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# Script to Screen: "Wicked like the Chaff"

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## ~INTRODUCTION~

Early on in this project, Dr. Ted Hovet, my primary thesis advisor, said, “Stories don’t come out of a vacuum; they’re the result of research and investigation.” This entire experience can be summed up in that phrase. By choosing a story set in the late nineteenth century in a part of the country I’ve never visited, extensive historical and geographical research was going to be essential. Along the way, I found myself pulling ideas from the great works of literature I’ve encountered during my years as an English major as well as the films I’ve studied in my minor. By the time I was actually formulating a plot outline, I realized how most every step of the journey was paved in research. Looking at historical photographs and paging through primary sources enriched my imagination, giving me new possibilities and points of view. The screenplay you hold in your hands, though clearly an exercise in fiction, contains the spirit of a bygone era in the American Midwest. I’ve attempted to people that world with characters who are unique, complex, and, most importantly, real.

A large influence on my writing has been certain American authors who generally fall into the “Tragic Visions” category: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, William Faulkner, and, more recently, Cormac McCarthy. Theirs is a world shaded by a real and ever-present evil by which men can prove to be ruthless and single-mindedly destructive. McCarthy, in his epic *Blood Meridian*, put it best: “You can find meanness in the least of creatures, but when God made man the devil was at his elbow.” In fact, many of my own characters have been informed by the personalities contained within these novels. Captain Ahab of Melville’s *Moby-Dick* sparked the inspiration for my Abe Miller, vengeful patriarch and farmer; the chugging steam locomotive is his great white whale. Quentin Miller, the film’s protagonist, might find a kindred spirit in Darl Bundren of Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*. Moreover, the film should serve as a meditation on violence just as *Blood Meridian* does; I mean to use Quentin as an inward investigation into the brutal means by which some men live.

Yet I can’t discuss the painstaking task of constructing the various scenes and sequences of this screenplay without paying homage to the films whose visuals and cinematic construction became blueprints for me to imitate. Writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson, like many other filmmakers, uses this technique of emulating certain films, calling them “templates” and “massive life preservers.” Interestingly enough, his films have had perhaps the most influence on my work; *There Will Be Blood* gave me the mold for a ruthless, domineering businessman

through the character of Daniel Plainview, which I then channeled into Abe, as well as the time period and iconography of the American west I felt appropriate for this project. Additionally, I couldn't help imagining the events of my screenplay as if Roger Deakins, cinematographer for *No Country for Old Men* and *Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, photographed it; I envisioned the stretching miles of the Midwestern plains and the Edward Hopper-esque use of lighting. A powerful example of Deakins's style that stuck in my mind throughout this project is the opening three minutes *The Assassination of Jesse James*; Jesse James stands in a field cast against a blood-red sky and seconds later his silhouette bends with the stalks of wheat, almost losing him in the image except that the wind doesn't shake his figure as it does the grain. I imagined by characters photographed against such dynamic shots of nature and the landscape of the Midwest.

The basic plotline of the film, the dueling family, initially grew out of a class discussion over Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in which the title character encounters the Shepherdsons and Grangerfords, clashing over a long-forgotten slight. Of course, I was familiar with the old story about the Hatfields and McCoys, being a Kentuckian myself. I felt that this was just the starting point I needed. Separating the fact from the fiction and history from myth regarding this famous feud became a cornerstone of my research. I turned to books and articles about the "hillbilly" caricature; Professor Anthony Harkins of WKU's History department as well as his book *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* became invaluable resources in this respect. During an interview with Harkins, I asked him how I could avoid furthering the hillbilly stereotype while I created my characters. He said, "Frame the story within a real political and social environment." In other words, illustrate the problems that would justify their behavior instead of making it seem like a violent phenomenon. My charge was clear: make real, three-dimensional characters whose actions, though inexcusable at times, are ultimately understandable.

Studying the actual Hatfield-McCoy conflict only complicated the preconceptions I already had from watching those Looney Tunes cartoons featuring two uneducated hillbillies slugging it out over a jug of moonshine. Perhaps the legendary status of this fight arises from how little certainty there is surrounding what actually happened; both families blame the other for starting it and both claim they won. In fact, one of the stories inspired a large plot point in my screenplay: many claim that the Hatfield family had friends in high places of the law, which

allowed them to get away with much of their criminal activity. In my story, Cassius Cullers gathers the sheriff and the judge to his side, which allows him to acquire a large portion of Miller's land. Facts spawned fiction, and historical research into this famous feud allowed me to find ways to humanize the families in conflict as well as complicate their clash. Ultimately, I realized there's something particularly "American" about the feud story, since our culture repeats the legend over and over again. Perhaps the romanticism of fighting for one's principles and rights against an aggressor strikes a chord in American society, and the lust for violence seen in our TV shows, films, and literature makes it all the more seductive. In many ways, Quentin Miller embodies the naïve romantic who is seduced by the warrior culture.

So I had my time, location, and basic storyline. What really was left to figure out were the motivations of the characters. Why does Abe stubbornly refuse to support so-called progress? Why is Cassius fighting to bring the railroad through the town of Larned? I couldn't simply leave these things for the audience to accept at face value; after all, one of my biggest priorities as already stated was making three-dimensional characters. For Cassius's part, I found the competition between the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads fitting. Watching Cecil B DeMille's *Union Pacific*, I realized how ruthless these two lines were when it came to extending their tracks to the West Coast first. Though never stated aloud, one can safely assume Cassius is under the employment of a railroad, leading him to fight tooth and nail to get his way.

So where does that leave Abe? I've attempted to make him simultaneously human and mythical; Quentin's voice over narrations describes Abe as almost god-like. Therefore, my temptation was to allow Abe's motivation to be: "Because Abe said so." But that's just not good enough. Of course, he's fighting for his principles, and when Cassius steals part of his land, what was originally mutual disgust becomes all-out war. Doing research, I realized that there used to exist great distrust towards the industrialization (like "technophobia" nowadays). The reasons were varied: they didn't want the immigrant labor force coming into their land, machines and equipment put men out of their jobs, and, simply, it threatened the traditional values of many families. Therefore, Abe is a man who simply wants to be left alone; the threats to his values would do good to stay away. In a way, he's set up his own little kingdom on his tract of land, and the Cullers family is the invading army.

In the end, both Abe and Cassius can be said to embody the "quintessential American"; they represent that tension between progress and tradition that has been so characteristic of this

nation's history. The research and actual composition of this screenplay gave me the opportunity to reflect on America itself, since it serves as much more than simply the backdrop to my story; the country infuses the characters with a common personality. America has often performed a balancing act between development and custom; whereas the nation often fights to be on the edge of innovation and to lead the world economically and culturally, it simultaneously finds itself struggling to hold onto its traditional values. My screenplay brings this wrestling match to a head and reflects upon the means in which some might turn in order to have their way. After all, the history of this country hasn't been bloodless. In fact, the expansion West is a perfect environment to place my story since that is one of the most powerful examples of an embattled moment in our past.

What I began with wasn't anything new: I borrowed a storyline older than Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, I visualized the scenes in the styles of influential Hollywood films, and I took direction from great authors on how to make interesting, realistic characters. Nevertheless, my intentions were to combine these formulas and styles into something unique and powerful: a story of my own. I've learned that screenwriting, like any art form, is recycling, revising, and reviving.

~Bobby Deignan

## ~ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY~

Andersen, Kurt. "Appalachia: Hatfields and McCoys." Time Magazine. 9 Apr. 2008

<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,925085,00.html>>. This article focuses on the history and legends of the Hatfield/McCoy conflict from a present-day point of view. Andersen interviews members of the two families still living in the region to get their feelings about the whole story that made them so famous. He gives great insight into how the facts change from family to family.

Anderson, Paul T. Boogie Nights. London: Faber & Faber, 1998. In Anderson's brief introduction to this screenplay, he says, "My function as a director is to be a good writer. My obligation as a director is to deliver the actors a good script..." His approach to filmmaking shed light on the importance of the screenwriting process and its position as the foundation of any good movie.

The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford. Dir. Andrew Dominik. Perf. Brad Pitt, Casey Affleck, Sam Rockwell. DVD. 2007. This film presented me with the iconography and visuals of the Midwest I felt appropriate for my story. Additionally, Roger Deakins's cinematography had a particularly powerful influence on my creative process; I imagined my scenes shot in his style.

Bloom, Harold. How to Read and Why. New York: Scribner, 2001. Bloom writes a short section on the character of Darl Bundren from Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, on whom I heavily based my character Quentin Miller. Bloom expounds upon Darl's identity crisis, which gives rise to his extraordinary consciousness. This consciousness and self-reflection was then translated to my character.

Dotson-Lewis, B.L. "Hatfield and McCoy Feud." 9 Apr. 2008

<<http://www.appalachiacoal.com/hatfield%20and%20mccoy%20feud.html>>. This site provided many of the popular legends and anecdotes about the Hatfield/McCoy fight, including several supposed "causes" for the whole conflict. In particular, this site presented the idea that Anse Hatfield had help from the authorities and courts, which I used in my screenplay.

Duel in the Sun. Dir. King Vidor. Perf. Gregory Peck. DVD. 1948. A popular Western that I used to work on my character of Abe Miller. The film has a powerful patriarch who resists the industrialization of the land.

Epstein, E.L. "Critical Note." Afterword. Lord of the Flies. By William Golding. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1954. This Critical Note reflected on the symbolism of *Lord of the Flies* and its meditation on the evil in the heart of mankind.

Faulkner, William. As I Lay Dying. New York: Vintage, 1991. This novel about the Bundren family's odyssey to bury their mother was extremely useful in creating believable characterization, dialogue, and setting. Darl, one of the characters, also informed my lead character.

Faulkner, William. Selected Short Stories of William Faulkner. New York: Random House, Incorporated, 1997. The short story "Barn Burning" had a profound effect on my script in the way of a father-son conflict; the son wants to stop his father's crimes, which is at the heart of the second act of my screenplay.

Harkins, Anthony. Hillbilly : A Cultural History of an American Icon. New York: Oxford UP, Incorporated, 2005. This book reveals the historical events that gave rise to the "hillbilly" stereotype, including the Hatfield/McCoy conflict. This specific section did

much to strip away the legend and myth of the conflict and present me with an idea of what really happened.

Harkins, Anthony. "Hillbilly: Fact and Fiction." Personal interview. 13 Apr. 2008. Sitting down with Dr. Harkins was extremely valuable to my research. The most important thing I learned from the session was how to create a story about a feud similar to the one between the Hatfields and McCoys without perpetuating the stereotype; Dr. Harkins said to put the characters in a realistic social and political environment so that their actions are understandable though not always excusable.

"The Homestead Act of 1862." The National Archives. 14 Apr. 2008

<<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/homestead-act/>>. The Homestead Act caused much of the frontier boom. This site provided the necessary research regarding the subject.

Matthiessen, Francis O. American Renaissance : Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman. New York: Oxford UP, 1968. Matthiessen writes extensively about the character of Ahab from Melville's *Moby-Dick*, who strongly informed my character of Abe Miller. The author sets Ahab up to be a tragic hero/villain of sorts, since he battles what he sees as an evil force: the white whale.

McCarthy, Cormac. Blood Meridian : Or the Evening Redness in the West. New York: Vintage, 1992. This novel serves as a meditation on violence and evil in mankind. I used the book to develop my own themes in the screenplay as well as characterization and dialogue.

Melville, Herman. Moby Dick : Or, the Whale. New York: Signet Classics, 1998. This novel contains the famous American persona of Captain Ahab, who I used to create my Abe Miller.

No Country for Old Men. Dir. Joel Coen. Prod. Ethan Coen. Perf. Josh Brolin, Javier Bardem, Tommy Lee Jones. Film. 2007. This film, adapted from a Cormac McCarthy novel, taught me much about translating literature to the screen.

"Rise of Industrial America: Rural Life in the Late 19th Century." Library of Congress. 10 Apr. 2008 <<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/riseind/rural/rural.html>>. This site focuses on everyday life on the plains, which was indispensable to me as I wrote scenes around the Miller house.

Searchers, The. Dir. John Ford. Perf. John Wayne, Natalie Wood. Film. 1956. The Indian attack scene in this film heavily influenced the scene in my screenplay when the Cullers sneak up to the Miller house followed by the big gun fight. In this film, the enemy is largely unseen—only clues like bird calls, dust rising in the distance, and glints of light tell the family that they're out there. This technique creates undeniably powerful suspense.

Shakespeare, William. Romeo and Juliet. New York: Washington Square P, 2003. This famous tragedy focuses on a battle between two powerful families.

Shakespeare, William. Titus Andronicus. New York: Washington Square P, 2005. One of Shakespeare's lesser-known tragedies, this play centers around a cycle of revenge, which progressively grows worse and worse until its bloody ending. This structure was used in my screenplay.

There Will Be Blood. Dir. Paul T. Anderson. Perf. Daniel Day-Lewis. Film. 2008. This film gave me a great model for Abe Miller in its Daniel Plainview. Additionally, the iconography and visuals of the West were perfect when thinking about scenes in my film.

Twain, Mark. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2002.

One of the sections of this famous American novel focuses on a Hatfield/McCoy like conflict between two Southern families. When asked about what started the whole fray, a character simply says they can't remember. The idea of senseless violence fueled by pride and dignity became a cornerstone of my story.

Union Pacific. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck. DVD. 1939. This film gave me the idea for the competition between the Central and Pacific railroads to reach the West Coast first. This becomes Cassius's motivation for fighting tooth and nail with Abe Miller.

Wister, Owen. The Virginian. New York: Signet Classics, 2002. A classic American novel about the frontier, which helped me with characterization as well as creating a realistic, authentic environment.

Wicked like the Chaff

by  
Bobby Deignan

1

EXT. MIDWEST PLAINS -- DAWN

1

A red sunrise appears on the black horizon. The flat, empty landscape swims into view. A lone bird CRIES. Dew hangs from the tall grass. A solitary tree stands against the blood-red sky.

The sun climbs higher. The sky turns orange. Wind moves through the fields. A heron stalks a riverbank and plucks a fish out of the water.

The sun is even higher now; it's yellow in the blue sky. A sod house now sits alone in the middle of the fields.

The sun becomes white as it rises higher. Now other homesteads, with wood planks for walls and tin sheets for roofs, dot the landscape. Fences crisscross the fields. A hawk perches on one of the fence posts.

The sun is now almost as its meridian. The houses are larger now with multiple rooms and porches. Empty rocking chairs sway in the wind.

The sun, blinding and white, reaches its peak. The MILLER HOUSE, two stories of dark wood siding and tall windows, stands alone on the crest of a hill overlooking miles of untouched landscape.

FADE TO:

2

EXT. MILLER HOUSE -- AFTERNOON

2

QUENTIN (V.O.)

My father was here at the beginning, and I imagine he'll be here at the end. He said he saw the first sunrise over the plains. He raised the walls of our house with his bare hands. We were the first family to people these parts...

The MILLER FAMILY is gathered in front of the house. A single table stands in the grass. CAROLINE MILLER (20s) sets plates and forks around the table. ISAAC MILLER (20s) and ROBERT MILLER (20s) bring chairs out of the house and set them around table. Other grandchildren play a game of "kick the can" in the grass.

QUENTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Father never said why he came out this way.

(MORE)

QUENTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He used to talk about the cities  
and all the people back east. He  
left all that for the dogs. Said  
they'd eat each other in the end...

ABE MILLER (50s) sits on the top porch step holding BEA  
MILLER (2) on his knee. He whispers into the baby's ear and  
gently rocks it.

QUENTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I always imagined him like one of  
them kings out of the Bible. Ain't  
never met a man who wasn't afraid  
of him. Nobody got a second chance  
to cross him neither...

Caroline crosses to porch and takes Bea from Abe.

QUENTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

One time, a man came snooping  
around our land, said he was  
inspecting for oil and would buy  
the land if he found any. That was  
the last thing he ever said on this  
earth. James used to talk about  
how the crows came and carried him  
away bit by bit...

QUENTIN MILLER (19) sits beneath a tree across the field  
watching his family.

QUENTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But all that happened before I was  
born.

QUENTIN'S POV: Abe pulls a pipe out of his coat pocket and  
places it in his mouth. He then produces a match, lights it,  
and begins puffing smoke. As he flicks the match into the  
dirt beside the steps, he makes a small, almost unnoticeable  
flourish of his wrist.

Quentin imitates Abe's flourish with his own hand.

QUENTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I'm the youngest of five sons: the  
Miller boys. My mother named me  
Quentin after her grandfather, a  
hanging judge from the Carolinas.  
Hung some two hundred criminals  
they say. Mother could have been a  
judge herself; what she says is law  
around our house.

Abe looks up and meets eyes with Quentin. After only an instant, the front door behind him opens and EVELYN MILLER (40s) and MIRIAM MILLER (17) appear.

QUENTIN (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 Killing is in our blood. It's how  
 we say what's ours is ours. Ain't  
 no two ways about it.

QUENTIN'S POV: Miriam sits down next to Abe, who places an arm around her shoulder and kisses her forehead. He pulls back her hair, revealing a large, jagged scar from the edge of her lip across her left cheek.

FLASHBACK TO:

3 INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

3

Isaac, Robert, and JASON MILLER (early 20s) burst through the back door. Each of them begin pulling chairs away from the large table in the center of the kitchen. Isaac turns up the flame in the single lantern hanging overhead.

ROBERT  
 Bring her in!

JAMES MILLER (late 20s) enters through back door carrying Miriam, who's bleeding profusely from the mouth. James sets her down on the table.

JAMES  
 Hold her!

Isaac and Robert grab her arms and hold her down. Miriam is screaming.

JASON  
 That son of a bitch cut her face  
 wide open!

JAMES  
 Get water! Somebody wake up  
 mother! Tell her to bring her  
 sewing needle and thread.

CUT TO:

4 INT. FRONT PARLOR -- THAT MOMENT 4

Quentin tiptoes through the dark over to kitchen door and pushes it ajar. He peeks through the crack at the commotion in the kitchen.

CUT TO:

5 INT. KITCHEN -- THAT MOMENT 5

James grabs Miriam's face and tries his best to hold it still. He manages to turn it to the left a bit, exposing the bloody side. Jason carries over a jug of water.

JAMES

Pour some water on it.

Jason pours some water, which momentarily cleans off the blood, showing the deep gash from her mouth almost totally across her cheek. Miriam screams again.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Again! Someone get mother! We got to close her up! Where else did he hurt you?

He shakes her.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Miriam! Did he hurt you anywhere else?

MIRIAM

NO!

CUT TO:

6 INT. FRONT PARLOR -- THAT MOMENT 6

Quentin still stares through the crack in the door as Evelyn enters through the front hall, heading towards the kitchen. SUSAN MILLER (mid-20s) follows closely behind her. They both rush past Quentin, throwing open the door on their way.

CUT TO:

7 INT. KITCHEN -- THAT MOMENT 7

Evelyn crosses to table. Susan stops short.

EVELYN  
Christ! What happened?

ROBERT  
Mr. Gaither took a knife to her!

EVELYN  
Gaither? Your father know about  
this?

The boys look at each other. Quentin enters the room.

EVELYN (CONT'D)  
Does Abe know?

JAMES  
He done smashed Gaither's skull in.

EVELYN  
Your daddy killed him?

JAMES  
Yes, ma'am.

EVELYN  
Should have known.

ISAAC  
Wasn't nothing left after pa got  
done with him.

MIRIAM  
Why did papa do it?

Evelyn presses her nightgown to Miriam's face.

EVELYN  
Shh...we'll get you fixed up now.  
Get my sewing, Susan!

Susan rushes out of the room.

MIRIAM  
He said Gaither was just going to  
talk to me. He didn't say nothing  
about him having a knife!

EVELYN  
Shh...shh...it's over now. Daddy  
won't make you talk to anymore men  
for him.

MIRIAM  
I don't want to do it again!

EVELYN

You won't, darling. You won't.  
Now, we're going to close you up.  
You're going to have to hold still  
for me.

Quentin stands in the doorway looking on. Susan reappears holding a handful of thread and a needle, which she hands her mother. Evelyn sees Quentin looking on.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Take your brother up to bed!

Susan crosses to Quentin, grabs his shoulder, and gently pulls him towards the parlor. He resists.

SUSAN

Come on, Quentin. You don't want  
to see this.

Evelyn threads her needle. Robert, Isaac, and James brace themselves, tightening their hold on Miriam.

Susan manages to pull Quentin into the parlor just as Evelyn makes the first stitch. Miriam wails.

CUT TO:

8 INT. FRONT PARLOR -- THAT MOMENT 8

Susan clutches Quentin's shoulder as he tries to keep an eye on the commotion in the kitchen.

CUT TO:

9 INT. KITCHEN -- THAT MOMENT 9

Jason hurries over and closes the door to the parlor.

CUT TO:

10 INT. FRONT PARLOR -- THAT MOMENT 10

Susan and Quentin stand in the dark listening to Miriam's screams coming through the door.

QUENTIN

Why was Miriam talking to Mr.  
Gaither?

SUSAN  
That's papa's concern.

QUENTIN  
But he cut her.

SUSAN  
Well, papa took care of it. Looks  
like Gaither won't be taking us to  
court now.

Susan moves towards the stairs. Quentin remains staring at the door.

SUSAN (CONT'D)  
Mama wants us in bed. Come on.

Quentin finally turns and follows Susan to the stairs.

FLASHFORWARD TO:

11 INT. QUENTIN'S BEDROOM -- EVENING 11

Quentin stands at his window watching Miriam outside.

CUT TO:

12 EXT. FRONT FIELDS -- THAT MOMENT 12

Miriam stands watching the sunset. She twirls a weed in her fingers. Behind her, the long table and chairs are empty and the rest of the family has gone. Miriam pulls her hair back behind her left ear, revealing that jagged scar again.

CUT TO:

13 EXT. REAR OF HOUSE -- MIDDAY 13

Quentin walks out the back door and down the porch steps. He picks up an axe, which is leaning against the side of the house. James, Robert, Isaac, Jason as well as AL (late 20s), JESSE (mid 20s), and RICH (late 20s) are resting in the shade of the house, talking amongst themselves.

AL  
We was just talking about you,  
Quentin. Jesse was telling us  
about that social you two went to.  
How you pissed your pants when Mary  
Mae asked you to dance with her.

The boys laugh at Quentin.

QUENTIN  
I didn't piss my pants.

JESSE  
You should have seen him. All red-  
faced and stuttering.

QUENTIN  
You're full of it. Shouldn't you  
all be setting dogs on fire or  
something? Or did you run out of  
turpentine? I know what you all  
think is funny.

AL  
I reckon if we did have a little  
more turpentine, we wouldn't need  
no dog. We'd just set you on fire  
and watch you run yourself to  
death.

They laugh. Quentin begins to leave.

ISAAC  
Quentin! Bring us water from the  
pump.

QUENTIN  
I've got to collect wood.

ISAAC  
Later.

QUENTIN  
Mama said so.

ROBERT  
Oh, Mama said so!

The boys laugh together.

QUENTIN  
You're just sitting around. Get it  
yourself.

RICH  
Where have you been since sun up?  
You ain't been working in the  
fields with us. Looking mighty  
useless.

QUENTIN  
 Shut up, Rich! You ain't even  
 family. Papa ought to run you off.  
 You, too, Al!

James sneaks up behind Quentin and wraps his arm around his neck, pulling him back. Quentin drops the axe in the dirt. The other boys laugh.

JAMES  
 Your brother asked you for some  
 water. Why did you have to go and  
 start smarting off? Insulting your  
 kin?

QUENTIN  
 Let go, James!

JAMES  
 Can't breathe, can you?

QUENTIN  
 Stop it!

JASON  
 Don't kill him. Who else is going  
 to run Mama's errands?

James releases Quentin with a jerk. Quentin lands on his knees in the dirt holding his neck. James walks back to where he was sitting.

Once James's back is turned, Quentin dives for the axe and picks it up. James swings around.

JAMES  
 What are you going to do with that?

QUENTIN  
 Take your goddamn head off if you  
 don't leave me alone.

JAMES  
 You better get me with the first  
 blow, boy.

QUENTIN  
 You won't even know what...

Robert springs at Quentin and wrestles for the axe. James pounces on the two of them, landing a hard punch into Quentin's head. Quentin releases the axe. Robert pulls it away from the fray and tosses it into the dirt beside the steps.

James pins Quentin to the ground. He slaps Quentin across the face.

JAMES  
Always said mama had one more  
daughter than she thought she did.

James slaps him again.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
She got herself a son who goes and  
pisses his pants!

Another slap. Quentin's lip splits open.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
And stalks around all day. Going  
off to the woods to cry.

Another, harder slap.

QUENTIN  
Get off!

JAMES  
You say something? If you want me  
off, then do something about it!  
You can't, can you?

Quentin struggles to push his brother off.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
Told you mama should have dropped  
you in a well when you was born.

James slaps Quentin one last time and then crawls off of him. Quentin scrambles to his feet, moving away from the group.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
Go get your damn wood.

Quentin stumbles over and picks up the axe. He heads off down towards the treeline beyond the field. The boys still laugh.

CUT TO:

14 EXT. TREELINE -- MIDDAY

14

Quentin collects wood along the treeline. He stops and watches his brothers on the other side of the fields at work.

CUT TO:

15 EXT. BACK FIELDS -- THAT MOMENT

15

Some of the Miller boys cut down the wheat while the others gather it up and load it on a rickety cart. An ancient horse is strapped into the cart's harness, sweating in the noon heat.

The field is rather bare. They have a hard time finding good wheat to bring in.

CUT TO:

16 EXT. TREELINE -- THAT MOMENT

16

Quentin sets his small stack of wood down beside a tree trunk and sits down beside it. He pulls a dirty cloth from his pocket and wipes the sweat off his forehead. He replaces the cloth in his pocket and begins drawing in the dirt with his finger, daydreaming.

He searches around himself and finds a small rock. He digs a small trench in the dirt with the rock, carving out patterns, circles, etc. He tosses the small rock aside. He searches around himself again. He crawls over to a large pile of stones and begins picking through it.

A fat, speckled SNAKE drops from the pile of rocks, hissing at Quentin. He recoils. The snake strikes out at him. Quentin scrambles backwards, grabbing the small rock again, bashing it into the snake's head.

The snake coils up into itself and turns over in the dirt, still squirming. The snake begins to slither feebly back towards rock pile.

Quentin strikes the snake again, this time the rock connecting with the serpent's back, just below the head. The snake folds in half, turning over and over again and mixing blood into the dirt.

Quentin hits the snake one last time, smashing its head into the ground. Still, the snake's body whips and writhes. Quentin jumps up and stomps on the snake over and over again until the animal is half-buried in the dirt and still.

Quentin slowly backs away and looks at the bloody stone in his hand. He tosses it down beside the bloody carcass. He stumbles over to the wood pile he had set down, picks it up, and heads back towards the house.

CUT TO:

17 EXT. REAR OF HOUSE -- THAT MOMENT

17

Evelyn steps out of house and walks to the edge of the porch. Caroline and Miriam are coming up from the clotheslines carrying a basket of linens.

EVELYN

Hurry up with those. The boys will be back soon. I'm going to need your help, Caroline, with supper. Once them boys bring it in, we can start. I hope they got a decent amount today. Don't know how long we can take this dry spell.

Caroline and Miriam continue on into the house.

Quentin appears along the side of the house carrying the wood.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Where have you been?

QUENTIN

Fetching wood like you asked.

EVELYN

A good hour ago. Set the wood down inside and come back out. Your brothers will be in soon.

QUENTIN

I'd like to start working the fields.

EVELYN

You can't do the jobs you've already got right. And you want to go out there and get in their way?

QUENTIN

I wouldn't be in the way. I know how to work.

EVELYN

Ask me again when we don't need anymore wood, the horse doesn't need anymore feeding, and the stove doesn't need fixing. When I ain't got no more use for you around here, then you go can do what you want.

QUENTIN  
I can do jobs for father, like  
James does from time to time.

EVELYN  
That ain't none of your business.  
Get that wood inside this instant.

Quentin goes to back door and stops.

QUENTIN  
Someone is building something just  
down the road.

EVELYN  
Who is?

QUENTIN  
Don't know. I heard them banging  
all afternoon.

EVELYN  
Take the wood in.

Quentin enters the house.

CUT TO:

18 INT. KITCHEN -- THAT MOMENT

18

Quentin drops the wood next to the large stove in the corner  
of the kitchen.

MIRIAM (O.C.)  
Mother?

QUENTIN  
No, it's me.

MIRIAM (O.C.)  
Come see this.

QUENTIN  
Where are you?

MIRIAM (O.C.)  
We're in the parlor.

Quentin opens door to parlor and walks in.

CUT TO:

19 INT. FRONT PARLOR -- THAT MOMENT

19

Miriam and Caroline stand in front of the window looking out the side of the house. Quentin crosses over and stands behind them

MIRIAM

See it?

QUENTIN

See what?

MIRIAM

Just over them trees.

Miriam points with her finger on the glass. Quentin looks.

QUENTIN'S POV: The peaks of a house are just visible over the treetops.

CAROLINE

They're only about a mile away.

QUENTIN

Does father know about this?

CAROLINE

Don't know. We first saw it just now.

QUENTIN

They must have been at it for days now. They already have the roof up.

MIRIAM

I wonder who they are.

QUENTIN

We won't have to wait too long to find out. Once father hears about this.

CUT TO:

20 EXT. ROAD -- MORNING

20

Quentin stands by the side of the road, watching a long procession of wagons passing by. The wagons are filled with furniture tied down with rope: headboards, tables, chairs, stools.

There are also stacks of crates, each with "CULLERS" written on the side of them. The line of wagons stretch from one bend in the road to the other.

CUT TO:

21 INT. TOWN HALL -- EVENING

21

Sixty some-odd men of the town sit shoulder-to-shoulder in the dimly-lit chambers. They talk to each other, waiting for the meeting to begin. Quentin sits at the end of a row next to Isaac, Robert, James.

The MAYOR (late 40s) steps up to the podium. The room becomes quiet.

MAYOR

Evening, gentlemen. We're going to get to the business as quickly as possible so you can get on your ways. The town's in some dry times as you might have noticed. Crops ain't what they used to be. You might as well be eating dirt with the way the corn's been coming in this year. It'd sure be nice to have some of them fancy irrigation systems, but we're working with what we've got. It takes some hard men to keep a town thriving during a time like this when nobody on the outside is lending a hand. But what I want to talk about tonight is bigger than just the food you bring in from your fields and put on your plates, into your children's stomachs. I'm talking about all that modernization that's happening back east. You've probably been wondering when we were going to get our stab at it.

Some of the men grumble, others nod their heads.

MAYOR (CONT'D)

Well, we need to welcome a man to our town who promises to bring us some of that very streamlining. He and his family have just moved up from Texas, said they were looking for some decent folk to settle down with and thought we looked just about right.

(MORE)

MAYOR (CONT'D)

I think God's sent us some of his angels, gentlemen. He walks like the rest of us, he says he sweats just like the rest of us, but he's going to prove that he's a man with his eyes on the future, a man of a new age. Gentlemen, I want to introduce Mister Cassius Cullers.

The group begins to clap. To the right of the podium, CASSIUS CULLERS (early-50s) rises from his seat, crosses to podium, and shakes Mayor's hand.

CASSIUS

The way your mayor speaks about me might lead you to believe I chop down trees and have a blue ox back home. No, my friends, I'm not one of those men in the tall tales. I'm just a lucky son of a bitch, if I may be so frank. I followed hard times from the womb all the way up to that day I got a break. I was beginning to think I'd give Job a run for his money. But God is a good God, gentlemen. He listens and He gives. I believe if each and every one of you went home tonight and called out for His help, why He would give you a reply that very instant. Know what he'd say? Hmm? He'd say, "You're in good hands. Cullers is here."

Some of the crowd laughs.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Truth be told, I admire men like you for the work you do. You're doing God's work, you know? Tilling the earth, sowing the seeds. You could be apostles if you weren't so damn busy. There ain't a group of people as charming as you between here and Texas. And that's why my family and I have stopped here. We built a house here. We plan to dig our heels in nice and deep, get a good feel of what kind of earth you have around here. What's more is that I want to give something to you. The future. I don't want to go way over your heads by saying that.

(MORE)

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

But it's exactly what I have to give. The future. And the future is the steam locomotive.

The crowd rumbles with whispers and quiet exclamations.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Thousands and thousands of miles of tracks will be laid all the way to the west coast, and I want to see it come through this town. Yes, through this very town; we're going to put Larned on the map. I want to hear that wonderful whistle blowing as the train comes down the tracks. Imagine it, gentlemen: that shining silver locomotive pulling up in the middle of town, crowds of people emptying from her stomach. Those are new customers. Those are people who will need medicine, a place to stay, food to eat. Tired of living on what you bring in every day, why not get a business swelling by letting our new friends purchase your goods? Think of the money the government will throw our way once we become a stop of the railroad. The next town's itching for us to get started. The future just can't wait for tomorrow. I say let us begin tonight by agreeing to a proposal.

The crowd erupts: some men shouting approval, others condemning the idea. The Mayor joins Cassius at the podium.

MAYOR

All right! All right, gents!

A YOUNGER MAN stands up on his chair right behind Quentin.

YOUNGER MAN

Lay the tracks! Land ain't much good for anything else these days!

MAYOR

Now we won't come to a decision tonight. An impulsive man might not be such a bad thing, but an impulsive town is quite another.

(MORE)

MAYOR (CONT'D)

We ought to hand this over to the proper authorities first, don't you think Mr. Cullers?

CASSIUS

By all means. Projects of this size shouldn't be commenced on a itch. But you won't want to let this slip through your fingers; I once saw a town lose their chance because they stood around too long scratching their heads. Know what that place is today? Just another deserted crossroads, gentlemen. The train will make a ghost town out of you in the blink of an eye.

Once again, the crowd begins to discuss amongst themselves.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Thank you for your time tonight. Hope I was brief enough. My family and I don't intend to remain strangers. And don't you hesitate to come calling on us.

Cassius shakes the Mayor's hand. The crowd begins dispersing, standing up and moving around or sitting and talking to each other.

Quentin looks around the room and sees Abe standing in the shadows at the back of the room. He emerges, flashes a glance at Quentin and the rest of his boys, and exits with the rest of the men through the doors.

CUT TO:

22

EXT. TOWN HALL -- THAT MOMENT

22

Quentin follows his brothers out of the town hall and over to their wagon where Abe is already waiting.

JAMES

What did you think about him, Father? Sounds like he might be running for governor.

Abe doesn't reply. He lights his pipe.

ROBERT

He's rich enough to buy himself an election.

ISAAC  
Got himself a big castle, too.  
Maybe he was a king when he lived  
in Texas.

Quentin climbs into the back of the wagon.

ISAAC (CONT'D)  
Wonder how he made all that money.

ABE  
Oil. If you make that kind of  
money in Texas, you do it in oil.

JAMES  
Think he's looking for oil here?

ABE  
No. He's done putting his hands in  
all that black slop.

JAMES  
How do you know?

ABE  
When you get to be as old as him,  
the last thing you want to do is  
start some big operation. I could  
see that from the back of the room.

JAMES  
Ain't the train a big operation?

ABE  
Just how much work you think he's  
going to do? Carry them steel  
tracks out there himself? Hammer  
away for a couple of months? No,  
he'll get immigrant sweat for that.  
Probably has a caravan of Mexicans  
following him up from Texas to do  
it.

CASSIUS (O.C.)  
Abe Miller?

Cassius waves his arm in the air as he crosses over from the  
doors to the Miller wagon.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)  
Thought that was you, neighbor.

Cassius extends his hand. Abe hesitantly accepts it and  
gives it a slow, deliberate shake.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Been meaning to come by your house and introduce myself. Didn't want to sneak up on you like we did. We bought that track of land and before we knew it, the house was ready for us. Didn't give us any time to make the regular rounds.

ABE

I understand.

CASSIUS

These your boys?

ABE

Introduce yourselves.

Each son steps forward telling Cassius his name and shaking his hand.

JAMES

James.

ROBERT

Robert.

ISAAC

Isaac.

Quentin has to hang over the end of the cart to shake Cassius's hand.

QUENTIN

Quentin, sir.

CASSIUS

Good looking clan. They hard workers?

ABE

Our farm hasn't failed yet, and we've seen some bad seasons.

CASSIUS

Yes, and ain't this one nasty? Dry enough around some of these parts to remind me of back home.

ABE

Where is it you come from?

CASSIUS

Little town in Texas. I would tell you the name, but you wouldn't know it.

ABE

Try me.

CASSIUS

Got a slew of boys myself. All about the same ages. Looks like we both got started in life about the same time.

ABE

Work in oil, Mr. Cullers?

CASSIUS

Texas gave me a good start. Just not the kind of life I wanted for my family. Now I'm hoping to get some cattle grazing on my land. We just needed some place away from all that mess.

ABE

Ain't you proposing to bring the mess to us? With what you was talking about in there?

CASSIUS

I get the notion you're going to need a bit of convincing.

ABE

Not at all.

CASSIUS

Then, what do...

ABE

You're wasting your time prospecting around here, Cullers.

CASSIUS

I didn't say I was looking for oil.

ABE

I didn't either. There just ain't much difference between a man digging around for oil and a rat looking for some way to bring more rats out with him.

CASSIUS  
I suppose I'm that rat.

ABE  
Ain't no need for a train in these  
parts. We don't want it.

CASSIUS  
All you need is to be shaken up a  
little, is all. You'll see.

ABE  
No, I won't.

Abe turns away from Cullers and climbs into the wagon.

ABE (CONT'D)  
Get in.

His sons obey and climb on the wagon.

CASSIUS  
The great thing about this country  
is that no one man has full claim  
on it.

Abe hitches the reins, and the horse begins to pull them.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)  
Stop on by the house. I'll let my  
grandchildren talk some sense into  
you.

The Miller wagon disappears down the road.

CUT TO:

23 INT. BOYS' BEDROOM -- NIGHT

23

Isaac and Jason are asleep in their beds. On the other side of the room, Quentin sits up in his bed next to a glowing lantern making shadow puppets on the wall.

He switches the positioning of his fingers and hands to make various shapes. Some of them look like animals, others like people, while others unknown.

Quentin hears voices coming from the next room through the wall. He carefully crawls over to the wall and places his ear against it.

EVELYN (O.C.)  
 Ain't too much there to distinguish  
 between an oil baron and a swarm of  
 locusts. They both have the same  
 results. But he said he wanted a  
 railroad?

CUT TO:

24 INT. PARENTS BEDROOM -- THAT MOMENT

24

Evelyn sits at her dressing table in a plain nightgown. Abe sits on the edge of the bed in his undergarments.

EVELYN  
 Where they going to put it?

ABE  
 I suspect he'll try to put it  
 somewhere he can see from his porch  
 swing.

EVELYN  
 Why's that?

ABE  
 He wants it to be his legacy.  
 He'll put it close to home.

EVELYN  
 So he can gloat every time he hears  
 a whistle scream. You don't think  
 he'll run those tracks through  
 here, do you?

ABE  
 I told him he was wasting his time.

Evelyn begins brushing her hair.

EVELYN  
 They did have such nice things. I  
 watched a couple of them wagons go  
 by the other day. I wonder what  
 Mrs. Cullers goes to bed in.

Abe moves to a rocking chair in the corner of the room. Evelyn sets her brush down and crawls under the covers. Abe leans forward, blows out the lamp, and sits back in the chair, watching.

CUT TO:

25 INT. TOWN FEED STORE -- MORNING

25

Cassius leans on the counter while the MANAGER (early 40s) takes inventory on a sheet of paper.

MANAGER

You should have seen this town thirty years ago. Half them buildings out there were gone. This feed store stands on the spot where the old jail used to be before they relocated it down the road.

CASSIUS

Needed more room?

MANAGER

I suppose. That and the sheriff didn't like the convicts hooting and hollering at ladies on the street. So they moved it down a couple blocks on account of the women.

CASSIUS

That was mighty thoughtful.

MANAGER

Yes, sir. Ain't been the same since that sheriff died. Thirty years ago, Larned was a different place.

CASSIUS

Was that Miller fellow around?

MANAGER

Abe Miller? I suspect he's always been around these parts. Did you meet him yet?

CASSIUS

Yes, I did. Him and his sons.

MANAGER

I don't see much of him anymore. His boys come into town now and again. Sometimes they come in here. Don't say much, but their kind usually don't.

CASSIUS

Uneducated boys?

MANAGER

That's what I fear. They ain't going to know anything different than tilling and harvesting. Well, there is that youngest boy. Something about him says he ain't like the rest.

CASSIUS

What do you mean?

MANAGER

Well, the others don't talk to him when they're in town. He's always wandering off on his own. When your own kin don't keep you around, the rest of us know something ain't right.

CUT TO:

26

EXT. BACK FIELDS -- MIDDAY

26

Quentin leans against a fence post pulling a weed apart. Every now and then, he looks over his shoulder in the direction of the Cullers house. He can only see the rooftop over the thick wall of trees surrounding the property.

Across the fields, his brothers are hard at work.

CASSIUS (O.C.)

Rest of your brothers are slaving away in this heat and you're looking mighty useless.

Quentin spins around to see Cassius approaching the other side of the fence.

QUENTIN

I finished the work Mama had for me. Ain't nothing wrong with taking a break, is there?

CASSIUS

No, no. In fact, you don't look like the kind of boy who's cut out for all that labor.

QUENTIN

You sound like my brothers.

CASSIUS

Well, tell me. What do you want to do?

QUENTIN

Work the fields like my...

CASSIUS

No. What do you *really* want to do?

Quentin tosses the weed aside.

QUENTIN

I don't know, I guess. Haven't thought much about it. There's really no need. All there is to do is work the farm.

CASSIUS

Now that's where you're wrong. I've been to the big cities, I've seen what young men your age can do. You name it, they're probably doing it. You just lack proper opportunities for your talents is all.

QUENTIN

You've never met me. How would you...

CASSIUS

I can sum a man up with just one look. It's true. I look at you and I see someone who wants to get out of here and to do something. Create something. Make a name for himself.

QUENTIN

I never gave much thought to ever leaving.

CASSIUS

Well then I'm telling you what you really want but just don't know. Your heart's yearning for it, but your brain just hasn't caught up yet. That's what I'm here for. Give you a little ambition.

QUENTIN

That's mighty kind of you, mister.  
But I think you're wasting your  
time.

CASSIUS

Now you sound like your father.

QUENTIN

You think so?

CASSIUS

Tell me. What's his angle with all  
that stubbornness about the  
railroad?

QUENTIN

I don't know what you mean.

CASSIUS

Of course you do. Why won't the  
man give the proposal a second  
thought?

QUENTIN

My father knows what he wants. He  
knows what's coming and he sort of  
braces himself for it, I suppose.  
He already knew all the answers to  
your questions before you even  
asked them. Like feeling the heat  
before there's a flame. He's  
always been like that.

CASSIUS

Narrow-visioned, you mean.

QUENTIN

No sir. He's...

ABE (O.C.)

Your mother ought to skin you  
alive.

Quentin turns to find Abe coming down to the fence line  
behind him.

ABE (CONT'D)

You're useless, you know? Get on  
up to the house.

CASSIUS

Now hold on there. This here is a  
brilliant young man.

(MORE)

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

Ain't a useless thing about him, if I may say so.

ABE

I said get, goddammit.

Quentin obeys and heads back to the house.

CASSIUS

What are you trying to do?

ABE

We might share a tract of woodland. Hell, we might even be drinking from the same well water. But I'm damn sure you won't go poking around in my family's affairs. You don't ask my boy about my decisions. He don't know a goddamn thing. Your house is up on that ridge; I suggest you stay up there.

CASSIUS

It'd take an idiot not to know you hate me. But it'd take a scientist to figure out why.

ABE

Don't let me catch you talking to any of my kin, you hear me?

CASSIUS

You mean your *kind*. Ain't all of them boys like you. Some of them got real brains. They'll be able to see why keeping up with innovations is the only way to live.

ABE

I'm a simple man. My family and I...we till the earth with our bare hands. That's the way we've done it since the beginning, without paying no mind to progress.

CASSIUS

You know, progress is like the train. What wise man would stand in its way? His hand out, thinking he'll stop it all on his own?

ABE

A wise man would pull up them tracks and watch your innovation run aground and be buried in its own filth.

CASSIUS

I've heard someone say all our industrialization is supposed to lift people like you out of poverty and squalor. Out of dry spells and desperate seasons. But I suppose one may fix his appetite for the bare essentials, grit his teeth, and crawl into the new century on all fours like a primate. Your one son ain't aiming to do that.

ABE

Quentin ain't none of your business, friend. And he doesn't think machines make us divine like you do.

CASSIUS

God was an inventor, wasn't He? If men like you were around for Genesis, you'd have told God not to worry about separating the dark from the light, land from sea, and we'd all still be floating on our backs while His face moved upon the waters. The very fact that you stand here right now with shoes on your feet and a shirt on your back says someone somewhere along the line said they'd move forward.

ABE

We didn't separate ourselves from the apes, Mr. Cullers. We didn't arrange for our dominance over the earth. It was handed to us. Like the earth gives us food, shelter, water: those bare essentials we grit our teeth about. It's when men start playing God that we call down our own catastrophes. And men like you play with idle toys. Mankind doesn't have to do a damn thing but wait.

Abe begins to walk away.

CASSIUS

I half expect you folks to be out of one of them hillbilly stories. Ever heard one of those? Oh, I suppose not. I just think you should know what you sound like to other people. You see, to them, you ain't some rugged outlaw at the world's end suffering to purify yourself...

ABE

I don't aim to purify nothing. All I know is: you won't run your trains through this land.

CASSIUS

I take you as a man of your word, Miller. All those boys of yours who probably can't spell their names in the dirt shows you ain't one to take too kindly to advancement. Look here. What you don't know is that Union Pacific and Central Pacific are vying to reach the West first. Union's promised me a large sum if I help ensure they get there first. I'd be willing to split that money with you, to mend any hard feelings.

ABE

I don't aim to help you with your business. I didn't ask for you to bring the competition here.

CASSIUS

I see. Well, this land ain't prisoner to your backwards ways. The train ain't hit a thing yet that could stop it. You better have mighty strong steel in that spine of yours if you think you can stand a chance.

Abe leaves him at the fence line.

CUT TO:

27

INT. BOYS' BEDROOM -- MORNING

27

Quentin lies asleep in his bed. The other two beds in the room are already empty. VOICES from outside can be heard.

Finally, the voices wake Quentin up. He crawls across his bed and looks out the window overlooking the front of the house.

QUENTIN'S POV: Abe, James, and Robert stand at the bottom of the front porch steps surrounded by fifteen other men. One of them is Cassius Cullers, standing next to the SHERIFF, and the JUDGE. The rest carry large rifles. The Sheriff speaks to Abe. The Judge nods his head, motions from Cassius to the fields, then extends a bundle of papers to Abe. Abe doesn't move to take them. Finally, James steps forward and takes the papers.

Quentin jumps out of bed and dresses quickly.

CUT TO:

28 INT. FRONT PARLOR -- THAT MOMENT

28

Quentin enters the room to find Evelyn and Miriam already there watching out the front windows.

QUENTIN  
What's happening?

EVELYN  
Cowards. Couldn't come by themselves. They had to bring all them guns with 'em.

QUENTIN  
What does the sheriff want? Why did he bring the judge?

EVELYN  
Shh!

Quentin watches out the window.

QUENTIN'S POV: The sheriff finishes talking, tips his hat, and turns to leave. The armed guard also begins to disperse and follow the sheriff back towards the road. The judge puts his hat on and follows the sheriff as well. Cassius lingers a moment longer staring at Abe before turning and heading back to his house. Abe remains unmoved.

CUT TO:

29 INT. FRONT HALL -- THAT MOMENT

29

The front door opens, and James marches in carrying the papers. Robert stops in the doorway and turns back to Abe.

After a moment, he continues on in the house leaving Abe alone outside.

Evelyn enters from Parlor.

EVELYN  
What did the sheriff say?

Neither James nor Robert responds. They both walk towards the kitchen, Evelyn following them.

CUT TO:

30

IN. KITCHEN -- THAT MOMENT

30

James stomps in and slams the bundle of papers down on the table. Robert and Evelyn enter as well. Evelyn slowly crosses towards the table and picks up the bundle.

Quentin and Miriam stand in the kitchen doorway.

Evelyn pages through the bundle, looking each sheet up and down.

EVELYN  
What does all of this say?

ROBERT  
They're taking away the north slope.

EVELYN  
What?

JAMES  
The north slope! The judge ruled that the land ain't really ours, and they're taking it away.

EVELYN  
Who are they giving it to?

JAMES  
Cullers! Goddamn thief!

EVELYN  
Cullers? Don't they know that's been our land for decades? They can't take it.

JAMES

Yeah, well, the sheriff said we unlawfully expanded our claim onto Cullers's land.

EVELYN

We've been here longer than Cullers. How could we?

JAMES

The sheriff wouldn't take no reason. Said the law was the law. Forgot to mention how Cullers paid for that law.

EVELYN

How much of the north slope?

JAMES

All of it.

EVELYN

Your father ain't going to let this happen.

JAMES

Well, he didn't say a thing. They started talking about land acquisition and unlawful encroachments, or what have you. And father got real quiet. He didn't even open his mouth when the judge said Cullers could have brought a lawsuit for money against us but didn't.

ROBERT

Now Cullers going to graze his cattle on our fields, let them stomp and shit on our food.

JAMES

Ain't ours no more! Didn't you hear the sheriff?

Quentin turns and begins to walk back towards the front parlor windows.

CUT TO:

31 INT. FRONT PARLOR -- THAT MOMENT

31

Quentin slowly approaches front windows.

ROBERT (O.C.)

I ought to go over there and cut  
his throat!

EVELYN (O.C.)

Ain't one of you going to do a damn  
thing. Your father will take care  
of this.

JAMES (O.C.)

Lot of good he did out there just  
now. Standing there, tongue-tied.  
How are we going to eat?

Quentin looks out the window. Abe is gone.

CUT TO:

32

EXT. WATER PUMP -- MORNING

32

Quentin sits between two empty buckets by the water pump watching the morning sky. Birds are just beginning to CHATTER. Quentin hears someone approaching from behind. He quickly turns to find Abe standing about three yards away, also watching the sunrise. Abe never looks at his son.

Quentin hops up and puts one of the buckets under the pump spigot and begins to work the handle. Abe remains still. Water spills into the bucket.

ABE

Today Sunday?

QUENTIN

Yes, sir.

ABE

Too early for them bells, I 'spect.  
Cullers and his family would be  
near town by now.

Quentin stops pumping. Abe looks down at him for the first time.

ABE (CONT'D)

Bring a rifle.

Abe starts walking towards the Cullers property.

CUT TO:

33 EXT. CULLERS PROPERTY -- THAT MOMENT 33

The Cullers house is twice the size of Miller's. Several chimneys coming out of the gabled roof. A spacious wrap-around deck lining the first floor. Signs of a newly built house are everywhere: dirt around the base is still freshly disturbed, piles of sawdust collect beneath the trees, and portions of the house are still unpainted.

CUT TO:

34 INT. CULLERS FRONT HALL -- THAT MOMENT 34

New, plush carpeting lines the hallway and goes up the stairs to the second floor. A vase of flowers sits on a table at the foot of the stairs.

CUT TO:

35 INT. CULLERS FRONT PARLOR -- THAT MOMENT 35

A large oak dining table sits in the center of the room surrounded by ten upholstered chairs with cushions in the seats. A painting of the archangel Michael slaying Satan hangs on the wall.

SHOT: ABE LOOKING INTO THE HOUSE FROM THE FRONT PORCH, FRAMED IN ONE OF THE TALL PARLOR WINDOWS.

CUT TO:

36 INT. CULLERS STAIRCASE -- THAT MOMENT 36

Family portraits are hung on the wall lining the stairs. Paintings of stern older women and wide-eyed men. Even a portrait of the children when they were younger.

Abe runs his fingers across one of these pictures

CUT TO:

37 INT. CULLERS FRONT PARLOR -- THAT MOMENT 37

Quentin walks past the large table to a tall cabinet. He opens the door and finds stacks and rows of fine China. He shuts the door.

In the corner of the room, he finds a trunk under a pile of fine linens. He removes these and opens the lid.

Inside, assorted gold and metal objects: candlesticks, trays, etc. He quickly shuts the lid and replaces the linens.

He walks to the front door and exits.

CUT TO:

38 INT. CULLERS MASTER BEDROOM -- THAT MOMENT 38

Abe steps into master bedroom. He stops at the foot of the bed, giving the whole room a look over. He crosses the long dresser and studies the intricate jewelry box, half-open with a string of pearls hanging out. He crosses to the window and looks out onto the backside of the Cullers property.

ABE'S POV: Quentin walks along the backside of the house along a row of wooden pens.

CUT TO:

39 EXT. CULLERS PROPERTY -- THAT MOMENT 39

Quentin walks along a row of wooden pens filled with chickens. He passes by a wooden shed and an open barrel of nails. Laying on the ground across his path is a sledge hammer. Quentin picks it up and sets it against the shed, out of the way. He continues into the barn.

CUT TO:

40 INT. CULLERS BARN -- THAT MOMENT 40

Quentin makes his way down the center of the barn, surrounded on both sides by stalls, each with a horse. Chickens congregate in the corner of the barn.

At the other end, the barn door stands ajar. Quentin walks to the door and steps out.

CUT TO:

41 INT. CULLERS STUDY -- THAT MOMENT 41

Abe steps into the dark study, looking at the shelves of books lining each of the walls. He walks around two large reading chairs and stops at a round table at the center of the room. Sitting on the table is a Zoetrope machine.

Abe bends down and studies it. He takes a finger, gives the center disc a spin, and sees the images flicker through the slits. He moves in closer, nearly pressing his eye against the slit, and gives the disc another spin. Inside, the image of a young girl dancing comes to life as she takes a couple steps back and forth.

CUT TO:

42 EXT. CULLERS PASTURE -- THAT MOMENT 42

Quentin takes a couple cautious steps into the meadow.

Five yards ahead of him stands a bull grazing. The bull has raised its head, watching Quentin slowly approach.

Quentin slowly makes his way until he's only a foot or two away. He slowly reaches out his hand.

The bull doesn't respond.

Quentin places his hand on the bull's head, right between the eyes. He begins to gently rub the bull's head.

After a moment, he hears someone approaching and turns just in time to see Abe swinging a sledge hammer. Quentin jumps out of the way and lands in the grass as the hammer smacks the bull on the side of the face. The beast's legs buckle and it moans. Abe swings the hammer again and brings it down square on the top of its head, splitting one of the horns. The bull flattens to the earth, kicking and twitching. Abe takes one more hit with the hammer, and the bull is dead.

Quentin remains in the grass staring at the dead animal, which stick twitches from time to time. Abe wipes the blood from his face and walks away.

CUT TO:

43 EXT. CULLERS PROPERTY -- LATER THAT MORNING 43

The Cullers family rides up towards the house in their wagon. Cassius drives the mule. In the carriage sits his wife MARY (early 50s), his daughter LILY (25) and his sons DAVID (35), CASEY (32), BILL (28), CASSIUS JR. (27), and TOM (23).

He stops it in front of the house, and the family climbs out of the back. David remains in the back. Cassius hands Cassius Jr. the reins.

CASSIUS

Take her around back. Ride with  
him, David. See that the mule's  
fed.

DAVID

Yes, sir.

The two of them drive the wagon around the back of the house.

Lily opens the front door and leads the family into the  
house. Cassius climbs the front steps.

Just as he reaches the doorstep, he hears David shouting.

DAVID (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Father! Come quick!

Cassius sprints off the front porch and rounds the house.

David and Cassius Jr. Stand side-by-side staring into the  
pasture. Cassius reaches them.

CASSIUS

What?

He looks out and sees the pasture littered with dead cattle.  
Five in all. The other cattle, some smeared with blood,  
huddle against the fence. His other family members file out  
the back of the house to see.

CUT TO:

44

INT. PARENTS BEDROOM -- AFTERNOON

44

Abe strips off his bloody shirt and tosses it on the floor.  
Evelyn stands in the doorway watching. Abe rinses the blood  
off his hands in a bowl of water next on the dresser.

EVELYN

No good ever came from killing,  
Abe.

Abe looks at his wife in the mirror on the wall.

ABE

God smote his enemies.

He splashes water over his face.

EVELYN

Well, we didn't get our land back,  
did we?

(MORE)

EVELYN (CONT'D)

And he's going to know who did it.  
What will you do if he wants a  
tooth for a tooth?

Abe says nothing. He splashes water across his face again.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Cullers might just be dumb enough  
to let you have it. You ain't as  
young as you used to be -- remember  
that.

ABE

I have eight sons, don't I?

EVELYN

Five. Three of them's just  
workers. Don't you go get them  
tangled up in this. You'll end up  
with a wildfire on your hands.

Again, Abe is silent. Evelyn crosses over, picks bloody  
shirt off the floor, and leaves with it.

Abe looks at himself in the mirror.

ABE

God smote his enemies.

He rinses his hands.

CUT TO:

45 EXT. MILLER HOUSE--NIGHT

45

James bursts out the front door. Jason is already waiting  
for him.

JAMES

Where is she?

JASON

Down by the road.

They begin running in the direction of the road.

JAMES

Who found her?

JASON

Quentin heard her first. He's with  
her now. Shit, James...she's all  
cut up. She's hurting real bad.

JAMES  
Get on back to the house. Get  
father. Wake up mother.

Jason turns and runs in the opposite direction back to the house.

CUT TO:

46

EXT. ROAD -- THAT MOMENT

46

James rushes towards the figures of Miriam, who huddles in the middle of the road screaming, and Quentin, who is kneeling next to her. Her dress is shredded and bloody. Her hair is matted with sweat and blood. Her feet and palms are black with dirt.

MIRIAM  
Goddamn them! Goddamn them!

James bends down next to her.

JAMES  
Miriam! Miriam! We'll get you  
back to the house!

He moves to pick her up. She recoils. As she scoots away, Quentin notices the dirt beneath her smeared with blood.

MIRIAM  
I'll tear their fucking throats  
out. Goddamn them!

James tries to restrain her. She struggles.

MIRIAM (CONT'D)  
Take the knife out of me! Take it  
out! Jesus! It burns!

JAMES  
Quentin! The knife!

QUENTIN  
There isn't one!

JAMES  
What--

QUENTIN  
There isn't a knife!

MIRIAM

I tried to scratch their eyes out.  
But they held be down. The held me  
down in the hay. I couldn't  
breathe. Their hands smelt like  
tar!

James struggles to his feet, carrying Miriam in his arms.  
She wails as blood begins to run down the insides of her  
thighs. The spot where she was sitting is black with blood.

JAMES

Jesus!

QUENTIN

Get her to the house! Hurry!

CUT TO:

47

EXT. MILLER FRONT PORCH -- THAT MOMENT

47

Jason comes out of the house, followed by Robert, Susan,  
Isaac, Evelyn, and Abe.

James and Quentin appear, carrying Miriam between them. They  
lay her down on the porch under the lantern for light. The  
family gathers around her.

Abe kneels down and straddles her, holding her face between  
his hands.

ABE

Who did this?

Miriam is screaming with pain and doesn't hear him. He gives  
her head a slight shake.

ABE (CONT'D)

Who did this?

Al, Jesse, and Rich come around the side of the house and  
join the crowd.

Abe brushes the hair out of her face.

ABE (CONT'D)

Listen to me. Tell me who did  
this. Let me know and I'll take  
care of it.

MIRIAM

You did.

ABE  
Tell me who did it, Miriam?

MIRIAM  
You!

ABE  
Was it Cullers. Did one of them do  
this to you?

Miriam wails in pain. She looks him square in the eyes.

MIRIAM  
You promised this wouldn't happen  
again. You promised.

ABE  
It's over. It's over. What did  
they do to you?

Abe looks at the cuts on her neck, chest, and shoulders as if  
it were the first time he noticed them.

Miriam pushes her hands between her legs, screaming. Abe  
looks down and then back at her.

ABE (CONT'D)  
Get her inside.

The brothers pick her up and rush her inside. Evelyn and the  
rest follow, leaving Abe on the porch, kneeling over a dark  
bloody stain in the wood.

CUT TO:

48 INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

48

Quentin goes around the table picking up the bloody cloths  
and garments strewn about and tossing them into a bucket.

Susan walks in. Quentin goes to hand her the bucket.

SUSAN  
Mother says to throw those out.  
S'no use trying to wash 'em.

QUENTIN  
How's Miriam?

SUSAN  
We got her in bed. She's sleeping  
now. They did a horrible thing to  
her.

QUENTIN  
It was Cullers, wasn't it?

She takes a jug of water off the table.

SUSAN  
She said it was three men from  
town. None of them was Cullers. I  
better get this upstairs to mother.

Quentin sets the bucket down next to the back door. He goes  
over to the lantern on the table and blows out the flame.

CUT TO:

49 INT. FRONT PARLOR -- THAT MOMENT

49

Quentin makes his way around the room blowing out the  
candles. When he goes to extinguish the last one, Abe calls  
to him from the shadows in the corner of the room.

ABE  
You think you can do a job for me?

Abe steps out of the dark into the dim light of the lantern.

QUENTIN  
Yes, sir.

ABE  
Go into town tomorrow. See the  
apothecary.

He picks a slip of paper off the table and hands it to  
Quentin.

ABE (CONT'D)  
There's the name. Buy a bottle of  
it.

QUENTIN  
What's it say? Is it for Miriam?

ABE  
Yes. Yes, it's for Miriam. Just  
bring it back here. Don't talk to  
anyone. You hear?

QUENTIN  
Yes, sir.

Abe goes past him into the front hall and climbs the stairs. Quentin looks at the word one more time before blowing out the last lantern.

CUT TO:

50 EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE OF TOWN -- MORNING 50

Quentin walks down the dirt road. He steps along the cart tracks then begins hopping from one hoof print to another.

Soon, he passes a man on horseback followed by a chain gang.

Crossing a wooden bridge, he enters the town.

CUT TO:

51 INT. APOTHECARY -- MORNING 51

Quentin walks along the sidewalk outside the apothecary's windows and looks in. After a moment, he opens the door and steps in.

The APOTHECARY (late 60s) enters from a back room and stands behind a counter, putting his wire-rimmed glasses on.

APOTHECARY

Morning, young man. How may I help you?

QUENTIN

I need a bottle of this.

He hands the apothecary the slip of paper. The apothecary takes a good long look at the word scribbled on the paper and then at Quentin.

APOTHECARY

Someone get hurt?

QUENTIN

What?

APOTHECARY

I just thought someone's been torn up pretty bad to be needing this.

Quentin doesn't respond. The apothecary turns and begins searching his shelves for the correct item.

Quentin wanders to the other side of the shop and looks at a row of multi-colored jars and bottles, each filled with different-sized capsules and pills. At the end, he stops by a larger jar of white powder.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)  
 Know what that is, son?

QUENTIN  
 No, sir.

APOTHECARY  
 That's powder to make your headaches go away.

QUENTIN  
 Ain't no such thing.

APOTHECARY  
 What do you think you're looking at? Ask anyone who's been in here and bought some. Gets rid of the pain in under an hour. Didn't know such a thing existed, huh?

QUENTIN  
 I didn't.

Quentin crosses back over to apothecary.

APOTHECARY  
 That'll be ten cents.

Quentin hands him a pocketful of coins. The apothecary studies Quentin a moment, picks out a dime, and scoots the rest back towards Quentin.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)  
 This will do.

He hands the bottle to Quentin.

APOTHECARY (CONT'D)  
 Be careful with this stuff. It's mighty strong now.

QUENTIN  
 Thank you, sir.

Quentin pockets the bottle and exits the shop.

CUT TO:

52

EXT. STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

52

Quentin walks along the shops, looking in the windows as he passes. Several TOWNSPEOPLE pass him going either way. Wagons and horses rush up and down the street.

Quentin comes to a corner and stops to wait.

Three older boys -- BILL CULLERS (28), CASSIUS JR. CULLERS (27), and TOM CULLERS (23)--come up behind him. Bill grabs the collar of his coat and pulls him away from the street up against the wall.

BILL

You one of them Miller boys?

QUENTIN

What are you doing?

TOM

Yeah, he is. I've seen him before.

CASSIUS JR.

He's the little one. Baby Miller.

QUENTIN

Let go of me.

BILL

Know who we are? You killed our cows.

Bill punches Quentin across the face and lets him drop to his knees.

TOM

Come on, get up.

They grab his shoulders and stand him up.

CASSIUS JR.

What are you doing way out here by yourself?

QUENTIN

Ain't none of your business.

BILL

You must be pretty stupid. You a stupid boy, huh? What's your name, stupid boy? Baby Miller?

Cassius Jr. punches him in the ribs. Tom pins him up against the wall. Cassius Jr. takes a second punch to Quentin's side.

TOM

My brother asked you a question.

QUENTIN

My name's Quentin, you son of a bitch.

Bill pulls a knife from his pocket and presses the blade against Quentin's cheek.

BILL

How about it, boys? Should I make him look like his pretty sister? Give him a nice big scar across his face? Don't know where she got it but it sure looks good on her!

Quentin struggles to release himself.

QUENTIN

You touched my sister! I'll kill you!

TOM

Not us. Just a couple of fellows we talked to in town. And they did more than touch her, didn't they Bill?

BILL

You killed our cattle, so we had your little sow cut up. Fair trade, I reckon.

Bill lowers the blade, tracing Quentin's rib cage.

CASSIUS JR.

Let him have it. Don't go too deep. Just stick him a little bit.

Cassius Jr. and Tom tighten their grips on Quentin. Tom covers Quentin's mouth. Bill opens Quentin's coat, exposing his shirt.

BILL

Think he'll squeal like his sister did?

The brothers laugh.

TOM

Do it.

CASSIUS JR.

Just one.

Bill presses the tip against Quentin's side.

BILL

This is for calling my mother a  
bitch.

Bill sticks Quentin, who moans. Bill holds the tip of the blade in Quentin as he speaks:

BILL (CONT'D)

If you or any of your kin step foot  
on our land again, we'll skin all  
of you alive. Mount your fucking  
heads on the wall. Hear me, boy?

He finally retracts the blade and the other two let Quentin go. Quentin curls up on the sidewalk gasping and holding his side.

The Cullers boys walk away laughing.

Quentin takes a look where the blade entered -- a patch of blood on his shirt around the tear.

He gathers himself up and checks his pockets. The bottle has fallen out. He searches around his feet. The bottle has rolled across the sidewalk against the wall. He picks it up and replaces it in his pocket.

CUT TO:

53

INT. KITCHEN -- AFTERNOON

53

Abe sits at the table, a coffee cup sitting in front of him. Evelyn moves around the kitchen, moving plates and cups.

EVELYN

The law wouldn't stand for this  
sort of thing in South Carolina.  
Two children attacked. One of them  
nearly bled to death lying in the  
road.

Abe turns the cup.

EVELYN (CONT'D)  
Ain't you going to say anything?  
You just going to sit there?

Abe still doesn't respond.

Quentin comes in from the back door, making his way towards the parlor.

EVELYN (CONT'D)  
Stop right there.

She crosses to Quentin.

EVELYN (CONT'D)  
Lift up your shirt.

QUENTIN  
It's fine.

EVELYN  
What did I say?

Quentin lifts up his shirt, revealing a piece of thick cloth wrapped around his stomach with a dark spot over his wound.

EVELYN (CONT'D)  
Still bleeding?

QUENTIN  
A little bit. Don't hurt none.

EVELYN  
What were you doing in town anyhow?

Quentin eyes Abe, who doesn't look up at him. He lets his shirt down.

QUENTIN  
I had to get something.

EVELYN  
What?

QUENTIN  
Nothing important.

EVELYN  
That ain't no answer. Don't you  
leave the property by yourself  
again.

Susan comes in through the back door.

SUSAN

Do you smell it? Something's been burning over at the Cullers place.

EVELYN

Burning?

SUSAN

The barn's burning. The Cullers boys have been trying to get all the livestock they could out of there. I wonder if some of them animals weren't stuck.

EVELYN

What have those devils been up to?

Quentin looks at Abe. Abe looks right back at him, then, after a moment, takes a sip of his coffee.

CUT TO:

54 INT. FRONT PARLOR -- NIGHT

54

Abe stands in front of the fireplace and lights lantern. He crosses to table in the center of the room and places the lantern in the middle.

Evelyn enters with a cup of coffee, placing it next to the lantern.

Abe opens a cigar box, picks one out, and puts it in his mouth. He lights the cigar and gives a few puffs. After a moment, he takes it out of his mouth, looks at it, then throws it in the fireplace. He shuts the lid on the cigar box.

He hears BIRD CRIES outside.

ABE

Listen.

Evelyn pauses.

Abe walks through kitchen to the back door. Evelyn follows.

CUT TO:

55 EXT. REAR OF HOUSE -- THAT MOMENT

55

Abe goes down the back steps. Evelyn waits in the doorway. Abe watches the treeline about fifty yards away.

ABE'S POV: The trees are still. Suddenly, a shadow moves low through the trunks and disappears.

ABE  
Get the boys.

Evelyn disappears into the house. Abe watches the trees.

CUT TO:

56 INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- THAT MOMENT 56

Evelyn knocks on the door. James opens it.

EVELYN  
(whisper) Wake up Robert and Isaac.  
Your father needs you. Hurry!

CUT TO:

57 INT. BOYS' BEDROOM -- THAT MOMENT 57

Quentin sits up in his bed, hearing the low voices outside the door. He tiptoes over, cracks the door open, and looks out.

QUENTIN'S POV: James comes out of his room pulling a coat on, followed by Robert and Isaac. Evelyn leads them down the stairs.

CUT TO:

58 INT. KITCHEN -- THAT MOMENT 58

Evelyn enters from the parlor carrying the lantern. Abe comes in through the back door, meets Evelyn halfway across the room, and grabs the lantern. He blows out the flame.

JAMES  
What's going on?

ABE  
Them Cullers boys. Out there.

He points out the window. He looks at Evelyn.

ABE (CONT'D)  
Put out all the lights.

Evelyn put the lantern down on the table and goes out to the parlor.

ABE (CONT'D)  
 The birds are stirring.  
 Something's keeping them up.

CUT TO:

59 EXT. BACK FIELDS -- THAT MOMENT 59

The candles and lanterns throughout the Miller house go out, and all the windows go dark one-by-one.

CUT TO:

60 INT. KITCHEN -- THAT MOMENT 60

Abe walks to the back window overlooking the fields and treeline. His sons join him.

Bird CRIES sound again.

ISAAC  
 They're out there, all right.

A moment of silence.

ABE'S POV: A flash of light along the treeline to the right. Slowly, several dark shapes emerge from the trees and crouch down in the tall grass.

ABE  
 Get your guns.

James, Robert, and Isaac rush over to the closet and take out their rifles, grabbing an extra one for Abe.

Abe crosses to coat rack, grabs his coat, and puts it on. Robert hands him his rifle. Abe checks to see if it's loaded and cocks it.

They exit out the back door.

CUT TO:

61 EXT. REAR OF HOUSE -- THAT MOMENT 61

The four of them stop in the dirt at the bottom of the steps, watching the treeline. All is silent.

To the left of the house, a handful of crows scatter from another treeline, SQUAWKING.

James and Robert raise their guns in the direction of the noise. Abe quickly throws his fist in the air, signaling them to halt.

Back to the right, small clouds of dust rise just beyond a small hill in the fields. Another glint of light flashes along the treeline.

ROBERT

How many do you think there are?

ABE

Get the rest of your brothers.

Robert runs back into the house.

ABE (CONT'D)

See to it they don't get at our livestock. If you catch any of them, bring 'em back here. I'll skin them alive.

Robert returns, followed by Al, Jesse, Rich, Jason, and Quentin, each carrying a gun.

ABE (CONT'D)

You better put a bullet in their head before you start worrying about which one you got.

Abe points to the right, and Robert, Jesse, Rich, and Jason head that way, crouching alongside the house and disappearing into the dark.

Abe points left, and Isaac, Al, and James head that way into the tall grass.

Abe and Quentin start straight down into the fields. They crouch in the grass and move slowly with their heads down. James checks behind them from time to time.

A breeze shakes the grass, and the two of them pause. Abe waits, listening.

ABE (CONT'D)

(whisper) There you are.

Quentin looks ahead.

QUENTIN'S POV: The dark grass shifts side-to-side. No sign of people.

QUENTIN

(whisper) I don't see him.

ABE  
 (whisper) Right up there. Hear him  
 breathing? Wait here. Be ready.

Abe slowly stands up. Quentin pulls his rifle up to his shoulder, eye over the barrel, aiming straight ahead.

After a moment, Abe takes a couple steps forward.

Another breeze shakes the grass. Quentin holds his breath.

A MAN with a sack on his head springs up out of the grass two yards ahead of Abe, screaming and his rifle aimed.

Abe quickly lifts his rifle and fires a shot into the Man's face, blowing off the right side. He falls backwards into the grass, firing a shot off at the sky.

To the left and right, gunshots begin exploding in the dark. Shadows along the treeline race out in the grass. More HOLLERS echo from the trees.

Quentin runs forward and stands over the Man's body. Abe crouches down next to him and rips off the blood-soaked sack. The attacker's face is mutilated.

ABE (CONT'D)  
 This one of the boys who stopped  
 you in town?

QUENTIN  
 Don't know.

ABE  
 I asked you if you've seen him  
 before. Did he attack you?

QUENTIN  
 Yes.

ABE  
 That's for your wound. But we'll  
 collect more before the night is  
 through. Follow me!

Abe begins running towards the treeline to the right of the house, towards the gunshots and hollers. Quentin trails him.

Two other MEN with sacks over their faces spring up and fire at them. Abe shoots one of them in the gut and buries his muzzle in the other's face.

They race to the treeline.

CUT TO:

62 EXT. FOREST -- THAT MOMENT

62

Abe runs into the maze of trees. Quentin tries to keep up but loses him.

Shadows rush past him to the left and right, firing their rifles into the dark. Quentin keeps running, taking shots at anything that moves.

He hears SCREAMS up ahead. He keeps running.

He races past dead bodies, face down in the dirt or strewn across tree trunks.

QUENTIN

Father!

Quentin runs alone through the forest. Shadows no longer pass him. He pauses in a small clearing.

He hears HOLLERS coming from all directions. Every now and then, a GUN SHOT echoes through the woods, and he might see a flash of gunpowder in the distance.

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

James! Robert!

He begins running in another direction. He sees another body face down in the dirt.

He hears more HOLLERS.

He stops, turns back, and begins in yet another direction. He can't find anyone.

AL (O.C.)

Quentin!

Quentin stops.

AL (O.C.) (CONT'D)

Quentin!

Quentin turns, rushes up a short incline, and finds Al lying against a tree trunk holding his neck. Quentin crouches down beside him.

AL (CONT'D)  
They got me right below the chin.  
I can't feel my ear.

Quentin takes a look.

QUENTIN  
I can't tell.

AL  
Where are the others?

QUENTIN  
I lost them.

They hear more SCREAMS and GUN SHOTS.

AL  
Father's going to give them hell.

QUENTIN  
I got to get you home.

AL  
Don't move me.

Blood gushes from Al's neck.

AL (CONT'D)  
I can't get my legs working.

QUENTIN  
They'll be back soon. We'll get  
you up to the house.

AL  
Not much good that'll do me.  
You'll end up putting right in the  
earth once you get me up there. I  
killed that son of a bitch for  
shooting me.

Al motions with a slight nod behind Quentin. Quentin turns and sees a man with a mask twisted over a stump, his face and chest bloody.

AL (CONT'D)  
I hope that was Cullers himself.

QUENTIN  
Don't talk, Al. You're bleeding  
too much.

AL  
 They'll wish they never tried to  
 put train tracks through here.  
 Make them wish that, Quentin.

QUENTIN  
 All right.

AL  
 Tell me you will. I want you to do  
 it with my rifle, too.

QUENTIN  
 Sure. I will.

Quentin takes Al's rifle.

Al begins to shake, his neck bleeding more profusely.

AL  
 He came up on me in the dark...took  
 a bullet right below the  
 chin...ain't never seen...put me in  
 the ground. Put Cullers in the  
 ground...

Al dies. Quentin closes his eyelids.

CUT TO:

63 EXT. FRONT FIELDS -- EVENING 63

Quentin is digging the second of two graves in the Family Plot.

James appear from the front fields and marches up to the front door and enters the house.

Quentin drops the shovel and walks up to the front porch. He hears James's voice from within and peeks in the parlor window.

QUENTIN'S POV: Abe sits at the table in the middle of the parlor, and James paces the room, shouting.

CUT TO:

64 INT. FRONT PARLOR -- THAT MOMENT 64

JAMES  
 They killed Al and Robert. Who did  
 we get last night?  
 (MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

Three or four of their laborers.  
That's all. We ought to drag each  
and every one of them out into the  
road and bleed 'em to death.

ABE

My sons ain't been buried yet.

JAMES

What? Are you going to wait?

ABE

Got to have a little bit of  
respect...

JAMES

If we don't do something...You  
ain't thinking about backing down,  
are you? Robert and Al--

ABE

Robert and Al ain't of concern no  
more. They're dead! There! Done!  
You think I don't want to get  
Cullers back? I haven't thought of  
a thing except making that man  
suffer. I want to see him burn. I  
can almost feel it. I've lost two  
sons! Don't come stomping around  
in front of me cursing me up one  
side and down the other! You don't  
need to do a damn thing but what I  
tell you to do. That's about all  
you're good for, ain't it? Now get  
out back and see that those boxes  
are ready for your brothers. I  
won't put them in the earth bare  
like heathens.

JAMES

So we're going to wait for the law  
to do something--

ABE

The law? Where are they at? They  
would have been here by now! He  
paid them to interfere in taking  
our land, now he's keeping them out  
of this. He wants to take care of  
this himself. No more buying other  
people off to do it for him. The  
son of a bitch wants to get his  
hands dirty. But he sure as hell  
doesn't know who he's coming after.

(MORE)

ABE (CONT'D)

My hands have been stained from all the years they've been soaking in blood. And I'm going to wrap my red fingers around his throat and watch his eyes turn up into his skull. Hear me? Now, get out.

James leaves the room.

CUT TO:

65 EXT. FRONT PORCH -- THAT MOMENT

65

Quentin watches James leave the room and then walks around the side of the house. He can see Isaac cutting boards for the coffins. Jesse and Rich are hammering away.

CUT TO:

66 EXT. BACK PORCH -- THAT MOMENT

66

James comes out the back door. He heads for the group working on the coffins but quickly changes his direction and heads toward the water pump, brushing past Quentin.

After a moment, Quentin follows James to the water pump, where he stands looking in the direction of the Cullers property.

QUENTIN

James?

No answer.

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

James, I want to help.

Again, James does not respond. He keeps his back to Quentin.

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

I want to get those bastards as much as you do.

JAMES

Ain't you supposed to be helping them?

QUENTIN

Father's tired. He's old. We ought to do this for him.

James turns to him.

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

We can't let them think they've won. We've been here longer. Father's always said we need to take what's ours and don't let anyone else have it.

JAMES

What were you thinking then?

QUENTIN

Don't know. You always have the ideas. I just want to help.

JAMES

Father said wait until after them two are buried.

QUENTIN

We have to do it tonight. Then they won't have a chance to celebrate.

James pauses.

JAMES

You've got to go through with it.

QUENTIN

I said I would, didn't I?

CUT TO:

67 INT. CULLERS STUDY -- NIGHT

67

JUNE CULLERS (3) plays with rag doll in the parlor. She hears some commotion coming from the dining room. She hears some glass BREAK. Her mother, ELEANOR (28) is asleep in a chair by the fireplace.

June gets up and walks to the dining room door.

Shadows move back-and-forth in the light coming from under the door. One of the shadows pause in front of the door as June is right on the other side of it. After a moment, the shadow moves away.

After a moment of silence, June opens the door and enters the dining room.

CUT TO:

68 INT. CULLERS DINING ROOM -- THAT MOMENT 68

June steps into the empty dining room. A bowl of food has been spilled on the large oak table. The chair behind it has been knocked over. The back door is slowly swinging shut.

CUT TO:

69 EXT. CULLERS PASTURE -- THAT MOMENT 69

Jesse drags Tom Cullers away from the house. Tom has a gag tied over his mouth. His hands are bound behind his back. He visibly struggles. Rich runs up and grabs hold of Tom's other side, helping to pull him out into the dark pasture.

JESSE

You going to cry? Didn't get to finish your food? Where you're going, you won't need food anymore.

CUT TO:

70 EXT. FOREST -- THAT MOMENT 70

A clearing: James, Quentin, Jason, and Isaac wait. Jesse and Rich soon appear, pulling Tom with them. They throw Tom down in the dirt. James stands over him.

JAMES

You cowardly son of a bitch. Killed two of my brothers. You must be the dumbest bastard in the state. Don't you know who we are?

James takes the rifle off his back and smacks Tom in the side of the face with it.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You think you can move out here and tell the rest of us what to do. That this is the way things are going to be. You really think so?

He quickly aims the gun and fires into the dirt inches from Tom, who recoils.

JESSE

I think he's afraid.

JAMES

Good. He should be. His family provoked us. They should have known better.

He cocks the gun and points it at Cassius Jr.'s head.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Think I won't do it? You better not blink. You might miss it.

Tom wails through his gag and struggles to move away.

JASON

Think you're headed somewhere, friend?

Quentin moves along the outside of the circle.

JAMES

Straighten that boy out, Jason.

Jason pulls Tom up and wraps an elbow around his neck.

JASON

Stand up.

Tom crumples towards the ground. Jason grabs him again and stands him up.

JASON (CONT'D)

I said get up.

Again, Tom lets himself fall.

James punches Tom in the gut with the butt of his rifle.

JAMES

Boy needs to follow directions better.

Rich and Jesse laugh.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You know, my father didn't want us to do anything until our brothers were properly buried. But you'll in the ground before they are. I'll see to it. Your family -- they ain't going to find you. You'll rot out here by yourself.

Tom struggles against his restraints.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
Give me a rock.

Jesse, Rich, and Jason check around their feet. Rich spots a large, jagged rock and hands it over to James.

James turns back to Tom.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
My brothers didn't die quickly.

With that, he bashes the rock into the side of Tom's head. Tom collapses sideways and hollers.

James stands over him and gives his head a second smack with the stone, splitting part of the skull open just behind the ear.

Quentin staggers backwards and grabs hold of a tree for balance.

James smashes the rock into Tom's head a third time and then steps back.

Tom writhes around in the dirt moaning and kicking.

ISAAC  
He ain't dead yet.

James drops the rock to the ground.

Tom shakes and screams.

QUENTIN  
Finish him off, James!

JAMES  
What? You getting squeamish all of a sudden?

QUENTIN  
I said finish him off!

JAMES  
Don't you fucking cry! I ought to split your head open!

QUENTIN  
Kill him already!

JAMES  
You do it!

QUENTIN

You're the one who got him this far. Now finish him.

James turns his back and walks towards the others. Tom continues to moan and tremble.

Quentin quickly races forward, grabs the rock, and turns back to Tom. He raises the rock into the air and brings it down into Tom's head.

Tom goes stiff for a moment. Then he begins to twitch. Quentin frantically hits him again.

QUENTIN (CONT'D)

Die, goddammit!

He hits Tom over and over again, getting himself covered in blood. Finally, Tom stops moving, but Quentin keeps smacking the body with the rock. After a few more hits, the rock slips from his hand and lands in the dirt.

Quentin weeps.

JAMES

That boy deserved to be left out here.

Quentin leaps up and runs away towards the house.

CUT TO:

71 EXT. WATER PUMP -- NIGHT

71

Quentin rushes up to the water pump and begins working the handle. He splashes the water over his face and hands, cleaning off the blood. He takes off his bloody shirt and tosses it into the grass. He splashes more water across his face, slowly calming down.

He takes a couple deep breaths and heads for the back door.

CUT TO:

72 INT. KITCHEN -- THAT MOMENT

72

Quentin enters the kitchen through the back door. Abe sits at the table in the dark. Quentin sees him and stops.

ABE

I ain't ever known you to be out all night.

QUENTIN

Sorry.

ABE

Were you with your brothers?

QUENTIN

Yes, sir.

ABE

You've been up to something. I know it. You don't look like yourself.

Quentin doesn't respond.

ABE (CONT'D)

I suspect you'd tell me everything if I asked you to. You ain't like the others. Never was. The other boys -- James, Robert, the rest of them -- they all have a way about them. Someone could take one look at them and know they was brothers. Even them boys we brought on to work. But there's something about you. I don't know if something ain't right or if something ain't wrong. I haven't decided yet.

QUENTIN

Maybe I ain't as different as you think.

ABE

What? And you be like James?

QUENTIN

Yes.

ABE

James...there's a fire in him. Sometimes you can look him in the eyes and see the devil looking right back.

QUENTIN

Is that why you always got him doing those errands?

ABE

I could tell James to cut out his left eye and he'd do it; don't even matter why. That's a good son.

(MORE)

ABE (CONT'D)

He's fixed many problems for me,  
kept my hands clean. Ain't  
everyday you find a boy like that.  
I look at you and I don't know you.  
I don't see a bit of myself in you.  
Maybe God spared you that.

QUENTIN

I'd never make my daughter do the  
things you've made Miriam do, if  
that's what you mean.

ABE

Miriam never did a thing she didn't  
want to.

QUENTIN

She's like James; all you'd have to  
do is ask, father. Ain't one of us  
who wouldn't do whatever you wanted  
us to.

ABE

You're trying to sound like one of  
your brothers. But you don't look  
the part.

QUENTIN

What did you make Miriam do all  
those times until she got cut up?  
Was she just a trap for anyone who  
tried to compete with you?

ABE

It's none of your business. You  
couldn't understand a thing about  
what I did. You don't possess the  
right mind. You can't see past the  
little things like a damn woman.

QUENTIN

Well, after tonight, maybe you'll  
be proud of me. Maybe you'll see  
I'm not different. And you was  
wrong: I wouldn't tell you. If you  
asked me what we've been up to, I'd  
just say you'll have to wait and  
see. And you'll have to do just  
that. You'll thank us, father.  
You really will.

Quentin leaves the room. Abe remains in the dark.

CUT TO:

73

INT. FRONT HALL -- MORNING

73

There's a series of firm knocks on the front door. Evelyn and Susan are cooking in the kitchen. The knocks repeat.

Abe walks into the front hall and crosses to the door.

ABE

Evelyn? You going to let someone stand there knocking all morning?

He opens it quickly and comes face-to-face with the caller.

Cassius stands on the front doorstep, his eyes red with tears.

Before Abe can say a word, a gunshot resonates through the whole house. Abe lurches forward and slowly looks down.

ABE'S POV: Cassius's smoking barrel is inches from his stomach where a patch of blood quickly spreads on his shirt.

Abe collapses to the floor and moans. Cassius is already gone.

EVELYN (O.C.)

What was that? Abe?

Evelyn runs into the hall.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Oh God!

She races to his side.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Susan! Get the boys! Quick!

She takes a handful of her apron and presses it over his wound.

Quentin scrambles down the steps and stands over his parents.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

Quentin! We gotta get your father to town! Get the horses!

Quentin stands there dumbfounded.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

You deaf? Get the damn horses! He's bleeding to death!

Quentin rushes out the front door.

EVELYN (CONT'D)  
 Abe? We'll get you to the doctor.  
 Fight it, Abe!

Abe groans. Evelyn presses her apron harder. The boys finally join her in the hallway, gathering around the two of them.

FADE TO:

74 INT. KITCHEN -- MORNING 74

Evelyn puts food on a plate, grabs a cup of coffee, and carries the meals into the front hall.

CUT TO:

75 INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY -- THAT MOMENT 75

Evelyn climbs the steps into the upstairs hallway and stops outside her bedroom door. She knocks and waits a moment. When no one answers, she slowly opens the door and steps in.

CUT TO:

76 INT. PARENTS BEDROOM -- THAT MOMENT 76

Abe sits in a rocking chair in front of the open window.

EVELYN  
 Decided to get out of bed today?

He doesn't answer.

EVELYN (CONT'D)  
 Been a while, hasn't it. I brought  
 your breakfast.

She sets it down on the dresser. She crosses over to him and leans down to kiss him. He turns his head away to avoid her. She slowly recoils and walks away.

EVELYN (CONT'D)  
 How are you healing?

Abe begins rocking the chair back and forth.

EVELYN (CONT'D)

I know what you're wanting to do.  
It's why you got out of bed this  
soon. Don't do anything that will  
open those stitches back up.

He doesn't respond. She wipes her hands on her apron, gives him another look, and then leaves the room.

Abe rocks in his chair, staring out the window.

In the distance, he hears a TRAIN WHISTLE. His rocking slowly stops.

He sees a black column of smoke on the horizon.

CUT TO:

77

EXT. FRONT PORCH -- AFTERNOON

77

Quentin sits on the top step whittling a stick. Abe slowly comes out the front door, using a cane to help him walk. Quentin turns to him, and then looks away.

ABE

What's the matter with you?

No answer.

ABE (CONT'D)

Man's a pitiful ape, ain't he? He's lost the heart to suffer. Man doesn't have the stomach for the all the suffering that comes with this life. He can't take the sight of blood like he used to. There was a time when boys younger than yourself rode out into the west, made war with the savages, cut roads into the sun dried plains. And they called it destiny. Like it was a promise or something. Because that's what their fathers told them. And their fathers.

QUENTIN

We ain't gotta do this. What's he going to do to us next?

ABE

He won't get the chance.

QUENTIN

But someone will come along and finish his work. There always is. So what are we waiting for? Someone to blink first?

ABE

You're too young to understand. Men exhaust themselves. They eventually lose their balance. Their vision gets blurry. They lose steam.

QUENTIN

Maybe there's another man with just as hard a head as you. Maybe Mr. Cullers is him.

ABE

Cassius and I...we're watching each other bleed to death. We don't rightly know who's going to run out first, but we're going to stare each other down to the last drop.

QUENTIN

That ain't no way to live.

ABE

When you find meanness in every corner of this earth, you haven't got a choice. One day, you'll understand the hate that's been driving the world. And you'll realize it was right here, inside you, since you was born. Evil ain't a stranger, Quentin. It's an old friend...like looking in the mirror and seeing your own face. It goes by the same name as you. You'll save yourself only when you stop running away from it.

QUENTIN

I don't believe it.

ABE

You know, I should have died right here on the doorstep. Because you didn't tell me what you were up to that night, because you thought you was smart by going off and lynching that boy, you could have been saddled with killing your father.

(MORE)

ABE (CONT'D)

But God didn't take me. I had work to do. He understands a vengeful heart, don't he? You used to.

QUENTIN

Some mistake God's silence for consent. But I don't want none of it. Not anymore.

ABE

Well, it ain't up to you, now is it?

Abe turns and walks back into the house.

CUT TO:

78 EXT. BACK FIELDS -- MORNING 78

SHOT: The new tracks run straight through the land. Building supplies and tools are piled up alongside the tracks.

Works hammer spikes into the rails.

CUT TO:

79 EXT. TRAIN TRACKS -- EVENING 79

SHOT: A bridge has been built over the hundred foot drop of a gorge. Workers move along the scaffolding, hammering away.

CUT TO:

80 EXT. DEPOT -- AFTERNOON 80

Cassius steps out of the newly built depot followed by a crowd of people: some shouting questions and others clapping their hands. A REPORTER (mid 30s) trails Cassius.

REPORTER

Well, you've got your tracks, Mr. Cullers. And I might say the train looks beautiful.

They walk alongside the train, which is parked at the depot.

REPORTER (CONT'D)

What made you decide to bring the Union Pacific through our little town?

CASSIUS

Sir, I know splendid folk when I see them, and this town is full of them. So many of you have made my family feel at home, and I wanted to give something back. Simple as that. Just a little bit of kindness in this world.

REPORTER

Today's the first trip for the train between here and the next town. I've heard talk that you had the labor sped up so you could do this ahead of schedule. Is this true?

CASSIUS

Yes, sir, it is. I thought to myself, people out here have waited long enough. With just a little more gumption, we could get these tracks finished two weeks before the deadline. And when this steam locomotive heads for Bridgeport on her inaugural journey, I'll be standing right there in that booth with the conductor.

The crowd cheers and claps. Cassius waves and steps up onto the platform alongside the train. David waits for him. Cassius waves at the crowd again and then turns to his son.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)

The train ready to depart?

DAVID

Just spoke to the conductor. Says to give him a few more minutes. Last minute inspections or some shit like that.

CASSIUS

Fine. Your brothers on board?

DAVID

Yes, sir.

CASSIUS

Good. Don't want any mishaps, do we?

DAVID

No.

CASSIUS  
 Stay by the door when the  
 passengers get on. You two make  
 sure none of them Millers get on  
 board if they try.

DAVID  
 They wouldn't be that dumb.

CASSIUS  
 They're simple folk. They'll try  
 anything. But I'm not going to  
 have this ruined.

DAVID  
 Don't worry. We'll watch out for  
 them.

David brandishes his rifle.

CASSIUS  
 Now don't go waving that around the  
 cabins when we're on our way. We  
 don't want the guests to get all  
 worked up.

DAVID  
 They won't even know we're there.

CASSIUS  
 Make sure of that.

Cassius walks away from David, who turns and enters the train  
 through a door.

Cassius passes a YOUNG MAN (early 20s) in a uniform.

CASSIUS (CONT'D)  
 Go back there and let those  
 passengers on. We're going to get  
 this thing moving.

YOUNG MAN  
 Yes, Mr. Cullers.

CASSIUS  
 That's a good boy.

The Young Man hurries to the other end of the train, where a  
 line has formed. He begins taking tickets, and the  
 passengers enter the train.

CUT TO:

81 INT. TRAIN'S CAB -- THAT MOMENT

81

Cassius steps into the cab, where the CONDUCTOR (50S) is inspecting the dials.

CASSIUS  
How long until we depart.

CONDUCTOR  
No more than five minutes.

CASSIUS  
I'm a bit anxious to get to Bridgeport before sundown.

CONDUCTOR  
Don't you worry about that. This will take you there in no time. But, you're sure everything's ready for us. I don't want to get halfway down the tracks and find out a couple yards of rail has come loose. You did all this awful fast.

CASSIUS  
Your job is to get this engine pumping when it's time to go. You let me worry about the details.

Conductor nods and goes back to inspecting the dials.

CONDUCTOR  
Shouldn't be more than five minutes.

Cassius slides open the window on the side of the cab. Outside, a smaller crowd of admirers have gathered and they begin shouting and waving. Cassius waves back.

CUT TO:

82 EXT. DEPOT -- THAT MOMENT

82

The whistle sounds. The crowd cheers. The pistons begin pumping, and the train lurches forward. A band in the crowd strikes up a patriotic tune.

Cassius leans out the cab window and waves to the crowd, while the train slowly begins to move forward.

In the two passenger cars, guests have also lowered their windows and begin waving to the crowd with gloved hands and handkerchiefs.

CUT TO:

83 EXT. WATER TOWER -- THAT MOMENT 83

Children sit on water tower walkway watching the column of steam rise into the air over the train as it slowly leaves the depot.

CUT TO:

84 EXT. EDGE OF TOWN -- THAT MOMENT 84

The train picks up speeds and passes out of town. Citizens line the street waving to the passengers as they go by.

CUT TO:

85 INT. FIRST PASSENGER CAR -- THAT MOMENT 85

David and Cassius Jr. stand at the back of the passenger car watching the rows of people in front of them.

Passengers point out the windows while talking to their neighbor. Some shuffle through their bags, looking for items.

David spots two MEN sitting near the front with their hats down over their faces, sitting unusually still. David pulls a pistol out of his pocket, cranks back the hammer, and puts it back in his coat, finger on the trigger. He then slowly makes his way down the aisle towards the two men. He nods at an older woman who looks up at him as he passes.

He stops next to the men. With his free hand, he reaches down and slowly pushes back the brim of one of their hats. Now that he can get a good look, he realizes it's just an OLD MAN (late 60s) with a glass eye. The OLDER GENTLEMAN (late 60s) next to him also looks up. Satisfied, David nods and slowly walks back to the rear of the compartment.

CUT TO:

86 INT. TRAIN'S CAB -- THAT MOMENT

86

Cassius stands behind the conductor watching the terrain pass by. The conductor pulls the whistle cord, and a shrill CALL sounds from the front of the engine.

Casey Cullers comes climbing over the Tender box.

CASEY

Pa!

Cassius can't hear him over the roar of the engine. Casey cautiously climbs closer. Once he's near the edge, he calls again.

CASEY (CONT'D)

Pa!

Cassius turns and sees Casey. He leans over into the Tender so he can hear his son.

CASSIUS

Any sign of the Miller boys?

CASEY

No. They're not on board. Bill's been watching for them. Ain't seen a thing.

CASSIUS

That's strange.

CASEY

We haven't heard so much as a peep out of them for what: the last five months or so?

CASSIUS

Don't believe for a minute they're done. I'd half expect them to jump the train like a bunch of whooping redskins.

CASEY

Why ain't they on the train?

CUT TO:

87 EXT. TRACKS NEAR THE BRIDGE -- THAT MOMENT

87

Abe kneels at the edge of a cliff. The rest of the boys are crouched down behind rocks watching.

The train tracks stretch across the field just a couple hundred yards away. Down to the left is the newly built train bridge.

The column of black smoke rises above the foothills, and the nose of the train appears.

The train speeds in from the right side of the Millers' view. Halfway across, the tracks explode. Spikes of dirt, smoke, and rock burst into the air.

The train brakes SCREECH as the metal grinds against metal. Then the train flies headlong into the smoke, loses contact with the rails, and collapses sideways into the dirt.

The train slides forward a hundred yards or so. The engine car crashes back up onto the tracks, the rails scraping down the side, as it pulls the other two compartments behind it.

The engine slides onto the bridge, crashes through the first stretch of metal railing, and begins descending into the canyon, busting through support beams as if they were twine.

After the engine car is completely descended, the second car moves halfway through the hole in the bridgework, and the whole locomotive comes to a screeching stop.

The second car teeters for a second, and then the wood beams and metal siding split in half, allowing the front portion of the train to drop even further.

Gashes in the engine let geysers of steam escape.

Abe slowly stands up, followed by the rest of them. After a moment, he begins his descent to the crash.

The rest of the Miller boys run after him.

CUT TO:

88 EXT. TRAIN CRASH -- THAT MOMENT

88

Abe limps along the edge of the crash, heading towards the bridge.

Quentin runs to the gash the train left behind in the dirt. Bodies are strewn in the rocks, some half-buried from being drug beneath the car.

QUENTIN  
Jesus Christ! Oh God!

Black smoke and white steam fill the air.

James, Isaac, Jason, Jesse, and Rich follow Abe.

ABE  
Start looking for Cassius. I want  
him found.

All except Abe and Quentin begin climbing onto the passenger cars.

CUT TO:

89 INT. SECOND PASSENGER CAR -- THAT MOMENT 89

Jason and Isaac lower themselves into the sideways car through two open windows. Jason drops onto a pile of suitcases and clothes. Isaac lands on some bodies.

The entire compartment is filled with bodies in various conditions. Some are twisted around the seats or the luggage racks, while others pile up on the ground, making the two Miller boys climb over them as they move towards the front.

Every now and then, Jason will stop and check a body to see if it's alive. He sees a large, bloodied WOMAN jammed against the ceiling with a pearl necklace around her neck. He reaches down and takes hold of the necklace, when she suddenly jerks awake SCREAMING.

Isaac raises his rifle and fires at her, killing her instantly. Jason pokes her a couple times with his fingers, and, when she doesn't respond, snatches the necklace.

CUT TO:

90 EXT. TRAIN CRASH -- THAT MOMENT 90

Abe stands at the edge of the cliff looking down at the smoking engine car.

James climbs out of the first passenger car through the split.

JAMES  
He ain't back here!

ABE  
What about the other one?

Isaac pulls himself up out of the second car.

ISAAC  
Plenty of bodies, but Cullers isn't  
one of them.

Rich walks over to Abe.

RICH  
Reckon he wasn't on board?

ABE  
He wouldn't miss the opportunity to  
ride this big silver whale into  
Bridgeport.

RICH  
Maybe he was thrown out a ways back  
when the train first left the  
tracks. Want us to start lifting  
the bodies out of the dirt?

ABE  
I'd bet you good money he was in  
that engine car. That son of a  
bitch would ride in the very front  
like he was the one running the  
train.

RICH  
How you going to get down there?

Abe shoves his cane at Rich and marches over to the tracks. He motions to James to help lift him up into the first passenger car. James grabs his father's arms and hoists him up.

Quentin runs down to watch. He is soon joined by Jason, Isaac, and Jesse.

CUT TO:

91 INT. FIRST PASSENGER CAR -- THAT MOMENT

91

Abe cautiously steps to the splintered edge and looks down at the rest of the train, dangling in the bridgework. He crouches and grabs hold of one of the seat backs, throws his legs over the edge, and begins climbing down. He uses the rows of seats like a ladder until he reaches the front of the car. He drops down. The car lurches forward a few inches.

JAMES  
Father! It won't hold!

ABE  
 I got to find him first. This  
 train ain't going anywhere in the  
 meantime.

Abe crouches down and looks through the compartment door at his feet.

ABE (CONT'D)  
 Cullers? You down there?

No response.

Abe lowers himself through the door into the Tender. The logs are scattered about. Abe steps down into them. Some of the logs come loose and roll forward, spilling over the edge into the canyon. Again, the train lurches a couple inches forward. Abe holds onto the side as he finds his footing and makes his way toward the engine.

At the bottom of the Tender, he leans over the edge and looks into the Conductor's Cab.

ABE (CONT'D)  
 Cullers?

He sees Cassius's body crumpled up against the firebox.

ABE (CONT'D)  
 There you are, you slithery son of  
 a bitch. Ain't no where to run  
 this time.

Abe grabs the roof, puts his legs over the edge, and climbs down into the cab.

CUT TO:

92 INT. TRAIN'S CAB -- THAT MOMENT

92

Cassius lies bloodied and mangled against the firebox. Smoke from the engine rises up through the front windows and fills the cab with smoke and ash.

Abe slowly lowers himself down.

ABE  
 You thought you had me, didn't you?  
 Put some bullets in my belly and  
 think you ended the conversation,  
 huh?

(MORE)

ABE (CONT'D)

I forgot to tell you when we introduced ourselves that I always get the last word, Cassius. Always.

Abe lifts Cassius's head and gives him a couple slaps.

ABE (CONT'D)

I want you awake for this. You ain't going to die on me already.

He shakes Cullers's head.

ABE (CONT'D)

I can't understand you. Want me to put your teeth back in. There's a couple of them around here.

He punches Cullers's face.

ABE (CONT'D)

I'm trying to even us up, and here you are trying to make fresh scrapes.

Abe slams Cassius head against the firebox.

ABE (CONT'D)

Ain't no use, neighbor. Better just let me do my work.

CUT TO:

93

INT. FIRST PASSENGER CAR -- THAT MOMENT

93

Quentin steps to the splintered edge and looks down. James and Isaac kneel at the edge already.

The train lurches forward a couple feet this time, and the sound of GRINDING METAL echoes from underneath the train.

ISAAC

It ain't going to hold much longer.

JAMES

Father!

The train lurches forward a little more. Several metal beams on the bridge give way.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
 Dammit, father! Hurry!

CUT TO:

94 INT. TRAIN'S CAB -- THAT MOMENT

94

Abe stands over Cassius. The cab drops downward a foot or two, and Abe nearly loses his balance. He slams against the side of the cab.

ABE  
 Mighty fine piece of machinery you  
 have here. It just can't wait to  
 bury you in the canyon.

Abe finds the coal shovel on the firebox near Cassius and lifts it into the air.

ABE (CONT'D)  
 Let me just...

He smashes the valve.

ABE (CONT'D)  
 ...get this open...

He cuts into the soft, hot metal. A thin stream of steam appears.

ABE (CONT'D)  
 ...and I'll be on my way, friend.

He gives one more hard whack, and a foot-long cut appears in the side of the firebox. A heavy current of steam escapes into the cab.

Abe tosses the shovel down and grabs Cassius's face.

ABE (CONT'D)  
 Here's to the modern world, Mr.  
 Cullers!

He pulls Cassius's face into the steam blast and pins him down, keeping his hands on his face.

Abe's arms begin to blister, and his sweat covers his face.

CUT TO:

95

INT. FIRST PASSENGER CAR -- THAT MOMENT

95

Quentin, Isaac, and James hear the BANGING below. Quentin immediately hops over the edge and climbs down into the passenger car. He drops four feet into the bottom, flattens himself to front of the car, and looks through the door.

He climbs into the Tender and slides down. He leans over the edge and looks into the Conductor's cab.

QUENTIN'S POV: Abe holding Cassius's head in a geyser of stream.

Suddenly, the bridgework all around the Tender and Engine car begins to buckle. Beams pull lose and smash into other beams. The train crashes forward another three or four feet.

Abe loses his balance and falls flat on his face against the firebox.

The train's jerk throws Cassius away from the steam vent and against the floor.

Quentin lies down flat and lets his top half descend into the cab.

Abe looks up, his nose broken and his front teeth missing.

ABE

Quentin!

Abe reaches upwards.

Quentin grabs at Cullers, who is closer. He gets a grip under Cullers's arm and pulls the corpse closer. Then, Quentin reaches towards Abe.

ABE (CONT'D)

What are you doing? Put him down!

QUENTIN

Give me your hand!

ABE

You ain't going to save him! He's dead!

QUENTIN

There's no time!

ABE

I said drop him!

QUENTIN

No!

The train begins moving forward at a constant pace. More beams buckle and smash against the side of the engine car.

ABE

No son of mine...

Suddenly, the engine car breaks loose from the First Passenger Car.

Quentin quickly pulls Cassius up into his arms, struggling to get a good hold on him. He pulls Cassius up into the tender.

The Engine car and Tender turns sideways. The Tender splits away from the engine car.

The Engine car smashes through the last bit of bridgework and plummets into the canyon, crashing at the bottom in an explosion of fire, smoke, and steam.

The Tender begins to slide down, following the same course as the Engine. Quentin grabs the side of the Tender, pulls Cassius up on top, and then hurries up after him.

As the Tender grinds down two large, twisted beams towards the edge, Quentin wraps his right arm around Cassius' torso and grabs hold of a beam with his left.

The Tender slides away from them and falls into the fire and smoke below with a deafening BOOM.

Quentin hangs there holding Cassius against his body.

QUENTIN

Please!

He struggles to pull himself up. He whole body shakes.

He finally gets a leg over the beam, and then hoists Cassius up with him.

CUT TO:

96

EXT. CANYON FLOOR -- THAT MOMENT

96

The Engine Car explodes a second time, throwing pieces of steel and iron in all directions. The flames spread, and the smoke thickens.

CUT TO:

97

EXT. TRAIN CRASH -- THAT MOMENT

97

James, Jesse, Rich, Isaac, and Jason stand at the edge watching the explosion at the bottom of the canyon.

RICH  
Jesus Christ...

They see Quentin through the smoke, climbing up the beams with a body thrown over his shoulder.

Near the top, Quentin lifts the body up over the edge and then pulls himself up onto the cliff. He lies there in the dirt panting.

Cassius lies facedown in the dirt next to him.

James walks over, turns Cassius over, and takes a long look at his face.

JAMES  
Cullers? Where's father?

He pulls Quentin to his feet.

JAMES (CONT'D)  
Where's father, you fucking  
bastard?

He lets Quentin drop to his knees. James marches over to Rich, takes the rifle out of his hand, and then crosses to stand over Cassius. He pulls back the hammer on the rifle.

Quentin leaps across and grabs the rifle as it fires. The bullet hits the ground inches from Cassius's head.

Quentin slams James to the ground and pins him down under the rifle.

QUENTIN  
Ain't going to be no more killing,  
James.

JAMES  
I'll kill you! I'll kill you!

Quentin leaps up, raises the rifle, and fires point blank into James's head. The bullet goes through and throws up a cloud of dust from the ground.

Quentin hesitates a moment, then pulls back the hammer and fires a second shot into James's head.

The other stand petrified.

Quentin lowers the gun and stares at his dead brother.

After a moment, he staggers back to Cassius and crouches down beside him. He feels for a pulse.

QUENTIN  
I couldn't let him fall.

He turns to the others. They stare back.

He slowly stands up and walks back over to James body. He fires one more shot at him and then tosses the gun into the dirt.

Quentin staggers away from the group and stands looking at the rest of the derailed train.

Quentin takes one last look at his brothers and then walks away into the wilderness.

CUT TO:

98 EXT. MILLER HOUSE--NIGHT 98

A fire blazes in the back fields. The bottom floor of the house is also in flames.

The top floor fills with flames. The barn also catches fire. The fires spread over all of the fields.

CUT TO:

99 EXT. TREELINE -- THAT MOMENT 99

Evelyn clutches Susan and Miriam as they watch the property burn, weeping. Isaac, Jason, Rich, and Jesse stand near them, watching the blaze.

CUT TO:

100 EXT. ROAD -- THAT MOMENT 100

Quentin stands in the middle of the road watching his family watching the blaze.

FADE TO BLACK.