

THE BLACK LIST

LET IT BLEED

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Genre: Epic Western, Modern Western, Western

Episode Duration: 60 minutes

Episode Type: serialized

Episodes per Season: 8

Seasons in Series: 5

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(Pilot)

By

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11/13/2014

Black

GRITTY OLD MAN (V.O.)
I weren't much of a man 'fore this.

FADE IN:

EXT. THE BADLANDS - DAWN

A MAN on horseback rides against the horizon. The dirt seems to glow, a reflection of the violent red setting sun.

GRITTY OLD MAN (V.O.)
I went place to place with no real
plan sides keeping one step 'head
of those who would do me wrong.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

A PISTOL
Two hands, tanned and rough, gently clean the empty chambers.

GRITTY OLD MAN (V.O.)
Living the only way I knew how...
Take everything I could while it
was there for the taking.

The hands belong to a large man. Menacing. Soulless. This is
DUKE FALLON (40).

He stands in the water up to his thighs, soaking wet. He
leans on his knee, standing on a stump or rock of some sort,
humming the tune to an old folk song as he cleans.

DUKE
*..and steal the gold from one so
bold... who plowed the lowlands
low.*

He pulls a handkerchief through an empty chamber. Blows.
Places a single bullet in the chamber. Flips it shut.

DUKE (V.O.)
I see now what I really was. More
ghost than man...

He COCKS the gun and LIFTS his leg --

-- A DROWNING MAN floats to the surface GASPING for air.

Duke squares his pistol and SHOOTS the man between the eyes --
The man goes limp, floating lifelessly.

DUKE (V.O.)
 A spirit... Walkin' earth. A curse
 to anyone I run into.

Duke presses the body back below the surface with his foot.
 Nonchalantly holsters his gun and resumes humming.

DUKE
*...They stabbed him, dragged him
 out of bed, and to the sea did
 go... They sent his body floating
 down, down to the Lowlands low.*

THICK RED BLOOD
 Permeates the water around his food, drifting downstream.

CUT TO

THE DEAD MAN'S FACE
 Lifeless. Caked in mud and blood as Duke drags his body up
 the riverbank.

DUKE (V.O.)
 Life don't have time for morals out
 here. So I didn't pay them any
 mind... You bleed to live, an' you
 bleed to die.

EXT. FRONTIER TOWN - DAY

Duke rides into a small Texas village, towing a donkey with
 the dead man strapped to it.

DUKE (V.O.)
 You stop and think about 'em,
 they'd catch up with ya. Hoisted on
 your own petard.

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

The SHERIFF, a fat useless relic, appraises Duke skeptically.

Duke unfurls a piece of paper from his pocket and hands it to
 the Sheriff.

It's a WANTED POSTER with a drawing of the dead man's face.
"Wanted for Murder. \$50. Dead or alive."

The Sheriff lifts the dead man's head to get a good look.
 He's been dead for days and starting to rot.

FADE TO BLACK.

DUKE (V.O.)
 God catches up with you eventually.
 Caught up with me. Lectured me the
 only way he knows how to lecture
 someone like me... Pain...

EXT. MEXICAN RANCH - DAY

Duke rides alongside a MEXICAN RANCHER (40, proud and thick-skulled).

They dismount and tie their horses up to a fence post on the edge of a small piece of desert property.

DUKE (V.O.)
 See, this new testament God don't
 bother killin' his enemies...

Out of the house steps the RANCHER'S DAUGHTER (18). A vision of youth and beauty.

Duke stops short. Warmth floods his face for the first time. *This is her. The one Duke was looking for without knowing it.*

He catches her eye. She beams at him. A radiant soul-melting smile.

DUKE (V.O.)
 He makes 'em love...

EXT. FIELD - DAY

A single tree in a field of tall grass.

A DEAD GIRL hangs by the neck. Her white dress muddied and bloodied.

DUKE (V.O.)
 Then he makes 'em suffer...

Duke stands at the foot of the tree, mourning. A quiet rage burns in his eyes.

We pan up to see the face of the dead girl. It's the Rancher's Daughter.

A tattered strand of white fabric hangs limply from her dress. Duke touches it tenderly.

DUKE (V.O.)
 Begin to hate what you was...

EXT. MEXICAN RANCH - DAY

Duke RACES his horse up to the Rancher's house --

-- Dismounts in a flash.

The front door opens. The end of a rifle peeks out.

Duke strides with purpose and draws his pistol --

-- GUNFIRE erupts from both sides!

We see about a dozen other men behind Duke. He's brought a small army with him.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

The gunfire fades away, replaced by the sound of hammer on nail --

-- The Sheriff nails a new WANTED POSTER to his wall. This one has a sketch of Duke's face.

"WANTED FOR MURDER"

DUKE (V.O.)

I don't know what kind of man that makes me...

EXT. THE HANGING FIELD - DAWN

Duke takes one last look at the tree where his beloved once hung. The bit of white fabric from the dress is tied around his wrist as a talisman.

He turns and we follow him away from his past. He kicks his horse into gear and rides towards the peaceful calm of the rising sun.

DUKE (V.O.)

I don't know what kinda man he wants me to be.

FADE TO BLACK.

TITLE CARD: LET IT BLEED

EXT. FRONTIER RANCH - DAY [NINE YEARS LATER]

THE TALISMAN

The same piece of fabric, rubbed brown by the passing of time. A now permanent feature of Duke's body. We pan up to:

DUKE FALLON

His features matured chiseled. Larger in both muscle and fat.

DUKE

Name's Duke Fallon. Willing to work hard. Whatever you got. Won't hear no complaints. The boy, Ace, works alongside. His wage'll come out of my own. Get twice the work for half the pay.

Next to Duke is ACE (18). Handsome and headstrong with a baby-face and an itchy trigger finger.

They stand out front of a basic log home, speaking with a gap-toothed FRONTIERSMAN and his broad-hipped WIFE.

FRONTIERSMAN

Well, I ain't never been good with numbers there, sir.

WIFE

Fence needs mending don't it?

FRONTIERSMAN

Aye. Suppose so.

WIFE

Trench needs digging as well, don't it?

FRONTIERSMAN

Aye. Suppose it does.

WIFE

You a gunslinger, is ya?

Duke pats the pistol on his belt. It's the same pistol he's always had but the years have rusted it.

DUKE

Can assure you ma'am. Ain't been shot in nine years.

EXT. FRONTIER RANCH, EXTERIOR FENCE - DAY

Duke hammers a wood fence post down into the ground. Ace strings wire along between posts.

EXT. FRONTIER RANCH, TRENCH - DAY

Duke and Ace work side by side, knee deep in a trench, digging steadily under the beating sun.

Ace stops to wipe the sweat away. Bone tired. Duke carries on digging without a word.

EXT. FRONTIER RANCH, HOUSE - DAY

The Frontiersman cowers in his doorway.

FRONTIERSMAN

'Fraid I can't pay you, sir.

DUKE

Why's that?

FRONTIERSMAN

Ain't none to be had then, is there?

Duke rests his hands on his belt. Awfully close to his gun.

WIFE

Ain't no use. We don't have the money. Best for all involved if you gather your belongings and ride on.

A look of pure evil flashes momentarily across Duke's face.

FRONTIERSMAN

Mighty sorry mister.

WIFE

Go on now.

Without a word, Duke turns and walks away. Ace follows.

ACE

We can't let them get away with that Duke. They owe us that money. It isn't right.

DUKE

Don't get hung up on debts, Ace.
Revenge ain't worth it's weight in
gold.

EXT. LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS; STREET - DAY

Duke and Ace ride along the busy street. It's a bleak, dreary town with a downtrodden populous. Gripped in the terror of the Bleeding Kansas era.

At a street corner, a HUCKSTER speaks fervently to a small crowd under a BANNER reading "*Pikes Peak or Bust!*"

HUCKSTER

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Buford Buewell and I am assembling a team of men to make the great journey westward to the Rocky Mountains. Word has come from the hills that the river is paying twelve dollars a day in pure Rocky Mountain gold.

CURIOUS ONLOOKER

I heard it was only six!

BUFORD BUEWELL

Can you afford to stay here if it isn't? Or even if it is? How many of us would kill for six solid, no kidding, Union Dollars? This here is Mr. Edward Wynkoop, and he has been to the wellspring himself.

EDWARD WYNKOOP, a regal, self-promoting shill steps forward.

EDWARD WYNKOOP

I have seen the magisterial Pikes Peak with my own eyes, and it is truly a sight to behold. It looms over you at all times like a guardian angel. And when the sun is high and bright the riverbeds sparkle with gold.

(A confident beat)

Ladies, gentlemen, I am telling you this... If but one regret you have in this life, it will be this... A moment when you had the opportunity to forever change your lot in life... And chose not to act.

BUFORD BUEWELL

Our team departs tomorrow at dawn on the Santa Fe trail to make station at the head waters of the South Platte River. I need strong men that can drive oxen over four weeks journey. Courageous men that are willing to brave the perils of Indian country-

He's drowned out by an onrush of interested parties.

Duke and Ace dismount. Tie up their horses across the street.

ACE

Why don't we head to the Mountains too, Duke? Think of all that gold we could find.

DUKE

Gold fever's got these people by the throat, Ace... Only thing they'll dig outta that ground is their own graves.

ACE

Twelve dollars a day, Duke!

DUKE

You know anything 'bout diggin for gold?

ACE

Well, no but-

DUKE

We do honest work, Ace. Nothin' honest ever come outta a rush.

EXT. LEAVENWORTH, STREET - DAY

Duke and Ace walk past a dozen covered wagons lining the street. Excited homesteaders rush to and fro, packing their most precious belongings for the long journey. It seems as if the entire city is getting ready to leave.

Ace stops outside an advertisement board, mesmerized:
"Denver City: Queen City of the Rocky Mountains"

Duke steps onto the porch of a **STORE** where an elderly statuesque female **MERCHANT** sits.

DUKE

Know where a man and a boy can find
an honest day's work?

MERCHANT

Work? Popular question these days.
Not gonna like the answer I'm
afraid. Economy not what it used ta
be. Ride west young man! The Rocky
Mountains beckon us all.

Duke scowls and turns back to the street. Watches the chaos
of the mass exodus.

EXT. LEAVENWORTH, STREET - LATER

An ABOLITIONIST PREACHER hands a leaflet to Ace as he passes
by. The Abolitionist's WIFE attempts to hand one to Duke, but
he looks her off.

ABOLITIONIST PREACHER

God compels us all to take up his
mantle and declare before all, that
slavery is an abomination. A stain
on this great nation!

Over his shoulder, a gang of BORDER RUFFIANS march towards
him with purpose. Bats and weapons in hand.

The lead RUFFIAN rips the Abolitionist around and knocks the
leaflets from his hands.

ABOLITIONIST PREACHER (CONT'D)

Please my brothers-

The lead Ruffian SMACKS the Abolitionist across the face with
his bat.

PREACHER'S WIFE

Help! Somebody!

The Abolitionist's Wife tries to shield her husband --

-- Two Ruffians casually toss her aside into the mud.

Down the street, Ace hears the commotion and looks back. He
steps toward the scuffle, but he's held back. He turns --

-- Duke has a firm grasp on his collar. He shakes his head
calmly. *"Don't even think about it."*

ACE

They'll kill that man.

DUKE

We don't get involved.

Ace looks back toward the scuffle. The Ruffians beat the Abolitionist senseless. A Ruffian levels a BRICK --

-- SMASHING the Abolitionist's head. His resistance ends.

Ace cringes. He looks back toward Duke but Duke has already moved on down the street. Ace hustles after him.

Duke pulls himself up onto his horse. He takes a long drag on his cigar. Looks stoically toward the sun as Ace joins him.

DUKE (CONT'D)

All Kansas is either killin' each other or leavin'. Won't be a state left to work in come summer.

ACE

"Pikes peak or bust?"

With a strange look in his eye Duke nudges his horse forward.

EXT. THE COLORADO PLAINS - DAY

A crude wooden stake sticks out of the ground. A BOY (18) walks past. Takes measured strides from the end of the stake. He stops and looks back...

...Some forty-yards back, an OLDER MAN looks through a surveying instrument. In his hand is a city map, charting out streets and plots of land.

He looks up. This is GENERAL WILLIAM LARIMER (49), a tough, polished man with a clearly defined sense of the way things ought to be done. He wears a Pennsylvania Militia General's jacket as if he were born in it.

He nods to the boy, his son, WILLIE (Loyal and headstrong). Willie takes yet another crude stake. HAMMERS it in.

Larimer turns and we follow his gaze to see:

THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

Majestic. Looming like distant gods. A presence we will grow accustomed to.

GENERAL LARIMER

What do you see here, son? Do you see what I see?

Willie returns to his father's side. Together they stand in awe, dwarfed by the great expanse of the mountain range.

GENERAL LARIMER (CONT'D)

We are knelt at the precipice of the future. All the country will travel here to see what we see now before us. All the world will know us... Denver City... It's all here... It just needs a guide... A champion.

He is that man.

Larimer looks at his son proudly.

GENERAL LARIMER (CONT'D)

That's good for the day.

They gather up their instruments and we pull up to see an endless line of wooden stakes marking out PLOTS OF LAND --

DISSOLVE TO:

A CITY MAP

The plots of land are drawn carefully, labeled with the names of landowners. We pull back further to see there are TWO TOWNS on the map divided by a RIVER:

-- Denver City on one side --

-- Auraria on the other --

-- Cherry Creek down the middle.

CHARLES BLAKE (V.O.)

Mr. President... Good officials of the Denver City Town Company... Word has reached us from the legislature in Kansas.

We pull back to reveal the map sits on a table inside --

INT. LARIMER'S CABIN - DAY

The cabin is bare bones, but homey. Candlelit except for what light pours through the tiny window. A DOZEN MEN of varying statures and appearances cram inside. Only one thing unites them, they've come to make a profit.

Willie sits at the desk in the corner. He vigorously scrawls on a piece of brown parchment: "*Minutes of the Denver City Town Company. March 1, 1859*"

CHARLES BLAKE, an exquisitely groomed merchant, holds the floor. He's all business.

BLAKE

We are a mere twenty days from our first county-wide *election* gentlemen. County judges, officers, prosecutors will all be decided. But most importantly, *the town that will hold the county seat*, a sure gateway to the territorial capitol.

(A measured beat)

But in pursuing this honor, we, the founding members of this great town company, must consider duly, both the goodwill of our citizens, and also the financial stability of this company.

COMPANY PRESIDENT

You would have us pass up this opportunity?

BLAKE

I do not believe it is in this company's best interest to pursue this election at any cost. For if we fail in our endeavors, the people of this city fail as well...

(Beat)

Now, make no mistake about it gentlemen, there is a fortune to be made here. And we are just the men to do it... But there may be a simpler, easier way...

General Larimer sits far in the corner. A looming presence. He listens with great intrigue.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Green Russell, your counterpart across Cherry Creek in the town of Auraria, has spoken liberally of his wish to merge these two great towns. Perhaps now is the time...

(MORE)

BLAKE (CONT'D)

I share his belief gentlemen, that it would be beneficial for all involved if these two burgeoning settlements were to unite, creating the most substantial commercial market west of the Mississippi, short of San Francisco.

He sits. The men around the room rustle with interest.

COMPANY PRESIDENT

Does anyone wish to comment on Mr. Blake's proposal...

Larimer lightly clears his throat. Eyes instinctively flash to the corner.

COMPANY PRESIDENT (CONT'D)

The chair recognizes General William Larimer, Treasurer.

The General stands and moves forward. Those seated naturally widen to create a space for him in the center.

GENERAL LARIMER

Gentlemen... What is the most valuable commodity we have at our disposal?

He offers the question to the room. A natural politician.

WAZEE, a weasly, hyperactive, East Coast Aristocrat:

WAZEE

Gold, obviously.

GENERAL LARIMER

No...

He points to the city map in the middle of the table.

GENERAL LARIMER (CONT'D)

Land.

We focus on the city map in the center of the table--

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DENVER CITY - DAY

An overview of the brand new town nestled along a creek with the Rocky Mountains in the distance. Like it popped up overnight. Buildings under construction.

Excitement in the air. Bustling with miners and prospectors recently arrived. Unlike many old west towns, it's lush, surrounded by green. Log cabins, frame buildings, tents, and fresh mud adobe houses alongside one another.

A stout old MEXICAN MAN shuffles down the street, his back loaded with mining equipment.

A shadow falls across him. He cranks his stiff neck around and looks up.

DUKE

Looms over him on his horse in a halo of cigar smoke.

The Mexican instinctively makes way.

Duke eases his horse into Denver City for the first time, Ace shortly behind him, thoroughly fried from the journey.

EXT. DENVER CITY, MAIN STREET - DAY

The boom-town bristles with excitement as Duke and Ace trot through town. Every single person stops their work to get a good look as they pass.

EXT. BRIDGE OVER CHERRY CREEK - CONTINUOUS

A team of BLACK LABORERS are hard at work constructing a bridge.

Duke and Ace ride down the riverbank. They cross the creek and we pull up to see hundreds of MINERS panning for gold up and down the creek, a frenzy as far as the eye can see.

EXT. AURARIA, MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

A post sign greets them at the top of the opposite bank:
"WELCOME TO AURARIA"

This side of the river is bigger. More buildings. More people. More excitement. They are immediately greeted by SALESMEN and LAND SPECULATORS.

THUNK --

EXT. CODY'S LAND - DAY

A WOMAN swings an axe hard into the side of a cottonwood tree. Her long red-hair whips violently in the wind.

This is LAURA CODY (18), a classic frontier woman. Despite her youth, she's already been hardened by a life of struggle.

She swings again -- *THUNK!*

It's a small tract of land marked off crudely by cottonwood branches and logs. Quite a ways outside town. A large brown tent sits near a campfire. Down in the creek a PROSPECTOR is at work panning for gold.

Duke and Ace ride up to the edge of the property.

THUNK!

With a *crack*, and a *snap*, the tree falls. Laura looks up from her fallen prey and catches Ace's eye.

Ace's heart leaps out of his chest. He shoots a yearning glance at Duke.

EXT. CODY'S LAND, CHERRY CREEK - MOMENTS LATER

RED CODY (40)

The prospector from the creek, stands at the water's edge. A stomach-churning, delirious hick with liquor-soaked eyes.

CODY

I can give you two square meals and two dollar a week.

ACE

Two dollars?!

CODY

That's a good wage boy.

DUKE

We'll take fifty cents a day. Never mind the meals. Payment on the day's end.

Cody spits a hunk of black tobacco and shakes Duke's hand.

CODY

Just keep your boy in line.

Laura glances up from her work. Swings her axe hard into the fallen tree -- *THUNK!*

INT. LARIMER'S CABIN - DAY

The meeting continues. Larimer looks pointedly at Blake.

GENERAL LARIMER

The rush is upon us gentlemen.
Every day, now 'til winter,
migrants are going to flood this
city, all in search of one thing...
But in order to get what they so
desperately want. In order to get
the thing they so desperately
need... They need the means to
obtain it... Control the land, and
the gold will flow right into your
open arms... If Denver City were to
win the county seat, we would
ensure not only the survival of our
city, but the prosperity it so
justly deserves.

BLAKE

Tell me, General Larimer. With two
towns on this river, how do you
propose to monopolize land
holdings? Why, Auraria is growing
larger by the day. They are nearly
twice the size of your *city*.

GENERAL LARIMER

Mr. Blake, migrants arrive daily
and only more will come once spring
arrives.

BLAKE

And they are *all* settling in
Auraria. You will lose the vote and
Denver will die a slow death. Merge
with Auraria and you ensure
prosperity. Your shares will double
overnight, gentlemen.

GENERAL LARIMER

Mr. Blake's plan would see you cash
in your shares now for pennies,
when in actuality, they could soon
be worth thousands.

BLAKE

(Derisively)

Thousands? Tell me, how much is a
parcel of land fetching in *La*
Platte right now General?

Larimer bristles angrily. *Blake has hit a sore spot.*

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Is it thousands, or even
hundreds... Or is it pennies?

(Beat)

You don't have the votes, General.
If you fail to take this deal,
Denver and Auraria may split the
vote and god forbid, a place like
Montana could take the election.

GENERAL LARIMER

There are other ways to win
elections, Mr. Blake.

BLAKE

If sounds as though the General is
proposing we employ the same
tactics he used back in *Bleeding
Kansas*. I for one will not permit
our new territory to go the way of
the border ruffians!

GENERAL LARIMER

I have done no such thing!

CAPTAIN BASSETT, handsome, assured and mild-tempered, stands
boldly and raises his bulky arms, nearly taking up the width
of the room.

CAPTAIN BASSETT

Gentlemen, please... We needn't act
like ladies on the matter.

Larimer and Blake grow quiet.

CAPTAIN BASSETT (CONT'D)

Now Mr. Blake, I believe the
General merely meant the powerful
art of persuasion.

BLAKE

Then I move we *persuade* Auraria to
accept an offer to merge towns.

COMPANY PRESIDENT

Why don't we take the day and
deliberate on the matter.

EXT. LARIMER'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

The meeting is disbanding. Spirits are high. Blake and
Larimer are last to exit.

BLAKE

Bear in mind General, some of us hold a stake in both companies. Do mind what you say.

GENERAL LARIMER

At some point you're going to have to pick a winner, Mr. Blake.

BLAKE

I am a businessman, General. Gold is the only winner I know.

He tips his hat and walks off. Larimer watches him go with a scowl.

CAPTAIN BASSETT holds back. Larimer waves him inside. *Bassett is something of a right hand man to Larimer.*

INT. LARIMER'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

GENERAL LARIMER

Russell aims to destroy our town from the inside out... Capitalistic espionage is what it is.

CAPTAIN BASSETT

The rest of the men will not see it on your terms.

GENERAL LARIMER

What do you know about Green Russell, Mr. Bassett?

CAPTAIN BASSETT

The Georgian? Only hearsay-

SMASH CUT TO

EXT. GREEN RUSSELL'S CAMP, CHERRY CREEK - DAY

Whip -- CRACK! The harsh sound of a whip breaking flesh.

The whip-wielding SLAVER reels back for another go.

The SLAVE, a hulking black man, withers on the riverbank in pain.

The slaver whips again -- CRACK!

A tall, gregarious man wades through the creek, watching calmly. This is GREEN RUSSELL (41). A righteous southern asshole.

GREEN RUSSELL
Gold is a white man's game, boys.

Whip -- CRACK!

He strolls down into the creek. Picks up a gold panning plate. Scoops the plate down into the riverbed. Rustles it down under the dirt with tender care.

GREEN RUSSELL (CONT'D)
Takes brains to find it... And grit
to get it out.

Whip -- CRACK!

He rustles the plate back and forth. Lifts it out of the water. Water streams out. He holds the pan up for all to see: Tiny GOLD SPECS nestle in the bottom.

Whip -- CRACK!

BACK TO:

LARIMER'S CABIN

Larimer cringes.

GENERAL LARIMER
These men have no honor. No decent
fear of God. How can you fight
against men like that, Mr. Bassett?

Bassett considers this for a moment. He leans forward in all seriousness:

CAPTAIN BASSETT
We *can* win this election, General.
It all depends how far you are
willing to go. What are you willing
to do to secure the future of this
city?

Larimer stares hard at Bassett.

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

An epic herd of buffalo graze peacefully.

GREEN RUSSELL

Walks into frame and sets down with his rifle a mere twenty yards from the herd. The animals oblivious to his presence. He drops to a knee. Takes aim...

FIRES --

-- A buffalo *staggers* and limps away from the pack. The rest of the herd remain in place, eating without a care.

Green methodically reloads the single shot rifle...

FIRES -- The wounded buffalo drops to the ground.

Green pokes at the downed creature with his boot. The buffalo grunts, still alive.

He drops to a knee and puts a buck-knife to the buffalo's neck -- SLICES deep into the jugular and across the neck. Copious amounts of BLOOD spool out over the ground.

EXT. GREEN RUSSELL'S LAND - DAY

A cluster of cabins perched nimbly on top the riverbank.

THE BUFFALO CARCAS

Gutted. Roasting over an open flame. A pile of used and discarded buffalo entrails, bones, and hides rot away nearby.

At an outdoor table, Green Russell sits at one end with a large, extremely bloody steak on his plate. Mr. Blake sits opposite him, watching him eat with a hint of disgust. Green eats with his whole body. An orgasmic ritual, not to be diluted by the presence of company or routine manners.

BLAKE

Your proposal was well received by a majority of the Denver City men.

GREEN RUSSELL

Just not the ones that count, eh, Mr. Blake?

BLAKE

They wish to discuss it further.

Russell looks up from his food pointedly.

GREEN RUSSELL

You sure you not trying to ham-bone me, Blake? Gold rush'll do funny things to folks.

Blake smiles. Assured and confident. But he doesn't answer.

GREEN RUSSELL (CONT'D)

Tell me about this Larimer character. What sort of man is he?

BLAKE

As much man as any of us. Plenty of raw ambition, only difference being he's been a failure twice over. Feels hard pressed not to make it thrice.

GREEN RUSSELL

Why do they call him General?

BLAKE

Organized the militia in Pennsylvania. The name stuck. He has neither the fortitude, nor the aptitude of a true general.

GREEN RUSSELL

You sayin' we got nothin' to worry about?

BLAKE

He's interested in the same things we all are. Money and power. If we offer him both, he should fall in line.

GREEN RUSSELL

Perhaps you underestimate him, Mr. Blake... Failure can alter man's perspective. Change him. Make him more determined.

THUNK! THUNK! THUNK --

EXT. CODY'S LAND - DAY

Ace HAMMERS a piece of wood into place. Duke and Ace are hard at work constructing the wooden frame for a small house.

Laura carries a bucket of water up from the creek. Ace sets down his hammer and joins her for a drink.

LAURA

You an' your Pa are good workers.

ACE

He's not my father.

LAURA
Who is he then?

ACE
He's Duke.

LAURA
An' you're Ace.

ACE
Just need a Queen and we have a set
of cards.

Ace smiles at her. She doesn't return it. Her stone face giving nothing away.

LAURA
Why ain't you working your own
claim?

ACE
Duke isn't interested in gold.

LAURA
Why ain't he interested in gold?

ACE
Says there isn't any here.

LAURA
You sure put a lot of stock in what
he has to say. If he ain't your kin
why you listen to him?

DUKE (O.S.)
Ace!

Duke waves him over to where a large cottonwood log lays.

Duke bends down and grabs one end of the log. To his surprise, Laura appears at the other end.

DUKE (CONT'D)
What do you think you're doing?

LAURA
Givin' what ya asked for.

She lifts her end of the log quite easily.

DUKE
Like hell you are. What does a
woman know about building a house?

LAURA

More than your boy does. And
more'n you I wager.

Ace chokes on his water. Duke glares at him.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Now you gonna lift this thing or I
gotta stand here all day
splinterin' up these woman hands.

Duke bends down and picks up his end. They carry it over and drop it in place. Laura dusts her hands off and marches away.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Back to work boys.

Duke stares at her with confused admiration as Ace smirks.

INT. SALOON - DUSK

A makeshift tent saloon crammed to the brim. Whiskey is the only drink, but there's plenty of it. Overflowing card tables give way to a bar packed with belligerent drunks.

Duke sits in the corner with a deck of cards and a liter of whiskey, his intimidating face keeping any socialites at bay.

Cody, drunk and foul, is squeezed between two fellow prospectors GIRARD and BOGGART.

GIRARD

You think there's really anything
in that creek?

BOGGART

Nothing thus far.

CODY

Maybe you're looking in the wrong
place.

GIRARD

You're gonna stand there and tell
like you actually found something
Cody, but I knows it for a fact
that you ain't found nothin'.

CODY

Speak for yourself.

BOGGART

I've managed three dollars this week.

CODY

Three dollars is a stain on the underside of my britches.

GIRARD

That's not nothing. That's thirteen hours work a day, that is.

CODY

Ya can keep your dust and your three dollars. You know what I got?

Cody leans in discreetly. Boggart and Girard lean in.

CODY (CONT'D)

I've filled a kettle. Full of dust, pebbles, nuggets, and black sand.

A DISCREET MAN stands nearby. His ears perk up.

BOGGART

A kettle?

CODY

You 'eard me.

GIRARD

Only kettle you've filled is the one of your own shit, you filthy Irish swine.

CODY

Who you calling Irish, yeh fat English carpetbagger!

Cody PUNCHES Girard --

-- Boggart PUNCHES Cody. A domino-effect fight breaks out. Duke sighs and takes another drink. *The Discreet Man slips out of the tent.*

EXT. CODY'S LAND - NIGHT

...Crickets chirp loudly...

Ace stands at the creek's edge, shirtless, splashing himself with water.

He stomps up the riverbank to their camp. By the light of the fire we can see his body is covered in BURN SCARS.

He adds a couple logs to the fire. Stokes it accordingly. Sits down next to the fire and picks up a tattered copy of *David Copperfield*.

Laura exits her tent -- Seeing her, Ace quickly buttons up his shirt, covering the scars.

LAURA

Mind if I sit? Nights is cool here.

ACE

No ma'am.

LAURA

Quit that.

She drops to her knees and sets down a bottle of whiskey. She pours out some liquor into a tiny tin cup and takes a sip. Even at her young age she's already an expert drinker.

Ace admires her over the fire, visibly taken with her.

ACE

Where'd you learn how to drink?

LAURA

Where'd you learn how to read?

ACE

Picked it up here and there.

LAURA

An' I done the same.

She takes another stiff drink defiantly.

LAURA (CONT'D)

How you end up with that man?

ACE

My parents died when I was young... I don't really remember much about them. Been with Duke about as long as I can remember.

LAURA

You ain't got a home?

ACE

Not for a long time now... What about you?

LAURA
Nashville.

ACE
Bet it's nice there.

LAURA
It was nice once but now it ain't
nothing to fuss over.

She averts her eyes... Offers him the tin cup. He takes a sip. *Chokes* it down. He promptly hands it back. She downs the rest of the cup and pours more.

LAURA (CONT'D)
You can read out loud if ya like.

ACE
You ever read a book before?

She glares at him. He promptly turns back to the first page of the book.

ACE (CONT'D)
*Whether I shall turn out to be the
hero of my own life, or whether
that station will be held by
anybody else, these pages must
show...*

She hands the cup back to Ace. He takes a deep breath and drinks again...

CUT TO:

ACE
Passed out cold next to the fire. Snoring. Puke dribbled down his front. Laura rifles through his jacket pockets. She opens his saddle bag and searches it.

...The crickets suddenly stop chirping...

She looks up. Tersely holds her gaze on the darkness for a prolonged beat.

...The crickets resume chirping...

Laura returns to her pilfering. Clothes, rations. Nothing of importance, except for...

A PISTOL
She holds it in her hands for a moment. Tests the weight. With a pitiful glance at Ace she tucks it in her jacket.

CODY (O.S.)
 Laura! Laura!

Laura whips around --

A drunken Cody stumbles up to his tent. He throws aside the flaps and lunges inside. *We hear him throwing dishes and luggage around.*

CODY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Laura! Girl, where are ya?!

Laura cautiously approaches, touching her hand to the spot where the pistol is tucked. She peeks inside...

INT. CODY'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

Cody is tearing apart the tent in a blind, drunken rage.

LAURA
 What d'ya want?

He whips around. Greed in his eyes.

CODY
 There you are. Where you been?

He takes a step toward her.

CODY (CONT'D)
 You been near that boy?

He looks her up and down as if some telltale sign of indiscretion will appear to him.

CODY (CONT'D)
 I said where you been girl? You been with that boy?

He creeps toward her. She holds her ground.

LAURA
 Yer full as a tick. Go ta bed.

CODY
 You been with him?!

He grabs her arm --

LAURA
 Don't touch me.

She whips the pistol out and puts it to his head.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Don't you touch me.

Cody's eyes roll up to see the pistol. He laughs.

CODY
Oughta know what's good fer you.

LAURA
I ain't Ma-

Cody whips his free arm up -- Knocks the pistol from her hand. He grabs her neck and throws her down. She hits hard on the corner of a table and flops to her knees. He presses down on top of her. Beats her across the back of the head. She gasps in pain.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Getoffme-

He beats her again. Rips at the bottom of her dress. Tears upward. Exposes her undergarments. His searing breath stings at her neck. She struggles. He presses down harder.

We pull back out of the --

EXT. CODY'S LAND, TENT - CONTINUOUS

The candlelight projects the flickering image of Cody positioning himself on top his daughter. His animalistic panting drowns out her gasps of pain.

...Once again, the crickets stop chirping...

We pull back further to see the shadows of:

SEVEN MEN ON HORSEBACK

Easing into frame from all sides, surrounding the tent.

-- A bottle smashes inside --

Cody yells. His shadow falls out of sight.

-- Rustling from within --

Laura bursts out of the tent, breathless, her dress ripped open and revealing -- She stops dead in her tracks.

LAURA'S POV

Seven horsemen, cloaked in shadow, bear down around her.

Cody bursts out of the tent. Pants around his ankles. Bare ass hanging out of his britches. He grabs at Laura -- Stops when he notices the SIX RIFLES aiming down at him.

CODY

Who's that out there? State yer business or get off my property.

The faceless men stare down at him ominously.

CODY (CONT'D)

Th-this here is private property. Trespassin, the lot of you!

A terrified beat.

CODY (CONT'D)

Speak! Speak yeh devils.

The one in the center, the only one without a rifle drawn, finally speaks up:

SHADOW RIDER

Catch you at a bad time?

CODY

Who's that speakin' out there? Show yourself!

SHADOW RIDER

Heard a man pray tell bout the fabled gold-filled kettle of old Red Cody... You wouldn't happen to be him, now would you?

CODY

Who be spouting lies about me? Show yourself stranger! Show your face!

SHADOW RIDER

Are you, or are you not, the man who this very night claimed to have a kettle filled with gold, dust, nuggets, rocks, and black sand?

The rider dismounts. His spurs *clink* as his feet scrape dirt.

SHADOW RIDER (CONT'D)

I heard a similar story once before... About a man with a mythical kettle filled with gold.

The shadow rider takes a threatening step toward Cody. Cody instinctively backs up a step.

CODY

Ain't no such kettle, stranger.
None such kettle in all the
territory.

SHADOW RIDER

Well, this particular kettle was
special... You see, it belonged to
a man. A man who owed a lot of
money. And one day that man took
his daughter and disappeared in the
night, kettle and all... *Debts
unpaid.*

The Rider takes another step forward; Cody backwards.

SHADOW RIDER (CONT'D)

See I met this man in California.
Made a deal with this man. And this
man owes me an awful lot of gold
for my trials and my troubles.

The men on horseback close ranks, tightening the noose.

Cody backs into the side of the tent, drained of courage.
Laura holds her ground, unflappable.

CODY

Who? Who are yeh?

SHADOW RIDER

I think you know very well who I
am.

The shadow rider steps closer and we get a glimpse of his
face basked in fire. This is JOHN REEVES (45). A sociopath of
the highest order. His actions are measured and calculated to
inflict maximum impact. He wears all black, from his hat on
down through his duster to his boots. Handsome, but his icy
blue eyes betray the evil within. He walks with both hands
perched on the tips of his holstered pistols.

CODY

(Gasps)

Reeves? They said you was dead.

JOHN REEVES

Sorry to disappoint.

Reeves motions to one of his gang members. One of the six
riders dismounts and disappears inside the tent.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

You find any gold in that river?

Cody cowers instinctively. Shakes his head.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
You wouldn't lie about a thing like that?

CODY
No sir. I swear I ain't find nothin'.

JOHN REEVES
Ain't find nothing?

CODY
I swear I ain't finded nothin. It's just dirt, Mr. Reeves.

JOHN REEVES
No. No, I don't think you did... Shame... Shame you didn't.

Reeves peers down at the river.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
Hate to tell you but you never gonna find anything in this water, Cody. It's clear as crystal, but dry as a bone.

Reeves sets his eyes on Laura. She stares straight ahead, stoic and unafraid, more than living up to her reputation as a hardened frontier woman. Her lip is bleeding and a bruise is already forming under her eye.

Reeves reaches out and wipes away the drip of blood from her lip. He looks at the blood for a moment. Holds it up for Cody to see.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
This is worth far more than whatever ya gonna find in that river.

He *licks* the blood off his finger. Lightly strokes Laura's injured face. She flinches -- Pulls away.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
You grown up since I seen ya last. What's your name?

LAURA
...Laura.

JOHN REEVES

Laura... Mr. John Reeves at your service. Give you my word. No more harm will come to you long as me an' my boys are about.

Laura's eyes flash at him dangerously.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

She got fire in her eyes, Cody.

He looks Cody up and down, disgusted with him.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

Spouse she didn't get that from you.

CODY

Me and mine ain't no concern of yours.

Now Reeves' eyes flash dangerously. Cody instantly regrets his cheek and cowers accordingly.

The dispatched rider exits the tent holding a small KETTLE. He hands it to Reeves. Reeves weighs the kettle in his hands.

JOHN REEVES

Tsk, tsk... What have we here?
Just dirt, huh?

The smile vanishes from Reeves face. He holds up the kettle for Cody to see. Cody starts to shake. Sweat drips down his face.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

My dear Laura... Would you mind deeply backing inside for a moment? Your father and I got words.

Her eyes clock the six rifles pointed at her. She backs slowly inside the tent.

The smile vanishes from Reeves' face. He steps close to Cody, so close he can feel his breath. He puts his arm around Cody. Walks him down towards the river. *The riders creep along behind.*

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

Do you believe in souls Cody? Me, I don't believe in 'em. Don't believe in morals neither. Never have.

They step into the river.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
 And I'd be lying if I said I had
 some sorta code...

Reeves slowly draws his pistol and presses the end up against
 Cody's SCROTUM.

CODY
 No, no, no, no, please-

JOHN REEVES
 But there is one thing I cannot
 abide... And that is the
bastardization of beauty.

Cody falls to his knees, spitting out his plea.

CODY
 Please don't shoot. P-please Mr.
 Reeves!

JOHN REEVES
 I wouldn't waste a bullet on a
 thing like you.

He holsters his pistol.

CODY
 (Blubbering)
 Thank you Mr. Reeves. Thank you!

JOHN REEVES
 Thing like you doesn't deserve to
 die clean. Thing like you must be
 dealt with the *proper* care.

Reeves hisses into Cody's ear.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
 That's why my Chinese friend here
 is gonna take your manhood.

The remaining color drains from Cody's panicked face.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
 Mr. Hanzo, would you oblige us?

In unison, all six riders descend from their horses and
 surround Cody in the river. One of the six, presumably MR.
 HANZO, throws back his poncho to reveal --

A SAMURAI SWORD
 Encased in a sheath.

Mr. Hanzo takes the encased sword and steps forward menacingly. He removes the sword from its sheath and points it at Cody.

Cody jumps up and makes a run for it-

BANG! BANG! BANG!

A flurry of shots strike at Cody's feet. He dives into the water, covering his head.

Two of the riders rush forward and grab Cody. Hold him down in the shallow creek.

Mr. Hanzo glides forward with his sword held aloft. He slashes open Cody's britches, revealing his *genitals*. Hanzo presses the tip of the sword against them.

Reeves tips down his head and lights a cigar as Cody blubbers indecipherably.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
Don't struggle now.

LAURA (O.S.)
Y'all let him go!

Reeves looks up from his cigar to see --

THE END OF A PISTOL
Staring him dead between the eyes.

JOHN REEVES
Boys... Hold up a minute.

Laura grips it tight with two hands. Only eyes for Reeves.

LAURA
I said y'all let him go now.

JOHN REEVES
What's your master plan here?

LAURA
Y'all leave or y'all die.

Reeves tips his hat back, admiring her gumption.

JOHN REEVES
Ma'am. I urge you to reconsider.

LAURA
Can't have ya killing or maiming him. Only way I'm gonna eat.

Reeves scratches his chin and smiles politely, puffing on his cigar without fear.

JOHN REEVES

Mr. Hanzo. Would you be so kind as to remove your sword from Mr. Cody's genitals.

Mr. Hanzo returns his sword to its sheath.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

Boys, would you all kindly lower your rifles and set them on the riverside and return the estimable Mr. Cody to his feet.

One by one they all place their weapons on dry land.

Two riders lean down and pull Cody up to his feet, his tattered britches hanging by threads.

LAURA

Now, y'all get on your horses and leave.

JOHN REEVES

Are you sure that's what you want us to do?

She holds his icy gaze. *But for the first time, a flicker of uncertainty passes behind her eyes.*

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

Tell you what...

He drops his cigar. Her eyes follow it down...

In one swift motion, he GRABS her pistol -- WRENCHES it forward -- Laura PLUNGES into his arms -- He catches her, draws his pistol and puts it to her head.

Laura blinks. *What just happened?*

Reeves smiles down at her.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

Sorry darling.
(To his gang)
Do it.

Cody jumps up and makes a run for it.

The riders catch him -- Throw him back into the river -- Pin down his arms and legs.

Mr. Hanzo draws his sword and swiftly SLICES into Cody's SCROTUM --

-- Cody's screams echo across the water. His limbs twitch violently.

Reeves clutches Laura tight as she averts her eyes, struggling to break free from his grasp.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
It'll all be over soon.

A pair of testicles drop into the water.

The riders let go of Cody. He flails in agony.

CODY
Ahh! Damn you!

Reeves hisses into Laura's ear:

JOHN REEVES
He'll be dead within the hour. Ask me, that man deserves everything coming his way. But I figure you got two options. You get him on the back of a horse. Get him to town. Save his life... Or...

He loosens his grasp on her. She remains in place. Holds her gaze tight on his.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
...You let him bleed.

Reeves picks up Cody's kettle. Considers it for a moment. Then tips the kettle over Cody and pours all the dirt and rocks out onto Cody.

CODY
Damn y'all! God damn you!

One of the rocks sparkles in the water. Reeves leans down and picks it up. A rock embedded with GOLD.

JOHN REEVES
Pleasure, Mr. Cody.

He tips his hat and pockets the gold nugget.

FADE TO BLACK.

...Blurred visions of orange and red dance in front of us.

ACE

Opens his eyes. He blinks hard, draining the liquor.

ACE

Holy shit.

Cody's land is ON FIRE. Everything from the tent to the mining rig, the cabin frame, and the cottonwood trees.

INT. SALOON TENT - NIGHT

Duke continues to play solitaire in the corner of the crowded tent. The bottle of whiskey his only company.

-- BANG, BANG, BANG --

Three distant gunshots... The saloon patrons quiet. Duke looks up from his cards.

(Beat)

...The saloon patrons resume their chatter...

Duke drains the last of his whiskey. Tips the glass over.

EXT. DENVER CITY, MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Duke untethers his horse. Mounts it, a bit uneasy. The age and the liquor catching up to him.

He trots away from the saloon but stops short. He squints into the darkness:

FLAMES

Small and distant. Rise up over Cody's land.

Alarmed, Duke kicks his horse into gear and gallops away --

EXT. CODY'S LAND - NIGHT

The blazing house frame collapses in on itself.

Cody gropes at the dirt, scratching and clawing his way out of the river as fire scorches him.

Ace stumbles down the riverbank. He grabs Cody by the armpits -- Heaves him up the bank. Cody screams in pain.

DUKE

Gallops at a sprint towards the fire. He jumps off his horse.

Draws his pistol. It shakes in his hand. He squints through the burning landscape, trying to control the shaking.

Ace drags Cody through the wreckage. Flames nipping at their heels.

Duke sees Ace and Cody through the smoke. He runs to them -- Grabs Cody's arm and helps carry him away from the fire.

DUKE
What happened?

ACE
I don't know. I-I was sleeping and
all of a sudden-

DUKE
Are you drunk?!

ACE
No, no. Yeah, a little -- Our
things!

Ace moves toward their campsite but Duke stops him.

DUKE
They're gone.

Duke sees the blood dripping from Cody's britches. He drops down to his knees and turns the bleeding man over on his back -- Cody cries out in pain.

Where his testicles should be is just a mass of blood and entrails. Duke grimaces. Ace covers his mouth and looks away.

ACE
Where's Laura?

CODY
He took her.

DUKE
Who?

CODY
Reeves... John Reeves.

Shadows obscure Duke's face, but the name triggers something. *He knows that name. He knows it very well.*

CUT TO BLACK

(END OF PART 1)

(BEGINNING OF PART 2)**EXT. DESERT - DAY**

Five horses race across the barren land of southern Colorado.

EXT. BENT'S FORT WRECKAGE - DAY

Bent's Fort used to be a major trading post but now it's an abandoned pile of wood collapsed in on itself.

Blistering sun. Fierce wind. Captain Bassett sits on his horse in the shade of a lone tree. He fans himself impatiently...

...The sound of distant horses...

Bassett squints into the distance...

SEVEN RIDERS appear over the horizon, headed straight for him. They are --

JOHN REEVES & THE BACKDOOR GANG

This time we can see them in the light of day. In unison, all seven dismount and strut towards Captain Bassett. It's an eclectic group:

MINAMOTO HANZO a.k.a. THE CHINAMAN (45)

One of the last true Samurai ever trained in Japan. A silent menace. Penetrating, inquisitive eyes.

MOONSHINE FREEMAN (35)

A gruff, menacing former slave with the scars to prove it.

FRANCO (30)

A disgusting, hunchbacked Mexican. His cloths worn thin like rags.

REGINALD JESSUP (40)

A slim, ghostlike Englishman with a shoulder length moustache.

FRANCOIS (35)

An articulate, degenerate Frenchman.

JESSE (45)

A man with pure crazy in his eyes.

And of course... JOHN REEVES himself.

Reeves walks out front and meets Bassett. The wind is howling. They have to yell to be heard.

CAPTAIN BASSETT

General Larimer has a proposition for you.

JOHN REEVES

General too scared to come himself?

CAPTAIN BASSETT

The General is a busy man.

JOHN REEVES

Get on with it then.

CAPTAIN BASSETT

The General is in need of assistance swaying the voting populous of Arapahoe County.

JOHN REEVES

Politics is the General's game, not mine.

CAPTAIN BASSETT

He believes you could be particularly adept at persuading people to vote for Denver City in the upcoming election...

JOHN REEVES

I am a man without a flag, Mr. Bassett. If Larimer wants me to pledge allegiance to him and his boom town then he knows the price.

Bassett digs into his saddle bag. Produces a stack of papers. Hands them to Reeves. *Stock Certificates.*

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

Didn't realize he was looking for investors.

CAPTAIN BASSETT

Shares in the Denver City town company. Each share entitles you to a plot of land within the city limits. What you choose to do with the shares and the land is your business.

JOHN REEVES

These are worth less than the paper
you wasted to print 'em.

CAPTAIN BASSETT

They are worth what we make them
worth. I urge you to consider their
potential... A county seat... A
territorial capitol. What would you
have given to be in on the ground
floor of Chicago or New York?

Reeves paces around Bassett.

JOHN REEVES

Chicago and New York ain't
capitols, Mr. Bassett. And if I
remember correctly, he didn't take
so kindly to my methods last time
around.

CAPTAIN BASSETT

The General is forever grateful for
your prior instances of help.

JOHN REEVES

Doesn't know you're here, does he?

Bassett holds his ground nervously.

CAPTAIN BASSETT

Will you accept this offer?

Reeves smirks. Counts the shares.

JOHN REEVES

Eight shares?

CAPTAIN BASSETT

One for each of your men and two
for you.

JOHN REEVES

Fifteen shares. In my name only.

Reeves offers his hand. Bassett considers it for a moment.
The devil himself offering a handshake.

He shakes it.

INT. BLAKE'S CABIN - DAY

Blake pours out two hefty shares of brown liquor in glasses.

Larimer sits admiring Blake's cabin and the sparse bits of luxury obviously craved by its owner: a stack of thick books, an obnoxiously large and elegant rug.

BLAKE

Straight from Tennessee. Aged
bourbon. Brought it myself.

He offers one to Larimer.

LARIMER

I don't consume.

Blake frowns. Dumps Larimer's into his own.

BLAKE

You're an odd bird, General.

Blake *does* consume, and does so liberally while the General waits impatiently.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

Why don't you just take the deal,
General? It's a guaranteed fortune.
You'll be one of the largest
landholders in the territory... You
know more than most, there is no
pride, and certainly no money, in
failure.

Larimer looks at him sharply.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

They will all come here... And you
will reap the rewards.

Larimer sinks in his seat. *It's an appealing thought.*

BLAKE (CONT'D)

I've arranged a meeting for you
with Green Russell. He is a man of
vision. The two of you should meet.
Face-to-face. He is a good ally to
have in this wilderness.

INT. INFIRMARY TENT - DAY

A hastily thrown together hospital, precariously situated in a grimy grey tent. A DOCTOR presses a bundle of bandages against Cody's mutilated crotch. Cody is unconscious, but alive. Certainly worse for the wear.

DOCTOR

Who is this John Reeves? I don't believe I've heard that name before.

DUKE

Hovers in the corner. Smoking. Watching silently. He ignores the Doctor's question, but we can see the truth in his eyes.

The Doctor shrugs and moves to wash his hands in the basin.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Well... I've done what I can for him. He'll live for now. Not for long if supplies don't arrive from the east.

DUKE

Good thing you turned up, Doc.

The Doctor sighs and looks at Duke.

DOCTOR

You look familiar. Were you part of the invasion?

DUKE

...Only in spirit, Doc.

He stands and ducks out of the tent --

EXT. INFIRMARY TENT - CONTINUOUS

Ace sits on a tree stump methodically cleaning the chambers of his pistol. *Just as we saw Duke doing nine years earlier.*

DUKE

Grab your things. We're moving on.

ACE

What about Laura?

DUKE

Her fate ain't any business of ours.

ACE

We can't let that gang kidnap her like that. God knows what they're doing to her.

DUKE

She can take care of herself.

ACE

There's only three men in this whole god forsaken territory that knew she existed. And one of them is dying in that tent. We're all she has. She's counting on us.

DUKE

You have any idea what you're talking about? You'd be marching right to your death.

Ace shoves his pistol into Duke's stomach.

ACE

Then march with me.

Duke glares at him.

DUKE

You care 'bout this girl enough to die?

ACE

It's not about that. It's the right thing to do.

Duke shakes his head.

DUKE

First girl you meet in nine years and she's gonna put a bullet in your gut... I didn't raise you just to watch you kill yourself.

ACE

Yeah, well you aren't raising me anymore. I'm eighteen. Time I struck out on my own. You've held me back long enough.

DUKE

The answer's NO!

He picks up his saddle and marches away.

ACE

Then this is where we part ways.

Duke stops and glares back at Ace.

DUKE

You're stubborn as a mule.

ACE

Wonder where I picked that up.

A tense beat as they stare each other down.

DUKE

If that's the way it's gotta be...

Duke tosses him the pistol. He looks at it for a moment, then looks up at Duke, *never more disappointed*.

Ace catches it, holds for a moment.

ACE

Well... Goodbye.

With a disappointed shake of his head, he turns his back and walks off, leaving Duke to stew.

EXT. GREEN RUSSELL'S LAND - DAY

At the river's edge runs a well-oiled gold sluicing operation. A cadre of men carry buckets of water out of the water and up to the top of the sluicing trench. They dump the water in at the top, the water runs down and out the bottom.

GREEN RUSSELL (41) works right in the river amongst four WHITE MEN, two NATIVE AMERICANS, and three BLACK SLAVES.

General Larimer and Captain Bassett stand at the top of the riverbank.

GREEN RUSSELL

Who be that standing ashore? Be ye man or beast?

GENERAL LARIMER

One be man. One be either man or beast.

Green stomps ashore.

GREEN

William Larimer, my, my. And Mr. Bassett. In the flesh, on my southern soil.

LARIMER

I didn't realize we were in the land of dixie, Mr. Russell.

GREEN

Please gentlemen, we don't stand on ceremony in Auraria. Call me Green.

Green shakes their hands with great ceremony.

LARIMER

Are these Negroes yours?

GREEN

Freemen. The lot of 'em. When I left Georgia, why, they just couldn't bear to be without me. Isn't that right Peaches?

PEACHES, the slave we earlier saw being whipped looks up from his spot in the creek.

PEACHES

Yes sir, Mr. Russell.

As Peaches turns away, Bassett notices the wounds up and down his back and arms.

GREEN

Come on up to my shelter. Let us take leave of this blistering wind. Can I offer you some coffee, perhaps?

INT. GREEN RUSSELL'S CABIN - DAY

Larimer and Bassett sip from steaming copper mugs of coffee. A great brown bearskin looms over them on the wall.

GREEN

That's good idn't it?

CAPTAIN BASSETT

My utmost compliments.

GREEN

I accept them humbly... Hot, strong, and good. Only way I make it and the only way I like it.

He smiles boldly. A regal smile befitting of a Southern diplomat.

GREEN (CONT'D)

Gotta enjoy the meager comforts of home we can afford ourselves out here in God's country, General.

(MORE)

GREEN (CONT'D)

As you know, it is no easy feat to live with so little, for so long, amongst so few.

LARIMER

Couldn't have said it better myself.

An awkward beat.

GREEN

So what brings such distinguished Denver City diplomats to my doorstep? Could this have anything to do with an upcoming election for our dear Arapahoe County?

LARIMER

Something of a sage, are you Green?

GREEN

Nah, I just talk to a lot of folk up at the Wootton's store is all. That Blake character is so set upon arranging this marriage, I must say I feel like the fairest girl at the ball.

LARIMER

He is *persistent*.

GREEN

But the boom is upon us gentlemen. I dare say our two sister towns will flourish like no others in the great west. New York, Washington, Auraria and Denver they'll say together without breaking for air.

CAPTAIN BASSETT

You and your men are finding the gold reserves adequate?

GREEN

We are doing quite fine. Quite fine, indeed. The problem is these newcomin' immigrants with no proper sense of how to do things. Lacking in patience. As if gold falls from the sky and blankets the ground in the evening. It's a wonder they even found the place alive in the first place.

LARIMER

And what of this *deal*?

GREEN

Is it not beneficial for you,
beneficial for me, beneficial for
all involved?

LARIMER

To have Denver City annexed? To
disappear from the records? I could
offer the same deal to you.

GREEN

Be no point in the matter. An
alliance with the shark would be
beneficial for the minnow, but the
minnow can offer no benefit to the
shark.

(beat)

What is it you want out of all this
Mr. Larimer?

LARIMER

I want what any man wants. What any
man is entitled to. To fulfil his
destiny.

GREEN

And what is your destiny? To be
King of your "Queen City?" God
ain't in the business of making
Kings no more. You should know,
General. Seems *disaster* has struck
you twice, both natural and
financial. *La Platte. Pittsburgh.*
Why not listen to the signs God is
giving you and cut your losses? I
will ensure you come out favorably.
And if it's power you want, I may
even be inclined to find a post for
you. The *new Auraria* will need a
Treasurer too, William.

The use of his first name perturbs Larimer and Russell seems
to know this.

GREEN (CONT'D)

Why, maybe there's even a post for
a slick Yankee boy like Mr. Bassett
here... Think of it, William!
Finally one of your ventures to be
a success.

LARIMER

Do not call me William.

GREEN

Pride, William, is not a mask
befitting a man of your business
acumen.

Larimer stares at him. Green smirks magnanimously.

GREEN (CONT'D)

Tell you what, William. You take
some time. Couple days even. After
such time as that, my charity will
be severely tried. There are
limits, after all, to the shelter I
can be compelled upon to provide
for those weaker off.

EXT. CHERRY CREEK - DUSK

General Larimer and Captain Bassett stand atop the still
unfinished bridge, looking out at their newly built city.

GENERAL LARIMER

Would you think me a fool if I turn
this deal down?

CAPTAIN BASSETT

I think some men have an
unquenchable thirst to build
something they can call their own.
Leave a legacy he can be proud of.

Larimer nods solemnly, lost in thought.

GENERAL LARIMER

You said we can win this election?

CAPTAIN BASSETT

It occurs to me there are three
ways you could win this thing...
One, you steal the votes the guy
thinks he already possesses... Two,
you locate votes you didn't know
existed... And three... You make
sure those who would vote against
you never get the chance.

INT. SALOON TENT - NIGHT

Duke sits alone with his liquor and a deck of cards. He stares deep into the bottom of his drink, searching for something, finding nothing. *This once famous gunslinger... Now nothing but a drunk.*

A breeze gusts through the tent -- Fluttering the talisman on Duke's wrist.

Duke looks down at the talisman. *A mocking reminder of the man he used to be.*

He curses under his breath and downs his drink.

INT. SALOON - DAY

Ace pushes through the swinging doors and clocks the scene:

It's quiet. The saloon is tiny and freshly built with a low flat ceiling. The BARTENDER delivers a tray of bourbon to a table of four CARD PLAYERS in the back. Two MEN sit alone at the bar. What town or territory we are in is hard to say, but these men all traveled a long way to get here.

Ace takes a table along the wall with a good view of the room. Eyes flash in Ace's direction but none seem bothered.

BARTENDER

What'll you have kid?

ACE

Do you have any food?

BARTENDER

Stew's on in back. Got a nice cut of buffalo sliced up in there. It'll fill a man's belly for a day. Baked some bread yesterday.

ACE

That'll be fine.

CUT TO:

A STEAMING BOWL OF STEW

Slams the table in front of Ace. It's a thick brown with large lumps of meat. The Bartender looms over Ace's table. Cuts off a hunk of bread.

BARTENDER

Mind yourself.

ACE

Thank you.

BARTENDER

How old are you, kid?

ACE

I don't see how that's any concern
of yours.

Ace sets a couple coins down on the table.

BARTENDER

No, I don't suppose it is.

He scoops up the coins.

ACE

One more thing.

Ace presses another coin to the table with his finger.

ACE (CONT'D)

I'm looking for a man. Heard he may
have traveled through recently.

BARTENDER

Don't need no jackpot going down
here, son.

ACE

Just tell me if you've heard the
name.

The Bartender considers for a moment. He slides the coin out
from under Ace's grasp.

ACE (CONT'D)

John Reeves. Mean anything to you?

BARTENDER

I heard the name. Everyone in here
has heard that name...

He leans down into Ace's ear.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)

I'll give you another bit for free,
son. You go asking round saloons
for a man; a thing, like John
Reeves, you'll find yourself dead
'fore Sunday next.

Ace tastes the stew.

ACE

My compliments to the chef.

BARTENDER

Your compliments is noted.

He returns to the bar. Ace hungrily shovels down his stew.

His eyes scan the room cautiously, landing on the card table. The DEALER glances up. Catches Ace's gaze.

Ace swallows his last bit of stew (and his nerves) and stands deliberately. He walks calmly through the saloon to --

THE CARD TABLE

The Dealer watches him the whole way. The other three don't even bother looking up from their cards.

ACE

Good afternoon gentlemen.

DEALER

You fixin' fer a game?

The Dealer shuffles the cards absent-minded.

ACE

I was hoping you gentlemen could help me. I'm looking for a person.

DEALER

A person? What person? This is everyone I know! What other person could you be lookin' for?

He laughs hysterically. The others are not amused.

ACE

Do any of you know John Reeves?

The Dealer stops laughing. Next to the Dealer sits a dirty HULK with a fat cigar attached permanently to his lip.

HULKING CIGAR MAN

John Reeves? You got better luck catching a ghost.

DEALER

Ghost wouldn't shoot back.

HULKING CIGAR MAN

What's a boy like you know a name like that for?

DEALER

You know what they call Reeves down south around Mexico way? *El negro del diablo*. The devil in black.

HULKING CIGAR MAN

Injuns got another name for him.

DEALER

I heard he's part Comanche.

HULKING CIGAR MAN

Heard he's descendent from Cortez himself.

Now we focus on two other two men sitting silently at the table with their backs to Ace. They're listening closely, quietly amused. *Each casually lowers a hand off the table and places it on his pistol under the table.*

ACE

Any of you know how to find him?

DEALER

Well shit kid. Reeves ain't real. Don't you know that?

CIGAR MAN

Folk tale.

DEALER

Indeed.

HULKING CIGAR MAN

Lot of men run around claiming to be John Reeves. But they just laying claim to a tale told for years down south. Story for the downtrodden to pin their fears and failures on.

ACE

What about you two?

One of the silent man looks over his shoulder. We immediately recognize him as *Francois*, a member of the Backdoor Gang. He regards Ace with a detached coolness.

FRANCOIS

Never met him. Neither the man, nor the legend.

The second silent man turns. It's *Jesse*, yet another member of the gang. He shakes his head.

Ace studies them carefully. Both carry a sense of danger about them.

ACE
Thank you for your time gentlemen.
Sorry to interrupt.

Ace walks back to --

THE BAR
The Bartender glances at him skeptically.

ACE (CONT'D)
Let me ask you another question.

Behind Ace, we see Jesse and Francois stand up.

BARTENDER
Get out of here, kid. If your life means anything to ya.

Francois and Jesse approach. The Bartender turns away.

ACE
I'm not leaving until-

-- Both Francois and Jesse press a pistol up against either side of Ace's face.

FRANCOIS
Until what, may I ask?

Ace freezes.

ACE
I'm not looking for trouble.

FRANCOIS
Tsk, tsk. That is unfortunate, because trouble's precisely what you've found.

Francois slides Ace's pistol out of its holster.

ACE
Are you Reeves?

FRANCOIS
(Laughs)
Am I Reeves, he asks! He asks, if I am John Reeves... If you were in the presence of John Reeves... You would know it...
(MORE)

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)

What could a boy like you possibly want from a man like John Reeves?

ACE

I just want to talk to him.

FRANCOIS

Sonny, the only people who talk to John Reeves, oftentimes find themselves incapable of speech quite soon thereafter.

...A door creaks open... Every eye in the building swings instinctively towards the door.

DUKE

Stands large in the doorway, silhouetted by the blinding sun.

DUKE

Let the kid go.

FRANCOIS

Come again?

DUKE

I said, let the kid go.

Francois and Jesse fidget nervously, their focus now on the stranger in the doorway.

Duke enters methodically. With every step he comes more into focus. He appears tired and old, sweating heavily from the journey. He holds up three fingers on his shaking hand.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Whiskey.

The Bartender looks to Francois for permission. Francois nods cautious approval.

The Bartender quickly pours a drink and slides it down the bar -- Duke catches it.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Two more for my friends.

FRANCOIS

Just exactly what is your business here, stranger?

DUKE

Just trying to buy you a drink.

The Bartender pours two more. Sets them in front of Jesse and Francois. Neither touches their glass, eyes glued on Duke.

DUKE (CONT'D)
To your good health.

Duke slams his drink.

DUKE (CONT'D)
You gonna drink those?

They stare wordlessly. He shrugs. Slams both of their drinks in quick succession. *His shaking hand settles almost immediately.*

DUKE (CONT'D)
What'd the kid do?

FRANCOIS
He asked a few too many questions.

DUKE
Should know better. Didn't your father teach you better?

ACE
My father's dead.

DUKE
You fixin' to join him?

FRANCOIS
Might I suggest you exit the premises, "*right quick*" as you Americans like to say.

DUKE
Just hate to see the young cut down before their time is all.

Jesse sticks his gun in Duke's face.

JESSE
Stop talkin'.

A tense *beat* as Duke slowly holds up his hands.

JESSE (CONT'D)
Heard 'nough of you.

Francois smirks. He traces the tip of his pistol around Ace's terrified face.

FRANCOIS

Is this beleaguered fellow your
Father?

ACE

No-

DUKE

I sent the boy in here, if that's
what you're after. Go on Ace, get
out of here.

FRANCOIS

No... I insist that he stay, and I
insist that you stay as well. I
insist we all stay... right...
here.

DUKE

This is between me and you. Leave
him out of it. Please. He's my only
son. Please, just let him go.

Francois takes the whiskey bottle from the Bartender. Pours
himself a drink. *Sets the bottle on the bar.*

FRANCOIS

He must learn the consequences of
his actions... As must you.

Jesse holds the pistol tight to Duke's face. Duke *cowers*
pathetically.

DUKE

Please he's not even a man yet.

FRANCOIS

Such cowardice. You disappoint me,
stranger.

DUKE

Please, we got money. We'll pay
you. We didn' mean nothing by it.
How can I make things right?

Francois smirks and tosses back his drink.

In a flash, Duke ELBOW'S Jesse hard in the FACE --

-- Grabs the WHISKEY BOTTLE off the bar --

-- SMASHES Francois over the head with the bottle (Francois'
pistol fires aimlessly) --

-- Wrenches around -- JABS Jesse in the THROAT with the broken bottle --

-- Grabs Francois by the throat -- Pins him to the bar with the glass shards.

A flash of the old Duke.

DUKE (CONT'D)
 (To the Bartender)
 You saw him draw on me.

The Bartender nods fearfully.

Jesse flails in a pool of his own blood on the floor, red gushing out of his neck. Francois gasps as the glass grinds against his neck.

DUKE (CONT'D)
 Ace, get their guns.

Ace stands in wide-eyed shock.

DUKE (CONT'D)
 ACE!

Ace snaps out of it. He scrambles over. Snatches up Francois and Jesse's guns.

DUKE (CONT'D)
 Through being reasonable. Time you get to talkin, else you wanna end up like your friend... John Reeves. Where is he?!

FRANCOIS
 I'd rather die valiantly on the field of-

Duke presses the jagged glass deep into Francois' neck.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)
 Ahk! Okay! Okay!

CUT TO BLACK

EXT. DESERT - DAY

FRANCOIS
 Drags his feet across the dirt. Face burnt. Lips dried. Looking as if he may collapse and die at any moment.

Twenty yards back, Ace and Duke follow on horseback. Ace is in a daze, still stunned by what he witnessed.

Francois stumbles and collapses.

DUKE
Didn't say sit down.

Francois looks up at Duke for mercy. *He'll get none.*

DUKE (CONT'D)
Pick yourself up.

With whatever last energy he has, Francois struggles back to his feet, sucking in the hot desert air. He stares up at Duke defiantly -- Spits in the sand at Duke's feet.

DUKE (CONT'D)
Not very smart of you.

Ace watches Duke, concerned. A hint of the returned psychopath gleaming in his eye.

ACE
Are you alright? You killed a man
back there.

Duke glares wordlessly at Ace.

EXT. SHACK - DAY

The blistering sun beats down on a very ordinary shack.

Duke clocks the territory. The shack sits in a clearing with an outhouse and stable. Enclosed by a broken fence and gate. Surrounded by tall grass and the trees. *Plenty of places a man could hide.*

Francois takes the last couple steps through the gate and collapses again.

Duke dismounts cautiously and draws his pistol. Ace follows suit.

DUKE
Stay behind me. No matter what
happens. You don't shoot unless I
shoot first.

Duke kicks at Francois' feet. Francois grabs hold of the fence. Pulls himself up. Duke presses his pistol into Francois' back.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Move.

Francois shuffles toward the shack.

Duke's eyes pass across the land from left to right. He digs his gun deeper in Francois' back.

The front door opens. They all stop...

...A tense beat...

A MAN steps out the door. His head tipped down lighting a cigar. His hat hung low over his face. He puffs a cloud of smoke and looks up.

Duke's eyes narrow. *It's John Reeves.*

JOHN REEVES

Hello there, Francois.

FRANCOIS

John.

JOHN REEVES

I see you've brung us a couple guests.

FRANCOIS

John, I swear to you, I had no choice-

JOHN REEVES

Shh, Shh, Shh. No matter... Well stranger, you got my attention. Sincerely hope it was worth the trouble...

He trails off...

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

Duke... Duke Fallon... Is that you?

Duke spits. *Something of a confirmation.*

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

(Awestruck)

I been wonderin' a long time what happened to you... Thought maybe you were dead... Suppose I should've known better.

FRANCOIS

John, he murdered Jesse! He was going to kill me too if I didn't bring him to you-

JOHN REEVES

Quiet, Francois.

He raises his hands a bit and takes a few steps forward. Duke watches him carefully, ready for any sudden movements.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

Suppose it's only proper I ask what you're doing with your pistol in my man's back?

DUKE

Wanna make a trade.

JOHN REEVES

Trade for what?

DUKE

The Frenchman for the girl.

JOHN REEVES

Girl... What girl?

DUKE

I know you got the Cody girl.

JOHN REEVES

Cody girl, Cody girl... Fiery red-head right? No, we never took her. Offered her a ride to Montana, but she turned us down.

FRANCOIS

John don't trust him! He lacerated Jesse right in the throat! I watched him bleed to death-

JOHN REEVES

I told you to quiet!

FRANCOIS

He'll do the same to us both!

Reeves DRAWS --

-- Duke sees it too late. He kicks Francois in the back, propelling him forward.

DUKE
Ace, get down!

Reeves FIRES twice --

-- The SHOTS strike Francois in the face. He flails backward and slams to the ground.

FRANCOIS
Stares to the sky, eyes hollowed out by bullets.

Ace stares wide-eyed at the dead man.

Duke reestablishes his footing. Keeps his pistol tight on Reeves, his hand visibly shaking.

JOHN REEVES
The French cannot be relied on.

He whistles loudly.

From behind the stable, a GANG MEMBER holding a rifle appears... Around the side of the shack, a second gangster appears... From the tall grass to the right, a third... From the brush to the left, a fourth... All four with their rifles trained on Duke and Ace.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
You know the key to negotiation?
Having the upper hand. And if you
don't have it, sometimes it's best
to cut your losses.

He casually holsters his pistol.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
Just lower that five-shooter and
we'll talk like old amigos.

The gang closes in. *Tightening the noose.*

DUKE
Your men.

JOHN REEVES
You ain't in any position to
bargain.

DUKE
Clocks all five targets. He puts his free hand over the hammer. *We know what's coming. We've seen it a hundred times before from John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, and countless others.*

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
I know what you're thinking... I
would advise you against it.

A tense beat as Duke considers his options... Finally and
cautiously, Duke lowers his pistol.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
Now the kid.

DUKE
Ace.

ACE
Duke, don't listen to him.

DUKE
Got no choice.

Begrudgingly, Ace holsters his weapon. Reeves smiles and
spreads his arms wide...

JOHN REEVES
Won't you come inside?

INT. THE BACKDOOR GANG HIDEOUT - DAY

Cramped. Barebones. Littered with the remnants of their
debauchery.

JOHN REEVES
There we go. Everybody still alive.
'Cept for Francois, but that was
his own doing...

Duke and Ace sit awkwardly at the table opposite Reeves. The
gang members mount the corners like silent watchtowers.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
Duke Fallon... It truly is a
delight to see you again... After
all these years. I'd begun to lose
hope... You fellas know who Duke
Fallon is?

He looks to Jessup, who shakes his head.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
Toughest, meanest gunslinger in
these southwest United States.
Baddest man to ever ride with them
Yankee boys into Mexico. Man killed
more greasers than the cholera...

He points at Duke's pistol.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
All with that pistol right there.

DUKE
You talk more'n I remember.

JOHN REEVES
The life of a gunslinger is a
solitary one, as you well know.
Can't help but go a little mad.
(With a glance at Ace)
What's the boy's name?

ACE
The man's name is Ace.

JOHN REEVES
He's got some kind of mouth on him.

ACE
You're one to talk.

JOHN REEVES
All he needs now is a gun and a man
to point it at.

ACE
I don't think that should be too
hard--What'd you do to her? In the
business of killing innocent woman,
are you?

JOHN REEVES
You don't know what you're talking
about, kid. You think this man
sittin' next to you never put some
lead in a woman?

ACE
Duke's wouldn't kill a woman.

JOHN REEVES
You must not know this man all that
well... Ace.

ACE
I know him better than you.

Reeves unbuttons his shirt and slides his shoulder out.
Reveals a bullet wound SCAR.

JOHN REEVES
How you s'pose I got that?

ACE
Probably shot yourself trying to
shave.

Reeves smirks.

JOHN REEVES
Yes, who among us ain't shot
themselves shaving?

DUKE
Ace, shut up.

ACE
This man can't go spreading lies
about you, Duke.

DUKE
Ace, shut up!

Duke's face says it all. *Everything Reeves has said is true.*

JOHN REEVES
That's right kid.

ACE
You're no gunslinger Duke. I've
known you nine years.

DUKE
And I had forty of 'em before you
came around.

Ace quiets shamefully.

JOHN REEVES
Aww... Isn't that nice. Father-son
sorta moment. I did wonder why all
this time had gone by without
seeing you none. And now I know.
Got yourself a child to *look*
after... What's it like? Livin'
within the law?

DUKE
Ain't here to reminisce.

JOHN REEVES
Y'all rode a hell of a long way to
find me. What for if not to
reminisce?

(MORE)

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
 Lemme tell ya, Ace, have we got
 some stories we could tell...

He laughs to himself, lost in some memory.

DUKE
 You'll shut your mouth right now if
 you know what's good, Reeves.

JOHN REEVES
 Boys... Ace... We are talking about
 a man who once led a horse thief
 over the border just so he had the
 jurisdiction to shoot him dead 'n
 front of a Texas Sheriff-
 (Laughs)
 A man who shot a murderer in both
 legs and then made him crawl twenty
 miles to the jail-
 (Laughing hysterically)
 -The whole way with his own horse's
 cock shoved up his ass!

Reeves pounds the table enthusiastically. The gang laughs.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
 A man who once marched room to room
 of a Mexican whorehouse... And shot
 every single soldier he found.
 (Wiping a fake tear)
 You were a truly beautiful madman.

DUKE
 Dammit, I said shut your mouth.

JOHN REEVES
 Who here is gonna make me? You?

Gone is the laughter. Returned is the sociopath.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)
 Look at you. Gone soft... The kid
 says you haven't shot that gun this
 decade. Is that true? Have you
 turned off the beaten path? Have
 you "found your lord and savior?"
 Are you a man of morals now? Cause
 I know a few Mexican hangmen with a
 noose fit to be hung with your neck
 in 'em.

DUKE
 Give me the girl.

JOHN REEVES
Angel de la muerte is what they
 used to call him.

DUKE
 The girl! Where is she?

JOHN REEVES
 Now you just look like death... Not
 the harbinger of it.

DUKE
 Dammit Reeves!

Duke pounds the table. LEAPS TO HIS FEET --

-- SO DOES REEVES. Both their hands at their sides, ready to
 draw. *Daring each other.*

JOHN REEVES
 I let you walk out alive once. You
 know I can't abide you doin' so a
 second time.

DUKE
 Ace, walk out that door and get on
 your horse.

ACE
 I won't do it.

JOHN REEVES
 Guess you'll have to die in each
 other's arms. Isn't that beautiful.

DUKE
 Dammit Ace!

Duke glances over his shoulder at Ace --

-- Reeves seizes the opportunity -- DRAWS his PISTOL. *Faster
 than anyone we've ever seen.*

Duke senses it, DRAWS --

-- Reeves SHOOTS DUKE in the chest --

-- Duke recoils -- FIRES at REEVES -- POUNDS the HAMMER in
 rapid succession -- RAPID-FIRES four more shots in the
 direction of the gang.

The gang raise their rifles -- Unload a volley of SHOTS --
 Raining a cacophony of explosions on *Duke's chest.*

Ace hits the floor covering his head.

SHOTS spray across the room in every direction. Bullet after bullet. Round after Round.

Every person in the room drops out of sight. The shots stop...

(Beat)

Sunlight beams pour through bullet holes and lingers in the settling gunsmoke.

Ace slowly uncovers his head and checks his body. *He's alive!* Sighing relief, he looks around. Duke is on his back. Drenched in blood. Dying.

Ace scrambles over to him.

ACE

Duke!

A RIFLE pokes Ace in the back of the head --

Ace freezes. He holds up his hands and slowly turns...

Hanzo holds the rifle. He silently shakes his head. *Don't move.*

JOHN REEVES

Rises up from behind the table, apparently unharmed. He surveys the damage. Franco, Moonshine, and Jessup are all shot and in varying states of injury.

FRANCO

Fuck! Fucker got me!

JOHN REEVES

I'll give it to ya, Duke. Nine year hiatus and you still know to shoot better than any man alive.

He fingers a bullet hole. Right over his heart.

He reaches up under his shirt and rips out a makeshift IRON VEST. A BULLET is pressed into the iron. Reeves plucks it out. Holds the bullet up for all to see.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

But you are too predictable a shot.

Duke breathes heavy.

DUKE

You draw on a man with his back turned?

JOHN REEVES

There's never been any rules to this game! You forget how it's played? No morals, no code is gonna save a man's life.

DUKE

Only his soul.

Reeves shakes his head, disappointed.

JOHN REEVES

Even if you an' I had souls, there's no god alive who'd risk his hide saving 'em.

He crouches down over Duke, *breathing hellfire*.

JOHN REEVES (CONT'D)

You been dead 'n gone nine years anyway. What say we make it official?

DUKE

Let the boy go... For old times...

Reeves glances at Ace with a wry smile.

JOHN REEVES

I'll do ya one better.

EXT. THE BACKDOOR GANG HIDEOUT - DUSK

Moonshine slings a ROPE over the top of the gate. Hanzo puts the accompanying noose *around Ace's neck*.

Franco and Jessup drop Duke harshly into the dirt underneath. He cringes, barely breathing as it is.

Reeves places a SINGLE BULLET in the chamber of his pistol. Presses the gun into Ace's terrified hand.

JOHN REEVES

I'm a man of a my word... You got one chance, kid. Kill or be killed.. Kill your old man and you get to live. Run out of breath, or even think about pointing this thing at me 'n you die.

Before Ace can utter a word, Hanzo and Moonshine PULL the rope --

-- HOISTING Ace up by the NECK --

-- The air immediately choked out of him. He claws at the noose. His legs kick helplessly.

Duke stares up at Ace. Delirious. Barely conscious.

DUKE

Do it!

Ace's eyes bulge as he sucks for air. He waves the pistol in Duke's general direction.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Do it now, Ace!

Duke stares up at Ace's flailing legs, utterly helpless.

On ACE

The life draining from his face as the rope chokes him to death. He tries to steady his aim as his body twitches violently.

Duke sits up, fighting the pain --

-- PULLS himself up to his feet.

Reeves watches curiously.

Duke grabs Ace's hand and brings the gun to his HEAD.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Do it now!

A tear squeaks out of Ace's eye as he stares at Duke.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Ace!

Ace SQUEEZES THE TRIGGER --

-- The shot blows out the back of Duke's head. He collapses instantly in a heap.

Hanzo lets go of the rope --

-- Ace plummets to the ground --

CUT TO BLACK.

DUKE (V.O.)
 It ain't no thing to kill a man...
 But to be a man...

EXT. THE JOHN REEVES GANG HIDEOUT - DAY

John Reeves crouches over Duke's dead body. He eyes the talisman on Duke's wrist, now stained with blood.

DUKE (V.O.)
 Did my best to bring no more harm
 to no one. Did I do right by you?

Reeves rips the talisman off Duke's wrist. *Pockets it.*

ACE

Lays on his back, staring up at the sky. The noose still hangs limp from his neck. Rope burns around his throat. As he stares skyward, HORSES go storming past him...

...But the last one eases over him. John Reeves at the reins, with Laura at his back. She stares down at Ace pitifully. Reeves tips his hat and rides on by.

With difficulty, Ace sits up...

Watches the gang ride away into the desert...

EXT. CHERRY CREEK - DAWN

DUKE'S LIFELESS FACE

We pull back to reveal his body hangs by the neck from the newly constructed bridge. A crude placard hangs from him:
"Vote Denver City"

DUKE (V.O.)
 Is this my reward at last? Or is
 it my punishment?

A *crowd of people* gather beneath the body. Blake and Green Russell are among them. They exchange a worried glance.

INT. LARIMER'S CABIN - NIGHT

General Larimer leans over his table and his MAP of Denver City. He draws along a straight edge with his pencil, charting the future with care.

Willie enters the cabin. He says something disconcerting to his father. Larimer furrows his brow in concern. *This is not what he wanted.*

DUKE (V.O.)
Maybe there's no such thing... Even
at the end, I'm none the wiser.

Larimer walks to the cabin door and opens it, revealing --

EXT. LARIMER'S CABIN - CONTINUOUS

JOHN REEVES
On the other side, waiting with a cold grin. His gang hover menacingly behind him. Without invitation from Larimer, Reeves steps through the door and inside.

DUKE (V.O.)
Livin' for nothin'...

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Ace drags himself forward, one step at a time. No one and no thing in sight. His face soaked in pain and anguish.

DUKE (V.O.)
Dyin' for nothin.

All alone... In the middle of nowhere.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END

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