

CRIMSON TRAIL

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Based on a true story.

BLACK SCREEN

The SOUND of BUZZING FLIES.

A PIG CARCASS

Lies in the mud. Meat hacked from its bones. Entrails scribbled on the ground. Flies swarm.

The carcass lies in the dog trot of a--

EXT. LOG CABIN - DAY

--which sits in a small clearing ringed by dense forest. Smoke leaks from the chimney. Cicadas drone.

TITLE:

**KENTUCKY. 1799.
THE WESTERN FRONTIER.**

A shoeless MAN (30), FREDERICK STUMP, his face plain and friendly, walks out of the forest and stops in the clearing.

He carries a string of fish, a plucked turkey, and under his armpit, a fiddle. He walks toward the sagging cabin and spots the dead pig. Frowns.

He readjusts his fiddle -- a nervous gesture.

He approaches the cabin and KNOCKS. After a beat--

The door opens and a YOUNG WOMAN appears, late teens, delicate features drawn in tension. Stump bows his head.

STUMP

Ma'am. Name's Frederick Stump. Ya new here, right? First time I seen this chimney smokin' since the Osgoods.

The woman doesn't return Stump's smile. She eyes his food.

STUMP (CONT'D)

Brought ya a turkey and some freshwater drum.

(then)

I'm ya neighbor.

From inside--

GRAVELLY VOICE (O.S.)

Open the door.

The woman opens the door, revealing a dark room.

At the table in the back lurk TWO SILHOUETTES. The first, a giant, meaty man, curls over a bloody meal.

The second, a wiry fellow, leans back in his chair.

TWO OTHER WOMEN, early twenties, sit in the corner. The taller, sturdier of the two breastfeeds an infant. Her sister, angled and distant, cradles another newborn.

A BABY CRIES. The young woman at the door rushes to a cloth-strewn pallet. Picks the baby up. Three women, three babies.

The GRAVELLY VOICE belongs to the big silhouette--

GRAVELLY VOICE

Come in.

Stump enters the--

INT. CABIN - DAY

The young woman exits with her CRYING BABY. The other women follow, leaving Stump alone with the two men.

Stump steps forward and offers a hand.

STUMP

Frederick Stump. Pleasure.

No reaction.

STUMP (CONT'D)

Always welcome my neighbors with a little fiddlin'. Long as you don't look for any notes what go missin'.

Stump CHUCKLES. But his laughter dies quickly. Then--

STUMP (CONT'D)

Brought ya a turkey and some freshwater--

GRAVELLY VOICE

We heard.

Awkward silence. Stump can tell he's not wanted here. He lays the food on the table.

STUMP

Well. Reckon I'll be off.

GRAVELLY VOICE
You brought a fiddle... and you're
not going to play it?

STUMP
(stumbles)
Oh. I'm... I thought you... I
didn't want to interrupt.

GRAVELLY VOICE
What did you say?

STUMP
Said I didn't mean to interrupt.

"LITTLE HARPE" (29), reedy with a snarl of red hair, stands
and walks past Stump to close the door. As he does, the big
man continues--

GRAVELLY VOICE
A knock on the door is, in point of
fact, an interruption.

STUMP
I'm... I wanted to offer a welcome
is all.

GRAVELLY VOICE
Then welcome us.

Silence. Stump slowly raises the fiddle. And plays. His
jittery hands render the MUSIC discordant.

The big man knifes a hunk of red meat into his mouth. He
shoves his plate across the table. It falls to the floor.
The gesture alarms Stump, and he stops playing.

GRAVELLY VOICE (CONT'D)
Food went cold.

STUMP
I'll let you to it. I've, I've got
some logs need choppin'.

GRAVELLY VOICE
Is that really what calls you?

The man slides a Cherokee tomahawk from his rope belt. Hands
it to Little Harpe, who pulls a whetstone from his pocket.
SCRAPES it across the blade. Sharpening it.

GRAVELLY VOICE (CONT'D)
Are you an honest man?

Stump frowns, at a loss. Little Harpe LAUGHS, shrill.

LITTLE HARPE
You smoked him, Mick.

Stump eyes Little Harpe sharpening the blade. Backs away.

STUMP
I ain't a liar, Mister, if that's
what's asked.

The big man stands. Six feet four inches. He moves toward Stump. FOOTSTEPS BOOMING.

Light from the window catches him. Close-cropped, jet black hair. Dry peeling lips that rictus over yellowed teeth. Ink-drop eyes. This is "BIG HARPE" (31).

BIG HARPE
Then why do you want to leave? Be
honest.

Little Harpe returns the sharpened tomahawk to his brother. Stump swallows. And finally--

STUMP
Because I'm... Because I'm afraid.

BIG HARPE
See? That's honest.

Stump moves toward the door. Little Harpe blocks him.

STUMP
I'll be takin' my leave now.

BIG HARPE
I think not.

Stump swallows.

STUMP
Why?

BIG HARPE
Because you knocked on our door.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

The three women, each with their baby, sit on a fallen hickory, fifty paces from the cabin.

Behind them, Stump bursts out the door.

STUMP
Help! Heeeeelp!

Little Harpe runs after Stump and tackles him. Big Harpe lumbers after, tomahawk in hand.

The women don't look back. They talk as if they don't hear Stump's PANICKED SCREAMS behind them. SUSAN -- the taller, sturdier one (24) -- speaks first.

SUSAN
"The Sun Was Sunk Beneath the
Hill"?

Her younger sister, BETSEY (22), angled and distant--

BETSEY
Too sad for my likin'. Sal, you
pick.

The young woman who opened the door for Stump, SAL (19, short for Sally) sings--

SAL
Soldier, soldier will you marry me/
With your musket, fife and drum?/

The others join in--

HARPE WOMEN
Oh, how can I marry such a pretty
girl as you/
When I have no hat to put on?

In the BACKGROUND, Little Harpe holds a SHRIEKING Stump down as Big Harpe buries his blade in the man's belly.

ON THE WOMEN as Stump SCREAMS OFF SCREEN.

HARPE WOMEN (CONT'D)
Off to the haberdasher she did go/
As fast as she could run...

CLOSE on Sal, eyes locked with her baby's, singing as loud as she can to drown the SCREAMS. The SOUND carries us to--

EXT. KENTUCKY WOODS - DAY

The hush of the forest. Wind billows the leaves.

A grimy hand pulls a branch aside, revealing MOSES STEGALL (27), built like knotted wood, eyes that could start a fire. Buckskin shirt pooled with sweat. He looks out into a--

FIELD

Where a doe grazes in the grass.

Moses draws a long rifle from a holster on his back. Moving slowly, he aims. And FIRES.

The round hits. The doe goes down, flailing.

Moses jogs toward his prey. But something else moves in the grass. A--

PACK OF TIMBER WOLVES

Pounces on the doe.

Moses breaks into a run. He stops twenty paces shy of the wolves tearing at the doe's flesh. Moses pulls out a belt ax. Launches it at one of the wolves.

The ax cracks a wolf in the head. It collapses with a YELP. All but one wolf scatters. The lone wolf -- the biggest -- faces Moses, bloody muzzle snarling. Alpha.

Moses unsheathes a small hunting knife. Ready. Moses YELLS and charges. The wolf runs at him.

WIDE SHOT of the two clashing in the field. Moses falls on the wolf, stabbing viciously.

MOSES

Rises out of the grass, neck grazed, face blood-flecked.

At his feet, the wolf, bleeding out. IT WHINES. Suffering. Moses stares. Eyes like ice. As the WOLF SUFFERS, he sheathes the knife.

LATER

Moses WHISTLES, carefree, as he ties the deer carcass to the back of his aging black horse.

Moses vaults into the horse's saddle. He rides across the field and nears the dying wolf. Hears its WHISPERED WHINING.

Moses stops. Scratches under his slouch hat.

MOSES
Whattya think, Smudge?

The horse ignores him. Moses hops off. Takes out his knife. With a quick stroke, Moses ends the wolf's suffering.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Moses rides on a thin, barely-trod dirt road that winds through the countryside.

A spindly, WHITE-HAIRED MAN (49) runs along the road from the other direction. Desperate.

MOSES

Hey, whoa. You all right?

WHITE-HAIRED MAN

(breathless)

Squar McBee... Do ya know... where he is? The justice a' the peace?

MOSES

Silas? He's over there.

Moses points at a two story log cabin a quarter of a mile off the road. The man runs in that direction.

MOSES (CONT'D)

Knock loud, now!

INT. SILAS MCBEE'S HOME - DAY

HIGH ANGLE looking down on a stout, fleshy man, lying unconscious in a pool of his own vomit.

POUNDING on the door.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN (O.S.)

Squar McBee! Squar McBee!

Silas's eyes flutter open. He raises his head. One side of his bristle-bearded cheek caked in retch. He winces at the incessant POUNDING on the door. This is SILAS MCBEE (45).

SILAS

Sammy!

A black OLD MAN enters the room. He doesn't bat an eye at Silas's condition.

OLD MAN

Sir?

SILAS

Shut that man up.

INT. SILAS'S BEDROOM - DAY

A woman lies in bed. Bandages cover her head and chest. She breathes faintly.

Silas, still a mess, stands at the foot of her bed. His eyes teary at the sight of her.

SILAS

She stir?

A young lady, the ATTENDANT, sits in a chair at the woman's side. She shakes her head.

ATTENDANT

No, sir. More red in her cheeks,
though. Good a sign as any.

The old man enters the room. Silas turns to him.

SILAS

Is he gone?

OLD MAN

He say he got business for you,
sir. Say he found a body.

SILAS

How far?

OLD MAN

Gonna be a ride.

SILAS

Christ.

Silas pivots, looking for something.

OLD MAN

Right here, sir.

The old man holds up a silver flask. Silas smiles a thanks as he takes the flask, unscrews it, and drinks.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

May I suggest you clean your face,
sir?

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Moses rides toward a two story cabin -- the only building in sight. The SOUND OF A CRYING NEWBORN carries us to--

INT. STEGALL HOME - DAY

CLOSE ON A WAILING NEWBORN, lying in a waist-high bassinet.

MARY STEGALL (25) -- radiant despite sleepless eyes, her linsey-woolsey dress glowing in the sun that finds her through the window -- stands by a boiling pot at the stove.

In a strainer on top of the steaming pot, some flowers. As she shakes the strainer, she rocks the bassinet.

MARY

Shhh, little one. I'm right here...

The door opens and Moses walks in. He leans over the bassinet. Regards his crying son.

MOSES

If I understood you, Abraham, I'd abide your sermon.

MARY

He's saying, "Get out of my face, Pa. I'm hurtin'."

MOSES

(to baby)

Was it her cooking?

Mary swats her husband. She notices the blood on his neck. Pulls his collar down, revealing a shallow bite mark.

MARY

God above, Moses.

MOSES

(playful)

Got you dinner, didn't I? You wanna thank me, I'll take it lying down.

MARY

(smiles)

You'll take nothing of the sort whilst your son's caterwauling.

MOSES

I can spare some grains of niter.

MARY

We're not giving gunpowder to a baby.

(re: herbs in the strainer)

I got winter savory in the steam -- better for colic anyhow.

Moses picks up the CRYING BABY and lays a calloused hand over the baby's tiny head.

Almost instantly, the BABY QUIETS. Moses looks at Mary.

MOSES
I got the Lord's touch.

MARY
I want to smack you right now.

EXT. STEGALL HOME - DAY

The baby sleeps in a bassinet tucked in the shade of the cabin. Mary leans against the hitching post. A Bible in her hands. Moses packs provisions into his saddle bag.

MOSES
"There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not... be revealed?" That ain't right.

MARY
That is not right.

MOSES
That is not right. Look it up, now.
Matthew--

MARY
Matthew ten-twenty six.

Mary flips through the pages. Movement catches Moses' eye. He turns and sees--

A GIRL IN A MUDDY WHITE DRESS. Six, seven years old. Walking away from him, through the grass.

MARY (O.S.)
Here it is.

Moses snaps out of his reverie. Turns to Mary as she reads--

MARY (CONT'D)
"... there is nothing hidden that will not be made known."

Moses looks back. THE GIRL IS GONE. Moses' imagination.

MOSES
Not be made known. Not be made known. Not be made known.

MARY

Moses, don't worry about getting
the quote right. Speak from the
soul. The rest will--

Moses grabs Mary and pulls her into a kiss. Passionate. He
breaks away. Smitten, Mary holds up a sack.

MARY (CONT'D)

Earned yourself a journey cake.

Moses tucks the sack into his saddle bag. Climbs onto his
horse. Mary places a hand on Moses' leg.

MARY (CONT'D)

You can change this land.

MOSES

Not the land needs changin'.

Moses winks at her. Gallops off.

EXT. KENTUCKY WILDS - DAY

Moses rides east across the Kentucky wilderness. As he
travels we see more signs of civilization: cabins, dirt
roads... the beginnings of a settlement.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

Late afternoon. Moses trots into a clearing where a new
wooden CHURCH stands. In front of the church, two trestles
hold a giant beam of wood.

One man, HUDGENS (61), stout as a barrel with cloudy white
hair, stands on top of the beam, cutting it with one end of
a giant saw. A cross around his neck. Good-natured smile.

Moses dismounts.

MOSES

Hope you're givin' Gilmore a turn
outta the saw pit, Hudgens.

HUDGENS

It suits him down there.

Holding the other end of the saw, inside the pit beneath the
beam, is GILMORE (44). Jovial face. An angry musket ball
scar mars his neck -- he's a mute.

Moses leans down close to Gilmore.

MOSES
You toleratin' this roustabout?

Gilmore smiles. Points up at Hudgens and rolls his eyes.

MOSES (CONT'D)
Don't I know it.
(to Hudgens)
Your ears burning? We're chatting
about your shortcomings.

Moses rises. He steps into the--

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Simple room with plain cut pews and stairs leading to a pulpit. Moses looks down. Stamps his feet.

MOSES
Good, level flooring. Nice beading
on the boards.

Hudgens appears in the doorway, catching his breath.

HUDGENS
Few of the roof slats are cracked.
We could swap them before tomorrow,
if we're swift.

Moses studies the roof.

MOSES
No rain tomorrow. Roof'll hold. The
roof will hold.

HUDGENS
Listen to you, minding your
diction. You'll be a wonder behind
that pulpit, Moses.

Moses walks to the doorway. Looks out at the woods.

MOSES
If anybody comes.

Gilmore walks up the stairs. Stops half way up. Picks up a caterpillar crawling along the step. Sets it on the ground, out of harm's way. Hudgens and Moses watch him. Then--

HUDGENS
They'll come. All plants grow
toward the light.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

The white-haired man holds a burning torch in the middle of the black woods. Shadows dance as he walks.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN
It's over here in the--

The man hears the SOUND OF URINATION. He turns and sees--

Silas peeing on a tree. The man waits as Silas finishes. The justice of the peace stumbles forward, drunk.

SILAS
Don't lemme stop ya.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN
I was sayin', it's... he's over
here in the crick.

The man takes a few more steps toward the sound of MURMURING WATER and BUZZING FLIES. He covers his mouth.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN (CONT'D)
Jesus.

Silas grabs the torch. Walks forward.

SILAS
Jesus ain't in Kentucky.

Silas steps forward. He lowers the torch to illuminate a--
BLOATED CORPSE at the edge of the creek. The remains of
Frederick Stump.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN (O.S.)
Lookit the belly.

Silas does. A large opening in the abdomen, voided of
organs. Maggots. An awful realization hits Silas.

SILAS
Damnation.

Silas removes the flask from the inside of his coat.
Unscrews it and drinks.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN
Let me a draw, Squar?

Silas ignores him, finishes the flask, and returns it to his
pocket. Silas speaks with authority for once--

SILAS

Tried to sink him with rocks. Been
in the water a day, two at the
most, judging by the bloat. Looks
like Frederick Stump, poor devil.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN

I hope he warn't alive when them
organs was stole.

SILAS

He was.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN

Howdy'a' know?

SILAS

Go home now. Stop for no travelers
and latch your doors fast.

WHITE-HAIRED MAN

What for?

SILAS

(fearful)

The Harpes are here.

(Harpes sounds like Harps.)

INT. STEGALL HOME - NIGHT

Mary holds a sleeping Abraham. As slowly and gently as she can, she sets him down in the bassinet. He stirs. Mary freezes. Abraham sleeps. She exhales, relieved.

MOMENTS LATER

She wets her hands and face from a bowl of water. Somewhere, a BABY CRIES. Mary stands suddenly. Listening. She throws a look at Abraham. He's still sleeping.

EXT. STEGALL HOME - NIGHT

Mary opens the door and looks out. Hears CRICKETS and KATYDIDS. And again, a baby CRYING. In the woods. Mary strains her eyes, focusing on the sound.

BIG HARPE (O.S.)

Beautiful evening, ma'am.

Mary starts. She turns to see the HARPES, silhouetted by moonlight, at the corner of her house.

CUT TO BLACK.

SOUNDS of a HORSE GALLOPING.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Silas, his face slicked with sweat, rides out of the woods toward his home. His servant hobbles up to him, panicked.

OLD MAN
Neighbor's house! It's burnin'!

Silas wheels. Though a thick copse of trees, a FIRE.

SILAS
The Stegalls.
(nods at his cabin)
Catherine?

OLD MAN
Hasn't woke. But she safe. You just
find out who done it, sir.

Silas stares at the fire.

SILAS
I know who done it.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Sun shines warmly on the wooden church.

MOSES (V.O.)
Thank you for coming...

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Moses stands in front of a dozen frontier folk -- each of them rapt. Hudgens sits in the back, watching. No sign of Gilmore. Moses is a commanding presence.

MOSES (CONT'D)
... for today we bless this Church.
Christen it as a home of God.
(then)
I stand before you a sinner. We--

The GIRL IN THE MUDDY WHITE DRESS walks down the aisle, away from Moses. He watches. Then shakes off the vision.

MOSES
We are all sinners. Some of us sin
in the light. Others in the dark.
But there is nowhere you--

Gilmore enters and accosts Hudgens. Hudgens WHISPERS heatedly as Gilmore gesticulates. Moses pauses for a moment, watching the two, before resuming--

MOSES (CONT'D)
... But there is nowhere you sin
that He does not see. "There is
nothing concealed that will not
be--"

Moses stops again as Gilmore and Hudgens continue their debate. Heads turn to the back of the church to look at the exchange. Moses stares at them.

MOSES (CONT'D)
Gentlemen?

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Moses follows Gilmore out into the sunshine. Hudgens trails them both.

HUDGENS
I'm sorry, Moses. This isn't worth
the interruption.

MOSES
What is it?

HUDGENS
He says something bad's in the air.
I can't smell it, but he's got a
nose like a hunting hound.

Gilmore climbs a tree. Stands on a branch looking out.

MOSES
Something's wrong, ain't it, Gil?
(quiet, to himself)
Isn't it, Gil?

Gilmore wiggles his fingers at Hudgens -- their own code.

HUDGENS
He can make out smoke, right so.

Hudgens points. Moses follows the gaze.

MOSES
West. Mary.

HUDGENS
Could be Cherokee signals, could be
chimney smoke...

MOSES
That far out? Got to be one big
chimney fire.

Hudgens ushers Moses toward the church.

HUDGENS
Moses, it's nothing. Your
congregation awaits.

Moses looks at the church. Several frontier folk have gathered at the doorway, watching. Moses looks back west. Deciding. Then to the congregation--

MOSES
I'm sorry. Next Sunday.

Moses jumps on his horse and rides out, leaving a disappointed Hudgens.

Gilmore runs to his horse to follow.

EXT. STEGALL HOME - DAY

ON A HEAP of blackened, smoldering logs and joists. All that remains of the Stegall home.

Across from the pile stands Silas, begrimed and hungover.

The GALLOP of a HORSE draws his attention to--

MOSES

Who rides up. Silas rushes to intercept him.

SILAS
Moses--

Moses leaps down from his horse, runs around Silas, and makes for his home.

MOSES
Mary! Maaaary!

Silas wraps two arms around Moses and stops him.

SILAS
There's nothin' left, Moses.

MOSES
Where is she? Where'd she go? Mary!
Maaaary! Where's Abraham?!

SILAS
They're gone, Moses. They're gone.

Moses SCREAMS. And collapses.

LATER

CLOSE ON Mary's Stegall's burned corpse, lying amid the blackened house. THREE KNIVES stick out of her front.

Moses kneels by her, knees on the charred timber, praying. Haloed by smoke. His face a mess of tears and snot.

Watching him, hats in their hands: Silas, Hudgens, and Gilmore, who gestures for all the men to turn their backs. Give Moses his privacy. The men turn.

Moses finishes his silent prayer. He pulls one of the knives out of his wife's belly -- buried so deep it is UNTOUCHED BY THE FIRE.

Something catches his eye. He moves a board from a pile of ash resembling a bassinet. He finds--

A tiny, charred skull.

Moses picks up the skull. As he did a day ago, he lays a calloused hand over the top of the skull.

LONG SHOT of Moses amid the ruins, seen from within the--

EXT. KENTUCKY WOODS - DAY

Big Harpe looms in the FOREGROUND. Watching Moses. Little Harpe sits at his side.

LITTLE HARPE
Moses is alone.

BIG HARPE
Call that alone?

LITTLE HARPE
This our chance to rush him, is my meanin'.
(off Big Harpe's silence)
What then? What's our aim?

BIG HARPE
Nothing changes. We go to the Cave.

Big Harpe stands. Walks back toward the horses.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
Get the women. We're riding.

LITTLE HARPE
What about Moses?

BIG HARPE
He'll have his time with us yet.

EXT. STEGALL HOME - DAY

CLOSE on a small grave. SOUNDS of a shovel hitting dirt.

REVEAL Moses digging a grave for his wife next to his newborn's grave.

Moses' eyes catch Silas, who receives a bottle of spirits from Sammy, his servant. Sammy kicks his horse and trots off. Silas approaches Moses, refilling his flask.

SILAS
Moses. Three men here. We can make
this chore go faster.

Moses doesn't answer. He digs. Silas continues--

SILAS (CONT'D)
I believe this devil's work to be
that of the Harpes. Micajah and
Wiley. Soulless brothers.
(then)
You heard of 'em?

Moses stops digging. His face pales. He looks up at Silas.

MOSES
Thought the Harpes were in
Danville.

SILAS
They escaped this Spring.
(off Moses' look)
Governor Garrard priced their heads
at three hundred dollars. We're
gonna ride on 'em. You fit to come
with?

MOSES
I'm not riding with you.
(then)
You're riding with me.

SILAS

These are slippery men, Moses. I heard they allied themselves with the most vile redskin savages, and they'll vanish among 'em if we tarry.

Hudgens comes over and pulls Silas away by the elbow. He speaks low, so Moses can't hear.

HUDGENS

Squire McBee, is it? Let the man bury his kin in peace, as the Lord would have it.

SILAS

You want peace? Take your hand off my goddamn elbow.

(to Moses)

We depart now. Afore the trail goes cold.

MOSES

Harpes can run as long as they like. They will not be spared their justice.

SILAS

What makes you so certain?

MOSES

Because I'm coming for them.

OFF Silas's look...

LATER

ON TWO GRAVES, marked with a stone each.

Hudgens and Gilmore stand by the graves, hats in their hands, paying their respects.

Moses sifts through the sack with Mary's journey cake in it. He removes a white handkerchief with "MS" stitched in the corner. He touches the "MS."

The SOUND OF HOOF BEATS. Moses sees--

JOHN LEIPER (28, sounds like Leeper), blue-eyed rogue with a coonskin cap and a mouth that won't quit smirking, astride a white Mustang horse. Silas escorts him.

SILAS

Moses, this is John Leiper. We are fortunate his path crossed with ours.

Moses tucks the handkerchief in his pouch.

MOSES

Are we.

SILAS

Leiper says he had a run-in with the Harpes years back.

LEIPER

To know 'em is to want 'em dead. And I can't say the reward coin won't fit in my pocket.

MOSES

What better way to make a profit?

Leiper says nothing.

SILAS

Leiper's a dead shot.

Leiper draws a long rifle. Aims at a distant tree. FIRES.

In the distance, a goose falls to the ground.

Leiper levels a gaze on Moses, who doesn't flinch.

MOSES

We're not hunting geese.

LEIPER

Everythin' kill the same.

Moses glances at his family's graves.

MOSES

We'll find out.

Moses mounts his horse. Then--

MOSES (CONT'D)

Let's run 'em down.

EXT. KENTUCKY COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The posse rides, five-strong -- a heroic tableau.

EXT. KENTUCKY PLAINS - DAY

Moses examines the ground among some tall grass.

MOSES
Hoof tracks. Dirt's not packed high
at the heel -- they ain't--
(corrects himself)
--they are not moving fast.

SILAS
Then let's go.

MOSES
There's more. Three other souls on
foot.

Moses points to the ground behind them: bare footprints.

HUDGENS
Prisoners?

SILAS
Harpes don't take prisoners.

Moses puts his horse into a trot. As the others follow--

HUDGENS
Did I miss something? Who's heeling
them in bare feet?

LEIPER
Their women. Three of 'em they
share like they's passin' a jug of
corn whiskey.

Gilmore spits on the ground.

HUDGENS
Why on Earth would any women
consort with those monsters?

LEIPER
We catch 'em, I'll ask 'em for ya.

Gilmore rides up next to Silas. Gestures at him. Hudgens translates the gestures.

HUDGENS
He wants to know why you don't wear
a badge.
(off Silas' look)
If you're law, where's your badge?

Silas rides on without answering. Hudgens looks at Gilmore.

HUDGENS (CONT'D)
Maybe he doesn't like the sound of
your voice.

Silas rides next to Moses.

SILAS
Moses, I know a man who has tracked
the Harpes before. He's called
Trabue. Colonel Daniel Trabue. He
lives not too far afield from this
very trail...

MOSES
The path I'm on leads to the
murderers of my family.

Silas says nothing.

EXT. KENTUCKY WOODS - DAY

Sal breastfeeds as she trudges along, exhausted. Beside her, Betsey and Susan plod forward on tattered moccasins.

Sal stops and leans a shoulder against a tree. She picks a large splinter from her bloody heel.

Little Harpe turns to look back at them.

LITTLE HARPE
No stallin'!

SAL
Sorry, Wiley.

Sal continues after the horses, trying to keep up. Betsey, holding her baby, walks next to Sal.

BETSEY
(whisper)
I heard Mick say there's regulators
on us. Again.

Sal nods. She heard the same thing. Betsey walks closer.

BETSEY (CONT'D)
My baby won't latch. My feet is
bruised. I am at my end.

SAL
Keep your voice down.

BETSEY

Why? Let 'em hear me. Let 'em bleed
me. It'd be a mercy.

SAL

What do you think will happen to
our children if Mick and Wiley came
down on us?

Betsey looks down at her infant. Then--

BETSEY

(whisper)

You hear about that Ann Lee? She
set up camp in Pleasant Hill. She'd
take us in--

SAL

Ann Lee's dead.

BETSEY

Not all the Shakers is. You can
midwife; we can make a living for
ourselves--

SAL

What about Susan?

BETSEY

She got no time for anybody but
them two.

SAL

Them two who sired our children.

BETSEY

You want your child raised by those
butchers?

SUSAN (O.S.)

Know the greatest butcher of all?

Sal and Betsey turn, surprised to see Susan walking directly
behind them. Close.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

It's He who saw fit to put
sufferin' in this world. Ain't
nobody crueler than Him. Which make
these two? Mick especial? His
finest creations. You ask me.

With that, the conversation ends.

WITH BIG AND LITTLE HARPE

Little Harpe, agitated.

LITTLE HARPE

Mick, we got the press a' time on
on us. Posse's closin' in even now.
Mick.

(then)

The women need mounts. It's like
walkin' with fish barrels tied to
our ankles.

Big Harpe holds up a hand. Shush.

Ahead of them, a field of grazing buffalo.

Big Harpe looks back at their hoof prints in the ground. He holds out a hand to his brother.

BIG HARPE

Rifle.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

On a rolling plain checkered with trees, the posse, astride their horses, are at a standstill. Waiting.

ON MOSES, his features dark with anger. He swats a bug.

ON SILAS, peeing on a tree. The posse waits. Long pee.

LEIPER

He waterin' just the one tree, or
the field entire?

Silas finishes and walks toward his horse with an inebriated gait. He marks Moses' expression.

SILAS

If we left when I said, we woulda
had the Harpes in sight by now, so
spare me the ugly eyes.

Moses watches Silas drunkenly mount his horse. And then--

A SHOT RINGS OUT. The horses startle.

HUDGENS

Sounded close.

Hudgens looks at Gilmore, who gestures.

HUDGENS (CONT'D)
Gil puts the report half a mile
out. From yon woods.

Moses prods his horse, but the horse agitates, trotting back
and forth.

MOSES
What is it, Smudge?

Moses turns his head, hearing something... something faint.

He notices a pebble on the ground, vibrating.

Moses shields his eyes from the sun and looks out.

Silas pulls out a BRASS FIELD TELESCOPE. Looks through it.

SILAS'S POV - THROUGH THE TELESCOPE

In the distance, above the trees, dust rises.

SILAS

Lowers the telescope. Looks at Moses.

MOSES
Stampede.

THE BUFFALO STAMPEDE

A maelstrom of brown buffalo thunders through the trees.

WITH THE POSSE

Moses points to sheer limestone cliffs abutting the field, a
hundred paces to their right.

MOSES
Move to the cliffs!

They take off. Silas's horse rears back and Silas, drunk,
slips off. His head claps into a rock. His horse takes off,
chasing the posse. Silas doesn't move.

Galloping, Moses looks back and sees Silas's horse,
riderless. The posse reaches the cliffs as Moses jumps off
his horse. He hands the reins to Gilmore.

MOSES (CONT'D)
Here.

Moses draws his rifle as he runs toward Silas.

HUDGENS
Moses! Don't!

But Moses is already out of earshot, sprinting through the tall grass. He arrives at Silas. Tugs at his shirt.

MOSES
Silas! Get up!

Silas moans. His eyes flutter. He stirs.

The rumbling is deafening. The wave of buffalo crashes out of the trees and spills onto the plain ahead. A line of death heading their way.

Moses kneels. Aims his long rifle at the coming stampede--
And fires. The ball splashes into the earth. No effect.
The stampede, thirty seconds away.

Moses pulls a powder horn off his belt. Powders the muzzle.
Twenty seconds.

He retrieves a ball and cloth from another pouch. Slips them in the muzzle.

Ten seconds.

Silas awakes. Sees the stampede. He SCREAMS.

Moses slides his ramrod off the barrel. Stuffs the round in.
Pulls the cock back.

No time to aim. He fires into the air.

The report spooks the buffaloes in front and they split--

HIGH ANGLE

Of the buffalo stampeding around Moses and Silas, like a river breaking on a stone, missing them by feet.

ON THE POSSE

Pressed against the cliff as the stampede rumbles away across the field and fades. Dust swarms the air.

SILAS

Breathing in panicked bursts. Clutching his heart. A hand appears in front of his face.

Moses stands over him. Silas takes the offered hand. Moses pulls Silas to his feet.

MOSES
Can you walk?

Silas, breathless, touches his head. Nods. In a daze--

SILAS
I... I fell off.

Moses leans over and picks up Silas's dropped flask. Hands it to him.

MOSES
You dropped this.

Moses pats Silas on the arm and walks back toward the cliff. Silas watches him go, bewildered.

MOMENTS LATER

Moses strides toward the others. The posse looks at him with wide eyes.

LEIPER
Well don't that beat all fire and thunder? Ya got flint, Moses.

HUDGENS
The wicked flee, but the righteous are bold as a lion.

LEIPER
Don't reckon a lion would sit tight for a stampede.
(then)
Ten dollars says it was the Harpe devils what started it.

HUDGENS
What manner of men would attempt murder with a herd of buffalo?

LEIPER
Ones we're doggin'.

MOSES
This wasn't a murder attempt.

SILAS (O.S.)
What was it then?

Silas hobbles toward them, still catching his breath.

Moses points to the ground, pockmarked with hoof prints.

MOSES
Covered their tracks.

The posses takes in the mess of hoofprints. Gilmore whistles, as if to say, *this is going to take awhile.*

LATER

The sun droops low in the sky. The men stand on the ground, about ten paces apart each, poring over the hoofprints.

HUDGENS
Can we not follow the buffalo tracks to their point of origin and recover the trail there?

Leiper wanders close.

LEIPER
Harpe is smart as whips. They likely doubled back and altered their course.

They sift through the grass for another moment.

LEIPER (CONT'D)
How'd you meet your friend there, Hudgens? Gabby Gilmore?

HUDGENS
War. He lost the powers of speech taking a musket ball for me in the neck. Which is why I frown on strangers making sport of his condition.

LEIPER
You make sport of it.

HUDGENS
I'm his familiar. You're not.

Gilmore nudges Hudgens. Gesticulates. Leiper sees this.

LEIPER
What's the dumbshow?

HUDGENS
He says you can make sport of him. So long as you don't mind him calling you an idiot.

Leiper smirks.

LEIPER
If the shoe fits.

WITH MOSES AND SILAS

As they comb through the grass. Moses is intent on his task, Silas stumbles along, casually looking at the ground.

SILAS
This could take days.

MOSES
The way you're looking it will.

SILAS
Moses... Back there...

Moses looks at Silas, who struggles for the words.

SILAS (CONT'D)
I owe you my... What I mean to say
is--

MOSES
You lost your grip. Happens to us
all.

Silas swallows, relieved. Moses looks at the confusing medley of tracks and grass.

MOSES (CONT'D)
Think your friend would help us?
Colonel Trabue, was it?

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Big and Little Harpe stand inside the woods, looking out at the posse. At Moses.

LITTLE HARPE
If we want to get to the Cave, we
shouldn't waste no more time.

Big Harpe's eyes follow Moses, who mounts his horse. The others follow suit.

BIG HARPE
Didn't you say we need mounts?

DISSOLVE TO:

THE MOON disappearing behind dark clouds. We are in--

EXT. DEAD FOREST - NIGHT

THUNDER RUMBLES. Lightning sparks the clouds. The posse travels through a woods of leafless trees -- a dead forest.

SILAS

Col. Trabue rode in Ballenger's posse against the Harpes, after they fled Danville. He knows the Harpes better'n any man alive.

HUDGENS

Am I the only one unnerved that all these trees are dead?

MOSES

They've been girdled.

LEIPER

Girdled? Ain't that a fashion reserved for the womenfolk?

MOSES

Old farming technique. Score the trunks around, kill the tree. Lets in sunlight so you can crop without clearing the land.

Gilmore, riding in back, hears something. He turns around.

Nothing but a hall of barren trees.

EXT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

In the dim orange light thrown from the windows, Moses and the others tie their horses to a hitching post.

Silas knocks on the front door.

SILAS

Hello the house! Callin' for Colonel Daniel Trabue!

The cabin's door opens. COL. TRABUE (50s), a stooped man with scars crawling out of an untamed white beard, eyes them warily for a beat. He lights up when he registers--

COL. TRABUE

Silas McBee! Father above, look 'atcha. Yer only meanta have one dinner a night, ya know that, soldier?

Trabue LAUGHS as he slaps Silas's ample gut.

COL. TRABUE (CONT'D)
 How's Catherine and the ankle
 biter?

Silas flinches at the words. Moses notices.

SILAS
 We have somber business, Daniel.
 (off Trabue's look)
 We're trackin' the Harpes.

Trabue's levity vanishes.

A sudden THUNDER CRASH carries us to--

INT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

The SOUND of RAIN HAMMERING the log walls mingles with the CRACKLES of the FIRE in the hearth.

Trabue plucks a burning ember from the flames with metal tongs and lights his clay pipe with it.

COL. TRABUE
 Nowhere the Harpes go what
 sufferin' don't follow. You men
 thirsty?

Leiper, Hudgens, and Gilmore, sitting around the kitchen table, look at each other.

HUDGENS
 Throat could stand a watering.

LEIPER
 Amen.

COL. TRABUE
 Johnny!

An angled boy of thirteen, JOHNNY, climbs down from the loft above. Good posture on this young man. Eager to please.

JOHNNY
 Tankards all around? Whiskey or ale?

SILAS
 Rye whiskey?

COL. TRABUE
 Corn. Aged it myself in the charred oaks out front. Technique outta' Bourbon County.
 (MORE)

COL. TRABUE (CONT'D)

(then)

Only the best for the hunters of
Harpes.

Silas grins at the prospect. Then touches the back of his head, remembering.

SILAS

I... I will have water.

Moses looks at Silas, surprised. As does Col. Trabue.

COL. TRABUE

For Silas McBee? You hit your head?

SILAS

I did, so it happens.

Trabue shrugs. Points around the room.

COL. TRABUE

Who's got hair on their chest?

MOSES

I'll take a water.

COL. TRABUE

Huh? What kind of posse welcomes
the evening hours with water?

Moses says nothing.

HUDGENS

Water suits us fine, doesn't it?

Gilmore nods. Leiper looks around, feeling pressured.

LEIPER

Hellfire, I'll take a water too.

Silas nods his thanks to the men.

Col. Trabue shakes his head, mystified.

COL. TRABUE

Well. Water's wet where it counts,
reckon. Johnny, fetch these men
their drinks.

JOHNNY

Yes sir.

Johnny, pitcher in hand, runs out the back.

EXT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

Rain pours. Johnny pops the lid off a wooden barrel. He reaches down to fill the pitcher. Barely any water.

Johnny looks in the direction of the forest. He looks down at his pitcher.

INT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

The men have gathered around Col. Trabue.

SILAS

Danny, we're hopin' you might have insight as to where our quarry is headin'.

Trabue puffs thoughtfully on his pipe.

COL. TRABUE

Well.

(thinks)

Given the direction they came from, and the direction you says they goin', only one place they's headin'. Cave-In-Rock.

This catches Moses' attention.

SILAS

Cave-In-Rock. That's Samuel Mason's hole.

COL. TRABUE

Only they don't call him Samuel Mason. They call him--

MOSES

The Captain.

COL. TRABUE

That's the one.

SILAS

Then we have to reach the Harpes afore they make it there. Else they're good as gone.

HUDGENS

What is the significance of Cave-In-Rock?

SILAS

It's home to the worst low lifes
around. Robbers, murderers,
rapists...

COL. TRABUE

And the Captain's their master.
He'd shame King Herod hisself. But
he's a songbird next to the Harpes.

HUDGENS

Enlighten us, Colonel. Who are
these people? The Harpes?

Trabue settles into a chair. Puffs on his pipe. Then--

COL. TRABUE

I rode agin' 'em with "Devil" Joe
Ballenger. Four days on their trail
till we realize their tracks went
one way, and they the other. Don't
know when they slipped us, or how.
But I do know it warn't anger I
felt when we lost 'em. It was
relief, sure as rain.

(puffs on pipe)

We found one a' their victims in
their wake. Slave boy. Not eight
years ol'.

Silence as Trabue finds the words.

COL. TRABUE (CONT'D)

Belly tore op', guts on the ground.
Head smashed to gruel. We thought
it mighta' been the wolves... but
warn't nothin' ate.

(then)

The thing about killers, ya know,
is they all got their reasons.
Robbers want yer money, soldiers
follow orders, injuns want their
land. But the big one? Big Harpe
they call him? No reason about him.
He got a thirst for anguish and
killin' like nobody outside a'
circle nine a' Hell itself.

Moses stares at the back door, where Johnny left.

MOSES

How long does it take to get water?

COL. TRABUE
 Eh, the hogshead's low, I'd wager.
 Johnny can refill at the river
 faster than a gnat could shit.

Moses says nothing, but continues staring at the door.
 Trabue returns to his story.

COL. TRABUE (CONT'D)
 After I quit the hunt, I heard
 Ballenger and them caught up with
 the Harpes in May. Surrounded the
 two, dead to rights. But...

Col. Trabue puffs his pipe.

HUDGENS
 But what?

COL. TRABUE
 Their rifles misfired.

LEIPER
All their rifles misfired?

COL. TRABUE
 To a man.

The men look at each other.

LEIPER
 "Devil" Joe Ballenger? Hope they
 took away his nickname after that.

Trabue looks at Leiper, unamused.

COL. TRABUE
 I think it suits him. How many men
 you know stared into the devil's
 eyes and lived to see the sunrise?

On Leiper's face--

COL. TRABUE (O.S.)
 Think you can do better?

EXT. DEAD WOODS - NIGHT

Driving rain. Pitcher in hand, Johnny runs among the trees.

He stops at a rushing river, swollen by the storm.

He leans down and fills the pitcher with fresh water. He
 stands and makes his way back into the woods when--

The SOUND OF A CRYING BABY stops him. *Huh?*

He walks along the river, toward the sound.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Johnny pushes a branch aside and sees--

Betsey trying to get her FUSSY NEWBORN to latch to her breast. Sal, with her own baby tied to her midriff, kneels by Betsey's baby, trying to help.

Susan watches them.

All heads turn to Johnny.

Johnny stares for a moment, before manners prompt him to avert his gaze from Betsey's exposed breast.

JOHNNY
Do you need help?

Sal shakes her head no. But it's not a look that answers his question. It's a look that says *get away*.

Johnny doesn't get it. He steps forward.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)
Do you need shelter?

BIG HARPE (O.S.)
You from that cabin yonder?

Johnny turns to see Big Harpe standing amid the trees behind him, blending in with the trunks.

LITTLE HARPE (O.S.)
Lotta horses hitched at that
cabin...

Johnny turns again to see Little Harpe walking out of the woods. Johnny's features tighten with realization.

He runs. Little Harpe LAUGHS as he tackles Johnny...

INT. COL. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

Trabue still holds court. But Moses isn't paying attention. He's still looking at the back door, where Johnny left.

COL. TRABUE
... their father -- Harper at that
time, William Harper--

Moses crosses the room and goes out the back door.

EXT. COL. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

Moses exits into the rain. Listens. Nothing but the wet.

EXT. DEAD WOODS - NIGHT

Moses jogs through the rain and leafless branches.

MOSES

Johnny! Johnny Trabue!

In the distance, the SOUND of a RUSHING RIVER.

Moses walks toward the sound.

WIDE ON MOSES

From a distance, approaching the river. In the FOREGROUND, lying on the leaves, a shivering, terrified Johnny Trabue. Standing above him--

Big Harpe, who slowly places his torn, moccasined foot on Johnny's face.

JOHNNY

Please... Please--

BIG HARPE

Shhhh. Face in the mud, now. Go on.

Weeping, Johnny turns his face to the ground. Big Harpe raises his foot--

CLOSE ON MOSES

Who arrives at the river where Johnny filled his pitcher.

He kneels. Finds traces of footsteps in the mud, already filled with water. He sees which direction they go.

MOSES

Johnny!

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Moses emerges into the clearing. Looks around. And sees--

JOHNNY

On the ground. Moses runs over to him... and stops.

The body of Johnny Trabue lies on his belly, HIS HEAD CAVED IN. For a fraction of a second, Moses' face contorts in pain. And anger. And then, Moses runs.

EXT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

The Harpe brothers are quietly leading three horses away from the hitching post as--

MOSES

Bursts out of the woods. Sees the Harpes.

Moses aims and FIRES, the SOUND of the shot DROWNED BY A CRACK OF THUNDER.

The shot misses, digging into a tree in a burst of bark.

INT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

The SOUND of the GUN SHOT through the THUNDER alerts Leiper. Leiper looks at the others. They did not notice.

EXT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

THUNDER CRACKS. Moses, advancing on the Harpes, flips his rifle and catches the barrel, wielding the gun like a club.

LITTLE HARPE

Scrambles for his rifle as Moses strides toward him. Little Harpe aims his rifle but he's too late--

Moses slugs him across the jaw with the butt of his rifle. Little Harpe goes down.

BIG HARPE

Lumbers up behind Moses, who grabs Little Harpe's rifle--

And spins, rifle trained on Big Harpe.

But before Moses can pull the trigger--

Big Harpe swats the rifle out of Moses' hands.

Moses springs forward, swinging. He catches Big Harpe on the cheek. No effect. Big Harpe--

Grabs Moses by the throat. Moses, struggling, choking, tries to pry Big Harpe's fingers loose.

BIG HARPE
This isn't honest.

LEIPER

Comes up behind Big Harpe. Wraps his arms around Big Harpe's chest and pulls him away as--

Moses collapses to the ground, GASPING.

Big Harpe twists free of Leiper's grip.

Leiper backs up, swinging his rifle around him.

Aims at Big Harpe's throat. Pulls the trigger.

The cock falls into the pan and--

Nothing. Misfire.

Leiper hesitates. Then drops the rifle and unleashes a volley of brick-splitting punches into Big Harpe's jaw, drawing blood.

But Big Harpe keeps coming. Draws a knife. Plants one hand behind Leiper's back and forces his knife toward Leiper's chest with the other.

Leiper has both hands on Big Harpe's knife arm, trying with all his might to keep the blade away.

The blade moves closer to his chest.

Big Harpe looks Leiper in the eyes. And with that look, Leiper knows: he is going to die.

SILAS (O.S.)
Drop it!

Big Harpe turns to see--

SILAS

Standing in the rain, his rifle sighted on him. Behind him, Hudgens, Gilmore, and Col. Trabue rush out of the cabin.

WIDE SHOT

On this tableau, with a row of distressed horses standing between the posse, rifles up, and Big Harpe.

Little Harpe rises woozily.

BIG HARPE

Releases Leiper, who falls to the mud.

Big Harpe looks at Moses. Places his hand on the only black horse of the group -- Smudge. In a sudden motion, Big Harpe buries his knife in Smudge's gut.

MOSES

No!

SMUDGE BRAYS and rears back on his hind legs as--

The SOUND and MOTION of the horse makes Silas PANIC FIRE. The shot THUDS into Smudge, who tumbles over as--

Big Harpe tosses the knife at Hudgens. The blade caroms off Hudgens' rifle. He FIRES, the shot going astray.

SILAS

Hold your fire!

Big Harpe leaps on one horse and Little Harpe on another. They slap the reins and the horses take off as--

SILAS (CONT'D)

Now!

Gilmore and Trabue answer with a THUNDER of GUNSHOTS. One ball grazes Big Harpe's shoulder, tearing a hole in his shirt. But he doesn't slow.

MOSES

Furious, yanks out his belt ax and launches it. It spins through the air and--

GLANCES off the leg of Big Harpe's horse. He rides on.

Moses runs to the SCREAMING Smudge and silences him with a fast knife in the neck. In the same motion, Moses leaps on another horse and races off in hard pursuit.

Silas and Gilmore climb on the remaining mounts and follow, leaving the others behind.

EXT. DEAD WOODS - NIGHT

RAIN. LIGHTNING. THUNDER. The Harpe Brothers ride through the woods, branches scratching their cheeks.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

The Harpes and their horses SPLASH across the twenty foot torrential river.

Big Harpe's horse stumbles, the wash threatening to sweep him away. But the horse swims to the opposite bank.

Sal and Betsey, both astride one of the two horses from before, and Susan on the other, await them. Babies slung to their chests.

Sal sees Big Harpe's bloodied face.

SAL
Micajah--

BIG HARPE
Ride! Ride!

The Harpes scream past the women, who kick their horses into a gallop. They disappear into the night.

WITH THE POSSE

ON MOSES, teeth gritted, as his horse--

SPLASHES headlong into the river.

LIGHTNING FLASHES.

Silas and Gilmore storm into the water behind him. Gilmore's horse slips, her front legs buckling. Gilmore flips into the river. The current carries him as--

SILAS
Gilmore!

Silas leans over to catch Gilmore. Misses.

SILAS (CONT'D)
No!

The current throws Gilmore against the bank, where his HEAD KNOCKS INTO A ROCK. His body goes limp.

Moses' horse clammers out of the torrent on the far bank. He turns to see--

SILAS

Leap from his horse, into the water, and grab Gilmore.

With his free hand, Silas clasps a reed. His grip slipping.

MOSES

Throws a look into the woods, where the Harpes went.

Moses looks back at the men. He yanks a HANGMAN'S ROPE out of his saddle bag.

ON SILAS

His grip weakening as--

The loop of the hangman's rope lands around a tree stump on the bank. A FLASH OF LIGHTNING reveals--

MOSES

Rope in hand, diving into the water. He collides with Silas and Gilmore and holds them fast as--

The rope goes taught.

Arm over arm, Moses pulls the mass of men ashore. Then--

MOSES
(breathless)
Turn him on his side.

Silas complies. He slams his fist on Gilmore's back, causing the drenched mute to vomit water. He breathes.

Silas slumps to the mud, relieved.

Moses looks across the river, into the night that covered the Harpes' escape.

The sound of TRABUE WAILING carries us to--

EXT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

Trabue, CRYING, kneels over the corpse of his son.

Leiper, Moses, and Silas stand behind him, hats off. The rain has stopped and the air is foggy.

CLOSE ON LEIPER, eyes gazing at nothing.

MOSES
Lord, in the midst of our sorrow
and loss, remind us of the glorious
eternal reunion that is waiting for
us.

COL. TRABUE
What if I ain't goin' ta Heaven?
What if I ain't deservin'? Then
I'll never see my boy.

MOSES
God will see fit to reunite you
with your son.

COL. TRABUE
God share His plan with you, did
He?

Moses says nothing. His eyes find Smudge, lying on the ground. Trabue wipes his snotty face.

Seeing this, Moses takes out Mary's white handkerchief. He holds it out, ready to offer it. But thinks better of it. Tucks it back in his pouch.

INT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

Moses enters to find Gilmore, woozy, sitting at the table, with Hudgens wrapping a bandage around his friend's head. Candles flicker.

MOSES
How's he faring?

HUDGENS
He has no brain to hurt.

Gilmore swats Hudgens.

MOSES
I'm glad for your help, Gilmore.
But you should quit the hunt. And
rest.

Gilmore gesticulates wildly.

HUDGENS
Easy, Gil. He's trying to save that
ugly head of yours.

Gilmore gestures angrily. Moses watches for a beat.

MOSES
You can have my share of the reward
money, if that's--

Gilmore smacks Moses with a mug.

HUDGENS
He doesn't shine to interruptions.

MOSES
Gil--

HUDGENS
He says he's not quitting.

MOSES

Doesn't matter anyway. Harpes took
two of our mounts. Killed a third.
Takes three off our party.

Gilmore gestures to Hudgens, who interprets.

HUDGENS

Gilmore says he saw a pen out
back--

MOSES

I'm not taking horses from a
grieving man. Leiper and I can ride
two-up and--

LEIPER (O.S.)

I ain't comin'.

Leiper stands in the doorway. Eyes downcast.

EXT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

Moses follows Leiper to his Mustang -- one of the two
remaining horses.

MOSES

What's spooking you? Leiper?

LEIPER

Rifle misfired. Had him square
and... and she misfired.

MOSES

It was raining.

Leiper's only answer is to scramble onto his horse. Moses
holds the reins, preventing Leiper from going.

MOSES (CONT'D)

What about your reward money?

LEIPER

Won't be the last bounty.

Leiper tugs the reins free of Moses' hands.

Moses watches Leiper ride away. Then--

MOSES

Leiper.

Leiper stops. Turns. Moses flips a coin at Leiper, who
catches it. He looks at it.

LEIPER
Silver dollar.

MOSES
At least you made your profit.

Leiper tosses the coin back. It lands on the ground.

LEIPER
Buy yourself a Bible.

Leiper turns and rides into the fog. And he's gone.

The sound of an AX SPLITTING FLESH AND BONE carries us to--

LATER

Moses chops the remains of his horse into pieces. Blood stains his hands and arms.

Silas walks up. He looks haggard and sunken.

SILAS
Is this necessary?

MOSES
Meat'll draw the wolves.

Moses chops another piece.

MOSES (CONT'D)
Small pieces bury quicker.

SILAS
You want to leave now? Or in the morning?

Moses looks at the shivering Silas.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Danny gave us an extra mount. Said we could quarter here, too, long as ya don't talk God to him. Says he ain't on speakin' terms with God.

ON the Colonel, who sleeps leaning against a tree. A jug of spirits in his hand. Moses nods.

MOSES
We'll ride sunup. Harpes need to rest, sure as we do. You could use some rest yourself.

SILAS
I could use a nip.

Moses shrugs. Resumes his chopping. Silas watches for a beat. Then walks off.

Moses chops another piece. He stops, resting.

The sound of a SECOND AX chopping flesh. Moses turns to see Silas at his side, working another ax.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Can't sleep anyhow.

Silas doesn't look up. Only chops.

MOSES
May I ask you something?
(off Silas's silence)
What happened to your wife and
child?

SILAS
What makes you think something
happened to my wife and child?

MOSES
You don't have to talk about it.

Silas takes another swing at the horse. Then--

SILAS
They was shot by a hunter's rifle.
Round pierced my son's throat.
Landed in my wife's chest. We lost
little Vardry. And Catherine,
she... she's in a sleep she ain't
wakin' from.

MOSES
I'm sorry.

SILAS
Was a Shawnee hunter. Comin' down
from the north. He say it was an
accident. He say he won't violate
no treaty. But I know the truth. He
saw the chance to kill some white
folk. And he took it. Them reds is
monsters. If I had a rope long
enough, I'd hang 'em all.

Moses renews his chopping. As he does--

MOSES
As Christ suffered, so shall we.

SILAS
Thought Christ suffered so we
didn't have to.

MOSES
Always be the burden of suffering.
But I believe God chooses who bears
it.

SILAS
Then why'd He choose us?

MOSES
Because we're strong enough.

Silas thinks on the words. Then, he and Moses bring down
their axes in unison. The SOUND of the CHOP carries us to--

LATER

Moses stands in front of Smudge's burial site, marked by a
mound of fresh dirt and two bloodied axes.

In Moses' hands, the char-free knife.

INT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

GILMORE lies on the bearskin rug, SNORING.

On the floor a few feet away, HUDGENS sleeps fitfully.

Silas lies in the corner.

Moses stands in the doorway. Looking at them.

Deep in thought.

EXT. TRABUE CABIN - NIGHT

Trabue leans against the tree, SNORING.

Moses sits next to him and gently nudges him awake. Trabue,
exhausted and still drunk, slurs his words.

COL. TRABUE
He was back... for jus' a second,
he was back...

Moses nods at the stable near the cabin.

MOSES

You got any more mounts in that
stable?

COL. TRABUE

Mare. Piebald. And a mule for
haulin'.

(then)

Mare was a gift to Johnny for his
thirteenth.

MOSES

I want to buy them.

COL. TRABUE

How much you offerin'?

MOSES

All of my reward money.

COL. TRABUE

Reward money? For killin' them
Harpes? You'd sooner get money from
Judas hisself.

MOSES

I will kill them. Sell me your
horses, give me a full posse, and I
can guarantee it.

COL. TRABUE

My son's horse ain't for sale.

MOSES

(after a beat)

"Whoever is generous to the poor
lends to the Lord--"

COL. TRABUE

Don't quote that book to me. S'got
the ring of a false coin.

Silence. Finally, Moses rises.

MOSES

I understand.

Moses walks away. Then pauses. Sees Smudge's burial site.

He walks back to Trabue. Doesn't sit this time. There is
danger in Moses' words. Gone is the preacher's diction--

MOSES (CONT'D)

I don't mean to press on a fresh
wound, but your son ain't usin' his
mare no more.

Trabue reaches for his bottle, but Moses steps on the
bottle. Leans down. Gets in Trabue's face. Scary.

MOSES (CONT'D)

Give me the rides I need, and I
swear to Jesus, I'll destroy those
scum what caved in your son's skull
like he was a dog in the woods.

OFF Trabue's shock--

EXT. DEAD WOODS - DAY

The sun rises behind a blue-fogged woods as--

The posse rides on horses, to a man. Gilmore rides on the
mule. Hudgens LAUGHS.

HUDGENS

An ass for an ass, isn't that a
fitting sight!

Gilmore ignores Hudgens, who pulls up alongside him. Throws
an arm around his shoulders and WHISPERS into his ear--

HUDGENS (CONT'D)

Stay behind me at all times, hear?
I'll keep you safe.

Gilmore nods.

Silas looks back at the cabin.

Trabue watches them, a pale face in the window.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The posse makes it across the tamed creek.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The horses stand still as Moses leans down, studying a tree.

MOSES

Blazes in the bark here.
(to Silas)
Direction of Cave-In-Rock.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Big Harpe's horse limps through the brush. He leans over and checks the hindquarters -- leaking blood from where Moses' ax grazed it.

Big Harpe leaps off the horse. Little Harpe and the three women pull up short, watching. Big Harpe says nothing to them. He walks to a bush and urinates.

Little Harpe examines the horse's wound.

LITTLE HARPE
Mount's no good. Bullet graze?

BIG HARPE
Ax. Moses.

Big Harpe finishes up. Walks to Susan.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
Get off. You're ridin' with Wiley.

SUSAN
Yes, Micajah.

Susan gets off. Whispers seductively to Big Harpe--

SUSAN (CONT'D)
I'm hungry.

Big Harpe stares at her. Takes out a tomahawk. Hands it to her. Gestures to the wounded horse.

BIG HARPE
Eat up.

Susan smiles. She takes the tomahawk.

ON BIG HARPE as Susan cleaves the horse's skull OFF SCREEN.

Sal averts her gaze as the horse flops to the ground. She hears a WHIMPER behind her. Turns to see Betsey WITHHOLDING TEARS, grabbing her breast.

SAL
Betsey?

BETSEY
Sal. It hurts.

MOMENTS LATER

ONE NEWBORN lies on the ground, FUSSING. Susan sits in the grass, nursing the other two newborns, one on each breast.

Little Harpe sits next to her, feeding her a piece of horse meat. She opens her mouth and receives it. She chews.

ON BETSEY, sitting on a fallen tree, weeping. Sal moves the cloth of Betsey's torn blouse aside, revealing her breast. A bulbous red welt covers the nipple. Infection.

Sal brandishes a long, silver KNITTING NEEDLE.

Betsey WHIMPERS.

SAL

Look away.

Betsey does. OFF SCREEN Sal lances the welt with the needle. Betsey SHRIEKS.

Big Harpe looks over, annoyed.

BIG HARPE

Stop the wailing.

Betsey covers her mouth.

SAL

Here.

Sal rubs some herbs onto a moist cloth.

SAL (CONT'D)

This is a poultice a' sorrel n' yellow lily roots. Should help with the pain and it'll make the red go away.

Sal gives Betsey the cloth. Betsey presses it to her breast. She manages a smile.

BETSEY

Thank you.

WITH BIG HARPE

Looking at something off in the distance.

BIG HARPE

Wiley.

Little Harpe leaves Susan's side and comes over.

Big Harpe nods. Little Harpe looks.

On a distant plain, a line of NATIVES riding on horseback.

LITTLE HARPE
Cherokee.

BIG HARPE
Lower Cherokee. Chickamauga. Movin'
north.

LITTLE HARPE
Think any of 'em would remember us?

BIG HARPE
Heard of us, at least.

Little Harpe looks at his brother, who watches the Cherokee.

LITTLE HARPE
Don't think on 'em, Mick. We got to
get to the Cave, and you know them
shiny teeths is ridin' on us right
now.

SAL (O.S.)
Micajah?

Big Harpe turns to see Sal Harpe walking up.

BIG HARPE
Are we movin' yet or what?

SAL
Yes, but Betsey will need some
food.

Big Harpe looks at the dead horse, which has been hacked apart. FLIES BUZZ around it.

SAL (CONT'D)
Food she can keep down.

SUSAN (O.S.)
Don't bother me none.

ON SUSAN, blood leaking out of her mouth, two babies still pressed to her breasts.

SAL
Well, Betsey ain't Susan.

Big Harpe sighs, annoyed.

CUT TO:**EIGHT EGGS SIZZLING IN A SKILLET**

A hand with a pewter spoon stirs the eggs.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The hand belongs to a GRIZZLED MAN (40s) with short, stringy gray hair and slate blue eyes. Dirt flecked but formal attire. He doles out the eggs to the plates of--

The EIGHT OTHER PEOPLE of his party: a STOUT WOMAN (30s), three teenagers -- two boys and a girl -- an older man and woman, and a black man and his eight-year-old, slaves both.

GRIZZLED MAN

Little bites. Chew slowly now.

The group sits in front of a horse-drawn covered wagon parked on a dirt trail snaking through the woods.

The Grizzled man spoons the egg remnants onto his own plate when he hears a NOISE IN THE WOODS. He looks.

Opposite him, Big Harpe, half concealed by leaves. Rifle trained between the man's eyes.

The black man moves to grab something from the back of the covered wagon... but can't find it.

LITTLE HARPE (O.S.)

Already got it.

The black man turns to face Little Harpe, who levels a rifle at him. Little Harpe taps the rifle.

LITTLE HARPE

'S right here.

The black man grabs his eight-year-old and guides the boy behind him, protective.

BIG HARPE

We're taking your food.

The Grizzled Man holds up calming hands. He nods at his wife, who gathers the three children and two elders and holds them close. The Grizzled Man faces Big Harpe. Noble.

GRIZZLED MAN

Eggs, bags a' flour, tobacco, jerky
in the wagon. Yours.

Big Harpe nods to somebody in the woods. In response, Sal steps out. She takes the Grizzled Man's plate. One by one, she scoops the eggs from the plates back onto the one.

She stops at the black boy's plate. Leaves his food alone.

She sets the plate down in the back of the wagon and begins collecting the provisions.

GRIZZLED MAN (CONT'D)
Take your food and leave us in
peace.

BIG HARPE
Thank you for your orders, sir.

Sal, sack and plate in her hands, walks by Big Harpe.
WHISPERS in his ear--

SAL
Please leave them, Mick.

Big Harpe regards Sal. Without looking at his brother--

BIG HARPE
Wiley?

LITTLE HARPE
Yeah.

BIG HARPE
Tie them up. Tight enough so they
won't make themselves a hindrance
to our ends.
(a beat)
But not so tight as they can't
twist themselves out after a piece.

LITTLE HARPE
They gonna peach on us.

BIG HARPE
Tie them.

Sal nods a thanks to Big Harpe.

LATER

Little Harpe cinches a rope around the wrists of the Grizzled Man, the rest of his party already trussed.

Two of the teenagers, the girl and one of the boys, CRIES. The STOUT WOMAN, presumably their mother speaks up, icy.

STOUT WOMAN
Addie. Jed. Look at me.

The children do. The Stout Woman shakes her head. *Don't make a fuss. It will be okay.*

The black man calmly strokes his son's back -- small movements with his restrained wrists.

Little Harpe finishes his task.

LITTLE HARPE
We're takin' them steeds, ain't we?

GRIZZLED MAN
No!
(off Little Harpe's look)
We'll be stranded without 'em.

LITTLE HARPE
You're stranded now.

Little Harpe turns to Big Harpe, but Big Harpe has his eyes on a spear tip mounted on the side of the wagon.

BIG HARPE
(to Grizzled Man)
Officer's spontoon. Where were you stationed?

GRIZZLED MAN
Hudson Valley. Under Arnold.

BIG HARPE
Arnold the fighting general.

GRIZZLED MAN
Brave a man as ever lived.

BIG HARPE
You see Burgoyne's surrender?

GRIZZLED MAN
Held his sword in my hand.

BIG HARPE
What did you do with the loyalists?
Tho ones who bled with the Torries?

GRIZZLED MAN
Hanged 'em on the first tree.

Silence as Big Harpe runs a calloused hand over the blade of the spontoon.

BIG HARPE
Blade's gone dull. We'll whet it
for you.

Big Harpe hands the spontoon to Little Harpe, who removes the whetstone from the pocket of his greatcoat. Starts sharpening the blade.

The family eyes Little Harpe anxiously.

Sal presses a hand on Big Harpe's arm.

SAL
We should travel.

Big Harpe doesn't take his attention off the Grizzled Man.

BIG HARPE
(to Grizzled Man)
My pap fought at King's Mountain.

GRIZZLED MAN
A just battle.

BIG HARPE
Not for him.

GRIZZLED MAN
(unsure)
You... lost him?

Big Harpe nods.

GRIZZLED MAN (CONT'D)
My condolences to you. He served
his country well by a grand sight.

BIG HARPE
He wasn't fighting for your side.

The Grizzled Man says nothing. Little Harpe finishes sharpening the blade. Hands it back to Big Harpe.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
And he didn't die in battle. The
victors -- your allies -- poured
him over with boiling tar.
Feathered him. Marched him around,
dancing to his screams.

Big Harpe pauses, staring in the woods, recollecting.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
Then they bayoneted pappy's belly
till his guts spilt.

Big Harpe sits on the ground, uncomfortably close to the Grizzled Man and his wife.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
I watched the whole thing. Twelve years old.

(then)

Pappy used to say Wiley and I weren't honest. He'd bloody our lips for lying, even when our mouths were closed. Remember that, Wiley?

LITTLE HARPE
Pappy's hugs had knuckles in 'em.

Big Harpe runs his thumb along the edge of the spontoon.

BIG HARPE
I laughed when pappy died. Laughed when I saw his belly open. Know what I thought then? There's your honesty, Pap.

(then, to Grizzled Man)
You want to see honesty?

GRIZZLED MAN
Please. Take our horses, our wagon, our clothes... Please don't hurt us.

Big Harpe flashes gritty teeth.

BIG HARPE
There's no word more honest than a scream.

EXT. KENTUCKY PLAINS - DAY

Silas and Moses ride side by side, with the others behind.

Moses reins to a stop. He holds a hand up. The posse quiets. In the distance, barely audible--

SCREAMS.

HUDGENS
Coyotes?

MOSES
No.

Moses kicks his horse, riding fast. The posse races after.

CUT TO:

A VISION OF HELL

The source of the SCREAMS. PAINED and DESPERATE.

Big Harpe, blood-soaked, rapturous, a spontoon in one hand and a tomahawk in the other, walks among a writhing pile of bodies tangled in severed limbs and viscera.

ON THE THREE HARPE WOMEN, their backs to the slaughter. Sal looks at her baby. She sings--

SAL
Oh don't deceive me, Oh never leave
me/
How could you use a poor maiden
so...

The others join in--

HARPE WOMEN
Remember the vows/
That you made to your Mary...

SMASH TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

BRANCHES WHIPPING BY.

ON MOSES, riding fast, jaw clenched, teeth gritted.

Moses GASPS.

He pulls up, stopping. The posse rears up behind him as dust rolls up.

Silence.

Moses gets off the horse. Moses walks among--

Mangled, bloodied bodies. All of them SCALPED.

Moses kneels down, checking pulses. Silas is furious.

SILAS
Scalped. Just like the goddamn
reds.

Moses ignores him, emotional. Hudgens' mouth hangs open.

HUDGENS
Who... who would do this?

And then--

ANOTHER SCREAM. Farther away.

Moses runs to his horse. Rides off.

EXT. ESCARPMENT - DAY

Moses descends a grade that leads to a pit closed in on three sides by sheer, fifteen foot limestone cliffs.

Moses stops. Jumps off the horse and runs to--

The Grizzled Man, lying in the pit against the cliff wall, holding his intestines. HE SCREAMS.

Moses drops to his side as the others arrive behind him.

MOSES
Easy. We're gonna help.
(calling back)
Silas.

Silas leaps off his horse and rushes over to Moses. He pulls the Grizzled Man's hands off his belly.

The Grizzled Man SCREAMS, half from pain, half from despair.

Silas looks at the terrible wound across the man's belly.

MOSES (CONT'D)
Save him.

Silas can only shake his head.

Moses looks at the rest of the posse.

MOSES (CONT'D)
Somebody save him!

Hudgens clammers off his horse, drawing a Bible from his saddle bag. He rushes to the man's side--

HUDGENS
Do you accept the Lord--

MOSES
No. Save him.

Hudgens looks at Moses, at a loss.

BELLOWING in fury, Moses unsheathes his knife and SINKS IT INTO THE GRIZZLED MAN'S NECK, silencing him. Then--

BIG HARPE (O.S.)
Moses Stegall!

Moses looks up. Up top stand Big Harpe, Little Harpe, and Susan, rifles trained on the posse. A trap.

BIG HARPE
Rifles on the corpse. Or we'll drop
you all like timber.

Moses looks at Silas. Nods.

The posse members lay their rifles down.

MOSES
It's me you're after, ain't it?

BIG HARPE
You're chasing us. Not the other
way around.

SILAS
Because of what you filth did to
Stegall's family.

HUDGENS
And everybody between there and
here.

MOSES
If you want me, then shoot me. But
leave these men be.

LITTLE HARPE
And they'll let us be? You goin' to
swear on a Bible?

MOSES
You'll have a head start, least.

BIG HARPE
Why don't you tell them who you
are, Moses?

The rest of the posse looks at Moses. He opens his mouth to speak when--

A SHOT RINGS OUT.

A ROUND CAROMS off Big Harpe's rifle, and the gun falls from his hands. Little Harpe and Susan spin to see--

JOHN LEIPER

Riding on them as he tosses his spent rifle to the ground. He grabs another RIFLE from his back. Aims.

LITTLE HARPE

FIREs at Leiper. Misses.

He runs to the horses where Sal and Betsey wait. They mount their horses as--

IN THE PIT

--the posse grabs their guns except--

MOSES

Who climbs onto his horse's back, and launches himself up. He grabs ahold of a groove in the cliff wall.

He pulls himself up to the--

TOP OF THE PIT

Where Susan ATTACKS him, pounding him, biting him. Feral.

Moses kidney-punches her. Tosses her off.

He scrambles to his feet. Then--

LEIPER (O.S.)
Moses! Duck!

Moses ducks as--

LEIPER

FIREs. The round--

HITS LITTLE HARPE'S HORSE in the head. The horse falls, pinning Little Harpe to the ground.

Little Harpe struggles to get out from underneath his dead horse. He reaches out a hand for Big Harpe.

LITTLE HARPE
Help me!

Big Harpe turns and sees--

JOHN LEIPER and MOSES advancing.

BIG HARPE
Goddammit!

Big Harpe kicks his horse into a run. Sal rides behind as they disappear into the brush.

Little Harpe grabs Betsey's leg.

LITTLE HARPE
Help me, you bitch!

Betsey pulls at Little Harpe--

LEIPER (O.S.)
Don't exert yourself.

Betsey spins to find Leiper, long rifle in one hand, flintlock pistol in the other.

LEIPER
I'd be more'n happy to lend him a hand.

HOOF BEATS. The posse rides up, with Gilmore leading Moses' horse. Silas dismounts. Tosses the rope to Moses, who begins tying Little Harpe's hands.

LITTLE HARPE
(pained)
Get this off me!

Moses slams a fist into Little Harpe. Knocks him out.

As Hudgens and Gilmore tie the women--

LEIPER
Couldn't stomach the reward money
goin' to you sons a' libertines.
How dya' like my timin', Squar?

SILAS
Impeccable. Moses, we'll get Big Harpe after--

But Moses is on the move again. He jumps on his horse. Takes off like a gunshot.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Moses!

EXT. WOODS - DAY

ON MOSES' HORSE, panting with effort. Moses kicks his heels into his horse's side. It runs faster.

The leaves BLUR BY.

ON MOSES, eyes straight ahead.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Moses BURSTS out of the trees into a field of long grass. Rising on a far hill are--

BIG HARPE AND SAL. Moses shakes the reins. The horse runs as fast as his legs will go.

Moses closes in on Big Harpe.

But the HORSE WHEEZES and starts to slow.

MOSES

Come on!

Big Harpe and Sal ride faster. Soon, they will disappear into a thick woods.

MOSES (CONT'D)

No.

Moses pulls the horse to a stop and in the same motion, jumps from the saddle. Swings his rifle out. Aims.

MOSES' POV

At the end of the rifle's barrel, Big Harpe speeds toward the woods. The barrel follows him...

MOSES

FIRE.

ON BIG HARPE as the bullet smacks into a tree right as he disappears into the woods.

ON MOSES, breathing hard.

EXT. HILL - DAY

Moses leads his WHEEZING HORSE back to the posse.

Little Harpe, his hands trussed and his mouth gagged, sits slumped on Silas's horse. He GROANS, waking up.

Betsey and Susan, gagged as well but allowed to hold their babies, sit together on their own horse.

Leiper tips his hat at Moses.

LEIPER
Think I earned that dollar.

MOSES
My horse needs to rest.

LEIPER
Think the words you's lookin' for
is thank and you.

MOSES
You saved our lives. Thank you.

LEIPER
I'll take it. Even though ya' made
a face like you was shittin' a
pinecone sideways.

Moses looks at Little Harpe and the two Harpe women.

MOSES
We leave them here. We go after Big
Harpe.

SILAS
And let highwaymen set these
criminals free?

MOSES
Nothing matters without Micajah.

SILAS
It all matters. We're gonna turn
these three in at Greenville. Only
fifteen miles out.

MOSES
And lose two days?

SILAS
I'm not givin' up the ride.

MOSES
No, you're losing it.

SILAS
You afraid a' losin' the trail? Or
of what Wiley's gonna spill when I
lose his gag?
(MORE)

SILAS (CONT'D)
 (off Moses' look)
 "Why don't you tell them who you
 are?" Big Harpe's words. Then you
 lay out Wiley afore he can shine
 light on that mystery.

Moses looks at Little Harpe, who stares back with red eyes.
 Moses yanks out a knife. Walks to Little Harpe. He SLASHES
 at Little Harpe and--

SLICES off the gag.

MOSES
 Go ahead, Wiley. Tell 'em.

Little Harpe works his jaw. Looks at Moses. Smiles.

LITTLE HARPE
 They don't know, do they?

SILAS
 Don't know what?

Little Harpe LAUGHS a shrill laugh.

MOSES
 Out with it.

LITTLE HARPE
 Legend tells a' two Harpes. When it
 should tell a' three. Ain't that
 right, Moses?

Silas looks at Moses, confused.

MOSES
 He's my brother.

SILAS
 What?!

LEIPER
 You're a... Harpe?

All men, speechless.

MOSES
 My mother took me away when the
 Revolt started, when I wasn't three
 years old. Nine years back, not
 long after my mother passed, the
 Harpes tracked me down in
 Knoxville. Told me we shared a
 father.

SILAS

And how long did you convoy with
these butchers?

MOSES

(after a beat)
Seven years, before I met Mary.

Silas pulls another length of rope out of his bag. Begins coiling it. He speaks slowly, deliberately--

SILAS

And what crimes did you commit?

MOSES

(eyeing the rope)
I will answer for my sins after we
capture Big Harpe.

SILAS

It's not your sins I'm talkin'
about. It's your crimes. And you
don't get to choose when you answer
for 'em.

Hudgens SHOUTS as Little Harpe yanks the flintlock from Hudgens' belt. Despite his trussed wrists, Little Harpe grabs Hudgens' hair and presses the pistol into his cheek.

The men freeze. Except Hudgens, who grabs at the flintlock. Little Harpe pulls the trigger -- CLICK. No shot.

Silas, Gilmore, and Leiper rush over. Silas pulls Little Harpe off the horse and rains blows upon his head.

As Moses runs over to help, Hudgens intercepts him. Pulls him aside.

MOSES

Hudgens, you all right--

HUDGENS

'Course I am. I took the powder out
of the pistol.

MOSES

What?

HUDGENS

I needed to get Silas away before
he arrested you.

(off Moses' look)
I want to be sure you are
considering your opportunity, here.

MOSES
Opportunity.

HUDGENS
Whatever you did... you needn't confess to this man. God will forgive you. Silas won't.

MOSES
I am not a liar.

HUDGENS
How can you preach from a cell? You have been given a gift. The gift of renown.

(then)
The brother of infamous murderers forsakes his blood for the Light. He captures his kin and saves their souls.

Silas has finished tightening the ropes around a now bloodied Little Harpe. Hudgens continues, quickly.

HUDGENS (CONT'D)
You want people to come to your sermons? This is how. This is how we will spread the Word.

Moses says nothing. Thinking.

SILAS (O.S.)
Well? Your confession?

Moses turns to Silas. But something catches his eye.

Behind Silas, in the woods, the GIRL IN THE MUDDY WHITE DRESS. Walking away, into the woods.

SILAS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I'm talkin' to you.

Moses snaps to. Looks at Silas. Then at Hudgens, who sweats.

MOSES
The Harpes didn't start their career as murderers till after we parted company.
(then)
I have no crimes to confess,
Squire.

Moses walks to his horse, leaving Silas casting a wary look at Hudgens.

EXT. KENTUCKY WOODS - DAY

With a SCREAM OF FRUSTRATION, Big Harpe slices a branch off a passing tree with his tomahawk. Sal rides beside him, her baby FUSSING. Sal looks at Big Harpe. After a beat--

BIG HARPE

(sharp)

Something wrong with your head? It keeps turning this way.

SAL

We're goin' west.

Sal's baby continues FUSSING.

BIG HARPE

Hush that thing or I will.

Sal makes SHUSH SOUNDS to the baby. After a beat--

SAL

We're not goin' to Cave-In-Rock,
are we?

BIG HARPE

Not without Wiley.

SAL

And Betsey and Susan. And the
children--

BIG HARPE

I don't abandon family.

The baby KEEPS CRYING.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)

Shut that fucking thing up!

SAL

You're tryin' to find the
Chickamauga.

BIG HARPE

I saw them on the move. Another
fifteen miles and we'll see--

(re: fussing baby)

I can't think with that thing.

SAL
(to baby)
Shh-shhh-shh.
(to Big Harpe)
I thought they were treatied now.
Lower Cherokee don't fight no more,
do they?
(off Big Harpe's silence)
Mick--

BIG HARPE
Don't tell me your mind, or I'll
knock it out of your skull. Quiet.
Both of you.

The baby WAILS.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
I said--

SAL
I know, I'm tryin'--

Big Harpe jerks the reins a stop. Swings his legs off the horse. Grabs the baby out of Sal's hands.

SAL (CONT'D)
No. Micajah, I'll quiet her--

Big Harpe, holding the baby by the legs, walks to a tree. Sal scrambles off the horse to follow.

SAL (CONT'D)
Noooo! Noooooooo!

LONG SHOT

Concealed by the leaves in the FOREGROUND, Big Harpe SWINGS THE BABY AGAINST A TREE.

The BABY'S CRYING stops immediately as Sal SCREAMS HYSTERICALLY. She crumples to the ground.

CLOSE ON SAL

As she kneels by the OFF SCREEN corpse of her infant. Big Harpe walks back to his horse.

EXT. LOWER CHEROKEE VILLAGE - DAY

A Chickamauga village, half-built. Ten circular, dome shaped structures that look like upside-down baskets -- called asi -- dot the grassy hills.

A group of sinewy men, painted, feathered, scarred, their arms caked with earth, build a larger asi out of saplings and mud. Their townhouse. These are the LOWER CHEROKEE.

The men turn to see--

BIG HARPE AND SAL

Riding in. Sal is in utter shock. Dazed eyes regard the Chickamauga men and women, who stop to stare at the new arrivals. Sal's eyes catch on a mother cradling an infant.

Big Harpe calls out, speaking in Cherokee, subtitled--

BIG HARPE
I will speak to the chief!

LATER

Five Chickamauga stand before Big Harpe and Sal. An older CHIEF (50s) in front, younger WARRIORS behind. Hands on their rifles and tomahawks, coiled and ready to spring.

Big Harpe stands tall, not to be cowed.

BIG HARPE
Chickamauga warriors. I am Micajah Harpe. My brother and I fought with your Chief John Watts during the attack on Buchanan's Station. We bled with your brothers in the war against the white invaders.

YOUNG WARRIOR
(to Chief)
He speaks like he does not know the color of his own skin.

BIG HARPE
I know the color of my skin...

Big Harpe removes a BLOODY BURLAP bag from his saddle bag. He upends it, dumping out a pile of human scalps. Taken from the family he butchered.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
But I am not like them.

The Lower Cherokee stare at the scalps.

The chief looks at Big Harpe, unmoved.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
*A posse of white men has captured
 my brother and my women. They mean
 us harm. Fight with me to bleed
 these dogs.*

CHIEF
We have made peace with white men.

Silence. Big Harpe lifts his shirt, exposing his bare chest, criss-crossed by scars. He points to one.

BIG HARPE
*From the Battle of Blue Licks,
 where we fought with white men.*

He points at another.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
*From the Cumberland Raids, where we
 fought with white men.*

He points at another.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
*From the blade I took for Chief
 Dragging Canoe. A blade from a
 white man.*

(then)
*I do not know peace. And neither do
 you. No matter what it says on a
 piece of paper.*

The Chief regards Big Harpe.

EXT. PATH - DAY

Silas leads his horse with Little Harpe on it. The women and the posse follow on horse behind.

Bringing up the rear is Moses, looking distant.

Gilmore and Hudgens walk their horses close to Moses. Gilmore gesticulates.

HUDGENS
 He says you're not a Harpe.
 (watching Gilmore)
 He says you're still his friend.
 Speaking for myself, I cannot
 disagree.

Gilmore isn't finished. He continues gesturing.

HUDGENS (CONT'D)

Lord, he's still going.
(watching Gilmore)
He says he'll ride with you if you
want to chase after Big Harpe now.

Hudgens lowers his voice--

HUDGENS (CONT'D)

Gil's got a point, Moses. I don't
see any advantage in waiting for
Silas to lead you closer to the
gallows.

Moses considers Hudgens' words. Then--

MOSES

I won't bring in Big Harpe without
Silas.

HUDGENS

Why not? Because he's a lawman?

MOSES

Because he's a good man.
(then)
Better than me, anyhow.

Off Hudgens' look...

EXT. LOWER CHEROKEE VILLAGE - DAY

The sun sets. At the edge of the Chickamauga camp, Big Harpe
leans against a rock. Forest behind him. Sal sits on the
ground, in a stupor.

From a distance, Big Harpe watches the Chickamauga warriors
engage in heated discussion with the Chief.

BIG HARPE

The Chief doesn't like me. He's
useless. But his son... I could
tell he was thinking the right
thoughts.

Sal watches the leaves.

Slowly, Big Harpe lays his giant hand on top of Sal's head.
Turns her head so that she's facing him.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)

It's just a baby.

Sal looks at Big Harpe with empty eyes.

APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS. Big Harpe turns. Smiles.

The Young Warrior and three other Cherokee warriors stand before them.

YOUNG CHEROKEE
Where are they?

EXT. KENTUCKY FOREST - NIGHT

The posse makes camp. Hudgens struggles to light a pile of wood and grass with a flint and steel. As Moses passes--

MOSES
Too much cattail.

Hudgens gets a spark and the FIRE WHOOSHES up immediately. A startled Hudgens scrambles back and trips. Gilmore silently laughs, slapping his knee, enjoying the spectacle.

LITTLE HARPE, SUSAN, AND BETSEY

Sit back to the same tree. Silas pulls a rope tight around them, securing them to the trunk.

Betsey and Susan's hands are free to hold their babies, which both CRY.

Leiper eyes Susan and nudges Silas.

LEIPER
This is the drab I cooked the sheets with.

Silas is aghast.

SILAS
You... "knew" this woman?

LEIPER
Them Harpe brothers set her up to't. Tryin' to rob me blind. Or naked.

(pointed, at Little Harpe)
Didn't work though, did it? I didn't have a bent shillin' to my name.

(then)
But the real reason they's mad as spitfire, you ask me, is she like it.

Susan spits on Leiper's foot. Leiper LAUGHS.

LEIPER (CONT'D)
She didn't spit last time.

Little Harpe ignores Leiper, choosing to stare at Moses, who stares back.

MOSES
This a vengeance spree? With you
and Mick? Bleeding those who
wronged you?

LITTLE HARPE
No. Mick gets his blood up, he
needs a release, is all.

MOSES
Is that why you knocked on my door?
For release?

LITTLE HARPE
We wanted ta give ya one last
chance ta ride with yer brothers.

MOSES
I'm not like you.

LITTLE HARPE
That's beyond yer choosin'.

Moses gives no response. The BABIES begin to CRY. Moses turns his attention to them.

Betsey latches hers to her breast -- much less infected since Sal treated it. The baby nurses.

But Susan can't get her baby to quiet.

Moses holds his hand out to the baby. Susan looks at him, murder in her eyes.

MOSES
I won't hurt him.
(a small smile)
Like to think I got the Lord's
touch.

Susan says nothing. Finally, she lets Moses lay a hand on the CRYING BABY'S head, as he did with his own son.

But the BABY CONTINUES WAILING.

Moses frowns. Removes his hand. Then--

MOSES (CONT'D)
Sorry. It worked on mine.

Moses steps away.

MOMENTS LATER

Gilmore whittles a piece of wood. Moses sits at the fire. Silas next to him.

SILAS
Why are you givin' them comfort?
(off Moses' look)
With the infant back there?

MOSES
I didn't. Baby had a mind to cry.

SILAS
Same difference.

Moses stares at the fire.

MOSES
Why are you a justice of the peace?

SILAS
Lord knows. Infernal job.
(after a silence)
Stamp out evil, reckon.

MOSES
If I was a squire? I wouldn't be
stamping out evil. I'd find what's
good. And I would protect it.

Gilmore finishes whittling the piece of wood. He tosses it to Silas, who catches it.

It's a WOODEN SHERIFF'S BADGE. Silas looks up.

Gilmore smiles at him. Silas doesn't smile back.

SILAS
A Harpe brother who protects the
good things. That's a new angle.

LITTLE HARPE (O.S.)
Tell 'em what you did, Moses.

The posse turns around to look at Little Harpe, who grins.

LITTLE HARPE
Tell 'em or I will.

Silas rises. Approaches Little Harpe.

SILAS
You know of Moses' crimes?

LITTLE HARPE
I wouldn't likely call 'em crimes.
(grin)
But you might.

Silas leans down and gags Little Harpe with a rope. Ties it tight around his mouth.

Moses watches the proceeding. Silas returns.

SILAS
(to Moses)
If you committed crimes, they are yours to confess. Not his.
(then)
Till then, you can protect the good things.

Moses looks at Hudgens, who shakes his head. *Say nothing.*

The FIRE POPS. Moses stares into the flames. Then--

MOSES
I killed a family.

HUDGENS
Moses, you don't know what you're--

MOSES
Quiet.

HUDGENS
Think about what you're saying.

MOSES
I am.

HUDGENS
Silas, he's not under oath--

MOSES
Quiet!

Hudgens silences. All eyes on Moses. Except Silas.

He toys with the wooden sheriff's badge in his hand.

MOSES (CONT'D)

Mick and Wiley joined the
Chickamauga tribe.

(then)

For a time, I... I joined 'em too.
For one raid, least. It was... they
took on a town of about twenty
people. In the Cumberlands. Twenty
souls. They waited till nightfall.
And they moved in.

(then)

We moved in. Mick and Wiley killed
I don't know how many of 'em. I got
to a home that was smartly defended
by a man with a fowler. He fired at
me. But he was too far away. Grazed
my shoulder. And then I shot him in
the chest. I had no rounds left for
his wife. So I cut her down with a
belt ax. I was just... I was
watchin' myself do it. Wasn't
thinkin' nothin'... just
watchin'...

(then)

I wouldn'ta' killed their son, but
he was tryin' to strangle me. Nine
year ol' boy. And their daughter...

Moses looks up and sees the GIRL IN A MUDDY WHITE DRESS
stumbling away from him.

MOSES (CONT'D)

She walked away into the woods.
Didn't run. Just kinda stumbled,
like. I followed her.

Moses watches his vision of the GIRL IN THE MUDDY WHITE
DRESS disappear into the woods.

MOSES (CONT'D)

She never turned 'round. She never
saw me. Just kept trippin' through
the woods, like she was
sleepwalkin'. Soon as she stops
walkin', I thought, I'm gonna
finish what I started. But she...
she never stopped walkin'. Not till
she came to a cabin in the
mountains. Preacher family. Most
beautiful woman I ever seen took
her in. All I did was watch. I just
watched.

Moses has fallen into colloquial speech without his attention to diction--

MOSES (CONT'D)

I was sick at the thought a' what I done. I turned myself in. But them marshals... they didn't put me in jail. They wanted me to stay with the tribe. To peach on 'em.

(then)

So that's what I did. That's how come Buchanan's Station turned out so well for the whites. They called me a hero. Kilt a family, and I'm a hero.

Silas takes out his flask. Unscrews it.

MOSES (CONT'D)

I left my brothers. Tracked down that woman I seen. And I married her. 'N I vowed she'd never find out who I was. Only... only the man she made me.

Silas drinks, relishing it. Then he downs the rest of his flask. His eyes bloodshot, angry.

SILAS

You bloody your hands with them reds. 'N that red just don't wash off.

HUDGENS

Silas, you heard the man. He has paid for his infractions.

SILAS

He hasn't paid nothin'. But he will.

MOSES

Reckon so.

Moses looks over at the tree with Little Harpe and the two women. Little Harpe stares intensely at Moses. Unsettling.

Moses turns. Sees a shadow of somebody in the woods. He draws his rifle...

MOSES (CONT'D)

Hey.

Silas reads the tension in Moses' voice. Looks up to see--

FOUR CHICKAMAUGA WARRIORS

Burst out of the woods. Blades in their hands.

SILAS

No!

HUDGENS

Spins as a warrior brings the tomahawk down. Hudgens--

Rolls to the side as the tomahawk sinks into the earth.

Another warrior hurls his tomahawk at Moses' head.

Moses BATS THE BLADE aside with his rifle's butt plate.

MOSES FIRES, hitting nothing. The FLASH illuminates the chaos as the warriors fall on the posse members.

SCREAMS in the night.

A Chickamauga warrior tackles Moses. They both go down.

SILAS

FIRE his rifle, dropping one of the warriors. Another attacks him from the side, slashing his cheek with a knife--

LEIPER

Presses his rifle's barrel to the head of the warrior attacking Silas. But the warrior whirls and disarms him--

HUDGENS

Tears a vicious warrior off Gilmore, to find that the Chickamauga took Gilmore's EAR OFF. Hudgens picks his rifle off the ground and aims it at the warrior who--

STEALS THE RIFLE from Hudgens, spins it, and aims it at Hudgens' face. The warrior hesitates--

HUDGENS

Dear God, please--

The warrior FIRES.

GILMORE

SILENTLY SCREAMS as his friend collapses, dead.

MOSES

Fights the warrior in the dark, rolling across the dirt, clawing, jabbing. They near the glowing embers of the fire.

Moses rolls on top of the warrior, his fingers finding the warrior's neck. The light of the embers illuminates the warrior's face, revealing a--

TWELVE YEAR OLD BOY

Moses hesitates. In that moment, the boy PRODUCES A KNIFE and jabs at Moses neck. Moses grabs the boy's wrist, stopping the blade from piercing his throat...

WITH SILAS AND LEIPER

The warrior stands over the dis-armed Leiper. The warrior raises his blade when--

A knife LANDS IN THE WARRIOR'S NECK.

Silas looks... the knife was thrown by Moses, who stole it from his twelve-year-old attacker.

GILMORE

Falls upon the warrior who killed Hudgens. He grabs a HUNK OF BURNING EMBER from the campfire and--

JAMS it into the warrior's mouth. The WARRIOR SCREAMS as Gilmore pummels him with his singed hand.

Gilmore looks up to see--

MOSES

Mercilessly twist the boy's neck, breaking it.

Gilmore turns to see--

HUDGENS

His head a mess of skull, blood, and brain.

Gilmore looks to the tree where Little Harpe, Betsey, and Susan were tied. They're gone.

His eyes rest on a wooded bluff overlooking their campsite. Gilmore makes out--

TWO FIGURES

DISAPPEARING INTO THE WOODS.

Gilmore sprints toward them.

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Gilmore runs after the retreating figures. Breathing in sobs. Blood pouring from where his ear should be.

Gilmore slows. Spins. Sees nobody.

Long silence. Deep shadows.

Arms reach out of the black. Grab Gilmore. Pull him back to the trunk of a tree.

Gilmore flails as--

BIG HARPE

Pins Gilmore against the tree. Little Harpe curls rope around him.

LITTLE HARPE
This is the one what can't talk...

Big Harpe backs up. Regards the still-flailing Gilmore.

BIG HARPE
Or scream.

Big Harpe takes out his tomahawk...

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Moses, scuffed and bruised, stares at--

THE POSSE'S HORSES

Lying in the ground, slashed. Dead.

SILAS (O.S.)
Hudgens is gone.

Moses walks to Hudgens' corpse.

Silas, ice cold.

SILAS
Chickamauga, Moses. Friends a'
yours.

Ignoring Silas, Moses wheels--

MOSES
Where's Gilmore?

LEIPER
I saw him run thataway.

Moses rushes off.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Moses jogs through the woods, rifle at the ready. In the moonlight, he sees ropes crudely tied around a tree.

Moses slows his advance.

MOSES
Gil?

Moses walks around the tree. Stops.

Tied to the tree, Gilmore. Head tilted to the side, lifeless. His arms and legs, HACKED FROM HIS HIS BODY. Only his torso remains.

Moses totters backward. Stunned.

Silas and Leiper run up to Moses' side. Silas stares.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Moses walks among the carnage. In a daze. Defeated.

Behind him, Silas nooses a rope.

SILAS
Your people.

Moses turns and faces Silas. Silas nods at the fallen Chickamauga warriors.

SILAS (CONT'D)
Your kindred.
(then)
This hunt is over. Trail's cold.

Silas, drunk, tosses the hangman's rope over a branch.

SILAS (CONT'D)
But I'm hangin' a Harpe afore
sunup, God help me.

LEIPER
Silas, you ain't an executioner--

SILAS
Dead or alive. Tha's what the
warrant says.

Leiper aims his rifle at Silas.

LEIPER
Drop the knife.

Silas looks Leiper square in the eye.

SILAS
Better hope you drop me in one
shot.

MOSES (O.S.)
It's all right, Leiper.
(off Leiper's look)
Let Silas do what he aims to.

LEIPER
He's talkin' smoke. We wouldn't be
here if we'd chased Big Harpe like
you said--

MOSES
Let him!

After a beat, Leiper lowers his rifle.

SILAS
None of us'd be here if Moses
didn't companion with murderers. If
he weren't a murderer himself.

Silas faces Moses.

SILAS (CONT'D)
You wanna walk, or you want me to
make you?

Moses looks at the hangman's rope.

He walks through the carnage of the camp.

Passes Hudgens. Stops at the rope.

He pulls out Mary's white handkerchief.

Walks to Leiper. Hands it to him.

MOSES
Keep it clean.

He walks to the rope.

After a beat, Moses puts his head through the noose.

LEIPER

Moses--

Silas grabs the other end and leans down with all his weight, lifting Moses, GAGGING, into the air.

LEIPER (CONT'D)

Hell you doin', Squar?

Moses GAGS. Flails. Interminable.

LEIPER (CONT'D)

This is murder, Silas. No other way about it.

ON SILAS, his face flushed. Shaking. Then--

HE SCREAMS and releases the rope.

Moses collapses to the ground, GASPING.

Silas slumps. Panting. Exhausted.

With shaking hands, Moses slips the noose off his neck.

Silas, eyes wet, grabs his rifle. Aims it at Moses.

SILAS

I ever see you again, I'll bleed you like a hog. Go.

Moses tries to talk, but he has no voice. He rises to his feet unsteadily. He falls back down.

Breath coming in LOUD RASPS, Moses rises again. Pulls his saddle bag off his dead horse.

He shuffles into the woods, dragging his bag.

Silas and Leiper watch him go.

EXT. OHIO RIVER - DAY

An expansive river glows white under an overcast morning. A flatboat sweeps down the current, oared by two BEARDED MEN.

Arranged on their boat: dress goods, leather boots, saddles, and harnesses. A floating store.

The taller of the two nudges the other. Gestures at the bank up ahead, where three women stand. Two of them wave their arms, flagging them down.

TALL BEARDED MAN
They in trouble?

SHORT BEARDED MAN
Could be a honey trap.

TALL BEARDED MAN
Look like the one's got a coupla'
infants.

SHORT BEARDED MAN
Shinier the lure, the bigger the
fish. Keep it movin'.

TALL BEARDED MAN
If they need help, we're givin' it.
Keep your pistol in your lap, if it
makes ya feel better.

ON THE RIVER BANK

Sal holds the two babies so Betsey and Susan can wave their arms at the flatboat.

SUSAN
It's workin'! They're comin'!

Sal looks at a single story BROKEN DOWN CABIN -- inside, the Harpe brothers hide. Sal WHISPERS to Betsey--

SAL
Betsey, I been thinkin' about your words. From before. About runnin'?
(off Betsey's look)
We'll find a fort down south to take us in. I could midwife, I could earn us a living.

BETSEY
(whisper)
I am so sorry about what happened to your baby, Sal. Susan and I... we're in pieces.

Susan, who can't hear their conversation, nudges Betsey.

SUSAN
(excited)
Get ready, get ready.

BETSEY (CONT'D)
 (to Sal)
 But you was right. Ain't nobody
 gonna protect us like Mick. He came
 back for us, Sal.

ON SAL'S FACE, heartbroken.

TALL BEARDED MAN (O.S.)
 Halloo! You all right?

CUT TO:

THE DEAD BEARDED MEN

Adrift, carried away in the river's current. We're on the--

EXT. FLATBOAT - DAY

ON SAL, sitting at the boat's side, staring at the water.
 The Harpes row.

BIG HARPE
 Hands up. We're comin' up on the
 Cave now.

EXT. CAVE-IN-ROCK - DAY

The flatboat, with Big and Little Harpe standing at the fore deck, and the women behind with their hands raised, floats toward the bank of Cave-In-Rock.

The mouth of a forty-foot cave opens in an imposing seventy-foot-high cliff wall.

Shabbily clothed OUTLAWS stand at the cave's entrance. Two of them stand on a ledge that lines the cliff wall.

Two more stand on top of the cliff. They have flintlocks, fowler shotguns, and long rifles aimed at the flatboat.

BIG HARPE
 We're the Harpes!

A wave of ANXIOUS WHISPERS sweeps across the outlaws.

A man (60) limps from the cave: smartly dressed in a tasseled coat. Long grey hair swept back beneath a brimmed hat. He carries no gun. Samuel Mason, aka, THE CAPTAIN.

THE CAPTAIN
 Zachary, pull them in.

One of the men wades out into the river and pulls the flatboat ashore. Big Harpe jumps down, followed by his brother. Nobody helps the women climb down.

Big Harpe walks up to the Captain. He towers over him. But the Captain only pops a quid of tobacco in his mouth.

THE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
I don't recall our last interaction
ending with an invitation for your
return. Much to the contrary, in
fact.

BIG HARPE
Law's on us. We'll stay here till
they give us up. Then we'll move
north and disappear.

THE CAPTAIN
You didn't answer my question.

BIG HARPE
Didn't hear one.

Big Harpe hands Mason a small sack of JANGLING COINS.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
For quarters.

Mason considers the money in his hand. Smiles.

The Captain walks into the cave. Big Harpe follows.

INT. CAVE-IN-ROCK - DAY

Big Harpe walks through a narrow corridor at the base of the cavern, which climbs into a yawning space littered with detritus, spent bottles, and torn clothes.

A grimy outlaw defecates in an overflowing chamber pot, while others nap fitfully. Less a fortress than a sad shelter for derelicts and criminals.

All of them freeze when they see Big Harpe.

As the Captain walks in front, he calls out to the men.

THE CAPTAIN
The last time Micajah Harpe and his
two brothers haunted this cave --
or were they half brothers?
Cousins? They killed one of our
own.

The Captain walks backward, talking to Big Harpe.

THE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
 Do you remember this? You tied him
 to his own horse. Ran him right off
 the cliff here to meet his end
 after a hundred foot fall. And what
 did you do, Micajah?
 (off his silence)
 You laughed.

The Captain arrives at the back of the cave, one hundred and forty feet back, where a crude wooden staircase leads up to an opening in the roof -- daylight bleeds down.

The Captain places the sack of money Big Harpe gave him in a chest that he locks. He's still talking--

THE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
 That moment made plain to me a
 simple truth: you and I do not
 share the same sense of humor.

The Captain nods. A group of outlaws rush out of a side room in the cave and push Big Harpe to his knees. One of them holds a knife to his throat.

AT THE ENTRANCE

Two outlaws converge on Little Harpe, aiming rifles at his chest. A single outlaw covers the women.

WITH THE CAPTAIN

The Captain stands tall over Big Harpe.

THE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
 I used to haunt ordinaries and inns
 like Hamlet's ghost. And I got in
 many fights.

The Captain wipes Big Harpe's hair out of his eyes. Tender.

THE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
 Myself, I earned a reputation for
 winning these fights. Know my
 secret? It's simplicity itself: you
 gouge the eye. You do it with the
 thumb.

Big Harpe watches the Captain, unimpressed.

The Captain displays his thumb. The thumbnail has been carved to a point.

THE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
 Always keep it sharp. Never know
 when I need to mark an occasion
 with a good eye gouge.

(holds thumb up)
 Next thing you do is spear it in to
 the face, where the eye meets the
 nose. Then you hook and pull.

As the Captain slides his thumb onto Big Harpe's cheek--

THE CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
 I vowed that if any of you three
 Harpes returned to this cave, I'd
 blind you all. And then bleed you
 all.

(then)
 Now. Here's the game: on a three-
 count, Jedidiah here is gonna spit.
 We'll see if I can't dangle that
 big eye of yours before his snot
 hits the sand. Ready? One. Two...

Big Harpe's head whips to his right. He BITES the wrist of
 the man holding the knife to his neck. Pulls off a chunk.

The MAN SCREAMS as Big Harpe yanks a hand free, grabs the
 knife, and holds it to the Captain's belly.

An outlaw presses a flintlock to Big Harpe's cheek, but he
 ignores it, focusing on the Captain.

BIG HARPE
 You want your insides in the dirt?

The Captain, sweating, nods to his men. They back away from
 Big Harpe, who rises. Easily a head taller than the Captain.

He angles the point of the knife near the Captain's eye.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
 We'll be leaving soon. But until we
 do... the Cave is mine.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Raggedly breathing, Moses totters through the woods, still
 dragging his saddlebag.

He stops. Drops into a sitting position. Stares vacantly.

He roots in his bag.

Pulls out the flat journey cake Mary made him. He smells it.

He takes a bite. It crumbles. He chews it. Swallows.
Tears drip from his eyes. He sets the cake beside him.
He pulls a flintlock pistol and powder horn from the bag.
He powders the pan of his flintlock.
Pulls the cock back.
Stares into space.

MOSES
Mary.

Moses places the barrel into his own mouth.
Squeezes his eyes shut. Steeling himself.
Pulls the trigger.
The cock falls with a loud CLICK. Misfire.
He SCREAMS. Hurls the pistol into the brush.
Collapses to the ground, weeping.
An idea strikes him. He pulls from his rope belt--
The char-less knife.
He points the blade to his belly -- where Mary took it.
Slowly he looks up, his face mired with dust and tears.
In front of him, the GIRL IN THE MUDDY WHITE DRESS,
stumbling through the woods.
Moses watches for a moment.
He struggles to his feet. And follows the girl.
ON THE JOURNEY CAKE, as ants swarm on it.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

Silas, caked in dirt, digs a grave with his bare hands. He hasn't gotten very far.

Leiper sits on a tree stump, loading one of several rifles lying on the ground before him.

Silas stops. Watches Leiper.

SILAS
You startin' a war?

LEIPER
Finishin' one.

Leiper stands and walks off, holstering his rifle behind him and tucking a flintlock into his belt.

SILAS
Harpes are in the wind.

LEIPER
We know where they're goin'.

SILAS
Cave-In-Rock?! Outlaws'll skin you alive.

Leiper keeps walking.

SILAS (CONT'D)
That's after you get past the Ohio.
Three hundred foot a' current.

LEIPER
Ya don't gotta come.

Silas watches, incredulous, as Leiper treks into the woods.

SILAS
You fancy the reward that much?

LEIPER
Good ridin' with ya, Squar.

ON SILAS

Who regards the destroyed campsite. And then...

He leans over, and pulls the wooden sheriff's badge from the dirt. Gilmore's gift.

Silas thumbs the wooden token.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The GIRL IN THE MUDDY WHITE DRESS stumbles through the woods. Moses follows, in a fugue state.

Alarmed, Moses stops too. The girl crumples to the ground. As Moses watches, another figure approaches her.

Mary.

She leans down and cradles the exhausted girl. After a moment, Mary rises, pulling the girl to her feet. She escorts the girl a few more steps.

Moses follows them out onto the--

EXT. BANK OF THE OHIO RIVER - DAY

The overcast sky reflects a wash of bright light into Moses' eyes. He squints.

Downstream, across the wide expanse of the river--

Cave-In-Rock.

Moses turns around and sees Mary and the girl in the muddy white dress, holding hands. Regarding Moses quietly.

Moses nods.

He draws from his rope belt the char-free knife.

He takes his coat off. Drops it to the sand at his feet.

Rips his shirt off. Uses it to tie the knife to his forearm.

He stares at the river. Then turns back...

But Mary is gone. Moses looks around for her.

Nothing. Tears well in his eyes.

MOSES

Goodbye.

Without hesitation, Moses wades into the Ohio.

And starts to swim.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Leiper trudges through the woods.

Silas catches up to him. After a silence--

LEIPER

Moses walked this way.

SILAS

I can see his prints, well as you.

They continue in silence.

EXT. TOP OF CAVE-IN-ROCK - DAY

Sal sits at the cliff's edge, directly over the cave, staring out at the river. Big Harpe walks up behind her.

BIG HARPE
We're not stayin' here.

Sal doesn't answer.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
It's best for you and the women.
We'll leave tomorrow.

SAL
I'm not goin'.

BIG HARPE
I'm not asking.

SAL
I said I'm not goin'.

BIG HARPE
(after a beat)
This on account a' your baby?

SAL
It's on account a' you.

Big Harpe pulls Sal up by her arms.

BIG HARPE
I'll gut you right here.

SAL
You already have.

Big Harpe lets go. He looks down. Sees how close Sal stands to the edge. Then, nicer--

BIG HARPE
We're goin' to that lake up in
Illinois Territory. Remember? The
one near the blackberry brier.
We'll settle. Wiley and I'll roll
us a cabin. You'll be happy.

SAL
And how many people need to bleed
to keep you happy?

Big Harpe steps closer to her. Dangerous.

BIG HARPE
 I didn't mean to quiet that baby.
 But how was I supposed to think?

SAL
 (after a silence)
 I like to imagine you in the
 furnace of hell, shoulder deep in
 boilin' blood. The sound of your
 screams'd be as sweet as a
 bluebird's call--

Big Harpe vice-grips her neck. She GAGS. He holds her face
 close, his face taut with fury.

He leans forward slightly, as if he's going to shove her
 over the side. But then he lessens his grip. Backs away.

BIG HARPE
 At least you're honest.

He turns and leaves her.

EXT. BANK OF THE OHIO RIVER - DAY

Silas and Leiper stand at the spot where Moses was. Silas
 leans over and picks up tattered fabric on the bank.

SILAS
 Moses' shirt. 'N pouch.
 (then)
 What ya' see?

LEIPER
 A big cave.

SILAS
 Eyes like a lynx.

LEIPER
 Cave-In-Rock's a shit name for a
 cave.
 (seeing something)
 Holy... Gimme that spyglass.

Silas hands Leiper his telescope. Leiper extends it and
 looks through.

LEIPER (CONT'D)
 Hell's highway. Moses is almost
 across.

SILAS
 In what?

LEIPER
In nothin'. He's catfishin' his way
across like he got gills.

Leiper tosses the spyglass to Silas, who looks across.

SILAS
Goddammit, Moses.

LEIPER
Can't get to him in time.

Silas looks around. He spots the cabin up stream -- the same place where the Harpes hid before killing the two boaters.

SILAS
Not swimmin', we can't.

AT THE CABIN

Silas and Leiper stand before the rotted cabin.

Silas walks forward and lifts up a section of the fallen roof. Leiper helps.

EXT. OHIO RIVER - DAY

Sunlight leaks through a break in the clouds as Silas and Leiper carry a chunk of the log cabin wall -- their raft. They set it in the water.

Silas draws his field telescope. Looks through it.

SILAS'S POV - THROUGH THE TELESCOPE

CLOSE ON one of the outlaws climbing out of the hole in the cave to the wooded land on top.

SILAS

Passes the telescope to Leiper.

SILAS
Look' like the mouth ain't the only
way in and out.

LEIPER
(looking through telescope)
Ayuh. Egress at the back, there.

Silas looks at the cliff the cave is set into. His eyes follow the wall of the cliff up river.

LEIPER (CONT'D)
What's the plan, Squar?

SILAS
(after a beat)
Moses. Save Moses.

Silas pushes their raft into the water.

EXT. UP THE OHIO RIVER - DAY

Moses, GASPING, wades in the shallows, having swum the width of the river. A sloping cliff wall faces him -- he's upstream from the Cave.

Moses holds out his forearm. The knife is still tied to it.

Without hesitating, he grabs a tree root clinging to the sloping wall. Begins to climb...

EXT. TOP OF CAVE-IN-ROCK - DAY

Sal stands at the precipice, taking in the river.

Behind her, an outlaw ambles into the woods. Pees. Sal ignores him.

She inches closer to the precipice.

Closer. Seconds from jumping. And then--

A SOUND catches her attention. A percussive WET SOUND. Hurried and repeated.

She walks into the woods, toward the SOUND. And freezes.

Before her, Moses kneels over the outlaw, STABBING HIM REPEATEDLY in the chest with his knife.

Moses stops. Slowly, his head rises.

Sal takes a step back, stricken when she sees: Moses, wide-eyed. Rivulets of blood trailing down his chest.

Moses holds up a red finger to his mouth. Shh.

Sal says nothing. But she nods.

Moses rises. Takes a step toward her, knife in hand.

MOSES
(whisper)
Help me.

Sal hears something DRIPPING. She looks down. Blood from Moses' knife drips on her boot.

SAL (PRELAP)
Mick.

INT. CAVE-IN-ROCK - DAY

Big and Little Harpe sit at the mouth of the Cave. Big Harpe chews on a hunk of bread.

SAL (O.S.)
Mick.

Big and Little Harpe turn to see Sal.

SAL
Need to speak with you.

Little Harpe stands.

SAL (CONT'D)
No. Only Mick.

Little Harpe turns to Mick. Who finally rises.

MOMENTS LATER

Big Harpe follows Sal as she climbs the wooden staircase in back. He grabs ahold of her, noticing something.

He moves aside the hem of her dress, revealing the spot of blood on her boot. He wipes his finger across the blood.

He looks up at her. After a beat--

SAL (CONT'D)
It's nothin'.

EXT. ABOVE CAVE-IN-ROCK - DAY

Sal walks through the woods. Big Harpe follows. His eyes darting around. Finally, he stops.

Pulls a flintlock pistol on Sal.

BIG HARPE
If you're planning on surprising
me... get to it.

Sal turns. She points farther into the woods.

SAL
I need to show you something.

BIG HARPE
Quiet.

Big Harpe cocks his head to the side, listening.

ON MOSES, hiding behind a tree just a few paces away. Knife at the ready...

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
Where is he?

ON SAL, not knowing what to say. And then--

Moses rushes out of his hiding spot. Straight for--

Big Harpe, who aims at Moses but--

Doesn't fire. He smiles as--

Moses brings the knife down. Big Harpe catches his wrist, the knife tip inches from Big Harpe's face.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
Hell of a preacher.

Sal SCREAMS and--

SLAMS a rock across Big Harpe's face.

He goes down.

Moses readjust his knife -- from a stabbing grip to a slitting grip -- and kneels by Big Harpe when--

A SHOT RINGS OUT. A round thuds into Moses' leg.

He YELPS as he falls backward.

ON SUSAN, who lowers her smoking rifle.

Little Harpe runs up and punches Sal in the face.

BIG HARPE (PRELAP)
My intention with you has not
changed.

EXT. CAVE-IN-ROCK - DAY

A sweating, pain-stricken Moses kneels on the sand. An outlaw stands on either side of him, holding an arm.

In the sand next to him: Sal, trussed and bruised.

Big Harpe, blood dried to his forehead, kneels by Moses.

BIG HARPE
 My intention is to give you a
 choice. And the choice is this:
 ride with us. Or pray to God...

Big Harpe inserts a finger into Moses' bullet wound. Moses SCREAMS. Little Harpe laughs his SHRILL LAUGH.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
 ... while I make you suffer. And
 this?

Big Harpe sticks his finger in deeper. Moses SCREAMS again.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
 This is nothing.
 (then)
 But if you ride with us...

Big Harpe withdraws his finger.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
 Who knows. Maybe one day you can
 kill us all.

Moses' glassy eyes find Big Harpe.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
 You want revenge. That's your only
 chance for it. So choose. God. Or
 blood.

Moses' eyes roll back -- he's about to faint. But he
 swallows. Summoning strength. And then--

MOSES
 As Christ suffered... so shall I.

Silence. Big Harpe shakes his head. Stands.

BIG HARPE
 Lay him flat.

The men do. Big Harpe pulls out his tomahawk. Tenderly sets
 the blade on Moses' midriff. Then--

MOSES
 Wait.

Big Harpe's black eyes glide to Moses'.

MOSES (CONT'D)
 (quiet)
 I'll, I'll ride with you.

BIG HARPE
Didn't make that out.

MOSES
(louder)
I'll ride with you.

Big Harpe grins. Slides his tomahawk back into his rope belt. Stands tall over Moses, who is utterly defeated.

BIG HARPE
Welcome back.

Movement catches Moses' eye. At the top of the cliff--

JOHN LEIPER

Aims a rifle down. And FIRES AS--

MOSES

Faints.

SLAM TO BLACK.

BLACK SCREEN

SHOUTING. RIFLE FIRE. SCREAMS. And then--

BLISSFUL QUIET.

SILAS (V.O.)
Moses.

SILENCE.

SILAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Moses.

EXT. CAVE-IN-ROCK - DAY

Moses opens his eyes to see--

Silas and Leiper standing there. Breathless. Tattered.

They have been through hell and back.

MOSES
Did you get them? The Harpes?

SILAS
They ran.

LEIPER
 Captain too. Scattered like
 cockroaches.

Silas offers a hand. Moses takes it. He rises to his feet.

And sees that Sal is still trussed.

WINCING, Moses picks up his char-free knife from the ground.
 And uses it to cut Sal free.

She climbs to her feet unaided.

Moses wipes sand off the blade.

MOSES
 You see which way Big Harpe went?

Silas nods.

SILAS
 Mounts hitched up top.

Moses takes a step on his bad leg and SUCKS IN AIR through
 his teeth.

Silas moves in to help. But Moses shakes him off.

MOSES
 Don't touch me.

Silas looks at the dried blood on Moses' arms and chest. At
 Moses' intense, crazed eyes.

MOSES (CONT'D)
 I want blood.

OFF SILAS'S LOOK...

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Moses, Leiper, Silas, and Sal ride fast through underbrush,
 ducking leaves and leaping over fallen logs.

They BURST onto a--

EXT. FIELD - DAY

And see the Harpes. Riding ahead.

ON BIG HARPE

As he turns around to see his pursuers. He shakes the reins.

ON LEIPER

Who rides toward a tree in the field. He balances on the saddle of his galloping horse and--

Grabs onto the tree branch. Swings up for a better vantage.

He takes aim with his rifle and CLICK. Misfire.

Leiper draws another rifle. Aims.

BIG HARPE

Rushes toward a thick canebrake, seconds from vanishing.

LEIPER

Fires.

THE ROUND

Lands in the small of Big Harpe's back as he disappears into the canebrake.

LITTLE HARPE

Sees the hit. Aghast. To Susan and Betsey--

LITTLE HARPE
Don't follow, into the trees!

The three of them veer off and vanish into the forest.

MOSES

Ignores Little Harpe. Rushes into the--

EXT. CANEBRAKE - DAY

Moses follows Big Harpe's trail through the claustrophobic reeds. Slows his horse.

Light up ahead through the canebrake. Moses moves the reeds aside and exits into a--

CLEARING

A small creek runs through the field. Next to it lies--

BIG HARPE

Blood dotting the corners of his mouth. Brittle breaths.

Moses dismounts as Silas catches up. Leaps off his horse.

SILAS
I'll do him, Moses.

He holds a hand out for Moses' rifle. But Moses doesn't take his eyes off Big Harpe.

MOSES
How many? How many you kilt?

A trace of a smile on Big Harpe's lips.

BIG HARPE
How many flies you swat?

MOSES
Mary and Abraham weren't flies.

BIG HARPE
You wanna know how they went?

SILAS
Don't listen to this, Moses. Let me put an end to this monster.

Leiper runs up, breathless. Grins when he sees Big Harpe.

LEIPER
Not so scary now, is he?

BIG HARPE
Your family's last moments belong to me. I can give 'em to you.

MOSES
Repent. Repent for what you done.

BIG HARPE
Stop playin' at preachin'. It ain't honest. I have no regrets anyhow.
(cough cough)
'Cept my newborn. Shouldn't a' kilt my newborn.

LEIPER
God's wounds, put a bullet in this cretin.

BIG HARPE
I did your babe first. It was the cryin'. Couldn't get my sleep. Couldn't think. I slit its neck ear to ear.

ON MOSES, listening.

BIG HARPE (O.S.)
 Mary didn't know at first. She
 asked what my secret was to keep
 him so quiet.

Big Harpe COUGHS. Continues, faint.

BIG HARPE
 Wiley and I took turns with the
 knives. Last thing I told Mary was
 that you were our kin.

Tears streak Moses' cheeks, drawing paths in the grime.

BIG HARPE (CONT'D)
 She was still been breathin' when I
 torched the place.

In a jerk of motion, Moses has the long rifle aimed at Big
 Harpe's head.

LEIPER
 Finally.

A curious expression threads Big Harpe's features: anxiety.

Reflexively, if slowly, he moves his head to the side, out
 of the way of the gun's barrel.

LEIPER (CONT'D)
 Lookit. Yella'. For all his talk,
 yella'.

SILAS
 Let me, Moses.

Moses' finger finds the trigger.

SILAS (CONT'D)
 Moses!

Moses looks at Silas.

SILAS (CONT'D)
 You told me to find what's good.
 And protect it.
 (then)
 I found it.

MOSES
 There's nothin' hidden that will
 not be revealed.

SILAS
Moses. Give me the rifle.

Silas holds a hand out for the rifle. After a beat, Moses passes it to him.

MOSES
(to Leiper)
Fetch him some water.

LEIPER
He's dyin' anyhow.

MOSES
Do it!

LEIPER
Christ, okay.
(looks around)
With what?

MOSES
Keep pressure on his wound. Raise
his feet.

Moses limps away.

LEIPER
Ah, hellfire.

Leiper grabs a dirty moccasin off Big Harpe's foot. Walks to the creek and fills the shoe with water.

EXT. CANEBRAKE - DAY

Eyes set, Moses hobbles through the reeds.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

He finds Sal astride her horse.

MOSES
You will want to see this.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

Silas stares as Leiper clumsily lets Big Harpe drink from his own shoe.

Moses, followed by Sal, walks over, KNIFE IN HAND.

MOSES
He still breathin'?

SILAS

Yes.

MOSES

Stand aside.

Leiper does. Moses displays the knife for Big Harpe.

MOSES (CONT'D)

You buried this so deep in Mary's
belly the blaze didn't touch the
handle.

Big Harpe has no energy left to respond. Except to stare at
the knife.

With effort, Moses rolls Big Harpe over onto his belly. Sits
on his back, straddling it. Holds Harpe's head by the hair.
He puts the knife to Big Harpe's neck.

Big Harpe WHIMPERS.

MOSES (CONT'D)

What's that? What's that noise yer
makin'?

SILAS

Moses. Please...

Moses kneels down. Mouth to Harpe's ear.

MOSES

You want honesty, brother?

Big Harpe makes a panicked, THROATY SOUND.

MOSES (CONT'D)

Let's be honest together.

Moses places the knife at the side of Big Harpe's neck.

AND BEGINS TO SAW.

But he's not slitting the throat. He's SEVERING THE HEAD.

Big Harpe grimaces, determined not to scream, but the pain
overwhelms him.

He SQUEALS, an awful sound filled with terror and anguish.

ON MOSES, jaw set, sawing.

Severing Big Harpe's head centimeter by centimeter.

Big Harpe SHRIEKS. And SHRIEKS.

Silas and Leiper look away.

But Sal doesn't. She watches every second.

Blood covers Moses' arms and hands. He saws.

Making it last.

Big Harpe's SCREAM PITCHES UP as a vocal cord is severed.

He is silenced as all cords are cut.

Big Harpe's arms thrash. Death throes.

MOSES (CONT'D)

(whisper)

You can hide in hell. But I'll find
ya' there.

Moses RIPS Big Harpe's head off.

He turns, eyes crazed. Severed head in hand.

He drops the knife.

Plucks a burlap bag off his horse's saddle.

Drops the head into the bag.

Sal reaches for it.

SAL

I'll carry it.

Moses hands her the bag. Climbs onto his horse.

SILAS

(quiet, empty)

What about the body?

MOSES

Leave it for the wolves.

Moses rides off.

ON SILAS, watching him go.

EXT. KENTUCKY WILDS - DAY

Moses leads Silas, Leiper, and a stone-faced Sal, carrying the bloodied bag on her horse.

Moses looks like a corpse.

A SERIES OF TITLES:

The posse received its three hundred dollar reward.

The SOUND of a MALLET HITTING A SPIKE carries us to--

EXT. OAK TREE - DAY

As Moses HAMMERS a nine-inch spike into a low-hanging branch of an oak. Behind him, Silas, Leiper, and Sal watch as--

Moses takes the severed head out of the bag.

With both hands, he SLAMS the head down on the spike.

Big Harpe's lifeless black eyes stare at them.

Moses looks off -- at what we can't see.

MOSES
Let it rot.

Is he referring to the head? Or something else... ?

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

Betsey and Susan, each carrying babies, stumble through the woods, alone.

The Harpe women were arrested and tried for murder. They were acquitted.

EXT. OAK TREE - DAY

Sal stares at the displayed head of Big Harpe.

Sal remarried. She changed her name so her descendants would not know of her connection to the Harpes.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

A distraught, panicked Little Harpe runs through the woods.

Wiley Harpe eluded the law for four years. He was caught in Mississippi and hanged.

EXT. SILAS MCBEE'S HOME - DAY

LONG SHOT of Silas walking toward his cabin. Waiting at the door, a woman. Catherine. Silas runs to her. They embrace.

Silas McBee became one of the first representatives in a state legislature. His years were long and successful.

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Moses downs a tankard of ale in a crowded saloon. By the looks of him, he is very drunk.

A man in the bar shoves his way past Moses, who doesn't take to the shove. Moses SLAMS his mug against the man's head and tackles him.

Moses pounds on the man's face. Again. Again. Again.

FREEZE FRAME

On a furious Moses, his bloodied hand in mid-air.

Moses Stegall never preached. In 1806 he tried to elope with a woman. Her brother shot him dead.

EXT. TREE - DAY

It rains in sheets upon the bleached skull -- all that remains of Big Harpe -- still nailed to the tree.

The skull remained on the tree for years. The spot became known as Harpe's Head.

MOVING CLOSER to the the skull, we can see what's beyond... what Moses was looking at when he said, "Let it rot"--

HIS CHURCH

Decayed. Overgrown with weeds.

Boards dangle in the wind, the wood grey and rotting in the Kentucky rain.

It still bears that name today.

FADE OUT.

THE END.