

The Wounded  
By  
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(Original Material)

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FADE IN:

SUPERIMPOSE

CHRISTIAN COUNTY MISSOURI-TENNESSEE BORDER 1867

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

SHERIFF OLIN FELL, is dying and he's not going gently into that good night. In fact, he's coughing himself to death under the dreadful spell of consumption.

Fell is overweight and balding. He looks older than his 60 years. His exaggerated handlebar mustache seems misplaced under his red-rimmed eyes that have sunk deep into their blackened sockets while he struggles to breathe.

PEOPLE, cloaked in the shadows, silently stand safely away from his deathbed, their backs to the bedroom walls, fearing they might catch whatever is killing the sheriff while his clogged lungs struggle to live.

His wife LOTTIE, a slight, impish woman in her fifties, tenderly wipes the sweat from his forehead.

Fell clamps a shaking hand on the wrist of his mixed-blood deputy, QUINN SKINNER, 32. He's a handsome, athletically muscular half-African-American, half-Shawnee Indian man. He is sitting near his dying boss. Fell urgently pulls him closer.

FELL  
(struggling to speak)  
Fetch him.

QUINN  
He won't come.

FELL  
He has to.

QUINN  
Likely as not he's drunk.

LOTTIE  
Please Quinn.

FELL  
I ain't got much time.

Fell loosens his grip and lays his head back on a sweat-soaked pillow.

Quinn stands erect glancing around at the impassive faces in the room. Reluctantly he turns to leave. Lottie joins him at the door.

LOTTIE  
I'm sorry to ask this of you Quinn,  
but it's for Olin.

QUINN  
He won't get much sympathy from  
MATT JESSOP.

LOTTIE  
It's his last chance.

QUINN  
Like as not I'll have to shoot him  
to get him here.

LOTTIE  
Can you at least try?

Quinn pauses to consider Lottie's pleas.

QUINN  
I suppose I owe the old bugger.

Quinn exits the room as she gently closes the door and returns to Olin's bedside where she takes his hand in hers.

LOTTIE  
Quinn is fetching him.

Fell manages a weak smile. He strains to speak then gives up as he starts coughing again. Blood trickles from the corner of his mouth. Lottie gently wipes it away.

LOTTIE (CONT'D)  
You rest now.

FELL  
I could have saved them, Lottie. I  
could have stopped it.

LOTTIE  
It wasn't all your doing.

Fell has another violent coughing spell. Lottie pats his back and wipes his forehead until the coughing subsides. Fell struggles to speak but his voice is a whisper. He tugs Lottie closer to himself.

FELL

I made a terrible mistake. Jasper gave me...

LOTTIE

The postmaster? What did he give you?

(CONT'D)

Tears flow out of the sheriff's eyes as his voice trails away and is mostly unintelligible. Lottie places her ear close to his mouth.

FELL

(whispering)

He gave me... I kept them...forgive...

With that Fell draws his last breath. Lottie sinks into the bed beside him weeping.

EXT. SAWMILL CREEK - NEXT AFTERNOON

It's a hazy, scorching hot, southern afternoon. A MAN is sitting propped against an a rotting tree trunk. Flies buzz around him in endless circles. Unshaven and grimy he resembles a discarded sack of ripe laundry.

A tree-branch fishing pole is cradled in one limp hand. The fishing line trails off into a stagnant pond. A whisky-bottle cork bobs lazily on the water's surface.

The man stirs, swipes flying insects off his face, while unsteadily trying to take a drink from a liquor bottle with his eyes closed. The bottle's contents dribble down his unshaven chin onto his sweat-soaked red long-johns.

Mumbling incoherently he lazily opens his bloodshot eyes squinting against the sun. His head drops back against the rough tree bark.

FLASHBACK - 18 MONTHS EARLIER OCTOBER 1865

EXT. TOWN STREET - DAY

The Civil War is finally over. Dark complexioned and tall, MATT JESSOP, 27, rides into Christian Mills wearing his blue Union Army uniform in this rabidly Confederate community. As he rides through he senses the tension building in the air like that soldiers experience on the cusp of a battle.

Along the dusty street he sees hatred on the faces of the MEN and WOMEN he grew up with and worked alongside. He recognizes some who were at his wedding when he married ANNIE LOOPER, the belle of Christian County.

Riding past the saloon, bitter, defeated men nudge one another as they spit tobacco juice into the dust in front of Matt's horse.

Slowly rounding a street corner, the sight of FOUR BODIES, two women and two men hanging from a tree between a courthouse and a church, startle him to an abrupt halt. Around the corpses' necks are crudely scrawled signs reading "YANKEE TRAITORS."

Warily approaching, he sees the bodies are those of his beloved young wife ANNIE, his nephew BURTON, 14; mother-in-law LILY and brother-in-law MASON, clothed in a torn and bloodied Union uniform, swaying grotesquely in a light breeze. They obviously had been there for some time.

Sliding from his saddle in anguish he stumbles to Annie's body, cuts her down, takes her body in his arms and sinks to the ground with a gut-wrenching cry.

EXT. SIDE STREET - CONTINUOUS

A MOB of townspeople led by PINKNEY SKAGGS, a brutish laborer and town bully, approaches Matt from behind.

SKAGGS  
(shouting)  
Welcome home blue belly.

Matt looks into Skaggs' smirking face and the twisted hate-filled screaming faces of others in the mob.

MATT  
Why?

SKAGGS  
We lost half the town to traitors like you. We figured we should even the score.

Matt's pain turns to rage as he starts to get up drawing his pistol in the process.

MATT  
You dirty sons of bitches.

Before he can stand and get a shot off Skaggs kicks the pistol from his hand as the mob descends on him like a pack of wild dogs beating him with clubs, fists and boots.

A GRIZZLED FULL-BEARDED MAN in a tattered Confederate uniform, produces a rope and throws it around his neck. Matt sinks into unconsciousness to the sounds of cursing and screaming from his attackers before he is dragged to the tree where his wife and her relatives were lynched.

CUT TO:

INT. JAIL - DAY

Stocky, middle-aged five-foot-eight with his signature drooping, bushy mustache Sheriff Olin Fell watches from his office window several doors away. Quinn stares out with him.

QUINN

We better stop this sheriff?

FELL

No.

QUINN

But...

FELL

But nothing.

Quinn marches to the back of the office and takes a rifle off a rack, checks if it's loaded then makes for the door.

FELL (CONT'D)

What do you think you're doing?

QUINN

I've seen enough killing while sitting on my ass for one day. If you won't stop them, I will.

FELL

You get back here.

Quinn gives Fell a look of disdain as he slams the door shut behind him.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Quinn's shrill voice rises over the roaring of the crowd as he shouts for the mob to disperse. Overtaken with bloodlust the frenzied men and women ignore him.

QUINN

Ain't you sorry bunch of bastards  
had enough killing for one day? Go  
home. You got church tomorrow. Go  
on. Now get...

He points his gun toward the mob.

QUINN (CONT'D)

...or so help me I'll see everyone  
of you cowards hang for murder.

VOICES FROM THE CROWD

You'll pay for protecting this Blue  
Belly half-breed.

ANOTHER VOICE

His kin got what was coming to  
them.

A THIRD VOICE

You'll get your taste of the rope  
soon enough deputy.

Quinn fires a couple of shots over the heads of the mob that  
grudgingly scatters as Fell joins him carrying a shotgun.

Matt is left lying unconscious and bloody in the street, the  
noose still around his neck.

FELL

Get my wagon and take him to DOC  
WATERS.

QUINN

What about them?

FELL

Can't bury them in the town  
boneyard. Jasper can box them up.  
We'll plant them at the Jessop  
place. Or what's left of it.

Quinn turns to leave but Fell grabs him by the arm and spins  
him around.

FELL ( (CONT'D)

Don't you ever defy me again. I've  
had enough grief already over  
hiring a mixed blood.

Quinn shakes his arm loose from Fell's grip.

SKAGGS

Then why did you?

FELL

Figured it would be good for the town. Now get going.

EXT. MATT'S HOMESTEAD - DAYS LATER

A small knot of PEOPLE are gathered in the rain on a hillside overlooking the Matt's burned out homestead. A pair of buckboards are parked off to the side. FOUR BLACK MEN are lowering the last of four crude coffins into the ground.

EXT. MATT'S HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS

Bandaged up, Matt's face is still showing signs of the beating he received from the mob. One arm in a sling he is supported by a single crude crutch. His face exudes pain and loss as he stares emotionless at the graves.

He is flanked on either side by Fell, Lottie, Quinn, Jasper the mortician, Doc Waters and the four gravediggers with shovels at the ready.

As the group breaks up, Lottie walks past Matt and gently touches his arm before going by. Fell is a few paces behind her. Matt steps in front of him.

MATT

You had to know this was coming?

FELL

It was vigilantes that done this. Not me, not the town. Vigilantes. Understand?

MATT

Was it vigilantes who tried to lynch me? You could have stopped them from lynching Annie and her kin. Or were too many of your friends involved?

Fell grabs Matt by the shirt and pulls him close.

FELL

Listen to me Matt Jessop. You chose the wrong side in the wrong town.

(MORE)

FELL (CONT'D)

Now you so much as set foot in  
Christian Mills looking for blood  
and I'll have you gunned down on  
sight. We've buried your dead as  
best we know how. Why don't you  
move on and find some peace.

MATT

What about my children?

FELL

They died in the fire. Couldn't  
find their bodies.

MATT

Maybe you just didn't try.

FELL

Then why don't you look? And while  
you're looking you might think  
about doing some forgiving. This is  
Christian County.

MATT

Time won't heal what you allowed to  
happen. There'll be no forgiving  
and no forgetting.

Fell ignores Matt's outburst as he walks away.

FELL

Just remember what I said.  
Vengeance belongs to the Lord.

EXT. BURNED OUT HOME - CONTINUOUS

Matt is sifting through the charred remains of his home.  
Looking out through the burned doorway he glares at the  
procession of buggies and horses winding its way back toward  
town.

TWO YEARS LATER

EXT. SAWMILL CREEK - MORNING

A dusty boot rouses Matt into full consciousness as the  
remains of his whisky bottle are poured over his face. Matt  
sits bolt upright furiously wiping his face with a mud-caked  
hand.

MATT  
Son of a bitch.

Staggering to his feet he clumsily tugs at a pistol tucked in his worn belt.

A hand reaches out shoving hard against his chest, propelling him into the pond behind him with a huge splash.

Struggling to stand up in the muddy water he manages only to sink back below the surface. Bubbles and foam dance on the water. A hand fishes around the water until it hoists Matt out of the creek. Matt is dragged hacking and puking the few feet to shore and dumped on the ground.

Struggling to stand up he manages to rise on his hands and knees dripping wet and tangled in his fishing line. The makeshift bobber hangs from his ear. There is no hook on the line.

MATT (CONT'D)  
What the hell are you doing?

QUINN  
I figured you was drowning.

MATT  
I was. You should have let me be.

Quinn helps him to his feet.

QUINN  
If dyin's your wish, do it on your own time.

Matt jerks his arm out of Quinn's grip.

MATT  
I ought to kill you.

QUINN  
You can see to that after our business is done.

Quinn tries to put his hand on Matt's shoulder. Glaring at him, Matt slaps it away.

QUINN (CONT'D)  
Sheriff Fell ordered me to fetch you into town.

MATT

He's got no jurisdiction here. You tell that old bastard to go to Hell.

QUINN

Reckon that's where he might be heading with him on his deathbed and all. But while he's still in the land of the living he's ordered you into town, and that's where you're going.

Quinn has brought a second horse with him tethered to his saddle horn.

MATT

So he's dying? It's about time. I prayed I could kill him myself.

Quinn pushes him toward the horses.

QUINN

I didn't bust my ass riding all night just to hear your whining. Now mount up.

MATT

I reckon you didn't hear me. I said...

Quinn half turns away then spins back landing a clean knock-out punch to Matt's jaw.

QUINN

I heard you just fine.

EXT. SAWMILL CREEK - CONTINUOUS

Matt is hog-tied and draped over his saddle. He has a small cut on his lip. Quinn is leading both horses toward a nearby wagon road. Matt comes to.

MATT

Alright, alright. If I'm going at least let it be sitting up.

Quinn stops and unties his struggling prisoner but leaves his hands tied. Matt climbs into the saddle. Quinn follows suit.

QUINN

Now don't you try getting away or I'll have to hurt you again.

MATT

You caught me unaware with a lucky punch is all. How about letting me get into some clean duds?

QUINN

You got clean duds? Where?

MATT

My castle. Just up the lane yonder.

QUINN

You rebuilt?

MATT

They didn't burn the barn.

QUINN

Well, hurry it up. We got a long ride back.

EXT. WAGON ROAD - LATER

Matt has changed his clothes. He has also strapped on his gunbelt but the holster is empty.

MATT

How about my sidearm?

QUINN

When we get to town.

The two men continue down the road in silence, past deserted homesteads and burned out buildings.

EXT. WAGON ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Quinn breaks the icy silence.

QUINN

Hope I didn't hurt you much. Them ropes aren't too snug, are they? I already asked the Lord to overlook my violent act.

MATT

When did you get religion?

Quinn doesn't answer but starts singing Let's All Gather by the River.

EXT. WAGON ROAD - CONTINUOUS

MATT  
What's he dying of?

QUINN  
Who?

MATT  
Who? Who in hell do you think?  
What's wrong with you? Fell.

QUINN  
The Doc says consumption. But I  
figure he been puffing too many of  
them quirleys.

MATT  
A man can't die from smoking.

QUINN  
Odd thing about the sheriff's  
quirleys. Queerest tobacco I ever  
did see.

MATT  
How so?

QUINN  
Nothing like the crops from  
Viginie.

MATT  
Is that a fact?

QUINN  
Darndest thing. Every time he'd  
crank up one of them cigareets he  
got so hungry he could eat the  
behind out of a buffalo in a  
stampede. That's why he got so  
damned pudgy of late. Got to  
laughing about nothing too.  
Unbecoming of a lawman, I would  
say.

MATT  
Probably came from Mississippi.

QUINN  
Nope. Grew it himself he did. In  
his yard, amongst the sunflowers.

MATT

Ever try it?

QUINN

Nope. My horse got into it though.  
Acted up something fierce.  
Couldn't ride him for three days.  
Old Olin was hankering to shoot him  
he was so mad.

EXT. TOWN STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

Quinn and Matt ride slowly into town. VARIOUS TOWNSPEOPLE stop to watch them ride past. Matt is grim as he stares down anyone daring to look at him.

EXT. STARS AND BARS SALOON

Riding past the saloon they hear raucous music from a jug band and out-of-tune singing filling the street.

On the sidewalk SEVERAL MEN are standing around talking. Among them is Pinkney Skaggs and NEHEMIAH BINNS, the town postmaster, a slimy little balding man with owlsh spectacles and a thin mustache. Nehemiah steps into the street as they pass by joined by Skaggs.

NEHEMIAH

Don't that beat all. I figured we  
saw the last of him.

SKAGGS

This time we will.

EXT. FELL'S HOME

Dismounting and tethering their horses to the white picket fence they approach the front door just as Lottie, in tears, steps out on to the veranda.

LOTTIE

I'm sorry Mister Jessop. Olin is  
gone. He passed away last night.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

A funeral carriage turns the corner behind them lurching toward the Fell home.

EXT. VERANDA - DAY

Lottie closes the door, takes Matt's hand and leads him to a bench where she sits down. Matt reluctantly takes a seat beside her. Quinn follows but remains standing.

MATT

Guess I can go home now.

LOTTIE

He desperately wanted to talk to you.

MATT

It's too late for talking. He should have done that when they were killing my family. What could he have told me that would make a difference to me now.

LOTTIE

I don't know for certain but it had something to do with your wife and kinfolks. I'm sorry.

Matt stands up to leave. Lottie and Quinn follow him.

LOTTIE (CONT'D)

All I know Mister Jessop is Olin was haunted of late by the night terrors over what happened here. He would wake up in a sweat and pace the floor all night.

MATT

He earned it.

LOTTIE

I think he wanted to clear his conscience.

MATT

I reckon that's between him and Satan now. I couldn't have helped him with that.

LOTTIE

He did say he had something for you but died before he could tell me what it was.

MATT

Unless it was my family, I wouldn't want whatever it was. But I thank you regardless.

Matt leaves the veranda returning to his horse. Quinn follows close behind him,. The DRIVER parks his carriage and steps down with his ASSISTANT.

Both go to the rear of the carriage, and remove a wooden stretcher before going into the house. Matt and Quinn pause near the horses and watch as the undertakers enter the house.

MATT (CONT'D)

Can I take the mare or do I walk?

QUINN

Take her. I'll pick her up when I can.

MATT

Just don't accuse me of horse stealing

QUINN

You could have been more understanding with Mrs. Fell. She had nothing to do with what happened.

MATT

All my understanding was strangled out of me by the vigilantes that hung my family and burned my house with my young ones in it.

QUINN

Fell wasn't all to blame. Carpetbaggers were coming in, the rabble from both armies were cleaning us out, folks were driven off their land. The town was being raided every second day. He couldn't take no more of it.

MATT

Are you asking me to feel sorry for him? Or his widow? He should have given the job to somebody else.

QUINN

He did.

MATT

Vigilantes?

QUINN

Ozark boys. They came in from Taney County promising to clean things up. Called themselves peacekeepers. Trouble was they got so they couldn't tell the innocent from the guilty. Didn't know when to stop. By then it was too late. They were running the town.

Matt mounts up. Quinn hands him his gun.

QUINN (CONT'D)

You might be needing this.

Matt holsters the revolver.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Maybe I'll accompany you out of town. Keep you out of trouble.

INT. STARS AND BARS SALOON - CONTINUOUS

The saloon is thick with smoke and over-flowing with a roaring crowd of COWBOYS, BAR GIRLS, CARD SHARPS and a handful of FORMER CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS still wearing tattered remnants of their old uniforms.

In a far corner a HILLBILLY JUG BAND QUINTET looking like a failed in-breeding experiment are playing a banjo, a squeeze-box, washboard, a harmonica and a jug. A PAIR OF HOMESTEADERS are clog dancing in front of the stage.

A large banner proclaiming General Robert E. Lee's Birthday is strung out behind the bar. A group of BARFLIES crowd the bar while ORVILLE the bartender frantically pours the drinks.

INT. CORNER CARD TABLE - CONTINUOUS

Skaggs, Nehemiah and three of their cronies, LARKIN SWILLING, ARLIE KROBORE AND EYES BRINK, are playing cards. The drinks are flowing freely.

SKAGGS

Did you see that Jessop bastard ride into town with that breed deputy, proud as all get out?

NEHEMIAH

Makes me wish we could go to war again.

SWILLING

Speaking of the war, where'd  
you serve, Nehemiah?

NEHEMIAH

I served right here in the  
Christian Mills postal station.

The group breaks out in derisive laughter.

BRINK

What did you do Nehemiah?  
Plaster the Yankees with stamps?

NEHEMIAH

You'd be mighty surprised by the  
harm you can do just by forgetting  
about letters for certain parties,  
if you know what I mean.

BRINK

Why that sounds as dangerous as  
fighting at Antietam,  
Chancellorsville and Gettysburg all  
rolled into one.

ARLIE KROBORE

And what about you, Pinkney?

SKAGGS

What about me? And don't call me  
Pinkney.

KROBORE

Okay then Skaggs. Where did you  
serve?

The question makes Skaggs visibly uncomfortable and  
defensive.

SKAGGS

I couldn't.

LARKIN SWILLING

Why not?

SKAGGS

You ask too many questions that's  
why not.

NEHEMIAH

Come on Pinkney...er Skaggs, tell  
them.

SKAGGS  
I got a bad back.

KROBORE  
Don't tell me Pinkney Skaggs had  
the condition known as yellow back.

In a rage Skaggs jumps up and pulls out his revolver and  
cocks the hammer. The music stops.

SKAGGS  
Nobody calls Pinkney Skaggs a  
coward. I could kill all you  
bastards.

The card players and nearby PATRONS scurry for cover.  
Nehemiah stays calm and grabs Skaggs by the arm.

NEHEMIAH  
Come on Skaggs. Nobody meant  
anything by it. It's a small town,  
you don't want to turn on your  
friends. You don't have any to  
spare you know.

Skaggs calms down, holsters his gun and sits back down.

SKAGGS  
Reckon you're right. And only I'm  
allowed to call me Pinkney. Just  
remember that. Now let's have a  
drink.

Nehemiah waves the players back to the table as the band  
starts up and the crowd settles down.

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

Orville, is serving drinks to a half-dozen BARFLIES when he  
looks out over the swinging doors and sees Matt and Quinn  
riding up the street toward the saloon.

Rushing to the end of the bar closest to Skaggs' table he  
shouts out to them.

ORVILLE  
(laughing)  
Hey Skaggs. A friend of yours is  
coming up the street.

Skaggs, along with Nehemiah, and the rest of the CARD PLAYERS  
get up and rush toward the door followed by most of the bar's  
patrons.

EXT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Matt and Quinn are nearing the mid-point of the saloon when a mob of men led by Skaggs bursts out of bar onto the sidewalk and street where they confront Quinn and Matt, spooking their horses.

Quinn leaps from his horse grabbing his rifle from the scabbard on his way down.

QUINN  
 (to Matt)  
 You stay put and keep that pistol  
 holstered.

Quinn steps around in front of his horse with Skaggs about 10 feet away from him. Skaggs is about to take his revolver out of its holster.

QUINN (CONT'D)  
 Wouldn't do that Pinkney.

Quinn jacks a shell into his Winchester.

SKAGGS  
 What's to stop me?

QUINN  
 Me and Mister Winchester here.

SKAGGS  
 We want the traitor. You can leave.

QUINN  
 All you people go back to your  
 birthday party.

SKAGGS  
 Or what. It's 20 to one black man.

QUINN  
 Brown man, actually.

Skaggs cocks the hammer back on his pistol aiming it at Matt.

QUINN (CONT'D)  
 I warned you.

Without further warning Quinn shoots Skaggs in the leg sending him to the ground writhing in pain and crying.

QUINN (CONT'D)  
 No you men take this war hero to  
 the doc and go back to your party.  
 (MORE)

QUINN (CONT'D)

If I have to pick another example I  
won't be shootin' legs.

Grumbling the men pick up Skaggs and carry him off down the  
street. The rest return to the bar. Quinn walks over to Matt.

MATT

I didn't think you'd do it.

QUINN

Me neither.

Matt wheels his horse around and rides away.

INT. FELL'S BEDROOM - DAYS LATER

Lottie is taking the last of Fell's things from a closet,  
folding and stowing them in a large trunk.

Looking through the closet one last time, she notices a small  
box tied with string tucked away on the top shelf. She gets a  
chair, climbs up on it and takes the box down looking  
quizzically at it as she takes it to the bed and sits down.

Carefully untying the string, she slowly lifts the lid and  
sees a neatly folded note. She reads it aloud.

LOTTIE

To be given to Matt Jessop after my  
demise. Olin.

The box is filled to the brim with letters. She takes one  
from the box. Her face pales as she stares at the envelope.

LOTTIE (CONT'D)

Olin, how could you?

EXT. FELL HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Lottie, carrying the box of letters, rushes out the door onto  
the street and marches to the jail.

CUT TO:

INT. JAIL - DAY

Quinn is working at the sheriff's desk sorting through papers  
when Lottie enters and shows him the contents of the box.

QUINN

What are they?

LOTTIE  
What do they look like?

                  QUINN  
Letters?

                  LOTTIE  
Yes, they're letters.

                  QUINN  
I figured so. Who from? Olin?

                  LOTTIE  
No. Some are from Matt Jessop and  
some are from his wife Annie.

                  QUINN  
Why would they write to Olin?

                  LOTTIE  
They didn't. They wrote to each  
other during the war but neither  
one got them. Somehow they ended up  
in Olin's hands.

                  QUINN  
Why wouldn't he give them to Matt  
after the war?

                  LOTTIE  
I don't know. Perhaps he felt  
guilty or ashamed. All I know was  
that something was bothering him  
these last few years and the cause  
was probably these undelivered  
letters.

Lottie gets up and goes back to the window and stares  
outside. Quinn approaches her.

                  LOTTIE (CONT'D)  
I want you to deliver them to  
Mister Jessop. Tell him how I found  
them. I have a few other things for  
him as well.

Asking Quinn to come back to the house they leave the jail.

INT. OLIN'S BEDROOM - DAY

Lottie goes to a chest of drawers, opens the top drawer and  
rifles through its contents.

She takes an envelope out then retrieves a small box from under the bed. Quinn helps her place it on the bed.

LOTTIE

I want you to take the box and the letters to Mister Jessop.

Lottie turns the envelope and the box over to Quinn and picks up another envelope as an afterthought.

LOTTIE (CONT'D)

This is from Olin. He left it to you for the service and loyalty you rendered him.

QUINN

What will you do Mrs. Fell?

LOTTIE

I'm going to live with my sister in Massachusetts. At least it is civilized there. I never much did like this town or its people anyhow.

EXT. JESSOP HOMESTEAD - THE NEXT DAY

Quinn rides up the lane holding the box Lottie gave him on the horn of his saddle. Warily he approaches a log barn on his left. The burned out remains of the Jessop home are on his right.

Quinn dismounts, box in hand, drops his reins on the ground and his horse wanders off. There is no sign of life. Quinn calls out.

QUINN

Matt. Matt Jessop. Are you here? If so, hold your fire it's me...

A shot rings out. A bullet strikes a nearby tree. Quinn scrambles for cover.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Quit shooting. It's me Quinn.

Matt replies from inside the barn.

MATT (V.O.)

You alone?

QUINN

I'm alone. I got something for you from Mrs. Fell. I also came to fetch my horse.

MATT

You sure you're alone?

QUINN

Damnit Matt I'm alone! What's wrong with you anyhow? I thought we was friends?

Matt slowly opens the door, sticks his head out, looks warily around then steps out in full view.

MATT

A man can't be too careful. Come on up.

Quinn cautiously leaves his cover and walks toward Matt.

QUINN

You could have killed me.

MATT

I could have if I wanted to. Come on in, I got coffee on the go.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Matt's living space is carved out of a corner section of the barn. He has a cot in one corner, a rudimentary kitchen with a wood burning cooking stove against the log wall with a stovepipe poking precariously through the wall.

The plank table has an assortment of utensils and foodstuffs on it. Two handmade chairs complete the set. A tin bathtub sits near a rail separating the space from the rest of the barn.

Behind them, Quinn's horse is tethered in a stall, a saddle and bridle sit on a fence rail. Chickens roam at will, pigeons fly around and barn swallows flit through the air. Quinn sits in one of the rickety chairs. He looks the room over while Matt is getting coffee.

QUINN

Nice place.

MATT

I fixed it up myself.

QUINN

I couldn't have guessed.

Matt blows the dust out of two grungy cups before setting them down and pouring the coffee. He sits down, reaches under the table and hauls out a stone jug. Quinn watches with interest.

Matt pulls the cork from the jug with his teeth then pours some into his cup. He offers the jug to Quinn who shakes his head no.

MATT

I learned this at Yellow Bayou in Louisiana. The Cajuns there called it Café Royale.

QUINN

I would call it another reason to have a drink.

MATT

Rightly so. Anyhow what have got for me?

Quinn places the box on the table and slides it over to Matt.

MATT (CONT'D)

What's in it?

QUINN

Don't rightly know.

Quinn opens the box. Inside is Fell's gunbelt and revolver and a few boxes of shells. Matt takes them out and examines them.

MATT

What the hell?

QUINN

Mrs. Fell sent them.

MATT

Is this what Fell wanted to give me?

Quinn gets up and heads for the door.

MATT (CONT'D)

Where you going?

QUINN

I'll be right back.

Quinn exits the room. Matt examines the gun until Quinn returns with a large paper-wrapped package and places it on the table without a word. Matt glances at it and back to Quinn. Without a word he unties a ribbon holding it together spilling the contents out on the table.

He runs his hands over the letters. He picks up a couple and reads the names. His confusion turns to anger.

MATT

These letters. Their Annie's and mine. Who could have done this?

QUINN

It appears to me Annie's letters never got sent out. Yours to her were never delivered.

MATT

Never sent? Never delivered?

In his frustration, Matt slams the envelopes down on the table.

QUINN

All I know is somehow the sheriff got hold of them. I guess after the war. Lottie found them yesterday when she was cleaning things up.

MATT

It was that son of a bitch Nehemiah. Wasn't it?

QUINN

I reckon. He ran the letter office.

MATT

Why would Fell not hand them over to me? The war was over.

QUINN

Maybe not for him. Patriotism can twist a man's mind. Or maybe he was scared of what you might do.

MATT

Guess I'll ride back with you.

QUINN

Not now. Get caught up on your mail. I'll leave the mare with you.

Matt stares into Quinn's eyes a moment before sitting down to read the letters. Quinn rides off alone

INT. BARN - EVENING

Matt is still at the table. He opens an envelope, removes the letter, turns the wick up in a coal-oil lantern and begins reading Annie's letters.

FLASHBACK - MATT'S HOMESTEAD 1863

ANNIE (V.O.)

April 18, 1864. My dearest Matthew. How much I miss you. I am penning this missive in the happiest of circumstances.

FLASHBACK

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Annie is in bed. Her sister SARAH, 19, a brown-haired attractive young woman, is wiping her sister's forehead. DOC THADDEUS WATERS, is sitting on a stool at Annie's feet looking under the blankets.

THADDEUS

Alright now, push.

Annie pushes while crying out in pain.

THADDEUS (CONT'D)

We're almost there. One more time.

Annie pushes again, cries out then sinks back on her pillow exhausted. A BABY cries. Thaddeus walks into view and hands her the baby wrapped in a blanket.

THADDEUS (CONT'D)

A beautiful baby girl. Just like her mommy.

ANNIE (V.O.)

Our last night together when you came home on leave last year has come to fruition. I am pleased and proud to announce the birth of our daughter BETHANY. She looks beautiful under her cradle quilt. I cannot wait for you to see her.

INT. BARN - EVENING

Incredulous, Matt stares into the letter tears welling up in his eyes.

MATT

A daughter. We had a daughter.

Matt stands up, engrossed in the letter, as he walks across the room and gazes out a window where he can see Annie's headstone in the distance.

MATT (CONT'D)

Oh God, Annie. I'm so sorry. I promise I'll make it up to you and our children. I swear.

INT. BARN - MORNING

Matt wakes up at the kitchen table to the sun shining on his face through a window. Half asleep he sits up to the pile of opened letters. A few are still sealed.

EXT. TREE LINED LANE - DAY

Matt is sitting on a Kentucky-style split-rail cedar fence tucking a letter back into its envelope. He chooses another, grimly opens it with a knife.

ANNIE (V.O.)

July 20, 1865 My dearest Matthew.  
My heart rejoices that this brutal war is finally over and you can now return to our growing family. All the children are fine and healthy.

FLASHBACK - EXT. TOWN STREET - DAY

Men are riding wildly through town firing their pistols into the air. TOWNSPEOPLE scatter madly in all directions to avoid the rampaging riders.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

TWO MEN and TWO WOMEN are standing on the back of a buckboard, nooses around their necks. A MASKED RIDER climbs up and hangs TRAITOR signs on them. He jumps down off the wagon and whips the horses.

ANNIE (V.O.) (CONTINUOUS)  
 Unfortunately Christian Mills has  
 become a haven to Satan's spawn  
 calling themselves Peacekeepers.  
 They are taking revenge on those  
 who fought for the Union.

Matt climbs down off the fence and ambles up toward the  
 family cemetery plot while continuing to read Annie's letter.

ANNIE (V.O.)  
 They let it be known it was  
 revenge for the proper and legal  
 executions of the killers of poor  
 President Lincoln who received  
 their just desserts.

EXT. ANNIE'S GRAVE - CONTINUOUS

Matt kneels beside the headstone and continues reading as he  
 grows angrier and more pained.

FLASHBACK

INT. SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Annie is seated at her desk writing. A LOUD KNOCKING at the  
 door interrupts her. She looks at a clock. It is midnight. A  
 second time the KNOCKING is LOUDER. Annie goes to the door.  
 Places her ear against it.

ANNIE  
 Who is it?

No answer.

EXT. DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Matt's brother BEN and his father EZRA, both drunk, each  
 holding a bottle of liquor.

EZRA  
 It's me. And Ben. Open up.

INT. SITTING ROOM

Annie is frightened.

ANNIE  
 What do you want?

EZRA (O.C.)  
It's about Matt.

INT. SITTING ROOM

Annie opens the door a few inches but is pushed back by Ben and Ezra. The two men laugh as they brush past her and seat themselves on the sofa angering Annie.

ANNIE  
What about Matt? Has he been  
injured? What's wrong.

Both men erupt into laughter.

BEN  
We were just fooling. We thought  
you might want some company to  
celebrate the war ending.

ANNIE  
Get out. You have no business here.

Ben takes a swig from the bottle.

BEN  
You want some? You must be getting  
lonely?

ANNIE  
I said get out. Both of you.

BEN  
Now don't you go getting uppity  
Mrs. Traitor. If it wasn't for us,  
you'd be swinging along with the  
rest of the turncoats in this  
county. So you be nice.

Ben reaches out grabbing Annie by one shoulder. She shrugs him off but stumbles backward into her desk. Ezra stands up and staggers over to Ben grabbing his arm.

EZRA  
Leave her alone son. It ain't worth  
the aggravation. Let's go.

BEN  
No Pa. A beautiful woman needs  
companionship.

Annie regains her composure and takes a long pair of scissors off the desk. She holds them menacingly in front her.

ANNIE

Now both of you leave. I'll be sure to tell Matt about this. He'll settle accounts with you when he gets home.

BEN

Well he ain't home yet. Is he? And we'll be long gone from here anyhow.

EZRA

Shut your mouth. Now let's go.

The pair stagger out laughing.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Matt, at the kitchen table, is going through the papers left to him by Olin. His brow is deeply furrowed. Visibly shaken by what he is reading Matt takes a drink from bottle in front of him. He sits back in his chair shaking his head.

MATT

(reading aloud)

They never found the children's bodies. Fell figures they were taken before the lynching.

Matt shuffles through to the last page of Fell's letter.

MATT (CONT'D)

Fell figures that Doc Waters and postmaster Nehemiah Binns know what happened to them.

Matt slams the letters down on the table, saddles the mare and rides all night to reach Christian Mills by sun-up the next morning.

EXT. DOC WATERS OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

Doc Waters is just waking up in his upstairs bedroom when he hears the cocking of a revolver next to his head. Opening one eye he sees Matt sitting in a chair next to his bed holding his pistol inches from his head.

WATERS

I thought you might get around to visiting me.

MATT

A dead man told me you could tell me what happened to my children.

WATERS

Fell?

MATT

And you better talk fast and true before I get tired of holding this hammer back.

Waters is terrified and starts to sweat.

WATERS

Can I sit up?

MATT

No. Talk.

WATERS

Your children aren't dead. Your folks took them when they left the county two weeks before your wife and her kin were lynched.

MATT

Two weeks? How is that possible?

WATERS

Fell kept your wife and her kin in protective custody to give your folks time to get away before they were turned over to the Peacekeepers.

MATT

Where did they go?

Matt presses his gun barrel against his left temple.

WATERS

I swear I don't know. I just know they were in a real hurry to leave.

MATT

Were they part of the lynching?

Waters hesitates to answer until Matt presses the pistol harder against his head.

WATERS

I heard that your Pa told the Peacekeepers when Annie and her kinfolk would be in town and Fell took them into custody. That's all I know. You should talk to Nehemiah at the post office. I swear I don't know where they went.

MATT

Maybe I'll do that. Go back to sleep doctor.

With that Matt knocks him out with a hit to his head with his pistol.

EXT. POST OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Matt can see Nehemiah sorting letters and placing them in mailboxes. The front door is locked. Matt pulls his gun and kicks the door open.

Charging across the room he smashes into Nehemiah pinning him against the back wall sending letters and parcels flying around the room. Matt sticks his pistol under the postmaster's chin.

MATT

I would like nothing more than to turn your head into one of those letter boxes you peddle but I need you to tell me where my folks went.

NEHEMIAH

I don't know anything.

MATT

Doc Waters says different.

Nehemiah clams up until Matt pulls the hammer back on his pistol and shoves it hard under his chin.

NEHEMIAH

Doc Waters is a known liar.

MATT

I got nothing to lose killing you right now.

EXT. POST OFFICE - DAY

A WOMAN walks up to the front door carrying a large parcel. Looking at the smashed door she sees Matt holding Nehemiah against the wall. Dropping her parcel she lets loose a scream and runs off down the street.

Nehemiah smiles angering Matt who slams his pistol across his face. Nehemiah caves.

NEHEMIAH

My nephew Jasper saw them out in Seattle. They were heading for the goldfields up in the Canadian Cariboo.

MATT

British Columbia?

NEHEMIAH

Yes.

MATT

When?

NEHEMIAH

Some months after the lynching.

MATT

Who did he see?

NEHEMIAH

Ben and a couple of kids. That's all I know.

MATT

How do I find your nephew?

NEHEMIAH

He has a barber shop on Alaska Way in Seattle.

Matt releases him and allows Nehemiah to run out of the building hollering for help. Matt follows him out and sees Quinn coming down the street with the woman who saw him.

They are followed by Skaggs limping around on one crutch, Swilling, Krobore and Eyes Brink are in the lead, followed by a gaggle of gawking TOWNSPEOPLE.

Matt stands his ground and faces the mob. Skaggs shouts over to Quinn who is carrying a rifle.

SKAGGS

Okay Mister Lawman, do your job.  
That traitor was trying to rob the  
post office. You got a right to  
shoot him down.

Quinn moves away from Skaggs toward Matt.

QUINN

What's going on Matt? You trying to  
rob the post office like they say.

MATT

I just wanted to ask Binns about my  
family. That's all. He needed some  
help with his memory. Must have  
been all that stamp glue he's been  
licking made him forget things.

QUINN

I might have to arrest you.

MATT

I won't surrender to no mob, Quinn.  
I won't die like my wife and her  
kin.

QUINN

Your business finished here?

MATT

Yup.

QUINN

Best you leave then.

Quinn turns to the crowd.

MATT

Just a misunderstanding folks.

Skaggs steps forward his hand on his gun butt.

SKAGGS

You do something or I will.

He pulls his gun from his holster and limps toward Matt.

QUINN

You don't learn so good do you,  
Skaggs?

SKAGGS

Go to hell.

Quinn shoots him in his good leg. Skaggs falls to the ground screaming.

QUINN

You can leave now, Matt. Take the mare. You can pay me later.

MATT

What about you?

QUINN

Don't worry about me. My plans are already set. Now get out of here and good luck.

Matt runs to his horse and rides away. Skaggs is being tended to by some of his friends as Quinn walks over to them removing the deputy's badge from his shirt.

Throwing the badge in the dust he looks at the faces in the crowd and shakes his head in disgust.

QUINN (CONT'D)

You folks get yourself another sheriff. Maybe you'll find somebody like good old Pinkney Skaggs here. Or maybe another Olin Fell. I doubt anyone any good will risk their lives to protect your sorry asses.

Quinn starts backing away from the crowd toward the jail his rifle levelled at them.

QUINN (CONT'D)

It's too bad you won't likely get what's coming to you for what you did to Matt's family. But maybe it's enough for you to you carry it to your graves.

Reaching the jail, Quinn has a pack mule and his horse waiting for him. Mounting up he addresses the crowd before leaving.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Your town is no better than a public outhouse. It is cursed for what you have done here and I gladly leave you to it. Whatever evil befalls it will is deserved. I would advise you not to follow me or I'll drop every damned one of you on sight.

Dust kicked up by Matt and Quinn's departures in opposite direction and kicked up by a sudden gust of wind, settles on the town while Skaggs is hauled away to Doc Waters' office. The sullen crowd slowly disperses leaving the cheerless street deserted.

CUT TO:

SIX MONTHS LATER

EXT. SEATTLE WATERFRONT - DAY

Alaskan Way is jam-packed with sailors, merchants, prospectors and confused families. Gold is still being found in the Cariboo Region up north in the British Columbia Territory continuing to attract the prospectors, settlers, the claim jumpers and the gamblers.

Desperate travelers are crowding onto cargo-barges, sailing ships and fishing boats in a desperate race to Victoria then to Vancouver.

Here, fortune hunters face the unforgiving gateway to the fabled gold fields three hundred miles inland through nearly impassable mountains, raging rivers and forbidding virgin forests.

In the midst of this tangle of desperate humanity, Matt is elbowing his way through the crowd frantically looking for Jeremiah's nephew.

After a few minutes of struggle, Matt sees a red and white barber pole on a building four doors away. A large wooden sign announces DR. JASPER'S TONSORIAL ARTS AND PAINLESS DENTISTRY CLINIC. TEETH PULLED ONE DOLLAR EACH.

MATT

This must be the place.

Matt studies the sign for a moment, climbs the few steps from the muddy street below and enters the building.

INT. BARBER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Matt is greeted in the shabby room by a blood-curdling scream from behind a curtain. An unfortunate PATIENT bolts through the curtains, holding his bloodied jaw, screaming in pain. Matt opens the door for the man.

PATIENT

(screaming on his way out)  
You're nothing but a dangerous  
charlatan.

Matt shuts the door behind him to be met by JASPER SHADBOLT wearing a bloodied apron. He's carrying what appears to be a Medieval implement of torture. His stained jumble of crooked teeth match his slicked down hair parted in the middle. A huge waxed handlebar mustache barely conceals his hare-lip.

JASPER

Well, there goes another satisfied customer. And what can I do for you my good fellow? Haircut? Ten cents. Tooth pulled perhaps? Just one dollar.

Matt stays by the door.

MATT

No, nothing for me thanks.

JASPER

Are you looking for a randy young lady then?

MATT

No. I'm Matt Jessop.

JASPER

Matt Jessop. Oh. You must be brother to Ben Jessop out of Missouri.

MATT

I am.

JASPER

I served with Ben in Colonel Alonzo Slayback's Lancers. Good soldier. Too bad he got mustered out for raping and pillaging. I did all the hair cutting and leg chopping for the outfit.

MATT

Your Uncle Nehemiah told me you ran into Ben here a while back.

JASPER

Dear Uncle Nehemiah told you that did he? How is the old bugger?

Jasper sits in his barber chair to chat.

MATT

Last I saw he had a dreadfully sore jaw. I'm looking for my family. He said you might know where they went.

JASPER

Really? He must have a bad tooth. Come to think of it, I don't quite remember seeing Ben. Memory's a little faulty of late.

Matt, exasperated digs in his pocket pulls out a gold coin and tosses it toward Jasper who easily catches it.

MATT

How's your memory now?

JASPER

Oh yes, I recall now. Saw him and a whole passel of folks come through. His Pa was with him. As I recollect a couple of ladies and some little sprouts were in tow. He didn't remember me. I tried to talk with him but four hard cases with him shoved me aside. Un-neighborly if you ask me.

MATT

Do you know where they were going?

JASPER

Nope. Least not for a certainty. I know they boarded a supply barge headed north. I figured they were looking for gold. Big strike up in the Cariboo. That's about all I can tell you.

Jasper continually flips the coin in the air.

MATT

I'm obliged.

JASPER

Don't mention it. If you're heading up there, that's mighty wild country. Ain't much law to help you neither.

MATT  
I'll keep that in mind.

Matt opens the door to leave.

JASPER  
Say. Are you sure you don't want a  
tooth pulled? Since you're a friend  
of my uncle's I'll do it for fifty  
cents and throw in the haircut too.

Matt shakes his head No, closes the door and heads into the  
bustling street.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Matt starts to walk away before bumping head-on into Quinn  
dressed in rococo finery befitting a fop of the court of Sun  
King Louis the Fourteenth. Matt doesn't recognize him at  
first as he tries to go around him.

MATT  
Pardon me.

Matt squints and takes a closer look.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Quinn? Quinn Skinner? That you?

QUINN  
That's me. Yes sir.

MATT  
What in hell are you doing here  
gussied up like that? You join the  
Cooper and Bailey Circus or  
something?

QUINN  
No sir. After I made my way here I  
fell into an opportunity due to the  
misfortune of a local hooligan.

MATT  
And what opportunity might that be?

QUINN  
I'm providing lonely menfolk with  
the loving attention of Madam Belle  
and her pulchritudinous ladies.

Matt ponders the implications.

MATT

You mean you're a ...

QUINN

Yep. An entrepreneur.

MATT

Weren't you going to be a parson or some such?

QUINN

I took a detour.

MATT

Some detour.

QUINN

You look a little peaked. How about a snort of Old Orchard. Seattle's finest groggery is just around the corner.

MATT

Will they let you in?

QUINN

It's a free country. Besides, a Louisiana black man runs it. He mightn't let you in. Besides, I find my customers there and I even got me a tab at the bar.

INT. CURLY WOLF SALOON - MOMENTS LATER

A cross-section of humanity has jammed into the elegant saloon creating a deafening din. From the crowded bar, RUBY, a brassy waitress with flaming red hair and a raunchy demeanor, sashays toward them. A huge smile suddenly explodes from her cherry red lips as she recognize Quinn.

RUBY

Well, if it ain't Lucky Quinn himself. Haven't seen you around lately.

QUINN

Why Ruby girl. You're lookin' smart as cream gravy darlin'.

RUBY

If I'm looking so smart why haven't you brought me any business?

Ruby turns her attention to Matt.

RUBY (CONT'D)  
 Say, who's your friend, Quinn?  
 Maybe he'd like something other  
 than a drink.

MATT  
 My name's Matt. A drink will do.

QUINN  
 How about fetching us a bottle of  
 your famous Kentucky bourbon. Put  
 it on my tab.

Ruby bursts out laughing.

QUINN (CONT'D)  
 What's so amusing?

Gesturing with her thumb toward the bar.

RUBY  
 What's so amusing is the boss said  
 your tab is finito. Gone. No more.  
 You ain't paid him in a month.

Matt fishes around his pants pocket and takes out a coin. He tosses it on the table. Ruby grabs it.

QUINN  
 Business has been slow. He knows  
 I'm good for it.

MATT  
 That's alright Miss.

QUINN  
 No, that's not alright miss.

Matt tries to calm him down as Ruby walks away toward the bar. The men watch her at the bar talking with DAVENPORT the saloon owner and bartender who is emphatically shaking his head. He hands her a bottle and two glass after Ruby hands him the coin. She returns with the bottle and places it on the table.

RUBY  
 He wanted me to tell you not to  
 leave without settling up. Oh. And  
 somebody is looking to beef you.

Matt pours a couple of drinks.

QUINN

Whoever would want to do me harm?

The men pick up their glasses. Matt knocks his drink back while Quinn salutes Ruby and starts to drink.

RUBY

How about Luther Schwein for one?  
And his boys, of course. That makes  
four.

Quinn nervously gulps down his drink. Matt pours another.

QUINN

He's locked up in Leavenworth for a  
long stretch isn't he?

RUBY

He's unlocked now.

QUINN

So soon?

RUBY

They say he was too mean for prison  
so they let him out for good  
behavior or something about two  
weeks ago just to get rid of him.  
It was either that or hang him.

QUINN

Well, San Quentin is a long way  
away.

MATT

Who is this Luther Schwein dude?

QUINN

He ain't no dude. He's the meanest  
son of a bitch in the Northwest. He  
rode with Boone Helm Plummer in '64  
up in Montana until the vigilantes  
hung them. Schwein got away and  
ended up here.

MATT

I heard Boone's name before.

QUINN

It's said he was known to  
cannibalize his victims. Luther's  
just as ornery.

MATT

What would make a man like that?

RUBY

His Daddy raised him with the hogs.

MATT

What?

RUBY

Yep. He slept with them, ate with them and god knows what else until the day he turned twelve.

MATT

What happened when he turned twelve?

RUBY

The way I heard the story he waylaid his Pappy near the sty, strung him up like a slaughter hog, butchered him with a hatchet and fed him to the pigs. Folks say he has a way with pigs. He can get them to do almost anything.

MATT

(to Quinn)

That would make for a mean fella I reckon. What does he have to do with you?

Ruby butts in.

RUBY

I'll tell you what he has to do with Mister Quinn here. He sweet-talked Madame Belle and her lovely ladies to work with him after Luther got in trouble and was dispatched off to prison, that's what. They were Luther's meal tickets.

Ruby flips her ample behind at the pair as she heads for another table.

MATT

Maybe you should have stuck with your Bible thumping business?

QUINN

I can't spread the word if I starve to death, now can I?

MATT

Maybe not. But being a whoremaster doesn't appear to offer much of a future either.

QUINN

Now don't you go calling them ladies whores. They might play a little loose at times but they're good women. I been teaching them God's word.

MATT

What does God's word say about you taking money from whores?

QUINN

The Lord works in mysterious ways.

MATT

And so do you. Seems you're walking both sides of the street and are fast running out of sidewalk.

Matt fills up the glasses. Both men are getting a bit of a glow on. Matt raises his glass to propose a toast.

QUINN

Here's to Luther's ladies. God bless 'em.

EXT. CURLY WOLF SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Four men shove their way through the crowd led by LUTHER SCHWEIN. Luther is carrying a wicked looking hatchet. His piebald left eye bulges out of its socket and stares off to in all directions like a chameleon.

His teeth are crooked and leaning in several directions. A bowler hat hangs precariously on his head almost overwhelmed by an unruly mop of matted grey-black hair.

With him are BUNK SKATES the runt of the litter at 4'11" but dangerously adept with a knife and a garrote rope; ORLEY COOMBS, a bulldog of a man built like a packing crate and STOVER BOLT an older guy with part of a straggly grey beard and a scar that runs north from his chin to the top of his head.

They say he fared badly and lost part of his beard after running afoul of some Mescalero Apache warriors in Oklahoma. Folks say he tried to cheat them out of their horses and the chief's daughter.

EXT. CURLY WOLF SALOON ENTRANCE

The men pause at the door surveying the scene inside.

LUTHER  
Do you see the sumabitch?

ORLEY  
(stretching on tiptoes to  
peer over the swinging  
doors)  
Nope.

LUTHER  
Ya know what he looks like don't  
ya?

ORLEY  
Nope.

Luther shoves him back away from the door when Bunk volunteers.

BUNK  
I'll look.

LUTHER  
No. You're too short.

BUNK  
I'll get on Orley's shoulders.

LUTHER  
This ain't no circus act you fool.

Stover interrupts.

STOVER  
Why don't we just open the door? I  
seen him sashaying around town  
before. I'll look.

Stover steps into the room, scans the scene and finally spots Quinn and Matt at a far corner table.

INT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS QUINN'S POV

QUINN  
(looking toward the door)  
Damn.

MATT  
What?

QUINN  
I just saw Stover Bolt.

MATT  
Who?

QUINN  
Stover Bolt. One of Schwein's men.

EXT. CURLY WOLF SALOON

Stover comes out.

LUTHER  
Well?

STOVER  
Well what?

LUTHER  
Is he in there damnit?

STOVER  
Ya. He's all duded up like a banty  
rooster. Drinking with another  
fella.

INT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS QUINN'S POV

The gang bursts through the doors sending patrons scattering, tables flying and creating general mayhem. The women run screaming from the room except for Ruby feigning disinterest.

They rush toward the table just as Matt and Quinn jump up to face them, scattering the table and chairs around them. Luther and his gang stop a few feet away. Luther raises his hatchet chest high. The blade gleams razor sharp.

LUTHER  
So you're the great Quinn Skinner I  
heard so much about. Don't you cut  
a swell jib in all that finery.

(MORE)

LUTHER (CONT'D)

I'll try not to mess it up too much  
when I kill ya.

Matt interrupts.

MATT

Now retreat a little, mister. We  
ain't asking for trouble.

LUTHER

Who in hell are you?

MATT

I'm an acquaintance of this  
gentleman.

LUTHER

That so? Well mister acquaintance  
of this gentleman, I reckon I get  
to lop off two heads today.

Luther and his cohorts laugh. Luther raises the hatchet and advances toward Matt and Quinn who back up a few paces. The metallic click of the hammers of a shotgun being cocked stops Luther dead in his tracks.

Luther turns his head just enough to look down the huge barrels of Davenport's double-barrel shotgun a few inches from his face.

DAVENPORT

There won't be no killing here  
today Luther, unless its me who's  
doing it.

LUTHER

You're making a serious error in  
choosing your friends Davenport.

DAVENPORT

They're not my friends and I'll  
risk it.

LUTHER

Why are you siding with this four  
flusher?

DAVENPORT

He owes me a honking big tab and I  
want him to live long enough to  
settle up. You can kill him anytime  
after he does.

From the sidelines Bunk is quietly edging up behind Davenport from Ruby's POV. He pulls a Bowie knife to stab him in the back.

Ruby takes a large tray she's holding and throws it Frisbee-like at Bunk hitting him in the head. The blow sends him and the tray crashing to the floor. Davenport looks back at the fallen thug and winks at Ruby.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

You should keep your boys in check Luther. Not to mention that little stump of a man.

LUTHER

You black bastard.

DAVENPORT

You shouldn't call folks names, Luther. It's rude.

Davenport smacks him across the side of the head with his shotgun barrel. Luther, bleeding from the ear and cheek barely winces.

Bending over, Luther suddenly whirls around, catching Davenport off guard with a punch to the gut. All hell breaks loose as Davenport counters with a head butt and a knee to the groin, causing Luther to drop his hatchet.

Davenport's customers come to his rescue attacking the toughs who give back as good as they get. As the brawl escalates chairs are broken, tables overturned and general mayhem reigns.

Some men at the bar stand back drinking straight from their bottles enjoying the spectacle. Between punches Davenport takes a moment to glare at them.

DAVENPORT (CONT'D)

(shouting)

I'm keeping track of those drinks.

Matt and Quinn fight their way out to the street while Luther is otherwise occupied.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Bodies crash through the saloon windows and out the doors as the fight continues in the street. Matt and Quinn run past the mayhem and head down the street to the sheriff's office. They pound on the door.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE

SHERIFF RUPERT DUMFEY is snoozing with his feet on the desk. The pounding rouses him out of it and he jumps to his feet.

DUMFEY  
Hell and damnation what the...?

Dumfey dashes to the door and throws it open.

DUMFEY (CONT'D)  
What's going on?

INT./ EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

MATT  
There's a riot at the Curly Wolf.

QUINN  
Ya. Luther Schwein and his men stormed the place. I think it's a robbery.

DUMFEY  
Damn. Is he back in town?

Dumfey re-enters his office and quickly emerges with a revolver. He runs up the street. Two DEPUTIES join him both carrying rifles.

MATT  
I'm getting out of here.

QUINN  
I ain't letting that no account lunatic put the run on me.

MATT  
I am.

QUINN  
Where you going?

MATT  
North.

QUINN  
North? Nothing up there but snow and moose droppings.

MATT  
I think I might find my young ones there.

EXT. CURLY WOLF SALOON - LATER

Luther and his cohorts have been beaten up and are seated on the sidewalk propped up against the saloon wall.

Men are milling around the front of the saloon holding Luther and his defiant, rowdy boys at bay with Davenport's shotgun. The sheriff and his deputies approach them with their rifles.

DUMFEY

Luther, you were told to stay away from Seattle, saloons and shady ladies to qualify for your release. You're prison bound, now boy.

LUTHER

No I ain't.

The four men stand up. Luther exposing a long-barrel revolver from under his coat and moves toward the sheriff. The deputies cock their rifle hammers back and take aim at the men. The sheriff follows suit with his pistol.

DUMFEY

Now Luther where's your hog sense? You know better than that.

Luther hands the pistol over to the sheriff and the quartet, swearing and making threats with each step, is marched hands in the air toward the jail.

DUMFEY V.O.

You boys will have a hog killing of a time complements of the City of Seattle until we can ship you back to Quentin.

LUTHER V.O.

But we didn't do nothing. It was those other fellows. But don't you fret none. I'll get them.

EXT. CATTLE SCOW - DAYS LATER

Matt and Quinn are leaning against the scow's rail looking out over the coastline going by. Lowing of cattle is constant in the background. Quinn has shed his fancy duds for more appropriate clothing.

QUINN

Is this the best you could do?

MATT

They had room for the horses.

QUINN

It stinks.

MATT

You got mighty uppity since leaving Christian County. You could've stayed in Seattle.

QUINN

I was hankering for a change.

They move to the bow of the boat and sit on some rigging.

MATT

How did you end up here anyhow? I figured you'd take the sheriff's job in Christian County.

QUINN

So did I, but the townsfolk had a different idea. They resented me taking sides with you especially after I shot Pinkney Skaggs twice in the legs and calling the town a public privy. It was a poor career choice.

They stand up and move on to the scow's railing where they watch the bow cut through the water.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Fell left me a little fresh start money. I guess he knew what would happen after he was gone. He probably only hired me to rankle the town anyhow. He wasn't all bad. Just mostly.

They go back and sit down.

QUINN (CONT'D)

Black folks didn't like my Indian blood. Indian folks didn't like my black blood. And white folk, well they didn't like either. Once I figured that out, I rode the rails to California then earned my keep swabbing decks on a passenger ship to Seattle. Had to save my money.

MATT

You did better than me. I rode out. Worked pushing cattle along the way. Took awhile though but I got to be a pretty good at playing poker.

QUINN

Changed your mind about settling things with your kin?

MATT

Nope.

QUINN

I figured you gave up on that notion.

MATT

I did at first. But Annie's letters cured my thinking on that one. I got to figuring that I couldn't be there for her when she needed me most. The least I can do now is to make things up to the young ones, I suppose.

QUINN

If you find 'em, then what?

MATT

Introduce myself.

QUINN

They'll know you.

MATT

Maybe.

QUINN

What about your folks?

MATT

I got some serious accounts to settle with them and my brother older Ben. My sister-in-law too.

QUINN

It ain't easy killing your own. It's one thing to beef a bad man. Another to spill the blood of your kin.

MATT  
I'll do what's needed. Any killing  
will be up to them.

QUINN  
Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord.  
Remember that.

MATT  
You're a fine one to be quoting  
scripture to me.

Matt stands up.

MATT (CONT'D)  
We'll be docking soon. I better  
check my plunder and see to the  
horses.

INT. HOLDING PEN - EVENING

Matt is checking his saddle and his pack. Quinn is sitting on  
a hay bale chewing on a straw.

QUINN  
I'm going with you.

MATT  
Nope.

QUINN  
Why not?

MATT  
What I gotta do ain't fit for man  
or beast let alone a Bible thumping  
whoremaster.

QUINN  
I got nothing better to do.

MATT  
You'll have to pay your own way.

QUINN  
I can do that.

MATT  
I only got two horses.

QUINN  
What about the mare I lent you?

MATT

She wore out on the trail.

Matt stops preparing his horses and moves closer to Quinn.

MATT (CONT'D)

If you're coming with me, I just got one thing to tell you. Don't go on like you're a man of the cloth. You ain't one, you never will be one and if that ain't enough, I don't like you being one.

QUINN

Hallelujah, brother. Hallelujah.

EXT. VANCOUVER PORT - MORNING

The scow steams into port and is moored to the dock. Crews scurry around preparing to unload. Matt and Quinn make their way down the gangplank amidst a throng of excited travelers.

Signs direct them to the official entry point, a small, stark uninviting office, except for a hug Union Jack flag on the wall, manned by a lone officious British BORDER AGENT in a shabby blue uniform.

AGENT

Welcome to the Territory of British Columbia gents. What's your business here?

MATT

Came to visit my family.

AGENT

And where are they?

MATT

The Cariboo.

AGENT

The Cariboo eh? Well, if your real intention is to moil for gold, it mostly petered out a few years back and you have to have a wife. If you're wintering up there take warm clothes. If you don't have money, go home.

MATT

Yes, sir.

AGENT  
You're not wanted by the law are  
you?

MATT  
No sir.

AGENT  
On your way.

Turning his attention to Quinn, he gives him a quizzical once  
over.

AGENT (CONT'D)  
What's your business here?

QUINN  
I'm a travelling preacher of the  
good book looking to save souls in  
this fine corner of the Lord's  
creation.

Matt turns around in disbelief at what he is hearing. Shaking  
his head in dismay he walks away.

AGENT  
You don't look much like a  
preacher. Where's your collar?

QUINN  
In my kit with my bible. I only  
wear it in the pulpit or at  
funerals.

AGENT  
What about weddings?

QUINN  
Oh, those too. Praise the Lord.

AGENT  
What's your name Mister Preacher?

QUINN  
Quinn Skinner. The Reverend Quinn  
Skinner.

AGENT  
Is that your real name?

QUINN  
That's it. Mostly.

AGENT

Mostly?

QUINN

It's really Half-n-Half Skinner.

AGENT

Half-and-half what?

QUINN

My dear departed mother was Shawnee they tell me. My daddy was a free mulatto man. He was so free he freed himself from my mother as soon as I was born.

AGENT

So where did Quinn come from?

QUINN

A fine preacher man who used to bring gifts and money to my mother. I took his name. I liked it.

AGENT

Can you guess about how long you're staying?

QUINN

As long as I can find sinners, I'll be here.

AGENT

You'll be staying quite awhile then. On your way.

Quinn jauntily swaggers away smiling.

QUINN

God bless you sir.

The agent just shakes his head.

AGENT

(muttering)

They all end up here.

EXT. STOCKYARDS - LATER

Matt is cinching down the pack on one of his horses. The other is already saddled as Quinn joins him.

MATT  
Where's your horse?

QUINN  
Ain't got one yet.

Matt looks around.

MATT  
See that stable yonder? They got  
stock for sale.

Quinn wanders off.

EXT. STOCKYARD - LATER

Matt is sitting on the fence waiting. Quinn rounds the corner riding a run down mule. Matt chuckles.

MATT  
That's some horse.

QUINN  
I'm trying to conserve my financial  
resources. She's all I could get  
for a good price. It was either her  
or a camel.

MATT  
A camel?

QUINN  
Seems the miners been using them  
for pack animals. Ugly critters.

MATT  
You'd look right at home riding  
one.

EXT. RIVERBOAT LANDING - DAYS LATER

Matt and Quinn have disembarked with their animals ready to leave. Quinn pulls his mule toward Matt. The horses try to kick it.

QUINN  
I been pondering the notion of  
trading my mule for your pack  
horse. The mule is more suited to  
packing.

MATT

What did you pay for that broken  
down plug anyhow?

QUINN

She ain't broken down. She's sound  
as a Tennessee Walker. I paid seven  
dollars for her.

MATT

Is that a fact? Seven dollars?

QUINN

A little less, maybe. I got a  
preacher's discount.

MATT

Preacher's discount? How much did  
you really pay?

QUINN

Five dollars they were asking. I  
prayed them down to \$3.75.

MATT

My mare is worth fifteen. Give me  
ten dollars and the rangy mule and  
she's yours.

QUINN

I gave you my mare back in  
Christian Mills. What about that?  
You didn't pay me for her. Let's  
call it an even trade.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - FIVE DAYS LATER - MORNING

It's a good day. Matt and Quinn are riding a narrow, rocky  
mountain trail. Matt is leading his mule. Quinn brings up the  
rear singing a poor man's version of That Old Rugged Cross.  
Annoyed, Matt keeps looking back. Finally he stops.

MATT

Would you stop that infernal  
caterwauling. You're scaring the  
mule.

Both men dismount on the trail. On one side are sheer rock  
mountain walls on the other a precipitous drop to a raging  
river. Matt grabs Quinn by the jacket and pulls him close.  
Quinn nervously glances down at the river.

QUINN

This ain't no place for fisticuffs,  
brother.

Matt is ready to punch him.

MATT

I ain't your brother. Hell, I ain't  
sure I'm even your friend even if  
you saved my skin twice. And when  
are you going to get it through  
your thick skull that you ain't no  
damned preacher?

Matt releases Quinn and shoves him back toward his horse.

MATT (CONT'D)

Now mount up before I take that  
Bible of yours and beat you  
senseless with it. At the next town  
we go our separate ways.

QUINN

Amen, brother.

EXT. DESERT CAMPSITE - EVENING

The pair is camped by a small creek. A fire is burning. A coffee pot hangs over it. A pan of beans heats up in the embers. Matt and Quinn have their bedrolls on either side of the fire. The mule and horses are tethered to a dead tree nearby.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Both men are sound asleep snoring. The fire has died out. They are surrounded by Luther and his three men, Bunk, Stover and Orley.

LUTHER

Well, well. Lookee here. If it  
ain't Mister Fancy Pants and his  
acquaintance.

The group dismount and kick at them until they wake up. Stover lashes out kicking Matt in the jaw. Matt rolls over trying to protect himself. They haul them to their feet.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Been hoping to see you boys again.  
We figured you'd be around here.

(MORE)

LUTHER (CONT'D)  
You shinned out of Seattle without  
so much as a see ya later.

ORLEY  
You hurt our feelings.

QUINN  
He didn't have anything to do with  
this.

LUTHER  
Too bad. He should choose better  
friends.

BUNK  
Ya. Too bad.

LUTHER  
Shut up, Skates.

The three thugs grab the Matt and Quinn and tie their hands  
behind their backs. Luther sticks his face into theirs.

LUTHER (CONT'D)  
I'm gonna kill you boys real slow.

BUNK  
Real slow.

LUTHER  
I told you to shut up. He heard me.

MATT  
How'd you find us?

Luther delivers a hard slap to Quinn's face.

LUTHER  
Your dentist friend said you  
boarded the Beaver and headed  
north. Guess you boys didn't figure  
we could outsmart you by coming up  
through the Okanagan to get the  
jump on you. Well Luther bested you  
this time.

EXT. CAMPSITE - SUNRISE

Matt and Quinn are hanging by their ankles from a thick  
branch on the dead tree. They have been stripped naked. The  
horses, mule and their gear are gone.

They are bloodied and bruised from a vicious beating. They are both unconscious. Matt stirs first and winces in pain. He surveys the landscape upside down through swollen eyes. Quinn regains consciousness shortly after. He looks over at Matt.

QUINN

Sorry my troubles landed on you.

No response. Matt slips back into unconsciousness.

EXT. CAMPSITE - MIDDAY

The desert sun is blazing down on them. Matt is turning lobster red, Quinn not so much. The blood on them has dried. Both are now awake, struggling to survive.

QUINN

I didn't expect to die like this.

MATT

I didn't expect to die at all.

EXT. DESERT COUNTRY - CONTINUOUS

Luther and his men are riding a wagon trail through the sage brush leading Matt and Quinn's horses and the packed mule.

LUTHER

Guess those fellas are about cooked by now.

STOVER

Ya, they'd be redder than that band of Indians we saw awhile back. They'll fix 'em good if they stumble on 'em.

ORLEY

At least one of them will be redder.

LUTHER

Ya. Reminded me of my pappy's hog farm. If old Boone was here he'd be lusting after one of their leg bones for lunch.

They all laugh.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER

As they hang in the sun, a hunting party of local Indians dressed in traditional cowboy garb, except for the feathers in their hat bands, ride up to them and circle the tree.

The Indians look at them with a certain curiosity then start to laugh, pointing at their nakedness and gesturing. Two Indian men ride over to them, unsheathing their knives as they approach.

MATT

This is gonna hurt.

QUINN

Lord help us.

The two Indian cowboys suddenly smile at Matt and Quinn as they cut them down.

FIRST INDIAN COWBOY

Lucky for you we're rounding up our cattle out here. Not many people come through these parts anymore.

Others ride over and throw blankets over them. The barely conscious pair offer only weak smiles in return. They are tied on separate travois, covered with deer and moose hides and hauled away.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - DAYS LATER

Matt and Quinn are being bathed by four NATIVE WOMEN. Their wounds have been dressed and the blood wiped from their skin. Their faces are still bruised and swollen in places.

The rough wooden door is suddenly thrown open by HUATA, the tribe's medicine woman and ranch business manager. Huata has a commanding demeanor. She fashionably dressed in a buckskin skirt and a trade-cloth blouse.

Her long, black hair is pulled tightly back and a colorful bandana is wrapped around her head. She is carrying a basket of plants and ointments. When the four women see her they quickly leave the bunkhouse. Huata positions herself on her knees, between their two bunk beds. She rummages around in her basket.

HUATA

It appears you two made somebody very angry. Are you claim jumpers?

Matt and Quinn look surprised at her her impeccable English.

MATT  
You speak English?

HUATA  
English, French, Latin and Shuswap.

QUINN  
You a doctor?

HUATA  
Indian style. I'm a medicine woman.  
I studied medicine and business at  
Oxford in England but I was needed  
here. Now let me do my work.

Huata removes the bandages from their heads and applies ointments to their wounds. She hands them two, corked clay bottles.

HUATA (CONT'D)  
Take a few sips from these every  
few hours. Don't drink them all at  
once or you could die.

QUINN  
What's in them?

HUATA  
Secret roots and herbs.

While Huata is packing up her basket CHIEF LOUIS, a well-dressed middle-aged man enters along with SIWILI, a younger Indian man, in traditional cowboy gear.

SIWILI  
I'm Siwili. My friends call me  
Willie. I work at the next ranch.  
Chief Louis wanted to meet you. He  
couldn't figure out how you got  
yourselves in such a condition.

Matt glances over at Quinn then back to the chief.

MATT  
It wasn't easy.

CHIEF LOUIS  
It is good our people found you.

MATT  
We are appreciative.

QUINN  
Yes, we are very grateful.

CHIEF LOUIS  
(to Siwili)  
This dark one is strange.

QUINN  
I'm part black and part Shawnee.  
I'm a preacher.

HUATA  
I would not boast about being a  
preacher.

CHIEF LOUIS  
Christian preachers have not helped  
our people. They are stealing our  
children and taking them to schools  
where they do injurious things to  
them a father would not do. Our  
language and the knowledge of our  
elders they want to banish from the  
land and take our ranches. They  
killed off the buffalo and now they  
want to do the same to all of us.  
They call us savages and they laugh  
at our ways. The Creator will exact  
justice on them in a time of His  
own choosing. They have much to  
answer for.

MATT  
I am truly sorry that your people  
have had to suffer these  
afflictions.

Chief Louis turns to leave.

CHIEF LOUIS  
Greed and hate are terrible  
diseases. You are welcome here  
until you have healed.

Matt and Quinn think about the chief's words and turn back to  
Huata.

QUINN  
Makes you wonder who the savages  
really are in this country.

MATT  
Ya.

HUATA  
Remember you must take your  
medicines until they are finished.

EXT. BUNKHOUSE - DAYS LATER

Matt and Quinn are sitting outside taking in the sunshine. Siwili comes into view, leading their horses and fully packed mule. Several smiling Indian riders are with him. Siwili rides up to them and dismounts.

SIWILI

Chief Louis sent seven riders to convince the men you described to return your possessions.

Matt and Quinn appear confused.

SIWILI (CONT'D)

We tracked them to Cayoosh Creek and waited for the stars to shine. Then we negotiated their return. Chief Louis taught us that negotiation is good.

Matt and Quinn look over the Indians. Three of them are wearing the belts and knives and guns belonging to Luther's three men. One is wearing Luther's bowler hat at a jaunty angle. Siwili notices the pair looking at the booty.

SIWILI (CONT'D)

They gave us gifts. The Evil Eye One ran away leaving his friends and most of his clothes.

INDIAN WITH BOWLER

Except for his trapdoor longjohns and his boots. I would have liked his boots.

INDIAN COWBOY

He took his guns too. He headed north.

Quinn reaches into his pants pocket and retrieves a gold watch and fob. He hands it to Siwili.

QUINN

Willie, please give this to Chief Louis. It's a gift.

MATT

Thank you for everything.

SIWILI  
 (declines the gift)  
 Chief Louie does not need a gift of  
 time or gold. He prefers a gift of  
 friendship.

Two days later.

EXT. DEADMAN FLATS - NIGHT

Matt and Quinn ride into the desert town prospering from a boom fueled by the expanding land rush further north. The law appears as absent as drunken prospectors and wild cowboys are plentiful, roaming the streets drinking, fighting and firing off their revolvers. Matt and Quinn pass the Deadman Saloon.

MATT  
 Let's have a guzzle.

QUINN  
 We should find us a room first.

MATT  
 Two rooms.

They pause, surveying the street. At the end of town is a two-story building. A faded sign proclaims it is the home of AUNT MAUDE'S BOARDING HOUSE. Matt and Quinn ride up to the building, tether their horses to a hitching rail and go to the front door.

EXT. BOARDINGHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Matt knocks on the door. Nothing. He knocks again.

WOMAN (V.O.)  
 I'm coming. I'm coming. Keep your  
 wits about ya.

The door opens as plump, middle aged AUNT MAUDE carrying a lantern pokes her apple-dumpling face out the door. She momentarily stares at their bruised faces.

AUNT MAUDE  
 Aren't you two a sight to behold.  
 I'm full up.

She starts to close the door. Quinn jams his foot against it.

QUINN

Ma'am. We been three weeks on the trail. For our pains we been held up, beat up, hung up and cut up. Now we gotta hole up awhile.

MATT

We can pay.

Aunt Maude sizes them up more closely.

AUNT MAUDE

You ain't miners are you?

QUINN

No ma'am. I'm a travelling preacher and my friend here is a detective.

Aunt Maude gives Quinn a closer, suspicious look.

AUNT MAUDE

A preacher you say. Where's your collar... and a detective? Well, don't that beat all.

QUINN

It's in my pack.

The trio stand there in an uncomfortable silence for a moment as Aunt Maude mulls it over.

AUNT MAUDE

I only got but one room left. Two cots in it though. Fifty cents a night, in advance, for the pair of you. Breakfast is at seven thirty sharp and you have to be out by nine.

Matt and Quinn enter, the door closes.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE

Maude leads them up a staircase.

AUNT MAUDE V.O.

Now there'll be no smoking, drinking, loose women or loud farting in the room. It wakes the other guests. If you need an extra night, pay me in advance in the morning.

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Aunt Maude, seated at the head of the table, holds court over her charges at breakfast. A young native girl, CHASTITY, is serving the five men and two women at the table. She pays special attention to Quinn.

Apart from Matt and Quinn, there are one local businessman, LAWSON TIPPIN, two cowboys, CLYDE and PICKETT, and a young school teacher, GLADYS.

AUNT MAUDE

So Mister Jessop, you are a detective.

Pickett and Clyde perk up looking anxiously around.

PICKETT

You a Pinkerton man?

MATT

No.

Matt returns to his food as he gives Quinn a hard look.

CLYDE

Government man then?

MATT

No.

CLYDE

Then what the hell are ya?

Aunt Maude interjects.

AUNT MAUDE

Now you boys leave Mister Jessop to enjoy his breakfast. He's just come through a harrowing journey.

MATT

I'm seeking the whereabouts of my kin from Missouri.

PICKETT

War refugees I suspect.

CLYDE

And what might their names be?

Clyde and Pickett glance at one another.

MATT

Same as mine I reckon.

PICKETT

Ain't nobody with that moniker in these parts.

Matt returns to his breakfast.

AUNT MAUDE

I neglected to mention. We should all be on our best behavior. We have a travelling preacher in our midst.

Matt chokes on that one.

AUNT MAUDE (CONT'D)

Mister Skinner here is a man of the cloth.

PICKETT

Ya don't look much like a preacher, boy. Ya look like some kind of mixed blood who should be dining with his own kind. Or might that be kinds?

Quinn doesn't respond but glares at Pickett. Quinn starts to stand up but Matt reaches out and holds him back.

AUNT MAUDE

Now gentlemen, everyone is welcome at Aunt Maude's. Everyone that is but miners and the Chinese.

Tippin throws his napkin on his plate.

TIPPIN

You will excuse me but I must open my place of business. Ladies. Gentlemen.

Gladys also timidly gets up.

GLADYS

I must also be going. Excuse me.

Both Gladys and Tippin take their leave.

AUNT MAUDE

Chastity. Will you please fetch more coffee.

CHASTITY

Yes ma'am.

As she passes Pickett he grabs her by the arm.

PICKETT

Now that's a right civilized name  
for an Indian girl ain't it?

Quinn stands up.

QUINN

Everybody knows who's civilized at  
this table and who isn't. Now let  
her go.

PICKETT

Or what?

The sound of a pistol being cocked under the table stops  
Pickett cold.

MATT

Or I'll splatter your innards all  
over this nice lady's dining room.

INT. ADJACENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Pickett and Clyde leave the room but stop to eavesdrop when  
Matt speaks to Aunt Maude.

MATT

Do you know if there is a Jessop  
family in the district? They might  
have moved in within the past year  
or so. Probably have three young  
children with them and a couple of  
women.

AUNT MAUDE

A lot of folks have passed through  
here Mister Jessop. I don't know of  
them myself but you might want to  
talk to CHARLIE HUDSON at the feed  
mill. That old gossip knows  
everybody's business. Wouldn't hurt  
to talk to SHERIFF SEEMES too.

EXT. ROOMING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Pickett and Clyde exit the door heading for the Livery  
Stable.

PICKETT (V.O.)  
We better get back.

CLYDE  
But I still got three dollars to spend.

PICKETT  
We'll be back in town real soon.

Pickett shoves Clyde toward the Livery Stable.

EXT. FEED MILL - LATER

Matt is talking with CHARLIE HUDSON, a rake thin sixty year old, in dusty overalls and well worn brimless cap on his head.

CHARLIE  
Seems like I recollect folks like that. From the south somewhere. Took over an old homestead about 10 miles northwest of here as the crow flies.

MATT  
Have you seen them of late?

CHARLIE  
Can't say as I have. Haven't seen much of them at all. Some of their hands have mile-wide mean streaks. You best stay away from them fellas. Even our so-called sheriff tippy-toes around them.

Charlie spits on the ground and takes a well-used rag from his back pocket and wipes his mouth.

CHARLIE ( (CONT'D)  
Excepting for a young lady.

MATT  
A young lady?

Charlie scratches his behind.

CHARLIE  
A handsome filly she is. Comes in a couple of times a month. Sometimes stops here to water her horse. Usually has a couple of ranch hands trailing her.

MATT

What's her name?

CHARLIE

Don't rightly know. She don't talk much. Tends to business with my misses up at the general store too. Has some little sprouts with her at times. That's about all I can say about her.

MATT

You say she goes to the general store?

CHARLIE

Yup. Don't know if BEULAH can tell ya much. Folks around here tend to stick pretty close to their own business.

MATT

I can tell.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - LATER

SHERIFF NERIUS SEEMES, is tall and slim with slicked down hair parted in the middle. A large mustache adorns his upper lip. He is hanging up wanted posters on a bulletin board.

DEPUTY JOHNNY MCKENZIE, a youngish man, heavy set and generally unkempt, is cleaning a rifle at his desk when Matt and Quinn enter. Seemes turns around to face them while Johnny stands up. Seemes looks them over for a moment.

SEEMES

What can I do for you gents?

Matt steps forward and shakes hands with the sheriff. Quinn extends his hand but Seemes ignores him.

MATT

I'm Matt Jessop and this is my partner Quinn Skinner.

SEEMES

Pull up a stump.

There's only one chair in front of his desk. Seemes sits on the corner of his desk. Quinn remains standing.

MATT

We're up from Missouri searching out my family. I think they might have settled in these parts a year or so back. My brother's name is Ben and my Pa's named Ezra. Last name Jessop.

Seemes rolls the end of his mustache while thinking about it.

SEEMES

No. Don't recollect anybody like that.

MATT

They might have three children with them, two boys and a little girl. Probably a couple of women. Maybe three or four hands too.

SEEMES

Sorry, can't help you. Could be they headed up to Williams Creek. Lots of gold found up there a few years back. Maybe you should try there.

Matt stands up and shakes hands with Seemes.

MATT

Thanks anyway.

Unexpectedly McKenzie enters the conversation.

MCKENZIE

Ya know Sheriff they sound like that bunch that settled at the old Spanish Lake Spread. Remember the Pinkerton men were asking about them?

SEEMES

That ain't them Johnny.

JOHNNY

But.

SEEMES

I said that ain't them.

Seemes takes his watch from his vest and checks the time.

SEEMES (CONT'D)

Time you started your rounds.

Johnny is perplexed but leaves anyway.

SEEMES (CONT'D)

Johnny's a good lad but he gets confused. Like I said, try Williams Creek. It's about a four day ride from here.

MATT

What did the Pinkerton folks want with them?

SEEMES

It had something to do with a lynching incident in Missouri I think they said. Seems they're wanted down there.

MATT

A lynching? When?

SEEMES

Not sure. Couple of years. I didn't know anything about the folks they were looking for.

MATT

Sheriff, why do I get the sense you're not being straight with me?

Sheriff Seemes loses his temper.

SEEMES

Why you two-bit saddle tramp. You come in here asking for help and then call me a liar. Who do you reckon you are?

Quinn intervenes.

QUINN

Look Sheriff I'm sure my friend here didn't mean it the way it come out.

SEEMES

You mind your business half....mister.

Seemes pushes Quinn back to address Matt.

SEEMES (CONT'D)

I'm protecting the citizens of this town.

(MORE)

SEEMES (CONT'D)

Vigilantism ain't tolerated here.  
You're in British Columbia  
territory now and I don't give a  
good goddamn what happened south of  
the border.

Seemes slams his fist on his desk. Matt and Quinn turn to  
leave. Seemes stops them

SEEMES (CONT'D)

One final matter. You Yanks like  
settling things with your guns. If  
you get involved in any gunplay in  
my town I'll lock you up. That is  
if you're not swinging from a rope  
before that. You war heroes bring  
trouble and I don't like it.  
Understand?

MATT

I understand. My experience showed  
me that when vigilantes run out of  
enemies they turn on their friends.  
Maybe you better think about that  
while you're protecting your  
citizens.

SEEMES

I don't need your advice. Now get  
the hell out of my office.

Seemes follows them to the door and slams it behind them.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

MATT

Williams Creek my ass.

QUINN

Do you figure they're here?

MATT

What do you think?

QUINN

Don't rightly know. But it's worth  
a gander.

INT. SALOON - NIGHT

Quinn is sitting alone at a table with a bottle and two  
glasses. Matt is going from table to table.

As he talks, the men at the tables shake their heads negatively and Matt moves on to the next. He returns to Quinn.

INT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Quinn pours Matt a stiff drink. Matt downs it. Quinn pours another.

MATT

Nobody knows nothing here.

QUINN

Could be they're fearful.

INT. SALOON ENTRANCE

Luther Schwein, looking like he lost a fight with a grizzly bear pokes his head through the swinging doors before coming in.

Dressed in a peculiar assortment of gender mismatched clothing he stands near the swinging doors and stares at the crowd staring back at him.

Carrying a sawed-off shotgun in his left hand he enters and slowly looks around and shouts out to the obviously intimidate bar crowd. No one dares laugh at Luther's bizarre fashion statement.

LUTHER

What the hell are you all looking at?

His right hand rests on a huge holstered revolver. He stomps over to the bar and talks to the bartender. The bartender points him toward Matt and Quinn's table where they're striving for invisibility.

INT. MATT AND QUINN'S TABLE - CONTINUOUS

MATT

Uh. Oh. Looks like he didn't leave the country.

QUINN

What the hell is he doing here?

MATT

Looking for you I reckon.

Quinn pushes himself back from the table as Luther approaches with a devilish grin on his face.

He takes a chair, turns it around and drapes himself over it, his shotgun resting on the chair back aimed at Quinn's chest.

QUINN

Somebody said they smelled you were back in town. Have a seat. Just direct that scattergun elsewhere.

Luther laughs, and places it in his lap.

LUTHER

How's that Mister Fancy Pants?

QUINN

Better. Like your wardrobe. What do you want?

LUTHER

(proudly)

Picked it all out myself at the clothesline haberdasher.

QUINN

What do you want?

Luther helps himself to a swig from the bottle.

LUTHER

Been lookin' for you boys. Your Indian friends said you survived our little reunion.

QUINN

We ain't interested in any more of you're little reunions.

LUTHER

We got unfinished business. I hate unfinished business. My boys were hoping to be here too but they got scared off over at Cayoosh Creek. Ran off naked as jaybirds. Headed south I reckon.

MATT

We were told you didn't make out much better.

QUINN

Sounds like we're even.

LUTHER

We'll be even when you're dead.

MATT

Only one problem with your figuring, friend.

LUTHER

And what might that be, friend?

MATT

There's two of us and only one of you. I think you should forget the past and move on now that you got clothes and firearms and such.

LUTHER

Until the past is fixed, a man can't move on, can he?

QUINN

Maybe this will convince you.

Quinn upends the table sending Luther to the floor. Matt, also taken by surprise, falls backward in his chair trying to get out of the way.

Luther fires the gun in the air. Bits of ceiling drop around them. Quinn jumps over the mess onto Luther landing a solid right to Luther's jaw sending.

The bartender rushes over with his own shotgun and points it at Quinn. Matt is now on his feet. Luther shakes off the punch rubbing his jaw as he gets to his feet his shotgun in his hands. The bartender swings his gun toward Luther.

BARTENDER

Go ahead mister.

Luther backs down.

LUTHER

Damned bartenders and their scatterguns.

MATT

We didn't invite this trouble.

BARTENDER

It don't matter a tinker's damn who brought it on. I can't let you bust up my place.

MATT

Nobody is going to bust up anything tonight.

BARTENDER

That might be true but all three of you can take your feud to the street. Now get.

Reluctantly Matt and Quinn leave with Luther following behind him. Matt stops and turns to the bartender.

MATT

How about replacing the bottle that was broke.

BARTENDER

You broke it. Buy another.

Reaching into his pocket Matt pulls out a coin and tosses it to the bartender who returns to the bar, grabs a bottle off the of a shelf and lobs to Matt.

LUTHER

You ain't gonna get a chance to finish it.

EXT. STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Luther is facing Matt and Quinn in the middle of the rutted street about ten paces apart. The darkness is penetrated by oil lamps on storefronts and from the windows of the saloon.

Luther has his right hand on his revolver, his shotgun is in his left, pointed at the ground. Matt and Quinn are about five paces apart facing Luther. Matt is holding his bottle.

MATT

Mind if I have a drink?

LUTHER

Go ahead. A dying man always gets a last wish.

MATT

What's your wish Luther?

Luther thinks a moment.

LUTHER

To see you two laid out in a couple of pine boxes. Cheap ones to boot.

Matt takes another drink. Matt smacks his lips at show how good it tastes.

MATT

Good whisky. Any other wishes?

LUTHER

I wouldn't mind a pull or two from that bottle of Red Eye.

Matt walks cautiously toward Luther who is suspicious. A few feet from Luther Matt stops. He tosses the bottle to Luther.

Pulling the cork out with his teeth, he takes a long swallow, replaces the cork before tossing the bottle back to Matt who backs away until he is in line with Quinn.

QUINN

We don't have to do this Luther.

LUTHER

Damned right we do. I'm a prideful man.

After silently staring at one another for a few more moments Luther suddenly shouts out.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Draw them sidearms you sons of bitches.

Luther tugs at his long-barreled pistol but it gets stuck in his holster. While he struggles with it, the gun fires and shoots him through the right foot. He screams in pain.

Matt and Quinn both have their guns drawn and are aiming them squarely at Luther as they advance toward him. Luther realizing he is beat drops the shotgun. Stoically he faces Matt and Quinn.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Well, what are you waiting for? You got me dead to rights, four ways to Sunday. Go ahead and shoot.

Quinn and Matt look at one another. Quinn holsters his revolver.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

What are you doing. I said shoot me. I'd sure as hell shoot you.

MATT

I say we shoot him.

QUINN  
I say we don't.

Matt and Quinn close the gap between them and Luther.

QUINN (CONT'D)  
We ain't going to shoot you Luther.  
I decided to forgive you.

LUTHER  
Forgive me? You can't do that.  
There's something powerful wrong  
with you, boy.

Luther shouts at the disappointed mob in front of the saloon that was hoping to see a killing.

LUTHER (CONT'D)  
Do you hear that? They's forgiving  
me.

MATT  
I ain't decided yet.

Luther focuses back on Quinn.

LUTHER  
You just can't do this.

QUINN  
Why not?

LUTHER  
It just ain't the human way, that's  
why not. I was fixing to kill you.  
Both of you. Besides, its  
embarrassing. Now go ahead and  
shoot. It's your duty.

Matt and Quinn take Luther by the arms. Quinn picks up his shotgun.

QUINN  
Let's get you to the doc's. Have  
that foot looked after.

They usher the protesting Luther away down the street.

LUTHER V.O.  
This just ain't right. You fellas  
are crazy. Just wait till I'm  
healed. You'll pay for this. You'll  
see. Nobody insults Luther Schwein  
and lives.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE

As the unlikely trio pass the sheriff's office, Seemes comes out and confronts them.

SEEMES

What's going on here?

MATT

Just an accident, sheriff. You can rest easy.

SEEMES

Well keep your accidents quiet. I run an orderly town here.

MATT

We can see that, Sheriff.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - MORNING

Matt is talking with Aunt Maude on the front porch. A woman wearing a sunbonnet that partially hides her face drives a buckboard past the boarding house. Pickett and Clyde follow her about 100 feet away.

Matt watches from the boarding house as the woman stops in front of the general store. She looks around warily before jumping down, tethering the horses and entering the store.

Pickett and Clyde tether their horses to a hitching rail in front of the haberdasher's shop on the opposite side of the street. They sit on a bench in front of the shop to watch the general store.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

On a hunch, Matt makes his way up the alley to the back of the general store. He waits a few moments before quietly trying the door when a delivery wagon rounds the corner and heads toward the rear of the general store. Matt quickly ducks behind crates stacked near the back wall.

Delivery driver, ANGUS SHELBY, stops his rig near the back steps, gathers some paperwork and knocks on the door.

DELIVERY MAN

Mrs. Hudson. It's Cariboo Freight.

MRS. HUDSON, a spinsterish looking woman with a severe bun on top of her head, opens the door.

MRS. HUDSON

It's about time you got here Mister Shelby. I've been waiting three weeks for this order.

SHELBY

Sorry ma'am but everything's slow coming out of Seattle these days. New border rules you know.

MRS. HUDSON

Let's not dawdle Mister Shelby, I need those goods on my shelves.

SHELBY

Yes, ma'am.

EXT. DELIVERY WAGON

Several boxes are unloaded for the general store and taken inside.

INT. GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

From Matt's position at the back door, Shelby is handing the weigh bills to Mrs. Hudson who carefully looks them over.

MRS. HUDSON

It seems the dainties are missing Mister Shelby.

SHELBY

(embarrassed)

I wouldn't know ma'am. You'll have to take that up with your supplier. I'm.....

MRS. HUDSON

I know, I know, you're just the delivery man.

SHELBY

Yes, ma'am.

Shelby exits as Annie's sister Sarah, who has not been recognized by Matt until he slips unseen into the store, is selecting a number of items and depositing them on the counter under the watchful gaze of Mrs. Hudson.

MRS. HUDSON

Will that be all my dear?

SARAH

Yes. Please make up the bill.

While the bill is being tallied Sarah goes to look at the dresses. Matt quietly sidles up to her, pokes his gun in her ribs. And whispers in her ear.

MATT

You make a ruckus and I'll kill you where you stand Sarah. Now you step along quietly with me.

Terrified, Sarah complies, but Mrs. Hudson is suspicious as the pair leaves out the back door.

EXT. BACK OF GENERAL STORE - CONTINUOUS

Matt angrily pulls a very frightened Sarah to his side shoving the gun barrel under her chin. Mrs. Hudson sticks her head out the door surprising Matt.

MATT

Get back inside.

Mrs. Hudson quickly ducks back inside to the sound of the door locking.

MATT (CONT'D)

So help me God I should kill you right now for what you did to Annie. She was your only sister with three children to care for. How could you?

Sarah starts to cry.

SARAH

I didn't do anything to Annie. I couldn't hurt her.

EXT. STOREFRONT STREET - CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Hudson runs out the door and looks frantically around. Clyde and Pickett see her and run over, their guns drawn.

MRS. HUDSON

Please help! At the back. A man with a gun. He's got Miss Sarah.

Pickett rushes into the store knocking over racks of clothes while he heads for the back door. Clyde dashes around to the alley.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

MATT

Then why did you run with them?

SARAH

They said they'd kill the children  
if I didn't go with them. They  
needed somebody to look after them.

MATT

Where are they?

Sarah struggles to get matt to release his grip. He eases up a bit.

SARAH

At the Triple J.

Clyde quietly comes around the building and gets the draw on Matt.

CLYDE

Let her go mister.

Simultaneously Pickett kicks the back door open and comes out with his gun aimed at Matt's head.

PICKETT

Drop that belly gun.

Matt shoves Sarah toward Clyde taking him off guard but Pickett gets a wild shot off and grazes Matt's left shoulder sending him spinning to the ground. Pickett ducks back inside.

Matt gets a quick shot off at Pickett but hits the door frame. Meanwhile Clyde and Sarah are still tangled up allowing Matt to get a shot at Clyde, who drops his pistol.

Sarah breaks free and runs screaming between buildings to the street. Clyde dives to the ground retrieving his pistol and manages to get to his knees and get a bead on Matt who dives for cover just as Clyde fires off a round.

Matt shoots back scoring a hit to Clyde's chest. Clyde staggers off between buildings to the street where he collapses.

EXT. STOREFRONT - CONTINUOUS

Sarah climbs on her buckboard and is frantically whipping her spooked team trying to turn the wagon around as Matt, holding his shoulder, rushes into the street. He grabs one horse's bridle, the animal rears throwing him to the ground.

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

Sarah drives straight past Matt heading down the street where she manages to turn the team around whipping them into a gallop.

EXT. STOREFRONT - STREET (CONTINUOUS)

Pickett rushes out the door, fires a few wild shots at Matt who finds cover under a freight wagon. Pickett continues down to the haberdashery, unties his horse and leaps into the saddle.

Matt is back on his feet as Sarah's buckboard thunders down the street toward him. Pickett fires another shot but misses Matt who returns fire.

From the sidelines a young BOY chases after a TODDLER wandering into the buckboard's path. Matt responds by running out to intercept the boys giving Pickett a clear shot at him. Pickett fires and his bullet grazes Matt's scalp sending him sprawling to the ground.

EXT. BUCKBOARD - CONTINUOUS

Sarah sees the two boys just in time to slow the rig and veer around them and Matt who makes eye-contact with Sarah before passing out as she drives by. Sarah continues out of town with Pickett.

INT. JAIL CELL - LATER

Matt comes to moaning. His head and shoulder are bandaged. His shirt is in tatters. Sheriff Seemes, is looking in on him with Quinn, Aunt Maude and McKenzie looking on from behind.

AUNT MAUDE

I'm certain he is well enough to  
stay at my place.

QUINN

Good thought.

Matt slowly sits up, looking around confused before cradling his head in his hands.

SEEMES

Mister, I warned you about gunplay  
in my town. You got a heap of  
explaining to do before you go  
anywhere.

EXT. JAIL - EVENING

The door opens and Quinn helps Matt onto the sidewalk. Seemes holds the door open.

SEEMES

While I can sympathize with you to  
some degree Mister Jessop I  
wouldn't be leaving town just yet.  
The lady could press charges  
against you. And stay away from the  
Circle J. Those boys out there  
don't mess around.

MATT

Yes, sir.

The sheriff starts to close the door then quickly reopens it.

SEEMES

And don't forget you owe the doc  
seven dollars and eighteen cents  
for all the stitching and wrapping  
and such.

QUINN

Do you think he'll give us a  
preacher's discount?

Seemes slams the door shut, as Matt and Quinn slowly walk toward the boarding house.

QUINN V.O.

There's something very wrong with  
this town.

MATT V.O.

Well it's really growing on me.

INT. TRIPLE J RANCH HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Ben has Sarah by the arm yelling at her and roughing her up.

BEN

You just had to go there didn't you? You had to see him.

SARAH

It wasn't like that.

BEN

How was it then? Next thing that traitor will show up at our door. What's the matter with you?

Ben shoves Sarah across the room toward the three children two of whom are crying. The oldest boy defiantly steps forward.

COLE

Leave her alone you bully.

Ben pauses a moment, takes his large leather belt from around his waist, then rushes toward the boy his hand raised to hit him.

BEN

Raise your voice to me will ya.

Cole steps back as Sarah shoves a chair in his path sending him tumbling to the floor knocking his head on a table.

SARAH

Get out. Run.

The children scatter and make it out the back door before Ben can get to his feet.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The three children run as fast as they can toward the barn.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

EZRA is sitting in his rocker in the corner near the fireplace, oblivious to the commotion, while Ben, his forehead gashed, struggles to get to his feet. Dazed, he looks around, then makes for the kitchen, walking past the old man.

EZRA

(whispering)

Let it be.

Ben stops and returns to face Ezra.

BEN  
What? What did you say?

Ezra retreats into silence. Ben makes for the kitchen, blood staining his face.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Crazy old coot.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ben stomps into the kitchen. AVIE JESSOP is shielding Sarah.

AVIE  
Let her be, Ben.

Ben grabs Ma's shoulder to move her out of the way. Sarah shrinks back in fear.

BEN  
I'll let her be alright.

Ma produces an iron skillet and raises it to threaten Ben.

MA  
So help me Ben, I'll splatter what  
few brains you have all over hell's  
half acre if you touch her again.

Ben retreats to a sideboard stocked with liquor.

BEN  
(muttering)  
Damned women.

Sara slips out the back door. Ben pours himself a stiff drink, downs it and pours another. Ma puts the skillet on the stove, pours herself a coffee and sits down at the table cradling the cup in both hands.

AVIE  
Ever since the trouble with Annie  
we been going to hell in a  
handbasket.

Ben comes to the table a drink in one hand and a bottle in the other. He sits down opposite Ma.

BEN  
What happened with Annie weren't  
our fault. Had Matt not betrayed us  
it would never have come about.

AVIE

You're pappy taught you well.

BEN

Pa taught us to be loyal.

Ben downs his drink and pours another.

AVIE

He taught you to hate and hate is what you believe in. It was hate what allowed you to murder your own, not loyalty. What breed of loyalty do you call that?

BEN

It wasn't as if they was blood kin?

Ma suddenly swipes Ben's bottle off the table sending it crashing to the floor. She stands up.

AVIE

Where's your loyalty going to get you now? The past has come calling and Judgment Day's upon us. You and your hate brought this on our heads.

BEN

You shouldn't fret. You didn't do nothin'.

Avie sits back down. Ben gets up and fetches another bottle but places it between his feet to keep it out of Avie's reach.

AVIE

I could have brought you fools to your senses but I let it go thinking it was all whisky talk. I'm just as much to blame as them lynching cowards you linked to.

Ben pours himself another drink.

BEN

They were patriots Ma. Patriots.

AVIE

I guess we'll soon see what Matt thinks of your patriots.

BEN

If he shows up here I'll just have to kill him won't I?

AVIE

You can't kill a man twice, Ben. What you did to Matt was enough to extinguish his soul. Like your Pa out there. Bitterness took his heart and now it's took his mind. Pa's already dead. He just don't know it. Without his family, Matt likely doesn't care if he lives or dies.

BEN

Well I ain't ready to lie down.

Ben gets up and leaves the room.

EXT. CORRAL - EVENING

Pickett is working a horse in the corral while LEO a ranch hand is watching through the rough pole fence. Ben walks over and shouts over at Pickett.

BEN

Pickett. Get over here.

Pickett rides over and dismounts.

BEN (CONT'D)

Get the boy's together. We got business in town tomorrow night.

PICKETT

Problem is Frank and the Indian boys are driving a herd up to the north fork. Ambrose is riding fence. Could be a couple of days to round 'em up.

BEN

Get them here as quick as you can.

PICKETT

Right.

Ben returns to the house.

PICKETT (CONT'D)

Leo, you chase down the Walker brothers. I'll find Ambrose.

INT. PARLOR - LATER

Sarah cautiously enters the room. Ben is feeling amorous. He staggers to his feet and tries to grab Sarah's arm as she walks by. She manages to evade him. He goes after her again.

BEN

Come on Missy. It's about time you and me got together. A woman your age needs a good man's attention.

SARAH

I'll let you know when I find one.

BEN

Don't you be righteous with me. Not after what I done for you these past years.

SARAH

You haven't done anything for me I couldn't do for myself. Now leave me be. You're drunk.

Ben manages to catch her in a bear hug. He buries his face in her neck while he clumsily tries to grope under her skirts. Sarah screams out while furiously punching at him.

SARAH (CONT'D)

You filthy bastard. Let me go.

He grabs her by the hair, twists her down, slaps her face then follows through with a punch to the side of the head. Sarah sinks to the floor. Ben hauls her to her feet and tries to kiss her. She squirms violently.

INT. STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

Avie comes rushing down the stairs her skirts raised up in one hand and a ceramic chamber pot in the other.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Ben forces Sarah to the floor in a tangle of arms and legs. Ben lands on top of her pinning her arms against the floor. Avie runs up behind him shattering the potty over his head knocking him cold.

AVIE

I'm takin's a real dislike to that boy.

Sarah shoves him off her and gets up. She kicks him in the crotch out of sheer anger.

SARAH

That pig will never touch me again like that.

AVIE

You best leave the house, child, before he comes to.

SARAH

I'm going to town. Can you look after the children?

AVIE

I'll keep them in my room.

EXT. ROOMING HOUSE - NIGHT

Sarah, sporting a cut lip and bruised cheek, knocks on the rooming house door. Maude opens it. Looks at her then at the wagon behind her in the street.

SARAH

I have to see Matt.

AUNT MAUDE

No women allowed in the men's rooms.

SARAH

I'm his sister-in-law.

AUNT MAUDE

Seems he didn't fare so well the last time you visited with him. He can't have visitors. He's healing.

SARAH

Please. I must see him.

Aunt Maude looks past her as she opens the door and stands aside.

AUNT MAUDE

Don't upset him. It's bad for the constitution.

INT. ROOMING HOUSE

Sarah enters the room. Matt is being tended to by Chastity as Quinn looks on. Matt's eyes are closed. Quinn steps in between Matt and Sarah before she can reach his bed.

QUINN

He lost a heap of blood.

Sarah looks quizzically in Quinn's face.

SARAH

I know you. You're that mixed-breed deputy from Christian Mills.

QUINN

That's us alright.

SARAH

I must speak with Matt.

QUINN

Not certain he can take much more of your brand of speaking.

Matt opens his eyes. He looks weakly around the room. Sees Sarah.

MATT

It's okay.

Quinn steps aside. Sarah approaches the bed. Chastity joins Quinn and they both leave the room.

MATT (CONT'D)

Come to finish the job?

Sarah ignores the remark. Sits in a chair beside him. He edges away from her.

SARAH

Matt. We must talk.

MATT

You did your talking in Christian Mills and again in town here the other day.

SARAH

I was afraid. I thought you were going to kill me.

MATT

I was.

SARAH

You don't understand what really happened.

MATT

I understand just fine. Annie wrote and told me what was going on. How Ben and Pa tried to violate her. How you never came back after she told you about it. She said you abandoned her just when she needed you most. And I really could understand when I found Annie and her kin hanging in the main square of that accursed town.

Sarah starts crying burying her face in her hands.

MATT (CONT'D)

But you know what she said in a letter to me? A letter I didn't get until after I got home and she was already dead.

Matt suddenly reaches out and grabs her by the hair yanking her head up. In the low light of a candle he can't see the cuts and bruises.

MATT (CONT'D)

Now you look at me when I tell you this. In spite of it all, Annie's last words to me were that she loved you and hoped you would come back. How could you have done that to your own sister?

Matt releases her and sinks back in his pillow.

MATT (CONT'D)

Now get out before I do something we'll both regret.

Sarah's anger flares as she jumps up, shoves the chair back and reaches for Matt's revolver hanging in its holster near the bed. She grabs the gun, throws it on the bed, hitting Matt causing him to wince.

SARAH

You can go ahead and kill me but you're going to hear me out Matt Jessop.

Sarah moves close to the bed.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I went with your family for the sake of your children. Ben threatened to kill them unless I went with them. He thought I was going to marry him.

Matt interrupts.

MATT

And did you?

SARAH

No. After Annie told them she was going to tell you about what they did, I was confined to the house. I couldn't leave. Do you know how I have grieved for my sister all this time? Do you know how I grieved for you knowing the severity of the wounds they inflicted on you. Don't you think we haven't all been wounded in one way or another over Annie's killing? Your Pa has lost his senses, your Ma is consumed with guilt and your brother is drowning in a river of whiskey and hate. It's only because of the children that I haven't taken my own life. Isn't that enough?

MATT

No.

Aunt Maude, Quinn and Chastity burst into the room.

SARAH

Get out. Get out all of you.

CHASTITY

We heard yelling.

SARAH

Well you might hear more. Now get back on the other side of the door and listen from there.

The trio back out of the room and close the door.

SARAH (CONT'D)

And one more thing Matt Jessop. I'm sick and tired of you accusing me of something I am incapable of doing.

MATT

Are you done?

SARAH

Yes, I'm done.

Sarah reaches down and pulls his hand holding the revolver, grasps the barrel and holds it to her chest. Matt looks puzzled.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Now Matt Jessop you go ahead and pull that trigger because my life isn't worth living anyhow. But you better think about your children and what you'll tell them because I'm their mother now. I kept your memory alive with them. And they know Annie and they know you. So go ahead and pull that trigger, because I just don't care anymore.

Matt let's the gun fall to his mattress. He closes his eyes and tears flow freely. Sarah kneels down beside the bed and cradles Matt's head against her chest. They are both weeping.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Sarah is sitting in the chair beside the bed. Matt is looking at her in a new way. Matt reaches up to touch her cheek. Gently she keeps his hand away.

MATT

What happened to you Sarah?

Sarah looks away.

SARAH

Ben was being Ben. He tried to bed me. Your Ma calmed him down with a thunder mug.

MATT

I still have to settle accounts with them over Annie.

SARAH

Matt, please stay away from them.  
Just take the children and go  
somewhere safe. That's what Annie  
would want.

Sarah steps back from the bed.

SARAH (CONT'D)

The Good Lord has settled accounts  
with your Pa. Ben is overdue for  
his.

MATT

It's not good enough.

Sarah approaches the bed, strokes Matt's ruffled hair then  
gives him a kiss on the forehead.

SARAH

I had best get back. If Ben finds  
me missing I don't know what he  
might do.

Sarah exits the room.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - NIGHT

Sarah carefully enters the parlor. A low light burns in the  
kitchen. Sarah enters to find Ma sitting cradling a cup in  
both hands in the near darkness.

SARAH

Where's Ben?

AVIE

He went to sleep it off in the  
bunkhouse.

Sarah enters and sits down across from Ma.

SARAH

I saw Matt.

AVIE

I figured you would.

SARAH

He's overtaken with hate and bent  
on revenge.

AVIE

I reckon he's entitled. Did he ask about me?

SARAH

No.

Avie just nods her head and takes a deep breath.

AVIE

You know Sarah, at the time I thought a woman couldn't do anything about the mistakes being made by their husbands. But seeing how you are now, I know I was wrong. I should have stood up for what was right. I'll enter into judgment for that I suppose.

Sarah stands beside her and puts her arm across her shoulder.

SARAH

You can't blame yourself Ma. It was Ben and Pa who were responsible. Matt will understand.

Ma stands up and gives Sarah a long, hard hug. She kisses her cheek.

AVIE

I just can't face him Sarah. Not after what passed amongst us.

SARAH

But he's your son. I'm certain he still loves you.

AVIE

I think you best scat. I'm off to bed now.

Avie cups Sarah's face in her hands and kisses her forehead one more time.

SARAH

I'm not leaving you alone. Keep the children with you.

Avie takes her lantern up the dark stairs with her. Sarah watches as she goes.

## EXT. DEADMAN MAIN STREET - LATE NIGHT

Deadman is all but deserted. A few lights flicker here and there. A sudden breeze drives a lone tumbleweed down the centre of the main street. A dog bays at the moon in the distance.

Johnny is checking doors along one side of the street. He enters a space between buildings to check the back alley disappearing from sight.

## EXT. BOARDING HOUSE

Five hooded men carrying torches ride up to Aunt Maude's front yard. A sixth man drives a buckboard under a large tree with branches overhanging the street.

He tosses a single noose over the largest branch, jumps down and secures it to the tree trunk.

BEN  
Fetch them here.

DRIVER  
We need another noose.

BEN  
One will do.

## INT. BEDROOM

Quinn is awakened by the dancing light from flames. He wakes Matt up as he heads for the window opening it cautiously he looks out to see the five riders. Matt joins him.

QUINN  
This looks familiar.

MATT  
What do you want?

FIRST RIDER  
We want you and your black friend  
to come down. We got business with  
you.

MATT  
I'd rather do it from here.

FIRST RIDER  
You fellas come on down or we'll  
burn the place to the ground.

MATT

That's you ain't it Ben?

BEN

Ya, it's me little brother. You Should've let it be. The past is the past you can't fix it.

MATT

Maybe. But this ain't Missouri.

BEN

Everywhere is Missouri. Depends what you make of it.

MATT

There's law here Ben.

BEN

You think so?

EXT. FAR END OF STREET - CONTINUOUS

Johnny emerges from the alley and sees the torches burning. Confused he starts up the street toward the lights, changes his mind and heads the other way.

Ben and his men take off their hoods and throw them to the ground.

BEN

Don't need these now.

EXT. SHERIFF'S HOME

Johnny runs up to the front door and pounds on it. No answer. Pounds some more.

INT. SHERIFF'S HOME

Sheriff Seemes, pulling on his pants, races down the stairs and throws open the front door.

INT./EXT. DOORWAY

SEEMES

Johnny? What do you want this time of night?

Johnny's out of breath but points toward the main street.

JOHNNY  
We got trouble Sheriff.

SEEMES  
Trouble? What kind of trouble.

JOHNNY  
Men. Men with torches. They're hooded too.

SEEMES  
Hooded? You go back to the office. I'll be right there. And stay away from them, you hear.

Johnny rushes off down the street.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The front door opens as Maude and Chastity emerge onto the veranda each carrying an oil lamp.

MAUDE  
What do you men want? Get out of here before I call the sheriff.

BEN  
Why don't you ladies join us instead. Get down here.

Ben points his gun at them cocking the hammer back. The pair reluctantly step off the veranda.

BEN (CONT'D)  
What do you say Matt?

MATT  
I say you're crazy if you think you can get away with this.

BEN  
I ain't talking no more. You get down here right now or we'll string these two up. Somebody's going to hang tonight and I don't care who.

Riders two and three get off their horses, enter the yard, grab hold of Maude and Chastity and shove them toward the buckboard. Matt gives in.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Johnny is taking a rifle out of a cabinet as Seemes enters.

SEEMES

Put it away.

Confused, Johnny hesitates.

JOHNNY

But.

SEEMES

We ain't interfering.

JOHNNY

Ain't interfering? There's a lynching going on and we ain't interfering?

Seemes sits down at this desk.

SEEMES

I have an agreement with those men.

JOHNNY

An agreement? What kind of agreement?

SEEMES

When they came to town I agreed to leave them alone if they left the town alone. It's as simple as that.

JOHNNY

But they ain't leaving the town alone. They're out there now.

Seemes jumps out of his chair in anger and rushes over to Johnny grabbing him by the jacket.

SEEMES

Damnit. Don't you understand? Those men are vigilantes. The worst kind. They don't care about anyone or anything and we ain't going up against them. Now put that rifle away before someone gets hurt.

JOHNNY

Someone is about to get hurt. If you ain't interested in stopping them, I am.

Seemes lunges for the rifle.

SEEMES

Give me that.

Johnny reacts by smacking the rifle butt into Seemes' gut knocking him to the floor. Johnny rushes out the door.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE

Matt and Quinn are tied back to back with a single noose around their necks standing near the back of the buckboard. The teamster is in the driver's seat, reins in one hand and whip in the other.

BEN

What have you got to say now little brother? I got it all.

MATT

You got nothing.

BEN

Nothing? I got your whelps, I got Sarah, I got a ranch and I got you right where I want you.

MATT

You got nothing. The children will always be mine and they'll always hate you. They know what you did to their mother. Sarah hates you already. Your whole life is a lie.

BEN

This is all your fault. You should've stuck with family. You're nothing but a traitor in our eyes. What you're about to get, you deserve. Time to get this done.

QUINN

Don't I get a last wish?

BEN

What do you think this is? A church meeting.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Luther limps into view with the help of a single crutch, from a building on the opposite side of the street making his way to the front of the buckboard. He looks around, belches and rubs his belly.

LUTHER

You got a lynching happening here?  
Well whoopee.

BEN

Get out of here you old fart.

LUTHER

I come to watch. These boys have  
been in my sights for quite a  
while. Mind if I whip the team?

BEN

Go ahead.

Leo, the driver, hands the whip to Luther who smiles and examines it.

JOHNNY O.S.

You hold it right there.

Johnny has a rifle aimed at Ben. Ben laughs.

BEN

What you gonna do Johnny? Kill us  
all?

JOHNNY

If I have to. Now let those men go.

Sheriff Seemes shows up and stands behind Johnny.

SEEMES

Put the rifle down Johnny.

JOHNNY

No sir.

Seemes moves in on Johnny trying to wrestle the rifle away. The rifle discharges shooting Seemes in the chest. As Johnny is turning back to the vigilantes Ben draws his pistol and shoots Johnny. Johnny falls to the ground.

Luther takes advantage of the confusion whips the horses into motion while throwing his hatchet cutting the rope on the tree. The wagon leaves as Matt and Quinn fall to the ground struggling to free themselves.

LEO  
You crazy bastard.

Pickett pulls his revolver just as his horse rears.

LUTHER  
Crazy bastard am I?

Luther pulls a shotgun from under his coat blasting Leo.

LUTHER (CONT'D)  
Now this is what I call a lynching.

Johnny recovers, pulls his revolver taking a wild shot at Ben while seeking cover but, misses but knocks Frank Walker out of his saddle. Maude and Chastity rush over to Matt and Quinn who are struggling to get their hands free.

Johnny throws his rifle over to Matt who shoots Billy Walker in the knee. Ben takes a shot at Matt. Matt is about to fire back, has Ben in his sights but can't bring himself to shoot. Ben laughs.

BEN  
Let's go boys. You were lucky this time little brother. You won't be the next time.

The remaining vigilantes gallop full tilt out of town after scooping Billy up, defiantly whooping and a hollering and firing their pistols into the air.

Quinn has sheriff Seemes propped up. Blood trickles from his mouth. Matt stands over him. Maude and Chastity are tending to Charlie's wounds.

SEEMES  
I reckoned I could keep the peace if I made a deal with the devil. I was sure proved wrong tonight wasn't I?

MATT  
We can't be right all the time. You did what you thought best. Now you rest easy, the Doc is coming.

SEEMES  
The doc can't help me. The only thing I ask is you don't let those fellas get away with what they done.

MATT  
I'll sure try.

SEEMES  
One more thing.

MATT  
What is it?

SEEMES  
Tell my wife I love her.

Seemes head drops back in death. Matt lays him gently on the ground.

MATT  
I will.

The doctor arrives, checks Seemes for a pulse.

DOCTOR  
He's gone.

Quinn solemnly removes his hat. Doc moves on to Johnny quickly examining his shoulder wound

DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
You'll live. Let's go. We have a bullet to dig out of you.

Maude and Chastity help Johnnie to his feet, marching him off down the street. As Matt and Quinn watch them go, Luther hobbles over coiling up the hanging rope, a sly grin on his face.

LUTHER  
This might come in handy.

QUINN  
I thought you come to kill us.

LUTHER  
I did. And I still might.

MATT  
We were dead for sure. We're in your debt.

LUTHER  
I don't want anybody in my debt. Might have to collect. The way I figure it, we's about dead even. Reckon you'll be seeing to those vigilante boys?

QUINN  
Likely will.

Matt and Quinn extend their hands to Luther who ignores them.

LUTHER  
I never shake another man's hand.  
Always feel like I have to count my  
fingers afterward.

Instead, he gives each of them a huge bear hug. He limps away laughing on his single crutch.

INT. STABLE - EARLY NEXT MORNING

Matt is finishing saddling his horse. He sticks a rifle in the saddle scabbard. Taking the reins he leads the horse outside and checks the cinch one more time. He is interrupted by Quinn, carrying a rifle, who comes into view from behind him.

QUINN  
I thought you might like some  
company.

Luther comes up behind Quinn.

LUTHER  
A man alone don't stand much of a  
chance.

MATT  
I can't accept your help.

LUTHER  
Too proud?

QUINN  
Pride comes before a fall says the  
good book.

MATT  
This is a family matter.

QUINN  
So?

MATT  
Families don't like meddling by  
outsiders.

QUINN

Your brother doesn't see it that way. Besides, you and me almost died together twice. I figure that makes us family.

MATT

Maybe so. But I still can't let you risk your life over this. Just stay here.

Matt mounts up.

LUTHER

It's a free country. Reckon I can go where I please.

MATT

Not if you're dead.

Matt spurs his horse and rides off.

LUTHER

Now there goes a mule stubborn man.

QUINN

Wonder where he's picking that up?

INT. RANCH HOUSE KITCHEN - THE NEXT DAY

Avie and Sarah are finishing up breakfast. Eli is helping Pa eat his food. Bethany, Cole, Ben, and Pickett, Ambrose Burgee and Billy Walker, whose knee is bandaged, are all done. Sarah comes over with more coffee.

BEN

That's enough. You three take your positions like we figured.

Ma comes to the table.

MA

What are you bunch planning?

BEN

We got us a little welcoming committee for that brother of mine.

Ben turns to his men.

BEN (CONT'D)

Get going and stay out of sight.

The men disperse.

AVIE

Sarah, you take the children to my room.

BEN

They stay right here, with Uncle Ben. Sarah stays too.

AVIE

You wouldn't.

BEN

I'll do what I gotta do.

EZRA

(mumbling to himself)  
Let it be.

Ben ignores him but gives him a quizzical look. He calls Eli and Cole over to him.

BEN

You kids take your grandpa to his rocking chair and keep him quiet.

The two boys, each taking an arm, help the old man up and lead him to the parlor.

AVIE

I can't let you do this Ben.

BEN

You shut up and stay out of my way old woman. Everybody into the parlor.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Sarah and the children are seated on a couch, Pa is in his chair while Avie leans against the doorjamb between the kitchen and parlor. Ben is pacing back and forth. He goes to a cabinet grabs a revolver from a drawer, takes it to Pa, kneeling beside him he places it in his hand.

BEN

Now Pa. Matt is coming.

EZRA

Matt?

BEN

Yes, Matt. He's coming to kill us  
for what you done.

EZRA

Matt's coming? Is the war over?

BEN

To kill us, Pa. Now when he comes  
through that door, you aim real  
good and shoot him. Do you  
understand?

Ezra looks blankly at Ben and nods.

EZRA

Shoot Matt? The war's over?

Ben stands up with a broad grin on his face.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

In the distance Matt, on horseback, slowly approaches the ranch stopping and unlatching the front gate. He pushes it open with his foot. To his left, Ambrose Burgee is lunging a young stallion in a corral.

Billy Walker, perched on hay bales watches. Next to him is a shotgun. To his right is a driving shed sheltering buggies and assorted farm equipment.

Matt stops for a moment, before riding closer to the corral where he dismounts. He stays beside his horse. Burgee stops lunging the horse, unhooks the lunge line and coils it up. He walks slowly inside the corral toward Matt.

Behind Burgee a rifle barrel pokes out through the half-moon window door of an outdoor privy.

BURGEE

You made your last mistake coming  
here.

MATT

Maybe. But I'm here to see Ben not  
you. It's best if you back away.

BURGEE

He's in the house. Why don't you  
just amble over there and knock on  
the door.

MATT

So you can backshoot me?

Behind Matt the sound of the metallic click of a rifle being cocked brings a smile to Burgee's face.

PICKETT O.C.

No, so I can backshoot you.

Matt half turns to see Pickett and TWO INDIAN RANCH HANDS standing behind him about twenty feet away near the driving shed. A tense silence erupts. Pickett raises his rifle taking aim directly at Matt.

PICKETT

I'll get extra pay for this.

The look on Pickett's face suddenly changes. He discharges his rifle into the air as he falls face first to the ground a hatchet protruding from the back of his head. Using his makeshift crutch Luther hobbles out from behind a nearby woodpile.

LUTHER

Who said ya need to bring a gun to a gunfight?

The two ranch hands cautiously reach for their pistols while Luther pulls his long-barrel revolver from its holster.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

(to the ranch hands)

You boys want some of this?

FIRST RANCH HAND

No sir. We just work here.

SECOND RANCH HAND

We're not gunfighters. Here, take our pistols. We don't need them.

EXT. CORRAL

While Matt is distracted with the action behind him Burgee seizes the moment, draws his pistol and fires a wild shot at Matt who dives for cover behind the hay bales.

A shot rings out from the outhouse hitting Burgee in the shoulder. Burgee fires two shots back into the outhouse and the rifle disappears.

Matt meanwhile gets the drop on Burgee who fires a shot at Matt.

Matt steps out and takes one shot at Burgee hitting him in the chest. Frightened, Billy, who has been immobile, during the action, gets the drop on Matt with his shotgun but hesitates to fire. Matt is aiming his pistol at Billy. Luther hobbles into the scene, his pistol in hand.

LUTHER

Now boy, you fish or cut bait with that scatter gun. We ain't got all day.

Billy looks nervously at both men, pointing the shotgun from one to another.

MATT

Come on kid. This ain't a good day for a young man to die.

Billy starts to put the gun down, but Burgee gets him with a wild shot before dying. Billy tumbles backwards over the hay bales. Luther limps over to Matt.

MATT (CONT'D)

I told you this was my fight.

LUTHER

Ya. I could see you had it going your way okay.

MATT

Where's Quinn?

LUTHER

In the crapper.

MATT

Shit!

LUTHER

That's right.

Matt dashes off toward the outhouse.

EXT. OUTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Matt throws the outhouse door open making a face at the stench at the ripe air. Quinn is sitting on the two-holer his rifle propped up beside him. He's holding a wound in his side.

MATT

Is this the best hiding place you could find?

QUINN

I had to go.

Matt helps him out laying him down near the end of the corral. Luther joins them.

MATT

I have to get my young ones.

Matt walks alone toward the house stopping a few feet from the front door.

MATT (CONT'D)

Come on out, Ben. It's time to finish this.

BEN V.O.

You come in, little brother. We got a welcome hone party brewing here.

Matt walks slowly up to the front door, takes hold of the latch and starts to raise it up. Sensing a trap he stops and walks around to the back of the house.

EXT. BACK OF HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Matt comes around the back to a staircase leading to the second floor.

INT. PARLOR./EXT MONTAGE

Ben is looking out the front window from behind a curtain. Ezra is in his chair in sight of the front door, holding his pistol. Sarah, the children and Avie are crouched down behind the settee in the parlor in view of the staircase.

BEN

Where the hell is he?

He turns to Sarah.

BEN (CONT'D)

You stay put.

Ben slinks out the front door hunting for Matt.

INT. TOP OF THE STAIRS /EXT MONTAGE.

Matt appears at the top of the stairs starting to make his way down. Sarah spots him at the halfway point.

Matt puts his finger to his lips asking for quiet. The three children see him. The boys keep quiet but little Bethany reacts.

BETHANY

Is that my daddy?

Sarah clamps her hand gently over Bethany's mouth

SARAH

Yes. But you have to be quiet.

Matt motions them to go. Sarah picks up Bethany leading the children on their hands and knees toward the kitchen.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE BACK DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Sarah and the kids rush out of the back door and race toward the barn.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE FRONT

Ben hears the back door slam shut and rushes to the side of the house just in time to catch a glimpse of Sarah and the children on the run. He fires two quick shots missing them.

EXT. WOODPILE - CONTINUOUS

Sarah and the kids find cover behind the woodpile before dashing to the barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Sarah and the kids close the door behind them before climbing a ladder into the loft.

EXT. CORRAL - CONTINUOUS

Luther is tending to Quinn. They see Sarah and the kids enter the barn.

QUINN

You can't help me anymore. Best you get over there with the children. That crazy bastard just might get to them.

LUTHER  
Now you watch your language  
preacher.

Luther hobbles away toward the barn.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

The barn doors creak open and Luther enters, closing them behind him. As his eyes adjust to the dim light a bit of hay falls down from the loft. Luther makes his way to a ladder up to the loft and starts climbing.

INT. LOFT

Sarah and the children are huddled in the far corner of the loft. Sarah looks frantically around before spotting a pitchfork. She stumbles through the hay to reach it, just as Luther steps into the loft. Sarah points the fork at him.

SARAH  
Please, don't come any closer.

Luther chuckles and raises his hands in the air.

LUTHER  
Missy, I ain't here to do no harm  
to you or your young'uns. That  
preacher fella asked me to watch  
over you.

SARAH  
It appears you could do with some  
watching over yourself.

Luther slowly turns away and sits down at the edge of the loft. He draws out his pistol and places it in his lap with his back to Sarah and the children.

LUTHER  
No one's gonna bother you while old  
Luther is on duty.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE FRONT

Ben is crouched down near the parlor window. He peers inside.

INT. PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Matt, his gun drawn, is at the bottom of the staircase heading toward the parlor. Ben smashes the window taking a quick shot at Matt grazing his gun hand. Matt sinks to his knees, and drops the gun grabbing his hand in pain. Ben grins triumphantly.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Matt gets to his feet and hobbles to the kitchen. His back to the wall he waits for a Ben to come looking for him.

BEN  
Got ya, little brother.

Ezra looks on blankly in silence, his revolver still in his hand.

BEN (CONT'D)  
Don't shoot Pa. I'm comin' in.

Ben smashes through the door. He empties his gun shooting toward the staircase but Matt is not there.

EZRA  
Matt? Is that you?

BEN  
No. Pa. It's me Ben.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Reloading his pistol Ben sees drops of blood leading from the staircase to the kitchen that is divided by a wall from the living room.

BEN  
Pa. Matt's hiding near the kitchen.  
Shoot the wall Pa. Shoot the wall.

Ezra fires all six shots at the wall. He hits Matt with one shot in the shoulder. Matt sinks face first to the floor. Half his body protrudes into the living room. Ben dances a little jig in celebration.

BEN (CONT'D)  
(Happy. Excited)  
You got him Pa. You got him.

EZRA  
(babbling incoherently)  
I got him son. I got him. Let it be  
now.

BEN  
(nervously giggling)  
I'll check for a certainty.

Ben finishes loading his pistol and cocks the hammer back. He inches warily toward Matt's body. Reaching him he sees blood oozing out over Matt's back.

Ben nudges Matt's side with his boot.

BEN (CONT'D)  
(still giggling)  
Peek-a-boo little brother. You  
okay? I hope not.

Ben tucks his revolver in this belt, bends over and rolls Matt over on his back. Matt appears dead even as his left hand is exposed holding his pistol.

Ben, who is kneeling on one knee, reaches to take the revolver when Matt's arm comes up and shoves the gun in his face.

MATT  
(barely able to speak  
cocks the hammer back)  
Not so fast Big Brother.

Ben unsteadily stands up. Matt motions for him to move back. He does but starts moving his hand slowly toward the gun in his belt.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Don't do it Bennie. I'll kill you  
where you stand.

Matt struggles to stand up.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Why'd you do it Ben? Annie didn't  
deserve to die like that. It didn't  
need to happen.

BEN  
That's what war is about little  
brother. Traitors have to die even  
those in the family.

Ben slides his hand a little closer to his gun.

MATT

They were no danger to you.

BEN

It had nothing to do with danger.  
If I couldn't kill you I could kill  
what you loved. But now here you  
are and I can still do something  
for the Confederacy and you're  
still the family bastard.

With that Ben goes for his gun while Matt screams out.

MATT

Don't do it Ben.

Ben has his pistol out and points it at Matt who shoots him  
three times in the chest before he can pull the trigger. Ben  
falls to the ground cursing his brother.

BEN

You son-of-a-bitch.

Matt limps over to his brother's body and kicks the gun away  
from him.

MATT

I hope it was worth it Bennie.

Ben closes his eyes. In the far corner of the room Ezra is  
still in his rocking chair holding his revolver. Matt  
shuffles quietly toward him. He cocks the hammer back on his  
gun. There's blood in his eye.

Avie intervenes stepping between Matt and Ezra. Matt stops in  
front of his mother and glares past her down at Ezra.

AVIE

I know he deserves to die for what  
he did, son. And maybe I do too.  
But he's been dead these past 12  
months anyway, after the Lord took  
his mind. Your bullets won't change  
a thing for him. I can only ask you  
to rid your heart of hate and your  
sorrow. You'll never be happy  
carrying his dead body around with  
you for the rest of your life if  
you're fixed to killing him.

Avie steps aside giving Matt a clear view of his father.

MATT

You speak of the Lord. Where was he when my Annie's life was strangled from her at the end of a rope? That carcass sitting in front of me doesn't deserve to take another breath.

AVIE

Do you what you have to do, son.  
But I don't have to watch.

Avie walks away as Matt confronts Ezra, raising his pistol and aiming it at Ezra's head.

EZRA

Is that you Ben?

MATT

It's me Pa. Matt.

Ezra breaks out in a wide smile. Matt is perplexed by the reaction.

EZRA

Matt? Welcome home son. Is the war over. I missed you.

INT. BARN LOFT

Sarah, the children and Luther all heard the shooting in the ranch house before hearing a final, delayed shot reverberate through the barn.

INT. BARN - MOMENTS LATER

The door slowly opens. The setting sun casts the long shadow of a man across the floor. The figure slowly enters the barn.

INT. LOFT - CONTINUOUS

Luther stands up pointing his revolver in the direction of the shadow. He cocks the hammer back.

EXT. BARN - LATER

Luther and Sarah are standing behind the children. Matt is standing in front them, bloodied, bruised and ragged.

Everyone is silent until Bethany breaks the tension and steps forward. Matt gets down on one knee. Bethany moves close to him, reaches out and brushes his cheek with her hand.

BETHANY

Are you my real daddy?

MATT

I sure am.

Bethany wraps her arms around his neck hugging him with all her might. Cole and Eli join her.

ELI

We knew you would come.

Matt slowly stands up.

MATT

Let's go home.

As Matt and the kids start toward the house, Sarah holds back with Luther. Bethany stops and turns toward Sarah.

BETHANY

What about Mommy?

COLE

She's not our mommy.

BETHANY

She is too.

Matt stops and turns back toward Sarah. He stops in front of her and Luther.

MATT

(to Luther)

Would you take the children to their grandma.

Luther gathers up Bethany in his arms and starts toward the house with the boys in tow. Avie is standing on the back porch. Ezra is sitting in a rocking chair beside her.

Matt stands close to Sarah looking into her eyes.

MATT (CONT'D)

In my anger and hatred I badly misjudged you Sarah, and I am so sorry. If it had not been for you these children would not even be alive. You have become the only mother they have or will ever have.

SARAH  
What about you?

MATT  
What about me?

SARAH  
What do you want?

MATT  
I can't imagine anyone but you  
being with me to raise this family  
and build a new life here. I know  
Annie would approve, if you would  
have me.

Sarah reaches out to Matt, throws her arms around his neck  
and buries her head against his chest sobbing uncontrollably.

THREE MONTHS LATER

EXT. RANCH HOUSE FRONT PORCH - DAY

Quinn can be seen driving up in a buggy with Chastity at his  
side. Luther, a half-dozen pigs following along behind him,  
is supervising the two Indian ranch hands who are separating  
cattle in the corral. Cole and Eli are sitting on a corral  
rail watching the action beside Luther.

LUTHER  
It won't be long before you two are  
doing this.

COLE  
Doing what Uncle Luther? Leading  
pigs around?

LUTHER  
Riding horses and roping dogies you  
fool kid. I'll look after the pigs.

EXT. ON FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Matt is seated on a porch swing with Bethany on his knees.  
Cole is on one side of him and Eli the other. Avie and Sarah  
are seated nearby at a small table playing cards. Ezra is by  
himself rocking aimlessly in this chair staring blankly into  
the desert.

Quinn, dressed all in black stops the buggy in front of the house and steps out. He winces as he gets down and holds his side. Gingerly he walks up the steps.

QUINN

I hear there's a wedding brewing  
out here.

MATT

So I'm told.

QUINN

Well I'm here to offer my services.

MATT

You'll have to talk to my best man.

Matt nods toward the corral where Luther is limping toward them.

FADE TO BLACK.