

LONELY CREEK

Written By

Jared Wayne Raun

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310-722-7184

Jraun05@gmail.com

"LONELY CREEK"

FADE IN:

EXT. HILLS - PRE-DAWN TWILIGHT

Limpid water churns in a lonely creek.

The creek winds through the hills to the flatland below.

Craggy mountains break the skyline.

EXT. VALLEY

Through the endless plains of dry grass a line of trees and brush marks a twisted path.

The trees and brush surround the creek as it flows always towards lower ground.

EXT. VALLEY - CLOSER

On one side of the line of trees, in the distance, a large ranch complex and roaming herds of cattle.

On the other, also in the distance, a tiny town.

An east-west road connects town and ranch, crossing the creek with a plank bridge wide enough for two horses abreast.

Farther south, a small farmhouse rises from the flatland.

EXT. CREEK

Water BURBLES and GURGLES over and around the rocks.

Birds CALL, frogs CROAK, a fish breaches the surface with a SPLASH, snatching an insect.

The creek passes under a fallen tree which serves as a worn footbridge.

Then the creek widens, deepens and slows right across from the farmhouse, before narrowing and disappearing into the distance.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAWN

The unpainted farmhouse is small and modest, battered by wind and weather, its color reduced to a nondescript grey.

Outside there is an empty corral next to an old barn, a field of wheat, a large garden, a pen for hogs, a sheephouse, a chicken coop, and in the distance scattered cattle graze.

TITLE: WYOMING TERRITORY 1876

The sun breaches the horizon behind the farmhouse, streaking colored light across the sky and casting the structure into silhouette.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - CLOSER

The CROW of a rooster pierces the silence.

On the porch an old dog lifts his head.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

BETH, 40s, stiff, serious, and plain, dressed in drab clothing, steps into the morning light.

She stares out from the porch at the horizon.

INT. BARN - STALL

A large cow udder bulges above a metal pail.

Two feminine but rugged hands grab hold and begin to squeeze.

The cow LOWS as the milk PINGS the bottom of the pail.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth places the pail on the table, pulls a metal strainer and half a dozen glass bottles from the shelf.

Beth sets the strainer on the first bottle, then carefully pours the milk through the strainer, filling the bottle.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Beth's FATHER, 60s, older than his years and sickly, sleeps in the bed, covered to his chin by blankets, his breath ragged and his sleep restless.

Beth enters with a jar of milk in hand, produces a small glass medicine bottle, drips three drops of tincture into the milk, and stirs with a spoon.

Beth holds the glass bottle up to the light and swirls the liquid, sees the bottle is almost empty.

Beth shakes her father gently, helps him sit up, lowers the jar of milk to his lips and encourages him to drink.

When he finishes, she takes the hem of her dress to wipe his mouth, then watches as he drifts back to sleep.

EXT. BARN

A cow exits the barn, followed by Beth.

A long switch SWOOSHES and SNAPS in the air, prodding the cow forward.

BETH
CuBoooooosss! Hup! Hup!

The cowbell CLANGS around the neck of the cow.

EXT. PASTURE

Beth drives the cow down a worn path, turns her into a pasture, and shuts the gate.

EXT. CREEK

Beth leads a horse with two large wooden buckets attached to either end of a pole strapped across its back.

Beth fills the buckets then carefully balances the rig and leads the horse back towards the farm.

EXT. SHEEPHOUSE

Beth drives a half-dozen sheep out of the sheephouse, grabs the horse by its mane, guides and releases both horse and sheep into a field.

The old dog helps Beth herd the sheep, nipping at their heels.

EXT. PIGPEN

A dozen hogs RUT in the mud and CLAMOR to be fed.

Beth appears with a pail and SLOSHES swill into the trough.

The swine fight for position and gobble their breakfast.

EXT. CHICKEN COOP

Beth opens the door of the coop and enters, shooing the chickens into the yard.

She puts out water and scatters feed on the ground.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth removes the plunger and lid from a churn, then places a butter cloth over the top and pours in the cream.

She works the plunger until the cream foams at the top.

BETH

(sings)

Come butter come

Come butter come

Peter stands at the gate

Waiting for a buttered cake

Beth stops, removes the lid, scrapes the butter from the sides and lid with a wooden butter paddle, replaces the lid, and continues churning for several long beats.

BETH (CONT'D)

(sings)

Come butter come

Come butter come

Cows in the pasture

Churn a little faster

Come butter come...

Beth stops, looks under the lid, then pours off the buttermilk into a separate container.

She scrapes the butter onto a marble slab.

Beth adds salt and kneads the butter, then samples the butter with a small scoop of her pinkie finger.

Beth uses a wooden mold with an ornate "BH" on the top to make bars.

She places the bars on a wooden platter and covers them with a cloth.

Beth cleans the churn and sets it back in its place in the corner.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

Beth sweeps the floor, makes the bed, and tidies up.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Beth enters, gives her father a quick glance, then sweeps and tidies the room.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth sweeps the floor as clouds of dust billow around her.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth sweeps the porch, large clouds of dust flying from the worn wood planks towards the dirt ground below.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

The RASP and RATTLE of her father's breath startles Beth as she enters the room.

She goes to him and shakes him gently.

BETH
Wake up, Pa.
(beat)
Time to go outside.

Her father stirs, wakes, looks up at Beth with eyes disoriented and scared.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth eases her father into a rocking chair on the porch.

She goes inside the house, returns with a blanket, tucks the edges under his arms and around his torso.

EXT. GARDEN - LATER

The garden is large with a wide variety of fruit and vegetables.

Beth hoes in the garden under the blazing sun, thoroughly drenched in sweat.

SQUEALS and GRUNTS catch her attention.

She looks up to see a few hogs at the gate inside the wheat field.

Beth SIGHS and drops the hoe to the ground.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD

Beth explores along the fence next to the wheat field, comes up to a broken part of fence.

Nearby amongst the wheat the milk cow LOWS.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Her father watches Beth step through the broken fence into the wheat field.

The dog runs up the porch steps and curls at his feet.

Beth's father drops his hand absentmindedly to pet the dog, as the dog presses into his hand and WHINES its approval.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD

Beth coaxes and prods the cow out of the wheat field and back into the pasture.

BETH
He, bossy, he boss.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Beth shoos and slaps the hogs on their rumps.

She wrestles and half-carries the most ornery one back through the breach in the fence and into the pigpen.

Beth falls in the mud getting the last hog into the pen.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth's father looks out towards the creek, seems to see something, and becomes agitated.

BETH'S FATHER POV - CREEK

The foliage moves and shifts in an unnatural way.

BACK TO SCENE

His eyes suddenly go dark with rage, he looks around for Beth and cannot find her, then his energy fades, the look in his eyes softens, and the eyelids become heavy.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - AT THE BROKEN FENCE

Beth, with a mouthful of nails and hammer in hand, raises the fallen planks, and nails them back into place.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth climbs the steps and pauses to regard her father, who naps with his mouth agape.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

Beth removes her muddy dress, picks out a new one from the wardrobe, and puts it on.

Beth goes to a modest vanity, sees her hair is wild from wrestling the pigs, and combs her hair in the mirror.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth approaches her still napping father.

BETH

Papa...

(beat)

The sun's gon' down.

Her father starts awake and gazes up at Beth.

FATHER

I seen someone... down by the creek.

Beth looks to where he gestures.

BETH POV - CREEK

The wind rustles the foliage gently.

BACK TO SCENE

BETH

That's just the wind, Pa.

Beth's father looks up at her, angry she doesn't believe him, then seems confused.

He focuses his confusion into resolve.

FATHER

(stern)

I will not permit you to spend all
we got on sumthin' we don't need,
Valerie...

(coughing; catching his
breath)

We do just fine with what the Lord
provides.

Beth looks down at her father with pained compassion.

BETH

It's Beth, Pa.

Beth's father seems to awaken from a reverie.

FATHER

Yes, Beth. Yes...

(hardens)

I know you plannin' on goin'
against my wishes, girl.

(thoughtful)

Just like your mother...

Beth's father looks up at her, rage at his confusion and helplessness welling up in his eyes.

FATHER (CONT'D)

I will not have it!

With a sudden burst of energy, he launches from his seat, grasps her sleeve and raises his hand, the blanket falling from his lap.

He stares at her with raw intensity, looks like he may strike her, then suddenly HACKS and COUGHS, lurching forward.

Beth moves in to catch him.

FATHER (CONT'D)
(weak; pitiful)
"Wives, submit unto your own
husbands, as unto the Lord."
(beat)
That's scripture, Valerie...

He suddenly hacks blood onto the bodice of her dress.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Beth tucks her father into bed.

BETH
Just rest now, papa.
(beat)
I'll be back for your bath and
dinner.

Her father looks up and gives her a feeble nod.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

Beth blots the blood from her dress in the mirror.

EXT. CHICKEN COOP - DUSK

Beth drives the chickens back into the coop, gathers the stragglers by their legs and tosses them in, then latches the door shut.

EXT. FIELD

Beth gathers the sheep and ushers them back into the sheephouse.

EXT. BARN

Beth waters the horse at the trough outside, then leads him into the barn.

EXT. PASTURE

Beth retrieves the cow and leads her back to the barn.

INT. BARN

The udder and the pail.

Beth's hands grab hold of the udder and squeeze.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Water steams in an iron pot on the stove, and a large metal tub dominates the center of the room.

Beth removes the pot from the stove and pours steaming water into the tub.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Beth lowers her naked father into the tub and scrubs him as he gazes into the middle distance.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - LATER

Beth tosses fresh wood into the stove, fills the iron pot with water, and places it on the burner.

She takes a ham-hock hanging in the corner and PLOPS it in.

Beth grabs a cutting board and a large knife, then begins to chop vegetables.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Beth enters with an ornate tray topped with fine china and a rose in a small crystal vase.

She sits next to the bed, and sets the tray across her father's torso.

His eyes flutter open, but stare ahead unseeing.

Beth feeds her father soup, but after a few spoonfuls he stops opening his mouth for her.

FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth is seated at the table eating dinner.

She sips stew, eats bread, and stares out the window into the darkness.

She turns and looks at the empty chair across from her for a long beat.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

Beth slumps into the room, exhausted from the day.

She sets the candle holder on a bedside table, and changes into her bedclothes.

Beth kneels beside the bed, folds her hands, and whispers a prayer beneath her breath.

She climbs into bed, blows out the candle, and stares blankly at the ceiling in the moonlight.

FADE TO BLACK.

A rooster CROWS.

FADE IN:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PRE-DAWN TWILIGHT

The sky lightens gradually from deep blue to light grey.

The rooster CROWS a second time.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM - DAWN

Beth opens her eyes suddenly, a harried look on her face, like waking from a nightmare.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Beth's father lies in bed perfectly still, his mouth agape, dead eyes staring at nothing.

Beth appears in the doorway and stops.

She stares at the corpse for a long beat.

SERIES OF SHOTS - MORNING CHORES

- The milk STRIKES the pail beneath the swollen udder.
- The milk GURGLES through the strainer into the jar.
- A bucket PLUNGES into the creek and emerges full of water.

- The cow LOWS as the switch CRACKS above.
- The sheep BAA and the horse NICKERS as they pass the gate.
- The dog BARKS at their heels.
- The swill SPLASHES into the trough and the hogs dig in.
- Chickens SQUAWK as they rush from the coop.
- The broom SWOOSHES the dust from the wooden floorboards.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Beth finishes sweeping, notices her father still staring sightlessly at the ceiling, and shudders.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH - LATER

Beth sits in her father's rocking chair and stares into the distance.

EXT. ROAD

The town MARSHAL, 50s, once a real tough bastard, gone slightly soft, rides his horse down the road.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - AT THE GATE

The marshal dismounts, ties his horse to the fence, opens the gate, and enters the yard.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

The marshal walks briskly to the porch steps and pauses.

MARSHAL
(tips his hat)
Good morning, Beth.

Beth barely looks up to acknowledge him.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)
I brought your Pa's elixir.

The marshal pulls a bottle from his coat pocket.

Beth looks down and mumbles.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

Beth, I can't hear ya.

(beat)

You're gonna have to speak up.

Beth raises her head, eyes wet.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - GRAVEYARD - LATER

Close on a small graveyard behind the house, with the grave of Beth's mother (VALERIE HARPER 1828-1867) shown prominently amongst a handful of smaller gravestones.

Two of the gravestones indicate the deceased were infants when they died.

A shovel PLUNGES into the empty plot next to the mother's grave and removes a mound of earth.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - GRAVEYARD

The MORTICIAN, 50s, rotund, in rolled-up shirtsleeves, vest, and glasses, and his ASSISTANT, 20s, in grubby shirt and overalls, lower the modest wooden coffin into the grave.

The PREACHER, 60s, tall and stern, stands on one side of the grave and reads from the Bible, but his voice is mostly inaudible to Beth.

The two gravediggers appear behind the preacher to either side, the assistant leaning on his shovel.

Beth stands alone across the open grave from the three men, the marshal behind and to the side at a respectful distance.

The dog slumps at Beth's feet, nose pointed down towards the grave, and WHIMPERS.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - GRAVEYARD - LATER

The preacher finishes his prayer and the men begin shoveling loose earth into the hole.

The preacher walks around the grave to Beth.

PREACHER

I'm so sorry, Miss Harper.

Beth nods but continues looking down at the grave before her as it fills.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

My brother-in-law is sick, down in Casper, and I need to visit, but I can come by later next week to check on you... if you like.

Beth raises her eyes, unable to speak.

She turns abruptly, walks up the porch steps, enters the house, and SLAMS the door shut.

The marshal watches her cross and stares at the closed door after she disappears.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Beth collapses onto her bed and buries her face in the pillow.

FADE TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - GRAVEYARD - THAT NIGHT

Moonlight illuminates the freshly packed grave and newly minted gravestone.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

Beth stares at the ceiling in the moonlight.

FADE TO BLACK.

A rooster CROWS.

FADE IN:

SERIES OF SHOTS - MORNING CHORES

- The milk STRIKES the pail beneath the swollen udder.
- The cow LOWS as the switch CRACKS above.
- The sheep BAA and the horse NICKERS as they pass the gate.
- The swill SPLASHES into the trough and the hogs dig in.
- Chickens SQUAWK as they rush from the coop.

EXT. GARDEN

Beth turns up the earth in an unplanted corner of the garden with a shovel, gets on her knees to make rows with a spade.

She plants seeds in the rows, pats the earth down, and waters the earth with a watering can.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SIDE OF THE HOUSE

On hands and knees, Beth digs around the shrubbery lining the house, pulling weeds.

She places the bundle of weeds on a compost pile next to the garden, and returns to her task.

Beth hears the LOWS of cattle in the near distance, and stops her work to listen.

She stands, bundle of weeds in hand, and sees a small herd milling about between the house and the creek.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth emerges with her shotgun and marches across the field towards the herd.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD

CLYDE, 20s, lean and mean cowpuncher, with sandy hair, freckles, and a big Adam's apple, tends the cattle with two other mounted men.

Clyde notices Beth and trots his horse forward.

CLYDE

G'day, ma'am.

Beth frowns.

BETH

These cattle belong to Mr. Farley?

Clyde squints at her.

CLYDE

(spits)

That's right.

Beth GROWLS.

BETH
This is *my* land!

Clyde shrugs.

CLYDE
And that over there belongs to Mr. Farley. We gotta graze these here cattle there summatha time.

Beth becomes infuriated.

BETH
You tell your boss, tell that Mr. Farley, never to trail his cattle through here again!
(beat)
And keep these beeves moving.

Clyde sizes her up.

CLYDE
(tips his hat in mock respect)
Will do...
(spits)
...ma'am.

Clyde turns his horse, rides back to the herd, and slaps his lariat against his chaps to get their attention.

CLYDE (CONT'D)
Hep now!

The cattle LOW and move past the farm into the graze-land beyond.

Beth watches and does not turn towards the farmhouse until the entire herd is clear.

FADE TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS - MORNING CHORES

- The milk STRIKES the pail beneath the swollen udder.
- A bucket PLUNGES and emerges full of water.
- The swill SPLASHES and the hogs dig in.
- The broom SWOOSHES the dust from the wood.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Beth sweeps, then slows her movements and stops, dizzy and nauseous.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

Beth stands and leans heavily on the vanity, staring at her reflection in the mirror.

A framed photograph catches her attention.

The photo displays the Harper family: Pa, an awkward and shy Beth at age thirteen, and Ma holding infant twin boys, all looking serious but relatively content.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - GRAVEYARD - LATER

Beth stands over the graves of her entire family.

EXT. CREEK

Beth runs up and stares into the water, then scans the water's edge until her eyes fall on a big rock.

She hikes up her skirt and wades out into the water.

Beth lifts the rock from its perch, then uses its weight to help her sink below the surface.

The bubbles from her breath breach the surface of the water for several beats, then stop.

FADE TO BLACK.

Underwater GLUGS and CHOKES over black.

FADE IN:

EXT. CREEK - FARTHER AWAY

The creek is placid but for the faintest of ripples.

Beth breaches the surface with a GASP.

She pants heavily as she makes her way back to the shore.

EXT. CREEK - BEHIND THE BUSHES - MYSTERIOUS POV

Beth is visible through the foliage as she hauls herself dripping onto the shore.

She turns over onto her back as she PANTS heavily, her chest heaving up and down.

WATER and FAUNA noises crescendo until-

CUT TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH - DUSK

Beth rocks in the rocking chair wrapped in a heavy blanket, hair still wet, a distant look in her eyes.

She gazes out upon the beauty of the rolling hills, the mountains on the horizon, and the trail of trees marking the winding path of the creek to the pond.

Beth sees the field of wheat, the garden, the sheephouse, her gaze falling to rest on the hogs rutting in the mud, and something changes in her eyes.

FADE TO:

EXT. CREEK - THE NEXT DAY

The water flows into the pond and swirls around.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

Beth's muffled voice can be heard singing from inside the house.

BETH (O.S.)
(sings)
Come butter come
Come butter come
Peter stands at the gate
Waiting for a buttered cake

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth churns the butter.

BETH

(sings)

*Come butter come
Come butter come
Cows in the pasture
Churn a little faster
Come butter come...*

Beth pours off the buttermilk and scrapes the butter onto the marble slab.

She presses down on the butter with the cream cloth, uses the wooden mold to make bars, and puts the bars on the platter.

INT. CHICKEN COOP

Beth, with a large basket on her arm, goes around to collect eggs from beneath the hens.

One ornery hen SQUAWKS and tries to peck her hands.

Beth steps back then carefully tries again, retrieves the eggs and continues, as the basket slowly fills.

INT. BARN

Beth loads a cart with the basket of eggs, platter of butter planks, and glass jars of milk in a wooden crate, securing all fast with twine.

EXT. ROAD

Beth guides the horse and cart through the front gate.

She CRACKS the reins and the horse trots faster.

Bottles TINKLE as the cart RUMBLES down the road.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

The afternoon light shimmers on the sun scorched earth of the dirt road.

Beth appears in the distance driving the cart and horse back from town.

BETH

Get up there, hoss, get on up.

CLOSER

Beth handles the reins, looks over her shoulder.

Lumber is stacked in the bed of the cart behind her, next to the empty basket, crate, and platter.

FADE TO BLACK.

A rooster CROWS.

FADE IN:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAWN - ESTABLISHING

The morning light streaks across the farm.

INT. BARN - PAIL - MORNING

The milk hits the bottom of the pail.

Beth's hands squeeze the udder.

BARKS and GROWLS sound from outside.

INT. BARN - WIDER

Beth sits up and listens.

The barking suddenly CUTS OUT WITH A YELP.

Beth grabs an old rifle and checks the chamber.

EXT. BARN

Beth exits rifle in hand.

BETH
Oscar? What is it boy?

The metallic CLICK of the hammer being pulled back on a sixgun sounds behind her.

Beth stiffens.

A hand reaches forward, snatches the rifle from her grasp, and drops it into the horse trough with a SPLASH.

VOICE (O.S.)
Walk.

Beth starts to turn.

VOICE(O.S.) (CONT'D)
Face forward!
(beat)
Into the house.

Beth does as she is told.

VOICE (CONT'D)
Don't scream or I'll kill you.

At the door, a hand shoves Beth roughly through the doorway.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth stumbles into the house.

The OUTLAW, 30s, greasy, bearded, and rail thin, enters and shuts the door.

Beth turns to face him, eyes defiant.

Her eyes glance past the outlaw at a shotgun mounted above the door.

The outlaw notices and follows her gaze.

He grabs the shotgun, ejects and pockets the rounds, crosses and hurls the shotgun out the back window.

The outlaw turns, keeping his gun on Beth, and quickly glances into each bedroom to make sure they are empty.

While the outlaw is briefly distracted, Beth grabs a large kitchen knife and extends the point towards the outlaw.

The outlaw turns back, scans her up and down, and gives her a hard stare for a long beat.

Beth returns the stare as best she can, hiding her fear.

The outlaw smiles and gestures towards the stove with the pistol.

THE OUTLAW
C'n ya cook?

FADE TO:

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - LATER

A plate of food CLATTERS onto the table.

The outlaw lounges in a chair, gun loose and comfortable in his grip, the plate of food before him.

Beth steps back and retracts her hand.

The outlaw gestures with the gun for Beth to sit.

Beth hesitates, then lowers herself into the chair across from him.

The outlaw stands and walks behind Beth, pulls rawhide from his coat pocket, and ties her wrists behind her to the chair.

The outlaw returns to his seat, places the gun on the table, and begins to eat savagely with his hands.

As his hunger abates, he becomes self-conscious of his animalistic behavior, wipes his hands on his shirt and picks up the utensils.

The outlaw glances up at Beth, who stares at him stone-faced, then places a forkful of grub up to her mouth.

Beth's eyes stare intently while her lips remain taut, then after a beat, she opens her mouth slightly.

The outlaw inserts the food between her lips, and Beth chews without enjoyment, face expressionless.

He looks at her awkwardly, then returns to ravage the remainder of his meal.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - LATER

The outlaw wipes his mouth and stands.

He thoroughly checks the other two rooms, comes back with a shirt crumpled in his free hand.

THE OUTLAW

There's men's clothes in that wardrobe.

The outlaw goes to the window, looks around outside.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)

Where's your man?

(nervous)

He coming back soon?

Beth quivers but does not answer, looking down.

The outlaw turns towards her.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)
(menacing)
Answer me.

Beth raises her eyes to meet his.

BETH
Those clothes are my husband's. He
went to town and will be back
shortly.

Beth turns her head from him and looks at the ground.

EXT. CREEK

A cord of rope wraps around Beth's midsection, then another,
and another.

The outlaw lashes Beth to a tree beside the creek.

He sets his gun on a pile of her father's clean clothing,
then strips off his own filthy clothes.

He wades into the creek with a bar of soap in hand.

Beth struggles against the ropes but finds they will not
budge.

She stares at her feet in the muddy water of the shore, then
looks up at the outlaw as he washes himself.

EXT. CREEK - LATER

The clean shirt belonging to Beth's late father hangs open on
the outlaw, showing his hairy chest.

THE OUTLAW
Now wash mine.

He unties her and slaps the soap into her hand.

BETH
My husband...

The outlaw remains expressionless.

THE OUTLAW
Come on, now, git.

Beth gathers his clothes, kneels and begins washing.

The outlaw leans against the tree and watches Beth scrub.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - LATER

The outlaw's clothes hang on a clothesline outside the house.

The livestock LOW and GRUNT and WHINE.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth sits while the outlaw paces.

He stops and stares out the window at the clothes drying on the line, then turns abruptly to look at Beth.

THE OUTLAW

How 'bout some coffee?

Beth stands to make the coffee, scoops coffee grounds into a metal kettle on the stove.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)

I like mine real strong.

She adds another scoop.

The animals continue to LOW and GRUNT and WHINE outside.

Beth gives the outlaw a firm look.

BETH

They need to eat and be let out.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

The outlaw sips coffee and watches from the porch as Beth releases the sheep into the field.

He scans the horizon for any sign of life.

Beth enters the barn and exits with the cow in tow.

As Beth passes the porch leading the cow to pasture, the outlaw steps down, grabs the cowbell and rips it from the animal's neck.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Beth sits on a chair in the corner of the room, tied as before, with the cowbell around her neck.

The outlaw stretches out on the bed, his pistol next to him, beneath his hand.

THE OUTLAW

You be real still now and don't let
that cowbell ring.

(beat)

Understood?

Beth nods slightly.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)

Good.

He lays back, tips his hat over his face, and relaxes into
the bed, breathing low and deep.

BETH

My h-husband. He'll be home any
minute.

The outlaw grins under the hat.

THE OUTLAW

Don't you worry none.

(beat)

I'm a light sleeper.

She stares at him, confused and frustrated at his
nonchalance.

FADE TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - LATER

The farmhouse is still and quiet in the afternoon sun.

EXT. ROAD

The preacher rides a buckboard up the road to the farm and
stops.

The preacher climbs down, enters the gate, and pauses briefly
to notice the clothes hanging on the line.

He crosses the yard, walks up the porch steps and KNOCKS.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

The outlaw sits with a start, gives Beth a hard look.

He leaps out of bed, rushes to the window to peek outside, then removes the cowbell silently, and unties her.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

THE OUTLAW
Get rid of him.

Beth stumbles into the main room and makes for the entrance.

The outlaw closes the door partway so he can see into the kitchen yet stay hidden.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

The preacher is about to knock again when Beth opens the door.

He removes his hat and bows his head.

PREACHER
Afternoon, Beth.

She does her best to smile.

BETH
Preacher.

The preacher barges in, handing her his hat as he passes the threshold.

PREACHER
You know, Beth, I'm worried about you. All alone out here. It ain't safe for a woman to be by herself, this far from town. It ain't... proper. The townsfolk are talking, wondering what you gonna do.

Beth hesitates, then hangs his hat on a peg and follows him inside.

PREACHER (CONT'D)
Is that coffee I smell?

He sits down at the table, his back to the master bedroom.

PREACHER (CONT'D)
Mind if I sit a spell and have a cup?

Beth serves the coffee quickly and stands across from him, facing the master bedroom.

The preacher takes a big whiff and SIGHS contentedly.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

I knew your Pa. Fine fellow,
though he was mighty quiet and
didn't come to service much once
your mama died. But he was a solid
member of the community. Always
ready to lend a hand when it was
needed. He helped rebuild the
church after the fire.

The preacher sips his coffee and looks pointedly at Beth.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

You come from good stock, Beth, and
it ain't too late for you. You
could still have a family, despite
your age. Babies, Beth. You'd
like that wouldn't you?

He waits for her response.

Behind the preacher's back, the outlaw eases into view, gun raised.

Beth is startled, but stifles her surprise.

She makes eye contact with the preacher and nods.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

Little ones. From the mouths of
babes. A pure joy. Got some
grandkids of my own now. There is
nothing better than helping these
little men and women learn and
grow. I tell you, Beth.

Beth nods again, but is focused peripherally on the outlaw, who eases further into view.

The outlaw makes eye contact with her, quickly jerks his head towards the door twice.

Beth, rattled, tries to get the preacher up and moving.

BETH

I'm sure you're right, preacher.
(beat; half directed at
the outlaw)
Just need a little time is all.

The preacher nods knowingly.

PREACHER

Oh, yes, I served a lot of grieving women over the years, and men. In fact, I prepared a few verses of scripture to share with you, to help you in this time of need. The Lord always provides the right sentiment for any occasion.

He pulls out a worn Bible from his coat pocket and riffs through the bookmarked pages.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

Ah, here we are...

He gazes down at the page and takes another sip of coffee.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

(takes on a different tone, his pulpit voice)
Psalms 34:18. "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

(pauses for emphasis; flips a few pages)
Mathew 5:4. "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

(flips a few more)
And this one, Beth, this is my favorite. Revelation 21:4.

The outlaw raises his gun and takes careful aim.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away--"

The outlaw begins to pull the hammer back on his pistol.

Beth lurches forward quickly, her knee hitting the table with a BANG, the noise covering the metallic CLICK of the hammer.

The preacher spills coffee over his hand and YOWLS.

Beth guides the preacher out of his chair, placing herself between him and the gun.

The outlaw ducks behind the bedroom door as the preacher turns towards Beth and the master bedroom.

BETH

I appreciate your help, I truly do,
but I ain't feeling right just now,
can't be around people.

(beat; pleading)

You can understand that, can't you?

The preacher, shocked at her brusque manner and his scalding hand, is thrown off guard.

PREACHER

Well, I, I just...

Beth guides the preacher to the door and hands him his hat.

BETH

Thank you.

EXT/INT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH - CONTINUOUS

The preacher steps outside as Beth blocks the doorway.

Discombobulated from Beth abruptly shooing him away, the preacher turns and makes one last attempt to reach her.

PREACHER

I know how tough it can be, Beth,
but please do consider. You need
people. To be a part of the
community. You need a partner, a
companion, now you are getting
older. Now your Pa is gone. Think
on these things, Beth.

Beth stares patiently waiting for him to leave.

The preacher looks at her funny, then tips his hat.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

Good day.

Beth nods in response.

He turns and walks stiffly away.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth SIGHS with relief as she closes the door, glances towards the bedroom, then at the kitchen cupboards.

She quickly reaches up on tip-toes to the highest shelf, pulls down an ancient army revolver and hides it from view.

The outlaw steps out from the bedroom, goes to the window and peeks beyond the curtain.

OUTLAW POV - PREACHER

The preacher exits the yard in his buckboard, a frustrated and confused look on his face.

BACK TO SCENE

Beth stands stiffly facing the door, gun hidden in the folds of her dress in front of her.

The outlaw continues to stare out the window, making sure the preacher is gone for good.

THE OUTLAW

(laughs)

You ain't got no husband... I reckon'd it was a lie... you is one rotten terrible liar.

(thoughtful)

But you done me a good turn.

Beth gathers herself then pulls the gun on him.

BETH

Get out of my house.

The outlaw faces her, surprised.

Beth pulls back the hammer with a metallic CLICK.

BETH (CONT'D)

Drop it.

The outlaw considers a moment, then dangles the gun out in front of him by the trigger guard.

THE OUTLAW

Here.

He tosses the gun at her eyes.

Beth uses her free hand to protect her face, recovers quickly but it is too late.

The outlaw covers the distance in an instant and wrenches her wrist to disarm her.

He places the antique pistol in his belt and quickly stoops to retrieve his own.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)
 Whatcha go and do that for?
 (stands)
 I ain't planning on doin' nuthin'
 to ya.
 (hardens)
 Now sit down.

Beth holds her wrist gingerly and stares at him with hate.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - LATER

Beth sits tied to the chair again.

The outlaw grabs a dishrag, tears it down the middle, and approaches, raising the cloth to gag her.

BETH
 Wait.
 (beat)
 I want to ask you something.

THE OUTLAW
 (intrigued)
 Yeah?

BETH
 Oscar. My dog, did you-?

The outlaw stares at her for a long beat, then ties the gag around her mouth roughly and exits.

Beth sits still a moment, then strains against the rope, working her wrists to free herself.

INT. BARN

The horse sits in the stall alone.

The outlaw enters and approaches the horse.

The horse shies away at first, but with a calming MURMUR and a handful of oats the outlaw wins his trust.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth struggles violently against her bonds.

Out the window, she sees the outlaw riding away on her horse and SCREAMS in anger.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - ROAD

The outlaw rides away without looking back.

Beth's muffled SCREAMS sound softly in the distance.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth struggles, furious and staring out the window, until the outlaw disappears beyond the horizon.

She finally gives up, her body going slack.

Soft, silent SOBS lift and toss her frame.

FADE TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - AT A DISTANCE

CREAKS and SCRATCHES sound from the farmhouse.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - LATER

Beth has slid the chair across the room and now faces the wall still tied to the chair.

She places her feet flat against the wall and pushes off the wall with all her strength, slamming the chair into the floor with a CRASH.

The impact fractures the back of the chair, she wriggles and struggles until the chair breaks further and she is able to free her arms from the wood.

She uses her teeth to pull the rawhide loose, her wrists finally tear free, and she pulls the gag from her mouth.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH - DUSK

Beth runs outside and scans the horizon.

BETH

Oscar!

(beat)

Oscar where you at, boy?

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Beth runs from one corner of the yard to the other, searching for the dog and calling out its name.

CLOSER

Beth stops and listens.

Muffled WHIMPERS sound from behind the chicken coop.

EXT. CHICKEN COOP - BEHIND THE STRUCTURE

The dog lies crumpled, its snout and feet tied with rawhide cords.

Beth arrives, relieved yet infuriated, unties the dog, then pets him and shows him love.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - BEHIND THE HOUSE

Beth appears, looks around, stoops down and retrieves the shotgun.

EXT. CREEK - AFTERNOON

The sunlight plays between the ripples of the water's surface.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CREEK - NIGHT

The moonlight mirrors what the sunlight did before.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Beth undresses, says her prayers, and crawls into bed.

She stares at the ceiling as before, but this time she is less stoic and more distraught.

FADE TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - THE NEXT DAY - DAWN

Beth emerges onto the porch.

Her gaze drifts from the horizon to the lumber still stacked against the barn and then to the clothesline with the outlaw's clothes still hanging.

ANGLE - CLOTHESLINE

Beth's hands tear the clothes from the line one piece at a time.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth enters with the bundle of clothes in her arms and a grimace on her face.

ANGLE - STOVE

A fire is already burning.

Beth's hands hurl the clothing into the fire one piece at a time.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - AT THE GATE - LATER

Beth exits the gate and gazes down the road towards town.

EXT. ROAD

Beth trudges along the dirt road with the sun beating down on her and sweat flowing freely beneath her dress.

FADE TO:

EXT. ROAD - AFTERNOON

In the distance two horses and riders appear.

CLOSER

Beth rides a borrowed horse as the marshal rides beside her.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD - LATER

Beth gestures towards the horizon.

BETH
He shucked out thataway.
(beat)
On *my* horse.

The marshal frowns.

MARSHAL

That Flint Tucker, he's a bad man.

(beat)

I'm a mite worried leaving you here
all by yourself.

BETH

Don't seem likely he comes back
this way. I'm more concerned about
that Farley. He ran his beeves
over my property last week, he
ain't never done that before.

She trails off.

MARSHAL

I know your Pa refused to budge
with Farley buying up all the
property 'round here. But you
don't gotta care for your Pa now,
you can do whatever you want.

Beth folds her arms across her chest.

BETH

I like running the farm just fine.

MARSHAL

(beat)

You're a mighty fine woman, Beth,
any man'd be lucky to have you.

Beth ponders at the marshal's meaning.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

(quickly changes the
subject)

Now, this Flint Tucker, there's a
chance, however unlikely, he might
still be prowling 'round these
parts. You will need to be extra
vigilant. You might even want to
come into town for a few days.

Beth brushes past him.

BETH

These animals ain't fixing to feed
themselves.

Beth crosses the yard to the porch.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth ascends the porch steps and turns.

The marshal removes his hat and wipes the sweat from his brow with his sleeve.

MARSHAL
(to himself)
I'm gonna need to ride up to the
county seat and inform the sheriff.

He puts his hat on and looks at Beth with curious sad eyes.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)
It was good to see you, Beth.

Beth softens.

BETH
Likewise, marshal.

The marshal tips his hat and starts towards the gate.

He notices the lumber stacked next to the barn, stops and turns.

MARSHAL
Building somethin'?

BETH
Oh... an icehouse.
(sighs)
But I was interrupted before I
could begin.

MARSHAL
Sounds like a mighty fine idea,
Beth.

BETH
More profit sellin' pieces than
whole hogs. And you can keep
whatever you like.
(beat)
Pa was against it.

The marshal considers.

MARSHAL
You planning on doing all that
y'self?

BETH
(cautious)
I was.

MARSHAL
How 'bout I come 'round and give
you a hand once I'm back?

Beth hesitates then shrugs.

BETH
I don't know marshal.

MARSHAL
You don't always need to do
everything yourself.

Beth frowns.

BETH
You got your work to do in town,
marshal, and I got mine here.
(beat)
Now git. I'm way behind on my
chores for today.

Beat.

MARSHAL
Okay, Beth, if you say so...

BETH
And tell ol' Ben thanks again for
loaning me his extra horse.

MARSHAL
Will do.

Beth nods her goodbye.

The marshal walks to the gate, mounts his horse, and heads
down the road away from town.

EXT. ROAD

As the marshal passes beyond the gate, he takes a quick
glance back, but Beth has disappeared.

FADE TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - THE NEXT MORNING

Beth, dressed in pants and shirt, sweeps the porch steps as the marshal arrives on his horse.

He dismounts and enters the yard.

MARSHAL
Morning, Beth.

Beth sets the broom aside and descends the steps.

BETH
I thought I made myself clear that
help was neither required nor
requested.

The marshal walks up to her.

MARSHAL
(smirks)
I hardly recognize you.

Beth stews for a beat.

BETH
A dress ain't no suitable type of
clothing for carpentry work.

The marshal is pleased he dodged her reprimand.

MARSHAL
I wonder... what you know about
carpentry?

Beth smiles despite herself.

BETH
I was old enough to help Pa build
this place. An' old enough to
remember what I learnt.
(beat)
What you know about carpentry,
marshal?

He raises his eyebrows.

MARSHAL
Less than you, apparently.

Beth smiles at the compliment.

BETH

I see you are a man of
perseverance.

(beat)

We better get started.

She turns and walks towards the pile of lumber.

The marshal follows, pleased.

MONTAGE - BUILDING THE ICEHOUSE

- From a distance, the sound of SAWING fills the farm.
- Beth and the marshal use a pair of sawhorses to cut the lumber.
- Beth and the marshal carry heavy beams in tandem.
- Beth and the marshal erect the first floor frame.

EXT. BACK OF THE BARN

As the marshal holds a beam, Beth ducks under his arm and squats in front of him to nail it into place.

She stands while the marshal lowers his arm, brushing her shoulder with his hand.

She freezes a moment, then turns to face the marshal.

Beth and the marshal hold each other's eyes a beat before she turns suddenly and walks over to the next beam.

The marshal gazes after her, the tension plain on his face.

Beth turns and holds out the hammer for the marshal, who shrugs it off, steps forward, and accepts.

MONTAGE - BUILDING THE ICEHOUSE - CONTINUED

- Beth and the marshal complete the frame for the second floor.
- Beth and the marshal place boards to complete the walls.
- Beth and the marshal construct doors for the first and the second floor of the icehouse.
- Beth and the marshal complete the project by nailing down the last board on the roof.

EXT. ICEHOUSE - DUSK

Beth and the marshal admire their handiwork.

The icehouse stands completed behind the barn in the shade, one and a half stories tall, the lower portion to store perishables, the upper portion with a small door on its side and a ramp leading to the ground below.

Beth glances over at the marshal.

BETH

In plain fact, marshal, there was no manner in which I could finish this in one day without your help.

(beat)

Now, I can return to my regular chores in a more timely fashion.

MARSHAL

I s'pose we will be seeing you in town more regular, to acquire fresh ice when you are in need.

BETH

I suppose...

MARSHAL

And I can help you get that ice loaded into the upper chamber tomorrow if you like.

Beth turns her face from the icehouse to him.

BETH

Yes, indeed.

The marshal beams a smile back at her.

FADE TO:

EXT. ROAD - ANOTHER DAY

Beth drives the cart towards town.

She notices cattle grazing in the distance by the creek, not far from her property.

Her face darkens at the sight.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

Beth drives the cart back from town with a large bulk covered with cloth in the back.

The marshal follows behind on his horse.

As they near her farm, Beth sees the cattle gathered even closer to her land than before.

BETH
(hollers back over her
shoulder)
You see that?

The marshal rides up parallel to her.

MARSHAL
What's that, Beth?

BETH
There.
(points)
Those beeves clustered right up on
the property line.

MARSHAL
(chuckles)
One problem at a time, Beth. Let's
finish this project before that ice
back there melts.

Beth stares at him a beat.

BETH
Alright, marshal.

She gives the reins a SNAP and rides on.

EXT. BACK OF THE BARN

The marshal rips the cloth away from the cart, revealing several large blocks of ice.

The marshal hoists a block of ice from the cart using metal hooks to place it on the ramp.

Beth pops her head out of the small door above.

BETH
Ready?

The marshal nods and pushes the ice halfway up the ramp.

Beth drags the ice to the door with a pole ending in a metal hook, and guides it inside with gloved hands.

INT. ICEHOUSE

Several other blocks of ice sit against the walls of the upper chamber, separated and covered with sawdust and straw.

Beth slides the new block into position, reaches into a bucket for straw to place between and on top of the ice.

EXT. ICEHOUSE - LATER

Beth and the marshal bask in their handiwork.

The marshal leans in towards Beth.

MARSHAL
Want to go inside?

INT. ICEHOUSE

Beth and the marshal enter the icehouse and close the door behind them.

MARSHAL
Huh. Feels about the same as
before we put in the ice.

Beth looks over her shoulder at him.

BETH
Give it time, marshal.
(faces forward)
Give it time.

The marshal stares at her back for a long beat.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Beth combs her hair in the mirror with a thoughtful, satisfied air.

She suddenly sets down the comb and puts her hair up trying different looks in the mirror.

After awhile she feels silly, lets her hair fall back into place, looks at her reflection and smiles.

FADE TO BLACK.

A rooster CROWS.

FADE IN:

EXT. CHICKEN COOP - A FEW DAYS LATER - DUSK

Beth drives the chickens back into the coop.

EXT. SHEEPHOUSE

Beth guides the sheep into the sheephouse and closes the door, the old dog at her heels.

EXT. ROAD

FARLEY, 60s, stout and commanding, dressed like an easterner with waistcoat, breeches, and bowler hat, rides up the road to the entrance, followed by Clyde and two other cowpunchers.

Clyde leans down and opens the gate.

Farley turns his horse onto the property.

FARLEY

Wait here.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The switch CRACKS back and forth in the air.

BETH

He, bossy. He, boss.

Beth recognizes the riders at the gate, ignores them and continues herding the cow down the path.

Farley trots his horse, intercepts Beth and the cow at the front porch of the house.

FARLEY

Howdy, Miss Harper.

He tips his hat.

BETH

(starts past him)
Got nothing to say to you.

Farley wheels his horse perpendicular to the cow, blocking its path.

FARLEY

Well, missy, I got a mite something to say to you.

Beth stops, mad.

BETH

Unless you come here to apologize for grazing cattle on my land, I don't want to hear it.

Farley shrugs.

FARLEY

That was an unfortunate mistake, but as you know there is an easy way for us to remedy the situation.

Beth glares at him.

BETH

I know you want this land, and you here to see if anything changed since now Pa is gone. Well, I can save you the trouble of asking.

(beat)

It ain't nothing changed.

Farley smiles.

FARLEY

Now, Beth, I understand, but you might show me the courtesy of allowing me to make my offer before you reject it outright.

Beth HUMPHS.

BETH

Make it then, and get on.

Farley dismounts and steps towards her.

FARLEY

Your Pa was stubborn, and that made me stubborn.

(beat)

I'm willing to double the last offer made to him for you: seven hundred dollars.

(beat)

(MORE)

FARLEY (CONT'D)
Seven hundred dollars! That's a
fair shake more'n any damn
homesteader ever got 'round here,
and is ever liable to get.

Beth looks Farley in the eye.

BETH
Mr. Farley, if you think you can
come in here and intimidate me then
you are sorely mistaken. The
Harper farm is not for sale, nor
will it ever be long as I'm alive.

Farley's smile drops, his eyes grow cold.

FARLEY
Those are some mighty serious
accusations, young lady. I just
quoted you the best damn price ever
offered any broke down dirt farmer
this side a the Mississippi, and
you talk intimidation.

Beth nods towards the riders at the gate.

FARLEY (CONT'D)
Them? They's my appraisers.
(snake smile)
That's how I come up with such a
generous price.

Beth SCOFFS.

BETH
Mr. Farley, you made your offer,
and I rejected it. As it stands, I
see no further reason for you to
remain on my land, and will
consider any further lingering as
trespassing.

She drops the switch and walks purposefully towards the
house.

FARLEY
Now, Beth, no need for that kind of
talk.
(hollers after her)
I come here to make you a good
faith offer!

Beth enters the house and emerges with a shotgun.

The men at the gate react, moving their hands to the guns on their hips.

BETH

I'm asking you kindly to leave my property, mister.

(beat)

The next time I have to ask won't be so kind.

Farley backs away with raised hands.

FARLEY

Fair enough.

(beat)

One way or another, I'm gonna connect my range.

He mounts his horse and tips his hat.

FARLEY (CONT'D)

G'day, Miss Harper.

Beth's stare remains ice cold.

Farley turns his horse and exits the yard.

EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Farley joins his men at the gate.

CLYDE

You want us to do something, Mr. Farley?

Farley considers.

FARLEY

Not at this time, Clyde, not at this time.

They all wheel their horses back up the road.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Beth watches them leave until they clear the horizon.

She leans the gun against the wall and returns to the yard, picking up the switch.

The cow has wandered some.

Beth SLASHES the switch through the air with a SNAP.

BETH
Sa, bossy, sa boss!

She herds the cow into the barn.

FADE TO:

EXT. CREEK - THE NEXT MORNING

A branch overhanging the rippling water sways.

EXT. ROAD

The marshal trots his horse up the road towards Beth's place and reins up with the farm still in the distance.

He pulls out a pocket mirror, removes his hat, spits on his hand and smooths down his hair.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - AT THE GATE

The marshal reins up and scans the yard.

MARSHAL
Beth...?
(louder)
Beth! You here?

EXT. FARMHOUSE - BEHIND THE BARN

The marshal trots his horse past the barn, looking for Beth.

His eyes come to rest on the icehouse and he remembers their time working on the project with satisfaction.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD

At the far edge of her property, far from any landmark, Beth slowly constructs a fence.

The horse and cart, full of cut lumber, stand nearby.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - AT A DISTANCE

The marshal rides his horse across the empty field.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD

The marshal rides up behind Beth and stops.

Beth grabs the shotgun leaned next to her against the fence, stands and turns, training the gun on him.

MARSHAL

Whoa, now, Beth, it's just me.

Beth lowers the shotgun.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

You in the habit of pointing that thing at every passerby?

BETH

Just heeding your warning, marshal, bad men being about.

The marshal dismounts, wraps the reins of his horse around the fence.

MARSHAL

Heard you were in town for more supplies, thought maybe there was somethin' wrong with the icehouse construction. I see now it was for an altogether different purpose.

Beth returns to her work, gets down on her knees, puts boards in place and hammers the nails home.

BETH

That Farley, he came by here yesterday with three men, said he wanted to make an offer, but seems to me he wanted to push me around.

(beat)

As you are aware, and are keen to mention, I am alone here and therefore need to deter him as best I can.

The marshal considers her.

MARSHAL

Is there anything I can do?

Beth stops working and turns to him.

BETH

I ain't close with many folk in town.

(MORE)

BETH (CONT'D)

I know most rely on Mr. Farley for their livelihood and have no cause to support me.

(beat)

I could use an ally in this.

MARSHAL

Beth, you know I'm your ally, and more than that, your friend. I will speak with Mr. Farley.

Beth nods and returns to her work.

BETH

Thank you kindly, marshal.

The marshal watches her for a beat.

MARSHAL

And the icehouse?

BETH

After I finish this portion of the fence, there is a hog I mean to slaughter.

(beat)

Already made a deal with Ben Mercer for the carcass and organ meats.

The marshal nods and looks out across the horizon.

MARSHAL

One more thing, before I leave you to your task, I got some news about that outlaw might make ya sleep better at night.

Beth perks up, stops work for a beat, then continues.

BETH

Yeah?

MARSHAL

Seems he was seen near here, down Casper way. He was recognized by the town marshal, and there was a shootin'.

BETH

(curious)

Did they get him?

The marshal lowers his gaze back to Beth.

MARSHAL

No. The marshal is dead.

(beat)

But one deputy winged him pretty
durn good.

Beth pauses in her work and frowns.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

I still wish you'd come stay in
town awhile 'til we can be sure
he's out of the territory.

Beth continues working.

BETH

Now, marshal, I told you before,
there's too much work to do here to
be away even one day.

MARSHAL

Okay, Beth, then all I can say is
be careful. Keep your eyes and
ears open and your scattergun close
to hand.

Beth stops her work and makes eye contact.

BETH

Thank you, marshal. I appreciate
all you been doing for me.

(beat)

I really do.

The marshal smiles broadly.

MARSHAL

Why of course, Beth.

(beat)

I'm happy to help.

BETH

And...

(beat)

You'll speak with Farley?

MARSHAL

Yes, Beth, I will.

BETH

Goodday, marshal.

MARSHAL
(tips his hat)
Goodday, Beth.

Beth returns to her work as the marshal wheels his horse back towards the farm, brimming with pride.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

Clyde waits near the road in the shade of a giant dead tree.

He sees the marshal coming and kicks his horse into motion, riding across the plain.

CLOSER

The marshal reins up as Clyde wheels his horse to block the road.

Clyde grins and spits.

FADE TO:

EXT. CREEK - A FEW DAYS LATER - NIGHT

The moonlight plays on the uneven surface of the water.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth reads in the faint candlelight.

The remnants of a meal are scattered across the table.

INT. FARMHOUSE - LATER

Beth does the dishes and tidies up the kitchen.

BARKS and GROWLS sound from outside.

Beth listens, then grabs the shotgun and lantern by the door, and exits.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PASTURE

Horse hooves CLOP on the hard-packed earth of the path.

Horse flanks lathered in sweat heave and swell.

The reins hang loose from the horse's neck.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth steps onto the porch, shotgun in the crook of her arm, and holds the lantern out from her attempting to see.

The dog BARKS violently at the approaching intruder.

BETH POV - THE HORSE

Coming up the path, difficult to make out in the dark, a lone horse approaches with a rider slumped on top.

BACK TO SCENE

Beth sets the lantern down and raises the gun.

BETH
Stop right there.

The horse enters the sphere of light, revealing the outlaw slumped in the saddle.

BETH (CONT'D)
Stop or I'll blow your head clean
off, I swear.

The outlaw slides from the horse sideways, landing awkwardly on the ground.

Beth lowers the gun, watches him for a beat, then picks up the lantern and warily descends the steps.

As she raises the lantern, she sees a large bloodstain on the outlaw's shirt.

The outlaw stirs.

OUTLAW POV

Beth wavers in and out of focus in his clouded vision.

BACK TO SCENE

The outlaw smiles weakly.

THE OUTLAW
I done... bringed you back... yer
horse...

He winces in pain and passes out.

Beth stares down at the outlaw for a long beat, then gets low, grabs his arm, and hefts him upward with her shoulder under his armpit.

She takes his full weight, then drags him up the steps and into the house.

FADE TO:

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - THE NEXT EVENING

The outlaw sprawls shirtless on the bed.

The wound is neatly dressed, white linen wrapped around his midsection, with a red brown stain on one side.

The outlaw COUGHS and stirs.

Beth appears in the doorway.

BETH

(beat)

You slept all day.

The outlaw looks down at the dressing on his wound, then up at Beth.

BETH (CONT'D)

There's dinner left over.

Beth disappears back into the kitchen, then reappears with a tray of food.

The outlaw tries to sit up but winces in pain and falls back.

BETH (CONT'D)

You need a doctor.

THE OUTLAW

No.

BETH

That is a nasty wound and I ain't trained proper.

THE OUTLAW

It'll heal.

(beat)

It went clean through.

BETH

But-

THE OUTLAW

It'll heal, I say.

(beat)

That's the end of it.

Beth places the tray roughly on the bedside table and exits.

The outlaw reaches over, winces at the movement, and falls back with a GROAN.

He collects himself and gingerly begins to eat.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - LATER

The large metal tub sits half-full and steaming in the center of the room.

The outlaw stands watching in the doorway of the master bedroom, supporting himself on the doorframe.

Beth wets a rag in the tub, rubs soap into the cloth until a thick lather forms, and wrings the cloth out.

Beth places the rag on the lip of the tub and looks at the outlaw.

BETH
Can you manage?

He nods.

Beth goes into her room, returns with the shotgun, watching from the threshold.

The outlaw limps to the tub and sits.

He carefully unwraps the linen and gently dabs his wound, wincing at every touch.

BETH (CONT'D)
There's fresh linen on the table.

The outlaw grabs the cloth and wraps it tightly around his torso, the area around the wound immediately turning pink.

The outlaw attempts to stand, struggles and almost falls before steadying himself.

Beth remains expressionless as she watches him limp towards the master bedroom.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

The outlaw sleeps soundly in bed.

Beth appears at the open door with the shotgun and watches him for a beat, then disappears.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

Beth enters and closes the door behind her, placing a chair beneath the knob.

She checks the cartridges in the shotgun, then RATCHETS it closed and places it on the floor on the far side of the bed.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM - LATER

Beth stares at the ceiling, unable to sleep, her hand hanging over the side of the bed, fingers resting on the shotgun.

FADE TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH - THE NEXT DAY

The outlaw rehabilitates sitting in the rocking chair watching Beth do her daily chores.

The old dog appears around the corner of the house.

He stares at the outlaw, sniffing, but does not growl.

The outlaw gives the old dog a conciliatory look, and tilts his head in greeting.

The dog holds his gaze for a beat, then disappears around the corner.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The outlaw and Beth sit at the table across from one another, the remnants of a meal before them.

The shotgun leans against the wall next to Beth's chair.

As Beth gets up to clear the plates, the outlaw looks out the window, restless, then stares at the shotgun.

His gaze drifts to Beth's backside as she washes the dishes and he SIGHS.

THE OUTLAW

You got any cards?

Beth looks at him over her shoulder.

BETH

What?

THE OUTLAW

Cards. Cards!
(beat)
Do you got any?

Beth finishes washing, dries her hands and turns to face him.

BETH

Sure, we got cards.

Beth walks to the wall, grabs the shotgun, and disappears into her room.

The outlaw taps his foot and stares out the window.

Beth reappears and places a deck of cards on the table.

BETH (CONT'D)

Here.

She returns to the sink and her washing.

The outlaw takes the cards and begins shuffling.

THE OUTLAW

I don't know no solitary games.

The outlaw deals two hands.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)

All I know is poker.

The outlaw picks up the cards and arranges his hand while waiting for Beth.

Beth finishes her washing and turns.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)

(without looking up)
You know what I'd like? A good
plug-a whiskey.
(beat)
You got any whiskey?

Beth stares at him for a beat.

BETH

In my experience, whiskey makes a
man unpredictable and more
susceptible to every impulse.

The outlaw LAUGHS, winces and holds his hand to his side.

THE OUTLAW

In my experience, you're right.

(beat)

But also in my experience, it helps
kill a man's pain.

Beth hesitates, then sits and picks up her cards.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)

You ain't got none?

Beth ignores him.

The outlaw grumbles to himself, lays down three cards and
picks up three from the deck, arranging them in his hand.

Beth crinkles her brow as she studies her hand.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)

You gonna draw any?

Beth tentatively discards two and picks up two.

The outlaw looks at his cards, looks at Beth with a sly
expression.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)

(triumphant)

Three beauties.

He throws down three queens.

Beth looks at her hand.

BETH

I don't really know this game.

The outlaw smiles.

THE OUTLAW

Well, darling, I can teach you.

(beat)

Show me what you got.

She lays down her cards.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)

I'll be damned...

(beat)

Full house.

BETH

What does that mean?

THE OUTLAW
It means you beat mine.

Beth is pleased.

BETH
You mean I win?

THE OUTLAW
Seems like you the one who can
teach me, darlin'.

He gathers the cards, shuffles, and deals a fresh hand for both.

FADE TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - THE NEXT DAY

Beth chops firewood, the shotgun leaning near her against the wall of the barn.

The outlaw steps out onto the porch, shirtless, still wrapped with linen around his midsection, and holding a steaming cup of coffee.

THE OUTLAW
Morning.

Beth looks up startled, stops chopping wood.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)
You got my saddlebags tucked away
somewheres?

BETH
Why?

THE OUTLAW
I like a smoke in the morning with
my coffee.

Beth stares at him a moment, grabs the shotgun, goes inside the barn.

The outlaw sets the tin cup on the porch railing and rushes limping to follow her.

INT. BARN

Beth rummages in the saddlebags, draped over the rail of a stall.

The outlaw creeps slowly up behind her.

He is close enough to reach out and touch her when she whirls with shotgun raised, the tobacco pouch falling at her feet.

BETH
Stand back!

The outlaw raises his hands open in front of him.

THE OUTLAW
You ain't gonna shoot me...

Beth's visage grows grim.

BETH
I said stand back!

The outlaw continues his slow approach.

THE OUTLAW
If you wanted to hurt me, you
woulda pulled the trigger when you
had the drop on me before.

He places his hand on the barrel of the gun and eases it down and to the side.

Beth's face betrays her confusion over allowing the outlaw to approach her thus.

The outlaw leans in, his face inches from hers.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)
And if I wanted to hurt you, I had
my chance...

He leans closer, whispers in her ear.

THE OUTLAW (CONT'D)
We don't want to hurt each other...

Beth's eyes waver, filled with an irreconcilable mix of emotions: fear, disgust, rage, passion, desire.

Beth leans away from him, raises the shotgun to his chest and physically forces him back with the barrel.

BETH
You leave. Now.

The outlaw backs away with a bemused look on his face.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD

Beth marches the outlaw, saddlebags draped over his naked shoulder, across the yard at gunpoint.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth marches the outlaw into the house, mirroring the scene where they first met.

The outlaw turns.

THE OUTLAW

My pistol?

She indicates the master bedroom with her head.

BETH

Put your shirt on.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

Beth, on the porch, holds the shotgun on the outlaw, as he stands in the dirt below, fully clothed but with no gunbelt, holding his saddlebags at his side.

THE OUTLAW

I'm obliged to you caring for my wounds.

He turns to leave.

BETH

You can take the whiskey.

The outlaw turns back.

THE OUTLAW

What?

BETH

Take the whiskey.

The outlaw looks at her in disbelief.

BETH (CONT'D)

It was Pa's.

(beat)

I don't drink.

Beth disappears into the house and returns with a half-full bottle of whiskey in hand.

She tosses the bottle to him.

The outlaw smiles a funny half-smile and tips his hat.

THE OUTLAW
Much obliged.

Beat.

BETH
So... where you gonna go now?

THE OUTLAW
Don't know.

The outlaw seems to want to say more, but turns and limps towards the creek.

Beth lowers the shotgun and stares after him for several long beats.

BETH
(hollers)
There's an abandoned mine up the
hill aways.

The outlaw disappears into the tree line without looking back.

FADE TO BLACK.

Terrified porcine SQUEALS and GRUNTS.

FADE IN:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - DAY

In an open field stands a lone tree on a slight rise with a large limb protruding from its side.

The horse and cart, filled with straw and a pitchfork sticking out, sits at the foot of the rise.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Tools RATTLE in a wooden hand cart as Beth pushes the cart across the bumpy ground.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - UNDER THE HANGING TREE

The docile face of a hog fills the frame as the barrel of a rifle presses on its forehead and FIRES.

The hog SQUEALS in surprise and keels over onto a bed of straw beneath the tree limb.

Beth, covered in a heavy apron, rolls the carcass onto its back, and thrusts a sticking knife beneath the breastbone.

She then pushes the handle forward, point down, severing the carotid artery.

A spray of blood mists her face and clothes.

ANGLE - STRAW

The blood pools and disappears beneath the straw.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - UNDER THE HANGING TREE - MOMENTS LATER

Beth holds the carcass in place with four wooden blocks, produces a skinning knife, and cuts around the rear legs.

She opens the hide with the knife pointed upwards, from where the hog was stuck, around the pubis, to the anus.

Beth skins along the side, grasping the loose hide in her opposite hand, placing tension on the hide.

Beth retrieves a bone saw from the hand cart, returns and saws through each rear leg above the hock.

She takes a metal pole, inserts it beneath the tendons in each leg, and affixes a rope to each side.

Beth tosses the rope over the tree limb, hoists the carcass halfway up, and secures the rope around a metal spike driven into the ground nearby.

EXT. ROAD

Farley drives an empty buckboard towards the farm.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - UNDER THE HANGING TREE

Beth skins around the outside of the hams, removes the hide around the anus, and cuts off the tail.

She pulls the hide down over the hips, then pulls off the hide along the hips and back.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - AT THE GATE

Farley reins up, opens the gate, and rides onto the property.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - UNDER THE HANGING TREE

Beth hoists the pig to a fully extended position, and reattaches the rope to the spike.

Beth pulls slowly down and out on the hide, removing it along the upper back until the skin catches at the neck, then finishes the removal with the knife.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - FOOT OF THE HILL

Farley rides the buckboard across the field and stops at the foot of the hill.

FARLEY
(hollers)
Howdy, Beth.

Beth turns surprised, clothes covered in blood.

Farley smiles.

FARLEY (CONT'D)
I told ol' Ben Mercer I'd pick up
the hog for him.

Beth frowns.

BETH
You 'bout a day early.

Farley smiles, all charm.

FARLEY
Ah, Beth, you caught me.
(beat)
I didn't speak with Ben.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - UNDER THE HANGING TREE

Beth turns away and looks into the dead eyes of the pig for a beat, then skins the face and the snout.

FARLEY (O.S.)
 (chuckles)
 You know, our last encounter did
 not unfold how I expected it would.

Beth cuts through the pelvic canal, pulls the anus from the
 body, and ties it off with a piece of string.

FARLEY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 You see, Beth, your mule-headedness
 puts me in a terrible position.
 (beat)
 I need to connect my range... but
 how can I do it now?

Beth cuts the skin along each side and around the opening of
 the penis, lifts and cuts underneath between the hams, then
 pulls the penis upward.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FOOT OF THE HILL

Farley drops down from the buckboard and starts up the hill.

FARLEY
 What you don't understand, my dear,
 is I am trying to help you.
 (beat)
 There are a lot of things can go
 wrong on a farm, Beth. Lots of
 things can go wrong for a woman
 alone, too.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - UNDER THE HANGING TREE

Beth looks down at Farley, holds his eyes a beat, then
 removes the penis from the base of the hams.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - ON THE HILL

Farley stops a moment, taken aback, then recovers and
 continues up the hill.

FARLEY
 (clear his throat)
 My father, he made his fortune
 importing and exporting up and down
 the eastern seaboard. He trusted
 the wrong people, was swindled out
 of everything, and died a pauper.
 (beat)
 (MORE)

FARLEY (CONT'D)

I was out here before anyone thought Wyoming Territory was worth a damn. I was energetic, smart, made my stake and turned a profit quickly. I promised myself I would never be taken advantage of like my father.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - UNDER THE HANGING TREE

Beth inserts the knife handle first, blade pointed outward, and cuts from the pelvis to the breastbone, avoiding the intestines.

The intestines and stomach roll out and hang bundled at the chest.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - THE HILL

Farley crests the hill as he speaks.

FARLEY

The damn sod-busters came fast and dug in quickly.

(beat)

I pushed the encroachers out, all but you Harpers. Your Pa and I were enemies from the moment he arrived, and he died my enemy.

INT. FARMHOUSE - UNDER THE HANGING TREE

Beth detaches the heart from the lungs, splits the heart open, and places the heart into a bucket of ice water.

FARLEY

But not you. You were just a kid. You had no choice.

Beth steps inside the carcass and saws between the hams, from tail to loin, then moves to the back of the carcass and saws through shoulder and neck to the base of the head.

Farley approaches Beth.

FARLEY (CONT'D)

You are a good worker. And smart. I can see that. Don't want to waste away stuck at home waitin' on some man.

(beat)

(MORE)

FARLEY (CONT'D)

I can set you up in any town along the Union Pacific line. Start you over in any business of your choosing. Not a business your father chose for you.

Beth removes the head at the base of the skull, cutting along the jawbone, leaving the jowls attached to the carcass.

FARLEY (CONT'D)

You like that idea, Beth? Being the proprietor of your own business?

Beth removes the tongue, washes it thoroughly, and places it in the bucket of ice water with the heart and liver.

Farley becomes frustrated with Beth ignoring him.

FARLEY (CONT'D)

(authoritative)

You will never build any security as a subsistence farmer!

Farley watches and waits for a response as Beth disappears down the rise towards the large cart.

FARLEY (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Well, I made my case.

Beth reappears with a pitchfork full of straw and a bundle of cloth in her arms.

She forks fresh straw onto the ground, and places two large clean sheets on top of the straw.

She lowers the carcass to the ground, wraps each half in its own sheet, lifts one bundle and hefts it down the hill.

Farley SIGHS and descends towards the buckboard.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

As Beth tromps up the hill to retrieve the second bundle, Farley jumps back onto his buckboard.

He cracks the reins and guides the vehicle alongside the cart and horse as Beth tosses the second bundle into the back.

FARLEY

I hope we understand each other better now.

(MORE)

FARLEY (CONT'D)
 (smiles)
 I hope we can be friends.

Beth secures the half-carcasses in the cart, then turns and faces Farley.

BETH
 I doubt we shall ever be anything remotely resembling friends, Mr. Farley. I already made an investment to improve the profit potential of this farm.

Beth gestures towards the icehouse.

BETH (CONT'D)
 I have a counter offer for you.
 (beat)
 I add a gate on both sides of the new fence I been building. Then you pass your cattle through my land for ten cents a head.
 (beat)
 Each way.

Farley frowns.

FARLEY
 My offer stands.
 (a threat)
 You have one week.
 (tips his hat)
 Good day, Ms. Harper.

Beth's mouth twists in a half snarl.

BETH
 Goodbye, Mr. Farley.

FARLEY
 Hah!

Farley CRACKS the reins and the horse lurches forward, as he turns the buckboard back towards the gate.

Beth stares after Farley with a grimace on her face.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - LATER

Beth cleans the gear and places it back on the hand cart, then leads the horse and cart towards the icehouse.

Beth returns and removes the straw and viscera to the waste pit, rinses the area with water, fills the pit with dirt, and shovels over the remaining blood and waste.

Beth rolls the hand cart back towards the barn.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - ICEHOUSE - THE NEXT DAY - AT A DISTANCE

Beth and BEN MERCER, 70s, wiry and spry, transfer the half-carcasses and bundle of organs from the icehouse to his buckboard, exchange a few pleasantries, then Ben Mercer hops up and drives the buckboard around the barn, out the gate, and onto the road back to town.

FADE TO BLACK.

The RATTLE and RUMBLE of wooden wheels on a rough road.

FADE IN:

EXT. ROAD - DAYS LATER

Beth drives the horse and cart with more lumber in the back.

The sun beats down from overhead.

In the distance, a plume of dust indicates a rider coming up behind her.

EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

The marshal rides up parallel to Beth, a bouquet of flowers in his hand.

MARSHAL

Howdy, Beth.

She looks over.

BETH

Hello, marshal.

Beth turns her head forward and continues down the road as the marshal trots beside her.

BETH (CONT'D)

I aim to get back and finish the other side of that fence.

MARSHAL

It's a big fence, Beth.

(beat)

It'll keep.

She pulls back on the reins and brings the cart to a stop.

The marshal comes around perpendicular and faces her.

Beth looks down at the flowers in his hand.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

These are for you.

He hands her the flowers and Beth tentatively accepts.

BETH

(beat)

Farley came to the farm again.

The marshal frowns.

BETH (CONT'D)

He came in a buckboard saying he was there to pick up the hog for Ben Mercer.

(beat)

Did you speak to him?

MARSHAL

To Ben Mercer?

BETH

(curt)

No, to Mr. Farley.

Beth glares at him.

MARSHAL

We conversed.

BETH

The reason I ask is he was all familiar like, talking about plans to set me up in some other town.

(beat)

Was that your idea?

The marshal looks away.

MARSHAL

Not exactly.

(beat)

But we spoke on it.

Beth gives the reins a little jerk and the horse lurches forward a couple steps.

BETH

I refused and he says one week,
whatever that means.

(beat)

Now, if you will kindly remove
yourself from my path, I need to
finish that fence.

The marshal guides his horse out of her way.

MARSHAL

Beth...

Beth turns toward him.

BETH

Your words sound pretty, marshal,
talking all nice, but you ain't no
help at all.

She thrusts the flowers back at him.

MARSHAL

(stunned)

Kee-

His voice falters.

He clears his throat and continues.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

Keep them.

(beat)

Please.

Beth hesitates, then places the bouquet beside her on the cart.

She gives the marshal a hard, disappointed look, then CRACKS the reins.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

Now, wait a minute, Beth.

BETH

Get up there! Get on up!

The horse lurches forward and the cart passes beyond the marshal's horse.

The marshal gazes up the road after her, shocked by the reversal of his expectations.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM - LATER

Beth enters with the flowers, steps across the room, and opens the wardrobe.

She places the flowers inside, stares at them for a beat, then closes the door.

FADE TO:

EXT. CREEK - NIGHT

The moonlight plays on the uneven surface of the water.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Beth finishes cooking dinner, sets the table, sits and eats staring out the window.

She looks at the empty seat across from her, stops eating, stands and stares down at the table for a long beat.

Beth goes to the cupboard, retrieves another table setting, sets the table before the empty seat, then sits.

She stares at the empty table setting across from her.

INT. FARMHOUSE - LATER

The moon gleams high in the sky above the farmhouse.

INT. FARMHOUSE

Beth clears the table of her dirtied plates.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD

Boots SCRAMBLE and SCUFFLE amongst the stalks of wheat.

INT. FARMHOUSE

Beth does the dishes and tidies up the kitchen.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD

A match STRIKES unsuccessfully against a wooden post.
Several more STRIKES before the match BLAZES to life.

INT. FARMHOUSE

BARKS and GROWLS from outside catch Beth's attention.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD

A makeshift torch CRACKLES to life, touches the wheat, which immediately catches fire.

INT. FARMHOUSE

A loud CRACKLE from outside joins the chorus of BARKS and GROWLS as Beth reaches for the shotgun and exits.

EXT. BACK OF THE BARN

The hand tosses the torch into a barrel of straw outside the door of the icehouse.

The straw catches fire, tongues of flame reaching up the wall.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth races outside to see the wheat field ablaze, the old dog BARKING at the growing flames.

EXT. CREEK

A lone dark figure runs full tilt across the field to the cover of trees by the creek.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth CRIES OUT in dismay.

She runs to the barn to fetch the buckets and the horse.

EXT. CREEK

The creek SWIRLS and CHUCKLES in the moonlight beneath the log footbridge.

A pair of boots STOMP across the bridge.

EXT. BARN

Beth emerges with the horse and rig, running and pulling on the horse's reins.

EXT. CREEK

On the other side of the creek, the ranch side, two horses and one man wait, concealed in the brush.

Clyde emerges from the creek, grinning.

Farley peers into the darkness, catching a glimpse through the trees of the raging inferno beyond.

He sees Beth arrive at the creek and ducks down, pulling Clyde down with him.

EXT. CREEK

Beth desperately fills the buckets, turns the horse and pulls him towards the wheat field.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD

Beth arrives with the horse and throws the buckets of water onto the fire.

The fire spooks the horse, it rears and backs away.

Beth tries to get the horse under control, gives up, and runs back towards the creek with the empty buckets.

EXT. PIGPEN

The hogs SCREAM and fight to press against the far side fence as the fire creeps closer to their domain.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD

Beth hurls the water onto the fire and runs back for more.

INT. SHEEPHOUSE

The sheep BLEAT and kick and swirl around the tight space in pure animal terror.

EXT. FIELD

Running back from the creek with full buckets, Beth trips in the dark, sending the buckets and water flying.

She hits the ground and GASPS, the wind knocked out of her, then catches her breath for a beat, stands and grabs the buckets, running back to the creek for more water.

EXT. CREEK - MOMENTS LATER

Beth arrives to fill the buckets again.

As she stands, she catches a glimpse of two horses and riders silhouetted in the moonlight.

BETH POV - FARLEY AND CLYDE

She sees the backs of the riders cresting a low hill on their way to the ranch house.

BACK TO SCENE

She has no time to dwell on this, turns quickly to run back to the wheat field.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD

Beth decides to protect the rest of the farm rather than continue trying to save the wheat.

She douses the fence posts nearest to the farmhouse, then returns to douse them again.

She continues dousing the fence all around, trying to contain the fire.

INT. BARN

The cow WHINES in dismay and BANGS against the confines of its stall.

EXT. CREEK

As she stands and turns with freshly filled buckets, Beth notices the fire has engulfed the icehouse behind the barn.

EXT. ICEHOUSE

Visible through the opening at the top, whose doors hang burnt and broken from their hinges, fire raging all around, the blocks of ice steadily melt.

WIDER

The upper floor of the icehouse collapses, sending the blocks of ice plummeting to the ground.

FADE TO BLACK.

A rooster CROWS.

FADE IN:

EXT. CREEK - PRE-DAWN TWILIGHT

Water meanders over and around the rocks, then passes under the fallen tree footbridge.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD

As the sun begins to lighten the sky, Beth is still working.

The center of the wheat field is a smoldering mess, while small fires still burn scattered throughout the field.

The fire was stopped on the farmhouse side, with barely any burnt marks on the fence.

The other fences surrounding the field were burnt up here and there, including a portion of fence enclosing the pasture.

The icehouse is mostly destroyed, but the barn was saved.

Beth continues dousing, then collapses onto her back, staring into the lightening sky.

She PANTS heavily for several long beats.

Her breathing slows, her eyes fill with tears, she CRIES softly, then gets mad and hoists herself up.

She goes back to hauling water and dousing for several more iterations.

FADE TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MORNING

Beth stands on the porch staring at the burnt field and fences with a blank look on her face.

EXT. FIELD

Beth tromps through the field, scanning the horizon.

She spots the horse in the distance, standing docile amongst the trees and brush next to the creek, the pole rig still on its back.

EXT. BARN

Beth guides the horse to the barn entrance, removes the pole rig, and ushers the horse into the barn.

EXT. PIGPEN

Beth appears with a pail of swill and SLOSHES it into their trough.

The hogs do not move, preoccupied with something in the center of the pen, but Beth does not notice.

EXT. CHICKEN COOP

Beth ushers out the chickens, feeds and waters them.

EXT. SHEEPHOUSE

Beth listens as the sheep WHINE to be let out.

She gazes over at the carnage, sees the damaged fence, and shakes her head as she walks away from the sheephouse without releasing the animals.

EXT. PASTURE

Beth knocks down the ruined parts of fence with the shovel, then digs the burnt and broken post stumps out of the ground.

EXT. CREEK

Beth chops at a medium size tree with an axe until it falls over to the side, while the horse drinks from the creek.

As she catches her breath, she gazes through a hole in the trees and brush at the ranch complex.

BETH POV - RANCH

A lone butterfly flits across her vision and breaks her from her dark reverie.

BACK TO SCENE

Beth chops the branches and foliage from the trunk of the tree, gathers these into the cart, then pulls out a rope and affixes the trunk to the cart with a rope.

Beth guides the horse back to the farm, the trunk sliding across the ground behind the cart.

EXT. WHEAT FIELD

Beth uses wood cut from the trunk and branches from the cart to rebuild a makeshift fence.

Once finished, the fence is uneven but functional.

EXT. BARN

Beth drives the cow to pasture.

The switch CRACKS overhead, but her mouth remains a tight line.

EXT. SHEEPHOUSE

Beth opens the sheephouse and guides the frantic, BLEATING sheep into the field.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

The old dog lifts his head when he hears the sheep, but depressed as his owner, he sets his head back on his paws with a WHINE and closes his eyes.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH - LATER

Beth climbs the steps, then looks out and admires her work on the fence with stoic bittersweet admiration.

Her eyes fall on the pigpen, where the pigs are gathered in a circle rutting around with something invisible beneath their snouts.

EXT. PIGPEN

Beth goes to the pigpen and shoos away the hogs.

A hog carcass, half-eaten by its brethren, dead from heat or shock during the battle in the night, lies sunken in the mud.

Beth SHUDDERS.

She opens the gate and drags the carcass out of the pen, weathering a litany of shrill WHINES of protest from the other hogs.

EXT. FIELD - LATER

The hog carcass burns at Beth's feet.

She stares into the fire as the flames leap and lick the sky.

Her eyes drift from the carcass to the ruined icehouse, black smoke from the fire billowing before her face.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth, thoroughly exhausted, wills herself to prepare a cold supper, and turns towards the table.

She notices the extra place setting still there from the night before.

FADE TO BLACK.

The SCRAPE and RUMBLE of wooden wheels over dirt and rock.

FADE IN:

EXT. ROAD - LATER

The preacher rides up the road on his buckboard.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth steps outside and gazes over the wheat field, the carnage of the fire, and her handiwork from the day.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

The preacher rides up to the gate and hollers.

PREACHER

Beth!

Beth glances over, relieved to see a friendly face, goes to him and opens the gate.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

Some folks saw smoke on the horizon early this morning. I apologize for not coming sooner, but was dominated by prior engagements.

BETH

I appreciate you coming out, preacher.

PREACHER

Are you okay?

Beth SIGHS.

BETH

I'm fine.
(beat)
But the wheat...

The preacher climbs down from the buckboard.

PREACHER

My poor, sweet, child.

He opens his arms to her.

Beth looks like she wants to accept his embrace for a moment, but then quickly changes the subject.

BETH

Come see.

She walks up the steps of the porch and gazes out over the burnt field.

The preacher follows and stands behind her.

PREACHER

I can gather some church members to help you rebuild.

BETH

No need, preacher.

(beat)

It's too late in the season to plant again, and this will hold the stock in the meantime.

They stare out in silence for a long beat.

PREACHER

You know, Beth, you may want to reconsider selling to Mr. Farley. Rumor has it he gave you more than a fair price.

BETH

(beat)

Frankly, preacher, I don't know what I'd do with myself if it wasn't for this farm.

Beth lowers her head.

PREACHER

Chin up, missy! You sell the farm, you got plenty of money to start over however you like.

He gently places his hands on her shoulders and turns her to face him.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

And I hear there is a particular gentleman of fine social standing who would love to help you start again.

Beth raises her head, eyes glistening.

BETH

Yeah?

PREACHER

The marshal is a private man, but there are some things you just cannot keep from womenfolk. The whole town is abuzz with the prospect.

He smiles warmly.

BETH

I don't know, preacher.

(beat; quiet)

I been alone my whole life, ain't
never had a man.

PREACHER

It's never too late, Beth.

He steps closer, leans in.

PREACHER (CONT'D)

(conspiratorial whisper;
almost lewd)

The Lord works in mysterious ways.

Beth holds his gaze for a moment, then looks out on the
carnage of the fire once more.

On the horizon, storm clouds threaten.

FADE TO:

EXT. CREEK - NIGHT

Thunder BOOMS across the terrain.

A smattering of rain dances and plays with the reflection of
the moon on the creek's surface.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

Lightning CRACKLES in the dark ominous sky above.

Rain pours down in sheets buffeting the farmhouse.

The rain turns ash to mud in the burnt out wheat field.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

Beth combs her hair absentmindedly in the mirror.

Frantic BARKS from outside catch her attention.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth grabs the shotgun and opens the door.

The dog, drenched and terrified, rushes inside.

Beth looks around, sees nothing amiss, shuts the door and turns to the dog.

BETH
You want to sleep in here tonight?

The dog runs back and forth, BARKING at nothing.

BETH (CONT'D)
I could maybe use the company.

She grabs a blanket from her room, leans down and dries the dog's dripping fur.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - LATER

Beth sits at the table, staring at the empty place setting.

The dog, calmer now, lounges at her feet.

The rain DRUMS loudly on the roof.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth steps onto the porch and gazes at her sodden farm, the barren wheat field and the ruined icehouse.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

Beth opens the wardrobe and stares at the flowers the marshal gave her, then shifts her gaze to a small cabinet in the wardrobe with a key protruding from its lock.

She unlocks the cabinet and opens it.

Inside is the outlaw's pistol and holster.

She stares at the gun for a beat, closes and locks the cabinet, and shuts the wardrobe door.

EXT. CREEK

Beth stands at the edge of the creek, her clothes sopping and drenched.

She stares into the chaotic display of torrential rain terrorizing the water's surface.

FADE TO:

EXT. FIELD

Beth rides her horse hard through the buffeting rain, thunder and lightning.

EXT. HILLS

The horse struggles up the steep muddy hills between a denser array of trees.

EXT. HILLS - HIGHER UP

The horse crests a ridge and Beth is silhouetted above the valley in a flash of lightning.

EXT. ABANDONED MINE - CAVE MOUTH

Beth reins up at the entrance, dismounts, and sees the flicker of firelight coming from inside.

INT. ABANDONED MINE

Beth enters, scans around, takes a few furtive steps and stops.

The outlaw crouches next to a feeble, sputtering fire, water from the ceiling dripping onto his hat.

Beth INHALES sharply.

The outlaw looks up and scrambles to his feet, takes his hat from his head and holds it in both hands at his waist.

BETH

(beat)

You kill that marshal down at
Casper?

The outlaw frowns.

THE OUTLAW

I shot back when he shot at me.

Beth appraises him with a poker face.

BETH

There's this rancher, he is gettin'
mighty bold...

The outlaw shifts his feet and looks away.

THE OUTLAW

Losing my freedom, the worst
punishment a man like me can have.
(looks back)
Rather be dead than trapped.
Rather hang.

They hold each other's gaze for a long beat.

FADE TO:

EXT. FIELD

The horse streaks through the rain, lightning and thunder playing in the background, with Beth at the reins and the outlaw slumped behind her.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - BARN

Beth dismounts and helps the outlaw down from the horse, then leads the horse into the barn.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth and the outlaw hurry from the barn through the rain to the shelter of the porch.

Beth opens the door.

The outlaw glances past her at the extra table setting, and returns his uncertain gaze to Beth.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

The outlaw stands shyly in his drenched clothing, the metal tub full of steaming water at his feet.

The outlaw and Beth make eye contact, then she scurries back to her room, leaving the door cracked open.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

The outlaw sits naked in the tub scrubbing himself with soap.

Once fully lathered, he cups his hands and carries water over his head to rinse.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S BEDROOM

Beth peeks around the half-closed door, and gazes on the outlaw as he continues to rinse.

BETH POV - OUTLAW

The outlaw's naked back is full of wiry muscle and scars.

FADE TO:

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

A bowl of dirty water and dark scattered hair.

A rugged hand rinses lather from a razor.

More hair matted with white lather falls in the bowl.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - LATER

Beth finishes cooking and sets the table.

The outlaw appears in the doorway of the master bedroom, clean-shaven for the first time.

Beth looks over at him in surprise.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Beth sits in silence eating dinner with the outlaw, too shy to even look up at him.

The outlaw sneaks some food to the dog under the table.

Beth notices but says nothing.

FADE TO:

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM - LATER

The dog sleeps on the floor under the kitchen table.

A slight CREAK wakes him.

The dog looks up, sees Beth walking lightly from her bedroom into the main room.

The dog places his head back on his paws as Beth pads towards the master bedroom.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

The outlaw sleeps on his side, his face turned towards the window and away from the door.

The door opens with a slight CREAK.

The outlaw's shape is visible in the moonlight from the door where Beth enters.

She eases into the room and stops, gazes down at him.

The outlaw opens his eyes, facing away from her, alert and aware, not sleeping after all.

Beth stands gazing down at his back.

Neither moves for several long beats.

FADE TO BLACK.

The BURBLE and GURGLE of the creek.

FADE IN:

EXT. CREEK - THE NEXT MORNING - DAWN

The placid water churns in the pond amongst the trees and brush.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH - EARLY MORNING

The outlaw exits the farmhouse with a steaming cup of coffee and sits on the steps.

He pulls his pouch of tobacco from his jacket pocket, rolls a smoke and pulls the pouch closed with the drawstring between his teeth.

The outlaw strikes a match on a wooden post, lights the cigarette, and smokes as he watches Beth work.

EXT. SHEEPHOUSE

Beth and the dog herd the sheep from the sheephouse towards the field.

One sheep breaks from the group and the dog races to chase it back.

Beth pets and cuddles the dog in gratitude for saving her from extra work chasing the sheep down.

EXT. FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Beth guides the sheep into the field and closes the gate, then sees dozens of butterflies flitting near the creek.

She crosses the field, stands amongst the butterflies, staring into the sky as they dance around her, and smiles.

The dog frolics and plays at her feet.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

The outlaw sits up straighter, curious to see Beth in a moment of lightness.

FADE TO:

EXT. CREEK - LATER

Water swirls around in an eddy, catching the sunlight.

EXT. CREEK - MUDDY BANK

Rough hands dig in the dirt until a worm appears squirming and half-buried.

EXT. CREEK - HOOK

The same fingers impale the worm onto a hook.

EXT. CREEK - WIDER

The outlaw sits on the footbridge fishing in the pond.

Beth approaches and sits beside him.

BETH

There's a story about this creek,
wanna hear?

The outlaw stares into the water.

THE OUTLAW

Mebbe.

Beth stares ahead as she speaks.

BETH

I heard it in town when I first
arrived here as a young girl.

(beat)

There was a shy little squaw who no
one thought was worth anything.
But a young brave, courageous in
battle, the desire of all the young
women of the tribe, he chose her.

(beat)

They loved each other very much and
were promised to one another. He
was killed in battle before they
could marry. She never took
another husband. Instead she went
up the mountain and wept, her tears
flowing down into the valley,
becoming this creek. When she had
no more tears left, she wanted to
join him in the ghost realm so much
she drowned herself to be with him.

(beat)

Right here in this pond.

The outlaw CHUCKLES.

THE OUTLAW

Sounds like a tall tale.

BETH

Maybe it is.

(beat)

Just what I heard.

Beat.

THE OUTLAW

But I like me a tall tale once and
again.

Beth stares at the ripples in the water.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - BARN - DUSK

The outlaw chops wood at the side of the barn.

A SHOT rings out in the distance.

The outlaw drops the axe and runs across the yard.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD - DUSK

Beth aims and FIRES, missing an array of tin cans arranged atop the fence.

The outlaw stalks up to her from the house.

THE OUTLAW

(annoyed)

Is that my pistol?

She FIRES and misses, the gun kicking back.

BETH

I grew up here, all I know is this farm. Pa fought hard to keep it, and I need to keep it for him.

She aims, FIRES, and misses.

BETH (CONT'D)

I put in too much work here, too much sweat and blood and grief, to up and leave now.

Beth FIRES and misses again.

She looks up at the outlaw, eyes desperate, searching.

THE OUTLAW

(stepping forward)

Beth, you ain't gotta have any more reason to stay than stayin' is what you want.

(beat)

That's all the reason you need.

Beth refocuses her eyes on the target.

She FIRES, and the can flies from the fence.

Beth looks back at the outlaw, emotion pulsing behind her eyes.

FADE TO:

EXT. CREEK - THE NEXT MORNING

The water in the center of the pond is still except for the slightest movement.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

The outlaw enters from the master bedroom, yawns and puts on his jacket.

EXT. PIGPEN

Beth SPLASHES slop into the trough and the hogs begin to eat.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

The outlaw stretches and scans the room.

His gaze goes to the coffee pot, then scans around and lands to rest on the shelves in the kitchen.

He stares at the empty milk jars on the shelf.

EXT. CHICKEN COOP

Beth sets out fresh feed and water for the chickens.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

The outlaw enters, holding an empty milk jar in his hand.

He places the milk jar in his jacket pocket.

EXT. CHICKEN COOP

Beth raises her eyes to the horizon.

Her eyes grow wide in dismay.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

The outlaw picks up the framed photo of the Harper family, and stares at their images for a long beat.

The front door SLAMS open and closed in the main room, startling him.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

Beth enters, scans the room for the outlaw, then goes to the master bedroom.

She reemerges with his pistol and holster in hand, just as the outlaw appears in the doorway from her room.

She goes to him, eyes frantic.

BETH
Someone coming.

Beth hands him the gun and he quickly straps on his gun belt.

BETH (CONT'D)
You'll be safer down by the creek.

The outlaw rushes to the window and looks out.

BETH (CONT'D)
If you stick to the fence along the
pasture, and stay behind the rise,
you won't be seen from the road.

Beth hurries him towards the door.

BETH (CONT'D)
I'll holler if I need you.
(beat)
Hurry!

The outlaw turns at the door and stops.

They hold each other's eyes for a quick beat, then he disappears through the door.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The outlaw hugs the wall along the porch, drops to the ground next to the garden, runs low through the plants to the burnt out wheat field, past the pigpen, then along the pasture fence, disappearing behind the rise with the hanging tree.

Beth steps onto the porch, watching him until he disappears behind the rise.

FADE TO:

EXT. ROAD

The marshal trots his horse down the road, dressed in his Sunday clothes.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

Beth sees the marshal approaching and hurries to meet him at the gate.

The marshal slows his horse and looks down at Beth, misinterpreting her eagerness.

MARSHAL

Hello, Beth.

(beat)

Ain't you gonna open the gate?

Beth locks eyes with him a moment.

BETH

We can talk fine here.

The marshal dismounts, wraps his reins around the fence.

MARSHAL

You're usually a mite more hospitable.

Beth gestures towards the charred wheat field.

BETH

As you can see, an unfortunate series of events has produced more work on the farm this week.

The marshal takes this as a rebuke.

MARSHAL

I'm sorry I didn't come sooner, Beth. It just took me a moment to figure on what I needed to say.

They stand in awkward silence across the fence from one another.

BETH

And what is that?

The marshal shifts his feet uncomfortably.

MARSHAL

I'm sorry I wasn't more help with Farley. You gotta understand, I was only doing what I thought was best for your interests.

Beth frowns.

BETH
My interests?
(beat)
My crops are gone!

The marshal gathers his courage.

MARSHAL
Beth, I admire you.
(beat)
I admire how you took care of your
Pa all those years. I admire how
you ran this farm all by yourself.
You are a mighty fine woman. A
woman of character. A woman who
carries herself with respect. You
have many qualities any man might
admire, and I admire you.

Beth continues to gaze at him.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)
Ah hell, I better just come out and
say it.

He removes his hat, gets down on one knee, and produces a
ring from his pocket.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)
Beth, I want to marry you. Whether
you sell the farm and come live in
town, or not. I can quit my job,
move here and help you run the
place. We can have children if you
want, or not if you don't, I won't
mind either way. Whatever you
want, I'll do my best to get it for
you. Whatever you need, I'll
provide. I want to marry you,
Beth. To be with you, to be your
man, to make you happy. Together
for the rest of our days.

He extends the ring forward and up towards her.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)
This was my mother's ring.

The marshal takes a deep breath.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)
Beth Harper, will you marry me?

Beth takes a long moment to absorb what he said.

BETH

Marshal...

He gazes up at her with hope in his eyes.

BETH (CONT'D)

Marshal, I been alone a long time, get lonely sometimes, as you must also. But I been alone long enough to be used to how it is. I am content with being alone, and having been alone this long, I have no intention of marrying for anything but love.

The marshal senses what is coming, frowns and slightly lowers the ring.

BETH (CONT'D)

And therefore I cannot accept your marriage proposal.

(beat)

Now please stand up.

This hits the marshal like a blow.

The marshal lowers the ring further and places it in his pocket absentmindedly.

BETH (CONT'D)

Now on the subject of Mr. Farley, I saw two men riding back to his ranch while I was gathering water to fight the fire.

(beat)

I am certain he is responsible.

The marshal stands slowly, painfully, the heartbreak making him feel his age.

MARSHAL

(flat)

You say you saw two riders. Did you see their faces?

Beth stares at him, then shakes her head no.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

That don't amount to much evidence.

(beat)

And my territory is within the confines of the law.

Beat.

BETH

If that is indeed the case, marshal, I feel now it is best for you to be on your way and save us both further awkwardness. There is still a fair amount of damage to repair, and this time I will appreciate if you honor my desire to do the work without any further assistance from your person.

The marshal puts his hat back on his head.

He turns towards his horse, grabs the reins from the fence and slowly mounts.

MARSHAL

I don't understand you, Beth.

(angry)

What else you gonna do? Ain't no other man round here want an ol' spinster like you.

The marshal stops, horrified he let his anger get the better of him.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

Beth, I am so sorry. I did not mean that, not a word.

Beth's expression is stone cold.

BETH

Good day, marshal.

The marshal wheels the horse facing towards town, and looks back down at Beth.

He holds her gaze for a beat, then tips his hat.

MARSHAL

Goodbye, Beth.

He smiles a small, sad smile, then kicks his horse into motion.

Beth watches the marshal shrink into the distance.

FADE TO:

EXT. CREEK

The outlaw lies prone beneath the rise of the creek bed, his head poking out amongst the tall grass.

A lone butterfly flits across his vision.

The outlaw pulls the milk jar from his jacket pocket, removes the lid, and raises the empty jar into the air, watching as the butterfly flits around.

With a sudden motion, the outlaw thrusts the jar over the butterfly and slaps his free hand over the opening.

He holds the jar close to his face, admiring the butterfly flitting around inside.

FADE TO:

EXT. CREEK - PLANK BRIDGE

The creek whirls and glistens in the sunlight, passes into darkness beneath the bridge, then back into the sunlight beyond.

The planks of the bridge begin to RATTLE slightly.

Several dozen hooves CLATTER across the wooden planks then disappear onto the other side of the creek.

The placid scene returns to peace and quiet as if the brief passing of horses never happened.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

Beth opens the wardrobe, gazes down at the flowers, contemplating what might have been.

EXT. ROAD - INTERSECTION

The road from the farm ends at the perpendicular road between the ranch and the town.

The marshal, a grim look on his face, trots his horse and turns east towards town.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM

Beth checks herself in the mirror, then grabs the comb and begins combing her hair.

EXT. ROAD - INTERSECTION - MOMENTS LATER

Farley and six riders gallop to the intersection and turn south towards the farm.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD

Beth walks briskly towards the creek, eager to retrieve the outlaw.

EXT. ROAD

The marshal looks over his shoulder, sees Farley and his men in the distance riding towards Beth's farm.

He lowers his head and turns back towards town.

EXT. ROAD

Farley and his boys pull up at the front gate.

FARLEY

Beth!
(shouts)
Beth Harper!

EXT. FARMHOUSE - FIELD

Beth hears the SHOUT in the distance and pulls up short, her expression of hopeful anticipation devolving into dismay.

She gazes out at the creek, seeking the outlaw's face, but cannot see him where he is hidden, and reluctantly turns back towards the farmhouse.

EXT. ROAD

Farley dismounts and wraps his reins around a fencepost, opens the gate and enters the yard.

FARLEY

Beth Harper!
(beat)
Come on out here!

EXT. FIELD

Beth hurries back towards the farmhouse.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Farley and his men saunter up towards the porch, scanning the property.

The old dog comes around the corner and BARKS fiercely at the strangers.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

Beth retraces the steps the outlaw used to make it to the creek unseen.

She moves along the fence of the pasture, past the pigpen, and through the garden.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Farley scans around, annoyed.

FARLEY
Where in tarnation is she?
(beat)
Beth! Beth Harper!

The dog approaches Farley and BARKS directly at him.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

Beth moves along the side of the house, then hoists herself up onto the porch from the side.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth appears and marches to the farmhouse door, facing out towards the men gathered in the yard below.

BETH
Mr. Farley, you are not wanted
here. Remove yourself from my
property this instant!

Farley smiles coldly at her.

FARLEY
Ah, there you are, Beth.

Farley's men close ranks, forming a semicircle behind him, three to each side.

Beth gazes down at the men, a small crack of fear threatening to shatter her show of strength.

The dog runs between Beth and the line of men, turns and BARKS and GROWLS at Farley unceasingly.

Farley looks down at the dog annoyed, then back to Beth.

FARLEY (CONT'D)

I heard you had a problem here the other day, thought I might bring some hands and see if we could help. Six working men can manage an awful lot in an afternoon.

Beth frowns.

BETH

I don't need no help, especially from you, Mr. Farley.

FARLEY

Everyone needs help from time to time, Miss Harper.

The two hands on the outermost part of the semicircle begin inching closer to the porch.

The dog BARKS at each in turn, then returns its attention to Farley.

BETH

I saw two riders the night of the fire, when I was fetching water, riding towards your property away from mine.

Farley ignores her.

FARLEY

You know I got to thinking the other day. That Beth Harper, she's so stubborn even a true calamity could not change her mind.

(beat)

And it looks like I was right.

BETH

I know it was you who set that fire, you hear me?

He chuckles to himself.

FARLEY
Stubborn as all hell.

The BARKS and GROWLS continue to crescendo.

FARLEY (CONT'D)
Damn it, Clyde! I can't hear
myself think with this damn dog
making all that racket!

He gives Clyde a hard look and a quick nod.

Clyde steps out from the semicircle and pulls his pistol.

BETH
No--!

Clyde points the gun at the dog, who BARKS and GROWLS up at him with all the primal fury the old canine can muster.

Clyde smiles wicked and spits.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

From a distance, the entire farm in view.

The shot RINGS OUT.

EXT. CREEK

The outlaw hears and leaps up.

He pulls leather and runs to the house, gun in one hand and jar in the other.

EXT. ROAD

The marshal stops in his tracks.

He curses himself for a fool, wheels his horse and starts back towards the farm at a gallup.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD

Clyde holsters his gun and looks to Farley for approval, while Beth stares at the carnage of the dog for a moment.

Then, suddenly, she disappears into the house, reemerges with the shotgun, and points it directly at Farley.

His men pull leather and point their guns at Beth.

BETH
Get off my land.

Farley raises his hands and smiles.

FARLEY
This ain't your land no more, Beth,
that's what I been trying to tell
you all along.
(beat)
It's mine.

EXT. ROAD

The marshal gallops his horse up the road.

In the distance he sees the outlaw streaking on foot towards
the farmhouse.

EXT. FIELD - CLOSER

The outlaw bolts across the field, past the pigpen, and
through the garden.

He slows as he approaches the side of the house.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

The cowhands inch forward, closing the circle.

Beth scans the faces of each man, but her gaze is returned by
cold hard eyes.

BETH
Damn you, Mr. Farley.
(beat)
I swear I will not hesitate to
shoot you clean through.

Farley smiles.

FARLEY
A sweet little gal like you?

BETH
Call 'em off, Mr. Farley.
(beat)
Call 'em off!

Farley signals with his hand and his men stop advancing, but they do not lower their guns.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD

The outlaw peeks around the corner, appraises the situation, then ducks back and takes a deep breath.

He holsters his gun, takes three long strides out onto the dirt path, and turns towards the men, raising his hands high, the left hand still holding the jar with the butterfly.

THE OUTLAW

Why don't you point your guns over
here 'stead of at the li'l lady?

This catches Farley and his men by surprise.

Farley lowers his arms and turns towards the newcomer.

FARLEY

Who the hell are you?

The outlaw ignores him and gazes deeply into Beth's eyes.

Beth holds his gaze for a frozen moment, terrified at what might happen next.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Clyde sees Beth is distracted and lurches up the stairs.

She turns, too late, Clyde gets his hands on the shotgun, forcing it upwards as it goes off: BOOM!

The blast tears through the roof of the porch, raining shattered splinters down on them both.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD

The outlaw pulls leather, ducks and fires, plugging Clyde in the stomach.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Clyde flies back and topples over the railing.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD

The cowboys scatter, fire and take cover, as the outlaw fires back.

One cowboy's cheek explodes and he goes down screaming and clutching his face.

Another cowboy takes a bullet in the hand, dropping his gun, as the next bullet bursts through his throat.

The outlaw takes a bullet in the shoulder, spins around from the impact, dropping the jar with the butterfly.

ANGLE - FARLEY

Farley ducks low, bullets whizzing all around.

He sees Beth crouched in the doorjamb and decides quickly not to miss his opportunity.

Farley pulls a derringer from his vest pocket and brings the small gun to bear on Beth...

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

...just as Beth notices and raises the shotgun towards him.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD

Farley FIRES, winging Beth in the arm, as the shotgun unloads with a BOOM, blowing him off his feet.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth falls back and lands halfway through the doorjamb.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD

Farley's eyes roll back into his head as blood burbles up from a cavernous hole in his chest.

The outlaw takes another bullet in his side, falling to the ground in a heap.

ANGLE - FARLEY

Farley GASPS as blood pours out his mouth, then turns his head to the side and dies.

FADE TO BLACK.

COWBOY VOICE #1 (O.S.)
Farley's dead.

COWBOY VOICE #2 (O.S.)
Let's get out of here.

FADE IN:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - AT THE GATE - MOMENTS LATER

The marshal reins up and dismounts at the gate just as two cowhands run towards their horses.

The prone outlaw recovers his senses, rolls onto his stomach, and aims from the ground.

He FIRES twice, KRACK, KRACK, hits both the retreating men.

A bullet hits one cowboy in the back of the head, spraying blood and brains out from his face onto the marshal.

The cowboys sprawl forward into the fence, BANG, BANG, in front of the marshal as he ducks for cover.

The marshal draws his pistol and after a beat peaks through the slats of the fence to scan the scene.

He sees Farley dead in the yard and Beth sprawled through the doorway amongst the ruffles of her dress.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD

The outlaw struggles to stand.

He sees the last cowpuncher running across the field towards the creek.

The outlaw limps to the fence and reaches over to pull a rifle from one of the cowboy's horses.

The marshal sees him but remains hidden behind the fence.

The outlaw limps back into the yard, half-falls to one knee, then raises the rifle.

The marshal gazes at his pistol hand as it shakes violently.

The outlaw squints down the barrel and FIRES, knocking the retreating cowboy to the ground in the distance.

The marshal wills his hand to stop shaking, then looks up and takes a deep breath.

The outlaw uses the rifle as a crutch to stand shakily then releases the rifle to fall into the dust.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - AT A DISTANCE

The outlaw sways on his feet, the lone living man left in the yard.

He draws his pistol, and scans around until his eyes come to rest on the prone Beth in the doorway.

With the outlaw's back to him, the marshal stands, steps through the open gate and raises his gun.

FADE TO BLACK.

The metallic CLICK of the hammer pulling back.

FADE IN:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth lies prone across the threshold.

First one leg shifts, then another, as Beth stirs awake with a GROAN.

She sits up, sees she is wounded, holds her hand to the wound, brings her fingers to her face covered in blood.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD

The marshal enters through the open gate, his gun on the outlaw.

MARSHAL
Flint Tucker!

The outlaw shifts his attention towards the marshal.

THE OUTLAW
(weak)
That's me.

MARSHAL
I'm taking you in.

The outlaw stands bleeding from several wounds, his gun arm limp at his side.

THE OUTLAW
I ain't going.

MARSHAL
I advise you, son, to drop your
weapon.

The outlaw shakes his head.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)
Drop your weapon, right now!

The outlaw holds his gaze for a long beat.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Beth grasps the doorjamb and stands.

Looking out into the yard, she sees the dead bodies, notices Farley, then the marshal pointing his gun at the outlaw.

She steps forward on the porch.

BETH
Marshal-?

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD - CONTINUOUS

The marshal does not take his eyes from the outlaw.

MARSHAL
Stay over there, Beth, this man is
dangerous.

The outlaw waves her back.

THE OUTLAW
He's right. Stay back.

The marshal risks a quick glance over at Beth.

MARSHAL
Beth...your arm.
(to the outlaw)
You bastard!

BETH

He saved me, marshal.

(beat)

I might be dead if it wasn't for
him.

Beth runs suddenly down the steps.

BETH (CONT'D)

You take that gun off him, marshal.

(beat)

You take that gun off him right
now!

The marshal looks at Beth, scans the scene and begins to understand what happened, then returns his eyes to the outlaw.

MARSHAL

Maybe he did but it don't matter.

(beat)

Don't change the fact he's a
criminal.

The outlaw looks at Beth intently.

THE OUTLAW

He's right.

Beth shakes her head.

BETH

I don't care! He can't have you! He
can't take you away from me!

The marshal's expression hardens.

MARSHAL

This man is wanted for murder,
Beth. It is my duty to take him
in, and I shall.

(to the outlaw)

Goddammit, boy, drop your goddamn
weapon!

Beth moves her hard stare from the marshal to the outlaw, her eyes soften, desperate and pleading.

The outlaw flashes a rakish smile at Beth.

Beth recognizes what the outlaw intends to do.

BETH

No...

(soft; under her breath)

Please...

The outlaw gazes back at her with sad eyes.

Beat.

The outlaw raises his gun in a flash, shoots from the hip.

Beth's mouth drops in horror.

KRACK-KRACK.

Two shots fire, and both men go down.

FADE TO BLACK.

Beth SCREAMS bloody murder in the darkness.

FADE IN:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The marshal sprawls against the fence with a bullet in his side, eyes wide in shock and pain.

The outlaw splays crumpled on the ground, blood bubbling from a fresh wound to the heart.

His eyes focus on the jar with the butterfly nearby.

He reaches his hand out, fingers stretching, but cannot reach the jar.

The outlaw breathes his last breath, and dies.

FADE TO BLACK.

The SCREAMS continue.

FADE IN:

EXT/INT. - FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING ROOM

The shotgun lies askew on the wood planks inside the threshold as Beth races towards the outlaw in the yard below.

She falls to the ground at his body, shakes him, drapes herself over him and weeps.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD - AT THE FENCE

Leaned against the fence, the marshal watches Beth grieve over the dead outlaw with incredulity.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD - CONTINUOUS

Beth weeps until she can weep no more, then looks up, sees the outlaw's face, gone stiff and slack.

She glances over at the marshal, whose ragged RASPS shake his body as he leans against the fence.

Beth sees the outlaw's pistol in the dust beside her.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD - AT THE GATE

Beth stalks towards the marshal, slumped and bleeding against the fence, the gun lowered at her side.

She raises the pistol as she approaches.

MARSHAL

Beth... wait...

Beth stands over him, hard eyes glaring behind the metal barrel of the pistol in her hand.

MARSHAL (CONT'D)

Beth... please...

Beth squints down at him.

She pulls the hammer back with a metallic CLICK.

The marshal scrabbles back against the fence in mortal terror.

BETH

You killed him.

Beth steels herself as if to shoot.

Beth and the marshal lock eyes for a long beat.

At the last moment, she releases the hammer, lowers her arm, the gun dropping from her fingers as she walks away.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - YARD

Beth returns to the outlaw, sinks to her knees, and places her head on his chest.

Her gaze sites down his arm to his hand, fingers outstretched towards the jar with the butterfly nearby.

She slowly reaches out and grabs the jar, bringing it to her face, matching the action of the outlaw when he did the same at the creek.

Beth places her hand on the lid, twists, and releases the butterfly into the air.

The butterfly flits past her face, dances over the outlaw's body, and alights into the sky.

Beth watches the butterfly disappear into the distance.

FADE TO BLACK.

A MURMUR of water flowing in the creek.

FADE IN:

EXT. CREEK - THE NEXT DAY

Water SPLASHES down a small plunge in the creek.

A stick swirls in the eddies below.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - AT A DISTANCE

The sound of a SAW cutting wood fills the air.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - GRAVEYARD

A simple wooden coffin slides down a ramp into a freshly dug grave.

The ramp is pulled away gently as the other end of the coffin settles into position.

Beth steps back, gazing down upon the new grave, on the opposite side of her mother's grave from her father.

She fills the grave, pats down the dirt, and hammers an unmarked wooden cross into the ground.

INT. FARMHOUSE - BETH'S ROOM - WARDROBE

A feminine but rugged hand opens the wardrobe, reaches in and grasps the flowers.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - GRAVEYARD - THE OUTLAW'S GRAVE

Beth's hand places the flowers beneath the simple wooden cross, and retracts.

The flowers RUSTLE as a breeze passes over the grave.

FADE TO BLACK.

A rooster CROWS.

FADE IN:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PRE-DAWN TWILIGHT

In the gray light, the farmhouse stands much as it did before, except for the charred remnants from the fire.

ANGLE - ROOSTER

The rooster struts a few steps and CROWS again.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - PORCH

Beth steps onto the porch, taking in the dawn.

INT. BARN

The hands reach for the udder and pull.

The milk PINGS the bottom of the pail.

EXT. BARN

The cow exits the barn, followed by Beth.

The switch SWOOSHES and SNAPS in the air, prodding the cow forward.

BETH
CuBoooooosss! Hup! Hup!

The cowbell CLANGS around the neck of the cow.

EXT. PASTURE

Beth releases the cow into the pasture and closes the gate.

As she turns back, she sees the path leading up to the yard in front of the farmhouse.

She stares at the empty yard where so many died and takes it all in, remembering.

EXT. CREEK

Beth leads the horse with the rig to the creek and fills the buckets.

She stares at the creek for a long moment before turning the horse back towards the house.

EXT. SHEEPHOUSE

Beth guides the sheep from the sheephouse.

EXT. PIGPEN

Beth fills the trough as the swine shove their faces forward, fighting for position.

EXT. CHICKEN COOP

Beth drives the chickens out, feeds and waters them.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM

Beth sweeps the floor and tidies up the room.

She pauses to gaze down at the impeccably made bed, then continues.

EXT. GARDEN

Beth hoes in the garden until she needs a break.

She stands up straight and leans on the hoe, stretching her back with one hand.

Beth shades her eyes, staring out at the horizon, her eyes falling to rest on the creek.

EXT. CREEK

Beth approaches slowly, stares at the water, watching the light reflect upon its surface.

Beat.

Beth slips her dress off one shoulder, then the other, unties the bow at her neck, and slides the dress down over her knees to pool at the ground.

She steps forward, into the mud of the bank, then wades out into the water.

Beth lays back, staring up at the canopy above.

The sun plays through the canopy, rays of light appearing and disappearing behind swaying branches.

The light plays on Beth's face and the water around her.

WATER and FAUNA noises crescendo until-

CUT TO:

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

The unpainted farmhouse is small and modest, battered by wind and weather.

EXT. CREEK

From a distance, part of the tableau, Beth floats in the center of the wide pool.

The creek passes under a fallen tree which serves as a worn footbridge.

Water BURBLES and GURGLES over and around the rocks.

Birds CALL, frogs CROAK, a fish breaches the surface with a SPLASH, snatching an insect.

EXT. VALLEY - DAWN

The small farmhouse rises from the flatland.

The tiny town wavers in the dust.

The large ranch dominates the plain.

EXT. VALLEY

The creek flows amongst the trees and brush.

The line of trees marks a twisted path through the valley.

EXT. HILLS

Craggy mountains break the skyline.

The creek winds through the hills.

Limpid water churns in a lonely creek.

FADE OUT.

THE END.