

The High Lonesome

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OVER BLACK SCREEN:

A MOCKINGBIRD SINGS. Sweetly. Until a shrill whistle overpowers it as a shell explodes and men scream.

EXT. REBEL ARTILLERY - SEMINARY RIDGE - GETTYSBURG - DAY

Rows of cannon bombard the Union positions ahead. Over one hundred big guns firing at once. The ground throbs.

Massed in the woods beyond, Pickett's Rebel infantry fix bayonets. One GRIM REB watches as a rabbit bolts from its hole and bounds back beyond the lines.

GRIM REB
Run, rabbit, run!
(to himself)
If'n I was a rabbit, I'd run,
too...

Another row of cannon belch fire, and we're suddenly...

HIGH IN THE AIR

Headed toward the Union positions. We seem to float a moment before a breathtaking descent to:

EXT. CEMETERY RIDGE - GETTYSBURG - DAY

A stone wall provides little cover as several Union men are blown to bits by the Confederate shell. Beyond, Union cannons respond in kind. The sound splits the air. A LIEUTENANT moves low, passes out cotton wadding.

LIEUTENANT
Genuine Confederate cotton, boys.

HOLD ON two of his men as they stuff the cotton in their ears. JOHN BOWMAN YOUNG and LEWIS HART. A shell bursts in the trees overhead. As splinters rain down on them...

LEWIS
When's it going to stop, John?!

JOHN
Can't say, Lewis!
(looks up)
This is no Presbyterian rain!
It's a genuine Baptist downpour!

CUT TO:

EXT. COBBLESTONED STREET BOSTON'S BEACON HILL - DAY

The RAIN POURS down as John Bowman Young huddles in a doorway. A student. John looks across the way to another doorway where:

MARY DEACON POWELL

Waits out the rain as well. There's a fire in her eyes the rain can't touch. She peers out, waiting for a break.

JOHN

Holding his breath until...

JOHN
And I believe I'm drowning...

COBBLESTONED STREET

Mary sees her chance, runs for it. John watches her disappear around a corner, then takes off after her.

STREET CORNER

John rounds the corner, stops. The shower intensifies; Mary is nowhere in sight. With a sigh, he backs into a second doorway and finds himself standing right beside her.

MARY
It's dreadful.

John can only nod. But it's anything but dreadful.

MARY
I only need to go another block.
You?

JOHN
Miles...

Suddenly inspired, John pulls off his coat, holds it up over both of them.

JOHN
Come on!

MARY
Where?

JOHN
Wherever you're going.

Laughing, they makes a dash through the rain. A few moments and they find themselves across from...

A BEACON HILL MANSION

Politely seething money.

JOHN
Do you work here?

MARY
I live here. It's my parent's house.

John is a bit overwhelmed by it. She studies his handsome face a beat, smiles.

MARY
I hope you find her.

JOHN
Who?

MARY
(she knows)
Whoever you were looking for.

She makes a run for it, looks back just before she disappears.

MARY
My name is Mary!

John watches after her, entranced. Until... a shell whistles down, EXPLODES into the cobblestones behind him.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY RIDGE - GETTYSBURG - DAY

And we're jolted back to reality. Men scream as the debris from the shell settles to earth. Lewis is scared.

LEWIS
When will it stop! Seconds are years! Minutes are centuries!

JOHN
Like being in love.

Lewis looks at his friend a beat, jolted out of his fear by the absurdity of the statement. And as Lewis manages to smile, the shelling suddenly stops. It takes them a moment to realize. As they pull the cotton from their ears...

LEWIS

It's over.

Then, a collective gasp goes down the line.

Beyond, across the field, 13,000 MEN emerge from the woods. In a line silently advancing, moving as one, preceded by a gleaming thicket of fixed bayonets.

A GENERAL rides down the Union line.

GENERAL

Let them come up close before you fire, men, and then aim slow.

Lewis prefers the shelling. John is 'transfixed.

LEWIS

Look at that. Would you?

JOHN

It's beautiful...

ANGLE ACROSS THE BAYONETS

The sun glints and gleams and they transform into:

CHANDELIER CRYSTALS

Above a Boston Society Ball. The women in gowns, the men in tails. All except John who still wears a rather plain black jacket. He watches as Mary dances with ALFRED ROEBLING, a young, rich Boston dandy. She looks over his shoulder, smiles back at John.

It's not lost on TEMPLE ROEBLING, Alfred's father. He steps up alongside John.

ROEBLING

She's a beautiful girl Mary Deacon Powell.

JOHN

Yes, sir, Mr. Roebling, she is.

ROEBLING

She'll make my son a fine wife.

JOHN

Do they have plans to marry?

ROEBLING

Of course. I just haven't told them yet.

Again, she looks over at John.

ROEBLING

And you, John? Any plans for marriage?

JOHN

(watching Mary)

I'm afraid my ambitions don't match my wallet.

ROEBLING

Oh, but they could.

That gets John's attention.

ROEBLING

Twelve thousand five hundred Christian men lost at Fredricksburg: A fearful slaughter, don't you think?

JOHN

Yes. Unimaginable if it hadn't happened a dozen times already.

ROEBLING

And where will the replacements come from? A federal draft is certainly on the horizon. Privileged men such as my son Alfred will be allowed to find a substitute, a man willing to fight in his place. A good man who will represent him on the battlefield. A man who would be remunerated most handsomely.

John waits for more. The music fades leaving only Roebing's smooth oily voice.

ROEBLING

Four thousand dollars. Money I would personally be willing to invest for such a man. Money which would be worth ten times as much by war's end.

John turns to watch Mary. God, she's beautiful. Roebling continues, but John isn't listening.

And then Alfred and Mary are there: Alfred breathing heavily, Mary ready for more.

MARY

The reel is still playing, Alfred.

ALFRED

But I'm exhausted. It's like marching down to Virginia.

MARY

John? Will you march with me?

She offers her hand; John takes it. They dance. Alfred could care less, but it's quite important to his father.

MARY & JOHN

They swirl and whirl, looking nowhere but at each other.

JOHN

There are lilacs in the air.

MARY

It's my perfume.

JOHN

It's your magic.

And as she falls laughing back into his arms and becomes...

LEWIS HART

Shot through the throat, falling back in John's arms as the Confederate infantry charges.

John lowers his friend to the ground. Blood gushes as Lewis grips his friend one last time with the strength of a man who knows he's dying.

LEWIS

Oh God... Oh God...

By the time Lewis's hand opens back up, he's dead. There's no place but rocks to rest his head. John pulls something from inside his jacket: his BIBLE. He sets it under Lewis's head. As blood soaks into the pages...

John fires his rifle, cutting down an enemy soldier not ten yards ahead. As he bites down to open another cartridge with his teeth:

CUT TO:

INT. TEMPLE ROEBLING'S OFFICE - BOSTON - DAY

John moistens the tip of a pen with his tongue. Roebling watches as John signs his name to a contract. John Bowman Young. \$4,000 in GOLD rests on the desk between them.

JOHN
(re: gold)
Invest it well.

ROEBLING
After this war is over, if
you're not dead, you may be a
relatively wealthy man.

Roebling takes the pen, as he sets the tip in its holder:

CUT TO:

A BAYONET

Thrusts through the air toward John's chest. Three inches of blade disappear into the blue wool uniform jacket.

John screams as the Grim Reb we saw earlier jerks the bayonet back loose. As he moves for a second strike, John raises his pistol and fires point blank into Grim's face.

CEMETERY RIDGE

Pickett's charge has reached the wall. The fighting, the fury, the carnage, is Biblical. You half expect to hear Joshua blow his trumpet. As men slaughter men...

A wounded John does his share. Emptying a pistol, he hits an empty chamber with an OMINOUS CLICK. Then...

A blood curdling REBEL YELL as a peach-fuzzed 17-year-old fires from five yards away. Hit in the side, John staggers, almost falls. As he looks back up...

MARY

Is standing across from him. Wearing her Sunday best, unaware of the battle raging around her.

MARY

I don't want the world, John.
The only thing I want is for you
not to go. The only thing I
want... is you.

JOHN

I'll be back before you know it.

She takes a LOCKET from her neck, opens it to show him a
LOCK OF HER HAIR. As she puts it around his neck...

MARY

Take this. I'll be with you.

She's gone in a passing cloud of black smoke, replaced by
half a dozen GRAY SOLDIERS who seem to swarm right at him.

John drops to his knees unwittingly revealing the mouth of
a cannon looming behind him.

As John fingers the locket at his throat...

JOHN

May God have mercy on my --

The cannon roars just above and over John's head, cutting
down the Confederates like a scythe. A dreamy SLOW MOTION
as John falls to his left out of frame.

FADE TO BLACK.

And a suddenly peaceful silence. War, love, life, it all
might as well be a million miles away. Maybe we're in the
grave. Maybe the black is the earth. Maybe...

A FACE

Looms into frame. A UNION BOY. Looking right at us. A
big sloppy grin on his face. He opens his mouth and yells
something. Seems like good news, but we can't hear it.
The silence still rules.

JOHN BOWMAN YOUNG

Lies back in the leaves where he fell. Eyes blinking.
He's awake. He's alive. And then the Union boy and his
COMPATRIOT heave him up onto a stretcher.

John looks to his left: Union soldiers pound each other on
the back, cheer in celebration. At least that's the way it
looks. They're not making a sound.

John looks to his right: Lewis lies dead on the ground, the blood soaked Bible still tucked under his head.

John looks up: into the tree branches passing overhead. The leaves move in the breeze, but again don't make a sound. Not even a rustle.

John finally puts his hand to his ear, brings his fingertips back bloody. The cannon blew his eardrums out. John Bowman Young is deaf.

He slumps back in the litter, carried out across the battlefield until we lose him among the dozens, the hundreds of stretchers being hauled silently to and fro.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MILITARY CEMETERY - GETTYSBURG - DAY

Thousands of simple wooden crosses stand in rows, a dead army at attention once again.

SUPER: Four months later.

A simple wooden platform is under construction. Silence still reigns until a CARPENTER brings a hammer down on the head of a nail. Bang, bang, bang... What's being built, we're not sure, but noise has returned to the world.

EXT. FIELD HOSPITAL TENT - GETTYSBURG - DAY

Orderlies, nurses, doctors come and go. There's a buzz of excitement in the air.

INT. FIELD HOSPITAL TENT - GETTYSBURG - DAY

Full of amputees and other badly wounded men who've somehow managed to find a way to survive.

Bare chested, John lies in bed staring up at an ORDERLY who's shouting something down at him. But we're in John's world now. The words can't be heard, although there is a dull throb to them.

The wounds on his chest and side are now purple welts. The real damage is between his ears. Sound makes a return:

ORDERLY

You've been discharged! You can
go home! DIS-CHARGED!

A DOCTOR steps up, regards the Orderly with disgust.

DOCTOR

He's deaf. Screaming at him
won't help.

The orderly shrugs, moves on. The doctor smiles at John, hands him an official looking paper. John scans it. It bears his name and especially boldly: Honorably discharged. And under reason: Deafness in both ears.

John looks up to the doctor, asks a little too loudly:

JOHN

This mean I can go?

The doctor nods. John stands, immediately pulls on a shirt and starts to gather his things in a bedroll. The doctor watches with genuine compassion.

DOCTOR

The world will be a much
different place for you now,
John. I've written some things
down for you.

He holds out an envelope. Finished packing his things, John finally is aware of it. He hesitates, then takes the letter. He looks at the doctor a beat, then turns and starts down the row of wounded men.

LINCOLN'S VOICE

Four score and seven years ago
our fathers brought forth on
this continent a new nation.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODEN PLATFORM - MILITARY CEMETERY - DAY

Six thousand people watch ABRAHAM LINCOLN make the
Gettysburg Address.

LINCOLN

Conceived in liberty, and
dedicated to the proposition
that all men are created equal.

CLOSE ON LINCOLN

He continues his speech, but no sound comes out. Just lips moving, eyes full of grief and a face worn with care.

JOHN

Passing by with his bedroll, he's stopped for a beat. Lincoln's speech has no meaning for him. The hush of the crowd may as well be a roar. The looks on the faces of the people as they listen means nothing.

Finally John turns and starts across the cemetery, more at home with the dead than he could ever be with the living. Headed east if we had a compass. And as he continues on, leaving Gettysburg behind, the words finally bleed back in.

LINCOLN

...that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

A campfire crackles: an owl hoots. John Young sits by a fire in the middle of nowhere reading the LETTER the doctor gave him. We hear his voice as he reads to himself.

JOHN'S VOICE

The world is changed. Music is lost as are simple natural sounds. Words are lost as well, but not their meaning. You must learn to read lips; learn to compensate. Your ears may be sensitive to vibrations; they may retain an awareness. Your other senses: smell, touch, sight, will be strengthened. Still there may be moments of despair. For this, Corporal Young, go home and seek out the ones you love.

John lowers the letter, pokes at the fire with the stick. Sparks shoot up. In a reverie, John speaks a single word:

JOHN

Mary...

As the precious name travels up with the sparks...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. OLD SLOCUM ROAD - OUTSIDE BOSTON - DAY

Black regiments of the 54th Massachusetts march down the road. 1000's of them in crisp formation. Singing, their voices raised up, feet pounding the rhythm.

54TH SOLDIERS

Mine eyes have seen the glory of
the coming of the Lord. He is
trampling out the vintage where
the grapes of wrath are stored...

Along a ditch off the side of the road, bedroll slung over his shoulder, one man walks against the flow: John Young, his destiny now leading away from the war. As we rise up looking out at the city before us...

CUT TO:

EXT. BOSTON - DAY

A world away from the war raging down South. Garlands decorate the doorways. A WOMAN wrestles a goose out of a butcher's shop. A MAN moves to help her to a waiting cart.

WOMAN

Thank you, sir.

MAN

A joyous thanksgiving, ma'am.

Thanksgiving as John arrives home. He walks with purpose. Stops across from the BANK OF BOSTON.

CUT TO:

INT. BANK OF BOSTON - DAY

Silence. John stands alone at a teller window. Across the way, the TELLER consults with the BANK MANAGER. They cast an occasional glance John's way. John shifts nervously. The manager approaches, gives John a phony smile and starts talking. His lips move, but silence comes out. Finally John raises both hands for the manager to stop.

JOHN

I want my money.

BANK MANAGER

I'm sorry, but I'm having
difficulty finding a record of
\$4,000 under your name. Perhaps
you could come back on Monday.

All that John understands is that the manager is pointing to the door. John loses his temper.

JOHN
Temple Roebing has my money! I
want to speak to Temple Roebing!

BANK MANAGER
Temple Roebing is dead.

The manager motions to a BANK GUARD already on the way.

EXT. BANK OF BOSTON - DAY

John is shoved out the door by that guard and a SECOND ONE. As he stares back, bitterness and the desperation grow.

CUT TO:

EXT. BEACON HILL - BOSTON - DAY

You wouldn't know there was a war going on up here. John stands across the street, frozen, not sure what to do. Then he sees her. Mary. Exiting the house, a SERVANT giving her a hand into a carriage.

John holds his breath. Watches. As the carriage rolls away, he moves to follow it.

EXT. BOSTON PUBLIC GARDENS - DAY

Summer lush. The carriage clatters along; John struggles not to lose sight of it. At last it stops. Mary gets out. Once again John is taken with the sight of her. Suddenly, he seems resolved to go to her. He moves forward.

MARY

Walking with a kind of purpose. Seeing someone. Waving. Hurrying forward.

She meets up with Alfred Roebing. He touches her shoulder, kisses her cheek.

JOHN

Slows, stops. Confused, unsure. Then he moves closer.

MARY & ALFRED

Walking. He takes her arm as they move.

MARY

Gettysburg was nearly five months ago and no word!

ALFRED

There was the letter saying he had been wounded.

MARY

But no letter from John!
Nothing from John...

JOHN

He's walking up behind them now, forty feet, then thirty feet away. Of course, he hears nothing. Their lips move. It seems an intimate conversation.

ALFRED & MARY

MARY

They say more men die in the hospitals than on the battlefields.

ALFRED

We would have heard.

MARY

(distracted)

Maybe he's dying now. Maybe he's been dying all this time. While I walk in gardens.

ALFRED

Oh, Mary...

Drained, Mary takes hold of his hands.

JOHN

Stops. Watches in disbelief. We're in his silent world as he sees Alfred's mouth move, Alfred wiping a strand of hair from her forehead, Alfred kissing her cheek. Finally, she collapses in his arms. As Alfred holds her to his chest...

The two men's eyes meet.

It takes Alfred a moment to recognize John. A moment more to see John has misinterpreted things. John stumbles away half-blind as well as deaf. Confused, but not stupid, Alfred turns Mary the other way.

ALFRED

The day's too beautiful to cry.
Let's walk.

With a look over his shoulder, Alfred leads her away.

JOHN

Barely watches where he's going. He never sees the...

CARRIAGE

Looming to his left. A woman SCREAMS. The driver shouts out. Rearing back, the horses make a godawful sound. And as John finally reacts, so does...

MARY

Turning at the sounds. Seeing...

MARY

John?

JOHN

And as he sees her, he turns and moves on.

MARY

Mary can't quite believe her eyes.

MARY

John!

She takes off after him. Alfred doesn't know what to do.

ALFRED

Mary!

BOSTON PUBLIC GARDENS

John half runs, half stumbles. Mary follows, can't quite close the gap.

MARY
 John! John, wait!
 (a few more steps)
 John, please! I --

Though shouted, the 'love you' is silent as we enter John's world. Just a dull throb of pain as he pushes his way into the crowd, doing everything he can to get away. From her. From the angry faces and silent curses of those he bumps into. And suddenly, he's gone. Swallowed up.

MARY

She stops short, casts about for a glance, but he's gone. She stands there a broken beat. Asks softly...

MARY
 Where are you?

And as Alfred steps up...

ALFRED
 Here. I'm here.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FLAMES - NIGHT

Fire twists and turns, flames dancing around each other. Within, words are burning. Words on parchment paper. In the doctor's strong cursive:

go home and seek out the ones you love

The flames consume till we are left with:

the ones you love

And finally the simple word:

love

And as that too finally burns and is gone...

CUT TO:

INT. BLACKSMITH'S FORGE - DAY

A hammer clanks, sparks fly as a wagon wheel hoop is pounded out by the SMITHY. His bicep bulges just like the nation he's helping to settle. And suddenly we're moving away and down the main street of...

INSERT: Independence, Missouri 1866

Gateway to the West. We pass stables, emporiums housing harness makers, wheelwrights, every craftsmen needed to outfit an expedition across country. There are hotels, barbershops, barrooms and huge drygoods stores.

Everywhere, haggling, trading, and outfitting going on.

MERCHANT

Now that this damn fool war is over we can go back to making money headin' folks west.

A very plain-looking John Young makes his way down the street. Wearing canvas pants and a flat cap, a pair of leather gloves shoved in his back pocket. Moving easily, the aches and pains of his war wounds no longer apparent. He's on his way somewhere.

A SETTLER sizes John for a local, steps in front of him.

SETTLER

Excuse me, fella, could you tell me where I might --

John avoids eye contact, tries to move around him. The settler sidesteps with him.

SETTLER

A little decency, mister, I just need to know where I can find --

And John is holding up a business-sized CARD. The Settler stops to read: I am deaf.

The settler shoves a hand in his pocket, comes back with a couple of nickels.

SETTLER

Here.

He tries to hand them to John who finally makes eye contact with him. He sure as hell doesn't want any nickels. Shoving the card back in his pocket, John continues on his way. The settler watches after him a beat.

SETTLER

Didn't mean no harm...

CUT TO:

EXT. RAIL SPUR - INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI - DAY

Running behind one of the big drygoods stores. Dozens of freight cars wait in line to be unloaded. Barrels, bales and crates onto pallets, handtrucks and wagons.

John works loading BARRELS OF BEER. They're piled high onto several large waiting wagons. A young man (YANCY) taps John on the shoulder, motions it's time to go.

CUT TO:

EXT MAIN STREET - INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI - DAY

John sits up on the wagon beside Yancy. As they pass a wagon train headed out...

YANCY

Crazy, isn't it? Me and you, full o'life, young men, sending married fellas and old men off on the great adventure west. Irony! That's it. Wish you could hear me, John, I know you'd have an opinion on it.

The wagon lurches to a stop across from:

EXT. THE THREE PISTOLS SALOON - INDEPENDENCE - DAY

The beer's final destination. John and Yancy hop down from the wagon. As John starts to pull on his gloves, the BURLY OWNER and two of his SURLY BARTENDERS step out to meet them. One of them carries a mug, the other a tap.

YANCY

(to Owner)

Howdy, Mr. Burlington.

BURLY OWNER

Don't howdy me, boy. This beer fresh?

YANCY

Yes, sir.

The owner looks to John who's starting to uncinch the load.

BURLY OWNER

Hang on till I check.

John keeps working. The owner's on a short fuse.

BURLY OWNER

Hey!

YANCY

Oh, Mr. Burlington --

BURLY OWNER
 (steps forward)
 What are ya! Deaf!

The owner grabs John by the shoulder, spins him around.

BURLY OWNER
 I said --

We're in John's world as the owner's mouth gapes, but no sound comes out -- just fury and spittle. As John passes a sleeve across his cheek...

YANCY
 He is deaf, sir.

BURLY OWNER
 That figures cause you are one
dumb sonuvabitch.

The owner motions to surly one who uses a mallet to tap one of the kegs. Surly two holds out the glass which quickly fills with suds.

The owner takes a big couple of gulps, swishes the last one, then spits it onto Yancy's boots.

BURLY OWNER
 Unacceptable. Take it away.

Yancy hems and haws a beat, then finds a spark of courage.

YANCY
 It's your beer, sir. We can stack it here or we can bring it inside. That's an additional charge, but we'd be happy to --

Without warning, the owner pulls a PISTOL, begins firing into the barrels. BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! That's what it sounds like to everyone but John who hears a dull thud.

People on the street scream, Yancy ducks. Only John stands like nothing's happening. The owner looks down to Yancy.

BURLY OWNER
 My place is the three pistols.
 (hefts gun)
 This is one of 'em.

He hauls Yancy up.

BURLY OWNER
 Unless you personally want to
 see the other two, get this
 wagon movin'!

YANCY
 Yes, sir!

As Yancy scrambles up behind the reins, John just stares at the owner.

BURLY OWNER
 You really are deaf, aren't you?
 You sorry sack of horse manure.
 Go on...

He cups his hands behind his ears, flutters his fingers.

BURLY OWNER
 Flap your ears outta here.

Laughing, slapping each other on the back, Burly and the two Surlies disappear inside The Three Pistols.

Matter-of-factly, without apparent rancor, John takes his work knife from his back pocket, cuts the rope.

As he yanks down on the sideboard release...

It's a hundred barrels of beer on the wall! The kegs drop to the ground, rumble toward the Three Pistols.

INT. THREE PISTOLS - DAY

The owner looks back as the first barrel smashes back the two swinging doors. As a dozen more smash through the big picture window. Burly and the surlies go down as another twenty roar in. As the place is flattened...

INT. THE THREE PISTOLS - DAY

John calmly climbs into the wagon alongside Yancy. Yancy starts to say something then stops. Finally, he shrugs, gives the team a chuck and they're on their way.

YANCY
 You definitely lost your job.
 Pity is you ain't gonna know the
 satisfaction of quittin'.

CUT TO:

EXT. WAGON TRAIN BIVOUAC - INDEPENDENCE - DAY

Chaos. A huge convoy of wagons is preparing to head west. Some are already moving. Teams are hitched. Tents struck.

John sits on a rock and watches it all. Yearning to be moving. Unable to be a part of anything beyond himself. He reaches into his pocket, unfolds a creased FLYER:

Help settle our nation! Wanted! Able-bodied young men to go West. Own 100+ acres of farmland at reasonable interest rates. Now is the time. Apply at once to: The Independence Mercantile Bank.

It features the drawing of a bold man standing ahead of his family. Looking to the horizon. Shocks of wheat, a farmhouse and cattle behind him. John folds it shut.

He stands, starts to walk back away from the train. He's found a way to be alone amidst a sea of humanity.

So has another. A LITTLE GIRL stands all alone wailing. Lost. Everyone too busy to pay a lost kid much mind. John doesn't hear her, but from where he sits, he sees her. In his own odd way, he's the only one who hears her. He watches her for awhile. Until...

CUT TO:

LITTLE GIRL

Bawling unabated. A shadow casts across her as John steps up. He finally kneels beside her, pats her shoulder.

JOHN

Shhh...

It doesn't really help. John reaches into his shirt, shows the girl the locket Mary gave him. She quiets, looks at it. John slips it off his neck, puts it around hers.

She stops crying and...

John scoops her up, holds her up over his head.

PULL BACK to show the mass, the little girl raised above it. John starts to turn her so everyone can get a look.

WAGON

A distraught mother stands scanning, calling out:

MOTHER

Becky! Rebecca!

She stops short as she see her lost daughter held up high.

MOTHER

Ohmigod...

And she's jumping down. And running. And reunited with her daughter. She scoops her from John, embraces her.

The little girl looks over her mother's shoulder, smiles at John. He smiles back, turns to go. The mother stops him.

MOTHER

Thank you, thank you so much --

John holds his I am deaf card out at her. She blinks at it, back at him. Before she can say anything else, John heads off, disappearing into the chaos.

CUT TO:

EXT. SETTING SUN - MISSOURI COUNTRYSIDE - SUNSET

It's about to drop blazing below the Western horizon. The wagon train is silhouetted in the distance. Dozens of wagon wheels have cut deep ruts in the earth.

Following these on foot, walking into the sun, is John. All his worldly possessions packed in the saddlebag over his shoulder. Heading West and looking Biblical.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

A rocky, desolate place. John sits before a meager fire, a strip of moldy jerked beef uneaten in one hand as he stares at the flames. He takes a half-hearted bite of the beef.

A POV - OF JOHN

Something's in the darkness watching our boy. As whatever or whoever it is starts to creep forward...

JOHN

Becomes aware, hand reaching for the saddlebag when:

A MANGY DOG peers in out of the gloom. Ears back, tail tucked, he advances cautiously, his big sad eyes trained on the beef. He's a MOOCHER, a redbone coonhound.

John HISSES and Moocher stops in his tracks.

JOHN
 (motioning)
 Go on! Git!

Too hungry to go, Moocher retreats to the edge of the firelight looking from John to the beef in his hand.

John reaches down, picks up a good-sized ROUND ROCK. He flings it. Moocher cringes as the rock skips past him just missing. A beat before he slinks off into the darkness. As John sighs, it's the only sound we hear.

CUT TO:

JOHN

Sleeping on the cold ground by the fire. Aware of another presence, he wakes, finds himself staring up at...

Moocher, who stands a few feet away, watching.

Finally, Moocher opens his mouth, drops the round rock that John threw at him. It's a hard put game of fetch to be sure. As Mooch backs off a step waiting for approval.

CUT TO:

EXT. MISSOURI/KANSAS BORDER - DAY

Saddlebag over his shoulder, John's back walking the Earth. Relentlessly, albeit slowly, West. As he passes, we see he's got company. Moocher trots at his heels.

CUT TO:

EXT. WAGON TRAIN - PLAINS - DAY

Leaving camp, stretching on for a mile. It's not all postcard though: Campfires are barely doused. The contents of cookpots are scraped onto the ground. Flour sacks, tins of food are discarded in TRASH PILES simply left behind.

WAGON TRAIN - NOW SEEN FROM A DISTANCE

John's watching them go. Following, but unable to join them. His face is gaunt despite a ragged beard.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERTED WAGON TRAIN CAMP - DAY

John stops by a trash pile. He falls to. On his hands and knees, eating the discarded food. Half-starved. Moocher

joins him. Which is the animal and which is the man? It's hard to watch. Suddenly he stops short.

He sees his reflection in a pool of dirty water. John stares down. The first time he's seen himself in a long while. He doesn't like the view. He's dirty, half rotten food smeared into his whiskers. Eyes hollow. He doesn't recognize himself. His hand reaches out to touch.

As ripples obscure the image, John looks across at Moocher. Moocher looks over at John. Two dogs eating trash...

John lurches to his feet. All sound cuts out as he SCREAMS. We can't hear him. We see the mouth gape, the tendons in the neck tighten, the rage and loathing in the eyes. All made worse by the fact that he's alone.

Waves run through the tall grass beyond as the wind blows through, but we can't hear the sound. And still John soundlessly screams. Staggering blindly. Wishing the ground would open up and swallow him whole. Then:

JOHN - FROM A DISTANCE

Suddenly, we hear the screams. We're in the tall grass. An indian stands here watching the white madman before him. This is SIX KILLER, a Pawnee.

Then, all around us, INDIANS rise up from the grass. Seem to emerge from nothing, from nowhere, and everywhere. Old. Young. But very few prime age men. They look as ragged as John. And as they watch him...

DESERTED WAGON TRAIN CAMP

John realizes. Nearly 100 Indians just a few feet away. We know there's hope for him because he's embarrassed.

The Indians start forward. John doesn't know what to expect, but they move right past like he wasn't even there. They're here for the same thing he is: discarded food and forage. They just go about it a little less desperately.

Six Killer steps up to John, gestures to the garbage.

SIX KILLER

This is all the white man has left us. And now...

(laughs)

You would takes that as well.

JOHN

I can't hear you. I'm deaf.

SIX KILLER
 With all the screaming, that
 does not surprise me.

Six Killer moves past, goes about scavenging.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRASS VALLEY - DAY

The wagons have cut an unmistakable, rutty swath west. On the north side: John and Moocher walk alone.

On the south side: Six Killer's tribe of nomads on the move. The few horses each drag a load on a bier. An Indian steps up beside Six Killer, gestures off toward John. They're speech is subtitled.

INDIAN
<We should drive him off.>

SIX KILLER
*<No. He's crazy. And the crazy
 bring good luck.>*
 (watches a beat; smiles)
<Screams alone.>

CUT TO:

A LIGHTNING BOLT

Splitting the night sky. Sent directly down from heaven by an angry God. With a downpour as a dancing partner.

EXT. CANYON - NIGHT

The Pawnee Indians camp, shivering under lean-tos and modified Army pup tents. There can't be a dry back in the place. As the thunder storm booms and rumbles, the horse stamp and the babies cry. Somewhere, an old INDIAN WOMAN sings a mournful tune. It's going to be a long night.

Across the narrow canyon, John has made his camp. It's just as wet, but a whole lot quieter. As rain runs off the brim of his hat and down his poncho, John sits staring up at the lightning bolts zigzagging across the sky. It's almost abstract when accompanied by only a dull, feint throb, rather than the...

BOOMING CLAPS felt on the other side of the canyon.

John tears off a piece of beef jerky, holds it out to an open fold of a piece of canvas on the ground. Moocher's nose pokes out, takes the jerky, then disappears again.

The silence is odd, a little unnerving. An awareness passes over John. He frowns, can't quite place the source of his sudden unease. Then, he places the palm of his hand on the ground. Finally, he closes his eyes. What is it?

John holds his hand lightly to the ground. There's the slightest quiver to it. Then:

John's eyes snap open. Pulling a pistol, he charges the Pawnee camp, firing several rounds in the air as he comes.

It gets attention above the thunder as he's met by several PAWNEE BRAVES, two rifles and three lances.

JOHN

Go! Get out of here!
Something's coming!

They're about to kill him when Six Killer steps into the fray. He jerks up the muzzle of a rifle just as it fires.

JOHN

Can't you hear it?!

SIX KILLER

(looking upward)
It's the sky.

John crouches, puts his palm down.

JOHN

Listen...

A beat and Six Killer is down with his ear to the ground. His eyes widen as he suddenly understands.

Before leaping to his feet, shouting COMMANDS in his native tongue. An instant later, all able-bodied Indians are running for the slopes of the canyon. And here come:

THE BUFFALO

Filling one end of the canyon. Spooked by the lightning beyond all repair. Rumbling forward, a galloping flesh and blood avalanche.

A TRIBE ELDER

About as nimble as a rock. He's not going to clear their path in time. Then, Six Killer and John are on either side of him, scooting him to safety. John looks back over his shoulder. The only thing left behind is:

MOOCHER

Facing the oncoming apocalypse of horns and heads.
Barking. Not giving an inch.

CANYON

No time to go back for him. John puts his fingers to his mouth, lets loose the shrillest whistle you ever heard.

Moocher looks, bolts for his master. Here comes the herd.

Moocher disappears for an instant, then appears scooting between a set of legs and leaping into his master's arms.

The buffalo blast by magnificently.

SIX KILLER

He looks across at the Indian who earlier wanted to drive John off. Luck indeed.

CUT TO:

EXT. KANSAS COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The Pawnee follow the wagon wheel path. They walk on the same north side of the tracks. Only now, John walks with them. They smile at him. The children pat Moocher on the head. Acceptance is a bit strange for the both of them.

The tribe elder steps over leading a HORSE. The elder points out the horse's ears. John sees them pivot, then follows the old man's bony finger off in that direction as several BIRDS take flight. John looks at the elder, back to the horse's ear. He smiles, nods he understands.

AHEAD - ANOTHER WAGON TRAIN GARBAGE DUMP

As the Pawnee begin to slow and stop before it. There's a sense of reluctance though. Then, Six Killer raises his hands, shouts something. He steps ahead.

John watches, wonders what's going on as he pulls off the COWBOY BOOTS he wears and tosses them into the trash heap.

It's like a ceremony as a SQUAW steps forward with a pair of traditional DOESKIN BOOTS. Six Killer speaks words in Pawnee. The tribe members look to John, then nod in sage agreement as Six Killer pulls on the doeskin boots.

They all watch as Six Killer steps over to John. He uses clarifying hand gestures so John understands. He rubs the thin doeskin between his fingers.

SIX KILLER

With my old boots, I can feel the ground. Like you do. I forget how to be Pawnee.

(draws himself up)

No more west. No more U S of A. We go north to Canada. Ca-na-da.

JOHN

Canada. I understand.

SIX KILLER

You bring luck.

(gesturing)

You come with. With us. You.

An offer for a home. This is very difficult for John:

JOHN

I -- I can't. I'm going to be a, a homesteader, a farmer. I'm going west not north.

SIX KILLER

If that is your way, take it.

Six Killer turns, motions to someone. A moment later, they step up with a beautiful INDIAN HEADDRESS.

SIX KILLER

This is the headdress of a chief. I will not put it on again until I feel like a chief again.

Six Killer plucks an EAGLE FEATHER from it. He carefully slides it into the band of John's hat.

SIX KILLER

Wear it well. And may there be better days for us all.

Six Killer takes his hands. John doesn't understand it all, but he gets the idea. Filled with emotion, he watches as the Pawnee begin to move north away from the tracks.

Then, they start to turn, look back at him. One of them screams, then another. Soon they're all screaming. But they're happy screams. John looks to Six Killer.

JOHN

I don't understand!

SIX KILLER

We named you! *Ola-haaka-ti!*
 'Screams alone!' They just want
 you to know, you no longer
 scream alone!

(gesturing; re: people)

We scream with you.

John does something we haven't seen in a while. He smiles.

Then the people turn, continuing north. John watches a lonely beat before he continues west. This time the trash is left behind. John doesn't even look the discards over. And as John continues on, we feel some hope for him.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. INDEPENDENCE MERCANTILE BANK - DAY

A PAINTER stencils: Helping to settle our nation on the glass window front. This is the bank from John's flyer. In fact, another of the flyers is on:

The desk of the manager. John sits alone before it in a stiff, high back chair. The portly BANK MANAGER approaches, holding a letter. He sits across from John.

BANK MANAGER

I've read your application, Mr. Young. Everyone wants to be a homesteader these days. But our bread and butter are families. Though we'd certainly think of underwriting a strong young man, but with your deprivation, I --

From John's POV it's just a mouth moving and a busy man looking like he wishes John wasn't here. In desperation, John interrupts.

JOHN

It is my hope, sir, to grow wheat. Did you ever see a wheat field in the wind, sir? It's like the ocean. The waves move over it... like a promise.

He says it from the heart, like a pioneer poet. The first spark of life from John in a long time. But also futility defined: being profound to a man shuffling papers.

BANK MANAGER

(bored)

I'm afraid I've never seen the ocean, Mr. Young.

John reaches over, takes a pen. The manager watches as John writes: Yes or no? across one of the flyers.

The manager takes the pen, CIRCLES NO. He then circles the line Able bodied young men, slowly crosses it out.

MANAGER

You - are - deaf.

Resigned, John stands and walks out. The manager sighs, drops the application and the yes or no into a trash can.

CUT TO:

A COLT .44

Plunked down on a wooden counter. A hand reaches in, hefts it up for a look-see. We're in:

INT. KANSAS HARDWARE STORE - DAY

A CLERK waits as John sights the barrel. Deciding to buy, deciding to set himself free, he slides a few crumpled bills across the counter. The clerk slides back a few coins in change, all that's left.

John looks at the boxes of cartridges. He checks his pockets, empty. Not to be denied, he slides the change back over, gestures at the cartridges.

The clerk counts the coins. Shaking his head, he opens a box, hands John ONE BULLET.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE JAYHAWK MERCANTILE BANK - DAY

Bedroll slung over his shoulder, John ties Moocher to a post outside. Smoothing back the eagle feather in his hat, he enters. Push has finally come to shove.

INT. THE JAYHAWK MERCANTILE BANK - DAY

John stands at a counter writing something on the back of his I am deaf card: G-i-v-e m-e a-l-l t-h-e m-o-n-e-y.

Three teller windows do a brisk business. John steps to the end of a line of three people. He'll wait his turn to do this. Nervous as a cat at a rocking chair convention.

It's then the affable T.Z. SPAULDING enters. Spaulding has seen or done just about everything there is. Until now. He walks about, tipping his hat to the ladies he passes.

He also eyes the big bank vault, the cash drawers behind the teller cages, the half-snoozing old WHITE-BEARD GUARD.

As Spaulding's duster coat flaps, we just catch a glimpse of metal within. Then, Spaulding sees John. To the trained eye: one scared wannabe bank robber. Spaulding smiles. And when he scratches his chin, we see he's missing the thumb on his right hand.

JOHN YOUNG

It's his turn. He steps up to the window. The TELLER is haloed by the visor he wears.

TELLER

Can I help you, sir?

Scared, John slides the card over. The Teller reads it, looks up and smiles.

TELLER

We can't help you here.

A long beat. John looks down at the card: I am deaf. It's wrong side up. He flips it over. The Teller reads again.

SPAULDING

Watches closely. Enjoying this unexpected delight.

BANK

The smile disappears as the Teller looks up to see the Colt .44 leveled at him. Panicked, he starts to scream.

John points the gun, holds up the card. Several patrons start screaming.

The white bearded guard staggers awake. As he rises, John points the gun at him.

The manager who turned down the loan exits his office. John swings his aim over to him.

MANAGER

Mr. Young, I understand you're upset about the loan --

John holds up the card. The manager reads.

MANAGER

Yes, you're deaf. I remember.

Spaulding tries not to laugh.

The guard moves to draw his gun. John aims back over, freezes him. The oldtimer squints:

Sees all the cylinders empty but one.

GUARD

He ain't got but one cartridge
in there, boys.

A MALE CUSTOMER tosses a sheaf of DEPOSIT SLIPS in the air.

John fires at nothing, the cartridge just fizzles: a dud.

The manager, the guard, the tellers, customers: they start to advance. John waves the gun, but they're not impressed.

The guard's about to clear his holster when:

BOOM! Spaulding discharges one of his two shotgun barrels into the ceiling. He's standing directly behind John who, despite the sound, has no idea he's there.

But the bank does. Every hand reaches for the sky.

John smiles, thinks it's himself they're afraid of. Until:

A leveled shotgun barrel appears just past his left shoulder. He looks over at Spaulding.

SPAULDING

I expect this young man wants to
cash in his six-shooter. So
what are you waiting for?!

As the teller's spring into action...

EXT. THE INDEPENDENCE MERCANTILE BANK - DAY

John and Spaulding double-time it out the door, each carrying a note sack. Spaulding goes right for his tethered HORSE. John unties Mocher then looks about anxiously, trying to decide which way to run.

SPAULDING

(laughing)

Judas Priest! Don't tell me
you're robbing the bank on foot!

Spaulding mounts up. Still laughing, he offers John a hand up. As they gallop away, Mocher breaks after them...

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - OUTSIDE OF INDEPENDENCE - DAY

Spaulding rides to a wooded copse where a second horse is tied and supplies are tucked away. He dismounts. John gets down behind him. Spaulding's already opening the bags of greenbacks, flattening them on the ground for a count.

SPAULDING

I'd say a 50-50 split on the money. You got a problem with that?

John doesn't answer. As Spaulding looks up, John holds out the I am deaf card. Spaulding takes it between the first two fingers of his thumbless right hand.

SPAULDING

Are you dumb, too, or can you talk?

John stares at him. Spaulding tucks the card in his shirt pocket, 'mouths' it slowly.

SPAULDING

Can...you...talk?

He points at John on the 'you', gums his fingers over his left thumb on the 'talk'. After a beat, John nods.

SPAULDING

(laughing)

So what the hell are you doing passing out cards? Say you're deaf. I am deaf. All you gotta do is say it.

Spaulding quickly counts the money into two piles. John watches a bit back on his heels.

SPAULDING

Two hundred and eighty-five dollars a piece. Woulda been a whole lot more on Thursday.

Spaulding stands hands John his cut. John tucks it in his trouser pocket, points at Spaulding's shirt pocket. He wants his card back. Spaulding takes it out, but doesn't give it back. He looks at the words: I am deaf. Finally:

SPAULDING

Not around me you're not.

That said, Spaulding tears the little card into ten pieces, feeds it to the wind. John doesn't know whether to be angry, confused or what.

Spaulding goes to a saddlebag. When he turns, he's holding a PEARL HANDLED REVOLVER in his hand. John blinks. Is he about to get bushwhacked? Spaulding steps up, turns the gun so John sees the silver inlay on the butt. In fine lettering: T.Z. Spaulding. Spaulding points to himself.

SPAULDING

That's me. T.Z. Spaulding. The sweet Lord's one and only. You?

A beat. We haven't heard John talk for a long time. And then, a little too loudly:

JOHN

John Young. John Bowman Young.

SPAULDING

Damnit, John, it's nice meeting you. Even if you do got a whole world to learn about how to rob a bank.

He holds out his thumbless hand. And as they shake...

CUT TO:

EXT. MISSOURI COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Riding hell-bent, the two of them rumble by.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MISSOURI COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

John and Spaulding sit by the campfire, horses munching into feed bags, b.g.. Spaulding sets down his empty plate, sighs, then looks to John who's just finishing his.

SPAULDING

Bacon tastes better after gunplay. It seasons things.

Spaulding reaches into a saddlebag, pulls out a bundle wrapped in oil cloth. He carefully unwraps it, pulls out a thick sheaf of hand-written pages.

John watches, curious.

SPAULDING

I'm writing me a book. It's part how-to, part how-not-to. Soon as I get a stake, I'm headed east. New York City. Find somebody to print it. I didn't lead this vivid life for nothing.

He takes off the title page, hands it to John who reads as Spaulding recites:

SPAULDING

T.Z. Spaulding, Gunfighter. Or,
How I Made My Way In This World
Starting Out With Meager Means
And Used My Pistols To Expand My
Opportunities.

JOHN

That's a helluva long title.

SPAULDING

It's a helluva long story. And
you're making an appearance in
chapter ten. Deaf bank robber
with one bullet and no horse.

John hands back the title page, watches as Spaulding busies himself with a pen and ink and fresh pages. On a clean sheet he writes: Chapter Ten. John Bowman Young.

SPAULDING

Here. I'll let you read some,
but just the first few pages.
Too much excitement to read too
much at once.

He hands John ten pages. Spaulding scribbles; John reads.

JOHN (V.O.)

Born in Texas, I have lived
forty-nine years in the West.
Forty-nine hard, fast and
crowded years. Vivid years.

At 'vivid', John pauses to look at Spaulding. Then...

DISSOLVE TO:

CRIME MONTAGE

John's voice becomes Spaulding's as we follow the two men's exploits. In Liberty, Missouri they enter A BANK.

SPAULDING (V.O.)

I strapped on iron for the first
time when I was fourteen years
out of the cradle. Why? On
account of my daddy was killed
by Comanche Indians.

A few moments later, they're hurtling through the bank's front window, a grainsack of cash in hand and a hail of bullets following them out. As they mount their horses.

CUT TO:

EXT. STAGE ROAD - MISSOURI - DAY

John holds guns on the DRIVER as Spaulding tips his cap to a WOMAN at the stage window. We can see he's been charming her. A second stage EMPLOYEE tosses down a STRONG BOX.

SPAULDING (V.O.)

Back then I was a mere amateur in the ancient art of bloodletting. I've since become an expert. Especially when it comes to pistols. Like old Jove himself, I own the power to take a life. It's held in each hand in the shape of a Colt thunderbolt.

Spaulding slaps the lead horse. The stage takes off. The strong box carried between them, they make for the trees.

EXT. STRONG BOX - DAY

Spaulding unloads shotgun barrel after shotgun barrel into the strong box with no apparent effect. John, meanwhile, has dumped and is sorting through a BAG OF MAIL.

SPAULDING (V.O.)

Now it's a fact that every man's got death coming to him. Not a whole lot get it when they deserve it, but gunfighters generally do. We ride the high lonesome and we die the high lonesome.

Frustrated, Spaulding gives the box a stomp, fires another round into it. John taps him on the shoulder.

As Spaulding turns, John holds up a KEY. Spaulding tries it. The box opens to reveal several hundred dollars.

SPAULDING (V.O.)

By all accounts I should be dead as at forty-nine I am ancient for a man of my profession.

Spaulding laughs and laughs. John can't hear it, but he smiles at the sight.

EXT. MISSOURI TOWN - DAY

John and Spaulding exit a clothing shop in brand new duds. Spaulding brushes off John's back. John picks a piece of lint off Spaulding's jacket.

As they head down the street John sniffs the air, catches the smell of...

JOHN

Lilacs.

Smiling, Spaulding stops him turns him toward the local WHOREHOUSE they're passing. John looks at the TWO GIRLS sitting on the porch. Lilacs...

John looks a little sad. Spaulding gives John a sidelong smile, motions an "after you." Finally, he looks at Spaulding, shakes his head.

JOHN

Let's get a drink first.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE GOLD FLAG SALOON - SUNDOWN

A group of COWBOYS, including a YOUNG stud SHOOTER rein up their ponies. Already half-drunk, they enter.

INT. THE GOLD FLAG SALOON - SUNSET

Head for the bar, shouting their drink orders. The young shooter stops short sees Spaulding down at the end of the bar. Recognition washes over him, then a mirthless grin.

SPAULDING & JOHN

Drinking quietly. Minding their business. Until, young shooter steps up behind. Three of his friends in tow.

YOUNG SHOOTER

T.Z. Spaulding hisself. Wizard of the Pistol. I heard you were a pretty good shot in your day.

Spaulding looks back over his shoulder.

SPAULDING

To be honest, sport, I ain't very fast and my accuracy always left a little to be desired.

YOUNG SHOOTER

Then how'd you get by?

SPAULDING

My temperament. It's colder'n most, definitely colder'n yours. You see, I was schooled to kill. And I'm always ready to do so.

YOUNG SHOOTER

Oooo... Mr. This-and-That, so handy with a pistol.

Pretty damn quick, young shooter draws his pistol. His three associates urge him on. Spaulding smiles at John.

SPAULDING

By virtue of my record, John, I have set myself up as a golden target for the younger roughs.

Backed by drink and friends, young shooter won't back-down.

YOUNG SHOOTER

I come to slap leather with you.

John can't hear, but he understands. Everything seems cold and calm. Lips moving, hands gesturing. He notes the holstered pistols of the three friends, Spaulding's own right hand dangling by the inside of his jacket.

Spaulding continues trying to talk his way out.

SPAULDING

Don't want to tangle ropes with you, rough. And I don't pistol fight since my thumb got shot off.

YOUNG SHOOTER

I don't give a whore's tit about what you do and what you don't do. Your notches are gonna be my notches. Got it, grampa?

SPAULDING

Mind if I finish my drink first?

YOUNG SHOOTER

Sure. Go on.

Spaulding sees as John's hand inches to his own belt.

SPAULDING

Did I mention the drop?
Gunfighter needs the drop.

YOUNG SHOOTER
(re: his own pistol)
Guess it's mine this time.

SPAULDING
(conceding)
Here's to you, kid.

As Spaulding raises his shot to drink, he flings the booze into the young shooter's face.

At the same instant, Spaulding's right hand flashes out and slaps down the barrel of the young shooter's pistol.

Half-blinded, the young shooter SHOTS HIMSELF IN THE FOOT. As he falls howling to the floor...

Spaulding swings the sawed-off up from inside his jacket, even as John draws his two pistols. The young shooter's friends blink under the realization they may be dead men.

SPAULDING
Get your friend on his feet.

They haul him up. Spaulding chucks him under the chin with the shotgun barrel. No ennuï now, Spaulding's temperament is different. He could kill him.

SPAULDING
I was talking about the drop.
Now, if you lose it, you gotta
figure on a way to get it back.

A beat. The young shooter nods he understands.

SPAULDING
Think about that when you're
roping cattle in Utah or New
Mexico or whatever godforsaken
place you hail from. Do it
there because I see you again,
I'll kill you.
(gestures)
Door's that way, boys.

They haul the young shooter quickly out and away. Spaulding watching. As he and John lower their guns.

SPAULDING
Just another cowboy can't keep
his twine on the tree.

The BARTENDER quickly refills Spaulding's shot glass.

BARTENDER

It's on the house, sir.

Spaulding nods his thanks. As Spaulding raises the glass, John sees that his hand trembles. Spaulding sees that John notices, looks to him..

SPAULDING

When my time comes, it'll arrive
beyond all escaping.

As he downs the shot...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MISSOURI WILDS - DAY

Up in the hardscrabble hills. John positions a shotgun between two rocks, starts to secure it in place with some twine. Spaulding steps up, checks the aim.

SPAULDING

A little lower.

Spaulding makes an adjustment, moves on. John finishes with the twine. He cocks back the hammer, ties a piece of string to the trigger. As he tails the string off...

SPAULDING

Finishes lining up a shotgun of his own. As he ties a string around the trigger.

JOHN

Rubs black boot polish down one end of a straight bore wooden branch. Several others are already blackened.

John sets it in place between two more rocks. After that, he places a battered hat on top of the rocks. Hold as he moves off with the rest of his branches and a few more hats. It almost looks like someone's there with a shotgun.

SPAULDING

He drapes four strings over a tree branch, ties them all to a lower branch. John steps up.

JOHN

I never heard of two men pulling
something like this off before.

SPAULDING

Me neither.
 (checks watch)
 It's time.

Spaulding motions John to go. He watches as John steps over, mounts his horse and tears off into the trees.

CUT TO:

EXT. LOCOMOTIVE - DAY

We're low on the tracks just ahead as the huge iron horse fills the frame. Can't really see how many cars there are. As black smoke belches...

JOHN

In position on a ledge at a bend. As the engine hits the curve, John leaps. He disappears for a second in the smoke, reappears as he hits the top of the coal car.

Pistols drawn, BANDANNA pulled over his face, it's a few steps down to the ENGINEER and the BRAKEMAN. As John levels the guns...

JOHN

Do what I say and things'll be
 right as rain!

ENGINEER

You're wastin' your time!

JOHN

No questions!

ENGINEER

Wasn't a question.

Ahead down the line, Spaulding steps out on the tracks, shotgun on his hip, bandanna over his face.

JOHN

Stop in front of that fella!

The brakeman pulls back on the brake.

EXT. TRACKS - MISSOURI WILDS - DAY

The train comes to a stop as the cowcatcher just reaches Spaulding. He steps over to greet the engineer and brakeman as John leads them off the engine.

SPAULDING

Afternoon, gents. We won't take up too much of your time, just want to lighten your load.

Heads begin to stick out of some of the windows.

ENGINEER

Never heard of two men robbing a train before.

SPAULDING

(stepping back)

Now that's an insult to the rest of the gang.

BRAKEMAN

What gang?

Spaulding points up into the trees,

SPAULDING

Up there! What are you, blind?

As they look, Spaulding pulls down on the strings:

SHOTGUNS go off right down the line. Every head disappears, the engineer and brakeman duck for cover.

SPAULDING

Hold your fire, boys!

(turns to Brakeman)

I'd apologize to the boys if I were you.

BRAKEMAN

Sorry, boys!

Now they see the hats, the gun barrels. Spaulding hefts three sticks of DYNAMITE.

SPAULDING

Now let's see that safe.

ENGINEER

You ain't gonna be happy.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIL CAR - TRAIN -DAY

The engineer, brakeman, Spaulding and John step up. The clapboards on one side have been blown away. We see the large, empty SAFE within. It's door blown off the hinges.

BRAKEMAN

Bringing the car in for the
Pinkerton boys to look at.

ENGINEER

Got robbed last night at
sundown. Cole Younger and his
brothers and Frank and Jesse
James. Cleaned us out.

John and Spaulding exchange a look of disbelief.

SPAULDING

How much they get?

ENGINEER

Sixty-five thousand dollars. In
gold.

Spaulding's mouth drops open at the princely sum. He paces
a circle, kicks a rock in anger.

A PASSENGER peeks out the window of the car behind. Seeing
him, Spaulding discharges the shotgun in the air.

SPAULDING

Next face I see looking out, I
remove from its shoulders!
Understood?!

VOICES shouting out 'yes sir'.

SPAULDING

How about the passengers? They
rob the passengers?

BRAKEMAN

Took everything, but their clean
underwear.

Spaulding mutters a string of obscenities lost on...

John. In his silence. He sees the engineer look down the
line at a PULLMAN CAR, exchange the briefest look with the
brakeman. It's lost on Spaulding, but...

John steps up cocking both pistols.

JOHN

The Pullman. Who's in it?

He seems quite serious. And the engineer's certainly not
going to die for the company.

ENGINEER

Full of Union Pacific Railroad
high rollers from back East.
Picked the car up this morning.

Spaulding smiles at John, impressed.

SPAULDING

Unrobbed I assume...

INT. PULLMAN CAR - DAY

Plush is the word. Five very WELL DRESSED GENTLEMEN try to
angle for a view out the closed windows.

GENT ONE

Where are they?

GENT TWO

I can't see them anymore.

They all react as the door is kicked in. Spaulding tips
his hat, winks over his bandanna.

SPAULDING

Afternoon, gentlemen. We're
here for your purses. And
watches. And rings if you're
wearing any.

Gent three (MR. MERRIWETHER) draws himself up taller than
the rest.

MERRIWETHER

Common scoundrels.

SPAULDING

On no, sir. Uncommon scoundrels.

MERRIWETHER

I am an officer of the Union
Pacific Railroad and I --

Merriwether stops short as Spaulding sets the end of the
shotgun against his stomach.

SPAULDING

I hope you never have to shoot
any man, but if you do, shoot
him in his lunch.

MERRIWETHER

His, ah, l-lunch?

SPAULDING

In the guts. Near the naval.
Might not kill him, but it'll
kill the fight in him in a hurry.

Spaulding smiles; Merriwether gulps, holds up his wallet.

SPAULDING

Wallets. Watches. Rings. My
associate will collect them.

John starts down with a sack. Merriwether is quick with his watch and a pinkie ring as well. So are the next three gents. John stops short across from the last.

It's Alfred Roebling. He cringes in fear, doesn't recognize John. But John recognizes him.

Alfred thrusts his wallet into the sack, then reaches to his vest for his pocketwatch. As John lowers the sack in shock, Alfred holds out the watch.

ALFRED

Take it.

John looks at Alfred. Alfred still doesn't recognize him, but he does recognize the grimness in his eyes.

ALFRED

Please... Don't kill me...

Spaulding's hand claps down on his shoulder.

SPAULDING

Let's go, kid.

John suddenly snaps out of it. He half-stumbles out, Spaulding at his side.

Relieved, Alfred doesn't quite know what to do with his watch.

EXT. THE WILDS - DAY

Over the train's shrill whistle, Spaulding and John make their getaway on horseback. Moocher bounds after them.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED BARN - NIGHT

Burned and shot-up during the war. The horses tethered to what's left of the stalls. Spaulding works his way through the BILLFOLDS, counts the take.

John stares into a campfire of salvaged clapboards. A big sigh from Spaulding.

SPAULDING

Three thousand cash. A thousand for the rest. A long goddamn way from sixty-five thousand.

(a beat; smiles)

Course, in the book I can say whatever I want happened.

WHAM! Spaulding whips around as John goes to work with a 2x4, smashing the walls, the window frame, anything within reach. An animal-like sound escapes between his teeth.

Spending his fury he finally drops the wood, looks helplessly at Spaulding. Tears start down his cheeks.

JOHN

I sold my life... For four thousand dollars.

John covers his face, sinks to the ground.

SPAULDING

Lord... Don't know exactly what you mean, but I'm sorry.

Spaulding pats John on the back, moves to tend the horses.

SPAULDING

Gotta be a woman...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CAMPFIRE - INSIDE DILAPIDATED BARN - NIGHT

The fire's just embers. John sleeps where we last saw him, a blanket thrown over him. Spaulding sleeps across the fire, blanketed, a rolled up jacket for a pillow.

John wakes, slightly disoriented at first. As he sits up, he sees a hand written page on the ground beside him. A note from Spaulding. He picks it up, reads:

JOHN (V.O.)

The unexpected happens to a man. But it's what he does when his name gets called, that makes him the man he is in the first place. You want to talk, I'll listen. Meantime, John, just remember hope, the patient medicine for disease, disaster and despair.

John looks at the snoring Spaulding, smiles. He tucks the letter in a pocket. Awake now, John looks up, sees the night sky through a big hole in the barn roof.

Suddenly, a SHOOTING STAR shoots across the gap.

OUTSIDE BARN

Partially blocked by a stand of trees, more stars shoot the sky. Beautiful, mysterious, soundless. Captivated, John exits the barn, moves forward trying to clear the trees.

CLEARING

A few hundred yards from the barn. John watches the light show. Maybe there's hope in the world after all. He closes his eyes, like he's making a wish.

INSIDE THE BARN

Spaulding stirs, wakes at the sound of a branch broken underfoot. Up on an elbow, he looks to see John is gone. Spaulding eases out his shotgun, moves low to peek out. More rustling, movement. Spaulding frowns.

SPAULDING

Kid?!

Everything's suddenly dead quiet.

THE BRUSH

A BOSS and his 10+ GANG frozen. About thirty yards from one end of the barn, fanned out in the bushes.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Can you hear me?

The boss takes a chance, his voice neutral as can be.

BOSS

Yeah.

INSIDE THE BARN

Spaulding knows damn well that's impossible. He looks to Mocher who lets out a low growl.

SPAULDING

Like hell he can...

(then loudly)
Bring some firewood with you.

JOHN

Still watches the sky. Completely unaware.

INSIDE BARN

Spaulding crouches, finger on the trigger as a silhouetted figure approaches, 20 yards away, a few branches in hand. Spaulding stands, the shotgun hidden. At that moment, the figure drops the branches to raise a pistol. He never gets it up as the shotgun roars and the figure goes down.

Spaulding begins firing into the dark. We hear an AGONIZED SCREAM before fire is returned. Spaulding ducks down as the barn is chewed up around him.

JOHN

At peace. Unaware a battle rages a few hundred yards away.

THE BRUSH

The boss and his men advance, blazing away.

BOSS
This gang's coming in for you,
you sonsuvbitches!

SPAULDING

Reloading, facing withering fire.

SPAULDING
On account of why?!

BOSSES VOICE
On account of sixty-five
thousand dollars.

As Spaulding laughs, the gunsmoke drifts. We follow it.

JOHN

Sniffing the air, smelling it. He turns, stops short at the sight of multiple muzzle flashes ahead. Oh shit...
MOVE WITH John as he dashes toward the flashes.

OUTSIDE BARN

The first few men are nearing Spaulding's cover spot.

THE BRUSH

John comes up behind the rear gang member, clubs him in the back. As the man falls, John grabs his rifle, starts firing into the rear of the gang. As two men go down...

OUTSIDE THE BARN

As the lead men turn at the confusion, Spaulding rises, kills one of them. As the second retreats, John fires his way through, making a dash for the barn. He dives in as bullets stitch the ground at his feet.

INSIDE THE BARN

John rolls in alongside Spaulding who's reloading. As the two men look at each other.

A BOTTLE with a flaming rag stuffed in it, sails overhead, smashes into the back wall, igniting several old hay bales. The horses go wide-eyed as the flames lick.

John makes a dash for the stall. Gunfire erupts.

SPAULDING

Gritting his teeth, he rises to return fire.

STALLS

The horses rear-up. As John unties them, they knock him over, both make a mad dash for the woods.

OUTSIDE THE BARN

All the gang sees is the shape of horses passing through the dark. Gunfire erupts, but the horses clear it.

VOICES

There they go! They're getting away!

And the gang take off, leaving...

JOHN & SPAULDING

Alone. John grabs a saddlebag, helps Spaulding to his feet.

JOHN
Come on. Before they come back.

OUTSIDE THE BARN

They stumble a few feet away, look back as the flames overwhelm the dry wood siding. Spaulding sits on the ground against a tree.

SPAULDING
(re: saddlebag)
You got the money?
(rubs fingers together)
The money.

John smiles, opens the bag to reveal:

JOHN
I got your book. Money's in the barn.

SPAULDING
Damn fool kid. Your share just doubled.

Spaulding winces in pain. That's when John sees he's gut-shot, his abdomen crimson. John kneels beside him, opens his shirt. He gasps as he sees the extent of the damage.

JOHN
Jesus, Spaulding...

SPAULDING
Jesus got nothing to do with it.

Pain wracks him. John takes his hand, squeezes it in grief. As it subsides, Spaulding manages a smile.

JOHN
I, I don't know why you let me ride with you.

SPAULDING
Simple selfish greed. When I saw you in that bank, I saw myself. Just wanted to be with my younger self awhile.

John looks at him helplessly, doesn't understand.

SPAULDING

It's okay. Having you as an
excuse to listen to myself talk's
just one more bit of selfishness.

Spaulding squeezes hard, feels the rattle coming on.

SPAULDING

It's been a vivid life and I
ain't never asked the odds of
nothing that walked or crept or
ran. Got no regrets save one.
There's an itching to Texas feet.
It drives a Texan from his home.
Sets him to wander the points of
the compass. But it's also
supposed to bring him back.

JOHN

(devastated)

I can't hear you...

Spaulding's gasping for breath by the time he finishes. He
grips John tightly, looks off toward the horizon.

SPAULDING

I wish I was home, Johnnie.

Spaulding's eyes lose focus and he's gone. John hugs him
tight. And as he rocks gently back and forth...

CUT TO:

EXT. GRAVE - DAY

Freshly dug. John grips Spaulding's body under the arms
and drags him in.

John reaches in the saddlebag. There's Spaulding's
manuscript. John's going to set that in the grave as well,
but he thinks better, puts it back in the saddlebag.

John picks up the jagged board he's used as a shovel. About
to start filling the grave, he stops. Pulling the bandanna
from his back pocket, he gently lays it across Spaulding's
face. To keep off the dirt. As John begins to bury him...

DISSOLVE TO:

SPAULDING'S MANUSCRIPT

As the oil cloth is unwrapped and pulled away. The page
turns and we see: Chapter One. The Gunfighter.

IMAGE: John reads, sitting by a RIVER BANK.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Within these pages you'll find my history. It is a vivid yarn, dappled by the orange flashes of gunfire. It features, if I don't say so myself, a man both bulldoggedly determined and possessed of an imaginative sort of bravery.

IMAGE: John cleaning and loading his pistols.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

It's a story of the old days and the old ways. Of a boy who took it on the run out of old Texas and lived to see many a lightning fast gunman lying dead beneath the wreathing smoke of his Colts.

IMAGE: John firing at big PINE CONES set up as targets.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

It is the story of a gunfighter.

IMAGE: A hand hovering over the butt of a holstered pistol.

SPAULDING

Now a gunfighter is schooled to kill. He focuses his thoughts on ways to beat the drop.

IMAGE: John wheeling, drawing and firing. The pine cone remains unscathed.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Speed is not of the essence. A cold-blooded and determined approach invariably wins.

IMAGE: John looking down the barrel of his Colt. Taking careful aim.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

To be candid, a killer instinct is required.

IMAGE: The pine cone explodes.

SPAULDING'S MANUSCRIPT

The pages turn until: Chapter Three. Gunology.

IMAGE: John whirls, or tries to whirl his pistols around his fingers, ending them cocked and aimed. Or trying to.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Twirl your pistols in single and double whirls. The .45s will be cocked by their own weight.

As he drops one, it hits the ground and FIRES, taking a chunk of bark off a tree trunk by John's leg.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

This should be done with unloaded pistols till you feel you've perfected it.

IMAGE: John holding his guns out, butt first, like he's handing them over to a sheriff or something.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

The road agent's spin or Curly Bill is used to spin your surrendered weapons back into firing position.

As John finally pulls it off...

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Fanning a pistol is highly inaccurate, but good in a crowd.

IMAGE: John fires, fanning the hammer with his left hand.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Hang your gun low or the muzzle may catch the top of your holster.

IMAGE: John's holsters hang low. SUPER SLOW-MO as he draws.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Draw your pistol, cocking the hammer as it comes. Tighten the fingers on the butt as the muzzle clears the holster. Fire as the muzzle comes level, not before.

Just as the muzzle clears the holster, the gun fires almost straight down. John looks down at... the hole in the ground just outside his right foot.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

The butt first cross draw eliminates the possibility of shooting yourself in the foot.

IMAGE: John makes the same draw across his body as the guns are now set higher, butt first. It does look smoother.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Find a hideout for a gun of last refuge.

IMAGE: John has tied a pair of DERRINGERS together with a long piece of STRING to the metal eyelet on either butt. Then he drapes the string over his shoulders so the guns hang above his wrists. Then, he puts on his jacket leaving a derringer up either sleeve.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

For practice, hold a poker chip on the back of your outstretched gun hand.

IMAGE: Moocher cocks his head as John raises his right hand, a POKER CHIP set on the back of it.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Go for your cutter and get an accurate shot off before the chip hits the floor.

Focused on his target, John goes fast for his gun. As the poker chip drops out of sight, John fires, hits the target.

He looks down at the poker chip resting on the ground, frowns. Then he looks at his dog.

JOHN

Hope you heard that, Mooch, because I sure didn't.

As John practices the draw again and again.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Gunfighter lives the high lone-some. Trust no one but yourself and your pistols. Check every cartridge twice, every man three times. And never trust no woman.

John's getting pretty good.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHEYENNE - DAY

John arrives with Moocher at his heels.

SPAULDING

If I was a young gunfighter today
I'd make for Cheyenne in the
Wyoming Territory. Cowboys,
soldiers and railroaders go there
to get roostered and buck the
tiger. They play hard and when
they fight, they fight to kill.
It's Boomtown.

INSERT: Cheyenne, Wyoming.

EZEKIEL, an old vagrant stands on the corner. You'd
dismiss him except for the eyes. They shine. A hat at his
feet, a street preacher, trading God for liquor.

EZEKIEL

His days are swifter than a
weaver's shuttle and are spent
without hope. So I ask, doth
Job fear God for nought?

Ezekiel pauses as he catches sight of John riding by.

EZEKIEL

I have heard of thee by the
hearing of the ear, but now mine
eye seeth thee.

CLINK. As a coin lands in the hat, all else is forgotten.
Ezekiel scoops it, hurries into the SALOON behind him.

John watches people talk here, laugh there. Not
understanding, not a part of it.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUNT SOPHIE'S PORCH - DAY

From the GIRLS lounging on the porch and the men going in,
it's a whore house. John steps up. As he tips his hat...

INT. PARLOR - AUNT SOPHIE'S PORCH - DAY

A get-acquainted room. Several PATRONS sip beer with the
GIRLS. ROLLINS, the black PIANO player, pounds away a roll
in the corner as one of the SOILED DOVES shows John in.

SOILED DOVE

Aunt Sophie'll be with you in a
second.

As John waits, the upright piano catches his eye. He steps
over. Sonny looks over, smiles, continues playing.

We're in John's head now and of course he can't hear it, but... He slowly reaches out, sets his palm down on the top of the piano. Feeling the vibrations of the music.

He closes his eyes to concentrate. To enjoy it.

REVERSE ANGLE

Seen-it-all madame AUNT SOPHIE is right behind him, can't get his attention.

SOPHIE

Say, mister...

She reaches out, grabs his shoulder. John wheels, two pistols drawn and cocked. Sonny stops playing. An instant later John's reholstering, but you can't unring a bell.

SOPHIE

You're pretty jack-all sensitive.
(re: pistols)
Even for a gunfighter.

John doesn't understand, decides the best thing to do is:

JOHN

I'm deaf.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - AUNT SOPHIE'S - DAY

Lined with doors leading into small rooms. Sophie leads John down to look at a...

SERIES OF GIRLS

Each in her bloomers or nightrobe or corset. Each reclined on a divan. Each mustering as much come-on as they can as John looks in on them.

GIRL #1

John looks at her. He reaches into his pocket, pulls out his billfold. Out of that he unfolds his worn flyer looking for sodbusters to go West. He holds it out to her.

GIRL #1

I can't read.

GIRL #2

Reading the flyer as John and Sophie watch.

GIRL #2
 (haltingly)
 ...own a-kres of farm-ers, farm-
 lords...

ELIZABETH "LIZA" PERRY

On her divan. A living, breathing mystery. Only we don't know that yet. She reads the flyer, editorializes it also.

LIZA
 (Southern accent)
 Wanted! Able bodied young men
 to go West. All those that
 didn't get turned to stumps in
 the war of course. Own 100 plus
 acres of farmland at reasonable
 interest rates. One percent for
 each of the 100 acres. Now is
 the time.
 (to John)
 Are you looking for farm hands
 or a roll in the hay?

Sophie busts out laughing. John can tell Liza can read, but sees there's something else about her, too. He smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM 27 - EXCELSIOR HOTEL - DAY

Moocher looks up at the scrape of the key in the door. John and Liza enter. Tail wagging, Mooch goes to her. She pats Mooch, keeps one eye on John as removes his gunbelts.

He raises a WINDOW, but it won't stay up. A STICK rests on the sill. He sets it as a stop to hold the window open. John looks out, checking the geography of the place.

Liza curls up at the head of the bed. Waiting for John. But he pulls two straight back wooden chairs to the center of the room. Facing each other. He looks over at her.

CUT TO:

MOOCHER

Watching something.

LIZA'S VOICE

Ahh. Ooo.

JOHN 'S VOICE

Ahh. Ooo.

(then...)

I'm checking into a hotel. You
be the man behind the counter.

LIZA'S VOICE

Turn toward me a bit more.

JOHN'S VOICE

I'd like a room.

WIDEN TO SHOW ROOM 27

Liza and John sit across from each other in the chairs.
Fully dressed. What's going on?

LIZA

How many days will you be
spending with us?

John frowns, doesn't understand.

JOHN

Again. Slower.

John focuses on LIZA'S LIPS as:

LIZA

How many days will you be
spending with us?

JOHN

Four days.

LIZA

I'm from Mississippi.

JOHN

(triumphant)

Mississippi.

LIZA

My name is Liza Perry.

JOHN

Leeza?

She slow-motions her mouth around it.

LIZA
Liii-zaa.

JOHN
Liza... My name is John Bowman
Young. From Boston.

LIZA
A blue Yankee... Maybe you
killed my little brother.

JOHN
Again.

LIZA
(bitter smile)
You'd remember him. He had one
green eye and the other was gray.

Way too fast for John.

JOHN
No, no, slower.

LIZA
I said... You - keep - a gun -
in your boot - sir.

The butt of a pistol is just visible from the top of John's
boot. But he knows that's not what she said. Finally...

JOHN
You have one under your skirt.

He points to a slight bulge at her hip.

LIZA
A woman should be able to
protect herself, blue.

CUT TO:

EXT. FEED STORE WALL - DAY

A man posts a notice. It reads: Wanted. One shotgun and a
man to hang onto it. Apply at the Wells-Fargo Stage Office.

Even as he nails it up, John's there behind him reading it.

CUT TO:

INT. WELLS FARGO OFFICE - DAY

The CLERK looks up as John steps in.

CLERK
Can I help you?

As John slides the notice across to him.

CUT TO:

EXT. STAGE ROAD - ON THE WAY TO CHEYENNE - DAY

A STAGE COACH moves along pretty good. The top is packed with luggage. The DRIVER and John sit up top with the STRONG BOX as a backrest.

DRIVER
Welcome to Wyoming. A land of
immense and inhospitable
distances.

John looks ahead, doesn't of course respond.

DRIVER
Must be nice being deaf. Never
have to listen to another person
long as you live. Could come in
handy with the wife.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER - STAGE ROAD - DAY

COTTONWOODS grow along the banks. As the stage nears a bridge, the driver reins it to a stop. Just ahead:

A heavy limb has fallen, blocks the bridge.

DRIVER
Moving tree branches is your
job. I - have - a - bad - back.

John doesn't like it. And as he reaches for his shotgun...

BOOM! Another shotgun goes off in the tree branches overhead. John doesn't have to hear it because he sees it.

TWO HIGHWAYMEN up in the branches, bandannas pulled up.

DRIVER
Dear Lord, I got a wife and
children. Please don't kill me.

HIGHWAYMAN ONE
(re: John's shotgun)
Toss it over the side.

John may be deaf, but he gets the point. He throws the shotgun off the stage. Highwayman One gestures toward the strongbox with his shotgun.

HIGHWAYMAN ONE

Now you throw that strongbox down and you folks can be on your way.

John knows what he wants, but hesitates.

DRIVER

The box! He wants the box!

John stands slowly, scoops his hands under the box and lifts it up. He looks at the highwaymen a beat, then heaves the box over the side. As he does, we see:

He's also scooped up two pistols. John gets off four rounds before the Highwaymen even realize.

They drop dead out of the trees to the bridge below.

John scrambles down off the stage, pulls the bandanna off highwayman one's face. Middle-aged, his beard is shot with gray. John rolls over highwayman two.

The dead men are side by side as we see two is barely a man, fresh-faced, maybe 19 or 20. John sighs big, can't help but feel like he's looking at himself and Spaulding.

DRIVER

You got 'em, kid! By God look at how you got 'em. Killed dead through and through.

TWO of the PASSENGERS look out, offer congratulations. John just stares down, looks like he's going to be sick.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - CHEYENNE - DAY.

They walk and Liza talks. John watches her mouth from the side now. Again, she slows the words down, articulates.

LIZA

Ready, blue?

John nods. Liza looks ahead, spots something.

LIZA

Here we go. Across the street. The grocer's.

ANGLE AHEAD AND ACROSS THE STREET - JOHN'S POV

A WOMAN argues with the SHOPKEEPER. Too far away for us to hear, but not for John.

JOHN

She never paid no nickel for a chicken egg and she ain't gonna start now.

The shopkeeper shrugs diplomatically, smiles. As the woman turns and stomps off, he says something under his lips.

JOHN

Says he'd give her a dime a piece if she laid them herself.

As they pass across the street, Liza shouts out...

LIZA

I'd give her a half dollar, but only if they're fresh!

As the shopkeeper double takes, they continue on.

LIZA

A month ago, blue, you were deaf. Now you hear better than I do.

Two PASSING WOMAN look Liza over with disdain. When they're only a few feet past...

WOMAN ONE

Whore.

WOMAN TWO

Jezebel.

Ouch. Liza looks at John a beat; he has no idea what was just said. He smiles at her. She smiles back.

LIZA

Think I'd like to be deaf, too.

CUT TO:

EXT. STABLES - LARAMIE - DAY

Where John has just left horse and Moocher in a stall. He shows one of the stall MUCKERS a wanted dead or alive flyer of desperado SILVER JACK TOWNSEND. Underneath it says: Reward. \$750. For The Murder Of Two US Marshals.

The mucker shakes his head. John holds out a \$10 gold piece. The mucker takes it and points up the street.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Never really took much stock in my right thumb till I lost it. Went missing 1862 in Laramie, Wyoming, shot off by a dirty no account dog name of Silver Jack Townsend. He left me for dead with a slug in the chest. One day, I aim to return the favor.

INT. LARAMIE SOCIAL CLUB - DAY

A DOZEN MEN or so inside. John enters, steps over to the bar and waits for the BARKEEP to come over. There's a big mirror on the wall behind the bar.

BARKEEP

What are you drinking?

JOHN

(loud enough)

I'm looking for a sonuvabitch named Silver Jack Townsend.

John watches the reaction of the folks via the mirror. Nearly everyone reacts on some level.

All at once: the barkeep can't help glance over John's left shoulder. Several people in the bar look the same way. Generally toward three men at a table. And two of those look at a third. SILVER JACK TOWNSEND.

John turns, slowly walks toward him, guns holstered.

Silver Jack remains seated. His associates lean back, but remain as well. Patrons begin to clear.

ANGLE UNDER TABLE

Silver Jack eases a .45 from his holster to his lap.

BACK TO SCENE

John stops about ten feet away, half trying to psyche Silver Jack out, half trying to psych himself up.

SILVER JACK

What's your beef, friend?

(no answer)
What are you, deaf?

His associates chuckle, then tense as John's hand goes slowly to a shirt pocket. He slides out a little card. Looks like his deaf card. He tosses it on the table. Silver Jack picks it up, reads:

SILVER JACK
J.B. Young. Gunfighter.

Not a deaf card after all. Silver Jack looks up, grins.

SILVER JACK
What sort of horseshit is that?

JOHN
Ever hear of T.Z. Spaulding?

Silver Jack recognizes the name. He clears his throat...

ANGLE UNDER TABLE

To hide the sound of cocking back the .45's hammer.

BACK TO SCENE

JOHN
He once said... If you're facing a fella wearing two guns, get the drop by occupying one of his hands.

Silver Jack's eyes flicker to the business card he holds in his left. As Silver Jack whips the pistol up with his right, the muzzle hits the edge of the table...

John crossdraws Spaulding's pearl handled revolvers.

Silver Jack finally clears the table, but fires wildly.

John levels both pistols, fires dead on. As Silver Jack goes over the back of his chair, his two associates draw iron as well.

John twirls the pistols, cocking them and firing them, then twirls, cocks and fires again.

The table is cleared as three men are hurled into eternity in the duration of a moment.

An awful, god-fearing moment as John realizes what he's just done. He feels it, does his best to bury it.

John walks slowly up to Jack. It looks like he's in complete control when in fact he's just trying to keep his balance. He reaches down, takes the card from between the dead fingers of Silver Jack's left hand.

CUT TO:

EXT. DILAPIDATED RANCH HOUSE - DAY

Weed ridden and deserted. Seen from a distance as John and Liza ride toward it. Liza rides side-saddle.

LIZA

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

It takes a moment before he gets it, smiles.

JOHN

That's a strange thing for a grown man to do.

Liza laughs, then reins across to look at the house. Closer is a plain WOODEN CROSS marking a GRAVE. Flowers grow on it. John looks from the grave, to the house, to Liza.

JOHN

What is this place?

LIZA

I don't know. Just a place.

She's lying and John knows it. She points off.

LIZA

See the cottonwoods? There's a creek along there. And a pond. I'll race you.

John looks ahead, nods. Liza swings one leg back over the horse. No side-saddle for racing.

JOHN

You say go.

Liza smiles, turns her head away so he can't see her say:

LIZA

Go...

She takes off. As John kicks to catch up...

CUT TO:

A SNAPPING TURTLE

Mostly submerged, its head above the surface. The end of a STICK comes into frame. As the turtle snaps down on it...

EXT. POND - DAY

The edge of a creek-fed pond. Liza pulls up the stick, the big snapper hanging off the end. She grins at John.

LIZA
It's old bachelor's pond. You
don't want to swim if he's home.

Liza walks a ways, sets 'bachelor' down in the tall grass.

LIZA
That'll keep him away for a bit.

John, gun aimed, leans down, theatrically scans the surface of the water.

JOHN
What about the frogs?

She sets her foot on his butt, shoves. John twists, flails his arms at the edge of the pond. As he splashes in:

LIZA
The South shall rise again.

CUT TO:

CLOTHES

Liza's: dry, folded. John's: wrung out, draped across the bushes. The sound of splashing and laughing in the pond.

UNDERWATER

Looking up at the sun. Liza and John swimming past. Too sparkly to see anything but the fact they're naked.

SURFACE

Still. Two heads are all we see above the surface. John closes his eyes enjoys the sun on his face. Liza looks over, studies his face. She listens as several birds sing.

Then, she cups her hands over her ears. A beat as the singing is muffled, but not eliminated. John opens one eye, then the other, looks over.

JOHN
What are you doing?

LIZA
Wondering what it feels like.

JOHN
Here. Lay your head back.

She lets him take her head in his hands, lean her gently back until all that shows above the surface: her eyes, nose and mouth. Her ears are under.

Everything's a little dreamy. There are no sounds and at the same time, a rush of noise that is silent. John leans over her, smiles. His lips move, but there's no sound.

Finally, Liza gets her feet back under her, faces him.

LIZA
What did you say?

JOHN
I said, that's what it feels like.

She slowly nods. Quite close, they look at each other. Just when it seems they might kiss, a SPLASH. Liza looks over. John follows her gaze. Bachelor swims from the pond's edge, disappears under the surface.

LIZA
Time to go. Race you to shore.

As John nods in agreement, she takes off. He swims after her. As the sound of her LAUGH echoes...

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACKSMITH SHOP - DAY

John watches as the SMITHY puts a rivet through a holster and into a belt. The smithy hands the rig to John who looks it over and nods. He hands the smithy a few dollars.

The smithy watches as John puts on the belt, then slides a Colt .45 into the holster. The holster is 'open-toed' so the barrel sticks through.

The smithy gestures, shrugs his shoulders.

SMITHY
Why?

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Classic showdown. John stands in the middle of the street. He wears his rivet holster low on his right hip, Spaulding's pearl handled crossdraws higher up.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

Very rarely does the killing of a man settle anything -- for the killer. There are the friends and relatives of the deceased, not to mention the expanding reputation of the notch holder.

Another SHOOTER stands across from him. As he quick draws, John grabs the butt of his holstered gun, pivots it on the rivet without drawing it, and fires it through the open-toe of the holster. The shooter falls.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM 27 - NIGHT

A bucket of beer on the table beside him, John sits on a chair in the dark, stares broodingly out the window. Down the street at Aunt Sophie's.

A knock on the door. John doesn't hear it, but Moocher does. He goes to John nudges his hand. As John looks back over his shoulder...

DOOR

John opens it to reveal Liza.

LIZA

Heard you were back in town..

JOHN

You heard right. Want a beer?

As John turns back in...

LIZA

No.

Liza bends down to pet Moocher. John's back is to her as he pours from the bucket. Liza asides to Moocher:

LIZA

Starting to miss him as much as I do you.

John turns back, offers her a beer.

LIZA
I said no.

JOHN
Must not've heard you.

As Liza looks him over.

LIZA
Back in one piece? No holes in
you?

JOHN
I'm tired, Liza. What's on your
mind?

LIZA
I'm taking the night off...
Anything you'd like to do?

Taken off guard, John looks her over. Then he smiles.

JOHN
Reenact the Battle of Shiloh.
You be Johnston and start from
that end of the room. I'll be
Grant and start from this.

LIZA
Better yet, you be Sherman and
I'll be the 6th Mississippi.
Coming up the hill after you...
With pillow bayonets.

She picks up his pillow, pokes him with it.

JOHN
You can do better than that, Rebel.

She really lets him have it. The pillow bursts, fills the
air with... Feathers.

They drift down. It's snowing. And they kiss, Liza
stopping only long enough to pluck a piece of down from her
tongue. His arms close around her. It's barely about sex.
He needs someone to be sweet to, tender to. And she needs
someone to be that way with her.

THE BED

We start underneath where Mocher is curled into a discreet
ball. Rise up to where they make love. The motion
continues to stir feathers up into the air.

And it's so much about touch. His hands moving across her. Sometimes lightly, sometimes stronger. The instep of her foot over his calf. Their fingers lacing together.

Looking down on her, John's eyes well up. It immediately makes Liza's eyes do the same. She reaches up gently wipes his eyes with her thumbs. And as they stare at each other, it feels like a breathless exposure of their hearts.

MOOCHER

Under the bed. As the feather settles on top of his nose, a TRAIN WHISTLE squeals...

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN STATION - CHEYENNE - DAY

FARRAGUT stands here waiting. Bowler cap, three piece suit and a black handlebar mustache. Looking smart, but make no mistake, Farragut is a formidable man.

He watches as SUNDAY, his equal in every respect, steps off the train. Sunday, taking pleasure in his freshly lit cheroot, spots his friend.

SUNDAY

Mr. Farragut...

FARRAGUT

Mr. Sunday...

SUNDAY

I'm dreaming of Baltimore.
Least the rubes there don't
smell like horse shit.

FARRAGUT

And I hear Philadelphia calling
my name. The whores there at
least know what a bath is for.

SUNDAY

This business'll be over in a
few days. Then we'll all be
going where we want to be.

The two men head off. Hold a beat before revealing:

THE MAN IN BLACK. Buttoned up grim and proper, gun strapped down to his thigh. He leads a HORSE over which TWO DEAD BODIES have been tied down. As he passes...

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - CHEYENNE - DAY

John and Liza walking together. Happy together. And then John pauses, momentarily taken away.

LIZA
What is it?

JOHN
(sniffing the air)
Lilacs...

LIZA
(smiling)
Not in Cheyenne.

He looks at her, shrugs it off. As they continue...

CUT TO:

EXT. CHEYENNE STREET - DAY

Sunday and Farragut walk the street. Ahead is Ezekiel. He has a view of something they don't. As he points his bony finger down the street, his voice is full of portent.

EZEKIEL
He is a brother to dragons and a
companion to owls. Upon this
earth there is not his like, who
is made without fear.

Farragut and Sunday are already wondering...

EZEKIEL
He discovereth deep things out
of darkness, and bringeth out to
light the shadow of death.

SLOW-MOTION as John and Liza round the corner.

John looks across at Farragut and Sunday. Like recognizing like, but not specifically in this case. And as John registers, catalogs and looks away, the SLOW MOTION ends.

FARRAGUT
Know him?

SUNDAY
Doesn't ring a bell.

A BARBER, leaning in his shop doorway, speaks up behind.

BARBER

J.B. Young. Twenty men that
kid's downed. Chain lightning
and eleven claps o' thunder with
the six shooter. Always draws
last, always shoots first.

FARRAGUT

That's Young? They say he's deaf.

BARBER

As a doornail. Born that way.
Don't miss it, on account he never
had it to begin with.

They watch as John and Liza enters Aunt Sophie's.

FARRAGUT

He likes the ladies.

Sunday takes out a card, pencils something on the back. He
hands it and a silver dollar out to the barber.

SUNDAY

Do me a favor. When he comes
back out, give him my card.

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR - AUNT SOPHIE'S -DAY

Rollins tinkles something a bit sad on the piano. The few
girls down here this early watch with interest as Liza and
John enter. She glances at them, looks at him.

LIZA

Well, I hope I was some use to
you, John.

JOHN

I thank you, Liza. I thank you.

She looks where she is, looks at the floor. Something
awful sad about bringing a whore back to the whorehouse.
She manages a smile his way and then goes.

CUT TO:

INT. LIZA'S DIVAN ROOM - AUNT SOPHIE'S ROOM - DAY

Liza enters. Alone. Blue. Not where she wants to be.
She reaches between her mattresses, pulls out a BOOK. On
the back inside cover are several columns of hand written
numbers. They add up currently to 4,007. As she closes
her eyes and figures in her head:

AUNT SOPHIE
 (looking in)
 Boy's got an itch. Looks like
 you know how to scratch it.

As Liza closes her book, looks over.

AUNT SOPHIE
 I don't know how you satisfy,
 Sweetie, but he just bought you
 for a whole week.

As Liza considers the news...

AUNT SOPHIE
 Said he'd catch up with you
 later.

LIZA
 Well... that's just fine.

CUT TO:

INT. THE TRIGGER SALOON - DAY

A quiet corner. A competent looking YOUNG GUN stands across
 from a seated Farragut & Sunday. An interview concluding.

FARRAGUT
 You come to us recommended, so
 we won't beat around the bush.

SUNDAY
 You've got to be able to keep
 your temper in check. You've
 got to be able to take orders.

FARRAGUT
 That's how you'll get done what
 we need getting done.

YOUNG GUN
 Cash money does wonders for my
 temper. And as far as orders
 go, my ears can hear 'em best
 when I get paid in gold.

Sunday sets a little pouch on the table. A heavy clink.

SUNDAY
 Fifty Union Pacific dollars.
 Keep yourself entertained for a
 few days until we need you.

YOUNG GUN

I hear the Great Northern
Railroad's paying seventy-five.

Sunday and Farragut exchange a cold look. Sunday sets down a second pouch. \$100. As Young Gun smiles, takes it.

JOHN

Stands in a corner, watching as Young Gun makes his farewells. Young Gun exits, looking John over, but John doesn't return the gaze. John steps up.

FARRAGUT

Mr. Young. I'm Mr. Farragut and
this is Mr. Sunday.

JOHN

Then this is yours.

John hands Sunday back the card he gave the barber.

SUNDAY

You read lips very well.

JOHN

(unfazed)

I had a good teacher.

FARRAGUT

Care for a drink?

John shakes his head.

SUNDAY

Cigar?

Sunday fans out several of his cheroots. A beat, then John takes one. Sunday scrapes a match across the bar, holds it out. John puts the cheroot in his shirt pocket.

JOHN

Why'd you want to see me?

FARRAGUT

Railroad business. A new Western line is going to be awarded by Congress. This town will crawl with Union Pacific and Great Northern bigwigs, Pinkerton men and plain hired guns. Could be war.

SUNDAY

We work for the Union Pacific Railroad. We're here to ensure the new line is a U.P. line.

FARRAGUT

As you know, railroad business can be a business of night riders, ambushes and open killings.

John looks the two of them over a beat.

JOHN

Listen now. I'll see a payroll through. I'll collect a bounty I think needs collecting. And I'll kill any man who crosses me. But I won't murder.

FARRAGUT

Duly noted.

SUNDAY

The job pays... \$250. Hired gun. With the emphasis on bodyguarding two Union Pacific officials.

John looks the two of them over, doesn't like them all that much. Finally...

JOHN

Nurse maid job. I'm not interested.

FARRAGUT

You going to throw in with the Great Northern?

JOHN

They haven't asked. Gentlemen.

John turns and starts out. As he goes, Sunday slides his pistol out from his holster.

SUNDAY

Are you really deaf, you yellow-bellied...

John's watching Sunday's face in the mirror as he goes.

SUNDAY MIRROR

...piece of gun slinging trash!?

John pauses, his back to them. Farragut and Sunday tense.

JOHN
Deaf as a stone.

John continues out. Farragut and Sunday don't know what to think. Farragut steps forward. As he catches Sunday's reflection in the mirror, the question is answered.

FARRAGUT
But very far from blind...

EXT. THE TRIGGER SALOON - DAY

As John exits, he takes Sunday's cheroot from his pocket. Striking a match, he 'lights' it by running the match up and down the cheroot's length, then smelling the SMOKE. Memorizing it. Satisfied, he tosses it away, walks on.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN STATION ROUNDHOUSE - DAY

Nine sets of rails lead in. Each hold railroad engines. They're never left cold. Some coal always burns.

A PHOTOGRAPHER is up under his cowl as his ASSISTANT raises the flash powder.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Hold still, gentlemen.

FLASH! A photo immortalizes the following:

The noses of two of the giants engines nearly touch. Assembled before them: several well-dressed Union Pacific Railroad Executives including Paul Merriwether (last seen when Spaulding and John robbed the train), Alfred Roebling and in the middle U.S. vice-president SHUYLER COLFAX.

Farragut and Sunday stand out of the picture, waiting.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Now I'll just get one more.

As he readies, the assembled talk among themselves.

COLFAX
This new Western rail line being proposed... It's like a soaring eagle able to annihilate magnificent distances.

Merriwether smiles at Alfred and then at Colfax knowingly.

MERRIWETHER

What it is is 45 million acres
of land and a charter bestowed
by you and your Congress.

ALFRED

What it is is a license to print
money.

COLFAX

Well that too for the company
lucky enough to be selected.

A round of laughs from a group of men who are all on the
same page. Corruption as good old boy banality.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHEYENNE STREET - DAY

Ezekiel on his corner as Alfred, Merriwether, et.al. pass.

MERRIWETHER

One day when you are president,
vice-president Colfax, you will
look back fondly on those who
were inspired to back you
financially. And I hope to be
one of those men you make your
face to shine down upon.

As Colfax smiles broadly...

EZEKIEL

Behold the kings and counselors
of the earth. They build
desolate places for themselves.

MERRIWETHER

(passing Ezekiel)

You are mistaken, sir. They
build railroads. Railroads which
take us across desolate places.

They all have a laugh. As they move on:

EZEKIEL

Today God will fear Job...

CUT TO:

EXT. EXCELSIOR HOTEL - DAY

A 3-year-old BOY ambles out of the hotel. Full of
curiosity until a stage rumbles by. That sets the boy

crying and looking about desperately. But like the child at the wagon train bivouac in Independence, no one notices.

Except John. As his shadow stretches, the little boy blinks, looks up at him. John scoops him. The boy stops crying. As he tugs on the brim of John's hat...

MOTHER'S VOICE

Temple! Temple!

John doesn't hear. And we don't get a good look as the WOMAN, exiting the hotel, spots her son, hurries over.

MOTHER

Oh thank goodness.

John starts to hand him over.

MOTHER

I can't turn away from him for two seconds. I -- John...

She stops short, John suspending the boy before her. It's Mary! As he recognizes her...

JOHN

Mary...

Staggering.

MARY

You look the same. Different, but the same.

JOHN

You're still wearing lilacs.
(re: boy)
Is he yours?

As she takes him.

MARY

This is my boy. I can't believe this, John. And here of all places. What are you doing here?

JOHN

I live here. When I'm living.

He laughs at his own joke. She doesn't get it. John looks at the boy, back to Mary.

JOHN

What's your boy's name?

MARY

Temple. After his grandfather.

It's happened too many times before, but once again the rug is pulled out from under John. As he falls...

JOHN

I think about that old man all the time.

He looks past her toward the hotel entrance.

JOHN

Where is he? Where's Alfred?

MARY

He has business this morning.

JOHN

Is he healthy? Happy? Wise?

MARY

John...

JOHN

How are his father's shoes fitting him?

MARY

Not very well...
(almost a whisper)
What happened to you, John?

John reaches out, touches Temple's hand.

JOHN

Nothing. Nothing happened to me.

And he means "Nothing" as a proper noun. She studies his face a beat. Then her eyes flicker past him.

John looks back over his shoulder. Here comes the Union Pacific Railroad.

As he turns, it almost looks like he's going to draw iron. One vs. a dozen as the group heads toward him.

STREET

As Farragut and Sunday feel the hink, get out in front of the others.

FARRAGUT

Mr. Merriwether...

Scrotums tighten all around. Mary's trying to head off a different kind of disaster.

MARY

Alfred, it's John Young.

ALFRED

Well I'll be...

Alfred steps forward claps John on either arm.

ALFRED

John Young. As I live and breathe.

As Farragut and Sunday ease, Alfred turns to Merriwether.

ALFRED

Mr. Merriwether, I'd like you to meet an old friend of mine from Boston. John Young.

MERRIWETHER

Always a pleasure to meet someone from Boston, Mr. Young.

Merriwether tips his hat, but John's attention rests squarely on Alfred.

ALFRED

John represented me during the war. He fought as my substitute at Gettysburg. And at Chancellorsville I believe.

JOHN

(clarifying)

I was paid to represent you.

ALFRED

Yes...

As Mary looks John over, sees the deadly hardware hanging from his hips.

JOHN

Do you know the price the old man negotiated for me to go in your place?

Alfred is completely taken aback by this question and by John's grim manner. Colfax looks impatient. Merriwether listens quite closely.

ALFRED

He told me, but... I forgot.

JOHN

Four thousand dollars.

ALFRED

John, we need to get back to business. But I'd love to see you tonight for a drink, or dinner --

JOHN

Do you know how much of that money I was paid? To take the place of a millionaire's son? Not a penny.

ALFRED

Uhh, father was, uh, quite a deal maker.

Polite laughs from every one but John.

JOHN

You're his heir. I want my money.

ALFRED

John, this is a discussion we should have in private.

JOHN

Tomorrow. I expect it tomorrow.

Without another word, John turns and heads into the hotel. Merriwether claps Colfax on the back.

MERRIWETHER

Sorry about that, Shuyler. Let me make it up to you with a steak.

COLFAX

I'm afraid I have a prior lunch engagement. My face shines down upon the Great Northern Railroad as well.

Another round of laughter though Merriwether is not so nearly happy about it this time. As he watches Colfax head off and Alfred looks to Mary...

MERRIWETHER

(regroups)

Well, that shouldn't spoil our appetites.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM 27 - DAY

Liza sits on the bed. She's been reading Spaulding's manuscript. As some passage makes her smile, the door opens and John steps in. She's either the last person he needs to see right now or the only one.

LIZA

Been waiting for you forever.

JOHN

You've got to leave, Liza.

He turns his back. She doesn't understand. She steps up, passes her hand gently over his back. He shrugs her off.

JOHN

Just go.

Liza watches as he takes off his gunbelts, drops them on the bed. She steps to face him. He looks miserable.

LIZA

What do you want, John Bowman Young?

(no answer)

Tell me. I've only known you awhile, but I feel it. I feel the yearning. It runs through you like a current.

She studies his face, waits for the answer. There's none.

LIZA

In Meridian, Mississippi I was a farm girl. That's where I'm from, blue. My daddy had thirty acres. Got it from his daddy. It all burned in the war. You know what Shiloh means? Place of Peace. It's where my father and my brother sleep. The 6th Mississippi. But I had another brother.

John looks away. She grabs his chin, turns his face to her.

LIZA

Listen to me... I had a brother Michael. He came to Cheyenne in the late 50's. To ranch. I came here to be with him. Well, he found his place of peace, too. And his ranch is where we rode that day. It's for sale. And the day I buy it is the day I'm not a whore anymore. It's the day I go back to being Elizabeth Clarissa Perry. Farm girl.

(smiles; remembers)

Cow barn girl... That's my yearning. Pricetag is \$8,000. I saved up \$4,000. It's sitting across the street in that goddamn bank. You should see their faces on Friday when I make my deposit.

(a beat)

I need \$4,000 more. What do you think of that, blue? You want to go halves with me on a ranch? You want to be partners?

Not just an offer, but an opening of her heart. Opened at the moment his heart has closed. Irony defined.

JOHN

Liza, life didn't turn out the way I thought it would. I didn't turn out the way I thought I would. I used to hope, but no more.

LIZA

Hope's a good breakfast, but a lousy supper. It's not enough to hope. You've gotta do.

JOHN

I am a gunfighter, Liza, not a farm boy.

LIZA

No. I read about you.

Liza steps over, picks up the manuscript: reads...

LIZA

My final days of lawlessness were spent with a reluctant outlaw from Boston, New England. John Bowman was a sobbuster at heart. Leastwise when I knew him. The sight of a wagon train used to

bollix him up something awful.
 But he was bent on beating his
 plowshare into a six-shooter.
 When I first met him, he was in
 the process of robbing a bank on
 account of they turned down his
 homesteading loan...

John knocks the manuscript from her hand. As it hits the
 floor, he's as mean as we've seen him.

JOHN

I bought you a week off. Go
 spend it.

Liza draws herself up.

LIZA

I'm going back to work. I got
 another four thousand dollars to
 earn.

She walks out, swings the door hard behind her.

It doesn't slam for John, just closes without a sound. And
 as Moocher barks his disgust, John can't hear that either.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - THE EXCELSIOR HOTEL - CHEYENNE - DAY

Alfred and Mary sit across from Merriwether. They've just
 finished lunch. Mary's barely touched her food.

MERRIWETHER

You look radiant, Mary. The
 West agrees with you.
 (re: her plate)
 Though not your appetite.

MARY

I'm sorry. I'm not that hungry.

ALFRED

Too much excitement.

MARY

I suppose I'm anxious to get out
 to see your hunting lodge.

MERRIWETHER

Ahh, you'll love it.

Alfred smiles at Mary; Merriwether sees something outside.

MERRIWETHER

The enemy passes.

Through the window, they see a second CONTINGENT OF SUITS, complete with their own pair of stone-faced TIED DOWN GUNS, walk with VP Schuyler.

MARY

Are those men with the Great Northern Railroad?

ALFRED

Yes. The man with the beard, the man you saw earlier, is Vice-President Colfax. He'll decide who gets the contract.

MARY

The Union Pacific will of course.

MERRIWETHER

(indulgent)

How are you so sure?

MARY

Because you're partnered with my husband, Mr. Merriwether.

Merriwether smiles at Alfred, at Mary, looks like he suddenly knows something no one else does.

MERRIWETHER

I believe you're right, Mary.

CUT TO:

EXT. STABLES - CHEYENNE - SUNSET

A BLACKSMITH looks up from his anvil as a shadow casts across him.

BLACKSMITH

Can I help you?

It's the grim man from the train station. The Man In Black. Or is he the Grim Reaper?

MAN IN BLACK

I'm looking for a man...

He unfolds a WANTED POSTER. It's John. Wanted For Robbery of the Jayhawk Mercantile Bank. The blacksmith looks at it.

BLACKSMITH

He's in town.

(pointing)
That's his horse there.

As he hands the photo back, he looks the grim man over.

BLACKSMITH
You a bounty hunter?

MAN IN BLACK
Something like that.

CUT TO:

INT. THE TRIGGER SALOON - CHEYENNE - NIGHT

The BARTENDER pours a shot of rye whiskey, carries it across to a hand. As the hand brings up the shot, we see John. He downs it, sets it with two other empties.

He's unaware of the man watching him down the bar. Young Gun (hired earlier by Farragut and Sunday). Figuring the last shot did the trick, he straightens, starts over.

YOUNG GUN
You John Bowman Young?

John doesn't hear him; doesn't answer him.

YOUNG GUN
Think you're better than me, Mr.
High-Hat?

As he stops just off John's left shoulder, John is finally aware of him.

YOUNG GUN
Tell you something. I don't
take no sass, 'cept sassparilla.

Young Gun's hand hovers his pistol.

A TABLE IN THE CORNER

Where Sunday and Farragut watch events unfold.

JOHN

Looks across at the bartender.

JOHN
Another...

The bartender's not stepping into the crossfire.

BARTENDER

Be there in a minute, friend.

Young Gun steps up alongside. John stays put, his arms crossed, elbows on the bar. John looks up.

YOUNG GUN

We're crossin' ropes, you and me.
I'll teach you some respect.

JOHN

You want to pick a fight, you
should do it with your eyes open.

YOUNG GUN

My eyes are open. They're
looking at you.

JOHN

Can't you see the Kingdom Come?

YOUNG GUN

Kingdom what?

JOHN

In my right hand.

Young Gun's eyes flicker down. A DERRINGER is in John's right hand. Aimed squarely at Young Gun's guts. Crossed arms and all. John ratchets back the trigger.

JOHN

Now I can't hear that, but I
know you can.

Young Gun's finally sensibly scared.

JOHN

I just want to be left alone.
You don't want to stand in the
way of that, do you?

YOUNG GUN

No... No I sure don't.

JOHN

Then step on back to your drink
and I'll be on my way.

Young Gun's eyes are full of fury, but he nods and does what John asks. John sets some coins on the bar, heads for the door. As he exits, Young Gun turns on his heel and starts after him. He draws his pistol as he goes.

Sunday and Farragut stand and start forward along with several interested patrons.

EXT. THE TRIGGER - NIGHT

As Young Gun strides out ready to kill. But he stops short as John is nowhere in sight. Finally, Young Gun spits, holsters his gun and turns to go back inside.

REVERSE ANGLE

John's been leaning against the wall alongside the door the whole time. Pistols holstered. Hands empty.

For a moment we hear both men's heartbeats, until...

JOHN

Whenever you're ready.

Young Gun's hand is still on the butt of his pistol. Seems like a huge advantage. As he draws...

Time stands still. The barrel of his gun has cleared the holster before John even moves. But when he does...

It's just a rivet pivot of his holster and bullets are zipping through the open toe.

Slammed in the chest twice, stumbles back to the street dead without getting off a shot.

Patrons stare out the barroom windows.

John looks grimly at the fallen man. No pleasure taken. In fact, John looks like he's going to be sick. As he lurches forward, starts away...

STREET

Farragut and Sunday follow. As they catch up.

FARRAGUT

A word with you, Young.

He turns, faces them.

SUNDAY

We'd like you to reconsider an offer we've now reconsidered ourselves.

JOHN
Leave me be.

SUNDAY
The job now pays \$4,000.

That particular number gives John pause.

JOHN
Then it's a killing job.

FARRAGUT
Yes. We'd like you to kill
Alfred Roebling.

SUNDAY
For the same amount you
apparently once saved him.

FARRAGUT
Confusing, isn't it?

SUNDAY
Ironic is the word Mr. Farragut.
Roebling's staying well outside
of town. At a ranch house.
You'll be miles away before...

John waves them off with revulsion. He continues away...

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - EXCELSIOR HOTEL - NIGHT

Mary sits in a chair in the hallway. Outside room 27. She
looks up as John steps around the corner. As he sees her:

INT. ROOM 27 - NIGHT

Moocher watches as the door opens and they enter. John
closes it behind them.

JOHN
Welcome to room 27.

They stand awkwardly. Neither of them knows what to say.

MARY
You look well.

JOHN
Why are you here, Mary?

MARY

Alfred is staying at the U. P. ranch. I'm here at the hotel tonight. I told him I needed to speak with you. He understood.

JOHN

Then speak to me. Do you love Alfred?

MARY

No. But I care about him.

She trails off. John looks at her. Finally...

JOHN

Did you love me back then?

MARY

I love you now. The way I loved you then. The way you love a dream.

They look at each other. She finally looks away.

MARY

Do you remember how easy it was to be together? How we laughed? How still we could be?

JOHN

I remember, but it's like a story someone told me, not something that happened to me.

MARY

(nodding)

A dream.

As she tries to compose herself, she's looking at gunbelts, the shotgun, loose cartridges on the bedspread. His eyes are on her.

JOHN

I haven't had a dream in a long time.

MARY

No. No I expect not.
(looks at him)
Do you kill men?

JOHN

I killed men during the war.

MARY

Do you kill them now?

He starts to look away, then looks her right in the eye.

JOHN

Yes. I kill men now.

MARY

Then I don't know you anymore.
My John died at Gettysburg.

JOHN

You don't have to tell me, Mary.
I'm the dead man.

(a beat; wonders)

Where do you find it in you to
judge me?

MARY

I should have listened to Alfred.
He realized what you've become.

JOHN

Alfred is weak.

MARY

Of course he's weak. But if
you're strong, then give me the
weak.

JOHN

He owes me \$4,000.

MARY

That isn't his debt. But he'll
pay it. Despite appearances he
doesn't have the money right
now. But in a few weeks, god
willing, you'll get it.

John turns, almost ashamed that the conversation has gotten
this base. And to his back, Mary asks the question she's
wanted answered for years.

MARY

What happened, John? In Boston.
In the gardens. You ran from
me. You didn't answer me. Why
didn't you turn around?

Of course, he can't hear her.

MARY

Answer me now!

Her shout causes Mocher to flinch. John sees this. Reacting, he draws his gun, wheels toward the door. Closed. Then the window. Nothing.

She watches, startled herself, confused. He looks to her.

JOHN
Did you hear something?

MARY
No... Did you hear me?

JOHN
(holstering)
No... What did you say?

Looking at her, his face goes slack. Realization flutters. She slowly reaches up, her hand trembling as she reaches out with both hand, barely touches the sides of his head.

MARY
Can you hear me, John?

JOHN
Mary, I'm deaf.

She lowers her arms, can't even begin to understand.

MARY
Since when?

JOHN
Gettysburg.

MARY
The letter, the letter I
received said you'd been shot.

JOHN
And deafened. A cannon went off
in my ear.

MARY
Dear God...

It's almost overwhelming. The magnitude of the chasm between reality and perception. Tears stream.

MARY
Every reason I ever made up.
Every story I told myself.
They're all wrong.

JOHN
Doesn't matter. It was only a
dream. And now you're awake.
And so am I.

MARY
Oh John...

JOHN
You should go now... Go!

A beat and she leaves. And John begins arming himself.

CUT TO:

INT. THE TRIGGER - NIGHT

Puffing a cheroot, Sunday looks up at someone. He pulls
out a wad of hundreds, ripples through fifty of them.

SUNDAY
Four thousand. As agreed.

He holds it out. A long beat. As John finally takes it.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - AUNT SOPHIE'S - NIGHT

Aunt Sophie shows Mr. Farragut down the hall. As he looks
through one door before continuing to the next...

FARRAGUT
No. Uh uh. Nope.
(looks in on Liza)
Oh, she suits me just fine.

LIZA'S ROOM

Farragut enters closing the door behind him. Liza looks
tired. He begins to strip down. Gunbelt, boots, pants...

FARRAGUT
You got a smile for me, girl?

LIZA
Long as you pay in cash.

FARRAGUT
Is there any other way?

He's down to his underwear. He plucks on his shorts.

FARRAGUT

You can finish taking these off.

He climbs onto the divan beside her. She forces a smile.

FARRAGUT

There you go... Let me ask you.
And be honest. How do you make
it through a day of this?

He asks friendly, but he's cruel. She gives it right back,
gestures to his crotch.

LIZA

Well, while you're down there
bumping away... I'm up here.
(taps her head)
Branding cattle.

FARRAGUT

Branding cattle, huh? I saw you
yesterday walking with a friend
of mine.

LIZA

Who's that?

FARRAGUT

J.B. Young. He a friend of yours?

He reaches up, brushes her hair from her forehead. Liza
gives nothing away.

LIZA

Just a customer, same as you.

FARRAGUT

He's fast with the pistols. But
I do believe I'm faster.

Farragut leans in, kisses her neck.

FARRAGUT

Anyhow, I plan to find out.

Liza pretends to respond, kisses him back.

LIZA

Thought you were friends.

FARRAGUT

Figure of speech.

More kissing. As things get a bit breathless.

LIZA

When?

FARRAGUT

(groping her)

When what, sweetheart?

LIZA

When are you going to shoot it
out with him?

Farragut pulls back, looks at her.

FARRAGUT

Why are you so interested?

A beat. She smiles.

LIZA

Because I'd like to watch.

FARRAGUT

Maybe tonight. Maybe tomorrow.
Hard to pin these things down.

There's a firm rap on the door.

LIZA

Yeah.

SUNDAY'S VOICE

I'm looking for my associate.
Mr. Farragut.

FARRAGUT

Damn... What!?

SUNDAY'S VOICE

We have urgent business.

Farragut sighs, then winks at Liza.

FARRAGUT

Stay warm, sweetheart, I'll be
back in a bit.

Farragut pulls on his trousers, struggles with his boots.

FARRAGUT

Hand me that gunbelt, will you?

Liza steps over, picks up the holster. Her back is to
Farragut. As a thought crosses her mind, she eases the
pistol from the holster.

REVERSE ANGLE

Boots on, Farragut looks at her back.

FARRAGUT

Hand it over, girl.

Liza turns. And as she hands him his holstered pistol...

CUT TO:

INT. SMOKING ROOM - EXCELSIOR HOTEL - NIGHT

Sunday and Farragut quickly, quietly brief Merriwether.

SUNDAY

He was paid in numbered notes.
Notes taken from the Great
Northern payroll.

MERRIWETHER

Killing the president of the
railroad is a crime. That's
all. But killing his family
will engender outrage. Outrage
Colfax will not ignore. Outrage
that will secure the charter.

FARRAGUT

Young'll take care of Roebing.
We'll handle the rest.

MERRIWETHER

Gentlemen, I don't care to know
details. They're why I pay you.
My brave Union Pacific detectives.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE OUTSIDE CHEYENNE - NIGHT

Farragut and Sunday ride hard.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - OUTSIDE CHEYENNE - NIGHT

Lantern light glows. Smoke curls off the chimney.
Crickets chirp. FIELDS OF GRAIN wave in the night breeze.

It couldn't be more idyllic. Except: John stands in the
moonlight. Murder in his eyes, pistols in their holsters.

JOHN

Alfred Roebing!

We see movement inside. A silhouette at the window.

JOHN
It's John Young!

The front door opens and Alfred appears.

ALFRED
Why are you here?

JOHN
Step out.

Alfred steps across and off the porch, stands across from him. As a shiver runs through him.

ALFRED
It's cold.

JOHN
I'm here to kill you, Alfred.

A beat. Alfred starts with a nervous laugh, then stops. The look on John's face stops him.

ALFRED
No one forced you to war, John.
It's an election you made.

JOHN
Yes. And killing you is an
election I made as well.

ALFRED
Good God, listen to yourself.

JOHN
You married the woman I loved.
You took the life that should
have been mine.

ALFRED
You gave it away. In spite of
your deafness, you gave it away.

JOHN
(surprised)
How did you know I was deaf?

ALFRED
I made inquiries.

JOHN
But you never told Mary.

ALFRED

She'd mourned for you enough. I didn't see any...

JOHN

You didn't see any what?

ALFRED

I'm going back inside now.

As Alfred starts to turn, John draws a pistol. So fast it's hard to see how it got in his hand. Alfred freezes.

JOHN

Turn your back on me, and I'll shoot you through and through.

ALFRED

(filled with fear)
My little boy is asleep inside!

JOHN

Then keep your voice down.

John slowly brings the pistol up to bear.

ALFRED

You're a murderer?

JOHN

What I am is forgotten. I used to think that all this, everything that happened to me, that it was God testing me. Until finally I understood; God has forgotten me.

ALFRED

And you? Have you forgotten John Bowman Young? You need to make your peace.

JOHN

There's no such thing.

ALFRED

Listen. I've had financial setbacks since my father died, but my business with the railroad, John. If we get the charter, I can give you as much money as you want. Name your price --

John lowers the gun. As Alfred sighs in relief, John draws a second pistol, tosses it into the dirt at Alfred's feet.

JOHN

Pick it up.

Alfred considers the gun, shakes his head 'no'.

John shoots. Alfred clutches his left arm. Hit!

JOHN

Pick it up, goddamn you.

Alfred reaches down, picks it up. Probably the first time he's ever held a gun. He holds it slack at his side.

JOHN

Now point it at me... Do it,
you coward.

Alfred begins to cry. He can't. Then...

The breeze blows back through John's hair as his life, as Alfred's life both hang in the balance. And for some reason John allows the breeze to catch him.

His head tilts back slightly. He can't hear it rustle through the moonlit field of grain beyond. But he can see it. You half expect Six Killer and the Pawnee to rise up.

A strange moment bordering on beautiful. John looks out. A wave runs over the field, a surge of power crossing the earth, born of Her and borne by Her.

JOHN

Is it a dream?

The gun's still aimed, but John doesn't know Alfred's there anymore. It's more unnerving. Alfred sinks to his knees.

JOHN

Caught in the hypnotic sway of the grain field.

JOHN

No. It's life...

The same words John said in the Jayhawk bank so long ago.

BOOM! Alfred fires back.

FARRAGUT & SUNDAY - 1/2 MILE AWAY

Reining up, the lodge not all that far away. They have FIVE HIRED GUNS riding with them. They react to the sound of more gunshots, then spur their horses onward.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - NIGHT

John doesn't hear the shot, but he looks down at the crimson bloom on his left side. Shot. He lowers his own gun, twirls it and holsters it.

John turns and starts to walk away. Alfred can't believe or understand it. He blinks through his tears, clutches his shattered arm.

ALFRED

All these years I've lived in your shadow! Mary doesn't have to say your name out loud for me to hear her saying it!

John keeps walking.

ALFRED

Goddamn you!

JOHN

Mounts his horse in the darkness, starts to ride away.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - NIGHT

As Farragut and Sunday ride up, they see Alfred on his knees. John is gone. Farragut hops down.

FARRAGUT

What's wrong, Mr. Roebeling?

No answer. Alfred weeps. Farragut sees the blood on his shirt sleeve.

FARRAGUT

Where's Young?

Sunday's gun is out; he's ready to finish the job.

FARRAGUT

Where's, Mrs. Roebeling? Where's your wife?

Alfred just cries. Farragut looks to Temple. Finally...

ALFRED

She's not here. She's at the hotel tonight.

Farragut thinks. Finally, he looks at Sunday, shakes him off. They're not going to kill Alfred yet.

CUT TO:

INT. LOBBY - EXCELSIOR HOTEL - NIGHT

A hitch in his stride, John enters, heads up the steps to the second floor. As blood drips to the carpet...

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM 27 - EXCELSIOR HOTEL - NIGHT

Dark, but for the moonlight. Moocher gets to his feet as the door opens and John walks in. Tail wagging, Moocher follows John as he walks past the open window. As the curtains drift back against the breeze, John enters...

THE BEDROOM

Where he sits on the bed. Moocher nuzzles him, licks his hands, but John barely responds. Finally, John lays on his side. Like he's laying down to die. As he closes his eyes, tears squeeze out.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - CHEYENNE - NIGHT

Sunday and Farragut prop Alfred up between them. He doesn't look so good. Reaching the door, Farragut pounds on it with his fist. One of the hired guns follows, drags little Temple along by the hand.

CUT TO:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

They dump Alfred on a chair. The DOCTOR moves in to start examining Alfred's bloody arm. Sunday and Farragut exchange a particularly grim look. As Alfred moans...

FARRAGUT

Mr. Roebing?

No answer. Farragut slaps him.

FARRAGUT

Mr. Roebing!

DOCTOR

Leave him be!

FARRAGUT

Do you think John Young would harm your wife?

ALFRED

What?

SUNDAY

Would he hurt your wife?

ALFRED

No... I don't know... Mary?
Oh god Mary...

DOCTOR

What's going on?

FARRAGUT

The man who did this, he might be after Mr. Roebling's wife.

DOCTOR

I've got him; go warn her!

A last look between Farragut and Sunday. Mission accomplished. They hurry out leaving Alfred behind.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - CHEYENNE - NIGHT

Sunday, Farragut and the five hired guns move ominously up the street. They pass Ezekiel, never at a loss for words.

EZEKIEL

Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.

They split: three go with Sunday and two with Farragut.

CUT TO:

INT. LOBBY- HOTEL EXCELSIOR - NIGHT

Farragut and his two enter. They start upstairs. As Farragut pauses to notice the blood left on the banister.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE ROOM 27 - SECOND FLOOR

Farragut's hired guns (#4 and #5) stop at the door. Farragut continues around the corner.

EXT. 1ST FLOOR AWNING - EXCELSIOR HOTEL - NIGHT

Sunday and his three hired guns (#1, #2, #3) creep along the top of the awning, passing by the 2nd floor windows. The lead man carries a shotgun.

INT. THIRD FLOOR HALLWAY - EXCELSIOR - NIGHT

Alone, Farragut knocks on a door.

FARRAGUT

It's Farragut, Mrs. Roebbling.

Mary answers in her nightrobe.

MARY

Is something wrong?

Farragut forces his way in, shutting the door behind him.

CUT TO:

EXT. AWNING - NIGHT

Sunday and boys are poised by the stick-propped window to room 27. Cheroot champed between his teeth, Sunday puffs smoke, nods at Hired Gun #1 who, leading with the shotgun, starts through.

INT. BEDROOM - ROOM 27 - NIGHT

Still lying on his side, John's eyes refocus as he sniffs something in the air. Cigar smoke?

INT. SITTING ROOM - ROOM 27 - NIGHT

#1 sees the empty room. As he turns to motion the others to follow...

The barrel of the gun hits the stick. The window falls...

AWNING

Hired Gun #2 catches it just before it slams. As the hired guns all breathe a sigh of relief...

SUNDAY

For crying out loud, he's deaf.

Smiles all around as they remember.

SUNDAY

Here we come, you deaf
sonuvabitch.

And they're climbing through.

INT. BEDROOM - ROOM 27 - NIGHT

Moocher's ears raise at the same time. John sees this. As his eyes pinpoint his own shotgun across the room...

INT. SITTING ROOM - ROOM 27 - NIGHT

#1 opens the door for #4 and #5 in the hall. They all follow Sunday and #2 and #3 into...

BEDROOM

Dark. Sunday watches as all the others open fire. The bed is torn to shreds. As they start clicking on empties.

SUNDAY

Enough!

Sunday steps forward. John's not there.

A CREAK on the awning outside the bedroom. Sunday wheels, fires several rounds through the wall as his men hurriedly reload. The bedroom window is closed. Sunday laughs at his own jumpy nerves.

#5

He ain't here.

A SCRATCHING from the closet. Everyone turns. Sunday motions for #3 to open the door. All guns are aimed.

Standing as far over as he can, #3 shoves open the closet door. Shivering in fear at the bottom: Moocher.

#4 sneers, raises his shotgun. About to club Mooch.

FAR BEDROOM WALL

We see John's eye peer through one of Sunday's holes, the shotgun barrel jut through another. As we realize John's out on the awning: BOOM!

The shotgun fires and #4 is hurled against the wall.

As Moocher makes a run for it: Boom! #3 is slammed into the open closet as he's hit.

Moocher disappears out the door as every man returns fire.

As the wall is turned to Swiss cheese...

INT. MARY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Finishing getting dressed, Mary reacts to the gunshots. Farragut sits across in a chair, pistol in hand.

MARY

I don't understand this.

FARRAGUT

Neither do I, Mrs. Roebling. Now come with me.

MARY

No.

FARRAGUT

You will if you want to see your boy again.

As Mary reacts to that...

INT. BEDROOM - ROOM 27 - NIGHT

As the last shot rings, Sunday looks to #1.

SUNDAY

(re: window)

See if he's there.

#1 goes to the window, pulls it open. He's about to stick his head out when he looks back.

#1

Like hell. Give it another few rounds.

Aiming high and low, they all blast the wall with another twenty rounds.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - AUNT SOPHIE'S - NIGHT

Several of the girls and customers have stepped out at the shots. Liza looks toward the hotel.

LIZA

John...

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - ROOM 27 - NIGHT

Sunday looks to #1 who opens the window and looks out.

ANGLE ON #1

No one on the awning. Just John's shotgun. The street is empty below.

#1

I don't see him.

WIDEN TO SHOW John perched atop the wooden Excelsior Hotel SIGN nailed to the wall over the windows. As he aims...

INT. BEDROOM - ROOM 27 - NIGHT

A GUNSHOT and #1's body goes limp. They yank him back inside but he's through.

Outside and above, the sound of a window breaking.

Nerves on the edge, #2 and #5 start fire into the ceiling.

SUNDAY

Stop it!

(they stop)

Get a hold of yourselves.

And then they're all diving for cover as lead starts to drill down through the ceiling from the room above. No one's hit as they all scramble out.

INT. 3RD FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Several GUESTS run screaming.

Farragut and Mary now react to the shots being fired from the 3rd floor room that they're passing. As Farragut hauls Mary along...

INT. EMPTY ROOM - 3RD FLOOR - NIGHT

John heads for the door.

INT. 3RD FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

John steps out, loading one of Spaulding's pearl handled revolvers as he goes.

Twenty feet down the hall, Farragut stands using Mary as a shield, his pistol aimed dead at John.

John is caught dead flatfooted. As Mary screams...

Farragut pulls the trigger. Click. Nothing. Click. Nothing again. As he pulls a desperate third time... BOOM!

John dives back out of sight as the bullet chews the transom just above his head.

Farragut looks, realizes his first two cylinders are empty.

FARRAGUT

That goddamn whore...

(Liza took out the shells in the room!) Farragut hauls Mary back to the landing, disappears down the stairs.

A beat. John exits the room a second time, follows. As he nears the third floor landing we're in his silent world.

INT. SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sunday, #2 and #5 nearly open fire on Farragut and Mary as they step off the stairs.

FARRAGUT

He's right behind me!

(to Sunday)

Where are the others?

SUNDAY

Dead.

FARRAGUT

Come on!

As they prepare to follow Farragut out...

FARRAGUT

(to #2)

You wait here.

Farragut, Sunday and #5 head out with Mary. #2 waits. Positioned behind a DOOR swung open into the hall.

Then there's John, leaping down to the second floor landing. He strides forward as shells pockmark the walls and ceiling around him.

John fires and double-whirls both pistols simultaneously. As the .45s are cocked by their own weight:

The door is torn to pieces as #2 is hit twice. He drops.

John stands there. Chain lightning and eleven claps of thunder. Gunsmoke curling up around him. As he reloads...

The door across from John opens a crack. A frightened eye stares out. Still loading, John looks across.

JOHN

It's okay. Lock the door and get under your bed.

A beat, the barrel of a gun juts out and... Bang! John sits heavily on the floor. Shot high in the abdomen. His pistols dropped out of reach.

The door opens. Merriwether (the frightened eye) steps out. Cautiously, gun aimed, he kneels across from John, smiles.

MERRIWETHER

A stranger gave me some advice once. I met him under difficult circumstances and I never forgot it. He said, "I hope you never have to shoot any man, but if you do, shoot him in his lunch."

The advice Spaulding gave him during the train robbery!

MERRIWETHER

His colloquial way of saying the stomach, of course.

John just looks at him. Is John about to die? Finally:

JOHN

Same stranger gave me some advice once, too.

MERRIWETHER

(indulgent)
Oh really. What was that?

JOHN

He said when your time comes...

John slowly raises either arm. There is a goddamn shiny DERRINGER held firmly in each hand. They are aimed point blank at Merriwether. As the chairman's eyes widen...

JOHN

It arrives beyond all escaping.

Two remorseless rounds slam into Merriwether's chest. As he twists back dead...

John drops the derringers. They hang by their strings at his sleeves. In pain, John sets his back against the wall, slides up to his feet, smearing blood as he rises.

CUT TO:

INT. LOBBY - EXCELSIOR HOTEL - NIGHT

Pandemonium. With Sunday and #5 leading the way, Farragut moves through the panicked guests, pistol in Mary's ribs.

EXT. EXCELSIOR HOTEL - NIGHT

Liza has just arrived as Farragut exits with Mary.

Rushing up with a shotgun, a TIN STAR SHERIFF sees Farragut's gun.

SHERIFF

Drop it!

Sunday exits, firing. The Sheriff goes down badly wounded, his shotgun out of reach.

Farragut, Sunday and #5 continue down the street.

Liza rushes over to tend to the Sheriff.

John exits the hotel. Liza sees him, gasps at the blood.

LIZA

John...

JOHN

Did you see them?

LIZA

(pointing)

That way.

John moves. She starts to stand.

JOHN
 (re: sheriff)
 Stay with him.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Ezekiel is a calm in the storm of commotion. He watches as John passes, hesitates at a deserted intersection. As all other sound mutes:

EZEKIEL
John Bowman Young.

Somehow John hears him. Don't ask how, but he looks over. The Prophet of Cheyenne points a finger up the street.

EZEKIEL
 That way...

Johns stares a beat, frowns. Heads that way.

CUT TO:

INT. ROUNDHOUSE - NIGHT

Sunday and Farragut lead in Mary. #5 brings up the rear.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

John moves down the street. Every sense he has on alert. The place seems deserted. Then... he sniffs the air:

JOHN
 Lilacs...

John looks to his left, sees the side door to the ROUNDHOUSE is open. He steps over, enters.

INT. ROUNDHOUSE - NIGHT

John looks about. Not a soul in sight.

ENGINE THREE

Execution site. TWO more HIRED GUNS (#7 and #6) stand here with little Temple. Rounding the corner, Mary breaks from Farragut rushes over to the boy.

MARY
 Why is he here?

SUNDAY

Seemed like a nice quiet place
to take care of business.

Mary can only imagine what he means.

Then: the telltale sound of feet SCUFFLING along the grit
covering the floor. Sunday looks to Farragut, then motions
to #5, #6 and #7.

SUNDAY

That way.

They head one way, Sunday the other. Farragut is left with
Mary and Temple.

BETWEEN ENGINES FOUR AND THREE

Sunday listens to the footsteps. He crouches, catches a
glimpse of John's feet passing on the other side of the
engine. Confident, he moves to bushwhack him. And then...

JOHN

Sees a shadow just disturb the glint of moonlight across a
locomotive.

SUNDAY

Steps around the corner, gun raised to kill John. But
John's gone. Spooky.

#7

Stands with his compatriots. Also spooked.

#7

Farragut! Sunday! Where is
he?!

FARRAGUT - BY ENGINE THREE

FARRAGUT

Somewhere between --

A STEAM WHISTLE SCREAMS. The rest of what he has to say is
drowned out by the sound

STEAM WHISTLES

John's hand pulls down one, bends back the handle.
Another. And another. And another.

#7

He motions to #5 and #6. They fan out, advance into the roundhouse.

SUNDAY

Covers one ear. Being deaf now would be an advantage.

#5

Alongside an engine. His eyes widen as he sees John step onto the track ahead. His back to him. #5 is inspired. Scrambling up to the engine, he engages it into gear. As it rolls forward, #5 jumps back to the ground.

JOHN

Moves cautiously along. Just ahead, the huge iron bumper at the end of the rail. The train silently fills the frame behind him. He's about to be crushed between the two, when he sets his foot on the rail, feels the vibration.

John dives clear as the engine slams into the bumper.

#5

Bringing up the rear, gun aimed. John looks to be a dead man when, out of nowhere...

Moocher leaps through a gap. Chomps down on his arm. John fires and #5 drops. Even then Moocher won't let go.

SUNDAY

Passing between two engines, a figure to his left. He nearly shoots #7. The two men consider each other a startled beat, then continue separately.

THE ROUNDHOUSE

The rivets just about want to shake loose under the cacophony. It's unbearable.

And then... SILENCE! (John's world).

JOHN

Moves with a slow grace between the engines, searching them out. For him it's practically a dream world. Moonlight slashing down. White steam billowing. And very quiet.

As he moves to cross into the steam ahead, a shadow seems to bulge from it.

John FIRES without hesitation. #6 drops dead to the floor, whisps of steam trailing down around him.

FARRAGUT

Farragut rattled. Looking four different ways at once.

Mary looks back over her shoulder, sees John standing ten feet behind her, like he was waiting for the bus.

John makes a gentle motion with his hand. Wants her to get down. She takes Temple, silently lies flat on top of him.

Farragut turns, sees Mary on the ground a confused beat before getting an eyeful of John.

Silence as both men fire, flames belching. Farragut is hit three times. Farragut dies.

John pulls Mary to her feet, but no time for reunions. Mary sees the blood all over him, is dismayed. John points off in a particular direction, just mouths "GO!"

She and Temple move off.

SUNDAY

Creeps along the top of ENGINE TWO. Catches a glimpse of John moving below. He cocks the hammers on two pistols, rises to get a dead angle.

JOHN

Just spotting Sunday's shadow on the wall ahead. He crouches, wheels and fires all at the same time.

Sunday fires simultaneously.

John is hit in the thigh.

Sunday topples over, drops behind the engine.

#7

Sound returns as Sunday nearly drops on top of him. #7 sees his dead boss, starts to panic. Wheeling around a few times before starting forward. Only to...

COME AROUND A CORNER

#7 freezes as he feels the barrel of John's .45 against the side of his head. He closes his eyes as John cocks back the hammer. Quieter out here so we hear it.

JOHN

Where are you from?

That question wasn't quite what #7 was expecting.

#7

W-W-What?

JOHN

Are you deaf? I said, where are you from?

#7

Texas...

JOHN

(points east)

Well, kid, Texas is that way...
Go home.

#7 drops his gun and skedaddles. Back toward Texas.

EXT. ROUNDHOUSE - NIGHT

The whistles return as John exits, each step a labor. He leans against the wall, can go no further. Out of gas, out of time, he slowly sinks back down to a sitting position. He stares off trying to focus on something.

JOHN'S POV

A rippling WHEAT FIELD. Amber waves of grain. Beautiful. Except... a black figure moves through it. Walking relentlessly forward. Advancing ominously. Is it Death himself? But wait, he's wearing a black cowboy hat...

JOHN

Drifting off. But then back to reality. Aware of one last presence. He looks up as the Man In Black looms over him.

MAN IN BLACK

John Bowman Young.

John starts to raise the .45. The Man In Black easily takes it away.

MAN IN BLACK

I'm with the Pinkerton Detectives
and I've been looking for you.

John's hand moves slowly for his boot. He starts to draw his boot gun. But the Man In Black casually 'toes' it away. He reaches in his vest like he's going for a gun. But he pulls out a folded paper instead.

MAN IN BLACK

In 1863 a \$4,000 investment was
made for you in the formation of
the Great Northern Railroad.
That \$4,000 investment is now
worth... \$900,000.

As John passes out...

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK: THUNDER ROLLS AND RUMBLES.

EZEKIEL'S VOICE

Doth Job fear God for nought?
Shall mortal man be more just
than God? Shall a man be more
pure than his maker?

MARCHING FEET POUND.

SOLDIERS

(singing)

Mine eyes have seen the glory of
the coming of the Lord...

A BATTLEFIELD CACOPHONY OF SLAUGHTER.

LEWIS' VOICE

(dying)

Oh God... Oh God...

A WOMAN CRYING SOFTLY.

TEMPLE'S VOICE
 Momma, is Papa going to die?

MARY
 Pray for him, Temple. Pray for
 him. Pray for both of them.

THE SOUND OF A KNOCK ON THE DOOR.

LIZA'S VOICE
 Mrs. Roebling, I'm Liza. I'm
 here to give you a hand.

THE THUNDER ROLLS.

EZEKIEL'S VOICE
 The Lord gave and the Lord hath
 taken away; blessed be the name
 of the Lord.

A PEN SCRATCHES

ALFRED'S VOICE
 John Young did not shoot me with
 intent. It was an accident.

SHERIFF
 You're sure of that?

ALFRED'S VOICE
 Yes, sir.

A TRAIN WHISTLE BLOWS.

SCHUYLER COLFAX'S VOICE
 The charter is awarded to... the
 Great Northern Railroad.

A GENTLE RAIN FALLS.

EZEKIEL'S VOICE
 (softly)
 Hath the rain a father? Who
 hath begotten the drops of dew?

FADE IN:

A PUDDLE - DAY

Dotted with rain. Nearly hidden in the ripples, the low
 angle reflection of a man's face. John? Obliterated as a
 boot steps down into it, pulls away leaving muddy streaks.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - CHEYENNE - DAY

Passengers board a TRAIN in the rain. Winter is coming. We see Alfred. He holds little Temple's hand with his right hand. The sleeve of Alfred's left arm is empty. In fact, it's pinned to his shoulder. He winces as he boards.

Mary helps him keep his balance. He sees her concern.

ALFRED

It's alright. I suppose I got my war wound after all.

RAILROAD STATION CROWD

John hurries along. No guns. Looks about desperately. He spots Mary.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Alfred and son enter the compartment. Mary's about to...

JOHN

Mary...

She turns. There he is. She steps over.

JOHN

Weren't you going to say goodbye?

MARY

I didn't know how.

He takes her hands.

JOHN

No one does. Are you going back to Boston?

MARY

Yes. Alfred's ruined. Dead broke. But he's determined to face it. And you?

JOHN

I don't know...

John hands her a document envelope.

JOHN

Give Alfred this. From me.

MARY

What is it?

JOHN

Nearly one million shares of the
Great Northern Railroad.

MARY

I can't take it.

JOHN

And I can't keep it. It was
born out of blood. And I'm
through with blood. Besides,
I'm giving it to him, not you.

Mary looks away, nods. This all hurts so much. John
reaches out, gently turns her face to his.

JOHN

Some things were meant to be.
Others are not. No matter how
hard we wish them so.

MARY

I said something terrible to
you. Something I didn't mean.
(a tear falls)
You didn't die at Gettysburg.

Mary steps into his arms. As they hold onto each other...

MARY

(over his shoulder)
I did.
(a whisper)
I love you, John Bowman Young.

He couldn't possibly have heard it, but some 6th sense
makes him know she said it, or is feeling it. John pulls
back, looks at her.

JOHN

I love you, too...

EXT. TRAIN - DAY

Where Liza watches them through the glass. In despair. Not
so bad at reading lips herself. And as Mary and John kiss,
we can see Liza's heart break.

CLOSE ON LIZA

She looks like she's going to fall over. The TRAIN WHISTLE BLOWS as she leans against a post for support. We hear steam hiss as the train starts to pull out.

Finally, Liza looks back one last time. The cars move by. She tries to fight off tears she doesn't have the strength to fight off anymore. And as the caboose finishes things off, there he is:

John! Standing on the other side of the tracks. He knows she's there. As he walks up her knees are weak.

JOHN

I just gave away the world.
Everything but \$4000. You still
need a partner in that ranch?

As she looks at him, something is amazing to her.

LIZA

Don't exactly know why, blue,
but I'd move a mountain for you.

JOHN

I believe you could do it...
Elizabeth Clarissa Perry.

John wipes a tear from her cheek.

JOHN

Cow barn girl.

She's not a whore anymore. And he's not a killer of men.
As they move into each other's arms.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WYOMING RANCH HOUSE - MAGIC HOUR

On the mantle: a published copy of Spaulding's book. And we begin to move away from it. A fire burns in the hearth, but we're already back outside through the front door.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

That's the Young homestead right
there. *The Young dream.* Always
knew he had more farmer than vivid
in him. Old John Bowman Young.
Finally cashed his pistols in for
plowshares.

The sky a riot of color. Smoke billows from the chimney.
Moocher trots past. The dilapidated house fixed up proper.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

And Liza! Liza Clarissa Young. I
would've liked to have known her.

Further back still until it seems we're passing out over
the ocean. Only it's a billowing SEA OF WHEAT. For as far
as the eye can see. And walking through the heart of it,
holding hands forever, John and Liza.

SPAULDING'S VOICE

She showed John that the end was
not the end at all. The end was
just the beginning. And a man can
make his peace after all.

FADE TO BLACK.

Roll Credits.

The End