

THE SEVEN DEATHS OF LIGHTHOUSE

by Kyle Patrick Johnson

Represented by:
Canton Literary Management (CLM)
Contact: Eric Canton
(866) 429-3118
ECanton@Prodigy.net
www.CantonLiteraryManagement.com

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FADE IN:

EXT. WEST NEBRASKA TERRITORY - PAINTER'S JUNCTION - EVENING

Foreground: the little white cross on top of the little white church.

Background: acres and acres of wheat fields, swaying in the hostile wind.

Deep background: Mount Lighthouse, the only modulation of the surrounding terrain, a giant fist on vast forever flatness.

The sky is deep gray, angry, stormy. With every crack of lightning, the wheat fields turn into waves on a troubled sea. Cries of sailors and cowboys mix in the distance.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - SUMMIT - DAY

A lone wide peak, Mount Lighthouse is covered with rocks, thick underbrush, hardy evergreens. The north side of the mountain is almost vertical, a cliff. The summit is slightly rounded, mostly flat, treeless.

A small, handbuilt, porchless cabin just below the summit. Crude. Lacks windows. The only sign of life at the cabin is a tiny wisp of smoke coming from a rudimentary chimney.

One small spring bubbles out of the ground behind the cabin, feeds a small stream that meanders down the mountain.

JOHN ELDRIDGE (30s), sad, stooped, weathered, stands on a tall rock at the summit, looks over the terrain with a spyglass. He wears working clothes: thick shirt, khaki overalls, tired hat.

Eldridge scans, looks three miles to the southwest at the one-street, six-building hamlet called Painter's Junction.

His eyes narrow, his jaws clench. Doesn't like what he sees.

He straightens.

He turns, runs to his cabin. Yanks open the door, goes in...

THROUGH DOOR

A modest, one-room square. The only light streams through the door and small chinks in the walls.

Eldridge strips off his working clothes, revealing long undergarments underneath. Throws on a black suit in an instant, black boots. Covers his face in a white mask. Dons a black wide-brimmed hat.

He strides quickly towards the door.

Beside the door are two pegs driven into the wall, about head height. A set of saddlebags hang from each peg. As he exits, Eldridge smoothly whisks the saddlebags off the peg further from the door.

EXT. CABIN

Eldridge steps out of the cabin directly onto the rocky ground. He whistles.

Two horses approach. Pilot is a short, roan mare; Admiral a towering, handsome white stallion.

Eldridge speaks with a clean, clear, clipped East Coast accent.

ELDRIDGE

Your turn, Admiral. Stand watch,
Pilot.

Eldridge swings the saddlebags over the large white horse. He goes back into the cabin, emerges with a fantastically ornate European saddle. Quickly fits it on the horse.

Admiral does not wear reins.

Eldridge returns to the cabin once more and emerges with a gunbelt and revolvers around his waist, bandolier across his torso, rifle in his right hand, shotgun in his left. He slings the rifle into the saddlebags, securing it.

Eldridge grasps the pommel, swings himself up into place. Places the shotgun in front of the pommel and pulls it towards the saddle, steadying himself.

He leans low over the horse's neck. Whispers strongly.

ELDRIDGE

We have work. Go, Admiral!

Admiral takes off at a dead run, racing down a slender, winding trail on the mountain's face.

EXT. MOUNTAIN FACE - SOUTH SIDE

Eldridge and Admiral plummet down the mountain, weaving and spinning on the trail like a graceful ice skater.

INT. PAINTER'S JUNCTION - DOOLEY'S DRY GOODS STORE - DAY

The store serves as a dry goods marketplace, post office, and temporary bank. It is simply a large square, with cans and sacks heaped on shelves on every wall.

A small safe squats in a back corner, behind a glass counter display of brand-new 3 cent Pony Express postage stamps.

The windows are blackened with creaky old shutters. No lanterns are lit.

RICH DOOLEY (50s), the optimistically weatherbeaten Irish proprietor, hunches behind the counter, bowed in fear.

TIN TOP (30s) and ROSCOE (20s), two luckless ranchers, gently kick Dooley's ribs, encouraging him.

TIN TOP
Come on, come on.

DOOLEY
It won't work. Leave me-- ugh.

Roscoe leans down, taps a six-shooter on Dooley's head.

ROSCOE
Friend, you'll open it, or we'll open it. Better if you do.

Dooley spreads his hands, frustrated, pleading.

DOOLEY
I don't know the lock, I tell you. The Pony boys do. I don't. We don't keep no money in there.

TIN TOP
I don't want no money. I got nothing against you, Dooley. Just open it.

Roscoe steps back and takes aim at Dooley, who cowers.

TIN TOP
No! Shoot, you'll bring every farmer with a gun on top of us.

ROSCOE
OK. Gimme the TNT, Tin Top.

TIN TOP
You got the TNT.

ROSCOE

Naw.

TIN TOP

I gave it you.

ROSCOE

It's in yourn saddlebag.

TIN TOP

No, tisn't.

ROSCOE

Oh, yeah.

Tin Top clucks his tongue, gives Dooley an apologetic look, indicates Roscoe is unworthy of such a noble partner.

Tin Top holsters his weapon, walks out the front door.

Roscoe keeps his six-shooter trained on Dooley, idly whistles "She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain."

Tin Top returns with a satchel of TNT.

TIN TOP

Roscoe, it was in yours,
shuttlehead.

ROSCOE

They look alike.

Tin Top tosses the TNT to Roscoe who catches it gingerly, dropping his revolver.

TIN TOP

Blow it.

ELDRIDGE (O.S.)

(commandingly)

Well, blow me down.

Roscoe drops the dynamite, terrified.

ELDRIDGE (O.S.)

Leave it on the deck.

Eldridge opens the front door in his persona as Lighthouse, an impressive figure. His white mask seems to glow in the shadowed room.

Tin Top pulls out his revolver and points it shakily at Eldridge, who pierces him with steely soulful eyes.

With his head, Eldridge motions for Dooley to scoot out the front door. Dooley does, using Eldridge as a shield.

ELDRIDGE

I think it's time you abandoned
ship, boys. You're outgunned.

Both Tin Top and Roscoe drop their eyes to Eldridge's bandolier and weaponry.

TIN TOP

Yeah, but I'm holding mine.

Eldridge sighs.

ELDRIDGE

So are they.

Eldridge jerks his thumb over his shoulder.

Tin Top's view of the street is obscured by the masked intruder, so Eldridge politely steps out of the way.

Across the street, all seven men in town are lined up with guns of every size and variety pointed at the little dry goods store.

Tin Top gulps.

TIN TOP

Oh, God.

ELDRIDGE

Don't ask him for help. He's a
great one for taking away.

TIN TOP

(to Roscoe)

How'd they know we was in here? We
closed the windows.

ELDRIDGE

Yup. That's how.

ROSCOE

Huh?

ELDRIDGE

Dooley loves the sun. He'd never
batten his hatches in the daylight.

Tin Top steps forward, teeth gritted.

TIN TOP

All right then, Mister No-Face,
you're mine. Tell 'em to put down
their guns and let us ride out of
here.

Eldridge laughs. Puzzled, Tin Top stops advancing.

ELDRIDGE

I'm proud of you. That's probably
the first brave thing you've ever
done. You keep walking forward,
it'll be the last.

Roscoe, dripping with sweat and anxiety, makes as if to lunge
for his gun on the floor.

Eldridge checks him with an unbelievably fast double draw.
Eldridge points one gun at Roscoe, one at Tin Top.

Roscoe gapes at Eldridge with genuine admiration.

ROSCOE

Wow.

ELDRIDGE

No reason to be frightened. I'll
deal with you fair. I'll shoot you
if I have to.

TIN TOP

(to Roscoe)

If I shoot him, he'll mightn't hit
us. See, if he falls back and
jerks around, he'll hit the
ceiling, maybe, or a shelf. I
think I'll be all right.

Roscoe keeps his eyes locked on Eldridge.

ROSCOE

(to Tin Top)

I ain't worried about you right
now.

To their astonishment, Eldridge puts both his guns back into
his holsters and turns his back on the outlaws. He stands
full in the doorway, faces the street.

ELDRIDGE

(to the posse)

All right, men, these boys don't
want to die. They're coming out.

Taking advantage, Tin Top scoops up the dynamite, shoves it into the handle of the safe. He lights a match by scraping it along the roughened surface of the TNT itself.

In a flash, Eldridge turns, draws one gun, shoots the match cleanly out of Tin Top's hands.

EXT. STREET - THE POSSE

Rises with a roar and, as an enraged bull pounds towards the matador, rush at the store with heads lowered, guns raised.

INT. STORE

Eldridge dashes inside the store, closes the door, sealing the darkness.

Tin Top and Roscoe are rendered blind. Eldridge, having seen their positions, jumps forward in the dark and hits them both squarely over the head with his drawn gun.

The mob bangs on the door in a fury.

Eldridge holsters his gun, picks up Tin Top's senseless body in a fireman's carry on his right shoulder, hoists Roscoe onto his left. He stumbles quickly towards the back door.

EXT. STREET

The seven man mob crashes into the surprisingly sturdy wooden door of the general store. Dooley stands in the street behind them, confused, concerned.

HENRY WILE (20s) and BILLY CUNNINGHAM (20s), overeager cowboys, get a bright idea and leap to the shuttered windows. They raise their rifle butts, as if to shatter the shutters and glass. Dooley, at the last moment, intervenes.

DOOLEY

No, no! Those windows cost me five dollars apiece! I can make a new door.

The mob continues to batter at the door like waves crashing into a solid bulwark. The door splinters and bows.

A voice behind Dooley stills them at an instant.

ELDRIDGE

If the brig is ready, these men are willing.

The mob turns and beholds Eldridge in the street, with Tin Top and Roscoe sprawled unconscious at his feet.

Eldridge holds up his hands, palms outward, beseeching the mob's patience.

ELDRIDGE

Use mercy.

The crowd, marveling at Eldridge's near-miraculous appearance, slowly moves forward. At the same pace, Eldridge moves backwards, leaving the Tin Top and Roscoe in the street by themselves.

In the mob, CHESTER HOLBROOK (40s), barber and default mayor of Painter's Junction due to his Eastern education, speaks.

CHESTER

Lighthouse, I thank you once again for your service to Painter's Junction. As you well know, my town council and I are still conducting an active inquiry for a law officer in --

ELDRIDGE

I'm my own captain, sir.

Chester shakes his head ruefully.

ELDRIDGE

Remember, fit the crime.

The men of the town, now practically surrounding Tin Top and Roscoe, merely turn inwards to face them.

Chester starts in surprise, recognizing the captured men.

CHESTER

Tin Top? Roscoe? What are you boys doing so far from your ranch?

Roscoe merely goggles up at Chester, unable to think.

TIN TOP

We rode in. On horses.

Dooley leans down to the would-be outlaws.

DOOLEY

Why were you pickin' on my store and me? I never done anything to your herds.

TIN TOP

Aw, I don't have nothing against you, Dooley. I told you that. I wanted my letter back.

Eldridge steps backwards silently, away from the crowd.

CHESTER

What letter would that be?

TIN TOP

The letter to the new President.

CHESTER

Lincoln? Why?

TIN TOP

My sheep ranch is doing poorly, so I thought the new army pay could help out. But Roscoe here said he can't run the flock himself, and the ranch'd be ruined in months. I thought I'd get that letter back before the President takes me up on it.

Unnoticed, Eldridge continues edging away.

ROSCOE

We was gonna rob the Pony boy, but we didn't know his route.

TIN TOP

Shut up, Roscoe.

CHESTER

I'm darned ashamed of you boys. But I'm proud, right proud, of your intent at civic duty, Tin Top.

HENRY

Should we put 'em in the jail over at Sandy Rock?

BILLY

Should we string 'em up?

The cowboys are roundly ignored.

DOOLEY

Boy, if you'da just told me, we coulda gotten that letter back for you anytime.

DOOLEY (CONT'D)

The Pony boys don't know that durned lock. They don't even have time to eat in town.

TIN TOP

You mean you know that lock?

DOOLEY

Course I do.

ROSCOE

Diggity-dang.

Tin Top bursts out laughing, relieved at the peaceful ending.

Eldridge slips away unseen, glides smoothly behind Dooley's store, finds Admiral patiently waiting for him.

The only person to witness his getaway is a young woman recently arrived from the East Coast, REBECCA STIFFLY (20s). She stands on the porch of the hotel, next door to Dooley's store. Curious, she follows Eldridge from a distance.

The townsmen remain gathered in the street, laughing.

TIN TOP

I'll spring you a new door, Dooley.

DOOLEY

Naw, I'll make a new one. You bring in some wood from your land tomorrow. Good oak.

ROSCOE

If it weren't for Lighthouse, we'd a been killed in there, Tin Top.

TIN TOP

Oh, yeah. Lighthouse. Lighthouse?

Tin Top calls to an

EMPTY SPOT IN THE STREET

where Lighthouse had stood.

BACK TO SCENE

No one around can give any clue. Helpless shrugs.

BILLY

Who is Lighthouse, Mayor?

CHESTER

I haven't a whisper of a notion as to his background, breeding, occupation, habitation. No.

GROSSMAN (60s), the quiet-mannered proprietor of the livery stable, takes his courage in his hands, clears his throat, speaks up.

GROSSMAN

I don't know he'd want us to know. Leave him be the way he wants.

HENRY

Think he lives up on Mount Lighthouse?

Henry points to the only peak in sight.

DOOLEY

No. The only one up there is crazy John Eldridge.

CHESTER

Be grateful for Lighthouse, but do not question him or seek him out. Leave him to his own designs.

EXT. PLAINS - TRAIL TO MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

Eldridge, still in his Lighthouse garb, trots Admiral swiftly towards the mountain and safety. Still rides in a signature style, without reins, grasping his shotgun across the pommel.

FOOT OF MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE

Eldridge remembers to glance behind, checking for revenge-takers or thrill-seekers.

To his dismay, he sees a horsed figure about a thousand yards behind, galloping furiously after him.

Eldridge grits his teeth, annoyed. Urges Admiral off the trail, behind a thickly rocked foothill. Turns Admiral to face the trail, sits quietly, shotgun at the ready.

The sound of purposeful hooves grows louder and louder.

Eldridge still sits, peacefully, patiently.

The empty trail before him echoes with the sounds of the careless stalker.

And... he waits... and... suddenly:

Rebecca, holding on to a ridiculously large Clydesdale workhorse, careens around the rock. She nearly collides with Admiral and Eldridge, who placidly stand their ground.

She yanks on the reins furiously, tugs her beast to a stop.

Eldridge looks at her calmly.

Gasping for air, she tries to return the stare with fortitude and confidence. She fails, stammers.

ELDRIDGE

Well?

REBECCA

I don't have a gun... I wanted to... I'm from back East. I arrived in the hotel this morning... I read a book. "The Oregon Trail", Francis Parkman. He made the West sound so wonderful, fragile. I wanted to come and see it before it disappears.

He continues to stare, a tinge of annoyance touches his eyes.

REBECCA

You're the first genuine hero I've ever seen. I want to know you.

ELDRIDGE

So that's why you stole that horse?

REBECCA

Borrowed.

ELDRIDGE

Don't play with words, miss. Sometimes words are your only ally.

REBECCA

What's your name?

ELDRIDGE

I don't care what your name is.

REBECCA

I'm a lady. I asked nicely.

ELDRIDGE

Ladies don't steal. Turn yourself around and give that horse back.

REBECCA
 You're the rudest hero I've ever
 heard of.

ELDRIDGE
 I'm no hero.

REBECCA
 You are rude, though. I knew a
 fellow back in Kenne who was rude
 as you, but he was a taxman.

Rebecca turns to ride off. Eldridge sits still in the
 saddle, shotgun still trained on her back.

ELDRIDGE
 (quietly)
 Stand fast.

Rebecca stops the Clydesdale. She looks back quizzically.

ELDRIDGE
 Kenne?

REBECCA
 Kennebunkport.

ELDRIDGE
 Maine?

REBECCA
 Yes.

Eldridge stares through her, reading her curiosity.

ELDRIDGE
 (beat)
 I'm called Lighthouse. This is
 Mount Lighthouse. This is Admiral.
 Farewell, now.

Eldridge pushes the shotgun in her direction, encouraging her
 to leave. She hesitates.

REBECCA
 Rebecca Stiffly. You live on that
 mountain?

Eldridge laughs, somewhat derisively.

ELDRIDGE
 Oh, no. Only crazy John Eldridge
 lives up there, steer clear of him.

ELDRIDGE (CONT'D)

He might shoot you, thinking you
were a bear. His aim's good, but
his brain's out to sea.

As he talks, Eldridge backs Admiral up the trail, keeping the
shotgun ever steady on Rebeccah. He backs around another
large boulder and disappears from her sight.

Rebeccah remains on her horse a minute. She stares after
Eldridge, then looks up at the top of Mount Lighthouse. She
narrows her eyes, pondering the mystery of the man.

EXT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - SLOPE (TEN MINUTES LATER)

Eldridge wearily urges Admiral up the steep side of the
mountain, pauses for his horse's sake. He looks down the
mountain onto the plain below, stretching to the horizon.

ELDRIDGE'S POV

Rebeccah rides the Clydesdale back to Painter's Junction.

BACK TO SCENE

Eldridge sighs a lonely sigh.

He dismounts. Removes the white mask, puts it in his
saddlebag. Takes out an ancient, colorless handkerchief,
wipes his face, ties the kerchief around his neck.

He steps in front of Admiral, coaxes him up the hillside.

EXT. PAINTER'S JUNCTION - ST. DUSTIN'S CEMETERY - DAY

PADRAIG SULLIVAN (30s), a robust yet gloomy undertaker, sits
forlornly at the front gate of his cemetery, about three
hundred yards east of town. A straight-off-the-boat brogue.

Rich Dooley walks out from town to visit with his fellow
countryman.

DOOLEY

Ah, Padraig. Not on the farm
today?

PADRAIG

Not a bit of it, Rich Dooley.
Hopin' for some action, I was.
Business being what it is. Which
is downright terrible.

DOOLEY

The undertakerin' business?

PADRAIG

Aye. Not a good decent gunfight in two years. Not a stabbin' victim from the far plains. Not a fisticuff fight with a lucky blow to hang me hat on. Not even a lousy case of consumption or plague or gout, for God's sake. And no one goes in for old age out here. We're all too busy livin'.

DOOLEY

But you've got your farm, Sullivan. Be a man and face the elements.

PADRAIG

A word for the wise, which, heaven too late, there are plenty few of at home: you can make an undertaker of a farmer, sure enough, but dontcha try makin' a farmer of an undertaker. I work too deep for soil-scratchin'.

DOOLEY

Lighthouse, then?

PADRAIG

Lighthouse.

Padraig spits on the ground derisively.

PADRAIG

Stealin' a man's bread from out his mouth, he is. Pacifiyin' with a gun? Who ever heard?

DOOLEY

Dontcha ever wonder who he is?

Padraig pulls a pipe from a deep pocket and begins tamping tobacco into it.

PADRAIG

I know who he is. The devil, keepin' down an honest man's livin'.

Padraig shrugs plaintively, rolls his eyes expressively. He heaves a giant sigh and lights his pipe. He draws deeply.

PADRAIG

The only good thing about America,
my Gaelic brother. The very root
of the country, and I get to
breathe it in instead of farmin'.

DOOLEY

The air?

PADRAIG

The 'baccy.

Chester, riding down the street lazily, reins in his horse
beside the Irishmen. Dismounts, fans himself with his hat.

CHESTER

A fine country, men. A privilege
to be a part of it, a rare and
honest privilege.

PADRAIG

Just in time to see it tear itself
apart before me very eyes. Honest
privilege, my foot.

Chester's eternal good mood does not waver.

CHESTER

Or you could be facing ruin and
starvation on the island of
perpetual green.

DOOLEY

Mr. Mayor.

CHESTER

Yes, Rich.

DOOLEY

I've been thinking. 'Bout
Lighthouse. He's our marshal,
ain't he?

CHESTER

For all intents and purposes, yes.

DOOLEY

What if he's gonna want pay down
the line?

CHESTER

Money, you mean?

DOOLEY

Or in kind. I don't know.

PADRAIG

There it is, Mr. Mayor. Is it wise, I say to meself, to entrust your lives and your wives to a man you can't even summon? To an enigma who might be lyin' dead on the ground in the next state some dewy mornin', not even able to be buried in this fine dustyard. Not natural, is it?

DOOLEY

He saved my skin today, and I'm grateful for it. But...

CHESTER

Men, think. We cannot afford to pay a marshal. Even if we threw in with Prairie Edge and Sandy Rock, we would not have enough capital to pay a man's salary. And I doubt you want to be taxed for a lawman you may not like in the long run. No, sir, the status quo is... fine by me.

Chester pauses, appears to be lost in deep thought. But his eyes follow the attractive figure of Rebeccah as she slowly plods west back into town on the Clydesdale.

DOOLEY

(involuntarily)

Another woman?

Chester turns to the Irishmen, who have risen to their feet at the sight of a pretty woman, and raises his hat.

CHESTER

Gentlemen. Civic duty calls. I believe that horse ought to be escorted home.

Chester rapidly mounts his own horse.

PADRAIG

You escort that horse. Mighty big of you, Mr. Mayor. I'll escort the lady, if'n you don't --

CHESTER

My duty extends to the lady. Good day.

Chester, without another look back at the men, rides to intercept Rebeccah. He pulls his horse next to her and falls into unheard conversation with her.

PADRAIG

Keep a sharp eye on the wily Mayor, good Dooley. We don't want him compromisin' his virtuous nature.

DOOLEY

Mm-hm.

Dooley remains distracted by the girl's beauty.

Billy and Henry ride out of town, passing Chester and Rebeccah. In perfect tandem, their heads swivel to watch Rebeccah's form.

Henry almost falls off his horse.

EXT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - SUMMIT - AFTERNOON

Eldridge finishes brushing down Admiral. He steps back. Watches the horse eat a bucket of oats and hay, drink from a small bubbling spring behind the cabin.

He nods approvingly. Lugs Admiral's saddle and saddlebags back to the cabin.

INT. CABIN

Eldridge sets the saddle down heavily on a crude table. Slings the saddlebags over the appropriate peg next to the door. Takes a small worn Bible out of an inside pocket, puts it gently in a prominent place on the table.

He slowly changes out of his Lighthouse suit, transforms into John Eldridge. His posture droops, his eyes become sleepy and hooded, his gait more bow-legged.

He sits at the table and scrubs the saddle, making the metal gleam, scouring the leather free of dust and sand.

While he works, he glances over at a long side table against a far wall, where he has laid out pelts and furs to dry.

But there are only three small furs: two foxes and a skunk.

He looks sadly at his tiny stash.

He gives the saddle a final wipe. Leans back on his rickety stool, eyes the saddle expertly. Nods in satisfaction, stands with a groan.

He crosses to a corner opposite the door and looks down at two small bags. Bends down, opens the first bag: meat jerky. Pulls out two lean strips, puts one in his mouth. Opens the second bag: coarse cornmeal.

Both bags are almost empty.

He takes a handful of the cornmeal, stuffs it in his mouth. Chewing loudly, he leaves the cabin.

EXT. SLOPES

As the sun falls in the sky, Eldridge scrambles over rocks and fallen tree limbs, making a circuit of the small mountain.

At intervals he stoops and checks small cleverly-hidden traps. Empty.

Empty.

Empty.

Each of them empty.

The sun begins to disappear over the horizon. Eldridge wearily ascends the slopes again, using tree trunks as poles to hoist himself over the uneven ground.

He breathlessly climbs upwards.

EXT. MOTHER'S GRAVE

He approaches a conspicuous copse of four trees on relatively flat ground, whose trunks make a perfect square eight feet on each side.

In between two of these trees, a crude wooden cross is jammed into the ground. On the cross-beam, hand-carved: "Mother."

Eldridge walks to the center of the copse, drops to his knees for a brief moment of commune.

The wind picks up pitilessly. It howls like a keening widow.

Eldridge stands, wraps his coat around himself, hunches his head, continues his ascent.

EXT. SUMMIT

He emerges from the sparse treeline at the top of the summit, finds Pilot standing there, waiting for him. Eldridge stands next to Pilot, uses the horse as a wind-break.

He pats the old beast. His voice is more rustic, more world-weary than when he dressed as Lighthouse.

ELDRIDGE

Whaddya think, girl? Huh, Pilot?
There any critters up here? No
more skins, no more money, no more
food. Goddamn, girl. What'll we
do? What'll I do?

Pilot stands still against the cold wind, offering no reply.

Eldridge wearily pats the horse on the rear, urging her to a lean-to on the lee side of the cabin, where Admiral waits. Gratefully, she heads off.

Eldridge climbs to the very top of the mountain, stands against the wind. Pulls his spyglass out of a deep pocket.

The wind blows more fiercely than ever, trying to knock him off the peak. But he stands nimbly, knees bent, gripping the mountain with his feet like a sailor on a roiling sea.

He raises his spyglass, looks dead into the wind, due west.

He stands there, a forlorn watchman.

Out of his eyesight, beyond his vision or knowledge, there is another peak to the west: Sunset Ridge.

EXT. SUNSET RIDGE - SUMMIT - THE EXACT SAME MOMENT

SNAKE JACK (60s), a mysterious leader of men, stands at the top of Sunset Ridge, looking due east, dull eyes glower under the brim of his large hat. Wispy gray hair blows forward in the strong wind.

Several paces behind him, SMALLSON (20s), his vast, chiseled lieutenant, lingers patiently, arms folded.

The rest of Snake Jack's gang of thugs huddle around their horses and a piteous fire. They are STEUBEL (30s), kindly-looking German; MALLORY (20s), attention-deficit disordered gunslinger; ERNIE (20s), conversational bore, wizard with a rope; O'HEARN (20s), Irish beanpole; and CHEZET (20s), heartless French killer.

Snake Jack finishes his survey of the land, turns at last, joins Smallson.

SMALLSON
Hell of a way to retire.

SNAKE JACK
Isn't it?

SMALLSON
The marshals'll never find us away
out here.

Snake Jack motions to his men to mount their horses. He and Smallson do the same.

SNAKE JACK
The Pony boy'll be by here tomorrow
morning, if the Injun were right.
We'll ride below, camp there.

Snake Jack leads a deathly procession down the ridge.

EXT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - SLOPE - DAWN

Eldridge slowly rides down the hill on Pilot, who picks her way carefully over every stone. He wears his John Eldridge costume, slumps over a dull, plain brown leather saddle.

His three pelts peek out of his unadorned set of saddlebags.

He slowly munches on the last bit of his meat jerky, pulling it out of his

EMPTY JERKY POUCH

EXT. PLAINS - MORNING

PONY EXPRESS BOY (15) trots quickly across the plains, not wishing to injure his horse by galloping the whole way.

He looks up, enjoying the endless sky. His whole demeanor radiates a zest for life and the West.

EXT. SUNSET RIDGE - FOOT OF THE RIDGE - MORNING

Snake Jack sits on a rock in the morning sun. The gang is sprawled out around him, munching a sparse breakfast.

O'Hearn, on the highest rock, looks down at Snake Jack casually.

O'HEARN
He's out there.

Snake Jack motions for his men to rise. Like lightning they leap to their horses. They mount, still hidden from the plains.

O'Hearn remains on his rock, calling softly to Snake Jack.

O'HEARN
I'd say he's about a mile away.
Not much dust this morn. Moving at
a quick trot. Call it three or
four minutes, Snake Jack.

Snake Jack nods, perpetually melancholy.

EXT. PAINTER'S JUNCTION - DAY

Crazy John Eldridge enters the small street that is Painter's Junction. Pilot plods along slowly, putting one foot in front of the other in monotonous succession.

Approaching the town from the east, from Mount Lighthouse, the first building on the right is a little white church with no name. Next is the sheriff's office, doubling as a tiny two-celled jail. The third and last building on the right is a large livery stable.

The first on the left is Dooley's store, which serves as the all-purpose general store, dry goods store, post office, and bank. The second building is an unimpressive two-story hotel with a greasy restaurant on the first floor. The third and last building, Chester's, is the most eclectic: a combination doctor's office, barbershop, and tavern all in the same room.

Eldridge pulls up outside Dooley's, wraps the reins on a hitching post. He takes hold of his pelts, and enters.

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Pony Express Boy nears Sunset Ridge, looks up, alerts as he looks for the pass and his distant trail. Suddenly...

A seven-man gang materializes out of the rocks ahead, surrounds him in the blink of an eye. He checks his horse and holds his arms out immediately.

PONY EXPRESS BOY
Hey, whoa! I'm with the Pony
Express! I got no gun, no money.

Ernie, dead ahead of the boy, pulls out a rope lasso, carelessly flicks it over the boy's head, pinioning his arms to his side.

PONY EXPRESS BOY
What the blazes?

Mallory looks around, attention flicking from one thing to another. Steubel leans over and taps his shoulder, jerking him back to the moment at hand.

Chezet leans forward in his saddle, long-barrelled revolvers in hand. He eyes the boy with a devil's glare.

Snake Jack, without moving his head or even his mouth, finally speaks for the gang.

SNAKE JACK
What town you come from?

PONY EXPRESS BOY
Chicago.

SNAKE JACK
No, just now.

PONY EXPRESS BOY
This morning?

SNAKE JACK
Yeah.

PONY EXPRESS BOY
Painter's Junction.

SNAKE JACK
Painter's Junction. Is it nice?

PONY EXPRESS BOY
What?

SNAKE JACK
Is it nice?

PONY EXPRESS BOY
Yeah, it's nice.

SNAKE JACK
How big?

PONY EXPRESS BOY
How big is what?

SNAKE JACK
The town. Painter's Junction.

PONY EXPRESS BOY
Not big.

SNAKE JACK
How many people there, boy?

PONY EXPRESS BOY
Not many. They got a livery,
that's all. That's why we stop
there.

SMALLSON
That's it, Snake Jack. Painter's
Junction for us.

SNAKE JACK
No, I wanna know how many people
there.

Chezet leans forward, looking for the kill.

PONY EXPRESS BOY
I don't know.

SNAKE JACK
Fifty?

PONY EXPRESS BOY
Less than that. Whaddya want from
me, anyhow?

SNAKE JACK
What you had to give, boy, you've
given. Smallson, come on.

Snake Jack rides off to the east, the direction that the boy
had come from. Smallson follows him, as do Steubel, Mallory,
and O'Hearn.

Ernie tightens his grip on the lasso. Chezet backs his horse
up.

The boy shows his youth, breaks down into a frightened jelly.

PONY EXPRESS BOY
What? What's gonna happen?

ERNIE
Don't fret. He's just givin'
hissself a challenge. It'll be
quikk as it comes.

Chezet continues backing up, pulls his hat down over his eyes. Without being able to see the boy, Chezet shoots him in the chest with both guns.

The boy topples to the ground. Ernie drags his lassoed body, bumping over the dusty ground, dumps it behind the rocks.

Chezet retrieves the boy's horse, ties it to his own.

Chezet and Ernie ride after the rest of the gang.

INT. DOOLEY'S DRY GOODS STORE - DAY

Eldridge enters with his three small pelts clutched in hand. Behind the counter, Dooley reads a small one-page newspaper.

Eldridge looks around, blinking, waiting to be noticed. Time passes as he waits: ten, then fifteen seconds. He scuffs his boot against the floor and Dooley finally notices him.

DOOLEY

Ah, John. Haven't seen you in a moon and a half, now. What've you got for me?

Eldridge silently shuffles forward and lays out his pelts.

DOOLEY

Um. This it?

Eldridge looks pleadingly at Dooley.

DOOLEY

I don't know, John. They're pretty small. And gettin' fewer.

Eldridge nods sadly. Dooley leans over the counter sympathetically.

DOOLEY

These ain't gonna fetch much.

A pathetic figure, Eldridge shrugs. Dooley sighs.

Dooley lugs out a large book of fur prices, runs his finger over it. Keeps up a one-sided conversation.

DOOLEY

You've probably picked that whole hill clean of life. Ain't even heard the coyotes up on the hill since you brought in all them rabbit skins last year.

DOOLEY (CONT'D)

Ever thought about farming it up there? I mean, it's a lot o' work to clear out all that stone, and them trees, but that's how it were done back in Eire. Sweat, back-breaking labor. Only way to get anything done. Say, how'd you end up on that hill, anyhow?

Eldridge, shuffling in the sudden silence, murmurs back.

ELDRIDGE

Like all you else.

DOOLEY

Huh?

ELDRIDGE

You got your land from the federal government. Parcel, 160 acres. So did I. Land agent didn't know there was a goddamn mountain on my 160 acres. Takes up near the whole goddamn thing. My ma signed for it afore we saw it. Had it re-surveyed. Twice. That's our farm.

Dooley is entranced.

DOOLEY

Huh. Can't trust governments for nothin', can you?

Eldridge shrugs.

DOOLEY

You know why they call it Mount Lighthouse, right? All the lightning strikes during storms round here, hit the top.

ELDRIDGE

Yup. Knocks down a tree a week.

DOOLEY

Can see the light miles around.

Henry, Billy, and Roscoe enter the store, laughing uproariously and talking loudly.

ROSCOE

And then he pulled out both guns,
the draw, I tell you, the draw,
both hands, the fastest thing you,
I gotta tell ya was the, fastest
draw...

At a loss for adjectives, Roscoe simply imitates the lightning speed of Lighthouse's gun hands. He provides his own sound effects. Billy and Henry are duly impressed.

ROSCOE

It was like his hands wasn't even
part of his own body, they were
movin' so fast and everywhere.
Diggity-dang. It was right here.
I was here, and he was up at the
door.

Roscoe quickly re-enacts the scene, portraying himself as menacing and Lighthouse as surprisingly capable.

BILLY

That musta been something, huh,
Dooley.

DOOLEY

(dryly)
I was here for most of it, Billy.

ROSCOE

But not for that draw. Man, Henry,
it was like a beautiful woman.

As Roscoe continues to extol Lighthouse's skills, Dooley moves back to Eldridge and the furs and lowers his voice to give Eldridge privacy.

DOOLEY

John, I can't offer you more than
two dollars for the lot. They're
small, and not in high demand right
now. Pull me in a coon or badger
or mink, I can do better.

ELDRIDGE

I can't eat a month on that.

DOOLEY

John, I can only do what I can do.

Eldridge nods, resignedly.

As Dooley reaches into his wallet for the money, Roscoe sidles over and talks to Eldridge.

 ROSCOE
You live on that mountain, John.

 ELDRIDGE
I do.

 ROSCOE
Every time Lighthouse disappears,
he always heads for Mount
Lighthouse. Makes sense. Ever see
Lighthouse go up the mountain?

 ELDRIDGE
Ever see Lighthouse go up the
mountain?

 ROSCOE
Yeah.

 ELDRIDGE
Nope.

 ROSCOE
Aw, you musta--

 ELDRIDGE
Nope. I never seen him. My land,
anyhow. I'd shoot him.

 DOOLEY
Two dollars.

Eldridge resignedly accepts four quarters, leaves the other four coins on the counter.

 ELDRIDGE
Jerky.

Dooley nods, exchanges the coins for a small amount of meat, which Eldridge immediately secures in his jerky pouch. Eldridge shuffles off with a small nod.

Roscoe watches him disappear out the door, shakes his head.

 ROSCOE
Crazy John.

 HENRY
He probably would shoot him.

ROSCOE
He'd never beat his draw.

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

The gang rides at a rapid trot across the prairie, heading east.

Snake Jack leads the way, with Smallson at his side. The rest of the gang stretches out far behind.

SMALLSON
You've been looking forward to this for a long time.

SNAKE JACK
Life's gotta be better than this riding and escaping all the time. Smallson, I want to see you take a woman, live well.

SMALLSON
Like you did?

SNAKE JACK
No, not like I did. New Orleans ain't no place to settle. I mean, be a king of your own land, rule your own woman.

SMALLSON
No more whores?

SNAKE JACK
That's not what I said.

SMALLSON
What about the men?

SNAKE JACK
They'll be fine, no matter what they say, they got no one to listen to but me. Smallson, a man either talks or he listens. Be a talker.

SMALLSON
Except when I listen to you.

Snake Jack laughs, his shifty eyes sliding over the horizon.

SNAKE JACK
That's right. But take care he don't shoot you in the throat.

Smallson raises his enormous bulk on his horse, standing.

SMALLSON

That's it, I see Prairie Junction.

EXT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - CABIN - THAT AFTERNOON

Eldridge leads Pilot to the lean-to. He removes the saddle, rubs her down, but his heart is not in his work.

Abruptly, he rips the four remaining quarters out of his jacket, throws them on the dusty ground, stamping his feet in frustration and anger.

With a sudden moment of panic, he falls to the ground and frantically scrambles to find all four pieces. He retrieves three, cannot find the fourth. He looks under the horse, under a small woodpile, all around the area: no quarter.

His irrational frustration spills over. He slumps to the ground, weeping.

It is only now that he notices a strange horse on his mountain. Standing on the far side of Admiral, who is eating contentedly, is the giant Clydesdale.

His mind wiped clear of his monetary problems, he pulls a small revolver out of his saddlebag, hunches, at the ready.

He slips noiselessly around the side of the cabin.

He steps to the side of his own cabin door, takes a deep breath, quickly forces it open with his shoulder. He jumps into the room, leaping like a frog, pointing his revolver everywhere at once.

Eldridge lands in the middle of his cabin. He does not fire his weapon. He stands, stunned, silenced. His arms fall to his sides, because...

He sees someone with their hands up in the air, indicating surrender. That someone is dressed up as Lighthouse, complete with hat, mask, and suit.

But the suit is too baggy, the mask too large. And the hair...

ELDRIDGE

Rebecca Stiffly. Goddamn it.

REBECCA

You must be Crazy John Eldridge.
"He might shoot you.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

His aim's good, but his brain is out to sea." That's right, isn't it?

ELDRIDGE

Goddamn it.

Rebecca lowers her arms.

Eldridge is torn: should he react to her as Lighthouse would, or as Crazy John Eldridge? He remains uncomfortable, involuntarily shifting back and forth between his dual personas in his speech, posture, and demeanor.

REBECCA

This mask is comfortable. Soft. Is this silk?

ELDRIDGE

(as Lighthouse)

You're on my land. My mother bought this property and left it to me. You are a trespasser. I have the right to carry out justice.

Rebecca pouts.

REBECCA

I just wanted to find Lighthouse.

ELDRIDGE

Why?

REBECCA

He's a hero. Mysterious and courageous.

Rebecca begins to remove the Lighthouse costume.

ELDRIDGE

(as Crazy John)

Well, but, how didcha know I was him, he's me? I axed you not to come up here.

Rebecca gives him a "no-duh" look.

REBECCA

Lighthouse always rides towards the mountain. Crazy John Eldridge never, ever sees him. Lighthouse never talks badly about anyone but Crazy John.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Pretty obvious, isn't it? Why hasn't anyone else figured you out?

ELDRIDGE

They don't wanna. They like life as it is. It's nice.

A thought strikes Eldridge, and his posture straightens again.

ELDRIDGE

(as Lighthouse)

What is your purpose here? Are you on this mountain to expose me to the people I protect, or to kill me for your own ends? What do you want?

REBECCA

Hush.

Eldridge is taken aback. As she is about to take off the Lighthouse shirt, Rebecca is caught in mid-motion, listening intently. Eldridge looks away, attempting to preserve her modesty.

ELDRIDGE

(as Crazy John)

Sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't--

REBECCA

Hush!

Rebecca quickly strips off the shirt, but she is wearing a man's shirt and pants underneath. Eldridge peeks up at her, sighs, relieved that her virtue is preserved in his mind.

Rebecca quickly runs out the door. Eldridge, still in his shuffling Crazy John persona, cannot react as quickly as she can, follows well behind.

EXT. SUMMIT

Rebecca runs to the top of the mountain. She stands straight, turning slowly, trying to locate the sounds she hears.

REBECCA

Guns.

She points to Painter's Junction. Eldridge arrives at the summit, looks down her arm at the small town. His mind is still clouded.

REBECCA
Someone's shooting. What to do?

Eldridge still tries to process her presence.

REBECCA
Listen, John. John Eldridge. Or
Lighthouse. Whoever you are. What
to do?

He looks at her with sad, broken eyes: his moment of purity.

ELDRIDGE
What's right. No reason to be
frightened.

Rebecca does not understand him.

REBECCA
I'm not.

Eldridge slowly grows again into Lighthouse.

ELDRIDGE
Go into the cabin. In the
saddlebags furthest the door there
is a spyglass. Bring it here.

Rebecca quickly runs back to the cabin. Eldridge looks down
at Painter's Junction, shading his eyes.

Rebecca returns. Eldridge looks through the spyglass...

ELDRIDGE
Ah. Oh, no. I must go.

REBECCA
You need to save the town?

Eldridge runs to the cabin, Rebecca at his heels.

ELDRIDGE
I must go.

REBECCA
I'll come, too.

ELDRIDGE
NO!

Rebecca is taken aback by his vehemence. Eldridge enters
the cabin.

INT. CABIN

Rebecca enters the cabin.

ELDRIDGE
You'll stay here. Here.

Eldridge gives her the spyglass.

ELDRIDGE
Watch with this. I must go.

Eldridge stands, uncertain, wanting to change into his Lighthouse costume but unwilling to disrobe in front of a woman. Rebecca immediately understands, leaves the cabin.

Eldridge quickly changes his clothes.

EXT. PLAINS - TRAIL TO PAINTER'S JUNCTION - MOMENTS LATER

Eldridge, dressed as Lighthouse atop Admiral, pounds along the trail, making magnificent time as he approaches Painter's Junction, which appears deserted from a distance.

Snake Jack and his gang pour out of Dooley's store and the little white church, form a seven-man row across the street.

On Snake Jack's signal, they raise their weapons, loose a volley at Eldridge.

Eldridge ducks low on Admiral and keeps the horse headed straight for the group, offering the smallest target possible. They are not hit.

SNAKE JACK
WHOA! Or we'll shoot again!

Eldridge brings Admiral to a halt, the horse breathing fire.

SNAKE JACK
You must be Lighthouse.

ELDRIDGE
How do you know to hail me?

SNAKE JACK
By your laughable outfit.

The gang laughs.

SNAKE JACK
They said you'd come.

ELDRIDGE

Your outfit is laughable. None of you can fire a decent broadside.

SNAKE JACK

Oh. You want us to aim at you, next time.

ELDRIDGE

I want you to find new waters. In peace.

SNAKE JACK

No, it's my town. I want it. I have it. Some of the people in my town said you would come to save them. And I'm damned if you didn't try.

ELDRIDGE

I'll not let you anchor here.

Snake Jack rolls his eyes and turns to his men.

SNAKE JACK

Alright, we've seen the freak show. Kill him.

The gang raise their weapons. Chezet grins an evil grin.

Eldridge, seeing their intent, forces Admiral into a spectacular wheel, whipping around 180 degrees, again offering a slim profile.

Admiral races back to Mount Lighthouse as the gang looses volley after volley, their accuracy diminishing as Eldridge expands the distance.

SMALLSON

You're always in charge.

SNAKE JACK

He'll be back. He thinks this is his paradise, Smallson. I want watches, all hours, till he's dead.

Smallson nods.

INT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - CABIN - NIGHT

Rebecca sits on the only stool in the middle of the one-room cabin, with Eldridge's meager, threadbare wardrobe laid out on the table in front of her.

Eldridge stumbles into the cabin, bone-weary and aching with stress, forgetting to latch the door. Rebecca's face flashes with concern.

REBECCA

Water?

Eldridge shakes his head, panting, unable to speak.

REBECCA

Whiskey?

Eldridge makes a sour face.

REBECCA

Rum?

Eldridge stops and stares her straight in the face for several seconds. As he holds her gaze, he visibly wilts from Lighthouse into Crazy John.

ELDRIDGE

NEVER.

Rebecca is taken aback by his vehemence.

REBECCA

I want to help you.

ELDRIDGE

(plaintive)

Why? Why couldn't you leave me alone?

REBECCA

I found my adventure.

ELDRIDGE

You're selfish.

Eldridge wearily tumbles onto his worn bed, facing the wall.

REBECCA

And you're not?

ELDRIDGE

No.

REBECCA

Keeping your own little life the way you want it, hidden, secluded, keeping people out. That's a kind of selfishness, too.

ELDRIDGE
Not people. Just you.

Rebeccah remains silent for a time, sitting on her stool.
Eldridge's breathing begins to normalize.

REBECCA
I want to learn to be a hero like
you. Can you teach me? Please?

Eldridge opens his eyes and looks at the wall.

ELDRIDGE
You can't leave. That's sure
enough.

Rebeccah smiles to herself. She begins to stand and walk
over to Eldridge.

REBECCA
Do you want to change --

ELDRIDGE
NO!

Rebeccah stops suddenly and returns to her little stool. She
sits back down on it.

Eldridge stares at the wall. He remembers...

INT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - CABIN - MANY YEARS PRIOR

TEEN ELDRIDGE and his Mother sit in the cabin, riding out a
cold winter. The stove burns brightly. One candle burns.

Mother sews. Teen Eldridge inexpertly skins a groundhog.

Mother shivers uncontrollably, shaking, sweating.

MOTHER
Read for me, John.

TEEN ELDRIDGE
Not out of that.

Mother pushes a small pocket Bible towards him.

MOTHER
It was your father's.

TEEN ELDRIDGE

That's not why. I don't want to read stories about a good God when I know he ain't.

MOTHER

Isn't. And it was Rum, not God, to blame.

Teen Eldridge obstinately shakes his head, filled with adolescent angst and inexpressible anger.

Mother, shaking, sickly, wraps blankets around herself.

MOTHER

You think I don't miss him?

Teen Eldridge sets his jaw. Mother sighs.

MOTHER

Turn around.

Teen Eldridge turns, faces the wall. Behind him, Mother changes her clothes quickly in the freezing cold. She climbs into the bed, teeth clacking.

MOTHER

All right.

Teen Eldridge slips out of his working clothes, revealing long one-piece underwear underneath. He gets into the bed with Mother, huddling together for warmth.

Teen Eldridge blows the candle out.

Dark.

The wind howls. Mother's teeth chatter.

MOTHER

I remember your father as a great man with one weakness. Did you know he used to dress in his naval uniform, go out on his boat, he always called it his ship, and roam the seas at night looking for poachers in his fishing ground?

Teen Eldridge's eyes flick open, shine in the dark.

MOTHER

He was always that firm on justice. He was a man, an Eldridge.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Oh, my hope is that you could be as great a man as he. After I'm gone.

Mother rolls over, goes to sleep. Teen Eldridge whispers.

TEEN ELDRIDGE

No reason to be frightened.

INT. CABIN - THE NEXT MORNING

Eldridge stirs, slowly waking on his bed. Rebecca slumps awkwardly on the stool, having fallen asleep upright against the table, her hand on the small worn Bible.

A squirrel pushes the door open, enters the cabin. It sniffs the ground, looking for food, makes its way to Rebecca's feet. It decides that she is not edible, climbs up her leg and into her lap.

Rebecca wakes. Rebecca looks down. Rebecca screams.

She swats the squirrel towards the door. Eldridge flashes up, instantly grabs the nearest gun. The squirrel vanishes. Rebecca continues to scream.

ELDRIDGE

(as Lighthouse)

Pipe down!

REBECCA

It was an animal!

Eldridge relaxes.

ELDRIDGE

(as Crazy John)

Yeah. At least you coulda killed it. I need the fur.

REBECCA

Squirrel fur?

ELDRIDGE

Any fur'll do.

Rebecca stretches, winces in pain, holds her stiff back.

ELDRIDGE

Stools aren't meant to be slept on.

REBECCA

I know that. I didn't see a guest bed.

ELDRIDGE
You're not a guest.

REBECCA
Then what am I?

ELDRIDGE
A nuisance. Go get some water.

REBECCA
From what?

ELDRIDGE
The spring out back.

REBECCA
What with?

ELDRIDGE
The bucket out back.

REBECCA
You keep your drinking bucket
outside? Where the animals can --

ELDRIDGE
Get the water.

Rebecca leaves, groaning in pain.

Eldridge rolls back over and rests for a moment. He sits on the edge of his bed, rubbing his eyes and hair, trying to wake up.

He performs some hand and gun exercises, working on his agility and speed.

Rebecca returns with the water.

Eldridge takes the bucket from her and mixes it with two handfuls of cornmeal. He mashes them into two round cakes. He hands one to Rebecca, who makes a sour face.

REBECCA
Ugh.

ELDRIDGE
Breakfast.

REBECCA
No, thank you.

ELDRIDGE
Eat it.

Rebecca has reached her boiling point.

REBECCA

Who are you? Who do you think you
are? One moment you're a hero.
Next you're a sniveling, selfish
loner. And cook this on a fire
like a civilized man!!

Eldridge: stock-still, mouth open. Wordlessly he walks
outside, empty-handed.

Rebecca rolls her eyes at the ceiling, imagining an eviction
or perhaps a worse doom. She follows him outside.

EXT. CABIN

Eldridge squats at an ancient fire pit, scraping a knife
against a rough metal piece on his shotgun. Eventually
sparks come off and light some wisps of wood underneath.

Eldridge looks up at Rebecca, silently nearby.

ELDRIDGE

Well, get some wood.

Rebecca forages in the nearby treeline, finds several
perfectly sized branches: not too long, not too thick.
Penitent, she offers them to Eldridge.

Eldridge puts the wood on the fire and watches the green
limbs crackle and spit.

Eldridge looks at the lean-to. The Clydesdale stands next to
Pilot and Admiral.

ELDRIDGE

Why didn't you return the horse?

REBECCA

The horse that I didn't steal?

ELDRIDGE

I told you --

REBECCA

You assumed. Old Mr. Grossman at
the livery rented me the horse. It
seems no one else wanted the poor
thing because he can't run very
fast, and he's too old to work.

He looks back at the fire. He sighs. He stands and returns
to the cabin.

Rebecca watches the fire.

Eldridge returns with a shovel. The two mash cakes rest on the metal blade of the shovel. Eldridge holds the shovel over the fire like a kid toasting marshmallows.

Rebecca smiles.

ELDRIDGE
They'll taste like dirt.

REBECCA
I'm always eager to try new
flavors.

Eldridge looks at her, wondering if she is joking. She laughs. He does not.

REBECCA
Do you ever laugh?

ELDRIDGE
No reason to.

REBECCA
What if I told you that it would
make me happy if you laughed?

ELDRIDGE
So?

REBECCA
Would you laugh then?

ELDRIDGE
No.

REBECCA
(beat)
Who are you, really? Are you
Lighthouse, or are you sad Crazy
John? Or are you somewhere in
between?

ELDRIDGE
I'm both.

REBECCA
I don't like Crazy John.

ELDRIDGE
You read too much.

Eldridge removes the shovel, tests the cakes. He replaces the shovel on the fire.

REBECCA
I see you as a noble man.

ELDRIDGE
You see my pa.

REBECCA
What?

ELDRIDGE
Lighthouse is my father.

Rebecca looks confused.

ELDRIDGE
What my father would be if he were here. Justice: firm, fair, merciful. I'm not good enough to be like him all the time.

REBECCA
Yes, you are. Don't short shrift yourself. I've seen you act.

ELDRIDGE
It's not how a man acts.

REBECCA
Yes. It is.

Unconsciously proving her point, Eldridge takes the shovel off the fire and offers her a grilled mash cake. She accepts, bites into it. Some corn oil drips on her chin, she wipes it off self-consciously.

REBECCA
It could use some spice.

Eldridge puts the whole cake in his mouth, chews quickly.

ELDRIDGE
Hurry up.

REBECCA
Why?

ELDRIDGE
You wanna learn something. We got today. Tonight I need to go into Painter's Junction and see what's happening.

Rebeccah smiles at him again, a beautiful, full smile. He looks away from her, not allowing himself to smile in return.

She quickly finishes her meager breakfast.

ELDRIDGE

Let's go.

She eagerly follows him as he walks away.

EXT. MOTHER'S GRAVE

Eldridge enters the copse, followed closely by Rebeccah. She looks down at the grave, and back up at Eldridge.

Eldridge falls to his knees at the grave. Rebeccah stands behind him, places her hand on his shoulder. He accepts the intimacy, eyes closed. One silent tear runs down his cheek.

ELDRIDGE

Ma died of the fever ten, fifteen years ago. She said before she died that she'd always watch over me, faithful as God, more faithful. Any time something important shows its colors, Ma needs to be the first to know.

Eldridge stands up and faces Rebeccah. His stance is straighter and firmer, and his demeanor is that of a confident but humble man. He is no longer Lighthouse or Crazy John.

He is John Eldridge.

EXT. PAINTER'S JUNCTION - STREET - DAY

Snake Jack walks slowly down the street, looks over his domain. The gang is strung out behind, glancing around curiously. Mallory and Chezet rudely break wooden chairs for the malice of it.

SNAKE JACK

Yup, it's good enough, eh, Smallson?

SMALLSON

If it's good enough for you, it's good enough for us.

MALLORY

Who gets the woman?

Snake Jack swings around authoritatively.

SNAKE JACK

What?

MALLORY

Well, I was just thinking that there's seven of us and only one of her. Maybe one each day of the week, huh?

Snake Jack silently regards Mallory with glittering eyes. Mallory begins to flush and takes a step backwards.

MALLORY

Or what you want, Snake Jack.

SNAKE JACK

Shut up and go find us some drink.

Mallory's eyes light up like a scolded and soon-hugged puppy. He excitedly runs into the hotel. Sounds of him rooting around inside filter out into the street.

The rest of the gang strolls slowly down the street.

STEUBEL

What are you gonna do with the people, Snake Jack?

SNAKE JACK

When we need food, they'll grow us food. We'll figure it out. Jest let 'em sit for awhile, learn their place.

CHEZET

Let's just kill 'em. Less mouths, less worry.

SNAKE JACK

Chezet, slowly. We'll take care of Lighthouse first, all in good time.

Behind the gang, Mallory pops out of the hotel, dismayed.

MALLORY

There ain't nothin' in there? What kinda dirty dry town is this?

O'Hearn points up the street.

O'HEARN

Try Chester's. It's a doctor place. Must be it's gotta have something to dull the pain?

Mallory jogs ahead of the gang.

ERNIE

I oncet had a toothache, right behind my eyetooth, the one on the right, and it was like'n I'd been shot through the eye, that was the pain. The quack I'd done gone to, called hisself a denstist, does he give me whiskey, anythin'? Nothin' more'n the knife the size of a man's hand goin' rootin' around in the roof of my--

SMALLSON

Shut it, Ernie.

Mallory grandly pushes open the door to --

INT. CHESTER'S STORE

-- the most eclectic building in town. One large room, subdivided into three areas of specialty: a doctor's office with chair to the left, a barber's office with chair to the right, a tavern bar stretched across the back of the room.

Mallory's mouth drops open, licks his lips in anticipation. He runs forward and vaults over the bar.

The rest of the gang filters in the doorway. Mallory looks up in disgust and disappointment. He pulls out his gun, shoots the counter just for spite.

MALLORY

Here's the bar. No liquor back here.

SMALLSON

None?

MALLORY

Not a fever-lickin' drop.

SNAKE JACK

There must be some, you idiot. Check the back room.

Ernie is the closest to the back door. He opens it, but sees only the prairie.

ERNIE

There ain't no back room.

MALLORY

Damn. Well, this town ain't no fun at all.

EXT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - SUMMIT - DAY

Eldridge's whole arsenal is laid out on shady ground: two rifles, two shotguns, a sawed-off shotgun, several small revolvers, two long-barreled revolvers, even a derringer. Bullets, gunpowder, and cartridges lie around the weapons.

Eldridge picks up a bucket of water, splashes it on a wide tree trunk, makes a large dark spot on the bark.

ELDRIDGE

That's about the measure of a man.

Eldridge steps back only about ten feet from the tree.

ELDRIDGE

Bring over the derringer.

REBECCA

The what?

ELDRIDGE

That little one.

Rebecca stoops, picks it up, nonchalantly hands it to him.

ELDRIDGE

It's loaded.

Rebecca squeals, jumps back.

ELDRIDGE

First lesson: don't shoot yourself. Point it at the ground or the sky if you don't know. Here.

Eldridge tries to hand her the gun. She barely touches it.

ELDRIDGE

Just take it. It's metal. You're not gonna hurt it.

REBECCA

That wasn't in my mind.

ELDRIDGE

Long as you don't put your finger
on the trigger, it won't do
anything. Now shoot the tree.

REBECCA

Aren't we supposed to stand away
back over there?

Eldridge laughs.

ELDRIDGE

This derringer is accurate to ten
feet. Beyond that, you ain't gonna
hit this mountain. The longer the
barrel, the better the aim.

Rebecca raises the gun in one hand. She closes her eyes.
She tightens her hand. The gun goes off. She screams
exuberantly.

REBECCA

What'd I hit? What'd I hit?

ELDRIDGE

What were you aiming for?

REBECCA

The tree.

ELDRIDGE

You weren't aiming for any tree.

REBECCA

Yes, I was.

ELDRIDGE

You were aiming at your eyelids.
Try again.

Rebecca again shoots the gun at the tree, eyes closed.

ELDRIDGE

What do you expect to shoot if you
can't even see it? Keep your eyes
open, arm steady, don't crush the
trigger, tweak it.

REBECCA

Are you religious?

ELDRIDGE

What??

REBECCA
You go to church?

ELDRIDGE
Never.

REBECCA
I thought you would. You don't like killing, you're on the side of law.

ELDRIDGE
Who says I don't like killing?

REBECCA
You gotta know God. Right?

ELDRIDGE
My father read the Bible. He said, "Only God and the sea out here, boy." God took my father away, my ma had to leave the sea. Then he took my ma, too. What good is he to me? I'm particular fond of the sea. Now shoot that goddamn tree.

Rebecca obliges, taking all of his prior advice to heart. Eldridge is impressed, nods sagely.

ELDRIDGE
Good. That'll be a quarter.

REBECCA
What??

ELDRIDGE
For the ammunition. You learn how to shoot, you pay for it.

REBECCA
How about I cook instead?

Eldridge thinks. Thinks hard.

ELDRIDGE
That'd be welcome.

Rebecca squeezes off another shot at the tree. She nods.

REBECCA
Let's try another one.

SERIES OF SHOTS (MOS)

Rebeccah and Eldridge are about twenty feet from the tree. She fires a revolver at the tree. He gives coaching advice, gesticulating, demonstrating.

They have backed up to thirty feet from the tree. Rebeccah fires the long-barrelled revolver.

They are now forty feet from the tree. Rebeccah uses the sawed-off shotgun.

Rebeccah uses the regular shotgun from the same distance.

Rebeccah uses the rifle from fifty feet away. She stands in a normal Civil War stance: feet about shoulder width apart, body turned slightly to the right, upright posture, head bent over the rifle.

BACK TO SCENE

She squeezes off a last shot with the rifle from sixty feet away. She turns with a satisfied smile to Eldridge.

REBECCA

This is fun.

ELDRIDGE

Glad you think so. You have a lot of cooking to make up for it.

REBECCA

Do you think they can hear the shooting in town?

ELDRIDGE

Yeah.

REBECCA

What do you think they're thinking?

Eldridge shrugs.

ELDRIDGE

Crazy John Eldridge.

Rebeccah laughs. Eldridge almost smiles.

REBECCA

(mock-formal)

Lest we use up all your expensive ammunition, sir, perhaps we should call an end to these festivities.

Eldridge nods his assent.

ELDRIDGE
Put it all back in the cabin.

Eldridge bends down and scoops up an armful of weaponry and walks quickly to the cabin. Rebecca follows more slowly with small leather bags of bullets, massaging her right index finger and right shoulder.

Eldridge exits the cabin as she is about to enter. He steps aside to let her pass, arms behind his back.

As soon as she is beyond him, he brings his arms up over his head in a lightning move, ensnares her in a lariat.

She struggles to get her arms free, but somehow the rope only wraps itself tighter.

REBECCA
What! Are you mad?

Eldridge lets go of the rope, silently watches her struggle.

ELDRIDGE
Slow down. Figure it out.

REBECCA
Figure it out?

ELDRIDGE
The knot. No reason to be
frightened.

Rebecca begins to calm down. She looks down, examines the noose-type knot in the rope.

She wiggles the rope around her midsection, works her left hand onto the knot after several tries.

She manages to feed some of the slack rope on the ground into and through the knot, loosening it. It falls to the ground as she triumphantly steps out.

Eldridge smiles.

REBECCA
What did I learn?

ELDRIDGE
If you need me to tell you, then
you learned nothing.

He bends down and picks up the rope again.

ELDRIDGE

Watch.

Eldridge holds out the rope like a magician. Then, faster than her eye can follow, he folds and bends the rope around itself, inverting it into a tight Bowstring knot.

ELDRIDGE

Just tie that tight around a bad man's hands. He won't get it off. You probably won't, either.

Rebecca watches, fascinated.

REBECCA

I know a couple simple sailor's knots.

ELDRIDGE

Like the Bowline? Or Overhand? Reef-Knot? Fisherman's Knot?

Eldridge rapidly demonstrates each of these knots as he casually mentions them. His hands move with delicacy and utmost speed.

REBECCA

Did you learn those back in Maine?

Eldridge's face falls, his demeanor turns cold.

ELDRIDGE

Bring in those guns.

INT. CABIN - EVENING

Eldridge and Rebecca finish dinner: a thick rabbit, potato, and carrot stew. The rabbit pelt lies on the center of the table, drying.

ELDRIDGE

My ma planted the potatoes and carrots.

REBECCA

I've never tasted rabbit before.

ELDRIDGE

Roasted or stewed. Only ways to rabbit.

They both eat contentedly, glancing at each other.

ELDRIDGE
You cook fine.

REBECCA
My mother taught me.

Eldridge nods.

ELDRIDGE
Mas are good for a lot.

REBECCA
Your mother and father bring you
here when you were young?

ELDRIDGE
My ma.

REBECCA
My father was a judge. He died
last year. Shot. No one knows who
did it, and no one was concerned.
Even my mother said it was a hazard
of his office.

ELDRIDGE
That's why you want to know how to
shoot a gun? To find revenge?

REBECCA
No, no. But I can help, like in
Painter's Junction.

Eldridge gasps, having forgotten all about the small town.

ELDRIDGE
Painter's Junction!

Eldridge quickly grabs his spyglass and runs out of the
cabin. Rebecca follows.

EXT. SUMMIT - SUNSET

Eldridge races to the peak, opening his spyglass into full
extension as he runs. The red setting sun provides a
spectacular backdrop as he arrives at his lookout point.

He looks through the spyglass at Painter's Junction as
Rebecca pants up behind him.

Nothing. The street is deserted, no lamps are lit in any
building.

Eldridge grits his teeth. He hands the spyglass to Rebeccah. She fumbles, unsure how to use it.

He steps behind her, helps her hold it up to her eye, point, focus. His hands envelop hers. He breathes over her head, into her ear.

She becomes more aware of him behind her than of the troubled town below. She closes her eyes, steadying herself against the wind and him.

He swallows hard. He looks down, astonished to see his shirt moving in time with his overworked heart, pounding in his chest. He looks back up, nose in her hair, breathing in her scent.

She leans back against him.

He stands like a bulwark, protecting her, giving support, hands still on the spyglass. She leans her head against his shoulder. His mouth opens, breathing quickly and shallowly.

She turns to face him, lowering the spyglass and their hands.

They stand. And gaze at each other.

ELDRIDGE

(dreamily)

I gotta hit the trail before it
gets dark.

Rebeccah watches him, silently, spellbound.

He releases the spyglass into her hands, turns, walks slowly to the lean-to. He saddles Admiral.

He disappears into the cabin, emerges as Lighthouse, except that he wears a dark mask and hat to blend in with the night.

He looks long at Rebeccah. He mounts Admiral, rides swiftly down the trail.

Rebeccah watches him descend the mountain, spyglass to eye.

The sun sets.

EXT. PAINTER'S JUNCTION - ST. DUSTIN'S CEMETERY - THAT NIGHT

Eldridge dismounts Admiral, quietly hitches the horse to the inside of the cemetery fence. He pats the horse soothingly, murmurs to him.

Eldridge pulls a large dark blanket out from below the saddle, drapes it over Admiral, blending the white horse with the solid black moonless night.

Eldridge slips away from Admiral, hunched at the waist. He glides like a silent ghost, slips towards the dark town.

EXT. STREET

Eldridge moves deliberately, smoothly down the left side of the street, looking in every window, gaping for a sign of life, any sign of life, any hint of massacre, any clue.

He reaches the end of town, eerily silent. He lopes across the street, looking around himself furtively, alertly, walking as though on glass marbles, always ready.

He works his way back up the right side of the street, still finds nothing.

He approaches the little white church.

The tiny whisper of a far-off voice. He presses close to the church wall, peeks in a window, cannot see through shutters.

He moves rapidly around the church, but every window is barred and door bolted. He circles around to the front door.

He tries to look through the doorjamb, sees nothing but a small crack of light. One voice still speaks in a murmur.

Eldridge feels exposed. He redoubles his vision about himself, glancing every way, back and forth.

And then...

The front door to the little white church bursts open with a flood of light.

Eldridge, slammed in his side by the door, flies off the step, scrambles around the side of the church.

The entire gang saunters out of the church, unaware of Eldridge's presence. They stand in the center of the street, illuminated only by the light from the church. They hold water canteens.

MALLORY

This town's too small to be shooting it up. May be a greener pasture down the road?

STEUBEL

Snake Jack says it, it goes.

MALLORY

But there ain't no women nor
entertainment.

O'HEARN

I'd not be talking outa turn,
Mallory. Snake Jack has a
tendency, he has, to make his own
entertainin'.

SMALLSON

The time he gunned down two
marshals on the street.

Chezet holds his arms out like a cross, both hands grasping
canteens, pretends to shoot in opposite directions.

SNAKE JACK

Cunning and courage. We have no
home, no wife, no fear of loss.

Eldridge creeps back into the shadows, goes around the back
of the little white church.

SNAKE JACK

We've wandered the West and had all
we could have, and for what? To
wander some more.

MALLORY

Life on the road, Snake Jack. The
trail for me.

Snake Jack turns on Mallory, snarling.

SNAKE JACK

Then take it.

Mallory juts his jaw angrily, mostly bluffing.

STEUBEL

Peace, men, peace.

SNAKE JACK

We have a home now. This is it.

Eldridge glides swiftly behind the church, moving towards the
street beyond the sheriff's office. The gang's voices ripple
clearly towards him.

CHEZET

And Lighthouse? Are you not going
to kill Lighthouse?

SNAKE JACK

When he comes. I happen to like lighthouses. They warn you of a storm.

ERNIE

I saw a storm once. The summer of '46 in Indiana. The clouds came up in the sky, just like that --

Ernie is ignored and interrupted, as usual.

CHEZET

If this is his territory, he'll come soon. I would.

SNAKE JACK

Then --

Eldridge steps out into the street, ghostly, barely seen. He interrupts Snake Jack.

ELDRIDGE

You men are out of your waters.

The gang wheels to face him, taken by surprise. To a man, they look down for their guns.

Only Snake Jack and Chezet wear revolvers, and Chezet's hands are both full of water.

As Eldridge speaks, he very slowly moves toward the gang, hands at the ready.

ELDRIDGE

What's your purpose here?

SNAKE JACK

This is our town by right of force.

ELDRIDGE

These people bought their land.

SNAKE JACK

And they'll stay on it. They'll work for us, now.

ELDRIDGE

Oh, I see. Your slaves. This is not a slave territory.

SNAKE JACK

No. It's mine. And if you want to live in my territory, you'll drop your guns where you stand.

Eldridge stops his approach. He cocks his head at Snake Jack, measuring him. He nods slowly, unbuckles his gun belt, dropping it to the street.

Snake Jack pulls his own gun out, seizing his advantage.

Eldridge continues to walk forward slowly, inevitably.

ELDRIDGE

Leave in the name of justice.

SNAKE JACK

Justice is a weighty mistress. She'll crush you, fighting for her.

ELDRIDGE

I have not yet begun to fight.

Snake Jack cocks his revolver as Eldridge comes within touching distance of him. Snake Jack rests the barrel of his gun against Eldridge's chin.

SNAKE JACK

One chance. Go away and leave us in peace. Or I will kill you.

In fascination, Chezet has not put down his canteens.

CHEZET

Why haven't you killed him already?

SNAKE JACK

I like his... passion. He reminds me of myself, when I was young.

Eldridge stares deep into Snake Jack's murky soul-less eyes.

ELDRIDGE

Where are the people?

SNAKE JACK

They're mine.

ELDRIDGE

You're beyond reason, aren't you?

SNAKE JACK

They're mine.

Eldridge nods softly.

Eldridge uncoils with graceful lightning.

SLOW MOTION

While springing sideways to the left, he lowers his head in a violent nod, redirecting Snake Jack's gun downwards and to the side. Snake Jack involuntarily pulls the trigger, winging Chezet in the forearm.

In the same moment, a derringer springs out of Eldridge's coat sleeve into his right hand. Still drifting with his bodily leap, he fluidly swings his right arm up under Snake Jack's chin, loosing two bullets into the gangster's brain.

Snake Jack falls backwards, his hat flying off his head.

Eldridge soars through the air, landing against Steubel. With an innate and misplaced sense of decency, Steubel catches Eldridge, braces his fall.

Eldridge continues his right arm swing, strikes the top of Steubel's head. Steubel drops, unconscious.

The rest of the gang stands for a fractional instant, stunned. Chezet buckles, grasping his bloody arm.

Eldridge makes a second leap toward the little white church, disappears completely in the deep dead black of night.

BACK TO SCENE

Smallson roars unintelligibly, races up the steps into the church, emerges immediately with an armful of guns. He throws the guns onto the street, reserves a shotgun.

Mallory, O'Hearn, and Ernie each take up a weapon as Smallson joins them in the street. They take aim at the prairie beyond the church and begin firing wildly after Eldridge.

ELDRIDGE

crawls towards the cemetery frantically on his stomach, breathing heavily and pumped full of testosterone and fear.

MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - SUMMIT - REBECCA

Rebecca sees the gunflashes from her place of vigil, hears the thunder of the weapons and Smallson's anguished bellows.

She bites her lip, clasps her hands.

REBECCA

Oh, God. Oh, God. Oh, God.

SMALLSON

runs out of shotgun shells. He scrabbles in the dirt, looks for more.

Violently, he flings away the shotgun and grabs a nearby revolver. Without aiming or even looking up, he fires off all six bullets into the prairie.

He throws the empty revolver through Dooley's beloved store window. He grabs another weapon from the ground, fires it until it clicks futilely. He continues, desperately wasting the gang's ammunition.

ELDRIDGE

crawls into the cemetery. Admiral stands patiently, unharmed and unperturbed by the target practice. Eldridge creeps around Admiral, shielding himself with the horse.

He climbs up onto Admiral, leaving the dark blanket draped across the horse's white flanks. He kicks Admiral.

Admiral bolts for the mountain.

SMALLSON

is out of guns and ammunition. O'Hearn, Mallory, and Ernie look to him for guidance.

SMALLSON

Well, see if they're alive,
goddammit.

Mallory rushes to Snake Jack's side and looks for life. After a moment, he fearfully looks up at Smallson, shakes his head.

Ernie slaps Steubel's cheeks. Steubel soon stirs.

O'Hearn helps Chezet to his feet. For all his cruelty, Chezet's relatively minor wound causes him to blubber and moan in a most unmanly fashion.

The gang ushers their wounded into the little white church.

INT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH

The brightness of twenty lanterns cascades from the front of the church, illuminating the tied and trussed figures of the townspeople, sprawled across the floor.

Billy, Henry, Dooley, Chester, Grossman, Roscoe, Tin Top, Padraig, the PREACHER (50s), the PREACHER'S WIFE: all are tied up, some motionless. Some writhe in pain and hunger.

The gang enters the church. Smallson, the last one in, closes and bars the door behind him. Steubel, holding his head, sits in a nearby pew. Chezet, still whimpering, is laid in a pew by Ernie and O'Hearn.

Mallory checks all the windows and doors, secures them. Smallson stands by the main door, hands on hips, looks down at the body of Snake Jack.

O'HEARN

What an ending.

Smallson turns on O'Hearn fiercely.

SMALLSON

End? End?! Ain't nothin' been ended.

O'HEARN

Taking this town and retirin' quietly within it was Snake Jack's dream, Smallson. We who live are free to find our own.

SMALLSON

Snake Jack is here, but his idea ain't cold and buried. Look!

Smallson points at the prisoners.

SMALLSON

He wants us to keep on.

While Smallson and O'Hearn glare at each other, Ernie drones in the corner.

ERNIE

I knew a fella oncet who had a big dercision to make. He had a gel in the East, beautiful gel, who wanted him to come back 'n' marry her. But he had a big ol' hoss of a gel out West who he was livin' with. You know what he did? He stayed with the big ol' hoss of a gel, 'cause he feared her more. He wrote that Eastern gel back and tol' her that --

SMALLSON

(to O'Hearn)

We stay. Find a lock for that door.

O'Hearn shrugs his shoulders in a carefree manner.

Ernie leans over Chezet's wound, shakes his head, studying it. Without hesitation, he reaches his dirty fingers into the wound, searching for the bullet. Chezet roars.

EXT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - SUMMIT - FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

Rebecca stands on the peak, spyglass clasped to her breast, eyes closed, lips moving.

She hears a sound behind her, and spins around.

Eldridge runs toward her.

REBECCA

Are you all right? What happened?
I could see it all from here --

ELDRIDGE

We mustn't sleep in the cabin.
Come on.

Eldridge takes her hand, leads her away from the summit.

SLOPE

Eldridge and Rebecca scramble down a steep face of the mountain, their going made difficult by the moonless night.

They reach a ledge of rock. Eldridge pulls Rebecca along the ledge into a large prickly bush. She squeals in pain, resists. But he disappears through the thorns.

INT. CAVE

Eldridge braces himself, gives a final wrenching pull, yanks Rebecca through the thorny branches into a small cave.

The cave is just tall enough for Eldridge to stand without hitting his head, just wide and deep enough for him to lay down in. There are no support beams.

There is a small ring of stones in the middle of the cave as a fire pit, a small stash of blankets and canned food.

Eldridge leans toward the fire pit, strikes a knife against his derringer, creates a tiny spark that grows into a night-light, burning some tinder in the pit.

Rebecca looks around the cave, admiring it.

REBECCA

You built this?

ELDRIDGE

Someone was gonna come for me,
sooner or later. This is a hard
place to track, even with the fire.
We'll talk later. Have some sleep.

Eldridge takes two blankets for himself, gives two to her. They each make a pillow out of one blanket, cover themselves with the other. They lie down, separated by the fire.

Eldridge closes his eyes. Almost immediately, his breathing becomes deep and slow.

Rebecca remains awake for a time. She watches Eldridge sleep.

Eldridge sleeps. And he dreams this dream...

EXT. ATLANTIC OCEAN - FISHING BOAT - NIGHT

The moon tries vainly to pierce through storm clouds, which pour thunder and vengeance upon the sea.

The small wooden boat is tossed beyond its endurance, threatening to break apart at any moment. The slender mast bends in ludicrous directions.

The four-member crew rushes about on deck, frantically flailing to keep the boat from capsizing.

The pale-skinned CAPTAIN (30s) at the stern hollers instructions to his crew, but the words are whipped away by the relentless wind.

The faces of the crew are lined with anxiety.

The boat tips crazily. A wave crushes against the bottom of the stern, the boat begins to fold in half, crumpling up against itself like a wadded piece of paper.

The Captain rises into the air, thrown off the deck. He is catapulted directly into the small mast.

CLOSE ON CAPTAIN'S FACE - SLOW MOTION

He nears the moment of impact with the mast.

EXT. PAINTER'S JUNCTION - FLASHBACK - SERIES OF SHOTS - SUPER SLOW MOTION - CLOSE ON SNAKE JACK'S FACE

In his dream, Eldridge relives the moment of Snake Jack's death: Snake Jack's surprised eyes...

The derringer swinging and snapping into place beneath his chin...

The first shot fired as the arm holding it continues to move...

Snake Jack's eyes opening wide with shock...

The second shot...

Snake Jack's head whipping back...

The derringer moving out of view...

The faded jagged vertical scar on Snake Jack's forehead, revealed by the tumbling hat...

Jack's eternal fall, his soul already gone...

The earth opening wide to take his body in a ready-made grave in the middle of the street...

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. CAVE - DAWN

Rebecca opens her eyes as the first rays of light play into the cave. She looks across the stone ring but Eldridge is not there. A large fire has been built already.

She sits up, stretching her bare-ground-sore back. Still sitting, she scoots to the edge of the cave, looks out across the majestic prairie through the thorny bush.

She hears some rustling above her, scoots back into the cave. Eldridge appears at the entrance, laden with a large burlap sack and a pouch. He tosses them into the cave, grunting.

ELDRIDGE
Guns and food.

REBECCA
Shall I?

Eldridge nods gratefully. Rebeccah busies herself with making breakfast. She digs into the pouch, pulls out a tiny bit of cornmeal and lard.

REBECCA

What happened last night, John?

Eldridge accepts the familiarity.

ELDRIDGE

I killed a man. The leader. Snake Jack.

REBECCA

You must kill many men.

Eldridge shakes his head, watches her prepare the food.

ELDRIDGE

No. He was the first man I've killed.

REBECCA

What?

ELDRIDGE

I worked over and over, getting better and better at gunfighting so I'd never have to do it. Now I'm so fast no one will fight me. I've saved a lot of life by being fast. But I couldn't think of a way out of it last night without killing Snake Jack. My father would be disappointed in me. He always said "Justice preserves life."

REBECCA

But you're safe. You did what you had to do. Didn't he deserve it?

ELDRIDGE

Doesn't make it easier.

REBECCA

Do you think they'll go away?

ELDRIDGE

Nope.

REBECCA

That's why you brought the guns?

ELDRIDGE

Yup.

REBECCA

What about the horses?

ELDRIDGE

Goddamn, I forgot them, too.

(thinks)

No place for them to hide. If we bring 'em down here we'll be spotted for sure.

REBECCA

You think they'll figure out we're on the mountain?

Eldridge looks at her incredulously.

ELDRIDGE

Half a brain would figure that out. Painter's Junction folks never did 'cause they didn't want to know. These bastards will.

Eldridge pauses, watching Rebecca quietly.

ELDRIDGE

What about you? You got religion?

Rebecca raises an eyebrow at the topic change.

REBECCA

Yes. Why?

ELDRIDGE

I'm gonna need to talk with the preacher, down in that little white church. Killing a man, it does something inside of you, something I gotta talk to a preacher about.

Rebecca nods, wisely remaining silent. A wisp of a smile reaches her lips.

Eldridge looks at her, long, unblinking. His eye begins to well up with a tear, and he blinks it away.

ELDRIDGE

Rebecca. Thank you for finding me.

Impulsively, like an inexperienced child, Rebecca leans across the fire and kisses Eldridge on the lips.

He fumbles with the kiss, trying to hold Rebecca out of the fire. They hold this pose for a long moment, enjoying the closeness.

Rebecca leans back and focuses on breakfast. Eldridge breathes deeply.

ELDRIDGE

We're oughta get married, you know.
I think we oughta.

Rebecca thinks for a moment, processing the suddenness. She smiles across the fire at him, her eyes twinkling.

REBECCA

If you think we oughta, John. Do
you want to go back to Maine?

ELDRIDGE

If you want to.

Rebecca nods eagerly.

REBECCA

I wouldn't want to by myself, but
the sea is in your blood, I can
tell.

Rebecca hands Eldridge a hot cornmeal cake.

REBECCA

And the food is better.

Eldridge awkwardly bursts out with a laugh, the first real laugh he has laughed in his entire adult life. Rebecca laughs as well, gleefully abandoning herself to his catharsis. They laugh.

They laugh.

INT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH - MORNING

Snake Jack's body lies in an open crude coffin at a rear corner of the church, out of the way, barely noticed.

The gang is gathered at the main door. Chezet sports Eldridge's abandoned gunbelt and revolvers, though his arm is still bound tightly.

Smallson, who has smoothly adopted his new role as leader, gives instructions.

SMALLSON

We'll go in twos. Chezet, you come with me to the mountain. That's where he prob'ly is anyhow. Mallory, O'Hearn, follow the northern trail. Ernie, Steubel, go west. When you find him, don't fight him. Two on one ain't fair. You'll get smoked. Just tell him the plan and what he's gotta do, then git back here.

O'HEARN

What if Lighthouse is in town, waitin' for us? Or in the livery right now?

SMALLSON

Then we'll kill him before he can get us all. Let's go.

Each member of the gang cocks their weapon of choice. Ernie slings a lightweight rope over his shoulder.

When ready, they cautiously unlock a giant padlock, open the door, peer out.

SMALLSON

All right.

They saunter out into the street as though they own the town. Which they do.

Steubel, the last one out of the building, closes the door behind him with an apologetic look at the hostages. The sound of a key in the lock echoes through the church.

The hostages on the floor breathe a collective sigh of relief. To a person, they begin struggling with their bonds.

CHESTER

Have hope, good people. This unruly gang of low-lives is afraid of our Lighthouse. He is no doubt mounting an attack for our defense.

ROSCOE

Sure they're scared of him. They seen him draw. I told you. Phuf, phuf! Like that. Diggity-dang!

PREACHER

Put your faith in God, not in one man against six.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

Six is the sign of the devil, and only God can outfight him.

PADRAIG

I've been thinking about that, preacher, and seeing as how God has a great love for this land and his people upon it, he would surely put power and might in our fists against our marauders. It is, I mean, too much to believe that lightning from heaven will just strike them down for us without our lifting a hand.

BILLY

(almost hysterical)
We gotta get outa here.

HENRY

We gotta get outa here!

The others ignore Billy and Henry, who moan feverishly.

TIN TOP

Did anyone notice how we outnumber them? If we get free, we could jump them.

Grossman looks pointedly at the preacher's wife.

GROSSMAN

Not manly of you to put a lady in harm's way like that.

TIN TOP

She's already in harm's way.

ROSCOE

Why jump 'em? Lighthouse's coming.

Padraig unexpectedly takes a leadership role.

PADRAIG

I'd be thinking, if I were't all of ya, as I have been meself, about what we can be doing in the now.

EXT. LIVERY - OVERHEAD SHOT

Dramatically, the gang bursts forth from the livery on their horses, going two by two, spreading from the town like an evil, unstoppable plague.

As Smallson and Chezet ride hard towards Mount Lighthouse, Padraig continues to speak to his fellow townspeople.

PADRAIG (V.O.)

What Lighthouse will do or will not do, we cannot control. What our new masters choose to do, we cannot control. What we can, let us do, and let's not make any more business amongst ourselves for meself at St. Dustin's. Billy, now, I don't know why you fancy to wear the spurs that you do, but as the gang did not see fit to take them off of you, let's we put them to use to cut these bonds. Come over here, me boy. That's it.

Sounds are heard of the other townspeople exclaiming their approval, and the scraping of bodies on the hardwood floor.

PADRAIG (V.O.)

There. Guide your feet... I got it... Chester, your hands...

The sounds of sawing.

The townspeople cheer quietly.

Smallson and Chezet pound towards Mount Lighthouse.

EXT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - SUMMIT

Eldridge and Rebeccah look for a place to hide the horses. Eldridge is in his working clothes.

Rebeccah looks down towards the flatlands. Her eyes widen, and she nudges Eldridge. Eldridge turns and shades his eyes.

He sees two horses and riders moving swiftly across the prairie, directly for the mountain.

Snatching up a shotgun that he had leaned against a nearby tree, Eldridge swings on top of Admiral bareback.

ELDRIDGE

To the cave, Rebeccah.

Rebeccah obeys without hesitation, racing off through the trees. Eldridge rides hard down the trail to intercept the riders.

SLOPE - ELDRIDGE

is almost at the bottom of the trail when he looks up and sees the riders come to a halt just beyond rifle range. Curious, he slows Admiral roughly.

He gazes at the intruders.

INTERCUT WITH PRAIRIE - SMALLSON AND CHEZET

gaze back at the undisguised Eldridge on his magnificent white horse.

Smallson shifts his bulk, shouts across the void.

SMALLSON

You Lighthouse?

Eldridge remains still, head cocked, listening.

SMALLSON

This town is ours, the way Snake Jack wanted it. You come into town, we'll kill you. We want you dead, or we want you gone. Until you tell us you're leavin', and until we're sure you're gone, we're gonna shoot one somebody from town every day. We're gonna shoot 'em out here on the plain so's you can watch. We're gonna start as soon as we get back to town, so be on the lookout for the show.

Eldridge squints his eyes shut, angered. He bellows back.

ELDRIDGE

You and I--

SMALLSON

This ain't a Indian treaty! We ain't discussin' nothin'!

Smallson and Chezet wheel their horses, gallop back to town.

Eldridge bites his lip, hard. He turns Admiral around on the narrow trail, urges him back up the slope.

INT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH

The townspeople are sitting up, look around furtively, rub their wrists in glee.

Padraig stands, goes to the nearest east-facing window to look out. He almost jumps out of his skin, rushes over to the other prisoners.

PADRAIG
They're coming back.

Padraig throws himself down on the floor and the townspeople follow suit, quickly wrapping their bonds loosely around themselves again. Just as they all become still in their former supine positions, the main door crashes open.

Petrified, the townspeople freeze as Chezet faces them, glowering in rage. Smallson steps into the doorway next to him. Smallson seems to grow in size, looming over the townspeople, who cower in fear.

SMALLSON
The preacher.

CHEZET
The woman would gall him more.

SMALLSON
I got no use for preachers. We can always find a use for a woman.

Chezet gives a ghastly half-grin, steps toward the Preacher. He pulls the Preacher to his feet, discovers his cut bonds.

The prisoners cower into tiny balls. With shaking hands, Billy removes his spurs and tosses them at Smallson's feet.

Smallson's eyes burn with rage.

EXT. PLAINS - AFTERNOON

The sky has turned cloudy, threatens rain. The prairie wheat whips back and forth like roiling waves on a stormy sea. Lightning strikes play on distant fields like demonic music.

PULL BACK to reveal the whole gang seated on their horses, forming a semi-circle, facing Mount Lighthouse. The preacher stands in the concavity of the group, facing Smallson.

EXT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - SUMMIT

Eldridge stands with spyglass trained on the gang. Rebeccah stands next to him, hand over her mouth. Without looking away, Eldridge reassures her unconvincingly.

ELDRIDGE

They won't do it. They have
nothing to gain and a slave to
lose. No reason to be frightened.

Even as he speaks the words, his jaw muscles clench.

PLAINS

Smallson peers down at the preacher imperiously.

SMALLSON

Whaddya think's gonna happen to you
when you die, preacher?

PREACHER

I'll go to heaven.

Smallson leans forward, saddle leather creaking.

SMALLSON

You really believe?

PREACHER

Yes.

SMALLSON

How do you know?

PREACHER

Because I can forgive you. So I'm
already there.

Smallson looks down at the preacher's peaceful, cherubic
countenance. He breathes in deeply, breathes out deeply. He
shakes his head.

Chezet pulls a gun, shoots the preacher in the head.

The preacher falls backwards into the loving arms of the
prairie.

SUMMIT

Rebecca gasps, crumples to the ground synchronously.

Eldridge throws his spyglass away, in the direction of the
cabin. He screams viscerally, bellowing his anger and
impotence to the dark clouds above.

PLAINS

Emotionless, Smallson looks up at the mount.

MALLORY

Do ya think he was watching?

SMALLSON

Yup. He's a dead man.

INT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - CABIN - NIGHT

Eldridge sits on the floor, back leaned against the door. He stares at the ceiling, thinking, planning, coping.

Rebeccah sits on the ground on the other side of the cabin, gently rocking back and forth, eyes closed.

Eldridge fades into a land of half-sleep, and he dreams this memory...

EXT. ATLANTIC SHORE - DAY

The Captain and a BOY (9) are sitting on an endless beach on the most beautiful day in the summer. The sun is warm, the seagulls are active, and the deep blue water rolls in to the surf.

A tall lighthouse stands behind them, dominating the shoreline.

Oddly, it is painted black.

The Captain idly tosses rocks into the water. Boy ties knots in a length of rope.

BOY

Why is it black, father?

CAPTAIN

Our lighthouse?

BOY

Yes.

CAPTAIN

Can you see the moon, son?

Boy looks up at the blue sky.

BOY

'Course I can't.

CAPTAIN

One can see the moon better if it
is surrounded by the night, like a
just man in an evil time.

Boy's attention flickers.

BOY

Will you tell me about when you
fought the war on the Lakes?

The Captain sighs.

CAPTAIN

I don't like to, son.

BOY

Why?

CAPTAIN

Men were hurt, men died. Death
does not make a good story.

BOY

But you musta done--

CAPTAIN

I did many things. Things I shan't
ever do again. Son, life is
precious. Not a man died on the
water that I don't weep for or his
families mourn. Maybe we must have
war to keep justice, but I'll never
take a life again. You shouldn't,
either. Ever.

BOY

But what if you have to?

CAPTAIN

Promise me.

BOY

Ever.

The Captain looks intently at the Boy, who smiles a sad, wise
smile. The Captain nods. He reaches for the Boy's rope,
pulling on the ends to see if the knot will hold. It does.

CAPTAIN

Good. Good boy.

The Boy smiles, pleased with the compliment.

Both stand, walking back to the black lighthouse.

FLASH FORWARD - INT. DOOLEY'S STORE - DAY

Eldridge, dressed as Lighthouse, stands in the doorway.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. ATLANTIC SHORE - BLACK LIGHTHOUSE - NIGHT

The night is dark and stormy, the wind whips.

Eldridge's mask morphs into the beam of light which struggles to illuminate the sea.

His dark clothes morph into the tall body of the lighthouse.

EXT. FISHING BOAT - CLOSE ON CAPTAIN'S FACE - SUPER SLOW MOTION

The Captain comes even nearer to the point of impact, bracing for the blow against the mast of the dying ship.

In the background, far below, the three men in his crew are crushed to death by a small wooden lifeboat, hurled upon them by the unnatural motion of the waves.

INT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - CABIN

Eldridge's eyes snap open. He breathes in sharply through his teeth.

ELDRIDGE

It must be finished tonight, before they kill another one.

Rebecca nods.

ELDRIDGE

You go back to the cave, wait for me there.

Eldridge stands, decided. Rebecca walks up to him impulsively, kisses him deeply, almost sensuously.

REBECCA

Come back to me.

ELDRIDGE

I will. I promise.

Rebecca steps outside. Eldridge picks up a hat.

EXT. CABIN

Eldridge steps outside as the first fat raindrops fall, promising a heavy storm. He pulls his hat low over his head.

He walks away through the night.

MOTHER'S GRAVE

Eldridge enters the copse and kneels at the grave. He prays deeply and firmly, giving all of his focus and concentration over to his prayer.

After just ten seconds, he stands again. He slaps the mud off his knees, walks back up the hill.

SUMMIT

Eldridge whistles for his horses. Both Admiral and Pilot appear out of the blackness.

Eldridge lugs weapons and the ornate saddle out of the cabin, readies Admiral for the trip.

He pats Pilot on the neck.

ELDRIDGE

Not this night, Pilot.

He climbs up on Admiral. The rains begin to come faster and heavier. He heads off down the mountain.

CAVE

Rebecca slides into the cave, wet and muddy, arriving inside just before the rain picks up its intensity and pounds the mountainside into mud.

She shivers in the cold, not daring to light a fire.

SLOPE

Eldridge rides gingerly down the mountain on his slipping and cautious steed.

A lightning strike lands on the mountain, a thunderous crash.

Spooked by the light and the noise, Admiral missteps, falls awkwardly on his side, trapping Eldridge's leg beneath his flank, slides heavily down an uncleared portion of the mountainside, off the trail.

They slide.

And slide.

They tear through small bushes and tall grasses, over rocks and under heavy boughs.

They arrive at the bottom, winded. Admiral snorts wildly. Eldridge pats his neck, trying to soothe the beast.

As Admiral calms, Eldridge extracts his trapped leg from beneath the horse. He stretches it hesitantly, feeling for broken bones. He sighs in relief.

He checks Admiral, who also appears to be miraculously unhurt. He hugs the horse's neck.

ELDRIDGE

OK. OK.

He helps the horse to its feet.

TRAIL UP THE MOUNTAIN

Smallson leads the whole gang, each on a horse, quietly up the side of the mountain. The trail is slow and muddy, but their progress is good. Each has a wide-brimmed hat on their head, a weapon ready to ambush Lighthouse.

But they pass him unseen in the dark and rain. Eldridge is unaware of their presence.

PLAINS

Eldridge rides toward the town, on the alert. He can barely see through the downpour, but all his senses are vigilant.

SUMMIT

Smallson arrives with the gang.

Mallory and O'Hearn enter and search the empty cabin, but emerge empty-handed.

Smallson looks frustrated. He indicates for the gang to spread out and search the summit. The gang vanishes into the blackness of the drenched woods.

Sounds: A low whistle. A whinny. A rope.

As the wind and the rain continue to dominate the peak of Mount Lighthouse, the gang reappears, crowding around a horse. The horse is Pilot.

Ernie leads Pilot, roped around the neck, to the summit, and the gang gathers close around him, huddled in conversation.

The gang breaks the huddle, hunches in a defensive perimeter around the horse, guns pointed in all directions. Chezet alone stands next to the horse.

Chezet lifts a revolver, checks the bullet. He places the revolver to the horse's head. He looks around the summit, looking for Lighthouse, looking for any reaction.

He shoots Pilot in the head.

The horse jerks to the side and falls to the ground with a bizarre, frenzied dying whinny. Chezet immediately crouches by its side, gun at the ready. The whole gang freezes, prepared for retaliation.

CAVE - REBECCA

hears the shot. Her eyes go white with fear.

REBECCA
(hisses)
John!

Rebecca gathers up a shotgun and shells, races from the cave, heading for the summit.

PLAINS - ELDRIDGE

hears the shot. His head jerks to the side, identifying in an instant the location of the shot.

Almost of his own accord, Admiral turns and gallops through the mud, headed back to the mountain.

SUMMIT

The gang continues to wait, hunched low, nearly invisible in the night.

SLOPE

Rebecca inches her way towards the summit as quickly and quietly as possible. She crawls through the mud and weeds, wiping the rain off her face, out of her eyes. Her shotgun becomes coated with mud.

REBECCA'S POV

She approaches the summit cautiously, ducking from tree to tree. She can just make out several motionless figures. She raises her shotgun and whispers low.

REBECCA
John?

The dark figures come to life, swinging towards her voice.

SUMMIT

Rebecca flattens herself against a tree.

MALLORY (O.S.)
Was it over there?

SMALLSON (O.S.)
In the woods, let 'er rip, boys.

Rebecca shouts in frustration.

REBECCA
You killed him, didn't you!? You
killed him, you killed him!

Rebecca darts around the perimeter of the gang, keeping trees between herself and their guns.

The gang fires repeatedly, a cannonade of gunfire, directed towards the place where Rebecca had come up the hill.

REBECCA'S POV

She crashes through the trees and bushes, circling around the gang. She moans in anguish and hatred as she moves in the dark. The gunfire is off to her left... now almost behind her.

She has worked her way directly behind the gang, shielding her movements with the sound of their own gunfire.

BACK TO SCENE

Rebecca raises her shotgun and lets loose two blasts. A solitary cry of pain comes from the gang, which immediately ceases fire.

CHEZET (O.S.)
What the hell is up here?

MALLORY (O.S.)
My back. Aah!!

SMALLSON (O.S.)
In the back?

ERNIE (O.S.)
Where is everyone? Ernie.

Rebecca scrambles to reload in the dark.

SMALLSON (O.S.)
Smallson.

CHEZET (O.S.)
Chezet.

MALLORY (O.S.)
(dying)
Mallory.

STEUBEL (O.S.)
Steubel.

SMALLSON (O.S.)
(beat)
Where's O'Hearn?

STEUBEL (O.S.)
He was next to me. I'll see... oh,
God, he's dead. In the back of the
head.

SMALLSON (O.S.)
Turn around, boys. Make her die.

The gunfire begins again, immediately. Rebeccah does not have a chance to get away or finish reloading. She flattens, scoots backwards, going down the hill.

Before she can reach safety, she looks up. The black figures of Smallson and Chezet stand over her, having charged forward in the noise.

She raises her empty shotgun in defiance.

REBECCA
You killed my love!

Smallson and Chezet shoot her simultaneously.

They stand motionless, breathing heavily.

CHEZET
She loved a horse?

SUMMIT - FIVE MINUTES LATER

The dwindling four-member gang gathers around the bodies of Mallory and O'Hearn. Steubel shakes his head woefully.

STEUBEL
O'Hearn was right next to me.

ERNIE

Mallory was Irish, too, but you couldn't tell it from the way he talked. O'Hearn had this big ol' brogue, you know, so's you could always know where he was from. Mallory lost his Irish way of speakin' when he was just a kid, when he come over --

CHEZET

Lighthouse must've headed into town.

SMALLSON

Well, he isn't here.

STEUBEL

He could hear the shots from town.

CHEZET

He could be back.

SMALLSON

Let's get him on the trail. Git.

Smallson, Chezet, and Steubel break the circle and begin running to their horses. Ernie does not move.

ERNIE

I'm out of bullets.

Smallson curses under his breath. He paws himself, searching for more ammunition.

STEUBEL

I'm out, too.

CHEZET

I've got two, but no more powder.

Smallson kicks the ground angrily.

SMALLSON

Back to town, avoid a fight. Damn!

SLOPE

Eldridge rides hard up the mountainside, pounding Admiral's tired sides with his feet. Admiral stops, neighing. Eldridge continues to kick, but Admiral does not budge.

Then Eldridge hears it. The sound of horses descending the black path above him.

Eldridge backs off the trail about four feet. He waits.

The gang rides past him at a rapid pace. He squints, and can almost make out their features in the night. Smallson, then Chezet, then Ernie, then Steubel ride past.

Eldridge rides out on the trail, cocks a rifle, and lets loose a round at the retreating gang. They are not hit.

Eldridge turns Admiral around, dismounts. He replaces the rifle in the saddlebags, takes up a revolver, ready for further action. He trudges as quickly as he can up the trail, dragging the exhausted horse behind him.

SUMMIT

Eldridge emerges onto the summit and finds the two dead bodies of Mallory and O'Hearn next to the fallen horse, Pilot. His eyes widen. He rushes off towards the cave.

CAVE

Eldridge bursts into the cave.

ELDRIDGE
It's me. It's John.

But the cave is empty. He looks around for a moment, then dashes out again.

SUMMIT

He emerges from the trees, looking about like a lost child.

ELDRIDGE
Rebecca? Rebecca?

He hunts around the summit, calling her name piteously.

He finds her.

He falls to his knees beside her and picks her up into his arms. He cries, his tears falling like the rain. He abandons himself to his sorrow, howling his pain to the moonless clouds.

His grief is exquisite, his passion unmatched, his gratitude unexpressed, his hopes dashed.

Lightning strikes the top of the mountain in reply.

EXT. MOTHER'S GRAVE - THE NEXT DAY

The dark, threatening clouds have not moved away from the mountain. The day is ugly, rainy.

Eldridge sits next to his mother's grave. He turns away from her grave towards a twin grave, unmarked. He throws himself down upon this second grave and weeps some more.

His eyes close. And he dreams this dream...

EXT. ATLANTIC SHORE - NIGHT

A storm rages, the black lighthouse creaks in the shrieking wind. Its bright light barely penetrates the gloom.

A MOTHER (30s) emerges from the lighthouse, wrapped in an oilskin parka. She shields the Boy with her jacket, but the wind and the rain still find their way to beat upon her face.

The Mother and the Boy lean against the wind, stepping their way to the sea. The Boy shudders, teeth chattering.

MOTHER

What would your father say?

BOY

No reason to be frightened.

They continue until they reach the edge of the gray water.

The Mother stops. She points out to sea.

MOTHER

Look, there he is!

The Boy looks at the ocean, and sees the fishing boat about half a mile off shore. He smiles broadly, and jumps up and down.

BOY

Father, father!

FISHING BOAT - FROM SHORE POV

The Captain does not see the Mother and Boy on the shore. Even the lighthouse's beam barely reaches the ship.

The Captain fights to save his ship from the waves.

The small wooden fishing boat is tossed beyond its endurance, threatening to break apart at any moment. The small mast in the center of the boat bends in ludicrous directions.

The boat begins to fold in half, crumpling like a wadded piece of paper. The Captain rises into the air, thrown off the deck, catapulted directly into the small mast.

SHORE

Boy and Mother scream in terror. The Mother holds out her arms, as if to catch her love in them.

FISHING BOAT - CLOSE ON CAPTAIN'S FACE - SUPER SLOW MOTION

The Captain's forehead strikes the mast.

He tumbles, heels over head over heels, down the length of the mast. Just as his senseless body is about to crash into the deck, an enormous wave reaches across the boat and swats him out into the eternal ocean.

He vanishes beneath the waves.

SHORE (MOS)

Boy screams without words. Behind him, out of focus, his mother cries dirges without melody.

SHORE - DAYS LATER (MOS)

A bodyless seaside funeral, attended only by Mother, Boy, and a PARSON. The Parson drones on as the Mother cries.

The Boy looks suspiciously at the Parson, angry at God.

The black lighthouse towers in the background.

INT. LIGHTHOUSE - DAY (MOS)

Mother has packed up all her meager belongings in unmatching suitcases. She and the Boy pick up their bags.

A plaque above the stove reads: "Kennebunk Point Lighthouse, served by Adult Male Eldridges after Jacob Elias Eldridge, d. 1733".

A stern-faced MALE ELDRIDGE stands at the door, insistently holding it open. A gloating ELDRIDGE WIFE stands behind him, watching gleefully as Mother and Boy depart.

EXT. LIGHTHOUSE - DAY (MOS)

Mother and Boy trudge away from the sea. As they crest a hill, the Boy turns to look back at the sea.

Mother barks out an order. With hurt eyes, the Boy turns away from the water.

Mother plods on. The Boy cries his own private tears.

INT/EXT. RAILROAD CAR - DAY (MOS)

The Boy presses his face up against the glass, looking out at the endlessly moving countryside. The Mother sits across from the boy, not smiling, not moving, staring at her hands.

The Boy sees sheep and cows far in the distance. He smiles, points at them. The Mother barely acknowledges him, sternly and unsmilingly looking away.

Trying to cheer her up, the Boy offers her the Bible to read. She gives it a vicious look, refuses it.

The Boy's face falls, returns to his dazed stupor, watching the world pass.

INT. GOVERNMENT OFFICE - DAY (MOS)

A large map chart on the wall displays square acreage lots with the heading: "Nebraska Territory: Lots Available under the Distributive Preemption Act of 1841".

A short line of people wait to sign deeds at a desk where an ARMY OFFICER sits impatiently.

Mother reaches the head of the line, bends, signs her name to a deed.

The Army Officer reaches up, puts an "X" through a square on the wall chart.

EXT. PLAINS - WAGON - DAY (MOS)

The Boy and the Mother ride silently across the country, sitting on top of their one-horse wagon. Their few possessions bounce wildly in the back of the wagon.

The Mother has lost her joy.

The Boy has learned to be stern.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. MOTHER'S GRAVE - DAY

A distant, sharp gunshot.

Eldridge jerks awake. He looks wildly about, runs up the hill, accompanied by the sounds of more distant gunfire.

SUMMIT

He races to the lookout point, spyglass in hand, and gazes down at the plains. He sees Smallson, Chezet, Ernie, and Steubel on their horses, firing revolvers in the air. Their horses are in a semicircle around the daily hostage: Padraig.

Eldridge, groaning in frustration, races back to Admiral and pulls a rifle from the saddlebag. He runs back to the lookout point, dextrously loading the rifle on the run.

He stands tall, ramrod straight. He aims his rifle high in the air, fires futilely towards the gang. The distance is too great to inflict damage, but the gang stops firing.

PLAINS

Smallson, arm still in the air, looks up at the mountain. He smiles coldly.

SMALLSON

He's watchin'.

All four gang members point their revolvers at Padraig.

PADRAIG

And if you be true about killin'
me, then who'll be about buryin'
you when Lighthouse gets done with
you, that's what I want to know.
You'll be leavin' a gapin' hole in
the economic structure of this
town, you will.

CHEZET

For Mallory. For O'Hearn.

SMALLSON

For Snake Jack.

All four fire simultaneously, and Padraig falls.

SUMMIT

Eldridge growls like an enraged bear. He storms around the top of his mountain, firing a revolver aimlessly at the trees.

He slumps to the ground, crying again.

His tears slow and stop. He has no more tears to give.

He lays on the ground, breathing. He looks up at the storm clouds about him.

He closes his eyes, and lets the words form from his breath, the words escaping naturally and slowly out of his body and into the world.

ELDRIDGE

Revenge breeds death. Justice breeds life. "He maketh my feet like hinds' feet: and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms." You have seen me die three deaths, O God. You've taken my father, mother, love, killing me one at a time. I've been as angry as hell, and I'm tired as death now. You better bring me to life again.

He breathes in deeply.

ELDRIDGE

No reason to be frightened.

INT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH - NIGHT

The storm continues outside, pounding the plains and the buildings relentlessly: wind, lightning, thunder, hail, rain.

Smallson, Chezet, Ernie, and Steubel eat a cold malnutritious dinner. The starving hostages, stiff on the floor, look at the gang with begging eyes.

Holding a piece of jerky, Steubel stands, crosses to the preacher's wife, whose eyes are red from crying.

SMALLSON

Don't give her none.

STEUBEL

But it's a woman.

SMALLSON

Don't give it. I told you, you eat it.

Steubel looks down at the woman, torn for a moment, but he follows instructions and chews the jerky in front of her. He shrugs apologetically.

The main doors burst open with a howl of wind, shattering and splintering the wood of the door around the padlock. The gang flinches. But the doorway is empty.

SMALLSON

Ernie, close 'em.

Ernie grunts to his feet. He walks down the main aisle of church and approaches the doors.

ERNIE

I oncet sawed doors like these on a town hall in Missoura. That hall was bigger 'n this here church, but it looked like a church inside. I always felt it funny that churches look like halls and halls like churches, 'cause they ain't the same thing at all, 'cause halls are all about laws and religion ain't got any laws if you do it right.

He spreads his arms out, grasping a door in each arm, regarding them thoughtfully, spread-eagled, defenseless.

ERNIE

Those doors was a lot like these here, but they was painted a--

Like a streak of lightning, an unmasked and undisguised Eldridge flies into the church, hurtling headlong into Ernie, who grunts and falls backwards.

Before the gang can react, Eldridge yanks Ernie to his feet, puts a gun to his head, shields himself with Ernie's body.

The hostages look with surprise at Eldridge, never having consciously expected Crazy John to be Lighthouse.

Smallson is not pleased. Nor is he surprised. He spits.

SMALLSON

If you're gonna kill him, then kill him and leave.

Ernie's eyes open wide, feeling betrayed.

ELDRIDGE

If you want him dead, kill him yourself. I'm not here for him.

Ernie is so terrified that his knees begin to knock. To ease his own tension, he begins quietly muttering to himself, talking to himself about anything that comes to his head.

SMALLSON
Then you're here to die,
Lighthouse. To die for what you
did to Snake Jack.

ELDRIDGE
Snake Jack was an evil man.

SMALLSON
Don't you talk about what you don't
know! You call it evil, but he
gave a life and a purpose to each
man here!

Chezet inches towards his guns.

ELDRIDGE
Enslaving innocent folks is an evil
purpose, and he paid a large debt
to this town with his death. And
yours is yet to be paid.

SMALLSON
About Ernie first. Kill him
already. Or at least shut him up.

ELDRIDGE
(to Chezet)
Stop. Stop moving. I can see you.
(to Smallson)
You let these people go, then we'll
talk.

SMALLSON
I let these people go, they grab
guns, they kill us. How dumb do
you think I am?

ELDRIDGE
Dumb enough to give your life to an
evil man.

Smallson jumps to his feet, brandishing a revolver that he
had been sitting on.

SMALLSON
Don't you dare say another word
about Snake Jack Eldridge!

Eldridge points his gun at Smallson's eye.

ELDRIDGE
Don't use my name. You call me
Lighthouse.

Smallson points his gun at Eldridge's eye.

SMALLSON

I didn't.

ELDRIDGE

You did.

SMALLSON

I didn't.

ELDRIDGE

You called me Eldridge.

SMALLSON

I called Snake Jack Eldridge.

ELDRIDGE

What?

SMALLSON

That was his name. Snake Jack
Eldridge. And you're a too-goody
horse shit.

But Eldridge is no longer listening to Smallson. His attention begins to wander, his memory in overdrive. He murmurs to himself.

ELDRIDGE

Jack Eldridge. Jack Eldridge?
What the...?

Chezet seizes the moment and jumps for his guns.

Eldridge pushes Ernie forward, leaps horizontally into a pew.

Smallson and Chezet fire repeatedly at Eldridge, who manages to remain unharmed by slithering back and forth along the pew, just out of their sight.

As the gang advances on him, still firing blindly, Eldridge slips underneath the pew, crawls towards the main door, shielding himself with the wooden pews. He slides and scrapes his way along the floor.

He reaches the door, crouches behind the last pew, waiting for the gang to reload together. At a relative lull in the firing, he pops through the door, out into the rain and dark.

CHEZET

Should we follow him?

SMALLSON
 Into that? No.

Smallson indicates the hostages.

SMALLSON
 We've got them. He'll come back.

EXT. STREET

Eldridge stumbles across the street towards Dooley's store. He slumps to the ground beneath Dooley's awning, directly across from the little white church.

His sightless eyes are watching a memory, this memory of a dream, a dream of the past...

INT. EAST COAST SHORE - LIGHTHOUSE - DAY

The Boy sits at a small table, reading slowly from a small pocket Bible. The Mother stands over a small stove fire, boiling a lobster. Bottles of rum stand on wooden shelves all over the interior.

The Captain bursts in the door with a carefree playact.

CAPTAIN
 Ahoy, there, me landlubbers! Gimme
 a kiss, lass!

The Mother willingly submits to being swept off her feet. She nestles against his chest.

MOTHER
 You're home early, Jack.

CAPTAIN
 The fish said I was too small, so
 they threw me back! Hey, boy,
 studying your learning, there?
 Good, good. That's the book, that.
 Only God and the sea out here, boy.
 No room for preachers or churches.
 Just you, God, and the sea. Ahhh!
 And a lighthouse to come home to.

MOTHER
 Your lobster's not done yet. Go do
 something worthwhile.

CAPTAIN

I shall, I shall. We had a tie-up
in the rigging, we're casting off
now.

He sweeps the Mother up again and plants a giant kiss on her
lips. The Boy smiles, enjoying his parents' revelry.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. LIGHTHOUSE - NIGHT

The stormy, fateful night. An unopened bottle of rum sits on
the table next to the cold and uneaten lobster.

The Mother paces the lighthouse floor, fretful and worried.

MOTHER

He should have been home. He
should have been home.

(to Boy)

See if the light is up.

The Boy races up the stairs.

EXT. LIGHTHOUSE TOP

The Boy is buffeted by the wind and rain as he peers through
the glass at the top of the lighthouse. He sees the fire
burning inside. He dashes back down the stairs.

INT. LIGHTHOUSE

The Boy comes back down.

BOY

It's lit.

The Mother barely hears him in her anxiety. She wraps
herself in an oilskin coat.

MOTHER

I'll look for him.

The Boy runs to her.

BOY

And me.

The Mother covers him in her coat and steps outside.

EXT. SHORE

At the water's edge, the Boy jumps up and down as he sights the fishing boat. He pulls a spyglass out of his pocket and opens it, watching the boat. He wipes the glass free of water after a few seconds.

FISHING BOAT

The Captain is at the wheel, trying to right the ship with one hand. In his other hand he grasps a bottle of rum, from which he takes too-frequent swigs. A crewman looks at him askance.

CAPTAIN

To keep warm.

The wheel turns suddenly under the pressure of a wave, and knocks the bottle out of the Captain's hand. He lets go of the wheel to reach for the bottle.

He grabs the bottle and stands back up, but the boat is in a perilous position between two waves which pound down on the two ends of the boat, weakening the middle.

The boat lurches. The Captain drops the bottle again. Again he loses focus.

Two more waves rise up from the sea, this time raising the ends of the boat. The boat begins to break in two, bending in upon itself.

The Captain is thrown into the air, flying towards the mast. He strikes it, falls towards the deck, deflected by a giant wave. He hurtles out to sea, out of sight.

SHORE

The Mother clasps her hands to her mouth. The Boy blanches.

OCEAN

The Captain resurfaces a long distance away from the boat. He is barely conscious, floats face up.

His face is covered in blood, and his brains are just visible through a horrid vertical gash in his forehead.

He drifts away from the boat, out to sea.

A tiny wooden lifeboat from the fishing vessel bumps into his body, slides over him.

He blinks, coughs. Reflexively throws an arm up, catches the side of the lifeboat. Uses all of his waning energy to crawl over the side.

He falls to the bottom of the lifeboat, shivering uncontrollably.

In the distance, towards the shore, the fishing boat sinks.

OCEAN - DAY

The storm has passed, but the Captain is unconscious, still drifting in the lifeboat. His head wound has clotted with the sea salt into an unsightly lump. He drifts on.

CAROLINA SHORE - SUNNY - MORNING

The Captain has washed ashore, still unconscious, lies in the boat on a beach in an unfamiliar terrain.

A SLAVE (70s) and his dog saunter down the shore. The dog's hackles rise at the sight of the boat, barks furiously. The Slave holds the dog back.

The Captain wakes at the sound of the dog. He stirs, painfully sits up, peers over the side, squints at the Slave.

SLAVE

Massah, I's sorry, this dog done think you was a snake. He only yaps like this at snakes. I's sorry, I's sorry.

The Captain snarls, raises a clenched fist.

CAPTAIN

Control your damn dog or I will.

The Slave is unafraid.

SLAVE

Massah, you's don't look so well.

The Slave touches his own forehead, points to Captain.

The Captain feels the wound, flinches with sudden deep pain.

CAPTAIN

You do this to me? You? I'll tear your head off, you son of a...

The Captain tries to jump out of the boat, his eyes murderous. But he is too weak.

The Slave apologetically bows away into the distance, hauling the dog with him.

SLAVE

He's just thought you's a snake.
That's all, just a snake.

CAPTAIN

Snake?

CAROLINA TOWN - DAY

The Captain, ragged, bloody, unshaven, stumbles wearily down the street of a Carolina village. He looks around with suspicion. Women recoil from him, men are afraid to confront him. A kindly MINISTER (60s) approaches him.

MINISTER

Man, can we help? Who are you?

CAPTAIN

(delirious)
I don't know. Snake.

MINISTER

No, man, what's your name?

CAPTAIN

I don't recall.

MINISTER

Snake? You from around here?

CAPTAIN

(vacant)
I don't recall.

The Captain abruptly strikes the Minister, knocking him to the ground--amnesia instigated, aggression spiked, and personality aberrated by his head injury.

He shouts at the townspeople.

CAPTAIN

I'm Snake. I'm Snake.

He runs off down the street.

INT. CAROLINA SALOON

The Captain sits at a table, finishing a mighty lunch. His WAITRESS (20s) comes to the table.

WAITRESS
All done, now, sir?

CAPTAIN
I don't know.

WAITRESS
More dessert?

CAPTAIN
No.

WAITRESS
Then you'll just owe three bits.

The Captain glares at her. He stands, walks out.

WAITRESS
Sir? Sir!

The Captain turns, strikes her down.

CAPTAIN
Consider yourself paid.

The Captain strides off, smiling to himself.

INT. WESTERN JAIL - A FEW WEEKS LATER

The Captain is in a cell, chatting with the SHERIFF (30s).
The Sheriff sits at a desk, cleaning his leather gun belt
with a soft rag.

SHERIFF
You really don't remember nothing?

CAPTAIN
Only my name. Took three days, but
I recollected Snake Jack Eldridge.

SHERIFF
Can I see the scar? I hear you got
a scar.

CAPTAIN
Sure. Come here.

The Sheriff approaches the cell, leaving his guns and belt on
the desk.

SHERIFF
Take off your hat.

When he is near enough, the Captain grabs him by the throat, hauling him up against the bars.

CAPTAIN

No one sees the scar. Let me out
or I'll strangle you right here.

The Sheriff scrambles for his keys and unlocks the door. The Captain lets him go and walks out, ready for his final transition into Snake Jack.

CAPTAIN

Can't have you telling anyone about
this, can we?

The Captain emotionlessly takes the Sheriff's own gun from the desk, shoots the Sheriff. With dead eyes, he surveys his work.

CAPTAIN

You're my first. I think. Thought
I'd feel something.

The Captain turns and walks out of the jail, into the blinding sunlight of the day.

Out of the bright light, Snake Jack's face appears.

The Captain's younger face appears within it, subsumed by it.

The faces blend together perfectly.

EXT. PAINTER'S JUNCTION - STREET - NIGHT

Eldridge slumps against Dooley's store, mentally processing the earth-shattering revelation, wanting to cry.

FADE OUT.

EXT. PAINTER'S JUNCTION - STREET - THE NEXT MORNING

The storm clouds are lighter, yet retain an angry hue. The rain has stopped.

Eldridge lays on his stomach in front of Dooley's store, protected by two upright barrels. He has a rifle propped on the ground in front of him between the barrels, aimed intently at the little white church. He wears a gun belt.

He waits.

His eye is stern, cold, full of plan.

Ernie comes out of the church with a bucket, heading for a water pump at the livery stable. He steps cautiously down the street, looking around but not seeing Eldridge.

Eldridge fires. And misses.

Ernie drops the bucket in the street, races back to the church, frightened but unscratched. The church doors slam behind him.

Eldridge curses softly. He looks down at his hands, wondering how he missed the easy shot. He looks at the sky, wildly thinking of a new plan.

He reloads the rifle: a complex mechanical task that allows him time to think. As he finally rams the bullet home, the front doors of the little white church swing open.

Two hostages, Roscoe and Tin Top, are framed in the doorway, standing with their arms outstretched like crosses. Their hands are tied together. Ernie ties them to the doorposts like living scarecrows, blocking the entrance.

The shutters of the windows are thrown open, and the rest of the hostages are displayed in them, tied to them, living shields for the gang members within.

Eldridge grits his teeth in anger.

ELDRIDGE

Cowards.

He thinks for a moment, re-reformulating his reformulated plan. He holds the rifle out in front like a scout, inches his way across the road towards the fallen bucket.

Tin Top and Roscoe watch him, open-eyed and frightened.

Eldridge reaches the bucket without incident, keeping his rifle trained on the little white church. He bends his knees, stoops, slips the bucket handle around his left wrist.

He backs his way down the street to the livery, watching the church the whole time.

He backs into the livery and puts down his rifle. He nods a quick greeting to Admiral, who stands placidly in a stall, eating happily. Admiral is untethered.

Eldridge quickly fills the bucket with clean water from the well. He takes a small sipper spoon from a wall hook, puts it into the bucket.

He picks up the rifle and the now-heavy bucket, suspensefully inches his way back to the church, again without incident.

He silently picks his way up the church steps, shushing the wide-eyed hostages with head motions.

Off to the side of the door, he sets down the bucket and the rifle, pulling out a revolver with his right hand.

With his left hand, he dips the scooper into the bucket and quietly holds it up to Tin Top's mouth. Tin Top gratefully gulps loudly. Eldridge silences him by taking the spoon away, glaring. Tin Top apologizes with a glance.

Eldridge gives Tin Top another drink.

Eldridge picks up the bucket and rifle in the left hand and lays down on the steps. Eldridge rolls quickly to the other side of the door, thinking invisible thoughts.

Standing up again, Eldridge gives Roscoe a drink, who is profuse in his non-verbal gratitude.

Eldridge returns the spoon to the bucket. He leans the rifle up against the side of the church, just around the corner from the steps. He picks up the bucket, walks around the side of the church.

He goes to every window, briefly giving each parched hostage a drink of water. All are grateful. All are silent. He still does not see any of the gang.

Having made a full circuit of the building, Eldridge pours the water out of the bucket, replaces the bucket in the street where Ernie had dropped it.

He runs across to Dooley's store, enters it through a broken window, and emerges with a thin lariat.

He makes his way carefully to the back of the church, and niftily climbs up to the roof, using cracks and boards to further his ascent.

ROOF

He slides over the roof, not daring to walk on it lest he make a sound. He pulls gently on all the wood shingles, testing them for weaknesses.

He finds one weak shingle. He gently, quietly pries it loose. He looks down into the church.

He finally sees the gang.

INT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH

The gang eats breakfast around the pulpit, a revolting repast of jerky and cold soggy beans. They are spread out across the front of the church: Smallson behind the pulpit, Chezet lounging on his back, Ernie sitting on the steps, Steubel at the first pew.

No light comes in through the small hole in the roof because of the overcast day. The open door and windows provide the interior with enough light to see by.

EXT. ROOF

Eldridge checks the other shingles in the area. Some more are loose, and he removes them, carefully piling them on the slanted roof.

He ties one end of the long lariat to the stovepipe, which emerges on one side of the roof. He pulls on the rope, testing its strength. He holds it with his left hand, and stands over the hole in the roof. He hefts his revolver in his right hand.

He jumps in the air...

And crashes through the roof.

INT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH

Eldridge rips through the roof, holding on to the lariat with his left hand and revolver out in his right. He begins firing as soon as he clears the roof, but his aim is off.

The startled gang dives for cover: Smallson behind the pulpit, Chezet rolls into a side closet, Steubel under his pew. Only Ernie is left in the open.

Ernie hesitates too long, makes a perfect target.

Eldridge jerks to a stop four feet off the ground above the aisle. He winces in pain as his left shoulder takes the brunt of the force, holding his body in the air.

Eldridge lifts his revolver quickly and squeezes off a shot into Ernie's face. Ernie falls.

Eldridge aims at the pulpit to shoot Smallson through it, but his revolver clicks: empty.

Eldridge lets go of the rope, drops to the ground, runs for the front door.

Steubel, the closest gang member to Eldridge, is on his feet in a flash, following Eldridge by only ten feet. He takes aim, but Eldridge pops through the doorway between Tin Top and Roscoe before he can fire.

Steubel races outside, onto the church porch, looking for Eldridge.

EXT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH

Eldridge retrieves his loaded rifle, holds it on his hip. He stands at the corner of the church, turned to face down the street across the front of the church.

Steubel comes out of the church. Eldridge fires from the hip at point blank range, ripping the bullet through Steubel's ribs from left to right, through both lungs and heart.

Steubel is knocked off the porch, lands heavily on the ground, dead.

His revolver and rifle empty, Eldridge decides on bravado. He charges back into the church with guns raised.

INT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH

Smallson and Chezet, choosing prudence over valor, quickly cut down Chester, who is tied to a back window. They hide behind him as Eldridge rushes down the aisle.

SMALLSON

Stop! Or we'll kill him right now!

Eldridge slows, halts. He puts down his rifle and holds the revolver with both hands, taking up a reckless and menacing position in the church.

The other hostages crane their heads around to see the action.

CHESTER

John Eldridge, Painter's Junction
is forever grateful for--

Smallson strikes Chester on the head with his revolver to silence him. Chester falls to the ground, appearing to be unconscious.

Bereft of their human shield, Smallson and Chezet unhesitatingly dive through the window vacated by Chester. Eldridge sighs, holsters his weapon. He walks over to Chester to wake him up.

But Chester smiles up at him.

CHESTER

I wanted to be reckless, too.

Eldridge smiles with his mouth but not with his eyes. His eyes are still full of mission.

ELDRIDGE

Let's cut 'em down.

Eldridge and Chester swiftly move around the church, untying the hostages. The newly freed hostages help to untie the rest, quickly turning the tables on the gang.

All the hostages, rubbing their sore arms and backs, gather at the center of the church for instruction.

Eldridge rubs his left shoulder, sore from his fall from the roof.

GROSSMAN

Where's your horse, John?

ELDRIDGE

Pilot's dead. Admiral, the white, in your livery. They've got their horses over there, too.

CHESTER

Do you believe they are defeated?

ELDRIDGE

Nope. They'll fight to win, and they're still in town. Listen. We've got the advantage in numbers now, we're nine, they're two. We can search the town, we know it inside out. Dooley.

DOOLEY

John.

ELDRIDGE

You got ammo in your store?

DOOLEY

If they haven't taken it.

ELDRIDGE

We'll go check. All of us. Our safety is each other. We'll stock up. Now, when we move from building to building, we move like a fisherman's net. Strong, rigid, but with holes between us.

ELDRIDGE (CONT'D)

We don't want them sitting up on
some roof just shooting at us all
'cause we're bunched together.
Okay?

All agree.

ELDRIDGE

To Dooley's store.

EXT. PAINTER'S JUNCTION - STREET

The townspeople move quickly and purposefully across the street in a staggered double line. Eldridge leads the way, favoring his left arm, followed by Dooley.

They all crowd into --

INT. DOOLEY'S STORE

ELDRIDGE

Quickly, now. We don't want to
stay put.

Dooley searches through his store, hands out several revolvers and boxes of bullets.

Eldridge dives under the counter and emerges with a large burlap bag full of weapons and ammunition from his cave. He stuffs the bullets and guns into every possible crevice on his body and clothing.

DOOLEY

Not enough for everyone.

ELDRIDGE

OK. Give 'em shovels.

Dooley hands out hoes and sledgehammers to some of the stronger men.

ELDRIDGE

Hurry. Back into the street.
Remember to be safe. If you see
them, yell it out and get out of
the way. It's mine to take 'em
down. No reason to be frightened.

The townspeople rush back out into the street, maintaining a staggered formation. The Preacher's Wife takes up the rear, in an aggressive stance, angry eyes, holding a shotgun.

Eldridge moves into the middle of the street, out in front, a sawed-off shotgun in his left hand and a long-barrelled revolver in his right.

They move slowly down the street, like a grinding phalanx. They pass the hotel and sheriff's office. They reach the livery and Chester's store. No sign of Smallson or Chezet.

They look all around, puzzled.

Smallson appears at the other end of the street, emerging from the white church like a bad Western dream.

ROSCOE

How'd he get back there?

Eldridge, turning, speaks urgently to his followers.

ELDRIDGE

Quick. To the sides. Watch for the other one.

Eldridge stands still in the road as the townspeople scatter in front of him, vanishing around him. He raises his guns, fires at will.

Smallson raises his weapon, empties it at Eldridge.

But the range is too great. Both are firing wildly to relieve their tension and their anger, knowing full well that they cannot will their bullets to their target.

Their weapons spent, they both lower their arms to their sides, glaring at each other with possessive stances.

At the side of the street, Chester points to the roof of his own store.

CHESTER

Look above!

Eldridge looks at Chester instead, reflex guiding his head to the noise instead of the danger.

Chezet lays on the roof of Chester's store, pointing his long-barrelled revolver at Eldridge. He fires.

Eldridge is hit in the left arm and spins to the ground.

His Bible falls out of an unseen inside pocket and lands in the dust beside him.

Chezet fires twice more and misses as Eldridge squirms in pain.

Chezet is forced back from the edge of the roof by the bullets and rocks that are hurled up at him by the defensive townspeople.

The townspeople swarm around and into Chester's building.

Eldridge stands up painfully. He reloads the revolver in his right hand. He drops the empty shotgun in the dusty street. He stoops and picks up the Bible in his left hand, clutching it to his hip with his wounded arm.

Eldridge faces Smallson down the street, which seems to get longer and hazier as they stand.

INT. CHESTER'S STORE

Henry, Billy, Chester, and Dooley run inside while Grossman, the Preacher's Wife, Tin Top, and Roscoe remain outside, shooting and shouting up at Chezet.

Chester takes up an aggressive stance, facing a side window, but only succeeds in looking foolish.

Billy and Henry go to another window, looking at Roscoe outside. They use hand motions to ask Roscoe if Chezet is to their right or their left. Roscoe motions back, aiding Billy and Henry to move directly beneath Chezet.

Billy and Henry sign their thanks. Then they raise their revolvers and shoot upwards, through Chester's ceiling. Chester nearly faints from shock at the reverberating crashes and booms of their guns in the room.

From the two holes in the ceiling, steady streams of alcohol come raining onto Billy and Henry like water from a hose.

Billy and Henry forget about Chezet. They stand like children in a snowstorm, eyes closed and mouths open.

Chester stamps his foot in anger. He moans to Dooley.

CHESTER

Cellars are expensive. Where else
would you store your stock?

Dooley shrugs in sympathy.

EXT. CHESTER'S STORE - ROOF

Chezet crouches, desperate for escape.

All sides of the building are surrounded by the townspeople: the preacher's wife on the street, Roscoe on the free side of the building, Tin Top behind it, and Grossman in the alley between the store and the hotel.

He decides to jump.

Impetuously, he stands and sprints towards the hotel, whose roof is several feet higher than Chester's store and about ten feet away.

As rational thought would have predicted, Chezet misses by a mile. He slams into the side of the hotel, slides violently to the ground.

ALLEY

Chezet lands on all fours.

Grossman is on his back in a flash, but even a banged-up Chezet can handle him. Chezet points his gun back between his own legs, pointed up towards the sky, contorted. He fires, gets Grossman in the thigh. Grossman falls off.

Chezet springs up, looking to escape, but both sides of the alley are blocked. The preacher's wife blocks the street. Tin Top points a gun at him from behind the store.

Chezet smiles an evil smile, undaunted and vicious. He raises both arms, pointing a long-barrelled revolver in both directions like his hero Snake Jack had once done. He prepares to fire, but...

Chezet sees Chester looking out his only alley-facing window at him with startled eyes. In lightning speed, Chezet breaks the window with his revolvers. Even though his hands are full, Chezet grabs Chester by the shoulders and pulls him through the window onto the alley floor.

Athletically, Chezet leaps through the window into --

INT. CHESTER'S STORE

Chezet's momentum carries him right into Billy and Henry, who are still drinking their fill from the heavenly flow.

Knocked off balance and pushed away from their delight, they immediately become peevish, and hit Chezet over the head several times without realizing who he is.

Chezet falls, unconscious.

Billy and Henry return to the alcoholic river.

Dooley shakes his head in disbelief, calmly crosses to stand guard over Chezet.

EXT. PAINTER'S JUNCTION - STREET

The rains begin again, coming gradually harder and harder until the end.

With a wild and determined face, Eldridge advances. Smallson edges towards the little white church as Eldridge approaches with steady step.

Without warning, Eldridge whips his right hand up into firing position with his usual lightning speed. He shoots his derringer, popping out of his sleeve.

Smallson dives inside the little white church, unhurt.

Eldridge continues his advance, reloading his long-barreled revolver on the move.

Smallson incompletely closes the doors to the church. There is still a small crack between them.

Eldridge approaches cautiously, his eyes narrowing in calculation, trying to guess Smallson's plan. He puts his foot on the church step, then thinks better of it.

He crouches slightly, walks around Steubel's body, underneath the church windows to the back of the church. Once behind the church, he gives a low whistle.

LIVERY

Admiral hears the whistle, gallops out of his stall, still chewing a mouthful of feed. He races down the street.

BEHIND THE CHURCH

Eldridge, seeing Admiral approach, whistles again softly. Admiral changes course, careens towards him. Eldridge holds out his hands, asking the horse to be quiet. Admiral bows his head, regally trots up to him.

Putting his Bible back into his pocket and his gun into its holster, Eldridge climbs up, stands on top of Admiral. With only one functional arm, he needs the boost to get onto the roof of the church.

He scrambles up on top of the roof with much pain.

INT. CHURCH - SMALLSON

crouches behind the front doors, wondering why Eldridge has not yet walked through them. He approaches the doors, peeking out through the crack, looking for his foe.

He sees nothing.

EXT. ROOF - ELDRIDGE

quietly walks over to the stovepipe, unties his lariat. He gently, quickly pulls the lariat out of the hole in the roof.

INT. CHURCH

As Smallson continues to look out the front door, the lariat hanging through the ceiling is silently drawn up and out of sight behind him.

EXT. ROOF - ELDRIDGE

ties an extremely complicated loop knot about twenty-four inches from the end of the lariat. The knot has an open space in it with the end of the rope passing through. The loop appears to be capable of sliding shut with applied force.

INT. CHURCH - SMALLSON

walks around the walls of the church, suspiciously and suspensefully looking out every window for a glimpse of Eldridge. He does see Admiral, sans rider and sans saddle. He grits his teeth and tightens his grip on his gun.

EXT. ROOF - ELDRIDGE

walks silently to the front of the roof, directly over the main doors. He lowers the lariat over the right side of the church, and snaps the loop of the lariat against the exterior wall.

INT. CHURCH

The sharp sound of the lariat hitting the wall sounds like a gunshot in the church.

Smallson crouches, looking around and seeing nothing. He races to the front of the church to locate the source of the sound. He stands in the middle of the aisle.

UP ANGLE ON ROOF - ELDRIDGE

snaps the lariat against the left wall.

INT. CHURCH - SMALLSON

whips around to face the new threat. He still sees nothing.

EXT. ROOF - ELDRIDGE

moves back a couple of paces and snaps the lariat against the left wall.

INTERCUT

Smallson moves backward in the church, following the "gunshots".

Eldridge snaps the lariat against the right wall.

Smallson turns swiftly again, swaying, disoriented.

Eldridge backs up yet again, now straddling the hole in the roof over the middle aisle. He snaps the lariat against the left wall.

ELDRIDGE'S POV

Through the hole in the roof, Eldridge can see Smallson turn again and stumble down the aisle. Smallson stops, stands directly beneath the hole.

ELDRIDGE

lets the lariat down through the hole. He flicks his wrist in a lightning-quick circle.

INT. CHURCH

The lariat responds perfectly to its master. It curls swiftly around Smallson's neck.

The end of the lariat slides through the open part of the knot, effectively creating a noose.

EXT. ROOF

Eldridge hauls on the slim rope with his right arm, takes all the slack out of it, seals the noose on Smallson's neck.

INT. CHURCH

Smallson rises an inch off the ground. He reflexively extends his toes to maintain some balance. He drops the weapon, reaches for his throat.

He is trapped. Death stands before him.

EXT. ROOF

Eldridge strains to lift the large struggling outlaw off the ground with his only good arm.

INT. CHURCH

Smallson chooses a new and more effective tactic. He reaches upwards with his right hand and pulls himself up, hanging onto the rope with his upper body strength.

The pressure released from his neck, Smallson breathes deeply and coughs a few times. The rain comes through the hole in the roof, pouring over his face.

SMALLSON

You think you're noble, you're righteous. What'd those people ever do for you?

INTERCUT WITH ELDRIDGE ON THE ROOF

ELDRIDGE

They needed me.

SMALLSON

(mocking)
They needed me.

ELDRIDGE

My father raised me up to love justice.

SMALLSON

So you're gonna kill me in a church? That's rich.

Smallson reaches up with his left hand and heaves himself up the rope another foot. He dangles well off the ground, but still has a ways to go to reach Eldridge.

Eldridge uses the edge of the hole as a pulley, resting much of Smallson's weight on the roof beam below.

ELDRIDGE

And you? Why terrorize these poor innocents?

SMALLSON

My pa raised me up to take what I want. I want what he wanted.

ELDRIDGE

What?

SMALLSON

This town. Pa wanted this town to retire in. You killed him, and I'll kill you.

Smallson comes up the now-slippery rope another foot with his right hand, and another foot with his left. His overhand technique has brought him close to the hole in the roof.

Eldridge's right hand is weak and trembling, but not because of Smallson's weight.

ELDRIDGE

Snake Jack was... your father?

SMALLSON

Born to a whore in New Orleans.

ELDRIDGE

What's your name?

SMALLSON

What the...

ELDRIDGE

(an anguished command)
What's your name?

SMALLSON

Smallson Eldridge.

Eldridge drops the rope in his fearful shock.

Smallson plummets to the ground. He breaks his left leg in the fall, the sound echoes throughout the church. As does Smallson's scream.

Eldridge leans over the hole in the roof.

ELDRIDGE

My father was named Jack Eldridge. He was a fisherman from Maine. We thought he was killed in a storm.

Smallson looks up with painful eyes, gripping his legs in both hands. He begins to understand. He nods slowly. Water falls in his eyes, he blinks it away.

SMALLSON

You'll be killed in this storm.
Brother.

Smallson, having landed on his gun, raises it and points it at Eldridge.

Eldridge had leaned too far over the open hole, trying to catch Smallson's reaction to the news of their fraternal relationship. The Bible falls out of his pocket, plummeting towards Smallson.

Just before Smallson can pull the trigger, the Bible strikes his gun and knocks it out of his grasp.

The Bible tumbles along the ground.

Smallson laughs ruefully. Eldridge does not smile. He pulls his long-barrelled revolver out of its holster and holds it in his right hand, which supports his body weight across the hole.

SMALLSON

My ma died as I was born. My pa named me Smallson as a joke, 'cause I was so big as a baby. It's just been me and pa ever since, doing what we want and gettin' what we need. And then you killed him like a coward, and you say you're his son.

Smallson's hand gropes for his gun, which is still nearby.

ELDRIDGE

I didn't know. What he'd become. I was only doing what he taught me to do.

SMALLSON

I want revenge.

ELDRIDGE

I want my loves to live again.

SMALLSON

You won't get it.

ELDRIDGE

Neither will you.

Smallson raises his gun once more, quickly taking aim.

Eldridge, even laying across the hole, displays the lightning speed that has defined him. He pushes off the roof with his right hand, bouncing into the air slightly.

Smallson fires, but Eldridge is already out of the way.

Eldridge, still in the air, lowers the gun and shoots Smallson through the head. Eldridge belly-flops on the roof, twisting his left arm underneath him.

Eldridge grimaces in pain.

He rolls over on the roof, looks at the stormy sky, lightning and thunder. He sighs.

ELDRIDGE

I don't get to blame you for this.

EXT. SUNSET RIDGE - FOOT OF THE RIDGE

The Pony Express Boy lies in death, peacefully.

EXT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - SUMMIT

Mallory and O'Hearn lay on top of each other in death, crumpled up against Pilot's carcass.

EXT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH

Steubel sprawls near the front steps.

INT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH

Ernie is spread-eagled on the steps to the pulpit.

EXT. PLAINS

The preacher is in the fetal position in the prairie among the whispering stalks of grain. Padraig lies yards away like a perfectly laid out corpse in a coffin, arms crossed.

INT. CHESTER'S STORE

Chezet lays unconscious on the floor of the store, with every townspeople gathered around him, pointing weapons at him: Chester, Dooley, a tourniqueted Grossman, sopping-wet Billy and Henry, Roscoe, Tin Top, the preacher's wife.

INT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH

Smallson lays, shot through the forehead. In the background is Snake Jack, still laying in his coffin.

EXT. MOUNT LIGHTHOUSE - COPSE

The twin graves of Eldridge's mother and Rebeccah.

EXT. LITTLE WHITE CHURCH - ROOF

Eldridge faces the sky, eyes closed, accepting the rain.

He opens his eyes, and they are full of tears.

EXT. PAINTER'S JUNCTION - STREET - DAY (AN HOUR LATER)

Outside the livery, Eldridge sits on a saddled and provisioned Admiral. He rides down the center of town towards Mount Lighthouse.

The townspeople are gathered on the sidewalks, silently watching him pass.

Chester steps out into the road by Dooley's store, and speaks to the silent rider.

CHESTER

Are you bound for your mountain,
John?

Eldridge shakes his head.

CHESTER

Shall you return?

ELDRIDGE

I'm going home. I never should
have left the sea.

Eldridge rides out of town, cutting across the wheat fields, riding due east.

Eldridge and Admiral almost disappear in the waving wheat, under the blackened, thunderous skies.

The CAMERA RISES up the side of the little white church, watching Eldridge the whole time, until all that is left of the town is the little white steeple with the little white cross.

In the deep background rises Mount Lighthouse, the only modulation of the surrounding terrain.

With every crack of lightning, the swaying wheat fields seem to turn into waves on a troubled sea, navigated by an unperturbed Eldridge on his trusty sea-horse.

An unseen seagull calls.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END