

BORDER HAWK

Written By

Cary Wayne Moore & Ben Powell

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Brackish Dream Ent.
778 E, California Blvd #2
Pasadena, CA 91106
702-496-4799

FADE IN:

1 EXT. KANSAS TERRITORY FARM HOUSE - NIGHT 1

An endless vista: beautiful flatlands untouched by settlement.

Spangled black skies with the moon low and close.

A corn field, dark green and well maintained.

CRICKETS

The corn RUSTLES lightly.

SUPER: KANSAS TERRITORY, 1856

A lone light burns its way into the countryside, and all falls silent.

A dog BARKS as a torch light barrels in closer.

Five men on horseback intrude upon the once quiet farm house.

CUT TO:

2 INT. HAY BARN - NIGHT 2

THOMAS TOWNES, a very young disheveled man, is passed out in the hay. The SHADOW of a large man falls over him as a HAND clamps down on his mouth. Thomas STARTLES awake to see DAVID, a rugged soft-eyed frontiersman in his 30's.

DAVID

Shhh!

Thomas stares, bug-eyed, but is quick to calm down.

THOMAS

I just needed a roof, sir. I wasn't going to--

DAVID

You've been here for three weeks, boy. It's time you moved on.

THOMAS

If you can give me just the night, I can be outta here first thing.

DAVID
You'll be out of here tonight, one
way or another.

Outside horses TRAMPLE about.

DAVID (CONT'D)
They say you killed that kid in
town!

THOMAS
(shocked)
He was no kid and I never!

DAVID
That's what they're sayin' in town.

THOMAS
I may have worn out his head, but
he was breathing.

DAVID
Ain't gonna make that rope any
loosened around your neck.

BANG! Gunfire erupts!

MOB (O.C.)
We know the boy's here! Come on
out.

He goes to the doorway and looks out. Thomas joins him.

THOMAS
I didn't mean to bring no trouble
on you. I'm sorry.

DAVID
Even so, you best get to it, I'll
buy you some time.

THOMAS
This is my trouble, sir--

Woman SCREAMS and David rushes out.

At the helm of the mob sits DONAGE, 30's with a scar across
his jaw.

DAVID
Gentlemen, gentlemen... What is all
this?

DONAGE
Official business is what. We
understand that you're entertaining
a fugitive.

DAVID
I know nothing about no fugitive.

DONAGE
Where is the boy?

DAVID
I have only daughters.

DONAGE
Do you test me?

DAVID
I'm not--

DONAGE
Where is the boy?

DAVID
He ran. He heard you was coming,
and he ran. Please...

Donage motions and CLEM, a 10yr old kid with a sly air about
him, rushes forward with a torch.

DONAGE
What example are you asking me to
leave? Do you expect me to consider
this the truth?

Donage quick draws on David.

CUT TO:

4 INT. HAY BARN - SAME

4

Thomas' (POV) of Clem rushing forward with the torch. Embers
EXPLODE through the slats, as gunfire rings out.

BANG!!!

FADE TO:

TITLE SEQUENCE

"BORDER HAWK"

5 EXT. TOWNES HOMESTEAD - DAY 5

Edge of the American frontier. ESTABLISH: A quaint little farmstead PUFFING smoke. Leaves of fall litter the landscape.

A wagon is parked IN front of the house. MACLAREN, A grim-faced farmer in his 40's, sits on the box chewing a stalk of grass.

SUPER: ILLINOIS, SUMMER OF 1854

6 INT. TOWNES HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS 6

In the pallor a WHEY-FACED GOVERNMENT MAN stands before MAMA TOWNES, a HAGGARD, and WORN frontier woman, nervously kneading his hat in his HANDS.

Whey-Face LICKS his LIPS, a DRY rasp.

Mama rocks her ROCKING CHAIR slow, steady, and RHYTHMICAL.

WHEY FACE

You have to look at this as good news, ma'am, a contingency for your boy.

She stops rocking.

STARES

MAMA

Contingency? You, trying to put my family back to slavery?

WHEY FACE

He's bonded ma'am. He goes to live in a good home.

MAMA

Says you. He'll be workin' another man's farm and at the end of a sharp leash with no uncertainty.

WHEY FACE

His education is guaranteed ma'am,
four months a year in school, food
and shelter. More so, on his
eighteenth--

Thomas BURSTS through the back door holding a hunting KNIFE.

THOMAS

Mama?

MAMA

I got this little man.

Mama CRUNCHES back into motion.

WHEY FACE

Your husband is dead, ma'am. Your
oldest sons have moved away. You
don't have the means--

CLICK! CLICK!

REVEAL: Whey Face has been at the end of a double barrel
shotgun this whole time.

WHEY FACE (CONT'D)

The law is the law. There's no
reason to upset the boy or bring
more trouble into this home.

FADE TO:

7 EXT. NORTH ELBA SETTLEMENT - DAY

7

ESTABLISH: An all-black settlement in upstate New York.

A BOY runs down the middle of the snow powdered street.

BOY

Mister John Brown, sir! Mister John
Brown!!!

People appear in their doorways and windows to see what's
what.

8 EXT. JOHN BROWN'S FARMHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

8

The boy runs up and BANGS on the front door.

BOY
Mister John, sir!!! Are you there,
sir?

He rushes inside.

SUPER: NORTH ELBA, NEW YORK.

Moments later, the door flies open. JOHN BROWN, a tall, blade-faced man in his late 50's with wild black hair jutting out of the top of his head, rushes out pulling on his dark jacket

John Brown marches down the street, ax handle in hand, and the boy in tow.

Townspeople fall in behind John Brown. Free Black men, carrying pitchforks, ax handles, and hammers.

9 EXT. ELBA - TOWN LIMIT - CONTINUOUS

9

A trio of BOUNTY HUNTERS pulls up short when they see John Brown and his posse marching out to meet them.

BOUNTY HUNTER
Shit.

He digs into his jacket and pulls out an official document.

BOUNTY HUNTER (CONT'D)
We're here under the authority of
the fugitive slave act of 1850
searching for Tobias Williams,
Edward Williams, Mary Smith and
Dangerfield Newbie escaped from
Missouri in March of 1852.

John Brown stops in the middle of the road.

BOUNTY HUNTER (CONT'D)
We're with-in our rights to find
and return these fugitives; and
anybody standing in the way, are
subject to fine.

BEAT

BOUNTY HUNTER (CONT'D)
You must be Mr. Brown.

JOHN BROWN
Fine or not, you'll leave here
empty handed.

DISSOLVE TO:

10 INT. SCHOOL HOUSE - DAY

10

A blank sheet of PAPER.

THOMAS (O.C.)
My Dad and his like didn't put up
"No Trespassing" signs. In winter,
they smoked pipes by hickory fires;

A busted LIP.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
In summer, they rested in the shade
of large trees.

Thomas stands in front of the class with scabbed lips and
bruised EAR.

SUPER: ILLINOIS, WINTER OF 1855

THOMAS
Come autumn they slept by cracklin'
campfires and hunted bear, elk and
deer as they wanted. Pa's gone, and
his kind will never walk on this
earth again. One can only hope
their lives will be the thing of
poetry and legend written now and
in the future.

The kids listen with rapt attention.

Applause at the end of the story. TEACHER beams at Thomas.

TEACHER
Thomas, that was beautiful. Just
wondrous. Who'd like to go next?

Kids sit on their hands.

TEACHER (CONT'D)
Nobody? That's fine. I think we're
done for the day.

She rings her bell, and the kids begin to bundle up and head
for the door. Thomas starts after them.

TEACHER (CONT'D)
A moment if you would, Thomas?

He stops and trundles over to her desk.

TEACHER (CONT'D)
Have you given any thought to the future?

THOMAS
Not much past spring plantin',
ma'am, I mostly just work.

TEACHER
Can I see your paper?

He hands it over.

TEACHER (CONT'D)
You're a bright kid. I would like to see you apply yourself to learn the art of pen.

THOMAS
Yes, ma'am but it has been made clear to me that writing and rather any kind of schoolin' is for the privileged.

TEACHER
Is that the story behind the busted lip, Thomas?

He eyeballs the kids building a snowman through the window.

THOMAS
Just part of life Ma'am. Not much time for being a kid.

Beat.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Do you reckon this was the last big storm of the season?

TEACHER
Quite possibly, Thomas, that'll be all.

Thomas grabs his books and slate and rushes outside with the others.

DISSOLVE TO:

11 EXT. KANSAS CITY - OUTSKIRTS - DAY 11

As winter gives way to a warmer wind, snow and ice blow off the plain and into the face of an elderly Indian woman carrying DRIED CORN in a bushel basket. Her FACE is careworn and seamed. Prairie dust darkens the WRINKLES in her face.

12 EXT. KANSAS CITY - STREET - CONTINUOUS 12

The ice MELTS and falls from eaves as the Indian CORN WOMAN, 60's and stoic in her defeat, posts up across from the General Store in this shiny new town lining the banks of The Missouri River.

She hustles her wares at a work-site for a new building.

SUPER: MISSOURI, MARCH 1855

At her feet is a group of PRAIRIE CROCUS, the first group of plants to flower each year.

DISSOLVE TO:

13 EXT. SCHOOL HOUSE - DAY 13

As the doors fly open, Thomas is the first kid out to play in the spring-fresh schoolyard. He skids to a stop. Playtime ends instantly. MacLaren is waiting in the box of his ramshackled old cart.

MACLAREN

Boy.

Thomas hangs his head and walks toward the wagon.

MACLAREN (CONT'D)

You can leave the books. You've had just about enough learnin' on the year.

THOMAS

But there's still three more weeks--

The old man grabs the boy by his lapel and lashes out using the closest object.

MACLAREN

I'll take no lip from you, boy!

Thomas leaves his books where they lay.

FADE TO:

14 INT. MACLAREN FARM HOUSE - EVENING

14

Spring dances on the evening breeze as MacLaren and his WIFE and DAUGHTERS sit around the table with their hands linked in prayer. Townes SQUIRMS in the corner on a little bench with a plate of his own.

Finally, the MacLarens set to work on their meal.

THOMAS

Sir...?

No response.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Sir...?

(BEAT)

I was thinking... Seeing as I'm out of school now and have more time for my chores, if maybe I could go and visit my mother for the weekend. I've got a half dollar saved from--

MACLAREN

South field needs plowing, maybe that gets done, and we'll see.

THOMAS

That's three days work, easy. Can't I start on Monday? In my Mama's last letter she mentioned her being sick and--

MacLaren wipes the grease from his mouth.

MACLAREN

What did I say?

THOMAS

Sorry.

BANG! The big farmer's hands slap down on the table.

MACLAREN

I most definitely did NOT say sorry.

THOMAS

You said... You said that if the
work got did in the South field;
we'd see about the weekend, sir.

MacLaren slowly lowers himself into his seat.

MACLAREN

That's correct, boy.

MacLaren goes back to his food.

Thomas CLEARS his throat.

Wife says a little prayer under her breath.

THOMAS

What time you reckon we'll get
started?

LONG BEAT

MACLAREN

You can start whenever you choose,
boy. I'm taking the girls to town
for the cotillion.

MacLaren sucks his chicken bones.

MACLAREN (CONT'D)

Find us a good suitor.

FADE TO:

15 INT. MACLAREN BARN - DAWN

15

A ROOSTER sleeps.

Movement. Thomas slips through the shadows.

The rooster stirs.

THOMAS

Quiet now, you old bastard. I got
work to do and I ain't about to be
bothered messing with you and your
noisy roost.

Thomas takes a hammer down off the wall and a couple of
stakes.

16 EXT. SOUTH FIELD - MORNING

16

The sun is just starting to illuminate the horizon as Thomas walks out to the edge of the HUGE field.

He's carrying a big bundle of gear that he dumps.

Thomas pounds stakes into the ground at the edge of the field. One... Two... Three...

Thomas pulls all three horses out of their stalls and ties them to the stakes.

The rooster CROWS at a big ORANGE sun.

DISSOLVE TO:

17 EXT. SOUTH FIELD - DAY

17

The sun, YELLOW and high.

Thomas jogs the horse next to a plow that's bigger than him. He slaps the horse's rear.

THOMAS
Come on you old devil.

The horse sweats and shakes.

Thomas unhooks the one horse and jogs it back to get a second one. He throws a look back at the horse as he walks away.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Rest up girl. You and I ain't done
by a long shot.

Thomas drags the second horse out into the field.

SHOTS: The sun gets higher and brighter.

Thomas strips to the waist, wide WELTS from a recent belt lashing glisten in the sun as he pushes the horse harder.

He jogs another exhausted horse back and pulls the third one.

Thomas never stops. He fights through it all to plow the FIELD.

FADE TO:

18 EXT. SOUTH FIELD - EVENING 18

Late afternoon. Thomas stands before a finished FIELD. He looks at the first horse, rubbing her nose.

THOMAS
You got one more ride left in you?

19 EXT. MACLAREN FARM HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 19

Thomas rides away from the farm house.

FADE TO:

20 EXT. TOWNES HOMESTEAD - NIGHT 20

Thomas climbs the steps to his mother's house and pushes the door open.

21 INT. TOWNES HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS 21

Thomas walks inside.

Dust clings to the surfaces and a crypt-like SILENCE hangs in the air.

THOMAS
Mama...?

Silence.

A wracking COUGH fills the void, and there she is in the doorway, leaned against the frame, diminished and weak.

22 INT. TOWNES HOMESTEAD - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS 22

Mama stands, watching Thomas wolf down a plate of pie. She's still red-eyed from crying.

MAMA
Oh baby, I never should have sent
you away.

THOMAS
You didn't have no choice, mama.

MAMA
The law's not all there is, Thomas.
There's right n' there's wrong.

He looks up at her as a bout of sadness washes over her face.

THOMAS

What, mama?

MAMA

Those government men are going to come looking, Thomas. They're going to take you back to that man or another'n. That's the law, and I ain't got the strength to stop 'em.

THOMAS

They won't catch me, Mama.

Mama reaches into her apron and pulls out a little bag of money.

MAMA

I put this up for you son. It's not much, but you take it, and you go. Find a life for yourself.

She slides the money across the table to him.

MAMA (CONT'D)

There are places the law don't reach--

She COUGHS.

THOMAS

I was brought up a frontier man, might as well die one. Of course, I reckon it seems, I could make my way back around once I hit of age.

DISSOLVE TO:

23

EXT. KANSAS CITY - OUTSKIRTS - DAY

23

A posse of BORDER RUFFIANS has set up a checkpoint on a road leading into town. Donage sits out front in a filthy duster.

His minions sit just behind him, cutting up. "Bloody Bill" ANDERSON, Thomas' age and crazy-eyed.

ANDERSON

We get back to town. I'm gonna
spend every penny and wooden nickel
I took off you in last night's game
and--

ROBERTS

Aw just shut yer damned--

A short WAGON TRAIN rolls towards them.

DONAGE

Hustle up, boys. We got some
movement.

They spur their horses forward.

DONAGE (CONT'D)

Howdy.

Donage grins. Bad teeth.

DONAGE (CONT'D)

Where you folks headed?

The lead wagon is piloted by JOHN JUNIOR, mid-30's with his
father's wild hair and a crazed look deep in his eyes, and
OWEN, a large man in his 30's with a gimp arm.

OWEN

To the nearest washbasin!

JUNIOR

Enough.

ANDERSON

Hey now, that's no way to speak to--

JUNIOR

He's my brother.

ANDERSON

That a fact?

Junior SPITS

Anderson circles the wagon.

JUNIOR

You're blocking the road.

ANDERSON

You aim to move us?

JUNIOR

I aim to do what I have to.

DONAGE

Easy now, stranger! Easy! No reason to get yourself into a sweat. All you'll do is scare the animals and make my friends uneasy. It ain't like you think.

OWEN

It ain't?

JUNIOR

Shut up, Owen.

DONAGE

We're civic-minded men, is all. Governmentally slanted if you gather my gist.

Two more BROWN BROTHERS sidle up alongside the wagons.

OWEN

I think we do.

DONAGE

These roads ain't safe.

JUNIOR

So we've heard.

ANDERSON

There's all manner of folks about.

DONAGE

Troublemakers.

ANDERSON

That's right. Troublemakers.

DONAGE

There's some small struggles with the territory at the moment. Lots of outsiders coming in. Lots of Yankees and instigators trying to disrupt and--

ANDERSON

--That's right, "*disrupt*"--

DONAGE

Anderson! Back the hell up... They want to weigh in on certain political discussions that we're trying to get sorted out here on the eve of statehood.

The Brown brothers share looks.

DONAGE (CONT'D)

You're not troublemakers are you?

Junior's eyes flash.

DONAGE (CONT'D)

Because I can tell by your manner of speaking that you're Easterners. Outsiders, perhaps? Adventurers? Is that how you fancy yourselves?

JUNIOR

We fancy ourselves Americans.

ANDERSON

Ain't we all then? The question at hand is; which side you on?

OWEN

The side of Freedom.

ANDERSON

Who's freedom? The freedom of some damned nigger loving outsiders to tell us our business or the freedom of an honest man to make a living off of his own land as he sees fucking fit.

Junior reaches between his feet and pulls out a gun.

JUNIOR

We're not looking for trouble!

(beat)

Just a bed.

Donage looks down the barrel of the gun.

He lifts a hand. Anderson comes up with a rifle. Behind them, the dozen or so Border Ruffians draw down as well.

Donage slow grins.

DONAGE

Your brother can wash his ass with
the free niggers back in New York
or Boston because not a one of you
sonsa bitches is stepping another
foot down my road.

Owen closes his eyes.

Junior does not move. He has his weapon trained on Donage
even as he stares down the barrels of the ruffian's pistols.

OWEN

Johnny... We don't have to do this.
Not here. Not now.

JUNIOR

I'm not stopping.

DONAGE

That we can agree on. You're gonna
turn them wagons around and go.

OWEN

Johnny, they got all the guns in
the world. Look at 'em.

A long beat. Junior's eyes are crazy. Sweat beads on his
brow.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Please, Johnny. The Old Man needs
us alive.

Junior slowly lowers his gun.

DONAGE

Good boy.

The Brothers turn the train around.

DONAGE (CONT'D)

You come back and try me again
sometime.

As they ride off.

DONAGE (CONT'D)

(to Anderson)

Did you see the brand on that
horse?

ANDERSON

No.

DONAGE
I'll be back in a day or two.

SUPER: KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI, 1855

FADE TO:

24 EXT. GLASGOW, MISSOURI FERRY LANDING - THE NEXT MORNING 24

Establish: A quaint little river crossing on the side of the road. A few slave men unload a wagon before it drives away, leaving them behind to care for the cargo. They wait outside the hut separate from the white passengers.

Thomas is asleep under the hut.

A ferry horn BLOWS!

He jumps to and hurries to the river edge.

Thomas scrubs his face and hands and tries desperately to comb down his boyish cowlick.

FERRYMAN (O.C.)
You coming, boy?

Thomas hurries toward the boat, getting in line along with the other passengers.

25 EXT. POLAR STAR FERRY - GANGWAY - CONTINUOUS 25

The Passengers each pay the Ferryman as they climb aboard the barge. Thomas digs in his pocket.

He pulls out the little roll of cash.

ACROSS THE BOAT: A familiar looking 10yr old boy watches Thomas carefully.

THOMAS
How much?

FERRYMAN
You traveling alone?

THOMAS
I am.

Ferryman ruffles his "carefully" coiffured hair.

FERRYMAN
Children ride my ferry for free.

THOMAS

I'm a man now, and I reckon I ought to pay like one.

FERRYMAN

You'll have plenty of chances to pay, I'm sure, but not on my boat. Get along and find a good spot.

Thomas accepts the charity and crosses the plank.

26

EXT. POLAR STAR FERRY - DECK - CONTINUOUS

26

Thomas finds a place to sit.

Nearby sits a REVEREND, thick-skinned with brutal scars on his neck and face, brawler's scarred hands wrapped around a bible in his lap. He talks to a GERMAN MAN with wild hair and fiery eyes.

GERMAN MAN

I would not have forgiveness in me, father, not after...

(indicates scars)

They barely left you a cheek to turn.

REVEREND

The good word don't spread easy on the frontier. The calling is not for men of weak constitution but you, sir, strike me as a man with plenty.

Clem, the kid from the beginning, appears at Thomas' side. Attractive, he has an Artful Dodger kind of feel under his HAT of road dust and mud.

CLEM

(whispering RE: Reverend)

I heard he got what he had comin'.

Clem slides away through the crowded ferry. Thomas follows. As does an old STRAY MUTT, hoping for a snack.

THOMAS

He's just a preacher. What could he have done?

CLEM

Tarred and feathered a year back, tied to a raft and stoned as he floated down the river.

THOMAS
(shocked)
Lord sakes, why?

CLEM
On account he was trying to get em'
all freed up, I guess.

THOMAS
Who?

CLEM
Niggers! Are you thick?

Clem, gives the dog a good pat on the head and then picks him up and hands him to Thomas.

CLEM (CONT'D)
Ha! He likes you.

He quickly grabs the dog back and throws him overboard

THOMAS
Are you thick?!

The ferry horn BLOWS.

CLEM
Nope.

Clem jumps over the edge.

Thomas watches as Clem and the dog swim ashore together and flop down.

Another horn blows in the distance, and Thomas catches his first glimpse of the new City Of Kansas.

27 EXT. KANSAS CITY FERRY LANDING - MOMENTS LATER

27

Anderson is at the bottom of the landing a lone silhouette against the riverbank watching boats as they arrive. He stands, like a guard waiting to stop interlopers from entering the territory.

The small vessel passes him before it bumps in amongst several large double smoke-stack ferry's that line the Missouri River.

As passengers file on and off, Thomas catches the young man's antagonizing look and drops his eyes to the floorboards.

FERRYMAN
Safe travels, young man.

He tips his hat, Thomas forces a smile back and walks off down the ramp.

ANDERSON
Hey there!
(pursuing)
Hey, stranger!

Thomas stops.

ANDERSON (CONT'D)
You here alone?

THOMAS
What business is it of yours?

ANDERSON
Whoa, there! Take it easy, I'm just here as a friend. I was passing by is all. Seen you. Thought I'd say hi.

THOMAS
So you did.

ANDERSON
I guess so.

Thomas walks.

ANDERSON (CONT'D)
You passing through or here to settle?

THOMAS
Not rightly sure.

Thomas starts to walk again. Anderson grabs him by his shoulder.

ANDERSON
Hold up now.

Thomas gives him a look.

ANDERSON (CONT'D)
Look at you! Donage'd like you. I got one more question.
(pause for effect)
Which side are you on?

Thomas get his bearings.

THOMAS

The western embankment or left side?

ANDERSON

I can see you don't know what I'm talking about. Please, grant me the chance to explain. Every Missourian has a stake in what's happening here.

Thomas looks with trepidation.

ANDERSON (CONT'D)

We've got a choice to make here in these new lands with regard to...

(pause loses the flow)

Which is to say, we ain't about to be controlled by these Republican know-nothings in Congress, these outsiders... These...

(Another confused pause)

They done forgot how the world works and are trying to strangulate our freedom, our trade, and the very culture that this great nation was built upon.

THOMAS

How?

With a triumphant FINGER, Anderson rattles on.

ANDERSON

How indeed! These so-called Free Staters have drafted an illegal and non-democratical constitution for this state and without the people. We haven't even had a chance to vote.

THOMAS

Vote on what?

ANDERSON

Our well-being. What do you think I'm talking about?!?

THOMAS

Slavery, I think. And you're for it best I can tell.

ANDERSON

Yes, I am.

THOMAS

Where are your slaves?

ANDERSON

I'm a horse trader myself, never
had no use for one, but it don't
change nothing. So, which side are
you on?

Thomas looks Anderson in the face for a long moment. He looks
past Anderson at the gathering group of people including a
wet-haired Clem.

THOMAS

It's a tough question. I reckon a
man ought to think and pray on such
a choice, to take his time and make
a reasoned and thoughtful decision.

ANDERSON

Of course, friend, just--

THOMAS

I know a thing or two about
servitude, and I wouldn't wish it
on any man no matter his color. So
I guess I'll change my answer...

(beat)

I'm on the right side.

Clem dangles Thomas' money bag.

Thomas checks his empty pocket.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Hey!

Thomas shrugs Anderson's hand off and makes for Clem.
Anderson grabs him, more roughly and pulls him back.

ANDERSON

Hold on now.

Thomas turns and cracks Anderson across the jaw knocking the
young man to the ground. As Anderson goes for his gun, Thomas
runs for it.

Anderson jumps to his feet and takes chase followed by Clem.

Thomas cuts between two buildings running behind the General Store.

28 EXT. KANSAS CITY - BACKSTREET - DAY 28

Thomas runs behind a few buildings lining the main street before cutting back towards the river, in an attempt to lose the boys.

Anderson and Clem come to a halt with no Thomas in sight.

ANDERSON
He must have made back.

The two hurry back up the alley.

29 EXT. KANSAS CITY - STREET - CONTINUOUS 29

Thomas skids to a stop in front of two horses pulling a wagon. Riding in the wagon is MISS FANNY, 40's and proper, next to her is SERVANT, driving.

MISS FANNY
Hop in.

Thomas jumps in the back of the wagon and covers up with a blanket.

As they pull away, Anderson pops out.

ANDERSON
IT'S A SMALL TOWN!

The smaller Clem slinks up next to him.

ANDERSON (CONT'D)
What did you get off him?

CLEM
Seven dollars.

ANDERSON
With that, I can buy one more horse.

He takes the pouch from Clem.

CLEM
What about my cut? I stole it!

ANDERSON

Would you rather have a cut of the
seven or a cut of the resale?

Clem stands there.

ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Come on.

The two boys fade into the street.

FADE TO:

30

INT. MISS FANNY'S DINING ROOM - EVENING

30

A handsome well-kept house chalked full of culture, past and present. The fireplace has Italian tiles adorning Greek imagery and jeweled stained glass windows on either side that pre-date the time.

Amidst all the woodwork and golden tones sits Thomas, eating voraciously from a bowl of porridge. He's in a long, ill-fitting nightshirt.

THOMAS

...So I told my mother I wasn't no
horse thief, and if walking meant
they catch me then I'd be caught,
but here I sit.

He holds the spoon up in a salute.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

And thank you, kindly for that.

MISS FANNY

You're a good boy, Thomas.

THOMAS

I did what any good MAN would do.
Say, though, I do have to wonder
why you would help out a dirty old
stranger?

Servant comes in with Thomas' clothes cleaned and folded.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

(to Servant)

Thank you so much.

MISS FANNY

I've seen those two ruffians harassing plenty of new folks as they arrive in town. Most of the time it goes the same as it did for you. But when I saw you stand up to them the way you did, I thought to myself. Now, there goes a MAN a little down on his luck and who could use a shower and a full belly.

(to servant)

Please show Mr... I'm sorry?

THOMAS

Townes.

MISS FANNY

Mr. Townes to the upstairs guest room. You can change in there and settle in for a good nights sleep as well. I leave for St. Louis in the morning but take your time getting up. Luteous will see to your breakfast and set you on your way.

THOMAS

I've imposed enough ma'am. I'll change and then be on my way.

As Miss Fanny exits the room.

MISS FANNY

Suit yourself but my door is open.

FADE TO:

31 INT. MISS FANNY'S FOYER - MOMENTS LATER

31

Thomas, now dressed and drinking a cup of tea, walks the hall admiring the paintings and other collectibles.

The Servant stands patiently at the front door.

THOMAS

Why does she have all this stuff?
Seems like a lifetime of work.

SERVANT

Sir?

THOMAS

All the paintings? Why?

SERVANT

It be her passion, Mr. Townes.
Collectin' and tradin' things of
beauty. That why she off to St.
Louis, Sir.

THOMAS

And she makes a living doing these
things?

SERVANT

Yessir. I reckon that she does.

THOMAS

Beats all I ever heard.

SERVANT

Yessir!

Thomas stares at a large painting and SLURPS down the remains
of his tea.

THOMAS

I guess beauty is in the eye of the
beholder.

DISSOLVE TO:

32

INT. GERRITT SMITH'S STUDY - MORNING

32

GERRITT SMITH, a presidential candidate, sits behind a large
canvas. He wipes a bead of sweat from his nose leaving behind
a smudge of paint.

The glistening paint on the unfinished canvas has large
ancient symbols being painted over with a simple fruit
basket.

THUD! THUD! THUD!

SMITH

Enter!

Several political figures enter being trailed by John Brown.

SMITH (CONT'D)

Gentlemen. You will have to excuse
me as I finish my palate. I must
inform you I am able to hold my
focus and converse by and by.

SUMNER, an older, serious man in a somber suit, and a Massachusetts politician steps forward. Smith refocuses on his canvas.

SUMNER

Then we might as well get to it.
Mr. Brown and I, while seated in
the foyer, discussed his intent.

SMITH

And?

SUMNER

It seems, to me, that you have
agreed to aid him in his endeavors
into the new territory and beyond!

JOHN BROWN

The Free-Staters of the frontier,
my sons, need guns! No amount of--

SUMNER

--The people of the Platte need
laws, the protection of our
government...

JOHN BROWN

Bah! Speeches! Speeches and more
speeches. Nothing gets done.
There's a war coming and the good
people in the City of Kansas, and
it's territory are bleeding to
death as we speak.

SUMNER

It can still be stopped. There's a
political solution... A compromise!
We don't need to shed more blood!

Brown looks wild-eyed.

SUMNER (CONT'D)

He doesn't want it stopped,
Gerritt. Look at him. The man wants
war.

JOHN BROWN

What I want is the crime of slavery
ended. Forever. Nothing less. Not
one more compromise, not one more
minute of waiting.

SMITH

John, we've been friends a long time... and I want as much as you for this great country to be steered in the proper direction. I've read the Governor's speech, and there is a promise.

JOHN BROWN

No different a promise than the last four years. Gather your committees, your wealthy friends, your big-talking Yankee aristocrats and get me the money I need. I'm going to Kansas.

SMITH

John...

SUMNER

We're on your side, Mister Brown. All of us want the same thing but... I'm delivering this speech to Congress next week on the subject, a real firecracker, I've no doubt that politics can turn the tide of this thing. I spoke of it with Mister Douglass and he--

JOHN BROWN

--Near two thousand years ago, Christ himself spoke pretty sweetly too, but here we are. Make your speech mister Sumner, and may it move mountains.

He stands, leveling a finger at Smith.

JOHN BROWN (CONT'D)

In the meantime, guns for Kansas.

SMITH

(over his shoulder)

This will be our last face to face, John!

As he exits, a shadow-cloaked man stands in a corner. He pulls a nearby curtain, blinding John Brown with sunlight.

FADE TO:

33 EXT. KANSAS CITY - STREET - DAY

33

As the elderly Corn Woman stands beneath the mid-day sun peddling her wares. The rhythmic POUNDING of a hammer from across the street sets the pace for the busy street.

Thomas steps out of the general store.

THOMAS
(to the store owner)
I tell you, sir. I am a damn fine
worker, better than most.

The door shuts in his face.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Kansas City, a town built on
hope... ha.

He notices the Corn Woman.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
That's what they have you reduced
to heh?

No response.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
I don't suppose there is any use
for a hard working, no nonsense, do
what it takes sort in your line of
work?

A man yells in pain as the hammering stops.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
I didn't think so.

He makes an Indian gesture for GOOD and ACROSS intriguing the Corn Woman as he crosses the street.

34 EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - CONTINUOUS

34

Thomas stands at the bottom of a partially built house.

THOMAS
Hey!

No response. The HAMMERING continues uninterrupted.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
I SAID HEY!!! HELLO!

The hammering ceases and David, the kind man from the opening scene, looks down off the edge of the roof.

DAVID
What do you want?

THOMAS
That's a mess of work you've got
for yourself up there.

DAVID
Yup.

He pulls back, his face disappearing over the roof line.

THOMAS
Hold on! You reckon you could use
some help?

DAVID
Nope.

THOMAS
I'm cheap. 30 cents a day, sun up
to sun down, heck, I'll--

David peers out again.

DAVID
You're a kid. You'll fall and kill
yourself.

He disappears over the edge of the roof again.

THOMAS
Wait just one minute now.

The HAMMERING starts back up. Thomas begins to climb the ladder when his attention is pulled across the street.

Clem is harassing the Corn Woman.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
You! What the hell do you think
you're doing?

Thomas charges across the street.

CLEM
Buying some corn from this here
savage.

THOMAS

With my money, and I seen what you done. You're taking a dollar in change for putting in a nickel and stealing the corn to boot. She can't make no sense out of money, and you know it.

CLEM

Ain't your money, ain't my problem.

THOMAS

It's 'bout to be, you little shit!

Clem charges. Thomas sidesteps and Clem takes to the ground.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

You pay what's owed!

He grabs Clem by the collar dragging him toward the Corn Woman.

CLICK! The unmistakable sound of a gun-hammer cocking back.

Thomas freezes. He looks over at Anderson with a pistol in one hand and three horse leads in the other.

Clem, grinning, pulls one more ear out of the basket and backs away.

Thomas flops down on the ground next to the Corn Woman.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Treasonable.

FADE TO:

35

INT. JOHN BROWN'S FARMHOUSE - EVENING

35

John Brown sits at the head of a long table with his WIFE and several of their daughters. BLACK MEN and WOMEN also sit at the table with him. Everybody talks and shares like equals.

JOHN BROWN

Let us pray. Lord, thank you for the bounty for which we, as free men and women alike, are about to acquire. We know it is through your grace and love that you have provided such a feast. And I ask of you to keep in mind my sons who forge a new way of thinking into this great country.

(MORE)

JOHN BROWN (CONT'D)
 I pray you will provide for them
 there as you have for us here--

WHISH! THUMP!

As an arrow cuts its way through an open window, with a message loosely dangling.

JOHN BROWN (CONT'D)
 Even if this means, Lord, we must
 sacrifice our current spread. In
 your name, Amen. Excuse me,
 friends.

Brown stands and removes the message. Studies it for a second then moves for the door.

JOHN BROWN (CONT'D)
 I must be on my way. Please enjoy
 and forgive me for my immediate
 departure.

He throws a coat on and snatches up the rifle propped up next to the door.

FADE TO:

36

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

36

A small clearing. A gnarled old tree stands in the middle. The tree is alive, but sickly with a rope scar adorning a low lying branch.

As Brown stands searching the darkness a cloaked figure appears from nowhere.

MESSENGER
 G.S. sends his regard.

JOHN BROWN
 Good Shepard! Warn a fella, next
 time! And who might you be?

MESSENGER
 Unimportant.

JOHN BROWN
 And G.S.? Garrett?

MESSENGER
 He would prefer G.S. from this
 point forward.

JOHN BROWN
I understand. And what of our
business then?

The messenger hands him an envelope.

JOHN BROWN (CONT'D)
Excellent. I've been expecting
this.

Brown gauges the weight.

JOHN BROWN (CONT'D)
Light... I'm hoping for enough to
arm a battalion of free men. He
remembers our agreed sum?

He tears the letter open. A sheaf of bills falls out.

Brown leafs through it.

JOHN BROWN (CONT'D)
Sixty dollars.
(slow breath)
Sixty dollars. It's an insult. An
insult to me and an insult to the
lives of my sons, doing God's work
so many miles away.

MESSENGER
This is to provide a start to your
Exodus. G.S does recall your agreed
upon sum and would like to oblige,
but he is at this moment committed
to the political option. There is
no doubt you will find sympathetic
ears along your journey. For now,
pray for Sumner's success in
delivering his oratory six days
hence.

Brown fans the money out.

JOHN BROWN
I'll be lucky to find five rifles
with these funds. Maybe you could
ask him for just a tad more...

Brown is alone.

FADE TO:

37 EXT. KANSAS CITY - STREET - DAY

37

Thomas sits with Corn Woman on the side of the street. She pours out her money cup and starts dividing the coins into two piles.

She pushes one over to Thomas.

THOMAS
(signs: you/money)
What? No no! That's your money.

He pushes the stack of coins back. Corn Woman shrugs and collects the coins up. She stands to carry that basket of corn.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
(signs: where/you/walk)
Wait! Where are you going?

Corn Woman signs to him.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Rain? There's no way, not a cloud
in the sky.

CORN WOMAN
Rain.

THOMAS
When?

She signs.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Two days. Perfect.

He gives a little half bow. Corn Woman pulls out a couple of ears of corn and hands them over.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
I owe you.

Thomas grips his corn as he trundles back across the street to the construction site.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
HEY! HEY, YOU!!!

The hammering stops, David peers down off the roof at him.

DAVID
I thought I told you--

THOMAS

Last chance. You hire me today for fifty cents because tomorrow it goes up to seventy-five.

DAVID

Not hiring you at that price sounds like an even better deal!

THOMAS

You'll be sorry.

He disappears, and the hammering starts back up.

FADE TO:

38

EXT. KANSAS TERRITORY - DAY

38

A quiet cabin, overlooking the banks of the Pottatowami Creek.

Anderson, tired and hungry leads three horses up to a small wooden Cable Ferry, dismounts his horse and pulls the restless creatures aboard.

Across the way, a man yells out as he makes his way to the crossing.

SUPER: 50 MILES, SOUTH WEST OF KANSAS CITY

HORSE BUYER

Kinda late on your round, ain'tcha boy?!

As Anderson launches the ferry, the current PULLS against the ferry ropes.

ANDERSON

Yessir! I had a hard time getting out of the city yesterday. I got a few ripe, fine fillies I know you're gonna like.

HORSE BUYER

I see that. I thought we had agreed upon two horses?

ANDERSON

I had a last minute deal come through.

HORSE BUYER

You don't say? How is your Mom doing?

ANDERSON

I can't say. Headed there next.

HORSE BUYER

That's a hell of a bit of business. And hardly a cloud in the sky when it struck?

ANDERSON

Yes, sir.

HORSE BUYER

Lord have mercy on her.

ANDERSON

Thank you. About the horses?

HORSE BUYER

How 'bout sixty for the lot?

ANDERSON

Is that all you can afford?

HORSE BUYER

It is, son. I'm sorry. Come on up if we got a deal.

Anderson hands him two of the leads as they walk up.

HORSE BUYER (CONT'D)

Thataboy. We'll get you out of here in a hurry. You still got what, a half days ride?

ANDERSON

Yessir...

HORSE BUYER

I am right sorry, son. She is a good Christian woman...

FADE TO:

Anderson stands in a small room where his MOTHER lays, discolored and glistening.

She MOANS.

ANDERSON
How much do we have now?

Anderson's FATHER sits in the other room.

FATHER (O.C.)
We are Ten dollars shy, but I don't
think she would make the trip
William.

ANDERSON
We can't give up!

FATHER (O.C.)
No, but we can be sensible.

ANDERSON
Any word on Jim?

FATHER (O.C.)
None.

Staring at his mother.

ANDERSON
I can get the money and a doctor to
come this way.

He pulls the sheet off her feet to reveal two burnt and crisp
nubs that were her feet.

He looks up to find her awake.

ANDERSON (CONT'D)
I'll leave at first light.

FADE TO:

40 INT. HAY BARN - MORNING

40

The morning light creeps in through the walls of the barn.
Part of the hay pile stirs. Thomas' weary face peers up from
under the hay.

He leaps to his feet. He rushes to a knothole and peers out.

41 EXT. HAY BARN - CONTINUOUS 41

David is hurriedly feeding his livestock as HUGE GREY CLOUDS loom on the horizon. Thomas sneaks out of the barn and slips away through the field without being noticed.

FADE TO:

42 EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY 42

David looks up every few seconds as he pounds away.

Distant thunder BOOMS out over the plain.

He throws another look back at the storm and finds Thomas peering over the ladder at him.

THOMAS
Dollar a day?

DAVID
We finish this before the rain
starts and you got yourself a deal.

THOMAS
I work for the rest of the month.
Every day. Guaranteed.

THUNDER.

DAVID
Guaranteed.

They shake.

SHOTS: Thomas and the Man work hard to get the roof finished before the storm rolls in.

FADE TO:

43 EXT. JAMES HEMP FARM - DAY 43

Rain everywhere. An apocalyptic deluge.

A rain-soaked Donage rides past a few slave cottages as HARRIET NEWBY, late 20's with large bold eyes, stands tied to a post. She is COLD and WRINKLED as she fights to stand.

In the distance a lone figure stands, poetic and strong, overlooking the scene. Meet ZERELDA JAMES, a middle-aged woman of masculine will.

Donage eases up to the porch. He tips his hat.

DONAGE

Zerelda.

ZERELDA

Donage. The saloon okay?

DONAGE

Last I checked.

ZERELDA

Suppose you wanna get dry?

FADE TO:

44 INT. HAY BARN - DAY - SAME

44

Rain pounds the barn roof as water drips from a rafter.

Thomas is curled up in the hay, snug as a bug. He's toying with a pair of coins.

FADE TO:

45 EXT. ROAD - MORNING

45

Thomas walks up the road. The sun shines brightly down. Thomas pauses and scoops a handful of stones up. He rejects a few and slips all the smooth flat ones into his pocket.

FADE TO:

46 EXT. ROOF - DAY

46

Thomas and David pound wood shingles into place on the roof.

DAVID

...not so different than anywhere
excepting that there's more people.
Life's a struggle all around. Lots
of folks weep for the black man,
but I come from a slave state and
it ain't no better for a white man
out there. If I could have my way
there'd be no slavery here, no
blacks at all, just a man working
for a days wage, fair and square.
(reflective)

(MORE)

DAVID (CONT'D)

I reckon there's a different value
on some things back East, with
industrialization and what not.
Rendering slavery unnecessary and
allowing--

THOMAS

I can think on how it's better,
excuse me.

Thomas stands up and walks to the edge of the roof.

He sees Clem standing over the Corn Woman with a couple of
ears of corn in hand.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

You pay what's owed!

Thomas digs the stones out of his pocket and whips them down
hitting Clem in the head. Clem falls to the ground before
staggering away. Halfway down the block, he turns and glares.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Go on then, GIT!

Clem slinks off.

DAVID

You're gonna make a heap of trouble
for yourself if you keep on like
that. Why are you going through so
much trouble for that thing down
there?

THOMAS

You mean, Girl?

DAVID

That's her name?

THOMAS

Best I can tell, and she's no
different than me. Trying to make a
living.

DAVID

She's different. We are all
different. That being said, I think
you'd do just fine in New York City
or anywhere else.

THOMAS

No, sir. Not me. Not New York or any other where with that many people. Don't it just bear down on a man?

David gives him another look.

DAVID

Look what's bearing down on you here...

He turns to look out over the landscape that spreads out in front of them.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Just across that river you've got the last piece of the puzzle. All other territories have been claimed and which way she goes is going to shift the balance of power in the Senate.

THOMAS

That's important?

DAVID

If you wanna keep the black man out. Hell, I got my own claim less than a days ride out, between here and the abolitionist city of Lawrence.

THOMAS

Why are you here then?

DAVID

A mans gotta work, and I just got my barn up and my first real crop planted. Next year I'll have more acreage and make the full run at farming.

THOMAS

Those side-eyed sons of bitches couldn't do an honest days work without--

DAVID

Easy, boy.

THOMAS

I don't like 'em or their ways.

DAVID

It's gonna be trouble you keep
carrying on with them Ruffians like
this.

THOMAS

It's always trouble with them
types.

Thomas starts swinging that hammer.

DAVID

No intentional change but you ever
work in a mine?

THOMAS

No, sir.

DAVID

Well, I managed to sell the owner
of this house on a new fandango of
a deal I'm calling a storm cave,
most of the time its used as a food
cellar.

Thomas just looks and pounds.

DAVID (CONT'D)

You see with these serious storms
we get around here I've come up
with the idea, we dig a hole in the
ground with some drainage and
ventilation and put a door on it.
That way when a twister comes a
callin' you ease down into it and
just wait it out.

THOMAS

Sir, you paying and you need me to
dig a hole... I'll dig a hole.

FADE TO:

47

INT. JAMES FARMHOUSE - EVENING

47

COL. TITUS, an arrogant man in his late 30's, a U.S. MARSHALL
appointed by President Pierce, Zerelda and a SHERIFF sit
around a table, staring down at maps of the territory and of
Lawrence in particular.

Donage lurks in the back.

TITUS

The population of Lawrence continues to swell with the "Northern Influence" and lends urgency to our situation.

MARSHALL

The President does not wish to eradicate these citizens of the United States, without just cause. It is my belief that with all the men at our disposal we should be able to simply overwhelm and arrest these extremists.

TITUS

And what of my business, after the fugitives are in custody?

MARSHALL

Once the arrests are made, the men and weapons are yours, Mister Titus, to do with as you please.

TITUS

What say you, Mrs. James?

ZERELDA

It seems a fine plan, Marshall. Without the abolitionist votes in Lawrence, the prospect of victory becomes almost certain.

Zerelda SNAPS her fingers and POINTS to heel. A young black female slave hops to her side.

ZERELDA (CONT'D)

(to the slave)

Show our guest around.

The slave bows her head.

The Marshall finishes his glass of whiskey and stands. The slave grabs his hand and leads him out. Zerelda and Titus watch him go.

BEAT

She leans across the table.

ZERELDA (CONT'D)

No arrests. No prisoners. Lawrence burns.

Zerelda eases back in her chair.

ZERELDA (CONT'D)

I want 'em to see the flames from
Kansas City.

TITUS

And feel the heat in Washington.

Titus toasts.

FADE TO:

48 EXT. STREETS - MORNING

48

Thomas bounces down the street. He clinks the coins in his hand together.

Something alerts him. Quiet on the street. Movement in the distance.

There's a shadow peeking out of the alley between two nearby buildings. It's lurksome and creepy. Thomas looks across the street and sees a pair of RUFFIANS.

The Ruffians nudge one another and give him pointed looks.

He turns to look behind and sees another PAIR OF RUFFIANS walking towards him.

Thomas turns back, Clem steps out of that alley in front of him. Clem has a bandage wrapped around his head covering an eye.

The two face each other in showdown fashion, the length of the street.

Thomas swallows hard. Border Ruffians are converging on him from every direction.

At the last second, Thomas breaks left and bolts through the front door of a dry goods store.

49 INT. DRY GOODS STORE - CONTINUOUS

49

As Thomas runs through. He SMASHES into a guy carrying two bags of flour, and they all go down in a plume.

Thomas scrambles to his feet and runs through the shop and out the back.

The Ruffians follow him through the door.

Most of them stop, giving up the chase.

Clem charges in.

CLEM

What are you waiting for?

RUFFIAN

It's just a kid.

RUFFIAN 2

We'll get him later.

50 EXT. BACK ALLEY - CONTINUOUS 50

Thomas bursts out of the back of the shop covered in flour as he disappears into a field.

FADE TO:

51 EXT. JOHN BROWN'S HOUSE - DAY 51

John Brown packs his wagon. He's got a compartment under the bed loaded with guns.

His WIFE stares across the yard at him.

Brown goes back to work. He packs boxes and bales into the back of the wagon, covering and concealing the weapons hidden within.

He looks up periodically. His wife is always there, always watching.

Finally, he puts the last crate into the wagon and goes to her.

JOHN BROWN

Go on inside. It's unseasonably cold.

WIFE

I just want another minute to fix you in my mind.

She puts a hand on the side of his big square skull.

WIFE (CONT'D)

You're not coming back, are you?

JOHN BROWN

I swear I am.

He kisses her gently and turns back to the wagon.

JOHN BROWN (CONT'D)
(to self)
One way or the other.

FADE TO:

52 EXT. KANSAS CITY - STREET - THE NEXT DAY 52

Border Ruffians are arrayed all around, waiting, and watchful.

Corn Woman peddles her wares.

Every once in a while, David looks down to take stock.

AT THE END OF THE STREET: Thomas watches the situation unfold.

Thomas slips into a nearby saloon.

53 INT. SALOON - DAY 53

Bottles, music, a pretty GIRL dancing near the player piano. Weary MEN are scattered throughout the bar.

Thomas lingers.

BARKEEP
Can I help you, son?

THOMAS
No, sir... Just looking, sir.

Eventually, Thomas tears himself away and heads for the stairs.

BARKEEP
Where you going?

Thomas ignores him and keeps on walking.

CUT TO:

54 EXT. ROOF - CONTINUOUS 54

David works. He chances another look down at the Ruffians.

THOMAS (O.S.)
Pssst!

David jumps. He looks to the side. There's Thomas on the second floor of the building next door. He waves David over.

With another glance at the Ruffians, David slips across the roof to where Thomas is peering at him.

Thomas has the window up, and he's shoving a plank out across the gap.

DAVID
What are you doing?

THOMAS
Coming to work.

DAVID
You can't do that they're waiting for you.

THOMAS
Them son of a bitches ain't gonna do a thing, but try and look tough.

DAVID
They're practically the law around here, and they don't like you much at all, boy.

THOMAS
Just brace the end of this up and I'll come over and get to work.

DAVID
No.

Thomas stares.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Look...

THOMAS
You promised me work...

DAVID
I'm not gonna have this on my hands.

THOMAS
You promised.

DAVID
You're just a kid.

THOMAS

No!

DAVID

Thomas...

THOMAS

I ain't no kid. I'm a man, and I
can make my own damned decisions.

MAN

One way or another, you're done
here, so go on and get.

Thomas SLAMS the window shut.

Border Ruffians hear the sound from the street below and look
up. David gives them a shrug and returns to his work.

FADE TO:

55

INT. SALOON - CONTINUOUS

55

Thomas comes down the stairs.

He takes a long look around and walks straight up to the bar.

Thomas digs into his pocket and pulls out one of his coins.
He gives the RUMMY next to him a long look. The Rummy is wet-
eyed and dumb. He barely holds himself to his stool.

Suddenly, a DAPPER GENT cuts in.

DAPPER GENT

Peach Brandy if you please!

Thomas likes what he sees in the dapper gent.

THOMAS

That sounds right good. Pour me
one, friend.

The Barkeep pours two and gives one to the man. Thomas
focuses in on his drink and doesn't see the Dapper Gent
giving his to the DANCING GIRL.

Thomas gives it a sniff.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Strong.

Thomas gives the Rummy a knowing look.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
How I likes 'em!

Thomas drinks. He chokes a little and fights it down.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Mmmm. Perfect.

He drinks again. He fights a little less hard this time.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Warms the spirit nicely! Another
one, if you please!

FADE TO:

56 INT. JAMES' BARN - SAME

56

Zerelda barges into the barn as Harriet walks around with a ladle and a water pail, giving out water to the other slaves.

ZERELDA
Harriet! For the love of all that
is holy, if I didn't know better
I'd a thought you was hidin'. Come
here, I have news and would like
for you to meet someone.

Behind her stands a short man, BUYER, with a shit-eating grin on his face.

BUYER
Well now, she'll do just fine. A
little older than hoped for but the
price is fair.

HARRIET
Ma'am, please... I ain'ts a run no
mo'. I ain'ts a run no mo' and if
yous' just'n wait. I has it on good
faith my husband'll show up soon
enough and with the money needed to
make dis buy. I ain't a run no mo'

Buyer inspects Harriet.

BUYER
Transaction's already occurred; you
can stop beggin'.

Zerelda delights in tying her hands.

ZERELDA

You think things were tough here on the prairie, missy? Let us see how things fit you out in Virginia. Let's see if running looks better on you down south.

In the corner stands JESSE JAMES, an eight-year-old with an eagerness for the world, Zerelda's youngest son.

ZERELDA (CONT'D)

Good luck Harriet. Frank!

HARRIET

Please, ma'am!

JESSE

He's in the library, ma.

ZERELDA

Well come here then, you'll do. Attend this nigger to the wagon.

HARRIET

I ain'ts a run no mo', ma'am!

Zerelda grabs a sabre from the wall.

ZERELDA

Take this and if she does try to light out, you bite her in the back of the knee.

BUYER

That will not be necessary. She's my property now.

The buyer grabs for the bindings keeping Harriet in tow.

BUYER (CONT'D)

I'll take that young man but oblige you for your help.

HARRIET

Mrs. James! Please!

The buyer KNEES her in the gut. As she SUCKS the life back in he takes a steady pull from his whiskey flask, passes it to Jesse who CHOKES down a long gulp and then drags Harriet to the wagon.

HARRIET (CONT'D)
I aint's gonna run!

DISSOLVE TO:

57 EXT. FOREST- DUSK- (FLASHBACK)

57

An 8yr old Thomas and his siblings run through the undergrowth as SHADOWY forms of WOLVES dart around in the distance. Thomas, the youngest, grips his Sister's hand.

Their dog, TRIP, protectively flees BARKING into the night. Wolves retreat.

There's the horrible sound of ANIMALS FIGHTING in the dark.

SISTER
Come on, Thomas!

She pulls him away, dragging him through the dark.

Thomas and the other kids charge headlong through the darkness. The branches of overhanging trees reach out to grab them. Everything is transformed into a nightmarish landscape of fear.

Suddenly, the children pull up short.

An animal stands in the trail in front of them, blocking their path. Its head is flat, waiting, poised...

BROTHER
Nobody move...

SISTER
We have to go...

Wolf HOWLS in the distance.

The Animal in front of them steps forward into the light. It's Trip. The dog is injured. Blood mats his fur.

Thomas kneels to pet the wounded animal and whisper in his ear.

As Thomas holds the dog, his ears go back, and a low growl slides out of his throat.

Thomas looks back down the trail.

WOLVES... A half dozen of them, closing in!

The dog rips free of Thomas's hands and sprints down the path.

THOMAS

Trip! NO!!!

His brother grabs him and pulls him along the trail.

More ANIMAL FIGHTING.

The kids FLEE.

There's a gate up ahead. It's open. MAMA stands there with a musket, ready to fire.

The kids rush through.

Mama starts to swing it shut. Thomas stops her.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Trip

Mama nods understandingly and stares down the barrel of the musket, waiting for the wolves to approach.

Trip Comes tearing down the path in front of them with the wolf pack on his heels.

CRACK! Mama fires her shot.

The Wolves pull up short but do NOT run away. They stare at the family, hackles up and hungry.

Mama lowers the musket and begins the process of reloading.

MAMA

Shut the gate!

The rusty hinge CREEKS... The gate swings closed.

The wolves are not impressed. They lope forward, curious and probing.

MAMA (CONT'D)

Get to the house children. Shut the door and don't open it until I get there... Hurry.

The kids strike out for the house. Thomas remains.

One Wolf leaps to the top of the fence. It GROWLS at Mama; it's back fur bristles. Mama fumbles her cartridge, nearly dropping the musket.

CRACK!

The Wolf on the fence YELPS and falls over.

The WHIP THUD of arrows in the night. Two more wolves fall with feathered shafts protruding from their sides.

The rest of the pack turns tail and runs.

Five INDIANS ride out of the shadows with smoking guns. They look like they just stepped out of a storybook in their buckskins and face paint.

They look down at Mama for a long moment. The LEADER smiles and inclines his head.

MAMA (CONT'D)
(signs/soft)
Thank you...

The Leader smiles at her again and makes a gesture of friendship. Then, with a motion, all five Indians turn their horses and thunder off into the night.

BACK TO:

58

INT. SALOON - EVENING

58

Thomas is drunk. He's bellowing to the Rummy next to him, finishes his drink and looks around. A couple of customers and the dancing girl have stopped to hear him tell his story.

THOMAS
That's why I reckon, a man owes a
debt, and he pays it.

He bangs the glass down on the counter and teeters up.

Thomas staggers for the door. Holding a coin high over head.

DANCING GIRL
Who was that kid?

Shrugs all around.

59

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

59

Thomas walks out of the saloon. He turns and looks down the street. Anderson and Clem are harassing Corn Woman.

THOMAS
 You son of a bitches, I thought I
 told you...

Thomas snatches a stick of firewood from a nearby pile as he stalks down the street.

Anderson never sees him coming. Thomas winds up and belts him over the back. Anderson goes down.

Thomas beats Anderson unmercifully.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
 Pay. What. You. Owe!

Thomas looks up from his brutal work. Anderson moans on the ground. Thomas spots Clem.

Thomas grabs Clem dragging him to Corn Woman's cup. Clem empties his pockets into the cup, Thomas snatches Clem's hat from his head and then shoos him away.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
 This looks to be a seven dollar
 hat.

Thomas bends down and rifles Anderson's pockets. Anderson moans. Thomas CRACKS him one last time, and he goes limp.

Thomas drops Anderson's money into the cup as well as the coin from his pocket.

Thomas looks up. PEOPLE on the street stare at him. He's the center of a major scene.

Thomas drops the stick, pops the hat on, and wanders right on out of there.

FADE TO:

60 EXT. NORTH ELBA - TOWN LIMIT - EVENING 60

John Brown, alone in his wagon, rides out of town. People watch from doorways and porches as he goes.

61 EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER 61

John Brown rides alone. He hears movement in the dark.

Brown pulls the wagon up short and jumps out.

He races around the back and starts flipping through the cargo trying to get at the hatch under the floor.

A MAN steps out of the shadows toward him.

John Brown pulls a gun out of the cargo compartment and spins with it. Dangerfield steps out of the shadows with his hands up, defensively.

DANGERFIELD

It's just me, John Brown, ain't no cause to shoot anybody.

JOHN BROWN

Danger??! What are you doing here?

DANGERFIELD

They got my Harriet down there Mister Brown. You planning on starting a war, you won't be doing it without me.

BEAT

DANGERFIELD (CONT'D)

Just put a gun in my hand, Mister Brown and I'll help free 'em all.

John Brown grins and thrusts the gun into Dangerfield's hands. Dangerfield takes it proudly.

FADE TO:

62

EXT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

62

A bloody and beaten Anderson rides in hard and loose, ahead of Donage and the rest of the gang. He bounces down sideways and kicks the charging dog. He bangs on the farmhouse door.

ANDERSON

We know the boy's here! Come out!

He kicks the door in and enters.

SCREAMS are heard from with-in, as the Farmer steps out of the barn.

DAVID

Gentlemen, gentlemen... What is all this?

Donage swings around.

DONAGE

Found him!

Anderson drags the Farmers wife out, kicking her to the ground and goes back in.

DONAGE (CONT'D)

Circle it up!

Pointing at the barn.

63

INT. FARM HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

63

A CROOKED photo frame encasing a family of four is ripped from the wall.

As Anderson stands staring at the picture through blood soaked eyes, the rage dims.

ANDERSON

Girls! Might as well come on out,
so I won't hurt you.

BEAT

ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Girls? Come on now?

He creeps into the room, peering inside a wooden chest to find two young girls.

ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Gotcha!

Clem busts into the room with a torch.

CLEM

Litn' it up!

Anderson grabs the two girls by their scruff and drags them out.

64

EXT. FARM HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

64

As Anderson pulls the girls from the burning house, he finds the barn already ablaze.

ANDERSON

Was he in there?!

He heads for the barn as Donage shoots the farmer.

BANG!

CUT TO:

65 INT. HAY BARN - SAME 65

Tears of rage fill Thomas' young eyes as flames catch hold in all directions.

He sees Anderson on a staggered path towards him. He makes for the food cellar hid away in the barn.

Thomas reaches the food cellar just before Anderson kicks in the barn doors.

ANDERSON

It'll only burn for a little bit
boys; let's find that disrespectful-

He succumbs to his head trauma, and the others have to pull him out feet first.

66 INT. FOOD CELLAR - CONTINUOUS 66

An 8x12 hole in the ground with jars of preserved produce.

Thomas sits on the ground as smoke wafts in and out of the cracks in the wooden door above him. The sounds of the building crumbling around the entrance blocking his way out.

FADE TO:

67 EXT. HAY BARN - MORNING 67

Rain starts to fall with the rise of the morning sun.

Anderson slumps on his horse in a daze watching as the rain puts out the charred and crumbling barn.

Satisfied and soaked they turn east.

68 INT. HAY BARN - CONTINUOUS 68

A pile of dead timbers and coal lay in a pile as the rain continues. A slight movement of the pile as the buried door beneath pushes to no avail.

CRASH!!!

A support beam falls scattering the pile and tearing through the cellar doors.

Thomas claws his way out to find the burnt house and the family left behind.

The sun peaks low on the horizon; Thomas gives it all his attention.

THOMAS
(to the family)
We'll come back for him but first
Lecompton.

David's body lay lifeless as they walk away from the LOW, rising sun.

FADE TO:

69 EXT. ROAD - DAY

69

John Brown and Dangerfield ride in silence as that same sun lights their way.

Dangerfield is reading a newspaper with the headline:

BLEEDING KANSAS!!!

FADE TO BLACK.

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