

BLACK RIVER

Written by

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FADE IN:

We're UNDERWATER.

*It's black and cold. Moonlight filters down. Fish flit by.
All is still.*

Seconds pass. Silence presses in.

*There's a rush of whitewater. Something silver flashes by. A
KNIFE. Being swept through the current. Cleaned.*

A sound goes shhk shhk shhk.

EXT. STEPPE. NIGHT

NOTE: the year is somewhere between 1860 and 1880.

The BAGGART RANCH HOUSE sits squat and lonely on the empty flatland. Stock pens flank the house. Cattle sleep.

PARNELL SNIPS (PRE-LAP)

Mr. Baggart, I can't reckon a thing
out there except cattle and quiet.

INT. BAGGART RANCH HOUSE. PARLOR. NIGHT

PARNELL SNIPS (42) steps back from a window, his brow creased with confusion.

PARNELL SNIPS (CONT'D)

We been at this weeks now. Sure
would help we knew what we was
expectin.

His eyes turn to GRANT BAGGART (55)--a swarthy lump of a man--who at present stares beyond the paunch of his stomach at something clutched in his hand.

PARNELL SNIPS (CONT'D)

Mr. Baggart, sir?

Sweat drips down Grant's face. He wipes it away.

GRANT BAGGART

Parnell, rouse the men. I'm not
paying them for their slumber.

Parnell sighs and gives a sharp whistle. The rest of the room stirs, a groggy mix of DIRTY COWPUNCHERS and HIRED HANDS.

Parnell gestures to a group of them. They slink from the parlor, passing SARAH BAGGART (25), who pouts in a doorway.

SARAH

Papaw, what's going on? Why won't you tell me? I can help.

Grant gives her a weak smile.

GRANT BAGGART

Tomorrow, dear, tomorrow. Hamlin, would you escort her to her room, please?

HAMLIN (22) detaches himself from a wall and waves Sarah before him. She huffs at her grandfather and stomps away.

Grant waits for their footsteps to recede up the stairs. He checks his pocket watch. It's almost two.

GRANT BAGGART (CONT'D)

Soon now. I can feel it.

PARNELL

Soon now for what, Mr. Baggart?

But Grant doesn't reply. He's perspiring more than ever.

EXT. STEPPE. NIGHT

The moon emerges from behind dark clouds. A COLD WIND begins to blow. In their pens, the sleeping cattle wake and groan.

TWO SHADOWS appear. They cut across the steppe, bringing the wind with them.

INT. PARLOR. NIGHT

The bitter wind howls against the windowpanes, rattling them in their frames. Grant quakes.

GRANT BAGGART

It's here.

His eyes find Parnell. Parnell gives another whistle.

THROUGHOUT THE ROOMS OF THE RANCH HOUSE

The men take up their rifles and smash out the window glass and level their weapons out into the night.

They shiver, breath smoking, and wait.

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

Sarah's eyes dart from a closet to Hamlin at the window.

SARAH

Well? What is *it*? What's out there?

But Hamlin doesn't respond.

EXT. STEPPE. LOW RISE. NIGHT

The shadows come to a halt. They are no "it." They are two men.

JAKE (21)--slight and pale--crouches down and stares at the YELLOW LIGHT of the ranch below. His lips twist into a grimace. The expression is cold and indifferent and insincere. As if the best Jake can do is to mimic this affectation. Mimic being human in all its various forms. He takes out a FLASK and tugs from it. The grimace fades.

His partner, GILCHRIST (42), towers over him. He's missing some teeth and his right ear. He shrugs off a grizzly-skin coat and pulls a COMPASS from his pocket. Its dial swivels to the ranch house. A small ticker reads "VIII." He spits.

GILCHRIST

We still got us a week. We oughta figger the artillery down there first.

Jake's head jerks to him. His voice is icy.

JAKE

No. Tonight.

Gilchrist scowls.

GILCHRIST

You'll still have your fun we wait.

JAKE

No, I ain't waitin, Gilchrist.
Tonight.

GILCHRIST

Git on your feet, boy.

Jake stands.

JAKE

I ain't waitin.

GILCHRIST
You *ain't* waitin. There might could
be fifty hands down there.

JAKE
There ain't fifty.

GILCHRIST
No? And how come you to know that?
Jake shifts. *He doesn't know.*

JAKE
I'm tellin you there ain't.
Gilchrist grins. He's been having fun with Jake.

GILCHRIST
Boy, I didn't allow there was.
He steps forward. The wind dies down and the night is quiet.
Then he tears it apart, his voice BOOMING over the flatland.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Grant Baggart, you was a two-bit
cardsharp sold his soul to the
Devil in exchnange for prosperity!
Well, you got it! But now the sands
done run out, Baggart, and what's
been promised is due. You can come
out peaceful or you can fix to
fight! Don't make a speck of
difference to us! And Baggart, I
tell you, it won't make a speck of
difference for you. Them's the
terms. You've a minute.

INT. PARLOR. NIGHT

The men share looks. A few of them back from the windows.
Grant jumps forward.

GRANT BAGGART
Triple pay to those remain. And a
hundred dollar bounty to each scalp
presented me. I swear it!

It's a lucrative offer. The men return to their posts.

EXT. LOW RISE. NIGHT

Gilchrist smirks.

GILCHRIST
He ain't comin out.

Jake is crouching again. He stares at the men's silhouettes below. He GROANS. Gilchrist kicks at him.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
What'd I tell you, boy? Git up. You
aim to leave it til tomorrow?

Jake leaps away. He stares at Gilchrist. Then he pads off.

EXT. STOCK PENS. NIGHT

Snow's begun to fall. Jake slips along the far fences, using the cattle as cover.

EXT. LOW RISE. NIGHT

Gilchrist peers through the thickening flurry and spits.

GILCHRIST
C'mon, boy.

EXT. STOCK PENS. NIGHT

Jake reaches the far end of the enclosures and stops.

He pulls a GLEAMING REVOLVER from his holster. The revolver is wrought silver, patterned with a DEMON'S LEERING FACE.

He raises it above his head and fires. The gunfire, a fiery red, punches a hole through the clouds.

EXT. LOW RISE. NIGHT

Gilchrist grins and hefts an identical REVOLVER from his belt. He fires it into the air as well.

INT. PARLOR. NIGHT

The gunfire echoes about the room. Grant gawks at the backs of his men.

GRANT BAGGART
Well, what are you waiting for?!
Blast them, goddamnit!

The barrage begins.

IN ALL ROOMS

The men discharge in the direction of the red revolver fire. Smoke singes the air. Grant hops up and down amongst it.

GRANT BAGGART (CONT'D)

Kill them! Kill them!

LOW RISE

Gunfire zips past Gilchrist. He howls with delight and charges the ranch, his revolver cartridge spinning endlessly.

PARLOR

His first shots blow men clean across the room. Detach limbs from bodies. A COWPUNCHER throws down his weapon.

COWPUNCHER

I ain't with Baggart no more! I-

He's shot through the chest, launched backwards to where Grant huddles behind a snooker table. Grant chokes back a scream and crawls from the room.

STOCK PENS

Jake fires through the fencing at the MEN lining the back windows. One dead. Two. Three. Four. Five. The speed and accuracy with which he shoots incredible. No joy in it like Gilchrist, just an emotionless nothing.

KITCHEN

Four of the men take shelter. Grant scampers in. He spots Jake barring his way out the back.

GRANT BAGGART

Why aren't you returning fire?!

HIRED HAND

Sir, the livestock.

GRANT BAGGART

Hang the livestock! Shoot him!

The men heave up and commence to emptying their barrels.

STOCK PENS

The cattle are blown to pieces. Jake drops to the ground and looks to his stomach. He's been hit.

BEDROOM

Hamlin is struck. Killed. His rifle clatters across the floor, coming to a rest at the edge of Sarah's bed.

STOCK PENS

The cattle have been driven into a frenzy. They surge against the wooden railings and split them, stampeding out into the night. Jake ducks as horns slice overhead. He sits there, shirt soaking with snow and blood. Then he rises up.

KITCHEN

COWPUNCHER

I think we got hi-

A HOLE EXPLODES in the cowpuncher's chest.

His companions spin to the windows, just in time to be cut down. Grant watches walleyed and stumbles back out of the room, down a hallway, and back into the...

PARLOR

Where a single ranch hand remains. But then he's hit.

Grant twists, searching for another exit. But there is none. He crumples back behind the snooker table.

And just like that, it's over. Nothing left but the sound of wind and Grant's frightened panting.

IN ALL ROOMS

Flurries of snow melt in warm pools of blood. Bodies are splayed across the floor. It's a gruesome slaughter.

EXT. CATTLE PENS. NIGHT

Jake rises unsteadily, silhouetted by the kitchen's yellow light. In this moment, we realize how small he is. Just an adolescent in stature. He stares at the oil lamps within and he groans. Then he groans louder. Then he stops.

The snow whorls about his head, but still he doesn't move.

Finally, a gust of wind extinguishes the lamps. Yellow light fades to black. Jake re-grips his revolver. He climbs through the windows.

INT. KITCHEN. NIGHT

Jake stumbles down from the sill. A DYING MAN twitches.

DYING MAN

Hel-

Jake shoots him through the head. He looks over the fallen bodies. Then he continues on.

INT. HALL. NIGHT

Jake drags himself past framed paintings and stern faces in inky daguerrotypes.

He passes the staircase. A weapon is cocked. He dives forward as a tintype beside his head explodes.

AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRCASE

Sarah fumbles to reload Hamlin's rifle, but she can't seem to do it, and as Jake rights himself, she flees down a hall.

Jake looks to the parlor ahead. He can hear Grant's panting. *It could all be over in a second.* Beat. He turns and climbs the stairs.

INT. BEDROOM. NIGHT

Sarah is rotated to the closet as Jake enters. She spins to him, but his revolver is drawn, and she drops her rifle.

SARAH

Please. I- I have no quarrel with you. You can just let me go.

Jake considers her. The blonde rings of her hair. THE LIGHT POOLED IN HER EYES. He shoots her.

She's slammed back against the closet, sliding to the ground with a whimper. Jake's face is blank. He watches the blood blossom from her. There's a muffled cry from the closet.

He frowns. He steps forward and kicks over Sarah's body, knocking away her arm as she reaches for him with her last breath. He opens the closet door.

There's a BOY (8) inside. The child's face is rigid with fear. Jake freezes. He looks to Sarah. Then back to the boy. There's a kitchen knife in the child's hand. It shakes.

Jake's face clouds. For a second, his trigger hand wavers. His weapon drops to his side.

Then the child begins to cry. An INHUMAN RAGE surges across Jake. He raises the revolver and fires.

INT. PARLOR. NIGHT

Gilchrist squats before Grant, his revolver shoved beneath Grant's chin.

GILCHRIST

You should've come out. But not the one of you ever do.

Jake staggers into the room. Gilchrist grins.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

You have your fun, boy?

Jake ignores him. A GOLD AURA comes from Grant's pocket and TEARS run down Grant's cheeks. Jake studies them then looks away.

JAKE

Finish it.

Grant begins to pray. Gilchrist takes Grant's cheek in his hand.

GILCHRIST

Hush now. You made your choice in this world. Ain't no takin it back.

JAKE

Finish it, Gilchrist.

Gilchrist glowers.

GILCHRIST

Don't tell me what to do, boy.

But he stands and brings the revolver to Grant's forehead. Grant's prayers quicken.

In a mirror, there's movement. Parnell. He creeps into the room. Jake spots him, but he's too weak to react, and Parnell swings behind him and presses a revolver to Jake's temple.

PARNELL SNIPS

Al-alright. No one moves. Except you, Mr. Baggart. You come with me.

Grant gasps relief. He makes to stand, but Gilchrist pushes him back down.

PARNELL SNIPS (CONT'D)

What'd I say? Don't you move.

Gilchrist ignores Parnell. He gives Jake a once over, noting his wound and his blood-soaked clothing. He chuckles.

GILCHRIST

Boy, I do believe you're gonna die.

Jake closes his eyes. Beat. He takes a deep breath.

JAKE

Finish it. I want it over.

Then he reaches up to Parnell's revolver and pulls the trigger, and with a bright flash, BLOWS OFF HIS OWN HEAD.

CUT TO:

INT. CABIN. BEDROOM. NIGHT

JOSIE (35) wakes with a jolt. She stays there a moment, tensely upright in her bed, heart thumping. But there's nothing out of the ordinary in the small room, and after a second she exhales and relaxes back into her pillow.

Her hand traces up her body, past her bruised arms to the JAGGED SCAR below her collarbone.

She looks to the window. A lock keeps it in place. She slips out of bed and lifts up a floorboard, removing a knife.

She goes to the window and jimmies the knife in the lock. It clicks open. She slips out into the night.

EXT. CABIN. PORCH. NIGHT

DEPUTY BILLY RUPP (23) sleeps in a rocking chair, blissfully unaware as Josie slinks past him and off into the woods.

EXT. FOREST. NIGHT

Josie slides beneath jagged trees, her footsteps muffled.

EXT. RIVER. NIGHT

She breaks from the forest and moves along the riverbank, stopping at a pine with a hollow in its trunk.

She looks about her and reaches into the hollow and removes a handful of BIRCH BARK FIGURES. She lays them carefully on the ground and reaches in again and removes a DRAWSTRING POUCH.

She blows cobwebs from the pouch and considers it. It's small and unassuming. With a deep inhale, she opens it.

A GOLD COIN tumbles from the pouch. Demons leer at us from its relief. Lettering GLOWS GOLD. Along its edge is a DATE.

Josie studies the date. Suddenly, she turns and flings the coin into the river. She watches it sink, her breath ragged.

INT. CABIN. BEDROOM. NIGHT

Josie slips back into her room. She listens for sounds within the cabin. There are none.

She sighs relief and turns to her bed. She stops in her tracks. There, on her pillow, is the glowing gold coin.

EXT. RIDGE. NIGHT

Gilchrist sits bestride a gigantic BLACK MARE, Jake's body slung over the flanks of a PACKHORSE beside him.

He stretches and reaches out and pushes Jake's body to the ground. It hits the earth with a sickening thud. He grins.

TIME PASSES. THE MOON MOVES ALONG THE SKY.

A thin layer of snow covers Jake's body. Gilchrist yawns and looks to it. But JAKE'S BODY IS NOW GONE.

His eyes dart to the heavens. There. A COMET FALLS TO EARTH, landing in a nearby wood. He spurs the mare.

EXT. PINE FOREST. NIGHT

Jake lies naked and unconscious in a shallow crater. His body is covered in tattoos and scars. His HEART GLOWS A DULL RED.

With a sudden gasp, he wakes. He tests the air around him, his eyes squeezed shut. He feels the white light of the moon upon his skin and for a second his chilly countenance thaws.

GILCHRIST (O.S.)
You're still down here with me.

He freezes. Gilchrist watches him from a few yards away.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
We ain't made it up to heaven yet.

His eyes snap open. He takes in his surroundings. His fingers rake at the snow.

JAKE

Ain't you finished it?

Gilchrist tosses him a bundle of fresh clothes, as well as his belt and holster.

GILCHRIST

Watch your tongue, boy. Course I did. Course I did.

EXT. CAMPFIRE. NIGHT

A rabbit roasts on a spit.

Jake huddles over his belt and notches it with a WORN KNIFE. The belt is covered in such notches. Jake finishes and counts the notch's column.

Across the fire, Gilchrist tears meat off the rabbit and pops it into his mouth. There's a LOUD HISSING. His mouth SMOKES. He spits out the meat, laughing through his pain...

GILCHRIST

I keep thinkin He'll one day forget
-fool I am-and there'll be food and
drink for the both of us again, but
damnit if that blood-eyed sunuvab-

JAKE

Ten and seven-score.

Gilchrist stops. Jake is holding up the belt. He frowns.

GILCHRIST

Boy, I was opinin. What'd you say?

JAKE

Ten and seven-score.

Gilchrist's face darkens. He considers the belt.

GILCHRIST

Alright. Toss it here.

Jake does. Gilchrist catches the belt and holds it to the firelight. After a few seconds he tosses it back.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Shit, I can't count it. How come
you to that figger? You can't
arithematize a lick more'n me.

JAKE
That doctor in Sutter's Mill. He
told me.

GILCHRIST
Boy, you put a fryin pan through
his skull.

Jake doesn't respond. Gilchrist scratches at the hole in the
side of his head where an ear should be.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
What're you fixin to tell me, boy?

JAKE
I want you to ask Him.

GILCHRIST
Ask Him what?

JAKE
You know what.

Gilchrist ponders that. Beat.

GILCHRIST
You ask Him.

Jake slashes at the ground with his knife.

JAKE
He don't come to me! You know He
don't! You ask Him. You.

Gilchrist reclines back into the shadows. His eyes gleam. The
fire pops. After a little while...

GILCHRIST
Alright, boy. I'll ask Him.

DISSOLVE TO:

A GOLD COIN

The same as Josie's. Spinning through the air, dropping back
into Gilchrist's open palm. He flicks the coin skyward again.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
You remember when I found you, boy?

Across the fire, Jake runs a BLOODY LOCKET OF BLONDE HAIR through his fingers.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

It were in that godforsaken desert where no water was to be found. We'd happened up a man and his mule had been waylaid. At first, we thought a buzzard was at them. Then we came in close and seen it were you. You weren't no bigger'n a pine cone, but you was bitin at the man, his mule untouched. Slurpin up his blood for to quench your thirst. We just sat our horses and watched.

Jake closes his eyes. A noise rings in his ears. It goes *shhk shhk shhk*.

JAKE

I never done that.

GILCHRIST

I remember thinkin to myself, by God, ain't that the prettiest thing I ever seen.

JAKE

Gilchrist.

GILCHRIST

Boy, you listenin to me?

JAKE

I killed a woman back there. I wish I hadn't'a done that.

Silence. Then Gilchrist breaks into laughter.

GILCHRIST

No you don't! A monster like you don't care bout nothin or no one!

Jake leaps to his feet, stabbing at Gilchrist with his knife.

JAKE

Take it back! Take it back!

But Gilchrist kicks up his boot and knocks Jake back and now he rises, his revolver out and his smile gone.

GILCHRIST

Boy, you want me to hurt you bad?

All of a sudden he begins to seize. He collapses, his eyes rolling into his head, his mouth foaming.

Jake strides forward and kicks him hard in the stomach. Then he walks off and sits and waits.

Gilchrist's seizures stop. He sits up. The gold coin is gone from his hand. He stands and paces. He avoids Jake's gaze.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

He gave me a name and a place and a date. Same as it's ever been.

But he doesn't say anything more and now Jake stands too, and Gilchrist feels his burning eyes and he kicks at the fire.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Goddamn it, don't you look at me like that! When the Devil speaks to you, you don't ask Him nothin! We was outlaws, boy. Killt dead. He brung us back into His service. He knows the deal He made. He don't need me remindin Him.

JAKE

I asked you, Gilchrist! I asked you. I ain't stayin here no longer. I ain't!

Jake waves his knife through the air. Gilchrist stops and spits. A long time seems to pass.

GILCHRIST

You're right, boy. You ain't. We got us a new destination.

He strides off into the night. Hoofbeats pound away. Jake stands there, trembling.

INT. CABIN. DAY [MEMORY]

A WOMAN stands at a counter with her back to us. Her hair is blonde. She's whetting a KNIFE. It goes *shhk shhk shhk*.

We're sitting at a table and on the table is a FISH. Sunlight slants through the windows. Warm yellow light. *Shhk shhk shhk*. We recognize the woman's knife. It's Jake's.

EXT. MESA FOOTHILLS. DAY

A DEAD MAN stares up at us. Jake kneels over him. His face screws up and his body quavers. It's confusing. Then we realize he's trying to make himself cry. But no tears come. His face hollows and he stands and walks away.

EXT. MESA. DAY [RIDING]

Jake and Gilchrist trot through soft rain. Jake's now bestride a BLUE ROAN. The knife is in his hand.

He watches the sun slide behind a cloud. He draws the knife DOWN HIS FOREARM. Blood flows.

GILCHRIST

Twelve Oaks. I recall correctly
that's a few days shy of Trapper's
Valley.

Jake twitches. Gilchrist senses the movement.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

You know it, boy?

Jake doesn't reply. Rainwater hits his wound. It SIZZLES and SCABS OVER. Gilchrist hears the noise and spits and sits his mare. Rain patters.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Boy, I ain't ridin all this way
what with you bleedin yourself
reborn every hour. You've somethin
you aim to make known?

Blood drips. Jake shakes.

JAKE

He ain't gonna send us up.

GILCHRIST

He is.

JAKE

He ain't.

GILCHRIST

He-

JAKE

He ain't! He told us five score!
Then He told us that weren't
enough. Five and twenty souls more.

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

Now it's another five and twenty
and there'll be another five and
twenty after that. I'm tellin you,
He ain't never gonna let us leave.
And I told you, I ain't stayin here
no longer! I ain't!

Jake plunges his knife into Gilchrist. Gilchrist bellows and whips out his revolver. It discharges, spooking Jake's horse, pitching Jake from its back. Jake lands on his shoulder. It pops. He writhes in the mud as Gilchrist dismounts.

GILCHRIST

Boy, what happens we don't keep a
date He wants kept?

Jake doesn't respond. Gilchrist kicks him in the face.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

He. Sends. Us. Back. To. Hell.

With each word comes a fresh kick.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

So why don't you quit all your
goddamn fuckin fuckery!

His next kick snaps back Jake's head. Now Jake doesn't move. The sun has come out. Its YELLOW LIGHT burns his eyes.

Gilchrist levels his revolver at the wretched figure at his feet. He opens his mouth and closes it and opens it again.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Why don't you just fuckin quit it.

He shoots Jake in the head.

EXT. SKIES. DAY [FALLING]

Jake plummets through the firmament. His eyes flutter open. He twists to the sky, staring up at something we cannot see.

GILCHRIST (PRE-LAP)

Boy. We're here.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE COMPASS

Its ticker winds from "XL" to "VIII."

EXT. OVERLOOK. DAY

Gilchrist flicks it shut. Spread beneath him and Jake is the town of TWELVE OAKS. He scans its empty streets.

A DRUNK with a sloshing flask stumbles from a saloon. Gilchrist grins. His eyes move to Jake's flask on his hip.

GILCHRIST
Wouldn't you like a taste of the
real thing?

Jake ignores him, his own gaze following the drunk.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Your shirt is scarlet, boy.

Jake looks down. His shirtsleeves are crusted red. Gilchrist gives a disgusted nod to a nearby river.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Go wash yourself clean fore someone
spots you.

Jake nudges his horse toward the water.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Hold on. I ain't finished.

Gilchrist holds out the compass.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
You signal you spot somethin.

Jake grabs the compass, but Gilchrist doesn't let go.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
And boy... you remember what it is
we's here to do. Cause I'm done
remindin you.

His eyes bore into Jake. Jake pries the compass away from him and gallops off.

EXT. RIVERBANK. DAY

A pale sun shines the cool water. Jake crouches with his arms submerged in a dark pool. After a second, he yanks them up. A FISH is clasped in his fingertips.

It wriggles in the light. Jake turns it from side to side, studying its glinting scales.

He lays it on a stone and angles its eyes to the sun and watches it writhe and gasp until it dies. He closes his eyes. We hear *shhk shhk shhk*.

He stands and undresses and wades out into the river. When he reaches its middle, he slips his head underwater.

INT. EMPTY SALOON. DAY

A BARKEEP polishes glasses. The batwings swing open and closed. Gilchrist sidles up to the bar.

GILCHRIST

Whiskey.

The barkeep nods. Gilchrist considers him and grins.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Say, I'm lookin for a fella.

The barkeep nods again, keeping his eyes to his work.

BARKEEP

You tell me a name and I'll try to tell you where that name'll be.

Gilchrist shakes his head.

GILCHRIST

No. That ain't no use to me.

BARKEEP

No?

GILCHRIST

No. I already know where this fella's gonna be.

The barkeep shoves a whiskey across the scarred bar top.

BARKEEP

That'll be a nickel.

GILCHRIST

He's gonna be where I find him.

BARKEEP

Y'hear me? I said that's a nickel.

GILCHRIST

I need you to tell me who'll be alongside him when I do.

The barkeep brings his eyes to Gilchrist. What he sees frightens him. He takes a step back. Gilchrist leers.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Nat Hanlan. Who's he ride beside?

BARKEEP
I- I'm sorry, mister, I'm sorry.

GILCHRIST
Who's he ride beside?

BARKEEP
Mister, I- I'm sorry.

Gilchrist takes up the whiskey and twirls it in his fingers.

GILCHRIST
You gonna tell it or not?

The barkeep gulps and looks about the saloon and finds no one and gulps again and finally shakes his head.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Alright.

Gilchrist shoots back the whiskey. It BURNS him. His face turns a fiery red. He belches up liquor and SMOKE.

The barkeep pitches back into the bar shelves, sending liquor bottles smashing to the ground.

BARKEEP
Mick Hanlan's the sheriff! He's got his cabin and his deputies up the mountainside!

GILCHRIST
Damn Mick Hanlan! I'm lookin for a man name of Nat Hanlan!

BARKEEP
But there *ain't no man* in town by that name!

GILCHRIST
What do you mean, *ain't no man*?

EXT. RIVER. UNDERWATER. DAY

Jake opens his mouth and swallows. His face burns red. He keeps his lips closed. Until it's too much...

EXT. RIVER. DAY

He bursts into the open air, choking up smoke and water.

VOICE (O.S.)

I ain't seen that trick before.

He spins from the voice at once, his eyes alighting on the opposite shore.

It's Josie. She watches him from the bank, a birch figure in her hand.

JOSIE

I didn't mean to startle you.

Jake doesn't reply. His fists are clenched. She grins.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I wasn't spying on you neither. I saw you in passing and I only come out cause, well, it's not everyday you find a soul breathes fire.

Jake's still.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Hell, my intentions are pure.

She waves her hand in the air, a SILVER BAND on her finger.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I am espoused, as they say.

Her voice turns bitter. She swallows it down and chuckles.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

More over, besides that dragon's gut of yours, I'm not sure you've anything I ain't seen before.

Seconds pass. Then, haltingly, Jake turns back to her, dipping down so that his glowing heart is underwater.

Smoke still curls from his lips. Josie offers him a FLASK.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Here, a peace offering. Not that you need the extra fire...

He ignores her, eyes flitting to his possessions balled at the base of a tree. She studies him.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
So? What's your secret then? How
d'you do such a thing?

He doesn't respond. He eyes her reflection: the muscles in her jaw, the sun on her purpled skin and brown hair.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
What? Your tongue burn up as well?

That INHUMAN RAGE flickers across his brow. He groans.

JAKE
You should leave now.

JOSIE
Excuse?

JAKE
You should leave now.

She just stares at him. Then she shakes her head.

JOSIE
Why d'you say that?

Jake is silent. His body is shaking. His eyes move to the treetops. Josie snorts and stands.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Fine. Strips down to his
altogethers and hiccups soot but
doesn't want to be seen.

She her head again and turns away and moves down the riverbank. She's almost gone when she spots the dead fish. She stops. Her eyes find Jake's possessions... *the revolver with the leering demon.*

She looks back to him. *It can't be this man-child, can it?* Time hangs suspended. Finally, she speaks...

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Stranger, d'you have a name? I
don't recognize you and I would you
were from hereabouts.
(beat)
I have a name. Folks call me Josie,
but really I'm Nat. Nat Hanlan.

Jake flinches. And now Josie knows. She smiles sadly.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

This town ain't much of a draw. New faces appear, it means they come looking for someone. Stranger, have you come looking for me?

A soft breeze ripples the water. Neither Josie nor Jake moves. Then there's a CRASHING through the trees. Billy Rupp erupts out onto the bank.

BILLY RUPP

Darnit, Josie, quit giving me the slip! Mick's gon tan my hide he-

He stops short, eyes darting from Josie, to the revolver, to Jake edging towards the riverbank.

BILLY RUPP (CONT'D)

No you don't!

He draws his revolver and fires. But Jake is already diving underwater, the bullets slicing the current above him.

EXT. RIVERBANK. SUNSET

Jake slinks along, naked, coming to a halt at the tree where his possessions lay. He rifles through what's left. His belt, revolver, knife, flask and the compass are all gone.

INT. MICK'S CABIN. FRONT ROOM. SUNSET

They're dumped onto a table before MICK HANLAN (50) who gives them a frosty once over and brings his steely gaze to the duo before him.

MICK HANLAN

Who was he?

BILLY RUPP

Mick, I been thinking maybe it were-

MICK HANLAN

Billy.

Billy Rupp pipes right down. Mick turns to his companion.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

Who was he?

Josie's face is flushed. Her fingernails dig into her skin.

JOSIE
You asking me, Mick?

MICK HANLAN
That's right, my dear, I'm asking
you.

JOSIE
Well, I don't know.

MICK HANLAN
You don't know.

Mick hefts up the silver revolver and studies it. Beat.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)
Why didn't you shoot him?

BILLY RUPP
Mick, I done tried to but-

MICK HANLAN
Billy.

Billy Rupp bites his tongue for good this time. Mick swivels again to his companion. She sneers, trying to put on a brave face.

JOSIE
With what would I have shot him,
Mick? You won't allow me a weapon
no more, remember?

MICK HANLAN
Ah. Well that's for your own
protection, isn't it?

JOSIE
My own protection.

Josie flexes her bruise-splotched arm. Mick smirks.

MICK HANLAN
Careful, *my dear*, careful. You know
I can't allow you a weapon. You've
the nasty habit of running off each
time I do.

JOSIE
Oh, you needn't worry, *my dear*. I
know there's no escaping you.

Josie's flinching even before Jake's revolver SLAMS to the table. Mick whips his hand to the door.

MICK HANLAN

Out.

Billy Rupp does as he's told.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

And Billy, she evades you again,
you might as well run off with her.

Billy freezes in the doorway. He looks to Josie. Then he nods and exits. Mick stands. He's a foot taller than Josie.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

Why were you at the river?

Josie stills holds the birch figure. She tries to hide it, but Mick spots it before she can. He stiffens. Then he recomposes himself and gestures to a chair.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

Sit.

Josie shakes her head.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

Josie. Sit.

Josie does as she's told. Mick circles behind her, picking up the compass, watching its dial twirl to her.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

Do you remember, my dear, those
distant times when we had no need
for such *vigilances*? They were
kinder, were they not?

He lays a tender hand upon her shoulder. Instinctually, unwittingly, Josie reclines her head towards it.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

But then came the little lies...

The hand curls into a vise. Josie whelps.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

The need for such cruelties.

He leans to her ear. She's trembling.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

But they may all go away, Josie.
All of them. All you need do is
tell me. Now. What is this all
about?

(MORE)

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

Is it that fella in Newsom? The one
you slipping away to fuck.

JOSIE

I- I'm not fucking no- I told you,
Mick, a- a hundred times...

MICK HANLAN

Is it that bastard child of yours?

JOSIE

No- no- I... You wouldn't believe
me if I told you. You wouldn't.

MICK HANLAN

Wouldn't I?

But Josie says no more. Mick throws the compass down.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

Will he be back?

Josie nods.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

And you won't tell me why?

She rubs the birch figure in her hand. She closes her eyes.

JOSIE

No.

Mick flings her and the chair across the room.

MICK HANLAN

Well, *my dear*, we'll have to change
us that.

He strides to her and raises up his arm. As it comes down...

EXT. FOREST. EVENING

... Gilchrist's fist slams into Jake's face.

GILCHRIST

Now she's got her your revolver.
And our compass. What happens she
lights out? What happens then?

Jake spits up blood.

JAKE

It don't matter. He ain't gonna
send us up.

Gilchrist kicks him. Jake's ribs crack. He curls into a ball.
Gilchrist kicks him again.

GILCHRIST

You make this right, boy. You and
you alone. Or next He comes to me,
I'll make it known I don't need no
partner. I'll make it known He can
send you right back to Hell.

INT. CABIN. BEDROOM. NIGHT

The birch figure turns in Josie's hand. She studies it. Fresh
bruises spot her face and arms.

She looks to the locked window. She's crying. Outside her
door we hear the mumble of voices. Mick's amongst them.

She shakes her head. No. *She's a prisoner*. No. *With no
future*. Tears roll over her swollen cheeks. She rises and
limps to the cabinet. Inside it sits the cursed coin.

INT. CABIN. FRONT ROOM. NIGHT

DEPUTY FREMONT and DEPUTY BUTANE huddle over Jake's things.
Butane shakes Jake's flask.

BUTANE

... and the final oddity, an empty
flask. Well, mayhaps not odd. Just
a damn shame.

Mick snatches it from him. Josie's head peeks into the room.

MICK HANLAN

Butane, get back to your post.

Butane scowls. He and Fremont slink off. Mick gives the flask
a once over and flicks it to the table.

He moves away. Josie steals towards Jake's possessions.

INT. CABIN. MICK'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Mick snores beneath his covers. A SHADOW falls over him. A
knife comes to his throat. Jake's.

Josie considers her sleeping husband and her hand shakes. Seconds pass. We await the death stroke. It doesn't come.

She grits her teeth and presses the blade down, cutting into Mick's skin. From another room...

BUTANE (O.S.)
Mick, you still up?

Footsteps approach. Josie shudders. She draws the blade away and slips from the room.

On the bedside table is her silver wedding band.

EXT. FOREST. NIGHT

Josie strides along, a bulging flour sack over her shoulder.

BILLY RUPP (O.S.)
Josie, is that you?

Billy Rupp gawks down at her from a platform up a pine tree.

BILLY RUPP (CONT'D)
What is you- Is you sneak- Mick's gonna- Well don't just- *Shit*.

Josie's receded into the night.

BILLY RUPP (CONT'D)
At least tell me where yer headed!

Josie doesn't reply. Billy clambers down and trots after her.

EXT. RAMSHACKLE HOMESTEAD. NIGHT

Billy waits beside a porch post. An owl HOOTS. He jumps.

INT. RAMSHACKLE HOMESTEAD. NIGHT

Besides a fiery hearth, Josie kneels before IRMA WINSTON (70), staring beseechingly into the old woman's eyes...

JOSIE
Irma, last time I run off to Newsom to see your niece...
(MORE)

JOSIE (CONT'D)

She- she told me the two of them had been settled off in Trapper's Valley-in Whitewater-but that they'd not been seen for many moons and that- that it would not be possible to find them again. She told me that she could help me no more.

Her voice warbles. She takes Irma's hands in her own, trying to keep tears from spilling down her cheeks.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Irma, I am about to... but if you told me that... then I wouldn't... Please, has she writ you? I don't know I could make it all the way to Whitewater alone, but if I knew, if I could get one last look after all these years searching... Please, has she? Has she writ you she was wrong? I'm begging you. Tell me.

The old woman gives a sad smile and caresses Josie's cheek.

IRMA

Oh, my poor child. No. No.

EXT. RIVER. NIGHT

Josie and Billy trudge mutely along in heavy silence, Billy casting uneasy glances at his companion, until, finally...

BILLY RUPP

Josie, what was that?

Josie doesn't respond. She spies the yellow glimmer of Mick's cabin up the valley slope. Her face is pale. She stops.

JOSIE

Billy.

BILLY RUPP

Yessum?

She takes the flask from her hip. Her voice is full of dread.

JOSIE

You hold onto this. They ask you where you been all night, you say you found it.

BILLY RUPP
Why would they be asking me-

JOSIE
Billy. I need to perform my
necessaries. You wait here.

BILLY RUPP
But, Josie-

JOSIE
Goddamnit, Billy Rupp, you do what
I'm telling you!

Josie shoves her flask into Billy's arms. Then she spins and disappears off into the dark.

EXT. FOREST. NIGHT

Against a fallen log, Jake studies the yellow light of Mick's cabin too. His face twitches. He closes his eyes.

EXT. UNDERWATER. NIGHT [MEMORY]

The water is dark. The knife sweeps by. A twig snaps.

EXT. FOREST. NIGHT

Jake's eyes bolt open. There's someone coming through the trees. Billy Rupp. Muttering sourly to himself.

Jake spots Josie's flask in Billy's hand. He stands and hefts up a rock. He steps out to meet Billy.

EXT. RIVER. NIGHT

Moonlight sheens the water.

Josie sits beside the hollow pine, the birch figure in her hand. Her eyes are wet. She wipes them. When she looks up, Jake stands over her.

She scrambles away, the birch figure spilling from her grip, but Jake doesn't go for her. He picks up the flour sack and dumps out his possessions. He finds his flask and pulls from it. She watches him.

JOSIE
I knew you'd find me. I knew if I
came, here you'd be.

He pulls his belt around his waist and checks his knife.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I'm not gonna run. I'm ready. For what it is comes next. For you. For whatever you are.

He draws his revolver. Her face contorts.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Ain't you listening to me?! I'm telling you I want it to end.

Jake's eyes find her in the dark. She's shaking. He groans. He raises the revolver.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I want you to finish it.
D'you understand?

Shhk shhk shhk. He steps toward her.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Finish it, damnit. I want it over.
Finish it! I said finish it!

He presses the barrel against her forehead. She closes her eyes. Seconds pass. She frowns. She opens them.

The revolver butt is swinging through the air. It smashes her across the temple, knocking her unconscious. She collapses.

An UNNATURAL WIND splits the night...

EXT. TWELVE OAKS. NIGHT [RIDING]

... as Jake spurs the black mare, Josie slung over its back, and gallops out of town. It continues...

EXT. CAMPFIRE. NIGHT

... shrieking in Gilchrist's ears, a terrible, impenetrable voice beneath it. He listens and spits out into the dark.

GILCHRIST

Boy, what've you done?

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CREEK. DAY

A wintry sun hangs. The mare waters. Along the creek bank, Jake sits, eying Josie still senseless over its back.

Speckles of light play on her face. He groans, screwing his face into a twisted smile and letting out a barking noise. An attempt at Josie's laughter. He stops. His hands shake. He watches minnows dart in and out of the shallows.

A tree branch swings through the air and knocks him into the creek. Before he can react, Josie shoves him underwater.

He swallows water. His mouth burns and he whips out his knife and slices it across the back of her knee. She screams and falls away and he clambers atop her, pointing his revolver down. Instead of shirking away, she presses her forehead towards the barrel.

JOSIE

Do it, goddamnit!

But he doesn't. He rolls off of her and crouches with his head in his hands. He grabs his flask and pulls from it. Seconds pass. He stands and marches off into the undergrowth. Josie crawls towards the mare.

He returns. His arm is bleeding from a knife wound and he's holding PLANTAIN LEAVES. He goes to the creek and dips his arm into the water. The wound burns over.

He crushes up the leaves and comes toward Josie. She tries to hobble away, but he throws her to the ground.

He takes her flask and pours it over her wound and she screams and he works the crushed up leaf into her wound.

He finishes. He releases her and she scrambles away. His eyes avoid her. Half a minute passes. She spits.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Why are you doing this?

He gestures to the mare. She gives a spiteful laugh.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

No.

He gestures again.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

No. I'm not going back up.

JAKE

He'll be here soon.

JOSIE

He? It ain't gonna be a *he*. Mick's gonna have himself a whole damn posse and they're gonna find us and you don't want that and I don't neither. So just finish it.

Jake's knuckles are white around his knife. He gestures a third time and now steps toward her. She laughs again.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

What are you gonna do? Kill me? No. Nothing's gonna get me up on that horse. And you've no rope to keep me there besides.

(gritting her teeth)

This ain't gonna end the way you want it to. I ain't gonna go along. So just finish it now, damnit. Like you're supposed to.

Jake is silent. Neither of them moves. Then come sounds of an APPROACHING RIDER. They both tense, but Jake relaxes first. There are creaking wheels. Snorts. This is no lone horseman.

He considers Josie. Then he steps out from the underbrush.

EXT. DIRT ROAD. DAY

A TRADESMAN helms an oxen-led cart. He spots Jake and reins the oxen.

TRADESMAN

Can I hep you, fella?

JAKE

Rope.

TRADESMAN

Rope? Do I have me some rope?

Jake nods. Josie crawls from the underbrush. The tradesman glances back into his cart. Josie makes to call out...

TRADESMAN (CONT'D)

Got me a couple a lengths some-

... but before she can, Jake shoots him.

The light and sound of the gunshot momentarily blind and deafen her. When she looks back up, Jake is stepping over the tradesman's body, kicking it to make sure it's facedown.

Then he's turning towards her, loosing a coil of rope.

INT. HOVEL. NIGHT [MEMORY]

A BABY gurgles at us from a pile of dirty blankets. It plays with something in its hands. A BIRCH FIGURE. A door flings open. A shadow falls over the child. A horse whinnies.

EXT. DIRT ROAD. FORK. DAY

Josie's eyes snap open. She's back over the mare, her arms and legs cinched together beneath its belly.

To her right, Jake studies the parting paths. He spots her awake and comes and turns the mare so she has a full view of the fork. She frowns. Then it dawns on her what he wants.

JOSIE

You want me to *help you*? After what you just done? No!

Jake doesn't respond. She glowers.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I won't! Besides, it don't matter the way you take. Left goes to Newsom. Right to Columnade. Mick's got acquaintances at both knows him and knows me, and you won't make it more than an hour at either.

She leers at him. He casts down his eyes and shakes his head.

JAKE

No. No people.

(beat)

I'll kill you. Once it's done. I will. I want to.

For the briefest of moments, his strained gaze meets hers.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I can't remember the way. I can't remember how it is I get there.

She ogles him, unable to decipher this creature before her. Then Jake's gaze darts past her back down the road.

Storm clouds approach. He drops to the ground, pressing his ear to the earth. We hear the FAINT DRUM of hoofbeats.

He leaps to his feet, scanning their surroundings. Scraggly hills rise parallel to the path. He draws his knife.

JOSIE

What is it? Is it Mick?

With a quick slice, he cuts the rope under the mare's belly. Josie crumples to the ground, her feet and legs still bound.

He drags her from the path and returns to the mare. He leads it down the left fork and kicks at its hindquarters. It bolts down the path.

He makes sure it stays its course then he takes a fallen branch and with it wipes away his and Josie's tracks.

He pulls Josie further into the underbrush and gags her with some loose rope. She struggles against him, trying to call out. Then she stops. A rider approaches... Gilchrist.

Atop the blue roan he comes to a skittering halt at the fork. He studies the hoof tracks and draws his revolver. He looks to the hills. Then down through the underbrush. He aims his revolver right at Jake and Josie. *Does he see them?*

Slowly, Jake raises his own revolver... when Gilchrist sneers and holsters his weapon and gallops down the left fork.

For a moment, Jake and Josie just lie there. Then Jake stands and cuts the rope around Josie's feet and pushes her limping toward the hills.

EXT. HILLSIDE. CAVE MOUTH. DAY

Jake stares into the awning darkness.

JOSIE

Who was that?

He ignores Josie. He steps forward and waits. Then he steps back out and pushes her further up the hillside.

EXT. FURTHER UP THE HILLSIDE. CAVE MOUTH. DAY

Jake crouches. From within the cave comes a gust of wind, tousling his hair. Thunder rumbles above.

EXT. ROAD. EVENING [RIDING]

Atop the blue roan, Gilchrist pounds down the muddy trail. He suddenly pulls hard on its mane.

Beside the road, the black mare grazes riderless. Gilchrist howls. He swings off the roan and shoots it.

He stands there panting. He mounts the black mare and gallops back the way he came. Raindrops splash against his face.

EXT. CAVE MOUTH. NIGHT

Rain pounds the hillside. Jake studies the empty path below.

INT. CAVE. ALCOVE. NIGHT

A small campfire burns, hidden from the outside world by the twisting cave walls. Josie frays her bindings against a rock. Footsteps draw near. She stops.

Jake appears and sits. There's silence between them.

Jake trails his finger through the dirt of the cave floor. He's drawn a rudimentary map there. We see crude trees. What looks to be a river. He frowns at it then wipes it away in frustration. Josie stares at him.

JOSIE

So what are you gonna do now?

He doesn't respond.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Wait out the storm? Pray Mick and his posse pass too? Even if they do, you ain't getting nowhere without no horses.

Jake takes out Josie's flask and sniffs at it. Josie chills.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Where'd you find that?

Jake's silent, but she already knows the answer.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

So I'm to be saved then? But Billy and that cart-man, well they're just fit to be killed, are they?

Jake tops the flask and returns it to his person. Josie's gaze flits to the compass open on the cave floor. Its ticker reads "VII."

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Why? What d'you get out of all this?

Jake closes his eyes. He hears *shhk shhk shhk*.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Goddamn it, won't you answer-

JAKE
Heaven.

For a moment, Josie is silent, stunned by Jake's response. Then she lets out a peal of laughter.

JOSIE
Heaven?! I didn't realize you could make it to heaven killing every soul you come upon.

That DARK RAGE blackens Jake's brow. His hand darts to his knife. Josie instantly presses further.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Matter of fact, I don't reckon you can. And I don't reckon you will. Cause what you've done ain't human.

Jake groans.

JAKE
That ain't got nothin to do with it!

JOSIE
Ain't He gonna punish you for helping me? I hope He does. I hope He sends you to hell right beside me.

Jake slashes the ground with his knife.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
You ain't gonna last seven days. They'll find us here.

JAKE
They ain't!

JOSIE

They will! Ain't nowhere they won't find us. Nowhere!

JAKE

Black River!

The words echo down the cave corridor, and for the second time, Josie is momentarily taken aback. Then she recovers.

JOSIE

Black River. Anydamnwhere. It don't matter. They'll find us. And when they do I'll make sure they hurt you. For everything you've done.

Jake springs to his feet.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Or you could just end it now, goddamnit!

He comes towards her and she shuts her eyes, but at the last moment, he twists and slices at the wall and storms off towards the cave mouth.

INT. CAVE MOUTH. NIGHT

Jake brings his knife down his arm. Blood flows. Rain burns the wound closed. Beat. He cuts his arm again.

INT. CAVE. ALCOVE. NIGHT

Josie rubs her bonds harder. Her hand brushes her thigh and she suddenly stops. She fishes in her pocket, to her surprise pulling out the birch figure. Her expression clouds. Footsteps approach. She hides the figure.

Jake again. His sleeve is blood-soaked. He removes his shirt.

She stares at his glowing heart. At his wounds and scars. She settles on his face. Still so young. She looks away.

JOSIE

Who's done all that to you?

Jake doesn't reply at first. He's shaking. A breeze comes from deep within the cave and gutters the fire.

JAKE

Why d'you want to die? You've the light.

His eyes find Josie's and hold them. Then Gilchrist's voice shatters the moment apart.

GILCHRIST (O.S.)
Boy! I know you're up there
somewheres!

Jake leaps to his feet and darts toward the cave mouth. Josie stays where right she is, musing that moment between them. Then she rises and follows.

EXT. DIRT ROAD. NIGHT

Through the deluge, Gilchrist peers up the hillside.

GILCHRIST
Did you reckon that little maneuver
was gonna save you?!

INT. CAVE MOUTH. NIGHT

Josie crouches behind Jake. His revolver is drawn.

NOTE: we intercut between the path and the cave mouth.

GILCHRIST
It ain't, boy! It ain't! You come
out now. I'll talk to Him. I'll ask
Him your questions. Mayhaps He will
forgive you. Mayhaps I will too...

Gilchrist's eyes sweep the slope. Nothing stirs.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
How bout you, Nat Hanlan! You seen
your savior yet for what he is?! He
ain't like you and me. You come
out, Hanlan, and I'll protect you.

Josie studies Jake's face for some reaction. There isn't one. Gilchrist kicks at the mud.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Damn it, boy, don't you ignore me! I
who shepherded you through this
world. I who shielded you from
truths you did not want to see! You
cannot change what you are. So you
quit this foolishness. You quit it
now and come back to me.

As before, nothing stirs. Gilchrist grits his teeth and spits away the fleck of hurt we see upon his brow.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Alright then. I'll afford you what I done afforded the others. One minute to signal your position or kill Hanlan. You don't, boy, you don't... there will be repercussion. By god, you know there will be. You know who else roams this world.

The rain comes down in sheets. Gilchrist draws his revolver. Jake does the same. He steps out to meet his partner...

They both collapse. Josie watches aghast as Jake's VEINS TURN BLACK. He writhes on the cave floor, his body contorting obscenely like a puppet pulled by all its strings at once.

Finally, he goes limp, his veins returning to their normal color. HIS HEART NO LONGER GLOWS RED.

Seconds pass. His eyes open. He stands, his back to Josie.

He stares down at his chest. He unsheathes his knife and draws it down his arm. Rain hits the wound. It doesn't burn. It doesn't heal. He turns to Josie, blood pouring from him.

JOSIE

Oh my God.

He takes a step towards her. Then collapses again.

GILCHRIST (O.S.)

Boy! He has punished us!

Gilchrist watches blood drip from a nick on his arm.

RIDERS APPROACH. He squints through the rain, uneasy for the first time. Then he leads the mare into the woods opposite the hills.

INT. CAVE MOUTH. NIGHT

Josie steps out into the rain. She could escape now.

She hazards a final glance at Jake's huddled form. At his scars and bruises just like her own.

The birch figures turns in her hand. She goes to him.

JOSIE

Cut me loose. I can't help you you
don't cut me loose.

Jake is still a moment. Then he takes his knife and hacks weakly at her bonds until they are cut through.

Josie snatches the blade from him, pausing again, considering how she could use it against him. Then she sighs and limps into the cave.

INT. CAVE. ALCOVE. NIGHT

She brings the knife to the coals until it glows red.

INT. CAVE MOUTH. NIGHT

She limps back and presses the burning metal to Jake's wound.

EXT. DIRT ROAD. NIGHT

The RIDERS come to a pounding halt. They are Mick and a posse comprised of Fremont, Butane, and deputies YARBOROUGH and GEORGE, as well as volunteers WINSTON, O'DOUL, HOCKLEDGE, RADCLIFFE, WOODSWORTH, MILTON, JAMES and the barkeep.

Mick stares down at the forking paths and swears.

BUTANE

Sheriff! Them's fresh.

Butane points to the tracks Gilchrist has just left behind. Mick leaps from his saddle and studies them.

MICK HANLAN

Butane. George. Take Radcliffe, Hockledge and the barkeep. See where the tracks lead. The rest of you, get out of your damn saddles and search for sign!

The rest of the men scramble from their mounts. Butane leads the others to the trees. A little ways off, Gilchrist watches them. His eyes flick to the barkeep. He grins.

INT. CAVE MOUTH. NIGHT

Josie considers the figures spreading out over the path.

INT. CAVE. ALCOVE. NIGHT

Josie returns to the fire. Jake lies at its edge. She sits.

JOSIE

Mick and his posse is rooting
around down below. I doubt but what
they'll find what with the rain.
We're lucky in that. I figger
they'll continue on.

Jake is wreathed in shadow. His words, when they come, seem disembodied.

JAKE

He'll join them.

JOSIE

Who will? Your partner?

JAKE

It ain't like he said. I ain't
unlike you. I ain't. I ain't.

He falls silent. Josie studies his prone form. Then she clears her throat.

JOSIE

I- I had a son once, a long time
ago, was stolen from me by his
father when he was just a babe. You
asked me why I wanted to die. Last
night I was told I would not find
him again. That is why.

Her voice breaks. She pauses.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

It was his birthday yesterday. I
reckon he'd be about your age.
Though perhaps you ain't got no age
no more. I wouldn't know.

(beat)

This is a cruel world and it grinds
one down until one is forced to
terrible decision. I don't want to
be a part of it no more. I sold Him
my soul. I must pay for what I
done. All of it.

Emotion wells up in her voice.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Though if I had a chance, any
chance, to see my son again,
there's nothing I would not do.
Nothing.

She quiets. The fire crackles. Her eyes cut through the dark.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Black River, is that where you're
taking me?

Jake's form shifts. He nods.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Off in Trapper's Valley, ain't it?
A day or two's ride from
Whitewater?

JAKE
I- I can't- I- I been trying-

JOSIE
You've forgot the way. But I ain't.
I can take you there.

Jake sits up now.

JAKE
But we'll need us saddles.

His eyes gleam. He looks down the cave corridor. Another gust comes from deep within it and blows out the last of the firelight.

EXT. DIRT ROAD. PRE-DAWN

The rain's let up. Mick watches Butane, George, Radcliffe and Hockledge trudge from the trees.

BUTANE
We ain't found a darn thing, Mick.

Mick cusses.

BUTANE (CONT'D)
And the barkeep. He never come
back.

GILCHRIST (O.S.)
That ain't no surprise.

The men whirl to the voice. There's Gilchrist by the roadside, leering, his silver piece replaced by a colt single-action revolver.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Some men ain't cut out for such adventure.

Butane sneers.

BUTANE

Who is you supposed to be?

Gilchrist's eyes find Mick.

GILCHRIST

Tell is this outfit is huntin runaways.

BUTANE

I asked you your name, stranger.
Or could you not hear me?

Butane gestures to Gilchrist's missing ear. The men chuckle.

GILCHRIST

Not but yesterday afternoon I
witnessed a dour-faced fella force
a poor woman up that very hillside.
(to Butane)
And my name is Ned. Why don't you
come tell me yours?

Butane makes to retort, but Mick gestures for silence before he can. There's an odd smile on Mick's lips. He motions to Fremont. Fremont slips into the underbrush. Butane sneers.

BUTANE

You heard *tell*, did ya, Ned?

GILCHRIST

That's right. A mortician such as
myself must keep an ear for such
whisperins. It's good for business.

FREMONT (O.S.)

Sheriff!

Fremont re-emerges, holding up a loop of rope, the remnants of Josie's bindings. Gilchrist smirks and chuckles and spits.

INT. CAVE MOUTH. PRE-DAWN

Down below, Mick and his posse gallop off along the path leading to Columnade. Jake and Josie squat, watching.

Behind them are the makings of a campfire.

EXT. HILLSIDE. EASTERN SLOPE. DAWN.

First light creeps up the rise. TWO STONES rest behind a bush. All appears is as it should be. Until one of the stones speaks...

MILTON

The Sheriff won't tell us a damn thing bout this fella we're after.

It's not a stone after all. It's Milton. His partner, Gilchrist, scowls.

MILTON (CONT'D)

Say, what're we dawdlin here fer? Mick said he wants us sweepin the hill, leadin the charge.

We follow Milton's gaze. Led by Mick and Butane, the men creep in pairs up the northern and southern slopes.

Hockledge and Yarborough emerge from a cave. They look to Mick and shake their heads and continue their stealthy ascents. Gilchrist spits.

GILCHRIST

I heard what Mick said.

EXT. CAVE MOUTH. DAWN

Jake and Josie sit quietly beside the crackling fire.

EXT. EASTERN SLOPE. DAWN

Woodsworth and George slink past. Milton frowns.

MILTON

Mick wants you provin youself. It ain't wise to disobey him.

Gilchrist's eyes sweep the slope above. He sneers.

GILCHRIST

It ain't wise to waylay upslope the
sun ain't full at your rear. I
ain't joined your little outfit for
to be cannon fodder. I've one life.
You have want to fritter yours
away, boy, do so and go follow
Mick's commands.

Beat.

MILTON

Hell, I'm forty two.

GILCHRIST

What?

MILTON

I'm forty two. I ain't no boy. And
I ain't never known no mortician to
know such things.

Gilchrist stares at Milton. Then he guffaws.

GILCHRIST

We is the sort to surprise.

MILTON

You ain't even got yourself an
ammunition belt.

(re: Gilchrist's Colt)

Hell, I bet that thing ain't even
carryin six shots.

Gilchrist's hand twitches towards his jacket.

GILCHRIST

You itchin to find out?

Just then, the first light reaches the hilltop.

INT. CAVE MOUTH. POV. DAWN

It forms a blinding radiance, obscuring the hillside below.

EASTERN SLOPE

Milton points above.

MILTON

Look!

In the dawn light, the cave mouth is visible. Smoke curls from it. Gilchrist grins.

GILCHRIST

Hullo, boy.

Milton lets out a bird call and waves to Mick and Butane.

SOUTHERN & NORTHERN SLOPES

Mick and Butane nod and signal down the lines. In their tandems, the men grip their weapons and wait...

WESTERN SLOPE

O'Doul and Winston creep along a narrow fissure.

CAVE MOUTH

The campfire gutters. Jake and Josie are nowhere to be seen.

EASTERN SLOPE

Gilchrist studies the curling smoke, doubt shading his brow. His eyes flick to the trees below.

NORTHERN SLOPE

Mick breathes in deep...

EASTERN SLOPE

Gilchrist stands, giving away his and Milton's position.

MILTON

The hell are you doin?!

NORTHERN SLOPE

.. and lets out a CRY, and now the men spring from their cover and charge the cave, a pincer movement up the hillside.

WESTERN SLOPE

O'Doul and Winston whoop and surge past the fissure.

A moment passes...

Jake and Josie push themselves through the narrow slot. Jake turns to fire at O'Doul and Winston, but Josie grabs his arm.

For a brief moment, Jake glares at her arm on his and there's that inhuman rage on his face then they are stumbling down the scraggly decline, Josie limping, trying to keep pace.

BASE OF WESTERN SLOPE

Jake reaches the bottom first, Josie at least a hundred yards behind him, and veers towards the trees.

GLADE

The posse's horses are picketed in a line. Jake presses his revolver to the first one's head.

He waits. There's GUNFIRE from on the mountain.

He fires. He goes to the next horse. Fires. Next is the black mare. He puts his revolver to its temple.

GILCHRIST (O.S.)
I don't think so, boy.

Gilchrist stands at the edge of the glade, panting, his silver revolver leveled.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Where is she?

Jake re-grips his revolver. Gilchrist grins.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
I wouldn't. Ain't the same stakes
no more. No bein reborn this time.

With his off hand, he draws the colt single-action and fires it casually at Jake's feet.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Where is she?

INT. CAVE MOUTH. DAWN

Mick and his posse stand beside the smoking flames. Gilchrist's gunfire reverberates up to them. Mick looks to Butane. Butane breaks down the hillside.

EXT. GLADE. DAWN

Gilchrist flicks his silver revolver towards the trees.

GILCHRIST
Toss it over there now.

Beat. Jake flings his silver revolver off into the woods.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Now the compass to me.

Jake underhands Gilchrist the compass. Gilchrist catches it and flips it open. The compass points behind him.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
That weren't so hard.

He turns. THWACK! A tree branch strikes him across the face.

He's knocked to the ground, colt single-action tumbling from his left hand. Josie drops the branch and picks it up.

JAKE
Shoot him.

Jake is staring at the ground. Josie looks to him. Then to Gilchrist. Her hand shakes.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Shoot him. Shoot him!

But Josie doesn't. Can't.

JOSIE
I- No.

Jake's face twists in anger, but Gilchrist is already stirring. Jake swings himself up onto the black mare. Josie follows, mounting a dappled pony.

They gallop through the brush. Jake scoops up his revolver from where he's tossed it and fires back at Gilchrist, but Gilchrist leaps to the side and the shot smokes a tree beside a dazzled Milton.

Milton looks from the scorched pockmark to Gilchrist. Then he spots the silver revolver and frowns.

MILTON
Where'd you get you that?

Gilchrist rolls his eyes and shoots Milton through the chest. Milton is thrown back into the trees.

Gilchrist climbs to his feet and returns the revolver to his coat. He looks to the wound on the tree trunk. He spits.

Butane crashes into the glade and watches as Jake disappears around a bend. His eyes find Gilchrist. He sneers.

EXT. FOREST/PRAIRIE. DAY [RIDING]

Jake and Josie plunge through the woods. They break out into the grassland.

JOSIE

Thisaway.

Josie spurs her pony, but Jake doesn't move. His revolver is laid across his saddle horn.

JAKE

Why didn't you shoot him?

Josie gawks at him. Then she forces a laugh.

JOSIE

You ain't even gonna thank me for saving you?

JAKE

Why didn't you shoot him?

Her laughter dies. Her eyes flick back to the woods.

JOSIE

We don't got the time for this.

JAKE

You should've done it.

JOSIE

They're coming.

JAKE

I told you-

JOSIE

Goddamn it, I know what you told me!
But even if I had it wouldn't've...

She falls silent. *Why didn't she shoot Gilchrist?* Her cheeks flush. Jake raises his revolver.

JAKE

I told you! I told you!

But it's a bluff and they both know it. Josie sneers.

JOSIE

I'm not beholden to you. You're following me.

She swallows and redirects her insecurities...

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I don't know if your partner's right about you or not. From what I've seen, you ain't *like* me at all. But I know I don't want to be like you. So you want me to lead you to Black River... you stop your killing. D'you hear me? Otherwise I won't. I promise, I won't.

She spurs her pony and gallops away. Jake sits right where he is. He takes his knife and draws it across his knee.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE COMPASS

Cupped in Gilchrist's hand.

EXT. PRAIRIE. DAY [RIDING]

The posse spills from the trees. Gilchrist pockets the instrument. Mick gestures across the grassland.

MICK HANLAN

Yarborough, take Woodsworth and pick up the scent. Give two shots you do. Don't let up. We'll follow.

Yarborough and Woodsworth gallop away. Gilchrist growls.

GILCHRIST

We ain't got the time for such maneuverin, Sheriff. We got to *keep after em*. I know their direction.

Mick slips from his saddle and trudges back towards the trees. As he passes Butane, he gives a nod. Butane grins.

EXT. FOREST. CLEARING. DAY

Rotten teeth lay in a splatter of blood.

In the center of the clearing, three men pin Gilchrist's arms behind his back.

BUTANE

You didn't charge the cave, Ned.

Butane slugs him across the face. Gilchrist howls, struggling against his subduers.

BUTANE (CONT'D)
You didn't charge the cave.

He punches Gilchrist again. Gilchrist flails, but the men don't give an inch. Finally, he settles.

GILCHRIST
It were Milton's idea. He sensed they'd draw us up and make for the horses.

BUTANE
Milton hadn't a thought of his own since he came out his mother's twat.

Butane winds up to strike Gilchrist once more...

MICK HANLAN (O.S.)
Butane. That's enough.

Mick stands at the edge of the clearing. A revolver dangles from his hand. Gilchrist eyes it and laughs. But there's desperation in his voice.

GILCHRIST
You're pinnin your ire to the wrong fella, Han- *Sheriff*. That boy'll kill your woman we don't git to him. I've seen his like afore. *Cut me loose.*

Mick affords him a wry smile.

MICK HANLAN
I've my years, Ned. I've seen his like too.
(beat)
Something's been tickling me. Like a burr in my side. Here you are amongst us, unheralded, uncalled. I can't help but wonder the which-of-why. A mortician has many bodies to attend to. Hell, we passed one such on the road here So why this boy? What's he done that's so ruffled you?

The question looms in the air, pointed, deadly. Gilchrist weighs it, knowing full well the gravity of his response...

GILCHRIST
He was lost and in need of direction. And I showed it to him.
(MORE)

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
In way of thanks he turned his
weapon against me. That I can't
forgive.

Mick's fingers drum against his revolver grip. Finally...

MICK HANLAN
And what *is* his direction?

GILCHRIST
Trapper's Valley.

BUTANE
Mick, tell me you- He ain't to be
trusted.

TWO RIFLE SHOTS rumble through the trees. Mick looks back to
Gilchrist. He holsters his revolver.

MICK HANLAN
Okay then, Ned. Time to go.

EXT. PRAIRIE. DAY [RIDING]

Hooves thunder. Shouts rent the air. Butane eyes Gilchrist.
Gilchrist gives him a bloody smirk and surges ahead.

EXT. PRAIRIE. HILLOCK. DAY

Jake and Josie watch the posse's distant DUST PLUME approach.

EXT. PRAIRIE. DAY [RIDING]

Over the endless prairie, the two parties ride.

EXT. PRAIRIE. LATE AFTERNOON [RIDING]

Josie tries to urge her horse forward. It labors. She calls
out to Jake.

JOSIE
He needs rest!

Jake unsheathes his knife and sidles towards her.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Don't!

He slashes the blade across her pony's hindquarters. Its eyes
go white and it races ahead.

Josie yells at him. Then her gaze widens. For a brief moment, she's caught sight of two little specks behind them. RIDERS.

Jake hasn't seemed to notice them. She bites her tongue and says nothing. They continue on...

EXT. PRAIRIE. DAY TO NIGHT [MONTAGE]

- Gilchrist slyly studies the compass and directs the posse forward.
- Midnight falls. The compass ticker moves from VI to V.
- A new sun rises. The parties ride on and on.

EXT. PRAIRIE. HILLOCK. MORNING

Jake eyes the distant spire of dust. It's thinned.

EXT. PRAIRIE. MORNING [RIDING]

The horses have slowed. In her saddle, Josie sags. She looks to Jake, seeking rest, but he doesn't stop. She takes out the birch figure and rubs at it.

JAKE (O.S.)

What is that?

Jake is staring at her. She glares back, bitter.

JOSIE

Nothing you'd understand.

He groans.

JAKE

You don't know that. You don't.

JOSIE

Yes. I do.

EXT. PRAIRIE. MORNING [RIDING]

Winston whimpers and clutches at his stomach.

WINSTON

How much we've left? My tongue is swollen and my innards all jumbled.

Around him, the dust-coated posse wilt in their saddles.

Gilchrist squints through the day. There's no sign of Jake and Josie. He feels Mick's eyes upon him. He spits and looks to the sky and mutters to himself.

GILCHRIST
You gonna help me or not?

BUTANE (O.S.)
Is who gonna help you?

He starts. Butane rides beside him. He deigns not to answer.

Butane's eyes move to his coat. Gilchrist realizes the compass is poking out. He tucks it away.

Has Butane seen it? Butane doesn't let on.

He sneers at Butane and trots ahead, peeking back over his shoulder. Butane betrays nothing.

The men continue their lackluster pace.

EXT. PRAIRIE. DAY [RIDING]

Josie is slumped in her saddle, barely conscious.

INT. HOVEL. NIGHT [MEMORY]

JOSIE (14) huddles on a straw bed, body speckled with bruises. She whispers to herself. We can't hear her words.

The door to the hovel is kicked open. A man, BEAL (40), steps inside. Sunlight floods the room.

EXT. PRAIRIE. DAY

Josie's eyes open. She's sprawled on the ground. Jake stares down at her from his horse.

JAKE
You fell out your saddle.

He offers her her flask. She considers it, still resentful, then takes it from him and drinks.

JAKE (CONT'D)
You were mutterin to yourself.

She doesn't reply.

JAKE (CONT'D)
You were askin Him to take your
soul.

She squints up at him. He's silhouetted against the light.
She scowls.

JOSIE
I'd better get on up, hadn't I?
Before you stripe my flank as well.

She makes to stand. Jake groans.

JAKE
It ain't I want to hurt them. I
don't care nothin for them.

She freezes. He's staring off at the cloud-shrouded sun.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I see it in their eyes. *The light.*
On their faces. And I know it ain't
in me. And then there ain't nothin
for me to do but hurt em.
(beat)
I can't stop it. I know it ain't
right. I know it. But that don't
find no- no *purchase* in me. I- My
mama was killed. She was taken from
me. What else could I become? What
else... But I done tried. I have.

His head drops and he gestures to Josie's pocket where the
birch figure is imprinted.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I seen that lyin beside you and I
knowed it meant something to you. I
knowed it. And I put it back. I
did. He done knows I tried. He done
knows it. I don't care nothin for
em. I don't.

His voice dies away. Neither he nor Josie moves. Then he
kicks his horse and gallops away.

EXT. PRAIRIE. EVENING [RIDING]

The sun dips below the horizon. Josie watches the two riders
disappear into a gully. She looks back to Jake, ill at ease.

Suddenly, the horses' nostrils flare. Ahead, a forest looms.

EXT. PRAIRIE. HILLOCK. NIGHT

Gilchrist studies the dark grassland beyond. There's no sign of Jake or Josie. His face flushes and he spits.

BUTANE (O.S.)
We're losin em, ain't we?

A few yards away, Butane grins at him. He doesn't reply.

BUTANE (CONT'D)
I s'pose it don't matter we do. We know their direction. *Trapper's Valley*. That's what the boy told you, ain't it? Course, that's a mighty wide swath of land. Mayhaps we could head them off, we knew wherein they was intendin. But the boy didn't tell you *that*. Shame. If only he'd revealed more in that powwow of yours.

Butane inhales deep, savoring this moment.

BUTANE (CONT'D)
The horses are bout ready to drop of thirst. Mick's patience will dry out the second they do. Ned, for your own sake, I suggest you catch us up 'fore that comes to pass.

He leers at Gilchrist.

Down below, the horses whinny. Gilchrist looks to them. The wind has shifted. It blows from the east. He laughs.

GILCHRIST
Would you look at that. The horses smell water.

Butane's smirk falters. Gilchrist's eyes glide back to him.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
If you put it to me, I'd say we'll catch em tonight.

EXT. FOREST. CREEK. NIGHT

The horses lap water from a curling stream. Josie does the same. She finishes. Her eyes find Jake.

He's crouched with his hands in the water. Beside him is a fish laid on a stone, glinting in a patch of moonlight.

He looks up.

JAKE

I don't recognize the way.

She bites her lip and avoids his eyes.

JOSIE

We'll be at Trout River by
daybreak. You'd recognize that,
wouldn't you?

Beat. He nods.

There's a noise through the forest. A *horse's whinny*? Both of
them snap their heads to it. Josie clears her throat.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I- I need to perform my
necessaries. I- it won't take long.

Before Jake can reply, she rises and limps away.

EXT. FURTHER INTO THE FOREST. NIGHT

Jake and the creek fall out of sight. Josie picks up her
pace, hissing under her breath.

JOSIE

Who's out there? Reveal yourselves!

VOICE (O.S.)

Josie, is that you?

Deputy Yarborough emerges from behind a bush.

YARBOROUGH

You got away from him?

Josie glances back through the trees.

JOSIE

Yarborough, I came to tell you to
leave. Before he kills you.

Yarborough gawks at her, taken aback. Then he laughs.

YARBOROUGH

Josie, that's silly. You stay here
now. Woodsworth's already gone off
to hobble your horses.

He reaches for her, but she shies away.

JOSIE

Yarborough, you ain't listening to me. Leave. Now! *I ain't going back.*

He stands there, stubbornly motionless.

YARBOROUGH

You ain't- But, Josie, he's a *savage.*

His words worm themselves inside her head. She muses them a moment. Then her resolve hardens.

JOSIE

He's no worse than Mick. And besides, I need him. He's gonna bring me where I have to go. *Leave. Now!*

But Yarborough just ogles her. Then he snorts.

YARBOROUGH

He's a murderer, Josie. Nothing more. And you ain't gonna get wherever that is. Mick says he wants you back. So you go back.

Josie's eyes narrow. She steps away. Yarborough steps forward. Beat. He lunges forward and grabs her. She makes to call out, but he stuffs his hand in her mouth.

YARBOROUGH (CONT'D)

Shut up now! Shut up!

He drags her struggling into the undergrowth. Then there's a FLASH OF RED LIGHT. He drops to the ground, screaming, one of his arms blown clean off at the elbow.

Jake strides from the trees and stands over him, revolver pointed down. His hand trembles. He groans.

Josie waits for him to kill Yarborough. But he doesn't. He holsters his revolver and strides back towards the creek.

EXT. FOREST. CREEK. NIGHT

Woodsworth lies beside the mare, Jake's knife sticking from his belly. Josie's pony is gone.

Jake emerges from the trees and yanks the knife from Woodsworth's stomach. Woodsworth howls. Josie goes to him.

JAKE
He run off your pony.

She examines Woodsworth's wound. It's non-fatal.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I ain't killed em. I seen em since
a day ago, but I ain't killed em.

Josie looks back to Jake. In his hand is the blonde locket.
He extends it toward her.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I understand. *I understand.*

There's the rumble of approaching riders. Josie looks down.
Her voice shakes.

JOSIE
I- I... I'm sorry.

The riders begin to take form beyond the trees. She stands.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
We've one horse now.

Her eyes meets his. There's a plan conveyed in her gaze.
Jake's face clouds with fury. Then it passes. He nods.

EXT. FOREST. CREEK. A FEW MINUTES LATER

The posse comes to a clangoring halt. Butane leaps from his saddle and scans the ground. O'Doul and Hockledge tend to Woodsworth. He calls out to Mick.

WOODSWORTH
Sheriff, I tried to stop 'em. I
even run off one of their horses!

Butane gestures to two forking sets of hoof tracks. One set veers left at a 45 degree angle (Northeast). The other continues ahead (East).

BUTANE
Which direction is theirs then?

Woodsworth can't remember *that*.

WOODSWORTH
I... Oh, my stomach!

Butane scowls. O'Doul whispers in Woodsworth's ear.

O'DOUL
Woodsworth, what'd he look like?

WOODSWORTH
(side of his mouth)
Wider'n a pine truck and taller'n
one too!

Butane swivels to Mick, waving to the rightmost tracks.

BUTANE
Sheriff, those headin east, that
must be them. They must be headin
for the ferry at Trout River. There
ain't another crossin north or
south for thirty miles.

MICK HANLAN
They could've split.

Mick's eyes find Gilchrist.

In his saddle, Gilchrist scans the trees about them. *Could the boy be pulling the same stunt?* He chances a peek at the compass within his coat. Its dial spin Northeast. *The compass doesn't lie.* He turns this over in his mind. To himself...

GILCHRIST
The boy wouldn't. He could not.
(beat, louder)
They ain't split. Those is theirs.

He points to the tracks leading Northeast. Butane purples.

BUTANE
Hold on now, Ned, that don't make
no damn sense! You said they was
heading for Trapper's Valley!
That's right beyond the river! Why
would they head north now? Ain't
nothing but wild land and brambles
to get snagged in thataway. Why
would they do that?

Gilchrist ignores him, gleaming gaze latched onto Mick.

GILCHRIST
They're two-to-a-saddle now,
Sheriff. North. You listen to me.
North. We'll catch em tonight.

Mick considers. Then he yells to the men and gestures for them to remount. Woodsworth calls out once more...

WOODSWORTH

Josie. Sheriff, that fella weren't
forcin her to be with him. She
wanted to be. She did.

Mick's lips twists into a wicked scowl. A woman SCREAMS.

EXT. PRAIRIE. NIGHT [MEMORY]

Josie (14) stumbles through a blinding snow, blood running
from a gash along her collarbone. Howling winds whip at her.

BEAL (O.S.)

Josie, git back here!

A RIFLE SHOT. Josie ducks. Falls. Clambers back to her feet.
She gasps for air. Keeps running. Beal keeps getting closer.

EXT. FOREST. GORSE. NIGHT [RIDING]

Josie hugs herself to the mare as she crashes through the
pitch black. Thistles tear at her. Behind her come the sounds
of Mick's men.

MICK HANLAN (O.S.)

Josie! Josie!

She clings tighter to the heaving animal, whispering in its
ear. *Faster. Faster.* But the calls are coming closer. *CLOSER.*

The underbrush rips at her. With a scream, she pulls hard on
the creature's reins and veers right [South].

INT. CABIN. DAY [MEMORY]

The woman stands at the counter, whetting her knife. *Shhk
shhk shhk.* We are in the doorway. Dust motes hang in the
slanted light. Water splashes.

EXT. TROUT RIVER. RIVERBANK. DAWN

Jake whirls to the noise, but it's just a FERRYMAN as he ties
his raft to a rickety dock. Jake's face twists with rage. He
tugs from his flask. He looks back to the shallows.

VOICE (O.S.)

Howdy.

He spins, revolver out and aimed. But it's just Josie.

He stares at her. She looks half-dead. Covered in cuts. His face scrunches up. He's trying to make himself cry. But it's no use. He stands and they make their way towards the ferry.

EXT. RIVER. FERRY. DAWN

The ferryman poles them across the river. Jake crouches at the raft edge, trailing his knife through the water.

FERRYMAN

Where's the two of ye headed? I can take ye upriver, further north into the valley, if that's where ye is-

Josie whispers inaudibly to him. He nods.

EXT. OPPOSITE RIVERBANK. DAWN

The ferryman waddles away, Jake's revolver aimed at his back. Jake doesn't fire. The ferryman disappears around a bend.

Jake looks back to Josie. She nods her thanks. Hoofbeats reverberate across the river.

EXT. TROUT RIVER. RIVERBANK. MORNING

The men pour forth from the trees, much the worse for wear. They nurse lacerations and are dotted with plant thorns.

Butane glowers at the ferry-less dock and swears.

BUTANE

What'd I say! I said they was headed for the river. Now they'll be watching us! We head north to cross, they'll go south. We go south, they'll head north. Where's that conspirin sunuvabitch?!

He spins, searching for Gilchrist. But Gilchrist isn't there.

MICK HANLAN (O.S.)

Josie!

At the dock edge, Mick bristles.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

You come out here! Josie!

(no response)

Hockledge, swim your horse across that river!

Hockledge eyes the water. It's hundreds of yards across and the current is deathly quick.

HOCKLEDGE

I don't know I wanna do that, Mick.

Mick spins to him, drawing his revolver.

MICK HANLAN

Swim your horse across the goddamn river!

Hockledge gulps. He searches for help amongst his fellow riders but finds none. He nudges his horse forward.

He hasn't made it ten yards when a bolt of red gunfire smites the water beside him. His horse frights and swims back to shore, another shot striking behind it.

The men gasp. This is the first they've seen of the red revolver fire. Butane finally spots Gilchrist. He's standing back within the trees, eying the scene darkly.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

You ungrateful whore! You run off with *him*?!

EXT. OPPOSITE HILLSIDE. MORNING

Hidden in the trees besides Jake, Josie draws the colt single action and aims it down at Mick on the dock.

MICK HANLAN (O.S.)

After what I done for you? After what I took you from? I saved you!

She squeezes the trigger.

EXT. RIVERBANK. MORNING

The bullet pocks the wood beside Mick's feet. Beat. He grins.

MICK HANLAN

No. No. You aren't capable of that, Josie! Are you?!

EXT. OPPOSITE HILLSIDE. MORNING

Josie's arms shake. She lets the weapon drop.

EXT. RIVERBANK. DAY

Mick fires his revolver wildly across the river.

MICK HANLAN
Goddamnit, answer me!

BUTANE (O.S.)
Mick, what're we gonna do?

Mick whirls to his deputy, chest heaving. He curses.

EXT. OPPOSITE HILLSIDE. MORNING

Jake and Josie watch as the posse moves back from the river.

EXT. FOREST. MORNING

The men duck into the trees. Josie's voice reaches them....

JOSIE (O.S.)
One of your posse ain't who he says
he is, Mick! Who don't you go ask
some questions of that fella in the
grizzly skin!

All eyes and muzzles swivel to Gilchrist. He glares across the river. Then he darts into the woods.

BULLETS whiz by. Too many. He stops. Turns. Forces a grin...

GILCHRIST
Well... well...

He spits and raises his arms in surrender.

EXT. OPPOSITE HILLSIDE. MORNING

Jake and Josie watch the posse march Gilchrist into the forest. Josie grins.

JOSIE
I'd bet they kill him.

She looks to Jake. He kneels there with his revolver. His nose and ribs are broken. His body bruised. Her eyes run over him and her grins fades. Beat.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
You fired at him. At the one done
that to you.
(MORE)

JOSIE (CONT'D)

You had a chance to kill him and you tried to. And Mick was right there and I... I couldn't do it. And I've had so many chances.

She stares at the ground.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I- I envy you. It ain't right, but I envy you can kill like you do. Like it's nothing at all. I envy you the strength to do it.

Jake groans. He takes out his flask and tugs from it.

JAKE

It ain't like that. It ain't.

Josie studies her own body. The residues of trauma there.

JOSIE

I envy you nonetheless.

(beat)

My first husband. Beal. He was the same as Mick. I didn't do to him what should've been done neither. And my son is gone because of that. Because I didn't protect him as I should've. I- I don't know why I've never been able to... perhaps it's cause I believe I deserve every bruise they've laid upon me. Perhaps that's why I don't want you killing no one, cause I don't have the strength to do it myself.

She quiets again, tracing the scar along her collarbone.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Tell me something, d'you still think of your mother?

Jake closes his eyes. *Shhk shhk shhk*. He shakes.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Cause I still think of my son. Every day. I used to wonder what become of him. I always feared, and knew deep in my heart, his father'd turned him into someone like you.

He opens his eyes and looks to Josie. There's a terrible sadness in her gaze. Yet, a warmth.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I wanted to save him from that fate. That life of cruelty and crime. I wanted to go back and undo what I'd done. But I can't. And now I know it *is* what he become. Him and his father. Outlaws. When I run off to Newsom to the woman who might find them. That's what she told me.

Josie wipes away tears. Beat.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Even now, a part of me thinks her wrong. A part of me believes they're still out there. Believes I might still save him and take this terrible guilt from off my shoulders...

She looks to Jake's thigh. There's a fresh gash along it. She watches the blood run. So does he.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Why d'you need to reach Black River? Why is it so special?

Now he draws his knife through the earth.

JAKE

Cause that's where I lost the light.

MEN'S YELLS drift across the river.

EXT. FOREST. DAY

The men form a loose semi-circle around Gilchrist. Hockledge and O'Doul hold guns to him as Butane paces.

BUTANE

What'd I say? I said, the no-good sunuvabitch wasn't to be trusted!

James scratches his head.

JAMES

Now hold on, Butane. Is you- Is you saying Ned ain't a mortician?

BUTANE

No, he ain't no goddamn *mortician*!

JAMES

Well, I'll be... Is that true, Ned?

All attention turns to Gilchrist. He looks from James to Butane to Mick. He sighs and attempts a look of contrition.

GILCHRIST

I'm afraid Deputy Butane is correct. I am no mortician.

Butane grins.

BUTANE

Line him up, Mick! Line him up and finish this once and for all.

GILCHRIST

I am, in fact, a collector of bounties.

Butane's grin dies.

BUTANE

You is lyin again.

GILCHRIST

As such I may tell you there's a sizeable figger upon that boy's head. One I aimed not to share.

BUTANE

Mick, he is lyin again.

GILCHRIST

But now that Mr. Butane has revealed all, I propose to divvy that figger up, so that we may together enjoy its spoils.

BUTANE

Mick, don't listen to him! Remember what I told you. What I saw!

Butane gestures wildly about, but no one listens.

O'DOUL

How much, Ned? How much is the reward?

GILCHRIST

Oh, quite substantial.

HOCKLEDGE

A thousand? Two?

BUTANE

Hockledge, don't gab with him!
Reach inside his pocket!

Hockledge's gaze darts from Butane to Gilchrist. Gilchrist grins and whispers to him...

GILCHRIST

More. Much more.

BUTANE

Damn you, Hockledge. I'm commandin
you, reach inside his pocket!

Hockledge sighs. Then reaches for Gilchrist's pocket. BLAM!

The men freeze. Hockledge looks down to his chest. A red rose flowers there. He collapses. No one dares move.

Mick steps forward, his revolver smoking.

MICK HANLAN

Last I remembered, I commanded this
outfit, Deputy Butane. Not you.

Butane gawks at him. Then he lets out a cry and storms away.

Mick whirls to the others. He looks crazed.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

Not a soul touches Ned without my
leave, is that understood?

(beat)

Is that understood?

Low grumbles of assent. Gilchrist grins. Mick addresses him.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

I don't care who you claim to be,
Ned. You bring us to my wife. Or
you won't live to see that boy
captured. I promise you that.

(beat)

And should you decide you'd rather
light out... then Josie be damned.
This outfit will hunt you.

Gilchrist's grin fades. Mick strides away. On the ground,
Hockledge gives a final rasp and stills.

EXT. HILLSIDE. AFTERNOON

Jake and Josie study the opposite shore. Nothing stirs. Josie sighs. Stretches. Stands and traipses up the incline.

EXT. TREES. AFTERNOON

She squats, pissing. She finishes and hikes up her pants. She's moving back down the hill when she stops.

Beside an overgrown road, a signpost reads WHITEWATER. A chipped arrow points south. She stares at it.

JAKE

What's it say?

She jumps. Jake watches her from a few yards away. Beat.

JOSIE

It- It says Black River. That's what it says.

Jake eyes her. Then he nods and walks off. She remains where she is, made frozen with guilt.

EXT. FURTHER DOWN TROUT RIVER. RIVER BANK. AFTERNOON

Muddy water laps at the shore. Gilchrist squats beside it, staring at the compass ticker. It reads "IV." He scowls.

GILCHRIST

The boy's gonna wait. He knows we can't cross. He's gonna wait til we make our move. Til we're so far off that this...

(re: the compass)

... won't amount to shit.

(beat, thinking)

And besides, ain't no first move to make what without his destination!

He glares up at the sky.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

You ain't come to me once since this began. Now's the time for to change that.

But there's no reply. Gilchrist scowls and considers the water. He cups a handful and drinks.

FROM THE BUSHES - We see Gilchrist's mouth BURN and SMOKE. We watch him spit out the water and howl...

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

You won't even allow me that?! I weren't the bastard done this to you! It was him! And yet you punish us alike! You forked-tongue sunuvabitch, help me now and-

Then Gilchrist freezes, his gaze drawn suddenly downriver. It's the ferryman. He's paddles towards shore, clinging to a log. Gilchrist grins.

EXT. OPPOSITE HILLSIDE. AFTERNOON

Jake and Josie watch Mick's men gallop off. North. Upriver.

EXT. OPPOSITE HILLSIDE. A FEW MINUTES LATER

They climb onto the black mare. Jake spurs the horse and they trot away south. Josie hazards a look behind them. Wary.

JAKE (PRE-LAP)

Will we arrive soon?

EXT. RIVERBANK. CAMPFIRE. NIGHT

Josie lies beside the flames, birch figure in her hand.

JOSIE

Yes. Yes, I think so.

Out in the river, Jake crouches, his hands submerged in the black water. Josie eyes him. She clears her throat.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

You know, I've been wondering something. How is it you know this will work? Helping me? How d'you know it'll get you on up to heaven?

Jake weaves his arms from side-to-side.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Heck, how d'you even know there's a heaven to get up into?

He looks to her.

JAKE
I seen it sometimes. When I fall.

EXT. SKIES. DAY OR NIGHT [FALLING]

Jake stares up at the black emptiness above as he streaks through space. A soft white glow comes over his face.

EXT. CAMPFIRE. NIGHT

Josie peers up at the moon. Her expression sours.

JOSIE
So heaven for you then. But what
for me? Tens more interminable
years upon this earth? Then I die.
And then what? Hell again?

JAKE
Maybe. But you've-

JOSIE
The light. Yeah, I heard you the
first time. I still don't know what
that means.

A fish splashes out in the water. She eyes Jake.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Why is it you need to get up there
so bad? To heaven?

His arms continue their rhythmic motion. She reddens.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Goddamnit, for once would you stop
doing that and answer me? Why the
hell d'you do that anyways?

Jake groans. Beat. He lifts his hands from the water.

JAKE
They're down in the dark. Like me.

He brings his eyes above.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Only those with the light ascend.
That's what she told me. But it
ain't within me. There's only
black. It ain't where it should be
cause I lost it.
(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

Only those with the light ascend to
heaven. And it's only heaven can
make you whole.

(beat)

I can't be with the black no more.
I want to be made whole.

He falls silent. Then he lowers his hands back into the water
and resumes his motions.

Josie shakes her head, trying to dispel the effect he's had.
Trying to dispel her shame.

JOSIE

That's- No. There ain't been nary a
soul in this world to help me. Why
d'you think I.. And now, when we're
but a day away from... I... Heck, I
don't even know your name.

JAKE

Jake.

Josie's mouth falls open. Jake is frowning.

JAKE (CONT'D)

That's what she used to call me.
She used to call me Jake.

EXT. TRAIL. DAY [RIDING]

Josie stares into Jake's back. A war raging within her.

JOSIE

Jake. I need to tell you something.

Jake groans at his name but turns to her. She readies
herself... then stops. A RIDER APPROACHES. Her eyes go wide.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

It can't be them.

It isn't.

An UNDERTAKER comes into view, a mule beside him with two
caskets on its back. He sits his horse and eyes Jake's blood-
stained clothing. He sighs.

CUT TO:

The undertaker, Josie's single-action on him, watching glumly
as she climbs onto his steed.

UNDERTAKER

I had been told that you was in chains.

JOSIE

Had you now?

UNDERTAKER

Yes, ma'am. There'd been talk of two bandits in this-a-here region for some time.

Josie's breath catches in her throat.

UNDERTAKER (CONT'D)

But I'd heard tell that not four days ago, two men fittin such description had been apprehended outside Whitewater. Now I suspect they were wrongly collared.

JOSIE

Two- two men?

UNDERTAKER

That's right. A father and a son.

Josie cries out. She spurs the undertaker's horse and gallops away. Jake watches her go. Then he follows.

EXT. TRAIL. DAY [RIDING]

Josie rides as if possessed, branches whipping at her face.

EXT. OVERLOOK. EVENING

The sun dips below the horizon. Josie crouches along a ridge. Spread beneath her is the town of WHITEWATER.

EXT. CAMPFIRE. NIGHT

A RABBIT roasts on a spit. Mick's men guffaw betwixt bites of meat.

GEORGE

100 acres for me and mine. That's what I'll do with my portion.

FREMONT

You know what I'll do with mine?
100 homesteaders' daughters.

The men hoot with laughter.

RADCLIFFE (O.S.)
Say, Ned, what's the kid's name?

At the fire's edge, Gilchrist's eyes slide open. Radcliffe is staring at him. Now the others too.

JAMES
Forget his name, Ned, what about that shooter'a his? What about the red gunfire?

GEORGE
Yeah! And why'd he kill all those people?

NUMEROUS
Yeah, why'd he done that!?

Gilchrist sighs.

GILCHRIST
Fellas, such grisly details ain't to be discussed over victuals.

GEORGE
Aw, c'mon, Ned don't hem'n'haw outta answerin. Is the kid really vicious as you say?

The men's face are eager, expectant. Gilchrist exhales.
There's no avoiding it now, is there? He spits.

GILCHRIST
He is. Even if he deludes himself otherwise.

The men chuckle. A twinkle enters Gilchrist's eye.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
But gentlemen, there are things more terrifyin in this world than some puny boy. Echoes of men walk this earth, like shadows unto their victims. They've years like stars thrown cross the sky and they seen this land when it was but a babe and suckled on the blood of its creatures. The're in the employ of a darker power now, and that boy's just one amongst them. And besides, he's young.

The men stare at him. He holds his breath. *Has he revealed too much?* Then they laugh. Soon they're in uproar.

RADCLIFFE

Hell, Ned. Was just a question!

Gilchrist chortles and takes a waft of the rabbit.

BUTANE (O.S.)

What're you sayin, Ned? That boy's immortal?

Butane leans forth from the shadows. Gilchrist scowls.

GILCHRIST

That boy can die. He will.

Butane sighs feigned relief.

BUTANE

I'd sure hope. Otherwise it'd be another trick you'd kept from us. One of many up your sleeve. Or should I say, inside that coat.

He reaches out and slices a strip of meat off the rabbit.

BUTANE (CONT'D)

I couldn't help but notice you ain't ate yet. Ain't you hungry?

GILCHRIST

No.

BUTANE

How bout some drink then?

Butane offers up his flask. Gilchrist doesn't budge.

BUTANE (CONT'D)

Strange. He don't eat and he don't drink. How come? It ain't like it's gonna burn you, Ned, is it? *Is it?*

Gilchrist's eyes blaze. Butane smirks.

DISSOLVE TO:

THE LAST LIGHT OF THE CAMPFIRE

Around it, the men sleep. All the save one. Gilchrist. He stirs and rises.

He moves to the slumbering ferryman, easing a knife from the man's belt. He moves to another body. Butane.

He brings the knife to Butane's throat. His gaze arcs over the campfire, making sure none are awake.

Then he looks back to his victim. But Butane's eyes are open. Gilchrist gawks at him, but before he can react, Butane splashes his flask up into his mouth.

Gilchrist bellows, mouth smoking.

BUTANE (CONT'D)

He's one of them! He's one of them!

The men wake, drawing their weapons. Gilchrist drops to his knees and claws at his lips. A shadow falls over him. Mick.

EXT. OVERLOOK. NIGHT

YELLOW LIGHTS flicker down in Whitewater. Jake studies them. He pulls from his flask.

JOSIE (O.S.)

I'm headed down there. At dawn.

Josie watches him by the horses. He turns to her and frowns.

JAKE

That ain't Black River.

She gives a grim nod.

JOSIE

I know it.

His frown deepens. He stands.

JAKE

No. No people.

JOSIE

I'm not asking you, Jake.

JAKE

No. No.

JOSIE

You don't under-

JAKE

No!

JOSIE
Goddamnit, my son might be-

JAKE
I said, no!

His hand is at his belt. He's trembling.

JAKE (CONT'D)
You promised me. I ain't killed no
one. I ain't done it. So you take
me to Black River. Like you said.

For a second, Josie's determination seems to waver. Then she
sets her jaw against him.

JOSIE
I ain't been taking us to Black
River. I been taking us here.

Jake moves so quickly that before she can blink he's upon
her, holding her to the ground, his revolver out and aimed.

JAKE
That ain't true. Tell me!

JOSIE
It is true! Black River's north of
here. A day or two maybe. Down
there is Whitewater. It is!

He presses the revolver to her temple. He's rocking back and
forth on top of her, moaning.

JAKE
I ain't stayin here no longer. I-
You promised. I ain't killed no
one. I ain't...

Her treachery seeps into his brain. He cocks the hammer.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I want to kill you. I do.

JOSIE
Please, I need to go down there.

JAKE
I do. I do.

JOSIE
Please...

But Jake does not release her and now her eyes narrow.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

You could've killed me a long time ago. But you didn't. You need me. No, no, you ain't gonna to-

A ROAR AND A FLASH OF RED LIGHT. Then... BLACK.

A horse nickers. Footstep approach. Others recede. Suddenly, there's daylight as a blindfold is removed from our eyes.

INT. STABLE. DAWN

Gilchrist blinks back the sudden light. He finds himself sprawled in a pile of hay. He tries to move. He cannot. His arms and legs are bound.

He hears scuffling. He looks up to find Mick on a stool opposite him. Mick's revolver is leveled at his chest.

He scowls and takes in the rest of the stable. A BIG BROWN HORSE stares at him from an opposite stall. He spits.

GILCHRIST

Why ain't I back in hell?

Mick draws one leg over the other.

MICK HANLAN

In the year I turned twenty one, Ned, I was a ranger.

Gilchrist rolls his eyes. *This gonna be a to-do.* He tests his bindings. Mick continues undeterred.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

The first night I was called to fulfill my oath, a posse of deputies and rangers such as myself rode out to a hollow in the mountains known as Devil's Canyon.

Gilchrist frowns. He brings his eyes back to Mick.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

A gang had hidden out there. They were just four in number, but they were killers all of them, and they fought as if they were forty. They killed seventeen of us that night. But in the end we did triumph. We did kill every single one of them dead.

(deep breath)

(MORE)

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

After they died we scalped them and commenced to collecting appendages. I was young and given to such barbarisms, so I too went to one of the bodies and prepared to slice off its right ear. Then I saw this fella was already missing his.

(long beat)

That was twenty nine years ago. And it was the last I ever thought to see Ned Gilchrist.

The horse nickers. Gilchrist doesn't move. Mick taps his revolver on his boot.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

When my wife told me what you were, I thought her a lying whore. When the barkeep told me it was two fire-breathing fellas after her, I told him to keep his deceit to himself. But when I saw you... well, I can't argue with you, can I, Ned?

Gilchrist spits.

GILCHRIST

You ain't said nothin.

Mick laughs.

MICK HANLAN

Should I have? The men would've thrown down their arms had they known what you were. Besides, I needed you to lead us. And you did.

His taps suddenly stop. He leans in.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

From what I've gathered, we've both of us been betrayed, Ned. By those to whom we've given much. Such betrayals... you said it, they can't just be forgiven. I saw what that boy did all those years ago. I figure we still need someone who knows him as well as you.

Gilchrist cocks his head at Mick. Then his mouth twists into a faux-grin.

GILCHRIST
I figger you do.
(beat)
Though I reckon there's a few of
your men, one in particular, might
not take kindly to me again.

Mick chuckles.

MICK HANLAN
Well... Well.

EXT. OVERLOOK. DAWN

There's a charred score mark on the rock along the ridge
edge. Below, a FOG rolls toward Whitewater.

EXT. FOREST. DAWN [RIDING]

RED GUNFIRE STREAKS THE AIR. Jake plunges through the trees,
firing at the treetops again and again...

EXT. OVERLOOK. DAWN

Josie stares down at Whitewater. Her hair has been singed.
Jake's gunfire rumbles through the trees. She walks off.

INT. STABLE. DAWN

Gilchrist tightens his belt. He collapses, seizing.

After a few seconds, the seizures stop. He climbs to his feet
and looks to his hand. In his palm is a SILVER INSTRUMENT
like a bone whistle. He looks to the eaves. He grins.

GILCHRIST
Took you damn long enough to choose
a side.

EXT. EDGE OF WHITEWATER. DAWN

Morning frost coats the town. Through the early chill, Josie
approaches. She reaches the first buildings and stops.

She looks to her left. The brown horse stares at her from an
open stable. She holds it gaze. Then she continues on.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE. DAWN

SHERIFF LINGHAM (60) dozes in his chair. A shadow falls over him. Josie. She nudges him.

JOSIE

Sheriff.

He wakes, mumbling.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I hear you've prisoners in your cells...

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE. JAILING AREA. DAWN

Lingham leads Josie down a narrow hall. Their steps echo.

They reach a bank of cells and Lingham points to the furthest one, gesturing for Josie to continue on alone.

Steeling herself, Josie does. With three quick steps, she moves to the final cell and turns to its TWO INHABITANTS.

They are a father and a son. Her face falls. *It isn't Beal. It isn't her child.*

SHERIFF LINGHAM (PRE-LAP)

They was killed a year ago, miss.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE. DAWN

The birch figure turns in Josie's hand.

SHERIFF LINGHAM

Both Beal and the- the... boy. It was an ambuscade gone awry. They'd taken to thieving, you see.

Josie stares out the window. The morning is gray. Lingham watches her, his hat twisting in his hand.

SHERIFF LINGHAM (CONT'D)

You- you can go see em. The graves is out past town. Out at Beal's ol' homestead. We gave em headstones and everything. Proper ones. You- Miss... Miss, I think you aughta...

DISSOLVE TO:

A MISERABLE HOVEL

Piles of scrap surrounding it. An outhouse to its side.

EXT. HOVEL. DAWN

By its entrance, loose piles of stone mark TWO GRAVES. Josie crouches before them, sobs racking her body.

JOSIE

Look what I done to you. Look what
I done.

She weighs the colt revolver in her hand. She raises it to her skull, tempted. Then she buries her head in her arms.

Time passes. A fog bank rolls past Whitewater. Her sobs die. She dries her eyes and returns her gaze to the graves.

She scowls. They're measly piles of stones. *Not headstones at all!* Suddenly she reels back to the approaching fog.

Was that a fleck of movement within it? She eagle eyes the nearing murk but finds nothing. She glances at the hovel. Then she re-grips her revolver and moves towards it.

INT. HOVEL. DAWN

Josie enters, pausing inside the doorway, searching the grimy insides for signs of her son. But there are none.

She forces down her emotions and moves to a cut out.

Outside, all is ill-defined. Then her eyes light up. There. Another flurry of movement. THREE RIDERS coming into focus.

she raises her revolver...

There's a muffled footfall behind her. She spins, but Mick strikes her before she can fire. She collapses to the floor.

He bends and traces the emerging gash on her forehead.

MICK HANLAN

Where is he?

But she's unconscious. He stands and goes to the door. He raises his revolver to the sky and fires.

EXT. UNDERWATER. NIGHT [MEMORY]

The knife sweeps through the water. Back and forth. Back and forth. As it passes a third time, it's yanked from the water.

EXT. BLACK RIVER. NIGHT [MEMORY]

A DARK FIGURE clutches the knife in its hand, staring off at the yellow light of a SMALL CABIN upon a hill.

EXT. FOREST GLADE. DAWN

Trees smoke, branches rent from revolver blasts. Jake huddles amidst them, turning the blonde locket of hair in his hand.

JAKE

I want to kill her. I want to.

EXT. CABIN. NIGHT [MEMORY]

The woman stands at the counter. *Shhk shhk shhk*. The sound is violent now. We are in the doorway. The yellow light is inside. We are silhouetted against it. Like Jake outside Baggart Ranch. We are stepping into it. We are speaking.

US

Mama... mama...

The woman keeps her back to us. *Shhk shhk shhk*. Mick's revolver fire resounds.

EXT. FOREST GLADE. DAWN

Jake's eyes bolt open. For a moment, he's still. Then he stands and walks off.

INT. HOVEL. MORNING

Josie sits bound to a chair. There are footsteps. A shadow over her. A hand removes the gag from her mouth.

It's Mick. He settles in a chair opposite her. The two of them study one another. Josie speaks first.

JOSIE

How?

MICK HANLAN

The ferryman. And a little feint upriver.

She scowls and nods.

JOSIE

We should've killed him.

MICK HANLAN

Yes, my dear, you should've. But
that ain't quite in you, is it?

She doesn't respond. Mick looks about the decrepit hovel.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)

The town sheriff informs me this is
where that bastard son of yours
died. To think, all these years I
believed you unfaithful, when,
truth be told, the beggarly bitch
simply wanted to return to what I
took her from.

Josie shakes her head. There are tears in her eyes.

JOSIE

You didn't take me from this, Mick.
He did. He sent me you. You did not
even know it.

Mick's leer fades. His tone softens. It becomes plaintive
like that of a child pleading of a perceived wrong.

MICK HANLAN

I came to tell you that you'll be
dead soon. You would be already if
the boy was with you. I wanted you
to know that it didn't have to be
so. I could've protected you.

Josie laughs at him.

JOSIE

Is that what you believe?

MICK HANLAN

Yes.

She shakes her head again.

JOSIE

No. When I was out in that freezing
snow, half-dead, and He finally
come to me. When I sold Him my
soul, I asked him for a way out. I
asked him for protection. And then
He sent you along, and for a little
while you gave me em both. You were
right, they were kinder times. But
He's a tricky one, ain't He? Cause
you weren't no different in the
end.

(MORE)

JOSIE (CONT'D)
You've failed to protect me for so long. And I never had no one in this world to love, so I loved you. And what's worse is a part of me still do.

She turns away now, overcome. Mick scrapes at the floor with his boot, but can't think of a word to say. There's a knock at the door. Gilchrist enters.

Mick stands. He gives Josie a final look then steps outside. Gilchrist takes his place. There's blood on his undershirt.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
They didn't kill you?

Gilchrist chuckles.

GILCHRIST
No. A deal was struck.

EXT. HOVEL. FIELD. MORNING [FLASHBACK]

Butane stands beside the ferryman, squinting through the fog to the forest beyond.

FERRYMAN
Ye think he's coming?

Butane ignores his companion. He walks off, circling the hovel and making for the outhouse.

He stops there. Sniffing. Something odd in the air. Then he opens the outhouse door and steps inside.

Gilchrist awaits him. He covers Butane's mouth and draws him into his body and kicks the door shut behind them.

INT. HOVEL. MORNING

Josie looks away, sickened. Gilchrist guffaws. Beat.

JOSIE
He ain't coming back for me, if that's what you want to know. He's long gone. I killed him. At the river. After you'd left. I did.

GILCHRIST
You may quit that chicanery with your hands.

Josie freezes. She's been trying to ease out of her bindings. Gilchrist grins. There's curiosity in his gaze.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

I must admit, I did not expect you, Nat Hanlan. I did not expect a soul to last more'n a day with the boy. And in the forest. He trusted you for to go off alone. I didn't think him capable of such.

JOSIE

Perhaps you don't know him well as you believe.

GILCHRIST

Didn't. Didn't know him well. He's dead, ain't he?

Josie blushes.

JOSIE

That's right.

Gilchrist chuckles and spits.

GILCHRIST

I know him well as any could. It's how I'm sure he'll return for you.

Josie frowns.

JOSIE

No, you don't understand. He ain't coming back. I betrayed him.

If this is supposed to alarm Gilchrist, it doesn't. He shrugs.

GILCHRIST

Then he'll come to have his fun. Or he'll come to continue this buffoonery. Either way, he'll return. He's no other choice.

He yawns. Josie studies him.

JOSIE

Are you gonna to kill him?

His gaze find hers. There's that hurt again.

GILCHRIST

He betrayed me.

Silence falls. Josie stares at the roughhewn floor.

JOSIE

You- you were wrong about him. He ain't like you said. He ain't *unlike* us.

Gilchrist laughs.

GILCHRIST

He told you bout his mother, did he?

Josie's eyes widen. *How did-*

JOSIE

He told me-

GILCHRIST

He killed her when he was but fourteen. Slit her throat I gather. Mayhaps more. How would I know? It don't matter to me and it ain't mattered to him until he was stuck in this world without liquor to dull his pain. Or whatever it is he feels.

(beat)

That boy is a liar who cannot face the fate he's doomed himself to, nor the monster he is.

Josie shakes her head at him. At his words.

JOSIE

But, he- he lost the li-

GILCHRIST

The *light*. Oh, yes, I know all bout the *light*, Nat Hanlan. Whatever he means by it, I promise you he ain't never had it within him.

She purples.

JOSIE

You don't care a lick about him, d'you? You, his partner, you don't-

GILCHRIST

Quiet, girl!

Josie quiets at once. Gilchrist's face has blackened in a terrifying anger.

He looks away. When he turns back, he's quietly seething.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Have you ever paused to ponder why it's I am his partner? It's cause I know the monster he is, and I don't look away. I know him as he is, somethin beautiful. He bears me cause of that. Cause I see him as no other soul would.

(beat)

He wants to be human. But he ain't. Certainly no longer in make. And he ain't never been in temperament.

He leans back.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

I see now that you ain't remarkable. You simply didn't flinch from him when all others have. He would've finished you in an instant had he not his own purposes. And once all is revealed to him. Well, then we'll see...

He spits. Josie simmers with rage.

JOSIE

He is gonna kill you.

He chortles.

GILCHRIST

He already has, Nat Hanlan. Many times. But I've killed him more. And I've more friends than he.

EXT. OUTHOUSE. MORNING

The ferryman raps at the outhouse door.

FERRYMAN

Butane? Ye in there?

He gets no response. He raps once more then opens the door.

FERRYMAN (CONT'D)

Mother'a God.

Butane's body is half sunk into the open pit, his stomach and chest torn open. Suddenly, a FLASH OF RED LIGHT. The ferryman is blown forward atop Butane.

INT. HOVEL. MORNING

Gilchrist looks up at the thunderous clap. Mick charges in.

MICK HANLAN

He's here.

EXT. HOVEL. MORNING

Gilchrist peaks his head out from behind the hovel.

Before him, the field extends fifty yards to the fog-obscured tree line. Four scrap heaps form a rectangle at its center.

The rest of the posse is nowhere to be seen.

Gilchrist regards the piles. Another blast of red light streaks past from the forest. He ducks back behind the hovel.

GILCHRIST

Boy!

The tree line is still. He draws his silver revolver.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Before we commence, there's something I aughta tell you!

No reply. He chances another look. Then grins.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

I'll just tell it then! All those times He come to me... not the once did He tell me He'd send us on up to heaven! Not the once! I figgered you aughta know that, boy!

Now Jake's voice bursts from the fog...

JAKE (O.S.)

You're lyin! You're lyin!

Gilchrist laughs.

GILCHRIST

No, I ain't! It's the truth! I been keepin it from you for too long. You wouldn't've come along with me I hadn't. But you've betrayed me, boy so, hell, I guess we're square!

Red gunfire scorches the air around him.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Now you know! It's hell or here!
Ain't no point to keepin Nat Hanlan
alive. So you come on out now and
do what it's you're s'posed to;
kill her once and for all!

The gunfire ceases. Quiet.

Note: We intercut between the scrap heaps and hovel.

Jake emerges from the fog. He trudges through the tall grass and stops short of the scrap heaps. He looks to the hovel.

In a cut out, Josie is framed, Mick behind her, his revolver to her head.

She catches sight of him and gasps. His arms are covered in long gashes. His face is ghostly white.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Looks you've had your fun, boy.

Gilchrist slides out into the open. He gestures Jake forward.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

But now that time is over. C'mon.
We ain't all day.

Jake doesn't budge. His eyes pierce Josie. He takes a step.

JAKE

I killed a man.

Tears run down her cheeks.

JOSIE

That's- that's... It's okay.

JAKE

I weren't strong enough not to. I weren't.

He moves forward one more pace.

We see something he cannot. Behind each of the piles, the men appear from beneath covers of matted grass. If Jake takes another step, he'll be caught between them.

JOSIE

It's okay. It's- I shouldn't've,
I... It's okay. It is.

JAKE
I killed a man.

JOSIE
It's okay. It was my- my...

Gilchrist signals to the men. They ready themselves.

GILCHRIST
C'mon, boy.

JAKE
I killed a man.

Josie frowns at his tone. Then her eyes widen, grasping the question beneath them. She nods.

JOSIE
It's okay.

GILCHRIST
Enough, goddamnit! Step forward and finish it!

Jake looks to Gilchrist.

JAKE
Okay.

With a blur of his hand, he raises the revolver and fires. His shot strikes the lintel above Josie. The lintel smashes down upon Mick's head. He stumbles back, his grip on Josie loosened.

It takes Mick's men a moment to realize what's happened. Jake leaps forward, diving down so that their crossfire strikes not him, but each other.

James and Radcliffe are killed in an instant. Jake's gunfire kills O'Doul in an instant more.

By the hovel, Gilchrist sighs and slinks away.

Jake is clipped in the leg. The shoulder. He wriggles behind a heap as Winston, George and Fremont advance upon him.

INT. HOVEL. MORNING

Josie knocks the revolver from Mick's hand. It clatters into a corner. She leaps for it, but Mick, half-blinded, grabs her and leaps for it himself. She trips him and together they roll across the floor in a raging ball.

EXT. HOVEL. SCRAP HEAP. MORNING

Jake is a bloody mess.

FREMONT (O.S.)
You come out now!

Winston, George and Fremont are almost upon him. He tests his arms. He can barely raise them.

FREMONT (CONT'D)
Y'hear me? Whatever you are?!

To his left is James' corpse. He pries a revolver from its hand. He watches the sun appear from behind the fog. He takes a deep breath and rises up.

INT. HOVEL. MORNING

Josie manages to grab the revolver from the floor and turn it on Mick. But she doesn't fire. The weapon shakes in her hand.

He beams and snatches it from her.

MICK HANLAN
Goodbye, *my dear*.

He tenses his trigger finger. She closes her eyes. Then...
BLAM! Beat. She opens them.

Mick is a pulpy jumble on the floor. Jake is hunched in the doorway. Mick moans. Stirs.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)
Help.

EXT. HOVEL. MORNING

Gilchrist watches Jake advance into the hovel. He has a clear shot, but curiously he doesn't fire.

MICK HANLAN
Help! Help!

Mick catches sight of Gilchrist out. His eyes bulge. But Gilchrist just grins and gives him a wave.

MICK HANLAN (CONT'D)
HELP!

He exhales cathartically, his revenge come after all these years.

Then Jake fires again and Mick moves no more. Gilchrist now discharges too. BLAM!

INT. HOVEL. MORNING

Jake is thrown across the room and smashed into a table. He lies there motionless.

GILCHRIST

The boy dead?

Josie looks to Jake. His chest rises ever so slightly.

JOSIE

Yes.

GILCHRIST

No, he ain't.

Gilchrist swings his revolver to her and Josie grabs Mick's revolver and fires it at him, and Gilchrist is forced behind the outhouse as she scrambles across the floor to Jake.

Note: We intercut between the hovel and outhouse.

Gilchrist sighs.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Nat Hanlan, I'm growin weary of all
this hoo-ha. I reckon we should
bring it to its end.

Josie searches about for an escape, but finds none. She slumps down, exhausted and despondent.

Her eyes circle the dirt-ridden hovel. All sign of her son long gone. Then they find Jake. Not gone. Here. Now.

Through a cut out she spies a horse laying on its side. She takes a deep breath. Then she drags Jake across the floor.

JOSIE

I'd say I'd have to ponder that!

Gilchrist rolls his eyes and springs out from behind the outhouse. His shots explode a shelf above Josie's head. Her shot clips him in the leg and he howls and dives back.

GILCHRIST

Damnit, girl, it's over! Whether
you know it or not!

Josie strains to lift Jake through the cut out.

JOSIE

The way I see it, there's only two days left! And it's only you!

GILCHRIST

Oh, it ain't only me! Besides, girl, I know where you are headed. Black River.

She freezes.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

That's right. He told me all. He told me all.

Gilchrist waits for Josie's response, but none comes. He leaps out and charges the hovel. But Jake and Josie are gone.

Hooves pound. Jake and Josie erupt from behind the hovel, galloping towards the forest.

Gilchrist watches them go. He sighs and takes out the instrument. He BLOWS INTO IT. A SHRIEKING WIND HOWLS...

EXT. FOREST. MORNING [RIDING]

It echoes through the trees. Aback the mare, Jake writhes in agonizing response. Josie grips his hand.

JOSIE

Hold on, Jake. Hold on.

EXT. TRAPPER VALLEY [MONTAGE]

It sounds out past Whitewater, through the forests and rivers of Trapper's Valley, filling every hideout and hellhole.

EXT. HOVEL. MORNING

Gilchrist takes the instrument from his lips. The shrieking subsides. He grins. Then he spots Mick's corpse and struts towards it.

EXT. FOREST/FIELD. BIRD'S EYE POV. EVENING

SIX RIDERS pound through the trees, converging on the field.

EXT. HOVEL. EVENING

Gilchrist rests against the hovel, humming to himself.
There's a freshly mauled ear balanced on his chest.

GILCHRIST
*... the church bells clanged, the
voices rang, run run, here comes
the Gilchrist gang...*

ESTEVAN (O.S.)
The boy too much for you,
Gilchrist?

He stops his song. He chuckles.

GILCHRIST
We all been at this some time. I
figgered the each of us could use
some fun.

He opens his eyes.

Before him, the riders peer down from their saddles. Each of them holds a gleaming silver weapon. Some of them are festooned in dried human remains. Some of them are garbed in clothing not seen in this land in a century or more.

They are JAMES KIRKER, JOEL GLANTON, JOHN CHIVINGTON,
CHEROKEE BILL & AUGUSTINE CHACON.

In their middle sits a giant, a man seven feet tall. He grips a SILVER ARQUEBUS as tall as he. Gilchrist grins at him.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Hullo, Estevan.

This is ESTEVAN THE MOOR.

INT. CABIN. NIGHT [MEMORY]

Moonlight angles through the window. Beneath us, the woman's eyes are wild. Her hair spills out on the floor. She speaks words we cannot hear. We bring the knife to her throat.

EXT. RIVERBANK. DAY

Jake's eyes flutter open. He's lying shirtless in a patch of grass. Water gurgles.

He frowns and tries to sit up. He winces. He looks to his side. His wound has been layered with a poultice.

Straining, he struggles to his feet.

Before him, is BLACK RIVER. It winds, its waters ashy and indecipherable.

He takes it in. Then he hobbles off through the underbrush.

EXT. FURTHER UP BLACK RIVER. DAY

Jake pushes through a choke of bulrushes.

JOSIE (O.S.)

I wondered where you'd got off to.

Josie is knelt by the riverbank.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

You shouldn't've moved. You already
been out a day.

He doesn't respond. He looks beyond her. She smiles.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

Is that it? Is that where you
wanted me to take you?

Jake nods. Atop a small hilltop, is the CABIN FROM HIS
MEMORIES.

EXT. UNDERWATER. DAY

Fish flit by. A hand flashes past. Sweeping back and forth.

EXT. BLACK RIVER. RIVERBANK. DAY

Jake weaves his hands to and fro as Josie daubs his wound
with more poultice. Her skin touches his. He shudders.

JOSIE

This'll keep you through the night.
Beyond that... I don't right know.

She finishes. She takes out the gold coin and studies it.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I s'pose that don't matter now
though, do it? Not a half day to
go. Will they come?

Jake nods.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
And it won't just be Gilchrist,
will it?

He shakes his head.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
And are you in any form to fight?
Another shake.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
And are you still fighting? After
what he said... I wasn't sure...
Jake nods a third time. She bites her lip.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
I- I am sorry. I should've listened
to you. I shouldn't've gone down. I-
I've done this to you.
(beat)
Jake, why didn't you kill me?

Jake stares off at the cabin. He closes his eyes. *Shhk shhk shhk.*

JAKE
I killed her here. Mama. It
would've been different I hadn't,
but I did. I- I tried to tell her
there were only black within me. I
done tried.
(long beat)
He ain't never gonna let us up, and
I thought- I thought I brung you
here and saved you I might undo
what I'd done. I figgered it'd be
as if it'd never happened. The
light would come back to me and
then maybe... I died, I would go
up... but after what Gilchrist
said...

He gestures to the sky.

JAKE (CONT'D)
D'you think it's up there? If
there's a hell, there must be.
Right?

Josie studies him. He's never looked more the child. More
innocent. More ignorant. Her lips tremble.

JOSIE

I- I don't know, Jake.

JAKE

I ain't never seen it. Heaven. I told you I had, but I ain't. Not when I die. Not when I fall. Never.

(beat)

I know the light was within me once. I saw her by the counter with the knife in her hand and there were a fish on my plate and I felt it then. I know I did. I weren't strong enough with her. But I been strong enough with you.

(beat)

I can't stay here no longer. I can't.

He falls silent. Neither of them speaks. Then Josie stands.

JOSIE

C'mon. You ain't showed me around.

EXT. BLACK RIVER. RIVERBANK. AFTERNOON

There's a GRAVE at the base of a willow tree. Jake crouches beside it. Josie waits for him to speak. He does not.

EXT. CABIN. PORCH. EVENING

The two of them stare into the darkness within. Josie looks to her companion. Then she steps forward.

INT. CABIN. NIGHT

Josie strikes a mildewy match. She lights an oil lamp. Then turns to the doorway.

JOSIE

You coming in?

Jake stands out on the porch, staring in at the yellow light. Just as he did as a child.

He groans. Then he steps inside.

INT. CABIN. EVENING

Josie boards up a window. At the table, Jake watches her.

JAKE

Josie.

She looks to him. In his memories, his mother never turned. But Josie does. She looks to him and she smiles.

EXT. BLACK RIVER. NIGHT

The sun's light fades away. FIGURES move along the bank.

INT. CABIN. NIGHT

Though a loophole, Josie peers out into the black.

On the floor, Jake whets his knife. *Shhk shhk shhk*. There's a FADED BLOODSTAIN on the floorboards beside him.

Josie turns from the loophole and considers him. Beat.

JOSIE

Jake. Does it hurt to die?

Shhk shhk shhk. He stops.

JAKE

No.

JOSIE

And how about hell?

JAKE

Yeah. That hurts some.

Josie nods and reaches into her pocket.

JOSIE

That's where Birch is, I s'pose.

Jake frowns.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

That was his name. My son. Birch.
It wasn't true what I told you
about him. He wasn't taken from me.
I gave him away. I was frightened
and alone and the Devil said I had
to and I did. To protect myself.

She comes and sits beside him. The lamp light flutters. The cabin creaks as a gust of wind pushes against it.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

I been thinking. I been thinking it's like I said: this a cruel world, and it's cold and empty and maybe- maybe there ain't no heaven in it. And I been thinking if that's so, then maybe the only warmth we can find in all this misery is to give ourselves up for another. *That's* the light at the end of the long night. *That's* what it is to be human.

Jake groans, drawing his knife along the floor.

JAKE

But I done that. I done it.

She smiles pityingly and shakes her head.

JOSIE

No. You saved me for yourself. But that's okay. Cause I done the same. All this time I been trying to save Birch when I should've been trying to save *you*.

Her words linger. She and Jake sit there, side-by-side. Then, the wind begins to HOWL.

JAKE

They're here.

Jake rises unsteadily to his feet and moves to the loophole.

Outside, all is black. One-by-one, SEVEN TORCH LIGHTS appear. They flicker then, together, go out.

Jake steps back from the loophole and turns to Josie. She goes to the oil lamp and snuffs it out.

They wait, listening. Josie looks to her revolver.

JOSIE

Jake, I don't know I can kill them. I couldn't even kill Mick.

His eyes glitter.

JAKE

They already been dead a long time.

The wind suddenly stops. An unnatural quiet falls.

Josie frowns. She makes to go to the loophole, but Jake tugs at her sleeve and shakes his head.

There's a SOFT THUD above, the faint creak of a FOOTSTEP.

Jake gestures for Josie to stay back. He crawls forward and raises his revolver and fires.

The red gunfire lights up the cabin and punches a hole through the ceiling. A body thumps as it hits the ground.

Jake turns to Josie. She's in front of the loophole. His gunfire has for a moment made her visible.

BLAM!

Another blast roars through the loophole and throws her across the room.

EXT. TREE. NIGHT

Estevan sits astride a branch, his arquebus mounted before him, peering through a telescopic sight.

SIGHT POV: There's a hole in the cabin wall. Nothing moves.

Estevan takes his eye from the sight and whistles.

EXT. BLACK RIVER. RIVERBANK. NIGHT

Gilchrist studies the compass. It's dial reads "I." He hears Estevan's whistle and raises his arm...

INT. CABIN. NIGHT

Jake crawls towards Josie's body...

EXT. BLACK RIVER. RIVERBANK. NIGHT

... and lets it fall.

Out of the dark, five streams of red gunfire plow into the cabin, pulverizing wall and roof.

INT. CABIN. NIGHT

Jake huddles over Josie as gunfire rents the air and debris showers down and the onslaught seems to never end...

EXT. BLACK RIVER. RIVERBANK. NIGHT

Until finally, mercifully, Gilchrist raises his arm back up and the gunfire ceases.

INT. CABIN. NIGHT

Wood chips flutter through the air. Moonlight filters down. Jake holds Josie tight. Dark blood seeps from her diaphragm.

GILCHRIST (O.S.)
Boy, you alive in there?!

NOTE: we intercut between Black River and the cabin.

Gilchrist spits.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
I figger you are! But she ain't. Or
she won't be in but a moment!

Jake puts his ear to Josie's chest. He can still hear her heartbeat, but it's faint and slowing.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
Boy, I am tired. And there ain't
nothing more to be done. I told you
once and I'll tell you again...

Jake stares down at her. At her hair spilled over the floor. At the blood spreading from under her. Her eyes flutter open and she gazes up at him.

She looks like his mother. Just like his mother.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
... we cannot change the fates
we've wrought ourselves. We cannot
change what we are. You accept that
now. Now. It is the time. He's told
me He'll forgive you. He's told me
He will.

Nothing stirs in the far off cabin. Gilchrist's eyes narrow.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
There ain't no more time left, and
goddamnit, I'll not let you damn me
like you have yourself. Boy, you
bring us that coin!

Wrath and rage surges across Jake. Except it isn't cold and unfeeling. It's ugly and passionate and *human*.

He reaches into Josie's belt and removes her flask. He flicks off its top and DRINKS EVERY LAST DROP.

IN THE TREE

Estevan brings his eye back to the scope.

SCOPE POV: a pulsing red light grows within the cabin.

BLACK RIVER

Gilchrist spits.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

They don't never come out, do-

The door to the cabin blasts open.

CABIN

Jake steps forth. Smoke pours from him--from his mouth and from out of his wound--and his heart and veins blaze red and he grips his revolver and glares out into the dark like a demon incarnate.

BLACK RIVER

Gilchrist's mouth falls open. It is a sight to behold.

But he hardens himself and looks to Estevan. Estevan nods. Gilchrist spits and as he does we move to...

EACH OF THE SEVEN COMBATANTS

Faces tensed, eyes narrowed; each experienced beyond all years, each knowing what will come next.

Jake's glare finds Gilchrist out in the night. For a moment, they hold each other's eyes. Then....

CABIN

Jake darts to his left, his revolver up and firing, and...

THE BARRAGE BEGINS

HILL

Jake charges down the slope, weaving between trees, gunfire singeing the air around him.

BLACK RIVER

Jake disappears into the forest. Gilchrist sneers and sneaks off towards the cabin.

TREE

Estevan brings his eye to the arquebus' sight.

CABIN

ALL IS MUTED. On the floor, Josie stares through a hole in the ceiling. Bits of wood fly overhead. She frowns and looks to the far wall. A hole is blown through it. Now another, scoring the wall above her.

SHE'S BEING SHOT AT.

Her eyes go wide and sound comes back to her - a cacophony of thunderclaps - and she cries out and crawls across the floor.

TREE

Estevan fires repeatedly into the cabin.

FOREST

Gunfire explodes a tree beside Jake's head. He dives forward and springs to his feet and fires back. His shot cuts through a sapling and slams into John Glanton, tossing him back and impaling him upon a branch.

Estevan's gunfire rumbles through the forest. Jake breaks towards it, Black River visible ahead.

BLACK RIVER

Jake finds Cherokee Bill, and Cherokee doesn't even bother with cover, and his first shot burns Jake's temple, and Jake's first shot goes through his chest.

For a moment, Jake catches sight of Estevan in the tree and Gilchrist sneaking up the hill, but before he can re-direct his revolver, he's struck and his weapon flies from his hand and Chivington and Augustine Chacon advance upon him.

Augustine's next shot strikes Jake's side and Jake is pitched back into the river, the black water swallowing him and his light whole.

CABIN

Josie pulls herself groaning across the cabin floor.

Gunfire slashes her calf and she screams. FOOTSTEPS APPROACH. Panic enters her gaze.

Her hand springs to her belt, but her revolver is nowhere to be found. Her eyes fly about the room, but the weapon isn't there either. Now Gilchrist steps inside.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Nice to see you, Nat Hanlan.

He spots a soft gold light coming from her pocket. He reaches in and pulls out the gold coin. He grins.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)

Looky here.

BLACK RIVER

John Chivington and Augustine Chacon crouch along the river bank. Augustine fires his SILVER RIFLE into the water.

Seconds tick away. The two of them grin. Steam bubbles rise to the river surface.

AUGUSTINE CHACON

The hell-

Jake explodes up from the depths. He grabs Augustine's leg and pulls him back into the river. There are throbs of red light. Then nothing. Chivington steps back.

JOHN COVINGTON

You'll drown you don't come out!
You aren't going to get at me with-

Red gunfire erupts from the river and blows him away. Jake surfaces, half-gasping, half-screaming, body afire once more.

BLAM! Augustine's silver rifle is blown from his hand. Estevan grins at him from the tree branch, arquebus aimed.

CABIN

Gilchrist kicks at Josie's body. Her wound. She spits up blood. Cries out.

BLACK RIVER

Her shouts echo down to Jake. He pivots towards the cabin. BLAM! Red gunfire scorches the ground at his feet.

He starts again for the cabin. BLAM! More burnt earth. He gives an agonized scream, breath steaming. Estevan grins.

ESTEVAN

You remain where you are,
Gilchrist's boy.

Jake spirals to him. To the arquebus. Estevan follows his gaze. He sighs.

ESTEVAN (CONT'D)
Child, I have defiled kings and
razed cities of gold to the ground.
Do you truly wish to set yourself
against me?

Jake takes a step forward. Estevan shrugs.

ESTEVAN (CONT'D)
So be it.

He drops to the ground, lithe as a cat, and straightens himself, pulling a shimmering, bejeweled SABER from his robes. He beckons Jake forward.

ESTEVAN (CONT'D)
Come to me, child.

But Jake doesn't. Instead, he reaches around to the back of his belt and brings forth Josie's revolver. He points it at Estevan and pulls the trigger...

But nothing happens. He frowns. Pulls the trigger again. Still nothing. Estevan laughs.

ESTEVAN (CONT'D)
Water, child. Water. Mortal arms
are not to be trusted. Estevan
knows this.

He grins and slides forward. Jake watches the water seep from the revolver chambers. He closes his eyes. He's doomed.

Or is he?

His eyes open again and he brings the cylinder to his mouth. He breathes hot smoke into the chambers. Drying the sodden paper cartridges and their gunpowder within in an instant.

He raises the weapon again. Estevan stops in his tracks. He cocks his head.

ESTEVAN (CONT'D)
Ah.

Jake fires.

CABIN

Gilchrist's foot snaps Josie's head back. She lies motionless. He pants. He draws his revolver and spits on her.

GILCHRIST

No more time to waste, Nat Hanlan.
The boy will thank you later. You
die fore midnight and he lives on
with me.

He points his revolver down. BLAM! He's blown across the room. He doesn't move.

EXT. TREE. NIGHT

Jake takes his eye from the arquebus sight. He looks to Estevan's body sprawled on the ground below. The fiery red glow is leaving him now.

EXT. UNDERWATER. NIGHT

Jake's knife cuts through the water, back and forth.

EXT. BLACK RIVER. RIVERBANK. NIGHT

Jake crouches and wipes the blade against his pant leg. He stands and looks up the hill to the cabin. He limps forward.

INT. CABIN. NIGHT

Jake eases himself through the doorway. On the ground, Josie is still, her breath shallow. He goes to her.

His legs give out and he collapses. Josie's eyes move to him.

JOSIE

Thank you, Jake.

MOVEMENT. Jake brings the colt revolver around, but Gilchrist knocks away his arm before he can, and the weapon clatters off across the floor.

Gilchrist rises, a chunk of his back missing. He hobbles towards the weapon. Jake tries to stand, but his legs give out again.

He brandishes his knife lamely and swipes it at Gilchrist but misses badly. He tries to mumble something but can't seem to speak. Gilchrist reaches down and picks up the colt revolver.

BLAM!

He pitches forward, neck cracking against the wall. He slumps down, dead.

We hear SIZZLING.

Josie let's Gilchrist's revolver fall from her hand. Her fingers and palms are BURNING. The weapon isn't meant for human hands.

Her gaze finds Jake's once more. Neither speaks. They both slip into unconsciousness.

THROUGH THE HOLES IN THE ROOF, THE MOON MOVES ACROSS THE SKY. SNOW BEGINS TO FALL.

Jake awakes. Beside him, Josie's chest barely moves.

He looks about the cabin, gaze landing on a bowl filled with the poultice. He makes to stand, but Josie's hand finds him.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

No.

He frowns and makes to stand again. Josie's fingers tighten.

JOSIE (CONT'D)

No.

JAKE

You can make it til tomorrow.

JOSIE

I don't want to. I want to go now.
I want to see my child.

Beside Josie's head is the faded bloodstain. Jake groans.

JAKE

You can make it. You can. I ain't
stayin here no longer. I ain't.

Josie is quiet for a little while. Then...

JOSIE

Okay.

She releases him. He crawls to the bowl and takes it up and crawls back. He kneels beside her.

He dips his fingers into the mix. Then he looks into her face. Moonlight glimmers in her eyes. He studies the creases of her brow and cheeks. The pain ingrained in them. Beat. He puts the bowl down. He groans.

The snow comes heavier. The birch figure is in her hand. He looks to the bloodstain. He frowns and shakes his head.

JAKE
Mama... Mama...

He rolls over on top of her. Her eyes open and she looks up at him. At the face so very young. She smiles.

JOSIE
Birch. My baby Birch.

He closes his eyes. Then he brings his knife to her throat.

JOSIE (CONT'D)
Thank you.

With a shudder, he draws it across her gullet.

EXT. CABIN. NIGHT

SEVEN COMETS plummet from the heavens.

EXT. SKIES. NIGHT [FALLING]

Gilchrist's eyes flicker open. Black clouds are spread below.

He turns onto his back. The moon basks him in its light. For a moment the violence and cruelty seems to fade from him.

Then he turns back over and the warmth leaves him and the world below approaches hard and fast.

EXT. BLACK RIVER. RIVERBANK. NIGHT

Gilchrist trudges along the riverbank, He stops for a moment and stares at something on the ground. Then he continues on.

EXT. CABIN. STOOP. DAWN

Jake sits, wiping blood from the gold coin. HIS HEART GLOWS RED AGAIN. A horse nickers.

Gilchrist watches him from atop a pony. He tosses Jake his revolver. It lands in the snow at Jake's feet.

Neither speaks. The snow flurries around them.

JAKE
Gilchrist...

Gilchrist looks to Jake. For a moment, it appears there's tears running down Jake's cheek. But it's just melted snow.

JAKE (CONT'D)
I wish I hadn't'a...

He falls silent. Gilchrist looks away.

GILCHRIST
I know.
(beat)
She called you Jake. Is that your
name, boy?

Jake nods. Gilchrist is quiet. He gestures to the pony.

GILCHRIST (CONT'D)
C'mon now. It's time for us to go.

Jake's face is blank. He looks down to the revolver and picks it up, weighing it in his hand.

He stands and goes to the pony. With Gilchrist's help, he swings himself up onto it. Gilchrist spurs the horse.

They ride off through the snow. Two dark figures. In his hand, Jake rubs at a BROWN LOCKET OF HAIR.

The snow falls heavier. We follow them until they are gone.

EXT. BLACK RIVER. GRAVE. DAWN

A fish has been laid atop the grave. In the dawn glow, its scales shine bright and white.

FADE TO BLACK