

I'LL BURN HIM & BURY HIM IN THE WOODS
[FIFTH DRAFT]

Written by

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LEGEND: YORK, 1866

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - THE HALTON FARMHOUSE - DUSK

A fist SLAMS down onto a wooden table, hard. Crockery and cutlery rattle.

The room lit by gas lamp, candles and the LAST LIGHT of the day.

EDWIN HALTON sits at the head of the modest table. He strokes his hands through his greying hair, agitated in thought.

His wife HARRIET is stood at the opposite end of the table. She's frightened.

Her eyes full of worry and excess water.

There are two plates of HALF EATEN FOOD, each in front of them both.

A third is set, but nobody seated.

HARRIET
(Trembling)
You're doing the right thing.

Edwin's focus on the third plate is broken.

HARRIET (CONT'D)
Give yourself the night to rest.
Fresh thoughts at dawn.

He rises and makes for the kitchen.

EDWIN
Are we out of gin?

She's hesitant to answer.

EDWIN (CONT'D)
Harriet?

She can't answer. This troubles her.

EDWIN (CONT'D)
I shall find my thoughts at the
tavern then.

HARRIET
Please, Edwin... this isn't a
decision to be pondered drunk.

He puts on his jacket, not listening. Heads to the front door

Harriet moves in close to him. She needs him to see her. See her FEAR.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

If he escapes, I'd have nary a chance at catching him, never mind stopping him.

EDWIN

He's perfectly safe. The shackles in the barn have held stronger men than him. No harm will come to you, Harriet.

HARRIET

And to himself?

EDWIN

I pray for it. It would save me a job in the morning.

Harriet takes a couple of deep breaths and walks over to the kitchen window.

She looks toward the BARN, in the FARMYARD, as the sun sets.

HARRIET

What is to be done, Edwin?

EDWIN

What needs to be done.

CUT TO:

Large, shrill blast of strings.

TITLE: I'LL BURN HIM AND BURY HIM IN THE WOODS

FADE IN:

INT. BARN - AT THAT MOMENT

A young man, SHACKLED to the barn wall. Frail, dirty. He hears the sound of a door closing.

JOSEPH [An older looking 17], watches Edwin leave the house through a crack in the barn door.

His shirt is a DIRTY BROWN and covered heavily in BLOOD.

CUT TO:

INT. TAVERN/PUB - LATER

Edwin sits at the bar, alone. He swigs from a wooden tankard.

Begins to sob.

Other patrons look over.

THOMAS, a younger man, makes his way to him from a small group; his drinking disturbed.

THOMAS

Sir, I believe you've had enough to drink.

Edwin wipes his tears, composes himself and stands. He's the bigger man of the two. Used to confrontation.

EDWIN

Pardon me?

THOMAS

I've come here to enjoy a drink with my friends. Not listen to some pansy blubbering in my ear--

A friend of his, IAN, has intervened and pulled him away

IAN

Apologies, Mr Halton.

THOMAS

What are you doing?

Edwin takes another swig of his tankard. HANDS SHAKING. He's ashamed of crying in public.

A BROKEN MAN.

The younger men argue under hushed tones for a moment. Thomas is suddenly awash with guilt.

He slowly removes his CAP and brings it to his chest, SCRUNCHED in his palms. He steps past Ian, to Edwin.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

My sincere condolences for the loss of your daughter, sir. May your next be on me.

He places some CHANGE on the bar and makes his way back to his seat with Ian.

Edwin falls back onto his stool. Pity makes him feel no better.

He finishes the rest of his drink.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - THE HALTON HOUSE - NIGHT

Harriet cries in her sleep.

We move in closer on her face. A heightening BATTERY of violin strings swells, as we CRESCENDO--

She BOLTS upright.

Edwin stands in the doorway with a 'BROWN BESS' musket.

Harriet squints, second guesses whether she's awake or not. She's FEARFUL.

He leaves the doorway. The SOUND of his footsteps disappear into another room.

The LORDS PRAYER starts to be spoken from the dining room.

She decides to follow the sound.

INT. DINING ROOM - HALTON HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Edwin, DRUNK, sits at the head of the dining table. He polishes his rifle. It's somewhat of an antique, even in this era.

He continues to recite the lord's prayer.

Harriet tip toes through the darkness, with a candle leading the way. She peeks her head through, into the dining room.

Only CANDLELIGHT, Edwin is barely visible. Still praying.

HARRIET

Sweetheart?

He stops speaking.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

It's the dead of night, your mind needs rest.

Continues to polish.

EDWIN

This rifle has lived a life beyond my own. I must spend the night readying it for work.

Harriet rushes to some drawers and grabs a BOX OF MATCHES.

HARRIET

Let me light some more candles.

EDWIN

No, leave me be.

HARRIET

Then I'll set them down for you.

She places them on the table. LIGHTS a few anyway, in silence. Preparing to speak.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

I know how much we struggle since... Talking about anything has caused us great difficulty. I feel the need to have you know:

[BEAT]

I'm still of age, Edwin. I'm still able... I can bear us another child. We still have life ahead of us. There is more loss yet to endure.

[BEAT]

Please, Edwin. Come to bed, you're not alone in this.

EDWIN

...But I alone must pull the trigger.

Edwin blows out the candles near him. Leaving him in almost total DARKNESS.

He's frightening her. The only remaining light comes from the candles she lit moments earlier.

EDWIN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The devil doesn't rest, why should I?

CUT TO:

INT. BARN - DAWN

The barn door swings wide.

Bright morning light envelops Joseph, asleep on the bare ground. He stirs.

Edwin enters, DRENCHES him with a full bucket of cold water.

Joseph springs up in shock, GASPS, breath taken away.

EDWIN

Hands.

He holds them out, shackled.

JOSEPH

I do believe I've learnt my lesson, sir.

Edwin grabs a set of keys from his belt, where a CANTEEN also hangs. He removes the chains, but keeps the shackles around his wrists LOCKED.

EDWIN
We're off to t'woods.

Edwin steps to the side, allowing Joseph to pass.

Joseph's eyes settle on the MUSKET slung over his shoulder.

JOSEPH
Why?

Edwin gestures toward the outside.

EDWIN
You know the way.

Joseph abides sheepishly and begins to exit, closely followed by Edwin.

INT. DINING ROOM - HALTON HOUSE - AT THAT MOMENT

Harriet watches from the house.

NUMB.

Tears making tracks down her cheeks. She turns away, unable to watch them leave.

Framed through the window, Edwin jabs Joseph in the back, on which we--

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Joseph is nudged forward deeper into the woods. He is at the front, with Edwin & his rifle putting pressure on from behind.

JOSEPH
Put down in the woods like a mangy mutt...

EDWIN
This is how it is to be done.

JOSEPH
You believe those accusations, again?

EDWIN
Agh... You'll not dissuade me.

JOSEPH

Whatever you see me as, you're wrong. You'll be making the same mistake again. Are you listening?

EDWIN

I'll not allow the devil's pawns to continue taking my family-- Allow witchcraft to exist in this age!

Joseph turns to confront Edwin. Edwin throws him to the ground, using his rifle.

JOSEPH

Any man, of sane mind, knows these as irrational thoughts.

Edwin takes a knee. They're face to face.

EDWIN

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

Composes himself.

JOSEPH

You are not of sober mind. I smell it on your breath. I would ask for a drink of water, but I know that is not what you carry in that canteen.

Edwin stands.

EDWIN

Keep talking and I'll cut out thee serpent tongue.

He DRAGS Joseph to his feet by the shackles on his wrists.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEEP WOODS - DAY

Edwin comes upon a clearing, loosely surrounded by trees.

A shallow, BODY-LENGTH HOLE has been dug. The shovel still laid nearby.

A pile of CHOPPED WOOD & dried twigs. Edwin has been here before, a plan for this very spot.

He lays his rifle on the ground.

Suddenly everything becomes more real for Joseph.

He is dragged, by his shackles, over to a tree near the grave. Heavy chain is bolted into the trunk.

Edwin takes a shackle from one wrist and latches it onto the chain.

JOSEPH

Father.

Emotionally TOILING on Edwin. It's clear he's still in two minds. Joseph tries to grab him with his now free hand.

Edwin hits it away without trouble.

EDWIN

Lies.

JOSEPH

You are to execute your last child.

EDWIN

Quiet!

JOSEPH

Why bring me into the woods? Why not let me die at their hands like she did? Like you allowed her to!

Edwin takes an axe, half plunged into a larger log, and finishes the cut with an aggressive CHOP.

EDWIN

Don't you dare pretend to know, boy!

[BEAT]

The devil took Katherine from me! I played no part in her death.

JOSEPH

Yet, you'll happily play a part in mine?

EDWIN

If anyone else were to see through your guise, folk would make a final accusation.

Joseph is confused. Edwin begins to stack wood next to the grave. Foundation of a fire.

EDWIN (CONT'D)

Two children from the same parents bewitched by the devil... The blame would fall to the woman who bore them.

Joseph is HURT.

He pulls on his chain. Tries to get as close to Edwin as possible.

JOSEPH

And what if Katherine wasn't bewitched? What if *I'm* not bewitched?!

An unbelievable thought to Edwin.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

Have you entertained the notion?

Edwin, desperate for him to empathise.

His next words seem difficult to say.

EDWIN

Far too many accusers to ignore.
Far too many...

JOSEPH

(turns his back to Edwin)
Do the other counties know of what took place... with Katherine? Her illegal execution, through unfounded accusation?! These beliefs were quashed over a hundred years ago.

Edwin gives him nothing. His stone cold ignorance is piercing.

Joseph is in utter disbelief. Mounting frustration.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

(faces Edwin)

So what now of your son? Waiting for death by his father's hand.

Edwin grabs his rifle from the ground and readies it.

EDWIN

You were caught feasting on a kid goat, you bloody heathen. You're no son of mine.

JOSEPH

Did that come from the same group that accused Katherine?

EDWIN

That very night, I found you covered in blood and speaking the devils tongue.

JOSEPH

I'm a butcher's boy, most of my cloth is stained with blood. And... I was blind drunk. You're not the only one who copes with Katherine's death by drinking.

Edwin is angered by that. He lifts his rifle.

EDWIN

Turn around.

JOSEPH

You're making a mistake, father.

EDWIN

Shut your mouth, you're not my boy.

JOSEPH

And of those who accuse. Are they not out there telling every man and their dog?

EDWIN

You must die before it comes back to us, before word spreads. Now turn around!

Joseph does. He faces the trunk of the tree. Begins to TREMBLE. Still desperate to change his father's mind.

JOSEPH

What will you tell them? When I'm no longer here?

EDWIN

You died of an illness. We burned your body as to stop the spread.

JOSEPH

Father, I am your son.

EDWIN

No. The devil hath taken my son.

He FIRES 'Brown Bess'.

A huge EXPLOSION from the chamber, a plume of smoke ERUPTS from the end of the barrel.

Joseph is HIT. Crows Scatter.

His body drops, but is caught by his wrist. Suspended in the shackle.

Edwin turns away from the atrocity he has just committed.

He exclaims and BREATHS HEAVILY in a panic.

EDWIN (CONT'D)

My boy.

The smoke clears. Edwin looks to the sky.

EDWIN (CONT'D)

Tell me I hath been true.

Edwin, in the foreground, looks away from the body.

Joseph's silhouette sits at the base of the tree in the background, out of focus.

A SQUEAKING FRICTION sound is heard from the tree. Edwin is alerted as it becomes louder. He turns and squints his eyes to look for where the sound--

No. Not possible.

The BOLTS holding the chain begin to UNSCREW out of the tree by themselves.

Edwin takes a few steps toward the tree, trying to believe his eyes.

They start to unscrew more aggressively.

Joseph's body begins to move. Unnaturally so.

Immediate, shattering fear. The doubt that Edwin ever really believed it himself, smashed.

Joseph now in horrible CONTORTIONS.

Edwin begins the long sequence to RELOAD his musket.

Joseph's head turns one-eighty on his shoulders. Eyes white. Skin covered in de-oxygenated veins.

The bolt bursts out of the tree.

Joseph manages to find his feet. He STUMBLES and LIMPS his way toward Edwin.

A couple of steps and the chain he drags with him has caught in his legs. He falls to his knees. MOANS, contorts.

Edwin, still in the process of shoving the powder and musket ball down the barrel.

Joseph manages to steady and lift himself to his feet again. He closes the distance betwe--

BANG! Edwin puts him down again.

This time he RUSHES toward the body and pours the LIQUID from his canteen onto him.

He tries to light a match, but his hands are shaking hard and he BREAKS the first couple. Throws the third, successful match onto the body.

Grabs the chopped wood and kindling from nearby and covers him, starting a LARGE FIRE.

We watch Edwin through the shimmering HEAT of the flames.

He digs the SHALLOW GRAVE deeper as the body of his son burns.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - HALTON HOUSE - AT THAT MOMENT

Harriet sits at the HEAD of the table. The sounds of digging permeate the scene.

We move over the table, CLOSE in on her.

SHE LOOKS DIRECTLY AT THE AUDIENCE.

CUT TO:

TITLE: I'LL BURN HIM AND BURY HIM IN THE WOODS