOT, its cylinders belching  
steam. The CAMERA PANS as it decelerates and comes to a stop  
between LENS and Gabriel, hiding him from VIEW.

Whitey, the Stationmaster, emerges from his shack as a uniformed  
TRAINMAN opens the mail-car door, slings a canvas bag in his  
direction.

REVERSE ANGLE - MC GILL

PAN with him as he approaches the telegraph shack on horseback,  
comes to a stop there even as Whitey scoops up the mail-bag,  
turning.

WHITEY

Morning, McGill. -- Just in time  
for the mail.

MC GILL

(handing him a  
folded piece of paper)

Hell with the mail. The Boss wants  
you to send this telegram, right  
away.

The whistle BLOWS; the train lurches forward. Unable to speak  
above the NOISE, Whitey nods, waves, disappears into his shack

as McGill wheels his horse, heads back in the direction from which he came.

ON THE TRAIN

-- as the engine, then the mail-car, passenger car, stock-car and caboose successively rumble OUT OF FRAME...

...revealing that Gabriel is no longer there. And now the electrical tattoo of Morse Code is HEARD, carries through a --

CUT AWAY TO:

DAY INTERIOR - CLOSE SHOT - DETAIL

Looming LARGE IN FRAME a telegraph key stutters. WITHDRAW to include a wizened TELEGRAPHER who sits beside it, transcribing the coded message onto paper with a pencil-stub.

Soon the message ends; the key is silent. Folding the paper the Telegrapher rises, moves hurriedly to the door of his small, dusty office.

EXT. TELEGRAPH STATION - DAY

Message in hand, the Telegrapher emerges from his station. A shingle above its door informs us that the population of Yuba City is 2,301. CAMERA PANNING, he scurries across the street toward a clapboard building, the CAMERA ZOOMING IN on its door. There, we SEE a painted silver star, the legend U.S. MARSHAL.

NEW ANGLE - TOWARD THE TELEGRAPHER

In B.G. the man trots across the street as in F.G. CAMERA SHOOTS PAST seven horses tied to the hitching rail at the side of the building -- roan geldings that might have been spawned by the same mare, same sire. They bear identical black saddles, and seven Winchesters jut from seven identical scabbards.

Gaining the boardwalk, the Telegrapher pauses apprehensively outside the door, nervously clears his throat. Then, crossing himself, he raises a shaky hand...and knocks.

The SOUND of his rapping on the door segues through a --

CUT TO:

INT. GABRIEL'S SHANTY (CARBON CANYON) - DAY

-- as the rapping ceases and we HEAR:

HULL'S VOICE  
(outside the shanty)  
Preacher...?

No response. Soon the door is opened from outside and Hull peers in PAST LENS.

HIS POV

The place is spotless...empty.

OUTSIDE THE SHANTY - ON HULL

as he withdraws and shuts the door, confused and worried. On impulse he jogs around the side of the shanty.

AT THE REAR OF THE SHANTY - HIS ANGLE

The lean-to that suffers for a stable is deserted: we SEE an empty stall.

INT. WHEELER SHANTY - WITH MEGAN & SARAH - DAY

...Megan makes final adjustments in the four place-settings on the table, seats herself as Sarah pivots from the stove with a skillet of eggs and beans -- begins to ladle food on the plates. Entering uneasily, Hull pauses.

HULL  
He's gone.

SARAH  
What? -- Who?

HULL  
The Preacher. He's packed and left.

CAMERA PUSHES IN on Megan's face as --

SARAH O.S.  
(stunned)  
But...why? Where to???

HULL O.S.  
(uninflected)  
I don't know. Must've left before sun-up.

Her appetite quashed, Megan stares guiltily at her steaming breakfast.

GROUP SHOT

as Sarah fights back the sense of overwhelming betrayal that rises within her...

SARAH

Well, he...he probably went to tell Lahood about the vote last night.

HULL

With his bedroll and coat?

SARAH

(a thin desperation)  
I can't believe he just...left.  
I mean, it's not...not like him.  
He'd've told us something...he'd...

Her eyes drop helplessly to the skillet she holds.

HULL

(lacklustre)  
I...expect we'll survive.

He somberly takes a seat at the table. As she replaces the skillet on the stove --

SARAH

(a brittle voice)  
All that talk of fighting -- no wonder he left.

HULL

(a frown)  
What's that supposed to mean?

Turning from the stove she takes her seat with downcast eyes.

SARAH

Lahood and Marshal Stockburn be damned. Isn't that what you decided last night?

HULL

(controlled)  
I spoke my mind, if that's what you mean.

SARAH

(resentfully)  
You got the rest of them to vote your way, didn't you?

HULL

They voted their conscience.

SARAH

They voted to fight!

HULL

(hotly)

If that's what it come to, damn right!

SARAH

(flaring)

You think they'd've voted that way before the Preacher came? You think they'd've voted that way if they knew he wouldn't be here?

HULL

They voted to stick together!

SARAH

The Preacher was holding them together! They knew he helped you in town! They watched him whip that...animal Lahood sent out here! They were counting on him to whip Lahood himself!

HULL

(explosively)

I reckon I did all right by us before he came, didn't I?

Even as Sarah opens her mouth to respond, an EXPLOSION rattles the windows, shakes the cabin to its very foundation, reverberates down the canyon from its distant source -- erases all dissension from their faces with its thunder...replacing it with silent and appalling uncertainty.

CAMERA WHIP-PANS from Megan...to Sarah...to Hull -- who bolts from his chair.

OUTSIDE THE SHANTY

Hull caroms INTO VIEW from within, gazing upstream as Sarah and Megan crowd the doorway behind him.

HIGH ANGLE - CARBON CANYON

Dust and smoke billow downstream from the uppermost bend of the creek. The explosion has occurred beyond it, O.S. We

SEE other miners rising from their work or scurrying from their shanties -- gazing toward the smoky, dusty cloud. Dogs bark, horses rear in panic.

AT THE CREEK

LOW LENS FOCUSES on a section of the creek. The echoes of the explosion are even now retreating down the canyon in a resonant diminution of the original blast.

As we watch, the current of the creek begins to dwindle... becomes a listless trickle.

ANGLE UP to Spider Conway standing on the bank. He directs a jet of tobacco juice into the shallow, placid water. He knows what's happened.

SPIDER

Damned if that don't cut it.

EXT. WHEELER SHACK - ORIGINAL ANGLE - HULL, SARAH, MEGAN

Distraught, Hull's gaze traverses the canyon from the point of the blast to the collection of placer claims below.

HULL

...Lahood dammed up the creek.

He turns to Sarah. Her eyes, glistening with tears, fix accusingly on him.

SARAH

If you'd accepted his offer, it wouldn't have happened!

She whirls inside.

Averting her eyes, Megan turns, too -- walks aimlessly away.

CAMERA PUSHES IN on Hull: on his doubt, his fear, his confusion.

CUT AWAY TO:

INSIDE A BANK - DAY

Balding and benign, his Adam's apple throttled by a black bow tie, a BANK TELLER counts out greenbacks for a LADY CUSTOMER.

TELLER

...twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five. Thank you, Mrs. Greene. -- Next, please.

The woman retires OUT OF FRAME, revealing the next in line: Gabriel. Wearing his turned-around collar, he steps up to the grille.

TELLER

'Afternoon, Reverend. What can I do for you.

Gabriel slides his hand under the grille. As he withdraws it, LENS ZOOMS IN on the key that rests on the counter.

JUMP TO:

INT. BANK VAULT - DAY

The Teller inserts Gabriel's key into one of the myriad numbered metal doors which line the wall of the vault. Each door contains two cylinder-locks, and into the second one the Teller now fits his own master key. Twisting both, he opens the numbered door and slides out a slim black metal box -- which he passes to Gabriel.

TELLER

Here you are, Reverend.

Wordlessly, Gabriel carries the box toward the opposite wall where we SEE a small booth equipped with a curtain, for privacy. Pushing the curtain aside, Gabriel steps into the booth -- lets the curtain fall closed behind him.

INT. BOOTH - CLOSE SHOT - THE BOX

-- as Gabriel's hands set it down on the shelf provided for that purpose. Its lid is held shut by a latch which Gabriel's fingers unfasten. As he opens the box, a chamois-wrapped bundle is exposed, and as Gabriel unfolds the chamois...

...we SEE the oiled steel and staghorn grip of a well-worn .44.

A beat.

Then Gabriel's hands remove the six-gun and chamois from the box.

It is otherwise empty.

OUTSIDE THE BOOTH - ON THE TELLER

Awaiting Gabriel's emergence from the booth, he idly picks his teeth.

INSIDE THE BOOTH - CLOSE SHOT - THE BOX

Empty, as before, the box FILLS THE SCREEN.

Silence.

We wait.

And wait.

And then, stark against the black container, Gabriel's white collar drops into the box.

HOLD AS DESIRED, and then --

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. CARBON CANYON - GROUP SECT - MINERS - DAY

Restive, disconsolate, the men of the colony have convened at the creek. Spider and Hull are there, likewise young Ev Gossage; also Jake Henderson and the two ancient sourdoughs, Bossy and Biggs. As they survey the fast-drying streambed...

BOSSY

Shit.

JAKE HENDERSON

Well, I reckon it's time to pack up the Missus, and light out.

EV GOSSAGE

It sure don't seem we got much choice.

SPIDER

What about you, Barret? Any ideas?

Hull merely shakes his head. Then, with a frown of sudden awareness --

SPIDER

Where's the Preacher? He'll know what to do.

HULL

(a murmur)

He ain't here.

EV GOSSAGE

You mean he's gone?

Known to be the Preacher's closest friend, Hull finds himself the focus of attention.

HULL

He, uh -- went to tell Lahood  
we turned him down.

He guiltily scans the faces of the men around him -- but nobody calls his bluff.

HULL

(gaining confidence)  
But, before he left, he said  
that if anything happened, we  
should try and do like he'd do.  
-- If he was here.

BOSSY

Shit.

EV GOSSAGE

(slowly)  
I don't know. -- Suppose we  
could dry-pan for a couple of  
days, come to think of it.

HULL

(improvising)  
I know he'd hate to see us quit  
without we gave it our best.

A ripple of AD LIBBED agreement sweeps the group, though a few dissenting voices are heard.

JAKE HENDERSON

Let's play her out for a couple  
of days. What can we lose?

SPIDER

(emphatically)  
One nugget. Like to find me  
one big nugget. I'd shove it  
s'far up Coy Lahood's ass it'd  
wink at him when he washed his  
teeth.

With AD LIBBED words of agreement the group breaks up in earnest -- men who have survived a twist of fate and now bend tired motions to a common goal. Only Spider lingers, looking at Hull with a grin of feral intuition.

SPIDER

You got sand, Barret, but you  
can't lie worth a damn.

(MORE)

SPIDER (CONT'D)

With the Preacher gone 'n' Lahood  
on the warpath, your life won't  
be worth spit. If I was you, I'd  
pack them two ladies and git.

He sidles OUT OF FRAME, the CAMERA HOLDING on Hull. Though his ambition has carried the day, the taste of it is bitter in his mouth. Digesting Spider's advice he slowly turns, looks off in the direction of the Wheeler shanty, O.S.

HIS POV - THE SHANTY - MEGAN

The small ramshackle cabin perches forlornly on the slope -- Sarah is within, unseen. Only Megan's tiny form is visible: a lonely figure wandering the hillside.

CLOSE ON MEGAN

Caught in a cross-fire of alienated feelings, her eyes flick unhappily from Hull, O.S., to the shanty where her mother is, B.G. Neither of them holds the fantasy of comfort. The creek is silent. ...And even the Preacher is gone.

Idly she turns, plucks a dandelion that sprouts between the rocks. Blowing once, she detaches half its gossamer plumes -- then in anger at the universe she dashes the flower to the earth.

AWAY TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - SUNSET

CAMERA TILTS UP from a lightless chasm between steep cliffs to a rocky hog-back looming overhead. There, the setting sun is bisected by the top of the ridge, FORESHORTENED BY TELE-  
PHOTO LENS.

As we watch, a horseman rides across the scarlet sphere, in silhouette.

He is followed by another...and another...and another...

Soon we SEE them all, all seven of them -- a grim battalion that advances slowly and inexorably toward the future...

Stockburn...and his "army."

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. CARBON CANYON - FULL SHOT - DAY

As when first seen, Carbon Canyon presents an image of rustic tranquility. But Carbon Creek no longer fills the sun-struck air with its music, and the miners no longer have its current to assist them. CAMERA PANS the weary figures as they work their claims: Bess Gossage using a bucket to wash the shovel-ful of gravel down Ev's sluice...old Biggs with his pants rolled up, tromping in the shallow water of a standing pool to stir up the murk while Bossy pans the muddied water...

...and Hull, REVEALED AS CAMERA CRANES DOWN, working alone in F.G. Using a shovel he loads his long-tom with gravel, then abandons the shovel and picks up a bucket. Scooping it full of water, he washes the gravel along the series of riffles...

...under the tentative gaze of Megan who moves INTO SHOT on the bank of the muddy stream-bed. Shortly --

MEGAN

Hull?

Hull grunts, a slave to the onerous rhythms of his work.

MEGAN

Are you angry at me?

HULL

(abstractedly)

Nuh-uhn. What gave you that notion?

MEGAN

You angry at Mama, then?

Pants rolled up, shirt sopping with sweat and face begrimed with mud, he looks at her. She is prim and spotless in a skirt and blouse, her hair in pigtails.

HULL

No, I wouldn't say that. Not angry.

MEGAN

(a nod)

She hurt your feelings, didn't she? -- I know how that feels.

(by rote)

If you love something, set it free. If it returns to you, it's yours. If it doesn't, it never was.

HULL

(wearily)

I guess so. -- We'll talk later,  
huh?

He picks up his shovel, returns to his labor. Megan observes him as he shovels gravel into the upstream end of the sluice; and in a moment --

MEGAN

Can I borrow the mare?

HULL

Can you saddle her?

MEGAN

(chagrined)

I already did.

HULL

(off-handedly)

Sure, take her out for a stretch.

MEGAN

Thanks.

She scampers upslope, OUT OF VIEW. Hull scoops another shovelful into the sluice, sighs, picks up the bucket... scoops water...pours it down the narrow wooden trough...

...abruptly whirls as an O.S. SHOUT splits the air.

HIS POV - UPSTREAM - SPIDER

pirouetting, waving his floppy hat, his feet describing a frenetic polka as if he had been attacked by hornets.

SPIDER

Rich, by Christ! Sweet holy ghost,  
I've struck her rich!!!

Whooping and whirling, he holds a lump of something as big as a football. His voice reverberates from slope to slope.

SPIDER

Gossage! Henderson! Barret!  
Look at this! Eddy 'n' Teddy,  
you pair of clodpolls -- come  
see what your daddy's pulled  
outa the stream!!!

(a whoop)

Lahood, you son of a bitch! I  
beat you! Look at this -- old  
Spider struck it rich!!!

NEW ANGLE - BOSSY & BIGGS

Turning downstream toward Spider, B.G., the two sourdoughs pause in their work.

BIGGS

What's that lump you holding,  
Conway? Some kind of turtle?

SPIDER

(brandishing it)

Turtle my ass! It's a lump of  
aggregate, ya crazy old fart!  
Chock full o' nuggets -- can't  
even count 'em, they's too many!

BOSSY

Shit.

With a common impulse they forsake their tools, hurry AWAY  
FROM LENS to share the glory of the find.

ON SPIDER

He clutches the lump of aggregate -- it gleams from a multi-  
tude of facets -- as Eddy and Teddy barrel INTO FRAME, colli-  
ding with each other.

TEDDY

What you got there, Dad?

SPIDER

What's it look like, y'brainless  
barn-owl -- it's gold! More'n  
you're likely to see in the rest  
of your life. Now run'n git the  
mules -- we're goin' to town!!!

EDDY & TEDDY

(the froglike grins)

Us???

Goin' to town???

RESUME HULL

Despite his fatigue the trace of a smile flickers across his  
face: he is happy for Spider's success. His eyes then shift  
from the spontaneous celebration toward --

THE WHEELER SHANTY

where Sarah is SEEN with a basket of clothes as she exits

the shack. For a moment she looks off and down toward the SOUND of Spider's O.S. SHOUTS of joy -- then stiffly crosses to the clothesline.

BACK TO HULL

as he reflects. Then -- perhaps with the memory of Megan's words -- he drops his bucket, starts up the slope and away from his claim.

AT THE CREEK - GROUP SHOT

Spider is now the nucleus of a throng of well-wishers; he cannot stop the antic prancing of his feet, his gleeful whoops.

EXT. WHEELER SHANTY - ON SARAH

Withdrawn, she methodically fastens her laundry to the clothesline, initially oblivious to Hull's presence as he advances INTO FRAME in B.G. -- watches her in uncertain silence. Then:

HULL

Sarah...?

Her hand briefly freezes -- then she resumes her chore without a backward glance. A beat.

HULL

I wanted to...apologize if anything I've done...or said...is going to stand between us.

SARAH

(a beat - inflexibly)  
Can't think of any such.

She lapses into silence. The moment is too complex for him.

HULL

(forced)  
Looks like Spider's payday come.

She glances momentarily down and O.S. toward the noisy throng.

SARAH

(uninflected)  
Maybe it was just his turn. Like it was your turn, couple days ago.

HULL

(a nod)

Leastwise, someone's gonna say  
goodbye to Carson Canyon a few  
dollars richer.

SARAH

Looks like.

He approaches hesitantly. She begins to hang up the dress  
that Megan had worn in front of the mirror.

HULL

When we all pack up...I hope you  
know there's plenty of space in  
my wagon for --  
(he gestures her shanty)  
-- whatever you're wantin' to take.

SARAH

(a beat)

Are you asking us to leave here  
with you?

HULL

I reckon we're all leavin', aren't  
we?

She says nothing. There are no more clothes to hang. Hull  
circles, ducking under the clothesline -- facing her across  
it.

HULL

Dammit, Sarah, ever since your  
Daddy died, I've done what I  
could -- helped you and Megan  
as best I knew how, and never  
put any conditions on it. Now  
I'm putting one: you owe me the  
truth. What do you have against  
me?

SARAH

(hushed)

Nothin'.

HULL

Well, do you love me or not?

She manages to meet his eyes. The perception of his pain  
gives her the strength to set aside her own. A beat. And  
then she nods.

SARAH

You're the decentest man I've ever known, Hull Barret. Yes, I do love you.

The words melt his tension, he pulls her to him in a possessive embrace.

HULL

Oh, Sarah...

SARAH

I apologize for being so...high-strung lately. It's just...

As if compelled by some inaudible command, her eyes drift up toward Ulrik Lindquist's cabin which Gabriel had used.

SARAH

(continuing)

...I...I've been so confused...

Construing her remark as a reflection of his own frame of mind, he nods sympathetically.

HULL

What with everything been goin' on around here, it's a wonder we all ain't crazy. But there's nothin' more to worry about -- we'll start over again, someplace else -- the three of us. First town we get to, we'll find ourselves another preacher, and...

...the fantasy loses itself in his chuckle. But at the mention of the word -- preacher -- Sarah's eyes drop as if with shame. A beat, then:

SARAH

(barely audible)

...yes...another preacher...

...and she pulls him to her, holding him tightly as if to banish the final traces of all conflict.

DIRECT CUT TO:

EXT. COBALT CANYON - LAHOOD'S DIGS - DAY

CAMERA DOLLIES along the forty-foot iron sluice -- the center of Lahood's operation -- with Josh Lahood as he scans the flow, alert to any gleaming flecks of "color". ANGLE

WIDENS to include the monitor, B.G. -- and McGill arriving on his horse. Dismounting, the foreman crosses TOWARD LENS, intercepts Josh as he reaches the downstream end of the sluice.

The raucous tumult of the mining process obliterates the message McGill relays -- we cannot HEAR his voice -- but he points O.S., directing the young Lahood's gaze toward the top.

Josh reacts to what he sees with a grin; the men exchange a word or two, and then McGill assumes the younger man's place at the sluice while Josh retreats AWAY FROM LENS toward his horse.

#### OVERLOOKING THE CANYON

LENS PANS with Josh as he guides the animal up the slope TOWARD CAMERA. The spray from the monitor reflects the sunlight in a misty geyser, B.G.

From CAMERA'S POV the noise is not so inhuman as it is down below, and as Josh arrives at the top of the canyon, ANGLE SHIFTS to include another rider. ...Megan.

JOSH

(pulling alongside)

Come to see how the rich folks do it, huh?

MEGAN

(a shrug)

Maybe.

JOSH

Your mom know where you are?

MEGAN

(loftily)

I don't tell her everything.

JOSH

Bet she wouldn't like it if she knew you was here.

MEGAN

I'm fifteen. Same age as her when she got married. I can do what I want.

JOSH

Well, maybe you'd like for me to show you around then, huh?

(tongue in cheek)

It's why you came by, ain't it?

MEGAN

(a beat)

Maybe.

He shoots her a knowledgeable look, then puts his heels to his horse's flank and turns the animal -- starts down the slope with Megan behind him.

MEGAN & JOSH

CAMERA SHOOTs from the canyon floor as we watch them descend, Josh raising his voice to be heard above the rising NOISE.

JOSH

(pointing off)

Three-quarters of a mile upstream, we di-verted half of Cobalt Creek, see? It flows through a ditch that runs along the con-toors of the slope, here, and it ends a hundred yards up yonder, to our right.

MEGAN

(peering O.S.)

It can't just end.

JOSH

It doesn't, really. It pours into a length of three-foot pipe that heads downslope real steep. See, there's ten yards of three-foot pipe, then it narrows into a two-foot pipe, and then a one-footer. All the time the water's goin' down the slope it picks up speed, see, and picks up force as the pipe gets thinner.

CAMERA TRACKS as, having reached the floor of the canyon, he guides his horse in the direction of the sluice and the monitor, Megan keeping alongside.

JOSH

(continuing)

At the bottom of the slope over there, all that water narrows from the one-foot pipe into a four-inch hose. The hose winds over to the monitor. My Dad brought in five boiler-makers t'put the pipe together, and we bought the hose from the fire company in San Francisco.

MEGAN

It hurts my ears!

JOSH

(raising his voice)

When all that water leaves the monitor, it's goin' at 200 pounds per square inch -- blasts the gravel right outa the cliff. The other half of Cobalt Creek runs right down here...right down the creek-bed, through the sluice.

MEGAN

(scanning the digs)

It looks like hell!!!

JOSH

(proudly)

We can placer twenty tons of gravel a day with this rig.

He reins up a stone's throw from the monitor -- manned by Club -- and from the sluice, where McGill presides over a three-man crew shoveling gravel. Reaching out, Josh takes the reins of Megan's horse, pulls her close. As CAMERA PUSHES IN...

JOSH

Now, what'd you really come by for?

MEGAN

(timidly)

I...I was just riding. -- Thought I'd take a look...

JOSH

I've wanted to look at you, too.  
-- Real close.

The fear and confusion of innocence cross her face -- too late. Laughing, he leans out in the saddle to wrap his arms around her. She cries out, struggling against his efforts. But his superior strength prevails, and he hauls her onto his knee, pawing at her, thrusting his lips against her stubborn, frightened face. Hit by her flailing feet, her horse bolts.

FULL SHOT - CLIFF FACE

The jet of water THUNDERS against the cliff. Megan's horse runs wildly THROUGH FRAME.

JOSH & MEGAN

Trying to control the writhing, terrified girl, Josh vents a WHOOP, inadvertently digs in his heels. His horse pivots skittishly, darting forward.

PANNING WITH JOSH & MEGAN

as Josh's horse, bearing the young man and his "capture", careens past the monitor, directionless --

JOSH

(a shout)

Cluuuuuuuuubbbb!!!

Turning, Club sees his young employer's predicament -- instinctively swivels the water-cannon to cut off the horse's headlong dash.

ANOTHER ANGLE

The process of mining is forgotten as the work-crew -- a total of ten or twelve -- flee prudently from the new direction of the hydraulic jet, or attempt to surround Josh's wheeling, pivoting horse.

TIGHT TWO SHOT - JOSH & MEGAN

Against the backdrop of the savage white spray, Josh's horse abruptly pulls up. Laughing fit to beat hell, Josh slides from the saddle with Megan tightly clasped against him.

JOSH

Look what I got me, boys -- a tin-pan's daughter!

MEGAN

Let me go!

GROUP SHOT - LAHOOD'S MEN

Some of them drenched with spray, others begrimed with mud, all of them delighted, they gather around their boss's son and his prize.

MEN AD LIB

(above the NOISE)

Rare up on her, Josh!

Take that cherry, son!

You give me seconds, y'hear?

Go to it, boy!!!

ON CLUB

A sordid grin spreads across his massive features and he abandons the monitor, hurrying toward the O.S. throng. Obeying the laws of physics, the monitor arcs skyward like a giant fountain.

GROUP SHOT

CAMERA PUSHES IN on Josh and Megan as he wrestles her down. In B.G. the hydraulic spume assaults the air of the canyon in a DEAFENING HISS. The girl's shrill SCREAM of protest punctuates the misty, throbbing air.

CLOSE SHOT

as Josh rips Megan's blouse from collar to hem -- LENS a brief voyeur to her creamy adolescent breasts.

QUICK CUT

The miners' muddied faces -- leering, gawking, jabbering.

QUICK CUT

The hissing, ROARING monitor -- drenching the air with its spray.

JOSH & MEGAN

as Josh flings up her skirt -- inserts his knees between her legs to force them open.

Abruptly, CAMERA ZOOMS IN on Josh's hat as -- simultaneous with the SOUND of an O.S. shot -- it is violently blown from his head.

The kid only jumps six feet -- straight up. Whirling, he gawks open-mouthed at:

GABRIEL

Atop the crest of the hill, astride his horse -- descending.

CLOSE ON GABRIEL - TRACKING SHOT

-- riding forward, unhurried, shirt open at the throat, hat pulled low.

Still wearing his preacher's garb, but without the starched white collar encircling his neck, he presents an ominous vision in black -- a wraith, an apparition, an awesome presence.

Around his waist is a gunbelt, the holster empty.

In his hand is his .44

THE MINERS

Shit, they scatter like roaches at the bottom of a cracker barrel.

CLOSE ON MEGAN

Seeing him, a cry is torn from her throat --

MEGAN  
Preacher!!!

CLOSE ON JOSH LAHOOD

Regaining his senses, his face contorts in a snarl of cheated furias.

CLOSE ON GABRIEL

-- approaching inexorably, inescapable as death.

RESUME JOSH

as his hand -- for the third time in their acquaintance -- drops toward his gun. And this time he follows through.

He has just enough time to clear leather, and then:

GABRIEL

fires four times.

QUICK CUT - JOSH'S PISTOL

It flies from his hand.

ANOTHER CUT

Hit again, it spins in mid-air.

ANOTHER CUT

Hit again, it reverses its spin.

ANOTHER CUT

Hit again, it explodes.

GABRIEL

There is a split-second's pause, and he fires once more.

ON JOSE LAHOOD

-- a round red hole appears in his gun-hand. So stunned is he by what he has seen that he can't even blink.

PANNING WITH GABRIEL

Leaning low from the saddle he sweeps up the girl who stretches her arms toward his neck. As he gathers her to him, her arms encircle him; she presses her face against his chest, weeping, trembling...as --

NEW ANGLE

Gabriel and Megan disappear through the white cloud of spray beneath the ROARING jet of water, OUT OF VIEW.

And as suddenly as he had appeared, he is gone.

...It is over.

DIRECT CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - TOWN - LOW ANGLE - SPIDER - DAY

Gripped in one of Spider's hands is his big lump of aggregate; in the other a bottle of whiskey. A rusted Paterson Colt protrudes from its holster near his hip. Drunk, he sways and lurches in the middle of the street.

SPIDER

(shouting)

Lahood, it's old Spider! Come  
out and tip a bottle with an  
honest man, y'skunk's butt!!!

He tips the bottle, drinking copiously. LENS ANGLES UP to include Lahood's establishment --

-- and the seven horses of Stockburn's entourage outside it.

INT. LAHOOD'S OFFICE - LAHOOD & STOCKBURN - DAY

CAMERA SHOOTs across the opulently furnished room toward the two men standing at the window, peering out. Lahood and STOCKBURN are seen in silhouette, their backs TOWARD LENS.

STOCKBURN

Is he one of them?

His voice is low and unctuous like the belly of a snake across black velvet.

LAHOOD

(nods)

Piece of trash named Conway.  
It's too bad. For a while  
there, I had 'em buffaloeed.

(shakes his head)

Then this preacher came along  
and shot 'em full of sass.

STOCKBURN

(derisively)

A preacher?

LAHOOD

(bitterly)

You take care of him along  
with the rest. He's made me  
look bad in front of my men.  
-- Whipped three of 'em, too.

STOCKBURN

(skeptically)

A preacher did that?

LAHOOD

(a nod)

Damned right he did.

STOCKBURN

(suspiciously)

What's this...preacher...look like?

FULL SHOT - THE ROOM - INCLUDING STOCKBURN'S DEPUTIES

Motionless as sculpture, they stand against the office wall: six icy gunmen with stars on their vests. All are big, all wear pistols slung low. A coiled dementia seems to radiate from their sunken eyes, their sloping jaws.

LAHOOD

Tell the truth, I never noticed much. He's tall, I guess -- six-four. Lean. Moves smooth for a man that big.

(brief beat)

His eyes -- I remember his eyes.  
-- Something strange about them.

Standing at the window with his back to CAMERA, we can almost feel Stockburn freeze. And in the silence that descends -- as happened earlier with Gabriel...THE CAMERA SLOWLY DOLLIES CLEAR ACROSS THE ROOM...

...TO A CLOSE SHOT OF STOCKBURN.

Backlit at the window, his face is a darkened mask.

LAHOOD O.S.

(quizzically)

That mean something to you?

STOCKBURN

(a beat)

Sounds like a man I once knew.

LAHOOD O.S.

Might be. He recognized your name.

Silence. Stockburn stands immobilized...contemplative. At length --

STOCKBURN

(low)

Couldn't be. The man I'm thinking about is dead.

OUTSIDE WITH SPIDER

Drunk as a lord, his challenge unanswered, he spits in the direction of the building.

SPIDER

(shouting)

I know you're in there, Coy!

(MORE)

SPIDER (CONT'D)

I got somethin' t'show ye!  
C'mon out 'n have a drink, y'old  
sow-bellied bloat!

HIS ANGLE - THE BUILDING'S MAIN DOOR

It blows open: two or three of Lahood's men tumble out as if avoiding a more threatening force...

...then Stockburn's deputies file out like an unhurried pack of wolves. They silently flank the door, with three men to each side.

ON SPIDER

His brows knit. He does not know them, but his intuitions prickle with their dark, mysterious silence.

ORIGINAL ANGLE - THE DEPUTIES - THE DOOR

A beat. Then Stockburn himself materializes from within, advances a step or two beyond his men who flank him like high priests of the occult. He stands there, flexing his hands with an ominous metaphysical grace.

He is forty, forty-five...ageless. A man with features so scarred by the vitriol of evil that a lifeless hush surrounds his presence and an aura of corruption pours from him in a vaporous cloud of dread.

SPIDER

recoils from the psychic stench of Stockburn as if from worm-infested flesh.

SPIDER

(uncertainly)

Where's...Lahood...?

ON STOCKBURN

His hands at the end of writhing wrists uncoil and flex like nests of serpents wakened from a magic spell.

STOCKBURN

Inside.

(a honeyed whisper)

Do you have a problem?

SPIDER  
(as it dawns)  
You're Stockburn.

Stockburn's response is a low throaty laugh.

STOCKBURN  
Yes. And these...

-- he indicates the wordless men behind him.

STOCKBURN  
...are my deputies.  
(a half turn)  
Gentlemen, say hello to Mr. Conway.

PANNING SHOT - THE DEPUTIES

Silent. ...Ominous.

GROUP - FAVORING SPIDER

Spider's eyes assess the stone-faced men mistrustfully. To steel himself, he takes a pull from his bottle. Then --

SPIDER  
I got no brief with you. It's  
Coy I want to talk to.

STOCKBURN  
(softly)  
He's listening.

An eerie stillness pervades the street as Spider hesitates, then clears his throat of fear -- attempts an unconvincing summons:

SPIDER  
(shouting)  
Lahood, y'creepy-legged lizard...

His voice trails off -- his gaze is mesmerized by the obscene, incessant dance of Stockburn's fingers. Briefly --

INT. BLANKENSHIP'S EMPORIUM

Blankenship looks up from his ledger, cocks an ear -- then turns toward Spider's sons who stand in MED. F.G., enraptured by a pair of factory slingshots.

BLANKENSHIP

Sounds like your daddy's running out of steam, boys. Better take him home now, huh?

EDDY

Aw hell, Mr. Blankenship, we only get to town here once a year.

The storkeeper shrugs, returns to his arithmetic.

RESUME THE GROUP ON MAIN STREET

Spider swallows, genuinely frightened by the seven implacable men who face him. Stockburn simpers, amused by the image the sourdough presents.

STOCKBURN

I don't think Mr. Lahood wants to talk to you...tin-pan..

(a beat - he raises an eyebrow)

But maybe he'd like to watch you dance, hm?

CLOSE ON SPIDER

He knows what Stockburn means. A sullen gleam asserts itself in his whiskied eyes: he shakes his head, a jerky no.

SPIDER

I don't know how to dance.

RESUME GROUP SHOT

In a motion so fast as to startle the eye, Stockburn's pistol seems to leap to his hand. The weapon fires -- the slug kicking up a cloud of dust as it strikes the earth two inches from Spider's foot. He jumps.

BRIEF CUT - THE DEPUTIES

Impassive, emotionless. Inscrutable.

RESUME GROUP SHOT

Dust settles, the torrid silence falls again. Spider quivers, forlorn and terrified. Then:

STOCKBURN

It's easy. You just...move your feet to the rhythm.

BLAM-BLAM!!! Twin geysers of earth erupt at Spider's toes and he hops reflexively.

AT BLANKENSHIP'S DOOR

Alarmed by the gunfire, Blankenship and Spider's twin sons move INTO VIEW from within -- and Blankenship grasps the situation at a glance.

BLANKENSHIP

God -- no!

EDDY

(shrilly)

Daddy!!!

Alertly, Blankenship grips a boy with each hand -- restrains them.

CLOSE ON SPIDER

Though drunk a moment past, he is now stone-sober -- directs a shout at his sons without removing his gaze from Stockburn's gun.

SPIDER

Stay where you are, boys!

GROUP SHOT - FAVORING STOCKBURN

as he tosses a command to his men:

STOCKBURN

Some music, gentlemen.

The SOUND of six additional pistols clearing leather is a sibilant WHOOSH in the hot, silent air. Then: BLAM...BLAM... BLAM...BLAM...their bullets rip into the earth at Spider's feet, at one-second intervals.

Nearly obliterated from VIEW amid the massive cloud of dust, Spider starts to dance. He jumps. He spins. He hops.

INT. BARBER SHOP - BRIEF CUT

The Barber/Dentist gently parts his curtain, peers outside.

INT. MORTUARY - BRIEF CUT

The sallow Mortician cautiously pokes his head out the door.

INT. POST OFFICE - BRIEF CUT

The spinsterish Postmistress stares through her mail-slots.

INT. LAHOOD'S OFFICE - BRIEF CUT

Lahood abandons his window with a sigh and turns away.

EXT. THE STREET - PANNING SHOT - STOCKBURN & DEPUTIES

Their faces obscured by a thick blue swirl of gunsmoke, they lay down a rhythmic fusillade that RESONATES throughout the town.

ON SPIDER

Dust billows as he huffs and gasps and jerks and bounces -- feet describing a pathetic parody of his celebration-dance in Carbon Canyon. His arms pump wildly -- one with the bottle, the other with his precious lump of aggregate.

CLOSE ON STOCKBURN'S PISTOL

as it fires twice.

BACK TO SPIDER

-- the bottle shatters, the precious lump disintegrates.

FAVORING STOCKBURN

STOCKBURN  
(over the NOISE)  
Pick up the tempo, gentlemen!

Wooden-faced, the deputies obey: BLAMBLAMBLAMBLAMBLAMBLAM!!!

AT BLANKENSHIP'S DOOR

The storekeeper fairly wrestles with the two Conway boys -- does his utmost to constrain them --

EDDY & TEDDY AD LIB  
Stop it! Help him!!!  
Daddy!!! Let me go!!!

EXTREME CLOSE-UP - SPIDER

Manic desperation flickers in his frightened eyes; dust swirls, the air ROARS with gunfire; he leaps, jumps, kicks, whirls, whimpers -- and then with a tormented animal protestation YELLS and --

INSERT

-- reaches for his gun.

Instantaneously:

SIDE ANGLE - LOW LENS - STOCKBURN & HIS DEPUTIES

Their seven guns whip upward, aimed no longer at the dirt. If there was measured rhythm to it previously, now the air is rent by solid hellish THUNDER.

ON SPIDER

as their bullets rip into him from head to toe. Scraps of fabric and gouts of blood erupt like stuffing from a ravaged doll as the slugs knock him backward, spin him, topple him...

And then --

ON STOCKBURN

as he lifts a hand.

THE DEPUTIES

cease fire.

BACK TO STOCKBURN

as he drops his hand.

STOCKBURN  
Thank you, gentlemen.

AT BLANKENSHIP'S DOOR

Eddy and Teddy tear themselves free from the older man's grasp, dash howling OUT OF SHOT toward --

SPIDER'S BODY

-- motionless amid the settling dust.

STOCKBURN & HIS DEPUTIES

There is a CLATTERING of spent shells hitting the boardwalk as the seven men shuck their empties, reload, calmly holster their weapons. Then...

...silence.

In which Stockburn wipes his hands on his shirt as if to cleanse and quiet them.

ON SPIDER'S BODY

as Eddy and Teddy, like a pair of pole-axed heifers, sink weeping INTO SHOT beside their father's bullet-riddled body.

And it is Eddy who, drawn by primordial impulse, touches a hand to a pool of Spider's blood and lifts it mutely, questioningly, incomprehensibly, toward Stockburn.

ON STOCKBURN

He recoils as if from something vulgar, looks down at them -- an angel of dark and vengeful portent.

STOCKBURN

Take him back to Carbon Canyon.

(a beat)

Tell the preacher to meet me here tomorrow morning.

Then, turning on his heel, he enters Lahood's building, abandoning the slow-witted boys who kneel and rock and keen above their father's corpse.

DIRECT CUT TO:

EXT. CARBON CANYON - SECTION OF SLOPE & CREEK - SUNDOWN

Twilight drifts downslope and fills the canyon floor: it is strangely deserted -- only Ev Gossage is SEEN; he paces with

a carbine in his hands, a nervous sentinel. At the SOUND of something pushing through the underbrush, O.S., he whirls.

HIS ANGLE - A HORSEMAN

emerging from the woods across the silent creek: a phantom in the dusk.

ON EV GOSSAGE

Fearfully, he brings the carbine to bear.

EV GOSSAGE

Stop! Who are you?

The horseman advances TOWARD LENS, still indistinguishable amongst the shadows. It is:

GABRIEL

(as he approaching)

'Evening, Gossage. Sure you know which end of that thing the bullet comes out?

Recognizing the Preacher's voice, Gossage's face floods with relief. His words tumble out in a torrent --

EV GOSSAGE

Preacher -- ! You won't believe what's happened! Lahood dammed up the stream -- ol' Spider found a peck o' nuggets 'n' lit out for town -- the Wheeler girl's horse come back without her, 'n' every-one's out looking for her, and --

He pauses open-mouthed as Gabriel comes closer and Gossage sees:

BRIEF CUT

The six-gun at Gabriel's hip.

BACK TO SCENE

as Gossage's eyes dart from the gun to Gabriel's open-collared shirt. Indeed, Gabriel's whole persona seems different. And as the miner stares --

GABRIEL

Pass the word that Megan's fine -- just took a little spill, is all.

He rides on past as CAMERA SHIFTS, revealing Megan seated behind him on the saddle, holding tight.

EV GOSSAGE  
(nonplussed)  
...I'll be damned.

JUMP TO:

INT. WHEELER SHANTY - DUSK

CAMERA CLOSE as Bess Gossage lifts the flannel "cozy" from a tea-pot, turning with it from the stove.

BESS GOSSAGE  
Here, Sarah --

ANGLE WIDENS as she pours a cup of tea for Sarah, who sits unmoving and despondent at the table where a lamp glows.

BESS GOSSAGE  
(continuing)  
-- drink up. Ain't no good to fret...the Lord'll protect her.  
'Sides, there's fifteen folks out lookin' for her, and --

CRASH! The women spin toward the O.S. SOUND.

THEIR ANGLE

The door, knocked open by Gabriel's foot, rocks back on its hinges as he enters from the dusk with Megan in his arms.

ON SARAH

That vision -- the embodiment of all her fantasies -- takes her breath away.

GROUP SHOT

GABRIEL  
She's all right -- just needs a little rest.

He crosses effortlessly toward the tiny bedroom with the girl in his arms as Sarah, with an inarticulate cry, gains her feet and reaches his side. She strokes her daughter's hair, her cheek, while Gabriel moves through the doorway.

INSIDE THE BEDROOM

-- where he stoops and places Megan on the bed, Sarah hovering alongside.

GABRIEL

It was Josh Lahood. He tried to...

He pauses...tucks the pillow under Megan's head, discreetly arranges her torn blouse. Then:

GABRIEL

(continuing - quiet)  
He tried, but he didn't.

Megan's eyelids flutter, she looks up at him.

GABRIEL

You're home, Megan. Your mother's here.

A single sob, the veriest sound of gratitude and longing, is torn from her throat. Reflexively her arms encircle his neck.

TILT UP to Sarah, the LENS PUSHING IN on her recognition of Megan's love for the man. And almost at once her stunned gaze falls on --

BRIEF CUT

The holstered pistol at Gabriel's side.

BRIEF CUT

Gabriel's collarless shirt.

BACK TO SARAH

Even as she stares uncomprehendingly at Gabriel we HEAR a loud and sudden footfall on the porch, O.S., the SOUND of:

HULL'S VOICE

(urgently)  
Preacher!?

ANGLE WIDENS FAST as Gabriel straightens, turning toward the door. -- For the briefest eternity his eyes lock with Sarah's, and he perceives in them the stormy conflicts, doubts and desires that play upon her soul. Hastily then, she averts her

gaze and Gabriel strides past her, through the door.

INT. MAIN ROOM - DUSK

Gabriel emerges from the bedroom simultaneous with Hull's arrival from outside. Seeing Gabriel without his turned-around collar -- and with the gunbelt at his waist -- Hull all but freezes in his tracks.

HULL

I -- uh...Ev said you'd brought Megan back. Is she...all right?

GABRIEL

She's fine.

Hesitating, still absorbing Gabriel's transformation --

HULL

(awkwardly)

You'd...better come outside.

DIRECT CUT TO:

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - GROUP SHOT - DUSK

CAMERA CLOSE on a blood-stained tarpaulin which covers Spider's motionless body. We HEAR:

EDDY CONWAY O.S.

(haltingly)

...then him and his men, they shot him...forever...the bullets kept hitting him forever...

ANGLE OPENS to include Gabriel and Hull among the solemn, restive group of placer folk convened around the tarp -- around Eddy and Teddy who kneel beside it as if reluctant to abandon the remains. A pall descends as Eddy's voice falters, trails off.

At length...

EV GOSSAGE

(to Gabriel)

It was him, wasn't it? The Marshal you warned us about.

GABRIEL

(a nod)

Stockburn. Stockburn and his deputies.

TEDDY

(abruptly)

He said...to tell the Preacher  
to come to town in the morning.

Silence falls -- Hull frowns at Gabriel.

HULL

Why you...?

All eyes fix on Gabriel: the stranger who now wears a six-gun instead of a collar.

And slowly, as if without volition, the miners' feet shift noiselessly away from him and place him -- finally -- in opposition to themselves across the lifeless, shrouded form. The silence is macabre in the dusk.

Ultimately:

JAKE HENDERSON

(hushed)

The night you warned us about  
this Stockburn, it sounded like  
you knew him. Spider asked you  
that himself. ...Is it true?

The others present hang on the pause that follows, awaiting Gabriel's answer. Spider's corpse is an eerie barrier between them. In a moment --

GABRIEL

(to all)

The vote you took the other night  
showed courage. You voted to stick  
together, and that's what you've  
got to do.

(a beat)

Spider went in alone, and that was  
his mistake. A man alone is easy  
prey. Only by standing together  
can you beat the Lahoods of this  
world. Whatever happens tomorrow,  
never forget that.

(a beat)

You've got a brave man here -- he  
deserves a proper burial. You'd  
best get on with it.

He turns away.

EV GOSSAGE

(too quickly)

Preacher...?

Gabriel turns back toward the group. Gossage's embarrassment is freighted with a desperate supplication...

EV GOSSAGE

You...you are goin' into town tomorrow, ain't you?

A beat. Then Gabriel merely turns on his heel and walks away. It remains for Hull to whirl on his fellow miner, horrified --

HULL

How can you say that?

DIRECT CUT TO:

INT. GABRIEL'S CABIN - NIGHT

CAMERA CLOSE as with a metallic CLINK a cartridge slides into the cylinder of a .44. ANGLE WIDENS to include Gabriel as he loads the weapon in the golden light of a fuel-oil lantern. A coffee-pot steams on the stove behind him and at the SOUND of the door being opened, O.S., he glances up.

NEW ANGLE - SARAH & GABRIEL

She stands within the threshold, looking at him...slowly shuts the door behind her.

A wordless hush consumes the rich golden light between them.

Finally:

GABRIEL

Megan feeling any better?

SARAH

She's sleeping.

(a beat)

I wanted to thank you for...what you did.

GABRIEL

No need. I'm just glad I happened by.

The conflict of passions and the passions of conflict reflect on Sarah's face. There is much that she wants to tell him -- much that she does not know how to say.

S-l-o-w-l-y she advances, the CAMERA PANNING until she is at his side...watches as he slips another cartridge into the gun.

SARAH

(hesitantly)

That very first day, when Hull said what you'd done in town, I knew you were a gunfighter.

GABRIEL

Lots of people carry guns.

SARAH

Megan told me what you did to Josh Lahood. ...Who but a gunfighter could do such a thing?

Silence.

He shoves the last of six cartridges into the cylinder and shuts it with a click.

GABRIEL

(easily - indicating the pot)

Want some coffee?

She makes no move. From an open window directly behind Gabriel a night breeze gently caresses her hair.

SARAH

The people say you're going to town to face that Marshal and his deputies.

He slides the pistol into its holster which rests on the table by the lantern.

GABRIEL

...Yeah.

SARAH

Don't. ...Please.

GABRIEL

(shrugs)

It's an old score. Time's come to settle it.

SARAH

Isn't there anything I could say...or do...to change your mind?

He shoots her a look, and rises...turns to the stove and pours two cups of coffee. Sarah turns away from him, the CAMERA PUSHING IN on her face...

SARAH

(quietly)

When you left the other day,  
it reminded me of another time  
someone left me...

(a beat)

After that, I swore I'd never  
get hurt again...never love again...

(a beat)

Then you rode into our lives...and  
I couldn't help the way I felt.  
-- God, if only I could control  
the way I feel!

(a beat)

When you left, I thought you'd  
gone forever. It forced me to  
grow up...see things differently  
...appreciate what I have. I  
need a man who'll never leave me  
again. Can you understand that?

FAVORING GABRIEL

The coffee poured, he slowly places the pot on the stove.

GABRIEL

-- Yes.

SARAH

And...you'd have left again one  
day, wouldn't you?

B.G., she turns toward him. But his back is to her -- she  
cannot see his face. We can.

A long beat. Then:

GABRIEL

(softly)

Yes.

Brief silence. She nods.

SARAH

Then it's best this way.

(softly)

I'm going to marry Huli.

GABRIEL

(a beat - he nods)

Huli's a good man.

SARAH

Yes. ...He is.

SARAH

This is just so I won't have to  
wake up at night for the rest  
of my life...wondering...

Rising on tiptoes she kisses him, embracing him tightly.  
Then, abruptly releasing him, she turns and walks to the  
door. Opening it, she pauses with her back to him.

SARAH

Goodbye.

GABRIEL

Goodbye, Sarah.

She steps outside -- and at that moment, through the open  
door, carried up the darkened canyon like the chill wind  
of death -- a wolf-howl with a human taint -- we HEAR the  
distant, echoing voice of:

STOCKBURN O.S.

*Freeeeeeeaaashhheeeerrrrrrrrr...!*

Sarah freezes. The eerie, ephemeral SOUND fades slowly.  
Silence reigns, Then:

GABRIEL

(quietly)

Close the door. -- Mosquitoes'll  
get in.

SARAH

(a whisper)

Who is it?

GABRIEL

A voice from the past.

Again the SOUND: an unearthly summons on the sephyr's of  
the night: the clarion of doom...a distant wail...

STOCKBURN'S VOICE

*Freeeeeeeaaashhheeeerrrrrrrrr...!*

CLOSE SHOT - THE LAMP

Out of oil, it sputters...dies.

NEW ANGLE - GABRIEL & SARAH

They face each other across the darkened room, with moon-  
light flooding through the open door. The SOUND dies...



HULL

Little.

GABRIEL

(indicates the Sharps)  
Good gun for buffalo.

(brief beat)

Problem is -- there aren't any  
hereabouts.

HULL

I'm going with you.

Gabriel assesses the image of edgy determination that he  
presents. In a moment!

GABRIEL

No buffalo where I'm going;  
neither.

HULL

(pointedly)

I know.

Hull shifts the rifle so that the barrel points -- as if  
coincidentally -- directly at Gabriel.

GABRIEL

Even with that cannon, you  
wouldn't stand a chance.

HULL

That's for me to decide, ain't  
it?

A beat. Their eyes hold. Then, with a shrug:

GABRIEL

Suit yourself.

He flicks the reins, his horse starts forward. And as Hull  
falls in alongside --

CUT TO:

EXT. COBALT CANYON - LAHOOD'S DIGS - PRE-DAWN

The bunkhouse door is shut, operations not yet under way.

THE MONITOR

Its lethal spray as yet unleashed, the water-cannon is SEEN  
in grim silhouette against the cliffs. Abruptly an EXPLOSION  
erupts at its base -- demolishes the iron nozzle and its

PANNING WITH GABRIEL

as he canters past the forty-foot iron sluice and hurls a pair of sputtering sticks of dynamite beneath it.

MED. SHOT - THE SLUICE

The two EXPLOSIONS blast the heavy device off the ground -- hurl it in twisted fragments to the stream-bed.

PANNING WITH HULL

as, swerving his horse around the tool-shed, he pitches a dynamite stick against its foundation.

THE TOOL SHED

The DETONATION of the dynamite rackets off the cliffs -- blows the clapboard structure apart like a matchbox.

AT THE BUNKHOUSE

The door is flung open from within, revealing Club in mangy long-johns. He stares in horror at --

GABRIEL

Astride his horse, he holds a fulminating stick of dynamite in one hand, looks at Club -- as if waiting.

RESUME CLUB

Whirling, he shouts a command to those within. Instantaneously, with Club in the lead, Lahood's half-naked workers tumble over each other, race to the safety of higher ground.

WITH GABRIEL - PANNING SHOT

Spurring his horse, he hurls the dynamite into the bunkhouse, rides away -- tosses Club a gallant salute as he goes.

ON CLUB

He grins, returns the gesture -- hits the dirt.

THE BUNKHOUSE

disintegrates.

VARIOUS SHOTS - GABRIEL & HULL

Shadowy forms, they streak through the camp, sowing the last of the glowing seeds of destruction. The air is rent by EXPLOSION after EXPLOSION, until the camp is unreclaimable, and the echoes of the blasts reverberate like cannon-fire.

AT THE CREST OF THE CANYON

as Hull and Gabriel ride up and INTO VIEW, pause to survey the holocaust below. CAMERA PUSHES IN on Gabriel as he lights the wick of one last charge and -- as it begins to sputter -- drops it.

GABRIEL

Uh-oh.

CLOSE SHOT

Beneath the very hooves of Hull's horse, the fuse sputters at the end of the bouncing, rolling stick of dynamite.

TWO SHOT - HULL & GABRIEL

Panicked, Hull vaults from the saddle and grabs the dynamite. Even as he hurls it away into the canyon, Gabriel smacks the riderless horse -- and it bolts.

GABRIEL

You're a good man, Barret. Take care of Sarah and the girl.

HULL

(whirling)

What the hell -- ???

Simultaneous with the dynamite's O.S. ROAR, Gabriel touches his hat -- and gallops OUT OF FRAME.

CAMERA PUSHES IN on Hull as the mandates of fate become clear to him, and he watches Gabriel recede in the distance. In the thin, colorless air he lifts a hand...breathes a whispered valedictory:

HULL

So long...Preacher.

INT. WHEELER SHANTY - DAWN

-- as Megan emerges from the bedroom, fully dressed. CAMERA WITHDRAWS to include Sarah, busy at the stove with preparations for breakfast.

SARAH  
(surprised)  
I thought you were still asleep.  
Why're you dressed?

MEGAN  
(solemnly)  
The Preacher's gone, isn't he?

SARAH  
(a beat)  
Yes.

MEGAN  
Did you tell him you loved him?

Sarah hesitates, and then --

SARAH  
He knows we both love him.

Megan reflects, nods.

MEGAN  
Did you say goodbye to him?

SARAH  
(a beat)  
Yes.

Megan nods again, then turns slowly to the door.

MEGAN  
I didn't.

Opening the door, she steps outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAHOOD'S OFFICE - CLOSE ON MC GILL - MORNING

Looking down the street and O.S., Lahood's foreman reacts with apprehensive awe to what he sees. The ANGLE WIDENS; we SEE that McGill is but one of five men -- Jagou, Tyson, two others -- lounging in the early morning sun outside the building.

MC GILL  
(half to himself)  
I'll be damned...

REVERSE ANGLE - LONG SHOT

To either side of FRAME we see the buildings of Main Street. In CENTER FRAME, far down the dusty expanse, a single horse-man approaches unhurriedly. ...Gabriel.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

The town's Barber/Dentist -- seeing Gabriel pass by in B.G. through his window -- vents a whistle of antiseptic orthodontic fear and quickly pulls his curtain shut.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

SEEING Gabriel ride past -- her view kaleidoscopic through her multitude of pignon-holes -- the Postmistress mutters an AD LIB prayer to the Virgin...and vanishes from view. We HEAR the sound of a door slamming shut.

INT. LAHOOD'S OFFICE - STOCKBURN & LAHOOD - DAY

They stand at the window, peering through the parted curtain, watching Gabriel approach.

LAHOOD  
That's him. That's the Preacher,  
all right.

STOCKBURN  
(staring out)  
Uh-huh.

LAHOOD  
Ever seen him before?

STOCKBURN  
(a beat)  
Can't see his face from here.

INT. MORTUARY - DAY

Gabriel's figure is SEEN between twin vases filled with faded crepe gladioli as he passes the establishment. Humming a tune of morbid jollity, the sallow Undertaker hastens out to fasten the shutters across his windows: slam...slam...slam!

EXT. MAIN STREET - PANNING WITH GABRIEL

as he brings his horse to a stop at the hitching rail of Blankenship's emporium, casually dismounts and tethers the animal. Then -- without so much as a glance at the men across the street -- he enters the store.

INT. BLANKENSHIP'S - DAY

CAMERA TRACKS with Gabriel as he advances leisurely toward the dining area, passing Blankenship at work with his ledgers.

GABRIEL  
(without a glance)  
Blankenship.

Blankenship stares -- seeing for the very first time the man about whom so much has been rumored.

CAMERA STAYS with Gabriel as he takes a seat at the counter, smiles at Mrs. Blankenship who busily tends her steaming pots and casseroles.

GABRIEL  
Morning, ma'am.

MRS. BLANKENSHIP  
(turning)  
Morning, son. Coffee?

GABRIEL  
Yes, thanks.  
(a beat)  
Then it might be a good idea if  
you and your husband took a  
little walk.

ON MAIN STREET

-- as Jagou abandons the group of men on Lahood's porch, scuttles across the street to the emporium. Cautiously peering through its window, he then turns and quickly re-traces his steps, returning to his cronies.

JAGOU  
(a baffled whisper)  
Sonofabitch is just sitting there  
drinking coffee. Even got his  
back to the door.

The men exchange a look.

MC GILL

Well, I reckon the five of us  
don't need the Marshal, do we?

INT. BLANKENSHIP'S - ON GABRIEL

Sitting -- sipping his coffee.

ON MAIN STREET

Guns drawn, Lahood's men cross the street to Blankenship's.  
At the door they pause -- await the signal of McGill's up-  
raises arm.

And as it descends:

INT. BLANKENSHIP'S EMPORIUM

they flood through the doorway en masse, with BLAZING, ROARING  
GUNS -- immediately ECLIPSED FROM CAMERA in a dense cloud of  
gunsmoke.

SERIES OF SHOTS

as they lay waste to the establishment...

The rank of pristine candy jars -- from which, not long ago,  
young Ebenezer Pipkin had tried to pilfer -- are blown apart  
in a bright-colored cloud of saccharine shards. The pots  
and vessels of Mrs. Blankenship's kitchen are riddled with  
holes, disgoring streams of sauce, soup, milk. The metal  
hoops of cracker- and pickle-barrels are snapped by bullets,  
barrel-staves parting with explosive floods of pickles, brine,  
and cracker-crumbs. Ranks of mugs and dishes shatter on their  
shelves.

BRIEF CUTAWAY - INT LAHOOD'S

Lahood and Stockburn stand at the window peering toward the  
SOUND of the O.S. fusillade.

LAHOOD

Well, Marshal -- it appears you  
won't have to bother yourself  
with the Preacher.

Stockburn's expression doesn't change; he continues peering  
through the parted curtains.

STOCKBURN

(quietly)

We'll see.

RESUME INT. BLANKENSHIP'S

-- as the lethal volley peters out, and the men are SEEN through dissipating gunsmoke.

THEIR ANGLE

PANNING LENS absorbs the chaos: a mire of glass and liquid squalor...

...no sign of Gabriel.

RESUME THE MEN

as they squint, bewildered, through the smoky haze --

GABRIEL'S VOICE

(behind them)

Looking for someone?

Well, shit -- their legs turn to jelly. And as they whirl with sickly faces --

INT. LAHOOD'S - CLOSE ON STOCKBURN & LAHOOD

They stand at the window as a renewed PEAL OF GUNFIRE commences within Blankenship's like a vengeful and interminable thunder-clap. And then...

...silence.

The two men remain motionless, peering through the curtain, as CAMERA ANGLES TO SHOOT PAST THEM, LENS ZOOMING through the gauzy curtain toward the soundless, lifeless emporium across the street.

We wait.

And then a single man emerges from within.

...Gabriel.

He glances only briefly toward Lahood's place, TOWARD LENS, and then starts down the boardwalk at a leisurely pace, AWAY FROM CAMERA.

LAHOOD O.S.

(dumbfounded)

Jaeesus...

(a beat)

What the hell's he doing now?

As we WATCH, Gabriel -- having put some distance between himself and Lahood's place -- steps off the boardwalk, strides toward center-street...and stops there.

EXT. MAIN STREET - LOW ANGLE - ON GABRIEL'S FEET

as they turn to face Lahood's. A beat. Then six spent shells clatter INTO FRAME in the dust and CAMERA TILTS UP to Gabriel.

Towering OVER LENS he calmly begins reloading his pistol.

RESUME LAHOOD & STOCKBURN

as Stockburn releases the curtain, turns away from the window and quietly answers his employer's question.

STOCKBURN

He's inviting us to join him.

EXT. MAIN STREET - WITH GABRIEL

-- sliding shells into empty chambers. The soft click-click is inordinately loud in the utter stillness that prevails. A beat. And then he glances up toward:

LAHOOD'S PLACE

as the door is opened from within...and with ritual precision Stockburn's deputies emerge. Three to one side of the door... three to the other. As they had when Spider came to town, they flank the open door like phantom escorts to a ghostly leader.

And in a moment -- as when Spider came to town -- Stockburn appears between the ranks of his disciples.

ON GABRIEL

He drops his gaze to his gun, slides home the last cartridge, snaps shut the cylinder...holsters the weapon.

Now, face bathed in shadow beneath the brim of his hat, he looks across the distance separating him from Stockburn and his deputies...

...and waits.

STOCKBURN & HIS DEPUTIES

Expressionless, they stare down the street at:

GABRIEL

SEEN FROM THEIR POV as a vulnerable figure forty yards away.

STOCKBURN & HIS DEPUTIES

Silently, as if at some unspoken command, the seven men descend the steps of Lahood's building...cross the boardwalk...move onto the street.

CLOSE ON GABRIEL

Eyes narrowed, he watches the dark and disciplined platoon as --

STOCKBURN & HIS DEPUTIES

-- with the methodical rhythms of long experience they fan across the dusty street in an implacable line, facing:

GABRIEL

-- his hand resting loosely near his pistol's staghorn handle.

STOCKBURN & HIS DEPUTIES - FULL SHOT

They remain motionless for a beat. And then -- with Stockburn moving first -- they start forward down the street, a step at a time.

ON GABRIEL

as he, too, slowly advances.

ON STOCKBURN'S "ARMY"

CAMERA DOLLIES ACROSS THEIR RANKS, BACK-TRACKS with them. For the record, left to right, their names are FOLKE, GRISSOM, KOBOLD, MATHER, SEDGE, TUCKER.

And, of course:

STOCKBURN

whose hands writhe like convulsive tendrils near his gun.

TRACKING WITH GABRIEL

Languid...watchful...poised...advancing.

HIGH ANGLE - MAIN STREET

The seven men marching down Main Street. Gabriel moving toward them. Separated by thirty-five yards....

...by thirty.

...twenty-five.

At once:

DEPUTY GRISSOM

goes for his gun.

GABRIEL

draws.

STOCKBURN & HIS MEN

all draw.

SUBJECTIVE CAMERA

DOLLIES across the line of Stockburn's men as the air EXPLODES with pistol fire, LENS blinded by the billowing fumes of burnt black powder.

SUBJECTIVE CAMERA

SHOOTS past Gabriel's shoulder through the smoke of his own ROARING gun, toward the swirling black cloud that engulfs the opposition.

SUBJECTIVE CAMERA

HOLDS on Stockburn and his men as, their last bullets spent, they stop firing -- the CAMERA'S VIEW restored as the gunsmoke

Revealing Stockburn, Sedge, Kobold, and Folke still standing.  
Grissom, Mather, and Tucker are dead.

But:

STOCKBURN'S ANGLE

Gabriel can no longer be seen. Only his hat reposes in the dust.

STOCKBURN

He reacts with a cynical, knowledgeable smile. Briefly surveying his casualties -- like a general on a battlefield -- he shucks his spent brass and, reloading --

STOCKBURN

(a terse command)

Fan out. Find him.

Reloading their pistols, the deputies deploy as bidden.

AWAY TO:

EXT. OPEN COUNTRYSIDE - MEGAN - DAY

Atop Hull's buckboard, she careens across the lowlands at break-neck speed. As she races PAST LENS --

BACK TO:

TOWN - HIGH ANGLE

A preternatural silence engulfs Lahood, California, as if the town had been afflicted with the Plague.

ON MAIN STREET

Gabriel's hat still reposes in the dust, F.G., while in B.G. Deputy Sedge moves stealthily AWAY FROM CAMERA down a narrow alley between a pair of two-story buildings -- the most logical route for Gabriel to have taken.

WITH SEDGE

as he advances warily TOWARD LENS along the narrow defile between the buildings, the CAMERA DOLLYING BACK to disclose an open side door in one of the clapboard walls.

As if touched by a gentle breeze, the door moves slightly on its hinges.

But there is no breeze.

SEdge

His eyes fix on the door. He knows who lurks just behind it.

Fanning the hammer of his pistol, he empties it into the door:  
BLAMBLAMBLAMBLAMBLAMBLAM!!!!

THE DOOR

-- recoils on its hinges, its center portion blown away in a profusion of splinters.

RESUME SEDGE

as, quickly shucking his shells and reloading, he cautiously advances to the door, the CAMERA GOING WITH HIM.

At the threshold CAMERA STOPS -- and Sedge steps into the dark interior, OUT OF SHOT.

We wait.

And then a single shot REVERBERATES from within.

...and Sedge staggers backward through the door, into the sunlight. He remains erect for a moment -- a look of profound surprise on his face -- then he tumbles in a twisted heap. AS CAMERA PUSHES IN we SEE the bullet-hole between his lifeless eyes.

EXT. MAIN STREET - STOCKBURN

Oddly silent, oddly motionless, he merely looks in the direction of the ECHO of the shot.

Meanwhile:

DEPUTY KOBOLD

scuttles INTO VIEW around a corner, pistol drawn. He pulls up, staring O.S. -- CAMERA WITHDRAWS FAST to include Sedge's body lying sprawled in the dust.

Kobold hurries on, PAST LENS.

FULL SHOT - LIVERY STABLE

The huge barnlike structure squats across a side-street, black bay doors gaping.

As we WATCH, Gabriel slips inside.

HOLD...then WHIP-PAN to Kobold as he spots Gabriel disappearing inside the stable and with a cunning grin hurries noiselessly after him.

FROM INSIDE THE STABLE

Kobold is SEEN approaching -- darting finally into the darkened interior, pressing up against a wall in the shadows as his eyes rake the place.

PANNING THE STABLE'S INTERIOR - KOBOLD'S POV

We SEE a massive sepulchre of shadows punctuated by thin rays of light which drift through chinks in the roof. A barn swallow peeps...horses munch contentedly in their stalls...tresses of alfalfa stream from the loft like maiden's hair.

No sign of Gabriel.

RESUME KOBOLD

He frowns uncertainly, looks toward --

THE TACK ROOM

Just inside the stable door and across the way from where he stands, the tack-room is a three-walled space in which a mess of saddlery drips from wooden pegs. Amongst the gear and SEEN AS LENS ZOOMS IN, is a shotgun resting on a shelf.

CLOSE SHOT - IN THE TACK ROOM

Kobold's hands thrust phantomlike INTO FRAME, remove the shotgun from its shelf -- grab the box of shells beside it.

The weapon's breech is well-oiled, makes hardly a sound as Kobold breaks it open. Sliding a shell into each of the barrels, he snaps it shut...pulls back both hammers...

AND IN A SERIES OF SHOTS

he lays down **BLAST AFTER BLAST**, the butt-plate slamming at his shoulder as he darts from post to shadowed post. His proficiency is such that there is hardly a pause between one salvo and the next: he loads and fires with lethal expertise, and no potential hiding-place escapes destruction. The charges rip into loft, hay-ricks and stalls -- the horses pitch and scream: no hidden man could avoid their wild hooves. The pellets rip 50-pound bags of feet apart in a deluge of cats, while rotten timbers overhead are snapped and hay cascades **PAST LENS** in waves. A pellet-riddled rat crawls **OUT OF VIEW**; and when at last his last shell is fired --

KOBOLD

stands just inside the tack-room, a motionless centurion... apparently triumphant.

Silence.

Then, as he reaches out to return the shotgun to the shelf --

SHOCK CUT

as if from nowhere, a twin-bladed axe whirs savagely TOWARD LENS.

KOBOLD

has only time to gape before --

LOW ANGLE

-- his severed arm flops limply to the earth, the shotgun clutched in the lifeless fist.

And as Kobold's scream rends the air --

AWAY TO:

STOCKBURN

A granite eminence, his eyes -- and only his eyes -- flick in the direction from which we HEAR his deputy's protracted death-cry. :

BRIEF CUT - LAHCOD IN HIS OFFICE

pair of stiff whiskies.

BACK TO:

INT. LIVERY STABLE - FULL SHOT

as -- emerging from the shadows -- Gabriel steps over Kobold's writhing body and, gun drawn, moves toward the big stable doors.

SUBJECTIVE CAMERA

SHOOTS ALONG THE SIGHTS of Deputy Folke's pistol, TOWARD Gabriel as he appears some forty yards away -- in the stable doorway.

The pistol fires.

ON GABRIEL

The slug splinters wood an inch from his face and he whirls, throws himself inside the stable, presses himself against the interior wall.

In a moment he peers tentatively out, trying to pin-point the location of the sole remaining deputy.

SUBJECTIVE CAMERA

AGAIN SHOOTS DOWN THE SIGHTS of Folke's pistol, toward Gabriel who is briefly glimpsed inside the stable.

The pistol fires again.

RESUME GABRIEL

as the bullet kicks up splinters, missing him by a hair's-breadth. He pivots inside.

Effectively pinned down, he finds a chink between two upright timbers of the stable wall, peers through this slit to locate his antagonist.

EFFECT SHOT

LENS SCANS GABRIEL'S POV through the slit. We SEE the windowless back wall of a clapboard building...next to it, a skinny picket fence...in front of the fence a watering trough...then another windowless brick wall belonging to the bank.

No sign of the gunman.

RESUME GABRIEL

He frowns -- can't figure out where Folke is concealed -- peers through the slit a second time.

And then it occurs to him.

FULL SHOT - STABLE DOOR

as Gabriel steps into full VIEW and empties his pistol PAST LENS -- BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM!! -- toward:

THE WATERING TROUGH

The six slugs smash through the side of the trough in a rhythmic horizontal pattern stitched across the length of it.

Punctured, the trough disgorges six identical streams of clear water. And then, in a grotesque transformation...

CLOSE SHOT

...the water runs crimson.

SUBMERGED IN THE TROUGH

Folke's body -- pistol still clutched in a dying hand -- is a gruesome wraith beneath the surface of the bloodied water.

GABRIEL

slowly unwinds, the last of the deputies killed.

Only one man remains.

STOCKBURN - EXT. MAIN STREET

His face inscrutable, implacable. He squints down-street in the direction of the gunfire.

A long moment passes.

And then --

LOW ANGLE - CLOSE SHOT - GABRIEL'S HAT

As before, it reposes in the middle of the street. A beat.

Then Gabriel's hand comes INTO SHOT and picks it up.

CAMERA TILTS UP. Gabriel towers OVER LENS.

Replacing the hat on his head he lifts his pistol, flips open the cylinder and shucks his empties in the dusty silence, his eyes on:

STOCKBURN - GABRIEL'S POV

SEEN outside Blankenship's emporium, some fifty yards away.

CLOSE SHOT - STOCKBURN

His face is suddenly transformed. A grin of raw sardonic evil permeates his eyes. Pulling his pistol from its holster he spins the cylinder to check its loads, then glances back at:

GABRIEL - STOCKBURN'S POV

He stands in mid-street, his face shadowed by his hat as he reloads his .44.

FULL OVERHEAD SHOT - STOCKBURN & GABRIEL

Both men are motionless. The soft click-click of each shell inserted in Gabriel's gun is magnified by the utter stillness...

...it is the only SOUND.

And ultimately it stops. Gabriel snaps shut the cylinder.

He is ready.

STOCKBURN

slowly crosses to the center of the street. His left hand -- the one not holding his gun -- twists and writhes as if to devour itself with psychic famine.

Arriving mid-street, he pauses.

HIS POV - GABRIEL

separated from him by a flat and dusty fifty yards marred only by the lifeless forms of Mather, Grissom, Tucker.

CLOSE ON GABRIEL

Like Stockburn, he holds his pistol loosely at his side. Features darkened by the shadow of his hat, he waits.

And waits.

And waits...

...until:

STOCKBURN

slowly starts forward, one ritual step at a time.

GABRIEL

advances toward him.

LOW ANGLE - STOCKBURN

Moving forward, looming OVER LENS.

LOW ANGLE - GABRIEL

A silhouette against the silent clouds, he passes OVER CAMERA.

Both men appear twelve feet tall.

FULL SIDE-ANGLE SHOT

as one man ENTERS SHOT FROM EACH SIDE OF FRAME and they come to a halt. No more than twenty yards apart. Against the dusty, weathered, soulless false-front stores of Main Street.

CLOSE ON STOCKBURN

His tension radiates like heat from the embers of hell.

CLOSE ON GABRIEL

Motionless -- his face unseen beneath the brim of his hat.

STOCKBURN

Motionless. And then --

-- he lifts his gun. But simultaneously:

GABRIEL

lifts his head -- and as the sun in all its brilliance illuminates his face --

STOCKBURN

freezes. The LENS SNAPS IN on his face.

STOCKBURN

(hushed - horrified)

...You...!!!

ON GABRIEL

as CAMERA PUSHES IN on his eyes and he directs at Stockburn the look which had frozen Josh Lahood's hand on its way to his gun -- the look which he had turned on Coy Lahood as well.

STOCKBURN'S GUN WAVERS

And a desperate pallor suffuses his features as he fires in panic.

But in his fatal hesitation --

GABRIEL

raises his gun and fires five times with coruscating speed: a burst of gunfire that RESOUNDS from the buildings, BOOMING back and forth and rising like a drum-roll or the beat of wings.

CLOSE ON STOCKBURN

Gabriel's bullets rip a perfect eight-inch circle pattern in his chest.

And before he can fall --

GABRIEL

fires one last shot.

STOCKBURN

A perfectly round hole appears in his forehead; the back of his head blows away and --

-- he falls.

A beat. And then --

LOW ANGLE - GABRIEL'S FEET

Empty brass clatters to the dust. TILT UP. Gabriel looms OVER LENS, calmly reloads while his eyes never leave --

STOCKBURN

spread-eagle in the dust, face up, his shirt stained scarlet with the circular pattern of Gabriel's bullets -- his hands inert and pale and relaxed at last.

GABRIEL

closes the cylinder, holsters his gun, turns on his heel and -- amid the crushing silence which envelopes the street -- walks toward his horse.

INT. LAHOOD'S OFFICE - LAHOOD - DAY

Sunlight through the curtain of the office window falls across Lahood's ashen face as his gaze marks Gabriel's movement toward the horse.

LENS TILTS SLOWLY DOWN...to Lahood's right hand.

It holds a blue-black Derringer.

And as the tiny weapon rises purposively OUT OF SHOT --

RESUME GABRIEL

as he reaches his horse and puts a foot in the stirrup --

-- pauses.

And looks toward:

LAHOOD'S OFFICE WINDOW - HIS POV

We SEE the gentle motion of the curtain with the presence

of the man within.

GABRIEL

Merely looks at it.

INSIDE THE OFFICE - LOW ANGLE

...with its opulent furnishings, its rich Persian rug. Lahood and the window are O.S. A long beat.

BLAM!!! A single shot resounds within the office, and the smoking Derringer falls INTO FRAME in MED. F.G.

...followed by the tyrant's body. Lahood is dead.

RESUME GABRIEL

as he smoothly gains the saddle, flicks the reins.

AWAY TO:

THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN - WITH MEGAN

White lather flecks her horse's neck as she guides the swerving buckboard toward the outermost buildings of town.

ON MAIN STREET - PANNING SHOT

as, one by one or in small frightened groups, the citizens emerge from hiding like survivors of a storm -- peer from doorways toward the carnage in the dust.

SEVERAL CUTS

The dead. Mather. Grissom. Tucker. Stockburn.

NEW ANGLE - DOWN MAIN STREET

as Megan's buckboard hurtles INTO VIEW around a corner, swiftly gains F.G. where she vaults down. Her eyes sweep the faces of the citizens.

MEGAN

Where is he?

Still in shock, the citizens stare at her -- make no reply.

MEGAN

Where is he?

BLANKENSHIP

Where is who, child?

ANGLE WIDENS as the storekeeper steps INTO SHOT beside her.

MEGAN

The Preacher!

BLANKENSHIP

He's gone.

He shakes his head with finality. Distraught, Megan whirls, eyes raking the street.

SEVERAL CUTS

The citizens. The corpses. No sign of Gabriel.

BACK TO MEGAN & BLANKENSHIP

as she spins to the buckboard, starts to clamber up --

BLANKENSHIP

Child -- !

She pauses, turning to him.

BLANKENSHIP

(a gentle admonition)

Look at your horse, all lathered up like that. You ride him any more, you'll kill him. He needs a rest.

(a beat)

The Preacher's gone, child.

Turning, he moves slowly back toward his emporium -- leaves Megan standing there. Small. Alone. Betrayed and near tears.

Glancing around, she becomes aware of the many eyes that stare at her. A beat. Then, stiffening with pride, fighting back her tears...

MEGAN

No, he's not -- not really.

She takes the horse's reins, begins to walk the animal back down the street, the buckboard empty in the traces. CAMERA TRACKS...

In a moment her gaze lifts -- toward the distant slopes of the Sierras.

MEGAN

Preacher!

CAMERA TRACKS IN CLOSE-UP, hope and inspiration lending a golden luster to her voice...

MEGAN

(a shout)

I'm setting you free, Preacher!

The ECHO of her cry resounds throughout the street.

MEGAN

I'm setting you free!

Her joy does battle with her sorrow. Of the citizens she passes, she is oblivious.

MEGAN

I love you, Preacher!

(a beat)

Goodbye!

CAMERA CRANES UP, LENS TILTING toward the edge of town and the foothills beyond...encompassing the forested slopes... and even further in the distance, the high white peaks of the Sierras...

MEGAN'S VOICE

(to herself)

He'll come back. If I pray for him, he will come back.

DISSOLVE THRU TO:

CLOSER SHOT - LONG LENS - SIERRAS

Swirling mists and radiant sunlight play on snow-clad slopes and -- in the distance -- a single horseman can be SEEN ascending: glimpsed, now hidden by ephemeral clouds, now SEEN again as he regains the silent and eternal fortress of the heavens...

MEGAN'S VOICE

(continuing)

If I ever need him again; I'll just pray for a miracle...

(a beat)

He'll hear me.

FADE OUT.

THE END